



# Region Matters

[mvpc.org](http://mvpc.org)

Merrimack Valley  
Planning Commission  
*plan • develop • promote*

*Winter*

## ***MVPC Welcomes New Executive Director Karen Sawyer Conard***



The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission is pleased to announce that it has appointed Karen Conard, of Andover, as its new Executive Director.

“We are delighted to have Karen join us as Executive Director,” said Merrimack Valley Planning Commission Chairman Robert Lavoie. “She brings decades of experience and extensive planning knowledge as well as deep community, government, and business relationships. We are confident she will not only continue but also build upon the strong collaborative and cooperative development efforts of retired Executive Director Dennis DiZoglio.”

Ms. Conard joins the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission with 27 years of experience in the public and private sectors, including having served in both the executive and legislative branches of state government. Most recently, she worked as the Director of Community Development and Planning for Peabody, where she oversaw all planning, zoning, community development, building/inspections, and conservation functions along with a staff of 25. Ms. Conard also served as Chairperson of the Peabody Community Development Authority, which administers a revolving loan fund designed to stimulate economic development throughout the city.

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission contracted with Community Paradigm Associates and its principal, former Lowell City Manager Bernard F. Lynch, to search for and recruit candidates for the position. Ms. Conard was selected for the position from a field of 25 well-qualified applicants.

“It is a true honor and privilege to be appointed as the next Executive Director,” said Ms. Conard. “The outstanding quality of the work and knowledge base of the staff and the Commission are wonderful attributes which I have admired for years, as both a resident of the Valley for 23 years and during my time working for the City of Methuen. I look forward to following in the great footsteps of Dennis DiZoglio and working on behalf of the municipalities we serve.”

Prior to her tenure in Peabody, Ms. Conard had worked as Economic and Community Development Director for Methuen and for a private sector real estate development firm in Lawrence. She also served in various capacities at the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency, the Massachusetts Office of Business Development, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, the Office of Governor Bill Weld, and the Massachusetts State Senate.

Ms. Conard is a graduate of Duke University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and French. She resides in Andover with her husband Robert and their three children.



***Caught in a Vortex***  
*by Amy Smith*

Rockport, Massachusetts

**GRAND Prize Photo**

[Essex National Heritage Area 2016  
Photo Results](#)

It's the 20th anniversary of the Essex National Heritage Area!

To mark this special occasion, Essex Heritage will celebrate the extraordinary organizations and people that make the Essex National Heritage Area (Essex County) so exceptional - like MVPC.

Please vote for MVPC to be recognized and celebrated with a special toast at Essex Heritage's 20th Anniversary Gala: A Toast to the Trailblazers, on April 5, 2017 at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem. Here is the link to vote for us. Group #4

[surveymonkey.com/r/TrailblazersVote](http://surveymonkey.com/r/TrailblazersVote)

[Economic Development](#)

[Environmental](#)

[Transportation](#)

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## ***Economic Development in the Merrimack Valley Region Gets a New Look***

In the summer of 2016, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission launched the Merrimack Valley Region Marketing Campaign to revisit the current regional economic development brand for the Region: “Merrimack Valley Means Business”. This campaign included development of a new logo and tagline. MVPC conducted this effort in collaboration with the Merrimack Valley Mayors and Managers Coalition, the Town of North Andover, and the consulting group, Brand One. We created a Roundtable consisting of stakeholders from around the region and state to guide the process. Our Team also conducted nearly 30 individual focus groups around the Merrimack Valley with partners from educational institutions, non-profits, local businesses, and Chambers of Commerce to ensure the feedback was well-rounded. We learned a lot about the region, experienced the passion people have for the Merrimack Valley, and identified some common themes for how people viewed the Valley: *great location, strong, diverse, gateway, thriving, blend of urban and nature, sense of community, entrepreneurial, opportunity, affordable, and growing*. Using those words and feedback from the Roundtable and focus groups, the consultant developed a new logo and tagline for the Merrimack Valley Region.

The colors represent the blend of water and nature, the river in the center of the V (which can also be a road!) emphasizes the prominence of the Merrimack River in the region, and the tagline speaks to the fact that the Valley was built for business but is also a place to call home. The third line of the tagline can be removed or modified by any community, organization, or entity in the region by changing the underscored word. This example uses Opportunity is Here! But it can be:

Culture is Here!



Diversity is Here!

Education is Here!

**MERRIMACK VALLEY**  
*Built for Business. Feels Like Home.*  
Opportunity is Here!

Recreation is Here!

In the coming months, MVPC will be launching Phase II of this project which will include a public relations campaign, design of a new website, and distribution of the logo and tagline to our partners across the region for use in their promotional materials. Stay tuned for additional updates. Many thanks to everyone who participated in this project – your commitment to this project helped make this project a success! We look forward to working with you on next steps. If you have any questions about this project, please contact Angela Vincent, [avincent@mvpc.org](mailto:avincent@mvpc.org).

## ***MVPC Hosts Economic Development Planners from Around Northeast***

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, MVPC hosted nearly 30 Economic Development Planners from around Northeast Massachusetts for the first **Northeast Region Municipal Meet-up** of 2017. This quarterly meet-up is organized by the [Massachusetts Office of Business Development \(MOBD\)](#) to help Economic Development Planners stay up-to-date on best practices and resources from around the region and state. At this meet-up, Mayor Fiorentini provided an update on Haverhill’s 311 Program and new developments in the City. Attendees also heard from Lisa Strout, the Director of the [Massachusetts Film Office](#). Lisa asked planners to consider becoming a Film Liaison to provide resources and assistance to film and television production studios that may want to do business in their community. Emmy Hahn from the Department of Housing and Community Development gave an update on the use of improvement districts (i.e., [Business Improvement Districts](#)) around the state and how they can be a funding mechanism for downtown revitalization. The Planners were then taken for a tour of the City by a Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority bus, ending with a hearty working lunch at the Barking Dog in downtown Haverhill. Thank you to Maria Di Stefano (Regional Director for MOBD), Nate Robertson (Economic Development Planner in Haverhill), and all the Planners who joined us – it was a pleasure to host this great event in Haverhill

*Above articles written by Angela Vincent  
Economic Development Planner*

## MVPC Awarded Regionalization Grant



MVPC was recently awarded funds in the amount of \$100,000 which will be used to conduct a Regional Housing Production Plan (HPP) for the region's cities and towns. A total of \$50,000 is a grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts - Community Compact Cabinet's Efficiency and Regionalization (E&R) program. This is a new program for 2017 and in making the award the Secretary of the Executive Office for Administration and Finance stated that MVPC was chosen because its application for funds "clearly met the overarching goal of driving implementation of regionalization and other efficiency initiatives that allow for long-term sustainability." Funds from the E&R program will be matched with an additional \$50,000 grant from MassHousing.

An HPP is a proactive strategy for planning and developing affordable housing. The HPP identifies the housing needs of a community and the strategies it will use to make progress in facilitating the development of affordable housing. By taking a proactive approach in the adoption of a HPP, cities and towns are much more likely to achieve both their affordable housing and community planning goals. A HPP clearly identifies areas that the community feels are appropriate for development by conducting a housing needs assessment, developing affordable housing goals, and creating implementation strategies.

Approving and building housing can be a difficult task and not easily accomplished without controversy. In eastern Massachusetts, we are producing far less housing than we need, and home prices and rents are being bid up substantially faster than most household incomes. As a result, residents face a severe affordability gap between their incomes and what they must pay to rent housing or purchase a home. Many of our children leave the state for more affordable housing elsewhere, and business is often reluctant to move here due to the high housing costs.

Developing a Merrimack Valley Regional HPP will not solve this housing problem, but will play an important first step in understanding the issue at a regional scale and starting to deal with it.

*Written by Mike Parquette  
Comprehensive Planning Program Manager*

## MMA presents Municipal Website awards to 4 Communities

- The Beacon January 30, 2017

Boston, Concord, Weston and Windsor were announced as winners of the MMA's fifth annual [municipal website awards](#) during the MMA Annual Meeting & Trade Show on Jan. 21.

The awards recognize excellence in customer service, functionality, convenience and government transparency delivered by a municipal website. Awards are given in four population categories.

[Boston](#) was the winner among communities with a population above 50,000.

[Concord](#) won in the category for populations between 15,000 and 50,000.

[Weston](#) won in the 5,000-15,000 category.

And [Windsor](#) was the winner among towns with a population under 5,000.

Judges evaluated municipal websites from across Massachusetts based on the following criteria:

- Clear branding as the official municipal site
- Intuitive navigation tools and organization of material
- Robust search function
- Timely information
- Availability of public records
- Resources for residents, such as ability to apply for licenses and permits, pay bills, order documents and offer suggestions
- Tools to promote economic development
- Information about departments
- Use of social media and tools for community engagement
- Visual appeal and overall experience

This year's contest judges were Jerrard Whitten, GIS/IT manager for the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, and Joshua Ostroff, partnerships director at Transportation for Massachusetts and a former Natick selectman.

# Complete Streets

Congratulations to the Town of Salisbury for receiving \$400,000 from the Complete Streets program. On January 26, MassDOT announced that a total of \$5.5 million was being distributed to 15 communities as part of the second round of the Complete Streets program.

The Town of Salisbury will use the funds to reconstruct existing sidewalks and construct new sidewalks on Pleasant Street and Seabrook Road. These improvements will connect parks, the rail-trail, an elementary school and retail areas.

The Town of Salisbury is the second Merrimack Valley community to receive Complete Streets Program funds. The City of Lawrence was among the very first recipients and is using the money for a Safe Routes to School project.

Clearly, these communities have taken advantage of a new funding source. The requirements include adopting a Complete Streets policy. For these communities, such a policy reinforces what they are already trying to do – promote multi-modal transportation and increase the livability of their communities.

A few additional Merrimack Valley communities are seeking to take advantage of this program. Any Merrimack Valley community interested in pursuing may call MVPC for information and assistance, and should also check out the MassDOT Complete Streets website [www.masscompletestreets.com](http://www.masscompletestreets.com)

*Written by Betsy Goodrich  
Senior Transportation Planner*



## Saving the “Pink House”

The Eight Towns and the Great Marsh Committee of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission has been working with the [Support the Pink House](#) organization, area legislators, and other partners on an effort to preserve the “Pink House”. The Pink House is an iconic, landmark structure that has fallen into disrepair located off the Plum Island Turnpike in the Great Marsh. The 1922 building, originally constructed as part of a messy divorce settlement and located out of spite in the marsh, has been abandoned for over fifteen years. Having saved the building from the wrecking ball this past year, local partner advocates and the Committee are working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on preservation and

reuse plans for the iconic building. The Committee reports interest from area universities and colleges as well as nonprofit organizations to repurpose the building into research laboratory for estuarine activities as well as office space for transient scientists. Stay tuned in 2017.

*Written by Joe Cosgrove  
Environmental Program Manager*

### MVPC Monthly Commission Meetings

Third Thursday of the month @ 7pm

**2017**

February 16      May 18  
March 16        June 15  
April 20

Go to [mvpc.org](http://mvpc.org) for more details

Check our website for Commission Meetings Agenda and Details on Upcoming Meetings & Workshops [mvpc.org](http://mvpc.org)

### Upcoming Meetings and Events

[Merrimack Valley Public Relations Campaign RFP](#)

**February 22** MPO Meeting — Noon  
**February 24** Legislative Caucus—10:00am  
**February 28** Public Hearing  
TIP and PPP Amendments  
1:00—2:00pm & 6:00—7pm  
**March 1** Planning Directors Meeting — Noon  
**April 27** CEDS Meeting - 9:30-11:30am  
Louise Haffner Fournier Education Center  
78-82 Amesbury Street Lawrence MA

MVPC Commission Office 160 Main Street Haverhill, MA

Contact: Nancy Lavalley [nlavallee@mvpc.org](mailto:nlavallee@mvpc.org)

Tel: 978.374.0519 ext. 10