



Region Matters

mvpc.org

Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission
*plan * develop * promote*

SUMMER 2010

Highlights:

*Focus on Regional
Energy Services*

*Transportation Projects
Advanced*

*Marsh Invaders
Under Attack*

MVPC Puts on a Brand New Face

This summer edition of the newsletter marks the official release of MVPC's new logo and the new name for our newsletter "Region Matters", according to an announcement by Dennis DiZoglio, MVPC executive director.

"More and more people are looking at regional solutions to common challenges they face", DiZoglio said. He added, "We here at MVPC feel that we can play a leadership role in assisting communities that are interested in thinking regionally. The new logo represents MVPC's visionary leadership and role of planning, developing and promoting the Merrimack Valley Region through responsible and efficient use of regional resources."

DiZoglio explained that MVPC staff and management work to promote balanced growth and sustainability, protection of natural resources, a cohesive transportation network and innovation through information technology solutions.

"Along with our new logo come advances in the 15-community regional agency's advanced technology. Our

recently completed Priority Growth Strategy — a far-reaching master plan for the region, the first such plan in 30 years — has been assembled into an innovative web-based application, allowing for efficient distribution and ease of interpretation and comprehension. The strategy is designed to drive the orderly development of the region for years to come. It identifies where the region encourages growth, where the region would like to preserve and protect land from development, and how the transportation network of the region can be upgraded and enhanced to sustain and connect these development patterns. The new logo is a collage of images that demonstrates this approach," DiZoglio said.

He suggested readers "check out our updated website, and new Facebook and Tweeter applications."

This is a great way, DiZoglio said, "to be part of the regional experience."

Area Bikers Pedal Their Ideas

A heavy turnout of bicycle enthusiasts showed up recently for a session with MVPC planners to explore possible improvements to the regional bike transportation network. More than 30 bicycle transportation supporters came up with numerous suggestions in a wide-ranging discussion. There were proposals for improving maintenance of roads with bicy-



Photo by Louis Rubenfeld

clists in mind, as well as construction of more multi-use paths such as recently opened in **Newburyport** and **Salisbury**.

Other suggestions involved better bike connections to village and transit centers, the need for north-south connec-

tions through **Lawrence**, improvements for safe bike travel on arterials in the region such as Routes 133, 125, 113, 97, 1 and 1A in **Haverhill**, **Andover**, **North Andover**, **Methuen**, **West Newbury** and **Salisbury**. Also, better bike access for schools and for bikes and pedestrians on bridges, and more bike racks at train stations. In addition, according to Elizabeth Goodrich, MVPC transportation planner, officials from **Andover** plan a speed survey this summer to determine which roads might be good candidates for bike lanes and narrowing travel lanes in their town.

Goodrich said the public is encouraged to participate in regional transportation development throughout the year. Suggestions are welcome by calling, e-mailing or visiting MVPC's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/mvpc.org.

Valley Communities Catching On To Varied Energy Services

Regional energy-saving strategies — and growing interest among MVPC cities and towns — topped the list of items reviewed recently by the Merrimack Valley Mayors & Managers Coalition. Several more communities are seeking information on regional services being generated by the coalition and MVPC. One service attracting the most interest is the Merrimack Valley Energy Management Program, which offers technical assistance to communities to help them develop energy management strategies and energy conservation programs. This program is currently using Energy Services Company (ESCO) to implement energy conservation improvements on public buildings. ESCO performs such services as replacing boilers, chillers, lighting and windows, using the cost savings from these improvements to pay for the upgrades. Nine communities, **Amesbury, Boxford, Lawrence, Haverhill, Merrimac, Methuen, Newburyport, North Andover and Georgetown**, have expressed interest in doing a joint procurement of ESCO services along with the Pentucket Regional School District, Greater Lawrence Technical High School and the Haverhill and Amesbury Housing Authorities. There are several benefits in this approach, such as

shared administration costs and competitive contract sizing. One novel effort being pursued is developing solar energy farms on closed landfills in the region. This concept was recently successful in **Brockton** and has been called turning “Brownfields” into “Brightfields”.

There are more than 160 acres of closed landfills in the region and currently five communities, **Amesbury, Haverhill, Andover, Methuen and Salisbury**, are considering issuing a joint Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify solar energy developers interested in working with them to bring the “Brightfields” program to the Merrimack Valley. Additional communities interested should contact Dennis DiZoglio, MVPC executive director.

Other ideas attracting interest in cities and towns include regional health districts, regional inspectional services, regional purchasing, and regional emergency vehicle maintenance.

Communities with closed landfills and interested in more information about this or other regional services should contact DiZoglio at MVPC.

Boaters: No Discharge Rule Extended

The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is expected to approve a proposal to designate MVPC and related area coastal waters as a no-discharge area (NDA) for sewage dumping by boaters.

Preparations leading to the request were largely due to the work of Peter Phippen, MVPC environmental planner and coastal resources coordinator for the Eight Towns and the Bay (8T&B) committee of MVPC and the Massachusetts Bays Program.

If approved, discharges of treated and untreated boat sewage would be prohibited in **Gloucester, Rockport, Essex, Ipswich, Rowley, Newbury, Newburyport, Salisbury, Amesbury, West Newbury, Merrimac, Groveland, North Andover, Haverhill, Methuen**

and Lawrence.

The formal request for the designation was made by



Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management, based on Phippen's work determining there are enough “pumpout” facilities where boaters can get their sewage holding tanks pumped out. This particular area has an estimated 5,555 boats, of which 1,525 may have a head or toilet on board, according to Phippen.

There are also more than 25 marinas or boat yards adjacent to the proposed NDA. In addition, there are 13 pumpout facilities in the proposed area, Phippen said. Officials said the North Shore area designation means continuous no discharge coverage all the way from the New Hampshire border to the tip of Provincetown.

Focus on Clean Tech at Strategy Session

A proposed clean-tech incubator facility in Newburyport highlighted a recent MVPC regional economic development strategy meeting at Northern Essex Community College in **Haverhill**. Also discussed were a proposed regional clean energy plan and a new small business mentorship program.

Representatives for the proposed clean-tech incubator facility in Newburyport provided an overview of the project. Formed to facilitate the commercialization of sustainable products and services in the rapidly growing clean-tech marketplace, the Newburyport Clean-Tech Center (NCTC) will provide critical resources to assist start-up businesses with early stage challenges. The NCTC will coach and support the advancement of start-ups that are considered to have innovative and marketable approaches to solve any of the numerous environmental issues faced today.

The meeting also featured a presentation by a new local business partnership that is aiming to rehabilitate and build eco-friendly low-income homes. The group's presentation sparked a lively discussion on economic development opportunities in the valley through energy retrofits and related job training.

Lavoie Re-elected MVPC Chairman

Robert Lavoie of **Amesbury** was recently re-elected chairman of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission.

Other officers elected to the 15-community agency included: Joseph Sullivan, **Haverhill**, vice chairman; Rob Phillips, **West Newbury**, secretary; Tillie Evangelista, **Georgetown**, assistant secretary; Robert Snow, **Rowley**, treasurer, and David Powell, **Newbury**, assistant treasurer.

Regional Transportation Projects Moved Forward

Amendments moving forward three major transportation projects in **Andover**, **North Andover** and **Lawrence** were recently approved by the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The amendments affected the FY 2010 element of the region's FY 2010-2013 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Specifically, MPO members voted to program \$442,956 in Highway Safety Improvement Program money to fund the design of improvements to the Route 125/Mass Avenue intersection in **North Andover**, to add \$7,665,860 to replace the deck of the Route 28 Bridge over Route 125 in **Andover**, and finally, to increase the estimated cost of the Canal Street Bridge over the Spicket River project in **Lawrence** from \$12,104,274 to \$14,452,232.

MPO approval is required of all state and federal transportation projects within the MVPC region.

and looking to the future...

In addition to approving the release of the three amendments to the region's 2010-2013 TIP, MPO members discussed the status of projects that could be included in the upcoming FY 2011-2014 TIP, which will be adopted by the MPO later this summer. Potential new projects on the horizon include construction of a link between the Eastern Marsh Trail in **Salisbury** and the sidewalk on the Gillis Bridge, the **Merrimac** Square reconstruction project, the reconfiguration of the Route 110/113 Rotary at I-93 in **Methuen**, and the reconstruction of Route 150 in **Amesbury**. Selection of the projects to be included in the draft FY 2011-2014 will depend on such factors as project readiness, funding availability and project scoring.

Regional Transportation Plan for 2011 in the Works

The MVPC transportation staff is working to develop the agency's Regional Transportation Plan for 2011, using information gleaned from a series of *Plan Launch* outreach sessions through the area earlier this year. A draft Vision Statement and draft Goals and Objectives for the RTP have already been developed and area cities and towns are now reviewing their list of priority roadway and bridge projects that will be included in the document.

As part of the groundwork for developing the RTP, the staff is also identifying and mapping high frequency crash locations using MassDOT crash data from 2006-2008. This information will be used by the MPO to identify intersections and road segments that will be the subject of additional analysis and traffic studies to identify improvements that can correct safety problems.

In the coming weeks, the staff will be scheduling additional outreach meetings to be held during the summer and fall on a variety of topics that will be included in the RTP. Meanwhile, interested persons are invited to visit MVPC's website www.mvpc.org for more information.

MVPC, Port City Exchange Transportation Ideas

Ideas on providing a coordinated and effective transportation network that includes transit, taxi, water taxi, bicycle and pedestrian modes for **Newburyport** were reviewed recently by city leaders and MVPC transportation planners. Improved public transit service and better public information topped the list of interests voiced at a meeting arranged by City Councilor Ari Herzog.

Also suggested was more visible public information at the city's train station and other locations. It was agreed that

the region would benefit from a higher level of "mobility management" to make transportation more accessible and visitor-friendly. Coordinating with the MBTA to utilize the commuter rail parking lot during weekends was proposed. MBTA spokesman Jodi Ray expressed interest in pursuing the idea further as a potential win-win for the city and MBTA, creating needed parking on the weekends and additional revenue (with discounted parking fees) for MBTA.

Another idea was a seasonal welcome center or transportation information center at the station, tying in bicycle and pedestrian trail usage.

MVPC planners suggested expanding these efforts to include **Amesbury** and **Salisbury**, providing a regional approach that could lead to a coordinated first class transportation network.

The three coastal communities already share many of the same issues of seasonal traffic congestion and tourism, and businesses in all three would benefit from such a coordinated and well promoted network.

Merrimack Valley Metal on Metal

Highest number of crashes for non-interstate intersections in the Merrimack Valley:

1. Main St. @ Bailey Blvd., Haverhill
2. Bridge St. @ Water St., Haverhill
3. Main St. @ Winter St., Haverhill
4. LaFayette Square, Haverhill
5. Chickering Road @ Mass. Ave., North Andover
6. Turnpike St. @ Andover St., North Andover



Source: 2005—2007 statewide Top 200 Intersection Crashes



MVPC Launches Aerial Attack on Marsh Invaders

MVPC and the Eight Towns and the Bay Committee are making final plans to embark this summer on an innovative project to determine the exact locations and hardiness of the invasive *Phragmites australis* plant in the Great Marsh, using Pictometry aerial photography and infrared imagery.

The grant-funded project will serve to gauge the likelihood and threat of expansion to healthy marshes.

The information gathered from the marshes in **Newbury**, **Newburyport** and **Salisbury** will also be used to

help map the threat from *Phragmites* to other salt marsh systems in Massachusetts and the rest of New England.

A key component to protecting and restoring coastal salt marshes is the assessment of the extent and robustness of the invader (*Phragmites australis*), and determination of vulnerability of the salt marsh to that specific invader. The project will detail existing conditions of the *Phragmites* stands and develop a methodology to define and evaluate the potential threat to the adjacent healthy marsh.

Haverhill Study Clicks Off

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission has been contracted by the city of **Haverhill** to assist in reducing the use of streetlights in a cost-cutting measure.

MVPC has mapped the location of all the city's 4,400 streetlights with the use of Global Positioning System technology. Then, the project involved acquiring and recording specific information and a variety of features at each location for use in producing a city-wide map. That information was forwarded to city officials as they evaluate certain lights to be deactivated city wide.



Mayor James Fiorentini has told the city's public works director to develop a proposed list of streetlights that might be turned off to save money.

Fiorentini told city councilors he wants to trim about \$100,000 from the \$770,000 streetlight budget.

In the 50-year history of MVPC this data collection project is the first of its kind for the agency, according to Daniel Ovalle, field services specialist for MVPC.

MVPC Awarded \$50k Grant

MVPC has been awarded a \$50,000 Strategic Planning Framework Grant by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development. Dennis DiZoglio, MVPC executive director, said the grant will be used to expand MVPC's recently completed Priority Growth Strategy, bringing the new strategy into compliance with regional land-use guidelines.

MVPC will be working closely with its communities to compile information required, including updates and status of community master plans and compiling an inventory of local innovative planning and zoning tools and practices.

Other information required deals with the proposed community land-use partnership act and assessing a community's status to comply with proposed zoning regulations.

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Serving the communities of:

Amesbury Andover Boxford Georgetown Groveland Haverhill Lawrence Merrimac Methuen
Newbury Newburyport North Andover Rowley Salisbury West Newbury