



# Region Matters

mvpc.org



Merrimack Valley  
Planning Commission  
*plan \* develop \* promote*

WINTER 2010

- Highlights:** Merrimack Adopts Housing Production Plan    Aerial Mapping of *Phragmites* in the Great Marsh    Stormwater Management Seminar 'Flooded'

## Region Unites on Energy

All the communities in the region now have access to an Energy Services Company (ESCO) to make their public buildings energy efficient and save tax dollars. ESCOs perform energy conservation improvements like replacing boilers, chillers, lighting, windows etc., and use the cost savings from these improvements to pay for the upgrades.



*Brockton redeveloped a former manufactured gas plant site, or Brownfield, into a Brightfield - a solar energy generating station that converts sunlight to electricity.*

**Mayors & Managers Coalition** which was formed in 2007 to consider regional solutions to common challenges the communities face. This coalition is comprised of **Amesbury, Andover, Lawrence, Haverhill, Methuen, Newburyport, North Andover and Salisbury.**

On behalf of the Coalition and the region, MVPC conducted a joint procurement for ESCO services along with the Pentucket Regional School District and the Greater Lawrence Technical High School. On October 29<sup>th</sup>, MVPC announced that Ameresco had been selected by the review committee to be the preferred vendor for the region. Eight proposals were received and the review committee, made up of representatives from **Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Newburyport** and the Pentucket Regional School District, shortlisted down to three firms, conducted interviews, and performed reference checks. Ameresco was unanimously selected. Ameresco, Inc. is the largest independent comprehensive energy solutions provider in North America. Headquartered in Framingham Massachusetts, Ameresco utilizes innovative strategies, systems, and technologies for renewable and sustainable energy generation and infrastructure renewal,

thereby reducing operating expenses, increasing energy reliability and enhancing the environment.

There are a number of benefits associated with the communities using this regional approach: shared administration costs, competitive contract sizing, and economies of scale. Working together regionally makes a lot of sense" said Mayor Fiorentini from Haverhill "we all benefit if we can attract a large experienced energy services contractor like Ameresco". Creating an opportunity for the smaller communities to work with the larger communities "allows a small community to think big" said Mayor Kezer from Amesbury. This program is now available to any community in the region that would like to make energy improvements to their publicly owned buildings.

Another effort being pursued is developing solar energy farms on closed landfills in the region. This concept was recently successful in Brockton and has been coined turning "Brownfields" into "Brightfields". There are over 160 acres of closed landfills in the region and currently nine communities: **Amesbury, Andover, Boxford, Haverhill, Georgetown, Newbury, Rowley, Salisbury and West Newbury** are considering working together to explore the opportunities. The first step is to perform a fatal flaw analysis on the various landfills to determine if they are suitable candidates for renewable energy. Issues such as slope, contours, shading and soils will be evaluated. MVPC has selected Meridian Associates out of Beverly to conduct this analysis. If the analyzed sites are suitable communities can consider issuing a joint Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify solar energy developers interested in working with them to bring the "Brightfields" program here to the Merrimack Valley.



*Brockton Brightfield consists of 1,395 SCHOTT Solar modules manufactured in Billerica, MA.*

## Merrimac Adopts Housing Production Plan



Merrimac Square

The Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen for the Town of **Merrimac** are to be commended for recently adopting a new Housing Production Plan which was developed on behalf of the town by the MVPC Comprehensive Planning Department and the Merrimac Affordable Housing Board of Trustees. The Housing Production Plan is an update of **Merrimac's** 2005 Housing Plan which expired in 2010.

A Housing Production Plan is a proactive strategy for

planning and developing affordable housing in a way consistent with the Town's goals and objectives by placing affordable housing where the Town determines it most appropriate. By taking a proactive approach in the adoption of a Housing Production Plan, **Merrimac** is much more likely to achieve both their housing and community planning goals. Housing Production Plans give communities that are under the 10% "affordable housing" threshold of Chapter 40B, but are making steady progress in producing affordable housing, more control over comprehensive permit applications for specific periods of time as outlined in their Plans.

Major components of the Plan developed by the Board of Trustees and MVPC include a comprehensive housing needs assessment, affordable housing goals, policies, and constraints, and implementation strategies. The Plan has been submitted to the Department of Housing and Community Development for their review and approval.

Any communities interested in this project or other planning initiatives are urged to contact Michael Parquette, Comprehensive Planning Manager at the MVPC.

## Aerial Mapping of *Phragmites* in the Great Marsh



Pilot Area for Development of the Great Marsh *Phragmites* Signature and Matrix

This past summer MVPC and the Eight Towns and the Bay Committee launched a pilot project, funded by the Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management Office (CZM), to identify invasive *Phragmites australis* stands in the Great Marsh on the upper North Shore. The purpose of the project is to develop a *Phragmites* photographic signature which, together with other data, will be used to determine an individual *Phragmites* stand's probability of expansion in the marsh and assist in more prudent planning for future control of *Phragmites*.

A 25 square mile area at the northern end of the Great Marsh, extending from the Parker River in **Newbury** to Beach Road in **Salisbury**, was chosen for this pilot study. Over 50 individual *Phragmites* stands were identified as potential ground-truthing sites. Aerial surveys were conducted with Pictometry imaging, using visible light and infrared photography. Pictometry imaging uses low-altitude, oblique-angle photography which allows identification of the areal extent of *Phragmites* stands and is useful in determining stand heights, densities and maturity. These characteristics are useful in estimating the health of a stand and together with other parameters may be used to assess the opportunities of a stand to grow and expand into the marsh.

About 40 stands were field-investigated in the study area in mid-July at the time of the aerial survey, to test the abilities and limitations of aerial mapping of invasive vegetative species. In order to calibrate this mapping

tool, several configurations of *Phragmites* stands were tested including: stands at the edge of a tree canopy (to test the oblique angle view), *Phragmites* patches grading into cattails or smooth cordgrass (to distinguish from plants with a similar leaf structure), stands adjacent to salt pans, pools, and open water (to test the infrared signature capability), extremely low density stands (to test visual scale concerns), and a number of other confounding factors. Data on ambient conditions were also recorded. Other attributes that were investigated included: upgradient land used to estimate potential degradation from stormwater input, marsh-side tidal flow impairments and restrictions which might reduce saltwater intrusion, and ambient marsh vegetation to establish the health of the adjacent marsh.

Currently, the aerial images are being analyzed. Based on the results, further field investigations of new *Phragmites* sites will be conducted to verify predictions made using the interpreted data. Final results will be available by the end of December 2010.



On a related note, funding has been secured through the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation to use this mapping technology and "lessons learned" from the pilot for mapping all *Phragmites* stands located within the Town of **Salisbury** as a first step in Great Marsh invasives species control. The **Salisbury** *Phragmites* mapping should begin this winter.



# Stormwater Management Seminar 'Flooded'

Nearly 100 people, representing 26 municipalities and a dozen environmental agencies and watershed groups, packed Northern Essex Community College's Technology Center on November 17 for MVPC's regional **Stormwater Phase II Seminar – New Regulations and Practical Approaches**. The session, co-sponsored by Weston & Sampson, Inc. (W&S) and the Eight Towns & the Bay environmental organization, provided a status report and in-depth overview of the new draft "MS4" (municipal separate storm sewer system) regulations that Merrimack Valley communities and other Massachusetts cities and towns will be required to implement during the next 5-year Stormwater General Permit cycle, beginning in 2011.



Dennis DiZoglio, MVPC executive director, greeted the attendees and opened the seminar by describing MVPC's roles and responsibilities as a regional planning agency, including offering regular training workshops on stormwater management and other environmental and land use issues relevant to communities. He then introduced **Haverhill** Mayor James Fiorentini, who welcomed the audience to the City of **Haverhill** and shared his insights and experience on the difficult – and increasingly costly – challenges our communities face as they strive to comply with the federal stormwater mandates during this lean budget time.

*"A note of appreciation to MVPC for developing and hosting the Stormwater Seminar...the program was excellent! It was very informative, topical, and the format was great. While nobody looks forward to the additional burdens from this mandate, at least the Merrimack Valley area is educated on this matter." – Mike Stankovich, City of Haverhill*

A team of Weston & Sampson stormwater professionals, led by W&S vice-president Kent Nichols, then presented a detailed, step-by-step review of the Notice of Intent (NOI) filing process that communities must follow,

as well as the required elements of a local Storm Water Management Program (SWMP), including the six *minimum control measures* that every SWMP must address:

**1)** stormwater education and outreach, with targeted messages to different local audiences, **2)** public participation and involvement, **3)** illicit discharge detection and elimination, **4)** construction site runoff control, **5)** post-construction runoff control, and **6)** municipal pollution prevention/good housekeeping practices. Mr. Nichols and his staff then outlined practical approaches communities can take to comply with the new federal Stormwater General Permit requirements, along with potential sources of outside funding and technical assistance.

The seminar concluded with an interactive panel discussion and Q&A session, moderated by MVPC director DiZoglio. Panelists included Weston & Sampson professional engineers Kent Nichols and Patty Passariello, **Newburyport** community development director Andy Port, and MVPC environmental planners Alan Macintosh and Peter Phippen. Among other topics, the panel discussed the nature and benefits of low impact development (LID) and 'greenscaping' practices as effective stormwater control measures, and explored possible *regional* approaches and solutions to shared stormwater management problems. One of the major themes emerging from the seminar is that communities need not tackle their stormwater problems on their own; that there are numerous areas where MVPC, watershed associations, and other professional groups and consultants can provide helpful expertise and assistance.



*"This morning's workshop was excellent. W&S did a great job covering very complex material in a short time. It's clear that communities are going to have to devote significantly more effort and resources to the stormwater issue..." – Jay Baker, Massachusetts Bays National Estuary Program*

## Upcoming Events

### **Citizen Planner Program - Four Session Program**

Session I January 10  
Session II February 7  
Session III March 7  
Session IV CPTC Workshop (Fall 2011)

Check our website for details on upcoming events:

[www.mvpc.org](http://www.mvpc.org) or contact: Nancy Lavallee  
Tel: 978-374-0519 email: [nlavallee@mvpc.org](mailto:nlavallee@mvpc.org)

## Monthly Meetings

**MPO** - January 4 (then last Tuesday of Month)

 Visit us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/mvpc.org](http://www.facebook.com/mvpc.org)

## Meet Your Regional Planning Commissioner

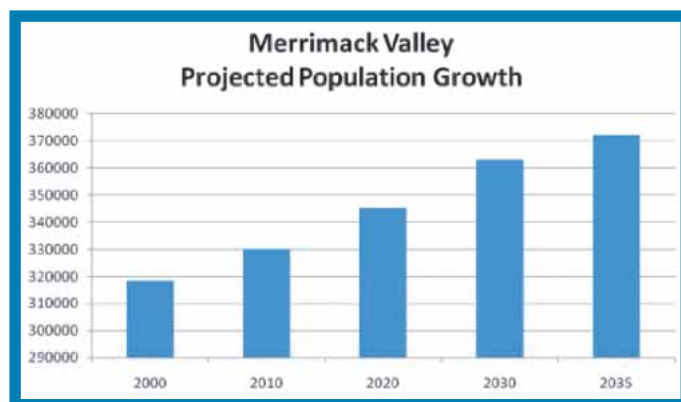
<b>Amesbury:</b>	Robert Lavoie
<b>Andover:</b>	John J. McDonnell
<b>Boxford:</b>	Joe Hill
<b>Georgetown:</b>	Tillie Evangelista
<b>Groveland:</b>	Robert O'Hanley
<b>Haverhill:</b>	Joseph Sullivan
<b>Lawrence:</b>	Lesley Melendez
<b>Merrimac:</b>	John Thomas
<b>Methuen:</b>	Kevin P. Hagerty
<b>Newbury:</b>	David Powell
<b>Newburyport:</b>	Ed Ramsdell
<b>North Andover:</b>	Richard Byers
<b>Rowley:</b>	Robert Snow
<b>Salisbury:</b>	Lou Masiello
<b>West Newbury:</b>	Brian Murphey



## Region's Population and Employment Projections Generated

Working in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), MVPC has approved a new long-range population and employment forecast to 2035 for the Merrimack Valley region. MVPC and MassDOT are projecting a total regional population of 372,000 in 2035, up from 318,556 in 2000. In addition, employment is projected to reach 150,000, up from 137,694 in 2000. The forecast is part of the ongoing development of the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization's 2011 Regional Transportation Plan, which will be completed in March 2011, replacing the current version of the document, which was adopted in 2007. Over the next few weeks, MVPC will be developing the municipal and traffic analysis zone forecasts, using the regional forecast as a guide, and will be seeking input from local officials and using the Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy to make recommenda-

tions. Please contact Anthony Komornick at MVPC with any questions, or if you would like to participate in the process. email: [akomornick@mvpc.org](mailto:akomornick@mvpc.org)



## MVPC 'News Guy' Retires



Our sincere THANKS and best wishes to Jim Simmons, long-time MVPC media specialist and friend, on his recent – and richly deserved – retirement from the Commission. Jim joined MVPC in 1996 following a distinguished career in journalism, which included reporting and editing positions with the *Haverhill Gazette* and the *Newburyport Daily News*. At MVPC, Jim's natural inquisitiveness, historian's knowledge of the Merrimack Valley region and its people, and mastery

of the English language all contributed to the innumerable interesting and informative newsletters, press releases, and annual reports he crafted through the years. Always thoughtful and helpful, Jim on a daily basis combined his extensive journalism expertise with an uncommon warmth and personal touch. From our Commissioners and staff, we extend to Jim our heartfelt gratitude and warmest wishes for a happy and healthy retirement, one filled with joy and contentment and peace – and *no* publishing deadlines!

Jim often times will share some very interesting stories of his life experiences as a WWII Veteran paratrooper, a DJ in Atlanta and a journalist. Jim promises to 'keep in touch' on Fridays for coffee and bring the donuts.

Serving the communities of:

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