

MERRIMACK VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

Monthly Meeting of March 18, 2021

Time: *11:00 AM*

To join this meeting contact Nancy Lavalley – nlavallee@mvpc.org

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Adoption of February Meeting Minutes
4. Warrant for February
5. Chairman's Comments
6. Director's Report
7. Contracts
8. Local and Regional Issues
9. Other
10. Adjourn

MINUTES

Thursday – March 18, 2021

Virtual Commission Meeting (GoToMeeting)

Recorded from MVPC, 160 Main Street, Haverhill, MA

Consistent with the Governor’s orders suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law and banning gatherings of more than 10 people, this meeting will be conducted by remote participation to the greatest extent possible. The public may not physically attend this meeting, but every effort will be made to allow the public to view and listen to the meeting in real-time. Persons who wish to do so are invited to watch the meeting on the MVPC web site or join the meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone by using the link: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/748821525> or you can also dial in using your phone by calling +1 (571) 317-3112 and using access code 748-821-525. If live transmission proves infeasible, an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive records of the meeting will be made available on the MVPC website as soon as possible.

1. **Call to Order** – Chairman Snow called the meeting to order at 11:00 am
2. **Roll Call** – Secretary Laplante called the roll and declared a quorum of 10 commissioners present at the time of roll call with 1 commissioner arriving late for a total of 11.

The following Commissioners and Staff were in attendance:

Commissioners

Amesbury	Robert Laplante, Secretary
Boxford	Jim Barnes, Treasurer
Groveland	Rebecca Oldham
Haverhill	Ken Cram
Lawrence	Pedro Soto
Merrimac	Bob Bender
Newbury	Martha Taylor
Newburyport	Rick Taintor
North Andover	Rick Byers
Rowley	Robert Snow, Chairman
West Newbury	Brian Murphey

Guests

Esther Encarnacion, Business & Economic Development Director (Lawrence)

Staff

Tony Komornick, Acting Executive Director & Transportation Program Manager
Mary Kay Beninati, Senior Transportation Planner
Betsy Goodrich, Senior Transportation Planner
Jim Terlizzi, Transportation Engineer
Jerrard Whitten, GIS-IT Program Manager
Mikayla Minor, GIS Analyst
Jennifer Hughes, Environmental Program Manager
Peter Phippen, Coastal Coordinator
Ian Burns, Targeted Economic Development Specialist
Nate Robertson, Community & Economic Development Planner
Jenifer Dunlap, Finance Administrator
Nancy Lavallee, Office Administrator

3. Adoption of February 18, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Secretary Laplante reviewed the minutes and recommended the Commission's authorization for adoption.

Vote: There was a motion by Commissioner Taylor and seconded by Commissioner Murphey to approve the February 18, 2021 meeting minutes. The February 18, 2021 minutes were approved by Secretary Laplante's roll call vote of 9 attending commissioners with 2 commissioners abstaining.

4. Warrant for February 2021

Treasurer Barnes reported on the February 2021 warrant and recommended the Commission's authorization for adoption.

Vote: There was a motion by Commissioner Taintor and seconded by Commissioner Taylor to approve the February 2021 warrant. The February 2021 warrant was approved by Secretary Laplante's roll call vote of 10 attending commissioners. 1 commissioner was not available at the time of the roll call vote.

5. Chairman's Comments

Chairman Snow reported on the following activities since the February meeting.

Chairman Snow reported that former Executive Director Theresa Park started in her new position as Deputy Director of Mass Development this week. She was given a parting gift from the Commission for her many years of service to the Commission, three of those years as Chairman. We wish her well.

Chairman Snow added that MVPC remains in good hands with 37-year veteran Tony Komornick taking the interim role of Acting Executive Director.

Chairman Snow updated the commissioners on the search for MVPC's next Executive Director is well underway. Bernie Lynch of Community Paradigm Associates has advertised the position and will be collecting resumes through March 24th. The MVPC Search Committee has been finalized with the following new and returning members: John Cashell, Robert Laplante, Lou Masiello, Lisa Schwarz, Rick Taintor, and myself, Bob Snow. Also participating on the committee will be staff members Acting Executive Director Tony Komornick and Finance Administrator Jen Dunlap. Thank you to all who volunteered to serve. We expect the first Search Committee meeting to be at the beginning of April. Commissioner Soto expressed interest in joining the Search Committee.

Chairman Snow noted that several GIS and Environmental Program contracts will require the Commission's approval. Jerrard Whitten and Jen Hughes will provide an overview of them.

Chairman Snow announced that Vice Chairwoman Kathleen Colwell of Methuen resigned from her service on the Commission earlier this month. Taking her place in the interim will be alternate Commissioner William Buckley. We thank Kathleen for her time in representing Methuen as Commissioner and in fulfilling her duties as Vice Chair and wish her continued success. We will be filling the now vacant position of Vice-Chair next year, beginning with the process of selecting a new Nominating Committee at next month's MVPC meeting.

6. Executive Director's Report

Acting Director Anthony Komornick and the staff program managers highlighted information from the following Executive Director's Report:

MVPC's Anthony Komornick thanked the commissioners for the opportunity to serve the Commission as Acting Executive Director for MVPC. Chairman Snow provided a brief update on where we stand in the process of selecting a new Executive Director.

Two items have recently come to our attention that could impact us in the near future:

1. Recommendations have been made from the Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Area Standards Review Committee to the Office of Management and Budget Concerning Changes to the 2010 Standards for Delineating Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas. These include:

- a. The minimum urban area population to qualify a metropolitan statistical area should be increased from 50,000 to 100,000.
 - b. The delineation of New England city and town areas (NECTAs), NECTA Start divisions, and combined NECTAs should be discontinued.
2. Urban Areas for the 2020 Census-Proposed Criteria
- a. Qualify Urban Areas Based on a Minimum Threshold of 4,000 Housing Units or 10,000 Persons Instead of a Minimum Threshold of 2,500 Persons

The Program Managers gave an update on current projects they are working on.

Transportation Program update: Anthony Komornick

Merrimack Valley MPO

The Merrimack Valley MPO held a Virtual Meeting on February 24th. The MPO approved the addition of seven small-scale transit projects for the MVRTA in FFY 2021 amendments to the region’s FFYs 2021-2025 TIP that will be funded under FTA’s 5339 Program.

The removal of the Merrimack Riverbank Stabilization project at the MVRTA Maintenance Facility from the FFY 2021 element that had also been proposed was not approved because the MVRTA had new information that the project may still be able to move forward in 2021.

- Presentation of regional target project list based on ‘TIP Readiness Days’ virtual meeting for the development for the MVMPO’s FFYs 2022-2026 TIP.
- Tony and Mary Kay participated in virtual TIP project scoring meetings on February 23 and March 11 with MassDOT District 4 and MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning (OTP) to use the Transportation Evaluation Criteria to score potential TIP projects.
- The next meeting of the MVMPO will take place on March 24th. The key item for discussion will be choosing 2022 to 2026 Regional Target projects for the 2022-2026 Draft TIP which will be prepared at the beginning of April.
- Mr. Komornick noted a couple of significant Target projects were creating funding issues within 2022-2026.
 - Reconstruction of Route 1 from Salisbury Square to the New Hampshire Border. The cost has increased from \$6.5 to \$17m. Since this is a Target project it greatly impacts how much funding can be given to other Target projects in any given year over the 5 years in the TIP. It’s not clear how this issue will be resolved. An option being considered is to give the project an Advance Construction designation, allowing the project programming to be spread out over two years of the TIP.
 - Similarly, the Route 114 project in North Andover increased in cost from \$26m to \$35m. The only option available is to spread the cost over four years absorbing target funding at \$11m per year.

Mr. Komornick added that where there are not enough highway projects scheduled in the FY2022. Rather than having MassDOT take back the Target funding, the MVMPO is considering whether it may be transferred to the MVRTA so that the funding stays in the Merrimack Valley.

- MassDOT submitted a plan to make improvements to River Street in Haverhill near Lowell Avenue to develop a safe crossing for riders getting on and off the MVRTA buses. The plan is to make a new sidewalk with a safety median that would be controlled with a flashing beacon and provide additional sidewalks on the south side of River Street and bus turnoffs for the MVRTA buses so that riders can get off and on the buses safely and traffic would not be impacted so severely. This is very important to MVPC because these recommendations were included in the Road Safety Audit that was conducted by MVPC a few years ago and MassDOT is moving them forward.
- Parts of the Draft TIP are being prepared now including calculating Green House Gas emissions of projects and mapping new projects.
- Met virtually with staff from FHWA and FTA to review the schedule and other details involving the upcoming Planning Certification Review for the Merrimack Valley MPO. The review is tentatively scheduled to take place on May 24-27.

Studies, Technical Assistance, and Local Activities

- Jim and Tony met with Rebecca Oldham and Groveland DPW Director Renny Carroll to go over the steps needed for the Town to develop a Pavement Management Plan.
- Staff provided recently collected traffic count data to the Town of Newbury.
- Tony and Betsy participated in the March 4th virtual meeting of the MVRTA Advisory Board.
- Continued work on producing 2020 MVPC Traffic Volume Report.
- Danny and Betsy have been looking into additional options for purchasing traffic counters that can recognize bicycles in a shared-use environment (i.e., cyclists riding on the road with autos/trucks). We are holding off on purchasing new counters until our research and evaluation process is complete.
- Tony and Betsy participated in a March 4th virtual meeting with local and MassDOT staff regarding design options for the proposed Amesbury Carriagetown Connector project.
- We were pleased to receive MassDOT's draft plans for making transit and pedestrian improvements on River Street in Haverhill near its intersection with Lowell Avenue. The pedestrian improvements include a new crosswalk on River Street with a protective median island and flashing beacons and new sidewalks. For transit, new bus pull-offs will be constructed on both sides of River Street. The need for these improvements was identified in MVPCs Road Safety Audit of this location.
- Danny collected sidewalk conditions data for Railroad Avenue in Rowley to be used as part of the Active Transportation Plan.
- Betsy continued to work with the Lawrence Mayor's Health Task Force on the food assessment and actively participated in monthly meetings.
- Betsy participated in a webinar about Transportation Utility Fees.
- Betsy convened the monthly Upper Merrimack Planners meeting on March 8th.
- Betsy and planners from Lawrence, Methuen, and North Andover participated in the New England Rail-Trail Network meeting convened by Rail-to-Trails Conservancy.
- Betsy and Tony participated in a meeting with Brad Bucher and the Conservation Law Foundation about how MVPC can support the Lawrence Resilient Corridors Planning Project.

Betsy performed the following MVRTA-Related tasks:

- Began analyzing recently-released data on the location and number of bicycle loadings/unloadings on MVRTA buses that are equipped with the new external bike racks.
- Finished the quarterly ADA service review for the MVRTA.
- Reviewed a preliminary bus shelter wish-list provided by the MVRTA and analyzed it for pedestrian and bicycle access.

Environmental Program update: Jennifer Hughes

Brownfields Program

- Performing Phase I Assessment with Methuen on Battye Property.

Stormwater Collaborative/MS4 Support

- Work continues on the MassDEP MS4 grant to assist communities in identifying BMP retrofit sites as required in Year 4 of the permit. Environment and GIS are meeting with each community to identify the most relevant sites where green infrastructure can be implemented. We currently have information from all communities but Andover. Also need to meet with Andover, Merrimac, and Newbury to identify potential retrofit sites.
- Finalized contract with Georgetown to complete MS4 Stormwater Permit compliance activities.

Green Communities

- April competitive grant round is open. Met with Lawrence to identify possible projects.
- Working on a proposal to Georgetown for final reporting assistance on their designation grant.

AARC Grant

- Thanks to assistance from Nate and GIS, MVPC will have a clean energy web page for communities to access for clean energy and energy assistance programs.

Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

- North Andover is currently reviewing the draft MVP/HMP and plans to hold a listening session at the end of the month. The next step will be a review by MEMA and FEMA.
- MEMA included Lawrence's application to complete and update the Regional HMP to MEMA as part of the Building Resiliency Communities and Infrastructure Grant Program. Awards should be announced this summer.

Open Space Monitoring

- Conservation Restriction monitoring in West Newbury, utilizing the new Open Space application created by MVPC's GIS team, has been completed. MVPC hopes to present the monitoring reports and application later this month.

Municipal Vulnerability Program

- The MVP Program held a webinar last week regarding the upcoming round of MVP Planning and Action Grants. The grant announcement is expected at the end of the month.

Coastal Program

- Great Marsh Symposium was held on March 17, 2021, and very well attended with approximately 200 attendees.
- Marsh hydrology restoration grant development with Great Marsh Partners (USFW, MAF&W, MassAudubon, TTOR).
- Great Marsh Coalition website update (greatmarshcoalition.org).
- Great Marsh Partnership updates (greatmarshpartnership.com).
- Collaboration with MIT Seagrant on possible aquaculture opportunities in waters of the Great Marsh.
- Attended MBP sponsored Merrimack River water quality activities partners update.
- Planning and development of ECAN Marsh Hydrology subgroup on key project ideas.
- Beach sand microplastic sampling site reconnaissance.
- Attended two of three training sessions sponsored by MDAR necessary for applicators license upkeep.
- Participated in MassBays Biological Conditions Gradient workshop for classifying estuaries of MassBays.
- Great Marsh alewife habitat interview for local media.
- Planned, prepared, and attended the annual Great Marsh Symposium.
- As a Commissioner of the Essex National Heritage Commission, approximately thirty 2021 Partnership Grant proposals were reviewed, prioritized, and selected for funding.

GIS Program update: Jerrard Whitten

Contracts and Grant Opportunities

- Executed parcel update contracts for Georgetown and Merrimac.
- Executed MIMAP and parcel update contracts for Newbury and Rowley.
- Developing proposal for collaborative work with Groveland for stormwater compliance.
- Exploring GIS and Environmental assistance for Merrimac Open Space committee.

GIS and IT Hardware and Software support

- Conducting imagery evaluation with the region, negotiating terms and cost with vendors.
- Developing document management system with Merrimac and consultant.
- Collaborated with Transportation Program in submitting abstract for MassDOT Transportation Innovation Conference.
- Working with Economic Development Program to update and map subsidized housing inventory.
- Added Mass Growth Capital Corp data to Economic Development business listing.
- Worked with Economic Development Program to update available properties dataset for MVPC Data Portal.
- Developing Regional Open Space Management application with Environmental Program.
- Updated Food Assessment mapping application working with Transportation Program.
- Continued work with MIMAP developers to improve system functionality.

Community GIS Initiatives

- Andover – initiated Maintstar v15 upgrade.
- Georgetown – completed a draft version of the stormwater inspector application.
- Groveland – integrated Open Space/Trail mapping application with MIMAP.
- Haverhill – providing hosting services for CMMS.
- Lawrence – added voter precincts dataset to Food Assessment application.
- Merrimac – provided a set of OS and Trail maps for local review.
- Methuen – finalized and provided a set of draft OS maps in support of the OS plan.
- Newburyport – created draft OS/CR monitoring application, updated water system application for valves and geography (PI vs. mainland), updated Zoning.
- North Andover – provided data and analysis to Environmental Program in support of MVP/Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Rowley – refining Stormwater Inspector application working with Town’s consultant.
- Salisbury – completed additional revisions to water system data working with muni consultant.
- West Newbury – finalized FY2021 parcel update, provided draft maps for local review.

Community and Economic Development update: Nate Robertson

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

- Started outlining a Scope of Work for an Economic Development Website/Guide for the Town of Groveland.

EDA Applications

- MVPC has successfully revised the scope of the \$850,000 EDA grant award for the expansion of Lawrence Partnership’s *Revolving Test Kitchen*, a food industry business incubator, in downtown Lawrence. This project is a collaboration between the Lawrence Partnership, Lupoli Companies, MassDevelopment, Northern Essex Community College, Entrepreneurship for All, and Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. We are now clear to move forward with project billing.
- Met with EforAll to discuss their new scope of work and discuss the application timeline.

CARES Act

- Released RFP for the MV Small Business Technical Assistance Program on COMMBUYS and MVPC.org.

Housing

- Refining the regional SHI GIS Map for final distribution.
- Met with the City of Methuen to conduct a Downtown Investment Guide (DIG) to document where investments are being made and highlight mixed-use housing development opportunities.

Targeted Economic Development Strategy

- Assembled a list of targeted businesses in each of the communities to do outreach to.
- Began outreach efforts to targeted businesses in conjunction with the three municipalities of Lawrence, North Andover, and Andover.

District Local Technical Assistance

- Assembled FY 2021 DLTA Solicitation and Funding Guide for imminent distribution.

7. Contracts

Grants/Local Community Contracts (by MVPC Program)

GIS

- **Georgetown** - \$ 1,800 (Includes use of 21 LTA hours) - Parcel Update FY2022
- **Merrimac** - \$3,000 (No match required) – Parcel Update FY2021
- **Newbury** - \$4,700 (No match required) – Parcel Update and MIMAP Operation FY2022
- **Rowley** - \$4,600 (No match required) - Parcel Update and MIMAP Operation FY2022

MVPC to receive funding from the towns of Georgetown, Merrimac, Newbury, and Rowley for the above GIS services.

Vote: There was a motion by Commissioner Taintor and seconded by Commissioner Barnes to authorize the above-mentioned contracts. The contracts were approved by Secretary Laplante’s roll call vote of 10 attending commissioners. 1 commissioner was not available at the time of the roll call vote.

Environmental

- **Mass. Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) - \$ 100,000 (plus \$66,667 in-kind match = Total Contract amount of \$166,667) - 319 Grant – Essex County Nonpoint Source**

MVPC will be partnering with the Merrimac River Watershed Council (MRWC) to receive funding from DEP over the next two (+) years to advance the goals of the Non-Point Source (NPS) Program. MVPC will serve as Regional NPS Coordinator in Essex County, in partnership with the Merrimack River Watershed Council (MRWC). We will work within Essex County to conduct education and outreach in all eleven Merrimack River Communities, work with local officials and municipal staff to identify high-priority areas for investigation, develop Watershed-Based Plans for 3 high-priority areas, and submit three 319 grants with at least one from an MVPC Environmental Justice Community. The MRWC will receive \$40,000 of the contract amount and provide \$15,000 of the associated in-kind match. MVPC will provide the remaining \$51,667 in in-kind match from its Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) District LTA funding.

Vote: There was a motion by Commissioner Taylor and seconded by Commissioner Soto to authorize the above-mentioned contract. The contract was unanimously approved by Secretary Laplante’s roll call vote of 11 attending commissioners.

8. Local and Regional Issues

Commissioner Barnes reported that Boxford’s Town Administrator, Alan Benson, officially resigned from his position effective this summer. A search committee is in place to search for his replacement.

Commissioner Barnes noted that the government just released the new Rescue Act and suggested that community spending of the funding be coordinated with existing COVID relief efforts and potential transportation improvement projects with the MVPC to maximize the resources and prevent duplication of efforts.

9. Other - None

10. Adjourn

Chairman Snow asked if there was any more business, hearing none, declared the meeting adjourned at 11:48 am. The meeting software indicated there were 10 commissioners present at the time of the Chairman’s declaration of adjournment.

Robert Laplante, Secretary