

MERRIMACK VALLEY

# COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2023–2028



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# INTRODUCTION

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**MVPC and the CEDS**

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**Acknowledgements**

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**Message from the Chair**

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**CEDS Accomplishments  
Since 2018**

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# INTRODUCTION: THE MERRIMACK VALLEY AND THE 2023–2028 CEDS

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) is one of 15 Regional Planning Agencies across Massachusetts, charged with planning and promoting sustainable development across the region. MVPC works in partnership with municipal staff in the cities and towns that comprise the Merrimack Valley region: Amesbury, Andover, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Merrimac, Methuen, Newbury, Newburyport, North Andover, Rowley, Salisbury, and West Newbury.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a five year strategic plan for the future of the Merrimack Valley's economy. The CEDS is made possible through a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), part of the Department of Commerce. As an EDA-designated Economic Development District (EDD), MVPC is charged with planning and executing the CEDS on a five year basis.

The last CEDS, which began implementation in 2018, envisioned a future economy that supports the region's downtowns, manufacturers, cultural sites, and transportation networks. Significant progress has been made towards these goals, as noted on pages ten and eleven. Since its creation five years ago, much has changed the state of the region's economy. First, the Columbia Gas disaster forced businesses closed throughout Andover, North Andover, and Lawrence for months on end. As the region recovered from that disaster, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, devastating the national and local economy. Facing an unprecedented shutdown of the economy, regional partners gathered to tackle the needs of businesses and workers—in many cases, guided by the themes developed in the 2018 CEDS.

Coming out of COVID-19, the region has seen significant shifts in living and working. Faced with a new economic reality, this CEDS document began its creation.

This CEDS is the culmination of a year-long planning effort that brought together over 40 economic development stakeholders from across the region, representing state & local governments, nonprofit organizations, community development organizations, and local business leaders. Together, the CEDS Committee met monthly to strategize around the top priorities for the future of the region's economy. A full list of the committee members can be found in Appendix I.

Beyond acting as a guiding document for framing the next five years of work in the Merrimack Valley, the CEDS aligns priorities to create actionable recommendations and priority projects for local governments and organizations to undertake over the next half decade. Although each individual project may not require the work of all partners, the CEDS as a whole can only be

implemented with the help of all organizations involved in its creation.

This CEDS document is laid out in the same way the CEDS Committee undertook its planning process. Beginning with analyzing regional data to understand the current conditions of the Merrimack Valley's economy, the committee then used the data to create a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the region. Informed by the data and SWOT analysis, the committee drafted five main pillars—and under each pillar, developed objectives and actionable strategies. With the objectives and strategies in mind, the CEDS committee identified action items, priority projects, and measures of success.

This CEDS is important not only for economic development stakeholders, but for any resident of the region to understand where the Merrimack Valley's economy stands today, and where we intend to go. It will guide the Merrimack Valley through continued growth and success.

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### Guide to Acronyms in this document

**CARES Act | Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act**

**CDFI | Community Development Financial Institution**

**CDC | Community Development Corporation**

**CEDS | Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy**

**CHAPA | Citizens' Housing and Planning Association**

**EDA | Economic Development Administration**

**EDD | Economic Development District**

**EPA | Environmental Protection Agency**

**ESOL | English to Speakers of Other Languages**

**GED | General Education Development**

**MeVa | Merrimack Valley Transit, formerly MVRTA**

**MPO | Metropolitan Planning Organization**

**MV | Merrimack Valley**

**MVED | Merrimack Valley Economic Development Corporation**

**MVPC | Merrimack Valley Planning Commission**

**MVRTA | Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority**

**REDO | Regional Economic Development Organization**

**USDOT | United States Department of Transportation**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**On behalf of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission and its Community and Economic Development Program, we would like to express our sincere thanks to all who participated in the 2023-2028 CEDS.** Over the past year this committee of municipal officials, business owners, state government representatives and nonprofit industry leaders met monthly to develop this comprehensive strategy that has been structured to chart a path for economic growth in the Merrimack Valley for the next five years. Led by our CEDS Committee Chair, Stratton Lloyd, this group of economic development experts analyzed data, identified solutions, and achieved consensus on how best to help the region advance in the coming years. This work would not have been possible without the intellectual contribution of each and every member of the committee and we are very appreciative to each of our partners who contributed their time and effort toward the production of MVPC's 2023-2028 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. A full list of the committee members can be found in Appendix I. Thank you all for your work on this important plan designed to promote the orderly and sustained economic growth of the Merrimack Valley for years to come.



**Jerrard Whitten, Executive Director  
Merrimack Valley Planning Commission**

**Stratton Lloyd**, Executive Vice President & Chief Operations Officer with the Essex County Community Foundation, served as the CEDS Committee Chair, providing guidance, input, stakeholder engagement, and support throughout the planning process.

**The Following MVPC Staff made significant contributions to the planning process and production of this final plan:**

**Jerrard Whitten** | Executive Director

**Jenifer Dunlap** | Deputy Director / Finance Director

**Ian Burns** | Community & Economic Development Program Coordinator

**Lauren Keisling** | Community Planner

**Kayla Rennie** | Community & Economic Development Planner

**Tony Collins** | Transportation Planner

**The development of this CEDS is funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration under the U.S. Department of Commerce**



# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

In 2022, our committee of local cross-sector leaders boarded a welcoming, colorful bus - operated by the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority, now known simply as MeVa - bound for an “inspiration” tour of the Merrimack Valley.

Along the way, we saw the growth and promise of some of the region’s biggest industrial centers, the hustle and bustle of commerce and community on Main Streets. We travelled the same roads and routes that residents use daily to get to work, to see friends and family, visit cultural attractions or take care of tasks that represent everyday life.

Up along the Merrimack River and back down the other side, we witnessed promise and progress. We observed challenges and opportunities. And with a renewed sense of the things that connect the 15 communities that make up the region, our committee, together with more than 40 regional business, government and nonprofit stakeholders, set to work on building the **Merrimack Valley Planning Commission’s 2023-2028 Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)** - together.

This document, a year in the making, creates a strategic framework that not only builds on the incredible accomplishments of the last half-decade, but also provides guidelines for growing and strengthening the economic ecosystem of the Merrimack Valley for the future, which we know can often be uncertain. The strategy outlined within takes a systematic look at the region’s successes and opportunities, and includes data, analysis and recommendations under five unique but interconnected pillars: Workforce Development and Industry Cultivation; Transportation and Mobility; Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs; Vibrant, Resilient Communities and Destinations; and Housing.

The goal is to collectively envision a region that provides **opportunity for ALL** to enjoy the quality of life the Merrimack Valley is known for, and to collaboratively embark on specific projects that make the region increasingly resilient: expanding career training programs, improving public transportation, creating new pathways to homeownership, ensuring our infrastructure and natural amenities are resilient to climate change, breaking down barriers to small business growth and so much more.

The priorities laid out in this strategy are driven by, for and from the community, and they are designed to provide a roadmap that leads the way toward creating sustainable change together.

Thank you to each and every person that contributed their time and expertise to this project.



Stratton Lloyd | CEDS Committee Chair  
Executive Vice President and COO  
Essex County Community Foundation

# 2018–2023 CEDS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The 2018 CEDS had four main pillars from which to build success over its five years: City & Town Centers, Manufacturing, Natural and Cultural Resources, and Transportation. Under each of these pillars were objectives and strategies that informed the action plan. Significant progress has been made under the guidance of the 2018 CEDS, while some objectives will be pulled forward into this newest edition of the CEDS. Below are a few key milestones accomplished under the objectives of the 2018-2023 CEDS. For a complete list of Priority Projects accomplished from the 2018 CEDS, see Appendix III.

## NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

**Vision: Natural and cultural resources are celebrated as vital to economic, social, and environmental resilience.**

### Protect open spaces for our natural and human environments to thrive

- Began an update to the regional Priority Growth Strategy, which will identify priority development and priority preservation areas
- Municipalities purchased open space areas for permanent preservation
- Completed Open Space and Recreation plans in local cities and towns

### Create communities that are safe, healthy, inclusive, diverse, and accessible, offering a plethora of natural and cultural opportunities

- Developed the Essex County Cultural Plan in partnership with the Essex County Community Foundation

## TRANSPORTATION

**Vision: Our multi-modal transportation system will be efficient and effective, and can play a key role in attracting and retaining employers and employees to/in the region, in helping individuals access jobs and job training, and in attracting visitors.**

### Increase the number of people who live and work in the Merrimack Valley

- The Targeted Economic Development Strategy met with large employers across the region to learn about their employees' transportation needs
- Since 2018 the Merrimack Valley has continued to grow in population, and 53,000 residents now live and work in the region

### Expand and enhance multi-modal transportation

- Methuen Rail Trail completed, with design in progress on the Lawrence extension

- First protected bike lane in the region is planned in the City of Methuen
- MVPC Secured federal funding to launch a Safe Streets for All program
- MeVa rebranded from the MVRTA, creating a more culturally relevant and inclusive brand for the region's riders
- Federal and State transportation agencies invested nearly \$80 million annually in infrastructure improvements through the Transportation Improvement Program
- Federal grant money was secured by MeVa to build two solar powered ferries for transportation along the Merrimack River

### **Ensure efficient movement of goods, people, and services**

- MeVa bus service became fare free, and buses operating Lawrence routes now run every 30 minutes.
- Bus on shoulder implemented and evaluated along I-93

### **Consider future transportation needs and advancements when planning for economic development**

- Began electric vehicle charging station mapping and planning for all cities and towns
- Incentivizing development to occur near transit nodes
- Bus routes added to Haverhill's Broadway business park, and new routes being explored to businesses in Haverhill and North Andover

## **CITY AND TOWN CENTERS**

**Vision: Our town and city centers are diverse, active spaces that promote a balanced live/work/play environment.**

### **Increase local planning capacity to create vibrant town and city centers**

- New staff hired at MVPC to expand community & economic development department
- MVPC partnered with local and regional chambers to expand economic development programming
- Created a Downtown Investment Guide for the City of Methuen to market available sites for redevelopment
- Supported MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative in Lawrence
- MVPC received funding to assist municipal staff with MBTA communities implementation

### **Update local zoning bylaws and permitting to allow desired uses**

- Numerous rezonings across the region, including new mixed use overlays in downtowns
- City of Haverhill passed an Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinance
- MVPC is assisting cities and towns with implementing the Commonwealth's MBTA

Communities legislation, with a goal of creating more walkable neighborhoods

- Each city and town has a certified Housing Production Plan, which are being updated for 2024

### **Take advantage of diverse funding sources to support local infrastructure improvements and revitalization efforts**

- MVPC secured additional EPA Brownfields funding to support brownfield redevelopment in the region
- City of Newburyport received EDA funding to rebuild parts of its waterfront bulkhead
- New DLTA-Augmentation funds allow MVPC to assist municipal staff with searching and applying for state and federal grants
- CARES Act funding was used to create the MV Strong program, a free small business technical assistance program that assisted over 250 businesses in the region
- EDA funds expanded Revolving Test Kitchen operations in Lawrence, supporting food entrepreneurs
- MVED provided gap loans to small businesses through the EDA-funded MV Economic Development Loan Fund. Since 2018, MVED provided four loans totaling \$555,675.

## **MANUFACTURING**

### **Vision: Manufacturing is a key source of jobs, income, innovation and prosperity in the Merrimack Valley**

### **Brand the Merrimack Valley as the premiere location for manufacturing jobs and innovation in the commonwealth**

- Created business development guides on WeAreMV.com to help businesses grow in the region, and created a dedicated municipal economic development website for the Town of North Andover
- MVPC attained REDO designation. Through REDO programming, staff meet with businesses in Manufacturing and other industries to address their challenges to retain their workforce
- Added a business resources page to WeAreMV.com, centralizing all financing, grant, and training opportunities for businesses from various government agencies and nonprofits

### **Provide employees and employers with the training and skill-building necessary to be successful**

- Merrimack Valley Economic Development Corporation became the region's Regional Economic Development Organization, creating a new resource for employers to be connected with state programs

- Conducted a workforce survey of manufacturers to learn their workforce needs, with a final report that offered key recommendations

**Adopt local land use policies and programs that support sustainable manufacturing uses that are integrated into the fabric of the community**

- Textile innovation center study analyzed the potential for future textile manufacturing in Lawrence
- MVPC conducted an outreach initiative to regional manufacturers to learn what they need to support their growth



# BACKGROUND DATA

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**Regional  
Demographics**

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**Workforce & Industry**

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**Emerging Industries**

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**Transportation**

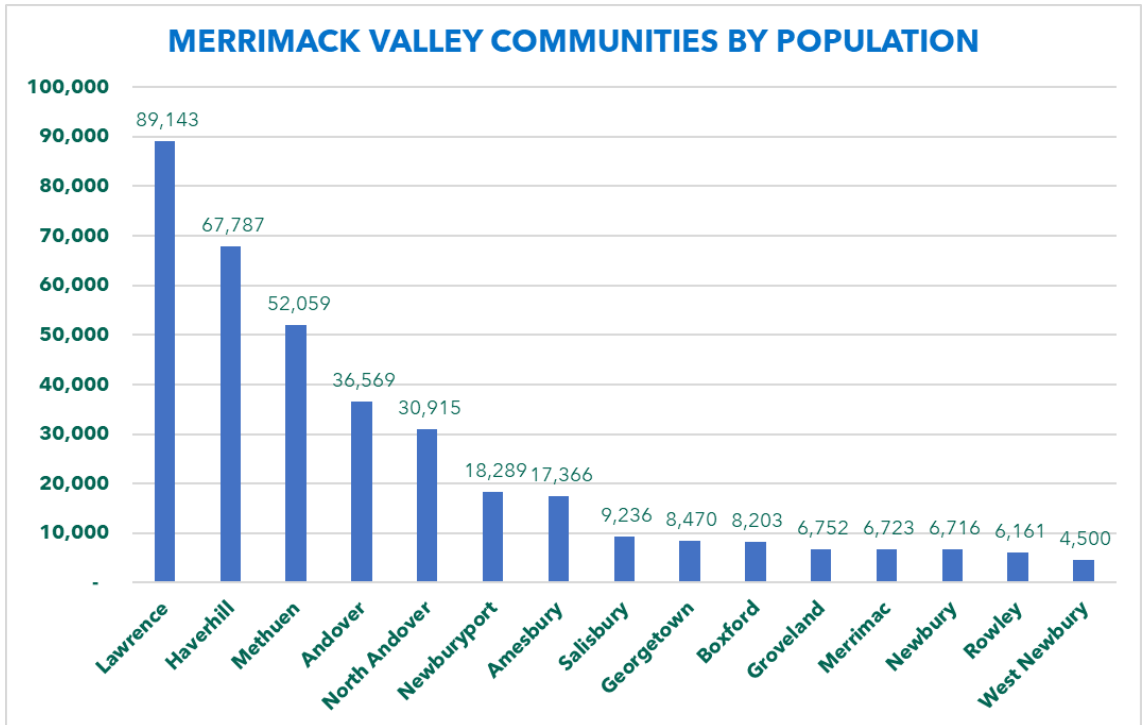
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**Housing**

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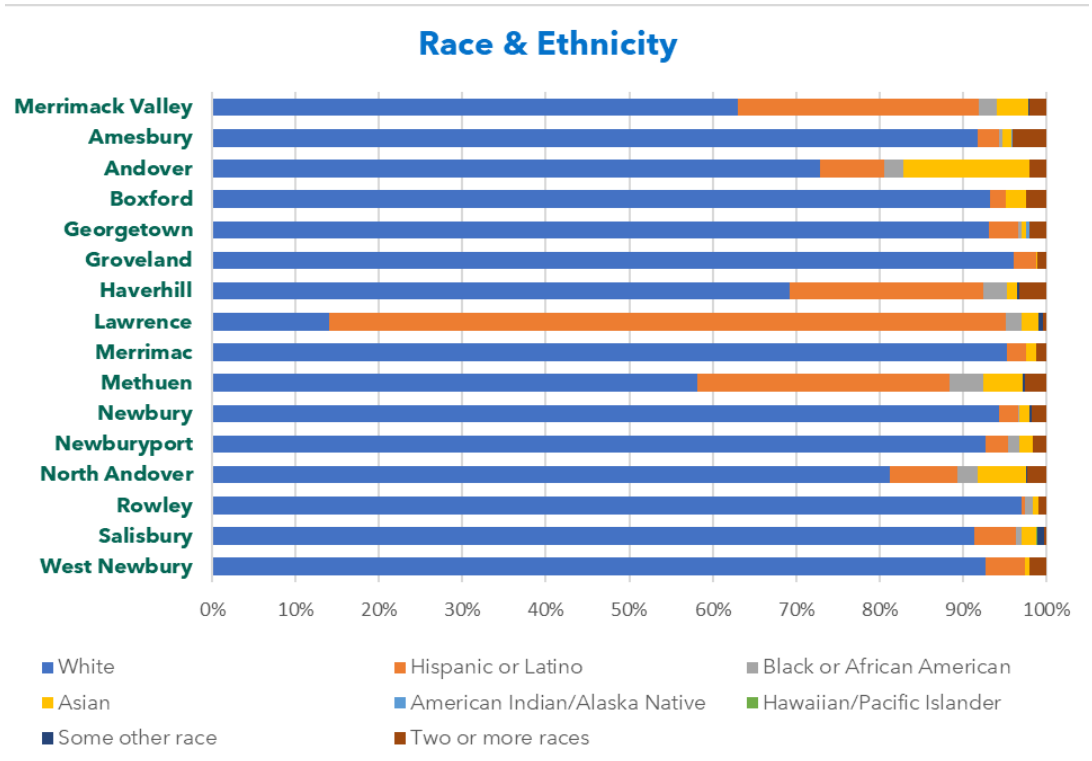
# REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The Merrimack Valley is home to almost 370,000 people as of the 2020 census. Lawrence, Haverhill, and Methuen—“Gateway Cities” that are economic hubs and have high immigrant populations—constitute the three most populous municipalities. The region is a diverse mix of communities, with mid-size cities like Lawrence, and rural small towns like West Newbury and Rowley.



Source: 2020 Decennial Census, Table P1

This dichotomy is also seen in race and ethnicity—as a whole, the region is diverse, but the non-white populations are concentrated in just a few communities. About 60% of the region is white, while almost 40% are Black, Latino, or Asian. As a whole, the Merrimack Valley region is projected to grow in population over the next decade.<sup>1</sup> This growth is only projected in a few regions across Massachusetts, particularly the eastern portion of the state. It is important to consider the economic implications of

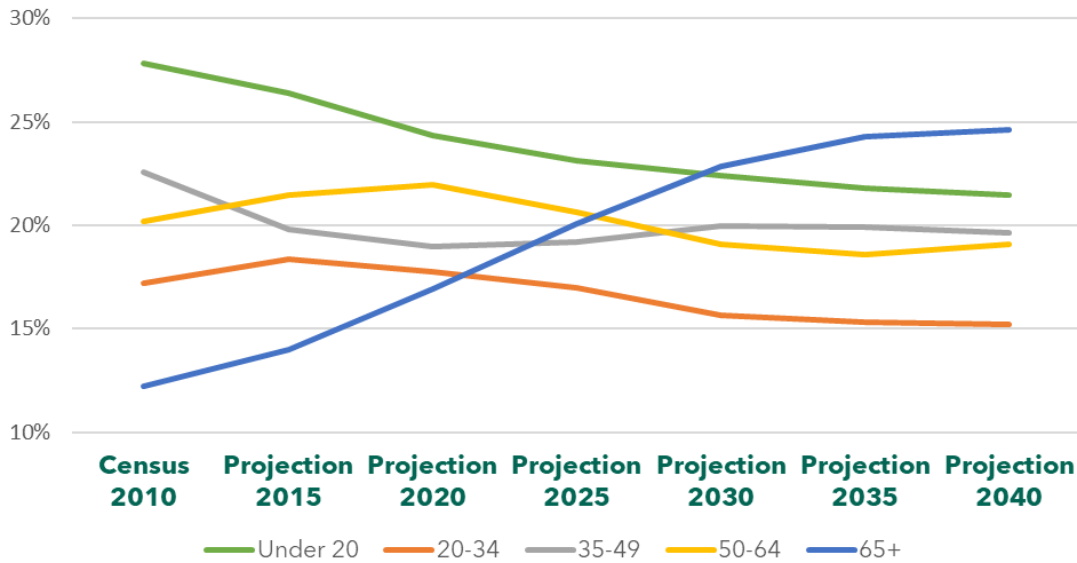


Source: 2020 Decennial Census, table P1

<sup>1</sup>Umass Donahue Institute, Massachusetts Population Projections, “City/Town Totals”



## Age Distribution Projections %



Change in population by selected age cohorts. Source: Umass Donahue Institute, Massachusetts Population Projections, "Age/Sex Details"

this population growth, as a growing population likely means a growing labor force. The diversity of the region also lends itself to a diverse workforce, a trait employers are increasingly seeking.

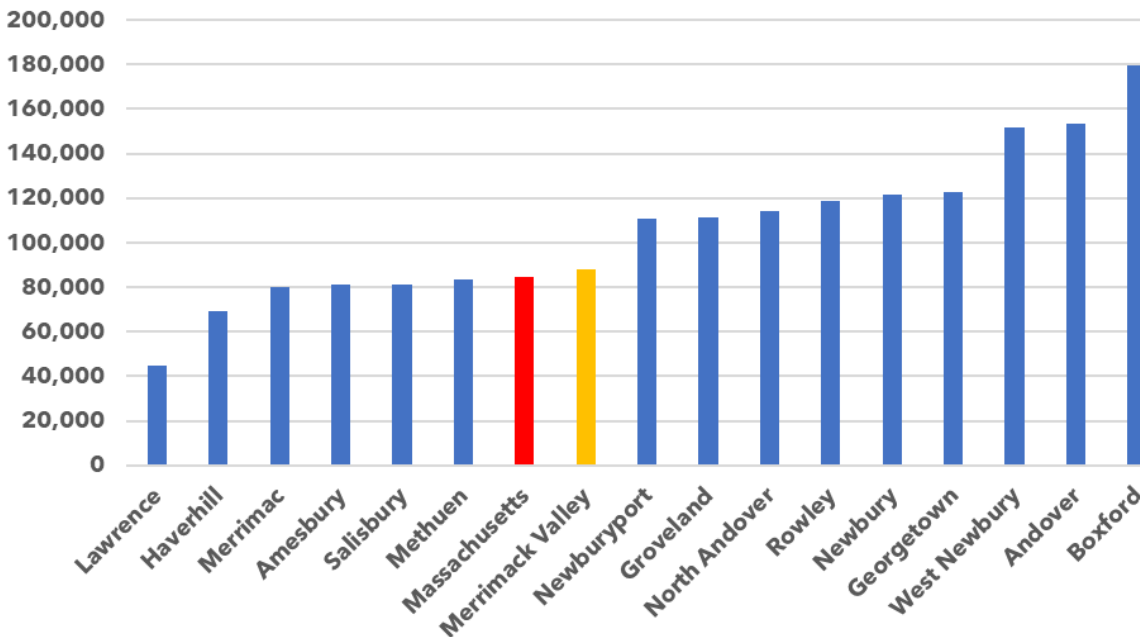
The Merrimack Valley is a growing region, but it is also an aging region. The 65+ age cohort is projected to almost double in size over the next 20 years, reflecting trends seen across Massachusetts. This presents a challenge for

the labor force—as more older adults retire and fewer young adults enter the workforce, there will be a need for employees across sectors. This demographic shift in a reduction of labor force was projected long before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic hastened the change. Older adults retired early, and some adults did not return to the workforce after pandemic-induced layoffs and furloughs.

The youngest communities in the region also tend to be the cities and major economic hubs—Lawrence,

Haverhill, and Methuen (Appendix II-7). This relative youthfulness is important to consider not only for workforce, but for other economic reasons. Young people contribute to the community's arts & culture scene, night life, and may soon be looking for an apartment or to purchase their first home.

## MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

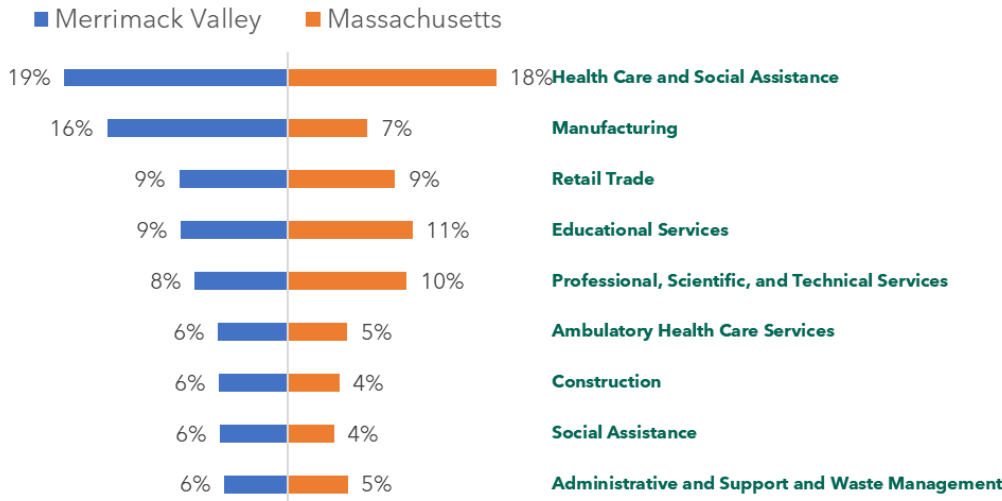


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2016—2021, table S1901

Households in the Merrimack Valley have slightly higher compared to the state, but this is not distributed evenly across the region. Communities like Andover and Boxford have some of the highest incomes in the state, while cities like Lawrence and Haverhill have some of the lowest.

# INDUSTRY & WORKFORCE

## Industry Mix by Percentage of Total Employment

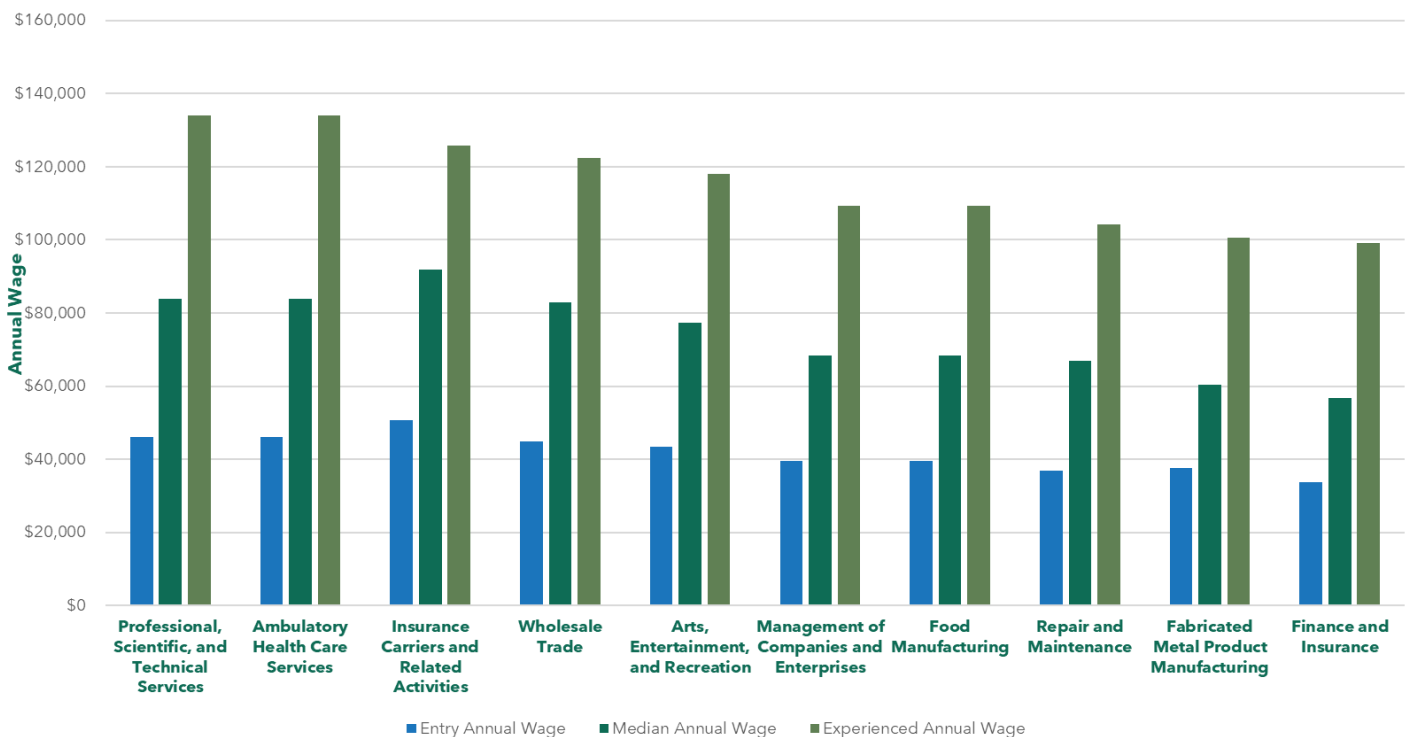


The Merrimack Valley has a fairly typical mix of industries compared to the state, except for one area: manufacturing. The region's manufacturing base makes up more than double the percentage of the state manufacturing base, at 16% versus 7% for the state. Healthcare and social assistance is the largest industry by employment. This is the same as the state, but it comes with a top concern—this industry is one of the lowest paying in the state (Appendix II-2).

Source: MA Department of Economic Research, "Staffing Patterns by Industry"

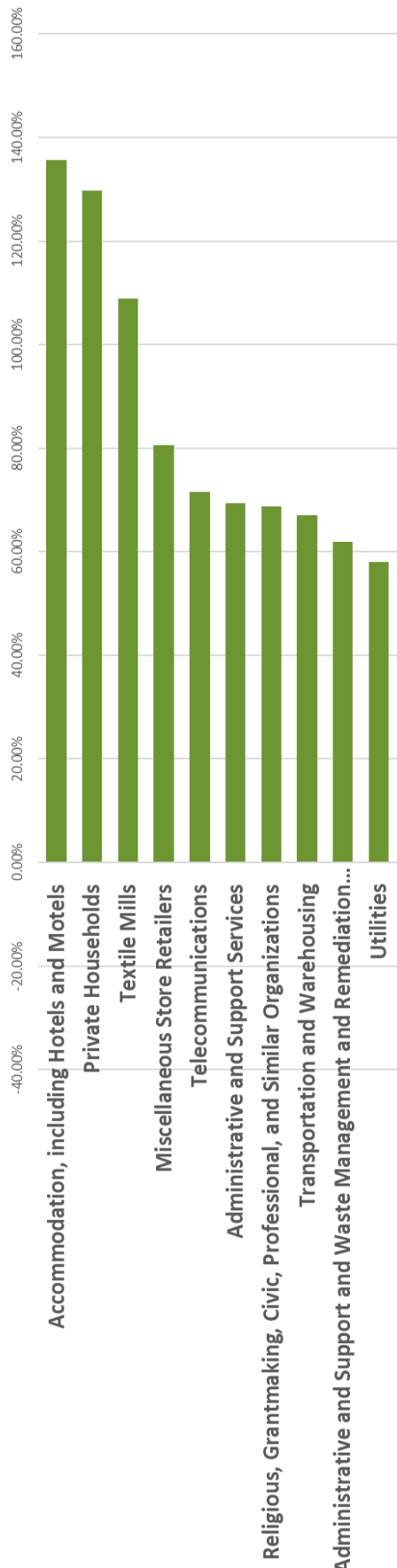
In contrast to the low paying healthcare and social assistance industry, the region is home to some relatively high paying industries. Professional, scientific, and technical services have a median annual wage just above \$80,000, with Ambulatory Healthcare Services and Insurance rounding out the top three highest paying

## MERRIMACK VALLEY HIGHEST PAYING INDUSTRIES



Source: MA Department of Economic Research, "Employment & Wage Industry Data"

## Top Projected Growing Industries in the Merrimack Valley Region, 2022–2033



Source: MA Department of Economic Research, "Long Term Industry Projections"

industries. Notably, both Food Manufacturing and Metal Product Manufacturing are in the top 10 highest paid industries—part of the key cluster of manufacturing industries in the region.

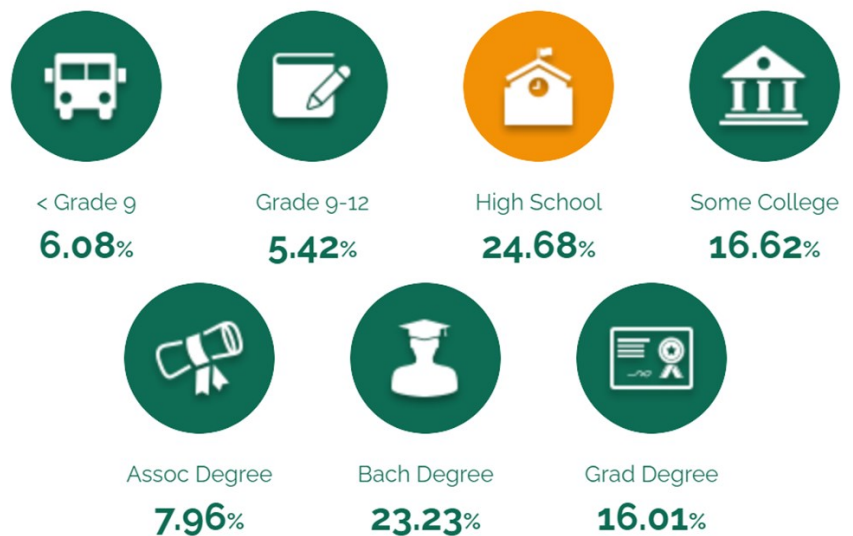
Along with the top industries in the region, it is important to consider the growing industries. According to the Massachusetts Department of Economic Research, some of the top industries projected to grow over the next decade include hospitality, retail, housing, and administrative services. Although textile mills are listed as the number two growing industry, this indicator may be met with some caution. The vast majority of this industry's growth in the region has been due to just one or two companies—although this shows promise for the potential of future businesses to be successful in that industry, it may not yet be a reliable trend that should be used for decision making purposes.

Many of these projected growing industries are also seen in the region's industry share, notably administrative services and retail. Of concern is the lack of Manufacturing listed as a potential growing industry—recent trends have shown its overall employment in the region is shrinking (Appendix II-3). Given that this industry makes up such a large employment base, thought should be given to ensure long-term resilience of this industry.

### Educational Attainment

The Merrimack Valley region is highly educated, with just under 50% of residents holding an associates degree or higher. This is close to the Massachusetts average, which is one of the highest in the country. This educated workforce is a key factor for employers trying to decide where to locate.

### Educational Attainment by Percentage of Population



Source: MVPC Data Portal, Applied Geographic Solutions and GIS Planning 2022, TaxFoundation.Org 2021 and GIS Planning research.

Contributing to this educated and skilled workforce in the Merrimack Valley are the various educational institutions located in the region. Outside of traditional secondary schools, the region is home to Greater Lawrence Technical High School and Whitter Regional Technical High School. These secondary schools offer strong training programs to prepare graduates for full time careers without going to college.

If a student chooses to pursue post-secondary degrees, the region has both public and private opportunities. Northern Essex Community College (NECC) creates pathways for both associates and bachelors degrees, as well as various certificate programs. NECC also offers adult training programs for specific career pathways. Merrimack College is the largest private higher education institution in the region, offering Bachelors and Masters degree programs.

# TRANSPORTATION

The Merrimack Valley sits at the intersection of several major roadways, situated at the crossroads of New England—Interstate 93 runs south-north along the region’s western end, interstate 95 runs south-north along the eastern end, and interstate 495 runs southwest-northeast across the region in a route closely following the Merrimack River. This affords the region easy access to major hubs across New England: Boston to the south, Worcester to the West, and Manchester & Portland to the North. Businesses are conveniently located to be easily reached by both commuting employees and moving freight. From many locations across the region, residents can be in Boston within 30 minutes. Boston Logan International Airport and Manchester-Boston Regional Airport are both under 40 minutes via car. Due to the extensive highway network in the region, MA DOT and US DOT invest over \$80 million annually in the Merrimack Valley.

The region is served by the MeVa Transit (formerly Merrimack Valley Transit Authority) bus system. This comprehensive bus system serves ten out of 15 communities in the region—the exceptions are Boxford, Georgetown, Newbury, Rowley, and West Newbury. MeVa has extensive service in the three gateway cities—Lawrence, Methuen, and Haverhill—and has hubs out in the cities of Amesbury and Newburyport. The most heavily used bus routes are located in Lawrence<sup>1</sup>, where buses run every 30 minutes. Starting in 2022, the entire system is fare-free.

In addition to the bus service, the Merrimack Valley has access to two separate commuter rail lines to Boston. The Haverhill line has two stops in Andover, one in Lawrence, and two in Haverhill. The Newburyport Line has one stop each in Rowley and Newburyport. The stops in Andover, Lawrence, Haverhill, and Newburyport connect to MeVa busses.

With the region’s rail stops being located near the ends of the lines, trains are less frequent than stops closer to metro Boston. Additionally, although the train is well suited for workers commuting into Boston, the schedule is not well made for workers reverse commuting in the outbound direction away from Boston.

In addition to MBTA Commuter Rail Service, the Amtrak Downeaster stops in Haverhill on its way north to Brunswick, Maine, and south to Boston.



Source: Merrimack Valley Transit

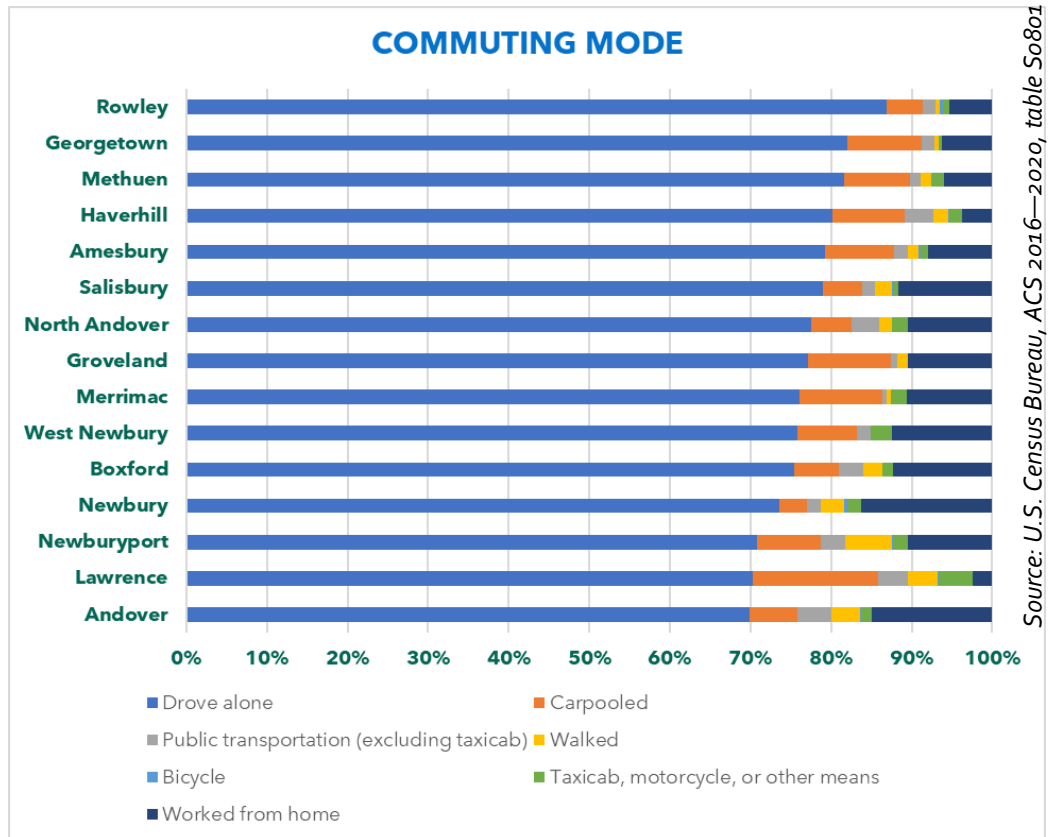
<sup>1</sup>MeVa Transit Ridership Data

Much of the rural area of the region is disconnected from transit options. Buses running within the city boundaries may be efficient and timely, but intercity routes tend to be longer and less frequent. This presents a challenge for commuters who live in one area of the region and need to commute to another without a car. Most business parks are located outside the city centers, making them less accessible for transit riders. When looking to access a strong workforce, employers often have to ensure their employees have the ability to get to work, especially for workers who cannot afford to live near their workplace.

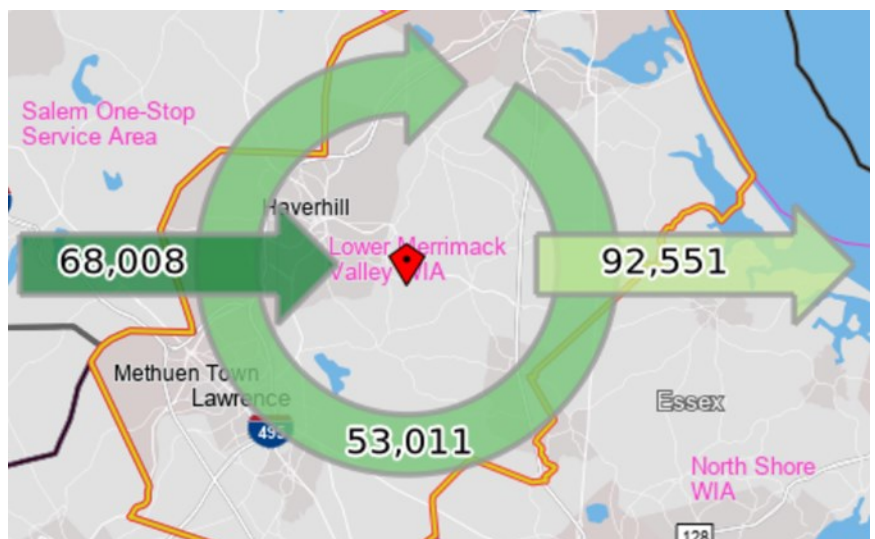
Given the inefficiencies in the current transportation system and the extensive highway network, it is not surprising to see the majority of residents in the region commute by car. The next largest cohort of commuters carpool, and less than 5% across each community commute by public transportation. This data was last available pre-COVID-19, so although we do see a sizable amount of workers working from home, it is expected that this number has significantly increased since this data was made available.

Commuting times for workers vary across the region, with most workers commuting less than 30 minutes. Almost half commute more than 30 minutes, with 10-20% of workers commuting more than 60 minutes (Appendix II-4).

In addition to considering commuting times, it is important to consider where Merrimack Valley residents are commuting to. Data from the MA Office of Labor and Workforce Development show 32% of workers commute into the region from outside, 25% work and live in the region, and 43% live in the region but commute out for work. The plurality of workers living in the region but commuting out may be doing so for several reasons, including relatively cheaper housing here compared to metro Boston. Conversely, residents commuting to the region but living elsewhere may be due to high housing costs here compared to nearby regions. It is common for employees to commute from New Hampshire due to lower cost of living in that state.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2016–2020, table S0801

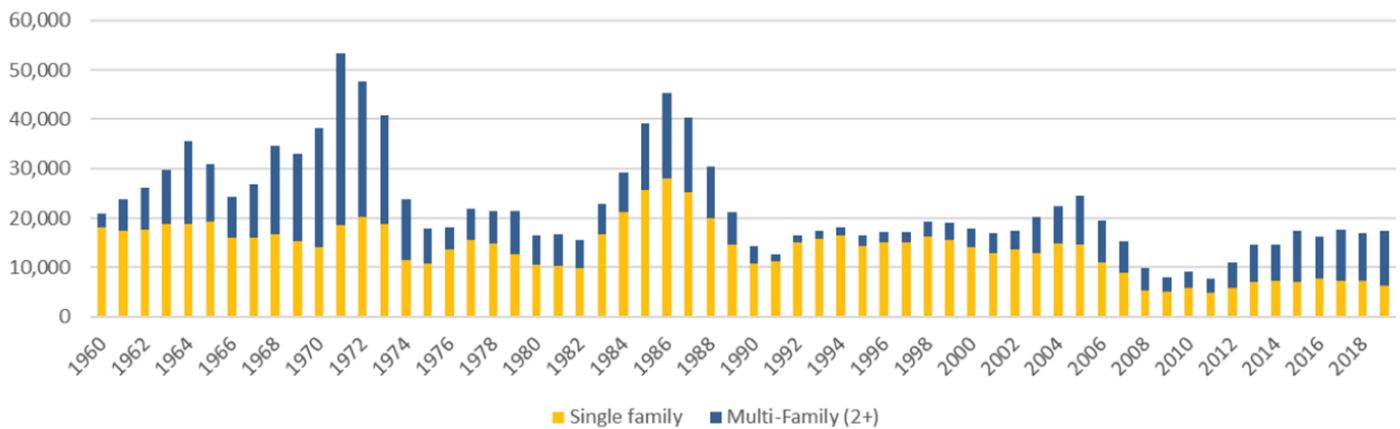


Commuting flow of Merrimack Valley residents and workers. Source: U.S. Census Bureau; UMass Donahue Institute image and analysis

# HOUSING

Over the past three decades, Massachusetts has seen a significant slowdown in housing production when compared to the previous three decades. This reduction in construction has created an imbalance in the housing market, resulting in soaring rent and home prices. As a result, in all but four communities across the region, a majority of renters are housing cost burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income

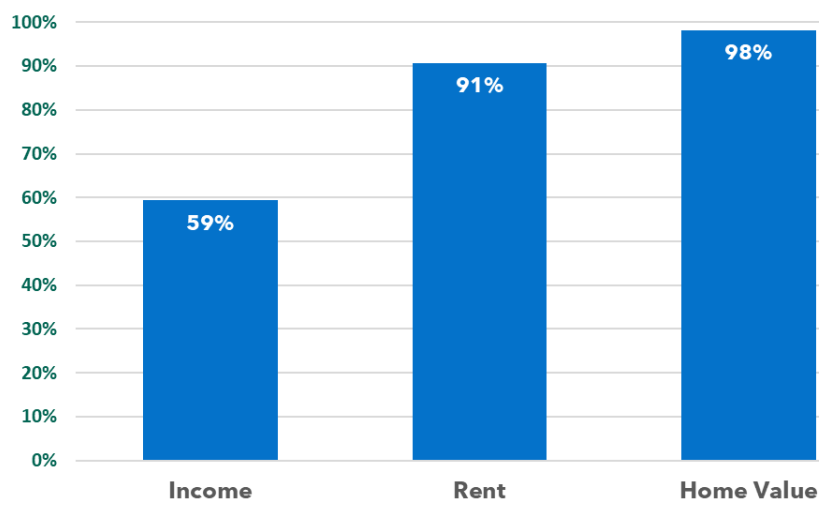
**Building Permits Issued in Massachusetts, 1960–2018**



Data and image source: MA Department of Housing and Community Development, MBTA Communities webinar presentation

on housing costs. Even in the four communities where a majority are not cost burdened, almost 40% are (Appendix II-5). As expected, homeowners see a lower rate of cost burden. This amount, however, is not negligible. In all but four communities, one in four homeowners are housing cost burdened (Appendix II-5).

**Merrimack Valley Median Income, Rent, and Home Value: % Increase from 2000-2020**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: 2000 and 2020 Decennial Census, tables DP-3 & DP-4, 2020 American Community Survey, table DP-04

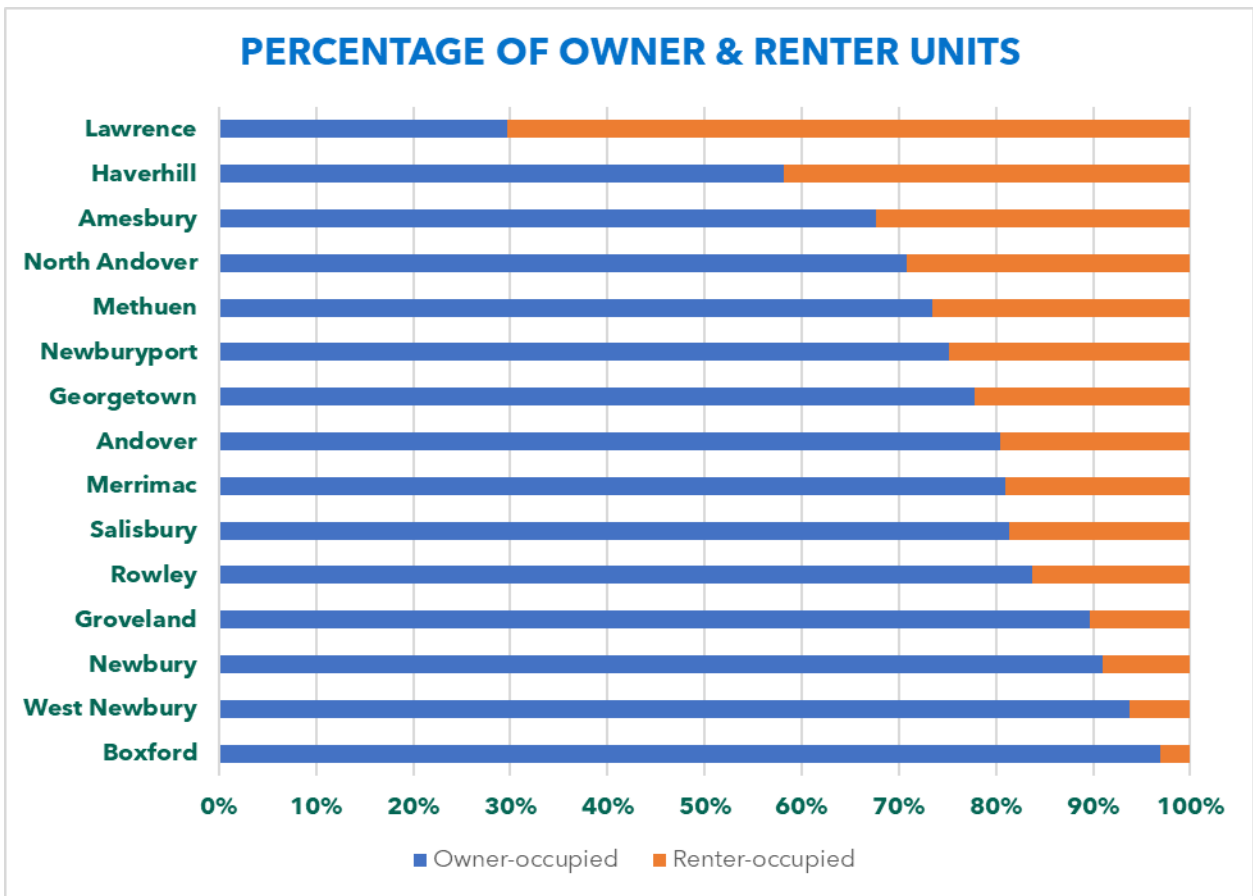
Contributing to this cost burden is how significantly the rise in housing costs has outpaced incomes in the past 20 years. In the Merrimack Valley, housing costs went up between 91% - 98% from 2000–2020, while incomes only rose about 60% during that same period. This sharp increase in housing costs can be attributed in part to the decrease in supply.

Additional data show that a majority of renters across the region have household incomes of less than \$50,000. This is significantly lower than homeowners, where a majority have a household income of over \$75,000. In most communities, the majority of owner-occupied homes make more than \$100,000 (Appendix II-6).

This presents challenges when considering workers' access to housing. The town of Andover, one of the more expensive communities in the region, is home to some of the largest manufacturers. The City of Newburyport,

located on the far eastern edge of the region, sees some of the highest housing costs while being home to one of the region’s largest business parks. This means that for low wage workers, with infrequent transit service and housing too limited and high cost near their place of work, they likely must own a car or know someone with a car to get to work. This may make it difficult for employers, especially manufacturers, to recruit workers—a key factor for businesses when determining where to locate their facilities.

Looking at housing units by tenure type, there is a clear divide between communities with large percentages of renter occupied units and communities with large percentages of owner occupied units. With large renter populations in communities like Lawrence and Haverhill, a major concern is resilience to economic shock. Renters may be more vulnerable than homeowners to rising housing costs, resulting in frequent moves compared to homeowners. Instability in living situations may lead to instability with employment, making it harder for businesses to find workers who can maintain employment in one place for a long period of time.





# SWOT & RESILIENCY

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**Strengths**

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**Weaknesses**

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**Opportunities**

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**Threats**

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**Resiliency Efforts**

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# SWOT ANALYSIS

To best plan for the needs of the region's economy over the next five years, the CEDS committee conducted a SWOT analysis of the economic conditions after reviewing the background data. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. In the analysis, the strengths and weaknesses are considered to be internal factors, and factors the region has some control over. Opportunities and threats are considered to be external factors—areas that the region cannot control but can act on. The full committee completed a draft of an initial SWOT analysis, which was then refined over the course of subsequent meetings. These items in the SWOT analysis were then used to help identify priority objectives and strategies for the overall vision of the CEDS.

## STRENGTHS

- Educated and diverse workforce
- Natural resources & open spaces
- Historic city & town centers
- Concentration and variety of industries
- Entrepreneurial Innovation

## WEAKNESSES

- Housing costs and lack of housing stock
- Workforce pipeline and development
- Public Transportation connectivity within region
- Municipal capacity
- Lack of available commercial & industrial space

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Federal Investments in manufacturing & supply chain
- Increased funding for transportation & infrastructure needs
- Increased interest in technical school education
- Current concentration of manufacturing businesses
- State zoning reforms

## THREATS

- Resistance to change & new development
- Climate change impact
- Aging population
- Competition from neighboring states and regions
- Lower costs of living in neighboring states and region

# A RESILIENT REGION

Throughout the CEDS process, resiliency was a common and recurring theme. This is especially true after experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, where much of the economy was effectively shut down for months on end. In addition to COVID-19, three of the region's communities underwent severe economic shock during the 2018 Columbia Gas disaster in Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover. In these communities, over pressurized natural gas lines caused over 80 structure fires. After this disaster, small businesses in the affected communities were shut down for months while gas lines were shut off. Both COVID-19 and the Gas Disaster forced an unexpected closure of businesses. Although the recovery looked different for both, the tools used to withstand both of these economic shocks are consistent and remain so today. After weathering these storms, the Merrimack Valley has set up a robust infrastructure of economic support systems to mitigate and respond to economic shocks.

Due to long standing planning efforts that predate these disasters, the region was well equipped to respond. Lessons were learned during both disasters, resulting in new resilience tactics. The region now has numerous examples of both "Steady State" initiatives and "Responsive" initiatives. Below are "Steady State" and "Responsiveness" initiatives that have been accomplished by MVPC and its partners. Steady State Initiatives—Resilience through specific long term goals and actions

- *Recovery & Resiliency Plan:* MVPC staff, with funding from U.S. EDA through the CARES Act, created a Recovery and Resiliency Plan to guide the region through the economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- *Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program:* MVPC staff work with municipal leaders and their residents to assess a community's vulnerabilities to natural disasters and creates an action plan to mitigate these risks.
- *Regional Economic Development Organization (REDO):* MVPC's affiliated non-profit, the Merrimack Valley Economic Development Corporation (MVED), was recently designated by the Massachusetts Office of Business Development as a REDO. In this role, MVED undertakes specific projects including business outreach, business support events, and connections between businesses and state resources to ensure their long term growth and success.
- *Targeted Economic Development Strategy:* An economic development program created after the Columbia Gas Disasters to support business retention and recruitment in the communities of Andover, North Andover, and Lawrence.

Responsive Initiatives—Information networks set up to respond to, mitigate, and deal with the aftermath of economic shocks.

- *Merrimack Valley Small Business Coalition:* A regular meeting of municipal staff, business support organizations, and business leaders to provide wrap around support services for small businesses.
- *Merrimack River Collaborative:* A group of municipal and nonprofit leaders to plan for the long term vitality of the Merrimack River and the economic benefits it brings to the region, with a focus on monitoring and implementing measures to improve the river's water quality.
- *Monthly Meetings of Municipal Staff:* MVPC convenes municipal planners and DPW directors in separate monthly meetings to tackle emerging challenges and plan for future needs as a region.
- *Mayors, Managers, and Administrators Regional Roundtable:* A quarterly gathering of the top elected or appointed official in each of the Merrimack Valley's cities and towns. These meetings serve to share information between municipalities and tackle high-level, regional challenges.





# GOALS AND STRATEGIES

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**Workforce  
Development &  
Industry Cultivation**

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**Transportation &  
Mobility**

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**Small Businesses &  
Entrepreneurs**

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**Vibrant, Resilient  
Communities &  
Destinations**

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**Housing**

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# THE FIVE PILLARS

The CEDS Committee spent its first few months reviewing the current economic conditions in the region, focusing on the data discussed in the background section and identifying concerns or benefits seen in its findings. Using this data and the SWOT analysis from the prior section, the committee drafted five main pillars to focus its efforts—Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation; Transportation & Mobility; Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs; Vibrant, Resilient Communities & Destinations; and Housing.

These five pillars became the major themes under which the committee built its objectives, strategies, and eventual action items and priority projects. After identifying these pillars, the committee split into breakout groups, with each group focusing on one pillar. Over several months, these breakout groups crafted the objectives and strategies listed on each page in this section.

Each pillar contains important areas for future work, while recognizing there is already exciting programs and partnerships happening in these categories across the region.

**Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation:** The region is home to several government and nonprofit partners working in this space, including the MassHire Workforce Board, MA Office of Business Development, MVPC, Lawrence Partnership, and Northeast Manufacturers Consortium. Regional educational institutions, including the technical schools, community colleges, and private colleges provide job training, certificate, and degree programs.

**Transportation & Mobility:** MVPC operates the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), supporting the MPO Board, which allocates federal highway funding in the region. MeVa Transit and the MA Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) comprise the public transit organization serving the region. Exciting investments have been made in the transportation network in recent years, including new highway bridges, redesigned streets and state highways, and free & expanded bus service.

**Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs:** The region is home to a strong network of small business service providers, from government agencies to nonprofit organizations. Mill Cities Community Investments, the Lawrence Partnership, EforAll/EParaTodos, UMass Lowell, and several other organizations play key roles in supporting the small business ecosystem. EDA-funded projects have played key roles in assisting small businesses, including the MV Strong Technical Assistance program, expansion of EforAll/EParaTodos into Haverhill, and expansion of the Revolving Test Kitchen in Lawrence.

**Vibrant, Resilient Communities & Destinations:** The region’s historic downtowns and attractive natural spaces have long been key drivers of economic growth. Municipal staff work on the front lines of overseeing new development, while organizations like MVPC and MassDevelopment play key supporting and guiding roles. Downtown centers have been beneficiaries of EDA projects, including Amesbury where EDA funding recently assisted with a study of the lower mill yard, and Newburyport where parts of the waterfront bulkhead are being repaired and replaced.

**Housing:** As discussed in the data section, the housing shortage in the region has led to significant increases in costs. Organizations across the region are working to address this challenge, from local governments to state agencies and non profits. Municipal staff work on local zoning and development initiatives, supported by MVPC and various state agencies. Non Profit organizations—including Lawrence CommunityWorks, Bread & Roses Housing, Habitat for Humanity, and Community Action Inc—work to increase access to homeownership and increase the supply of affordable housing.

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRY CULTIVATION

**Vision: Businesses will have the resources and workforce they need to move to or expand in the Merrimack Valley, and residents across the region will have access to jobs that generate wealth and increase their economic mobility.**

## **Objective 1: Expand career-training educational programs for all ages and build awareness of current offerings**

- Ensure organizations working across the workforce development field are connected and collaborating to maximize the effectiveness of career pathways opportunities and the overall system
- Enhance availability of technical training opportunities for students and adults through apprenticeships and classroom opportunity
- Build awareness for all of tech school & community college resources and expand physical capacity of schools to meet demand
- Utilize professional development to increase the number of in person presence of teachers in schools and recruit from industry to provide teacher training
- Expand ESOL classes, life skills, digital literacy training and other opportunities to provide wrap around services for future workers
- Creatively engage future and hidden workers in our community, including graduates with non-recognized degrees from other countries, currently or previously incarcerated individuals, individuals without a GED, immigrants/refugees, and parents with limited access to childcare
- Partner with local organizations and elected officials to help undocumented workers access jobs and job training programs

## **Objective 2: Tap into the strong workforce base already living in the Merrimack Valley and recruit workers to the region to expand supply of workers**

- Enable workers in our communities to have transportation, childcare, and housing in order to access jobs within the region
- Encourage people of all education and skill levels to work in Merrimack Valley
- Engage employers by sector to identify gaps and connect workforce efforts with municipal and human services organizations
- Create regional partnerships to develop collaborative pathways and agile workforce strategies for the work of the future in industries such as clean energy, advanced manufacturing, technology, and healthcare

## **Objective 3: Ensure businesses have the resources they need to move into or expand in the Merrimack Valley, including new and emerging industries**

- Bring awareness to potential workers of key and growing industries in the region, such as clean energy, advanced manufacturing, technology, and healthcare.
- Focus business development efforts on future technology and clean energy industries
- Provide resources to companies as they grow & expand, helping them stay local
- Expand overall available industrial space in the region

# TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

**Vision: Residents will have access to safe, reliable, and accessible modes of transportation for access to home, work, social events, and recreation.**

**Objective 1: Redesign key road corridors with a Complete Streets and resiliency approach to include transit and other modes of transportation early in the design process**

- Design streets that prioritize sustainable modes of transportation and limit additional capacity of single occupancy vehicles
- Design streets with sidewalks, bike lanes, accessible curb ramps for ADA accessibility
- Consider all modes of transportation when scheduling detours for roadway construction & implement a comprehensive messaging campaign for detours
- Consider transit rider travel time in the design process and seek out ways to improve travel time by incorporating strategies like bus only lanes, signal prioritization at intersections for buses, queue jumps and biking infrastructure
- Incorporate climate resilient design into transportation infrastructure

**Objective 2: Leverage existing and future expansions of public transit to connect people with housing and employment opportunities**

- Make the transit system more user friendly and accessible by improving marketing & public outreach so residents are aware of transit options
- Inform and educate residents, employees, and employers about the climate resiliency benefits of public transit, and how our mode choice influences land use
- Find opportunities for transit priority treatments and new investments in different modes of transportation, such as bike shares or water ferry transport
- Create welcoming signage and outreach for the linguistically diverse communities in the region

**Objective 3: Incentivize transit-oriented development for new development and transportation projects**

- Plan land use to support infill development around transit
- In partnership with elected officials , find ways to support and incentivize zoning that creates density around transit or infill development rather than greenfield development
- Within MBTA communities legislation, create vibrant, walkable, mixed-use places with enhanced, multi-modal Commuter Rail stations and a variety of commercial uses

**Objective 4: Ensure bike, pedestrian, and multimodal travel is safe and comfortable on key corridors**

- Create safe paths for walking & biking from key origins and destinations
- Create pedestrian oriented commercial centers, balancing car access with pedestrian safety, comfort, and culture
- Identify key corridors to expand sidewalks, improve road crossings, and implement traffic calming measures for pedestrian safety
- Connect active mobility options with transit modes
- Support multimodal connections at MBTA rail stations by aligning transit schedules and creating spaces where riders feel safe and comfortable while waiting to transfer





# SMALL BUSINESSES & ENTREPRENEURS

**Vision: Small business owners and entrepreneurs will have equitable access to comprehensive and streamlined resources needed to grow and sustain their business.**

**Objective 1: Simplify pathways for starting a business through municipal and other resources**

- Create a pathway for small businesses to access resources
- Assess and remediate barriers for starting a business
- Partner with state and local officials to simplify processes for permits and business certifications

**Objective 2: Break down barriers to small business growth and increase promotion of local businesses**

- Ensure businesses have equitable access to technical assistance and digital resources
- Foster business to business relationship building to strengthen the economic ecosystem across complementary industries
- Market & promote local businesses to increase spending and investment within the region
- Remove barriers to a business' growth to build long term resiliency

**Objective 3: Access to capital**

- Encourage banks to expand their loan offerings to entrepreneurs and small businesses
- Create additional opportunities for obtaining capital outside of traditional banks, through CDFIs or other financing institutions
- Create improved access to information on financing options

# VIBRANT, RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND DESTINATIONS

**Vision: The region's downtowns, main streets, commercial districts, and outdoor spaces will be climate resilient hubs for community and economic activity**

**Objective 1: Create welcoming spaces where people want to gather, connect, dine, shop, or have an experience**

- Review and update zoning that encourages mixed use, adaptive reuse, or infill development in city/town centers to attract desired uses and reduce vacancy
- Prioritize arts, culture, & beautification projects such as facade improvements, signage, and wayfinding
- Create an economic development tool to show the value of place making
- Encourage pedestrian-friendly, ADA compliant, and multimodal commercial centers
- Maintain clean streetscapes year-round to keep spaces accessible to the public

**Objective 2: Activate public places as destinations for community use and benefit**

- Attract the public to community spaces through arts and culture
- Promote tourism to regional public places and open space, encouraging passive or active uses depending on desired impacts
- Develop programming around regional destinations to highlight cultural, historic, commercial, downtown, and natural spaces

**Objective 3: Ensure our infrastructure and natural amenities are resilient to climate change**

- Protect, conserve, and restore natural resources for community benefit and sustainable long-term growth
- Educate and connect communities to resources and funding available for climate resiliency and energy efficiency
- Encourage new construction and renovations to utilize energy efficient and climate smart strategies
- Support conservation and acquisition of open spaces in priority locations
- Incorporate green infrastructure and stormwater management designs into construction projects

# HOUSING

**Vision: The Merrimack Valley will be home to affordable and accessible housing, where all residents have a choice of where and what type of housing to live in**

## **Objective 1: Create a diverse housing stock accessible to all abilities, ages and income levels**

- Establish inclusionary zoning, zoning that allows for smaller ownership units, and Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaws region wide
- Increase “missing middle” ownership opportunities, including starter homes, & multi-family housing across all communities
- Generate housing that provides community supports for aging adults and people with disabilities
- Encourage universal design features in housing production

## **Objective 2: Encourage direct and indirect pathways to homeownership through state and nonprofit partnerships with municipal governments**

- Develop partnerships with housing organizations such as CHAPA or other nonprofits to explore novel strategies for homeownership opportunities
- Establish and grow existing down payment assistance and subsidized mortgage programs for first time homebuyers in each community in the Merrimack Valley

## **Objective 3: Incentivize new housing development that adheres to smart growth principles**

- Increase housing density within downtown villages and around transit areas
- Update zoning codes to support smart growth priorities in each town/city, including compliance with Section 3A (MBTA Communities) zoning and implementation of 40R smart growth districts
- Build comprehensive housing growth plan that includes supporting infrastructure needs with a climate resiliency lens, including renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions

## **Objective 4: Increase stock of affordable units and work to stabilize rents of market rate units**

- Establish a comprehensive guide of affordable housing options that include home ownership and extend beyond Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) projects
- Meet or exceed the 10% Chapter 40B affordable housing threshold according to community needs
- Identify appropriate tax title properties to support affordable housing
- Create building subsidy to encourage development across the board and offset differing land and building costs in each community
- Provide support to help municipal staff start housing trusts in their communities to ensure each city and town has an active affordable housing trust

## **Objective 5: Conduct community education on housing policy, data, and best development practices to create region-wide familiarity and buy-in**

- Organize regional/statewide effort facilitating education in Merrimack Valley municipalities
- Engage with Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and community organizations to set up localized information sharing with residents on various housing topics
- Identify municipal and regional housing best practices used across the state and country
- Identify training opportunities for members of local boards and commissions



# ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

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**Action Items**

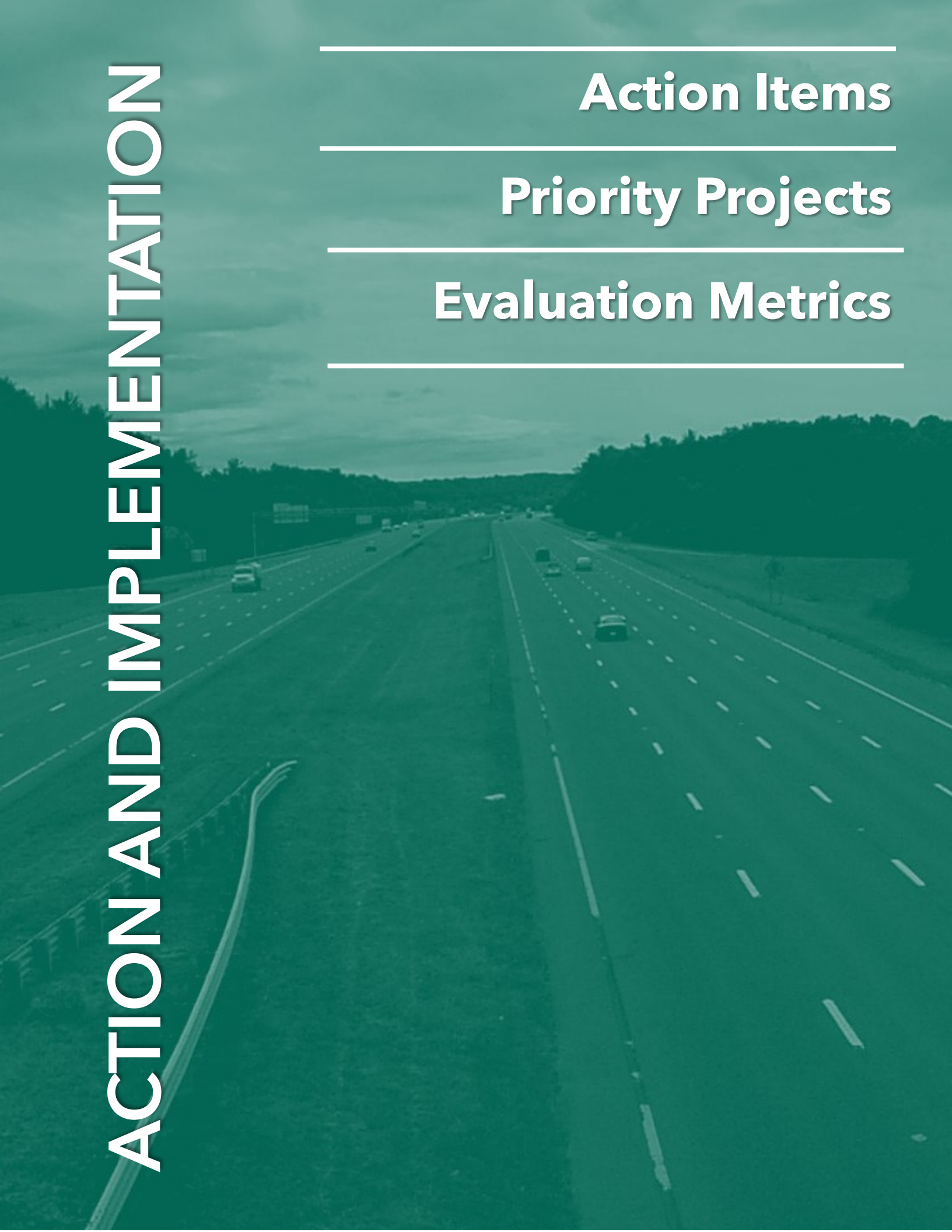
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**Priority Projects**

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**Evaluation Metrics**

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# ACTION ITEMS

Based on an evaluation of the objectives and strategies listed in the previous section, the CEDS committee has outlined the following group of top priority action items to consider implementing. These action items are not inclusive of every project that may need to take place in the next five years, but are the starting point for which to build implementation of the CEDS. Action items represent areas of work that have not yet been explored or are in the early stages of exploration, and are recommended based on this plan's development. Each action item will not require the work of every organization involved in the CEDS Committee, and each item may be led by a different organization or group of organizations.

## Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation

- Create a cross-sector regional workforce coalition that meets regularly to address workforce strategies and needs
- Develop an awareness campaign to parents, high school guidance departments, and teachers to promote new high demand jobs following non-traditional college pathways
- Strengthen existing employer engagement in the workforce development ecosystem to ensure programs meet the employers needs and students are employed
- Connect adult learning at regional technical schools to ESOL programs
- Dedicate resources to creating a teacher pipeline for technical school programs

## Transportation & Mobility

- Analyze zero emission transit and create recommendations for future clean transit development
- Conduct a gap analysis of sidewalk and pedestrian infrastructure along key corridors
- Explore the feasibility and success of implementing local sidewalk funds
- Complete the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and advocate for increased federal infrastructure funding that achieves its goals
- Collect stories of road and transit users on how they get around to help inform decision making
- Realize key segments of the regional active transportation network

## Housing

- Conduct community education sessions on housing in each city and town
- Work with communities and MVPC to implement

community Housing Production Plans

- Host information sessions before town meeting to talk about housing need
- Conduct a gap analysis of the need for additional shelter space and access
- Host a regional developer roundtable to learn about constraints on market rate and affordable housing developments

## Vibrant, Resilient Communities & Destinations

- Create educational toolkits for municipal staff and residents too learn about CPA benefits and passage
- Create a database or calendar of events happening around the region
- Create a central map of parks and open spaces across the region for public use
- Host a zoning think tank for all municipal staff and planners across the region to discuss innovative zoning and how to get it passed through city council or town meeting
- Plan opportunities for cross-community events and tourism experiences

## Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs

- Improve and promote a centralized webpage on WeAreMV.com dedicated to cataloguing all business development resources
- Create a small business grant fund for micro businesses
- Operate programming to assist businesses with achieving state certification as women or minority owned
- Create information guides for municipal staff on business resources to assist them in helping businesses in their city or town

# PRIORITY PROJECTS

In addition to Action Items, the CEDS Committee has used the CEDS Objectives and Strategies to identify regional priority projects. Different from action items, these projects represent work that is already underway or planned for in the region, but does not currently have all the funding or resources needed for implementation.

Project	CEDS Pillar	Description	Timeline for Project Start (if funding is available)	Potential Partners
Lower Millyard Revitalization	Transportation & Mobility	Redesign and replace the Water Street Garage with a multi-use, multi-level garage that serves both the businesses in downtown and Lower Millyard and future residents.	2024	City of Amesbury, Lower Millyard landowners
Downtown Streetscape Improvements	Transportation & Mobility	Permitting and construction of engineered and designed streetscape improvements in downtown North Andover, running from Sutton Street to Water Street, via Main Street; Water Street to High Street; and High Street to Prescott Street. Improvements include, but are not limited to, new and or improved sidewalks, bump-outs, crosswalks, traffic and pedestrian signals, landscaping, lighting, and undergrounded utilities.	2024-2025	Town of North Andover, MVPC, MassDOT, National Grid, Verizon, Comcast
Career Training	Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation	Improve skilled labor training programs in the areas of plumbing, electrical, carpentry and heavy equipment operations. These are skilled labor fields not projected to be made obsolete by the introduction of AI.	2024-2025	
Digital Literacy and Equity	Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation	Provide comprehensive technology-based training to help residents compete in the modern job market. Digital Literacy levels can begin from Basic; learning to use a computer and its fundamental functions, Intermediate; refining basic digital literacy knowledge, and learning to utilize online resources and Advanced; individual classes on specific programming/software to introduce or enhance learners' knowledge (G-Suite, Office 365, Excel, Word, etc.)	2024-2025	Community Action, Inc; MakeIT Haverhill
Walk In Conversational English Classes	Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation	Provide weekly walk-in classes for those who cannot commit to a structured schedule to practice basic reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.	2024-2025	Community Action, Inc; MakeIT Haverhill
In-Person Job Fairs	Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation	Offer industry-specific job fairs, being the first step for individuals to find apprenticeship and trade programs.		Community Action, Inc; MakeIT Haverhill
Revolving Test Kitchen Expansion	Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs	RTK Shared Kitchen proposes to revitalize what was "Sals" Restaurant at 40 Hampshire Street by building out four "Pop-Up" Food Vendor Stalls in the space. This will re-activate the restaurant space by offering a diverse food program to the community. Member food businesses of the RTK Shared Kitchen will be able to operate their own temporary restaurant experience to sell their food and test their restaurant concept before taking the leap into building out a permanent restaurant.	2024	Lawrence Partnership, Foundation Kitchen, City of Lawrence
Old Town Hall	Vibrant, resilient communities & destinations	The Old Town Hall is at the center of downtown and is on Main Street. The reimagination of the building and it's use downtown will help to create a center for arts, retail, and other activity.	2023-2024	Town of Andover
Downtown Connectivity Project	Vibrant, resilient communities & destinations	Creating a safe, pedestrian friendly area downtown with an area set aside as a plaza for performances, markets, seating, etc.	2023-2024	Town of Andover
Transportation Plan	Transportation & Mobility	To conduct a public process and create a plan for improvements throughout Andover to the transportation network to make it safe for all and to increase multi-modal use.	2023-2024	Town of Andover
DyeWorks / Casa de Colores	Vibrant, resilient communities & destinations	Dyeworks will serve as the hub of a healthy, equitable new neighborhood, bringing a full-service Latinx supermarket, a satellite site of the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, and a new home for LCW's Movement City Youth Program to the North Canal Mill District, in a 35,000 square foot former mill building fronting the Merrimack River.	2024-2025	Lawrence CommunityWorks, Groundwork Lawrence, Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, Union Market
Marriner Mill	Housing	Marriner Mill is an enormous mill building on the northern border of Lawrence with Methuen, along Broadway. It will be redeveloped as a total of ~240 units of affordable housing (nearly 90 by Trinity Financial and 150+ by LCW and The Community Builders) as well as 50,000 square feet of commercial space for community services (including a childcare center) and local businesses.	2025	Lawrence CommunityWorks, The Community Builders, The Community Group

Municipal Academy	Vibrant, resilient communities & destinations	UMass Lowell and its partners will create an educational platform and "community of practice" for municipalities that will target education, training and support of elected and appointed municipal officials / employees / volunteers across a broad segment of areas including finance, operations, sustainability, resiliency, emerging technologies, information technology, public safety, public health, etc. By leveraging flexible delivery methods (e.g., in-person, online and hybrid) along with emerging virtual / augmented reality delivery technologies and regular in-person convenings / conferences (e.g., quarterly? semi-annually?), the Municipal Academy will serve to keep these key municipal stakeholders up to date on "best practices" in all the intersecting topics that they encounter in their roles and prepared with the right mindset and skillset to address the increasingly complex needs of their communities. An anticipated outcome of the joint training and convenings should be a more regional focus and sense of collaboration between communities to tackle the broader regional challenges (e.g., climate adaptation).	2023-2024	Umass Lowell, MVPC, local cities & towns, NECC, Merrimack College, Mass Municipal Association, regional Chambers of Commerce, Lawrence Partnership, Greater Haverhill Foundation
Industrial Space Study	Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation	Conduct a study of industrial space across the region to determine its current occupancy and what factors are inhibiting growth. Factors to study and base recommendations on include zoning, infrastructure, <del>environmental constraints, or other build out restrictions</del>	2023-2024	MVPC
Merrimack Valley Commercial and Residential Decarbonization Initiative	Vibrant, resilient communities & destinations	This project is to help small business and residents in the Merrimack Valley to reduce and offset their carbon footprint. The initiative will focus on building infrastructures, tightening building envelopes, solar installing, community solar, plus other solutions.	2023-2024	Mill Cities Community Investments, Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources, All in Energy, Groundwork Lawrence, Browning the Green Space, City of Lawrence, City of Haverhill, Town of Andover, Town of North Andover, City of Methuen
New Business Park off Route 110 (former Dutton's Airfield)	Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation	This project will create a new business park with up to six newly constructed high-bay buildings that would add over 500,000sf of new advanced manufacturing and clean technology space, providing over 1,000 new jobs. This site is a vacant former airstrip next to Interstate 495 that would be accessed directly off the Exit #111 off-ramp at Route 110, with a traffic signal that would also benefit Northern Essex Community College (NECC). UMass-Lowell, NECC and nearby Whittier Voke would also be involved in supporting the industries at this badly-needed new business park.	2023-2024	City of Haverhill; Greater Haverhill Foundation; Northern Essex Community College; University of Massachusetts-Lowell Innovation Hub; Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School
Expanded Vocational Training After Hours	Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation	This project would provide additional funds needed to attract teachers and training professionals who could teach vocational skills after school hours to adults, as well as to students who did not get accepted or enrolled at Whittier Voke or Greater Lawrence Tech. Attracting such talent to work these hours will require extra financial incentive, but will still pay economic dividends.	2023-2024	City of Haverhill; Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School; Greater Lawrence Technical School
South Union Street Transit Oriented Development Zone	Housing; Transportation & Mobility	Establish a zoning district near the MBTA commuter rail station to allow for housing and mixed uses		City of Lawrence
Rt. 125 Bus Route	Transportation & Mobility	Establish a MeVa bus route from Lawrence to Haverhill via Route 125 through North Andover	2024-2025	MeVa, Town of North Andover, MVPC
Border to Boston Trail	Transportation & Mobility	Establish a connection of the Border to Boston trail through the Newbury/Byfield area	2026	Town of Newbury, MVPC
MBTA Communities Compliance	Housing	Achieve MBTA communities compliance across the region, establishing by-right multifamily zoning districts in each city and town	2023	MVPC, Municipal Staff, Local boards and commissions
Brown School Affordable Housing	Housing	The vacant Brown School is a potential site for new affordable housing and potentially a community use adjacent to the building. The City is looking for assistance in infrastructure upgrades or financial help to find the right developer to take on this project and receive enough subsidy so that the project becomes more desirable to all neighbors	2024	City of Newburyport, YWCA, other affordable housing developers
Business Park Infrastructure Upgrades	Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation	We are looking to upgrade the infrastructure in Newburyport's business park so that it better attracts new companies and diversifies the business sectors. This would include investing in roadways, sidewalks, and drainage, and could potentially open the door to a broader mix of uses in this area	2028	City of Newburyport, Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce and Industry, MassHire
Market Landing Park Phases 2 and 3	Vibrant, resilient communities & destinations	We are restoring and expanding our downtown waterfront park, removing parking spaces and adding green spaces, and also improving access to walking paths and bike trails. We will also add a visitor center and bathrooms to improve the park and downtown as a visitor destination.	2023	City of Newburyport, Waterfront Trust, Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Relocation of MeVA Lawrence Bus Hub from Buckley to McGovern	Transportation & Mobility	Relocation of Lawrence Bus Hub from Buckley to McGovern Intermodal Station--Facilitate enhanced and more welcoming environment for MeVa riders, including bus-train connection at existing MBTA Station	2024	MeVa Transit



Merrimack River Ferry	Transportation & Mobility	MeVa was the recipient of \$4.2m in discretionary FTA low-no emissions ferry program funds to build 2 solar-powered low-profile vessels, for future operations on Merrimack River between Haverhill and Newburyport. Additional funds will be needed for docking areas, maintenance, and other operation needs.	2024	MeVa Transit
Transit Priority Treatments: Bus Shelters and Signal Priority	Transportation & Mobility	Installation of Bus Shelters/Signage/Amenities--As part of MeVa's transition from flag stop to bus stop system, MeVa is undertaking an aggressive program to acquire and install shelters, bus stop signs, furniture and other passenger amenities across the service district. Signal Priority Treatments for Buses at Congested Intersections--In order to increase competitiveness of transit mode, MeVa is working with MassDOT and local jurisdictions to install signal priority treatments, que jumpers, pullouts or dedicated bus lanes at critical choke points, including at mouth of Railroad Ave. in Haverhill and	2024 -2026	MeVa Transit
Expansion of Bradford Bus Maintenance Facility	Transportation & Mobility	MeVa's current bus maintenance facility is highly constrained. Any opportunity to transition to battery-electric or other zero emission fuel technology, such as hydrogen, would need to be sequenced right, starting with building the physical capacity and infrastructure to support the transition. The MeVa facility is adjacent to an underutilized surface parking lot at the MBTA Bradford Commuter Rail Station, which could be better utilized for expansion of MeVa's bus barn and shop with 21st century technology.	2025 - 2027	MeVa Transit
Salisbury Beach Erosion Controls	Vibrant, Resilient Communities & Destinations	Implement erosion controls along the Salisbury beach waterfront using Coir Logs over a 1.5 mile stretch of Beachfront	2024	Salisbury Beach Betterment Association, Town of Salisbury, MVPC
Merrimack Street Haverhill Redevelopment	Housing, Vibrant, Resilient Communities & Destinations	The current parking deck located in downtown Haverhill will be torn down and replaced with a mixed-use development of housing and commercial space, connecting major sections of downtown that were torn apart during Urban Renewal.	2024	City of Haverhill, Lupoli Companies
Small Business Coalition	Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs	The small businesses coalition, formed after the columbia gas disaster, aims to strategize with business support organizations from across the region to support small business growth.		
Merrimack Valley Digital Equity initiative	Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs; Workforce & Industry	Projects and programs focused on increasing digital access, equipment, and literacy for Merrimack Valley communities. This work works to address gaps seen in digital infrastructure outlined in ECCF's Digital Divide report	2023-2026	Essex County Community Foundation
Plum Island Center Gateway Project	Vibrant, resilient communities & destinations; Transportation	Plum Island Center serves as the gateway to a significant portion of the island: it is the only access and egress point for the 1200+ seasonal and year-round Newbury and Newburyport residents, it includes Newbury's primary access to the beach as well as the Parker River Wildlife Refuge access, and it is the primary commercial hub on the island with popular restaurants and stores. The transportation infrastructure in the Center has become inadequate for the amount of vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic it sees daily. This project would create a Center that is safe for all users by constructing transit and access improvements to parking, pedestrian and bike	2025	Town of Newbury, City of Newburyport, Parker River Wildlife Refuge, MVPC, other transportation partners
Byfield Center Improvements Project	Vibrant, resilient communities & destinations	The goal of the Byfield Center Improvements Project is to complete improvements to seven intersections in the Byfield Village Business District, addressing safety issues for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles, while supporting the residential, retail, and commercial uses of the village. The project will include new ADA compliant crosswalks and sidewalks, traffic calming strategies, and improvements to stormwater infrastructure. This area also includes the intersection between off-road and on-road portions of the Border to Boston Trail, which is currently in the design	2025	Town of Newbury, MVPC, local businesses, Border to Boston
Regional IT Collaborative Hub	Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation	A regional IT Hub to support emerging companies (i.e., startups), small & medium businesses, non-profits and municipalities with IT-related workforce development programs, IT support services (including a regional Network / Cyber Operations Center) and awareness / advocacy convening activities. As a collaboration with other regional academic institutions, government agencies and industry organizations already underway this engagement center at the UMass Lowell Haverhill Campus will include digital equity activities to empower traditionally underserved communities with access to and training on digital platforms (i.e., broadband Internet + PC / laptop / Chromebook + digital literacy training) matching a workforce with the needs	2025-2026	Umass Lowell, NECC, Merrimack College, MassHire, GLCAC, CAI, ECCF, Lawrence Partnership, Various Corporate Partners

# EVALUATION METRICS

To ensure success during the five year implementation period of the CEDS, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission will work closely with its partners and regional stakeholders to implement both the objectives outlined and the priority projects listed. The CEDS Committee will meet on a regular basis throughout the year to discuss current project updates and determine next steps for implementation. Below are some of the criteria to measure the performance of the Merrimack Valley CEDS:

## **Workforce Development & Industry Cultivation**

- Number of jobs new or expanding businesses bring into the region
- Number of program graduates from workforce training programs & employee retention for those graduates
- Percent of job openings and labor participation rate
- Average wages of top regional industries and wage increases

## **Transportation & Mobility**

- Amount of riders using public transportation
- Reductions in non-motorized road user fatalities
- Change in commuting times for workers
- Federal aid invested in transportation projects

## **Housing**

- Increase in affordable housing stock
- Permits for new housing construction issued, by type of housing
- Passage of new zoning bylaws that encourage the development of new housing
- Change in share of cost-burdened households across the region

## **Vibrant, Resilient Communities & Destinations**

- Tourism dollars brought into the region
- New zoning bylaws incorporating climate resiliency and downtown development goals
- Development, reuse, infill, or design projects in commercial centers
- Prioritized open space preserved

## **Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs**

- Number of new startup businesses
- Economic impact of new or growing businesses—number of new jobs and local revenues
- Number of businesses that obtain grants & financing opportunities
- Increase investment in small businesses from local loan funds through CDFIs or other organizations
- Diversity of business owners accessing support programs

# APPENDIX

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**CEDS Committee  
Members**

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**Additional Data**

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**2018 CEDS Projects**

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# APPENDIX I: COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Name	Title	Organization
<b>Academic Institutions</b>		
Allison Dolan-Wilson	VP of Advancement	Northern Essex Community College
Mike McCarthy	Chief Operations Officer	Northern Essex Community College
Noemi Custodia-Lora	VP of Lawrence Campus & Community Relations	Northern Essex Community College
Stephanie Guyotte	Associate Director	UMass Lowell Innovation Hub
Susan Almono	Coordinator of Grants, Workforce Development, & After School/Evening CTE Programs	Greater Lawrence Technical High School
Tia Gerber	Director of Community Partnerships	Whitter Regional Vocational Technical High School
Tom O'Donnell	Senior Director, Innovation Initiatives	UMass Lowell Innovation Hub
<b>Chambers of Commerce</b>		
Alex Eberhardt	President	Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce
Joe Bevilacqua	President	Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce
Michael Bevilacqua	Vice President	Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce
Nate Allard	President	Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce
<b>Community Organizations</b>		
George Ramirez	Executive Director	Lawrence Partnership
Jacob Greer	Executive Assistant and Grant Writer	Lawrence CommunityWorks
Jessica Andors	Executive Director	Lawrence CommunityWorks
Jonathan Guzman	Public Affairs Coordinator	Groundwork Lawrence
Karina Calderon	Deputy Director	Lawrence Partnership
Kerri Perry	President & CEO	Community Action, Inc
Lisbeth Valdez	Program Director	MakeIT Haverhill
Monica Manaski	Executive Director	Essex Art Center
Sophan Smith	Executive Director	EforAll
Glynn Lloyd	Executive Director	Mill Cities Community Investments
Alexandra Nova	Sr. Director of Strategy & Operations	Mill Cities Community Investments
<b>Public Agencies/Organizations</b>		
David Bancroft	Senior VP, Community Investment, North Region	MassDevelopment
Eleni Varitimos	Director of Division Operations, Community Development	MassDevelopment
Geetha Rao Ramani	Vice President Business Development - North Region	MassDevelopment
Ian Burns	Community & Economic Development Program Coordinator	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Jen Dunlap	Deputy Director / Finance Director	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

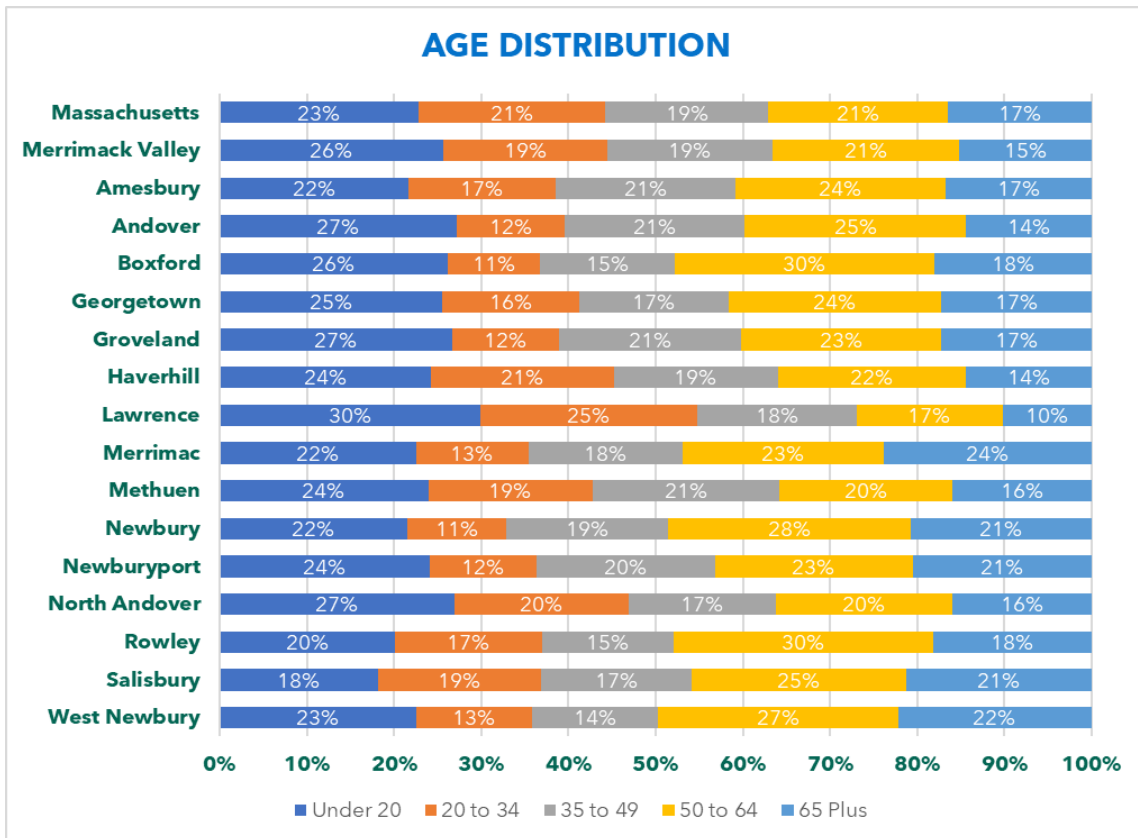
Jerrard Whitten	Executive Director	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Kayla Rennie	Community and Economic Development Planner	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Lauren Keisling	Community Planner	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Patrick Reed	Transportation Program Manager	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Rick Byers	Commissioner	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Steve Lopez	GIS & IT Program Manager	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Tony Collins	Transportation Planner	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Christina Minicucci	Development Director	MeVa Transit
Frank Bonet	Executive Director	MassHire MV Workforce Board
Niorka Mendez	Director of Communications	MeVa Transit
Noah Berger	Administrator and CEO	MeVa Transit
<b>Elected Officials</b>		
Christina Eckert	Legislative Aide	Office of State Rep. Kristin Kassner
Erin Olivieri	Legislative Director	Office of State Sen. Barry Finegold
Janice Phillips	Director of Constituent Services	State Senator Barry Finegold
Kristin Kassner	State Representative	2nd Essex District
<b>Municipal Representatives</b>		
Andrew Herlihy	Director of Community Development	City of Haverhill
Andrew Levine	Chief of Staff	City of Newburyport
Andrew Port	Director of Planning	City of Newburyport
Andrew Shapiro	Assistant Town Manager, Director of Community & Economic Development	Town of North Andover
Angela Cleveland	Director of Community & Economic Development	City of Amesbury
Ann Ormond	Director of Business, Arts, and Cultural Development	Town of Andover
Carol McLeod	Finance Director	Town of Merrimac
Christine Lindberg	Chief of Staff	City of Haverhill
Dan McCarthy	Director of Planning	City of Lawrence
Denise McClure	Planning Consultant	Town of Merrimac, McClure Planning LLC.
John Cashell	Town Planner	Town of Georgetown
John Wilson	Director of Community & Economic Development	City of Methuen
Katelyn Sullivan	Office of Planning & Development	City of Newburyport
Kathleen Colwell	Planning Division Director	City of Methuen
Kenny Lamarche	Economic Development Project Officer	City of Lawrence

# APPENDIX I: COMMITTEE MEMBERS

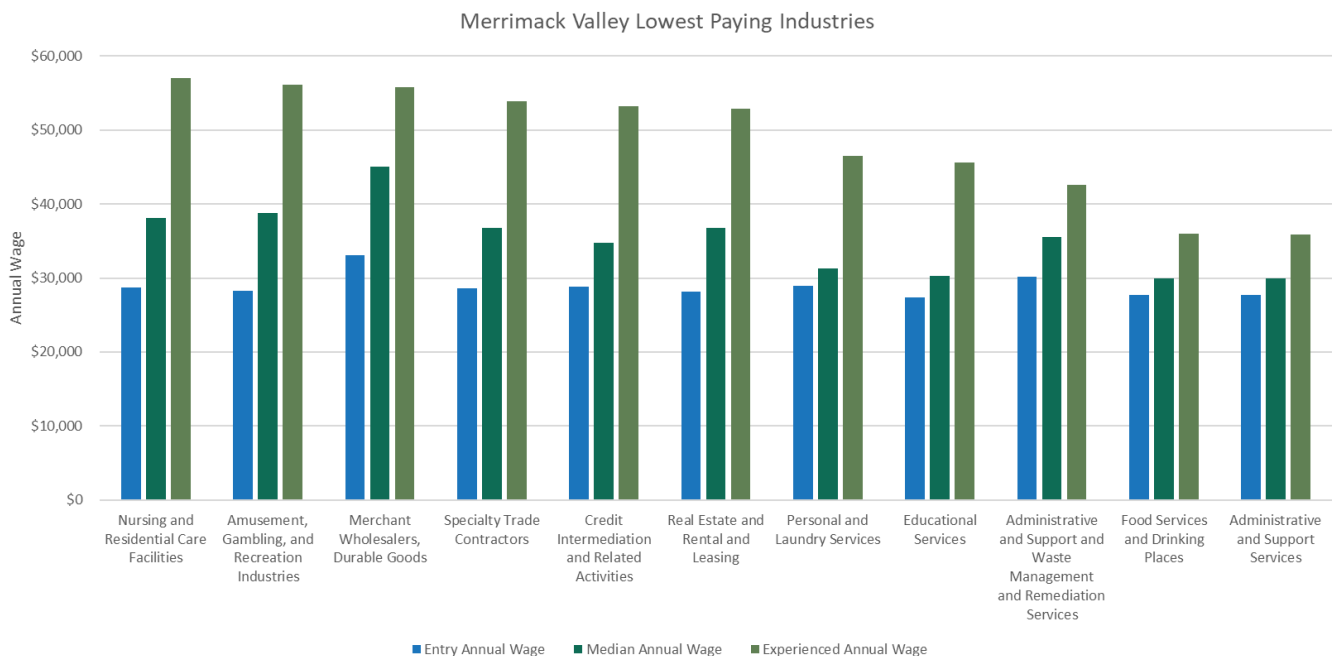
Kirk Baker	Town Planner	Town of Rowley
Kristen Grubbs	Assistant Planner	Town of Newbury
Lisa Pearson	Planning Director	Town of Salisbury
Lisa Schwarz	Assistant Planning Director	Town of Andover
Martha Taylor	Town Planner	Town of Newbury
Nipun Jain	Planner	City of Amesbury
Pamela Price	Asst. Director of Economic Development	City of Haverhill
Ross Povenmire	Planning Agent	Town of Boxford
Private Industry		
Abel Vargas	President	Valley Home Insulation
Derek Mitchell	President	LEADS
Frank Carvalho	Principal Owner	Frank Carvalho Consulting
Gary Sidell	Owner	Bell Tower Management
Janin Duran	President & Owner	Janin Duran Consulting Group
Luis Roman	Senior Associate	OPUS Private Client LLC
Robert O'Brien	Executive Director	CI Works
Stratton Lloyd	Executive VP & Chief Operations Officer	Essex County Community Foundation

# APPENDIX II: ADDITIONAL DATA

Appendix II-1: Age distribution of MV Communities. Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census, table P1



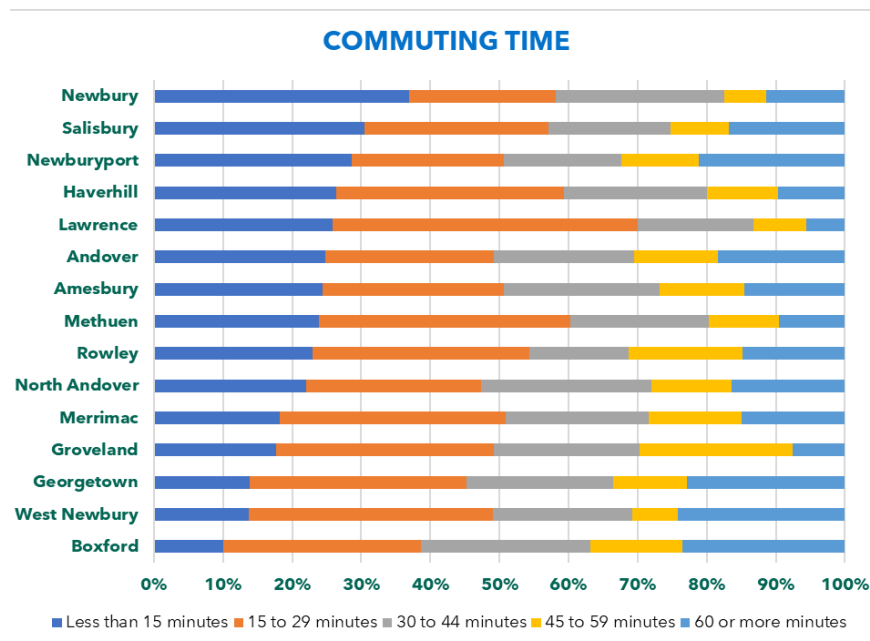
Appendix II-2: Merrimack Valley lowest paying industries. Source: MA Department of Economic Research, "Employment & Wage Industry Data"



Appendix II-3: Projected growing and shrinking industries in the Merrimack Valley. Source: MA Department of Economic Research, "Long Term Industry Projections"

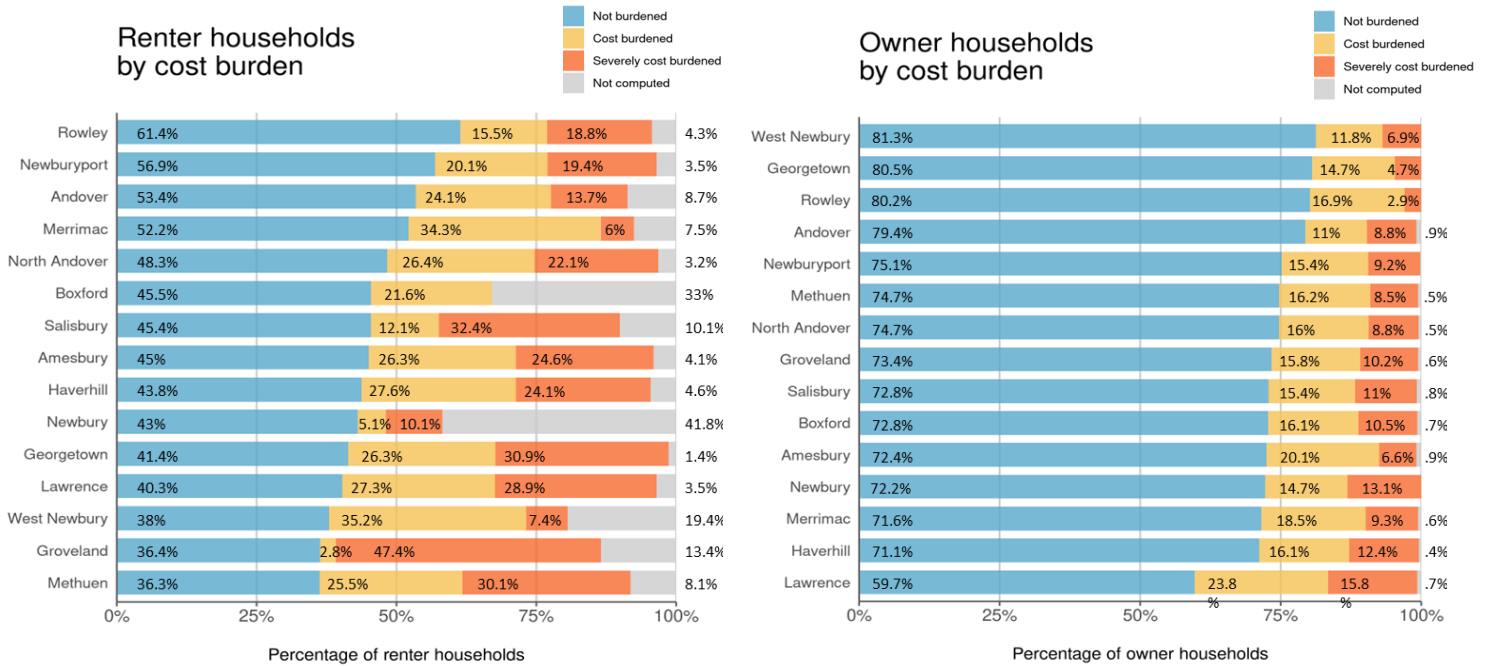


Appendix II-4: Commuting time of Merrimack Valley residents, by municipality. Source: American Community Survey, 2015–2020 estimates

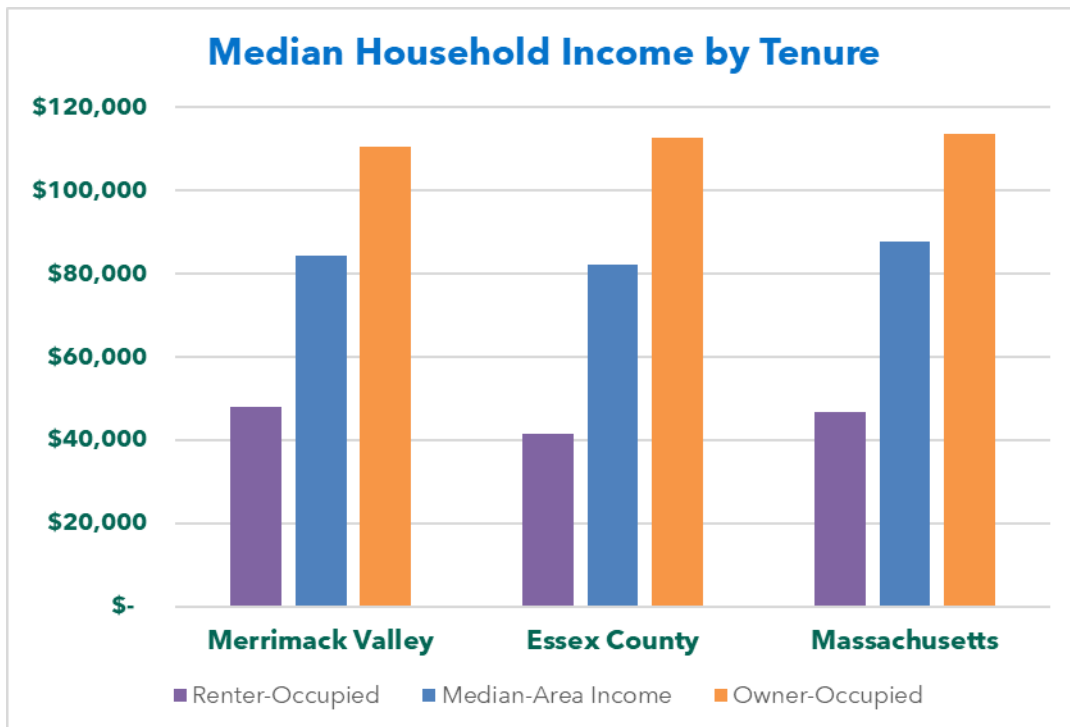




Appendix II-5: Owner and renter cost burden rates in MV Communities. Images/Charts source: Massachusetts Housing Partnership *Data Town*. Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2016-2020, Tables B25070 & B25091



Appendix II-6: Median household income by tenure. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 ACS Estimates, Table B25119



# APPENDIX III: 2018 CEDS PROJECTS

The following priority projects identified in the 2018-2023 CEDS are either in progress and on track for completion or are completed as of 2023.

Project Name Community	Project Description
<b>Tombarello</b> Lawrence	The City of Lawrence, along with its partners, is looking to clean up 2.4 acres of a 14-acre Brownfield site. The end goal is to market the property for redevelopment by getting the site as pad ready as possible. In 2020, the City received Brownfields funding from MassDevelopment and the EPA for cleanup at the site. The City and its partners has hosted multiple community meetings for future visioning of the site, and the work continues to get the site ready for development.
<b>Downtown Revitalization/Redevelopment</b> Methuen	Methuen's downtown corridor had multiple plans for infrastructure upgrades. The infrastructure needs were proposed to be developed in two phases. Phase I, now complete, included transportation improvements at the Lowell Street/Osgood Street/Railroad Street/Pelham Street intersection, also locally known as "Five Corners." Additionally, an LED street light upgrade for Downtown Methuen Square is also proposed in Phase I. Phase II of the infrastructure program will focus on transportation improvements to the Broadway/Osgood Street intersection.
<b>Merrimack Street Redevelopment</b> Haverhill	There is significant potential for continued transformation in the Merrimack Street area of downtown Haverhill. The city has chosen a developer, Lupoli Companies, to redevelop the current site of the Goecke Parking Deck--creating a mixed-use development that reconnects Merrimack Street to Bailey Blvd.
<b>Newburyport Business Park and 40R District</b> Newburyport	The City needs funds for the redesign/reconfiguration of the Rt. 1 Rotary and Parker Street. Parker Street crosses in front of the court house and heads into the business park. It is necessary to create a safe crossing in this location in order to 'unlock' the eastern side of the approved 40R district.
<b>Historic Mill District Redevelopment</b> Andover	The Town has created a new zoning district to encourage transit oriented development in proximity to Andover's regional transit station by fostering a range of housing opportunities within mixed-use development projects, while reconnecting Andover's central business district to the regional transit station. Since creating that zoning district, the town has chosen a developer, Minco, to redevelop the site into housing.
<b>Broadway Business Park</b> Haverhill	The City of Haverhill has completed transformation of previously undeveloped land near I-495 into a business park that is now home to several large employers, including Amazon, Monogram Foods, and Edwards Vacuum.
<b>Merrimack Street Redevelopment (from Union Street to Broadway)</b> Lawrence	This project reconstructed the western portion of Merrimack Street from South Union Street to Broadway Street. The eastern half of Merrimack Street was reconstructed in 2016. Merrimack Street is a vital regional employment center, and has seen millions of square feet in redevelopment in recent years, with the potential for millions more in the coming years.
<b>I-93 Bus-on-Shoulder</b> Region	The Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO) analyzed the feasibility of implementing either a Bus-on-Shoulder (BoS) or a High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lane on I-93. On this basis, BoS was implemented and was successful in its first trials. Unfortunately, due to changing commuting patterns as a result of COVID-19, the commuter bus no longer runs from the Merrimack





# Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

*Plan • Innovate • Promote*

**The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission is committed to assisting our 15 member communities in the planning areas of transportation, the environment, land use, economic development, and GIS mapping. The purpose for creating our organization over 60 years ago governs our actions today – to help communities plan growth and resources, develop economically and regionally, and promote community collaboration for the overall welfare and prosperity of our Valley's residents.**

**Merrimack Valley Planning Commission**

**160 Main Street**

**Haverhill, MA, 01830**