

H.AVERHILL

Downtown Haverhill: Designated a State PDA

Land Use: The Downtown Haverhill PDA is approximately 169 acres along the northern bank of the Merrimack River. It is the City's traditional civic, industrial and commercial district and consists of almost 5 million square feet of building space.

This PDA is perhaps the most dynamic mixed-use area in the City. Long a center of commerce and industry, mill conversions completed by the Beacon Companies, Forest City Residential, and Planning Office of Urban Affairs are leading the PDA's transition to a 'smart growth' future. Major architectural assets include a significant inventory of late 1800's multistory brick commercial buildings / storefronts in Railroad Square and on Merrimack Street; many are tenanted and others are available. The PDA also hosts a variety of multifamily housing stock, some single-family homes at the periphery, professional services and retail including a full-service supermarket at its eastern end. Public vest-pocket parks are found in Railroad and Merrimack Squares.

Downtown Haverhill is generally zoned Commercial Central (CC). General and professional offices are allowed, as are most establishments principally offering convenience items, services and/or proprietary goods. Multifamily residential uses are subject to City Council approval and a special permit. Key structure dimensional and density maximums include: 2.0 FAR (Floor to Area Ratio), appropriate for the context; 60% lot coverage and 60' building height also apply. A 54-acre portion at the western side of the PDA proximate to Merrimack Street, Railroad Square and Essex Street is designated a Chapter 40R DSGOD (Downtown Smart Growth Overlay District). Within the DSGOD are five subzones: three according to density; and two according to use (multifamily and townhouse). The DSGOD's purpose is to allow greater flexibility in converting former mill space to live-work or other residential dwellings; to develop affordable and market-rate housing, and to create mixed uses as-of-right to minimize the need for relief under the City's Zoning Code. The City has also enacted a Waterfront District (WD) zone and a Merrimack Street Gateway Renaissance Overlay District (MSGROD). The WD is a comprehensive zoning district with eight distinct sub-zones with goals for creating mixed-use development appropriate for that zone. A major objective of the WD is to promote physical and visual connections between the Merrimack River and downtown. The MSGROD is aimed at encouraging additional smart growth, fostering a range of housing opportunities along with mixed-use development and provide for public and private access and use of the Merrimack River.

Infrastructure: Downtown Haverhill enjoys municipal water and sewer service, National Grid natural gas, and two telecommunications service providers. DSL and broadband service are available.

Access: Routes 97 (Ginty Boulevard/Winter Street), 110 & 113 (Washington/Merrimack Street), and 125 (Main Street) are both neighborhood streets and regional roadways. I-495 is approximately two miles west. MBTA Haverhill Line and Amtrak Downeaster passenger rail services call on the downtown Haverhill station. MVRTA operates nine bus routes that serve the PDA; many originate at its Washington Square station. Trucks provide freight service to local businesses. Ample sidewalks and crosswalks provide good pedestrian access. Bicyclists share local streets. The Basiliere Bridge is structurally deficient and should be rehabilitated. The intersections of Main@Water/Merrimack; Main@Winter/Summer; and Main@Ginty/Bailey had 78, 60, and 42 total accidents respectively between 2009-2011, but all three intersections are slated for improvements in 2015 – 2016.

Environmental: The PDA is densely developed urban land. 6.16 acres, or 5.04%, are classified as wetlands; 21.04 acres or 17.21% are within a 100- year floodplain.

Recommended Strategies: MVPC recognize the improvements made in the downtown and actively supports the City’s goals and policies for the PDA, particularly: 1) to retain existing business; 2) to increase mixed uses; 3) to improve streetscapes and provide visual and pedestrian access to the river, and 4) to generate new economic development in this area. The City must continue to aggressively pursue state and federal funds for infrastructure improvements vital to the continuation of the downtowns revitalization. Additionally, the city has completed portions of the downtown riverwalk, and the Bradford section will be under construction in 2015. The city has mapped priority bicycle routes and painted bike lanes in the downtown, sidewalks have been widened along Washington Street and neck-downs added, street trees have been planted, and the floodwall improved. The current plans for redevelopment of Merrimack Street are exciting and MVPC supports the proposed revitalization plans. Also, a study completed by MVPC found that the lower acre neighborhood that abuts the Haverhill Downtown could be enhanced by improved access and connections to the downtown. To this end MVPC recommends that the City consider redesigning and reconstructing Winter Street to be more pedestrian friendly.

Lifestyle Center: Designated a Regional PDA

Land Use: The Lifestyle Center site comprises approximately 336.84 acres northwest of downtown and consists of almost 900,000 Square feet of building space. Route 97 (Broadway) bisects the site and it provides access to local roads and to I-495. The northern site portion was initially developed as an industrial park with highway oriented businesses lining Broadway; some interior parcels have since redeveloped for ‘big box’ retail. Some commercial offices are present; other parcels remain undeveloped. The southern site portion is chiefly wooded land and a small commercial business at its frontage on Broadway. The PDA is particularly well buffered from surrounding suburban-scale residential developments.

Zoning for the entire southern site portion and some interior parcels on the northern site are Industrial Park (IP). Parcels along Broadway on the northern site are zoned Neighborhood Commercial (CN) and Highway Commercial (CH). Principal use and dimensional/density data includes:

- Residential uses: prohibited, all zones.
- Retail/service commercial uses: prohibited in IP; by-right CH. CN: special permit required for retail above 50,000 sq. ft.
- Eating/drinking establishments: IP (prohibited); by-right (CH). Dine-in restaurants by right only (CN).
- Wholesale, transportation and industrial uses: generally by-right (IP); prohibited (CH and CN).
- FAR: 1.25 (IP) and .50 (CN and CH).
- Maximum building heights: 50’ (IP); 40’ (CH), and 35’ (CN).
- Maximum lot coverage: 50% (IP); n/a (CH and CN).

Infrastructure: The site is served by municipal water and sewer. National Grid provides electric and natural gas services. Two telecommunications companies provide DSL and broadband services.

Access: The Lifestyle Center site is accessible via Route 97, just west of Exit 50 on I-495. MVRTA Route 15 provides fixed-route public transportation to part of this site with a turnaround at the Target store. Service operates hourly on weekdays and less frequently on the weekends. The MBTA Haverhill Line and the Amtrak Downeaster both provide passenger rail service to downtown Haverhill, approximately two miles east. Trucks provide freight service. Bicyclists and pedestrians typically share local roads; Route 97 at this location is a recommended bicycle route, according to a local bike map authority. Some sidewalks are present in the vicinity of the Target store. Route 97 is slated for reconstruction (traffic signals, sidewalks, bike lanes, etc.) between Research Drive and Silver Birch lane which will improve vehicular and pedestrian access in this area.

Environmental: 72.42 acres (21.6%) are wetlands; 51.5% acres (15.3%) are within a 100-year floodplain. Vernal pools may be present in the wooded wetlands.

Recommended Strategy: The site's proximity to I-495 and Route 97 is a significant asset. The City should ensure that the site is optimally zoned for maximum economic and environmental benefit with a more contemporary site plan. Low impact development techniques might reduce land consumption with less impact to nearby wetlands. Shared parking facilities and pavement management/parking removal should be considered. Future development at this site will also present an opportunity to upgrade public transportation, bicycling and walking infrastructure.

Upper Hilldale: Designated a State PDA

Land Use: The Upper Hilldale/Fondi Road Priority Development Area (PDA) is located in northern Haverhill, on the Plaistow, NH border. The area is comprised of five contiguous parcels of industrially zoned land totaling approximately forty-seven (47) acres. Thirty-eight (38) acres is undeveloped woodlands, and the remaining nine (9) acres is the site of WBE Extrusion Corporation, the owner of all five parcels. This area was designated a Priority Development Site (PDS) by the state in 2007. If developed, this will be the largest industrial development in Haverhill in nearly forty years.

Infrastructure: The City received a MORE grant in 2007 to extend sewer service to the site and to install new water lines and this project has been completed.

Access: This site is located off Hilldale Avenue, a rather small, rural, two-lane road. Access to the closest major highway, Route 495, is best done through Plaistow, NH on route 121 to 125, but access to and from this site to the highway is not ideal. Industrial development along Hilldale Avenue will ultimately bring more traffic to this somewhat isolated roadway. Both automobile and truck traffic will increase, and therefore it may be prudent to conduct a traffic analysis to determine what level of traffic the existing roadway can accommodate and whether the street can be upgraded and improved to handle the amount of traffic generated by build-out at current zoning. The City may need to consider re-zoning the site to a floor area ratio compatible with the amount of traffic the street can accommodate, if in fact the capacity cannot be increased. The site does not currently have access to public transportation, and Hilldale Avenue is a narrow road without shoulders or sidewalks and is not recommended for bicycle or pedestrian traffic.

Recommended Strategies: As an area designated a growth district by the city, this site does not have good access to the highway, and public transit does not serve this area. If the area is industrially developed, automobile and truck traffic will increase and it is doubtful whether Hilldale Avenue can accommodate much of an increase in traffic because currently, it is a small narrow two lane rural road. The city may want to consider completing a build-out analysis of this area and then conduct a corridor analysis to determine whether the roadway can accommodate the amount of build out allowed by zoning. If not, then the roadway will have to be upgraded, or the zoning changed to allow only for the amount of growth the road can handle.

Ward Hill: Designated a Regional PDA

Land Use: Ward Hill is located in the City's southwestern quadrant. Its business park, approximately 542 acres, is perhaps the most dynamic and visually prominent such park in the community. Ward Hill Business Park counts approximately 56 members and consists of approximately 2.7 million square feet of building space, including:

- food manufacturers and distribution, i.e. Cedar's
- medical uses, i.e. Whittier Rehabilitation Hospital
- light manufacturing
- warehousing/distribution
- agricultural uses, i.e. Spring Hill nursery & dairy
- large retail (BJ's Wholesale Club)
- hospitality, i.e. Comfort Suites,
- indoor recreation facilities, i.e. Valley Associates Ice Rink; Cedardale Health Club

Ward Hill is bounded by I-495 on the west, the Merrimack River to the north and south, and a mix of woods, residences and commercial uses on the east. The site is zoned Industrial Park (IP). No residential uses are permitted. 1.25 FAR, 50% lot coverage and 50' structure height maximums apply.

Infrastructure: City water and sewer services are available. National Grid provides electric and natural gas services. Two telecommunications companies provide DSL and broadband services in the community. The 56 member Ward Hill Business Park association provides certain maintenance and security services including marketing.

Access: Ward Hill is bisected by the I-495/Route 125 connector road which is the area's transportation gateway. MVRTA Route 14 (Bradford/Ward Hill) serves the northern and southern Business Park; peak headways are forty-five minutes. Trucks provide local freight service; bicyclists and pedestrians share local roadways.

Environmental: 16.79 or 3.10% is wetlands; 30.40 acres or approximately 6 acres are in 100-year floodplain. No other onsite environmental factors would limit development.

Recommended Strategies: The City's 2006 zoning revisions enabled the Park to become more competitive in the current economy. MVPC supports continued efforts by the city and the Business Park's Board of Directors to ensure the Park remain competitive by improving the infrastructure, image, and by expanding business opportunities.