

As clearly outlined in Section 4.0 Regional Challenges for the 21st Century, if the communities in the region do not grow there is a good chance that they will not be able to meet the demands placed on them by their citizens: new jobs will not be created, housing will not be affordable, transportation options will be limited and local governments will not have the resources to provide municipal services. This does not mean that communities should allow uncontrollable growth or that there should not be a balance with protecting the character of the communities and of the region. There needs to be a responsible way of promoting the orderly development of the Merrimack Valley taking into consideration the needs to protect its natural resources. The approach recommended is to develop a regional priority growth strategy founded on the principles of “smart growth”.

The purpose of this section is to identify where growth is appropriate throughout the region based on zoning, infrastructure, access and limited environmental impacts. These areas have been identified as Priority Development Areas (PDA) and are defined as “areas of concentrated development, including a city or town center, consisting of existing and appropriately zoned commercial, industrial and mixed-use areas suitable for high-density development”.

To ensure that there is local buy in to this strategy and that it is a locally driven process each community was asked to identify growth areas that were consistent with the PDA definition. Once identified, data regarding each PDA was collected. The data collection was extensive and included the following:

- **Land Use:** Uses allowed by zoning were identified (Industrial, commercial and residential). The density allowed by each community in the PDA was reviewed and calculated. Any PDA targeted by the local, state or federal governments for development incentives was recognized such as Priority Development Sites (PDS) or 40R districts.
- **Infrastructure:** The availability of infrastructure to support development was identified, including; water, sewer, broadband & utilities.
- **Access:** Transportation access including road, transit and off road connections were recorded. Using the MVPC Congestion Management Study each PDA was evaluated for any congestion that may limit access or development potential.
- **Environmental:** All environmental constraints that could impact development of the PDA were identified, including, wetlands, flood plains, water supply protection areas and rare species habitats.

As can be imagined each PDA has unique zoning requirements, access points, available infrastructure and environmental constraints and as such needed to be evaluated as to the nature and suitability for development. MVPC collected and evaluated the PDA data shown in Appendix 10.6 according to three rankings: highly advantageous, medium and low. Criteria used to make these rankings were based on the following ranges:

- **Land Use:** Highly Advantageous – A PDA that allows a mix of uses, has density of at least a Floor to Area Ratio (FAR) of 1.0, and is designated a PDS to low - where single uses are allowed, a FAR of less than .5 and no PDS designation.
- **Infrastructure:** Highly Advantageous – A PDA that is served by water, sewer, broadband and all utilities to low - where the PDA has limited access to water and sewer.
- **Access:** Highly Advantageous – A PDA that has highway access, transit service and is friendly to bikes/pedestrians to low - where the PDA has limited highway access, no transit service and is not pedestrian friendly.
- **Environmental:** Highly Advantageous – A PDA that has minimal impact on wetlands, water protection areas, rare species habitats and not located in a flood plain to low - where the PDA has a significant impact on these environmental sensitive elements.

Once evaluated each PDA was classified according to how consistent they were in meeting the “smart growth” principles outlined throughout this Strategy and in particular in 8.0 Smart Growth Strategies of the Merrimack Valley.

In the spring of 2012 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) began working with MVPC to expand the State “Planning Ahead for Growth” strategy into the Merrimack Valley. The EOHED had begun to work in various regions of the State with regional planning agencies to identify promising areas of new growth.. In addition to identifying areas for growth, EOHED partnered with the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) to ensure that regional plans reflect a well-balanced analysis of future land use objectives for the region by also identifying appropriate areas to prioritize for preservation. In 2009 the EOHED worked in Southeastern Massachusetts developing the south coast corridor plan and in 2012 the metro west region along the I 495 corridor was introduced to the Planning Ahead for Growth Strategy. Unlike these other regional planning efforts, the analysis of local priorities and articulation of those priorities was already completed when EOHED and EEA began their work with MVPC. Using the Priority Growth Strategy Report, the state was able to accelerate its analysis of regional priorities in the Merrimack Valley.

MVPC identified 56 PDAs in the work that was completed in 2009. EOHED and EEA used the 56 sites as a starting point for the state’s regional planning process. MVPC’s Priority Growth Strategy also included a matrix of all 56 PDAs, and EOHED assigned each area a numerical value corresponding to the matrix’s scoring of high, medium and low. By sorting each of the PDAs by score, EOHED was able to determine a reasonable cut off (a score of 40 and above) to narrow the list of PDAs to those best suited for significant new growth. In total, 23 PDAs had a score of 40 or higher. Those 23 PDAs were then evaluated against EOHED’s criteria for areas with the best potential for appropriate new growth which include:

1. Downtowns and village centers;
2. Locations with potential for transit oriented development;
3. Areas which support the reuse of a previously developed site; and
4. Areas which present the potential for multi-family housing.

Based on the evaluation criteria established by EOHED, the 23 remaining PDAs were reduced leaving a total of 13 state PDAs in the region. This number was reached by combining 10 regional PDAs to create 5 larger state PDAs; adjusting the list to reflect updated information on areas which have increased potential for new growth since the Priority Growth Strategy was developed in 2009; and removing several sites that did not rise to the level of significance to be identified as a state PDA.

Subsequently MVPC designated PDAs either regionally significant or locally significant. Using the approach EOHED used to identify State PDAs, MVPC used the evaluation matrix to identify regionally significant PDAs determined by scores in excess of 35, as well as sites not selected by the State and identify local PDAs that were of local concern but did not rise to be designated regionally significant. A listing of each PDA by order of significance is as follows:

Priority Development Areas of State Significance:

Amesbury

- Golden Triangle
- Amesbury Village Center/Lower Millyard

Andover:

- Downtown
- Brickstone Square
- I-93/Osgood Street
- River Road

Haverhill:

- Downtown Haverhill
- Upper Hilldale

Lawrence:

- Malden Mills
- Lawrence Industrial Park
- Merrimack Street
- Lawrence Gateway/Downtown

Methuen:

- Malden Mills

Newburyport:

- Downtown Center

North Andover:

- Osgood Landing
- Machine Shop Village

Priority Development Areas of Regional Significance:

Amesbury:

- Cedar Street
- Route 150 Gateway Village

Andover:

- Rolling Green
- Lowell Junction

Georgetown:

- Georgetown Square Village Center
- National Avenue
- Norino Way

Haverhill:

- Lifestyle Center
- Ward Hill

Merrimac:

- Merrimac Square

Methuen:

- Aegean Park
- Branch Street
- Downtown Methuen
- Griffin Brook Industrial Park
- The Loop

Newbury:

- Byfield Village Center

Newburyport:

- Newburyport Industrial Park

Salisbury:

- Redevelopment Zone
- Salisbury Village
- Salisbury Beach Center

Priority Development Areas of Local Significance:

Amesbury:

- Interstate 495/Hunt Road

Boxford:

- Old Village Center
- West Boxford Village Center

Georgetown:

- Route 133/Chestnut Street

Groveland:

- Groveland Village Center
- Route 97

Merrimac:

- Merrimac Route 110

Methuen:

- Lindberg Avenue

Newbury:

- Route One
- Central Street at Kent Way
- Central Street at Fruit Street

North Andover:

- Route 114 Corridor

Rowley:

- Route One
- Rowley Village Center

Salisbury:

- Business Park
- Gateway Site

West Newbury:

- West Newbury Village Center

The following is a description of the PDAs for each community and their PDA classification: State, Regional or local significance, along with recommendations on how the community can strengthen the PDA: