

The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

By Jessica Strunkin
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A Compact for development, preservation

In an effort to steer limited state resources to our region, the 495/MetroWest Partnership worked with state, regional and local partners to identify the best locations for development and the key areas for preservation in our 33 communities. This work resulted in the 495/MetroWest Development Compact Plan, which is already reaping benefits for the region.

In many ways, the Compact Plan is the embodiment of the 495/MetroWest Partnership's work. The Partnership is a public-private regional economic development organization serving over half a million residents, and an employment base of approximately \$19 billion/year. The Compact area was built upon the Partnership's service area, and the Plan was the result of the Partnership's request to the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development to conduct a corridor study. Given the region's significant growth in employment and population, comprehensive planning was needed to ensure the region's prosperity. Much like the Partnership's work, the plan was developed through public-private partnerships at local, regional and state levels, with a focus on ensuring sustainable economic growth in the region.

Thirty-seven communities participated in the land-use planning and prioritizing project. Successfully advancing the sites to regional and state priorities increased the community's likelihood for state resources and support. With the recent announcement of three state grants for the region, it is clear that the Compact Plan is a document making a difference.

As part of the MassWorks infrastructure grant program, the 495/MetroWest region will receive over \$9 million in state investments. The funding paves the way for a new neighborhood near the Ashland commuter rail station, complete with biking and walking trails. Bucolic Berlin will be one step closer to their long envisioned Riverbridge project, a village style development with housing, restaurants, retail and 86 acres of preserved open space. Marlborough's investment in Simarano Drive will be more than matched by this state grant for roadway, pedestrian and bicycle improvements in support of the resurgent growth in the area with the new TJX facility and the pending arrival of Quest Diagnostics. All of these projects were identified by the local, regional and state Compact Plan partners as priority development areas, increasing their chances for state investment.

These most recent examples do not stand alone. In 2012, Ashland received a MassWorks grant for water improvements and in 2011, a Littleton priority development was awarded nearly \$2 million, to allow for a new plaza with retail, restaurants and a hotel. However, the benefits and impact of the Compact Plan are not limited to the MassWorks Program.

The Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT) was identified by Bellingham and Franklin, as

well as the state, as a priority preservation area in the Compact Plan and has since received renewed state and federal attention and assistance. In October 2013, the Friends of the SNETT received news of a second year of the National Park assistance to further develop this beautiful natural resource for the region's residents and visitors. Preservation will continue to be an important part of the region's quality of life and sustainable growth as envisioned by the Compact Plan.

In 2013, Framingham identified three underutilized sites as priorities for development, agreeing to a streamlined town permitting process in exchange for the state's assistance elevating site visibility and promoting economic development. All three locations were highlighted for development in the Compact Plan.

Nearly two years after its completion, the 495/MetroWest Development Compact Plan continues to have a positive and tangible impact on our region. The Compact Plan is seeing a real return on investment through realized development in our communities resulting in new jobs, housing options, and preservation of open space and protected resources. The 495/MetroWest Development Compact Plan has had little time to gather dust and its implementation will continue to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for the 495/MetroWest region.

Jessica Strunkin is deputy director at the 495/MetroWest Partnership.