

## Devens Forward MVP Case Study

**Municipality:** Devens Regional Enterprise Zone

**Project Title:** Climate Action and Resilience Plan

**Grant Award:** \$142,170

**Match:** \$50,635

### **Community Overview:**

Set in Central Massachusetts within the Towns of Shirley, Harvard, and Ayer, Devens is a 4,400-acre community and an award-winning model for military base reuse. The modern community of Devens was born out of the 1994 Devens Reuse Plan, which established the principles of sustainable development and reuse as essential to Devens future. Devens was created as an example of what sustainable development and sustainable economic growth could be. Devens is co-governed by the Devens Enterprise Commission and MassDevelopment.

Devens is known for its military roots and as a world-class location for businesses, a growing residential community, and a leading destination for sports and recreation. With over 100 businesses and organizations that collectively employ more than 5,000 workers and over 2,100 acres of recreational land, Devens is a desirable place to live, work, and play.

### **Description of Climate Impact:**

Devens—like the rest of Massachusetts—is already experiencing the effects of climate change. Temperatures across the state are projected to increase significantly throughout the century. The state's average temperature increased 3° F between 1900 and 2014. 2010-2014 was the period with the highest number of days with a maximum temperature above 90°F. As a result of rising temperatures, Devens may expect to experience warmer winter months and more extreme heat in the summer. These changes bring an increased risk of heat-related illnesses and vector-borne diseases, especially for vulnerable populations. Higher temperatures also stress habitats and bring an increased demand for energy for cooling in the warmer months.

Devens is already seeing precipitation coming in fewer, more intense events with longer dry periods in between. There have been 30% more extreme precipitation events (days with rainfall above two inches) since 2005. This shift in precipitation patterns results in increased potential for drought during the periods with no rainfall. Drought stresses the water supply, impacts habitats, and increases the risk of wildland fires (especially relevant as one-third of Devens' land area is protected open space).

Climate projections tell us that changing temperatures and precipitation patterns have the potential for dramatic impacts on our community's natural resources, infrastructure, critical facilities, economy, and social services. Devens pursued funding for a climate action & resilience plan to reduce the threat of these impacts.

### **Project Goals:**

In an effort to enhance the entire community's resilience to these hazards and ensure we are doing our part to minimize our contribution to climate change, the Devens Enterprise Commission and their partner, Mass Development Devens, have committed to taking the results of the MVP planning grant process to the next level by developing a community-wide climate action and resilience plan. Part of the goal was to help advance low-impact development and green infrastructure and nature-based solutions to better adapt to changing climate conditions and improve public health and safety in and around Devens. Ultimately, the goal was to create a detailed implementation strategy that will allow Devens to address both climate mitigation and adaptation.

### **Approach and Result:**

*Devens Forward* was developed through a collaborative community-wide effort that included staff from the Devens Enterprise Commission and MassDevelopment, residents, businesses, volunteers, and other members of the community.

A Climate Action Stakeholder Group (CASG) served as primary advisors to the development of the plan. The group met three times over the course of the planning process to provide input on setting goals, brainstorming actions, and prioritizing actions.

The project team used the following approach to complete the project:

#### Baseline Assessment:

- Created a brand for Devens' climate resilience work
- Gathered background information on the community's climate action to date, included existing policies, ordinances, plans, and studies
- Identified relevant metrics and data sets
- Conducted interviews with key stakeholders
- Hosted goal setting meetings with the CASG
- Conducted carbon sequestration analysis

#### Action Identification

- Researched best practices and created a list of potential actions within 7 plan elements
- Hosted action brainstorming meetings with the CASG
- Tabled at community events and gave presentations to community organizations and boards

#### Action Prioritization

- Developed an evaluation framework through which to prioritize actions
- Hosted action prioritization meetings with the CASG

- Launched an online public survey to prioritize actions
- Finalized a list of priority actions

### Final Plan Development

- Developed implementation steps and resources for priority actions
- Compiled the results of all previous phases into a final plan
- Integrated feedback from the public and CASG
- Presented final plan for approval
- Created an online dashboard to track progress towards project goals
- Developed a Climate Action Toolkit for businesses
- Developed a video to present to final plan to the public

### Highlights from community engagement:

- ✓ 132 responses to online surveys
- ✓ 8 one-on-one stakeholder interviews
- ✓ 1 student focus group
- ✓ 7 events and meetings
- ✓ 20+ social media posts

### **Lessons Learned:**

Because the future of governance in Devens is uncertain after 2033, creating a future-looking plan required special consideration. For example, setting targets for 2050 felt important to track progress, but it was uncertain what governing body would be accountable to those goals at that point in time. To avoid compromising the long-term vision, the project team set interim targets for 2033 and long-term 2050 targets. The team also learned how to balance the priorities of many different stakeholders. Between the Devens Enterprise Commission and MassDevelopment and the numerous other consulted stakeholders, there were a wide range of priorities to be weighed and compromised on.

Finally, given that the plan was coming together during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project team learned valuable lessons about the interconnectivity of climate resilience and resilience to other kinds of shocks. The benefits of ensuring residents are prepared for a natural disaster support preparedness for other types of emergencies. A connected and resilient community is one that can bounce back from any kind of unexpected event. The COVID-19 pandemic was also a lesson in adaptability. Adjusting meetings from in-person to online meant finding creative solutions to make sure the end result was not compromised. This kind of creative thinking is critical to taking a bold approach to combatting climate change.

## **Partners and Other Support:**

### Devens Enterprise Commission

- Peter Lowitt, FAICP, Director
- Neil Angus, AICP CEP, LEED AP BD+C & ND, Environmental Planner

### MassDevelopment Devens

- Jessica Strunkin, Senior Vice President of Devens
- Karen Davis, Executive Assistant, Community Relations
- David Blazon, Director of Department of Public Works & Recreation
- John Marc-Aurele, Director of Engineering
- Roy Herzig, Environmental Project Manager
- Jim Moore, Utilities Manager

### Climate Action Stakeholder Group

- Anne O'Connor, Transitions Women's Shelter
- Glenn Eaton, Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
- Chris Ryan, Town of Harvard Economic Development
- Dona Neely, Devens Eco-Efficiency Center
- John Henshaw, Mt. Wachusett Community College
- Christine Bonica, Bristol-Myers Squibb
- Anne MacMillan, Fort Devens
- Shelby McCormack, Now Communities
- Tracy Clark, Devens Committee
- Elizabeth Ainsley Cambell, Nashua River Watershed Association
- Lorena Novak, United Native American Cultural Council
- Anne Ferguson, Dragonfly Wellness Center
- Bob Fico, Devens Recycling
- Al Futterman, Nashua River Watershed Association
- Mark Wetzel, Town of Ayer Department of Public Works
- Melissa Fetterhoff, Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Martha Morgan, Nashua River Watershed Association
- Christine Rogers, Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development
- Hillary King, MVP Regional Coordinator
- Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon
- David Blazon, Department of Public Works
- Donna Bulger, Clear Path for Veterans
- Patricia Stern, Loaves and Fishes
- Ken Ducharme, SMC Ltd. East
- Paul Sellew, Little Leaf Farms
- Todd Sumner, Parker Charter School

**Consultant Team:**

**Kim Lundgren Associates, Inc.:** Project lead, with expertise in incorporating innovative stakeholder facilitation and equitable engagement into climate action and resilience planning projects.

**Project Photos:**

