

# Position Profile



MERRIMACK VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

Executive Director



COMMUNITY PARADIGM ASSOCIATES, LLC

## Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

The [Merrimack Valley Planning Commission](#) is the regional planning agency for a diverse region of approximately 270 square miles in the northeastern corner of Massachusetts. The Commission serves its 15 member communities, which includes the cities of Amesbury, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen and Newburyport; and the towns of Andover, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Merrimac, Newbury, North Andover, Rowley, Salisbury, and West Newbury.

The population of the region totals approximately 330,000, ranging from 4,200 in the smallest town to 70,000 in the largest city. The Upper, or western portion of the Valley includes affluent suburbs and former industrial cities. Charming seaside communities dominate the



Lower, or eastern portion of the Valley. And, small, picturesque communities and villages fill the center of the Region.

Because of its location, history, natural beauty and diversity, the region offers a high quality of life, vast economic opportunities and a natural landscape that make it an attractive place to live, work, and visit.

The Commission, with its roots in 1959 as the Central Merrimack Valley Planning District, recently celebrated 60 years of leading regional planning and collaboration for the Merrimack Valley. The District was established in accordance with [MGL, Chapter 40B, Section 3](#). Over the following 12 years, each of the current member communities joined the organization and, in 1971, it became the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC).

The Commission has a stated [mission](#) to:

*Foster a cooperative effort among its communities in resolving common, regional problems, to allow its communities to plan jointly, and to promote with the greatest efficiency and economy the coordinated and orderly development of the region and the general welfare of its residents.*

The MVPC has sought to be proactively involved in all of its member communities with a goal to consistently plan, develop, and promote the sustainable development of the region through the appropriate use of regional resources, and support a regional vision that includes the priorities and quality of all of its communities.

The MVPC works to support member communities in the planning areas of transportation, environmental protection, land use, economic development, hazard mitigation, energy management, mobile applications/related technology and GIS mapping. The Commission also administers several initiatives including two revolving loan funds: a Brownfields Assessment and Remediation program to assist with redevelopment projects, and an economic development gap-financing program through the MVPC-established Merrimack Valley Economic Development Corporation to leverage private investment.



In addition, the MVPC, through the Mayors and Managers Coalition, has prioritized regional collaborative problem solving among participating member communities. Such efforts include [joint purchasing efforts](#), energy management, electric aggregation, regional service delivery, storm-water management initiatives, computerized maintenance management software, and development of an economic development branding and marketing campaign.

Collaboration is prioritized by the MVPC as a means of operating successfully and achieving its stated mission. Collaboration and cooperation efforts include local, state and federal government, along with private sector businesses and individuals. The federal and state agencies that partner with MVPC include the Environmental Protection Agency, the Economic Development Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

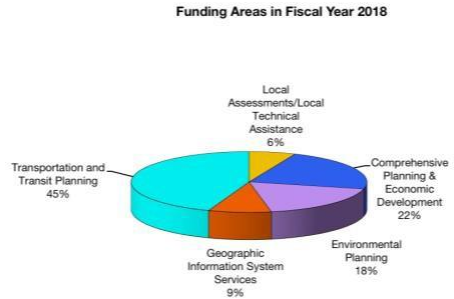
A fuller understanding of the MVPC work program and ongoing projects is available through the [2018 Annual Report](#). Other MVPC reports and planning studies are available on the MVPC [Information Center](#).



## The Organization

A sixteen-member [Board of Commissioners](#), consisting of one representative from each community plus an at-large member to represent the minority population of the region, governs the MVPC. Each community also designates one alternate member to vote in the absence of the community's full member.

The MVPC is funded through a variety of sources including municipal assessments, grants, and other miscellaneous revenue. The MVPC's FY2020 budget is approximately \$2.3 million derived from the following sources: local assessments (5%), grants (85%), and other sources (10%). In FY2018, the operating funds supported a range of planning and technical services in six major functional areas:



- Transportation and Transit Planning 45%
- Comprehensive Planning & Economic Development 22%
- Environmental Planning 18%
- GIS services 9%
- Local Assessments/Local technical assistance 6%

The work of the MVPC is conducted by a highly talented, and committed fourteen-member [staff](#) of planners, program managers, administrators, and specialists. An Executive Director, who is appointed by the Board of Commissioners, manages the staff.



## The Position

The Executive Director is the chief executive officer of the Commission and is responsible for the overall management of the organization. This includes planning and regulatory activities, staff direction and oversight, budgeting and financial management, as well as external relations with public entities, the media and the public.

The Executive Director provides a leadership role in coordinating all Commission activities and providing professional advice to the Commissioners and member communities in the development, implementation and administration of the policies, goals, regulations, and statutory requirements.

The Executive Director is responsible for developing and achieving the MVPC's goals and objectives, as well as the MVPC annual work program, the MVPC annual budget and other financial reports, and the development of future projects and programs that are necessary to the future of the organization, the region, and its membership.

# Current Programs and Priorities

## **Regional Economic Development**

Economic development continues to be a focus of the MVPC and its collaborating organizations. The [2018-2023 Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) (CEDS) identified four emerging issues for the region, with accompanying objectives to guide strategies through 2023:

- City and Town Centers
- Manufacturing
- Natural and Cultural Resources
- Transportation

In 2018, the Commission launched [WeAreMV](#), a business and economic development website to support businesses and development in the region supported by a branding and marketing effort throughout 2019.



## **Regional Plan**

A major undertaking of the MVPC was the 2009 Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy, “The Regional Land Use Plan for the Merrimack Valley”, which serves as a regional master plan that was developed with broad-based support. The [Plan](#) was updated in 2015, is still being implemented, and will need to be continually reviewed and updated, or redrafted. The Plan serves as a guide for the region as communities consider land use patterns, economic development, water-based infrastructure, community amenities and transportation projects.

## **Housing Production**

The stability of the region is tied to the production of housing within the member communities that matches local objectives regarding community character, as well as housing costs that support workforce needs. In 2019, the MVPC the first of its kind in the state [Regional Housing Plan](#) that will guide housing strategies for each of the member communities and the region as a whole through 2023.

## **Transportation**

A major responsibility of the MVPC is to provide planning for infrastructure related to transportation. The work in this area includes specialized community specific plans such as traffic counts, trail-related projects and [Complete Streets](#) initiatives. However, the larger portion of the Commission’s work is support for the [Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) (MVMPO), which makes decisions for the region on the allocation of federal transportation funds for planning, construction and transit services. The Commission is responsible for the developing the three federally mandated transportation planning documents that outline and support the work of the MVMPO. These planning documents include the [Regional Transportation Plan](#), the [Transportation Improvement Program](#) (TIP), and the [Unified Planning Work Program](#) (UPWP).

### **Community Technical Assistance**

The MVPC plays an important role in managing broad regional planning efforts and specialized technical assistance for all fifteen member communities. Larger communities tend to be more well staffed to provide local planning capacity needs, while smaller communities are in need of additional assistance related to ordinary planning needs. With increasing complexity of land use and regulatory issues, the demand for such technical assistance will continue or expand. A regional initiative that serves to support the work of the Commission and utilization by individual communities in an affordable manner is the provision of [GIS and Information Technology](#) services, providing innovative technology applications to communities on a cost-effective basis.

### **Stormwater Management**

New EPA stormwater requirements are currently in progress via the MS4 permit. These regulations are significant for reducing water pollution throughout the region. However, there are additional financial costs that can occur for municipalities if not managed effectively. And, there are complexities involved in implementing the requirements for which municipalities may not be prepared. MVPC has taken a lead role in serving as a technical resource and information clearinghouse for member communities and the public through the [Merrimack Valley Stormwater Collaborative](#). This role is likely to continue and possibly expand in the future through implementation.



### **Climate Change**

The MVPC has taken a lead role in working with member communities on energy goals geared towards carbon footprint reduction through conservation and renewable sources. This has been a local effort in addressing a more global issue. Commission efforts have included ongoing support for member municipalities through [open space planning](#) and sub-regional efforts for the coastal communities of the region in resiliency planning through the [Great Marsh Initiative](#). Moving forward, the MVPC is looking at additional planning efforts related to impacts of climate change upon land use patterns, infrastructure needs and environmental impacts.

### **Finances**

Like most regional planning agencies, the MVPC is dependent upon the variability of outside funding sources related to planning activities. In general, the operation of the organization is sustainable but only as such, assuming continued flow of funds. Currently, the MVPC is facing added pressures related to pension payment obligations passed on from the state retirement system. This new challenge, if mandated, will place added demand on existing resources and affect long-term sustainability, unless the obligation can be avoided or otherwise mitigated by alternative financial management or additional revenues.

## The Ideal Candidate

The MVPC seeks to hire an Executive Director with significant managerial experience, and preferably with demonstrated prior success within a multi-faceted public organization. The candidate should be competent in all areas of management and operations, but especially the areas of planning, financial management, personnel administration, and inter-governmental relations. The ideal candidate will:

- Have experience working in, or with, municipal government, and possess demonstrated knowledge or understanding of most of the programmatic responsibilities of the MVPC including community planning, development regulation, municipal management, environmental protection, economic development, transportation, coastal planning, affordable housing, and intergovernmental relations.
- Be a highly visible and engaged regional leader, able to convene, inspire and build partnerships and opportunities for collaboration within the region and externally to partner organizations and agencies.
- Possess skills to build a network of support and a track record of building relationships in order to advance the interests of the MVPC and the region.
- Be self-motivated and visionary with an entrepreneurial philosophy in order to sustain the organization, maintain its relevance, and provide needed services to member communities in an ever-changing environment. And, have a proven ability obtain funding through securing grants or other creative means of generating revenue.
- Possess excellent interpersonal and communication skills in order to be a leading spokesperson, ambassador and advocate for the MVPC, the region and the member communities.
- Be an inclusive and collaborative organizational manager so as to empower the staff for maximum effectiveness and innovation. And, be able to help recruit highly talented staff as needed, as the MVPC is recognized for the high quality of its employees.
- Possess the skills and experience to work with Commissioners, staff and external entities to identify and address the long-term strategic needs of the organization and develop short-term tactical steps to advance the mission of the organization.
- Have at least ten years of leadership or executive level experience, at increasing levels of responsibility, career growth and tenure that would evidence a multi-year approach to addressing the needs of the organization and the region.
- Preferably possess an advanced degree in planning, public administration or other appropriate field. The MVPC will consider a candidate with outstanding relevant work experience who does not hold a Master's Degree.

## Compensation

The MVPC will offer a compensation package that is competitive with similar organizations with an annual salary of \$130K +/-, based on experience and qualifications. Attractive benefits, including health and retirement plans, are included within the total compensation package.



## To Apply

Interested applicants should provide résumés, in confidence, by 5:00 p.m. on November 22, 2019, via email to:

[Apply@communityparadigm.com](mailto:Apply@communityparadigm.com)

**Subject: MVPC Executive Director**

Submit a **single PDF** with cover letter and résumé.

Following the closing date, résumés will be reviewed according to the outlined qualifications. The Board of Commissioners has appointed a Screening Committee to review applications and interview the most qualified candidates in confidence. Based upon these interviews, a selection of finalists will be chosen for further evaluation and reference checks before a final selection is made by the full Board of Commissioners. Finalists will be contacted for references and approval of background reviews before their selection is publicly advanced to the Board of Commissioners.

Questions regarding the position should be directed to Bernard Lynch, Principal, Community Paradigm Associates at [blynch@communityparadigm.com](mailto:blynch@communityparadigm.com), or 978-621-6733.

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission is an EEO/AA employer.