



## DEC VIRTUAL READ FILE February 27, 2024

### DEVENS IN THE NEWS:

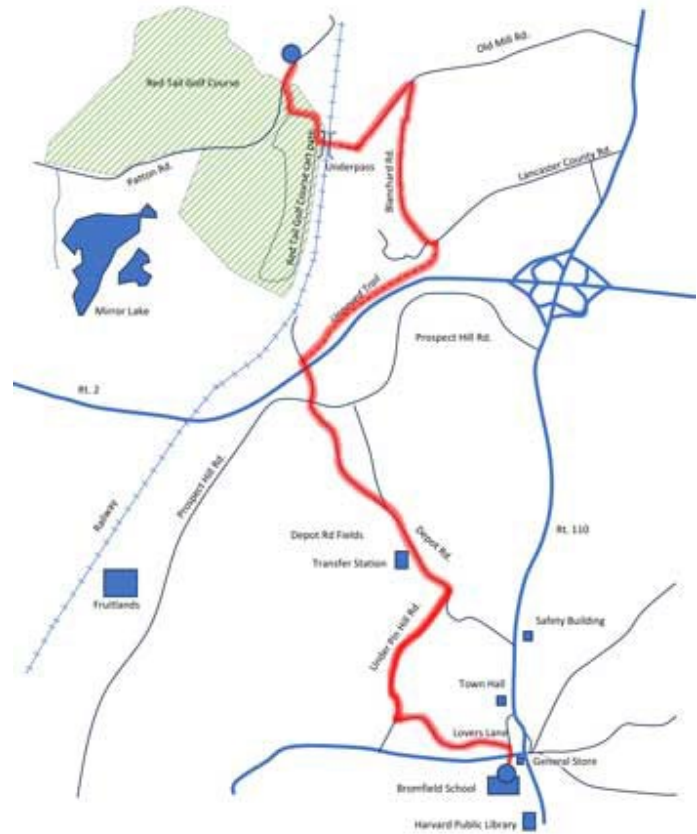
#### Plans for Devens-Harvard connector path stall as proponents and stakeholders wrangle

THE HARVARD PRESS BY VALERIE HURLEY · FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2024

<https://www.harvardpress.com/News/News-Articles/plans-for-devens-harvard-connector-path-stall160as-proponents-and-stakeholders-wrangle>

Two years after it was first presented at a public input session, a nascent plan for a pedestrian and bicycle path connecting Devens from the Red Tail golf course to Harvard at Old Mill Road has not advanced significantly. The need to coordinate the requirements of numerous stakeholders, including CSX railroad, MassDevelopment, the U.S. Army, and volunteer committees of Harvard, has made advancing the plan difficult.

"I remain optimistic that this connection can happen, but with the complexity of the easement issue, it may take some time," said Neil Angus, a planner with the Devens Enterprise Commission, the permitting authority in Devens. Gaining an easement for the railroad underpass at Old Mill Road is the most complicated problem to be sorted out, and Angus said he has asked Mass-Development to look into it. The U.S. Army had an easement years ago, but Angus suspects it expired when the golf course was built in the late '90s and the army road was eliminated. If so, he said, CSX, a transportation corporation that controls 20,000 miles of track nationwide, would need to grant the easement. Transportation Advisory Committee member Stacia Donahue said her conversations with a supervising engineer at MassDOT point to an arduous and expensive process with CSX. "We are just hoping the Army still has the easement," she told the Press.



The route that transportation committee members highlighted this week differs from the one prominently featured in the presentation two years ago, though it was included. In both cases, the connection would start at the Red Tail golf course, go under the railroad bridge on Old Mill, and continue to the town center. The original presentation, however, routed people to the shared-use path

that will be added to Ayer Road during its 2026 renovation: Anyone headed to the schools would need to brave the shared-use path's intersection with the Route 2 interchange.

Committee members have more lately emphasized the connector's potential to create a route to the Bromfield School that wouldn't run along Ayer Road. That route would require regular maintenance on an existing but unpaved trail that starts at the end of Lancaster County Road and leads to Depot Road, after which a bicyclist could pedal from Depot Road, to Under Pin Hill Road, to Lovers Lane, to Elm Street, and finally to Minister's Path, which leads directly to Bromfield. (See map.) Only trail bikes could handle the rustic trail in its present condition, however.

To get a state grant for the connector will require Harvard and Devens to join forces on an application. If MassDevelopment and the railroad can work out the easement, said Transportation Advisory Committee Chair Gabe Medjanis, the committee would apply for a MassTrails grant.

### **Harvard-Devens water pipe: An opportunity?**

Another project that requires cooperation between Harvard and Devens, but on a much larger scale, is the \$5 million water pipe connection from Harvard to Devens. The pipe will connect town center homes to Devens' water supply. From town center, the pipe will run to Depot Road's dead end, under the CSX tracks, and on to the Devens water treatment plant. That project prompted some transportation committee members to ask whether a path there, too, was feasible. Angus, however, said starting the path at Depot Road would be harder than starting it at Old Mill Road, as it opens onto a less accessible part of Devens and the track crossing would be level with the ground instead of going under the railroad bridge, as it would at Old Mill. Still, he said, installing the water pipe "presents an opportunity to work with the railroad at the same time to clarify the Old Mill Road easement."

### **Ascend Elements Raises Additional \$162 Million to Build Sustainable Lithium-Ion Battery Materials in United States, Latest funding adds to the company's recent \$542 million equity round for a 12-month funding total of \$704 million**

Westborough, Mass., February 20, 2024

Ascend Elements has Signed Lease for occupancy of 33 Jackson Road, Devens

<https://ascendelements.com/ascend-elements-raises-additional-162-million-to-build-sustainable-lithium-ion-battery-materials-in-united-states/>

### **Framework committee sends plan for new housing at Vicksburg Square to MassDevelopment**

THE HARVARD PRESS BY JOHN OSBORN · FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2024

If MassDevelopment and the Devens framework committee can find a way to work together, voters in Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley could be asked later this year to clear a path for the development of new housing at Vicksburg Square in Devens, adding hundreds of apartments and condos to the region's sparse inventory of places to live.

Last week, the 11 members of the Devens Jurisdiction Framework Committee present for the committee's Feb. 14 meeting voted unanimously for a draft warrant that would amend the zoning at Vicksburg Square for housing, allowing for the construction of up to 400 new rental and for-sale units at the site. The area is currently zoned for innovation and technology, but the buildings have been deserted for years.

Reacting Wednesday afternoon to news of the committee's action, a spokesperson for the Executive Office of Economic Development issued the following statement:

“Building more housing to make it more affordable for all has been a top priority of our administration. The administration is supportive of processes that allow for more units to be built, and we will continue to monitor this closely.”

State law empowers the three towns, gathered at town meetings in their respective towns on the same day and at the same time, to change zoning at Devens, provided a majority at each of the three meetings approves the change. But such a measure also requires the support of MassDevelopment, the agency that oversees development at Devens.

The article proposes that 25% of the units be regular rental housing, 25% be rental units for people with special needs and older people, and the remaining 50% for sale to individuals and families. And by allowing for as many as 400 new units within Vicksburg Square only, passage of the article would raise the cap on housing at Devens from 282 to 682, more than doubling the available housing within the state-managed Devens Regional Enterprise Zone.

### **The question of jurisdiction**

Unlike previous drafts, the version approved last week makes no mention of which town will have jurisdiction over new Vicksburg Square housing. Most of the land at the site (80%) lies within the historical boundaries of Ayer and the rest within Harvard. Ayer and Harvard representatives have agreed informally that if jurisdiction of Devens is returned to the towns, Harvard would be willing to negotiate with Ayer to move all of Vicksburg Square within that town’s boundaries. Representatives of Shirley have said they have no objection to such a redrawing of town lines

Co-chairs Jannice Livingston, who is a member of the Ayer Select Board, and Victor Normand of Harvard have argued that Ayer and Harvard voters will want to know who is responsible for providing services, including education, to the new residents. The committee would need to have an answer to secure the support of their voters, they said. “That notion has not gone away,” Normand reaffirmed this week in a brief phone call with the Press.

But John Katter, who represents the 800 residents living in Devens, vigorously opposed the provision, calling it “premature.” The Devens Enterprise Commission was against it as well. So when it came time to vote, Harvard Select Board Chair Rich Maiore, with Ayer’s consent, moved to drop it.

Thus revised, the proposal was supported by every stakeholder representative at the meeting, including elected and appointed leaders of the three towns, the Devens Enterprise Commission, and Katter. The two members appointed to represent the business community at Devens were absent. So was MassDevelopment, one of the committee’s founding members. MassDevelopment withdrew from the committee two years ago, saying it would return in 2033 when state law mandates it join the towns in studying the future governance of Devens.

### **A request to MassDevelopment**

For the article to become law, however, it must yet clear a number of hurdles.

Getting MassDevelopment on board is the first step, so following the framework committee’s Feb. 14 vote, Co-Chair Normand wrote to MassDevelopment’s president, Dan Rivera, advising him of the group’s action and requesting that “MassDevelopment concur with the language of the article and cooperate with the towns on all the other requirements to facilitate a super town meeting.” In his letter, Normand requested an answer by April 1.

Copies of Normand’s letter were sent to the chair of the MassDevelopment Board of Directors and Secretary of Economic Development Yvonne Hao; state senators Jamie Eldridge and John Cronin; state representative Danillo Sena; and Interim Executive Vice President for Devens Operations Meg Delorier. The Press invited the three legislators and Delorier to comment, but none offered a response in time for this issue of the Press.

Rivera, however, was quick to reply, writing within minutes of receiving Normand’s letter that he would “get back” to him as soon as the agency had reviewed the draft proposal.

### **What next?**

For the committee, time is of the essence. If MassDevelopment agrees to join the towns in advocating for Vicksburg Square housing, the select boards of each town would have to approve the warrant, and state law requires at least two hearings. Ayer Town Manager Robert Pontbriand warned that if a Super Town Meeting cannot be convened before the middle of June, it would have to wait until the fall. "It would make no sense to have a town meeting ... in July or August," he said. Maggiore disagreed. While he did worry that a delay might create the impression that the towns were not capable of acting, encouraging the Legislature to preempt them, he said it was important not to rush. Rushing would erode confidence in the process among voters, he said. If the vote were scheduled for the fall, "I promise you the sun will still rise."

DEC Director Neil Angus added that engaging voters in the three towns would take time and significant effort. He questioned whether the framework committee had the capacity to shoulder that burden. In previous campaigns, he noted, MassDevelopment has handled voter outreach and conducted hearings, devoting staff time and money to the effort. "We all have day jobs," he said, looking around the table at Ayer Town Hall, where the meeting had convened. Could the outreach be done by volunteers, he asked, "or do we need a professional to help guide the process?"

Pontbriand echoed Angus' concerns. What if MassDevelopment simply says the agency is not in a position or prepared to participate, he asked. "We have a good plan up until April 2. What happens then remains to be seen, but we need to be thinking proactively."

What happens next could be "going no further," said Normand. "That we've done our part, and that's as far as we can go." But for now, he said, the ball is in MassDevelopment's court.

And with that, the committee moved on to its next agenda item, creating a matrix for evaluating the four commonly proposed options for future governance of Devens: a return of historical land to the towns; a self-governing town of Devens; the status quo, with governance and provision of services remaining with MassDevelopment; or a hybrid of all three.

## How Eye Tracking Reveals What Really Makes Streets Walkable

Posted on February 25, 2024 by Genetics of Design

by Ann Sussman, RA

<https://geneticsofdesign.com/2024/02/25/how-eye-tracking-reveals-what-really-makes-streets-walkable/>

Interested in learning how adding trees and greenery improve the pedestrian experience? Or how it increases the likelihood that people will even consider walking down a suburban street?

Then come to this public meeting, with the [Devens Enterprise Commission](#), open to all [over Zoom](#), on Tuesday, February 27th, at 6:45 PM ET.

Prof. Justin Hollander (Tufts University) and I will discuss [Green + Complete Streets \(GCS\)](#) policies which aim to improve the pedestrian and cyclist experience. And, include a presentation on biometric tools, including eye tracking, showing new understandings about why these interventions work.

A brief slideshow, [Biometric Responses to Green and Complete Street Elements in Devens, Massachusetts](#) will review our team's recent research using [state-of-the art eye-tracking software](#) (iMotions-online) to better understand the public experience of new residential streets in [Devens](#).

This includes slides, such as below, which indicate how viewers see and focus on a street differently when it has more trees and red-brick walkways. They can't help it! Note how reddest heatmaps are larger on top image, with more GCS elements, than the one below it, with less. (Heatmaps glow reddest where people look most, fading to yellow and green in areas receiving less attention, and show no color at all in areas ignored.)

And these first glances, turn out to be extremely important – determining whether someone decides to walk down a street – or never gets the idea!

Interested in learning more? Come by or feel free to reach out to our nonprofit, [theHapi.org](https://theHapi.org); its mission is to understand the human experience of the built environment and improve its design through education and research. (email: [contact@theHapi.org](mailto:contact@theHapi.org))



Thanks to Prof. Justin B. Hollander, UEP, Tufts, and the Devens biometric research team Maria Christofi, Lisa Carlson-Hill, and Lydia Eldridge for their work here, and Devens Enterprise Commission for making it happen; and, finally, to iMotions.com for making the research feasible.

### **Court Martial at Fort Devens**

**Arlington Friends of the Drama** - <https://www.yourarlington.com/events/22004-afd-022124.html> - 22 Academy Street, Arlington, MA 02476

**March 1-17, 2024 - Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays**

by Jeffrey Sweet - Directed by Lisa Miller-Gillespie - Production Manager Susan Harrington

When a group of young black women join the Women's Army Corps during WWII, they're promised training as medical technicians. But a racist Colonel at Fort Devens has other ideas and demotes them to cleaning duty. The battle of wills leads to a confrontation in which the colonel makes comments so offensive that the WACs pull an immediate strike. Though a visiting general is able to compel most of the women to go back to work, two refuse and are held for trial. Defended by a civilian lawyer who's never tried a court-martial, they embark on an uphill fight to change the status quo. Based on a true story, this gripping and inspiring drama explores the complexities of standing up for one's rights.



Based on a True Story

# Court-Martial at Fort Devens

Written by **Jeffrey Sweet**

**Lisa Miller-Gillespie**  
Director

**Susan Harrington**  
Production Manager



**March 1-3, 8-11, 15-17**

Fridays and  
Saturdays, **8 pm**

Sundays, **3 pm**

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