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**DEVENS IN THE NEWS:**

**Historic \$4B economic development bill clears path for major housing expansion in Devens:  
Harvard Press Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>**

After months of negotiation, the Massachusetts House and Senate, meeting in special session last week, passed and sent to Gov. Maura Healey the \$4 billion “Mass Leads” economic development bill she proposed in February, including two provisions that could dramatically increase housing in Devens.

One section within the 319-page package (Section 272) amends Chapter 498, the law that created Devens, to eliminate its cap on the number of residential units that can be built there, as well as the cap on the square footage of commercial or industrial development allowed within the Devens Regional Enterprise Zone.

The housing cap, as outlined in Chapter 498, is currently 282 residential units, limiting the number of homes that can be built and constraining the area’s development. Eliminating the cap, advocates say, will pave the way for construction of hundreds of additional homes and apartments.

**Coming up with a housing strategy**

Recommending how many and what kinds of units should be built and where they should be located will be the job of a working group that the secretaries at the offices of Economic Development and of Housing and Liveable Communities are required to convene within the next 30 days. The working group’s mandate—stipulated in a second section of the bill (Section 298)—is to come up with a housing strategy and plan for all of Devens, without altering the area’s bylaws or building regulations.

Neil Angus, director of the Devens Enterprise Commission, which is the area’s permitting and regulatory authority, estimates that approximately 80 acres of undeveloped land there is zoned for residential use, including Adams Circle and Grant Road, the location of Emerson Green. Housing could be permitted and built in those areas with little regulatory delay provided a suitable developer and source of financing can be found.

**Vicksburg Square not yet zoned for housing**

However, one historic and much-discussed site would not be immediately available: Vicksburg Square, including its iconic but abandoned quadrangle of former army barracks. While the bill requires the working group to investigate the feasibility of building up to 400 multifamily residential units there, the area is currently an Innovation and Technology District and would have to be zoned residential before its redevelopment for housing could occur. Chapter 498 requires that any zoning change must be approved by the town meetings of Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley. Leaders of the three towns told the state nearly a year ago they would support such a change.

The working group, as specified in Section 298 of the bill, is required to include representatives from the towns of Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley; the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency (MassDevelopment); the Devens Committee, which represents Devens residents; and the Devens Enterprise Commission. The Press asked EOED for details on how its members will be chosen, how many, and who will make the appointments, but did not receive answers in time for this week’s issue of the paper. As a working group, the committee is not subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Whenever it finally convenes, the group has six months after the bill is signed by the governor to complete its work, when the secretaries of EOED and EOHLs must report its findings and recommendations to the House and Senate.

The bill passed the House of Representatives in special session on Nov. 14 by a 139-4 vote. The Senate passed the bill the same day 39-1. Harvard's Sen. Jamie Eldridge and Rep. Dan Sena both voted for the measure. It now awaits Gov. Healey's signature to become law.

In a note to the Press, Eldridge said he was grateful to conference committee member Senator Barry Finegold "for his support in ensuring that the legislative language in the Economic Development conference committee bill not only repeals the cap on housing and commercial development at Devens but also establishes a task force focused on potential additional housing at Vicksburg Square." He also praised the focus of the Healey-Driscoll administration's economic development secretary, Yvonne Hao, on developing Devens. "This work will have a significant impact not only on the Devens community but also on the towns of Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley, as well as the entire Nashoba Valley and North Central Massachusetts region."

State Rep. Dan Sena applauded the removal of the Devens housing cap. "While more work needs to be done on this issue, removing the cap represents a major milestone," he said.

The \$4 billion bill is a massive package that authorizes borrowing for several major state initiatives, including millions of dollars for investment in life sciences, climate technology, and artificial intelligence, plus dozens of policy changes.

The bill also includes an earmark for Harvard: authorization to appropriate \$25,000 for purchase of a drone for the Harvard Police Department, inserted at Rep. Sena's urging in a final package of legislator earmarks approved by the joint House and Senate conference committee. But as always, it's up to the Governor to release the money.

## **Healey-Driscoll Administration Announces Navjeet Bal as MassDevelopment President and CEO: Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development – November 22m 2024**

BOSTON – Today, the Healey-Driscoll administration announced that Navjeet Bal will serve as MassDevelopment's new president and CEO. Bal brings more than 35 years of experience in infrastructure finance, legal expertise, and strategic leadership to the role.

"MassDevelopment is a vital economic development resource that helps our cities and towns, businesses, banks, and communities achieve their economic potential," said Governor Maura Healey. "Navjeet's strong experience in both the public and private sectors will enable MassDevelopment to meet the evolving needs of our state, and we look forward to working with her to drive innovative strategies to grow our economy."

"Congratulations to Navjeet Bal on her appointment to lead MassDevelopment, an important driver of economic development across Massachusetts," said Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll. "We are grateful to have Navjeet join our team and are confident she will work tirelessly in her new role to support economic growth statewide for all the residents in Massachusetts."

The MassDevelopment Board of Directors voted to confirm Bal's role today, and she will begin on December 9.

"We are thrilled to welcome Navjeet Bal to the MassDevelopment team," said Economic Development Secretary Yvonne Hao, who serves as chair of MassDevelopment's Board of Directors. "Her deep expertise in finance, public service, and strategic leadership will advance our work to expand economic opportunity and growth for the communities and residents of our state."

Bal joins MassDevelopment after nearly a decade at Social Finance Inc., a national nonprofit and registered investment advisor with expertise in developing innovative funding models that measurably improve lives, where she serves as General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer. She previously served in roles at Mintz Levin, Nixon Peabody LLP, and the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, where she was the Commissioner of Revenue under former Governor Deval Patrick from 2008 to 2011. She led the Department of Revenue

through the Great Recession and into economic recovery, implementing a new corporate tax structure, tax credits, and the nation's first individual health insurance mandate.

"It is a privilege and an honor to join the Healey-Driscoll administration at this exciting time, and I look forward to working with Governor Healey, Lt. Governor Driscoll, Secretary Hao and the entire MassDevelopment team in supporting economic development across the Commonwealth," said Bal.

Bal has been recognized with a Grunin Prize for Social Entrepreneurship at NYU Law School for her legal work on the Veterans CARE project, the nation's first Social Impact Bond serving veterans. She was also recognized as one of the first recipients of the NASABA Cornerstone Award for her leadership in the South Asian legal community. Bal graduated with a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Williams College and juris doctor from Northeastern University School of Law. She currently serves on the board of the Boston Public Library.

Bal joins the MassDevelopment team at an exciting time, which includes the signing this week of Governor Healey's economic development bill the Mass Leads Act, a nearly \$4 billion bill that will strengthen Massachusetts' global leadership in climatetech, life sciences and AI, create jobs, expand workforce development programs, and support rural and regional economic development initiatives.

Mass Leads includes several provisions involving MassDevelopment, including the reauthorization of key economic development programs in the Community One Stop for Growth implemented by the agency. The bill also supports housing and economic development prospects in Devens, the former military base overseen by MassDevelopment that has been redeveloped into a regional enterprise zone, by eliminating a cap on the number of residential units and square feet of commercial and industrial development that can occur there. Mass Leads also includes a directive to merge MassDevelopment and another quasi-governmental agency overseen by the Executive Office of Economic Development, Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation, to ensure a more coordinated, cohesive approach to supporting small businesses.

#### About MassDevelopment

MassDevelopment, the state's development finance agency and land bank overseen by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development, works with businesses, nonprofits, banks, and communities to stimulate economic growth across the Commonwealth. During FY2024, MassDevelopment financed or managed 349 projects generating investment of more than \$3.5 billion in the Massachusetts economy. These projects are estimated to create or support 22,426 jobs and build or preserve 1,754 housing units

### **Devens growth: An opportunity and a challenge – The Harvard Press Friday, November 22, 2024**

Passage of the governor's economic development bill with its provisions for more housing at Devens is an exciting development for the region. Now comes the hard work of figuring out what's best for the residents and businesses there, as well as the surrounding towns that may, at some future time, be responsible for educating and providing services to the new residents.

With 80 acres available at Devens for residential housing today, MassDevelopment, the quasi-government agency responsible for the area's development, could move quickly to increase the number of homes and apartments well above the 270 currently planned, which includes 46 apartments and 26 additional homes yet to be built at Emerson Green.

But the state is wise to call for a working group of stakeholders, including residents, to review the options and propose a solution that works—or is at least optimized—for everyone. The residents who have already invested in property there will have to live with the outcome, so it's right they are represented. And when it comes to the Vicksburg Square parcel, an eyesore and an opportunity, adding housing there can only be done with the approval of the town meetings of Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley, whose votes are needed to change the zoning from innovation and technology to residential.

It's worth noting that the governor's bill also removes the commercial building cap at Devens, although for all practical purposes that was done two years ago when the limit was increased to 12 million square feet.

Though development will ultimately be constrained by environmental restrictions put in place by the state, an increase in the number of businesses there and the expansion of existing businesses seems inevitable, increasing the demand for homes and apartments to house the growing workforce.

The need for more housing in our region is evident. We applaud the measures in Gov. Healey's bill that support its growth at Devens and urge the working group to move quickly—and transparently—to create a plan that works for both the residents and the three towns.

An invitation: Coffee with the editor at Devens

The Press will be covering the plan to increase housing at Devens, including the progress of existing projects such as Emerson Green. We'd like to hear from Devens residents. We invite you to grab a coffee and join editor John Osborn at Marty's Cafe Monday, Nov. 25, from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m., for a freewheeling discussion of residents' visions and concerns.