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DEVENS IN THE NEWS:

Recommendations of Devens Housing Working Group await key studies

by John Osborn · Friday, July 11, 2025

The Devens Housing Working Group submitted its report to Gov. Maura Healey and the Legislature right on time, May 20, but work on its recommendations for increasing housing within Devens is just now getting underway.

The most consequential recommendation of the seven-member panel was that the Innovation and Technology Center district, which includes Vicksburg Square, be rezoned to allow housing, a move that could lead to the construction of hundreds of new residential units. The report observed the change could be done either by the Legislature or—as specified in Chapter 498, the law governing the area's redevelopment—a Super Town Meeting of Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley. MassDevelopment has led past rezoning efforts, but as of this week neither the agency nor the three towns had given any indication they were ready to proceed.

However, the report also recommended that four studies be undertaken to inform development of the ITC district: an educational assessment; an assessment of existing but abandoned housing, such as Vicksburg Square barracks; a traffic and parking study; and a plan for engaging the public.

At this month's July 2 meeting of the Devens Committee, Executive Vice President for Devens Operations Meg Delorier said the goal is to complete the four studies within approximately one year. They will be paid for with a $300,000 grant awarded to the town of Ayer by the Executive Office of Housing and Liveable Communities, though Delorier said some additional funding could be required.

The town administrators of the three towns and superintendents of Harvard Public Schools and the Ayer Shirley Regional School district will oversee the educational study and are already at work on a request for a consultant to do the work. A traffic and parking study was already budgeted by MassDevelopment for fiscal year 2026 and will be paid for by the agency, Delorier said. MassDevelopment will also oversee the assessment of existing buildings, while the Devens Enterprise Commission will develop a plan for engaging the public, especially Devens residents, in future planning.

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