



## DEC VIRTUAL READ FILE October 3, 2024

### DEVENS IN THE NEWS:

#### Harvard Press 9/26/24:

#### [Gov. Healey announces working group to 'revitalize' health care in Nashoba Valley region](#)

by John Osborn · Thursday, September 26, 2024

After weeks of silence following the closing of the Nashoba Valley Medical Center, the Healey-Driscoll administration announced Wednesday that it will convene a working group to “stabilize and revitalize” health care in the Nashoba Valley region. A second group will be assembled to deal with problems created by the closing of Carney Hospital in Dorchester. The administration also informed the towns most heavily impacted by Nashoba’s closing, including Harvard, that they can apply for grants of up to \$250,000 to purchase additional equipment and defray the cost of transporting patients to more distant and overcrowded emergency rooms. Nashoba Valley Medical Center, including its emergency room, ICU, and 16-bed geriatric psychiatric unit, closed Aug. 31. Harvard patients with a medical emergency are now transported to Emerson Hospital in Concord or UMass Memorial in Leominster. The Nashoba Valley working group will be chaired by Robert Pontbriand, Ayer’s town manager and an outspoken advocate for the hospital, and by Joanne Marqusee, assistant secretary in the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. The announcement states that its members will include representatives of area hospitals, community health centers, physicians, public health agencies, labor unions, emergency service providers, community leaders, and elected and local government officials. “Using data, community feedback, and input from key stakeholders in each community, the working groups will bring recommendations to state and local officials to promote equitable access to care,” the announcement said. Harvard Town Administrator Dan Nason told the Press Thursday afternoon that he first learned of plans for a working group two weeks ago through his contacts in the office of U.S. Representative Lori Trahan, but had received no further information on when the group would meet or who would be included. Pontbriand, the committee co-chair, was not available for comment. Nason said he learned of the emergency grants yesterday and had circulated the news to Harvard’s town departments. He said he expected Harvard would apply. In a phone conversation Thursday afternoon Harvard’s state Sen. Jamie Eldridge confirmed that he and state Rep. Dan Sena would participate in the working group, along with other area legislators. Eldridge described the formation of a working group as a positive action by the governor.” But he noted that the purpose of the working group was to

address the gaps in health care caused by the hospital closing and to rethink health care access in the Nashoba Valley region— not the reopening of the empty hospital.

“I do want to make it clear,” Eldridge said, “just speaking for myself, separate from the working group, that I continue to advocate and do outreach to find a bidder to bring back the hospital.” So far, he said, no bids have been submitted and the vacant hospital buildings and grounds now belong to the real estate group Apollo Global Management.

To read the full text of the governor’s announcement, go

to: <https://www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-announces-working-groups-focused-on-ensuring-health-care-in-communities-impacted-by-steward-closures>

Editor’s note: This is a developing story and will be updated as additional information is received.

## Harvard Press 9/13/24:

### MassDevelopment wants to build Devens housing in areas already zoned for it, says interim CEO

BY JOHN OSBORN · FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024

If Gov. Maura Healey’s economic development bill passes later this month with its provisions or more housing at Devens, the state will seek to build first in areas already zoned for residential development, not in Vicksburg Square— which is not. Interim MassDevelopment CEO Dan O’Connell made the statement last Wednesday, Sept. 4, at an in-person appearance before the Devens Committee, which meets monthly in the agency’s offices on Andrews Parkway. MassDevelopment is the agency responsible for redeveloping the former U.S. Army base and providing services to its residents and businesses. Passage of Healey’s economic development bill, now stuck in a six-member joint committee of the Massachusetts House and Senate, would authorize the spending of millions of dollars to support the growth of biotech and clean energy businesses in Massachusetts. But both the House and Senate versions passed in July (H4804 and S28679) would also eliminate the 282-unit housing cap at Devens and create a working group mandated to come up with a plan for more housing there, with [https://www.harvardpress.com/News/News-Articles/massdevelodevens-housing-in-areas-already-zoned-for-it-says-interim-ceo\\_9/26/24](https://www.harvardpress.com/News/News-Articles/massdevelodevens-housing-in-areas-already-zoned-for-it-says-interim-ceo_9/26/24), 7:21 PM particular attention to the quadrangle of abandoned U.S. Army barracks at Vicksburg Square. Advocates, including the Devens Framework Jurisdiction Committee, have proposed that up to 400 multifamily units be built here. Acting CEO O’Connell told committee members last Wednesday that housing was likely “the highest and best use” of Vicksburg Square, noting that the recently passed housing bill doubled the tax credit for restoring historic buildings such as Vicksburg Square, which is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. The larger credit should make the economics of redeveloping more attractive, he said. But redevelopment of Vicksburg Square requires that the area—currently an Innovation and Technology Center district—first be rezoned for residential development. And the law that governs redevelopment of Devens, Chapter 498, requires that any change to zoning be approved by majority votes of the town meetings of Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley, and that the language of the article presented to voters be approved by

MassDevelopment, a process that could take months. O'Connell signaled that given the state's housing crisis, the agency wanted to move more quickly.

### **Without a vote of the towns**

"I think immediately on passage of the economic development bill and the lifting of the cap, our intention at MassDevelopment would be to look at areas already zoned for housing at Devens," O'Connell said. The Devens Enterprise Commission, which would be the permitting authority for any such development, estimates that 85 to 90 acres are available, much of it located near Grant Road and Adams Circle, and housing could be built in those areas without a vote of the towns. <https://www.harvardpress.com/News/News-Articles/massdevelodevens-housing-in-areas-already-zoned-for-it-says-interim-ceo> 9/26/24, 7:21 PM O'Connell said the agency would look for interest among developers for either single family housing, "which has been such a success here," or "multifamily rental units that could be workforce housing for the growing workforce at Devens." He added, "We hear from a number of the new companies, Electric Hydrogen, Commonwealth Fusion Systems, that their employees love Devens ... They want to live near where they work so they could walk or bike to work." O'Connell's appearance last week was his first before the Devens Committee, a five-member board elected by residents to advise MassDevelopment on its governance of Devens. He was accompanied by Meg Delorier, interim executive vice president for Devens, and by the department heads of fire, police, public works, and recreation. Approximately a dozen residents were present either in person or remotely for a lively Q&A session on issues from traffic to future governance of the region to the lack of progress on 46 units of multifamily housing at Emerson Green. O'Connell said NOW Communities, Emerson Green's developer, understood that it could not proceed with the final phase of its project until the multifamily dwelling, now a gaping hole, is built. "We won't let them do anything until they finish their commitment. They owe us 46 units and they owe us a park," he said, though he offered no timeline for when construction might start.

### **A bill in September?**

"I think we've shown NOW Communities that we're serious about how they need to proceed on the multifamily units before they are able to do any additional single family housing, which I think has been a good and profitable <https://www.harvardpress.com/News/News-Articles/massdevelodevens-housing-in-areas-already-zoned-for-it-says-interim-ceo> 9/26/24, 7:21 PM business for them. And so we're going to hold their feet to the fire on that, and we would not consider them for additional [projects] unless they've met all their commitments." But O'Connell was optimistic about both passage of the economic development bill and the prospects for more housing. He said he had met with Healey shortly after the Democratic Convention in August, and that she assured him the leaders of both the House and Senate had committed to calling the Legislature back for a formal session to pass the bill later this month—or in early October. "I think there'll be quite a bit of interest from the development community in Devens," O'Connell said. "Interest rates are finally looking like they're going to drop a little bit. But it's been a tough time for the industry, especially the residential housing development industry. I think our timing could be really good here in terms of the cap being lifted and the economics of creating housing getting more attractive for the development community."

## Construction on Devens water connection project begins Sept. 16

BY JOAN ELIYESIL · FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024

For the next 18 months, Depot Road will be an active construction site as the \$7 million project to connect town water to the Devens water supply begins. Starting the week of Sept. 16, Contractors will begin installing a water main along the full length of Depot Road, from Ayer Road to the railroad tracks. The water main will continue under the tracks to a new pump station, and another water main will be installed from the station to a Devens water supply connection point near Salerno Circle. Department of Public Works Director Tim Kilhart told the Press that residents should expect travel delays on Depot Road, mainly during weekday work hours. He said the Transfer Station and Ryan Land playing fields will remain open, but on some days it may take a bit longer to get to those locations. Depot Road residents may also need to adapt their schedules when construction is taking place at the end of their driveways. Kilhart said he didn't know on which end of Depot Road construction will begin, but residents can avoid work areas by using Mill Road, Under Pin Hill Road, Prospect Hill Road, or Old Shirley Road to access Depot Road destinations. No road closures are expected, but Kilhart said the area near Under Pin Hill Road will likely require heavy equipment because of the amount of ledge in that area, and the road curves in that area may make travel dangerous. He said <https://www.harvardpress.com/News/News-Articles/construction-on-devens-water-connection-project-begins-sept-16-9/26/24> , 7:22 PM the Police Department will decide if the road needs to be closed for safety reasons on some days. He added that, in the event of a road closure, detours would be set up, and as much advance notice as possible would be given on the town website and on the Police Department's Facebook page. When the project is finished, town water customers, including the schools and municipal buildings, will get their water from Devens, where it is treated for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. Harvard's two town wells both contain PFAS levels that barely meet (and have in the past exceeded) the new PFAS standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency. The town voted \$4.85 million for the project in 2023, and an additional \$2.31 million at Special Town Meeting in May. Due to a procedural technicality, bond counsel requested that a revote on the \$2.31 million be taken at the upcoming Town Meeting on Sept. 28 (see details in "Fall Town Meeting only three weeks away; Select Board closes the 13-article warrant"). Town Administrator Dan Nason told the Press the revote will not delay construction.