

Harvard-Devens Jurisdiction Committee

Initial Plan Summary

Version: 09/01/2022

Background

Passage of Ballot Question #4 at the 2017 Town Elections directed the Select Board to “begin planning for and initiate discussions with appropriate parties with the goal of presenting a plan to the Town of Harvard voters to resume jurisdiction over the land presently part of Devens formerly under the jurisdiction of the Town of Harvard...”

The Harvard-Devens Jurisdiction Committee (HDJC) was subsequently formed by the Select Board in February 2018 and charged with developing the plan. This “Initial Plan Summary” is intended to provide an *overview* of the major elements to be addressed in a comprehensive plan for Harvard’s resumption of jurisdiction of its historical lands within Devens. This outline plan is intended to stimulate public inquiry and debate and may or may not contain all elements of a final plan.

In 2019, MassDevelopment, the quasi-public state agency that manages Devens, aided in the formation of the Devens Jurisdiction Framework Committee (DJFC) which is composed of representatives from Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley, MassDevelopment, the Devens Enterprise Commission, and Devens residents and businesses. The task of the DJFC is to coordinate the efforts of the Devens stakeholders in determining local municipal governance of Devens and to submit a recommendation to the Governor and Legislature, as required by Chapter 498 of the Acts of 1993.

The DJFC’s task is similar to that of the HDJC but is broader in scope. It can consider a range of options for the future governance of Devens, such as the creation of Devens as a standalone town, for example.

Consultant Services

The HDJC has taken the position that MassDevelopment should fund the cost of the consultant services required to develop a complete plan for Devens future governance. Funding for consultant services is seen as an appropriate and required expense of the Devens redevelopment project.

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The essence of the HDJC plan is that Devens will be returned to Harvard and by extension to each of the other two towns from which it was assembled by the Army in 1917. This first draft of a plan is explained below.

Residential Community – Devens residents have previously requested that their residential community be kept together and not be split up among separate towns. An element of Harvard’s “resumption of its historical lands” plan is that

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the entire residential community of Devens will become part of Harvard. This will add all 282 homes authorized under the Reuse Plan to Harvard.

Boundary Changes – The historical boundary will be changed to include the approximately 40 housing units on Bates and Autumn Streets, now part of the Town of Ayer, thus keeping the Devens residential community together.

Municipal Services – Harvard will be responsible for providing all municipal services, including education (which Harvard now provides by contract with MassDevelopment). This can be accomplished by a variety of means:

- Expanding existing staff, facilities and equipment where needed within existing Harvard departments.
- Contracting with third parties for services; or
- Regionalizing specific services with other communities.

Utilities - Obtain legislative approval for the creation of a Devens “super” municipal utility which will be managed by an independent commission for the benefit of ratepayers. This retains the present organization and operation of Devens utilities for providing electric, gas, water, and for servicing wastewater, and additionally, storm water services.

A local utility commission, appointed for staggered long terms would replace the MassDevelopment Board. This proposal changes only the governing structure but would not change operations or the geographic area currently served by Devens utilities. Legislation must include provision for adequate initial capital for infrastructure maintenance and rate stabilization.

Unified Permitting – Unified Permitting remains in place. Members of the Devens Enterprise Commission will be locally appointed as terms of current commissioners expire, rather than being appointed by the Governor.

Zoning/Reuse Plan - The Reuse Plan and Devens Zoning Bylaws remain unchanged.

Public Lands – The ownership and operation of Mirror Lake as a public facility should transfer to the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. Future ownership and management of other open space areas now owned by MassDevelopment must be resolved. Entities holding conservation restrictions or other interests in open space must be consulted.

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Connectivity, Traffic and Transportation – Consider a limited re-opening of Old Mill Road to Patton Road. This access would be gated and available only for pedestrians, bikes, and emergency vehicles. Also, consider adding another access road (perhaps reconnecting Depot Rd with Salerno Circle) which would exclude trucks by design.

Environmental – Maintain existing agreements with US Army, EPA and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to ensure the high-level protections are maintained. Harvard must have status as a party of interest in these agreements.

Taxation and Municipal Finance – The HDJC believes that a thorough understanding of the impact on local taxes and municipal finance is critical to any discussion of Harvard resuming jurisdiction over its former lands at Devens. This applies equally to both Harvard and Devens.

Tasks to be considered include:

- Develop combined operating and capital budgets, including potential long term debt schedules.
- Merge Harvard and Devens property assessments.
- Develop projected tax rates assuming residential/commercial-industrial split rates.
- Analyze impact of split tax rate (residential vs. commercial/industrial) on Harvard's existing tax base.
- Review projected life of major capital investments (utilities, roads and equipment).
- Develop potential future capital obligations.

In short, a thorough analysis by consultants with municipal finance experience is required.

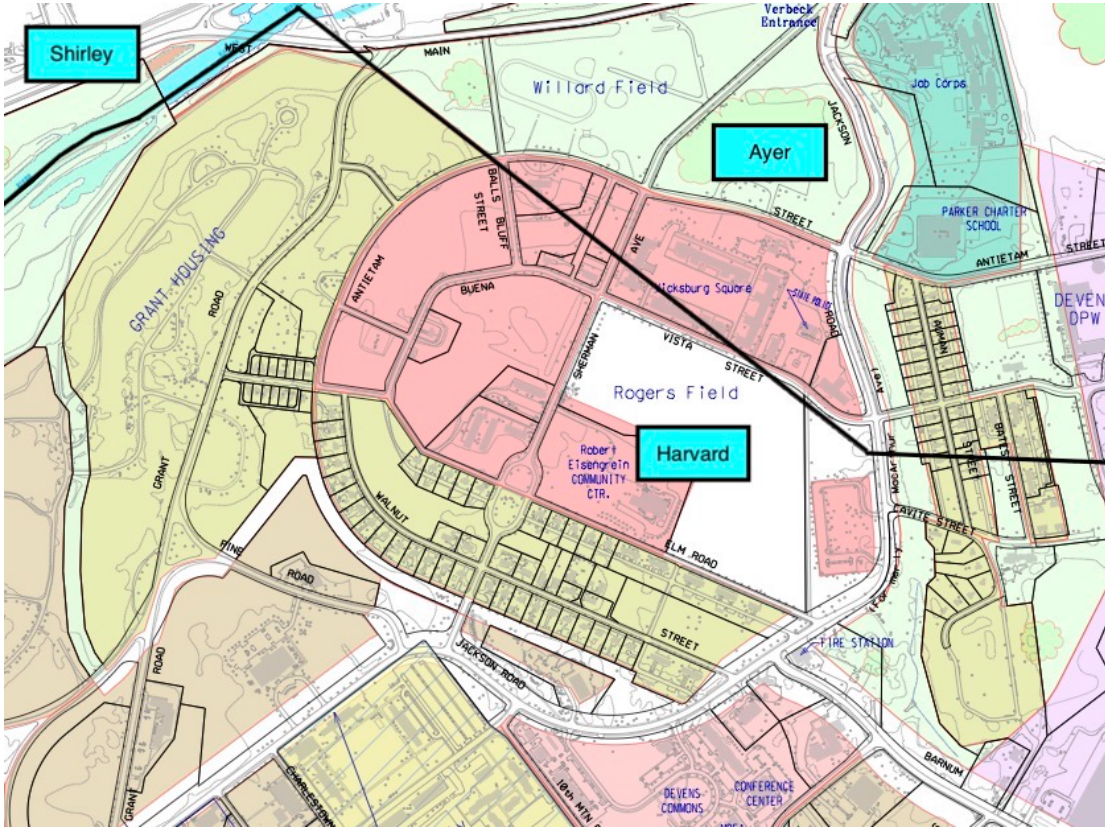
In Conclusion

While this initial summary plan represents a possible future vision for a combined Devens-Harvard community, many details still need to be addressed; there will be questions raised, and various options presented. The current efforts of the larger Devens Jurisdiction Framework Committee (DJFC) are progressing slowly, and it will likely take years for the DJFC to reach a consensus. This initial plan summary provides a basis for citizen engagement within Harvard as well as the larger Devens community.

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Appendix B. Devens Housing Areas



Devens housing areas, shown in yellow, are along Grant Road, Walnut Street, Elm Road, Cavite Street, Bates Street, and Auman Street. Bates and Auman Street straddle the Harvard-Ayer town boundary.

The yellow area at the bottom of the image is a portion of the U.S. Army Fort Devens compound and is not used for civilian purposes.