Large Site Demand and Capacity In Massachusetts

A Report by MassEcon®
Location is everything.

March 2025

MassEcon
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Mission

MassEcon's mission is to promote and champion Massachusetts as the best place to start, grow and locate a business. Built upon a robust network of corporate and civic members, MassEcon convenes public and private sector leaders of industry to create an inclusive business ecosystem that enhances job growth across a diverse talent pool; promotes investment in all communities; expands equitable opportunities throughout the Commonwealth.

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Introduction

Team Massachusetts

MassEcon is a non-profit organization promoting economic growth and opportunity in the Commonwealth. As a dedicated member of Team Massachusetts, MassEcon provides expert site location services for businesses that are looking to locate to or expand in Massachusetts. In this role, MassEcon has worked on 350 site location projects since 1995. In recent years, it has leant assistance to an average of over 85 projects per year.

Since 2019, MassEcon has worked on over 40 site location projects which have sought 50 or more acres for facilities. Of these, 27 projects have sought over 100 acres, and three over 200 acres. Despite working with Team Massachusetts, municipal, and commercial development partners, MassEcon has encountered a market with a limited supply of large acreage availabilities.

To determine current inventory, explore prospective off-market sites, and identify potential large acreage sites that may be viable for future economic development opportunities, MassEcon researched and developed this report. MassEcon received support for this project through a REDO grant provided by the Commonwealth.

A brief summary of the report:

- Massachusetts has a limited number of 100+ acre sites available and designated for non-retail commercial economic development. This is a largely under-recognized issue.
- Many 100+ acre sites in the current marketplace lack sufficient power and/or water infrastructure to meet the needs of desirable employment-generating opportunities.
- Delivering sufficient power load and other infrastructure requirements to large sites presents challenges that only rigorous planning at the municipal, regional, and state level will overcome.
- Several highly desirable industries are driving demand for large acreage sites.
- This report identifies multiple large acreage sites that could be made viable for such requirements.
- Within Massachusetts, there are a number of valid interests that compete for large acreage sites, including housing and mixed-use development, as well as open space/recreational/agricultural preservation.
- Massachusetts' competitive advantages in securing desirable economic development/employment generating opportunities will be weakened if additional large acreage sites are not secured and prepared for such opportunities.

We acknowledge the assistance of Tighe & Bond for creating a GIS-based Property Selection Dashboard for MassEcon to utilize in its research of large acreage parcels in Massachusetts. We are also thankful to Langan Engineering & Environmental Services, LLC, for developing the mapping of the sites that are included in this report, as well as the Arc-GIS-based interactive database of Massachusetts large acreage sites that is included as a link in this report. VHB provided guidance on the Massachusetts permitting regime. Eversource and National Grid provided substantial input on the provision of energy load to large site requirements. MassEcon received survey and follow-up input from over 40 commercial real estate advisory and development organizations, as well as several municipal and regional economic development professionals.

Survey Commercial Real Estate

In 2023-24, MassEcon surveyed Massachusetts-based commercial real estate brokers and developers. Overall, 60 commercial real estate professionals submitted survey responses. Just over two dozen of these respondents providing additional input by way of an open comments section.

Key Findings

- There is a lack of suitable large acreage land sites available for development
- Lack of viable large-acreage sites is a detriment to Massachusetts economic competitiveness
- Lack of sufficient power to sites and difficulty in permitting are major impediments to large site development
- Large sites are needed most for climate-tech, data centers, advanced manufacturing, and warehouse/distribution users
- Demand for large sites is highest in central and northeastern Massachusetts

Survey Findings

In the 5-year period between 2019-2024,

76% of respondents were aware of at least one site requirement of 50 or more acres.

80% indicated they were aware of large requirements that were unable to find suitable sites in Massachusetts.

55% of respondents agreed that Massachusetts does not compete well for large-acreage requirements.

76% of respondents agreed that Massachusetts does not have enough 100+ sites available for non-retail commercial development, while 65% agreed that it doesn't have enough 50+ acre sites

90% of respondents agreed that the lack of suitable large acreage sites for non-retail commercial development places Massachusetts at a competitive disadvantage.

Demand for Large Sites by Type of Use

Operations with High demand for Large Sites

Warehouse/Distribution/Logistics	**100.00%**
Clean Energy Tech Manufacturers	**100.00%**
Data Centers	**100.00%**
Advanced Manufacturing *(Defense, aeronautics, Robotics, etc.)*	**90.00%**
Traditional Manufacturing *(Food processing, printing, machinery. etc.)*	**66.67%**
Life Sciences Manufacturing	**50.00%**

Most Important factors affecting viability for large acreage sites

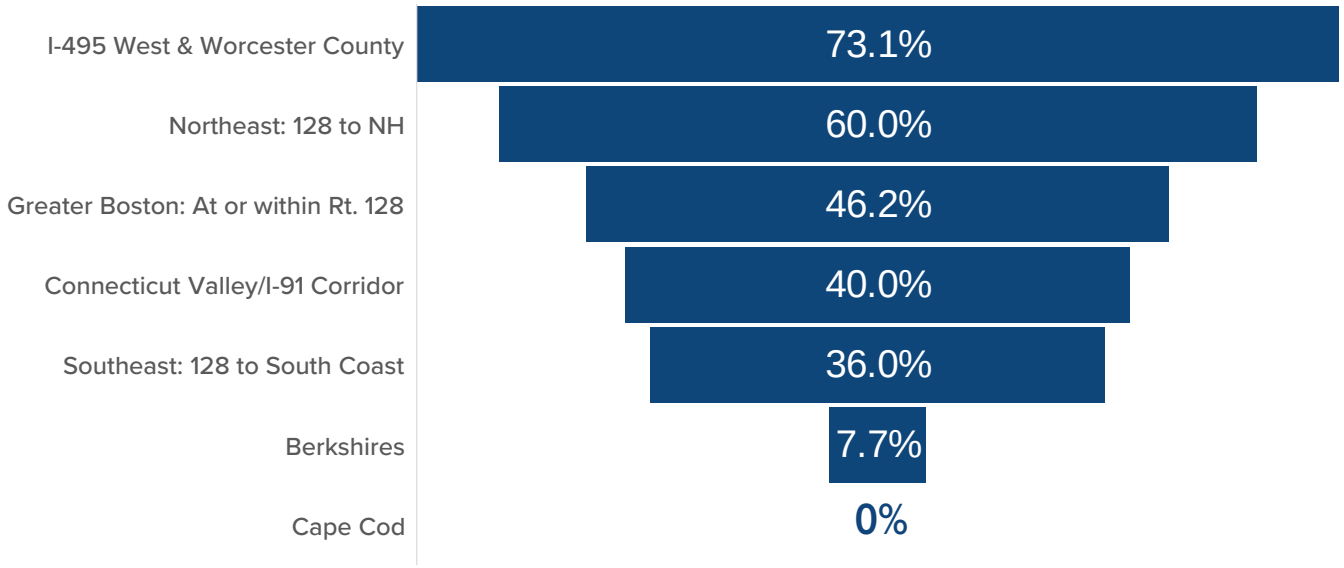
Sufficient power	**93.10%**
Municipal water	**75.86%**
Proximity to major highway	**72.41%**
Municipal sewer or on-site treatment capacity	**62.07%**
Desirable workforce within 45-minute commute time	**62.07%**
Favorable topography and limited wetlands	**62.07%**
Established local support for non-retail commercial uses/ Appropriate zoning in place	**55.17%**
Low property tax rate	**34.48%**
Access to municipal or state incentives for prospective users	**27.59%**
Low area construction labor cost	**20.69%**
Low area construction materials costs	**20.69%**
Proximity to major airport	**10.71%**
Nearby public transportation	**10.34%**

While 31 % of respondents indicated that previously undeveloped acreage was the most preferable for large acreage development, **69% indicated there is no preference among undeveloped, previously developed or brownfields site options.**

Major impediments to large site development

Sheer lack of acreage	**100%**
Lack of infrastructure to potentially suitable sites	**100%**
Permitting is too difficult	**100%**
Development costs are too high	**75%**
Difficult to change zoning for commercial uses	**75%**
Restrictions on land otherwise suitable for commercial development *(protected open space, recreation, preserved farmland, conservation land, etc.)*	**50%**
NIMBYism in some communities	**25%**
There isn't a sufficient demand for such large spaces	**20%**

Where is the Highest market demand for Large Sites?



Regional Identification of Large Site Needs

A Review of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies in Massachusetts

Supported by the federal Economic Development Administration, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDs) are intended as strategy-driven plans for regional economic development, developed by a range of stakeholders in a region, often coordinated by regional planning agencies.

A review of the most recent CEDs in 10 Massachusetts regions, reveals a range of interpretation of the current state of site availability for large commercial development projects. The omission of large site availability as an issue in planning, in many regions, is a concern, given identified market demand.

How the CEDs view availability of land for commercial uses as a strength or weakness

Weakness	Strength	No Reference
Berkshire	Southeast	Central Massachusetts
Franklin	Old Colony	Cape Cod
Hampden/Hampshire	Montachusett	
Merrimack Valley		
Northern Middlesex		

Regions

Berkshire County, 2017-2022 - Berkshire County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Topography is a limiting factor in the Berkshires, as it includes several mountain ranges and limited valley plains. The report notes only 10 sites available of 10 acres or more and no sites at 50-acres or more. It does identify the former Berkshire Mall site in Lanesborough, at 84-acres, as the largest potential redevelopment site in the Berkshires.

Franklin County, 2020-2025 - Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

The Franklin CED notes the lack of ready-to-use industrial space as an economic weakness. It identifies the Andy Lane Industrial Area in Montague as a potential site for commercial expansion.

Hampden & Hampshire Counties – Pioneer Valley Plan for Progress (PVPFP)

While noting limited inventory of shovel-ready industrial sites, the PVPFP emphasizes preservation of agricultural land to preserve the local agricultural economy.

Regions

Central Massachusetts (generally the greater Worcester area and southward) – CMPRC CEDs, 20223-2028

Large acreage sites availability for development is NOT noted in the report. It does note rising costs of infrastructure acts as a deterrent to economic growth and that municipalities need assistance in facilitating sustainable development practices particularly through land use, zoning and community planning.

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2019 CED (North Central Massachusetts)

The plan identifies several industrial parks that are at or near capacity. It also inventories small- to mid range sites for potential development. In addition, it notes several large-site opportunities such as Salerno Circle at Devens, the Simplex Drive complex in Westminster and the Westminster Business Park.

Northern Middlesex Council of Governments, 2020-2025 CEDS (Greater Lowell Region)

The plan acknowledges a lack of developable land but offers no strategic recommendations.

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission CEDS 2023-28

The plan notes that the lack available commercial and industrial sites for new development but offers no strategic recommendations.

Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District Regional Planning, 2023-28

The plan sees numerous remaining development sites as economic strengths to the region and catalogues an inventory of large acreages sites available or potentially available for development, all of which are noted in the inventories presented later in this report.

Old Colony (Plymouth County area) Economic Development Strategy CEDs, 2020-25

The plan notes that the region has thirty-two industrial parks, including the Avon Industrial Park, the Brockton Business Center, and the Plymouth Industrial Park, which are near major highways.

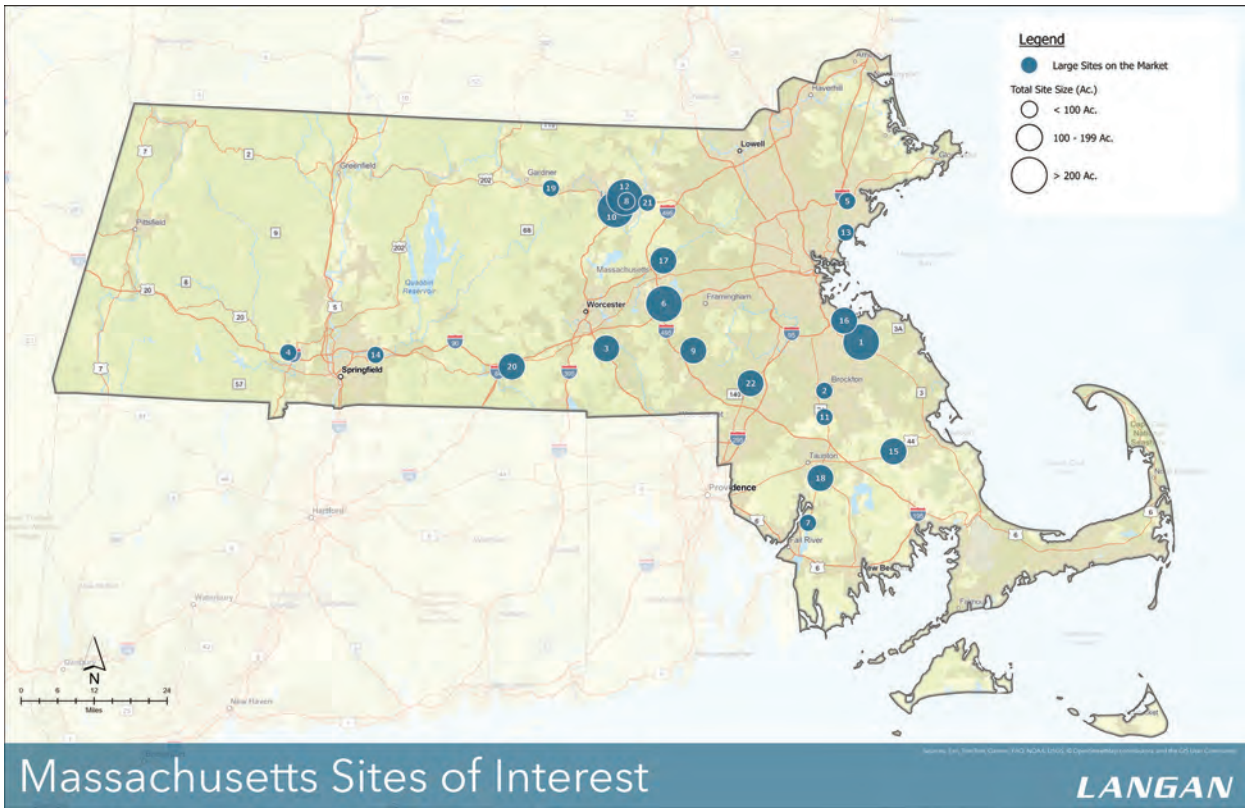
Cape Cod Commission CED 2019-2024

No spaces issues are noted. The Cape has self limiting issues for large acreage development, unless the Joint Base Cape Cod should be transitioned for other uses in the future. Given the plan's emphasis on the Blue Economy, the preservation of some ocean-front spaces for commercial R&D and industrial uses would be reasonable.

Large Sites for Non-retail Commercial Development Opportunities

A. The Current Market

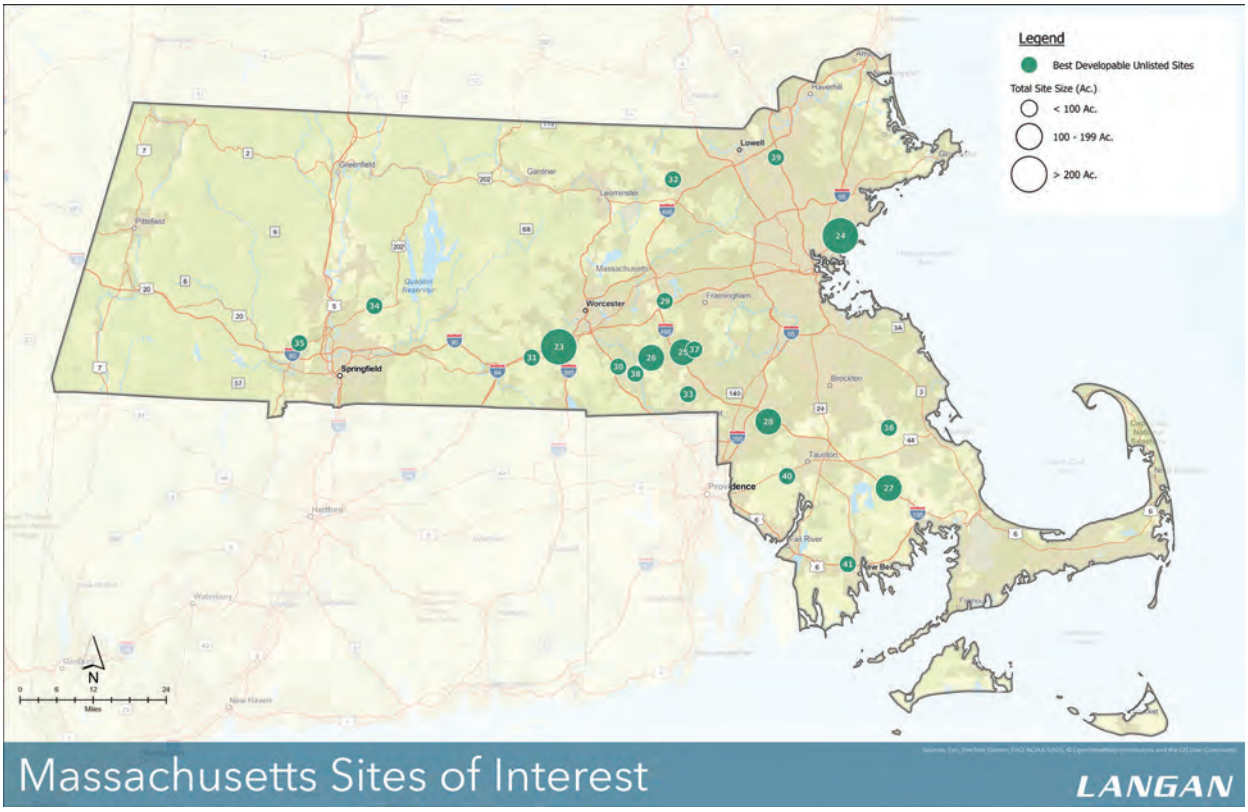
Our review of the commercial marketplace yields 12 sites of 100 or more acres available for significant commercial opportunities. These sites are zoned for commercial or industrial use, or are in the process of being zoned for these uses. Four of these sites include 300 or more acres. One site, 75 Reed Road in Hudson, includes the most robust power capacity of any site in the state, at 48 MW. The total acreage available among these 12 sites is 2,423.



Site ID	Site Name	Town	Table Acres	GIS Acres	Notes	Owner
1	Aggregate Industries, 611 Pleasant	Weymouth/Hingham	300	298.90	Limited Industrial	Aggregate Industries
2	600 Belmont Street	Brockton	65	66.79	General Commercial	City of Brockton
3	122A and Boston Road	Sutton	143	452.45	Industrial	Kraft Group
4	67 Cabot Road	Westfield	72	69.90	Industrial	City of Westfield
5	8 Centennial Drive	Peabody	60	78.86	Industrial	Analogic
6	Metrowest Development Portfolio - 21 Cosline Dr	Southborough/Westborough	324	389.13	Industrial	EMC
7	Fall River Technology Park	Fall River	91	77.29	Industrial	City of Fall River
8	696 Fort Pond Road	Lancaster	65	149.47	Industrial	GFI
9	555 Hopping Brook Park	Holliston	187	185.50	Industrial	Jon Delli Priscoli
10	100 McGovern Blvd.	Lancaster	375	367.88	Industrial	Capital Group Properties
11	21 Lincoln Street	West Bridgewater	70	71.51	Industrial	West Bridgewater Owner LLC
12	435 Leominster Shirley Road	Lunenburg	300	257.63	Industrial	
13	701 Lynnway	Lynn	68	48.10	Industrial	Sweetser
14	Millside Business Park, 100 State St	Ludlow	40	31.32	Industrial	Westmass
15	3-4 Park Ave.	Carver	127	227.03	Industrial	Route 44 Development
16	Quincy Shipyard	Quincy	148	133.99	Industrial	Dan Quirk
17	75 Reed Road	Hudson	149	147.51	Industrial	National Development
18	Silver City Business Park, 8 Galleria Dr.	Taunton	150	146.40	Industrial	Portman
19	1 Simplex Drive	Westminster	75	74.81	Industrial	Equity Industrial
20	241 Sturbridge Road	Charlton	120	195.94	Industrial	GFI
21	Salerno Circle	Devens	100		Industrial	MassDevelopment
22	Quarter Point, Washington St	Foxborough	167	163.74	Commercial/Industrial	The Kraft Group

B. The Developable Market

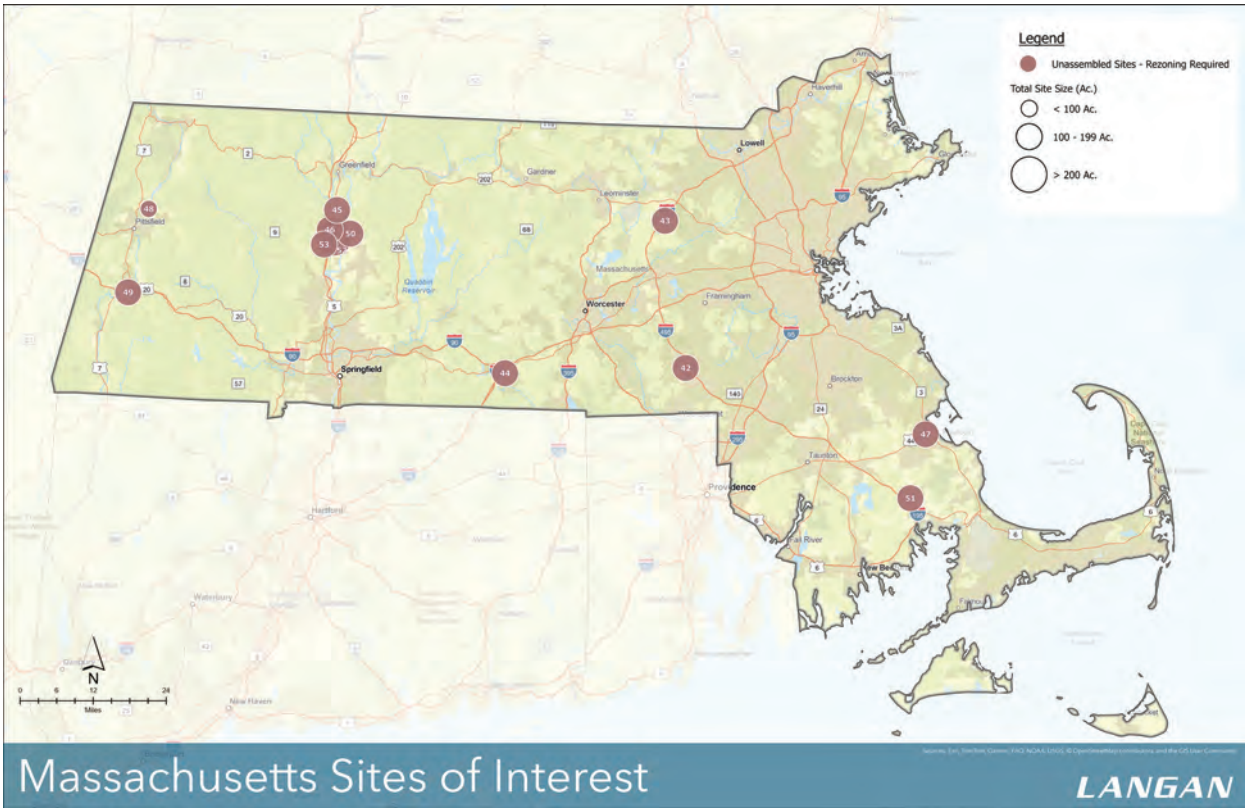
Our review of large sites that are not currently in the marketplace but are otherwise potentially developable yielded six (6) locations of over 100 acres. These total 1,729 developable acres. An additional 12 locations include 50-100 developable acres, totaling 910 acres.



Site ID	Address	Town	Table Acres	GIS Acres
23	163 Southbridge/191 Southbridge/0 Ashworth	Oxford	260.3	198.60
24	0 Salem Turnpike	Saugus	235.5	232.48
25	0 East Main & Rear I-495	Bellingham	163.1	163.93
26	0 Mendon Street	Mendon	138	134.35
27	Wareham Street	Middleborough	114	111.50
28	881 South Main Street	Mansfield	106.7	104.39
29	0 Turnpike Road	Southborough	91.9	92.09
30	Purgatory Road	Northbridge	86.6	85.36
31	0 H Putnam Road	Charlton	86.2	88.01
32	Off Boston Road	Groton	81	80.55
33	0 Cross Street	Bellingham	75.6	77.01
34	East State Street	Granby	75.4	69.88
35	0 North Road	Westfield	75	74.91
36	101 Monponsett Street	Halifax	73.8	70.13
37	555 Hopping Brook Road	Holliston	72.7	69.98
38	Providence Road	Northbridge	71.9	73.83
39	0 Dascomb Road	Andover	68.4	70.97
40	0 Williams Street	Dighton	51.8	50.92

C. Un-assembled, Not Currently Developable Large Sites

We surveyed the state to identify parcels, most often multiple contiguous parcels, that are currently not zoned for commercial development. In most cases, the parcels are currently zoned for agriculture use, but are not permanently restricted Chapter 61 lands, i.e. restricted for agricultural, forest, or open space recreation uses. All of these 12 sites are over 100 acres and total 1,694 acres. These sites were selected based on proximity to numbered highway routes and access to basic power infrastructure, though some have limited or no current access to municipal water or sewer. This list is not a comprehensive list of such acreage, but is meant to demonstrate that such acreage is potentially viable for development with long-term planning.



Site ID	Address	Town	Table Acres	GIS Acres	Notes
41	Hathaway Road	New Bedford	95.4	114.30	Whaling City Golf Course
42	136 Farm Street	Bellingham	139	146.65	Vacant EMC land
43	244 Adams Place	Boxborough	105.8	103.57	Mixed non-ag zoning
44	183 Charlton Road	Charlton	137.2	127.91	Mixed woodland zoning
45	Off North Main Street	Deerfield	129.2	127.21	Mix of non-61 farmland
46	State Road	Deerfield	132.3	131.56	Mix of non-61 farmland
47	Monks Hill Rd area	Kingston	153.3	145.12	Mixed non-ag zoning
48	655 Cheshire Road	Lanesborough	86.2	88.23	Former Berkshire Mall site
49	300 Stockbridge Road	Lee	171.5	120.73	Owned by Town of Lee
50	475 Amherst Road	Sunderland	133.1	134.80	Mix of non-61 farmland
51	76 Beach Street	Middleborough	138	147.89	Non-ag/Non-residential zoning
52	Off Log Plain Road	Whately	208.7	137.46	Mix of non-61 farmland
53	Westbrook Road	Hatfield	130	131.58	Mix of non-61 farmland

D. Context

In total, this report has identified 2,423 acres of 100+ acre sites available in Massachusetts. To place this combined acreage in perspective, it is approximately the same acreage as one mega-development site in Louisiana acquired by Meta last year for one date center.

Massachusetts will never compete for such a mega-project, usually defined as a project with a need for 1,000 or more acres of contiguous land. Around the US, states are investing in such development sites to be competitive for mega-sized projects. Massachusetts will not be able to offer such acreage.

Massachusetts can and should compete for more modest projects of 100-400 acres in size. Currently, we lack a sufficient number of 100-acre sites. In some cases, the sites that the state has available are lacking in infrastructure and power.

Large 100+ acre sites are needed for future job-generating opportunities. In order, for Massachusetts to be competitive for future opportunities in AI, advanced manufacturing, and climate-tech, long-term planning and site assembly should begin as soon as possible.

This 200-acre Framingham site includes Bose and Sanofi facilities.

Large Load Power for Large Sites: A Competitive Requirement

Beyond the availability of acreage for large commercial opportunities itself, the most significant issue for site viability is the availability of sufficient power. As noted in the survey, the demand for large acreage sites is highest among data centers, climate-tech, and advanced manufacturing users. These very users have the greatest requirements for large load power capacity.

Since 2022, MassEcon has fielded requests for information for site requirements with elevated, sometimes exceptional, energy needs. Data centers, which are viewed as important assets for the developing AI industry, often have high energy requirements. In addition, clean tech companies that are developing or manufacturing clean energy systems, also tend to have high energy demands. In fact, **since 2022, MassEcon has received 18 requests for sites noted as "Large Load Needs", with nine (9) energy requirements of 10 Megawatts (MW) or more.** At present, Massachusetts has only two sites available that readily meet such site requirements, one with 48 MW load capacity and another at 18 MW.

Recent Large Power Load Requirements

Year	ID#	Power Need	Project Name	Use Type	Acres
2025	3367	50MW	Project Y	Heavy Manufacturing	150
2024	3328	100 MW	Project Evolve	Data Center	150
2024	3329	150 MW	Project X	Data Center	300
2024	3287	20 MW	Project Marathon 2	Solar Module Manufacturing	150
2024	3271	30 MW	Project Jupiter	Battery Manufacturing	100
2024	3286	50 MW	Project Marathon 1	Solar Cell Manufacturing	100
2023	3246	10 MW	Project U	Clean Technology	40
2023	3252	40 MW	Project Fusion	Fusion Plant	100
2022	3090	100 MW	Project Zanzibar	Data Center	150

In order to serve such needs, significant increased load capacity would have been required at prospect sites. These opportunities included over 1,100 projected new Massachusetts jobs. While two of these projects are currently active, the remainder did not go forward with a Massachusetts site option.

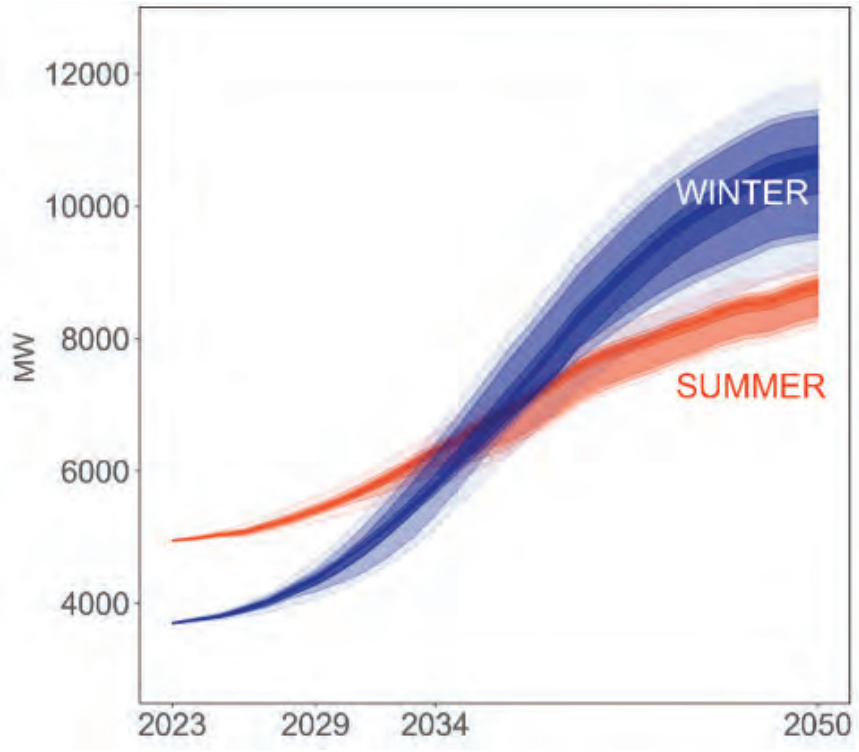
The ability of Massachusetts to compete for investments by significant employers with large-site, large-power requirements will require well-developed planning by the Commonwealth, its municipalities, and its utilities that effectively determines where large sites will be developed over the next several decades and how power will be delivered to serve these sites.

Planning for Power: What the Utilities Tell Us

Each of the state's three regional energy providers, Eversource, National Grid, and Unitil have recently produced Electric Sector Modernization Plans (ESMP). Each should be required reading for the Massachusetts commercial property and economic development communities.

As Eversource's ESMP reports, "the grid of tomorrow will look vastly different to the grid of today. Eversource's peak electric demand is expected to increase 2.5-fold by 2050, and by 2035, the increased electrification of heating will shift that peak from summer to winter."

In it's ESRM report, National Grid provides this visual to demonstrate the peak demand it forecasts, with demand doubling by 2050, and a shift to peaking in winter in the mid 2030's



Source: Future Grid Plan: Empowering Massachusetts by Building a Smarter, Stronger, Cleaner and More Equitable Energy Future Executive Summary, January 2024

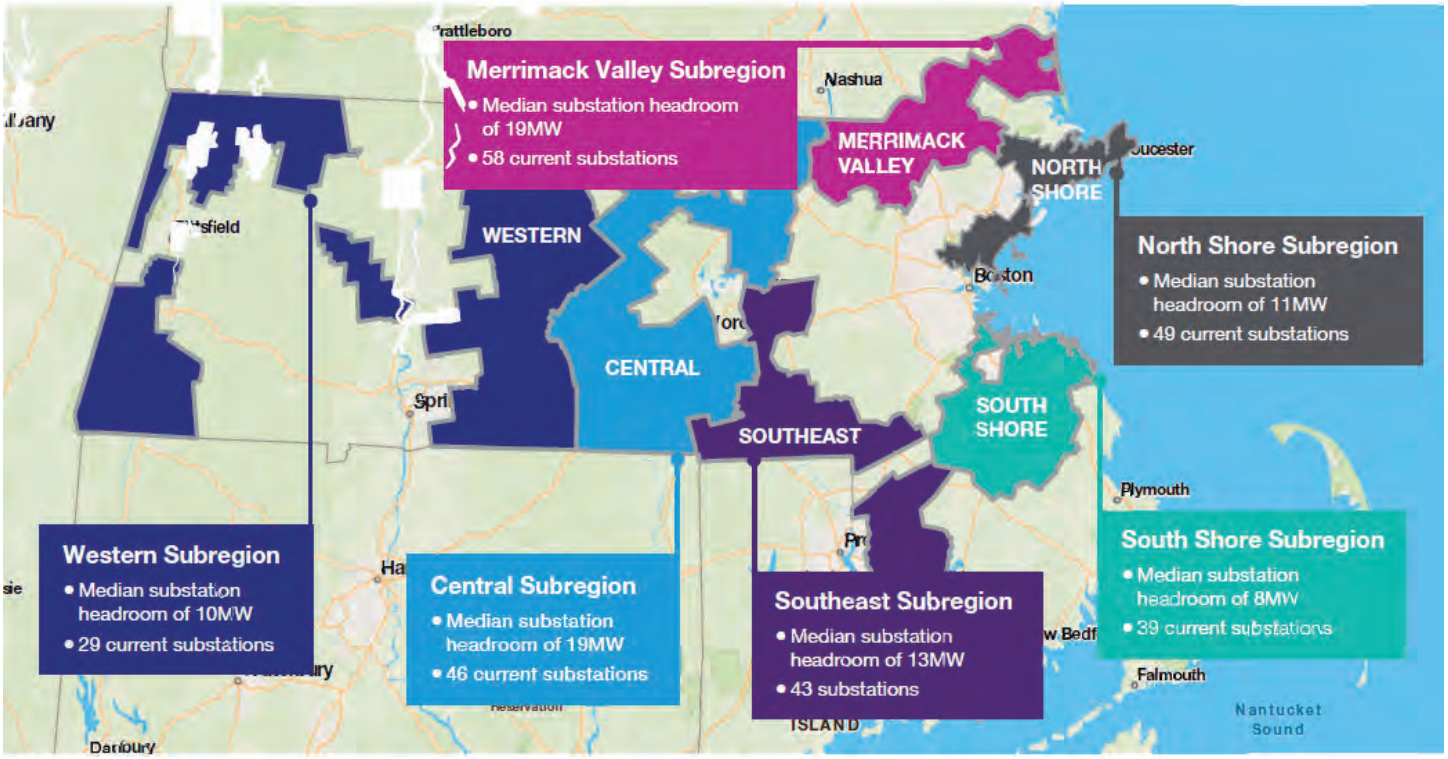
In order to meet higher electricity demands, Eversource, National Grid, and Until plan substantial investments in upgrading existing substations and building new substations. These upgrades will not be without disruption in host communities.

> "Each new substation, station upgrade and battery storage project will also require extensive street distribution line upgrades or new distribution lines to relieve loading on existing distribution feeders. Depending on the concentration of customers served out of each new substation, this street work may be extensive, and will therefore require significant community outreach effort. Construction of distribution lines also present an opportunity to underground newer lines, which will in turn deliver additional resilience benefits to customers. Active stakeholder engagement in the EDC decision-making process for new bulk substations is critical to the successful execution of these projects."

As these three regional utilities invest to meet the higher electric energy needs required by Massachusetts's nation-leading clean energy goals, 41 municipal power and light companies will also need to upgrade their electrical power storage and transmission systems.

National Grid Substation Investments

National Grid's Six Major Service Sub-regions



Current: 264 substations
1,318 distribution Feeders

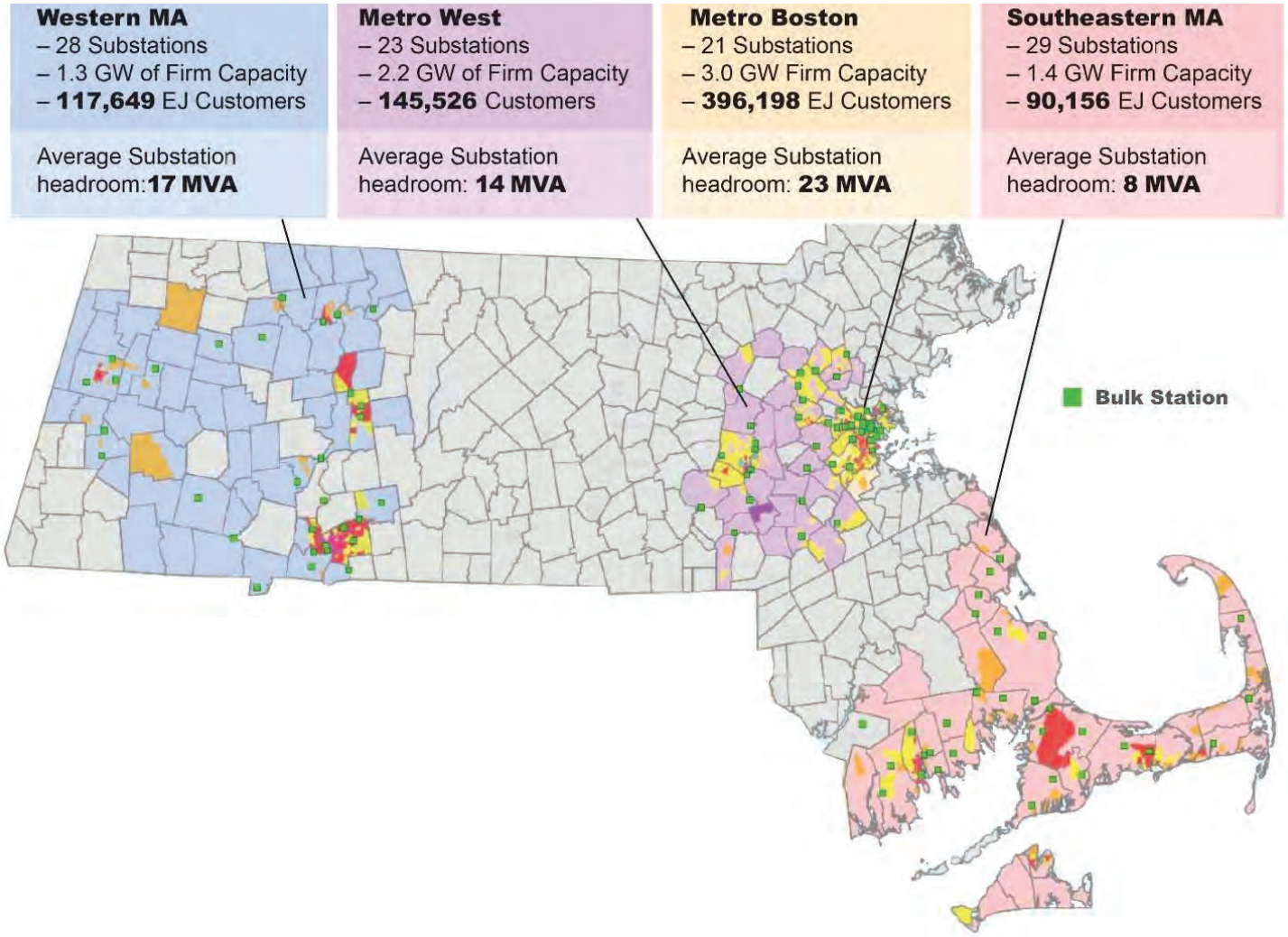
By 2030: 13 upgraded substations
Expansion of 14 feeders

By 2050: 32 new/upgraded substations
Expansion of 13 feeders

To accommodate higher energy use that comes with greater electrification, Eversource's plan enables "reliable integration of 2.5 million electric vehicles statewide, 1 million residential heat pumps within the Company's service territory, and an additional 2.2 GW of new solar resulting in 5.8 GW of solar hosting capacity." Further, its 10-year plan foresees expected impacts from large customer loads, electrification of heating and transportation (EV), and off-sets by energy efficiency (EE) and DER (PV), [that] results in a projected 20% increase in net electric demand in the ten-year forecast period, raising the total peak demand served by Eversource from 6.1 GW to 7.4 GW in 2033."

Continuing with the Eversource example, it operates across the four (4) regions it defines as: Western Massachusetts, Metrowest, MetroBoston, and Southeastern Massachusetts. At present, its bulk power substations on "average serve between 7,000 to 18,000 customers, or 14,000 to 36,000 residents. Current average electrification hosting capacity on these substations ranges between 8 to 23 MWs."

Eversource Substation Investments



Current: 172 substations
Approximately 11,500 circuit miles of overhead lines
9,200 circuit miles of underground lines
172,900 service transformers

By 2030: 6 upgraded substations and
5 new substations

By 2035: Upgrade 2 substations and build 9 new substations
Expansion of 13 feeders

Why Our Focus on Substations?

Substations must be located proximate to the load they need to serve.

We highlighted the plans of the utilities to grow substation capacity to deliver power loads to meet the growth in demand projected in electrical power needs. These projections do not account for dramatic growth in power needs that would come with heavy users that large 100+ acres sites will host. MassEcon's list (page 13) of recent large site requirements totaled 550 megawatts of demand. This would be equivalent to about 25 percent of the total build of new substation capacity envisioned by Eversource and National Grid by 2035.

Planning for Power Drives Opportunity

Assembling and preparing large sites for significant employment generating opportunities requires full consideration of power needs. Delivery of power does not happen overnight. In the visual below, National Gride provides insight on typical timelines to meet pathways for projects requiring up to 2.5 MW, 2.5-10 MW and 10 MW and greater.

Power Connectivity Timeline

200kW – 2.5MW, up to 40 weeks, subject to change based on project scope, Step Zero process can support initial capacity availability assessment, provided in 3 weeks to support site due diligence

2.5-10MW, 40 weeks to 4 years, highly dependent on infrastructure needs, assessment on costs/timeline is provided with an engineering study $50,000-$75,000 completed in <6 months, timelines subject to change based on project scope

>10MW projects range, National Grid can support in options solutions engineering with a support services agreement, up to estimated 10% of project to cover project management and engineering support during the early project phases, if transmission upgrades are required timelines extend

Source: National Grid

Power Provides Opportunity

The capacity to deliver power to economic opportunities is a significant need for Massachusetts to meet. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Massachusetts consumes twice as much electricity than it generates, relying on electricity imported from the broader regional grid. Eighty percent of electrical generation in Massachusetts natural-gas fired. The balance is from renewables. As Massachusetts moves to its nation-leading clean energy goals, its utilities face challenges in transitioning to higher electrical demand. It is encouraging that National Grid, Eversource, and Until are meeting monthly with the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities and Department of Energy Resources to discuss how to meet such challenges of today and tomorrow. In large site development, planning for power many years ahead of expected site activation is essential.

Planning for Permitting

A lengthy permitting process was also universally identified as an issue in the development of large sites in our survey of commercial real estate professionals.

Massachusetts has some of the most rigorous environmental protection laws and regulations in the country. Entitling large sites for commercial uses can be a long and complex process. Projects that require a State Agency Action – such as a permit, land transfer, or financing – and have impacts that exceed one or more environmental review thresholds are subject to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), a public review and disclosure process similar to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This process, which typically takes between 12 and 24 months and involves several rounds of public comment and review, must be completed prior to the taking of the applicable State Agency Actions. Projects usually need to be developed beyond the conceptual design phase in order to complete MEPA. In addition, the State Agency Actions themselves have their own review and processing procedures, as do Federal and local permits. Wetlands Protection Act review for waterfront projects and/or projects adjacent to wetland resource areas tend to have additional layers of permitting obstacles.

At the local level, many large site opportunities will be found in towns. While cities typically have substantial planning offices, towns usually have more modest planning offices. In all cities and towns, local permitting approvals flow through planning, zoning appeals boards, and conservation committees that consist of volunteer residents of the community. Meetings are typically on a monthly basis. The volunteer nature of this municipal based permitting and approvals process, can present timeline issues for large acreage site projects.

For developers, there is a fundamental requirement to begin the discussion with any municipality at the earliest possible opportunity. For large site development to succeed, community support for prospective scale and uses at sites needs to be attained as early as possible.

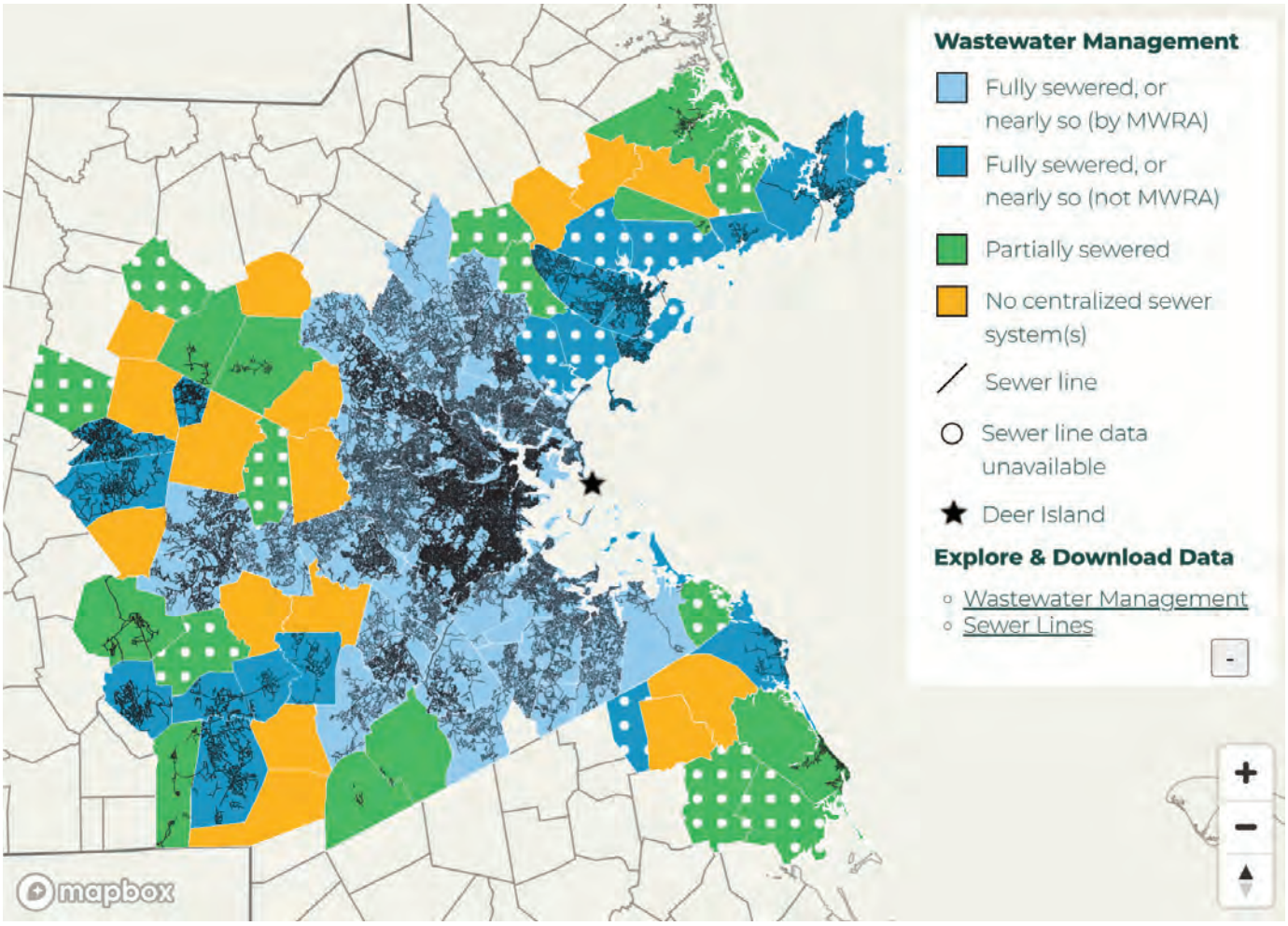
The Commonwealth also needs to play a significant role. We haven't enough large sites in the marketplace. The Commonwealth will play an essential role in developing goals for large site development to meet future economic development needs. This will require a long-term commitment to assisting developers and municipalities in planning and assembling large sites, In addition, the state will play a role in facilitating a transparent and consistent state-level permitting process. The reinstitution of a state-leve permitting ombudsmen conveys this commitment.

Many municipalities have developed expedited permitting processes, some of which guarantee completion of the process within a prescribed period. There are ample best-practice examples for communities to emulate to support large site projects. "The Chapter 43D Expedited Local Permitting Program is now part of the Community One Stop for Growth, a single application portal and collaborative review process of community and economic development grant programs." About 90 communities have adopted the 43D standard of guaranteeing local permitting decisions on identified priority development sites within 180 days. Every large site assembled and prepared for significant opportunities should have expedited permitting in place.

Planning for Water and Wastewater

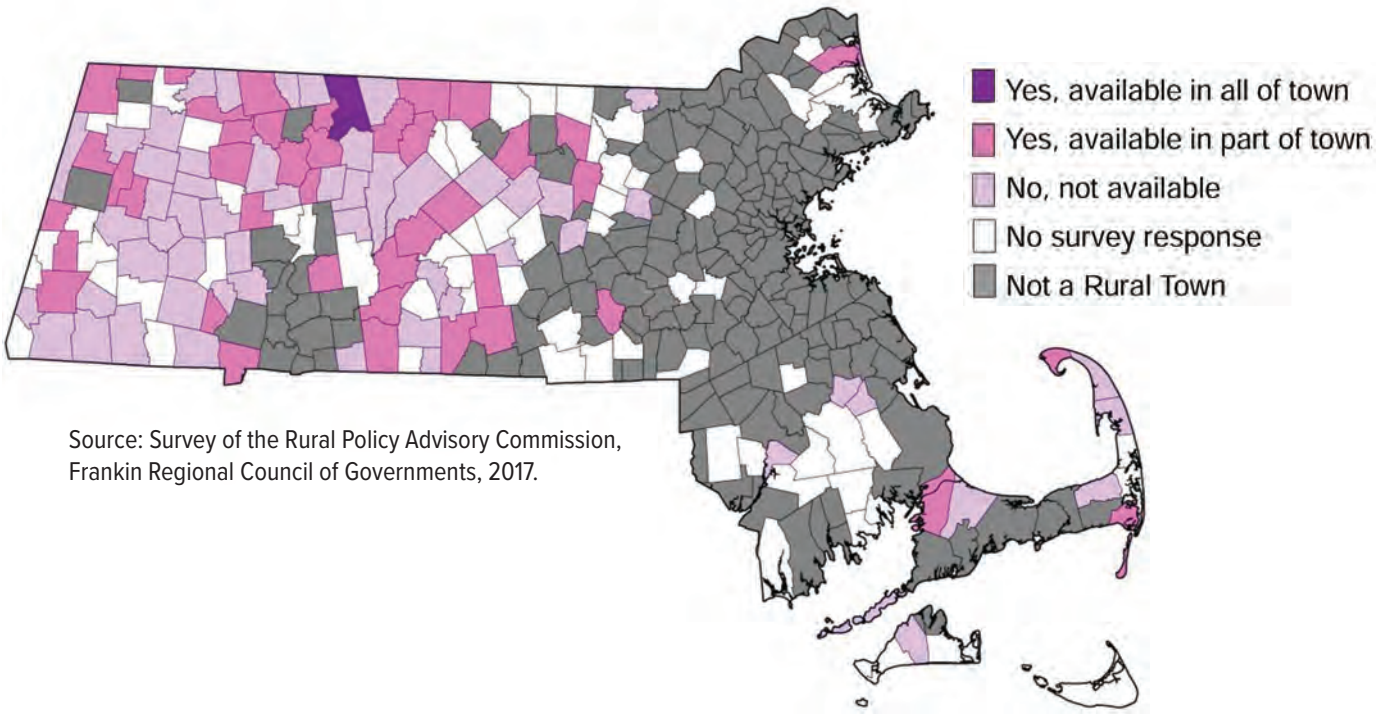
Among important factors affecting viability of large acreage sites (Page 30), were municipal water and sewer availability and capacity. Jason Palitsch, Executive Director of the 495/ MetroWest Partnership, emphasizes present water and sewer constraints in many municipalities. “Massachusetts is served by very old water and sewer infrastructure, which is expensive to maintain, upgrade, and/ or expand. Our cities and towns derive their drinking water from different sources and different systems, with limited sewer capacity or sometimes little to no sewer at all. These limitations are especially pronounced in smaller populated communities, in which larger parcels may be available, including older sites with redevelopment potential (such as mill buildings) with old water and sewer infrastructure that would not match contemporary needs.”

It is a significant point of emphasis. While Massachusetts is a comparably water-rich state, its municipal water and sewer systems vary dramatically. As the following map shows, even in the greater Boston region, the most developed in the state, many communities lack centralized wastewater systems. Many others, including several that have populations of over 25,000, are only partially sewered.



Source: Regional Wastewater Management, Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, April, 2021.

Massachusetts has 170 municipalities that are defined as rural. In a 2017 study by the Rural Advisory Commission, these municipalities were surveyed on sewer availability. Of the 60 percent of responding communities, only one reported that sewer service was available throughout the community. Of the remaining reporting municipalities, 53 percent indicated no sewer systems in place, while 45 percent indicated partial sewer service.



Source: Survey of the Rural Policy Advisory Commission, Frankin Regional Council of Governments, 2017.

In the same report, 54 percent of municipal responses indicated that expansion of water sewer systems would aid in economic development and housing production. Expense was the primary limiting factor in preventing expansion of water/sewer systems.

Massachusetts does have strong programs that can assist municipal investments in water and sewer. In March of 2024, the Healey/Driscoll Administration announced a $1.4 billion program to fund low-interest loan and grants upgrade or replace water and wastewater systems in Massachusetts. The funded projects were selected through the State Revolving Fund (SRF), which has provided $8.6 billion in water and sewer funding to Massachusetts communities over the years.

As Massachusetts grows the number of large-site availabilities in coming months and years, planning for water and sewer capacity to such sites will be as important as aligning power capacity and expedited permitting in meeting large-site economic development requirements.

Big Acres, Big Opportunities –
Planning and Preparation will Boost Massachusetts Competitiveness

Massachusetts continues to be a center for economic expansion for a variety of reasons. While not a low-cost state, Massachusetts delivers high value. It leads with its talented and highly productive workforce, which is supported by the best performing public schools in the nation. It's a leader in a variety of industries, from traditional core sectors in electronics, financial services, food processing, and commercial fishing to the life sciences, climate technology, defense/robotics/aerospace/marine technologies, and artificial intelligence. These industries are supported by the greatest concentration of public- and private-higher education institutions in the world. Its citizens, renown for their high standards and readiness to scrutinize, drive public and private sectors to never be satisfied with the status quo. Together, these elements have created a unique place in the world. The Commonwealth offers its residents a rich history and future driven by innovation, set amidst a landscape of natural beauty complimented with superb cultural attractions. Quality of life is enhanced by one of the lowest crime rates in the nation and an accessible, high quality health care system.

Massachusetts is focused on addressing many issues that inhibit even greater economic health and quality of life. A lack of affordable housing, the need to improve the nation's fourth largest public transportation system, and aging infrastructure have all been subject of study, resulting in long-term resolution efforts.

Championed by the Healey-Driscoll Administration and supported by the Legislature, the $4 billion Mass Leads Act has provided new tools to Team Massachusetts to incentivize economic expansion, including assisting in identifying and preparing underutilized properties to meet housing and economic development needs.

To meet the demand of significant employers in highly competitive and desirable industries for large acreage sites, the Commonwealth, its municipalities, and its property developers will need to collaborate at a high level to position Massachusetts for success.

This report has identified the demand for 100+ acre sites for non-retail commercial development. The first tier of sites noted are already in the marketplace, but several need additional infrastructure support to be viable for desirable highest and best uses. Power demand at these sites will require frank discussions between private and public developers, the state, host municipalities, and utility providers.

Our review of potential large sites that are not currently in the marketplace but are otherwise potentially developable yielded six (6) locations of over 100 acres. These sites possess desirable development attributes and should be prime targets for private and public investment as they ascend to the development marketplace.

The final group of sites are intended as a non-comprehensive sampling of the types of properties around the state that will be needed to fill future needs are significant employers. These sites are not zoned appropriately and lack robust infrastructure. As we consider future large acreage needs, sites need to be assembled across the state to be ready for large projects of significant economic impact that will present themselves to Massachusetts now and in the coming decades.

Steps Toward Opportunity

- Identification of 100+ acre sites for potential economic development by private/public developers, municipal, regional and state planners
- Development of community support for economic development activities at identified sites
- Planning for required site needs: power, water/sewer, related infrastructure
- Site preparation for economic activity

Without more large acreage sites prepared and reserved for such economic opportunities, Massachusetts will lose it capacity to compete for many desirable, major employment opportunities.

If we prepare such sites, will they come? The answer is an emphatic "yes".

In a global economy in which industries are constantly evolving, often in new directions at rapid pace, Massachusetts is involved in a global site location competition. For all the state's competitive advantages noted in this section, it will be a target for significant investments by these employers. To win the competition for the best projects, it will need to have large acreage sites prepared and ready for these opportunities. This will require planning, investment, and a high level of state-municipal-developer collaboration.

Large site requirements will also benefit areas of the state that have not always shared in the growth of the state's most robust industries. Workforce will always be a key-driver in site location decision-making. However, for the emerging large site requirements, developable acreage and ample power are the most important determinants. We are, after all, a small state in size. Any 45-minute commute radius around most any point in the state draws from a sizeable and talented workforce base.

Massachusetts has a strong history of success is planning economic development in significant spaces. Kendall Square in Cambridge was once a tired landscape of soap manufacturers and aged mill properties. Boston's Seaport once consisted of countless single-level, dilapidated warehouses and parking lots. At the point of its base reduction/closure, Devens seemed an isolated site with little upside for economic opportunity. Today, these areas each rank among the greatest achievements in economic development in state and national history. Kendall Square reigns atop the life sciences world with millions of square feet of commercial and institutional lab space. In a short amount of time, Boston's commercial center has almost doubled in size with the expansion to the Seaport. One of the greatest military-base conversions ever, there are over 6,000 now employed at Devens, across a spectrum of cutting-edge industries.

Massachusetts needs large acreage spaces, ready for future economic opportunities. Assembling, preparing and preserving such sites can bring benefit to every region of the state. As it rises to this opportunity, Massachusetts will secure long-term economic prosperity.

Summary of Sources

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