

WBJ Features

Site Aims to Market Developer-Ready Sites

By Brandon Butler

MetroWest495 Biz Writer

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A new site, www.massecon.com/readymass, seeks to market permit-ready sites in the state, including several in the MetroWest region.

It seems like a simple idea.

Gather real estate agents, regional officials and property owners to compile a list of sites to display on a web site that are pre-permitted, have utility and transportation infrastructure in place and are ready for move-in or development.

So simple. Yet such a site had not been created - until now.

The Massachusetts Alliance for Economic Development (MassEcon) has launched ReadyMass, a listing of about 70 priority development sites in eight regions of the state. The locations are either unused parcels that are permitted and ready for development, or vacant office or manufacturing space ready for move in.

Real Estate Recognizance

Potential developers or tenants can go on the web site, www.massecon.com/readymass, and research various sites, find out what amenities the sites have to offer as well as contact information for the owner or manager of the properties.

"Clearly at this point of economic transition everyone needs to be very coordinated in terms of economic development," said Paul Matthews, executive director of the 495/MetroWest Partnership, which helped select nine sites in the MetroWest region that are on the web site. "The state and the private sector have really come together to develop a listing of the top-tier market-ready sites in the state."

While the state Office of Business Development has a site finder program, this initiative is different because MassEcon solicited ideas of properties from officials around the state, then selected 70 from the 200 entries to profile on the site.

For example, one property listed on the site is 50 Washington St. in Westborough, a three-story office building located a quarter of a mile from Interstate 495 along Route 9. There is up to 94,000 square feet available for lease in the building, which is fully functional with heat, electricity, gas, sewer and water service already connected.

The ReadyMass program began under the Romney Administration but MassEcon, which is a quasi-public organization that encourages business development, got involved in 2007 to help market and advertise development-ready sites in the state. MassEcon reached out to regional partners, like the 495/MetroWest Partnership, to get an inventory of potential sites to market. The list was narrowed to those that met minimum requirements, such as being pre-permitted, having ready-to-use access to water, wastewater and electricity, and having easy access to transportation, among others, said Susan Houston, executive director of MassEcon.

"The idea is to help market Massachusetts as a competitive business location with the point that we have real estate that can accommodate companies of all sizes during all points of their life cycle," she said. "From headquarter space, to research space, to manufacturing space for small, medium and large companies; we want to showcase all of those."

The web site will then be updated as new locations become "market-ready" or current vacant sites become used.

The online web site is the not the only part of the initiative, however.

The next step in the process will be for a robust marketing campaign to increase awareness of the listing service to real estate brokers nationally, Houston said.

MassEcon is working with Boston-based marketing firm Solomon McCown & Co. and in the spring MassEcon will host "Massachusetts On Location," a tour of development-ready parcels to site selectors from out of state.

Tim McGourthy, director of economic development for the City of Worcester, helped select some of the sites in the Worcester area for the ReadyMass program. He said when potential developers have access to information, they are more likely to pursue a project.

"It's a good thing to send a message to the market that we have sites that are ready for development," he said. "Usually, if people are looking for space, they're looking for it quickly, so this will help make those connections."