

## Worcester Business Journal

# Development Groups Tout Local Sites

## List aims at luring businesses to the Bay State

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If you were looking for a location to expand or move your business in Massachusetts, where would you start? In a few months, the answer could be a new list that the Massachusetts Alliance for Economic Development is putting together.

The group, now known as MassEcon, is soliciting suggestions from regional economic development groups, municipal officials, developers and others about the some of the best locations in their areas.

“It’s part of how we market Massachusetts as a place to do business,” said Executive Director Susan Houston.

Properties on the new list will be ready for companies to build or move in right away. Developable sites must be able to get permits in 180 days, and office and industrial sites need to be ready to move in within two to eight months.

Besides promising a quick turnaround time, locations being considered for the list must be within five miles of a major highway and have utilities available. Buildings must be at least 50,000 square feet, and land must be able to support at least 100,000 square feet.

In Central Massachusetts, the North Central Massachusetts Economic Development Council, the 495/MetroWest Corridor Partnership and the Massachusetts Office of Business Development’s Central Massachusetts division have all submitted proposed sites. MassEcon will go through those locations and others to arrive at a complete list.

### Sampler Plate

Houston emphasized that even when the list is finished it won’t be a comprehensive catalog of good places to set up shop in the state. Instead, she said, it’s intended as a representative sample of appropriate spots.

“Because one property is picked and not another for this, it doesn’t mean the properties not on the initial list are in any way faulty,” she said.

Nancy Jackson, who leads the North Central Council, said she sees the value of the list as highlighting not just specific properties but also the attributes of her region, and the state

as a whole.

“I think, first of all, it goes a long way to represent the state, that the state wants your business – that’s kind of news to some people,” she said. “And the state is ready for your business, as witness these 40 to 50 sites.”

The list will change over time, Houston said, so other locations may end up getting a turn.

Adam Ploetz, manager of sustainable development programs at the MetroWest Partnership, said that’s a good thing since the his organization wasn’t able to comprehensively comb through properties in the area this time around. He said he hopes brokers and developers will alert him to locations that should be added to later editions of the list.

For now, Houston said, MassEcon is still in the early stages of creating the initial list. The full list should be available in the spring, she said.

As for what exactly will be done to publicize sites on the completed list, Houston said it’s too early to discuss that. Ploetz said he thinks it will be used to market the state in trade publications and at trade shows.

“It helps when you have someone from the state at a trade show in Belgium showing property in, let’s say, Northborough,” he said.

Ploetz also said the list will probably help make sure state economic development leaders are promoting the right spots so that they don’t end up wasting companies’ time on sites that aren’t yet ready to go.

Timothy McGourthy, Worcester’s economic development director, said he expects to submit some sites for the list, but he sees these sorts of centralized efforts as less effective than talking directly to businesses. Besides, he said, some of the properties the city is trying hardest to market, like CitySquare and Gateway Park, wouldn’t fit the MassEcon criteria.

“Identifying the criteria of the business and weighing them against what we have to offer is a lot more useful for us than a generic list,” McGourthy said.

Still, he added, any opportunity to highlight available properties is worth the effort.