



NEWS

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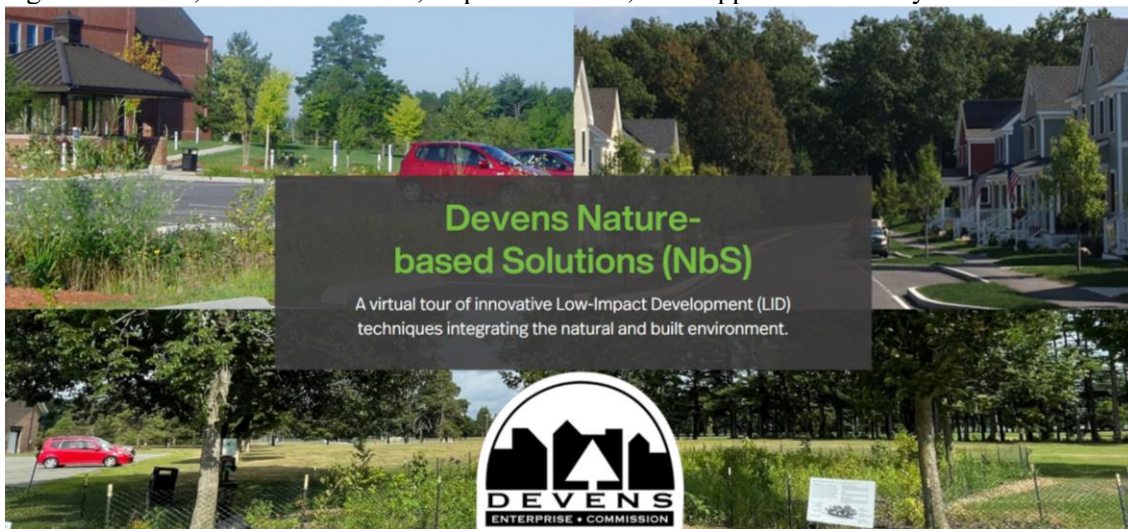
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Virtual Tour of Devens Nature-based Solutions Launched Online

Sharing Lessons Learned in Designing and Developing with Nature

Devens has established itself as a leader in sustainable redevelopment through a systematic collaboration with nature. The Devens Enterprise Commission (DEC) today announced the public launch of a free, self-guided virtual tour showcasing the community's nationally recognized portfolio of nature-based solutions (NbS) — a series of innovative approaches to climate resilience that harnesses the power of natural systems to manage stormwater, reduce urban heat, sequester carbon, and support biodiversity.



Accessible from any device at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/23f99d73d4344e11b73fc403ead955db>, the tour guides users through 16 distinct NbS sites across the 4,400-acre former military base turned model sustainable community— no boots required. As Neil Angus FAICP, Director of the Devens Enterprise Commission, likes to say, “*Seeing is believing!*”. Development of this on-line tour originated from the DEC’s in-person tours that were created for municipal planners and volunteer boards and committees so that more practitioners and decision makers could see how these model NbS worked in reality. The DEC partnered with the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) to provide free shuttle bus tours guided by Angus and the DEC’s Environmental Planner Beth Suedmeyer, to visit key green infrastructure sites around Devens. Since 2023, the Commission has conducted 14 NbS tours to over 300 individuals, municipalities, students, educators, developers, and property owners. The tour offers a comprehensive look at a number of real-world applications of NbS in a relatively small area.

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Stream daylighting and restored riparian corridors;
- Commercial and residential examples of Low-Impact Development Techniques, including, green roofs, biofiltration landscape islands, reinforced turf, and more;
- Energy and water efficient development patterns;

- Cluster development and other urban heat island reduction strategies;
- Rainwater harvesting and porous pavement;
- Embodied carbon reduction and material reuse strategies;
- Rewilding native meadow habitats using pollinator meadows and pocket forests;

With support from the State Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program and funding from the Massachusetts Ecosystem Climate Adaptation Network (MassECAN), each stop on the tour was filmed and produced by the DEC and local videographer Kyle Lindfors. The online storymap, complete with aerial images, photos, videos and resource links, was created in conjunction with BSC Group, offering a unique online experience that puts this living infrastructure front and center.

Angus stated, *“We are proud to share our experiences and lessons learned deploying Nature-based Solutions in hopes that more municipalities, developers, and landowners will see the economic, social, and environmental benefits of these approaches and incorporate them into their own development and redevelopment projects.”*

Education, tools, resources, and cross-sector collaboration among government and private sector developers and property owners, has been key to increasing the capacity and willingness to adopt Nature-based Solutions. Ralph Baker, President Nashua River Watershed Association and a tour participant and user of the new on-line Virtual Tour, stated: *“During the Nashua River Watershed Association's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program project with the City Fitchburg to develop a watershed-wide NbS plan, Neil and Beth conducted two tours for local municipal officials which provided a valuable opportunity for others to learn first-hand from the experiences at Devens. We look forward to sharing their virtual tour with our communities as part of our mission to encourage use of NbS to address the impacts of climate change. Thanks to their thoughtful and dedicated work, Devens is truly a showcase of how Nature-based Solutions can be designed, permitted and effectively implemented in our region.”*

Academic tours have also occurred in Devens to introduce NbS and sustainable design to students and faculty. Corey Dehner, JD, PhD, Associate Professor and Co-Director, Leadership in Environmental Action at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, had this to say following a recent in person tour: *“I am grateful for the Devens Enterprise Commission's tours on nature-based solutions and community design. This exposure helps my STEM students reflect on intentional design practices. Through the tours, they contemplate the value of accessible green space, homes designed to foster neighborly connection, gardens with native plants that support pollinators, and practices for mitigating stormwater runoff. Many of the DEC's approaches offer a compelling and much-needed model for redesigning communities.”* Professor Dehner is now looking forward to directing interested students to the online Virtual Tour.

Devens has long served as a living laboratory for sustainable redevelopment. Since its transformation from Fort Devens in the 1990s, the community has redeveloped and attracted over 100 businesses and organizations with more than 9,000 employees while protecting over 1,800 acres of open space, restoring degraded ecosystems, and integrating green infrastructure and NbS throughout its re-built environment. The virtual tour synthesizes decades of economic, social, and ecological investment into a single, navigable platform.

About the Devens Enterprise Commission:

The Devens Enterprise Commission is the regulatory and permitting authority for redevelopment of the Devens Regional Enterprise Zone. Its role is to administer and enforce the reuse plan, by-laws, regulations and sustainability vision within the Devens Regional Enterprise Zone.

About Nature-based Solutions:

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) involve incorporating water, soils, and plants into developments to provide more natural methods of addressing stormwater management, urban heat island impacts and climate change, while providing benefits for both human well-being and biodiversity. Devens integrates NbS into all development projects through a combination of education, incentives, and regulations.