Massachusetts: Attracting Cutting-Edge Technologies in a Variety of Industries

Cynthia Kincaid (June/July 09)

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is home to a number of successful manufacturing, healthcare, and retail companies. The state's manufacturing sector covers a broad range of industries, including chemicals, plastics and rubber, transportation equipment, paper, fabricated metal, food, and electrical equipment. The manufacturing sector is the commonwealth's fourth-largest employer with a 10 percent increase in revenue over the last five years.

The information technology (IT) industry - comprised of computer and communication hardware and software, and communication services - has also made a positive fiscal impact in the commonwealth. Utilizing cutting-edge technologies like robotics, RFID/CSID, photonics, nanotechnology, and telecommunications, Massachusetts has been outperforming many other states in IT growth. In fact, the state's software industry has grown to more than $10.9 billion.

The renewable energy sector is also moving full steam ahead, with a number of companies that design, engineer, finance, and construct renewable energy systems. An emphasis on photovoltaic (PV), wind, solar, biomass, and geothermal are leading the state's charge into renewable energy. Marlborough-based Evergreen Solar is locating its first full-scale solar panel manufacturing plant in Massachusetts. The state's leaders are also exploring ways for Massachusetts to better benefit environmentally and economically from biofuel technology. Governor Deval Patrick recently convened a group of technology executives and urged them to create a trade group to make their needs better known at the political table.

Massachusetts is also eying a leadership role in broadband through its Broadband Institute (MBI). The Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development and the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) are partnering with the Institute and EEA's Office of Geographic and Environmental Information to develop sophisticated mapping that will help the state determine the highest-priority areas for investments in broadband infrastructure and technology. "This mapping project is a critical next step towards prioritizing specific and targeted broadband investments," says Greg Bialecki, the commonwealth's Secretary of Housing and Economic Development. "It will enable the MBI to maximize the use of public funds, both state and potentially federal, and help to attract private sector investments that will reduce the overall cost of deployment." The mapping project will initially focus on western Massachusetts, where problems with broadband coverage are most acute. It will also lay the foundation for comprehensive, statewide broadband mapping, as targeted for funding by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Massachusetts is also committed to streamlining the permit process as a way to encourage infrastructure development within the state. The Massachusetts Permit Regulatory Office (MPRO) has developed the Municipal Permit Tracking System (MPTS), a free electronic permit-

tracking program that enables municipalities all across the state to streamline permitting operations and communications, while accelerating the permitting process as a whole. The Municipal Permit Tracking System contains 11 main template database tables for tracking department permits. Since its launch in 2007, 72 communities have adopted the program and have identified 115 priority development sites across the state.

"The Municipal Permit Tracking System will be a key resource for cities and towns all across the Commonwealth," says April Anderson Lamoureux, permitting ombudsman, "As a result, opportunities for economic development and job creation will be on a faster track."