

Community Development Strategy Town of New Salem

Overview

Volunteers and paid staff serving as elected or appointed members of various boards and committees undertake New Salem's governance, community development, and strategic planning efforts. The activities contained within this application for funding are consistent with the priorities and needs identified through several local and regional community assessment and strategic planning processes. In addition, the goals and priorities outlined in the application have been guided by the Massachusetts Office for Commonwealth Development's 'Sustainable Development Principles'. This Community Development Strategy was reviewed and discussed at a public meeting held on January 18, 2005, and adopted by the Selectboard at a meeting on January 31, 2005.

Community Planning Entities

Town residents are involved in a variety of local and regional planning efforts to help clarify and coordinate the Town's priorities. Needs assessments and community-based planning activities are conducted by the Selectboard, Town Coordinator, Board of Assessors, Board of Health, Council on Aging, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee, Fire, Police, and Highway Departments, Library Trustees, Planning Board, Recreation Commission, Treasurer, Town Accountant, Town Clerk, and School Committees. Various ad-hoc and sub-committees working under these municipal boards are also involved in needs identification and goal setting.

The Town is assisted in its planning and community development efforts by several regional organizations including the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), Franklin Community Development Corporation (FCDC), and the Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (FRHRDA).

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) have also assisted the Town, providing guidance and funding to help meet community needs.

Planning Process and Documents

The Town is involved in a variety of planning processes, as follows:

Community Action Statement (CAS): Each year, New Salem uses the CAS as one of its guides for decision-making. The CAS, adopted in 1996, describes the Town's economic development, housing, infrastructure and service gaps, outlines the factors contributing to the needs, and identifies ways to meet the action goals to address the needs. Changes to priorities and goals are identified by each department head and communicated to the Selectboard. The Board adopts annual goals, monitors progress, and assists with securing financial, human and other resources needed to meet the goals.

Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSP): In 2003, the New Salem Community Development Committee worked with the Massachusetts Watershed Coalition to update

the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan, identifying priorities for open space preservation, zoning and land use, and recreation. Community Development Plan (CDP): In 2004, the New Salem Community Development Committee worked with FRCOG and the Massachusetts Watershed Coalition to create the Community Development Plan. This document addresses Open Space and Resource Protection, Housing, Economic Development, and Transportation/Town Roads. This report will guide planning for the Town's future growth, and will serve as the basis for its Community Development Strategy.

Capital Plan: Each year, members of the Selectboard, Finance Committee, and Capital Improvements Committee meet to discuss long-range capital needs and priorities for the Town. Recommendations for capital planning, prioritization of needs, and allocation of resources are made and discussed at Town Meeting.

ADA Transition Plan: New Salem has adopted a plan to achieve compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Annual Town Report: Each year, the Town produces an Annual Town Report that contains detailed information about Town processes, highlights progress made on a number of community development and planning projects, and identifies needs and priorities related to Town governance, community development, social services and public safety. Reports from various Boards, Committees, Commissions, and Trustees are reviewed and accepted at each Annual Town Meeting. The report for the year ending June 30, 2003 was adopted at the 2004 Annual Town Meeting.

Regional Plans: The Town's needs and priorities were taken into consideration during the development of the following regional plans:

- Franklin County Regional Water Supply Study, 2003. This study assesses the short and long-term capacity of 17 community water supplies to support growth in the region and provides a region-wide context for water conservation. Produced by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments with funding from MA EOE. A.
- The Greater Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2003 Annual Report. The CEDS program is operated by the FRCOG and guides economic development activities throughout Franklin County and neighboring communities. The program is directed by a committee of 35 business and community leaders.
- Regional Transportation Plan, 2003. This plan, coordinated by the FRCOG with input from all 26 towns, promotes ways to develop transportation alternatives to the automobile, while at the same time supporting the improvement and more efficient use of traditional facilities.

Strategic Action Plan

The planning processes described above have resulted in specific action plans that the Town will undertake over the next three to five years. The Town's priorities, projects, and identified resources and funding sources are described in detail in the relevant planning

documents. Methods to meet some of the Town's specific goals are described in this proposal for funding and are summarized below.

Housing Rehabilitation as a Priority: One of the goals outlined in the Community Development Plan is to 'provide a housing rehabilitation loan program for low and moderate-income residents, especially seniors who lack financial resources to fund home improvements and repairs, including accessibility improvements and septic system upgrades'. The preservation of existing housing stock is also a high priority for the Town, as a majority of New Salem's residents live in single-family homes. Providing a means for our residents to have access to funding for correction of code violations, lead paint removal, removal of asbestos, and repairs to septic systems will help to reach this goal. The Housing Rehabilitation activity will preserve existing housing stock, particularly for low and moderate-income residents and elderly residents, through a no-interest, deferred payment loan program.

Sources of Funding:

The Town seeks 2005 CDBG funding as part of a multi-town application to address the high priority of housing rehabilitation. New Salem will work with the Franklin County Regional Housing Authority to implement this no-interest, deferred payment loan program, providing outreach and other support services. Relationship to Sustainable Development Principles: Housing rehabilitation relates to the Sustainable Development Principles in a number of ways. By allowing people to improve their existing housing conditions rather than build new housing elsewhere, this activity is a clear example of Principle #1-"Redevelop First". By the same token, encouraging rehabilitation rather than new growth also ties in with Principles #4-"Restore and Enhance the Environment", and Principle #5-"Conserve Natural Resources". Every home not built lessens the potential for adverse environmental effects, helps to preserve natural resources, and limits the waste of water, energy and materials. In addition, rehabilitation also serves to "Expand Housing Opportunities" (Principle #6), especially for the most vulnerable in our community-the elderly and those with lower income levels-by allowing them to remain in their homes. Finally, this multi-town CDBG application ties in with Principle #10-"Plan Regionally". By encouraging smaller towns to work together towards the common goal of providing housing rehabilitation funds to their residents, it provides opportunities that might have been unavailable to each town working alone. Priorities and Goals Established by New Salem's Vision Statement (2002, Revised in Community Development Plan 2004) Our vision for New Salem is to preserve our beautiful rural community character and unique neighborhoods. We envision the careful management of land use and population growth to protect the Town's natural, historic and scenic assets, as well as enhance people's enjoyment of these special resources. Through proactive planning, we will encourage land uses which sustain the health of our waters, forests and wildlife, and which help the Town to permanently protect its open spaces. We see the land planning and development process as a key tool to address community needs. The Town will set guidelines for landowners and developers to design projects that contribute to our small-town character. Preserving natural resources, historic districts and features, scenic roads, trails and recreational opportunities for Town residents and visitors will be considered. We will promote existing business and encourage small-scale economic

development that is consistent with our rural character to increase private services for residents. We also will promote sustainable forestry and agricultural businesses that preserve the rural, scenic qualities of New Salem. Our planning for the future must develop a process to manage the tax rate. Additionally, New Salem will foster active participation of diverse interests in Town affairs, and encourage activities to strengthen our sense of community identity.

To achieve this vision, the following shared goals and objectives have been identified to guide the implementation of the Town's Community Development Plan: Goal-Encourage diverse housing opportunities while preserving the rural character of the Town:

- Promote sustainable residential growth to manage tax rates, community services and environmental quality;
- Investigate the development of senior and affordable housing;
- Review current sub-division regulations and cluster development options;
- Preserve historic buildings and sites. Goal-Improve transportation systems
- Conduct inventory of public and private ways;
- Increase community awareness of public transportation services & encourage regional transportation planning;
- Preserve rural character of roads;
- Encourage safer options for walking and bicycling in Town (both on and off road). Goal-Preserve New Salem's rural character, open spaces and environmental quality:
- Protect the health of ponds, streams and water supplies;
- Identify farmlands, forests, wildlife habitats and natural resources that should be protected;
- Protect scenic ways;
- Create greenways within town and connecting with greenways in surrounding towns;
- Promote community-based nature education and related activities;
- Preserve night sky by minimizing light pollution. Goal-Foster sustainable economic development to enhance community services:
- Maintain and improve Town by-laws to ensure sound development practices;
- Encourage businesses that preserve community rural character and the use of local resources (cottage industries, forestry, agriculture, recreation, tourism);
- Improve access to telecommunications services;
- Encourage establishment of restaurant in Town. Goal-Foster community participation in Town affairs;
- Encourage diverse interests to join in community activities, Town boards and Town meetings;
- Improve opportunities for community gatherings. Resources for Implementing the Community Development Strategy New Salem will address its community needs and priorities using a variety of local, regional, state and National resources including:
 - Local property taxes
 - Volunteer labor and donated materials

- Community fundraising activities (bake sales, book sales, silent auctions, etc.)
- State aid through school and transportation programs, lottery games, library programs and special status exemption funds
- Technical assistance and grants from regional organizations including Franklin County Community Development Corporation, Franklin County Council of Governments, Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission * Grant and loan funding through the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Affairs, and other state agencies
- Grant and loan funding through US Department of Agriculture, US Department of Housing and Community Development, and other federal agencies Other Planned Community Development Activities The following describes activities that are either ongoing or have been planned to assist the Town in reaching the goals detailed in its Community Development Plan; the relationship of the activity to Sustainable Development Principles is also listed. Housing Rehabilitation
- Provide homeowners with access to funding for the rehabilitation of existing housing, particularly for those who lack financial resources;
- Funding to be used to correct code violations, hazardous material remediation, septic system repairs, improve accessibility, improve energy efficiency;
- Sustainable Development Principles: #1 Redevelop First, #4 Restore & Enhance the Environment, #5 Conserve Natural Resources, #6 Expand Housing Opportunities, #10 Plan Regionally Town Common Septic Study
- Complete the study of Septic Systems in the Town Common area which was funded in part by a grant from the DCR * Determine if further actions are required to safeguard the Quabbin watershed area * Sustainable Development Principles: #4 Restore & Enhance the Environment, #5 Conserve Natural Resources Town Library Project
- Using funds provided by the taxpayers and a grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, continue work on the project to relocate the current outdated library to an existing building in the Town center
- Sustainable Development Principles: #1 Redevelop First, #2 Concentrate Development, #5 Conserve Natural Resources Programming and Needs Analysis of Town-Owned Buildings
- Follow-up on the Programming and Needs Analysis recently completed for all Town-owned buildings;
- Determine best use of available space for all Boards and Committees in Town;
- Explore option of consolidating Town agencies into one building, rather than using the 'campus' approach now in existence; This will also help streamline any permitting process by having all government entities in one location
- Explore the option of converting the Town Hall into Senior Housing
- Explore the option of opening up vacated buildings to small businesses (i.e. professional office or restaurant)
- Explore options for increasing energy efficiency in Town-owned buildings

- Sustainable Development Principles: #1 Redevelop First; #2 Concentrate Development, #3 Be Fair, #5 Conserve Natural Resources; #6 Expand Housing Opportunities, #8 Increase Job Opportunities Explore Changes to Zoning By-laws
- The Selectboard and Planning Board have agreed to study & follow-up on possible changes to zoning by-laws and/or subdivision regulations, including the following:
 1. Accessory or 'In-law' apartments to allow elderly or low-income residents to remain in their home;
 2. Allowing duplex or other multi-family dwellings;
 3. 'Cluster' zoning to allow sub-division development using smaller house lots and leaving remainder of land as open space;
 4. Creation of a 'Commercial' district, perhaps along Route 202;
 5. Arrange zoning to create 'villages' within the Town, allowing more concentrated development in these centers, and larger lot requirements outside of the village;
 6. Ensure that building lot requirements are sufficient for placement of well and septic system, particularly if initial septic system fails and needs to be replaced;
- Sustainable Development Principles: #1 Redevelop First, #2 Concentrate Development, #6 Expand Housing Opportunities Explore Ways to Retain and Expand Open Space
- Develop an Agricultural Commission to protect farmland
- Encourage use of natural resources as an economic base-Forestry, Farming, etc.
- Continue to offer tax benefits through Chapters 61, 61A and 61B
- Study concept of Town acquiring property to be kept as open space;
- Sustainable Development Principles: #4 Restore and Enhance the Environment, #9 Foster Sustainable Business