

## Town of Hardwick – FY2015 Community Development Strategy

### **Introduction**

This Community Development Strategy summarizes the Town of Hardwick's recent strategic planning efforts, provides highlights of the Town's relevant planning documents and identifies the Town's most significant community development goals. These goals will shape the Town's future community development efforts, including the investment of public funds.

### **Plans & Studies**

Senior Center Plan (2014) – Completed under an FY12 CDF grant, this plan updated the improvements required at the existing Senior Center/Youth Center and explored options for relocation of the Senior Center. It was found that the current Center is no longer viable due to safety and environmental concerns (incl. code noncompliance), energy inefficiency, and general upkeep costs. Rehabilitation costs were estimated at \$2 million or more. Two alternate sites were recommended, including a site near the Elementary School and the current site with a new facility. Another identified option was the Hardwick Knitters Mill, assuming other long-term tenants could be identified.

Facilities Needs Assessment (2011) – Conducted on behalf of the Town by the Quaboag Valley CDC and a graduate student from UMass-Amherst, the purpose of this assessment was to develop an understanding of the physical state of Town facilities and how the facilities are used for future planning purposes. Interviews were conducted with all department heads at Town Hall and with staff from other active facilities to determine their ongoing and future needs and preferences. Overall, there was a preference for keeping and renovating the existing Town Hall and developing a Capital Improvement Plan to consider consolidation or relocation of Town facilities. The Senior Center and Police Department were identified as agencies in severe need of new or improved facilities.

Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (2011) – An ESA was conducted at the Senior Center/Youth Center. The report identified several contaminants in the structure (asbestos, lead paint, etc...) and potential soil and groundwater contaminants (oil). None of the contaminants were regarded as imminent hazards but the report recommended removal of the hazardous building materials, and further testing of the soil and groundwater.

Energy Conservation Study/Detailed Energy Audit (2010) – As a result of increasing energy costs, the Town commissioned this energy study to identify potential HVAC and related improvements at public facilities. The study identified the Senior Center/Youth Center and the Town Hall as top priorities for improvement. The facilities currently require around \$70,000 yearly to ineffectively heat, cool and light.

Housing Needs Assessment (2010) – The housing assessment was commissioned to provide an evaluation of Hardwick's existing housing conditions and market through an analysis of real estate, census and demographic data. The assessment found that most single-family housing was not affordable for local residents, and that the rental unit inventory was concentrated in a single neighborhood (Gilbertville) and was composed mainly of older buildings in poor to fair condition. The report recommended adoption of the Community Preservation Act and allocation of some CPA funds for affordable housing. Other recommendations were to form a regional housing non-profit, to sell of surplus Town facilities for conversion to affordable housing, and to continue pursuing state CDBG funds for use in housing rehabilitation and/or first-time homebuyer assistance. :

Hardwick Reconnaissance Report – Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory (2008) - The Town, with the assistance of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and local regional partners – the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) and the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (NQRLP), initiated the Heritage Landscape Inventory program in Hardwick. The goals of the program were to identify a wide range of landscape resources, particularly those that are significant and unprotected, and develop strategies for preserving heritage landscapes. At a heritage landscape identification meeting, local residents and Town officials identified and prioritized the landscapes that embody the community's character and its history. The priority landscapes identified were the Village of Gilbertville, Hardwick Pond, the Dougal Range, Hardwick Village Historic District and the Moose Brook Corridor.

Senior Center Building and Infrastructure Assessment (2007) – The Town requested an assessment of the Senior Center as a result of deteriorating conditions in this former school facility, which also includes the Youth Center and Food Pantry. The report identified numerous code and ADA nonconformities and energy wastage issues and proposed a series of prioritized actions (totaling about \$1 million) for addressing them.

Gilbertville Infrastructure Evaluation and Planning Report (2007)- Funded through CDBG, this report includes an inventory of infrastructure throughout the Village of Gilbertville. The plan includes four priority projects: in the Railroad Lane area, the Prospect Street area, the High Street area, and the East Main Street area.

E.O. 418 Community Development Plan (2003-2004) - Hardwick completed work on Community Development Planning under E0418 in consultation with CMRPC. The Selectmen formed an advisory committee to guide the process. Priority was given to transportation, economic development and zoning. The proposed zoning bylaw amendments were made available for public review. The recommended bylaw changes were adopted by Town Meeting in 2012. Public hearings have been held during the last several years to discuss the proposed changes.

Quabbin Subregional Housing Plan (2002; amended 2003, 2004) - The Quabbin Subregional Housing Plan was created to guide the implementation of regional measures to increase the affordable housing supply. Ten towns in the region joined to use the most recent census data, information from the buildout presentations, and a needs assessment questionnaire to identify affordable housing needs and inventory the resources presently available to meet them. The towns agreed to support a regional approach to efforts to develop affordable housing at the local level. The plan recommends specific actions for each town. For Hardwick, these include funding for housing rehabilitation to correct major code violations and to provide septic system repairs and upgrades; the creation and rehabilitation of affordable housing units within the community; assistance in the support of the creation of affordable housing including infrastructure improvements, the pursuit of state and federal grant programs and zoning bylaw revisions.

Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Buildout Analysis (2000) - Under the direction of the EOE (now EOEA), the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) completed a buildout analysis for the town. The analysis gave the town its first in-depth look at available land, building constraints, and potential residential growth. It laid a foundation for comprehensive planning under the MA DHCD EO 418 Program.

Hardwick Master Plan (2001) - Development of the Master Plan began in 1998 with the review and authorization of a community planning process aimed at grassroots support. In the end, well over 100 people participated in drafting the plan. With the assistance of the Center for Community Character (Newport, RI) and the Dunn Foundation (Warwick, RI), the Hardwick Planning Board organized local facilitators for each of the 8 Master Plan elements: Circulation, Economic Development, Historic and Cultural Resources, Housing, Land Use, Natural Resources, Open Space and Recreation, and Services and Facilities. In addition to the individual plan elements, the Planning Board wrote and disseminated two town-wide opinion surveys on a range of topics. After several months of review and discussion, the plan was completed in the winter of 2001. Due to this inclusive planning process, the plan genuinely represents the involvement of local residents.

The Planning Board created the Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) to track the implementation of the Master Plan recommendations. The MPIC is responsible for the creation of a master list of recommendations, the identification of responsible boards and/or committees, the establishment of priorities for action and the tracking of progress related to the implementation of selected items. Other responsibilities include the preparation of presentations and the engagement of the public in discussions about the implementation of the plan and the provision of assistance to other boards and committees regarding the advancement of the Master Plan. An update to reflect 2010 Census data was tabled in 2012 to focus on the zoning bylaw update (see E.O. 418 above).

Ware River Valley ETA Action Strategy (Hardwick, Palmer, Ware, Warren, Monson, & W. Brookfield) (1998) - Through state Municipal Incentive Aid Grant funding, the WRV ETA analyzed and assessed each parcel listed in the WRV ETA database. Upon completion, recommendations were presented to each member community pertaining to needed zoning changes, infrastructure improvements or other impediments to development. Parcel data sheets and municipal information packets were developed for each community.

Central Ware River Valley Rail Trail Project (1997) - Through funding from the Massachusetts DEM (now DCR), the town undertook an assessment of the former Boston & Maine Railroad from the Hardwick-Ware Covered Bridge in Gilbertville to Hardwick Road in New Braintree, a distance of approximately 6.5 miles. Portions of the trail under town and Hardwick Area Land Trust control were improved to provide passive recreational use. As of 2014, two miles of the trail are complete and a one-mile section in Wheelwright is scheduled for 2015 construction.

Village of Wheelwright Fire Protection Study Report (1997) - Funded through MSCP CDBG funds, a comprehensive plan for improving the Village of Wheelwright's fire protection system was developed. Through a

combination of local and MSCP CDBG funds, the actual physical improvements to the distribution and supply system were made over a five-year period from 1998 to 2002. The final remaining element needed for fire protection was the funding and construction of a 210,000 gallon water storage tank. This final phase was completed through the use of FY04 MSCP, CDBG and local funds. The storage system was placed into service in 2007.

Hardwick ADA Self-Evaluation Plan and Transition Plan (1997, revised 2000 and 2009) - The Town completed an inventory of accessibility barriers at public facilities and planned action steps to provide universal access to every town-owned property and building. This plan was revised in 2000 and 2009 to provide a more in-depth analysis of program and service delivery. Through a combination of local and CDBG funds, access to programs and services within municipally-owned properties has been substantially provided.

Village of Gilbertville Fire Protection Study Report (1996) - Funded through MSCP CDBG funds, a comprehensive plan for improving the Village of Gilbertville's fire protection system was developed. Through a combination of local and MSCP CDBG funds, the actual physical improvements were made in 1996-1999.

Ware River Valley Economic Target Area Plan (Hardwick, Palmer, Ware, and Warren) (1996) - Recognizing the need to promote economic development both locally and sub-regionally, Hardwick participated in an application for designation as an Economic Target Area in the Ware River Valley. As part of the application process, the participating communities developed a three-year strategy to promote economic development which included improved transportation access; the inventory, assessment and improvement of water and sewer infrastructure; the creation of a business and parcel data base; and other economic development strategies.

Open Space and Recreation Plan (1996; updated 2014) - The Town completed a comprehensive Open Space and Recreation Plan in 1996 which spells out an extensive list of goals and policies over a range of focus areas including historic preservation, growth management, water resources, fisheries and wildlife, forest and vegetation, agriculture, soils, scenic qualities, recreational activities, and general environmental protection. The plan provides specific actions to achieve each of these goals and an action agenda to move the process forward.

Town of Hardwick Community Action Statement (1993; amended 1994-99) - The Action Statement provided an assessment of community capacity along with an inventory of community needs. For each need identified, an assessment of the factors that contribute to the need led to the development of action steps to resolve it. Needs included infrastructure improvements to antiquated water distribution and fire protection systems (Wheelwright and Gilbertville Villages were specifically identified), improvements to public buildings (including ADA compliance), job creation efforts, enhanced educational opportunities, housing rehab., affordable homeownership, services and programs for youth and elders, and other services including childcare, food, fuel, and adult education/literacy.

### **Targeted Activities**

Hardwick (with a population of 2,990 as of US Census 2010) qualifies as a town-wide community development target area. Most activities are expected to be focused in the Gilbertville section due to its relatively high proportion of low- to moderate-income residents and its aging infrastructure and housing.

### **Future Community Development Activities**

In the next 3-5 years, the Town plans to address the goals defined in these efforts through a variety of community development activities and through a combination of local, state, and federal funding:

#### Circulation/Transportation

- Continue to support the efforts to provide alternative travel through a network of multi-use trails.
- Consider protections offered by acceptance of certain roads as "scenic."
- Expand MART and other public transportation services.
- Divert heavy traffic from residential areas whenever possible.
- Support ongoing MassHighway efforts to improve bridges serving village centers.

#### Economic Development

- Support and encourage local businesses including traditional businesses, cottage industries, forestry and forest products, and conventional and innovative agricultural businesses.
- Offer Ware River Valley Regional ETA benefits to new and expanding businesses.
- Encourage the development or repair of infrastructure within the town's villages to support economic

development initiatives.

#### Historic and Cultural Resources

- Provide incentive programs to help homeowners preserve historic properties.
- Undertake additional educational programs and expand documentation of the town's history.
- Encourage adaptive reuse of Gilbertville's mill area where a new (2012) zoning overlay district allows adaptive mixed use for housing, offices, regional/neighborhood services, and/or retail.
- Continue to support town cultural activities.
- Adopt the recommendations of the Hardwick Reconnaissance report and initiate strategies to protect the town's historic fabric from loss through deterioration, replacement with new structure and landscapes or simple dilution by inappropriate new development.

#### Housing

- Rehabilitate existing housing to preserve neighborhoods, historic structures and affordability.
- Develop homeownership programs, particularly for low/mod-income first-time homebuyers.
- Support the development of new affordable housing through land banks, TDR, etc...

#### Land Use

- Implement the recent (2012) update of the zoning and land development bylaws so as to preserve and protect the character of the town and still allow for constructive and productive growth consistent with the Town's plans and policies.

#### Natural Resources

- Develop design and performance standards for site planning and development, especially in key areas
- Promote design guidelines and regulations to maintain scenic qualities in the landscape.
- Explore overlay zoning for key environmentally sensitive areas.
- Regulate and enforce graveling, mining, and forest cutting through permitting.

#### Open Space and Recreation

- Support proactive acquisition of open space.
- Work with landowners to save and protect open space lands through assistance and utilizing the recently adopted (2012) flexible zoning standards.
- Protect important natural features such as the Quabbin watershed, rivers, streams, ponds, etc.
- Implement a greenbelt plan designating areas for open space protection and areas with development potential.
- Continue to support and develop access to the Ware River.
- Promote agriculture in all Town policies, regulations, and incentive programs.
- Update the Open Space Plan.

#### Services and Facilities

- Investigate options for consolidation of municipal facilities and seek resources for consolidation
- Improve and expand sewer lines within the wastewater district(s) and to new areas.
- Implement the prioritized recommendations laid out in recent studies of Gilbertville infrastructure
- Develop and implement a Capital Improvement Budget/Plan under the auspices of the Capital Plan Committee
- Enhance or replace public safety facilities.
- Develop a comprehensive road maintenance and improvement action plan.
- Upgrade the village center (Gilbertville, Wheelwright, and Hardwick Center) water and fire protection services and facilities.
- Support the development of new or improved service programs for the Council on Aging/Senior Center, youth programs, literacy services and others
- Upgrade administrative support services within Town government.

#### **Consistency with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles**

The Town of Hardwick's Community Development Strategy is consistent with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles:

Concentrate Development and Mix Uses - Much of Hardwick's planning efforts are directed to redeveloping existing infrastructure, utilities, and buildings. The implementation of improvements recommended in recent studies will encourage reuse of existing sites and infrastructure within the existing village of Gilbertville, an area that is compact and contains historic resources. The village mixes commercial, civic, cultural, educational and recreational activities with existing open space and homes.

Advance Equity - Equity is encouraged by the regional CDBG-funded housing rehabilitation program that serves low- to moderate-income residents and by social service programs (adult literacy, domestic violence prevention) that serve at-need populations. Many of the Town's strategic planning efforts have also involved inclusive community outreach. This was especially evidenced in the Hardwick Master Plan development process, as well as in the E.O. 418 community development planning project.

Make Efficient Decisions - The Town continues to recognize the importance of making its permitting processes clear and efficient. The Building Department integrates gas, plumbing, electrical and building inspectional services into a single organization, and has made all required forms available online. The department also coordinates regularly with the Conservation Commission. In 2014 the Town adopted MGL Chapter 43D expedited permitting provisions for the Hardwick Knitters Mill property in Gilbertville.

Protect Land and Ecosystems - The Town has actively worked with the East Quabbin Land Trust to continue to protect sensitive and important land resources within the community. Its planning efforts have also focused on improvements to its potable water infrastructure to comply with existing or future mandates. The Town has also actively supported the clean-up of contaminated former mill sites within its villages. The adoption of the recommendations from the 2007 infrastructure study of Gilbertville will improve water quality in the Ware River through reduction of sewage leaks. Groundwater monitoring is underway to ensure that the former town landfill does not impact the Muddy Brook Aquifer or Hardwick Pond.

Use Natural Resources Wisely - The Town continues to support an active recycling program which has included facility development as well as local budgetary support. The Town, in concert with DCR, CMRPC and NQRLP, completed an inventory of Heritage Landscapes, resources that are significant and unprotected. The Heritage Landscape Inventory program reconnaissance Report is the initial preservation-planning document that identifies heritage landscape and discusses strategies for their long-term protection.

Expand Housing Opportunities - The Town has addressed the potential for expanding housing opportunities through various zoning bylaw changes (adopted 2012) which allow cluster development, promote infill and multi-family housing in the villages and it will continue to pursue funding on a regional basis for housing rehabilitation.

Provide Transportation Choice - The Town has developed water access at two locations along the Ware River, has initiated planning work to develop a multi-use rail trail, has developed a comprehensive road maintenance and improvement action plan and has sought to expand regional public transportation services.

Increase Job and Business Opportunities - Through participation in the Ware River Valley ETA, the Town has attempted to encourage and promote economic development. This has included traditional businesses, cottage industries, as well as agricultural and forestry-based businesses. The Town's planning documents clearly demonstrate an effort to encourage, promote, and support agricultural and forestry-based businesses. This is further evidenced by its active agricultural commission (Paige Agricultural Trust), which is still very active. It has run an educational farm in town, established the Hardwick Farmers Cooperative Exchange, provided agricultural educational forums, sponsored the annual Hardwick Fair and provided scholarships to those continuing educational pursuits in the field of agriculture.

Promote Clean Energy - A comprehensive energy audit was conducted in 2010 and funding for energy efficiency improvements at some Town facilities was allocated. The Town has initiated a program of collecting used motor oil at its recycling center. The motor oil collected is then used to as fuel to heat the existing Town garage. Additionally, the Town plans to adopt and implement a Comprehensive Energy Management System under MGL, c25A, section

111, the Guaranteed Energy Savings Contract as a part of a joint venture with the Town of Athol. A solar generation by-law was adopted in 2012 to clarify permitting requirements for solar panel installations. A PILOT agreement was negotiated with a firm seeking to build a solar PV generating facility at the Dunroamin Country Club. A municipal aggregation program is being developed to assist residents through negotiation of a town-wide price for electricity, potentially offering cost savings to ratepayers.

Plan Regionally – The Town has been an active participant in numerous regional planning efforts including the Ware River Valley Economic Target Area Plan and subsequent Action Strategy, the Central Ware River Valley Rail Trail, Ware River Valley Community Assistance Program, the Rural Eleven Prioritization Project (CMRPC), and the Quabbin Sub-regional Housing Plan.

### **Funding Strategies**

Transportation/Circulation - The Town will maintain its membership and participation in MART and continue to seek the expansion of other public transportation services. The effort to divert heavy traffic from roadways serving primarily residential land uses will continue. These efforts will require nominal financial investments, requiring local actions by local boards.

Economic Development - The Town will continue to work to improve the infrastructure within its Village centers seeking to encourage new business development and/or expansion. The Town will continue to seek funding for improvements through the MassWorks program in combination with local finding in order to maintain and enhance business activities within village centers. The Town will continue to support programs that assist small businesses. The Town will maintain an active membership and presence with both the Quaboag Valley Chamber of Commerce (QVCC) and the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QV CDC). The Town will continue to use (when available) local funds to leverage federal and state funding for infrastructure improvement projects.

Housing - The Town will continue to participate in regional CDBG housing programs, seeking to maintain a source of funds to assist eligible property owners with the rehabilitation of existing housing (often historic) to preserve the villages and maintain affordability. Assistance will continue to be sought under federal housing programs administered by the Commonwealth. The town will continue to support efforts of the QV CDC involving housing development through the re-use of existing structures and the development of affordable multifamily housing. The Town will investigate formation of an affordable housing trust to help enhance funding opportunities.

Public Facilities and Services – Recent and ongoing Town studies indicate a continued need for comprehensive planning and physical improvements to municipal facilities and local infrastructure. USDA's Rural Development Program is a potential source of funding for some of the required improvements, but the current program is a combination loan/grant and the debt service for the resulting loan would have to be met through local sources and (for infrastructure projects) by ratepayers. The majority of the households within Gilbertville, location of many of the needed improvements, are low-income. CDBG and other grant funding will be sought and matched with local funds to undertake and complete these projects without negatively impacting local ratepayers.

Recent grant funding sources include: CDBG funding was received in FY2012 and '14 for use with infrastructure improvements on High Street, Taylor Street, Prospect Street and Broad Street in Gilbertville and for Senior Center planning, and was previously used to make other water and sewer improvements. USDA grant and loan funding was used in 2011-2012 to replace a failed sewer pump station in Gilbertville. USDA funding was also used in 2012 to plan for improvements at the Gilbertville sewage treatment plant. US EPA funding from the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission was used in 2011 to conduct Phase I Environmental Site Assessments at the Senior Center/Youth Center and Municipal Office Building.

### **Project Prioritization**

#### First Priority

- Rehabilitate existing housing to preserve neighborhoods, historic structures and affordability
- Continue to repair or replace substandard utilities (water, sewer, drainage, roads and sidewalks) within

- Gilbertville and evaluate other parts of town that may require utility improvements or extensions
- Assist with revitalization of underutilized structures (residential, commercial and industrial) in Gilbertville
- Provide social services including (but not limited to) adult literacy, domestic violence prevention, food security, elder care, youth services, and/or comprehensive outreach services
- Evaluate municipal facilities and properties for potential consolidation, disposal, renovation and/or relocation. Evaluation is to include structural, environmental, operational and/or market study.
  - Investigate and support the development of new or renovated facilities for the Municipal Offices, Senior Center and Police Department
  - Support maintenance and efficiency improvements for town properties including the highway garage, fire station, elementary school, Paige Library, old town house, recycling center and others
- Complete a Master Plan update
  - Incorporate data from the 2010 US Census and more recent American Communities Surveys
  - Implement zoning by-law changes (adopted 2012) that were developed during the plan update

Second Priority

- Revisit passage of the Community Preservation Act
- Investigate the viability of seeking a Green Community designation from the state
- Form a Local Historic District Committee and investigate the feasibility of establishing Local Historic Districts for the existing Gilbertville and Hardwick Center National Register Historic Districts
- Retain or expand MART and other public transportation services
- Upgrade administrative support services within Town government

General Continuing Priorities

- Offer Ware River Valley Regional ETA benefits to new and expanding businesses.
- Continue the comprehensive road maintenance and improvement action plan developed with the assistance of CMRPC.
- Continue to monitor the Muddy Brook Aquifer and residential wells to ensure that water supplies for Hardwick and the Town of Ware are not being adversely affected by the former landfill.
- Continue to implement the recommendations of the Hardwick ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan

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*Reviewed, discussed and recommended for Board of Selectmen approval by the Community Development Advisory Committee at its public meeting of November 18, 2014*

Signed, Erik Fleming, Chairman



*Reviewed, discussed and accepted by the Hardwick Board of Selectmen at its public meeting of November 24, 2014*

Signed, Kenan P. Young, Chairman

