

## ASSIST SMALL TOWNS IN ADDRESSING UNIQUE GROWTH PROBLEMS

### What are the objectives of this strategy?

To help smaller communities without professional planning staffs address issues and problems that they would otherwise be unable to deal with.

### Why is this strategy important?

Many small communities do not have professional planning staff to deal with long-range planning issues in the community. Often times, it is only volunteer board members that are available to deal with such issues.



*Route 143 in Worthington*

### How can we accomplish this?

One solution to this dilemma is for communities to utilize the services offered by the regional planning agency of which they are a member. Regional planning agencies (RPAs), under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40B Sections 1 through 8, are established through the initiative of a group of municipalities to establish a regional district. RPAs are authorized to prepare region-wide planning documents and review local plans for consistency with the regional plan. The RPAs also provide general assistance to the municipal planning boards within the region.

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission's (PVPC) Planning Board Assistance (PBA) program provides municipal planning boards with professional, high quality planning services on a part-time, cost-effective basis. Under this program PVPC will provide a planner on a fee for services basis. This planner will provide a higher level of technical assistance and attention beyond the free services available through PVPC's Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program. The PBA program is not a substitute for a town planner or community development professional, but is a cost-effective alternative.

## DID YOU KNOW...

The Planning Board Assistance program offered by the PVPC can provide a variety of planning services, such as:

- Assistance with the review of development proposals
- Review and update existing zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations
- Create development review tracking systems
- Interpretation and guidance concerning planning principals and planning law
- Updates on Planning Board requirements and training

## How and where are communities using this strategy?

### CASE STUDIES FROM THE PIONEER VALLEY



#### **Highlands Communities Initiative (HCI)**

Administered by the Trustees of Reservations, the Highland Communities Initiative (HCI) is a grant-funded program to promote land conservation and community preservation in rural Western Massachusetts. The Highlands Region is the 38 towns that lie between the Housatonic and Connecticut River Valleys, and the Vermont and

Connecticut borders. Fifteen communities in the Pioneer Valley region are also members of the Highlands Region.

HCI grew out of the concerns of several Highland residents who recognized the importance and difficulty of maintaining the quality of life and rural character of their communities in the face of rising development pressures. As a result, HCI was established to provide information and technical assistance to municipal boards, land trusts, community leaders, and others concerned with the future of the Highland landscape.

HCI's small grants program has been successful in funding a variety of conservation and zoning efforts for these 38 communities. Since 2001, HCI has provided a total of \$221,777 for 61 projects in the Highlands region, ranging from \$200 to \$5,000. In addition, HCI continually offers a series of educational workshops and events to inform residents of the Highlands region on a variety of planning topics.

Link to [HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE](#)

#### **PVPC Planning Board Assistance Program**

The Planning Board Assistance Program is an emerging program which provides municipal planning boards with professional, high quality planning services on a part-time, cost-effective basis. Under this program, PVPC provides a planner on a fee-for-services basis. The planner can provide technical assistance to the Planning Board on a part-time basis, and is available for Planning Board members to contact whenever questions arise.

To date, the Towns of Hadley and Longmeadow have taken advantage of this new program. The Scope of Work for Hadley under the PBA program includes reformatting the zoning bylaw, updating the subdivision regulations, reviewing and prioritizing long range planning recommendations, investigating the issue of discontinuing roads, and researching different options for enforcing the zoning bylaw.

Link to [PLANNING BOARD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM](#)