

2006 Community Development Strategy - Town of Montague Turners Falls, Lake Pleasant, Millers Falls, Montague Center, and Montague City

Overview

The Town of Montague is governed by a 126-member representative Town Meeting, three-member Board of Selectmen and a variety of elected and appointed staff, boards and committees. These agencies and individuals work together and with residents, business owners and nonprofit groups on strategic plans for community development. The activities in this application are consistent with the priorities and needs identified through local and regional community assessment and strategic planning processes, and with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles. This Community Development Strategy was reviewed, discussed and approved at a public meeting held by the Montague Board of Selectmen, with _____ in attendance on January 23, 2006.

Community Planning Entities

Montague residents engage in a variety of planning efforts to clarify and coordinate the town's priorities. Needs assessments and community planning activities are conducted by the Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Planning Board, Capital Improvements Committee, Board of Assessors, Board of Health, Council on Aging, Finance Committee, Highway Department, Library Trustees, Parks and Recreation Commission, Economic Development & Industrial Corporation, Airport Commission, Police Department, Conservation Commission and School Committee. Together, these efforts involve at least 75 residents on a regular basis. Various sub-committees working under these municipal departments are also involved in identifying needs and setting goals.

The Town also participates in regional planning processes conducted by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC) and the Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA). The Brick House and Montague Catholic Social Ministries conduct meetings, focus groups and other needs assessment activities to develop plans and provide social services to Montague residents

State agencies, including the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) assist the Town by providing guidance and funding to help meet community needs.

Planning Processes and Documents

Plans, documents and processes that have informed this Community Development Strategy include, but are not limited to the following:

Town Plans:

Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Map and Community Development Plan: The Comprehensive Plan prepared by the Montague Planning Board and adopted by Town Meeting in 1999 addresses land use, housing, cultural and historic resources, community issues, open space, natural resources, recreation, economic development, public facilities, infrastructure, and transportation in Montague. The Future Land Use Map provides a long-term vision for growth and development that is fully consistent with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles. It concentrates residential development in and adjacent to village centers, promotes growth of businesses in villages and along major roads, and identifies prime farmland, productive forest and wildlife habitat for protection. The Comprehensive Plan promotes revitalization of the Town's five villages, preservation of historic resources, redevelopment of abandoned and underutilized

commercial and industrial properties, rehabilitation of older residential properties, and development of transportation alternatives. The plan was developed with input from hundreds of residents through public meetings and surveys, and has been updated and expanded by the 2004 Community Development Plan, which encompasses an Economic Development Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan and Housing Plan (see below).

Economic Development Plan: The Montague EDP was developed by a 24-member task force of municipal and civic leaders and adopted by the Selectmen in 2004. The plan highlights priorities for improvements in civic and physical infrastructure to support economic development.

Open Space and Recreation Plan: Montague's OSRP was developed by a 17-member planning committee, with assistance from FRCOG, and was approved by the state in 2003. More than 40 residents in addition to the committee members participated in development of the plan. It includes an inventory of natural, agricultural, scenic and recreational resources, analyzes long-term development patterns, and establishes priorities for preservation, land use and recreation.

Housing Plan: The Town's 2004 Housing Plan, prepared by a 12-member committee including housing and social service advocates, realtors, town officials and low-income residents, includes an inventory of housing assets, demographic information and needs assessment and guidelines for future housing development. The plan emphasizes the importance of modernization and improvements to the Town's existing stock of older, pre-World War II housing.

ADA Transition Plan: In 1998, Montague adopted a plan to achieve compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Town Administrator updates the plan yearly with involvement from residents and municipal officials.

Capital Plan: Montague's five-member Capital Improvements Committee meets regularly to discuss long-range capital needs and priorities for the Town. Recommendations for capital planning, prioritization of needs and allocation of resources are discussed at Town Meeting.

Turners Falls Targeted Economic Development Plan: This plan was prepared by graduate students from the University of Massachusetts Regional Planning Department in 2004, and was informed by surveys of dozens of Turners Falls residents and focus groups of artists and civic leaders. Recommendations from this plan and the 2004 Economic Development Plan are proposed for implementation in a new arts-based economic development program in Turners Falls in 2006.

Conceptual Plans for Cultural Heritage Center: In 2004 and 2005, the Town of Montague worked with graduate and undergraduate students in the Landscape Architecture department at the University of Massachusetts to develop conceptual plans for conversion of an old convenience store on the grounds of the Great Falls Discovery Center into a cultural heritage center.

Turners Falls Airport Master Plan and Updates: The Turners Falls Airport Commission produced a Master Plan in 1990, with updates in 1999 and 2002. These documents, produced with input from a Technical Advisory Committee of elected and appointed officials, residents and airport users, provide a plan for airport maintenance and development over a 20-year period.

Strathmore Mill Redevelopment Feasibility Study: In 2005, the Town of Montague received a state Smart Growth Technical Assistance Grant to investigate the feasibility of redeveloping a vacant 250,000 square foot paper mill for mixed commercial, industrial and residential use. The study was overseen by a 10-member committee and held several public meetings attended by dozens of residents.

Annual Town Report: Each year the town produces an Annual Report that contains detailed information about town processes, highlights progress on 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 December 31, 2004 was adopted at the 2005 Annual Town Meeting.

Regional Plans: Montague's needs and priorities are addressed in the following regional plans:

Regional Policy Plan, 1998. This document guides the growth and protection of the natural and cultural resources of Franklin County. Produced by FRCOG with significant input from a 23-member committee.

Connecticut River Scenic Farm Byway Corridor Management Plan, 1998. This document includes and inventory of resources and recommendations for land use and planning along the Connecticut River Scenic Farm Byway, which traverses Montague along State Routes 47 and 63.

Regional Transportation Plan, 2000 and 2003. This plan, coordinated by the FRCOG with input from all 26 towns, promotes ways to develop alternatives to the automobile, while supporting the improvement and more efficient use of traditional facilities.

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 FRCOG with funding from MA EOE.

The Greater Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, updated annually. The CEDS program, managed by FRCOG, guides economic development throughout Franklin County and neighboring communities. A committee of 35 business and community leaders directs the program. Every five years, the CEDS committee solicits economic development projects from all towns in the region and creates a regional list of priorities. Montague submitted 12 projects for inclusion in the 2005 CEDS, more than any other town.

Franklin Regional Brownfields Committee The Town of Montague is an active participant in the Franklin Regional Brownfields Committee, which identifies contaminated properties in the region, sets priorities and leverages resources for assessment, cleanup and redevelopment. Three properties in Montague have been assessed under this program, and one has been remediated.

Social Service Plans

Brick House Community Coalition Needs Assessment. In 2005, the Brick House Community Resource Center participated in monthly Continuous Quality Improvement Gatherings sponsored by the Department of Social Services to address "transitioning youth" needs. Brick House staff held a listening session attended by 18 youth in August, and met with guidance and drop out prevention staff at Turners Falls high school in November and December. Student and teacher surveys will be delivered to two classrooms at Turners Falls High School before the next semester begins. The Montague Institute for New Directions (MIND) program for women at the Brick House grew out of a community-driven needs assessment called *Hope is the Horizon* conducted in with participation from at least residents.

Montague Catholic Social Ministries Needs Assessment. Between December 2003 and December 2005, MCSM held seven community meetings and focus groups to ascertain community needs and develop programs to address them. Residents who participated in these meetings identified poverty and the lack of education, training and economic opportunities as barriers to self-sufficiency among

households in Turners Falls and surrounding areas. Participants recommended family literacy programming for children and adults, skill development and English as a second language as priorities to improve economic security and quality of life for residents of Turners Falls.

Strategic Action Plan

The planning processes and documents described above were used to develop a comprehensive list of projects that the Town intends to undertake between 2006 and 2011. This list was presented to the public for comment in draft form at a meeting of the Board of Selectmen on January 9, 2006, and is included beginning on page 5.

These projects clearly demonstrate the Town's endorsement of the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles. They reflect a focus on maintenance, improvement and redevelopment of existing buildings and infrastructure in the Town's five villages, with a special focus on downtown Turners Falls, as well as a commitment to improving economic conditions and quality of life for disadvantaged residents, and dedication to conserving critical natural resources in Montague.

Resources

Montague has a long record of success using a variety of local, regional, state, national and private sector resources, often on the same project, to implement its community development goals. Past and future sources of funding include:

- Local property taxes
- State aid through school programs, lottery funds, library programs and special status exemption funds
- Technical assistance, grants from and partnerships with regional organizations and institutions including FRCOG, FCCDC, HRA, Greenfield Community College and the University of Massachusetts.
- Collaboration with the private sector, including but not limited to Northeast Utilities, the Town's biggest taxpayer and largest private landowner
- Federal and state highway and other transportation programs
- State grant and loan funding from the Department of Housing and Community Development, Office of Environmental Affairs, MassDevelopment, Massachusetts Cultural Council, MassHistoric and other state agencies.
- Grant and loan funding from federal agencies, including but not limited to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development, U.S. Economic Development Administration and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Community fundraising activities (bake sales, book sales, silent auctions, etc.)
- Private foundations
- Secular and faith-based organizations
- Volunteer labor and donated materials

Funding sources for specific projects are identified on the table beginning on page 5.