

CITY OF GARDNER

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING



PUBLIC HEARING

FY2010 Community Development Strategy

December 10, 2009 – 10:30 a.m.

Meeting Room – City Hall Annex

Gardner, Massachusetts

Committee Members Present: Jennifer Dymek, Robert Hubbard, James Cruickshank, Councilor James Minns, Darlene Morrilly, Richard Reynolds, Bernard Sullivan, and Joanne Foster (arrived at 10:45 a.m.)

Committee Members Absent: David Curran and Julie Meehan

Others present: Terri Hillman, and Katie Fucile, CD&P; Deborah Namvar, MOC, Inc., 9 Prichard Street, Fitchburg; and Mary M. Roth, HOPE

J. Dymek called the Public Hearing to order at 10:30 a.m. The purpose of the public hearing was to discuss the FY2010 Community Development Strategy.

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) requires a rewrite of the Community Development Strategy every three years. A copy of the proposed rewrite was presented. The FY2010 CDS summarizes the City's various efforts to engage in community-based planning and priority setting, and to outline a plan of action intended accomplish specific community development goals.

J. Dymek distributed a Summary of the Changes proposed for the FY2010 CDS. The Steering Committee reviewed the proposed Target Areas. This section is new to the strategy this year and will define the selected target area. In the past the selected area has been mentioned, but has never been outlined.

The City has five census tracts. After much discussion the Steering Committee decided to include the following in the FY2010 proposed Target Area:

Downtown Target Area

Urban Renewal Area

Census Tract/Block 7071/1 (53.0% LMI) and 7071/2 (55.2% LMI)

Census Tract/Block 7072/1 (61.8% LMI)

Census Tract Block 7073/1 (68.8% LMI) and 7073/2 (59.8% LMI)

Census Tract Block 7074/2 (51.1% LMI)

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Census Tract 7074 presently has a waiting list of clients for CDBG housing rehabilitation funds. Some of these homes may be Block 2. For the next meeting a map will be provided showing where the above proposed Target Areas are located.

The FY2010 CDS Priority List was reviewed. B. Sullivan suggested that Item #5 be altered to include the wording “to encourage pedestrian travel.” He will send J. Dymek information from MassMotion.

J. Cruickshank suggested adding a separate section “Green Initiative” to the Strategy.

J. Dymek closed the Public Hearing at 11 a.m.

FY 2010 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Introduction:

Included this year is the pending Urban Renewal Plan, Expedited Permitting and the Land Development Guidebook. Deleted from this list are the plans dated from 2004 and earlier.

Defined Target Area:

New to the strategy this year is a section defining the selected target area. DHCD has noted in the past that while the selected area has been mentioned, it has never been outlined or defined.

Housing:

Goal 1, bullet point two, added "local financial institutions" to the resource list.

Bullet point six has been amended to read "Complete and Implement an Urban Renewal Plan".

Previously, it was just listed as "complete".

Goal 3, bullet point two, added "local financial institutions" to the resource list.

Economic Development:

Goal 1, added bullet point two which reflects the hiring of an economic development coordinator.

Bullet point three has been amended to read "Complete and implement an Urban Renewal Plan".

Bullet point four redefines the use of 43D to attract redevelopment to the priority development areas (FY 2009 43D utilized to create priority development areas).

Bullet point five redefines the use of 43Q to create a DIF program within a DIF district. (FY 2009 utilized 43Q to create a DIF district).

Bullet point six adds "Economic Development Fund, MOC and local financial institutions" to the resource list.

Bullet point seven adds "Workforce Investment Board (WIB)" to the resource list.

Added bullet point nine which reflects the desire to market the City.

Bullet point ten adds "Economic Development Website" to the resource list.

Bullet point twelve has been amended to "Promote and utilize state programs" (FY 2009 used "make better use of state programs")

Goal 2, amended bullet point one to read "Complete and Implement an Urban Renewal Plan".

Previously, it was just listed as "complete".

Bullet point two adds "Economic Development Website" to the resource list.

Bullet point four redefines the use of 43D to attract redevelopment to the priority development areas (FY 2009 43D utilized to create priority development areas).

Bullet point five redefines the use of 43Q to create a DIF program within a DIF district. (FY 2009 utilized 43Q to create a DIF district).

Added bullet point seven which reflects the desire to market the City.

Bullet point eight adds "DEP and private investment" to the resource list.

Bullet point eleven has been amended to "Promote and utilize state programs" (FY 2009 used "make better use of state programs")

Open Space and Recreation:

Goal 2, deleted the bullet point of appropriately converting the senior center (project completed).

Transportation:

Goal 1, deleted the bullet point of creating an intermodal transportation center for MRTA (completed).

Municipal Utilities and Services:

Goal 1, amended bullet point two to read “Annually update the City’s first Capital Improvement Plan” (FY 2009 listed it as “Complete the City’s first CIP).

Special Needs:

No changes

Priority List:

Amended the target areas in 1 and 2 to reflect the new areas

Removed the FY09 priority to convert the Senior Center

Altered number 3 to “Complete and Implement an Urban Renewal Plan” (FY09 was listed as develop and implement)

Number 13 was amended to attract redevelopment to the Priority Development Sites (previously was “create Priority Development Sites”).

Number 15 was amended to include buildings, particularly in the target areas.

Number 16 was amended to “annually update the CIP”

Number 17 to reopen the Visitor’s Center was added.

FY 2010 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

The FY 2010 Community Development Strategy (CDS) summarizes the City's various efforts to engage in community-based planning and priority setting, and to outline a plan of action intended to accomplish specific community development goals. The FY 2010 CDS incorporates findings of relevant plans, including: Urban Renewal Plan (CDBG, pending 2010); Land Development Guidebook (City, 2009); Expedited Permitting (City, 2008); Urban Revitalization Study (CDBG, 2007); Capital Improvement Program (City, 2007); Design Guidelines (City, 2007); Open Space and Recreation Plan (City, 2006); Zoning Ordinance (City, 2006); Montachusett Opportunity Council, Inc. Community Action Plan (MOC, 2006); ADA/504 Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan (City, 2005); Peabody Hill Housing Inventory (City, 2005); Rules And Regulations Governing The Subdivision of Land (City, 2005); Downtown Target Area Inventory (City, 2004); E.O. 418 Community Development Plans (City, 2004). The City will use the FY 2010 CDS to direct resources from all sources toward projects that address the needs identified by the community as high priorities. The City expects to address the priorities with the CDBG and non-CDBG resources identified after each Action Step.

DEFINED TARGET AREA

For FY 2010, the City, acting through its Department of Community Development and Planning, has elected to target its CDBG activities to the properties bound by the approved Downtown Target Area (DTA), the boundaries of the proposed Urban Renewal Area (URA), and in Census Tracts 7071 and 7074. The DTA is a Slum and Blight Target Area, which is DHCD approved through July 8, 2014. The proposed Urban Renewal Area was created 1995 as part of an Economic Opportunity Area project. Beginning in 2005 and continuing to 2007, the City held a series of public meetings to further define the area based on the current economic conditions. In 2009, the final boundary was selected for inclusion in the proposed Urban Renewal Plan. Census Tract 7071 has an LMI population of 52.2% and 68.9% of the housing was constructed prior to 1969. Census Tract 7074 has an LMI population of 41.5% and 69.2% of the housing was constructed prior to 1969. Overall, the City has an LMI population of 51.1% and 72.6% of the housing was constructed prior to 1969.

HOUSING

Goal 1: Expand Housing Opportunities in appropriate locations to meet the needs of Gardner's population.

Action Steps:

- Partner with local and regional non-profit organizations to rehabilitate existing buildings or construct new ones within the Downtown Target Area (DTA), Urban Renewal Area (URA) and CDBG Target Areas (Census Tract/Block #7071/001, 002 & 003; 7074/001, 002 & 003) in order to effectively utilize the existing infrastructure, create safe and affordable housing, repair dilapidated buildings, and create walkable neighborhoods. *{Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Greater Gardner Community Development Corporation (CDC), Gardner Community Action Committee (CAC), Gardner Redevelopment Authority (GRA), Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School (Monty Tech)}*
- Target efforts to rehabilitate substandard housing, or to construct new homes, in CDBG Target Areas. *{CDBG and local match, local financial institutions}*

- Modernize and selectively reconfigure existing public housing. *{Gardner Housing Authority and Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD)}*
- Facilitate the redevelopment of vacant lots and underutilized buildings in the DTA, URA and CDBG Target Areas by increasing the quantity and availability of parking; supporting Brownfield assessment and remediation; expediting the process for taking control of tax title properties; and exploring the use of the receivership provisions in M.G.L. Ch. 111, Section 127 I & J. *{City Budget, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Public Works Economic Development (PWED) grant, Community Development Action Grant (CDAG) and GRA}*
- Utilize MGL Chapter 40R to create a smart growth zoning district. *{City}*
- Complete and implement an Urban Renewal Plan in order to facilitate redevelopment efforts in and near the Downtown Target Area. *{Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), GRA, City Budget}*

Goal 2: Better manage the amount and style of residential growth in the rural areas, particularly in Water Supply Protection Districts, in order to maintain the area's rural character and protect natural resources.

Action Steps:

- Adopt a local ordinance limiting the expansion of the sewer collection system to a defined area unless the developer obtains a change in the defined area based on sound planning and/or engineering rationale. *{City Budget}*
- Create one or more Areas of Critical Concern Overlay Districts to provide additional design and development guidelines to protect and conserve environmentally sensitive lands and natural resources. *{City Budget}*
- Develop an Intermunicipal Agreement with neighboring towns in order to provide consistent protection to environmentally sensitive lands, natural resources, and water supplies. *{City Budget}*

Goal 3: Provide appropriate support to residents dealing with foreclosure.

Actions Steps:

- Partner with local banks, realtors and attorneys to identify and track foreclosed properties *{City Budget, Private Financing}*
- Partner with local non-profit and for-profit organizations that offer foreclosure prevention counseling and education to first time homebuyers and others entering the housing market *{Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Greater Gardner Community Development Corporation (CDC), RCAP Solutions; Neighborworks Homeownership Center; local financial institutions}*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal 1: Diversify the local economy and increase job opportunities by encouraging and facilitating retention and expansion of Gardner based businesses along with attracting new businesses to Gardner.

Action Steps:

- Expand the Business Visitation Program. *{Chamber of Commerce, GRA and Mayor's Office}*

- Better coordinate economic development activities through hiring an Economic Development Coordinator *{Greater Gardner Industrial Foundation, GRA, City, CDBG}*
- Complete and implement an Urban Renewal Plan in order to facilitate redevelopment efforts in and near the Downtown Target Area. *{Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), GRA, City Budget; other State and Federal grants, tax credits and financing programs}*
- Utilize MGL 43D to attract redevelopment to the Priority Development Sites *{City and 43D TA Grant}*.
- Create a District Improvement Financing (DIF) Program within a provisionally approved DIF District under MGL 43Q *{GRA, City Budget}*
- Partner with local and regional non-profit and for-profit organizations to rehabilitate existing buildings particularly within the DTA and URA in order to effectively utilize the existing infrastructure, repair dilapidated buildings, and create walkable neighborhoods. *{Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Greater Gardner Community Development Corporation (CDC), Gardner Community Action Committee (CAC), Gardner Redevelopment Authority (GRA), Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School (Monty Tech), Economic Development Fund (EDF), Montachusett Opportunity Council (MOC) and local financial institutions}*
- Assist, and expand, training opportunities of the local workforce. *{Chamber of Commerce, GRA, local businesses, local non-profits, Workforce Investment Board (WIB)}*
- Assist in the formation of local and regional business relationships. *{GRA, Chamber of Commerce, Square Two and Montachusett Regional Planning Commission(MRPC)}*
- Implement a proactive Marketing Strategy through tradeshow and conference attendance, promotional advertisements, flyers, factsheets, site tours, and preparation of “Doing Business in Gardner” handbook. *{City Budget, GRA, Economic Development Website, Chamber of Commerce}*
- Promote the Grow Gardner Fund loan program. *{GRA, Economic Development Website}*
- Formalize staff outreach to local business and related technical support. *{GRA and City Budget}*
- Promote and utilize state programs such as the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP); District Improvement Financing Program (DIF); and loan programs available from public and quasi-public entities. *{GRA, City Budget, Economic Development Website}*
- Support job training, job-related childcare assistance, job-related transportation, elder self-sufficiency and other economic security and self sufficiency programs *(MOC, GRA, CDC, MHCC, CAC)*

Goal 2: Promote reinvestment in older industrial and commercial properties by conducting strategic planning efforts and identifying opportunities and offering development incentives.

Action Steps:

- Complete and implement an Urban Renewal Plan in order to facilitate redevelopment efforts in and near the Downtown Target Area. *{Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), GRA, City Budget, other State and Federal grants, tax credits and financing programs}*
- Promote the Grow Gardner Fund loan program. *{GRA and Economic Development Website}*
- Utilize MGL 40R & 40Q to create a smart growth zoning district and a funding mechanism to provide a local source of financing for redevelopment efforts. *{City Budget}*
- Utilize MGL 43D to attract redevelopment to the Priority Development Sites *{City and 43D TA Grant}*.
- Create a District Improvement Financing (DIF) Program within a provisionally approved DIF District under MGL 43Q *{GRA, City Budget}*

- Assist businesses to make improvements to building facades and signs within the Downtown Target Area. *{CDBG}*
- Implement a proactive Marketing Strategy through tradeshow and conference attendance, promotional advertisements, flyers, factsheets, site tours, and preparation of “Doing Business in Gardner” handbook. *{City Budget, GRA, Economic Development Website, Chamber of Commerce}*
- Support Brownfield assessment and remediation. *{EPA, MRPC, GRA, DEP and private investment}*
- Expand the scope and distribution of the “Distressed Property List”. *{City Budget}*
- Make loans to qualified businesses from the Grow Gardner Fund. *{GRA and Grow America Fund}*
- Promote and utilize state programs such as the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP); District Improvement Financing Program (DIF); and loan programs available from public and quasi-public entities. *{GRA, City Budget, Economic Development Website}*
- Selectively demolish buildings that are beyond reuse in CDBG Target Areas (DTA, URA, and Census Tract/Block #7071/001, 002 & 003; 7074/001, 002 & 003)). *{CDBG}*
- Apply appropriate ‘Smart Parking’ standards and strategies and increase the availability of parking to support redevelopment. *{CDAG, PWED}*

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Goal 1: Protect and conserve Gardner’s natural resources.

Action Steps:

- Set priorities for and acquire additional open space parcels, particularly in the Water Supply Protection Districts and Areas of Critical Concern. *{Division of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) and other State and Foundation grants, Donations, and City Budget}*
- Cooperate with the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to place Conservation Restrictions on City owned land in Crystal Lake watershed *{Division of Fisheries & Wildlife and City Budget}*
- Improve management and maintenance of existing municipally owned open space. *{City Budget}*
- Adopt a Reduced Salt Policy. *{City Budget}*
- Create one or more Areas of Critical Concern Overlay Districts to provide additional design and development guidelines to protect and conserve environmentally sensitive lands and natural resources. *{City Budget}*
- Develop inter-municipal agreements aimed at protecting watershed and open space along town boundaries. *{City Budget}*
- Promote awareness of the benefits of donating open space. *{City Budget and volunteer efforts}*
- Increase maintenance of the City’s open space parcels and dams. *{City Budget}*

Goal 2: Improve recreational resources and facilities.

Action Steps:

- Acquire land, particularly in west Gardner, for municipal recreation fields. *{DCR, City Budget, Urban Self Help, local contributions}*
- Complete North Central Pathway in conjunction with the Town of Winchendon. *{DCR and other State and Foundation grants, and volunteer support}*

- Complete the restoration of Parkers Pond. *{Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and other State grants}*
- Improve public access to Lake Wampanoag and create access to Wright's Reservoir. *{DCR and volunteer support}*
- Create Otter River Greenway in conjunction with the Town of Templeton. *{DCR, MA Environmental Trust and volunteer support}*
- Construct a Little League complex. *{Local contributions, City Budget and EPA}*
- Increase maintenance of the City's existing recreation facilities. *{City Budget}*

TRANSPORTATION

Goal 1: Increase access to transportation options.

Action Steps:

- Complete North Central Pathway in conjunction with the Town of Winchendon. *{DCR and other State and Foundation grants, and City Budget}*
- Apply appropriate 'Smart Parking' standards and strategies in the DTA and URA.
- Complete Derby Drive (aka Pond Brook Street) and increase availability of parking in the DTA. *{PWED, CDAG, CDBG and matching private sector funds}*
- Advocate for upgrading of State Route 2 and improvements to Commuter Rail System serving Northern Worcester County. *{None required}*

Goal 2: Ensure that people, including those with disabilities, can travel throughout the City in a safe and convenient manner.

Action Steps:

- Install ADA compliant curb ramps and sidewalks and repair deteriorated infrastructure within the DTA. *{CDBG, City Budget and MassHighway}*
- Prepare and implement a pavement management plan. *{City Budget and MassHighway}*
- Continue to support the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority's fixed route and para-transit services. *{City Budget and USDOT grants}*
- Improve dangerous intersections. *{MassHighway}*
- Provide better traffic control features, such as line painting and cross walks. *{City Budget}*
- Increase the enforcement of traffic laws and ordinances. *{City Budget}*

MUNICIPAL UTILITIES AND SERVICES

Goal 1: Improve delivery of municipal services

Action Steps:

- Restore municipal staffing levels in all departments to 2002 levels. *{City Budget}*
- Annually update the City's first Capital Improvement Program *{City Budget}*
- Expand access to, and availability of, recycling facilities and other alternatives to decrease the municipal solid waste produced within the City. *{City Budget and EPA}*
- Concentrate scarce local resources to address public safety and public health priorities. *{City Budget and CDBG}*

- Increase opportunities for staff training and professional development. *{City Budget and GRA}*
- Modernize municipal equipment, with an emphasis on public safety and computer technology. *{City Budget and Federal Grants}*
- Assess the needs and costs related to building a new Police Station and upgrading the Fire Station/HQ. *{City Budget}*

Goal 2: Advance sound water policies and practices

Action Steps:

- Upgrade existing water distribution and sewer collection systems as outlined in recently completed studies. *{City Enterprise Fund Accounts}*
- Adopt local ordinance requiring storm water Best Management Practice's. *{City Budget}*
- Adopt a local ordinance limiting the expansion of the sewer collection system to a defined area unless the developer obtains a change in the defined area based on sound planning and/or engineering rationale. *{City Budget}*
- Adopt Reduced Salt Policy. *{City Budget}*

SPECIAL NEEDS

Goal 1: Improve access to municipal and regional services, activities and programs.

Action Steps:

- Improve access to municipal buildings and other priority buildings identified in the City's ADA Transition Plan. *{CDBG, City Budget and other locally raised funds}*
- Improve access to municipal communications by providing auxiliary aids and services. *{City Budget and volunteer support}*
- Continue to support the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority's fixed route and para-transit services. *{City Budget and USDOT grants}*

Goal 2: Increase support available to persons having special needs, including but not limited to the elderly, the homeless, low and moderate income persons and the disabled.

Action Steps:

- Expand partnerships with local and regional health, social and human service providers. *{Various grant sources including CDBG}*
- Provide technical and strategic support for community and regional planning. *{City Budget}*
- Support efforts of private developers to create affordable and market rate senior housing, particularly assisted living facilities for the frail elderly. *{Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and CDBG}*
- Expand existing City efforts to rehabilitate substandard housing, particularly inaccessible, multi-family buildings. *{CDBG and local match}*

FY 2010 Community Development Strategy
Priority List

1. Rehabilitate dilapidated buildings within the Downtown & CDBG Target Areas (DTA, URA and Census Tract/Block #7071/001, 002 & 003; 7074/001, 002 & 003).
2. Selectively demolish buildings that are beyond reuse in CDBG Target Areas (DTA, URA and Census Tract/Block #7071/001, 002 & 003; 7074/001, 002 & 003).
3. Complete and implement an Urban Renewal Plan.
4. Rehabilitate non-code compliant and/or construction of affordable single and multi-family homes.
5. Reconstruct or alter streets, sidewalks, and public buildings to allow for handicap accessibility.
6. Work cooperatively with all area for-profit, non-profit and service agencies to implement the CDS.
7. Restore, enhance, build, and support diverse recreational facilities and/or activities.
8. Support and expand economic security and self-sufficiency programs.
9. Apply appropriate 'Smart Parking' standards and strategies and increase availability of parking in the Downtown Target Area.
10. Acquire, protect, and maintain open space and environmentally sensitive lands.
11. Attract and assist businesses opening in, relocating to, or already existing in, Gardner.
12. Effectively utilize MGL Ch 40Q & R to establish a smart growth zoning district and a funding mechanism to provide a source of financing local redevelopment efforts.
13. Utilize MGL 43D to attract redevelopment to the Priority Development Sites.
14. Upgrade existing infrastructure, particularly in the Downtown Target Area and Urban Renewal Area.
15. Redevelopment of vacant or underutilized land and buildings, particularly in the target areas.
16. Annually update the Capital Improvement Program.
17. Reopen the Heritage Visitor's Center