

TOWN OF NORTHBRIDGE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Introduction

The Town of Northbridge endeavors to address the needs of the community by offering its residents and officials the opportunity to voice concerns and opinions about the needs & desires of the community. The Community Development Strategy summarizes the Town of Northbridge's recent strategic planning initiatives, highlights pertinent planning studies and identifies significant development goals.

Available planning documents show the town's diligence in gathering valuable information of the community to aid in the development of desired future. These documents include, the Community Action Statement (1996), the Community Development Plan (2005), the Downtown Revitalization and Marketing Plan (2000), Open Space Plan (2005), Northbridge Master Plan, the Capital Improvement Plan (2000), Urban Rivers Vision Action Plan (2007), Heritage Landscape Inventory (2007), Route 146 Corridor Study (2003-2008), 43D –Expedited Permitting (2008), Economic Opportunity Area designation (2008), and the most recent Goals & Objectives for Northbridge Municipal Departments (2008).

Target Area

The New Village Target Area (NVTA) has been a priority for the past number years and consists of A Street, B Street, C Street, D Street, Border Street, Crescent Street, Overlook Street, Maple Street, Linden Street, High Street, Upper High Street, Arcade Street, Lake Street, Chestnut Street, Water Street, Oak Street, West Street, Grove Street and Forest Street. Also included in the target area is a portion of North Main Street extending from the intersection of Main Street to the intersection of Overlook Street. This NVTA continues to be a priority for the Town of Northbridge. The Board of Selectmen continued to support the revitalization of this neighborhood through rehabilitation of housing units and infrastructure. As part of this year's annual assessment/review of the Community Development Strategy, discussion included expanding target area to include Main Street through Hill Street, which incorporates the shops (mill complex), Whitinsville Community Center, and the Aldrich School.

Source Materials

Community Development Plan (CD Plan) Through public participation at public meetings and workshops, the town completed its Community Development Plan (2005) which focuses on the economic development and housing elements. The CD Plan describes the current housing stock in Northbridge and outlines how the town can increase its affordable housing. In addition, the economic conditions of the town are outlined in the CD Plan, which consists of census information, housing costs, development, and zoning. The recommendations outlined in the CD Plan focus on how the town can improve its economic development efforts, while acknowledging the great strides Northbridge has taken in the past few years to revitalize its downtown districts.

Downtown Revitalization and Marketing Plan The Downtown Revitalization and Marketing Plan provides an implementation action plan for the four recommendations: 1) Concerning funding and

financing sources and programs, 2) For the management of a building improvement initiative, 3) Concerning overall design themes and conceptual examples of building projects that could be undertaken, and 4) Concerning tasks, responsibilities, management/organization and scheduling for establishing an effective revitalization program for the downtowns.

Community Action Statement (CAS) The Community Action Statement identifies the top 5 community priorities of the Town of Northbridge as of 1996. These priorities, in which include the following: 1) To upgrade and maintain town services, equipment and infrastructure- this includes bringing town buildings and sidewalks into compliance with the ADA; expanding library services; upgrading and maintaining the sewer treatment plant, water works, streets and sidewalks, waste disposal and recycling, and upgrading the services of the DPW, Fire and Police Departments, 2) To implement economic development and housing improvement programs on a local and regional basis; activities involved in addressing this need include, creating an industrial park(s); evaluating existing industrial and commercial property and land suitable for those uses; providing support to existing local businesses; providing assistance to residential property owners so that they maintain their housing units in a decent and safe condition; revitalizing neighborhood and village centers; and working with neighboring communities interested in pursuing these same activities, 3) To meet the social services, health, education, employment, and recreation needs for the elderly, local youth, and other special needs population groups; due to local fiscal constraints the Town has been forced to cut back on its funding programs. Funds have also been cut for local parks and recreation facilities. 4) To review and update local zoning regulations with a focus on preserving and utilizing Northbridge's resources and strengthening the local tax base. Consider rezoning areas to encourage commercial and industrial development, evaluate its residential districts, lot size requirements, enhance recreational land uses, and to preserve and promote the town's historical resources and 5) To enhance the management of the town to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services to the community.

Open Space Plan The development of the goals and objectives for the Northbridge Open Space Plan began by examining the physical, cultural and social characteristics of the community by the Open Space Committee. Analysis of this information along with public comment, led to the formation of goals and objectives in terms of open space and recreation. Some of the goals developed in this plan include: 1) Protecting the town's open space and scenic areas, 2) Preserve and enhance the town's water sources, 3) Provide for planned and controlled growth throughout the town, 4) Provide the town with well balanced recreational opportunities, and 5) Enhance and increase conservation land in the Town.

The Town of Northbridge is proactive throughout the review process for new subdivisions. The preservation of open space is a top priority for the Planning Board because it creates land for recreation, such as a bike path or walking paths. Concentrating development encourages the Town to support the conservation of land and provide the option for recreational activities.

Northbridge Master Plan A Master Plan Committee is presently working with the Planning Board in updating the town's Master Plan. Through public workshops, meetings and survey/questionnaire residents have identified a number of planning initiatives and opportunities to improve & preserve the Northbridge we know today.

Northbridge is privileged to have all of its mills in use today, many of which are utilized for industrial and commercial/retail. The master plan has stressed the importance of regionalism in economic

development and lists the following as goals: 1) support and encourage existing businesses, 2) secure additional development of attractive industries and commercial establishments to ensure balanced growth, 3) protect and enhance existing village centers of Whitinsville, Rockdale and Linwood, 4) preserve the rural character of outlying areas and enhance the attractiveness of the community to tourists as well as residents by concentrating development in the village centers, and 5) improve the economic vitality of the Blackstone Valley Region.

Northbridge is equally fortunate to still have its mill-housing units providing residence for many individual and families of various age and incomes levels. These housing units are located within Rockdale Village and the Village of Whitinsville (the New Village Target area -NVTA).

The Community Services and Facilities component offer the following goals: 1) improve the recreational facilities throughout the town, 2) provide resources for maintenance of fields, parks and playgrounds, 3) work with the Whitin Community Center 4) create bike and pedestrian paths, and 5) find a better suited location for the DPW. One of the continuing goals of the Master Plan is to ensure that the Town meets the needs of the community and more specifically, the needs of the seniors and low & moderate income levels, preservation of open space, which focuses development & redevelopment in appropriate areas of town.

Strategy 1: Revitalize Neighborhoods/Improve town infrastructure

(Redevelop First, Be Fair, and Enhance the Environment)

As part of the December 2008 public meeting and the January 2009 public hearing and workshop, the town continued to discuss its need for revitalization of its neighborhoods and infrastructure, more specifically the New Village Target Area (NVTA). In addition, these items have been noted in several of the plans and studies that have been conducted over the years. The need for revitalization in Northbridge has been demonstrated through public workshops held during the planning stage of the plans and studies. The Town of Northbridge held numerous public hearings and meetings over the past couple of years to discuss the CDBG program application and more specifically the NVTA multi-phase project. Most recently, December 08, 2008 (public meeting with the Board of Selectmen); January 12, 2009 (Board of Selectmen public hearing); January 20, 2009 (public workshop); and January 26, 2009 (continued Board of Selectmen public hearing).

Action Plan:

The town's action plan to achieve the above strategy consists of utilizing state programs that are designed to assist communities in neighborhood revitalization and improving existing infrastructure by redeveloping first or replacing or expanding as necessary. These programs include the Community Development Block Grant, the District Improvement Financing Program, Chapter 90 funds, etc.

1. Revitalization Effort in "the Village" –to include new sidewalks, roadways, drainage, façade improvements (CAS)
2. Revitalization Effort in the Rockdale section of Northbridge –to include new sidewalks, roadways, drainage, façade improvements
3. Sidewalk replacement in the Linwood section of Northbridge
4. Update the town's roadway inventory and roadway pavement conditions survey

5. Begin a phased program of sidewalk replacement culminating in replacement of all Portland cement concrete sidewalks over 25 years old
6. Design and construct extensions to the water distribution system along Union Street and Church Street
7. Design and construct an extension of the sanitary sewer collection system northward on Providence Road to neighborhoods beyond Electric Pond
8. Encourage the development of affordable housing

Strategy 2: Upgrade Public Facilities

(Redevelop First, Concentrate development)

The town's public facility buildings are older and continue to need ongoing maintenance. In addition, many of the buildings are inadequate for the town's population, including the Fire Stations, DPW garage, Town Hall, Senior Center. Additionally, the Aldrich School, located across the street from Town Hall was recently turned over from the school is presenting being renovated; plumbing & electrical updates, handicapped bathroom installation/compliance, and interior painting of the first floor in preparation for relocation of municipal department currently located outside of the Town Hall. Capital projects would need a substantial amount of funding in order to build new facilities. Unfortunately, most of these sites are inadequate to expand the facilities and new sites will need to be identified.

Action Plan:

As the town continues to grow, the public facilities continue to get older. Constant maintenance on the buildings will be an ongoing expense to the town.

1. New Fire Department that will meet the safety needs of the community
2. New DPW Facility that meets the current and projected future need of the Town of Northbridge.
3. Maintain the current public facilities and equipment, including the Town Hall windows and heating system and the Senior Center.

Strategy 3: Promote Economic Development

(Redevelop First, Concentrate Development, Increase Job Opportunities)

Economic development continues to be a top priority for the town. Completion of our downtown revitalization project demonstrates the importance of economic development. As a result of this project, Downtown Whitinsville has seen an increase in businesses locating to the downtown. Community Development grants aided the town in completing this project, along with a very successful Sign & Façade Program. The most recent study, the Community Development Plan has outlined action steps that would promote economic development within the town. Additionally, the Urban Rivers Action Plan (2007) completed for Rockdale Village also identifies strategies to promote economic development.

Action Plan:

There are many opportunities to apply for grant funds to promote economic development. The town continues to strive to maintain the downtown as a vibrant place to work shop and conduct business. There are other locations for economic development opportunities in the town including Plummer's

Corner, along Rt.122, Rt.146/Main Street are all great locations for vibrant economic development opportunities. Over the past several years Northbridge along with Sutton, Douglas and Uxbridge have been working together to in a regional effort primarily focused on: Land use development; Transportation patterns; infrastructure improvements; and Environmental assessment along the Route 146 corridor.

1. Update Master Plan;
2. Implement Community Development Plan
3. Facilitate Business Representation in Public Economic Development Efforts
4. Facilitate economic development at the route 146/Main Street Interchange
5. Enhance existing traditional business districts (including Whitinsville and Rockdale), this strategy includes a) maintaining a traditional New England aesthetic by encouraging compatible signage, landscaping, and architecture, b) improve/maintain safe traffic circulation flow and convenient parking, c) provide more opportunities for residents and visitors to “buy locally” by developing businesses of necessity such as small grocer store, general retail, professional services and restaurants, and d)increase communications with local business owners to identify issues and opportunities for improvement
6. Provide mixed use at Plummer’s Corner and along the Route 122 Corridor while controlling Strip Development
7. Develop reuse plans for vacant, obsolete or underutilized buildings and properties
8. Develop reuse plans for vacant, underutilized or surplus Town-owned properties
9. Improve infrastructure as needed to support existing and attract new development to targeted areas
10. Support cottage industries and home based businesses,
11. Expand recreation and eco-tourism opportunities,
12. Create business development incentives to stimulate private investment,
13. Create marketing, recruitment and retention partnership for Northbridge,
14. Seek economic development funding sources
15. Inventory Underdeveloped/underutilized land (public/private)
16. Brownfield Redevelopment
17. Continue to seek funding for programs such as sign and facade

Strategy 4: Encourage Affordable Housing

(Redevelop First, Concentrate Development, Be Fair, Expand housing opportunities, Conserve Natural Resources)

The town’s Community Development Plan analyzes the housing stock of Northbridge and provides recommendations to encourage affordable housing.

Action Plan:

In order to encourage affordable housing, several elements will need to be evaluated in great detail, from zoning to housing opportunity areas. This action plan comes directly from the Community Development Plan.

1. Revise zoning, subdivision and building regulations to ensure overall residential quality, desired design and character, and affordable housing opportunities for all income groups
2. Work cooperatively with local housing ownership and management organization
3. Convert existing housing units into affordable housing units

4. Identify areas in Northbridge for new affordable housing development
5. Utilize innovative public and private funding and technical assistance program to maintain and produce additional affordable housing opportunities
6. Create a local Housing Partnership

Strategy 5: Promote Open Space

(Concentrate Development, Restore and Enhance the Environment, Conserve Natural Resources)

The town's Open Space Committee developed goals to address open space, recreation, and historical preservation. Concerns of the committee include growth, loss of town character, degradation of its natural resources, loss of agricultural and forest lands and the adequacy of its recreational opportunities. Without good planning, the character of the town can be dramatically altered in a short period of time by random changes in land use patterns.

Action Plan:

The town is committed to open space and will continue to make every effort to have the opportunity for recreation, open space and to preserve our historical character.

1. Maintain and strengthen the character of Northbridge
2. Strengthen financial commitment to Open Space, Recreation, and Historic Preservation
3. Preserve and protect the town's natural resources
4. Preserve wildlife corridors
5. Preserve, Protect and Expand protected Open Space in Town of Northbridge
6. Preserve significant views
7. Provide opportunity for passive recreation
8. Enhance existing recreational facilities and create new recreational facilities
9. Fund and implement a turf management program for the town's recreational athletic fields
Implement a phased inventory of public shade trees by a certified arborist including maintenance recommendations and identification of diseased and hazardous trees
10. Review zoning options (regulations/TDRs, 40R, etc)

Strategy 6: Support Social Services

(Be Fair)

The Town of Northbridge continues to grow every year and there are more children than ever that are in need of after school and school vacations, including summer vacation. In addition, Northbridge's senior population is also growing and the town provides elders programs through the Senior Center, but there is a need for additional programs if they had available funding. In addition, there is opportunity to provide to low-to moderate-income residents job training, Adult Education Programs, and other social service programs.

Action Plan:

Given the demographics of the town's population, there exists a substantial need to provide social services to improve the lives of its children, elderly and low to moderate income residents.

1. Provide job training to town residents
2. Provide health services and education to the senior population

3. Continue providing the elders with meals, on-site programming, volunteers to provide off-site programming
4. Provide children with meaningful after school, vacation and summer programming

Strategy 7: Encourage Environmental Awareness/Education to Citizens

(Restore and Enhance the Environment, Conserve Natural Resource)

1. Reduce the phosphorus content of incoming sewage by encouraging consumers to use low or no phosphorus containing detergents and dish washing products
2. Work with the Board of Health develop and implement regulations regarding grease traps and the discharge of grease to the sanitary system
3. Prepare an Emergency Dispensing Site Plan
4. Educate residents, local official and developers on stormwater management

Conclusion

Town of Northbridge has assembled available information to assist in the development of the Community Development Strategy. Northbridge has taken the strategies and priorities gathered from this information into consideration, while developing its list of development priorities. A list of “highest priorities” was created for the town to follow in addressing the community’s ever changing needs. The town is utilizing a targeted approach to address its community development needs. Upon reviewing the data available for the town’s census tracts, it became apparent that the top two areas that should be targeted are the New Village and Rockdale, respectively. Census tract information indicates that the New Village Target Area (NVTA) has the highest percent of low to moderate income persons of all the census tracts within the town. In addition, there is a high rate of housing built prior to 1940.

The New Village Target Area (NVTA) has been a priority for the past 4 to 5 years. Targeting has proved to be beneficial and effective. The town previously targeted the two downtown business districts of Rockdale and Whitinsville for revitalization. These areas have since seen significant private investment. After great success in our downtown business districts, the town decided to target the New Village area that has the highest percent of low to moderate income persons and that has an older housing stock.

In order for the town to provide best planning practices and much needed services and conveniences for maintaining a high quality of life for its residents, the following projects and activities have been prioritized in order of urgency of community development need: 1) Revitalization Effort in the “New Village” to include new sidewalks, roadway, drainage, façade improvements, 2) Revitalization Effort in Rockdale section of Northbridge to include new sidewalks, roadway, drainage, façade improvements, 3) Replacement of School roofs 4) Update the Master Plan, 5) Implement the Community Development Plan, 6) Revise zoning, subdivision and building regulations to ensure overall residential quality, desired design character, and affordable housing opportunities for all income groups, 7) convert existing housing units into affordable housing units, 8) Provide job training to town residents, 9) Provide health services and education to senior population, 10) Improve municipal buildings & facilities, and (11) educate the residents, local officials and developers on phosphorus reduction, stormwater management, green-energy and other environmentally-friendly initiatives.