

TOWN OF NORTHBRIDGE

43D -Expedited Permitting Initiatives Technical Assistance Grant (TAG)

2011 -FISCAL YEAR END REPORT

NORTHBRIDGE COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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The Town of Northbridge received its 43D funding in February of 2009; in total the town received \$99,900.00 for eight (8) expedited permitting initiatives –which included five (5) Local tasks and three (3) Regional projects. At the time, municipalities were eligible for additional funding for Regional projects -this increased the grant funding allocation up to \$100,000.00 for a single municipality.

This 2011 Fiscal Year End Report provides an overview & status of the various 43D initiatives undertaken by Northbridge since the designation of Priority Development Sites and receipt of the State’s Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) funds.

The report is divided into six (6) sections: I -Municipal Self-Assessment Checklist; II -Status/Overview of TAG Funded Initiatives; III -TAG Balance Sheet; IV -Overview/Summary of Priority Development Sites (PDS); V -Best Practices Model for Streamlined Local Permitting; and VI -Request to Extend & Redirect remaining funds.

Northbridge's 43D Program
I -Municipal Self-Assessment Checklist

Provided below is an updated Municipal Self-Assessment Checklist for Northbridge.

Improving Communication with Permit Applicants	In Place	Planned
Single Point of Contact	☑	
User's Guide to Local Permitting	☑	
Permitting Flow Charts & Checklists	☑	
Clear Submittal Requirements	☑	
Concurrent Applications	☑	
Combined Public Hearings		
Pre-Application Process	☑	
Project Technical Review Team	☑	
Regularly Scheduled Inter-Departmental Meetings		☑
Physical Proximity to Professional Staff	☑	
Development Agreements		
Encourage the Use of 3 rd Party Consultants	☑	
Standardizing the Permitting Process	In Place	Planned
Predictable Impact Fees		
Objective Criteria for Special Permits, As-of-Right Zoning & Master Plans	☑	
Effective Use of Site Plan Approval	☑	
Two-Tier Assessment Process		☑
Delegating Minor Decisions to Staff		☑
Uniform Timelines, Notifications, and Appeals		☑

Resources for Improving Local Permitting Performances	In Place	Planned
Adequate Staffing		☑
Create Culture of Training		☑
Maximize the Municipal Website	☑	
Electronic Permit Tracking System		☑
Create an Electronic Filing Process for Permit Applicants		☑
Planning	In Place	Planned
Selecting Preferred Sites for Commercial or Industrial Development		☑
Designating Priority Development Sites Under Chapter 43D	☑	
Pre-Permitting for Selected Sites		☑

Northbridge's 43D Program

II -Status/Overview of TAG Funded Initiatives

As noted, Northbridge received funding for eight (8) initiatives, provided below is a status and overview on the following TAG funded initiatives: *Best Development Practices Guidebook; Zoning Bylaw Review & Assessment; Sewer Infrastructure Assessment –Linwood; Permitting Guidebook; GIS Software and Maintenance & Training; Sewer Extension Feasibility Study; and Regional Roadway projects.*

LOCAL INITIATIVES

Best Development Practices Guidebook

Completed in December 2009, this comprehensive resource guide, intended to improve the quality of development and expedite the permitting process in Northbridge was prepared by Pare Corporation (PARE) and is available in hardcopy or electronically on the town's website.

The Best Development Practices Guidebook describes the required and preferred design, construction and maintenance practices relating to Site Planning, Landscape Design, Stormwater Management, and Erosion and Sediment Control applicable for a range of uses and development scales. The guidebook also includes strategies focused on compact development; to protect valuable wetland and upland habitats, reduce exposure of soils to erosion, and encourage energy-efficient design. The guidebook includes sample diagrams and typical design details; provided in an easy to read and user-friendly format. Both the Planning Board and Conservation Commission played a role in shaping and drafting this resources document.

The guidebook has been very well received; by the municipality, residents, and applicants & designers alike.

Zoning Bylaw Review & Assessment

Prepared by our Regional Planning Agency –Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC); this zoning bylaw assessment provides Northbridge with Expedited Permitting Regulations; permit application templates, permitting flow charts, clear submittal requirements and checklists to assist in expediting the permitting process in Northbridge.

Prior to local adoption and the approval/designation of Priority Development Sites, the Community Planning & Development Office had previously initiated a pre-application process for many of the town's land-use related permits. As part of the Zoning code; Northbridge has

provisions for all site development projects: Standards for Review & Timelines for review by other boards (21-days for as-of-right and 45-days for special-permit applications) these provisions are not exclusive to PDS but for all projects/site development plan reviews in town.

A Technical Review Committee (TRC) consisting of the Town Planner, Building Inspector, DPW Director, Fire Chief, Highway Superintendent, Sewer Superintendent, and representatives from the Board of Health, Conservation Commission and the Whitinsville Water Company have been meeting with applicant/engineers prior to the adoption of 43D provisions. The purpose of the TRC review is to identify applicable local provisions & permits necessary, discuss potential site design issues and to clarify procedures prior to filing application (and during the formal review process). Applicants/Engineers, as well as, would-be applicants are encouraged to meet with the Technical Review Committee; arrangements are made through the Community Planning & Development Office.

Sewer Infrastructure Assessment –Linwood

Completed in October 2009, this report prepared by Weston & Sampson Engineering provides an assessment of the wastewater infrastructure for Linwood (village of Northbridge); the study area is within the proximity/project area of one of the designated Priority Development Sites (PDS) in Northbridge (Linwood Mill).

The sewer assessment includes an analysis of the existing public sewer infrastructure and hydraulic capacity, as well as discussion and guidance on potential upgrades and recommendations.

Permitting Guidebook

Prepared in-house, this comprehensive “land use” permitting guidebook offers a variety of information aimed to help streamline the permitting process for all land use applications in Northbridge. More than just a municipal directory; this 60-plus page resource offers a step-by-step guidance on land use permitting in Northbridge; includes department overviews; frequently asked questions; permitting requirements; fee schedules; and applicable land-use zoning and permitting provisions. The guidebook includes development guidance for new construction; detailing the various types of permits and permitting authorities responsible.

The Northbridge Permitting Guidebook was created for hardcopy distribution, as well as for viewing online; the electronic-version includes hyperlinks to the various department webpages, application/forms and staff emails.

GIS Software and Maintenance & Training

With TAG funding, Northbridge purchased an ArcView Single-user license through ESRI (Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc); prior to this the town had limited GIS capabilities. The town, in working with its Regional Planning Agency (CMRPC), updated/amended the Zoning Map to a digital-format (previous was hand drawn & not formally updated since 1996); the town with municipal funds also purchased new orthoimage base maps as part of the States buy-up program (October 2009).

In addition to purchasing the GIS software, Northbridge contracted with CMRPC to update roadway layouts, zoning, mapping of stormwater outfalls, and installation of other data layers for the town. Prior to purchasing the GIS software, the Northbridge Planning Board required approved subdivisions to include electronic-versions of roadways and subdivision lots. As part of this program CMRPC has also created new data layers and provided training to the Town Planner, DPW Director and the IT –Systems Administrator.

REGIONAL INITIATIVES

Sewer Extension Feasibility Study

In partnership with the Town of Sutton, a Sewer Extension Feasibility Study was completed in February 2010; prepared by Graves Engineering, Inc. this study evaluates the existing sanitary sewer system within the study area of two (2) designated Priority Development Site(s) within Northbridge & Sutton, MA. The report investigates the feasibility of extending sanitary sewer within both towns near the intersection of Route 146 and Main Street (Northbridge)/Whitins Road (Sutton). The proposed extension would connect areas in both towns to the existing sanitary sewer in Sutton, MA. A conceptual layout plan was developed, which includes locating & sizing gravity sewer; sewer pump stations; and force mains. The study also includes cost estimates for design, permitting, and construction (to both new and existing wastewater infrastructure).

Northbridge’s existing sanitary sewer system is approximately 1.5 miles from the study area. Extending the municipal system would require extensive construction and is considered price prohibited; the wastewater system in Sutton is approximately ½ mile away.

Completion of this feasibility study provides Northbridge and Sutton with valuable build-out and capacity information; which will not only assist in expediting the permitting process of future economic development sites but may also position the towns to pursue possible funding through the State’s MassWorks Infrastructure program.

Regional Roadway Projects

Two (2) regional roadway projects were also funded with the Technical Assistance Grant: partnering with the towns of Sutton and Douglas (East-side roadway & West-side). Provided below is an overview of the regional projects.

East-side Roadway Study –Completed in June of 2011 by Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC); this regional initiative with the Town of Sutton evaluates the existing roadway infrastructure within the study area. The same subject area of the Sewer Extension Feasibility Study.

As described in Northbridge’s TAG application, the towns of Northbridge, Douglas, Sutton, and Uxbridge, MA had been working together in support of and to promote economic development along the Route 146 Corridor. This regional effort focuses primarily on land use development, transportation patterns and infrastructure improvements within a 4-town study area. As a result of extending the dialogue

beyond town boundaries Northbridge and Sutton rezoned certain properties to more compatible designations; this in turn may result in reducing the potential difficulties in permitting land use development proposals within two municipalities.

In addition to having complementary zoning, Northbridge and Sutton also recognized it was equally important to understand and identify transportation patterns to further promote economic development and protect existing neighboring land uses. The preparation of the study also allowed the towns to take input and comments from the neighbors. Identify potential issues and perhaps understand in advance of a site development application concerns expressed.

To that end the East-side Roadway Study was prepared; the report evaluated the roadway infrastructure of Main Street/Whitins Road (Northbridge/Sutton) and Lasell Road/Oakhurst Road (Northbridge/Sutton). The roadway study includes: general description & evaluation of existing conditions; land-use; traffic data; identifies resource areas; sightlines; turning radius; and lane widths, as well as potential layout alternatives for a new connector road or roadway improvements.

Reporting began with a public workshop/forum held in June of 2009; where landowners and other interested parties met with town staff and the consultant to discuss existing traffic patterns and how potential buildout of the undeveloped parcels may affect vehicular movement within this area. A follow-up public meeting was convened in January 2010; the purpose of workshop was to discuss the findings of the roadway study and to review a series of alternative layout scenarios.

West-side Roadway –This regional initiative (with Douglas & Sutton) is currently ongoing and includes obtaining definitive subdivision approvals for a connector road along the westerly side of Route 146.

75-90% complete -To date the contracted engineering firm (Guerriere & Halnon Inc.) has completed all the necessary survey work, delineated the wetland & resources areas and prepared definitive subdivision plan for filing (in Sutton & Douglas). The Northbridge Planning Board has reviewed and determined a separate filing would not be required for same in Northbridge. Upon approvals from Sutton and Douglas the Northbridge Planning Board will vote and endorse plan Approval Not Required; pursuant to MGL CH 41 Sec 81P. The proposed subdivision requires a curb-cut in Northbridge.

As a result of a pending sale of one of the subject properties (in Douglas, MA) the formal filing of the Definitive Subdivision has been delayed; in an effort to facilitate definitive submissions in the meantime the layout plan prepared may be revised to phase the project and include a temporary cul-de-sac. It is anticipated filing with Douglas & Sutton may be submitted within the next 2-weeks; with approvals 6 to 8 weeks thereafter. The proposed curb-cut (subdivision roadway) in Northbridge has already received recommendations from the Northbridge Safety Committee and will require a permit prior to construction.

Given the circumstances noted above it is Northbridge's understanding Sutton will look to redirect and transfer uncommitted TAG funds from its Task I –GIS; these funds will be used to prepare the revised layout. A request of extension (6-months) will also be sought for this regional project. Like the regional Sewer Extension Feasibility Study, this project (definitive subdivision) has the potential to position the towns to pursue possible funding through the State's MassWorks Infrastructure program.

Northbridge's 43D Program
III -Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) Balance Sheet

Northbridge -43D Grant Funds (Expedited Permitting Initiatives)

TASK	Consultant	Status	Original Budget	Committed Funds	Remaining Balance	
LOCAL INITIATIVES						
1	Best Development Practices Guidebook	PARE Corporation	100% (complete)	\$20,000.00	\$14,945.00	\$5,055.00
2	Zoning Bylaw Review & Assessment	CMPRC -Worcester	100% (complete)	\$22,000.00	\$15,500.00	\$6,500.00
3	Infrastructure Assessment -Linwood	Weston Sampson Eng	100% (complete)	\$12,400.00	\$7,300.00	\$5,100.00
4	Permitting Guidebook -Northbridge	In-house (Northbridge)	100% (complete)	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
5	MassGIS Software & Maintenance/Training	ESRI (software)/CMRPC (maintenance/training)	100% (complete)	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$0.00
Sub total:				\$59,900.00		\$16,655.00

TASK	Consultant	Status	Original Budget	Committed Funds	Remaining Balance	
REGIONAL INITIATIVES						
R1	Regional Roadway Projects Douglas/Northbridge/Sutton			\$27,500.00		
	6A. Roadway Analysis	CMRPC -Worcester	100% (complete)	\$6,500.00	\$0.00	
	6B. Roadway	Guerriere & Halnon, Inc	75 to 90% (complete)	\$23,240.00*	\$0.00	
R2	Sewer Extension Feasibility Study (Sutton/Northbridge)	Graves Engineering, Inc	100% (complete)	\$12,500.00	\$5,250.00	\$5,010.00*
Sub total:				\$40,000.00		

*Redirected \$2,240 from Task R2 balance (June/July 09)

Local Initiatives Balance:	\$16,655.00
Regional Initiatives Balance:	\$5,010.00
Remaining uncommitted Funds:	\$21,665.00

Northbridge's 43D Program

IV -Overview/Summary of Priority Development Sites

In the Spring of 2008, Northbridge Town Meeting voters approved three (3) Priority Development Sites (PDS). However, given the site readiness of one of the properties (2040 Providence Road) the Interagency Permitting Board (IPB) elected to designate two of the sites in Northbridge, MA at the time. Provided below is a general overview and status of the Priority Development Sites approved in Northbridge, MA.

Linwood Mill (PDS) –Located at 670 Linwood Avenue, the subject property is included in the Linwood Cotton Mill National Register Historic District. The mill complex encompasses upwards of 120,000 square-feet; serviced by public water & sewer and within the town's Industrial –One zoning district. As described in the TAG application, Town Meeting action taken in 2004 adopted a Historic Mill Adaptive Reuse District (Overlay) which included the Linwood Mill and the John Whitin Mill. The intent of this zoning provision is to promote economic development by encouraging the preservation, reuse and renovation of underutilized or abandoned historic mill properties by allowing and encouraging mixed-use development.

In May of 2009, the Whitin Mill (Priority Development Site) was permitted for a mixed-use project; including residential units and approximately 20,000 square-feet of commercial/office retail space. This designated Priority Development Site (PDS) was the first to be permitted in Northbridge, MA. Resulting in a successful and coordinated effort, the Northbridge Planning Board granted approval(s) [for Site Development Plan approval & Special Permit] in less than 30-days (opened on May 26, 2009 / approved on June 23, 2009). Additionally, the Conservation Commission convened and made separate determination for same well within the 180-day requirement, in fact the Conservation Commission issued its Orders of Condition within 2-weeks of the formal submission (opened June 10, 2009, closed June 24, 2009 & issued July 08, 2009).

Given the fact the project was a re-development proposal of a predominant site (historic mill) many concerns had previously been communicated and understood well in advance of project consideration. In addition to being a designated PDS the site is also an Economic Opportunity Area. The property had been vacant (more or less) and in disrepair beyond the past two decades. Local permitting [of the site development plan approvals & special permit] as a whole proceeded very well. The types of local approvals that would be required for the project were identified as well as the issuing authorities, prior to filing.

[Commentary] –It is one thing to have municipal boards committed to expedite the permitting process and another to have the developer; more specifically the engineer willing and able to commit to same. In this instance all parties were committed to expediting this project.

For the Linwood Mill project by the time of formal submission; the final design plans were prepared addressing concerns raised in the Technical Review meetings (pre-application review). As noted before Northbridge had already established a Technical Review process; additionally the town has a Safety Committee that reviews proposed site development projects regularly in conjunction with local permitting. For reasons mentioned above; it made sense for Northbridge to designate this site as a PDS.

Upon completion of the Linwood Sewer Infrastructure Assessment (TAG funded report -described above) copies of same were distributed to the owner/applicant of the Linwood Mill project; meetings convened and the necessary improvement and upgrades were identified for the permitted mixed-use project.

Main Street Properties (PDS) –Consisting of five (5) properties; the Priority Development Site is situated adjacent to Route 146 along Main Street; abutting a Walmart (built in 2007) and National Grid Distribution site (built in 2005/06). The parcels are located in the Business –Three Zoning District and total ±4.3 acres; it is unlikely the parcels will be (re)developed individually; a number of the properties remain for sale.

The Sewer Extension Feasibility Study and East-side Roadway study completed as part of Northbridge’s TAG will benefit these subject properties. Additionally, the State’s Site Finder form -Massachusetts Site Finder (MassEcon) and information regarding same was forwarded to property owners following State designation and receipt of the TAG funds.

2040 Providence Road –Subject property was approved locally as a Priority Development Site (PDS) in the Spring of 2008; however was not approved/designated by the State’s Interagency Permitting Board. Understanding IPB’s position regarding “site readiness” the town, in working with the property owner nominated and awarded Federal Brownfields Assessment Grant to perform a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (completed in November 2010).

The subject property, a former gas station/auto salvage yard consists of +25 acres on Route 122 in Northbridge (Rockdale, MA –village of). The property also includes extensive wetland resource areas (extends to the banks of the Blackstone River) and within the town’s Floodway/Floodplain. In January of 2007 the subject property had received local approval(s) for an office/retail building; however due to the declining economy and condition of the site; this redevelopment never materialized.

The Phase I Environmental Site Assessment completed in January 2011 by Fuss & O’Neill; federal grant funding made available to conduct environmental assessment to facilitate property reuse and redevelopment. Northbridge recognizes this as a critical element in the future redevelopment and site readiness of this property.

Submission of a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment application (Federal Brownfields Assessment Grant) for the property is currently being drafted. The town continues to explore opportunities to assist in the redevelopment of this site.

Northbridge's 43D Program

V -Best Practices Model for Streamlined Local Permitting

Provided below is an overview of other local expedited permitting initiatives since 2008. The following is taken from the “Best Practices Model for Streamlined Local Permitting” guidebook prepared by the Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (November 2007).

(#10) Physical Proximity of Professional Staff -In November 2010, Northbridge officially relocated its land-use departments to one centralized location to what is now known as, the Aldrich School –Town Hall Annex. Prior to this, the Health Department was located in the Northbridge Town Hall (7 Main Street) and the other permitting offices (Building Department, Zoning Board, Conservation Commission, and Planning Office) were located within the Police Station building (21 Piedmont Street); some 1 ½ miles away from the Town Hall. The Aldrich School –Town Hall Annex is located directly across the street from the Northbridge Town Hall (Whitinsville, MA –village of).

The siting of these departments at one location has increased communications between the land-use departments and improved efficiency in expediting local permitting (our 1-stop-shop land-use permitting destination). Approximately \$50,000.00 of municipal funds was spent to upgrade/renovate the Aldrich School building which had been vacant for a number of years after the school closed its doors.

(#14) Objective Criteria for Special Permits, Of-Right Zoning, and Master Plans –the Town of Northbridge is currently working on a Master Plan update (in-house); this update will include a review of the existing permitting provisions which presently included standards and criteria for by-right and special permit applications. Additionally, the Site Evaluator Guide prepared by Moran, Stahl & Boyer (October 2008) has been reviewed as part of the town Master Plan Update (currently ongoing).

(#21) Maximize the Municipal Website -The town's website(s); specifically the Community Planning & Development, Conservation Commission, Building Department, and Board of Health sites have undergone major overhauling since adoption of MGL CH43D. Today, in addition to listing names of the elected officials, posting meeting dates and contact information, these land-use related websites include electronic-copies of permit applications; bylaw provisions; meeting minutes; guidance documents; and other helpful links and downloadable resources to assist in the permitting process.

(#22 & #23) Electronic Permit Tracking System / Electronic Filing Process -Northbridge has coordinated and met with a number of vendors (informational presentation) to explore options on electronic filing and permitting databases. Although, the town finds its current permitting process to be very efficient and streamlined, Northbridge is looking into ways to enhance its data sharing capabilities. The town is aware of the

permitting software offered by the State (prepared by neighboring community of Grafton, MA) and is exploring this option; however to implement in-house would be a very time intensive undertaking.

(#24 & #26) Selecting Preferred Sites for Commercial or Industrial Development / Pre-permitting for Selected Sites

As noted above, in addition to the TAG funded initiatives the town also utilized municipal funds to further enhance its GIS; updating the town ortho-imagery; inputting new roadway and subdivision data, zoning district updates, and other data layers from MassGIS. The ability to creating these base maps has been a tremendous advancement for Northbridge. However not having parcel-based Assessor data is a huge shortcoming for this type of resource. The town's ability to analyze a specific site for potential development or pre-permitting is somewhat limited. As part of the town's Master Plan update will include expedited permitting initiatives specifically; Best Practices #24 & #26; to be included in the Action Plan.

Northbridge’s 43D Program
VI -Request to Extend & Reprogram TAG Balance

For reasons described in Section II –Status/Overview of TAG initiatives; the towns of Douglas, Northbridge and Sutton shall request a 6-month extension to complete the West-side Roadway Project (Valley Crossroads). Additionally, as a result of a number of favorable bids Northbridge has a remaining balance of \$21,665.00 in the 43D -Technical Assistance Grant (see below).

Task I –Best Development Practices Guidebook

TAG Allocation: \$20,000.00
Contracted Amount: \$14,945.00
Balance: \$5,055.00

Task III –Sewer Infrastructure Assessment (Linwood)

TAG Allocation: \$12,400.00
Contracted Amount: \$7,300.00
Balance: \$5,100.00

Task II –Zoning Bylaw Review & Assessment

TAG Allocation: \$22,000.00
Contracted Amount: \$15,500.00
Balance: \$6,500.00

Regional Task (Sewer Study) –Sutton/Northbridge

*TAG Allocation: \$12,500.00
Contracted Amount: \$5,250.00
Balance: \$7,250.00 (-\$2,240.00) = \$5,010.00

**As detailed previously -the sum of \$2,240.00 was redirected from Regional Task 2 to Regional Task 1B*

TAG Account

Local Task Allocation:	\$59,900.00	Remaining Balance -Local TAG:	\$16,655.00
Regional Task Allocation:	\$40,000.00	Remaining Balance -Regional TAG:	\$ 5,010.00

Accordingly, Northbridge shall also request to redirect a portion of its (Local) Initiative TAG fund balance (the amount of \$16,600.00) to (1) purchase a multi-user license through ESRI and (2) Contract with Northbridge’s RPA –Central Massachusetts Planning Commission to create parcel-base mapping for its GIS (Digital Parcel Conversion).

- The cost to upgrades Northbridge’s ArcView Single Use to ArcView Concurrent Use (multi-user) is \$1,800.00; please find enclosed price quote from ESRI dated June 17, 2011 &
- The cost to perform the parcel base mapping (Digital Parcel Conversion) is \$14,800.00; please find enclosed price quote prepared by CMRPC along with scope of work and schedule to complete the following new local initiative “Northbridge Parcel Mapping Initiative”.

As noted herein, Northbridge received its 43D funding in February of 2009. The original TAG application to the IPB included price quotes/cost estimate for each of the 43D initiatives identified. Subsequent to the procurement process 3 out of the 5 local initiatives came in under budget, as did each of the regional projects. At the time many consulting firms perhaps were willing to submit very competitive bids to get the work.

As a result of these favorable bids Northbridge has \$16,655.00 remaining from its TAG Local Tasks and \$5,010.00 remaining in the Regional allocation. Northbridge would like the ability to reprogram the remaining fund balance of the local tasks (less \$55.00) to perform the two (2) local tasks described above (ArcView & Digital Mapping). Upon approval both initiatives may be completed within 6-months.