

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

FY 2016

TOWN OF CLINTON

INTRODUCTION

Clinton is a densely settled and diverse community, located 13 miles northeast of Worcester and 35 miles west of Boston. Only 5.7 square miles in land area, Clinton owes its unique sense of place to features such as the Wachusett Reservoir, its steep hilly terrain, historic mill buildings and workers' housing, its traditional downtown, excellent parks and public spaces, and impressive turn-of-the-century civic and institutional buildings.

The Town's population, which was 13,606 in 2010, has been remarkably constant since 1910. Despite its location near three interstate highways — I-495, I-190, and the MassPike — Clinton is somewhat removed from the region's major transportation facilities. As a result, the Town has faced limited development pressures over the past three-quarters of a century. While this relative remoteness has helped to preserve the Town's historic beauty, it has also translated into limited economic development opportunities and levels of poverty that are higher than surrounding communities.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Clinton's Community Development Strategy is informed by a series of planning documents and activities completed over the past 15 years. The Town's strategic policies, which are developed in an open, participatory process, are established by the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, The Zoning Board, The Conservation Commission, and the Office of Community & Economic Development. Major strategic objectives have been documented in the following reports and studies:

- A major update of Clinton's Zoning By-Laws in 2001;
- An ADA Transition Plan in 2002;
- An initial Community Development Strategy developed in 2004, with annual updates;
- An EO 418 Planning Document (2004)
- A Master Plan (2012)
- Priority Development Area (PDA) Assessment (2012)
- Cultural District Assessment (2012)
- An update of Clinton's Open Space and Recreation Plan (2013)
- Downtown Housing Study (2014)
- Complete Streets Study (2014)
- Downtown Sign and Façade Design Guidelines (2015)
- Downtown Cultural Resource Survey (2016)
- Downtown Parking Management Plan (2016)

Clinton's Master Plan is the Town's principal strategic document, and identifies goals and objectives for six key areas of interest: land use; economic development; housing; open space, natural and cultural resources; community facilities and services; and transportation. In addition to these targeted areas of

interest, , the Draft Plan established several major “cross- cutting” goals:

- **Restore town pride** by improving Clinton’s appearance and the quality of life for its residents;
- **Strengthen Clinton’s role as a regional economic center** by keeping existing industries and attracting new ones, providing a durable employment base, and capturing regional trade in Downtown Clinton; and
- Create a healthy, strong and cohesive community by encouraging **public participation** in the civic life of town.

The Board of Selectmen plays an integral role in setting the strategic direction for all of the above. The Board routinely discusses issues and strategies as part of its regular meetings. These meetings are broadcast on live community access television, which informs the public of the goals and objectives being established. Also, each Selectmen’s Meeting has a public comment session as part of its regular agenda, thereby allowing any citizen the opportunity to offer their input on any matter.

In its efforts to encourage citizen participation, the Town has held public hearings and meetings for each of its planning endeavors. The Town has consistently been engaged in planning and community development initiatives, and annually seeks citizen input while updating its Community Development Strategy. These forums are advertised on-line, in local newspapers, in postings at numerous public buildings, and on Facebook. In addition, a survey of community needs was conducted in 2013.

HOUSING

With median sale values and gross rents well below state and regional averages, affordable housing has always been a large share of Clinton’s housing inventory—46% of which is rental housing. The Town has continued to support and provide for housing creation—including affordable housing—through the following actions:

- Clinton’s Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO) operated the Clinton Housing Improvement Program (CHIP) for many years using CDBG Funds and Program Income. The CHIP was most recently funded by an FY11 CDBG award. This program provides much-needed funds for low and moderate income residents to repair their homes.
- The Planning Board updated the Town’s Zoning By-Laws in 2001 and has since modified the town’s zoning to encourage mixed-use development, biotech uses, and expedited permitting. In addition, the Zoning By-Law minimum lot-area requirements (12,000SF and 18,000SF) are small, and are not a meaningful barrier to residential development. The By-Law revisions also provided for Open Space Residential Development (OSRD), In-Law Accessory dwellings, and simplified Clinton’s multi-family provisions.
- The 2001 revisions positioned the Town of Clinton to manage multiple new housing projects. For instance, the Town has worked collaboratively to re-develop the historic Lancaster Mills as a mixed-use project providing 209 units of housing and 36,000sf of commercial space. In 2012, Town Meeting created a zoning overlay district for surplus church properties, which has enabled the creation of 54 new units of housing, as well as commercial space. In addition, 68 units of housing have been created –and 28 acres of Open Space preserved- by OSRD.
- In 2009, the CEDO received a CDBG-R grant to administer the Clinton Housing Authority’s elderly

housing development project on Water Street. This successful project provided electrical upgrades for the facility thereby bringing the development up to code.

- In 2014, the Town conducted a Downtown Housing Study, to examine zoning scenarios to encourage the appropriate development of housing in mixed-use buildings downtown. Further study, including a parking utilization study, will be undertaken in 2016.
- In 2014, the Town established a Distressed Properties Committee, to identify foreclosed and abandoned properties, as well as properties repeatedly cited for health code violations, and to stimulate the rehabilitation of these properties through owner action and receivership.

These programs also support The Office of Commonwealth Development’s Sustainable Development Principles of **“Concentrate Development and Mix Uses,” “Expand Housing Opportunities,”** and **“Use Natural Resources Wisely.”** In the coming years, it is a priority of Clinton to continue to provide assistance to low and moderate income homeowners through a CDBG-funded Housing Rehabilitation Program. Opportunities to partner with local lending institutions and foundations will also be evaluated and pursued. The Town may also seek to create new senior housing and will examine the viability of “live/work” space in downtown and adjacent industrial precincts.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

In 2016, Clinton will complete an update to Open Space and Recreation Plan, which was last updated in 2007. The Town’s demonstrate its commitment to protecting open space in 2007 when it passed a \$2.65M Debt-Exclusion to acquire 62-acre Rauscher Farm. To assist in the purchase, the Town received a Self-Help Grant of \$353,300, and as a condition of the grant, created a permanent Conservation Restriction on the Wekepeke Reserve, a 435-acre town-owned parcel primarily located in Sterling.

The Town’s ongoing commitment to preserve its open space is also reflected in its housing build-out strategy. Recent developments such as “The Woodlands” condominium project and the Bufton Farm Flexible Development preserve a large percentage of the overall land as open space, establishing walking trails and other amenities, and protecting existing vernal pools on the site. The Town is also pursuing other opportunities at Rauscher Farm and along the Central Mass Railroad right-of-way to expand access to open space and to recreational opportunities.

All of these plans and strategies support the Sustainable Development Principle of **“Protect Land and Ecosystems.”**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Clinton has been and continues to be pro-active in its efforts to encourage economic development in the community and revitalization of the downtown. Many steps have been taken to increase the walkability and viability of our downtown. These efforts have included:

- Completion of a comprehensive Downtown Planning Study in 2002, funded through the MCDBG program. This plan provided a comprehensive analysis of the entire downtown, including demographics and statistics that compare the downtown with the surrounding area.

- An analysis of Clinton’s economic development policies and strategies in the Master Plan. This document included strategies for the downtown and Clinton’s approximately 1,000,000 square feet of vacant mill space, as well as an analysis of other challenges that the Town faces in this area.
- Working with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, the Town has utilized DHCD’s DLTA Program to perform an evaluation of Priority Development Areas, to support the Downtown Clinton Cultural District Initiative, and to consider the zoning parameters of Downtown Housing.
- At Special Town Meeting in October 2008, voters adopted Chapter 43D and created five new Priority Development Sites. 43D procedures were adopted in 2011
- At Special Town Meeting in October 2008, Clinton voters adopted new zoning regulations that incorporate biotech zoning. The previously mentioned Priority Development Sites are the locations where this zoning has been adopted.
- Clinton has also established a Water & Sewer Enterprise fund to help address infrastructure issues in the community.
- Clinton applied for and received a MORE Jobs Grant in the amount of \$665K. These funds, were used in partnership with Nypro, Inc. to improve drainage in the area, create additional parking, and create access from the new parking area to Nypro.
- The Town has been an active participant in the establishment of Discover Clinton.
- The Town is in the process of reviewing responses to an RFP for downtown Parking, and will also issue an RFP for downtown Lighting in 2016.

Over the next three years, the Community and Economic Development Office plans to continue augmenting the walkability and viability of its downtown. A successful commercial area needs a strong series of linkages connecting residents and employees to businesses and municipal services. The CEDO will utilize Program Income, CDBG, MDI, and Massworks Infrastructure funds to undertake additional initiatives. All of these efforts support the Sustainable Development Principles of **“Increase Job and Business Opportunities,” “Make Efficient Decisions,” “Use Natural Resources Wisely”** and **“Concentrate Development and Mix Uses.”**

SOCIAL SERVICES

Clinton’s demographics reflect a community that has great diversity at both an ethnic and socio-economic level. There is a great need for services for the town’s low- and moderate-income residents, as well as for elderly residents. Some of the Town’s strategies to address these needs have included:

- Providing annual funding for WHEAT.
- Providing an extensive HiSET and ESOL program through the Clinton Adult Learning center.
- Providing a robust early childhood development program, the Clinton Early Childhood Resource Center, through the Clinton Public Schools
- Providing space to FLLAC educational consortium
- Providing job readiness and training facilities utilizing Adult Education programs, as well as

programs from MOC, the North Central Workforce Training Board, and the Department of Elder Affairs.

- Providing “Meals-On-Wheels” to disabled and elderly residents through a mix of public and private funding.
- Pursue funding to provide a combination of low-income housing and transitional housing for our low- and moderate-income citizens.
- Providing transportation services to disabled and elderly residents through the Senior Center.
- Relocation of the Senior Center to a larger and more flexible facility in 2015.

Moving forward, the Town plans to continue and augment these services. The Town plans to seek funds through the School Department, Town Meeting, MOC, the Department of Elder Affairs, and CDBG, as well as other state and federal funds. The Town will also continue to work with SMOC and United Way of Tri-County on the development of their property on High Street, where it is proposed to construct a new facility that will consolidate its activities in a central and prominent location.

These plans support the Sustainable Development Principle of “**Advance Equity**”.

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Like many communities, Clinton faces the challenge of dealing with issues relating to its aging infrastructure. Without the proper infrastructure in place, residents cannot access goods and services, and commerce will be frustrated. Through careful and thoughtful planning, the Town of Clinton has successfully addressed many infrastructure and facility issues. Due to this planning, in the past 15 years Clinton has successfully:

- Renovated the Police Station;
- Renovated Clinton Middle School;
- Constructed a new Elementary School;
- Constructed a new water filtration plant;
- Worked with MassHighway to rebuild an intersection and install new traffic lights at the Clinton Fire Station;
- Constructed a new Parks and Recreation Department facility.
- Completed a comprehensive ADA Transition Plan to serve as a blueprint for addressing barrier and access issues in municipal facilities.
- Rehabilitated an existing structure to serve as a new Senior Center
- Capped an existing landfill
- Instituted curbside, single-stream recycling
- Worked with MassDOT and National Grid to implement \$4.1 million of improvements to Water Street, including a \$350,000 debt exclusion by Town Meeting to provide enhanced sidewalks

In addition, the CEDO and the Department of Public Works (DPW) will work to identify additional opportunities to improve water lines, sewerage, roadways, and sidewalks in other areas of the community. The Town expects to pay for these improvements by utilizing a combination of local funds,

water and sewer enterprise account funds, Chapter 90 funds, and grants that would include sources such as CDBG and the Massworks Infrastructure Program.

Moving forward, the Town will include pedestrian and bicycle accommodations in future infrastructure improvements, and will also seek to re-establish public transportation. For instance, the 2016 Parking Management Study will place a strong emphasis on the pedestrian environment.

These objectives support the Sustainable Development Principle of **“Concentrate Development and Mix Uses,”** along with **“Provide Transportation Choices.”**

FY 2016 PRIORITIES

As part of the Community Development Strategy process, the Town developed the following list of projects and activities for discussion purposes.

- 1. Direct investment into the Town’s public & private infrastructure in a manner that will promote the redevelopment of commercial, industrial & mixed-use districts.**
 - a. Ongoing: Target Infrastructure Improvements, funded by Chapter 90 or other funding sources, to mixed-use districts, including residential streets within the downtown such as including Nelson, Ash, Clark, Washington, Maple, Walnut, Peirce, French, Richardson, Battista, and White Streets.
 - b. 2016: Implement phase II improvements to “pocket parks” on High Street, which were created in 2015.
 - c. 2016: Work with MRPC to identify eligible sites and implement EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant
 - d. 2016: Complete Downtown Parking and Downtown Lighting studies, and initiate implementation of recommendations.
 - e. 2016: Complete Cultural Resource Survey, which will identify properties eligible for N.R. listing or for inclusion in National Register district.
 - f. 2016: Utilize impact fee generated by Lancaster Mills development to work with owners on a viable redevelopment strategy for Bigelow Spinning Mills on Main Street.
 - g. 2017: With local businesses and institutions to finalize Cultural District Administrative Structure.
 - h. 2017: Work with MRPC and Planning Board to bring recommendations for as-of-right housing to upper floors of High Street to Town Meeting.
 - i. 2017: Seek funding to from private sources as well as CDBG to re-commence Clinton Downtown Sign and Façade Improvement Program.
- 2. Rehabilitate & preserve Clinton’s affordable housing stock through continued funding of the Clinton Housing Improvement Program.**
 - a. Ongoing: Seek CDBG funding for program
 - b. 2016-18 Work cooperatively with Fitchburg Community Development Office on outreach and implementation of HUD Lead-Based Paint Hazard Control Grant Program.
- 3. Create a connected pedestrian & bicycle environment that provides alternatives to automobile driving, encourages physical activity & creates a space for community interaction.**
 - a. Ongoing: Implement recommendations of 2014 Complete Streets Planning Survey, including Water Street Project
 - b. Ongoing: Work with Clinton Board of Health on Montachusett Healthy Communities Initiatives
 - c. 2016: Seek to implement a “Safe Routes to Schools” program at the Clinton Elementary School

- d. 2017: Seek funding to design improvements for Central Mass Rail segment
4. **Seek additional funding to re-furbish & improve Clinton’s recreational facilities & programs.**
 - a. 2016: Seek funding to repair sidewalks, parking areas, and playgrounds at Philbin Park
 - b. 2016: Implement recommendations of Central Park safety study
 5. **Implement social service programs to assist Clinton’s elderly population with health & social service needs.**
 - a. 2016: Seek funding to extend senior shuttle service to transport needy citizens to WHEAT Community Café
 - b. 2017: Work with Senior Center, WHEAT, CALC, MOC, ECRC, Clinton Hospital and others to create Social Services Master Plan
 - c. 2017: In conjunction with Trustees of Clinton Home, establish Program for Accessibility Improvements
 6. **Address Downtown Parking Issues.**
 - a. 2016: Complete Parking Management Plan and initiate implementation of recommendations
 - b. 2016: Work with DPW Director and BOS to establish definitive Downtown Maintenance Plan
 - c. 2017: Seek MassWorks funding to support rehabilitation of downtown infrastructure
 - d. 2017: Implement Way Finding
 7. **Implement social service programs that assist low & moderate-income people by providing after-school care, fuel assistance and/or health & wellness programs.**
 - a. Ongoing: Continue town assistance for WHEAT, Inc.
 - b. 2016: Assist WHEAT Inc. in relocation of service locations to High Street
 - c. 2017: Work with Senior Center, WHEAT, CALC, MOC, ECRC, Clinton Hospital and others to create Social Services Master Plan
 8. **Improve & make public facilities (such as schools, municipal buildings & recreational facilities) accessible by implementing key components of the Town’s ADA Transition Plan.**
 - a. 2016: Formulate priority list of capital improvements
 - b. 2016: Seek funding to implement recommendations of prioritized project list
 9. **Improve & expand the Town’s inventory of affordable housing.**
 - a. 2016: Work with planners to assess the viability of creating new senior housing.
 - b. 2016: Examine the viability of allowing “live/work” space in appropriate districts