

DRAFT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

FY 2013

TOWN OF CLINTON

INTRODUCTION

Clinton is a historic industrial village located 13 miles northeast of Worcester and 35 miles west of Boston. Defined by both its natural and built environment, Clinton owes its unique sense of place to features such as the Wachusett Reservoir, its steep hilly terrain, historic mill buildings and workers' housing, a Victorian-era downtown, and impressive turn-of-the-century civic and institutional buildings.

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. This has resulted in limited development pressures over the past half century. While this isolation has helped to preserve the Town's historic beauty, it has also translated into limited economic development opportunities and a higher than average poverty level for the region. Today, Clinton remains a densely settled historic town surrounded by open space and rugged natural features.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Clinton's Community Development Strategy consists of a series of planning documents and activities completed over the past decade. Reflecting the ongoing strategic direction established by the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, The Zoning Board, The Conservation Commission, and the Office of Community & Economic Development, these have included:

- A major update of Clinton's Zoning By-Laws in 2001;
- An ADA Transition Plan in 2002;
- A Community Development Strategy developed in 2004, with annual updates;
- An EO 418 Planning Document (2004) that identified a series of goals and strategies focusing on
- Affordable Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, and Open Space/Conservation;
- An update of Clinton's Open Space and Recreation Plan (2012)
- A Master Plan (Final Draft, 2012)
- Community-wide Survey of Senior Needs (2010)
- Priority Development Area(PDA) Assessment (2012)
- Cultural District Assessment (2012)

Clinton's Master Plan 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 goals, 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 has played 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. The vast majority of these meetings are broadcast on live community access television and keeps the public well informed 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 recent Master Plan and Open Space and Recreation planning processes included extensive citizen participation at numerous workshops and forums. The Town held two public hearings in 2007, one in April and the second in December, to solicit public input for the Master Plan. It held a public hearing on Tuesday, July 22, 2003, to gather the input of its citizens for its EO 418 Planning Document. The session was conducted by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission and included a good mix of current and former Town officials who offered their thoughts and expertise to make it an extremely successful planning session.

HOUSING

Clinton has made a major commitment to renovate and expand its affordable housing inventory. It has pursued this affordable housing strategy through the following actions:

- Clinton's Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO) operated the Clinton Housing Improvement Program for many years using CDBG Funds and Program Income. Currently, the CHIP is being funded by a CDBG award extended in 2011. Current Housing Rehabilitation projects are concentrated on Clinton's Target Area, which extends from the northern section of Clinton through the central core of the town to Fairmont and Grove Streets to the south, incorporating much of the community's oldest housing stock. This program will provide much-needed funds for low and moderate income residents to repair their homes, insuring that the Town of Clinton's housing stock will not fall into disrepair and ultimately a slum and blight condition. 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". The Town has recognized the need to continue the pursuit of these funds in many of its planning endeavors, including the Town's EO418 Community Development Strategy and the Draft Master Plan.
- The Planning Board updated the Town's Zoning By-Laws in 2001 and is poised to adopt additional revisions based on recommendations established in the 2012 Draft Master Plan.
- The 2001 revisions positioned the Town of Clinton to manage multiple new housing projects. For instance, The Woodlands, a recent housing development with 492 units, is an example of how Clinton has managed large growth in a controlled manner. In all, there are currently approximately 700 new housing units in various stages of construction, permitting or planning. These changes have had a positive impact on the Sustainable Development principle of "Concentrate Development and Mix Uses."

- 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 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 for new programs with local lending institutions will also be evaluated and pursued. The Town will also seek to provide educational programs for homeowners to help them avoid mortgage defaults and foreclosures.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Clinton is in the process of updating its Open Space Plan, which was last updated in 2007. The Town's commitment to protecting its remaining open landscapes was further demonstrated in 2007 when it passed a Proposition 2 ½ Debt-Exclusion Override to spend \$2.65M for the acquisition of the 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 of Clinton closed on this property in June 2008 and is currently seeking funds through the DCR's Recreational Trail Grant Program to construct trails on the site

The Town's ongoing commitment to preserve its open space is also reflected in its housing build-out strategy. The Town of Clinton consistently requires affordable housing and open space protection in all housing development plans. 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 grants such as Rails-to-Trails.

All of these plans 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. 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 and to support the Downtown Clinton Cultural District Initiative.
- At Special Town Meeting in October 2008, voters adopted Chapter 43D and created five new Priority Development Sites.

- 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.
- At Annual Town Meeting in 2011, the Town formally adopted its 43D Permitting Procedures and published its *Users Guide to Expedited Permitting*
- At Annual Meeting in 2012, the Town formally approved a Mixed-Use Overlay District Zoning By-law, specifically intended to encourage the appropriate revitalization of surplus church properties in town.
- Pursuant to the strategy outlined in the FY 2005 Community Development Strategy, DHCD awarded the Town \$777,700 to replace water lines and sidewalks in the downtown and greater downtown area. Upon the successful completion of this project, the infrastructure in this area was greatly improved. In 2008, the Town received an additional CDAG grant of \$986,000 to address additional infrastructure work in the downtown target area
- 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 be 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 completed a comprehensive ADA Transition Plan to serve as a blueprint for addressing barrier and access issues in the downtown as well as outlying areas of the community.
- The CEDO invested money to help a local business to reopen four months after a devastating fire. This effort helped to insure that a long-time successful business was able to remain open, thereby retaining jobs and avoiding a vacant lot in the heart of the downtown area.
- The CEDO loaned \$100,000 to a small business to enlarge and renovate its building, allowing the business to expand its capacity to serve more clients.
- Clinton recently completed the construction of a \$13,000,000 water filtration plant, which will insure its citizens and businesses will receive the cleanest possible water. This reflects a greater desire for the Town of Clinton to upgrade its water infrastructure as part of its commitment that clean water will not need to flow through 100+ year-old pipes.
- In 2002, the Town completed a streetscape project that covered approximately 40% of the downtown area. This project, funded by a combination of CDBG and local funds, was a major first step in upgrading downtown infrastructure.
- Currently, the Town is assisting with efforts to reinvigorate the non-profit organization, Uptown, Inc. This group has served as an independent body of community activists and business people to focus on the needs of the business community and implement programs to address those needs. Clinton's Director of Community and Economic Development serves as a member of the Board of Directors of this organization.
- Currently, the Town is assisting members of Discover Clinton, a downtown merchant's association dedicated to enhancing activity in downtown Clinton through event Planning and common marketing initiatives.
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Over the next three years, the Community and Economic Development Office plans to utilize Program Income, CDBG, 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 mentoring programs for at risk youth through CDBG funds.
- Providing annual funding for WHEAT.
- Providing programs that will assist low- and moderate-income people who are facing foreclosure due to temporary issues that render them unable to pay their mortgage.
- Providing educational programs that will teach people proper financial management and avoiding mortgage foreclosures.
- Providing an extensive GRE and ESL program through the Clinton Adult Learning center
- Providing job readiness and training facilities utilizing Adult Education programs, as well as funds from MOC 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.

Moving forward, the Town plans to continue seeking funds through the School Department, Town Meeting, MOC, the Department of Elder Affairs, and CDBG, as well as other state and federal funds to continue these types of services.

These plans will 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. Through careful and thoughtful planning, the Town of Clinton has successfully addressed many facility issues. Due to this planning, in the past 12 years Clinton has successfully:

- Renovated the Police Station;
- Renovated Clinton Middle School;
- Constructed a new High School;
- Constructed a new Elementary School;
- Constructed a new water filtration plant;
- Worked with Mass Highway to rebuild an intersection and install new traffic lights at the Clinton Fire Station
- Constructed a new Parks and Recreation Department facility.

The Town recently accepted the donation of the Clinton Home for the Aged building on Chestnut Street for use as the Clinton Senior Center. The Town has established a Senior Center Building Committee and is working with Courtstreet Architects on design of our community's new Senior Center.

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, EDF, and the Massworks Infrastructure Program.

A grass roots effort, which has been endorsed unanimously by our Board of Selectmen, has also gotten underway to lobby for the return of commuter rail service to Clinton. A non-binding referendum was placed on the May 2006 ballot, thereby allowing our citizens the opportunity to express their views on whether this option should be pursued by our state and federal representatives. This initiative was over-whelmingly supported by the voters. In the FY 2009 state budget, \$250K was approved for a feasibility study for the return of commuter rail service to Clinton.

FY 2013 PRIORITIES

While realizing that the following tasks may not be accomplished in the exact priority listed below, the Town has established the following priorities to be pursued as part of its Community Development Strategy:

1. SECURE GRANT FUNDING TO RENOVATE THE CLINTON HOME FOR THE AGED FOR A NEW SENIOR CENTER.
2. CREATE A CONNECTED PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE ENVIRONMENT THAT PROVIDES ALTERNATIVES TO AUTOMOBILE DRIVING, ENCOURAGES PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND CREATES A SPACE FOR COMMUNITY INTERACTION.
3. DIRECT INVESTMENT INTO THE TOWN'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INFRASTRUCTURE IN A MANNER THAT WILL PROMOTE THE REDEVELOPMENT OF COMMERCIAL, MIXED-USE AND UNDERUTILIZED FACTORY BUILDINGS AND SHOPPING PLAZAS.
4. IMPLEMENT SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS TO ASSIST CLINTON'S ELDERLY POPULATION WITH HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICE NEEDS.
5. IMPLEMENT SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS THAT ASSIST LOW AND MODERATE-INCOME PEOPLE WHO ARE IN TEMPORARY FINANCIAL DISTRESS THAT WILL HELP PREVENT MORTGAGE FORECLOSURES.
6. CONTINUE TO PRESERVE AND EXPAND THE TOWN'S INVENTORY OF PROTECTED OPEN SPACE.
7. IMPROVE AND EXPAND THE TOWN'S INVENTORY AFFORDABLE HOUSING.
8. REHABILITATE, PRESERVE AND EXPAND CLINTON'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING STOCK THROUGH THE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE TOWN'S HOUSING REHABILITATION PROGRAM.
9. IMPROVE AND MAKE PUBLIC FACILITIES ACCESSIBLE (SUCH AS SCHOOLS, MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES) BY IMPLEMENTING KEY COMPONENTS OF THE TOWN'S ADA TRANSITION PLAN.
10. SEEK ADDITIONAL FUNDING TO IMPROVE OFFERINGS AT RAUSCHER FARM.
11. EXPLORE THE FEASIBILITY OF THE EVENTUAL RETURN OF COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE TO CLINTON.