

FY17 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Town of Sunderland

Introduction

This Community Development Strategy summarizes the Town of Sunderland's relevant planning processes, identifies the town's most significant community development goals, and relates them to the Commonwealth's sustainable development principles. The identified goals will shape the town's future community development efforts with investment of federal, state and local resources. These goals are consistent with the priorities and needs identified through several local and regional community assessment and strategic planning processes.

Community Planning Entities

Town residents contribute to a variety of coordinated local and regional planning efforts. Needs assessments and strategic planning activities are conducted and/or facilitated by the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Economic Development Committee, Agricultural Commission, and other Town Boards and Committees. Various Town officials are also involved in needs identification and goal setting. A total of 35 area residents volunteer for these key boards and committees.

The Town is assisted in its planning and community development efforts by several regional organizations including the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), UMASS Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning Program (LARP), Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (FCRHRA) and other contracted experts.

The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the Department of Energy Resources (DOER), the Massachusetts Community Preservation Coalition (CPC), the Department of Public Health (DPH) and other state agencies and non-profits also assist the Town, providing guidance and funding to help meet community needs and goals.

Planning Processes and Documents

Community Development Plan (CDP): Sunderland's Community Development Plan, created under Executive Order 418, was completed in June 2004. The Plan emphasizes protection of source water, natural resources and open space including productive agricultural land, and encourages promotion of economic development, public transportation and affordable senior housing.

Housing Production Plan (HPP): The Town of Sunderland Housing Production Plan was approved by the Department of Housing and Community Development on February 18, 2016. The Plan's Affordable Housing Goals and Strategies are designed to increase the amount of affordable housing in Sunderland with particular consideration given to current housing stock, while still maintaining the community's character.

Source Water Protection Plan (SWPP): A comprehensive Source Water Protection Plan was adopted in February, 2008. The Plan is designed to aid in the protection of the public water system for Sunderland's wellfields.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF): The Economic Assistance Coordinating Council's Tax Increment Finance plans for Sunderland were approved in December, 2004. Three 10-year TIF agreements were endorsed by Town Meeting on April 29, 2005.

Community Preservation Act: Sunderland accepted MGL c.44B, §§3 to 7, the Community Preservation Act (CPA), at the 2009 Annual Town Meeting and by approval of a November 2010 General Election ballot question. CPA in Sunderland provides a dedicated funding source for protecting open space, providing affordable and senior housing, preserving historic assets and creating recreational land, through a 3% property tax surcharge, with specific exemptions, and state matching funds. CPA funds were first appropriated at the April 27, 2012 Annual Town Meeting for qualified community preservation purposes.

Green Communities: Sunderland's Green Communities Action Plan Report, approved by the Board of Selectmen on June 21, 2010, provides guidance to the Town in meeting "Green Communities" criteria established by MGL c.25A, §10 and furthering the Town's energy reduction goals.

Annual Town Report: The Town of Sunderland produces an Annual Report each year which contains reports from various Town boards, committees, commissions and departments. These reports detail information about town processes, highlight progress made on a number of community development and planning projects, and identify needs and priorities related to town governance, community development, health and human services, and public safety.

Regional Plans: The Town's priorities were taken into consideration during the development of the following regional plans:

- Sustainable Franklin County's A Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. This long term plan was completed in 2013 and examines the need and issues the region will be facing over the next twenty years. It recommends policies and actions that the towns may take to make the region more sustainable. The Plan was completed after an extensive public participation outreach effort.
- The Greater Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2016 Annual Report: The CEDS program is operated by the FRCOG and guides economic development activities throughout Franklin County and neighboring communities. The program is directed by a committee of 45 business and community leaders.
- Regional Transportation Plan, 2016: This plan, coordinated by the FRCOG with input from all 26 towns, promotes ways to develop transportation alternatives to the automobile, while at the same time supporting the improvement and more efficient use of traditional facilities.
- Community Action Plan, 2015-2017: This plan describes the needs of people with low incomes from our service area, as well as an internal evaluation of the Community Action agency's functioning. It then states the agency's plans for October 1, 2015, through September 30, 2017.
- Connecticut River Scenic Farm Byway Corridor Management Plan, 2016: The purpose of this project, coordinated by the FRCOG with input from the 6 towns along the byway, is to balance historic, cultural, agricultural, and natural resources with travel-related economic development appropriate for each of the communities. The plan provides Sunderland and other Connecticut River towns with planning goals and strategies and access to Federal Highway funding for implementation of activities. The plan was originally written in 1998, but was updated in 2016.

Consistency with Sustainable Development Principles

The Town of Sunderland is committed to the principles of sustainable development. The Town's activities, policies, and programs are consistent with these principles, including the following:

Protect Land and Ecosystems: The Sunderland Conservation Commission and Agricultural Commission continue to identify agricultural parcels for permanent protection, and the Recreation Committees continues to seek passive recreation opportunities which utilize the Town's natural resources. For example, the Town entered into an agreement in 2008 to purchase an APR on 6.3 acres on Silver Lane in the Agricultural District, and contracted with an engineering firm to design a boat ramp at the Connecticut River. The Town also protects its land and ecosystems through its Transfer of Development Rights, Wetlands and Right-to-Farm bylaws, and the Community Preservation Act.

Expand Housing Opportunities: The Town established a Housing Committee in March 2008 and has been working towards the construction of affordable senior housing at 120 North Main Street, including the creation of a market study and preliminary design studies in 2015. In addition, the Town has amended its bylaws to contain inclusionary zoning provisions, and has conducted studies through technical assistance to identify approaches to securing permanent affordability in existing housing.

Increase Job and Business Opportunities: In 2015, the Sunderland Economic Development Committee completed a Business Guide to Sunderland and also submitted recommendations to the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen regarding suggested regulation changes to make Sunderland more business-friendly. Creation of a Village Center zoning district, which will provide additional commercial opportunities while maintaining the character of the community, was approved at the 2012 Annual Town Meeting.

Promote Clean Energy: The Town promotes clean energy in many ways. It has equipped most town buildings with motion light sensors and programmable thermostats. It has also installed mechanical seal pumps in its wastewater treatment plant to conserve water. The Sunderland Public Library is powered through a 14-well geothermal system, and the Elementary School and Public Safety Complex have received energy management system upgrades through an energy performance contract. The Town received Green Communities designation in 2012 and issued a Solar Project RFP in June 2012 for potential large-scale solar development to provide electricity to municipal buildings. This project is still proceeding although is currently delayed in the permitting process by Eversource Electricity.

Provide Transportation Choice: The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority runs fare-free fixed-route public transportation to and from Amherst. Transit service is also provided on weekends and holidays with a reduced frequency. These PVRTA buses are equipped with bicycle racks to accommodate two to three bicycles. Sunderland has placed bicycle racks at strategic locations in town to encourage bicycling as a primary means of non-motorized transportation, and has also designated a Park & Ride lot in the village center, close to public transit. In addition, the Community Pathways Committee was formed in 2015 to improve Sunderland's active transportation infrastructure access to community resources.

Resources

Sunderland continues to address its community needs and priorities using a variety of local, regional, state, and national resources including:

- Local property taxes, CPA Surcharge and state match
- Education and unrestricted general government state aid, library programs, and special status exemption funds
- Technical assistance and grants from regional organizations including the FRCOG, PVPC, Franklin County CDC, Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, and Solid Waste Management District Federal.
- State grant and loan funding, and technical assistance through the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, MassDOT, Department of Conservation & Recreation and other state agencies.
- Federal grant and loan funding through the US Department of Agriculture, US Department of Housing and Community Development, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Highway Scenic Ways program, and other federal agencies.
- Private foundations, non-profit organizations and higher education institutions such as Mass Housing Partnership, Kestrel Trust, Franklin Land Trust and the University of Massachusetts
- Volunteer labor and donated materials
- Community fundraising activities

Strategic Action Plan

The planning processes described above have resulted in specific goals and recommendations that the Town will undertake in the next 3-5 years. Priorities, projects, and resources are described in the relevant planning documents. The following Priority Project List describes some of the Town's specific goals, funding methods to meet them and comments on the status of the goals.

Sunderland Community Development Strategic Action Plan – Priority Project List						
Priority	Timeline	Location	Project	Project Description	Funding Sources	Comments
1	Ongoing	Town wide	Housing Rehabilitation	Provide resources to assist low and moderate income residents to improve conditions in existing housing.	CDBG	
1	Ongoing	Town wide	Encourage affordable housing	Conduct planning, site feasibility, design, and other activities to support development of and/or create community housing	CPA, State funds	In progress
1	Ongoing	Town wide	Senior Service Needs	Support the Sunderland Council on Aging, Meals on Wheels program, Food Pantry, Fuel Assistance Program and other social service programs to meet the needs of the Town's seniors	CDBG, Town funds, volunteers and private funds	
1	2017-2019	Town wide	Comprehensive Community Development Plan	Continue to update Town's (1974) Master Plan to identify community needs and short-term objectives, and set long term goals	FRCOG, CPA, Town funds, state funds	In progress
1	2017-2019	Town wide	Revise zoning format	Revise the format of the zoning bylaws so that they are more user-friendly	FRCOG, Town funds, State funds	Initial assessment has begun.
1	2017-2018	Town wide	Revise zoning to encourage economic dev	Revise zoning bylaws based on the Economic Development Committee's recommendations	Town funds, State funds, FRCOG	
1	2018-2020	Town wide	Revise zoning to encourage affordable housing	Draft inclusionary zoning provisions	DHCD Peer-to-Peer, CPA, Town funds, FRCOG,	
1	2017-2018	Town wide	Revise zoning to encourage affordable housing	Revise zoning bylaws to explicitly allow accessory apartments	Town funds, State funds, FRCOG	
1	2017-2018	Town wide	Site solar energy systems on Town properties	Purchase or contract with 3 rd party to install solar energy systems on town properties to provide solar-generated electricity to Town buildings	Town funds, Green Communities, private funds	In progress

Priority	Timeline	Location	Project	Project Description	Funding Sources	Comments
1	2019-2021	Town Center	Reconstruct North Main Street surface and infrastructure	Reconstruct road, sidewalks and collapsing storm drains along Rt. 47 (North Main St.) in Village Center. \$1.5-\$2 million estimated project cost	Town funds, State funds, Federal funds, FRCOG, CDBG	
1	2017-2020	Town wide	Open Space & Recreation Protection	Update 1994 Open Space & Recreation Plan	State funds, CPA, non-profit funds, FRCOG	
1	Ongoing	Town wide	Energy Conservation and Efficiency	Provide education and promote weatherization and energy-smart home renovations for Town residences	Green Communities, private funds	
1	Ongoing	Town wide	Open Space Connection	Connect current open space areas to create continuous wildlife corridors	APR, CPA, private funds	
1	Ongoing	Town wide	Open Space Protection	Protect certain land for conservation, agricultural recreation, and forestry purposes	APR, CPA, State funds, private funds	In progress
1	2017-2019	Town wide	Wellhead Protection	Delineate Zone II Wellhead (WHPA) protection areas	Town/District funds, State funds	
1	2019-2021	Town wide	Source Water Protection	Update 2008 Source Water Protection Plan	Town/District funds, State funds, non-profit funds	
1	Ongoing	Regional	Senior Center	Continue to work with regional partners to build a senior center ideally situated and equipped to serve Sunderland, Whately and Deerfield seniors	CDBG, State funds, Town funds	Regional senior survey completed 2012
2	Ongoing	Town wide	Senior and Disabled Paratransit	Provide paratransit and Med-Ride opportunities in Franklin County for Sunderland seniors and disabled residents	CDBG, State funds	Sunderland is served by PVTA, while other FC towns use FRTA
2	2019-2021	Town Center	Reconstruct Sidewalks	Reconstruct sidewalks on N & S Main Streets to promote pedestrian access within the Town Center	State funds, Town funds, CDBG, FRCOG	

Priority	Timeline	Location	Project	Project Description	Funding Sources	Comments
2	Ongoing	Town wide	Revitalize commercial properties	Revitalize established, underutilized commercial properties to attract business and promote economic development opportunities	Town funds, State funds, private funds, CDBG	
2	2018-2020	Town wide	Encourage Economic Development	Streamline the local permitting process	Town funds, State funds	
3	2017-2020	Town Center	Design & Construct Riverfront area	Design and construct boat ramp and pedestrian-friendly area along a portion of the Connecticut River as a destination in the Town center	FRCOG, State funds, Town funds, Federal funds	Boat Ramp design completed 2012
3	2017-2021	Town Center	Water System Improvement	Old Amherst Rd. water lines are aging (near 100 years old) and will need replacement	Town/District funds, State funds, CDBG	
3	2017-2021	Town wide	Create Sidewalk Access	Install sidewalks on commercial connectors to promote pedestrian access to destinations & transit	State funds, CDBG, Town funds	
3	Ongoing	Town wide	Increase Affordable Housing	Promote the UMass Home Sharing Program among residents to defray housing costs for senior citizens and students	Town funds, State funds	
3	2019-2021	Town wide	Promote Bicycle Access	Install bicycle lanes on Rt. 47 to promote safer access for bicycle commuters within the Town	State funds, Town funds, FRCOG	
3	2019-2021	Town wide	Revise Zoning for open space	Establish a Scenic Byway Overlay District to protect scenic vistas and corridors	Town funds, State funds, FRCOG	
3	2017-2018	Town Center	Create a covered bus stop in Village Center	Create a covered PVTA bus stop with bench in the Village Center District to encourage riders to walk around the downtown	Town funds, State funds	