

Town of South Hadley Community Development Strategy *(Approved and Adopted by the South Hadley Selectboard January 6, 2009)*

Introduction

This Community Development Strategy summarizes the Town of South Hadley's recent strategic planning efforts, provides highlights of the town's relevant planning documents and identifies the town's most significant development goals. These goals will shape the town's community development efforts including the investment of public funds. South Hadley has identified its needs and goals, including projects for funding through the CDBG program, through a thorough review of its existing planning documents, reports and studies. These have all involved significant local input and are reflective of the desires of the community. The measures to accomplish these will vary according to project type but include local funding, state and federal grants, private funds and in-kind labor, materials and time.

RENAISSANCE: A Revitalization Plan for South Hadley Falls (1988)

This report identified the South Hadley Falls area as the most distressed segment of the community. Through surveys and public meetings, the planning effort identified issues confronting the South Hadley Falls area. In addition to detailing the issues facing the Falls, the report also reviewed the array of efforts underway to revitalize the area and identified some recommended options for remedying the problems. Of particular interest was that the report identified 93% of the streets and sidewalks in the Falls area needed maintenance or repair. Based, in part, on this report, the Town was successful in obtaining resources and support to undertake a major residential rehabilitation and commercial business assistance program and to rehabilitate much of the sidewalks and streets in the area. Funding for these past efforts was largely derived from the Town's CSO efforts, CDBG, and Mass Highway.

Town of South Hadley Community Action Statement (1996)

The Town's Community Action Statement (CAS) addressed all areas of the community's needs from computer technology to economic development issues. Some particularly pertinent aspects of the CAS regarding infrastructure concerns were:

- Removal of storm water from sanitary sewers in older sections of Town.
- Reconstruction of infrastructure to include development of storm drainage system master plan.

South Hadley Falls Feasibility Study (April 1998)

As Holyoke Water Power and Holyoke Gas & Electric (HG&E) pursued relicensing of the Holyoke Dam, the Town became an active participant by intervening in the process. The Town sought to have the successful licensee to invest in the South Hadley Falls area immediately surrounding the Dam. To aid its efforts, the Town engaged Balmori Associates, Inc. to develop a plan for improvements to the riverfront including revitalization of the Texon Building which lies within the South Hadley Falls area. This study recommended development of a riverfront park and redevelopment of the Texon Building into a mixed-use facility. When combined with the previous housing rehabilitation and area infrastructure improvements, the proposed investments would serve as catalysts for the South Hadley Falls revitalization.

Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Buildout Analysis (2002)

Under the direction of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA), the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) completed a Build-out Analysis for the town. The build-out analysis gave the town its first in depth look at available land, building constraints, and potential residential

growth. It laid a foundation for the in-depth community planning effort that is being followed under E.O. 418.

Pioneer Valley Regional Housing Plan – Quabbin Subregional Housing Plan (2002, revised 2003)

An outgrowth of the Pioneer Valley Regional Housing Plan developed in 1994; the subregional housing plan was created in response to Executive Order 418, in order to increase the supply of affordable housing. Using the most recent census data, information from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs buildout presentations, and a needs assessment questionnaire, eight towns in the region identified affordable housing needs and resources and agreed to location and regional housing action steps. The plan provides a “snapshot” of regional demographics and housing indicators, a description of housing needs, and recommendations for addressing those needs. The plan recommends the following actions for the subregion and South Hadley:

- Committed to make its best effort to create affordable housing units as a reasonable share of the total housing produced.
- Agreed to cooperation in the sponsorship of first-time homebuyer seminars.
- Investigate resources for technical assistance in a variety of areas including zoning bylaws, homebuyer purchase assistance, state and federal housing programs, and infrastructure development and upgrading, and greenways.
- With the assistance of the PVPC agreed to meet semi-annually to review progress on meeting the individual and community goals and to coordinate subregional initiatives.
- Maintain/modernize public housing.
- Create six units of affordable housing units (single, family, rental) per year.

The South Hadley Board of Selectmen endorsed participation in this plan at their August 27, 2002 meeting. The Town of South Hadley has been an active participant in this regional planning effort. In concert with this regional planning effort, the South Hadley Planning Board appointed an advisory committee to examine local Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Regulations to determine barriers to affordable housing and to developing affordable housing while maintaining and enhancing open space.

E.O. 418 Community Development Plan (2004)

Following completion of the build-out analysis the South Hadley Board of Selectmen contracted with the PVPC to complete the Town’s Community Development Plan. The Plan addressed four key elements: open space and resource protection, housing, economic development, and transportation. In developing the Plan the South Hadley Planning Board analyzed data related to the four elements and developed goals, objectives, and strategies to meet the Town’s most pressing needs in those areas. Some of the goals include: preserve scenic landscapes and vistas; provide a broad range of available housing including development of additional affordable housing; balance housing development and preservation of open space, recognizing the need for both; expand the commercial and industrial tax base; revitalization of the South Hadley Falls area; regional multi-modal transportation, reduction in the reliance upon single-person occupancy vehicles for personal travel.

South Hadley Comprehensive Plan (2007 - present)

South Hadley has recently contracted with Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB, Inc.) for the preparation of a Comprehensive Plan. The project will be undertaken in two phases; the Town is currently in Phase 1, with recent completion of the Housing Plan. The plan contains eight Comprehensive Plan Elements: Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, Services and Facilities, Community Design and Land Use, Cultural and Historic Resources, Natural Resources, and Open Space and Recreation. Although not formally adopted, the “draft” housing component identifies

8 goals and 11 implementation strategies which include maintenance of existing housing stock, home buyer assistance, regulatory changes, sustainable development, and updating of existing housing data.

Town of South Hadley Beachgrounds Renovation Project (2007 - present)

South Hadley received funding through an Urban Self Help Grant to renovate Beachgrounds Park located in South Hadley Falls. The funds received from the grant will expand Beachgrounds Park by .26 acres bring the total park area to 8.2 acres, provide comprehensive improvements to update and modernize the park, and furthers the communities efforts to revitalize the South Hadley Falls area.

Economic Target Designation (2007)

The Town of South Hadley Selectboard applied for designation of an Economic Target Area (ETA) for the South Hadley Falls and received approval from the State's Economic Assistance Coordinating Council in Spring 2007. The goals of the Economic Target Area for the next five years are:

- Upgrade the visual image of the South Hadley Falls Area with a focus on the commercial/industrial properties
- Expand access to improved employment opportunities for the residents of the South Hadley Falls area
- Achieve 100% occupancy of the viable commercial/industrial space in the South Hadley Falls area
- Develop a tourism program and market in the South Hadley Falls area with vacant, retail storefronts fully utilized

Economic Opportunity Area Designation (2007)

With revitalization of South Hadley Falls as a long-term goal for the Town, the Selectboard applied for Economic Opportunity Area (EOA) designation. In December 2007, the South Hadley Falls area was designated as an EOA by the State's Economic Assistance Council.

THE RANGE AND RIVER: An Open Space and Recreation Plan (2007)

The South Hadley Open Space and Recreation Plan includes a five-year plan with eight major goals:

- Support and promote both resource preservation and passive recreation along the Connecticut River and its tributaries.
- Continue protection of existing water resources including wetlands, aquifers and their recharge areas, streams, ponds and floodplains.
- Provide increased passive recreation and conservation activities in the Mount Holyoke Range.
- Increase active recreation potential for all areas of Town.
- Increase citizen participation in preserving cultural and natural resources.
- Work with current and future developers for the provision of additional open space and recreation opportunities.
- Expand conservation lands available for passive recreation.
- Promote preservation of the remaining farmland and continued farm operations.

The plan identifies fifteen specific action recommendations to be undertaken over the five-year planning period through 2012. Some of these specific recommendations provide for development of neighborhood playgrounds; provide and maintain canoe access to Stony Brook and Bachelor Brook; clean up of several Conservation land sites; establish an additional trail across the Mount Holyoke Range for hiking, riding, biking, and skiing; and expand facilities and recreational opportunities in the Beachgrounds Park.

Future Community Development Efforts

In the immediate future, the town will address the goals defined in these efforts through a variety of community development activities and through a combination of local, state, and federal funding:

Circulation and Transportation

- Consider methods to improve access to public transportation.
- Continue to repair and replace sidewalks as needed.
- Connections of streets, bike lands, and sidewalks among neighborhoods and other destinations.
- Define long-term vision for traffic mitigation that monitors traffic volume and land uses to avoid congestion
- Consider transportation connections between South Hadley Falls and the Commons/College area.

Economic Development

- Upgrade the visual image of the South Hadley Falls Area with a focus on the commercial/industrial properties.
- Expand access to improved employment opportunities for the residents of the Falls area.
- Achieve a 100% occupancy of the viable commercial/industrial space in the Falls area.
- Develop a tourism program and market in the South Hadley Falls area with vacant, retail storefronts fully utilized.

Historic and Cultural Resources

- Provide incentive programs to help homeowners preserve historic properties.
- Continue to support town cultural and historic activities.
- Increase citizen interest in local cultural and historical significance of South Hadley.
- Consider the creation of one or two local historic districts based on the study conducted by the PVPC.

Housing

- Rehabilitate existing housing to preserve neighborhoods, historic structures and affordability.
- Develop homeownership programs, particularly for low/mod-income first-time buyers.
- Through the South Hadley Housing Authority develop new housing for low/moderate income families next to Newton Manor.
- Revise local regulations to promote a diverse housing market.
- Establish incentives for developers to provide a range of housing choices.

Land Use

- Continue to modify, as necessary and appropriate, zoning and land development bylaws so as to preserve and protect the character of the town and still allow for constructive and productive growth consistent with the town's plans and policies.

Natural Resources

- Develop design and performance standards for site planning and development, especially in those key areas of town.
- Promote design guidelines and regulations to maintain scenic qualities in the landscape.

Open Space and Recreation

- Continue the development and enhancement of South Hadley's parks and recreation areas.
- Protect more land on the Holyoke Range and along the Connecticut River or its tributaries.

- Revise development regulations to improve the balance between open space and development.
- Promote preservation of the remaining farmland and continued farm operations.
- Continue to support and develop access to South Hadley's lakes, ponds, and streams.

Services and Facilities

- Continue to seek available funding to improve the infrastructure systems within the community (streets, sidewalks, water, sewer, etc.)
- Begin Infiltration and Inflow Mitigation Project.
- Continue working with HG&E and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in regards to Channel Marking, the Texon Building redevelopment, creation of a riverfront park, Cove Island and erosion control.

Consistency with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles

The Town of South Hadley's Community Development Strategy is clearly consistent with most, if not all, ten Sustainable Development Principles.

1. Concentrate Development and Mix Uses - Much of South Hadley's planning efforts are directed to redeveloping existing infrastructure, utilities, and buildings within the Falls area but also recognizes the importance of its more densely populated town center (Rte 47/116 area). This area is host to families with a mix of household incomes as well as housing and infrastructure conditions that qualify for CDBG assistance. Many of the town's planning efforts propose and promote concentrating resources and modifying zoning to encourage continued use and development of this area.

2. Advance Equity – Many of the town's strategic and community planning efforts have involved exhaustive community support. This was especially evidenced in the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee and most notably in the Comprehensive Plan committee.

3. Make Efficient Decisions – Although the town desires to maintain a small town character, it realizes the importance of growth and development and has not imposed onerous or unnecessary development or permitting requirements. The Town recently created a Development Review Team, consisting of various Town departments and representatives, which meet monthly to review proposed developments and issues associated with ongoing developments.

4. Protect Land and Ecosystems – The town continues to support an active and aggressive land acquisition and protection program and has developed implementation strategies that will allow the town to continue to do so. Recently, the Connecticut River Scenic Byway was declared as a National Scenic Byway, the first in the country. The town has actively been working with regional, state and federal agencies to continue to protect sensitive and important land resources within the community. This has been evidenced in the update and completion of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (2007) as well as the active role of the Open Space and Recreation Committee. The town's planning efforts have focused on improvements to sewer and stormwater infrastructure to improve upon overall water quality within the town through the completion of a Combined Sewer Overflow project in the Falls. Additionally, the Town adopted a new Stormwater Management Bylaw with assistance from the PVPC.

5. Use Natural Resources Wisely – The town continually works with regional, state and federal agencies to protect sensitive and important land and natural resources within the community. Recent planning efforts to use natural resources wisely include the adoption of *The Range and River: An Open Space and Recreation Plan for South Hadley, Massachusetts, 2007-2012*. Additionally, the Town completed a Combined Sewer Overflow project in the Falls and participated in the development of the

Comprehensive Recreation & Land Management Plan intended to address the Holyoke Dam's impact on the impoundment area.

6. Expand Housing Opportunities – The Town's Comprehensive Plan stresses the importance of incorporating sustainable development practices as a component of the Housing Plan. This will be addressed through expanding housing choices, maintaining the town's varied housing stock, encouraging multi-family housing in appropriate locations at an appropriate scale, and promoting sustainable practices in housing.

7. Provide Transportation Choice – The PVTA has regularly scheduled services routes that connect South Hadley with Springfield, Chicopee, and Holyoke, in addition to the free five college bus service linking the town with Hadley, Amherst and Northampton. The PVTA also provides support for van service in and around town for people with disabilities and senior citizens. The South Hadley COA also provides transportation services for seniors within South Hadley.

8. Increase Job and Business Opportunities – Through the designation of both an ETA and EOA the Town will increase job and business opportunities by offering Tax Increment Financing and Special Tax Assessment Agreements under MGL, Chapter 23A for Certified Projects within the EOA. Additionally, Certified Projects are also eligible for other State Tax Incentives and projects supportive of the EOA may receive further consideration for funds.

9. Promote Clean Energy – The town's Open Space and Recreation Plan supports overall preservation and conservation practices – which is consistent with the promotion of clean energy and renewable resources.

10. Plan Regionally – The town has been an active participant in numerous regional and sub-regional efforts including: the Quabbin Sub-Regional Housing Plan, membership within a regional planning district and through with the FERC and HG&E for the licensure of the Holyoke Dam. Additionally, the town's Open Space and Recreation Plan and zoning by-laws are consistent with "Valley Vision 2", the regional land use plan.

Community Development Target Area

The town is planning on concentrating the majority of its community development related activities to the area known as South Hadley Falls, which is nearly identical to and includes the entirety of US Census Tract 8211. The racial make up of the target area is predominantly White. In 2008, there were 3,481 people over the age of 16 in the labor force within the target area. Of these 61.8% were employed, 3.9% were unemployed, and 34.3% were not in the labor force. Within South Hadley Falls, residents have the lowest incomes and most social distress characteristics of the target area. Within the target area, 160, or 23.0%, of the households are headed by a single female, with the majority of these households located in the Falls. More than 10% of the population in South Hadley Falls had incomes below the poverty level in 2000, while the total target area had 520, or 7.6%, under poverty level. In the Falls area, within the past four years the area has lost over 200 private-sector jobs. This area is also the single largest concentration of vacant commercial and industrial buildings in South Hadley and has experienced the least amount of investment over the past 10 years.

Prioritization of Projects

We believe that based on the content of this comprehensive document, the following represent the areas of need and projects which are a priority of the Town of South Hadley.

1. Housing (Target date ongoing through 2013)

- Update demographic, housing and income data, particularly in the South Hadley Falls area.

- Continue with plans for roofing and siding improvements on identified South Hadley Housing Authority buildings.
 - Support, and seek funding as necessary, the provision of housing across a broad range of incomes, age groups and demographics including, but not limited to housing rehabilitation, and the construction or conversion of units as “affordable” for low and moderate income persons.
2. Economic Development (Target date ongoing through 2013)
- Upgrade the visual image of the South Hadley Falls area with a focus on the commercial/industrial space.
 - Expand access to improved employment opportunities for the residents of South Hadley Falls.
 - Achieve 100% occupancy of the viable commercial/industrial space in South Hadley Falls.
 - Develop a tourism program and market in the South Hadley Falls area with vacant, retail storefronts fully utilized.
3. Infrastructure and Building Improvements (Target date ongoing through 2013)
- Begin Infiltration and Inflow Mitigation Project.
 - In support of public safety and environmental enhancement – rehabilitate and/or reconstruct the town’s streets and sidewalks, water lines and sewer lines, and stormwater drainage systems, particularly in the designated Community Development Target Area.
4. Social and Community Services (Target date ongoing through 2013)
- Continue to undertake improvements to South Hadley Senior Center.
 - Seek additional forms of assistance to aid the needier residents of South Hadley with programs and strategies designed to meet the particular needs of seniors, disadvantaged youth, low and moderate income families and other individuals and populations with special needs. This includes such programs as housing assistance, adult literacy, job training, various elder services, child care, and economic development related and self-sufficiency programs.
5. Recreational Opportunities and Open Space (Target date ongoing through 2013)
- Continue with modifications and updates to parks and recreation areas, particularly Beachgrounds Park.
 - Continue protection of existing water resources including wetlands, aquifers and their recharge areas, streams, ponds and floodplains.
 - Provide increased passive recreation and conservation activities in the Mount Holyoke Range.

Discussed December 2, 2008 by the South Hadley Selectboard. Approved by the South Hadley Selectboard on January 6, 2009.

By:

 Carlene C. Hamlin, Chair

 John R. Hine

 Gregory R. Sheehan

 Marilyn G. Ishler

 Robert G. Judge

Town of South Hadley Target Area, January 2009

