

Ware Community Development Strategy – 2017

Introduction

The Ware Community Development Strategy (CDS) represents a continued effort by residents and public officials to make community improvements; some primarily to benefit low and moderate-income persons and others to benefit the entire community. Although programs are designed and managed under the auspices of the Ware Community Development Authority (CDA), public participation is the primary component of project development and management. The public participation process included a brief survey and specific discussion of the CDS at a public hearing held on October 12, 2017 and a follow-up briefing and discussion at the CDA meeting on November 16, 2017.

Community Development Goals and Objectives

The Town's community development (CD) goals and objectives include economic development and downtown revitalization, housing, infrastructure improvements, transportation, and social services.

1. Economic Development and Downtown Revitalization

- Work with the Department of Public Works to identify and secure funding for physical improvements to the downtown including new traffic and street lights and extensive streetscape work, with an expected outcome of improved traffic flow and safety for vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians throughout the downtown corridor.
- Continually reexamine and modify the local zoning bylaws to attract more businesses while protecting the public interest
- Collaborate with Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QVDC) to support business development training programs, technical assistance to small businesses, a revolving loan fund which provides capital for small and micro-enterprise businesses, regional tourism development, and job readiness training and workforce development programs
- Where appropriate, offer Ware River Valley Regional Economic Target Area benefits (Tax Increment Financing) to new and expanding businesses
- Work with property owners and the Town to implement recommendations of the parking study
- Partner with the Ware Business & Civic Association (WBCA) on revitalization activities for the business district, including downtown and the mill yard
- Investigate opportunities to develop alternative energy sources (electricity, natural gas, etc.)
- Continue collaborating with the Urban Foundation to implement new wayfinding system

2. Housing

- Support programs that help low to moderate income homeowners maintain their homes
- Research and identify strategies to develop local and regional housing opportunities for seniors
- Explore affordable housing options, including ways to afford current housing stock
- Emphasize public health and safety including preventing and eliminating slum and blight areas through code enforcement and related activities

3. Infrastructure Improvements

- Continue infrastructure and surface improvements in the North Side Neighborhood, including ADA compliance
- Upgrade/improve the waste water system including the waste water treatment plant's capacity and collection system; extend system into residential neighborhoods with high rate of septic system failures on small parcels
- Construct a new water filtration plant to improve the water quality in town

4. Transportation

- Support the Quaboag Connector (QC) service through monetary and public support
- Work with the QVCDC to expand the QC

5. Social Services

- Continue to support social service programs that help Ware's low-moderate income residents. Current areas of support include adult literacy, domestic violence prevention, community health
- Based on need and as resources permit, support new or expanding programs not currently funded through CDBG including programming for senior citizens, afterschool program, and food security

Activities/Projects

1. Economic Development/Downtown Revitalization Projects

- Funding for Ware's Pioneer Valley Transportation Improvement Project (TIP) is scheduled for FY2019. The project is for infrastructure improvements to Main Street to improve downtown flow and safety for vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians.
- The Town and various WBCA committees are working on several initiatives including a wayfinding system, advantageous property utilization, a QR code for historic landmarks, streetscape and beautification, and a central community calendar,.
- The QVCDC continues to partner with the Ware CDA to provide loans to small businesses; discussions for additional project opportunities are ongoing
- The CDA and P&CD staff administer a revolving economic development fund for assisting small businesses
- The Town has an agreement for solar energy credits and continues to explore potential development of solar facilities on municipal properties
- In 2017, the Planning Board and P&CD staff offered zoning amendments to the Use Table to attract more businesses
- Through public/private partnerships with WBCA, QVCDC, Holyoke Community College (HCC), The Urban Foundation, Country Bank, and a state grant, HCC opened a satellite campus in Ware in 2017 called Education to Employment (E2E)
- In 2017, Ware was designated a Green Community and was awarded a \$169,535 grant

2. Housing Projects

- Continue to focus on owner-occupied housing rehabilitation projects, as there is a consistent need, as evidenced by the current wait-list
- Ware's FY15 CDBG program included the Property Assessment and Reuse Program (PARP) project: rehabilitate multi-unit investor-owned structures with a detrimental impact on neighborhoods. Three projects (8 housing units) were completed and the Town will review the implementation of this program
- The Town and its consultant will investigate the use of a variety of funding sources to continue housing rehabilitation efforts in the Ware River Valley, including the Home Modification Loan program (HMDL), the Low Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and MHFA Get the Lead Out, and CDBG
- Seek appropriate funding sources to loan to non-LMI owners in septic repair/replacement and sewer line connections.
- Investigate ways to expand housing opportunities for elderly residents, as identified in the 2016 Master Plan
- Continue improving the available housing stock, particularly for low/moderate-income residents

3. Infrastructure Improvement Projects

- An engineering design for Bank and Spring Streets was completed through funding CDBG FY16 funding. The designs from this project will be used for infrastructure improvements on Bank and Spring Streets. This will likely be split out into two different projects.
- Income survey of Cottage Street is being conducted in 2017 in anticipation of FY2018 CDBG application for infrastructure improvements; this is a continuation of the North Side Neighborhood Infrastructure Improvement Project
- The DPW studied the potential for extending sewer lines into neighborhoods near the main sewer line running to the Gibb's Crossing development, and continues to pursue connecting these neighborhoods. The primary impediment to these extensions is an acceptable funding formula
- Begin construction of new water filtration plant, funded through a \$6 million town appropriation
- Explore options for infrastructure improvements along Route 32, a commercial area with heavy foot traffic and limited or poor sidewalk access

4. Transportation

- In 2017, public/private partnerships launched the Quaboag Connector (QC) transportation service, a curb-to-curb 12-month pilot program. A grant has funded the program for a second year. The QC provides transportation for residents of Belchertown, Brookfield, Hardwick, Monson, Palmer, Ware, Warren, and West Brookfield. The Town plans to enhance this service through public support and possible grant funding.

5. Social Service Projects

- We expect these programs to be included in future CDBG applications, at funding levels based upon demand and availability
- The Ware Adult Learning Center (WALC) provides an integrated curriculum of adult basic education, high school equivalency, economic literacy, and a crucial transitions component, to uneducated and under-educated people. Due to funding cuts, the program has been reduced to the most basic services and CDBG funding remains necessary for the career path and college prep services. The Ware CDA is committed to providing assistance to this important component of the region's social service network through CDBG funding and, if necessary, Program Income funds.
- Domestic violence continues to be a reality in Ware. Hard-won successes are too valuable to risk a downward slide in DVTF program funding. The number of restraining orders issued, police responses, and reported teen violence, warrant continued DVTF services including: outreach, counseling, education, training, service coordination, and direct advocacy. The CDA acknowledges the importance of this program and the serious negative impact on the community if it ends.
- Both of these programs, along with other services provided in the community and region will become integrated in the PATCH approach described above. This should improve efficiency for the providers and better service for the clients.

The Ware CDA reviewed the CDS at a public meeting on November 16, 2017 and concluded that it accurately reflects the desired strategies for the community, after modifications as discussed at the meeting. The Authority voted 3-0 to recommend that the Ware Board of Selectmen endorse the CDS as so modified. The Board of Selectmen reviewed the CDS at a public meeting on _____, and determined that the goals and objectives are relevant to meeting the needs of the Town. It was endorsed by a _____ vote of the Board.

Nancy J. Talbot, Chairman