

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHITMAN'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY?

The Town of Whitman is seeking public comment on its FY12 Community Development Strategy (CDS). The Town is in the process of updating its CDS in order to seek additional grant funds from the FY14 Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant Program as part of a joint application with the Town of Abington. The application will be submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

The Town's Community Development Strategy should reference or incorporate findings of relevant plans and analyses that have been completed and used for decision-making purposes by municipal boards, agencies and departments. Such plans may include but are not limited to EO 418 Community Development Plans, EO 418 housing strategies, Capital Improvement Plans, Master Plans, Downtown Plans, Open Space and Recreation Plans, Area Revitalization Strategies, Urban Renewal Plans, the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, and a Community Action Statement (CAS). The strategy must be discussed in a public forum.

DHCD will evaluate the submitted Community Development Strategy to determine its adequacy. The Strategy must be determined to be adequate or the application will be subject to special conditions regarding the CDS. DHCD will use the following four criteria to make this determination:

- a. The CDS must describe the manner in which a community has identified and will accomplish projects and activities which include, but are not limited to, the subject CDBG application.
- b. The CDS must conclude with a list of projects and activities in order of the priority in which the community intends to undertake them, and provide specific goals and annual timelines for accomplishing its goals.
- c. The CDS must identify and describe the geographic target areas that are intended as the focus of community development efforts.
- d. CDBG applications must document that a CDS and its priority list were discussed at a separate public forum, meeting or hearing, held at least one (1) month prior to the submission of a CDBG application in order to allow for timely community input. Compliance with this requirement must be documented by copies of meeting announcements, attendance lists and minutes. Minutes must reflect that the CDS and priority list have been presented and that discussion has occurred.

Please review the Whitman CDS and target area map and submit comments you may have to the Town of Whitman. Comments can be submitted in writing to:

Wayne Darragh
Community Opportunities Group, Inc.
129 Kingston Street
Boston, MA 02111

Comments can also be submitted electronically via email to CDS@whitman-ma.gov. You can also attend the Board of Selectmen's meeting on Tuesday, January 7, 2014 to present your comments in person. Thank you for your participation.

Whitman Community Development Strategy (CDS)

What is a Community Development Strategy?

A Community Development Strategy (CDS) represents an effort to engage in community-based planning, conduct needs assessments and identify strategies for addressing those needs. The CDS serves to summarize various planning documents developed locally and to outline a plan of action intended to accomplish specific community development goals that will have an impact on the community.

Why does Whitman need a Community Development Strategy?

DHCD requires that municipalities prepare or update a Community Development Strategy as part of any Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) application. The CDS must explain how the community expects to address its established priorities with CDBG and non-CDBG funds over a 3-5 year period. A CDS should also discuss the targeting of certain portions of the Town for priority development purposes.

What are Whitman's needs and priorities?

In recent years, Whitman has completed several planning processes, including the development of a Master Plan (2004), an Executive Order 418 Community Development Plan (2004) and the Whitman Circulation Study. These documents identified a number of goals and suggested actions including:

- Increasing open space holdings and access
- Identifying additional ground water sources
- Encouraging higher density development around Town Center
- Amending and updating the Zoning Bylaw
- Expand the function of the EDIC
- Create a town-wide sidewalk system
- Create a development strategy for the Route 18 corridor

What are Whitman's target areas?

The town has not yet identified a target area for its CDBG activities. A target area roughly bordered by West Street, Park Avenue, Essex Street, Plymouth Street, the Shumatuscant River (overland to Washington Street), Washington Street, Harvard Street, Dover Street and South Avenue to West Street has been proposed.

What else should the Town consider?

The CDS must also discuss how the community will plan for and implement projects that are consistent with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles listed below:

- Concentrate development and mix uses
- Advance equity
- Make efficient decisions
- Protect land and ecosystems
- Use natural resources wisely
- Expand housing opportunities
- Provide transportation choice
- Increase job and business opportunities
- Promote clean energy
- Plan regionally

TOWN OF WHITMAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Background

Whitman's Community Development Strategy (CDS) provides a snapshot of Whitman's community development goals, which are reflective of Whitman's unique position in the local and regional economies, the community's demographic trends and a vision for its future. Whitman was first settled in 1670 and became part of neighboring Abington before incorporating as the separate town of South Abington in 1875. The name Whitman was adopted in 1886. Whitman is comprised of only 7.1 square miles, making it one of the smallest towns in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Whitman's population grew quite rapidly between 1890 and 1910 and then again in the 1960s and 70s. Since 1970, the Town's population has remained relatively steady and has only grown by about 1,400 residents. As of the 2010 census, Whitman had a total population of 14,489.

Historically, Whitman has been both an agricultural and industrial center but since the decline of the shoe making industry in the mid-twentieth century, has transitioned into a residential suburb of Boston. Initially, the Town was primarily an agricultural community, where dairy farming playing an important role. As farmland was developed into industrial and residential uses, the number of dairy farms in Whitman dwindled. Today, there is only one full dairy operation in the Town. With the rise of industrialization, Whitman became a manufacturing center with a wide variety of cottage industries; some of these small-scale operations grew into larger assembly line factories. Cotton balls, wooden crates, cannon balls, nails and tacks were all manufactured in Whitman. While the Town had a relatively large variety of companies, none could compare to Whitman's shoe and boot manufacturing industry, which quickly grew to be Town's largest employer. At one point, there were more than twenty factories making shoes and other related products in Whitman. Shoe making and related industries remained the Town's largest employment sector through the mid-1900s.

Evidence of Whitman's manufacturing heyday can be seen in the remaining factory buildings. Though largely abandoned, some of these former factories have been converted into condominiums, helping to address the increasing demand for housing in the Town. Whitman is working to reinvigorate the local economy by supporting business development, improving walkability, supporting traffic circulation, protecting recreational and ecologically sensitive open spaces and planning for future development.

The Town of Whitman's Community Development Strategy (CDS) consists of four major sections. Part I presents the Town's four **Major Strategies** and provides the basis for the CDS. These strategies are: Resource Protection, Land Suitability, and Open Space; Housing; Economic Development; and Transportation. Part II outlines the **Key Elements of CDS Implementation** - Community Outreach and Participation and the Community Development Target Area. Part III highlights the **CDS's Relationship to the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles**. Finally, Part IV outlines the Town's **Community Development Priorities** with a prioritized list of projects/activities.

Part I. Major Strategies:

The Major Strategies discussed in this CDS are drawn from the Town's E.O. 418 Community Development Plan (2004). This plan was developed independently of Whitman's 2004 Master Plan. However, the Community Development Plan relied on the Master Plan for background information and as a basis for the goals and recommendations included in the Community Development Plan. The following sections are based on the broad goals Whitman identified in the Community Development Plan.

Resource Protection, Open Space, and Community Facilities

Whitman's Community Development Plan discusses a number of goals for protecting environmental resources and expanding open space and recreation opportunities. Additionally, the CDS meetings provided additional suggestions for improving community facilities.

Whitman has contracts with several entities to provide drinking water and, as of 2004, had recently expanded municipal sewer service to the majority of the town. It is not expected that the water supply or sanitary services will limit future population growth or land development. However, the Community Development Plan acknowledges that the Town should consider increasing the storage capacity of its emergency water supply. It recommends that this be accomplished through an update of the 1995 Emergency Water Supply Plan and the broader Emergency Plan.

Whitman residents place a high value on open spaces. During a 2002 visioning session for the master planning process, participants included the Town's open spaces as among the most valued Whitman assets. At that same session, residents expressed the desire to develop additional open and recreational spaces. Acquiring new land for preservation and recreation as well as to permanently protect its existing ecologically sensitive and/or recreation holdings is a community goal. Additionally, it is important that the Town work to improve signage regarding its open and recreation spaces so that residents are aware of existing public spaces available for their use. In addition to providing recreation areas, open spaces help protect the local environment. Whitman needs to ensure that ecologically sensitive areas are protected and that municipal land holdings, including recreational areas, are designed to help protect water supplies.

There was much discussion at the CDS meetings on the Town's need for increased and improved community facilities. The existing senior center is very busy and the space is insufficient for all the programming the Council on Aging provides. The Council has to rent space for certain activities and currently does not have adequate parking facilities for its two vans. Additionally, several community groups continue to press the Town to create storage areas for their materials. While the Town has been able to complete several major projects recently, the Department of Public Works is in need of a new facility. Since the 2004 Community Development and Master Plans were written, the Town has built a new police station, renovated Town Hall, and worked with Hanson to open a new Whitman-Hanson Regional High School. The Town recently purchased a decommissioned Armory and must determine the best use for that building.

Whitman's existing land use patterns are typical of older industrial towns and features a well-defined commercial and civic center with a concentration of industrial uses nearby. Additionally, the railroad throughway provides an anchor for a second commercial and industrial

area. Residential density varies throughout town. Residents have expressed concern about the density of some newer infill development but value the Town's small, rural community feel. Future development should respect these values and seek to provide walkable neighborhoods that increase access to recreational facilities and schools. In addition to considering these factors during new construction, the Town intends to connect dead-end streets and update the zoning bylaw to allow for the permanent conservation of open spaces preserved by a new Cluster Development or Open Space Subdivision provision and rezone ecologically sensitive areas into protective zoning districts.

Housing

As is common in Massachusetts cities and towns, Whitman has a shortage of affordable housing. The Town of Whitman had 5,104 housing units at the time of the 2000 Census. More than 70% of housing was owner-occupied and the remaining 27% was rented. The total number of housing units in Whitman increased approximately 11% between 1990 and 2000, a rate more than double the 4.8% increase in population over that period. Detached, single-family homes are the most common type of housing in Whitman, but have been decreasing in share as more attached single-family and multi-family condominiums have been built. More than 43% of the Town's housing units were built before 1939 and many were built before 1900.

The extension of town-wide sewer service has opened new areas to development; however, most of the new development has been at the upper end of the residential market. Housing in Whitman remains more moderately priced than in many adjacent communities. The Town has more than 200 affordable rental units, but, as of 2004, there were almost 100 families on the affordable housing waiting list. Whitman intends to employ a number of tools to increase the number of affordable housing units. These tools include: increased use of Chapter 40B provisions, creating an Affordable Housing Partnership and establishing regulations to encourage the development of affordable housing units.

During the 2004 master planning process, residents who participated in a visioning session listed the diversity of housing types as one of the Town's assets but also included 'excess development of condominiums' as a problem the town was facing. As Whitman continues to grow and increase the number of housing units, the community will need to come together and determine what vision they have for future development. The development of a Community Housing Action Plan and Housing Goals will help the community define this vision.

Economic Development

Similar to other communities grappling with the decline of their major industry, Whitman is working to stimulate new economic development. Historically, many Whitman residents worked in town, but that number has decreased dramatically since the middle of the 1900s. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of businesses located in Whitman decreased by almost 50, but the number of jobs rose by more than 100. As of 2004, there were about 3,000 jobs in Whitman with no one employer employing more than about 50 employees. While local unemployment was only slightly lower than the 2000 statewide average, Whitman workers made \$16,000 less than the average Massachusetts employee. Comparatively, the \$28,191 that Whitman employees made was \$4,320 less than the average wage for the towns surrounding Whitman.

In addition to allowing the Town to support more housing, the expansion of the public sewer system enables Whitman's infrastructure to support a larger economic base. As of 2000, there were about fifty acres of vacant, business/industrial land. To help attract new business to Whitman, there is a 240,000 square foot business incubator in one of the abandoned shoe factory complexes. Although 70% occupied by a variety of organizations including office space, light manufacturing, assembly uses and some personal services and retail, there is still space available for additional businesses and the owner is exploring converting some of the remaining space into artist studios.

There are a number of goals and initiatives that support an improved local economy. Many of these initiatives are focused on either improving education and training for Whitman residents or making the Town more attractive to potential employers. With changing economies and growth patterns, Whitman should consider a number of rezonings to increase the number of areas in the Town available to business. Additionally, Whitman intends to increase its outreach and marketing effort to ensure that businesses are aware of the Town's permitting processes and maintain an inventory of available business/industrial/commercial spaces. Whitman has an existing Economic Development Industrial Corporation, which can possibly be responsible for these tasks. Otherwise, the Town may consider creating a new organization to handle these additional responsibilities. Whitman may begin to provide skills training and other educational programs through the Workforce Investment Board to low, moderate, and middle income residents who need to either enhance their skills or learn a new skill. Finally, the Town is considering developing a comprehensive economic development strategy to coordinate economic development activities.

Transportation

Despite being a few towns removed from the limited access highways, Whitman remains very well connected to other communities as well as to Boston and Brockton. There are a number of regional roads that run through Whitman and it has an MBTA commuter rail station on the Kingston/Plymouth Line, providing easy access to both Boston and Plymouth. However, transit access to Brockton is limited. The Town would like to study the demand and feasibility of expanding Brockton Area Transit Service to Whitman and Abington.

The Town has seen increased accident rates at many of its largest intersections and is experiencing vehicle congestion on many streets. There are a number of strategies Whitman is exploring to alleviate congestion and decrease accident rates. The accident rate increases when roads are congested, intersections are poorly designed and drivers become frustrated. To address these conditions, the Town has discussed increasing signage to alert drivers of alternative routes which should decrease congestion on larger roads and downtown. A combination of improving signalization, establishing and enforcing reasonable speed limits should also work to decrease frustration and the number of traffic accidents.

In addition to improving open space and recreational access, installing bike paths and multi-use recreational paths throughout town would provide recreational opportunities and encourage people to bike or walk. One of the most valued aspects of Whitman's existing transportation system is the network of neighborhood streets. Many Whitman children already walk to school, so improving pedestrian access in a few key areas could drastically increase the number of

students who can safely walk to school. However, one of the problems facing the Town is the fact that sidewalks are, at best, inconsistent. Some streets have sidewalks on both sides, some only on one, and many have no sidewalks at all; when the 2004 Community Development Plan was written, most of the existing sidewalks were found to be in poor condition. Improving existing sidewalks, installing new ones and improving connections between existing streets could dramatically improve walkability in the Town.

Many Whitman residents perceive a lack of downtown parking, but there are many unlimited on-street parking spaces and there are several public parking lots downtown. Citing several examples of public parking that is not marked and is indistinguishable from adjacent, private uses, the Community Development Plan concludes that this perception might be more related to the location and signage of existing parking as opposed to the total amount of parking. Parking at the Whitman Commuter Rail Station is in high demand and especially as the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority increases daily service, the 200-space lot is expected to regularly be at, or beyond, capacity. The Town is interested in ways to possibly expand parking availability at the commuter rail station.

Part II. Key Elements of Community Development Strategy Implementation:

Community Outreach and Participation:

The Town of Whitman has recently participated in several participatory planning projects involving visioning sessions and other community meetings. The 2004 Master Plan and Community Development Plan gave residents numerous opportunities to share their thoughts and concerns as well as help develop a shared vision for Whitman's future. The CDS was developed using these documents to ensure consistency between the Town's existing planning documents and projects included here.

In preparation for this grant application, the first CDS meeting was on Tuesday, November 15th at 2:30 p.m. and the second meeting occurred at the regularly scheduled Board of Selectmen Meeting on Tuesday, November 22nd at 7:00 p.m.

Community Development Target Area:

The town considered a number of elements before selecting a target area. Whitman examined the low and moderate income percentages of its census tracts, the age of its housing stock, the location of its public facilities, the location of its downtown business section and the economic development potential of certain areas before creating the Whitman Center Target Area.

The target area is roughly bordered by West Street, Park Avenue, Essex Street, Plymouth Street, the Shumatuscacant River (overland to Washington Street), Washington Street, Harvard Street, Dover Street and South Avenue to West Street has been proposed. The Whitman Center Target Area encompasses the census tracts with the highest percentages of LMI individuals, the central business district/Downtown Whitman, the area around the commuter rail stop and several public facilities (town hall, senior center, armory, etc.).

Part III. Community Development Strategy's Relationship to the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles:

Whitman’s CDS promotes a focus on *concentrating development and mixing uses, increasing job and business opportunities, and providing transportation choice*. These ambitions also contribute to improving *equity* within the Town by expanding affordable *housing opportunities* available in Whitman and providing opportunities for low and moderate income residents to find *employment opportunities*.

As reflected in the Town’s Community Development Plan, the CDS mentions specific plans and studies that can be utilized to ensure that *efficient decisions* are made as Whitman undertakes community development projects. The CDS includes several zoning amendments and updates that will enable Whitman to *protect land and ecosystems, use natural resources more wisely, and increase job and businesses opportunities*. Several of the proposed zoning changes also promote *concentrated development and mixed use* areas. By repairing deteriorated sidewalks, providing recreational biking and walking facilities, and increasing pedestrian connections between schools and neighborhoods, the CDS will *provide transportation choices* to those residents who cannot afford a vehicle or do not want to be overly reliant on automobiles. Additionally, the CDS proposes a *regional planning* study to explore opportunities for expanding Brockton Area Transit Service to both Whitman and Abington.

The strategies that Whitman has selected ensure that its existing neighborhoods and businesses are supported and enhanced by new development. Stability in Whitman’s local economy contributes both to a vibrant *regional* economy and to quality of life in Whitman. The overlaps between Whitman’s Major Strategies and the Commonwealth’s Sustainable Development Principles are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ Sustainable Development Principles	Community Development Strategy			
	A. Resource Protection, Open Space, and Community Facilities	B. Housing	C. Economic Development	D. Transportation
<i>Concentrate Development and Mix Uses</i>	X		X	
<i>Advance Equity</i>		X	X	
<i>Make Efficient Decisions</i>	X	X	X	X
<i>Protect Land and Ecosystems</i>	X			
<i>Use Natural Resources Wisely</i>	X			
<i>Expand Housing Opportunities</i>		X		
<i>Provide Transportation Choice</i>	X			X
<i>Increase Job and Business Opportunities</i>	X		X	
<i>Promote Clean Energy</i>				
<i>Plan Regionally</i>			X	X

Part IV. Community Development Priorities:

1. Construct a new DPW facility. *(2015)*
2. Update the Water Supply Plan and increase emergency water storage capacity. *(2016)*
3. Develop a Housing Action Plan that will lead to increased affordable housing opportunities. *(2017)*
4. Increase marketing and outreach to encourage businesses to locate in Whitman. *(2012)*
5. Develop and maintain an inventory of buildings, rental spaces, and vacant land available for businesses. *(2012)*
6. Repair deteriorating sidewalks and construct sidewalks throughout Whitman that will provide a connected, pedestrian friendly network. *(2020)*
7. Conduct a feasibility study for expanding Brockton Areas Transit (BAT) Service to Whitman and Abington. *(2013)*
8. Implement recommendations of the Downtown Whitman Traffic Analysis and Circulation Study including improved roadway signage, improved coordination of traffic signals and improved signage to public parking lots in the central business district. *(continuous)*
9. Develop a comprehensive Economic Development Strategy to foster appropriate new commercial and industrial development to expand the Town's tax and job bases. *(2014)*
10. Perform a comprehensive review of Whitman's zoning bylaw including potential changes to allow for cluster development, new open space provisions to protect ecologically sensitive areas and rezoning land to allow for increased commercial/industrial/business development. *(2014)*
11. Develop greenways to connect town owned conservation and open space parcels and improve the signage to increase public awareness of these recreational opportunities. *(2018)*
12. Rehabilitate and preserve Whitman's existing housing stock affordable to low- and moderate-income households. *(continuous)*
13. Increase public services to the Town's elderly and low-income populations. *(continuous)*
14. Encourage rehabilitation of the buildings in the central business district in order to attract new businesses and enhance Whitman's economic base. *(2013)*
15. Develop and deploy a coordinated town-wide geographic information system (GIS). *(2014)*
16. Develop bike paths and other multi-use paths to expand recreational options for Whitman residents. *(2017)*