

**WARREN, MASSACHUSETTS**

**2010 DOWNTOWN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE APPLICATION**

**TOWN HALL REUSE STUDY**

---



*The Historic Town Hall in Warren Center Village*

---

**PREPARED BY WARREN PLANNING DEPARTMENT**

**NOVEMBER 19, 2009**



## 2010 Downtown Technical Assistance Application Cover Sheet

### Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Program

Community Name: Warren

Date of Application: November 19, 2009

**Principal Contact: Please print clearly.**

Name: William Scanlan Address: Shepard Municipal Building  
48 High Street  
Title: Town Planner Warren, MA 01083  
Phone: 413-436-5701 (office) 508-579-9975 (cell)  
E-Mail: wscanlan1@charter.net

**Name & Signature of the Chief Executive Officer or Chief Elected Official (Required):**

Name & Title Robert W. Souza, Jr. Chairman, Board of Selectmen

Signature *Robert W. Souza Jr.* (please print)  
(required for submission)

**Check one box for the type of assistance being requested:**

- ☐ Business Improvement District
- ☐ Creative Economy
- ☐ Design
- ☒ Economics of Downtown
- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Parking
- ☐ Way finding/Branding

See attached program description for more information relating to the designated topics.

**Please provide the following information in a narrative. The narrative should not exceed 3 pages.**

- o Description of issue to be addressed.
- o Evidence of strong public/private partnership
- o Positive outcomes expected as a result of the requested assistance
- o Demonstration of a community's ability to begin implementation of recommended action(s) within one to three months of completion of Downtown Technical Assistance Site Visit Grant.

**Please include the following information with your application:**

- ☐ Downtown/town center target area map.
- ☐ List of individuals comprising a downtown organization or committee.

## APPLICATION NARRATIVE

### 1. Description of Issue.

Warren seeks assistance in preparing a Reuse Study for the historic Town Hall located in the village of Warren Center. Construction of the Town Hall was completed in 1902 as a replacement for the previous structure built in 1878. The Town Hall anchors Downtown Warren with its prominent location on the square on the corner of Route 67, Main Street, and Route 19. In 1993, municipal departments moved to the former Elementary School (now Shepard Building) on High Street, approximately .5 miles from Warren Center. The Police Department maintains its headquarters on the first floor, but the rest of the building remains vacant.

In 1997, Reinhardt Associates completed a thorough assessment of the structural condition of the building. According to the Report, “The building is of Classical/Romanesque style with rubble stone foundation, masonry bearing walls, a copper roofed Clock Tower and Main front entrance roofed Portico. The windows are classically arched windows with some Palladium style windows on the North side. The Main entrance, ancillary entrances, and exit openings are arched in classic style and trimmed with limestone.” The Town Hall is on the National Register of Historic Places as an individual listing (6/14/01). A Preservation Restriction from 11/30/99 insures that any renovation to the exterior of the property complies with historic standards.

The Heritage Landscape Inventory report identified “Center Village” as one of six “priority heritage landscapes”. These are areas that, because of their importance to the historical development of the community and traditional New England landform, have unique value and are worthy of dedicated efforts to help preserve vital elements of the Town’s character. The study identified the Town Hall as an important opportunity for community life: “The Town Hall is a focal point and anchor in the village; it could serve as an excellent place for gatherings and community activities.” The report included a recommendation that the Town “Pursue the adaptive reuse of the former Town Hall. The building is listed with National Register of Historic Places, and is eligible to apply for the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF).” (Page 9) The attached Center Village Map from the report identifies the location of the Town Hall along with the other architecturally significant buildings in the Downtown.

The building is located within Warren Center, whose boundaries are depicted on the attached Village Centers map prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Along with the village of West Warren, the villages are the focus of intensive community development efforts aimed at revitalizing Warren’s mixed use community centers. The Town’s Community Development Advisory Committee recommends projects for funding within these villages for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) applications. The Town has completed a number of important projects within this village:

- FY 2003: Warren Common improvements, gazebo restoration, and accessibility
- FY 2004: Infrastructure improvements to Comins Pond Road
- FY 2005: Infrastructure improvements to Pine Street
- FY 2006: Infrastructure improvements to Winthrop Terrace and parking for the Warren Library
- FY 2008: Infrastructure improvements to Bacon Street
- FY 2009: Sidewalk improvements for ADA Accessibility in Warren Center (Construction will occur in 2010.)

Warren’s latest Community Development Strategy (FY 2009) highlights the importance of targeting public assistance to help revitalize the village target areas:

“As housing rehabilitation and public service social projects remain critical concerns throughout the town, this type of assistance will be made available on a town-wide basis. However, the strategy continues to emphasize improvements to the village centers of West Warren and Warren where there exists a concentration of mixed-use properties and great need for improving public facilities and infrastructure.”

Reinhardt's "Renovation/Restoration" study of the Town Hall included a detailed analysis of the structural condition of the building and foundation, a review of mechanical systems, handicapped accessibility requirements, and floor layout plans for returning municipal offices to the building. The 1997 renovation cost was approximately \$1.1 million. Because of the high cost, and adequacy of the Shepard Municipal Building for town offices, the Town did not pursue reuse of the Town Hall as a municipal office center. In 1999, the Town repaired the roof to prevent damage to interior building finishes from leaks. As a result, the building is in a structurally sound condition and is capable of accommodating a variety of uses. The Police Department continues to occupy first floor space in the building, and their occupancy insures the building receives basic maintenance; however, the Department is actively searching for a new site upon which to construct a modern Police Station. Since there was no need to use the building for other municipal purposes, it has remained largely vacant for lack of a viable reuse plan.

Warren seeks the assistance of an experienced professional to develop alternatives for reuse of the building. In its current state, it detracts from the Town's efforts to revitalize the Downtown. When the Police vacate the premises, the building will be completely vacant, creating an impression of disinvestment by the Town. It is unlikely that the Town will decide to move its municipal office functions back to the Town Hall. However, the building could add vitality to the village if re-used for private purposes, or if the second floor auditorium once again held Town Meetings or provided a venue for entertainment events. Given the weak economic conditions in the Downtown, it is important to obtain consulting expertise to analyze market conditions to help target uses that will find this location attractive for their purposes.

Therefore, the Goals of the study are:

1. To develop a feasible Reuse Strategy for the Town Hall that identifies a viable civic or private use for the building and presents a realistic approach for achieving this goal.
2. To contribute to the revitalization of Warren Center by targeting public and private investment into the Town Hall that will support greater economic activity in surrounding buildings.
3. To support economic growth of Warren as a whole.

## 2. Evidence of Public/Private Partnership

The Community Development Advisory Committee (CDAC) will provide an oversight role to guide the Consultant during the preparation of the study. As noted above, the CDAC has a successful record of accomplishment in implementing projects that have made major strides in improving the appearance and functionality of public infrastructure in Warren Center. With its focus on revitalizing Warren's villages, the CDAC is in the best position for implementing recommendations that emerge from the study. The members of the Committee have diverse backgrounds in both municipal and private sector work. They bring an extensive knowledge of Warren and the Village Center to help the Consultant understand the Town Hall, local economic conditions, and potential opportunities for reuse. The members of the Committee are:

Richard Eichacker, Chairman, software designer

Madeline Witaszek, Town Accountant

Leona Wrobel, former owner of the Warren Spa restaurant and former Selectwoman

Robert Downing, Member of the Board of Selectmen and Board of Health

Bonnie Richard, secretary

Ray Veitenheimer, Sr., retired

To provide additional business expertise to the task, the Town recruited three ad hoc members with a stake in Downtown to serve on the reuse committee for the duration of the project. These individuals are:

Cindy Fountain, Branch Manager of the Spencer Savings Bank in Warren Center  
Clifford Fountain, Realtor and owner of the former train station in Warren Center  
Joel Girouard, owner of the Coin-o-Matic laundry in Warren Center

### 3. Positive Outcomes Expected from the Requested Assistance

The Town Hall could be a focal point of life in the Downtown. It occupies a prominent location in the village square and is highly visible from all vantage points within the Center. Even though the Police continue to occupy the building, its outward appearance has deteriorated. The lack of activity in the building is symbolic of the high vacancy rate in Warren Center. The Town continues to maintain the building, but it has been unable to find a suitable use for the property. Unless the Town identifies a new strategy to bring the Town Hall, its future is uncertain. When the Police vacate the premises, there will be little incentive to perform proper maintenance, particularly as the Town budget shrinks and hard choices confront local officials over how to maintain services for residents without cutting core functions.

Thus, the Reuse Study will have the following positive outcomes:

- ❖ Insure the long-term maintenance and public investment in the property through occupancy by viable civic uses or private businesses.
- ❖ Help preserve a building on the National Register of Historic Places.
- ❖ Contribute to revitalization of Warren Center by bringing additional people into the area who will patronize other establishments.
- ❖ Allow the return of community events, Town Meetings, and arts and entertainment shows in the second floor auditorium.
- ❖ Spur private property owners to undertake other renovation projects in the village.
- ❖ Result in savings to the Town since a renovated building will lower maintenance costs and new occupants will contribute to its upkeep.

### 4. Demonstration of a community's ability to begin implementation of recommended action(s) within one to three months of completion of Downtown Technical Assistance Grant.

The Town is prepared to begin implementation of actions recommended by the consultant. Without knowing the specific recommendations that will evolve during process, presented below are several actions the Town is prepared to take.

- Create a permanent building reuse committee. Recruit members with expertise in the fields recommended by the consultant as having a high likelihood of success. The Town will add other members with financial expertise and knowledge of architectural and building practices.
- Refer the report to the CDAC for identification of possible CDBG-eligible applications. These may entail additional engineering or architectural evaluations or direct construction if proposed projects will satisfy a National Objective under the CDBG program. For example, architectural barrier removal work is eligible regardless of the ultimate use of the building.
- Consider the possibility of funding under the Economic Development Fund (EDF), a component of the CDBG program, for private business development if new jobs will result.
- Develop a funding strategy to make the necessary building repairs. This may include an application to the Mass. Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF), energy improvements under the Energy Efficiency and Block Grant (EECBG) programs, and other Dept. of Energy Resources Program (DOER) programs, and U.S. Rural Development Community Facilities loans and grants.
- Prepare articles for Town Meeting if any Town action is needed.
- Seek state Library grants if a library use receives a favorable recommendation.

## **SCOPE OF SERVICES**

### **Task 1: Start-Up**

1. Obtain and review previously completed planning studies and documents:
  - ❖ "Study for the Renovation/Restoration of the Town Hall Building", Reinhardt Associates, Inc. September 19, 1997
  - ❖ "Downtown Revitalization Planning Project", BSC Group/Terrasphere, December 2005
  - ❖ Warren Center Traffic Plan, 25% Highway Design Submittal, Lenard Engineering, Inc., 2008 (MHD Project No. 605559)
  - ❖ "Economic Development Strategies Plan", Communities and Business Strategies, Inc., February 22, 1996
  - ❖ "Warren Reconnaissance Report", Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program, DCR, Spring 2008.
2. Tour the building to help understand current condition and space configuration.
3. Obtain floor plan and prepare summary of usable space.
4. Hold first Committee meeting to discuss the project and consider possible reuse options. Review current and past uses of the building and town actions for maintenance/ improvements.
5. Identify existing parking spaces that serve the building and discuss its effects on future use of the Town Hall.

### **Task 2: Economic, Labor, and Demographic Analysis**

1. Identify market area, collect and analyze basic market data such as income, retail spending, business establishments, and employment growth.
2. Review demographic data, including population, housing, building permit trends, and population projections/buildout.
3. Prepare analysis of local labor force data.
4. Prepare summary of economic conditions in Warren Center and the community.

### **Task 3: Public Input**

1. To gain insight into local factors affecting the building's reuse, the Consultant may select one of the following options:
  - A. Hold a focus group of key individuals, such as the Administrative Assistant, one or more members of the Board of Selectmen, the Police Chief, Library Directors (Warren and West Warren Libraries), the Quaboag Valley CDC, DT property owners and other individuals suggested by the Committee; or
  - B. Conduct individual interviews with the individuals mentioned above.
2. Hold second Committee meeting to refine possible reuse options.
3. Determine three alternative scenarios for consideration.

#### Task 4: Public Visioning Workshop

1. Prepare meeting announcement of the workshop for distribution and a press release for publication in a local paper. The Town will handle distribution of the announcement and invitations to local officials and downtown property owners.
2. Prepare a presentation of the preliminary analysis of building conditions, past reports, and recent trends.
3. Engage the public in a discussion of alternative reuse options.
4. Prepare a summary report of the findings and conclusions of the workshop.

#### Task 5: Vision Drawings

1. Prepare layout drawings of three reuse options for the building. These may include:
  - a. Municipal uses such as a Library, continued use by the Police Department, meeting space, use of the Auditorium for Town Meeting, and space for other municipal departments.
  - b. Private uses of the building, such as professional offices, retail, restaurant, etc.
  - c. Arts use of the building, such as renovation of the Auditorium for plays and cultural events and use of other areas for teaching, exhibits, and artist work space.

These alternatives are merely suggestions and should not preclude other reuse alternatives that may arise during the study.

2. Prepare conceptual drawings of exterior treatments for each alternative.

#### Task 6: Presentation of Alternatives

1. Hold third Committee meeting to present alternatives and lead discussion of advantages and disadvantages of each.
2. Revise the drawings based upon Committee input.
3. Select a preferred alternative and include supporting information/justification.

#### Task 7: Final Report

1. Make a presentation to the Board of Selectmen of the findings and recommendations of the study.
2. Prepare a program of “next steps” for the Town to pursue.
3. Prepare final report for submission to the Town and DHCD.

## CONFORMANCE TO EVALUATION CRITERIA

From the Guidance: Applications will be reviewed to determine overall consistency with the goals of the MDI, support of the Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) and the Commonwealth's priorities and initiatives, and impact on local downtown/town/village center revitalization efforts. DHCD will evaluate applications based on the following:

- Presents a complete description of issue to be addressed

This application discusses current conditions of the property, identifies support for the project in other Town reports, and demonstrates the need to undertake a thorough Reuse Study by a capable professional.

- Presents reasonable/feasible project costs & scope of services

The Scope of Services lays out a reasonable and feasible approach to identify viable uses for the Town Hall. It combines market research to understand current economic forces in the area, provides flexibility for the consultant to test several reuse scenarios, and provides ample opportunity for the Committee and public at-large to participate in the planning process.

- Provides evidence of strong public/private partnership

The Community Development Advisory Committee, composed of a committed group of volunteers with diverse backgrounds, has overseen a number of important revitalization projects in the Town Center with funding provided by successful CDBG applications. With the technical assistance provided by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Warren has built the capacity to manage complex grants for a variety of public improvements. The strengths of the CDAC members will be supplemented with the addition of three experienced business persons who work in the Downtown and have a vested interest in seeing the Town Hall brought back to life.

- Describes long-term and tangible outcomes as a result of assistance

The response provided in Narrative Question 3 discusses how vital the project is to the revitalization of Warren Center and demonstrates clear and achievable outcomes that will be a direct result of the study.

- Demonstrates community's ability to implement recommended action(s) within one to three months following the consultant's final product/assistance

The response provided in Narrative Question 4 contains numerous actions the Town will take to begin implementation of recommendations contained in the report within three months of completion. The specific steps will depend upon the findings of the study.

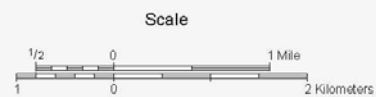
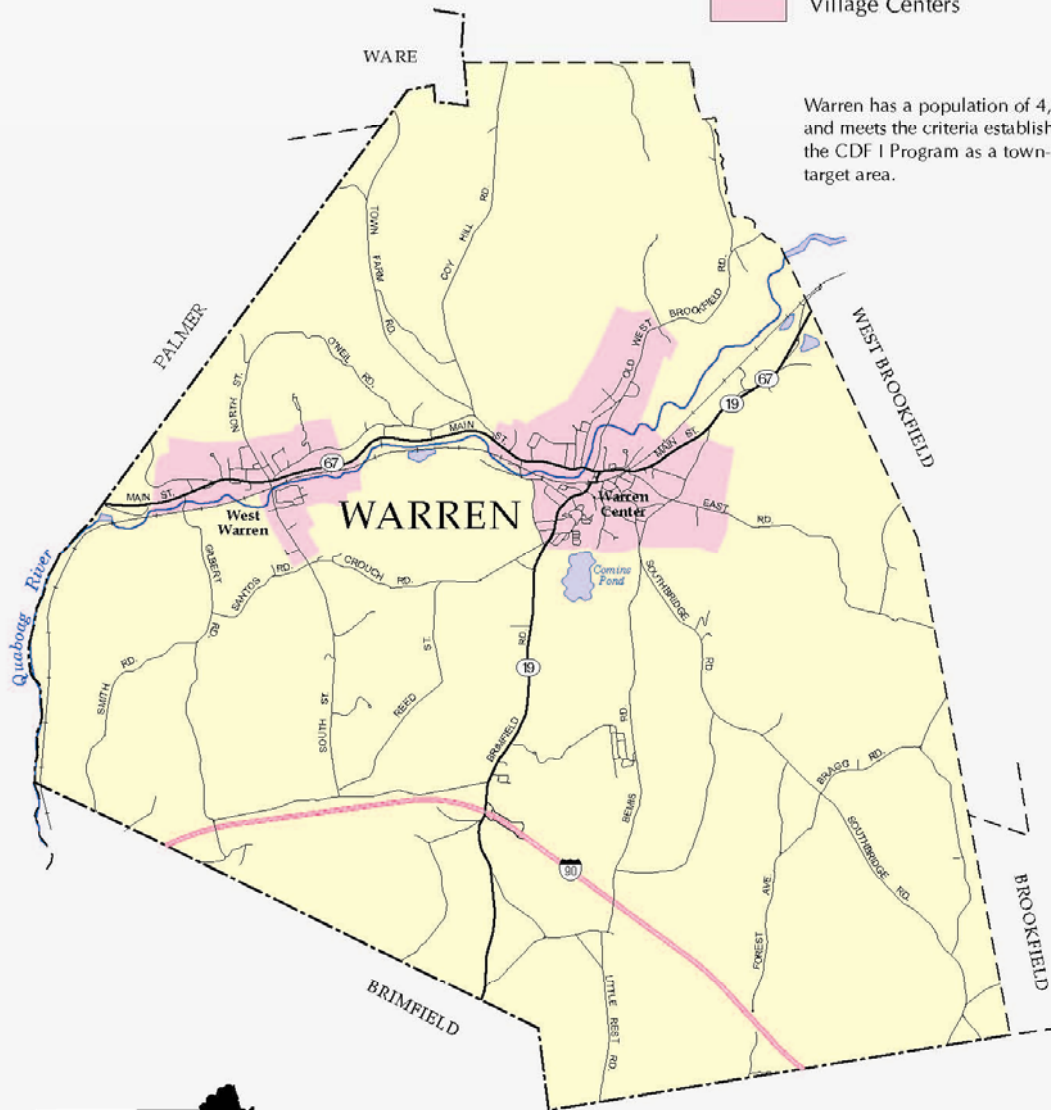
- Supports DHCD's and the Commonwealth's priorities and initiatives. These include: Gateway Plus Action Grant activities, the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles and MDI activities in c40R; c43D or Growth District Initiative target areas.



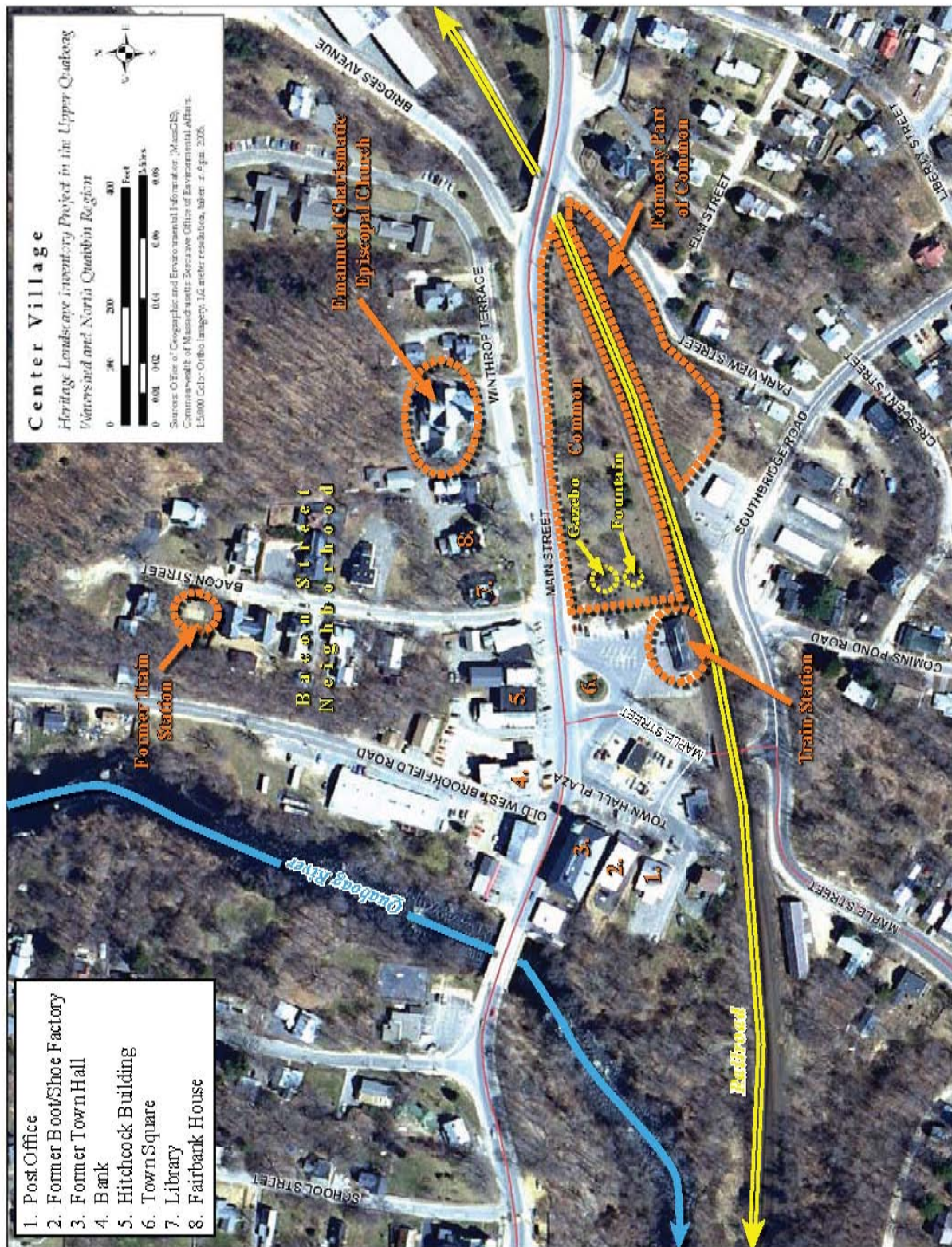
# Town of WARREN Massachusetts

 Village Centers

Warren has a population of 4,776 and meets the criteria established in the CDF I Program as a town-wide target area.

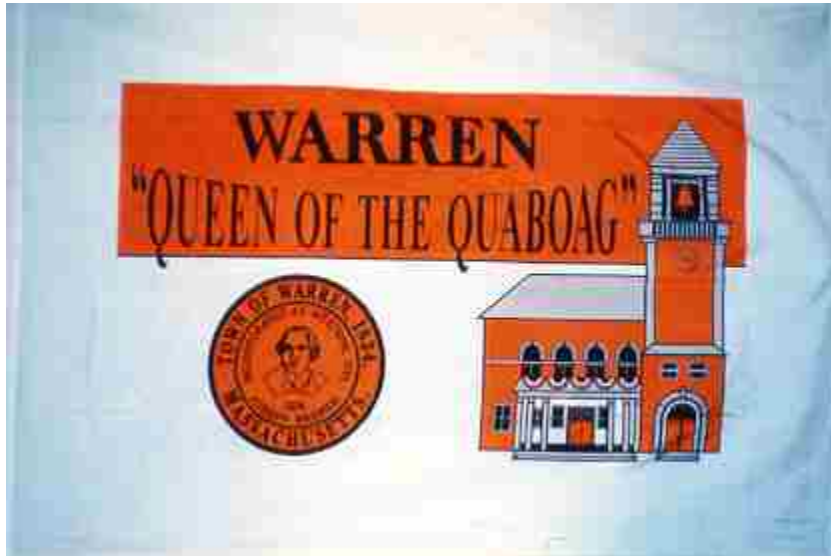


Prepared by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, January 2009.



Source: Warren Reconnaissance Report, Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program, 2008





Town Flag of Warren, demonstrating symbolic importance of the Town Hall to community life.