

**FY 2011 WARREN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

Introduction

Warren's Community Development Strategy (CDS), first developed September 9, 2002, is a community-based planning document designed to assess the needs of the community and identify strategies for addressing those needs. It is intended that the document be regularly evaluated for its effectiveness and used as a tool for planning future community development projects, not just on an annual basis but on an ongoing basis throughout the year. The strategy compliments the town's Master Plan (May 2006) and has been developed to meet the requirements of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development's Block Grant Program by summarizing previous planning efforts. The strategy also outlines community development priorities and suggests an implementation method for completing priority projects. Previous planning efforts include the Quabbin Subregional Housing Plan, American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation & Transition Plan, Economic Development Strategies Plan, and the Warren Downtown Revitalization Planning Project. The strategy also adheres to the state's Sustainable Development Principles which encourages the coordination and cooperation of all agencies, invests public funds wisely in smart growth and equitable development, gives priority to investments that will deliver good jobs and good wages, transit access, housing, and open space, and is in accordance with the following sustainable development principles. Warren's CDS places particular emphasis on the commonwealth's number one principle, *Concentrate Development and Mix Uses*, whereas the town's priority continues to be the revitalization of the two village centers with projects that remediate and reuse existing sites, structures and infrastructure.

Following are Warren's planning documents used to develop the town's CDS.

Economic Development Strategies Plan (1996)

The study was undertaken under the direction of the Warren Local Partnership for Economic Development. The objective was to guide the town in promoting community awareness and support for economic development projects. The major recommendations of the plan include: Retain exiting jobs in Warren, Revitalize Warren Center, Establish a Revolving loan fund, Create a business/industrial incubator, Establish reasons to spend money in Warren, Establish a mixed-use zone, and Take administrative steps to create jobs.

Community Action Statement (CAS): (1993-2003, as amended)

"The Community Action Statement (CAS) is a locally produced planning and program administration tool ... that communities also use in order to be eligible for many of the assistance programs offered by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)." (CAS, Intro-1996)

Warren reviewed and updated their CAS annually since its inception through 2003. The CAS was used as the primary document in developing the town's first CDS adopted on September 9, 2002. The Priority Needs first identified in 1993 continue in large part to be the priority needs of today. Those needs include Water Protection/Planning, Facility Improvement/Accessibility, Infrastructure, Administration/Management, Housing, Human Services, Parks and Recreation, Planning, Public Safety and Economic Development.

Quabbin Subregional Housing Plan (June 2002)

The 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, ten towns in the region identified affordable housing needs and resources and agreed to local 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. In addition to some regional approaches, the plan recommends

Warren continue to seek funding for housing rehabilitation including correction of major code violations, septic system repairs or upgrades, maintain/modernize public housing, and continue to support fair rent commissions (mobile home parks).

Warren ADA Self-Evaluation Plan and Transition Plan (2000 – 2002)

The town completed its Self-Evaluation in 2000, which led to a comprehensive handicapped accessible needs study funded through the FY 2000 CDBG Program. The study was completed in 2002 with the assistance from the Center for Living and Working and culminated with an approved Transition Plan. The Plan provides the town with an instrument to review and prioritize recommended actions related to the removal of barriers to persons with disabilities, develop a timeline for actions, include ways to fund activities, and develop a method to evaluate the progress of the plan.

Warren Downtown Revitalization Planning Project (December 2005)

The Warren Downtown Revitalization Planning Project was completed through funding provided by the FY2004 Community Development Block Grant Program. BSC Group/Terrasphere Inc., with offices in Boston and Worcester, undertook the planning effort and provided conceptual planning services in an effort to assist the town move towards actual revitalization efforts. Services included the development of a public participation process, data collection and analysis, preparation of maps, graphics and conceptual drawing for proposed improvements, and a final report and action plan for improvements. Technical services involved the identification of infrastructure needs and the determination of costs including accessibility improvements; parking availability and condition; traffic flow and circulation; general infrastructure needs including water, sewer, streets, sidewalks, and drainage; and overall appeal and functionality of the downtown. Alternatives for each area were assessed including conceptual drawings and estimates of cost. Other services consisted of a social and physical assessment through surveys, interviews, and data review; review of ownership and development patterns; research and site visits to municipalities/downtowns who have successfully addressed similar problems; review of funding alternatives; development of public focus group meetings and forums to determine level of support and interest for each option; and the development of a recommended action plan which incorporates engineering and architectural solutions with specific implementation strategies. The completed project reinforced previous concerns with Warren Center. "Deterioration is evident throughout the area. There is inadequate pedestrian and vehicular circulation, partly caused by accessibility non-compliance and overall lack of uniformity and consistency".

Warren Master Plan (May 2006)

Completed by the University of Massachusetts Amherst Project Team (UMASS Planning Dept.) and local Master Plan Committee, the Warren Master Plan consists of several major components: plans for land use, open space and recreation, economic development, transportation and infrastructure, housing, public spaces and services, etc. The research process consisted of the following steps: compiling a basic economic, demographic and geographic inventory of the town as well as of the surrounding Quaboag Valley region; developing a basic community profile through interviews and meetings with residents as well as with public officials; observing and documenting town landscape features; and tabulating and analyzing general survey data.

The Master Plan concluded with a General Action Plan which included short-term, mid-term and long-term strategies designed to address many of the concerns previous identified. Some strategies include but are not limited to: Implement zoning bylaw changes, develop grant writing capacity, physical improvements to village centers, implement residential growth management policies, and redevelopment of vacant lots or buildings. To the extent possible, the town has taken steps to implement Master Plan strategies and the CDAC uses the plan as a guide in prioritizing activities.

WARREN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES AND ACTION PLAN

In order to promote smart growth and obtain community input, the Board of Selectmen formed the Community Development Advisory Committee (CDAC) on August 25, 2003. Their mission is to meet as an appointed body of the Board of Selectmen, assist with the development and management of community development activities, and make recommendations which are in the best interest of the community. The CDAC also serves as the review committee for the CDS which presents a summary of the town's planning efforts, identifies priority needs, and presents an action plan for addressing those needs. The committee holds monthly meetings to discuss needs and prioritize projects which fit within the framework of their mission and the CDS. The CDAC continues to build from previous efforts and evaluates the most pressing needs of the community while conforming to the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles. General priority areas and project specific activities are identified. The CDS and accompanying action plan was first reviewed and adopted by the Board of Selectmen in January 2005 and is continually evaluated for its effectiveness. Any proposed changes are openly discussed and acted upon as needed. Projects and activities are identified and evaluated based on the overall community need, need to low and moderate income persons, previous efforts to rectify the need, available sources of funds, ability to proceed, location of the proposed project, support for the project or activity, and compliance with local, state and federal initiatives.

Target Area - According to the 2000 US Census, Warren has a town-wide population of 4,776 and meets the criteria established under the current CDF program as a town-wide target area. Warren also has a population that is predominantly low and moderate income, (59.5%, 2007 HUD Calculation). As housing rehabilitation and public service social projects remain critical concerns throughout the town, this type of assistance will be made available town-wide. However, the strategy continues to emphasize improvements to West Warren and Warren village centers where there exists a concentration of mixed-use properties and great need for improving public facilities and infrastructure. New census figures may project a population which will exceed 5,000 people at which time these village centers will be adopted as two target areas for CDBG assistance.

The CDAC also recognizes that the town's low tax base and high educational expenses prevent the town from immediately addressing many critical needs. Therefore, the town will pursue grant funds to accomplish the proposed activities and allow the town to use any available local funds on other projects, which will similarly serve to improve the conditions of the community. Where appropriate, the town will seek appropriation, Chapter 90 monies, USDA loans and grants, CDF funds, and DEP funds to make various improvements.

Included below are Warren's five general priority areas followed by specific priority projects.

I. Economic Development and Revitalization of Village Centers

Warren has two distinct village centers; Warren Center and West Warren Village Center. Most day-to-day essentials can be found in these village centers. However, many properties and the infrastructure which supports the services are outdated and do not meet current standards. Warren's Economic Strategies Plan and CAS remarked on the condition of Warren Center: "...A general facelift is needed. Many of the buildings are in need of physical repair, painting, handicapped access, and maintenance. Major façade improvements are needed on a number of buildings. There is no common design character to the buildings. A design for the Village would be an improvement. The buildings with boarded-up or shabby fronts detract from all the other buildings and depress the character of the village." Recent CDF funding has rectified some of these conditions, but additional efforts to help revitalize the area.

West Warren Center is much the same. A former Community Center is vacant and boarded up, a corner lot where a neighborhood library existed was demolished following a fire, and opposite that corner was a service station that has also since been demolished leaving a dirt lot in its wake. The former William Wright Company mill complex is largely vacant after the company closed operations in 2006. The mill closing contributed to the

Town's high unemployment rate and had a severe economic impact on West Warren. Approximately 600,000 square feet of old mill space poses a challenge for finding compatible uses and redeveloping the property. The largely vacant complex contributes to the weak economy of the village.

II. Infrastructure and Public Facilities

Infrastructure and public facilities are in poor shape and their improvement is a top priority. Two water districts, independent from municipal management, operate in each of the villages. Both districts report that many water lines are undersized, tuberculated, and not up to ISO standards for firefighting capability. Inadequate drainage systems also exist throughout the town and are a contributing factor to the poor condition of the streets and sidewalks. More recently, the absence or deteriorated condition of sewer lines has become a concern for the community. Playground facilities were a major concern, but new facilities have recently been introduced in the town. However, some existing facilities require upgrades as they are old and do not comply with current ADA standards. Some public buildings remain inaccessible, such as the Warren Public Library and the Town Hall, which remains largely vacant as the majority of the building is not handicapped accessible. Improvements continue to occur in and adjacent to the village centers. However, improved infrastructure and public facilities specifically in these areas continue to be a priority. The CDAC will work with departments responsible for the maintenance of the infrastructure and public facilities in order to prioritize work. Replacement water, sewer and drainage lines are needed throughout the villages and remain a top infrastructure priority. Restoration of streets and sidewalks should occur based on need, overall condition, readiness to proceed, and availability of funds. Recreational facilities that are outdated will continue to be evaluated as their improvements are vital to the overall betterment of the town's neighborhoods. In addition, new facilities for both passive and active recreation uses require consideration. Public and private funds should be sought to enhance existing areas, consider new recreation areas and create a long term maintenance plan.

III. Housing Improvements

Warren is committed to improving the stock of affordable housing through housing rehabilitation, including correction of major code violations, septic system repairs or upgrades. The town will continue to seek funds for housing rehabilitation, including correction of major code violations, septic system repairs or upgrades. Another housing priority is to maintain and modernize public housing as well as continue to support fair rent commissions (mobile home parks).

IV. Social Services

Warren intends to build on the foundation of the existing social services. The CDAC meets regularly with existing groups such the Council on Aging to identify service gaps and discuss means to address those needs. Social service needs which have been identified include but are not limited to, domestic violence prevention, food distribution/open pantry, transportation for the elderly and disabled, and heating assistance. Additionally, unemployment in the area continues to be concern primarily due to the recent departure of two major employers in Warren. Projects such as adult education can provide learning and training, thereby providing residents who are better educated, better prepared and available for the local workforce. Complimentary services such as counseling, transportation or day care assistance may be needed to successfully address other identified social service needs. The CDAC will continue to discuss these needs and seek ways to fund critical projects. Public social service projects are exempt from Sustainable Development thresholds of the CDBG program. However, wherever possible, sustainable development principles will be considered as part of the overall effort to promote smart growth. Where appropriate, consideration should be given as to services that can be planned regionally to have a measurable impact to the town of Warren and neighboring communities. Projects should be designed so that they are fair and allow for public participation.

V. Planning and Administrative Services

The Master Plan was recently completed and accepted at a town meeting on May 9, 2006. The plan identifies smart growth issues including open space preservation, housing, transportation, capital spending, infrastructure,

future land use, and the development of the town economically. Members of the CDAC also served on the Master Planning Committee and have shared the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles with the UMASS firm as to insure proposed initiatives are guided by these principles.

The Master Plan also considers the ability of the town to manage and initiate the intended objectives. Many town services and positions are operated on a part-time basis with a limited number of full-time support staff. Inadequate municipal management is affecting their ability to plan for large capital needs projects or seek available funding sources. The town recognizes this as a liability and previously noted in their CAS "*need for more Board/Dep't cooperation and coordination ...too many part-time elected boards - many members are out of town and unavailable during business hours ...Fragmentation of government due to the nature of the Town's organizational structure is increasingly evident and is affecting the delivery of services....*" This continues to be problematic for the town when faced with complicated problems affecting both town departments and locally controlled authorities, such as water districts.

*** PRIORITY PROJECT LIST ***

The Warren CDAC developed the following list of projects and activities through an ongoing public participation process which continually involves discussions at regularly scheduled public meetings, consultation with other town departments, and through full discussion at recent advertised public meetings and hearings. Most projects and activities are presumed to qualify for funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development Block Grant Program. With the exception of the identified public service and economic development activities, all projects are consistent with sustainable development principle of **Concentrate Development**. The ten initiatives are intended solely for benefit of Warren residents. The projects were conceived locally and their outcome is largely dependent on local efforts. They are being referred to a "*Warren's Top Ten*" community development projects and activities. The top ten projects are all located within the village centers of West Warren and Warren where there is a large concentration of mixed-use properties as well as a large population of persons thought to be of low to moderate income. Again, these projects and activities are identified as priorities based on the overall community need, need to low and moderate income persons, previous efforts to rectify the need, possible sources of funds available, ability to proceed, location of the project, community support, and compliance with local, state and federal initiatives. Additional projects were also developed in cooperation with neighboring communities, which have been successfully administered in the past by other towns and/or community development organizations. All remaining projects are those that the town recognizes as priority needs, however, they may have other identified funding sources, require additional evaluation, or do not meet the CDBG national objective.

Warren "Top Ten"

1. *Warren Center Improvements*: The project was conceived as a multi-phased initiative intended to improve Warren Center which has been identified as an area in need of comprehensive physical improvements. Phases include Phase I - concept planning, Phase II - engineering and architectural design, and Phase III - construction. Phase I and II are complete as well as portions of Phase III. Design plans and specifications are being used address construction efforts using a variety of funding sources which may include CDBG funding, MassHighway assistance, Chapter 90, local appropriation and private sources including Warren Water district. FY 2009 CDF I funding has allowed for sidewalks and ADA improvements along portions of Main Street. MassHighway is presently considering intersection enhancements in the area.
2. *Crescent and Nelson Street Improvements*: The two streets have significant deficiencies with the potable water service, street and sidewalks surfaces and storm water drainage systems. The rehabilitation of these streets will complete a section of Warren village that started with Comins Pond Road and followed by Pine Street. The two streets received design assistance through the FY 2008 CDF I Program and Crescent Street recently received FY 2010 CDF I funds for construction. Nelson Street requires construction funding. The two streets also abut Warren Center.

3. *School Street Neighborhood Improvements: (Area framed by Quaboag Street, Hillside Avenue and Prospect Street):* This is an older neighborhood located within Warren village center where existing infrastructure is outdated and in need of upgrading. The area is plagued with poor walks, road surfaces, insufficient drainage, and water and sewer lines are outdated and thought to be in poor condition. Neighborhood sidewalks do not meet 521 CMR, MHD and Federal ADAAG accessible curb ramp standards. Some residents have expressed concerns for the safety of children in the area due to extreme elevation changes near sidewalks and undefined separation between pedestrians and vehicles.
4. *Pleasant and Highland Street Improvements:* Located in West Warren village, the two streets have significant deficiencies with street and sidewalks surfaces and storm water drainage systems. The rehabilitation of these streets will reinforce the targeting community development approach as nearby streets had previously received CDBG assistance. Hobo Gendron Park (FY 2007) and the Warren Senior Center (FY 2010) are also located in this area.
5. *Warren Domestic Violence Services:* The Warren Domestic Violence Task Force is a community based group formed through FY 04 CDF funds who continue to bring awareness and education about domestic violence to residents by 1. providing professional training to police, teachers, community, 2. developing prevention strategies and initiatives, 3. initiate community education and outreach, 4. coordinate services among community agencies, and 5. seek funds to sustain the task force and support future projects. Task force members indicated the need to employ a domestic violence advocate to assist local victims with issues such as navigating the court system, and accessing housing, child care, and other critical services.
6. *Shepard Building Accessibility Improvements:* Some residents are experiencing trouble with the existing lifts (which may now be non-compliant) and a full service elevator is needed.
7. *South Street Sewer Main Replacement and Extension:* This is a residential area within proximity of municipal sewer mains. Extension and rehabilitation of lines to this area would prevent costly repairs for low to moderate income households.
8. *Redevelopment of the Wright Mill Complex:* The Wright Mill represents an important opportunity to promote economic development in Warren. It is necessary to identify viable uses for the 600,000 square feet of vacant mill space. The complex can provide jobs for a high number of low and moderate income residents and significantly expand Warren's tax base. Redeveloping the mill will contribute to the revitalization of West Warren and concentrate development where capacity exists in water, sewer, and road infrastructure.
9. *Pulaski Street Improvements:* The Street abuts the large vacant mill complex in West Warren. Local residents rely on potable water delivered through lines that remain within the privately owned mill complex. The condition of the lines and their ongoing maintenance are a concern for are residents. Service should be reestablished independent of the vacant and privately owned mill.
10. *Warren Town Hall and Community Center Reuse & Revitalization:* The buildings were constructed approximately a century ago and remain largely vacant for separate reasons. The Town Hall, partly occupied by the Warren Police Department, requires extensive modifications for ADA compliance. Municipal services are now in Shepard Building. The town would like to explore reuses of the Town Hall. The community center once offered various activities including dancing, bowling, billiards, theater, etc. The facility is now vacant and citizen groups would like to see the building rehabilitated.

NOTE: The following areas of interest are also located within the village centers and have been discussed by the CDAC in consultation with the Highway Department, the water districts and local residents. They are noted as having deficiencies in water service and drainage systems. Street and sidewalk surfaces are in poor condition exhibiting significant deterioration. Many walks and ramps do not meet Access Board, MA Highway Department standards, or Federal Accessibility Guidelines. The need for comprehensive improvements in these neighborhoods is presumed to be similar to that of other priority initiatives.

West Warren: (River, Central, Summer and Spring Streets, and the west end of Chapel which was recently reported as having a significant drainage problem).

Southbridge Road Neighborhood Improvements: Located in Warren Center and framed by Southbridge Road, East Street and Washington Street, the infrastructure conditions are thought to be outdated and non-compliant with current standards.

Regional activities

11. *Housing Rehabilitation:* Warren is committed to improving the stock of affordable housing through housing rehabilitation, including correction of major code violations, septic system repairs or upgrades. The town hopes to continue its affiliation with Ware and seek funds for housing rehabilitation, including correction of major code violations, septic system repairs or upgrades.
12. *Adult Learning and Support Services:* Educational statistics continue to reflect a need for adult education services. Many adults in Warren are without a high school education and find difficulty obtaining employment or meeting the needs of area employers. This is evident as several adults previously employed with a recently closed local mill are currently using the service. The Ware Adult Learning Center (WALC), a program of The Literacy Project (TLP) has provided this service to Warren residents and has a proven history of offering an integrated curriculum of adult education to under-educated persons. This program has been previously made available as a regional activity with the town of Ware. Warren hopes to continue this affiliation. This program is the only local program offered at no cost to low and moderate-income adult learners. Warren also recognizes that many persons in need of adult learning services may also require additional services such as day care, transportation and counseling and thereby support complimentary services which help to ensure success of such public social service programs.
13. *Assistance to small businesses.* Warren identifies the Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation (QVBAC) as a regional agency endorsed to provide business loans and business assistance to residents of the community. The QVBAC provides loans to micro enterprise businesses or other small businesses that show job creation. Business assistance in the form of business counseling, training and seminars are also provided by the QVBAC for the benefit of town members.

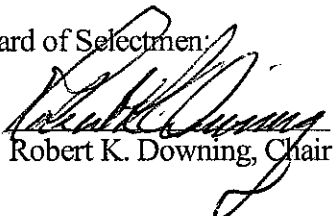
Other activities recognized as priority needs. However, those projects or activities may have other identified funding sources, require additional evaluation, require site control and/or owner authorization, or do not meet the CDBG national objective.

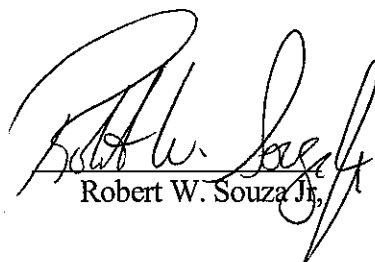
- Warren Library expansion and accessibility improvements
- Warren Police Station
- Warren Brownfield Assessment and Remediation
- Vacant mill building assessment: Two large employers in the town have recently ended operation and the properties now lay mostly vacant. Town officials would like to explore reuse possibilities and create new job opportunities for Warren residents.

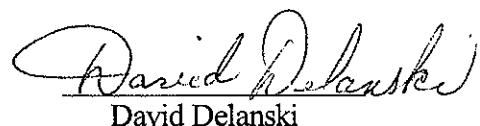
The Warren Community Development Advisory Committee held public meetings on September 29, 2010 to specifically discuss the strategy and seek comments from Warren residents. Comments were discussed and incorporated into the strategy, which was forwarded to the board of selectmen for final review and approval.

Warren's Community Development Strategy was reviewed and accepted by the Warren Board of Selectmen on October 26, 2010.

Board of Selectmen:


Robert K. Downing, Chair


Robert W. Souza Jr.


David Delanski