

Community Development Strategy

Warwick is a small (population 780, 2010 US Census), rural community located in North Central Massachusetts. Professional staff, elected officials, and appointed members of various boards and committees undertake Warwick's governance, community development, and strategic planning efforts. In addition the Town recognizes the need for regional planning and solutions to problems. Town officials and residents are active members of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Franklin County Solid Waste Management District, and the Franklin Regional Transportation Authority. This Community Development Strategy, along with the principles of Sustainable Development, were reviewed and adopted at a public meeting held on January 14, 2005, and updated most recently at a public hearing on September 11, 2008 and adopted at a public meeting November 12, 2009

Community Planning Entities

Town residents are involved in a variety of local and regional planning efforts to help clarify and coordinate the town's priorities. Needs assessments and community-based planning activities are conducted by the Board of Selectmen, Administrative Coordinator, Board of Assessors, Board of Health, Council on Aging, Finance Committee, Fire, Police and Highway Departments, Broadband Committee, Library Trustees, Planning Board, Recreation Commission, Treasurer, Town Accountant, Town Clerk, and School Committees. Various ad hoc and sub-committees working under these municipal boards are also involved in needs identification and goal setting. The Town is assisted in its planning and community development efforts by several regional organizations, including the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), Franklin Community Development Corporation (FCDC), and the Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (FRHRDA). This Community Development Strategy was developed in accordance with the Massachusetts Office of Community Development's Sustainable Development Principles.

Planning Processes and Documents

The Town is involved in a variety of planning processes, as follows:

Community Action Statement (CAS): Warwick uses the CAS as a guide for decision-making. First adopted in 1996, the CAS describes the Town's economic development, housing, infrastructure and service gaps, outlines the factors contributing to the needs, and identifies ways to meet the action goals to address the needs. Changes to priorities and goals are identified by each department head and communicated to the Board of Selectmen. The Board adopts annual goals, monitors progress and assists with securing financial, human, and other resources needed to meet the goals.

Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSP): In 2002, the Warwick Open Space Planning Committee completed an Open Space Plan that inventories Town's natural resources, and establishes priorities for open space preservation and land use. In 2009 the plan was updated and revised for the next seven year period.

Capital Plan: Periodically, members of the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee meet to discuss long-range capital needs and priorities for the Town. Recommendations for capital planning, prioritization of needs and allocation of resources are recommended and discussed at Town Meeting.

ADA Transition Plan: Warwick has adopted a plan to achieve compliance with Title II of the

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Town ADA Coordinator updates the plan periodically with involvement from residents and municipal officials. In accordance with the plan and using funding from a 1996 CDBG grant, the Town installed an elevator affording universal access to all floors of the Town Hall, and a ramped walkway (recently revamped by the Highway Department under the guidance of a former selectman who is an engineer) to provide an acceptable entrance to the ground floor and elevator. Without this, a current member of the Selectboard would be able to serve only with considerable safety risk and constant assistance. The town library and elementary school are ADA compliant.

Annual Town Report: Each year the town produces an Annual Town Report that contains detailed information about town processes, highlights progress made on community development and planning projects and identifies needs and priorities related to town governance, community development, social services, and public safety. Reports from various Boards, Committees, Commissions and Trustees are reviewed prior to and accepted by townspeople at each Annual Town Meeting. The report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013, was adopted at the May 5, 2014, Annual Town Meeting.

Regional Plans: The Town's needs and priorities were taken into consideration during the development of the following regional plans:

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- **Franklin County Regional Water Supply Study, 2003.** This study, produced by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments with funding from MA EOE, assessed the short- and long-term capacity of 17 community water supplies to support growth in the region and provides a region-wide context for water conservation.
- **Western Millers River Watershed Growth Management Plan, 2003.** The Western Millers River Watershed Growth Management Plan and the associated planning process was to initiate a joint discussion of growth management issues among the members of the Orange, Erving, Warwick, and Wendell Open Space Planning Committees and to identify specific community preservation strategies that would help the towns develop in a manner that would retain their unique characteristics.
- **Northern Tier Strategic Investment Initiatives Final Report, 2004.** Conducted by Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc., The Northern Tier Project identified new economic engines and sectors that could create a stronger and more dynamic regional economic base and provide for a skills and training system that could help the region's low-income and working class residents gain access to well-paying jobs.
- **The Greater Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2014 Annual Report.** The CEDS program, directed by a committee of business and community leaders, is operated by the FRCOG and guides economic development activities throughout Franklin County and neighboring communities.
- **Regional Transportation Plan, 2012.** This plan, coordinated by the FRCOG with input from all 26 county towns, promotes ways to develop transportation alternatives to the automobile, while at the same time supporting the improvement and more efficient use of traditional facilities.

- ***Sustainable Franklin County: A Regional Plan for Sustainable Development, 2013.*** The FRCOG and its Project Partners were selected in 2010 as one of 45 regional areas nationwide to receive a HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant. The plan is being used to guide local and regional sustainable planning and implementation activities, and addresses housing, transportation, economic development, energy, infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources.
- ***Franklin County Water and Sewer Survey, 2013.*** This survey and digitized mapping project was undertaken as part of the Franklin County 2103 *Regional Plan for Sustainable Development* to update sewer and water infrastructure information in Franklin County.
- ***Franklin County Regional Housing Study, 2014.*** Prepared by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, this study provides additional insight into the existing population and housing conditions in Franklin County and quantifies the affordable housing needs for various income levels in the region.
- ***Franklin County Regional Shelter Plan, 2013.*** Prepared by FRCOG with funds from the Western Regional Homeland Security Advisory Council, the plan provides the municipalities of Franklin County with a plan for regional sheltering so that they can provide the essential emergency services associated with regional emergency sheltering operations.
- ***Draft Franklin Disaster Debris Management Plan, 2013.*** Prepared by FRCOG with funds from the Department of Housing and Commercial Development (DHCD) through its District Local Technical Assistance Program (DLTA), the Franklin County Disaster Debris Action Manual defines roles, responsibilities, and procedures and provides guidance for development and implementation of all elements involved in managing debris removal operations when the scope and severity of a hazard event overwhelms an individual community's response capabilities.

Strategic Action Plan

The planning processes described above have resulted in specific goals and action plans that the Town plans to carry out over the next three to five years. The Town's priorities and projects, as well potential funding sources to accomplish the goals below are identified at the end of this document in the project list.

Telecommunications Access: Warwick is among the one-third of municipalities in Western Massachusetts that have limited access to affordable and reliable broadband services. Consequently, the town's residents were deprived of economic opportunities such as doing business on the Internet; working from home to save commuting time and gasoline; and engaging in university-based distance learning programs to obtain academic degrees, improve their employment opportunities, and participate in telemedicine. The town's Broadband Committee, appointed by the Selectboard, has worked to implement a wireless broadband solution for the town. In 2008 the Town Meeting authorized borrowing which permitted installation of wireless infrastructure on an unused cell tower, and a Commonwealth owned communications tower. The town-owned system has become a part of a regional solution

including portions of five other un-served towns. The system is able to serve 90% of the population and 75% of the land mass but is limited by dense vegetation which results in slower speeds than desired. The Town advertises “up to 1 Mbps downloads” while the FCC definition of broadband is a minimum of 4Mbps download speed. The town owned system currently serves more than 50% of households and all town buildings. It is operated as an enterprise fund and has generated \$450,000 in revenue in five and a half years. To date more than \$200,000 has been invested in the wireless system which is connected by fiber to the MBI123 / AXIA anchor institution network and by wireless and fiber to the NH FastRoads Network’s node in Fitzwilliam NH. The Town is seeking to find funding to implement fiber to the home. This is being done in concert with WiredWest / MBI and in addition the town is considering continuing the self-help model using its own workforce to begin to implement fiber connections. There is officially no cell phone coverage in the Town. Residents use Internet appliances called network extenders, microcells and properly Fem-To-Cell’s to make cellular service available at public buildings and homes served by the Warwick Broadband service and a device specific to a cellular carrier. The town is working with CoverageCo to establish cellular service that will be connected to the Warwick Broadband Service.

Housing: The town's primary housing goals, as outlined in CAS, and its EO 418 submissions, include correction of sanitary and building code violations, lead paint removal, removal of asbestos and repairs to septic systems. Preservation of existing housing stock is a high priority for the Town, as a majority of Warwick's residents live in single-family homes. Encouragement of affordable housing was one of the goals of the new Zoning By-Laws adopted at Annual Town Meeting this May. ***One MGL Chapter 40B-qualified house built in 2007 was sold to a qualified buyer.***

Economic Development: *Warwick’s land use zoning is geared to agriculture and home bases businesses.* The town's main economic development goals include support for expanded marketing and production by established businesses in Warwick as well as diversifying the types of businesses, promoting a stable tax base, providing jobs and services for Warwick’s residents, and encouraging economic development balanced with the preservation of natural, historic, and scenic resources and the community's character. The Town lacks such amenities as a restaurant. Many residents, still mourn the demise of the Warwick Inn’s Tavern about a fifteen years ago, have expressed a desire for an informal gathering place, such as a tea shop or restaurant, in town—one that would attract diners from surrounding towns. Home and cottage industries are encouraged by the zoning by-laws, and the town has indicated a preference for having development that is not ancillary to a home be allowed only by special permit or variance. In 2014 the town created a 44 acre as-of-right solar zoning district on town owned land where ground based solar projects are encouraged. The town became part of the Greater Franklin County Economic Target Area in 2008 allowing residents to take advantage of alternate energy tax incentives.

Preservation of Natural Resources: The Town of Warwick is committed to preserving and protecting environmentally sensitive lands, natural resources, wildlife habitats and to expanding recreational opportunities. In May of 2008 the Town adopted significant revisions of its Zoning By-Laws. These included provision for and incentives to use Conservation Development. All roads are protected by the Scenic Road Act, which requires a Planning Board and/or Tree Warden’s Hearing before any shade trees or stonewalls bordering public ways can be disturbed. In 2004, through the efforts of its Open Space Committee, the Town received a Self-Help Grant to purchase 36 acres of environmentally sensitive land to permanently protect public access to a trail and scenic overlook. The Warwick Open Space Committee has twice updated the Town’s Open Space and Recreation Plan, identifying more sites that should be considered for conservation, and working on developing a

Town-wide trail system. Warwick's Open Space Plan identifies the long-term benefit to the Town of creating greenways to link large parcels of State Forest and other permanently protected open space. The Open Space Committee is working enthusiastically working to fulfill this Plan objective. Easements on these greenways will facilitate an exceptional Town-wide trail system. The Open Space Committee needs funds to cover the cost of purchasing easements, legal fees and transaction costs, and acquisition of additional parcels for natural resources and habitat protection.

Public Safety: The Warwick Volunteer Firemen's Association plans to break ground in the spring on a new building to house police, fire, rescue, and emergency management services and when completed gift it to the town. Plans are approved and the building permit has been issued. Efforts are also underway to improve current safety levels by enhancing the communications networks (switching from low-band to high-band radios and pagers). Some but not all of the needed communications equipment was purchased in 2008. In July of 2007 the Warwick Volunteer Firemen's Association completed a 2-year project upgrading and dredging the primary fire pond in the center of town; this increased its capacity by about 60,000 gallons. This year they reconstructed a fire pond on Orange Rd. The FD received two surplus fire apparatus from the state fire district, a 4WD pumper and a 2500 gallon tanker. The town purchased a new 4WD police cruiser in 2012 and replaced an old 4WD cruiser with a low mileage Crown Victoria this year. The Town Meeting authorized funding in 2014 to double the police budget to permit more time for investigations and to patrol roads and enforce speed limits.

Transportation: The Town maintains over 59 miles of town roads and almost 500 culverts. The town hosts heavily traveled (especially by semi-trailers) Route 78, a numbered highway and major connector between MA Route 2 and the greater Keene, NH, and Brattleboro, VT, areas. There are no state highways in Warwick. Identified needs include 1) a better road bed to handle current traffic loads on Route 78 along with a funding source to maintain and upgrade it in response to the demands of future traffic loads and 2) public transportation to serve the general population (giving access to nearby shopping areas and medical centers) as well as the elderly and veterans. In 2014 the town completed a \$500k Mass Works pavement recycling and over-layment project on a portion of Route 78 and is included in the transportation bond bill for \$3.2 million in road reconstruction including flood mitigation at a major stream crossing.

Energy Conservation: In 2007 a citizen initiative supported by the Selectboard led to the formation of an ad hoc Town Buildings and Energy Committee. In 2008 the Town Meeting voted to recognize this effort as an official Town Committee. This effort has resulted in organized volunteer workdays at the Town Hall and other significant contributions including basement storm windows, window repair, and replacement of thermostats with programmable ones. On the basis of the committee's recommendation the Town has contracted with an energy performance contractor to undertake a performance based energy audit that could result in energy savings being financed by actual cost savings. The Town purchased a more efficient heater for the Highway Department garage appropriation of funds to insulate the equipment garage and installation of new insulated garage doors. In 2014 the town voted to become a Commonwealth Green Community and has met the necessary five criteria.