

Community Development Strategy
Town of Ashby
Adopted by the Board of Selectmen

Ashby is a largely residential community of 3,200 people tucked away on the New Hampshire border on the far western end of Middlesex County. With its small population, rural character, quaint villages, large forested open spaces, farms, hilly terrain, and historic charm, Ashby appears to be from another time or place compared to its mostly suburbanized and urbanized neighboring communities. Currently, Ashby is challenged with the community's desire to maintain and preserve its character, its sustainability, and its sense of community while being influenced by the development trends of the region and the commuting of over 80% of its population to work outside Ashby.

PLANNING GUIDES AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Based upon input received from local residents, the Town of Ashby has created a variety of planning documents that identify needs, set priorities, outline plans for accessing resources, and serve as guidelines for coordinated decisions making. The plans and reports currently in use and supporting the Community Development Strategy include but are not limited to the Community Development Strategy (EO418 Plan) 2004, Open Space and Recreational Plan 1999, Commonwealth Capital Plan FY08, Freedom's Way Landscape Inventory Ashby Reconnaissance Report 6/2006. Some influential regional plans and reports are Montachusett Region Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (MRCEDS) 9/2004, Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization-Endorsed Unified Work Program 2007, Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization -Endorsed Transportation Improvement Program[TIP] 2007, Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization Public Participation Plan 6/2007, Nashua River Watershed Association – 5 Year Action Plan (2003-2007), and the *The 1995 to 2020 Vision for the Nashua River Watershed* (The 2020 Plan).

The Town of Ashby Community Development Plan forms the basis of the community development strategy as the document clearly delineates the elements necessary to preservation and sustainability of Ashby. The Community Development Strategy has set forth the following priorities: **1. Natural Resources and Open Space Preservation; 2. Housing, 3. Economic Development; and 4. Transportation.** Based upon public input and current & future needs, we have added **5. Cultural Resources** includes historic resources, cultural events, and municipal facilities. We believe this Community Development Strategy and project prioritizations, as guided by the Community Development Strategy, are consistent with the concepts and recommendations of the Sustainable Development Principles outlined by the Office for Commonwealth Development and listed as follows: **1)Concentrate Development and Mix Uses, 2)Advance Equity, 3)Make Efficient Decisions, 4)Protect Land and Ecosystems, 5)Use Natural Resources Wisely, 6)Expand Housing Opportunities, 7)Provide Transportation Choice, 8)Increase Job and Business Opportunities, 9)Promote Clean Energy, 10)Plan Regionally**

Local residents, elected and appointed officials and department heads were asked to provide input including the public forum for the CDS. The input gathered at all local and regional meetings was used to set goals, priorities, and action steps. All local priorities, including but not limited to identification of all resources available to address local needs as well as grant requests, are determined by the needs and priorities determined during these reviews.

Target Area: In 2008, the Ashby Board of Selectmen determined the area of the whole Town of Ashby a Target Area on recommendations from the Board of Health and Building Department. The Town exhibits a high amount of housing sanitary code violations, requires public infrastructure investments, and needs to protect its natural and cultural resources. Focusing resources on this Target Area will protect the environment, preserve town character, and eliminate code violations & repair dilapidated homes in the town and sub-region. These efforts will be enhanced by ongoing efforts to create affordable housing, to preserve the existing stock of affordably-priced homes, and to help offset the incredible amount of new housing constructed at non-affordable prices.

Community Resources: Ashby strives to implement plans of action for priorities established by the town through the following limited community resources: **1)**Local Taxation (income and motor vehicle excise tax) , **2)**Permit and fee income, **3)**Volunteer assistance, **4)**Community fundraising activities, **5)**Local, State, and Federal aid, **6)**Technical assistance and grants from regional organizations, **7)**Like every town in Massachusetts with local needs, funding is raised through local taxation, permit and fee income, and state and federal aid. All available revenue is insufficient to address all local needs.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

The goals in this category are consistent with the sustainable development principles of, *#4 Protect Land and Ecosystems*, *#5 Use Natural Resources Wisely*, and *#10 Plan Regionally*, by continued enforcement of environmental regulations.

Action Steps Taken Since 2004

* Placed conservation restrictions on sensitive upland buffer areas including:

- Placing 12.5 acres of the Lyman Woodlot under Chapter 97 protection.
- Contributed to the placing of the 117 acres of the Joseph Property under state protection (Willard Brook State Forest).
- Major contributors in developing the Mount Watatic Management Plan.

* Identified and certified vernal pools at several locations including Blood Hill Conservation Area, Willard Brook State Forest, Ashby Elementary School and Elliot Road.

* Identified and designated scenic roads.

* Amended zoning, the Open Space Residential Development bylaw, to promote clustering of new housing with protection of priority open space and avoidance of homogeneous roadside development.

Goal 1: Plan to protect future drinking water supplies.

*Action Step: Seek assistance from Nashua River Watershed Association or other state agencies to monitor private well water quality and quantity by sponsoring free water testing days and keep records of well problems.

*Action Step: Create a multi-year plan to raise funds for a public water supply feasibility study.

*Action Step: Provide town residents with information about best management practices.

*Action Step: Study the potential of Ashby Reservoir for public water supply.

*Action Step: Study options to share water with Fitchburg Reservoir.

Goal 2: Protect water quality in streams and ponds

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- *Action Step: Consider passing a local wetlands bylaw.
- *Action Step: Pursue conservation restrictions on sensitive upland buffer areas.

Goal 3: Protect lands that support biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

- *Action Step: Protect of areas identified as rare species habitat and BioMap Core Habitat.
- *Action Step: Identify and certification of vernal pools.
- *Action Step: Promote best practices in Biomap.
- *Action Step: Supporting landscaping areas.

Goal 4: Create protected corridors for wildlife.

- *Action Step: Give priority to conservation actions that link large open space and habitat areas.
- *Action Step: Work with large landowners in identified corridor areas.

Goal 5: Preserve rural scenic character as well as natural resources and habitat.

- *Action Step: take steps to initiate the implementation of the recommendations of the Freedom's Way Landscape Inventory Ashby Reconnaissance Report by assigning tasks, time tables and funding sources.

Goal 6: Provide more recreational opportunities for residents.

- *Action Step: Plan trail and greenway creation in light of natural resource priorities
- *Action Step: Create a Trails Subcommittee.
- *Action Step: Seek assistance from Boy Scouts and other groups.

Goal 7: Enhance public awareness about environmentally-sound private landscape practices.

- *Action Step: Make public education materials available to residents.

Goal 8: Collaborate with other municipalities and agencies to achieve regional integration of open space protection and recreational opportunities.

- *Action Step: Keep aware of regional open space activities through MRPC, NRWA, Land Trust Alliance and other contacts.

HOUSING

The goals in the Housing element are consistent with the sustainable development principles of, #1 *Concentrate Development and Mix Uses*, by participating in housing rehabilitation program, #2 *Advance Equity* and #6 *Expand Housing Opportunities*, by increasing housing opportunities for disabled, low-to-moderate income, and senior citizens.

Action Steps Taken Since 2004

- *Established inclusionary/incentive zoning for subdivisions.
- *Repaired a series of housing rehabilitations with the assistance of Community Development Block Grants funds.
- * Invented and studied the feasibility of using town owned land or buildings for affordable housing. In 2006, Ashby attempted to auction town land for the purpose of creating affordable housing.

Goal 1: Shape housing development to preserve rural character.

- *Action Step: Mitigate the effects of ANR development.

- *Action Step: Establish Conservation Subdivision Zoning by right for parcels of 4 acres or more.
- *Action Step: Require the retention of significant existing vegetation in site plan review.
- *Action Step: Study the feasibility of wastewater management options for Ashby's Villages that would allow for denser development.
- *Action Step: Consider establishing zoning and a Transfer of Development Rights Program for a new compact village center and village nodes with design standards.

Goal 2: Provide for permanently affordable housing to provide options to senior citizens, young people, and others needing moderately-priced housing and to meet Chapter 40B goals.

- *Action Step: Establish the Ashby Housing Partnership to focus on promoting affordable housing.
- *Action Step: Apply for a Community Development Block Grant for housing rehabilitation in FY09. This grant application will be regionally sponsored with the other towns in order to increase the viability of the application. The grant will provide extensive housing rehabilitation funds to assist rundown and blighted properties that would otherwise have no way to repair their homes. Funding for the grant application will come from the services of the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission and the Ashby Board of Selectmen.
- *Action Step: Seek technical assistance from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership.
- *Action Step: Create senior housing with the assistance of RCAP Solutions and federal funding.
- *Action Step: Explore the possibility of a "friendly 40B" or Local Initiative Program project on town-owned or private property.
- *Action Step: Amend zoning to permit accessory units by right if one unit is permanently affordable.
- *Action Step: Allow affordable single family or two-family housing on substandard size parcels.
- *Action Step: Adopt the state law on tax title properties that promotes affordable housing creation in return for forgiveness of taxes owed.
- *Action Step: Study creation of a new Community Land Trust or expansion of the mission of the Ashby Land Trust.
- *Action Step: Explore the feasibility of tax abatements on existing homes for income-eligible households who agree to permanent affordability agreements.

Goal 3: To prevent and reduce the alarming number of home foreclosures and keep residents in their homes.

- *Action Step: Provide assistance to Ashby residents in maintaining homeownership by participating in programs that provide education to residents on the mortgage loan process and the responsibilities of solid financial planning. The outreach program will be administered by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The goals in this category are consistent with the sustainable development principles of #3 *Make Efficient Decisions*, #8 *Increase Job Opportunities*, and #9 *Promote Clean Energy* through the continued support of agricultural, light commercial and tourism development.

Action Steps Taken Since 2004

- *In 2008, Ashby prepared and accepted a zoning bylaw to allow by special permit utility scale wind turbines.

*In 2008 studied the scope and impact of creating an Agriculture/Recreation zoning district to expand income sources available to farms.

*In 2005 expanded the area of the Residential/Commercial B zoning district to encourage commercial activity in the village center.

*In 2005 establish an Agricultural Commission and enacted a Right to Farm bylaw to encourage agricultural enterprises.

Goal 1: Expand the nonresidential tax base, consistent with town character.

*Action Step: Enhance the tourism infrastructure.

*Action Step: Publicize local festivals to regional tourist agencies and greater Boston and Worcester media.

*Action Step: Expand festivals and events for a seasonal calendar of activities.

Goal 2: Enhance business opportunities in historic Town Center.

*Action Step: Explore new wastewater management strategies for the Town Center.

*Action Step: Explore allowing a wider variety of business activities in the Town Center by right.

Goal 3: Explore the economic potential of alternative resource-based activities.

*Action Step: Study market opportunities for agricultural tourism, specialized crops and animals, and gourmet and ethic markets.

*Action Step: Study market opportunities for recreation businesses.

*Action Step: Encourage and support expansion of equestrian-oriented businesses.

*Action Step: Study market opportunities for specialty production from forests.

*Action Step: Study opportunities for wind energy.

*Action Step: Create programs and locations to showcase local arts and crafts.

Goal 4: Provide economic opportunities for Ashby residents to improve skills and jobs.

*Action Step: Encourage and support public-private cooperation for economic development.

Goal 5: Expand the nonresidential tax base consistent with town character.

*Action Step: Review permitted industrial zones and light industrial uses.

TRANSPORTATION

The goals in this category are consistent with the sustainable development principles of #7 *Provide Transportation Choice*, by continuing to provide public transportation service through the MART, and #10 *Plan Regionally*, by participating the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee in order to work with other towns in the region and develop a transportation plan that will improve traffic in our existing neighborhoods.

Action Steps Taken Since 2004

*In 2007 applied for and received approval of the Small Town Road Assistance Program (STRAP) grant for improving rural roads.

Goal 1: Improve the road infrastructure

- *Action Step: Develop a strategy for road improvement and maintenance.
- *Action Step: Improve the drainage and subgrade preparation of roads in order to promote longevity and low impact storm water practices.
- *Action Step: Seek funding sources for paving.

Goal 2: Additional public transportation services for the elderly.

- *Action Step: The Town should work with MART to examine more access to seniors possibly exploring routes to senior's households.

Goal 3: Promote other transportation alternatives.

- *Action Step: investigate and conduct an inventory of horse, bike, snow mobile, and hiking trails.
- *Action Step: promote the establishment of trail connectivity through trail easements and trail creation.

Goal 4: The Town will investigate State Programs to improve and expand sidewalks along primary roads to meet the needs of pedestrian safety while walking between residential areas and the Town Center.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The goals in this category are consistent with the sustainable development principles of *#1 Concentrate Development and Mix Uses, #2 Advance Equity, #5 Use Natural Resources Wisely, #8 Increase Job and Business Opportunities, and #9 Promote Clean Energy*, by cultivating and enhancing the historic character and sense of community, improve the safety and efficiency of Town buildings, and actively promote preservation.

Action Steps Taken Since 2004

- *Ashby prepared a Heritage Landscape Inventory
- *Registered historic cemeteries with the Massachusetts Historical Commission
- *With the assistance of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Ashby prepared a preservation plan for the First Parish Church cemetery.
- * Restoration of the Old Engine House in the Town Center
- * Studied alternatives for a new police and communications buildings to replace the existing trailer, which is in serious decline.

Goal 1: Maintain a balanced mix of village centers; agriculture, forested and open space lands; and small neighborhoods.

- *Action Step: Adopting regulations that support the historic preservation of significant neighborhoods like South Village.
- *Action Step: Survey & Planning Grants from the Mass Historical Commission should be sought and used for preservation plans, planning studies and resource protection projects, supplemented by funds from the town.

Goal 2: Maintain the rural characteristics of the Town by: Insuring not net loss of significant trees or stone walls and no net gain of asphalt width on existing scenic roadways. Preserving and/or enhancing view shed and preserving historic structures and landscapes.

*Action Step: Continuing enforcing the existing Scenic Roads bylaw with direction from the planning board – tree warden roles with respect to the Scenic Roads Act and the Massachusetts Shade Tree Act.

Goal 3: Strive to attain a vibrant town center by maintaining a balance of residential, commercial, municipal and intuitional uses.

*Action Step: Expand town center social and cultural events such as band concerts, Ashby Community Carnival, and farmer’s market.

*Action Step: Encourage appropriate commercial uses to the Town Center.

*Action Step: Investigate additional parking for the Town Center.

Goal 4: Improvement of Public Safety Facilities

*Action Step: Revisit the reasons for the failure of funding for a new police station and including redesign as necessary.

*Action Step: Research and propose new funding approaches.

Goal 5: Energy Efficiency of Municipal Structures

*Action Step: Conduct an inventory of municipals structures, their condition, and necessary repairs and maintenance.

*Action Step: Prepare a municipal building energy use analysis and reduction plan.

*Action Step: Develop energy efficiency protocols and operational policies to reduce the energy use.

PROJECT PRIORITY LIST: Timeline for such projects are projected within a five year period.

1. Provide assistance to Ashby residents in maintaining homeownership by participating in programs that provide education to residents on the mortgage loan process, extol the responsibilities of solid fiscal planning, and assist families stay in their homes and avoid foreclosures **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** To be completed on or before June 2009. **Costs:** To be research. **Funding Source:** To be determined.
2. Apply for and implement housing rehabilitation of low income single family homes including the upgrading of derelict septic systems and critical maintenance. Coordinate with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission on the application and implementation. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Application to be completed in FY2009 with implementation on the next couple years if funding is approved. **Costs:** To be research. **Funding Source:** Community Development Block Grant Funds.
3. Study the energy efficiency of the municipal buildings to determine the necessary capital improvements, maintenance repairs, and operational improvements (including potentially limiting hours of operation) to make the most impact on a reduction of energy use. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Dependent on availability of funding. **Costs:** Estimates to be obtained. **Funding Source:** To be determined.

4. Study additional alternatives for a new Police and Communications Building including suitability of existing structures, downsizing the design alternatives, alternative sites and funding sources. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Dependent on the availability of funding; goal is to be completed on or before June 2010. **Costs:** Estimates to be obtained. **Funding Source:** To be determined.
5. Adopt and implement a road infrastructure maintenance plan and a strategy for the improvement of the road infrastructure. Apply for funding to perform road improvements based upon the approved maintenance plan and improvement strategy. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Planning to be completed in 2009. **Costs:** To be research. **Funding Source:** To be determined.
6. Based upon the preservation plan as prepared by the Department of Conservation and Recreation preserve and restore the First Parish Cemetery in the Town Center. **Responsible Entity:** Cemetery Commission. **Timeframe:** Dependent on the availability of funding; goal is to be completed on or before June 2011. **Costs:** Estimates to be obtained. **Funding Source:** Potential Source of funding is the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund.
7. Adopt zoning bylaws focused on the preservation of agricultural character and active farms. **Responsible Entity:** Planning Board. **Timeframe:** To be completed in 2009. **Costs:** To be research. **Funding Source:** Planning Board.
8. Establish a series of wind power research towers to determine best locations for viable wind energy for and in the Town of Ashby. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Dependent on availability of funding. **Costs:** Estimates to be obtained. **Funding Source:** To be determined.
9. Retain the services of a qualified team to research and develop alternatives for water and waste water systems in the Village Centers for the purpose of increasing the density of structures and potential economic development of small business reliant on public water and sewer. **Responsible Entity:** Planning Board. **Timeframe:** Dependent on availability of funding. **Costs:** Estimates to be obtained. **Funding Source:** To be determined.
10. Obtain assistance in order to establish a Housing Authority with the goal of improving senior and affordable housing within the Town. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Dependent on availability of funding. **Costs:** To be research. **Funding Source:** Potential funding source is the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission's Local Technical Assistance Services.