

Community Development Strategy
Town of Ashby
January 10, 2014 (Updated January 7, 2016)

Ashby is a largely residential community of 3,074 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 regional development trends and the fact that more than 80% of residents commute to work outside of 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. Local plans and reports currently in use and supporting the Community Development Strategy include but are not limited to the Community Development Plan (EO418 Plan) 2004, Open Space and Recreational Plan 2012, Commonwealth Capital Plan, and the Freedom's Way Landscape Inventory Ashby Reconnaissance Report, 2006. Some influential regional plans and reports are the Montachusett Region Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (MRCEDS) 10/2009, Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization-Endorsed Unified Work Program 2007, Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization -Endorsed Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) 2012, Nashua River Watershed Association – 5 Year Action Plan (2007), and The Vision for the Nashua River Watershed (The 2020 Plan).

The Community Development Strategy is organized around several elements: 1. Natural Resources and Open Space Preservation; 2. Housing; 3. Economic Development; and 4. Transportation. Based upon public input, current and future needs, we have added a fifth element, Cultural Resources, which includes historic resources, cultural events, and municipal facilities. We believe this Community Development Strategy and its project prioritizations, 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 to develop this CDS at a public meeting on January 8, 2014. The input gathered 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 a result of these reviews. The Board of Selectmen then adopted this Community Development Strategy on January 10, 2014. Additionally, a well-attended Public Forum was held in Ashby on January 7, 2016 to obtain public input to update this document.

Target Area: The 2010 US Census reports that the population of Ashby is 3,074. According to the Massachusetts Fy14 CDBG program guidance, communities with a population under 5,000 may designate the entire community as the target area for grant purposes. The Ashby Board of Selectmen designated the entire Town of Ashby as the target area. This allows the town to assist eligible residents

regardless where they reside in town. The Selectboard based their decision on the recommendations from the Board of Health, Building Department, and Highway 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 throughout the community will better serve to protect the environment, preserve town character, eliminate code violations and repair dilapidated homes, and provide necessary street repairs/improvements (drainage, reclamation, and paving). These efforts will be enhanced by ongoing efforts to improve the transportation network, create affordable housing, 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 (real estate 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. However, like every town in Massachusetts, funding through local taxation, permit and fee income, and state and federal aid is often 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.

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

*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 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, timetables 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.

Goal 1: Shape housing development to preserve rural character.

*Action Step: Mitigate the effects of ANR development.

*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 a local Housing Partnership to focus on promoting affordable housing.

*Action Step: Continue seeking Community Development Block Grants for housing rehabilitation program and a residential home heating program. Grant funds would assist homeowners repair their properties, assuring safe, sanitary and code complaint affordable housing and assist low and moderate income households to afford home heating fuel.

*Action Step: Seek technical assistance from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership.

*Action Step: Create senior housing with the assistance of regional local affordable housing developers, and state 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.

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.

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.

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

Goal 2: Enhance business opportunities in historic Town Center.

*Action Step: Explore new wastewater and potable water 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 ethnic 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 and solar 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.

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.

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.

* Continue to seek out funding sources for paving for other roads.

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, snowmobile, 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.

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 and 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 no net loss of significant trees or stone walls, and no net gain of asphalt width on existing scenic roadway

Goals 3: Preserve and/or enhance view sheds and preserve 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 4: 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 5: 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 and research any potential funding sources.

*Action Step: Research and propose new funding approaches.

Goal 6: 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. Apply for and implement a housing rehabilitation program with other community(s) to assist eligible single-family homeowners repair their property and apply for funds for residential home heating fuel assistance. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Pursue funding and implementation on annual basis. **Funding Source:** Community Development Block Grant funds.
2. Study the energy efficiency of 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 reduction of energy use. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Dependent on availability of funding. **Funding Source:** To be determined.
3. Research potential funding sources and 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:** By 2016, dependent on the availability of funding. **Funding Source:** To be determined.
4. Adopt and implement a road infrastructure maintenance plan and a strategy for the improvement of the Town’s road infrastructure. Apply for funding to perform road improvements based upon the approved maintenance plan and improvement strategy. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** 2016. **Funding Sources:** Chapter 90.
5. Based upon the preservation plan 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 upon funding. **Funding Source:** Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund.
6. Adopt zoning bylaws focused on the preservation of agricultural character and active farms. **Responsible Entity:** Planning Board. **Timeframe:** 2017. **Funding Source:** Planning Board.
7. Establish a series of wind power research towers to determine best locations in Ashby to develop viable wind energy systems. Appropriate locations for solar should be researched as well.

- Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Dependent on availability of funding. **Funding Source:** Massachusetts Technology grant funds, other sources to be determined.
8. Retain the services of a qualified party to research and develop alternatives for water and waste water systems in the Village Centers for 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. **Funding Source:** Planning grants, other sources to be determined.
 9. 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. **Funding Source:** Potential funding source is the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission's Local Technical Assistance Services.
 10. Implement the approved plan for refurbishing the Town Common. **Responsible Entity:** Parks Department. **Timeframe:** depending on funding. **Funding:** Local appropriation, state PARC grant, and other grants.
 11. Implement recommendations if/when financially feasible in the Town Center water study to provide improved water supply. **Responsible Entity:** Board of Selectmen. **Timeframe:** Depending on funding, 2016-2021. **Funding:** local appropriation, state and federal grants.