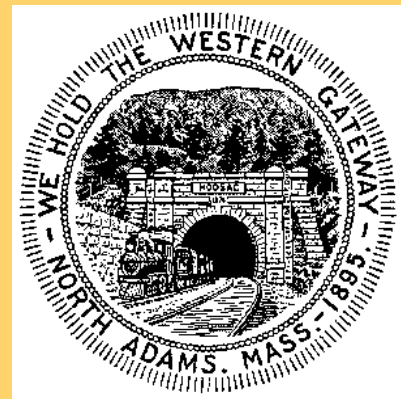


NORTH ADAMS LONG-RANGE PLANNING STRATEGY

11.22.2010



Prepared by:



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1 INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the long-range planning strategy for the City of North Adams as it prepares to embark on their first new Comprehensive Plan in over 40 years. This report defines the context in which the city has renewed its interest in long-range planning, the benefits the city would like to see from such an effort, and the approach the city would like taken in the future planning process.



Downtown North Adams

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In early 2010, the City of North Adams submitted an application to receive District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. Specifically, the city requested assistance to develop a strategy for long-range planning – the city has not had a long-range comprehensive or master plan in 40 years (1971). After such a long time away from planning, the city desired an overview of comprehensive planning practice and benefits to the community. Renewed interest in planning had been sparked by a few key variables:

- **Large Development Proposal:** A national big-box retail proposal along the Route 8 corridor, the city's prime corridor for industrial and employment activity, had raised community concerns. Residents clearly voiced their desire for a future land use plan to define the land use patterns that will best meet the city's current and future needs for high-quality employment and housing options.
- **New Mayor:** Mayor Alcombright's successful bid for Mayor in 2009 marked the first change in city administration in 26 years. Whereas the prior mayor had taken a very grant-based approach to planning, the new mayor wished to better understand what a long-range planning approach could offer the city, an interest that resulted in the DLTA application.
- **Desire to Build on Successes:** Over the past few decades, the city has seen both setbacks and successes. The momentum of the latter – including Mass MoCA, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and some related spin-off economic

activity and investment in the downtown – give good reason for the city to be optimistic about its future. The city wishes to better understand and plan for the renaissance already underway to facilitate investment and economic recovery.

DEVELOPING A PLANNING STRATEGY

The Long-Range Planning Strategy for North Adams was developed over the course of several months through the commitment and dedication of the following committee members:

- Richard Alcombright, Mayor of North Adams
- Jay Green, North Adams Administrative Officer
- Mike Nuvalle, Community Development Director
- Steve Green, Community Member
- Brian Miksic, Chairman, Develop North Adams
- Michael Leary, Chair, North Adams Planning Board
- Michael Boland, North Adams City Councilor

This committee met every 1-2 months over the summer and fall of 2010 to discuss a long-range planning strategy for the city. Early on it was determined that a plan was desired, and the committee then focused on identifying the important issues and topics the plan should help move forward for the city.

IN THIS REPORT

This report contains the following sections and appendices:

Section 2: Key Themes of Prior Plans and Strategies

This section highlights the five themes that consistently emerge from past planning work of the city.

Section 3: Future Planning Topics

This section discusses the topics and issues any future long-range plan for the city should contain.

Section 4: Components of a Desired Planning Approach

This section describes the general planning and outreach approach favored by the city.

Section 5: Creating the Plan

This section describes the steps the city will need to take to initiate the comprehensive planning process.

Appendix A: Summary of Plans and Strategies

This appendix contains the detailed summaries of existing planning and strategic documents of or impacting the city.

2 KEY THEMES OF PRIOR PLANS AND STRATEGIES

A review of plans and strategies completed for the City of North Adams was conducted as a first step of the strategy development. The comprehensive review of long-range planning directions previously devised for the city included plans and strategies in the following categories (See Appendix A for a full summary of plans and strategies.):

- *General Plans and Strategies*
- *Economic Development*
- *Energy and Climate*
- *Housing and Neighborhoods*
- *Open Space and Recreation*
- *Transportation*

The review of prior planning work in the city points to five “Key Themes” that have recurred over time. These themes were presented as a starting point for discussion at the first Long-Range Planning Strategy Committee meeting held on May 26, 2010.



The scenic valley setting of North Adams, Massachusetts

THEME 1: REBRANDING THE CITY

A recurring theme in past plans and studies is that the city needs to redefine itself to its own residents and be able to communicate this identity in terms of how it fits into the larger Berkshire region to other residents, businesses, and tourists of the region. The “old mill town” identity is frequently discussed as a barrier to attracting new residents and businesses. Arguably, the new identity of North Adams is emerging if not already evident, but there has not yet been a concentrated effort to complete, package, and market that identity to cement that redefinition. The lack of a clearly defined vision for the city’s future to unify and guide decisions is a fundamental barrier to fostering consensus and gaining momentum.

THEME 2: BUILDING A DIVERSE ECONOMY

The mill closings and departure of Sprague Electric in the last century left an economic gap that the city has struggled to fill ever since. Initial efforts to recapture a manufacturing anchor business have since evolved into an interest in a more diverse economic mix. This is in part a reflection of larger economic trends but also the city's desire not to see all of its eggs again put into one basket. The successful addition of Mass MoCA has been the major economic story of the city. Long in the planning, this success has been a landmark event for rebranding the city and injecting new life into its downtown. Another significant positive trend has been the transformation of North Adams State College to the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. MCLA's ability to engage as a leader in the region through such efforts as the Compact for Higher Education and various regional speaker series events raise the bar even further and highlight the benefits of this institution to the city and region.

Recent economic planning has focused on building on the anchors of the hospital, MoCA, and MCLA while simultaneously working to bring primary jobs to the Route 8 Corridor between Adams and North Adams. Economic development in the city has also enjoyed the support of an influx of community-driven initiatives such as Develop North Adams, a collaborative of local businesses, and the Hoosic River Revival Coalition working to develop a design concept for the downtown riverfront.

Moving forward, economic development efforts in the city would benefit from a comprehensive assessment of supportive land use patterns and tools as well as how to best target investment to ensure the city protects and builds the quality of life features essential for remaining competitive in a global marketplace. This includes housing, parks, schools, and other features that will make the city an attractive place to new employers and residents.

THEME 3: COMBATING THE IMPACTS OF POVERTY

Closely linked to the economic downturn that followed the loss of major employers is the story of a population that is increasingly aging and impoverished. Because the workforce had been dominated by manufacturing workers, the decline in the manufacturing sector meant high unemployment and no comparable replacement jobs. Now a generation later, the city is struggling with a very high poverty rate. This rate serves as a good indicator of a set of poverty-related conditions facing the city: deferred maintenance on properties impacting the appearance, safety, and stability of housing stock; blighted conditions in neighborhoods; a mismatch between economic aspirations of retail and restaurant storefronts in the downtown and the local consumer preferences; and an increased demand on services while tax revenues suffer from low property assessments. Untangling this web will take a concerted and multifaceted effort. Future planning will need to focus not only on how to draw new residents into the city but also how to raise the level of opportunity for current residents to thrive.

THEME 4: THE IMPACT OF GEOGRAPHY

The geography of North Adams is consistently discussed as both a major barrier and a key asset. The natural scenery of the city's mountainous surroundings is a defining feature which generates recreation and offers aesthetic appeal. The city is home to a main gateway into Mount Greylock State Reservation and several trail heads to the

Appalachian Trail. The city is also fortunate to have two designated scenic byways: Mohawk Trail along Route 2 and Mount Greylock Scenic Byway which starts in the city and goes southwest over the mountain, including Bascom Lodge at the summit.

This nestled location at the far north of the county, however, is often discussed as a contributing factor to a sense that the city is isolated and difficult to get to. This level of difficulty is related in part to the fact that many north county residents travel either west or south for work and the fact that most of the county's other cultural attractions are concentrated in the southern half of the county. A solution to this perspective may require a cooperative effort between the city and other north county towns, particularly Adams and Williamstown. These two towns are the city's largest neighbors and are locations that visitors either travel from or through en route to North Adams. Williamstown is well known for Williams College and the Clark Art Institute while Adams has a downtown that has been enjoying a resurgence and has been making progress planning the long anticipated Greylock Glen development.

THEME 5: NO HOLISTIC STRATEGY

The city last updated its comprehensive plan in 1971, nearly 40 years ago. These plans are typically updated every 10 years. While the city has a volume of planning documents on its shelves, there is not an overarching document to clearly define how those individual, often topic-specific, plans fit together. There is also no document that establishes a long-term vision for the city to work towards. Rather, plans and strategies tend to have short 3-5 year time horizons and involve minimal public input. A new plan would help the city tackle the four themes listed above and should include a strong emphasis on public participation and implementation so that it does not just sit on a shelf.

3 PLAN TOPICS / CONTENT

The following summary lists the key topics that future long range planning efforts in the city should work to include and address. These items were identified through a review of prior planning and analysis work conducted for or by the city and should be considered a starting point.

Master plans in Massachusetts must contain goals and policies in the following areas (MGL Ch41 s81d):

- *Land Use*
- *Housing*
- *Economic Development*
- *Natural and Cultural Resources*
- *Open Space and Recreation*
- *Services and Facilities*
- *Circulation / Transportation*

In addition to these basic requirements, there are several contemporary planning topics that the city would like to include in the plan:

- *Climate Change Adaptation*
- *Social Equity*
 - *Economic and Opportunity Disparity*
 - *Health and Wellness*
- *Energy/Renewable Energy*



The location of Mass MoCA in the city's downtown has attracted additional investment and economic activity upon which the city can now build.

VISION

The basis of any long-range plan document is a meaningful, community-defined vision statement expressing where the community would like to be in the future. The visioning process should work to engage as diverse a range of residents as possible to gather their ideas and wishes for the future of the city, including the role of the city in the northern Berkshire community as well as the larger Berkshire region. Creative approaches should be considered that draw upon the artistic character of the city and help participants freely embrace the possibilities.

ELEMENTS

Land Use

The city does not have a land use plan to guide land use decisions. The need for one recently became a glaring priority with two big box developments proposed for the Route 8 corridor, a key area of economic activity south of downtown. The development proposals prompted some to ask – how should the corridor develop to best serve the long-term best interests of the city? Without a future land use plan or any long-range strategy to guide development decisions, the city must consider the proposals only as they relate to current zoning. Two main concerns are that the development may eliminate some opportunity for higher paying primary job development and that it may further hamper the viability of downtown retail.

The new long-range plan should contain a future land use plan to guide future growth and development decisions in the city.

Function 1: Guide Future Development Decisions and Zoning Changes

This land use plan should contain a number of land use categories to show the desired mix, use, and density of development throughout the city. These categories can incorporate current zoning districts but can also call for the creation of new zoning tools into the city's code.

Function 2: Identify Big-Picture Function of Specific Areas

The land use plan can call specific attention to areas such as neighborhoods, historic districts, downtown districts, secondary or neighborhood activity centers, and gateways into the community. The plan can also highlight main circulation routes – car, bike, and pedestrian – in, out, and through the city.

Function 3: Identify Future Infrastructure Improvements

The future land use plan can identify where infrastructure improvements could be needed to support long-range vision and land use patterns. For example, areas where roads may be widened or extended, priority areas for streetscape improvements, future trails and bikeways, and the river restoration project location. This provides a geographic location for policies and actions called for in various other elements of the plan while simultaneously showing how they relate to each other and development patterns.

Economy

The city has struggled to overcome the decline in manufacturing jobs which occurred last century, most notably with the loss of Sprague Electric. In recent years, however, the city has gained some economic momentum with the success and growth of MassMoCA and MCLA and is at a critical stage of rebirth and reinvention. Many of the old mills have

been successfully redeveloped into artist live-work-gallery units, affordable housing, and mixed-use developments. The hospital continues to provide a main employment and service anchor just north of the downtown. The downtown itself is dominated by a variety of small businesses, storefronts, the Mohawk Theater, and MassMoCA. Manufacturing and other large-scale uses have now largely shifted to the Route 8 corridor to the south or, to a lesser degree, along the Route 2 corridor to the west.

As the city continues to diversify and expand its local economy, it will need to focus on cultivating a multi-layered tourist destination (aka. moving “beyond MoCA”). At the same time, it will need to identify a strategy for attracting new industry to the city to bring a solid base of primary jobs to the city and northern county region.

Housing and Neighborhoods

There is a two-sided face to the city’s old housing stock. The bright side is that the city has a number of historic structures, many of them in one of its six historic districts. These historic resources contribute significantly to the character and interest of the city. On the flip side, the age of the housing stock coupled with decades of disinvestment has resulted in a number of homes in various stages of disrepair. This impacts the image of the city to visitors, the quality of life for some residents, and safety in those extreme cases where blight has included health code violations or created spaces for illegal activities. The city has devoted considerable time and resources to identifying housing and neighborhood-based issues and strategies for addressing them. These should be revisited, refined, and prioritized through the planning process. Prioritization should balance cost with visual, economic, and quality of life impacts while maximizing the use of creative partnerships such as neighborhood cleanup days to bring volunteer hours to the cause.

Historic Preservation

The city has an excellent supply of historic structures. The majority are located within one of the city’s six national historic districts. While these notable historic preservation efforts have gone a long way to preserve the city’s historic resources, the city has and continues to face preservation challenges. Urban renewal efforts mid last century left their mark on the downtown, removing entire blocks of development. Currently, the main threat facing historic buildings is the cumulative deterioration of prolonged disinvestment. Homes, particularly those used as rental properties, have in many cases not seen any significant investment in decades. Non-residential structures are hampered by vacancy, leaving owners without the revenue to reinvest into the property while at the same time susceptible to vandalism. While several of North Adams’ old mills have seen successful adaptive reuse in recent years, its churches have now become subject to speculation as the Diocese has consolidated parish operations.

Historic Districts Not Adequately Protected

There are six historic districts in the city: Blackinton Historic District, Church Street-Cady Hill Historic District, Freeman's Grove Historic District, Freight Yard Historic District, Monument Square - Eagle Street Historic District, and Normal School Historic District. Each is host to a number of historic and architectural resources that are of great cultural and economic importance to the city. These have been designated as historic districts through the National Trust for Historic Preservation but this is honorific and does not actively protect the structures in the district from inappropriate modifications or demolition by neglect. The creation of local historic districts would allow the city to create regulations and design guidelines specific to each to actively protect the historic resources and character within the districts.

Historic Surveys

The historic surveys that led to designation are decades old and the condition and number of contributing historic structures may have changed in the meantime. The new long-range plan for the city should identify priority historic resources – buildings, districts, and landscapes – for preservation and reuse in the future.

Parks and Recreation

The city has a number of outstanding park and recreation amenities within its limits and is surrounded by vast public lands at its outskirts. There is currently little integration of these resources into a cohesive system. Additionally, some of these resources are in need of reinvestment to bring them back to their former quality and meet current recreation needs.

Quality Parks and Recreation Amenities

The city has a number of parks including the several parks, playgrounds, and conservation lands in addition to the state forest and reserve lands to the north, southeast and west. The largest park and recreation resource is the 219-acre park cluster of Windsor Lake Park, Noel Field, Alcombright Complex, Historic Valley Campground and MCLA Athletic Field in the south central area of the city. The Western Gateway Heritage State Park is a notable historic park just south of City Hall and near the gateway to Mount Greylock. Future planning will need to focus on prioritizing improvements to existing park resources, matching resources to recreation demands, and integrating the parks to each other and surrounding development including connections between neighborhoods and schools, parks and playgrounds, or the downtown to parks, plazas, and pathways.

A Connected Trails System

The City is also fortunate to have the Hoosic River flow from Adams in the south to Williamstown in the west, passing right through the heart of downtown North Adams. This river has become a central focus of regional and local trail and recreation planning in recent years. The Hoosic River Revival Coalition recently developed a design concept for the downtown riverfront that could serve as an important step forward in linking the downtown with surrounding neighborhoods while at the same time creating a new asset and destination for the downtown. In addition, the bike/pedestrian trail planned along the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway creates a great opportunity for the city to advance regional multi-modal transportation by connecting to Williamstown. Future efforts should pay specific attention to creating an integrated system that at a minimum weaves together the Appalachian Trail, Mohawk Trail, Mount Greylock Scenic Byway, and Ashuwillticook Trail and connects that system to the downtown.

Natural Resources

Climate Change

Increased temperatures, flood events, invasive species spread, and summer drought events are predicted for New England. Climate adaptation strategies, such as modified flood planning, stormwater management, stream and riverbank restoration, invasive species management and water conservation efforts would meet current needs and prepare the city to weather a changing natural world. The city should integrate climate change adaptation strategies in its future planning efforts. Potential topics include urban forestry, green urban design, stormwater management, water conservation, and innovative cooling practices.

Natural Resource Protection

The city's topography is a defining characteristic and one that offers inherent natural resource considerations. The slopes that set the boundaries of the valley community have a number of watershed and water-resource protection implications to protect both water supply and natural habitat areas. The protected state lands that surround the city offer important wildlife habitat and the city will need to consider its role and potential impacts through the land use planning process.

Services and Facilities

Energy Consumption and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The city is currently working towards achieving Green Community designation from the state. As part of this commitment, the city will reduce its energy use by 20% in the next five years. This includes its vehicle fleet, facilities, and street-lights and will be achieved through a combination of energy efficiency measures and renewable energy generation. The city may also wish to explore ways in which to support or facilitate energy efficiency and renewable energy generation in the residential and business sectors through the long-range planning process. This could include water conservation, waste reduction, and local food production in addition to energy conservation.

Local Government and Social Services

The city is fortunate to have a number of social service organizations active within the city and northern Berkshire County area, including the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition and Northern Berkshire United Way.

Transportation/Circulation

A number of major assets and opportunities are available to the city through its transportation infrastructure.

- **Greylock Scenic Byway:** The recent decision to re-route the Greylock Scenic Byway to direct traffic towards the downtown will be a major project that will offer great benefit to the town through increased tourist visits.
- **Route 8:** The Route 8 Corridor is both a major gateway into the city and a major economic corridor.
- **Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway:** This recently completed byway plan included the installation of kiosks at key locations.
- **Mohawk Trail Bikeway:** Current efforts to plan a route along Route 2 between Williamstown and North Adams are underway and can be integrated into an overall multi-modal strategy.
- **Ashuwillticook Trail:** The city will need to plan for the portion of bike trail that will connect the Ashuwillticook Trail in Adams to the planned Mohawk Trail Bikeway.
- **MoCA Concert Events:** MassMoCA hosted its first major summer concert which drew approximately 10,000 people to the city for three days in August. Parking and shuttle service were an essential planning component of the event and will need to be refined after this initial run if this is to become an annual event.

- **Airport:** The North Adams Regional Airport is a major transportation asset for the city and should be included in any economic development and transportation investment strategy of the city.

4 COMPONENTS OF A DESIRED PLANNING APPROACH

The process by which the Comprehensive Plan is developed is very important and is a critical component to the success or failure of its implementation down the road. The city is committed to a broad public engagement process to build enthusiasm in the community for the vision and potential of its future.



Citizens have already been actively working to plan and re-envision the waterfront of the Hoosic River in the city's downtown.

BROAD PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The city would like to ensure that broad public outreach and involvement techniques are used to engage the community in the planning process. The outreach strategy should be active on at least three fronts: general public, stakeholders, and elected officials.

GENERAL OUTREACH

Website

The outreach strategy should plan to use the internet as a way to share information about the planning process, draft work products, and opportunities for public input.

Public Workshops

The public should be directly engaged in interactive format workshops at key stages of the process. Each workshop should both share information and have fun and interesting ways in which the community can provide meaningful input and direction into the process. Innovative exercises or technologies are encouraged to broaden the reach to segments of the population who may not traditionally get engaged in a planning process.

Media

Standard media outlets should be kept in the loop to ensure good coverage of the plan as it is developed, with particular emphasis on public workshops and events.

TARGETED OUTREACH: STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder Interviews

There are a number of stakeholders in the city with specialized knowledge, some of which will also serve as implementation partners once the plan is completed. These individuals should be pulled in early in the process to help inform the plan – including elected officials, various boards, active non-profits, key employers, among others.

PROJECT OVERSIGHT

Comprehensive Plan Committee

A Comprehensive Plan Committee should be compiled to guide the plan's development. Interested individuals should be invited to apply to serve on the committee, with the Mayor making the final appointments. The composition should represent a broad cross-section of backgrounds and interests, and include professional and citizen representatives.

Elected/Appointed Officials

The Mayor, City Council, and Planning Board should be regularly updated on the planning process so that they can weigh in and provide direction to its development, particularly on key policy points.

CITY FRAMEWORK AND ANALYSIS

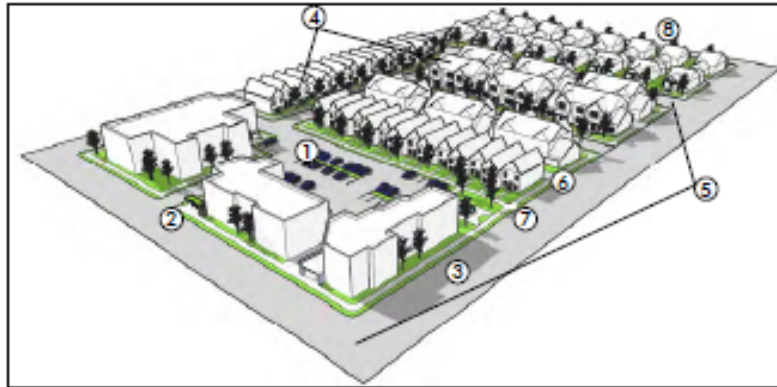
The planning process should integrate area-specific mapping and recommendations throughout as appropriate. While neighborhoods are not strongly identified, the downtown does have a clearly defined and agreed-upon boundary that is used for other economic and public investment planning and projects. The plan should be sure to devote special attention to the downtown in its land use planning, goals, and design recommendations. In addition, a number of other physical components should be addressed such as historic districts, current and proposed trail corridors, and key gateways into the city. Other areas may be defined through the planning process.

A FUNCTIONAL DOCUMENT

The city is eager to have a plan that is user-friendly and places a strong emphasis on implementation. The plan document should be actively used by city staff and leaders to guide decision-making and priorities, not a book that simply gathers dust on a shelf.

USER-FRIENDLY

The document should be graphic and easy to use for professionals as well as the general public. Features such as a clear table of contents, illustrated concepts, maps, and best practice highlights should be integrated throughout. This will allow all readers to understand the spirit and intent behind each of the plan's goals and policies. Also, the plan should avoid jargon which can decrease the ability of the general public to understand the intent of the plan.



- | | |
|---|--|
| ① Surface parking located behind buildings and away from primary street frontage. | ⑤ Uses within activity center organized around a pattern of walkable blocks. |
| ② Direct pedestrian connections to transit stop | ⑥ Alley access to residential garages |
| ③ Retail and other active uses clustered along primary street frontage. | ⑦ Direct pedestrian connection to activity center and neighborhood from primary street frontage. |
| ④ Mix of multi-family housing types | ⑧ Medium density residential provides transition to existing single family neighborhood |

Well-labeled illustrations can help illustrate concepts the plan calls to be applied in the city.

EMPHASIS ON IMPLEMENTATION

The plan should clearly list goals, objectives, and actions in an implementation matrix, list relative priorities, and identify responsible parties.

5 CREATING THE PLAN

The city has determined to move forward with the creation of a comprehensive plan. This section details the steps the city will need to take to secure the staffing and other supports needed to successfully develop and adopt a new comprehensive plan.



The City will move forward with economic and long-range planning on the regional level through the CEDS and regional planning processes.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

The new North Adams Comprehensive Plan will be developed over the next three years as a companion effort to the regional planning process which will begin in early 2011.

Regional Plan

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission applied and was successfully awarded a HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant in the fall of 2010. This grant will support the development of a regional comprehensive plan over the course of the next three years. The work plan will generally include:

Year 1

- Regional Vision
- Integrated Economic Development Strategy
 - General Business and Economy
 - Historic and Cultural Resources
 - Natural Resources and Recreation
 - Agriculture

Year 2

- Community Health and Wellness
- Neighborhood Analysis and Strategies
- Infrastructure and Services
 - Energy
 - Water and Wastewater
 - Transportation

Year 3

- Future Land Use Scenarios
- Future Land Use Plan Map, Goals, and Policies
- Draft and Final Plan
- Plan Adoption

North Adams Comprehensive Plan

The city's plan will be developed alongside the regional plan, following the same schedule for topics and workshops. At each stage of the regional planning process, the city will work with BRPC to translate the data and analysis into a city-specific document. All city plan components will be subject to review of city staff, plan committee members, Planning Board, and public in a separate – but parallel – process. It is envisioned that the process recommended in this document will still be conducted, but that city-specific events would be held as an immediate follow-up to a regional workshop on the same topic.

NEXT STEPS

In preparation for the start of the joint comprehensive planning processes, the city will take the following steps:

Hire Planner

The city has determined that a part-time hired or contract planner will be needed to ensure enough staff capacity within the Community Development Department to oversee the comprehensive planning effort. This position will more than likely be supported through grant funds. A model job description is provided in the appendix.

Submit DLTA11 Application

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission has issued its District Local Technical Assistance solicitation for 2011 projects. If successfully awarded this grant, the city would receive BRPC staff support to help develop the comprehensive plan. Applications are due in mid-December.

Develop Work Plan

If successfully awarded, the city will work with BRPC to develop a detailed work plan of how the city's plan will be developed alongside the regional plan. This will include how the process will successfully address the city through the process in a way consistent with the desired approach laid out in this report.

APPENDICES

A SUMMARY OF PRIOR PLANS AND STRATEGIES

The following summary of plans and strategies completed for the City of North Adams provides a comprehensive review of long-range planning directions previously devised for the city.

- *General Plans and Strategies*
- *Economic Development*
- *Energy and Climate*
- *Housing and Neighborhoods*
- *Open Space and Recreation*
- *Transportation*

GENERAL PLANS AND STRATEGIES

COMMUNITY ACTION STATEMENT

Prepared By: City of North Adams Office of Community Development

Year Completed: 2005

Overview

The Community Action Statement is a document maintained by the City since 1993 (updated in 1996 and 2005). This action plan follows a prescribed format from the state, answering a set of questions and information prompts. The document focuses on a comprehensive review of city government with the aim of identifying gaps in service/needed improvements and ways to address them. These services are broken down into the following categories: Administration; Budget, Finance, Accounting and Assessing; Community and Economic Development; Finance Committee and Financial Planning; Housing; Human Services; Land Conservation; Parks and Recreation; Planning and Zoning; Public Health; Public Safety; Public Works; and Public Schools.

Key Findings

The document culminates with the identification of the top five community needs:

1. Improve economy through economic development initiatives (create jobs).
2. Improve physical and technological infrastructure.
3. Continue to pursue Community Development and Housing initiatives in order to improve the quality of life for our residents.
4. Improve upon the installation of a Geographic Information System (GIS), and improve other area networks to improve efficiency.

5. Continue to improve the educational systems and facilities, and to better integrate and improve computer technologies into both the curriculum and staff support.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Prepared By: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Year Completed: 2004

Overview

The Community Development Plan is a state-funded plan intended to help communities balance new development interests with economic, transportation infrastructure, housing, and open space preservation considerations. In its 2004 plan, the city focused on the Route 8 corridor connecting Adams and North Adams, housing opportunities, and revitalizing the Bracewell Neighborhood.

Key Findings

Recommendations of the plan are summarized below by plan element:

Housing – Revitalize the Bracewell Neighborhood

- Remove severely blighted structures through selective demolition to create larger lots and neighborhood pocket park or tot lot opportunities.
- Produce new affordable housing that is compatible with existing development.
- Rehabilitate blighted and vacant structures to put them back into active productive use.
- Address parking deficiency in neighborhood.

Economic Development – Support Route 8 Corridor’s Strong Potential for Economic Growth

- Establish entity to promote economic development of corridor
- Continue to gather information on corridor businesses and potential funding sources
- Conduct streetscape improvements
- Coordinate with CEDS to list priority sites on corridor for assistance
- Designate portions and an Economic Opportunity Area (EOA)

Transportation – Route 8 Access Management

The study focused on assessing three intersections along the corridor as well as parking and overall traffic volume capacity. Furnace Street intersection was flagged as a potential issue.

Open Space – Updated Mapping

Efforts focused on updating mapping; policies deferred to the Open Space and Recreation Plan (2001).

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Prepared By: Brown Donald & Donald Planning Services, Inc.

Year Completed: 1971

Overview

The Comprehensive Plan of the city was last completed in 1971 and contains a comprehensive inventory of conditions as well as a number of goals and objectives for the city to pursue. The goals of the plan are listed below as categorized by topic in the plan.

Key Findings

Basic Goals

1. To coordinate the projects and programs of all areas of local and regional physical development
2. To improve the community's economic base, which provides the wherewithal for its services and facilities
3. To provide the highest possible level and quality of life for all the community's citizens
4. To protect and improve the natural environment in which the community lies

Economic Goals

1. To strive to retain and improve North Adams' existing industries
2. To strive to diversify North Adams industry
3. Attract new forms of commercial activity or other development
4. To maintain and improve North Adams' place as the central market area for residents of Northern Berkshire
5. To attempt to improve North Adams' commercial image for tourists and vacation and seasonal residents of Northern Berkshire
6. To provide encouragement for enlargement of a North Adams tourist industry
7. To seek to develop the State College as a major North Adams industry

Housing Goals

1. To provide suitable standard housing to serve present residents of North Adams
2. To encourage residential development of types not now prominent in North Adams, so as to attract a varied group or in-migrants

Facilities and Utilities Goals

1. To provide the physical sites and facilities to enable North Adams to have an outstanding public school plant
2. To provide municipal buildings and services at a level adequate to the needs of the citizens and economic progress

Transportation Goal

1. To seek actively to improve North Adams' communication with its region and the Northeast

Open Space Goals

1. To provide imaginative and complete facilities for outdoor recreation as possible to serve residents of North Adams and vacationers alike
2. To conserve sites where not already available for recreation programs, particularly in the urban area
3. To promote indoor facilities for city-wide events, large meetings and programs

Development Administration Goal

1. To provide the most effective and imaginative execution of the City's development plan, by encouraging the highest standards of municipal administration consistent with efficiency and available financial resources

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Prepared By: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Year Completed: 2004

Overview

The CEDS is a regional economic strategy that qualified communities to apply for funding through the economic Development Administration (EDA). The CEDS established the following economic vision for the region: "A diverse and robust economy that creates a sustainable prosperity, capitalizing on the region's unique and traditional combination of industrial and intellectual vigor, and natural and cultural resources." The plan also identified ten regional economic development "focus projects", one of which was in North Adams: the MassMoCA Small Business Development Center.

Key Findings

Three regional goals were set forth in the CEDS, each with a number of supporting objectives:

- 1. Encourage economic vitality of base and emerging industries in identified regional clusters**

Supporting objectives: workforce development, plan sites, business incentives

- 2. Improve region's economic competitiveness through targeted infrastructure and community improvements**

Supporting objectives: improve housing stock, downtown redevelopment, neighborhood enhancement, improved transportation, targeted utility improvements

- 3. Promote regional economic cooperation and analysis**

Supporting objectives: support regional collaboration, improve analytical capacity of region

ECONOMIC ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY

Prepared By: HyattPalma, Inc.

Year Completed: 1995

Overview

This strategy contains a vision for the future of North Adams' downtown and analysis and recommendations for the current downtown and business mix. It also presents an analysis of the downtown business climate and mix, proposed economic strategies that should enhance the downtown's existing businesses and attract new ones.

Key Findings

Vision

The strategy defines a multi-point vision for the downtown. This vision includes an active, safe, fun, clean, artsy, social, and attractive downtown. This includes a strong

business mix emphasizing non-chain retail and restaurant options, businesses, and preservation and investment into downtown buildings and streetscape.

Downtown Economic Enhancement Strategies

Values

- **Quality begets quality** – demand, expect, and protect quality
- **Social hub** – position the downtown as the community’s social hub
- **Preservation** – protect remaining historic structures
- **Community-wide priority** – make economic enhancement a priority to the entire community as expressed through volunteerism, funding, and patronage/support
- **A “Town Downtown”** – strengthen and recreate a pedestrian-friendly downtown through streetscape improvements, infill, and linkages
- **Convenience and products** – improve convenience and variety of downtown businesses to attract more patronage

Development Framework for Long-term Enhancement

- **Managed growth** – fold the downtown strategy into the Comprehensive Plan and implement it
- **Physical linkage** -
- **Asset linkage** – the assessment recommends linking the following:
 - MCLA and Williams, the arts community, regional cultural events and attractions, the downtown Holiday Inn, the downtown Library, Mass MoCA, Heritage Park, Churches, area-wide visitor attractions, community-wide events, and natural resources.
- **Economic linkage (downtown districts)** – Old Main Street District, New Main Street District, Heritage Park, Artery Arcade, Mass MoCA, New Anchors
- **Physical appeal and linkages** – Streetscape improvements (Mass MoCA urban design plan), Center Street parking lot improvements, Route 2 signs, New Main Street improvements

COMMERCIAL AREA REVITALIAZATION DISTRICT PLAN

Prepared By: City of North Adams

Year Completed: 1998

Overview

The CARD program of Massachusetts State was initiated by MGL Chapter 40D in 1978 to support revitalization of downtowns suffering from the effects of disinvestment. While the incentives and advantages of establishing a CARD have thinned with time, some distinct functions still remain. The CARD designation has been used as a prerequisite for

the Off-Street Parking Program grants awarded by the Office of Administration and Finance and receives special consideration for Public Works Economic Development (PWED) Program grants and Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) infrastructure loans. In addition, a CARD designation can help meet loan and financing application requirements of MassDevelopment.

Key Findings

The CARD area in North Adams was defined in the downtown, including Main Street, American Legion Drive, and Ashland Street. The CARD designation lasts for three years, after which time the applicant must apply for an extension or reapply for designation. The City has not renewed its application since 1998 and therefore is no longer an active participant in the CARD program.

At the time of its last application, the city noted the following investment projects:

- A Traffic/Parking Management Study
- A Signage Design/Location Study
- A Wayfinding Sign Program
- A programming feasibility study for the Mohawk Theater
- A façade and marquee restoration for the Mohawk Theater
- Infrastructure improvements for the Center Street municipal parking lot
- Central City Improvements funded in two phases through PWED
- North Adams Revolving Loan Program for business loans
- Marketing for Heritage Park

In addition, the city noted a number of challenges to downtown revitalization:

- The presence of large superstores in the city that have created a difficult environment for traditional small businesses (e.g., hardware, pharmacy, auto parts, florist, etc).
- The Berkshire Mall providing additional regional retail competition
- A high vacancy rate and business turnover in the downtown and in Heritage park
- The existence of poor traffic and pedestrian signage
- Inactivity of the South Branch Industrial Park

ENERGY AND CLIMATE

GREEN COMMUNITIES ACTION PLAN

Prepared By: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission / Center for Ecological Technology

Year Completed: 2010 (pending)

Overview

The city applied to receive technical assistance from a DOER-selected consultant to develop an action plan detailing what the city would need to do to achieve designation. The action plan, currently in development, will go to the city for formal adoption in spring/summer 2010.

Key Findings

The action plan details steps the city will make to meet the five criteria and submit an application for designation as a “Green Community” to the Green Communities Division of the Department of Energy Resources (DOER). The five criteria are:

1. As-of-right siting for renewable energy generation (commercial wind, ground-mounted solar PV, biomass CHP), renewable energy research and development, or renewable energy manufacturing.
2. Commitment to expedite permitting for the above by ensuring that nothing in local processes prohibit permitting within 365 days of application submission.
3. Development of a municipal energy use baseline (buildings, fleet, and street/traffic lights) and a commitment and plan to reduce that energy use (expressed in MMBtu) by 20% over five years.
4. Adoption of a Fuel Efficient Vehicle Fleet Policy committing to buy efficient replacements for non-exempt vehicles.
5. Adoption of the Stretch Energy Code, an optional appendix to the new state building code that went into effect at the start of 2010.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

NORTH ADAMS OPEN SPACE PLAN

Prepared By: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Year Completed: 2006

Overview

The Open Space Plan is a mandated document in the state that contains a rich amount of information on the city including history, demographics, and an inventory of natural habitat, critical species, scenic and cultural resources, agricultural lands, and conservation and recreation amenities.

Key Findings

Plan Goals (8)

- Increase environmental awareness throughout city
- To improve recreation areas and increase access throughout city
- Conserve areas of concern
- Increase open spaces
- Coordinate activities for the city's youth
- Promote North Adams
- Improve care of existing vegetation, inventory trees, plan new trees/shrubbery
- Obtain best possible Open Space Plan survey results

TRANSPORTATION

MOUNT GREYLOCK SCENIC BYWAY: CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN

Prepared By: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Year Completed: 2000

Overview

This plan provides an inventory and description of the Mount Greylock Scenic Byway that consists of the section of road from Lanesborough to North Adams that crosses over the state's highest peak. This byway is predominantly within the Mount Greylock State Reservation, which makes for a particularly natural setting but also includes a variety of recreational uses and tourist visits.

Key Findings

The main recommendations of the plan are presented in one of nine topics:

Coordinated Information and Interpretation

Recommended Actions: Prepare brochures, prevent litter, enhance internet availability of information on the byway and mountain, support DEM interpretive programs, offer taped audio tours, coordinate signage, continue and enhance educational uses, and outreach to community planning boards.

Scenic Resources

Recommended Actions: Assess feasibility of additional pullovers at scenic vistas, prepare a brochure with short walks, add better signage to announce upcoming pull-offs, review tree trimming guidelines, and encourage broader use of reservation than just summit.

Natural Resources

Recommended Actions: Communicate presence of sensitive areas to warn visitors, support implementation of GOALS Plan, minimize impact of road and facility projects, update plan with new biodiversity material as it is developed, coordinate with conservation and land protection interests outside of reservation area.

Historic and Archeological Resources

Recommended Actions: Provide clearer interpretive information, make references readily available for those interested, create and publicize additional walking tours, involve nearby colleges, historic societies, and children.

Cultural Resources

Recommended Actions: track current trends, cross-promote with other local sites and businesses, continue cultural resource education - including with local schools.

Recreation

Recommended Actions: Reduce impacts of reserve on adjacent private property, safeguard North Adams watershed lands, improve trailhead signage and parking, promote other state parks, investigate feasibility of a universal access trail, pursue additional funding options to support maintenance and improvements, ongoing outreach with local recreation groups.

Land Use and Conservation

Recommended Actions: Work to maintain rural character and soften the transition between towns and reserve, consider establishing design criteria, support the Forest Legacy Area designation, work to advance education on land conservation options, support local farming initiatives, and coordinate with local municipalities and land trusts to conserve land within the corridor.

Transportation

Recommended Actions: Improve safety at select intersections, improve directional signage, improve speed enforcement, implement transportation alternatives to summit on peak days, make parking safer, and maintain safety devices.

Tourism and Economic Enhancement

Recommended Actions: Design and use a byway logo to brand it, make travel of the byway more of an event, cross-promote with other businesses and destinations, develop self-guided “theme” trails, work to improve tourist variety with local municipalities and business groups.

MOHAWK TRAIL SCENIC BYWAY CORRIDOR PLAN

Prepared By: Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Year Completed: 2010

Overview

The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway corridor includes the communities of Greenfield, Shelburne, Buckland and Charlemont in Franklin County; and Savoy, Florida, Clarksburg, North Adams and Williamstown in Berkshire County. The study area includes Route 2 and a one-half mile buffer strip along each side of the road. The total length of the Byway is approximately 41 miles, with 22 miles in Franklin County and 19 miles in Berkshire County.

Key Findings

The goals for the corridor, as expressed in the management plan are:

- Preserve the rural scenic character of the corridor and protect important viewsheds.
- Protect the character of historic districts and village centers along the corridor.
- Preserve and enhance the natural resources along the route.
- Promote a low impact approach to tourism based on recreational, historic and cultural resources that minimizes traffic congestion.
- Promote greater awareness of the Byway and its recreational, historic, and cultural resources.
- Promote safety measures for roadway users including motorists, pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles.
- Enhance transportation safety, efficiency and comfort, without compromising the rural qualities of the roadway.
- Maintain and enhance the quality of recreational experiences available to Byway users.
- Increase universal access to recreation areas and associated facilities.

- Explore appropriate design standards for commercial development along the Byway.
- Promote educational opportunities for students and the general public related to Byway resources.

BERKSHIRE BIKE PATH IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Prepared By: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Year Completed: 2009

Overview

This plan outlines the plan for developing a regional bike path to run north to south in the county. The plan takes a community-by-community approach, highlighting the proposed route through the municipality and status of planning and next steps.

Key Findings

The city plays two main connectivity roles for the regional network:

- Northern continuation of the Ashuwillticook Trail which currently ends in Adams, and
- Create an east-west corridor between North Adams and Williamstown along Route 2.

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

FAIR HOUSING PLAN

Prepared By: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Year Completed: 2010

Overview

The plan reviews housing and demographic data, including housing subsidy use in the city, and makes recommendations to advance fair housing practices. Fair Housing refers to the Federal Housing Act anti-discrimination provisions as well as the fair housing laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that safeguard equal access and opportunity to housing for all.

Key Findings

The plan identifies a number of dynamics in the city that have potential implications on fair housing practices:

- The racial composition has become more diverse since 1980.
- The proportion of seniors relative to the whole population has increased since 1980.
- The proportion of residents living in poverty increased from 42 to 63% since 1980.
- With 12.6% of its housing stock comprised of subsidized units, the city exceeds the state 40B required minimum of 10% affordable housing.
- In 2010, the census tracts and block group geographies in the city will change; new data will need to be evaluated.

The plan identifies six impediments to fair housing practices in the city:

1. Child discrimination and its link to lead-based paint with lack of open advertising,
2. Minority and subsidized reciprocity discrimination,
3. Challenged-specific neighborhoods,
4. Disconnect between State Fair Laws relative to affected agencies,
5. Predatory lending practices, and
6. Need to improve Fair Housing Plan and its collection of data.

BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION REPORT

Prepared By: City of North Adams

Year Completed: 2008

Overview

The Blue Ribbon Commission report summarizes the findings of a public process dedicated to identifying ways to increase neighborhood livability, instill a sense of community pride in property owners and tenants, and identify actions the city can take to facilitate community revitalization at the neighborhood level.

Key Findings

- Adopt a Blight Ordinance that is meaningful and enforceable (“has teeth”)
- Use Neighborhood Watch programs to help curtail criminal activities
- Review the CO ordinance to assess whether new CO’s can be required at the time of sale
- Landlord education on laws, enforcement, tenant screening, and tenant rights
- City needs to consider options for combating blight and getting properties back on the tax rolls - this may take a combination or enhanced enforcement, demolition, and reselling tax titled properties to owners with a commitment to reinvest and maintain well.
- Employ community strategies to combat illegal dumping of garbage, such as a community “collection day”
- Continue to identify additional ways to rehabilitate blighted and vacated properties
- Conduct a comprehensive housing study
- Identify programs and resources that could be used to facilitate property investment (e.g., historic grants, RLFs, tax incentives)
- Build community pride and raise expectations of living environment

HOUSING STUDY

Prepared By: David Taylor, UMASS Amherst

Year Completed: 1989

Overview

The study examines six rental housing indicators to inform the city in its planning for addressing housing issues in North Adams.

Key Findings

- **External Housing Conditions:** 29.3% of surveyed structures were dilapidated or in need of significant rehabilitation. Two variables were listed as contributing to this figure, at least in part. The first is low incomes of the area translate to low rents which do not create an incentive for landlords to invest in properties. The second is the age of housing stock, with 65% of the city’s total housing stock built prior to 1940.

- **Interior Housing Conditions (multi-units structures):** Approximately one third of vacant apartments have a code violation; these are usually minor in nature.
- **Owner-Occupancy and Condition:** The study did not find evidence to support a commonly held belief that owner-occupied multi-family structures are less likely than pure rental properties to exhibit code violations or be in a state of disrepair.
- **Apartment Vacancy Rate:** Monthly vacancy rate found to be 2.2%; 5% is generally considered the norm.
- **Multi-Unit Housing Prices:** The study found multi-family unit prices rising between 1985 and 1987 while days on market decreased. This was attributed to speculative investment associated with the planned MoCA and Greylock Glen developments.
- **Apartment Rental Costs:** The price of rent is low relative to the state and other areas of the region, in part because of the student population and poverty rates.

Part-Time Planner

City of North Adams, MA

Overview

The City of North Adams seeks an experienced, innovative, and team-oriented Planner to join its multi-disciplinary Community Development team. The Planner will enhance the advance planning capabilities of this team and play an integral role in the creation of the City's new Comprehensive Plan.

North Adams is small city of approximately 13,700 people located in northern Berkshire County in western Massachusetts. The Berkshires are a renowned destination for arts, culture, and recreation with numerous museum and performance venues in a small-town New England setting with rich natural resources. The city is in the midst of a major renaissance sparked by the location of a premier modern art museum and events venue, MassMoCA, in its downtown and the growth and expansion of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts just a mile from the city's center. The city seeks to build on recent gains through the development of a new Comprehensive Plan, the first in nearly 40 years. This plan will be developed alongside the newly announced HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant-funded regional planning effort of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. While the Comprehensive Plan is anticipated to be the primary work responsibility of this position, additional project work will likely include neighborhood revitalization strategies, economic development planning, and bike path planning.

The ideal candidate will have a strong background in all aspects of comprehensive planning; other desired professional experience includes initiating and facilitating strategic neighborhood planning, community and economic development tools and incentives; energy efficiency and renewable energy programs and incentives; trail and corridor planning; zoning ordinance and subdivision regulation assistance; historic preservation planning; and a successful track record with a variety of grant-writing and administration services. The Planner will work with others in the department to staff city boards and committees, assist with grant writing and administrative tasks, and represent the city Community Development Department through direct interaction with the public as needed.

Additional desired characteristics of the planner include:

- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Team player
- Ability to multi-task and appropriately prioritize work
- Experience and comfort with ArcGIS 8 or higher
- Meeting facilitation and presentation experience and skills
- Familiarity with Massachusetts land use regulations and planning environment

A Master's degree in urban planning or a related discipline with a minimum of five years of relevant professional experience is required, and AICP certification is preferred. Starting salary is \$____, depending on qualifications and experience. If you can bring energy and expertise to North Adams in this capacity, please submit your cover letter, resume, and qualifications. The City of North Adams is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer.

