

# **DRAFT FY 2010-2013 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Dalton 2009 Community Development Strategy (CDS) was developed as a result of an extensive community-based planning effort to identify and document community development-related issues. The Dalton CDS synthesizes the Town's current planning documents with continued on-going community outreach and support. The Town's Master Plan (2001) forms the backbone of this Strategy supplemented by the following additional reports: the Business Development Plan (2000), Dalton Free Public Library Long Rang Plan (2001), EO418 Community Development Plan (2004), Open Space and Recreation Plan (2006), Senior Center Report (2006), Library/Senior Center Feasibility Study (2006), Historic Cemeteries Preservation Report (2007), Expedited Permitting Plans (2009), Senior Center Feasibility Study (2009), Five Year Capital Improvement Program FY (2010). The elements of each of these plans are inter-related and provide a context for defining Dalton's demographic, physical, social needs, financial characteristics and likely funding sources. The objective of the CDS is to focus on five key areas: Housing, Open Space, Economic Development, Transportation, and Public Facilities as the most significant community development needs.

## **BACKGROUND**

Many people make Dalton their long-term home (over 30 years), contributing to a strong sense of community (*U.S. Census 2000*). Residents of Dalton take great pride in their town's environmental resources and beauty, New England mill town character and small town social fabric. It is also evident that residents care significantly for the future of their community as documented by the over 50% return rate on the community survey conducted in 1998 as part of the community outreach and public participation under the development of the Master Plan.

However, residents and community leaders recognize the need to diversify their community by addressing the need for a range of housing options, diversifying their economic base to become less reliant on one employer and providing incentives and programs to local business owners to enhance local entities. Promoting and encouraging appropriate residential and business growth must be done within a process that protects all important town resources. Business and residential growth must be encouraged while maintaining the "New England Village" atmosphere currently found in Dalton.

## **FOCUS ON CRITICAL ISSUES**

The goal of the Community Development Strategy is to maintain a healthy community by fostering a diverse economic and social base. A diverse economic base consists of a healthy blend of jobs and types of businesses requiring a labor force of varying skills and education levels. A diverse social base consists of people of varying income levels, household compositions, and ages. The following critical issues and goals, as identified in the varied planning documents and local planning efforts, provide the framework for which the town seeks to foster an improved economic and social base:

**Housing:** Dalton's housing began as a result of the "mill town philosophy" – mill owners built single and multi-family dwellings for their workers close to the mills. This development trend is still evident today with much of the residential base located near the center of town (Routes 8 and 9). Dalton has historically included a mix of housing types. In 2000, approximately 39% percent of the housing was built before 1940. Unfortunately, many of these older homes are in need of improvement and contain code violations, usually because the owners cannot afford to undertake the needed repairs.

The town of Dalton has experienced continual residential development while having very little increase in the non-residential tax base. Today, Dalton is experiencing a rise in single-family units in the more rural areas where sewer and water have yet to exist. The extension of utilities to these homes will be a huge financial burden to the town. In fact, Dalton currently has one of the highest real property tax rates in Berkshire County and there is an initiative by the town to request for an override of Proposition 2 ½ to balance the FY2004 and 2005 costs to deliver basic community services.

A major theme identified in the community planning process was the need to accommodate the housing needs of certain groups within the population, specifically seniors and families. These two groups continue to grow as evident from the increase of persons over 65 years of age and under 18 years of age.

**Open Space:** One of the most important factors to consider in evaluating the town's resource protection needs is the declining amount of buildable land. A build out analysis conducted as part of the town's economic development planning study in 1999, revealed that there is currently very little easily, accessible, buildable land left in the community that is not subject to some development constraints. Outside of the center of town, development in much of Dalton is constrained by steep slopes, bedrock close to the surface, and wetlands. Of land that has not been developed yet, roughly half is either completely or partially constrained for building, with a large percent dedicated to open space. As a result, much of the future growth and development must be directed back into the center of town most able to handle infill and enhancements. In turn, funding and zoning regulations must be investigated to allow for these types of redevelopment projects to occur.

**Economic Development:** The Town's economic base is heavily reliant on one manufacturer: Crane & Company. While employment has been mostly stable this reliance on one company, in one industry, is not fiscally sound for the future of Dalton. The volatile nature of this reliance was also felt when the town suffered a major loss with the closing of Beloit-Jones, another prominent paper manufacturing company. This shut down shrunk the employment base by over 10%. The loss of good paying manufacturing jobs means that the overall payroll sources in town have decreased. This in effect has created a ripple effect throughout the local economy. Although Dalton has a relatively high household income for the Berkshires, the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs in the region since 1986 has led many families to leave the region thus eroding the stability of the community (*Dalton Business Development Plan, 2000*). Regionally, the gain in employment has occurred in the service sector (*Regional Plan for the Berkshires, 2000*).

Finding appropriate and suitable ways in which to strengthen and diversify the town's economic base is critical. As such, the town seeks to enhance and improve its ability to provide assistance to private business and property owners as well as create incentive programs that leverage private funds.

**Transportation:** The town of Dalton's access to a main transportation corridor is limited. Long recognized as an inhibitor to regional economic growth and development, the regional highway system is the principal infrastructure weakness (*Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Berkshire County, 2000*). The town of Dalton is located more than 13 miles from the Mass Turnpike (I-90) which runs east-west through the region, with a full interchange in Lee and a half interchange in West Stockbridge. Other east-west routes, such as Routes 8 & 9 that bisect the town of Dalton, are winding two lane roads that meander their way across the mountains to the east and west and go through the middle of small towns, making access to either I-91 to the east or I-87 to the west time-consuming and difficult. Taken together, these conditions present serious transportation limitations in terms of regional economic competitiveness (*Regional Transportation Plan, 2000*).

Solutions to the major transportation problems in the central Berkshire area, where the bulk of the region's population resides, have focused on long-range construction around Pittsfield. This issue has been unresolved for many years, hindering many other planning decisions, which such a project would affect. Getting through Pittsfield is consistently cited as the most serious traffic impediment in the region (*Regional Plan for the Berkshires, 2000*).

**Public Facilities:** The Town's public facilities are aging. Many important buildings and sewer and water facilities were constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They must be maintained, renovated and in some cases new facilities constructed. The community's public buildings form a core of significant architectural assets providing essential services to residents. Other important public facilities consist of water and waste water facilities, again providing essential public services which must be maintained and improved to meet the latest environmental standards.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

The following are a set of goals and priority action items related to the five program areas:

Provide for a variety of housing options that meet the current and future needs of Dalton's population, while avoiding undue fiscal impacts (*Business Development Plan, 2000*).

- Participate in state and regional efforts to increase the affordability of housing and link the efforts to fiscal reforms.

Continue Town participation in local and regional housing rehabilitation efforts conducted by local and regional housing service agencies such as Berkshire Housing Development Corporation (*EO418 Community Development Plan Housing Strategy, 2004*)

- Secure funding for homeowner housing rehabilitation assistance programs.
- Secure funding for rehabilitation assistance for rental and mixed-use properties.

Promote efficient land use that balance community needs, while minimizing fiscal, environmental, neighborhood, and scenic impacts (*Dalton Master Plan, 200 and Open Space Plan 20061*).

- A series of overlay maps should be developed to indicate locations of important areas of critical environmental concern and areas of preferred development locations.
- Dalton's Zoning bylaws should be amended to better encourage development practices that create and preserve open space and are costs effective.
- Investigate ways that would permit the town to buy or protect land from future development.
- Seek supplemental funding to preserve historic cemeteries as important open space and historic monuments

Retain and encourage growth of Dalton's existing businesses (*Dalton Master Plan, 2001 & Community Development Plan, 2004*).

- Conduct a site by site analysis of vacant or underutilized business parcels to determine the best use and seek to enhance viability. Document and map sites for further planning and analysis.
- Through the local development function, pursue resource options and incentives to businesses to expand or locate in Dalton.
- Enhance Downtown's visual appeal through building façade renovation/construction with design assistance and a strong but cooperative design review process.
- Investigate the creation of a Downtown Corridor Redevelopment overlay district along the commercial corridor on Main Street centering on the need to protect historic resources and promote economic development through infrastructure (i.e. street lights, street furniture, pedestrian access, sidewalks, etc) and façade & signage improvements.
- Provide for on-going implementation of Expedited Permitting Program in conformance with MGL 43D.

Provide orderly and cost-effective maintenance and extension of facilities and infrastructure, including roads, and public building improvements consistent with fiscal and growth objectives (*Dalton Master Plan, 2001 & Community Development Plan 2004, Library/Senior Center Feasibility Studies 2006 & 2009, Dalton 5 year Capital Improvement Program*).

- Continue with annual updates of the five year Capital Improvement Program
- Reduce capital costs by sharing equipment and buying materials cooperatively with neighboring municipalities.
- Guide development projects to areas where growth can be accommodated by existing infrastructure to minimize overall capital costs.
- Create a new Library of approximately 15,000 square feet, or add 10,000 square feet to the existing facility.
- Create a new Senior Center of at least 5,000 square feet.
- Complete South Street reconstruction project
- Secure financing for Housatonic Street Reconstruction project
- Continue annual local street re-surfacing and target sidewalk reconstruction
- Replace aging sewer, drains and water lines as funding becomes available
- Complete phase 3 of Town Hall renovations

**PRIORITY PROJECTS LIST (from Capital Improvement Program)**