

BROOKFIELD FY 2013

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

I. Introduction

This Community Development Strategy (CDS) presents a summary of the Town's relevant planning documents, identifies priority needs, and proposes actions to address those needs. A review of plans and reports identified important community development needs; these reports include the Quabbin Subregional Housing Plan, ADA Transition Plan, the Master Plan, and the Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report. Municipal officials identified needs specific to their departments. To maximize public input, the Town emailed the CDS to a wide distribution list. The Board of Selectmen received comments at a public hearing held on October 11, 2011. The needs identified below serve as the basis for Brookfield's CDS.

II. Current Community Development Needs

- 1. Handicapped Accessibility:** Because the basement, balcony, second, and third floors of the Town Hall are not handicapped accessible, there are severe space shortages for municipal departments while large areas remain unoccupied. An elevator, new restrooms, and other ADA improvements would provide accessibility throughout the building. The Town may apply for CDBG funds to remove architectural barriers and raise local monies for other needed improvements. (See discussion below.) The Municipal Facilities Planning Committee is evaluating options to renovate the building for municipal purposes.
- 2. Preservation of Town Hall:** The Town Hall is on the National Register of Historic Places. Due to gradual deterioration, it is critical to undertake needed repairs. The building requires substantial renovation to improve outdated systems and address a critical shortage of usable space. The Town has made a number of improvements: it upgraded the wiring, re-pointed brick, repaired dormers, added new dormer windows, re-built windows, made weatherization improvements, replaced downspouts, and added a new steel I-beam to shore up the building. Other needs include a back-up electrical system, storm windows, removal of antiquated wiring, interior renovations, and plumbing upgrades.. When falling slate tiles from an earlier slate roof renovation and cascading snow threatened public safety, the Selectmen erected a protection roof on its main entrance, placed unsightly but practical fencing around the building to protect passersby, and consulted an architect for installation of snow fences and gutters.
- 3. Infrastructure – Roadways, Water System, Sidewalks, Drainage:** The Town has received four CDBG awards in recent years to make water, drainage, and street improvements in the Town Center. Town staff contributed many hours of equipment, labor, and materials for these projects. The village center is eligible due to the concentration of low and moderate-income households. With its FY 2004 grant, Brookfield improved Sherman, Pleasant, and Lower River Streets. In FY 2005, the Town constructed a new 500,000-gallon water tank. In FY 2007, the Town made street, water, and drainage improvements on River Street and areas around the Town Common. In 2010, the Town used CDBG-R funding to make street, water, and drainage improvements on Common Street, Lincoln Street, and Lincoln Street Extension.

Although these improvements have been helpful, significant infrastructure problems remain. There are many streets without sidewalks, and many existing sidewalks are in need of repair. Handicapped parking in the small commercial district is minimal. The center of Town still suffers from aging and undersized water mains. Inadequate drainage in many streets in the

center of Town results in flooding that causes damage to individual properties as well as to municipal buildings. One high priority area is the Hayden Avenue/Hyde Street neighborhood, where substandard water mains, drainage, and street conditions create problems for residents. The Draper Street-High Street neighborhood is another area in dire need of water main replacement and drainage improvements due to steep grades and icy winter conditions. Frozen water cascading down Draper Street flows onto State Route 9, causing a serious safety hazard in the winter.

Central Street, the main avenue in the Town Center, receives significant use by pedestrians and disabled people in wheelchairs because of the presence of the Town Hall, Elementary School, Library, businesses, and churches. The street is badly in need of new sidewalks and curb ramps to remove barriers for wheelchair users to participate fully in community life. Street, drainage, and parking improvements will enhance the quality of life of Town Center residents.

Major flooding occurred in the fall of 2005 and 2011, causing significant property damage in low-lying areas near the Quaboag River and North and South Ponds. Several buildings and public streets sustained damage. The 2012 regional Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan identified portions of Quaboag St., Mill St., Oak Ave., Pine Lane, Long Hill Rd. (at Salmon Brook), and East Main St. as specific areas prone to flooding. The Town is repairing the bridge over Dunn Brook on Quaboag Street due to concerns of possible failure; the Town will have to contribute 50% of the cost. The Town is looking for other funding sources to prevent further damage to Quaboag St.

Mill Street is poorly constructed and prone to flooding from the near-by Quaboag River. Approximately 4700' in length, it has old cast iron water mains and needs drainage, pavement resurfacing, and guardrails. In several locations, the roadway, without guardrails, sits directly over and next to the railroad track, and a vehicular mishap could easily turn into a railroad accident as well. Local industries would benefit from improved water flow and fire protection. Mill Street is a dangerous road and has had several fatalities over the years. A new owner of the derelict Spencer Plating factory on Mill Street approached the Town to request assistance in finding uses and renovating the property. The Town may submit an application to FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) for a permanent solution to Mill St. flooding

A portion of East Main Street north of Route 9 is a locally maintained road in need of water, drainage, and road improvements. This is a sparsely populated rural road with great historical significance, as it is the only section of Benjamin Franklin's Old Post Road that has never been paved. Nevertheless, it is overgrown with trees and bushes, many of which are invasive species (Norway maples and Bittersweet) which in and of themselves are harmful.

- 4. Housing:** Many older homes, especially in the Town Center, are deteriorating. The Quabbin Subregional Housing Plan (2002) recommended seeking funding for housing rehabilitation and septic system repairs on a regional basis. Brookfield participated in the Ware regional housing rehabilitation program for many years to assist income eligible households and is looking to continue the program with another partner. The Brookfield Housing Authority owns one two-unit residence at 3 Hayden Ave., which is in urgent need of modernization. The Board of Health has noted a number of building code and health violations. In addition, several boarded-up, vacant residences are causing blight on their neighborhoods. If left unchecked, these eyesores will erode property values and cause potential health and safety issues. The Town wishes to recover some of these properties that are abandoned to make them into low- and moderate-income housing for residents of modest means.

5. **Sewers/Septic Systems:** Developing a sewer system for the Town Center, once contemplated in the 1970s, is not feasible due to the high cost and low population. Septic system failures plague the area due to very tight soils and small lots. Brookfield has run septic repair programs to assist property owners using a variety of state grants and loans and will continue to do so as part of its Housing Rehabilitation Program.
6. **Water System:** The Water Department service area is located entirely on the north side of the Quaboag River and serves the more densely populated parts of Town. As development spreads to other areas, residents may ask to tie-in to the system. The Department is willing to extend the system across the River, but would have to develop new pumping stations, wells and/or storage systems. Through the initiative of town officials, the newly reconstructed bridge over the CSX tracks and the upcoming new bridge over the Quaboag River have included the infrastructure to facilitate crossing these potential obstacles. The system will be extended when funding becomes available.
7. **Senior Services:** The senior citizens do not have adequate facilities for their needs. The Council on Aging uses a church for its activities since it has no dedicated space. The Board of Health holds flu clinics in the Town Hall. There is a strong need to provide a functional Senior Center to centralize social assistance services, health clinics, nutritious meals, and recreational activities. One option is to renovate space in the Town Hall, but without grant assistance, the cost would be more than the Town could afford.
8. **Brookfield Center Revitalization:** The Village Center has been the focus of many public improvement projects intended to bring about its revitalization. As a compact mill village, the Center contains aging infrastructure, an older housing stock, a high concentration of low and moderate-income households, civic and religious institutions, and many businesses. The Town is concentrating its community development resources in ways that will increase the standard of living of area residents. There is mounting pressure from townspeople to have the Town improve sidewalks for wheelchair users and provide more handicapped parking.
9. **Police Station:** The Police Department does not have a permanent home and had to renew its lease in a former residence at considerable cost. The Municipal Facilities Planning Committee is investigating options for developing a permanent station. With no grant funds available, the Town may have to issue long term debt to pay for the facility.
10. **Brownfields Clean Up:** The Town acquired 59-67 Mill St. in 2003 after a devastating fire destroyed an old mill. With a \$200,000 EPA Brownfield Cleanup grant, the Town completed the cleanup in 2012 and created the Mill Station Park on the site. A second brownfield site is the old Finney Gas Station on Rt. 9, where leaking gas tanks contaminated soils and affected nearby property. The derelict garage occupies a prominent location, and a clean site would offer a significant economic development opportunity. The Town may have to acquire the property to continue with the environmental assessment and eventual clean-up.
11. **Merrick Public Library:** Lack of usable space hinders the Library's ability to offer diverse programs, computer technology, and reading materials, and its dirt floor basement makes it a liability. The heating systems need replacement. The Library Board continues to search for creative solutions to these problems.
12. **Youth/Community Center:** The Recreation Committee provides a well-maintained outdoor recreation area at Lewis Field. However, only the Library provides year-round space for youth and only during normal hours. The winter usage of the Library by students has dramatically

increased in the space-challenged building. Brookfield needs a Youth Center to offer year-round social and recreational activities. One option is to create a combined Community Center/Senior Center that could offer varied educational and cultural programs to all residents.

- 13. Planning:** Brookfield recently completed its first Master Plan to ensure that new development is consistent with its rural character and preserves the natural environment. The Plan included an extensive public participation process to uncover local needs and propose solutions to achieve community goals. The Town will now move into the implementation stage to address the Plan's important recommendations.
- 14. Brookfield Cemetery:** Brookfield Cemetery, which is a National Historic site, is in need of major repairs. The Preservation and Management Plan pegs the total cost of work at \$250,000. The Cemetery Commission received a \$17,250 grant from the Mass. Historical Commission (MHC) in 2010 to restore the gate, and work is now complete. Repairs are complete on the Civil War monument. In 2012, Brookfield received a second MHC grant of \$25,000 to restore the stone archway. As the oldest operating cemetery in the country, the Cemetery is running out of burial space and must expand to meet future needs.
- 15. Preserving Heritage Landscapes:** The Heritage Landscape Inventory Report (2008) identified numerous archaeological and historic sites, scenic landscapes, and farms. The report discusses opportunities to document these assets, plan for their preservation, and implement tools to ensure Brookfield retains its rich heritage. The report contains specific recommendations to achieve their permanent protection. These include zoning amendments, local historic districts, the Community Preservation Act, and educational efforts.
- 16. Banister Common and Mall:** Over the years the Town Common and Mall have undergone extensive alterations to fit the Town's changing circumstances and to accommodate traffic and parking demands. Many of these changes, however, reduced the land available for community events and modified the original landscape design. In 2011, the Banister Common and Mall Committee approved a conceptual Master Plan that provides a road map for preserving the landscape's historic features, re-creates planting and lighting themes, and reorganizes spaces to provide for contemporary needs. The Committee will seek to implement the Plan with state and federal funds supplemented with local matches.
- 17. Document Preservation:** The Brookfield Historical Commission has a large collection of historic documents that require protection. A Commission priority is to obtain a temperature and moisture-controlled area to insure the long-term preservation of its important documents.
- 18. Agricultural Commission:** Preserving Brookfield's heritage as a farming community is the critical mission of this body created in 2010. The Commission organizes Farmers' Markets on the Town Common, distributes a brochure of local farms and equine activities, and raises awareness of local agriculture and its benefits for Brookfield. The Commission intends to sponsor a Right-to-Farm Bylaw to help protect farmers from nuisance complaints.
- 19. Mobile Home Park Upgrades:** Nanatomqua and Wagon Wheel mobile home parks are under Consent Orders from DEP to develop new wells and upgrade sewage treatment facilities. These projects will require expensive improvements and cause a severe hardship on the residents since most are on fixed incomes. The Town is working with the parks to facilitate the upgrades.
- 20. Sawmill Pond Dam:** The Mass. Office of Dam Safety (ODS) inspected the Sawmill Pond Dam and found numerous deficiencies. As the dam owner, ODS has ordered the Town to

conduct additional inspections and to bring the dam into compliance by Sept. 30, 2013. The Town has hired Lenard Engineering to oversee the project.

- 21. Lakeside Condominium Campground:** The Town has acquired all but three lots of the former campground off Hobbes Ave. through tax title foreclosure. Brookfield will study potential uses of the 14-acre property to meet local needs, or it could sell the land for other purposes. Future uses should be consistent with the Master Plan. One possibility is to develop affordable housing on the site for low and moderate-income families and seniors.

III. Consistency with Sustainable Development Principles

This Community Development Strategy is entirely consistent with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles, as briefly outlined below.

- 1. Concentrate Development and Mix Uses:** The Town Center Revitalization Program seeks to revitalize the historic hub of the Town by improving infrastructure to concentrate growth here in order to minimize development of the Town's farms and rural areas. The Village zoning district encourages mixed use, and Brookfield focused housing rehabilitation efforts here to retain the older housing stock of market-rate affordable units.
- 2. Advance Equity:** Brookfield offers many services to its low and moderate-income population. The Town has run three septic system programs over the years, and until it lost its CDBG funding in FY 2012, participated in a regional Housing Rehabilitation Program with Ware as the lead community. Brookfield also participated in the literacy program of the Ware Adult Learning Center for income-eligible adults to learn new skills for today's job market.
- 3. Make Effective Decisions:** The Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Zoning Board of Appeals provide an orderly permitting process for residents and businesses to foster sustainable development. The recently completed Master Plan provides a blueprint for revising land use controls to insure local boards have the proper tools to manage growth effectively.
- 4. Protect Land and Ecosystems:** Brookfield is home to outstanding natural environments that are important wildlife habitats. These include the Quaboag Wildlife Management Area (WMA, 1,445 acres), the Quacumquasit WMA (170 ac.), the Richardson WMA (370 ac.), and the Wolf Swamp WMA (787 ac.). Brookfield, in conjunction with the Quaboag-Quacumquasit Lake Association, completed a Section 319 project in 2010 with the goal of restoring water quality and habitat within the Ponds by reducing phosphorus and sediment loads.
- 5. Use Natural Resources Wisely:** With over 1,000 acres, the Elm Hill Wildlife Sanctuary in Brookfield is one of the largest preserves managed by Mass Audubon. The Society plans to establish a network of interpretive trails for public use. The Town recently approved a conservation restriction with the Opacum Land Trust to protect 105 acres on Rice Corner Road and is considering the sale of its unused Cooley Hill Reservoir, which is surrounded by Massachusetts Audubon's Elm Hill Wildlife Sanctuary.
- 6. Expand Housing Opportunities:** For many years, Brookfield offered housing rehab deferred payment loans through the Ware regional program operated by PVPC. The Town hopes to continue the program by partnering with another community on a joint CDBG application in 2013. The Board of Health provides loans and grants to homeowners facing expensive septic system repairs. The Town is also working to implement recommendations in the Quabbin Subregional Housing Plan.

7. **Provide Transportation Choice:** Brookfield is a member of the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) and receives fixed route service along Route 9 and complementary para-transit services. Brookfield participated in CMRPC’s “Inter-Community Trail Feasibility Study” (2004), which identified two trail opportunities: the Quaboag Plantation Path, linking North Brookfield, Brookfield and West Brookfield; and the Quaboag River Water Trail, following the River from Lake Lashaway through Brookfield to Warren.
8. **Increase Job and Business Opportunities:** The Town works closely with the Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corp. (QVBAC), which has provided over \$2.0 million to businesses via small business loans, micro-enterprise loans, and peer lending. It also provides business planning, training for start-up businesses, job skills training for individuals, and personal financial management training.
9. **Promote Clean Energy:** Brookfield received a grant from the Mass. Renewable Energy Trust to explore renewable energy systems, which led to a proposal to install a solar farm at the Transfer Station. The Town selected EPG Solar as the preferred bidder and is negotiating a power purchase agreement with the company. Construction should begin in 2012. In 2008, the Selectmen voted to close Town Hall on Fridays to save energy, and in 2009 voted to limit use of the Town Hall to one evening per week during the winter.
10. **Plan Regionally:** Brookfield is active in CMRPC activities and works with surrounding communities on regional initiatives. In 2010 Brookfield joined a regional compact with 6 towns to procure supplies at bulk rates for cost savings and with four towns to improve personnel management. The Brookfield Highway Superintendent initiated a program with superintendents of four surrounding towns to share equipment and to jointly purchase new equipment for use by the five communities. The towns executed an Inter-Municipal Agreement in 2012 to formalize the arrangement and expand the program.

IV. Community Development Priorities

The Board of Selectmen has approved the following high priority actions to address the needs identified above. The list of activities emerged through an ongoing process that involves discussions at regularly scheduled public meetings, consultation with town boards and departments, the Municipal Facilities Planning Committee, the Capital Improvement Planning Committee, and citizen input at public meetings and hearings.

1. Make water, street, sidewalk, and drainage improvements in the Town Center. Priority locations include Central St., High St., Draper St., Hayden Ave., Hyde St., Mill St., and Main St. Upgrade the drainage system to reduce neighborhood flooding, minimize sedimentation, and protect water quality. Make repairs to the Dunn Brook Bridge on Quaboag Street and the Sawmill Pond Dam on Lake Road.
2. Many residents are unable to afford major housing repairs, keep up with rising utility bills, or pay for expensive septic system upgrades. It is important to continue the housing rehabilitation program by submitting a competitive CDBG application with another community.
3. Finalize plans for the Town Hall barrier removal project and seek CDBG funds for those improvements. Concurrently, finalize plans for renovation of the historic building and appropriate funds to complete the restoration.

4. Renovate space in the Town Hall for use by the Town's seniors where medical clinics, recreational activities, meals, and specialized services can help seniors maintain active and healthful lifestyles.
5. Continue with efforts to find a permanent home for the Police Department.
6. Work with the Brookfield Housing Authority to modernize its Hayden Avenue property.
7. Make parking improvements in the Town Center, including additional handicapped parking, and improve sidewalks for wheelchair accessibility.
8. Increase quantity of housing available for low and moderate-income households and work to rehabilitate abandoned homes and/or tax title properties with deed restrictions for affordability.
9. Implement recommendations from the Master Plan to help Brookfield manage its growth in a sustainable and orderly fashion.
10. Clean up the Finney's Garage site and re-develop for a commercial use.
11. Implement recommendations of the Brookfield Cemetery Management Plan. Prepare options for expansion to provide land for additional plots.
12. Seek state and federal funds to restore the Banister Common and Mall in keeping with its original design while enhancing its functionality to accommodate contemporary community needs.
13. Provide a climate-controlled site for preservation of historic Town documents.
14. For streets prone to flooding near the Quaboag River and North and South Ponds, apply for disaster mitigation grants and other sources to reconstruct the roads to prevent flood damage.
15. Assist small business retention and development by providing resources such as micro-enterprise loans, training, and business technical assistance. In addition, assist persons wishing to enhance work skills by offering programs in reading, writing, math, computer literacy, and business management prowess, in order to generate employment for the local population.
16. Continue renovations at Lewis Field by solving drainage problems and improving parking.
17. Develop a Youth Center and/or multi-purpose Community Center to offer recreational, educational, and cultural programs to Brookfield residents.
18. Study land use options at the Lakeside Campground for meeting Town needs.

Adopted by the Brookfield Board of Selectmen on _____, 2012.

Stephen J. Comtois II, Chair

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