

WAREHAM COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Public Meeting

Community Development Strategy

Room 225, Multi-Services Center

6:00 P.M., October 17, 2011

CEDA Board Members Present: Jean Connaughton, Chairman; Sandra Besse, Robert Fitchenmayer, Jo Jeffries, Jennifer Petersen, Rudy Santos, David Smith

Members Not Present: None

Also Present: Peter Sanborn, Acting Director, CEDA; Karen Hamilton, Housing and Grants Manager, CEDA; Jacqui Hickey, Financial Assistant, CEDA

Chairman Connaughton called the meeting to order to talk about the needs and priorities. He noted that this hearing is a posted meeting of the Community and Economic Development Authority. She introduced Peter Sanborn, Acting Director.

Peter stated that Wareham is progressing on many identified community needs and priorities with its Block Grant funds: housing conditions, Agawam Village, Streetscape improvements, public social service programs. He provided a description of what programs are being funded.

A discussion of the needs of the community is the first step to preparing a CDBG grant application for FY 2012 funding, which is due on December 16. A public hearing will be held in November to talk about specifics of that grant application. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to talk about the needs of the town as a whole, and not about the upcoming grant application specifically. This needs discussion is a DHCD requirement as part of the review, development or revision of a local Community Development Strategy (CDS).

CDBG is a federal program with a portion of funds that flow down to each state for distribution to small and mid-sized communities. Within the overall CDBG structure, a state has considerable latitude in distributing funds. Massachusetts does this through multiple funds. One of these is the Mini-Entitlement Plan fund. Wareham falls into this category; it is one of ten communities that have been designated as Mini's – they are of moderate size in population, and have high needs indicators based on housing, demographic and socio-economic factors. Mr. Sanborn explained the census block information shown in the package of information.

Unlike most similar sized communities in Massachusetts, a majority of Wareham's population is low- or moderate-income. He explained that these are income guidelines issued by HUD and have a major affect in how the town develops and administers its CDBG grants. He referred to the income chart. A Mini designation results in these ten

communities receiving CDBG funding on a non-competitive basis and getting a higher level of funding than others. This year the grant will be reduced to \$900,000 from \$1,000,000 in previous years.

The needs to be discussed can be those that are addressed by town government, non profits, etc. Deborah Rose said that she would like everyone to state why they are here and if representing an agency. She has been a resident for 44 years and is concerned about town.

Mr. Sanborn gave an overview of the current (2010) CDS and described how it describes needs, and goals and priorities in different topical areas: housing, economic development, transportation, public social services, and municipal services. It puts the needs in each of these areas in context to the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles (SDP). It concludes with a priority list.

There are several needs that continue over a long period of time, including improving the quality of privately-owned housing and the public housing stock for affordable decent housing. These needs can be addressed by the Housing Authority and the housing rehab program to address deficiencies and code issues. There also has been a demand over the years for private developers to create rental apartments, with long-term commitments to affordability. Someone asked if it is the landlord or homeowner who asks for repairs? It is the homeowner. A developer comes and asks for assistance in return for granting long-term affordability.

Mr. Sanborn said that CEDA also operates the Title V septic repair program, which is funded by the MA DEP and not by DHCD/CDBG. Sandy Slavin wanted to know if this loan could assist with the nitrogen-loading issue. Mr. Sanborn said that it will address septic waste problems so that "the fix" will meet state and local requirements. It can also help finance tie-ins to the sewer system.

Deborah Rose asked about affordable housing for seniors and disabled households and she said she did not qualify for either one because her income was too high, even though it wasn't very high. Jacqui Hickey said that is what the town is trying to do with its proposed Westfield affordable housing project. Ms. Rose said that she will be forced to leave her home and cannot get anything suitable. Peter said this is beyond town's control: rent and eligibility for affordable apartments are based on income; one can be over the limit by a lot or a little, but the limit is the limit. Why can't the town develop something like the Bourne Housing Authority's Bourne Oaks that has rents for elderly with various income levels? Mr. Sanborn said that he was not familiar with that development but he would be surprised if it was exactly as she described it.

Ms. Rose continued and spoke about the houses that are nothing but eyesores and are unsafe. Mr. Sanborn asked her what she thinks that CEDA or the town should do differently? She said that Wareham is not cooperative. Peter said it takes a long time. CEDA is funding a part-time position through the Board of Health for a Code Enforcement Inspector. She mentioned that the Town is spending money on Main Street

when other parts of the town look terrible. Is the town going to fix up the properties along Cranberry Highway? They are eyesores. Mr. Sanborn said that there is only so much time and money and the town doesn't have the ability to solve every problem. Jacqui Lindsey said that we have to work with the State and but Deborah has a good idea. Mr. Sanborn asked for clarification as Ms. Rose had said many things. Ms. Lindsey responded and he stated that the comments are noted.

Another attendee said that transportation was important issue. There are a high percentage of low income residents; much more so than in other communities. Also, there are many disabled and elderly residents who cannot drive. Mr. Sanborn said that the Town has recognized this for many years and has responded by funding transportation assistance programs, i.e., Dial-A-Ride, Out-of-Town transportation for medical appointments, and the OWL Pass program. All three are heavily used and CEDA anticipates a continuing need for these programs.

The CDS states that there are many needs relating to economic development, both direct and indirect: Business improvements in town, and services to populations who need readiness training or other skills for jobs, revitalization of Wareham Village. The intent of a project like the Village Streetscape project is to create an improved public environment that induces new business to locate or old business to revitalize. There are plans to reconstruct Cranberry Highway with major changes that include sidewalks and intersection redesign. The project is in design but the Town has to agree to take over the maintenance from MassHighway once the work is completed. The ongoing cost of this is a major concern if the Town takes over the maintenance responsibilities.

Someone said that the town needs to come up with a reinvestment plan for Cranberry Highway that includes mixed-use, commercial and residential properties. He said that property owners along the highway are waiting for the state to move first.

Darryl Higgins said that he was from the Onset Youth Center. The group wants to build a brand new youth Center and asked how they would qualify for funding. He said that the center hopes to have a grant writer to get things going in raising funds. What category do we fall in? Mr. Sanborn said it would be a public facilities category. He offered to meet with Mr. Higgins to go through the particulars.

David Willis asked why the Town was spending money on Main Street when it cannot keep clean what already exists. Revitalizing downtown is foolish; the Town should be moving the homeless along, and cleaning up streets. There was brief discussion among attendees about the pros and cons of Mr. Willis comments.

Another attendee brought up bike paths and bike lanes. They should be added to the list of priority needs. Dave Smith mentioned that Merchants Way might be a good street in the Village to mark as a bike lane. Someone asked if the streetscape project was in both Wareham village and Onset Village; Mr. Sanborn said it is only in Wareham Village. Sandy Slavin asked if the streetscape money is committed to Main Street? Chairman Connaughton said it is, or the Town would have to give it back. Another attendee said

that commuter rail will it be coming to Wareham. Mr. Sanborn said that his understanding is that it is not happening anytime in the foreseeable future.

The \$900,000 grant is not money in-hand as of yet. To complete the three remaining phases of the streetscape project, the town has applied for \$1.4 million from another grant source. Pam Sequeira, WHA Director, brought some papers to show Agawam Village and the improvements occurring there. Len Gay talked about the sidewalk bump-outs along Main Street and asked if they were of concern to the fire department and Municipal Maintenance. Mr. Sanborn said that they are aware of the plans and haven't said it will be a problem. The bump-outs occur at crosswalk points only. Mr. Gay said that he doesn't believe in them. Mr. Sanborn said that this will make for safer condition for pedestrians. He said that the design decisions occurred before he came to Wareham. David Willis said that maybe the Town can give more money to Municipal Maintenance and not do the streetscape project. Peter said that will not happen because it is not allowable to use these funds for operating costs.

An attendee asked what the Town is doing to fill vacancies in the Industrial park and bring down the vacancy rate. Mr. Sanborn said there is a new business going in there now, but that he understands that there is almost no vacancy. He was asked if there was an inventory of available space. There was some discussion about doing more planning related to economic development. Jennifer Peterson, CEDA board member, said that CEDA could use Program Income for these types of things that relate to economic planning. She wanted to explain to the attendees the difference between grant and other money so everyone would better understand that the money is not all interchangeable

An attendee said that there are areas of town that are just a disgrace and asked what is going to be done about it. Why would any business locate to or expand in Wareham when it looks as it does? Mr. Sanborn said that appearances are important but are likely not the most important considerations when making a locational decision.

A woman asked what the grant currently is being used for and was told: housing rehab, streetscape, social service programs, improvements at Agawam Village and 4 Recovery Road.

Chairman Connaughton reiterated that this is a meeting to determine needs and not to discuss specific funding possibilities. CEDA needs to come up with a list of needs from all. Then it goes to the CEDA Board and Selectmen where it will get approved, hopefully. Mr. Sanborn added that anyone can bring up anything, but that the meeting's purpose is to get a response as to what the needs are for the town as a whole. CEDA staff will take these suggestions and determine what will be able to be used. If staff misses something, the CEDA board will catch it. He noted that all members were present. Mr. Sanborn said that CEDA is a semi-independent, community and economic development agency.

One woman said that Wareham is not what it used to be. There is a need to do something about kids on the streets. Rudy Santos said everyone realizes that many problems exist in Wareham but there are also a lot of people who work in a positive direction.

Darryl Higgins said that's why there is a need for a Youth Center. Youth will use it as a home, and the board wants to start a program and put this in place. First, however, is the need to get this building done. Lee McDonald from Turning Point agreed that there is a need to keep the kids off the streets. There was discussion about various social services programs. Mr. Sanborn said that there is a cap that the State puts on the number and total dollars for social service programs in any one grant.

There was a discussion about infrastructure needs. The town made a grant application on A.D. Makepeace's behalf to extend Rosebrook Drive to enable it to further develop the business park. Another attendee brought up storm water remediation. He said that years ago Gus Campinha said we had money. Mr. Sanborn said that he did not know about the particulars of this but that even a \$1 million dollar grant would not be enough to meet the cost.

Under the public facilities area of the CDS, Mr. Sanborn asked if anyone has comments regarding parks, school buildings etc. A gentleman brought up the needs for a community boating program and site to host it. Jacqui Lindsey said the kayak ramp at the Narrows needs to be addressed. She also said the town's tennis courts are never used. Someone suggested that Besse Park could be used for a kayak launch. Another attendee mentioned that the Minot Forest School has an issue with their wheelchair ramp and wanted to know if any of these funds could be used for this.

Another person spoke about the zoning bylaws, how they are administered and the need to modify and improve them, and to make them more user-friendly. He said that the permitting process can be very confusing and frustrating.

Lee McDonald said that more money for fuel assistance is needed. The amount of assistance from the existing program is far too little.

Meeting Adjourned 7:55 P.M.

