



Wareham, MA Leadership Exchange and Sustainable Redevelopment Financing Assessment

Produced by the Southeast New England Network

Executive Summary. Through the support of the SNEP Network and US EPA, Throe Environmental developed an innovative new community technical assistance program called the ***Leadership Exchange and Sustainable Redevelopment Financing Assessment***, which was launched in Wareham, MA. Our project team worked in partnership with Wareham leaders to address climate resilience financing associated with the Town's sustainable redevelopment efforts at the downtown Wareham Village. The following report provides summary findings and recommendations.

The project had three distinct, though inter-related components:

- ***A Community Assessment***, which included extensive conversations and interviews with Town leaders as well as thorough review of existing policies, plans, and pertinent reports.
- ***The Leadership Exchange Podcasts*** that provided leaders from Wareham and other communities with important context related to the case study communities' work, while also publicly sharing the initiatives in these communities with a broader audience.
- ***Leadership Exchange Webinars*** that focused on a key themes related to Wareham's sustainable redevelopment vision for downtown Wareham Village. The SNEP Network Project Team identified communities with notable work on these themes and invited leaders from case study communities into the Exchange to highlight their work and share their experiences.

Wareham Community Assessment. Downtown Wareham Village is in need of economic redevelopment. Merchants Way is abutted by several blighted and vacant properties; environmental hazards from the adjacent Wankinco River threaten areas in the flood plain; and underused rail lines situated just feet from the water block direct riverfront access, pose safety hazards, and serve as a vulnerability. Wareham has not yet taken a holistic approach to redevelopment, an approach that would improve efficiency and achieve multiple economic, social, and environmental outcomes. Once an industrial and economic hub, Wareham faces the challenge of how it will reinvent its economy for decades to come, while also addressing the generational threats of climate change and sea-level rise.

To successfully address this challenge, the SNEP team identified four key themes that will effectively address the community's resilience challenges: green infrastructure and stormwater management; community resilience; incentivizing sustainable waterfront redevelopment investment; and, smart growth and strategic zoning. These four issues and themes served as the organizing structure for the Leadership Exchange.

Leadership Exchange Summary of Findings. Each of the four exchanges offered unique perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated resilient waterfront redevelopment. Though the entirety of the discussions were rich and informative, there were key takeaways from each event that we feel are important to highlight.

Green Infrastructure and Low Impact Development:

- Achieving long-term climate resilience will require Wareham to make advanced stormwater management and green infrastructure an integral part of economic development and redevelopment processes.

- The impacts of climate change require a fundamental shift in how coastal communities like Wareham manage stormwater. Though water quality and natural resource restoration will remain significant priorities, the need to address water quantity and flooding will result in an increasingly complex infrastructure system. As a result, the interaction and interconnectivity between green and gray stormwater infrastructure financing systems and processes will become equally complex.

Environmental, Social, and Economic Resilience:

- Resilience, perhaps by definition, can only be achieved by establishing a holistic approach to infrastructure development and financing. While this project was focused primarily on the role of stormwater, green infrastructure, and natural systems on Wareham’s efforts to redevelop its downtown waterfront, this redevelopment effort must ultimately address anticipated future impacts attributed to a changing climate.
- Addressing the impacts of climate change throughout the entire Town of Wareham will become the most significant environmental, economic, and social challenge facing community leaders. By investing in its own resilience, outside capital, grants, and investments are much more likely to materialize.

Waterfront Redevelopment

- Redevelopment of existing urban areas results in a unique opportunity to enhance environmental and resilience infrastructure. Technologies, policies, and financing systems evolve and innovate, thereby addressing problems associated with past development. As a result, redevelopment of urban areas—including previously developed waterfront—can result in a net gain in long-term resilience.
- Each of the communities that participated in the Leadership Exchange were successful in their urban redevelopment efforts due in large part to the capacity of local leaders to effectively engage residents, businesses, and diverse—and at times divergent—special interest groups.

Smart Growth and Strategic Zoning.

- Decisions addressing growth, zoning, and development will almost by definition illicit strong reactions from citizens and community groups. The communities that are best prepared to develop and incorporate innovative growth policies are those that most effectively embrace diverse opinions and inform decisions accordingly.
- The role of form in redevelopment efforts, including the interaction between the built and natural environments, is often more important than stipulating land use and business activities. The key is to be authentic in regard to design and implementation and to ensure that investments in waterfront and urban areas are consistent with broader community goals and priorities.

Recommendations and Options for Moving Forward. With the findings from the Climate Leadership Exchange series as a foundation, the SNEP Network makes the following recommendations to the Town of Wareham.

Environmental, Social, and Economic Resilience. Our recommendations focus on establishing long-term resilience as a foundational element of the Town’s decision-making processes including, but not limited to planning, financing, and economic development.

- *Expand existing institutional capacity to address long-term resilience infrastructure financing needs.* We recommend establishing a task force or committee to investigate the potential efficacy of expanding the capacity of the Wareham Redevelopment Authority to include an array of resilience infrastructure investment and financing activities. Creating this capacity within the existing authority would result in two specific benefits. First, it would enable Wareham leaders to address long-term economic, financing, and social resilience in a cohesive policy environment; more specifically, it would ensure that resilience itself is embedded in the Town’s economic development and redevelopment

activities. Second, expanding the capacity of an existing institution, if viable, would require significantly fewer administrative resources, making it a less intensive process than establishing a new institution.

- *Create a comprehensive Town-wide resilience vision and plan.* Implemented in parallel with the financing institution task-force, there should be a Town-wide effort to transform the existing Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program plan into a comprehensive resilience infrastructure implementation plan. Very simply, the plan should create a path forward for ensuring that the Town can grow and thrive into the future in spite of the risks associated with climate change. The primary goal of this recommendation is to create a community-wide understanding of the infrastructure, economic, and social systems that are needed to realize the community's vision for sustainable redevelopment.

Green Infrastructure. The anticipated impacts of climate change will require a holistic approach to stormwater management. This in turn will require Wareham to expand the focus of its existing stormwater programs beyond water quality to include the impacts of climate change, including flooding. This is especially important as it relates to the Town's vision and desire to redevelop its waterfront areas where the collective impacts of stormwater on natural and manmade assets will be most acute and significant. To that end we recommend:

- *Develop a town-wide green infrastructure component to the community resilience plan.* The proposed resilience plan should explicitly address the use of green infrastructure and natural features as key components of a long-term resilience strategy. This is especially important in regard to the Town's waterfront areas given the high likelihood that stormwater will have a direct impact on those regions.
- *Implement a collaborative approach to stormwater and green infrastructure operations and maintenance.* We recommend that Town leaders consider a regional approach to its MS4 permit program and the associated six minimum control measures (MCMs). Effective stormwater management can be an important economic driver and creating efficiencies within operations and maintenance is a necessary foundation and starting point for establishing a more extensive stormwater and green infrastructure program. As a result, creating administrative and program efficiencies through regional cooperation in the MS4 program is an economic development tool that requires literally no additional investment on the Town's part.

Waterfront Redevelopment. Clearly Wareham leaders recognize the potential economic benefit associated with redeveloping its waterfront areas. Resilient development requires maximizing those benefits in the long-term, which in turn requires reducing development risk. In other words, resilience requires balancing short-term economic gain with long-term viability of economic, environmental, and social systems into the future. To that end, the project team recommends:

- *Add and/or strengthen a resilience overlay to all economic, planning, and redevelopment plans.* This project has demonstrated the urgency that is felt by Town leaders to build, diversify, and strengthen its economy into the future. This is appropriate, of course, given that economic viability is one of the three essential elements of long-term sustainability and resilience (social and environmental systems being the other two). To that end, the Town has developed a number of plans that provide a roadmap for achieving what could be a prosperous path forward for the Town. To ensure that the Town can thrive well into the future, it is critical that a comprehensive resilience plan be developed immediately and then overlaid on existing economic and redevelopment plans to ensure that the community is on a path towards resilience. The goal is not to stop redevelopment plans and activities, but to ensure that those plans are leading to resilience rather than magnifying exposure to climate risks and adverse impacts.

Smart Growth and Strategic Zoning. Long-term resilience is perhaps best described as the expected outcome of effective "smart growth" strategies and plans. This is certainly the case with Wareham and its

efforts to redevelop its waterfront areas. If developed with long-term resilience as a priority, the waterfront district has the potential to establish a foundation of economic growth well into the future. To that end, our recommendations include:

- Conduct a regulatory and zoning review. Realizing a resilient vision and future for the Town will require assuring that the rules and regulations that guide economic development and growth are in concert with long-term resilience goals. This in turn will require a review and/or audit of the Town's local zoning, permitting, and pertinent regulations to ensure that economic and land development activities are in synch with the Town's soon-to-be-developed resilience plan. This review should focus specifically on the potential impact and relationship between economic development and the need to restore and protect the Town's natural resilience assets and infrastructure.
- Pursue a form-based coding approach for Merchant's Way. The specific businesses and industries that form a local economy are in a constant state of flux, and it can be very difficult to predict what services and businesses will flourish, especially in the long-term (for example, it is unlikely that cannabis dispensaries were part of the Town's long-term economic vision in the past). What matters more than the type of industry within a community is how those industries fit into the fabric and distinctive look of a community. To that end, we recommend that the Town investigate potential zoning revisions in the waterfront areas to focus on form-based codes. Coupled with very clear regulations in regard to resilience, form-based codes will help guide redevelopment efforts well into the future while maintaining and celebrating those things that make Wareham unique.



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