

# APRIL 11-15, 2022

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WEEK

Updates from the Fitchburg Community Development and Planning Department



## Department Overview

Community Development Week, a national celebration, reminds us to take some time to review the prior year, celebrate our accomplishments, and plan for the year ahead.

In addition to managing the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Community Development and Planning Department managed 9 state grants to improve both the built environment and quality of life for our residents.

The Department oversees projects of all sizes, and collaborates with both partner agencies and City Departments.

The following pages highlight Community Development and Planning accomplishments, programs supported by CDBG and HOME, and expands upon the leveraging impact of both these funds, and the work of Community Development and Planning staff, more generally.

The Department of Community Development & Planning is committed to improving the quality of life in Fitchburg and enhancing the city's economic competitiveness by revitalizing neighborhoods, building community and strengthening the commercial sector.

Its three divisions: Planning, Economic Development, and Housing & Development aim to achieve this mission through data-informed decision-making, collaboration, community engagement and strategic planning.

# CDBG & HOME Overview

CDBG and HOME funding is a popular, bipartisan budget item that is administered to local governments nationwide through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This funding is intended to primarily benefit low-to-moderate income populations (meaning those whose household income is less than 80% of the area median income).

In Year 47 (the current program year), the City was awarded **\$1,001,125** in CDBG funds and **\$480,186** in HOME funds. While the City is still waiting to learn its CDBG and HOME allocations from HUD, in the Federal budget, CDBG funds were reduced overall, while HOME saw an increase.

Community Development and Planning Staff anticipate that the Year 48 CDBG allocation will be less than the amount noted above. The HOME allocation is likely to be at least level-funded. The City will receive notification on or around May 13th, at which time the City will submit its Annual Action Plan to HUD for approval.

## YEAR 48 UPDATES

(July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023)

- Last month, the City Council voted to approve the Mayor's recommendations for CDBG funding
- A public hearing will be held virtually to discuss these projects on April 25th
- The City is waiting on its allocation amount from HUD and will submit its Annual Action Plan soon.

The 2022-2026 Five Year Consolidated Plan is nearly complete and will be implemented for the 2022-2023 fiscal year. This document will guide CDBG and HOME's funding priorities, as the City moves into its next phase. Infrastructure remains a high priority, along with affordable housing and homelessness services.

Current CDBG subrecipients are now in the final quarter of the program year, and have been in regular communication with CDP staff regarding their accomplishments and community impact. Homeowner rehab has several projects in the queue and will be a busy program over the summer. Other programs will be detailed in the following pages.

## HOME ARP Funding

In addition to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, the Fitchburg/Leominster HOME Consortium has been granted **\$1.7M** in HOME ARP funds. This funding is intended to support housing efforts in the consortium, particularly addressing homelessness, focusing on specific qualifying populations. The Cities are currently performing the required consultation, outreach, and gap analysis for the HOME ARP plan that must be submitted to HUD.

Once the Plan is approved, the City can begin exploring ways to commit the funds to make the greatest possible impact. Residents can expect that the funding will be used in partnership with other local agencies and matching funding sources.

For more information about HOME ARP funding, please visit the HOME ARP webpage at [www.fitchburgma.gov/992/HOME-Program-ARPA-planning-and-information](http://www.fitchburgma.gov/992/HOME-Program-ARPA-planning-and-information)

# Year 48 Program Highlights

## Health Department Code Enforcement

One of the ways the Health department works to improve the City's housing stock is through code enforcement.

In the first half of the program year, the Health Department inspected 51 units and 195 dwellings. 507 code violations were issued in 50 units, all of which have been corrected by the property owners.

These inspections are a vital tool in ensuring residents are able to live in safe, decent housing.

## North Star Family Services Family Shelter

The North Star Family Services Family Shelter provides a variety of supports to families in need. The home-like shelter offers shared kitchen and living spaces, with private bedrooms for the families. North Star case management supports the families and helps them access the resources they need, such as WIC, but also keep medical or mental health appointments, assist with job search activities, and securing daycare.

## Moran Square Redevelopment



The Moran Square Redevelopment Project, conveniently located just a block away from the Intermodal Station, will bring 44 units of much needed, mixed-income housing and over 7,000 square feet of new commercial space to Fitchburg's downtown.

Slated to be complete by Fall 2022, this \$23M project is funded through a variety of state and federal resources, including \$130,000 of the City's HOME Program funds. The Moran Square Redevelopment Project will reactivate this vacant stretch of Main Street.

The Moran Square Redevelopment joins four other housing projects at 409 Main Street, 655 Main Street, 759-769 Main Street and 805 Main Street in revitalizing Downtown Fitchburg in 2022.



# Department Highlights

CPD's Planning Division coordinates land development review activities for the city by:

- Providing staff support to the Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Community Development Department and the Department of Public Works
- Providing guidance to homeowners, engineers and developers through the land use approval process
- Reviewing Special Permits, Site Plans and other development proposals
- Researching and drafting necessary zoning ordinance amendments

## Planning Board Highlights

Planning has been as busy as ever! Applications are moving from paper to the more-efficient OpenGov portal, prospective business and property owners are frequent visitors, and

In the last 12 months, the Planning Board has approved the following:

- 45 Special Permits
- 19 Site Plan Reviews
- 102 Units of Housing
- 165,000 Square Feet of Commercial Space

Some of the highlights include the development of the former Mill #1 space into commercial recreation facilities, new units of housing above Main Street storefronts, and the conversion of underused industrial space to cannabis cultivation.

## Conservation Commission

In the past year, the Conservation Commission was presented with 14 notices of intent and completed 10 site walks to review work impacting local wetlands. Approved projects include:

- Fitchburg Water Department: Construction of a new water main between the water treatment plan and water storage tanks located at 1200 Rindge Road.
- Fitchburg DPW Engineering: Replacement of culverts on McIntire Road and Williams Road.
- Fitchburg Recreation: Installation of an accessible walkway to the Coggshall Mirror Lake gazebo.
- Greif, Inc.: Improvements to Snow Mill Pond Dam (100 Newark Way).

In addition, the Conservation Commission, working with the Tree Warden, has also been diligent about the removal of trees infested with spotted lanternflies.

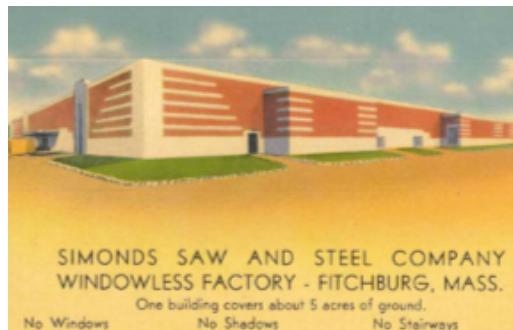
## Economic Development Highlights

While the COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for local businesses, it was also cause for many to reevaluate their careers. In the last 12 months, 17 new businesses have opened in Fitchburg. These businesses include restaurants, personal care services, and retail.

Mary Jo Bohart, Economic Development Director, works closely with prospective business owners, guiding them through the permitting and licensing processes, assisting with State and local requirements, helping to navigate tax credits, and making referrals to NewVue Communities Small Business Technical Assistance, where appropriate.

# Department Highlights

## Amazon Comes to Fitchburg



Fitchburg's 135 Intervale Road site served as the manufacturing headquarters for Simonds Saw Inc. for nearly a century. As of 2018, that 360,000 square foot building fell out of use after the company sold divisions and officially closed the Fitchburg plant. Fortunately, due to national trends of intense growth in the e-commerce sector, the property was quickly sold to industrial developer GFI Properties who demolished the old Simonds building.

GFI has now begun its construction of a build-to-suit "last mile" e-commerce distribution facility for Amazon. Fitchburg will benefit from both jobs creation and commercial tax base growth after this significant industrial redevelopment opens in 2023. This project promises to bring 200-300 new jobs to the City, as well as significant excise and property tax growth. CDP's Economic Development Division.

CDP staff played a critical role bringing Amazon into Fitchburg. From fielding the initial calls of interest, to coordinating a Development Review meeting of Department Heads, and by helping to usher the project through the Conservation Commission and Planning Board approvals, the CDP team worked diligently to bring this job-creating and revenue-producing project into the city.

## Game On Fitchburg

Game On Fitchburg, a commercial recreation center in West Fitchburg, first granted approval in 2017, now has its conditional occupancy and can host events such as tournaments and games. In the past year, several modifications to their Special Permit have been issued to address improvements and lessons learned from its conditional occupancy. Working closely with the Planning Board, Game On has tackled concerns from the City and abutters, quickly finding solutions to conflicts presented. Since opening Game On has been required by the Planning Board to attend periodic meetings and provide updates or requests.

The site boasts 7 outdoor turf fields and a 120,000 square foot indoor facility which includes basketball, volleyball, and pickleball courts, axe throwing, and a bar and restaurant.

Modifications from the past year include:

- Enhancements to the kiosk signage at the entrance of Industrial Road
- Improved emergency management practices in coordinating with FPD and FFP
- Coordinating off-site improvements including paving and sidewalks on Game On Way
- Improvements to parking & loading during large events
- Various actions to ensure that project implementation corresponds with the Special Permit decision



# Department Highlights

## Twin Cities Rail Trail

Phase I of the Twin Cities Rail Trail will be complete by the end of June! CDP Staff served as the local liaison to the project, coordinating work between the contractors, MDOT, and the Twin Cities Rail Trail Association.

Phase I brings the trail from 1st Street in Fitchburg to Carter Park in Leominster. Phase II, which is anticipated to start in 2024, will extend the trail from the Intermodal Station in downtown Fitchburg to the Monoosnec Brook Parkway in Leominster.

Major milestones of the past year include the installation of two trail bridges - one over Route 2 and one behind the Longhorn Steakhouse in Leominster, the addition of benches and bike racks, and improvements to a variety of intersections to increase safety. Work to be undertaken this spring includes development of additional parking spaces, installation of additional fencing and completion of punch-list items.



The Twin Cities Rail Trail Association (TCRTA) has partnered with the two cities to assist with the long term maintenance and care of the trail. Their work will include organizing volunteer and community events and fundraising to support the ongoing maintenance and enhancement of the trail. They have recently kicked off a fundraising campaign to develop an endowment for the long-term care of the trail.

## CARES Act Update

In May 2020, the Federal Government passed the CARES Act to help communities mitigate the effects of COVID-19. The CDBG-CV funds, as they came to be known, have been used to prepare for, prevent, or respond to COVID-19 and its effect on the community. The Community Development and Planning Department worked quickly to get the program underway, and has been supporting Fitchburg families and businesses throughout the pandemic.

By partnering with MOC and the Spanish-American Center, over 100 qualifying Fitchburg households were assisted with rent or utility bills, stabilizing families during a time of need. CDBG-CV funds also supported Community Health Workers and Navigators at MOC, which were especially critical when COVID tests were scarce, and to assist people in navigating the vaccination process and eligibility requirements.

Both the Salvation Army and the North Central Massachusetts Faith Based Community Coalition saw increased need in their food programs, as families endured layoffs, business closures, and illness. CDBG-CV funds supported the food pantries, food delivery, and meal programs to keep families fed.

# BUSINESS SUPPORTS

The Community Development and Planning Department runs three different types of business support programs: the Business Loan Fund, Microenterprise Grant Fund, and the Emergency Grant Program (funded by CDBG-CV).

Since 2020, over 60 emergency business grants were made, using a combination of CDBG and CDBG-CV funds, helping small businesses weather uncertain times, closures, increased costs, and costs related to mandated COVID-19 safety measures.

Meanwhile, the regular business loan program and the microenterprise grant program has had a steady stream of applications from new businesses getting their start in Fitchburg and from existing businesses looking to expand their offerings. Over \$315,000 has been provided to local businesses in the form of loans or grants since 2017, leveraging an additional \$1.6M in other resources for the businesses.

In upcoming Year 48, the Department will add the Sign and Façade Program, to assist business owners in improving their external conditions, with a match from the business owner or landlord. Finally, the upcoming fiscal year will also see an expansion of the business loan fund, thanks to American Rescue Plan Act funds. The department has also received ARPA funds to create a Storefront Activation fund to help reactivate currently-vacant storefronts.

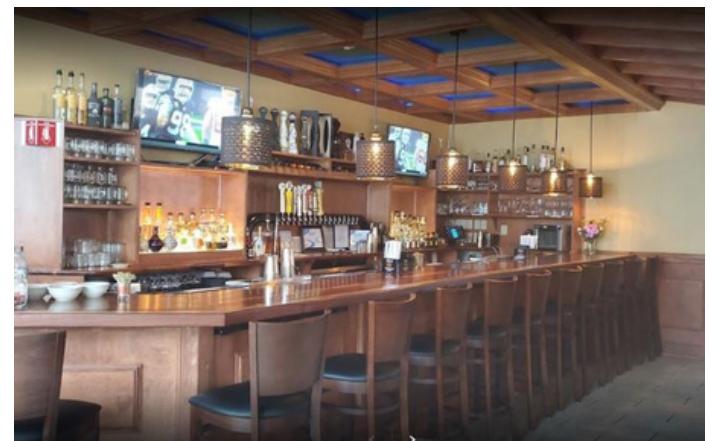
## BUSINESS FEATURE

### Downtown Fitchburg Restaurant Entrepreneur Embraces Growth

During the height of the pandemic, local restaurant entrepreneur Elmer Melendez saw an opportunity to create a new dining concept in downtown Fitchburg. In August 2020, he was the successful bidder at a foreclosure auction to purchase 310 Main Street, a high-visibility commercial property that was blighting due to vacancy. Less than a year later, in early June 2021, Tacos Tequilas Mexican Cocina was launched with a totally refreshed interior, bold signage, and a menu offering a full range of Mexican specialties.

This is one of many downtown businesses that was supported through the help Reimagine North of Main, the public-private partnership downtown. As part of this effort, CDP staff facilitate regular Downtown Business check-ins with members of the partnership, including

NewVue Communities, North Central Chamber, Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority, Enterprise Bank and MassDevelopment. These meetings are an effort to share resources and capacity to ensure that downtown businesses have the resources they need to thrive, and are can work smoothly through the permitting process.



# Parks, Playgrounds, and Recreation

## Pawlak Playground



Fitchburg's much-anticipated Pawlak Community Playground is now complete! This project, which began as a grassroots effort to both honor Sam Pawlak, a local educator, and to improve play experiences for children with disabilities, is now a reality for Fitchburg's youth.

The Community Development and Planning Department partnered with the Sam Pawlak Community Playground group to apply for a Massachusetts PARC grant to help this project come to life. The \$400,000 PARC grant was leveraged with CDBG funds, a Congressional Earmark, and the fundraising efforts of the Community Group.

Senior Project Manager, Amy LeBlanc, oversaw the planning and installation of the park which includes poured-in-place play surfacing, play equipment, site furnishings other elements which transform this space adjacent to the existing Parkhill Playground into an inclusive, accessible space to play.

Parkhill Playground will see additional improvements in 2022-2023, thanks to an allocation from the City's ARPA funds.



A ribbon cutting ceremony will be held at 3:30 PM on May 12th. Come out and join us in celebrating the City's newest accessible play space.

# AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

The American Rescue Plan Act was signed into law in March 2021, and its intent is to provide financial aid to local governments to accomplish the following objectives:

- Supporting urgent COVID-19 response efforts to continue to decrease spread of the virus and bring the pandemic under control
- Replacing lost revenue for eligible state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments to strengthen support for vital public services and help retain jobs
- Supporting immediate economic stabilization for households and businesses
- Addressing the systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic

The Mayor assembled an ARPA Committee (made up of City Department Heads) and an ARPA Advisory Committee, chaired by the CDP Director, which includes members from local agencies. Working with the other departments, the Community Development and Planning Department took on much of the behind-the-scenes administrative work, including setting up the ARPA applications online, preparing the completed applications for review by the committee, and maintaining correspondence with the applicants.

The City held two application review meetings, which allowed the applicants to speak on their proposed projects and answer questions from the Committee.

The first round of funding has been passed by the City Council, and grantees will be able to start their projects in the upcoming fiscal year. CDP staff will be working closely with grantees providing project and financial oversight.

For more information, please visit [www.FitchburgMA.gov/ARPA](http://www.FitchburgMA.gov/ARPA)

# Grant Administration & Leveraged Funds

A portion of CDBG and HOME funds pays for the staff administering these programs, and allows staff to apply for other grants for the City. With reductions in funding and the increasingly-competitive nature of grant funding, the leveraged dollars from CDBG, HOME, and other City investment make much larger investments possible. Over the last 10 years, CDBG and HOME funds have leveraged over \$100 Million.

The following grants are just some of those that were successfully acquired by Community Development and Planning Staff in the last 5 Years:

- MassDevelopment Site Readiness - Sandpit (\$100,000)
- Safe Routes to Schools for Memorial Middle (\$2,053,435)
- MassIT Broadband Grant (\$40,220)
- Real Estate Technical Assistance (\$45,000)
- MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces (\$251,245)
- MassDevelopment TDI Local (\$130,000)
- EOEEA Planning Grant (\$45,000)
- MassDevelopment Site Readiness - Airport (100,000)
- MassWorks - Main & Boulder Project (\$3,000,000)
- MassWorks - River Street (\$3,050,000)
- PARC - Pawlak Playground (\$400,000)
- Complete Streets (\$618,964)
- Brownfields Remediation (\$382,000)
- Liabilities to Assets (\$239,900)
- MassTrails (\$39,687)
- Neighborhood HUB Phase I (\$27,000)
- MassDevelopment TDI (\$825,000)
- First & Railroad Park - PARC and EPA Grants (\$261,203)
- TDI Challenge Parking Grant (\$45,000)

## Your Community Development and Planning Staff

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