



Resilient Land Use Planning:

Plainfield's Climate Resilience Plan

Prepared by an adhoc Joint Committee of the Town of Plainfield specifically for the application for state planning funds under COMMBUYS BID # BD-21-1042-ENV-ENV01-60974 through the Planning Assistance Grant Program of the Executive Office of Energy and the Environment.

Submitted: May 27, 2021

Please also see the letters of support that are part of this application from the Select Board and from the representatives of the various boards and commissions. If this grant is awarded, the Town of Plainfield agrees to share the end product of the funded activities with EEA and with other communities in the Commonwealth through reports, meetings, workshops, and to highlight these activities in print, on the web or other media outlets. EEA is to be credited for project funding.

Submitted via email to Kurt Gaertner Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs 100 Cambridge Street, 9th Floor Boston, MA 02114 Kurt.Gaertner@mass.gov

Resilient Land Use Planning: Plainfield's Climate Resilience Plan

Project Description

Massachusetts has embraced both land conservation and green energy as pathways to sustainable futures. With land use decisions in the realm of the local towns, inconsistencies in conservation practices have arisen across the sensitive landscapes that span watersheds that are crucial to the resilience of both the communities where they exist and downstream communities.

Plainfield is in a unique position, both within the landscape as headwaters to two watersheds, and as forward thinkers in the realm of land conservation planning. The creation of a shared vision through this community planning process could lay the groundwork for land uses that support a thriving community and it could provide a model for other communities to address the next phase of resilient land use at the intersection of watershed planning, natural and cultural resource conservation, and green energy.

The purpose of the Plainfield Climate Resilience Plan is to bring together the relevant recent town studies and recommendations to create a long-term vision for Plainfield's landscape. Its location at the headwaters of two watersheds, one of which is a National Scenic River, makes this location an appropriate place to address the applicability of various climate resilience strategies. The final report will include a presentation and analysis of available data on the soils, water, trees/forests, land ownership patterns, and demographics. The analysis will provide the basis for recommendations for increasing resilience across the landscape.

Plainfield has completed a Municipal Vulnerability Plan and a Hazard Mitigation Plan, both of which have recommended actions to address climate change. The MVP Plan recommends the Town address erosion issues and forest and tree canopy loss.

Most communities have adopted bylaws for green energy and land conservation. Many communities are moving on to the next phase of bylaws that address environmental concerns. For example, while Plainfield's solar bylaw was extensively researched and adopted, experience has shown it to be insufficient with regard to deforestation analyses. The town has therefore identified the need for further exploration to balance and mitigate the impacts with the benefits.

Using a robust public outreach and input process for creating this **Climate Resilience Plan**, the following questions are being proposed to the consultant team:

- What natural resources, ecosystems, and wildlife corridors exist that are worthy of long-term conservation that are not currently preserved or protected?
- How can private property owners, especially those with active agricultural land and managed forests, be engaged in sustainable land use practices?

- What are current and potential future impacts to water quality and potential mitigation strategies?
- How can healthy soils be preserved or re-established in rural areas?
- What roles do trees and forests play in healthy ecosystems and a sustainable future?
- What does the current forest and tree canopy coverage look like and how can it be managed in sustainable ways?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of participating in carbon sequestration programs?
- What recommendations of the MVP and Hazard Mitigation Plan can be moved closer to implementation? Where are there synergies between the plans and the CRP?
- How can the abundance of natural assets be conserved and improved in positive ways?
- How can the status of the town’s participation in the Westfield River’s National Scenic River designation be addressed?

The proposed Climate Resilience Plan will provide a roadmap for sustainable land use practices for the Town of Plainfield that could be used as a guide for other communities. The coordination and collaboration between the relevant boards and committees are a unique asset which ensures successful implementation of this critical work.

Projected Budget and Timeline: The proposed project is to be completed by a consultant between January and June of FY22. The following is the budget summary for this project.

Engage consultant to conduct public outreach and complete the plan tasks:	\$11,000
Town match (proposing to provide a cash match)	\$ 3,700
Total grant request	\$14,700

Product to be Delivered: A planning document showing the analyses conducted, the research uncovered, and the mapping of resources. The plan will include recommendations for increasing the landscape’s resilience as noted in the description above and provide professional graphics and illustrations.

Town Support: This project is being embraced by all of the town boards and commissions as a way to provide meaningful discussions on important land use topics. As the town moves forward with future planning projects, they want to be sure that natural resources are tended to first. The town has regional property owners, both public and private, who, while they exist locally they also act regionally, bringing forward the discussions that will happen as a result of this participatory planning process.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The RFR lists a variety of tasks that are eligible for grant funding. This proposal includes the vast majority of these tasks as described in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1.

RFR tasks suitable for funding	This proposal includes these tasks in these ways...
Actions implementing the results of a Climate Vulnerability Assessment under the MA Vulnerability Preparedness Program	In combination with the Hazard Mitigation Plan, the MVP Action Plan will be assessed for implementation ideas related to resilient land uses
Zoning for solar or other renewable energy systems	After enhancing zoning for solar array installations , the next phase of solar implementation concepts will be explored.
Implementation of techniques from the Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit	All relevant guides and tools will be evaluated for application in Plainfield and similarly situated towns.
Rezoning for consistency with a Master Plan or implementation of specific actions or recommendations from a Master Plan	The Climate Resilience Plan will provide the framework for future discussions regarding the development of a town-wide comprehensive plan.
Development of a mixed-use zoning district (e.g. mill building reuse, Village Center); Work necessary to utilize a package wastewater treatment plant to advance development under village center or other smart growth consistent zoning	Although this concept is not on the table at this time, the town-wide conversations that will happen during this process would be beneficial. Research has been conducted on the feasibility of creating a Village District that encourages mixed uses.
Feasibility studies, land-use analyses, and other plans necessary for successful redevelopment or other use	Much of the project is a land use analysis regarding existing land uses and ownership patterns in the context of climate change.
Zoning for agriculture, forestry preservation, or tree retention	If rezoning is to be considered, land uses and their appropriate placement need to be discussed first. This grant would provide the

	assistance needed to evaluate existing patterns and increase resilience.
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This proposal also meets the majority of the Evaluation Criteria for this grant as described in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2.

Grant evaluation criteria	This proposal addresses the criterion in these ways...
Advances sustainable development	The purpose of the project is to consider sustainable land uses for rural areas that protect water quality and increase the value of forests and tree canopies.
Enhances land use regulation...in an area of high natural resource value	Plainfield is located in critical wildlife corridors both east to west and north to south. The forests located there have a high resource value for long-term conservation as a strategy for climate resilience.
Utilizes funding efficiently...provides it where it is most needed...distributes funds to communities that have not received a grant or that have received little funding assistance in prior grant rounds.	Plainfield has not received planning grant assistance in the past and does not have paid professional staff to conduct the extensive research and mapping needed to do this work.
Implements a Master, Climate Change (mitigation or adaptation), Open Space, Housing Production, or other Plan (including priority implementation projects identified by a Municipal Vulnerability Program Community)	The MVP Plan and the Hazard Mitigation Plan are the only currently viable plans available. Some chapters of master plans are available (such as one for land use) but they are all drafts without standing. This makes this Climate Resilience Plan even more important because it lays the groundwork for planning to come.

<p>Implements a Smart Growth Toolkit technique</p>	<p>Many elements of the toolkit could be explored in this planning process. Open space zoning will be considered as a smart growth tool and has been prioritized by the Planning Board, as well as considerations for carbon sequestration in light of growth elsewhere.</p>
<p>Demonstrates consistency with the MA Sustainable Development Principles</p>	<p>This proposal is consistent with the MA Sustainable Development Principles by seeking to identify and protect sensitive lands and ecosystems, by making climate resilient recommendations that result in wise land use, by exploring the next phase of green energy bylaws, and by acting locally with partners and property owners that act regionally.</p>
<p>Delivers a substantial energy or environmental benefit (e.g. better climate resilience, reduced energy use, protection of critical habitats, or reduced greenhouse gas emissions)</p>	<p>The goals listed are the primary purposes of the proposed Climate Resilience Plan: to provide a roadmap to improved climate resilience, to investigate how to do green energy more sustainably, and to protect the critical habitat that make up the forests in this area, as well as conducting public education around these efforts.</p>