

## Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Action Grant Case Study

**Municipality:** Westhampton, MA

**Project Title:** Resilience Building Through Community Visioning and Planning

**Award Year (FY):** FY22-23

**Grant Award:** \$237,516.00

**Match:** \$77,550

**Match Source:** In-kind services of Town staff and volunteers, Cooler Communities/Grinspoon Foundation cash grant

**One or Two Year Project:** Two-Year

**Municipal Department Leading Project:** MVP Committee

**Project Website URL:** <https://www.westhampton-ma.com/home/municipal-vulnerability-planning>

### Community Overview:

- Westhampton is a rural community with a population of 1,622 located in western Massachusetts in the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains.
- Westhampton does not have Environmental Justice (EJ) communities based on the percentages set by the Commonwealth for characteristics of race and ethnicity, income, and English isolation; however, seniors, children, low-income residents, and socially isolated residents in Westhampton are considered priority vulnerable populations. Westhampton has an aging population with 46.5% in the range of 50 years of age or older.
- History, open spaces, and resource-based economy are integral to Westhampton's identity. The economy is primarily based in agriculture, forestry, and mining as well as small locally owned businesses, home-based businesses, and artisans. The largest employer is Hampshire Regional High School. The largest private employer is Hathaway Construction.

### Project Description and Goals:

#### Project Description and Location

The Westhampton MVP Action Grant project included preparation of a resilience-focused community Master Plan (RMP) and Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP); diversity, equity, and inclusion training workshops for staff, boards, and residents; and climate education projects with youth at Hampshire Regional High School. All activities took place within the Town of Westhampton. Students exhibited their climate resilience projects at the annual Westhampton Fall Festival.

#### Climate Change Impacts Addressed

The primary climate change impacts addressed by the project included warming temperatures, drought, severe storm events resulting in damage to buildings and infrastructure, damage to

crops and forests, shifting native/invasive species, and water quality degradation from increased erosion during heavy rain. Each of these impacts was identified in the Town's MVP Summary of Findings (May 2021).

### Project Goals and Tasks

**Goals:** Goals included taking steps to promote agriculture; improve stormwater management through infrastructure and nature-based solutions; address infrastructure needs at Town facilities; introduce opportunities for compatible economic growth; guide development to areas with no flood risk; increase the availability of affordable housing; maintain safe drinking water supplies; create new recreational opportunities; improve emergency response services; conserve, restore and steward open space to benefit people and biodiversity.

#### **Task 1: Grant and Project Management**

- Subtask 1.1 Monthly Reports
- Subtask 1.2 Final Report

#### **Task 2: Prepare Resilience Master Plan**

The Town's first RMP included traditional master plan components plus forward-thinking, climate-change-related goals and actions.

- Subtask 2.1 Data Collection and Analysis of Existing Conditions
- Subtask 2.2 Develop Goals and Metrics
- Subtask 2.3 Prepare Draft Master Plan Chapters
- Subtask 2.4 Master Plan Mapping
- Subtask 2.5 Final Draft Master Plan

#### **Task 3: Prepare Open Space and Recreation Plan**

An updated OSRP with a resilience focus prepared in conjunction with the RMP.

- Subtask 3.1 Data Collection and Analysis
- Subtask 3.2 GIS Analysis
- Subtask 3.3 Development of Supply, Demand, and Trend Analysis
- Subtask 3.4 Prepare a Draft OSRP
- Subtask 3.5 Integrate the OSRP into the Master Plan

#### **Task 4 Public Engagement**

This task provides engagement with, and training for, Westhampton residents and volunteer committee members. The purpose is to ensure resident participation as well as adoption of a well-vetted plan.

- Subtask 4.1 Town Staff Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Training to include:
  - Understanding what diversity, equity and inclusion means in the workplace and in public meetings.

- Identify marginalized social identity groups and common manifestations of bias and discrimination.
- Define terminology and concepts relating to social bias, discrimination, and harassment. Use of respectful language when discussing social identity groups.
- Analyze prejudice, bias, stereotypes – how they are created, manifested and tools for countering them.
- Recognize power, privilege, and perspective.
- Engage with cultural humility. Demonstrate allyship.
- Create welcoming, inclusive, and equitable environments.
- Subtask 4.2 Public Workshop on EDI
  - Designed for community members introducing tools for interrupting bias/discrimination and skill building for healthy, respectful, and equitable community conversations.
- Subtask 4.3 Youth and Education School Program (Cooler Communities/Grinspoon Foundation). This initiative leverages classroom education and empowers students to take steps to address climate change impacts by creating exhibits for community presentation and engagement.
- Subtask 4.4 OSRP Public Engagement - Public engagement will be conducted to establish a community vision, goals and actions for each plan with broad outreach and resident participation.
- Subtask 4.5 RMP and OSRP Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups
- Subtask 4.6 Town Board Working Group Participation – New MVP/RMP and Open Space and Recreation Plan Committees will be appointed.
- Subtask 4.7 Public Workshop – Two public workshops
- Subtask 4.8 (listed as 4.5 in Attachment B) Public Hearings for the RMP and OSRP Approval

### Meeting Project Goals

Employing nature-based solutions: The RMP and OSRP each identified nature-based solutions as a high priority in improving town infrastructure and identifying potential funding sources to assist with implementation such as culvert replacement and public tree planting. In addition, RMP action items will create resource guides on various topics related to activities residents can take to improve their understanding and resilience to climate change impacts.

Improving equitable outcomes for and fostering strong partnerships with EJ and other Climate Vulnerable Populations: The DEI staff/board training workshops were well attended. The public workshop was lightly attended but participants found it very valuable. A guide to DEI terms was developed and will be posted to the Town’s website with other project documents. In addition, each plan identified ways to further engage residents in community building such as regular community gatherings, events, and walking tours of historic and open space lands in town.

Providing regional benefits: Each chapter in the RMP specifically identifies ways the Town can participate in regional collaborations around resiliency.

## Implementing the public involvement and community engagement plan set forth in application:

Resident participation and input were foundational to the MVP project. Throughout the planning process, the Town engaged with residents in a variety of ways including: outreach through Town website newsletters, posting of meetings to Town and Library websites and paper flyers, posting to local Facebook page and email distribution to residents. Residents shared their ideas via community surveys, public visioning/goal/action setting workshops, and reviewing draft documents. In addition, focus groups and interviews were conducted with stakeholders, Town board members, expert advisors, and Town staff.

Finishing the project on time: Each project task was completed on time, within budget, and within the fiscal year identified in the application. The only delay was the Cooler Communities student exhibition was postponed from May 2022 to October 2022 because the 50<sup>th</sup> Hampshire Regional High School anniversary where the exhibition was to take place was canceled due to the COVID pandemic. Student exhibits were displayed at the Town's annual Fall Festival which drew hundreds of residents and visitors from surrounding communities. A Hampshire Regional High School teacher noted how beneficial it was to have younger students visit the exhibits to see what they will be learning when they reach high school.

### **Results and Deliverables:**

Project Results and Deliverables: (e.g., square footage of habitat restored or created, increase in tree canopy coverage, etc.). Report out on the metrics outlined in your application.

All final project documents will be posted at:

<https://www.westhampton-ma.com/home/municipal-vulnerability-planning>

*Task 1 Deliverables:* The Town and consultants prepared meeting materials, meeting notes, monthly and final reports for the project.

*Task 2 Deliverables:* Consultants prepared draft maps, existing conditions, and draft RMP documents for working group and public review. All comments were incorporated into a final Resilient Westhampton Master Plan.

*Task 3 Deliverables:* Consultants prepared existing conditions and trend analysis, GIS data and mapping, and draft Open Space and Recreation Plan. Public input was incorporated into the final Open Space and Recreation Plan by the OSRP Committee. The OSRP is summarized in the RMP and attached by reference.

*Task 4 Deliverables:* Public engagement results included:

- 129 RMP survey responses and 260 Open Space and Recreation survey responses received. Postcards were sent to each household in Town encouraging residents to complete the surveys in addition to other outreach methods.
- Eight focus groups with community stakeholders and advisors regarding topics in each of the RMP chapters.

- 20 interviews with Town staff and community members to collect information on existing conditions and community needs.
- Two public input workshops for the OSRP and two public input workshops for visioning, goals, and actions under the RMP.
- A public hearing before the Planning Board for adoption of the Resilient Westhampton RMP and a public hearing before the Conservation Commission for adoption of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.
- 10 students and 3 teachers participated in the Cooler Communities Youth exhibit tables at the Town's annual Fall Festival with 18 community action pledges completed at the event. Four Hampshire Regional High School teachers participated in the Cooler Communities program using climate curriculum they developed for their science, math, and Statistics courses at the High School. Two high school youth also participated as members of the Open Space and Recreation Committee.
- Regular meetings of the MVP/RMP working group and the Open Space and Recreation Committee as well as attendance at focus groups and public workshops.
- Attendance by 15 staff and 22 board members (total 37 participants) at 6 hours of DEI training sessions. (We had originally included school staff in our estimate of attendees, but they had previous DEI training within the school system.)
- Thirteen residents participated in a 3-hour Ethical Upstander Community Conversations Workshop. Although participation was slim, participants found the workshop very valuable. A DEI language guide was prepared by Human In Common which will be posted on the Town's website for wider distribution.

### **Lessons Learned:**

Lessons learned: Collaboration and broad citizen engagement are essential to Open Space and Master Planning success. Multiple outreach methods essential in a small town where some residents do not use technology. Working groups, focus groups, community advisors contributed valuable knowledge and insight. Food provided by volunteers at public meetings was much appreciated by participants especially for evening meetings after a workday. More informal opportunities to explore community inclusion would be helpful in the future. Public workshops can be scary or intimidating for some. It was helpful to streamline and focus the RMP and Open Space/Recreation Plan very local but with regional context. Incorporating resilience in all aspects of community life broadens the understanding and attracted interest from new and younger residents. Flexibility was essential in pivoting as circumstances demanded during pandemic.

The best way for other communities to learn from our project/process is to review the Master Planning and Open Space Planning documents on the Town's website:

<https://www.westhampton-ma.com/home/municipal-vulnerability-planning>

### **Partners and Other Support:**

- Selectboard initiated and supported applying for MVP grants.

- MVP Master Planning and Open Space Planning Working Groups consisting of residents and board members guided the overall process, gave valuable insight/knowledge, helped promote participation, assisted in reviewing documents, assisted with small group facilitation at workshops.
- Local volunteer project managers essential in managing the project on the local end.
- All the town residents and businesses who shared their ideas and knowledge.
- Professional expertise:
  - Weston and Sampson - overall project management, technical support, writing/preparing documents, public presentations, budget management.
  - Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – data collection and GIS mapping
  - Conservation Works – Open Space/Recreation Plan project management, technical support, writing/preparing documents, public presentations.
  - Human in Common – DEI trainings
  - Cooler Communities/Grinspoon Foundation – Youth climate change curriculum and student exhibit support, small grant to Hampshire Regional High School.
  - Hampshire Regional High School Curriculum Director and teachers – developed and presented curriculum to students, supported student exhibit projects.
  - Town staff guidance and local knowledge.
  - Regional expertise – CISA, University of Massachusetts Clean Energy Center and Department of Environmental Conservation, Hilltown and Valley Community Development Corporations, Pioneer Valley History Network, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Franklin Regional Transit Authority.

**Project Photos:**



Master Plan Visioning Workshop



Master Plan Strategies and Actions Workshop



Westhampton Fall Festival Vision Board



Westhampton Fall Festival-Cooler Communities Student Exhibit



Westhampton Historic Town Center