

January 7, 2010

TO: Peter Frei, Holland Blog

FR: Paul Bracciotti, Senior Planner, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

RE: Tri Town Selectmen's Meeting, 1/5/10 @ Wales Selectmen's Office

I met with the members of the Tri Towns boards of selectmen as part of our efforts to establish and maintain a helpful relationship among the towns the PVPC to the extent it can assist in providing information and help securing state and federal funding.

This evening was one in a series of those discussions. As the time draws near for the February 12, 2010 deadline for the electronic submission of community development block grant applications, the landscape becomes more and more crowded. There are policy writings to be prepared, reviewed and adopted, (the Community Development Strategy). There are departments, town, regional, state, to be met with to gain opinions and program ideas and statements of support, (for instance the variety of such agencies which financially assist low and moderate income home owners in the repair and operation of what are often quite old structures such code enforcement officers, fuel assistance/weatherization/heating system agencies; the US Department of Agriculture which assists very low income seniors with grants and families with very low cost mortgage loans; HAP in Springfield which makes loans for the removal of lead from homes, especially important in those households with children.)

Above all, there are citizens as individuals and as members of groups to be kept informed, listened to and permitted to shape and influence the program as it is submitted to the MA Dept of Housing & Community Development. Citizen participation is a cornerstone of the federal Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. In small communities this process seems to work most effectively when it is informal, meaning that the 'professionals' need to spend time in town during the day and attending evening meetings. This is quite time-consuming. In the larger communities, participation can be made more formal and fit into a schedule which saves the time and energies of all.

Remaining in the process that affects Brimfield, Holland and Wales is the preparation of the actual grant proposal descriptions and budgets. There are also many forms, some 'boiler plate' to be prepared and signed by the submitting officials. For this year that will be the chairman of the Holland selectmen for the Tri Town program and the Wales chairman for the town's "stand alone" request for drainage and road improvements in Woodland Heights with supporting housing rehabilitation loans. In both cases what the chairman signs is to reflect the citizen participation and accompany professional planning that will have occurred during the many weeks and, hopefully months, prior to the applications' deadline.

This is the process in a small nutshell. I have attached Holland's draft strategy statement; a coupon ad recently run in the local papers so people can register their interest in housing rehabilitation, septic repair and water well assistance.

Paul Bracciotti, Senior Planner
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission