

DCTA ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT

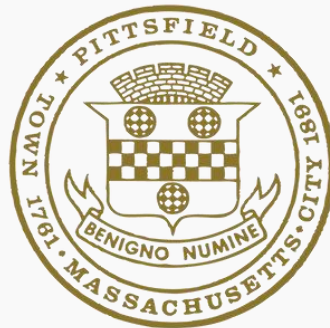
PITTSFIELD, MA

DEC. 2024

FAST FACTS

- With [43,927 residents](#), Pittsfield is the largest city in Berkshire County and serves as the county seat.
- From 1907 to 1987, General Electric ran a [transformer plant in Pittsfield](#), employing as much as a quarter of the population at one time before the plant moved to Boston.
- [Pittsfield's economy](#) shifted from agriculture to industry in the early 1800s, leveraging its abundant waterpower resource. Today, the city has a more diversified economy, with key sectors in healthcare, tourism, plastics manufacturing, and insurance.
- [Wahconah Park](#), a city-owned baseball stadium in Pittsfield, first opened in 1892 and is one of the oldest baseball stadiums in the country and one of the only remaining stadiums with a wooden grandstand.

In the fall of 2023, the City of Pittsfield's Department of Community Development (DCD) began receiving technical assistance (TA) from [Enterprise Community Partners](#) (Enterprise) through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) [Distressed Cities Technical Assistance \(DCTA\) program](#). The DCD, which oversees Pittsfield's housing policies and programs, aimed to address critical challenges in the city's housing landscape and strengthen its community development strategies.



Pittsfield, located in the economically diverse Berkshire County in Western Massachusetts, faces unique challenges. While southern Berkshire benefits from a cultural tourism economy, the northern area, including Pittsfield, is still grappling with the economic shifts that followed the closure of General Electric's facilities in the 1980s.

Phase I of Enterprise's TA support focused on three core challenges:

1. LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

A long-time DCD staff member has recently taken on the role of director, and this transition coincided with a broader shift in city leadership as Pittsfield prepared for a new mayor. To help DCD navigate this transition, Enterprise provided support by:

- Offering ongoing leadership coaching for the newly appointed director
- Organizing DCD's first-ever team retreat, where staff:
 - Completed a Strengths Finder assessment to understand team dynamics
 - Developed communication skills for effective outreach and advocacy
 - Created a transition binder for the new mayor, documenting the Department's successes and priorities



"All of the Lights" by Brian Beckett

This support has strengthened collaboration within DCD and has positioned the team to work effectively with the new mayor's office.

2. HOUSING MARKET CHALLENGES



"Full of Wonder" by Genavieve Quetti

Pittsfield's housing market poses unique affordability issues. Located in a wealthy state, costs for land and labor are high, and many residents struggle to afford rent and reach the goal of homeownership. To support the city's housing strategy, Enterprise:

- Conducted an assessment to map Pittsfield's housing ecosystem and identify ways to support strategy development and better housing coordination
- Supported the DCD to host quarterly meetings with stakeholders to discuss Massachusetts' Affordable Homes Act, a \$5 billion state initiative. These meetings have helped the city prepare for the resources available through this Act.

By assessing the community's housing ecosystem, the DCD now has the data needed to inform their strategy, enhancing coordination to address Pittsfield's unique challenges.

"The DCTA program has been transformative for Pittsfield, equipping our Department of Community Development with the tools and strategies needed to address our housing challenges head-on. From leadership coaching and stakeholder engagement to strategic alignment of resources, this partnership is empowering us to create lasting change and foster collaboration across our community. We're now better positioned to leverage state initiatives like the Affordable Homes Act and strengthen Pittsfield's housing ecosystem for future generations."

—Justine Dodds, Director of Community Development, City of Pittsfield

3. STAKEHOLDER KNOWLEDGE

Misunderstandings and misconceptions about housing development exist within Pittsfield's stakeholder community (e.g., elected officials, city staff, developers). To address this, Enterprise:

- Provided the DCD with communication tools that enhance their ability to engage stakeholders on housing needs (e.g., using storytelling to make a better case for priorities)

By building DCD's capacity to effectively advocate and communicate, the DCD can now engage stakeholders more effectively, fostering collaboration on housing initiatives and positioning the city to maximize available resources.



In **Phase II** of the TA, launched in the fall of 2024, Enterprise has expanded its focus to include a few new initiatives:

- **Resource Alignment:** Developing a crosswalk matrix will help align city and state resources with Pittsfield's housing priorities. The matrix is a tool that maps available resources—such as funding and programs—against specific housing goals and strategies identified by the city. This matrix will help identify gaps, overlaps, and opportunities for leveraging resources effectively to address housing challenges. It will also facilitate coordination between city and state efforts.
- **Workforce Pipeline Development:** The shortage of skilled tradespeople (such as electricians and plumbers) has slowed progress on affordable housing projects. In partnership with local organizations like Taconic Vocational High School, MassHousing, and MassDevelopment, Enterprise is working to:

- Assess and address barriers in the skilled trades workforce
- Create a Skilled Trades Barriers-Solutions Matrix and Key Findings Memo
- Develop case studies on workforce development models that could benefit Pittsfield and similar communities



"Persip Park" by Alexander Estrada

Through these initiatives, the TA being delivered by Enterprise is equipping Pittsfield's Department of Community Development with the leadership skills, strategic planning tools, and resources necessary to support affordable housing and future economic resilience. This partnership provides a valuable example of how TA can empower communities to address their housing and development goals by building the capacity of its leaders.

If you think your community could benefit from the support that Pittsfield is receiving, please complete [the request form](#) for HUD to review.