

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Community Development Office strives to effectively manage community change in accordance with the Town of Amherst Master Plan and the Town's ordinances and regulations. This is done by providing professional advice and technical expertise in a consistent and fair manner to citizens, boards, commissions, departments and regional agencies on the implementation of land use ordinances, regulations and policies for both short- and long-term physical, economic, and community development of the Town. The office is operated by a team of three full-time staff members who provide a variety of services, including:

- Land development review
- Master planning/long range planning
- Building permitting and inspections
- Health and safety
- Economic development: commercial, industrial and small business

The Office includes the Building, Code Enforcement, Planning, Zoning and Economic Development Departments. It provides support to the Town's Zoning Board of Adjustment, Planning Board, Historic District Commission, Conservation Commission, and the Heritage Commission.

2013 STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

The 2013 Community Development Strategic Plan was based upon a vision for Amherst in 2030:

Residential: Amherst will preserve and enhance its unique rural, historical and small town character in residential areas.

Commercial/Industrial: Amherst will have an established vision for the development and redevelopment of its Commercial and Industrial zones that is reflected in daily operations and its image as a business-friendly community.

To achieve this vision there are three interrelated themes to be balanced: quality of life, quality of natural resources, and economic development. The 2013 Strategic Plan was developed with the aim of achieving this balance. Maintaining and attracting a strong commercial/industrial core along the Route 101A corridor will provide needed jobs and services, while relieving some of the property tax burden on residents. Balancing economic development with protecting natural and water resources, maintaining the community's character, and enhancing open space, will ultimately provide an excellent quality of life for residents and businesses alike.

The 2013 Strategic Plan was developed as a blueprint for aligning the community's long-term goals with budgeting and daily operations of the Community Development Office. At the time the plan was initially drafted, the goals and initiatives had not yet been fully vetted by the boards and commissions that the department represents. The plan focused on long-term goals with the understanding that it would be updated upon more in-depth review from boards and commissions.

2014 STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

PLAN PROCESS AND VETTING

Since the presentation of the Strategic Plan in October 2013, the plan has been reviewed by the boards and commissions that this Office represents. Goals and initiatives were provided to the Planning Board Conservation Commission and Historic District Commission for their review, comment and concurrence. The Planning Board offered input and requested changes in the language of the goals adopted which have been reflected in the amended goals and initiatives below. The Plan was also reviewed by the Historic District Commission and the Conservation Commission during 2013-2014 for consistency with their mission. Staff will continue dialog with boards and commissions to ensure that the plan is reflective of their vision of Amherst. By its nature, the Strategic Plan process involves frequent review, analysis and adjustment, and staff will continue to incorporate board and commission feedback into the process.

2013-2014 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Several strides have been taken towards achieving the goals of the Community Development Office over the past year:

- In 2013, the Town was awarded a grant to combine, simplify and update its water resource related ordinances. At Town Meeting in March 2014, voters approved amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to adopt an updated Wetland & Watershed Conservation District and a new Aquifer Conservation and Wellhead Protection District which reduced redundancy with other water resource ordinances, updated wellhead protection standards and incorporated current best management practices.
- In May 2014, the Board of Selectmen adopted a revised Septic System Ordinance to complete the overhaul of the Town's water resource related ordinance. The revised ordinance was prepared in concert with the Town's consultants and several local contractors to reflect the Town's priority for protection of its water resources and development of clear regulations for the construction of new and replacement of septic systems in Amherst.
- In May 2014, the Planning Board adopted Driveway Regulations, prepared in coordination with the Department of Public Works, to establish clear and uniform guidelines for the construction or modification of driveways and access points from private property to public ways owned and maintained by the Town.
- In 2013-2014, the Office made significant progress towards the digitization of Community Development files. Currently all septic systems, Zoning Board of Adjustment and Historic District files have been scanned and saved digitally. Building permits from 2006-2012 have also been saved, and Planning Board files have been partially digitized and it is the hope of the Office to continue that project in FY2016.
- In 2014, the Heritage Commission was awarded an \$11,500 grant from the NH Department of Historic Resources to expand the Historic Resource Study initiated in 2010. This grant will support documentation of four farmsteads and it is anticipated the project will begin in late 2014.

AMENDED GOALS AND INITIATIVES

With input from department boards and commissions on the 2013 Strategic Plan, the Community Development Office has identified the following modified goals:

Goal 1: Amherst will encourage land use which protects open space and rural aesthetics.

Goal 2: Amherst will continue to allow for a variety of housing options and be a leader in the State (and region) in maintaining and managing its Historic District and resources.

Goal 3: Amherst will be known as a community where businesses succeed and thrive, with clearly established regulations and processes for land development.

Goal 4: Amherst will maintain safe drinking water and protect water resources.

Goal 5: Amherst will ensure quality construction, and will fairly and equally enforce regulations.

Goal 1: Amherst will encourage land use which protects open space and rural aesthetics.

Measurable Outcome: Dedicate a minimum of 20% of total land area to permanent open space by 2030, an increase from 14.8% in 2013.

Related Initiatives:

- 1) Revise Subdivision Regulations and the Zoning Ordinance to encourage the protection of open space, stonewalls, and rural landscapes as detailed in the 2013 Regulatory Review (FY 2020) (Cost Est.: \$25,000 with consultant).
- 2) Work with the Amherst Conservation Commission and other private organizations such as the Amherst Land Trust, the Society for the Protection of Forests, and the Audubon Society, to incorporate their visions, goals and initiatives for open space and natural resource preservation into the Town's Ordinances and Regulations (FY2017) (Cost Est.: \$2,000).
- 3) Create Construction Standards Regulation to include roadway design, rural/scenic roadway design, drainage, bridge, and utility standards. (FY2016) (Cost Est.: \$2,000).

Goal 2: Amherst will continue to allow for a variety of housing options and be a leader in the state (and region) in maintaining and managing its Historic District and resources.

Measurable Outcome: Maintain the current residential and Historic District property valuation distribution through 2030.

Related Initiatives:

- 1) Continue to allow for a variety of housing options to attract and support all generations of Amherst residents from aging in place to families.

- a) Revise Subdivision and Non-Residential Site Plan Regulations to encourage the extension of utilities (water, gas lines, broadband, cable, underground electric, etc.) to new development (FY 2017) (Cost Est.: \$5,000 support from consultant).
 - b) Continue to support Affordable and/or Workforce Housing Ordinances (ongoing) (Cost Est.: No Cost).
 - c) Complete a Sidewalk, Bike, and Trails Master Plan study, starting with the Safe Routes to School Study and Conservation Commission Walk Book, to identify current needs and future connections, and update regulations accordingly (FY 2018) (Cost Est.: \$2,500 via iTRaC grant through NRPC or \$15,000 with consultants).
- 2) Support the Historic District Commission (HDC) in its role as district regulator, and provide necessary updates in legislative changes and educational opportunities to its members.
- a) Improve education, communication, and outreach to residents of the district through the Town website and ACTV (FY 2018-ongoing) (Cost Est.: \$2,000 – requires partnership with ACTV and increased volunteers/funding for ACTV).
 - b) Begin proactive Enforcement of the district (FY 2018) (Cost Est.: See Goal 5.3).
- 3) Support the Heritage Commission in its role of protection and preservation of non-historic district community resources, and provide necessary updates in legislative changes and educational opportunities to its members.
- a) Support grant applications to update and expand the Historic Resource Study (HRS) initially completed in 2010 and require utilization of study resources in land development applications (FY 2015-ongoing) (Cost Est.: \$13,100 to be covered by grant).
 - b) Improve education and communication through the Town website and ACTV (FY 2018 - ongoing) (Cost Est.: \$2,000 – requires partnership with ACTV and increased volunteers/funding for ACTV).
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Goal 3: Amherst will be known as a community where businesses succeed and thrive, with clearly established regulations and processes for land development.

Measurable Outcome: Increase the Total Assessed Valuation of Commercial/Industrial property in Amherst to 20% by 2030 and maintain that percent through 2040, an increase from 13.26% in 2013.

Related Initiatives:

- 1) Define and implement a Board of Selectmen approved Town Vision for Economic Development.
 - a) Define a clear vision for Economic Development in Amherst (FY 2016) (Cost Est.: \$2,000).
 - b) Appoint an Economic Development Committee to define and implement a work plan and communications strategy for Economic Development in partnership with the Community Development Office (FY 2017) (Cost Est.: \$70,000 (annually) to support an entry level Planner for daily, Planning/Zoning support while allowing Director to focus on EDAC. This would also reduce a majority of consulting needs for Ordinance and Regulation updates. Current staffing cannot

support another committee, and budget allocations do not currently support growing this division of the Community Development department.).

- 2) Ensure the development and redevelopment of Commercial and Industrial properties aligns with the design standards articulated in the Economic Development Vision.
 - a) Revise the, Non-Residential Site Plan Regulations and Subdivision Regulations to align with the 2013 Regulatory Review suggestions (FY 2016) (Cost Est.: \$2,000 via iTRaC grant through NRPC or \$30,000 with consultants).
 - b) Revise the Sign Ordinance (FY 2017) (Cost Est.: \$30,000 with consultant).
- 3) Encourage and provide infrastructure expansion (transportation, utilities, and workforce) to meet the needs of the businesses in the Commercial and Industrial Districts.
 - a) Partner with Pennichuck, Liberty (gas), PSNH, and Comcast to ensure infrastructure is maintained, future connections are available as needed, and Town regulations reasonably encourage the extension of utilities (water, gas lines, broadband, cable, underground electric, etc.) to new development (FY 2017) (See Goal 2.1).
 - b) Partner with NRPC through TTAC to ensure existing transportation infrastructure is maintained and future connections are available as needed (ongoing) (Cost Est.: No Cost).
 - c) Partner with local non-profits and community groups to ensure multi-modal transportation options as required by businesses and residents to support workforce (ongoing) (Cost Est.: No Cost).
 - d) Explore and implement a sewer utility to serve the Commercial/Industrial zones to protect water resources and encourage development.
 - i) Partner with neighboring communities (Merrimack, Milford, and/or Nashua) to examine the feasibility of extending sewer infrastructure down Route 101A corridor (FY 2016) (Cost Est.: \$5,000 for baseline feasibility study).
 - ii) Create and implement a Sewer Master Plan to build support for and outline the community's goals for the expansion of sewer (FY 2017) (Cost Est.: \$80,000).
 - iii) Implement partnership agreement with neighboring communities to expand existing sewer system and build public-private partnership to share the cost (engineering and construction) (FY 2018-2021) (Cost Est.: \$30-40,000).
 - iv) Engineering of sewer expansion project (FY 2020-2021) (Cost Est.: \$400,000 or \$200,000 per year).
 - v) Project Construction (FY 2022-2025) (Cost Est.: \$40 million).

Goal 4: Amherst will maintain safe drinking water and protect water resources.**Measurable Outcomes:**

- **Protect ground water resources to maintain 100% of the Safe Drinking Water Act standards for drinking water supplies; and**

- **Protect surface water resources and support Pennichuck in meeting its Strategic goal of a maximum phosphorous load in Pennichuck Brook Watershed of 30 ug/l.**

Related Initiatives:

- 1) Revise Water Resource Regulations (Wetlands, Watershed, Aquifer, Floodplain, and Water Pollution Control Ordinances) to simplify and align with BMP's as defined in 2013 Regulatory Review.
 - a) Combine, simplify, and update the Wetlands Protection District and Watershed Protection District (FY 2014) (Cost Est.: Grant). **COMPLETE**
 - b) Update the Water Pollution Control Regulations to reflect current BMP's (FY 2014) (Cost Est.: Grant). **COMPLETE**
 - c) Update the Aquifer Protection District to include Well-head/Ground Water Protection, current BMP's and supporting administrative processes (i.e. sampling requirements, design standards, etc.) (FY 2014) (Cost Est.: Grant). **COMPLETE**
 - d) Work with the State DOT, DES, and federal EPA to ensure Amherst meets Stormwater quality regulations (FY 2014-ongoing) (Cost Est.: No Cost).
- 2) Provide proactive enforcement for local water resource related ordinances including Wetlands, Watershed, Aquifer, Groundwater/Well-head, Floodplain, and Water Pollution Control Regulations (FY 2018) (See Goal 5, Initiative 3.b).

Goal 5: Amherst will ensure quality construction, and will fairly and equally enforce regulations.

Measurable Outcome: Continue recent improvements in Enforcement to increase the Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule (BCEGS) ISO rating from a 4 issued in 2013 to a 3 by 2030.

Related Initiatives:

- 1) Provide timely and accurate access to information and data stored within the department.
 - a) Create digital copies of archived data to be stored on Town server (FY 2014-2016) (Cost Est.: \$8,000 - 10,000 to complete).
 - b) Invest in and install a paper file management system which will accommodate all archives and foreseeable future documentation, in an organized, safe, and efficient manner (FY 2015-2018) (Cost Est.: \$15,000).
 - c) Provide public internet access to permits, data, and files (FY 2018) (Cost Est.: \$5,000 to add customer portal into current Community Development software system, with annual maintenance required).
- 2) Ensure quality construction.
 - a) Ensure all building permit applications meet current code specifications (2009 ICC Codes, as amended) and are processed within 7 to 14 days of complete information submission. (ongoing) (Cost Est.: No Cost).

- b) Ensure all construction meets or exceeds current code specifications through the inspection process including special inspections as necessary.
 - i) Ensure inspections can be scheduled with 24-48 hour advance notice for inspection (ongoing) (Cost Est.: No Cost).
 - ii) Utilize subcontracted, certified, Building Inspector on an as-needed basis to provide support during vacations, and keep inspection scheduling within 24-48 hour advance notice. (FY ongoing) (Cost Est.: \$5,000 – 10,000 for FY 2016-2017 for subcontracted building inspector).
 - c) Ensure all existing properties comply with relevant codes, regulations, and ordinances via adopted Code Enforcement procedures (ongoing) (Current time commitments allow for approx. 2-3 hours per week on complaints/Enforcement).
- 3) Fair and equal enforcement of regulations.
- a) Ensure compliance with Code Enforcement policy and reasonable response times to written complaints (ongoing) (Cost Est.: No Cost).
 - b) Provide Staff time and resources for proactive enforcement (FY 2018) (Cost Est.: \$85,000, Current Staff levels do not allow for proactive enforcement. Current time allocation allows for approximately 2 hours per week on complaints).

FY2016-2020 BUDGET IMPACT SUMMARY

As an overview of all of the above discussed goals and initiative the following table is provided. The strategic goals and initiatives outlined in this document are intended as a blueprint for aligning the community's long-term goals with budgeting and daily operations of the Community Development Office.

The proposed FY 2016- FY2018 operating budgets were derived based on an annual 8% increase in health insurance, 2% increase in dental insurance and annual Steps to eligible employees.

Community Development Office - 5 Year Budget Initiatives					
Goals and Initiatives - Budget Impact years	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20
Goal 1: Encourage land use which protects open space and rural aesthetics					
1.1 revise regulations and ordinances	0	0	0	0	25,000
1.2 Incorporate ACC and ALT goals and initiatives into regulations	0	2,000	0	0	0
1.3 Create construction standards for roadways, rural/scenic roadways, drainage, bridges and utilities	2,000	0	0	0	0
Goal 2: Variety of housing options and leader in maintaining and managing historic district and resources					
2.1 Continue to allow for variety of housing options	0	5,000	2,500	0	0
2.2 Support Historic District	0	0	0	2,000	0
2.3 Support Heritage Commission	0	0	0	2,000	0
Goal 3: Community where businesses succeed and thrive, with clearly established regulations and processes for land development					
3.1 Design and implement Economic Development Vision	2,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000
3.2 Design standards for Commercial and Industrial	2,000	30,000	0	0	0
3.3 Infrastructure expansion	5,000	80,000	10,000	20,000	210,000
Goal 4: Maintain safe drinking water and protect water resources					
4.1 Revise water resource regulations	0	0	0	0	0
4.2 Proactive enforcement of water resource regulations	0	0	0	0	0
Goal 5: Ensure quality construction, fairly and equally enforce regulations.					
5.1 Access to data and information	8,000	0	20,000	0	0
5.2 Ensure Quality Construction	5,000	5,000	0	0	0
5.3 Fair and equal enforcement	0	0	85,000	85,000	85,000
Totals	\$24,000	\$192,000	\$187,500	\$179,000	\$390,000
Proposed Operating Budget	\$294,010	\$304,862	\$316,275	n/a	n/a
Total (Initiatives and Operating Budget)	\$318,010	\$496,862	\$503,775	\$179,000	\$390,000