

Town of Amherst

STRATEGIC PLAN: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

FY 2017-2021 PLAN TO GUIDE DEPARTMENT PRIORITIES AND BUDGETING

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September 14, 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MISSION

The Community Development Office strives to effectively manage community change in accordance with the Master Plan and the Town's ordinances and regulations. We do this 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 the short- and long-term physical, economic, and community development of the Town. The office provides 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.

OVERVIEW

The Office includes the Building, Code Enforcement, Planning, Zoning, and Economic Development Departments. It also provides support to the Town's Zoning Board of Adjustment, Planning Board, Historic District Commission, Conservation Commission, and the Heritage Commission. The Office also supports the Capital Improvement Plan Committee and Stormwater Committee and assists other Town Departments and Boards as needed. In support of the commissions and boards, the Office has become the central repository for all land use related plans and documentation, and the central communication hub for all land use boards. The Office is operated by a team of three full time staff members.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Community Development Office was reorganized in 2012 (formerly Planning & Zoning) to combine functionality and add economic development as part of its core mission. 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.

As the Town begins to contemplate revising the Master Plan, it is the goal to use that public outreach and engagement opportunity to further refine the Strategic Plan and create two documents that will align to define the community's future in both its policies and budgeting processes.

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 that will need to be balanced: quality of life, quality of resources, and economic development. It is hoped that, by detailing a Strategic Plan for the Community Development Office, Amherst will be able to achieve 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.

Although 2030 is 15 years away, this is a critical timeframe for measuring Amherst's success in achieving its Vision, as predicted demographic changes (including an ageing and shrinking total population, and reduced workforce productivity) becoming a reality. It is crucial for the community to outline and implement a strategy to achieve its vision before 2030 to counter these predicted trends before they happen.

2010 MASTER PLAN GOALS

The 2010 Master Plan is the core document underlying the community's land use regulations and the Community Development Office. The "Ten Key Master Plan Recommendations That Can Shape Amherst's Future" outlines the community's recommendation:



1. Ensure that new development and redevelopment respect Amherst's natural resources and complement the Town's existing character.
2. Preserve and protect historic and cultural resources throughout Amherst.
3. Continue to preserve Amherst's natural resources and rural landscapes including aquifers, prime agricultural soils, forests, scenic vistas, wildlife habitats, and water and air quality for the sustainable health, safety and welfare of current and future generations.
4. Protect Amherst's extensive water resources for the benefit of residents and the environment, including surface water features, groundwater, and aquifer areas.
5. Save open space in residential development.
6. Encourage redevelopment that enhances the appearance of existing commercial and industrial areas.
7. Improve the ease and convenience with which residents can walk and use bikes for recreation, shopping, commuting and going to school.
8. Provide educational facilities that support quality education for the town's students.
9. Recognize the importance of recreation for health by providing needed facilities.
10. Continue to develop greenways and trails in order to provide a town-wide and inter-town system of recreational trails.

Through the Master Plan Recommendations and analysis of the Historic and Environmental trends, the Strategic Plan will identify several broad strategic goals and initiatives to implement the long-term goals of the community. Specifically, the Strategic Plan addresses Recommendations 1-7 and 10.

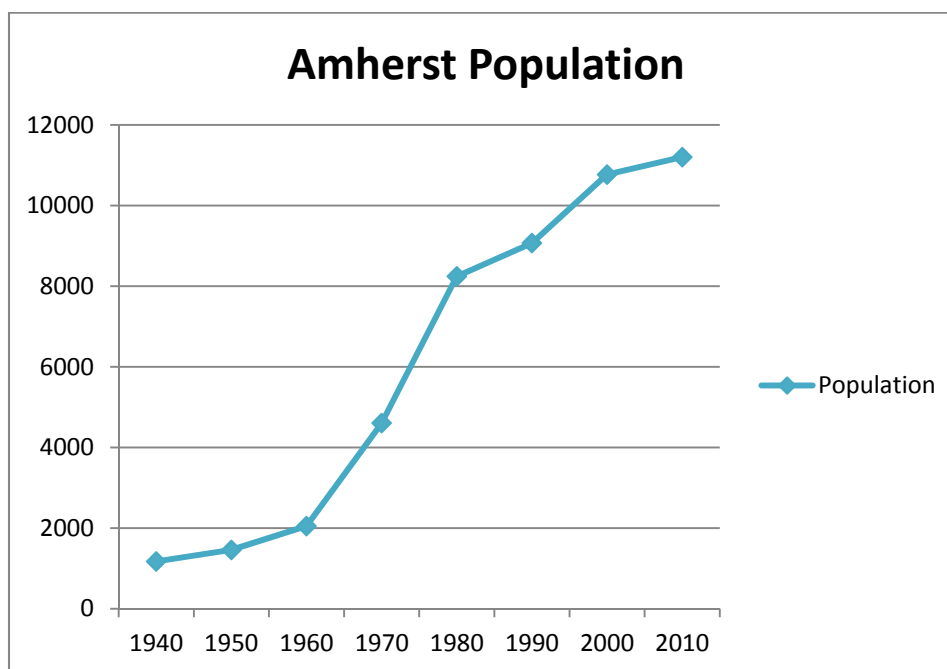
HISTORICAL TRENDS

Amherst is a community that embraces its historical role as a regional hub and the patterns of land use that melded today's landscapes and character. To understand the evolution of the community and this Office, several statistics were analyzed, including population growth, income distribution, assessed property values, permits, land use application, and budgeting trends.

POPULATION

Amherst's largest population growth occurred in the 1970's followed by a sharp decline in the 1980's.

Chart 1: Amherst Population



Source: US Census Bureau

The more recent population growth of the 1990's subsided through the 2000's and is predicted to slow further over the next several decades (see Chart 3). The shift in long-term population growth trends requires reciprocal shift in the community's long-term planning focus; from managing residential growth, to maintaining and preserving the existing population, by providing for the services they need.

INCOME

Even as population growth has slowed, the income distribution of the community details a significant increase in the percent of higher income households over the decade, with no changes in the percent of lower income households. (Note: the 2000 data was derived from the 2000 Census; and the 2010 data is from the American Community Survey, which utilizes a significantly smaller subset of the population.)

Table 1: Amherst's 2000 & 2010 Percent of Households by Income Group

Total Household Income	2000 % of All Households*	2010 % of All Households
Less than \$99,999	55.92%	55.44%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	23.74%	12.21%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	10.98%	16.83%
\$200,000 or more	9.35%	15.51%

Source: US Census Bureau 2000 Census and 2010 ACS table B19001

Amherst has retained and attracted higher income households even as population growth has slowed.

ASSESSED PROPERTY VALUATION

In contrast to the slowing rate of growth from 2000 to 2010, the Residential property valuation more than doubled, aligning with the growth in higher income households during that time. As the Commercial/Industrial tax base grows; it not only provides local jobs and services, it also reduces the tax burden on residential tax payers by increasing the taxes contributed by businesses. Over the past three years, the assessed value of commercial and industrial property in town has declined slightly, reflective of the slowdown in commercial growth and depreciation in existing commercial and industrial properties.

Table 2: Amherst's Total Assessed Values

Year	Commercial/ Industrial	% Commercial/ Industrial	Residential	% Residential	Total
2000	\$76,607,200	9.79%	\$705,542,300	90.21%	\$782,149,500
2010	\$223,760,375	12.20%	\$1,610,306,725	87.80%	\$1,834,067,100
2012	\$204,315,825	13.26%	\$1,336,143,075	86.74%	\$1,540,458,900
2013	\$201,181,800	13.08%	\$1,337,201,800	86.92%	\$1,538,383,600
2014	\$201,832,975	13.08%	\$1,341,039,075	86.92%	\$1,542,872,050
2015	\$201,211,775	13.01%	\$1,345,724,955	86.99%	\$1,546,936,730

Source: Amherst Assessing Database

PERMIT AND APPLICATION TRENDS

The Community Development Office has been tracking permit trends since 2006, which reflects the national economic downturn of the late 2000's and the more recent upswing in the local economy.

Table 3: Amherst's Building Permit Application History 2005 – 2015 (through 9-1-2015)

Building Permit Application History											
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 (YTD)
New SF Residential (including Condos)	64	51	30	26	10	14	8	34	7	13	19
Residential Additions/Alterations	217	192	161	134	145	142	119	109	175	127	128
Commercial/Industrial new	N/A	N/A	11	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2
Commercial/Industrial additions/alterations	N/A	N/A	170	35	19	15	13	25	19	15	11
Signs	37	31	31	24	12	22	26	32	34	39	28
Pools	8	13	13	8	0	15	8	7	5	10	6
Demolition	5	5	14	20	19	24	16	12	13	21	10
Septic Systems	102	80	83	61	55	47	60	50	48	92	38
Electrical	36	77	60	59	101	112	103	146	247	191	187
Plumbing	N/A	N/A	49	14	6	20	7	5	77	80	65
Mechanical	N/A	N/A	N/A	43	41	57	43	33	276	307	214
Earth Removal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0	0
Home Occupations	N/A	N/A	N/A	7	5	7	1	7	4	3	4
Total	489	489	622	431	413	475	405	450	920	899	712
Building Inspections	974	1163	N/A	N/A					884	764	471

Source: Amherst Community Development Office, 2015

It is important to note that a significant shift occurred in early 2012 in the building permit review and inspection process. In partnership with the Fire Department, the Building Department began, for the first time, adhering to and enforcing the 2009 International Code Council (ICC) building code standards as adopted by the State for building permit issuance, inspection, and final certificates of occupancy. This shift in policy also marks a significant shift in the time required to approve and inspect permitted work. By adhering to the State adopted standards, Amherst is ensuring quality construction for residential and commercial construction and has enhanced its Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule with the ISO from a 6 in 2003 to a 4 in 2013.

Table 4a-c: Amherst's Land Use Board Applications

Planning Board	2012	2013	2014	2015 (YTD)
Scenic Road Hearings	2	2	1	1
Public Hearing on Zoning Ordinance	2	2	2	2
Non-Residential Site Plans (NRSP)	7	10	7	4
Water Resource Management Plans/ Conditional Use Permit	5	3	4	3
Affordable Housing Suitability	1	1	0	0
Subdivision	3	1	8	2
Lot Line Adjustment	6	1	4	1
Discussions	3	4	2	1
Sign Master Plan	3	1	0	1
Compliance Hearing	2	1	0	0
Total	37	25	26	15

Zoning Board of Adjustment	2012	2013	2014	2015 (YTD)
Variance	23	16	27	8
Special Exception	2	3	3	0
Appeal of Administrative Decision	3	0	1	1
Equitable Waiver	1	0	1	0
Variance for the Handicapped	1	0	0	0
Total	30	38	32	9

Historic District Commission	2012	2013	2014	2015 (YTD)
New Residence	n/a	1	1	1
Building Modifications	36	7	10	19
Tree Removal	31	11	4	0
Fence/Landscaping	13	2	0	1
Mechanical Equipment	3	2	3	2
Demolition	0	1	6	0
Total	83	28	24	23

Source: Amherst Community Development Office, 2015

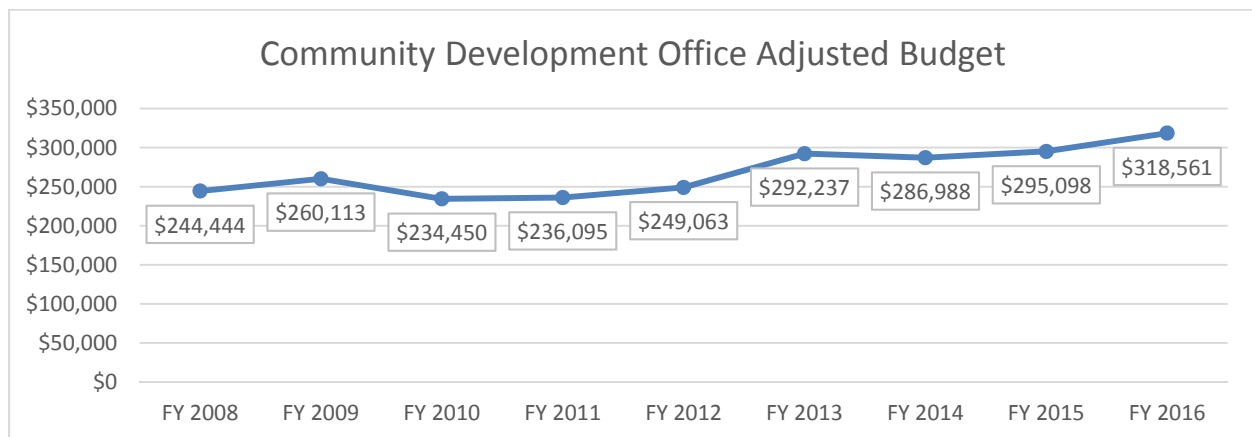
The permit and land use board activities have been steadily on the rise from the lowest levels in 2009. Although new residential growth is not expected to regain the momentum it has had in the past, the community will continue to add on, redevelop, and further increase the values of its residential properties. In light of a slowing rate of population growth, the focus of long-term planning will shift from managing residential development, to encouraging quality construction in keeping with the character of

the community, and encouraging economic development in the commercial and industrial zoned lands, relieving some of the property tax burden from residential properties.

BUDGET TRENDS

The Community Development Office budget over the past five years reflects steady growth of the permits and applications, along with staff turn-over, reorganization, and significant policy changes. In FY 2012 the Planning & Zoning Department was reorganized into the Community Development Office combining several departments that had overlapping responsibilities, eliminating positions, and becoming a single office operated by three full time staff members and two as-needed subcontracted positions for recording secretary and building inspector back-up.

Chart 2: Community Development Office Adjusted Budget 2008-2015



Through the reorganization, two key elements of achieving the community's vision (long-range planning and economic development) are now included within the Office's responsibilities. The adjusted budget also reflects significant recent efforts to improve technology within the department including software to process all permits and applications, and the beginning of the conversion to digital data storage accomplished through encumbered funds.

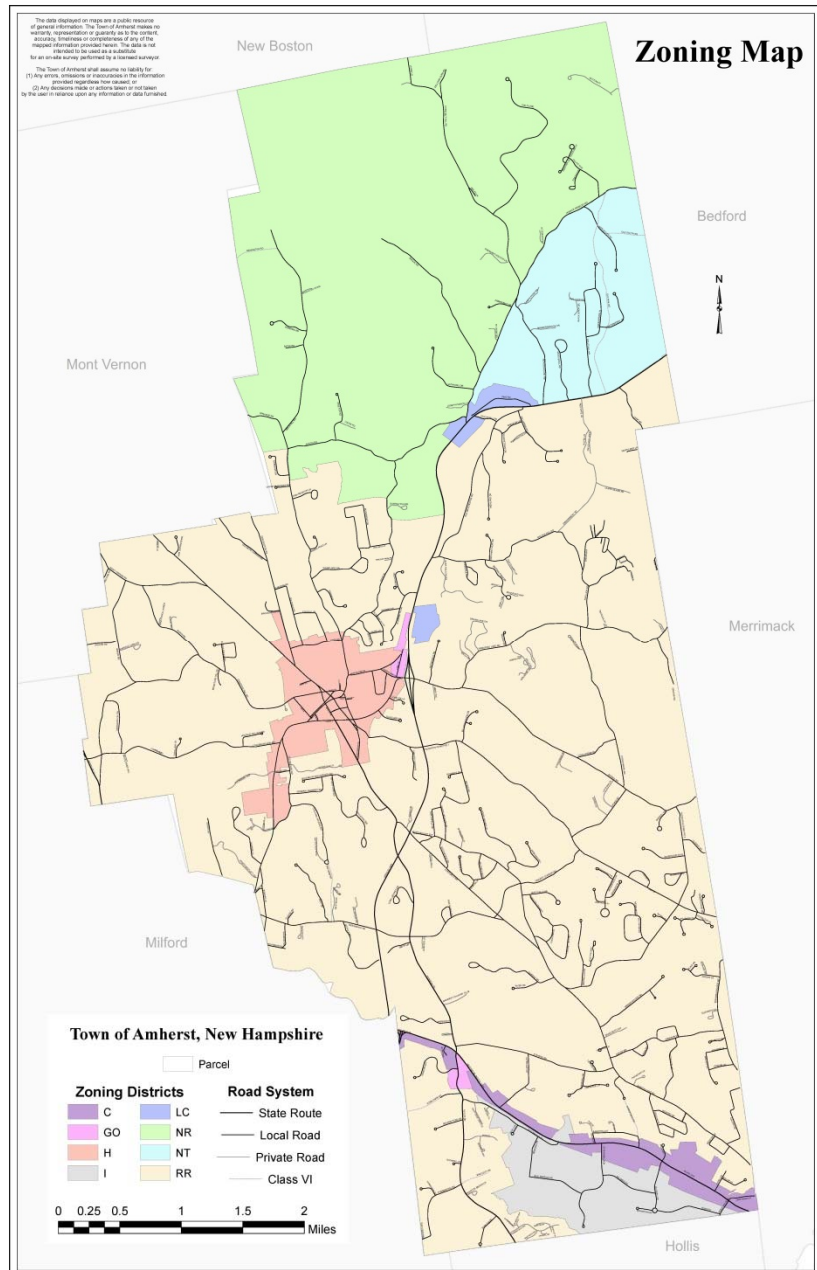
ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

LAND USES

Amherst is largely a single family residential community, and its zoning districts closely reflect the actual land uses. Utilizing the area of each zoning district, the Town's 21,976 acres are designated as follows: 92.53% of land is Residential; 7.10 % of land is Commercial, Limited Commercial, or General Office; and 2.66% of land is Industrial.

As reflected in the Zoning Map, the Commercial/Industrial land uses are highly segregated from the majority of residential areas. All Commercial and Industrial zoned land is located in the southeast of Amherst along the Route 101A corridor. There are several small pockets of Limited Commercial or General Office along the Route 101 and Route 122 corridors; however, they are just that, pockets along a State roadway, segregated from the major residential uses.

Furthermore, protection of open space in residential areas is specifically highlighted in the Master Plan Recommendations. Based on data supplied by the Conservation Commission, there are currently 3,504 acres of protected open space land or 15.8% of the total land in the community. Open spaces contribute to preserving the community character and protection of natural and water resources. In addition, open spaces provide valuable opportunities for passive recreation (i.e. walking, biking, hiking, horseback riding trails, sledding at Bragdon Farm, and swimming at Baboosic Lake).



WATER RESOURCES

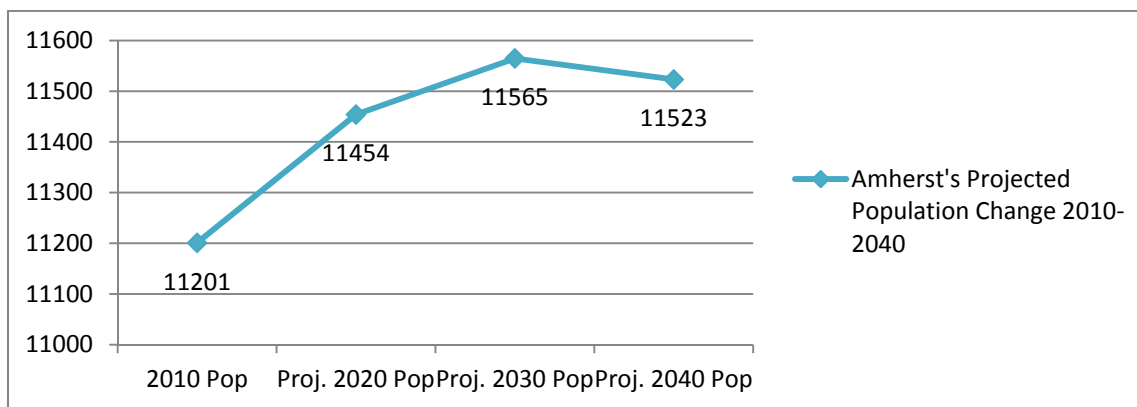
The importance of maintaining the community's high quality water resources led Amherst to become one of the first communities in the State to enact regulations to protect its water resources; including aquifer, wetlands, watershed, floodplain, and septic system standards. The major challenges facing Amherst over the next several decades include managing stormwater runoff and the lack of a sewer utility, as all but 40 properties in Amherst (residential and commercial/industrial) are served by private septic systems. Of particular relevance is the fact that most of the Town's commercially and industrially zoned land sits directly over one of the largest aquifers in the State, which supplies the 750,000 gallon/day Pennichuck well, and abuts several high-quality wetlands systems.

Protecting the aquifer and surface water resources in balance with developing the Commercial/Industrial corridor to provide jobs and off-set residential property taxes will be essential to achieving Amherst's vision. Staff have reviewed Pennichuck Water Works *Final Restoration Plan* and subsequent *Strategic Plan* (November, 2012) for relevant data and ideas in establishing reasonable water quality goals. Based on Pennichuck's data gathering, reporting, analysis, and strategic plan, their goal is to ensure the watershed's water quality continues to meet 100% of the Safe Drinking Water Act standards, and to reduce the phosphorous loading in the Pennichuck Brook Watershed to 30 ug/l.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Amherst, along with the State of NH, over the next several decades is faced with the daunting combination of an aging population, the out migration of its youth, and shifting forces in the long-term economy, which will reduce overall labor productivity. Economic growth in New Hampshire depends on a small handful of factors: the change in the size of the labor force, the skills possessed by those workers, and the amount of capital invested in the local economy,ⁱ including infrastructure. A clear strategy will need to be defined to mitigate and capitalize on the predicted changes; to protect and maintain Amherst's unique community and spaces.

Chart 3: Amherst's Projected Total Population 2010-2040

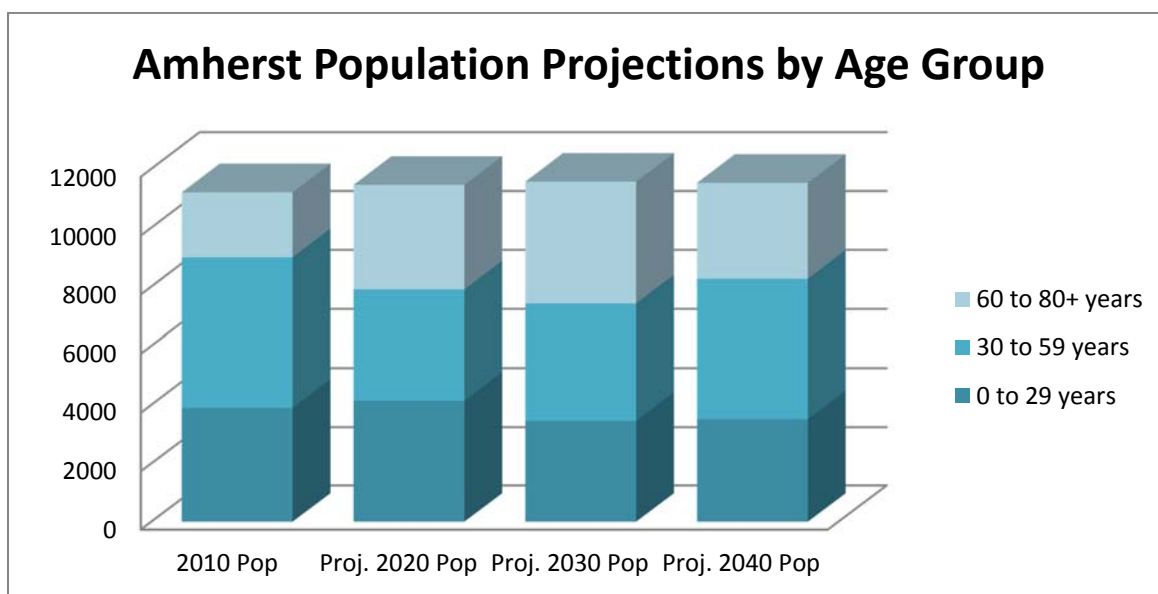


Source: Nashua Regional Planning Commission, 2012

Projected total population is expected to rise slowly over the next two decades with 253 additional people by 2020, peaking in 2030 at 11,565. By 2040 the total population of Amherst is expected to begin shrinking. While a decline in total population could have some benefits, such as less congestion and reduced pressure on natural resources, we will need to maintain our highly skilled workforce.

The possibility Amherst and the State of NH facing a stagnant or declining total population presents a myriad of challenges from loss of industries and services, to declining property values. To counteract these projections, Amherst needs to shift its priorities from managing residential growth and protecting natural resources to preserving its quality of life and natural resources in balance with encouraging economic development along the Route 101A corridor.

Chart 4: Amherst's Percent of Population by Age Group 2010-2040



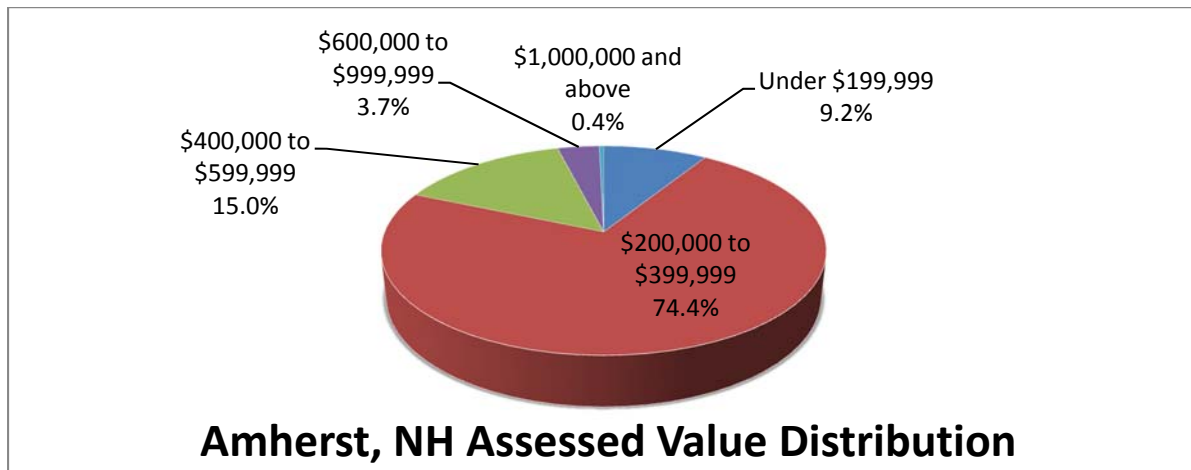
Source: Nashua Regional Planning Commission, 2012

As the rate of population growth slows over the next several decades, Amherst will also be faced with an aging population, at the expense of the working age population (30 to 59 years). The aging of the community will bring significant challenges from meeting transportation and housing needs, to ensuring a sufficient workforce and consumer base for the commercial and industrial businesses.

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY VALUES

As highlighted in the Master Plan recommendations, the community's ideals revolve around preserving and protecting the historic character and natural heritage of the community, along with its community character. As 92% of the community's land is residential, it is important to understand the variety of residential property values that contribute to the definition of character.

Chart 5: Amherst's 2013 Assessed Residential Property Ranges

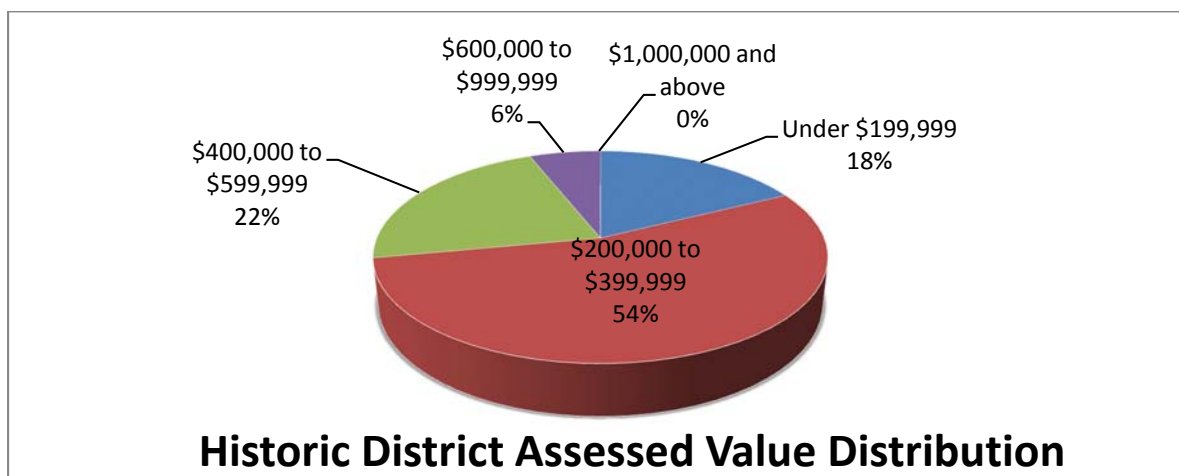


Source: Amherst Assessing Department, 2013

The vast majority of all appraised housing values fall between \$200,000 and \$399,999. However, when reviewing property value distribution it is important to note that the highest values (over \$400,000) outnumber the lower values (under \$199,999) by 2 to 1. Much of Amherst's landscapes are characterized by larger lots with single family homes, reflective of its agricultural heritage and higher property values.

In addition, the importance of preserving Amherst's historic character is reflected in a review of appraised values of property within the Historic District versus other residential properties.

Chart 6: Historic District vs. Residential Value Distributions

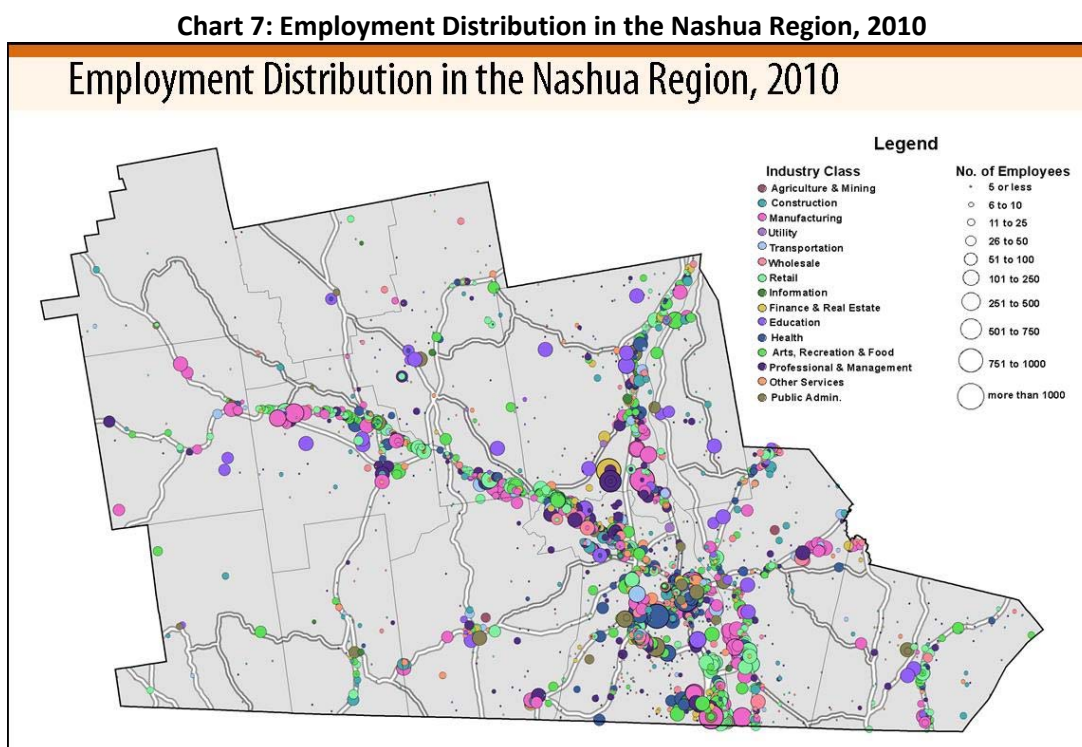


Source: Amherst Assessing Department, 2013

The rigorous preservation and aesthetic standards to which the properties in the district must adhere are clearly valued by the residents and the community. Similarly, the appraised values in the district fall significantly higher on the distribution when compared to residential values as a whole.

EMPLOYMENT

Although Amherst is largely residential, there are significant employment opportunities in the community including education, manufacturing, wholesale, professional, management, arts, recreation, and food. The employment center is focused along the Route 101A corridor in Amherst, as shown in the map provided by the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC).



Source: Nashua Regional Planning Commission, 2012

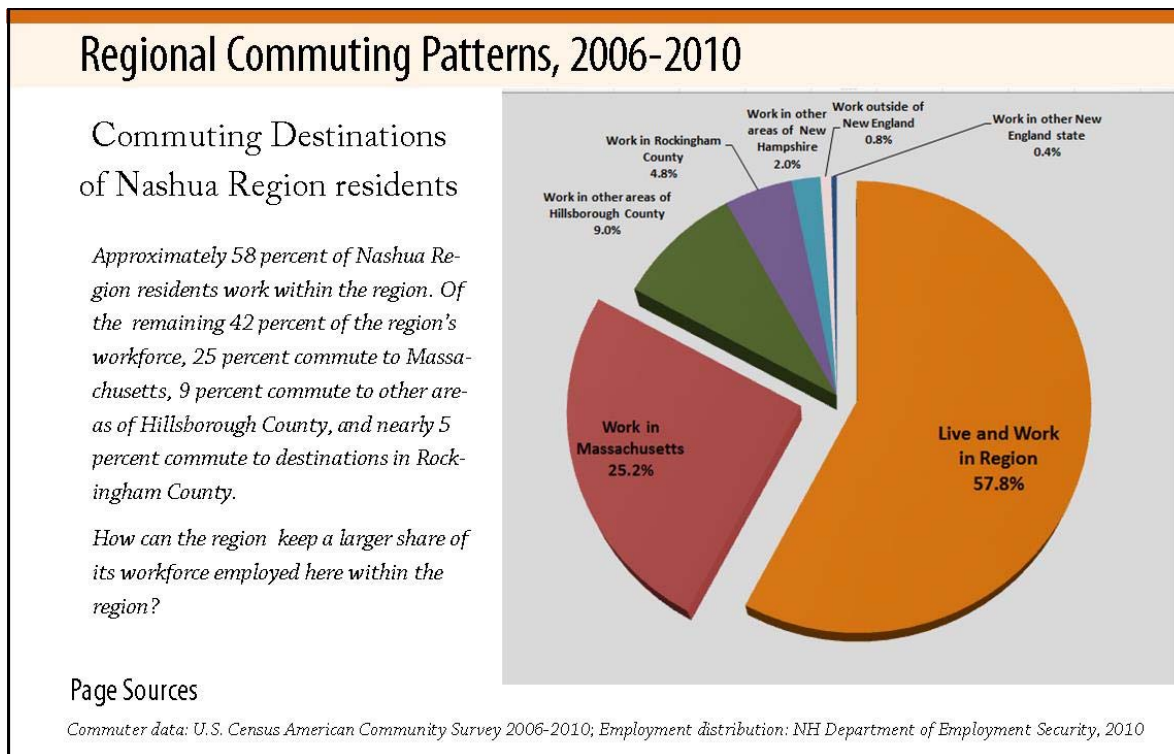
Employment centers with high quality jobs within Amherst and the region are critical to Amherst maintaining its existing quality of life and reaching its long-term goals.

COMMUTING PATTERNS

Approximately 28% of Amherst's 5,562 employed residents work within the community and 66% within the immediate region (13 towns NRPC represents); including 18% in Nashua, 9% in Merrimack and 7% in Milford. This is a higher percent of people working within Amherst and the immediate region than the regional average as shown on the chart below. Of the remaining 34%, 9% work in Manchester, 3% in Bedford, and 22% work outside of New Hampshire. This highlights the importance of maintaining the

community's Commercial and Industrial base and attracting new businesses, as the majority of people who live in Amherst work here or within the immediate region.

Chart 8: Regional Commuting Patterns



Source: Nashua Regional Planning Commission, 2012

TRANSPORTATION

Three recurring themes in the Master Plan and in recent transportation surveys conducted by this office and NRPC are: traffic along the Route 101A corridor; maintenance of infrastructure; and the need for more sidewalks, walking, and biking trails within the community.

Amherst's highly segregated land uses and regional commuting patterns reinforce the importance of its main transportation corridors for two purposes: access to services, and a means to access the greater region. The State owns and maintains both of the Town's main transportation corridors: Route 101 and Route 101A. As an active member of the region's Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC), the Town has a voice in the maintenance and development of those corridors.

The commercial/industrial corridor along Route 101A contains a majority of all services within the community as shown in Chart 7 and is the east-west travel corridor within the region. For the over 35,000 vehicles per day that travel the corridor, the numerous traffic lights provide a regular headache. In contrast for the retail businesses located along the corridor, the number of vehicles per day and access to signalized intersections are an important factor in choosing to locate in Amherst.

Infrastructure maintenance for the Town's road and bridge network has recently seen significant reinvestment through the \$15 million dollar road bond approved in 2010 and increases in roadway maintenance budget lines. Unfortunately, the condition of the transportation network will require significant additional investment and maintenance into the future to ensure adequate bridge and road conditions.

Beyond vehicle transportation, there is significant opportunity to provide an increased quality of life for residents through the provision of safe and accessible walking and biking trails. The recently completed Safe Routes to School study highlights some of the highest impact opportunities (i.e. sidewalk access to the Middle School and High School along Boston Post Road) and provides a grant funding avenue to pay for a portion of the costs to implement some of the options.

In addition, alternative modes of transportation services to support residents without vehicular access are growing in Amherst and the region. These alternative options will become more critical as older citizens give up driving and need access to basic services, from groceries to medical appointments. Alternative options like the Souhegan Valley Rides Blue Bus and other options will need to be explored and supported as the community ages over the next 30 years.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In the regional and national market, New Hampshire is known for its lack of sales or income tax and its overall low tax burden.

Table 4: 2013 US Business Tax Climate

New England Rankings of the US Business Tax Climate - 2013			
Rank	State	Rank	State
7	New Hampshire	45	Rhode Island
24	Massachusetts	46	Vermont
33	Maine	49	New York
42	Connecticut	50	New Jersey

Source: US Tax Foundation 2015 Report and www.nheconomy.com (9/7/15)

While the State's tax structure certainly attracts business, Towns are limited in their ability to offer additional tax incentives to attract businesses to their community. The local tax options include creating; Economic Revitalization Zones (which Amherst completed in 2012), Tax Increment Finance Districts (TIF Districts), and Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive Programs. Each of these programs has been authorized by State statute and can be customized to the individual community within the confines of the enabling statute.

Beyond tax incentives, the top five elements to maintaining and attracting new business to Amherst include:

- A clear, concise development process,
- Availability of utilities,
- Available and trained workforce,

- Transportation networks, and
- Maintaining the community's high quality of life.

The Master Plan barely touches upon Economic Development or Commercial/Industrial uses, leaving the community without a clearly defined vision. However, the Office views economic development as a key element to countering predicted population and aging trends, and ensuring Amherst is able to maintain its quality of life and resources without being overly burdensome to its residential taxpayers.

By encouraging economic development in line with the community's character and protecting water quality, the Town will offset some the residential tax burden and provide needed local jobs.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The following analysis of the Office's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats is to help the Office capitalize on its strengths and opportunities, and minimize threats and weaknesses.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection and analysis • Resource analysis • Quality of Staff/Responsive Customer Service • Technology • Relationships with Town Departments, Boards, and Commissions • Professional networks • Public Outreach • Maintaining community character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Economic Development Vision • Loss of data • Data accessibility • Timeframe for permit approvals and inspections • Misalignment of ordinances and regulations with Master Plan • Engaging the public • Proactive enforcement • Physical space • Increasing State & federal regulations
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial/Industrial utility expansion • Commercial/Industrial development and redevelopment • Clear, concise, development requirements, standards, and approval timeframes • Transportation options • Diversity of housing types • Local employment opportunities • Promoting a reputation of common sense, fair and equal treatment to all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of utilities for Commercial/Industrial • Declining water quality • Loss of community and historical character • Lack of proactive enforcement • Lengthy, unclear approval process for land development applications • Litigation • Aging population • Lack of transportation options

STRENGTHS

Data collection and analysis: The Office had been storing all land use related documentation in paper format, but has made substantial progress towards creating an accessible digital copy of departmental records. Digital files allow for increased accessibility and analysis.

Resource analysis: Town, State and federal laws related to land use are funneled through the Office. The professional Staff of the Office provides support to its citizens, businesses, fellow department heads, and volunteers to navigate and analyze the information they need.

Quality of Staff/Responsive Customer Service: The Office team includes three full-time staff with a combination of advanced degrees, certifications, and professional work history that has significantly improved operations over the past several years. The team has focused on improving customer services

and access to information, streamlining operations, and improving technology to become a resource for the community.

Technology: New permits and applications are now tracked and stored digitally through a web-based application and backed up on the Town's server. The large scale data conversion project the Office is undergoing has been jump started with septic system and Zoning Board files now stored digitally. The next steps of the conversion process include building permits 2012-2006, Historic District and Planning Board files, and finally building permits prior to 2006.

Relationships with Town Departments, Boards, and Commissions: The Office functions as the communications and data hub between the several departments and the volunteer boards and commissions it supports. In addition, the office provides Staff support for the regulatory boards as well as assistance to the non-regulatory commissions. Providing a strong support system and communications link between these various groups has improved overall functionality and has helped to streamline the applications and permit processes.

Professional networks: The professional networks developed by staff support the daily operations of the department by providing education, exploring ideas, and offering support as needed. The staff belongs to regional and State organizations such as the Nashua Regional Planning Commission, NH Building Official Association, International Code Council, NH Planners Association, and NH Building Officials Support Staff. They also attend workshops, conferences, webinars, and other training opportunities to ensure they are informed and employing best practices of the industry.

Public Outreach: Educating, communicating, and engaging the public is an essential part of the Community Development Office. The Office utilizes a variety of public outreach tools and methods to support departments, boards, and commissions in their operations and has recently undertaken an effort to upgrade the Town's website.

Maintaining community character: Highlighted throughout the Master Plan, this is the ultimate elusive community goal of maintain community character. The Office enforces the existing rules and regulations to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the community; and in the process, preserves and enhances the community's vibrant character. In addition, by ensuring quality construction in conformance with the Building Codes, the community can improve its Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule (BCEGS) from ISO, thereby reducing insurance rates.

WEAKNESSES

Lack of Economic Development Vision: The Town has embraced the idea of promoting economic development in Amherst; however, no clear vision has been defined by the Master Plan or other avenues. Strategic goals and a vision for economic development need to be defined to ensure that the Department's efforts meet the community's goals. An ongoing FY16 initiative will address this concern and work to identify an economic vision for the community.

Loss of data: Insufficient storage space in Town Hall has left many older paper files stored in boxes on the floor or in cubbies of the basement without climate control. These files are deteriorating without proper storage facilities. Significant strides have been made towards making digital copies of data; however, there is an ongoing storage issue for paper files.

Data accessibility: Insufficient storage space in Town Hall has required files to be stored on three different floors in a multitude of boxes, cabinets, and unlabeled spaces. Furthermore, much of the data was filed utilizing a by-year system instead of creating property files, which further compounds the issue understanding what data may be available and accessing it. Significant strides have been made towards making digital copies of data however there is an ongoing storage issue for paper files.

Timeframe for permit approvals and inspections: As permit applications increase, timeframes for permit approvals and scheduling inspections lengthens. By State law, the Town has 30 days to issue an approval, denial, or request additional information on a permit application; however, this Office strives to turn around permits within 7 to 10 days and provide inspections within 24 to 48 hours of the request. In an effort to keep job sites working during building season, the Office has reprioritized, dedicating additional time to inspections and less time to plan review and approval.

Misalignment of ordinances and regulations with Master Plan: The Town received a grant to complete a Regulatory Review of all the Town's land use related ordinances and regulations in 2012. This report highlights the misalignment of the existing ordinances and regulations with the goals of the Master Plan. The Town was able to secure grant funding to complete several of the needed updates in 2013, however there are still a significant number of updates that need to be completed if the community wants to meet its goals, which will require additional time and resources.

Engaging the public: An essential part of the Office's role includes reaching out and engaging the public in land use policy decisions. Public engagement is essential to ensure the Town's goals are accurately reflected in ordinances and regulations. However, it is extremely challenging in both time and resources to connect with the community.

Proactive enforcement: Enforcement at this time is largely a written-complaint based system. The Office does not have the staff time to engage in proactive enforcement. This is contrary to the idea of building an image of fair and equal enforcement for all community members and breeds a negative feeling for many residents and businesses. Proactive enforcement is also a component of the community's BCEGS rating from ISO, which feeds into insurance rates.

Physical space: The Office space in Town Hall is poorly configured to serve the public, house the staff, and store information.

Increasing State & federal regulations: During the recent economic downturn, the State and federal government reduced enforcement and support for environmental and health programs. In addition, new regulations have been passed including, but not limited to, a revised Alteration of Terrain permitting and federal Stormwater Regulations. As new regulations are adopted, much of the implementation and enforcement falls to the local communities.

OPPORTUNITIES

Commercial/Industrial utility expansion: There are over 300 acres of undeveloped industrial land along the Route 101A corridor with direct access to roadways, water and gas lines, and basic utilities (phone, internet). The remaining utility key to attracting new development and protecting the community's water resources is access to a sewer system. The Town is at the initial stages of discussions with its neighboring communities on the potential for a future sewer utility expansion, with the hope of developing a feasibility study and sewer master plan.

Commercial/Industrial development and redevelopment: The commercial and industrial land along the Route 101A corridor is Amherst's current economic hub, with over 300 businesses currently in operation along this three mile corridor. While the main commercial properties along Route 101A are developed, they have entered a period of redevelopment, whereby older structures and uses are slowing being renovated or replaced with new ones to take advantage of the more than 35,000 cars that travel the corridor each day. In addition, with over 300 acres of vacant industrial land available, there is tremendous future development potential to encourage new industrial business to locate here. This would increase the tax base and bring good jobs into the community.

Clear, concise, development requirements, standards, and approval timeframes: With a clear, concise process for land development and redevelopment, including known standards and reasonable approval timeframes, businesses and residents are able to understand what will be required before undertaking a project. These parameters also feed into building Amherst's reputation of operating in a fair and equal manner and increasing the BCEGS rating. The Regulatory Review has outlined a roadmap for the Town to revise its ordinances and regulations to align with the Master Plan and fit this ideal. The revisions are essential to implementing design standards and regulations to preserve the existing residential and historic character and protecting natural resources in the community.

Transportation options: Significant investments in infrastructure and alternative transportation options have laid a solid foundation for improving transportation in Amherst. Recent investments include increased funding for road and bridge maintenance, support for the Souhegan Valley Rides service, returning as a participating member in the regional Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC), and Safe Routes to School (SRS) Study.

Diversity of housing types: While the majority of all housing types in Amherst are single family residential units, Amherst has a 20+ year history of encouraging 'Affordable or Workforce' housing with specific design standards to protect community character. The State law and zoning ordinance supporting diversity housing is designed to enable Amherst to continue to provide housing options for its residents as they age and to encourage young families to locate here while protecting property values.

Local employment opportunities: As discussed earlier, 28% of Amherst residents work within the community and 66% in the immediate region. As part of defining Amherst's economic development

mission and vision, protecting and fostering the existing businesses can be balanced with attracting new businesses and diversifying the employment base.

Promoting a reputation of common sense, fair and equal treatment to all: The Office is striving to build and foster a reputation, of utilizing a reasonable, common sense-based approach to the land development process, with fair and equal treatment for residents and businesses alike. Building our reputation is an important step in encouraging economic development and meeting the community's goals.

THREATS

Lack of utilities for Commercial/Industrial: Without the extension of sewer along the Route 101A corridor to the vacant industrial lands, the future development of the community's economic hub will be limited by the uses it can support. The extension of a sewer utility would also alleviate the growing threat to the region's aquifer by development along the Route 101A corridor, which increases septic loading directly above the aquifer and abutting valuable surface waters.

Declining water quality: Ground and surface water supplies provide Amherst residents and businesses with clean drinking water, recreation opportunities, and are a valued part of its landscapes. While significant improvements have been made to water quality at Baboosic Lake, poor water quality results have been reported each summer for the Souhegan River (e-coli) and Pennichuck Brook Watershed (phosphorus). Amherst's drinking water sources also supply much of the region's drinking water, as both the Town of Milford's public water supply wells and a large Pennichuck well are located within Amherst. Protecting and preserving our existing ground and surface water supplies, while balancing the rights of property owners, and supporting businesses is a complicated balance that Amherst will have to meet to protect its quality of life over the next 20+ years.

Loss of community and historical character: Preserving and enhancing Amherst's existing landscapes are a focal point of the Master Plan and much of the community's pride. The Historic District and cultural heritage reflected in the rural residential and agricultural landscapes outside of the Route 101A corridor are an intrinsic part of the community's quality of life, and are what attract residents and businesses to the area. These are the same factors that help to preserve and enhance property values. Without detailed design standards and regulations to reflect the goals of the Master Plan, the Town is handicapped in protecting these elements.

Lack of proactive enforcement: While the Office has taken significant steps to ensure all new permits and applications comply with existing regulations and responds to all written complaints, the lack of proactive enforcement is a concern in providing protection for the community's historic and natural resources. In addition, it is contrary to the idea of building an image of fair and equal enforcement, and hinders the community's ability to increase its BCEGS rating.

Lengthy unclear approval process for land development applications: Town ordinances that overlap or contradict each other create a web of standards that are difficult for practicing professionals and property owners to understand. Without a clearly defined process and timeframes for expected

development, the unknowns create a significant hurdle to attracting new businesses into the community and can discourage property owners from improving or maintaining their properties.

Litigation: Enforcement of ordinances and regulations is essential to meeting the goals of the Master Plan and to promoting a reputation of fair and equal standards for all. Litigation arising out of violations that are unable to be quickly corrected or are perceived as unfair, through the land use application process is lengthy, time consuming, and costly for the Town and property owners. Minimizing litigation, while enforcing the Town's ordinances will continue to be a challenge for this Office.

Aging population: As Amherst's population ages and even potentially declines, there are a host of issues the community will need to discuss and find solutions to; such as, providing additional transportation options, attracting and retaining a workforce, ensuring a diversity of housing types to allow residents to stay in the community as they age, declining school enrollments, and many more. Many of these items are not addressed in the current Master Plan and the community needs to determine how it would like to approach solving these issues.

Lack of Transportation options: The lack of sidewalks within the community has been highlighted through the recent Safe Routes to School study and will need significant funding to implement the findings and improve access to safe sidewalks. In addition, as the population ages, cars will become less accessible and older citizens will give up driving, limiting access to basic services from groceries to medical needs. Due to the rural, residential nature of the community, viable alternative transportation options will need to be explored and supported.

GOALS

An examination of the Town and Community Development Office through a review of the Master Plan recommendations, historic analysis, environmental scan, and SWOT analysis, outlines the community's priorities as maintaining and enhancing the existing quality of life, and preserving the quality of resources, while increasing the economic development along the Route 101A corridor. These important themes of the community's future are interrelated. Progress in any area must be balanced against the others, to ensure that the success of one does not come at the decline of another. Finding the correct balance will be essential to ensuring Amherst is able to meet its vision and shifting some of the tax burden from residential to commercial/industrial properties. The three themes can be translated into strategic goals to ensure the Office supports and facilitates the community's evolving needs:

Goal 1: Amherst will encourage development which maintains open space and rural landscapes.

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 business-friendly community, with clearly established regulations and processes for land development.

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

Goal 5: Amherst will have a reputation for ensuring quality construction, and fair and equal enforcement of the regulations.

These five goals are not mutually exclusive. Although they have individual timeframes for accomplishment, they will need to be balanced to ensure Amherst is well on its way to achieving its vision by 2030.

Goal 1: Amherst will encourage development which maintains open space and rural landscapes.

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

Protecting permanent open space accomplishes many of the community's ideals at once including but not limited to protecting water and natural resources, providing alternative transportation options for trails, protecting rural landscapes, and preserving its heritage. The Conservation Commission (ACC) and Amherst Land Trust, strongly supported by largely unsuccessful Open Space Committee, have been the major participants in protecting and preserving open space and natural resources in Amherst. All three of these committees have worked with large land owners to preserve agricultural lands and natural resources from future development. However, the ACC has recently announced a shift in approach from focusing on large parcels to preserving smaller but highly valuable tracks of land; as there are a limited number of larger parcels left for preservation, and funds to purchase lands have significantly dwindled since the economic downturn. The Planning Board supports the preservation of open space for the protection of rural landscapes and character and for the preservation of active and passive recreation opportunities.

Beyond purchasing land or easements out-right, the Planning Board has successfully required many new residential developments to set aside significant land area for future protection through easements or deeds to the ACC or homeowners associations through its subdivision regulations.

2015 Update: As of September 2015, Amherst currently has 15.9% (3,502 acres) of its total land area protected from development and open to the public, an increase of 1.1% (240 acres) in the past two years. To ensure future protection of natural resources and protect Amherst's landscapes and quality of life, the goal is to set aside 20%, or 4,395 acres of the total land area in town as open space by 2030. To achieve this goal approximately 60 acres of land per year will need to be permanently protected.

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^{ii iii iv v}(FY 2019) (Cost Est.: \$25,000 with consultant).
- 2) Work with the Amherst Conservation Commission and Amherst Land Trust to incorporate their visions, goals and initiatives for open space and natural resource preservation into the Town's Ordinances and Regulations (FY2018) (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.

The community takes great pride in the Historic District, agricultural heritage, and tradition of natural resource protection. These facets are critical to preserving the community's character and quality of life and have largely been successfully implemented. The following initiatives focus around maintaining and preserving community character, while supporting the predicted changing demographics of an aging population.

As discussed earlier, Amherst's residential properties provide for a variety of housing options across the property valuation distribution but skew decidedly toward the higher end, with 9% of its residential properties valued under \$199,999 and 19% valued over \$400,000. This is further evidenced in the Historic District with 18% of properties under \$199,999 and 28% valued over \$400,000. In maintaining Amherst's community character and quality of life, the goal is to continue the current residential property valuation through 2030 and beyond.

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) 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 2017) (Cost Est.: \$20,000).
- 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 and provide staff review and guidance on applications submitted for HDC approval (FY 2017) (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 on behalf of the Heritage Commission, provide administrative support to the Commission and require utilization of Heritage Commission resources in land development applications (Cost Est.: See Goal 5.3)
 - 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).
- 4) Update the 2010 Master Plan (as required by statute) in order to continue to develop and implement the vision for Amherst's future. (FY 2018 & 2019) (Cost Est. \$100,000 total)

Goal 3: Amherst will be known as a business-friendly community 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.

The future of Amherst's economic development will largely revolve around commercial and industrial development and redevelopment, in contrast to the booming residential growth of the past several decades. Economic development will be a key function of the Community Development Office to encourage investment in the community, providing local jobs and services, while reducing the residential tax burden. As discussed earlier, to succeed in achieving Amherst's vision economic development, development will need to be balanced with maintaining the quality of life and resources. To balance these goals, the community will need to develop and implement design and access management standards, invest in a sewer utility, and streamline the development process.

To truly meet the economic development potential of this area and increase the assessed valuation of its infrastructure, the community will need to invest in a sewer utility. A sewer utility will allow the corridor to attract significantly larger variety of industrial businesses which are excluded due to the limitations of private septic systems. In addition, the sewer utility is critical to protecting the Town and regions water resources and will relieve the pressure from existing development on the aquifer.

Beyond infrastructure, the community will need to create a clear, concise development and redevelopment process to retain and attract new businesses. This streamlined process will be complimented with clear design guidelines and access management standards to ensure development is complimentary to the community's character, protects ground and surface water, and manages traffic along the Route 101A corridor effectively. Time is money; and a confusing, expensive, or drawn-out development process will discourage investment in the corridor.

Since 2000 the total percent of Amherst's property valuation derived from Commercial and Industrial properties has risen from 9.79% to 13.26% or by almost 3.5%. This growth in non-residential valuation has largely come from development and redevelopment of the Route 101A corridor and some of the

industrial lands south of the corridor. By increasing the percent of Commercial and Industrial property valuation to 20% of all property by 2030, or adding 0.2% - 0.3% per year, the community will have made significant strides towards reducing the residential tax burden while providing needed jobs and services for residents.

Related Initiatives:

- 1) Define and implement a Board of Selectmen approved Town Vision for Economic Development.
 - a) 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.: See Goal 5.3)
- 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^{vi vii viii} suggestions (FY 2017) (Cost Est.: \$30,000 with consultant)
 - b) Revise the Sign Ordinance (FY 2018) (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 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. The study will provide order of magnitude cost estimates, capacity requirements, recommendations for implementation and potential funding mechanisms. Upon completion of this study, the Community Development Office will be able to provide a more realistic timeframe for implementation of a sewer utility in the future (FY 2017) (Cost Est.: \$30,000 for Baseline feasibility study).

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

Measurable Outcome: Protect ground and surface water resources to maintain 100% of the Safe Drinking Water Act standards for drinking water supplies, and support Pennichuck in meeting its Strategic goal of a maximum phosphorous load in Pennichuck Brook Watershed of 30 ug/l.

Ground and surface water supplies provide Amherst residents and businesses with clean drinking water, recreational opportunities, and contribute to the overall quality of life. Amherst has a strong tradition, through its local ordinances of protecting water resources and is currently grant funded to combine, simplify, and update existing regulations with best management practices to ensure this tradition endures. This legacy is a large part of the existing high quality of life enjoyed by residents; however, maintaining these resources will continue to be challenged by stormwater runoff, the lack of a sewer utility, and lack of quality data sources by which to measure results.

Ultimately the protection of water resources is not simply a local issue but a regional, State and federal goal. The Town has a strong partnership with Pennichuck Water Works, local stormwater coalitions, and NH DES to assist the community in achieving its goal of protecting water resources beyond its own ordinances.

Related Initiatives:

- 1) Provide proactive enforcement for local water resource related ordinances including Wetlands, Watershed, Aquifer, Groundwater/Well-head, Floodplain, and Water Pollution Control Regulations (FY 2017) (See Goal 5, Initiative 3.b).

Goal 5: Amherst will have a reputation for ensuring quality construction, and fair and equal enforcement of the 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.

Underlying all land development and redevelopment is the importance of access to existing information and data, ensuring quality construction and fair and equal enforcement of the regulations. By providing responsive, quality customer service, property owners and interested parties can be well informed in their decision making process before beginning any development or redevelopment. In addition, quality construction and fair and equal enforcement reinforces the community's character and overall quality of life by ensuring the steps the community has taken to implement its vision are followed. By providing these three aspects, the Office hopes to build trust and confidence in the Town, encouraging investment and reinvestment.

As measures to ensuring quality construction and enforcement are implemented, the Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule (BCEGS) can be utilized. The BCEGS is a national assessment standard which evaluates the building code standards and enforcement practices in individual communities, with special emphasis on mitigation of losses from natural hazards. The concept is simple: municipalities with well-enforced, up-to-date codes should demonstrate better loss experience, which can be reflected in lower insurance rates. The BCEGS rating is a 1 to 10 scale, with 1 representing exemplary enforcement of ICC or comparable local building codes. Most communities in New Hampshire are rated between a 4 and 7 on the scale for commercial and residential codes, with no communities achieving a 1 and only one community achieving a 2. Amherst's goal for improving its ratings is to align with similar communities, not necessarily striving for a perfect score.

Amherst was last assessed by the ISO in 2003 and received a rating of 6 for both residential and commercial. A new assessment was finalized in October of 2013 rating the community as a 4 for both residential and commercial, reflecting the significant progress made since the Department was reorganized under Community Development.

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 (ongoing) (Cost Est.: \$20,000 via FY15 encumbrance and FY16 initiative to complete a significant amount of all records).
 - 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 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 - ongoing) (Cost Est.: No Cost).
 - b) Ensure all construction meets or exceeds current code specifications through 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. (ongoing)
 - 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 2017) (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. Addition of a mid-entry level planner responsible for development review, zoning enforcement, and providing administrative support for land use boards in coordination with the Community Development Director will address the concern of proactive enforcement, will allow the Director to focus on Economic Development, and will reduce consultant fees required for implementation of regulatory updates as staffing will allow for management of those projects internally.).

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BUDGET IMPACT SUMMARY

The following table provides an overview of the Office's recommended goals and initiatives:

Community Development Office - 5 Year Budget Initiatives					
Goals and Initiatives - Budget Impact years	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Goal 1: Encourage development which maintains open space and rural landscapes					
1.1 revise regulations and ordinances			\$25,000*		
1.2 Incorporate ACC and ALT goals and initiatives into regulations		\$2,000			
Goal 2: Variety of housing options and leader in maintaining and managing historic district and resources					
2.1a Revise Subdivision and Site Plan Regulations to encourage extension of utilities	\$5,000*				
2.1b Complete Sidewalk, Bike and Trail Master Plan	\$20,000*				
2.2a Support Historic District - Improve education and outreach		\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
2.2b Support Historic District - Proactive enforcement & professional support	(see 5.3)				
2.3a Support Heritage Commission - Support grant applications, provide support and incorporate HC priorities into regulations and ordinances	(see 5.3)				
2.3b Support Heritage Commission- Improve education and outreach		\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
2.4 Update the 2010 Master Plan		\$50,000* \$40,000	\$50,000* \$40,000		
Goal 3: Business friendly community with clear regulations and development processes					
3.1 Implement Economic Development Vision	(see 5.3)				
3.2a Revise regulations to align with Economic Vision – revise NRSP and Subdivision Regulations	\$30,000*				
3.2b Revise regulations to align with Economic Vision Revise Sign Ordinance		\$30,000*			
3.3 Infrastructure expansion – Sewer Baseline Study	\$30,000				
Goal 4: Maintain safe drinking water standards and protect water resources					
4.1 Proactive enforcement of water resource regulations	(see 5.3)				
Goal 5: Ensuring quality construction and fair and equal enforcement of the regulations.					
5.1 Access to data and information – paper file management system			\$15,000		
5.1b Access to data and information – online permitting portal			\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
5.2 Ensure Quality Construction	Ongoing- No Cost				
5.3 Fair and equal enforcement	\$85,000	\$85,000	\$85,000	\$85,000	\$85,000
Total	\$115,000	\$131,000	\$149,000	\$94,000	\$94,000
Total (if 5.3 not funded)	\$85,000	\$86,000	\$99,000	\$9,000	\$9,000
Proposed Operating Budget (with global assumptions)	\$309,254	\$309,254	\$309,254	\$319,242	\$319,242
Total Proposed (Initiatives and Budget)	\$424,254	\$440,254	\$458,254	\$403,254	\$403,254
*Cost will be performed in-house with staff resources, if initiative 5.3 is funded.					

CONCLUSION

Amherst is grappling with three themes: enhancing its quality of life, preserving its natural resources, and encouraging economic development. While the three themes are unique, they are completely interrelated requiring a balance approach to managing and achieving the Town's vision. The three themes are translated into five strategic goals detailing a work plan for the Community Development Office to strive towards over the next five years and beyond.

Ultimately the Community Development Office is tasked with assisting the community to find and maintain an acceptable balance between its quality of life, quality of resources, and economic development in the hopes of achieving the community's long-term vision, and reducing the tax burden on residential property owners.

ⁱ Source: *From Tailwind to Headwind New Hampshire's Shifting Economic Trends*, from the NH Center for Public Policy, September 2012.

ⁱⁱ 2013 Regulatory Review, Chapter 1 - Land Use & Zoning, Goal 3: Manage Residential Growth to Protect Natural Resources:

A. Both the existing Open Space Plan and Planned Residential Development Ordinances contain very quantitative design standards. While it is recognized these ordinances must have some form of quantitative control, the Project Team believes the outcome of developments designed, approved and constructed under these ordinances could be vastly improved if the text of both ordinances were to be expanded to identify qualitative and flexible performance standards which both an applicant and the Planning Board could rely upon during the advancement of a specific development plan. Consider rewriting both provisions to ensure qualitative design standards are identified for the purposes of improving the quality of both the resulting built environment and open space to be preserved.

B. Consider requiring or incentivizing subdivisions of tracts having an area greater than a specified maximum acreage, or which propose more than a certain number of lots (or dwelling units as applicable) to be developed under the Open Space Plan Ordinance. Evaluating the characteristics of the land (physical, environmental, historical, and cultural attributes) and then designing around those characteristics should be a priority when revisions are put forth to the Open Space Plan Ordinance.

ⁱⁱⁱ 2013 Regulatory Review, Chapter 2 Historic & Cultural Resources, Goal 1: Preserve Town Character:

- A. The current Open Space Plan and Planned Residential Development Ordinances include qualitative controls which promote, if not require, preservation of historically significant view-sheds and landscapes to the extent practicable.
- B. The Subdivision Regulations include design standards which promote the retention of stonewalls and specimen trees; re-use of fieldstone disturbed by development activities; use of period fencing and lighting fixtures and a requirement for the planting of street trees.
- C. The elimination of standards which promote the disturbance or removal of historic and cultural resources. Rather, preservation of these same resources becomes an important function of the land use ordinances and regulations to affording the Planning Board flexibility in working with applicants to retain and conserve such resources. As an example, future amendment of the Zoning Ordinance could provide the Planning Board with authority to grant approval for limited deviations from applicable minimum lot area and frontage requirements if such deviations would permit existing interior stonewalls to become future parcel boundaries between lots.

^{iv} 2013 Regulatory Review, Chapter 3 – Conservation, Goal 1: Protect Natural Resources: A. The Open Space Plan and Planned Residential Development Ordinances include qualitative controls which promote if not require preservation of scenic vistas, view-sheds and landscape and significant wildlife habitat areas as part of open space planning efforts specific to those Ordinances. In order to promote the retention of corridors and contiguous areas open space and wildlife habitat, such controls could also enable the Planning Board to consider the location of planned open space areas within a proposed development in relation to existing or potential future open space areas situated on adjoining parcels.

^v 2013 Regulatory Review, Chapter 4 – Housing, Goal 1: Preserve Town Character:

B. The current Open Space Plan and Planned Residential Development Ordinances be amended in accordance with that series of specific recommendations offered elsewhere in this Summary Report.

^{vi} 2013 Regulatory Review, Chapter 1- Land Use & Zoning, Goal 1:

C. The Planning Board may wish to consider presenting updated Subdivision and Non-Residential Site Plan Review Regulations in a single volume entitled Land Use Regulations of the Town of Amherst. This approach has proven successful in several local community's in recent years. Lastly, the Town presently maintains separately published Road Specifications, Water Pollution Control Regulations, Stormwater Regulations, as well as regulations governing Scenic Roads. It is recommended this series of municipal regulations be incorporated into the document or documents resulting from any future effort to amend the town's present land use ordinances and regulations.

^{vii} 2013 Regulatory Review, Chapter 1 – land Use & Zoning, Goal 2 Encourage Sustainable Development:

C. Incorporate variable roadway design standards and, design standards for stormwater management facilities which incorporate Low Impact Development techniques.

D. Include design standards for exterior and signage lighting which are both dark sky friendly and promote energy efficiency. Some examples are available from the Rockingham Regional Planning Commission and the Town of Sandown.

E. Revise off-street parking requirements contained in the Non-Residential Site Plan Review Regulations to limit the amount of new impervious surface to the extent practicable.

^{viii} 2013 Regulatory Review, Chapter 1 – land Use & Zoning, Goal 4 Manage Commercial Industrial Development:

A. Architectural design standards should be incorporated into amended Non-Residential Site Plan Review Regulations for commercial and industrial development. The architectural design standards should reflect both new development and redevelopment standards, as a majority of the commercially zoned land is already built and will be best served with redevelopment standards, while the industrial zone has significant amount of vacant land. The adoption of architectural design standards would provide the Planning Board with the benefit of aesthetic control over both development and redevelopment proposals. Existing development sites advanced to the Board for approval of periodic additions and renovations would also be reviewed under the recommended design standards, providing an opportunity to upgrade the quality of the existing built environment.

C. To be most effective, these future design standards/guidelines should be developed in a manner that is most appropriate for the Town of Amherst. Therefore, it is recommended that the Amherst Planning Board consult with

one or more architects and landscape architects in the development of a regulatory program most appropriate for the community.

D. The Town of Amherst engage in an open dialogue with both the local business community and sign companies to obtain feedback on the perceived effectiveness of the existing Sign Ordinance not only to evaluate the same, but to also ensure any future amendments to the Ordinance are written to reflect the varying environs that exist in the community. It should be recognized that sign standards appropriate to the Route 101-A corridor will likely differ from those applicable to the Industrial District, residential areas or the Historic District given distinct differences in demands and sensitivities unique to each District.

E. Access Management standards be included, requiring adjoining sites be linked with cross access easements where possible, in alignment with both the Route 101 and Route 101A corridor studies. As new development or re-development occurs along these corridors, the Planning Board could rely upon authority provided under updated land use regulations to promote cross access between adjoining non-residential properties. These accommodations would help reduce congestion along main transportation corridors and enhance public convenience.