



# Amherst Village STRATEGIC PLAN



June 2015







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## Acknowledgments

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**A**mherst Village is a quintessential and picturesque New England town center revered for its strong sense of place, beautiful aesthetics and its historic preservation. Many of the structures that framed Amherst Village when the community was the thriving seat of Hillsborough County in the 1700s still stand today. Beautiful Colonial homes surround bucolic green spaces. Elementary schools buzz with activity during the school year, a small grocery store on the Green does a thriving business and the town library appears to be constantly teeming with life. It's no wonder that Yankee Magazine cited Amherst Village as one of the 'Five Best Town Greens in New England.'

In 2013, the Amherst Board of Selectmen (BOS) launched a strategic planning initiative for town government to help guide (cost) effective annual operating planning and budgeting. In 2014, the BOS looked to extend strategic planning by engaging other town boards, commissions, committees and residents. The BOS wanted to identify a topic of planning that was both focused in scale and scope to allow for completion within several months and involved the collaboration of committees, commissions and boards.

Because Amherst Village is a unique and highly-regarded asset for the entire town, the BOS decided to have it be the focus of this planning and learning journey. The plan, supported by vigorous public input, would help guide policy

and planning decisions in Amherst Village for the foreseeable future. The town partnered with the Nashua Regional Planning Commission to help in the effort.

The Amherst Village Strategic Plan includes a comprehensive assessment of issues relating to five core subject areas in the Amherst Village area, including :

- Traffic and Safety
- Recreation, Attractions and Events
- Historic Preservation
- Community Development
- Lighting and Utilities

The plan outlines strategies to address topics identified in these subject areas in a manner that is phased over time, sustainable in both cost and utility over the long-term, and consistent with public input and previous planning efforts. The plan also recognizes that previous planning and stewardship efforts have helped Amherst Village evolve into a place that is attractive, unique and historically accurate. In short, the plan seeks to protect those qualities that are best about Amherst Village while offering measured strategies to help explore and address long-term issues of concern identified by residents.





Active public involvement represented a centerpiece of the Amherst Village Strategic Planning effort, which included a visual preference survey and many in-person opportunities for public comment. Amherst residents were continually invited to participate in the planning process via project flyers and postcards, social media communications, and newspaper articles.

Residents, both those living within and outside the Village, hosted a series of five house meetings to discuss the future the Village. Members of the Amherst Village Plan Steering and Outreach Committees visited other boards in town including the Conservation Commission, School Board, Heritage Commission and the Safe Routes to School Committee to collect input and coordinate. Additionally the Amherst Village Business Owners, Souhegan Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Amherst Mom's Club and Preschool in the Village also met with Committee members to share their insights. The Town also hosted two public forums to share planning data and recommendations for public input prior to the final presentation to the Board of Selectmen. These events were held between October 2014 and March 2015 and were attended by over 100 individuals.

Committee members consisting entirely of Amherst residents, town board and commission members and town department heads met frequently to analyze data and public input and craft recommendations and strategies moving for-

ward. A total of 554 residents (or approximately 5 percent of the town's population) completed the visual preference survey regarding existing conditions and potential improvements to the village area.

Through these efforts, several major themes emerged centering upon traffic and safety, historic character, lighting and utilities, community development, and recreation and events:

- Amherst Village is a treasured and picturesque place, revered by residents for its historic character and integrity.
- Change in Amherst Village should be incremental and subtle so as not to impair the Village's unique character.
- Concern that Amherst Village has slowly lost commerce over the years as the Route 101A has grown into a major commercial center.
- Many value the quiet and serenity of the village, but some worry that it is 'dying' and losing its status as a community gathering place.
- General agreement that existing businesses should be supported, disagreement regarding whether new businesses should be encouraged.
- Some disagreement regarding how significantly traffic impacts the village environment, but wide agreement that traffic calming and enhanced



## EXCERPTS from the Amherst Village Visual Preference Survey

### What is best about Amherst Village?

*"Open green spaces, that it is walking friendly, charming and stays true to it's historic feel. I don't want it to change at all, it's perfect just as it is."*

*"That it is small, quiet and quaint"*

*"The historic charm, tree lighting & Halloween activities"*

*"Visually, it is stunning"*

*"Remarkably preserved historic rural village"*

*"Picturesque, quaint, unique, historical"*

*"The green and the library"*

*"It's not sold out to commercial activity"*

*"It's living history. People continue to live in the houses where people lived over the past 200 years. ..."*

*"Quiet living while enjoying a walkable village along with a great small store named Moulton's. This is why I chose to move to the Village 20 years ago to raise my two children."*

*"The 'Norman Rockwell' feel with all its charm of a small town village. All the wonderful family events that take place - the 4th of July Parade, the Antique Show on the Green with the Library book sale, the Christmas tree lighting, etc."*

### What would make Amherst Village even better?

*"More activity like a true village center should have."*

*"Leave Village alone!!!"*

*"A café or pub. Right now Moulton's and the Library fulfill the need for social meeting spots, one or two more in that vein would be welcome."*

*"Nothing!"*

*"More recreational space for walking/strolling and bicycling"*

*"Increased opportunity for residents to interact with one another."*

*"Bring it to life a bit. Mike's and Moulton's demonstrate that businesses can fit in. See New Boston for some good examples."*

*"Slower moving cars and more yielding to pedestrians"*

*"I am grateful [the Village] exists as it is"*

*"Protect areas from further development"*

*"Make it more of a place where we could spend the day. Bike, walk, stop for ice cream"*

*"More things for young families to do."*

*"Farmers Market!"*

*"A place on the green where we could get a burger and a beer..."*

WHAT WE HEARD



pedestrian amenities would improve the overall village atmosphere.

- Perception of divisions between village residents and residents of the town at large.
- Wide agreement that Amherst Village needs more community gathering spaces and places. For those residents supporting additional businesses in Amherst Village, agreement that they should serve as gathering places, like a restaurant, café or pub/tavern.
- Wide agreement that historic preservation should remain a central priority in Amherst Village, though some feeling that Historic District Commission could enhance its interactions with residents.

In May 2015, the Strategic Planning Working Groups presented their findings and recommendations to the Amherst community at two public forums, attended by approximately 60 residents. Residents noted areas of agreement on committee recommendations, including the need for traffic calming, reductions in traffic noise, and the value of considering utility line burial and creating a more welcoming environment for pedestrians and young families. Some residents also noted areas of disagreement or concern.

Following the public forums, working groups met for a final time to adopt recommendations they believed represented the highest priority for town action (though some working groups ultimately concluded that all of their recommendations represented priority items).

All 35 recommendations, including project priorities, were presented to the Amherst Board of Selectmen (BOS) on June 5, 2015. As part of the process, the BOS asked attending citizens for comment. Only two of the recommendations received negative comment. A number of attendees voiced their opposition to the two recommendations narrowly approved by the Community Development Working Group. One recommended making existing Village businesses conforming uses under the town ordinances. The other recommended further study of possible zoning changes to support some additional levels of commercial use in the Village District.



## Public Involvement by the Numbers

# 554

Number of Amherst residents who completed a Visual Preference Survey

# 23

Number of house meetings, strategic planning work meetings, and public meetings and forums held in association with the planning process.

## Historic District *QUICK FACTS*

Year Established: 1991

1600 Acres

120 buildings

Hillsborough County Seat from  
1769 to 1864

Period architecture ranging  
from 1700 to 1924, including  
Late Colonial, Federal and  
Greek Revival

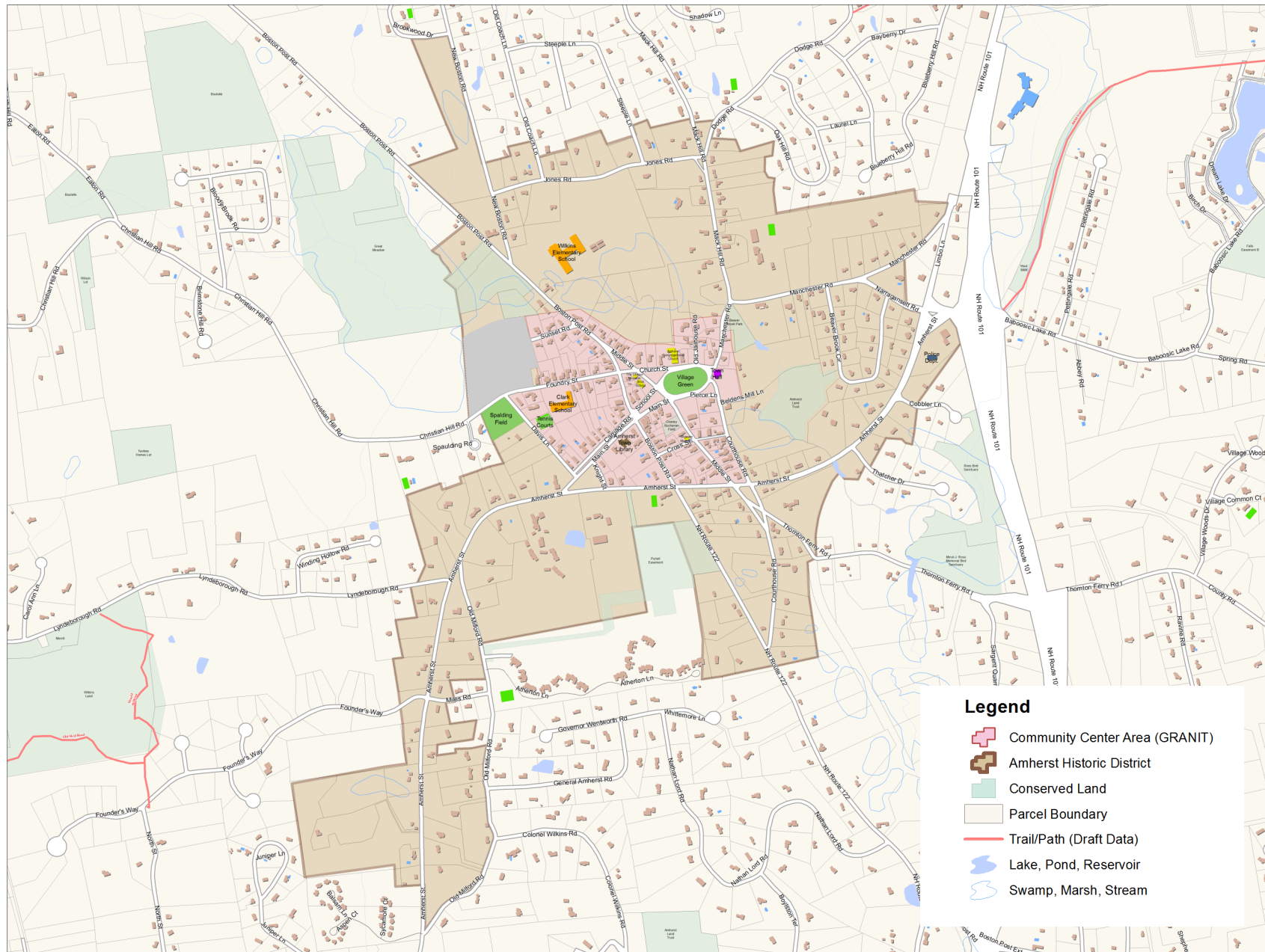
Largest Designated Historic  
District in New Hampshire

Historic District Commission: 5  
members, 5 alternates

Once the key Southern New  
Hampshire commercial and  
industrial center, today the  
district is largely residential  
and only four purely commercial  
structures remain.



# STUDY AREA



The Amherst Village Historic District, displayed in brown, is the largest historic district in the state and stretches along Amherst Street from Route 101 to the southern end of Old Milford Road. The district also stretches as far north as Brookwood Drive. The Village itself, displayed in pink, is generally recognized as being bound by Amherst Street to the south, Courthouse Lane to the east, Sunset Road and the Manchester Road Bridge to the north and Davis Lane to the west.





Several planning efforts over the last several years have considered improvements to the Amherst Village area. These efforts have included the Amherst Master Plan, Amherst Safe Routes to School Plan, Middle Street Traffic Study, and a Village Traffic Spot Speed Analysis. These planning documents were reviewed by committee members and plan authors to ensure that their recommendations were considered and, when appropriate, integrated into this plan.

### Middle Street Traffic Study

This traffic study, completed by NRPC in 2014, considered the potential impacts of a scenario in which a segment of Middle Street traversing the Amherst Village Green is closed to vehicular traffic. The study was initiated due to concern that motorists were utilizing Middle Street as a cut-through to avoid Boston Post Road, which includes a signalized intersection and a crossing guard controlling traffic during school hours.

The study found that while some motorists use Middle Street as a cut-through, Boston Post Road still handles ten times more traffic than Middle Street and five to seven times more during peak hours. It also found that the closure of the Middle Street segment would cause only a slight increase in delay at intersections along Boston Post Road, but it warned that the closure might have adverse impacts on Boston Post Road pedestrians because rerouting all traffic on to that roadway would increase the ratio of vehicles to pedestrians. Moreover, a higher share of

drivers exceeded the posted speed limit on Boston Post Road than Middle Street. In short, the study found that while discontinuing a segment of Middle Street to vehicles would address one issue, it may trigger potentially adverse impacts on other streets in the village. NRPC suggested closing the Middle Street segment for a temporary period and monitor the closure's impacts on the entire Amherst Village road network before reaching a final decision on the matter.

### Amherst Master Plan

Amherst's Master Plan ('Lighting the Future'), last updated in 2010, outlines a broad vision for the future of the entire Amherst community. Among objectives of particular relevance to this plan, the master plan backs the continued preservation and protection of historical and cultural assets in Amherst Village. The plan notes the importance of good design related to commercial structures and seeks assurance that such structures complement the town's historic and semi-rural character.

The master plan also advocates traffic calming measures in Amherst Village and the integration of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations into road projects. The plan supports the expansion of "very limited and selective" commercial activities in the village, but also calls for preserving the village's residential character and civic functions. The plan recommends a number of energy efficiency upgrades and calls for nonspecific "improvements to the Village Green environs." Additionally, the plan outlines the need for more meeting and gathering places for Amherst residents and



more community activities on the Green and in town and school facilities. A town-wide greenway and trail network, community gardens and the expansion of recreation fields are also outlined in the plan.

## Amherst Safe Routes to School Plan

The Safe Routes to School Program is administered by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation and aims to increase the number of children who walk or bicycle to school, by implementing projects that remove the barriers to prevent them from doing so. A Safe Routes to School Travel Plan was completed by the Town in May of 2013 and highlights from the recommendations are discussed below:

- Increase awareness of the public and enforcement activities by police to help change unsafe behaviors of drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Complete the gaps in the sidewalk network and upgrade, where necessary, sections of sidewalk in the vicinity of Amherst Village.
- Implement traffic calming measures in the Clark-Wilkins neighborhood through improved signage and pavement markings.

## Village Traffic Spot Speed Analysis

Al Patnaude, a member of the Traffic and Safety Working Group, utilized traffic count and speed data as the foundation to develop the Village Traffic Spot Speed Study Data and Analysis. The following is a brief summary of the findings.

Boston Post Road south of Sunset Avenue has an 85% cumulative speed (the speed at which 85% of vehicles travel) of 33 mph and a posted speed limit of 25 mph. This location has the unfortunate confluence of one of the worst conforming traffic speeds with a high volume of school-aged pedestrian traffic. In addition, the 8 am school hour has the best compliance with speed but is likely due to congestion.

Boston Post Road south of Foundry Street has an 85% cumulative speed of 31 mph with a posted speed limit of 25 mph. The northbound traffic into the village is slightly slower than southbound traffic traveling toward the light, which is suggestive that the timing of the light influences speed.

Foundry Street west of Boston Post Road has an 85% cumulative speed of 30 mph with a posted speed limit of 25 mph. The westbound speed exceeded the eastbound



**A sidewalk along Main Street in Amherst Village.**

speed by 2.6 mph, which may be due to the descending hill as vehicles enter the village. The highest conformance to speed was seen during school hours where congestion is likely the major factor in improved conformance. The highest speeds were seen late in the evening and in the very early morning hours.

Middle Street north of Church Street has an 85% cumulative speed limit of 26.4 mph with a posted speed limit of 25 mph. The southbound traffic volume peaks in the morning and is twice as high as any other peaks throughout the day. The Highest travel speeds are seen in the few hours prior to the morning commute.

Middle Street south of Main Street has an 85% cumulative speed of 28.1 mph with a posted speed limit of 25 mph. Traffic originates from the intersection of Middle and Boston Post Rd by drivers trying to avoid the school hour congestion and school crossing.





## Traffic & Safety Working Group Mission

- Consider traffic models to manage shared use
- Traffic volume, speed and noise
- Walking, sidewalk access and biking
- Signage, could existing signs be minimized?

## Working Group Members

- Chair – Mark Reams, Al Patnaude, Tori Burke, Chris Buchanan, Will Ludt, Chris Janson and Bruce Berry

## What We Heard

Residents in Amherst offered differing opinions regarding the relative state of traffic and road safety in the Village district. While some hailed the “delightful” and “peaceful” nature of walking in the area, others lamented the “raceway” nature of roadways in the Village and noted that too many motorists speed and ignore traffic laws. Similarly, while many considered traffic levels light and manageable in the Village, others complained that peak hour traffic levels can

detract from the quality of life in parts of the district and that traffic noise can be a major issue.

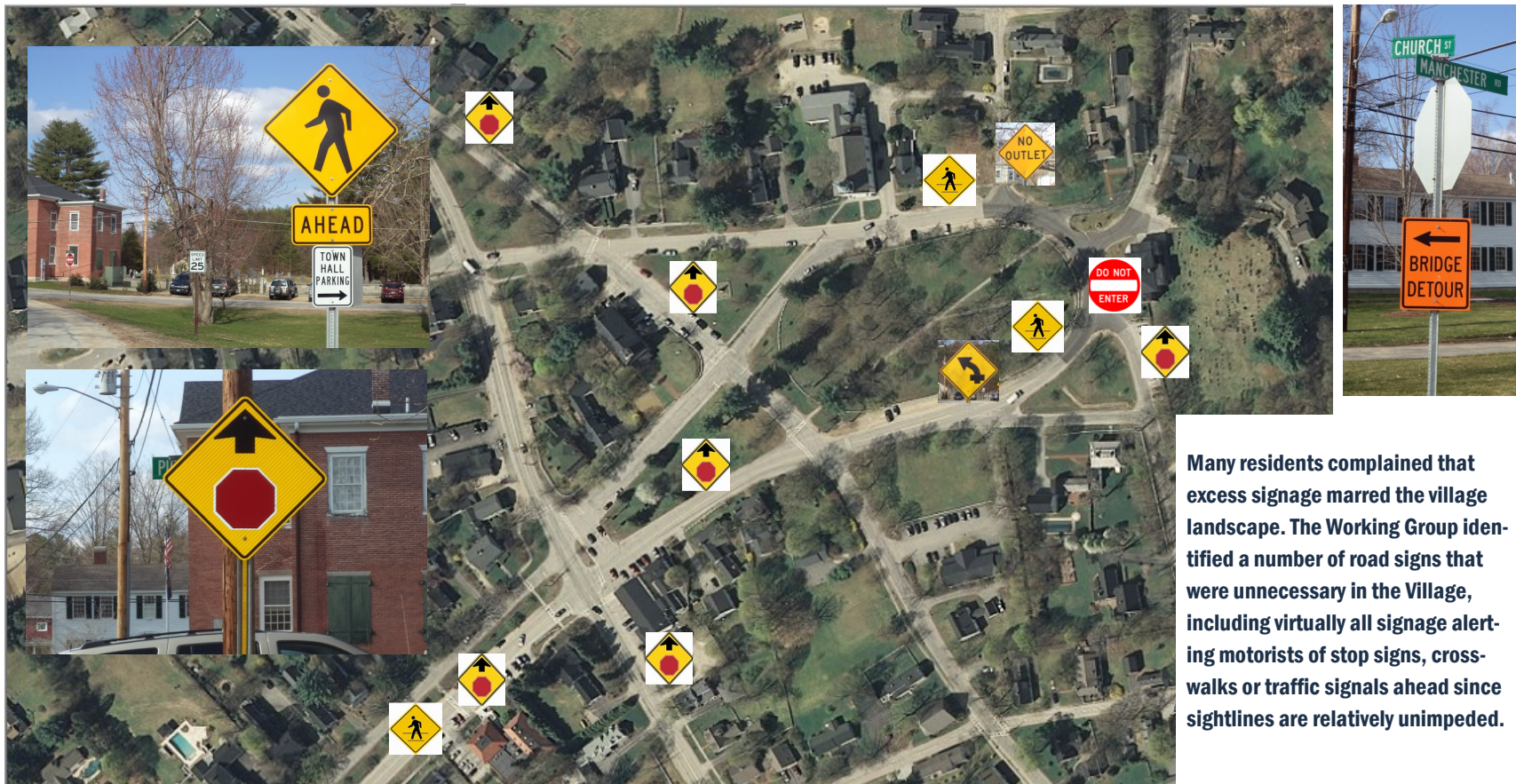
Despite these differing perceptions, there was relative consensus that some minor pedestrian-oriented investments would improve the overall Village environment (for example, 76 percent of visual preference survey respondents agreed that the walking environment should be improved in the Village). However, many residents urged caution in considering such investments, citing cost concerns and noting the importance of maintaining the current rural and historic aesthetic of the district. One survey respondent noted that “less is more,” another opined “enough with the stop signs already,” while another urged “please be sure to preserve a historic appearance.”

Residents broadly agreed that additional parking was not needed in the Village district, but many called for accessibility improvements to the Village from outlying areas. There appeared to be general agreement that minimizing roadway signage, re-routing truck traffic, re-opening the Mack Hill Bridge, and more aggressive traffic enforcement would benefit the Village.

## Committee Recommendations

Traffic and Safety Committee members devised a series of recommendations





based on several factors including; public input, a review of previous plans, level of benefit, costs, timeframe and committee deliberations. The Working Group identified projects with low costs and potentially high impacts that are well suited for short term implementation (identified by star symbols on page 24). However, Working Group members noted that all of the recommendations warrant further consideration.

## NO ADDITIONAL COST OR LOW COST RECOMMENDATIONS

- Law Enforcement Education Initiative

*Amherst Police develop and publicize community oriented safe driving education initiative, increasing citizen awareness and encouraging motor vehicle code compliance.*

- Targeted Motor Vehicle Code Enforcement

*Amherst Police would conduct directed enforcement efforts in conjunction with education initiative using available resources to promote and reinforce safe driving behaviors.*

- SAU Sponsored School Bus Use Initiative

*School District promotes increased use of school buses and decreased reliance on parental transportation to mitigate traffic congestion at start and end of school day.*

- Eliminate Excess Traffic Control Signage

*Remove unnecessary traffic control signs in the Village that do not meet MUTCD*





Speed feedback signs (far left) and school zone beacons (left) are among the Working Group's high and moderate cost traffic and safety recommendations.

guidelines, have not been placed pursuant to town ordinance, and/or conflict with proposed traffic safety initiatives. The committee identified approximately 15 to 17 traffic signs potentially appropriate for removal which consisted largely of advance warning signs indicating approaches to stop signs, traffic signals and crosswalks.

- Town Ordinance Banning Truck Engine Brake Use

Enact a town ordinance and post signs to prohibit commercial truck drivers from utilizing engine/Jake/retarder brakes on approaches to and through the Village, reducing excessive and unnecessary noise.

- Town Ordinance Banning Village Through-Trucking

Consider enacting a town ordinance – alone, or in conjunction with an engine/Jake/retarder brake ban – to prohibit Village through-trucking, reducing excessive noise and contributing toward improved pedestrian safety.

- Street Crosswalk Bollards

Place crosswalk signs at higher volume pedestrian crossings, including at points along Boston Post Road, Cross Street, Main Street, and Middle Street as recommended in the 2013 NRPC Amherst Safe Routes to School report.

## MODERATE COST RECOMMENDATIONS

- Additional School Zone Beacons

Install two school zone beacons on Jones Road at Upper Wilkins Field for increased pedestrian safety due to student ingress/egress via the rear field.

- Unify Village Green with Removal of Middle Street Section

Connect Village Green area through removal of Middle Street portion between Main Street and School Street, consolidating traffic on primary Village roads and encouraging pedestrian-friendly town center. Unification provides a more cohesive central area with increased pedestrian safety for those traveling between the two existing sections and eliminates the need for at least two stop signs.

This recommendation also reduces traffic flow past the Brick School/SAU office, improving pedestrian safety in congested location previously identified as being challenged for adequate safe parking and pedestrian travel and allows for improved sidewalk connectivity.

Finally, it concentrates traffic on primary routes and eliminates central Village cut-through traffic. A 2014 NRPC traffic study recommended the town consider closing the Middle Street section to vehicular traffic for a temporary period to evaluate its impacts on surrounding roadways before implementing a permanent solution.





**The Working Group recommended discontinuing a portion of Middle in the Village to enhance the Village Green and improve pedestrian conditions.**

- Brick/Paver Crosswalks

*Texturize pavement through use of bricks/pavers at central pedestrian crosswalks beginning with three crosswalks: Boston Post Road at Main Street, Boston Post Road at School Street, and Main Street at Town Hall. Increases motorist visibility of pedestrian crossings and contributes to a more aesthetically attractive streetscape.*

#### **HIGH COST RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Speed Feedback Signs

*Placement of six stationary, speed feedback display signs on approaches to Wilkins and Clark schools and on lower Mack Hill Road as recommended in 2013 Safe Routes to School NRPC report. Speed feedback signs are generally recognized as the most cost-effective of interactive speed control devices.*

- Textured Pavement at Central/Sensitive Road Areas

*Texturize pavement through use of pavers at sensitive pedestrian areas such as Boston Post Road near Moulton's Market and Boston Post Road at Foundry Street.*

- Enhanced Sidewalk Network

*Expand Village sidewalk network completing loop along Manchester Road, Mack Hill Road, Jones Road, New Boston Road, and Boston Post Road. The project is eligible for Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funds but was not successful*

*in the 2014 round. Town should reapply in 2016.*

- Continue Manchester Road Bridge Reconstruction

*Although the Manchester Road Bridge reconstruction project is well underway, with completion scheduled for late 2015, the Working Group noted the project would be of significant importance to traffic and safety in the Village district. Traffic control devices and placement at Manchester Road and Mack Hill Road intersections will be considered by Highway Safety Committee as construction develops.*

#### **Working Group Priorities**

The Working Group selected targeted motor vehicle code enforcement, a traffic safety education campaign, increased elementary school bus use, a town ordinance banning truck engine brake use, re-opening Courthouse Road to two-way traffic, street crosswalk bollards, the elimination of excess traffic control signage, and the installation of additional school zone beacons as the initial priority items for the town to pursue. Following the discussion and implementation of those initial priority items, the Working Group recommends that the town consider a town ordinance banning thru-tucking, enhancing the sidewalk network, installing speed feedback signs, unifying the village green, and installing paver crosswalks.





### Recreation, Attractions, & Events Working Group Mission

- Envision a system of events, venues, parks and paths that provide residents of all ages easier, multiple modes of access to the Village and surrounding attractions

### Working Group Members

- Chair – Craig Fraley, Steve Yurish, Marie Grella, Liz Larson, Ken Miller, and Conservation Commission representative

### What We Heard

Amherst residents noted many recreational draws to the Village district. Residents appreciate leisure opportunities afforded by Village parks, trails, schools, and playing fields. Community events in the Village are well attended and have become treasured trademarks of the town, including the Christmas tree lighting, Halloween trick-or-treating or Independence Day Parade. The Amherst Village Green embodies the aesthetic quality of the historic district and offers plentiful passive recreation opportunities.

Despite these strengths, many residents noted that the Village's recreation

assets could be better utilized. Overwhelmingly, residents favored the return of the town's farmers market to the Village district. Residents pointed to a number of other potential enhancements including; more outdoor sitting areas, playgrounds, a gazebo, expanded community events, walking trails and bike paths.

Pleas for increased recreational offerings were tempered by those who felt no recreation enhancements were necessary in the district. One survey respondent noted "Keep it simple. [The Village] is a beautiful place right now."

### Working Group Recommendations

After accounting for public input and the community's recreational objectives, the working group settled on a series of recommendations designed to enhance the Village's recreational offerings and enhance its existing character.

- Trail Network Branching out from Village

*Although many trails converge near the Amherst Village district, they do not reach the core of the Village area. This recommendation would extend existing trails to the center of the district with clear markings. A trail head located at a center point in the village would provide a key central reference point for hikers.*



- Better Connectivity between Amherst schools, parks and Village

*Create a pedestrian/bicycle route from Souhegan High School and Amherst Middle School to the Village District.*

- Distance-based Walking Map of Amherst Village

*Create a walking map of the Amherst Village District with distances clearly delineated, so residents can make smart decisions suiting their skill levels and time constraints.*

- Virtual Tour App of Historic Sites in Village

*Work with the Amherst Historical Society to create a smart-phone app for visitors to use as a tour of historic sites in Amherst Village.*

- Expand Village-based Community Events

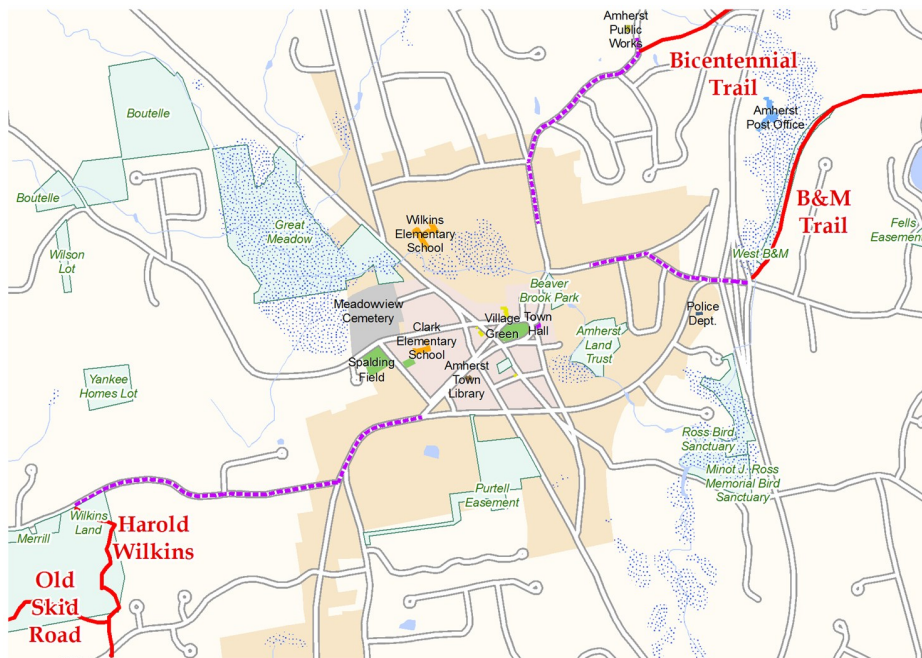
*Reach out to current event organizers to consider how events can be expanded and marketed to larger audiences. Launch an annual fall festival, modeled in part around the current Cider Festival. Research the feasibility of overflow parking during large events and the closing of School Street during Halloween and Christmas Tree Lighting events. Promote the notion of 'Something for Everyone' in organizing events.*

- Expand Passive Recreational Opportunities

*Place Adirondack chairs around flat-top granite boulders for community/picnic type seating and gatherings at Buchanan Park. Purchase permanent backyard-style games for residents to play in Village parks. Offer 'Bocce Ball Nights' with a painted court at Buchanan Park.*

## Working Group Priorities

The Working Group recommended the expansion of passive recreational opportunities, the development of a trail network from the village, and expanded community events as priority items for town consideration.



**Above: There are opportunities to better link several existing trails in the vicinity of Amherst Village to the center of the district.**

**Below : An eye-catching trailhead could be placed at a center point in the Village. Also, Adirondack chairs placed around a granite boulder is a working group recommendation for Buchanan Park.**

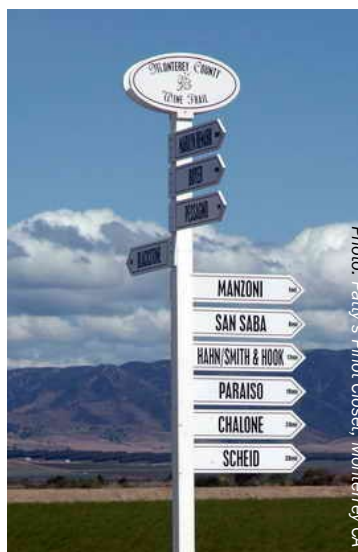


Photo: Patty's Pinot Closet, Monterey, CA







## Historic Character Working Group Mission

- Strengthen relationships among the Historic District Commission (HDC) members and residents
- Consider creating a guidelines book
- Educational effort to convey role and authority of HDC
- Educational effort on how to be a good steward
- Outreach, education and non-regulatory incentives for good historic preservation

## Working Group Members

- Chair – Chris Hall, Colleen Mailloux, Amily Moore and Historic District Commission (HDC) members

## What We Heard

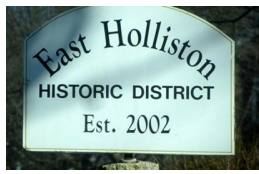
Amherst residents consistently noted that newcomers are attracted to the town, in part, because of the charming, idyllic, and well-preserved nature of the Village district. Retaining the district's unique character represents a community

priority, and residents are united that historic preservation should remain a hallmark of the Village. However, residents are split between concepts of appropriate evolution within the Village. There is some preference for subtle enhancements that also preserve the Village character. Such concepts including attracting a small commercial gathering space (including a coffee-shop or restaurant), providing additional sidewalks, and enhancing recreational offerings. This is contrasted by others who prefer to see the Village remain as it is today with only minimal change over time.

There are fears that some efforts aimed at preserving historic character, when interpreted too strictly, hamper those very goals. Unpredictable regulatory processes, per anecdotal reports, deter some from making investments that preserve the quality and integrity of historic homes and structures. The burden of maintaining a historic home has also been reported as off-putting to potential homebuyers.

Overall, there is a recognition and appreciation among Amherst residents that the Village retains its historic character and strong sense of place, thanks in part, to the hard work and dedication of the HDC. Continuing that work with improvements in transparency and a clearer understanding of regulations, should strengthen historic preservation efforts while encouraging additional investment. Additionally, there is a general understanding of a need for a bal-





**Members of the Historic Preservation Working Group agreed on the need to strengthen the visibility of the Historic District through special signage. Tasteful and highly visible welcome signs would be placed at gateways to the district, while historic street signs would provide another visual reminder of the historic district.**

ance between making the Village a museum and encouraging too much change or commercialization.

## Working Group Recommendations

The Historic Character Working Group centered its recommendations around three Ps: Preservation, Perception and Prominence. The committee endeavored to better showcase the historic district, improve transparency surrounding HDC decisions, and enhance historic preservation efforts in the district.

### PRESERVATION

- Utilize HDC as a Community Resource

*The Historic District Commission has volunteered to serve as a resource to town residents and officials in implementing recommendations outlined in this plan to ensure consistency in style and ensure that any improvements are historically accurate and complimentary.*

- Conduct Annual Regulation & Ordinance Review

*The HDC recognizes that state statutes and preservation practices change over time, and concluded an annual review of HDC regulations and standards should be conducted in consultation with an attorney to ensure compliance with such changes. This will not only ensure that regulations are clear and current but provide residents an opportunity to provide input.*

### PERCEPTION

- Improve Public Access to HDC Information

*The HDC will update its website and informational brochure to provide residents a better understanding of its role; the application process and standards for review;*

*and Historic District rules, regulations and guidelines.*

- Improve Regular HDC Communication

*The HDC will see that new property owners in the Village District receive a “friendly first” welcome letter, designed to encourage stewardship of the district and educate residents of their obligations regarding land ownership in an historic district. Additionally, the HDC will publish and deliver a postcard to all historic district property owners notifying them upon the completion of a new HDC page on the town website, as well as in advance of any annual changes to HDC regulations.*

### PROMINENCE

*The HDC concluded that there is a need for improved visual cues in the Village, both to inform visitors they are in a historic district and to provide a more unified style and branding element to the district.*

- Distinguished Historic Village Street Signs

*The proposed street signs would differ from those in other areas of town and provide a clear visual cue and improved aesthetic element noting the historic district.*

- Coordinated Historic Village Welcome Signs

*These signs, of a historic visual character, would be placed at four to six strategic gateway locations welcoming residents and visitors to the Village.*

## Working Group Priorities

The Working Group decided that the all of the recommendations were feasible in the short-term and represented priority items. Private funding would be explored for the two signage recommendations.





## Lighting & Utilities Working Group Mission

- Assess suitability and status of current operational lighting.
- Explore trial of architectural lighting to showcase the Village at night.
- Explore the cost and implications of burying utilities underground.

## Working Group Members

- Co-Chairs: Bruce Berry and Chris Buchanan. Other members include Liz Larson, Sean Gaffney, and an HDC representative

## What We Heard

Few Amherst residents are seeking major or immediate changes to utilities in the Village. This extends to the outward appearance of utilities and their impact on the aesthetics of the Village environment. Those that would like to see changes to what utilities are available are looking for sewer, natural gas, and underground power lines – invisible changes. While buried power lines were viewed as a major aesthetic enhancement, many residents noted some level of skepticism largely relating to the perception of high costs associated with such improvements. Instead, residents prefer more practical cost effective improve-

ments starting with an inventory of existing street lights to identify where there are outages. The first step is to make repairs to existing infrastructure then identify gaps. Preferences for any new fixtures or infrastructure needs should be targeted to solutions that are efficient, low cost and fit within the existing historic character. Overall, economy is essential and the benefits of any new improvements must outweigh the costs.

## Working Group Recommendations

The Working Group coalesced around four major recommendations regarding lighting and utilities in the Village district.

- Bury Utilities Lines as part of Road Reconstruction Projects

*The Working Group concluded that utility line burial could aesthetically improve the Village District. Public opposition to the proposal largely has centered around two issues; the perception of very high costs associated with utility line burial and concern that burying utility lines only in the Village District unfairly focused taxpayer investment in one area of the community.*

*After significant research and deliberation, the Working Group concluded that utility line burial could be more economical when combined with road reconstruction projects. Additionally, the group determined that, over the long-term,*



burial might actually save funds in some cases by reducing maintenance costs and minimizing utility disruptions associated with severe weather events. Additionally, the Working Group found that current town regulations mandate utility burial for new development and that a town-wide effort to incorporate burial into road reconstruction would ensure consistency. Finally, the Working Group found that burial might be advantageous for the whole of the community and not just the Village District.

The Working Group has compiled rough costs related to utility line burial (included in the appendix of this document) in an effort to begin a broader community conversation regarding this important issue.

- Alternative Street Lighting

Amherst Village currently has relatively minimal street lighting provided by street lamps attached to utility poles. If the town did move forward on utility line burial, some kind of alternative lighting system would become necessary. The Working Group concluded that lantern-style street lights might be more consistent with the Village's historic and aesthetic character. Such lighting could also be programmed to minimize visual obstructions of the night sky.

- Architectural Lighting Demonstration

Although Amherst Village is blessed with many historically significant structures, they remain cloaked in darkness at night. The Working Group concluded that architectural lighting of certain landmark buildings in the Village District might be appropriate to help ensure that the district's historical buildings can be enjoyed during all light conditions.

A no-cost professional demonstration is slated to be held this summer (2015) to showcase to the town the visual impacts of architectural lighting on landmarks including the Congregational Church, Town Hall, Brick School, Amherst Town Library, as well as sites on the Green.

- Architecturally Illuminate Town Buildings

Should the lighting demonstration prove successful, the Working Group would recommend moving forward and architecturally lighting certain key town-owned buildings in the Village District.



**Lighting and Utilities Working Group members noted concern that utility poles significantly marred the aesthetics of the town's landscape.**

## Working Group Priorities

The Working Group concluded that all recommendations represented priority items, particularly since three of the four recommendations are longterm in nature but will require further study and planning, which should continue in the short-term. Additionally, all of the recommendations are interwoven, so that if the town moved forward on utility line burial, an alternative lighting scheme would become necessary and if the architectural lighting demonstration proved successful, a permanent installation would need to be implemented.





## Community Development Working Group Mission

- Explore whether, and if so, how to invite additional businesses and enhance or support existing businesses.

## Working Group Members

- Chair – Colleen Mailloux, Gordon Leedy, Tracy Hutchins, Amily Moore, Steve Yurish, Rick Crocker and Will Ludt

## What We Heard

There is no clear consensus in Amherst regarding the question of inviting additional businesses into the Village district. Though this topic was directly considered in the visual preference survey and debated thoroughly in house meetings and public meetings and forums, residents were relatively split regarding the appropriateness of such a course. In the survey, 41 percent of respondents indicated support for additional businesses, 36 percent answered ‘maybe/unsure’ on the issue, while 23 percent noted they were opposed to business expansion in the district. Many residents expressed concern that new businesses might diminish the unique historic character of the Village and noted that

existing infrastructure did not support business growth. Others noted concern that new businesses might harm existing businesses.

Among those supporting new businesses, many noted that the Village is too sedate and does not offer enough gathering places for residents. Business expansion supporters agreed that the issue needed further study, and that any zoning changes must be thoughtfully implemented in a manner that would not detract from the district’s rural and historic character. In the survey, a slight majority of all respondents indicated that a pub/tavern or a coffee-shop/bakery would be a welcome addition to the district.

While the issue of business expansion was ardently debated, there was clear consensus in Amherst regarding residents’ strong support for existing Village businesses. A number of residents noted that the Village has historically served as a gathering place and center of commerce and should continue to do so. Many noted the value and convenience of Moulton’s Market and its treasured role as a community institution and gathering spot. Others hailed the garages/service stations and Carriage House businesses.

There is clear consensus related to creating and maintaining a sense of community and preserving the district’s historic character. Residents generally noted support for maintaining an attractive, unique and functioning town center with options for commercial, civic, and social activity.





**From Clinton County, Ohio and Montgomery Township, NJ to the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle, several communities have adopted successful ‘Shop Local’ campaigns that encourage residents to support locally-owned businesses.**

## Working Group Recommendations

- ‘No Action’ Alternative

*Leaves in place existing Village zoning districts (including residential, agricultural and home occupation) with no changes. Existing businesses would be grandfathered and permitted to remain in operation, unless a business stopped operating for 18 months or longer.*

- ‘Shop Amherst’ Campaign

*In order to encourage residents to support local businesses, the town would work with local business organizations to launch a ‘Shop Amherst,’ campaign, including promotional materials and small events.*

- Make Existing Businesses Conforming Uses

All existing businesses in Amherst Village currently fall under residential zoning. This approach would zone all existing businesses as commercial under Amherst’s zoning ordinance and eliminate the need for proprietors to seek zoning board relief in the event that a Village business stopped operating for 18 months or longer. While some working group members considered this course a good compromise that would show community support for existing Village businesses, others worried that it might invoke unintended consequences and would be unfair to non-conforming businesses located in other areas of the community. (3-2-1 split vote)

- Walkway to Future Community Garden/Playground

*Fundraising is underway for a playground and community garden at Stearns-Davis Park off Courthouse Road. Construction of a sidewalk or walking path would pro-*

*vide safe pedestrian access from Amherst Street to the park*

- Further Study of Zoning Overlay District and Design Standards

*As a possible way to encourage more business activity in the Village, the town would study the appropriateness and feasibility of a zoning overlay district allowing for some commercial uses. To ensure that development in the zone is consistent with other Village uses, design standards would govern the size, scale, uses and architectural appearance of applications (3-2-1 split vote).*

*Working Group members disagreed on this recommendation, with a minority two members voting in opposition, noting their support for the ‘No Action’ alternative of keeping in place existing Village zoning with no changes.*

- Town-wide Economic Visioning

*The working group recommends the Amherst Board of Selectmen and Community Development Department continue its efforts in long-term economic visioning, including in the Village district, into future years.*

## Working Group Priorities

In a 3-2-1 split vote, the Working Group recommended making existing businesses conforming uses and the further study of a zoning overlay district and design standards as priority items. The minority voting members favored the ‘No Action’ alternative with no changes to existing Village zoning. Community Development Director Mailloux abstained from all votes.

# Traffic and Safety

★ Short term priority projects

|   | Initiative                                | Benefit  | Cost                  | Target Date |
|---|---|----------|-----------------------|-------------|
| ★ | Traffic Safety Education                  | High     | No Additional Cost    | 0-1 Year    |
| ★ | Targeted Motor Vehicle Code Enforcement   | High     | No Additional Cost    | 0-1 Year    |
| ★ | Pedestrian Crosswalk Yield Signs          | High     | \$1,500               | 0-1 Year    |
| ★ | Additional School Zone Beacons            | High     | \$5,000               | 0-1 Year    |
|   | Unification of Village Green              | High     | \$4,000 - \$5,000     | 1-3 Years   |
|   | Speed Feedback Signs                      | High     | \$35,000              | 1-3 Years   |
|   | Enhanced Sidewalk Network                 | High     | \$60,000 - \$328,000  | 3-5 Years   |
|   | Reopen Manchester Road Bridge             | High     | \$198,841             | 0-1 Year    |
| ★ | Increase Elementary School Bus Use        | Moderate | No Additional Cost    | 0-1 Year    |
| ★ | Resume Two-Way Traffic on Courthouse Road | Moderate | No Additional Cost    | 0-1 Year    |
| ★ | Engine/Jake/Retarder Brake Ban            | Moderate | \$350                 | 01- Year    |
| ★ | Eliminate Excess Traffic Control Signage  | Moderate | No Additional Cost    | 0-1 Year    |
|   | Through-Trucking Ban                      | Moderate | \$350                 | 1-3 Years   |
|   | Textured Brick/Paver Crosswalks           | Moderate | \$4,500 - \$6,000     | 1-3 Years   |
|   | Textured Brick/Paver Intersections        | Moderate | \$108,000 - \$162,000 | 3-5 Years   |



## Recreation, Attractions & Events

★ *Priority Initiative*

| Initiative   | Benefit  | Cost      | Target Date |
|--|----------|-----------|-------------|
| ★ Trail Network from Village                       | Moderate | \$1000    | 1-3 years   |
| Interconnectivity between schools, parks & Village | High     | High Cost | 10-15 years |
| Village Walking Map                                | Moderate | \$500     | 1-3 years   |
| Virtual App.                                       | Moderate | Low Cost  | 1-3 years   |
| ★ Expand Current Events                            | High     | No Cost   | 1-3 years   |
| ★ More Passive Recreation                          | High     | \$5,000   | 1-3 years   |

## Historic Preservation

| Initiative                              | Impact   | Cost     | Visibility |
|---|----------|----------|------------|
| ★ Improve Access to HDC Info            | High     | Low      | Moderate   |
| ★ Improve Regular HDC Communications    | High     | Low      | Low        |
| ★ HDC Regulations and Ordinance Review  | High     | Low      | Moderate   |
| ★ Historic Village Welcome Signs        | Moderate | Moderate | High       |
| ★ Historic Village Street Signs         | Moderate | Moderate | High       |
| ★ Utilize the Amherst HDC as a Resource | Moderate | Low      | Low        |

RECOMMENDATIONS

## Lighting and Utilities

| Initiative                                     | Benefit  | Cost          | Target Date |
|--|----------|---------------|-------------|
| ★ Burying Wires as part of road reconstruction | High     | High          | 1 – 3 years |
| ★ Alternative Street lighting                  | High     | High          | 1 – 3 years |
| ★ Architectural Lighting Demonstration         | High     | Low (No cost) | 0 – 1 year  |
| ★ Architecturally Illuminate Town Buildings    | Moderate | Moderate      | Mid-Term    |

## Community Development

| Initiative                            | Benefit  | Cost                                       | Target Date             |
|---------------------------------------|----------|--|-------------------------|
| No-Action Alternative                 | Low      | \$0  | Current                 |
| Shop Local Campaign                   | Moderate | \$1,000                                    | FY17                    |
| ★ Make Existing Businesses Conforming | Moderate | \$2,000                                    | FY17                    |
| Walkway to Proposed Park              | Moderate | \$10,000 design,<br>\$100,000 construction | FY18 or 19 construction |
| Town-Wide Economic Visioning          | High     | Already funded                             | FY16                    |
| ★ Zoning Overlay & Design Guidelines  | High     | \$20,000                                   | FY17-18                 |



This eight-month-long Village Strategic Planning Project is important to Amherst residents for the following two reasons. First, it represents an effort by the BOS to extend strategic thinking and dialogue to other town committees, commissions, board and citizens. Second, the results have provided a realistic sense of citizens' feelings and hopes about an historic village that is unparalleled by its beauty and historic authenticity.



Word Cloud created using written survey responses to the question “What is best about Amherst Village?”