

TOWN OF AMHERST
Planning Board

February 22, 2022

APPROVED

1 In attendance at Amherst Town Hall: Bill Stoughton, Dwight Brew, Christy Houpis (4:04pm),
2 Tom Silvia (alternate), Mike Akillian (alternate), Tracie Adams, Chris Yates, Tom Quinn
3 Staff present: Kristan Patenaude, Recording Secretary
4

5 Bill Stoughton, Vice Chair, called the special meeting to order at 4:00 pm at Amherst Town Hall.
6 He explained that this meeting is only to discuss the Master Plan Steering Committee update
7 regarding the Master Plan.
8

9 Dwight Brew explained that the Master Plan Steering Committee has been meeting for
10 approximately 18-20 months to work on the Master Plan update. This process began with a
11 community survey that received a large amount of useful input. An additional public input
12 meeting and survey were also completed. The documents presented to the Board this evening
13 should demonstrate what the Committee has determined to be important to the community, via
14 this survey. Other items are not included in these documents, as they may not have risen to the
15 same level of importance. The Master Plan Steering Committee has mostly been unified on these
16 items. There are other items, such as water and air quality impacts, which may need additional
17 study by those with additional expertise.
18

19 Chris Yates stated that he is happy with the contractor chosen for the Master Plan update. He
20 believes the draft documents do a good job at capturing the feeling of the community, as
21 received via the surveys. He noted that he believes the goals and to-do items that come from the
22 Master Plan process are just as important, if not more so, than the Master Plan document itself.
23

24 Tom Silvia asked a question regarding if there will be priorities set to the seven items mentioned
25 in the vision statement. While all of these items are touched upon in the documents, some appear
26 to be more guiding principles. It appears that there could be conflict between other items at
27 times, such as development and a sense of rural character. He asked for more specifics regarding
28 Amherst's Land Uses and Local Economy, as mentioned in the vision draft document.
29

30 Chris Yates stated that he believes the vision statement will become more detailed as other draft
31 documents become further completed.
32

33 Tom Silvia stated that some of the items mentioned actually seem to be anti-economy, so he is
34 trying to understand the items that appear to be at conflict. In terms of the draft outline
35 document, Tom Silvia stated that he believes the examples given from different departments
36 seem to range from broad to minute (e.g., replacing the use of freon in the Library).
37

38 Dwight Brew stated that the Master Plan Steering Committee is aware that the items listed are all
39 at varying levels. This is due to there being varying items submitted from various sources. The
40 Committee's intention is to work to level set these items out in the future.
41

42 Tom Silvia noted that he would like to see more information in the vision regarding the schools
43 and recreation. While these are only touched upon lightly, they are often some of the main
44 reasons people move to Amherst.

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45
46 Dwight Brew explained that the Master Plan document is really a land use plan, with a focus on
47 land use. While certain elements from the schools could touch on land use, for example a large
48 development in Town could impact the available space in the schools and thus the phasing of the
49 project may need to be staggered, generally the schools are managed by other regulatory boards.
50 He noted that there may be more information needed for the recreation section, as it may deal
51 more heavily with land use in Town.

52
53 Tom Silvia noted that a component of the schools does deal with land use and that this is being
54 heavily debated in Town currently. It might be important to include this, if possible.

55
56 Dwight Brew explained that the Master Plan Steering Committee reached out to the
57 Superintendent of Schools at the beginning of the process. He was willing to be involved in the
58 process, and Tom Gauthier, chair of the Amherst School Board, was chosen to be on the
59 Committee. Tom Gautier has been a regular participant to the process.

60
61 Christy Houpis stated that he appreciates the effort of the Committee and that the draft
62 documents seem to mirror the public survey results. He expressed concern over keeping local
63 controls regarding housing, especially with the new Housing Board in place by the State. He
64 asked if the Town is being thoughtful regarding the resources and local controls, versus allowing
65 these to be circumvented. He asked if this should be addressed in the Master Plan.

66
67 Dwight Brew explained that the Committee has approached the process by trying to identify
68 what the Town wants to be and including rationale on why this is reasonable. For example, the
69 Committee felt that clean water and rural aesthetic are concrete items to include that could then
70 lead to ordinances and/or additional plans. If a development application then came forward that
71 did not propose to pollute the water in Town or detract from the rural character, it could be
72 considered to move forward. The Committee used this process to determine what Amherst would
73 like to look like and what can be put in place to achieve this.

74
75 Chris Yates stated that he does believe the housing issues mentioned by Christy Houpis are
76 important and suggested bringing this back to Steve Whitman and Resilience Planning & Design.

77
78 Bill Stoughton suggested that State legislators be brought in to speak with the Planning Board
79 regarding housing items in the future.

80
81 In response to a question from Tom Quinn, it was noted that the draft profile documents are not
82 yet final. Tom Quinn noted that there were quite a few inaccurate items, such as the size of the
83 Amherst Middle School and the picture identifying the Transfer Station. Chris Yates asked that
84 these inaccuracies be sent along for revision.

85
86 Tom Quinn stated that he believes the draft documents appear to focus on the largest issues in
87 Town. The comments in the “other” section of the public survey seem to heavily mention the
88 quality of the schools in Town and taxes. He echoed Tom Silvia’s comments about seeing more

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89 regarding these items in the Master Plan. He was surprised to see that there was not more
90 mentioned regarding the schools and land use, for example the tradeoffs of constraining
91 development in order to not degrade the quality of the schools, while also focusing on large
92 increases in taxes. Tom Quinn asked if the connected community items are truly possible in
93 Amherst.

94
95 Chris Yates stated that many of the items mentioned will likely be vetted out down the road. He
96 believes committees may need to be formed after the Master Plan is complete to look at the
97 tradeoffs for certain items.

98
99 Tom Quinn stated that he was hoping to see more information regarding mixed use development,
100 especially in the Commercial District. He believes that redevelopment of existing sites into
101 mixed use developments could lower taxes and lead to potential additions to the housing stock in
102 Town.

103
104 Tom Quinn expressed concern regarding certain items listed under the draft action items section,
105 “Reclaim and maintain grasslands on private lands,” and “Restore and conserve wetlands mostly
106 on private lands.” He questioned how this can be done on private land. Bill Stoughton stated that
107 wetlands are generally protected by State law. Grasslands could have conservation easements
108 placed on them, thus allowing them to be protected while still remaining as private land.

109
110 Tom Quinn suggested that PFAS/PFOA be included under the action item for creating minimum
111 drinking standards for new developments.

112
113 Tracie Adams stated that she believes these draft documents and the process are on the right
114 track. She believes the correct contractor was chosen for the project. She noted that she has
115 reviewed Mike Akillian’s comments on the documents and believe that many of them can be
116 incorporated and certain areas expanded upon. She explained that she also reviewed the 10 key
117 recommendations from the previous Master Plan, and the current documents include almost all
118 of these recommendations. One of the only items missing, which there seems to be consensus on
119 including, is the schools. She noted that the action items are a work-in-progress. She agreed with
120 the suggestion to strengthen the language regarding public and private well water quality
121 standards. She explained that the Committee did discuss mixed use development and that this is
122 highlighted within the document. She also stated that she believes the concern expressed by
123 Christy Houpis is real, and that the document needs to look into how the Town can be developed
124 the way it wants to be, and not from the State. She explained that the Committee was looking to
125 move forward in a similar way with all of the action items suggested.

126
127 Mike Akillian thanked everyone for their efforts on this document. He stated that he does believe
128 the document looks to address what was heard from residents. He explained that he believes the
129 vision statement should represent the whole community. He stated that the current vision
130 statement seems to revolve around land use issues and the high priority items pulled from the
131 public survey. He would like for the vision of the entire community to be more touched on.
132 There is no current mention of air quality or health and safety of the community. He expressed

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133 surprise that, if the vision is focusing on the entire community in 2035, there is no mention of air
134 quality. He stated that 24% of Amherst residents also work in Amherst. He noted that there is no
135 mention of economic/financial vitality in the documents. He asked if there has been any
136 discussion as to if the Town supports existing businesses well versus making the Town desirable
137 to new businesses. This is also not included in the draft documents. He explained that these items
138 may not have been included in the public survey, but if 24% of the population as mentioned
139 above is part of the broader community, there may need to be items included that address these
140 items.

141
142 Mike Akillian stated that the Town services mentioned in the vision do not seem to include
143 infrastructure items such as cell, broadband, public water, transportation, etc. There also does not
144 seem to be any idea of possible outcomes included for Town services. He also noted that each
145 Town Department has a dashboard with a list of items that it works to complete. If these items
146 are being worked on, it is supposed to show that the Town is in good shape and that the
147 Departments are serving the public well. There is nothing in the Master Plan regarding these
148 dashboard items. He is concerned that this Master Plan will focus on to-do lists, instead of what
149 the Town wants to achieve. He would like to see more information on the citizen-oriented
150 outcomes that the Town is striving for.

151
152 Mike Akillian noted a number of themes that could potentially be included, such as air quality,
153 public health and safety, infrastructure, and support for local businesses. He noted that the
154 economic development section could also mention which businesses the community might like
155 to see more of in order to better serve residents, such as a grocery store located near the northern
156 section of Town, or doctors/dentists. This could especially focus on aiding the elderly
157 population. The economic development section could also consider bringing in new businesses
158 to bring in additional revenue/tax dollars.

159
160 Mike Akillian stated that he believes action items #15, 19, and 27 are very important and may
161 deserve some sort of priority. He is grateful to the Conservation Commission for its work on
162 creating an actionable plan around water resources. He endorsed seeking out technical help for
163 other sections along the way. Mike Akillian stated that, at the last Planning Board meeting, Bill
164 Stoughton mentioned that he was hoping to complete the Master Plan update in order to rewrite
165 certain regulations for inclusion at next year's Town Meeting. Mike Akillian asked which
166 chapters of the Master Plan seem to get the most immediate attention; these appear to be water
167 resources, rural character, and housing. Rural character involves a number of variables that,
168 depending on how they are blended together, maintain this sense of character. The section may
169 want to address if there is a limit to growth in the Town based on water resources. There may
170 need to be additional analysis to give data to this point. Items such as historic buildings, stone
171 walls, scenic roads, open space, water bodies, and traffic can all be combined in different ways to
172 create or maintain a sense of rural character. Mike Akillian noted that a couple of people have
173 stated that items will be filled in along the way as the draft is written. He asked what can then be
174 expected in the next draft documents.

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176 Chris Yates stated that he believes items will become further vetted out as the draft is written. As
177 the themes are developed, he believes more in-depth information will be accumulated in certain
178 areas.

179
180 Mike Akillian stated that a small group of ACC members got together to compile data and work
181 on the water resources action items. He asked who will be completing this type of work for the
182 other sections. He noted that it seems that people believe that Steve Whitman, of Resilience, will
183 be writing these sections. Mike Akillian stated that he has reviewed all of the Master Plans
184 previously completed by Resilience and believe that they were all drawn from baseline material,
185 with some sidebars defining certain items for the public, but he questioned how this company
186 instead of the local community will be the best one to do these analyses and write the sections.
187 He is concerned that the Master Plan will recommend that the Town complete an economic
188 development plan, or other items that push the work further down the road and onto others.

189
190 Bill Stoughton stated that he would like some sense of how the Plan elements stack up against
191 the survey results, in several respects:

- 192 • Are there high priority items from the survey that do not show up in the Plan?
- 193 • Conversely, are there theme elements or action items that were low priority items in the
194 survey?
- 195 • An indication of these in the body of the Plan or in an appendix would be helpful.

196
197 He explained that he believes many of the draft action items are things that the Town is already
198 doing (vehicle replacements, bridge upkeep, etc.). He believes these items should be collected
199 and the Plan can note that the Town will “continue infrastructure upkeep.” He believes the action
200 items should be “culled,” and prioritized. What are the most important action items to achieve
201 the vision? It is important to recognize that, after the completion of the Master Plan, much work
202 remains to be done. In thinking about which questions should be answered in the Master Plan
203 and which can be left for later, several things are important:

- 204 • Can the work be accomplished by the Steering Committee and its consultants, or does it
205 require other people and resources?
- 206 • Is the work more of a “big picture” effort, or is it focused on details and implementation?
- 207 • Is doing the work now important to show what can be done, what should be done, or to
208 capture momentum?

209
210 Chris Yates stated that the Committee did wrestle with how much to include the schools into the
211 Master Plan. He agrees that, especially with where the community sits today in terms of concerns
212 with the funding and future of the schools, there should be more about the schools included in
213 the Plan. He questioned how that can be addressed within the confines of the RSA. He noted that
214 he has not once seen information come back from the schools when it was requested of them
215 during a Planning Board application hearing process.

216
217 Mike Akillian explained that the basic model for a Master Plan includes a vision statement and a
218 section on land use. It would be a legitimate question to ask the schools to articulate a vision of
219 what they want to achieve over the next 10 years and how they plan to use the land in Town to

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220 do so. He believes the honest answer will be that the schools do not have a plan of this type. As
221 education came up often throughout the public survey, he is unclear as to why the Committee
222 wouldn't ask the schools for a vision statement, especially as their land use could play a major
223 role in the Town's future.

224

225 Tracie Adams noted that the Committee has asked the Department Heads for feedback on the
226 Master Plan documents and will continue to do so. She believes the intention for the Master Plan
227 document, as laid out by Dwight Brew the current Committee Chair, is to be an overarching,
228 broad document that does not dive down into the minutia.

229

230 **Dwight Brew moved that the current draft Master Plan vision, outline and action**
231 **items are generally consistent with the desires of the Planning Board and the**
232 **community based on the results of the community survey; and to ask the Master**
233 **Plan Steering Committee to continue to develop the Master Plan based on these**
234 **outlines and with consideration of the comments received today. Seconded by**
235 **Christy Houpis.**

236

237 **Discussion:**

238 ***Bill Stoughton asked Mike Akillian to sit for Arnie Rosenblatt.***

239

240 **Voting: Dwight Brew - aye, Bill Stoughton - aye, Tracie Adams - aye, Tom Quinn -**
241 **aye, Christy Houpis – aye, Mike Akillian – aye, and Chris Yates – aye; 7-0-0 motion**
242 **carried.**

243

244 Bill Stoughton thanked Dwight Brew for all of his work and effort, not only for the Master Plan
245 Steering Committee, but for the Town in general, and himself personally.

246

247 **Christy Houpis moved to adjourn at 5:04pm. Seconded by Tracie Adams.**

248 **Voting: Dwight Brew - aye, Bill Stoughton - aye, Tracie Adams - aye, Tom Quinn -**
249 **aye, Christy Houpis – aye, Mike Akillian – aye, and Chris Yates – aye; 7-0-0 motion**
250 **carried.**

251

252 Respectfully submitted,

253 Kristan Patenaude

254

255 Minutes approved: March 2, 2022