

WELCOME TO



AMHERST, *NEW HAMPSHIRE*



October 7, 2019

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FY 2021-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

MISSION

The Amherst Office of Community Development provides excellent customer service, professional assistance and technical expertise in a consistent and fair manner to all its users on:

- the implementation of land use ordinances, regulations and policies;
- the issuance of building permits and the provision of inspections during the construction process;
- the enforcement of codes and ordinances.

Through community outreach and engagement, and support to appointed and elected Boards and Commissions, the Amherst Office of Community Development works to plan for the future sustainable development of the community while respecting individual rights and protecting historical and cultural resources and the natural environment.

VISION FOR 2025

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- is a trusted source of information and guidance in the community.

VALUES

The following core values represent the beliefs and behaviors that guide us in all the Office of Community Development's activities:

- ✕ **Customer service**
- ✕ **Integrity**
- ✕ **Equitable service**
- ✕ **Support**
- ✕ **Transparency**
- ✕ **Efficiency**
- ✕ **Knowledge**

OVERVIEW

The Amherst Office of Community Development includes building, code enforcement, planning, zoning, and economic development functions. The Office 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 Program Committee and assists other Town Departments and Boards as needed.

HISTORICAL TRENDS

BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION HISTORY

Building Permit Application History														
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (a/o 10/4/19)
New SF Residential (including Condos)	51	30	26	10	14	8	34	10	13	24	12	35	37	24
Residential Additions/Alterations	192	161	134	145	142	119	109	175	127	166	302	207	259	218
Commercial/Industrial new	N/A	11	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	2
Commercial/Industrial additions/alterations	N/A	170	35	19	15	13	25	19	15	18	18	14	12	10
Signs	31	31	24	12	22	26	32	34	39	50	52	22	17	12
Pools	13	13	8	0	15	8	7	5	10	6	1	3	9	2
Demolition	5	14	20	19	24	16	12	13	21	12	4	12	6	5
Septic Systems	80	83	61	55	47	60	50	48	92	58	40	53	56	54
Electrical	77	60	59	101	112	103	146	247	191	212	235	226	226	162
Electrical (for generator)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	72	30	33	54	21
Plumbing	N/A	49	14	6	20	7	5	77	80	90	87	112	161	68
Mechanical	N/A	N/A	43	41	57	43	33	276	307	372	313	340	408	296
Earth Removal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Home Occupations	N/A	N/A	7	5	7	1	7	4	3	6	8	2	4	3
Total	449	622	431	413	475	405	461	911	899	1088	1104	1060	1250	877

PLANNING BOARD APPLICATIONS

Planning Board	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (a/o 10/4/19)
Scenic Road Hearings	2	2	1	1	3	2	2	2
Non-Residential Site Plans (NRSP)	7	6	3	4	3	2	3	4
Water Resource Management Plans	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Affordable Housing Suitability	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subdivision	3	1	8	7	6	3	6	4
Lot Line Adjustment	6	1	4	2	0	0	0	3
Conceptual Discussions	3	4	2	2	2	8	9	3
Sign Master Plan	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Compliance Hearing	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Conditional Use Permit	0	0	4	2	2	3	6	6
Total	32	20	22	18	16	18	26	23

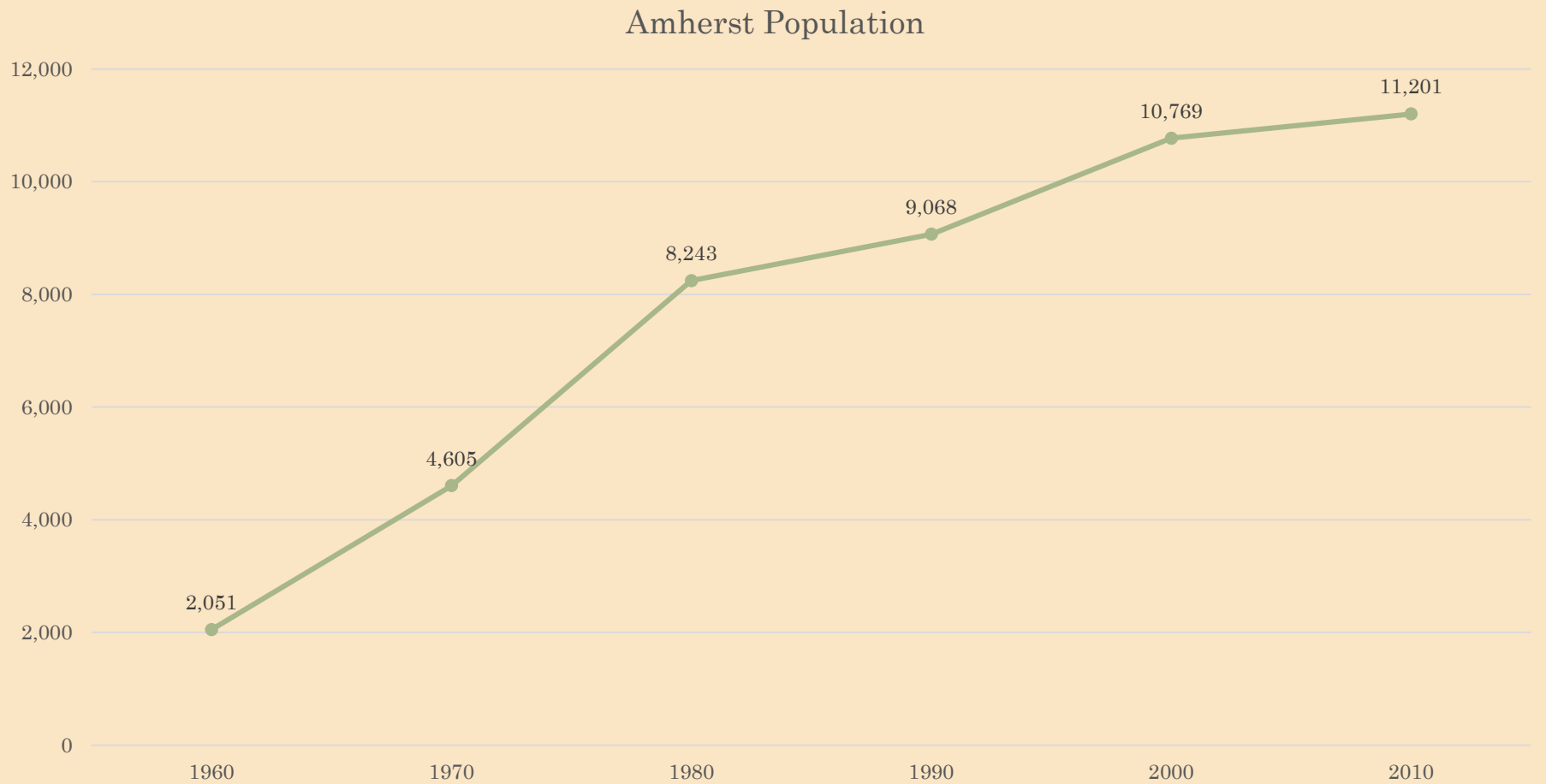
ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT APPLICATIONS

Zoning Board of Adjustment	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (a/o 10/4/19)
Variance	23	16	27	12	12	14	9	13
Special Exception	2	3	3	0	0	0	0	1
Appeal of Administrative Decision	3	0	1	2	1	0	0	0
Equitable Waiver	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Variance for the Handicapped	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	30	19	32	14	13	15	10	14

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION APPLICATIONS

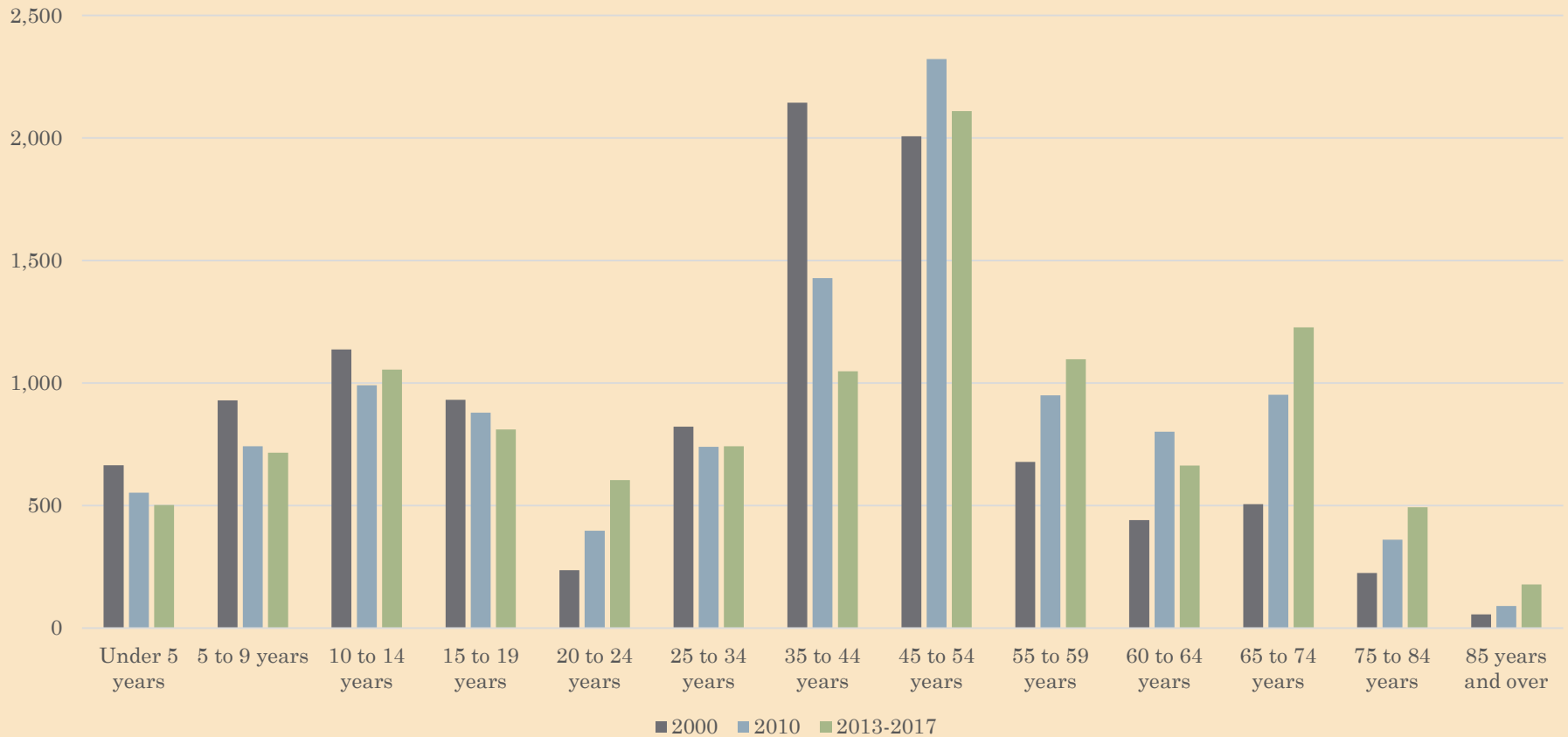
Historic District Commission	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (a/o 10/4/19)
New Building	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	0
Ext. Building Mods/Alterations	36	7	10	14	10	9	14	10
Building Additions	0	0	0	4	5	4	1	1
Tree Removal	31	11	4	0	0	0	0	0
Fence/Landscaping	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Mechanical Equipment	3	2	3	3	1	2	2	0
Demolition	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheds/Accessory Structures	0	0	3	2	0	2	9	3
Other	0	0	3	4	4	13	4	6
Total	83	24	24	28	22	30	31	24

POPULATION



AGE OF POPULATION

Amherst Population Age



ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

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The environmental scan looks at things that can impact the department from a variety of perspectives: economic, social, political, technological, demographic.

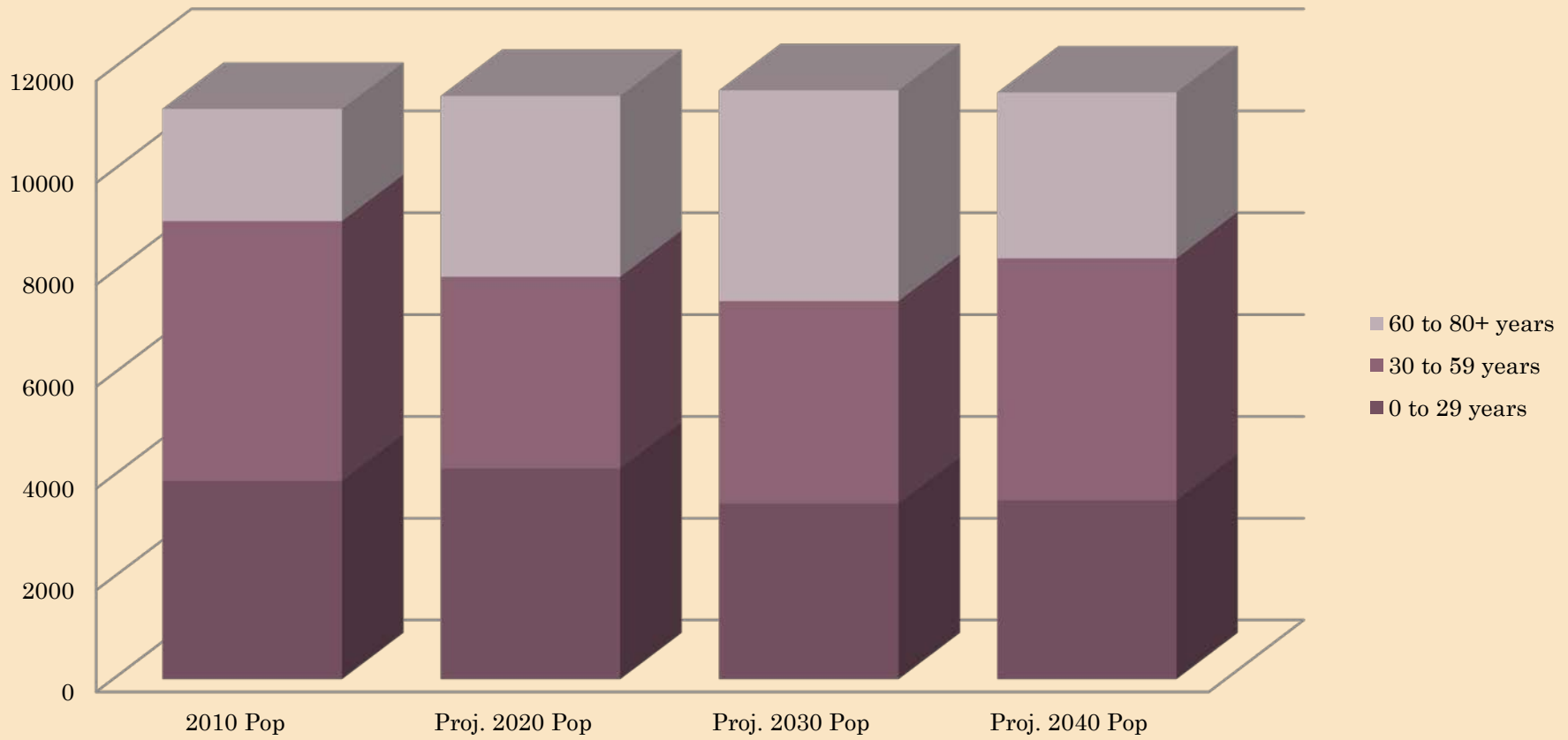
PROJECTED POPULATION

Projected Population
(NRPC Region - Nashua + New Boston + Bedford)



POPULATION PROJECTION BY AGE GROUP

Amherst Population Projections by Age Group



EMPLOYMENT

- Employment opportunities in the community include education, manufacturing, wholesale, professional, management, arts, recreation, and food services.
- Working at home cuts down on traffic congestion at peak traffic hours.
- By 2020 it is predicted that 1 in 4 workers in the U.S. will be over 55.
- ACS 2013-2017 indicates 5,933 workers 16 years and over in Amherst; 79.5% worked in New Hampshire; 73.2% worked in Hillsborough County; 12.3% worked at home. 82% of the workers drove alone to work with a mean travel time of 33.5 minutes.

TECHNOLOGICAL

- Online permitting.
- Speed and convenience.
- Fewer interruptions.
- Social media.

POLITICAL

- Legislative changes.
- Board member changes.
- Residents' votes and participation.

SWOT

Strengths

- Research skills and planning/zoning knowledge
- Customer service
- Responsive inspection scheduling
- Years of forward thinking planning
- Dedicated and passionate Board and Commission members
- Staff support to Boards and Commissions
- Professional networks and continuing education
- Procedural changes for plan recording
- Inhouse plan review
- One stop shop for building, fire, planning, zoning, historic district, heritage, conservation

SWOT

Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Development Director turnover• Previous lack of staff engagement• Regulations and ordinances in need of update• Filing and accessibility of data; previous digitizing choices• Space needs and office layout• Lack of communication with the public about Planning Board processes/decisions• Online permitting not yet operational

SWOT

Opportunities

- Master Plan update
- Use of internet/social media to increase public awareness and understanding of OCD function
- Hire planner to do planning tasks
- Use of technology to allow online permit applications
- Outreach and engagement
- Proactive communication between Boards, Commissions and Departments
- SOP's/FAQ's to assist in staff transitions and answer questions
- Departmental staff meetings and involvement in department
- Map of pending applications with links to details
- Review fees to make sure reasonable but can help cover departmental costs

SWOT

Threats

- Regional trends forcing Amherst to have to react
- Outdated Master Plan, ordinances and regulations not getting desired development
- Boards and Commissions working individually; Departments not knowing what others are doing
- Market driven development vs. tax base
- Changes in Board of Selectmen or Planning Board members
- Aging population
- Transportation/sprawl
- Lack of infrastructure for commercial/ industrial development

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INTERNAL GOALS

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✘ **Goal 1: The filing system will be overhauled.**

Strategy 1: Create a list of the standard contents of a municipal land use file and how to maintain the record.

Strategy 2: The existing physical files will be reorganized/refiled.

Strategy 3: Existing digitized files will be reviewed for filing/indexing protocols.

Strategy 4: A new plan for digitizing files will be created and reviewed for budgetary impacts and organizational utility.

INTERNAL GOALS

✖ **Goal 2: Office space and layout will be evaluated.**

Strategy 1: Working with the Assessing and Tax Collector departments, brainstorm ways to better utilize space in the office.

Strategy 2: Inventory all the filing cabinets and equipment/materials on top of cabinets in the office and the back hallway.

Strategy 3: Turn the Planner's desk to be facing the counter/office and bring it into the Office of Community Development portion of the office space.

INTERNAL GOALS

✖ **Goal 3: Foster a sense of teamwork and engagement with all Office of Community Development staff.**

Strategy 1: Hold monthly staff meetings to go over applications, permits, ongoing project status, upcoming absences, staff concerns and issues.

Strategy 2: Continue to involve staff in budget preparation and monthly review of budget and revenue numbers to ensure accurate reporting and balancing of the budget.

INTERNAL GOALS

✖ **Goal 4: Create SOPs and FAQs for the Office of Community Development.**

Strategy 1: Brainstorm the most frequently asked questions that come to the Office on a regular basis.

Strategy 2: Assign questions to the most appropriate staff person who will draft an answer to bring to the next staff meeting for review and approval by staff.

Strategy 3: Post the FAQs and responses to the Office website page.

Strategy 4: Over the course of the next six months, each staff person to create detailed SOPs on job duties. Expectations for content will be discussed at staff meeting.

Strategy 5: Draft SOPs to be discussed at staff meeting and to be tested by staff person unfamiliar with the process to make sure they are easy to follow.

Strategy 6: Create a binder for final SOPs to be stored; create a schedule for review and update as necessary.

EXTERNAL GOALS

EXTERNAL GOALS

- ✦ **Goal 1: Complete the online permit application system.**
 - Strategy 1: Complete the required application form review so the forms can be uploaded to the system.
 - Strategy 2: Test the system for accuracy, ease of use, that it does what it is supposed to do.
 - Strategy 3: Provide public notice and information about the system and how it works.
 - Strategy 4: Begin operation of system.
 - Strategy 5: Evaluate results and make changes as needed.

EXTERNAL GOALS

✘ **Goal 2: Review the Office of Community Development's fee schedule.**

- Strategy 1: Assemble a list of all the Office's fees for applications and permits.
- Strategy 2: Calculate fixed costs for any of the aspects of filing and processing applications and permits.
- Strategy 3: Determine if there are additional aspects of the process that should be assessed a fee.
- Strategy 4: Consider if the fees proposed are "reasonable".
- Strategy 5: Have Planning Board and Board of Selectmen review and adopt as necessary.

EXTERNAL GOALS

✘ **Goal 3:** **Create an online map that shows pending applications before the Town's land use boards with links to supporting documentation.**

Strategy 1: Consult with NRPC regarding feasibility of such a map and any costs involved in its creation and maintenance/upkeep.

Strategy 2: Receive appropriate training for staff to be able to upload data and maintain the map as well as remove details once an application is approved/denied/withdrawn.

Strategy 3: Determine what kinds of supporting documentation would be helpful to the public and standardize the format.

Strategy 4: Begin operation of map.

Strategy 5: Evaluate results and make changes as needed.

EXTERNAL GOALS

✘ Goal 4: **Improve Office of Community Development outreach and engagement to the community.**

Strategy 1: Evaluate current Office website page and the information it disseminates.

Strategy 2: Create a list of topics to publicize to the community.

Strategy 3: Determine best methods of creating content and distributing to users.

Strategy 4: Create a schedule/timeline for publication of the content and distribute.

Strategy 5: Coordinate with Master Plan update process to provide timely and relevant information.

BUDGET IMPACT

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- The internal goals are designed to reaffirm the Office of Community Development's procedures and serve as a basis from which to move confidently into future planning projects with no concerns about the underlying practices and procedures.
- The external goals are designed to meet the vision of providing a streamlined, transparent and efficient process to the public.
- The goals are achievable by staff inhouse and within a short window.
- Minimal to no budgetary impacts from the first year of this strategic plan.

DISCUSSION
