



# Amherst NH Town Government



## Community Development FY 2025-2029 Strategic Plan

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October 10, 2023



# 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

The Amherst Office of Community Development:

- is a streamlined and efficient point of service for all who seek to use and develop land in town;
- has worked with stakeholders to translate the vision of the updated Master Plan into a physical reality for the community;
- 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:

- **Integrity**
- **Equity**
- **Support**
- **Transparency**
- **Efficiency**
- **Service**
- **Ethics**





# OVERVIEW

The Amherst Office of Community Development includes building, code enforcement, planning, and zoning 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, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, and the Master Plan Steering Committee and assists other Town Departments and Boards as needed.





# HISTORICAL TRENDS



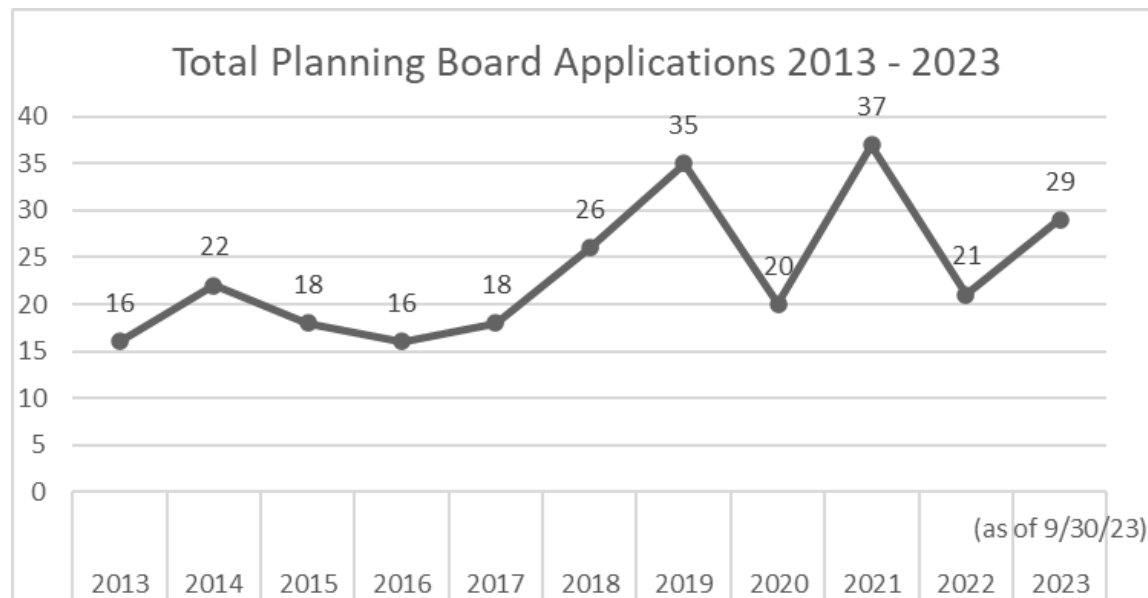
# BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION HISTORY

Building Permit Application History											
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (as of 9/20/23)
New SF Residential (including Condos)	10	13	24	12	35	37	36	37	37	18	21
Residential Additions/Alterations	175	127	166	302	207	259	278	259	353	251	205
Commercial/Industrial new	2	1	2	2	1	1	3	2	5	2	1
Commercial/Industrial additions/alterations	19	15	18	18	14	12	13	28	32	12	18
Signs	34	39	50	52	22	17	14	17	13	13	8
Pools	5	10	6	1	3	9	4	22	20	23	9
Demolition	13	21	12	4	12	6	6	12	6	2	6
Septic Systems	48	92	58	40	53	56	71	69	93	62	39
Electrical	247	191	212	235	226	226	219	226	309	230	350
Electrical (for generator)			72	30	33	54	31	19	36	21	44
Plumbing	77	80	90	87	112	161	101	83	103	69	60
Mechanical	276	307	372	313	340	408	439	426	574	314	282
Home Occupations	4	3	6	8	2	4	3	7	2	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>910</b>	<b>899</b>	<b>1088</b>	<b>1104</b>	<b>1060</b>	<b>1250</b>	<b>1218</b>	<b>1207</b>	<b>1583</b>	<b>1018</b>	<b>1044</b>



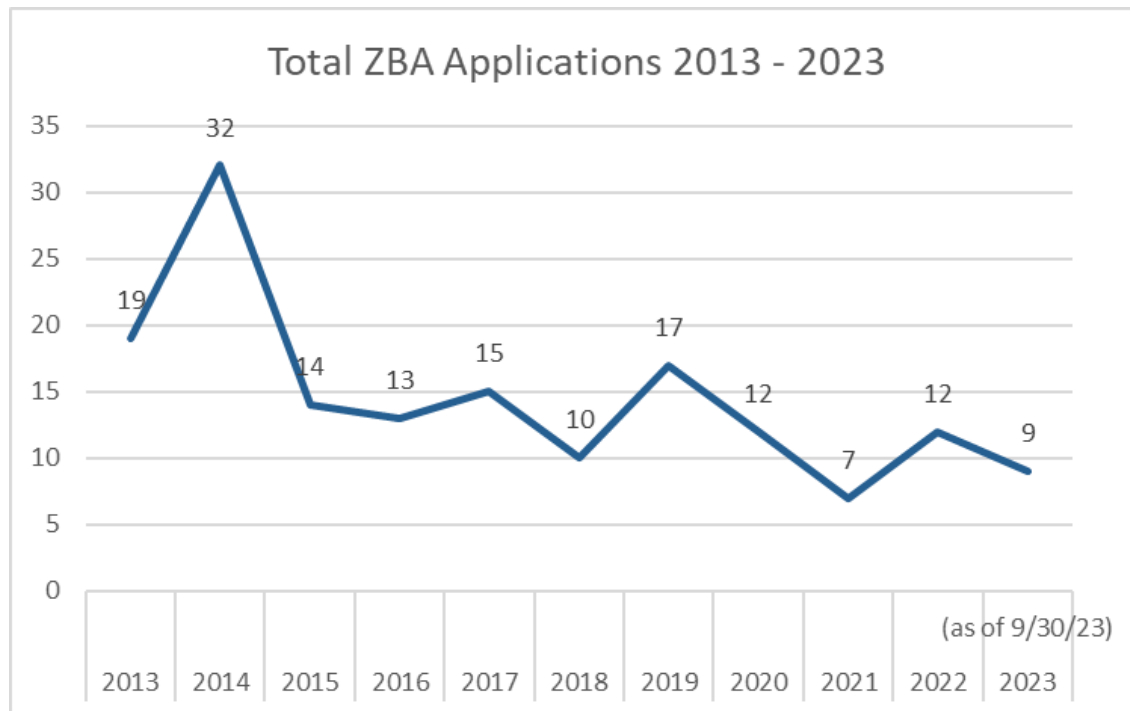
# PLANNING BOARD APPLICATIONS

Planning Board	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
											(as of 9/30/23)
Scenic Road Hearings	2	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	3	0	2
Non-Residential Site Plans (NRSP)	6	3	4	3	2	3	9	6	10	2	3
Subdivision	1	8	7	6	3	6	4	4	7	4	7
Lot Line Adjustment	1	4	2	0	0	0	4	1	3	2	3
Conceptual Discussions	4	2	2	2	8	9	3	1	6	5	4
Sign Master Plan	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
Compliance Hearing	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Conditional Use Permit	0	4	2	2	3	6	11	6	8	6	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>29</b>



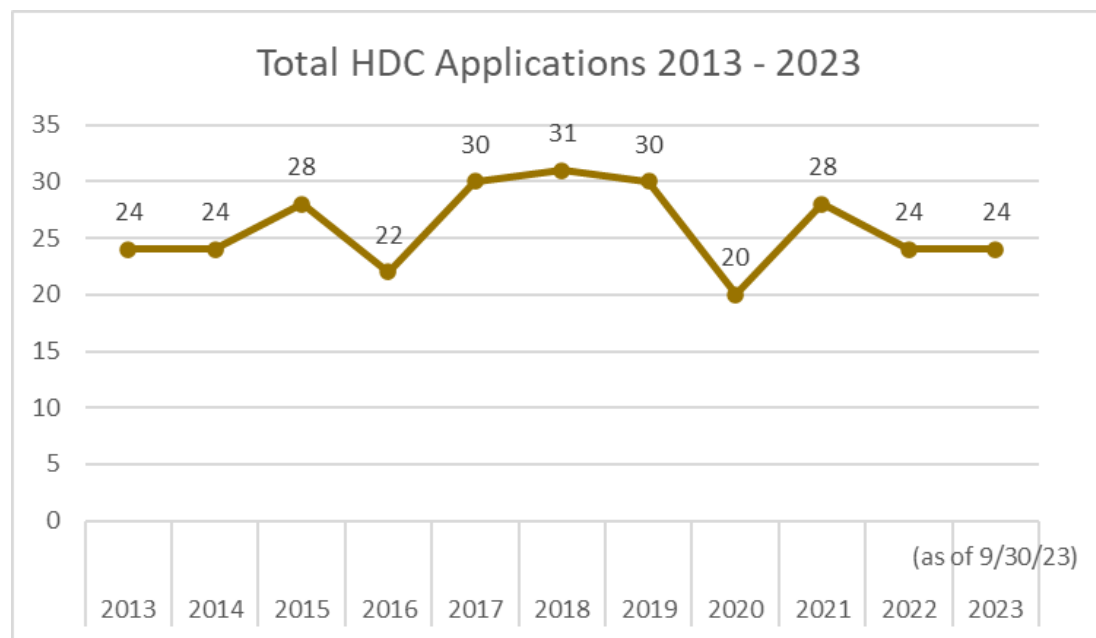
# ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT APPLICATIONS

Zoning Board of Adjustment	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
											(as of 9/30/23)
Variance	16	27	12	12	14	9	15	10	7	10	5
Special Exception	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Appeal of Administrative Decision	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	2
Equitable Waiver	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
Variance for the Handicapped	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Rehearing Request	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>



# HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION APPLICATIONS

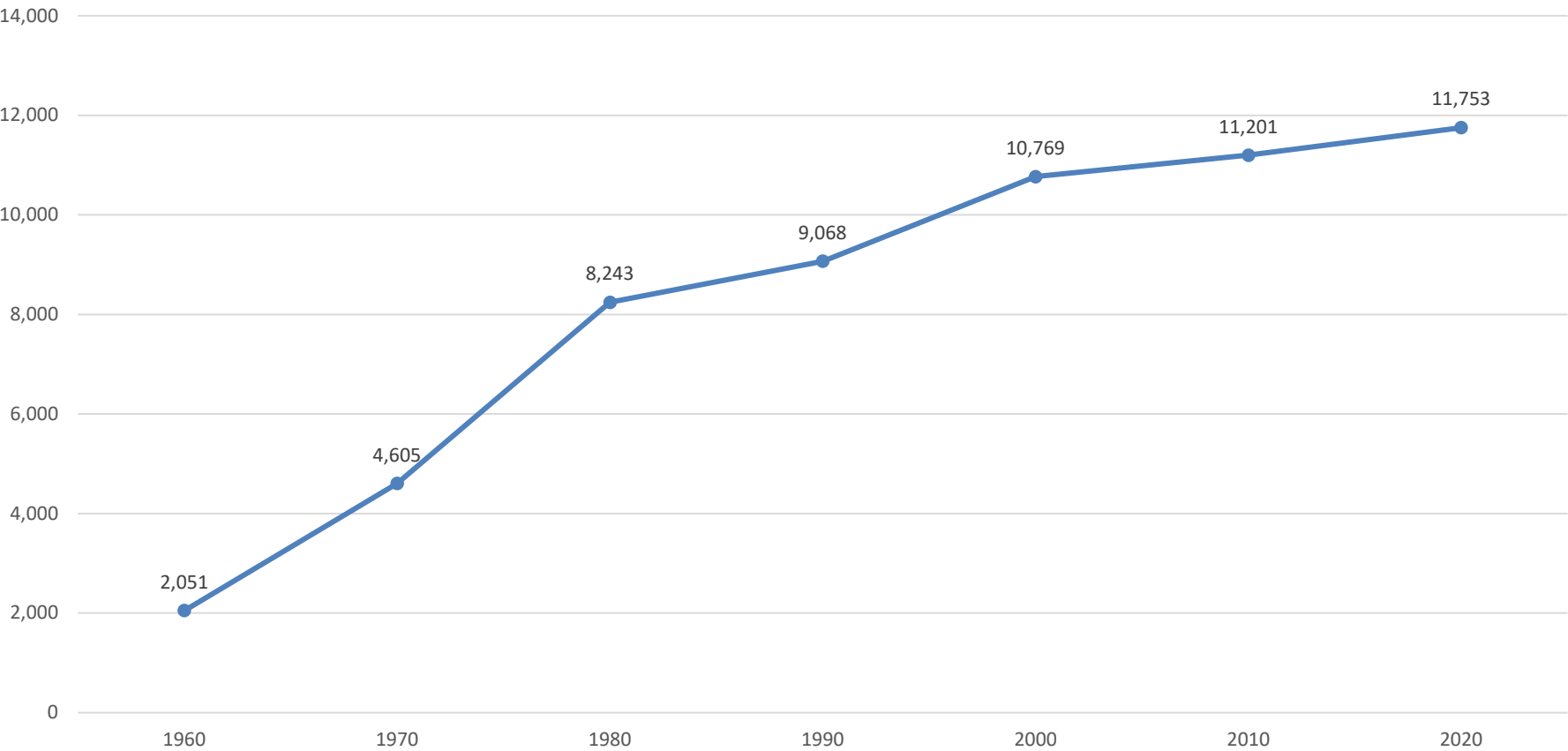
Historic District Commission	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
											(as of 9/30/23)
New Building	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Ext. Building Mods/Alterations	7	10	14	10	9	14	10	9	20	4	11
Building Additions	0	0	4	5	4	1	1	2	0	3	0
Tree Removal	11	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fence/Landscaping	2	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	3	4
Mechanical Equipment	2	3	3	1	2	2	2	3	5	6	3
Demolition	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Sheds/Accessory Structures	0	3	2	0	2	9	5	5	2	4	5
Other	0	3	4	4	13	4	2	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>





# POPULATION

Amherst Population



US Census

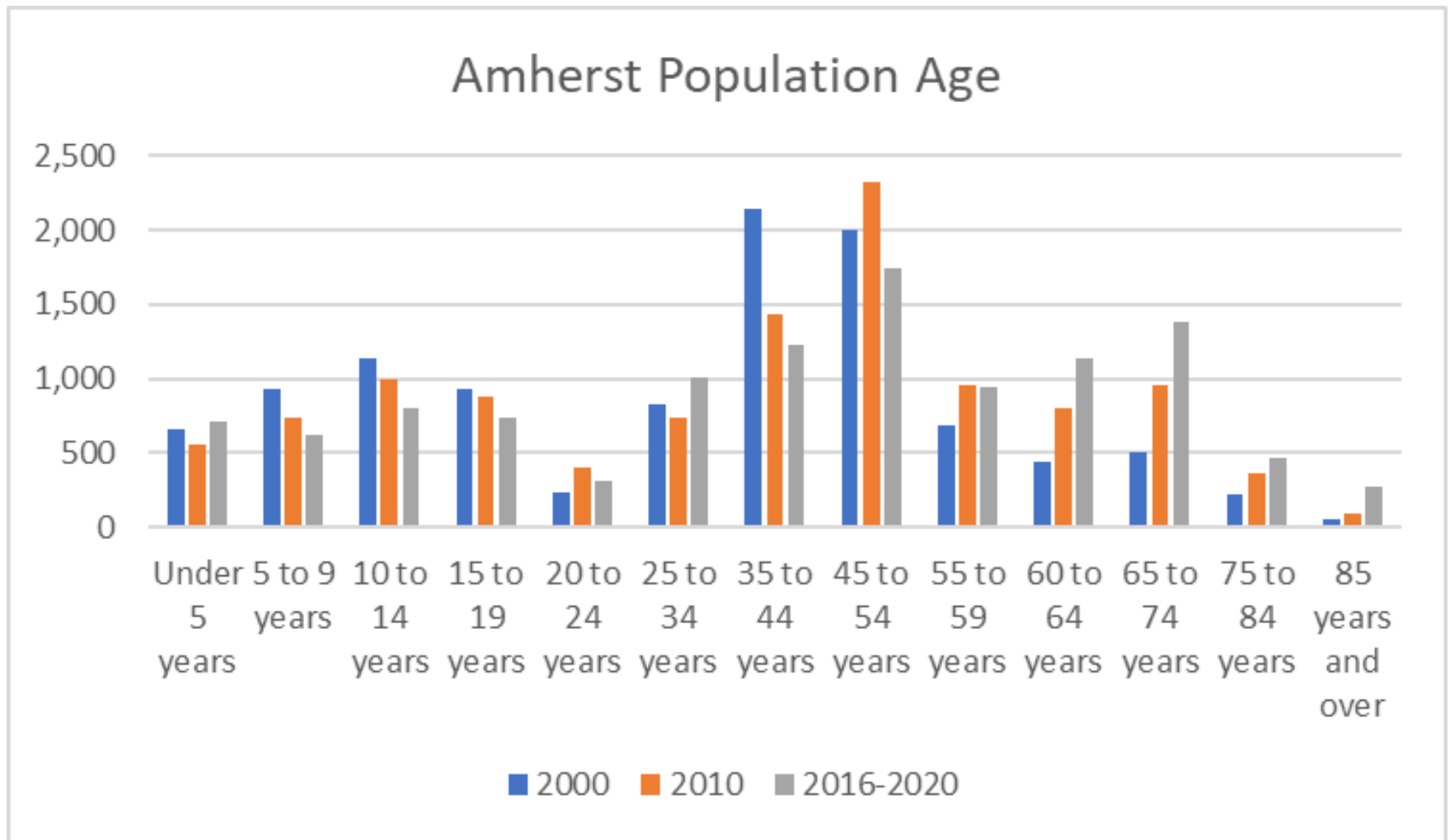


# 2020 Census

Community	2010 Population	2020 Population	Difference	% Change
Amherst	11201	11753	552	4.93
Brookline	4991	5639	648	12.98
Hollis	7684	8342	658	8.56
Hudson	24467	25394	927	3.79
Litchfield	8271	8478	207	2.5
Lyndeborough	1683	1702	19	1.13
Mason	1382	1448	66	4.78
Merrimack	25494	26632	1138	4.46
Milford	15115	16131	1016	6.72
Mont Vernon	2409	2584	175	7.26
Nashua	86494	91322	4828	5.58
Pelham	12897	14222	1325	10.27
Wilton	3677	3896	219	5.96
	205765	217543	11778	5.72

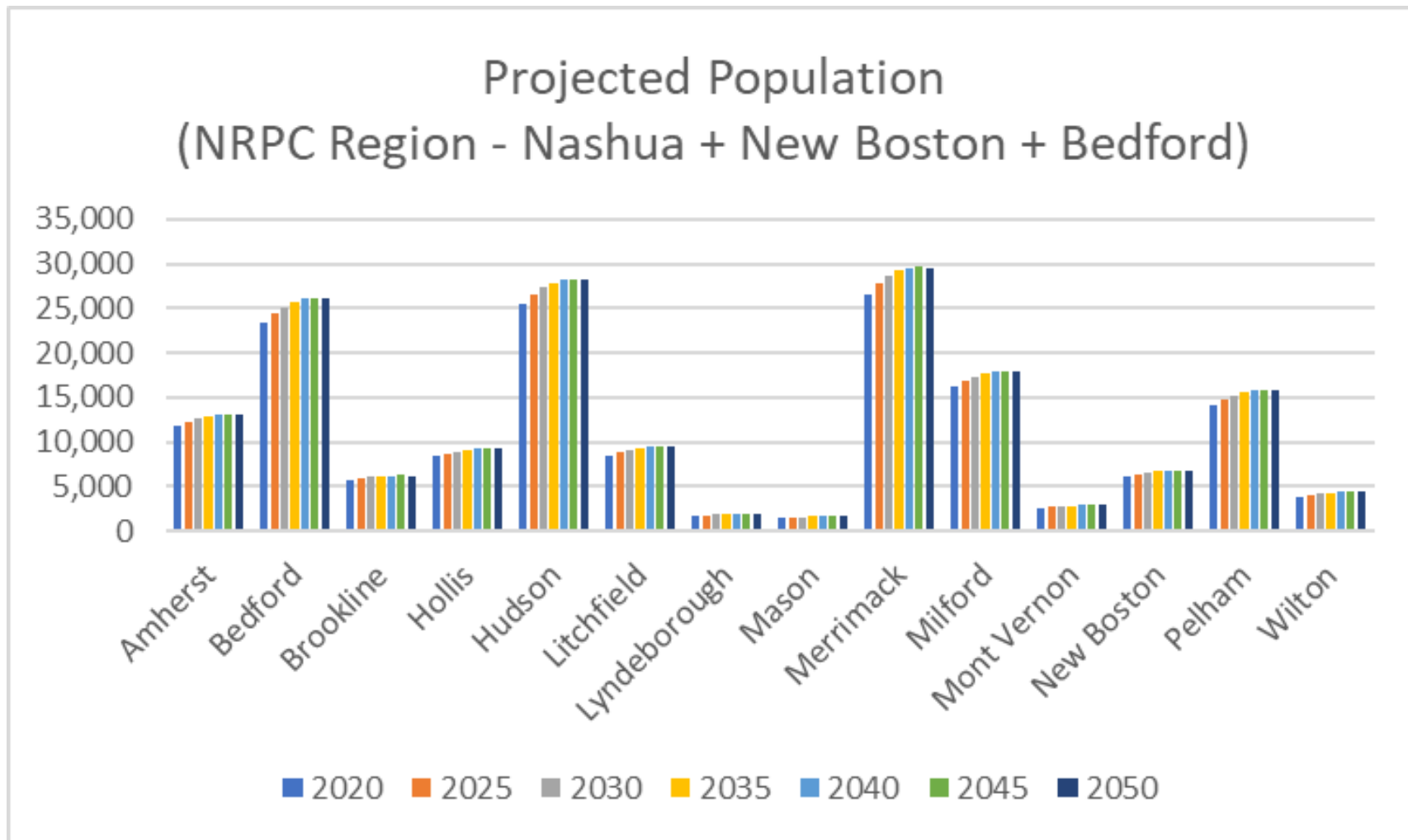


# AGE OF POPULATION





# PROJECTED POPULATION





# 2023 Achievements





# 2023 Achievements

- Master Plan adopted
- Regulatory audit underway with NRPC
- HDC Regulations updated & Rules of Procedure nearing completion
- Contract with NRPC for GIS services
- Contract with engineering consultant for MS4





# SWOT





# SWOT

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research skills and planning/zoning knowledge</li><li>• Customer service</li><li>• Responsive inspection scheduling</li><li>• Staff support to Boards and Commissions</li><li>• Online permitting</li><li>• (Inhouse plan review)</li><li>• One stop shop for building, fire, planning, zoning, historic district, heritage, conservation</li></ul>





# SWOT

Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staffing</li><li>• Regulations and ordinances in need of update</li><li>• Filing and accessibility of data; previous digitizing choices</li><li>• Space needs and office layout</li><li>• Lack of communication with the public about land use processes/application procedures/decisions</li><li>• (Inhouse plan review)</li></ul>





# SWOT

Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Master Plan update</li><li>• Use of internet/social media to increase public awareness and understanding of OCD function</li><li>• Outreach and engagement</li><li>• Proactive communication between Boards, Commissions and Departments</li><li>• SOP's/FAQ's to assist in staff transitions and answer questions</li><li>• Map of pending applications with links to details</li><li>• Review fee schedule to make sure reasonable but can help cover departmental costs</li><li>• (Inhouse plan review)</li></ul>





# SWOT

Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Legislative mandates</li><li>• Outdated Master Plan, ordinances and regulations not achieving desired development</li><li>• Boards and Commissions working individually</li><li>• Market driven development vs. desired tax base</li><li>• Changes in Board of Selectmen or Planning Board members</li><li>• Aging population</li><li>• Transportation / sprawl</li><li>• Lack of infrastructure for commercial / industrial development</li><li>• Neighboring communities competing for employees</li></ul>





# STAFFING





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STAFFING

- To maintain service standards and operational efficiency, the Office of Community Development requires four personnel: Community Development Director, Town Planner, Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer and Executive Assistant.
- Why is it difficult to attract candidates?
  - No State retirement system
  - Lower salaries than some towns
  - Lack of opportunities for advancement
  - Not as many different opportunities as larger municipalities
- Amherst will always be a training ground for planners who will go on to other roles – because of our size and lack of advancement possibilities.
- What do we have to offer? An historic district, more commercial development than some of our neighbors, possibilities to work with environmental planning, opportunities for a certain level of specialization after initial broad training.
- Being without a planner makes it possible only to keep up with the day to day, application-related tasks and much harder to focus on additional projects.





# 2023 Hiring Process

- Two hiring processes – March & August
- March – six applicants – two telephone interviews – one candidate lacked immediate availability and certain required skills; one withdrew because of lack of New Hampshire Retirement and low salary
- August – 11 applicants – two in-person interviews – neither candidate had all the required experience and skills (One candidate was surprised by the lack of New Hampshire Retirement and was already making more than the top of our salary range)



# 2023 Hiring Process

- At the time of the August hiring process, these were the Planner positions in direct competition

Community	Advertised Range	
Amherst	\$55,931	\$68,182
Dover, MA	\$91,103	\$115,547
Bolton, MA	\$76,523	\$99,840
Milford, NH *	\$65,000	\$72,000
Londonderry, NH *	\$75,810	\$99,177
Swanzey, NH		
Bedford, NH *	\$68,000	\$94,000
Winthrop, ME	\$60,000	\$80,000
Rochester, NH *	\$72,334	\$97,486
Concord, NH *	\$77,000	\$92,000
Conway, NH *		
Portsmouth, NH *	\$72,063	\$87,593
(* - New Hampshire Retirement System)		





# Current Status

- NRPC or KNA for assistance in short term
- Continue to evaluate salary and benefits to attract full time Town Planner





# SINGLE POINT OF FAILURE





- Our single point of failure is personnel related. The workload of the department is such that losing one employee creates extra work for the remaining staff and causes delays in some task completion.
- Town Planner retention –
  - Flexibility – telecommuting, days off in lieu of meeting time.
  - Training opportunities as they come up through OPD, NHMA, APA, NHPA, etc.
  - Opportunities to specialize – historic preservation / environmental planning / stormwater management, etc.
  - Possibility of working towards AICP.
  - Grant extra days off (within Town approved parameters).
  - Allow time for volunteer work (within Town approved parameters).





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## Goals for 2024/2025

- **Hire / Retain a Town Planner.**
- **Re-evaluate office space.**

Continue to work on space for a Town Planner and enough space for working, storing files and spreading out plans for review in the Town Hall.
- **Continue to provide transparent information to the public.**

Continue to upload documents and information to the website for public access re: land use board meetings. Evaluate ease of use and streamline upload procedures. Prepare an operating procedure to ensure that outdated materials are removed from the website.
- **Complete regulatory audit.**

Work on Zoning Ordinance and regulation updates based on audit results.





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Long-term projects
  - Filing system overhaul
  - Create SOPs and FAQs for Office of Community Development
  - Review fee schedules, application forms and checklists
  - Create a map of pending applications for the website with links to associated documentation
  - Improve outreach and engagement to the community
  - Investigate records management software
  - Review and update Land Use Boards Rules of Procedure and Regulations as needed
  - Continue to comply with MS4 requirements
  - Work on Master Plan initiatives as directed
  - Continue staff education and professional development
  - Consider enforcement improvements
  - Consider establishing Technical Review Committee





# BUDGET IMPACT





## BUDGET IMPACT

- Possible costs for space reorganization when it is finalized – furniture, use of Microtime for setting up work areas, etc.
- Hiring a planner – money already in budget – any slight increase for new planner can be absorbed from the money not spent while without one.





# DISCUSSION

