



**Amherst Village Center Strategic Plan
iTRaC Project
Scope of Work
July 17, 2014**

Project Overview

The Amherst village is a quintessential and picturesque New England town center. Beautiful homes surround extensive green spaces that are crisscrossed with old cow paths. These paths, once very practical, have long since evolved into paved roadways with confusing travel patterns. The Amherst Village Center Strategic Plan will utilize extensive public outreach to seek input from numerous groups, town boards, and residents in the vicinity of the town center. The input will be analyzed to identify the most pressing issues facing the center and prioritize strategies to address them.

Of particular interest is coordinating the various infrastructure projects planned for the village center, including sidewalk and roadway improvements and utility services. There is a need to identify current utility issues and access, as well as needs and plans for additional utility connections. In addition to infrastructure, we anticipate that topics such as historic character, parks and recreation, businesses, schools, and residential needs will also be addressed through the process.

Project Purpose and Goals

The project aims to achieve the following:

1. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of all issues associated with the Amherst village center.
2. Identify issues and needed improvements to vehicular travel, pedestrian and transportation patterns in the village.
3. Identify barriers and needed improvements to pedestrian travel in the village.
4. Identify strategies to maintain and enhance the historic nature and community character unique to Amherst's village center.
5. Develop a vision for the village and identify needed land use changes.
6. Address the current status and future needs of utilities in the village.
7. Develop recommendations for phased improvements.

Project Study Area

This project will focus on the Amherst village center. The primary study area will be the community center area (as provided from GRANIT – UNH data source) as well as the transportation connections through the village center and the adjacent area as shown on the attached map.

Project Committee

The project committee will be selected by and have oversight from the Amherst Board of Selectmen. The committee will have between 8-12 members representing the following groups:

- Board of Selectmen
- Planning Board
- Heritage Commission
- Historical Society
- School District
- Town Staff
- Businesses
- Parks and Recreation
- 2-3 residents, both from within and outside the study area

The Board of Selectmen will clarify the process, expectations and role of the committee members in writing.

NRPC Project Team

Camille Pattison, Principal Planner

Jen Czysz, Senior Planner

Mark Connors, Regional Planner

Sara Siskavich, GIS Manager

Kristina Sargent, Regional Planner

Task 1 – Public Outreach

Public outreach is always the most successful when local groups in town are willing to take the lead on specific events. The Board of Selectmen have committed to being active in forming the project committee, soliciting public participation and informing the community about the process. NRPC will develop brochures, maps and outreach materials for use in raising awareness about the project and to encourage public engagement.

NRPC recommends the following public outreach process:

1. The project committee members will conduct focus group meetings with groups such as:
 - Historical Society
 - Heritage Commission
 - Town Boards, Commissions and Committees
 - Village Center Residents / Businesses / Churches
 - Town Staff

NRPC and the committee will develop a standard list of questions. NRPC will provide facilitation training for committee members, as well as handouts and other resources as needed. Committee members will be responsible for scheduling and facilitating the focus groups and returning the results to NRPC for summarizing.

2. Town-wide electronic survey - NRPC and the committee will develop and finalize the survey questions in a collaborative effort. NRPC will use these questions to develop an electronic survey for distribution, and summarize the results.
3. The committee or town staff will develop a project page on the town website with social media updates, and provide regular updates to other media such as the Amherst Citizen and Amherst Today.
4. Large “open house” style event which will be marketed town-wide. This type of event can either be a kick-off event prior to the focus groups or a culminating event that delves deeper into issues identified through the focus groups. We recommend the latter for this project. The event consists of a series of topic stations such as utilities, sidewalks, historic character, recreation, etc. Each station provides information on existing conditions with a map and then poses a question designed to solicit public input. Each station will be staffed by a committee member or NRPC staff. NRPC will take the lead on developing maps and materials for this event. The committee will schedule the event and meeting space and advertise the event with materials provided by NRPC. NRPC will summarize all information collected at the open house.

Public outreach efforts will be a vital part of the project’s success. In addition, the Committee may want to consider utilizing the following outreach techniques: town festival; direct mailings; house meetings/meetings in a box; or a chocolate and wine event.

Task 2 – Document Review

NRPC will conduct a detailed review of all relevant documents provided by the committee in addition to the following documents:

- Town of Amherst Master Plan, 2012
- Amherst Non-Residential Site Plan Regulations
- Historic Plan
- NRPC Traffic Study

Task 3 – Identify Issues

After conducting the input meetings and document review, NRPC staff will develop a table of issues specific to the Amherst Village Center.

Task 4 – Develop Strategies

The issues will be discussed in detail with the project committee and strategies to address them will be brainstormed in a joint effort with the committee, town staff and NRPC staff. NRPC staff will work with the committee to prioritize the strategies utilizing an impact feasibility grid that results in a matrix of projects that range from high-impact, high-feasibility to low-impact, low-feasibility. As part of this process, town departments will be asked to provide cost estimates for infrastructure and other improvements.

Task 5 – Develop Recommendations and Implementation Schedule

A final report will summarize key findings from all of the public outreach efforts and the document review, and will identify the issues, strategies and barriers to implementation. The final report will include a comprehensive action plan that prioritizes projects, and provides a multi-year timeline to coordinate infrastructure improvements. An implementation matrix will identify key groups to lead initiatives, cost estimates and timeframes.

Major Timeline Milestones

Summer 2014 – Selectmen form Project Committee

September – November 2014 – Public Outreach, Town-wide Electronic Survey, Document Review, Focus Groups

January 2015 – Open House Event

February – March 2015 – Impact/Feasibility Analysis, Prioritize Issues

April – May 2015 – Develop Strategies with Cost Estimates

May – June 2015 – Develop Recommendations and Implementation Schedule

Budget

Committee Meetings and GIS \$1,450.00

Task 1 – Public Outreach \$6,750.00

- Brochure/Community Engagement Materials
- Focus Group Facilitation Materials and Training
- Summarizing focus group input
- Electronic Survey and Analysis
- Press releases, media updates
- Open House Event

Task 2 – Document Review \$775.00

- Review of all relevant reports and documents and summarize issues

Task 3 – Issue identification \$1,250.00

- Develop report of issues from document review and public input

Task 4 - Develop Strategies \$1,525.00

- Conduct Impact Feasibility Analysis with committee and prioritize

Task 5 – Recommendations and Implementation Schedule \$3,250.00

- Final Report and Action Plan

Project Total= \$15,000

NRPC iTRaC Program - \$10,000.00

Town of Amherst - \$5,000.00