

1 Approved Master Plan Steering Committee Minutes

2 8/17/20

3 Present:

4 D. Brew

5 T. Quinn

6 T. Katchmar

7 J. Ilsley

8 J. Hardner

9 T. Gauthier

10 W. Ludt

11 C. Yates

12 T. Adams

13 N. Kypfer

14 N. Strong

15 Start time – 7:02

16 D. Brew – Covid disclosure and roll call. T. Adams joined the meeting. The authority behind the
17 committee was discussed. This is a subcommittee of the Planning Board. (Master Plan Sub Committee)
18 MPSC is subject to right to know. Minutes must be taken. Questions? No questions from members
19 noted. No budget at the current time. Minutes volunteer requested. T. Quinn volunteered for this
20 meeting. Members of the committee were introduced and all were identified as to what constituencies
21 they represent. Goal is maximum public comment. This will be different than what is typical of
22 Planning Board (PB) or Select Board (SB) meetings. Public input should be allowed as much as possible.
23 OK for public to raise hand at any point and join in the conversation when reasonably possible. N.
24 Strong invited to discuss what a master plan is and the regulations involved.

25 N. Strong – presentation is an update of one presented last fall. Master Plan (MP) is a duty of the PB.
26 (RSA 673:1) First mentioned item in RSA is that “It shall be the duty of the PB to prepare and amend
27 MP.” PB is also responsible for promoting interest in the MP process and product. Purpose of MP is to
28 make a land use plan. MP is the vision of the town and should be used to amend ordinances and to
29 answer the question of “what type of development where in town”. Principles of smart growth, sound
30 planning and natural resource protection should be outcomes of the process. Sections of the MP need
31 to line up with the vision of the plan. Mandatory sections of MP are vision (wishes and desires),

32 including local and state, and land use plan. May consider a number of other issues as well. MPSC
33 members can utilize surveys, local and state data sets in the process. MP should be revised every five to
34 10 years. Nic recapped the requirements of the process and reviewed what exactly a MP is supposed to
35 do for the town. MP is a guide for development, CIP, zoning, regulations and town departments should
36 reference MP in their decision making processes. MP is NOT a legally binding document, not an
37 ordinance or regulation and not a strategic plan. (Strategic plans have a much shorter time horizon.)
38 Must have a MP to have a zoning ordinance. Why now? It has been 10 years. Zoning ordinance today
39 may not fit current MP. Used by community development, surveyors, engineers and other town
40 boards/commissions. Also helpful for others to learn about the town. Sections that people look at
41 include vision, existing land uses, history of Amherst, types of favored/un favored developments, areas
42 of natural constraints of development, demographics, the story of Amherst, places of interest,
43 actionable goals and objectives. Want the document to be understandable, interesting and up to date.
44 All sections to be based on public interest. Third parties (consultants) may be a part of developing the
45 MP. NS suggested themes may be better than chapters for this MP. NS suggested the following
46 themes: Rural character/quality of life, history/heritage, growth/development/design,
47 people/community and essential facilities/services. NS noted that in a prior discussion Mike Akillian
48 suggested a variation of the theme concept that asks larger questions. (See 25:00 on Vimeo for
49 examples of questions) NS noted existing plans and studies can be incorporated into the MP directly or
50 as appendices. (Plans available include conservation, multimodal, village, HDC plan and Heritage.)
51 Details should be relegated to appendix to keep the plan readable. Final product can be book form, web
52 format or summarized on posters around town. Initial step is public engagement. "Is this the right time
53 for this now?" Should be asked and answered first. COVID may make this project difficult. At the very
54 least this process will be different. The entire process should be transparent in any case. NRPC will be a
55 valuable resource for data. Land use maps will be created after data has been collected and a vision is
56 formed. (future land use) Last step is implementation. Questions?

57 D. Brew – Not sure everyone understands theme based plan. DB retracted his question and pointed out
58 that themes may allow for a more thorough examination of an issue compared with sticking with typical
59 chapters. Took a question from J. Hardner

60 J. Hardner - Thematic questions may help with data collection. Question – understand what plan is
61 supposed to do but there seems to be a disconnect between the plan and what is actually done. Wants
62 to avoid this here. Unclear as to mechanics. If we change zoning how is this not a taking?

63 D. Brew – For example changing zoning from 2 to 3 acres.

64 N. Strong – PB would need to prove a public benefit with the proposed zoning amendment. Would have
65 to conform with MP and be approved by voters.

66 J. Hardner – was there a disconnect between the current MP and the recent PB?

67 N. Strong – a certain portion of town felt the current MP was a bit boilerplate and too generic. It
68 became a document that was not often referenced by the PB.

69 D. Brew – MP should be implementable and realistic. Possible to have conflicting visions without
70 reconciling those. Ex. Promote preserving open space and allowing for a diversity of housing. A bad MP
71 can hurt the town. Question T. Quinn

72 T Quinn – how many themes are typical in a MP?

73 D. Brew – We have some thoughts and have put them out there. Most important thing is to go out to
74 the community and ask the questions. Several thoughts can be combined into a single theme. Won't
75 know how many until we speak to the community.

76 T. Quinn – Is Mike Akillian still involved?

77 D. Brew – Mike is happy to assist where it makes sense. Hopefully that is still the case. Question C. Yates

78 C. Yates – Been reviewing the MP and state resources. Good stuff in the MP. I'm a fan of the theme
79 based method. Better product. My two cents.

80 T. Katchmar – I like theme based as well. Important when going out to the public not to leave a blank
81 slate. Might be better to put 10 themes out there and narrow them down to five or so. Before COVID
82 there was a lot of town involvement in these matters due to several large developments. Now is
83 probably a good time. Delay could result in losing town interest.

84 D. Brew – Three more public attendees. Raise your hand if you want to speak.

85 C. Yates – Do we want to start thinking about putting together some electronic surveys?

86 D. Brew – (Shares his slide presentation again) Brings up topics for next meeting slide. Slide refers to
87 how to start the process. When and what to communicate to the community, what info do we want to
88 solicit and what ways do we want to get this info. Now is not a good time for in person meetings.
89 (Survey monkey, zoom meetings, etc) Roundtable discussion begins.

90 J. Ilsley – Likes theme idea as well. First thing to do is craft a survey off of those themes. Warns against
91 a purely electronic format. Problem with elderly especially. Needs to be multimedia to reach everyone.
92 Expensive to mail to everyone – maybe \$5000. Do we have that?

93 D. Brew – No. Let me backtrack. We don't want to keep going back to ask for money. One other thing
94 we have done in the past is to use the free newspaper. Contracted with them in the past to distribute
95 voting guide. Still a few thousand dollars. Mail still may have some benefits as a standalone item.
96 Agreed that electronic only will miss people. Maybe we can put information in local stores or mail out
97 with tax bills. Now is a good time to talk about subcommittees. Maybe based on themes. Another one
98 we might want is a communication subcommittee. Any that are spun off are subject to same rules as
99 main committee.

100 J. Ilsley – Would the moderator entertain a booth at the elections as long as we are away from the
101 building?

102 D. Brew – Jared, has ACC done anything in the building in past elections?

103 J. Ilsley – probably wouldn't be allowed in the building.

104 J. Hardner – ACC has not but Bike Ped did.

105 D. Brew – they were outside. That could be a way. We have one coming up in Sept.

106 W. Ludt – Tues the 8th

107 D. Brew – May be 1000 for the Sept one. Maybe not with mail in voting. 1200 normal thought. 6-7K in
108 the November election. Does it make sense to start the communication committee now? Any
109 volunteers? Maybe two people to give some thought as to what the subcommittee should do? Chris,
110 Tim, Tom and Joe volunteered.

111 T. Quinn – May be a good idea to decide if this is in fact possible first.

112 C. Yates – The subcommittee could provide a recommendation on that.

113 T. Quinn – We should also think about money that may be needed.

114 C. Yates – We do need to consider a multimodal outreach.

115 J. Ilsley – Upfront work is important. Questions should be based on themes. Tax bill mailing is a good
116 idea. Heavy lifting is getting the input up front. May avoid problems down the line with the community
117 and the revised master plan.

118 T. Quinn – Any concerns sending a survey with a tax bill considering many aren't too happy getting a tax
119 bill?

120 D. Brew – That's reasonable. Nic, is it possible to get the Comm. Committee in contact with each other.

121 N. Strong – Yes

122 W. Brew – Can you check with Dean and Gail whether it is legal to send information? (with tax bills)

123 N. Strong – I can ask.

124 T. Quinn – Was the paper you were referring to the Amherst Citizen?

125 D. Brew – You are right, they went digital only. Scratch that. We will have to do something new with
126 the voter guide too. Any other thoughts? None noted. The last thing on my list is the next meeting
127 time.

128 T. Adams – Nic, are there any other towns we can look at that are similar to our town?

129 D. Brew – Nic has a large list of towns

130 T. Adams – I was looking for a small more targeted list of similar towns using themes.

131 N. Strong – I asked a number of towns via listserv who is proud of their master plan and only heard back
132 from Dover. Everyone seems to have a mixed feeling about their master plan. Everyone seems excited
133 to start and over time enthusiasm wanes.

134 J. Hardner – lets go to step zero and ask how do we keep this from happening to us? We seem to be
135 starting with data collection but maybe we should ask how this can be impactful.

136 J. Ilsley – Those that were upset with the current plan, are they upset with the MP itself or how it was or
137 was not executed? This all started with high density housing being developed.

138 J. Hardner – Where is the problem?

139 J. Ilsley – In the town I work in they hired out UNH to survey. Survey drove to specific topics and offered
140 little clarity. Hiring out the process results in a cookie cutter plan.

141 J. Hardner – Consensus around thematic approach? Maybe limit to three themes? Focus should be on
142 themes and nail it.

143 C. Yates – can you turn on the chat function?

144 N. Strong – Not now.

145 C. Yates – I had a link I wanted to share.

146 D. Brew – Let’s send our slides out as well at the same time.

147 W. Ludt – Last week at our Heritage meeting we had reps from NH Division of Historical Resources come
148 in. They go to all 23 Certified Local Governments of which Amherst is one. Talked to them about theme
149 based approaches. Asked them about problems with getting grants. I am concerned. They said it
150 shouldn’t be too hard to work with a theme based plan with respect to grants. It did not seem like there
151 are a lot of theme based plans out there. Just a point of reference. I agree with Jared about nailing
152 down themes. Don’t want to change the themes as we go along.

153 D. Brew – I kind of thought communication subcommittee were going to look at this? We have eight
154 themes so far – four from Nic and four from Mike Akillian. There is some overlap. We might want to
155 narrow these down. Chris, Tom, Joe and Tim – is this reasonable? Can you winnow these down for our
156 next meeting?

157 (sub committee agreed)

158 N. Strong – Discussion about meeting dates. Decided that next meetings will be 9/11/20 at 2PM and
159 9/22/20 at 6:30PM.

160 D. Brew – Motion to adjourn. Seconded. Meeting adjourned 8:04PM.

161 Minutes approved: July 19, 2021