

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Master Plan Steering Committee

June 20, 2022

**APPROVED**

In attendance: Tracie Adams - Chair, Danielle Pray – Board of Selectmen – Ex-Officio, Tim Kachmar, Will Ludt, Chris Yates, Jared Hardner.  
Staff in attendance: Nic Strong, Community Development Director, Nicole Stevens, Town Planner; and Kristan Patenaude – Recording Secretary (remote)  
Also in attendance: Steve Whitman, and Zak Brohinsky (remote), Resilience Planning & Design.

**1. Call to Order**

Tracie Adams called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and introduced the members. She noted that there are members of the community this evening wishing to speak, and she asked them to do so at this time.

Barbara Dalton, 14 Summerfield Way, stated that she is interested in becoming more involved with the Town. She has read some of the past meeting minutes for the Committee and noted that there was concern with how to inform residents. She suggested that information be included in the tax bills sent to residents or given to new people as they enter Town. She suggested that there be an email list for people when volunteers are needed on different committees/boards. She noted that the height allowance for buildings in some parts of Town can be up to 80' tall. She asked if something can be altered in the Master Plan to decrease this allowance.

David Sutherland, 32 Peacock Brook Lane, expressed concern regarding some shooting of a 9mm firearm that recently occurred across the street from his house. He reached out to the Police Department and was told that nothing can be done because there is no noise ordinance in Town. He believes there should be restrictions in Town for light, height, and especially noise.

Will Ludt noted that he and his wife have been trying to get a noise ordinance addressed in Town for a number of years. They have a hard time sitting in their backyard in the Village due to noise from traffic. An ordinance change would need to be voted at Town Meeting.

Danielle Pray noted that Town Counsel has indicated that gun use is regulated by the State, and, thus, a noise ordinance would not be able to restrict gun use in Town.

Deb Keough, 16 Summerfield Way, stated that she is willing to help with planning in Town. She would like to see something put in place so that residential and commercial/industrial zoned parcels cannot be placed next to each other. She is interested in responsible development. She suggested a "Respect Your Neighbor" Act. She explained that the recent Bon Terrain warehouse proposal would have ruined her life. This is unacceptable for any resident to put up with because the Town is supposed to protect them from harm. Size, light, and noise of buildings ought to be regulated to fit better with the Town. The area for the proposed warehouse is a highly valued habitat area for species and the proposal would have ruined this. She would like to see something addressed in the Master Plan regarding a potential noise ordinance.

Christine Bagley, Summerfield Way, stated that she found the recent warehouse proposal to be eye-opening. She stated that southern New Hampshire is becoming very developed and while she understands that business is necessary, she believes the Town needs to have more strict zoning to

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protect the rural nature of the Town. This will allow people to enjoy clean water, open spaces, woods, and trails. Amherst could become the next Massachusetts or New York without more protective zoning laws.

Will Ludt suggested that the residents present at the meeting attend the next Planning Board meeting en masse. Chris Yates stated that, as many of the residents brought up zoning items, it would be useful for them to also attend a Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) meeting. Danielle Pray stated that most of the items mentioned fall under the Planning Board's responsibility. Nic Strong noted that the ZBA is an appeals board and does not entertain discussions regarding potential zoning amendments. She asked that residents not show up to a Planning Board meeting en masse without an appointment to do so, as the Board generally has a full agenda of applications. A discussion with residents could be scheduled on a future Planning Board agenda.

Tracie Adams noted that Committee members present tonight represent many different boards and committees in Town, so the residents are being heard by all of those representatives this evening. She also noted that the Committee does care about the rural nature and conservation of the Town. The Master Plan process is being advanced with those items in mind.

Paul Philp, 1 Beacon Lane, stated that he has reviewed some of Amherst's ordinances and believes that those regarding noise, light, and pollution seem to be very out of date. He suggested looking at ordinances from other parts of the country. He is happy to sit on any board/committee to help look at updating ordinances.

Tom Kachmar noted that there are many open positions on boards/committees in Town and asked those interested in getting more involved to consider volunteering on those boards.

Tracie Adams noted that all draft documents being discussed by the Committee are available through the Town website. There will also be a chance for public comment on the draft Master Plan document in September. This will be advertised through the website. The Town is still trying to find more ways to inform residents.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Nic Strong stated that there are sometimes grant opportunities available for municipalities to help with items such as updating ordinances. She is unclear if there are any grants of this type available at this time. Steve Whitman stated that these grants are usually focused on singular planning topics such as water resources or housing.

Christine Bagley asked if there is an ordinance regarding how many feet there can be between a residential and industrial building. Tracie Adams stated that she is unsure of this item. Christine Bagley stated that this should be considered and explained that a neighbor had bullet holes through her door years ago, even though the house sits at a distance where this should not be a problem. There was great concern in the neighborhood when this happened. She noted that most of the laws on the books do not take into account the high-powered firearms that now exist. She also stated that she spoke with the NRPC Air Quality Director regarding the warehouse situation on Bon Terrain. It was stated to her that southern New Hampshire, as recently as 15-18 years

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ago, did not meet the standards for air quality. These standards only started to be met approximately 7 years ago. Christine Bagley wonders how close to the standard the area is now. She noted that she does not want to see unhealthy business come into Amherst, such as proposed by the Bon Terrain warehouse.

Chris Buchanan, Chair of the Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), updated the Committee that there is currently approximately \$1.7M of possible funding available to Amherst within the next year through federal grants. He explained that each time a grant application is submitted for federal or state funding, it must include sections of the Town's Master Plan which can be used to justify the proposed project. This is a requirement of every grant he has submitted for the Town in the past 2-3 years. Currently, the Town's Master Plan provides language regarding the infrastructure improvements recommended in the Multimodal Master Plan. There is a role that this Committee plays in terms of influencing grant funding opportunities for the Town. It is essential that similar language continues to exist in the updated Master Plan. There is a current grant opportunity, due in September, for a minimum \$5M infrastructure budget for a project that aligns specifically with the Village streets project in Town, for which a recent engineering study was voted forward at the last Town Meeting. This will require language in the Master Plan to be supportive. He emphasized that language from the Multimodal Master Plan is essential to be included in the Master Plan in order to make these funding opportunities viable.

Jared Hardner asked Chris Buchanan to inform the Committee regarding the Multimodal Master Plan.

Chris Buchanan explained that the BPAC was created in 2017 with a mission to assess what residents are looking for in terms of infrastructure improvements. A public survey was conducted and 500 people participated. There were also seven public meetings held over a yearlong span with very robust participation. This was aggregated into a charter for the BPAC. A research component took place for one year and he was the primary author of the Multimodal Master Plan. This included data from the Federal Highway Administration, the AASHTO Green Book, and the Small Town and Rural Multimodal Network Guide, published by the Federal Highway Administration in 2016. There is specific guidance for making rural infrastructure work. Designs catering to rural audiences and sanctioned by the Federal Highway Administration were included. The Multimodal Master Plan uses physics to design safety-based infrastructure for all users, creating paths throughout Town either in the woods or along the roads. There are specific rural designs to be utilized. This Plan went through the BPAC, Planning Board, and ultimately the Board of Selectmen, where it was accepted in July 2019. He noted that the Master Plan Steering Committee's very well responded to public survey found that 84% of the Town agrees with continuing to make safe multimodal paths through the Town.

Jared Hardner noted that Chris Buchanan has an upfront view as to what happens when there are unsafe streets. Chris Buchanan noted that he does not even own a bike, but as a member of the Fire Department, has had 15 years of responding to calls for those hurt from unsafe streets. He stated that he will submit exact language to the Committee that he believes should be included in the Master Plan in order for the Town to remain eligible for grant funding.

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Tim Kachmar asked if Chris Buchanan can also submit pictures of the different multimodal options available depending on the area of Town. He stated that he doesn't believe the options will be moved forward if they all look like the sidepath which was installed on Amherst Street. Nice bike lanes or paths through the roads would match the rural character of this Town.

Chris Buchanan explained that the technique used on Amherst Street is only appropriate for high volume roads and was installed there as this is the highest volume road in Town. This technique would not be appropriate for neighborhood streets or most of the other roads in Town. The Multimodal Master Plan has designs from the Small Town and Rural Multimodal Network Guide which has graphics showing the other treatments.

Jared Hardner explained that Chris Buchanan taught him about painting lines on roads and how it makes the roads less safe. This sets people in "highway mode" instead of "country lane road" and they become less aware of what's going on around them and tend to drive faster. This was confirmed by the Police Chief. There are rural and urban applications that can be used. Chris Buchanan agreed that the data shows that people drive, on average, 5-8 mph faster on roads that are striped.

Chris Yates asked if there has been communication with the Police Chief, DPW, and Board of Selectmen regarding removing lines from some of the more rural roads in Town. Chris Buchanan explained that implementation of concepts from the Multimodal Master Plan are currently being discussed within those groups. Implementing a complete streets policy means that each time a road is reconstructed, that is the time to audit how it will be remade and which techniques can be included. It is 60% cheaper to implement these techniques during the time of road reconstruction. It is an incremental project. The adoption of these types of policies is what is being discussed. The directive to paint lines on Town roads comes from the Board of Selectmen, with the guidance of the Highway Safety Committee. This has been discussed in terms of specific roads, but there has not been a Town-wide vision yet put in place. The Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices has specific guidance as to whether or not roads should be painted. Lines started to be painted all over Town approximately 20 years ago which may or may not be within this guidance. The criteria is 6,000 cars per day.

Tracie Adams thanked the public for their participation, noting that it was 45 minutes well spent. She moved into the regularly scheduled portion of the meeting.

## **2. Update on Master Plan with RP&D**

### **• Review and discussion of the Draft Master Plan sections**

- Formatted draft of Introduction and first two themes**
- Draft text of theme three and questions/discussion**

Steve Whitman stated that the Committee last reviewed the buildout analysis and alternate scenarios with NRPC. This allowed the Master Plan to be informed via the Land Use Plan. The major actions for the first two themes, heritage and infrastructure, were also reviewed. He sent

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the Committee the first draft of a formatted introduction, the first two themes, and a draft of the third theme. He would like the Committee to have more discussion on the third theme before moving forward with it. Steve Whitman stated that he was happy to take edits and comments this evening or for the Committee to take the next few weeks to review the documents and suggest additional edits.

Tracie Adams stated that the hope is to bring draft documents to the Planning Board for review at its second meeting in August. Jared Hardner asked what the timeline would be for the review. Steve Whitman stated that he would like to receive any comments by July 11<sup>th</sup>. The documents would be revised for review at the next Committee meeting on July 26<sup>th</sup>. Then the draft would be ready to go to the Planning Board.

The next Steering Committee meeting is Tuesday, July 26<sup>th</sup>. Tracie Adams noted that Sara Siskavich and Ryan Friedman of NRPC attended the last Planning Board meeting to review the buildout analysis results.

Chris Yates asked that the NH Housing Analysis, recently distributed by Nic Strong to the Planning Board and others, be sent to Steve Whitman, as the data may help inform the form-based code and design standards section of the third theme.

Jared Hardner made the following suggested corrections:

- Page 13, to read: “91% of respondents believe that conserving natural resources was the highest or a high priority for the Town.”
- Page 14, last paragraph, the aquifer should be noted to be an essential Town resource and that it is the highest ranked public water resource in the State.
- Page 15: change the term “flood holding capacity,” to “flood storage capacity.”
- Page 23: change the word to “premature.” Steve Whitman explained that this is in regard to the RSAs and how Planning Boards operate. ‘Scattered and premature’ development is to be discouraged, as this is in areas where the infrastructure cannot yet support the proposed development.
- Page 27: the BPAC is a subcommittee of the Board of Selectmen; this section should also include the language and graphics which will be submitted by Chris Buchanan.

The Committee agreed with adding a hyperlink to the Multimodal Master Plan into the document and that the plan itself could be an appendix to the Master Plan.

Jared Hardner pointed out that the school expansion proposition that is called out in the draft did not pass so this wording should be reviewed. Chris Yates asked if the school boards have provided their visions to the Town for inclusion. Steve Whitman stated that part of a strategic plan from the schools was submitted along with some data.

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The Committee discussed and agreed to remove the last paragraph on Page 29 regarding the schools and hyperlink to the school website itself. Chris Yates stated that he would like to link to the school's vision, but this information has not yet been provided and is not available on their website. Will Ludt stated that he believes this may be available on the Joint Facilities Advisory Committee (JFAC). Chris Yates stated that he would like a statement from the overarching school board organization.

Tracie Adams stated that she likes how the draft document is shaping up. She enjoys the photos and colors that have been added.

• **Next steps:**

- **Committee member edits submitted**
- **Complete writing and formatting**
- **Organize implementation actions**
- **Review next draft July 26<sup>th</sup>**

Steve Whitman explained that this plan will allow the Planning Board to look at the vision and land use regulations to determine which ones will not help reach that vision. Enough direction needs to be provided in order to allow the Planning Board to do so, without being overly specific. Thus, the housing section could include information such as where mixed-use housing/multifamily and commercial housing could best be located near each other in Town.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Steve Whitman stated that the heritage section of the document is found within the first theme, starting on Page 11.

Chris Yates stated that the public has difficulty looking at the potential tradeoffs to balance landowner rights. In the changing political environment, the State is pushing down to allow a lot in terms of building. There needs to be a balance within the ordinances to allow people/developers to do what they'd like on their land within reason. He noted that there has only been one workforce housing project developed in Town over the last number of years and, through knowing people who live there, it is not actually priced to be workforce housing. The State has a guide it recently put out that explains how the developer can lay out costs of workforce housing in order to turn a profit.

Tim Kachmar stated that he isn't sure this type of housing is possible to build based on the cost of housing materials. Chris Yates stated that these have recently dropped slightly.

Chris Yates stated that he is a proponent of housing standards and designs for Planned Residential Developments. He is also a fan of sidewalks to be proposed as part of new developments. Tim Kachmar stated that he is in favor of sidewalks where appropriate. Chris Yates stated that everywhere outside of this area that he's been to has sidewalks as part of new subdivisions to allow people to walk and access other areas.

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Steve Whitman stated that the Committee is looking to create housing opportunities for new and existing residents into the future which will require regulations that both developers will buy into and which will create units that fit in Amherst.

Tim Kachmar stated that he did not like the idea of promoting duplexes and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) on every piece of property in Amherst, and he would highly suggest that the Town not go that route if it wants to be kept the way it is. Using language regarding suitable development for residential zoning to be enforced is important.

Chris Yates stated that, without structured ordinances, there is little strength for the Planning Board to say no to certain proposed developments, without pushback from the emergency services departments, DPW, or the Conservation Commission. Water studies and information from other committees makes it easier to deny certain types of developments legally.

Will Ludt asked about the discrete things he proposed to preserve the historic character of Town, such as a metal detecting ordinance. Steve Whitman stated that most of these things are in the Implementation chapter and also contained within the Existing Conditions profiles which will be in the Appendix.

Steve Whitman asked that all proposed amendments be sent to Nic Strong by July 11, 2022.

Will Ludt asked about including a GIS map for heritage locations in Town in the draft similar to the aquifer map on Page 18. Steve Whitman stated that he believes something similar is in the Existing Conditions section, but he will see if something additionally can be worked in.

Steve Whitman asked the Committee to send in all comments whether they were with regard to content or formatting such as color or graphics. He said that if the Committee saw a place that they thought could use a photo or graphic, to point that out.

**3. Distribution of Build Out Analysis Final Report from NRPC**

**4. Approval of minutes of May 24, 2022**

**Chris Yates moved to approve the meeting minutes of May 24, 2022, as presented.  
Seconded by Tim Kachmar.**

**Voting: 4-0-2; motion carried (J. Hardner, W. Ludt abstained).**

**The voting on the April 26, 2022, minutes was postponed due to lack of a quorum on that item.**

**The voting on the February 14, 2022, minutes was postponed due to lack of a quorum on that item.**

**5. Old / New business**

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305 None at this time.

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307 **Tim Kachmar moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:04pm. Seconded by Chris Yates.**

308 **Voting: 6-0-0; motion carried unanimously.**

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312 *Respectfully submitted,*

313 *Kristan Patenaude*

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315 Minutes approved: July 26, 2022