

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Master Plan Steering Committee

July 26, 2022

**APPROVED**

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

**1. Call to Order**

Tracie Adams called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and introduced the members. The Committee will be reviewing the draft Master Plan this evening in its entirety. She thanked the team from Resilience Planning & Design, and Nic Strong. She introduced the committee members present and noted that this has been a team effort and she appreciated what everyone has done.

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

- Review and discussion of the Draft Master Plan sections
- Identify changes that must be made prior to Planning Board Review
- Timeline for distribution of Draft Master Plan to Planning Board
- Discuss presentation/discussion at August PB Meeting and how to gather feedback
- Next steps

Steve Whitman explained that this will remain a draft until the public hearing process has been completed and it has been formally adopted by the Town. He noted that there has been another round of edits completed by Committee members, Nic Strong, and Chris Buchanan, Chair of the Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC).

Steve Whitman noted that he spoke with Tom Gauthier regarding comments from SAU39. He has reviewed the SAU's Joint Facilities Advisory Committee website. Information from the website can be added and referenced in the Master Plan. The Committee explained that it has been requesting information from the schools throughout the Master Plan update process and has not received much information back. The wording needs to be tailored to this. Chris Yates noted that some of the language in the existing conditions profile about the school bond should be changed because although it was accurate at the time the profile was written, it is confusing now because the bond did not pass. Steve Whitman stated he would review this and it may be best to pull that language.

The Committee discussed the broadband section of the Master Plan. Tim Kachmar suggested that the Plan be left vague regarding this item. Steve Whitman explained that there is an action item regarding how to monitor telecommunications in Town to make sure the Town is staying up to date. It was noted that something regarding cellular items in Town can be noted in the same section on Page 31.

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Will Ludt stated that the map on Page 22 is missing some data. Steve Whitman stated that additional data points would need to be provided in order to update that, as they were not included in the existing conditions.

Will Ludt asked about form-based codes. Danielle Pray agreed that this should potentially be removed, as it has not been discussed by the Town and it would be a complete departure. Steve Whitman stated that a form-based code simplifies the development process and is added in as an action item. The focus is on design-focused future development, instead of only focusing on the use of a building. Chris Yates stated that this could be explored by a subcommittee in the future as a potential.

Danielle Pray stated that the language on Page 43 should definitely be more neutral. Steve Whitman stated that he had already rolled the language back to suggest that the possibility be investigated rather than it should actually happen. Danielle Pray reiterated that it was a complete departure and Tracie Adams said it was far from what was currently in place. Steve Whitman noted that just because something was different did not mean it was bad. He noted that the existing zoning was cumbersome, and a form-based code could clarify that. He thought that if the language was changed, it might need to be pulled from the implementation matrix. Chris Yates thought that the language should be more exploratory. Danielle Pray stated that she looked at the older Master Plan and there were many things in that plan that had not come to fruition. Tim Kachmar agreed that the language should be kept broad. Steve Whitman said that a regulatory audit was a suggested action item. He noted that he would remove the sentence regarding form-based codes and the explanatory box from Page 37.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Steve Whitman stated that Dover, Lancaster, Stratham, Exeter, Concord and Portsmouth were some NH communities that had enacted form-based codes for some areas of their towns.

Chris Yates asked Danielle Pray if a form-based code could be something for the Planning Board to explore in the future. Danielle Pray stated that it would be part of a larger discussion on many different alternative types of zoning. Steve Whitman stated the language regarding form-based codes could be changed to "...use of alternative types of zoning, such as form-based codes," and information could be added on transition zones instead of the box further explaining form-based codes. Danielle Pray stated that there was lots of work to be done on the Town's ordinances and regulations.

Will Ludt suggested that the maps of the Economic Revitalization Zones on pages 38 and 39 be made on larger paper to fold out so they are easier to read. Steve Whitman said that the orientation could be changed

In response to a question from Danielle Pray, Steve Whitman stated that the Town already reupped its Economic Revitalization Zones (ERZs) once before. Danielle Pray suggested that the next time they are reviewed the Town should evaluate their benefits. Steve Whitman stated that a regulation audit could bring deficiencies to light that would be addressed by zoning changes that

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could render the ERZs unnecessary. The Town can consider removing these and stick with new zoning changes, as they are made.

It was confirmed that information on metal detecting is included in the Plan.

Tim Kachmar stated that, on Page 8, he would like to see the sentence, "...an effort to shift away from largely automobile dependent transportation network that exists today," removed. This is not at all accurate and cannot be done in a rural town, such as this one. It can be a desire to bike around Town or create a monorail system, but this should not be included in the Master Plan. Chris Yates suggested that the wording be "...an effort to incorporate other transportation options...." Steve Whitman stated that this will still match with what Chris Buchanan has suggested be included. Danielle Pray asked if this wording will be specific enough. She noted that she, Will Ludt, and Chris Buchanan are working on a submission to NRPC regarding the Greenway to Bedford along the Rail Trail to make sure it is a priority. The wording needs to support the BPAC efforts. Steve Whitman stated that support comes in the Introduction section, Transportation section, an action on a Complete Streets Policy, and in the Appendix section. This will give the BPAC places to reference in terms of any grant applications.

Tim Kachmar questioned the statement on page 9, "Amherst is a Town that people of all ages, backgrounds, and stages of life can enjoy the highest quality of living, while having access to housing options that meet their needs." He believes there are many types of development that the Town may not want, as shown on previous public surveys, that would make this statement untrue. Chris Yates stated that he believes the issue is that the Town does not currently have access to certain types of housing that it may need. Tim Kachmar stated that the Town does not have water and sewer access that it may need for certain types of housing, which means that not everyone has access to all kinds of housing in Town. Steve Whitman stated that this sentence is relatively vague. This is not only in regard to workforce housing, but also elderly housing, single-family housing, etc. This is being left vague so that it can be interpreted as the Town wants moving forward. Chris Yates stated that he believes Tim Kachmar was reviewing this sentence for honesty in the marketing of the Master Plan. Steve Whitman explained that the vision is that the Town will then address this between now and 2035 to the best of its ability. The Town does have infrastructure issues, which are also noted throughout the Plan. If the Town tries to make a change and it is not palatable to the residents or developers, then it has tried its best, but it can point to this part of the Plan in order to try to make changes. Tim Kachmar stated that he better understands this item now. Tracie Adams stated that she likes the broader, vague language.

Tim Kachmar stated that he believes the general "diverse and integrated transportation network" language included in the Plan is setting the Town up for a Simpsons monorail episode. This is a bad idea and not what Amherst is about. Tracie Adams asked if the issue is with that specific phrase. Tim Kachmar stated that his concern is with all of the language included regarding alternative transportation, such as bike paths, pedestrian items, etc. Danielle Pray stated that she believes if Tim Kachmar knew the plan for the Greenway proposal, it might not be as concerning to him. Danielle Pray noted that the Town already voted for doing an engineering study of the

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streets in the Village, as they are up for road reconstruction anyway. Tim Kachmar stated that he hopes nothing is being done with those roads. Danielle Pray stated that the Greenway runs from Bedford to Buck Meadow in the woods and along easements. Tim Kachmar stated that he is not against that proposal, but the language included in the Master Plan makes it sound like the intention is to get rid of automobiles and add sidewalks everywhere. That is how the language could be interpreted. Danielle Pray stated that other potential items to include on the 10-Year Plan in the future are the sidepath along Route 122 into Hollis, and the rail trail from Nashua to Lyndeborough. Tim Kachmar stated that his concern is that outside people will use the language in the Master Plan to sell this kind of idea about multimodal infrastructure and complete more of it in Town. This could be interpreted and misused by developers. Steve Whitman explained that those people would have to work through the Town's current zoning ordinances. As transportation changes into the future and/or older people in Town need other transportation options, the "diverse transportation" language will allow for this potential. Tim Kachmar stated that he hopes this is not a discussion regarding an Amherst bus system. Steve Whitman stated that he isn't sure Amherst could support that, but transportation management agencies have things like van shares or similar smaller operations. Tim Kachmar stated that he could understand this sort of thing through the Recreation Department.

Steve Whitman asked if there were any other suggestions. Tim Kachmar stated that overall, the draft is really good. He noted that it took into account the surveys and discussions and was a nice piece of work. Steve Whitman stated that the last couple of work sessions with the Committee have been very helpful. Tracie Adams stated that the color chosen for the third theme was a bit dark and could be made more vibrant to be like the other two.

It was noted that the Planning Board meeting to discuss the current draft document is August 17, 2022, and the edits will be made to the draft by August 7, 2022. Comments need to be submitted by August 2, 2022, in order to make the necessary changes. It was noted that comments could still be made through the public hearing process with the Planning Board as well.

Rich Hart, 51 Christian Hill Road, stated that he believes the draft is comprehensive and covers many of the Town's future problems, except for one, impacts from global warming. He asked what the plan is to address this into the future. The State also recently increased the amount of rain that will be produced during the 10- and 20-year storms. He asked what the plan is to address larger floods in Town. The Town has begun placing larger bridges and culverts to allow for more water to move downstream, but there may want to be discussion regarding holding the water instead of allowing it to move more quickly. The Conservation Commission has discussed this but has not yet come up with any plans.

Steve Whitman stated that many of those items would be addressed in a review of the site plan regulations in the Master Plan.

Rich Hart stated that many houses are currently without water in Town due to the drought. He asked how this will be addressed into the future. There is not much that can be done immediately, but a plan is needed to discuss possibilities into the future.

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Will Ludt stated that there are electric car charging stations in Maine, and this may need to be discussed in Town, as electric cars will likely become more popular in the future.

Rich Hart noted that electric prices are also set to rise. The Town may want to consider installing solar panels on certain Town buildings to generate some of the electricity needed and cut tax bills. The Town may also want to consider electric cars for some of its employees. There may be grants for this type of item.

Chris Yates stated that, regarding solar panels, the ordinances will need to be updated. He agreed that there are no charging stations in Town, and this could be another discussion.

Steve Whitman stated that, in the Vision statement, there is language regarding municipal facilities. An action on page 51 regarding municipal properties and having them become demonstration sites for sustainable design strategies and technology updates, could be updated to include specific information on solar panels or car charging facilities. Tracie Adams agreed with giving a range of ideas.

Chris Yates mentioned the Hillsborough Area Renewable Energy Initiative and their volunteer work with solar panel projects.

- 3. Establish next meeting dates**
- **August 17th for Planning Board**
  - **August 23rd Master Plan Steering Committee?**
  - **Public Input – location and date**
  - **Public Hearing for adoption**

The Committee discussed the process for presenting this document to the Planning Board. There will likely need to be two public hearings prior to adoption. Steve Whitman noted that, if the Planning Board needed more than one meeting before having the public hearings, that was no problem.

Bill Stoughton, 11 Pine Top, asked about the statutory requirements for the public hearing. Steve Whitman stated that the public hearings must be carried out by the Planning Board, as that group is identified by the RSA as the adopting board. The Planning Board must conduct at least one public hearing and then vote to adopt the Master Plan during a public hearing. This does not need to go to Town Meeting for a vote.

The Committee determined to hold a meeting on August 23, 2022, to debrief after the Planning Board meeting on August 17<sup>th</sup>. The Committee discussed timing for the public hearings. The Committee agreed to discuss this with the Planning Board on August 17<sup>th</sup>. Once changes to the document and the timing of the hearings have been agreed upon, the Master Plan process will be handed over to the Planning Board for them to complete.

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Will Ludt stated that he believes the public hearing information should be kept fairly high level, at first. Steve Whitman stated that the whole draft will be out as a public document.

**4. Approval of minutes of February 14, 2022; April 26, 2022; and June 20, 2022**

**Tim Kachmar moved to approve the meeting minutes of February 14, 2022, as presented. Seconded by Chris Yates.**

**Voting: 4-0-1; motion carried (D. Pray abstained).**

**Will Ludt moved to approve the meeting minutes of April 26, 2022, as presented. Seconded by Tim Kachmar.**

**Voting: 4-0-1; motion carried (C. Yates abstained).**

**Chris Yates moved to approve the meeting minutes of June 20, 2022, as presented. Seconded by Will Ludt.**

**Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried.**

**5. Old / New business**

None at this time.

**Tim Kachmar moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:55pm. Seconded by Chris Yates. Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.**

*Respectfully submitted,  
Kristan Patenaude*

**Minutes approved: September 22, 2022**