

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Master Plan Steering Committee

August 23, 2022

**APPROVED**

1 In attendance: Tracie Adams - Chair, Tom Gauthier, Tim Kachmar, Jared Hardner, Chris Yates,  
2 and Will Ludt (remote)  
3 Staff in attendance: Nic Strong, Community Development Director; and Kristan Patenaude –  
4 Recording Secretary (remote)  
5 Also in attendance: Steve Whitman, Resilience Planning & Design, and Bill Stoughton  
6

7 **1. Call to Order**

8 Tracie Adams called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and introduced the members. She explained  
9 that the draft Master Plan was presented to the Planning Board for the first time on August 17,  
10 2022. Plenty of good comments, suggestions, and questions were received. She thanked the  
11 Master Plan Steering Committee for its support throughout this process and also for attendance at  
12 the Planning Board meeting. There were five out of seven members in attendance, showing that  
13 the group is a team and supportive of the process.  
14

15 **2. Discuss edits from Planning Board meeting (see attached matrix)**

16 Steve Whitman reviewed the matrix with the group. Many of the items are fairly straightforward.  
17 The first major suggestion is regarding the relationship of the survey results to the Master Plan  
18 and needing to express how much interest there was in certain items. Jared Hardner offered as a  
19 potential solution that a short overview be provided in the Introduction of the Master Plan.  
20

21 Jared Hardner stated that it might be helpful to include a bar chart or graph showing some of the  
22 important survey results, such as top priorities, in the Introduction of the document. This could  
23 help to present that information in different ways and make it a little more granular. He hopes  
24 that this might help readers to remember that they weighed in on these topics and then see that  
25 reflected in the document. Readers could then also view the full set of results in an appendix of  
26 the document.  
27

28 Steve Whitman stated that this could be added in the Community Engagement section. This  
29 suggestion will emphasize the survey over all the other community engagement events the  
30 Committee had. Jared Hardner stated that he believes the group received more participation in  
31 the survey than through any of the other events.  
32

33 Tracie Adams stated that Arnie Rosenblatt confirmed that he would like to see the survey results  
34 reflected throughout the document as well.  
35

36 Bill Stoughton, 11 Pine Top, stated that he viewed this suggestion through the lens of being able  
37 to implement items within the Master Plan. He thinks it will be important to show how many  
38 people answered affirmatively in the survey to the items included in the Master Plan, as well as  
39 showing if there are items in the Master Plan that were not heavily supported in the survey and  
40 why those are now being included. He believes there are some pet projects included in the  
41 Master Plan, which is fine, but he would also like to see visualized the degree of public support  
42 behind the items included.  
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Tracie Adams stated that some of the other concerns brought up by the Planning Board were softening the language for implementation to make it clear that these items are not being dictated but are items that the Town could consider in the future and that other communities are doing.

Steve Whitman stated that his only issue with hanging on the survey so heavily is that a lot of the questions couldn't have anticipated the things that were raised. He will try to connect items in the Master Plan back to the survey results but not everything is going to connect clearly. It is not an insignificant amount of time that will be needed to do this, and there's not necessarily a linear connection between the survey and the Plan.

Jared Hardner suggested that there be an extra line included in the existing tables stating what supporting evidence there is for inclusion, or whether this is being included due to the consultant's recommendation, or if this is a best practice seen in another community. He believes that the Planning Board needs more information in the Plan as to what the basis of a recommendation is before they can implement it. The Plan needs to be transparent if an item is being included due to a recommendation from the consultant.

Steve Whitman stated that no recommendations from the consultant were included in the Plan without first being vetted by this Committee. Jared Hardner stated that the wording might then be that these items were committee suggestions based on best practices in other municipalities.

Chris Yates stated that the Committee did not have the opportunity to have some larger community engagements and have smaller groups vet out some of these items, due to COVID-19 and time constraints. Thus, the consultants brought the Committee certain recommendations that other towns are doing for possible inclusion. In the future, there should be subcommittees to further explore these ideas.

Jared Hardner stated that he believes this will be addressed in the second round of comments from the Planning Board, which looks to soften the implementation language within the Plan from 'should do' to 'can explore further.'

Chris Yates stated there needs to be some 'go do's' in the Plan. He is concerned that the Town is going to be left with a prettier version of the previous Master Plan document without them.

Steve Whitman stated that the overarching direction from the Planning Board was to use language such as 'examine' and 'consider' over 'should do.'

Chris Yates stated that, as an elected Planning Board member, he believes there needs to be 'go do' language included. Jared Hardner stated that there are currently three Planning Board members in the room, and he would like some direction as to how the Committee should best move forward on this item.

Chris Yates stated that he has a concern regarding actions further down the road if all of the 'should do' language is removed.

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88  
89 Bill Stoughton stated that his concern with the Implementation Matrix, in particular, is the use of  
90 mandatory language, 'go do this,' 'you should do this,' etc. The concern is that the Planning  
91 Board does not have the ability both through funding and time to complete all of these items. He  
92 would like the Master Plan to be realistic and to prioritize certain items. He is okay if the  
93 Committee wants to recommend that certain implementation items are really important and  
94 should be prioritized, versus being told that all of the items must be completed. Therefore, he  
95 would like to see the words 'consider' and 'evaluate' used. Ultimately, the Master Plan is not a  
96 decision document, but using soft language and recommending that certain items be evaluated  
97 makes sense.

98  
99 Chris Yates agreed with softening some of the language but considering leaving in some priority  
100 items that the Committee feels strongly about. Tim Kachmar agreed with this suggestion to leave  
101 some items to highly recommend that the Board consider implementing in the future.

102  
103 Bill Stoughton stated that his intention with this suggestion was to help better understand what  
104 the Town's top priorities are.

105  
106 Tim Kachmar suggested that the Committee could pick five items from the Implementation  
107 Matrix, relating back to the top priorities seen from the survey, and recommend those for future  
108 action by the Board.

109  
110 Jared Hardner suggested that the matrix could be revised to include a section showing the top  
111 things the public wanted per the survey and how the Master Plan correlates with that, and then a  
112 second section of the top things the Committee would recommend going forward and how the  
113 Master Plan correlates with those. He stated that this should be easier to manage and would  
114 satisfy the Planning Board Chair's concern with having too many resource intensive things listed  
115 that, if they were not completed, could lead to questions from people asking why they were not  
116 done. Jared Hardner said that there could be a third category of items that have softer wording  
117 so that they were not lost from the plan but did not have the same strength as the top priorities.

118  
119 Chris Yates stated that there are some recommendations that the consultant has made that other  
120 communities are doing that may require exploratory committees to go examine further. People  
121 generally don't know what they don't know, until it's brought to their attention.

122  
123 Steve Whitman asked if he should soften the text throughout the document to 'evaluate' and  
124 'consider.' Tracie Adams confirmed that the language throughout the document should be  
125 softened. The Committee will then provide three topics regarding the survey result priorities,  
126 recommendations from the Steering Committee, and other things that are worthy of  
127 consideration. She noted that Tim Kachmar suggested titling this section "Future  
128 Considerations," instead of the "Implementation Matrix."

129  
130 Steve Whitman stated that the next concern voiced by the Planning Board was regarding  
131 accuracy of data in the Plan. He explained that Jared Hardner and Zak Brohinsky have worked to

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assure accuracy of the natural resource information in the Existing Conditions section. The data related to the American Community Survey and the 2020 Census can be updated as well.

Jared Hardner explained that he reviewed the percentages of land allocation in Town and realized that there was a GIS error in the Plan's table which had neighboring towns owning a third of the Town's land. The allocation and associated percentage data has been fixed.

Steve Whitman stated that the next Planning Board comment dealt with transit system alternatives and transportation management. This item was requested to be removed entirely from page 26 of the Plan. Tracie Adams stated that Arnie Rosenblatt noted this item was too ambitious and he would recommend removing it. The Committee agreed with this suggestion.

Steve Whitman stated that the next comment deals with the Complete Streets policy mentioned on page 25. The suggestion is to soften the language from "should be adopted." This Complete Street policy item came from the Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC). It's a very common idea in New Hampshire right now, with even the NHDOT suggesting Complete Streets policies.

Tim Kachmar suggested that the language be changed to suggest following State and federal guidance for multimodal policies. He stated that buzzwords are often replaced quickly, and this could be an issue for a 10-year Master Plan. EPA controls could also be mentioned.

Chris Yates noted that he believes the Town is currently working towards implementing a Complete Streets policy through small scale projects, while not yet having adopted an actual policy. Tim Kachmar noted that his concern is with using the buzzword "Complete Streets."

Jared Hardner stated that he believes there has been an ongoing process for several years and certain items, such as the Multimodal Plan, have been already consulted on and endorsed. He would like to make sure that these items are not lost within the Master Plan, but that it is clear that any new and not yet endorsed items will be carefully considered and examined in the future before implementation. He stated that he believes the groups, such as BPAC, should be consulted for additional language to be included. Steve Whitman stated that these groups were already consulted and the language they suggested is included in the document, "Future road improvements should be planned for by documenting them in the Road Improvement schedule and Capital Improvement planning process."

Chris Yates stated that he wants to make sure the Plan contains language that supports the potential State and federal grants for multimodal projects which the Town may want to apply for in the future. Steve Whitman stated that this language was received from the BPAC and was placed in the document. Will Ludt agreed that certain language needs to be placed in the Master Plan for grant application purposes, noting that the Heritage Commission has previously run into the same problem with applying for grants if the appropriate language is not listed in the Master Plan.

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Chris Yates asked if the language in the Plan, if softened, will still support potential grant applications for multimodal projects. Steve Whitman stated that he thinks it would. Chris Yates stated that he previously spoke with Chris Buchanan, Chair of BPAC, regarding the specific language he would like included in the Plan. He noted that there should be a balance between the 'should' language and the knowledge that the Town cannot redo all of its roads in the same manner. Steve Whitman explained that the last section of language mentions that "the Town-wide network could then be expanded in a gradual and cost-effective manner also adding new segments or retrofitting existing segments when scheduled improvements or development occurs." Steve Whitman expressed concern with heavily editing the document based on Planning Board suggestions, only to have the Committee decide that these are priority items it would like to see included.

Jared Hardner stated that Tim Kachmar is part of a constituency in Town that may be surprised by and not like the language in this section of the Plan. He believes BPAC needs to be consulted regarding the exact language that is needed. Tim Kachmar stated that he believes the language should state that the Town supports following State and federal transportation guidelines and recommendations, instead of throwing out certain buzzwords and specific programs. He does not want the document to be out-of-date in a few years depending on elections and changes in the government.

Chris Yates stated that, in speaking with Chris Buchanan a few months ago, it seemed that BPAC was seeking grant funding of somewhere around \$5-10M. He does not want to lose those opportunities because the Town cannot point back to supporting language in the Master Plan.

Tim Kachmar stated that he hopes all of that grant money gets approved by Town vote, as opposed to the Committee simply implementing all of those changes.

Steve Whitman asked if he should have BPAC review pages 24-27 of the Plan to identify items that are currently underway and those which are proposed items where language could be softened. Tracie Adams agreed with this and stated that the language needs to be supportive of the grants but not overstep boundaries. The grants are important, so the supportive language needs to be included.

Jared Hardner noted that the average citizen cannot keep up to date with all that is going on in Town. He believes BPAC should be consulted to make sure the language in the Plan is clear to prevent unnecessary confusion that something new is being introduced when there has actually been a long process behind it which is not new at all.

Steve Whitman stated that the next comment was in regard to the study of recreational resources in Town. This is an item which came directly from the Rec Department and was backed up by the survey results. Tim Kachmar stated that he supports the idea of softening the language in this section and relating it back to the survey data. Tracie Adams referred back to the survey results. She stated that question #6 regarding recreational infrastructure resulted in it being a highest priority for 32% and high priority for 41%, for a total of 73% of the respondents.

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Steve Whitman stated that the next comment addresses softening the language that asset management software should be purchased. This is an industry best practice now for communities building and maintaining buildings. Many communities are far behind this best practice, so this is a new idea to many. Tracie Adams agreed with softening this language and potentially listing some of the other local communities which use the software.

Steve Whitman stated that the next comment was in regard to language on page 35 which states, "Clarify that the findings of the buildout analysis highlighted that the current regulations may not guide future development in a way that creates the pattern of development and open space protection residents expressed interest in and is identified in the Vision." This wording can be reworked to match the Vision statement. He explained that, based on the number of changes being made throughout the document, this may be a very different document once the edits are made.

Steve Whitman stated that the language will be further softened in the form-based code section. This is an item that was not originally in the survey but came through research with the Committee and consultant. Tracie Adams stated that there needs to be more language regarding what this is and other communities that are using it. Steve Whitman stated that a Selectman asked that the language currently included describing form-based code be removed from the document.

In response to a question from Chris Yates, Steve Whitman stated that this is a new form of zoning which became a best practice starting around 2010. It is different from the Euclidean form of zoning most towns were using. This does not have to occur all throughout Town to start. It is based on building placement, massing, and design over use. It is supposed to be visual and easier for people to understand.

Steve Whitman stated that the language regarding Economic Revitalization Zones (ERZs) and transition areas can also be softened. Language regarding looking at the intersections of the zoning districts and determining if changes are needed can be added.

Steve Whitman stated that page 45 language will be clarified to state that the build out analysis did not indicate how much growth will occur but looked at where growth would occur in the community. The recommendation regarding Planned Residential Developments (PRDs) will be removed from page 44 and the following language will be inserted, "modifications of zoning may be investigated to ensure open space preservation." References to mixed-use throughout the document will also be softened. He noted that there was a Planning Board comment regarding the word 'audit' in the matrix. The term can be further described, and the recommendation can be softened. On page 48, there was a question regarding how to track the results of a Master Plan. Arnie Rosenblatt suggested leaving it to the Planning Board to determine how best to do this. A best practice can be included for this item, but there is often not enough staff, the Planning Board doesn't make it a priority, or there isn't an Implementation Committee involved

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in order to see it through. An Implementation Committee is a suggestion included in the Master Plan.

Tom Gauthier suggested removing the language regarding an Implementation Committee and stating that the Planning Board will determine a committee to best track the progress of the Master Plan. This will place the accountability on the Planning Board for this item.

Steve Whitman stated that there is a suggestion on page 49 to change the word 'implementation' to 'recommendation.' Any references to 'implementation' elsewhere in the document can also be changed.

Jared Hardner noted a potential GIS change to the document. He explained that every plot of land in Town is currently listed in a category. Many of the properties listed as agriculture are forests that have been unused for a number of years. If one looks at the pie chart of these categories, it looks as though the Town has a lot of active agriculture/tree farms/etc., when this may not actually be the case. This change would help to properly manage and track these properties. Currently, this gives a wrong impression that there's a lot more active agriculture, non-forestry agriculture than is actually occurring in the community. Tim Kachmar asked if this should be a future recommendation for a committee to scope this item further. Steve Whitman suggested that a caveat could be added to these numbers in the Plan. Jared Hardner stated that he would review the largest properties listed incorrectly and send them to Steve Whitman.

Steve Whitman stated that the last recommendation from the Planning Board is to drop all columns in the Recommendation Table, except for the actual recommendations.

**3. Discuss edits from Tom Gauthier re: school information (see attached enrollment reports and narrative)**

Tom Gauthier explained that the Future Needs and Projects paragraph has been reworded to highlight and expand the work of the Joint Facilities Advisory Committee (JFAC). It is important to expand this section, as a majority of tax dollars go toward the schools. New school projection and enrollment data was also submitted. He explained that 724 students are slated for Clark Wilkins School this year. The new enrollment figures predict pre-K-4 at 706 students, versus the old numbers which predict 662. This is off by a factor of 10%. There has been an influx of new families. There are now 19-20 students predicted per kindergarten class.

In response to a question from Jared Hardner regarding at which thresholds at which one starts to get concerned about growth, Tom Gauthier stated that this is still being studied. Room studies are currently being completed. One idea that has been discussed is using the High School Annex for middle school classrooms, so a facility study is being completed at the High School to audit the classrooms. The concern seems to be that if another two classes are added at Clark Wilkins, it could become a space issue.

In response to a question from Jared Hardner regarding whether this growth is due to new homes or changes in demographics of existing homes, Tom Gauthier stated that it is likely a

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combination of both. The people who are working on this graph know how many potential houses are in the pipeline for the Town.

Jared Hardner asked what the expected range for new houses will be over the new few years. Tracie Adams stated that many of the proposed developments have only come before the Planning Board for conceptual ideas so far. Only one development of up-to 25 units, is currently before the Board with an application. Jared Hardner stated that if the proposed range of new homes in the next 10 years is somewhere between 0-400, a sensitivity analysis will be needed in order to know what the thresholds are.

Chris Yates explained that Nic Strong sends requests to departments for input during each new Planning Board application for development, and he does not recall once that the school board has sent back comments.

Jared Hardner explained that cumulative impacts cannot be managed on a one-off basis. These need to be put in context with a projection and sensitivity analysis to make informed decisions.

Tom Gauthier stated that he would address this directly with Steve Chamberlin, Interim Superintendent. He noted that he would also like the last sentence regarding options for the Brick School to be removed. Will Ludt suggested that the Brick School also be reviewed for the JFAC in its facilities study.

Tracie Adams asked that the word “unfortunately” be removed from the school information submission.

Steve Whitman addressed adding the survey results to the Appendix. Tim Kachmar suggested that there be a link so that people can view the entire survey results, including the answers to all of the open-ended questions.

Jared Hardner stated that some of the comments to the open-ended questions were not fit for civil discourse. Some did not truly tie to the survey itself, some were overtly racist, and some had people’s direct names included. He does not want these items validated. Chris Yates noted that the full survey results, including all of these open-ended answers are currently available through the Envision Amherst website.

Jared Hardner suggested that PDFs of the Excel pages be included in the Appendix.

Steve Whitman stated that the Library submitted a number of changes to be addressed. Some asked why the Library is not covered under the Recreational Facilities section and other areas of the document that the Library should be mentioned. The Committee agreed that Steve Whitman could review the suggestions from the Library and then run any suggested changes by Nic Strong.



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Will Ludt noted that he has a couple of items still to draft comments on and would forward them separately to Steve Whitman.

**4. Timeline for updating draft**

Steve Whitman stated that an updated draft will be created in the next 3-4 weeks and brought before the Committee again. Zak Brohinsky is currently on a leave of absence. Steve Whitman will work with Nic Strong to identify potential dates in October for the Committee to meet again.

Tracie Adams stated that she will talk to Arnie Rosenblatt about updating the Planning Board on progress at its second meeting in September.

Steve Whitman stated that the Committee had been offered some additional photos of wildlife for potential inclusion in the plan. He stated that the Planning Board meeting was an endorsement of the work done by the Committee. He noted that he and Liz Kelly would experiment with their publishing program, InDesign, to see if they can provide a redlined document.

**5. Next steps towards public hearing**

This was previously addressed.

**6. Approval of minutes of July 26, 2022**

Approval of these minutes was tabled to the next meeting.

**7. Old / New business**

None at this time.

**Tim Kachmar moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:01pm. Seconded by Chris Yates.  
Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.**

*Respectfully submitted,  
Kristan Patenaude*

**Minutes approved: September 22, 2022**