

September 22, 2022

DRAFT

1 In attendance: Tracie Adams - Chair, Danielle Pray, Chris Yates, and Will Ludt
2 Staff in attendance: Nic Strong, Community Development Director; and Kristan Patenaude –
3 Recording Secretary (remote)
4 Also in attendance: Steve Whitman, Resilience Planning & Design
5

6 **1. Call to Order**

7 Tracie Adams opened the meeting at 6:30pm. She explained that the intention of this meeting is to
8 review the redlined Master Plan document, in hopes of getting it ready to present and handoff to
9 the Planning Board. The Planning Board will then handle the public hearing and adoption process.
10

11 **2. Discuss Revised Master Plan**

12 Steve Whitman explained that he created a Word document for the Master Plan, in order to track
13 changes. This will allow the Planning Board to see the redlined document, as requested by Arnie
14 Rosenblatt. He explained that the first minor changes are on page 7 and include adding a couple
15 of paragraphs regarding the initial survey that the Town completed in 2020/2021. These survey
16 results were also peppered throughout the document. The Committee noted that it liked this
17 inclusion.
18

19 Tracie Adams suggested consistent wording throughout the document when discussing the
20 “Winter 2020/2021 survey.”
21

22 Regarding the changes on page 9, Tracie Adams noted that the Planning Board made it very clear
23 that it did not want items defined as “must do” because that implied that they “had to be done,”
24 but instead asked that the plan include wording about what should be considered or evaluated. This
25 language seems to have been changed and is consistent through the document now.
26

27 Steve Whitman stated that there is a lot of language throughout the document which has been
28 changed from “should” to “could” and “will” to “may.”
29

30 Chris Yates stated that he is not fond of this. He read through the document a couple of times. He
31 believes the original document had a lot of good goals and “go-do’s” which have been very watered
32 down. He does not see this language as a governing document to guide the community. This makes
33 sense in some areas but removed the teeth from the document in some places entirely.
34

35 Tracie Adams stated that Arnie Rosenblatt and Bill Stoughton were strong in saying that they
36 would not support the Master Plan as originally presented because they wanted something
37 softened.
38

39 Chris Yates stated that softened is one thing, but removing all direction is another. Those are two
40 members of a larger group.
41

42 Steve Whitman stated that the language through the document is not so consistent because a strong
43 message was put forth at that Planning Board meeting. His choice would be to agree with Chris
44 Yates regarding the language.

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Chris Yates stated that this is a document that is supposed to guide land use and planning in Town for the next 10 years. This document now approaches these topics as that they “may” be completed. If that is the intention, the group might as well stamp a new date on the old Master Plan.

Danielle Pray noted that the old Master Plan has a number of pie in the sky ideas that needed to be amended.

Tracie Adams noted that the Planning Board didn't want to put things in the Master Plan that required funding because this may or may not be available. That was one concern with saying that certain items were definitely going to be completed.

Chris Yates stated that, normally through this process, there would have been additional community forums and outreach to get some of these items more delineated. The Committee's hands were tied based on current conditions.

Steve Whitman stated that the good news is there is still quite a bit of action the Town can take using this document.

Tracie Adams noted that she does not want to eliminate all of the suggestions included from the consultants regarding items they've seen in their experiences and items that other communities are doing.

Chris Yates stated that a good example is on page 14. “Connecting existing conservation lands with these remaining unfragmented blocks and other important natural resource areas may be a priority for the Town in the future.” One of the things that has been very clear through the survey and outreach is people stating that this is a priority. Simply because this is listed as a priority in the Master Plan does not mean the Town will rush out and do it. This simply means the Committee has identified some areas that should be further examined. He stated that his biggest fear is that this document will be approved by the Planning Board and sit on a shelf.

Danielle Pray stated that, in this particular instance, she agrees that the language should be more definitive.

Tracie Adams noted that, per the August 23rd meeting minutes, Line 93, Bill Stoughton stated that he is okay if the Committee wants to recommend a prioritized list of implementation items. Thus, the Committee could consider adding stronger language on items it feels are the most important. She noted that Steve Whitman had suggested choosing three topics to prioritize from the survey results.

Chris Yates explained that he understands the Board of Selectmen does not want to be pushed to spend money on all of these items, but the Town needs some sort of basis for zoning, ordinances, and to guide land planning.

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Tracie Adams stated that she believes it is okay for the Committee to pick its priorities based on the survey results and information gleaned throughout this process. She agreed that the item highlighted by Chris Yates on page 14 is a priority.

Will Ludt asked who the implementer is of the Master Plan. Chris Yates stated that he does not believe there is one decider. If this document is approved, the intent would be to set up a subcommittee, either under the Board of Selectmen or the Planning Board, to further examine some items for trade-offs and to see if they are reasonable for the community.

Danielle Pray explained that this is a document that the Planning Board is supposed to use to amend zoning ordinances or create new zoning ordinances. Tracie Adams noted that other committees around Town hopefully also use it for direction when making decisions. Danielle Pray explained that one of the tests for variance criteria for the ZBA refers back to the Master Plan regarding that piece of land. This is a guiding document that should be referred to more often.

Will Ludt asked if the Integrated Innovative Housing Ordinance (IIHO) came from a previous Master Plan or from the Planning Board. Chris Yates stated that he believes the Planning Board took guidance from the State when creating the IIHO. Danielle Pray explained that the IIHO morphed from a workforce housing/affordable housing item.

Tracie Adams stated that one of the Committee's priorities should be listed as conservation and connection.

Chris Yates asked if the Plan should also be referenced by Town departments and the school boards. Nic Strong agreed that, although its basis is land use, the whole of the Town government should be using the Master Plan as a guiding document.

Tracie Adams stated that the language on page 14 should be reverted back to, "the important natural resource areas are a priority for the Town in the future."

On page 15, regarding water resources, the Committee agreed to change the language to, "...will have a role in shaping."

Tracie Adams noted that Arnie Rosenblatt stated that he wants the Committee to review this document through the eyes of someone who could use this document in order to build in Town. Chris Yates stated that the words do matter.

Tracie Adams noted that, on page 19, language was added that, "based on the 2021 Master Plan survey, 83% of respondents agree or strongly agree that Amherst needs to preserve its historical and cultural resources."

Will Ludt stated that page 16 mentioned water resources and how they may affect wildlife or vernal pools but there is no information regarding how they are impacting humans. Tracie Adams suggested changing the language in that section to say, "threats to Amherst water resources and

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residents.” The Committee agreed to continue considering how to include this item. The Committee agreed that it would like to have the acronym PFA/PFOA spelled out in the document.

Will Ludt asked if preserving the Town’s historic character should be a top priority, as 83% of respondents strongly agreed with that item. Tracie Adams noted that maintaining the Town’s rural character is definitely a top priority. Steve Whitman noted that all of the Committee’s top priorities are in the Vision statement, and the Planning Board did not edit that section.

In response to a question from Danielle Pray regarding underground utilities, per page 21, Nic Strong stated that only new subdivisions with roads are required to have underground utilities. The Committee agreed with the language as presented for this item.

Regarding the language on page 23, Steve Whitman noted that this section on Heritage and Culture is not specific to the Historic District; this is Town-wide.

Chris Yates stated that the last sentence says that “Amherst could pay special attention to preserving the character of the Village and guiding development on Route 101A and 101E to ensure it aligns with the existing character.” He stated that these appear to be two separate thoughts. One to pay special attention to preserving the character of the Village and another to guide development on Route 101. The group decided to change the “could” back to “should.”

In response to a question from Chris Yates regarding if the language for diverse and integrated transportation systems was reviewed with Chris Buchanan of the Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), Steve Whitman stated that he tried several times and got no response. He noted that Chris Buchanan did edit the document the first time, but some of the language was softened from that time.

The Committee agreed to use the title of the community survey consistently throughout the document, either the Amherst 2021 Master Plan Survey or the Winter 2020/2021 Master Plan Survey.

Chris Yates stated that, regarding the diverse and integrated transportation system section, the Town relies on the BPAC to apply for grants to get projects funded. He does not believe the general community realizes that seed money is needed to get projects shovel ready. Steve Whitman stated that he believes the intent is still in the document for this. Tracie Adams noted that the Multimodal Plan is in place and has been approved by the Board of Selectmen.

Steve Whitman noted that he changed some of the language regarding Complete Streets. In case that term is not in vogue in the future, he added language, “...or suitable best practices identified by the Bureau of Federal Highway Administration.”

Steve Whitman noted that he removed all references to public transit stops in the document, as requested.

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On page 28, Tracie Adams noted that data has been included that business owners responded to the survey, with 68% stating that they would prefer bicycle access over parking for their locations.

Chris Yates asked about the language regarding that site plan regulations could be completed with an eye to reducing pavement widths or safety, and to do so with sufficient right of way to provide facilities for alternative transportation modes. Steve Whitman stated that this mostly deals with including shared paths or multimodal paths. Chris Yates noted that the Planning Board has seen a trend for applications to come in proposing narrow roads without multimodal paths. Steve Whitman stated that he believes that is what the BPAC advocates for Complete Streets examples, and these can be seen in the Multimodal Plan.

Steve Whitman noted that the Library is highlighted in the Community Facilities section and in some of the Historic and Cultural materials, but the Library wanted to be seen as a location for Recreation and included in that section.

Will Ludt noted that there was no reference to Peabody Mill Environmental Center (PMEC) in this section. Steve Whitman stated that PMEC is listed in the Existing Conditions section, on page 8.

Regarding the change on page 34, under Municipal Buildings, Facilities, and Services, Chris Yates stated that he likes the addition regarding facilities management software.

On page 36, the Committee highlighted the addition of, “62% of business owners agree or strongly agree that Amherst would benefit from business-friendly regulations, permitting, and inspections.”

The Board discussed the proposed removal of some information regarding transition zones. Tracie Adams noted that Arnie Rosenblatt was not a fan of this item. Steve Whitman explained that transition areas were a strategy that the Committee discussed. The Planning Board did not seem to like it, but he believes that the Planning Board left it up for the Committee to decide. Chris Yates stated that transition zones give the ability for options such as wider areas and smaller buildings, when approaching the residential zone from the industrial zone. Tracie Adams agreed that this is sort of a mixed-use strategy. She noted that she believes Arnie Rosenblatt reviews these items with an eye toward developers trying to potentially abuse them. The Committee agreed with leaving the revised language as is. Chris Yates noted that residents are already recommending this type of change in the ordinances.

On page 48, Chris Yates stated that he was surprised the following sentence was proposed to be deleted, “There is also an interesting opportunity during this process to create transition zones between the mixed-use and commercial industrial zones and the largely residential areas in the community. These transition zones could include a mix of housing alternatives, protecting natural resources, open spaces, and compatible low traffic commercial uses.” He stated that he believes this is exactly what Bill Stoughton had previously mentioned wanting, in that these areas could provide a more gradual transition from higher density mixed-use areas to lower

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density residential areas in the community. Tracie Adams explained that she believes this was proposed to be deleted because it mentioned a mix of housing alternatives which could be utilized in a way that the Planning Board did not anticipate.

On page 49, Steve Whitman stated that he could not find a way to eliminate a certain item and still be authentic on the Committee's behalf. There was some discussion regarding removing recommendations that certain people did not like or did not feel comfortable. However, the survey did not ask some of these specific questions of the community. Also, the Committee has advocated for certain items, as informed by the survey, through the community forums and through conversations with other boards. Ultimately, the Town has to say that it agrees on all of the recommendations in the Plan.

Chris Yates noted that the explanations regarding municipal regulations, non-regulatory municipal investments and initiatives, and volunteers have been removed from the document. He stated that it strikes him that some people do not understand how the community is laid out and how it operates. He believes there is educational value in bluntly communicating this to the public. For example, he believes that some people assume that the Town has more control over the schools than it truly does. Steve Whitman stated that this could be amended to describe that there are three primary pathways through which the Master Plan is traditionally implemented. Danielle Pray stated that she would like to include information regarding the foundation for these items. Steve Whitman stated that he would work to create a paragraph briefly describing these three pathways. He noted that the Master Plan is not only for zoning, but it also deals with infrastructure, programming, and staffing for the Town.

The group discussed the Recommendations Matrix on page 60. Steve Whitman explained that the language in this matrix has been softened.

In response to a question from Chris Yates regarding if the Plan no longer recommends an Implementation Committee, Tracie Adams noted that the Planning Board did not want this as part of the Master Plan but wanted to go about it as part of the Board's business.

Danielle Pray explained that there was some concern regarding including this item and then having the Planning Board held to creating the Committee.

Chris Yates stated that he previously had a lengthy conversation with Dwight Brew, prior Master Plan Steering Committee Chair, regarding the fact that recommendations made in the last Master Plan were never implemented. Chris Yates stated that the Town paid money and spent time to create a useful Master Plan including recommendations from a number of people in Town. He is concerned that the softened language in the new Master Plan will not lend itself to a useful product.

Danielle Pray explained that the language as proposed places the responsibility on the Planning Board. Thus, there is already a group set to work on this item and it may not be necessary to recommend creation of an additional group at this time.

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Will Ludt stated that the prior Planning Board likely had different priorities under the last Master Plan.

Danielle Pray noted that citizens will hopefully bring forward their concerns in the future, as they seem to be now.

Chris Yates stated that he would prefer an Implementation Committee or someone similar to track if anything is being done. Danielle Pray stated that that still can be done without being listed in the Master Plan.

Steve Whitman stated that the only actions deleted were the first four regarding tracking and where this document would live and one related to public transit and transportation management.

Danielle Pray stated that the language, as presented, works for her philosophy.

The Committee discussed some of the items listed in the Existing Conditions section. Chris Yates stated that, regarding the proposed policy to monitor technology, he believes the Town needs to consider updating its stance on residential solar. He noted that the Town currently has a restriction that a resident can only place enough solar on a house to cover the resident's usage. Steve Whitman explained that a shared facility for metering is allowed by NH law. Chris Yates noted that there is not a mechanism locally to allow this.

Tracie Adams noted that Jared Hardner could not be at this meeting but submitted comments that he believes the proposed language looks good. He suggested punting on the outstanding issue of the land use map. He also proposed a couple of formatting items. He deferred to the Planning Board as to how to address the survey results and integrate them into the Plan.

Tracie Adams noted that Rich Hart expressed concerns during the July 26th meeting regarding global warming, the potential increase in the amount of rain for the 10- and 20-year storms, and flood areas in Town. Steve Whitman stated that he believes these items are addressed in the Plan. Tracie Adams noted that there has also been conversation regarding electric charging stations and solar panels. Steve Whitman explained that there is a section which speaks to the potential for other resources and incorporating them into the municipal facilities, if possible.

In response to a question from Tracie Adams regarding the form-based code items, Steve Whitman stated that this is still included as an option strategy but deemphasized. The box describing this item has been removed.

Tracie Adams noted that Jared Hardner previously suggested a bar chart or graph showing some of the important survey results, or top priorities. Steve Whitman stated that there is one that shows the top ten included.

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Will Ludt explained that the group in Town which did a lot of research regarding the previously proposed warehouse on Bon Terrain Drive mentioned communications and how the Town gets the word out. Steve Whitman explained that the last recommendation of the Master Plan reads, “consider broadening the communication strategies used to ensure that all residents and businesses are regularly informed of municipal initiatives and related news.”

Chris Yates noted that this group’s concern was about not being notified of the conceptual plan for the warehouse. Some of these residents may not have been notified even if an application had gone in because of the distance between the properties.

Steve Whitman explained that there is one item that Bill Stoughton asked for that was not completed exactly as proposed in the Population and Housing Profile. The American Community Survey (ACS) takes a sample of the community to show trends between censuses. Bill Stoughton requested that the margin of error figure for ACS data be inserted in every single table in this section. Steve Whitman stated that he believes this to be too much and instead added in a disclaimer that that five-year American Community Survey does have a margin of error.

Steve Whitman noted that Tom Gauthier supplied updated school projections which are included on page 6 of the Population and Housing Profile. Updated language was also inserted in the Facilities and Utilities section under Future Needs and Projects. The link to the Joint Facilities Advisory Committee was included.

Chris Yates stated that he takes offense to the portable classroom statement, as he believes they are some of the best classrooms at the school. The units have air conditioning. He would have liked to see more school information included in this document. He expressed this opinion to some school board members last night at the Planning Board meeting.

3. Discuss Next Steps

Tracie Adams noted that comments by anyone can be made all the way through the public hearing. She noted that the Committee has gone page by page over the revisions and she is comfortable moving this forward to the Planning Board.

Chris Yates stated that he still has some changes he would like to see made, but he will consider discussing these with Arnie Rosenblatt. He noted that Arnie Rosenblatt does have a long history of understanding the legal aspects of these items.

Tracie Adams noted that the Committee is trying to present this to the Planning Board for its October 5, 2022, meeting. Once presented, the Planning Board can determine when to schedule public hearings for. Steve Whitman stated that he would send the revised document to Nic Strong within the next day or two. He asked if the Committee would like to have him at the Planning Board meeting to present this item. Tracie Adams noted that the Committee needs to save Resilience’s contract time to make sure there is availability for the public hearings and creation of the story map. She noted that Steve Whitman’s presence was critical for answering questions and

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giving context at the last Planning Board meeting, but she believes the Committee can likely handle the October 5, 2022, meeting.

Steve Whitman suggested that the Committee share the draft with the Planning Board prior to the meeting and if the Board members have any issues he can either speak with them prior or attend the October 5th meeting.

4. Approval of Minutes of August 23, 2022

Will Ludt moved to approve the meeting minutes of July 26, 2022, as presented.

Seconded by Chris Yates.

Voting: 4-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

Will Ludt moved to approve the meeting minutes of August 23, 2022, as presented.

Seconded by Chris Yates.

Voting: 4-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

5. Old/New Business

None at this time.

6. Adjournment

Will Ludt moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:31pm. Seconded by Chris Yates.

Voting: 4-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*