

TOWN OF AMHERST
Planning Board

October 30, 2019

APPROVED

In attendance: Michael Dell Orfano- Chair, John D'Angelo-Selectman Ex-Officio, Marilyn Peterman, Sally Wilkins, Rich Hart, Brian Coogan, Christy Houpis (Alternate), and Lisa Eastland (Alternate).
Staff present: Nic Strong, Community Development Director, and Kristan Patenaude, Minute Taker.

Michael Dell Orfano called the work session to order at 7:32 pm at the Amherst Town Hall.

1. Work Session – Master Plan

Mike Dell Orfano stated that this work session is to look at the Master Plan process and how to organize sessions moving forward.

Christy Houpis presented his draft Master Plan Communication & Engagement to the Board.

He stated that there are three objectives:

- 1) What do Amherst citizens need to know about the Master Plan?
 - a. The process to complete the Plan
 - b. The milestones and timeframe
 - c. The theme being deployed
- 2) How do we want Amherst citizens to feel about the Master Plan?
 - a. Provide awareness
 - b. Enable comprehension
 - c. Create convictions
 - d. Deliver completion
- 3) What do we want Amherst citizens to do?
 - a. Engage in conversations and provide feedback
 - b. Volunteer to be on the steering committee or a work group
 - c. Help bring neighbors and residents into the process

Brian Coogan suggested that the Board may need to help citizens to understand what the Master Plan is and why it is initially as well. He believes there will need to be a feedback loop and that the process will need to be transparent to all.

Daryl D'Angelo stated that there will probably be pushback from the public due to the most recent Master Plan being seen as not useful and a waste of time. She believes that the Board will need to not only engage the public, but overcome the obstacle of objections.

Christy Houpis explained that the stakeholders will need to be identified and prioritized for the process. This can be done through profiles (renters, homeowners, business owners, etc.), demographics (gender, age, geographically, etc.), personas (elderly, parents with school age children, single millennials, teenage students, etc.), etc. There will need to be a messaging campaign with mass personalization via the profiles noted above. This could include the same

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message being stated in many different ways. This campaign should include a messaging framework, for example: “What do you think of Amherst” and “What does Amherst think of you?” The campaign should include key factors and components, such as what the Master Plan is and why it matters.

Daryl D’Angelo stated that the question of “What does Amherst think of you” will open the door for some discussions and the answers might surprise people.

In response to a question from Mike Dell Orfano, Christy Houpis stated that the campaign will not be able to address all people and thus, all interests will not be covered. The audience will have to be prioritized, and the process will have to marry these groups with their prioritized interests. There is not enough time, energy, or money to reach all audiences before the process itself will expire.

Mike Akillian stated that the communication and outreach program will need to find people where they are and engage them there. Ideas will come to the surface if the right questions are asked and there will be commonality where the themes are concerned. There will be some differences in opinion, but if different interest groups are identified and reached out to, a prioritization will be seen.

Brian Coogan stated that this process is not meant to exclude any populations. Themes will be presented that resonate with certain groups and the saturation of these messages can only go so far. Different messages will be sent to different people, reaching the populations that are prioritized.

Christy Houpis stated that this is not a pessimistic viewpoint. The groups will try to reach out to all areas of interest, but the reality is that they still might not reach everyone.

Christy Houpis explained that there are different communication containers and delivery mechanisms such as: digital (websites, social media, video, email lists, webcasts, etc.), print (flyers, bulletin board posting, papers, magazines, handouts, etc.), live engagement (open houses, focus groups, religious groups, business organizations, schools, social groups, etc.), and engagement kits for volunteers to publically provide the framework concepts and to capture feedback. This process will also require budgeting and expenditures. This will be time dependent, medium specific, based on skill availability, and approval may be required, or there may be other limitations.

Christy Houpis stated that he believes the next steps for the Board are to identifying who will participate on the task force, to create a milestone schedule and timetable, and to draft core messages with key content and facts included.

In response to a question from Mike Dell Orfano, Mike Akillian suggested that the Board move forward with the themes as presented, but be always open to others that might be fleshed out in the process. This will be a dynamic process. He believes the Board has a small window to

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89 communicate and engage with the public before the holidays hit. An article in the Citizen could
90 detail what the Master Plan is, why it is being approached differently this time, the role of the
91 Planning Board in community-wide planning, the four themes, and a request for volunteers. He
92 would like for the Board to acknowledge the process publically and explain that it will be bound
93 within a number of months.

94
95 The Board discussed which working group they each wanted to be a part of:

96 Marilyn Peterman: Livability

97 Christy Houpis: Communication & Engagement

98 Rich Hart: Infrastructure

99 Lisa Eastland: Communication & Engagement

100 Sally Wilkins: Project Manager/Coordinator of groups/Task Force

101 Mike Dell Orfano assigned Arnold Rosenblatt to the Character group and Cliff Harris to the
102 Business group.

103 Brian Coogan: Task Force/Data collection

104 John D'Angelo: Task Force

105 Mike Akillian: Fill-in for any group

106
107 Mike Akillian stated that he met with NRPC Executive Director, Jay Minkarah, and Assistant
108 Director, Sara Siskavich earlier today. He presented these ideas to them and found them to be
109 excited about the process. They will begin thinking about how they can adapt the kinds of
110 analyses NRPC does to the horizontal themes. He suggested that some Board members meet
111 with NRPC next week and that there then be interfacing between NRPC and the working groups.

112
113 The Board agreed that Mike Dell Orfano, Christy Houpis, Nic Strong, Community Development
114 Director, and Mike Akillian will meet with NRPC next week.

115
116 The Board discussed that a budget number will be needed before January 13, 2020, the public
117 hearing.

118
119 In response to a question from Marilyn Peterman, Mike Akillian stated that he believes the
120 working groups should be made up of 5-7 people each. If additional people volunteer for each
121 group, they could be asked to become ambassadors for the process and bring information out to
122 the public.

123
124 The Board discussed the information that would be pertinent when asking for volunteers and
125 how they will approach the process of online forms/websites, etc.

126
127 Mike Akillian suggested that the small group sit down with NRPC first to discuss possible
128 budget items associated with analysis and data collection.

129
130 The Board agreed that the first step will be speaking with NRPC and populating the working
131 groups.

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Town Administrator Shankle suggested that the Board try to make an impressive presentation regarding the thematic approach they're taking at an event like the town meeting.

Mike Dell Orfano suggested that Lisa Eastland and Brian Coogan sit down with Steve Frades at some point.

Sally Wilkins agreed to collate names and information for possible volunteers to each working group.

The Board discussed that there will be volunteers with possible agendas and that this should be acknowledged as a possible problem but not further delved into. It will be a function of the task force to recalibrate the working groups as needed.

Mike Akillian stated that this is a data-driven process with stage 1 being to amplify and bring in as much data, analyze it, discuss and debate, and stage 2 being to filter the information to end up with tradeoffs, etc. In this process lots of people, including squeaky wheels, will have their say.

In response to a question from Mike Dell Orfano, Mike Akillian stated that Board members should weigh in on the leader for each working group, but that it can also be a decision of the group itself. The Board can work to populate the groups with successful people and skills.

Town Administrator Shankle stated that the town can figure out how to get the chosen group leaders training on how to best facilitate a group of people.

The Board discussed how to word the volunteer message to reach the greatest number of people, including those who might not believe they have any "skills."

Mike Akillian stated that the working groups will collaborate with other team members (e.g. NRPC, UNH Coop Extension) to create discussions, analyses, and scenarios on various topics to share out for discussion, dialogue, and possible tradeoffs.

Christy Houpis suggested that the working groups also contain people with different perspectives, as well as different skills. Brian Coogan agreed that the groups can possibly be purposefully mixed with people to create diversity within each group.

Frank Montesanto suggested that the Board reach out to each Commission in town to see if there are interested members from those groups as well.

**Marilyn Peterman moved to adjourn at 9:24 pm. Sally Wilkins seconded.
All in favor.**

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177 Respectfully submitted,
178 Kristan Patenaude
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180 Minutes approved: November 20, 2019