

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Planning Board

February 22, 2022

**APPROVED**

1 In attendance at Amherst Town Hall: Bill Stoughton, Dwight Brew, Christy Houpis (4:04pm),  
2 Tom Silvia (alternate), Mike Akillian (alternate), Tracie Adams, Chris Yates, Tom Quinn  
3 Staff present: Kristan Patenaude, Recording Secretary  
4

5 Bill Stoughton, Vice Chair, called the special meeting to order at 4:00 pm at Amherst Town Hall.  
6 He explained that this meeting is only to discuss the Master Plan Steering Committee update  
7 regarding the Master Plan.  
8

9 Dwight Brew explained that the Master Plan Steering Committee has been meeting for  
10 approximately 18-20 months to work on the Master Plan update. This process began with a  
11 community survey that received a large amount of useful input. An additional public input  
12 meeting and survey were also completed. The documents presented to the Board this evening  
13 should demonstrate what the Committee has determined to be important to the community, via  
14 this survey. Other items are not included in these documents, as they may not have risen to the  
15 same level of importance. The Master Plan Steering Committee has mostly been unified on these  
16 items. There are other items, such as water and air quality impacts, which may need additional  
17 study by those with additional expertise.  
18

19 Chris Yates stated that he is happy with the contractor chosen for the Master Plan update. He  
20 believes the draft documents do a good job at capturing the feeling of the community, as  
21 received via the surveys. He noted that he believes the goals and to-do items that come from the  
22 Master Plan process are just as important, if not more so, than the Master Plan document itself.  
23

24 Tom Silvia asked a question regarding if there will be priorities set to the seven items mentioned  
25 in the vision statement. While all of these items are touched upon in the documents, some appear  
26 to be more guiding principles. It appears that there could be conflict between other items at  
27 times, such as development and a sense of rural character. He asked for more specifics regarding  
28 Amherst's Land Uses and Local Economy, as mentioned in the vision draft document.  
29

30 Chris Yates stated that he believes the vision statement will become more detailed as other draft  
31 documents become further completed.  
32

33 Tom Silvia stated that some of the items mentioned actually seem to be anti-economy, so he is  
34 trying to understand the items that appear to be at conflict. In terms of the draft outline  
35 document, Tom Silvia stated that he believes the examples given from different departments  
36 seem to range from broad to minute (e.g., replacing the use of freon in the Library).  
37

38 Dwight Brew stated that the Master Plan Steering Committee is aware that the items listed are all  
39 at varying levels. This is due to there being varying items submitted from various sources. The  
40 Committee's intention is to work to level set these items out in the future.  
41

42 Tom Silvia noted that he would like to see more information in the vision regarding the schools  
43 and recreation. While these are only touched upon lightly, they are often some of the main  
44 reasons people move to Amherst.

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Dwight Brew explained that the Master Plan document is really a land use plan, with a focus on land use. While certain elements from the schools could touch on land use, for example a large development in Town could impact the available space in the schools and thus the phasing of the project may need to be staggered, generally the schools are managed by other regulatory boards. He noted that there may be more information needed for the recreation section, as it may deal more heavily with land use in Town.

Tom Silvia noted that a component of the schools does deal with land use and that this is being heavily debated in Town currently. It might be important to include this, if possible.

Dwight Brew explained that the Master Plan Steering Committee reached out to the Superintendent of Schools at the beginning of the process. He was willing to be involved in the process, and Tom Gauthier, chair of the Amherst School Board, was chosen to be on the Committee. Tom Gautier has been a regular participant to the process.

Christy Houpis stated that he appreciates the effort of the Committee and that the draft documents seem to mirror the public survey results. He expressed concern over keeping local controls regarding housing, especially with the new Housing Board in place by the State. He asked if the Town is being thoughtful regarding the resources and local controls, versus allowing these to be circumvented. He asked if this should be addressed in the Master Plan.

Dwight Brew explained that the Committee has approached the process by trying to identify what the Town wants to be and including rationale on why this is reasonable. For example, the Committee felt that clean water and rural aesthetic are concrete items to include that could then lead to ordinances and/or additional plans. If a development application then came forward that did not propose to pollute the water in Town or detract from the rural character, it could be considered to move forward. The Committee used this process to determine what Amherst would like to look like and what can be put in place to achieve this.

Chris Yates stated that he does believe the housing issues mentioned by Christy Houpis are important and suggested bringing this back to Steve Whitman and Resilience Planning & Design.

Bill Stoughton suggested that State legislators be brought in to speak with the Planning Board regarding housing items in the future.

In response to a question from Tom Quinn, it was noted that the draft profile documents are not yet final. Tom Quinn noted that there were quite a few inaccurate items, such as the size of the Amherst Middle School and the picture identifying the Transfer Station. Chris Yates asked that these inaccuracies be sent along for revision.

Tom Quinn stated that he believes the draft documents appear to focus on the largest issues in Town. The comments in the "other" section of the public survey seem to heavily mention the quality of the schools in Town and taxes. He echoed Tom Silvia's comments about seeing more

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89 regarding these items in the Master Plan. He was surprised to see that there was not more  
90 mentioned regarding the schools and land use, for example the tradeoffs of constraining  
91 development in order to not degrade the quality of the schools, while also focusing on large  
92 increases in taxes. Tom Quinn asked if the connected community items are truly possible in  
93 Amherst.

94  
95 Chris Yates stated that many of the items mentioned will likely be vetted out down the road. He  
96 believes committees may need to be formed after the Master Plan is complete to look at the  
97 tradeoffs for certain items.

98  
99 Tom Quinn stated that he was hoping to see more information regarding mixed use development,  
100 especially in the Commercial District. He believes that redevelopment of existing sites into  
101 mixed use developments could lower taxes and lead to potential additions to the housing stock in  
102 Town.

103  
104 Tom Quinn expressed concern regarding certain items listed under the draft action items section,  
105 “Reclaim and maintain grasslands on private lands,” and “Restore and conserve wetlands mostly  
106 on private lands.” He questioned how this can be done on private land. Bill Stoughton stated that  
107 wetlands are generally protected by State law. Grasslands could have conservation easements  
108 placed on them, thus allowing them to be protected while still remaining as private land.

109  
110 Tom Quinn suggested that PFAS/PFOA be included under the action item for creating minimum  
111 drinking standards for new developments.

112  
113 Tracie Adams stated that she believes these draft documents and the process are on the right  
114 track. She believes the correct contractor was chosen for the project. She noted that she has  
115 reviewed Mike Akillian’s comments on the documents and believe that many of them can be  
116 incorporated and certain areas expanded upon. She explained that she also reviewed the 10 key  
117 recommendations from the previous Master Plan, and the current documents include almost all  
118 of these recommendations. One of the only items missing, which there seems to be consensus on  
119 including, is the schools. She noted that the action items are a work-in-progress. She agreed with  
120 the suggestion to strengthen the language regarding public and private well water quality  
121 standards. She explained that the Committee did discuss mixed use development and that this is  
122 highlighted within the document. She also stated that she believes the concern expressed by  
123 Christy Houpis is real, and that the document needs to look into how the Town can be developed  
124 the way it wants to be, and not from the State. She explained that the Committee was looking to  
125 move forward in a similar way with all of the action items suggested.

126  
127 Mike Akillian thanked everyone for their efforts on this document. He stated that he does believe  
128 the document looks to address what was heard from residents. He explained that he believes the  
129 vision statement should represent the whole community. He stated that the current vision  
130 statement seems to revolve around land use issues and the high priority items pulled from the  
131 public survey. He would like for the vision of the entire community to be more touched on.  
132 There is no current mention of air quality or health and safety of the community. He expressed

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surprise that, if the vision is focusing on the entire community in 2035, there is no mention of air quality. He stated that 24% of Amherst residents also work in Amherst. He noted that there is no mention of economic/financial vitality in the documents. He asked if there has been any discussion as to if the Town supports existing businesses well versus making the Town desirable to new businesses. This is also not included in the draft documents. He explained that these items may not have been included in the public survey, but if 24% of the population as mentioned above is part of the broader community, there may need to be items included that address these items.

Mike Akillian stated that the Town services mentioned in the vision do not seem to include infrastructure items such as cell, broadband, public water, transportation, etc. There also does not seem to be any idea of possible outcomes included for Town services. He also noted that each Town Department has a dashboard with a list of items that it works to complete. If these items are being worked on, it is supposed to show that the Town is in good shape and that the Departments are serving the public well. There is nothing in the Master Plan regarding these dashboard items. He is concerned that this Master Plan will focus on to-do lists, instead of what the Town wants to achieve. He would like to see more information on the citizen-oriented outcomes that the Town is striving for.

Mike Akillian noted a number of themes that could potentially be included, such as air quality, public health and safety, infrastructure, and support for local businesses. He noted that the economic development section could also mention which businesses the community might like to see more of in order to better serve residents, such as a grocery store located near the northern section of Town, or doctors/dentists. This could especially focus on aiding the elderly population. The economic development section could also consider bringing in new businesses to bring in additional revenue/tax dollars.

Mike Akillian stated that he believes action items #15, 19, and 27 are very important and may deserve some sort of priority. He is grateful to the Conservation Commission for its work on creating an actionable plan around water resources. He endorsed seeking out technical help for other sections along the way. Mike Akillian stated that, at the last Planning Board meeting, Bill Stoughton mentioned that he was hoping to complete the Master Plan update in order to rewrite certain regulations for inclusion at next year's Town Meeting. Mike Akillian asked which chapters of the Master Plan seem to get the most immediate attention; these appear to be water resources, rural character, and housing. Rural character involves a number of variables that, depending on how they are blended together, maintain this sense of character. The section may want to address if there is a limit to growth in the Town based on water resources. There may need to be additional analysis to give data to this point. Items such as historic buildings, stone walls, scenic roads, open space, water bodies, and traffic can all be combined in different ways to create or maintain a sense of rural character. Mike Akillian noted that a couple of people have stated that items will be filled in along the way as the draft is written. He asked what can then be expected in the next draft documents.

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Chris Yates stated that he believes items will become further vetted out as the draft is written. As the themes are developed, he believes more in-depth information will be accumulated in certain areas.

Mike Akillian stated that a small group of ACC members got together to compile data and work on the water resources action items. He asked who will be completing this type of work for the other sections. He noted that it seems that people believe that Steve Whitman, of Resilience, will be writing these sections. Mike Akillian stated that he has reviewed all of the Master Plans previously completed by Resilience and believe that they were all drawn from baseline material, with some sidebars defining certain items for the public, but he questioned how this company instead of the local community will be the best one to do these analyses and write the sections. He is concerned that the Master Plan will recommend that the Town complete an economic development plan, or other items that push the work further down the road and onto others.

Bill Stoughton stated that he would like some sense of how the Plan elements stack up against the survey results, in several respects:

- Are there high priority items from the survey that do not show up in the Plan?
- Conversely, are there theme elements or action items that were low priority items in the survey?
- An indication of these in the body of the Plan or in an appendix would be helpful.

He explained that he believes many of the draft action items are things that the Town is already doing (vehicle replacements, bridge upkeep, etc.). He believes these items should be collected and the Plan can note that the Town will “continue infrastructure upkeep.” He believes the action items should be “culled,” and prioritized. What are the most important action items to achieve the vision? It is important to recognize that, after the completion of the Master Plan, much work remains to be done. In thinking about which questions should be answered in the Master Plan and which can be left for later, several things are important:

- Can the work be accomplished by the Steering Committee and its consultants, or does it require other people and resources?
- Is the work more of a “big picture” effort, or is it focused on details and implementation?
- Is doing the work now important to show what can be done, what should be done, or to capture momentum?

Chris Yates stated that the Committee did wrestle with how much to include the schools into the Master Plan. He agrees that, especially with where the community sits today in terms of concerns with the funding and future of the schools, there should be more about the schools included in the Plan. He questioned how that can be addressed within the confines of the RSA. He noted that he has not once seen information come back from the schools when it was requested of them during a Planning Board application hearing process.

Mike Akillian explained that the basic model for a Master Plan includes a vision statement and a section on land use. It would be a legitimate question to ask the schools to articulate a vision of what they want to achieve over the next 10 years and how they plan to use the land in Town to

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do so. He believes the honest answer will be that the schools do not have a plan of this type. As education came up often throughout the public survey, he is unclear as to why the Committee wouldn't ask the schools for a vision statement, especially as their land use could play a major role in the Town's future.

Tracie Adams noted that the Committee has asked the Department Heads for feedback on the Master Plan documents and will continue to do so. She believes the intention for the Master Plan document, as laid out by Dwight Brew the current Committee Chair, is to be an overarching, broad document that does not dive down into the minutia.

**Dwight Brew moved that the current draft Master Plan vision, outline and action items are generally consistent with the desires of the Planning Board and the community based on the results of the community survey; and to ask the Master Plan Steering Committee to continue to develop the Master Plan based on these outlines and with consideration of the comments received today. Seconded by Christy Houpis.**

**Discussion:**

*Bill Stoughton asked Mike Akillian to sit for Arnie Rosenblatt.*

**Voting: Dwight Brew - aye, Bill Stoughton - aye, Tracie Adams - aye, Tom Quinn - aye, Christy Houpis – aye, Mike Akillian – aye, and Chris Yates – aye; 7-0-0 motion carried.**

Bill Stoughton thanked Dwight Brew for all of his work and effort, not only for the Master Plan Steering Committee, but for the Town in general, and himself personally.

**Christy Houpis moved to adjourn at 5:04pm. Seconded by Tracie Adams.**

**Voting: Dwight Brew - aye, Bill Stoughton - aye, Tracie Adams - aye, Tom Quinn - aye, Christy Houpis – aye, Mike Akillian – aye, and Chris Yates – aye; 7-0-0 motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Kristan Patenaude

Minutes approved: March 2, 2022