

TOWN OF AMHERST
Master Plan Steering Committee

January 25, 2022

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1 In attendance: Dwight Brew, Will Ludt, Jared Hardner, Tom Gauthier, and Tracie Adams.
2 Staff in attendance: Nic Strong, Community Development Director, and Kristan Patenaude –
3 Recording Secretary (remote)
4 Also in attendance: Steve Whitman, and Zak Brohinsky (remote), Resilience Planning & Design,
5 and Bill Stoughton
6

7 **1. Call to Order**

8 Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:32pm.
9

10 **2. Update on Online Engagement Tools and Outreach to Boards/Committees**

11 Steve Whitman explained that the online engagement tool is scheduled to close on January 31st.
12 There have been approximately 80 respondents using this tool.
13

14 Will Ludt explained that he spoke with the Historic District Commission and is scheduled to go
15 speak with the Garden Club and Amherst Democrat's regarding the Master Plan update. Nic
16 Strong noted that she received word from two Master Plan Steering Committee members
17 regarding volunteering to reach out to other boards and committees. Tracie Adams noted that she
18 would be in touch with the Newcomers group.
19

20 Dwight Brew noted that many of the boards/committees that the group was going to try to reach
21 out to will meet after the closing period for the online engagement tool. It was agreed that
22 additional outreach to boards/committees at this point may not be as useful as continuing to
23 move the process along. Steve Whitman noted that a synopsis from any board/committee can
24 always be included along the way.
25

26 **3. Next Steps in Planning Process and Schedule**

27 Steve Whitman stated that the plan is to continue monthly meetings into the summer and
28 complete the process in July. During the month of February, Zak Brohinsky will be reviewing all
29 of the survey data and creating a summary report. All of the raw data and/or an Excel
30 spreadsheet of the data can also be provided to the Committee. The Committee will be able to
31 review a draft engagement report at its February meeting.
32

33 Steve Whitman stated that he would like the Committee to work on submitting feedback for the
34 draft vision and themes this evening. He will then work to pull out implementation options and
35 bring them to the next meeting. The Committee will likely have a draft Master Plan to review in
36 April/May. Two public hearings will then need to be held.
37

38 In response to a question from Jared Hardner regarding when public consultations will occur,
39 Steve Whitman stated that he is waiting to see if thematic focus groups will be necessary for one
40 or two topics. If so, these will occur in March.
41

42 Jared Hardner noted that the Amherst Conservation Commission (ACC) has been working on
43 creating water resources content, including proposed solutions. He believes public input will be
44 needed on this item and would like to reserve space for a focus group on this topic. There could

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be potential changes to Town ordinances from this topic and he believes people in the community may have feedback.

Steve Whitman explained that, through the lens of the Master Plan, discussion about a groundwater ordinance should not tie the hands of the Planning Board and ACC to write it. He stated that the Planning Board and ACC should vet the implementation actions, not the broader public.

In response to a question from Will Ludt regarding when the public will have a chance to voice its opinions on the proposed themes/goals of the Master Plan, Steve Whitman stated that this would occur during the public hearings in June/July. Will Ludt noted that he believes this would occur late in the process. Steve Whitman stated that the Committee has a lot of work to do before it can share the draft with the public. He needs the Committee to work on the vision and future land use sections.

Will Ludt expressed concern that members of the public will feel that they had no input into this process. Steve Whitman stated that the Committee has documentation showing the number of times and ways it reached out to the public. Tom Gauthier noted that public input will always be a concern to some and is likely to be an issue unless the Committee was to go door-to-door.

In response to a question from Tracie Adams regarding allowing public input after receiving the draft Plan review, Steve Whitman stated that the Committee will likely receive a draft Plan in April and it will then need to be reviewed with the ACC/Planning Board/other Town entities.

Will Ludt expressed concern that the public will not be involved in this process until almost the very end. Will Ludt stated that past Master Plan revisions seemed to see more public input and engagement during the process, though maybe this was due to it being a different time. Dwight Brew noted that each Committee meeting is open to the public though rarely attended, and video and written minutes are kept of each meeting. Dwight Brew also noted that the public forum held at the Middle School was publicized all over Town and turnout was still quite low. If the Committee hears from the public that the draft Plan has missed the mark, it can always redo sections of it. Tom Gauthier pointed out that the Master Plan update is taking place in the COVID-19 era.

Dwight Brew mentioned that he will not be running for Board of Selectmen this year. Thus, after the vote in March, he will no longer be on the Committee. He would like to make sure things are on track before his departure. Dwight Brew noted that he had reviewed a Master Plan that Resilience had provided as an example at the beginning of the process and stated that it was prepared from a top-level with items listed that should occur, but not a lot of additional detail. He noted that the placeholders and action items listed would spin off in 20 different directions that would create a lot of detail. He went on to say that the Master Plan is done at a relatively high level, with implementable things that emerge from it. Dwight Brew asked, in terms of the ACC's water resource work, if it would make sense to work two parallel processes, so that top-level items from the Master Plan could spin out into a more detailed action plan for water

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89 simultaneously. He stated that a lot of smart people are working on the water plan, with specific
90 ideas that are too detailed for the Master Plan, yet related. Steve Whitman stated that all details
91 should be forwarded to the Master Plan Steering Committee for inclusion decisions. He
92 explained that the Town is in a good position, has done a number of things really well, and that
93 the Master Plan could identify things that could be bettered, made possible because of past
94 planning.

95
96 Dwight Brew asked Bill Stoughton if the outline presented by Steve Whitman was enough to
97 present to the Planning Board as an update. Bill Stoughton thought that the Planning Board
98 would want to see what the Committee had reviewed very early in the process, so there would be
99 the opportunity to comment if a significant change in direction occurred. He thought that there
100 was enough detail regarding milestones for the Planning Board, but that an early draft should be
101 made available, so the Planning Board was among the first to see it and give feedback.

102
103 Dwight Brew asked about the thematic approach. He asked if there would be an outline for the
104 Plan once the themes were nailed down.

105
106 Steve Whitman stated that he would like the Committee to identify potential visions and themes,
107 and then engage with the Planning Board as early as possible because they were the ones who
108 would have to implement the plan. He would like to make sure the Committee is happy with the
109 draft Plan before bringing it to the Planning Board. Dwight Brew thought that the Committee
110 could share the milestones and outline with the Planning Board. He asked if the draft would be
111 formally unveiled to the Master Plan Steering Committee or the Planning Board. He thought the
112 Committee had an April/May timeframe for the draft and thought that there were some groups
113 that should probably see it first. Bill Stoughton disagreed, noting that the Planning Board is the
114 entity to approve the Master Plan, and the Steering Committee is doing the work the Planning
115 Board charged them to do. He said that the Planning Board had to approve the plan and, while
116 many groups might want to review it, it is the Planning Board that will take action on it. Dwight
117 Brew stated that he was trying to figure out if the draft would be reviewed for the first time at the
118 Master Plan Steering Committee or the Planning Board. Bill Stoughton stated that the Committee
119 should be happy with it before forwarding it to the Planning Board. Tracie Adams
120 agreed. Dwight Brew stated that once the draft was discussed in public, anyone would be free to
121 ask to see it.

122
123 Steve Whitman noted that the proposed timeline was fairly aggressive to be completed by July,
124 and the Committee should take the time for an additional meeting before going to the Planning
125 Board, if it feels necessary. He stated that adding an extra month or two was not a bad thing in
126 the grand scheme, for a Master Plan that would be in place for a decade.

127
128 Steve Whitman noted that the Committee should revisit the NRPC build out analysis when it
129 makes the most sense to do so, in order to have clarity around the vision and themes to make the
130 most of the additional build out scenarios.

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Dwight Brew stated that the NRPC's build out analysis seemed to use a basic ratio scale to estimate how many new dwelling units will exist in 20 years (660 units), based on historic knowledge of the number of units coming into Town each year. He stated that those numbers may be completely accurate, or that there may be more development and the proposed numbers could be reached in ten years, or that there may be less development and it could take 25 years to reach the proposed numbers. Dwight Brew explained that, based on that study, Nic Strong reached out to Department Heads and the schools to see what would be necessary to accommodate that growth.

Nic Strong stated that she heard back from two entities regarding that request.

Dwight Brew stated that it would be useful to understand what needs to happen to Town services based on the projections and what impacts could be absorbed. He stated that identifying what could occur a certain number of years in the future would direct the discussion on growth.

Steve Whitman stated that the Committee can ask NRPC to focus the growth in certain areas of Town to show how that would spatially be different than the baseline study. He noted that the Town is paying for the build out analysis and so should use the data as best it can. Steve Whitman stated that the Steering Committee should be taking this time to inform the Planning Board on where development could be focused in Town, using the Master Plan. The land use regulations should be in keeping with the Master Plan or the Master Plan should be updated if it is glaringly different. Utilizing the build out analysis after the Plan is completed, would likely not be useful.

Jared Hardner stated that the ACC group that is working on water issues would likely have some requests as part of the build out analysis. Zak Brohinsky asked Jared Hardner to forward the findings so he could make sure they were incorporated. Jared Hardner stated that he would send a one-page outline of the talking points to Zak Brohinsky.

4. Draft Vision and Emerging Themes

Steve Whitman stated that a vision statement is generally more than a sentence but less than a page and gives a broad view of where the community is headed. He stated that, being outsiders, the Resilience team needs input from the Committee to make sure the proposed vision statement is appropriate. Steve Whitman explained that the vision is typically written in the present tense/active voice, as if in the future. He noted that the three themes discussed at the last meeting were included, and that he was interested in hearing the Committee's thoughts and suggested actions. Steve Whitman read the draft vision statement created by Resilience.

Introduction:

Known for its historic village center, Amherst is a community that has been actively engaged in community planning for several decades. This includes conserving open space for all to enjoy, constructing trails and recreation facilities and programs that encourage health and wellness, and providing quality municipal services and schools to the residents of Amherst. Although the Town is located in a rapidly growing region the residents of Amherst have worked together to

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177 *successfully maintain the distinct character of the community which is comprised of historic*
178 *sites and buildings, fields and forests, and quiet neighborhoods that surround the village center.*
179 *As a result, Amherst continues to be a desirable place to live and work for people of all ages.*
180 *Looking ahead the residents of Amherst are committed to maintaining this practice of working*
181 *together and planning for the future.*

182
183 ***Amherst 2035:***

184 *The historic architecture and pedestrian friendly streets of Amherst's Village continue to be the*
185 *heart and civic center of the community, and a place where neighbors meet and build*
186 *relationships. Radiating out from the Village new pathways have been constructed to*
187 *accommodate a range of transportation and recreation alternatives for people of all ages.*
188 *These pathways blend in with the landscape and connect neighborhoods to parks, open spaces,*
189 *heritage sites, and municipal and commercial services. Continued land conservation efforts*
190 *have created greenways of connected open space that support habitat and recreation, and*
191 *protect water resources.*

192
193 *Enhanced vegetative buffers and architectural requirements blend new residential and*
194 *commercial development into the community without diminishing Amherst's notable*
195 *character. Established nodes of development activity along Route 101 preserve the character of*
196 *this gateway to the community while providing focused areas for higher density development*
197 *activity that includes a mix of commercial and residential uses. Amherst is a town where people*
198 *of all ages and backgrounds can spend their whole lives and enjoy the highest quality of living,*
199 *while having access to housing options that meet their needs.*

200
201 *Amherst's municipal facilities reflect a commitment to the residents, embody sustainability and*
202 *community resilience, and have inspired private property owners to pursue energy*
203 *conservation, renewable energy, and regenerative landscaping projects of their own. Major*
204 *infrastructure upgrades and the high level of cost-effective town services have been made*
205 *possible through the creativity and cooperation of residents and local leaders who identified*
206 *outside funding sources and public/private partnerships that brought many projects to reality.*

207
208 *This vision is now a reality because of the efforts of residents, municipal volunteers, and*
209 *municipal staff on the following initiatives:*

210 ***• Natural and cultural resources:***

- 211 *o Focus on water quality and quantity protection*
- 212 *o Land conservation of large unfragmented land areas and unique habitat types*
- 213 *o Expand trail system and wayfinding to connect residents with the many natural and*
- 214 *cultural resources in Amherst*

215 ***• Infrastructure and services:***

- 216 *o Address energy conservation needs and renewable energy opportunities – municipal*
- 217 *facilities and sites*
- 218 *o Create a network of multi-modal pathways that provide transportation alternatives,*
- 219 *support health and wellness, and encourage interaction between residents boosting*
- 220 *social capital*

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- o More resilient sites and infrastructure...water, habitat, food production, etc.*
- *Land Use:*
 - o Defined development nodes along Route 101, and new performance standards for the development area along 101A*
 - o Lower density residential development and home industries intermingled with conservation lands and buffered from view*
 - o Higher density residential units within and adjacent to nodes of commercial activity*

Will Ludt thought it important to mention infrastructure, utilities, broadband internet, etc.

Jared Hardner asked about the second paragraph in the Amherst 2035 section and how Resilience arrived at the language and how they knew this was correct information. Steve Whitman stated that it is up to the Committee to decide if this section needs to be edited. He stated that future land use had to be discussed to see if it resonated with the Committee and that more work was needed on this. Jared Hardner noted that there were decisions being made in this proposed language, for example, "enhanced vegetative buffers and architectural requirements," and wondered if the Committee found this appropriate. Dwight Brew asked what they would be enhanced in comparison to. He noted that some Planning Board members do not believe that certain proposed/implemented developments represent the character of the Town because the houses all look the same, the plans appear the same, and the developments are visible from the street with no buffering vegetation. If this is to be the baseline, then buffers should be enhanced. Dwight Brew noted that many worst-case scenarios seem to have occurred from certain developments in Town.

Jared Hardner noted that the vision needs to be further developed to give the language some direction for the Planning Board to be able to take action with it. Steve Whitman stated that action items need to be identified from the strong proposed themes that keep coming up during public outreach. Jared Hardner asked about the statement regarding nodes of development activity and allowing a mix of commercial and residential uses. He wondered if that was a shift in the type of development currently allowed on Route 101. Dwight Brew stated that, on Route 101A in the Commercial District, it is currently permitted to have up to 25% square footage of a unit residential. He noted that a lot of towns have mixed-use, allowing shops and restaurants on the ground floor with apartments above, but Amherst does not have that type of development.

Jared Hardner asked if this proposed language promotes mixed use housing, or just notes that it is possible in Town. Steve Whitman explained that is up to the Committee. He noted that the vision is not bound by existing zoning. The Town could decide to direct development to the Economic Revitalization Zones and create nodes that become more walkable and bikeable, or to spread out the development over more areas of town. The Master Plan can clarify this.

Jared Hardner questioned if this is truly what the Town wants to do. Tracie Adams stated that there is public feedback showing that it is. Steve Whitman stated that this is way the Town seems to be growing. He noted that Bedford was trying to get back to mixed nodes of development. Amherst still has time to think about how it wants to grow over time. Steve

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Whitman stated that he has heard people are concerned about growth, so the vision should talk about what it looks like.

Jared Hardner asked what the pros and cons of a nodal model were. Steve Whitman explained that the idea is to focus nodes of high-density development to areas of activity. Areas not served by water and sewer would not be as high density. He stated that it could be encouraged or required that upper stories be built for non-commercial/residential uses, build multi-use infrastructure in and between these areas and to not allow strip development in the gateway area to town. He stated that this would promote efficient use of land and take the pressure off more rural areas. This would also allow for types of housing identified as needed, but which don't work elsewhere in Town, to be incorporated.

Steve Whitman explained that he used the Economic Revitalization Zones, as five nodes for development. He noted the Committee may not necessarily want to restrict those areas to non-residential uses, but instead identify them as priority areas. Each node could have its own characteristics. The Steering Committee does not need to do the Planning Board's work of changing density requirements but can identify differences in nodes and what to encourage there. Steve Whitman explained that Route 101A could handle high-density residential development because of the transportation network options and ability to walk to facilities and services. Steve Whitman stated that there could be greenway connections and major land conservation included as part of this. The vision will guide land use and development over time.

Will Ludt stated that he would hate to see Route 101 turn into another Route 101A. This could happen if high density mixed commercial and residential were allowed, such as strip malls. Steve Whitman stated that greater density could occur if there was water and sewer in the area. There is already economic activity on Route 101. Dwight Brew stated that there was no water and sewer in the proposed Route 101 nodes, although there could potentially be water at The Meeting Place. Steve Whitman the same level of density as on Route 101A may not exist, and that might be a limitation to growth. The density that makes sense could match the level of activity.

Dwight Brew stated that there was a height limit of 35' on buildings and that the Town would probably not see any development over three stories. He asked why the Town wanted denser development. Unless something was driving it, he believes most people would say no. He stated that workforce housing may be a driver. If that was something that the Town wanted, then something should be done. He asked why the Town would not stay the course and why would it want to become more urbanized. Steve Whitman stated that was a fair question.

Bill Stoughton, 3 Pinetop Road, explained that the Town may not want to see the density increase overall, but the amount it does increase may want to be clustered so that other areas can remain more rural and open. Instead of forcing the sections of Route 101 identified to become broken up into several lots with 300' of frontage, these could be designed into a tasteful plaza, with longer stretches of undeveloped land in between. He thought that the Town may want to favor greater density in some areas than spread development out all over Town. Tom Gauthier stated that the Town should save the land it has.

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Dwight Brew asked why the Town would want to increase density at all. Bill Stoughton stated that, while the Town may not want to, property owners may want to, and they have the right to do things with their land. Dwight Brew stated that there was already a Zoning Ordinance in place, but the question is where in Town to allow more compact development over what exists today. Steve Whitman explained that this is considered “diversity of density,” focusing diversity in some areas to keep other areas preserved. He stated that Route 101 has scenic viewsheds and character along with functional state highways. He explained that the Master Plan update process is a time to check and see if everyone is okay with the way things are going or if there were concerns. Steve Whitman stated that there have been concerns raised from the public regarding looming growth and loss of some open areas. The Master Plan can allow development to become focused in some areas of Town and make it more vibrant, perhaps via a central square with a septic system below and shared parking, and with farmland and low-density residential development in between. The Town can incentivize development with certain requirements within those development areas.

Dwight Brew stated that, hypothetically, if the Town was all zoned with two-acre zoning but one section was allowed to have a higher density with one-acre zoning, development of the two-acre lots would likely be delayed, while more economical development took place on the one-acre lots. However, once the one-acre lots were gone, the two-acre lots would start to be developed. Jared Hardner stated that two different cohorts of people would be occupying the different lots and it would not reduce the development pressure. He stated that workforce housing would be a potential reason to do this. Dwight Brew stated that the Town has to accommodate workforce housing but questioned how to do that. Workforce housing could help drive some high-density development, as this might not happen unless coupled with a reason. Steve Whitman explained that development can be incentivized in certain nodes with the tradeoff of design and meeting certain objectives. Tools can be used in combination.

Bill Stoughton did not think it was a desire of the Town to allow more development on Route 101, which is a gateway to Town. The area is very noticeable, with conserved land and commercial structures that even resemble barns or farms, and people like it. Steve Whitman asked if there is clarity that can be provided in the Master Plan to help this vision. A vision needs to be painted through a policy perspective to help the Planning Board moving forward. Jared Hardner stated that he believes the sentence in the proposed vision that reads, “*Established nodes of development activity along Route 101 preserve the character of this gateway to the community while providing focused areas for higher density development activity that includes a mix of commercial and residential uses,*” should be shortened to read, “*Established nodes of development activity along Route 101 preserve the character of this gateway to the community.*” This would be more in line with what the public currently wants. Bill Stoughton stated that Route 101 coming from Bedford also has constraints limiting development, including wetlands and conserved areas.

Bill Stoughton stated that the areas in Town that are currently most dense are probably the areas that make the most sense to continue to expand development in, but it is unclear how much

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development can reasonably be expanded. Tom Gauthier noted that the traffic along Route 101 toward Bedford could also be a limiting factor for development. Steve Whitman asked if the Committee believes the Town is built out in terms of non-residential development. Tom Gauthier stated that there may be pockets of this type of development but much of Route 101 does not have the capacity. Dwight Brew stated that it is unclear if the Planning Board has the proper tools to disallow certain types of development. Jared Hardner explained that the vision statement sentence he proposed previously would then allow for the Planning Board to create tools to disallow this type of expanded development. Tracie Adams agreed that preserving the gateway to Town is important to residents as well. She noted that she believes the vision statement could be simpler. Steve Whitman explained that the update is to look at what needs to be changed in Town, because if nothing needs to be changed, there is no purpose in this process. Dwight Brew stated that things could be good in Town now, but that luck likely won't last forever, so something is needed to preserve this level of good.

Steve Whitman suggested that one action to come out of this process could be a corridor study of Route 101 to decide if growth needs to be steered to certain areas. The Committee agreed that this should be an action. Will Ludt noted that additional expansion in Bedford could place a lot of stress on the Baboosic Lake area of Town. Dwight Brew stated that the Town is seeing large parcels of undeveloped land sold to developers. This is leading to large, proposed developments.

Steve Whitman explained that three themes identified for the draft Plan include, Natural and cultural resources, Infrastructure and services, and Land Use. Natural and cultural resources seem to define the Town, its gateway, and its community. The Infrastructure and services category includes the transportation network, potential multimodal options, and municipal facilities. Land Use will allow for discussion on guiding future development, studies such as the proposed Route 101 corridor study, ways to get a variety of housing options, and guiding non-residential development over time.

Jared Hardner stated that it appears additional items for historical/heritage/cultural resources will need to be added. Steve Whitman stated that historic/cultural items need to be added. These items are widely dispersed through Town. These items define the Town and there needs to be discussion on how development will be guided based on preserving these.

In response to a question from Will Ludt regarding how historic and cultural resources will be included in the Master Plan if they are not a theme, Steve Whitman explained that these items will be part of the existing conditions sections. This is being woven into the vision section to add body to it. This topic can also be built into action items to become more integrated and valued. If the Heritage Commission has ideas on actions to be implemented, this information should be passed along. Any other boards/committees that have clear actions can also pass them along.

Dwight Brew explained that items need to be added upfront into the Master Plan so that ordinances can flow from it in the future. It is important to address these upfront so that the process flows. Steve Whitman agreed and noted that the Master Plan does not need to address

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the answers to these items but can say that further studies are needed to create the proper regulations.

In response to a question from Dwight Brew regarding where economic development fits in, Steve Whitman stated that he would place this under the Land Use theme. Steve Whitman explained that the land use pattern would be discussed, and then how future change will be directed. All of these things flow together but need to be broken up into digestible parts. He noted that this is only a draft and will be revisited during future meetings.

Dwight Brew stated that he would like to get this in front of Planning Board members shortly for individual feedback. Steve Whitman stated that this feedback could be provided to Nic Strong. Steve Whitman suggested that the Committee take a week to provide feedback on this item and that feedback would then be provided to Nic Strong before forwarding this as a memo to the Planning Board. Bill Stoughton stated that the memo could be sent to the Planning Board and if the Planning Board Chair believes additional discussion is needed at a Planning Board meeting, it will be included.

5. Work Session on the Future Land Use Plan

Steve Whitman stated that it is clear that no one knows what the Route 101 corridor will look like. The future land use map is only as useful as the data included. He would like to continue to refine this land use map with the Committee to see how it evolves, but it is not necessary to include in the Master Plan.

Dwight Brew stated that increased density has been viewed as a problem for some in Town for a number of reasons. Determining a solution is challenging because there are different reasons for the concern. He speculated that higher density could be achieved by choosing a large parcel, requiring 100' buffers on all sides, with one road cut, and allowing a high-density residential development on the inside. The parcel would look similar to other rural ones on the outside. He asked how this type of idea could be shared and considered. Steve Whitman asked if the Town already has a mechanism to consider this type of high-density development. Dwight Brew stated that he does not believe there are mechanisms in place to not allow a development to be seen from the outside.

Bill Stoughton stated that the existing Planned Residential Development (PRD) ordinance, if amendments to it pass, allows up to 6 attached dwelling units in a single multi-family structure, with requirements that it maintain a rural aesthetic – this could lead to the aesthetic Dwight Brew is suggesting. Nic Strong stated that multi-family units are only listed in the PRD. Bill Stoughton stated that the maximum density will be 125% of whatever zoning in that area allows.

Dwight Brew asked who in Town should be looking at how to increase the number of less expensive homes in Town and the ways to achieve that. He is concerned that the Committee needs to be involved with all of the laws to do this. Steve Whitman explained that this falls on the Committee, informed by the Planning Board, if it so chooses, to determine housing options and associated tools for the Town. The Master Plan update process is an opportunity to keep this

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on the radar. Dwight Brew suggested that the Planning Board could be asked for input regarding which items need to be included in the plan. Steve Whitman stated that the opportunity to ask these questions of the Planning Board is now.

Zak Brohinsky exited the meeting at 8:14pm.

Bill Stoughton asked what the public survey found regarding a desire for workforce/elderly/diversified housing in Town. Dwight Brew stated that these types of housing were not specified to be highly desired, but the desire to maintain a rural character in Town was. Steve Whitman asked if these answers were coming from certain age/income groups living in Town or those seeking housing in Town. Jared Hardner stated that the demographic data collected matches the census data in almost every category. Dwight Brew explained that respondents were primarily those already living in Amherst, not those who wish to move into Town or those who currently commute into Town. Bill Stoughton stated that the Committee's responsibility is to serve Amherst residents only, not those who are trying to live in the Town. The job is not to make Amherst the place everyone wants to live, nor to build a wall to keep everyone out. If residents say that there needs to be more elderly/affordable housing, then it should be addressed. If they do not raise that issue, it may still need to be addressed, but the desires of existing residents need to be clear.

Nic Strong stated that the survey showed that diverse/affordable housing was a moderate priority, limiting commercial development was a high/moderate priority, and limiting residential development was a high/very high priority. Steve Whitman stated that the Town will continue to receive some development though, so the discussion is where/how to direct it. The Master Plan will allow for a clear message of how to guide growth that cannot be blocked out.

Dwight Brew stated that the survey results seem to say that development should continue to happen according to existing density/zoning regulations and that development should not be encouraged by reducing lot sizes or changing zoning in other ways.

Steve Whitman explained that expanded buffers for surface water could be considered, as part of the discussion from the ACC. The Committee could consider where development can be focused in Town and under what conditions. If developers cannot satisfy the proposed conditions of an area, they will not develop there. Bill Stoughton asked if it would be appropriate to limit growth in Town. Steve Whitman stated that the Committee must decide if no additional growth in certain areas is defensible. First, the Committee should look at guiding growth to certain areas with certain parameters.

Jared Hardner stated that 85% of those surveyed stated that the highest/high priority is to secure and preserve water resources in Town. This is the exact inverse of adding development. Development would need to be limited in order to fulfill this item. 82% of those surveyed stated that it is a high/highest priority to maintain the rural character of the Town. 70% support limited residential density in Amherst. The community has effectively said that it wants to limit development in Town, and this should be reflected in the Master Plan. This can then be taken as

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far as the law will allow, instead of muting the vision simply because a developer is going to push back.

Bill Stoughton stated that the Town seems to want the quality of resources and the environment to be protected, and limiting development is a consequence of that desire. This is not the Committee trying to keep people out but maintaining the quality of resources for everyone.

Dwight Brew noted that, thusly, the Master Plan should not promote reducing lot sizes anywhere in Town. There are no sewers even on Route 101A. There are maybe only 45 houses in Town on very small lots that are on a sewer system, near Baboosic Lake. There are limited-to-no public water and sewer opportunities in Town and so there are not logical places to encourage development. The Master Plan might then look to limit development, protect resources, and preserve the rural character.

Steve Whitman stated that this might be an overall theme emerging for the vision/direction, but the Committee will still have to answer questions regarding housing in Town for all ages, and taxes. How will people age in Town and pay for their houses? The group should continue to strategize on how to answer these items in a way that fits the Town. This could include simply continuing to monitor for opportunities for housing options/varieties, or some building in the ERZ's, while focusing on land/resource protection.

Jared Hardner stated that the data overwhelmingly shows that the vision of the community is to preserve and protect the rural character and resources in Town. There will always be some portion of those with differing opinions. The Committee should focus on that theme and not stitch in accommodating statements regarding potential options that are not compatible, which could cloud the vision. Tracie Adams stated that the vision needs to emphasize what was revealed through the study and the details should be addressed later.

Steve Whitman explained that 9/10 communities feel the same way regarding protection of resources. The data Amherst has is more informed, but the message is not entirely different from others. Tracie Adams stated that other neighboring communities have done something different, and their residents were not happy. Steve Whitman stated that Amherst has a track record for following this path of protecting resources and rural character. Jared Hardner stated that the Committee can commit to this path and then draft the Master Plan to follow it. Adding in caveats could allow for the vision to be swayed into the future.

Steve Whitman stated that Resilience will rework the vision statement after hearing this discussion. He suggested the Committee review this before asking Planning Board members for feedback. The Committee will look at potential themes and actions at the next meeting.

Jared Hardner explained that a water strategy is being drafted by the ACC. This can be included in the Master Plan however it best fits. If protecting water resources is going to be a main part of the vision statement, there needs to be backup information for it. Steve Whitman stated that the ACC info could be included in the appendix. Jared Hardner suggested that there could be a video

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Master Plan Steering Committee

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created similar to “How Things Work” regarding water resources in Town for the public to view. This could also be completed for other resources in Town. Steve Whitman stated that this could be included with the story map in the Master Plan.

Dwight Brew stated that the Committee is next scheduled to meet on February 14, 2022.

6. Approval of Minutes December 13, 2021

Jared Hardner moved to approve the meeting minutes of December 13, 2021, as presented. Will Ludt seconded.

Voting: Dwight Brew - aye, Tom Gauthier - aye, Tracie Adams – aye; Will Ludt - aye, and Jared Hardner – aye; 5-0-0 motion carried.

5. Old/New Business – none.

Jared Hardner moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:38pm. Tracie Adams seconded.

Voting: Dwight Brew - aye, Tom Gauthier - aye, Tracie Adams – aye; Will Ludt - aye, and Jared Hardner – aye; 5-0-0 motion carried.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*

Minutes approved: February 14, 2022