

TOWN OF AMHERST
Master Plan Steering Committee

November 23, 2021

APPROVED

In attendance: Dwight Brew, Tom Gauthier, Chris Yates (remote), Will Ludt, Jared Hardner (remote), Joe Ilsley, and Tracie Adams.
Staff in attendance: Natasha Kypfer, Town Planner, Nic Strong, Community Development Director (remote), and Kristan Patenaude – Recording Secretary (remote)
Also in attendance: Steve Whitman, and Zak Brohinsky (remote), Resilience Planning & Design

1. Call to Order

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

2. Feedback on Community Forum

a. Online link for input at: <https://bit.ly/amherst-get-involved>

b. Postcard attached

Steve Whitman stated that he estimated approximately 50 people attended Monday evening's public forum event at the Middle School. Many people took postcards to give to others, which include links to the website and survey questions. He will send along a version of the postcard that can be posted online.

Natasha Kypfer stated that the question worksheets and postcards are also on display at the Library, and at the Community Development Office window in Town Hall.

Will Ludt noted a bit of disappointment at the low turnout for the public forum.

Steve Whitman suggested advertising for the questions on public access tv.

The Committee discussed getting the word out to the school community. Steve Whitman stated that materials can be altered to fit the best format for each demographic.

Jared Hardner stated that, if the Committee hopes to have meaningful participation in this process, there needs to be approximately twice the magnitude of people participating. He does not believe it is necessarily helpful to have 50 people, especially the same 50 people that participate in most Town events, participate in this process. He stated that people may feel as though they already made themselves heard through the previously released survey.

Steve Whitman stated that other towns have had success getting the word out through as many channels as possible. He noted that not all of the information from the forum has yet been entered, but the responses from those who did attend seem to show members of the public who are quite well informed as to the issues at hand.

Zak Brohinsky stated that he spoke to a couple members of the public at the forum who stated that they would like to read through relevant materials and the current Master Plan before commenting.

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Bill Stoughton, 11 Pinetop Road, suggested that the Committee reach out to local civic organizations, such as the Garden Club, Lions Club, Junior Women's Club, Newcomer's Club, etc.

Natasha Kypfer stated that the group could ask the DPW if information about the questionnaires could be posted to one of the large electronic signs.

The group discussed how best to reach out to these civic organizations. Dwight Brew suggested that the Committee reach out and see if they could be included on each group's agenda for their December meetings, for a brief 5-minute discussion on the project.

Town Administrator Shankle explained that the promotional video could also be placed on the Town's Vimeo channel.

The group discussed extending the deadline for the questionnaires until January. Other groups in Town that might be reached out to include Amherst Democrats, Amherst Republicans, PTA, PTSA, Historical Society, Boy and Girl Scouts, Friends of the Library, and the Recreation Department.

Mike Akillian stated that the previous survey elicited approximately 1,800 responses from the public. It is unclear if the low forum turnout is an example of diminishing returns, as people feel that they have already answered the questions being posed. He suggested that the responses from the forum be grouped into categories so that people can weigh in on their levels of investment for each. Steve Whitman stated that this will be part of the second public forum in the spring. Steve Whitman stated that, while it is unusual to have had a survey completed before Resilience's process got underway, it was a rich survey that received many responses. Now, the Committee is looking to reach others with different questions for additional context.

Tracie Adams suggested visiting the Transfer Station one day to hand out the postcards. Dwight Brew noted that there may be an area to place the postcards instead.

In response to a question from Joe Ilsley, Natasha Kypfer stated that there are stacks of the postcards and worksheets at the Community Development Office window, but that the Town Clerk is not actively handing them out to those who come into Town Hall for business.

Steve Whitman noted that the Committee may need to print out more postcards, as there were only 100 created for the forum.

Joe Ilsley stated that he would work to hand out the postcards at the Town's Trot off Your Turkey event on Friday November 26, 2021.

3. Promotion of Online Engagement Tools

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Chris Yates stated that he would post the online postcard with associated links to the Town's Facebook site. Steve Whitman encouraged Committee members to push the online tools out to the public.

4. Existing Conditions Analysis: Public Facilities Section:

The Committee discussed proposed edits to the Public Facilities profile, including that Clark School was built in 1937, and the Souhegan 2.2 subcommittee effort. Tracie Adams stated that she would like to see additional pictures and graphic included.

5. Discussion of Focus Groups, Format, and Schedule

Steve Whitman suggested that the Committee hold off on moving forward with the focus groups at this time, in order to push the online engagement tool.

Chris Yates stated that the Committee has gathered some good information so far and he would like to start putting together the focus groups so that the information can start to be processed. He would like to make sure that there are goals, strategies, and actionables available for discussion for these groups. He is concerned that the groups will not have enough time to review items in depth, if this continues to be put off.

Steve Whitman stated that he usually forms the focus groups after all responses are received from the public input session, and if more information is then needed on a certain item. A focus group would then be formed with experienced people in a given topic to discuss things in-depth.

Chris Yates noted that there were approximately 120 people who expressed interest in helping with these focus groups previously. He asked when these people would be reached out to. He suggested that the groups could also discuss innovative ideas being utilized in other communities. He is concerned that the Town is going to end up with a standard Master Plan.

Steve Whitman explained that the Committee previously decided to forgo creating individual working groups for each topic in order to move the Master Plan process forward more quickly. While working groups require multiple meetings and additional time, focus groups meet once with knowledgeable people on each topic discussing in-depth items and tools to consider.

Dwight Brew stated that the original survey received over 1,800 responses only six months ago. He is concerned that the group is spending time trying to receive another, possibly 200 responses to certain questions, and asked if this makes the already received responses any more valid. He asked if a plan will be put together than addresses these responses, once this community input session is complete.

Steve Whitman stated that this will be part of the plan. Next, Resilience will look at the data and pull-out themes by topic. These themes will be incorporated into the Master Plan, along with a Vision to guide the Town and a future land use plan. All of this will take place after January 1, 2022. Resilience needs the background for the Town before it can move forward with the plan, and it has just finished the existing condition sections.

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Mike Akillian stated that he does not believe there is an in-depth analysis of the data as part of the scope of work for this project. He believes that the Committee has received directional goals for the survey responses, but that there has been no in-depth insight offered. He asked if the plan would consider alternative types of housing in Town or the creation of a Housing Committee. He would like to know when the public will start discussing the potential tradeoffs and costs associated with certain items. He believes the Committee could look at the 1,800 responses received, pick 5-6 key issues, and start to address these items using focus groups.

Steve Whitman stated that Resilience and the Committee will continue to work to create a plan that addresses these key items. Resilience just finished completing the existing conditions profiles and there is now a lot of analysis to do. This part of the Master Plan update involves getting to know Amherst and beginning public engagement. The Master Plan update is not slated to be complete until 2022.

Joe Ilsley stated that the Committee sought an outside consultant for help updating the Master Plan and chose Resilience because the Committee believed it would deliver the Master Plan it was hoping for. He believes that the Committee should stay the course and follow the plan as outlined.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Steve Whitman stated that not all of the existing conditions profiles will have focus groups, as not all of them will likely need one. This will be up to the Committee. Typically, a focus group is for an item that deserves a deeper dive and more creative solutions.

Dwight Brew stated that the focus groups do not necessarily need to only relate to one subject at a time.

Chris Yates asked if the creative ideas discussed in the focus groups will be brought back to the Committee. Steve Whitman stated that the Committee will hear the ideas and then help vet them. The Committee can then decide if the ideas will become part of the final community forum in the spring.

6. Approval of Minutes October 26, 2021

Joe Ilsley moved to approve the meeting minutes of October 26, 2021, as presented. Tom Gauthier seconded.

Voting: Dwight Brew - aye, Chris Yates - aye, Tracie Adams – abstain; Will Ludt - aye, Jared Hardner – abstain, Joe Ilsley – aye; and Tom Gauthier - aye; 5-0-2 motion carried.

5. Old/New Business – none.

Tracie Adams moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:51pm. Will Ludt seconded.

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173 **Voting: Dwight Brew - aye, Chris Yates - aye, Tracie Adams – aye; Will Ludt - aye,**
174 **Jared Hardner – aye, Joe Ilsley – aye; and Tom Gauthier - aye; 7-0-0 motion**
175 **carried.**

176

177 *Respectfully submitted,*

178 *Kristan Patenaude*

179 Minutes approved: December 13, 2021