

February 14, 2022

**APPROVED**

In attendance: Dwight Brew, Will Ludt, Jared Hardner, Chris Yates, Tim Kachmar (remote), and Tracie Adams.

Staff in attendance: Nic Strong, Community Development Director, and Kristan Patenaude – Recording Secretary (remote)

Also in attendance: Steve Whitman, and Zak Brohinsky (remote), Resilience Planning & Design, and Bill Stoughton

**1. Call to Order**

Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

**2. Presentation on Water Resource Plan – Jared Hardner**

Jared Hardner explained that the Conservation Commission (ACC) has been brainstorming on how to be helpful and create content for the Master Plan update. He explained that the public survey ranked protecting and securing water resources in town as the highest priority. Thus, the ACC has sought concrete, actionable items to address this. Of the 1639 respondents, 85.2% listed water resources as the highest or high priority. This survey also ranked natural resource protection, such as protecting drinking water, surface water, the aquifer, and dealing with flooding/instream flow, as a high priority.

Jared Hardner explained that there are three sources of drinking water in Town: fractured rock aquifers (granite), alluvial aquifers (sand & gravel), and water utilities such as Pennichuck. Fractured rock aquifers deal with water flowing through fractures in the rock. In these circumstances it is unclear where the water is traveling from and unclear the productivity of nearby wells. However, water travels more easily through alluvial aquifers. This area is very productive for water in the alluvial aquifer zone. It is considered one of the best, if not the best, in the entire State. There are also some areas in Town that are supplied by Pennichuck for their water. In regard to if development will diminish the availability of the quantity of these drinking water sources, it will not have an effect on water utilities, it is unlikely to have an effect on alluvial aquifers, and it is unknown if this would have an effect on fractured rock aquifers. In regard to if development will degrade the quality/safety of these drinking water sources, it will not have an effect on water utilities, it will have an effect on alluvial aquifers, and it is possible to have an effect on fractured rock aquifers. He explained that the concern is the amount and density of proposed developments built on top of the alluvial aquifer in Town. Some of the highest quality aquifers in Town, such as those along Route 101A, have already been developed on top of, unfortunately, and their quality is diminished. There are some small areas within this zone that can still be protected and used for a public water supply in the future. He mentioned that PFOA's are complex issue and can be spread airborne. As more and more people test in Town, contamination has been found further spread out. More testing is needed to determine the full range of contamination and range of sources.

The ACC has examined ways to ensure that new developments will have high quality water available. Certain actions that could be included in the Master Plan are:

- Educating Amherst residents on their sources of drinking water

February 14, 2022

**APPROVED**

- Recommending that the Planning Board investigate community wells for future developments
  - ensure water quality for residents of future developments
  - ensure water quantity for future and current residents
- Recommend that the Planning Board strengthen its requirements for private wells
  - minimum drinking water standards before granting a certificate of occupancy
  - improved capacity testing for new wells
- Recommend that the Planning Board evaluate septic controls
- Investigate protecting lands with the potential for community wells
  - reclassify groundwater areas to GA or GA1 under the New Hampshire Groundwater Protection Act 1991 (currently there is no active management in Amherst in many areas)
  - acquire conservation lands with groundwater resources (example, Buck Meadow)

Jared Hardner explained that, in terms of surface water quality in Town, there are three existing watersheds: Baboosic Brook (38% of Amherst, 7% developed, 29% protected); Souhegan River (53% of Amherst, 23% developed, 15% protected); and Pennichuck Brook (8% of Amherst, 45% developed, 1% protected). Baboosic Brook has the greatest potential to conserve a healthy watershed. There is more that can be done for the Souhegan River watershed, and there's not much that can be done for Pennichuck Brook as it has already been heavily developed over. He explained that some of the lakes, ponds, and streams in Town already exceed EPA water quality limits for things such as E coli, phosphorus, pH, etc. Baboosic Lake Beach and Young Judaea Beach have both been impaired in the past by E coli and cyanobacteria. While the TMDL's have been calculated and most point sources are regulated by the EPA, it is the non-point sources (yard fertilizers, farms, parking lot drainage, etc.) that are the key source of these issues and are not being currently controlled. The Town would need to decide to identify and work towards regulating the non-point sources. Private septic systems may also contribute to these problems.

Certain actions that could be included in the Master Plan to deal with surface water quality include:

- Recommending greater implementation of the Amherst Stormwater Management Plan (last updated 2011) per the MS4 permit
- Recommend that the Planning Board evaluate septic controls
- Recommend that the Board of Selectmen improve agricultural nonpoint source controls
- Recommend continued efforts to increase natural habitat protection
  - watersheds need to be 70-75% naturally vegetated to be kept healthy. There are areas in the north side of Town where this would be completed.
- Recommend a watershed-scale assessment of costs and benefits of development restrictions in sensitive locations in Town
  - based on results zoning and planning ordinances could be updated. This looks to strategically locate developments in Town to reduce water quality impairment.

February 14, 2022

**APPROVED**

Jared Hardner stated that water flows through the watersheds in Town. The rate at which it flows through is affected by the amount of development within the watershed. As natural habitats are removed, there is a higher volume of water flowing in a shorter amount of time, thus potentially leading to flooding. Natural vegetation holds the water in place and allows it to leach into the land over a longer period of time. 89% of Amherst is outside of the 100- and 500-year flood plains. It is not expected that a large number of structures in this area would be affected by flooding. However, there are certain areas in Town that may be affected by flooding, especially in terms of roads then being blocked. Pinch points in roadways affect many residents and emergency access. Certain actions that could be included in the master plan to deal with flooding include:

- Recommend that the Police and Fire Departments develop access plans for floods
- Recommend that the DPW plan to upgrade culverts and bridges at strategic locations in Town
- Recommend protection of natural habitat in locations with water retention capacity.

Jared Hardner noted that increased flooding is likely in the future due to climate change.

Jared Hardner summarized key points for considerations for the Master Plan update, including:

- Recommendations that developments should proactively integrate water resource protection
- Identify and protect strategic areas in Town for groundwater resources, natural habitat cover necessary for surface water quality, and flood water retention
- Strengthen measures to manage future impacts such as the Amherst Stormwater Management Plan, community wells, new private well requirements, and septic requirements.

In response to a question from Will Ludt regarding wells in the Village that Amherst used in the 1980's through its Water District, Jared Hardner stated that these wells are no longer in use by Pennichuck due to high levels of manganese.

In response to a question from Will Ludt regarding if neighboring towns are as judicious with their water supplies, Jared Hardner stated that it depends on the watershed. There are small tributaries coming in from the north. The Souhegan River watershed covers approximately 250 miles to the northwest, with water coming through Amherst from various towns upstream. Some of the streams that originate in Amherst and flow into the Souhegan River are heavily polluted by non-point sources, and these are things Amherst is solely responsible for.

Will Ludt noted that he believes a video showing residents where their water comes from would be a great addition. Jared Hardner explained that the ACC has a contact at Pennichuck who might be able to help with this project.

Tim Kachmar asked what the Town has done to establish a baseline of water quality and quantity. He noted that developments will continue to progress in Town, and it will be important to have a baseline study in order to measure possible impacts to water resources in Town. Jared

February 14, 2022

**APPROVED**

Hardner stated that, while this would be ideal, it is likely not possible to achieve a baseline report. Doing this work has shown that, in terms of quantity, Pennichuck customers will not run out of water, alluvial aquifers will likely not run out of water, but fractured rock aquifers could be in danger of running out of water. This is an issue if new developments continue to be placed along fractured rock aquifers. He is suggesting that new developments have community wells, as these require more rigorous testing than private wells. This water would also be treated by a professional operator, so that the people within the development are receiving clean drinking water.

Chris Yates asked about having community education on fertilizer, detergent, and deicer use as part of a long-term strategy for water resource protection. Jared Hardner stated that this can occur as part of the Amherst Stormwater Management Plan, but that broader education would be helpful. The community needs to think about these issues in terms of the scale of the watershed itself.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Jared Hardner stated that he assumes Camp Young Judaea is aware of the impairment in its water, but he has not communicated with them directly about this.

### **3. Review of Updated Master Plan Vision and Themes**

Dwight Brew noted that, at the last Planning Board meeting, Planning Board Chair Arnie Rosenblatt appointed Tracie Adams as Vice Chair of the Master Plan Steering Committee. Dwight Brew explained that this will be his last meeting with the Committee, as he is not running for reelection to the Board of Selectmen. He thanked the Committee and all those involved for their work and noted that he appreciates everyone's efforts. He believes the vision, themes, and actions all support one another and seem in agreement with the initial survey and most of the public outreach. He suggested that the group not allow the recent public outreach to have more impact than the initial survey, as the initial survey had approximately 20 times more input. He also suggested that the group avoid moving items forward that are not directly tied to the survey, without a larger discussion and consensus among the Committee. He believes anything brought up outside of the surveys would need to have a lot of additional discussion before inclusion. He suggested that the draft vision, themes, and actions be communicated to the Planning Board and larger public.

Steve Whitman agreed with Dwight Brew. He suggested that the Committee give feedback and suggestions on the draft Master Plan outline before drafting a memo to share with the Planning Board, before sharing it more broadly. He questioned if it will be possible to put this all together quickly enough to share with the Planning Board at its meeting this Wednesday.

Bill Stoughton, 11 Pinetop Road and Vice Chair of the Planning Board, explained that the Planning Board would likely have time to review this item at its meeting this Wednesday. However, the Planning Board's first March meeting had a full agenda. The next meeting in March will likely be an organizational meeting, as there will be new members, and elections for

February 14, 2022

**APPROVED**

officers will be held. He believes this Wednesday would be the time to get feedback on the draft from the Planning Board.

Dwight Brew noted that he would also like to have the opportunity to speak to the Department Heads and Board of Selectmen on this draft, while still a member of this Committee. A brief memo, referencing the draft documents, could be submitted to the Planning Board for review at their Wednesday meeting, so that these can then be more broadly distributed. Bill Stoughton suggested that this information could be submitted to the Planning Board Chair in parallel with submitting it to the Department Heads.

#### **4. Draft Master Plan Outline**

The Committee discussed the draft vision document. Jared Hardner stated that he believes the edits made to the document are appropriate. This document may continue to be edited along the way.

Steve Whitman addressed the draft actionable items document submitted by Will Ludt regarding heritage items for the Master Plan. He questioned if some of the actions should be included in the Master Plan or completed internally by the Heritage Commission. Will Ludt explained that his intention is to get more public participation than there currently is. Chris Yates stated that some of these items could be taken by the Heritage Commission after the fact and worked on. Steve Whitman stated that he will include Will Ludt's action suggestions into the document for now, to then be reviewed at a later date, if needed.

Steve Whitman noted that he will replace action items #22-32 with the items outlined in Jared Hardner's PowerPoint presentation from this evening.

Will Ludt stated that he does not believe the proper number of action items are being mentioned regarding the schools. Steve Whitman stated that there are not usually items for the schools listed in the Master Plan, as these are handled by a different set of regulating boards. This is a land use document. The schools are mentioned in the vision and the content sections, but these are managed by a different body. Unless there are specific actions regarding land use and schools, there is not much more to add. Dwight Brew stated that there is a lot of danger in taking over the powers of another statutory board. However, there could be an item stating that there will be limited phasing of new developments to align with the school's ability to include new students. Steve Whitman stated that the Master Plan can look for ways to align those, or study that. Chris Yates agreed that there has not been a lot of discussion during Planning Board application hearings regarding phasing and accurate information from departments such as DPW or the schools, in order to make a case for phasing a development. Steve Whitman noted that action item #28 is proposed to be for a Town wide Fiscal Impact Analysis or Cost of Community Services Study and use this to determine something about greater development in Town. This would be a holistic approach looking at all of the departments in Town and the associated studies. Tracie Adams agreed that this holistic approach containing data points is needed for the Planning Board. Dwight Brew explained that not many understand how to estimate impacts in

February 14, 2022

**APPROVED**

this overall, holistic way. At some point these impacts lead to an increase in services. A new house could also bring in taxes to cover some of these municipal costs.

**5. Outreach and Engagement Report**

The Committee reviewed the draft outline document. Steve Whitman asked that photos begin to be compiled by the Committee and shared for the Master Plan.

Tim Kachmar expressed concern regarding the draft Vision statement that “Amherst’s municipal facilities reflect a commitment to the residents, embody sustainability and community resilience, and have inspired private property owners to pursue energy conservation, renewable energy, and regenerative landscaping projects of their own.” He stated that it sounds political without a lot of meaning behind it. Steve Whitman agreed that this statement could be simplified.

Tracie Adams stated that there are only two items: redevelopment – keeps the look of existing structures, and education, that are not included in this draft document from the 10 key recommended items mentioned in the previous Master Plan document. The redevelopment piece is mentioned throughout the Master Plan, though, regarding keeping the rural character of the Town.

It was noted that feedback from the Planning Board can be sent to Resilience via Nic Strong. Steve Whitman stated that these sections can likely begin to be written next month.

The Committee reviewed the public input and how the public will continue to be informed on these items.

**6. Actions by Theme**

*This item was previously discussed.*

**7. Approval of Minutes January 25, 2022**

**Tracie Adams moved to approve the meeting minutes of January 25, 2022, as presented. Will Ludt seconded.**

**Voting: Dwight Brew - aye, Chris Yates - abstain, Tracie Adams – aye; Will Ludt - aye, and Jared Hardner – aye; 4-0-1 motion carried.**

**8. Old/New Business –**

Tracie Adams thanked Dwight Brew for his leadership and work on the Committee.

**Jared Hardner moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:01pm. Tracie Adams seconded.**

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

*Respectfully submitted,  
Kristan Patenaude*

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Master Plan Steering Committee

February 14, 2022

**APPROVED**

259 Minutes approved: July 26, 2022