

TOWN OF AMHERST
Master Plan Steering Committee

March 30, 2021

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In attendance: Dwight Brew, Chris Yates, Tom Quinn [6:55pm], Will Ludt, Tracie Adams, Jared Hardner, and Tim Kachmar.

Staff in attendance: Natasha Kypfer – Town Planner, and Kristan Patenaude – Recording Secretary

1. Roll Call to Order

Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:31pm., and Natasha Kypfer read the following statement. On behalf of the Master Plan Steering Committee, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor’s Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, as extended by various Executive Orders, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor’s Emergency Order.

However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, I am confirming that we are:

Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means:

We are utilizing Zoom for this electronic meeting.

All members of the Board have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone #312-626-6799 and password 821 6680 7619, or by clicking on the following website address:

<https://zoom.us/j/82166807619> that was included in the public notice of this meeting.

Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting:

We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using Zoom or telephonically. Instructions have also been provided on the website of the Planning Board at: www.amherstnh.gov. Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access: If anybody has a problem, please call 603-341-5290.

Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting:

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, the meeting will be adjourned and rescheduled.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote. Let’s start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance. When each member states their presence, please also state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to- Know law.

Roll call attendance: Dwight Brew, Chris Yates, Tracie Adams, Will Ludt, Jared Hardner, and Tim Kachmar – all present and alone.

TOWN OF AMHERST
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45 Presentation by Resilience Planning & Design, LLC, followed by Q&A

46 Dwight Brew explained that at the Master Plan Steering Committee's January meeting, he and
47 Nic Strong, Community Development Director, agreed to identify some firms that could provide
48 the group with assistance on the Master Plan. Due to the cost and the Town's Purchasing Policy,
49 an RFP was required. Three firms responded to the bid. Two of the firms were interviewed last
50 night, and the final one will be interviewed tonight.

51
52 Steve Whitman, Liz Kelly, and Zak Brohinsky, of Resilience Planning & Design joined the
53 Committee.

54
55 Steve Whitman stated that he founded Resilience Planning & Design, LLC, in 2014. The
56 company's focus is on Master Plans, and regulatory work with communities, including open
57 space planning, housing studies, etc. The small team likes to work with municipalities and
58 primarily the volunteers on Boards/Commissions.

59
60 Liz Kelly stated that she is a professional Planner, with an interest in ecological design and
61 natural resource planning. She has worked with municipalities and regular sectors. She has
62 experience in non-profit project development and implementation.

63
64 Zak Brohinsky stated that he is a GIS and spatial analyst, with a background in land use and
65 conservation. He is also trained in FEMA Hazus software. He sits on a local renewable energy
66 non-profit.

67
68 Liz Kelly explained that the group completed a Master Plan update for Littleton, NH. The goal
69 was to create an actionable document that balanced natural resources with future growth and
70 development of the town, to be aligned with the goals and visions. The group worked directly
71 with Littleton's Planning Board on this project. The Planning Board wanted a more graphic,
72 easy-to-read document to inspire their officials and the public. The group also completed a
73 Master Plan update for Plaistow, NH. This Master Plan had three themes: built environment,
74 natural environment, and land use. The group created implementation strategies under the
75 stewardship of Plaistow's issues and resources. Of particular importance, in this case, was the
76 town's protection of its water resources. The group also completed a Master Plan update for
77 Wolfeboro, NH. For this update, the group worked with the town's Planning Board and
78 subcommittees, based on a number of topics, such as energy, climate change, the arts, and the
79 heritage of the area, including a number of general topics.

80
81 Steve Whitman added that the group worked on a Water Resources chapter for Francestown,
82 NH. The group looked at surface and groundwater resources as a way for the town to be
83 proactive and good stewards. The group also completed a Housing Study & Regulatory Audit for
84 Jackson and Newbury, NH. This allowed the towns to better understand the existing housing
85 stock and involve the communities in the existing and future needs. The group helped with an
86 Open Space Plan for Portsmouth, NH. This included a comprehensive study to understand the
87 existing parks and open space locations and identify future open space conservation areas to

March 30, 2021

APPROVED

88 create habitat and recreation connections. This looked at these networks as connections both into
89 downtown and out of it. The group is working on a similar plan for Burlington, VT, currently.

90
91 Steve Whitman stated that the group recognizes that Amherst is unique. It is important to keep
92 the unique characteristics of each town. The group does this by understanding the context of the
93 community and where the community wants to go into the future. The group needs a deeper
94 understanding of each part of the community and how it wants to balance the desire for
95 protection of natural resources with development. He explained that Zak Brohinsky will begin
96 with an in-depth understanding of the Town and then ask both the Committee and the public for
97 a better understanding of the existing conditions. This will help to guide and inform the decision-
98 making later on. The goal is to make an action-oriented plan to guide and inform into the future.

99
100 Zak Brohinsky stated that he works to understand the existing conditions and resources. This
101 provides the group and the Town with a baseline of information. Once this level is understood,
102 the group can analyze and look at Amherst critically. There may be options that have been
103 overlooked or gaps that need to be addressed. He will work to inventory the existing resources
104 and think creatively for Amherst's needs.

105
106 Liz Kelly noted that there have been some changes since COVID-19 regarding meetings. The
107 group is aware that the way it communicates with the Committee and public may be altered
108 throughout the working process.

109
110 *Tom Quinn joined the meeting.*

111
112 Steve Whitman stated that the general process is:

- 113 1) Project Management & Meetings
114 2) Mapping & Analysis
115 3) Outreach & Engagement
116 4) Document Development & Delivery

117 Steve Whitman explained that the group likes to meet with the Committee monthly and that a
118 12–16-month total process is ideal. The group will work to create a timetable with the Town. The
119 group will work to be an extension of the Town staff.

120
121 In response to a question from Dwight Brew, Steve Whitman stated that the group likes to work
122 through the existing conditions analysis and public Q&A before working on a draft document. It
123 could take a few months to engage the public, possibly using previous vision statements of the
124 Town. The group will then bring a draft statement and an iterative process will continue.

125
126 Dwight Brew noted that the Committee previously sent out a survey to the public that received
127 approximately 1,800 response. He explained that the group would like to make sure that the
128 vision statement is not crafted by a small group, but by as many from the community as possible,
129 and asked how Resilience will work to make this possible.

March 30, 2021

APPROVED

Steve Whitman noted that it is unusual for a survey to have already been completed. His group would go through the survey data, along with the existing conditions data and decide how best to proceed.

Dwight Brew stated that most Master Plans for NH towns look similar. The details and implementation plans are what differ between them. The purpose of the Master Plan is to influence things in Amherst that might not have happened without the Plan. He questioned how a graphically-oriented, easy-to-read Plan will help the Town with items that require funding or changes in zoning.

Steve Whitman explained that the implementation section is critical for this. There needs to be a robust table of clear actions, with who is responsible for each action and a timeline. There needs to be a method to track actions and engage others. Liz Kelly stated that the group tries to take the approach with the document layout for it to be easy-to-read without losing the utilitarian purpose of a Master Plan. It is at the forefront of their minds that the document serves a dual purpose. Zak Brohinsky stated that, from a GIS perspective, a story map is the equivalent to an engaging document with a utilitarian feel. This can include an amalgamation of photos, texts and videos, which link to the utilitarian documents.

Jared Hardner explained that a key theme that came in through the survey is protection of the Town's water resources. The Amherst Conservation Commission has recognized that it has to pay more attention to this subject but has little capacity to take it very far. He asked what the group will be able to accomplish on a technical level, in terms of doing water planning in a meaningful way.

Steve Whitman stated that he believes the group can do most of what the Town needs for this during the Master Plan process. The group will look at all land use in Town and can make it a focus of the Master Plan without ignoring the other natural resources in Town. Zak Brohinsky added that, for Franconstown, the group looked at water resources in Town and also how those fit into the surrounding towns. The group could look at how Amherst fits into the larger water system.

In response to a question from Jared Hardner regarding a GIS model for nutrient loading in Town, Zak Brohinsky stated that he could provide the Town with a proxy substitute to create this type of analysis. Steve Whitman noted that this information could be woven together as part of the Master Plan process but may increase the budget.

In response to a question from Chris Yates, Steve Whitman stated that the group does use map data from NH Regional Planning Commissions as needed to inform their process.

In response to a question from Chris Yates, Steve Whitman stated that the group has a default of three public engagement meetings, but the actual number could depend on the community. In-person meetings are more advantageous, if possible.

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Master Plan Steering Committee

March 30, 2021

APPROVED

In response to a question from Chris Yates, Steve Whitman stated that it would be difficult to complete the process in 12 months. A draft could be completed in that time, but this would still need refinements and two public hearings.

In response to a question from Tom Quinn, Steve Whitman stated that there are many options that can be reviewed with the Committee in terms of public engagement and online tools.

In response to a question from Tom Quinn, Steve Whitman stated that the group tries to reach out to the older population in Town through newspapers and paper flyers around Town. Focus groups can also be utilized.

Tom Quinn explained that the Town doesn't currently have a hardcopy newspaper and doesn't have a service center for outreach. He asked that the company keep this in mind when deciding how to communicate with the older population in Town.

Steve Whitman explained that the group usually likes to have 2-3 large public events as one component of the process. The group does outreach through digital and print formats. They also use website information and focus groups when possible. Liz Kelly stated that the group can customize the process within the chosen budget.

Tom Quinn noted that, if the process is not complete until 2023, per the 16-month suggested timeline, this could leave the Town's zoning significantly past when it should usually be updated. Steve Whitman explained that if there are critical regulatory issues at play, the group can try to get clarity on these items early on to move forward with zoning amendments to the 2022 Town Meeting. Tom Quinn explained that he would be uncomfortable pushing forward with certain items without a completed Plan.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Steve Whitman explained that there is no community that doesn't have somewhat of a diverse, vocal group of citizens that want to be involved in the process. The group tries to listen to all perspectives and make it clear people are being heard. It also works to ask the community how they can best feel supported in the process.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Steve Whitman stated that the group will provide a fresh set of eyes to look at the existing data covered in the survey and ask questions to tease out certain unrecognized needs. Liz Kelly explained that an analysis of the survey will be done to see the needs that have been asked out. The group will then look for needs beyond these.

Natasha Kypfer asked questions for Nic Strong, who was unable to attend the meeting.

In response to a question from Natasha Kypfer, Steve Whitman explained that the group calculates the proposed number of hours within a segment based on their experience working with similar sized communities. The RFP may also identify additional things that are taken into consideration. The group creates behind-the-scenes sheets and checks each other's proposed numbers.

TOWN OF AMHERST
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March 30, 2021

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In response to a question from Natasha Kypfer, Steve Whitman stated that the group's level of involvement in the process varies from town-to-town. Some towns like to get the group's advice and information, and a proof-reading of the Plan, but not for the group to write it. There was also a town which asked the group to finish a draft Plan for them. Liz Kelly stated that the group received some sections of Wolfeboro's Master Plan that were written by community members. The group always works with the community to get the best product for it. It can be a challenge to make it look like one person wrote the Master Plan, if different sections are being written by different people/groups. Their company can make a Plan cohesive, if granted editorial capabilities.

In response to a question from Natasha Kypfer, Steve Whitman stated that the group measures the success of Master Plans they have completed based on the implementation. In Dover, for example, chapters are updated one at a time and action items are reviewed each year to show which ones are complete and no longer needed. It is important to show the tracking process to the public. Liz Kelly explained that looking at how the action items are allocated and who will collaborate on them moving forward is important. The group works to make a design plan that is not overwhelming and shows a logical path forward.

In response to a question from Natasha Kypfer, Steve Whitman gave the example of Littleton, and Berlin, for towns that have been successful with the implementation of their Master Plans. Liz Kelly stated that Dover adopted regulation and architectural standards to move forward with developing streetscape changes. In Rochester, the town wanted to look at a downtown improvement plan. The group proposed a variety of ways to implement ideas, such as pop-up shops. The town saw an increase in pop-ups and outdoor dining, partially due to COVID-19, that aligned with their goals.

The Committee thanked Resilience Planning & Design, LLC, for the presentation.

Dwight Brew stated that the Committee would meet again next Monday at 6:30pm to review the presentations and hopefully decide on a path forward.

**Will Ludt moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:39pm PM. Chris Yates seconded.
Roll call: Chris Yates – aye; Dwight Brew – aye; Tom Quinn – aye; Tracie Adams – aye; Will Ludt – aye; Jared Hardner – aye; and Tim Kachmar – aye. Motion carried unanimously.**

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*

Minutes approved: July 19, 2021