

Town of Amherst

STRATEGIC PLAN: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

FY 2021-2025 PLAN TO GUIDE DEPARTMENT PRIORITIES AND
BUDGETING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MISSION

The Amherst Office of Community Development provides excellent customer service, professional assistance and technical expertise in a consistent and fair manner to all its users on:

- the implementation of land use ordinances, regulations and policies;
- the issuance of building permits and the provision of inspections during the construction process;
- the enforcement of codes and ordinances.

Through community outreach and engagement, and support to appointed and elected Boards and Commissions, the Amherst Office of Community Development works to plan for the future sustainable development of the community while respecting individual rights and protecting historical and cultural resources and the natural environment.

VISION 2025

The Amherst Office of Community Development:

- is a streamlined and efficient point of service for all who seek to use and develop land in town;
- has worked with stakeholders to translate the vision of the 2020/2021 Master Plan into a physical reality for the community;
- is a trusted source of information and guidance in the community.

VALUES

The following core values represent the beliefs and behaviors that guide us in all the Office of Community Development's activities:

Customer service

We provide customer focused service to all our constituents based on listening and delivering what is needed.

Integrity

We carry out our duties in an ethical, honest, legal and professional manner at all times.

Equitable service

We provide the same level of professional, courteous and respectful service to all individuals.

Support

We provide support to the Town's appointed and elected officials on various boards and commissions to assist them in discharging their duties.

Transparency

We are open and straightforward in all ordinance, regulation, code and policy development, permitting, inspection and planning services.

Efficiency

We endeavor to be as efficient as possible in our processes and work habits to provide services to the Town in a cost effective way while being reasonable to applicants. We seek common sense solutions while keeping the Town's best interests in mind.

Knowledge

We strive to continuously improve our knowledge and education in order to provide a high quality service-oriented experience to the department's users.

OVERVIEW

The Amherst Office of Community Development includes building, code enforcement, planning, zoning, and economic development functions. The Office provides support to the Town's Zoning Board of Adjustment, Planning Board, Historic District Commission, Conservation Commission, and the Heritage Commission. The Office also supports the Capital Improvement Program Committee and assists other Town Departments and Boards as needed.

The Office is the central repository for all land use related plans and documentation, and the central communication hub for all land use boards. The Office is operated by a team of four full time staff members: Director, Executive Assistant, Code Enforcement Officer/Building Inspector/Health Officer, and Planner I.

HISTORICAL TRENDS

Understanding the historical influences on the Office of Community Development is the first step in determining why the Office is where it is today and how best to achieve the vision for the future. Pressures on services from various sources can have effects on things such as the length of time to issue permits to the amount of time that can be devoted to long-term planning versus the day to day running of the department.

PERMIT AND APPLICATION TRENDS

Table 1 shows the number of various types of building permits issued from 2006 through 2019. Of interest is the sharp increase in new single family residential in the last three years. The totals indicate a steady rise in the number of permits issued each year through the Office of Community Development which translates into more processing time by staff.

Table 1: Amherst's Permit Application History 2006 – 2019 (through 10/4/19)

Building Permit Application History														
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (a/o 10/4/19)
New SF Residential (including Condos)	51	30	26	10	14	8	34	10	13	24	12	35	37	24
Residential Additions/Alterations	192	161	134	145	142	119	109	175	127	166	302	207	259	218
Commercial/Industrial new	N/A	11	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	2
Commercial/Industrial additions/alterations	N/A	170	35	19	15	13	25	19	15	18	18	14	12	10
Signs	31	31	24	12	22	26	32	34	39	50	52	22	17	12
Pools	13	13	8	0	15	8	7	5	10	6	1	3	9	2
Demolition	5	14	20	19	24	16	12	13	21	12	4	12	6	5
Septic Systems	80	83	61	55	47	60	50	48	92	58	40	53	56	54
Electrical	77	60	59	101	112	103	146	247	191	212	235	226	226	162
Electrical (for generator)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	72	30	33	54	21
Plumbing	N/A	49	14	6	20	7	5	77	80	90	87	112	161	68
Mechanical	N/A	N/A	43	41	57	43	33	276	307	372	313	340	408	296
Earth Removal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Home Occupations	N/A	N/A	7	5	7	1	7	4	3	6	8	2	4	3
Total	449	622	431	413	475	405	461	911	899	1088	1104	1060	1250	877

Source: Amherst Office of Community Development, 2019

Applications to the Planning Board have remained fairly constant over the years from 2012 to 2019. The increase in Conditional Use Permit (CUP) applications reflects the changes made to the Zoning Ordinance regarding Integrated Innovative Housing projects. It is to be anticipated that those CUP approvals will be forthcoming as subdivision applications in the next couple of years as they receive their required state and federal permits.

Table 2a-c: Amherst's Land Use Board Applications

Planning Board	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (a/o 10/4/19)
Scenic Road Hearings	2	2	1	1	3	2	2	2
Non-Residential Site Plans (NRSP)	7	6	3	4	3	2	3	4
Water Resource Management Plans	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Affordable Housing Suitability	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subdivision	3	1	8	7	6	3	6	4
Lot Line Adjustment	6	1	4	2	0	0	0	3
Conceptual Discussions	3	4	2	2	2	8	9	3
Sign Master Plan	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Compliance Hearing	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Conditional Use Permit	0	0	4	2	2	3	6	6
Total	32	20	22	18	16	18	26	23

Source: Amherst Office of Community Development, 2019

The number of applications the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) has dealt with appears to have evened out since 2014. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of ZBA applications are variances. This is a result of a Zoning Ordinance that has not seen a major update in some years and that is out of date in terms of the listed uses within each district.

Zoning Board of Adjustment	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (a/o 10/4/19)
Variance	23	16	27	12	12	14	9	13
Special Exception	2	3	3	0	0	0	0	1
Appeal of Administrative Decision	3	0	1	2	1	0	0	0
Equitable Waiver	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Variance for the Handicapped	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	30	19	32	14	13	15	10	14

Source: Amherst Office of Community Development, 2019

The Amherst Historic District is the largest in the State of New Hampshire. It is to be expected, therefore, that the Historic District Commission (HDC) will be very active dealing with the myriad different applications required by the regulations to maintain the integrity of the district. The HDC has had a steady workload for the last eight years.

Historic District Commission	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (a/o 10/4/19)
New Building	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	0
Ext. Building Mods/Alterations	36	7	10	14	10	9	14	10
Building Additions	0	0	0	4	5	4	1	1
Tree Removal	31	11	4	0	0	0	0	0
Fence/Landscaping	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Mechanical Equipment	3	2	3	3	1	2	2	0
Demolition	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheds/Accessory Structures	0	0	3	2	0	2	9	3
Other	0	0	3	4	4	13	4	6
Total	83	24	24	28	22	30	31	24

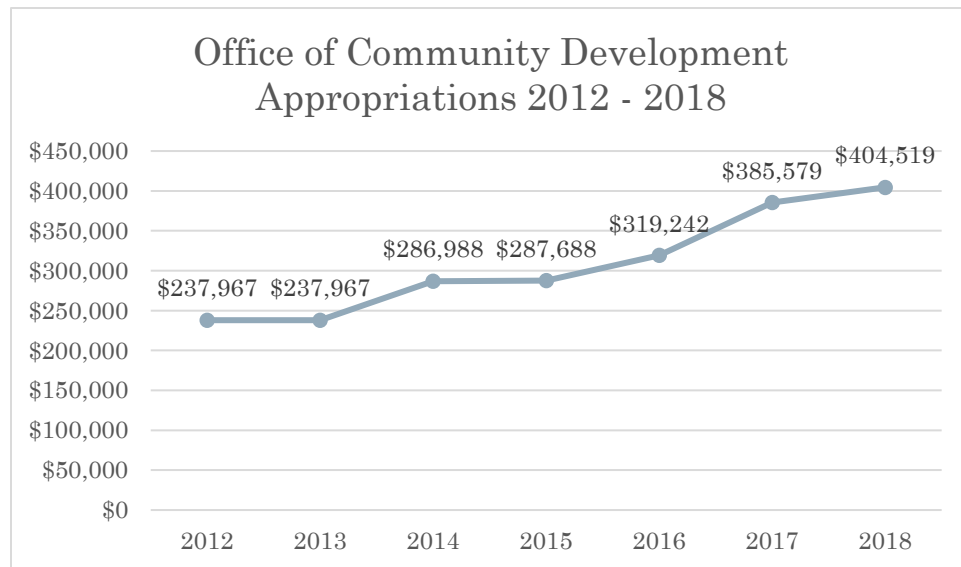
Source: Amherst Office of Community Development, 2019

BUDGET AND DEPARTMENTAL STAFFING TRENDS

The Office of Community Development budget has increased over time as the department has been restructured. In FY 2012 the Planning & Zoning Department was reorganized into the Office of Community Development which combined several departments that had overlapping responsibilities and became a single office operated by four full time staff members. The departmental budget also includes a part time recording secretary who takes the minutes for the Planning Board, ZBA, and HDC. The budget covers health insurance and other benefits, fees for outside consultants, office supplies, postage, newspaper classified ads for public hearings, continuing education through conferences and seminars, fees for maintaining permitting software, and so on. Application fees provide some offsetting revenue.

The turnover in Community Development Directors is a trend that should be considered. Any turnover in the department creates upheaval but this is especially true at the leadership level. Application reviews, long term planning projects, staff training and development, departmental procedures all suffer with a lack of continuity. The recent hiring of a new director and resignation of the Planner I in 2019 will add stresses to the department that must be recognized and managed to avoid employee burnout and delays in service provision.

Chart 1: Office of Community Development Budget 2012-2018



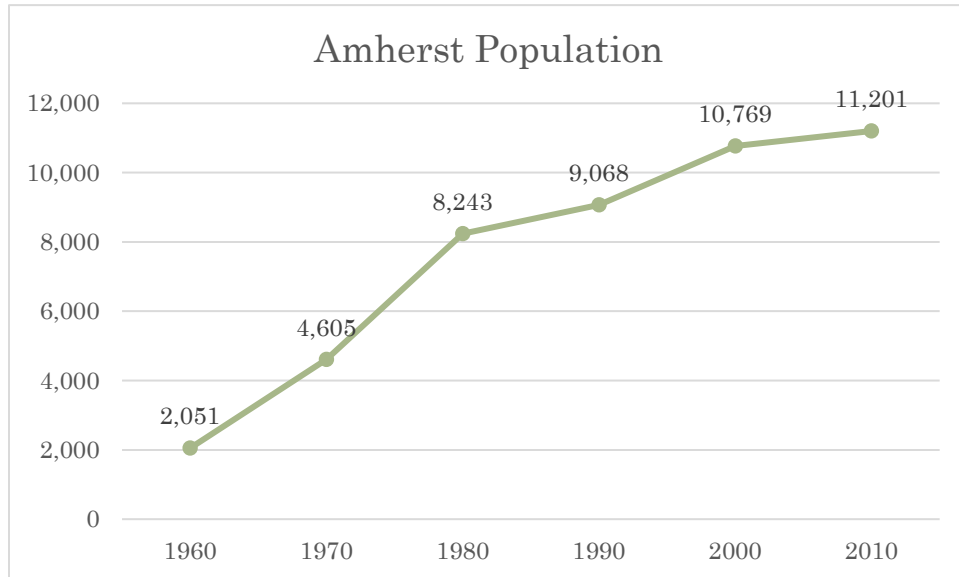
Source: Amherst Town Reports

POPULATION

Amherst’s population increased rapidly in the 1980's, then slowed somewhat in subsequent decades. The U.S. Census is conducted only every ten years, leaving the years in between to be extrapolated from the American Community Survey (ACS) which utilizes a much smaller subset of the population for its census questions. The New Hampshire Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) estimates Amherst's 2018 population at 11,545 people. The Amherst Town Clerk maintains her own town census which she updates with births and deaths and by asking new residents for their details, including whether they know where the previous homeowners moved to. By their own admission there may be flaws in the counting but the most recent number available from the Town Clerk as of October 2, 2019, was 12,789, a considerable difference from the OSI estimated figure. It would be very interesting to compare the Town Clerk's figures for each decade with those of the census to see if there were any correlations to be drawn but unfortunately the data is maintained on an ongoing basis as a snapshot on any given day and is not stored historically.

Population growth is a driver of services for the Office of Community Development as the owners of property apply for building permits or Historic District Commission approvals and so on. On the flip side, the types of application approved by the Planning Board for subdivisions increase the number of building lots available in town and thus attract new residents.

Chart 2: Amherst Population

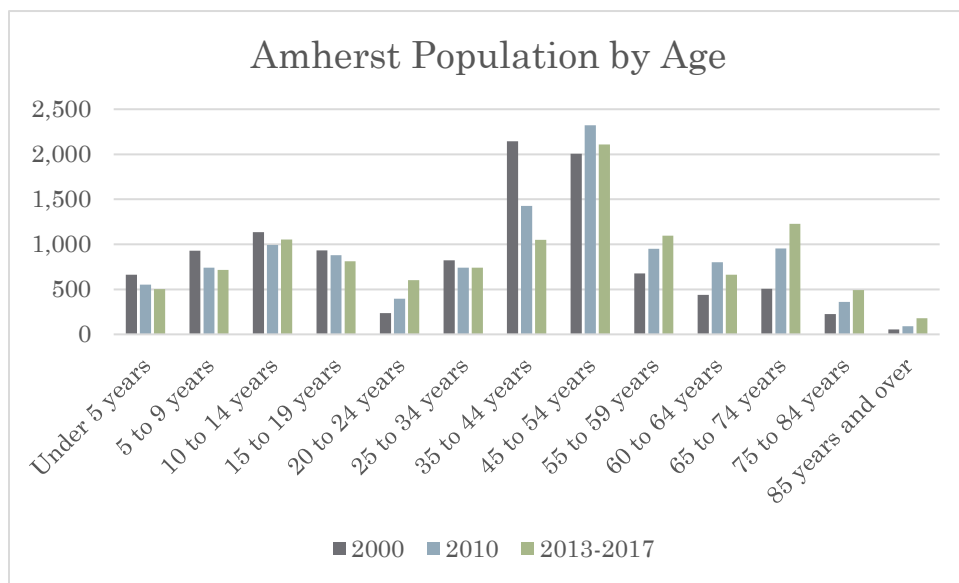


Source: U.S. Census Bureau

AGE OF POPULATION

As well as knowing how many people are living in town and how that compares to previous years, it is perhaps more interesting to know the ages of the residents because that has a direct impact on the facilities and services needed in town.

Chart 3: Amherst Population by Age



Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

The chart indicates the age groups from the 2000 census, the 2010 census and the 2013 - 2017 five year ACS aggregate. In a static population one could assume that the numbers in each category would remain the same and simply move to the next age group with each census. In- and out-migration, births and deaths, obviously render that assumption false. However, it is interesting to see from these numbers a significant decrease from the 45 - 54 year old age group to the 55 - 59 year old age group in all three counts. An increase in the 20 - 24 year old age group and the 65 - 74 year old age group in the 2013 - 2017 count may mean the need for increased senior services and varying housing types to provide for these groups.

ASSESSED PROPERTY VALUATION

The residential property valuation more than doubled from 2000 - 2010. As the Commercial/Industrial tax base grows, it not only provides local jobs and services, it also reduces the tax burden on residential tax payers by increasing the taxes contributed by businesses. Over the past three years, the assessed value of commercial and industrial property in town declined slightly, reflective of the slowdown in commercial growth and depreciation in existing commercial and industrial properties. It has ticked up, however, with an increase of \$19,380,850 from 2017 to 2019.

Table 3: Amherst's Total Assessed Values

Year	Commercial/ Industrial	% Commercial/ Industrial	Residential	% Residential	Total
2000	\$76,607,200	9.79%	\$705,542,300	90.21%	\$782,149,500
2010	\$223,760,375	12.20%	\$1,610,306,725	87.80%	\$1,834,067,100
2015	\$201,211,775	13.01%	\$1,345,724,955	86.99%	\$1,546,936,730
2017	\$200,031,750	12.14%	\$1,446,418,500	87.85%	\$1,646,450,250
2019	\$219,412,600	TBD	\$1,479,180,420	TBD	\$1,698,593,020

Source: Amherst Assessing Department

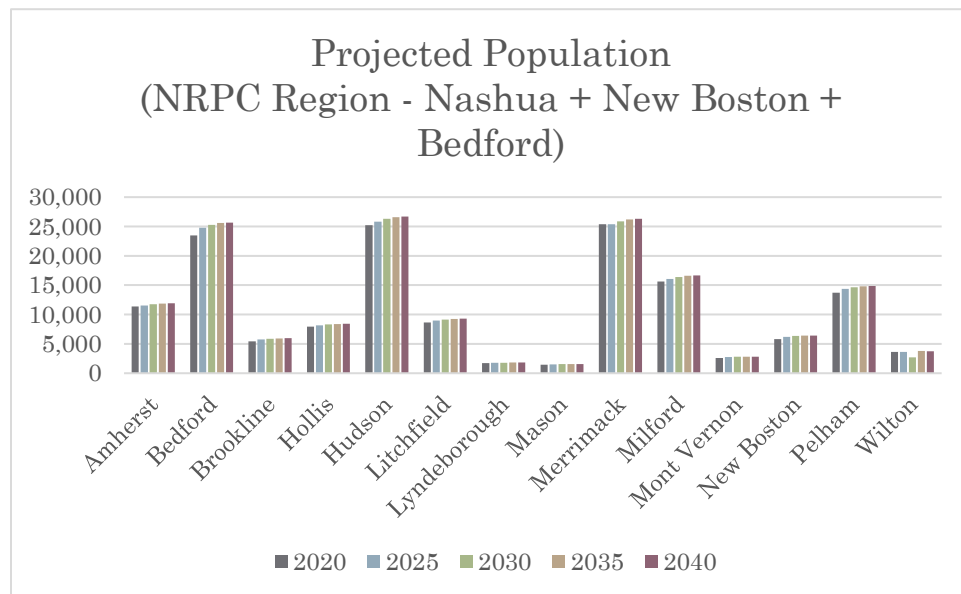
ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The environmental scan looks at things that can impact the department from a variety of perspectives: economic, social, political, technological, demographic, etc.

REGION

Amherst is situated in the southeast portion of the State. Amherst contains 33.9 square miles of land area and 0.5 square miles of inland water area. Amherst is a member of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission, which contains communities as varied as the City of Nashua (2010 pop. 86,494) and the Town of Mason (2010 pop. 1,382). The Office of Community Development also considers the directly abutting towns of New Boston and Bedford to the north as part of the region. The region's population is projected to rise at a steady rate for all communities.

Chart 4: Projected Population



Source: New Hampshire Office of Strategic Initiatives

The chart does not include the City of Nashua which is far and away bigger than any of the other communities in the region. It is interesting to note that all the communities are projected to level off in 2035 - 2040 but that trend is predicted earlier in the smaller towns such as Lyndeborough, Mason, Mont Vernon and Wilton.

LAND USES

According to the 2010 Amherst Master Plan, of the 21,986 acres in town, 13,346 acres or 62% of the land were developed. Amherst is mostly single family residential. This is because the zoning ordinance has historically only permitted single family dwellings except in Planned Residential Developments and under the recent Integrated Innovative Housing Ordinance which

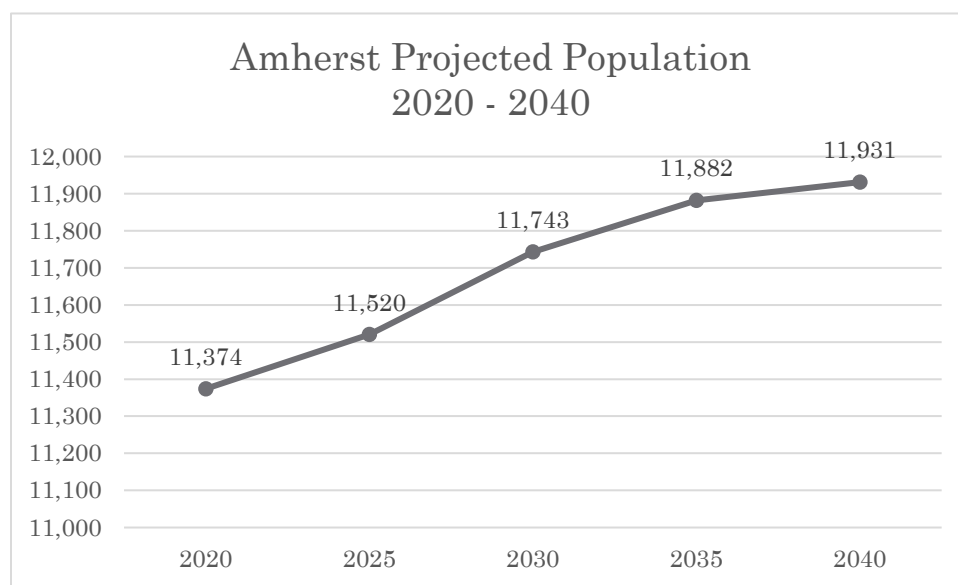
allow duplexes and multi-family residential. This has led to the zoning districts closely aligning with the actual land uses. In 2018, 92.53% of land was Residential; 7.10% was Commercial, Industrial or General Office; 2.66% was Industrial. Commercial and Industrial zoned land is located in the southeast of Amherst along N.H. Route 101A. Small areas of Limited Commercial or General Office are located along N.H. Routes 101 and 122.

Data from the Conservation Commission in 2018 indicated that 3,709 acres of land were protected open space or 16.9% of the total land in the community.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The chart below shows the projected population for Amherst from 2020 to 2040. As noted above, local census data already puts Amherst's population higher than that listed below for 2040. Increasing population puts pressure on all the services provided by the Town of Amherst, not just those of the Office of Community Development.

Chart 5: Amherst's Projected Total Population 2020-2040



Source: NH Office of Strategic Initiatives

Amherst, along with the rest of the State, is projected to see an aging population. According to the 2010 census, Amherst's median age was 44.4 while the State's was 41.1. The ACS 2013 - 2017 median age for Amherst was 45.7. As seen on the map below Amherst is one of the older towns in southern New Hampshire, along with Hollis, Brookline and Lyndeborough in the NRPC region. An aging population brings with it the need for expanded senior services, housing that is adaptive to the needs of various age groups, a change in the way older people are valued in the workforce and wider community, along with transportation issues and health care challenges.

Map 1: NH Population Median Age by Town, 2010

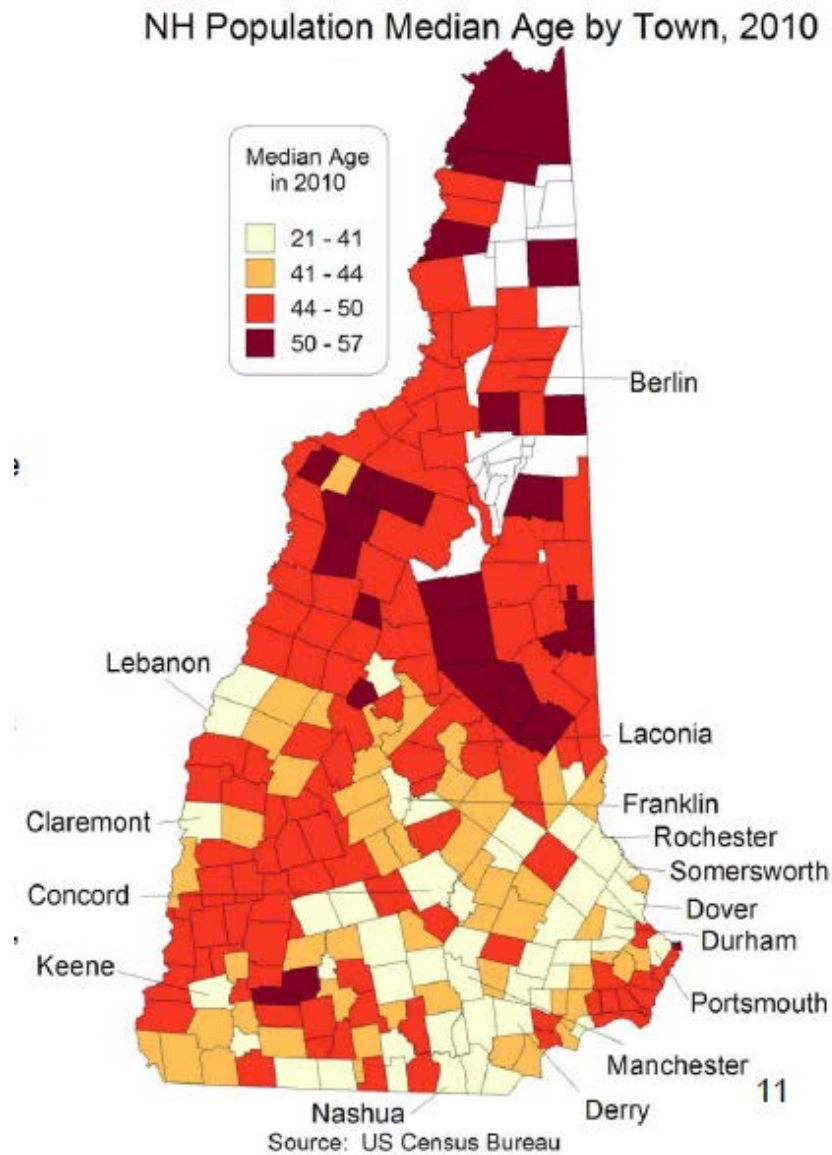
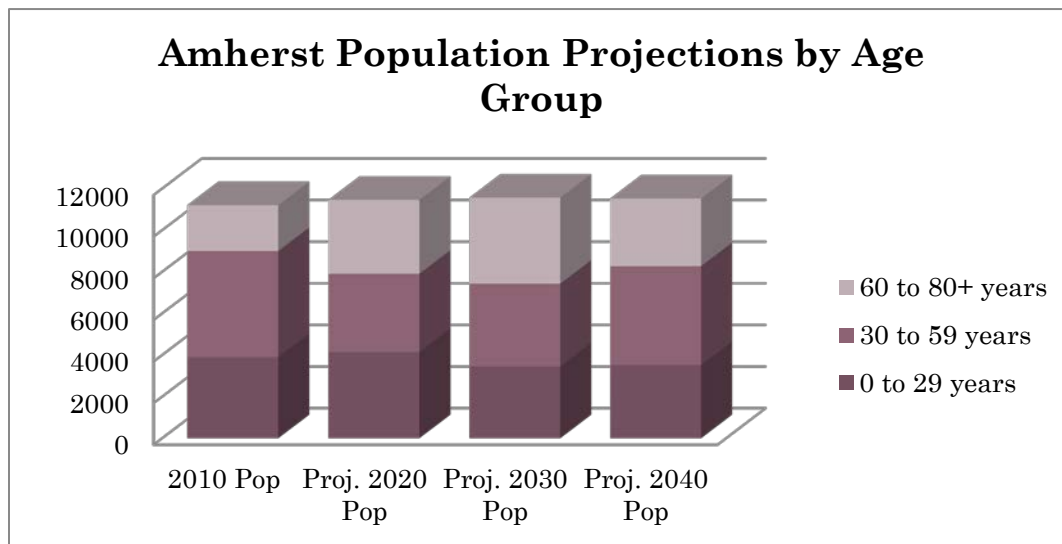


Chart 5: Amherst's Population Projections by Age Group 2010-2040



Source: Nashua Regional Planning Commission, 2016

EMPLOYMENT

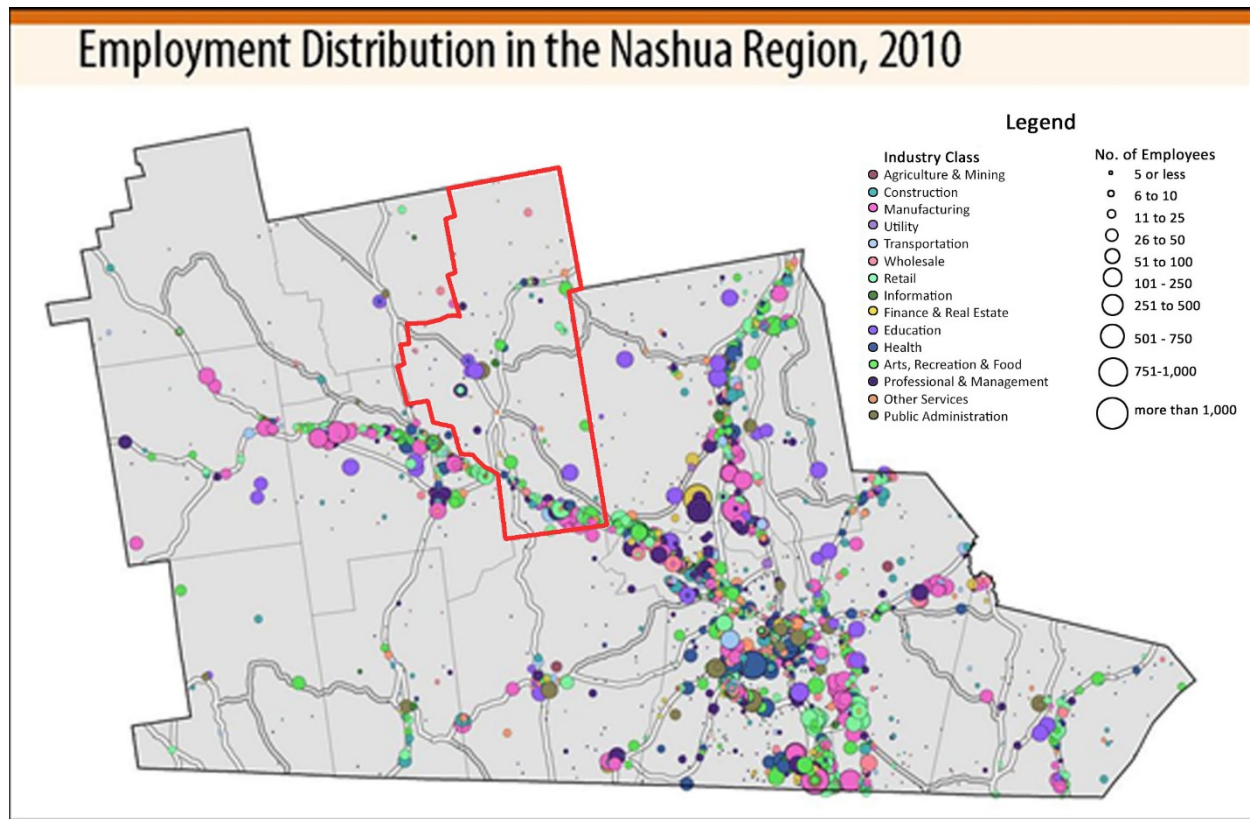
Although Amherst is largely residential, there are significant employment opportunities in the community including education, manufacturing, wholesale, professional, management, arts, recreation, and food services. The employment center is focused along the Route 101A corridor in Amherst, as shown in the map provided by the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC).

Maintaining a local workforce naturally requires housing for the employees, along with services and facilities to meet their home-life needs. Expanded opportunities for working at home, with the proper safeguards to protect the character of the neighborhood and town, should be explored. Working at home cuts down on traffic congestion at peak traffic hours.

As noted above, an aging population is going to mean changes to the nature of the workforce in New Hampshire. By 2020 it is predicted that 1 in 4 workers in the U.S. will be over 55. There are many reasons for the aging workforce - financial need due to lack of retirement plans or savings; increased longevity; a smaller generation coming behind the Baby Boomers, requiring older workers to work for longer and mentor the younger workers; a desire for the social benefits of work.

The ACS 2013 - 2017 indicates that of the 5,933 workers 16 years and over in Amherst, 79.5% worked in New Hampshire and 73.2% worked in Hillsborough County; 12.3% worked at home. 82% of the workers drove alone to work with a mean travel time of 33.5 minutes. These statistics show how important it is that Amherst strive to provide economic opportunities for its residents to enable them to maintain their local employment.

Chart 6: Employment Distribution in the Nashua Region, 2010



Source: Nashua Regional Planning Commission, 2012

TECHNOLOGICAL

The need for up-to-date technology is critical to the Office of Community Development. Instant communication is standard in the business world today. The convenience of scanning and emailing reports and plans and documents is expected and desired. Being able to find out as much information and do as much business as possible without having to set foot in the town hall is something that a lot of the Office's customers are interested in. Setting up the systems to enable online permitting requires proprietary software and all the costs for maintenance and upkeep that go along with them. Providing more information online cuts down on the physical interruptions of customers coming to the counter with questions; the challenge being to provide up-to-date, accurate information that is usable by a wide variety of clientele.

Dealing with the challenges posed by the increasing use of social media is something the Office of Community Development must rise to. The need for the Office to remain a neutral source of information regarding the Town's ordinances, regulations and policies must be weighed against the important need for the public to be debating and discussing accurate information.

POLITICAL

The Office of Community Development has to stay abreast of changes made to the State statutes by the State legislature to ensure that the Town's ordinances and regulations remain statutorily correct. Many of the annual Zoning Ordinance amendments have their roots in legislative amendments in Concord.

At the local level changes in leadership at town elections can create changes in policy that may affect the Office. Long term board members add continuity to the process and bring their wealth of knowledge and history to the table. Newly elected or appointed board members necessarily require the materials and training to be able to discharge their duties which creates additional workload for the department.

The residents of Amherst also have an effect on the Office of Community Development when voting on zoning amendments, budgetary warrant articles, CIP items and so on. The importance of residents' participation in the Master Plan update process cannot be overstated; it is vital that robust outreach and engagement opportunities are offered so that the future planning of the Town is determined by those who have the most at stake.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The following analysis of the Office of Community Development's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is to help the Office capitalize on its strengths and opportunities, and minimize threats and weaknesses.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research skills and planning/zoning knowledge • Customer service • Responsive inspection scheduling • Years of forward thinking planning • Dedicated and passionate Board and Commission members • Staff support to Boards and Commissions • Professional networks and continuing education • Procedural changes for plan recording • Inhouse plan review • One stop shop for building, fire, planning, zoning, historic district, heritage, conservation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Development Director turnover • Previous lack of staff engagement • Regulations and ordinances in need of update • Filing and accessibility of data; previous digitizing choices • Space needs and office layout • Lack of communication with the public about Planning Board processes/decisions • Online permitting not yet operational
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master Plan update • Use of internet/social media to increase public awareness and understanding of OCD function • Hire planner to do planning tasks • Use of technology to allow online permit applications • Outreach and engagement • Proactive communication between Boards, Commissions and Departments • SOP's/FAQ's to assist in staff transitions and answer questions • Departmental staff meetings and involvement in department • Map of pending applications with links to details • Review fees to make sure reasonable but can help cover departmental costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional trends forcing Amherst to have to react • Outdated Master Plan, ordinances and regulations not getting desired development • Boards and Commissions working individually; Departments not knowing what others are doing • Market driven development vs. tax base • Changes in Board of Selectmen or Planning Board members • Aging population • Transportation/sprawl • Lack of infrastructure for commercial/ industrial development

STRENGTHS

- Research skills and planning/zoning knowledge
 - The professional full-time Office staff are able to review plans and applications submitted to the various boards and commissions based on their knowledge of the Town's ordinances and regulations as well as State statutes and best planning practices. Staff are aware of online sources and print materials to be able to research any in-depth questions that come up.
- Customer service
 - Staff prides itself on being the go-to department to answer the many varied questions that are presented by customers at the counter or by phone or email. Providing information and responding to queries in a timely manner are standard practice.
- Responsive inspection scheduling
 - Building inspections are scheduled with 24 hour notice and a substitute inspector is arranged for if the Building Inspector will be absent for multiple days due to vacation or training attendance.
- Years of forward thinking planning
 - Prior Planning Boards and townspeople enacted forward thinking ordinances and regulations years before other towns began to think about the issues. Open space and affordable housing are examples of things that have been in Amherst's Zoning Ordinance since the early days of zoning.
- Dedicated and passionate Board and Commission members
 - Amherst is extremely fortunate to have volunteers on the many Boards and Commissions and Committees who go above and beyond with their commitment to the Town and their specific areas of interest and expertise.
- Staff support to Boards and Commissions
 - Staff provides solid, data driven support to the Boards and Commissions that the Office serves so that the elected or appointed officials can make their decisions knowing that they have been presented all the facts surrounding an issue.
- Professional networks and continuing education
 - The staff of the Office of Community Development belong to various professional associations and attend conferences, seminars and lectures to stay informed on current practice in their particular area of expertise.
- Procedural changes for plan recording
 - Mylars for subdivision plans are now mailed to the Hillsborough County Registry of Deeds rather than being hand delivered by a member of the Office of Community Development, making the process fair and efficient.
- Inhouse plan review
 - Plan reviews for subdivisions, site plans, lot line adjustments, ZBA and HDC applications have been brought back inhouse which saves time and money.

- One stop shop for building, fire, planning, zoning, historic district, heritage, conservation
 - The Office of Community Development serves as the central location for distributing and taking in applications for the various boards, commissions and departments listed, and for answering questions and directing people to the best resources.

WEAKNESSES

- Community Development Director turnover
 - Turnover at the Director level of the department has led to changes to procedures and methods as each new Director has come on board. This has created tension among the Office staff and some delays in implementing past departmental goals due to lack of continuity.
- Previous lack of staff engagement
 - There has been a lack of involvement between management and staff with regard to the Office's budget, regulation updates, goal setting, and many other day to day operations which leads to misunderstandings and unease.
- Regulations and ordinances in need of update
 - The Zoning Ordinance has not seen a major update in many years and needs to be reviewed with regard to Master Plan goals but also statutory requirements and changes that have been made in the intervening years. The subdivision and site plan review regulations require update. The Historic District Regulations should be reviewed.
- Filing and accessibility of data; previous digitizing choices
 - The files for the various boards and commissions are scattered throughout Town Hall due to prior document conversion projects, lack of space and lack of a coordinated approach or understanding of how municipal files should be maintained. It is hard to find the paper files. It is even harder to find anything that has been digitized and stored on the server due to some past poor choices in methods of scanning, storing and indexing documents. This wastes many hours over the course of a week and can lead to items not being found.
- Space needs and office layout
 - There is a lack of suitable filing space that is convenient for the Office staff to access. The office space and layout itself is cramped and does not provide space for storage or for all members of the Office to be in proximity and feel like part of the team. The Planner's desk is currently oriented to face away from the counter and the public interface.
- Lack of communication with the public about Planning Board and other Commissions' processes/decisions
 - The traditional methods of updating ordinances and regulations and approving applications and issuing decisions have been followed and are beyond reproach. However, those traditional methods only reach people who know what they are looking for. There has been a lack of outreach to let residents know how the Boards and

Commissions function, what projects they are working on and what the impact to the townspeople may be.

- Online permitting not yet operational
 - It is intended that building permit applications, along with some other types of permit, will be accessible and submittable online. The software is in place and the system ready to use, but inhouse work on the application forms themselves still requires completion.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Master Plan update
 - The upcoming Master Plan update will be an opportunity to understand the townspeople's wishes and intent for the future of the community. It will allow changes to be made to the Town's ordinances and regulations to ensure the community's development fulfills the vision.
- Use of internet/social media to increase public awareness and understanding of OCD function
 - The Office of Community Development should make more strategic use of the internet and/or social media to publish information and facts to help the public understand what the Office and the various boards and commissions do.
- Hire planner to do planning tasks
 - A vacancy for the Planner I position will be filled in order to take on much of the application review tasks for the various boards and commissions which will free up the Director to manage the Office and turn to long-term community development and planning functions.
- Use of technology to allow online permit applications
 - Finalizing the project to allow for online permit applications will free up a lot of paperwork and time spent at the counter taking applications physically from people.
- Outreach and engagement
 - Any opportunity to publish information about the Office of Community Development and the boards and commissions it supports, along with the opportunity to solicit input and comment from the public should be seized.
- Proactive communication between Boards, Commissions and Departments
 - Continuing to make sure that all the boards, commissions, committees and departments that the Office of Community Development supports are aware of what each other is doing is important for efficiency and understanding of the goals of each.
- SOP's/FAQ's to assist in staff transitions and answer questions
 - Creating SOP's of all of the Office's main functions will assist in transitioning when staff changeover happens. FAQ's published on the Town's website will assist in answering many commonly asked questions to help cut down on calls to the Office by offering alternative customer service options.

- Departmental staff meetings and involvement in department
 - Monthly staff meetings and engaging staff in things like budget preparation and goal setting will increase teamwork and involvement in the workings of the Office to everyone's benefit.
- Map of pending applications with links to details
 - Creating a map on the Town website that locates pending applications to the various boards and commissions and provides links to supporting documentation and information will increase transparency and understanding of the process.
- Review fees to make sure reasonable but can help cover departmental costs
 - Fees assessed for the applications to boards and commissions and for permit applications should be reviewed. Fees are required by law to be reasonable and are not expected to totally cover departmental costs but it should be determined that they are, in fact, fair and reasonable.

THREATS

- Regional trends forcing Amherst to have to react
 - Changes in neighboring towns' ordinances or regulations, increases in regional population, greater use of Amherst's roads by pass-through traffic, these things can all cause Amherst to have to react in ways that were not anticipated to ensure the town's residents are not disadvantaged.
- Outdated Master Plan, ordinances and regulations not getting desired development
 - An outdated Master Plan with unfulfilled goals, and ordinances and regulations that are based on old data and a lack of updated vision will not get the Town the type of development it desires.
- Boards and Commissions working individually; Departments not knowing what others are doing
 - If the Town's boards and commissions are working in a vacuum decisions could be made that contradict each other. Working from an updated Master Plan and ordinances and regulations will cut down on this possibility. The same is true for departments and department heads who should work towards their own goals but with an understanding of what the rest of town government is doing.
- Market driven development vs. tax base
 - The Town may desire to increase commercial development with an eye to increasing the tax base. However, in a market driven economy the type of development being proposed may not be what the Town would most like. Robust programs designed to seek and encourage the type of development desired will be required to help ensure that goals and objectives from the Master Plan can be achieved.
- Changes in Board of Selectmen or Planning Board members
 - Changes to the political landscape in Amherst can create significant changes to the direction and functions of any town department.

- Aging population
 - As the population ages in Amherst and across the state, every town department is going to see different requests for services than they may have before. The Town's Boards and Commissions may need to make changes to regulations in order to facilitate needed development types.
- Transportation/sprawl
 - Tied in with the aging population factor is the very real issue of transportation needs and the type of development that has been ongoing in the past. Requiring large lots and having development spread out through town means that townspeople are reliant on private automobiles for transportation. When the population gets older and can't drive to where they need to go there will be the need for some kind of transportation network and/or provision of services on a neighborhood basis so that services are closer to where the people live.
- Lack of infrastructure for commercial/ industrial development
 - This threat is not Office of Community Development specific but if some provision of services and infrastructure, i.e. sewer, to the commercial/industrial zones in town is not made, the type of development that can take place there will be limited.

GOALS

There are two types of goal for the Office of Community Development: internal facing goals to do with the procedures and practices needed to run an efficient and effective Office; and outward facing goals to make sure the Office is fulfilling its mission and providing exemplary service to its many customers.

INTERNAL

Goal 1: The filing system will be overhauled.

- Strategy 1: Create a list of the standard contents of a municipal land use file and how to maintain the record.
- Strategy 2: The existing physical files will be reorganized/refiled.
- Strategy 3: Existing digitized files will be reviewed for filing/indexing protocols.
- Strategy 4: A new plan for digitizing files will be created and reviewed for budgetary impacts and organizational utility.

Goal 2: Office space and layout will be evaluated.

- Strategy 1: Working with the Assessing and Tax Collector departments, brainstorm ways to better utilize space in the office.
- Strategy 2: Inventory all the filing cabinets and equipment/materials on top of cabinets in the office and the back hallway.
- Strategy 3: Turn the Planner's desk to be facing the counter/office and bring it into the Office of Community Development portion of the office space.

Goal 3: Foster a sense of teamwork and engagement with all Office of Community Development staff.

- Strategy 1: Hold monthly staff meetings to go over applications, permits, ongoing project status, upcoming absences, staff concerns and issues.
- Strategy 2: Continue to involve staff in budget preparation and monthly review of budget and revenue numbers to ensure accurate reporting and balancing of the budget.

Goal 4: Create SOPs and FAQs for the Office of Community Development.

- Strategy 1: Brainstorm the most frequently asked questions that come to the Office on a regular basis.
- Strategy 2: Assign questions to the most appropriate staff person who will draft an answer to bring to the next staff meeting for review and approval by staff.
- Strategy 3: Post the FAQs and responses to the Office website page.
- Strategy 4: Over the course of the next six months, each staff person to create detailed SOPs on job duties. Expectations for content will be discussed at staff meeting.

- Strategy 5: Draft SOPs to be discussed at staff meeting and to be tested by staff person unfamiliar with the process to make sure they are easy to follow.
- Strategy 6: Create a binder for final SOPs to be stored; create a schedule for review and update as necessary.

EXTERNAL

Goal 1: Complete the online permit application system.

- Strategy 1: Complete the required application form review so the forms can be uploaded to the system.
- Strategy 2: Test the system for accuracy, ease of use, that it does what it is supposed to do.
- Strategy 3: Provide public notice and information about the system and how it works.
- Strategy 4: Begin operation of system.
- Strategy 5: Evaluate results and make changes as needed.

Goal 2: Review the Office of Community Development's fee schedule.

- Strategy 1: Assemble a list of all the Office's fees for applications and permits.
- Strategy 2: Calculate fixed costs for any of the aspects of filing and processing applications and permits.
- Strategy 3: Determine if there are additional aspects of the process that should be assessed a fee.
- Strategy 4: Consider if the fees proposed are "reasonable".
- Strategy 5: Have Planning Board and Board of Selectmen review and adopt as necessary.

Goal 3: Create an online map that shows pending applications before the Town's land use boards with links to supporting documentation.

- Strategy 1: Consult with NRPC regarding feasibility of such a map and any costs involved in its creation and maintenance/upkeep.
- Strategy 2: Receive appropriate training for staff to be able to upload data and maintain the map as well as remove details once an application is approved/denied/withdrawn.
- Strategy 3: Determine what kinds of supporting documentation would be helpful to the public and standardize the format.
- Strategy 4: Begin operation of map.
- Strategy 5: Evaluate results and make changes as needed.

Goal 4: Improve Office of Community Development outreach and engagement to the community.

- Strategy 1: Evaluate current Office website page and the information it disseminates.

- Strategy 2: Create a list of topics to publicize to the community.
- Strategy 3: Determine best methods of creating content and distributing to users.
- Strategy 4: Create a schedule/timeline for publication of the content and distribute.
- Strategy 5: Coordinate with Master Plan update process to provide timely and relevant information.

BUDGET IMPACT SUMMARY

The listed internal goals for this strategic plan are designed as a back to basics reboot to put the Office of Community Development on solid procedural footing in order to move confidently into future planning efforts with no concerns about the underlying practices and procedures. Along with these internal goals the external goals are designed to kickstart the Office in its pursuit of the mission and vision of the department. As such, it is intended that the goals are achievable inhouse and within a short window. Therefore, there are minimal to no budgetary impacts from the first year of this strategic plan.

The following table provides an overview of the Office's recommended goals and initiatives:

Office of Community Development - Budget Impact Summary						
Goals and Strategies	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
INTERNAL						
Goal 1: The filing system will be overhauled.						
Strategy 1: Create a list of the standard contents of a municipal land use file and how to maintain the record.	Staff					
Strategy 2: The existing physical files will be reorganized/refiled.	Staff	Staff				
Strategy 3: Existing digitized files will be reviewed for filing/ indexing protocols.	Staff					
Strategy 4: A new plan for digitizing files will be created and reviewed for budgetary impacts and organizational utility.		Staff				
Goal 2: Office space and layout will be evaluated.						
Strategy 1: Working with the Assessing and Tax Collector departments, brainstorm ways to better utilize space in the office.	Staff					
Strategy 2: Inventory all the filing cabinets and equipment/materials on top of cabinets in the office and the back hallway.	Staff					
Strategy 3: Turn the Planner's desk to be facing the counter/office and bring it into the Office of	Staff					

Community Development portion of the office space.						
Goal 3: Foster a sense of teamwork and engagement with all Office of Community Development staff.						
Strategy 1: Hold monthly staff meetings to go over applications, permits, ongoing project status, upcoming absences, staff concerns and issues.	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff
Strategy 2: Continue to involve staff in budget preparation and monthly review of budget and revenue numbers to ensure accurate reporting and balancing of the budget.	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff
Goal 4: Create SOPs and FAQs for the Office of Community Development.						
Strategy 1: Brainstorm the most frequently asked questions that come to the Office on a regular basis.	Staff					
Strategy 2: Assign questions to the most appropriate staff person who will draft an answer to bring to the next staff meeting for review and approval by staff.		Staff				
Strategy 3: Post the FAQs and responses to the Office website page.		Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff
Strategy 4: Over the course of the next six months, each staff person to create detailed SOPs on job duties. Expectations for content will be discussed at staff meeting.		Staff				
Strategy 5: Draft SOPs to be discussed at staff meeting and to be tested by staff person unfamiliar with the process to make sure they are easy to follow.		Staff				

Strategy 6: Create a binder for final SOPs to be stored; create a schedule for review and update as necessary.		Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff
EXTERNAL						
Goal 1: Complete the online permit application system.						
Strategy 1: Complete the required application form review so the forms can be uploaded to the system.	Staff					
Strategy 2: Test the system for accuracy, ease of use, that it does what it is supposed to do.	Staff + selected users					
Strategy 3: Provide public notice and information about the system and how it works.	Staff					
Strategy 4: Begin operation of system.	Staff					
Strategy 5: Evaluate results and make changes as needed.	Staff					
Goal 2: Review the Office of Community Development's fee schedule.						
Strategy 1: Assemble a list of all the Office's fees for applications and permits.	Staff					
Strategy 2: Calculate fixed costs for any of the aspects of filing and processing applications and permits.	Staff					
Strategy 3: Determine if there are additional aspects of the process that should be assessed a fee.	Staff					
Strategy 4: Consider if the fees proposed are "reasonable".	Staff					
Strategy 5: Have Planning Board and Board of Selectmen review and adopt as necessary.	Staff					
Goal 3: Create an online map that shows pending applications before the Town's land use boards with links to supporting documentation.						

Strategy 1: Consult with NRPC regarding feasibility of such a map and any costs involved in its creation and maintenance/upkeep.	Staff/TBD					
Strategy 2: Receive appropriate training for staff to be able to upload data and maintain the map as well as remove details once an application is approved/denied/withdrawn.	Staff/TBD					
Strategy 3: Determine what kinds of supporting documentation would be helpful to the public and standardize the format.	Staff					
Strategy 4: Begin operation of map.	Staff/TBD	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff
Strategy 5: Evaluate results and make changes as needed.	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff
Goal 4: Improve Office of Community Development outreach and engagement to the community.						
Strategy 1: Evaluate current Office website page and the information it disseminates.	Staff					
Strategy 2: Create a list of topics to publicize to the community.	Staff					
Strategy 3: Determine best methods of creating content and distributing to users.	Staff					
Strategy 4: Create a schedule/timeline for publication of the content and distribute.	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff	Staff
Strategy 5: Coordinate with Master Plan update process to provide timely and relevant information.		Staff	Staff			