



# Amherst NH Town Government



## Community Development FY 2024-2028 Strategic Plan

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October 11, 2022



# 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

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 updated 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:

- **Integrity**
- **Equity**
- **Support**
- **Transparency**
- **Efficiency**
- **Service**
- **Ethics**





# OVERVIEW

The Amherst Office of Community Development includes building, code enforcement, planning, and zoning 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, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, and the Master Plan Steering Committee and assists other Town Departments and Boards as needed.





# HISTORICAL TRENDS



# BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION HISTORY

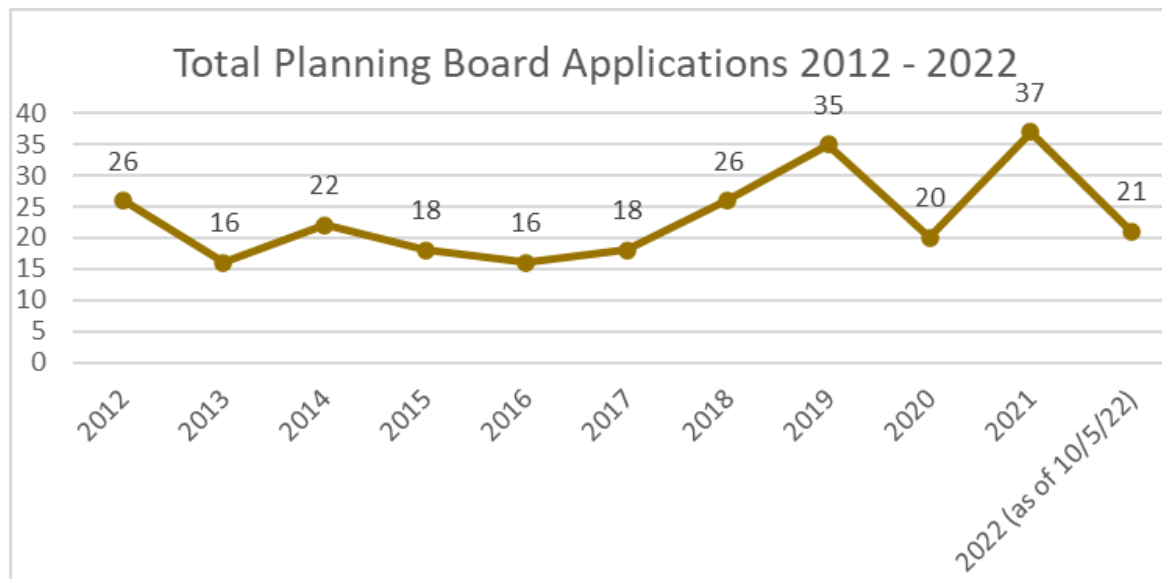
Building Permit Application History												
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (as of 6/29/22)	2022 (as of 10/5/22)
New SF Residential (including Condos)	34	10	13	24	12	35	37	36	37	37	10	18
Residential Additions/Alterations	109	175	127	166	302	207	259	278	259	353	162	251
Commercial/Industrial new	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	3	2	5	2	2
Commercial/Industrial additions/alterations	25	19	15	18	18	14	12	13	28	32	9	12
Signs	32	34	39	50	52	22	17	14	17	13	7	13
Pools	7	5	10	6	1	3	9	4	22	20	16	23
Demolition	12	13	21	12	4	12	6	6	12	6	0	2
Septic Systems	50	48	92	58	40	53	56	71	69	93	40	62
Electrical	146	247	191	212	235	226	226	219	226	309	148	230
Electrical (for generator)				72	30	33	54	31	19	36	11	21
Plumbing	5	77	80	90	87	112	161	101	83	103	42	69
Mechanical	33	276	307	372	313	340	408	439	426	574	208	314
Home Occupations	7	4	3	6	8	2	4	3	7	2	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>910</b>	<b>899</b>	<b>1088</b>	<b>1104</b>	<b>1060</b>	<b>1250</b>	<b>1218</b>	<b>1207</b>	<b>1583</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>1018</b>





# PLANNING BOARD APPLICATIONS

Planning Board	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (as of 10/5/22)
Scenic Road Hearings	2	2	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	3	0
Non-Residential Site Plans (NRSP)	7	6	3	4	3	2	3	9	6	10	2
Subdivision	3	1	8	7	6	3	6	4	4	7	4
Lot Line Adjustment	6	1	4	2	0	0	0	4	1	3	2
Conceptual Discussions	3	4	2	2	2	8	9	3	1	6	5
Sign Master Plan	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1
Compliance Hearing	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Conditional Use Permit	0	0	4	2	2	3	6	11	6	8	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>21</b>





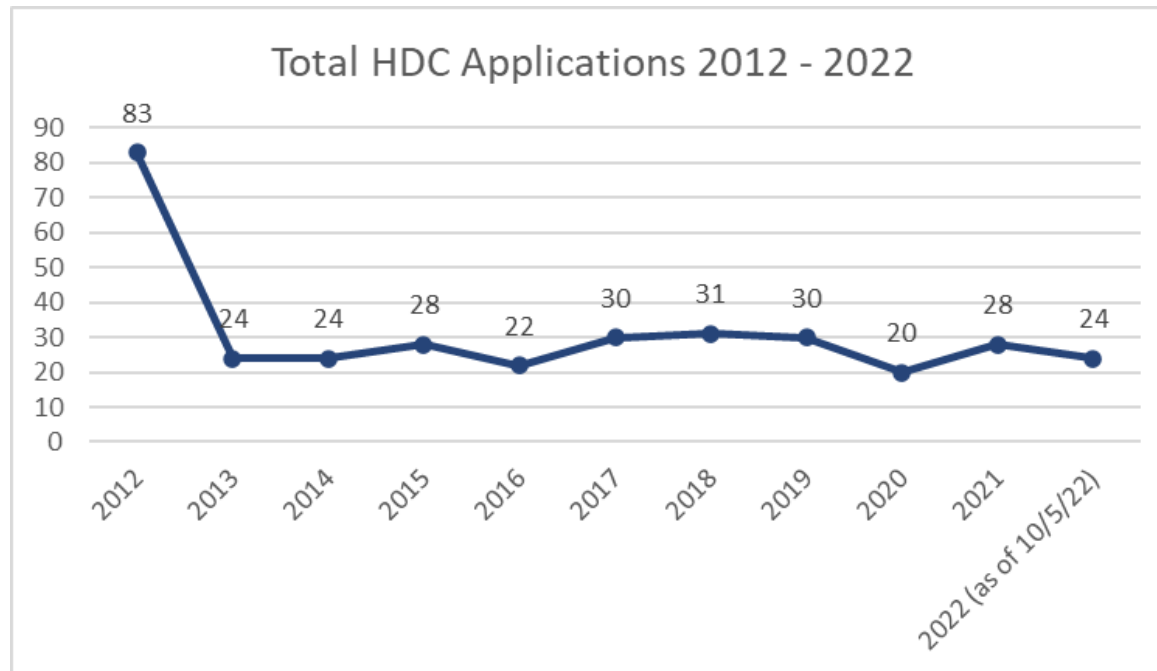
# ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT APPLICATIONS

Zoning Board of Adjustment	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (as of 10/5/22)
Variance	23	16	27	12	12	14	9	15	10	7	10
Special Exception	2	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Appeal of Administrative Decision	3	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	1
Equitable Waiver	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1
Variance for the Handicapped	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rehearing Request	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>



# HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION APPLICATIONS

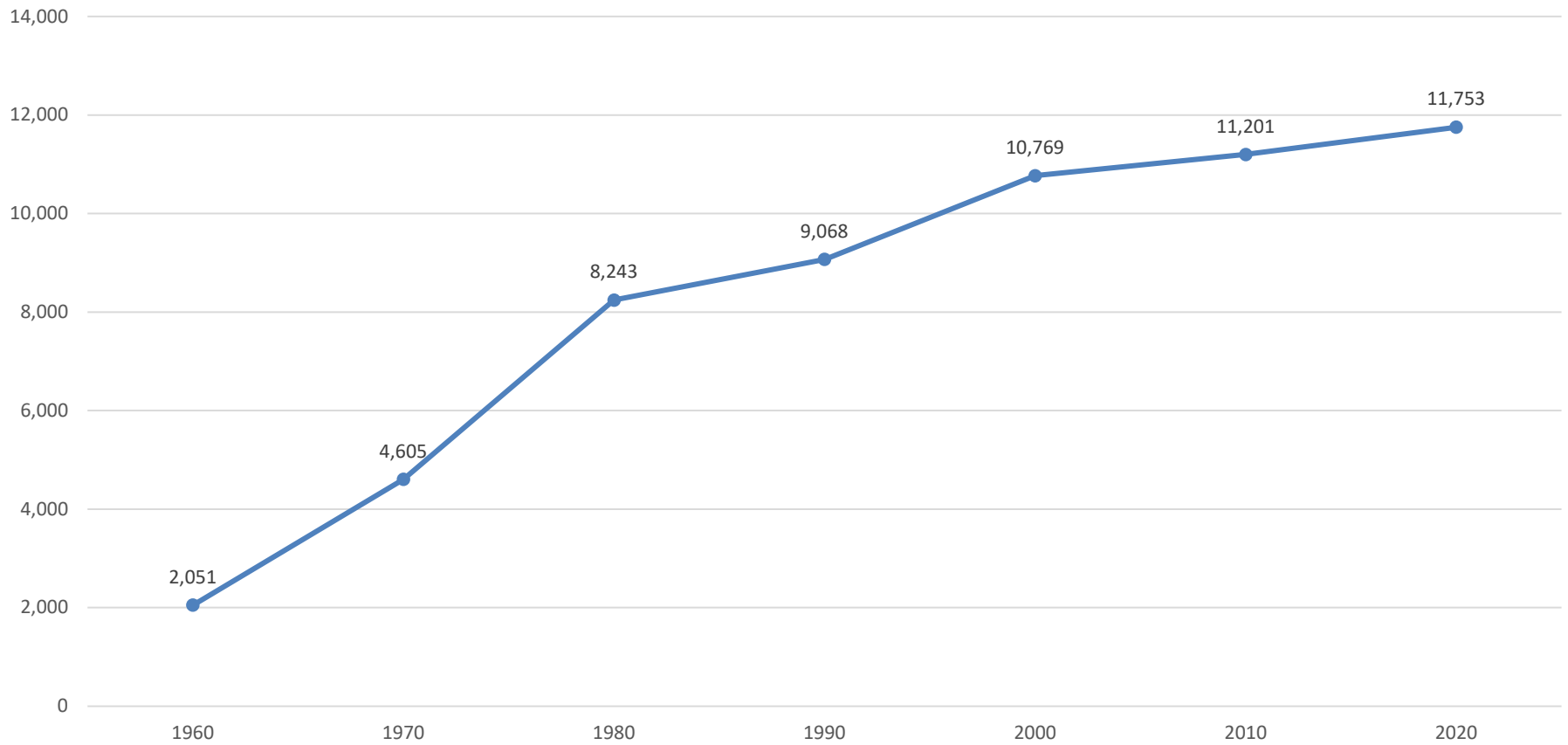
Historic District Commission	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (as of 10/5/22)
New Building	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	1
Ext. Building Mods/Alterations	36	7	10	14	10	9	14	10	9	20	4
Building Additions	0	0	0	4	5	4	1	1	2	0	3
Tree Removal	31	11	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fence/Landscaping	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	3
Mechanical Equipment	3	2	3	3	1	2	2	2	3	5	6
Demolition	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Sheds/Accessory Structures	0	0	3	2	0	2	9	5	5	2	4
Other	0	0	3	4	4	13	4	2	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>





# POPULATION

Amherst Population



US Census

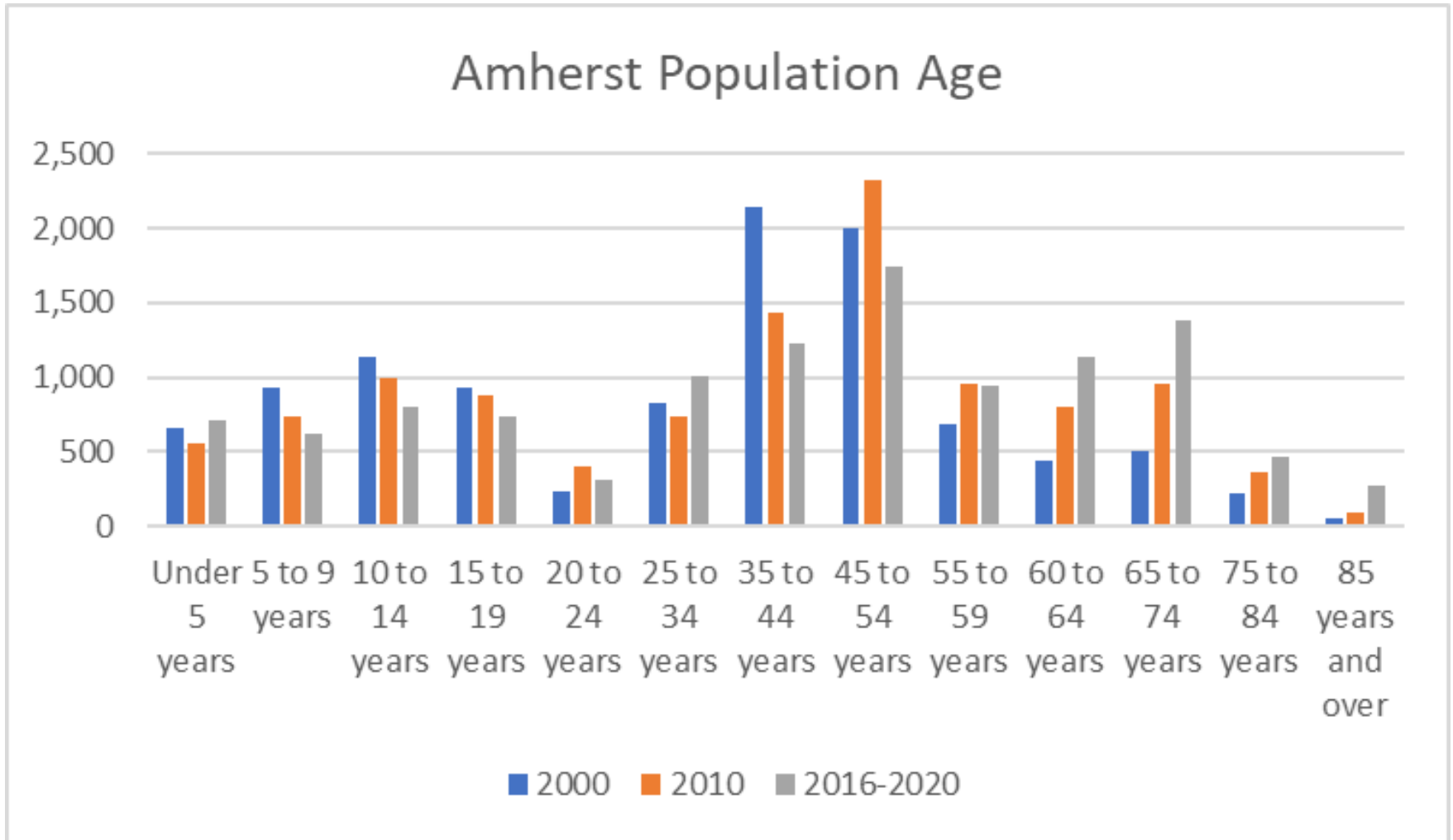


# 2020 Census

Community	2010 Population	2020 Population	Difference	% Change
Amherst	11201	11753	552	4.93
Brookline	4991	5639	648	12.98
Hollis	7684	8342	658	8.56
Hudson	24467	25394	927	3.79
Litchfield	8271	8478	207	2.5
Lyndeborough	1683	1702	19	1.13
Mason	1382	1448	66	4.78
Merrimack	25494	26632	1138	4.46
Milford	15115	16131	1016	6.72
Mont Vernon	2409	2584	175	7.26
Nashua	86494	91322	4828	5.58
Pelham	12897	14222	1325	10.27
Wilton	3677	3896	219	5.96
	<b>205765</b>	<b>217543</b>	<b>11778</b>	<b>5.72</b>



# AGE OF POPULATION





# ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN





# ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

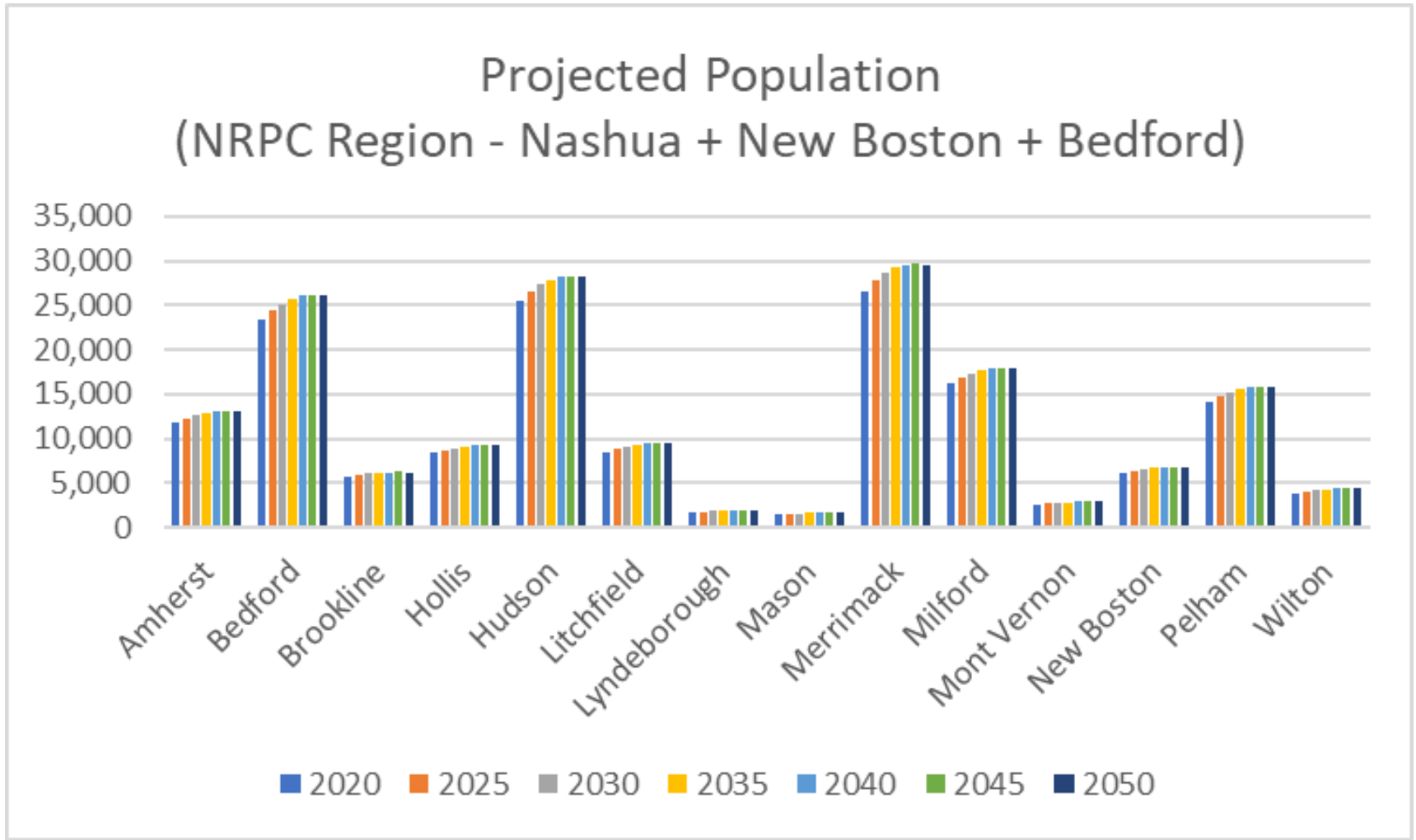
The environmental scan is the opportunity to look at things that can impact the department from a variety of perspectives: economic, social, political, technological, demographic.







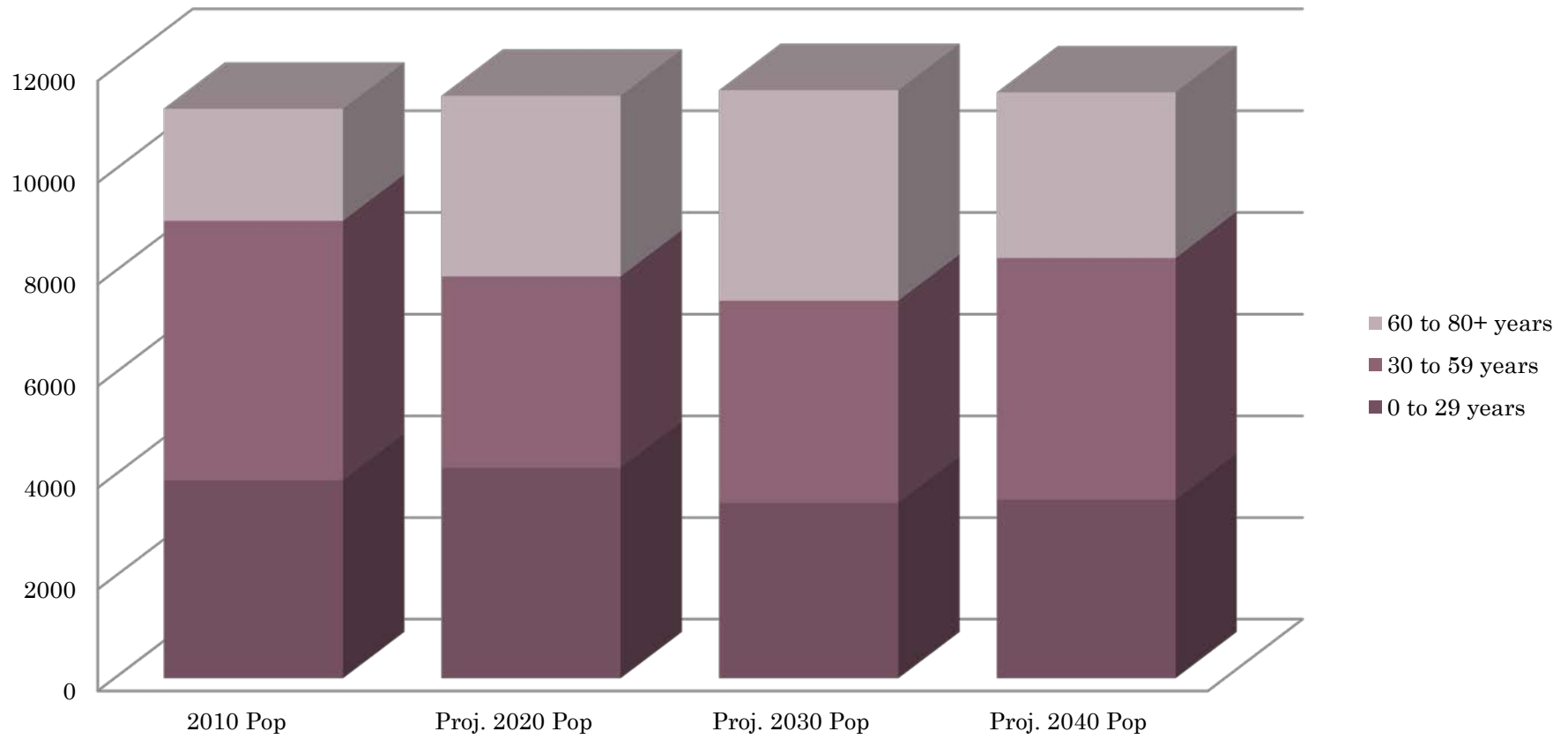
# PROJECTED POPULATION





# POPULATION PROJECTION BY AGE GROUP

## Amherst Population Projections by Age Group





# EMPLOYMENT/BUSINESS/DEVELOPMENT

- Changes that have come with Covid.
- Market volatility.
- Environment for new/expanding businesses.
- Supply chain issues for building supplies.
- Mortgage rates / inflation / gas prices.





# TECHNOLOGICAL

- Online permitting / applications.
- Hybrid meetings.
- Social media / website.





# POLITICAL

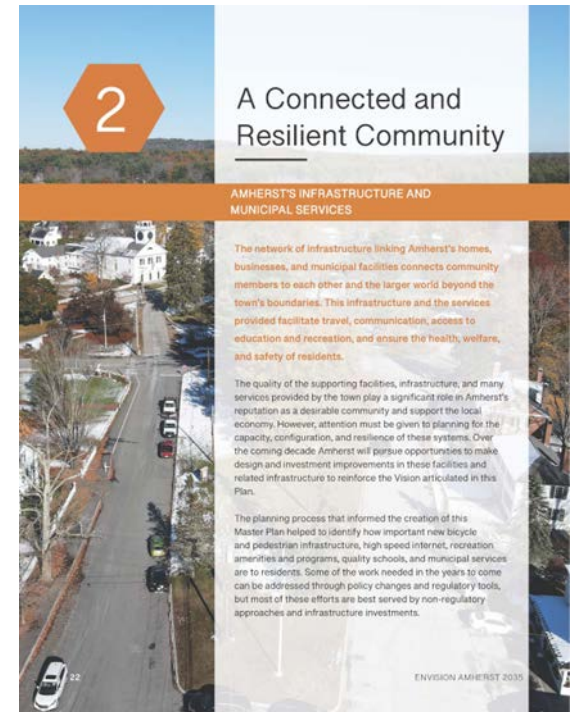
- Legislative changes.
- Board member changes.
- Residents' votes and participation.
- More requirements from EPA relative to MS4.
- Suggestions / requests from Board and Committee members.





# MASTER PLAN UPDATE

- The Master Plan Steering Committee has been working on the update since 2020
- Draft plan has been scheduled by the Planning Board for public hearing on December 21, 2022
- Initiatives from the Master Plan may require assistance from Community Development





# SWOT

## Strengths

- Research skills and planning/zoning knowledge
- Customer service
- Responsive inspection scheduling
- Staff support to Boards and Commissions
- Online permitting
- Inhouse plan review
- One stop shop for building, fire, planning, zoning, historic district, heritage, conservation







# SWOT

## Weaknesses

- Staff turnover
- 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 land use processes/decisions





# SWOT

## Opportunities

- Master Plan update
- Use of internet/social media to increase public awareness and understanding of OCD function
- Outreach and engagement
- Proactive communication between Boards, Commissions and Departments
- SOP's/FAQ's to assist in staff transitions and answer questions
- Map of pending applications with links to details
- Review fee schedule to make sure reasonable but can help cover departmental costs





# SWOT

## Threats

- Legislative mandates
- Outdated Master Plan, ordinances and regulations not achieving desired development
- Boards and Commissions working individually; Departments not knowing what others are doing
- Market driven development vs. desired tax base
- Changes in Board of Selectmen or Planning Board members
- Aging population
- Transportation / sprawl
- Lack of infrastructure for commercial / industrial development





# STAFFING





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STAFFING

- To maintain service standards and operational efficiency, the Office of Community Development requires four personnel: Community Development Director, Town Planner, Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer and Executive Assistant.
- Why is it difficult to attract candidates?
  - No State retirement system
  - Lower salaries than some towns
  - Lack of opportunities for advancement
  - Not as many different opportunities as larger municipalities
- Amherst will always be a training ground for planners who will go on to other roles – because of our size and lack of advancement possibilities.
- What do we have to offer? An historic district, more commercial development than some of our neighbors, possibilities to work with environmental planning, opportunities for a certain level of specialization after initial broad training.
- Being without a planner makes it possible only to keep up with the day to day, application-related tasks and much harder to focus on additional projects.





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STAFFING

- Space needs – moving some personnel to the Fire Department will free up space in Town Hall and coordinate the permitting / inspection functions between Building and Fire.
- Concerns with long term monitoring and maintenance of approved conditions for site plans and subdivisions – the Town should require applicants to pay for Town Engineer inspections and the regulations should be updated to include long term maintenance requirements.
- There are upcoming mandates for stormwater inspections to be performed by a certified inspector – the Town should require the Town Engineer or other qualified professional to conduct those inspections at the applicants' expense.
- The Board of Selectmen have expressed concerns with other aspects of enforcement in town. Should there be a desire to change from a complaint-based enforcement system to some other model, we will have to evaluate the pros and cons and determine the appropriate way to move forward.
- MS4 requirements – propose use of professional consultant paid from the Stormwater budget line. If in the future there is the need for an employee, we could possibly share with DPW.
- GIS – need to update what data we already have and meet the needs of various departments and Boards / Commissions – propose to contract with NRPC. Each Town entity with GIS needs can budget as they need.





# SINGLE POINT OF FAILURE







- Our single point of failure is personnel related. The workload of the department is such that losing one employee creates extra work for the remaining staff and causes delays in some task completion.
- Town Planner retention –
  - Flexibility – telecommuting, days off in lieu of meeting time.
  - Training opportunities as they come up through OPD, NHMA, APA, NHPA, etc.
  - Opportunities to specialize – historic preservation / environmental planning / stormwater management, etc.
  - Possibility of working towards AICP.
  - Grant extra days off (within Town approved parameters).
  - Allow time for volunteer work (within Town approved parameters).





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Once a Town Planner is hired and has been in place for six months to a year, it will be possible to think ahead with meaningful strategic goals for the department.
- What if we can't find a Town Planner?
  - Risk of burnout
  - Increased use of outside consultants for some tasks
  - Consider restructuring position (least preferred – would require reorganizing entire department)





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## Goals for 2023/2024

- **Hire / Retain a Town Planner.**
- **Re-evaluate office space.**

Continue to work on moving the Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer and Executive Assistant to the Fire Department in order to provide enough space for working, storing files and spreading out plans for review in the Town Hall and to give back space to the Tax Collector and Assessing Department.
- **Continue to provide transparent information to the public.**

Continue to upload documents and information to the website for public access re: land use board meetings. Evaluate ease of use and streamline upload procedures. Prepare an operating procedure to ensure that outdated materials are removed from the website.





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## Goals for 2023/2024

- **Contract for MS4 assistance**

Hire outside consultant to work on the requirements of the MS4 permit

- **Contract for GIS assistance**

Work with NRPC to update existing GIS data and provide GIS mapping and data management for future projects





# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Long-term projects
  - Filing system overhaul
  - Create SOPs and FAQs for Office of Community Development
  - Review fee schedules, application forms and checklists
  - Create a map of pending applications for the website with links to associated documentation
  - Improve outreach and engagement to the community
  - Investigate records management software
  - Review and update Land Use Boards Rules of Procedure and Regulations as needed
  - Continue to comply with MS4 requirements
  - Work on Master Plan initiatives as directed
  - Continue staff education and professional development
  - Consider enforcement improvements





# BUDGET IMPACT







## BUDGET IMPACT

- Costs for contracts for MS4 and GIS being worked on for FY24 budget.
- Possible costs for space reorganization when it is finalized – furniture, use of Microtime for setting up work areas, etc.
- Hiring a planner – money already in budget – any slight increase for new planner can be absorbed from the money not spent while without one.





# DISCUSSION

