AMHERST MASTER PLAN
KEY DIRECTIONS vis-à-vis Articles 24 & 25, Village Center Rezoning

Chapter 2, Goals & Objectives

C. Key Directions for the Community

The goal of sustainability underlies each of the key directions for Amherst's Master Plan:

- **Maintain Amherst's existing community character.** The preservation of Amherst's community character will require a variety of different approaches, including protecting and promoting adaptive reuse of historic buildings and landscapes, focusing development in already-developed areas, creating design standards that ensure new development is in accord with existing neighborhood character, protecting critical conservation lands and farmland, and promoting the local agricultural economy. The residents of Amherst have a strong interest in maintaining the character of their community for years to come, and the use of appropriate tools such as form-based zoning and conservation easements will help to ensure that this goal is achieved.

- **Encourage vitality in the downtown and village centers.** Amherst's downtown and village centers should be a focus for the community's economic life, cultural vigor, and social activity. Vitality in these areas can be pursued through a variety of initiatives, including encouraging additional housing development, economic investment, expansion of cultural facilities, promotion of a mix of uses, and improvements to the public realm (parks, streetscapes, and public squares). These initiatives will lead to a more walkable community, allow for more day-to-day interactions among residents, and attract more visitors to the community while enhancing Amherst's growing tourism industry.

- **Balance land preservation objectives with more intensive development in appropriate areas.** Perhaps the most significant theme that surfaced throughout the *Planning Amherst Together* process is the need to protect the Town's significant open spaces, including wildlife habitats, farmland, recreational lands, scenic vistas, and environmentally sensitive areas. Conservation of large tracts of land will require trade-offs in other areas. For example, in order to deal with rising land prices that can result from reducing the supply of buildable land, higher density development must be allowed and incentives must be developed to direct more growth and increased economic activity to the appropriate areas. A mix of uses should likewise be promoted to encourage a more walkable community and bring residents closer to jobs, shops, and services. This Master Plan tries to address these trade-offs, striking a balance between land preservation and the need for intensified responsible development in Amherst.

- **Provide housing that meets the needs of all residents while minimizing impacts on the environment**. Amherst values its economic and cultural diversity. Sustaining this diversity now and into the future will require addressing the needs of large segments of the population, including both renters and homeowners, that are financially strained by rising housing costs. It is critically important to encourage a broad mix of housing types with a full range of initiatives designed to preserve, develop, and/or replenish the community's low and moderate income affordable housing inventory. Housing strategies must also ensure that the mix of housing in the Town meets the varying physical needs of all residents and is affordable to the broadest spectrum of a growing community while minimizing the impact of housing development on the environment.

- **Provide community services to meet the needs of all residents.** Amherst is becoming an increasingly diverse community in terms of ethnicity, age, income, education, physical ability, and in many other ways. Amherst's services and facilities must keep pace with the population's changing needs, including maintaining its historically strong schools, planning for needed fire department, public works, school, library, and recreation facilities, and providing critical social support services.

- **Diversify and expand the economic base.** Amherst should pursue policies and regulations that encourage the diversification and expansion of its economic base in a manner consistent with the community's character and desires. This will generate fiscal benefits for the community, provide revenue to pay for community services, create more private sector job opportunities for residents, and reduce dependence on the University and colleges as the economic engines of the community.

- **Enhance Town/Gown relations and cooperation.** The Town of Amherst and the educational institutions that are located within its boundaries have a symbiotic relationship. The University and colleges are major employers and provide economic support to local businesses; they also enhance the cultural opportunities available to Amherst residents. On the other hand, Amherst taxpayers provide a wide variety of public facilities and services to the large student population, with limited opportunities to obtain fiscal support for these services through local fees or taxation. A central theme of this plan is the need to enhance cooperation between Amherst, the University, and colleges in order to more equitably share the costs and benefits of this symbiotic relationship.

- **Promote an ethic of sustainable environmental and energy practices in all Town activities.** Amherst citizens have a high degree of awareness regarding environmental and energy issues. This Plan details ways to protect natural resources, conserve energy, reduce reliance on the private automobile, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage green building techniques. Public outreach and education will be a key component in supporting this ethic of sustainability throughout the community. Requiring greater sustainability in Town policies, regulations and practices can enhance Amherst's ability to provide jobs, housing, security, education, and the other elements of a good life. This can set the tone for the community, help ensure environmental justice, and serve as an example for local businesses and developers.