



Amherst Massachusetts

OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

John P. Musante, Town Manager
Town Hall
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002-2351

Phone: (413) 259-3002
Fax: (413) 259-2405
townmanager@amherstma.gov
www.amherstma.gov

October 13, 2012

TO: Select Board

FROM: John P. Musante, Town Manager

CC: Safe & Healthy Neighborhoods Work Group

SUBJECT: Safe & Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative – Progress Report & Next Steps

The past few months have been marked by a ramping up of community initiatives to fulfill our shared objective of making all of our Amherst neighborhoods safer and healthier in the years ahead. There is a renewed sense of urgency to make meaningful and lasting progress. That requires an ongoing action agenda that Town staff and I are fully committed to.

Progress Report

Accompanying this memo are detailed progress reports from key Town staff. Highlights:

- Town staff and I have met with many neighborhood residents and groups, property owners and landlords, rental property managers, students, and university and college officials to provide information and hear their concerns and suggestions for positive change, especially related to the growing number rental properties;
- The Town has increased its inspection and code enforcement efforts with our new Building Commissioner Rob Morra and the hiring of our new Code Enforcement Officer Jon Thompson, who began full time in June. Improved inspection programs have begun with swifter response times to identify and address with property owners deficiencies related to life safety, structural maintenance, and clear infractions of the Zoning Bylaws;
- Health Department initiatives over the past two years have helped to decrease the amount of overflowing household trash, upholstered furniture, and discarded mattresses in areas historically known to be problem areas;
- In October, the Amherst Police Department and the University of Massachusetts Police Departments began joint patrols on weekend evenings in the Sunset, Phillips, Fearing Street neighborhood near the Southwest Residential Area of the campus to increase visibility and reduce the number of complaints related to noise, litter, out of control parties, and other inappropriate behaviors;

- UMass has invited members of the community to an open forum to exchange information and ideas. Enku Gelaye, Associate Vice Chancellor and Dean of Students, will discuss the student conduct process, the university's protocol for addressing behavioral concerns, and the services provided through the Dean of Student's Office. The new UMass Police Chief, John Horvath, will also be available to meet community members. The forum will take place on Tuesday, October 16th at 6:00 pm in the Community Room at the UMass Police Station, 585 East Pleasant Street.

Key Next Steps

I have invited several members of our community from key stakeholder groups to work together with me and my staff in a Safe & Healthy Neighborhoods Working Group to complete work in the development of specific action-oriented recommendations. The Safe & Healthy Neighborhoods Working Group will work under the direction of the Town Manager and advise the Manager on matters associated with rental housing in Amherst. As its first responsibility, the Working Group will undertake the following tasks:

- The Working Group will research and review programs of residential rental regulations employed in other college communities, including appropriate and necessary property inspection programs, will solicit input from stakeholder groups and members of the public, and will, not later than March 1, 2013, deliver to the Town Manager for his consideration and transmittal to the Amherst Select Board for its consideration and action a proposed program of residential rental regulations in the form of amendments to the Town of Amherst General By-Laws for action at the 2013 Annual Town Meeting. Key areas to be incorporated into a recommendation:
 - Rental registration
 - Special Permit requirements
 - Pre-inspection of rental units
 - Regular inspection program
 - Penalties for violations
 - Parking requirements
 - Exterior maintenance requirements
 - Property Management Plan
 - Property Owner Response Plan if complaints
- The Working Group will consider the impacts and effectiveness of the current four unrelated persons "family" definition in the Amherst Zoning Bylaw, will develop a recommendation for its retention or amendment, and will, not later than February 1, 2013, submit said recommendation to the Town Manager for his consideration and transmittal to the Amherst Planning Board for its consideration and action.

The Working Group will consist of fifteen (15) members, including one member representing each of the following stakeholder groups:

- David Ziomek, Director of Conservation and Development (Chair)
- Phil Jackson, residential homeowner
- Stephanie O’Keeffe, Chair of Amherst Select Board
- Sandra Anderson, Amherst Planning Board
- John Kennedy, UMass Vice Chancellor for University Relations
- Nancy Buffone, UMass Executive Director External Relations and University Events
- UMass Faculty Representative TBA
- Off-Campus Student Tenant TBA
- Landlord/Rental Property Owner TBA
- Rental Property Manager TBA
- Rob Morra, Building Commissioner
- Julie Federman, Health Director
- Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
- Tim Nelson, Fire Chief
- Scott Livingstone, Police Chief