

**AMHERST PLANNING BOARD**  
**Wednesday, December 10, 2008, 7:00 PM**  
**Pole Room, Bangs Community Center**  
**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Susan Pynchon, Chair; Ludmilla Pavlova-Gillham, Richard Howland, Jonathan O’Keeffe, Denise Barberet

**ABSENT:** Bruce Carson, Jonathan Shefftz, Eduardo Suarez

**STAFF:** Jonathan Tucker, Director; Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner; Sue Krzanowski, Administrative Assistant

**OTHERS:** Niels la Cour, Diana B. Stein, Rob Crouner, Al Woodhull, Jonathan Hymer, Andy Churchill, Alan Root, Mary Streeter, Vincent J. O’Connor, James Wald, Clare Bertrand, Aaron Hayden, H. Oldham Brooks, Walter Wolnik, Barbara Force, Alan Powell, Gerry Weiss, Alisa Brewer, Mangala Jagadeesh, Tanya Cushing, Peggy Roberts, Carol Gray, Marilyn Blaustein, Scott Merzbach

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Ms. Pynchon opened the meeting at 7:10 PM, welcomed everyone, and announced that the first part of the meeting would be for the Master Plan Forum. Ms. Pynchon briefly outlined the agenda for those present.

**MASTER PLAN FORUM**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Jim Wald, final chair of the Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC), asked the former CPC members who were in the audience to introduce themselves.

Mr. Wald told the Board that the Master Plan is really a work in progress which will be modified along the way. It attempts to strike a balance between being too detail-oriented and being general enough to be a useful planning tool for the next 25-30 years. A master plan should provide a vision of the future, Mr. Wald said. While it doesn’t have to match letter for letter, it should be consistent, he said. Expected zoning changes will be brought to Town Meeting, and so there will continue to be public input along the way, he told the Board.

Aaron Hayden, former CPC member, said that approval of the plan will assist the town in receiving grant money and will help validate proposed zoning bylaws.

Alan Root, former CPC member, said the master plan is only a guiding document which will be tested when the Zoning Bylaw is revised. It’s a “people’s plan” from lots of public input, and the Planning Board may not need to do much more with it, he said.

Mr. Tucker said the chapters reflect the elements of a master plan outlined by state law.

Ms. Pynchon said it would be helpful for the Board to go through the plan chapter by chapter.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Niels la Cour, 124 North Whitney Street, thanked the 1,000+ community members who participated in the master planning process and the members and officers of the Comprehensive Planning Committee. Mr. la Cour told the Board that the time for public comment has ended and he said the Board should adopt and accept ownership of the plan. Start with the Zoning Bylaw and get going on implementation of the plan, he urged the Board.

Vincent O'Connor, 179 Summer Street #1, said that the master plan should have used random surveys that were more representative. There was an unintended but quite visible bias in the public participation process, he said. Mr. O'Connor praised former Conservation Director, Pete Westover, commenting that his skills and vision had helped the Town to achieve a real land use plan. Mr. O'Connor said the Town really needs reasonably priced or affordable housing for graduate students with families. The master plan should address the encroachment of educational/non-profit institutions on the commercial tax base, he said.

Walter Wolnik, 8 Hillcrest Place, distributed copies of a tabular summary of the Master Plan survey which he said he would provide electronically. The CPC tried its best to get responses from the community, he said.

Mr. Howland said that the master plan could be compared to an ocean chart. It provides a barometer for measuring new ideas to see how they'll fit, he said. It should be considered a tool for re-working the Zoning Bylaw, he said. Mr. Howland asked that the public comment on major faults, weaknesses or strengths and said that people should understand that it's not going to be substantially rewritten at this point in the process.

Chapter 2 – Goals and Policies

Mr. Hayden said that the State asks the Planning Board to get involved in areas it typically doesn't get involved in. The CPC had input from various other committees, he said, and the Planning Board can ask these same committees for assistance in addressing issues and/or problems.

Mary Streeter, 66 Larkspur Drive, said that she is working with the Town's IT Department to put the Existing Conditions map(s) online and expects to add the survey. Ms. Streeter said that she hopes other committees will be aware that they will have responsibilities.

Mr. O'Keeffe said that the Planning Board will need to sketch out who will be responsible for areas/tasks. The Board will not be able to do it by themselves, he said.

Mr. Tucker said that Planning staff have been budgeting in FY10 for consultants to assist with the project.

At this point, Ms. Pynchon noted that the Board would accept written comments from the public as well as input during the meeting.

Alisa Brewer, 5 Fairfield Street, asked if staff would publicize online where hard copies of the maps are located.

### Chapter 3 – Land Use

Carol Gray, 815 South East Street, said the master plan should be “judgment free”. She thought there should be more said about brownfields. She said it appeared that staff was advocating for form-based codes and suggested that other forms of development regulation should also be explored and explained. Ms. Gray prefers changing “density bonuses” to “bonuses”. She thanked the CPC for their work. In response to a question from Ms. Pavlova-Gillham, Ms. Gray said that all new development should be put in the village centers.

Mr. Wald said that existing critical open space is pretty much protected. Growth needs to take place someplace, he said.

Peggy Roberts, 2 Hills Road, said that she had served on the Economic Development Committee. Committee members used all of their thoughts together to shape input, she said, and worked hard as a group, not individuals.

Mr. Hayden said that Chapter 3 responded to all of the other chapters.

Andy Churchill, 59 Pine Street, said that the land use chapter is important and sets the base for a lot of the other chapters.

### Chapter 4 – Demographics and Housing

Mr. Hayden said the Town should maintain a wide variety of housing. Mr. Churchill commented that there is competition for affordable housing between students and non-students.

### Chapter 5 – Economic Development

Ms. Gray advocated for more density in the downtown and village centers.

### Chapter 6 – Natural and Cultural Resources

Clare Bertrand, 610 Bay Road, said that she served on this Committee and had fun with it. This chapter preserves the heart and soul of what Amherst is, Ms. Bertrand said.

### Chapter 7 – Open Space and Recreation

Mr. Hayden said that this was the other fun chapter.

Ms. Gray suggested removing “most significant” from O.2.A.

Mr. Churchill said that the Agricultural Commission wanted the most productive farmland targeted first.

Ms. Tanya Cushman, representing J & J Farm in North Amherst, said that “open space” and “agricultural” are not the same thing.

Mr. Hayden said that a balance needs to be struck between desired uses.

#### Chapter 8 – Services and Facilities

Ms. Barberet expressed concern about strategies that call for adequate funding, particularly in this economic climate. What are some realistic strategies, she asked.

Marilyn Blaustein said that she was chair of this committee. There are checks and balances. The need for capital expenditures still needs to be recognized in bad times, Ms. Blaustein said.

Ms. Bertrand, Mr. Root and Mr. Churchill spoke in agreement with Ms. Blaustein.

Ms. Pavlova-Gillham said that there isn't a well-identified section that includes current activities in the capital plan. She would like to see more of the capital plan included, she said.

Mr. Root commented that the master plan looks at a much longer range of time than the capital plan.

Rob Crowner said that the Plan did not adequately address either waste management or energy.

Ms. Gray said that maintaining existing environmental regulations should be emphasized in Chapter 6. Bike paths should be discussed only in the recreation section, she said. Ms. Gray said Chapter 8 is really good.

#### Chapter 9 – Transportation and Circulation

Ms. Streeter said that public transportation should be made more attractive to kids so that they will use it. Open space shouldn't be developed because once it's gone, it's gone, she said.

Mr. Churchill said that the committee didn't sketch out a vision. That still needs to be done, he said.

Mr. Wald said that working on the committee was very rewarding. People got along and worked for the common good, he said.

Mr. Wolnik said the Transportation Subcommittee discussed maintaining a continuous major north-south public transit line. There was information missing about school bus transportation, he said.

#### Chapter 10 – Implementation

Ms. Gray had several suggestions for Chapter 10, including maintaining regulatory bylaws, more protection of open space, and removing repetitive recommendations. Ms. Gray said the matrix was heavy on density issues and light on open space. "Built-up areas" should be changed to "village centers", she suggested.

Mr. Tucker clarified that the Matrix is a listing of the strategies described in other chapters, not a set of recommendations on its own. The purpose of the matrix is to allow the Town to assign responsibilities and add a timeframe, he said.

Mr. Crowner said that the Matrix does not include all the strategies.

Gerry Weiss, Middle Street, asked if there are specific regulations being recommended to be updated.

Mr. Tucker replied that there are numerous recommendations that have been amended and that all of the strategies in the Matrix need to be updated and revised in a coordinated manner. Staff can provide that updating, he said.

Mangala Jagadeesh, 44 Spaulding Street, said she wanted to see the results of that updating.

Ms. Streeter suggested that the Zoning Subcommittee consider a zoning change that would require a minimum of two stories for new buildings in the downtown and village centers.

Ms. Roberts commented that the whole process exceeded her expectations. The public input was amazing, she said.

Mr. Howland encouraged members of the public to write to the Planning Board with suggestions and/or comments.

The public forum was adjourned.

### **PLANNING BOARD MEETING**

The Board agreed that its next meeting will be January 7, 2009, which will put the meetings back on the regular schedule of first and third Wednesdays of the month.

Discussion of the next steps for the Master Plan will be on the agenda.

#### **I. MINUTES – Meeting of November 19, 2008**

Ms. Barberet noted that her name was misspelled under MINUTES on page 1.

Mr. O’Keeffe MOVED: to accept the Minutes of November 19, 2008 as corrected by Ms. Barberet. Ms. Barberet seconded, and the Motion passed 5-0.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. O’Keeffe MOVED: to adjourn this meeting at 9:33 PM. Ms. Barberet seconded, and the Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted:

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Sue Krzanowski, Administrative Assistant

Approved:

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Susan Pynchon, Chair

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_