

**AMHERST PLANNING BOARD**  
**Joint Meeting of Planning Board and Housing & Sheltering Committee**

**Tuesday, June 18, 2013 – 7:00 PM**  
**Town Room, Town Hall**  
**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:**

Planning Board members: David Webber, Chair, Rob Crowner, Bruce Carson, Richard Roznoy, Kathy Ford

Housing & Sheltering Committee members: Greg Stutsman, Co-chair, Nancy Gregg, Co-chair, Andrea Battle, Aaron Blodgett

**ABSENT:**

Planning Board members: Stephen Schreiber, Sandra Anderson, Jonathan O’Keeffe and Connie Kruger

**STAFF:** Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director  
Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner  
Nate Malloy, Community Development Planner

Mr. Weber opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m. in the Town Room, Town Hall

Mr. Webber and Mr. Stutsman gave introductory remarks.

Mr. Stutsman stated that this was the second of two public meetings, the first having been held in April. He noted that there would be another public meeting at completion of the study. The Housing Market Study is a “counterpart” to the Housing Production Plan, he said.

Mr. Tucker presented the history of the Housing Market Study.

Mr. Malloy stated that the Housing Production Plan is based on Massachusetts affordable housing laws. There is a straightforward template for preparing an HPP. The Housing Market Study is about market rate housing. In a Housing Market Study the consultants determine the format, unlike an HPP in which the state determines the format. The Housing Market Study will have three parts when finished:

- A determination of who could or would move to town;
- An analysis of the impact of student housing on the town;
- An analysis of zoning.

Kyle Talente of RKG gave a Power Point presentation on the findings of the Housing Market Study.

One of Mr. Talente’s conclusions was that the town needs to meet the demand for student housing if it wants to accommodate the housing needs of others, particularly those of low and moderate income.

Mr. Roznoy asked how many students come to Amherst for an education but then have to leave after graduation because they cannot afford to live here.

Mr. Webber noted that young families and working families are priced out of the housing market.

Mr. Talente also stated that neighboring towns are unlikely to provide more multi-unit housing developments in the future as they have in the past.

Mr. Blodgett commented that although there would be a growth in the amount of housing provided at the UMass Honors College, there will be other housing on campus that will be shut down to accommodate renovations. Therefore the number of beds on campus will not increase appreciably in the near term.

Mr. Blodgett asked about the lower end homes that are commonly converted to rentals and whether their values decline over time.

Mr. Talente stated that the ebb and flow of the housing market causes these lower end homes to have values that also ebb and flow.

Phil Jackson asked where people who live in Amherst earn their incomes. He stated that Amherst has the highest residential property taxes of surrounding towns and that this contributes to people's inability to stay in town. He stated that Amherst isn't providing enough housing and he asked if existing multi-family residential developments could be made denser.

Mr. Tucker explained that the multi-family apartment complexes in Amherst were built prior to the mid-1970's. Town Meeting then rezoned these areas to make these developments non-conforming, requiring a Special Permit for alterations or additions. Many are 1 and 2 story buildings which could be made denser. The question should be directed to the property owners. Mr. Tucker also noted the phenomenon of the conversion of apartment complexes to condominiums, some of which are now owned by "speculators".

Mr. Talente stated that people in Amherst earn their income from academic institutions, food service, retail and health. There is a challenge in redeveloping multi-unit housing developments because the owners need to stop renting in order to go through with the redevelopment. This causes them to lose income in the near term. There is an "opportunity cost", he said.

Walter Wolnik reiterated a previous statement by Mr. Talente that West Virginia law permits public/private partnerships on state-owned land. He urged the town to try to get the state legislature to "get rid of the Pacheco law". He recommended that the community make an effort to get representatives to amend the Pacheco law to pave the way to allowing public/private partnerships on state-owned land.

Denise Barberet referred to the Technical Memorandum dated May 6<sup>th</sup>. She noted that Strawberry Fields and Veridian Village, both proposed condominium developments for those over 55, did not get built. They would have had purchase prices of \$399,000 and up, she said.

Mr. Tucker noted that Veridian Village was a proposal of Hampshire College and that Strawberry Fields was a PURD intended to serve those over 55. Court actions delayed Strawberry Fields and then the recession hit.

Mr. Talente stated that it has been difficult to find financing for condos since 2009.

Hwei-Ling Greeney lives in downtown Amherst. She would like to have more owner-occupied homes and fewer rentals. The ratio of rental to owner-occupied homes in Amherst should be reversed to match more closely the ratios of other communities in the area. The Housing Market Study should reflect the preferences and needs of the community, she said. The consultants should provide the town with concrete steps to collaborate with UMass to build more housing on campus.

Mr. Tucker noted that the ratio of rentals to owner-occupied housing in Amherst has not changed much since 1950. It has been about 45% owner-occupied to 55% rental for the past several decades.

Mr. Talente noted that the control over whether we can have public/private partnerships is at the state level – the University system and the governor’s level. The need for housing is here now. The public/private partnership solution will take decades to come to fruition. He noted that the ratio of rental to owner-occupied homes in Amherst is “in balance for its own market”.

Andy Churchill noted that based on the HPP study the population of family-aged households is decreasing. The market seems to be for those older and younger than family-aged households. He asked if this is a reason to build more student housing.

Mr. Talente stated that this is a reason to build more student housing because the competition for housing is too great for family-aged households to compete.

Melissa Perot asked whether there is a point at which the balance between owner-occupied units and rentals is unstable. She stated that in North Amherst 80% of the units are rentals and that this causes instability. It is not an attractive environment for families. “Students don’t give life to communities” she said.

Mr. Talente stated that the type of housing provided is critical. Single-family homes are not suited for students. If the town provides housing and amenities in one place it will keep students out of single-family neighborhoods. Support services make the difference, he said.

Mr. Roznoy cautioned against conflating rental housing with student housing. We need housing for the bank teller and the hairdresser he said.

Cinda Jones asked if the consultants could make a recommendation about a good location for student housing.

Vince O’Connor made several comments:

- Amherst is not the economic focal point of Hampshire County; Northampton is;
- Businesses and the railroad are leaving Amherst;
- Amherst needs to determine what type of town it is; it is not another Northampton;
- The consultants should look at the housing study that was done in the early 1990’s;
- Current zoning encourages duplexes and “McMansions”;
- Amherst needs to look at its infrastructure and compare it to those of Tier 1 communities to make sure that our infrastructure makes build out possible;
- The Housing Market Study doesn’t focus on “proactive requirements and proactive affordable housing”;
- Amherst is highly unionized.

Maurianne Adams made the following comments:

- It’s helpful to see the two studies which highlight two housing markets;

- The student rental market is an enormous force;
- It would be helpful to know more about other communities where there is a large university and a small town;
- The statement about the ebb and flow of rental conversions is questionable; there have been no re-conversions after a conversion to rental has taken place, she asserted;
- Is it possible to have a tax deduction for families that move to town?
- Is it possible to press for redevelopment of existing large apartment complexes, perhaps providing incentives to make it financially attractive to redevelop these properties?
- The town shouldn't write off public/private partnerships even though this is a long term issue;
- The town should address the regulatory challenge of public/private partnerships;
- There are many strategies that should be followed simultaneously.

Mr. Stutsman asked about the imbalance of services. Mr. Talente stated that RKG would give an indication of services that should be close to residential development.

Mr. Malloy stated that the public can submit comments on the Housing Market Study to the Planning Department c/o Nate Malloy or Christine Brestrup.

Mr. Malloy stated that the Planning Board and the Housing and Sheltering Committee should have this Housing Market Study on their agendas for the next few meetings. The consultants will be back later for a public meeting when the next draft of the study is available.

Mr. Talente stated that a new draft will be available for internal review next month.

Mr. Webber thanked everyone for attending and stated that the Planning Board will discuss the Housing Market Study and that the Planning Board and the Housing and Sheltering Committee would schedule another public meeting, possibly for August 7<sup>th</sup> to meet with the consultants and the public again.

Adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Approved:

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Christine M. Brestrup  
Senior Planner

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David Webber, Chair

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