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## 3. Land Use

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### Master Plan

Relevant existing and past plans and policy documents:

- *Valley Vision 2, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission [Sept. 2007]*
- *Build-Out Analysis and Future Growth Study [2002]*
- *Atkins Corner Sustainable Development Master Plan – Action Steps for a Better Amherst [November 2000 – February 2002]*
- *Final Report of the Select Committee on Goals (SCOG) [1973]*

#### A. Goal

*A sustainable, attractive town with a viable, mixed-use downtown and active village centers that are well connected with livable and diverse neighborhoods and campuses, and interwoven with protected open space, natural resources, and active farmland.*

#### B. Overview

This Land Use chapter represents the fundamental element of the Town of Amherst’s Master Plan. Policy decisions about the community’s land use, including zoning code revisions, will directly impact all other elements of this plan. Several key ideas recur throughout this chapter, including: the protection of Amherst’s unique landscape through the preservation of significant natural, scenic, and agricultural lands; the importance of directing future growth towards existing built-up areas such as the downtown and village centers; improving the Town’s fiscal health through strategic land development; and the need to guide new development in a manner that respects the Town’s history and existing community character.

#### C. Existing Conditions

The assessment of the Town’s existing land use conditions is the result of technical research, as well as discussions with the CPC and Town Staff. This section summarizes the key land use conditions:

- **Current land use patterns:** Dominant land uses include residential (23 percent of land area) protected agricultural (18 percent), conservation (18 percent), and land owned by Amherst’s three institutions of higher education (16 percent). The Town has a relatively small amount of land (3.6 percent) designated as commercial, retail, or industrial zones.
- **Land consumption outpacing population growth:** Recent trends indicate that development of single family dwellings in Amherst has been consuming relatively more land per new residence

to accommodate new residents. This is an indicator of “sprawl”. Since the year 2000, the total developed land area in Amherst that consists of residential lots larger than ½ acre grew by 65 percent, while Amherst’s population remained relatively stable.

- **Land preservation priorities:** Preservation of the community’s unique rural landscape is a key priority in Amherst. Approximately half of the Town’s land currently enjoys some form of protection from development, and a significant percentage (4,850 acres, or 27.3 percent) of the community’s total land area (17,762.5 acres) is permanently protected. Amherst’s principal tool for managing growth has been 40 years of an aggressive conservation land acquisition program resulting in Town ownership of over 1,700 acres of open space, and development limitations of other kinds on an equivalent additional area. The continued protection of these significant land areas will help the community retain its rural character, even as growth occurs.
- **Increasing land values and affordability concerns:** Due to the nature of supply and demand, land prices will continue to rise as more demands are placed on finite land resources. Increasing land values drive up housing costs in the community, leading to growing concerns about housing affordability. Other demographic trends such as the shift towards smaller households place additional pressure on the housing stock, as more units are needed to house the same population.
- **Need for intensified development:** Ultimately, the preservation of land in Amherst must be coupled with the intensification of development in appropriate areas of the community. More land can be conserved if higher density development is directed to the downtown, village centers and specific districts and neighborhoods.
- **Need to protect community character:** The Amherst community takes pride in the historic character of its developed areas. Even as higher density development occurs, design standards can

help to ensure that such new development is in accordance with the character and needs of the community. Design standards can also be used to support the development of well-connected, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighborhoods.

- **Need to revise zoning codes:** Revision of Amherst’s current zoning is necessary in order to address the land use needs listed above and to facilitate implementation of the strategies described in the following section.

The Objectives and Strategies and the Land Use Plan Map discussed in the remainder of this chapter provide a coherent framework for approaching Amherst’s future land use and reconciling the need to preserve land while supporting growth that benefits residents and businesses alike.

#### **D. Objectives and Strategies**

This section describes the objectives and strategies that will support the Land Use goals for the Town of Amherst.

#### **OBJECTIVE LU.1 – Preferentially direct future development to existing built-up areas.**

The following strategies recommend ways to manage future growth so as to take full advantage of the Town’s existing infrastructure, and reduce sprawl.

#### **STRATEGIES**

##### **LU.1.A Inventory and identify existing developed areas that are appropriate for density increases and redevelopment.**

Certain portions of the downtown, village centers, and specific districts and neighborhoods may be appropriate for higher densities of development. The Town should update its regulatory code to ensure that such development is permitted and encouraged, particularly as infill and redevelopment initiatives are pursued.

##### **LU.1.B Evaluate built-up areas on the basis of their character, quality, and priority, and then identify areas to:**

- A. Emphasize preservation (historic areas of the downtown, village centers, and other specific districts and residential neighborhoods - key resource areas).**
- B. Emphasize adaptive reuse (particularly high quality historic areas of the downtown).**
- C. Allow a varying combination of preservation and redevelopment (other village centers, transitional or neighborhood business areas).**
- D. Allow more extensive development and redevelopment with a balance of incentives and controls (highway commercial corridors, research parks, etc.).**
- E. Encourage denser development of appropriate scale and design (village centers and downtown).**

**Form-based Codes**

Form-based codes supplement the conventional zoning approach of segregating and regulating land use types by focusing on the desired form (design) of an area once its development is complete, and creating regulations to guide new development toward that desired end result.

The design outcomes for specific areas are identified through a design-focused public participation process. Form-based zoning regulations create "regulating plans" tailored to specific areas and can be effective in helping to create vital, mixed-use areas.

The Town should create a refined conceptual development framework that focuses most new development and infill on its existing built-up areas, including downtown, village centers, and specific districts and neighborhoods. Depending on the character and historic quality of particular areas, the Town can emphasize different approaches in terms of preservation, adaptive reuse, infill, and redevelopment strategies.

New zoning, development/design regulations, and density incentives must take into account the potential impacts of strong student housing pressures, including the issue of absentee landlords. In campus-edge neighborhoods in particular, new regulations should be undertaken in tandem with other regulatory or program efforts. These could include strengthening code inspections, revising existing rental registration regulations, and encouraging alternative student housing efforts (see H.7.B, H.8, and S.3.F).

**LU.1.C Use flexible zoning techniques, such as form-based codes, to promote mixed-use development.**

Rather than focusing on the separation of land uses, form-based codes guide the creation of healthy mixed-use communities where building form, public space, and streetscape design take top priority. (See sidebar at left.) Unlike typical zoning practices, form-based ordinances allow the community to specify the various "types" of

buildings, streets, and open spaces that will be featured in the plan. The objective is to create a setting that accommodates diverse uses over time, but is highly specific in terms of physical form. Using tools such as form-based codes, Amherst can increase the flexibility of development regulations, promote a mix of uses, and ensure that its desired character is retained.

**LU.1.D Undertake rezoning efforts that direct more intensive development to appropriate areas and limit development in key resource areas.**

The Town should engage in a comprehensive review and update of its zoning bylaw and map to ensure that the regulations reflect the community's vision for future development, as captured in the land use principles that preface this chapter. Permitted densities may need to be increased in built-up areas like village centers, and reduced in key resource areas or in agricultural zones.

**LU.1.E Revise existing zoning to encourage and include incentives for well-designed, energy-efficient infill/redevelopment projects.**

Incentives such as density bonuses and more flexible dimensional regulations should be available for infill and redevelopment projects that demonstrate specific characteristics of high quality, sustainable design.

Infill and redevelopment projects provide many benefits to the community, but can often cost more when considering the expense of cleaning up a polluted brownfield site (see LU.5.F) or redeveloping and adaptively reusing an historic structure. Accommodating parking needs is also a big hurdle to overcome in infill and redevelopment projects. Incentives that promote infill and redevelopment while protecting existing historic character and protecting residential neighborhoods should be built into the development standards. Specifically, minimum lot sizes for residential districts and parking standards for all districts should be re-evaluated.

The Town should also develop incentives to encourage energy-efficient development. For example, density bonuses could be offered to development projects that are LEED-certified and/or which meet other appropriate standards. (LEED is one national benchmark for green

building established by the US Green Building Council – see <http://www.usgbc.org/> for more information.)

**LU.1.F Establish programs to encourage economic development in existing developed areas (e.g., Economic Opportunity Area (EOA) type programs).**

Economic development can be encouraged in predetermined areas through the creation of additional Economic Opportunity Areas. These EOAs should already have sewer, water and other necessary utilities, except where it serves the community's interests to extend those services. By encouraging infill and redevelopment, the need for additional infrastructure investments can be minimized; therefore, developments within the area will help the region and the community economize on utility infrastructure.

**LU.1.G Reduce energy use by encouraging new residences near supporting goods and services and transit.**

A better integration of land uses can help to reduce the need for car travel. When residences are in close proximity to shopping, services, jobs, parks, public transit facilities, and other public amenities, residents spend less time driving and consume fewer energy resources. Energy consumption is further reduced when streets are designed to be more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly.

**LU.1.H Create mechanisms for transfers of development rights (TDRs) from key resource areas and agricultural lands to village centers, downtown, and other specific districts and neighborhoods where denser development is more appropriate.**

Property ownership can be described as a bundle of specific rights to use and control land (including mineral rights, timber rights, air rights, development rights, etc.), which the government can constrain to varying degrees. In a transfer of development rights, the right to develop a parcel of land is severed from the land itself, and can be bought, sold, and transferred elsewhere. The original land is subsequently protected from development, the property owners are paid the value of the development rights, and developers who purchase those rights can move them and use them to build at

higher densities in a different location, where such density is desired and appropriate. Amherst should explore the implementation of a TDR program in order to manage future growth.

**OBJECTIVE LU.2 - Create vital downtown and village centers (areas of mixed-use, including retail, commercial, and residential elements) that are walkable, attractive and efficient.**

Through infrastructure investment, incentives, and improved regulations, the Town should foster increased economic, cultural and social activity in the downtown and outlying village centers by encouraging a variety of mixed-uses including live-work units. These areas should foster interactions through attractive public spaces and the creation of a walkable environment.

**STRATEGIES**

**LU.2.A Change zoning to allow denser residential occupancy near existing services and public transit.**

Residential development near or in combination with shops, services, and public transit can greatly contribute to a more vital community, particularly when streetscapes are designed to promote walking and biking. Such development can reduce energy consumption, help build a sense of community, and improve community health overall. Residents are more likely to interact on the street and enjoy public spaces when they can walk or bicycle to many of their daily destinations.

**LU.2.B Encourage increased upper floor residential development in downtown and village centers to support a vital economic and social setting.**

The Town should review and update its development ordinances to encourage additional upper floor residential development in the downtown and village centers.

**LU.2.C Support the development of live/work spaces (e.g. artists' lofts, high tech small business offices).**

Live-work units may take variable forms including renovated lofts and mixed-use townhouses. This type of housing encourages adaptive reuse of older buildings, leads to lower car emissions for workers who no longer need to

commute, reduces start-up costs for small businesses, and can help revitalize local economies. The Town should encourage the development of live/work spaces throughout the Amherst community. For more information on the subject see the Live Work Network at <http://www.liveworknet.com>.

#### **LU.2.D Build a permanent farmer’s market facility.**

Developing a facility in which Amherst’s current seasonal farmer’s market could operate year-round in downtown Amherst could benefit the community in a variety of ways. It can help support the economic viability and sustainability of local agriculture, serve as a community gathering place, and provide a new attraction to draw visitors from the broader region.

#### **LU.2.E Develop more public art in downtown and village centers.**

Public art helps celebrate and enhance the unique character of Amherst’s downtown and village centers. The Public Arts Commission could involve the Amherst community in a public process to identify additional locations where they would like to see public art installations, host design competitions, recruit artists to contribute more public art to the community on a permanent or temporary basis, and seek to establish mechanisms for funding ongoing maintenance of permanent public artworks.

#### **LU.2.F Use downtown green spaces more intensively, adding play spaces to encourage people of all ages to congregate.**

Public green spaces are significant assets to urban areas, particularly when they are well-loved and frequently used by community members. Amherst should examine whether additional amenities, activities, or events could be provided in order to enhance the use of downtown green spaces by all members of the community.

#### **LU.2.G Create music/dance/meeting venues downtown.**

Entertainment venues such as music venues, nightclubs, theaters, and restaurants can greatly increase the



vibrancy in the downtown by attracting visitors and creating downtown activity well beyond working hours.

#### **LU.2.H Promote sustainable tourism in Amherst.**

The Amherst community should examine opportunities for increasing sustainable levels of tourism in town. New marketing initiatives that highlight key attractions or offer “visitor’s packages” can help attract more tourists, contribute to the local economy, and invigorate the downtown area. The character of new tourism marketing initiatives should be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure that the levels of public use of Amherst’s tourism resources remain sustainable over time, avoiding damage or degradation of those resources or the community’s overall quality of life.

#### **OBJECTIVE LU.3 - Preserve key undeveloped lands**

The Amherst community places a high value on its unique landscapes and natural resources. The following strategies recommend ways to identify, evaluate and preserve the Town’s most critical natural resources.

#### **STRATEGIES**

##### **LU.3.A Update inventories of key natural resources in Amherst and publish the results.**

The Amherst community should develop an updated inventory of key natural resource areas using data and input from the Town, conservation organizations, and landowners.

##### **LU.3.B Evaluate resource lands on the basis of environmental quality, risk, and connectivity.**

Once a natural resources inventory is completed, each parcel should be assessed for its value based on designated criteria of environmental quality, relative risk of loss or degradation, and connectivity, and priorities should be set for future conservation efforts.

##### **LU.3.C Identify areas to preserve, areas where a varying combination of preservation and development should occur, and areas to allow development with only modest controls.**

Once conservation priorities have been set, the Amherst community should determine how to manage the remaining inventory of natural landscapes. Certain areas may be deemed appropriate for future development, while other areas may be appropriate for more limited development. Regulations can be established to ensure that the most significant natural resources and environmental features on a given site are preserved.

**LU.3.D Purchase the most critical natural resource properties.**

The Town and local conservation organizations should continue to work together to purchase those properties that represent Amherst’s highest conservation priorities.

**LU.3.E Revise growth management regulations—zoning, subdivision regulations, health regulations, etc.—to protect environmental resources and scenic viewsheds.**

The Town should comprehensively review and revise its zoning and subdivision ordinances to ensure that growth management regulations are aligned with growth needs and land preservation priorities. Regulations should seek to preserve the environmental and scenic value of Amherst’s significant rural landscapes.

**LU.3.F Revise zoning overlay districts for aquifer, watershed, and farmland resources. Create a zoning overlay district for critical forest resource areas.**

Overlay districts can be used to help conserve a variety of vulnerable natural resources, including aquifers, wetlands, and forest resources. Overlay zones further refine underlying zoning (through buffers, setbacks, clustering requirements, etc.) in order to protect these resources. The Town should revise existing overlay districts and develop new overlay districts to ensure that the community’s regulatory code is in line with its environmental protection priorities.

**OBJECTIVE LU.4 - Protect key farmland and farming in Amherst.**

The following strategies describe ways to maintain the viability of Amherst’s agricultural community through updates to land use regulations.

**STRATEGIES**

**LU.4.A Provide incentives to encourage sustainable/green farming and forestry practices.**

Encouraging sustainable agriculture and forestry can preserve the fertility of the soil over generations, contribute to a sound local economy, and create positive impacts on the community and the region.

The Amherst community should identify and implement incentives to encourage the use of farming practices that conserve and protect the water supply, retain wildlife habitats, and maintain high soil quality. Land use regulations can help to play a role in promoting these sustainable practices.

Amherst should consider providing financial incentives (preferential tax assessments, rebates, etc.) to property owners who can demonstrate that they consistently use and harvest land resources in sustainable ways.

**LU.4.B Revise and expand farming overlay districts, and create new forestry districts.**

Current farmland conservation overlay zoning districts regulate new residential development in critical farmland areas in order to preserve agricultural land uses, protect prime soils, and prevent other uses from negatively impacting farming activities. This zoning limits the amount of new development that can take place on the land, and maximizes the amount of protected ‘common land’ that must be permanently set aside when development occurs. Similar forest lands overlay district protections should be considered.

The Planning Board should work with the Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission, Tree Warden, and Public Shade Tree Committee to revise existing regulations, create new overlay districts, expand existing districts, and continue to explore ways to refine and expand resource protection zoning.

**LU.4.C Create regulations that protect and support farmers' interests.**

Barriers such as costly permits, lengthy approval processes, zoning restrictions, and legal disputes can limit a farm's business options and hinder profitability. The Town should update its ordinances in order to remove these barriers and enhance agricultural sustainability. It can eliminate policies that impede farming interests, such as restrictions on accessory farm businesses. Through the Right to Farm bylaw, the Town can encourage the incorporation of nuisance disclaimers into sales contracts for non-agricultural development within agricultural zones, in order to reduce conflict and litigation between farmers and neighboring residential communities.

**LU.4.D Continue to acquire APRs (agricultural preservation restrictions), and buy development rights on critical farmland.**

Agricultural preservation restrictions (APRs) are voluntary programs that offer owners of "prime" and "state important" agricultural lands an alternative to selling their land for development purposes. The APR program pays farmers the difference between the fair market value and agricultural value of their land in exchange for permanent deed restrictions. These deed restrictions preclude any development that would have a negative impact on the land's agricultural viability. The community should seek to promote additional APRs in the Amherst region.

**OBJECTIVE LU.5 – Identify key locations for business development and adopt land use regulations that can help broaden the Town's business tax base while avoiding inappropriate businesses, big boxes, heavy industry, etc.**

The Amherst community has a clear sense of the types of businesses and industries that it would like to attract to the community. The Economic Development chapter of this plan highlights a number of strategies for encouraging the growth of target industries. This objective and accompanying strategies look at the role that land use regulations can play in enabling future economic growth.

**STRATEGIES**

**LU.5.A Identify and inventory areas suitable for different kinds of commercial development in Amherst.**

The community should develop an inventory of the lands most suitable for targeted economic development in Amherst. This may include small lots for retail and mixed-use development in the downtown and village centers, or larger lots in selected outlying areas appropriate for research and technology firms or light industry.

**LU.5.B Amend the zoning regulations to encourage business development in appropriate undeveloped and under-developed areas.**

Increasing permitted business densities in appropriate, strategic locations where existing natural resources are not of high quality or of critical importance can help to limit sprawl and reduce development pressure on critical rural lands. In areas targeted by the community as appropriate for future development, zoning amendments should be pursued to allow for higher densities.

**LU.5.C Encourage commercial and mixed-use development in downtown and village center business districts.**

In order to reduce development pressures on scenic rural landscapes, the Town should create a favorable regulatory environment that removes obstacles and provides incentives for compact, well-designed development in the downtown and village centers.

**LU.5.D Revise and expand zoning districts to accommodate clean, sustainable industry.**

Certain categories of industry are desirable for Amherst because they can bring skilled, well-paid, high-demand jobs to the community and enhance and diversify the economic tax base. Zoning districts should be expanded and/or new districts created to facilitate this type of economic development.

**LU.5.E Identify and inventory existing and potential areas appropriate or already zoned for the development of business parks, then extend or**

**improve the infrastructure necessary to make these parks viable.**

Provide existing and potential new business parks with necessary infrastructure in appropriate areas for clean businesses, research companies, professional offices, information- or technology-based firms and other appropriate business uses.

**LU.5.F Inventory areas needing environmental clean-up, including known brown-fields sites, and assess their suitability as sites for commercial or mixed-use development.**

Brownfields are abandoned or underutilized properties that have real or perceived environmental contamination that constrains redevelopment potential. While federal funding and tax incentives are available to address these problems, municipalities often must take the lead in guiding the clean up and redevelopment of these sites. The Town should inventory its brownfield sites, prioritize the clean-up of those areas that are suitable for commercial or mixed-use redevelopment, and seek resources for undertaking rehabilitation and development of these sites.

**LU.5.G Consider outright Town purchase of the most critical properties to spur appropriate development and redevelopment. Then use public ownership as a development incentive, as well as a control.**

Once an inventory has been completed, the community should consider whether any of the lands targeted for economic growth are in need of special attention in order to attract private investment and appropriate development. In some cases the Town may need to purchase the properties outright, or obtain development rights or easements for critical areas.

Amherst has a long history of obtaining property rights—particularly APRs and conservation easements—in order to protect critical resources and slow or control growth in specific areas of Town. Public ownership of land can also be used as an active incentive where development is desired—it allows the community to reduce land costs for development, offering transfer of a property to a developer at a very low cost in exchange for the developer providing public amenities. Ownership allows the

community full control over the nature and design of the resulting development.

**LU.5.H Organize and coordinate administrative procedures to ensure that the permit process itself does not represent an unreasonable impediment to desired development.**

Having identified the kinds of business development it desires, the Town should encourage their development. The permitting process should be expedited for these businesses by implementing coordinated review procedures for development plans, while continuing to ensure that such companies protect the health and welfare of local populations and ecologies, and respect historic character.

**OBJECTIVE LU.6 - Guide new housing growth so as to minimize impact on Amherst's open space and small-town rural character.**

Any new growth in Amherst should be designed to protect the Town's natural resources and preserve its existing character. The following strategies recommend how development and design regulations could be used to ensure that future growth is in accordance with the Town's land use principles and harmonious in terms of design.

**STRATEGIES**

**LU.6.A Revise growth management regulations— zoning, subdivision regulations, health regulations, etc.**

These regulations can be used to protect environmental resources and preserve scenic viewsheds and to help determine the nature, location, and design of future housing development. Zoning and subdivision ordinances should be updated to reflect the Town's vision for future growth and development. Health regulations can be developed to better govern private septic and well systems, which are required for residential development in some of the Town's remaining undeveloped outlying areas beyond the reach of our public sewer/water systems.

**LU.6.B Increase density of residential units in specified areas when strict design and planning guidelines are met.**

Amherst can develop incentives to encourage developers to adhere to planning and design guidelines. Density bonuses and dimensional flexibility are ways to encourage development located in appropriate areas and that meets desired planning and design standards.

**OBJECTIVE LU.7 – Identify appropriate locations for future municipal recreation facilities.**

Certain lands owned by the Town of Amherst may be suitable for providing additional recreation amenities in the community, such as parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, passive recreation lawns, and natural areas.

**STRATEGIES**

**LU.7.A Inventory and evaluate Town-owned lands that are not dedicated or restricted to an exclusive public use.**

Town-owned parcels that are currently vacant should be inventoried and evaluated to determine if they are suitable for the development of new recreation opportunities. Criteria used in the evaluation may include the land's accessibility, population served, environmental constraints, and potential for filling specific recreation gaps, among others.

**LU.7.B Identify appropriate locations for new recreation to occur in concert with planned new conservation, school, fire department, public works, and/or other planned municipal facilities.**

For each new Town project or facility, the recreational needs of the neighborhood and community as a whole should be considered as a potential shared use. See LU.8.A.

**LU.7.C Begin multi-year design and capital budget planning for new recreation facilities.**

Following completion of the evaluations above (LU.7.A, LU.7.B), the community should target and pursue



the most appropriate lands for additional development of recreation facilities.

**OBJECTIVE LU.8 - Create a process, committee, and/or administrative mechanism for sorting out competing interests on individual properties.**

From time to time, different interest groups – such as the Town, residents, property owners, colleges, University, and developers – may need to negotiate competing interests on a particular piece of land. The following strategies suggest approaches for reconciling these different interests regarding land use regulations and development options.

**STRATEGIES**

**LU.8.A Develop an administrative land use review process for all Town projects.**

The Town should take the lead in demonstrating how to coordinate the community’s diverse interests in the development or redevelopment of public land by imposing on itself a mandatory process to mediate, prioritize, and coordinate competing proposals for various municipal land parcels for proposed new Town projects. This internal review process should involve all of the appropriate Town departments and boards/committees representing major public interests. Every proposed use of an existing or proposed new public property should be reviewed for the full range of potential public uses and interests (conservation, housing, recreation, historic preservation, infrastructure, etc.), and multiple joint uses of property should be encouraged wherever feasible.

**LU.8.B Revise the community’s development regulations to more fully incorporate diverse public interests.**

Zoning, subdivision regulation and other development regulations are intended to represent and protect both the public and private interests in the rational and orderly development of land. These regulations should be revised to ensure that multiple public interests are better represented in and provided for through new private development.

**LU.8.C. Require community charrettes as part of the permitting process, to encourage public participation in design.**

For development projects above certain thresholds of scale or impact, charrettes could be a required step in the permit process. Community charrettes are an excellent tool for integrating public input into the design process. Through a series of public meetings, design workshops, and open houses, stakeholders and the public can engage in an interactive approach to creating development principles and an illustrated vision for a particular piece of land. Charrettes result in design solutions that effectively negotiate a variety of competing community interests.

**LU.8.D Educate the public about land use regulation (zoning).**

Public education will be a key component to updating Amherst’s land use (zoning) regulations and engaging in future design and planning initiatives. Coordinated efforts by the Planning Board and other Town committees, will foster a broader understanding of the rationale behind new zoning amendments, including how such revisions reflect the community’s land use principles.

**OBJECTIVE LU.9 - Honor the historic/cultural character and beauty of neighborhoods.**

The Amherst community should undertake a variety of efforts to preserve the historic character of its neighborhoods. Historical information and design standards can play a significant role in ensuring that new development, redevelopment, and infill projects will retain the desired character of the community.

**STRATEGIES**

**LU.9.A Identify design standards that will preserve existing town character, and develop an enhanced design review process.**

Design standards are important when considering the character of the downtown and village centers. Amherst has had an advisory design review process in place since October 1983. Standards should be developed that capture the existing character of these areas and require future buildings to reflect a similar character in terms of height,

bulk, relationship to the streetscape, and appropriate architectural styles and building materials. The Design Review Board could serve an important role in reviewing and advising on potential development options in areas outside of its current downtown jurisdiction. Form-based codes can also be used to ensure that future development adheres to desired community characteristics.

#### **LU.9.B Create neighborhood design standards.**

Design can serve to preserve historic small-town character, ensure that new development complements historic buildings, and create an accessible, pedestrian-friendly environment. In addition to addressing fundamental issues such as building height, width, and setbacks, design guidelines can also focus on elements such as signage, materials selection, streetscape improvements, and landscaping.

Specific standards should be developed to encourage new development and neighborhood infill development that reflects and enhances existing neighborhood character. These standards should be made a part of the Town's development regulations, and incorporated into each of the residential zoning designations. Special neighborhood overlay districts can also be considered to preserve and promote the design qualities unique to specific neighborhoods.

#### **LU.9.C Identify design standards that minimize environmental and visual impacts in natural areas, and amend design regulations to incorporate those standards.**

The Amherst community should identify specific design standards that would best guide development occurring on or adjacent to scenic landscapes, and incorporate these principles into existing development permit regulations. Design elements may address issues of siting, height, bulk, required setbacks, and appropriate building materials, among others. A design review process can also be created to ensure that new development does not detract from Amherst's scenic resources.

#### **LU.9.D Promote the use of buffer zones to minimize the impact of new buildings on nearby key resources.**

Buffer zones can be designed to limit potentially negative visual, auditory, and ecological impacts of development. The Amherst community should work to identify the minimum size and design requirements for buffer zones surrounding important natural features such as watersheds, habitats, scenic landscapes and areas for traditional recreation.

**OBJECTIVE LU.10 – Utilize “greenways” and walkways to tie neighborhoods, public spaces, etc, together and make it easier for Amherst residents to walk or bicycle to more destinations.**

Greenways are protected corridors of natural green areas, often established along rivers and streams, which can generate numerous benefits for a community. In addition to protecting natural resources and maintaining habitat and wildlife travel corridors, greenways provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. Through the careful planning and installation of trails and bikeways, greenways can provide transportation corridors—a great way for residents and visitors to explore the region, access major recreational areas, and connect community members to nearby shops, jobs, and centers. In these ways, greenways promote healthier lifestyles and a more active community; they also help protect wildlife habitats and environmental resources. Greenways and trails should be an integral component of the community’s transportation system.

**STRATEGIES**

**LU.10.A Create connected, walkable centers and neighborhoods.**

The downtown core, village centers, and residential neighborhoods should be designed to appeal to pedestrians and offer a safe, convenient, and attractive network of sidewalks and pathways for traveling from place to place.

**LU.10.B Create walkways to connect businesses and residences – create walkways between buildings.**

The Town should require new developments to be pedestrian friendly, and to safely connect residents to destinations within a development and to needed goods and services nearby. Sidewalks and pathways should be expanded to create connections between residential areas,

commercial areas, and employment centers. Where feasible, existing informal pedestrian connections across vacant land or through village center alleys should be formalized as public walkways.

**LU.10.C Develop a Town-wide plan mapping future greenways, sidewalks, and bike lanes, and amend land use regulations to help implement the plan.**

In coordination with the Transportation Plan developed under Strategy T.1.A, the Town should thoroughly review and map potential sites for establishing and extending greenways. Regulations and programs can then be pursued to protect planned greenway lands from future development. Greenways and trails should, where appropriate, effectively connect to the Town's sidewalk and bike lane systems and to public transit stops, all of which can be mapped and planned for in a coordinated fashion. Provisions can be made to ensure that all new developments include sidewalks, bike lanes, and appropriate connections to the greenway system.

**LU.10.D Update the subdivision and zoning regulations to require road and pedestrian connections among different neighborhoods, districts, and corridors.**

Connectivity is a priority development principle to promote and improve on mobility throughout the community. Development regulations need to reflect this principle, and should require both vehicular and pedestrian connections whenever feasible.

**LU.10.E Continue to work with land owners to establish easements for greenways.**

As part of its ongoing outreach program regarding the acquisition of open space and trails, the Town should continue to maintain close contact with residents, businesses, farmers, and local governments that own parcels of land which have been targeted for future greenway use. Regular communication should be used to educate landowners about the importance of greenways, offer incentives for the granting of easements, and discuss other ways to protect open space for the public good while respecting private property rights.

**E. Land Use Policy Map**

The attached Land Use Policy Map represents, in a general manner, the land use development intentions of the community of Amherst as expressed in this Master Plan. This map is consistent with decades of community-based planning expressing the community's preference to preserve and enhance its traditional New England settlement pattern through control of new development.

The majority of new residential and commercial development will be selectively directed into existing built mixed use centers and associated densely-settled neighborhoods. New infill and redevelopment in existing historic downtowns, village centers, and established neighborhoods will have to abide by rigorous and sensitive design and density controls intended to preserve and enhance existing character. Existing outlying farmlands, riparian (stream-related) corridors, and woodlands are predominantly shown on the Map as permanently preserved lands or as lands targeted for potential preservation or for carefully-limited development. Some selected outlying areas—usually but not always near existing or proposed new centers—would be targeted for carefully controlled non-residential commercial development.

Areas designated as “centers” on the Land Use Policy Map are deliberately broad and generalized, and include the existing mixed-use downtown and village centers, the densely settled residential neighborhoods associated with and surrounding those centers, and other adjacent areas within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile (approximately 15-20 minutes walking time) of the geographic center of existing or proposed centers. These areas also include potential new centers and neighborhoods. Areas within these “centers” should not be understood as automatically representing areas targeted for new or infill development—as shown, for instance, they also include areas already preserved or slated for potential future preservation.

Amherst has yet to complete a center-by-center and neighborhood-by-neighborhood geographic planning process to create new zoning districts and

new development regulations for those areas. Accordingly, the “centers” shown on the Land Use Policy Map are meant only to indicate their general existing or potential location. Likewise, areas shown for potential future non-residential development or preservation are not unequivocal statements of future community intent. In many places, areas of potential development and preservation overlap, indicating where the community has expressed an interest in both, but has not yet resolved how to balance those interests.

Following the completion of the geographic planning and rezoning process called for in this Plan, development regulations will change, and some of the areas designated for development will be developed and others designated for preservation will be preserved. Others will experience compromise solutions. Some will not change at all. The Land Use Policy Map does not represent community decisions on these questions. It only indicates where the community has expressed specific strong interests for preservation and/or development, and, in the process, identifies those areas where the community will need to coordinate and reconcile its sometimes competing interests.