

MIXED-USE CENTER ZONING: A BRIEF HISTORY 2010-2013

Feb. 2010

The Planning Board adopts the Amherst Master Plan, completing a community planning process begun in 2004. The Plan includes these and other priorities:

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 and/or 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.

[LU 1.B]

Summer 2010

The Planning Board develops a scope of work for a consultant to help the community develop village center plans and accompanying new zoning incorporating form-based design regulations for the highest priority village centers—North Amherst village and Atkins Corners.

April - Sept. 2011

The Cecil Group (consultants) and Planning Board conducts participatory on-site village center planning and design workshops, develops conceptual plans, and generates rezoning proposals.

From April-July, the Town Manager and Amherst Redevelopment Authority sponsor a community charrette planning process for the Gateway Corridor project, which seeks to extend the north end of the downtown to the southern edge of the UMass campus. The resulting plan, presented in July, envisions a revitalized north end of the downtown and proposes several action steps, including a housing market study to assess the viability of non-student housing demand, and a traffic study to evaluate the potential impact of UMass and Gateway development on the nearby streets. The Town decides to pursue housing studies of two kinds—affordable housing (Housing Production Plan with state guidelines) and market rate.

Nov. 2011

The Fall 2011 Special Town Meeting gives the village center rezoning proposal (both village centers in a single article) a strongly favorable majority vote (60%--119Y/79N) from Town Meeting, but fails by 12 votes to achieve the 2/3s vote required for zoning to pass.

- Jan. - April 2012 The Planning Board conducts a public process to significantly rework the village center rezoning proposals and present them in two separate articles.
- May 2012 The 2012 Annual Town Meeting gives the two village center rezoning proposals stronger majority votes but does not achieve the 2/3s required:
- Atkins Corners ~ 63%--131Y/78N; 7 votes short of 2/3s
 - North Amherst village ~ 65.2%--137Y/73N; 2 votes short of 2/3s.
- June - Sept. 2012 The Planning Board identifies problems with rental housing, increased student rentals in neighborhoods and absentee landlords as immediate and urgent community issues, and works exclusively on zoning amendments addressing those issues for the Fall 2012 Town Meeting.
- Nov. 2012 The Fall 2012 Special Town Meeting adopts 4 out of 5 Planning Board zoning amendments governing residential rental uses, along with one petition article supported by the Planning Board. Town Meeting does not support imposing new zoning regulations (including a Special Permit requirement) on the rental of single family homes.
- The Town Manager appoints a Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Working Group to develop and recommend residential rental regulations in the form of an amendment to the General By-Laws.
- Dec. 2012
- April 2013 The Safe and Healthy Neighborhood Working Group recommends a new draft General By-Law regulating residential rental properties. With some minor adjustments, the Town Manager submits the Bylaw for the consideration of the 2013 Annual Town Meeting.
- In March, a completed Housing Production Plan (for affordable housing) is presented to the Housing and Sheltering Committee.
- In April, consultants RKG Associates hired and the Housing Market Study begins. Preliminary results are released May 3.
- The Planning Board and its Zoning Subcommittee re-examine village center zoning proposals and decide to proceed incrementally, making no changes to zoning districts or boundaries but pursuing the following changes first:
- Amending the requirements for mixed use buildings
 - Amending dimensional regulations for selected mixed use center districts
 - Adding locational requirements for new additions or expansions of non-conforming structures. These follow form-based design requirements for building changes in these districts.