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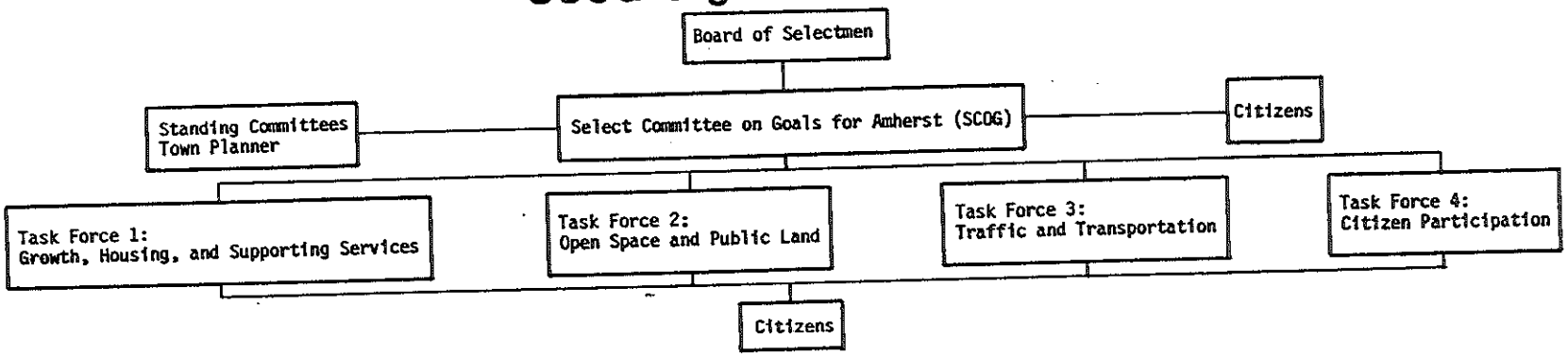
Summary of the Report of the Select Committee On Goals for Amherst

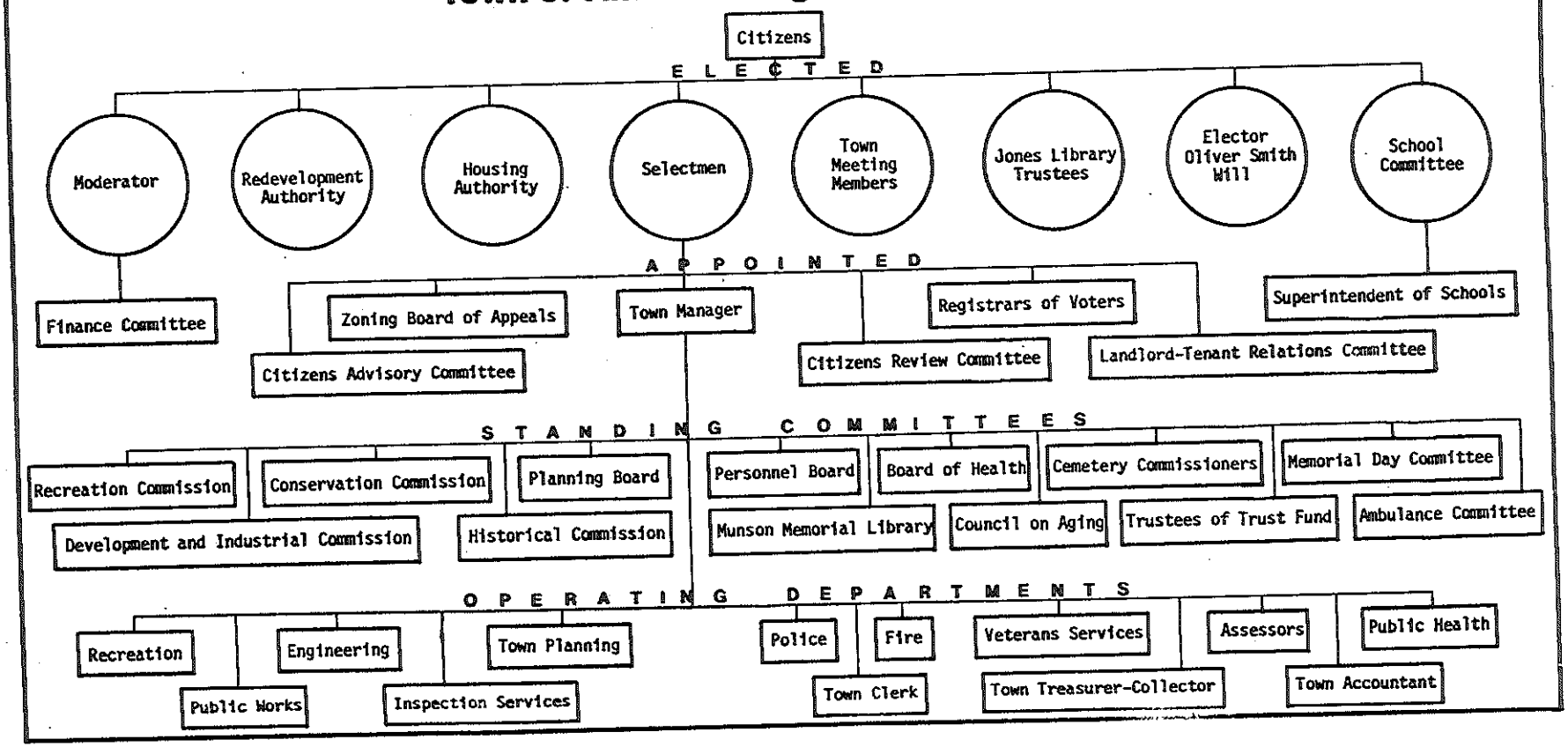
AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS

FOUNDED 1759

SCOG Organization Chart



Town of Amherst Organization Chart



What is SCOG?

The Select Committee on Goals for Amherst (SCOG) was established by the Board of Selectmen on October 5, 1971. The Selectmen announced that in accordance with plans discussed throughout the summer, SCOG would address the quality of life in Amherst by examining the issues of growth and development and proposing goals and recommendations for town policy. SCOG was to encourage public participation in the goal-making process and to coordinate town agencies in their formulation of policy regarding growth and development. A final report of recommendations including goals, objectives, and implementation steps was to be presented to the Board of Selectmen upon completion of the Committee's activities.

The Select Committee on Goals consisted of twenty-five members including the Selectmen, the chairmen of thirteen standing town committees, and several at-large citizens. Subsequent reorganization of SCOG into several issue-oriented task forces precipitated a greatly enlarged membership of interested citizens. The Office of the Town Planner provided technical information and staff assistance and served as a clearinghouse of information about SCOG.

Why SCOG?

In 1971, more so than in other recent years, local issues of population growth, residential and commercial development, and highway construction revealed the absence of general town policy in these and other related areas. Concern with these problems climaxed at a Special Town Meeting on October 4 and 6 at which citizens and organizations formally discussed growth, development, and town policy in Amherst. Throughout the preceding summer the Board of Selectmen had been considering alternative ways of involving citizens in the articulation of goals and policies for the town. Understanding that all issues of growth and development are related, significant, and well within the responsibilities of the Board of Selectmen and other town agencies, the Selectmen recognized an opportunity to encourage community-wide consideration of all aspects of future development. To avoid a superficial and unilateral "solution" to these problems that would be detrimental to the town's social, cultural, and economic welfare by adopting only land use policy as the means of controlling growth and development, the Selectmen created the Select Committee on Goals for Amherst.

What did SCOG do?

The Select Committee on Goals interpreted its assignment as that of determining principles and concepts to direct growth and development. The Committee emphasized that it would not arbitrate goals for Amherst but would instead seek out and reveal what the town's goals indeed are. In accomplishing this SCOG studied many aspects of growth and development in Amherst, surveyed public opinion on these issues, and formulated a plan of goals, objectives, and implementation steps designed to control growth and shape development in a meaningful and reasonable way. The recommendations were presented in the Committee's final report to the Board of Selectmen on January 29, 1973.

Citizen participation in the Committee's activities was encouraged throughout the year. Reorganization of SCOG into several issue-oriented task forces entailed an enlarged membership broadening the base of citizen representation. Two series of public hearings provided a forum for voicing opinions and reacting to tentative recommendations, and a questionnaire survey buttressed initial findings with an in-depth analysis of public opinion. Scheduled television and radio broadcasts and local newspaper articles rounded out the coverage of SCOG activities. The Town Planner's Office collected and distributed information about SCOG for interested citizens and organizations.

Orientation of the SCOG task forces focused attention on three general areas of local concern: (1) growth, housing, and supporting services; (2) open space and public land; and (3) traffic and transportation. Studies by the task forces and other local government and civic agencies and consultation with planning experts supplied the technical and planning information to substantiate the ideas of the townspeople and the Committee. These individual task force research projects were undertaken and reviewed in the context of a growth analysis program conducted by the Town Planner.

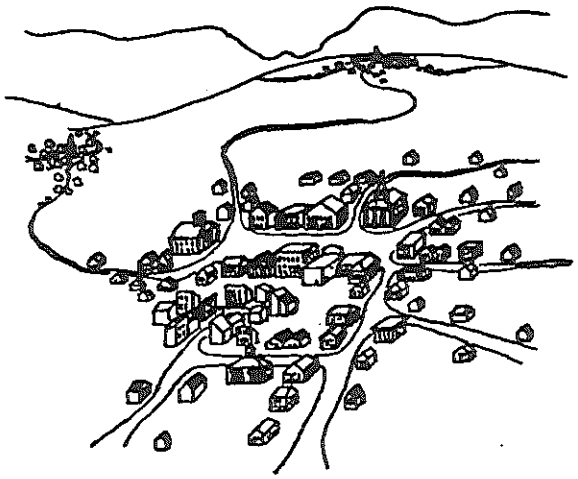
The SCOG Report

The final plan proposed by SCOG reflects this composite image of local interests. The following summary and outlines of the SCOG recommendations describe the highlights of the plan. Citizens and organizations interested in more information about SCOG and its proposals are referred to the Committee's final report, available for review in the town libraries and the Office of the Town Planner (253-2773). Copies of the SCOG final report may be purchased upon request.

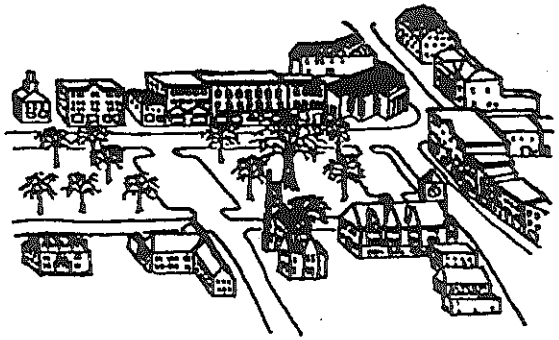
The SCOG Plan

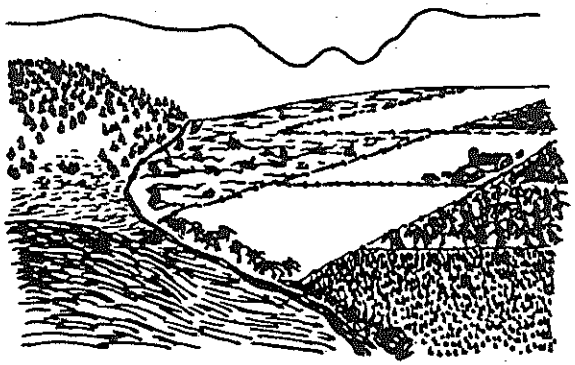
THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON GOALS RECOMMENDS TO THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN THAT THE TOWN OF AMHERST ADOPT THE FOLLOWING PROPOSALS IN ORDER TO CONTROL GROWTH AND SHAPE DEVELOPMENT IN SUCH A WAY AS TO MODERATE THE RATE OF GROWTH AND IMPROVE THE QUALITATIVE ASPECTS OF THE TOWN.

VILLAGES - THE TOWN SHOULD ESTABLISH FIVE VILLAGES, IN NEW AND TRADITIONAL LOCATIONS, WHICH WILL COMPLEMENT THE TOWN CENTER BY ORGANIZING FUNCTIONS WHICH ARE NOW SPREADING SHAPELESSLY THROUGHOUT THE TOWN. FUTURE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE ACCOMMODATED WITHIN THESE VILLAGES. HOUSING APPROPRIATE TO THE NEEDS OF AMHERST SHOULD BE CLUSTERED AT EACH VILLAGE. PROVISIONS FOR ADEQUATE PUBLIC UTILITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, AND FOR SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES, SHOULD BE CONCENTRATED AT EACH VILLAGE CENTER. COMPOSITION AND CONFIGURATION OF THE VILLAGES SHOULD VARY, DEPENDING UPON ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES, HISTORICAL TRADITIONS, AND THE INTENT OF TOWN AND VILLAGE RESIDENTS TO PROVIDE VARIETY AND PURPOSE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMHERST.

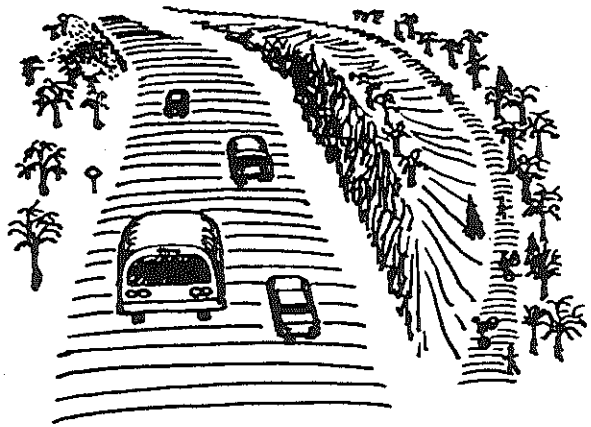


TOWN CENTER - THE TOWN SHOULD ENHANCE ITS TRADITIONAL TOWN CENTER AS THE PRIMARY CIVIC, COMMERCIAL, SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND RESIDENTIAL SECTOR OF TOWN. IMPROVEMENTS TO THE FUNCTIONAL AND AESTHETIC QUALITIES OF THE TOWN CENTER, INCLUDING POSSIBLE REHABILITATION OR REDEVELOPMENT OF MARGINAL AND TRANSITIONAL BUILDINGS AND AREAS, SHOULD EMPHASIZE THE TOWN CENTER AS THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF ACTIVITY IN THE TOWN.





OPEN SPACE - THE TOWN SHOULD ESTABLISH AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF OPEN SPACE LANDS. PART OF THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM SHOULD DEFINE AND CONTAIN THE VILLAGES. BROADER GREENBELTS BETWEEN THE VILLAGES, AND OTHER LARGE TRACTS OF LAND, SHOULD SERVE TO SATISFY A VARIETY OF NEEDS INCLUDING RECREATION, CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES, PRESERVATION OF LANDMARKS AND SCENIC VIEWS, AND MAINTENANCE OF WORKING FARMS. COMPOSITION OF THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM SHOULD INCLUDE PRIVATE BUT EMPHASIZE PUBLIC LANDS.



TRANSPORTATION - THE TOWN SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM WHICH WILL SATISFY THE INTERNAL NEEDS OF EACH VILLAGE AND THE TOWN CENTER, AND WHICH WILL RELATE THE VILLAGES TO EACH OTHER, TO THE TOWN CENTER, AND TO THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND OTHER AREAS OF EMPLOYMENT, WITHOUT VIOLATING THE INTEGRITY OF THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM. A NETWORK OF LOCAL ROADS FOR NECESSARY AUTOMOBILE TRAFFIC SHOULD BE COMPLEMENTED BY A PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEM OPERATING BETWEEN THE VILLAGES, THE TOWN CENTER, AND THE UNIVERSITY. ALTERNATIVES TO THE HIGHWAY INCLUDING PEDESTRIAN, BICYCLE, AND BRIDLE PATHS SHOULD BE PROVIDED, ESPECIALLY WITHIN THE VILLAGES.

Summary of the Recommendations of Task Force 1: Growth, Housing, and Supporting Services

GOALS

1. Moderate the rate of growth within the town of Amherst in order to improve the qualitative aspects of the town.

2. Establish within the town of Amherst five villages to be called North Amherst Village, Cushman Village, Southeast Amherst Village, South Amherst Village, and Hampshire Village. Future growth and development within the town should be encouraged to locate within the villages.

   a) Limited commercial activities and special areas for controlled light industry will be permitted in some villages.

   b) Residential densities within the villages will be consistent with the available natural land characteristics, utility systems, and transportation objectives.

   c) New development within the villages will be primarily individually owned housing units, with limited areas available for multi-family units. Residential development will be encouraged to follow the principles of cluster and planned unit development.

   d) Future development of public facilities, such as libraries, schools, health centers, etc., should be located within the centers of the villages.

3. Discourage growth outside the villages by whatever means possible in order to retain open space, reduce transportation and utility problems, and enhance the total environment of the town.

   a) Discourage using land outside of villages and the town center for commercial, light industrial, multiple-family units, public facilities, structures for intensive recreation, and school buildings, through zoning and land use regulations.

   b) Reduce future development of utilities, roadways, and public facilities in the areas outside the villages.

   c) Encourage the protection of scenic, historic, and cultural features and areas within the town of Amherst by every means possible.

4. Establish the town center as the focal area of the community and have it serve as the primary commercial, civic, and population center of the town of Amherst.

a) Permit within the town center limited commercial, light industrial, multi-family, single family dwellings, and community facilities.

b) Propose that the Planning Board study the feasibility of relatively high density development through greater variation in structure heights, land usage, multiple-use structures, and the preservation of viable residential neighborhoods in the area between the center of the town and the University.

c) Increase the functional and aesthetic value of the town center through the improvement of the public facilities, transportation modes, public services, commercial facilities, and housing.

d) Consider creative reuse of poorly utilized land within the town center.

5. Encourage that future housing development be of types and sizes that will fulfill the needs of the various segments of the population and that the housing be distributed within the various villages and the town center.

a) Upgrade standards regarding architecture and landscape design in residential, commercial, and light industrial areas in order to improve privacy, safety, and visual qualities within the community.

b) Continuously update all codes relative to housing within the town so that the standards will be at the highest level legally possible, in order to provide safe and healthy conditions for all residents.

c) Support the continued development of public and private housing for the elderly (including nursing homes of various levels) and the development of low income housing by the private sector of the town through federal and state sponsored rent subsidies and non-profit corporations.

d) Encourage the rehabilitation of certain older areas or buildings within the town.

6. Maintain an adequate level of community services for the town and provide for expanded services as required by changing needs of the population and growth but within the guidelines established in sections A and B of this report.

a) Support the proposed establishment and operation of a community health center under the aegis of the Amherst Board of Health, with citizens' participation through a Health Planning Council, as recommended by the ad hoc Health Planning Committee in its final report of June 30, 1972.

b) Encourage the establishment and operation of a nonprofit prepaid comprehensive health care program for the residents of Amherst.

c) Encourage the establishment of day-care nursery facilities for children.

d) Encourage the construction of additional indoor sports facilities and crafts centers.

e) Develop the satellite library systems in the villages and maintain a high per capital level of library services.

f) Maintain the high educational standards within the town and encourage that the development of any future school facilities be centrally located within the villages.

g) Continue to provide protection for the community by continuously modernizing the police and fire departments and by providing adequate manpower and facilities to meet any future growth needs.

h) Continue to provide the required community services through town departments with a special emphasis on the capabilities of the Public Works and Town Hall services.

i) Provide public water, sewer, and solid waste disposal to the community to meet projected needs and to meet or exceed all federal and state environmental standards. The town should maintain these services on line in excess of capacity anticipated five years or more in the future.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Adopt in principle the primary, the supporting goals, and related objectives of the report of the Task Force on Growth, Housing and Supporting Services so that the Selectmen, Town Meeting, and town committees and boards will have a framework on which to base decisions in the near future until total implementation methods can be developed and presented.

2. Make this report available to all town committees, boards, authorities, and commissions so that they will be able to plan their activities to conform to the supporting goals and related objectives.

3. Establish a special town committee consisting of 3 members of the Planning Board, one member from each precinct and a member from the present Task Force on Housing, Growth and Supporting Services. The Town Planner will be an ex-officio member. This committee, along with whatever professional help needed, will develop a new zoning map for the town of Amherst and submit it to the Planning Board by October 1, 1973.

Included in the new zoning map should be the necessary changes required to:

a) Set up precise boundaries of the villages.

b) Zone the areas outside of the villages to eliminate all use other than single family dwellings on large lots.

c) Protect the critical open space, desirable natural features, and high conservation areas as designated by the Conservation Commission, the Historical Commission, and the report of the SCOG Task Force on Open Space and Public Land.

d) Develop a variety of zones within the villages that will allow relatively high densities of individually owned housing units along with limited areas for public facilities, multi-family rental units, commercial activities and controlled research, wholesale, or administrative light industry.

e) Develop the villages so that each will be compatible with available natural land characteristics, utility systems, transportation, and cultural features, and so that each will preserve and acquire unique characteristics.

f) Establish liaison with regional planning agencies and adapt town zoning to existing regional plans whenever feasible.

4. Continue the current moratorium on apartment construction until such time as the zoning by-laws can be modified to implement the village concept. Likewise a moratorium should be placed on all changes in the zoning map until the new zoning by-law has been approved. This moratorium should continue until procedures are set up to review architectural, landscaping, and code requirements. Finally, developments of any kind which include single family dwellings should be discouraged until the appropriate by-law modifications have been approved.

5. Suspend major development of sewer and water lines pending such time as the village concept has been adopted. Likewise new road construction or major improvement, and sidewalk development, be limited until the village concept has been accepted. This should not affect activities already approved by Town Meeting.

6. Set up a permanent town Design Review Board as a subcommittee of the Planning Board which will consist of seven members who would:

a) Develop architectural design and landscape layout guidelines for the town.

b) Set up overall goals relative to design for the town, each village, and the town center.

c) Issue advisory reports to the Planning Board for each proposed development, dealing with landscaping and architectural design.

7. Charge the Historical Commission with identifying particular scenic, historic, and cultural features, structures, and characteristics in the town which should be preserved, and to suggest means for protecting them.

8. Instruct the Planning Board to do a comprehensive study of the area between the town center and the University which would be presented to the town within the next eighteen months. The purpose of the study should be to determine whether any benefits would accrue by allowing relatively high density development through greater variation in structure heights, land usage, multiple-use structures, and the preservation of viable residential neighborhoods in the area between the center of the town and the University. Methods of implementation should be included in the final report of the Planning Board.

9. Request the Amherst Redevelopment Authority to undertake a study oriented towards possible reuse and rehabilitation of poorly utilized or older rundown areas within the town center. The Authority should identify land that is presently being poorly utilized and suggest means of creative reuse of such land. The Authority should also identify older areas and individual buildings within the town where rehabilitation should be encouraged. Specific suggestions for reuse and rehabilitation should be included in the final report.

10. Set up a temporary town committee to review all existing town, state, and national codes relative to sanitation, fire, building, electricity, plumbing, and other areas that deal with public health, safety, and comfort in private and public housing. The committee's purpose shall be to propose to the proper approving authorities modifications, additions, and deletions to existing codes. One result of the committee's activities might be the introduction of new codes into the town by-laws. The codes, recommendations, and guidelines adopted by the town in the future should be the highest level that is practically and legally possible in order to protect the residents of the town from unsafe, unhealthy, and uncomfortable living conditions.

Membership on this committee would be drawn from the Planning Board, Public Health Board, Landlord-Tenant Relations Committee, and recognized authorities from the town. The Director of Inspection Services and the Town Engineer would be ex-officio members.

11. Instruct the Planning Board to submit to Town Meeting once every two years a report on growth and housing within the town. Included in the report should be an estimate of population increase, the number of rental units, the number of privately owned units, the type of development that has occurred, and a comprehensive review of the current zoning by-laws with suggested changes.

12. Set up a standing town committee on supporting services which will serve as an advisory board to the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting on various supporting services within the town. Responsibilities would include water, sewer, solid waste disposal, fire protection, police protection, and highway maintenance. The primary purpose of the committee would be to engage in long range planning in order to maintain the level of services required by the town. Subcommittees should be set up to develop specific plans for large town projects dealing with facility or system enlargement or modernization. The committee should develop a continuous liaison program with the regional authorities concerned with supporting services and coordinate town activities with them. As an immediate charge, the committee should systematically explore the quality and quantity of ground water in Amherst and the purchase of land areas between villages where there are ground water sources.

13. Request the Recreation Commission to investigate possible means for future expansion and utilization of indoor sports facilities and craft center capabilities within the town and to report back to the town within one year.

14. Request the Trustees of the Jones Library to initiate a study of the feasibility of developing additional satellite library systems in each of the villages. Included should be projections on usage, costs, facilities required, volume requirements, locations, and a projected time table for implementation.

Summary of the Recommendations of Task Force 2: Open Space and Public Land

GOALS

1. The town should adopt an active program of open space preservation and acquisition.
   a) Some working farms and orchards should be preserved.
   b) The Holyoke Range should be protected.
   c) Wetlands must be preserved.
   d) Steep wooded slopes should be protected from intensive development.
   e) Scenic views must be maintained and enhanced.
   f) Historic and cultural landmarks should be preserved.

2. The program of open space acquisition and preservation should be specifically designed to complement the village concept, i.e. the creative use of open land for the purposes of separating, shaping, and characterizing the villages.

3. The program of open space acquisition and preservation should include a variety of types and uses of open space to serve a broad range of citizen interests.
   a) Both organized and passive recreation areas should be encouraged on town land and in private developments.
   b) Conservation efforts by the town should be expanded.
   c) The potential of water recreation should be explored.
   d) Three large tracts of open land must be protected: the Holyoke Range, the Lawrence Swamp, and the "Northeast Kingdom."

IMPLEMENTATION

1. The town must adopt an aggressive, well-financed program of land acquisition.
   a) Total appropriations for open space acquisition must be substantially increased.
   b) A number of alternative tools for land acquisition should be utilized by the town, including:
      1. outright purchase
      2. easements
      3. options and "rights of first refusal"
      4. grants and "living trusts"
      5. eminent domain.

2. The town must act to preserve working farms and orchards, in such ways as:
   a) Establishing a farmers' market
   b) Support for legislation enabling use-value assessment of agricultural lands
   c) Purchase-and-leaseback of some farms
   d) Organizing an experimental farm.

3. The town must act to protect the Holyoke Range from encroachment of development. While waiting for state and federal park programs, the town may have to purchase key pieces of territory to protect the Range.

4. Revision of the Zoning By-law may be necessary to implement the open space program.

5. Subdivision Regulations should be revised to encourage more open space and better use of it in developments.

6. New town agencies should be established to implement and supervise the open space program:
   a) Land Acquisition Review Committee
   b) Town Realty Department.

7. Capacity of the town planning function should be expanded.

8. Participation in regional planning is encouraged.

Summary of the Recommendations of Task Force 3: Traffic and Transportation

GOALS

1. The town should adopt policies that encourage the leveling off of growth, both of the town and the University.

2. The town should adopt policies which encourage the development of village centers and maintain the intervening open spaces.

3. The town should accept the need to maintain the Central Business District as a viable focus for town, commercial, and civic activities.

4. The town should recognize that it is not in the best interest of Amherst to attract high speed trunk line traffic to this area.

5. The town should develop public transportation especially to serve selected heavy use arteries such as routes between outlying apartment complexes and the University.

6. The town should aim for a road system engineered to permit efficient traffic flow and dispersal at moderate speeds.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Establish a Public Transportation Committee to study the feasibility and details of a public transportation system for Amherst, and to make specific recommendations about the establishment of such transportation.

2. Establish a Traffic Circulation Subcommittee of the Planning Board to study traffic problems in and about town and to make regular reports of recommendations.

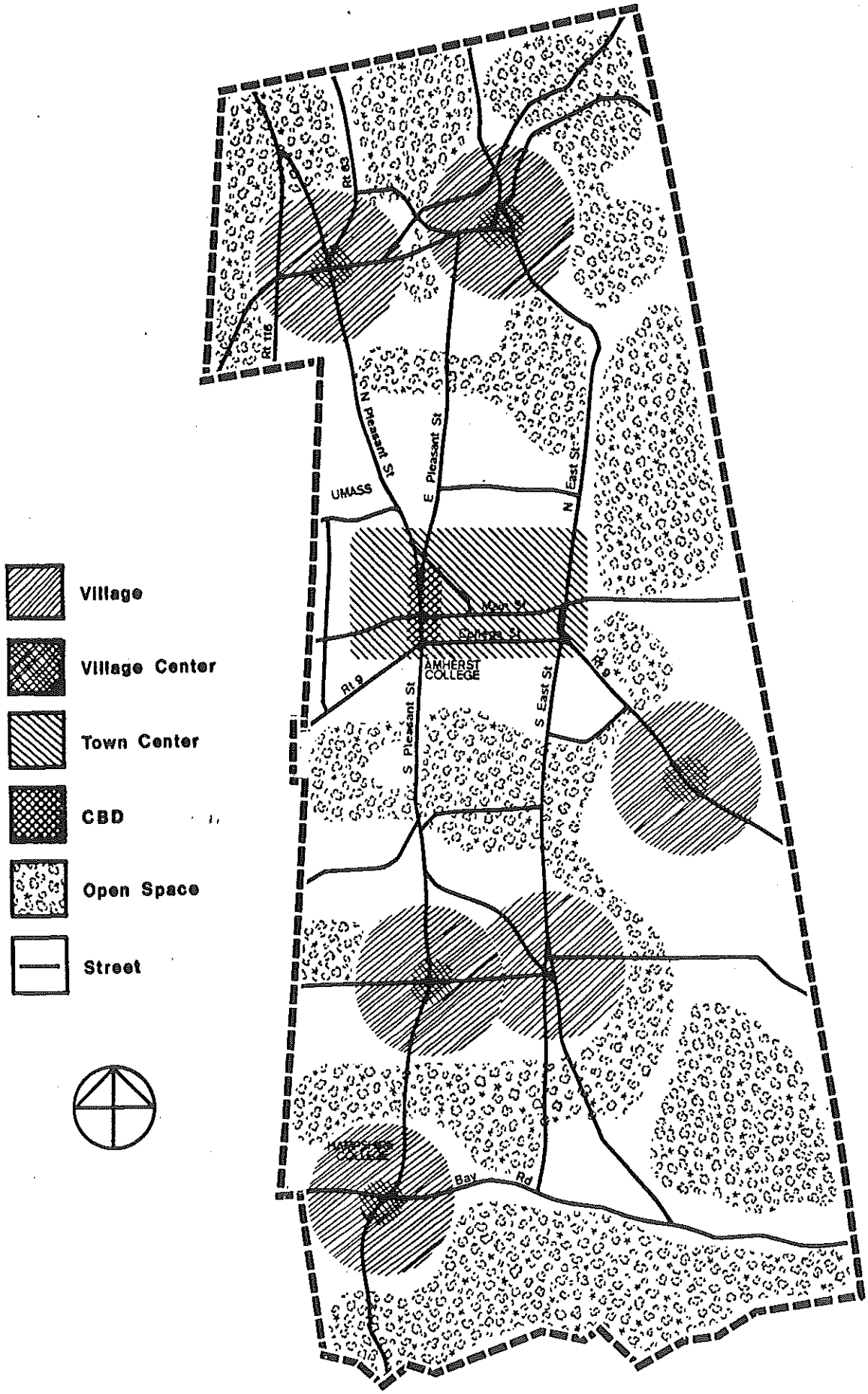
3. Support and encourage further development and enhancement of the Central Business District. Measures taken should include study of the feasibility of:

   a) pedestrian malls

   b) new parking areas and parking garages

   c) enhancement of the Town Common and adjacent areas by progressive reduction of "automobile blight."

4. Make plans for building and maintaining bicycle, pedestrian, and bridle paths.



The Conceptual Plan

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OFFICE OF THE TOWN PLANNER
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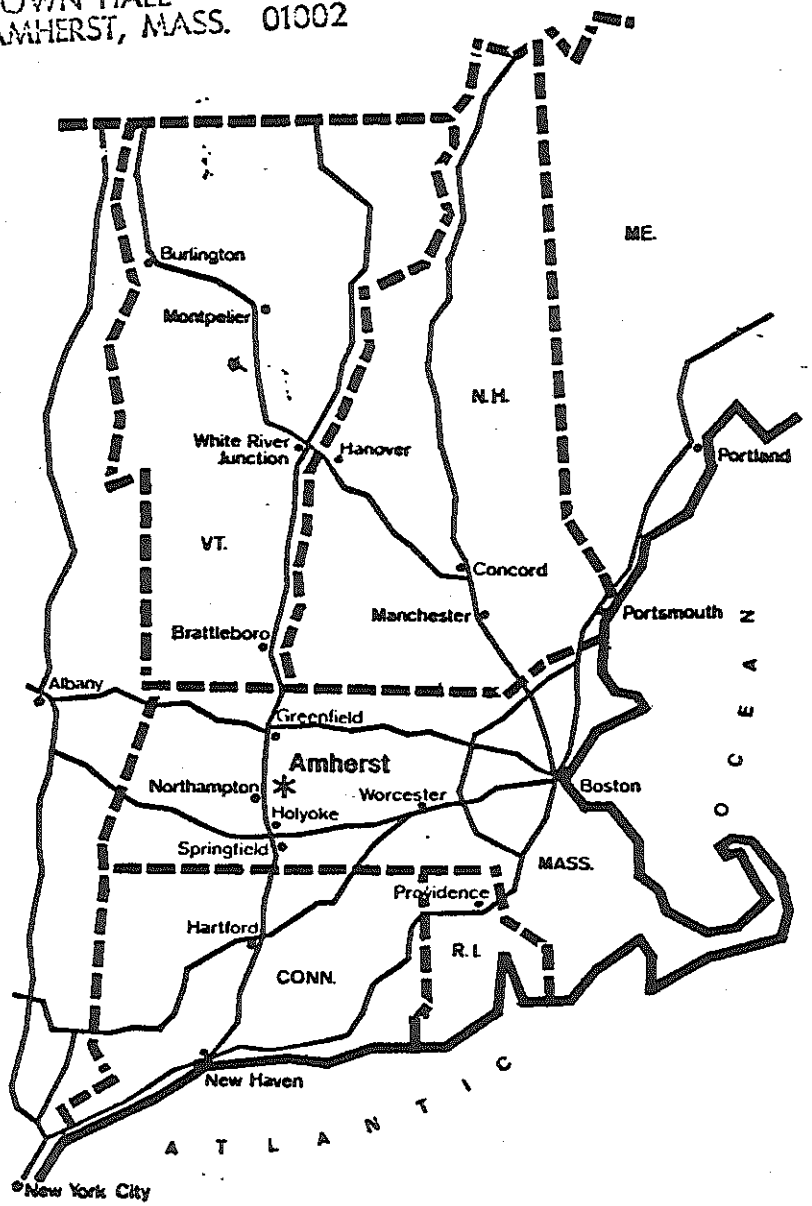
AMHERST, MASS. 01002



Amherst, Massachusetts

Incorporated: 1759

Location: 42° 22' 30" latitude
72° 31' 30" longitude (center of town)

Elevation: 1106' highest point
150' lowest point
300' contour around town center

Size: 27.8 square miles

Population: (fall 1972)

permanent residents and off-campus students
16,375

on-campus students
13,587

total
29,962

Assessed Evaluation: $146,913,640 (100%)

Tax Rate: $34.50

Type of Government: Board of Selectmen/
Town Manager - administrative

Representative Town
Meeting - legislative

Colleges and Universities:

	enrollment	employment
University of Massachusetts (founded 1863)	23,000	8,000
Amherst College (founded 1821)	1,250	525
Hampshire College (founded 1970)	1,000	225