

Amherst Downtown Community Forum

June 29, 2017

Exercise 4:

Discussion of the following aspects of downtown life: What's working, what's not, and ideas for the future.

Living:	Working:	Playing:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Stores & Restaurants • Vehicles, public transit, bikes, walking • Parking • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office space • Retail space • Employment • Commuting • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopping, eating, socializing • Community events • Parks and open spaces • Culture & entertainment • Other

Submission 1

Living:

Working	Not Working
<p>Repurpose former bus. space off of S. Prospect as artist studio space</p> <p>Brand Amherst by having pedaled rickshaws for local transit</p> <p>Business – downtown great place for office space</p>	<p>More on campus (UMass) housing would help affordability of downtown housing</p> <p>Parking system – concerns about new plans</p> <p>Walking – sidewalks & crosswalks (multiple materials problematic)</p> <p>Biking- currently dangerous</p> <p>Complete Streets</p> <p>Need motorcycle parking</p> <p>Bike rack on common</p> <p>More residential units (hard to make them affordable) – full spectrum</p>

Working:

Working	Not Working
Adequate work space? Do we have the right kinds and quantity? But quite a bit of it is unofficial in various cafes and coffee shops High quality informal work spaces Economic incubator space – how to tap potential of university	Lack of a mix of retail is problematic

Playing:

Working	Not Working
	Performance space – perhaps combined with another need such as parking garage or fire station

Submission 2

Living

Affordable housing – low/moderate income, workforce housing

Mixed use space

Housing in the downtown

More people downstairs – get rid of the car one stops

Food store (mixed reactions: costly, parking)

Bring more people downtown: 3-4 stories cap of buildings

Strolling

Playground downtown (roller coaster)

Pedestrian walking streets

Very limited in who can live downtown

Playing

Biking lanes – better on street lanes

Art walk

Reduce cars

Cinema

Jones Library

Alley is fun! – Just happened – Needs lighting, clean

Jay walking

No gas station downtown - when the one goes it's not a priority to have another

No smoking downtown – smoking areas

Tackle panhandling – help people to give money to better services

Create thought-out spaces for bikes, walking, cars

Like no chain stores or restaurants

Come into town to use several on a single trip: library, banking, post office, Bangs Center, A.J. Hastings

Working

Dependable parking- NO STRESS – convenient and very usable – pay at the end

Parking garage is not convenient/private – giving up

Parking is not welcoming behind Judie's

Lots of private parking; redo private passes – wasted space

Mixed use with a performance space

Performance and offices

See more family stuff – activities, locations

Outdoor seating – benches, tables

Sculptures to climb on, whimsical activities, checkers, flower beds

Building should not be planned without parking

Parking garage behind something

Submission 3

Housing

- Needs more diversity – economic, social
- Needs more handicap access
- Need more
- Need more mixture of rents
- Disfavors new high rises – not attractive, out of scale
- Favors new high rises

Commercial – need more, but population to support them

Transit

- Needs to be safer for bikes
- Likes bus system
- Delivery trucks pose problem
- Sidewalks need improved

Parking

- No increase in fees
- Parking garage ½ & ½

Working

- Not enough retail space
- Rents too high
- BID a positive
- Safety – feeling of danger, winter in dark

Employment

- Need more entrepreneurial
- Cost of living drives out talent

Playing

- Tables in parks
 - Art Center
 - Good Restaurants, not enough diversity
 - Collaborative Performance Space – affordable
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Submission 4

Living:

+ Can walk, shop, etc

- Some things not available

Critical mass needed

Need people also like to work

Need housing for workers, UMass

Need parking for people who come into town

-Hard to find parking

+ Don't need a car to live

-Need groceries, etc that people need to live

Working/Playing

- Parking shouldn't assume cars in the future – need alternative modes of transit
- Slow traffic to promote biking
- Need to provide for people coming from outside – town is too small
- Jones Library and Cinema are draws
- Work backward to figure out how to achieve the goals we have
- Business development assistance

Submission 5

Living

Working:	Not Working:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proximity• Single Family Houses nice but....\$\$\$• Owner occupied houses – well maintained• Parks & Commons accessibility• Trees• Neighborly feeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Year-round homeless shelter• Too many students• More ped friendly• More family affordable• More quality rentals• \$\$\$• Need condos• Zoning• Too much student houses

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxes keep going up • Houses become not affordable • Tension between rentals & owner-occupied • Absentee landlord controls & enforcement • Conversion of single to multi housing • More quality senior housing
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Stores & Restaurants

Working:	Not Working:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited back service [loading/unloading zones] • More variety • High rents for success • High turnover

Transportation & Parking

Working:	Not Working:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable parking • PVTA • Bike lanes working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sidewalks • Crosswalks • Better quality asphalt • Snowclearing sidewalks • Parking kiosks signage & usage • Parking signage • Double parking • Better signage for no bikes on sidewalk • Protected bike lane

Playing

Not Working: entertainment stage

Submission 6

Living

Housing

- There is no diversity in economics or population of the types of people living downtown
- Too many renters
- Student housing is an issue; new developments seem to be for students
- Can there be regulations for college students?

Stores & Restaurants

- Need grocery store
- Current stores are not supporting “living” in downtown
- Scales of buildings are excessive

Vehicles, public transit, bikes, walking

- Biking lanes need to be safer for families and need more bike parking

Parking

- Parking study said garage was not needed
- Requirement for no parking provided by new businesses is a bad idea
- ‘I don’t want to pay for a parking garage with my tax money’
- App showing available parking is preferred
- Remote parking with shuttle was good

Other

- There is a tension between life of downtown for 2p vs. 2am = there needs to be a balance

Working

Office space

- Town is too expensive to have smaller businesses find spaces
- Mass Mutual was an unfortunate leaser where one entity consumed the entire first floor of retail in a building

Retail space

- Town is too expensive to have smaller business find spaces
- With 1 East Pleasant we’ve lost small shops
- With Carriage Shops gone, we’ve lost small shops

Employment

- Amherst is a ‘suburb’ of other nearby cities

- No job opportunities in downtown
- Amherst office park (south) is a potential place for more businesses and can alleviate pressures off Central Business district

Other

- “Certain big landowners seem to control entrepreneurs who control most of downtown development, which seem to control BID and PB’ (It was then pointed out that Maria was on the PB, which <Maria> happily raised <her> hand and said ‘guilty’)
- Developers need to be more transparent in endeavors of development = present one scenario and end result is different
- Downtown is too expensive for small businesses to build new

Playing

Shopping, eating, socializing

- Restaurants = good
- Cinema, library, post office = good

Community events

- Block Party, Taste of Amherst, Merry Maple = all great community events

Parks and open spaces

- More playgrounds both outdoor and indoor = all seasons
- Preserve the open spaces

Culture & entertainment

- A REAL music venue in downtown is needed

Other

- Lower income population are not able to use the downtown (due to inability to get access living further out)
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Submission 7

Housing

- Lack of affordable
- Ratio of families – Student 25/75
- Need more housing everywhere
- Housing downtown relates to housing at UMass
- Some of the needed residential units needed on Campus
- Where

- Kendrick Place is truly a mixed clientele
- Housing for the homeless

Stores & Restaurants

- People do like to eat out
- What kind of Retail can make it
- Appreciated stores
- Demographic for retail customers
- Multi-age entertainment – performance space

Parking

- Some short term spaces 15 mins
- More functions require more parking
- Municipal Parking District shouldn't be
- AmherstWorks people are meter feeders
- Collective parking not delivered
- Amity/Pleasant/Main intersection needs improvement
- Dedicate bike lanes

Other

- Offensive signs on street corners

Working

- Office space – needed downtown? Could be on outskirts. Buy in other spaces
- Retail

Playing

- Perf Space
- Kendrick Park needs development
- Flooded rink popular

Community Events

- Outdoor seating for food/eating in parks
- Space for casual conversation after events
- North Common space for casual conversation after events

Submission 8

Living

Housing

Working	Not Working
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Single family houses nice • Owner-occupied housing is well maintained • The parks, accessibility to trees in residential areas • Neighborly feeling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be more pedestrian friendly • More affordable family housing • More quality rental housing • Single family houses expensive • Need condos • Worry about too much student housing • Taxes keep going up – houses not affordable • Tension between owner-occupied and student rentals • Need more supervision over property management – absentee landlords, more enforcement • Conversion of single family homes to multi housing • More quality senior housing • Too many students • Year round homeless shelter

Stores & Restaurants

Working	Not Working
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited back service (deliveries) • More variety • High rents – high turnover

Transportation & Parking

Working	Not Working
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable parking • Good bus PVTA • Bike lanes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sidewalks, crosswalks • Need better quality asphalt • Sidewalk snow clearance • Parking kiosks confusing – hard for tourists & newcomers • Parking signage

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double parking • Better signage for no bikes on sidewalks • Outdoors stage
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Submission 9

Living

Not working:

- More on campus housing
- Might create more affordable non-student housing
- Sellen St - opportunity site for artists studios

Submission 10

Live

Good	Bad	Future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional bike share • Senior housing & affordable housing projects • Dining options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student pressure on housing, high prices • Lack of retail options & affordable retail space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More bike accessibility • Better pedestrian connection to Rt 9 shopping • More Parking/more reliable parking

Work

Good	Bad	Future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AmherstWorks helping small businesses, innovation • Public transportation options 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More attention to culture and economy in summer • Need to keep regional factors in mind regarding demand for jobs, services, etc

Play

Good	Bad	Future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amherst Cinema • Dining options • Benefit from rich regional cultural offerings 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create more social spaces • Performance space • Consider Kendrick Park for the above

Online Submissions

Online Submission 1

I've lived in Amherst for 39 years. I have an environmental design degree and an interior architecture degree and am dismayed by some of the design choices made regarding the downtown.

I value the Amherst Cinema. It's a great asset. I value the older architecture and areas of downtown that have a distinctive "sense of place." I think the flower baskets and planters are a great addition in the summer! I do not have a problem with finding parking in downtown Amherst. Amherst has some good restaurants but not enough exceptional ones.

As for what needs improving: 1) I would love to see lots of tables and chairs in a park-like setting where people can gather, relax with a drink, eat a take-out meal, socialize. I think of plazas in European cities and parks, where there is far more outdoor restaurant and cafe seating. Perhaps this could be provided in the section of the common closest to Town Hall. Another area that is sorely underdeveloped is the patio space in the center of the parking that is above the underground garage. What wasted space! This should have lovely landscaping and attractive tables and chairs. There are so many little restaurants from which one could take out meals. Providing attractive public spaces to sit and eat or relax and read would be a real plus. It feels like the town went only halfway to making the Boltwood parking area attractive. It could be better designed to attract more people.!

If it were up to me, I would also eliminate the parking spaces in front of Town Hall and use that space as a plaza. Build a real parking garage in the CVS lot. A parking lot smack in the middle of a town is ugly. Parking should be hidden as much as possible.

I do not think parking in the center should go up to \$1 an hour. That's awfully expensive for small town parking. It will discourage people from coming to Amherst. I thought we want to encourage more people.

There should be more variety in shopping downtown. There should be a good grocery store on Pleasant Street, especially if there are going to be a lot more people living in the center.

I think the large common should have more benches.

I think Kendrick park should include a well designed playground for children, benches and/ or tables and seating. Look at what Northampton did with the redesign of Pulaski Park. It's wonderful!! Inspirational!

Online Submission 2

Here, again, I'll combine exercise 3 & 4, since printing out & scanning doesn't work for me.

I think of the "old" or "core" downtown as the area from Rt 9 to Amity. I also see the boundary of a newer downtown as having its northern boundary as Hallock St & the southern tip of Kendrick Park. The eastern edge of Kendrick Park has been built up but I'd consider that mixed-use (and quite ugly); not "downtown." The western edge of Kendrick Park can also be mixed-use (not "downtown") and developed in ways to maintain its architectural charm and the green open spaces and set backs of its large buildings.

So I consider the "edges" of downtown today to be Amity to the South, Hallock & the southern edge of Kendrick Park to the North. It's a very zig-zag line to determine the Eastern & Western boundaries of downtown.

Re LIVING: I'm very satisfied with the various "pocket" residential areas scattered throughout the "larger downtown" area and want their openness and historical qualities maintained. At the same time, we need much greater progress in establishing affordability in our neighborhood housing.

I don't want Amherst to look like Northampton, where I have lived, and then moved to Amherst. But we could have more stores (grocery, for example), theatrical or music spaces, greater variety of small restaurants, bookstore with art gallery & coffee/tea shop. Parking remains a problem as does safe sidewalk walking noted above.

Re WORKING: Many of us work at UMass or Amherst College, and walk or bike to work. The affordability of neighborhood housing would be an incentive for others to live and work in Amherst, & allow Amherst workforce to walk (rather than commuting from outlying areas).

Re PLAYING: The opportunities are limited only by the creativity of entrepreneurs, but also by the rents (far too high!) maintained for downtown space. Perhaps Amherst should develop an incentive plan for shops, restaurants, theater & musical spaces -- or a multi-use plan -- or both.