

**Town of Amherst**  
**2018 Community Development Strategy**

**Introduction:** As part of an ongoing effort to implement the Master Plan, the town encourages citizen participation through its nearly 60 standing boards and committees, with meetings of the Select Board and Planning Board streamed to local TV and the internet. The Town has a months-long public input process for the CDBG application and for Community Preservation Act (CPA) proposals in order to prioritize and select projects that benefit residents of the community. The CDBG Advisory Committee held a public hearing in December 2017 to review the draft strategy and activity list.

**Housing:** The focus of many in the community is the extreme need for housing for the non-student population, in particular, low- and moderate-income households and permanent supportive housing, including enhanced single room occupancy (ESRO) units, for extremely low-income (ELI) people and those transitioning out of homelessness. Amherst's Housing Production Plan (HPP) notes that there is an imbalance of demand and supply. Put simply, there is not enough housing to meet the various markets: students, families, elderly, individuals, renters, low and moderate income. The HPP establishes a goal of producing 48 units of affordable housing annually to meet the needs of the community. In addition to the HPP, the town completed a comprehensive housing market study that focused on market-rate units. This report, completed in 2015, concluded that there is housing demand in Amherst for different market segments, but it cannot be adequately met until the student demand is mitigated. RKG has emphasized the need for both affordable and market-rate housing if Amherst wants to maintain its diverse population.

**Community Services:** For many years the Town has supported local social service agencies that provide emergency food and clothing, adult education and literacy, mentorships, and general support services. The development and success of these programs remains a priority for the community even though the Town faces challenges to continue its support. Community priorities for social services are to maintain a balanced approach among family stabilization, individual stabilization, youth development, services that help develop economic self-sufficiency (adult education), food and nutrition programs, low-cost accessible comprehensive health services, and emergency and preventive services ranging from rental assistance, fuel assistance, to shelter services. Access to these services is very important, and includes reliable public transportation and accessibility improvements on public infrastructure—streets and sidewalks.

**Land Use:** The town continues to focus land preservation in areas between the centers and in areas that are mostly preserved but missing critical properties in terms of priority habitat and ecological value. To reinforce the open space, and to allow for growth of housing and commerce, Amherst has focused on zoning changes that allow for denser development in the centers and encourage commercial and mixed uses along the major transportation corridors. The Planning Board and community members are constantly seeking changes to local regulations to allow Amherst to grow and adapt to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century without losing its character and architectural aesthetic. The Town realizes it needs to be more strategic with open space purchases, finding properties that can also be used for housing or have another dual purpose.

**Economic Development:** Amherst is the host community for three of the area's five colleges, and an employment center for the region. The University of Massachusetts alone employs over 5,000 local

residents. Over the decades, community planning efforts have consistently stressed the need to increase and diversify non-academic business employment opportunities for Amherst area residents. To meet this objective, the Town believes it can encourage two seemingly divergent strategies: increase small businesses and support services in the village centers, while also attracting high-level professional and research positions and high-technology incubator industries through the development of a business park or industries that could possibly partner with the local colleges and university. Included in this effort is a collaborative approach with abutting communities and the region to attract businesses that could utilize local resources. The Town recently created the position of an Economic Development Director that works with the Business Improvement District, local businesses, UMass, and other stakeholders to make the Town more competitive for industry and grants.

**Natural and Cultural Resources:** For decades, the community has consistently supported efforts to preserve and improve the natural and visual environment of the town. The Town adopted the Community Preservation Act (CPA) in the early 2000s and has been using this funding to complete various projects. There are now two local historic districts and last year the State approved a Cultural District in and around the downtown. The Town is looking at new regulations for preservation of natural features and creative approaches to support local initiatives such as small-scale farming. The Town has received preliminary approval for the 2017 update to the Open Space and Recreation Plan that outlines clear objectives and actions for enhancing Amherst's natural amenities.

**Open Space and Recreation:** Amherst has engaged in active planning for open space and recreation since the late 1960s and now owns over 2,500 acres of conservation land connected through a network of 80+ miles of local and regional trails. Although the Town continues to preserve land for the protection of natural resources and to maintain active agriculture, there is now more of a focus on stewardship of existing lands and expansion of recreational opportunities. The Town is working to establish strategies and implementation methods to protect Amherst's valuable natural resources that are also coupled with projects that seek to accommodate the increasing need for more recreational facilities, affordable housing, and connect to other community amenities.

**Transportation:** It is possible to live and work in Amherst without a car, however there is still a need to increase the reliability and connectivity of public transit to help residents access retail outlets and services. The Town has built many of the parts necessary for a network of pedestrian and bicycle paths connecting and supporting the village centers and open spaces. As an active hub of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) system and home of the University of Massachusetts Transit operation, Amherst has supported and invested in public transportation, especially to serve heavy-use arteries, such as routes between outlying apartment complexes and the University. The Town is working with regional partners to assess a bike-share program in Amherst that would help expand local transit options, is removing barriers along its sidewalks and roads, and is developing a Complete Streets plan.

**Planning and Implementation:** An integral component of Amherst's Master Plan is the land use policy map, which shows where in the community many of the strategies and goals should be implemented. The map identifies the Town Center and seven outlying village centers as high priorities for housing and infrastructure improvements, and as areas to concentrate services and economic development. The CDBG Advisory Committee has determined three target areas:

1. Town Center—An area north of Route 9, west of University Drive, east of Shumway Street, and north along East Pleasant Street to Olympia Drive and then south of Strong Street.

2. East Amherst Village Center—An area bounded by Fort River School and Pelham Road to the East, to the south there is Colonial Village apartments, Stanley Street, as well as Echo Village and Rolling Green that are ¼ mile south along Route 9; Shumway Street to the West; and Spaulding Street, Salem Street, Hedgerow Lane and Arbor Way to the North.
3. Pomeroy Village Center/East Hadley Road—An area south of East Hadley Road, east of Route 116 and encompassing a ¼ mile radius around the Pomeroy/Route 116 intersection, including the Orchard Valley residential neighborhood.

### FY2018 PRIORITY PROJECTS

Priority Ranking	Category from Master Plan	Project or Activity
1	Housing/Land Use	Create affordable and fair housing options (rental and ownership) for the chronically homeless and extremely low income, low- and moderate-income families, individuals, seniors and the disabled that includes the purchase, renovation or construction of housing and associated infrastructure.
2	Community Services	Support social service programs including but not limited to family stabilization, individual stabilization, youth development, economic self-sufficiency (adult education), food and nutrition programs, low-cost health care services, and emergency & preventive services ranging from rental/fuel assistance, to shelter services.
3	Community Services	Continue to make modifications and improvements based on the <i>Transition Plan Update</i> ensuring that all public facilities and programs are accessible to individuals of differing abilities. Also ensure that sidewalks, especially within Village Centers, are accessible and located near residential uses, and that public facilities are updated.
7	Open Space and Recreation	Seek small sites in for the provision or improvement of playgrounds within walking distance of residential areas, such as East Street School and East Hadley Road.
9	Economic Development	Enable and recruit appropriate retail and other businesses that enliven downtown and village centers
11	Natural and Cultural Resources	Identify and preserve scenic, historic, and cultural landmarks through preserved historic buildings, well-lit facades, murals and sculpture gardens, and connecting greenways.
14	Open Space and Recreation	Continue to expand the local and regional system of trails and greenways to connect to schools and destinations
15	Economic Development	Strengthen partnerships between the Town of Amherst and UMass, Amherst & Hampshire Colleges as they relate to housing, economic development, student rentals and other Town/Gown relationships.