

Planning Board Special Meeting – Draft Master Plan Review
Thursday, February 4, 2021
Meeting Minutes
As Approved

Attendance: Brad Hutchison, Diane Mulvaney, Melissa O’Brien, Joanna Brown, Nate Therien, Michael Adelman; Richard Harris, Planning Director; Anne Capra, Assistant Planner

Chair Hutchison called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Discussion resumed with Goal 1, Objective 1-7 and whether this objective implies that South Hadley is not a welcoming community that attracts and supports a diverse population. Mr. Therien said that the language did not imply we were not currently attracting and supporting a diverse population, but that in the future we wanted it to be true. This is the same for other goals.

Ms. Brown requested that the language in the plan relative to diversity also include “gender identity and sexual orientation” and noted that state statutes more broadly define diversity. She specifically referenced page 8. Members agreed with such an addition. Members further discussed inclusion of “economically disadvantaged” within this category.

Members discussed “Current Actions” related to Goal 1 on page 29. Ms. O’Brien noted that due to events of the past year, Police Departments around the country are evaluating the types of services they are providing communities. She wanted to be sure such an action item was included in this plan. Mr. Therien stated that he was aware of the SHPD conducted an internal evaluation of this sort.

Members discussed the purpose and presentation of the “Current Actions” page for Goal 1. This discussion was repeated for Goals 2-4 also. (See pages 29, 31, 33, and 35) Mr. Therien stated that he finds these lists of “current actions” to not be inclusive of everything Town entities are doing, and is concerned the Plan as presented could imply that they are. They are also just a snapshot in time of efforts that did occur, and by the time this plan is finalized, other actions may be ongoing. Some entities provided their lists early in the process, and have undertaken new actions since. He recommended some sort of disclaimer to that effect. Some actions listed are explicitly described as related to the current Plan, and so should not be listed. Members discussed these concepts, as well as the layout of the header including the font and placement on the page which sort of buries it. Members discussed the value of having all the current actions for each goal in one section. Mr. Harris stated he thought it would be overlooked by readers. Ms. Capra noted the content of these sections was derived from several rounds of outreach to Town departments, boards and committees, and there was nowhere else in the plan where this content is presented. It also offers a sort of benchmark relative to where we are now.

Ms. Capra suggested changing the header from “Current Actions” to “Some examples of current actions related to this goal”. Mr. Therien suggested further text to the effect, “For recommended actions related to this goal, refer to Section 6 Implementation Plan.”

Members discussed Goal 1 “current actions” attributed to the Planning Board. Recommended edit from “*Requiring that streets and sidewalks...*” to “*Evaluate how streets and sidewalks...*” (p.29)

Goal 2

Discussion proceeded to Goal 2 on page 30. Chair Hutchison discussed the reference to “retention of historic development patterns” in objective 2-4 and noted in his professional experience on a project in

Amherst in evaluating modern zoning and how it typically prevents so-called historic development patterns, e.g., lot size, building setbacks, etc. Mr. Harris agreed and referenced the efforts to rebuild after the tornado destruction in Springfield and Monson and their inability to reconstruct the damaged neighborhoods due to the local zoning codes which required larger lots and greater setbacks. Mr. Therien expressed the need for a definition of “historic development patterns”.

Ms. Mulvaney inquired about Mount Holyoke College’s (MHC) involvement in the plan given the numerous references to the campus and its role in the community, and expressed that private properties are not within the domain of the municipality’s ability to dictate what can happen there. Ms. Brown requested that all private properties as recognized in the Plan as serving a role in the community be labeled as such, e.g. with an asterisk or footnote. Ms. Capra noted that MHC was represented by Kevin McCaffery at several of the public forums. Mr. Therien stated that Mr. McCaffery hosted a public input meeting with MPIC members and MHC administrative heads of operations and departments regarding the Master Plan goals, objectives, and actions. Ms. O’Brien noted that for the 2010 Master Plan, MHC was represented on the advisory committee and was very involved. She continued that she believes the College is aware of the Master Plan, the plan update, and the role of the campus in community life. Mr. Harris confirmed this.

Chair Hutchison requested clarification about the amendments to the Water Supply Protection District (WSPD). Mr. Harris noted that major earth removal was prohibited within the District, and within the Stormwater Bylaw an amendment to require all runoff on Zone 2 sites to be retained on site.

Goal 3

Discussion moved on Goal 3. Mr. Adelman inquired about the distinction between objectives 2-7 and 3-1. Ms. Capra noted that 2-7 was about forest management and its role in climate change, and 3-1 is about all other actions that can mitigate climate change.

Ms. Brown inquired if 3-4 is a “must” or rather “make available in all parts of town” relative to fiber optic networks. Members discussed internet connectivity and technological obstacles. Mr. Harris recommend editing the objective to “all residents and businesses are connected to high-speed fiber optic network”. Rather than be SHELD specific only, another action could also support build out of the SHELD fiber network.

Members discussed how the Board could be more supportive of climate resiliency (objective 3-1). Recent actions of the Board included adoption of the 40R Smart Growth Zoning districts for increasing density which promotes less fossil fuel-based transportation modes; and reducing impervious surfaces through promoting smaller parking lots. Mr. Hutchison mentioned he was disappointed that the recent amendments to the Water Supply Protection district did not include the provisions to prohibit tree cutting. The Conservation Commission’s policy of 2:1 replacement of trees cut in jurisdictional areas gets at supporting trees. Mr. Harris noted that amendments to the Solar Bylaw would be more advantageous for climate change if SHELD would allow more alternative energy generation. Ms. Brown stated that much education is needed on climate change to effect change. Members also approved the Plans call for helping residents acquire devices to access the internet and support for learning how to use them.

Goal 4

Ms. Capra noted the recommended edit discussed at the last meeting, “Be a leader in municipal communication, *with the public and among municipal staff, boards, and volunteer committees.*” Ms. Brown noted South Hadley is caught between newspaper regions, and the local Civic Alert system is

great. Could there also be a local text message or additional format for local news? Ms. Mulvaney stated there are many ways to tighten up how the municipality communicates with residents. There needs to be a structured plan for communication developed. Mr. Harris referred to a report that noted 70-75% of voters in November got their information through social media. Ms. Mulvaney said we should pay attention to the ways people are having difficulty getting information in the current pandemic, e.g., signing up for vaccinations requires an email and not all have one. A proposed recommendation is that we need new types and deeper levels of participation. Ms. Mulvaney applauded the breadth of tools in objective 4-1. Branding is needed relative to communications.

Discussion moved onto Goal 4 Current Actions. Mr. Hutchinson inquired about “appointing liaisons to other boards to share information”. The Planning Board does not have this, suggesting a need to research where/who is doing this. Members noted much of the Planning Board’s current actions supporting communication are not listed, including for example, the reports and documents from the Planning Director that are posted as agenda background materials before each meeting.

Mr. Harris noted that introduction of Warrant Articles, the posting of applications and project plans, and community engagement during planning projects were all forms of communication the Planning Board conducts.

Members noted reference to the Town’s “award winning website” is mentioned throughout the plan in several places. Members acknowledged the website is much improved but felt that further work on the website is needed. Members also felt the Civic Ready system mentioned in the Plan needs to be more fully described and attention paid to how it is being used and what might increase usage.

Section 4 Future Land Use Map

Members discussed the layout and format of the map and agreed it needs more work. Information on the map doesn’t correspond to the labels on the legend, e.g., “Priority Preservation Areas” labeled as “Future Protected Open Space”. “Priority Development Areas” is labeled as “Areas for Development”. Need consistency from map to legend. Map is cluttered and hard to read. Open space layer appears to be inaccurate. Need to get a more accurate layer. Map B-8 Open Space Inventory from the Open Space and Recreation Plan provides a much more detailed map. Members asked if it could be hyperlinked in the Master Plan, and/or included in the Appendices.

Ms. Brown motioned to adjourn at 8:04 PM, Ms. Mulvaney seconded. All in favor via roll call vote.

REMINDERS – THINGS TO COME BACK TO -ITEMS TO CARRY FORWARD

- In defining diversity within the plan, or in defining diverse populations, include “sexual orientation, gender identification, and economically disadvantaged” populations. See page 8.
- Potential Action – South Hadley Police Department evaluates services provided to the community.
- “Current Actions” page after each goal (See pages 29, 31, 33, and 35) - Suggested changing the header from “Current Actions” to “Some examples of current actions related to this goal”. Also adding subtext: “For recommended actions related to this goal, refer to Section 6 Implementation Plan.”
- “Current Actions” page after each goal (See pages 29, 31, 33, and 35) – remove actions that presume adoption of the updated Plan, i.e. actions related to the current Plan.

- P.29 Planning Board Current Actions - Recommended edit from “*Requiring that streets and sidewalks...*” to “*Evaluate how streets and sidewalks...*”
- Edit objective 3-4 to “all residents and businesses are connected to high-speed fiber optic network”, rather than being SHELDT fiber optic specific.
- Goal 4 recommended action: we need to find ways to support, encourage and sustain new types and deeper levels of participation, including development of a more structured communications plan.
- Reference to the Town’s “award winning website” needs to be clarified, and more work on the website as a communications tool is needed.
- Figure 4.1 Future Land Use Map (p. 38-39)
 - Map legend needs to correspond to narrative on previous page.
 - “Aquifer Protection” needs a more recognizable graphic presentation on the map.
 - Buttery Brook watershed is not on the map
 - Icons for Services and Facilities clutter the map and make it hard to read. Consider two “Future Land Use Maps”: 1) Priority Protection and Development Areas, 2) Services and Facilities
 - Protected Open Space layer appears to be lacking parcels. Need to get an updated layer.
- Hyperlink Map B-8 Open Space Inventory from the Open Space and Recreation Plan in the Master Plan, and/or include in the Appendices.

NEXT MEETINGS

Thursday, February 18th at 6pm

Thursday, March 4th at 6pm

Thursday, March 18th at 6pm

Respectfully submitted by,
 Anne Capra, AICP
 Assistant Planner/Conservation Administrator