

**Planning Board Special Meeting –Master Plan Review**  
**Thursday, March 18, 2021**  
**Meeting Minutes**

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 began on *Chapter 5 Plan Recommendations, Economic Development* (p.51). Mr. Hutchison questioned the listing of “access to Westover Airport/AFB” as a “competitive advantage”, and whether the airport did have passenger flights. Mr. Harris said there had been limited civilian flights from the airport but currently there weren’t any. Ms. O’Brien noted the APZ (accident potential zone) covers a good portion of town and actually impedes development in this area. Mr. Harris noted that HUD restrictions on funding in this zone do impede some local development opportunities, but that Westover does provide jobs for the region and may be better recognized as a regional asset. Mr. Hutchison suggested reference to Westover is removed and to add recognition of the Amtrak station in Holyoke which is just minutes away and provides rail service between New York City and Burlington, VT. He noted the area has long been on the edge of a bedroom community for NYC to the south, and not as much so for Boston due to the lack of an east-west rail connection.

Ms. Brown questioned what the term “capture” in “ability to capture regional growth and spending” meant. She recommended removing reference to Westover from recognition as an advantage to the community, and preferred to add reference to the rich arts and culture opportunities in the region afforded by area colleges and other non-profits. Ms. Brown stated she thinks it is a stretch to reference Mount Holyoke College (MHC) as a business incubation opportunity. Ms. Mulvaney noted that the way the MHC bullet is phrased suggests this is already happening; needs to be re-phrased to recognize it as a potential to build upon. Mr. Hutchison noted that some of the other institutions in the Five Colleges Consortium are successful business incubators, most notably UMASS. Mr. Harris stated he had received professional training in GIS at the college and such opportunities do exist for the public at large. Perhaps the bullet should be split into two or three: 1) Business incubation potential through the members of the Five College Consortium, especially the University of Massachusetts Amherst; 2) potential to expand professional training opportunities for the public at MHC and area colleges; and, 3) rich cultural opportunities afforded by the Five College Consortium and area non-profits.

Ms. O’Brien said for as long as she has lived here, residents have struggled to know about what is going on at the college (arts and culture events). She suggested South Hadley should have a “what’s going on in South Hadley” webpage or post of some sort that includes events at MHC. Mr. Therien questioned the first bullet pairing recreation and cultural facilities at MHC. He stated that the college has not been willing to share recreational facilities with the public. Distinguish between attending sports events as a spectator at area colleges, and using the sports facilities as a member of the public. Ms. O’Brien stated the plan should recognize that the community desires to build stronger ties with MHC and utilize more of what they have to offer. Mr. Therien noted the five colleges are producing an astonishing amount of art, music, and theater, and are a huge asset to residents.

Ms. Capra referenced back to Ms. Brown’s inquiry about “capturing regional growth and spending” noting that South Hadley has the potential to do this by promoting access to all of the assets in the region discussed. MHC is a draw for visitors, tourists, and potential new residents. Ms. Brown said she

would like to see the plan recognize the renowned arts and culture facilities in the area including the UMASS Fine Arts Center, the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, etc. She also noted a regional locus map inset on the page would be very useful showing the NYC, Boston, Albany, the Berkshires, etc.

Ms. Mulvaney noted that Rep. Comerford is working to promote the East-West Rail project. Members discussed whether the relative low cost of housing compared to area towns should be mentioned. Mr. Therien stated Bradley Airport should be noted as an advantage.

Discussion moved onto the *“Economic Sectors and Employment” section*. Ms. Brown stated that employment growth in education through campus expansion was not realistic, and wasn’t clear why eldercare was listed. Members noted that these were sectors for future employment growth given the existing demographics of the community and existing economic sectors. Members noted the biotech and laboratory industry growing out of UMASS, and the high-tech computing facility in Holyoke through MIT. These opportunities may be more regionally germane rather than specific to South Hadley. The current expansion of home offices due to COVID is also a new reality that may be an opportunity as well. This new reality should be mentioned in the Master Plan.

Discussion moved on to the *“Retail Gap Analysis” section*. Members had many questions regarding the methodology used in the analysis, including the data sources, and if any public input informed this analysis. Mr. Harris explained that this analysis was performed by RKG, a subcontractor to Harriman Associates, and that we would request more information about the full analysis. Members discussed concerns about sectors listed in both the oversupply and undersupply categories, and felt that they did not reflect the types of businesses residents would like to see open in South Hadley. For example, an oversupply of “specialty foods” was listed yet repeatedly in public forums, members talk about wanting a small grocer in the Falls, or a bakery. Mr. Harris noted that such analyses typically look at regional spending patterns, which in South Hadley’s case, would include commercial corridors in Chicopee, Holyoke and Hadley. Thus, given the short drive time to retail centers on Memorial Drive in Chicopee or Route 9 in Hadley, the analysis would have factored in those markets in considering opportunities for South Hadley.

Members agreed that this analysis as presented, hurts South Hadley rather than helps by not recognizing the types of businesses the community wants to bring in, and could possibly dissuade interested businesses from locating here. Members discussed removing this section completely. Ms. Capra suggested that the plan recognize the tension between the results of a traditional retail gap analysis and the feedback from the public regarding retail expansion. Ms. Capra will request the detailed analysis, including methodology, from Harriman for the Board’s review. Mr. Harris noted that from a land use perspective, the results of the analysis suggests that there is room for more small shops, which is generally consistent with the scale of new retail residents mention wanting in public forums. RE-zoning properties to allow commercial/retail development on smaller lots may be needed. Ms. O’Brien noted that Mr. Harris’ perspective should be added to the plan if this section is kept, albeit re-worked.

Members further discussed the composition of stores on Route 9 in Hadley and how they all co-exist: population, arterial roadway, large university, etc.

Discussion moved on to the *Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic (p.53)*. Ms. Brown stated this section is not effective, and needs to be more concise. Mr. Therien said the narrative is dated and should be framed as “COVID has taught us certain things...” There remains much uncertainty about the future and the impacts of COVID on many aspects of our lives. Members noted that issues encountered during the

pandemic such as limited internet access should be recognized, and recommendations to address that should become part of this plan.

Recommendations (p.53)

First recommendation - Change from just expanded internet for businesses to working with SHELD to offer free internet in public places for all residents in need.

Second recommendation – Remove “Distribute economic growth equitably within the community”. Members discussed the definition of “light manufacturing” and where in town it could locate. Mr. Therien suggested adding a definition for this.

Third recommendation – Members inquired about what workforce initiatives currently existed. They need to be referenced in the plan if the recommendation is going to be “expanding” them. The plan lacks any baseline on the existing workforce and training needs. The Town does not provide workforce training, but would provide the space for it via ensuring that zoning allowed for the use where appropriate. Ms. Mulvaney suggested that there be a community outreach person to businesses and the colleges.

Tenth recommendation (p.54) – Mr. Therien stated that the plan does not address or acknowledge what prevents more diverse commercial uses. Ms. Mulvaney noted that the plan should recognize those groups that have a hard time breaking into the business market and establishing such as minority and women owned businesses. Members discussed the integration of an arts and culture economy with business development.

The Willimansett/Route 202 corridor should be added as a neighborhood for commercial development.

p.54 Delete redundant recommendation: “Provide opportunities for new job and housing to attract new employees.

Ms. Brown motioned to adjourn at 7:57 PM, Mr. Therien seconded. All in favor via roll call vote.

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

**P.51 Economic Development**

- Remove Westover Airport/AFB as an advantage to South Hadley.
- Replace with recognition of Amtrak passenger service station in Holyoke, and Bradley Airport in Windsor Locks, CT.
- Re-work bullets about MHC. See notes above on page 1.
- Add reference to the regional arts and culture facilities.
- Add Regional Locus Map
- Add discussion of remote offices/relocation of work force to home offices due to pandemic; opportunity for economic expansion.
- Retail Gap Analysis – Section needs to be re-worked including more information about data used, and a discussion about how the results contradict the desires of the community for the type of retail expansion. Action Plan should address this: e.g. how does a community attract a small grocer when a retail gap analysis says there is already an oversupply? What action items address this sort of conflict to bring in new businesses to South Hadley?
- Edit discussion about COVID impacts on community.

- Edit recommendations p.53-54 (see above)

**NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday, March 30<sup>th</sup> at 6pm – Special Planning Board Meeting

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