

# Introduction and Vision

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## About this Plan

Why make a comprehensive plan? There are plenty of reasons, but we, the South Hadley residents who have guided the development of this Plan between 2007 and 2009, would like to share the four that matter most to us:

1. The Plan represents our community's best thinking about how we can preserve what we love about South Hadley.
2. It articulates South Hadley's critical long-term challenges and opportunities.
3. It provides a set of achievable goals to move South Hadley toward the future that residents would like to see.
4. It invites South Hadley's citizens, organizations, and government to work together to improve the quality of life for current residents and for the next generation.

Alternately, one could ask, "what happens if we don't plan?" We are, in fact, experiencing that reality right now. South Hadley's comprehensive plan, last updated in 1979, is long out of date, and the absence of a relevant plan has been felt in a number of ways: residential and commercial development that sometimes feels haphazard or out of place, decisions that favor an "easy fix" over a long-term investment, or perhaps a sense that town government, businesses, organizations, and residents, no matter how well intentioned, are not working together to tackle the issues that matter most for our shared future. This Plan, drawn from the wisdom of the citizens themselves, articulates what we would like South Hadley to look like and suggests ways for us to work towards that vision.

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## South Hadley's Vision

### SOUTH HADLEY: SHAPING OUR FUTURE

South Hadley is a community where citizens take great pride in the physical beauty of open spaces, extraordinary views of the Connecticut River and Mt. Holyoke Range, small town atmosphere, friendly neighborhoods, and a quality school system. South Hadley residents enjoy a high quality of life – even with a growing population, people appreciate the Town's New England character, with its sense of community and strong civic involvement. Residents value the benefits of being part of a college town, and feel it is a great place to raise families, in part due to the area's abundant recreational and educational opportunities.

South Hadley is distinctive in that it has had two historical population centers: the Falls and the Center, which have long provided a rich diversity of physical settings, neighborhoods, and community resources. As we look to the future, South Hadley needs to ensure that fragile open spaces, agricultural lands, vistas, and water resources are adequately promoted and protected for the benefit of current residents and future generations. A thriving South Hadley will have a robust economic base to provide a range of business and employment opportunities; it will offer a variety of housing options to meet its residents' needs; it will have the educational and cultural resources to enrich residents' lives, and it will continue to provide constructive ways for residents to contribute their time and energy to benefit the community.

This Comprehensive Plan will allow South Hadley citizens to SHAPE OUR FUTURE. From the River to the Range and from the Center to the Falls, we seek to maintain and enhance our quality of life, to engage residents, businesses, and stakeholders in supporting the Town's development while preserving its character, heritage, and small town charm. This Plan is South Hadley's opportunity to envision our desired future, to prepare for change, to recommend the best possible steps we can take, and ultimately to shape the future we want.

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## South Hadley's Plan Principles

Throughout the development of this Plan, South Hadley residents and Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) consistently expressed a desire to shape South Hadley's future. This desire suggests a community that is actively engaged in considering its long-term goals as well as developing the policies and practices that will achieve those goals. It suggests continuous attention to improving our communication, management, and stewardship of resources. The future we shape for South Hadley should include:

- maintaining our recreational resources, open space vistas, and lands for our children and their children to enjoy;
- developing the regulatory structures, partnerships, and investments needed to develop housing that genuinely reflects and supports the needs of all generations, economic levels, and employers;
- Supporting current businesses while helping prospective businesses become established;
- fostering cultural resources and events to help residents experience the richness of our community and its heritage; and
- engaging a greater part of the community at various levels of town governance.

To help us shape our future, the Plan puts forward a host of goals, strategic objectives, and recommended actions. The Plan and these recommended actions have been organized around four core Plan Principles:

### **Managing towards our Shared Vision:**

Coordinating Town actions, regulations, and investments consistently towards achieving the community's objectives and goals. This principle envisions efforts to manage town programs, budgets, and actions in a proactive way that is intentionally and thoughtfully directed towards achieving specific outcomes, and applies both to overall planning and policy and to specific actions of town departments. For example, a goal of developing a number of parcels of open space over time might suggest the coordination of complementary economic incentives, zoning bylaws, and infrastructural improvements.

### **Communications:**

Ensuring that the Town, Schools, and local agencies consistently make organized, accurate, and high-quality information about South Hadley's resources, activities, regulations, goals, and policies readily available through a variety of easily-accessed sources, including but not limited to the Town's website. This principle is especially important to supporting the Town's economic and social well-being, enhancing the quality and use of Town services, promoting tourism, encouraging active participation in local government, attracting new residents, and integrating new residents more quickly into the fabric of the community.

### **Sustainability:**

Promoting policies and actions that will meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability should be understood broadly to include maintaining a long-range focus for Town actions and investments as well as the stewardship of the Town's natural lands, parks, and public buildings. Sustainability also implies renewed attention to *efficiency*, or making the most of what we have, whether measured in infrastructure, energy, money, or time, or in natural resources like land and water.

### **Leading by Example:**

Ensuring that the Town holds itself to the same standards it sets for others. As South Hadley invests in its future, the Town's actions, investments, public buildings, and spaces must serve as an example of what is expected of private citizens and developers.

These Plan Principles are highlighted throughout the Plan's topic area chapters and its implementation program.

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## **Implementing South Hadley's Plan: Core Initiatives**

In the two-year-long process of developing South Hadley's first Comprehensive Plan in 30 years, several issues emerged as the most crucial and compelling focus of Town attention and investment over the next five to ten years. Progress will require both public- and private-sector actions and involve all of the specific areas in this Plan, including housing, transportation, economic development, land use, historical and cultural resources, open space and recreation, natural resources, and municipal services.

Several geographic focus areas emerged as needing particular community attention as well. The nature of the attention needed for the various geographic areas vary from revitalization, design enhancement, and preservation.

Through a strong public engagement process, as well as the research and development work that supported this Plan, the Plan recommends five initiatives to address these issues. When implemented over time, they will have a substantial and positive impact on the Town's quality of life. Implementing these key initiatives will involve all aspects of community planning and will involve public, private and community non-profit organizations and agencies.

Addressing each of these issues is essential to invigorating South Hadley – with particular emphasis on South Hadley Falls and the Route 116 corridor – and enhancing the overall quality of the Town's public spaces, economy, and opportunities. The five core initiatives to address these issues are:

1. Revitalize South Hadley Falls
2. Invest in the Route 116/Route 33 Commercial Focus Area as a mixed-use center
3. Connect South Hadley's Centers
4. Secure open space in the range, river and rural areas
5. Update the regulatory infrastructure to support the community's desired outcomes

## **Core Initiative 1: Revitalize South Hadley Falls**

**Goal:** Energize continued redevelopment and investment in South Hadley Falls, in part by using recreation as an organizing focus for economic development, tourism, and investment activity.

South Hadley Falls represents the area of greatest potential opportunity for redevelopment, investment, and adaptive re-use within the Town. Recently, the renovation of the Beachgrounds Park and planning for riverfront recreation have focused attention on the potential for recreation activities – public and private, indoor and outdoor – to form the organizing theme for renewed revitalization efforts. Connecting the Falls and enhancing it as a recreation destination for residents and tourists alike also holds the potential to enhance the area’s appeal to potential developers and businesses. Many of the Town’s goals for housing, visual quality, and economic development relate strongly to the success of South Hadley Falls. Strong partnerships and new relationships among public agencies, landowners, developers, and particularly the business community will be essential to achieving this goal, making improved communications and information especially important.

**Strategies** may include:

- Capitalize on Gatehouse Park overlooking the dam as a cultural tourism destination.
- Encourage additional recreation-related uses throughout the Falls, and finding new opportunities to create recreation connections - both literal and information-based.
- Recruit a variety of businesses to the Falls, such as restaurants and small shops as well as larger employers and investors.
- Develop a new Library and SHELD facility along a main thoroughfare in the Falls area.
- Work with area churches and societies to integrate existing recreational facilities into the new recreational district.
- Establish a Business Improvement District to support development in the area.
- Improve signage, transportation, and streetscape to direct travelers to South Hadley Falls.
- Link for mutual benefit with recreation, tourism, transportation, economic development, and cultural initiatives in Holyoke.
- Connect the South Hadley bike/pedestrian network with any pedestrian / bike development in the Holyoke canal area.
- Encourage expansion of a PVTA link with the Holyoke transportation hub.

## **Core Initiative 2: Invest in the Route 116/Route 33 Commercial Focus Area as a mixed-use center**

**Goal:** Actively promote redevelopment of the Route 116 / Route 33 commercial focus area as an attractive, economically vital, livable, and walkable mixed-use center for the Town, integrating residential and commercial uses.

Route 116 forms South Hadley's north/south spine. The Route 116/Route 33 intersection is at the center of this corridor and has emerged as a key focal point for the Town's economic activity and future development. This area functions as an important hub of commercial activity and offers substantial potential for future reinvestment in housing, mixed-use development, traffic and landscaping improvements, and pedestrian facilities that can better connect the area to the rest of South Hadley. The desire is to create a visually appealing, walkable mixed-use center that offers business opportunities and pathway connections to surrounding neighborhoods and centers.

**Strategies** may include:

- Work with the Newton Street Big Y commercial center and other existing commercial establishments to encourage visually appealing and pedestrian-friendly improvements to these sites.
- Review and revise zoning in the target development area to encourage high density mixed use development.
- Encourage high-density residential development in the district, developed in a manner that encourages walking and biking to the commercial areas and onto adjacent paths and trails.
- Encourage professional office development for the 116/33 area through zoning and economic development efforts.
- Investing in sidewalks, bike paths and road renovations throughout the district that encourage pedestrians and bike use.
- Establish a Business Improvement District to support development in the area.

## **Core Initiative 3: Connect South Hadley's Centers**

**Goal:** Integrate South Hadley's commercial and mix-use centers, the Town Common/College, South Hadley Falls, and the neighborhoods and businesses along the Route 116 corridor, physically, economically, and visually.

This core initiative will reinforce the economic and social health of South Hadley's centers through better physical, visual, and information connections with paths, sidewalks, traffic improvements, and public transit as well as through streetscape, signage and landscaping improvements. The vision is to integrate the corridor between the Town Common and Mount Holyoke College area transit, trails, and important landscaping and visual improvements. This envisions the Town, agencies such as Pioneer Valley Transit Authority and MassHighway, and property owners all

working on strategies to help overcome the physical and transportation features that separate and sometimes isolate South Hadley's centers. Efforts will be needed to develop a larger path network that creates greater connectivity and greater walkability/bikeability among residential and economic centers, promotes public transit options in the corridor from South Hadley Falls to the Town Common, and also promotes greater information about the public spaces, centers, and resources found throughout.

**Strategies** may include:

- Target town investment in beautification, including tree planting along primary streets as well as a bike / pedestrian route connecting the Town Common/College area, the public schools along the 116 corridor, the 116/ 33 district, and South Hadley Falls.
- Use the investment in the new elementary school to support the goal of an attractive Route 116 corridor accessible to bikes and pedestrians.
- Target utility investment in underground wiring and improved street lamps along Route 116.
- Encourage commercial establishments to locate in the commercial focus areas.
- Expand a PVTA transportation link connecting the Town Common/College area, the 116/33 district and South Hadley Falls
- Encourage Route 116 resurfacing investment to support general beautification program and pedestrian goals in the Route 116/33 and South Hadley Falls districts.

#### **Core Initiative 4: Secure open space in the range, river and rural areas**

**Goal:** Assure robust conservation and stewardship of targeted open spaces in the Mt. Holyoke Range, the rural areas north of the Town Common, and along the Connecticut River.

South Hadley has a wealth of natural resources that underpin its beloved character as a small-town residential community with an agricultural and industrial heritage that grew from its riverfront, mountain range, and farmlands. Scenic roads, fields, and forests are part of both the historical landscape and the natural resource base of the Town that supported growth in the past and will continue to do so in the future. While the Town, landowners, and partner agencies have worked together to conserve many critical areas, there are ongoing needs. The Plan recommends continued investments in conservation planning, land acquisition or protection, stewardship and management of Town lands; and building an information base so that the public, Town, and visitors can participate much more actively both in enjoying these lands, and promoting and protecting the natural and historic resource values that many of these properties represent. A continuing focus on the Range, River, and Rural Areas is stressed throughout this Plan.

**Strategies** may include:

- Developing a bike path in the Ferry Street area, connecting South Hadley Falls and the Mount Holyoke Range.
- Develop a Mount Holyoke Range Bike Path that coordinates with Granby, Amherst, and Hadley.
- Integrate The Ledges Golf Course with plans for Ferry Street open space and bike paths.
- Establish a dedicated funding source for acquisition and management of open space resources.
- Create interactive web-based and print maps of South Hadley's conservation and recreation lands, providing education about stewardship, resource values and protection, and available hiking and biking trails.
- Promote South Hadley's open spaces and natural resources as a competitive advantage in support of sound economic development.

### **Core Initiative 5: Updating the Regulatory Infrastructure to Support the Community's Desired Outcomes**

**Goal:** Develop and adopt a modern, efficient and effective regulatory infrastructure that creates a framework for enhancing South Hadley's community, economy, and aesthetic quality.

To accomplish the Town's many goals, the Town's zoning bylaw, subdivision regulations, zoning map, and review procedures need to be reviewed and revamped to help enable desirable development, improve the business environment, allow for housing diversity, and improve the aesthetic quality of South Hadley. Updated community standards that flow from the principles, goals and recommendations of this Plan will

- help improve housing quality and options;
- provide consistency and transparency to the development review process;
- promote infill and development that meets emerging economic models;
- enact design and landscaping standards that ensure that new investments improve the quality and function of South Hadley's landscapes; and
- provide historic resource standards that ensure the future of South Hadley's iconic buildings and neighborhoods.

**Strategies** include:

- Update the Zoning Bylaw
- Update Subdivision Regulations
- Undertake an assessment of the design character and enacting a Design Review Bylaw
- Expand the boards and committees involved in the development review process
- Formalize the role of the Development Review Team in carrying out coordinated and expanded development reviews.

- Discourage new commercial development in the residential areas through zoning

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## Public Engagement

Understanding that this Plan will only be useful if it represents the opinions and hopes of the broader South Hadley community, CPAC held open, public meetings and special workshops throughout the development of this Comprehensive Plan. These events were designed to solicit the opinions, feelings, ideas, visions, and observations of many of the people who have a stake in South Hadley's future: residents, business leaders, regional planning representatives, and public officials. Concurrently, the Heritage Landscape Inventory process was underway, which had significant overlap with the Plan in articulating the value of South Hadley's heritage and strategies and priorities for its preservation.

As part of the plan development process, special, facilitated discussions and workshops were held to work out some of the most important and fundamental principles and recommendations that appear in this Plan. The content and results of all these forums may be found in an appendix at the end of this Plan.

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## Plan Organization

Following this introduction, the Plan is organized into eight topical chapters:

- 1. Land Use & Community Design**
- 2. Economic Development**
- 3. Municipal Services & Facilities**
- 4. Open Space & Recreation**
- 5. Natural Resources**
- 6. Historical & Cultural Resources**
- 7. Housing**
- 8. Transportation & Transit**

One can immediately see that the topics of these chapters overlap and that many topics could appropriately be addressed in one or more chapters. Thus it is important to see the Plan as a whole, with each of the chapters contributing a set of perspectives, ideas, and recommendations in support of the Plan's larger goals and core initiatives.

The eight topical chapters are supplemented by additional information in the three following sections.

- The **Implementation Program** compiles all the recommendations of the eight topic area chapters and provides additional information on how to move ahead on each: relative priority, possible timeframes, and who should likely take responsibility for each.
- A selection of **Maps** provides additional information related to various topics.
- A record of **Public Involvement** illustrates the process CPAC used to involve the community in developing the Plan and its component parts.

It is important to note that this Plan presents a starting point, not a conclusion. While we offer in this Plan many recommendations, each one suggests an opportunity for further community conversation and process. There may well be disagreement about some of the recommendations or their relative priority. We can--and should--discuss and debate the particulars as we move ahead. Ultimately, it is the community that must weigh the merits of any particular course of action--whether it's a zoning change or a new walking trail--and ensure that all actions together shape the best possible future for South Hadley.