



**Master Plan Implementation Committee
Report to Town Meeting
May 2016**

We continue to see solid progress towards the goals of the Master Plan and we are, as always, grateful for all the hard work of volunteers and staff. Their efforts help enhance the quality of life for all of us in South Hadley and we appreciate them.

General Observations

Some progress is very visible: the new bike lanes on Rte. 116, the mounds of dirt by the high school playing fields where artificial turf is being installed, new and/or repaired sidewalks, increased community use of walking trails and of course the new Plains School and the Tiger Trolley.

Other progress is experienced rather than viewed. Communications between and among boards and commissions appear to have improved over the last year. This is especially heartening as some of the largest tasks yet to be tackled will require multiple entities to work together. The Open Space Committee set a good example in its handling of the development of a Community Preservation Act (CPA), working with several other entities and reaching out to meet with many more. Communications from the Town to residents have improved as well, in part because of the new Town website. Although not all boards and committees are currently posting their minutes, agendas and other documents on the site, the potential is there, and it's now much easier to find desired forms and applications.

Many tasks are often not very visible to the general population, but accomplishing them is crucial to progress. Staff cross-training, better use of space and consolidated functions are leading to increased efficiency and better service for the public in the Town offices. The Town Administrator and the Selectboard are to be commended for their efforts in regard to these tasks.

Planning is another often-underappreciated task. Rather than leaving us to react at the last minute to crises or opportunities, plans give us a means of shaping the future. The planning process allows us to engage with diverse points of view and helps to ensure that many voices, not just a few, are heard. This year several important plans have been produced. The

Community Preservation Act, despite its defeat, enabled residents to have many conversations about how to finance future improvements. The Redevelopment Authority's plan for South Hadley Falls and the Planning Board's Smart Growth District Design Guidelines/Standards will help steer the continuing development in the Falls and elsewhere in Town. The Capital Improvement Program used by Capital Planning enables better long-term financial planning. Some other entities are tasked with developing plans but have yet to do so, including Recreation and Sustainability and Energy. Both will need to engage multiple entities in the planning process.

Challenges

The primary barrier to greater progress continues to be a lack of people to do the work, especially in regard to tasks requiring special skills. For example, developing a "5-year plan for environmental improvement and long-term sustainability using established standards", which is one of the tasks assigned to the Sustainability and Energy Commission, requires a significant amount of expertise. Few entities have paid staff, and those that do indicate that these employees are already extremely busy. Time is also an issue. The Planning Board has an immense list of tasks, as does the Conservation Commission, and staff and volunteers are already stretched by the many necessary hearings. Finding people to fill vacant slots on boards and committees continues to be a problem, and while interns can be very helpful, they require training and supervision and are usually available only for projects that don't last longer than a semester.

A secondary issue, in some cases, is a sense that a particular task shouldn't be assigned to the entity in whose matrix it appears. The Cultural Council is tasked with increasing use of the Town Common, and their members don't see that as their responsibility. Recreation tasks include oversight of waterfront access and developing pocket parks, and members think that these should not be part of their matrix.

A third concern is those tasks that require the participation of multiple entities, such as expanding the trail network along the Connecticut River. Conservation, Open Space, Recreation, Bike/Walk, Ledges, DPW and the Historical Commission, at a minimum, could all have a role to play, and the Redevelopment Authority (in its role as inheritor of CEDC tasks) is responsible for the section of trail that connects the Beach Grounds and the Riverfront Park and the future Gate House Park. When a task is assigned to multiple entities it can be difficult to figure out which one should take the lead. The Planning Board has agreed to name a lead group in such cases.

Following is a summary of the Master Plan-related work of each entity we are assigned to monitor. Please bear in mind that this reflects ONLY tasks assigned in the Master Plan. The Town's various boards, committees, commissions and individuals have accomplished many good things in the past 12 months that are not reflected in this document, and many entities are also working on other significant efforts. For each entity we have listed the total number of tasks, the numbers completed, ongoing or in process, and those where no action has been taken. Please note that in some instances of "no action," this reflects a task that is seen as belonging to another entity, or a task that requires other work to be completed before it can be

undertaken, for example tasks having to do with a Municipal Housing Trust, and numerous Planning Board tasks.

The complete set of matrices with our comments will be posted on MPIC's web page by the end of May.

Agricultural Commission: seven tasks, none active. The Commission hasn't met in several years, but the new Chair has been meeting with other Agricultural Commissions in the region, and talking with the Kestrel Trust people. He hopes to have the Commission functioning by September.

Bike/Walk Committee: Not part of the Master Plan. It was established to implement recommendations assigned in the plan to the Sustainability and Energy Commission and several other entities. It continues to push for bike lanes and walking trails. Bike lanes are now marked on Rte. 116. Members participated in the development of the Pioneer Valley Planning Council/South Hadley Comprehensive Bike and Pedestrian Plan.

Board of Health: nine tasks, all completed or ongoing.

Capital Planning Committee: two tasks, one completed with yearly updates and one task ongoing (only partially addressed) as large projects come up. No formal use of Life Cycle costing, though Capital Planning tries to get the most life out of major municipal purchases including such larger purchases as DPW trucks and police cruisers.

Community and Economic Development Committee (CEDC): tasks have been reassigned to the Redevelopment Authority.

Conservation Commission: 29 assigned tasks, seven totally or mostly completed, three in process and six ongoing. Of the remaining 13, five are yet to be addressed, three require a heavy time investment and specific expertise; and five need to be reviewed with the Open Space Committee for joint action.

This year saw a large project – researching ownership and mapping of much of the Mt Holyoke Range, working in conjunction with the Kestrel Trust – nearly completed. For parcels identified as owned by South Hadley, filing and recording deeds has been accomplished, and mapping done. While a small amount of the Range needs to be done when/if more funding is available, MPIC believes that this goal has been substantially reached.

Cultural Council: five tasks. Three are ongoing, two are inactive. The Council uses social media to promote interest in arts and cultural events, and supports artistic efforts through its grants program. Mt Holyoke College provides lots of information on its website, so the Council has not felt the need to duplicate it. Members feel that use of the Town Common is not the responsibility of the Council.

Department of Public Works (DPW): 16 tasks. Four have been entirely completed, and 11 are partially completed or on-going programs. Just one goal has yet to be addressed. Of particular

note this past year are the improvement of sidewalk conditions or availability, accomplishment of or design of plans to relieve intersection congestion, adding crosswalk ramps for ADA compliance. Among on-going programs, those concerned with bike paths are being worked on primarily by the Bike/Walk Committee. An educational video about composting was made; it and others are accessible via the DPW Facebook page.

Fair Housing/Housing Trust: no action. Now the responsibility of the Redevelopment Authority.

Golf Commission: two tasks, now considered ongoing.

Historical Commission: 10 tasks. Two completed, six ongoing or in process, and two no action. Since last fall the Commission has been meeting regularly; working with the Planning Board to review applications that might affect historic structures and areas; and supporting the Community Preservation Act effort and the Historic District Study Committee. A consultant archivist will be in town soon to identify public and private sources of information about the town's history, which will in turn enable the Commission to develop projects to collect and digitize the information, which will become part of a searchable database. No action on content for the Town website and cable. A demolition delay bylaw appears to be a Planning Board responsibility.

Open Space Committee: 24 tasks. Eight completed, six in process, nine no action. The Open Space Committee's focus for most of this year has been preparation and completion of the Community Preservation Act report for the Selectboard. Now the Committee will begin focusing on the Master Plan Recommended Action items recently reviewed by the Planning Board and declared top priorities for the Open Space Committee.

Planning Board: 112 tasks, 26 completed, 28 in process, 30 ongoing, and 28 no action. Top accomplishments this past year include the Smart Growth District, starting the Housing Studies and adopting the Smart Growth District Design Guidelines/Standards. Priorities for the next 12 months include completing the Housing Studies, revising the Subdivision Regulations and work on the Design Guidelines for a broader area of town.

Recreation Commission: 10 tasks, four ongoing, six no action. The biggest accomplishment this year is getting the artificial turf field at the high school designed and bid under budget. The field should be ready to play on in July. This effectively creates "additional athletic fields" as they will be increasing the hours of use on that field dramatically and allowing the other fields to rest. Recreation continues to use Mount Holyoke College for a variety of programs including team sports, fitness and summer offerings. No progress on other Master Plan objectives including public waterfront access, signage and lighting, pocket parks, or a trail linking Ledges to other areas. Now that the Recreation Director is also responsible for Ledges there is a greater possibility for action. No action on developing a coordinated vision for meeting town-wide recreation needs.

The Redevelopment Authority has been focused on the redevelopment plan for South Hadley Falls, which will require a number of approvals, including a vote at a Town Meeting. If/when

it's approved, implementation will begin. There's no agreement yet about what to start with.

Selectboard: 50 listed tasks, 36 ongoing, seven completed, seven no action. Highlights include preparing new or amended policies on personnel, email and Town Hall use; centralizing facilities evaluation, maintenance and repair; and increased partnerships with neighboring communities and other government entities around issues such as transportation and planning for growth. Ties with SHELd have been greatly strengthened. The Selectboard has also requested a report on the Senior Center building and other Town facilities.

The School Department: five listed tasks, three completed, two in progress. Accomplishments specific to the Master Plan include the building of Plains Elementary School, comprehensive review of the social studies (including history) curriculum, and providing signage to teach about natural resources and the environment. Other accomplishments include collaborations with other town entities in order to accomplish tasks or obtain funding. The schools work with many groups including the Hitchcock Center to develop educational programs based on natural resources and local animals offered both in the classroom and field trips. The School Department continues to partner with DPW regarding snow removal on sidewalks and suggests improvements for walkways in order to encourage students to walk to school.

Solid Waste Advisory Committee: this offshoot of the Sustainability and Energy Committee has had little to do since the landfill was closed. The committee is currently inactive.

South Hadley Electric Light Department (SHELd): one task, ongoing. The Fiber Optic Study Committee unanimously recommended that SHELd pursue establishing a partnership with Axia, which would consist of SHELd owning and maintaining the fiber optic cables, with Axia arranging for and managing content. Axia would pay SHELd for the use and maintenance of the lines. At present, SHELd is waiting for a business plan from Axia, which will be considered by the SHELd commissioners.

South Hadley Public Library: tasks completed.

The Sustainability and Energy Commission: 27 listed tasks. Many are not being addressed, as the Commission has not met in more than a year. None are completed, though several are in process or ongoing. Of the two spin-off committees, Solid Waste has completed its task and Bike/Walk has made substantial progress, as noted elsewhere in this report. A few other tasks are being addressed through work being done by SHELd and the Planning Board. Per the Chair, priorities for the next 12 months include regular meetings, investigating the costs and implications of the Renewable Energy Trust, continuing to push for a "sustainability champion" and figuring out what it would take to develop a 5 year plan for environmental improvement and long-term sustainability.

Town Administrator: Eleven tasks, all ongoing. Significant progress has been made in regard to communications, centralized planning and cross-training, website consolidation of applications and forms, and use of space in Town Hall. Priorities in the near future include continued attention to records retention and storage and a new phone service.

Tree Warden/Tree Committee: three tasks, all ongoing. The committee worked with the Planning Board to revise the list of trees acceptable for planting in new subdivisions. A tree inventory is in process and a tree restoration program is underway.

Zoning Board of Appeals: no action (none required).

Looking Forward

Many master plans contain a provision for review of the plan about five years after its adoption. The South Hadley Master Plan has no such provision. Anticipating this significant anniversary – our Master Plan was adopted in 2010, based on information collected over the previous two years - in December 2014 MPIC initiated a conversation with the Planning Board about how they wished us to proceed. We noted that many Master Plan-assigned tasks were ongoing, and were being pursued by the entities responsible for them. Others were one-time efforts, some of which had been completed. Some entities had completed all their assigned tasks, some had completed some tasks, and some were pursuing some assigned tasks and ignoring others. We wanted to know if the Planning Board wished us to 1) monitor only Master Plan tasks; 2) monitor tasks that appeared to be the result of Master Plan assignments, even when a new group had been formed to handle them (e.g. Bike/Walk, Solid Waste, Redevelopment Authority); 3) monitor tasks that entities were addressing, regardless of whether they appeared in the Master Plan; and/or 4) conduct a type of rolling update of the Master Plan by working with each entity to determine what they see as priority tasks and incorporating them into that entity's task matrix.

The Planning Board members reviewed the matrices with our five years' worth of progress assessments and decided on tasks that should be the top priority for each entity over the next 5 years. These were formally adopted at the Planning Board's March 28, 2016 meeting, and will be distributed to the various entities by the Planning Board within the next month. The Board instructed us to focus only on tasks described in the Master Plan. We will continue to monitor progress, indicate projects that have been completed and flag tasks not yet begun. As in the past, we will report our findings to the Planning Board, the Selectboard and the Town Administrator.

Respectfully submitted,

The Master Plan Implementation Committee

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Ann Eaton, Secretary
Margaret Jodoin
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