



**Master Plan Implementation Committee
Report to Town Meeting
May 2012**

*The Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) was formed in 2011 by the Selectboard and Planning Board in order to advance the goals of South Hadley's master plan (aka Comprehensive Plan), which was adopted by the Town and approved by Town Meeting in 2010. MPIC's **operating principles** are:*

- *To ensure that officials, departments, committees, and other groups in town are aware of the Plan and its goals.*
- *To help the above groups explore their potential contributions to the implementation of the Plan and set priorities.*
- *To facilitate communication and collaboration among entities with overlapping interests and potential interests.*

The enclosed report has three sections:

- 1. Summary Observations**
- 2. Report on South Hadley Priorities 2011-2012**
- 3. Report on Boards, Committees, Departments, and other key players**

1. Summary Observations

The Master Plan is working. We have seen broad support for the ideals contained in the Plan, and the document itself is emerging as a useful tool in setting priorities and fostering consensus about the work we should do to create a bright future for South Hadley.

MPIC has been impressed by the deep commitment by [*perhaps: Committee members have been impressed by...commitment of*] the many people who work to make South Hadley the great town it is, whether volunteers, employees, or elected officials. It is this collective energy that is helping the Plan bear early fruit.

However, the Master Plan is ambitious, as it should be, and success rests on meeting significant challenges. Two overarching themes have emerged from our conversations this year:

- Many of our volunteer organizations are unable to fulfill their charges adequately without expanding their membership. As a community we need to **find ways to engage more residents** in our shared efforts. The strong turnout at the recent SDAT presentation might provide [*provided*] a moment to identify new volunteers. [*We should look for other such occasions.*]

- We are working in an **environment of scarce resources**, and a number of initiatives simply cannot be undertaken without funding, pointing to the need to find new revenue sources and aggressively pursue grants and partnerships [.]

2. Report on South Hadley Priorities 2011-2012

For 2011-2012, MPIC worked with the Selectboard and Planning Board to identify the Town's **highest level goals** for the year. We list them below, with annotations about the progress to date of which we are aware.

An Updated Planning Framework

- Under the auspices of the Planning Board, move quickly to revise zoning bylaws to reflect better South Hadley's current land-use values and goals: promoting economic development and providing an appropriate mix of housing, while protecting open space and natural and historical resources.

On target for Town Meeting approval in Fall 2012.

- Work with team from UMass to begin the assessment work that will inform the development of a design review process to preserve community character and aesthetic quality.

First step—a design assessment project—nearing completion.

- Support and participate in the Open Space Committee's efforts to update the Town's 2007-2012 Open Space and Recreation Plan, consistent with the Town's Master Plan.

Open Space and Recreation Plan on track to be completed in June 2012.

Falls Revitalization

- Support the work of the CEDC [*Community Economic Development Commission [CEDC]*] in investigating immediate opportunities to promote economic development, as well as longer-term strategies to leverage resources, for example through grants and matching funds.

CEDC is pursuing the possibility of various properties that might be redevelopment sites. The CEDC has made progress on the disposition of several Town tax properties. The Selectboard accepted the CEDC's recommendation that the School St. property be sold, and Richard Harris will be preparing an RFP in June. The Commission has prepared a recommendation regarding the East St. property that will be presented to the Selectboard at an upcoming meeting. At the next CEDC meeting, members will very likely finish developing a recommendation to the Selectboard for the disposition of the Fibermark property. The Commission has nearly completed its work on a set of formal guidelines for the rehabilitation, development, or disposition of Town properties, in the form of a recommendation to the Selectboard.

- Aggressively pursue participation in Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) program to develop charettes for the Falls.

SDAT grant secured, and site visit occurred April 23-25 with substantial public interest. Final report is in process. The SDAT Steering Committee will be transitioning into an implementation body. A new neighborhood group has already been established in the Falls: a promising first step.

- Participate in the design charette undertaken by the team from UMass.

Public meeting held February 8.

- Pay particular attention to futures of Texon and SHELD properties.

The future of both properties is still unclear and needing [needs] attention.

New Library

- Continue to build community and financial support for new library as a vibrant community resource and anchor to Falls redevelopment.

Funding approved by voters and Town Meeting. Architectural work underway with construction possibly to begin by late 2012.

New School

- Forge ahead with much-needed plans to replace Plains School.

The new school is slated to be located on the grounds of the current Plains School.

Regional Collaboration

- Build and maintain productive ties with neighboring communities to pursue shared goals for stronger towns and a stronger Pioneer Valley, including access to transportation (rail service and bike trails, e.g.), joint purchasing, mutual aid, and economic development.

South Hadley recently joined Hampshire Council of Governments and is investigating mutual aid agreements in the areas of resources for emergency response and public works equipment.

Effective Local Government

- Support the Selectboard, Town Administrator, and departments in their work to develop a shared vision for their work, a unified management program for Town resources, and enhanced communication, both internal and with the public.

The Selectboard participated in a Know Your Town forum and will be conducting meetings with employees to discuss the recommendations contained in the Department of Revenue report.

- Support the efforts to reduce the Town's energy consumption through implementation of a performance contract.

Siemens is finalizing its performance contract proposal with feedback from the Capital Planning Committee. The final proposal will be presented to Town Meeting members at a Special Town Meeting in June.

3. Updates on Departments, Boards, and other contributing bodies

Agricultural Commission

The Agricultural Commission has not met since last Fall as of March, 2012, but prior to this date, they have attempted to meet the recommendations of the Master Plan. They have supported the Right to Farm Bylaw and carefully evaluated the future land use, preservation, and or development potential of the farms in light of South Hadley's position in the regional market as a priority. They have also supported the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) for McCray's. They continue to work on other recommendations such as promoting community-supported agricultural and other "farm-to-table" initiatives as a way to conserve farmland and protect natural resources. They are working on a web page on the Town's website which will include access to information regarding the Chapter 61 and 61A and APR programs. The Agricultural Commission is developing a pamphlet which will better detail their mission.

Board of Health

The nine Master Plan recommendations for the town's Board of Health primarily concern monitoring of air quality, water quality and a series of environmental issues. Almost all of the activities associated with these have been part of the Board's work and continue on an on-going basis. Discrepancies from the goals primarily relate to frequency due to the data sources used. These include, as example, monitoring of water quality is done on a quarterly rather than daily basis, although the Board is notified immediately if an incident occurs; a similar situation exists with respect to air quality monitoring; reportable disease occurrence is continuously available on-line; water sources subject to potential contamination have been and are monitored on an on-going basis. A related goal is the updating and mapping of septic tanks and it would be helpful to have intern assistance in doing this. Monitoring of ground water related to the landfill is on-going. Overall, the Board appears to be in compliance with the Master Plan goals.

Capital Committee

Capital Planning is consistently working on the Master Plan recommendations as they prepare for Town Meeting. They are also working on a 5-10 year Capital Plan.

Community and Economic Development Commission

CEDC is pursuing the possibility of various properties that might be redevelopment sites. It has paid particular attention to the Fibermart property and has released the School Street property. CEDC has agreed to recommend to the Selectboard to hold on to 351 East St. for approximately 10 years with a possible use as athletic fields should funding become available.

Conservation Commission

The Conservation Commission has reviewed the Implementation Matrix [*omit: a few times,*] to determine what items they are most likely able to accomplish with their present limited staff hours and work load. There are 28 items listed in the Recommended Action list for Conservation. Although there are many good ideas in the matrix, most of them would take a lot of time and additional people (volunteers, interns, consultants or staff) to complete. *See Appendix*

Cultural Commission

The Cultural Council is an exciting group of people who are trying, with their small group, [*consists of a small group of people who are trying*] to bring the arts to the forefront in South Hadley. To date they have compiled an Arts directory and Arts Calendar Resource for [S]south Hadley Town's website. Currently they are working on a listing of variety of arts entertainment and compiling a listing of recurring events and venues.

Three community meetings have been held with an invitation to all South Hadley artists to participate. To that end the Cultural Council has met with the Library Building Committee and architects to see about exhibit space in the new library and will be meeting with SDAP [*what is this?*] to discuss the same. [*omit Of course*] a major part of their time is spent on the Arts Lottery Council Grants which are given out each year. This takes a considerable amount of time. They have had two speakers: Richard Harris, Town Planner, spoke about a cultural district. A representative from the Easthampton Cultural Council spoke about all that they do but the Council does receive money from the Town so they are able to do more. The Easthampton Council does share south Hadley's need for more members, however. Several members of the Cultural Council went to Boston for a state advocacy group meeting. They learned that there are a lot of people who have great ideas but few who are willing to do the work.

Department of Public Works

The Department of Public Works has met the recommendations of the Master Plan for the most part [*not sure what you mean here*] of they are on-going as needed. The DPW continues to [*omit strive to*] work on new goals and recommendations under the leadership of Jim Reidy.

Fair Housing; Housing Trust

The Selectboard has not established a Fair Housing Trust.

Golf Commission

The two recommended actions under the Master Plan for the Golf Commission were to:

- 1) improve the efficiency and financial stability of The Ledges, potentially including expanded non-golfing uses, and
- 2) explore ways to increase use of the clubhouse to increase revenue.

For this purpose, the Selectboard appointed an Ad-hoc Review Committee, which met frequently during 2011 to explore different options. These included selling the course, leasing it to a management company (possibly on a revenue-sharing basis) or closing it entirely. By the start of 2012, the Committee recommended that the town continue to operate The Ledges for the 2012 golf season due to time constraints. This was tied to a recommendation that an RFP process for a full management contract be carried out during the 2012 golf season; such a contract would include general management, food and beverage and course maintenance.. By taking these steps, it was felt that by fall 2012, the town would be in a better position to make decisions regarding the future of the course. The Selectboard approved the first recommendation and by March 2012, a general manager had been hired, a food and beverage vendor selected and the maintenance contract extended for the 2012 season. To date, the bidding process has not been acted on by the Selectboard. MPIC believes that the extensive research and discussion by the Ad-hoc Committee, in conjunction with members of the Golf Commission, has made a strong start relative to the Master Plan recommendations.

Historical Commission

The Historical Commission, though severely short of members, has made progress towards the goals listed in the Town Master Plan. Members of the Commission and the South Hadley Historical Society (SHHS) have assembled significant information about Town history, and have begun paperwork to establish historic districts. A primary barrier to further or more rapid progress is lack of people to undertake additional activities and/or follow through on those already begun. The Commission currently consists of two active members; the SHHS board, whose members would normally carry out at least some of the tasks, has only about six active

members. Interns from Mount Holyoke and/or UMass could undertake various activities such as data collection and production of web content, but this requires recruiting and supervision. Finding new Commission and SHHS board members is a priority.

Open Space

The Open Space Committee was formed in the spring of 2011 and has been meeting for over 8 months. Members recognized that the Committee was created as a follow-up to the development of the 2010 Master Plan and that the main responsibility of the Committee is development and management of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan. As such, much of the past 7 months have focused on development of a new Open Space and Recreation Plan as the existing plan expires in 2012. The Committee understands that an update or new plan is necessary in order to qualify for State reimbursement programs for land acquisitions and protection of important open space as well as recreational facility development. The Committee has been updating and writing various sections of this plan which is due into the state by the end of June 2012. As part of the update process, the Committee conducted a public survey late last year and public forum on January 26, 2012 to get information from residents regarding present day open space and recreational needs.

Planning Board

Over the course of this past year, the Planning Board has completed, acted upon, or begun action on nearly 46% of the Master Plan's recommended actions specifically assigned to it. Per the Board's assessment, there has been action on 53 of the total 115 recommendations. *[italicize to be consistent/(See appendix)]*

Activity on this number of recommendations was possible through these two primary projects:

UMass Design Assessment Project

Nearing completion this spring, the contract between the Town and UMass Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning (LARP) and Department of Architecture provided graduate student and faculty support for the documentation and characterization of the architectural, landscape and urban design features of the Master Plan designated focus areas of Town. This documentation will provide the first step towards a design review process; a priority recommendation of the Plan.

Zoning By-Law Revisions Project

The Planning Board solicited proposals and interviewed finalists for this project and unanimously agreed that Joel Russell Associates (JRA) was best qualified to undertake this project. Through several meetings with the Board, JRA has prepared drafts of eight (8) distinct packages which will be presented to the public for review and comment in May. It is expected

that the project will be completed and ready for Town Meeting approval in the fall of 2012. Once the work on this project is complete, it is anticipated that the Board will consider a project that addresses potential changes to the zoning map.

In addition, the intent of the Master Plan was tested this past year through the Planning Board's review and rejection of a large proposed multi-family development off of Ferry Street. The process undertaken by the Board to reach this decision unfolded over several meetings and enabled the Board to more clearly define Special Permit terms such as, "character" and "compatible." The decision has also provided important information to Joel Russell as he continues to provide proposed changes to our Zoning By-law.

Though not included on the Planning Board's task list, it has also heavily supported the revitalization of South Hadley Falls through the Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) grant opportunity.

In this next year, the Planning Board will endeavor to reassess the prioritization of various recommendations to ensure that they are in alignment with the Master Plan Implementation Committee's overarching yearly priorities.

Public Library

MPIC Recommendations for the Library were focused on expansion of the current Library, or development of a new one, with an emphasis on enhancing the Falls through this effort. The Library staff and Trustees have moved steadily forward in achieving these goals. A site in the Falls was selected and purchased during 2011, and, in July of that year, a grant for over \$4 million awarded to the Town for the purpose of constructing a new library. A debt exclusion necessary for the building was approved at a special election in November, followed by Town Meeting approval in December. Currently, steps necessary to proceed, such as working on contracts for the architectural firm and a project manager, additional soil testing and the like, are underway. In addition, fund-raising efforts to raise the \$1 million required by the state grant, are continuing. Construction is targeted for late 2012 or early 2013. Finally, efforts to improve transportation to the library will be undertaken in conjunction with the DPW and town administrator.

Recreation Commission

A number of recommendations for the Recreation Commission will require coordination with other entities:

- Ledges Golf Course walking trails. (Golf Commission and Conservation Commission)
- River access, signage, etc. (Conservation Commission)

- Maintenance and facilities. (DPW/Parks Dept)

On other recommendations:

1. The Recreation Commission in conjunction with the Friends of Buttery Brook Park is looking into improvements at Buttery Brook Park, potentially with an Urban Self Help grant and part of that would include a fitness/hiking trail in the wooded area. They received a \$250,000 grant from MA Department of Conservation and Recreation last July and are looking for additional funds before moving forward there.
2. There is community desire for a Year-Round Multi-Purpose Rec [*Recreation*] center, but no plans to identify funding.
3. The Commission is looking at a potential new space for additional playing fields, and plans may hinge on the location of the new school facility.

School Committee

Until the new Superintendent takes office, the recommendations of the Master Plan have been put on hold.

Selectboard

The Selectboard has been active in promoting awareness of the Plan and in advancing many of its agendas. In particular this year, it has been focusing on effective local government with the assistance of the MA Department of Revenue.

During the current budget cycle the Selectboard tried to address the need for a Facilities Director position or function as outlined in the Plan. Since approximately 75% of building space is under the management of the School Committee, such a position or function will need to be defined through a joint effort of the Selectboard and the School Committee. A suggestion that the Financial Policy and Advisory Team, composed of representatives of the Appropriations Committee, the Selectboard and the School Committee, take up this task will be considered by that committee at its next meeting.

Sustainability Commission

The Sustainability Commission has been active, but details on their Plan-related activities for the year are not yet available.

SHELD

SHELD's lone goal in the Master Plan is to "Coordinate the fiber optic system development with residential/commercial development projects." A rapidly evolving environment, stemming from multiple public and private sector players and a dynamic market, make the ISP business a complex undertaking for SHELD, but they have positioned themselves as advantageously as possible for the Town's long term benefit, in alignment with Master Plan goals.

Town Administrator

Initial efforts began under Paul Beecher, and should be continued once a new Town Administrator is in place.

Tree Warden

The recommendations for the Tree Warden all require money. The Tree Warden is doing what he can, especially in light of the Oct. 29th severe snowstorm, but there is much more he would like to do. The Tree Warden feels the Town needs a full-time Tree Warden and department as the Town is falling behind. As a community we are losing trees on the Town Common and elsewhere. We could use a Street Tree Ordinance as well as adopting a native landscaping and tree planting program throughout the Town.

Zoning Board of Appeals

The Zoning Board of Appeals has had no need to meet during the past year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Master Plan Implementation Committee

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