



**Master Plan Implementation Committee
Report to Town Meeting
May 2023**

South Hadley has just completed its first full year under the Master Plan Update, which was adopted by the Planning Board in spring 2022 and endorsed by Town meeting in May. The Master Plan Implementation Committee has been monitoring progress towards the goals of the plan, as charged, and we have seen some significant progress. Most entities are well into working on the short-term tasks assigned to them in the Plan, and many are thinking about mid- and long-term activities as well. Broadly, we are very pleased to see increased communication and cooperation among various branches of Town government, for example the agreement between the School Department and the Administration to establish a joint facilities management program. A forum centering on implementation of the Master Plan, held last November for all departments and boards charged with Master Plan-related tasks, was very well received, and we anticipate that it will become an annual event. There appears to be increased cooperation and collaboration with Mount Holyoke College around academic offerings as well as cultural and energy-related activities. Finally, we are putting in place a new reporting schedule for all entities that will be followed by a regular joint meeting of the Selectboard, Planning Board, Town Administrator and MPIC to assess progress and identify ways to overcome barriers to further advancement.

The Master Plan Update has four goals. They are outlined below with a few examples of activities taken from the list of actions associated with each goal that illustrate progress. For a more detailed look at the tasks assigned to various boards, commissions, committees, departments and individuals, go to <https://www.southhadley.org/1276/Implementation-Status-Reports>. The April/May 2023 task lists will be posted shortly.

The first goal is that South Hadley should be a community where everyone can thrive. Many entities are working towards this goal, including:

The Council on Aging, which convened the Age and Dementia Friendly Task Force involving representatives from numerous parts of Town administration as well as individuals representing various nonprofit service providers. The Town recently received an official designation as a dementia-friendly community by the Dementia-Friendly Initiative.

The Planning Board is undertaking efforts to increase housing options at different price points that will meet the needs of residents at all life stages, addressing the possibility of Accessory Dwelling Units, developing new mixed-use zoning for the 33/202 Corridor, and updating the state-required Housing Production Plan. The Short-Term Rental bylaw is an effort to develop a new income stream and bring new customers to South Hadley.

To help develop a more diverse workforce, SHELD is establishing an intern program at SHHS.

The Commission on Disabilities is working with many entities to help them recognize and respond to the needs of people with disabilities, whether for recreation, transportation, or more appropriate outdoor seating.

Town Meeting approved a bylaw establishing a Human Rights Commission.

The second goal is that as a community, we preserve our natural and cultural resources.

The Planning Board has been addressing the issue of protecting our watersheds.

The Conservation Commission has undertaken extensive work on trails. The campaign to raise enough money to preserve the Lauzier property as farmland in perpetuity was successful.

The Historical Commission is working with the South Hadley Public Library, The Old Firehouse Museum and other entities to inventory collections of historical materials.

Goal three states that as a community we cultivate resilience.

In consultation with the Planning and Conservation Department, the DPW is replacing culverts and removing a dam to better handle the effects of heavy rainfall.

SHELD has put in place a number of new programs to reduce carbon emissions, including offering rebates when someone installs an electric vehicle charging station.

The Sustainability and Energy Commission posts links, regularly updated, to energy-saving suggestions and incentives.

Goal Four centers on communications. We want to be a community that communicates well in all directions: within Town government, from administration to the community and back again, and within the community. MPIC sees many examples of enhanced communication, including:

the Town Administrator's Weekly Wrap-up, which is carried in the Town Reminder as well as appearing on the Town website.

Increased participation in public hearings, facilitated in large part by the ability to hold virtual and hybrid meetings.

Many meetings are recorded and available on SHCTV-15; this also increases community awareness and involvement in Town government.

Of course, there is still work to be done. We are pleased that next year will see a review of Town Meeting itself and hope that the review will take the Master Plan goals into account. We are also looking forward to the work of the Human Rights Commission once its membership is complete and it has begun its tasks.

In general, the major barriers to progress appear, as usual, to be lack of funds, lack of volunteers and employees, and lack of time (also a function of lack of funds.)

Lack of space is also an issue, on two levels. First, as the town has moved to more in-person and hybrid meetings, it has become apparent that we have a real shortage of meeting space. It had been anticipated that the new Senior Center would provide meeting space, but currently it is rarely available in the evenings and not at all on weekends, and there's a great deal of demand for daytime space, especially when entities want to hold hybrid meetings and record them, a procedure that MPIC strongly supports. South Hadley Public Library has two spaces, both much in demand. One option for additional meeting space may be Berkshire Hills Music Academy.

Second, reflecting increased participation, both the Recreation Commission and the Senior Center indicate that they could use more space for their programs. Again, weekend use of the Senior Center might help alleviate this need.

More technical, "back room" support for volunteer boards and committees that don't have staff is highly desirable. A promised handbook for chairs should provide some helpful instructions about how to post agendas and minutes, for example. But entities need more guidance about making changes to their web pages, such as updating their board lists and posting materials. MPIC would like to see someone at Town Hall designated as the contact person for when such changes are needed. And some entities may need to be reminded to post their minutes as soon as possible after they're approved, even if the meeting has been recorded; a video of the meeting doesn't substitute for written minutes.

MPIC's new reporting schedule has posed some challenges as well. Initially, we were asked to send the task lists to the various boards, and committees for updates three times during the year. This has proved to be too great a burden for many of the entities, so MPIC will return to its earlier schedule of meeting with each entity in the fall to ask about their current priorities, request that they complete the task list early in the calendar year, and meet again with them in the spring.

We remain grateful to all the elected and appointed individuals, volunteers and employees who work so hard to make South Hadley a good place to live.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Gooch Dobosh, Chair
Nate Therien, Vice Chair
Renee Sweeney, Clerk
Ben Ayres
Larry Dixon
Margaret Jodoin
Kevin McCaffrey (until April 2023)
Susan Perry
Michelle Theroux