



**Master Plan Implementation Committee
Report to Town Meeting
May 2015**

Over the past 12 months the Master Plan Implementation Committee continued to follow the actions of Town boards, commissions, departments and staff in regard to progress towards Master Plan goals. We are seeing good results in many areas, but we continue to hear that a barrier to further progress is a lack of people, and sometimes expertise, to carry out various tasks assigned in the Master Plan. For this reason, both this year and last we worked with the Community Based Learning program at Mt Holyoke College to identify opportunities for students to participate in Town projects. We expect to continue to encourage boards and committees to make use of student interns where appropriate.

We also attempted to measure the effectiveness of the Master Plan in enhancing the quality of life for Town residents. As a follow-up to last year's student research projects, this year a Mt. Holyoke Community Intern administered a town-wide survey assessing residents' perceptions of various aspects of life in South Hadley. The findings were presented to the Selectboard in early April, and a final report will be posted on the MPIC page of the Town web site, <http://www.southhadleyma.gov/223/Master-Plan-Implementation-Committee>. Most responses suggest the town is definitely moving in the right direction, though (as one would expect) there are some differences of opinion on specific issues, and a variety of suggestions of areas for improvement.

In December 2014 we shared a status report with the Planning Board and asked for their guidance in regard to how we should proceed when boards, commissions or other town government entities have either completed the tasks mandated for them in the Master Plan, or are not pursuing them. The Planning Board asked that we find out what priorities are being pursued, even if not listed in the Master Plan. Additionally, the Board is looking over the matrices and will determine whether tasks not being pursued are still necessary, should be assigned to some other entity, or should be eliminated. Where multiple entities need to be involved in carrying out a task, the Board will name a lead entity.

Another issue we identified last year and again this year was the need for more effective communication among town boards and commissions and between town government and town residents. The new web site will be helpful in making it easier for residents to access information. The Town continues to use Everbridge and social media (including FaceBook, etc.) for special announcements, but as comments on our survey clearly indicate, many people don't know what's happening in town. MPIC members try to meet with each board or department at least twice per year, and we have often found ourselves telling one body what others were currently doing about the same issue. One of our tasks this next year will be to consider more effective ways to share information.

A few Master Plan issues that have not been addressed include the Agricultural Committee, which exists only on paper; the Fair Housing/Housing Trust, which has yet to be appointed; and the Historical Commission, which lacks a chair and faces difficulties getting a quorum for its infrequent meetings. It is hoped that Planning Board review of the matrices may lead to some action on these items.

A brief summary of activities pursued by each entity follows. For those who want further details, we expect to post the updated matrices on our web page within the next several months. As ever, we appreciate and applaud all the people - volunteers, elected officials and paid staff - who contribute so much time and effort to making South Hadley a good place to be. Additionally, we want to thank those board and committee members, elected and appointed officials and staff who met with us and patiently answered our questions.

Agricultural Commission: not currently functioning.

Bike/Walk Committee: The Bike/Walk Committee has met with experts in the field, conducted a survey, held monthly treks to open up South Hadley's town-owned land to our residents, and is working with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission as they conduct an assessment of creating bikeways in Town. Biking/walking has increased in Town and the DPW has been encouraged to create safer bike/walk lanes and sidewalks, especially as they are renovating or repaving streets. The State was asked to create a bike lane on Routes 116 and 202, and the northern portion of 116 has been done.

Capital Planning Committee: Town Meeting approved borrowing \$7.5 million to be expended over 10 years. This will be repaid through current tax revenue.

Community and Economic Development Commission: some functions have been assumed by the Redevelopment Authority. The RA expects a plan to be ready by fall and is pushing for a Smart Growth ordinance for part of the Falls area.

Conservation Commission: continues to work on Mt Holyoke range parcels documentation. The Commission is in its second year of working with Kestrel Trust. Wetland permitting and protection of conservation land are also priorities. Since taking over the George Hahn/Edwin Warner Arboretum two years ago, the Commission has been putting on an Arbor Day program with the Middle School.

Cultural Council: most time is spent on its grants program. A recently published brochure helps fulfill the Master Plan goal of increasing public awareness of many cultural activities in the area.

Golf Commission: Master Plan tasks are completed or ongoing. The Commission is now focusing on building revenues through improved scheduling and adding new golfing groups. Food and beverage service has worked well, making a net \$40k last season. The Commission continues to want to have the facility open for 3-4 nights per week during the off-season. In addition to the lengthy winter, a major problem this year was damage to the courses from illegal snowmobile activity, and litter left by visitors, especially dog residue.

Board of Health: Master Plan tasks are completed or ongoing. The Board is now working on reducing opioid use, developing emergency plans (Ebola, earthquake, mass casualty); food and waste issues (banning Styrofoam containers, mandating composting, road kill disposal); regulating funeral home inspections; and regulating e-cigarette purchases. Many projects involve partnering with other communities.

Fair Housing/Housing Trust: still to be established by Selectboard.

Historical Commission: the Chair resigned last fall and a new chair has not yet been named. The remaining members have met twice to consider whether proposed actions (bikeway, cell towers) would have a negative impact from a historical perspective. Otherwise, no further progress has been made towards Master Plan goals. MPIC is concerned that action by other entities (for example, adopting a Community Preservation Act) cannot move forward without significant Commission input.

Open Space Committee: The Committee continues to take the lead in the study and creation of a dedicated funding source for the adoption of a Community Preservation Act. This is a complex issue that involves many departments and groups, and ultimately will provide enhancement assistance in historic, open space, recreation and housing areas. Other ongoing efforts include a grant application for trails and a bridge off Ferry Street that will cross Batchelor Brook.

Planning Board: The Board is developing regulations for a Smart Growth District including design standards for the Falls. This was anticipated to be ready for Town Meeting in May, but since State approval has not been received yet, the Board anticipates moving forward at a Fall Special Town Meeting. The Board is also working on revisions to the Flexible Development provisions of the Zoning Bylaw; a Design Review Bylaw; and efforts to develop affordable housing including a Housing Production Plan, multifamily development study, and an Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw. Funding for the Housing Production Plan is anticipated through a State grant and Town Meeting is being asked to appropriate funds for the multifamily development study in May 2015.

Department of Public Works: The Master Plan's emphasis on transportation continues to be realized through road and sidewalk improvements. Increased funding in Chapter 90

monies, later augmented by funds under the Winter Recovery Assistance Program, continues to enable progress on a number of neighborhood roads, including East, Alvord and Ferry streets. DPW also expended many resources on landfill capping and related efforts. (See Solid Waste Committee)

Recreation Commission: is working on athletic fields including a related budget request to Annual Town Meeting in May. The Commission has planned for expanded summer activities to include new full day program offerings.

School Committee: Continuation of curriculum improvements and the building of Plains School are cited as the items needing the most attention during 2014-2015. Other focuses include work on remediation, transition to PARCC, and substantial technology upgrades.

Selectboard: In conjunction with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, the Selectboard launched a project to research and develop a comprehensive plan to increase bike and pedestrian paths. These would link the Falls and the Commons areas as articulated in the Master Plan. Board members are exploring other possibilities and connections as well. The Tiger Trolley was established as part of an innovative bus service, which can adjust the fixed route to allow access for passengers at more convenient spots.

Solid Waste Advisory Committee: New Recycle Center Permit stickers have been printed and distributed. Once the landfill is capped, gates, buildings and recycling containers will be reconfigured with some assistance from grant funds. The Committee continues to monitor 200 businesses in town for proper waste recycling, including food waste.

South Hadley Electric Light Department (SHELD): The Department has been working on a fiber optics network. A survey of poles was to be completed by end of November 2014, to be augmented with underground system. Backbone fiber routes were progressing but with election of new Commission members it may be put on hold until the Commission has an opportunity to evaluate it. Village Commons is currently serving as the beta test site. The new Commission will also take up the planned replacement building.

South Hadley Public Library: has completed its Master Plan tasks. It is now working on expanding programs and services, including outdoor summer programs and participating in river-oriented programs. With the School Department, the Library has initiated after school bus service to the library. Using grant funds, the Library is working with a consultant to explore some merging of services with Gaylord Library.

Sustainability and Energy Commission: The Committee is divided into subcommittees and proceeds based on member interest. Bike/Walk and Solid Waste are functioning, as noted elsewhere. The Chair is pushing for a “sustainability czar” either as a part time paid or volunteer position.

Town Administrator: Master Plan tasks are completed or ongoing. Priorities in the past year included successfully encouraging reinvestment in South Hadley, with an emphasis

on the Falls area, but not at the exclusion of other neighborhoods. Presstek consolidated its operations into South Hadley and Mohawk Paper announced plans to open a major facility in town. Housing starts were healthy, though retail in town and elsewhere continues to become internet based or big box. The Village Commons continues to be an important place for small retail.

Tree Committee: is working on policies regarding setbacks and subdivisions. The Committee is currently developing educational materials about tree planting and maintenance. It expects to start mapping historic trees.

Zoning Board of Appeals: no action at present

The Master Plan was approved by Town Meeting five years ago. Many Master Plan tasks have been completed, while others are ongoing, and those responsible should take great pride in their work and dedication. We also recognize that much remains to be done. As mentioned above, Planning Board members are reviewing the status of all Master Plan recommendations. We look forward to their conclusions and suggestions for continued progress.

Respectfully submitted,

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