



Master Plan Implementation Committee  
Report to Town Meeting  
May 2017

Eight years after Town Meeting adopted the Master Plan, we continue to see solid progress towards its goals. Many tasks are either completed or ongoing, though others remain to be addressed. What follows are some general comments, and discussions of issues surrounding planning and communication.

**General Comments:**

The Master Plan Implementation Committee monitors the tasks assigned in the Plan to the various Boards, Commissions, Committees, departments and individuals referenced in the Plan, as they are designed to achieve or make progress towards the Plan's goals. From the Master Plan:

Long Term Goals

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

Core Plan Principles

- Manage toward our shared vision
- Communications
- Sustainability
- Lead by example

## Core Initiatives

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

In October 2016 the Planning Board distributed revised Master Plan priority task matrices to each entity listed in the plan as adopted in 2010, and these are the tasks that we have been monitoring this year. The number of tasks overall has declined significantly, in part because many have been completed. Of those remaining, a number are in the process of completion and others are on-going and will continue indefinitely due to their nature (i.e. monitoring and repair of roads and sidewalks). A relatively small number of tasks has not been undertaken.

Attached is a table showing each entity with the number of tasks assigned to it in its original task matrix, the number assigned in the revised matrix, and the status of the tasks in the revised matrix. The complete Master Plan task matrices (revised), including the status of each individual task, may be found by going to the MPIC web page on the Town web site: <http://www.southhadley.org/223/Master-Plan-Implementation-Committee>

We see many positive signs. The new manager at SHELD is looking at issues in regard to fiber optics. More people are getting involved in Town government; compared to the past few years there are many fewer vacancies on boards and committees and more contested elective offices. The Bike/Walk and Recreation Commission activities draw a significant number of participants and the Tree Committee is also becoming increasingly active. More sidewalks and roads have been improved. In the Falls, the Public Library is always busy with reading and Internet activity and its community rooms are widely used. Strong resident involvement with other Falls-based activities will be enhanced by the Redevelopment Authority's proposed plan. And it appears that steps are underway to make good use of the former Big Y plaza at the intersection of Rtes. 116 and 33.

## **Specific Areas of Interest: Planning and Communication**

### Planning

We have been pleased to see evidence of strategic, long-term planning on the part of multiple bodies, in contrast to simply reacting to situations and occasions. Some examples:

A consultant is looking at all municipal facilities (except the schools) to make recommendations about the best use of space, and options include moving various municipal departments, renovating existing space, constructing new facilities but also the possibility of leasing space.

The Planning Board and the Redevelopment Authority are looking at ways to increase housing options that will also draw new business into the community, taking into account new economic trends to ensure proposed changes remain relevant in the future.

The Cultural Council is using its grants program to encourage networking among arts and culture organizations.

The Selectboard is working with the Town Clerk's office on the possibility of holding all town elections, including Fire Districts, on one day, rather than on multiple days, thus saving time, money and potentially leading to greater voter turnout.

And the Selectboard reviewing the status of several entities, including the Agricultural Commission and the Open Space Committee, neither of which is currently functioning. They may be dissolved or restructured; either (or others) could be brought back on an ad hoc basis as needed.

But work remains to be done.

Recreation: The Master Plan assigned to the Recreation Commission the task of generating a town-wide recreation plan that would reflect the needs and interests of all town residents. The Recreation Commission, however, feels that the responsibility rests more broadly. Last fall the Town Manager convened a large group of individuals representing both public and private sector recreation opportunities to discuss town-wide recreation opportunities and needs, and that discussion needs follow up action. In addition, three other tasks assigned to the Recreation Commission have not been addressed. We would like the Selectboard and Planning Board to decide whether the tasks should be reassigned.

Sustainability: the Sustainability and Energy Commission is currently inactive, though it is assigned five priority initiatives in its revised task matrix. Again, we would ask that the Selectboard and Planning Board determine whether any other entity or individual could or should be undertaking any of the tasks.

Fair Housing Trust responsibilities have been reassigned to the Redevelopment Authority, and one of those tasks is the creation of a Fair Housing Committee. Redevelopment members feel that the committee ought to include representation from entities serving people with disabilities, the elderly, and veterans, as they, too, may have housing needs. We recommend that the Selectboard, the Planning Board and the Redevelopment Authority jointly figure out how best to proceed.

Open Space: Four tasks assigned to the Open Space Committee have not been undertaken because the Committee is no longer active. We ask that the Planning Board and Selectboard determine whether these tasks should be reassigned or dropped.

The Master Plan is in its eighth year since adoption, and it's based on 10-year-old data. We hope that within the next year the Selectboard and the Planning Board will agree that it's time to get the update process started.

## **Communication**

We've seen great improvements in the past several years in communication between Town government and residents, including the new Town web site, the Town Administrator's occasional column in the Town Reminder, and many articles about activities in town. Groups such as Recreation and the Cultural Council are adept at using social media to publicize their activities. Issues are frequently presented to the general public through various forums, and SHCTV broadcasts both live meetings and repeats. The Selectboard's quarterly "meet the residents" gatherings seem like a really good idea. And this year Town Hall staff members have received training in improved communication with residents and other visitors.

Communication among different parts of municipal government has improved, as well, and we've been seeing instances where boards and committees are jointly tackling projects. For example, Bike/Walk, Recreation, the Canal Park group and Open Space have worked together to publicize the walking opportunities along the Connecticut River in the Falls.

Through our monitoring activities, however, we see a need for continued improvement. People are busy, or sometimes they don't pay attention. For example, when the Planning Board sent out the revised task matrices in October we found that most of the recipients hadn't even realized the priorities had been revised, and many had missed the email entirely. It wasn't until we started asking them which tasks they were addressing that they realized what had been happening. This points to the need for follow-up, especially where boards don't have staff.

The Town website is an important communication tool, and the website overall is greatly improved. The web pages for each part of Town government are useful sources of information not only for residents but also for the Selectboard and other boards, as it allows them to see what other entities are doing, and determine whether there are ways they can work jointly. However, keeping information current, reasonably accessible and understandable, although much improved, is an area still needing attention. A significant number of boards and committees – even some with staff – don't keep their web pages up to date, and some aren't posting minutes or even agendas. In addition, there is a lack of consistency in what is provided. Board lists, contact information, and links to agendas and minutes of all entities should be easy to find. It appears to us, and has been mentioned by some staff and committee volunteers, that more training in posting to the Town website would help in this regard. Moreover, we suggest that periodic monitoring of the website is important.

The original Master Plan called for a Communications Committee “to disseminate information regarding the community’s open space and recreation resources and needs (including Mount Holyoke College and other community institutions)”. As far as we can tell, this entity was never created, and the task appears to be spread among other entities. As we proceed, especially as and if we move towards updating the plan, it could be useful to acknowledge that this task has been assigned elsewhere.

In summary, despite our suggestions, we think things are going well, and that we’re making good progress towards the goals of the Master Plan. And we are very grateful, as always, to the members of the community – elected and appointed officials, staff and volunteers - who give their time in so many ways to help make South Hadley a good place for all of us.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Gooch Dobosh, Chair  
Ann Eaton, Secretary  
Margaret Jodoin  
Michelle Wolfe

Attachment: Tasks List

<b>Entity</b>	<b>Original matrix tasks</b>	<b>Revised matrix tasks</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Agricultural Commission	7	2	Inactive; may be disbanded
Bike/Walk Committee	1, part of Sustainability & Energy Comm.	0	Ongoing
Board of Health	9	2	1 complete 1 ongoing
Capital Planning	2	2	Both ongoing
Community and Economic Development	57	0	Assigned to Redevelopment Authority
Conservation	29	5	2 ongoing 3 on hold
Cultural Council	5	2	1 completed 1 ongoing
Dep't of Public Works	16	6	1 complete 5 ongoing
Fair Housing/Housing Trust	6	0	Assigned to Redevelopment Authority
Golf	2	2	Both ongoing
Historical Commission	10	1	In process
Open Space	24	8	Now inactive, may be disbanded 4 no action 4 completed
Planning Board	112	67	12 completed 22 partly completed 9 ongoing 10 in process 14 minimal or no action

Recreation	10	4	1 in process 3 no action
Redevelopment Authority	0	1 from CEDC 3 from Fair Housing	1 complete 2 in process 1 no action
Selectboard	50	21	10 complete 7 ongoing 3 in process 1 eliminate
Schools	5	2	Both complete
Solid Waste	Part of DPW	0	Complete – landfill now closed
SHELD	1	1	In process
SH Public Library	1	0	Complete
Sustainability & Energy	27	5	Inactive except Bike/Walk
Town Administrator	11	11	All ongoing
Tree Committee	3	3	1 complete 2 ongoing
Zoning Board of Appeals	1	1	Ongoing as needed

Please note: The Planning Board revised the original matrices and distributed the revisions in October 2016. Many of the tasks on the original matrices have been completed, thus reducing the absolute number of tasks. Others were carried over as “ongoing”. To see the full matrices with listed tasks please go to <http://www.southhadley.org/223/Master-Plan-Implementation-Committee>