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Land Use & Community Design

Introduction

The Land Use and Community Design chapter is a synthesis of how the other Plan elements for the community – economic development, housing, cultural & historical resources, open space & recreation, natural resources, transportation, and municipal facilities – come together to make up South Hadley’s built environment. Land use policy is instrumental in guiding the type and location of development in South Hadley, while community design guidance helps ensure future development consistent with the Town’s vision and identity. Throughout this planning process, the importance of preserving community character has repeatedly been identified as a high priority. Therefore, including community design in this Chapter is a critical component of this Plan.

Identification of Issues

Throughout the public engagement process, there were various common themes raised by the public as critical concerns regarding South Hadley's previous and current land use and community design patterns. These issues are as follows:

- Development (particularly multi-family and commercial) appears haphazard and located in inappropriate places;
- Development (particularly multi-family and commercial) is out of character with the surrounding neighborhood;
- Lack of landscaping, trees, greenery in existing and new developments;
- Unappealing architecture, signage and landscaping of development throughout town especially with respect to the main thoroughfares (Routes 116, 47, 33, 202)



- Lack of common areas;
- Lack of pedestrian connectivity between developments;
- Loss of agricultural lands and scenic vistas to large subdivisions and multi-family development;
- Overabundance of non-conforming land uses throughout town;
- Spot zoning of parcels throughout town;
- Potential for large residential development (“McMansion” style development) that use significant pristine forest/agricultural land;
- Lack of comprehensive ideas for development;
- High noise levels from businesses disturb neighboring residences;
- Insufficient access to riverfront;
- Insufficient recreational / alternative transportation opportunities (i.e., bike and hiking paths) throughout town;
- Overabundance of auto-related services throughout town;
- Eateries and shops should be consistent with the character of the town;
- Concern for the environmental impacts of development;
- Loss of mature, native vegetation due to development.

Goals

The Land Use and Community Design goals are closely interrelated and mostly pertain to the need to evaluate and update the ordinances and bylaws that form South Hadley’s regulatory framework.

LUCD-1	Improved aesthetic quality throughout the Town by aligning the Town’s regulatory framework, development review process, and Town investments and programs towards this goal.
LUCD-2	A regulatory framework that facilitates and moves the community towards its Comprehensive Plan goals in a manner which is transparent, efficient, fair, and effective, while making the best use of South Hadley’s staff and volunteer resources.
LUCD-3	Coordinated actions among Town boards, commissions, and governing bodies including Town Meeting that are consistent with the land use principles and vision statements in this Plan.

Critical Issues: Managing Change Towards Community Goals

The key themes that are stressed throughout this Plan all relate directly to how South Hadley manages its land use environment, and the ongoing process of land use change.

Managing Change towards a Vision

Land use and community design planning is intended to help communities manage land use change and actions on private property in a manner that allows for economic development, meets housing needs, provides for municipal facilities, and is consistent with other community goals such as natural resource conservation. A vital, overarching theme of this plan is the need to manage change towards a vision for South Hadley – a statement of what type of community, with what characteristics, South Hadley desires to be. When visions are articulated, and supported by the community, it becomes much easier to coordinate actions towards achieving an outcome – and much more likely that the necessary, ongoing process of land use change will happen in a way that contributes to the desired future for the Town, rather than detracting from it.

Indeed, substantial concerns were expressed in the Plan development process over the visual quality and overall impact of recent land use change in South Hadley. A strong interest in developing standards and regulations that would guide development in a manner that supports a better visual and environmental quality in the town, and a better overall environment for economic development was expressed by residents, business representatives, and committee members. Vision planning is a major theme of this plan, especially for land use, and appears throughout the recommended actions in the various Plan Chapters.

Ensuring Aesthetic Quality

South Hadley's cultural and economic history has shaped its character. The Town has a rich array of architectural styles, scenic vistas and historic spaces that give the Town its identity. The Town's landmarks and landscapes – mill buildings, historic homes, working landscapes, the Mount Holyoke Range, the Mount Tom Range, the Connecticut River, and the Mount Holyoke College campus – give the community a set of guidelines and cues that can help organize the Town's policies and process for land use planning.

Managing the aesthetic qualities and visual outcomes of land use and development is essential to ensure that change occurring in South Hadley contributes to and enhances the Town's quality. Throughout this Comprehensive Planning process, the community has continually identified the importance of the aesthetic quality of site and building design and maintaining our vistas.



The most fundamental way for the Town to ensure that future projects contribute to the community's vision is through the strategic use of a design review process and standards within its planning and zoning practices. Through the use of standard design review processes and tools such as architectural guidelines, landscaping and site planning standards, or enhanced site plan review, South Hadley can help guide future developments in a manner that is consistent with the vision identified in this Plan.

Implementation of a design review process can function both as a means of preserving community character, and a way to ensure that new development reflects an appropriate and complementary addition to the Town's character. Such a process is critical to the Town's land use and design outcomes - both to have standards for architectural treatment, landscaping, and site planning, and also to have a process for review that works with applicants to improve their aesthetics. The combination of a clear vision statement for the Town's land use and community design, strong planning and zoning foundation, and implementation of a design review process can help guide development in the Town for many generations.

Land Use and Sustainability

The Plan's sustainability goals and principles are tied intrinsically to how and where the community develops. Implementation of these goals and principles will impact, and be impacted, by:

- Resources which are protected.
- The community's reliance on energy and transportation systems.
- Impact of new development on natural systems and infrastructure.

During the development of this Plan, it was noted that many of South Hadley's land use and sustainability issues were related directly to the quantity, quality, and presence - or lack - of landscaping throughout the Town. Ensuring robust and healthy landscaping and vegetation is intrinsic to sustainability. Among many other issues, landscaping issues relate to the need to conserve South Hadley's trees and forests, and to enhance and increase substantially the amount and quality of landscaping in developed areas, particularly the 'gateways' into the Town and new residential neighborhoods. The multiple landscape, environmental, hydrologic, and particularly aesthetic benefits of landscaping make it a pressing need - and excellent opportunity - for South Hadley to improve many aspects of its quality of life through enhanced landscaping programs and standards.

Sustainability principles go beyond landscaping and support "green development". Encouraging revitalization of distressed areas and incorporation of better management of land use promote sustainable development practices. As energy becomes a more significant factor in development decisions, it will be more vital for the community to provide infrastructure support for alternative energy facilities.



South Hadley's Land Use

The development of South Hadley's existing land use patterns have been primarily shaped by three major physical features within the Town (listed in order of prominence):

- The Connecticut River, to the west
- The Mount Holyoke Range, to the north
- The roadway system, which divides the Town into 'quadrants' or districts, each with their own economic, historic and aesthetic character.

As will be discussed in many other sections of the Plan, South Hadley has a significant portion of its land area in conservation or working landscape use, providing multiple benefits to the Town. One such benefit is the continuity of many of its historical landscapes as a result of conservation efforts. Approximately 1,167 acres of land remain in agricultural use. This agricultural land in the Town contributes to its identity, providing an attractive, undeveloped aspect. On the other hand, residential land encompasses approximately 3,127 acres of land, which is more than double the amount of agricultural land in Town.

An examination of the historical land use patterns in South Hadley indicates the gradual shift in land use, from decreasing agricultural lands to increasing residential development. Exhibited more dramatically in recent years, this increase in residential development has raised many concerns about the long-term vision for the Town's land use and will be examined herein. In recent years, this increase in residential development has been more dramatic, particularly in the western and southern portions of the Town. This development continued to increase with fervor into the first few months of 2009, but has since subsided along with the weakened economy.

Economic development is largely dependent upon the Town's land use policies and long-range planning. Development that is guided with a long-term vision and community design principles, such as those identified in this Chapter of the Plan, provide the foundation for organized and balanced economic development. Strategic land use planning can result in a stronger local economy by attracting new businesses to the area, ensuring the continued success and growth of existing businesses and providing new opportunities for development. Similarly, South Hadley's land use also relates strongly to its regional context and its role in the region's economy, as detailed in Chapter 2, Economic Development.

Historical Land Use Trends

From its early agricultural settlement through development of Mount Holyoke College and its emergence as a riverside industrial town, South Hadley's land use pattern has been shaped strongly by its economic history. This continues today as South Hadley is an attractive Town for many who work in the region's businesses, schools and colleges. The Town retains its rural character, even with its convenience to Interstate 91 and regional employment and shopping centers.

Consistent with the experience of other towns in the Pioneer Valley, South Hadley has seen slow but steady erosion in land devoted to active agricultural use since 1970, with a corresponding increase in the amount of land in low- and medium-density residential use.

Table 1-1: Land Use: 1971, 1985, 1999, 2005

South Hadley	Acres:				% of Land Area:		% Change:	
	1971	1985	1999	2005	1971	2005	1971-1985	1985-2005
Agriculture & Natural Lands	8,191	7,732	7,402	7,843	69.3%	66.5%	-3.9%	0.9%
<i>Active Agriculture</i>	1,202	1,058	833	733	10.2%	6.2%	-1.2%	-2.8%
<i>Pasture, Orchard, Nursery</i>	453	369	334	234	3.8%	2.0%	-0.7%	-1.1%
<i>Forest*</i>	6,082	5,855	5,785	6,399	51.5%	54.3%	-1.9%	4.6%
<i>Water</i>	454	449	449	477	3.8%	4.0%	0.0%	0.2%
Mining/Gravel Pit	32	32	59	51	0.3%	0.4%	0.0%	0.2%
Open Land/Power Lines	432	509	393	229	3.7%	1.9%	0.7%	-2.4%
Waste Disposal	7	7	2	20	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%
Recreation/Golf Course	190	199	150	311	1.6%	2.6%	0.1%	0.9%
Residential:	2,467	2,715	3,127	2,729	20.9%	23.1%	2.1%	0.1%
<i>Multi-Family</i>	37	64	137	144	0.3%	1.2%	0.2%	0.7%
<i>Residential Under 1/4 ac</i>	215	219	219	166	1.8%	1.4%	0.0%	-0.4%
<i>Residential 1/4 - 1/2 ac</i>	1,659	1,797	2,054	1,819	14.0%	15.4%	1.2%	0.2%
<i>Residential > 1/2 ac</i>	555	636	717	601	4.7%	5.1%	0.7%	-0.3%
Non-Residential:	498	622	635	606	4.2%	5.1%	1.0%	-0.1%
<i>Commercial</i>	67	81	107	122	0.6%	1.0%	0.1%	0.4%
<i>Industrial</i>	76	106	146	173	0.6%	1.5%	0.3%	0.6%
<i>Institutional</i>	296	376	312	256	2.5%	2.2%	0.7%	-1.0%
<i>Transportation</i>	59	59	70	55	0.5%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Total Land Area*	11,816	11,816	11,767	11,789				

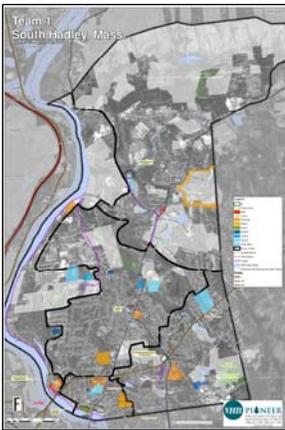
*Data from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission provided November 9, 2009; data for 2005 in table reflect the 21-category classification. *Number disparities reflect changes in methodology and GIS data resources over time.*

Nearly seventy percent (70%) of South Hadley’s land was classified as agricultural, undisturbed vegetation or natural land, or open undeveloped land in 1971 (see Table 1-1). While South Hadley has developed many new housing units, new shopping facilities, and new industrial facilities over the past three decades, two-third’s of South Hadley’s land was still classified as agricultural, undisturbed vegetation or natural land, or open undeveloped land in 2005. This decrease is reflective of the diminished number of farms as noted in the Natural Resources and Open Space & Recreation chapters. Similarly, the four-fold increase in multi-family residential land reflects the increase in multi-family housing as detailed in the Housing chapter.

Developing a Land Use Vision

South Hadley’s residents and officials engaged in three structured workshops/exercises as part of the Plan development process, and each of these exercises helped articulate the overall vision for the Town. A more thorough description of these workshops is provided in the Appendix on Public Involvement.

Exercise #1: Facilitated Workshop on Land Use Features



On February 18, 2009, the South Hadley Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) held a facilitated workshop with Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. to explore the Town’s land use futures through a unique structured format. This format required teams of citizens to consider and make very challenging choices on a set of potential land use futures for a particular area of town. Participants had to choose among a set of hypothetical public and private decisions and investments, each with different implications and trade-offs for the Town. The resulting maps and choices ([see the Workshop Results in the Workshops Appendix](#)) provide an important look at how citizens can work together when making important decisions about South Hadley’s land use policies and public investments.

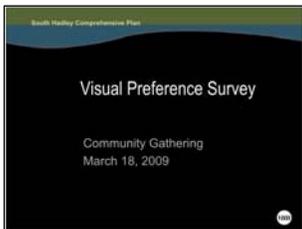
Participants in the workshop represented many of South Hadley’s elected and appointed boards and commissions, each of which has its own area of responsibility for the Town’s land use futures. The participants were divided into five teams, with members of committees distributed among the groups so that different boards and commissions were represented on each team.

The results of this workshop pointed to some of the potential future choices that the community may need to make related to land use:

- **Planning for the loss of traditional industrial uses.** Participants were asked to consider, in a hypothetical situation, whether to use State grant funds to try to retain an industrial employer for a short period of time, or allow the industrial employer to leave and use the same funds to redevelop the property. The teams chose to allow the industrial employer to leave, and to focus on ways to re-use an industrial site for school, residential, or ‘incubator’ business space.
- **Promoting renewable energy or other ‘green economy’ uses.** The teams also were asked to choose whether to re-use a large industrial site for community park land, or an industrial park promoting renewable energy. The teams uniformly supported promoting new types of ‘green economy’ and renewable energy uses, and focusing on improvement of the Town’s existing network of parks and conservation land instead of adding more.

- **Improving aesthetic quality through public investment.** Given options of where and how to spend grant funds on paths, roadways, or other grant projects, all of the teams sought out places and locations to invest in beautification: landscaping, gateway signage and plantings, façade improvements, and removal of dilapidated uses and buildings.
- **Improving existing commercial centers.** Teams focused strongly on strategies and opportunities to improve the quality and function of the Town’s existing commercial plazas, and to limit the encroachment of new commercial uses into residential and transitional land use areas.

Exercise #2: Facilitated Workshop-Visual Preference Survey (VPS)



With the strong interest in visual design quality, an important part of the public process for the Plan was to understand the types of visual characteristics and qualities that are most appealing to South Hadley’s residents. A public gathering meeting was held on March 18th, 2009 in which a “visual preference survey” was conducted. The intent of the visual preference survey was to generate discussion and identify the components that make a visual image negatively or positively received. A PowerPoint presentation served as the vehicle for this exercise while each participant was provided with a handout of each of the slides and, in most cases, was asked to rate each slide on a scale from 1 to 10 according to attractiveness (see the PowerPoint in the Workshops Appendix).

The results of the VPS were strongly indicative of the community’s feelings about visual design and quality. This exercise identified the following as critical components of attractive design in South Hadley:

- Trees
- Landscaping
- Development to Scale
- Architecture with Character
- Sidewalks.

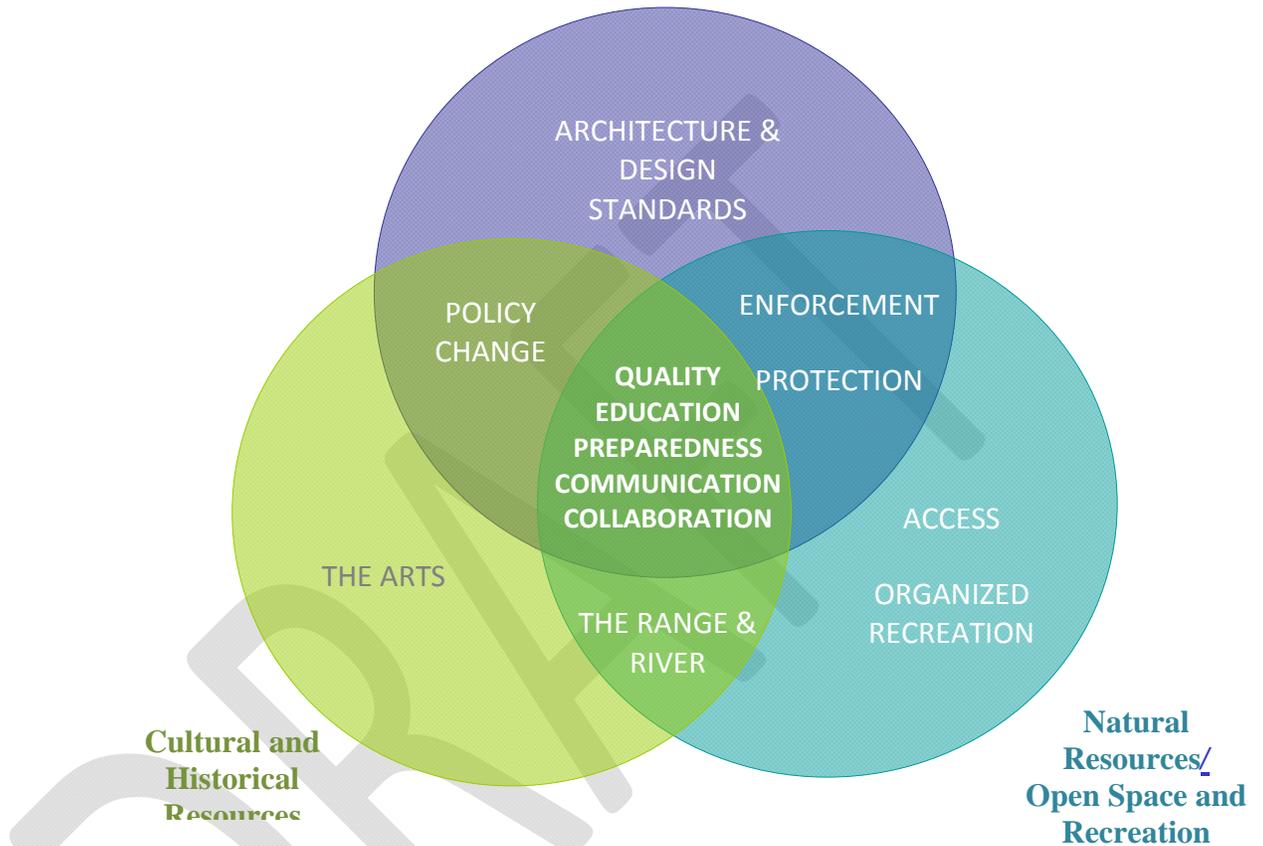
The strength of the VPS exercise provided the community with critical information regarding the desired look and feel of future development in the Town. In planning for future development, provisions will need to be implemented to ensure the aforementioned components remain central to future design.

Land Use District Visions

Managing towards a vision, a major theme of this Plan, is especially important for land use. During a community meeting on April 29, 2009, participants worked on the “vision qualities” in four topic areas: Cultural and Historical Resources; Open

Space and Recreation; Natural Resources; and Land Use and Community Design. They were asked to describe what they envisioned as the best future qualities for these topic areas. As with the Visual Preference Survey, the outcome of the community gathering was very strong and centered on consistent themes. These themes, and the overlapping issues, are shown in the graphic below.

Land Use and Community Design



Specific concerns emerging from this forum and relating directly to this Chapter, included the following:

- The Town's main thoroughfares (particularly the portion of Route 116 from the Falls to Mosier and Brainerd Streets) are in serious need of beautification, greenery, and safe, pedestrian-friendly walkways.
- The future development of automobile related services should be carefully regulated due to their current saturation as well as the potential for adverse effects of this land use type on its surroundings and the environment.
- Spot zoning undermines a neighborhood and the community's character.
- Future development that is consistent with the Town's vision to maintain its identity will also depend largely on available utilities (e.g. sewer, water, etc.). In keeping with the desired "rural, New England character" of the Town, it

was suggested that existing public services not be extended into environmentally sensitive and unique areas where they do not currently exist. This will help guide and limit the impact of future development on the surrounding environment.

Land Use Area Vision Statements

Through the public engagement process, research, and discussions involved in this Plan, a set of vision statements was developed covering each of South Hadley's greater land use districts or areas.

The purpose of these vision statements is to articulate a desired future outcome for each area, as a guiding framework for the many policies, regulations, investments, and public and private decisions that shape the land use character of an area.

These vision statements also act as the guiding statements for upcoming evaluations of the Town's zoning bylaw, to help increase consistency between this Plan and the regulations that are instrumental to its implementation. The following provides a description of each of the land use areas, as well as an outline of its major challenges.

South Hadley Falls

The South Hadley Falls area consists of a variety of land uses, including many municipal buildings, such as Town Hall, Police Department, SHELD, and the Library. Industrial and commercial establishments line the main streets in the Falls, with residential land uses mixed in. The density of residential in this area varies, from high density Mill style housing to low density, single-family housing. The Falls serves as one of the gateways into Town and is a critical component of South Hadley's history. Particular characteristics and considerations for this area include:

- The Falls serves as a visible gateway to the Town, and, as such, should be given priority funding for aesthetic improvements. Funding, through grants or the development of a special fund, should aim to assist property owners with maintenance and landscaping as well as contribute to the general beautification of the area.
- Consistent with Town-wide revitalization strategies, the main corridors of the Falls area should consist of mixed-use development whenever possible. New development should be diverse and generally consist of a mixture of office space, retail and residential, with the support of a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Easy and convenient access to the waterfront in the Falls should be a high priority. This will be made possible with the development of the riverfront

parks and could also be achieved with the rehabilitation and reuse of vacant, older mill buildings.

- The revitalization of the Falls should be strongly connected to the future riverfront parks as it will become a new destination that attracts new foot traffic to the Falls. When a bike/walking/hiking path is developed to connect Chicopee, Holyoke, and Amherst, it too should be connected with the Riverfront Park.
- The creation of an Economic Development Committee for the Falls can help guide the vision for this area. This committee can help identify existing and future target areas for economic development and seek to attract new developers to the area.
- While architectural diversity is highly valued, development immediately adjacent to a highly valued landmark or historical place should complement the existing character of that place in order to help preserve the historic character of the Falls.
- A design review process should encourage and provide assistance with on-site improvements to pedestrian facilities, landscaping, and aesthetics.

Route 47, Hadley Line to Town Common

Route 47, from the Hadley Line to the Town Common, consists primarily of single-family residences and farmland with patches of commercial development. A cluster of businesses is concentrated in the Village Commons and immediately surrounding area. Reflecting its predominately rural and scenic character, Route 47 has been designated a Scenic Byway by the Federal government through South Hadley and Hadley.

The character of this corridor should remain in keeping with its current pattern of locating retail/professional businesses in the Village Commons and Town Common area, with the rest remaining rural with scenic vistas and single-family residences. Particular characteristics and considerations relevant to this corridor include:

- North of the Village Commons area, this corridor is predominately rural with residential development occurring on one parcels of an acre or more and several large farm tracts including the Lizotte and Adams farms.
- This corridor plays a significant role in the scenic and rural identity of the Town and the preservation of this role is challenging, yet critical for the Town's identity.
- This corridor is highly fragmented, with regards to ownership as well as land use which poses a threat to the continuity of its character.



- The gravel pit operation in this area (which is considered grandfathered) should be considered an exception, rather than a predominant feature of this neighborhood.
- Provisions should be made for the reuse and restoration of the old Center School, a unique historic building.
- The creation of a design review process, with oversight along this corridor, can help preserve the scenic significance and rural identity of this corridor in light of future development.

Route 116, Amherst Line to Town Common

Route 116, from the Amherst Line to the Town Common, consists of a mix of land uses with historical properties and structures located nearer to the Town Common and predominately single-family residences to the north. Particular characteristics and considerations relevant to this corridor include:

- Though limited, the commercial development along this corridor is not consistent with the dominant residential and historical nature of the corridor and does not complement neighborhood character.
- The character and intensity of development along this corridor has maintained open spaces and significant views of the Mount Holyoke Range.
- Several gravel pits are located along the north side of the Amherst Road portion of the corridor opposite the town of Granby. While only the largest of these operations predates the Zoning Bylaw, both operations are considered nonconforming (but grandfathered) since the Zoning Bylaw has been amended since the smaller operation was originally permitted. Such operations, similar to the smaller commercial businesses, should be considered exceptions, and contrary, to the corridor's dominant character.
- Future development of the Amherst Road portion of this corridor should be limited to residential uses, consistent with existing trends.
- Future development of the Woodbridge Street portion of this corridor (from Amherst Road to the Town Common) should complement the surrounding architecture and style.
- Implementation of a design review process, with jurisdiction over this corridor, can help retain this historical and residential character of the Town.



Route 116, Town Common to Mosier/Brainerd Streets

Route 116, from the Town Common to Mosier/Brainerd Streets, consists of a variety of land uses. The majority of this area is institutional, housing a sizable portion of Mount Holyoke College. Additionally, this area is also home to residential, commercial and retail facilities. Throughout this planning process, this section of Route 116 has been continually identified as having high architectural integrity, historical significance and aesthetic value. Particular characteristics and considerations relevant to this corridor include:

- The retention of Town character, particularly in this area, is extremely important. Key components include the preservation of residential properties, existing densities, and architectural character.
- Encouraging the College to pursue development that is architecturally consistent, in its proportions and features, with the historic buildings and patterns that front College Street/Route 116.
- Implementing a design review process in this area can help ensure that its unique character and architectural tradition is preserved in all developments or redevelopments.

Route 116, Mosier/Brainerd Streets to Cumberland Farms

Route 116 from Mosier/Brainerd Streets to Cumberland Farms consists of residential development with intermittent commercial development. Particular characteristics and considerations relevant to this corridor include:

- Maintain this area's predominantly residential character, with businesses of a professional nature (versus retail).
- Conversion of abandoned businesses and isolated commercial properties to uses compatible with surrounding uses.
- In areas zoned as a Business A-1, Business A, and Business B districts many uses only require site plan review; however, consideration should be given to whether this requirement should be revised to require that more business uses be subject to the Special Permit process.

Route 116, Cumberland Farms to Route 33/Route 116 Intersection

Route 116 from the Cumberland Farms to the intersection of Route 116 and Route 33 (inclusive of all four corners) is a commercial center with a few residences interspersed. Particular characteristics and considerations relevant to this corridor include:



- The Big Y Shopping Center is the dominant commercial center in this corridor. However, it has underutilized spaces and should be examined as to possible changes in the uses of the site. In addition to retail, this shopping center could also include mixed use development of residences and office space to enhance pedestrian traffic similar in concept to the Village Commons. Careful planning and design would be essential to making it attractive for investment.
- Updating of the Big Y Shopping Center's site amenities and design should make the site more pedestrian-friendly by incorporating more green space, landscaping, walkability and connectivity and less of an expansive asphalt character would offer substantial benefits. Enhanced signage and lighting could also reduce light glare and light trespass.
- Planning for the redevelopment of this key commercial center should be undertaken as part of a broader and focused examination of each of the community's commercial focus areas in a proactive manner as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.
- Given the central location of this commercial center, the addition of a small open space area conducive to small gatherings should be encouraged.
- Although currently permitted under the Zoning Bylaw, drive-through businesses should be discouraged due to the conflicting goal of making this area more walkable and pedestrian-friendly.

Route 116, Route 33 to Route 202

Route 116 from Route 33 to Route 202 is a mixed-use corridor with residential and commercial properties, a horse farm, several conservation areas, and the high school. Particular characteristics and considerations relevant to this corridor include:

- As there have been a number of single-parcel zoning amendments in this area, the effect is a hodgepodge of commercial and residential properties. Careful attention should be made to ensure that the many areas that were previously spot-zoned from residential to business do not encroach upon neighboring residential lands. Of particular concern is that these isolated commercial zoning actions do not serve as the rational basis for additional zone changes creeping into the adjoining residential neighborhoods.
- Maintain this area as predominantly residential with businesses of a professional nature (versus retail). Enhancements to the aesthetic quality of the commercial properties should be made with the help and guidance of a design review process.



- Encourage adaptive reuse of the existing structures when converting residential properties to a professional business or other nonresidential use.
- Aspects of community design standards such as the maintenance of visual character through setbacks, signage and type of structure should be prioritized.
- Given the small size of most of the individually-owned parcels in this corridor, it is vital to insure that the scale of development is compatible with the surrounding areas.

Route 202, South of Route 33 to Connecticut River

Route 202 south of the intersection of Route 33 is an exclusively residential area. Particular challenges facing this corridor include:

- Single-family homes dominate the character of this portion of Route 202 although some other residential uses abut or access this corridor. As such, lower density residential development should be prioritized over high-density development.
- New development should be consistent with the existing character of the neighborhood in terms of the scale of the residential structures, provision of open space, etc.
- Significant open/green space should be required for higher density developments to compensate for the greater intensity of the housing.

Route 202, Route 33 to Granby Town Line

Route 202 from the Route 33 intersection to the Granby Town Line is a mixture of residential and commercial properties with some “institutional” uses. Particular challenges facing this corridor include:

- Generally, this area transitions from residential near Route 33 and becomes mixed with commercial as the corridor moves north. Maintaining mixed use (developing both residential and commercial properties) is preferable. However, for the commercial section(s), as stated for all other commercial areas in Town, there should be continuous efforts as owners renovate or change the property to make this thoroughfare more green and walkable, with attractive landscaping, signage, pedestrian features, and less prominent parking. A design review process would facilitate this.

- As noted for other areas with commercial features, mixed-use development should be promoted wherever possible using the flexible development method (or a similar strategy). From the Route 202/33 intersection north, more dense multi-family housing developments should be considered provided the traffic impacts associated with such a development have been clearly outlined and mitigation measures have been put in place. In this context, multi-family housing may be developed using the flexible development method (or similar strategy) that prioritizes usable open space, greenery, landscaping, walkability and overall visual appeal.
- The Route 33/Route 202 intersection is a key commercial focus area for the community. As the School Building Committee's plans to develop a new elementary school move towards fruition, the likelihood increases that the Plains School property could be redeveloped and expand this commercial focus area. Planning for the redevelopment of this area should be undertaken as part of a broader and focused examination of each of the community's commercial focus areas in a proactive manner as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

Route 33, from Route 202 to the Chicopee Line

Route 33 from Route 202 to the Chicopee Line is a mixture of residential, retail, and commercial land uses. This area is transitional between the more intense commercial uses in Chicopee and the more residential character which dominates Lyman Street north of Route 202. Particular characteristics and considerations relevant to this corridor include:

- Standards should be developed so that changes to the South Hadley Square Shopping Center (Big Y complex on Willimansett St.) make the plaza more green, landscaped and safe for pedestrians. Ideally, any changes would be subject to a design review process that encouraged improved and creative design, landscaping, layouts, façade treatments, and signage that promotes walking and create common green space. Any new development, whether mixed-use or a single-use large retailer, should be done with these principles in mind.
- To further the "pedestrian friendly" development of the South Hadley Square Shopping Center, businesses that rely heavily on "quick in and out" vehicular traffic in a manner which impairs the pedestrian flows should be discouraged.
- Efforts should be made to connect the South Hadley Square Shopping Center with the Shadowbrook Estates development and Buttery Brook Park. The entire area should be safe, walkable and connected.



- Properties on Route 33 that are subject to the professional business permit process should follow the same practice as described above. Over time, these properties should be beautified, restored, landscaped and made more walkable with attractive signage and more discreet parking. A design review process should be employed.
- Encourage adaptive reuse of the existing structures when converting residential properties to a professional business or other nonresidential use.
- As part of the mixed-use component, denser affordable/ multi-family housing could be developed via the flexible development method (or a similar strategy) in and near this complex.
- The site of the state highway maintenance facility located near the Big Y shopping complex is considered a key site in the community's economic development strategy. As discussed in Chapter 2, Economic Development, the state highway maintenance facility should be moved and the site redeveloped, in conjunction with the further development of the Big Y Shopping Center and the adjoining undeveloped commercial properties.
- Planning for the development/redevelopment of this commercial focus area should be undertaken as part of the strategic planning process proposed for the community's five commercial focus areas.
- The entryway from Chicopee should be visually improved with new signage, landscaping, lighting, and streetscape treatments to make it more welcoming.

Alvord Street

The area of South Hadley centered along the Alvord Street corridor has dramatic scenic views of the remaining agricultural landscape in Town as well as an eclectic mix of development. In addition to farms (some active, some dormant) and single-family homes, this area also encompasses The Ledges Golf Course, Pioneer Valley Performing Arts (PVPA) School, Brunelle's Marina, large single-family home subdivisions, and a clustered condominium development. Particular characteristics and considerations relevant to this corridor include:

- Given the diminishing rural landscape and vistas left in town, it is recommended that the preservation of the agricultural character of this neighborhood be of the highest priority. Owners of agricultural and larger parcel properties should be assisted financially by a network of supports, land trusts, etc. to ensure that this is achieved. Available conservation funds should be actively pursued for this corridor.



- As some farms are, and have been, inactive for some time, explore what assistance from state and federal sources, as well as non-profit organizations such as Community Supported Agriculture groups and the Food Center of Western Massachusetts, could be leveraged if the farm were to become active again. Such incentives should be widely publicized. Reestablishing working farms in the community would be a major step toward achieving the Town's sustainability-related, land use, and open space goals.
- To maintain the rural character and vistas, retention of open space should be strongly encouraged and facilitated. Should development occur in this corridor, associated open space should be of a character and scope which maintains viable agricultural usage.
- As noted in the Economic Development Chapter, this corridor is home to many recreational uses including the Ledges Golf Course, Brunelle's Marina, Mount Holyoke College Boathouse, McCray's Farm which operates a mini-golf facility, and a horse farm

Pearl Street

The land and corridor along Pearl Street is similar to Alvord Street in that it has many dramatic vistas and a rural landscape, but differs in its development pattern. Pearl Street has maintained a residential development pattern that has not changed much since the houses were first constructed. It consists of swaths of farmland with single-family homes situated on larger plots of land.

Like Alvord Street, given the diminishment the scenic and rural landscape (not only in town but in the Pioneer Valley overall), preservation of this area's rural visual and land use character should be a top priority. Again, however, preservation should not occur without support for residents – funding and incentives should be pursued on all fronts to ensure that this can occur for the benefit of the community. Particular characteristics and considerations relevant to this corridor include:

- Given the diminishing rural landscape and vistas left in town, it is recommended that the preservation of the agricultural character of this neighborhood be of the highest priority. Owners of agricultural and larger parcel properties should be assisted financially by a network of supports, land trust, etc. to ensure that this is achieved. Available conservation funds should be actively pursued for this corridor.
- As some farms are (and have been) inactive for some time, explore what assistance from state and federal sources, as well as non-profit organizations such as Community Supported Agriculture groups and the Food Center of Western Massachusetts, could be leveraged if the farm were to become active again. Such incentives should be widely publicized. Reestablishing working



farms in the community would be a major step toward achieving the Town's sustainability-related, land use, and open space goals.

- To maintain the rural character and vistas, retention of open space should be strongly encouraged and facilitated. Should development occur in this corridor, associated open space should be of a character and scope which maintains viable agricultural usage.

Community-Wide Development Considerations

Several significant land use and community design issues emerged which have community-wide implications. These issues, which were touched upon in the analysis of each corridor, are discussed below.

Long-Range, Strategic Planning for Commercial Nodes

Commercial centers serve and impact a community in a variety of ways. While they most immediately provide services for community residents, such centers also attract customers from other communities which increases the consumer draw of the community. These centers also provide job opportunities and enhance the community's tax base. Since many people are introduced to the community through shopping and/or employment visits, the aesthetic and functional quality of a community's commercial centers are vital in expressing a community's character. Similarly, local commercial centers of insufficient aesthetic and/or functional quality may encourage local residents to shop in other communities.

South Hadley has several centers of commercial activity:

- Route 116 @ Route 47 (focused on, but not solely occupied by, the Village Commons)
- Route 116 @ Route 33 (focused on, but not solely occupied by, the Big Y Shopping Center)
- Route 202 @ Route 33 (focused on, but not solely occupied by, the Plains Elementary School site)
- Route 33 south of Route 202 to the Chicopee City Limit (focused on, but not solely occupied by, South Hadley Square Shopping Center)
- South Hadley Falls

The first area, focused on The Village Commons, could benefit from development of a community consensus as to the character of its further development. The last four of these areas are either underdeveloped or could benefit from redevelopment.

As the community grows and develops, the character in which these areas develop will have profound and lasting implications for the town as a whole, but particularly upon the southern portion of the town. Due to their significance in the community, a larger planning vision should prevail in these areas. Rather than develop these critical areas in a piecemeal fashion in response to a given development proposal, the



town (officials and residents) can take a proactive role in discussing and creating desired development scenarios around the physical space of these areas.

To ensure that these areas are given intense consideration and focused planning efforts, the Community and Economic Development Commission should create committees made up of residents, businesses and town officials should be formed to create the community's desired development scenarios for each of these areas. Since each area is unique and its development affects different residents and property owners, separate committees should be created for each of the identified areas. Each committee should be comprised of representatives of the immediately affected residents and property owners as well as representatives of the community at large. Once the desired development scenario is established including Town Meeting endorsement, an Economic Development Coordinator, working with the Town Planner, Planning Board, Development Review Team, and the Selectboard, can work with the property owners to seek out viable, prospective developers to implement the desired development scenarios.

Aesthetic Quality of New Developments & Redevelopment

Throughout the discussions regarding South Hadley's development, concerns have been expressed relating to the aesthetic quality of new developments. Suggestions have been made that many of these developments have an "unappealing architectural appearance", lack sufficient landscaping, conflict with the surrounding architectural scale and styles, are out of scale (building mass is too big when compared to the existing neighborhood), and generally are not in keeping with South Hadley's preferred historical and cultural character. This last point may be the most significant when considering South Hadley's planning for its future and the Comprehensive Plan's Vision.

As development and redevelopment continues to occur in different parts of the community, the more that such developments are copied from other communities, the greater the likelihood that South Hadley will lose its own "sense of place" – those characteristics which are unique to South Hadley (even to western Massachusetts). While it is unrealistic and unreasonable to hold that all new developments are to be of a singular style to maintain South Hadley's character, it is vital that new developments be of a style and character which is compatible and consistent with the neighborhood or corridor in which the development is occurring.

Creation of design standards for new developments and redevelopment projects needs to be based on an examination of the existing characteristics and styles which dominate South Hadley's principal neighborhoods and corridors. This examination needs to also identify the characteristics which need improvements/refinements – such as landscaping, parking, etc. Implementation of the community standards should be through enactment of a formal Design Review Bylaw.

Compatibility of "Exempt Uses" in Residential Neighborhoods



Massachusetts General Law exempts several uses from restriction as to location under zoning bylaws. Uses exempt from zoning include nonprofit "educational" uses, churches, group homes, certain classes of day care centers, agricultural uses over 5 acres. These uses are no less intrusive to residential neighborhoods than commercial establishments. Unfortunately, some of these uses have been developed or recently expanded in South Hadley in the middle of residential areas. While the Town cannot (and should not) prohibit location of such uses and can only impose "reasonable regulations" on these uses under zoning, the Town needs to insure that all uses conform to similar standards for compatible design, landscaping, signage, and lighting.

"Spot" Zoning

What is "spot" zoning? There is not a single, uniform definition of what constitutes "spot" zoning. However, it generally involves the application of a zoning classification to a particular parcel of land which is different from that of all of the surrounding parcels and is not in keeping with the community's Plan. The size of the subject parcel relative to the surrounding parcels can impact whether a particular zoning action is considered to be "spot" zoning.

"Spot" zoning is generally considered illegal and unsupported by courts. More significantly, such zoning undermines the credibility of the community's comprehensive planning efforts. It can set the basis for further zoning actions which are inconsistent with the public interest in advancing sound planning practices.

Within South Hadley, there are numerous instances of "spot" zoning having been approved. Of particular concern are those locations on Newton Street and College Street. But, other locations on Route 116, Route 47, Route 33, and Route 202 also raise concerns. In many instances, it appears that the "spot" zoning was taken to substantiate a pre-existing nonconforming use. Generally, these parcels are quite small – less than half an acre – although a few parcels are an acre or more. While the intent of Town Meeting was well meaning (trying to accommodate an existing business), this approach undermines the long-term goal of the community's Plan which would be to phase out the nonconforming uses to the extent permitted by statute. Town Meeting enacted other measures (such as the Professional Business Special Permit, Bed & Breakfast Special Permit) to allow limited nonresidential use of the small, "commercial" parcels on many of these major roadways.

While in its' purest sense, "spot" zoning is achieved through legislative means (i.e., Town Meeting approval of a zoning map amendment), "spot" zoning can also inadvertently occur through the approval of Special Permits which allow uses to develop which are not in keeping with the Zoning Bylaw's intent. The Planning Board, as Special Permit Granting Authority, is entrusted with the authority and power to ensure that such actions do not occur. To better ensure that such effects do not occur, the Planning Board should utilize the descriptions of the various corridors in considering whether or not a proposed Special Permit is in keeping with the character of the neighborhood.

Creation of this new Plan sets the stage for the community to again ensure that "spot" zoning does not occur by either Town Meeting or Planning Board actions.



This Plan should be the basis for future Town Meeting and Planning Board decisions without prior actions being given the status of “precedent” since they preceded development of this new Comprehensive Plan.

Character and Compatibility of Multi-family developments

A viable housing market and economic development strategy depends partly on having a diverse housing supply. This diverse housing supply requires a balancing of the different forms and densities of housing; but also requires that the newer housing still conform to the character of the neighborhood and be done in a manner which is compatible with the community’s goals and objectives. Character of a neighborhood is not defined merely as the type of housing (i.e., single-family, duplex, etc.) as many of South Hadley’s neighborhoods, particularly older neighborhoods, have several types of housing. Rather, neighborhood character is also defined by the scale of the buildings, extent of greenery, proportion devoted to impervious surfaces, etc.

In recent years, an increasing share of the new developments **has** been in the form of multi-family housing. While the density of the multi-family developments approved during recent years have generally been lower than was approved previously, they are often viewed as being out of character by abutters. Developers have often sought to market these dwellings to persons in the 55 years old and over age group by providing one-level condominiums, limited recreational features, and 1 or 2-vehicle garages. Accordingly, these newer developments appear to have greater degrees of impervious surfaces and less landscaping than characterized many of the earlier developments.

As has characterized much of the single-family residential development over the past 10 years, these multi-family developments have generally been located or proposed in areas which are dominated by single-family dwellings. This “in-fill” development trend raises concerns about the compatibility of the differing housing types. While they are not inherently incompatible, the burden is on the newer developments to integrate into the fabric of the neighborhood. Such integration can be achieved through a conscious effort on the part of the development’s designer by such means as the architectural style and scale of the buildings, buffering, screening, and landscaping.

Buffers between multi-family developments and surrounding single-family neighborhoods can significantly mitigate the perceived impacts of the differing housing types. Current regulations do not provide standards or guidance for the maintenance or development of such buffers. The Planning Board has frequently imposed buffering requirements with differing degrees of success, but more guidance would benefit the development design process.

Diversification of multi-family housing could also benefit the extent to which such housing is compatible with the existing neighborhoods and surrounding buildings. Instead of demolition of existing older structures, large Victorian housing could be converted into multiple dwellings. Another example could be smaller-scale apartment buildings that have architectural appeal and historic charm. In cases of larger, more dense development, the general guiding criteria should be directed at promoting open and usable space, creating common areas, preserving architectural



integrity, keeping existing trees and greenery, providing adequate buffers to adjacent residential uses, creating development concentration in areas that are consistent with respect to housing types and densities in the surrounding area, and supporting public transportation nodes.

The Land Use Review and Regulatory Process

The overwhelming majority of land use decision-making occurs at the Town level in the context of an application by a private party – or, very occasionally, a public agency – for a permit to change the use of land or a building. Examining the structure of the Town’s development review process, and the incentives and disincentives created by the bylaws in effect, is perhaps the single most important step in moving towards better land use and visual design outcomes over time as land use change occurs. This section discusses current issues both with the review process, and the zoning map and bylaws.

South Hadley’s Development Review Process

South Hadley’s governmental structures formally divided authority over the development review process among various bodies: each of the Fire Districts and their Water Departments, Town Meeting, Board of Health, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Building Commissioner, Town Engineer, Department of Public Works Superintendent, and the Electric Light Department. This division of authority and ability to create separate rules and regulations creates the potential for fragmented and contradictory decision-making. To address this, several years ago, the Town Administrator created an informal Development Review Team, consisting of 11 members. This body generally reviews and coordinates development activities, but is limited in its jurisdiction and its effect on the visual outcome of new development.

Throughout the Comprehensive Plan development process, concern has been expressed regarding the ultimate effect of South Hadley’s development review process under current bylaws and regulations. South Hadley’s regulatory structure is sometimes described as being fragmented or out of step with current practices and community concerns. There is a sense among many participants in the process, reflecting a variety of interests, that the Zoning Bylaw, Subdivision Regulations, and other regulatory tools are not adequate to address current concerns or meet future development issues or pressures.

Of primary concern is the inability of the Zoning Bylaw to integrate new development effectively with the historical character and fabric of neighborhoods and corridors. Repeatedly, residents and officials expressed a sense that new development often ended up seeming out of character and out of context with the perceived density, visual features, and neighborhood character of well-established neighborhoods. When discussed further, this was often found to be an issue of:



- *site layouts and scale*, which often were substantially different from those of adjoining, established areas
- *lack of landscaping*, a consistent theme, which made newly-developed areas as well as many commercial properties stand out in visual contrast to South Hadley’s “treescape”
- *architectural character*, as many new projects did not effectively incorporate many of the traditional architectural “cues” found in much of South Hadley such as the fenestration, materials, or proportions characteristic of historical mill or residential buildings.

There is a need to evaluate the entire zoning scheme covering South Hadley. Strategic changes to current zoning can help guide future development in a direction consistent with the Town’s vision and also open up new opportunities for growth in areas previously inaccessible to certain types of developments, and also can maximize utility of existing spaces.

The sense from the community is that the Town’s Planning Board, and other commissions and boards, would benefit from updated regulations that will support a greater emphasis on the desired character of South Hadley’s land use areas. The need for a thorough update, with a focus on these key visual and environmental design outcomes, is highlighted throughout this chapter and indeed the entire Plan.

As the Town moves towards a more vision-oriented approach to development management, coordination among Town bodies and commissions on development review will be critical. Formalization of the Development Review Team and expansion of its role in the pre-permitting processes could aid in addressing this need for a coordinated approach to development permit review and development management.

Given the Plan’s emphasis on the importance of landscaping and historic working landscapes in critical areas, the Town must also address greater involvement of the Conservation Commission and the role of the Tree Warden on relevant applications.

Initiating Design Review

A design review process generally involves an assessment of a project’s consistency and compliance with the Town’s stated goals and vision that are established in Town documents, including this Plan. Such a tool is fundamental to improving the Town’s land use and visual design outcome – both to have standards for architectural treatment, landscaping, site planning, and also to have a process for review that works with applicants to improve the visual outcomes.

A design review process is managed by a Design Review Board which makes decisions/recommendations on projects based on the community’s design standards. Implementing design standards, however, requires thought and care both with respect to the content and reach of the regulations, and the form that a review body will take.



South Hadley does not presently have a design review process. While various bodies in the development permitting process consider differing aspects of design standards, the community has not developed nor adopted design standards nor established a formal design review process. Implementation of such a process is vital to achieving the goals and objectives of this Plan.

Numerous questions are especially important for South Hadley to consider and answer prior to developing a Design Review process:

- ***What form will a review body take?*** There are many models, whether within the Pioneer Valley and nationally, for a good design review process. This body could range from a subcommittee of the Planning Board to a fully independent, appointed committee with regulatory authority that absorbs some of the review functions currently performed by existing boards and commissions.
- ***What level of training or expertise will be required*** for participation in this review body? Some communities require a professional design background for those who are on it, and others find that lay members with a variety of perspectives can implement a program effectively.
- ***How are the Design Review Standards to be developed?*** These standards are the essence of the design review process. They typically begin with a thorough, objective assessment of the area's design characteristics.
- ***What resources will be needed for implementation?*** The Town must carefully work through the process of implementation, including an assessment of staff resources, being cautious about what locations are initially included, and the stringency of the standards that are developed.
- ***What role will the historic commission play in the design review process?*** The Design Review process can greatly aid in the management of the town's historical resources.
- ***How will a Design Review Board relate to the Development Review Team functions?*** Decisions of individual departments and boards impact the design of developments. It is vital that the infrastructure designs be compatible with the physical and environmental design of the development.

Implementation of a more extensive design review process could also help the Town substantially in moving towards its desired future vision. While zoning dictates the type of development which may occur on a particular site, and its allowable bulk relative to the size of the site, an efficient design review process can help guide the end result, the look, the feel and the presentation of a development.

Enforcement

Development and adoption of bylaws and regulations is merely one part of managing the development process. Without consistent enforcement of the bylaws and regulations, their adoption has little meaning or benefit to the community. There has been voiced frequent concern about the level of current enforcement efforts. Many violations occur simply due to a lack of knowledge as to what are the bylaw and regulation requirements.

Enforcement of existing regulations is generally undertaken on a “complaint” basis. The route for enforcement varies depending on the nature of the regulation or bylaw involved. For example, under Massachusetts General Law, the Building Commission is the Zoning Enforcement Officer. Since conditions of Special Permits are viewed as being part of the Zoning Bylaw, enforcement of such conditions **is** generally the responsibility of the Building Commissioner acting as the Zoning Enforcement Officer. Additionally, the diverse and “lean” structure of the community’s government adds to the “maze” of the enforcement process. This structure makes the “transparency” of the enforcement process more challenging and difficult.

Thus, another area of land use regulation that arose in the public process concerned enforcement of South Hadley’s existing and future bylaws. Particularly in areas where residential uses abut commercial and other non-residential uses, there is a strong interest in seeing the Town take a stronger role in ensuring that enforcement actions are taken regularly. Enforcement ultimately is a crucial component of ensuring that any bylaw implements the provisions and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

To enhance enforcement of existing and future bylaws and regulations, the community could formalize the role of the Development Review Team while also increasing the resources available for code enforcement. Use of the Town’s website for reporting of alleged code violations and for providing a community report on enforcement actions taken could increase the process’ transparency while also increasing the awareness as to what the various codes and bylaws require.

Land Use and Community Design Goals and Recommendations

The Land Use and Community Design goals are closely interrelated and mostly pertain to the need to evaluate and update the ordinances and bylaws that form South Hadley’s regulatory framework.



Land Use Goals

LUCD-1	Improved aesthetic quality throughout the Town by aligning the Town’s regulatory framework, development review process, and Town investments and programs towards this goal.
LUCD-2	A regulatory framework that facilitates and moves the community towards its Comprehensive Plan goals in a manner which is transparent, efficient, fair, and effective, while making the best use of South Hadley’s staff and volunteer resources.
LUCD-3	Coordinated actions among Town boards, commissions, and governing bodies including Town Meeting that are consistent with the land use principles and vision statements in this Plan.

LUCD-1 Improved aesthetic quality throughout the Town, by aligning the Town's regulatory framework, development review process, and Town investments and programs towards this goal.

Objective 1-1: Adopt a set of policies and bylaws that are consistent and updated to reflect the goals of the Town of South Hadley.

Recommended Action 1-1-1: As a priority recommendation of this Plan, develop, adopt, and implement a set of design standards that will lead to improvements in the Town’s aesthetic quality, supporting its economic development and cultural resources goals. Given the importance of this goal to shaping the entire Land Use Chapter, this recommendation is fundamental to shaping all of the other recommended actions as well.

Recommended Action 1-1-2: Develop clear standards to manage multi-family development more effectively through the special permit process.

Recommended Action 1-1-3: Adopt bylaws and provisions that provide for the mandatory allocation of open space, with preferential protection of agricultural lands and trees.

Recommended Action 1-1-4: In conjunction with the Open Space and Cultural & Historical Resources goals of this Plan, review the zoning bylaw and map to prevent high-intensity development of those environmentally or visually sensitive lands that are currently within the Residence A-1, Residence A-2 and Agricultural districts.

Recommended Action 1-1-5: Develop and adopt landscape design standards and bylaw.

Recommended Action 1-1-6: Establish standards that reduce the location and visibility of parking areas in view of the public right-of-way, and maximize both landscaping and pedestrian facilities along public roads.

Recommended Action 1-1-7: Require underground utilities in all new developments and road extensions.



Objective 1-2: An integrated investment strategy to enhance the community's streetscape.

Recommended Action 1-2-1: Consistent with the recommendations in other chapters of this plan (including Economic Development, Open Space & Recreation, and Municipal Facilities), develop and adopt a sidewalk improvement program.

Recommended Action 1-2-2: Work with private and public utilities to relocate above-ground utilities to underground.

Recommended Action 1-2-3: Enhance the community's streetscape by establishing a streetscape beautification program.

Recommended Action 1-2-4: Coordinate the utility improvement programs of the Fire Districts' Water Departments, SHELD, the Town, and private utilities to enhance the streetscape along major roadways while sharing the cost for such enhancements.

Recommended Action 1-2-5: Identify and assess corridors for a comprehensive streetscape Improvement Strategy.

Objective 1-3: Develop the commercial focus areas consistent with community goals and objectives and active community/property owner involvement.

Recommended Action 1-3-1: Working with residents and property owners develop a concept plan for development/redevelopment of the commercial focus areas.

Recommended Action 1-3-2: As part of the concept plans, develop strategies for linking housing and commercial development of these areas.

LUCD-2 A regulatory framework that facilitates and moves the community towards its Comprehensive Plan goals in a manner which is transparent, efficient, fair, and effective, while making the best use of South Hadley's staff and volunteer resources.

Objective 2-1: Prepare and adopt an updated Zoning Bylaw, Subdivision Regulations, and general bylaw (Design Review Standards, Landscape Standards, Sign Regulations, etc.) that draw on the experience and successes of comparable towns for best practices of community land use and design management.

Recommended Action 2-1-1: Hire a planning and zoning consultant to update the Town's Zoning Bylaw.

Recommended Action 2-1-2: Develop Special Permit standards that will provide greater clarity in defining whether applications meet the standards for approval.

Recommended Action 2-1-3: Develop new zoning standards that facilitate and encourage mixed-use residential projects, particularly in South Hadley Falls and other commercial focus areas.

Recommended Action 2-1-4: Develop and adopt amendments to the Zoning Bylaw which provide purpose statements for each zoning district that relate to the Comprehensive Plan goals.



Recommended Action 2-1-5: Develop and adopt well-articulated special permit standards that further the purpose statements for each zoning district.

Recommended Action 2-1-6: Review and revise requirements for submittal of plans required for various permits to reflect Goals, Objectives, and Recommended Actions in this Plan.

Recommended Action 2-1-7: Develop new standards for “Lot Coverage” to incorporate limits on the total extent allowed for impervious surfaces.

Objective 2-2: Ensure that development taking place in the short-term (prior to adoption of new/revised regulatory tools) do not compromise Plan goals.

Recommended Action 2-2-1: The Planning Board shall give priority consideration to the recommendations of the Plan with respect to new development (and redevelopment) in the Residence A-1, Residence A-2, Residence B, Residence C and Agricultural Districts.

Recommended Action 2-2-2: “Flexible development” or similar methods should be strongly encouraged in the single-family neighborhoods within the Residence A-1, Residence A-2, Residence B, Residence C and Agricultural Districts.

Recommended Action 2-2-3: The Planning Board shall give priority consideration to encouraging adaptive re-use, infill development, and re-development in South Hadley Falls and the commercial focus areas to further the land use and economic development goals/objectives of this Plan.

Recommended Action 2-2-4: The Planning Board shall encourage development of multi-family and mixed-use housing developments only in areas identified in the South Hadley Community Development Plan as “Potential Focus Areas” for such development and compatible with the Land Use Area Vision Statements as detailed in the Master Plan.

Objective 2-3: Active community involvement in the regulatory processes addressing land use issues to insure that development which occurs does so consistent with the comprehensive plan goals.

Recommended Action 2-3-1: Convene a facilitated public workshop on regulatory framework and requirements, practical impact, and available solutions for dealing with the impact of Floodplain regulations, especially in South Hadley Falls, with participation by Mass DEP regulatory personnel, local property owners and developers, and Town officials, boards, committees, and commissions.

Recommended Action 2-3-2: As discussed in Chapter 2, Economic Development, the Community and Economic Development Commission should work to address South Hadley Falls issues such as, but not limited to: beautification, landscaping, pedestrian-friendly initiatives, historical character, funding, establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID), benefits of mixed-use and feasibility of development in the floodplain.



Recommended Action 2-3-3: Bring together residents, businesses and town officials to create vision plans for the Town's commercial focus areas (including both Big Y plazas and other large commercial spaces in the Falls) addressing physical space and types of businesses to ensure development and site changes occur holistically and in accordance with this Plan.

Recommended Action 2-3-4: Develop options for landowners of agricultural and large open space lands to assist with preservation efforts, continuing or newly operating a working farm.

Objective 2-4: A design review process that is guided by the goals/objectives of this Plan, governed by clear standards, and is integrated with and involves the various participants in the development review process.

Recommended Action 2-4-1: Assess the community's design characteristics.

Recommended Action 2-4-2: Develop and adopt clear Design Review Standards that are based on the assessment of the community's design characteristics and the goals/objectives of this Plan.

Recommended Action 2-4-3: Develop design standards to minimize the incompatibility of new industrial, commercial, and/or residential uses in developed, mixed use corridors and areas.

Recommended Action 2-4-4: Development of narrow parcels should be designed to blend in with the adjoining uses and development characteristics along the roadway corridor.

Recommended Action 2-4-5: Incorporate standards to ensure that proposed new developments maintain a lot coverage which is compatible with the existing neighborhood and corridor in which it is located.

Recommended Action 2-4-6: Develop and adopt a Design Review Bylaw including creation of a Design Review Board (preferably as an amendment to the General Bylaw).

Recommended Action 2-4-7: Formalize the existing Development Review Team (DRT) with a clearly defined role in the design review process and the broader development review processes used by the various Town boards and committees.

Recommended Action 2-4-8: Expand the composition of boards, committees, and commissions involved in the development review and design review processes to include the Historical Commission.

Objective 2-5: Residential development appropriately balanced between traditional single-family housing and multi-family housing without infringement upon, nor disruption of, established neighborhoods.

Recommended Action 2-5-1: Develop clear standards to manage multi-family development more effectively through the special permit process.



Recommended Action 2-5-2: Carefully assess and identify where multi-family housing should be located and the variety of forms it can take.

Recommended Action 2-5-3: Carefully study the Residence A-1, Residence A-2 and Agricultural zoning district provisions and the zoning map, to ensure that the bylaws and zoning map work together to foster desirable land use patterns that are consistent with the goals of this Plan

Recommended Action 2-5-4: Review and recommend changes to the zoning map to identify and provide property zoned for multi-family development in such a manner that would not adversely alter or impact the character of single-family neighborhoods.

Recommended Action 2-5-5: As South Hadley's current zoning bylaw allows, by special permit, the construction of multi-family dwellings in Residence A-1 and Residence A-2 zoning districts without limitation on the density or number of dwellings, the bylaw must be reviewed and revised to denote specific areas in Residence A-1 and Residence A-2 districts for multi-family dwellings, to better manage the intensity of these developments.

Recommended Action 2-5-6: Review and revise the Zoning Bylaw to better manage the intensity and impacts of multi-family developments, particularly in the Residence A-1 and Residence A-2 districts, through buffer, lot coverage, density, and impervious surface provisions.

Recommended Action 2-5-7: Incorporate both inclusionary zoning and affordable housing density bonus provisions as ways to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Recommended Action 2-5-8: Adopt incentives to encourage retention of existing residential buildings through conversion to multi-family use in lieu of demolition of such structures for development of new multi-family buildings.

LUCD-3 Coordinated actions among Town boards, commissions, and governing bodies including Town Meeting that are consistent with the land use principles and vision statements in this Plan.

Objective 3-1: Development and adoption of clear vision statements by each department, board, and committee/commission involved in the land use/development process consistent with the goals and objectives of this Plan.

Recommended Action 3-1-1: The appointing authorities should consider the development and adoption of the vision statements in their evaluation of the members of the department, board, or committee/commission.

Objective 3-2: Zoning that reflects the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, incorporates a public decision making process, and avoids piecemeal changes.

Recommended Action 3-2-1: Carefully study the allowable uses in each zoning district in light of current development and the goals of this comprehensive plan, in order to provide for appropriate uses by right.



Recommended Action 3-2-2: Require a report to Town Meeting by the Planning Board regarding the consistency of proposed uses with the Comprehensive Plan and the purpose of the zoning district prior to any rezoning action.

Recommended Action 3-2-3: Limit the expansion of non-conforming uses within the bylaw.

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