



**Master Plan Implementation Committee
Report to Town Meeting
May 2014**

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

- *Ensuring that officials, departments, committees and other groups in town are aware of the Plan and its goals;
- *Overseeing implementation of the Plan by Town committees, departments and boards and assisting as needed in setting priorities;
- *Facilitating communication and collaboration among entities with overlapping interests and potential interests; and
- *Sharing its findings with the Selectboard, the Town Administrator, Town Meeting members and the broader public.

This report has three sections:

1. General Observations
2. A summary of progress for each Board, Commission and Committee to which Master Plan goals and tasks are assigned
3. Plans for 2014-2015

1. General Observations

MPIC members continue to be impressed by the energy and dedication of volunteers, elected and appointed officials and employees. Many people commit many hours to town business as they work to enhance the quality of life for all of us in South Hadley.

We've seen good progress towards Master Plan goals in many areas this year. Some highlights:

A Redevelopment Authority has been formed. This body will be able to move forward with efforts begun by the Community and Economic Development to attract and retain businesses in town.

The new South Hadley Public Library building will open on schedule in early September. The Fibermark structure is almost gone, and the Texon building demolition is expected very soon. These changes will greatly enhance the appearance of the Falls, and open up space for other uses in the on-going Falls revitalization.

The Open Space Committee has taken the lead in regard to establishing a Community Preservation Act that would increase the Town's ability to preserve open space and historic structures.

A Historic District Study Committee has been established to look at the Falls area. Establishing a Historic District is a necessary first step in applying for tax credits and other grants for historic preservation.

The Planning Board prepared, and Town Meeting accepted, revised zoning bylaws. Within the next few months the Board will propose additions to those bylaws, resulting in substantially updated regulations.

The new Bike/Walk Working Group, a subsidiary of the Sustainability Committee, has made excellent progress, working with other groups to expand current trails and increase public use of them. It is also pushing to add bike lanes and trails.

The Board of Health and the Golf Commission have fulfilled their Master Plan recommendations, while continuing to work on enhancements.

The Selectboard is moving forward on many fronts, assisted by the Town Administrator, whose Master Plan tasks are either completed or ongoing.

We'd also like to note with pleasure that various boards and committees have been working not just with each other, but with outside groups as well. For example, the Conservation Commission has been working with the Kestrel Trust, and several boards, including MPIC, have been working with faculty and interns from Mt. Holyoke and/or the University of Massachusetts. Other boards are working with regional organizations including Hampshire Regional Council Of Governments, Pioneer Valley Transit Agency and Pioneer Valley Planning Council.

Challenges remain, of course:

Some tasks are enormous, and completing them will require significant time and/or professional expertise, with its attendant costs. One such task is a Town-wide inventory of fragile and otherwise protection-deserving land. Another is identifying and promoting opportunities for sustainable energy throughout the Town. Building a more robust economic base will require time, expertise, and the participation of a significant number of entities and individuals.

Some tasks involve more than one, and sometimes many, boards and committees. The Master Plan assigns responsibility for some tasks to multiple boards and commissions, each of which would have a stake in the task's completion. In this situation, it's often a question of who "owns" the task. Open Space has set an important example by taking the lead in discussions about a Community Preservation Act (CPA).

Effective Communications: We find, as we move from meeting to meeting, that quite a few boards simply aren't aware of what others are doing and therefore can't take advantage of opportunities to build on each others' work. For example, recreation opportunities are provided by entities including Schools, Bike/Walk, Conservation and the Golf Commission as well as the Recreation Commission. Several boards have email lists that they use to notify individuals about events of interest. Boards and residents alike might benefit from a shared list that notifies individuals about many opportunities, while giving them the right to opt out of mailings.

We were pleased to learn that there is a line item in the proposed budget for an upgraded Town web site that will be significantly more user-friendly. While there's lots of good information on the current site, it can be difficult to find, and content is not always the most relevant and up-to-date. Currently only a few individuals can modify the web site. It would be useful to provide access and training to board chairs and others that would enable them to post online documents such as minutes or notices of upcoming events. And if the board or committee already has a website or Facebook page it should be easy to link it to the Town web site. This is especially important considering that the proposed upgrade, even if approved, won't be available for another year. The use of other social networking tools should also be explored.

Emerging priorities. A plan is not a straitjacket. The Master Plan was adopted four years ago, and reflects priorities put forth during the study period a year before that. Inevitably, some boards and commissions have identified issues not listed in their matrix of tasks that they consider of higher priority than some of the listed activities, or decided that some tasks should actually be the responsibility of a different board or committee. A challenge for the boards, and for MPIC, is how to decide when (or whether) to put aside a Master Plan task and substitute another. Is it imperative that all Master Plan tasks are completed before tackling anything new? Is there a way to "reassign" certain tasks? There is no clear channel or enforcement mechanism for this.

Some issues simply weren't addressed in the last year. Though an Agricultural Committee was formed, it has been inactive. Is there the possibility of combining with any of our neighboring towns to address issues such as preserving farmland and encouraging urban agriculture? Affordable housing is one of the key "achievable goals" in the Master Plan. The Planning Board has drafted new regulations that will come to Town Meeting within the next 6 months, and a great help in this effort would be an active Housing Trust.

2. Summary report on Boards, Commissions and Committees

Board of Health: We are pleased to recognize the efforts of this board. All Master Plan recommendations are completed or ongoing.

Capital Planning: no change.

Community and Economic Development: As an outgrowth of the CEDC, the Town has formed a Redevelopment Authority that is looking at ways to retain and add businesses to the Town. Priority areas include the Rte. 116-33 intersection area and the Falls. Other concerns include finding a good use for the about-to-be-vacated South Hadley Public Library building on Bardwell Street, and possible use of the arts as a driver for Falls redevelopment.

Conservation Commission: has accomplished a substantial number of tasks assigned in the Plan, though there are several additional projects that haven't been undertaken due to lack of resources. Overlap with Open Space Committee tasks is considerable and there is room for additional collaboration between the two groups. Using more interns from Mt. Holyoke and UMass is a strong possibility and further work with the Kestrel Trust is likely. The Director is looking into increasing the Commission's web presence.

Cultural Commission: their grants program has been very active. Over the next year they'd like to add visual arts events in connection with theatre and/or choral performances. They would like to enhance their ability to use the Town web site, and to update the "space available" list.

Department of Public Works: has provided support to the Bike/Walk Committee and continued its sidewalk improvement program. A major concern over the past year has been the impact of the landfill's closing. In part through the **Solid Waste Committee**, DPW has been exploring means of trash disposal and possible ways of raising revenue from the closed landfill. It has also been overseeing the required on-going monitoring of the site. The committee thinks that long-term, area communities might want to cooperate to "pool" their trash and create our own trash removal system. There is enough money in the landfill contingency fund to pay for the monitoring and other costs. Recycling will continue at the landfill.

Fair Housing/Housing Trust: The Trust has been established and is awaiting the appointment of members.

Golf Commission: This Commission is to be commended for having met its Master Plan goals, and improvements are expected to continue.

Historical Commission: The year's major activity was participating in the formation of a Historic District Study Committee. Originally designed to cover the entire town, the committee's charge has been narrowed to the Falls. Its work is in the beginning stages. Open Space is leading discussions of a Community Preservation Act (CPA), one of the tasks also assigned to the Historical Commission.

Open Space Committee: has been managing two large initiatives this year, including a review of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan for State approval and the establishment of a Community Preservation Act (CPA) Study Committee at the request of the Selectboard.

Planning Board: Revised bylaws were adopted in June 2013, and additional regulations will be acted on at Town Meetings scheduled for this May, June and in the fall. GIS interface is available on the Town website. Many other tasks are in process, including development and adoption of design standards, and others are ongoing. The board has completed many Master Plan initiatives crucial to implementing other recommendations in the Plan.

Public Library: on track to move to new facility in September. With the opening of this facility, the Library will have completed its major Master Plan task. If the PVRTA "loop" project comes into being, the transportation issue will be resolved.

Recreation Commission: has been working to enhance Battered Brook and Beachgrounds Parks, and has expanded recreation programs. Challenges include ongoing maintenance of playing fields and parks and the need to replace the Plains School fields while the new school is being built. The Commission provides current program information on their web site and plans to add web pages for all league schedules. More coordination in publicizing recreational opportunities offered by other departments/commissions would be useful.

School Department: has completed two specific Master Plan tasks. 1) Designating a party or parties to oversee the new Plains School construction and 2) Improving the sidewalks leading to the schools. The latter enables more students to walk to school, thereby reducing the need for special bus routes.

Selectboard: has made significant progress. Working with new Town Administrator, the Selectboard has overseen organizational/department changes, streamlined the budget, and advocated for South Hadley to operate more regionally on issues such as planning, waste disposal and transportation. The Selectboard has also begun talks with SHELDT about multiple issues and is involved in discussions about a comprehensive capital plan.

Through the Town Administrator, the Selectboard has initiated an ongoing review of all municipal facilities and upgraded 50% of Town Hall facilities. During the next year this will be extended to the Senior Center, Police Station and Old Fire House. They continue to appoint new committees essential for achieving Master Plan goals and other Town improvements.

Sustainability Committee: has established 4 working groups. **Bike/Walk:** Created in spring 2013, this group has held an open forum, created a survey on the Town website and elsewhere, sponsored several activities and discussions and have met with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to discuss a bike/walk way connecting the Center to the Falls. They are pursuing a handicapped bicycle loop on the Bynan Conservation Land to be developed with grants and volunteer labor. They have met with 5 other committees to craft a historical walk in the Falls and consulted with Northeast Utilities about using their land for a bike/walk trail. **Sustainability Indicators** has been establishing a baseline of key sustainability metrics with respect to social, economic, and environmental issues. The working group has completed discussions with community stakeholders and will complete its initial report this June. **Waste Reduction and Reuse:** This group will remain closely aligned with regional efforts and attempt to bring appropriate elements of regional programs to South Hadley. The group will play an increasing role as a result of the recent landfill closure. An objective for coming year is to improve community awareness and participation. **Green Community:** This working group continues to gather information necessary to support a community decision to pursue designation as a Green Community. Information required to weigh the financial tradeoffs (cost to ratepayers v. potential for energy efficiency grants) is being consolidated.

SHELD: Its only Master Plan goal is to further develop and expand the fiber optic network for the town. It is currently exploring different approaches. Strong communication and cooperative efforts with the Town will be needed to implement a town-wide system.

Town Administrator: The Town Administrator's Master Plan goals have been achieved or reflect ongoing programs that have been initiated (e.g. staff development, improving overall communications.) Additionally, the Town Administrator's strong support to the Selectboard has resulted in much progress relative to its goals.

Tree Warden: The Town Tree Warden has been assessing Town trees, trimming trees and removing others at sites such as Buttery Brook. The Tree Committee, appointed last June, is working with him on tree planting this Spring and Fall and rebuilding the Town nursery. It developed a Non-hazardous Tree Removal policy, which was approved by the Selectboard. A Tree City USA designation has been approved for South Hadley for 2014 again after 18 years.

Zoning Board of Appeals: no current actions needed.

3. MPIC's Plans for 2014-2015

In 2014-2015 MPIC will continue to meet periodically with each board and commission, helping to identify and overcome barriers to progress. Committee members will also:

Continue to encourage the use of student interns, and faculty-student teams, especially from Mt Holyoke and UMass, facilitating connections when necessary;

Where possible, enable boards and commissions to work together on issues requiring or benefitting from the participation of multiple groups;

Clarify MPIC's responsibility when a board or commission is not pursuing tasks assigned to it in the Master Plan, and/or when a board or commission adopts priorities other than those in the Master Plan; and

Consider how, or if, the Master Plan should be revised, and in what timeframe.

In addition, MPIC will collect and disseminate the results of the assessment project being carried out by Mt. Holyoke students and faculty. The purpose of the Master Plan is, broadly, to enhance the quality of life for Town residents. Last year we decided that it would be useful to get some sense of whether residents' perceptions about the current quality of life in Town is changing. We approached the College via the Director of Community Engagement, and as a result, during Spring semester 2014, two Anthropology classes carried out studies examining various aspects of life in South Hadley. Results will be available shortly. In the fall a survey will be administered to examine in more detail what residents think about current and future plans for open space and varieties of housing (both key goals of the Master Plan), and the availability and desirability of amenities such as shopping and dining options, recreational, educational and cultural opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Gooch Dobosh, Chair
Ann Eaton, Recorder
Margaret Jodoin
Michelle Wolfe
Linda Young