



**Master Plan Implementation Committee  
Report to Town Meeting  
May 2022**

South Hadley has experienced lots of change in the past year, including a new Town Administrator, a new Director of Planning and Conservation, a new Superintendent of Schools, a newly updated Master Plan, and new procedures for reporting on progress towards the goals of the plan.

The Master Plan is intended to guide a wide range of community decisions, including regulatory changes, land use policies, and budgeting decisions. Developed with input from a broad range of groups and individuals, its goals reflect our community's vision for the future. Its objectives and their associated tasks tell us what we need to do to get to where we want to be.

Goal 1: A community in which all members can prosper. It focuses on economic development, housing, education and other services for a diverse population.

Goal 2: A community that cares for its natural, cultural and historic resources. The town should maintain and increase town-wide care and protection for its natural resources, including its aquifer, agricultural lands, wildlife corridors; its historic assets, including buildings, viewsheds, and development patterns; and its cultural assets, including its history and social connections.

Goal 3: A resilient community, able to thrive despite economic, demographic or climate change-related challenges. Here, the plan addresses climate change, expanding the tax base and finding other sources of support, increasing participation in town government to become more representative of the population and ensuring that residents and businesses can take advantage of modern information technology. This last topic reflects one of the major takeaways from the COVID pandemic, when many residents had to shift to remote work, learning and socializing and it became obvious that not everyone was equipped to make the transition.

Goal 4: A community that communicates effectively in all directions. Goal 4 addresses communication between the public and municipal officials (elected and appointed); outreach to residents and businesses; and internal communication among the municipal officials, staff and volunteers who will implement the recommendations of this Master Plan.

The updated plan contains two components that were not included in the 2010 plan. First, recognizing that many tasks require participation from multiple entities, each action item lists the entities most likely to need to be involved, and identifies a primary entity that has the responsibility for taking the lead. Second, the plan proposes ways of measuring progress – or lack of it – towards completion of each task and achievement of each goal. It's important to look at where we are as a community as compared to where we want to be. If an action item isn't bringing about the desired results, we should document that and change course.

The Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) was very involved with the development of the updated plan, helping to collect information from residents, meeting with boards, committees, commissions and employees of the Town to solicit their ideas and get feedback as the plan was being developed. As part of the process, each entity was asked to prepare lists of action items designed to lead to the objectives and goals specified in the Plan, and to suggest possible metrics that would measure progress. To make the best use of this information, MPIC, with guidance from the Planning Board, Selectboard and Town Administrator has developed a new reporting schedule. To date, we have been updating the lists of tasks for each entity once per year, in preparation for this annual report to Town Meeting. Beginning this summer, the Town Administrator has asked that entities update their lists of action items three times a year, in November, March and July, enabling her to tie actions more closely to the budget process and to flag issues of possible concern. Updated lists will also be posted on the Town website.

In addition, MPIC will be submitting a written status report to the Planning Board, Selectboard and Town Administrator twice yearly. The report will generally be followed by a joint meeting of those entities with MPIC to address issues around responsibility. Although the Master Plan is “owned” by the Planning Board, which is the only entity with the right to make changes in the plan, many of the tasks in the plan are not the responsibility of the Planning Board, nor does it have the authority to compel any other entity to undertake a task. We anticipate that a joint meeting will enable the boards to determine how best to proceed, and which entity should take the lead when there is an issue to be addressed.

MPIC is now helping to roll out the new plan, meeting with each entity to discuss its list of action items, identifying potential metrics, and describing the new procedures for getting feedback. Although the plan has only been in force since late March 2022, during the last year many entities have already been working on the tasks assigned to them. For example, the Planning Board has proposed a new storm water management bylaw to address issues associated with climate change. SHELd continues to press ahead with installing fiberoptic cable throughout the town and is currently ahead of schedule and under budget. Enhanced communications include (but are not limited to) the Town Administrator's weekly wrap-up, greatly expanded background materials about the budget, and a series of community forums featuring the Town Administrator, Town Planner, Chief of Police and head of the Department of Public Works.

Many entities are engaged in collaborative projects. A couple of examples: the Council on Aging's Age and Dementia-Friendly Community initiative involves many other boards and commissions as well as representatives from the food pantry and various private social services

providers. South Hadley Public Library is engaged in multiple collaborations with entities ranging from the public schools to the Historical Commission to the Registrar's office.

MPIC will be working with entities over the next year to help identify ways in which they can measure progress. Our first step will be to determine what sorts of data they currently collect, then explore what other sorts of feedback could be easily obtained without overburdening staff or volunteers. If we can establish baseline data (for instance numbers of attendees at various COA activities this year, numbers of inquiries about preserving wetlands, or miles of bike lanes constructed) the Town will be able to see what changes in the future and use that information to help decide whether a specific activity should be continued, expanded, or eliminated.

MPIC is currently revising its bylaws so that they better reflect our work. We are also working with SHCTV-15 to develop a short (3-5 minute) informational video about MPIC's work that will be posted on our web page. This was one of the suggestions that came out of the series of meetings we hosted during the planning process for the update, and we hope that all entities will eventually have such a video. Finally, we are working with the Town Planner to design a forum for all Town departments, boards and committees. This will be held in November 2022 and will deal with various topics connected with the Master Plan.

There has been good progress over the past year, but of course work remains to be done. As we roll out the new lists of action items, we are not surprisingly finding a few glitches: issues that need to be clarified, tasks possibly improperly assigned, tasks not included. While communication has improved there are still significant gaps. The web pages of many entities aren't up to date. It can be hard to find information on the Town web site. And some individuals noted that it was very challenging to get information about voting absentee in the recent election. As ever, it can be a challenge to find enough people to volunteer; the recent Town election had only one town-wide contested seat, and there are vacancies on at least 10 boards and committees. And there are never enough funds to support every request.

That being said, we continue to be impressed by the numbers of people who put in countless hours as volunteers, and by the hard work of Town employees. Their efforts are a primary reason why South Hadley is a good place to live, and we thank them all.

Respectfully submitted,

The Master Plan Implementation Committee

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