

University of Massachusetts Amherst and Town of Amherst Information and Background

The University of Massachusetts Amherst and the Town of Amherst jointly seek the services of professional planning consultants to guide a shared process to develop a plan for housing and economic development that will benefit both entities. The goal is to develop a specific, coherent, systemic approach to future housing and economic development throughout this college town that meets the needs of both parties.

Amherst, Massachusetts is home to three institutions of higher education: UMass Amherst, and Amherst and Hampshire Colleges. As of the 2010 census, Amherst had a population of 37,819 with an increase from 2000-2010 of 8.5%--the greatest increase of any community in Hampshire County. The draft RKG Housing Market Study indicates that most of this increase was attributable to an increase in undergraduate student enrollment (and commensurate increases in faculty and staff) at the University of Massachusetts during the same period. UMass enrollment is expected to continue to increase by 1500 students over the next seven years. The regional planning agency estimated a 2012 Amherst population of 39,016. The UMass Donohue Institute recently projected a 2015 population for Amherst of 40,801. From September to May, the population of Amherst increases by about 30,000 students. The undergraduate and graduate student population at UMass is approximately 28,000, with about 13,500 of those students living on campus, making UMass Amherst the third largest residential campus in the country.

Amherst is a relatively diverse community with a nearly 20 percent non-white population. Median household income is over \$77,000. However, it is clear from observation and recent studies that demographic trends and Amherst's housing market forces are increasingly simplifying a diverse community, driving out low and moderate income families, elders, and others of modest means. The large number of students and a limited housing supply directly impact the local neighborhoods, with single-family homes increasingly being converted to student rentals. This phenomenon, in turn, raises rental rates and impacts the availability of affordable housing in Amherst. The effect of off-campus student misbehavior by small numbers of students has the potential to further destabilize neighborhoods.

Since the 1960s, the Town of Amherst has purchased or otherwise permanently preserved over 5,300 acres (30+%) of the Town's land area in the form of critical farmland, wildlife habitat, greenbelt corridors, and other conservation lands. When combined with Town properties, and state and institutional land ownership, the result is that more half of Amherst's land area is not taxable. Amherst has relatively progressive zoning, with both significant growth controls in outlying areas and business and center zoning which encourages responsible development. However, growth regulations regarding housing are stringent and have yet to catch up with other community intentions, and community resistance to new growth has been consistently high. Very little meaningful new housing has been built relative to steadily increasing need in the last two decades. Despite

ongoing efforts over a period of decades, Amherst's economy remains overly dependent on the academic industry and only approximately 8% of local property tax revenue comes from non-residential sources. Therefore, economic development and increased town revenues are desired.

UMass Amherst, which celebrated its sesquicentennial anniversary in 2013, is the flagship campus of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The campus spans 1400 acres (815 acres located in Amherst) and has experienced a building boom in recent years, with new academic and research buildings being constructed, as well as new residential halls housing 1500 undergraduate students. In 2009, a small growth plan was developed, with the goal of adding 3000 new students by 2020. The campus is approximately halfway to meeting this goal.

Previous Planning Processes

Amherst has engaged in the following community planning exercises and studies relevant to this project:

- Select Committee on Goals (SCOG) Report, 1973
- Report of the Regional Commission on Affordable Housing Needs of Academic Communities, January 1990
- Building Analysis & Future Growth Study, Applied Geographics & Philip B. Herr Associates, October 2002
- UMass Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning Report, Defining Village Boundaries, 2004
- Amherst Master Plan, February 2010
- Urban Renewal Assessment, Vision and Action Steps for the Gateway Corridor Project, June 2011
- Amherst Housing Production Plan, March 2013
- Amherst Housing Market Study (draft), November 2013

In the fall of 2010, the University of Massachusetts Amherst embarked on an ambitious process to create a “culture of planning” and a Campus Master Plan. This process created a shared and supported framework to inform the physical planning decisions campus wide. The purpose of the plan was to ensure that short term decisions were part of a long term vision for the campus, that the look, feel and function of the campus is reciprocal with the academic mission, and finally to create a living process and documentation that can help the campus meet its goals, raise its aspirations and not least, help raise funds. The effort featured extensive public process, which included nearly 200 events lasting over 350 hours with a wide variety of stakeholder groups (administration, faculty, staff and students), existing governance committees and neighbors. The process went from Idea Gathering Sessions, to the testing of Plan Alternatives, the development of a Preferred Alternative, and the final Campus Master Plan. In addition to all of the public meetings, the process featured innovative use of custom online GIS applications that helped engage the broader student body and campus community allowing the Campus Planning department to document their “Likes and Dislikes” about campus as well as

providing a unique way to introduce them to the draft Plan and to give feedback through the “Master Plan Explorer”. By taking a systems approach, looking at open space, pedestrian/bike/vehicular circulation, utilities and land use and how they work together to create the whole, the campus developed the mantra that the institution must create campus, not just build buildings. A set of Guiding Principles form the heart of the Campus Master Plan and provide the framework for continuing to develop a “culture of planning” on campus. The Campus Master Plan is available online at www.umass.edu/cp.

Section II. SCOPE OF WORK/TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

A. General Specifications

Together, the University and the Town seek a consultant who will meet the goals outlined below in two strategic areas of focus (Housing and Economic Development), given the following parameters:

- Consistency with Town of Amherst and UMass Master Plans
- Consistency with national best practices in college towns
- Consideration of public safety and quality of life issues
- Inclusion of broad sustainability best practices, goals and objectives
- Inclusion of sound transportation and circulation planning
- Consideration of potential for increases in town revenues
- Consideration of future of higher education model (web-based learning, etc.) for its campus impacts next 10-20 years (i.e., changes to people living on or near campus) and models/trends
- Consideration of the impact on the residential population and character of residential neighborhoods of the Town of Amherst, over the next 10 to 20 years, of proposals in the study.

Area of Focus 1: Housing

Identification of key considerations, criteria, and impacts for a community to use in thinking about housing, zoning, and development projects in a college town.

Identification of various, specific locations, throughout the community, to consider for zoning or development, or redevelopment consistent with the Town and/or UMass master plans and national college town best practices :

- On-campus, for development of private student housing for all segments of the student population
- Off-campus, for development of private student housing for all segments of the student population
- Off-campus, for development of private housing for those affiliated with University (faculty, administration, service workers, etc.)

- Off-campus, for development of residential, market-rate housing.

Identification of policies or actions steps, including but not limited to zoning by-laws, that could be implemented:

- By the University, to encourage and support more on-campus housing
- By the Town, to encourage and support more off-campus housing
- Shared efforts where appropriate.

Area of Focus 2: Economic Development

Identification of key considerations, criteria, and impacts for a community to use in thinking about economic development and zoning projects in a college town.

Identification of various, specific locations throughout the town for the community to consider for economic development projects consistent with the Town and/or UMass master plans and national college town best practices:

- Development of UMass R&D spinoffs and state initiatives
- Development of student recreation venues (bowling, live music, etc.)
- Development of retail and service businesses

Identification of policies or action steps, including but not limited to zoning by-laws, that could be implemented:

- By the University, to encourage and support R&D spinoffs, state initiatives, recreation venues and retail
- By the University and the Town, to develop strategies for increased tourism on and off campus
- By the Town, to encourage and support the University's R&D spinoffs, recreation venues and retail businesses
- By the Town, to attract empty nesters, retirees and/or downsizers to move to Amherst.

B. Deliverables

The consultant will provide a written plan that outlines recommendations for specific priority actions (near-term, mid-term, and long-term) by the Town and the University under each of these areas listed under the Scope, to address problems and prioritize strategies. The plan, including an analysis of data, will address the objectives with action steps that the Town and the campus can take either singularly or together.

The selected consultant will be expected to proactively facilitate town and university staff, town-gown steering committee, and public participation throughout this process.

This will include being fully prepared prior to each meeting, playing a leadership role all facilitated meetings, ensuring all voices are heard, leading discussion to consensus, documenting the results, and maintaining a trustful and respectful relationships with all participants throughout the process. Responders may propose, based on their experience, the best way to meet these goals, including the number of times—and the most effective ways—to engage the public in the process.

Copies of preliminary and final draft reports and plans shall be submitted in both hard copy (10 copies) and electronically in the form of Word documents, as well as jpegs or pdfs, as needed and appropriate. All maps shall be developed and delivered in formats compatible with the computer mapping systems of the Town of Amherst (ArcGIS) and the University of Massachusetts (???). All delivered documents, plans, and maps shall thereafter be the property of the Town of Amherst and University of Massachusetts Amherst.

C. Timeline

The town-gown steering committee expects to hire a consultant by the end of January, 2014. Planning and public meetings will take place throughout February, March and April of 2014, with the preliminary draft plan presented to the town-gown steering committee by March 25 and the final plan presented by April 15. Any change to this timeline must be made with the approval of the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the Town of Amherst, through its representatives on the Town Gown Steering Committee.

D. Budget

The Town of Amherst and the University have each committed \$30,000 to this effort, providing a total of \$60,000 for the project.