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Introduction & Vision

South Hadley's Vision

SOUTH HADLEY: OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

South Hadley is a community that takes great pride in the physical beauty of its open spaces, extraordinary views of the Mt. Holyoke Range, Mount Tom, and the Connecticut River, small town atmosphere, residential neighborhoods, and school system. South Hadley residents enjoy a high quality of life – people appreciate the classic rural New England character with its sense of community and strong civic involvement. Residents value the benefits of being part of a college town, and feel it is a great place to raise families, in part due to the abundant recreational and educational opportunities and resources in the area.

South Hadley needs to ensure that fragile historic landscapes and buildings, open spaces, agricultural lands, viewsheds, and water resources are adequately protected. The Town appreciates its active citizenry and seeks to strengthen and increase the number of residents who give their time to better the community. It is important that this plan creates opportunities for future generations of South Hadley residents to live, work and play here, as many current residents have done.

The vision set out in this Comprehensive Plan is to create OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT: to enhance opportunities for the future and engage residents, businesses, and stakeholders in supporting its future, while preserving South Hadley's historic and resource heritage and its small town charm. The purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is to help guide decisions, investments, and actions in South Hadley; help the Town and community prepare for change; and over time, manage change towards this vision.

South Hadley's Plan Principles

Throughout the process of developing this Plan, South Hadley residents and the CPAC consistently expressed a hope for South Hadley's future: that South Hadley will develop and implement OPPORTUNITIES to CONNECT. This principle envisions a community that provides the information, support, and public investments needed for a high quality of life, and stresses information, communication, management, and stewardship. By implementing OPPORTUNITIES to CONNECT, South Hadley will (for example):

- Enable residents and visitors to take advantage of the Town's recreation resources, open space vistas and lands,
- Develop the regulatory structures, partnerships, and investments needed to develop a housing stock that genuinely reflects and supports the needs of all generations, economic levels, and employers.
- Help prospective business owners find space for opening a business;
- Provide opportunities for hiking and walking in parks and natural areas;
- Foster cultural events and helping residents become part of cultural networks; and
- Engage a greater part of the community in Town governance.

To accomplish this, there are a host of recommended actions, goals, and strategic objectives. This Plan and these recommended actions have been organized around four core Plan Principles. These principles have been kept in mind by the CPAC in developing the Plan, the recommendations, and what the Plan promotes as guiding principles for implementation. The Plan Principles are:

Managing towards a Vision: coordinating Town actions and investments consistently towards achieving the objectives and goals of the community. This principle envisions efforts to manage Town programs, budgets, and actions in a proactive way that is intentionally and thoughtfully directed towards achieving specific outcomes, and applies both to overall planning and policy and to specific actions of Town departments.

Communications: ensuring that the Town, Schools, and local agencies consistently make organized, accurate, and high-quality information about South Hadley's resources, activities, regulations, goals, and policies readily available through a variety of easily-accessed sources, including but not limited to the Town's website. This principle is especially important to supporting the Town's economic and social well-being, to enhancing the quality and use of Town services, and encouraging active participation in local government.

Sustainability: promoting policies and actions that will contribute to the preservation and enhancement of South Hadley’s environment for current and future generations. An emerging and important principle for South Hadley, this relates to Town actions and investments as well as the stewardship of the Town’s natural lands, parks, and public buildings.

Leading by Example: ensuring that the Town’s actions and investments, especially with respect to public buildings and spaces, are consistent with the same standards and principles that are required of others. As South Hadley invests in its future, this Plan principle is intended to ensure that the public investments, buildings and spaces are held up as examples of the desired future for the community.

These Plan Principles are highlighted throughout the Plan’s topic area chapters, and the Plan implementation program.

Implementing South Hadley’s Plan: Core Initiatives

In the year-and-a-half process of developing South Hadley’s first Comprehensive Plan in nearly 30 years, several important planning initiatives emerged as the most crucial and compelling areas for the Town to work on for the next five to ten years. These core initiatives involve both public and private-sector actions and cut across all of the specific areas in this Plan, such as housing, transportation, economic development, land use, and municipal services.

Through a strong public engagement process, and the research and development work that supported this Plan, the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee has recommended four key initiatives which, when implemented over time, will have a substantial and positive impact on the Town’s quality of life and the goals of this Comprehensive Plan. Implementing these key initiatives will involve all aspects of community planning and will involve public, private and community non-profit organizations and agencies.

The core initiatives all relate to the theme of “Opportunities to Connect.” Each one supports invigorating South Hadley’s centers – notably South Hadley Falls and the Route 116/Route 33 Center – and enhancing the overall quality of the Town’s public spaces, economy, and opportunities. The core initiatives are:

1. Investing in the Route 116/Route 33 Area as a Mixed-Use Center
2. Revitalizing South Hadley Falls, Using Recreation as a Catalyst
3. Connecting the Centers through Pathways, Transit & Beautification
4. Securing Open Space in the Range, River and Rural Areas
5. Updating Community Regulations and Standards for Improved Outcomes

Core Initiative 1: Investing in the Route 116/Route 33 Center

Goal: Actively promote the redevelopment of the area immediately around the intersection of Route 116 and Route 33 as an attractive, economically vital and truly walkable mixed-use center for the Town, integrating residential and commercial uses in a livable neighborhood.

The commercial plaza and surrounding residential neighborhoods at the intersection of Route 116 and Route 33 emerged as a key focal point for the Town's economic activity and future development. While not originally developed as a Town center, this area functions as an important hub of commercial activity and offers substantial potential for future reinvestment in housing, mixed-use development, traffic and landscaping improvements, and pedestrian facilities that can better connect the area to the rest of South Hadley. The desire is to create a visually appealing, walkable center that offers business opportunities, and pathway connections to surrounding neighborhoods and centers.

Initiatives may include:

- Work with the Newton Street Big Y commercial center and other existing commercial establishments to encourage visually appealing and pedestrian-friendly improvements to these sites.
- Review and revise zoning in the target development area to encourage high density mixed use development.
- Use the construction of a new elementary school to open the current Plains School land to as well as portions of the Black Stevens Conservation area to encourage high density development within the target development area. Purchase land elsewhere in town to balance conservation goals.
- Encourage high-density condominium development in the district, developed in a manner that encourages walking and biking to the commercial areas and onto adjacent paths and trails.
- Encourage professional office development for the Newton / Lyman area through zoning and economic development efforts
- Invest in sidewalks, bike paths and road renovations throughout the district that encourage pedestrians and bike use.
- Consider a Business Improvement District to support development in the area.

Core Initiative 2: South Hadley Falls Revitalization

Goal: Support continued redevelopment and investment in South Hadley Falls, in part by using recreation as an organizing focus and catalyst for economic development, tourism, and investment activity, and giving priority consideration for public uses to locate or expand in the Falls.

As the Town's historic center, South Hadley Falls represents the area of greatest potential opportunity for redevelopment, investment, and adaptive re-use within the Town. Recently, the renovation of the Beachgrounds Park and planning for riverfront recreation have focused attention on the potential for recreation activities – public and private, indoor and outdoor – to catalyze ongoing revitalization efforts. Connecting the Falls and enhancing it as a recreation destination for residents and tourists alike also holds the potential to enhance the area's appeal to potential developers and businesses. Many of the Town's goals for housing, visual quality, and economic development relate strongly to the success of South Hadley Falls. Strong partnerships and new relationships among public agencies, landowners, developers, and particularly the business community will be essential to achieving this goal, making improved communications and information especially important.

Initiatives may include:

- Capitalize on Gatehouse Park as a cultural tourism destination
- Encouraging additional recreation-related uses throughout the Falls, and finding new opportunities to create recreation connections - both literal and information-based.
- Recruiting a variety of businesses to the Falls, such as restaurants and small shops as well as larger employers and investors.
- Developing a new Library and SHELD facility along a main thoroughfare in the Falls area
- Working with area churches and societies to integrate existing recreational facilities into the new recreational district.
- Creating a searchable, up-to-date inventory of the
- Establishing a Business Improvement District to support development in the area.
- Improving signage, transportation, and streetscape to direct travelers to South Hadley Falls

Core Initiative 3: Connecting and Enhancing South Hadley's Centers

Goal: To connect the College/Town Common, Lyman Street, Route 116/33, schools, and South Hadley Falls physically, economically, and visually, with paths, sidewalks, traffic improvements, and public transit as well as through streetscape, signage and landscaping improvements.

In keeping with the theme of “Opportunities to Connect,” this core initiative will reinforce the economic and social health of South Hadley’s centers through better physical, visual, and information connections. The vision is to connect the Town Common and College area to 116/33 to South Hadley Falls, and the Town’s important public spaces to each other, with transit, trails, and important landscaping and visual improvements. This envisions the Town, agencies such as Pioneer Valley Transit Authority and MassHighway, and property owners all working on strategies to help overcome the physical and transportation features that separate and sometimes isolate South Hadley’s centers. Efforts will be needed to develop a larger path network that creates greater connectivity and greater walkability/bikeability among residential and economic centers, promotes public transit options in the corridor from South Hadley Falls to the Town Common, and also promotes greater information about the public spaces, centers, and resources found throughout.

Initiatives may include:

- Target town investment in beautification, including tree planting along streetscape as well as a bike / pedestrian route connecting the College / Commons area, the public schools along the 116 corridor, the Lyman / Newton district, and South Hadley Falls.
- Connect that network with any pedestrian / bike development in the Holyoke canal area.
- Use the investment in the new elementary school to replace Plains School, as well as future Mosier School renovation to support goal of an attractive 116 corridor accessible to bikes and pedestrians.
- Target SHELD investment in underground wires and improved street lamps along route 116.
- Discourage new commercial development in the residential areas through zoning, and by encouraging existing commercial establishments to move to either Lyman / Newton district or South Hadley Falls
- Encourage a PVTa transportation link connecting the College Commons area, the Lyman Newton district and South Hadley Falls with the Holyoke transportation hub.
- Lobby for and leverage route 116 investments to support general beautification program and pedestrian goals in the Lyman /Newton and South Hadley Falls districts.

Core Initiative 4: Securing Open Space in the Range, River and Rural Areas

Goal: To support the health of the Town’s natural resources, quality of life, and economy by securing and providing ongoing stewardship of open spaces and historic landscapes in the Mount Holyoke Range, along the Connecticut River from South Hadley Falls to the Town line, and in the Rural areas of South Hadley north of the Town Common – and to promote conservation and stewardship through robust, accessible, and high-quality communications and information resources about South Hadley’s open lands and resources.

South Hadley has a wealth of natural resources that underpin its beloved character as a small-town residential community with an agricultural and industrial heritage that grew from its riverfront, mountain range, and farmlands. Scenic roads, fields, and forests are part of both the historic landscape and the natural resource base of the Town. The corridors along Alvord Street and Ferry Street, and the landscapes around The Ledges are especially valued by residents, but especially vulnerable to the effects of change. Overall, there is a very strong desire to retain and protect these historic, culturally significant landscapes in the Town.

While the Town, landowners, and partner agencies have worked together to conserve many critical areas, there are ongoing needs. The Plan recommends continued investments in conservation planning, land acquisition or protection, stewardship and management of Town lands; and building an information base so that the public, Town, and visitors can participate much more actively both in enjoying these lands, and protecting the natural and historic resource values that many of these properties represent. A continuing focus on the Range, River, and Rural Areas is stressed throughout this Plan.

Initiatives may include:

- Continue conservation efforts in the Alvord Street corridor, including along the road itself.
- Develop a Holyoke Range Bike Path that coordinates with Granby.
- Develop a Bike path in the Ferry Street area, perhaps along power lines, connecting with South Hadley Falls and the Holyoke Range.
- Integrate Ledges Golf Course with plans for Ferry Street open space and bike paths.
- Create interactive web-based and print maps of South Hadley's conservation and recreation lands, providing education about stewardship, resource values and protection, and available hiking and biking trails.

Core Initiative 5: Updating Regulations and Standards for Improved Outcomes

Goal: To develop and adopt a modern, efficient and effective set of community standards, including zoning, subdivision, and design review standards, that create a framework for improving South Hadley's community, economic, and visual outcomes as private and public investments are made.

South Hadley, as a community, has brought together a tremendous amount of energy and ideas through the development of this Plan. However, many of the essential goals and objectives in the Plan, and in fact the vision itself, are contingent upon a complete review and update of the Town's land use regulations. To accomplish the Town's many goals, the Town's zoning bylaw, subdivision regulations, zoning map, and review procedures need to be reviewed and revamped

to help enable desirable development, improve the business environment, allow for housing diversity, and improve the visual appearance and quality of South Hadley.

Updated community standards that flow from the principles, goals and recommendations of this Plan will help improve housing quality and options; provide consistency and transparency to the development review process; promote infill and development that meets emerging economic models; enact design and landscaping standards that ensure that new investments improve the quality and function of South Hadley's landscapes; and provide historic resource standards that ensure the future of South Hadley's iconic buildings and neighborhoods. Updating standards in light of the goals and vision of this Plan also will help the Town focus on necessary steps to manage change and transition underway in critical corridors, notably the area around Route 202 and 33, where proactive planning is especially important now.

Public Engagement

Public engagement in planning, and the public life of the Town, is a continuous responsibility and process. Throughout the development of this Comprehensive Plan, the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) has held open, public meetings and a series of special workshops to solicit the opinions, feelings, ideas, visions, and observations of many of the people who have a stake in South Hadley's future: residents, business leaders, regional planning representatives, and public officials.

At a few points in the process, special, facilitated discussions and workshops were held to work out some of the most important and fundamental principles and recommendations that appear in this Plan. The roundtable discussion came up with the summary statement about how South Hadley is today, and provided a jumping-off point for working on statements about its future:

"South Hadley is a community with vast community-accessible open spaces and rolling hills and concentrated centers of mixed-use development achieved through a combination of a variety of measures including public infrastructure (such as pedestrian and bicycle corridors) and regulatory measures (such as Planned Unit Development)."

In February 2009, the CPAC and a small group of public and agency officials engaged in a challenging **facilitated land use workshop** that looked at some very difficult, but not unlikely, scenarios that the Town may face in the next ten years, such as the potential closure of the landfill; the potential closure of large employers;

proposals for development on agricultural lands; changes in the management of The Ledges golf course; and difficult decisions about how best to use scarce grant and public resources. The result of the Facilitated Workshop, which is found in Appendix C of this Plan, was a pair of potential future land use scenarios. These reflect how the community might react and respond to challenging scenarios in the future, and also showed where the Town can benefit most from pro-active partnerships and planning work in the immediate future.

Residents then participated in a **Visual Preference Survey** in March 2009, where they gave a one-to-ten rating and comments on images of buildings, roads, landscapes, and open spaces found within and outside South Hadley. The results were consistent, and compelling: South Hadley residents valued landscapes with abundant trees, well-defined streetscapes and edges, commercial buildings that use historic architectural forms, and residential neighborhoods that may be dense, but use short setbacks, sidewalks, and landscaping to create an intimate feel. The results of the VPS are especially important to zoning revisions and public investments that will flow from this Plan.

Finally, a **workshop and survey** were held in April 2009 focusing on South Hadley's open space and recreation resources. This discussion highlighted a core principle and theme of this plan: the need to connect residents to their own public open spaces both literally and electronically. South Hadley residents, almost overwhelmingly, knew very little about the locations, qualities, resources, and access points of their own public lands and parks. Once informed about these spaces and resources, the greatest desire expressed was to be able to walk, bike, and play on the lands, through public investments in trails and stewardship, and much better information about the "where/when/how" of using South Hadley's public lands. The need for stewardship and management resources was also highlighted; again, the more residents know about their recreation and open space lands, the more likely they are to support such investments. This workshop informed much of the discussion in this Plan about information needs, as well as supporting recommendations for a recreation-based revitalization strategy in South Hadley Falls.