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Land Use & Community Design

Introduction and Goals

The Land Use and Community Design chapter is a synthesis of how the other Plan elements for the community – economic development, housing, cultural & historic 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 element is a critical component of this Plan.

Land Use and Community Design Goals

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| LUCD-1 | Implement a regular update process for the Comprehensive Plan that will evaluate progress towards implementation of its goals and achieving the land use visions for South Hadley’s districts. |
| LUCD-2 | Develop and adopt a regulatory framework for South Hadley that facilitates and moves the community towards its Comprehensive Plan goals. |
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LUCD-3	Implement an improved framework for land use planning and review that is efficient, fair, and effective, making the best use of South Hadley’s staff and volunteer resources.
LUCD-4	Achieve a coordinated effort among Town boards and commissions to develop visions for Town actions that are consistent with the land use principles and vision statements in this Plan.
LUCD-5	Achieve improved visual quality throughout the Town by aligning the Town’s regulatory framework, development review process, and Town investments and programs towards this goal.

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. Residents, businesses, and committee members alike expressed 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. Vision planning is a major theme of this plan, especially for land use, and appears throughout the recommended actions in the various Plan elements.

Ensuring Visual Quality

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

Managing the visual 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 visual quality. Throughout this Comprehensive Planning process, the community has continually identified the importance of the aesthetic quality of site plans and buildings to the continued health of the Town.

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 visual fabric. Such a process is critical to the Town's land use and visual design outcome – 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 visual outcomes. 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 board 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: what resources are protected, and how; the extent to which the community relies on energy and transportation systems; the ways that its land uses foster continued local agriculture, or not; and the 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 visual 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.

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 visual 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 historic landscapes as a result of conservation efforts. In addition to its impact on historic landscapes, it also has positive impacts of agricultural land in the Town. Though none of the Town’s farms are operated exclusively as agricultural enterprises, 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 northern part of Town. This development continued to increase with fervor into the first few months of 2009, but has since subsided along with the weakened economy. Another example of the residential boom is exhibited by the construction of a new residence hall at Mount Holyoke College, although the College does not anticipate growth in its residential population.

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 Element 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 4, Economic Development.

Historic 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: South Hadley is an attractive Town for many of the professionals 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.

The major land use trend in evidence today is the conversion of open and forested land – particularly agricultural land – to medium and low-density residential use. Consistent with the experience of other towns in the Pioneer Valley, South Hadley has seen slow but steady erosion in the percentage of land in agricultural use since 1970, with a corresponding increase in the amount of land in low- and medium-density residential use.

Table 2-1:
Land Use: 1971, 1985, 1999, 2005

Source: MassGIS, 1971, 1985, 1999 and 2005

Table 2-2:
Land Use Changes: 1971, 1985, 1999, 2005

Source: MassGIS, 1971, 1985, 1999 and 2005

Note: The third column, 'Percent Change (1971-1999),' is not the sum of the first two columns. To ensure accuracy, each percentage provided above is an independent calculation based on raw data.

As shown above in Table 2-1, nearly 70 percent of South Hadley's land was agricultural, undisturbed vegetation or natural land, or open undeveloped land in 1971; this total decreased to 65 percent by 1985 and to 61 percent by 1999. The most significant land use changes since 1971, as shown in column three of Table 2-2, have been in Higher Density Residential (+268%), Industrial (+92%), and Commercial (+61%).

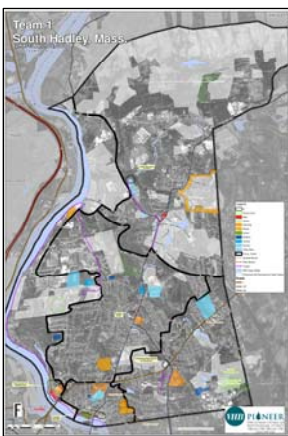
Housing has increased across all housing types in South Hadley from 1971 to 1999. The largest increase has been in higher density housing (+268%), followed by low density housing (+29%) and medium density housing (+24%).

Developing a Land Use Vision

South Hadley's residents and officials engaged in three structured exercises as part of the Plan development process, and each of these exercises helped articulate the overall vision for the Town.

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 provide an important look at how citizens can work together when making important decisions about South Hadley's land use policies and public investments.

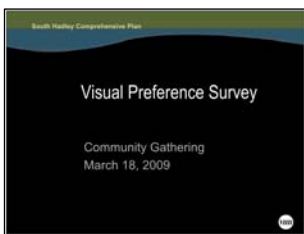


Participants in the workshop represented many of South Hadley's elected and appointed boards and commissions, each of which has its own area of responsibility for the Town's land use futures. The participants were divided into five teams, with members of committees distributed among the groups so that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

The results of this exercise pointed to several 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 visual 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.** Both 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.

Visual Preference Survey



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, 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.

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:

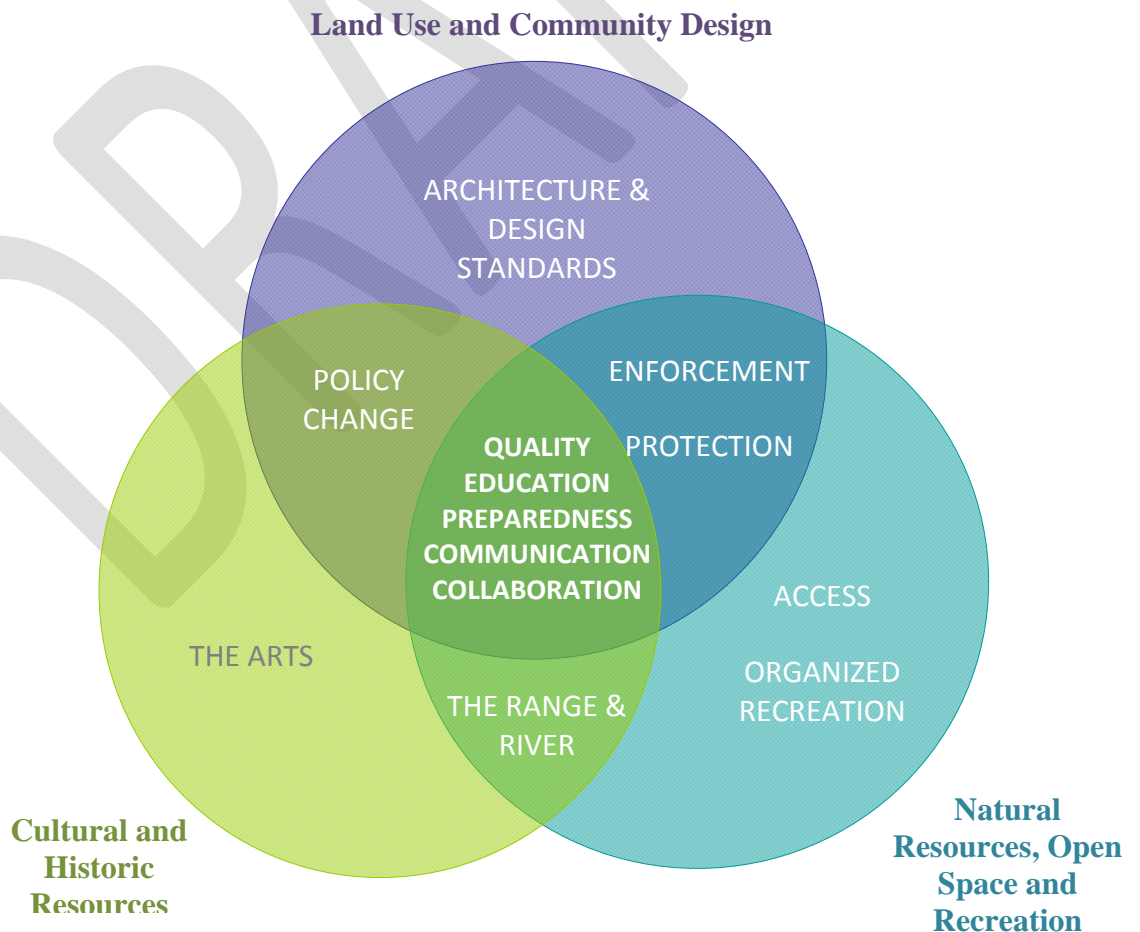
- Trees

- 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 three topic areas: Cultural and Historic Resources; Open Space; Recreation and 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.



Specific recommendations, relating directly to this element, include the following:

- In general, the Town's **main thoroughfares** (particularly the portion of Route 116 from the Falls to Chap de Laine's Home Furnishings) **are in serious need of beautification**, greenery and pedestrian-friendly and safe walkways. This vision may be facilitated with the implementation of a Design Review Board (DRB). The CPAC has recommended that such a DRB have jurisdiction over renovations and new developments along the Town's major corridors.
- In particular, 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. As mentioned previously in this Plan, spot rezoning methods are illegal and regulatory measures need to be taken to enforce this. Additional measures should be taken in the Industrial B district, where such businesses are allowed by right with a site plan review, to limit development of this type by Special Permit only.
- 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 is highly recommended that current public services not be extended into 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 mix of land uses, including many municipal buildings, such as Town Hall and the Police Department. 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 challenges facing this corridor include:

- 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.
- 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.
- The Design Review Board should encourage and provide assistance with on-site improvements to pedestrian facilities, landscaping, and aesthetics.
- 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 the general beautification of the area.
- 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 Park and could also be achieved with the rehabilitation and reuse of the old mill building.
- The revitalization of the Falls should be strongly connected (visually and narratively) to the newly developed Riverfront Park as it will become a new destination that attracts new foot traffic to the Falls. Should a bike/walking/hiking path be developed to connect Chicopee 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 would be involved in the efforts highlighted above, as well as addressing other key issues related to this area: dilapidated housing, development within the flood plain, establishing communal funds for beautification/rehab, ensuring historical character is preserved and making sure that mixed-development is a priority. The Economic Development Committee can help identify target areas (existing and future) for economic development and seek to attract new developers to the area.

Route 47, Hadley Line to Town Common

Route 47, from the Hadley Line to the Town Common, consists primarily of single-family residences with patches of commercial development. A cluster of businesses is concentrated in the Village Commons and immediately surrounding area. Route 47, to north of this section (in Hadley) has been designated a Scenic Byway. This designation may be extended to include a portion of Route 47 in South Hadley from the Hadley Line to the Town Common. The results of the Heritage Landscape Survey will largely influence this potential designation.

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 challenges and recommendations relevant to this corridor include:

- 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 few gravel pit operators in this area (which have been grandfathered in) should be considered exceptions, rather than a predominant feature of this neighborhood.
- Provisions for the reuse and restoration of the old Center School, a unique historic building the community, should be made.
- 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, Town Common to Chap De Laine's

Route 116, from the Town Common to Chap De Laine's Home Furnishings, consists of a variety of land use. 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 challenges and recommendations 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, to-scale density, and architectural preservation.

- 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 is a desirable strategy.
- 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, 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 single-family residences to the north. Particular challenges and recommendations relevant to this corridor include:

- With the exception of a few scattered businesses, there is limited commercial development along this corridor. Existing commercial development consists of some development which is not consistent with the residential and historic nature of the corridor and does not complement neighborhood character. On the other hand, a few commercial properties complement the landscape well, such as Gagne's Package Store, which is a remnant of the town's rural past, and the dinosaur store which is linked to the Pioneer Valley's long, rich tradition of the discovery of dinosaur footprints and fossils in the area.
- Future development of the northern part of this corridor should be limited to residential uses, consistent with existing trends.
- Future development of the southern portion of this corridor should complement the surrounding architecture and style, not compete against it.
- The implementation of a design review process, with jurisdiction over this corridor, can help retain this historical and residential character of the Town.

Route 116, Chap De Laine's to Cumberland Farms

Route 116 from Chap De Laine's to Cumberland Farms consists primarily of residential development with intermittent commercial development. Particular challenges and recommendations relevant to this corridor include:

- Maintain this area as predominantly residential, with businesses of a professional nature (versus strict retail). This is in alignment with Section 7 of the bylaw that articulates which types of home occupations may be permitted in these districts.

- Encourage any new development to keep in the spirit of the current practice (i.e., not allow the construction of an amusement park, roller rink, bowling alley or fast food restaurant which are currently permitted under the current bylaw). Additionally, in areas zoned as a Business B district which only requires site plan review; consideration should be given to whether this should be revised to be subject to the Special Permit process.
- Investigate how abandoned gas station and other businesses could have controlled reuse through the Special Permit process (i.e., social, economic, community needs and consistency with adopted Master Plan, traffic flow and safety, character of surrounding land uses, etc.) and/or determine whether these lands could revert back to residential with the professional overlay.

Route 116, Cumberland Farms to Shell Gas Station

Route 116 from the Cumberland Farms to the Shell Gas Station is a strong mixture of residential and commercial type land uses. Small businesses and retail establishments (including restaurants) line this corridor, with residential intermingled. Particular challenges and recommendations relevant to this corridor include:

- The Big Y plaza should be retrofitted to better accommodate and attract pedestrian activity; made more walkable, green, have more landscape buffer and be better connected to Route 116 and the mixed retail/housing complex that is now under construction.
- Along with the other Big Y Plaza located on Williamansett St. and the larger commercial spots in the Falls (e.g. the former Michael's Market site, etc.), a larger planning vision should prevail in these areas. Rather than develop these critical commercial areas in a piecemeal fashion, the Town can take a proactive role in discussing and creating desired development scenarios around the physical space of these areas. A committee made up of residents, businesses and town officials could be formed to perform such a task.
- Should a change in Big Y Plaza tenant(s) occur, there would be substantial benefits to having stronger standards in place for green space, landscaping, walkability and connectivity when changes to the site are made. In particular, modifications to the site should strive to make it more inviting and pedestrian-friendly, reducing parking as the prominent feature of the complex. Improving the overall effect of the site and sign lighting and reducing glare and light trespass also could be addressed with standards for site plan changes.

- In addition to retail, this shopping center could also include mixed use development of residences and office space to enhance pedestrian traffic. Careful planning and design would be essential to making it attractive for investment.
- Given the central location of this shopping complex, the addition of a 'meeting space' should be encouraged, such as a small open space area conducive to small gatherings.
- Although currently permitted under the bylaw, drive-through businesses should be discouraged due to the conflicting goal of making this area more walkable and pedestrian-friendly.

Route 116, Shell Gas Station to the Route 202 Clover Leaf

Route 116 from the Shell Gas Station to the Route 202 Clover Leaf is predominantly residential with intermittent commercial properties, as well as the High School complex. Particular challenges and recommendations relevant to this corridor include:

- As there have been a number of single-parcel zoning amendments in this area, the effect is of 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.
- Maintain this area as predominantly residential with businesses of a professional nature (versus to strict retail). The beautification of the commercial properties should be made with the help and guidance of a Design Review Board.
- Aspects of community design such as the maintenance of visual character through setbacks, signage and type of structure should be prioritized.

Route 202, North and South of Route 33

Route 202 south of the intersection of Route 33 is a predominantly residential area. Route 202 north of the Route 33 intersection has residential mixed with commercial properties. Particular challenges facing this corridor include:

- The area south of the intersection of Route 202 at Route 33 is predominantly residential with mostly single-family homes. As such, lower density residential development should be prioritized over high-density

development, and new development should be consistent with the existing character of the community.

- The area north of the Route 33 intersection begins as residential and becomes mixed with commercial. 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 via 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.

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. Closer to Route 202, this area is predominantly residential. As Route 33 approaches the Chicopee Line, there is a transition to commercial and retail uses. Particular challenges and recommendations relevant to this corridor include:

- As recommended for the Big Y shopping center on Newton Street, standards should be developed so that changes to the Big Y complex on Willimansett St. make the plaza more walkable, 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 promote walkability 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. Again, in making this complex more safe and walkable, businesses that rely heavily on drive-through traffic should be discouraged.
- 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.

- Efforts should be made to connect this shopping center with the Shadowbrook Estates development and Buttery Brook Park. The entire area should be safe, walkable and connected.
- The other commercial 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 as property is renovated and/or businesses change hands, through a design review process.
- “Spot zoning” in this corridor is strongly discouraged as inconsistent with the principles and goals of this Plan. Those properties that were given special zoning changes in the past should not be considered as precedents for the desired land use character of this area.
- The state highway maintenance facility located near the Big Y shopping complex should be moved. This land could be developed through flexible development or a similar strategy for affordable housing, senior housing, or some other community-based need (e.g. senior center, community center, etc.)
- 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, large single-family home subdivisions, and a clustered condominium development. Particular challenges and recommendations relevant to this corridor include:

- Given the scarcity of 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. Residents of agricultural and larger parcel properties should be assisted financially by a network of supports/land trust/etc. to ensure that this is achieved. Any and all available conservation funds should all be actively pursued by Town to be used in active partnership with landowners.

- 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.

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 scarcity of this scenic and rural landscape not only left 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.

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

Throughout the 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, both on the Town and applicant sides, 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 ability of the bylaw to integrate new development effectively with the historic character and fabric of existing 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 historic mill or residential buildings.

The sense from the community is that the Town's Planning Board, and other commissions and boards, would benefit from modernized 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.

Initiating Design Review

Particularly as the Town seeks to implement sustainability principles, 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 Town currently has a Development Review Team, consisting of 11 members, which reviews and coordinates development activities, but is limited in its jurisdiction and its effect on the visual outcome of new development. Therefore, the 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.

The 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. 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. Three considerations are especially important for South Hadley.

- *What form will a review body take?* There are many models, whether within the Pioneer Valley or 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 the Conservation Commission and others.
- *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.
- *What resources will be needed for implementation?* The Town must carefully work through the process of implementation, which will require staff resources, being cautious about what locations are initially included, and the stringency of the standards that have been developed.

The Future of South Hadley's Bylaws

This Plan is intended to provide the guidance for future public and private developments, whereas the Town's planning resources provide the *tools* for implementation. There are several tools which can be used to help guide future development towards the Town's vision. However, many of these tools require updating in order to maximize their utility to the Town. Chief among these are the Zoning Map, subdivision regulations, and Zoning Bylaw, which are recommended to be thoroughly and comprehensively updated following adoption of this Plan.

From the public input and discussions involved in this Plan, it is clear that any process to work with the bylaws will need to take a comprehensive look at the Town's regulations, process, and maps. An update process is likely to include amendments and revisions to Subdivision Regulations, Zoning Bylaws, and Zoning Map as well as the implementation of new standards and/or guidance documents for design regulation and control.

There are a host of issues that South Hadley will need to consider in terms of which body reviews which aspects of an application, how best to use the Town's professional resources for review, and how issues should be coordinated among agencies. The Town will need to discuss and resolve such issues as:

- Which body will review design issues
- How to improve coordination among Town bodies and commissions on development review

- What form a local historic commission may take (See Chapter 7), and what role this commission or body may have in design review
- The appropriate involvement of the conservation commission on relevant applications, particularly where historic working landscapes in the Range or agricultural areas are considered
- The appropriate role for a tree warden, given the emphasis in this Plan and the public process on the importance of landscaping to the Town

Enforcement

Another area of land use regulation that arose in the public process concerned enforcement of South Hadley's existing 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.

Land Use and Community Design Summary

Land use planning goals and strategies will need to focus on managing the Town's changes that will occur from:

- Reinvestment and redevelopment in the existing patterns
- A continuing balance between some new residential, and some additional conservation
- Connecting the spaces through communication as well as physical improvements.

With respect to land use, the most important principle for this plan is managing towards a vision. Vision statements for the Town's land use districts are an essential step in providing a sound, workable framework for future steps.

Implementation will require action on two critical fronts:

1. A comprehensive re-evaluation of the Zoning Bylaws, Zoning Map and Subdivision Regulations; and
2. Implementation of design standards and controls as part of the regular development review process and regulatory controls.

Moving Ahead: Recommended Strategies

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. The Objectives and Recommended Actions in this section have strong overlap with all of the land use goals.

Land Use and Community Design Goals

LUCD-1	Implement a regular update process for the Comprehensive Plan that will evaluate progress towards implementation of its goals and achieving the land use visions for South Hadley's districts.
LUCD-2	Develop and adopt a regulatory framework for South Hadley that facilitates and moves the community towards its Comprehensive Plan goals.
LUCD-3	Implement an improved framework for land use planning and review that is efficient, fair, and effective, making the best use of South Hadley's staff and volunteer resources.
LUCD-4	Achieve a coordinated effort among Town boards and commissions to develop visions for Town actions that are consistent with the land use principles and vision statements in this Plan.
LUCD-5	Achieve improved visual quality throughout the Town by aligning the Town's regulatory framework, development review process, and Town investments and programs towards this goal.

Objective: To perform an annual review of the plan for implementation purposes by the CPAC, reported to the Town Meeting and the Planning Board.

Recommended Action: Establish a standing committee charged with monitoring implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, developing a design review process, and recommending updates to the zoning bylaw.

Recommended Action: Prepare an annual report for the Town Report on progress towards Comprehensive Goals, such as grants obtained that further a recommended action of the comprehensive plan.

Objective: To address immediate land use issues in the short term in order to ensure that development taking place in the immediate future does not compromise Plan goals.

Recommended Action: It is a recommendation of this Plan that the Planning Board give priority consideration to the recommendations of the Plan with respect to new development in the A1, A2, C, D and Agricultural Districts, particularly with respect to the issuance of special permits and for multi-family housing, due to the vulnerability of these areas to land use change that may be inconsistent with the Plan's adopted goals and recommendations. If at all possible, the flexible development method should be strongly encouraged until it can be required by a revised bylaw.

Recommended Action: It is a recommendation of this Plan that the Planning Board give priority consideration to encouraging adaptive re-use, infill development, and re-development in the South Hadley Falls and the Business zoning district, in order to further the land use and economic development objectives of this Plan.

Recommended Action: Convene a facilitated 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.

Recommended Action: As discussed in Chapter 4, Economic Development, consider forming a permanent Economic Development or revitalization committee or partnership for South Hadley Falls which would address issues such as, but not limited to: beautification, landscaping, pedestrian-friendly initiatives, preserving historical character, establishing communal funds, investigate benefits/drawbacks of establishing a BID, ensuring mixed-use is a high priority and feasibility of development in the floodplain, etc.

Recommended Action: Through a facilitated process or standing committee, bring together residents, businesses and town officials to create vision plans for the Town's commercial hubs, 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 a larger plan.

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

Objective: To prepare and adopt a professionally and thoroughly updated zoning and subdivision bylaw, and potentially other bylaws such as sign and lighting controls, that draw on the experience and successes of comparable towns in the area for best practices examples of community land use management and design control.

Recommended Action: Develop Special Permit standards that will afford the Planning Board greater certainty in its authority to administer the bylaw.

Recommended Action: Develop new zoning standards that facilitate and incentivize mixed-use residential projects, particularly in South Hadley Falls and the Business zoning districts.

Recommended Action: Work to develop special permit standards that include general standards referencing Mass general law, and then contain specific, well-articulated standards for the issuance of a special permit in each zoning district, with the standards related to a purpose statement for each zoning district.

Recommended Action: Develop purpose statements for each zoning district that relate to the Comprehensive Plan goals.

Recommended Action: Develop and adopt a landscaping standard that requires a portion of the total construction cost for a project to be allocated towards

landscaping, with incentives for landscaping located in or in view of the public right-of-way.

Recommended Action: In any establishment of new bulk and site plan standards, work to 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: In a revised bylaw, in order to support the goal of enhanced visual quality in the Town, require undergrounding of utilities in all new developments and road extensions.

Objective: Create a process for rezoning that reflects the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, incorporates a public decision making process, and avoids piecemeal changes.

Recommended Action: 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: 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: Carefully evaluate the potential to severely limit the expansion of non-conforming uses within the bylaw.

Objective 5: An adopted set of policies, ordinances and bylaws that are consistent, modernized, and updated to reflect the goals of the Town of South Hadley.

Recommended Action: As a priority recommendation of this Plan, the Town should commission the study and development of a set of design standards that will lead to improvements in the Town's visual quality, supporting its economic development and cultural resources goals as well. *Given the importance of this goal to shaping the entire Land Use element, this recommendation is fundamental to shaping all of the other recommended actions as well.*

Recommended Action: Develop flexible development standards (or a similar strategy) particularly to help manage multi-family development more effectively through the special permit process.

Recommended Action: Consider both inclusionary zoning and affordable housing density bonus provisions as ways to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Recommended Action: Work towards bylaws and provisions that provide for the mandatory allocation of open space, with preferential protection of agricultural lands and trees.

Recommended Action: Carefully consider where multi-family housing should be located and the variety of forms it can take. Efforts should be made to diversify multi-family housing: conversion of large Victorian housing into multiple units, 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.

Recommended Action: Carefully study the A1, A2 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: In conjunction with the Open Space and Cultural & Historic 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 A1, A2 and Agricultural districts. As South Hadley's current zoning bylaw allows, by special permit, the construction of multi-family dwellings in A1 and A2 residential districts without limitation on the density or number of dwellings, the bylaw must be reviewed and revised to denote specific areas in A1 and A2 districts for multi-family dwellings, to limit the density of these

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