

PLANNING BOARD

[2010 Annual Report]

The Northbridge Planning Board meets the second and fourth Tuesday of the month beginning at 7:00 PM in the Selectmen's Chambers of the Town Hall. The Planning Board consists of five (5) elected members and one (1) appointed associate member. The Board has the responsibility to review proposed development projects and make decisions in accordance with state/local bylaws and regulations. The Planning Board is assisted by the Community Planning and Development Office, staffed by a Town Planner, R. Gary Bechtholdt II and a Planning/Conservation Secretary, Barbara Kinney.

The Planning Board's official powers and responsibilities are defined in the Northbridge Subdivision Regulations, the Northbridge Zoning Bylaws, and as prescribed in Massachusetts General Laws. These rules and regulations have been enacted to protect the safety, convenience and welfare of the inhabitants of Northbridge by regulating the laying out and construction of ways in subdivisions and providing access to lots therein.

In addition to subdivision control, the Planning Board reviews site plan development applications of non-residential uses and structures within town. The Planning Board reviews proposals in accordance with Chapter 173 of the Northbridge Zoning Bylaw and considers impacts on traffic, municipal and public services and utilities, environmental quality, and community economics to ensure the health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the town.

The Planning Board reviews development proposals from the planning stage through completion of a project. In addition, the Board has the authority to amend the Northbridge Subdivision Rules and Regulations. The specific types of reviews performed by the Planning Board include: 1) Approval Not Required Plans, ANR -the division of land creating new lots on existing roadways; 2) Preliminary and Definitive Subdivision Plans - divisions of land creating lots and new roadways; 3) Site Plans - plans for commercial/industrial developments; 4) Common driveway special permits; and 5) Permits for proposed work that affect public street trees and stonewalls along Town designated Scenic Roads.

During the Fall of 2010, the Planning, Conservation, Building, and Board of Health offices were relocated to the Aldrich School building, creating a Town Hall Annex

As gas prices creep up to \$3.05/gallon, the town is looking at alternative energy and smart growth principles that will help reduce our dependency on oil, lessen our carbon-footprint and promote green energy. As part of this initiative the Planning Board is

The decline of the economy, primarily the deterioration of the housing market of 2008 and 2009, had a profound impact upon the workload of the Planning Board. In the early years of the decade, the Board was swamped with subdivision applications and construction. In contrast, only two applications for new subdivision proposals were submitted in the past year (Winston Woods and The Camelot).

Heather Hill, Erica Drive and Rocky Road were accepted as public ways. The following subdivision roadways remain unaccepted ways: Green Meadow Court; Ash Street (extension of); Hastings Drive; Windsor Ridge Drive; Cliffe Road; Shining Rock Drive; Clubhouse Lane; Fairway Drive; and Sandtrap Court.

The Planning Board also participated and sponsored a number of workshops during the calendar year, which were aimed to assist in the preparation and updating of the town's Master Plan. These public workshops were proposed and organized by our Town Planner. Mr. Bechtholdt has been extremely active in finding opportunities for the Planning Board and interested citizens to gain knowledge in land use planning and other planning initiatives. In January 2009, the Planning Board hosted a Smart Growth/Smart Energy workshop where representatives from the Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD), the Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) and the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) reviewed the State's Green Communities program, Transfer Development Rights (TDRs) and Smart Growth Zoning Districts (40R).

Similarly during the fall of 2009, the Planning Board hosted a regional "Shaping the Future" workshop series with Mass Audubon and its Regional Planning Agency (CMRPC) concerning Mass Audubon's release of "Losing Ground –Beyond the Footprint", a publication documenting changes in Massachusetts' land-use and the reality of habitat loss and sprawl. Northbridge is included in the top ten "sprawl frontiers" and has one of the highest rates of development in Massachusetts. The workshop reviewed land-use and development patterns in the Blackstone Valley and offered strategies to update community plans to protect priority land and water supply areas.

In addition to assisting the Planning Board and other municipal boards and committees the Community Planning & Development Office participated in a number of projects including: the Blackstone River Bikeway; Commuter Rail Feasibility Study; 43D Expedited Permitting; Land Use Partnership Act (CPA II / LUPA); Affordable Housing; Green Communities Act; Stormwater Management; Low Impact Development (LID); Best Development Guidebook; Geographic Information Systems (GIS); Webpage updates; Subdivision Inspection form; and overseeing the town's Community Development Block Grant program.

As we begin the new decade the Planning Board will continue to explore land-use provisions and other initiatives that help protect the environmental quality, preserve the community character and promote the economic viability of Northbridge.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Dolber, Chair

Barbara Gaudette, Vice Chair

Richard Griggs, Clerk

Edward Palmer

Kevin Curtin

Cindy Key, Associate Member