

## PLANNING BOARD

[2014 Annual Report]

The Northbridge Planning Board consists of five (5) elected members and one (1) appointed associate member. The Planning Board has the responsibility of reviewing development projects and making decisions in accordance with state/local bylaws and regulations. The Planning Board's official powers and responsibilities are defined in the Northbridge Subdivision Rules and Regulations, the Northbridge Zoning Bylaw and as prescribed in the Massachusetts General Laws.

The subdivision rules and regulations have been enacted to protect the safety, convenience and welfare of the inhabitants of Northbridge by regulating the laying out new lots and construction of ways. In addition to subdivision control the Planning Board reviews site development plans in accordance with Chapter 173 of the town's Zoning Bylaw. The Planning Board oversees site development proposals from the planning stage through completion.

The Planning Board typically meets the second and fourth Tuesday of each month in the Northbridge Memorial Town Hall (7 Main Street); all meetings are open to the public and begin at 7:00PM. The Planning Board is assisted by the Community Planning & Development Office (14 Hill Street –Aldrich School Town Hall Annex) staffed by a Town Planner, R. Gary Bechtholdt II and a Planning/Conservation Administrative Assistant, Barbara Kinney.

During the calendar year of 2014, the Planning Board held 20 Board meetings, 11 Open Space & Recreation Plan Update public meetings and various other public workshops. Applications reviewed by the Planning Board include division of land creating new lots on existing/approved roadways (ANR plans); Site plans for commercial and other non-residential developments; Planned Business Developments; and residential subdivisions.

In 2014, Northbridge had six (6) residential subdivisions under construction, each varying in degree of completion. Approximately 24 of the 65 single-family homes within the Camelot subdivision have been completed; 16 of the 31 single-family homes within Hemlock Estates have been built; 8 of 9 of the single-family house lots within Hillside Garden Estates completed; roughly 75 of the 105 single-family house lots have been built within Presidential Farms; and 47 of 56 single-family houses lots within Shining Rock Golf Community have been constructed. Carpenter Estates consisting of 18 single-family house lots has yet to commence construction with an additional 18 single-family house lots recently approved for Leonardo Estates subdivision to be located off Highland Street. The Planning Board continues to work with the homeowners of the Farnum Circle subdivision in hopes of completing priority items by next year. The Planning Board also reviewed a preliminary subdivision plan for 8 single-family homes proposed to be located off Union Street. The Planning Board remains concerned with the continued residential growth in town, where demands on public infrastructure and services will also increase.

Site development approvals during 2014 include: 4 & 16 North Main Street, a site redevelopment for a gas station, convenience store and donut/coffee shop; 135 Providence Road, a site development expansion of the Salvation Army Thrift Store and three new office/retail storefronts totaling ±19,300 square-feet and 369 Douglas Road, a site development expansion of ±8,800 square-feet for WGM Fabricators, Inc., a glass manufacturing company from Woonsocket, RI. The Planning Board also approved a ground-mounted solar facility in 2014 to be sited off of Lasell Road in Northbridge and Sutton.

Osterman Commerce Park, the Planned Business Development approved in 2013 completed its initial phase 1 construction with the opening of a ±24,000 medical office building for Milford Regional Medical Center. When completed the Osterman Commerce Park will include 5 to 6 buildings with over 200,000 square-feet of mixed-use building space located off of Church Street Extension. As part of its overall approval the owner of the project is committed to work with the town in improving access along Church Street Extension, specifically the Quaker Street intersection.

In August 2014, Northbridge was selected to participate in a District Local Technical Assistance Grant and Priority Development Program for the preparation of a Reuse Study for 2040 Providence Road. The subject property, a former auto salvage yard had a Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessment completed in 2011 & 2012, as part of a Brownfields Assessment Grant awarded to Northbridge from the US Environmental Protection Agency. The preparation of the Reuse Plan included a public workshop with abutters as well as other interested parties to facilitate and gather information about the potential reuse of the site. Attendees reviewed existing site conditions (land use, zoning, etc.), environmental assessment (brownfield) and explored potential redevelopment opportunities that are economically viable, environmentally sensitive and complementary to the locus area. The Reuse Study completed by CMRPC –Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission recommended zoning amendments for mixed-use (residential/office/commercial) and a build-out potential which included site clean-up and access to the Blackstone River. The Planning Board intends to host a follow-up workshop with abutters and others to review the findings and recommendations before sponsoring any potential zoning amendment articles.

At the 2014 Special Town Meeting (held January 14, 2014) the town amended its zoning bylaw by (1) extending the Business-One Zoning District to include subject property formerly known as China Pacific restaurant on Linwood Avenue and (2) amending Zoning Bylaw Section 173-27 [Off-street parking, loading and landscaping standards] to provide certain zoning relief and flexibility for retail and service uses located in buildings constructed prior to November 07, 1967.

At the 2014 Spring Annual Town Meeting (held May 06, 2014 & May 13, 2014) the town amended its zoning bylaw by (1) adding a new provision entitled “Registered Marijuana Dispensary” and (2) adding to the Table of Use Regulations (Section 173-12), allowing Registered Marijuana Dispensary (RMD) within the Industrial-Two Zoning District by Special Permit. The RMD provision defines and regulates Registered Marijuana Dispensaries (RMDs) in town and includes provisions for siting requirements of RMDs, as well as, restrictions to minimize potential adverse impacts on adjacent properties.

At the 2014 Fall Annual Town Meeting (held October 28, 2014) the town amended its Zoning Bylaw Section 173-20 [Table of Height & Bulk Regulations] by (1) increasing the maximum height permitted in the Industrial Zoning Districts to 60-feet and (2) increasing the number of stories to four (4).

The Community Planning & Development Office continues to oversee and administer the Disaster Recovery funds of a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) awarded to the town for the relocation of the Rockdale Youth Center from its current location on Providence Road (within the Floodway) to the vacant St. Peters’ school building on Church Avenue in Rockdale. The town has partnered with the Whitin Community Center and is working with volunteers and Dixon Salo Architects, Inc. on this initiative.

On December 19, 2014 President Obama signed legislation that established the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park. The National Park designation of the Blackstone River and Canal also includes 5 sites within Rhode Island and Massachusetts: Old Slater Mill in Pawtucket (RI); Slatersville in North Smithfield (RI); Ashton Village in Cumberland (RI); and Hopedale & Whitinsville historic districts in Massachusetts. The Planning Board

recognizes this special designation as a unique opportunity that will have positive impacts for the town, its residents and businesses.

In May 2014, Janet Dolber decided not to seek re-election and in July 2014 Brett Simas resigned as a result of moving out of town. The Planning Board would like to thank Ms. Dolber and Mr. Simas for their dedication and commitment in serving and assisting the town. The Planning Board welcomed Brian Massey (elected) and Pamela Ferrara (appointed) to the Board in 2014.

Respectfully submitted by,

George S. Murray, Chairman

Mark Key, Vice Chairman

Brian Massey, Clerk

Barbara Gaudette, Member

Pamela Ferrara, Member

Cindy Key, Associate Member