

## PLANNING BOARD

[2015 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 Northbridge 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 generally begin at 7:00 PM. 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 2015, the Planning Board held 19 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 (Site Plan Review); Planned Business Developments (Special Permit); and residential subdivisions (Preliminary/Definitive Subdivision Review).

The Planning Board continues to oversee the construction of the following residential developments: Camelot (65-lots located off Hill Street); Carpenter Estates (18-lots off Carpenter Road); Hemlock Estates (32-lots located off Sutton Street); Leonardo Estates (18-lots off Highland Street); and Presidential Farms (105-lots located off Hill Street). The Board also continues to work with the homeowners of the Farnum Circle subdivision in hopes of completing priority items identified by the owners. Despite the lack of new subdivision approvals in 2015 (zero) the Planning Board remains concerned with the residential build-out where demands on public services and infrastructure continue to increase.

Site development review approvals during 2015 included a ±31,500 square-foot Fine Arts and Athletics Center for the Whitinsville Christian School and a ±5,000 square-foot accessory storage building for Foppema's Farm. WGM Fabricators, Inc. completed its redevelopment and expansion project at 369 Douglas Road, opening up its state of the art glass fabrication facility in Whitinsville in August 2015.

The Planning Board reviewed (February-September 2015) a site plan review application for a proposed in-vessel food composting facility where food waste collected offsite would be combined with woodchips and mixed in a rotary drum; the resulting compost would then be transferred offsite and used for landscaping, etc. As a result of the Building Inspector/Zoning Enforcement Officer's determination of non-permitted use within the Industrial Zone the site plan review application was subsequently withdrawn.

In July 2015, the Planning Board began its review of a proposed ±4,500 square-foot retail building with gas station, drive-thru and standalone carwash (to be located on Main Street). The Planning Board continues to

review the proposal awaiting additional information from the Applicant/Engineer on the proposed stormwater management (floodplain), traffic analysis and recommendations of the Conservation Commission and Safety Committee. The build-out of Osterman Commerce Park continued in 2015, with the completion of Phase 1 & 2, including the construction of a second ±16,000 square-foot medical office building; site construction also commenced in the Fall of 2015 for remaining Phases 3 & 4.

At the 2015 Fall Annual Town Meeting voters accepted Deane Way (Hillside Garden Estates) as a public way and authorized the Board of Selectmen and Conservation Commission to accept land donation of ±50 acres located off Highland Street from WRT Management Corporation. The subject property, zoned residential, was previously included in a Comprehensive Permit application (Granite Hills Estates) and was to include 124 townhouse units. The Planning Board supported the land donation as open space vs. the potential for 124 new housing units off of Highland Street with access through the neighboring Hills at Whitinsville subdivision where traffic safety and demands on town services would be of concern.

The Community Planning & Development Office continues to oversee and administer the Disaster Recovery funds received from the State's Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG); in total over \$1.4mil has been awarded to Northbridge for the Rockdale Youth Center Relocation Project. The town has partnered with Fuss & O'Neill, Inc. and Blackstone Heritage Corridor, Inc. to evaluate and identify preferred alignments for the Blackstone River Bikeway; approximately 5.5 miles of the planned 48-miles will traverse through Northbridge.

Throughout the calendar year the Town Planner and Town Manager met with representatives from the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce and Quinsigamond Community College to evaluate and coordinate efforts to locate a satellite campus within the Blackstone Valley; an evaluation of a site in Northbridge (Church Street) is underway. The Planning Board recognizes the prospects of this initiative as a positive for the community; a boost for the downtown that may create future opportunities in developing workforce training and incubator space in town.

In November 2015, the Planning Board hosted a public workshop aimed to initiate dialogue on economic development opportunities and strategies for the town. Attendees reviewed existing zoning districts and offered commentary and opinions on potential zoning amendments and land use development patterns. The Planning Board plans to host a follow-up workshop in February 2016. In June 2015, the Planning Board opened its public hearing to consider amendments to the town's Subdivision Rules & Regulations (Chapter 222); provisions under review include placement of street trees; street design standards and other general requirements.

In December 2015, the town engaged the services of Beals + Thomas, Inc. to assist the Planning Board and Ad-Hoc Committee in updating the town's Open Space & Recreation Plan. The plan will include an Inventory of Land, Analysis of Needs, Goals & Objectives, and a 7-year Action Plan for implementation. The town also engaged the services of Karen Sunnarborg, a housing and planning consultant to assist in the preparation of a Housing Production Plan.

After more than 25-years of public service Barbara Gaudette stepped down from the Planning Board in July 2015. Barbara worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life in Northbridge; of the many accomplishments we are enduringly grateful for her work on the 1994 Master Plan, the 2002 Open Space & Recreation Plan, the creation of the Mumford River Walk, and her contributions that lead to the inclusion of Whitinsville in the establishment of the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park (December 2014). The Planning Board

would like to thank Ms. Gaudette for her exceptional dedication and commitment in serving and assisting the town.

Respectfully submitted by,

Brian Massey, Chairman

Mark Key, Vice Chairman

Pamela Ferrara, Clerk

George S. Murray, Member

Cindy Key, Associate Member