

## **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE, Annual Town Meeting 2011**

### **Sandra Hackman, Planning Board**

As many people know, the Planning Board reports to annual town meeting on Bedford's progress in implementing the Comprehensive Plan. Also known as the Master Plan, this plan includes a vision and action steps in areas such as housing, land use, economic development, and open space and recreation. The board approved the existing plan in 2002, after years of work on the part of residents and staff. Now it is time to create a new plan.

What's really exciting is that the town has accomplished most of the dozens of specific action steps in the existing plan. In putting these ideas and proposals into practice, town residents, volunteers, and staff have laid important groundwork that will help Bedford fulfill our vision for sustainable, people-centered development in the years ahead.

For example, Bedford has made huge strides in historic preservation and affordable housing, and in creating a linked network of trails within and among our many conservation areas—all goals in the existing plan.

The Bicycle Advisory Committee has also been working with DPW to pursue the extension of the Minuteman Rail Trail that annual town meeting approved last year—another goal of the existing plan.

Town meeting approved design guidelines for the Great Road business district in 2007—another action item in the existing plan—and the Planning Board applied them in approving new designs for the Blake Block and the Marshall's/Whole Foods shopping center. Although those redevelopments have not yet occurred given the weak economy, when they do they will transform and enliven those areas of town. And the town's efforts in the next few months to create a master plan specifically for the center of town will further the Comprehensive Plan's vision of a walkable, bike-friendly Bedford.

These and other new and exciting developments promise to provide a springboard for creating a new plan. For example, the Energy Task Force has been promoting imaginative ways for town government and residents to curb our energy use. We'll hear more about that later tonight, when we consider whether to take the final step toward becoming a state-certified Green Community.

The Arbor Resources Committee is hard at work on several new proposals to enhance the tree canopy of our community. And the Transportation Advisory Committee and the Planning Board are starting to consider new options to enable residents and businesses to get around within Bedford and connect with nearby towns.

The Planning Board hopes to harness the energy and creativity of these and many other efforts in building a new Comprehensive Plan. The process of doing so is challenging: it can take one to two years, or even longer. And we do not yet have a firm roadmap, as we are awaiting the outcome of legislation that would revamp the state's guidelines for master plans.

However, the Planning Board is taking the first step by meeting with boards and committees this spring and fall to talk about initial ideas on several fronts:

- First, we intend to document the town's progress over the past decade in realizing the goals in the existing plan.
- Second, we intend to update Bedford's profile—the snapshot of residents and businesses, and the town's attributes and amenities—based on the 2010 census.
- Third, we again aim to create a vision for the future: which aspects of the town residents want to preserve, and which aspects we would like to see change and grow over the next 5 to 10 years.
- And finally, we aim to home in on specific action items that will enable all of us to realize that vision.

We intend to use the ideas that come out of our early discussions with town boards and committees to spark ideas and proposals from residents and businesses during a series of widely publicized meetings.

We hope as many people as possible will participate in this process. Of course, this may entail attending one or two or even a few meetings. You know the expression? the Revolution will never come—it would require too many meetings? Well, I'm sympathetic. Still, that's where ideas often germinate.

We therefore welcome everyone to participate in the preliminary meetings we are holding with boards and committees, and then in the ensuing brainstorming sessions specifically designed to solicit broad public input.

You can find out when these meetings will occur by checking the Planning Board agendas posted on the town's website. You can also send us your written comments and ideas, and we hope to create a website to nurture this process.

Meanwhile I should mention that Bedford could not have accomplished so much over the past decade and even longer without Planning Director Rich Joly. Dozens of board members have learned much from his thoughtful judgment and quiet wisdom during the 26 years he has served the town.

As many people may know, Rich is retiring at the end of June. So while we reluctantly prepare to say goodbye to Rich and launch him into the next phase of his life, we are also searching for a new planning director to guide us in updating the Comprehensive Plan.

We look forward to working with everyone on that update. Thank you.