

Executive Summary

The review of the 2002 Belchertown Community Plan was initiated in April 2007 and completed in 2008. Formal adoption was in January 2009. A volunteer committee was formed to complete this work; the following individuals served on this steering committee:

Bernie Schliemann – at large citizen
Jon Clements – Agricultural Commission
Linda Leduc – Conservation Commission
Judy Gillan – Historical Commission
Christopher Laurenzo – Planning Board
Woody Sherman – Belchertown Economic Development and Industrial Corporation
Ron Aponte – Board of Selectmen
Doug Albertson – Town Planner

This group completed (1) a thorough review and update to the 2002 plan, (2) developed a comprehensive list of priorities that should be addressed in the next five years, (3) drafted an agriculture section to cement the importance of this historical economic driver, and (4) revised the list of action items – in priority order – at the end of each section.

The steering committee sought public input through a survey (available online and in print for a 3-month duration) and a public forum conducted at the Belchertown High School in November 2007. Both the *Sentinel* and Channel 5 were used to promote both the survey and public forum. Additionally, paper copies of the survey were made available at the Town Planner's office, the library, Checkers, and the Sports Shed. A total of 38 respondents completed the online survey (none completed a paper copy) and 24 residents attended the public forum. The committee feels that sufficient effort was applied toward gathering and refining public input through the survey instrument and public forum; a copy of the survey is attached and integrated with the list of top priorities (Section XI of the 2009 Belchertown Community Plan).

A consolidated list of top priorities was compiled from all sections [respective section listed in brackets] and is intended to serve as both a checklist and mandate for the town's leadership in addressing the concerns of the public. In addition, the committee believes that the central themes of **business development** and **environmental conservation** (or "green") are instrumental to preserving the interests of Belchertown residents. These themes are certainly well-represented in the following list of top priorities:

1. [Housing] Develop **planned growth strategy** ensuring infrastructure exists to support the desired pace and type of growth.
2. [Land Use] Draft **phased development bylaw** providing incentives for developers to save open space, provide housing for preferred groups, avoid suburban landscapes, and promote the rural look and feel of the town by phasing the number of building permits.

3. [Agriculture] Develop **incentives for landowners** to keep their land in forestry, agriculture, and recreation.
4. [Open Space and Recreation] Develop **review process for proposed developments** adjacent to preserved conservation land and agricultural land to prevent adverse impact to that land and maximize the overall area of contiguous open space.
5. [Land Use] Draft **zoning bylaw revisions** to increase lot size in areas of environmental concern including poor draining soils, steep slopes, active farm and forestry production, and wellhead / watersheds.
6. [Natural Resources; Community Facilities & Services] Update and distribute **GIS** information. A Graphic Information System (GIS) provides the town with valuable data used in making decisions related to zoning, housing, demographics, the environment, and other natural resource-related issues.
7. [Historical & Cultural Resources] Establish policy defining and protecting **scenic vistas and views** from town ways.
8. [Natural Resources] Develop comprehensive **Lakes Management Plan** with the Tri-Lakes Association with emphasis on nutrient run-off.
9. [Natural Resources] Require **wildlife habitat evaluation** for all development projects (other than single family homes) outside of village areas.
10. [Circulation & Transportation] Use a pavement management system (to prioritize **town roads**) for street maintenance and improvement.
11. [Community Facilities & Services] Develop a five-year and a ten-year plan for Fire, Police, EMS, and Public Works Department **staff and facility needs**. Identify possible sites for north and south satellite stations.
12. [Economic Development] Work with the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation to plan and achieve redevelopment of the **state school property** in ways that gain the most for the community. Consider how utilitarian service facilities might be tucked into the site plan concept.
13. [Open Space & Recreation] Establish a **system of bikeways and hiking trails** (separate from roadways if possible) connecting the far ends of town to recreation areas and other public facilities.
14. [Open Space & Recreation] Develop **plan for targeting parcels**, portions of parcels, development rights, and easements for acquisition.
15. [Community Facilities & Services] Evaluate aging assets and create an **annual improvement schedule**.

16. [Health & Human Services] Evaluate readiness and capacity to **respond to biohazard emergencies**, disease outbreaks, and other serious threats to public health and safety.
17. [Land Use] Draft **creative or flexible development bylaw** to providing incentives for subdivision and multiple ANR developers to enhance the use of natural resources and preserve the rural look and feel of town by offering flexible frontage requirements, varied lot sizes, road widths, and use of common drives.
18. [Housing] Assure **design of affordable housing units** will be compatible with other structures in the area, preserving the town's rural look and feel.
19. [Health & Human Services] Assess availability of **acute / urgent health care** services and emergency services in Town.
20. [Economic Development] Examine the zoning bylaw, and compare the types of businesses that are allowed in the town center with the types that have been identified as promising for that area. Identify developable parcels in the **town center**; consider whether they need to be rezoned; and whether adjustments are needed in allowed uses, dimensional and site plan requirements, sign regulations, and development review procedures. Consider full or partial implementation of the 2003 Town Center Plan.
21. [Historical & Cultural Resources] Develop and adopt appropriate **demolition notification bylaw** allowing time to consider alternatives to the loss of historic structures.
22. [Housing] Address requirements of **low income housing**.
23. [Community Facilities & Services] Conduct a **town office space needs analysis**.
24. [Circulation & Transportation] Commit necessary resources to **manage tree and vegetation cutback** work along public roads.
25. [Circulation & Transportation] Develop a policy for **services to private roads**.

A graduate student from the University of Massachusetts Amherst assisted the Town Planner in updating the tabular data throughout the Community Plan while the committee updated the content of each section within the plan. This list should serve as the basis of the town priorities for the Board of Selectmen as well as the town's various committees and departments. In addition, quarterly updates and an annual written progress report should be drafted by each committee and department for the Board of Selectmen and town residents.

The committee is confident that the revised plan reflects the interests of Belchertown residents.