



Town Planner

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MEMO

To: Richard Brown, Somerset Town Administrator
From: Nancy Durfee, Town Planner
Re: Town Planners Role, Responsibilities and Tasks
Date: May 21, 2021

The Town Planner's main responsibility is to create and carry out plans for the Town's development and prosperity. The planner works with Town officials, Regional, State and Federal agencies, boards, and residents to make recommendations toward the healthy development of the community and to provide sound professional advice and technical expertise.

A Town Planner is someone who develops plans and programs for the use of land. They use planning to create communities, accommodate growth, or revitalize the economy in communities. They also typically do the following:

- Meet with public officials, department heads, developers, and the public regarding development plans and land use development;
- Gather and analyze economic and environmental studies, censuses, and market research data;
- Conduct field investigations to analyze factors affecting land use;
- Review site plans submitted by developers;
- Assess the feasibility of proposals and identify needed changes;
- Present, develop, and construct projects for the betterment of the community;
- Stay current on zoning, environmental regulations, and other legal issues.

Planners identify community needs and develop short-and-long term plans to create, grow or revitalize a community or area. As an area grows or changes, planners help communities manage the related economic, social, and environmental issues, such as planning a fishing pier to attract new businesses, conducting a study to understand the needs of the town center. Planners work on

broad, community-wide plans such as a Master Plan, while addressing specific issues. Ultimately, planners promote the best use of a community's land and resources for residential, commercial, transportation, historic preservation, and environmental or recreational purposes.

As Town Planner, there is a great need to collaborate with public officials, engineers, architects, and developers, often giving presentations, attending meetings and managing projects. There is ample opportunity to balance conflicting interest and negotiate deals, which often faces pressures from politicians, developers, and the public. Most importantly, good planning preserves the best of the past and promotes innovation, so that the town's future will continue to meet the community's needs.

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS AND PLANNING BOARD

The Town Planner has been tasked with assisting the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) including attendance at all hearings, writing decisions, and corresponding with petitioners, attorneys, and consultants in order to finalize the board's decisions. As the Town Planner, it is my responsibility to write the decisions, and correspond with petitioners, attorneys and consultants to ensure an efficiently run process.

PROJECTS

ZONING RECODIFICATION AND CHANGES PROJECT

The Town of Somerset appropriated \$50,000 at the 2019 fall Town Meeting to revise and recodify the Somerset Zoning Bylaws. We determined a two-step process would be necessary to complete this tasks afforded to us by the residents. This process includes an attorney conducting a diagnostic review, identify deficiencies and a consultant to review Somerset's existing regulations, identify topics and critical concerns, provide written recommendations based on the Master Plan, engage the public regarding key decision points and prepare a development guide, all to streamline and create a user-friendly zoning process for residents and businesses in town.

- Zoning Recodification and Changes website was created for targeted outreach and education. <https://www.townofsomerset.org/somerset-zoning-recodification>

TOWN OF SOMERSET, SHARED STREETS AND SPACES GRANT – MASSDOT

The Town of Somerset executed and completed a dedicated bike lane along Bayton Avenue and Read Street as part of the Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program through MassDOT. The Town was awarded \$12,100 for the implementation of the bike path. The dedicated bike lane route will begin at the southern end of Brayton Avenue, near the intersection with Route 6, extending north to Read Street where the bike lane will turn left and run along the north side of Read Street, terminating at the South Elementary School and the Somerset Middle School. The bike lane will expand upon an existing bike path network in the region, including the South Coast Bikeway.

ROUTE 103 ACCESS MANAGEMENT STUDY – SRPEDD

Route 103 Access Management Study: The Town is working with SRPEDD on the Route 103 Access Management Study recommended in the Route I-195 Exit 4 Assessment. This study is currently underway.

MUNICIPAL VULNERABILITY REGIONAL PLAN – SRPEDD

MVP Regional Plan: The Town completed the Municipal Vulnerability Regional Plan with Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) and are neighboring communities of Swansea and Dighton to build on our Municipal Vulnerability Plan to describe clear regional actions to advance our adaptation and resiliency to a changing environment. The Plan will be added as an addendum to the Somerset, Municipal Vulnerability Plan and Hazard Mitigation Plan and be utilized to advance regional actions in order to reduce risks and build resilience.

MUNICIPAL HARBOR AND DESIGNATED PORT AREA PLAN – LLOYD’S REGISTER NORTH AMERICA, INC.

Municipal Harbor and DPA Plan: The Town is working with Lloyd’s Register North America, Inc. on a Municipal Harbor and DPA Plan. The creation of a Municipal Harbor Plan stems from recommendations identified in our recently completed Master Plan, 2020 and Expanded Economic Development Plan, 2019.

The Town is looking to attract new business to the waterfront which will bring economic benefits to the state – new revenue and new business. The Town needs a plan to capitalize and real outcomes for connecting the community to its waterfront.

- Scope of Work was developed, contract with the Seaport Economic Council and Lloyd’s Register North America Inc. was completed;
- Kick off meeting with key Department Heads was held;
- Data mining and sharing has taken place;
- Shoreline survey conducted;
- Interviews of key stakeholders and Town Officials

WILBUR AVENUE FEASIBILITY STUDY

The town of Somerset acquired the undeveloped 98-acre parcel from New England Power Company in 2003 for \$6.9 million. The parcel is mostly wooded with two open field areas. The town received a Technical Assistance grant from MassDevelopment in order to determine future prospects of the parcel. The town is interested in better understanding of the highest and best use for this property. An analysis of existing conditions and development constraints is needed to inform this understanding. Based on the analysis, conceptual site plan alternatives will be prepared to illustrate approaches to developing the land.

- Scope of Work was developed, contract with Santec was completed;

- Kick off meeting with Town Administrator, Town Planner, MassDevelopment and Santec;
- Site visit was conducted;
- Data mining and sharing completed;
- Stakeholder meeting with area businesses and Town Officials has taken place

COMMUNITY CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The Town initiated a proposed conflict resolution assessment project with Consensus Building Institute (CBI) to assist the community amidst the current issues. CBI provides strategic planning, organizational development, and highly-skilled facilitation to communities in conflict. We are currently searching funding from CEC to conduct the proposed project.

NEW GRANTS & GRANTS RECEIVED

The Town Planner was tasked with exploring grant opportunities to obtain non-taxpayer funding for Town improvements, studies and plans. The strategy was to pursue grant opportunities with various Regional, State and Federal agencies and continue oversight and administrative requirements during the implementation of projects.

NEW GRANTS

- Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program, a grant was submitted in late February to extend the current bike lane from the South School on Read Street to the Swansea town-line. This expands on the bike path network in the region, including the South Coast Bikeway;
- 3280 County Street, Brownfield Remediation Project;
- Slade’s Ferry Crossing Overlay District Bylaw Revisions;
- Housing Production Plan;
- Community Conflict Assessment
- Somerset Reservoir Emergency Dam Improvements, Federal earmark for \$1.3 million to raise the reservoir 2’.

Grants Received		
Route 6 Roadway Improvements	MassWorks	\$1,300,000.00
Expanded Economic Development Plan	EDA	\$24,000.00
Route 138 Study	SRPEDD	\$20,000.00
Municipal Vulnerability Plan	EOEEA	\$26,000.00
3280 County Street	MassDevelopment Brownfield	\$45,000.00

Slade's Ferry Park n' Ride mixed-use rendering	Bay Coast Bank	\$6,800.00
Slade's Ferry Park n' Ride Fishing Pier & 200 Main Street Renderings	TWSRSC	\$12,000.00
200 Main Street Acquisition Funding	TWSRSC	\$39,000.00
Route 103 Access Management Study	SRPEDD	\$65,000.00
Municipal Harbor and DPA Plan	Seaport Economic Council	\$48,900.00
Slade's Ferry Bike Path	MassDOT	\$12,100.00
Rte. 103/Wilbur Avenue Feasibility Study	MassDevelopment	\$20,000.00
Slade's Ferry Fishing Pier	Senator Rodrigues	\$500,000.00
Community Conflict Resolution	CBI/CEC	\$20,000
	TOTAL	\$2,138,800.00

ON-GOING PROJECTS

MASTER PLAN

One of the primary responsibilities of the Town Planner is to update and implement the town’s Master Plan. A Master Plan is a comprehensive, long term (15-20 years), planning document that outlines a vision and policy framework to guide future growth and development of a community. The Planning Board adopted the Master Plan on July 14, 2020.

- Review Action and Implementation sections of the Master Plan, Expanded Economic Development Plan, Route 138 Corridor Study, Route I-195 Exit 4 Assessment, Hazard Mitigation Plan and MVP Plans.
- Continue to host meetings with Department Heads and key board members to move plans forward.
- Assisted the Conservation Commission Chairman and Agent with improvements to the north end Broad Cove Conservation property. The Master Plan and Route 138 Opportunity Study identified the north end of Somerset as a natural gateway to the town. One of Somerset’s most unique attributes is its location on the Taunton River, with gorgeous views and recreational opportunities. The Broad Cove Conservation area has been a long-term priority for public access for the town. A meeting was held between Somerset Conservation and the Town of Dighton Conservation and Highway Department to discuss partnership and collaboration on the shared resource and opportunities.
 - The Conservation Commission Chairman, Agent and the Town Planner are also investigating future projects in the south end Town to improve access to the waterfront as outlined in the Master Plan.

SLADE'S FERRY REDEVELOPMENT

The Slade's Ferry Redevelopment Committee (SFRC) and the Town Planner has been implementing action items from the Slade's Ferry Report, 2010 and the Master Plan, 2020.

- Development of roadway stripping for bike lanes that connect the community to the regional South Coast Bikeway plans and the South Coast Rail were completed.
- Renderings of the Mixed Use Development in the Park and Ride area of Slade's Ferry are being developed.
- Fishing Pier renderings completed.
- Park and Ride surveyed for future development.
- Weintraub and Slade's Deed research.

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROJECTS COMPLETED

- Assist other Departments as necessary.
- Assisted and rectified the Almy Street culvert grant for the Highway Department when the project was in jeopardy. Saving the Town over \$500,000.
- Assisted the Town Administrator on various projects and issues related to Town matters.
- Created a Development Guide for economic development.
- Assist Residents and Businesses in the community.
- Assist the Planning Board with their Stormwater Rules and Regulations.
- Created maps in ArcGIS for the Recreation Department to host the Easter celebration in the community and for the Open Space Plan.
- Developed grant projects through plans and reports including 3280 County Street Brownfield Clean-up, Community in Conflict, Shared Streets for Bike Lanes on Read Street, Slade's Ferry Crossing Rezoning, Housing Production Plan. The total sum of these grants come to over \$300,000 in funds for FY21 to move projects forward.
- Worked toward securing \$1.3 million Federal earmark for the Somerset Reservoir Emergency Dam project.
- Future funding for \$1.4 million for the Somerset Waterfront Park seawall.
- Completed the following plans, reports and studies:
 - Route 138 Corridor Study
 - Route 195, Exit 4 Study
 - Municipal Vulnerability Plan
 - Regional Vulnerability Plan
 - Master Plan
 - Economic Development Plan
 - Wilbur Avenue Parcel Study
 - Economic Development Self-Assessment and Permitting Process Review