

## **Planning Board 2008 Annual Report**

To the Honorable Board of Selectmen:

The Ashburnham Planning Board consists of five (5) elected members and one (1) appointed associate member (currently vacant at this time). The Board has the responsibility of reviewing proposed development projects (residential subdivisions, business/commercial and industrial site plans, Common Driveway Special Permits, Open Space Residential Development Special Permits, Accessory Dwelling Unit Special Permits and Scenic Road Permits) and makes decisions on them in accordance with state/local bylaws & regulations. The Zoning Bylaw also allows the Board to review major residential developments to preserve the natural and cultural resources of Ashburnham by insuring the larger-scale of conversion of land to residential use does not consume all of the Town's woodlands, fields, farmlands, historic structures and landscapes, cart paths, stone walls, geologic formations, water courses, wetlands, riparian zones, groundwater recharge areas, hilltops, scenic vistas, and other significant open spaces as well as providing a public voice and public authority in consideration of alternative approaches to conventional residential developments.

The Planning Board's official powers and responsibilities are provided through the Ashburnham Subdivision Regulations, Zoning Bylaws and as prescribed under the authority of the Subdivision Control Law enacted under Chapter 41, Section 81A-81GG of the Massachusetts General Laws. These rules and regulations have been enacted for the purpose of protecting the safety, convenience and welfare of the inhabitants of Ashburnham by regulating the laying out and construction of ways in subdivisions and providing access to lots therein.

At the April 2008 annual town election, William Nolan was nominated and elected to a 5-year term. Following the election, the five member Board reorganized and John MacMillan was re-elected to the position of Chairman, Joseph Kalagher was re-elected to serve as Vice-Chairman, and Bruce Whitney was re-elected to serve as Clerk to the Board. The Planning Board regularly met on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday evenings at 6:30 p.m. in the Town Hall. In calendar year 2008, the Board conducted 20 regular meetings and performed numerous on-site visits as well as meeting with other Boards and Committees.

The Board is also responsible for preparing careful studies pertaining to planning issues in the Town and recommending zoning amendments for Town Meeting approval.

During the calendar year 2008, the Board approved 8 "Approval Not Required" (ANR) plans of land as compared to 14 in 2007. The Board endorsed 13 building permit applications for new dwellings in 2008, compared to 21 in 2007.

The Board continues to monitor previously approved Lakeview Estates, Cashman Hill Estates and Bray Avenue subdivisions during the construction process. The three subdivisions create forty (40) new lots and must meet the requirements of the Growth Limitation Bylaw. The Lakeside Village condominiums previously approved by the Board as an Open Space Residential Development for residents over 55 with 11 duplex units (22 dwelling units) came back before the Board for a modification in 2008. Due to current market conditions the Board approved a modification to the Lakeside Village condominiums removing the over 55 restriction. Progress on all four subdivisions has slowed or stopped due to the continued housing crisis.

The Board performed 3 Scenic Road hearings in conjunction with the Scenic Road Regulations. The Board also granted the Department of Public Works a town wide permit for routine maintenance on all scenic roads in town.

No new Preliminary or Definitive Subdivisions were submitted to the Board during 2008, a continuing sign of the slowdown in the housing market. One Common Driveway Zoning Special Permit was issued under the Common Driveway Bylaw for 2008.

The November 13, 2008 Special Town Meeting adopted zoning amendments submitted by the Board that created a Special Permit process for Large Wind Energy Systems and Small Wind Energy Systems with approval of the Building Inspector. The Special Town Meeting also approved a re-write of the Open Space Residential Development Bylaw.

The Planning Board, with funding approved back at the May 2006 Town Meeting, hired four (4) graduate students of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, to prepare an "Ashburnham Industrial Land Use Suitability Analysis and Assessment". After comments by the Planning Board and Town Planner, the final report was delivered to the Planning Board in December 2007. The Board presented the final study to the Board of Selectmen in 2008 and will work on implementing the recommendations of the study in the coming years.

Bruce Whitney served as the Planning Board representative to the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission and John MacMillan served as the Planning Board representative on the Affordable Housing Committee. Joseph Kalagher and John MacMillan represented the Planning Board on the Village Center District Zoning Committee.

The Board continues to work with the Village Center Zoning District Study Committee and will be recommending new zoning for the Village Center at the 2009 Annual Town Meeting.

Through the efforts of Town Planner, Eric Smith, the Town received a grant from the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation to conduct a Marketing Plan for the Village Center. The plan was completed in December 2008 and is now being reviewed by the Village Center Zoning Committee and the Planning Board.

The Board would like to take this opportunity to thank Eric R. Smith, Town Planner for 3+ years of service to the Town of Ashburnham. Eric brought a great deal of expertise and professionalism to the Planning Board and the Town. In December 2008, Eric accepted a Planner position with the Southwest Regional Planning Commission in Keene, NH. Although we will miss Eric, we all wish him luck with his new job.

The Board recommends that the recently approved Low Impact Development (LID) Bylaw be modified to remove the simplified portion of the bylaw. The Board has found that the bylaw is difficult to enforce the way it is currently written and we no longer have staff support to assist the Board in the process of approving LID permits.

The Planning Board now has a great deal of information on the Town's new website it can be viewed at [www.ashburnham-ma.gov/](http://www.ashburnham-ma.gov/). We welcome your comments on the website.

Respectfully submitted,

John MacMillan, Chair  
Joseph Kalagher, Vice Chair  
Bruce Whitney, Clerk  
Thomas Ruble  
William Nolan