

Planning Board 2010 Annual Report

To the Honorable Board of Selectmen:

The Ashburnham Planning Board consists of five (5) elected members and one (1) appointed associate member. 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 Developments, Accessory Dwelling Unit Special Permits and Scenic Road Permits) and makes decisions on them in accordance with state/local bylaws and 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, stonewalls, 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 Laws 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 subdivision and providing access to lots therein.

Following the 2010 Annual Town Election, Joe Daigle was elected to a 4-year term and Joseph Kalagher was re-elected to a 5-year term. 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 2nd and 4th Thursday evenings at 6:30 p.m. in the Town Hall. In calendar year 2010 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 2010 the Board approved 12 "Approval Not Required" (ANR) plans of land as compared to 5 in 2009.

The Board continues to monitor previously approved Lakeview Estates, Cashman Hill Estates, Bray Avenue subdivisions and Lakeside Village condominiums during the construction process. Current market conditions have slowed or stopped activity on these subdivisions during 2010.

No new Preliminary or Definitive Subdivisions were submitted to the Board during 2010, a continuing sign of the slowdown in the housing market.

The Planning Board applied for and received three grants from the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission funded through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts "District Local Technical Assistance" Program. The grants assisted the Town in (1) re-writing the "Open Space Residential Development Bylaw to allow such proposals by right; (2) Planning assistance to create a "Cultural Plan" for the Town; and (3) to review and re-write the "Development Rate Limitation" portion of the Ashburnham Zoning Bylaws. All three projects have been completed and the Planning Board will be presenting the Cultural Plan to the Selectmen during the first quarter of 2011 and Zoning Bylaws will be recommended to the Annual Town Meeting in May 2011. A copy of the completed "Cultural Plan" may be seen on the Planning Board's page on the Town's website.

The Planning Board would like to welcome Mary Ellen Kelly as the new Land Use Administrator.

The Planning Board now has a great deal of information on the Town's website and can be viewed at www.ashburnham-ma.gov/. We welcome your comments on the website. The Board also conducts Open Discussion at the start of each meeting, and those having questions and concerns about the planning process in the Town are encouraged to attend.

Respectfully submitted,

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