

Planning Board 2011 Annual Report

To the Honorable Board of Selectmen and residents of Ashburnham:

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 Bylaws also allows the Board to review major residential developments to preserve the natural and cultural resources of Ashburnham by ensuring 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 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.

Following the 2011 Annual Town Election, Roger Hoyt was elected to a 5-year term. The five member Board reorganized and Joseph Kalagher was selected as Chairman, William Nolan as Vice-Chairman, and John MacMillan, as Clerk to the Board. The Planning Board regularly meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month at 6:30 p.m. in the Town Hall. In calendar year 2011, the Board conducted 18 regular meetings, one special meeting, and performed several 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.

The Board applied for and was awarded a "DLTA" grant by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission for assistance in developing a Planned Unit Development "PUD" Bylaw, and changes to the Open Space Residential Development "OSRD" Bylaw. This new "PUD" Bylaw as well as the "OSRD" Bylaw changes are planned to be presented at the Annual Town Meeting in 2012. It is the Board's intent that if additional grants of this type become available in 2012, they will look for assistance in developing Bylaws relative to solar energy and the feasibility of a shared Town Planner.

During the calendar year 2011, the Board approved three (3) "Approvals not Required" (ANR) plans of land as compared to twelve (12) in 2010. The Board conducted one (1) Special Permit Public Hearing for the William J. Bresnahan Scouting and Community Center, Inc. The Board voted in favor to approve the Special Permit with conditions. The Board conducted one (1) Site Plan Review for the new J. R. Briggs Elementary School project. The site plan was approved with conditions.

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 2011. No new Preliminary or Definitive Subdivisions were submitted to the Board during 2011, a continuing sign of the slow down in the housing market.

The Planning Board continues to offer information on the Town's website at www.ashburnham-ma.gov. The Planning Board may also be contacted by email at planningbd@ashburnham-ma.gov. We welcome your comments on the website. The Board also conducts Open Discussion at the start of each meeting, for those having questions and concerns about the planning process in the Town. You are encouraged to attend.

Respectfully submitted,
Joseph Kalagher, Chair
William Nolan, Vice Chair
John MacMillan, Clerk
Joseph Daigle
Roger Hoyt
Thomas Ruble, Associate Member