

Planning Board 2012 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 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 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 2012 Annual Town election, John MacMillan was elected to a 5-year term as a write-in candidate. John did not seek re-election to the Board due to the fact that after many years as an Ashburnham resident, he and his wife decided to build a home in Westminster. He graciously agreed to serve until construction was completed. The five-member Board reorganized and William Nolan was elected to the position of Chairman, Joseph Kalagher was elected to serve as Vice-Chairman, and Roger Hoyt was elected to serve 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 Lower Level Meeting Room at Town Hall.

On October 1, 2012 the Planning Board in conjunction with the Board of Selectmen appointed Meredith Fagan to fill the position vacated by John MacMillan, when he moved from Town, until the next election. Joseph McPeak was appointed to fill the position of Associate Member.

In calendar year 2012, the Board conducted 20 regular meetings, 2 special meetings, 3 public hearings, and performed several on-site visits as well.

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 presented two Zoning Bylaw changes at the Annual Town Meeting on May 5, 2012. The two Bylaws were a rewrite of the Open Space Residential Development Bylaw, and the introduction of a Planned Unit Development (PUD) Bylaw. Both of the proposed bylaws were approved at Town Meeting and subsequently approved by the Attorney General.

The Board applied for and was awarded a "DLTA" grant by the Montachusett Regional Planning Committee for assistance in developing a Large Scale Solar Development Bylaw to be presented at the Annual Town Meeting in 2013.

During the 2012 calendar year the Board approved three "Approval Not Required" (ANR) plans of land, and one Open Space Residential Development (OSRD).

The Board conducted two Special Permit Public Hearings; one for an accessory dwelling unit, and one for live entertainment. The Board voted in favor to approve the Special Permits 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 2012.

No new Preliminary or Definitive Subdivisions were submitted to the Board during 2012, a continued sign of the slowdown in the housing market.

The Board would like to thank the unsung hero who helps with all the day-to-day aspects of the Board, Land Use Administrator Mary Ellen Kelly.

The Planning Board continues to have a great deal of information on the Town's new website and it can be viewed 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, those having questions and concerns about the planning process in the Town are encouraged to attend.

Respectfully submitted,
William Nolan, Chair
Joseph Kalagher, Vice Chair
Roger Hoyt, Clerk
Joseph Daigle
Meredith Fagan
Joseph McPeak, Associate Member