



MAKING YOUR PLAN WORK... WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PLAN IS DONE

You've spent the past two years hard at work on creating a Master Plan for your community and you may be wondering...Now what!?

This is a critical time in the life of any Master Plan. Thousands of dollars have been spent. Thousands of volunteer hours have been dedicated. Municipal staff and elected officials have staked their success on this valuable consensus document. Multitudes of citizens have committed their energy and time to a project that is now complete.

Or is it?

Actually, you should probably sit down for this. Are you ready?

A MASTER PLAN IS NEVER FINISHED.

That's right, a Master Plan is *never* complete. Why? Simply because you have spent all this time and energy attempting to plan for the future of your community doesn't mean that things remain the same forever.

Remember that great idea about using the old town landfill site as a wildlife sanctuary? Well, just as your Master Plan was being distributed around town hall, a local company made an offer to buy the landfill site and turn it into a golf course. So much for the wildlife sanctuary...

And what about the plans to expand water and sewer service to the old state highway? Well, the city council just voted to expand only the water lines...no new sewer service this year...

*And of course you remember the discussion about extending affordable housing opportunities into the western part of the town to take advantage of the new elementary school, right? Well, the school district just accepted a new plan that would re-locate that proposed school to a new consolidated **elementary on the eastern edge of town...how about buying a few new buses instead?***

Communities change and develop and grow and evolve and do all the things that other dynamic systems do. And this means that your work is never really done. Your Master Plan must remain a living and organic document in order to maintain its relevancy over time. The plan must be updated on a regular basis and, most importantly, your plan must be used by community leaders to help them make the difficult decisions they face every day.

GETTING PEOPLE TO USE THE PLAN - IMPLEMENTATION

Getting your strategies off the printed page and into the real world is your first, and most important, task. Here are some ways to do this.

The 100-Day Rule

Every great idea begins with a small first step. Your completed Master Plan needs an early success story to help build momentum for completing more challenging and more time-consuming tasks such as changing the zoning map or

building an industrial park. Your community should identify at least one quick and easy project, a project that is listed in the Master Plan, that can be completed, start to finish, in 100 days or less. Examples might include:

- Start a town-planning newsletter for distributing information about Master Plan implementation and other land use issues.
- Erect new signs identifying villages or neighborhoods.
- Appoint a task force or committee to begin one of the “big” projects such as amending the zoning bylaw or zoning map.
- Sponsor an event to highlight a key issue – a downtown clean-up day, a tree planting ceremony to initiate the revitalization of a neighborhood park, a guided tour of redevelopment sites in your business district, or perhaps a farm breakfast highlighting local farm products.

The Big Three

It is likely that your 1) zoning bylaw, 2) zoning map and perhaps your 3) subdivision regulations will all need amending to be consistent with your new Master Plan.

In other words, **the land use tools that are used most frequently to shape the landscape of your community MUST reflect the ideas set out in the plan.** Until the right tools are in place, the work will not be done.

Seeking support for these changes to the laws in your community is critically important. Establishing a Zoning Review Task Force is often the first step in the process. Identify members of the community who:

- Are willing to commit to at least one year of monthly meetings in support of the project.
- Represent different factions and viewpoints regarding land use issues.
- Can work with other committee members to seek compromise solutions to difficult and sometimes polarizing issues.
- Are willing to speak openly and candidly about the impacts—positive and negative—of a proposed zoning change.

Changes to the zoning bylaws can require the professional expertise of planners in most instances. Generally speaking, volunteer citizen committees, unless they are made up of citizens who are comfortable with the writing of land use codes, will be less effective in producing zoning amendments and may take much longer to produce results that are acceptable to the community. With this in mind, the community may wish to seek funds to hire a professional consultant who can work with the Zoning Task Force to successfully complete the necessary changes to the bylaws. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has offered grant funding to communities for the purpose of amending zoning bylaws and zoning maps.

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Amending the planning board’s subdivision regulations is also quite important in implementing your Master Plan. The rules that govern subdivision road width and construction methods, the ways in which the community reviews and approves new subdivisions, and the techniques for protecting the interests of the community during the development process should be updated to correspond with any strategies laid out in the Master Plan.

Capital Improvements Plan (CIP)

If your community does not do so already, it should be preparing an annual plan that lists and prioritizes major capital expenditures over the next five to six years. The CIP can not only allow some prioritization of any purchases, but it can also alert the community to possible large expenditures and allow for some kind of budgeting, borrowing, or

saving to lessen the fiscal impact when it does finally hit. Improvements to infrastructure such as new aerators for the wastewater treatment plant or water line replacement can be planned, as well as new or improved school facilities, fire and police equipment, and playground equipment.

Effective fiscal policies can allow your community to spend its available resources wisely and judiciously – and in a way that does not encourage inappropriate patterns of growth and development.

The Public Eye

In order to value and use the plan, people need to have access to it. The following are ways that the ideas in your Master Plan can be publicized:

Printed Copies: Printed copies of the completed plan should go to every municipal board, commission, agency, or department. Elected leaders should receive their own copies to use when they assume public office. Your libraries, senior centers, schools, and other places where people may go to find information should be given copies of the plan. How about copies for waiting rooms in medical offices and train/bus terminals? Local real estate professionals, surveyors, builders, and bankers may also wish to read your plan. Be creative and don't be overly selective in your distribution decisions.

Executive Summary: An executive summary stating the overall conclusions of the plan should be created to share plan goals with those who do not have the time or will to read the entire plan. These should be available widely, have them sent home with school children, give stacks to churches and social organizations, and generally blanket the community with these documents. Make it short and it can easily fit on a single piece of paper, making it an affordable option for almost every community.

Poster: Some communities have developed visually intriguing posters that describe and summarize the plan goals.

The Internet: Does your town have a website? If so, get your plan (at least the executive summary) online. If not, this is a great reason for your community to get its own website. Online documents are affordable, universally accessible for those with Internet access, and very flexible—changes are inexpensive and virtually immediate.

The Shiny Tool

Visualize your plan as a hammer. If you picked up your hammer two years after you bought it and it looked as shiny and unscuffed as the day you brought it home, it is likely that you rarely used it to do any real work. Don't let your plan be a shiny tool. USE IT! The document needs to be referenced in public meetings. Plan goals need to be integrated into grant applications, annual reports, and department memos. The plan must be integrated into the day-to-day workings of your community or it will fail to reach its potential as a tool for guidance, focus, and change.

Implementation Checklist

A great tool for implementing your strategies is to devise a checklist for use by community leaders and planners when assessing the progress of your plan goals.

At a minimum, a good checklist should include:

1. Each strategy or action step mentioned in the plan
2. A relative timeline for accomplishing the task (short-term, mid-term, or long-term)
3. Department, organization, or individual responsible for doing it (be specific!)

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4. Cost—in dollars
 5. Cost—in time (volunteer or paid)
 6. Cost—in public education (how many people will have to be convinced?)

Planning board or city councilors can use the checklist to measure progress in implementing the plan, or it can be used as a device to educate town meeting members or the public about the need to accomplish certain tasks. Any way that it is used, the checklist affords the opportunity to measure accomplishments and identify challenges.

UPDATING THE MASTER PLAN

Your plan will need to be updated. How often this needs to occur depends on the specific circumstances in your community. Here are some good rules of thumb to use in determining when and how to update a plan.

Annual Review: A board, perhaps the planning board or board of selectmen, or an individual should review the document annually to check progress. Perhaps simply going over the Implementation Checklist (see last section) at a public meeting would be enough to uncover any tasks that were neglected over the past 365 days. Minor course corrections in policies or goals can be made and publicized through a press release or fact sheet.

Five-Year Review: After five years, there is a good chance that enough things have changed to make it worth the community's while to take a comprehensive look at the plan. Perhaps, at this point, it is wise to begin revising and updating the plan one topic at a time. This would allow a relaxed review of the document over the course of a few years.

Ten-Year Review: At this point, you need to consider a comprehensive update of the plan. Consider the development of a new document and definitely undertake a full public outreach process to establish public issues and concerns that have evolved, changed, or appeared since the last plan.