



Town of Ashland , Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee

Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meeting (Hybrid)

Ashland Public Library
66 Front Street
Ashland, MA 01721
June 26, 2025, 7:00 PM
Meeting Minutes (*Draft*)

Present:

Town Manager:	Michael Herbert
Sustainability Project Manager:	Samantha Riley
Select Board Representative:	Brandi Kinsman
Select Board Representative:	Yolanda Greaves
Planning Board Representative:	Camilo Espitia
Planning Board Representative:	Anna Tesmenitsky
Library Trustee's Representative:	Claire Goss
Open Space and Recreation Representative:	Roberta Soolman
Sustainability Committee Representative:	Chuck Lidz
Affordable Housing Trust Representative:	Alan Galiwango (absent)
Board of Health Representative:	Ed Burman (absent)
Cultural Council Representative:	Stacey Grant Lewis (absent)
Historical Commission Representative:	Karen Coleman
Ashland Upper Charles Trail Committee Representative:	Tony Lewis
Conservation Commission Representative:	Carl Hakansson
Council on Aging Representative:	Steve Mitchell (remote)
Econ Dev Advisory Committee Representative:	Beth Reynolds
ZBA Representative:	(Open Seat)
School Committee Representative:	Mike Caira (remote)
Town Forest Committee Representative:	Cara Hulme
Design Review Committee:	Bill Novakowski (absent)
Precinct 1:	Jacob Coolberth
Precinct 2:	Leah Suarez
Precinct 3:	David Evancho (absent)
Precinct 4:	Aroon Manoharan (remote)

Precinct 5:
Precinct 6:
High School Representative:

Rajashree Ghosh
Lisa Churchill
Hasini Reddy (absent)

Others Present

Jenn Goldson, JM Goldson
Austin Smith, JM Goldson

Members of the public

Mark Dassoni
Catherine Jurczyk

Call meeting to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM.

Meeting Minutes – May 2025

The Committee agreed to table approval of minutes until the next meeting; the Committee will vote on approval of all available minutes at that time.

Subcommittee Presentation and Discussion

The Subcommittee shared a presentation with the Committee. Mr. Coolberth explained that the Subcommittee met to focus on some of the Strategies including finding locations for beautification and to strengthen a couple of the strategies. They built a color-coded map based on the crowd mapping data and commentary from the public, they shared the map with the Committee. The map showed areas marked off for potential bike paths, bus routes and pocket parks. Key locations were marked off on the map as properties that would be good potential purchases for the Town, including Kidde Fenwal, and the space abutting the Middle School for possible field space, and another space with access to the Girl Scout Camp. Locations on the map also included the former Fire and Police Station and the area behind Mindess School, and the Valentine property, to be used for rental or for Town organizations. A parcel off Ponderosa Road, as well as a parcel off Olive Street were marked on the map for potential future uses.

Ms. Suarez reviewed a memo presented by the Subcommittee which overviewed ways/areas to create trails and paths around the community.

Suggestions included:

- Ashland Upper Charles Trail (AUCT)
- Pedestrian Crossing on Front Street to Telechrom Building on Homer Avenue.
- Priority Locations for Sidewalks
- Creating a Clocker Bus Route
- Creating more parking to support Downtown activity and regional visitors to the AUCT

The Subcommittee memo reviewed potential Park Creation, including:

- Aggregate Quarry
- Dog Park
- Valentine Property

Park Improvements would include evaluating adequacy of school fields based on expected growth, and ensuring they are ADA compliant.

Girl Scout Camp – Rehab for outdoor recreation; preserve buildings; allow buildings to be used by Recreation Department to serve the public.

Stone Park – expand its uses, convert to Town Common, bring Farmers Market.

Ashland High School Baseball field – Fix drainage issue.

Beautification Site List Includes:

- Police Station
- Montenegro Square
- Oak Street/Cordaville Road
- Marathon Route (Route 135) seating / gathering areas
- Railroad Crossing Downtown
- Tilton/Cherry/Megunko Streets
- Mill Pond
- Eliot Street/ Route 126 and roundabout on Route 126
- Pleasant Street
- Kids Spot at Stone Park
- Route 126, seating/gathering areas
- Downtown
- Olive Street

Zoning and Bylaw Changes:

- Reconsider Zoning for Marijuana Sales
- Consider Zoning to allow boutique hotels
- Establish fee structure for Town beautification and other expenses
- Develop process for home repairs to assist needy, to keep home habitable.

The Committee thanked the Subcommittee for all of their work.

New Member Welcome and Introductions

Camilo Espitia introduced himself and discussed his background and experience working in Lowell as the Deputy Director of Planning for the City of Lowell; he looks forward to working with the Committee and helping the community. Committee Members introduced themselves.

JMG Presentation:

Jenn Goldson thanked the Subcommittee for their detailed work; Ms. Goldson suggested that JMG could put together a questionnaire that includes all of the information from the Subcommittee's Map and Memo; as homework each Committee Member can respond and state whether they object to any of these. If there are no objections they will be included in the plan; any objections will be discussed. Members agreed.

• **Plan**

Ms. Goldson explained they have 5 Core Themes, 22 Goals and 81 Strategies.

Ms. Goldson discussed Phase IV; Making the Plan Practical, and gave an overview.

- Draft and revise Comprehensive Plan; Ms. Goldson reminded the group that not all 81 Strategies will be implemented to a T, or implemented in the exact year the Plan says. You do the best you can with the resources you have. Many things may happen over the next decade.

Mr. Espitia suggested that it is important to track the plan, tracking what gets done, what is successful. Ms. Tesmenitsky discussed the Implementation Committee that will track and establish implementation metrics. Ms. Goldson stated that having an Implementation Committee allows Planning Boards to continue with their regular work and not be responsible for tracking the progress of the Plan. Mr. Herbert noted we have spent years working on this; he wants to ensure that these things get done by prioritizing and respecting the work and the expertise of the people who will do the work. Ms. Ghosh suggested an Action Plan to show who is responsible for what work, and the level of urgency; Ms. Goldson noted the Implementation Plan does address this, as well as cost and potential funding; it will also include links to case studies for each Strategy, and the timing/sequencing of the implementation. Ms. Goldson suggested as homework the Committee sequence the Strategies by urgency.

• **Future Land Use Map**

Ms. Goldson noted the Land Use Map is not a legal document in Massachusetts, it is a vision document that takes goals and strategies and puts them down in a spatial way on a map. Some themes include:

- Downtown Vibrancy
- Connectivity
- Cultural and Community Assets
- Thriving Business corners
- Conservation and Ecological priorities

Mr. Coolberth agreed to be the liaison with Austin Smith as the responses from the Committee are compiled, Ms. Goldson noted that they will turn the document around quickly and get it back to the Committee in the next meeting packet.

Mr. Smith explained that they have taken some of the single Strategies and have incorporated them with a similar Strategy; this helps with readability and making it less overwhelming for the community.

Mr. Smith reviewed the combined goals that have been consolidated, which included:

- Incorporate 3D into 3C
The Committee discussed the term “Smart Growth” and the potential of not combining these Strategies. Committee suggested keeping them separate. JMG will add the Strategies from the Subcommittee Memo after the feedback is received from the Committee.
- Incorporate 3E and 4C into 4B
All Strategies from combined goals will be in new goal. Ms. Greaves suggested adding “Invest in adaptable facilities and infrastructure”.
Recreation and Library should be included; areas where the investment will be in will be listed.
- Incorporate 5E and 5C into 5A
The Committee agreed to this change.
- Incorporate 2D into 5B
The Committee agreed to this change.
- Combine strategies 4B11 and 4B12
The Committee agreed to change “including” to “such as”; and include Recreation Department.
Mr. Herbert expressed concern with having another committee, and suggested having DPW/School oversight, or eventually, Parks and Recreation Department.
Ms. Tesmenitsky suggested a working group rather than a committee; Mr. Herbert agreed. The Committee agreed to keep these as separate goals.
Change to OSR (Open Space Recreation) Committee from OSRP.

- Ms. Goldson and Mr. Smith discussed JM Goldson’s proposed new Strategies for the Town:

- 3.C.12: Expand by-right options and reduce dimensional requirements to allow easier conversion of existing single- and two-family homes and construction of new buildings to up to four units in areas served by town water and sewer to support more affordable housing options for older residents looking to downsize and allow Ashland’s neighborhoods to adapt to changing resident needs.
 - Ms. Tesmenitsky stated there was no feedback from the community requesting this. Ashland is already affected by MBTA, 40B and ADU by-right zoning, and now it is being suggested to expand density by-right.
 - Mr. Herbert said it is not good timing as Ashland has been dealing with multiple 40B Projects over the past few years.
 - Ms. Greaves recommended to keep as is, but as a lower priority.
 - Mr. Espitia suggested increasing requirement for affordable housing.

- Ms. Goldson suggested the compromise of adding “consider expanding”,
 - Remove wording of “older residents “.
 - The Consultant will work on revising this.
- 3.C.13.: Evaluate development incentives for permanently affordable housing, such as density bonuses, within the Ashland Downtown District.
 - Ms. Goldson explained they could add a clause in the bylaw, allowing developers to build more affordable housing than minimum.
 - Ms. Greaves does not feel this is necessary to be in the Comprehensive Plan; the Town will soon be on track meeting the affordability requirement and can then update the Town’s Housing Production Plan.
 - Ms. Tesmenitsky inquired why the Consultant Team feels that Ashland needs this; what they had spoken about wanting was public housing. The Town will soon hit the 10% affordability threshold.
 - Mr. Herbert suggested striking “density bonuses” from the strategy. Committee agreed.
- 3.C.14: Explore options to financially support low-income homeowners, especially seniors and people with disabilities, with home repairs. This is already on the list.
- 2.D.7.: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to reduce minimum parking requirements and relax dimensional requirements in the Ashland Downtown District. To increase development opportunity and support downtown walkability and vibrancy.
 - Ms. Tesmenitsky stated that the public doesn’t want this due to existing parking challenges, making parking even less likely; unless it could be combined with a public parking garage or transportation.
 - There is public concern regarding a potential lack of parking with the addition of the 40B at the Mill Building.
 - Ms. Goldson suggested striking due to the rewording of the previous strategy. Committee agreed.

Upcoming Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meetings:

July 17th

- Review graphic layout of Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map
- Strategy review - focus on practicability and implementation capacity.

August 21st

- Review Second Draft
- Vote to Recommend to Planning Board
- After this, publish the draft or have Select Board take public comments, and written comments.
- Ms. Tesmenitsky suggested hosting public forums to present the draft.
- Ms. Ghosh suggested continuing this discussion at the next meeting.

Invoice and expense

Mr. Herbert noted that the original contract was for \$250,000 (\$276,783 after additional work/meetings were added); we have so far expended \$177,000.

Public comments:

- Ms. Jurczyk expressed concern about some of the changes discussed tonight; Ms. Greaves recommended that she sends in her comments.

Conclude and Adjourn

The Committee adjourned at 9:42 PM.

Documents Referenced During 5/19/2025 Meeting

Meeting Agenda, 6/26/2025

Subcommittee's Updated Strategies – PPT Presentation

JMP Goldson - PPT Presentation