

Jeff Lucy

## Implementing the Vision

Develop an outline for a long-term, multi-board project that combines aspects of three of the four focus areas, including community, finances, and infrastructure.

**Community:** The real test of community is when scarce resources and funds are allocated; where folks come in from different perspectives and means, and yet have to make hard decisions together. Face to face interactions oriented toward problem solving (e.g., inclusive and collaborative design charrettes) work better than less personal forms of communication such as formal presentations by experts or endless email threads.

**Finances:**

Shutesbury has some challenges in this area. The Town must balance its already high costs of government against its aspirations. Notably, the Town does not yet have (and hasn't paid for) broadband or a new library, still makes do with an older set of public buildings, and has static population growth. The meaning of fiscal sustainability should be parsed. Are we concerned with the sustainability of Shutesbury's government and its town employees or the sustainability of the taxpaying residents?

**Infrastructure:**

The Vision acknowledges the broadband initiative, which is already well into the pipeline. It also calls out four new infrastructure needs: 1) library/senior/community center; 2) Town Center pedestrian walkways; 3) renewable energy projects; and 4) senior housing. None of these are far along in the planning stages. Other than the library/senior center it does not recommend any new town buildings, but emphasizes continued use and maintenance of the existing stock.

**Project to Consider:**

Phased development of Lot 0-32. This town-owned parcel is currently an eyesore and possible source of contamination, but could accommodate a library/senior/community center, senior housing, and a renewable energy project benefitting the Town. It could also be connected east and west via new pedestrian walkways. This project would involve community building, a necessary assessment of financial implications and tradeoffs, and ultimately realize all four identified infrastructure needs.

In regards to the land use / housing focus area, the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals are developing a slate of zoning amendments for a fall special town meeting and 2018 annual town meeting. These amendments will perfect the zoning bylaws adopted in 2008 and continue to foster the land use objectives of the 2004 Master Plan.

To: Master Plan Working Group

August 3, 2017

Subject: Recommendations for Implementing the Vision

From: Mike Vinskey

1. The Select board has requested the Master Plan Working Group reconvene to provide them with recommendations on how to proceed in regards to the Vision. The Select board has requested this working group mine the vision to develop and articulate specific topics to be addressed through focused studies, community engagement, and recommendations leading to actions.

2. The Visioning statement focuses on four main areas: community, finances, infrastructure, and land use/housing. Aspects of one area impact the others and should be considered together rather than individually.

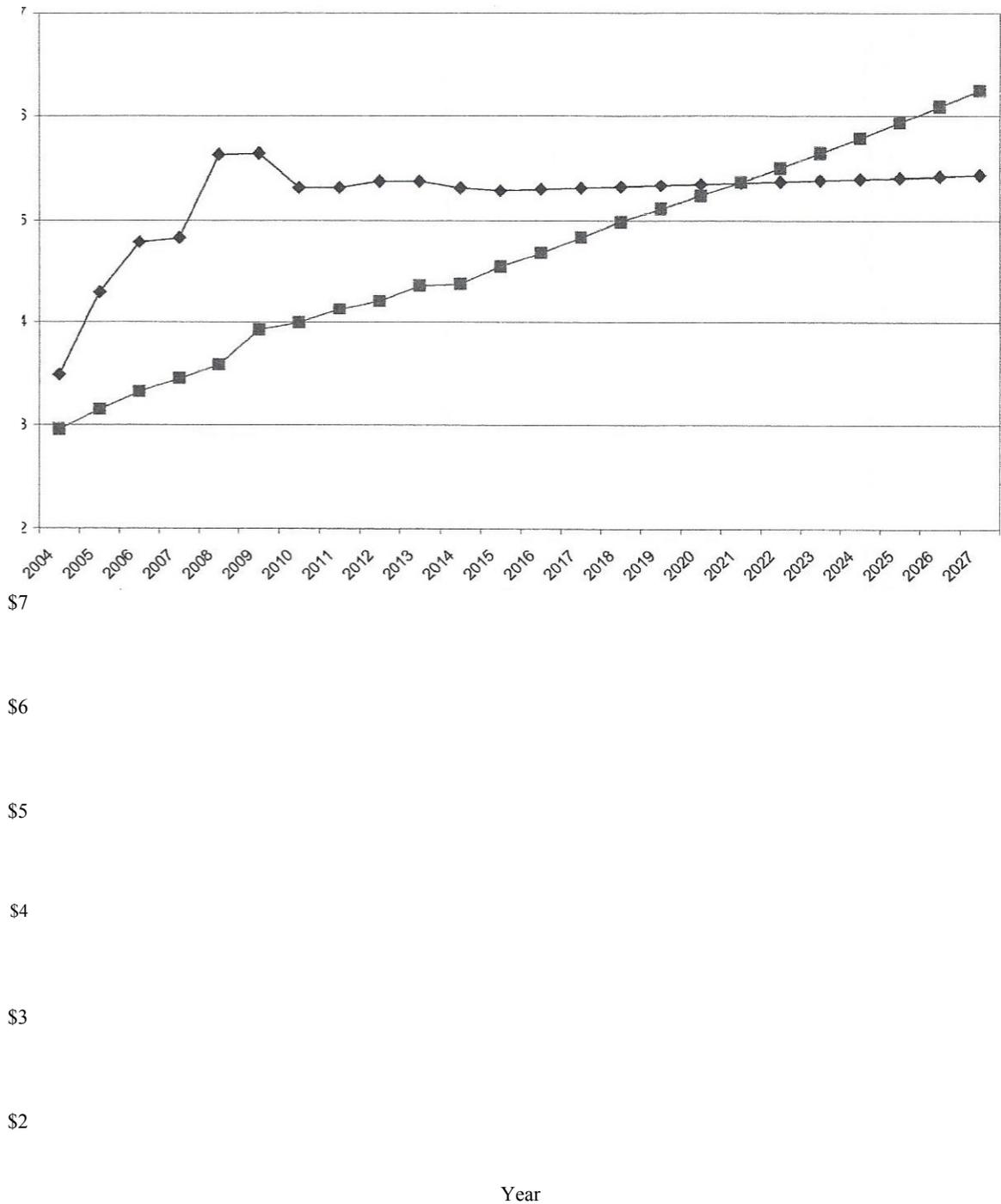
3. The visioning process was conducted as a function of the Planning Board. However, implementation should reside in the Select board since implementation requires an understanding and familiarity with all aspects of town activities and structure and how they interact with each other.

4. Financial vision will be the basis for all other visioning implementation since there will always be limited financial resources with unlimited potential to use those resources. Therefore, a determination of affordability and priorities will need to be established by the Select board. The financial vision for this time period (10 years) needs to be established. Currently the vision for financial planning extends out only one year for the majority of town expenses. This view needs to consider ten years of estimates for revenues and expenses.

5. Previous years' methodology has been to increase the levy 2.5%, add potential state funding and tax revenues, then parcel the total to each line item. The rate at which the levy had been increasing over the past ten years along with a stagnant yearly increase in total assessed valuation indicates we will reach our levy ceiling (\$25/1000) in 2021.

#### 2.5% Levy Increase vs. Levy Ceiling

—+—Levy Ceiling —F 2.5% Levy Increase



6. From the October 26, 2016; DORDLS; 'City & Town' magazine, "When a community's levy limit collides with or hits its levy ceiling, the community lacks the capability to realize levy growth, both from 2.5 percent increments and from new growth, until excess levy capacity is regained."

7. The primary means for Shutesbury to regain levy capacity is to increase assessed values of homes. Once we "hit our levy ceiling" the only way to continue a 2.5% annual levy increase is to add four million dollars to our total assessed property value each year. This would mean building sixteen \$250,000 homes every year to add

four million dollars each year to our total assessed value. Even so, by 2027 we would again be at our levy ceiling. Over the past ten years our annual assessed property value has increased an average of only \$ 1.9 million/year (evidenced by the relatively flat levy ceiling line in the above chart).

8. There is great speculation that property values will soar once our broadband network is up and running. However, Leverett's total assessed property value has only increased \$790,000/year in the years since their broadband network has come on line. This brings us back to having to build numerous houses every year for the foreseeable future and where, potentially, a coordinated effort of town boards, committees, and government will need to be focused.

9. A massive growth project of this magnitude will require massive coordination (and massive approval by residents). This highlights a discrepancy with the visioning statement. People value open space, forested views, ample space between neighbors, and a feeling of being isolated. A growth program will increase population, use open space for housing, require higher density living arrangements, and detract from the feeling of isolation. Extensive discussion and coordination with the Planning board needs to be conducted prior to implementing any specifics of the visioning statement. Many questions need to be answered. How large a population do residents actually want? Where will all the new houses be built to house an expanding population? What effect will population growth have on the quality and quantity of water resources, septic systems, road maintenance, fire and police emergency response, school size, etc. What will be the demographics of this influx of residents? How will town government services need to be tailored to support this demographic?

10. If the demographic is young families with school age children, town expenses will go up dramatically and unequally. The school budget will require more than the current 2/3 of town tax revenue. Generally, it costs about \$15,000/year to send one child to school from first grade through high school. The tax bill on an average assessed house (\$250,000) is about \$5,000 per year. A new home with two school age children in it will cost \$30,000 in school expenses each year, while that new home will generate only \$5,000 in tax revenue.

11. Elementary school student enrollment has been decreasing for the past several years. As the school enrollment goes down there should be a corresponding decrease in the amount required to fund the school. However, this is not the case. School costs continue to increase even though there are fewer and fewer students. The current trend of decreasing elementary school enrollment was reason for the recent exploration of regionalizing Kindergarten through Grade 12 with Amherst, Pelham, and Leverett. This exploration proved unattractive to Shutesbury because costs would not have been reduced, and the quality of education provided would not have been better than what we currently have. Perhaps it is time to reevaluate regionalization and ensure the Regional School leadership presents a concept that does reduce costs and improve education.

12. A corresponding demographic that doesn't include a population of school age children is at the other end of the spectrum and is a demographic that would require

fewer expensive services than families would require. What direction Shutesbury moves toward regarding demographics is a question that needs to be answered before additional effort is expended on directly implementing the vision.

13. Coordination with the Building committee needs to take place prior to implementing the visioning statement, but is again not a stand alone function. The visioning statement indicated a desire for spaces where residents can gather. While not expressed in the visioning process, the town is currently addressing the need to provide adequate storage for records that need to be kept, some indefinitely. How this will be addressed is not clear at this time, however, if a new structure is required to be built, how to prioritize this need along with the desire for meeting space needs to be established. In the meantime a 'space' survey of town properties should be conducted to determine what opportunities we might have to satisfy space requirements with currently constructed buildings.

14. The survey results indicate residents place a premium on open space and placing land in conservation restrictions. This may be an honorable goal to pursue, but it may end up hurting us in the process. There needs to be thought given to the potential for commercial use of land such as the Wheelock solar project. This project will bring, on average, over \$ 109,000 in Payment in Lieu of Taxes each year for twenty-five years to the town's coffers. A conscious decision whether to encourage private property owners (the town of Shutesbury owns very little viable commercial property) to develop their land for commercial use or to forego potential tax revenue should be made by the Select board and coordinated with the Planning board as part of the visioning process and before any implementation takes place.

15. All of the above ideas require greater input, awareness, and buy-in from more than only the couple of hundred residents that participated in surveys and public forums. This process will necessitate numerous opportunities for townspeople to gather to discuss these potentially confrontational issues. Unfortunately, Shutesbury doesn't have a culture of open, respectful, considerate dialog. For this reason many people refuse to attend public forums and town meetings. The threat of verbal abuse, internet bullying, lawsuits, and physical harm insure only the thickest skinned individuals participate. This needs to be corrected before any implementation of visioning aspects are considered.

16. Specific recommendations: The MPWG needs to be provided from the Finance committee what the financial future for the next 10 years looks like. The N'IPWG needs via public input or Select board decision making to determine what the town demographics should look like for the next ten years. A discussion with school officials, School committee members, and residents needs to take place to chart a direction for our school system for the next 10 years. The Planning board needs to be queried, regarding our demographic profile, about whether our current land planning requirements will meet our requirements for the next decade. The Building committee needs to provide a space use survey incorporating the need for record storage. At the same time a process for changing the culture of disrespect, bullying, and uncivil discourse needs to be established. All these requirements rely in some way or another on each other and no one task can be conducted in a vacuum. However, until these requirements are complete there

makes no sense moving forward with recommendations on specific projects to be accomplished.