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orthampton Planning Special Recognition

Epitomizing the exact opposite of NIMBY: Esther Ralston and Stephen Ferrari

When, with the support of Councillor LaBarge, the city proposed both an infill affordable duplex and a walking trail immediately next to their home, they worked with the city in the permit public hearing process. Then, instead of simply acquiescing to both projects, they provided leadership to ensure both projects were implemented. Esther took charge of organizing an informal Friends of Saw Mill Hills Conservation Area and coordinated building the trail. Steve worked with Habitat for Humanity to direct the home building process, saving Habitat the funds they typically use to hire such assistance.

Extra-Ordinary Volunteer Commitment: Yvonne Freccero

The community regained a huge asset when Yvonne, after an absence from Northampton, returned to Northampton, supposedly to retire. During this alleged retirement, she joined the Housing Partnership, became a member of the Next Step Collaborative, whose charge was to address the homelessness in our community, searched tirelessly for a permanent site for the Cot Program, chaired the management team that administers the Cot Program, and oversaw the program's 400-person volunteer effort that has now grown into its own non-profit organization. She continues to work with the Housing Partnership on efforts to create additional affordable housing and just helped launch a successful evening meals program for the homeless. When the permanent cot shelter opens in a couple of months, we should all be aware it would not have happened without Yvonne.

Exemplary Conservationist: Armand LaPalme

The largest donation of conservation land the city has ever received took place several years ago, when Armand LaPalme bargain-sold the Mineral Hills Conservation Area to the city. With his family's blessing, Armand ensured that land which he had cared for over many years would forever be preserved. His donation, however, did not end when the land transferred to the city. To this day Armand works tirelessly to maintain the property and its trails. Keep an eye out for the full moon where you may see the shadow of this gracious man sledding down a snow-capped hillside on a winter's night.

Open Space Preservation: Carolyn Gray and George Peppard

Over the years, the city has received many donations of land, cash, and bargain-priced land. The most generous donation the city ever received was early last year when Carolyn Gray and George Peppard provided the financial assistance needed to acquire an agricultural preservation restriction on a beautiful piece of Park Hill Road farmland. Then, as the final dessert, they placed a conservation restriction on adjoining land they owned, adding to a contiguous open space corridor.

Extra-Ordinary Board Service, Redevelopment Authority Pioneer: Edward Skroski

In spite of Ed's 30 years, so far, on the Northampton Redevelopment Authority, the majority of those years as chair, few people even know that the city has a Redevelopment Authority. Ed's years of dedication, however, is part of the reason that Northampton is as successful as it is. The Redevelopment Authority literally built the Northampton Industrial Park, creating a core of some of the best jobs in the city. They also played a key part in building interest in redeveloping downtown Northampton, and especially in sparking the Round House plaza redevelopment.

Extra-Ordinary Board Service, Redevelopment Authority & Housing Partnership Pioneer: Richard Abuza

Richard seems to never tire of public service, even though he is now in his 23rd year on the Northampton Redevelopment Authority, which developed the Northampton Industrial Park, and his 11th year concurrently serving on the Housing Partnership, 7 of which were as its chair. In addition to his board service, he has found time to bargain-sell a key portion of Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area to the city. Richard's gift of eloquent articulation, sincere compassion, and a strong commitment to the provision of affordable housing remains an irreplaceable asset to the city.

Extra-Ordinary Board Service, Conservation Commission Pioneer: C. Mason Maronn

To many people, Mason Maronn is the Conservation Commission. Now in his 26th year on the Commission, the majority of those years as chair, Mason has kept a positive attitude, a broad mind, and a willingness to continue learning, and, most importantly, is always dedicated to preserving the environment. Mason is the city's hardworking wetland protector, but one who also understands development constraints and can fairly implement what is arguably the most arcane of regulations.

Extra-Ordinary Board Service, Conservation, Planning and Zoning: Mark NeJame

Mark is leaving city board service, for now, after twelve dedicated years. Mark's motto could be "have skills will travel." Starting on the Conservation Commission, Mark helped modernize the Commission's approach to permitting. Then, just as he mastered the work and life got easy, he moved on to the Planning Board. There he helped the board as it transitioned from being primarily a permit granting authority into a board with a much stronger planning focus. Then, to meet his new calling, Mark moved on to the Zoning Board and steered it through a major transition period and helped it emerge as a professionalized Zoning Board of Appeals. We wait for Mark to leave his valuable, but non-planning, outside board commitments and come back to serve on a city board again.

Wayne Feiden, A.I.C.P., Planning Director



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Honoring our History: Historic Northampton

When the Flood Hazard Mitigation Team received a floodplain outreach grant to create a video of flood hazards, the City gave Historic Northampton the commission. Kerry Buckley welcomed the challenge to take a budget barely enough to pay for supplies and agreed to serve as executive producer. Kerry put his powerful vision, energy, and commitment into the project, as he does for every Historic Northampton project. David Parnell, the filmmaker, took Kerry's direction and, created an informative video that exceeded any reasonable expectations we had or the budget allowed. Historic Northampton now hosts this video on their web site and maintains it as part of their historical collection.

Honoring our History, Extra-Ordinary Volunteer Commitment: Stan Sherer and Louise Bloomberg

When the Historic Commission applied for and received a small grant from the Northampton Arts Council to celebrate the millennium by documenting significant historic preservation projects in Northampton, Stan Sherer was approached to create the photographs. Stan not only readily agreed, but devoted hundreds of uncompensated hours that culminated in a priceless gift to the City of sensitively portrayed images depicting outstanding examples of preservation in a community that cares for its built environment. Stan also made presentations at the High School to educate students on the state of the art techniques utilized to produce the images as well as personally installing the images at both exhibit locations.

Louise Bloomberg, of the Historic Commission, oversaw the project implementation and organized the exhibit opening at Historic Northampton in addition to overseeing the installation of the images at their permanent location on the second floor of City Hall. Ms. Bloomberg volunteered her time to undertake the time consuming task of soliciting and editing information for the text panels that provide a brief history of each project. Together these two individuals accomplished a project that serves as a great learning tool and by being permanently on public display, will continue to draw excitement and interest.

Exemplary Conservationist: Gerrit Stover

Gerrit Stover is the person to call for planning projects that need a bit of moral support or volunteer work. When the City was considering downtown architectural standards to help enhance the vitality of downtown, it was Gerrit who created a computerized visual analysis that demonstrated why the standards were needed. When the City partnered with Habitat for Humanity to move a surplus city-owned house to a nearby building lot, it was Gerrit who created the computer rendering that helped neighbors visualize how the house would look on the site. When the City was interested in preserving farmland and vistas along Park Hill Road, it was Gerrit who brokered a key joint Northampton-Easthampton Agricultural Preservation Restriction.

When city planning is happening, Gerrit can be counted on to participate and advocate.

Open Space Preservation and Affordable Housing Advocacy: Broad Brook Coalition

The City forms many partnerships with many non-profit and neighborhood groups. One of the most fruitful is our partnership with the Broad Brook Coalition. BBC support made possible the City's purchase of well over half of the 550-acre Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. BBC volunteers now perform the majority of the maintenance at Fitzgerald Lake, and have transformed the conservation area into our best maintained conservation area.

BBC's genesis came about by opposing a poorly thought out development. Early on, however, BBC decided that they wanted to help make good things happen, rather than simply opposing projects. BBC transformed themselves when they fought successfully for a mixed-income development at Pines Edge and created the fund raising and support necessary to expand Fitzgerald Lake. Nancy Harvin, Frank Olbris, Jonathan Roche, Monica Jakuc, Bob Packwood, Carmen Ahearn, Jody Larsen, Marianne McKim, and Norma Roche, have all played pivotal roles in this effort of the years, but dozens, if not hundreds, of other volunteers have all participated in this truly collaborative partnership.

Progressive Downtown Redevelopment: Claire Bateman

Claire Bateman made the transformation of the former Elks Building and the permanent home for the Interfaith Cot Shelter a successful reality. She undertook a project on the brink of failure and turned it into a vibrant contributor to our downtown. When Claire rescued the project, she accepted the most ambitious revitalization project in downtown in over a decade. Claire shared the original vision that saw a homeless shelter, social service agencies, private citizens and a religious organization living harmoniously in a building restored to its former glory. Ms. Bateman is to be congratulated for her spirit and her perseverance in bringing this endeavor, which benefits the City in a multitude of ways, to magnificent completion.

Extra-Ordinary Board Service, Planning Board: Dan Yacuzzo

Dan Yacuzzo served on the Northampton Planning Board for eleven dedicated years, the last three of those years as Chair. Dan is a passionate and extremely strong advocate for what he saw as the City's needs. Mr. Yacuzzo often used his positive attitude and good cheer to make even the most passionate and controversial discussions go smoothly. In addition, Dan has worked tirelessly to support other planning goals. He was a driving force in creating and making the Taste of Northampton a success and is a generous supporter of the arts. His business and his community efforts were a key part in making Northampton's hospitality business one of the most important part of downtown's success.

Extra-Ordinary Board Service, Planning Board: Andrew Crystal

Andrew Crystal served on the Planning Board for fifteen dedicated years, seven of those years as Chair. In addition to being a brilliant moderator, Andy served two critical roles on the Planning Board. First, he helped the Planning Board learn how to use their new Site Plan Approval authority and remained the strongest advocate of ensuring that projects were well designed. Second, Andy helped transform the Planning Board to be more proactive, initiating the Planning Board's first Northampton State Hospital master plan. He also advocated goal setting for Board activities and served on the Chamber of Commerce and as the Chair of the Safer Streets Committee, which eventually led to the creation of a permanent Transportation Commission.

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GrowSmart Developer: Michael Sissman

Michael Sissman has always been interested in good urban design. In the last few years, Michael created three great projects. First, he took over a very controversial infill project on South Street, scaled it back, improved the design, and created a project that the neighborhood could support. Then he converted the architecturally beautiful, but functionally obsolete, Twin Cleaners Building into a model of redevelopment. Finally, he began his riskiest project, the Strong Block, the largest downtown Northampton infill project in a decade. Michael's Strong Block project incorporates excellent architecture, commercial infill, and downtown housing. All of these projects are part of the future of a thriving downtown Northampton.

Although we recognize Michael Sissman for his recent accomplishments, it is worth noting that some of his activities from the freewheeling 1980's have stood the test of time. Michael's Mill Bank project created an anchor on Pleasant Street, where one was desperately needed. In addition, his creation and redevelopment of housing on upper floors in the downtown helped create the downtown residential population that is critical to keeping a downtown healthy.

Exemplary Rail Trail Advocate: Craig Della Penna

Craig Della Penna has helped build support for Rail Trails throughout New England as part of his work with the Rail-to-Trails Conservancy. We honor him, though, not for his regional work but for what he has done for Northampton. Craig has raised the profile of rail trails in Northampton both through advocacy and through quiet behind the scenes work. He has also helped spearhead a local and very successful fundraising effort to support rail trails in Northampton.

Craig and his wife, Kathy Della Penna, have also tied their life together with the Northampton Rail Trail network. They purchased a historic house, closer to the rail trail than any other house in Northampton, carefully restored it, and made it into the Sugar Maple Trail Side Inn, a bed-and-breakfast. Helping develop rail trails for local residents and visitors and bringing in rail-trail based tourism are accomplishments to be proud of.

Extraordinary Contributions, Rail Trail: Barry Schechter and Kathy Hibshman

The City of Northampton, through the dedicated work of hundreds of volunteers and contributors, is slowly building a rail trail network. When the Commonwealth's spending priorities slowed the development of this effort, Barry Schechter and Kathy Hibshman stepped forward and offered to help.

First through a generous donation, and then through an even more generous challenge grant, and finally by regularly renewing the challenge grant, they have provided major financial assistance to our rail trail development network. Equally significant, by crafting their donation as a challenge grant, Barry and Kathy have sparked a community outreach project, the involvement of dozens and dozens of contributors, and the development of a private bicycle and pedestrian alliance.

Affordable Housing Development: Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity

The City is proud to have the Pioneer Valley Chapter of Habitat for Humanity as a working partner and would like to honor them on the 15th Anniversary. In order to fulfill the Vision 2020 goal of creating scattered site affordable housing opportunities across the City, the Office of Planning and Development has looked to limited developments as a way to meet that goal. When property can be acquired to serve multiple City goals, such as open space and natural resource protection, there are often opportunities to create affordable housing on those sites as well. Most non-profit agencies and private developers, however, have found that these projects, with the level of affordability that the City wants, are not cost effective. Habitat has been able to fill this gap.

To date, our local Habitat chapter has created seven owner-occupied units in the City; one on Cahillane Terrace, two on Pinebrook Curve, two on Vernon Street and two on Ryan Road. Last fall they broke ground on six more units on Westhampton Road. This summer they hope to start work on six additional units off of Garfield Avenue in Florence. Because of incredibly dedicated volunteers, the strong leadership of M.J. Adams, our chapter's first Executive Director, other funding sources and the sweat equity of the homeowners themselves, Habitat's housing is affordable for a segment of the community for which owning a home would otherwise be impossible.

Extraordinary Community Service: Jack Hornor

Jack Hornor has contributed a great deal of time, energy and finances to our community over the years, most recently as Chair of the Northampton Housing Partnership. Not only did Jack ably guide the activities of the Committee charged with overseeing the City's affordable housing efforts, but served, and continues to serve, as the Partnership's highly energetic representative on the State Hospital Citizen Advisory Committee and the Office of Planning and Development's Technical Review Committee.

Jack efforts, energy, and fundraising support across the county are noteworthy and appreciated. Jack does everything from overnight volunteering at the Hampshire Inter-faith shelter to jump starting fundraising effort for exterior painting of the Grove Street Inn homeless shelter and for the Men's Resources Center.

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Community Service: Northampton 350th Anniversary Committee

The City is impressed and delighted by the dedication of the 350th Anniversary Committee. The Committee presided over all aspects of the 350th Anniversary. The Committee produced events that would engage all of Northampton's nearly 30,000 residents, and they gave the publishing rights of six new books to the Historic Commission so that they can continue to be available to everyone.

The committee expended much time and effort to providing a variety of cultural and social events that appealed to virtually every citizen in Northampton. These activities ranged from organizing conservation hikes and bicycle tours of the city's great trees to developing performance arts pieces for the Anniversary year. The committee also sponsored a series of park lunchtime readings of journal and diary entries spanning the full 350 years of our city's history. Most recently, the Committee helped fund the Turkey Hill Conservation project and worked an incredible number of man-hours toward the goal. This small list of accomplishments does not even come close to illustrating how much of an inspiration the committee's work has been to the City.

Community Service: First Churches

First Churches carries the tradition of the meetinghouse first established in Northampton in 1878, both architecturally and through the role they take in the community. Each week, over 35 civic organizations and 1200 citizens enter its doors as the church serves as an active meeting place. The church is also one of the ten buildings to host First Night, a fundraiser that supports the Center for the Arts. On any occasion, one might attend a concert held in the sanctuary.

Over the years, First Churches has continually been committed to restoration efforts that respect the history of the church, its grounds, and the community. For example, in the recent past, landscaping renovations paid tribute to the architectural style of the church and First Churches agreed on a boundary line that would grant the public access to the greater part of the front yard. Additionally, the wrought iron fence was restored and elm trees were added in front of the church. Not only do these changes bring a sense of the past, the addition of lights and a walkway benefit the citizens of Northampton as it continues its inspirational presence on into the future.

Continued Commitment: Valley Community Development Corporation

The City of Northampton is proud to have the Valley Community Development Corporation as an active partner in the community. With the leadership of Executive Director Joanne Campbell, Valley CDC continues to put forth the energy to accomplish valuable projects that address the housing and economic development needs of our low-income residents. The Millbank development was the first in over a decade to offer affordable units downtown. Valley Community Development Corporation focuses not only on creating new affordable housing, but also on preserving existing units. The School Street project illustrates this, as well as the consideration given to smart growth principles.

Above and Beyond: Andrea Miller

Ms. Miller, Research and Evaluation Analyst employed at ServiceNet, Inc., has played a critical role in the quest to understand and address regional homelessness. The City serves as the lead agent for the Three County Continuum of Care. Through that effort, Andrea has spent countless hours designing and implementing state of the art data collection mechanisms that have proven to be invaluable in assessing programs and policies. Andrea's work has been recognized, lauded, and utilized by the Western Mass. Inter Agency Council on Homelessness. She also represents western Massachusetts on the Homeless Management Information Systems Committee at the State level. Her time, energy, and thoughtful analyses are greatly appreciated.

Vibrant Downtown Vision: Sam Goldman

In the early 1970's, downtown was lacking vitality. Sam, a professor of business law at UMASS and a local resident, had a vision of a strong and vibrant downtown. Using creative financing he purchased, renovated, and rented several buildings in the heart of the City. His projects brought life to previously vacant spaces in the upper floors of buildings, including a corner lot on Main and Masonic Street, a parcel on Center Street, and the building that currently houses Country Comfort. Additionally, Sam was an active and respectful landlord. Sam's early renovation efforts provided momentum for future projects and today; the upper stories of buildings are flourishing with activity.

Extra-Ordinary Board Service: Ken Jodrie

Ken has dedicated 14 years of time, energy, and thoughtful input to the Planning Board. He has served as chair and his ideas on aesthetics and design have transformed the board's focus on these issues. While serving on the Board, Ken has previously served on the first Central Business Architecture Committee and helped create its culture. Ken is presently co-chair of the Tree Committee and is working to add a tree perspective to many actions the city takes. In years past, Ken was active in the Jackson Street PTO where he spearheaded the first Jackson Street creative playground and helped leverage the Barrett Street Marsh Conservation Area boardwalk. Ken's commitment to the community, as demonstrated by these activities, is to be applauded.

Wayne Feiden, A.I.C.P., Planning Director

