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Community Branding & Wayfinding Program: *Town of Amherst Final Report*



Dt: November 30, 2015

To: Elizabeth Hahn,
Manager of the Downtown Initiative Program
Department of Housing and Community Development
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Fr: Mark Favermann, Favermann Design

Re: Community Branding and Wayfinding Program: Town of Amherst Final Report

Founded initially in 1658 and chartered as a town in 1759, the Town of Amherst is located in the Connecticut River Valley in Hampshire County, Massachusetts. The largest community in Hampshire County, it has a population around 40,000. Set in a beautiful expansive bucolic countryside, it has a residential charm underscored by a town-gown environment that includes Amherst College, Hampshire College and the University of Massachusetts flagship at Amherst. The town is well known for its politically active and often rather vocal residents. However, when entering Amherst, there has never been a clear sense of arrival or even sense of place.



To assist with improving this situation, Amherst needed to have a community brand and a clear wayfinding system. A community's brand is an integral part of its civic identity. It is a visual representation of its essence or character. Correspondingly, once the community brand is clear, how to get to, from and through a neighborhood, downtown, town or city itself gives the community an easily accessible navigational orientation. This is called wayfinding. In turn wayfinding fosters a sense of comfort for visitors and residents. When developed, the community brand underscores a sense of character that can and should be further applied to the town's website and other forms of social media as well.

The need for wayfinding and appropriate signage has long been a concern of the Town of Amherst's town government and many of its civically involved residents as well as business and cultural institution leaders. Over the past two decades or so, various planning studies and implementation attempts have been tried in Amherst with very limited results.



Downtown Amherst

With the founding of Amherst's Business Improvement District (BID) in 2011, a new, organized business voice was established. Along with streetscape elements, maintenance and other amenities, the BID began to focus on needs of better orientation for the visitors and new residents. The Amherst BID identified the necessity for a comprehensive approach to developing wayfinding and functional signage to not only welcome visitors to historic and residential Amherst, but to establish direction and reinforcement to Amherst's Downtown.



To start the process, the BID invited a group of 25 civic and town administrative leaders to a three-hour community branding and wayfinding workshop in mid-November 2014. This included institutional leaders, business people, the Town Administrator, members of the Board of Selectman as well as Town Planning Department staff.

Sponsored by the Amherst BID and held in the Amherst Board of Selectmen's room, the workshop was fully attended, and the participatory exercises were undertaken with enthusiasm. The resulting creative recommendations of this workshop became a foundation to build a Town of Amherst community branding and wayfinding program. Mark Favermann of Favermann Design led the workshop.

A collaboration of public and private organizations applied through the Town of Amherst's Conservation and Development Department to the DHCD's Downtown Initiative for a grant to continue and complete the community branding and wayfinding work. In competition with other Massachusetts municipalities, the Town of Amherst won the grant.

The first step was to develop a scope of services for the consultants, Favermann Design. These tasks included the following steps and elements:

Scope of Services

I. Community Branding Design of Signage and Wayfinding Elements

Design of a brand theme, logo and slogan or tagline including color, font, placement, etc. to be approved by Select Board and/or other appropriate Town of Amherst boards and committees.

1. Creation of at least three (3) brand options for application to all wayfinding elements. These will be illustrated to show a "hierarchical family" of individual signs and other elements.
2. Refinement of a final logo/logotype and slogan as a Community Brand.
3. Recommendations for placement and use of Brand on wayfinding elements and other applications (website, etc.).
4. Development of preliminary hierarchy of wayfinding elements.
5. Refinement of hierarchy to an intermediate phase for public review and discussion.
6. Creation of sign element site placement with digitally illustrated location views using GIS where appropriate.
7. Development of a final wayfinding sign and element hierarchy,

II. Meetings

1. A preliminary meeting with advisory committee to develop strategy and goals
2. At least four (4) meetings with advisory committee and Town of Amherst coordinating staff, three (3) of which may be consultant-facilitated public meetings with community members to discuss project context and visual influences.

III. Deliverables

1. Creation of a sign and element specification digital document with recommendations for placement, installation, costs and city staff involvement.
2. Digital, reproductive images of the signs and/or their elements that can be used for fabrication.
3. Development of cost estimates. Prepare cost estimates for the fabrication of all sign elements—display, posts and panels, and installation.
4. Presentation for review and approval of the project report for DHCD's Downtown Initiative that includes narrative summarizing the process, the expected outcomes of the grant, and includes images of the signs and branding.

IV. Timeline

1. June 2015: Advisory Committee meeting and concept development.
2. July/August 2015: Concept development.
3. Late August/early September 2015: Presentation by consultant of design concepts to advisory committee and other boards/committees at an invitational open public meeting (#1) to solicit input. Concepts brought to Design Review Board, Amherst Historical Commission, Planning Board, and Select Board by Town staff for review and comment. Concepts brought to BID, Chamber of Commerce, and other downtown stakeholders by BID staff.
4. September 2015: Refinement of plans.
5. Late September/early October 2015: Presentation by consultant of refined plans at public meeting (#2). Further refinement.
6. October 2015: Presentation of final design plan by consultant to Planning Board and Select Board at joint public meeting (#3) for review and approval.

V. Ownership

The designs of all brands, wayfinding elements, and signs shall be the property of the Town of Amherst. Favermann Design shall retain the right to use any and all design elements for public relation, marketing, and illustration for articles, workshops, and website imagery. The Town of Amherst will be credited in any such use.

Starting in May 2015 after the Scope of Services was agreed, Favermann Design began meeting with a representative advisory committee to focus on Amherst's community branding and wayfinding needs. Serving on the committee were individuals from the Town Planning Department, Amherst's Chamber of Commerce, the Amherst BID, the executive director of the Emily Dickenson House, a representative of UMASS Amherst's community affairs office, a member of the Board of Selectmen and the director of the DPW.

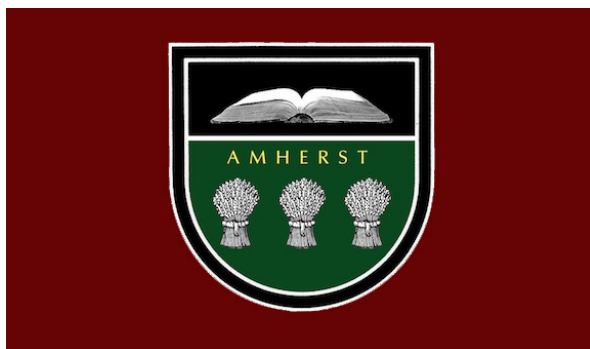
Using the information generated in the previous 2014 workshop, the committee worked on refining concepts and ideas on what would best symbolize or represent the Town of Amherst. Using earlier words, phrases and concepts generated by the participatory group exercises, Favermann Design's staff visually interpreted the words and phrases and then worked with the Advisory Committee to further refine them. The interpretation took the form of various visual design options for the community brand. In addition, specific phrases were considered as potential slogans or taglines.

During the months of May through November 2015, Favermann Design participated in 5 community workshops and public meetings for the development of appropriate branding and signage solutions to help visitors identify and navigate throughout the Town of Amherst.

During the design development process, Favermann Design did research into the historical context and desired image for Amherst. These made reference to the aquarian importance of Amherst and its surrounding areas as well as the strong educational component of the Town's institutions. Favermann conducted presentations and discussions with the Advisory Committee and the Town's planning staff evolving the branding design concepts.

Strategic arrival routes and visitor journeys were analyzed by the Town's planning staff as well. Concurrently, while the branding was being worked out, potential sign shapes and sizes were displayed during the workshops to give members of the Advisory Committee an idea of what the branding could look like on a potential sign type.

A variety of branding elements were explored throughout the summer and early Fall. Design explorations looked at a variety of colors, specific images and fonts. Additionally, a slogan or "tagline" for the wayfinding system was initially agreed upon A Learning Landscape. Coming out of a series of ideation exercises led by the Favermann staff, this tagline is based upon the town's beautiful geographic location and its wealth of



Amherst Flag



Amherst Seal

educational institutions and life-long learning emphasis and tradition. This slogan was later lessened in importance and may be used in the future.

Initially, the various design options evolved from site specific elements focused on the Town Hall, the Dickinson House and other structures relating to the Town of Amherst. Additional concepts were developed using trees and landscape elements. Each design concept was created in a variety of “looks” ranging from very detailed to gestural.

Some members of the Advisory Committee who felt that the designs were either too conservative or not reflective enough of the youthfulness or contemporary nature of the Town of Amherst. Advisory Committee member Sarah la Cour suggested using a ‘window-like’ approach that showed the townscape viewed in the background behind a strong (Learning) tree element.

The Favermann staff took all these things into consideration and created a layered image that showed in simple color arrangements the hilly countryside with a silhouetted Amherst downtown skyline. The silhouette of Town Hall can be identified. A clean, modern typeface was used as well. This graphic representation is at once more contemporary and evocative. It was unanimously chosen by the Advisory Committee.

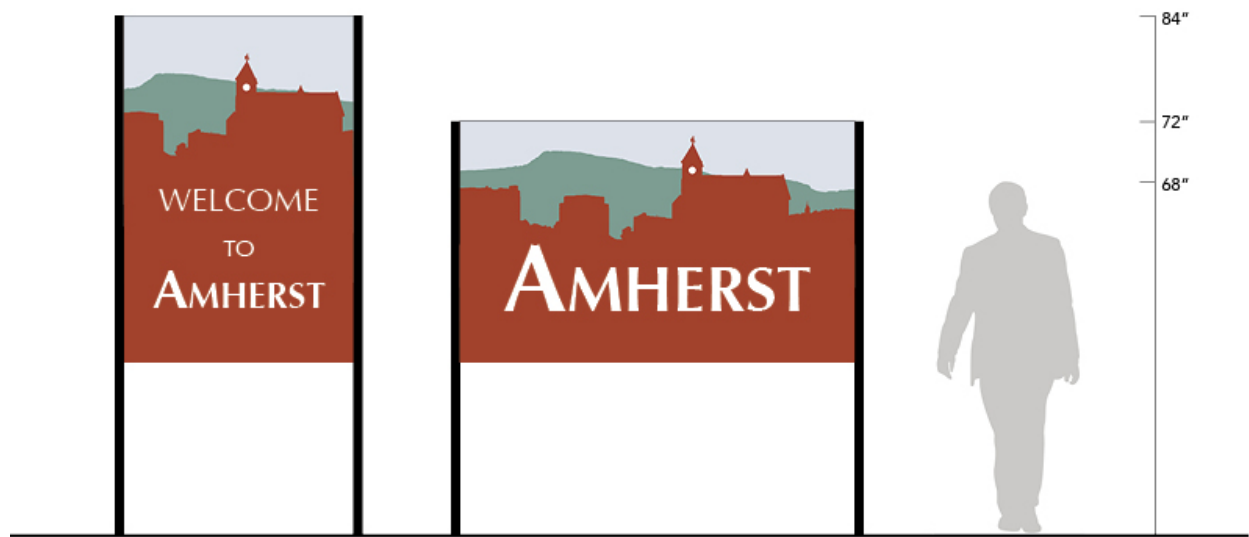
Scale model and illustrations were created of the design options. Through this procedure, appropriate sign types and a streetscape sign family were determined. Working with the planning staff, a determination was made of the number and “what signs go where” was made. This sign location plan on a site map is being evolved as is determination of numbers of specific signs to be fabricated and installed by the Town of Amherst’s Planning Department.

Favermann Design created a sign specifications template package, showing each sign, the recommended number to be fabricated of each sign, and including the final artwork for each element. This digital specifications package will eventually be sent out to qualified fabricators and installers to acquire competitive bids to make and install the signs.

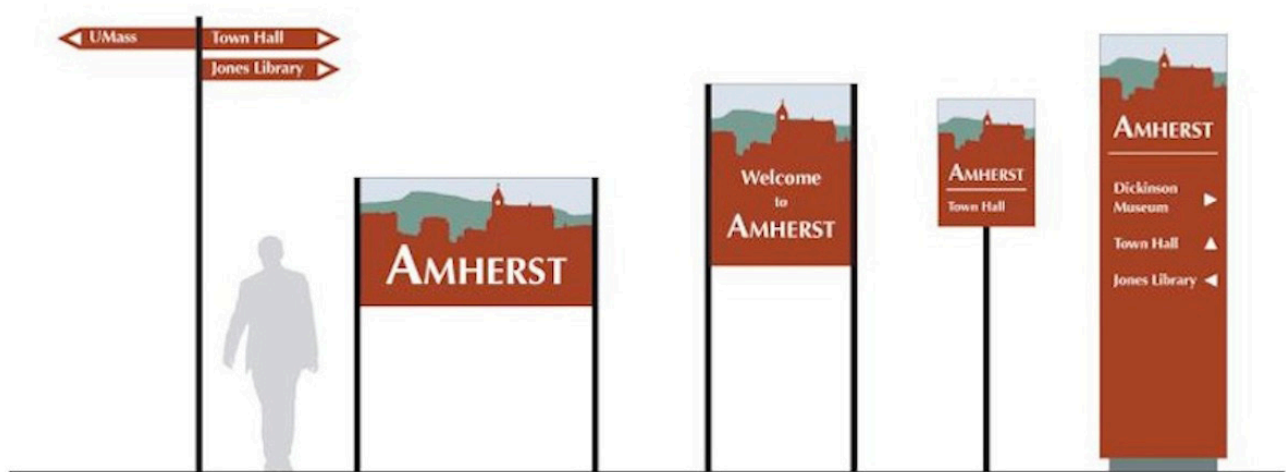
The Town’s Planning Board approved the designs in early November. On November 23, 2015 after the presentation and review, Favermann Design’s Town of Amherst community branding and wayfinding package received unanimous approval from the Amherst Select Board.

The Town of Amherst is said to be one of the most difficult communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in which to create agreement achieve community consensus on any topic, and, indeed, designing a community brand and concept designs for a family of sign types took considerably longer in Amherst than it has in other communities. However, the overall process went smoothly and efficiently, and involved a consistent cooperative effort by a number of thoughtful, involved individuals on the Advisory Board.

The project will initially be implemented in Downtown Amherst and at the entrances to the community. This will be followed by sign elements and directional signs placed throughout the whole Town. Similarly, social media community branding integration will evolve over time as well.



Welcome Sign Elements



Family of Amherst Sign Elements

This report was funded by the:



Massachusetts Downtown Initiative

Department of Housing & Community Development, 100 Cambridge Street, Boston, MA 02114