

**Minutes of  
The Williamstown Planning Board  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2015  
7:00 p.m. at the Municipal Building**

**Members Present:** Amy Jeschawitz, Chris Winters, Ann McCallum, Carol Stein – Payne, Elizabeth McGowan

**Others Present:** Andrew Groff, Atty. Jay Sabin, Atty. Sherwood Guernsey, Bill Frado, Joan Blair, Bruce McDonald.

Ms. Jeschawitz opened the meeting at 7:00 PM.

**MINUTES**

*Ms. McCallum moved to approve the September Minutes.*

*Mr. Winters seconded.*

*The Motion Carried Unanimously.*

**ANR**

**Blair Road: Galusha**

Atty. Jay Sabin stated that the ANR plan being presented is for James Galusha. The plan is to accommodate an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) owned by the Commonwealth. The creation of these three lots is to provide for an exclusion zone outside of the APR. The farmland preserved totals 137 acres. Three lots will be created for the exclusion zone. There are existing buildings and one home in the exclusion zone. It is hoped that the APR will close by the end of the year.

Atty. Sabin additionally noted that the ANR mylar is not prepared and if approved the Planning Board can sign it outside of a public meeting.

Atty. Sabin described that the APR is made up of different parcels of land owned by different family members.

Ms. McCallum asked about frontage for the lots.

Atty. Sabin stated Ch. 81P states that a way in existence prior to the existence of a subdivision control law or under a plan previously approved by the Planning Board. Either of these approaches are acceptable.

Mr. Groff stated that there is a subdivision plan in existence that was created in 1978, it is acceptable for the Board to create the lots.

Ms. McCallum expressed concern with this situation.

Atty. Sabin noted that it would be preferable for the Board to accept based on the old subdivision plan not a way in existence.

Mr. Winters noted that this is a way, most folks think of a road as a public road. That is not what this access route is.

Ms. McCallum asked about lot sizes.

Atty. Sabin stated that there is a single lot with Mr. Galusha's home, a 14 acre parcel with barns, and a 2.5 acre parcel adjacent to Mr. Galusha's home.

Ms. McCallum stated she is in favor of the petition.

Mr. Winters asked about the APR changes. Are there minimum structures that are permitted?

Atty. Sabin stated that there is a cabin on one portion of the property that is very basic and had to be tied into agricultural use to be allowed on restricted property.

*Mr. Winters moved to find that Approval is Not Required under the Subdivision Control Law finding that there is adequate frontage and area to support the changes.*

*Ms. McCallum seconded.*

*The motion carried unanimously*

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Waubeeka & Five Corners**

Atty. Stan Parese stated he is present to continue a discussion with the Board regarding Mr. Deep's desire to have a partner or other developer construct an inn of some undetermined size at the Waubeeka property. This however is only a possibility if a zoning change is created. The energy behind this initiative is an economic imperative. The golf course as a standalone entity is a 50 year old business model that can no longer sustain itself. The desire is to create a zoning bylaw change that could enable that outcome while remaining sensitive to the community and environment of South Williamstown. A follow up meeting was held with the Board chair and town staff regarding

process and tonight this discussion will be continued.

Atty. Parese additionally noted that a zoning amendment has a structured process and must be voted upon by the Town Meeting with a 2/3 vote. This is a process is being done in cooperation with the South Williamstown community and the Planning Board. This will not happen if the community doesn't want it to happen.

Atty. Parese stated that at this stage the process is brainstorming. If there is to be a bylaw change how will incremental steps going to be taken. Right now further refinement must occur. No votes have been taken no decisions have been made, this is very preliminary.

Atty. Parese stated that September's consensus was that the "Southern Gateway" district could be extended to the South. Another approach was to place an overlay district on top of the Waubeeka property. A third suggestion is that a new base zoning district be created that encompasses the entire Five Corners Historic District and reinvigorate this part of the community as a vibrant village center as it once was many years ago. This could potentially help to bring life back to an area that has been essentially dark for some years until the recent revival of the Store at Five Corners. The current thinking is to create a regulatory environment where that community can thrive again. Current zoning does not encourage long term stability.

Mrs. Guernsey asked what current zoning in the area is.

Mr. Groff stated that it is Rural Residence Two and this is a predominately residential district for one and two family homes. Limited home business are permitted.

Ms. Guernsey asked if Waubeeka is allowed to change its use right now by using the rights of non-conformity.

Atty. Parese explained that this was attempted in the 1990s for an expanded club house.

Mr. Groff added that a hotel is an additional use category one cannot simply extend the non-conforming nature of Waubeeka to include a hotel. It has to change one non conformity to another.

Ms. Joan Blair asked which board if any governs building height and aesthetics?

Mr. Groff explained that this would be up for consideration during the Zoning Board's Special Permit process.

Atty. Parese discussed the maps proposed to the board for the scope of a Five Corners Business District and added that this could be beneficial to the businesses existing in this area.

Atty. Parese discussed the talking points provided to the board. Summarizing that the proposed district is meant to be community and place where there is vibrancy that is appropriate to scale.

Atty. Parese added that the economic vibrancy of the community is critical to all residents. We have acute infrastructure needs, police, fire, schools. This could be part of a change in the community that is needed. There is also a notion in the community that the water line might be extended in this process. This is not happening. Sewer is not happening either, due to this development if any occurs will be of smaller scale.

Atty. Parese noted that the developer wants to see development by right, however this is not going to fly in this district, a hotel will have to be by special permit only. There will be a significant public hearing process.

Stan also noted that there are further environmental restrictions on development that are outside of zoning that will control what type of development can be constructed on the site, wetlands, title 5, etc. These are state regulations that no one in this community has a right to override.

Atty. Parese added that there is a growing movement towards form based codes. This does not place too much emphasis on use, it places more emphasis on form of building and the building's relationship with the street. The concept being that if a building is appropriately scaled and designed what occurs inside of it is not of major concern.

Mr. Guernsey asked Mr. Deep why he purchased the course if he knew it was not economically viable.

Mr. Deep stated that golf is a great game I love to play and I knew that the profit and loss statement was deplorable. It is possible to turn this course around. We are trying additional things in an attempt to turn the corner. The idea is to save this course as a community asset.

Mr. Bill Frado stated that one of the things is a 60 bed hotel on spring street with a 40 bed annex how will you deal with that competition?

Atty. Parese stated that this project includes taking down the Williams Inn, this is a net loss of rooms.

Mr. Frado stated that this map is concerning, there are private residences in this area.

Ms. Jeschawitz stated that there are a lack of accommodations in town. This is a thing we must keep in mind. Take a look at the 170,000 visitors to the Clark those folks stayed in South County because that is where the types of places people want to stay. Tourism is a big part of our community, the college is talking about building a hotel, and the town will have the exact same process as this. This is just the beginning steps of addressing the issue at this site.

Atty. Guernsey stated that there is no one who wants to see the golf course close. The issues come in how this possible development fits with the neighborhood. I am aware of the historical nature of the neighborhood but the times have change at the time there was more commercial activity there were fewer cars. Looking at this we need to step back and say things are different. We do not want to create congestion. A zoning change is also forever

until it is changed again. This is a big decision we need to make some decisions on what precisely can be permitted here. The proposed extent before us adds too much potential for commercial development. How much commercial activity can that particular road structure and the people that live in the community really want.

Atty. Guernsey stated that until there is more data from the proposal can we really go forward.

Atty. Parese stated that if the Board says to Mr. Deep go home, we will.

Atty. Guernsey stated that Mr. Deep needs a partner. We need to know who this partner is first before we go forward. Mike Deep will not be the developer. The community needs to know who the players are.

Mr. Winters asked what Waubeeka is seeking.

Atty. Parese stated that we are asking for permission to draft a bylaw and then discuss it. We could go back and forth on hypotheticals all night.

Ms. McCallum stated that this is a constructive discussion we should hear everyone's views on seeing this area develop. We need to hear thoughts now pro and con.

Ms. Jeschawitz stated that tonight we need to decide if we want to continue to explore this option the next step would be to hold a community outreach session similar to what is being done with housing in winter.

Mr. Bruce McDonald stated that he lives on 295 Hancock Road and lives across from the golf course. Anything obstructing the view shed would be upsetting. It would be much preferable to see development along the lines of an inn in this area of Route 7 or any location on Main Street or Spring Street. These areas should be reformed into more of a colonial environment. Height is of course a concern. If this building was to look similar to the Bedford Inn in New Hampshire this is preferable. This is exactly the type of development we need in Williamstown. Aesthetics and architecture are a major concern. Something of a colonial character is becoming of Williamstown. We are concerned with style and not particularly use. We do not want a Seven Eleven.

Ms. Guernsey we want to see the golf course survive. We all recognize that we have to accept some change. A tasteful small inn could be really nice. We want to make sure it doesn't get too far and too out of control.

Ms. Blair asked if the golf course will absolutely remain. She additionally noted that she is a pro inn and pro golf course.

Mr. Deep stated that the only reason for this exercise is to preserve Waubeeka as an 18 Hole golf course.

Ms. Blair noted that there is a significant amount of education needed zoning is a complex topic.

Ms. McCallum stated that looking at this and hearing this evening's comments, there are ways to amend this.

Mr. Guernsey continued to express concern.

Ms. McCallum asked for Mr. Gurnsey's opinion.

Mr. Gurnsey stated he would propose something concrete for the board to consider, unintended consequences.

Mr. Winters stated that the consequence of Rural Residence 2 zoning is that the Store at Five Corners died.

The public expressed concern about this statement.

Ms. Jeschawitz explained the concept further, noting that the creativity of business owners is stifled by the restriction.

Several members of the public noted that any bylaw should be as stringent as possible.

Ms. Jeschawitz stated the Board could also consider that the Economic Development Committee is doing work on these issues and over the past 10 to 15 years in Williamstown we are still grappling with the same things as we did when we wrote the 2002 Master Plan. We really need to start having some vision for things that are happening in the future whether we love them or not. We need to think about the needs of the community as a whole versus small pockets. Looking at the relief the inn would bring to the community that day there were 4500 visitors, why don't we let them stay here? The town needs this to accommodate people. There is congestion in the center of town this can be a relief to the community. The course is a community asset now, the inn could be too.

Ms. Shineski stated that it seems that the community wants to save the golf course, we want a tastefully done inn, we must define what is nice but we are afraid of unintended consequences. If you make the store easier to change the store will disappear. The store might stay a store but it won't be that building. There could be a slow progression of change, leaping into something is not a good idea. Why do we need to create the opportunity to create more change where we don't want it?

Ms. Jeschawitz asked if the Board wants to continue this discussion.

Ms. McCallum these comments are fascinating and helpful. No one has said a negative thing about a nice hotel on the golf course. It is when we start to think about fixing other problems, these folks do not see this as a problem, and perhaps we do not have to do this. Perhaps the Board should now focus on what the best way to get a hotel on Waubeeka is without negative consequences elsewhere. We can't figure this out now but we can keep working on it. We should focus on minimums.

Ms. Jeschawitz, do we want to keep pursuing this with Mr. Deep?

Mr. Winters stated that it would be helpful next time to talk about uses to be allowed, how they would be allowed, and have a better frame work.

Ms. Jeschawitz stated that perhaps the Board needs to have some sort of break out session.

Ms. McCallum volunteered to work on a draft amendment with town staff.

Mr. Winters noted that the Board should have something more tangible to talk about.

The Board and the public discussed process moving forward.

The public expressed a desire for specific plans at this stage

The Board and Atty. Parese noted that this is for a special permitting phase not a zoning change

Ms. McCallum stated we need to think about types of buildings we need to think about form and buildings not specific projects.

The Board agreed to work on more specific proposals for November 10 and tabled the current discussion until that time.

**Housing Policy Study**

**Office Space Zoning**

The Board agreed to table these items until Nov. 10.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM.