

Minutes of
The Williamstown Planning Board
TUESDAY, JULY 14, 2015
7:00 p.m. at the Municipal Building

Members Present: Amy Jeschawitz , Elizabeth McGowan, Chris Winters, Ann McCallum

Others Present: Andrew Groff, Attorney James Art, Rita Coppla Wallace, Charles LaBatt, James Kolesar

Ms. Jeschawitz opened the meeting at 7:04 PM.

MINUTES

Ms. McCallum moved approval of the minutes from May 7.

Ms. McGowan seconded.

The Motion Carried Unanimously.

Ms. McCallum moved approval of the minutes from May 27.

Ms. McGowan seconded.

The Motion Carried Unanimously.

ANR

Carlisle, Water Street

Ms. McCallum made a motion to approve the ANR request for Carlisle.

Mr. Winters seconded.

The Motion Carried Unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

DEFINITIVE PLAN OF SUBDIVISION

Pine Cobble Modification

Mr. Winters noted that in order to proceed with this project the Board must invoke the Rule of Necessity. A number of Board members have a conflict of interest as they work for Williams College. No quorum is available if all with a conflict will recuse themselves.

Mr. Winters, and Ms. McGowan stated they have a conflict as they work for Williams College.

Atty. James Art noted that this is a simple boundary line adjustment for the Pine Cobble subdivision. It is a very basic definitive plan modification. Many lots on Pine Cobble suffer from not meeting the true topography of the mountain side. This is a small land swap between the open space parcel and the parcel containing 600 Pine Cobble to correct for some failed land that has caused a rip rap retention wall to be constructed in the open space parcel. The thought behind approaching the Board now is to finalize this plan before the property closes. The current tenant would like to purchase the home but only after this issue is resolved.

Atty. Art also noted that there are many other issues with the subdivision. Some restrictions make no sense since much time has passed since first approval. There is likely to be a reworking of some of these issues wholesale.

Ms. McCallum moved to approve the Certificate and Plan for Modification of Definitive Plan as presented, referencing the letter of July 14, 2015.

Ms. McGowan seconded.

The motion carried unanimously.

ACCESS & PARKING DETERMINATION

Pratt House, Park Street

Atty. Art noted that this existing building will be used as a single family home for teaching assistants. It will remain a single family home. The Board needs to look at an Access Determination and a Parking Determination.

Mr. Groff noted that Conservation Commission approval has been granted

Ms. McCallum asked about grades on site.

Mr. LaBatt stated they range 3 to 1 to 2 to 1 and meet standards from subdivision rules.

Ms. McCallum stated she is appreciative of the change of the façade in relation to the street. The new placement is reflective of the house's original configuration.

Atty. Art added that there are only 4 parking spots and the students mostly do not have cars.

Ms. McCallum moved that the access and utilities provided to the building is equivalent to a subdivision and that the four parking spaces provided are adequate.

Ms. McGowan seconded.

The motion carried unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

Williams College, Downtown Hotel Proposal

Mr. James Kolesar and Ms. Rita Coppola Wallace stated they are present to discuss the hotel project.

Mr. Kolesar stated he has been consulting with Pinnacle Group and community members. Following this consultation it has become apparent that the hotel programming is most appropriately 60 rooms, 40 seasonal rooms, a 200 person function room, and a public bar and restaurant. Much work, on the Planning Board's request has also been done on the location of the hotel with a focus on stormwater and ecology on site. This was the impetus for the community group that was created.

Mr. Kolesar stated that this group of prominent members of the town are focusing on various aspects of the property these include, program, ecological issues, logistical issues (parking / traffic), the feel of the building (aesthetics included). This group has met four times but the center of gravity of the group has pushed towards the following areas;

Ecology, deference to experts, program of the hotel, these are important but seasonal rooms less so. Logistics, traffic and parking are of high importance. Overall feel, building height are concerning to the group as well.

Mr. Kolesar also noted that Ms. McCallum has developed a plan that attempts to find the sweet spot on the corner. This the committee found intriguing. Ms. Coppola Wallace then presented an idea to do the traffic and parking study as well as the full environmental analysis before the zoning change as opposed to later. These will take a few months and sometime in the fall the College would like to resume the conversation on the size and scope of a business district expansion.

Ms. Coppola Wallace further noted that the study will include an analysis of the hotel program.

Ms. McGowan stated she feels this is an important change in the process. These studies are needed and should address some of the neighborhood concerns related to the project.

Ms. McCallum asked who will develop the project.

Ms. Coppola Wallace stated that Cambridge Seven will do the design, Guntlow the Civil, Tighe and Bond Traffic, and an additional contractor in engaged on geotechnical questions. The result of these studies will not be to get an answer that a particular idea won't work. If it doesn't work, why? Additionally, how could it work on a particular site?

Ms. McGowan asked who has been hired as architect.

Ms. Coppola Wallace stated it is Cambridge Seven, there was a substantial process and three groups were vetted.

Ms. McGowan noted that this hotel will be an important landmark and current renderings are not inspiring. This hotel will be an important community landmark. It is important to keep this in mind.

Other Zoning Projects

Ms. Jeschawitz stated this topic is on the agenda because the ZBA requested that this Board investigate looking into re working the professional office space definition.

Ms. McCallum asked about housing policy as well.

Ms. Jeschawitz noted that this is a broader project. The ZBA issue is really specific and could be done this year.

Mr. Winters stated he would look into it.

Ms. McCallum suggested that Mr. Groff look into some other town's definitions

Mr. Groff stated he will coordinate with and work with Mr. Winters on this issue.

Housing Policy Study

Ms. McCallum began by noting she had a conversation with the interim head of real estate for the College. Overall the takeaway is that people seem to be looking for short term solutions, smaller units, furnished units, flexibility.

Ms. McGowan added that there is a tenured faculty benefit for housing but only within a short distance from Williamstown. There are many people that get stuck in this situation where they have a spouse far away whom resides at their primary home and they come to and fro. They have no ability to seek more permanent housing in town.

Ms. McCallum added that there are a lot of short term teachers and other professionals who are in the same situation.

Mr. Winters stated he spoke to Brian O'Grady and some other members of the senior community location doesn't seem to matter much. What matters is transportation, the Council on Aging Van reaches most of the community and the bottom line is most seniors drive so location is not important. The construction is important, single level, individual entrances are critical.

Mr. Winters noted that many people stay in homes much too big for them and will not leave. Stubbornness. There is really no way to quantify market demand but this is some good anecdotal evidence. Bottom line is there is some level of demand.

Ms. McCallum asked about Highland Woods.

Mr. Winters noted that many people from the Spruces have been in touch with Mr. O'Grady who would like to move back to town. Highland Woods could meet this demand.

Mr. Groff added that the project there is on track for a February to March 2016 completion.

Ms. Jeschawitz stated that a lot of confusion comes from what the definitions are to housing, specifically the term affordable.

Ms. Jeschawitz added that we need to classify these things and come up with a data set quantify where the need is and then start to develop a plan.

Mr. Winters cautioned the Board on trying to quantify need for housing.

Mr. Groff noted that exact quantification is impossible but added that approximation can adequately guide policy choices. Anecdotal evidence is helpful.

Ms. McGowan agreed and noted that the Board's continued outreach and conversations with people such as real estate agents will be critical.

Atty. Art added that the diversity of housing options keeps popping up as a huge issue in the Economic Development Committee's discussions.

Mr. Groff noted he will be sure to include this information in the baseline data on this topic for the next meeting.

Mr. Winters stated that to maximally satisfy diversity of options is to create less regulations. A radical notion is to simply remove restrictions. Perhaps setbacks and lot sizes could be revisited.

Ms. Jeschawitz suggested having a special work session meeting to address these topics.

The Board suggested making the August meeting a work session meeting.

Ms. McCallum added that she will research the existing bylaw restrictions on multifamily housing for this meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM.