

**MINUTES**  
**The Williamstown Planning Board**  
**THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2015**  
**5:30 p.m.**  
**Board Retreat – The Williams Inn – Main Street, Williamstown, Massachusetts**

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

**Others Present:** Andrew Groff, Jeffery Thomas, Karen Lartin, Van Ellet, & Paul Harsch.

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

**New Business**

*Board Retreat: 2016 Priorities Discussion*

Ms. McGowan began the discussion by noting that the Board has convened in a less formal arrangement to have an open discussion about setting priorities for topics to study in the coming year and for bylaw amendments that the board might wish to pursue.

Ms. McGowan also thanked the members of the public including folks from the Economic Development Committee (EDC) and the Affordable Housing Committee (AHC) who could join the board, for attending the retreat.

Mr. Thomas noted that he hopes the EDC could contribute to this conversation but noted that he would not want the Boards to confuse remits. It is hoped that that the EDC will exist for one year and produce a report which will give the Planning Board actionable items for the implementation phase of the project.

Dr. Lartin added that the Planning Board is very important to the EDC's process as many of the implementation items that will come out of this report can be acted on by boards such as the Planning Board.

The Board discussed at length issues around increasing business opportunity in Williamstown, including amending use regulation, expanding existing business districts, or other perhaps missed opportunities.

Mr. Harsch noted that the EDC hopes the Planning Board can provide some opportunities for so called low hanging fruit in zoning that could be changed with big results.

Mr. Ellet gave description of his Committee's (AHC) new approach. They will now be focused more on policy changes that could help create housing in the community that isn't just subsidized housing but perhaps more market housing at affordable rates. Aging in place issues are also on the table.

Mr. Ellet added that the North County region is sorely lacking in senior services especially for housing facilities as the community ages. This could also be a focus of economic development.

Mr. Harsch added that the local real estate market is struggling at the high end of the market. That side is over built. There is a need for 1 level living, there is a need for multi family, and we are precluding younger families from enjoying the advantages of the local school system.

The Board then continued to discuss housing as a potential issue for further study.

Mr. Winters noted that there seemed to be much community momentum from meetings held in 2014 for an in depth look at this issue.

Mr. Groff noted that if one really studies the 2002 Master Plan in quickly becomes clear what is still relevant and what is not. The housing element of that plan is one of the most out of date sections if not the most.

Ms. Jeschawitz noted that this could be an area of study for 2016 that could coincide well with other efforts.

The Board discussed the housing issue overall in more detail, noting zoning issues, multifamily restrictions, recent success with subsidized housing, and problems with current subdivision rules and regulations.

The Board determined that a focus on overall town wide housing policy would be a best fit for a 2016 – 2017 planning project as it would complement the work of the EDC and be an ideal opportunity for collaboration with other town boards such as the EDC.

The Board agreed to discuss a sketch of a possible planning process at its next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 PM.