

Affordable Housing Trust present, still in session until after John Ryan's presentation:
Richard DeMayo, Stanley Parese (chair), Fred Puddester, Tom Sheldon, Catherine Yamamoto

Present

AHC: Charles Bonenti, Van Ellet, Cheryl Shanks, Leigh Short, Catherine Yamamoto (chair); Absent: Bilal Ansari

Also Present: Hank Art, Peter Elvin, Sarah Gardner, Margaret Harwood, Suzanne Kemple, David Kemple, Betty Ann Labombard, David Mangun, Brian O'Grady, Susan Puddester, Mark Reinhardt, David Rempell, Bob Scerbo, Ken Swiatek, Chris Winters, Carol Zingarelli

Stephen Dravis (iBerkshires), Martin Filion (Willinet)

Business

1. Chair's statement

The Affordable Housing Committee would like to thank the hundreds of Williamstown residents who attended the April 24 Special Town Meeting. The robust attendance indicates that residents are aware of and concerned about the fate of our friends, neighbors and relatives who lost their homes in the flood and those still living in The Spruces. The votes taken that night indicate a sense of obligation to work together toward a solution of where to house the many Spruces residents, and others, who would choose to live in Williamstown, if housing that they could afford were available to them.

This committee sincerely appreciates the decision to take no action at this time and to continue to explore all options available to us. Time is needed to seek the opinions of engineers, architects and developers with experience in affordable housing. We must take time to work, not in a reactionary way, but deliberately and creatively toward a solution.

We must continue to vet all options, to consider all proposals, and to listen to all voices as we work together to find that solution. Williamstown's housing problem is big and it will require a big solution. Multiple housing styles on multiple sites will be required to accommodate the needs of the various groups we seek to house.

We are confident that this town, our town, can, in a collaborative way, work together to determine our future path. Where that path takes us is up to us.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the April 24 meeting were approved 3-0-2.

3. Housing Needs Assessment presentation by John Ryan

John Ryan, the consultant hired by the AHC to conduct a housing needs assessment, presented the prominent elements of his written report.

A. Types of Need

1. Current residents of the Spruces facing a planned evacuation
2. Previous residents of the Spruces who evacuated unexpectedly and are in limbo or in unsatisfactory housing
3. Current renters who are paying rent that is burdensome (above 35% of their gross income)
4. Low-income homeowners who will need daily care assistance

B. Trends

1. Nonelderly renters are markedly more burdened by rent than they were 10 years ago
2. Professionals in the area live in town
3. Current Williamstown residents are not on the waiting list: odd
Later, Betty Ann Labombard said that the Section 8 waiting list has been closed since 2009. David Rempell asked John Ryan how this would affect his interpretation of the waitlist data. John Ryan said that if the vouchers could be used in Williamstown, they, in combination with federal subsidies, could make housing affordable to people at the lowest income level.
4. Gentrification: Williamstown residents are older, wealthier, and less ethnically diverse than they were 10 years ago.

C. Non-trends

1. The range of housing prices is wider than elsewhere in the state, as has been true.
2. Some houses are below 150,000, which had been true 10 years ago as well
3. Special needs residents' housing deficit is not large.

D. Questions (followed by Ryan's answer)

1. Van Ellet: Though many residents of the Spruces have indicated an interest in home ownership, do you believe a home ownership model for Sprucians could be financially viable, or will any large project have to serve a broader mix of income and target groups to be viable? They would be best served by a single senior development that could accommodate as broad a range of incomes as possible.
2. Charles Bonenti: if the issue is the economy then do we need jobs first and housing second? This is a political judgment that the town needs to make.
3. Leigh Short: is there a similar town elsewhere with experience we could learn from? Middlebury tried a subsidized housing ownership model that did not go well, built a townhouse-style complex of 30-40 units for family housing that was popular, and has been the location for many market-rate retirement communities.

4. Cheryl Shanks: What about children? The number of children in Williamstown is dropping at a rate greater than statewide, and the number of children living in rental housing has essentially gone to zero, which is highly unusual.

5. Van Ellet: Given the potentially large infrastructure costs required to develop some of the Town-owned properties currently under consideration, should the AHC be thinking more about using our limited resources to purchase and rehabilitate some of the Town's lost cost housing, such as some of the homes currently priced under \$150,000? The subsidies would have to be huge, and the housing is too dispersed to be what Spruces' residents want, but this is a good idea for other populations, especially families.

6. David Mangun: who is "the Vermont expert" referred to in the discussion of Middlebury? Eileen Pelletier of the Central Vermont Community Land Trust.

7. Sarah Gardner: a. Can a development be subsidized with tax credits alone? They can provide half the subsidy. b. Could Cable Mills receive more development funding if it increased the percentage of affordable units? Likely they are where they need to be financially. c. What are best practices for housing those 62 and older? Refer to CHAPA; anticipating the need for services.

8. Robert Scerbo: Can motels be used? That depends, case by case, which motels are underperforming. Most motel conversions on the Cape have been to condos, not to affordable housing.

E. Statements

1. Margaret Harwood stated that she has always lived in Williamstown, raised three daughters in town, has lived at the Spruces for 18 years, and has a memorial garden at her house. She most wants a four-room house where she can have both a memorial garden and a place for pets.

2. Betty Ann Labombard described the status of wait lists for and capacities of subsidized housing in Williamstown. The Section 8 list was closed in 2009.* Turnover is low in family housing. Though people need to qualify in terms of household composition, someone has remained a resident since the complex opened in 1983.

4. Balance due

The committee voted to pay John Ryan the balance due for the HNA, \$2000, 5-0-0.

5. Photec

A. Tighe & Bond recommends additional sampling to determine the size of the silver contamination area on the bank, which will indicate the amount of remediation that remains (on the bank--the building is still there). Sampling would close out Phase

III of the project. The cost would be \$17,530. 11,222.10 remains of the Mass Development Grant. Affordable Housing will use \$6307.90 of its CPA money allocated to technical services to pay the balance.

B. \$2.25 million in federal, state, and local funds have already been used on this site and it's still not useable.

6. Conservation Commission

The Affordable Housing Committee and the Conservation Commission should meet together, perhaps on May 23, to begin to talk about housing and conservation issues.

*In an email 5/9/13, Betty Ann Labombard clarified: "In reviewing our records I found that when we last had an open list, in May 2009, we had 23 local people apply. Since that time we have leased 9 of these families. The others are off the waiting list due to either no longer being eligible or no longer needing it."

Documents used: John Ryan Housing Needs Assessment final report, and HNA executive summary

Next Meeting: May 14