

**Affordable Housing Committee  
Minutes  
August 13, 2013**

Present

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

Also present: Joan Burns, Vivian Jaffe, Peter Elvin, Bob and Nancy Scerbo, Anne Skinner

Stephen Dravis (iBerkshires), Martin Fillion (Willinet), Ed Damon (Transcript)

**Business**

1. Minutes

Charles moved and Bilal seconded that the minutes of the July 23rd meeting be approved. The motion carried 4-0-1 [Short abstained because he was not present at the July 23 meeting].

2. Action to Engage Consultant

The Committee discussed the only proposal received in response to the Committee's RFP—from Connie Krueger (who will serve as the lead) and Jennifer Goldson, individual consultants who teamed up to make a joint proposal. The Chair reviewed some of the key elements of their proposal (see attached), including key dates, including two public meetings on the Water St. and Photec sites in early October.

- It is expected that a final draft of the RFP would be available in early November, and out to bidders in late November. To provide 30 days to respond to the RFP, proposal review would probably take place in mid- December; recommendations available in late December or early January.
- Bilal indicated that some attention might be given to asking possible developers about their credentials for working with projects located in a flood plain. (It was noted that Tim Geller (President of the South Berkshire Housing Development Corporation) will visit the AHC at its September 17<sup>th</sup> meeting to discuss the development of projects in flood plains).
- Bilal made a motion to accept the proposal, which was soon seconded by Leigh.
- There was a brief discussion regarding whether the two community meetings referenced in the proposal could be held on the same day, which could save some money. Van also asked about whether we had to accept the proposed project bid/fees, which are still in sealed envelope—separate from the main proposal. It was agreed that the Chair and Leigh Short would discuss the cost proposal, and any outstanding project issues related to cost with Peter Frohlin to resolve.
- Committee voted to accept the proposal 4-0-1.
- Leigh Short raised the issue about the joint proposal—why two consultants? The Chair reviewed the two sets of credentials, and noted the different skill sets and probable roles in completing the work.

3. Sites

### **A. 59 Water St**

The Committee discussed issues related to water pipeline replacement near the property on Latham Street, as well as surface flooding/drainage, noting that there probably are some issues to be addressed if the property is developed.

### **B. Phototech**

The Committee reviewed and discussed the most recent letter from Tighe & Bond regarding remediation still needed on the river bank at this site. T&B did confirm the existence of a “hot spot” in the soil. However, because of the vagueness of the communication, it was decided that Leigh Short would call T&B to clarify the meaning of the letter. The Chair noted that over \$2.5 million of local, state, and federal had already been spent to clean up the site, and that the site is almost ready for actual development. The current proposal would not address any costs associated with the demolition of the building, which would be handled by the developer...

### **C. Cable Mills**

Cathy Yamamoto noted that over \$1.5 in CPA funds has been committed to this project. She communicated with David Traggorth of Mitchell Properties about the current status of the Cable Mills project. She reported that the 13 low income housing units associated with the project will be for people with incomes at 80% of the area median income, and that according to Mr. Traggorth, no tax credits have been applied for—just CPA funds and funding from the state’s Affordable Housing Trust Fund. David expects construction to begin next spring.

### **D. Purchase of Private Properties**

Cathy Yamamoto indicated that the AH Trust, which will be meeting tomorrow, has discussed the purchase of private property in Executive session, as has the Spruces Roof Group. Although she cannot be too specific because of confidentiality concerns, she will attempt to gather some general information for a future report to the AHC. There was some concern expressed about the lack of information available to the AHC and a brief discussion about the status of the Sweet Farm site on Henderson road, and if it has been assessed properly. The Chair advised that the AHC should let the Trust pursue the purchase of any private property, which should be its role. The AHC can make recommendations to the Trust at any time. She agreed to ask the Trust to meet with the AHC us to discuss possible sites.

Because of the limited options and the political hurdles associated with the development of town-owned property, Charles and Van noted the need for an increase emphasis on fund raising from sources other than CPA, such as foundations. Both indicated strong support for the purchase and development of private property and the need to make sure adequate funds are available to purchase property, if something of interest becomes available. Committee members also mentioned the need to initiate other programs to support low income housing, such as those for first time homebuyers, help with rehabilitating houses, and assistance with down payments. Charles has list of potential funding sources that he will share with the Trust and will discuss later with the AHC.

## **4. Other Business**

**AHC Website**-- Cathy Yamamoto discussed the need to update the AHC's portal on the Town's website, and asked for a volunteer to review what is there, and to see what needs to be removed. It was decided that the Chair will ask Cheryl Shanks if she has the time to take on this task.

**The Spruces**-- Bilal reviewed information about the next Spruces "clean-up day," noting that 110 Williams Students have signed up to help. The clean-up is scheduled for some time at the end of August, probably August 30<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup>.

**AHC Open Meeting Law Violation**-- Cathy Yamamoto reviewed the status of the open meeting law (OML) violation filed against the AHC in March by Mr. Kenneth Swiatek of Stratton Road — that the AHC had violated the OML when it agreed by e-mail to send a letter-to-the editor. She admitted that a violation of the OML had occurred. The AHC has received a final letter from the Attorney General's Office that the matter is now closed. All documents related to this violation are posted on the AHC's website.

**Actions by Select Board**—The Chair summarized the recent action of the Select Board relating to the Lowry and Burbank properties.

- They agreed to explore the possibility of directing the<sup>i</sup> mitigation grant funds to the Higher Ground project located on the land donated by Williams College.
- They rescinded their request to the ConCom to return control of the property to the Board of Selectmen.

The Select Board took these actions in the hope that the grant money would accelerate the timeline for the development of the Williams property. Bilal questioned whether this would be the case, since the final amount of the grant money, as well as its actual availability, will be in doubt for some time— until the transition of the Spruces residents is finalized and completed. He added that this uncertainty would not be attractive to potential developers. Bilal asked that the Women's Institute be contacted to discuss this issue.

Charles questioned if there may be any issues regarding the merging of the Higher Ground/Williams project (Private) and the infusion of public funds from the hazard mitigation grant. It was noted that the Town would not be a partner in the project, just a collaborator. He also questioned how the initiation of the HG/Williams project would affect the development (i.e., availability of public money) or other affordable housing projects.

The AHC went on to review some of the history that had transpired over the last year to get the ConCom and the Select Board to study the possibility of using these properties, or some portion of them, for affordable housing. Because of the immediate need of the Spruces residents, our efforts related to Lowry/Burbank had often been viewed too narrowly. The affordable housing problem for Williamstown is, in reality, a much broader challenge, not just a replacement housing/ relocation problem of Spruces residents. Because this broader challenge still exists, the AHC debated whether to continue to get the properties evaluated as possible housing sites, and whether to send a request to release the properties directly to the ConCom (i.e., not through the Select Board)—to see if some final resolution of these issues can be achieved.

The Chair noted that we still have our request to release the properties before the Select Board.

- Leigh Short suggested that we could continue the evaluation of Lowry and Burbank without getting them released from ConCom control. Bilal and Charles supported getting some resolution regarding the status and suitability of these properties.
- It was agreed the AHC's Chair would contact the chair of the ConCom to inquire about the ongoing issues relating to these properties.

Nancy Scerbo suggested that the AHC and other Town committees might focus on developing responses to the questions posed by the ConCom to the Select Board and the AHC. Bilal indicated the need to have talks directly with the ConCom, as has been attempted for the last year. She also asked how much the study to evaluate Burbank would cost, whether other conceptual plans developed by Guntlow of Lowery had been done—in addition to the one plan that was presented to the AHC and released to the public. The Chair responded that no other plans had been developed and that the AHC had shared all information regarding the evaluation on our website.

Van suggested that questions cannot really be addressed until the ConCom has an opportunity to respond to recent actions by the Select Board, which will not be until next month.

Nancy Scerbo raised the suggestion (raised at the last Con Com meeting) that further study of the properties could be done without purchasing these services from consultant, but it was agreed that professional, unbiased experience must be used to complete a meaningful assessment.

Bob Scerbo suggested that the AHC not assume that the ConCom will stop the evaluation process of the two properties at this time, and that the AHC should see how the ConCom reacts to the recent actions of the Select Board.

Bilal introduced a motion to ask the ConCom to continue study of the two properties. It was noted that we would have to ask them to release the property, not just continue to study. Charles seconded.

Anne Skinner spoke in support of Cathy's opinion that the property is the Town's and that future uses may be needed. Citizens have right to change the status, if needed.

Cathy Yamamoto suggested that it might not be the right time to strongly pursue the resolution of the Lowry/Burbank issue, given the developments related to the Williams site, and the probability that an RFP should be going out on the Water Street and Burbank properties this fall. Van again stressed the realistic opportunities to develop private property, that the need of the Spruces residents would not be met by Lowry and Burbank, and that the AHC focus on what can be done.

Bilal withdrew his motion, with agreement by seconder Charles, that the committee send a request directly to the ConCom.to release the Lowry and Burbank properties.

#### **Dates of Next Meetings:**

- The next AHC meeting will be Tuesday, Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>.

- A meeting with Tim Geller on Sept 17<sup>th</sup>.

Documents:

Kruger-Godson Proposal

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