

Present

Charles Bonenti, Van Ellet, Cheryl Shanks, Leigh Short, Cathy Yamamoto (chair)

Absent: Bilal Ansari

Also Present: Tim Kaiser (Director of DPW) for presentation of Spruces flood map; Julie Sniezek and Charlie Labatt (Guntlow Assoc) for presentation of Lowry conceptual site design; Joan Burns (Housing Authority), Peter Elvin, Peter Fohlin (Town Manager), Paul Harsch, Tom Hyde, (Hoosac Watershed), Dave Lachance, Robin Lenz, David Mangun (Higher Ground), Jane Nicholls (League of Women Voters), Brian O'Grady (Council on Aging), Stanley Parese (Affordable Housing Trust), Mark Reinhardt (Housing Authority), David Rempell (Selectman), Joan Rubel, Nancy Scerbo, Tom Sheldon (Selectman), Matt Silliman, Lauren Stevens (Hoosac Watershed), Kim Wells (Agriculture Commission); Ed Damon (North Adams Transcript), Jaime Bairstow (Willinet)

Business

1. Statement

Cathy Yamamoto read the following statement: This is a regularly scheduled meeting of the Affordable Housing Committee. This committee has been charged by the Selectmen to determine the unmet housing needs of our community. The purpose of our work is to identify sites in town that are suitable for Affordable Housing, to determine what type of housing might be built to meet the identified needs, and to determine the feasibility of building that housing. The committee has met 25 times since Tropical Storm Irene 16 months ago. Public notice of our meetings has been made according to state law. Our meetings are covered regularly by the press and are televised on Willinet. We welcome all questions, ideas, and good-faith proposals. It is our hope that discussion here will be positive, constructive, and intended to improve our town for the betterment of all residents.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the November 27 meeting were approved 5-0-0; the minutes of the December 11 meeting were approved 1-0-4.

3. Property & housing studies

a. Townwide

1. The sealed bid received from John Ryan totals \$8500. The Affordable Housing Trust has committed \$1650 toward this amount; AHC will cover the rest (\$6850). Vote to accept 5-0-0.

2. The committee would like to arrange a conference call with Mr. Ryan near the beginning of his work on this project.

b. Lowry

The AHT is paying for 100% of the \$5200 Lowry study.

c. Photec

Mass Development identified one "area of interest," perhaps contaminated by silver, near the river. This is an area that merits increased attention and scrutiny.

d. 59 Water St

Test pits and sampling have been done and we are waiting for the results. Peter Fohlin points out that the circumstances of Photec and Water St are similar: an inspection was done of each site, and in each case an area of concern for further investigation was identified, and is being pursued.

4. Spruces property flooding: presentation by Tim Kaiser (DPW).

a. Elevations and flood plain

Tim Kaiser displayed a large, colored topographical map that shows elevations at or above flood stage for the Spruces property. He pointed out that neither the 1938 flood nor the Irene (2011) flood were "100-year" floods, but rather "50-year" floods, so they had not inundated the property to the maximum shown on the display map.

b. Mitigation

1. Run-off from the Luce Road area is a relatively minor contributor to water levels at the Spruces. The town investigated the cost of engineering drains for diversion and judged the cost to far exceed any gain.

2. Two main drainage sites allow run-off from uphill and the Spruces property to reach the river. One is an underground pipe that empties into the river. Its outlet is usually several feet above the river. When the river floods, this outlet is under water and backs up. The other is a small brook that runs to the east of the park. It has the same back-up issue as the drainage pipe when the river is high.

In both cases, water appears to be coming from uphill (through drainage caps and grates) when in fact it is caused by the overflowing river forcing the drains to back up, releasing pressure inland wherever there is a vent.

3. A flood chute alongside the Spruces property, like the one in North Adams along River St, would be:

a. illegal, as it creates flooding pressures both upstream (by restricting the flow of water) and downstream (by increasing water velocity), and

b. too costly, as the cost of even the concrete (not including the construction, or cost to mitigate problems it would create downstream) would be over \$20 million dollars.

c. Questions for Tim Kaiser

1. Kim Wells asked where the 66 residences remaining at the Spruces were located on the topo/flood map. Tim Kaiser indicated that they are on the old,

easternmost side, and said that the rest of the park had been especially vulnerable to the velocity of floodwater, which knocked aside foundations.

2. Paul Harsch asked whether the presentation's bottom line was that there was no practical, financially or technically feasible way to protect housing on this site. Mr. Kaiser said yes.

3. Lauren Stevens said that if our valley had received the 15" of rain that the adjacent hill towns received, instead of the 5" we did receive, we would realize more fully how vulnerable we are to flooding. He also stated that although private property owners are compensated (directly or through tax breaks) for agreeing to use their land for a public service like conservation or open agriculture, they are not compensated for allowing flooding, which is also an important public service.

5. Lowry conceptual site plan

a. Maps

Julie Sniezek showed three large-scale maps of the Lowry property: one a color aerial photograph with the property lines marked out, one a black-and-white line map, and one, the "conceptual site plan," a colored stylized map with potential building sites marked out.

b. Description of map contents

The conceptual site plan had forty separate single plots, each between 5800 and 7000 square feet, leading from the southernmost property access on Stratton Rd parallel to the Stratton condos driveway, then crossing to the north and turning into a cul-de-sac in the central portion of the property. Altogether this used 10.2 acres of the site's 30 total acres, cut down a few but not many trees, and lodged the houses in a nook between a remaining hayfield of 4.7 acres above (to the south) and one of 7.9 acres below (to the north).

c. Questions for Julie Sniezek

1. Water

An audience member asked where the run-off goes. Julie Sniezek said that were this concept to go forward, the engineers would determine where it now goes and would try to approximate that.

2. Agriculture and other uses

a. Cathy Yamamoto asked where the fields were that Kim Wells is currently farming. Wells replied that they were visible in the light-colored areas of the map.

b. Kim Wells asked how he would get access to the hay fields. Julie Sniezek said that he should be able to use the road. In response to a question about timing, Kim Wells said that he fertilized, then cut hay the last week of May, the second week of August, and if possible also in late September.

c. Charles Bonenti asked where on the map the recreational uses of the property took place, since discussion of the hayfields had involved nonuse due to fear of Lyme disease, while other parts of the site were wooded. Kim Wells said that there was an old, compacted farm road that cut through the northern hay field, and people walked on it to get to town. Charles Bonenti asked whether the only use for the property except for hay was as a shortcut. No one answered.

3. Development and density

a. David Mangun asked if there would be a community room in the new development. Julie Sniezek said that any one of the plots could be designated for a community room.

b. Paul Harsch asked if these plots were intended for rental or ownership. Cathy Yamamoto said that they were intended in the near-term for rentals, since the purpose was to find an affordable home for currently displaced Spruces residents, who paid about \$300 a month.

c. Mark Reinhardt asked whether the number of units (40) was a product of what would work best on the site engineeringwise or was a number arrived at for other reasons. Julie Sniezek said that she could not address that question. Cathy Yamamoto said that the idea was to allow for mixed use, including agriculture and recreation.

d. Stanley Parese asked if the plot size was larger or smaller than that at the Spruces. Julie Sniezek said that the plot size at Lowry was 5800-7000 square feet, and an audience member said that the newer section of the Spruces had plots of 5000 square feet, the older (currently inhabited) section smaller.

e. Jane Nicholls asked why 40 sites were planned if 66 households needed placing. Cathy Yamamoto explained that it is estimated that about 40 of the 66 households would want to and/or be able to move to the proposed site. It is expected that some now living in The Spruces will choose to live elsewhere for a variety of reasons as they will have other options open to them.

4. Access and safety

a. Paul Harsch asked if it would be possible to open a second driveway onto Stratton Rd, at the northernmost access point, for fire and safety purposes. Ms Sniezek said that the northernmost connector had steepness and wetlands issues, and that the driveway further up the hill was fine.

b. Nancy Scerbo asked how close the 50-foot accessway was to Stratton building 3, and if it was a right-of-way or owned. Julie Sniezek said

that it was an owned part of the parcel, and at its closest was 120 feet from a corner of building 3.

5. Cost and centrality

a. An audience member asked whether town water went up there; yes.

b. Cathy Yamamoto pointed out that near edge of the Lowry property is closer to Spring St than Photec is.

c. Nancy Scerbo asked what the \$3 million in infrastructure seed money would buy. Cathy Yamamoto said that she did not know, but not much, and that development money would have to come from other sources, public and private.

6. Mission Statement

The committee decided to wait to discuss a draft mission statement.

7. Web site

The committee's web site has several documents posted and will have minutes posted as well.

Documents consulted: John Ryan proposal (\$8500); town topographical flood/elevation map of the Spruces property; three Guntlow displays of the Lowry property.

Next meeting: January 2, 2013 (Wednesday) at 7 p.m.