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May 31, 2013

Office of the Attorney General
Division of Open Government
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Attorney General:

The Williamstown Affordable Housing Committee has replied to the Open Meeting Law complaint that I filed with them on March 14, 2013, in a letter dated April 25. The letter signed by the committee chairman, Catherine Yamamoto, acknowledged the committee's violation.

The committee held a specially scheduled meeting at 4:30PM on April 24, 2013 which was the same day that there was a heavily attended Special Town Meeting scheduled later in the day. Chairman Yamamoto was not present at the 4:30PM meeting. Four of the six committee members were present. I was not able to attend due to prior commitments related to the Special Town Meeting later in the day. It appears there were no members of the public or press attending the meeting other than the local community access camera operator. The Williamstown Affordable Housing Committee meetings are usually well attended and covered and heavily reported by three news outlets. You may watch the discussion here:

<http://www.willinet.org/content/affordable-housing-committee-meeting-42413> .

The explanation given by the Acting Chair, Ms. Shanks, at the 4:30PM meeting was that Ms. Yamamoto wrote the letter which she submitted to local media and had sent an email to members of the committee as an fyi. Then apparently, per Shanks, all the members of the committee separately responded to Ms. Yamamoto asking that their names be included on the letter. It would be interesting to examine these email messages as to whether this, in fact, occurred or whether Ms. Yamamoto may have been solely responsible for the open meeting law violation and whether she added their names improperly. It is/was not my intent to falsely accuse any innocent committee members.

While there was a motion made at the 4:30PM meeting, since Ms. Yamamoto was not present, she did not vote to acquiesce to the story related at the meeting. In addition, committee member Charles Bonenti was not in attendance and voting at the meeting.

An apology and acknowledgement of the committee's Open Meeting Law violation was made at a legally posted Open Meeting, though it is unlikely that any members of the public are aware of the committee's Open Meeting Law violation and apology.

However, my attendance and/or observation of Williamstown public meetings leads me to believe that there is an epidemic of Open Meeting Law violations occurring in Williamstown. The Affordable Housing Committee's response failed to address my recommendation that **"training is needed."** Training is needed for all boards and committees in Williamstown, and as part of the remedy and action, required by my complaint. All the Affordable Housing Committee members should be required to attend Open Meeting Law training conducted by the staff of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. Also, the fact that this training will be held as required as a result of a violation of the Open Meeting Law should be publicized in the local media, The Advocate, The Transcript, and iBerkshires.

Sincerely,



Kenneth J. Swiatek

✓ cc: Williamstown Affordable Housing Committee