

Williamsburg Board of Selectmen  
Economic Development Meeting  
Thursday, February 21, 2019, Noon  
Williamsburg Town Office Planning Board Room

Present: Denise Banister, William Sayre

Absent: David Mathers

Others Present: Dave Christopolis and Paul Lischetti (Hilltown CDC), Bob Barker, Paul Kennedy, and Jean O'Neil (Planning Board), Charles Dudek (Planning Board & ZBA), Gerry Mann (ZBA), Nick Dines (CDAC, Mill River Greenway), Charlene Nardi (Town Administrator).

Denise Banister called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. Bill Sayre presented a handout that summarized planning documents completed by the Town over the years.

David Christopolis had called the meeting together with Williamsburg Town officials to discuss businesses that are up for sale and the impact the sales may have if the businesses leave. Dave gave an overview of the businesses and properties for sale noting that a change for another business has been brought to their attention.

Williamsburg Market: Has been up for sale for years and the owners are ready to retire. Concern is that the Town may lose the food market. Current owners think potential buyers have been put off by the increase in minimum wage and it is difficult for a small food store to compete with large food chains. The current owners have requested the HCDC's small business department for assistance in the sale. Dave said that he feels the current market provides a great service to the residents of Williamsburg and neighboring Towns whose only other option for food shopping is to drive farther to larger food chains. He feels there will be a loss to the community to lose the store.

Cichy's Garage: Been for sale for some time and if the correct offer is received it is assumed the current owner would take it.

14 Williams Street: Is the location for Dr. Hanno Muellner's medical office. The current owner of the property wishes to sell it, but Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Dr. Muellner's affiliation, isn't really interested in buying it. While current location doesn't have the room or best layout to suit his practice, Dr. Muellner would prefer to keep his practice in Town versus moving to Northampton. HCDC has been working with Dr. Muellner and CDH to locate another property more appropriate in an effort to keep Dr. Muellner's office in Williamsburg. Property looked at: Lashway-owned locations and the old Cumberland property.

It was also noted that the Lawton Family Farm property is for sale.

Dave wanted to know if the Town felt it could or should get involved in any of these sales, and if so, how? He wondered if these possible changes were of concern or interest to the Town and whether there were options to offer incentives to small businesses to stay or come to revitalize vacant buildings. Is there an opportunity for the Town and HCDC to do things to shape the changes?

Paul Lischetti gave an overview of his work with Dr. Muellner and CDH. He noted that generally their real estate developments were for housing; however, they are looking at all options including the HCDC rehabbing a location for the purpose of renting it to a business such as Dr. Muellner (CDH). It was asked whether the Hilltown CDC looked at any future housing uses of the current Town Office building if the Town were to move Town government to the Helen E. James. It was also asked if the first floor of the Helen E. James should be looked at for rehabbing for renting to Dr. Muellner. This would bring revenue to the Town. Members also noted that when the Town builds a public safety complex, the two former fire stations will be vacant.

In discussing vacant properties, the following were mentioned:

Brassworks – Current owner is focusing on other properties at this time. It was mentioned that owner has been notified of new zoning bylaws that open up opportunities for revitalizing the building.

125 and 127 Main Street - Two white columned homes: Both are vacant. The 127 Main Street house is in better shape than the 125 Main Street house. They are owned by Alicia Denood Ayer and Lavinia Clay.

45 & 47 Main Street - Lashway properties: Existing buildings on the properties add to the purchase cost and may require environmental clean-up.

41 Main Street - Old Cumberland Farms: Building in rough shape and may require environmental clean-up.

Hilltown CDC is going to keep looking for property for Dr. Muellner to relocate. Is it a goal or priority for the Town to maintain these businesses in Town? What can Williamsburg do?

A co-op could be an option for the Market location as there are resources to support it especially in food desert areas (10 miles or more from food stores), which includes Williamsburg. There is a Food Trust which offers lending outside the normal constraints and interest of banks. The State is very interested in keeping small food stores open.

Hilltown CDC is applying for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) which will include Williamsburg and will provide continued social services and give HCDC more of a presence in the community including a possible real estate purchase (on the water and sewer system).

It was noted that the Town doesn't have a master plan. That the Town's current infrastructure project is a public safety complex. Elderly housing is also a need but isn't being explored at this time. It was noted that it may be useful for the Town and HCDC to work in a collaborative effort for funding needs. The first step is for the Town to develop a strategic plan. Discussed opportunities to get an outside agency to assist in putting that plan together utilizing all the work and study findings already done. PVPC was focused on because they have been involved in many of the studies already done. It was mentioned that if PVPC couldn't help in working on a strategic plan, a Community Compact grant may be an option.

The Planning Board has it on its radar to work on a strategic plan.

**Funding Resources for achieving goals:** It was noted that outside funding is needed because the community is limited by its tax base and the absence of capacity and resources.

MVP grant - \$400,000 is available for infrastructure projects after the initial planning stage.

Green Communities grants can be used for green energy solutions in a new Public Safety Complex.

Working with the Governor and Lt. Governor's offices as they seem to be very interested in supporting the rural communities and offering funding opportunities.

Hilltown CDC's focus is economic development and they would like the opportunity to collaborate with the Town to keep the community vibrant.

**Next Steps:**

Dave to contact PVPC to see if they are able to assist with a strategic plan and pulling together the information already gathered over the years.

Paul and Dave to draft a scope of work. Identify real viable funding opportunities.

Paul outlined three focuses:

1. Continue to look for properties for the Dr's Office
2. Maintain and increase conversations with Town about what it is doing and what its focuses are, increase communication to identify opportunities to support one another
3. Look for funding

Dave will make some calls and get back to the Town. Another meeting will be set up in the future.

Meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.