



Williamsburg Planning Board

141 Main Street, P.O. Box 447

Haydenville, Massachusetts 01039-0447

Phone: (413) 268-8400

Fax: (413) 268-8409

Minutes for meeting on **January 16, 2024**

Member	Present	Not Present	Member	Present	Not Present
Tariq Abu-Jaber	[R]		Jean O'Neil	[R]	
Chris Flory	[R]		Eric Schmitt	X	
Holly Hendricks	X		Steve Smith	X	
Other attendees: Podge Thomas, Darlene Stone Adair [R]					

At 7:02 pm Chair Smith called the meeting to order.

Comprehensive Plan Community Sessions: The board discussed the most recent January 11th Historical and Cultural community session. The session had approximately 35 attendees, in addition to PVPC and Planning Board employees.

Suggestions included being more succinct with slide delivery, more clear communications to attendees about how the meetings would work, and advance visibility into meeting materials by planning board. Additional suggestions included enhancing moderation to limit long winded speakers, adjusting room logistics to minimize background noise, and improving the sign-in process.

The board felt that having both attendee groups cover both topics worked well. Childcare was offered at the prior session, but there were no takers. It will be offered again at the next session. Feedback during and after the session from town residents is attached below.

Board reviewed and revised questions and structure for the upcoming January 25th focus group on Transportation, Services and Facilities. Schmitt to draft list of town services and facilities.

New planning board member search. The board is pleased to see significant interest in filling the open seat. Per Chair Smith, interested parties include Pam Atcheson, Cathy McKeown, Harry Miles, Darlene Stone Adair, Patrick Sumner, Podge Thomas.

Minutes review and vote:



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Meeting Date	Comments	Motion to Accept	Motion to Accept as Amended	Second	Vote Yea - Nay
1/2/2024	Meeting minutes	O'Neil	Hendricks		6-0

Committee Liaison reports. Schmitt shared that he spoke with town resident Melissa Adams regarding the recently released MA Farmland Action Plan. Adams is a state employee who manages the farm viability program. Schmitt learned from Adams that permanently protected agricultural parcels in town are limited to Warners on Mountain Street and a new parcel across the street and that there are two maple producers in town that have or will soon have short-term covenants through the farm viability program. Finally, Adams noted that there is a current effort underway to identify Locally Important Soils in towns to help qualify more farmland for funding for protection.

The next planning board meetings are scheduled for Monday January 29th and Monday February 12th.

The meeting adjourned at 8:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric Schmitt



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To the Planning Board

Re Cultural & Historical resources in the town's Comprehensive Plan

Williamsburg has a rich, deep history — agricultural, industrial, commercial, social, religious, artistic and literary. That history must be brought with us into the future: learned, shared and appreciated by each succeeding generation of residents, and made visible/accessible to visitors as part of what makes Williamsburg interesting and attractive.

To these ends, it will be important for undertakings like the Greenway and the town's growing trail network to incorporate historical features to engage visitors and residents alike, including children. Such features might also offer opportunities for local artists to help tell Williamsburg's stories.

We are fortunate to have a Historical Society that has, for over 60 years, collected items and documents that embody the stories of Williamsburg's past. The townsfolk have benefited for all that time from an agreement under which the town-owned 1841 Old Town Hall, a highly visible and defining centerpiece of the village with an amazing history of its own, houses the Society's collections so the public can enjoy them. But the building is not accessible to all, can only be open June through early October, and has other deficiencies that make it an unsuitable repository for delicate and perishable objects and documents. Fortunately, we also have a fabulous public library that shares the mission of preserving historical documents, and is able to share them with the public year-round. If the Old Town Hall's condition can gradually be upgraded, it will better serve the need for residents and others to encounter and experience the town's varied past through the artifacts it contains.

Though the Historical Society has been inactive through the Covid pandemic, I'm hopeful that a new Board of Directors to be recruited in the near future will adopt a greater emphasis on programmed activities for the public than was the case in the past. Cultural Council grants might help to support activities that could extend the Society's reach in the community, generate new interest, and bring new members (especially younger ones) to the Society who would, in turn, carry its mission into the future.

I do not believe Williamsburg's residents are so interested in preserving historically significant buildings that they would voluntarily subject their neighbors, never mind themselves, to restrictive historic-preservation mandates enforced by the town or the state. The two National Register historic districts we have now do not impose any onerous requirements or prohibitions. I doubt very much that there is any appetite in town for locally-designated districts within which the alteration of historic structures would be regulated by a local body under mandated design guidelines. Nor do I believe anyone in town would want to be responsible for drafting such guidelines — a phenomenally difficult and inevitably thankless task.

Eric Weber
1/11/2024



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Feedback on Community Meeting #2 (Cultural and Historical) from a resident:

BIG thanks to the Planning Committee for hosting the listening session last night. What a great turnout! I had to leave at 7:30, so I missed the wrap up and any opportunity to offer feedback, so I thought I'd drop you a line (you seems like the kind of person who is open to feedback!).

The atmosphere was so welcoming and the healthy snacks were much appreciated! It was also nice to have 10 minutes or so to visit with neighbors before the meeting started.

My suggestion for future listening sessions relates to the facilitation of small group discussion. I think that, before the 2 groups split up, it would have been helpful for the facilitators to state some simple ground rules for sharing and then gently enforce those ground rules. Reining in the conversation would have allowed us to finish our separate conversations and wrap up before 7:30.

I know that group facilitation is an art and takes lots and lots of practice. But I get nervous that townspeople may hesitate to attend meetings if they become significantly longer than advertised. And this process is so incredibly important- the more voices, the better!

Thanks again for creating this important vehicle for input. The Planning Committee is approaching this task with great care and professionalism!