

Difficult Choices Site Selection and Feasibility

As members of the Williamsport Housing Opportunities Committee, you have been asked by the Selectmen to evaluate two potential Town owned sites. Based on the analysis, the HOC is to issue a formal recommendation to the Selectmen as to which site the Town should pursue in its efforts to diversify the range and affordability of housing within the Town.

Community Overview

Williamsport is a suburban community located approximately 23 miles northwest of Boston. It is a largely residential town with a small retail area. It has seen modest growth in the last two decades, due to the quality of the local school system and its access to the commuter rail.

It has a population of 11,063. The 25-34 and 35-44 year old population has seen a net decrease of 34% and 21% respectively from 1990 to 2010. This may be due a lack of housing choice for households in this age group in the community. There are also an increasing number of senior-headed households.

The town largely consists of single-family homes and the vast majority of housing units (89%) are ownership units. There are few rental options, particularly for lower-income residents.

The town's recent housing needs assessment demonstrated a significant potential demand for family AND age restricted units for households earning at or below 80% of AMI. . Based on the occupancy rates, waiting lists and inquiries to existing affordable rental developments, the greatest current need is for affordable rental housing.

The town has adopted a housing production plan. In order to achieve the "safe harbor" provisions of 40B, the town must produce 35 units of housing a year. The HOC is committed to reaching that target with this project.

Site 1: The Millard Fillmore Middle School:

The Fillmore School was first built in 1878. In keeping with the Progressive spirit of the time, the Town fathers had chosen a location for the school in a glen adjacent to the White River – a perfect location for the children of Williamsport to combine education for the mind and exercise for the body. The school closed in 1987 at which time it was used as town offices until the current Town Administration building was built 8 years ago.

The building contains 42,000 s.f. of space on 3 levels. The classrooms have gorgeous floor to ceiling windows and a lovely central staircase. The HOC thinks that with 42,000 s.f., it should be possible to create 35 units for seniors.

Based on studies that were conducted in the late 80's and recent discussions, the following is known and shared by the Town Planner, Rita Farrell:

- Many of the town's older residents attended school at Fillmore and there is strong sentimental attachment for the building.
- Growth pressures from subdivision development in the past decade have increased demand, and begun to stress the capacity of the Town's two public water wells.
- The septic system was adequately sized for the school but the current condition is unknown given the amount of time that the school has been underutilized.
- Farrell believes that the building has been identified as having historic importance but suggested further conversation with the Historic Society.

Part 1:

You have \$15,000 to spend on due diligence on this building. How would you spend it? Use the cards distributed to figure out what you will and won't spend these limited resources on.

After you complete Part 1, all teams will share their approach and the trainers will provide additional information.

Part 2:

Do you think this is a suitable site for affordable housing? If yes (or maybe yes), assume you have an additional \$15,000 to spend on feasibility, how would you spend it?

Part 3: Which site should the HOC pursue and why?

Site 2: The Berry Bog and Transport Site:

The BB&T site is a 4 acre site that is located about 1.25 miles south of the town center. The site is also adjacent to the old freight rail spur that is no longer in use. When a Chilean import/export conglomerate purchased BB&T, the land was sold to the Town for \$1.

The site's only remaining structure a multi-story 5,000 sf barn that fronts on Water Street. There has been talk, led by the Regional Planning Agency, about using the abandoned rail spur and its proximity to Town Center as the beginnings of a multi-community bicycle rail trail that would allow one to ride the 22 miles from South Williamsburg to the Fairweather Light House.

The following is known about the site based on files that were turned over along with the land:

- According to a 21E environmental report completed in 2012, no leaks/reported spills have occurred on or around the site in the past 25 years.
- The Local Historical Society's annual report states that the barn is of high importance given its connection to the agricultural and economic history of the Town.
- A neighbor who is an architect volunteered to prepare two sample site plans.
 - One has a cluster of three buildings. Each building can hold 10-12 units, for a total of approximately 35 units.
 - The other has 24 units, arranged as 12 townhouses. The townhouse design picks up architectural themes from the neighborhood.
 - Everyone prefers the townhouse design.

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After you complete Part 1, all teams will share their approach and the trainers will provide additional information.

Part 2:

Do you think this is a suitable site for affordable housing? If yes (or maybe yes), assume you have an additional \$15,000 to spend on feasibility, how would you spend it?

Part 3: Which site should the HOC pursue and why?