

In the wake of Irene's damage

Williamstown is considering future affordable housing sites

By Meghan Foley
North Adams Transcript

WILLIAMSTOWN — The Affordable Housing Committee plans to look into the potential of four local properties to support affordable housing.

At its Wednesday night meeting, the committee agreed to investigate the former Photech site on Cole Avenue, the old town garage site and the former Carol Cable building — both on Water Street — and The Spruces Mobile Home Park on Main Street as possible candidates for the construction of new affordable housing.

Catherine Yamamoto, chairwoman of the Affordable Housing Committee, said the committee does plan to consider other properties around town for affordable housing, but its members want to look at those four first.

Interest in having more affordable housing in Williamstown has grown over the past couple weeks following Tropical Storm Irene damage to The Spruces. During the storm, the

retirement community flooded, displacing 273 people.

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As of Wednesday, the town had approved only 23 of the 225 homes for occupancy.

"Right now we have 132 people without homes who want to stay in Williamstown," Robin Lenz, coordinator of the Interfaith Emergency Response Team, said.

Yamamoto said there are roughly 435 units in Williamstown that would be considered affordable housing, but with the flooding at The Spruces, about half of them have been lost.

Despite the flooding that occurred, The Spruces should still be looked at as a place for affordable housing, Ann McCallum, a local resident and architect, said.

"It seems like a good place, if we can make it not flood all the time," she said.

She said that could possibly be solved by raising the site, or reworking the layout and drainage.

"It's compounded by the NIMBY [not in my back yard] factor, if you try to put it any-

where else," she said.

While The Spruces and the former Carol Cable building are privately owned, the former town garage and Photech sites are owned by the town.

Bob Morgan, co-owner of Morgan Management, said Tuesday the company is doing everything it legally can to get residents back in their homes, and that the town has been very cooperative.

"It's too early to decide what we're going to do until we know the amount of people going back into the park," he said.

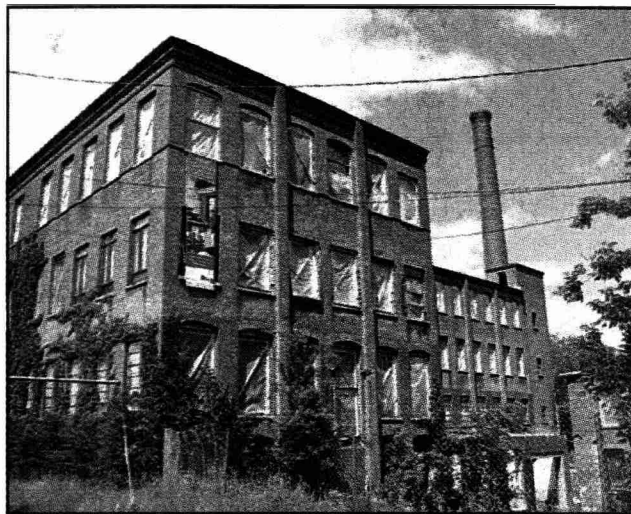
The company hasn't yet determined how many homes need to be occupied in order for the park to be viable, but the park can't operate on 20 out of 225 homes, he said.

"It's going to take a lot of money to get the park up to speed, and FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] isn't going to be able to financially help us," he said.

He said Morgan Management doesn't yet have a total cost for the repair work.

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Transcript file

The Cable Mills building on Water Street in Williamstown is one site being considered for affordable housing.