

**TOWN OF ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**BOARD OF SELECTMEN WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES 09/12/2015**

*On Saturday, September 12, 2015 at 10:00 a.m. the Board of Selectmen held a Workshop meeting at the Hoosac Valley High School cafeteria at 125 Savoy Road, Cheshire, MA 01225. Present were Chairman Blanchard and Members Nowak and Duval, as well as Town Administrator Mazzucco and Collins Center Staff.*

*Participants introduced themselves, and explained where in Adams they live or work and how long they have been here. Questions were narrowed down into four different categories, and then filtered down into two "Harvests" of information to narrow down the most important community themes and priorities. The categories are **Present, Future, Concerns and Aspirations**. Citizens and Board Members split into groups to discuss the following topics:*

**PRESENT:**

***What do I like most about living/working here? What makes Adams special?***

Input was documented as being small town flavor, New England heritage, historical values and having an identity. Adams was noted as having a welcoming sense of close-knit community with similar values and age groups, and being a great place to raise kids. It was expressed that the community is a great cross-section of people and diversity of lifestyle. Specific assets to this area were noted as being Mount Greylock, outdoor landscape/scenery, the Greylock Glen, being easy to access and having four seasons of peace and quiet, quality of life and authenticity. Other benefits to the area were listed as being the colleges, the Hoosac Valley High School Facility, and the schools. It was stated that this area is a great place to return if there are jobs, since there is a potential opportunity for both environment and business. The community was explained as having informal small jobs and 'word of mouth' resources. This general area was noted as having good access to recreation and outdoor activities. Specific notes were made that the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail is the most beautiful in the world and there are great downtown walking trails. Downtown Adams was called a "walking city" with Armory Court, the Topia Theater being available to refurbish, and the art on Grove and Park Streets. The location of Adams was noted as ideal because it is close to larger cities, allowing for great value in real estate.

***What do I find challenging?***

Challenges expressed by the citizens included Community Policing, building a relationship with youth, and having a safe town. Needs were expressed for a School Resource Officer, having good Schools and School technology. Transportation was noted as lacking. It was explained that the Downtown needs revitalization, is blighted and there is nothing to keep people downtown. It was specifically expressed that the Topia Theater needs to be completed because there is a lack of Park Street foot traffic. It was explained that the Town needs tax paying young citizens and to be attractive to young people. It was expressed that there is nothing for youth to do and there are few jobs for young people as job availability is limited. Population was noted as being in decline, with less people adding to the tax base and ultimately causing an economic decline. The landlords of empty buildings and property neglect were noted as being challenging. The lack of jobs, industry or farms was outlined as being a challenge. It was pointed out that the speed of government is slow and needs to move more quickly in government infrastructure with regulations for issuing permits and inspections. The "insular" attitude of the older population was expressed as needing optimism. Tourism was also pointed out as lacking for this area.

**FUTURE:**

***What caught my attention in the last conversation? What had real meaning for me?***

Citizens expressed a need to encourage business growth, create jobs and promote jobs in neighboring communities. A request was made for the government and building process to be streamlined and to create an Economical Development Commission because of the economic decline and loss of services. It was noted that there needs to be a connection built to the natural environment. It was pointed out that

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though it is a safe area to live and raise children, there needs to be better community policing efforts. Community members advised that there are both people from out of the area and lifelong residents, family and community in Adams. Housing and blight were brought up, and it was explained that people are unable to fix the housing stock on their own. Concern was expressed that the schools are being judged by those outside of community, but the housing does not support the system. It was explained that the kids coming in from other cities are behind the local education and bring down the schools, causing a need to improve school quality. Transient population was pointed out as creating a lack of identity, as people pass through and don't develop an identity here. In the past ethnic neighborhoods created an identification and now they are mixed.

***What do I want Adams to be like 20 years from now? What would change?***

**Development:** Citizens noted having the continual development creation of a vibrant downtown with full storefronts on Summer and Park Streets. A request was made for redevelopment of existing buildings, to create more hotels, motels, B&B's and Campgrounds. Specific requests were made to create a Sam Adams Brewery and to complete the Topia Theater reconstruction to bring businesses to Park Street. The refurbishing and availability of upstairs apartments on Park Street was noted. Having Mount Greylock as an economic driver, creating activism toward environmentalism, and having more small farms to produce food for sale locally were envisioned. Other changes were expressed as having more educated business owners, putting in a Tramway, creating the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail as an economic driver with a bike shop, and creating a tourist train from North Adams to Adams. Putting in a series of parks put in to replace blight was also brought up.

**Natural Resources:** Changes in Natural Resources were envisioned as utilizing the Greylock Glen and Mountains to provide more Eco-Tourism, expanding the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail to North Adams, providing better information for visitors on hiking trails and making the Hoosac River more attractive.

**Arts and Culture:** The future creation of arts-based development and to become an art and cultural center hub for artists to provide direction in this area was noted as the changes to be made for Arts and Culture.

**Jobs:** Citizens expressed the vision of having more and good paying jobs at a livable wage and creating more small ten- to fifteen-employee businesses.

**Transportation, Infrastructure:** Citizens expressed a desire to have improved public transportation in general, and also to and from New York City, Vermont, Boston, the Southern Berkshires and Albany.

**Schools:** The improvement of the school district and having better technology for education available were noted as a vision for the future. It was explained further that there would be an arts community working with the schools, and a political structure would be set up in Hoosac Valley High School that mirrors Adams.

**Government:** Input was received about having a stabilized and improved tax rate with more commercial taxes coming in. It was noted that there would be a more business-friendly municipality, especially regarding the permitting processes. There would be new leaders in town, and a change the political structure with fewer town meeting members. It was expressed that in the future it was hoped that there would be more experienced people on the Finance Committee, the meeting minutes and videos would be available online. There would be more support from town officials for development of new small businesses. The Visitors Center would have longer hours. There would be a community vehicle available for citizens. Also envisioned was a limit being placed on tax breaks to industry and housing.

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**People:** The vision for the future was expressed as having youth staying in the community, returning or being drawn to the area. There would be strong youth programming, and the community would pay homage to its ethnicities.

**Communication:** The future of Adams was expressed as having branding and available information about Adams to the public, having a better website with more public communication and a better information network for tourists. Creating a centralized news source like *The Transcript* was noted as important for the future, as well as having good signage in the Greylock Glen and throughout town and marketing the Town with a slogan such as "Come Back to a Simpler Time" to make Adams more attractive to others.

**Public Safety:** Citizens expressed that the future would have better community policing with beat walks and an enhanced youth/police rapport, creating a safe community for kids to play in the quiet streets.

**What would stay the same?:** It was expressed that Adams should keep the "Small Town" feel to maintain and improve a sense of community, preserve and maintain existing scenery and to keep affordable housing numbers stable.

**What are the possibilities?:** Future possibilities were outlined as having Art and Cultural assets being built in the Topia Theater, church buildings, Memorial School, and the Simmons Building. There would be a Senior/Youth Community Center. The Town would be drug-free, and have improved drug education. The Town would be business-friendly and have a business liaison. Coffee shops, craft and clothing stores and other retail businesses would be established. Development would be under way at the Greylock Glen, to include camping, the amphitheater, and the tramway. Small villages would be created for the elderly to live in. The small building near the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail would be available as a bathroom. There would be inter-connection on the web with all areas feeding into each other. There would be retention of young people, a skateboard park and other places for kids to go. The Town would maintain history and create a relocation draw to the "Small Town" theme. There would be artist lofts and specific artist housing available. The Adams Memorial School Building would be either developed or sold. Also noted was a balance of tax credits for low income housing businesses, specialty boutiques and artist-only housing.

**CONCERNS:**

**What is becoming clear to me?** Citizens noted that Town employees don't know how to support new businesses and investors and need to be business-friendly. It was expressed that better training is needed for Town employees and there is a need for outreach from Community Development to change the practice to being proactive. The need for police coverage and community policing due to the drug situation in town was noted. It was pointed out that the school system needs to be a focal point because there is a need for school system adequacy, and support for all youth. Recognition of those who stay and work to improve outcomes was expressed as a necessity. The need for a feasibility study to be done and support to be given for a central hub of activity was expressed. It was noted that it is clear that public transportation has limitations. A need for more proportional low-income housing and rentals in Adams was expressed. The lack of economic opportunity and the need for more jobs to be created to bring in more people was made apparent. It was noted that local government is challenged to regulate and enforce change, which doesn't happen without huge opposition. It was expressed that people need to be willing to see and work for change because the same problems have occurred over the last thirty years and decisions are not made unless forced. It was brought up that it is becoming more difficult to live in this area with the imbalance of the cost of living versus income because there is a changing demographic to becoming low income. It was stated that Park Street and empty buildings need to be filled with businesses.

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***What questions do I have?*** Questions were expressed regarding what the measures of economic development progress are, what would a Selectman do next, and if this form of government is stuck, if getting more grants is the best option. It was asked how \$15 per-hour minimum wage rates compare to a full-time employee, how to develop the downtown and attract foot traffic to those businesses, and how to inspire the silent majority of long-term residents to get behind an idea.

***What concerns me?*** Concerns were expressed that the youth is out of control and bored. It was noted that it is unsafe to go out at night because there are drugs, high crime levels and poverty in Adams causing officer safety issues in the community. Gossip, negative attitudes and lack of effort to create change in small groups was explained. Concern was expressed that leadership is weak, there is a lack of support from the State and Town Government, and not enough available funding. Excessive scrutiny by Building and Zoning was noted. The red tape involved to open a business in Adams was a concern and it was noted that there needs to be a liaison to help. Economic development is a need. There was a concern that there are no things to do or places to go in town. The two main streets having empty buildings and blight were noted. It was expressed that there are artificial barriers among nearby communities which creates a lost sense of community. The time it takes to get to a major highway was noted. It was pointed out that there is a lack of information and there needs to be a way to keep the general public engaged and informed. It was pointed out that the school system rating is concerning and new, young families don't want to send their kids there. A concern was expressed that the energy being put into the Greylock Glen is taking away from revitalizing the Downtown, and the Downtown needs to be developed before the Greylock Glen. It was stated that there is a focus on niche resources versus one "mega" project and that small businesses are not being visited by residents and are therefore not sustainable. A need to bring in mixed jobs, businesses and artists for economic development was noted. More support is needed for families because there are many residents, but fewer taxpayers. It was also expressed that the Northern Berkshires is utilized for resources and initiatives, but not this area.

**HARVEST 1:**

***What attributes of Adams today will be important in the future? What do we want to conserve?:*** Citizens noted that the natural resources, small town feel, architecture, heritage and existing buildings were important to conserve. Additionally expressed as important were the youth, youth programs and sports, and Youth Center. Keeping the downtown walkable, having live music, maintaining the School District, having safety and security and respecting owners' rights were also noted.

***What possibilities do we want to embrace in the future?*** Input received was varied. It was expressed that the future should include an improved public education system, enhanced recreation, progressive leadership, improved transportation and improvements made to the appearance and beautification of Town entrances. The development of a Community Cultural Center was noted as important, as well as utilizing existing buildings, such as the Adams Middle School Building. The possibilities of building a river park along the flood chute and creating eco-friendly aspects and access to natural resources to create a recreational economy was expressed. This would include the development of the Greylock Glen as a recreation hub of the Berkshires, with four-season activities on the mountain. Further discussion took place about expanding the economic environment by reviving the downtown area. A suggestion to expand the Visitors Center and increase tourism with better marketing of the Town and its attractions was made. The addition of a Community Planner and Tourism Director to improve online presence and marketing was brought up. Additionally, the creation of an inter-generational Youth/Senior Center and youth activities was noted as well as the creation of assisted living for seniors. Enhancing the technical info-structure was stated. The creation of town pride to embrace the historical ethnic diversity was expressed, and to be "Northern Berkshire Strong". Updating the town bylaws to become business friendly, having a Small-Business Liaison person and creating uniform standards of property upkeep were desired. The creation of a committed Economic Development Committee was expressed as important. Being the small-town leader of the Berkshires and having regional recognition

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of Mount Greylock as a historic and recreational destination was listed, as was the mindful development of the Greylock Glen and national recognition to the Mount Greylock Memorial for all Veteran Wars. The addition of moderate-income housing in the downtown area was added. The addition of a second Corporate Business Park to drive more jobs, plus the creation of work-at-home spaces and additional parking were brought up. Building the Tramway was also noted.

**ASPIRATIONS:**

*What does Adams Value? How might those values guide us?* It was noted that community attachment was highly valued. Having families, family-friendly atmosphere, a small-town feel, hard-working citizens, personal connections, and working together were important. It was noted that other values included the schools, prioritizing economic opportunities, having recreational activities and sports were also important. The natural resources and beauty, scenery conservation, and quality of life were valued. Preserving the Town History while promoting business growth and being an innovation center was expressed. Having downtown businesses to draw people who drive through was brought out as important. It was pointed out that Adams is an inter-generational location with programs and a center for youth, which would create a future with speakers, trainers, facilitators, supporters, investors, and new school athletics. This would also lend itself to being a corridor of Arts and Culture.

*What is the most ambitious idea we have?* Responses included having quality of life for all ages, creating and encouraging communities and reducing community divides. Other thoughts expressed were to promote economics through ecological resources, building the tramway to the top of Mount Greylock, routing traffic through the downtown and making Park Street a one-way street. Additional ideas were to increase both the transient population and permanent population. Building downtown businesses and making a central business hub with community support for new businesses was stated. Creating a unified Park Street Business District rather than having two separate business streets, and including a cultural downtown theater or other attraction was suggested. Utilizing the Greylock Glen to keep the transient population here and developing the Greylock Glen to have a regional promotion of outdoor attractions and services was included. Creating parking for everyone on Park Street was noted. Expanding the artist community and having a niche for manufacturing to create high-paying and skilled jobs was suggested. Having a strong social media presence and a centralized communication and education center was emphasized. Eliminating zoning completely and supporting people working remotely from their homes was expressed. Encouraging active farming, creating a Dude Ranch and a Wellness Center were ideas shared. Utilizing the old Armory building as a combined Youth and Senior Center was shared. Inspiring those with college degrees to come back to Adams to live and work, as well as consolidation for sustainability were given as ideas. Focusing more on the Town's history, ethnic diversity and Susan B. Anthony were added. Having a walkable, safe, livable downtown and feeling safe in town was given.

*What needs our priority focus?* The Schools, stabilizing the tax base, creating and promoting a safe, small, accepting town community were given as priorities. Developing the Greylock Glen to have music events and creating a tourist-friendly Train were given as suggestions. Downtown revitalization and increasing the visibility of attractions with communication and a web presence to support tourism was noted. Creating common goals to identify resources for creation and funding through economic development was expressed. Redeveloping a current property into a permanent physical space for the Youth Center was brought forth as a priority.

**HARVEST 2:**

*Ambitions:* Participants shared the ambitions of having a quality of life for all ages, promoting economics through ecological resources. Developing Park Street and rerouting traffic through downtown to create a central business hub, and providing parking and visibility for all businesses and creating a downtown "anchor" with the Topia Theater. A suggestion was made to have a streamlined

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campaign and support for a small business fast track, such as micro-loans, counseling and resources. The completion of the Greylock Glen and the creation of the tramway were given. Eliminating zoning and building an innovation center was offered. Creating an Inter-generational Center for Arts, Skills, and Environmental Enrichment and building a centralized communication and education center to identify attractions such as a Dude Ranch were recommended.

**Priorities:** Citizen priorities were to get interested and involved, create a community hub and have a safe, small, accepting town community. It was noted that the youth should become involved in planning. A priority suggestion was to have Adams become the destination of cultural and recreational activities through Mount Greylock and the Greylock Glen, the downtown revitalization and to develop the Topia Theater. The recommendation was given to press legislators to fast-forward the completion of the Greylock Glen by creating funding. A creation of signage to the Town's attractions and Town "Branding" was added to the list. Having outstanding schools, youth activities and creation of a facility for the youth was brought up. Have a streamlined campaign and support for a small business fast track, such as micro-loans, counseling and resources and to create jobs was given as a strategy to stabilize the depleting tax base. Finally, having a transportation backup for the community was given as a priority.

The Board of Selectmen concluded the discussion, and adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Tony Mazzucco,

Deborah J. Dunlap, Recording Secretary

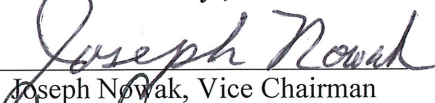

APPROVED FOR RELEASE AT THE AUGUST 1, 2018 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING



Richard Blanchard, Member

Christine Hoyt, Member

James Bush, Member

  
Joseph Nowak, Vice Chairman  
John Duval, Chairman