

TOWN OF ADAMS

BOARD OF SELECTMEN WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

OCTOBER 17, 2015

On the above date, the Board of Selectmen held a Workshop at 10:00 a.m. in the Hoosac Valley High School Cafeteria, 125 Savoy Road, Cheshire MA. Present were Chairman Blanchard and Members Nowak and Duval. Also in attendance were 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. The session was the first of two Goal Setting initiatives. Information gathered from the September 12, 2015 Workshop was categorized by topic and three of the topics discussed were Economic Development, Housing Stock, Natural Environment and Greylock Glen. Input was solicited on each of the strengths, challenges, hopes and ambitions, possible actions, and who can help.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Strengths: Having an Economic Development Commission with qualified individuals gives the opportunity for others to get involved in sub-committees and projects. It would build the character of Adams through its properties, outdoor environments, location, history and 19th century building architecture. The local McCann School provides local skilled tradesmen and computer aided drafting with a good work ethic and low labor costs. It would conserve the physical beauty of the area and provide outdoor recreation and activities such as a train, a bike trail and a draw to Mount Greylock. The Route 8 Corridor provides easy access to the walkable downtown, where there is affordable housing and available business inventory of diverse sized buildings and storefronts in a small town atmosphere with high visibility. Economic development would help Adams to be a major employer in Berkshire County, and to invest in educational resources for the high school and colleges to draw families to a safe area. The proximity of Adams to other art and cultural attractions would allow for a trickledown effect to this area, and with the natural advantage would lend itself to the creation of town festivals with accessibility from Albany, New York City and Boston with no traffic.

Challenges: Transportation for citizens and trucks and road infrastructure were noted as being inadequate. There is a large population of workers with inadequate job skills, as well as a lack of well-paying jobs due to large employers leaving the area. An explanation was given that the market is not strong enough to attract investors and those with businesses are challenged with statewide building codes. The available building inventory needs rehabilitation, there needs to be start-up money for small businesses and expanded business hours. It was pointed out that there is a lack of signage, maps, marketing and information, creating a challenge in getting through-travelers to stop to patronize the local businesses. The retail market is limited because many businesses in the area are competing for the same niche, causing retail turnover. Additional impediments are the youth migrating out of the area because of not having enough activities or interests in the community, and the population is aging. Adams was explained as competing with

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other communities, and having a history of failed or incomplete economic development efforts. The lack of broadband internet media access was noted as part of the reason Adams is underutilized and underdeveloped. The need to improve the school system rankings to attract younger families was also listed as a challenge.

Hopes and Ambitions: A desire was expressed to get more young people in the community by creating opportunities for careers to draw more young families and professionals to the area. It was suggested that the Town of Adams would be known as business-friendly, attracting more artists and cultural related businesses to the community. Other ambitions were to build upon the outdoor offerings of the Town's natural beauty with camping or "glamping", cross-country ski and hiking trails, and to have a mountain bike park by developing the Greylock Glen. Other ideas were to have 100% occupancy of Park Street businesses to create a healthy downtown that has sustainably occupied buildings. Adams becomes a destination for stores and attractions and to bring the technology industry to the area which brings in more people. It was suggested that the Town's Strategic Plan yield sustainable businesses and a downtown with market rate housing. Other ambitious goals were to have transparent streamlined codes and zoning, develop the Tramway to the top of Mount Greylock, to install the last distance of broadband, and to create tourist attractions by using buildings such as the Memorial School as museums for historical purposes and exhibits.

Possible Actions: Actions that were suggested to make changes happen were to develop the Greylock Glen, to complete the Strategic Plan for the Town, and to take a more aggressive approach to get funding and market the Town's assets. The Town could liaison with larger businesses to provide internships and to find grant opportunities without conditions. Bringing in the broadband service and supporting education was suggested. It was recommended that attention be given to the Mill Buildings and to support the artist impact in the museums in town. A suggestion was made to carry on the theme of Susan B. Anthony as a draw for women-owned and women-run businesses. It was pointed out that the Town could advertise this by the Town's website and through the Chamber of Commerce, as well as having historical groups and events to celebrate the history. Another thought was to name neighborhoods and areas after historical groups to develop pride in Adams and to create collaboration by communities. Pop-up retail stores and work/live options for residents could be created. A program could help combat blight and to create green spaces. Volunteerism was also noted as something everyone can do.

Who Can Help? The Small Business Association, local banks and schools, local businesses, Town Government, the residents, youth and seniors can help. Other organizations like the Arts Advisory Board, ProAdams, the Events Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Economic Development Commission could be helpful.

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The State Representatives and Senators are able to act for this region and advocate for funding and grants in Boston.

HOUSING STOCK

Strengths: It was noted that there is a sense of community in the regions around town providing a neighborly feeling. Many historic homes have character, unique craftsmanship and variety in several areas of town. The price ranges of the housing and commercial buildings provide a variety of affordable choices for those looking to locate in Adams. Older buildings now provide housing, such as the Old Mill and the former Hospital. It was pointed out that housing is located in beautiful areas, many of which are well maintained and situated in natural settings. There are plenty of housing options, especially for the elderly and low income families, and those attracted to a beautiful area to telecommute or retire here. Many housing options are within a walking distance to the downtown, where there are available services, restaurants and a municipal sewer system. Adams is only three hours to Boston, four hours to New York City, 45 Minutes to Bennington, Williamstown and Lenox and it is well positioned near other great communities that increase interest in this area. Citizens of Adams volunteer to maintain the character and cleanliness of the town.

Challenges: There are too many units for the populations and that available need renovation. Seniors have a hard time living at home due to taxes and upkeep, and many neighborhoods and houses are not being taken care of. It was noted that subsidized housing makes houses less desirable and creates disrepair and blight. Vacancy was observed as being high, and concerns were expressed about the tax rate, high utility costs, and a lack of available land. Housing sizes were designed for a prior era and the current owners' economic positions prevent them from being able to provide upkeep. Blighted areas were identified, and it was explained that the school system is not growing as there are fewer young families. Zoning and building codes were noted, and 40R could draw some issues. Section 8 was expressed as bringing many social problems and that the Town needs to be able to support them. Vacant homes are becoming abandoned and there are too many houses on the market, causing unresponsive real estate agents. The lack of jobs in the community and transportation deficits were noted as causing this problem. The difficulty of a first time homeowner to get a house was identified, as well as the lack of quality rental property and affordable rent for young professionals. The inability of adequate policing of bad properties was noted.

Hopes and Ambitions: Having better employment and a boosted economy would support home buying and upkeep, provide a more affordable lifestyle for small families, and would assist the elderly to stay in their homes. Having more housing downtown and creating work/live options would make for a more vibrant downtown and improve the blighted properties on the corridor and in the center of town. Groups would capitalize on the arts to bring in people from Boston

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and New York City to purchase real estate or a second home. More jobs would increase population, allow for more development and repaired houses, bring in new young working professionals, and improve the blighted areas with tax funds. 40R was offered as a hope for the future. Having a support system with team-player thinking, excited and positive attitudes, and volunteerism to clean up Adams and help the Town buildings to look better was also brought up.

Possible Actions: Suggestions were made to streamline the permitting and code enforcement processes, to provide grant opportunities to address blight, and to perform a needs assessment on the housing stock. A suggestion was made to assess the best practices of other communities. Artists could be enlisted to help properties look better. 40R was noted as being good for development and the Town could create better uses of big abandoned buildings. Blight could be removed and replaced with new housing and green spaces. It was proposed that the Town reach out for more grants to be able to improve the rental stock to bring in more people to town. The Town was recommended to provide a liaison resource for people to help improve houses and businesses and condensing all information to one department. A proposal was made to do marketing to second homeowners, and to change zoning to attract live/work space owners. The Town was asked to lower tax rates and increase the tax base. Arts and volunteerism were expressed as a way to provide help in a trickle-down effect.

Who can help: Those identified as being able to help with this were the Town Departments, Elected Officials, and the Berkshire Housing Development Corporation. Realtors and local Artists could help out. Businesses in town could contribute to the educational system by helping to groom workers and partners for the future and in turn support the schools. Broadband would help. The Town changing zoning to be more business friendly and provide a live/work district and to market the livability of Adams was noted. Federal and state grants were identified as being a great help.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT & GREYLOCK GLEN

Strengths: The strengths of the natural environment were noted as Mount Greylock being the tallest mountain in Massachusetts and the Greylock Glen, and the fact that the Greylock Glen is accessible from the downtown area. The beauty of the area and its seasonal changes, open spaces, farms, and the spectacular natural vistas were listed. The topography was pointed out as being good for trails, and the trail system was expressed as a strength. The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail and Scenic Railway, plus the hiking, touring and swimming in the area were pluses. Town festivals in the natural location, and four-season activities were added. The simple, serene lifestyle of the limited population and the affordability of this location are advantageous. The history of this area, the Bascom Lodge's location and the future addition of the educational center at the Greylock Glen were also added.

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Challenges: It was noted that there is no marketing being done for activities in the area, or signage for wayfinding, especially at the Visitors Center, the Greylock Glen or the Appalachian Trail. Extending the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail was listed as a challenge, as well as the negativity surrounding the Greylock Glen development failures and a legacy of incomplete projects. The development of the Greylock Glen was pointed out as causing discord and fear by townspeople, and concern by environmentalists. One challenge was noted as finding a way to have accessibility to the top of Mount Greylock without causing damage or diminishing aesthetics. Funding was defined as a major challenge, especially to have the economic viability of development and a limited population. Promotion of the Town's setting and proximity to urban centers to get visitors to come to the Greylock Glen Environmental Center was explained as a challenge. Destruction from current industry in the area, and working with the government regarding permitting was stated. The challenge of the Town's liability related to the promotion of outdoor activities needs to be explored. Transportation was also expressed as a limitation.

Hopes and Ambitions: Having an Amphitheater, and educational center, mountain biking trails, an indoor/outdoor center to practice mountaineering, a Tramway, and offering more hiking trails, wilding and foraging at the Greylock Glen were listed. Expanding the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail and providing more outdoor activities in Town were added. Making the downtown more vibrant and helping to boost ancillary businesses was offered. Adding signage for things to do and adding better marking on the hiking trails was suggested. Promoting Adams as a place for women-owned businesses and making Susan B. Anthony part of the theme of the downtown with a statue was brought up, as well as honoring the ethnic backgrounds of different parts of the town. Making Town officials more responsive and embracing of growth and bringing the townspeople together over the development of the Greylock Glen was pointed out as ideal. Making the downtown more vibrant and having Adams becoming an economic catalyst was noted as being important to be competitive with other towns. Expanding ancillary events connected to town events, festivals, outdoor activities, train excursions, and cultural tourism to attract more people to Adams was suggested. Having sustainable projects with volunteers, staff and youth involved through a formal process to work on these projects was also an ambition.

Possible Actions: Actions that were suggested by participants were to complete the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail and Train Project to connect Adams to North Adams, and to complete the infrastructure at the Greylock Glen. Creating responsible development of the Greylock Glen and the Mount Greylock area with grants was listed. Finding a developer who is willing to take a chance on building a tramway was suggested. Sponsoring tours up the mountain with a hiking history, having more bicycle and running races, and starting to use the Greylock Glen now with bands, festivals and the arts was proposed. Bringing recreational based businesses to the downtown was suggested. Holding a marketing campaign and outreach program, making signage for what there is to do and where to go, and improving the Town's website to be an information

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resource were brought out. Forming steering committees and creating community organizational groups for maintenance of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail were also suggested as actionable.

Who can help: Those who were listed as being able to help were the State Representatives and Senators, Town Departments, the Federal Government, the Townspeople, organizations like ProAdams, the Adams Arts Advisory Board, the Visitors Bureau, the Events Committee and the Economic Development Commission. The Berkshire Chamber of Commerce and other local businesses, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, and private investors were listed as being helpful. Clubs such as the Boy Scouts and area experts like Ramblewild were pointed out as being those who are environmentally conscious. Finally, it was noted that if everyone has a positive attitude it will help tremendously.

The Board of Selectmen concluded the discussion, and adjourned the meeting at 12:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Tony Mazzucco,
Deborah J. Dunlap, Recording Secretary

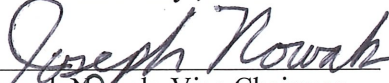
APPROVED FOR RELEASE AT THE AUGUST 1, 2018 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING



Richard Blanchard, Member

Christine Hoyt, Member

James Bush, Member



Joseph Nowak, Vice Chairman



John Duval, Chairman