

PLANNING BOARD/SELECTBOARD JOINT MEETING

DATE: October 10, 2019

TIME: 6:00 P.M.

FOR: Joint Meeting Planning Board/Selectboard

PLACE: Large Meeting Room

PRESENT: Planning Board: Brandee Nelson, Chair; Jonathan Hankin; Jeremy Higa;

Pedro Pachano; Garfield Reed

Selectboard: Steve Bannon, Chair; Ed Abrahams; Bill Cooke; Kate Burke;

Leigh Davis

Mark Pruhenski, Town Manager

Chris Rembold, Town Planner

Joe Grochmal, Intern (By Phone)

Ms. Nelson called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

REAL ESTATE REPORT: BERKSHIRE COUNTY REALTORS

Tom Doyle and Eric Steuernagle were present from the Berkshire County Board of Realtors to discuss the housing trends in Great Barrington. Handouts with housing data were distributed.

Mr. Doyle and Mr. Steuernagle gave the Board members an overview of the housing trends from Lenox south. They explained that the median selling price for a house in the area is \$326,000. Currently the market is relatively flat with properties on the market for up to a year.

Mr. Steuernagle said of the houses sold over the last few months only one might have been intended for an Air B&B.

Ms. Davis asked how many buyers are second home owners.

Mr. Steuernagle said there is no way to track that information.

Mr. Doyle said that in 2019 58 houses have sold ranging in price from \$300,000-\$500,000.

Ms. Davis asked about people who want to live in Great Barrington. She asked how people decide where to buy when there are nearby towns with lower tax rates.

Mr. Steuernagle said infrastructure is the deciding factor. People don't want to buy where there is not internet or Broad Band.

HOUSING SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE:

Ms. Burke said the committee's discussion has been around a way to reduce expenses for renters. She said there has been discussion about incentives and zoning revisions for housing opportunities.

Ms. Nelson said the housing study could be informative in providing information on rentals and affordable housing that is for sale.

Ms. Burke said it is important to create substantial affordable work force housing.

Ms. Davis said the stigma around affordable housing and the push back from the community needs to be addressed. It is important to keep explaining what the housing is and get a policy in place to help get rid of the stigma.

Ms. Nelson said the Planning Board is working on creating the tools to allow more incremental changes.

Mr. Hankin said there is funding for large scale projects that could effectively turn into ghettos. He said there needs to be money available for the smaller projects.

There will be further discussion of projects that can provide support such as child care, transportation and other types of incentives to support affordable housing.

ECOMOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE UPDATE:

Ms. Davis said the Committee has been working on a recommendation on the reuse of the Housatonic School. There are many good ideas that are being worked on.

Mr. Hankin asked if there has been discussion about Broad Band in Housatonic.

Ms. Davis said yes.

Mr. Pachano said infrastructure is the biggest driver for redevelopment.

Ms. Davis agreed.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF SHORT-TERM RENTALS:

Ms. Nelson said the last discussion ended with the Selectboard working on outreach to see what the community is interested in. She said zoning is not the most effective place to address short-term rentals.

Mr. Rembold said there should be information soon from the State about properties that are registered. It might be possible to get a firm that will do data calculations.

Ms. Burke said there is a notion that we can't tell people what they can do with their properties but if they are running their houses as a business in a residential zone, then that is not legal and we can take some action. She said we do need research data and outreach.

Mr. Bannon suggested defining "house" in the bylaws.

Mr. Hankin said he owns more than one house and has long term rentals. He advised being careful about discouraging language for rentals.

Ms. Nelson said it is clear that the majority wants to collect data prior to moving forward.

Ms. Davis said the housing need study will be helpful in proving the data we need to move forward.

Mr. Rembold said he is not sure how the data for taxes will come in. There might not be a distinction between hotels and Air B&Bs.

Ms. Burke asked if Mr. Grochmal could take on seeing what is on Air B&B for Great Barrington.

Mr. Grochmal said he would be happy to take it on.

Ms. Nelson said there may be information from the American Planning Association that could provide housing trends.

The Boards would like to have information about short-term rentals such as who owns them and if the owners live in the houses.

MASTER PLAN:

Mr. Rembold said he would talk with various boards to ask them to start thinking about the update process for the Master Plan. He said the process needs to be considered as well as a budget for the update because it might not be possible to do all of it in house.

Mr. Hankin said the last update took three years.

Mr. Rembold said he will encourage a lot of community outreach. He said it takes a dedicated diverse committee to do the work. We were fortunate to have a very diverse group last time and there was a lot of outreach done. He said there are many new trends and hot button issues to be incorporated into the revised plan.

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING STRUCTURE & AGENDA:

Moderator Michael Wise was present to discuss the Annual Town Meeting. He said there is a clear consensus for more than one night for the meeting in order to have shorter meetings. He said it is not clear how to organize and schedule a second meeting.

Mr. Wise said there has been discussion of a second meeting in the fall or a second meeting several nights after the first meeting. Will they both be Annual Town Meetings or just a town meeting. He said there is no consensus at this point.

Mr. Bannon said he thought it would be good to have two meetings similar to this year with the second meeting concentrated on zoning so it doesn't have to be rushed through.

Mr. Abrahams said it is important to set a time limit. This allows people to make arrangements for child care. He suggested that the nights could work but this year there would have been 3 consecutive nights.

Ms. Burke suggested consecutive weeks instead of consecutive nights.

Mr. Bannon suggested limiting the meetings to 2.5 hours and have them in the same week but perhaps Monday and Wednesday instead of Monday and Tuesday.

Mr. Pachano said it is important to have the meeting prior to the election so that the current Planning Board would be able to present and discuss the zoning articles they worked on for months leading up to the meeting.

There was additional discussion of providing transportation, child care and the possibility of remote participation. There will be additional discussion of this topic.

NEXT MEETING:

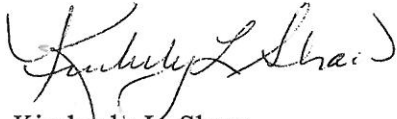
The next meeting will be held on December 9 at 6:00 P.M. Topics for the agenda will include Data Collection for Short-Term Rentals and updates from the committees.

CITIZEN'S SPEAK TIME:

No one spoke.

Having concluded their business, Ms. Nelson adjourned without objection at 7:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kimberly L. Shaw".

Kimberly L. Shaw

Planning Board Secretary

