

Diversity Equity and Inclusion Report for Williamstown Planning Board March 2023

Time Period July 2022 to December 2022, 6 months

Note: the first DEI report for the Williamstown Planning Board, will cover the 6 month period from following the June 2022 Town Meeting

Board Members:

Board Member	Responsibility	Term Ends
Stephanie Boyd	Chair	2023
Allison Guess		2023
Roger Lawrence	CPA representative	2026
Peter Beck	Vice Chair	2025
Ken Kuttner	Berkshire Regional Planning Representative	2027

Overview of Planning Board responsibilities:

The Planning Board is responsible for overseeing the long term land use patterns of Williamstown through the Zoning Bylaw, Subdivision Rules, and Comprehensive Planning process. The Board meets the 2nd Tuesday of the Month at 7 PM. The Planning Board proposes zoning changes through warrant articles at Town Meeting, reviews applications for land subdivisions and development plans, and manages the Comprehensive Planning process.

For the past several years, the planning board has been striving to modify zoning regulations to allow a variety of housing types to meet the needs of a diverse population, and recommend zoning changes that might encourage employment opportunities. The planning board recommends to Town Meeting, proposed warrant articles. Town Meeting is the decision making body.

Recent zoning changes of note have been clarification of rules regarding outdoor and indoor cultivation of marijuana, allowing by-right detached accessory dwelling units and allowing by-right the conversion of a single family home into a two family home.

The Planning Board is required by Massachusetts general law to prepare a [Master Plan periodically](#).

Public Meetings: All members of the public are welcome to join the Board's discussions. At all meetings, the Planning Board engages with the public and hears public comment. The public is usually not given a time restriction unless there are many people wishing to speak and time is limited. This may happen during a Public Hearing. All board materials are available online in meeting packets.

Meetings have been hybrid format.

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The Planning Board is working to prepare proposed bylaw amendments for Town Warrant, developing Comprehensive plan and exploring longer term options. It is important to note that the Planning Board is not authorized to make changes to the Town's code but can only present proposals to Town Meeting, the decision making authority.

Current Projects

Currently the Planning Board is working on several initiatives that intended to support the needs of a diverse, equitable and inclusive community:

1. Preparing a bylaw proposal that addresses short term rentals in Williamstown

As more rental units are being used for short term rental units, there is potential lack of rental housing. Williamstown has fewer rental units per capita than surrounding communities and rents are higher.

The goal of the proposed bylaw is to increase the availability of long term rental housing through reducing short term rentals operated by out-of-town corporations while simultaneously allowing Williamstown residents to benefit from short term rental opportunities. Increasing the availability of rental units may help those with lower income find suitable housing.

Current Status: Select Board is currently considering whether or not to bring this article to Town Meeting in 2023.

2. Preparing a bylaw proposal to allow manufactured housing in all residential zones in Williamstown.

Manufactured (mobile) housing is significantly cheaper than stick built housing. Currently manufactured housing is only permissible in a Mobile Home Community. This proposed bylaw would allow any landowner to install a manufactured house as primary residence or as an detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) on any residential lot by right. This housing type may be particularly effective in rural areas.

Current Status: bylaw language drafted, Information Sheet (FAQ)s in process. Planning Board members are consulting with other key Town boards for input prior to up-coming public hearings.

3. Preparing a bylaw proposal to allow 3 and/or 4 unit housing by-right in the General Residence zone.

In an effort to increase the supply and diversity of housing types in Williamstown, the Planning Board is proposing to allow 3 and/or 4 unit housing by-right in General Residence on all residential lots. Currently large lots and special permits are required. This article allows for and removes some regulatory barriers to creating lower priced rental units. This is an attempt to remove some of the restrictions associated with zoning practices.

Current Status: bylaw language drafted, Information Sheet (FAQ)s in process. Planning Board members are consulting with other key Town boards for input prior to up-coming public hearings.

4. *Preparing a bylaw proposal to reduce lot frontage requirements for residential lots in the General Residence zone*

In an effort to allow the construction of more housing, the Planning Board is proposing to reduce the frontage requirements from 100 ft to 66 ft in the General Residence zone. This article may result in smaller lots that are lower priced or at least allow for a few more building lots in the center areas of Town.

Current Status: bylaw language drafted, Information Sheet (FAQ)s in process. Planning Board members are consulting with other key Town boards for input prior to up-coming public hearings.

5. *Exploring whether the development plan review should include notification to Stockbridge Munsee*

Currently projects that involve removing more than 20,000 square feet of vegetative area, or building more than 2500 square feet of new non-agricultural building, or are located in the Upland Conservation District, or create or substantially alter a large-scale solar photovoltaic installation or alter or create 10 or more parking spaces involve a development plan review by the Planning Board.

Currently, the project proponent must notify - the Conservation Commission under the Wetlands Act, the Williamstown Department of Public Works for utility connections, the Massachusetts Department of Public Works for curb cut permits, the Board of Health or DEP for on-site disposal facilities and an ENF to EOEa for MEPA review.

The Planning Board is assessing whether to recommend adding the Stockbridge Munsee tribe to this list of agencies to be notified.

Current Status: investigating potential impact

6. *Developing a long term community vision through the Comprehensive Plan*

The Planning Board is required by Massachusetts General Law to periodically conduct a Comprehensive (Master) Plan. The Planning Board assembled a committee of 11 people that represent a wide variety of views and interests and with wide-ranging life experiences to provide guidance on the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee.

Committee Members: Justin Adkins, Peter Beck (co-chair), Stephanie Boyd (co-chair), Susan Briggs, Melissa Craig, Don Dubendorf, Sarah Gardner, Dan Gura, Susan Puddester, Tanja Srebotniak, and Huff Templeton.

By law the Comprehensive Plan is required to address Economic Development; Housing; Land Use, Parks, Open Space and Recreation, Cultural and Historic Resources, Transportation, Housing; Public Facilities and Services. **Sustainability and community resilience** and **diversity, equity, and inclusion** have been identified as overarching frameworks for the Envisioning Williamstown 2035 Comprehensive Plan. Unlike the previous 2002 Master Plan, these topics will be foundational in this new Plan.

To effectively plan for the future, the community must be good stewards of its natural and built environment; address global challenges, like climate change, with local actions; and be an inclusive community that provides opportunities for existing and future residents. Because these topics can be viewed through the lenses of many aspects of community life, from transportation, to economic development, to natural resources, they will be explored and addressed in areas of the plan.

An excerpt from the Existing Conditions report:

“ Williamstown’s commitment to becoming a more equitable and inclusive community represents an opportunity to make equity a guiding principle in policy development, infrastructure investment, capital improvement planning, and in local governmental processes and initiatives. This will help address issues that underserved and marginalized communities face including lack of transportation, secure and affordable housing options, food access, social and recreation opportunities, and the need for other support services.

This desire to integrate equity into the Comprehensive Plan builds on a formal commitment the town has made through the passing of Articles 36 and 37. This was an important first step the town has made as it works towards becoming a more inclusive community that celebrates diversity and provides equitable opportunities for all. Aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion that are observed through the analysis of existing conditions in the following sections focus on the following:

- Highlights populations in Williamstown that have historically been marginalized and underserved in land use and community planning.
- Identifies some of the preliminary needs community members of different ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, sexual orientation, genders, income levels, and others may have and that could be addressed through the Comprehensive Plan.
- Summarizes some of the work that the town and other community groups have undertaken to make Williamstown more equitable and inclusive as a community.

Current Status: [Existing Conditions report](#) completed, community workshop held and [outreach report](#) prepared.

Report prepared by Planning Board Chair: Stephanie Boyd, January 26, 2023

Report ratified by Planning Board on February 14, 2023