

## Minutes

### Select Board

Present: Stephanie O’Keeffe, Alisa Brewer, Diana Stein, Jim Wald, Aaron Hayden

Absent: None

Others: Members of the Town’s Planning Department, Planning Board, members of the public

The Planning Board meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

This meeting was posted as a Select Board meeting to enable all Select Board members to attend and offer comment freely that might be considered “deliberation.” The room was very full and people were coming and going, so it was difficult to know if there was ever a quorum’s worth of Select Board members in attendance at one time.

This was the Planning Board’s meeting to consider the preliminary subdivision plans submitted by landmark Properties for development of the project called “The Retreat.” Ms. O’Keeffe offered comment on the project on behalf of the Select Board, as discussed at the Select Board’s December 2, 2013 meeting. No other Select Board members spoke. She read from prepared remarks (attached) and also noted that issues raised that evening about whether or not to gate the proposed roads, and in particular, about creating deed restrictions on possible future ownership of the project (whether the units could be sold individually or would require a single owner for the whole project) were of keen interest to the Select Board and she hoped there would be additional opportunity to comment on those at future steps in the project consideration process.

A full record of the Planning Board’s meeting is available in their minutes of the same date.

ADJOURN - The Planning Board meeting adjourned at 11:50 p.m.; any potential Select Board quorum dissolved much earlier than that.

Submitted by Stephanie O’Keeffe

### List of Documents Presented at the Meeting

Many documents were presented to the Planning Board; the Select Board did not have those documents.

Select Board Comments to the Planning Board -- S. O’Keeffe

**Select Board Comments to the Planning Board -- S. O’Keeffe**  
**12/4/13 The Retreat – Consideration of Preliminary Subdivision Plans**

It is unusual for the Select Board to offer comment to the Planning Board, but because this particular application overlaps with and impacts a number of areas that we deal with regularly, we felt it was important for us to weigh in. We don’t mean to suggest that the Select Board has any authority or expertise in your process, because we certainly do not. But we hope to offer perspective that reflects our role and might be helpful to you in your role.

Among the critical issues facing Amherst are our incredibly tight housing supply and the pressures that puts on housing affordability; the huge demand for student housing and how the conversion of single-family homes to student rentals challenges many of our neighborhoods; and of course, the big impacts of disruptive behavior by a small percentage of students.

The Retreat proposal is kind of in the sweet spot of all of those issues. As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that we maximize the positive outcomes of this project, and eliminate or mitigate the potential negative outcomes as best we can.

We would like to offer the following comments on the issues under your review tonight. Our apologies if any of this strays into areas that are not relevant for the preliminary subdivision considerations. The distinctions were a little blurry to us, and we are learning on the fly.

I will speak very briefly on five areas: Waivers, Safety, Sustainability, Access Points, and Sewers.

**Waivers:** The significant number and scope of the waivers being sought is a concern for us. Deviations from the zoning bylaw at this scale need to be for high purposes, in keeping with larger community goals and values, or should otherwise be denied. We ask that in your consideration of each of the waiver requests, you look closely at what would be given up and what would be gained, and that your decisions come down on the side of supporting what is best for Amherst. Where the developer’s interests and the community’s interests are not aligned, we trust that you will protect the community.

**Safety:** Safety concerns are paramount, particularly considering the intended population. These are young people, typically living on their own for the first time, and they will be less experienced in many of the life-management and decision-making skills than a different demographic would be, so protections that take these realities into account need to be baked into the individual units and the full property design. Optimal fire safety, fire truck access and ambulance access must be priorities. Roadway design that accounts for newer drivers who would have less experience with icy conditions, for example, must be considered.

**Sustainability:** Green measures that address sustainability issues now and that allow for enhancement in the future should be a priority. This may be relevant for current utility consideration, and we hope it will be part of the unit design considerations at a later stage. Additionally, we hope that infrastructure for bicycles and buses will be a clear and significant aspect of the road design. Ensuring bike safety in relation to vehicle parking and the flow of traffic within the complex is a necessity for encouraging bicycle use to and from the complex.

**Access Points:** The access points where The Retreat roads meet the public streets are of critical importance. Assessing their locations and relative impacts is way beyond our expertise, but we look forward to a traffic study that will do that, and hope steps will be taken to decrease overall traffic impacts to the greatest and most reasonable extent possible. Additionally, we agreed with the point in the staff memo that providing for clear and safe pedestrian access to the Cushman Store makes good sense.

**Sewers:** As noted in the materials, extension of Town sewers to the Flat Hills Road/High Point Drive area has been identified as a moderate need, so we encourage you to ensure that the developer meets the Town's engineering and easement requirements that would facilitate consideration of the Town accepting the water and sewer infrastructure, in order to keep all such options open.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. This is a major project with major impacts. It is incumbent upon all of us to make sure we get this right. To that end, and in support of the Planning Board's work, the Select Board will be back with additional comment at subsequent steps in this process.