

Revitalizing Williamstown's Superblock: Lessons from New Urbanism



**Sara Wild, Amy Siedlecki, Sophie Mason,
Chris Law & Will Harron**

**Environmental Planning 302
Professor: Sarah Gardner
Client: Ann McCallum**

Fall 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

- 1. Paper summary.....4
- 2. Problems.....4
- 3. Project Scope & Goals.....6

II. BACKGROUND

- 1. Site Description.....9
- 2. A History of Town Centers in Williamstown.....12
- 3. Old Town Garage Site History.....13
- 4. Community Profile.....14
- 5. Additional Background Research20
- 6. Relevant Law & Policy.....25

III. INTERVIEW RESULTS

A. *“Preliminary” Interviews*

- 1. Research Tool: Focused Interviews.....26
- 2. Realty Groups.....26
- 3. Williams College Officials.....34
- 4. Other Preliminary Interviewees.....39

B. *“Late-Stage” Interviews*

- 1. Town Officials.....40
- 2. Classroom Contacts.....43

IV. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

A. *Whole-Block Plan*

- 1. Background.....46
- 2. Pathway Options.....49
- 3. Full-Block Solution.....51

B. *Old-Town Garage Site Plans*

- 1. Background.....54
- 2. College-Involved Site Designs.....55
- 3. Mixed-Use Site Designs.....59

V. CONCLUSIONS & MOVING FORWARD

- 1. Lessons Learned.....64
- 2. Site Guidelines.....65
- 3. Conclusions & Moving Forward.....66

Tables and Figures

<i>Table 1:</i> Selected characteristics of Old Town Garage Site.....	10
<i>Table 2:</i> Inventory of downtown buildings, Fall 2009.....	11
<i>Table 3:</i> Percentage of residents with various advanced degrees.....	16
<i>Table 4:</i> Parcel Count by Property Class in Williamstown, 2009.....	18
<i>Table 5:</i> List of interviews conducted.....	26
<i>Table 6:</i> Assessment characteristics for evaluating design solution.....	54
<i>Figure 1:</i> Superblock and Old Town Garage Site.....	9
<i>Figure 2:</i> Old Town Garage Site circa-1960s.....	14
<i>Figure 3:</i> Spring Street present-day.....	14
<i>Figure 4:</i> Williamstown Population from 1970-2008.....	15
<i>Figure 5:</i> Unemployment Rates in Williamstown and Massachusetts....	17
<i>Figure 6:</i> Distribution of housing prices in Williamstown, 2000.....	18
<i>Figure 7:</i> Log and Pappa Charlie’s pathway options.....	49
<i>Figure 8:</i> Expanded Multi-Use Fitness Center.....	56
<i>Figure 9:</i> “Minimalist” Option.....	60
<i>Figure 10:</i> “New Urbanist” Option.....	62
<i>Figure 11:</i> “Paved Paradise” Option.....	63

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Paper Summary

The Old Town Garage site in Williamstown, MA can best be described as the barren expanse of gravel and pavement parked awkwardly between the quaint shops of Spring Street and those of nearby Water Street. Perhaps ironically, this fallow ground also rests as one of the few remaining commercial spaces downtown. In what ways can this site be best utilized to benefit the town, and which of these options have the greatest potential for success?

The following is a report compiled for client Ann McCallum, of the Williamstown Planning Board, through Environmental Planning (Envi 302), taught by Sarah Gardner, of the Center for Environmental Studies at Williams College in Williamstown. By evaluating Williamstown's various needs and looking critically at the feasibility of each option, we will attempt to answer the above questions, determining the best possible use for the site and incorporating it into a larger plan that anchors Williamstown around a unified town center.

2. Problems

Problem #1: A lack of a unified "town center." Ask a resident of Williamstown, and they will note two parts of "downtown Williamstown"—Spring Street and Water Street, each of which host an array of shops and restaurants. However, these two locations are located more than 1000 feet apart with no clear pedestrian link between them. This limits the spillover effects of shoppers walking down Spring Street onto Water Street, and vice versa, resulting in sub-optimal economic activity on both ends.

Problem #2: An eyesore and forgone opportunity downtown. In its current state, the town garage site is a notable eyesore in an otherwise idyllic place to live. Pavement or gravel covers the entirety of the lot and reaches flush with the buildings at its western end. Especially as it sits in an otherwise densely developed part of town, “the symbolism [of the vacant lot] is compelling” for passers-by (*Georgetown*, 2). Moreover, such an empty lot provides the town with zero income in the form of tax revenue. As one of the few commercial spaces remaining in Williamstown, this is an incredible opportunity.

Problem #3: Waning economic activity. Over the past several years, stores have gradually been abandoned (most recently, Hopkins General Store and McClelland’s Press) or slow-developing on these two streets. The bulk of this effect has been felt on Water Street, which has struggled to re-establish itself as a commercial hub. With access to cheaper and more “complete” stores, instead of walking downtown consumers are more likely to drive to Wal-Mart or buy online. The domino effect is always the same, however. As one author observes, “Abandonment often spreads by contagion...Store closings, whether induced by the market or by idiosyncratic factors, reduce retail traffic in the area, thus jeopardizing remaining merchants” (*Georgetown*, 2). Due to its unpredictability, such a danger should be headed off whenever possible. Furthermore, we want to provide residents and visitors with the things they need.

There are several environmental corollaries to these three concerns that merit our attention. Presently, the enormous impermeable cover of the site and current use as a parking lot raises concern of polluted runoff entering the adjacent Green River; the effects of this surface can be compared against other more efficient uses of the site. On a broader scale, habits influenced by a vibrant downtown—or lack of a vibrant downtown—when accumulated can have significant environmental impact. Besides effects on individual health, automobile use from “sprawl shopping” begets a much

larger carbon footprint than window shopping; if we trust pundits like Jim Kunstler that high gas prices will turn societies inward in a few decades, it is crucial to plan for this future now (Kunstler *b*).

3. Project Scope & Goals

Seeking to complete this project is Ann McCallum, representing the Williamstown Planning Board. Ann is a partner in Burr & McCallum Architects, a firm based in Williamstown with projects in the town proper and the Berkshires at large. She was elected to the Planning Board in 2005, with her dedication to the Superblock project a key component of her platform.

While one may look at the project from a number of different priorities—use, aesthetics, sustainability—Ann’s focus is very clearly utilitarian. This focus results from the stalled history of this very project, a history that most notably includes a Request For Proposals (RFP) released in 2004 that failed to attract any significant development offers. Rather than working only conceptually, Ann seeks the materials and research to assure a successful RFP for the old Town Garage Site. Providing this assurance is ultimately the main aim for our project.

More specifically, our client sought the following items in particular:

- Broadly, information to the town necessary for a successful RFP
- A design for the whole block site, with alternates
- A design for the town garage site, with alternates.

To tackle this problem, we approach it from two critical dimensions: First, we need to look at the *developer* side and why the original RFP failed to attract any takers. Is there something inherent in the project that entails excessive risk, or can a developer be attracted simply by refining the scope and incentives of the request? Our second view must be *local*, determining the demand for space and use in Williamstown. What does the town need, and is this site the best location for this use? What is the town's demand and capacity (if any) to absorb retail, commercial, office and residential space, and how elastic is this demand? An examination of these two dimensions—developer and town—will bring us to the most appropriate plan for the site.

To get to the bottom of each of these questions, our project uses and synthesizes *interviews* as a chief research tool. (More on methodology and the results of these interviews in Section III.) Indeed it is one thing to build an exciting structure; it is quite another to assure that this structure will be used and used successfully in both short- and long-runs. Our interviews attempt to look beyond the inclinations and biases of isolated players (Williamstown residents, town officials, existing merchants) and to give attention given to what is feasible—historically, looking at past, present and wherever possible future trends; logistically, with a mind towards space restrictions and concurrent building plans; and practically with respect to developer and tenant attractiveness. Interviews were thereby conducted with town officials, college officials, local real estate agents, downtown merchants, and other significant personalities in Williamstown development.

The potential uses we will consider for the site are several: (1) Mixed use buildings, consisting of some combination of retail, residential, commercial and office spaces; (2) specialty housing, including senior living or low income residences; (3) various specific uses, including a youth center, community arts and crafts center, public market and/or skating rink.

Once use is evaluated and settled upon, the next step in the project is to develop a design for the site that maximizes pedestrian traffic and incorporates surrounding elements of the downtown. In drafting the garage site itself, our design will incorporate rules of zoning bylaws, town codes, SmartCode design, and potential green elements; include necessary infrastructure considerations such as parking, lot division, road construction, sidewalks and open space; and reflect the culture, history and architecture of Williamstown proper. In attempting to unify Water and Spring Streets, our design will look at a number of different pathway options and the future capacity to fill any new spaces that might result. Garage lot building details such as road placement and façade direction will be necessarily influenced by any plan for short- or long-term connectivity. Finally, we will investigate funding sources on the assumption that developers will never feel wholly confident in buying the property.

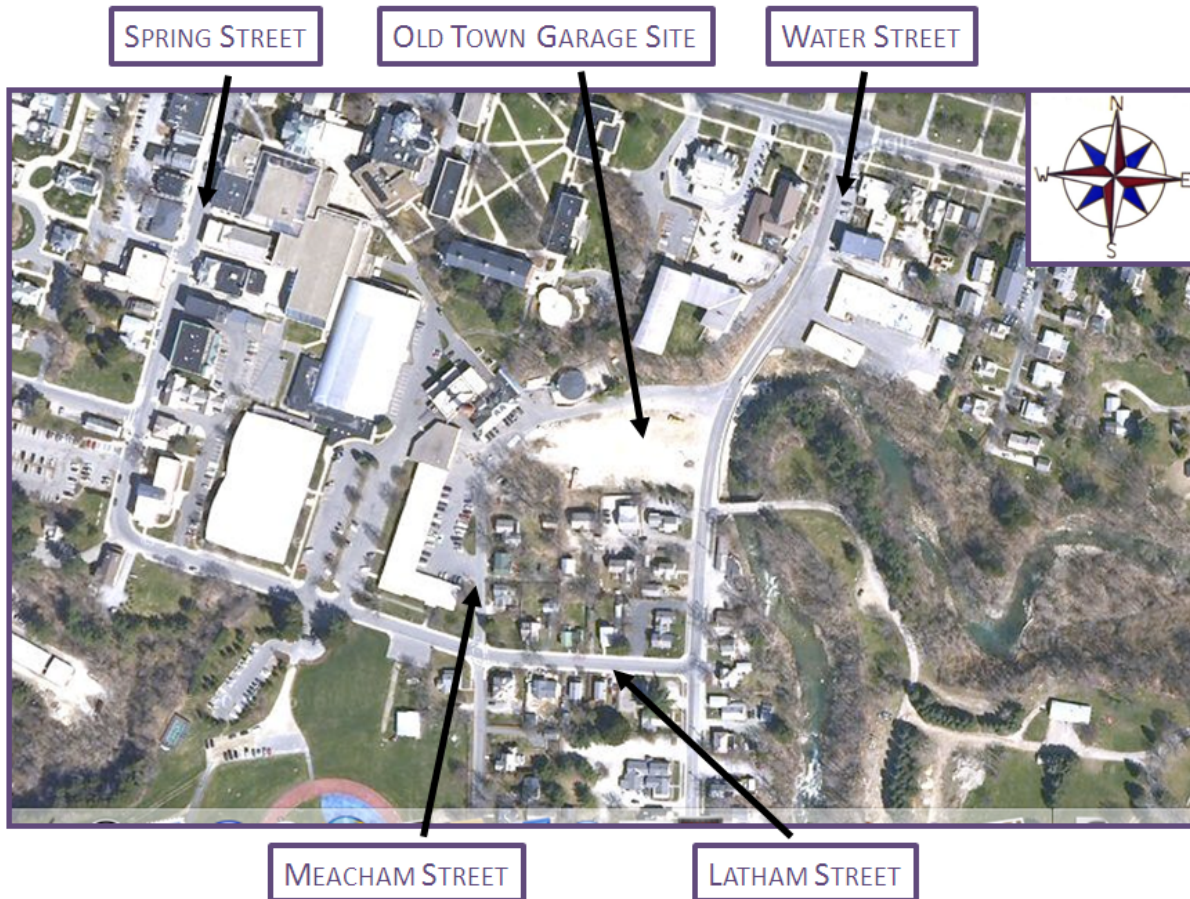
The goal of this project is thus to secure vibrancy for downtown Williamstown, while making the best use of what limited space it has left. Indeed, the first sentence of the Williamstown Master Plan (2002) emphasizes how “the increasingly competitive demand for [the town’s] limited resources” requires a thoughtful and comprehensive plan for what space it has (WMP, 1)—we hope to provide this foresight. The project will ultimately result in a number of benefits for the town, including:

- A vibrant, unified town center
- Increased well-being of community members
- Increased economic activity
- A positive step away from sprawl, and
- Depending on the project, an increase in the town’s tax base.

BACKGROUND

1. Site Description

Figure 1: Superblock and Old Town Garage Site



The Old Town Garage Site (see Table 1) is located on Water Street, between Route 2 and Latham Street and across from the Green River Linear Park. Currently owned by the town of Williamstown, this roughly one acre, triangular plot of land sits on the edge of the Williams College campus. This site is currently empty and is waiting for a development to be proposed.

The site is near the center of town, Spring Street. As a pedestrian crosses Spring Street (where there are many multi-use buildings, which will be mentioned later), and walks east, they would walk through the underused athletics courtyard at the back of the Williams College Museum of Art, the large parking lot by Facilities, and the Faculty Art Studio. Then, the site comes into view. The gravel and haphazardly parked cars that are scattered across this plot beautifully display the wasted opportunities of the Old Town Garage Site. Patches of green growth cover a portion of the east corner of the site, and spread thinly across the northern edge, but mostly the land is covered in gravel and dirt.

Table 1: Selected characteristics of Old Town Garage Site

	Current Uses
51,317 ft²	Informal parking
Dirt/gravel lot	Snow storage
Located at base of Water Street	Construction staging area
Located w/in Village Business District	Williams athletic equipment storage

A college-owned road (“Heating Plant Drive”) wraps around the north side of this site. It then curves south next to the backside of the Williams Building and Grounds facility and its idling or parked vehicles, until it becomes Meacham Street. Along Meacham Street, facing the B&G Building are three residential homes. The street continues south and intersects with Latham Street – the main road that moves east to west, and has the potential to improve the connection of Water Street with Spring Street. Latham Street ends at its connection with Water Street. Commercial and residential buildings are located along Water Street, north and south of the site (see Table 2). Directly to the east of the site, across Water Street, is the entrance to the Green River Linear Park. Mostly hidden

from view because of the structure of Water Street, the park has a pleasant green space, a small children's park and leads into a quaint, rolling cemetery.

The block as a whole, outlined by Mechem Street, Latham Street, and Water Street, is split between a section of residential homes, and the empty plot. This site is a hole, surrounded by homes, college buildings, restaurants, shops, a park and a cemetery. The following table lists the developments along Water Street and those of Spring Street, in order to clearly layout what is present and what this undeveloped site could potentially use.

Table 2: Inventory of downtown buildings, Fall 2009

Water Street Buildings	Spring Street Buildings
Accountant Office	College Buildings – Morgan Housing, Chandler Gym
Insurance, Oil, Attorney Offices	Williams Shop, Spice Root, Sushi Thai, (Residences above all)
Water Street Grill	Ephporium, St. Pierre's Barber, (Athletic Offices above)
Record Store	Papa Charlie's, Williams Newsroom, Jewelers, (Offices above, connected to college gym) Willinet TV
Verizon Office	Empty (future Subway), Hudson's Gallery, Harrsion Gallery (All with second floor offices/residences)
Tsubo Massage Therapist	Adams Block includes – Law Offices, empty (McClelland's Stationary), Hart's Pharmacist's, Clip Shop
Mountain Goat, Bike Shop	Zanna Clothing Store
3 Unmarked Buildings/Houses	2 Empty plots (one future Purple Pub)
Empty; Photography	Walden Building includes – Red Herring, Images Cinema, Mass MoCA Shop, West Winers and Spirits
Hot Tomatoes Pizza	Post Office
In Touch Spa	TD Bank North (offices and apartments above)
	Lickety Split, attached office buildings
	Helen's Bakery, Ephs Alley Shops (second floor residences)
	Dan Forth Building includes – empty launders,

	Sweaters/Antiques/Gifts shop
	The Log
	Attorney's Office/Williamstown Media
	B&L Building includes – Where'd You Get That, Tunnel City Coffee, Williams College H&R, Apartments

2. A History of Town Centers in Williamstown

Although “Spring Street” is commonly considered the center of town, we see that over time this town center has been incredibly dynamic. In 1750, lots in the plantation of West Hoosac were first offered for sale. The first Proprietors of what became Williamstown located their houses near Hemlock Brook. In 1762, the first tavern was built, on the current site of the CDE and across from the village green that served as Williamstown’s first town center. Main Street was gradually cleared of trees and North and South Streets were cleared. With this the center shifted gradually along Main Street, “...the eastward movement which has continued to this day” (*Williamstown* 9). Water Street was cut in 1761, and its location along the Green River made it the first commercial district. Water power made the location important—several mills and a mill-pond were built along Water Street. (*Williamstown* 79).

Spring Street began growing in 1846. It slowly transformed from “a street of homes to a street of business” through serving college students and town needs (*Alumni Review* 1926). A college bookstore (now Ephporium), a shoe store, a confectionary, and even a bath house were all early residents of Spring Street. A high school was also located where the Post Office now stands. (Burr, personal communication). The street eventually overtook Water Street as the center of commerce in the village. By 1931, “A person going to Spring Street could send a telegram via Western Union,

arrange for a delivery of coal or shoot a game of pool” (Carman 2001). Cole Avenue also developed as a town center due to its proximity to the busy Williamstown train depot and Hoosic River Mills.

One result of these dispersed town centers was that pedestrians could easily access all of their shopping needs in-town. Even as late as the 1940s the town centers were healthy: “When World War II veterans and their spouses set up housekeeping in Williamstown in the late 1940s with their new babies, they delighted in the convenience of small-town life. All their shopping needs could be met on foot on Water, Main, and Spring Streets” (*Williamstown* 486).

The advent of the automobile and the growth of large shopping centers changed all that. The most recent town center to develop is the Colonial Shopping Center, to the east of the village along Route 2. Boasting an organic food market, restaurants and a pharmacy, the shopping center is outside of easy walking distance and fronted by a large parking lot. By 2003, “residents no longer shopped on foot but drove or used the internet or catalogs...For groceries, they traveled to Stop & Shop and Price Chopper in North Adams; for general items and clothing they shopped...at Wal-Mart in North Adams and the Berkshire Mall in Lanesborough” (*Williamstown* 487). Shopping in-town has changed. Spring Street businesses reflect the town’s “transformation into a cultural destination,” while Water Street has revitalized into a street “geared largely towards the needs of a generation with leisure” (*Williamstown* 487).

3. Old Town Garage Site History

The Town Garage site is located at a nexus of local history. Water Street was laid out in 1761, when the French and Indian War had wound down (*Williamstown* 131). The cessation of devastating raids into the Hoosac Valley allowed the town to grow and develop. Water Street was the first major ‘spur’ of development off of the east-west axis of the Town Green (Burr, personal

communication). Currently, Christmas Brook runs through a culvert beneath the site. In the 1850s, the brook was dammed to form a small lake. This was used by college students and town residents for ice-skating in the winter. Christmas Lake lasted until sewer lines were installed in the area; the lake drained in 1904. For a short time in the 1860s, a town lock-up was located near the site.

The last building to occupy the site was the Town Garage. The site was leased by the town in 1960 and purchased in 1961. The Garage was the home of “the highway, water, and sewer department offices and storage for cemetery, highway, sewer, water, and welfare department vehicles” (*Williamstown* 479). Because of these uses, the ground may be contaminated with automotive runoff, as well as leakage from underground fuel tanks.

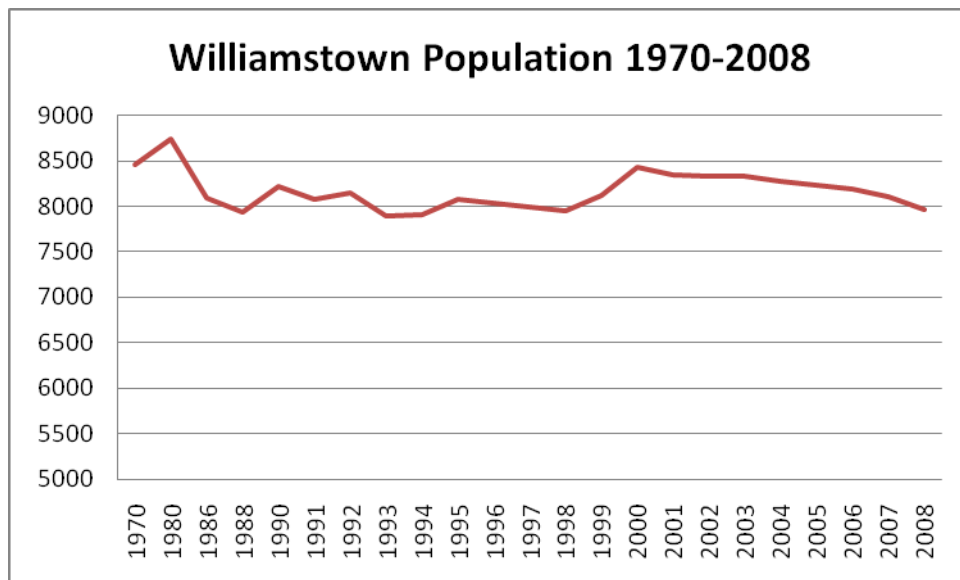
As retail expanded along Water Street, however, the Town Garage became regarded as an eyesore. A warning in 1988 by the Town Study Group gave notice that the DPW was rapidly outgrowing the site. The site was declared unfit for heavy use the next year but the authorization to build a new garage facility was not given by the Town Meeting. The DPW moved onto a property off of Simonds Road in 1997, and the old Town Garage was demolished in 2003. (*Williamstown*, 479)

4. Community Profile

Williamstown itself (incorporated 1765) is a town of 46 square miles situated in the northwest corner of Massachusetts, adjacent to Vermont to its north and New York to its west. CNN rated Williamstown as one of the “100 Best Places to Live” in 2007 (*CNN* 2007). The population as of 2008 was 7968 and has decreased 3.1% since 1990, and UMASS Amherst projections predicted a slight decrease to 7,501 by 2020 (Figure 4). The relative stability of Williamstown’s population can be contrasted with the ongoing rise in US population, 13.2% since 1990, and the majority of Berkshire county’s more significant population loss (Kelley 2008).

The Williamstown economy is based heavily upon being a college town and a popular destination for tourism. Williams College, a liberal arts undergraduate institution that employs many residents, provides 2000 student consumers and is integrated into the center of town. As of 2008, there were 2,137 undergraduate students. Forty percent of the student body is involved in athletics at Williams, demonstrating that there would be a fairly large portion of the student body using athletic facilities (such as a new field house) and a new path on a daily basis. The College also employs 1,087 faculty and full-time staff equivalent.

Figure 4: Williamstown Population from 1970-2008



Source Data: U.S. Census Bureau

Tourism in Williamstown is largely due to the many arts attractions in the area. Visitors are drawn by numerous museums in the area including the Francis and Sterling Clark Art Institute, Williams College Museum of Arts (WCMA), Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Arts (Mass MoCA) in adjacent North Adams, and further draws in nearby Stockbridge. Various performing arts events, including Williamstown's popular summer theatre festival, as well as outdoor opportunities (most notably attracting "leaf peepers" in the fall), draw additional tourists to town seasonally.

Age in Williamstown

As of the 2000 Census, the median age in Williamstown was 35.6 years, spot on with the national average of 35.3. However, since this figure includes Williams College students, who make up about a quarter of the town's population, the actual median age would be significantly higher for solely town residents excluding College students.

Race and Class in Williamston

Williamstown was 91.1% white in 2000 (compared to the national average of 75.1%), with 3.0% Asian and 2.6% black. Residents are highly educated (Table 3), with 88.8% having received high school diplomas (compared to 22.8% nationally), 53.6% having received bachelor's degrees (15.5% nationally) and an astounding 29.1% having received an advanced degree (8.9% nationally). Similarly, a high 52.8% of Williamstown residents are employed in "management, professional and related occupations" compared to the national average of 33.6%.

Perhaps correlated as a result is socioeconomic status in the town. Median household income is \$51,503 (compared to \$41,994 nationally). Only 38 of 8424 citizens (0.45%) received some sort of public assistance in 2000, versus a national average of 3.4% the same year; likewise, the percentage of families below the poverty level was 1.9% versus 9.2% nationally. Far from being a sign of community prosperity or redistribution, this may be one strong sign of an affordable housing

shortage in town, as interested low-income buyers are instead pushed to look at nearby towns like North Adams and Pownal.

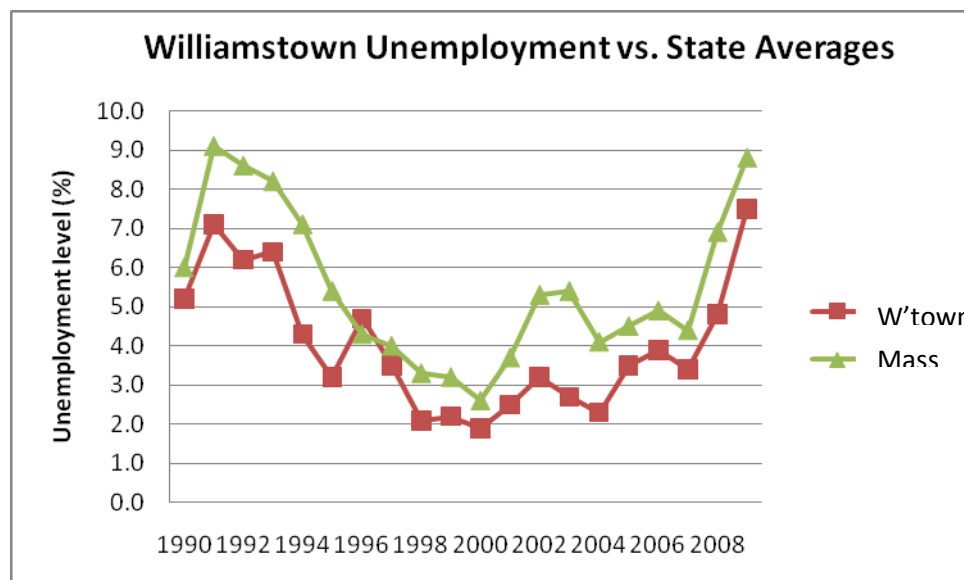
Despite this apparent wealth, unemployment has in fact increased from 1.9% in 2000 to 7.5% in 2009 (Figure 5), although remains slightly below the Massachusetts average. However, figure # clearly shows that Williamstown is not experiencing and has not experienced any disproportionate economic hardships over the past two decades.

Table 3: Percentage of residents with various advanced degrees

	<i>W'town</i>	<i>U.S. Avg</i>	Difference
HS	88%	22.80%	286%
Bachelor's	53.60%	15.50%	246%
Advanced	29.10%	8.90%	227%

Source Data: Massachusetts Municipal Profiles, 2007

Figure 5: Unemployment Rates in Williamstown and Massachusetts



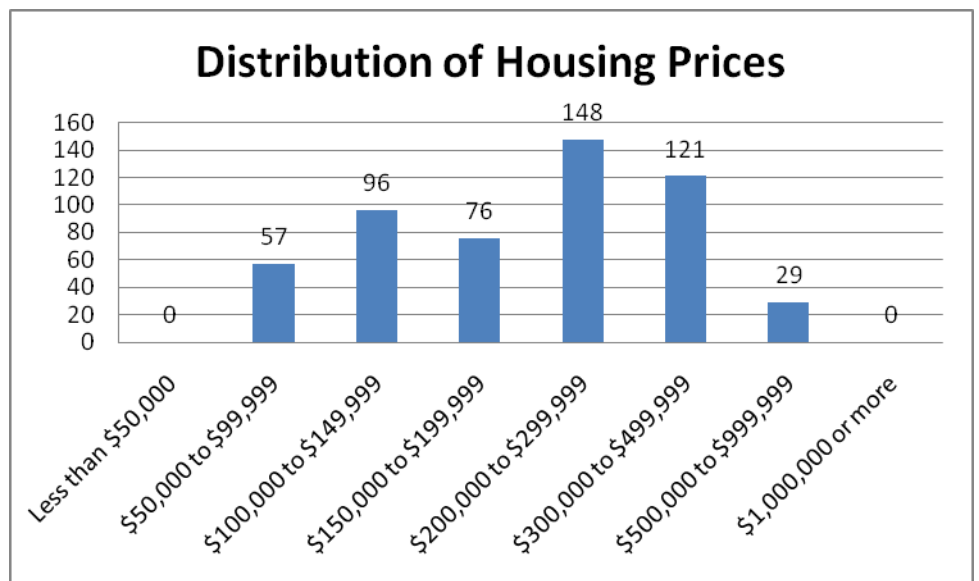
Property Composition

The majority of properties in the town are single family homes (see table 4), with 360 vacant plots, 183 condos, 137 multiple units, 116 commercial, 17 apartments, 14 industrial, 42 miscellaneous residential and 174 “other.” These numbers have stayed surprisingly consistent in the past several years, with most change coming in the form of 15-16 new single family houses a year (Massachusetts Municipal Profiles).

Among properties in Williamstown, a distinct portion of residential and commercial activity exists along Main Street (Route 2) east of the town rotary. That said, many other residents live on plots of rural land removed from the downtown area, and here housing density is low. The median home price in 2000 was \$225,700, compared to the national average of \$119,600 and state average of \$185,700 (Figure 6). Below (Table 4) is the distribution of housing prices in 2000. Like most Massachusetts municipalities, there is a constant tax rate across all property uses.

Table 4 & Figure 6: Parcel Count by Property Class in Williamstown, 2009; Distribution of housing prices in Williamstown, 2000

Property Class	Count
Single family	1893
Vacant land	360
Condos	183
Other	174
Multiple units	137
Commercial	116
Misc. residential	42
Apartments	17
Industrial	14
Total	2936



Source Data: Massachusetts Municipal Profiles, 2007

Why this matters

The above profile teaches us several lessons about Williamstown that are important to consider throughout the progression of this project. *First*, we are looking at a variety of different potential uses for the site, so any plans to serve residents should take into account Williamstown's particular demographic. This overall demographic is fairly easy to pick out by glancing at the above statistics or even simply by walking downtown: largely wealthy, white, and educated. *Second*, the economy is not significantly detached from outside trends; while there are concerns of waning business downtown, Williamstown is no worse off than elsewhere over the past several years. *Third*, a flat use tax means that the needed tax income the town receives from a given project will not depend on its type; any variations instead will be due to potential differences in the new assessed value of the property and any additional income generated by new residents or businesses. *Fourth*, there is clearly an affordable housing shortage in the town that shows up not only anecdotally but in housing prices and socioeconomic data. *Fifth*, any planner must weigh significantly the importance of the college to the town when making decisions or devising alternatives. Besides employment, the college provides a number of advantages for residents, with the ability to audit classes, attend lectures, use recreational facilities, attend sports games for free, and enjoy the spillover effects of intellectual activity and art, as well as the "youthful vibrancy" that college age individuals provide (Teri Lamb: personal communication). This site clearly abuts the college property, notably the facilities and heating plant buildings. *Finally*, since Williams students make up about a fourth of the town's population, this group's interests are important to consider in addition to non-college affiliated town residents.

Despite this numeric perception of needs, we return to our previous debate of who the project ideally should serve. While Williamstown is relatively homogenous, this homogeneity may not be

best for the town. As a result we must be further aware of the sometimes competing needs of various town residents and visitors. While facilitation of visitor activity must play a part in the economic goals of the project, it is important to note that tourist revenue is not necessarily stable. This again reflects the question of addressing needs, like an affordable housing shortage, or demand, like organic goods demanded by wealthy and intellectual individuals. Both of these are important decision-making factors with indistinguishable priority; Williamstown can be happy with what it has or take advantage of excess demand for its space and services. Finally, quantitative figures will be combined with the more qualitative information gathered from interviews with real estate experts to paint a more complete picture of Williamstown.

5. Additional Background Research

“Superblock”

The popular understanding of the word “superblock,” a term that frames our project, has shifted quite a bit over time. Defined using the average distance a child would walk to school, the term was initially a defining aspect of Clarence Perry’s 1920s vision of self-contained and decentralized neighborhoods that would provide for an individual’s daily activities and needs (Goldfield 1987). However, it has since become synonymous with the failures and destruction brought on by federal Urban Renewal projects throughout much of the century, under which isolated and uniformly built housing projects became the standard. In choosing the title “Superblock” this project hopes to transcend urban planning’s unsuccessful past by looking at the specifics of the idea of self-contained units Perry originally proposed, drawing inspiration only from those details that have stood the test of time, namely asserting a town center that provides for all of the needs of the Williamstown community.

Downtown Revitalization

As mentioned previously, Williamstown seeks to improve the vitality of its downtown area. There are numerous reasons to look at “urban infill” as a mechanism for this change—using existent or abandoned spaces instead of building outward, with the space to be “filled” in our case being that between Water and Spring Streets. As one commentator quips, “Density and infill development are no longer bad words in planning and local government management. When done properly, they are essential tools in creating places that people will be proud to manage” (Paetman 2005). Another agency echoes that higher density development—in particular, urban infill housing—stands as a “major strategy for achieving smart growth” (Danielson et al 2005) in that it limits a town’s environmental footprint and promotes health and community interaction. Besides these advantages, an inherent part of urban infill is the positive language needed to spark revitalization, with developers “seeking solutions that genuinely turn constraints into opportunities” (Danielson et al 2005).

Another key aspect of our plan is creating a unified downtown. The presence of a discernable “town center” is crucial for imparting residents and visitors alike with a sense of place as well as sustaining growth. Such a concept has become central to smart growth theorists looking at classic New England virtues for inspiration, who attest that “progressive management that places an emphasis on creating walkable, mixed use, architecturally interesting downtowns that have a sense of ‘place’ goes a long way in providing for the future of a community” (Paetman 2005). Our team holds that the habits spurred by technology and sprawl are not immutable, and that the classic “town”—an otherwise natural phenomenon that according Jim Kunstler (1996) disappeared along with the invention of the automobile—can still profoundly shape how its residents interact.

Executing coordinated and thoughtful building plans has furthermore become an important tool of town officials seeking to breathe new life into their municipalities. As the Charter of the New Urbanism states,

“We recognize that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive framework” (CNU 1996)

Smart Growth & New Urbanism

As just mentioned, one emerging tenor of urban planning—New Urbanism—is the concept of creating dense, mixed-use developments that bring together all of one’s daily needs into one walkable area such that transportation is minimized and community interaction and pedestrian access are maximized (CNU 1996). Urban infill is the technique used to achieve these goals in areas of existing development that is not sufficiently dense. New Urbanism itself has stated social goals related to improving a town’s sense of community, social equity, and the notion of common good (Talen 2002). Social improvements are accomplished when careful attention is paid during the planning process to the connection between the physical aspects of the site and the community that will be a part of it such that the physical space will foster a close-knit community (Talen 2002). Too often, planning does not even consider the people that will be using the space and how the physical aspects of an area will affect them.

“Smart Growth” and New Urbanism are planning concepts devoted to development based on walkability and mixed use development, two of the fundamental characteristics desired in newly renovated or built areas. An interesting perspective about these planning processes comes from an article by Kannan et al, real estate agents who wrote about the real estate market and the demand for smart growth communities (Online). They took surveys and concluded that demand for smart growth communities is much higher than its supply. According to the survey results, “...about 61 percent of people who indicate they will buy a house in the next three years would prefer to buy in what they

described as a smart growth community.” This shows that people value being able to walk to stores and services as well as the community feeling of a mixed use area. They also wrote that interest in smart growth or New Urbanist communities “varies by geography, economic and demographic fundamentals, and buyer profiles.” They also included some of the positive characteristics associated with smart growth living that are not frequently discussed, such as the fact that such properties are low maintenance and have health benefits. Kannan et al write, “Some planners and experts have persuasively argued that the proportion of overweight American increasing from 24% in 1960 to 64% in 2000 is a direct result of the dominance of low-density, automobile dependent suburban development.” With increased time spent walking and socializing outside, people in smart growth communities live healthier lives. As made evident by these writers, there are many other positives associated with smart growth development that are commonly overlooked.

It is our hope that this Superblock site will bolster the sense of community in Williamstown by improving the downtown area and creating closer social ties with the addition of a dense, mixed-use center of daily life.

Case studies

Hismen Hin-Nu Terrace, Oakland, CA:

Examples of New Urbanism are becoming increasingly abundant as this new age of planning catches on. One such example is a 1.5 acre site in Oakland, California called the Hismen Hin-Nu Terrace. This is a previously distressed community that was revitalized into a mixed-use area including 92 affordable rental homes, a community center, three courtyards, and commercial space that included an early childhood education center, nonprofit offices, a convenience store, and a marketplace for street vendors. The community was involved in interactive design workshops so that

they could play an active role in the redesign of the area; the community specifically chose a variety of environmentally friendly finishing products to use. The businesses included in this area and green space integrated through landscaping add to the vibrancy of the streets and make it seem like a safe, walkable, attractive area. Most importantly, this area's revitalization spurred the redevelopment of surrounding neighborhoods, including new housing, restaurants, and businesses. This case study highlights the potential for a project like that of the Williamstown Superblock to revitalize an underused or poorly used location successfully into a vibrant, attractive, comfortable mixed-use center of activity. This example provided both affordable housing and businesses, which is one of the potential plans for our project. This case also shows how revitalizing and improving one area and making it into a mixed-use location can spark improvements in the surrounding areas; we hope that by developing the Superblock, Spring Street and Water Street will both also be revitalized as a result.

Williamstown B&L Building

Another example of a recent mixed-use development right in Williamstown is the B&L Building at the base of Spring Street, completed in 2006. The site of a gas station abandoned in 2000, the B&L Building houses a coffee shop and a toy store on the ground floor, College offices on the second floor including Williams' Human Resources, and faculty apartments on the third. The building, owned by Williams College, currently serves as an "anchor" to Spring Street, drawing customers down the street due to the lure primarily of the coffee shop. Its mixed-use nature fits the character of the street it inhabits, something we want to emulate at the Town Garage site. Furthermore, Spring Street is currently undergoing a construction boom, as several buildings are being expanded or rebuilt with more office and retail space. This shows the continued vibrancy of the Williamstown business district, and might possibly be attributed to the anchoring affects of the B&L Building. Furthermore, the B&L Building won the 2006 Honor Award from the Western

Massachusetts Chapter of the American Institute of Architecture (http://www.wmaia.org/awards/awards_BLbuilding.html). This example proves that there clearly exists the potential for mixed-use developments to be successful in downtown Williamstown as far as attracting businesses and residents as tenants of such buildings as well as improving downtown vibrancy by attracting visitors and town residents to the area.

6. Relevant Law & Policy

Any development on the Old Town Garage Site would be affected by several legal issues. In most cases, any development would have to conform to the Williamstown Zoning Bylaw (ZB). The ZB would apply to site usage, regulation of building frontage and height and setback, and parking. The site is zoned within the Village Business District, an area which is “intended to accommodate a broad mixture of uses in a compact pedestrian-oriented environment” (Williamstown Zoning Bylaw 7). Commercial development should thus emulate the mixed-use design of businesses on Spring and Water Streets. If development were to incorporate Low Income Housing, the provisions of MGL (c) 40B would come into effect. Chapter 40B provides developers of Low Income Housing a way to streamline the planning process. If a town contains less than 10% affordable housing, 40B allows development to be denser than local zoning allowances. The site is not within a riparian zone or a buffer zone for application of the Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act.

Another law that may affect our site is the "Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act". This law provides Federal funding for several species of grants. An Assessment Grant would fund cataloging the site and determining its condition, as well as provide funds to conduct planning. Cleanup grants will cover any cleanup necessary. The recent history of our site

demands a thorough environmental analysis be conducted to determine the presence and levels of soil contamination, and the Brownfields Revitalization Act can help to fund this process.

III. INTERVIEW RESULTS

A. “PRELIMINARY” INTERVIEWS

1. Research Tool: Focused Interviews

Since our project encompassed many different areas of Williamstown life, it was necessary to take advantage of all sources of knowledge in the area. A key tool we used throughout this project was personal interviews. There were a few questions we asked of everyone, but in general we drafted unique questions for each individual interview, due to the fact that each person we interviewed was knowledgeable about different aspects of our project. For each meeting, we sent two members of our group; one primarily did the conversing while the other took notes.

Table 5: List of interviews conducted

INTERVIEWEES	
Lynne Blake	Ann McCallum
Andy Burr	Mary Morrow
Peter Fohlin	Cindy Poulin
Sarah Gardner	Diana Prideaux-Brune
Tim Kaiser	Harry Sheehy
Steve Klass	Kevin White
Terry Lamb	Michael Zeppieri

2. Real Estate

In order to determine the most appropriate way of revitalizing Williamstown's center and finding a use for the Old Town Garage Site, we attempted to determine what business was like in general and what the current demands included. We explored the state of the housing and commercial real-estate markets in Williamstown by conducting interviews with the three main realty companies in town: Williamstown Realty Group, Alton & Westall Agency, and Harsch Realty. We planned on using each group as a resource for our project in order to create a base for analyzing key market demands.

Our interviews commenced with questions aimed at forming a general understanding of the realtor's background the town, as a way to recognize the realtor's relationship with Williamstown. These realtors were vital in improving our comprehension of the residential and commercial properties in Williamstown. Because of the focus of our project, we discussed the main downtown area, Spring Street, and the area in which we hope to improve business activity, Water Street. The interview then flowed into discussing overall trends of the commercial and residential markets, and the reasons for current changes in these demands. As we hoped to present a basic design for development that was attractive and feasible, we used these realtors to investigate the demands in Williamstown, what has been missing, and of what there has been an oversupply.

Williamstown Realty Group

The first interview was conducted with the Williamstown Realty Group. One of the most striking facts from this interview in general, was simply the amount of time given up for our conversation. Two realty agents, Lynne Blake and Michael Zeppieri, were more than willing to talk to our group for an hour, displaying no sense of urgency to attend to their daily business. This simple fact acts as an appropriate depiction of the overall state of the market that we were soon to learn.

Mr. Zeppieri claimed, the economy is currently functioning in a manner that causes it to be incredibly difficult to receive a loan for development. He illustrated this fact with a story about one of his acquaintances, who needed new tires for his car. Instead of being able to find a loan for the \$400 purchase of new tires, it was easier for him to receive a loan to buy an entirely new car, in 72 payments. This difficulty in gaining loans unfortunately helps to keep real estate action close to stagnant.

Clearly, the Williamstown demographics also play a role in determining market behavior. Young residents do not stick around because there are few jobs here to keep the young residents in town. Mr. Zeppieri claimed that this leaves a great number of the Williamstown population hovering around the ages of 60-80. Developers are therefore hesitant to construct a new building and business, as the demographics may likely not support the new production. As Mr. Zeppieri has many businesses in the neighboring North Adams, he had many stories from business in that town that illustrated the sluggishness of the current economy. Mr. Zeppieri stated, “At peak business hours, you can roll a bowling ball down the main street [in North Adams] and not hit a single person.” He had a laundromat located in Williamstown, but was forced to move five years ago because he was losing money. Currently he uses many creative ways to find a profit, such as an arrangement with Williams’ students (*Easy Eph Laundry*) to pick up and deliver their laundry. Mr. Zeppieri’s personal business stories show how a limited population can regulate business decisions. Williamstown does not have a large population with large demands. This is why it is so important to pinpoint the demands that do actually exist.

However, Mr. Zeppieri and Ms. Blake’s testimony made it clear that certain demands do exist. The relatively new expansion of *Wild Oats* illustrates just that. Moving from a smaller location in the Colonial Plaza, the new location of this store, further east along Route 2, closer to the

downtown area, has been able to provide more services to its customers as a result of the enlarged development. This organic food store has been able to take advantage of the niche of Williamstown residents that prefer this type of food, and appreciate the proximity of the store to the center of the town although not within walking distance to support new urbanist building techniques.

The realtors we interviewed described the potential for continued growth as well, citing the Cable Mills Complex on the south end of Water Street. Both realtors stressed the need for new attractions to the street. Their realty business is located on the north end of the street, in a prime location for catching the eye of the heavy traffic of Route 2, but the rest of the street curves southward and does not provide this luxury of flowing traffic to the other businesses.

Both realtors were excited by the prospect of developing the Old Town Garage Site. While they admitted the town has a small population and limited demands, which “big box stores” and the Internet tend to satisfy, there are some businesses that could succeed, through years of hard work. They declared that it would take many years to turn a profit, but a profit is possible. They used *The Browns* clothing store (located near the north end of Water Street) as an example of years of hard work that created a successful business originally expected to fail. We have questioned whether *The Browns* is actually a successful business because it seems that there are rarely people in the store and it seems rather overpriced. The businesses they claimed to be lacking in town (while they say are definitely neither bars nor banks) included moderately priced clothing stores, particularly menswear and shoes. In our opinion, these retail suggestions were too specific and perhaps personal preference was too prominent of a feature in these realtors’ opinions. In the end, we agreed with the realtors that the Old Town Garage Site would also have a better chance of success if designed for mixed-use, but were not very enthused by their ideas of what specific stores should go in the development.

To aid in this hypothetical new development, the realtors stressed the importance of improved walkways. As their business occupies a building on Water Street, they are clearly interested in an investment in any feature that would help to increase pedestrian traffic. An improved connection between Spring Street and Water Street could make the town look busier, thereby attracting even more visitors. People enjoy going to places that appear populated! Mr. Zeppieri and Ms. Blake agreed with the benefits of improved walkability, which are expanded upon within this paper, saying that it would allow better connections to the heart of the downtown. Much of Williamstown is limited--population, consumption, parking and transportation--but successes like *Wild Oats* prove that when specific needs are well-met a profitable business can be supported.

Alton & Westall Realty Group

We met with two realtors from the Alton & Westall real estate agency. These two women, Terry Lamb and Cindy Poulin, were very knowledgeable about the town and College and the relationship between the two. They gave us some insight into the supply and demand of the real estate market in Williamstown and some trends that have occurred. Ms. Lamb stressed, “There was a time when there wasn’t a rental space to be had in Williamstown.” She said this was during the “Dotcom Era,” but that is no longer the case because the economy is not as strong as in the past. There are open commercial spaces currently in the town, but they did not recognize a strong trend in what types of businesses are leaving and which ones are successful within the town.

It was interesting to talk to these women in real estate because they appeared to have a very different mindset from other interviewees. Similarly to Williamstown Realty Group’s desire for a men’s shoe store, these women focused on very specific businesses that they would like to see in Williamstown such as a bakery or a children’s clothing store. Again, we questioned the ability for

stores like this to succeed because there is already a bakery on Route 2 and children's clothing does not attract the majority of town residents to the location. College students and many elderly persons do not need to purchase children's clothing. These agents did not seem to care as much about the more general use of the vacant Old Town Garage Site and strategies to better the town center as a whole.

Ms. Poulin and Ms. Lamb wanted to encourage us to plan for an anchor store to draw people to the new development. They told us that the Old Town Garage Site needed to be developed before the introduction of the path so that there would be something to draw the people to use the pathway between the two areas. They did not think that the stores and restaurants to the north on Water Street are close enough to draw people to use the path and connect the business areas of the two streets.

Another thing they found very important was to remember the prominence of Williams College students in the town and also the characteristics of the other citizens. They stressed that Williamstown citizens enjoy the environment and outdoors. For the most part, people enjoy walking outside and the Williamstown downtown and community. They also wanted to encourage us to consider the importance of the arts and tourism within the town. The College and tourism are main aspects of the community and consumption that cannot be forgotten when planning for revitalization of the town center.

Harsch Associates Interview

Harsch Associates is the realty group furthest away from our site, located on 311 Main Street, across from *Wild Oats*. We met with an agent, Kevin White, who was able to answer many of our questions, although we were not able to conduct the interview in the same manner that we had intended for the realtor group's owner instead. Mr. White spoke to us mostly about the Cable Mills

Complex on Water Street, of which Harsch Associates are developing. This casual interview was enlightening with regard to the future of downtown Williamstown and Water Street.

The estimated opening of the Cable Mills is now, after a few delays, scheduled for February 2011. Prices of units range from \$260,000-\$750,000. Mr. White also stated that of the eighty two total new homes planned, there are twelve “moderate income” units, yet he was not able to give us an exact figure for the cost, only stating that the prices would be substantially lower than the market price. The units that have already been sold have been purchased by a mix of people, some with connections to Williamstown, while others will be newcomers to the area. The uniting trait of these buyers is that they understand the vision for the Cable Mills. As no model has been finished, Harsch Associates is relying on simulations and the imagination of consumers to depict the structure and ambiance of the apartments.

From the interview we learned that The Cable Mills complex will be the key player in the rejuvenation of Water Street. Once open, it will be a grand new attraction highlighting Water Street. As mentioned earlier Mr. White informed us that there are plans to improve roadwork and sidewalks upon the opening of Cable Mills. When finished, the apartments, townhouses, and duplexes will be located in a scenic setting, next to a river and improved green spaces which will be a great improvement from the current grungy looking old factory buildings. This development will greatly affect the possibilities for business on the Old Town Garage Site. As the Cable Mills provide many new residences, the demand for one-level housing units will most likely be drastically reduced. However, Mr. White stated that more affordable rental units should still remain in demand, as the Cable Mills will not fulfill this need. Also, the plan for the Cable Mills currently does not include any commercial or retail space, which signifies that there could still be a need for more new businesses at the Old Town Garage Site. As the apartments will create a great draw to Water Street,

our site will have the benefit of increased pedestrian traffic to the area. The Cable Mills Apartments development will break the way into improving Water Street and revitalizing the entire town center of Williamstown.

Summary

The realtors of the area provided a unique view into the commercial and residential demands of the town, as well as more personal descriptions of the characteristics of the town. All realtors from the three groups, Williamstown Realty, Alton and Westall, and Harsch Associates, clearly conveyed their wealth of knowledge of the town and College activity to us.

The realtors' insight into the business demands of the town was useful in deciding upon our final design suggestions for the Superblock. They were most helpful in making suggestions for the development of the Old Town Garage Site. They supported the idea of a mixed-use development for the site based on their knowledge of the current economy and business demands. The more business the site could hold, the more likely it would succeed. One specific business, or meeting one specific demand, would not result in a sufficient amount "revitalization" for Williamstown. The realtors interestingly had very specific ideas what they would like to see in a new downtown building, with suggestions that included a men's clothing store, a children's clothing store, a bakery, along with a quality steakhouse, to name just a few.

Also highlighted throughout the interviews was the fact that the developer must understand the demographics of Williamstown. It is important to realize the large number of College students in the town, and their specific demands. Another key group includes tourists within Williamstown. The influx of tourists during the summer theater shows and the fall "leaf-peeping" provides another base for consumption. Although important, the realtors emphasized that the businesses in

Williamstown must be able to rely upon consumers besides those of the tourists. Tourists come and go, but the residents are the main support of the business.

Overall, these interviews were helpful, but we did not get much of the specific information we were looking for. We desired some more concrete data about the types of businesses that have failed and succeeded in the area and some projections for why they did. With increased attempts at finding this information, we have found that market research is not readily available and possibly should be completed in order to learn more about the success of commercial spaces in downtown Williamstown.

3. Williams College Officials

A key focus of our project was talking to College officials about the future plans of the College and also about their knowledge of the community and how the school and town can work together. We needed to find out the overall plans for the College, as well verify rumors of specific plans involved with the athletic buildings and fields within and in close proximity to the Superblock. To get this information we set up interviews with Harry Sheehy, the Athletic Director, Steve Klass, the Vice President of Operations, and Diana Prideaux-Brune, Associate Vice President for Facilities. Steve Klass and Diana Prideaux-Brune ended up suggesting meeting with us simultaneously which ended up being very beneficial and useful for obtaining specific details we desired.

Harry Sheehy, Director of Athletics

We met with Harry Sheehy first and he opened our eyes to some new possibilities for improving the new Superblock. Our group, along with our client, Ann McCallum, was under the impression that the College would not be interested in developing the land of the Old Town Garage Site. Contrary to this belief, Mr. Sheehy showed great interest in parts of the site for possible athletic

facility development. He enlightened us about the great need for facilities that the athletic department currently has. The College needs a new fitness center, locker room facilities, a new field house, indoor tennis courts, improved ski rooms, increased office space, and sufficient meeting areas. Although some renovations can be made within existing structures, these new additions will require more land use and construction as well. A plan for these new buildings does not currently exist, but Mr. Sheehy sees the space of the Old Town Garage Site as very attractive for potential new athletic development.

It was also important to talk to Mr. Sheehy about the plans of the athletics buildings that already exist within the area so that we could plan for our path to connect Spring Street and Water Street. Our proposed path goes right between athletic buildings and other College property. Mr. Sheehy was especially encouraging of the path because he believed it would supply better connections between the athletic buildings within the area and those to come in the future. We learned that the Athletics Department has discussed the demolition of the current Towne Field House and the construction of a new one oriented parallel to Latham Street instead of where it currently lies parallel to Spring Street. This would require the removal of the Facilities building on Latham Street, which would improve the feasibility of the path we have designed. This would also allow for more space between the Lansing–Chapman Ice Rink and Towne Field House for the path and possibly a nice green space to draw people in.

Mr. Sheehy also helped us understand some of the difficulties associated with parking in the area. For basketball and ice hockey contests, there is often times a lack of available parking within the area. By moving the field house, and the demolition of the Facilities building, there would be more space within the middle to supply parking which could be used for athletic contests, the Williams College Museum of Art, along with general commercial use. Mr. Sheehy encouraged this

idea because he said it is beneficial aesthetically to the area because it puts the parking inside a series of buildings so that it is more hidden and does not provide an eye sore.

Stephen Klass, Vice President of Operations

Diana Prideaux-Brune Associate Vice President of Facilities

We interviewed Stephen Klass and Diana Prideaux-Brune simultaneously. Our primary goal of this interview was to determine whether there were any plans for the College that we were unaware of. Specifically we were interested in whether the Facilities building on Latham Street was ever going to come down since we were told that most of the Facilities operation would be moving to an off-campus site in the near future. They informed us that this Facilities building would not be taken down until there is a viable plan for another building or another use of this space. While Facilities will be moved mostly off-campus, they will need to maintain some sort of on-campus base to keep some of their vehicles and supplies. Therefore, unless another use is found for the space, such as the construction of a new field house, the building will stay standing in its current location. This apparent flexibility of location and lack of opinion for whether the building stays standing on Latham Street was encouraging for our ideas specifically involving the path. Basically, Ms. Prideaux-Brune was optimistic that this building will eventually come down either completely or partially giving us confidence that our proposed path would be possible. She also was careful to remind us that the Heating Plant, which abuts the Old Town Garage Site on the north side of the property, is the only building on campus that absolutely cannot ever move. She reminded us to consider that since this plant has large vehicles coming in for maintenance or to make deliveries, we must keep in mind how close the path will be to the heating plant because we do not want the pedestrians to be affected by potentially dangerous vehicles.

Mr. Klass and Ms. Prideaux-Brune stated that the town and College are not necessarily ready to prepare a plan for what is going to go in the Old Town Garage Site because there is so much uncertainty with the already existing infrastructure and possibilities of changes within the block as a whole that it would be difficult to properly plan for the smaller site to effectively unite and revitalize the area. Like Mr. Sheehy, they determined a need for more parking in the area to serve athletics events, visitors to the Williams College Museum of Art, along with the overall commercial district and whatever is developed in the Old Town Garage Site. They suggested a multi-level garage going in somewhere in the block, but distanced away from the street so that it wouldn't be aesthetically detrimental to the downtown area. After the completion of our plans, we realized that this may be difficult with spatial limitations, but have found other creative ways of adding more parking to the area. We asked them to look at the possibilities of modifying the use of the Meadow Street block to create a more united business district since Williams College currently owns several of the houses on the edge of the block along Meham Street and across Latham Street on the side by Weston Field. They admit that while the College does not own a couple of the houses in this area, they could easily consider purchasing them if the land became desirable for their plans.

When we asked Ms. Prideaux-Brune, as a planner herself, what her ideal use of this space would be, she first said that, similar to Mr. Sheehy's vision, the new field house should be rotated such that its length would run along Latham Street. She envisioned a path running along the opposite long side, which could be extended to reach the Old Town Garage Site. She thinks the Old Town Garage Site should include mixed-use buildings with stores on the first level and apartments on the upper levels. Ms. Prideaux-Brune also sees a parking garage being built behind any buildings, but did not really provide us with a specific location. Finally, she would like to see the Meadow Street block completely rebuilt because it is currently a poorly used space in the town center and in

desperate need of repair. Again, Ms. Prideaux-Brune did not have any suggestions how this could be completed, but it was simply her perfect world solution to the problem.

Finally, we mentioned to Mr. Klass and Ms. Prideaux-Brune our proposed path and our once consideration of removing a portion of The Log in order to widen the entrance of the path to make it more appealing and draw pedestrians down it. They were both supportive of the route, but were unsure whether we would really need to remove any part of The Log to make it work. Firstly, they commented that in order to make The Log more usable in the future, which is a goal of the College, it would most likely need to be expanded which is in opposition to our idea. The College has also considered moving the building elsewhere on campus because it is somewhat out of place on Spring Street and could be better used if it was surrounded by more College buildings rather than by town buildings because of the potential for noise complaints or other town against College conflicts. Another caution associated with widening the opening of the path included the potential for someone, someday, to try and drive down the path. From their experience, this is inevitable in paths with widened openings and would destroy our desire of making the path safe and walkable. Instead, we thought of ways to make this path attractive so that people want to walk down it, and if such techniques are implemented successfully then a widened path opening would not be necessary.

Note: Another important idea, although somewhat unrelated is that Mr. Klass was asking us about the current Williams' bookstore situation. We all agreed that the conditions are undesirable and in need of improvement. They have been discussing the possibility of making a larger bookstore that would not only sell textbooks but also Williams apparel and other merchandise. Because College paraphernalia is often associated with sporting events, they thought that an ideal location for such a store would be close to the new field house, such as on the Old Town Garage Site serving as the anchor attraction.

Summary

The interviews with College officials taught us a lot about how the College plans. From talking to Harry Sheehy in the Athletics Department, we learned that there is no athletic plan on paper, but there are still many ideas and needs for athletic facilities. When talking to Diana Prideaux-Brune and Steve Klass it was clear that there is no master plan for the rest of the campus either, but they are aware of the athletic needs as well along with other small changes that College needs to make in the downtown area. It doesn't appear that the College has any major ideas for the near future after the completion of the Stetson-Sawyer Project. Again, we learned that the College is not completely disinterested in the Old Town Garage Site like previously thought.

Another important part of communicating with the College officials involved the discussion of the path and their perception of the utility that such a connection between the two streets would have. In both meetings it was clear that cooperation between the town and College is key to the planning and revitalization of the Superblock because the property lines are so intertwined and benefits and costs are so interrelated.

4. Other Preliminary Interviewees

Mary Morrow, Chamber of Commerce

We tried to get market information for the downtown area of Williamstown by talking to people involved in the Williamstown Chamber of Commerce. Mary Morrow was a useful person to talk to, but did not have any more information about specific studies and market information for the town. She discussed trends and ideas and cited the particularly successful businesses such as *Tunnel*

City and Where'd You Get That?. She attempted to explain to us why she believed these businesses were successful and her beliefs on what types of places could be successful in the future.

She also explained to us more about what the Chamber of Commerce does. They work to bring business together so they can buy necessary business products in bulk and save money. The Chamber helps them collaborate in order to better all of Williamstown's businesses for the overall unity and vitality of the downtown area and economy as a whole. It was interesting to learn about these efforts because they correspond with our ideas of improving the entirety of the Superblock and Williamstown's downtown in order to improve the economic situation and community vibrancy.

It was interesting to hear Ms. Morrow's opinions on how the Superblock can be improved and what should be developed in the Old Town Garage Site because she is not involved in planning at all and had many different opinions. She wanted to see a lot of green space, parks, gardens, and other attractive contributions to the downtown area. She was quite concerned with the empty store fronts on Spring Street and Water Street so she was not encouraging that more commercial space be built.

Andy Burr, Burr and McCallum Architects

Another notable interviewee was Andy Burr. He helped guide us towards historical documents related to our topic along with providing us with extensive background information of Williamstown in general. He taught us specifically about the center of Williamstown and how it has changed over time. Most importantly, he led us to the Williamstown Local House of History which was where we are able to obtain ample information that was relevant to our project in order to fully understand the history and scope of planning in Williamstown.

B. “LATE-STAGE” INTERVIEWS

1. Town Officials

Later in our research process, we decided to meet with some town officials and representatives to discuss our ideas, learn more about the market situation, and note what they believed the most important needs of Williamstown were. Most importantly we sought advice about the ideas we were considering (described later in Section III) and the possible legal and political obstacles they might face, including verifying that they were not overlooking any necessary regulations.

Tim Kaiser, Director of Public Works

We were advised by Ann McCallum to meet with Tim Kaiser to go over our proposed designs. We wanted to make sure that we were aware of all the specific site constraints associated with the Superblock and specifically for building on the Old Town Garage Site. We were concerned about underground restrictions and possible contamination from the old use. Besides these concerns, we wanted to make sure we had considered all necessary regulations such as setbacks and parking regulations. Lastly we wanted to ask him about who takes on certain costs such as road building and pipe movement in order to develop an area.

Mr. Kaiser was very knowledgeable and helpful in terms of knowing everything off the top of his head that we would need to consider for the Old Town Garage Site. He had maps ready for us that showed sewer lines along with locations of old oil spills. He informed us that there have been old tanks found underground, leaking. The tanks sites that were discovered were properly cleaned up, but the entire site has not been assessed and he informed us that further clean up could be necessary.

He told us that there are sewer lines running through the site connected to Meadow Street and through towards Spring Street. These cannot be built on and would have to be moved for development to occur directly above these lines. If the town wanted to make the site more appealing and attract a developer, they could pay for this movement of pipes, but more typically Mr. Kaiser informed us it was the responsibility of the developer.

We also talked about the logistics of constructing a new public road within the town since some of our designs incorporate a Meacham Street extension. He informed us that Williamstown generally does not take on projects of building new roads and that the financial responsibility of this would also be put on the developer if this design was desired. We were also reminded again that this Meacham Street extension goes through College property and therefore this issue would have to be addressed as well.

Mr. Kaiser looked over our designs and made sure we were aware of all possible requirements such as setbacks, plantings, lighting, and parking. He reiterated how much space these requirements take up and wanted to make sure we were aware of all of this and had incorporated it into our drawings. Mr. Kaiser was nice enough to send us on our way with copies of some relevant maps that are displayed in the appropriate areas of this work.

Peter Fohlin, Town Manager

We met with the Town Manager, Peter Fohlin, in order to get his feedback on our site designs. He stated strong opinions about the area and made it clear that he has no desire to develop the Old Town Garage Site until the right use for the space is proposed. He encouraged creativity and ideas outside the box rather than simple mixed-use developments that are the easy answer and have been proposed and rejected in the past. He tried to teach us about the importance of the long term

affects of all aspects of town planning. He wants to find a use for that space that will benefit the town in the long run and help to revitalize the town center. He feels that putting the right development in this area could help the entire economy of Williamstown by spreading out activity within the Village Business District and contributing to community relations within the town. He wants a proposal that would achieve all of these goals, but he does not believe he has seen the right idea as of now.

In order to develop this area and improve the entirety of Williamstown's Center, Mr. Fohlin thinks it is important for the College and town to plan the area together. The Superblock is similar to a puzzle with different pieces of town and College land. He strongly believes that they need to plan together in order to do the right thing for the town as a whole. Mr. Fohlin informed us that he and other town representatives informally meet with College officials frequently and that there is a good relationship between the two parties. He feels that there could still be improvements in the communication and planning techniques between the town and College, but wanted to make sure we were aware that there are efforts being made currently.

Mr. Fohlin encouraged us to be more creative with our ideas. At the time of the meeting we only had designs for four different mixed use developments on the Old Town Garage Site along with the proposal of our path. We were under the impression that some of our other ideas such as a College athletics use were too extreme and unrealistic. After meeting with Mr. Fohlin, it became clear that taking risks in terms of proposals and designs can lead to great things. He encouraged our creativity and that we try to think of more unique ideas that could benefit the town at a much more significant rate than simply tax revenue from retail space and housing. We then brought our athletic design back into the idea and incorporated an idea of a museum like attraction for the site.

Summary of Town Officials

Overall the town officials taught us about the feasibility of developing the Old Town Garage Site along with many problems related to the improvement of the block as a whole and the current state of the Superblock. We learned about the difficulties associated with the different ownership of land in the block and specifically that the College property would present a problem for making changes. They also informed us about more specific regulations such as parking and setback requirements. We also learned to be more creative with our proposals and designs instead of playing it safe with simple mixed-use developments. Lastly, the importance of College and town relations was reiterated within these meetings in order to successfully revitalize downtown Williamstown.

2. Classroom Contacts

Sarah Gardner, Associate Director of Environmental Studies at Williams College, Member of Conservation Commission

Throughout our project we also drew a great deal from our Professor and Conservation Commission member, Sarah Gardner. Before we were given our specific project assignment, in class, Professor Gardner introduced us to the practices of urban and town planning. She supplied us with background information surrounding different environmentally related planning strategies such as New Urbanism and Smart Growth. Both her theoretical or academic background in the subject along with her practical background as an involved town member who serves on committees allowed her to advise us throughout this project in many ways. She frequently helped us determine who to interview and where to look for specific information. Her guidance came throughout the semester and was not based on one specific interview like the others, but she answered our questions as they came and pointed us in the right direction. Professor Gardner was able to guide us along throughout

this project as an academic scholar in the field of environmental planning along with being an involved town member with great knowledge of the people and tendencies of the area.

Ann McCallum, Burr and McCallum Architects, Member of Williamstown Planning Board

Like Sarah Gardner, our client Ann McCallum guided us throughout the semester and provided us with lots of planning insight. Initially she provided us with lots of background information and history of the Superblock as a whole along with specifics for the Old Town Garage Site. She presented us with some designs and ideas she had for the reorganization and therefore revitalization of the downtown area. Ms. McCallum's views came more from an architectural perspective with a more specific focus on the specific buildings within the space rather than the more general idea of what should change and be done to improve downtown Williamstown.

Ms. McCallum was an asset to our team in many ways other than her architectural skills. As a member of the Williamstown Planning Board, she was very familiar with regulations and requirements for different developments which helped us guide our way through our plans and ideas for the center of Williamstown. As a part of this board, she had many connections to town officials and was able to suggest people for us to meet with in order to gain more relevant information to the project. After our research, we moved on to making site designs that Ms. McCallum guided us through. She presented us with ways of putting plans together with specific design features and guidelines in order to make our designs realistic.

Again, because of Ms. McCallum's knowledge and familiarity with the planning process and specific area we were dealing with, she was able to help us throughout the semester to determine our final proposals and suggestions. We did not interview her once, but met with her frequently to consult and determine next steps throughout the project.

IV. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES

A. WHOLE-BLOCK PLANS

1. Background

After our preliminary research and information gathering, we came to the conclusion that our group had a third task: in addition to finding an optimal pathway and design for the Old Town Garage Site, the Superblock as a whole (again, the main downtown block, outlined by Spring Street to the west, Latham Street to the south, Water Street to the East, and Route 2 to the north) could use some reorganization. Overall, our vision is to suggest improvements that would encompass and benefit the entire block as a whole unit. We wanted to come up with a plan that would benefit both the town and the college, mainly by taking care of the College's need for a new, larger field house and attempting to forge a physical and conceptual connection between Spring Street and Water Street. Before we begin, we will reiterate several logistical and conceptual obstacles that have faced the project from the beginning:

Obstacles

Lack of a clear pathway: There is no clear path linking these two commercial streets. Because of this, a curious pedestrian hoping to visit both ends of Williamstown "center" will be met with a slew of obstacles—a maze of college buildings, hills, stairs, and parking lots blocking his path. Some of these obstacles will be harder than others to move, and may depend on future plans (below). In this sense there has been an unfortunate lack of coordination between private developers, town officials and the college.

Future and present plans: Most of the obstacles that lie between the two streets are college-owned, and some are slated to be removed or rebuilt in the near future. In a broader sense, our plans

will depend on the College's *own* plans for its buildings in and around the Superblock. Our goal is thus one of maximum communication with the College and openness to a range of compromises. Furthermore, one project on Spring Street is already underway—the construction of a commercial plaza to house the new Purple Pub, among other establishments. This influx of retail and restaurant may have a negative effect on the demand for more shops in the garage site. While the timing is a bit off, given a few more months this could serve as a natural experiment for the elasticity of commercial space; i.e. an answer to the question, “If you build it, will they come?” Also being constructed is the Cable Mills property down the street of the town garage site, a complex that may absorb some excess moderately-priced housing demand. These plans, past and present, shall play a key role in the design of our site.

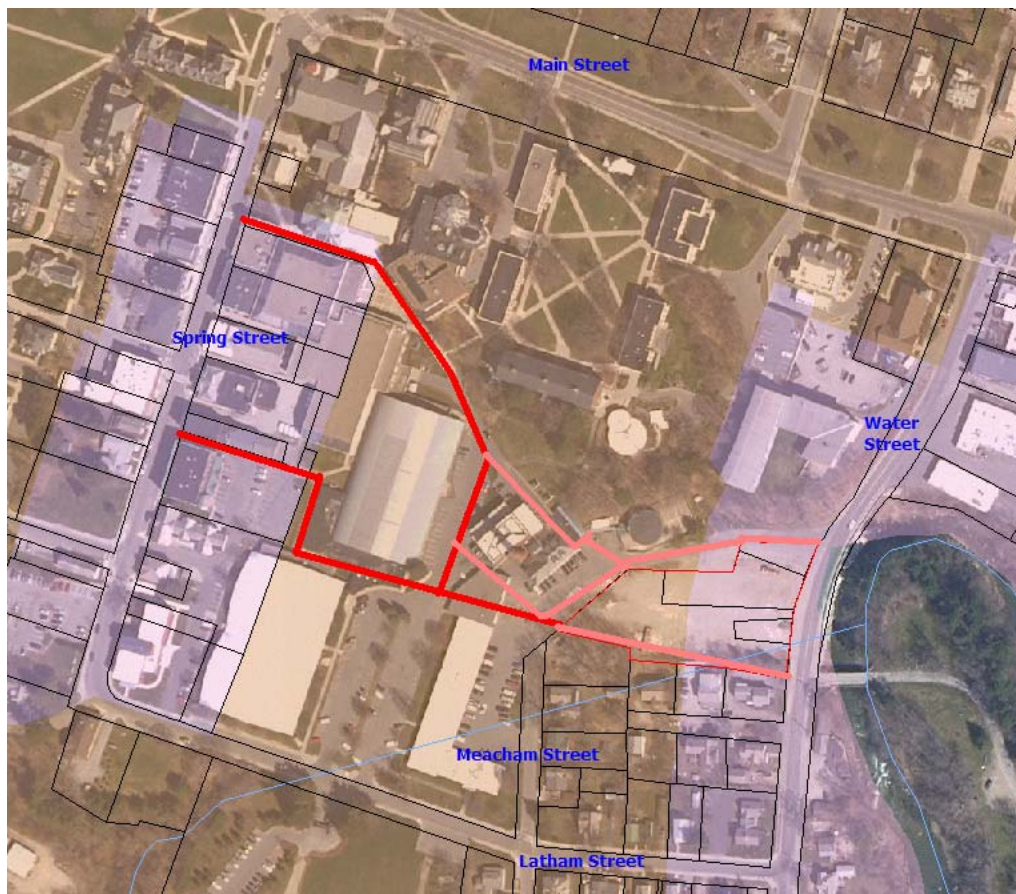
Other site-specific constraints: Given that the site has housed a heating plant, coal and vehicle storage, and gas pump in the past, there is potentially a brownfield below the surface of this pavement; still, while perhaps snaring construction the necessary cleanup would ultimately provide a great service to the town. The rerouting of Christmas brook underground (see below) beneath the site may also limit the reach of sewage systems and the digging of foundations.

Developer risk: As the tenor of our interviews and the failed RFP show, clearly there is something intangible holding developers back from utilizing the site. Indeed, one would think that attracting developers should be easy—as one architect commentator argues, “There’s big money in small urban infill sites” (Barista). However, in practice the start-up costs still seem prohibitive for many developers. As Gyourko & Rybczynski (2000) explain, New Urbanist projects have a “relatively high perceived risk” and thus “relatively high required rates of return, which in turn require these projects to generate cash flow quickly to be financially attractive to investors” (733).

Any plan thus needs to address this perceived risk head-on and potentially provide early capital investment.

Ordering: Implementing a larger strategy falls into a “chicken or the egg” conundrum, whereas it is unclear which should be tackled first: the *lot*, or the *larger plan*. The two are undoubtedly intertwined—on one end, an already established infrastructure between the two streets will help ease some of the worries of developers we hope to attract; on the other end, the lot is a key piece of the puzzle and is a property the town can act on much more immediately. Moreover, construction on one may be inconsistent with further plans in the future.

Figure 7: Log and Poppa Charlie’s pathway options, with Latham Street at bottom



2. Pathway Options

While a focus is on unifying downtown Williamstown, our project was essentially tasked to two groups of decisions: which pathway to install and what to construct on the town garage site. For the pathway (Figure 7) we narrowed our focus down to three options, based upon preliminary evaluations of demand and feasibility from our basic data collection.

Pathway Option #1: No change / Revamped Latham Street

While evaluating any option it is important to consider the “null” in the situation. In this case we must look at the route to Water Street as it exists now along Latham Street. Latham runs east to west from the base of Spring Street until it intersects with Water Street, passing by the field house, B&G, Weston Field space, and single-family and duplex residences. This route would be made more attractive and “walkable,” with streetlamps and wider sidewalks among other cosmetic additions.

On the positive side, as it is an existing route (A) there are no physical obstacles that need to be dealt with; (B) its construction does not depend on College plans (although as mentioned previously, we look forward to working with the College), (C) costs of revamping the route would be minimal. The route also logically connects pedestrian traffic to the future Cable Mills site. Unfortunately, there are several key problems: It is an incredibly long walk (1350 ft measured to the center of our lot), and not an obvious one to get to our new site; pedestrians would have to turn down Meacham Street to get there. Moreover the entire way has little to “draw” pedestrians towards Water

Street, with no commercial or public space and little feasibility of constructing it, given the long distance.

Pathway Option #2: Pappa Charlie's-Williams Athletics Complex

A second option we considered is the existent pathway that runs past Pappa Charlie's sandwich shop and the squash-pool-WCMA complex owned by the College. This draws people very logically from the top of Spring Street (arguably the location of the most commercial and pedestrian activity) into a plaza already constructed by the school. Despite the advantage of being already cleared, however, the current path is very barren and unexcited, a long sea of brick and stone. While a modest length of 1050 feet, the existence of College offices and facilities means that there is little to no infill potential for the space, dooming it to further pedestrian purgatory. Next, it would only draw people from the top of the street, doing little for overall flow. Finally, there is the "elevation problem": To get from this path to the Old Town Garage Site, pedestrians currently need to descend an awkward metal stairwell of 1-2 stories.

Pathway Option #3: The Log-Old Field House (Walden Street extension)

The third and final option exists across from Walden Street, in the space between the Log and the Dan Forth block building, an entrance currently occupied by a tall hedgerow. Such a path would go through a back parking lot and between the current field house and hockey rink, with a slight downhill grade. There are currently physical obstacles by way of College buildings, as the field house and hockey rink offer a narrow channel and the facilities building diverts walking to the garage site somewhat.

A drawback is time and uncertainty, as path construction could begin right away but full construction not completed until College facilities are moved or rebuilt; also an old addition to the Log would need to be knocked down depending on a path's width. Otherwise the path is the most linear of our three options, leading a pedestrian straight to the Old Town Garage Site. Furthermore it is the shortest of the three at 815 feet from entrance to the middle of the lot. Finally putting it over the top is its existence at a halfway point on Spring Street, which would serve to draw pedestrian traffic from *both* ends. These significant advantages have led us to incorporate this option above all others into our plans.

3. Full-Block Solution

Towards our larger block plan, we have decided that a path diverting from Spring Street from the space next to The Log all the way from here to the Old Town Garage Site is needed to accomplish our goal of unifying downtown Williamstown. The path should be wide and attractive to pedestrians, with trees and other plants planted on either side and with amenities such as benches and water fountains spaced along it as well.

In order to take full advantage of this, however, we propose that the Towne Field House and the Williams facilities building, both belonging to Williams College, be moved. Although this will certainly involve a great deal of cooperation and agreement between the town and the College, it is not an impossible goal. After interviewing several different College officials, we understand that the College will need to build an entirely new and much larger field house sometime in the near future, so this would already necessitate the removal of the current field house. As seen in Figure 7, the new field house could be constructed parallel to Latham Street, with the new track and several tennis

courts on the second floor, leaving the first floor free for plenty of open space with seating and



gathering areas, interesting Williams’ athletic displays, or even some small shops or cafés.

Figure 7 – Illustrates the rotated and enlarged design for the College field house, running parallel to Latham Street, and allowing room for the connection pathway.

The outer walls of the first floor should be composed of as much glass as possible to maximize the vibrancy and attractiveness of the building from a passerby’s point of view. The second floor of the building should even include large plate windows to make the entirety of the field house as externally attractive as possible. The majority of Williams’ facilities operations will also be moved to an off-campus site at some point soon, leaving that building potentially empty. (The

College has claimed that if a better use for the space taken up by the current facilities building arose, they would be completely willing to take it down.)

These changes, which have already been thought about by Williams College officials, if not drafted into an actual plan, would allow plenty of space for our path, which would then improve the movement between Spring Street and Water Street. The simple fact that this area would be opened up significantly would improve its overall appeal to pedestrians. Since the actual athletic facilities would not be on the first floor of the field house, the building could be designed with an open and appealing floor plan that would draw in those walking by with shops and seating areas. Also the innate fact that this would be an athletic facility would mean that there would be groups of people coming to use it every day, adding to foot traffic. A negative aspect of this proposed adjustment would be that the parking currently in this location would be covered by the path and the building and would have to be reallocated elsewhere in the Superblock, or parking could be incorporated into the first floor of the building.

B. OLD TOWN GARAGE SITE PLANS

Table 6: Assessment characteristics for evaluating design solutions

CHARACTERISTICS TO ASSESS
<i>Aesthetics</i>
<i>Town Benefits</i>
<i>College/Town relationship</i>
<i>Attraction of new development</i>
<i>Ease of Implementation</i>
<i>Parking</i>

1. Background

More specifically, we also want to suggest several different ways in which the Old Town Garage Site in particular could be developed and improved from its current state. We developed plans with the idea that they could provide developers and the public with the idea of just what the site is capable of, and perhaps spark further inspiration. Each of these various uses could be incorporated into the above-listed larger plan, and ideally serve as a means for drawing pedestrian traffic. The three different uses we have selected after much consideration are:

- College fitness or other athletic center;
- A museum or other cultural attraction; and finally
- Various mixed-use commercial and residential development.

Given our lack of authority in making decisions for the town or developers, we decided it would make the most sense to assess the pros and cons of each site qualitatively instead of quantitatively. We came up with six different attributes with which to qualitatively evaluate the strengths and the weakness of each proposed use (Table 7): Aesthetics, benefit to the town, impact on college/town relationship, ability to attract new development, ease of implementation, parking, and flexibility.

2. College-Involved Site Designs

Option 1: Fitness Center

The first design, shown in Figure 8, depicts a new, expanded and improved, multi-use fitness center. As we have it structured, each floor is 12,000 square feet. The potential design we have could provide appropriate space for first floor locker rooms and commercial stores along the street front, a second story fitness center, and a smaller third story that could be used as additional area for the fitness center or specific rooms for uses such as spinning or yoga, along with a possible rooftop

terrace. This development would combine a fitness center with commercial businesses, and perhaps a café or snack bar for hungry patrons.

Aesthetically, the physical attractiveness of a large, block athletics building may not be the most visually pleasing option for the site. However, a design for this building could utilize the same recommendations we stated for the field house and incorporate glass walls and large windows as much as possible; this would make it an interesting feature for pedestrians. This site plan would also allow for some green space in the western side of the lot, and since it would also utilize the footpath running through the site, this would also improve its aesthetics.



Figure 8 – Expanded Multi-Use Fitness Center, depicting a footprint of 12,000 square feet, appropriate for locker room, fitness center, shop and café space. (This design is also used for the following museum proposal.)

Clearly the expanded and improved fitness center would benefit the college, but it would also benefit the Williamstown community members that frequent our current fitness center and would likewise benefit from the new development. This in turn would improve the relationship between the town and the college because this space could be used equally by both parties and foster intermingling of the two groups. However, selling this property to the College to develop could be seen as negative for the town because it would increase College sprawl as the institution would take control of another piece of Williamstown land away from the town. Because this would necessitate the College to develop an athletics master plan and agree to this idea in the first place, it is pretty difficult for the town to implement. This would be a more long term project. However, a fitness center will certainly draw people to use its facilities so this site would have a lot of attraction. This site design does provide around 30 parking spaces. In addition, the current location of the fitness center, just off of Spring Street, negatively affects the nearby businesses, restaurants and offices because of the traffic and parking demands the center creates. By moving the center off of Spring Street, much of the parking that is taken up by gym users would be available to those drawn to Spring St. by its other attractions. This new location for the center would relieve some of the congestion that is felt on Spring Street, specifically around the “rush hour” time of 4-6 pm.

Option 2: Museum

The second option we explored does not stem from our conversations with college administrators and stretches the possibilities of our designs. We looked to develop this space for the college as a new location for the Williams College Museum of Art. Figure 8 also shows how the site could be designed to accommodate a four story museum building using the same plan as for the fitness center. The developer would have to ask for a variance to allow for a fourth floor. With these

four floors, though, and the 48,000 square feet it would provide, the college museum would have ample space in which to expand. The first floor also provides space for a café or restaurant and a museum store.

Currently, our group believes that the museum is slightly cramped into a somewhat odd location. Not quite visible from Route 2, sitting in between the old gym and the Courier Dormitory quad, many visitors have trouble locating the museum, not to mention a space in which to park. This new site would be easily visible from the street, with ample parking spaces. This location would benefit the College museum, as well as Water Street itself since the development would also draw patrons over to the less frequented downtown road of Water Street. In this way the town community would benefit from this use of the site, in addition to being able to visit and enjoy the improved museum, which would also serve as an added tourist attraction to Williamstown, especially since this area is already so well known for its arts attractions. Similar to the athletics plan, this use of the site would foster town/College intermingling, but again would mean that another parcel of land would be turned over to the College and would be difficult to implement because of its dependence on the College. The College already has an existing art museum, and a relocation of all the exhibitions would be highly costly. In addition, the College has not expressed a need for expansion, and this plan is purely speculative. However, similar to the athletics plan, the museum would bring with it all of its current visitors to the new site and therefore have a naturally high draw; the amount of visitors to the museum would probably increase due to its improved location and increased size.

Our third proposed use of this site is mixed-use commercial and residential development. This use would presumably be the most aesthetically pleasing because, depending on the specific design, it would incorporate lots of greenspace and buildings designed to mimic existing downtown Williamstown architecture. It would benefit the town by acknowledging its housing demand,

especially that for affordable housing, and by promoting increased commercial activity not only on the site but also in the surrounding downtown areas by association. This use does not foster much improvement in the town and College relationship because it is a plan which the town could implement on its own, but this does mean that it would be the easiest to implement and could be done the soonest. This plan would have a fairly high risk for developers because its draw is unknown at this point and is not automatic like it is in the other plans. A way in which this could possibly be solved would be through the inclusion of an anchor attraction, similar to Tunnel City on Spring Street. The parking availability for the mixed-use option depends on the specific plan, but this use has the potential to provide lots of parking.

3. Mixed-use site designs

We have designed three tentative site plans that demonstrate the possible range of options of how the Old Town Garage Site could be designed for mixed-use. We concentrated on designs that would generate revenue for the town and attract a developer. Again, we elected to assess these different site designs qualitatively rather than quantitatively and therefore came up with five different attributes with which to evaluate the strengths and the weakness of each given design, including housing, retail, aesthetics, accessibility, parking, and cost.

Option 1: Minimalist

The first design is “The Minimalist.” This design is our most cautious approach to mixed-use development of this site. As there are still questions as to the level of commercial and residential demand within Williamstown, this design is an appropriate first step. This can be easily transformed and developed further in response to future changes in demand. As seen in Figure 9, the main

features are a building at the front of the site along Water Street, a small parking area, a footpath running along the south side of the site, and ample green space. In terms of housing, this building could accommodate twelve individual two bedroom flats, each with 1250 ft². This is a fairly limited supply, but it has the potential to be developed as affordable housing and could also be attractive to the elderly as the apartments are one level, easy to access, and within walking distance of downtown attractions.

This site could have retail space on the first floor amounting to 4,500ft² as it is currently designed, which is large enough for a single store, but could also be split into two smaller stores.

The ample window frontage to Water Street is a great benefit to the limited commercial space, and the shallowness of the space is also desirable to businesses. This site is highly aesthetically pleasing due to ample green space. There is space for a variety of visually pleasing and comfortable elements such as benches, pathways, gardens, and perhaps even a fountain or gazebo. This green space would also be a great location to place an outdoor skating rink for public use during the winter (we sized the footprint to fit 200-250 people) which in the summer can serve the community as a pavilion or skate park. The main path itself has enough space to be wide and flanked with plants and benches. Again, as it is a fairly wide-open design, accessing all elements of the site is simple.

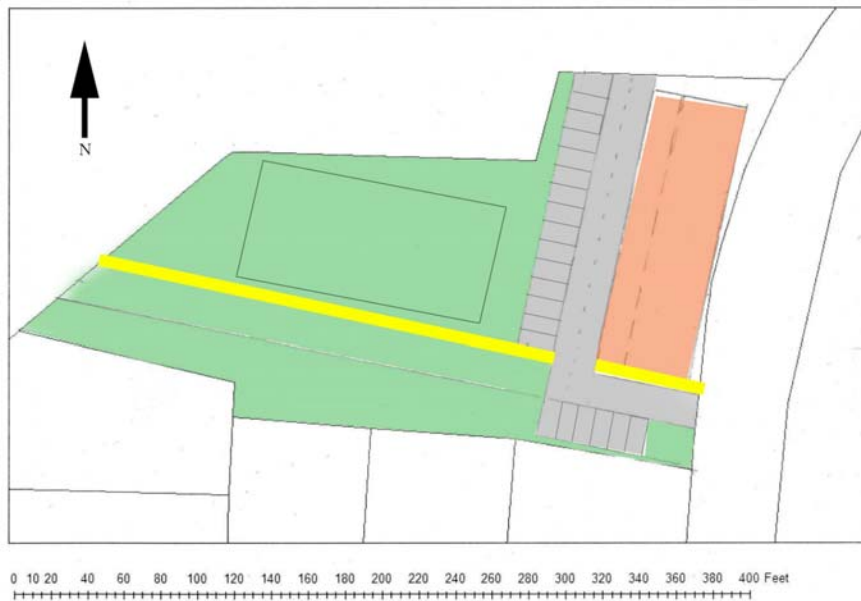


Figure 9 – The “Minimalist” option takes a cautious step at development, allowing for future site developments, in order to react to a changing economy and demand.

Smaller pathways diverting from the main one could traverse the great open space and draw pedestrians into the green space and even all the way to the commercial spaces. This site, however, provides no through access for vehicles, although there is plenty of available room for parking. In the back of the first floor there are personal garages as well as rear spaces that together meet all residential and commercial needs. The current open space would allow for future adjustments and more spots to be added if needed. As it is the least developed, the costs for this site design will clearly be the lowest. There is only one building, one parking area, and a simple pathway that would need to be developed, in addition to any costs associated with installing the green space. However,

because development on the site is so limited, there will also be low levels of revenue accruing from the commercial and residential uses.

Option 2: “New Urbanist”

Next we have the “New Urbanist” site design, shown in Figure 10, which is an attempt to fully develop the site along New Urbanist principles. The building fronting Water Street from the Minimalist design is used again, but here Meacham Street is extended to Water Street along the length of the footpath, and ten town houses will be added along the extended Meacham Street along with extra parking and more limited green space. Along with all of the housing amenities offered with our “minimalist” design, ten units of town houses are added. These are two to three bedrooms, and the first floor can be converted into commercial space if the demand arises in the future. Along with 4,500 ft² fronting Water Street, the site has the potential to expand retail space among the first floor of the townhouses in various configurations.

Aesthetically this site utilizes the full range of New Urbanist principles, including wide sidewalks and curb plantings, along with a compact set of mixed-use buildings. Green space can be added wherever possible. The extension of Meacham Street, along with several fire and access lanes, will allow the automobiles greater access to our site. However, in accordance with our goal of walkability, the path to Spring Street will still be an integral part of our walking corridor. Unfortunately, the parking in this plan is not as extensive as one may like with the extent of activity planned. It does allow for on-street parking which can be increased for special events. Additional spaces could also be added in the back of the building, but still there are fewer spots planned than mandated by zoning law, so this design would need to be specially approved. As this is a heavily

developed site, the costs for this design are most likely to be the highest, especially considering the fact that a two lane road would have to be constructed in addition to the path.

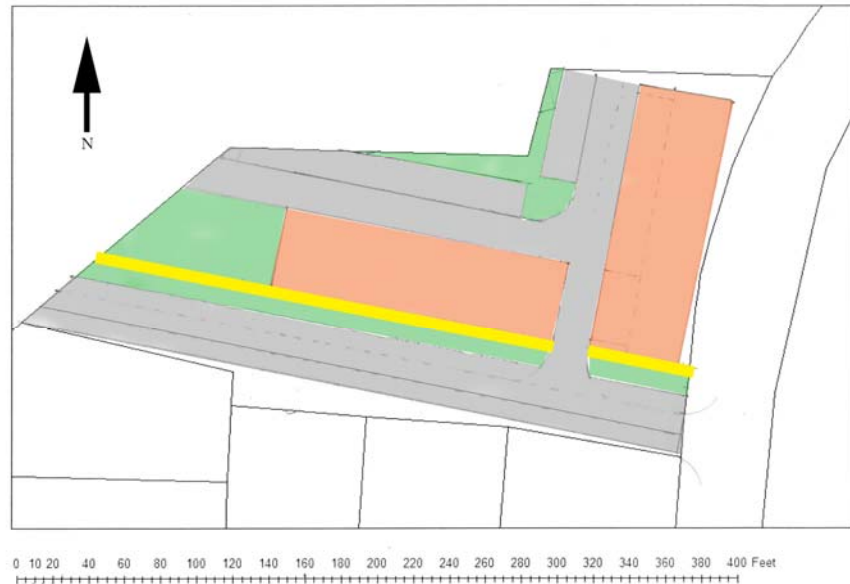


Figure 10 – The “New Urbanist” Option extends Meacham Street through the site to increase connectivity through the Superblock.

Option 3: “Paved Paradise”

Our third design is “Paved Paradise,” shown in Figure 11, and the point of this site is to demonstrate how the layout would look if attaining the required parking spaces was our top priority, which would turn the space into a site dominated by pavement. It is exactly the same as the previous design in retail and residential space, but there is no road. A positive attribute of this site is that it does not take away from the current parking usage of the empty Old Town Garage site. However, we don’t want this space to turn into a “paved paradise”; aesthetically, it fails. This design simply

demonstrates what the site would look like if it were to accommodate the required number of parking spaces.



Figure 11 – The “Paved Paradise” Option is not a design we suggest. It is simply an experiment utilized to effectively illustrate the unattractive elements of following the parking code rigorously.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND MOVING FORWARD

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Site design impacts site use
- Questions regarding current real estate market
- Town and College planning inexorably tied
- Cannot satisfy all town needs at once

1. Lessons learned

We have repeatedly come across several key themes over the course of our research and design work. These key themes should be treated as lessons learned—and are part of our recommendations for any development both on the site and within the greater Superblock.

Taking cues from New Urbanism, we must reassert that the way a site is designed critically impacts the habits of its users. These impacts can include health and safety, time management, as well as consumer spending and the perceived “vitality” of the town.

Furthermore, there is a great degree of uncertainty in the present real estate market. It is relatively easier to find home buyers, especially for affordable housing, than small retail shops. The village aspect of Williamstown and lack of parking makes it less attractive to large retail chains. Any plan for new development must also evaluate whether or not the market can absorb a new establishment, and be flexible, not “biting off more than it can chew.”

It must also be recognized that the town and college development inseparably affect one another. The College is the town’s largest landowner, and its parcels lie adjacent and intermingled with other town sites. Anything the college does affects the town, and vice versa. Past construction plans have often been counterproductive to overall interests. That said, it is clear that the college

does not have a firm “plan” for many of its sites. This prevents engagement in full-block planning but nevertheless presents an opportunity for future communication between parties.

Finally, we must remember that no plan will satisfy the interests of every constituent party. What a project should encompass varies greatly by the group of people you ask: residents, college administration, students, visitors, second-homeowners, those at high incomes, those at low, and those who want development now and those who do not. The best that can be done is to conduct planning based on a sympathetic reading of as many town needs as can be accommodated, as well as the utilizing the options that become available at the hands of developers.

SITE GUIDELINES:

- “Anchor” property
- Focus on pedestrian experience
- Architectural fit with site and downtown

2. Site Guidelines

Besides general lessons for development, we also hope to offer guidelines geared towards our specific Old Town Garage Site and future its development. We have offered several potential designs for downtown Williamstown and our parcel; whether the town expands on these ideas or seeks other plans from developers, we must emphasize several important features for an RFP that any plan should include. These guidelines incorporate our key concerns, yet are as concise as possible—so as not to deter the volume and quality of proposals the town receives.

First, the Old Town Garage Site needs an “anchor” property that will draw people in from Spring Street. The unique opportunity this site presents cannot be wasted on a function delinked from

town or visitor activity. For instance, we know that one past proposal called for a windowless book storage facility on the site, which clearly would not contribute to our goal of increasing downtown vitality. In fact, that would be a worse use for the site than its current use, because it would limit future development and improvement.

With that said, any project must also emphasize the pedestrian experience. The biggest take-away point from New Urbanism is “walkability” as a catalyst for downtown vitality. Any proposed designs must promote this by providing a means of foot travel and social convergence. Our proposal of a walking path connecting Spring and Water Streets fits this goal, but the site itself must also incorporate this, both in making the final development accessible by foot and by incorporating the walking path and prominent college walking routes to limit the need for vehicle traffic (and thus also alleviate possible parking shortages).

Finally, it is imperative that the design fit in with the architecture of downtown. In particular a design should incorporate historical characteristics of the site, such as the heating plant building and the remarkable smoke stack that rises above the property. Creating a pleasing appearance will do much to encourage people to patronize the location, and it will also serve to draw people from Spring Street.

NEXT STEPS:

1. Explore ways to ease financing constraints
2. Create formalized institution for joint town/college planning
3. Take advantage of new “natural experiments”

3. Next Steps

The work we have done thus far has allowed us to lay out several attractive options for our site and the greater Williamstown downtown. Furthermore, it has allowed us to Looking forward, we recommend several steps the town can take to make this vision a reality:

First, we discovered by talking to realtors that a major obstacle for attracting new development in Williamstown is the obstacles to obtaining proper funding. The Town may explore ways to ease these credit constraints, and critically evaluate how much it is willing to contribute to a given development plan. Furthermore, seeking grants and other forms of state, federal, and town funding can help to alleviate these funding issues and spur development in Williamstown.

Next, although informal meetings are regular, the planning board should explore creating a formalized institution for town & college planning. This can allow future plans and interests to be expressed and better coordinated between the two parties. Our project has striven to be a prototype for such a relationship as much as possible, and from our work it is clear that each party recognizes the mutual benefits that would result from such a partnership. Such dialogue should be as straightforward and as honest as possible, as well as trying to be the most practical—the town and college actually doing things together should be the focus, rather than making a public show of cooperation that has little actual power.

Finally, developers and town planners may be concerned with commercial and residential market demand in Williamstown. Luckily, there are two upcoming “natural experiments” in downtown Williamstown to give us some insight into the actual state of the market. In the new Paresky development on Spring Street, we can observe the demand for commercial and office space, as well as the “staying power” of those who set up shop. Next, the Cable Mills property further south on Water Street will provide several mainly high-income housing units in a variety of formats. The Cable Mills development could ultimately serve as a key proponent of Water Street redevelopment

on its own, an exciting prospect for the future of downtown Williamstown and one that could be piggybacked by the development of the Town Garage site. These developments offer great promise but great risk to their investors and their fate will influence the tone of development in the town for the near future. Once developed, the town may see how just well these downtown residential spaces sell, as well as analyze the new traffic patterns that are created.

REFERENCES

Burr, Andy. Personal Interview. 30 Oct 2009.

Burns, Deborah and Lauren R. Stephens, Eds. *Williamstown: The First 250 Years 1753-2003*. Williamstown, MA: Williamstown House of Local History and Williamstown 250th Anniversary Committee, 2005..

Barista, Dave. "Architect to developers: There's big money in small urban infill sites." *Building Design & Construction*. 9 Sep 2009.

Carman, Linda. "Taking a brief look back at the history of Williamstown's Spring Street." *The Advocate*, Jun27 2001

"Charter of the New Urbanism" *Congress for the New Urbanism*, 1996. <<http://www.cnu.org/charter>>

"Community Revitalization Desktop Guide." *Community Action Team, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development*.

Connolly, Julianna; Roberston, Mark; and Wiener, Jon. "Two-Town Sites." Williams College Environmental Planning Workshop Study, 2000.

"The Different Contexts of Urban Land." Georgetown University Press, 2004.
<http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&q=cache:QqrInEr_QJIJ:press.georgetown.edu/pdfs/1589010078_Ch1.pdf+vacant+urban+space&hl=en&gl=us&sig=AFQjCNEP4F3bSg5elU-ujNUddvjXVhGafA>

Goldfield, David R. "Neighborhood Preservation and Community Values in Historical Perspective." *Neighborhood and Community Environments*, Vol 9. New York: Plenum Publishing Company, 1987.

"Gyourki, Joseph E. and Rybczynski, Witold. "Financing New Urbanism Projects: Obstacles and Solutions." *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol 11 Issue 3. 2000.

Kelley, Michael. "Berkshire population projection anticipates South County growth." *Berkshire Record*. 5-11 Sep 2008.

Kunstler, "Home From Nowhere." New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Kunstler, James. "The Long Emergency." New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006.

Massachusetts Municipal Profiles, 2005-2007

Paetman, Mark. "Fairfield Village Green is great (Letter to the Editor)." *Public Management*, March 2004.

"The Story of a Street," *Williams Alumni Review*. Jul 1926.

US Census Bureau, various data

“Williamston Master Plan.” Williamstown Master Plan Steering Committee, 2002.

Williamstown Zoning Bylaw. Williamstown, MA.

Zwiker, Jason A. “The New Historic North Charleston.” *Charleston City Paper*. 26 Jul 2006.

100 Best Places to Live.” *CNN Money*. 2007. <<http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2007/>>