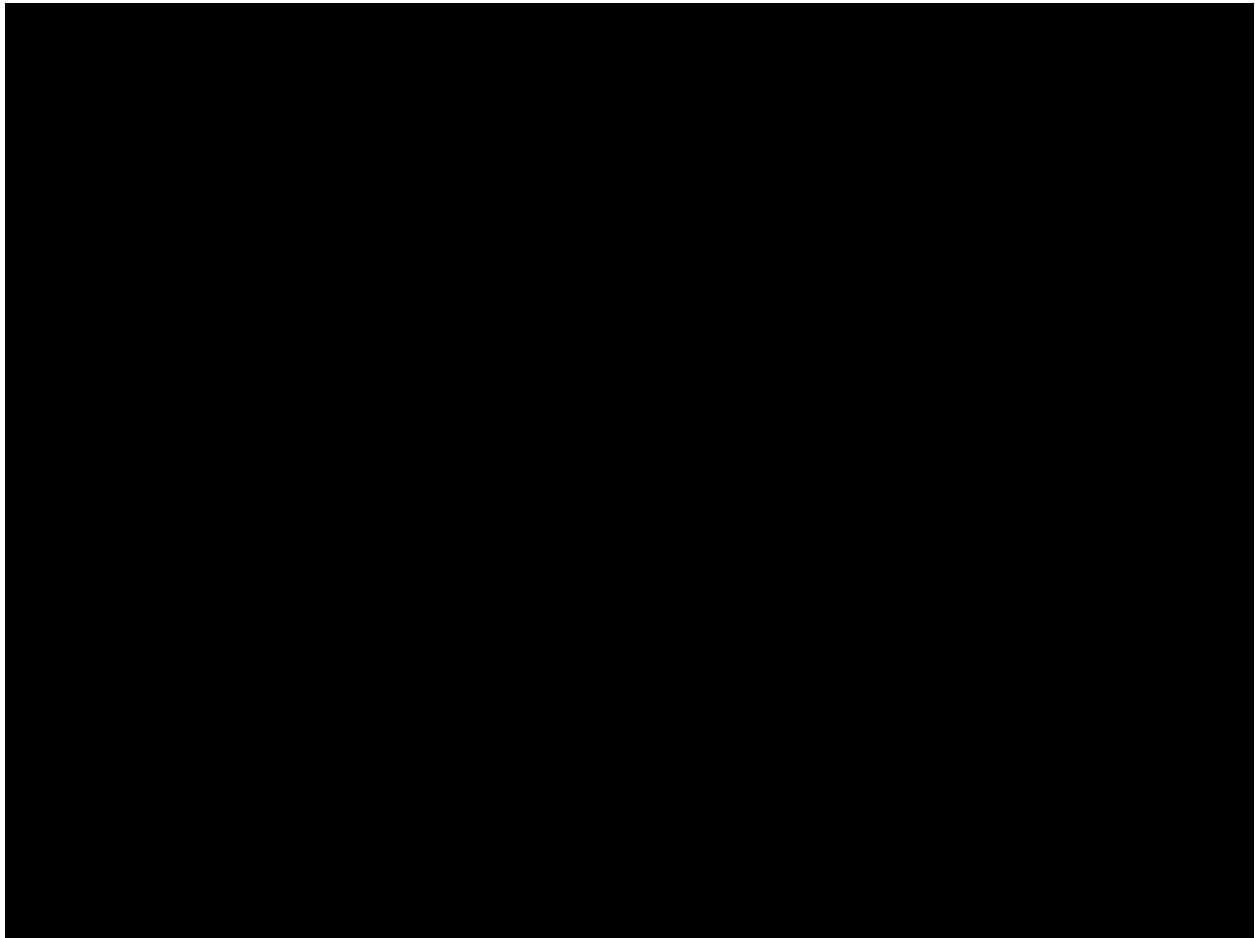


# Racial and Socioeconomic Exclusion in the Built Environment in Williamstown



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Katie Orringer and Morgan Dauk  
Clients: Bilal Ansari and Andrew Art

Fall 2020: ENVI 302

Professor Sarah Gardner

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<sup>1</sup> “Trump Administration, Week 183: Friday, 17 July – Thursday, 23 July 2020 (Days 1,274-1,280),” OAD.  
<http://muckrakerfarm.com/2020/07/trump-administration-week-183-friday-17-july-thursday-23-july-2020-days-1274-1280/>.

## Recognition of Privilege

As a foreword to our report, we recognize our own white privileges in a society that is plagued with prejudice against people of color. In researching and writing about the history of Williamstown, we understand that we have not been subject to the same biases that have impacted minority groups for hundreds of years. While we cannot fully understand the extent to which racism has affected individuals and families from our own experience, we hope that our efforts to describe the events of the past pay tribute to the pain and suffering that many people of color have had to endure.

## Overview of Project

This report was conducted as a semester-long project for Williams College's Environmental Planning Workshop (ENVI 302). This class is one of the required courses for seniors to complete to fulfill their Environmental Studies Major and/or Concentration (minor). The professor for this course is Sarah Gardner. Professor Gardner connected clients from the Williamstown community with Williams College seniors taking this course. Students worked with various clients on unique planning projects.

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## *INTRODUCTION*

Williamstown has a reputation as a progressive, liberal college town. Williams College, a well-known liberal arts school, has been the central part of the town since its founding in 1793. Despite being home to a college, Williamstown is not a diverse place. Residents are predominantly white (70.7%),<sup>2</sup> and even counting the 12.9% of citizens in poverty,<sup>3</sup> the median income is higher than the national average.<sup>4</sup> However, Williamstown was not always so homogenous. Williamstown has become a space that lacks racial and socioeconomic diversity due to loss of employment opportunities, specific housing policies and the exclusionary choices made when responding to challenges. The history behind how the town became whiter and more gentrified has been largely untold and even hidden. As part of our historical narrative, we will discuss these hidden histories, including the way in which the town decided to site and provide infrastructure to certain neighborhoods and in one case even allowed a racially restrictive covenant. By uncovering that history, we address several important questions. Do current zoning and town planning structures separate residents racially and socioeconomically? How can we make changes to the zoning and planning structures in town to promote diversity and inclusion? Has Williamstown become less diverse due to race and class prejudices, through policy and informed practice, or due to more explicit displays of racism?<sup>5</sup>

Our project aims to uncover a portion of Williamstown's racial history by exploring historical examples and identifying themes of racial and socioeconomic exclusion in the built environment in Williamstown. To do so, we will begin with a brief overview of the racial history of the area. We will then examine four Williamstown neighborhoods over time to trace patterns

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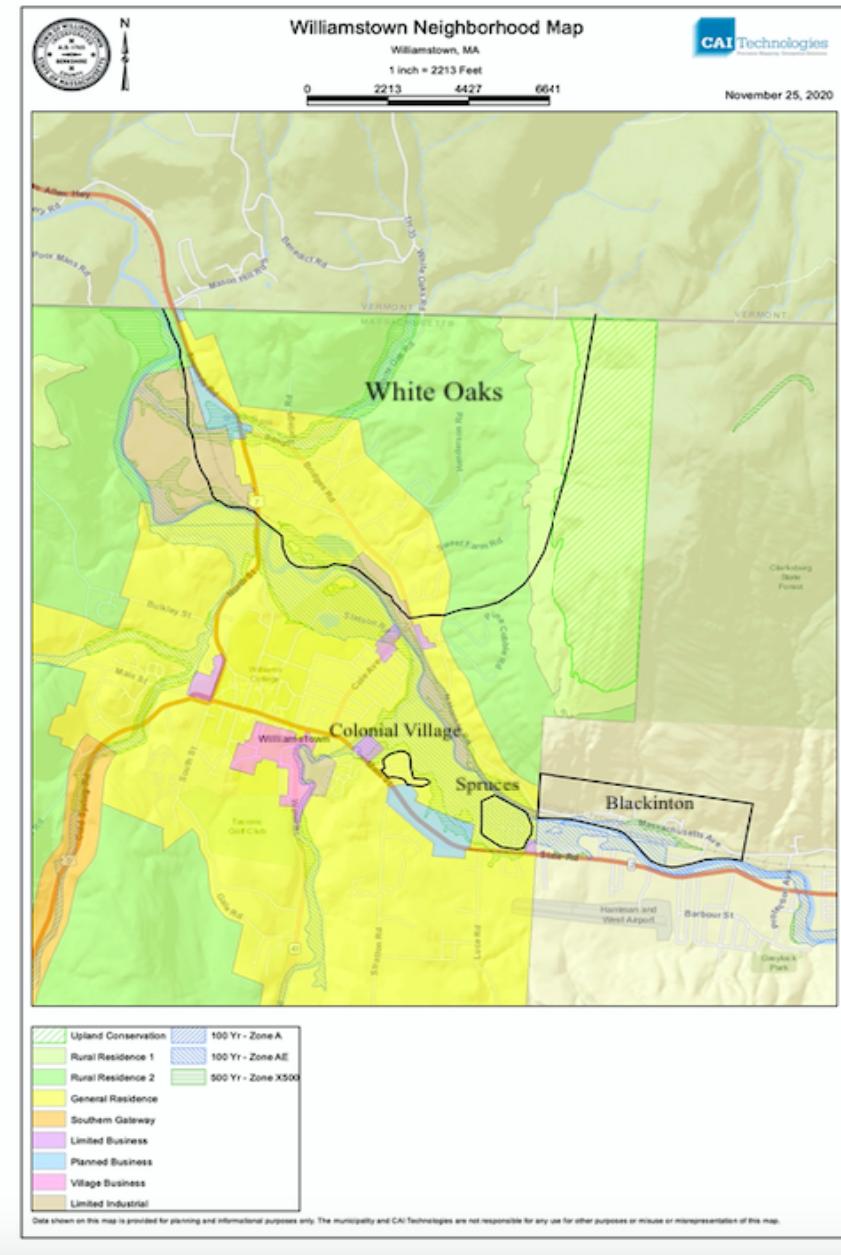
<sup>2</sup> "Williamstown, MA." *Data USA*, datausa.io/profile/geo/16000US2579950. Accessed 2 December 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "Williamstown, MA," 2018. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/16000US2579950>. This data is notably from 2018. With the covid-19 pandemic, the rates of poverty are likely higher in 2020 and that could affect the median income.

<sup>5</sup> Questions taken from our scoping report due Oct. 8th.

of housing policies and preferences that failed to invest in remedies for exclusion. These neighborhoods include White Oaks (1763-1930), Blackinton (1899-1901), Colonial Village (1930-1960), and the Spruces (1950-2014). These four places in particular will be examined because each neighborhood highlights a unique and significant challenge in Williamstown's built environment. Blackinton demonstrates that the town's priorities did not include providing infrastructure improvements to a community of mill workers who were residents of lower socioeconomic status. White Oaks exemplifies the attitude of the College and central Williamstown toward the people living in the most historically diverse neighborhood. We examine the changing demographics of the White Oaks and describe how residents of color were subject to "missionary outreach," social stigmatization, gentrification, and cultural erasure. Our examination of the neighborhood formerly known as Colonial Village involves local residents' attempts to remove the racially restrictive deed covenants, which from the inception of the neighborhood in 1939, banned people of color from residing in the neighborhood (except as servants). Lastly, we examine the response of Williamstown to the flooding of the Spruces, a mobile home community. We will discuss the affordable housing debates and socioeconomic prejudices that resulted in many Williamstown residents losing their homes and town citizenship as their lower-income neighborhood was removed and transformed to parkland. After recounting some of the hidden history of these neighborhoods, we will analyze the town's current zoning laws, housing policies, and residential housing preferences. Specifically, we will examine how Williamstown is predominantly focused on single-family homes which are unaffordable to many potential residents. To conclude, we will make a series of recommendations we believe the town and college should implement in order to better promote equity and inclusion in Williamstown.



Current zoning map for Williamstown with FEMA floodplains (blue lined, from Blackinton area to White Oaks and along the branches of the Hoosic River)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Created using ArcGIS.

## *THEMES OF RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC EXCLUSION*

Through the historical analysis of these four neighborhoods there are several central themes that our project examines. First is the notion that biases against people of lower socioeconomic status have greatly influenced Williamstown's infrastructure development. Blackinton and the Spruces are two neighborhoods which embody this theme because the town government failed to provide adequate resources for residents from these areas to remain in Williamstown. We contrast this notion with another theme, in which financial resources determine the mechanism and ability through which a governing body may act in response to housing challenges. We contrast the town's investment decision strategies with those of Williams College. We will explore how Williams College and Williamstown have approached the challenge of affordable housing shortages in different ways.

Another theme of racial exclusion that we examine is the impulse toward "beautification" among the predominantly white and relatively privileged Williamstown residents living in the center of town. We consider the consequences of this approach on the lives of the residents who lived on the periphery of the town that were once a community of diverse residents. We also examine the legacy of the explicitly racist, directly exclusionary deed restrictions in the former Colonial Village neighborhood and the effects of that housing exclusion on town segregation. Another recurring theme we highlight is that of perhaps seemingly well-intentioned decisions resulting in harmful outcomes towards minority groups and lower income populations. Albert Hopkins' missionary efforts in White Oaks, though motivated by religious morals, stimulated racism and the displacement of minorities. Similarly, Albert Bachand's goal to provide elderly residents with a desirable, low-cost, retirement community ultimately resulted in housing insecurity and physical endangerment. Most of Williamstown's lack of diversity stems from

consequences of these decisions that weren't necessarily racially or socioeconomically driven, but the effects of the decision produced an outcome that tended to encourage segregation and injustice for minorities and less affluent populations. We categorize these as unintentional outcomes.

## HISTORY

Before discussing the historical details of the four neighborhoods in Williamstown, a general conception of Williamstown's racial history is important to have for context. Our case studies predominantly examine policies and narratives from the 20th century onward, so the general history section will focus on detailing the racial history of Williamstown in the mid-18th century through the mid-19th century. Darin Li's piece *The Agitators: Williams College and the Antislavery Movement*, details Williamstown and North Adams' relationship to slavery.<sup>7</sup> North Adams cotton mills were successful and prosperous, but their cotton was sourced from slaves working in cotton fields in the South.<sup>8</sup> The building that is now known as Mass MoCA was one of such cotton mills that flourished at the hands of the oppression of Southern slavery.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, next door in Williamstown, Williams College created a student group in the 1820s called Williams Anti-Slavery Society (WASS) that supported abolition, but centered its remedy to slavery on the removal of Black people to Africa through the colonization movement.<sup>10</sup> President Griffin, Professor Dewey (the professor who helped found the society), and even Reverend Gridley of the Congregational Church all supported the colonization movement.<sup>11</sup> The college's legacy of racial inequity did not begin there, however, as Ephraim Williams Jr., the man

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<sup>7</sup> Li, Darin. "The Agitators: Williams College and the Antislavery Movement, 1820-1830," 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

whose will and estate led to the founding of Williams College, is known to have bought, sold, and enslaved people in the mid 1700s.<sup>12</sup> Ephraim Williams sold an enslaved nine-year old boy named Prince on September 25, 1750.<sup>13</sup> Williams purchased J. Romanoo as a 16 year old slave February 13, 1755.<sup>14</sup>

### *WHITE OAKS*

White Oaks is located in the northern portion of Williamstown between the steep slopes of the western boundary with New York, the northern Vermont state line, and the eastern borders of Clarksburg and North Adams.<sup>15</sup> With the Hoosic River to the west and the south and steep slopes on both northern and eastern sides,<sup>16</sup> it has finite expansion potential and remains secluded from the Williamstown center. Cut off from the town by both a river and later the tracks of the Boston Maine Railroad, it was commonly referred to as “the other side of the tracks.”<sup>17</sup> People who lived in Williamstown spoke of White Oaks and its racially diverse, generally poorer population, in derogatory terms. This is particularly exemplified in common vernacular of the time in which many white residents of Williamstown referred to upper White Oaks as “‘N word’ Hill.”<sup>18</sup> White Oaks residents at the time describe degrading personal accounts, one of which being that those who lived in the isolated neighborhood were not considered “as good” as those

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<sup>12</sup> Ephraim at the time of his passing had three slaves named Moni, London, and Cloe who he gave to his brothers in his will. Seider, Maynard. “Maynard Seider: Slavery and the North Berkshires,” November 3, 2020. [https://www.berkshireeagle.com/opinion/columnists/maynard-seider-slavery-and-the-north-berkshires/article\\_09e57d6f-2eba-58f9-b024-3fa3669e678f.html](https://www.berkshireeagle.com/opinion/columnists/maynard-seider-slavery-and-the-north-berkshires/article_09e57d6f-2eba-58f9-b024-3fa3669e678f.html).

<sup>13</sup> Williams, Ephramin. “Bill of Sale for Slave Named Prince.” Accessed December 4, 2020. <http://www.americacenturies.mass.edu/collection/itempage.jsp?itemid=7799>.

<sup>14</sup> Charles, John. “Bill of Sale for Slave J. Romanoo.” Digital Collection -Bill of sale for slave J. Romanoo. Accessed December 4, 2020. <http://americacenturies.mass.edu/collection/itempage.jsp?itemid=7800>.

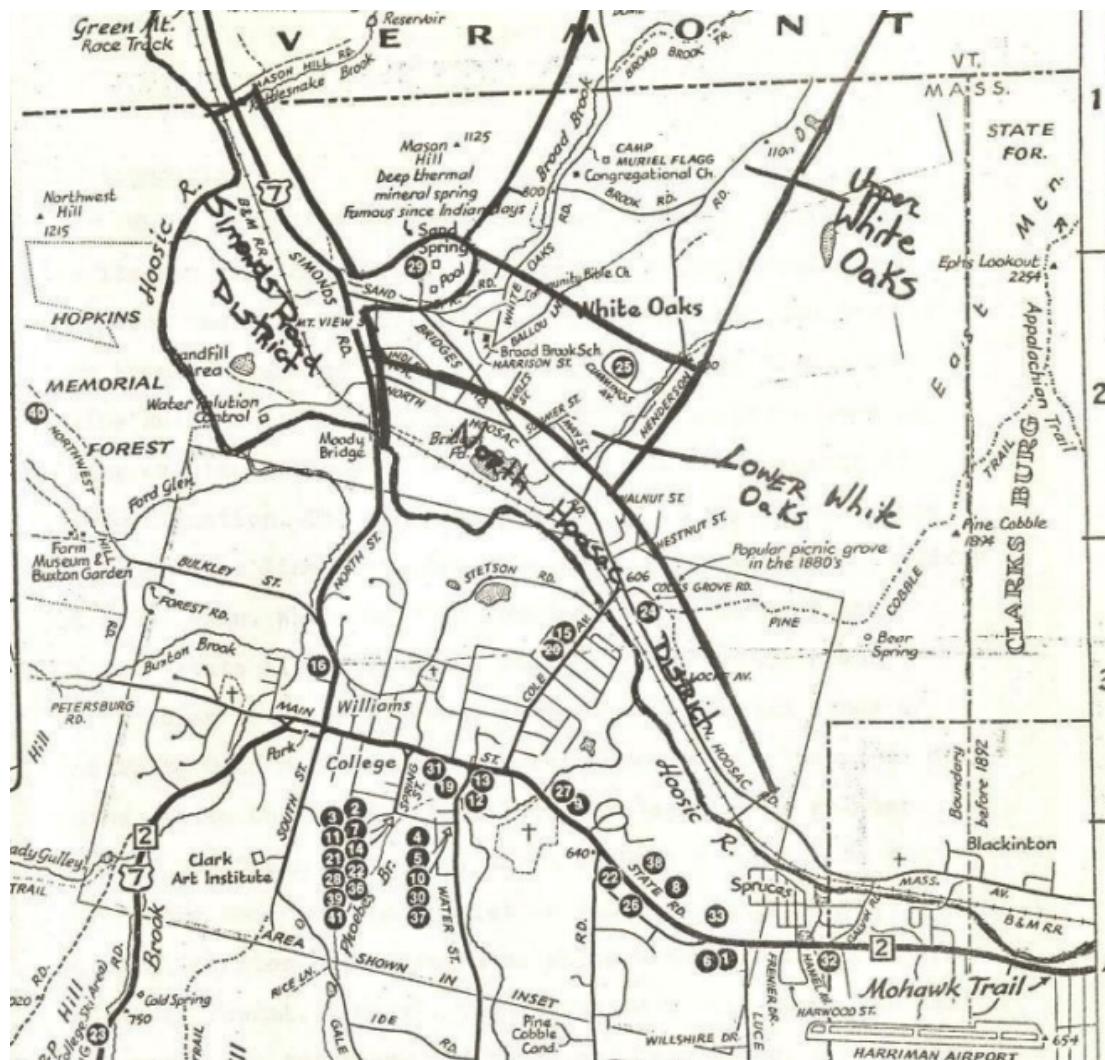
<sup>15</sup> Eckerson, Wayne. A History of White Oaks Neighborhood in Williamstown, Massachusetts. *An Independent Project in American Civilization*, May 1981, pp. 3, Williams College Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp. 3.

<sup>18</sup> This name was referred to by both Grace Greylock Niles and Wayne Eckerson in their written works.

who lived “upstream.”<sup>19</sup> However, its protective location and geographic characteristics are largely what inspired its settlement as a haven.



Map of White Oaks in relation to Williamstown Center<sup>20</sup>

The first resident, John Smedley, settled in White Oaks in 1763, and founded a saw mill on the intersection of Broad Brook and the Hoosic River.<sup>21</sup> Later, he became a prominent citizen

<sup>19</sup> Eckerson, pp. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp. 17.

within the community due to the profitability of his business.<sup>22</sup> However, economic growth on the grounds of forestry only continued until the early 1800s.<sup>23</sup> At this point, most of the available forests were depleted of harvestable timber, which greatly decreased the quality and value of the land.<sup>24</sup> However, the timber harvesting also cleared the landscape of trees, making space available for homes and small farms.<sup>25</sup> The most valuable land constituted the area near the Hoosic River, while higher elevations had rockier soil.<sup>26</sup> Lower White Oaks was known for its steep slopes, but upper White Oaks had great potential farming ability as it is the site where oak trees used to grow in high abundance.<sup>27</sup>

In part because of its geography — in close proximity to both New York and Vermont — White Oaks became a refuge for poorer displaced people seeking a haven from slavery with potential opportunity for community and modest economic development.<sup>28</sup> Because slavery in New York state wasn't abolished until 1836,<sup>29</sup> slaves who managed to free themselves from the suppression of their white enslavers sought refuge there. The beautiful Berkshire area thus served as hope for a new life of freedom. However, white historians write disrespectfully of their independence, referring to their homes as "shanties" and tying them to their experiences as slaves by publicizing their families as being raised under the names of their former masters.<sup>30</sup> The descriptions of these residences as being lowly and inferior are likely unfounded or exaggerated, as the standard of "regulation houses" defined in 1753 by the General Court,<sup>31</sup> do

<sup>22</sup> Qtd. in Ibid pp. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp. 23

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pp. 23.

<sup>30</sup> Niles, Grace. "Albert Hopkins and Williamstown." *New England Magazine*, Kinsman, 1904, pp. 675, Williams College Archives.

<sup>31</sup> "Regulation houses" gained their name through regulations that required homeowners to clear 5 acres and construct a house measuring at least 15 by 18 feet with a 7-foot stud and a chimney in order to obtain a title.

not seem to exceed the conditions of some homes (see the photo of the home in the White Oaks). With the cheapest land in Williamstown, the area was attractive for the socioeconomically poor.<sup>32</sup> In his thesis on White Oaks, Williams College student Wayne Eckerson estimated that by 1850, the average real wealth in upper White Oaks was \$208, compared to lower White Oaks' \$625, North Hoosac Road's average of \$1100, and Simons Road's \$2209.<sup>33</sup> He also determined that in 1850 Black people made up 15% of the White Oaks population, while Southern Williamstown had essentially no Black citizens at the time.<sup>34</sup>

Historians who wrote about the residents of the White Oaks, especially Black citizens, often did not include their personal narratives from interviews, and tended to portray the general population with broad generalizations as criminals or runaways.<sup>35</sup> They attributed the abutting state lines and proximity to the border as a means of protection that was taken advantage of in order to avoid the eye of the law.<sup>36</sup> Historians wrote that the congregation of lower-income populations brought poverty, alcoholism, demoralization, and occasional violence to the upper White Oaks area.<sup>37</sup> This perspective reflects the racist thinking of the time period, as written from the perspective of those who regarded White Oaks citizens as outcasts.<sup>38</sup>

Residents of more central neighborhoods within Williamstown also exhibited racial and socioeconomic biases towards those residing in White Oaks, which tainted the perception of the neighborhood compared to the more affluent parts of Williamstown.<sup>39</sup> Professor Albert Hopkins, who was commended for proselytizing in White Oaks, even referred to the community and

Jones, Moira. "1753 House." *Williamstown Historical Museum*, 15 May 2015, [www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org/featured-slider/exhibits/1753-house/](http://www.williamstownhistoricalmuseum.org/featured-slider/exhibits/1753-house/). Accessed 3 December 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Eckerson, pp. 26.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp. 52.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 23-24.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp. 23-24.

<sup>37</sup> Qtd. in Ibid, pp. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Eckerson, pp. 53.

<sup>39</sup> This assumption comes from reading Eckerson's and Niles' written works.

people as a “waste place” that required beautification through religious contexts.<sup>40</sup> This exemplified the elitist perspective in which people of color who were poor were regarded as “heathen” and lesser. The bias and prejudice against Black people are reflected in condescension from historians, often through Williams College,<sup>41</sup> who represented affluent white viewpoints. Despite evidence that suggested the presence of a local culture and support system within the White Oaks neighborhood,<sup>42</sup> there is a lack of this representation in written accounts. Such records instead describe racist attitudes felt by townspeople that the “degenerate state”<sup>43</sup> of the upper White Oaks was considered to be in need of “some reformatory movement.”<sup>44</sup> This initiated a response from Albert Hopkins in particular, who took to the construction of a chapel in the White Oaks community as a means of bringing residents into Christianity.<sup>45 46</sup>

Professor Hopkins was a well-respected figure in the college community, and his motivation to establish the White Oaks chapel as a means of undertaking this local mission made him even more popular amongst townspeople and fellow parishioners.<sup>47</sup> He was adored and respected by his students, who held him in the utmost regard for his teaching prowess and high expectations.<sup>48</sup> In the media, he was honored for his vision in introducing religious reform in upper White Oaks.<sup>49</sup> In 1833, he began leading religious services in the White Oaks

<sup>40</sup> Qtd. in Sewall, Albert. *Life of Prof. Albert Hopkins*. Anson D. F. Randolph & Company, 1870, pp. 219, Williams College Archives.

<sup>41</sup> Examples of this include written works from Eckerson, Niles, and Sewall.

<sup>42</sup> Eckerson, pp. 52-53.

<sup>43</sup> Eckerson, pp. 29.

<sup>44</sup> Niles, Grace. “The Mission of the White Oaks Chapel.” *The Christian Register*, 1 December 1904, pp. 1324, Williams College Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, pp. 1234-1235.

<sup>46</sup> Hopkins supported foreign colonization through missionary efforts. Sewall, pp. 143. The White Oaks chapel was likely his means of fulfilling this ideal. This form of colonization reflects more so the notion of submission by a community rather than empowerment for the people living there.

<sup>47</sup> Haig. “Semi-Centennial of Chapel in White Oaks: Interesting Exercises Held in Rural Edifice Famous as Pastorate of Late Prof. Hopkins. Rev. Mr. Haig’s Paper Read.” *North Adams Transcript*, Newspapers.com by ancestry, 30 October, 1916.

<sup>48</sup> Sewall, pp. 119-121.

<sup>49</sup> Haig.

schoolhouse,<sup>50</sup> and by 1865 he felt a chapel was necessary to “secure and make permanent the good results of these efforts.”<sup>51</sup>

Using donations he received from friends and volunteer labor from residents in the community, the chapel was completed and ready for worship in 1866.<sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> With the inscription in its bell: *the tongue of the dumb shall speak*, the purpose of the chapel was to prompt societal reform for the community.<sup>54</sup> While his motivations were based on religious morals, it should be noted here that Hopkins was a professor at the college with extensive influence and connections. While he could have used these connections to educate poor Blacks who were demeaned for their illiteracy<sup>55</sup> — which would have quite literally supported the aforementioned inscription — he instead established a chapel that chastised the culture of the area as a “waste place.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Eckerson, pp. 29.

<sup>51</sup> Qtd. in Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp. 29.

<sup>53</sup> The chapel was willed to the president and trustees of Williams College upon Hopkins’ death. The college retained ownership until it was transferred to The Albert Hopkins White Oaks Chapel Association in 1889, which was founded for the purpose of maintaining the chapel and the religious worship therein. “1889 - Chapters 358, 359.” *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*. Secretary of the Commonwealth, Wright & Potter Printing Co., State Printers, 1889, pp. 1051.

<sup>54</sup> Niles, Grace, “The Mission of the White Oaks Chapel.” pp. 1324-1325.

<sup>55</sup> Eckerson, pp. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Qtd. in Sewall, pp. 219.

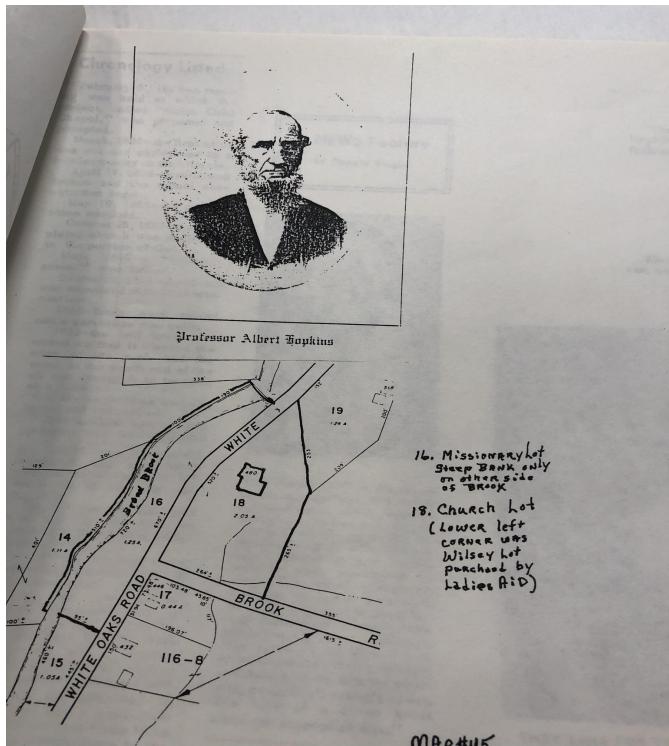
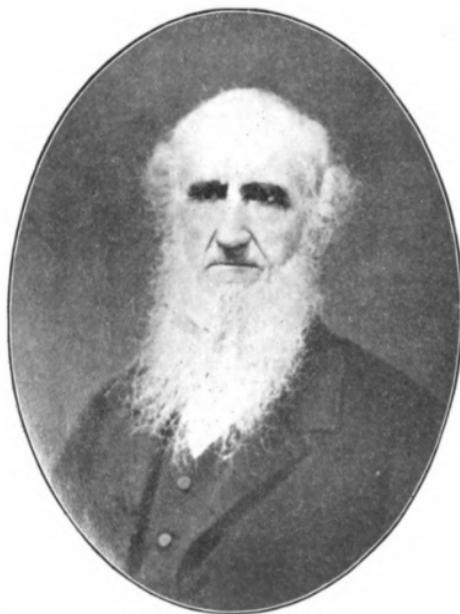


Photo of Albert Hopkins' mission plan to construct a chapel in White Oaks<sup>57</sup>



ALBERT HOPKINS, MORALIST AND PHILOSOPHER, HOOSAC VALLEY. 1823-1872

Photo of Albert Hopkins<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Map #45. *Williams College Archives*.

<sup>58</sup> Niles, Grace. "Albert Hopkins and Williamstown." pp. 666.

Missionary efforts as measured by church attendance, however, suggest that by 1892 less than half of those attending were residents who lived in the neighboring region, and only 15 of 46 residents living on the hill were ever members.<sup>59</sup> Poorer populations were invited and did attend, but influence in the church was maintained by its wealthier members.<sup>60</sup> Historical records suggest that seats at church required purchase,<sup>61</sup> which could have driven away many poorer people who probably could not afford to attend, even if they supported the message shared by missionaries from Williams.

By the early 1900s, church member population had grown,<sup>62</sup> it seemed the neighborhood became less impoverished, and White Oaks was considered by white counterparts to have improved on the grounds of morality.<sup>63</sup> However, this was likely driven by wealthier residents buying out upper White Oaks residents, obtaining their property, and gentrifying the community.<sup>64</sup> This pattern suggests the influx of more affluent people was the cause of increased church attendance as a means of supporting the idea of social and moral reform. This is reflected in the shift of wealth that occurred between the two White Oaks regions. From 1850 to 1860, the ratio of farmers to laborers went from 1:2 to 2:1 in upper White Oaks, and by 1880, farmers far exceeded laborers.<sup>65</sup> Thus, upper White Oaks became home to incoming farmers that contributed steadily increasing wealth to the area.<sup>66</sup> Lower White Oaks, which was known for its poor farmland as a result of steep inclines, became a new home for poorer displaced residents.<sup>67</sup> Population increased while per capita real wealth decreased in the mid to late 1800s.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Eckerson, pp. 30.

<sup>60</sup> Eckerson, pp. 31.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. in Eckerson, pp. 30.

<sup>62</sup> Eckerson, 29.

<sup>63</sup> Qtd. in Eckerson, pp.32.

<sup>64</sup> Eckerson, pp. 24-25.

<sup>65</sup> Eckerson, pp. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Eckerson, pp. 24-25.

<sup>67</sup> Eckerson, pp. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Eckerson, pp. 25.

Consequently, as a result of this gentrification, the Black population decreased in the White Oaks.<sup>69</sup> At about that time, the hill lost its racist nickname among white historians and townspeople and was then called “Oak Hill.”<sup>70</sup> Articles written in the early 1900s praised Albert Hopkins for successful missionary efforts in upper White Oaks<sup>71</sup> despite data that suggested much of the target population were not members of the church.<sup>72</sup> New England Magazine was one such example, in which Niles wrote:

*“And the work begun by this good man some thirty-eight years ago in this valley is still prospering. A beautiful parsonage now stands on an eminence above the chapel, and the ‘waste places’ on the hillsides are adorned with cottages and gardens, and the thrift of the valley is everywhere evident. The fugitive slaves have died out, and their children moved away to broader and busier fields of labor.”<sup>73</sup> <sup>74</sup>*

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<sup>69</sup> Niles, Grace. “Albert Hopkins and Williamstown.” pp. 677.

<sup>70</sup> Eckerson, pp. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Niles, Grace. “Albert Hopkins and Williamstown.” pp. 677. and Haig.

<sup>72</sup> Eckerson, pp. 30.

<sup>73</sup> Niles, Grace. “Albert Hopkins and Williamstown.” pp. 677.

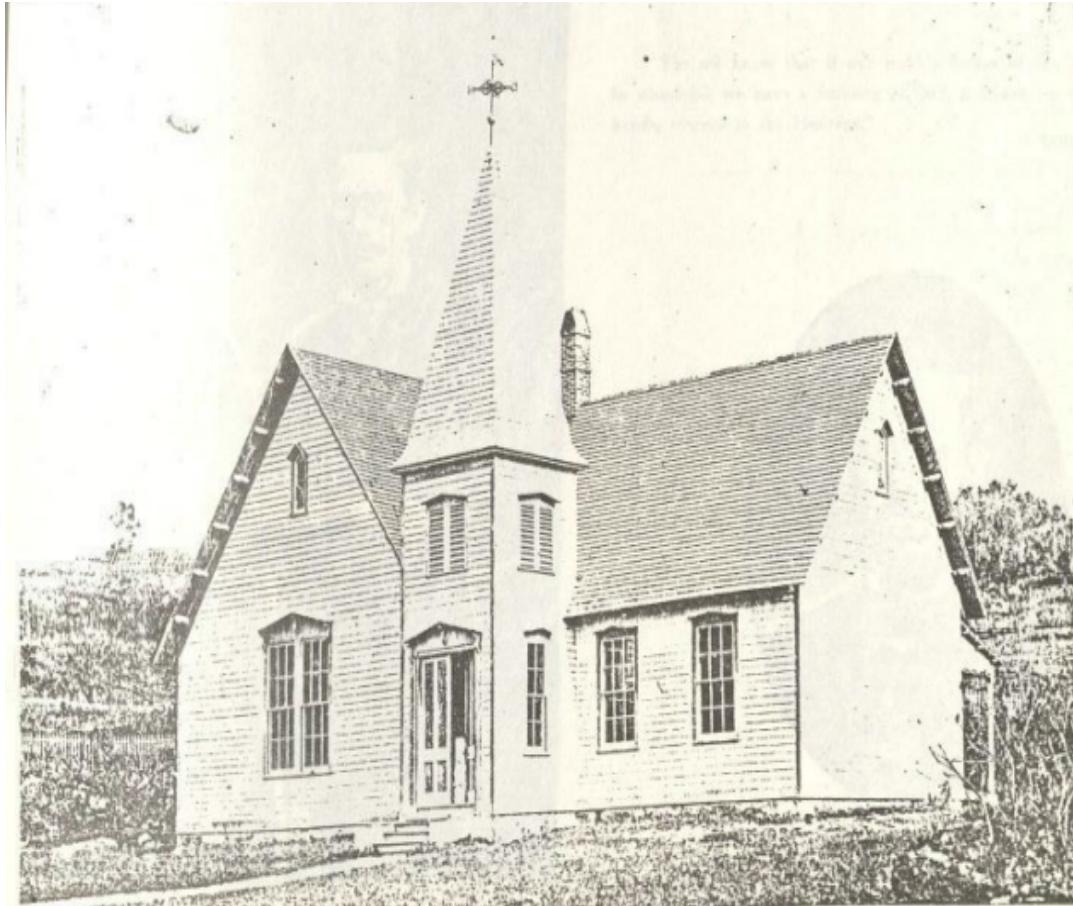
<sup>74</sup> In the early 1920s, the Williamstown Water Company refused to install infrastructure that would furnish residents with clean water. Wells in White Oaks were condemned by the state board of health, but the water company denied clean water supplies under the premise that the cost of water could not be justified by the number of consumers.

“Supply of Water is Still Sought: Residents of White Oaks Will Discuss Plans at Mass Meeting to be Held Thursday Night.” *The North Adams Transcript*, Newspapers.com by ancestry, November 13, 1923.

Despite the printed praise of White Oaks being a more acceptable community after the emigration of Black residents, prejudice against the neighborhood was still present years afterward (there was a reference to the “‘N word’ Hill section of town” in a Transcript newspaper article even in 1926).

Seven, John. “The Burning Cross.” *North Adams Panopticon: Stories Springing from Coca-Cola Ledge*, 2020, pp. 16.

It is likely that this prejudice influenced the refusal for water supplies in the White Oaks in the 1920s, especially since there were ties between Williamstown residents and the KKK during this time period (as described and cited later in this report).



Early photo of the White Oaks chapel<sup>75</sup>

During this time, historical accounts report biases from townsfolk towards White Oaks residents. Those who lived in White Oaks had higher rates of illiteracy, racial diversity, and laborers.<sup>76</sup> People living there were described as having less articulate speech, and many students were a year behind their fellow pupils in school.<sup>77</sup> This resulted in prejudice both from teachers and other children who lived in Williamstown, with one White Oak resident reporting that he was called a “block-headed White Oaker” many times by his teacher.<sup>78</sup> This would have

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<sup>75</sup> Eckerson, pp. 29a.

<sup>76</sup> Eckerson, pp. 53.

<sup>77</sup> Eckerson, pp. 53.

<sup>78</sup> Eckerson, pp. 53.

marginalized those discriminated against, impacting their opportunities for educational growth and social connections.

Black employees who worked at the college experienced similar prejudices in their time at Williams as implied through historical records. Specifically, *The Berkshire Hills* by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts describes "Aunt Hagar" Thompson, who was a servant to the household of President Griffin after spending much of her life in slavery.<sup>79</sup> In this historical account, she is defined by her skin color and "witty, talkative" nature as opposed to respectfully acknowledging her dedication and loyalty to Williams, under which she continued to serve as a laundress after leaving the Griffin service.<sup>80</sup> She died at the age of 105,<sup>81</sup> although there is no description of her retirement or gratitude for her service in said documentation. "Aunt Dinah" is another example of a Black employee of Williams College who was not respectfully regarded in this historical record. Her occupation was termed as a "mammy."<sup>82</sup> The use of this term embodies a degrading racial caricature of African American women who were depicted as joyful maternal figures for white children in the families they served.<sup>83</sup> It suggests Black women in bondage under their white masters were content in their positions, which allowed their oppressors to justify the treatment of people of color.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, "Aunt Dinah" was only highlighted in this historical work for her origin as a "foundling" left at the Williamstown Tavern and for an embarrassing mistake she made while working at the college.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Grace Greylock Niles writes of "Aunt Dinah" as simply a

<sup>79</sup> Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts. *The Berkshire Hills*. New York and London, Funk & Wagnalls company, Federal Writers' Project, 1939, pp. 35.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Pilgrim, David. "The Mammy Caricature." The Mammy Caricature - Anti-Black Imagery - Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University, Ferris State University , Oct. 2012, [www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/mammies/](http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/mammies/). Accessed December 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts, pp. 35-36.

fugitive slave.<sup>86</sup> This written history does not delve deeply into the livelihoods of these Black service workers employed by Williams despite their obvious sacrifices in working at the institution. Similar racial prejudices were likely in place during their lifetimes in service to the college.

Abraham Parsons was one such name that appeared in the media often as he was known for an unusual talent. Parsons was a Black resident in White Oaks commonly known by the nickname “Abe the Bunter” due to his ability to break objects with his head.<sup>87</sup> Historical records describe him utilizing this as a means of income,<sup>88</sup> but fail to acknowledge the demeaning nature of such a lifestyle to which he was reduced in order to obtain financial gain to support him and his family. In the media, he was defined as a “character”<sup>89</sup> which suggests he was regarded more as a sideshow or curiosity rather than a human being. As a result, many stories illustrated him as an anomaly for his ability to butt objects,<sup>90</sup> and Williams College students often had “a great deal of sport with him” by asking him to accomplish similar feats.<sup>91</sup> This published description of the relationship; however, was much more forgiving than actual encounters between the two parties. This is exemplified in one story that was commonly published and shared in a way that portrayed Parsons as an entertaining abnormality. The story described students tricking him into breaking a grindstone with his head,<sup>92</sup> although it is doubtful that this narrative is anything but a myth.

Reportedly, students asked Parsons if he wanted a cheese block, to which he agreed.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Niles, Grace. *The Hoosac Valley: its legends and its history*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, Cornell University Library, 1912, pp. 416.

<sup>87</sup> “Abe Bunter Dead. Familiar Character Passes Away at Williamstown. Stated Many Physicians Have Purchased Rare Cranium.” 1900, Williams College Archives.

<sup>88</sup> “Death of ‘Abe Bunter’ at Williamstown.” 11 February, 1875, Williams College Archives.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Many of the newspaper articles cited in this paper alienated him from the rest of the Williamstown population for his ability, which was perpetuated by his nickname “Abe the Bunter.”

<sup>91</sup> “Killed with His Head. A Famous Williamstown Darkey. Over One Hundred Years Old--A Remarkable Head that has Bunted a Grindstone into Pieces.”

<sup>92</sup> “Killed with His Head. A Famous Williamstown Darkey. Over One Hundred Years Old--A Remarkable Head that has Bunted a Grindstone into Pieces.” January 12, 1895, Williams College Archives.

<sup>93</sup> “Death of ‘Abe Bunter’ at Williamstown.”

They promised him the cheese if he could break it with his head while it was in a sack.<sup>94</sup> They then placed a grindstone into the sack instead of the cheese, and watched as he smashed it, supposedly breaking it into pieces.<sup>95</sup> Illustrations of Parsons in this manner — suggesting inhuman-like abilities — immortalized his position in society as an outlier. This arguably reduced his humanity so townsfolk and students would feel that they could exploit him. Challenges like these utilized him as a source of entertainment, especially at the hands of male fraternity students who would break objects over his head as a party trick.<sup>96</sup> The feats made him famous, but in doing so, his humanity was overlooked.

In his older years, Parsons lived with his wife Elsie in White Oaks before he was forced to relocate under the demands of a town selectman.<sup>97</sup> This came as a huge blow to the couple, who had lived in their home for many years and were deeply saddened by their forced removal.<sup>98</sup> No doubt this eviction caused great anger and feelings of injustice. Excuses for his displacement were reportedly due to “helplessness” from an injury,<sup>99</sup> although the reasons are unclear and conclusions about his health were likely drawn without his consent. From there they moved to a poorhouse in South Williamstown,<sup>100</sup> where he spent the rest of his days.<sup>101</sup> Parsons was rather well liked during his life,<sup>102</sup> but seen as an entertaining medical mystery.<sup>103</sup> The possession of his

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> “‘Abe the Bunter’ Parsons had the best head in Williamstown at the turn-of-the-century.” *The Berkshire Sampler*, 6 Jun, 1976, Williams College Archives.

<sup>97</sup> “Abe Bunter Dead. Familiar Character Passes Away at Williamstown. Stated Many Physicians Have Purchased Rare Cranium.”

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> *Hoosac Valley News*, 28 Dec, 1894, Williams College Archives.

<sup>100</sup> “Taken to the Poorhouse. ‘Abe Bunter’ a Williamstown Nxgro Who Claims He is a Centenarian.” *The Berkshire Eagle*, December 27, 1895, Williams College Archives.

<sup>101</sup> “‘Abe Bunter’ Dead: Familiar Character Passes Away at Williamstown: Stated Many Physicians Have Purchased Rare Cranium.”

<sup>102</sup> “Parsons Lost Only One Battle In Role of Sledgehammer.” *Berkshire Eagle*, September 28, 1953, Williams College Archives.

<sup>103</sup> “Abe Bunter Dead. Familiar Character Passes Away at Williamstown. Stated Many Physicians Have Purchased Rare Cranium.”

head following his death became a common focus amongst curious researchers.<sup>104</sup> After he passed away in 1900 a guard had to be stationed at his grave to deter curious minds from excavating his remains under scientific premises.<sup>105</sup> Debates over ownership of his head continued after his death between contracted buyers he struck deals with during his lifetime.<sup>106</sup> Specifically, concerns over ownership between Dr. Dickinson of Boston and Dr. R. W. Olds of Williamstown were published in local newspapers, with suggestions of many more who may also have been seeking follow ups to their “contracts” regarding Abraham’s head.<sup>107</sup> This attention suggests that those who took interest in him considered him a medical specimen who was more valuable in death than in life. The written record of Abraham Parsons’ life effectively embodies the racist and condescending attitudes of white Williamstown residents towards poor Black citizens of White Oaks.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> “Parsons Lost Only One Battle In Role of Sledgehammer.”

<sup>106</sup> “‘Abe Bunter’ Dead: Familiar Character Passes Away at Williamstown: Stated Many Physicians Have Purchased Rare Cranium.”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

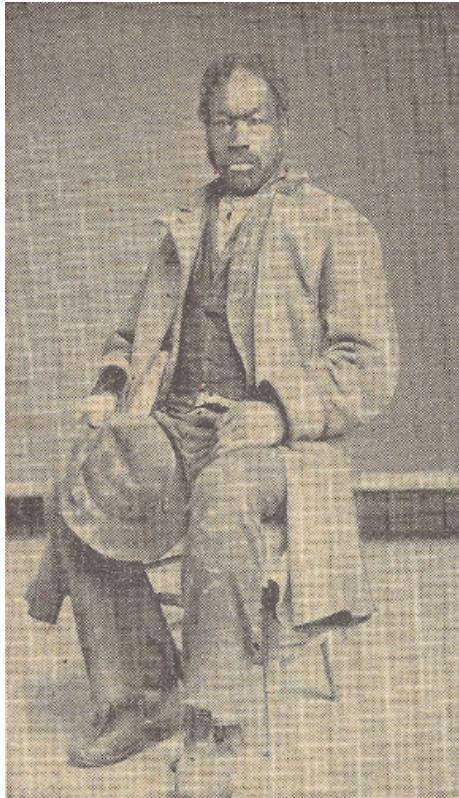


Photo of Abraham Parsons<sup>108</sup>



THE GEORGE ADAMS' SHANTY, THE LAST OF THE NEGRO CABINS IN WHITE OAKS

Photo of a house in the White Oaks owned by a Black resident<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup> "Parsons Lost Only One Battle In Role of Sledgehammer."

<sup>109</sup> Niles, Grace. "Albert Hopkins and Williamstown." pp. 676.

The accomplishments and efforts of other Black citizens of Williamstown were not acknowledged by white residents. During the Revolutionary War, people of color fought on behalf of the United States,<sup>110</sup> but one such veteran who lived in Williamstown was not acknowledged for his service. His name was Ishmael Titus. He was once a slave but gained manumission for taking his enslaver's place as a soldier in the war.<sup>111</sup> Written works by white historians do not acknowledge these sacrifices made by Titus.<sup>112</sup> In contrast, white resident Benjamin Simonds has been applauded for his role as a settler of White Oaks and a patriot colonel in the Revolutionary War.<sup>113</sup> Of additional importance is that Simonds owned slaves, the records of whom being those of Hartford (no recorded last name),<sup>114</sup> and Ishmael Thomas.<sup>115</sup> Yet, this history is not readily found in Williamstown records, as even the Williamstown Historical Museum website did not seem to have evidence of Benjamin Simonds enslaving Black people.

During the civil war, Edward Hopkins, son of Albert Hopkins, died with five fellow soldiers at Ashland, Virginia.<sup>116</sup> Albert Hopkins went to the burial site to retrieve his son's remains so he may be buried in Williamstown, but could not distinguish which grave belonged to his son's, as all the graves were shallow and unmarked.<sup>117</sup> Historical records seemed to blame the Black people who buried the remains for not providing the fallen soldiers with acceptable

<sup>110</sup> "Pension application of Ishmael Titus." Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters, R10623, Feb. 4, 2017. <http://revwarapps.org/r10623.pdf>. Accessed December 2020.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Eckerson's written work, as well as *The Berkshire Hills* by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts fail to mention Titus' name. Grace Greylock Niles' *The Hoosac Valley : its legends and its history* only describes Titus as a fugitive slave.

<sup>113</sup> Eckerson, pp. 19-20.

<sup>114</sup> Stratton, Isaac. Hartforde freed by Benjamin Simonds." *Williamstown Historical Museum*, Catalog Number Ps2010.393.577, Apr. 10, 1783. <https://williamstown.pastperfectonline.com/photo/0EB5560D-3FEE-460A-B27E-816270452122>. Accessed December 2020.

<sup>115</sup> Senate Unpassed Legislation 1788, Docket 884, SC1/series 231, Petition of Noah Miles. Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, Massachusetts Archives, Boston MA, Feb. 3, 1788, Harvard Dataverse, V5. <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/UR1OB>. Accessed December 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Sewall, pp. 205.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

burials.<sup>118</sup> Hopkins returned about a year later with means that allowed him to identify his son's grave.<sup>119</sup> His son currently rests in town.<sup>120</sup> In contrast, four citizens of White Oaks, consisting of a mother and a son travelling with an older married couple, froze to death in an April snowstorm on their way back from selling baskets in Pittsburgh, NY in 1857.<sup>121</sup> After identifying the deceased, Williamstown authorities refused to bring their bodies home—which lay just a few miles—to be buried.<sup>122</sup> Even today, they remain buried apart from their families, most likely in the “Moses” Cemetery of Pittsburgh.<sup>123</sup>

#### *RISE OF THE KKK IN THE BERKSHIRES*

Though White Oaks was historically home to much of the Black community in Williamstown, it was also an active site for Ku Klux Klan activity in the 1920s. Anti-Catholicism was the main focus of the KKK when they arrived in the Berkshires, but soon after they began targeting Black people.<sup>124</sup> Known for their racist ideals and violent nature, the KKK actively recruited in Williamstown and North Adams on multiple occasions throughout the 1920s. Their efforts were reported in *The North Adams Transcript*, which described meetings hosted by the KKK that were open to the public—events which many people outside of the organization attended.<sup>125</sup> Activities often included burning large crosses, in White Oaks specifically,<sup>126</sup> that were populated by Black residents.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, pp. 207-208.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, pp. 205-209.

<sup>121</sup> “Frozen to Death in April.” *Taconic Crest Project*, pp. 5, Williams College Archives.

<sup>122</sup> “Frozen to Death in April.”

<sup>123</sup> “Frozen to Death in April.”

<sup>124</sup> Seven, pp. 10.

<sup>125</sup>“Still Another Cross is Burned: Klan Meeting Reported to Have Been Held in White Oaks Church.” *The North Adams Transcript*, Newspapers.com by ancestry, March 18, 1926.

<sup>126</sup> “Fiery Cross Burns in the White Oaks. Section Was Scene of at Least One Meeting of Ku Klux Klan.” *The North Adams Transcript*, Newspapers.com by ancestry, 22 January, 1926.

These racist acts were not openly disapproved of by the community, which allowed for their continuation. Reverend Robert H. Washburn of the [Williamstown] Methodist church gave a sermon on the topic of the racial hate group, not in objection but in consideration of whether its presence was necessary, opening up his audience to only “100 percent Americans.”<sup>127</sup> In response to a burning cross found in a field, the local fire chief claimed the perpetrators would be tried to the full extent of the law, not due to the intent behind the burning but because it violated fire regulations.<sup>128</sup> This suggests the motivation behind any disciplinary action had more to do with the endangerment of property owned by white people than the safety and well-being of Black citizens. The KKK was integrated into the network of the community, with meetings held at the local White Oaks Chapel and resident participants rumored to live on Hopper Rd.<sup>129</sup> In an apparent expression of gratitude for allowing the KKK to use the chapel as a place to meet during the winter,<sup>130</sup> they even donated \$75 in 1926 for the purpose of installing a new hardwood floor.<sup>131</sup> It was recognized that this was the closest thing to charity the group had done since their origination in Williamstown.<sup>132</sup> The Klan’s use of religious meetinghouses was not new, however, as the organization itself was closely tied with Protestant churches.<sup>133</sup> Nationwide, the group claimed to be composed of Protestants, and mainly targeted people who were Black, Catholic, Jewish, and foreign-born under the ideology that America was in peril and would only

<sup>127</sup> “Ku Klux Klan Discussion At Evening Church Service.” *The North Adams Transcript*, Newspapers.com by ancestry, December 2, 1922.

<sup>128</sup> Seven, pp. 1.

<sup>129</sup> “Klan Presents \$75 Gift to W. O. Church: Announcement Made at Annual Christmas Supper at Church Last Evening- To Be Used for New Floor.” *The North Adams Transcript*, Newspapers.com by ancestry, December 3, 1926.

<sup>130</sup> This source suggested the Klan rented the space.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Miller, Moats. “A Note on the Relationship between the Protestant Churches and the Revived Ku Klux Klan.” *The Journal of Southern History*, Southern Historical Association, Vol. 22, No. 3, Aug., 1956, pp. 355.

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2954550.pdf?casa\\_token=zphOvDDx7M4AAAAA:aDBIvCWlYgilj70EE0KwP3a8EI-EiRuxubnH-10iGd\\_DVC5snrQU7gITNF1uvXFd53pKUmap8Xn4NUF9Z3qDXwDaCyflW7HrLBgrKscAEE-NJEoYpApQ](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2954550.pdf?casa_token=zphOvDDx7M4AAAAA:aDBIvCWlYgilj70EE0KwP3a8EI-EiRuxubnH-10iGd_DVC5snrQU7gITNF1uvXFd53pKUmap8Xn4NUF9Z3qDXwDaCyflW7HrLBgrKscAEE-NJEoYpApQ). Accessed December 2020.

be saved if the demographic remained white, Protestant, and native-born.<sup>134</sup> The fact that many officers of the group were Protestant ministers<sup>135</sup> is likely what prompted many visitations to church meetinghouses.<sup>136</sup>

By 1927, the organization experienced massive growth.<sup>137</sup> The *North Adams Transcript* described the initiation as taking place in local fraternal organizations, in which hundreds of new members were welcomed by a regional Klan Kouncil.<sup>138</sup> This suggests that many Williamstown community leaders with fraternal ties — who likely had great influence over their peers— also supported the racist hate group and perpetuated their message.



Newspaper clipping describing KKK activity<sup>139</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

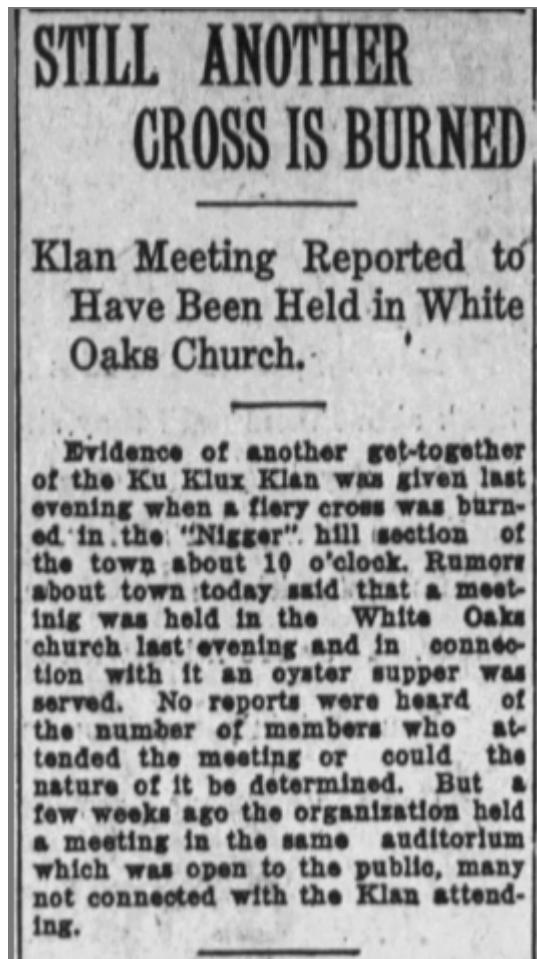
<sup>135</sup> Ibid, pp. 356.

<sup>136</sup> Secular and church reports published news of the Klan visiting churches. Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> "Report Klan Has Large Initiation: Over 100 New Members Join Organization at Indoor Meeting." *The North Adams Transcript*, Newspapers.com by ancestry, April 7, 1927.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> "Klan Gives Church at Williamstown \$75." *The Berkshire Eagle*, Newspapers.com by ancestry, December 4, 1926.



Newspaper clipping describing KKK activity<sup>140</sup>

A partial reason for the large influx of growth in the mid 1920s was due to the release of the divisive film *Birth of a Nation*.<sup>141</sup> The movie was released in 1915, remaining popular for 20 years with multiple releases.<sup>142</sup> Its arrival was announced in Berkshire theaters near the end of 1915, but not without protest from the Black community.<sup>143</sup> Complaints were publicized by African Americans who wanted to avoid the potential creation of racial rifts as reported to result from the showing of this movie in other regions.<sup>144</sup> That is, in Boston, an NAACP protest

<sup>140</sup> "Still Another Cross is Burned: Klan Meeting Reported to Have Been Held in White Oaks Church."

<sup>141</sup> Seven, pp. 1.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, pp. 1.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, pp. 2.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, pp. 2-3.

marched to a theater, but tickets were not sold to Black patrons.<sup>145</sup> Later, police involvement stimulated what was referred to in the papers as a “race riot” that was actually known to have started with a “plainclothes cop sucker-punch[ing] civil rights leader William Monroe Trotter.”<sup>146</sup> While the newspaper sided with the Black community against the screening of the film early in May of 1915,<sup>147</sup> articles shifted points of view as the year progressed.<sup>148</sup> By the end of 1915, a *North Adams Transcript* editorial article wrote,

*“the systematic attempt to prevent the production of *The Birth of a Nation* in this state strikes us as being far-fetched. There is not the slightest evidence that the picture has intensified race prejudice in New York where it has long been shown as a matter of course, and there is no reason why it should do so among intelligent people, white or colored. It would be just about as logical to protest against screen representations of mob violence among whites, because scenes do not truly reflect the character of our civilization.”<sup>149</sup>*

Despite local efforts to prevent the movie screening, it was shown in Berkshire theaters January of 1916, and not without its predicted consequences.<sup>150</sup> KKK members rode through the streets promoting the movie and its racist message while mounted in full regalia.<sup>151</sup> The movie was well received by white citizens, and streetcar schedules were even modified to match screening times as they ran from North Adams to Williamstown.<sup>152</sup> Organized efforts to stop the screening from the St. James Lodge of the Knights of Pythias, who may or may not have been

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, pp. 2.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, pp. 2.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, pp. 2.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, pp. 3.

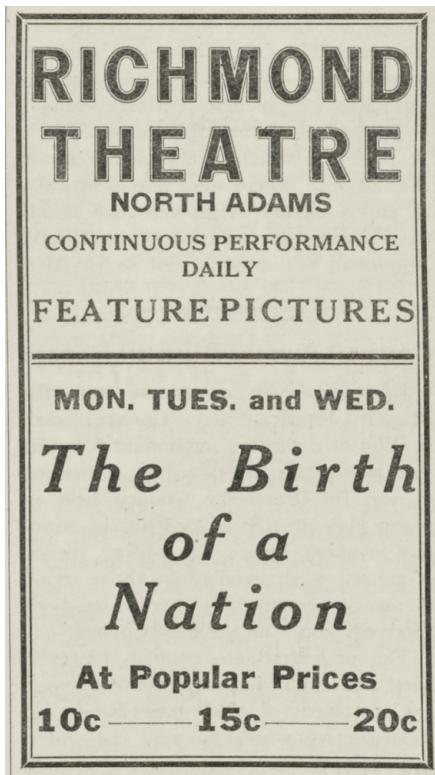
<sup>149</sup> Qtd. in Ibid, pp. 3.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, pp. 3.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, pp. 2.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, pp. 3.

working with the NAACP, were of no avail.<sup>153</sup> The film was so successful in romanticizing the KKK that it was able to translate its on-screen message to real-world recruits, increasing their organization's numbers.<sup>154</sup>



Advertisement for *Birth of a Nation* from the year 1919, showing the film being screened three days per week in North Adams four years after its first release<sup>155</sup>

The presence of the KKK catalyzed racism amongst local populations. The 1920s in the Berkshires was fraught with cross burnings and violence, though many instances were passed off as the work of local pranksters.<sup>156</sup> The North Adams Transcript often denied that the work of burnings came from Klan members, which heavily influenced the public to disregard the true extent of racism in the area.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>153</sup>Ibid, pp. 3.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid, pp. 4.

<sup>155</sup>"Richmond Theater." *Williams Record*, April 18, 1919, Williams College Archives.

<sup>156</sup>Seven, pp. 7.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid, pp. 7.

## *BLACKINTON*

Blackinton is one neighborhood in which the history of the area tells an important story about Williamstown's socioeconomic history. Blackinton is now located entirely in North Adams, but began as a neighborhood divided between Williamstown and North Adams near the Iron Bridge of the Hoosic River.<sup>158</sup> It is named after Otis and Sanford Blackinton, manufacturers in North Adams.<sup>159</sup> Sanford created a mill in the area that drew in Welsh workers to work and live in Blackinton.<sup>160</sup> In 1899, the residents of Blackinton decided that they wanted more street lights and to be a part of the fire district. During one of the early meetings on the issue on June 2nd, 1899, Blackinton residents missed the meeting that was held to discuss their proposal, arriving after the short meeting ended.<sup>161</sup> The residents of Blackinton felt that they were being unfairly treated, and they wanted the same access to water for fire hydrants and electricity for street lights as their fellow citizens were receiving from North Adams.<sup>162</sup>

In January 1900, Blackinton petitioned Williamstown to be annexed into North Adams in order to receive infrastructure that Williamstown was reluctant to provide.<sup>163</sup> Simon P. Galvin brought this petition to the legislature, and the petition was signed by 95% of the Blackinton residents who were taxpayers and homeowners.<sup>164</sup> Residents wanted to be included into North Adams to become part of its fire district so that they could receive water more easily.<sup>165</sup> Blackinton residents also wanted to expand their lights and sidewalks to the entirety of the villages, and have their children attend a more town unified school.<sup>166</sup> At the town meeting to

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<sup>158</sup>Miller, Mike. "Blackinton Annexation" February, 2012.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>"Blackinton People Sore." *North Adams Transcript*, June, 2nd, 1899.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>"For Annexation." *North Adams Transcript*, January, 24th, 1900. via Miller, Mike. "Blackinton Annexation" February, 2012.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

discuss the matter, the Williamstown Committee said that they were reluctant to provide such services and claimed that residents would have to wait a long time before such the town could afford to pay for them.<sup>167</sup> The Williamstown Committee said they were "willing but unable" to provide those services.<sup>168</sup> By February, the question of whether Williamstown would provide services to Blackinton or give the area to North Adams was a widely discussed topic among Williamstown residents.<sup>169</sup> Most Williamstown residents were opposed to the measure as it would provide the town unfair expenses and some even blamed Blackinton residents for not having attended the meeting in the past that discussed the fire district in that area.<sup>170</sup> Williamstown residents thus seemed to support North Adams claiming Blackinton and providing the needed services.<sup>171</sup> On February 21st, the *North Adams Transcript* released another article on this topic, explaining that Williamstown opposed the measure of maintaining control of Blackinton and thus providing those residents services because they were not given enough notice.<sup>172</sup> In the meantime, more surveys are being conducted to establish the new border lines of the area replacing the 1749 boundaries.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

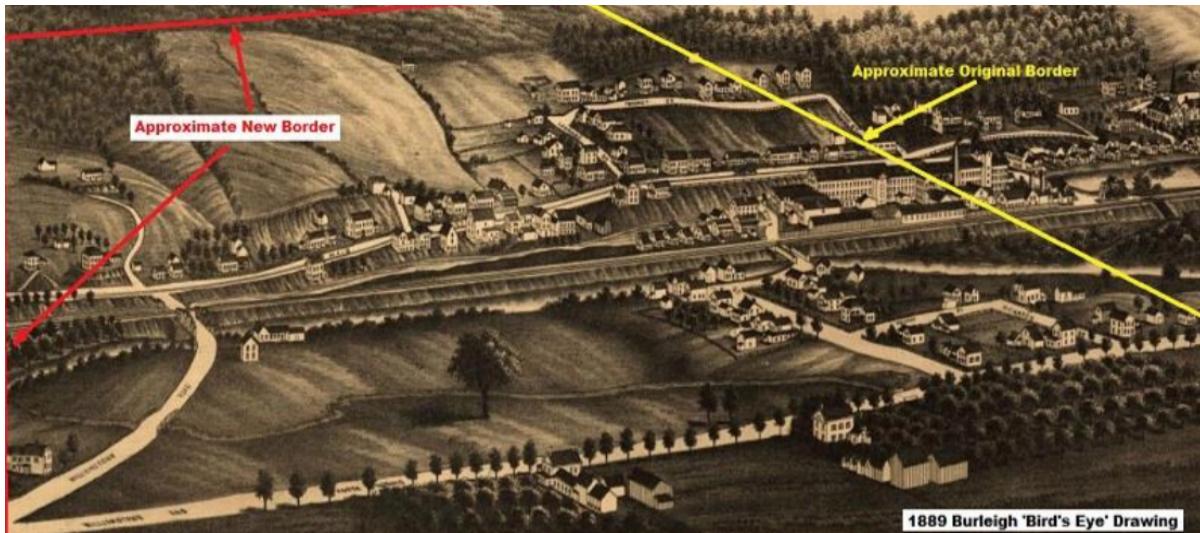
<sup>169</sup> "Want a Fair Bill." *North Adams Transcript*, February, 5th, 1900. via Miller, Mike. "Blackinton Annexation" February, 2012.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> "New Survey to be Made." *North Adams Transcript*, February, 21st, 1900. via Miller, Mike. "Blackinton Annexation" February, 2012.

<sup>173</sup> Miller, Mike. "Blackinton Annexation" February, 2012. And Ibid.



Map of Blackinton<sup>174</sup>

In March 1900, the annexation question continued as the Williamstown committee moved to delay the decision about Blackinton, though reports of the meeting suggest that the committee favored North Adams annexing the neighborhood.<sup>175</sup> Lawyer Clarence Smith of the Williamstown board was the only member opposing the North Adams annexation, and he moved to extend the decision deadline, advocating for voters to have more say in the matter.<sup>176</sup> He thought that losing Blackinton would mean losing property taxes and thus would not benefit Williamstown.<sup>177</sup> In April, a decision was made that North Adams would annex Blackinton in exchange for paying Williamstown \$3000, and North Adams was responsible for creating a union school.<sup>178</sup> During the decision meeting, Dr. Bascom of the Williamstown committee spoke that he was shocked to see how little the city and town fought over this issue, seemingly

<sup>174</sup> Miller, Mike. "Blackinton Annexation" February, 2012.

<sup>175</sup> "More Time Given: The Annexation Hearing Which Resulted in Putting Matter Off." *North Adams Transcript*, March, 16, 1900. via Miller, Mike. "Blackinton Annexation" February, 2012.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> "Terms Fixed: City is to Pay \$3000 for Annexation of Blackinton." *North Adams Transcript*, April 3rd, 1900. via Miller, Mike. "Blackinton Annexation" February, 2012.

unbothered by the issue that was actually one of great importance.<sup>179</sup> This was particularly perplexing as the street lights that were requested by Blackinton residents upon annexation would have benefited Williamstown residents who moved along the road connecting the two areas quite often.<sup>180</sup>

The bill detailing the annexation of Blackinton passed in the legislature, and new boundaries between Williamstown and North Adams were drawn. Today, those stone monuments marking the boundary line still stand. Blackinton was officially moved into North Adams' control.

## THE MOVING OF GRIFFIN HALL

According to the Williamstown residents and most of the committee, Blackinton was ultimately given to North Adams by Williamstown for economic reasons. However, at that same time, money from Williams College alumni was being poured into the College's building projects, which resulted in the college hiring the Olmsted firm to prepare a plan to beautify main street and to move Griffin Hall approximately 45 feet to the northeast.<sup>181</sup> Though obviously the funds of the college are largely separate from those of the town, the contrast in wealth and investment in infrastructure of Williams College and Williamstown as a whole is still apparent. The college funneled significant funds for a purely aesthetic project like the moving of Griffin Hall. This was announced in August 1902, just two years after Williamstown ruled that they did not have the resources to extend infrastructure to Blackinton. The building committee at Williams College ruled that preserving Griffin Hall was critical, despite the costs, as it is a

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> "Fire District Questions." *North Adams Transcript*, June 1st, 1899.

<sup>181</sup> The building was moved 15 feet north and 30 feet east. "Williams Trustees Meet: A Number of Important Matters Discussed." *The Berkshire Eagle*, October 11, 1902.

historic building on campus.<sup>182</sup> Thus, they decided to move the building to make aesthetic space for the new chapel, an extremely costly production, though not the most expensive of their potential plans.<sup>183</sup> Wealthy alumni Francis Stetson ('67) paid \$25,000 in 1904 which paid for the moving and updating of Griffin Hall.<sup>184</sup> Mrs. Thompson of New York City also paid a generous sum of money at the start of the construction to fund the project.<sup>185</sup> The project of moving the building provided numerous labor jobs, as did other costly town projects done at the same time including constructing a new bridge over the Green River, and greatly investing in redoing the highway roads.<sup>186</sup> It is important to note that there is a clear difference between the sources of money of the college and the funds of the town. However, this anecdote only serves to highlight the differences between the funds of each entity and how that has influenced the town over time.

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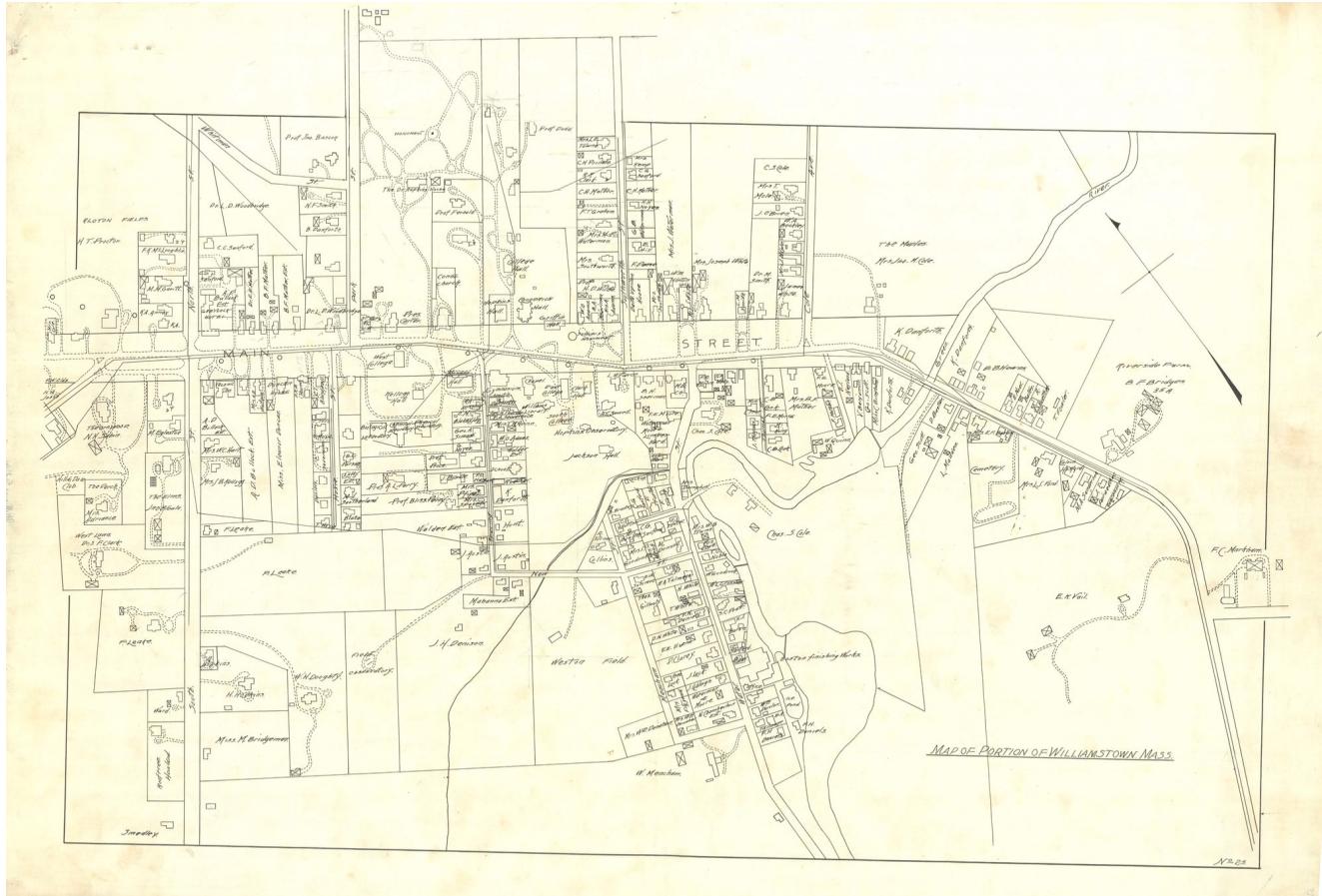
<sup>182</sup> "New Chapel Site: Williams College's New Costly Chapel Will Supplant Old One." *North Adams Transcript*, August 20, 1902.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> "Trustees' Meeting." *North Adams Transcript*, June 21, 1904.

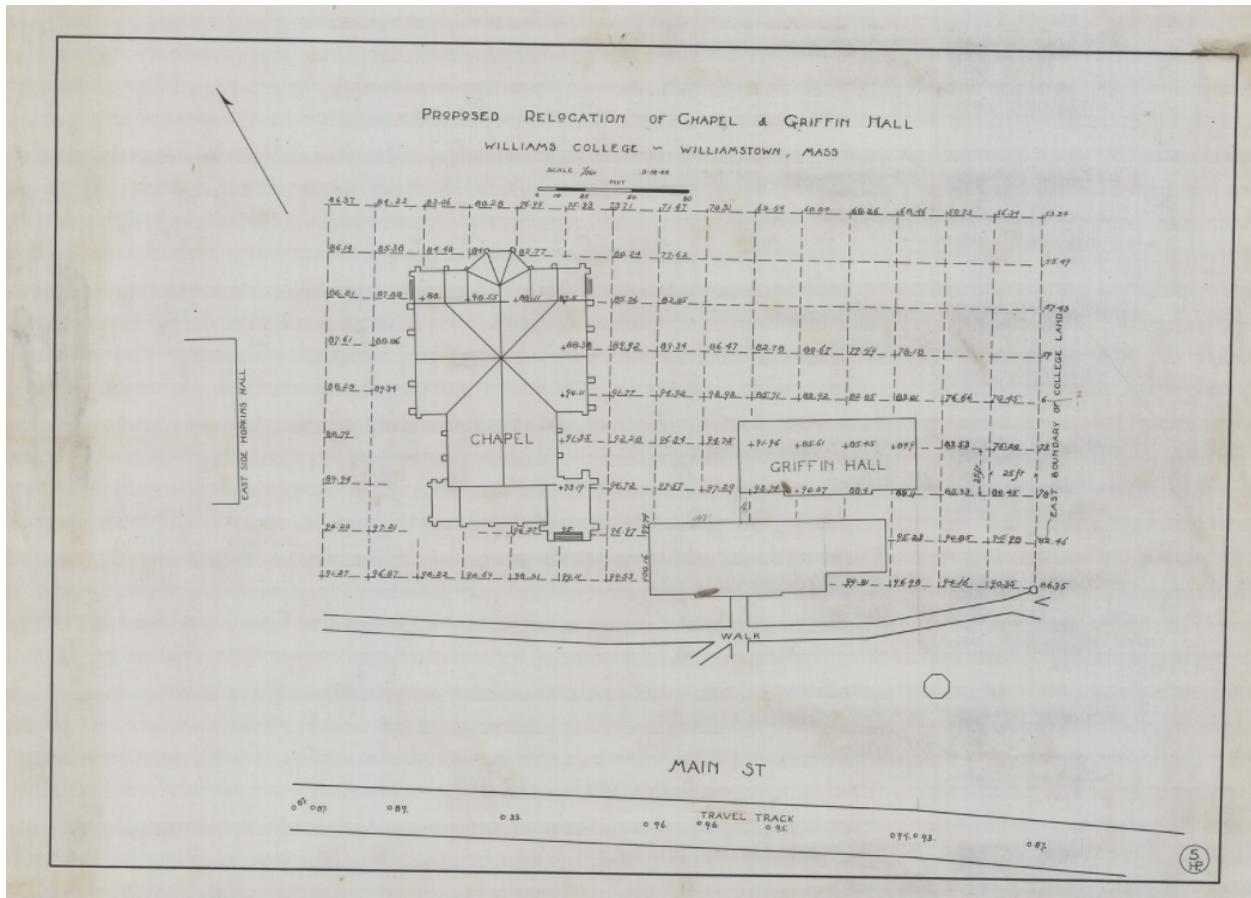
<sup>185</sup> "New Chapel Site: Williams College's New Costly Chapel Will Supplant Old One." *North Adams Transcript*, August 20, 1902.

<sup>186</sup> "Abundance of Work in Town." *North Adams Transcript*, June 15, 1903.



Griffin Hall plans by the Olmsted Firm demonstrating the before and after photos<sup>187</sup>

<sup>187</sup> Olmsted Archive, Proposed Relocation of Chapel and Griffin Hall at Williams College, Flickr, 2016.  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted\\_archives/24573953363/in/album-72157658965966528/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted_archives/24573953363/in/album-72157658965966528/)  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted\\_archives/24570099824/in/album-72157658965966528/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted_archives/24570099824/in/album-72157658965966528/)



Griffin Hall plans by the Olmsted Firm demonstrating the before and after photos<sup>188</sup>

Evidently, Williams College has lots of alumni willing to donate money to the school, but perhaps not to the greater Williamstown community. The amount of money spent on moving Griffin Hall for a purely aesthetic purpose was far more expensive than the cost of providing lights and other infrastructure to Blackinton, yet the town turned those residents away due to supposed economic constraints. The fact that the funding for these projects was to preserve a building named after President Griffin, a known supporter of the American Colonization Society, shows that the college at that time prioritized aesthetic considerations. Having the famous Olmsted firm propose a redesign plan for the campus to create an even more pleasing aesthetic

<sup>188</sup> Olmsted Archive, Proposed Relocation of Chapel and Griffin Hall at Williams College, Flickr, 2016.  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted\\_archives/24573953363/in/album-72157658965966528/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted_archives/24573953363/in/album-72157658965966528/)  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted\\_archives/24570099824/in/album-72157658965966528/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/olmsted_archives/24570099824/in/album-72157658965966528/)

was a more important priority than the investment in infrastructure to redress economic inequality in the broader Williamstown community. This is one example of how historical aesthetic preference manifested in class, socioeconomic, (and to some extent) racial bias in the built environment of Williamstown.

### *COLONIAL VILLAGE*

The neighborhood formerly known as Colonial Village is unique among the four neighborhoods we selected in that it is the only area that contained an explicitly racist housing covenant for all the homes in the Village. This deed restriction clearly reflects the racism in the nation and in Williamstown during the mid 20th century. Barbara Oneil, a resident of Williamstown at the time, provided some of her experience with prejudice around the time Colonial Village was founded.

Growing up, Barbara learned of the mistreatment of her family through unfair housing policies. Her father, Harry Logan, worked three jobs but was forced to live in the basement of what is now called Spencer House on the Williams College campus, where he was employed as a janitor<sup>189</sup> for the Chi Psi fraternity house.<sup>190</sup> While he wanted to move, due to biased bank lending practices, he and his wife weren't granted a loan to purchase a house until two white men from the fraternity cosigned for a mortgage on their behalf.<sup>191</sup> By the time Barbara was born, her family lived in a rental house on the corner of Arnold and Elm Street, which is located just up the road from Colonial Village.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Oneil, Barbara. Interview. November 12, 2020.

<sup>190</sup> "Elimination of fraternities." *Willipedia*, March 13, 2009.

[https://wso.williams.edu/wiki/index.php/Elimination\\_of\\_fraternities](https://wso.williams.edu/wiki/index.php/Elimination_of_fraternities). Accessed December 2020.

<sup>191</sup> Oneil, Barbara. Interview. November 12, 2020.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

Barbara learned that residential struggles were not the only displays of racism. She experienced condescension from her white peers throughout her younger years.<sup>193</sup> Growing up, she was the only Black girl in her neighborhood.<sup>194</sup> Her first recollection of prejudice was when she asked a white boy to go to a dance.<sup>195</sup> He agreed after an initial refusal, but she described that other children kept looking at them while they were together, recalling that “that’s the way it was” with prejudice in Williamstown at the time.<sup>196</sup> This racism continued into her adulthood, presenting itself most apparently around the time of her marital engagement in the 1960s. After returning home from her work in Boston, she met her husband and they eventually decided to get married.<sup>197</sup> He is white, and when her family learned of this, her mother disapproved, believing that an interracial couple “would not work.”<sup>198</sup> When the couple went to the Methodist church where Barbara attended, the Reverend, who was the Chaplain to the college at the time,<sup>199</sup> would not marry them because of the color of her skin.<sup>200</sup> They eventually found an Episcopalian priest that was willing to marry them, but family members were still hesitant to support the marriage.<sup>201</sup> This type of racial tension represents the general context in which the Colonial Village deed restriction was written as a means of maintaining segregation between whites and minorities in the early to mid 1900s. Even as a child, Barbara came to the understanding that it was not a welcoming place.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, with factual addition by Bilal Ansari. The minister was Robert K. Buckwalter.

<sup>200</sup> Oneil, Barbara. Interview. November 12, 2020.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

William Harry Thurber ) KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS  
 Protective Covenants ) That, WHEREAS, WILLIAM HARRY THURBER of North Adams, Berkshire County,  
 and Restrictions ) Massachusetts, hereinafter called the "owner", is the owner of a certain  
 tract of land situate on the northeasterly side of Main Street in Williams-  
 town in said County, which land he has subdivided into building lots for the purpose of  
 developing the same as a restricted residential tract, said tract being shown on plan  
 entitled "Colonial Village, Williamstown, Mass. owned and developed by W. Harry Thurber  
 Aug.- Sept. 1939 Supersedes plan of same title dated Apr.-June 1939 Henry C. Neff- Civil  
 Eng'r.", on file in Northern Berkshire Registry of Deeds at Adams, Mass. and to which plan  
 reference is always to be had. NOW, THEREFORE,

(a) All lots in the tract shall be known and described as residential lots; no structures  
 shall be erected, altered, placed, or permitted to remain on any residential building lot  
 other than one detached single house dwelling not to exceed two and one-half stories in  
 height and a private garage for not more than two cars.

(b) No structure shall be erected or placed on any lot until design and location thereof  
 have been approved in writing by a committee composed of William Harry Thurber, E. Adele  
 Thurber and Harold G. Button, all of said North Adams, or their survivors and in event of  
 the death, disability or refusal to serve of any of them, the others shall have the right  
 and duty to appoint a successor member of said committee by an instrument in writing duly  
 recorded with Northern Berkshire Registry of Deeds, and a document signed by a majority  
 of the committee certifying the fact of such approval shall be conclusive evidence that  
 the restrictions in this paragraph have been complied with.

(c) No building shall be located on any residential building lot nearer than 30 feet to  
 the front lot line, nor nearer than 20 feet to any side street line. No building, except  
 a garage or other outbuilding located 60 feet or more from the front line, shall be loca-  
 ted nearer than 15 feet to any side lot line.

(d) No residential structure shall be erected or placed on any building lot, which lot  
 has an area of less than 8,000 square feet or a width of less than 75 feet at the front  
 building setback line, as shown on the recorded plan.

(e) No noxious or offensive trade or activity shall be carried on upon any lot nor shall  
 anything be done thereon which may be or become an annoyance or nuisance to the neighbor-  
 hood.

(f) No persons of any race other than the white race shall use or occupy any buildings on  
 any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a  
 different race domiciled with an owner or tenant.

This is the restrictive deed covenant in the Colonial Village neighborhood. See section f.<sup>203</sup>

When specifically asked about the name of her neighborhood,<sup>204</sup> current resident Kashia Pieprzak, speculated that the developer had perhaps chosen "Colonial Village" due to both the architecture style and how it celebrated colonialism/white supremacy.<sup>205</sup> The buildings were not,

<sup>203</sup> "Protective Covenants and Restrictions." William Harry Thurber, 1939.

<sup>204</sup> Of note, we will still refer to this neighborhood as Colonial Village in our report for clarification, but we acknowledge that the neighborhood asked that Williamstown not use the name of the former neighborhood due to its connection to racist practices.

<sup>205</sup> Pieprzak, Kashia. Interview, October 15, 2020.

after all, built in the colonial period, but were constructed during a particularly racist time in the nation's history during World War II.<sup>206</sup> Recently, the neighborhood decided against using the name, so they took down the neighborhood sign and have requested that the name no longer be used by the town.<sup>207</sup> They have not renamed the neighborhood, and maybe never will, as having a neighborhood name makes the community seem exclusive and gated to many current residents.<sup>208</sup>

Harry Thurber created Colonial Village on a 70 acre plot of land off of East Main Street in Williamstown.<sup>209</sup> Thurber's marketing vision for the subdivision and future neighborhood was modern homes available at a low cost to support the desire for more affordable housing in town.<sup>210</sup> The 46 homes constructed were cape cod and colonial style homes arranged in a more densely packed manner than most neighborhoods at the time.<sup>211</sup> A year later in 1939, Thurber adopted a racially restrictive covenant for occupants of the neighborhood.<sup>212</sup> This covenant detailed that "no persons of any race other than the white race shall use or occupy any buildings or any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race domiciled with an owner or tenant."<sup>213</sup> Sadly, such racially restrictive covenants were not uncommon during the mid 20th century. *The Color of the Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* explains that 56% of developments in NYC suburbs as well as 85% of larger neighborhoods built between 1935- 1947 contained such covenants.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> "May Create Village of 46 Homes in Williamstown." *North Adams Transcript*, November 4th, 1938.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> "Protective Covenants and Restrictions." William Harry Thurber, 1939.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. section f.

<sup>214</sup> Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: a Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.

Enforcing such racially restrictive deeds was outlawed by the Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kramer* in 1948.<sup>215</sup> However, not until the passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act was writing such deeds illegal.<sup>216</sup> Today, many of these racially restrictive covenants remain as unenforceable language that is kept in deeds for a variety of reasons, including that many homeowners are not aware of the exclusionary deed and removing the restriction is time consuming and costly.<sup>217</sup> For current Colonial Village resident, Kashia Pieprzak, learning about the covenant made her determined to remove it. She learned of the deed restriction when she was signing the papers on her new home in the neighborhood in 2012.<sup>218</sup> The lawyers present with her at the time said there was nothing she could do about the deed, but that it was not legally binding.<sup>219</sup> She recalled that two years earlier, an African American colleague of hers at Williams College was told by her realtor about the deed when looking to buy a home.<sup>220</sup> That friend did not ultimately buy a home in the Colonial Village neighborhood because of that deed.<sup>221</sup> According to many lawyers in town, there was nothing the residents who were invested in removing the covenant could do to remove it.<sup>222</sup>

The neighborhood in July 2020; however, refused to accept doing nothing. They moved to remove the deed, change the name of the neighborhood, and send a bill to the Massachusetts legislature to make it easier to strike out racially restrictive covenants. Kashia was pleased to see her neighborhood come together to tackle this injustice,<sup>223</sup> and she cited Bilal Ansari's letter to

<sup>215</sup> Welsh, Nancy H. "Racially Restrictive Covenants in the United States: A Call to Action," n.d. [https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/143831/A\\_12%20Racially%20Restrictive%20Covenants%20in%20the%20US.pdf](https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/143831/A_12%20Racially%20Restrictive%20Covenants%20in%20the%20US.pdf).

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Pieprzak, Kashia. Interview. October 15, 2020.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Written Testimony in Support of H4944 via Kashia Pieprzak.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> According to Written Testimony in Support of H4944 via Kashia Pieprzak, 44 homes in her neighborhood worked to fight against this racially restrictive covenant.

iBerkshire detailing his family's experience in Williamstown in the face of racism, as a powerful piece in inspiring action among her neighbors.<sup>224</sup> Kashia and several of her neighbors contacted Representative John Barrett and Senator Adam Hinds to ask them to sponsor their bill, H4944, which would authorize the actions necessary to remove the racially restrictive deed that is still referenced today. In her written testimony, Kashia urged the Massachusetts legislature to adopt H4944 "an act providing for the expungement of racially restrictive covenants in recorded real property documents."<sup>225</sup> Kashia told us that the inspiration for this deed was from a bill passed in the state of Washington in 2018, SHB 2514,<sup>226</sup> which allowed homeowners to remove racially discriminatory language from deeds if requested to do so.<sup>227</sup> She referenced this legislation in her written testimony. Neighbors and other residents in town also sent letters to the legislature in support of this bill. Today, the bill has not been voted on yet and is still being investigated,<sup>228</sup> but the passage of this bill will nonetheless be extremely important as a step towards acknowledging and fighting against the racist past of Williamstown, and other towns in Massachusetts.

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Written Testimony in Support of H4944 via Kashia Pieprzak.

<sup>226</sup> SHB 2514, 65th Congress in the State of Washington, 2018. <http://lawfilesextr.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2017-18/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/2514-S.PL.pdf>

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. and Pieprzak.

<sup>228</sup> "An Act Providing For the Expungement of Racially Restrictive Covenants in Recorded Real Property Documents," Bill H.4944, 191st (Current), 2020. Accessed December 6, 2020. <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/H4944/BillHistory>.



This is a home in Colonial Village located on Berkshire Drive



This was one sign of many posted in Colonial Village during the summer of 2020, demonstrating residents' support of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

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<sup>229</sup> "Sold: 131 Berkshire Dr, Williamstown, MA 01267: 3 Beds / 2 Full Baths / 1 Half Bath: \$380000." Stone House Properties, LLC. Accessed November 29, 2020. <https://www.stonehouseproperties.com/real-estate/131-berkshire-dr-williamstown-ma-01267/228031/75444781>.

<sup>230</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "On the Books, Unenforceable: Restrictive Covenant an Echo of Williamstown's Racist Legacy." iBerkshires.com | YOUR COMMUNITY - YOUR NEWS. July 13th, 2020. <https://www.iberkshires.com/story/62627/On-the-Books-Unenforceable-Restrictive-Covenant-an-Echo-of-Williamstown-s-Racist-Legacy.html>.

## SPRUCES

The Spruces were opened in 1954 by Albert Bachand with the goal to create a neighborhood that embodied a “wonderful way of living.”<sup>231</sup> As a wealthy mobile home salesman, he wanted to be able to sell his homes to customers while enticing them to remain in Williamstown.<sup>232</sup> In the early years of its establishment, the Spruces was seen as an icon amongst retirement communities, even earning a five star rating.<sup>233</sup> White lion statues were stationed at the entrance to the grounds, and upon entering there was a windmill, a lighthouse, a 102-foot long covered bridge, and a 1500 water jet display that was once considered to be the largest in the country.<sup>234</sup> The neighborhood slogan hung above the entrance, “Be ye of kind heart/gentle mind/and neighborly spirit/then through these portals pass, for thou art welcome.”<sup>235</sup> Historical records imply residents as being satisfied with the neighborhood and its living conditions.<sup>236</sup> The community continued in a form of self-governance for many years, and at one point Bachand even proposed succeeding from Williamstown.<sup>237</sup> However, this never took place, and Bachand eventually put it up for sale in 1966.<sup>238</sup>

Despite a flourishing community of 350 residents by 1988,<sup>239</sup> the Spruces was in constant danger due to its location. Adjacent to the Hoosic River and situated on a 100-year floodplain,<sup>240</sup> land topography put residents at risk. This was not uncommon for many mobile home parks

<sup>231</sup> McGuire, Phyllis. “Founder Envisioned Spruces Park as Thriving Community.” IBerkshires.com | YOUR COMMUNITY - YOUR NEWS, 3 June 2012, 12:56PM, [www.berkshires.com/story/41420/Founder-Envisioned-Spruces-Park-as-Thriving-Community.html](http://www.berkshires.com/story/41420/Founder-Envisioned-Spruces-Park-as-Thriving-Community.html). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>232</sup> Westerdahl, Carl. “The Spruces: Al Bachand’s Model American Mobile Home Park.” *Williamstown Historical Museum*, April 21, 2012, Williams College Archives, pp. 10-11.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, pp. 11.

<sup>234</sup> nka. “The Spruces.” Edited by Dataedge et al., Atlas Obscura, Atlas Obscura, 29 July 2019, [www.atlasobscura.com/places/the-spruces](http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/the-spruces). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>235</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 3-4.

<sup>236</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 11.

<sup>237</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 25.

<sup>238</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 26.

<sup>239</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 11.

<sup>240</sup> Demers, Phil. “Williamstown Applies for \$6.25M Grant for Spruces Relocation.” Bennington Banner, North Adams Transcript, 16 Nov. 2012, [www.benningtonbanner.com/local-news/williamstown-applies-for-6-25m-grant-for-spruces-relocation/article\\_1fa03445-e445-553d-910d-9a4352fd2199.html](http://www.benningtonbanner.com/local-news/williamstown-applies-for-6-25m-grant-for-spruces-relocation/article_1fa03445-e445-553d-910d-9a4352fd2199.html). Accessed Fall 2020.

across the country.<sup>241</sup> Local zoning practices often allow mobile home parks to be placed on coastal flood zones and floodplains because land is cheaper.<sup>242</sup> Historical records show that flooding potential of the land was apparent around the time the Spruces was established.<sup>243</sup> Carl Westerdahl from the Williamstown Historical Museum wrote, “Clearly [Bachand] also knew that the land on which The Spruces was built had water problems, including the water table, the stream east to the park, and the river itself.”<sup>244</sup> Currently, the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act greatly restricts wetland development, including those categorized as 100-year floodplains,<sup>245</sup> but this law was not instilled until 1972.<sup>246</sup> Thus, Bachand’s project was able to take place, although such an undertaking would not be legal today.<sup>247</sup> Bachand did take preemptive measures to combat potential floods, however. In 1955, one year after The Spruces opened, Bachand dredged, straightened, and widened the Hoosic River running next to the land, dropping the water level by 3 feet.<sup>248</sup> Three dikes were made as well, with a dam on the eastern side.<sup>249</sup> Such developments; however, were funded by Bachand personally, and in asking for reimbursement from the town, he was rejected.<sup>250</sup> Between 1959 and 1961, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) built concrete channels, walls, and earthen levees were installed along the Hoosic River and North Branch Hoosic River to protect against 500-year floods (at the time of analyses) in response to major floods that impacted Adams and North Adams.<sup>251</sup> However,

<sup>241</sup> Gardner, Sarah. Notes from Prof. Gardner, November 2020.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 22.

<sup>244</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 22.

<sup>245</sup> Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. “Protecting Wetlands in Massachusetts.” Mass.gov, 2020, [www.mass.gov/guides/protecting-wetlands-in-massachusetts](http://www.mass.gov/guides/protecting-wetlands-in-massachusetts). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>246</sup> Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC). “MACC THROUGH THE YEARS.” MACC, [www.maccweb.org/page/AboutThroughYears](http://www.maccweb.org/page/AboutThroughYears). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>247</sup> Gardner.

<sup>248</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 23.

<sup>249</sup> McGuire.

<sup>250</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 23.

<sup>251</sup> Lombard, Pamela, et al. “Flood-Inundation Maps for the Hoosic River, North Adams and Williamstown, Massachusetts, From the Confluence With the North Branch Hoosic River to the Vermont State Line.” *Scientific Investigations Report 2014-5236*, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2015, Reston, pp. 2, Virginia.

these structures did not include the Spruces neighborhood.<sup>252</sup> In 1966, Bachand offered to install more flood control in the form of \$1,500 or 25% of the potential cost for riverbank protection and erosion prevention from the town or state,<sup>253</sup> but he was again rejected and no further work commenced.<sup>254</sup> Later, in recognizing that this was an issue yet no further action was going to be taken, he expressed concern in his own words: "...[the river] completely changed [its] course and is threatening the area trunk sewer line...Unless something is done to prevent it there's going to be lots of taxpayer dollars spent. I'm no engineer but...the problem is there for anyone to see."<sup>255</sup>

Years passed without any severe ramifications until Hurricane Irene brought disaster to Spruces residents. Western Massachusetts received 3-10 inches of rain, which caused rivers across this region of the state to peak at record levels.<sup>256</sup> On August 28, 2011, the USGS stream gauge in the Hoosic River near Williamstown estimated a peak flow of 14,900 cubic feet per second, which correlated with a 1-percent annual exceedance probability (AEP) flood.<sup>257</sup> In other words, there was a 1% chance a flood this extreme would occur each year, and Hurricane Irene met those odds. Located a mile downstream from the gauge, the Spruces was subject to major flooding.<sup>258</sup> Two-thirds of the 226 homes were destroyed or damaged,<sup>259</sup> and nearly 300 residents were evacuated.<sup>260</sup> Later, those residents received news that their homes were deemed "conditionally uninhabitable."<sup>261</sup> Many returned only to gather pets, medications, clothing, and

<sup>252</sup> US Army Corps of Engineers. "North Adams Local Protection Project." New England District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, [www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Flood-Risk-Management/Massachusetts/North-Adams/](http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Flood-Risk-Management/Massachusetts/North-Adams/). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>253</sup> McGuire.

<sup>254</sup> Qtd. in Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Westerdahl, pp. 24.

<sup>256</sup> Lombard et al. pp.1.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, pp. 2.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> McKeever, Andy. "Williamstown Rules Spruces 'Uninhabitable'." IBerkshires.com | YOUR COMMUNITY - YOUR NEWS, 29 Aug. 2011, 2:26PM, [www.iberkshires.com/story/39300/Williamstown-Rules-Spruces-Uninhabitable-.html](http://www.iberkshires.com/story/39300/Williamstown-Rules-Spruces-Uninhabitable-.html). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

valuables that were left in the flood.<sup>262</sup> Most were able to find shelter with nearby family and friends, but a significant portion did not have any other housing resources.<sup>263</sup> Town officials projected 20 people would be homeless as a result, with potential for more as others struggled to find temporary refuge in hotels they couldn't afford or that had limited occupancies.<sup>264</sup> Some residents even tried to return to their unsafe homes full of wet electrical systems and spilled petroleum products in an attempt to find sanctuary.<sup>265</sup>

After the event, Spruces residents received aid and compensation to assist in their relocation, but results were slow and interfered with their ability to remain citizens of Williamstown. On September 3rd, 2011, a presidential disaster declaration was issued for Berkshire county, but it wasn't until 2013 that Federal financial assistance arrived for the state of Massachusetts in the form of \$11 million for private assistance and \$53 million for public assistance.<sup>266</sup> FEMA presented Williamstown with \$6.13 million that year to assist in resident relocation<sup>267</sup> specifically. In hindsight, many agreed that relocation efforts for displaced residents took far too long.<sup>268</sup> While residents wanted to stay in the Williamstown community, the housing options were too expensive, there were no affordable rentals, and any available options were coupled with difficult accessibility for older people (multiple floor units).<sup>269</sup> Many had to find places to stay in apartments in Pittsfield or Vermont.<sup>270</sup> These residents no longer maintained a

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup>Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Lombard et al. pp. 1.

<sup>267</sup> Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness. "North Adams Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings." *North Adams*, pp. 11.

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2019/07/11/North%20Adams%20Report.pdf>. Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>268</sup>Currie, Sarah. Interview, October, 19, 2020.

<sup>269</sup> Zingarelli, Carol. Interview. October 25, 2020.

<sup>270</sup>Ibid.

Williamstown address which restricted their power in town processes by eliminating their ability to vote on town policy changes, events, and other projects.

On the community level, townsfolk and local organizations responded with rapid outreach. Carol Zingarelli, a Spruces resident at the time of the tragedy, recalls a positive response from Williams College students and neighboring community members. She described efforts that came from “boots on the ground” as more organized and effective than the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), and Red Cross initiatives.<sup>271</sup> Churches called meetings to organize the public for support, which drew efforts from college aged students to retirees.<sup>272</sup> Donations from the town totaled around \$80,000.<sup>273</sup> Soon after the event, the Higher Ground Housing Project was quickly organized to assist in relocating people who had lost their homes, working with both FEMA and the town government to design plans to assist those affected.<sup>274</sup>

Finding affordable housing options for Spruces residents proved difficult, ultimately resulting in a single housing complex<sup>275</sup> with 40 units: Highland Woods.<sup>276</sup> Higher Ground worked with both the town and the college to drive the search for new development sites.<sup>277</sup> The Lowry property, the Burbank property, the PhoTech site, and the old town garage site were all considered, yet ultimately decided against.<sup>278</sup> With the Lowry property being so large, it was predicted that installing housing there would effectively mimic the kind of community lost in

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<sup>271</sup> Zingarelli.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Yamamoto, Cathy. Interview. November 4, 2020.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> MountainOne. “MountainOne Bank Supports Affordable Housing in Williamstown.” MountainOne, 9 Nov. 2015, [www.mountainone.com/content/mountainone-bank-supports-affordable-housing-williamstown](http://www.mountainone.com/content/mountainone-bank-supports-affordable-housing-williamstown). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>277</sup> Yamamoto.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

Hurricane Irene.<sup>279</sup> Plans would include utilizing \$3 million of the \$6.2 million allotted by the Federal Hazard Mitigation Grant.<sup>280</sup> But, it was argued that more houses could be built for the same amount of money on smaller properties, and that Lowry remained farmland.<sup>281</sup> At the time, Kim Wells leased the property and was using it as farmland to grow hay for his livestock.<sup>282</sup> Wells also sat on the Agricultural Commission, which challenged the use of conserved land like the Lowry property for new development.<sup>283</sup> This brought frustrations by those advocating for affordable housing opportunities, who argued that besides its use for harvesting hay, the land was hardly utilized besides occasional horseback riding and hiking.<sup>284</sup> Some felt that the vote against the use of the Lowry property stemmed from economic prejudice that discriminated against low income populations,<sup>285</sup> projecting a sense of NIMBYism that was “very bothersome” for those affected.<sup>286</sup>

The other property options faced similar challenges when presented to town boards and commissions. The large size of the Burbank property<sup>287</sup> coupled with the fact that it was already town owned (reducing acquisition costs) made it a considerable option for development.<sup>288</sup> However, agricultural commissioners and members of the public were again concerned with the loss of potential farmland.<sup>289</sup> With larger properties voted against, it left smaller, less desirable

<sup>279</sup> Dravis, Stephen. “Williamstown Planners Pass on Making Lowry Statement.” IBerkshires.com | YOUR COMMUNITY - YOUR NEWS, 9 Apr. 2013, 10:17PM, [www.iberkshires.com/story/43713/Williamstown-Planners-Pass-on-Making-Lowry-Statement.html](http://www.iberkshires.com/story/43713/Williamstown-Planners-Pass-on-Making-Lowry-Statement.html). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Dravis, Stephen. “Williamstown Ag Commission Questions Housing Proposal.” IBerkshires.com | YOUR COMMUNITY - YOUR NEWS, 6 Dec. 2012, 11:46PM, [www.iberkshires.com/story/42807/Williamstown-Ag-Commission-Questions-Housing-Proposal.html](http://www.iberkshires.com/story/42807/Williamstown-Ag-Commission-Questions-Housing-Proposal.html). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Yamamoto.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Zingarelli.

<sup>287</sup> Yamamoto.

<sup>288</sup> Dravis, Stephen. “Williamstown Ag Commission Questions Housing Proposal.”

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

places open as options. The PhoTech Mill site on Cole Ave. was already owned by the town,<sup>290</sup> but the size of the plot was much smaller.<sup>291</sup> Additionally, it was polluted<sup>292</sup> and partially situated on a 100-year floodplain.<sup>293</sup> Though small, the old town garage site was strongly recommended by Affordable Housing Committee Chairwoman Cathy Yamamoto as a means of helping to meet affordable housing needs,<sup>294</sup> which were far under the town's 10% threshold goal<sup>295</sup> as outlined by the Comprehensive Permit Act of Massachusetts.<sup>296</sup> Yet, similar environmental barriers arose as contamination proved to be a substantial hurdle.<sup>297</sup> In response, local advocates complained about the time spent deciding on potential building sites, to which Yamamoto responded,

*"I know our cause is urgent, but we have to be realistic about how long these things take...Every site we look at has some issue that holds us up – it has contamination, it's in conservation or it's owned by someone else. The best we can do is meet each hurdle as it comes along."*<sup>298</sup>

While mobile home parks are not classified as affordable housing by law because they are considered as substandard housing,<sup>299</sup> the park still provided affordable homes to many low-income people in Williamstown. Consequently, the removal of the Spruces as a viable living space greatly hindered the residential options that were affordable to poorer populations.

<sup>290</sup> Groff, Andrew et al. "Town of Williamstown, Massachusetts 2013 Annual Report." McClelland Press, Inc., 2014, Pp. 21. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/146676638.pdf>. Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>291</sup> Yamamoto.

<sup>292</sup> Groff, pp. 21.

<sup>293</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Williamstown Con Comm Frames Questions on Lowry, Burbank." IBerkshires.com | YOUR COMMUNITY - YOUR NEWS, 8 Aug. 2013, 11:16PM, [www.iberkshires.com/story/44518/Williamstown-Con-Comm-Frames-Questions-on-Lowry-Burbank.html?fb\\_comment\\_id=642040822481323\\_6934272](http://www.iberkshires.com/story/44518/Williamstown-Con-Comm-Frames-Questions-on-Lowry-Burbank.html?fb_comment_id=642040822481323_6934272). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>294</sup> Yamamoto.

<sup>295</sup> Shanks, Cheryl. Interview. October 14, 2020.

<sup>296</sup> King, Nathanael. "Most Mass. Communities Fall Short of State Affordable Housing Goal." Spare Change News, Scn, 10 Dec. 2018, sparechangenews.net/2018/12/most-mass-communities-fall-short-of-state-affordable-housing-mandate/. Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>297</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Hurdles, Frustration for Williamstown Housing Committee." IBerkshires.com | YOUR COMMUNITY - YOUR NEWS, 5 Oct. 2012, 1:41PM, [www.iberkshires.com/story/42376/Hurdles-Frustration-for-Williamstown-Housing-Committee.html](http://www.iberkshires.com/story/42376/Hurdles-Frustration-for-Williamstown-Housing-Committee.html). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Gardner.

According to the 2013 Housing Needs Assessment, 18 households found new housing in Williamstown and 67 households were able to reoccupy their homes on a “year-round basis” after the flood.<sup>300</sup> However, those residing on Spruces land were required to move by 2016.<sup>301</sup> Many people were not able to continue living in Williamstown, evident in surveys that tracked the housing aftermath.<sup>302</sup> As of March 2013, 66 households had moved to North Adams, 9 had moved to Pownal, 8 had moved to Adams, about 60 lived elsewhere in Massachusetts, and 10 had moved outside the state.<sup>303</sup> Immediately following the flood, seniors were offered priority housing, but not all 158 of these displaced households were fully accommodated.<sup>304</sup> Of these, only 4 were relocated to Meadowvale, and Proprietor’s Fields was not able to offer priority to Spruces residents because it was a federally funded project.<sup>305</sup> The Berkshire Housing Authority reported that 10-12 residents moved to subsidized rental housing in North Adams instead.<sup>306</sup> By the time that Highland Woods was available as an affordable housing unit built for displaced Spruces residents, five years had passed,<sup>307</sup> and few actually returned.<sup>308</sup> The complex includes 40 units of one- and two- bedroom apartments for citizens with up to 60% Median Area Income, with eight units under larger subsidies.<sup>309</sup> In our interview with Cathy Yamamoto, she mentioned that Williams College played a key part in the development of Highland Woods by donating the land,<sup>310</sup> which made the construction more affordable.<sup>311</sup> In this respect, Williams was a very

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<sup>300</sup> Ryan, John. “Housing Needs Assessment Williamstown, MA.” *DEVELOPMENT CYCLES*, Prepared for the Williamstown Affordable Housing Committee, April, 2013, pp. 35.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> “Highland Woods Project Accepting Applications.” IBerkshires.com | YOUR COMMUNITY - YOUR NEWS, 11 Aug. 2015, 8:37PM, [www.iberkshires.com/story/49916/Highland-Woods-Project-Accepting-Applications.html](http://www.iberkshires.com/story/49916/Highland-Woods-Project-Accepting-Applications.html). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>308</sup> Zingareli.

<sup>309</sup> MountainOne. “MountainOne Bank Supports Affordable Housing in Williamstown.”

<sup>310</sup> Dravis, Stephen. “Williams Donates Land for Housing Project,” June 2013.

<https://www.iberkshires.com/story/44245/Williams-Donates-Land-for-Housing-Project.html>.

<sup>311</sup> Yamamoto.

positive contributor in the execution of this project. However, she also noted that a probable reason for its installation was that the placement of the land was rather hidden — that is, it didn't impact current residents' line of sight from their homes.<sup>312</sup> Economic class prejudice was believed to be a common theme in the process of creating affordable housing for Spruces residents, preventing low income projects from being built close to more affluent neighborhoods.<sup>313</sup>

Today, the Spruces' land remains as a reminder of the loss of homes, community, and hope for a life in Williamstown for many low-income retirees. The park is marked by the white lion statues that stand outside its gates, but most other features of the neighborhood have been lost. Described as ghostlike by The Atlas Obscura, a dirt road winds from the entrance through the gridded neighborhood pathway.<sup>314</sup> Empty lots are dotted with Japanese maples, red oaks, and cypress that were once planted by people who lived there.<sup>315</sup> Renovations have been made to beautify the park in remembrance of its past, including a 2.2 mile perimeter trail and mowed paths that traverse the interior of the once-neighborhood.<sup>316</sup> Patches of wildflowers now grow where homes once stood.<sup>317</sup> There is a sign with historical photos,<sup>318</sup> yet there is no formal memorial honoring what was lost in Hurricane Irene, leaving much to the imagination for drivers passing the pearly white lion gates.

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> nka.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Sophia. "This Abandoned Neighborhood In Massachusetts Has Been Transformed Into A Gorgeous Park." OnlyInYourState, Leaf Group Lifestyle, 18 Aug. 2019, [www.onlyinyourstate.com/massachusetts/abandoned-neighborhood-park-ma/](http://www.onlyinyourstate.com/massachusetts/abandoned-neighborhood-park-ma/). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Gardner.



The white lion gates at the Spruces<sup>319</sup>

#### CONNECTION TO INJUSTICES & POLITICAL ACTION IN WILLIAMSTOWN TODAY

Racism and other prejudices in Williamstown are often overlooked. For this reason, it is imperative to recognize recent acts of hate in Williams and the influence such actions can have on the community over time. Even today, Williamstown is not exempt from racism and displays of hatred conveyed through intimidation to minority populations. Throughout the past four years, there have been incidents of hate directed at minority faculty, students, and community members. For the sake of privacy to victims, we will not go into details about any specific case, but it is important to highlight that the town is not immune to acts of hate even in 2020. Present day echoes of the same intimidating actions of the KKK in the area in the early to mid 20th century with actions and threats against minorities in town.

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<sup>319</sup> nka.

The Berkshire County President of the NAACP, Dennis Powell, discussed injustices and political action in the county today.<sup>320</sup> He talked about the way the community came together this summer in light of the killing of George Floyd.<sup>321</sup> However, first he discussed that the discrimination in the county has really changed over the course of his life.<sup>322</sup> He recalls as a child that property was very hard for African Americans to own because the banks did not give out mortgages to people of color.<sup>323</sup>

According to Powell, this summer, the NAACP in Berkshire county gained 600 new members and raised \$100,000 more than their previous donations. Some of the main areas of focus of the NAACP in the county currently are education, climate justice, and political action.<sup>324</sup> Today, Powell worries about gentrification, the lack of affordable housing, homelessness, and police brutality.<sup>325</sup> He encouraged us to recommend more affordable housing options to get young people to stay in the area and create spaces in town that allow faculty of color to have a sense of community.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Powell, Dennis. Interview, Nov. 6, 2020.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.



Recent protests in Williamstown regarding the connection of past and present racism<sup>327</sup>

## ZONING AND OTHER CURRENT HOUSING POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Williamstown has historically been zoned primarily for single-family homes. Such homes are expensive and are often large and environmentally unsustainable. According to the Ryan Report which examined Williamstown housing in 2013, 84% of homeowners in Williamstown lived in single-family homes.<sup>328</sup> Current numbers include 1862 single family homes, 93 two-

<sup>327</sup> This photo was taken October 12, 2020 by Sacha Yanow. As a counter narrative to the Colonial 1753 House and part of art activism on Indigenous People's Day for Black and Mahican peoples not memorialized as residents of Williamstown. Williamstown Racial Justice and Police Reform committee.

<sup>328</sup> Ryan, John. "Housing Needs Assessment," April, 2013.

family homes, 26 three family homes, and 158 second homes.<sup>329</sup> Having such a high percentage of single-family homes makes Williamstown a costly place to live. The strict zoning also often impedes the construction of new buildings in town, including affordable housing units.

According to Jamie Art, who works in the General Counsel in the Office of the President at Williams College and assists in running the college's rental properties program, apartment style structures in particular are nearly impossible to be approved due to the tight zoning restrictions in town that limits where rentals are allowed.<sup>330</sup>

The town's newest affordable housing units were recently approved for development, which assists in reaching the 10% threshold for available affordable housing in a town as deemed by Chapter 40B of The State's Affordable Housing Zoning Law.<sup>331</sup> This includes the old PhoTech site on Cole Avenue, which is being built by Berkshire Project Housing Development Corp.<sup>332</sup> Many obstacles have been associated with the PhoTech site — namely environmental challenges in its cleanup<sup>333</sup>— and financial logistics with funding.<sup>334</sup> This initiation of construction has been exciting for members involved in the planning process,<sup>335</sup> and should be considered a successful step toward equitability in Williamstown through affordable housing.

The aforementioned approval by the 40B Massachusetts state law allows for developers in towns that are still under the state's threshold goal of 10% affordable housing to bypass zoning

<sup>329</sup> Town assessor, via email with Gardner, Dec. 10, 2020.

<sup>330</sup> Art, Jamie. Interview, October 28, 2020.

<sup>331</sup> "Fact Sheet on Chapter 40B: The State's Affordable Housing Zoning Law." *Citizens' Housing and Planning Association*, October, 2007. <https://www.oakbluffsma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3807/40B-Fact-Sheet-from-2007#:%~:text=The%20goal%20of%20Chapter%2040B,their%20housing%20inventory%20as%20affordable>.

<sup>332</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Williamstown Transfers Former Photech Property, Housing Project to Start 'Within One Week'." IBERKSHIRES.COM | YOUR COMMUNITY - YOUR NEWS, 11 June 2020, 1:11AM, [www.iberkshires.com/story/62423/Williamstown-Transfers-Former-Photech-Property-Housing-Project-to-Start-Within-One-Week-.html](http://www.iberkshires.com/story/62423/Williamstown-Transfers-Former-Photech-Property-Housing-Project-to-Start-Within-One-Week-.html). Accessed December 2020.

<sup>333</sup> Endres et al. "Redevelopment Plan for the Photech (Station Mill Site)." *An Environmental Planning Project*, Fall, 2003. <https://web.williams.edu/wp-etc/ces/photech-plan.pdf>. Accessed December 2020.

<sup>334</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Williamstown Transfers Former Photech Property, Housing Project to Start 'Within One Week'."

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

codes and allow construction as long as at least 25% of their units are affordable.<sup>336</sup> Affordable housing is defined as costing 30% or less of income for owners or renters.<sup>337</sup> Affordable housing for low income residents is defined as those meeting between 30-60% of median income of the town's average, moderate income is defined as 60-80%, and workforce income levels (of police men, fire men, and teachers) are up to 120% of the town's average median income.<sup>338</sup> Notably, mobile homes are not currently included as affordable housing under this law.<sup>339</sup>

In all, the town currently has several units for affordable housing. The complete list is as follows: Meadowvale (30 units), Stetson Road/Cole Avenue (8 units total), Spring Meadow (22 units), Church Corner (8 units), Highland Woods (40 units)<sup>340</sup> and the Williamstown housing authority manages 74 rent units.<sup>341</sup> There are also 60 units at Proprietors Field (senior living affordable housing).<sup>342</sup> New developments include 13 units at Cable Mills units and the PhoTech site (also called Cole Apartments) which will have 41 apartments.<sup>343</sup> However, Williamstown has still not reached the 10% threshold for affordable housing.<sup>344</sup>

The newly passed zoning article 32 of the chapter 70 zoning code could become more important in the effort to promote more inclusion and diversity in town.<sup>345</sup> This law allows for two family homes via a "by right" in districts R2, R3, and Southern Gateway which allows

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<sup>336</sup> DeCoste, David. Should Mobile Homes Be Counted as Part of a Municipality's Affordable-Housing Stock? Boston Globe , 16 Mar. 2018, 1:49PM, [www.bostonglobe.com/metro/regional/south/2018/03/16/should-mobile-homes-counted-part-municipality-affordable-housing-stock/3wI7294s6AGfADdz9DSQK/story.html](http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/regional/south/2018/03/16/should-mobile-homes-counted-part-municipality-affordable-housing-stock/3wI7294s6AGfADdz9DSQK/story.html). Accessed Fall, 2020.

<sup>337</sup> "Housing and Neighborhoods: An Element of Sustainable Berkshires, Long Range Plan for Berkshire County." *Sustainable Berkshires*, March, 20th, 2014, page HN40. via Ryan Report folder.

<sup>338</sup> Gura, Dan. Interview. November 20, 2020.

<sup>339</sup> DeCoste.

<sup>340</sup> MountainOne.

<sup>341</sup> Ryan Report.

<sup>342</sup> Ogden, Elton. Interview, November 18, 2020.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> "Fact Sheet on Chapter 40B: The State's Affordable Housing Zoning Law." *Citizens' Housing and Planning Association*, October, 2007. <https://www.oakbluffsmma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3807/40B-Fact-Sheet-from-2007#:~:text=The%20goal%20of%20Chapter%2040B,their%20housing%20inventory%20as%20affordable>.

<sup>345</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Zoning Bylaw Likely to Engender Debate at Williamstown Town Meeting," May 20, 2019.

<https://www.iberkshires.com/story/59985/Zoning-Bylaw-Likely-to-Engender-Debate-at-Williamstown-Town-Meeting.html>.

owners of single family homes to divide their homes in half.<sup>346</sup> This is an update on the laws permitting two-family homes. Specifically this article "treat(s) conversions of existing single-family homes to two-family homes as a separate use" and removes the word "new" from the existing law.<sup>347</sup> This bylaw allows for more housing options in town that are more reasonably priced than the traditional single family homes, thus potentially attracting a more diverse population to the town. This higher density living would also be more sustainable in terms of its carbon footprint. Breaking large family homes in half, as well as adding an accessory dwelling unit in the form of a barn or garage, could allow for three families to live on one plot of land.<sup>348</sup> However, those hoping to add both additions (a two-family home and an ADU) must wait five years before applying for the second of the two changes.<sup>349</sup> Town zoning protocols have recently changed to accommodate this ADU option (passed in 2019).<sup>350</sup> Specifically, article 33 of the zoning code allows for ADUs on conforming lots.<sup>351</sup> However, many people may choose not to take advantage of this opportunity.

A few additional rental properties are appearing today with the implementation of the ADU law which allows for single family homes to convert a garage or barn into a living space.<sup>352</sup> Some residents are concerned that these units will predominantly become Airbnbs as the few residents utilizing this law are creating such a business. The ADU law helps promote higher density living, but it does not necessarily promote diversity and inclusion in town as they are

<sup>346</sup> "Zoning Bylaw Amendment - Non Conforming 1 & 2 Family Structures," *Town of Williamstown Annual Town Meeting Fiscal Year July 1, 2020 to June 31, 2020*.

<sup>347</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Zoning Bylaw Likely to Engender Debate at Williamstown Town Meeting," May 20, 2019. <https://www.iberkshires.com/story/59985/Zoning-Bylaw-Likely-to-Engender-Debate-at-Williamstown-Town-Meeting.html>.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid. Other specifications about the size of the lot and ADU allowed are described in this article.

<sup>352</sup> Boyd, Stephanie. Interview, October 26, 2020.

primarily used as short-term rental units. The current ADU laws can be improved to contribute to home ownership for people of lower income.

In addition, according to Town Planner, Andrew Groff, the last time that the town attempted to create multiple family housing zoning options in town was in April of 2018. The proposal was to allow special permits for a maximum of four units per plot of land but only in a specific corner of town (Cole Avenue and parts surrounding the campus).<sup>353</sup> The town website's draft notes and recorded sessions of the 4/3/18 and 4/10/18 meetings demonstrate the reluctance of the town to change the zoning code to multiple family housing zoning districts. These meetings were notably longer than other meetings, suggesting that residents pushed back against the measures. Notably, a planning board member stated that zoning in town really hadn't changed since 1955, which is why the board favored a new proposal.<sup>354</sup>

According to Planning Board chair Stephanie Boyd, another issue the town faces due to current housing policies and practices is a lack of rental properties.<sup>355</sup> Williams College owns the majority of the properties near the center of Williamstown, which are leased to faculty and administrative staff so Spring Street and the rest of campus are easily accessible.<sup>356</sup> This program is conducted through the college as a means of providing incoming professors and some staff temporary housing before they reach tenure status or find a more permanent residence.<sup>357</sup> This program incentivizes professors to teach at Williams, but as a result it controls most of the rental properties in the heart of the town. This leaves much want for housing within walking distance of Spring Street by those not employed by the college. If this need were fulfilled, these people

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<sup>353</sup> Williamstown's Planning Board meeting on April 3rd, 2018.

<sup>354</sup> Williamstown's Planning Board meeting on April 10th, 2018.

<sup>355</sup> Boyd, Stephanie. Interview, October 26, 2020.

<sup>356</sup> Arts, Jamie. Interview. October 28, 2020.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

would feel more connected to the community and it would ease any financial burden brought on by commuting costs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This section will detail recommendations for the future in order to promote diversity, inclusion, and equity in Williamstown. We will consider town zoning changes, new housing options, mixed-use development design, and town decision-making mandates, as well as specific suggestions for how the town and college should acknowledge the racial history of Williamstown. We interviewed members of the Planning Board, Affordable Housing Trust, and the DIRE committee, as well as the town planner and a Williams alumna Boston-based city planner to gather information. From their insight we made informed suggestions on how best to improve inclusion in Williamstown through planning methodology. Our goals are to reduce the number of single-family homes and utilize secondary homes for more of the year.

We envision implementing strategies that will allow Williamstown to become a more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming space for all. A large portion of this goal involves providing higher density housing and mixed-use development. High density planning is more sustainable because it promotes walking and decreases the need to use a car by mitigating urban sprawl.<sup>358</sup> High density also reduces how much land must be developed in order to create new homes and stores, often by building up or simply allowing more people to live in the same space. Mixed-use development may have multiple connotations, but we choose to define it as outlined by The Urban Land Institute's Mixed-Use Development Handbook. This definition adheres to three points: 1) it allows for three or more revenue-producing establishments (recreation, civic,

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<sup>358</sup> Berggren, Christopher. "Urban Density and Sustainability." Latest News, SmartCitiesDive, [www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/urban-density-and-sustainability/241696/](http://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/urban-density-and-sustainability/241696/). Accessed Fall 2020.

cultural, etc.), 2) promotes integration, density, and land use compatibility, and 3) allows for walkability throughout the community.<sup>359</sup> Williamstown should be a space in which residents can walk to work, grocery stores, and downtown, and it should be affordable enough so anyone who wants to live there may do so. Lastly, we hope to promote ownership — not just rental status — of homes for people of middle to lower socioeconomic status.

Before detailing our recommendations, it is important to understand the connection between the historical piece we have outlined and our planning suggestions. Often when introducing a change to a town or city, opposition will cite that the proposals may "change the character of the neighborhood," and thus new proposals should not be approved. This was a central theme in our historical analysis of the White Oaks and Colonial Village. Part of Hopkins' local mission in White Oaks was to "change the character of the neighborhood,"<sup>360</sup> much like how the racially restrictive covenant in Colonial Village was implemented to maintain a certain homogeneous neighborhood character. Mayor Bottoms of Atlanta upon the introduction of new city housing proposals said, "for too long, housing policies have excluded those who are most vulnerable, particularly communities of color."<sup>361</sup> The article by Latimore went on to explain:

*"The proposed zoning policies in the analysis also target structures of racism and discrimination that have limited housing affordability and exacerbated inequality in Atlanta. The resulting policies seek to increase immediate and long-term affordability for*

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<sup>359</sup> The Delaware Complete Communities Toolbox. "What Is Mixed-Use Development?" Planning for Complete Communities in Delaware, University of Delaware, [www.completecommunitiesde.org/planning/landuse/what-is-mixed-use-development/](http://www.completecommunitiesde.org/planning/landuse/what-is-mixed-use-development/). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>360</sup> This was one theme we discussed in ENVI 302.

<sup>361</sup> Latimore, Marshall A. "City of Atlanta Announces City Planning Initiative to Address Housing Affordability, Racial Equity: The Atlanta Voice." The Atlanta Voice | Atlanta GA News, December 3, 2020. <https://www.theatlantavoice.com/articles/city-of-atlanta-announces-housing-affordability-racial-equity-initiative/>.

*Atlanta residents and directly address the structures of discrimination that still exist in Atlanta's zoning and land-use policies.<sup>362</sup>*

Our recommendations for Williamstown thus similarly aim to fight against policies that have allowed for and even promoted discrimination. This article on Atlanta's proposals explains why we tackle zoning and affordable housing in our recommendations.

### *SWOT Analysis*

**Problem:** Lack of integrated housing in town due to single family homes dominating the residential life in Williamstown. This impedes creating a town that is diverse and inclusive both racially and socioeconomically.

**Decision Criteria:** We value proposals that promote inclusivity, diversity, sustainability, and affordability (both for the town and residential home buyers/renter).

### **Proposal Ideas**

- 1) multiple family zoning (general residence), special permit with a maximum cap at 4 (3 plus an ADU permitted)
- 2) ADU exemption of setbacks, special permit for ownership by splitting land in half
- 3) mixed-use development with new affordable housing at old town garage site

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

### *Comparative SWOT Analysis*

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
No action	No cost to town No pushback Homeowners keep valuable land	Not sustainable No middle/low income families	Reduce fear of changing image/unknowns	Economically unfavorable
Proposal #1: Multiple family zoning via special permit (general residence) (cap at 3 + ADU = 4)	Integrated affordable housing Less land development No initial cost to town Steady income for retired residents High density housing	No guaranteed change May need supporting incentives Wealthy neighborhoods control outcome Landowner pushback New units could become rentals	Better community engagement Options for middle income families Use for second homes year-round	Reluctance to change More Airbnb's v. full time rentals Unwillingness to split homes Push back from town again
Proposal #2: ADU exemption setback & ownership capabilities (via special permit)	Housing for low income residents Integration with landowners Creates incentive for housing options No cost to town Small environmental impact Home ownership available Financially appeal to homeowners Steady income for retired residents	Relies on motivation of homeowners Limits high-density housing (2 per lot) Neighbors can prevent grant of permit Incentive may not be strong enough Citizen may not want to divide land	Appeals to younger demographic Population growth good for business Option for middle and lower income Utilize otherwise unused space/building Use for second homes lots year round	Opposition to waiving boundaries More Airbnb's v. ADU ownership
Proposal #3: Mixed-use development with rental units	Increases town center appeal Creates more jobs	Largest environmental impact Competing businesses Most expensive to build May be expensive for tenants Segregated section of town	Business opportunities Modeled to exemplify sustainability Student interactions Option for lower income	Environmental limits/parameters Rapid change may result in pushback Unlikely under 40B to get another affordable housing unit so soon High median area income so units not truly affordable

**Proposal #1: Multiple Family Zoning Districts via Special Permit with cap at 3 (with an ADU would allow 4 per lot) for general residence**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promote inclusivity and diversity in town by offering more homes at lower prices</li> <li>● Creates integrated and not segregated affordable housing</li> <li>● Environmental benefit as fewer homes/apartments built on green land</li> <li>● No cost financially for the town</li> <li>● Allows for elderly residents in large single-family homes living on fixed incomes to keep and maintain their house by charging rent<sup>363</sup></li> <li>● Promotes the highest density housing option possible with the fewest restrictions</li> <li>● Use for underused large homes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Moving to multiple family zoning does not necessitate but only allows for this type of living arrangement - does not guarantee change</li> <li>● Might still need to be paired with other incentives to promote higher density living</li> <li>● Owners of large pieces of land do not want to give up that space<sup>364</sup></li> <li>● Worried of new units becoming rentals which could run down the neighborhood<sup>365</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Opens the opportunity for more people to move to the area with different backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses</li> <li>● Could allow for more Williams College staff to live in Williamstown and not have to commute (benefit to the environment)</li> <li>● Promotes more high density living which promote community engagement</li> <li>● Creates more options for middle income families, a market without many options in Williamstown right now<sup>366</sup></li> <li>● Preserves farmland by building additional homes in already used lots</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Town citizen opposition to measure (reluctance to change)<sup>367</sup></li> <li>● This could promote more Airbnb's which could change the current nature of Williamstown if fewer people live there year-round</li> <li>● Citizens may be unlikely to actually split up their home and thus this new rule would be ineffective at promoting change</li> <li>● Wealthier large homeowners could oppose this measure</li> </ul>

<sup>363</sup> Williamstown's Planning Board meeting on April 3rd, 2018. Mr. Kapiloff suggested that aging in place was one positive aspect of such new zoning districting.

<sup>364</sup> This was brought up by a local homeowner of a 5-acre land lot at Williamstown's Planning Board meeting on April 3rd, 2018.

<sup>365</sup> Williamstown's Planning Board meeting on April 3rd, 2018.

<sup>366</sup> Williamstown's Planning Board meeting on April 3rd and 10th, 2018.

<sup>367</sup> A common theme from the Williamstown's Planning Board meeting on April 3rd and 10th, 2018 was that people are not in any hurry for change.

**Societal Impact:** Our proposal promotes diversity and inclusion, both racially and socioeconomically in Williamstown. Affordable housing units tend to be separated from the rest of town, thus preventing integration. By allowing for families of different income levels to live closer together, this will better promote inclusion, making Williamstown a less homogenous community. Creating homes closer together on the same plot of land further promotes a sense of unity.

**Environmental impact:** Our proposal promotes sustainability as it creates higher density living, reduces the need to build on more land for affordable housing, and divides up large single-family lots into smaller sections in a more sustainable way that will save farmland from development. This could reduce the town's carbon footprint in the long-term by building homes out of buildings already constructed rather than creating new structures. By not extending our proposal to the rural residences, we follow a smart growth principle of not allowing sewers to be expanded as that can allow for urban sprawl and thus a larger town footprint.<sup>368</sup>

**Economic impact:** Our proposal is financially feasible as it is no cost to the town to make this change. It also has another financial bonus for bringing in new residents as it allows for residents of a lower socioeconomic status to be able to afford to live there with the addition of more available rental units. These units could offer middle and lower socioeconomic status citizens who do not want to buy a house the chance to still live in a home. This option is also far cheaper than constructing additional rental units or apartment buildings. Notably, this proposal does not suggest multiple family zoning in rural residences in order to avoid the need to fund additional sewer pipes needed in the southern neighborhoods in town to accommodate more houses.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Gardner.

<sup>369</sup> Groff, Andrew. Interview. November 13, 2020.

According to town planner Andrew Groff, that soil is heavy in clay so it is challenging to build a sewer system and filtration system for water.<sup>370</sup> We thus avoided creating such costs.

**Feasibility:** As previously mentioned, when the town last examined zoning reconsiderations to promote higher density living in April of 2018, there was significant pushback from residents. Ultimately, the plan was not instated. However, this suggestion, unlike the previous proposal, would be more equitable as it would allow for higher density living in all general residential areas of town, not just specific places. This plan is also feasible because it will not be costly to the town, and it will generate more young people and families who can stimulate the local economy. Additionally, Williamstown requires parking spaces for every bedroom, so we capped the number of units at 4 so that parking limitations were less likely to be an issue than if there were an unlimited number of units per lot allowed. Special permits will allow neighbors to voice concerns which could allow residents to be more on board with the proposal.<sup>371</sup>

**Comparison to doing nothing:** The pros and cons of doing nothing, in this case, not creating a multiple family zoning code, are fairly straightforward and suggest that implementing this proposal is feasible economically, will provide important societal benefits to the town, and will promote sustainability and a lower town carbon footprint in the future. If the town maintained its single-family home focus throughout Williamstown, there would be no financial cost to doing so. In terms of societal impacts, the cost to doing nothing is that the town will maintain its current homogenous status — both racially and economically. It will also maintain a small population density as it currently does. However, implementing this proposal would allow for a higher population density (assuming many single-family homes became divided into several family units). This will also better promote affordable housing options in town that are not

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Gardner.

physically removed from the rest of the community. Societal impacts thus are a huge cost to not implementing our proposal and a huge benefit of implementing it. Environmentally, without this proposal, single-family homes will continue to take up far more land than necessary which is wasteful and unsustainable. With our proposal in place, single family home plots of land can be divided across several families, promoting higher density living which is more sustainable. Our proposal makes the need for several more affordable housing buildings less necessary, thus saving resources and additional land.

**Conclusion:** Implementing our proposal is preferable to not taking any action. Of note, our proposal will be met with opposition from residents, but we still feel that it is the best solution due to its ability to promote inclusion, diversity, and sustainability at little financial cost. We also recognize that multiple family zoning is most helpful for achieving our desired ends if residents are on board.

**Proposal #2: ADU Incentives: exemption for setbacks via Special Permit & bylaw permitting ownership of ADUS so properties may be split in half in every residential district**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creates a more affordable housing option for lower income residents</li> <li>● Promotes integration of new residents with current landowners</li> <li>● Incentivizes homeowners to implement this proposal by creating an income rental that does not have to follow code</li> <li>● No cost to the town</li> <li>● Small living spaces have a smaller environmental impact</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creation of ADUs relies on motivation of those developing/creating them</li> <li>● Supply and demand dictates housing development (if people do not want to move into ADUs, more ADUs will not be useful)</li> <li>● Limit to number of ADU units per home (garage or barn) so does not allow for very high-density housing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Allows for increased socioeconomic diversity in town</li> <li>● More housing introduces more opportunities for racial diversity</li> <li>● Increased population closer to town is good for local businesses</li> <li>● Promote young people to move to town, stimulating the economy<sup>372</sup></li> <li>● Preserves farmland by building additional homes in already used lots</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Town and/or planning board may not want to waive the setback boundaries</li> <li>● This incentive may not be strong enough to promote implementation</li> <li>● Could promote creating Airbnb's instead of more full-time rental units</li> <li>● Neighbors have a say in the special permit granting process and may complain</li> </ul>

**Societal impact:** In terms of societal impacts, this proposal promotes inclusivity of residents of various income levels. Its ability to greatly impact society; however, is somewhat limited as one can only have one ADU per household, regardless of ownership or rental status.

**Environmental impact:** This proposal promotes sustainability by creating additional housing on lots already used for residents, thus conserving additional land from construction. This proposal can create affordable housing rental units without constructing a large new building. It also

<sup>372</sup> Gura, Dan. Interview. November 20, 2020.

allows for two families to exist on a plot of land intended for one family, thus reducing the carbon footprint of the town. It incentivizes higher density living options as compared to the current sprawl from single family home zoning.

**Economic impact:** This proposal could allow for homeowners to make more money off of their property by having an ADU rental unit and even more money by selling the ADU and half of their land to new owners. This proposal would not result in any financial cost to the town. Upzoning (i.e. creating more density by, for example, dividing owned lots in half) means creating more supply of housing which then allows for the prices to decrease and become more affordable.<sup>373</sup> In addition, the current ADU law does not require property owners to live in one of the units, so people with summer homes in Williamstown could also utilize our proposal to make more money.<sup>374</sup> Additionally, more homes allows for more residents which increases the town's tax base which can bring in more money to the town.

**Feasibility:** This proposal is likely to produce some resistance from the town. Residents are concerned about ADUs becoming Airbnb's, but with this proposal, we can permit ownership of ADUs, lessening citizen fear of renters not taking care of properties. In addition, a setback exemption will still require a special permit from the Planning Board which gives neighbors the opportunity to voice their concerns which could be anxiety reducing to citizens, thus allowing this proposal to be successful. (With non-conforming lots, the current law already allows for neighbors to voice their concerns at the Planning Board meeting).<sup>375</sup> This proposal is not costly to the town to implement either as it will only split a home into two lots, which is under the 3-4 residents per lot limit that then requires extensive sewer construction which could be costly.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Litman, Todd. "Can Upzoning Increase Housing Supply and Affordability?" *Planetizen*, February 4, 2019. <https://www.planetizen.com/blogs/102740-can-upzoning-increase-housing-supply-and-affordability>.

<sup>374</sup> "FAQ on ADUs," *Planning Board* via Stephanie Boyd, page 10.

<sup>375</sup> "FAQ on ADUs," *Planning Board* via Stephanie Boyd, page 13.

<sup>376</sup> Groff, Andrew. Interview. November 13, 2020.

**Comparison to doing nothing:** Economically, a lack of ADU development would limit housing availability for residents of lower income looking for places to live in Williamstown. It would also diminish financial opportunities for those who are looking to build ADUs. By not implementing this change in zoning, residents who currently own homes would not have incentive to open part of their land to renters or even buyers. With the setback exemption, it allows for homeowners to make additional income and utilize a part of their property that otherwise would not be utilized due to legal constraints. Sustainability-wise, without this incentive, properties would have more land and barn/garage space than is necessary for homeowners. By allowing for another family to use that (otherwise unlivable) space, it creates higher density living and reduces the need for additional affordable housing to be created. With regard to the societal impact, this proposal promotes higher density living than that which is currently present in Williamstown. However, because it is only a modest incentive, it is limited in how widespread an impact it will make. Of note, without this incentive, according to Planning Board Chair Stephanie Boyd, there will only be about one new ADU constructed per year. Thus, this additional incentive is preferable in that it could help motivate the installation of more ADU units on a faster timeline.

**Comparison to proposal #1:** Overall, this proposal is a great option and it is favored in the short term due to its feasibility and ownership capabilities. However, ADU development incentives are limited in the number of units able to be constructed. Only one ADU may be created, but allowing for ownership of the building by selling half of your land is important in promoting lasting diversity and inclusivity. This proposal will also be met with less town opposition than proposal #1.

**Proposal #3: Affordable Housing Mixed-Use Development with Rental Units in Williamstown: Old town garage site**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reduce commuting costs for residents in town</li> <li>● Provide housing for residents of lower income that want to live in Williamstown</li> <li>● Increase revenue for local businesses</li> <li>● Make the center of Williamstown more appealing to potential residents by providing opportunities for recreation, business, and retail that are closer to their homes</li> <li>● Create more jobs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Larger environmental impact than other proposals</li> <li>● Additional businesses may compete with those already present</li> <li>● More expensive than just building affordable housing complexes</li> <li>● Town would likely need to hire a private developer (as the state has just funded two affordable housing projects in town) so it may turn into a Cable Mills situation in which only a fraction of the units are truly affordable</li> <li>● High median area income, units not truly affordable</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Would provide opportunities for incoming businesses in Williamstown</li> <li>● Design could be modeled to exemplify environmentally sustainable practices for other mixed-use development projects</li> <li>● Preserves farmland by building on impervious, already developed land</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Environmental limits/parameters may hinder development</li> <li>● Current residents may disapprove of the installation of lower income housing (NIMBYism)</li> <li>● Current businesses may disapprove of more businesses moving in</li> <li>● Town may have to allocate funds to this project</li> </ul>



<sup>377</sup> This is the old town garage site in 2020.

**Societal impact:** Affordable housing units in a mixed-use development at the old town garage site would better integrate residents of lower to moderate income with the affluent community of the college than other current affordable housing units. By taking steps to diminish past tendencies to segregate the town, as noted in our historical analysis, this would make Williamstown a more equitable community with opportunities for housing, work, and recreation readily available to all income levels. This form of integration may also increase interaction between college students and Williamstown residents through the utilization of common spaces and community resources within the mixed-use developments. Increasing this exposure could

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<sup>377</sup> Photo taken by Sarah Gardner December 2020.

inspire more student-led community involvement and make town residents feel more welcome.

With the potential for a more diverse demographic in the mixed-use affordable housing development, welcoming minority groups would also build on the current community of people of color, thereby reducing the typical “white elite” picture of Williamstown. Currently, there are far less faculty of color at Williams College than are those who identify as white.<sup>378</sup>

Additionally, there is a slightly higher rate of turnover for faculty that identify as minorities.<sup>379</sup>

Inviting more diversity into Williamstown could help improve these ratios by creating a greater sense of inclusion. Due to the large nature of the complex; however, this project would likely be protested by current Williamstown residents that may not favor significant rapid change.

**Environmental impact:** The environmental impact of mixed-use development in Williamstown would arguably be greater than simply installing affordable housing that invokes sprawl. It is environmentally desirable to develop housing in areas with pre-established infrastructure — most notably sewer systems<sup>380</sup> — so new housing units don’t require further construction that would destroy surrounding conserved farmland or forest. Of course, this proposal still has environmental ramifications, but if designed in a way that reduces the carbon footprint, then these effects could be greatly limited compared to housing projects that require larger land and resource usage. If funds were directed towards clean energy and the building design took advantage of creating more sustainable living practices in the long-term (walking pathways, natural lighting, energy efficient appliances, insulated windows, etc.), then the long-term environmental impact may be diminished even further. While the extent of this buffering

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<sup>378</sup> “Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Data.” *Williams College*, June, 2013. <https://diversity.williams.edu/files/2010/04/Faculty-Diversity-and-Inclusion-Data-2013-CWade.pdf>. Accessed December 2020.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Gardner.

depends on the time, money, and focus dedicated to this aspect of the project, it is still possible to design an environmentally sustainable mixed-use residential complex.

**Economic impact:** Affordable housing combined with mixed-use development has the potential for significant economic benefits. Mixed-use development would make the residential area more appealing through proximity to resources and activities, and the resulting influx of residents in the affordable housing units would provide more customers and employment opportunities for local businesses. Affordable housing units would also bring in revenue for the town. This project; however, would be expensive for the town to construct, and due to the new affordable housing units just constructed, it is unlikely that the town would receive funding from the state again in the next decade. Thus, for a faster solution, the town would need to hire a private developer which is expensive. This would likely result in a Cable Mills type of building in which only a fraction of the units are actually affordable.

**Feasibility:** Of the three proposals, this project will be the most difficult to complete due to financial, environmental, and social parameters. A mixed-use development would require the construction of residential living spaces as well as supporting facilities that would appeal to residents for practical or recreational purposes. The state of MA has already funded Highland Woods,<sup>381</sup> decreasing the likelihood that Williamstown could obtain funding to cover the cost of a new complex. If a private developer was utilized, this would not only make the project more expensive for the town, but once the units were ready, the cost could be much higher than those subsidized by government funding. However, this could change according to grants or programs that could provide means for lower income residents. Environmentally, the ground on this site is

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<sup>381</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Williamstown's Highland Woods Fully Functional." Williamstown's Highland Woods Fully Functional / Williamstown.com, IBerkshires.com, 25 Aug. 2016, 2:33AM, williamstown.com/story/52791/Williamstown-s-Highland-Woods-Fully-Functional.html.

polluted,<sup>382</sup> and past efforts have already shown the difficulty involved in reducing the level of pollutants to an acceptable level. Additionally, if the project were to take place, a large focus would need to be dedicated to reducing long-term carbon footprint, as potential for large scale emissions is very apparent in a construction project that invites more people and business establishments. It would require extensive research and design during the planning stages of the project while keeping in mind the long-term ramifications. The community would likely not respond well to the rapid and extensive change that this project would bring as oftentimes residents do not favor large developments for fear of disruption in their daily lives. These parameters reveal that the difficulties of this project are more extensive than the other proposals, but this proposal is not unfeasible. With proper funding, planning, design, and marketing, this project could attract new residents to an upgraded Williamstown center while increasing opportunities for socioeconomic and racial diversity.

**Comparison to doing nothing:** If this project was not implemented, there would still be the issue of housing shortages for people of lower income in Williamstown. While it would save money in the short term, the continuation of current housing practices will only support the segregation tendencies that occur between people of varying socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. This may cause more faculty turnover for people who identify as minorities, making it difficult to appeal to both future students and potential professors, thereby negatively impacting the potential financial and reputational future of the college. Environmentally, this project would obviously have a larger carbon footprint than if the project was not moved forward, but the extent of its emissions and resource use hinges vastly on the extent to which sustainability is considered a priority.

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<sup>382</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Hurdles, Frustration for Williamstown Housing Committee."

**Comparison to proposal #1 and #2:** Affordable housing in a mixed-use development complex is the costliest project. If it is to be implemented using environmentally-conscious design, it may also be the most time consuming and difficult to implement in the face of potential environmental regulations and limits. Similar to the other proposals, it could help integrate residents with the town and the college. However, the extent to which it does so may be much lower. The residents would be concentrated in one area away from the rest of the current citizens, and it may take continuous work by the town (town activities, events, housing projects) to fully integrate incoming residents with current residents. However, this proposal could still work in the long run to create a more equitable community as the proposed area is in the center of town. Of the rest of the proposals, this project would also be the most likely to be rejected by the Williamstown community due to the amount of change it would create in such a short time frame. That is, residents may not be willing to see their town altered from its current state for fear of future unknowns or impacts it may have on their own lives. However, this site was recommended by various interviewees throughout our project as one of the best places to insert an affordable housing development.<sup>383</sup>

**Proposals Timeline:** Our best proposal in terms of meeting our decision criteria of diversity, inclusivity, sustainability, and affordability in the short term is proposal #2. Then we suggest the town implement proposal #1 in the long term and then proposal #3 (in that order).

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<sup>383</sup> Gura, Yamamoto, Groff interviews.

### **Short Term to Long Term Proposals**

2: This proposal is our best solution in the short term. It allows for higher density living in a sustainable way. It is notably less radical than proposal #1 and offers an added monetary incentive for homeowners to utilize this plan, so we believe it can be accepted by the town. We acknowledge that this offers smaller units, and many may continue to be short-term rentals, even with ownership available. However, it is a less costly option than proposal #3, and is most likely to be accepted. It also allows for ownership and promotes sustainability.

1: This is a good solution in the long term due to its ability to promote inclusion, diversity, and sustainability at relatively little financial cost. We also argue that multiple family zoning is a helpful proposal for achieving our desired ends, but the backlash from residents makes this proposal less feasible in the short term.

3: This proposal has too much of a financial and environmental cost in the short term and creates an aesthetic change that will not be feasible to implement without town pushback. We support the adoption of this proposal, but acknowledge that it will take the longest time to implement as the town has recently created new affordable housing units, so it will be several years before a new project is approved.

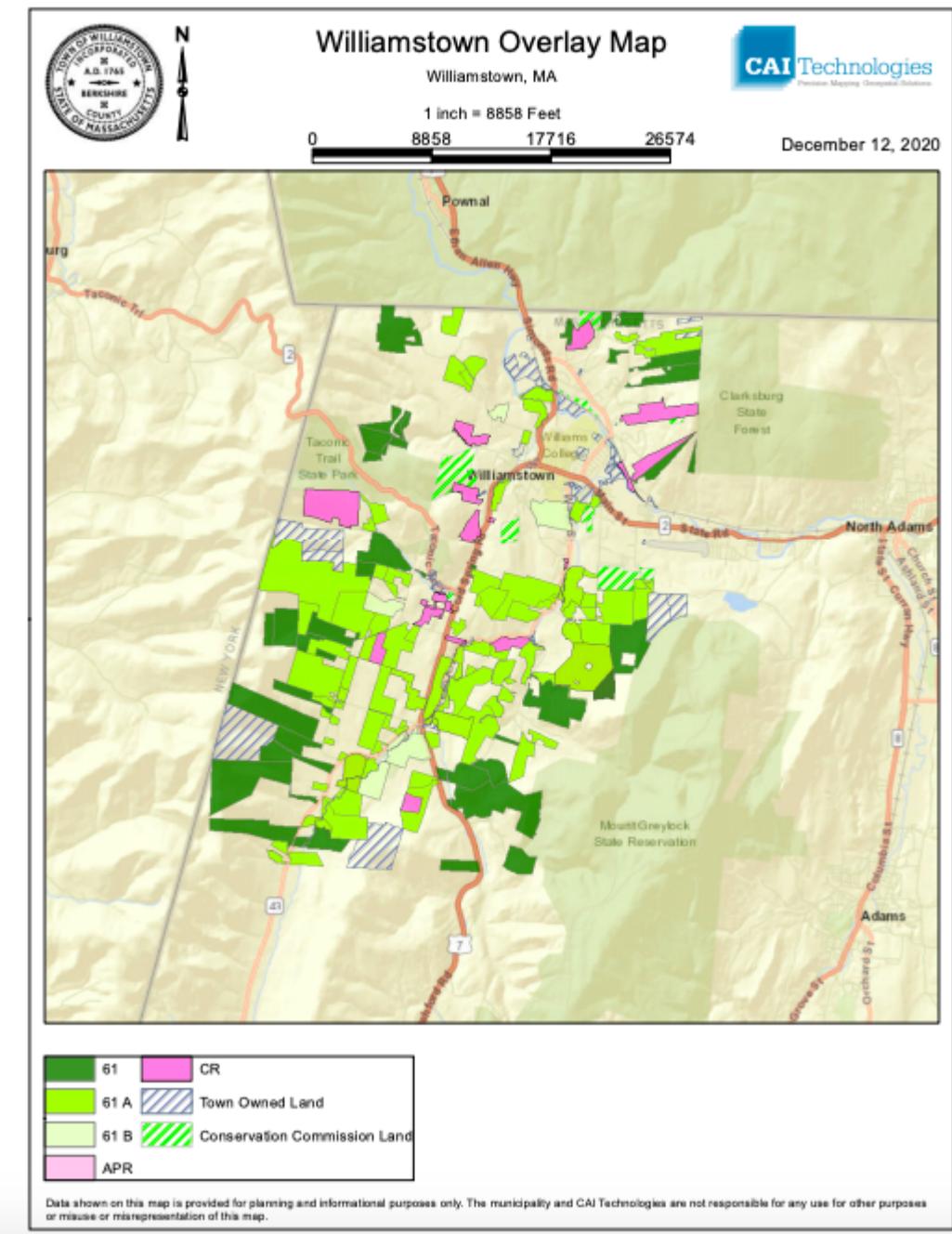
### **RECOMMENDATIONS DISCUSSION**

Reimagining zoning laws is a crucial part of our planning concept. As previously detailed, Williamstown housing is focused on single family homes. The new zoning article (33) allows for accessory dwelling units in town as an exterior rental property on their land. There is also an updated two-family zoning law effectively allowing single family homeowners to divide their house in two as well (article 32). Though this is a great step in the direction of providing

housing at affordable rates, as well as establishing more rental properties in town, these laws do not incentivize residents enough to expand their homes to potential users. The ownership of homes is thus still challenging for lower income residents. Easing restrictions on ADU construction for property owners may help reverse that trend. Additionally, altering the zoning laws and thereby increasing the density of living in Williamstown would also eliminate the need for land owned by other town entities, namely the Conservation Commission which protects wetland and river resources.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> “Welcome!” *Williamstown Con Com*, Town of Williamstown. <https://sites.google.com/williamstownma.gov/concom/home>. Accessed December 2020.



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The areas of interest on this map pertain to the Conservation Commission Land. Increasing housing density by implementing our recommendations would reduce the demand for and threat to Conservation Commission Land.

### *Discussion of Proposal #1*

The zoning code should be updated to further promote high density housing to allow for more people of all backgrounds to be able to live in Williamstown. Our recommendation is that Williamstown moves to a multiple family home district in general residence as part of an effort to eradicate single family homes. According to the Ryan Report Housing Needs Assessment completed in 2013, about a third of all single-family homeowners lived in a home with no other occupants.<sup>386</sup> Multiple family zoning allows for residents to utilize underused homes by renting them out. Single family home districting is inherently restrictive in the number of people it allows to live in town, it requires that homeowners are able to afford buying large homes and promotes residents to live spread out from one another in a way that discourages community engagement. That is, single family homes arguably promote families functioning on their own with less communication with neighbors due to the distance between homes.

Williamstown now allows for two family zoning, but that bylaw can and should be strengthened. Though our proposal will certainly be met with backlash from some single family home owners, planners should anticipate their concerns and emphasize what this plan will *not* change rather than focusing on alterations to current housing.<sup>387</sup> Single family home districts in Williamstown have for years excluded people of lower socioeconomic status. The town's reluctance to accept change, whether by building upon natural areas or by building affordable housing apartment buildings has left multiple family zoning districts as a great option for promoting inclusivity in town while preserving the natural environment. This change is also overdue. According to Andrew Groff, the large subdivisions in town have not been updated since

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<sup>386</sup> Ryan, John. "Housing Needs Assessment," April, 2013.

<sup>387</sup> Groff, Andrew. Interview. October 14, 2020.

1993.<sup>388</sup> Our proposal also notably goes beyond the bylaw discussed in 2018 because it allows for multiple family zoning in every part of town which promotes integration and inclusion. The 2018 proposal restricted multiple zoning to already higher density areas in Cole Avenue and part of the college's campus.<sup>389</sup>

Upzoning from single family homes has recently been implemented for similar reasons in Minneapolis. Historically, single-family home zoning prevented African American citizens from living in neighborhoods populated by affluent whites.<sup>390</sup> In 2018, the Minneapolis 2040 policy was passed to eradicate single-family zoning across the city.<sup>391</sup> The aim of this project was to increase housing supply thereby making it more affordable, reducing racial and economic segregation, and limiting the city's carbon footprint by reducing the need for longer commutes.<sup>392</sup> Population growth was vastly outpacing the rate at which new living units were being offered, and increased prices prevented citizens with less financial resources (often people of color), from obtaining housing in more expensive areas.<sup>393</sup> Minneapolis City Planner Director Heather Worthington noted that these single-family zoned areas were built on old redlining maps,<sup>394</sup> in which residents of Black neighborhoods were refused housing loans. This is indicative of the racial roots and connotations of single-family housing policies. However, critics argued that shifting the zoning policy would give too much power to developers who would overbuild neighborhoods by tearing down starter homes to build duplexes and triplexes that wouldn't contribute to affordable housing efforts.<sup>395</sup> Proponents of the plan argued that

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> April 2018 meeting, Multiple Family Zoning. And Gardner.

<sup>390</sup> Kahlenberg, Richard D. "How Minneapolis Ended Single-Family Zoning." Report Rights & Justice, The Century Foundation, 24 Oct. 2019, tcf.org/content/report/minneapolis-ended-single-family-zoning/?session=1. Accessed December 2020.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Qtd. in Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

neighborhood “character” may be altered with additional development, current home owners weren’t mandated to split their homes or property, and it would be more beneficial if the community’s “character” was more diverse.<sup>396</sup> The execution of this plan may vary from our proposal, but the arguments in the debate for zoning reform are parallel. Likewise, the fact that Minneapolis was able to implement reform — despite efforts to do so being described as a “fool’s errand” in the past<sup>397</sup> — prove that similar feats are possible for other regions facing similar pushback against general upzoning. Relatedly, according to Sisson’s piece on planning, “Romem’s research found that small-scale, incremental change would not only ease the pressure of the state’s crippling housing crisis — it would do so without making drastic changes to the neighborhood fabric.”<sup>398</sup>

#### *Discussion of Proposal #2*

A setback exemption incentive paired with ownership capabilities of ADUs (by dividing the land in half) should be implemented to encourage single family homeowners to rent part of their property to those who otherwise can’t afford to live in Williamstown (proposal #2). According to Planning Board chair Stephanie Boyd, with the current bylaw<sup>399</sup> without incentives, the predictions for the number of accessory dwelling units implemented every year in town is about one.<sup>400</sup> Though over time this will definitely promote higher density housing in Williamstown, this rate means that this change will not happen for decades. Of note, our

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Romem is a housing researcher who recently studied upzoning.

Sisson, Patrick. “Why California, and the Nation, Shouldn’t Be Afraid of Density and Upzoning,” December 6, 2019. <https://archive.curbed.com/2019/12/6/20998974/california-real-estate-housing-zoning-density-affordable>.

<sup>399</sup> The current bylaw was passed in 2019 (Andrew Groff via email Dec., 8, 2020.)

<sup>400</sup> Boyd, Stephanie. Interview. October 26, 2020.

proposal does not change the districts allowing for the construction of *new* ADUS as passed in 2019 (R2, R3, general residence and Southern Gateway).<sup>401</sup>

A setback exemption for ADUs that allows for old barns or garages to be utilized and produce income for homeowners is a good way to encourage residents to divide their homes into housing units sooner. For some, the lack of a setback exemption may be the only thing keeping them from taking advantage of the financial opportunities that an ADU development would bring. Case studies across the United States describe instances in which the only limitations that kept landowners from building an additional unit on their property were restrictions on ADU placement.<sup>402 403</sup> It should be noted that there is a study from 2013-2015 that suggests upzoning could increase existing housing prices and contribute little to new housing construction.<sup>404</sup> However, this study reflected the state of the housing market at the time of the Great Recession in a highly urban area of Chicago that had almost no population growth at the time.<sup>405</sup> The differences in time period, geographic location, and demographic potential between this study and Williamstown suggests the outcome of the research is not a likely viable argument against our upzoning recommendations. That is, we still believe the ownership component of ADUs is crucial in producing higher density living, inclusion, and cheaper housing options.

A case study for a housing system in a similarly populated area to Williamstown<sup>406</sup> was based out of the Rural Municipality (RM) of Coldwell, in Southern Manitoba, Canada, in

<sup>401</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Williamstown OKs Accessory Dwelling Unit Bylaw," May 22, 2019.

<https://www.iberkshires.com/story/60002/Williamstown-OKs-Accessory-Dwelling-Unit-Bylaw.html>.

<sup>402</sup> Menard, Lina. "Evelyn Brom's ADU: Another House for the Other Street." Accessory Dwellings, 29 Dec. 2019, [accessorydwellings.org/2019/12/29/evelyn-broms-adu-another-house-for-the-other-street/](http://accessorydwellings.org/2019/12/29/evelyn-broms-adu-another-house-for-the-other-street/). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>403</sup> Thieroff, Mark, and Eli Spevak. "St. Paul's First ADU Goes Up." Accessory Dwellings, 25 Apr. 2018, [accessorydwellings.org/2018/04/25/st-pauls-first-adu-goes-up/](http://accessorydwellings.org/2018/04/25/st-pauls-first-adu-goes-up/). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>404</sup> Litman, Todd. "Can Upzoning Increase Housing Supply and Affordability?" Planetizen, 9 Feb. 2019, 2PMPST, [www.planetizen.com/blogs/102740-can-upzoning-increase-housing-supply-and-affordability](http://www.planetizen.com/blogs/102740-can-upzoning-increase-housing-supply-and-affordability). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> "Williamstown, Massachusetts Population 2020." World Population Review, 2020, [worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/williamstown-ma-population](http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/williamstown-ma-population). Accessed Fall 2020.

2015.<sup>407</sup> The RM of Coldwell had a population of 1,351 people according to the 2011 census.<sup>408</sup> A project similar to our recommendations was employed in this region. They wanted to promote population growth while providing housing for seniors who wanted to move from their current place of residence.<sup>409</sup> This is similar to the motivation behind our recommendations as we are also striving to provide available housing to those who are unable to live in Williamstown today in order to increase the population in the future. Thus, the strategies utilized by this case study are similar to our ADU proposal. In the Coldwell study, from 2011-2015, the Community Development Corporation reimbursed individuals up to \$5000 if they were to purchase lots and build an additional dwelling on it within the first two years.<sup>410</sup> The program was described as successful, having been utilized by at least three families, and houses were either moved into the RM of Coldwell or newly built during this time.<sup>411</sup> While this rate of lot development is similar to that described by Stephanie Boyd in that it did not promote large scale rapid change, it is important to note that the size of the region in this case study is more than six times smaller than that of Williamstown.<sup>412</sup> With a smaller population to start with, there were less people to utilize the incentive in the first place. It is significant to note that the project was considered successful as the proposals have been utilized by citizens of the community.<sup>413</sup> From the case study, it seemed likely that residents would continue to use the incentive in the future. This bodes well for our proposal in that reducing logistical challenges may motivate change at a higher rate in a less populated area than if there was no additional assistance for landowners.

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<sup>407</sup> Ashton, Bill et al. “Growth Strategies for Rural Communities: Six Case Studies” *Brandon University*, Rural Development Institute, May, 2015, pp. 23.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, pp. 24.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> “Williamstown, Massachusetts Population 2020.”

<sup>413</sup> Ashton, Bill et al.

### *Discussion of Proposal #3*

While our proposal for mixed-use development at the old town garage site would have great benefits for incoming residents and local businesses, we recognize that such a rapid large-scale change may not be feasible in the near future. While it could increase town appeal for people of lower income by ultimately providing a united community at a convenient location, current Williamstown citizens may feel uncomfortable with such a change. Local shops and restaurants may be more apt to support the project due to increasing the customer base but may be weary of incoming businesses impacting the profitability of their services. The project would also be far more costly than other proposals, but government funding may be utilized if an application were to be approved. Federal organizations provide financial resources to assist in the cost of construction for low income housing. One such program in Massachusetts includes the HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME), which provides financial assistance for developers that are either acquiring, rehabilitating, or constructing affordable rental properties that will be available for households under 60% median area income.<sup>414</sup> While it is unclear whether this program would currently approve the proposal due to recent government funding for other housing developments, this form of federal assistance may certainly be employed.

Similar housing projects have taken place across the country, with one larger scale example being that of South Campus Gateway in Ohio. In 1997, a plan was approved by the Ohio State University's board of trustees and the Columbus city council for mixed-use development<sup>415</sup> in order to promote redevelopment and revitalization in an area that was unsafe and ineffectively utilized.<sup>416</sup> The entirety of the project involved installing restaurants,

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<sup>414</sup> “HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME).” *Housing and Community Development*, Mass.gov, 2020. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/home-investment-partnerships-program-home>. Accessed Fall, 2020.

<sup>415</sup> “South Campus Gateway.” *ULI Development Case Studies*, April-June 2007, Volume 37, Number 09, Case Number C037009, pp. 4. <https://casestudies.ulicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/C037009.pdf>. Accessed December 2020.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, pp. 3.

nightspots, a cinema, a campus bookstore, a grocery store, boutique shops, 184 market-rate apartments, office spaces, and a parking garage.<sup>417</sup> While exact mechanisms of financing the South Campus Gateway project are not of interest in our proposal, it was noted that the cost of the property acquisition, business relocation, and removal of old buildings was covered by Ohio State University's endowment fund.<sup>418</sup> Infrastructural improvements and various construction costs were financed by the city of Columbus, and state funds were utilized for the subsidization of the parking garage.<sup>419</sup> This project had similar challenges as described previously — that is, buy-in from the neighborhood was a lengthy process,<sup>420</sup> — and housing construction expenses were high.<sup>421</sup> In response to the project; however, surrounding landlords and property owners were more willing to invest in housing options for potential tenants who could be attracted to the appeal of new development in the area.<sup>422</sup> The completion of the project resulted in a vast improvement in housing options and resource availability for the tenants living there, which correlates with the goal of our mixed-use development in Williamstown. While this was a much larger scale project than can be implemented at the old town garage site, the results of this case study imply that mixed-use development in an under-utilized area of a college town is attainable. Similar financing strategies as those described in this case study may also be utilized by Williamstown and the college in conjunction if state grants are not offered. Despite the fact that the apartments in this study were not categorized as affordable housing, this study is still a reflection of potential outcomes for our proposal, assuming both projects have similar occupancy rates. As of 2007, the apartments at South Campus Gateway development were fully occupied,<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, pp. 5-6.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, pp. 6.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, pp. 9-10.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, pp. 8.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, pp. 9.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid, pp. 9.

which could also happen in Williamstown due to the historical demand for affordable housing options. In conclusion, our proposal creates the opportunity for more affordable housing options and lowers the cost of the housing market in Williamstown by increasing the supply.

### *Town Council Proposal*

In order to pass radical legislation, the town's decision-making process may also need to be changed. As it currently stands, each board must take their initiatives to the annual Town Meeting where a two thirds majority vote of the residents must be met in order to pass the proposed zoning bylaw.<sup>424</sup> If that proposal does not achieve that high benchmark, then the board returns to discuss it again for the next year.<sup>425</sup> This process severely limits how many different proposals the Planning Board, for example, can aim to implement in any given year. Of course, citizens who oppose the proposed changes are also more likely to attend the town hall meeting to oppose the measure, so this too, impedes change.

Because a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority vote by residents is mandated by state law for town meetings, we cannot alter this percentage to favor faster approvals.<sup>426</sup> Instead, we recommend that the town moves to a council-oriented government system once the population reaches 12,000 people. The state of Massachusetts prohibits towns with less than 12,000 from having a city form of government,<sup>427</sup> which includes “the presence of a city or town council as the alternative legislative body to a town meeting.”<sup>428</sup> With the current population of Williamstown at 8,267,<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Boyd, Stephanie. Interview, October 26, 2020.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Gardner.

<sup>427</sup> "Forms of Local Government Commonwealth of Massachusetts," [https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/forms\\_of\\_local\\_government\\_0.pdf](https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/forms_of_local_government_0.pdf)

<sup>428</sup> Lynch, Tara. “A Review of Municipal Government Structures.” *City & Town*, Massachusetts Department of Revenue’s Division of Local Services (DLS), 21 July, 2016, pp. 2. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/16ctown-july21pdf/download>. Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>429</sup> “Williamstown, Massachusetts Population 2020.”

this proposal cannot be immediately implemented. However, we feel that if the population threshold were reached in a number of years, then establishing this system would increase the efficiency of project developments. That is, the majority of an entire community would not have to be convinced of each change in order for measures to pass. This shift would require following the procedural steps for altering government structure as outlined in Massachusetts state law but it has the potential to foster positive change in the community. The current system allows for a few dissenters to have a significant say in the process, which is one reason that planning changes are difficult to enact in Williamstown. We recognize that this system may be arguably less democratic. However, in order to prevent the dissenting voices of a few to dictate town decisions, we feel that this proposal is appropriate. Due to the timely legislative measures and population requirement this change necessitates, we present it as a long-term possibility.

In a similar town, Palmer, MA, a comparable shift was made to the town's government structure. Over twenty years, Palmer's population grew 6% to 12,497 residents in 2000.<sup>430</sup> They proposed a shift to the Town Council-Town Manager structure from a system consisting of an Open Town Meeting, Board of Selectmen, and Town Administrator.<sup>431</sup> This change seemed to stem from a general feeling of inadequacy in the Town's government system, as an editorial was written at the time describing the lack of productivity from the part-time Board of Selectmen.<sup>432</sup> Their annual report from 2004 stated that this shift would "streamline operations"<sup>433</sup> thus contributing to a more efficient town system. This suggests that in Williamstown, a council system would allow town boards to act much faster in response to housing crises. Moving

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<sup>430</sup> Smith, Michael and Schudrich, Arianna. "A Study on Structural Changes in Local Government in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." *Clark University*, Master's of Public Administration Capstone Project, Massachusetts Municipal Managers Association Form of Government Committee, 7 May, 2010, pp. 35. [https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/mmma\\_form\\_of\\_govt\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/mmma_form_of_govt_report_0.pdf). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, pp. 35-36.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid, pp. 36-37.

<sup>433</sup> Qtd. in Ibid, pp. 37.

forward, a town council structure will help the town adopt more necessary changes that promote higher density living faster and sooner.

This proposal is intended to promote efficiency at town meetings in order to pass a greater number of significant laws every year. The Planning Board itself has made efforts to attempt to promote productivity in a timely manner through the "consent agenda" that will allow voters to pass numerous, routine articles with one vote rather than take separate votes on each.<sup>434</sup> Our proposal aims to build off of similar sentiments.

#### *Short-Term: Planning Board Decisions Based on New Census Data*

The Planning Board, as well as all of the other town boards, have pledged to work to improve the town's inclusivity and equity through the adoption of bylaw 36 and 37. These two articles, the "Not in Our County" pledge and the "Equity" petition, demonstrate the Planning Board's commitment to providing equity to residents and reimagining zoning and planning to make the town more inclusive.<sup>435</sup> In the year 2021, the Planning Board has made it a priority to promote diversity and inclusion in Williamstown. According to town planner Andrew Groff, the town is mostly waiting for census data in order to make concrete decisions on how best to initiate changes in town to promote inclusion.<sup>436</sup> One suggestion we have for the town is to reconduct the Fair Housing Survey of 1963-1964 done by Williams College students. This study surveyed the housing preferences of Williamstown residents. Redoing this survey today could gauge how progressive the opinions of residents are today in terms of more inclusive housing measures. Andrew Groff says that from his experience, in the last fifteen years there has been a shift away

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<sup>434</sup> Dravis, Stephen. "Zoning Bylaw Likely to Engender Debate at Williamstown Town Meeting," May 20, 2019. <https://www.iberkshires.com/story/59985/Zoning-Bylaw-Likely-to-Engender-Debate-at-Williamstown-Town-Meeting.html>.

<sup>435</sup> "Citizen's Petition 'Not in Our County Pledge'" 36, "Citizen's Petition 'Equality'37," *Town of Williamstown Annual Town Meeting Fiscal Year July 1, 2020 to June 31, 2020*.

<sup>436</sup> Groff, Andrew. Interview, October 14, 2020.

from residents wanting large, rural, single family homes to more citizens desiring smaller housing units within walking distance of town.<sup>437</sup> If the new studies demonstrate that is a widely held view, that could influence planning to promote more mixed use development. Perhaps returning places like Cole Avenue to a mixed-use development, complete with a grocery store and coffee shop, would be desirable. It would certainly be more sustainable for the town as it would promote walking and discourage car use.

It's possible that the shifts in desired living spaces described by Andrew Groff reflect the struggle felt by younger populations with Williamstown housing. While Groff describes a desire for smaller units, Elton Ogden describes a decrease in youthful populations. Studies show a general migration of younger people out of Williamstown as housing remains unaffordable for people who do not have the depth of financial resources more commonly associated with older generations.<sup>438</sup> Perhaps the desire for smaller units is representative of the few younger residents that were able to obtain more affordable residences. However, the overall migration of the younger demographic creates a lack of diversity in income level. This is also unfavorable for future economic prospects, as Ogden reported having a diverse population was key to supporting schools, local businesses, and other services.<sup>439</sup>

Dan Gura, a recent addition to the Williamstown Affordable Housing Trust Committee, notes that an aging population is not conducive to economic growth or sustainability. Population and diversity are likely to decrease over time, and having an older population makes it more difficult to make changes with long-term goals. That is, it is difficult for people to value the impacts of their current actions 30 years from now if they don't see themselves as being present

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> Ogden, Elton. Interview. November 18, 2020.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

to experience them.<sup>440</sup> Dennis Powell, President of the Berkshire County Branch NAACP, believes that changes are more likely to stem from youthful generations — particularly changes in prejudice and systemic racism. He supports the notion that young people have the power and knowledge necessary to improve racist policies.<sup>441</sup> Thus, allowing affordable housing would not only promote socioeconomic inclusion, but it would create living opportunities for young people who are more likely to inspire change and improve upon the racial context of Williamstown's history.

### *Recommendations for Williams College*

In terms of our recommendations specifically for Williams College, we encourage the college to look into options to open up some of its rental properties to town use, and/or staff use. The town has a monopoly of the rental units in the area that they reserve for faculty, but this system does not promote inclusivity in town. These rental units should be opened to staff like dining hall workers, who work extremely long hours and can't otherwise afford to live in Williamstown. From our historical analysis, Black service workers at Williams have historically experienced prejudice, and because many college staff members contribute to the diversity at Williams, taking this step to support people of color would assist in reconciling with its history. This employee housing system is available in other schools across the country, one example being a small liberal arts college in Kentucky.<sup>442</sup> Berea College owns housing near their campus that they offer to both faculty and staff as temporary residences for the first three years of their employment.<sup>443</sup> First priority for residential applicants go to those who were most recently

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<sup>440</sup> Gura, Danial. Interview. November 20, 2020.

<sup>441</sup> Dennis Powell during Environmental Planning 302 on Nov. 17, 2020.

<sup>442</sup> Sheri, Gordon. "Rental Housing Policy." Human Resources, Berea College, 16 Nov. 2018, [www.berea.edu/human-resources/rental-housing-policy/](http://www.berea.edu/human-resources/rental-housing-policy/). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

employed in permanent or temporary positions and live more than 40 miles from campus, and a lease-renewal is offered during the first three years.<sup>444</sup> Through this system, they aim to improve recruitment efforts for faculty and staff and provide housing near the campus for employees.<sup>445</sup>

While this system only offers housing for the first three years, it may be more beneficial for Williams to offer longer lease agreements due to the high housing demand in Williamstown. If the college is unable to release its control of rental properties, perhaps it could allocate some of its funds to building new, more affordable and accessible rental units in town. The college generously donated some of its land in the wake of the Spruces tragedy to create more affordable housing in town. A similar donation today would greatly help the town strive for inclusion.

Additionally, following in the footsteps of Brown, Williams should create a student-led group to acknowledge the town and college's past ties to slavery and racial injustice, and implement strategies to fight against racial inequity today.<sup>446</sup> Part of this would include advocating for the adoption of Bill H4944, which would expunge racially restrictive covenants recorded in property documents.<sup>447</sup> This group could also lead the efforts in examining the names of buildings on campus and suggest renaming of buildings that have direct ties with slavery and/or the colonization movement. Yale University is in the process of renaming a series of buildings and Williams College could follow their lead if the group finds building names tied to slavery.<sup>448</sup> This group could also more explicitly examine the college's role in the colonization movement and missionary efforts. We also recommend a permanent exhibit be installed in the

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Suggestion came from Seider, Maynard. "Maynard Seider: Slavery and the North Berkshires," November 3, 2020. [https://www.berkshireeagle.com/opinion/columnists/maynard-seider-slavery-and-the-north-berkshires/article\\_09e57d6f-2eba-58f9-b024-3fa3669e678f.html](https://www.berkshireeagle.com/opinion/columnists/maynard-seider-slavery-and-the-north-berkshires/article_09e57d6f-2eba-58f9-b024-3fa3669e678f.html).

<sup>447</sup> Barrett, John. "Bill H.4944 191st (Current)." Bill H.4944, The 191st General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2020, [malegislature.gov/Bills/191/H4944](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/H4944). Accessed Fall 2020.

<sup>448</sup> "Yale to Change Calhoun College's Name to Honor Grace Murray Hopper," February 9, 2018. <https://news.yale.edu/2017/02/11/yale-change-calhoun-college-s-name-honor-grace-murray-hopper-0>.

Williams College Museum of Art honoring citizens of the past who were subject to and suffered from racism, oppression, and socioeconomic exclusion in Williamstown.<sup>449</sup> Lastly, the college should increase the diversity requirement for future Williams College students. In doing this, Williams would be taking steps to acknowledge and address its history.

#### *Other Recommendations Based on Historical Findings*

Our final recommendations are in regard to the memorial of injustices and displaced residents in Williamstown. We suggest that the town implements a monument and plaque honoring the history of the Spruces and the residents who were displaced. As it stands today, the park's history as a vibrant neighborhood community is not acknowledged. Former Spruces resident, Carol Zingareli, suggested this to us in our conversation with her. She also recommended that the Williamstown Historical Museum dedicate a long-lasting exhibit to the Spruces by screening a historical video that plays on a loop.<sup>450</sup> For the White Oaks neighborhood, in order to recognize the systemic segregation of people of color, it would be appropriate to construct a gathering place that would acknowledge their exclusion and bring people together. This may be accomplished through a park, memorial, or community center where people can exercise their freedom to socialize and integrate themselves into the network of the neighborhood. Lastly, to honor the history of Blackinton, we ask the town to remember the importance of diversity — racially and socioeconomically — in future decision making. We feel that acknowledging the many years of wrongdoings that have resulted from racial bias and

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<sup>449</sup> Idea inspired by Seider, Maynard. “Maynard Seider: Slavery and the North Berkshires,” November 3, 2020. [https://www.berkshireeagle.com/opinion/columnists/maynard-seider-slavery-and-the-north-berkshires/article\\_09e57d6f-2eba-58f9-b024-3fa3669e678f.html](https://www.berkshireeagle.com/opinion/columnists/maynard-seider-slavery-and-the-north-berkshires/article_09e57d6f-2eba-58f9-b024-3fa3669e678f.html).

<sup>450</sup> Zingareli, Carol. Interview. October 25, 2020.

inequality is one of the first steps in making the Berkshires a more inviting, equitable place for people of color.

### *The Next Steps*

This report aimed to begin the important work of uncovering the racial and socioeconomic historical narratives of Williamstown. There is certainly more work to be done in this area, so we wanted to conclude with a section encouraging specific areas of further research. First, we encourage an investigation into the history of banking practices in Berkshire County. Fortunately, Frances Jones-Sneed, who was kind enough to discuss her research with us, has been hired by a local bank to investigate the banking practices in the area over time.<sup>451</sup> The bank who hired her hopes to better understand the past record of banking practices in order to inform new equitable programs today.<sup>452</sup> Redlining has already been found in Pittsfield, and Jones-Sneed aims to examine if there were any patterns of discriminatory practices in the banks in this area, particularly in the 20th century.<sup>453</sup>

Other areas of study involve continuing to investigate the history of the White Oaks neighborhood —notably the individual histories of residents like Abraham Parsons, “Aunt Dinah,” and “Aunt Hagar” Thompson — and finding and reconducting the Fair Housing Survey of 1964, investigating the story of how Sanborn Tenney acquired land, and asking the town manager about more information as to where the Spruces residents relocated. We hope that this work will only be the starting point for an investigation into the racial history of Williamstown.

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<sup>451</sup> Jones-Sneed, Frances. Interview. December 4, 2020.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.