

Community Preservation Committee

27 February 2023 - FY24

Present: Sally Underwood-Miller [presiding], Carole Owens, Tom Stokes, Patrick White, Jay Bikofsky, Linda Jackson, Gary Pitney, Anne Rabinowitz, Nicole Faireaux, Ericka Oleson

Also present: Ron Brouker, Arthur Dutil, Steve Sagarin, Teresa O'Brient, Susie Harding, Lis Wheeler, Karen Marshall, Pat Flinn, Rich Bradway, Pam Sandler, Charlie Adams, Francis Goyes, Ellen Spear, Kate Fletcher, Ranne Warner, Sarah Delsignor, Laura Dubester

Carole Owens made a motion to approve the minutes of 5 January. Patrick White seconded. All present voted in favor.

Carole Owens made a motion to approve the minutes of 19 January. Patrick White seconded. All present voted in favor.

Jay Bikofsky stated that there needs to be more specificity regarding the Affordable Housing Trust. There was some discussion regarding the tenets of that decision. Does the CPC retain oversight or is there autonomy for the Housing Trust? Sally Underwood-Miller stated that she believed the funds would still need approval for payment. This will be clarified with Town Counsel.

Patrick White suggested that the plans and applications for Pine Woods/Construct need to be refined. Town Counsel in her comments reminded the Committee that appliances and the like could not be funded. CPC money may only be used for capital improvements and major projects, in support of the integrity of the structure for its designed use. They can use the money already allocated to develop a more cohesive and long range plan.

Carole Owens asked if money already allocated (to Affordable Trust or any applicant) has to be spent before more money granted. She expressed her opinion that with respect to money already allocated to the Affordable Housing Trust, the Trust does NOT have to come back to CPC for any further approval in order to spend it. Tom Stokes suggested that we contact Town Counsel.

Requests for the Affordable Housing Trust and Construct were tabled pending further study.

Charlie Adams explained that part of the strategy behind the Pennrose project for affordable housing units in Lenox would provide for 10% of the housing being prioritized for Stockbridge workforce for the first year. Communities in the eastern part of the state have banded together to create a collective community of housing for their area. It was noted that there are 1500 on the waitlist for Heaton Court, so the need is certainly critical. While acknowledging that there is a desperate need for affordable/workforce housing in the area, the Committee felt that our funds would be better spent developing and/or creating housing within our own borders. Sally Underwood-Miller made a motion to deny funding for this project. Gary Pitney seconded. All members polled voted against, with Anne Rabinowitz as the sole dissenter. Anne went on to express her strong support for the project.

Patrick White made a motion to lower the funding for the Riverbrook fire escape to \$35000. Anne Rabinowitz seconded. Based on ensuing discussions, the motion was withdrawn. Pam Sandler described the dire conditions of the current fire escape which is made of wood. Tom Stokes spoke in favor of recommending the full \$50,000 and made a motion to recommend full funding to the next Meeting. Carole Owens seconded. All members polled voted yes except Anne Rabinowitz who abstained.

Next the Committee discussed the funding for the Stockbridge Housing Authority. Pam Sandler made the case for the new siding that will be much more durable and need painting less often. Carole Owens made a motion to recommend to Town Meeting to fund the full \$20000. Gary Pitney seconded. All members polled voted yes.

Patrick White made a motion to recommend the approval of \$15000 to Town Meeting for the Stockbridge Housing Authority to repave and refinish the pathways and driveways. Carole Owens seconded. All members polled voted yes.

After much discussion, and taking into account Town Counsel's caution regarding the Anti-Aid provision for private entities, the Committee voted against recommending funding for the Berkshire Theatre Group. Linda Jackson pointed out that they do not seem to have cohesive plan going forward. It was not clear whether the roof would be simply repaired using modern-type asphalt shingles, or would the project restore the shingled roofing. Gary Pitney made a motion not to recommend funding to Town Meeting. Carole Owens seconded. All members polled agreed and voted against funding until a better and more comprehensive plan is submitted. Unfortunately, there was no one present to clarify.

Next, the Committee debated the merits of the acquisition of the Fenn (Swann) property, approximately 350 acres that abut the Agawam Lake property owned and managed by Mass Wildlife. This is a complex undertaking currently involving the Land Trust, Berkshire National Resources Council and Mass Wildlife. CPA funding may only be used if the Town has an interest in the property either through the institution of a Conservation Restriction or some ownership. Under Mass Wildlife's regulations, they cannot accept a CR owned by another entity as, among other things, the assessment of the property value would be lessened. The Town cannot purchase property for more than the assessed value. One possible iteration of this acquisition might be to subdivide the property. BNRC and the Land Trust would own one smaller portion, and Mass Wildlife would take over the larger section. Another option might be via the Municipal Vulnerability program whereby the Town would buy the property and the ConComm would hold the CR. This would solve the issue of the CPC requirement that the town own the land. It was generally agreed to set aside up to \$300000 for the proposal as needed. While everyone was very enthusiastic regarding the importance of preserving this property, it was decided to table the project until the 3/6 meeting. The details of the purchase agreements are still up in the air. It is hoped that there will be more firm information soon.

The Committee moved on to Old Town Hall. This is another important project for the Town. To have the building off the Town's books and finally settled will be a huge step forward. This initial funding will go for the necessary ADA compliance. The plan is ultimately to install the lift that will give access to the second floor community area once the trusses that were burned in the fire have been replaced and the roof has been reconfigured. Questions were raised about the roofing shingles. There is much that needs still to be settled regarding the purchase of the property. The church has provided a letter of support for the project. It will be to their benefit to have this settled as well. It is hoped that the expanded Waldorf High School will bring families and jobs to the Town and that the reuse of the old Town Hall will be a benefit to everyone. Gary Pitney made a motion to recommend the requested sum of \$185616.17 to Town Meeting for approval. Linda Jackson seconded. All members present were polled and voted yes.

The Sergeant gravestones are an important part of the Town's history. The deterioration is considerable. Patrick White made a motion to recommend to Town Meeting the \$42000 for their conservation and restoration. Carole Owens seconded. All members were polled and voted yes.

Patrick White made a motion to recommend to Town Meeting the sum of \$3875.00 for the Stockbridge Museum and Archives to restore the Anson Clark daguerreotypes images of early Stockbridge, including early images of West Stockbridge and other local persons. (Photographer Clark lived both in Stockbridge and West Stockbridge where he had his studio. Included in his important body of work is a photo of Agrippa Hull, an important figure in the African-American history of the Town that was restored several years ago.) Carole Owens seconded. All polled members voted yes.

Patrick White made a motion to recommend to Town Meeting the sum of \$5600.00 for the Stockbridge Museum and Archives to digitize microfilm images of the Congregational Church, Berkshire Playhouse and the publication titled The Berkshire News. The Historical Commission deemed these documents to be of significance to further knowledge of the history of the Town. Preserving them in this way would allow them to be viewed more widely without danger to the originals. This kind of project has been undertaken in other communities. Linda Jackson seconded. All polled members voted yes.

Patrick White made a motion to recommend to Town Meeting the sum of \$5200 to begin work on restoring the entrance to the Foot Bird Sanctuary. This property has been neglected for many years and the periphery had often been used as a storage area for the highway department. Mrs. Foot donated this property to the Town to be an open space and habitat preservation area. Trees will be planted once the cement pad has been removed. There are plans to install benches and perhaps trails. Linda Jackson seconded. All polled members voted yes.

The Friends of Gould Meadows requested \$11916.25 to continue the work they've undertaken to restore this important open space for the enjoyment of townspeople and visitors alike. The work will continue in the removal of invasive species and replanting of native species. Much of the work has been done by volunteers. Patrick White made a motion to recommend the continued funding of this ongoing project. Anne Rabinowitz seconded. All polled members voted yes.

The Laurel Hill Association applied for \$20000 to restore the Mary Flynn trail that runs along the Housatonic River. The trail is ADA accessible and used by many townspeople and visitors. However, the infrastructure of the path is degrading, and making the trail unsafe. The project is submitted under Recreation. The trail will need to be closed for the duration of the restoration. Patrick White made a motion to recommend funding to Town Meeting. Jay Bikofsky seconded. All polled members voted yes.

A second follow-up meeting is scheduled for March 6 at 4pm. Committee members opted to revisit unresolved issues and applications at that meeting.

Patrick White made a motion to adjourn at 6:15. Carole Owens. All polled members agreed.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally Underwood-Miller, Chair