



## COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

### Minutes

February 13, 2024 at 7:00 P.M.

**The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) held this meeting as a virtual meeting. No in-person meeting will take place at City Hall.**

#### **Attendance:**

Eliza Datta, Chair  
Susan Lunin, Vice-Chair  
Mark Armstrong, Member  
Judy Weber, Member  
Buzz Dunker, Member  
Antonio Smargiassi, Member  
Mollie Hutchings, Staff

#### **Coleman House Affordable Housing Final Report**

The presentation of the Coleman House completion report was led by Elise Selinger and Lizbeth Heyer from 2 Life. Coleman House provides affordable housing for low-income seniors, has received \$4,214,622 from the CPC in two rounds of funding. The renovation has resulted in all apartments being adaptable and meeting design standards.

Ms. Selinger discussed the challenges encountered during the renovation of the Coleman House project, including the discovery of asbestos, the need to replace plumbing due to code requirements, and the contractor difficulties which led to escalating costs. She also mentioned the refusal of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board to grant a waiver for the existing drains. Ms. Selinger emphasized the importance of continuous fresh air and the installation of smart thermostats. She also discussed plans to transition the property to all-electric and the steps taken to make the apartments fully accessible or adaptable. Questions were raised about the decision to retain gas and the ease of adaptation for residents, as well as the potential impact of power outages. Ms. Selinger confirmed the importance of a generator and the consideration of Passive House due to resiliency concerns. The team discussed the Coleman House project and expressed their appreciation for the project. A vote was held to approve the final report and release remaining funds, which passed unanimously.

## West Newton Cinema Pre-Proposal Discussion

The West Newton Cinema project was then discussed, with Elizabeth Heilig, the president of the West Newton Cinema Foundation (WCNF), presenting a pre-proposal. The cinema, built in 1937, is a significant part of the community and is threatened with demolition. The foundation aims to purchase the Cinema by August of this year, operating it as a nonprofit movie and performance theater. Ms. Heilig presented the history and architecture of the theater, discussing its unique art deco design elements.

Ms. Heilig discussed the current state and future plans for a theater that serves approximately 50,000 people annually. She noted that the theater's condition is poor, leading to a decrease in attendance compared to other theaters in the area. However, the theater still attracts a significant regional audience. The WCNF aims to enhance programming through live events, panel discussions, spoken word, and small music performances, and could also serve as a prominent part of the proposed Washington Street Arts and Culture district. The proposed feasibility study would include a facility analysis and financial plan for the renovation. Ms. Heilig confirmed grants from the Mass Cultural Council totaling \$43,000 for a facility assessment and a building system assessment.

Mr. Armstrong questioned the assumptions made by the study, particularly regarding the potential for renovation versus new construction and the economic viability of operating multiple screens. Ms. Heilig clarified that the plan is to program the entire building with at least 3-4 screens for economic viability and special programming. She also mentioned the need for renovations to make the theaters accessible, comfortable, and safe, including the installation of a lift or elevator. Mr. Smargiassi raised the possibility of integrating the theater into the development proposal, which Ms. Heilig indicated was unlikely. Ms. Hutchings and Kelley Brown, also representing WCNF, discussed the importance of preservation in the feasibility study and potential future renovation project.

Mr. Brown and Ms. Heilig shared more about their organization, including their board composition, fundraising efforts, and plans for a business plan and facility assessment. A capital campaign is currently underway to raise \$5.6 million led by Ms. Heilig, who reported on the status of the quiet phase and promising leads secured/identified. Ms. Hutchings noted a demolition delay on a property under review, which could lead to total demolition if the funds were not raised. The WCNF team acknowledged their current lease ~~that~~ expires in August, which is their deadline to acquire the building.

Ms. Datta and Ms. Lunin expressed concerns about site control and the project's feasibility. Ms. Heilig confirmed that they would consider returning to the committee for more funding if needed and were working hard to put all the necessary pieces in place. Mr. Smargiassi expressed support for the project but raised concerns about the effectiveness of past strategies due to the lack of site control. He suggested that the owner might need to obtain a special permit and proposed returning to the CPC after reaching an agreement. Mr. Brown clarified that they (WCNF) would be the owners should the project move forward, and the owner's plans for demolition would not proceed.

Ms. Heilig explained that the pre-proposal is meant to initiate the renovation process, understand the committee's stance on the project, and determine the cost of initial renovations for fundraising purposes. Ms. Weber added it seemed that the study is also about strategically applying for additional resources. Mr. Brody asked if there was a larger donor who could speed up the process. Ms. Datta and Ms. Hutchings both agreed that the funding process after receiving a CPC recommendation could take months and would be unlikely to help meet an August fundraising deadline. The WCNF team clarified that the feasibility study would help their team decide how to program the Cinema after acquisition and would not inform their capital campaign to purchase the building. Mr. Brown asked if CPC would be allowed to provide acquisition funds. Ms. Datta and Ms. Hutchings confirmed it was an allowable use of funds, but not what the current pre-proposal described.

The CPC concluded with a unanimous vote to invite the WCNF to submit a full proposal for the feasibility study once the site control issue was resolved.

### **Current Projects and Bonding Update**

Ms. Hutchings updated the team on the current projects. Ms. Datta inquired about the city's plans to issue bonds for the two projects, and Ms. Hutchings confirms that they will be issued on March 13th. However, she does not have an updated estimate of the interest rate on the bonds. The current bond interest rates are between 3 and 3.6%, which is lower than the current 3.3% rate. Mr. Brody clarified~~ds~~ that the current rates are not unlimited, but they will still be fine.

The committee confirmed they will be meeting in March, and voted~~ds~~ to adjourn.