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**Community Preservation Committee  
Funding Recommendation for the  
First Baptist Restoration Project**

**Date:** August 19, 2024 **Rev. October 12**  
**From:** Community Preservation Committee  
**To:** The Honorable City Council  
**CC:** The Honorable Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

**PROJECT GOALS & ELIGIBILITY**

The goal of this project is for the restoration of the bell tower at First Baptist Church in Newton Centre. The bell tower's state of disrepair has led to the closing of the main building and sanctuary of the First Baptist Church, which is a venue for several musical organizations, school graduations, and community events throughout Newton. It has also led to the closing of the lawn, which is a prominent green space in the Newton Centre streetscape.

**RECOMMENDED FUNDING**

Account	Account No.	Amount
Historic Funds Balance	5810-335810	\$280,000.00
Historic Budgeted Reserves	58B10498-57900B	\$500,000.00
FY25 Unrestricted Fund Balance	58R10498	\$1,220,000.00

**SPECIAL ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE CPC**

**Funding of Private/Religious Institutions and Bells:**

The topic of using CPA funds to for improvements on religious buildings was raised as part of previous discussions of the Committee regarding other projects, including the recently completed Grace Church Tower Restoration. It was determined that the majority of the CPC members at that time agreed that this project must be reviewed in the same manner that any historic resource project would be considered, based on the historic significance of the structure, its importance to the community, and the merits of its restoration process and plan.

[www.newtonma.gov/cpa](http://www.newtonma.gov/cpa)

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After being consulted by Planning Department Staff, the Law Department emailed, advising that the restoration of the First Baptist Church bells was an allowable expense.

**Project engineering and timeline:**

John Wathne, the structural engineer for the project, presented the details of the condition on the tower, and the scope of work needed to stabilize and restore the structure. CPC asked questions regarding the urgency of the project, and how long the tower could remain as it stands. The applicant team answered that the current project schedule would require three construction seasons beginning in Spring 2025, and that any delay would reduce the chance of being able to save the tower. A long-term solution to the water infiltration problem which caused the instability, which is a design problem rather than deferred maintenance, is included in the scope of work.

**CPC Funding and Fundraising:**

After considering multiple options for how to fund the project, including matching the confirmed funds (~\$1.2 million) or breaking the funding into yearly phases, the committee chose to fund the entire amount, but reimburse the Church at the match percentage on remaining project expenses (49.4%). For example: if the First Baptist Church submits for approval an invoice for \$100,000, with proof of payment from their accounts, they will be reimbursed with \$49,400 of CPA funds. This decision was made to ensure that the Church was contributing to the project alongside the CPC contribution, but also allow them to start with the necessary work without delay.

**Historic Significance and Review:** The building was constructed by Mead, Mason and Co in 1888. It was designed by John Lyman Faxon, and influenced greatly by the work of Henry Hobson Richardson, for whom the style "Richardsonian Romanesque" is named. The bell tower is particularly significant in its dedication to Samuel Francis Smith, who was minister of the church from 1842 -1854 and author of *My Country, 'Tis of Thee (America)*. The building is listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places, and meets the eligibility criteria for Historic Resource funding.

There is currently a Preservation Restriction on the property which is held by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The project has been reviewed and approved by Paul Holtz at MHC, as required, and has received a letter of support from the Newton Historical Commission. The proposed work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation and Restoration. The proposal calls for the tower to be restored and repaired using existing and in-kind materials.

**ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS** (*funding conditions*)

1. Recommended CPA funds should be appropriated within 1 month and the project should be completed within 3 years after the date of its approval by City Council, with the understanding that these deadlines may be extended by submitting a written request to the CPC outlining the reason the extension is necessary and the proposed new deadline.
2. All CPA funding will be used solely for the restoration of the tower as a public element of the building which is visible from all surrounding public ways and park spaces. No funding can be used for the support of any religious activities, or for the restoration of any other elements of the building which are solely used for religious purposes.
3. The Applicant will be asked to update the CPC on the status of the project at regular intervals as requested. Periodic site visits to check the status of the restoration work may also be requested.
4. A preservation restriction will be placed on the property.
5. The CPC will hold 10% of the project's CPA funding until all restoration work is complete, at which time a final report and updated project budget must be submitted to the CPC for approval. The Applicant will be expected to present these materials at a public meeting of the CPC for their review and approval before the final funds are released.

6. The release of CPA funds will be governed by a grant agreement that includes but is not limited to the usual conditions for the phased release of CPA funds for historic resource projects, including a final report to the CPC and the return of unspent funds.
7. Any CPA funds appropriated but not used for the purposes stated herein should be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.
8. Use Restriction: The CPC voted on 10/8/2024 to approve the following language for a recommended use restriction by the church:
  - 1) The Church will be required to permit community access to the Church buildings, for so long as the Church retains ownership of the property, such community access to be provided substantially in accordance with the terms of the Community Use Agreement previously proposed by the Church and in line with the Church's current protocol, as more fully provided in the Grant Agreement to be entered into by the City and the Church.
  - 2) The Church will be required to record a deed restriction that requires subsequent owners of the property to comply with the community access provision of the Grant Agreement until the thirtieth anniversary of the execution of the Grant Agreement.
9. 3) Any subsequent owner can obtain a recordable release from the requirements of the community access provision upon the payment to the City of a buyout fee initially equal to the amount of CPA grant funding actually provided by the City for the bell tower restoration project. The buyout fee will be reduced proportionately over the 30-year life of the deed restriction.

#### ATTACHMENTS

Additional information not attached to this recommendation, including proposal, petitions and letters of support, are available on the CPC's website at: <https://www.newtonma.gov/government/planning/community-preservation-program/proposals-projects/first-baptist-church-bell-tower-preservation>