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Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

April 14, 2020

The virtual meeting was held online on Tuesday, April 14, 2020 beginning at 7:00 pm. Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present included Mark Armstrong, Dan Brody, Byron Dunker, Rick Kronish, Susan Lunin, Robert Maloney, Peter Sargent and Martin Smargiassi. Commission Member Jennifer Molinsky was absent. Planning and Development Director Barney Heath, Assistant City Solicitor Maura O'Keefe, and Community Preservation Program Manager Lara Kritzer were also present. Ms. Kritzer served as recorder.

Mr. Armstrong opened the meeting and all member introduced themselves at this time.

Proposals & Projects

Whipple/Beal Fence Restoration, Newton Cemetery – Presentation and Review of Final Report

Mary Ann Buras and Lalor Burdick were present on behalf of the Newton Cemetery. Ms. Buras gave a presentation on the project and its results. Before and after photos showed the extent of the work on the fences and their finished appearance. Ms. Buras explained that before the restoration, the posts had become offset and were twisted and out of plumb. Bio-growth, deterioration and rust had damaged the wrought iron and pieces were missing from the original design. The fence had gradually moved completely off of its original granite bases and the post caps were missing in addition to other problems. The cemetery had hired Ray Dunetz Landscape Architects to assess the condition of the fence and complete construction documents. The project had followed the public bidding process and hired Cassidy Brothers Foundry to restore and replace the damaged and missing parts of the ironwork. This work had been done off site, and a site visit was held at the foundry to see the work underway.

The Henry Perkins Foundry had created new pieces to replace the missing elements of the fence. Ms. Buras explained that this historic foundry had been in business for five generations and had created new molds for the fence. This work represented approximately half of the project's budget, but the Cemetery now owns the molds and would keep them on site in case more recasting was ever needed in the future.

Ms. Buras stated that the fence had been reinstalled last April and now included new granite bases as well as new interpretive signage. The plot was the site of the Cemetery's first burial and had been rededicated during a ceremony held in June 2019. The project budget was \$60,000 and they had spent \$58,200 on the work, leaving \$1,800 in unspent CPA funds to be returned.

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Mr. Armstrong noted that the fence now had good modern posts and foundations to support the structure. Ms. Buras added that they had used stainless steel rods to ensure that the fence would stay in place in the future. Mr. Sargent asked about the annual maintenance budget for the fence. Ms. Buras stated that they planned to do an annual visual inspection of the fence and anticipated that they would need to plan for a more extensive overhaul of the fencing in twenty years. She added that their maintenance crew would continue to inspect the fencing and plot regularly as part of their general duties at the Newton Cemetery. There were no further questions at this time.

Mr. Kronish moved to approve the final report and presentation for the Whipple/Beal Fence Restoration by the Newton Cemetery. Mr. Sargent seconded the motion. Members unanimously voted to approve the motion by roll call vote.

Nathaniel Allen Homestead Rehabilitation, Newton Cultural Alliance – Presentation and Review of Final Report

Adrienne Hartzell, Managing Director of the Newton Cultural Alliance (NCA), was present on behalf of the project. She provided a PowerPoint presentation on the progress on the Allen House restoration work since her last meeting with the CPC in the fall of 2019, as well as a final report and budget. Ms. Hartzell explained that the project had been 90%-95% complete when it was shut down due to the ongoing COVID-19 quarantine. At that time, they had been six to eight weeks away from completion, and she now estimated that they would be three to four months behind when the quarantine ended. A big part of this was that the elevator, which was not complete and was now holding up the completion of the masonry and hardwood floors.

Ms. Hartzell provided a summary of the important dates in the history of the house and barn and the issues that had come up during construction. They had discovered that the North wall of the rear ell had no foundation and had to be completely rebuilt. The lower level of the building had been extended and Ms. Hartzell explained how some of the space used as apartments in the barn and carriage house spaces could not be reused as it did not meet building code. The building had been insulated for sound as well as for the elements, and underground work on the site was completed to install new conduits into the building. The windows had been reframed, and in some places replaced, and they had installed new French doors inside, creating a more flexible space that could be easily expanded. Ms. Hartzell noted that the building had five levels that needed to be addressed to meet accessibility requirements, creating a challenge in how the elevator needed to be designed and located.

Additional exterior work included replicating the barn doors and replacing the roofs, all of which have different rooflines. Ms. Hartzell noted that they had come back before the Committee for a third request for funding to install a geothermal HVAC system. Ms. Hartzell explained how the new equipment room had been designed and located and how the system itself had been installed. The system had just started functioning before the shutdown took effect. Ms. Hartzell presented photos and information about the new restrooms installed for the performance space, noting that the water has not yet been turned on. They had also restored some of the original masonry, including rebuilding the base of the original chimney in the former classroom and the fieldstone south wall of the barn.

Ms. Hartzell noted that exterior work had just started when the shutdown took place. A new brick walkway from Webster Street to the door had been installed and she reviewed where the additional walkways would be installed and how accessibility would be addressed including the brick drop off area and ramp leading into the rear ell.

Ms. Hartzell showed photos of the main lobby and historic classroom as well as the newly restored staircase. She explained that it was not possible to gain accessible access to some of the spaces in the building, including the bowling alley, and that they would show that space in a controlled way. In the main lobby, they had kept three of the original timber beams which had supported the former second story of the ell where Nathaniel Hawthorn's students had lived when they boarded here. They had also worked with the Mass. Historical Commission to gain permission to add a new set of doors between the performance space in the original barn and the former classrooms. In the classroom, the original benches and fireplace surround were intact and would remain in place.

Ms. Hartzell stated that they were currently working on another tax credit application and to extend their loan with the Village Bank. Mr. Armstrong asked how complete the work was at this point. Ms. Hartzell answered that they were 90% complete and were well into the completion of finish work at this time. She noted that there was painting, flooring, and the elevator to be addressed. The elevator was partially installed, but she had concerns as to whether there would be additional delays in having that work completed once business was underway again. Once the elevator was completely installed, they could finish the surrounding masonry and flooring.

Committee members agreed that the project was in good shape but that it was not ready for a final approval. Mr. Smargiassi asked about the size of the space. Ms. Hartzell stated that they had 17,000 square feet of space on a quarter acre lot. It was also noted that the elevator alone cost the project \$700,000. Members discussed the possibility of providing some of the final funding now to address ongoing work, but to hold a small percentage back until the Certificate of Occupancy was issued. Ms. Lunin stated that she agreed with releasing the funds incrementally. Ms. Kritzer stated that there was \$260,000 in CPA funding on hold at this time. Ms. Hartzell explained that landscaping needed to be done as well as the interior work and suggested that 10% of the remaining funds be retained until the work was complete. Mr. Sargent asked if the recent request for \$600,000 was entirely for the HVAC system and whether that part of the project was complete. Ms. Hartzell confirmed that this was the funding amount and that the work was complete. Mr. Sargent stated that he would support the release of some of the funding at this time. Members agreed to release 50% of the available funds, or \$130,000.

Mr. Sargent moved to release \$130,000 of the retained \$260,000 to the Newton Cultural Alliance for the work completed on the building, with the rest to be released after the remaining work was completed and a Certificate of Occupancy has been issued for the site. Ms. Lunin seconded the motion. Members unanimously voted to approve the motion by roll call vote.

Ms. Hartzell asked what information should be presented as a final report when the work was complete. Members stated that information and photos of the elevator and the remaining elements to be completed was all that would need to be submitted. Members also agreed to plan to hold a future CPC meeting at the Allen House when the work is complete.

Rental Housing Assistance Program Pre-Proposal Discussion

Mr. Heath explained that the current situation has led the City to consider what a rental or mortgage assistance program might look like. Ms. Kritzer gave a brief PowerPoint presentation outlining the City's current thoughts on this program and how it might be managed.

A question was raised as to what types of people would be helped by this program and whether people eligible for other housing assistance should also be considered for these funds. Mr. Heath stated that they had to gauge the level of need in the community first to know where the funding was most needed. He noted that Boston had announced its program two weeks ago and had already received 7,000 applications. They wanted to do their best to determine where these funds were most needed and to try and help as many people as quickly as possible. The purpose of the funding would be to address the immediate needs of those who had seen their income negatively impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

Mr. Sargent expressed his support for an expedited application process and thought that the City should get a proposal to the CPC for review as soon as possible. He thought that the numbers proposed in the presentation were fair and was comfortable with the proposed plan. Mr. Kronish questioned who would be eligible for the program and expressed a preference for the funds to go to employees rather than business owners. Mr. Maloney asked about the legality of the program and Ms. Kritzer explained that these programs were well within the mandates of the Community Preservation Act and were supported by the Community Housing Coalition and Mass. Housing Partnership. Ms. Lunin asked how the program would be advertised. Mr. Heath answered that they would begin a media push as soon as the program was approved and would be working with a third party to manage it. Members expressed agreement that the pre-proposal should move forward in an expedited fashion.

Discussion was opened to the public at this time. Councilor Allan Ciccone, Jr. stated that he had gotten calls from local businesses in need of funding to pay their landlords and wondered if CPA funding could be used for this purpose. He also expressed support for the proposal. Mr. Heath stated that CPA funding could not be used for this purpose but that they were looking at small business funding to come out of the additional CDBG funds that the City was receiving. He noted that they were limited by HUD as to what could be done with the funding but that they wanted to help as much as possible.

Josephine McNeil asked if the City would be receiving CARES Act funding. Mr. Heath answered yes. Ms. McNeil thought that it was important to provide funding to help those who were most vulnerable and questioned why the funds should be prioritized to those not already getting assistance. She asked about how the program would be publicized and suggested that they focus on getting the word out to any and all groups in Newton if possible.

Marcia Johnson, NLWV, wondered if funding could be made available to essential workers and agreed with Ms. McNeil's points. She suggested that the City reach out to religious organizations, the Boys and Girls Club, Family Access, and the Chamber of Commerce. She added that the League of Women Voters would be happy to help as well.

There was no more public comment at this time. Members agreed to consider the presentation to be the project's pre-proposal. Mr. Sargent moved to approve expediting the proposal process with the full proposal to be submitted as soon as possible. Mr. Kronish seconded the motion. Members unanimously voted to approve the motion by roll call vote.

Program Planning & Committee Business

Approval of March 10, 2020 Minutes – Members had reviewed the draft minutes of the March 10 meeting and provided revisions beforehand. Mr. Sargent moved to approve the March 10 minutes as revised. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion. Members unanimously voted to approve the motion by roll call vote.

Review of potential proposals -Ms. Kritzer explained that she had had several discussions since the last meeting about potential CPA proposals including the fence at the Jackson Homestead, gutter and window repairs at the Durant Kenrick House, and rehabilitation work on the house at Angino Farm. None of these projects had funding amounts at this time, and all were now on hold. Members discussed other possible sources for future projects and proposals.

New Signage for CPA projects – Ms. Kritzer explained that Alice Ingerson had discussed the possibility of new signage for CPA funded construction projects and had included additional signage funding in the FY21 budget. Members noted that the temporary construction signs were owned by the CPC but that more permanent signage, such as the one at the Highland Playground, was provided by the property owner or applicant. Mr. Armstrong agreed to work with staff on a new sign design.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42 P.M.