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Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES
8 May 2018

The meeting was held on Tuesday, 8 May 2018 starting at 7:00 pm in Newton City Hall Room 204.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC below) members present: chair Peter Sargent, vice chair Mark Armstrong, and members Byron Dunker, Rick Kronish, Susan Lunin and Robert Maloney. Members Dan Brody and Beryl Gilfix were absent.

Community Preservation Program Manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder.

[Blue, underlined phrases](#) below are links to additional information online.

Final Reports on Completed Projects

[WPA Mural](#), Newton North High School (Newton Public Schools)

This report was presented by Newton North High School Principal Emeritus Jennifer Huntington, who was instrumental in writing the original proposal to the CPC and in shepherding the project to completion. She explained that an interdepartmental “research and interpretation” group of staff and volunteers had never discovered either how the artist, Maurice Compris, was chosen or how he had been instructed by the project’s Newton sponsors. The title of the three-part mural is *Citizenship*. Its center panel, *Education*, included the colors of Newton High School and an image of Newton’s City seal, but the side panels, *Commerce* and *Industry*, were clearly not images of Newton per se.

The federal government paid for the artist’s time through the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) art program. As required by that program, Newton itself -- thanks to a donation from resident Mrs. Eugenie Stafford Brown -- had covered the cost of materials. When the mural was originally installed in 1936, it was dedicated to Mrs. Brown’s son, Stafford Leighton Brown, a Newton High School graduate who had volunteered as a World War I ambulance driver in France before the United States entered the war. He died in the war’s final months, while piloting a test flight for the U.S. forces. His mother also endowed a scholarship in his memory, which is still awarded today.

When *Education* was moved from the original high school library to the cafeteria of the Newton North High School built in the 1970s, *Commerce* and *Industry* were left rolled up in storage spaces, where they were re-discovered just before the 1970s school was demolished. The contract for restoring all three panels was awarded to Hartmann Fine Art Conservation Services, based in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The panels were painstakingly cleaned, attached to new linen backing and then to rigid corrugated aluminum panels. The Hartmann staff had carefully painted in missing and damaged areas on each panel.

A space had been specifically designed in the current Newton North High School’s main corridor for *Education*, but as the school had no space large enough to display all three panels side-by-side, *Commerce* and *Industry* were installed on the curved wall outside the auditorium. All three panels also had to be divided vertically to fit through the school’s interior doorways for final installation. Hartmann Fine Art had provided detailed instructions about how to care for the mural and move it safely in the future, if needed. The project’s final cost was \$99,400, and the School Dept. had returned \$15,000 of unspent CPA funds.

Huntington explained that of the 70-plus Newton residents who had served in World War I, 50 had died during

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the two years of American involvement. In response to a *Newton Tab* article about the project, one Newton resident had contacted her about two brothers in her family who had served in the war, one of whom had given his life, but neither of whom was listed on the existing bronze plaque at the school because they had not graduated from high school. The surviving brother's grandson eventually became Newton's fire chief.

The re-dedication ceremony in November 2017 included participation by many Newton veterans, who rang a memorial bell as members of Newton North's leadership class recited the name of each World War I casualty from Newton. Huntington felt this ceremony had helped current students understand the war's huge impact a century ago, on a generation that had then been close to their ages now.

Huntington and Alice Ingerson then presented a series of slides, including [images of the mural before, during, and after its restoration](#). The Newton CPC's webpage for the project also includes this final report's [narrative, financial summary, and research sources consulted for the project](#).

Newton Highlands Playground, Winchester & Dedham Streets (Parks & Recreation Dept.)

This final report was presented by Parks & Recreation Commissioner Bob DeRubeis and by Allison Crosbie, who has succeeded landscape architect Carol Schein as the Parks & Recreation Dept.'s Open Space Coordinator. As the project's primary manager, Schein had [drafted the final report](#) before retiring in January 2018.

DeRubeis explained that this site had been his department's top priority for total rehabilitation for well over a decade. Drainage and grading problems had made the fields virtually unplayable, and the old playground equipment had been removed several years for safety reasons.

The only change to the wooded, upland portion of the site was to improve the existing pathways for passive recreation. In the many community meetings that informed the master plan for the site, neighbors had emphasized that, while they welcomed park visitors from everywhere in Newton, they preferred not to encourage more intensive use of these woods.

In contrast, the site's low-lying, poorly drained areas had to be reconstructed from below ground level, with brand- new drainage and irrigation systems, lights, well-marked entrances and circulation paths, seating and stone walls, tennis and basketball courts, and playground equipment. In the early stages of construction, it became clear that the poor soil and subsoil conditions required even more remediation than originally anticipated. The playing fields have been hydroseeded, but Parks and Recreation is asking the sports leagues not to use the fields until fall 2018, when the turf should be well-established. The site's other facilities are open for use now and are already very popular.

DeRubeis emphasized that the new LED lighting at Newton Highlands had significantly expanded the site's capacity – almost as much as adding a new field to Newton's overall system. The new lighting system's "smart" technology had enhanced the department's efficiency by allowing staff to turn the lights on and off remotely, in response to changing weather and other conditions. DeRubeis was grateful that the immediate abutters had accepted the need for lighting, and he hoped users and visitors from other Newton neighborhoods would learn from the Highlands' site's true "down lighting," which lit only the fields and not the neighbors' yards, that night practices and games could truly be good neighbors.

DeRubeis acknowledged that, although some parking had been added within the site, it would be a continuing challenge to keep the parks' commercial abutters from using the City parking along the site's edges.

The \$2.5 million of CPA funding appropriated for final design and construction at this site have now been fully expended, along with some additional City funds and some of Newton's federal CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funds, for accessibility. In response to funding constraints, design and construction of the park's permanent support building, including restrooms, had been deferred to a future phase. In response to Ingerson, DeRubeis and Crosbie promised to provide by summer 2018 a final accounting of final, actual costs and funding sources for this phase.

Committee Business

Ingerson provided the Committee with several brief updates. She noted that the small group of CPC members who had helped to draft the scope of work for the Committee's [Crescent Street consultant](#) expected to review a draft of the consultant's report in mid-May. The final report was due by May 31. She hoped to post it online by June 1 and mail it to the CPC by June 4, along with any other materials for the CPC's June 21 Crescent Street discussion. In response to questions from several members, Ingerson said she did not know what progress had been made toward an agreement resolving the safety, parking and traffic concerns expressed about this project by the Myrtle Baptist Church, but she believed no further work had been done to recruit a property manager, because the City's project team hoped its recruitment efforts could benefit from suggestions in the CPC consultant's report.

Ingerson also summarized recent changes to Newton's [supplemental FY19-23 Capital Improvement Plan](#), which currently lists enough in CPA-eligible needs to absorb at least 10 years of Newton's available CPA funding, possibly closer to 15 years if Newton's CPA spending follows the recently revised guidelines and allocation targets in Newton's [Community Preservation Plan](#). She reported that during recent budget meetings with City Council committees, several councilors had asked about setting clearer, multi-year priorities for CPA-eligible City projects, and that Mayor Fuller had asked her senior staff to work with the CPC toward this goal.

Ingerson noted that Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly intended to request CPA funding for its planned expansion of Golda Meir House, on Stanton Avenue. Though she had no final details about the project yet, she believed its number of units, total budget, and CPA request would all be roughly the same order of magnitude as those for the Housing Authority's Haywood House project.

Ingerson then projected two alternate spending plans for fy18-19-20 for the Golda Meir project three other current or anticipated large proposals: Crescent Street, Haywood House, and Webster Woods. Although it would be possible to fund all four projects in fy19, she encouraged the Committee to consider deferring at least one of these projects to fy20, to maintain a more stable fund balance and allow more flexibility in responding to unanticipated opportunities.

Ingerson also described her continuing concern about conservation restrictions for CPA-funded land acquisitions. These restrictions, which are required by the CPA state statute, have yet to be recorded at the Registry of Deeds for several land acquisitions in Newton, going back as far as 2003-04. In each of the past several years, Ingerson has asked the Newton Law Dept. if it would like to tap the CPC's remaining administrative budget for help to complete these restrictions, but this offer has not yet been accepted. Peter Sargent asked Ingerson to inform the Law Dept. that if these restrictions were not completed soon, the CPC was prepared to hire a consultant directly to complete them, either by using its own administrative funds or by docketing an appropriation request with the City Council.

Finally, Ingerson asked the Committee if they would be willing to meet in Newtonville at the Newton Senior Center in calendar 2019, to reduce competition for City Hall Room 204. After a brief discussion, all members present asked Ingerson to request Room 204 for 2019, out of concern that construction on Austin Street might make parking at or near the Senior Center difficult for the time being.

Based on a motion by Mark Armstrong and seconded by Susan Lunin, the minutes as submitted for 3 April 2018 were approved by a vote of 6-0.

A motion to adjourn by Bob Maloney, also seconded by Lunin, was approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.