



Setti D. Warren
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts
Department of Planning and Development
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459

Telephone
(617) 796-1120
Telefax
(617) 796-1142
TDD/TTY
(617) 796-1089
www.newtonma.gov

James Freas
Acting Director

Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

14 April 2016

The meeting was held on Thursday, 14 April 2016 at 7:00 pm in City Hall Room 204.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC below) members present: chair Jim Robertson, vice chair Jane Sender, Jonathan Yeo, Don Fishman, Laura Fitzmaurice, and Rick Kronish. Members Mike Clarke, Joel Feinberg and Beryl Gilfix were absent.

Community Preservation Program Manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder.

Blue, underlined phrases below are links to additional information online from www.newtonma.gov/cpa.

PROPOSALS & PROJECTS

[Newton Highlands Local Historic District Survey](#) (historic resources) – pre-proposal for potential \$20,000 request from City of Newton Planning Dept.

Senior Planner Katy Hax Holmes explained that, if the CPC agrees to consider a full proposal, the Planning Department will request funds to hire a professional preservation consultant to study the buildings and boundaries for a potential new local historic district (LHD) in Newton Highlands. This effort was initiated by the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council. She noted that the amount of neighborhood-raised funding listed in the pre-proposal as a match for the requested CPA funding might be increased if the neighborhood can raise more funds.

Holmes said the proposed new district would be about the same size as Newton's current Chestnut Hill LHD but larger than the City's other three LHDs, in Auburndale, Newtonville and Upper Falls. The proposed district includes many buildings already on the National Register of Historic Places, but existing survey forms must be updated for all buildings in the district. The district also includes a potential National Register district of homes designed by pioneering woman architect Annie Cobb, based on research by CPC member Laura Fitzmaurice.

Holmes staffs the Newton Historical Commission (NHC) and administers Newton's demolition delay ordinance, which allows NHC to delay demolitions, but buildings can still be demolished when the delay expires. In contrast, a local historic district (LHD) can forbid demolitions permanently. In response to questions from Rick Kronish, Holmes explained that the LHD has authority over all exterior changes visible from the public way, including additions such as porches but excluding easily reversible changes such as paint colors and storm windows. All buildings in the district are subject to the LHD, regardless of their age.

Holmes also outlined the process for creating LHDs, which is set by state statute, Massachusetts Chapter 40C, and by Newton's ordinances. All buildings in the proposed district must be documented in a study report to the NHC, which will then notify all potential residents of the district by mail and hold a public hearing on the proposed district. If NHC endorses the district, it forwards the proposal to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). If MHC approves the district, it must then be either adopted or denied by Newton's City Council, by a simple majority vote.

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website www.newtonma.gov/cpa

contact Alice E. Ingerson, Community Preservation Program Manager

email alingerson@newtonma.gov phone 617.796.1144

Newton Highlands Area Council members Rodney Barker and Bob Burke said the Council had done all it could to inform all residents and property owners affected by the proposed district, including two community meetings and two fundraisers. The Council worked on its own with Gretchen Schuler, a consultant who had once worked in Newton's Planning and Development Department, on four successive drafts of the map for the proposed district, excluding homes whose owners were less supportive. Very few people had opposed the district. Barker also noted that Acting Director of Planning & Development James Freas had supported creating this district when he met with advocates for the proposal.

Jonathan Yeo remembered that when Auburndale residents proposed a new LHD there, they sent out hundreds of letters and conducted a door-to-door survey, then presented those results to the Newton Board of Aldermen. Holmes explained that although NHC must hold a public hearing, and the City Council may also hold public hearings, there is no formal requirement for the support of residents or property owners affected by the district. The City Council makes the final decision.

Holmes also explained that each of Newton's LHDs has its own individual commission. The state statute sets these commissions' requirements for membership (from specific professions), for quorums, etc. Newton's four LHD commissions meet monthly and are staffed by the Planning and Development Department. The planner who currently supports all four of Newton's LHD commissions does not have time available to support a fifth.

Robertson was concerned that without a clear plan for staffing, any study supported with CPA funds would be a wasted effort. Approaching the creation of new LHDs one at a time seemed disjointed. He would like any full proposal submitted to include an outline of the City's overall strategy for new districts or historic preservation more broadly. Alice Ingerson noted that the CPC had approached City archives similarly: rather than consider proposals for one collection or one department's records at a time, the CPC had supported funding for a survey and then a strategic plan for all City archives.

Holmes said that the Planning and Development Dept. saw zoning reform as possibly contributing to such an overall strategy for Newton's historic resources. She thought some more detailed decisions about this might be made when the new Planning and Development Director starts in June. Holmes believed that several other neighborhoods might also request LHD studies, and that in combination these proposals would create a critical mass of support for a more strategic, efficient approach. Fitzmaurice noted that residents of West Newton Hill had suggested a new district there with over 300 structures, which would be the state's largest LHD.

Robertson asked whether the NHC could administer multiple local districts. Ingerson and Holmes said the Planning Dept. had previously proposed a single, combined commission, separate from NHC, to manage all local historic districts. Fitzmaurice opposed this approach, on the grounds that each current LHD commission sought residents of that district as members. She felt the City should hire additional staff.

Ingerson suggested exploring additional alternatives. For example, it might be possible to group LHDs by their shared, formative historic periods: one group of villages grew up around stops on Newton's northern rail line, parallel to the Mass Turnpike, which began serving commuters in the 1840s (Newtonville, Auburndale), while another group of villages grew around stops on the rail line that became the MBTA Green D Line, which began serving commuters in the 1880s (Chestnut Hill, Newton Highlands). It might also be possible to design a flexible administrative system that could adapt to changes in workload over time. Each LHD might receive the most, and most complicated, applications in the first few years after it was established. As property owners gradually learn that following Newton's published [historic preservation design guidelines](#) improves the likelihood of project approval, the same commission's workload might decline, or staff might be authorized to approve projects that follow the guidelines, allowing that district to be combined with other, similarly mature districts.

Robertson noted that Boston's historic districts delegated many decisions to staff. He also suggested that Newton might recover the administrative costs of additional districts through application fees, which are not currently charged.

Holmes assured the Committee that the proposed survey of historic structures in Newton Highlands would be necessary for any historic preservation or implementation strategy adopted by the City. Yeo believed that the

City would not propose, and the City Council would not create, a Newton Highlands LHD without a clear implementation strategy.

VOTE: Fitzmaurice moved, and Yeo seconded, a motion to consider in the regular fall 2016 funding round a full proposal from the Planning Department for a Newton Highlands local historic district study, accompanied by an outline of the department's overall strategy for local historic districts and for historic preservation more broadly. The motion was adopted 6-0.

Historic Architecture Survey to 1870 (\$37,500 appropriated 2010)

Holmes explained that the CPA grant had been the first in a multi-year series of MHC planning grants. Work to date had documented about 500 buildings constructed over 170 years up to about 1870, including about 55 individual buildings and 4 districts that were potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Having correct, confirmed dates for these buildings, and a documented architect for many of them, helps the Newton Historical Commission persuade owners and developers to extend and adapt these historic buildings, rather than demolish and replace them.

A copy of Holmes's presentation is posted on the CPC's webpage for this project, at www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/cpa/projects/historic.asp#Early-Architecture.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Committee unanimously approved the minutes of the 10 March 2016 meeting, with corrections as noted, and the Fy15 annual report, in both cases on motions by Yeo, seconded by Kronish.

By sense of the meeting, the Committee also authorized Ingerson to use Fy16 administrative funds for assistance in documenting and posting housing affordability restrictions for all past CPA projects.

Ingerson explained that the state Dept. of Revenue recently suggested a state match of 19% for local Fy17 CPA program budgets, rather than the 18% used in the CPA budget already submitted for Newton's program. When the final state match is confirmed next November, too late to revise the Fy17 budget, it will probably exceed 19%. Rather than revise and resubmit the Fy17 budget now, Ingerson and City Comptroller David Wilkinson recommended making any additional state funds available through the Fy18 budget. The Committee accepted this recommendation.

Finally, the Committee discussed briefly the current docket item for \$2.5 million in CPA construction funding for Newton Highlands Playground, for which the Parks & Recreation Dept. had asked the CPC in January to hold its written recommendation, pending a revised funding request that has not yet been submitted. Since this topic was not on the agenda for tonight's meeting, the CPC asked Ingerson to invite Parks & Recreation Commissioner Bob DeRubeis to update the Committee at its May meeting.

The Committee then adjourned by consensus at 8:15 pm.