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**Community Preservation Committee**

**MINUTES**  
14 May 2015

James Freas  
Acting Director

The meeting was held on Thursday 14 May 2015 at 7:00 pm in Room 204 of Newton City Hall.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC below) members present: chair Joel Feinberg (arr. 7:20 pm), vice chair Jim Robertson, Beryl Gilfix, Jane Sender, Rick Kronish, and Jonathan Yeo. Members Mike Clarke, Don Fishman and Laura Fitzmaurice were absent.

Community Preservation Program Manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder.

**PUBLIC HEARING on Museum Archives, Accessibility & Fire Suppression Supplemental Request**  
(\$742,345 previously appropriated, \$400,000 new request, historic resources)

Public Buildings Project Manager Rafik Ayoub and Historic Newton Director Lisa Dady, both of whom are new to this project and to the City of Newton, summarized the proposal. Ayoub explained that the project's original 2007-08 scope of work was confined to accessibility & archival storage. Over the succeeding 8 years, changes in the project scope, in Historic Newton's needs, and in building codes all contributed to cost increases. The most recent expansion of scope was to install fire suppression throughout the full building. The final scope also includes bringing the building's main floor up to existing codes for accessibility, including the main entrance, restroom, kitchenette and corridor leading to the archives work area. Compact/movable shelving, insulation, full climate control and appropriate fire suppression will be installed in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century wing housing the archives. The only work in the main house will be installing a sprinkler system for fire safety.

Ayoub explained that previously submitted budgets had been based on the work of a professional, non-City cost estimator, working from nearly but not fully completed drawings. Final construction documents have now been completed and construction costs have been verified through competitive bidding, for the first time. The current request is based on actual construction bids. The chosen contractor chosen is ready to start work and has agreed to hold his price for 90 days – until late June or early July. Construction should take 5 months.

Lisa Dady was glad to be working in a community with the resources made available to Newton through the Community Preservation Act. She noted that some the Homestead's archives are several centuries old, and that the lack of space nearly rules out collecting newer materials. Re-housing and re-organizing the archives will make them more usable for research and visitors. Quoting an archivist friend, she believed that archives "save lives," in the sense of community memory. As an example, she hoped future generations could listen to the oral histories of senior Newton residents recently recorded by Cabot School students.

Dady felt the Jackson Homestead's current access and collections storage were not up to the standard Newton sets for itself as a livable city. She reiterated several points made at prior hearings for the project: that adequate archival storage was important for the Homestead's re-accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums (formerly the American Association of Museums); that the current wheelchair lift is inadequate and cannot be repaired because parts are no longer available for it; and that the 17<sup>th</sup> century wing housing the

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archives would burn down very quickly if a fire ever started there. Based on her past experience with building projects, she felt this project was poised for completion during the current construction season.

In response to questions about the final slides summarizing the project's schedule and budget, Dady explained that Historic Newton was requesting \$15,000 for time from its staff to open the building for contractors. Though the contractor gets the key to the building for most public projects, it seemed important to have Historic Newton staff on site at all times to protect the collections. Dady had walked through the building carefully with Public Buildings, noting any work that was not explicitly included in previous budgets, including moving collections out of the way of fire suppression work on the main house. Ayoub noted that in addition to the project's listed 10% contingency, Public Buildings was also requesting \$52,500 for additional work that might be needed and could be done more cost-effectively by City staff than through change orders with the contractor, such as repairing any minor incidental damage caused by construction.

Ayoub and Dady saw a generous contingency as an appropriate precaution, given the surprises that often arise with construction on historic buildings, and given that the accepted low bid for construction was significantly lower than the next-highest bid. Though Ayoub had checked the low bidder's references carefully, both Public Buildings and Historic Newton preferred to request enough funding to avoid any need for yet another supplemental request after construction began. Both departments hope to return some of the requested CPA funding unspent.

### **Public Comments**

Sue Flicop read comments from League of Women Voters, which were also submitted in writing. The League had supported the original proposal in 2007-09, but noted that this was the project's 3<sup>rd</sup> subsequent – and 4<sup>th</sup> total – request for CPA funds. The League's readers recognized that the original cost may have been underestimated, and that some project costs have risen over time, but they felt it was time to question this budget history. Could the sponsors guarantee that this cost escalation would not continue, and that the project would finally be completed with the currently requested funds? Multiple collections of City archives are currently held in other locations, in conditions that are no better and often worse than those at the Jackson Homestead. Should the City consider consolidating all of these archives in a single, secure, climate-controlled, fire-safe facility? Until these questions were answered, the League could not support the current proposal as submitted.

Alderman Deborah Crossley, Ward 5, who chairs the Board's Public Facilities Committee, reported that Public Buildings Commissioner Josh Morse had assured her that Rafik Ayoub would be able to dedicate his time to this and only one other project, until this project is completed. Although she was glad to see the new budget was based on an actual construction bid, she encouraged Public Buildings and Historic Newton to provide the Board with a more detailed comparison between the 2013 budget and the 2015 one, assigning and explaining cost increases not only between design and construction but also among the project's major components: archival facilities, accessibility and fire suppression. She suggested that this additional submission should also clarify the extent to which budget increases reflected imprecise initial estimates vs. changes in the project's scope over time. Finally, she noted that the ideal schedule listed in the proposal might be difficult to reconcile with the Board of Aldermen's actual meeting schedule and already full agendas in June and July 2015.

Historic Newton Board member Jonathan Kantar offered several explanations for the project's delays and cost increases: The project was too small to compete effectively with other, larger projects for project management staff time in the Public Buildings Department; the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board had lost the project's submission for several months, and the information had to be re-compiled and re-submitted; and the project's design and specifications had to be revised to meet new building code requirements introduced since it first began in 2008. The project had originally been designed to avoid triggering the requirement for sprinklers; when it became clear that was not possible, the addition of sprinklers increased costs significantly. Contractors are harder to attract and their bids are now higher than they would have been 2-3 years ago; further delay would only increase construction costs. He felt it was wise to include a significant contingency when accepting the lowest bid submitted. He did not believe Historic Newton bore any responsibility for the

project's difficulties to date, and that their experience with Durant-Kenrick would help them to "co-manage" the project efficiently with Public Buildings.

Former Historic Newton President Anne Larner said the project's long process had been frustrating for everyone involved. She said fire suppression was added to the project's scope partly in response to recent fires in other historic buildings. She supported Alderman Crossley's suggestion that Public Buildings and Historic Newton staff submit an additional, detailed comparison between the 2013 and 2015 project budgets.

### **CPC Discussion**

Robertson thought this project illustrated why, for projects above some minimum size or cost, the CPC should provide planning grants and require designs to be completed first, then consider construction funding requests based only on completed designs and specifications. He also thought the City's now-pending acquisition of the Aquinas College property, immediately behind the Jackson Homestead, might have significant implications for the Museum Archives project, by allowing for archival storage in a new, purpose-built facility nearby, rather than adapting the Jackson Homestead itself for this purpose.

Robertson was disappointed that Historic Newton's commitment to raising non-CPA matching funds had not increased in proportion to total project costs. For CPC members new to the project, Ingerson noted that in 2013 the CPC had voted to recommend about \$40,000 less than was requested for this project, asking Historic Newton to fill that gap through fundraising. Historic Newton's board had subsequently voted to tap for this purpose a special City fund dedicated to the Jackson Homestead, originally donated many years earlier by the Nabisco Corporation (this line was listed in the submitted new budget as "Jackson Homestead fundraising"). At the same time, Ingerson noted that the \$40,000 of CDBG funding listed in previous budgets for accessibility improvements was no longer listed in the 2015 budget. The project had been unable to use these funds by the federal spending deadline, which had been extended several times. As a result, the additional \$40,000 raised had simply balanced this other \$40,000 withdrawn.

Kantar felt that Historic Newton deserved credit for leveraging the \$2.7 million in CPA funds it received for the Durant-Kenrick project by raising nearly an equal amount from non-CPA sources for that project. Dady felt the same was true for the staff time paid for by Historic Newton to write grant applications to other funders, such as a pending one to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for the Burying Grounds projects.

In response to Rick Kronish, Jim Robertson summarized the expected results of the \$20,000 in CPA funds appropriated for a City Archives strategic plan. Many historic City records are currently held by individual departments, sometimes in damp basements or hot attics, without climate control or fire suppression systems. The strategic plan will recommend an interdepartmental solution, including possibly a new facility. In 2013 the CPC considered holding further funding for the Museum Archives project until a strategic plan could be completed, but the Committee was persuaded by Historic Newton's arguments that their collection included many non-City records and needed its own, separate facility.

In response to questions from Jonathan Yeo, Joel Feinberg and Robertson, Historic Newton Archivist Sara Goldberg said it was difficult to estimate how much archival storage capacity the project would add at the Jackson Homestead, but that the renovated space should accommodate all materials currently stored off-site. Dady said that architect Larry Bauer's firm had prepared a full space needs study for the Homestead in 2005, but that she was not familiar enough with it to summarize its recommendations. If desired, she could provide industry standard calculations for the capacity benefits of compact/movable shelving. She noted that, even with its own improved facilities, Historic Newton remained committed to collaborating with other City departments on archival facilities, collecting and cataloguing. Even if a new shared archival facility were built, funds spent on this project would not be wasted, because the Jackson Homestead serves multiple purposes.

Beryl Gilfix was very pleased by the project's progress on several fronts: a more realistic budget, a new project manager in Public Buildings, and a highly motivated new director at Historic Newton. After exploring multiple options for accessibility, she felt the project's ramp and universal entrance were an appropriate, minimal-cost solution. She thought the Board of Aldermen would support the project, since many Aldermen had used the

archives or relied on the archivist for research assistance. Yeo agreed that Public Buildings was now being managed well as a department.

Ingerson indicated that, based on her correspondence with Dady, she was concerned that CPA funds used to pay Jackson Homestead staff might be applied not only to work required by the CPA-funded capital improvements, such as protecting the collections from damage during construction, but incidentally to education, research or outreach, which are not CPA-eligible. Yeo asked Dady to work with Ingerson to ensure CPA funds were spent only for CPA-eligible activities.

Feinberg asked all CPC members to indicate whether they were ready to vote, how they were leaning, and any changes or special requirements they would like to see as conditions in a funding recommendation.

Robertson explained that, like the League of Women Voters, he initially felt the project should be put on hold until it could be integrated into a comprehensive City-wide approach to archives. However, he now believed that the project's visitor-centered accessibility and safety improvements should not be held up in order to rethink the project's archival component. Although a detailed comparison with the previous, 2013 budget might help to explain why costs had increased, he was not sure this would help the CPC or the Board of Aldermen make the decision before them now, which is whether the project is worth funding at its current cost. He was still concerned about the very small proportion of non-CPA funds committed to the project.

Yeo felt the project needed to be done, and any delay would only make it more expensive. He urged the sponsors to provide the more detailed budget breakdown requested by Alderman Crossley. He knew from his School Committee experience that sprinklers dramatically increase project costs, but they are a requirement.

Kronish also supported the request for a more detailed budget breakdown. He felt the project was justified and was not troubled by its possible overlap with a future shared facility for City archives.

Gilfix supported the current proposal but also urged the sponsors to clarify its budget changes over time.

Jane Sender generally supported the project. Before voting, she would have preferred to see a more detailed explanation of why the total project budget had increased 300%, apparently without any major change in scope. Not questioning this cost escalation could give the impression that the CPC was not doing all it could to use public funds efficiently. However, she did not feel the CPC should delay its vote to wait for this explanation, especially since the Aldermanic committees were requesting it and would review it carefully.

Feinberg had shared Robertson's initial skepticism about this request. However, he also saw the project's accessibility and safety improvements as worthwhile on their own, apart from the archives improvements. The project seemed a legitimate use of CPA funds. He agreed with Sender that the CPC needed to demonstrate careful stewardship of public funds, but that since the Board of Aldermen's Public Facilities and Finance committees would review the project's budget history carefully, the CPC need not conduct that same review in depth before forwarding its recommendation to the Board.

Kronish thought the CPC needed to establish clearer, more specific expectations about non-CPA matching funds. Ingerson noted that the current proposal requested CPA funding for all City staff time. In many other recent proposals from City departments, including Historic Newton's own most recent proposal for the Burying Grounds, City staff time had been explicitly costed but had been covered by the City operating budget and therefore counted as "contributed services" within the project's non-CPA matching funds. The Committee asked that its policy on this issue be scheduled for discussion at its next meeting.

**VOTE** After a motion by Kronish, seconded by Sender, the Committee voted 6-0 to recommend the appropriation of \$400,000 to the Public Buildings Department for completion of the Museum Archives, Accessibility and Fire Suppression project, on the understanding that Historic Newton and the Public Buildings Dept. would provide a more detailed budget breakdown and history as part of the CPC's submission to the Board of Aldermen, and would do their best to return some CPA funds unspent.

## **Committee Business**

Alice Ingerson gave a presentation of background information for the Committee's future discussions of affordable housing, including for Massachusetts, greater Boston and Newton in particular: trends in housing prices and incomes over time; sample occupations in which average Massachusetts salaries would put a single-income household below the 80% AMI (area-wide median income) line, making that household eligible for housing subsidized by federal CDBG and CPA funds (though CPA funds can also be used for households from 80 to under 100% AMI); the relatively stable size of homes sold in Newton, despite the rising size of new homes being built; the location of existing subsidized housing in Newton; the difference between housing included on the Massachusetts Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) and the subset of that housing for which prices or rents are actually required to be affordable to households at or below 80% AMI; the complementary pros and cons of rehabilitating existing housing versus new construction as strategies for developing affordable housing; and an overview of both cost categories and funding sources included in past affordable housing proposals to the CPC.

As requested by the Committee, a copy of this presentation has been added to the CPC website under [Reports & Presentations – Special Presentations](#). The direct link is:  
[www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/66359](http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/66359)

Sender moved, and Gilfix seconded, approval of the 9 April 2015 minutes as submitted. The minutes were approved by a vote of 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned by Committee consensus at 9:15 pm.