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Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

26 February 2014

Candace Havens
Director

The meeting was held on Wednesday 26 February 2014 at 7:00 pm in Room 209, Newton City Hall.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC below) members present: chair Joel Feinberg, vice chair Jim Robertson, Beryl Gilfix, Laura Fitzmaurice, Tom Turner, Don Fishman (arr 7:05 pm), Leslie Burg, Dan Green (arr. 7:10 pm, dep. 9:45 pm), Mike Clarke.

Community Preservation Program Manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder.

PUBLIC HEARING

City Archives Strategic Plan (historic resources), CPA request \$20,000, total cost \$23,780

The presentation was made by David Olson, City Clerk, and Nancy Kougeas, City Archivist. CPA funds were used a few years ago to survey City archival records, with Kougeas as the consultant. She found historical records housed all over the City, often in conditions that put the records at risk. The inventory helped persuade the City to restore a part-time position City Archivist, to which Kougeas was appointed. Her triage work, showing departments what they can legally discard, has freed up significant storage space – to the departments' delight. The next step is to determine strategically whether the City's archives should be consolidated in one location or continue to be stored multiple but upgraded storage spaces, and how to prioritize scanning or microfilming in comparison with facilities improvements. The project will use a consultant, hired with CPA funds, as well as contributed hours by City staff in multiple departments.

CPC Questions

Leslie Burg commented that, despite her great respect for the proposal's authors, she found it not very thorough or complete. It listed only one community contact, though at the pre-proposal the CPC had specifically asked for additional contacts. There was also no full budget attachment.

Mike Clarke felt the City needed to support its archives more. He had been using them to write histories of Newton's almshouses and its Parks and Recreation Department.

Joel Feinberg noted that, even if the CPC supported the strategic plan, they might not support a resulting much larger request for CPA funding of improved archival storage facilities. Olson felt that the triage done by Kougeas had given the City more time to address storage needs. The strategic plan might simply recommend adding climate control and fire suppression to existing spaces, rather than new facilities. Olson was also hopeful that the City would fund these needed improvements through the regular City capital budget. Ingerson expressed the same hope, since electronic records have now made finding adequate storage for the City's finite paper archives a one-time problem.

Public Comments

On behalf of the League of Women Voters, Andrea Kelley commented that in contrast to their general practice, they were strongly supporting this proposal. They encouraged more sharing of records storage between the City and Historic Newton, raising more non-CPA funds for this project, and providing more written evidence of community outreach and support.

PUBLIC HEARING

City Hall Veterans Wing Historic Artifacts (historic resources), CPA request \$19,000, total cost \$19,355

This presentation was also made by Olson and Kougeas. These artifacts are displayed in a small first-floor museum on the War Memorial side of City Hall, dedicated to veterans from the American Revolution through World War I. Most of the displays have not been touched since they were installed in 1932. They include wax dioramas. When the Newton chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic closed, they donated their archives to the City's Veterans Department as well. Later, veterans also donated materials from World War II through the war in Vietnam. If the proposal is funded, appropriate specialists will assess whether each specific artifact could or should be restored and kept on display, preserved in storage, donated, or discarded. The project will not make recommendations for improved displays or storage. The need for facilities improvements will depend on how many and which artifacts are possible to display or preserve.

In contrast to the three-dimensional artifacts, City staff can assess the importance and needs of paper items themselves. Kougeas noted that the National Archives and Records Administration's Northeast Center could assess the Grand Army of the Republic collection at no charge.

CPC Questions

Burg reiterated her respect for Olson but felt that this proposal, like the previous one, was not thorough or complete. It did not include a letter or supportive contact from any Newton veteran. Kougeas noted that the Newton Veterans' Agent had just submitted such a letter, but she agreed that more community outreach was needed.

In response to Feinberg, Laura Fitzmaurice, and Jim Robertson, Olson said the proposal's \$19,000 cost estimate was based on describing the collection to several conservators and asking what they would charge to assess it. These conservators had not examined the collection or provided a breakdown of the hours needed from each type of specialist. In response to a question from Robertson, Kougeas noted that museums do not usually offer to help with such assessments at no charge. She also said the textile conservator consulted thought Newton's Civil War flag was a very fine example, even compared to those at the statehouse.

In response to a question from Fitzmaurice about whether some objects could be sold to generate funds to preserve the others, Historic Newton archivist Sara Goldberg (in the audience) noted that her organization had just raised some funds by selling de-accessioned objects from the Newton Historical Society's collections.

Burg and Dan Green agreed that the project was important. In response to Burg, Olson could not say whether the City would provide non-CPA funds for any actual restoration or preservation recommended by the assessment, though he noted that the project had originated with the Mayor. As an example, Robertson wondered what would happen if \$75,000 worth of conservation work was recommended on the Civil War flag. Olson said he wouldn't support such a large expenditure but thought something in the range of \$1,000 to \$5,000 would be defensible.

Beryl Gilfix supported the League of Women Voters' recommendation to solicit matching funds from veterans' groups. Olson said there are other potential funding sources for actual conservation, including one grant for preserving Civil War material. Feinberg felt that without the assessment

proposed, it would be difficult to raise non-CPA funds for actual preservation or restoration, and there would be no real pressure to do anything about these long-neglected artifacts.

Public Comments

On behalf of the League of Women Voters, Andrea Kelley asked whether the City could provide more matching funds than the contributed staff time listed in the proposal, valued at only \$355. The League noted the limited evidence of community support provided the proposal. They also wondered whether the artifacts would be better preserved in some location other than City Hall.

Former Historic Newton archivist Susan Abele felt that many of the Civil War items in this collection were very valuable, but noted that some artifacts have actually disappeared, including one gun. The City needs to assess and document these materials' provenance, significance and condition before anything more is lost, through neglect or for other reasons.

UPDATE on FUNDED PROJECT

Museum Archives, Accessibility & Fire Suppression (historic resources), CPA funds appropriated \$742,345, total cost \$845,897

This update was presented by Ted Callahan, contracted project manager in the Public Buildings Department, joined by Adam Gilmore, the department's Director of Project Management. On February 20th, Planning & Development Director Candace Havens approved the department's request to extend the project's required start date from April to July of 2014. Gilmore explained that Public Buildings has chosen to continue with the project's previous architect, but the Law Dept. has been updating that architect's 2007 contract to 2014 City standards. Gilmore also noted that the project's immediate objective is to meet the July spending deadline for the CDBG accessibility funds included in the budget. Callahan explained these funds would therefore be used to build the accessible exterior ramp first, then all the other construction would be done as a second phase. Design for the second phase will happen during construction of the ramp.

Historic Newton will continue to hold programs during construction, by having the public use the main front door and perhaps a door on the Jackson Road (west) side of the building. The parking lot on the Washington Street side will not be affected by the construction. Callahan noted that the archival collections must be moved out of the building before construction begins, however.

Gilmore also noted that Public Buildings must hire a consultant to assist in designing a fire suppression system for this historic wooden building. The department has looked at but needs to understand the details of the unobtrusive fire suppression system approved by the Newton Historical Commission for the Durant-Kenrick Homestead. The city's Department of Public Works will need to install a new 4-inch water line to provide adequate pressure for the Jackson Homestead's fire suppression system, which will be designed for minimum visual impact, including in the basement.

Gilmore assured the CPC that the project could still be completed with the current total of appropriated CPA funding. In response to Burg, he explained that the budget submitted for funding had been produced by a cost estimator using the architect's initial design, plus an escalation factor. Another estimator will review the project when construction drawings are nearly complete.

In response to Robertson, Callahan acknowledged that some target dates in the extension just granted would not be met. The dates in the extension request had come from the architect, who did not have the full list of tasks to be completed. Callahan still believes construction can start by the extended deadline of July 21st, however.

PUBLIC HEARING

City Hall Accessibility & Acoustics (historic resources), CPA request \$749,950, total cost \$829,950

This presentation was also made by Callahan and Gilmore. The CPC and the public offered comments and questions throughout the presentation.

Callahan summarized the acoustic engineers' recommendations to use fabric-wrapped wall panels and sound-absorbent-window shades or drapes to absorb sound and reduce echoes in both the Aldermanic Chamber and the War Memorial Auditorium. He noted that the existing ceiling sound tiles in the Aldermanic Chamber became useless once they were painted, years ago. In response to Fitzmaurice, Callahan emphasized that the wall panels would not cover any interior architectural ornamentation. Beryl Gilfix suggested separating the acoustical and accessibility improvements, but Green preferred to keep both components in a single project.

Gilmore reminded the CPC that wheelchair access to the War Memorial Auditorium currently requires going through the Aldermanic Chamber onto a curved plywood ramp that is not ADA-compliant. Callahan showed floor plans with a new, one-door elevator through the auditorium's front lobby. In response to Robertson, Callahan explained that the budget in the current proposal was based on a previous design for an elevator from only the first to the second floor, which had been adjusted by estimating the cost of adding a basement stop. A building code consultant had recommended asking the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board to approve an elevator without a stop at the balcony level. The top of the elevator's structure would protrude into the balcony space but would not be visible from the auditorium's main floor. Further below-slab investigations are needed to design that basement level, because the building stands in a former wetland. Robertson noted that the findings from that additional engineering could also affect the project's cost.

City Hall custodian Anthony Pellegrino Tony Pellegrino was concerned that the planned elevator would block one current door from the War Memorial Auditorium into the main lobby leading outside. As an unintentional side effect, during a fire people might mistakenly take the lobby stairs to the balcony, then have to find their way down again to leave the building safely.

Callahan explained that as currently planned, the elevator's basement stop would be in the area housing the archives of the Inspectional Services Department (ISD), so many of those archives would have to be moved during construction, and some would have to be moved permanently. The current proposal includes about \$20,000 for that purpose. Nancy Kougeas noted that at least a million pages of historic records are currently stored in the basement. The basement flooding in 2010 led to significant mold damage. Many of the ISD archival plans are also stored rolled, though they should be stored flat. Cleaning them might cost more than \$20,000. She thought perhaps that could at least happen off-site during the elevator's construction. Kougeas noted that legally, these and other City archives must be stored permanently within City Hall.

Feinberg and Fitzmaurice asked whether Public Buildings had considered housing the new elevator in a modern, non-historical addition on the building's south side (facing Homer Street). Callahan said that option had been rejected because it would violate the building's historical symmetry.

Callahan also explained work envisioned for future phases not included in the current proposal, including: a new, accessible exterior entrance to the building on the War Memorial side, probably on the south side, from the War Memorial rotary; repair of the War Memorial's exterior stone steps, which were assessed several years earlier using CPA funds; evaluating and bringing the War Memorial

wing's toilets into compliance with the ADA; and adding a small wheelchair lift for the stage in the War Memorial. Until these features were designed and built, wheelchair users would still need to enter the building from the existing elevator, in the small parking lot facing the library on Homer Street, then access the new elevator at the opposite side of the building through the basement or first-floor corridors. Though many CPC members felt this was problematic, Commission on Disabilities Co-Chair Rob Caruso noted that this indirect route protected wheelchair users from the weather, compared to a route that might seem more direct, but more of which would be outdoors.

Feinberg agreed that the War Memorial is an impressive, historic facility that is woefully underutilized and inaccessible, but Burg, Robertson and Kelly all felt these future features should be included in a revised, single proposal, even if that increased the proposal's total cost. On behalf of the League of Women Voters, Andrea Kelley felt it defeated much of the point of adding a new elevator if wheelchair users must access it by a circuitous route. Feinberg, Burg and Gilfix agreed. Olson thought the current proposal was sensitive to the building's architecture but was also troubled by having no accessible exterior entrance near the new elevator, though that could be acceptable temporarily.

Green felt the current proposal for basement access to the elevator through the archival storage area was not well thought-out. Although Gilmore assured the CPC that ISD was fully aware of the current plans, Green preferred to see those plans revised so the archives storage area would not have to be redesigned or rebuilt in an improvised way in reaction to the elevator project. Burg and Olson felt this would best be accomplished both by having Public Buildings coordinate with both ISD and the City Archivist, but also by allowing the City Archives Strategic Plan, discussed earlier, to inform Public Buildings' plans for improving the building's accessibility.

Robertson commented that like many City proposals, this one appeared to have been submitted for funding before many key questions had been answered. As a result, these projects often required supplemental appropriations. Green agreed and did not believe that the proposal as currently configured could receive a funding recommendation from the CPC. By consensus, the CPC members requested a revised proposal for the full scope of work, including those components Callahan had described as intended future phases.

Gilfix and Burg preferred to have a site visit before making any further decisions about phasing. Callahan and Ingerson committed to arrange such a visit.

On behalf of the League of Women Voters, Kelley also commented that like many other City proposals, this one had no real plan for funding future maintenance. Maintenance funding that had been assumed or promised in past proposals had not always materialized. The League urged the CPC to recommend funding only for proposals that included credible maintenance plans.

At this point the public hearing was closed.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

After a motion by Green, seconded by Gilfix, the minutes for the 22 January 2014 meeting were approved as submitted by a vote of 9-0.

After a motion by Green, seconded by Robertson, the Committee also approved a staff proposal to transfer \$400 from other administrative categories to "dues and subscriptions" to cover the increase in Newton's 2014 dues for the Community Preservation Coalition (\$7900 vs. the budgeted \$7500). By consensus, the Committee also delegated to its officers and staff responding to the Coalition's request to urge that Newton's state representatives support the transfer of \$25 million from the state budget surplus to the state CPA Trust Fund in 2014, as was done in 2013.

Scheduling Working Sessions and Possible Funding Votes

As context for this discussion, Ingerson reviewed her latest drafts of the program's 5-year funding forecast and currently available funds report, including a list of anticipated future proposals. After a brief discussion of the assumptions used in the funding forecast and in past budgets, especially for state matching funds, the Committee agreed by consensus to adopt a rule of budgeting for each upcoming year the percentage state match actually received the previous year. If the actual state match falls short of the budget, Ingerson will make sure the currently available funds report reflects actual state funding and therefore actually available funds.

Ingerson noted that no group that had requested the required orientation meeting by the February 1st deadline seemed likely to submit a viable pre-proposal by the March 1st deadline. Although most of the ideas submitted were probably CPA-eligible, most of these groups had not identified a capable proposal author or an organization or department that could manage the project if it were funded. As a result, the only new proposals she currently expected to receive by the 1 October 2014 deadline were those for which the CPC had already discussed pre-proposals, including the Waban Hill Reservoir acquisition, a planning grant for the New Art Center, restoration or rehabilitation of historic windows at City Hall, and restoration of the WPA mural for display at Newton North High School – though this last project had proposal-writing and project management capacity challenges as well.

After further discussion, the CPC agreed by consensus to schedule working sessions and possible funding votes at its 20 March 2014 meeting for the Farlow Park, Newton Highlands Playground, and City Archives Strategic Plan proposals, and at later meetings for the other current proposals. They clarified their information requests for each current proposal as follows:

Farlow Park: The CPC would like the Friends of Farlow Park to organize legally as a 501(c) 3 nonprofit for fundraising, or to find another 501(c) 3 that can hold tax-deductible community donations for the project. The Friends have asked the Newton Conservators to do this, but the Conservators Board has not responded officially yet. Any CPC funding recommendation for Farlow Park would probably be contingent on a revised plan for fundraising by the Friends to create an endowment to help maintain the pond & bridge over time. Robertson and other members considered the maintenance plan in the current proposal inadequate because it relies heavily on volunteers.

Newton Highlands Playground: Several CPC members felt that the lack of community letters and of supporters at the public hearing did not reflect well on the proposal. Ingerson said the many letters received too late to distribute prior to the hearing would be distributed prior to the working session.

City Archives Strategic Plan: CPC members felt this proposal almost took for granted their deep reservoir of respect for David Olson. However, they were still willing to consider it.

City Hall Veterans' Artifacts: Before scheduling a working session for this proposal, the CPC asked for more written evidence of community moral and political support, though not necessarily financial support. Ingerson noted that this project and the Archives Strategic Plan would be managed primarily by Kougeas, who is stretched very thin. If the CPC recommended funding for both projects, she suggested that they be implemented sequentially rather than simultaneously. The CPC hoped that Olson would take primary responsibility for soliciting additional evidence of community support.

Allen House: Based on a recent site visit, Robertson, Turner, and Clarke agreed with City staff members Frank Nichols (Engineering Division) and Doug Desmarais (Housing Rehabilitation) that the project's rehabilitation budget should probably be increased by \$1-\$1.5 million. Ingerson noted that the Durant-Kenrick project, with a significantly smaller construction budget, had taken about 4 years

to raise enough non-CPA funds to make that project viable. CPC members were concerned that if the Allen House project takes that long, NCA may not retain Suzuki as an anchor tenant and may not still have a building worth rehabilitating. CPC members indicated their willingness to brainstorm with NCA about strategies for addressing these issues. In the meantime, the CPC agreed to request a revised proposal with a higher capital budget, more sources of operating revenue, and a phasing plan, so some parts of the building could be rehabilitated and begin generating revenue before the whole project is completed. They also suggested that the Newton Cultural Alliance complete construction drawings with private funds, as a basis for a firmer construction budget.

Historic Burying Grounds: Historic Newton has requested a working session in May. Prior to that session, CPC members asked them to address concerns expressed at the public hearing that the tree work in the proposed project is really CPA-ineligible maintenance, and that the proposal has an unusually high ratio of management costs to construction costs. Robertson suggested that the CPC simply decline to recommend funds for anything it saw as maintenance, such as the tree work. Ingerson suggested that the CPC could also consider recommending funds only for tree work directly needed for tomb repairs now, and defer any funding to remove vegetation along the fences until it receives a funding request for new fences. She also suggested that the CPC could pledge not to approve any future capital funding for the Burying Grounds, beyond the current proposal, until significant progress is made in raising some kind of endowment for these sites. Gilfix felt Historic Newton might be able to undertake such fundraising now that it has completed fundraising for the Durant-Kenrick project.

City Hall Accessibility and Acoustics: The CPC agreed to schedule a working session for this project after the site visit but also to request a revised proposal with the larger scope discussed during the public hearing. Members were anxious to break the pattern established by past City projects of asking for inadequate initial funding, then returning with multiple supplemental funding requests. Robertson also expressed concern about the Public Buildings Department's management capacity, since as of 8 months after the final supplemental funds were appropriate for the Museum Archives project, that project is already at least 4 months behind its intended schedule.

The committee then discussed its general concern about the nexus between CPA capital funding and future project maintenance. Clarke felt the CPC should require City proposals to include verifiable maintenance plans, with a signed commitment by the Mayor for future maintenance funding. Burg, Feinberg, Robertson and Ingerson felt it would not be possible to get an enforceable, credible commitment to future funding. Ingerson suggested that when asking projects to do community fundraising for maintenance or endowments, the committee hold its recommendations until significant funds have been raised or committed, rather than rely on promises of future fundraising.

The meeting was adjourned by committee consensus at 10 pm.