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Candace Havens
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Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

11 April 2013

The meeting was held on Thursday 11 April 2013 at 7:10 pm in Newton City Hall, Room 222.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present: Leslie Burg, Thomas Turner, Jim Robertson, Don Fishman, Michael Clarke, Nancy Grissom, Joel Feinberg. Absent: Dan Green.

Program manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder.

PROPOSALS & PROJECTS

Discussion of pre-proposal for Allen House (35 Webster Street, West Newton)

Presented by Laurel Farnsworth and Adrienne Hartzell, Board members, Newton Cultural Alliance (NCA)

Farnsworth noted that this pre-Civil War building, which had been the home of noted educator Nathaniel Allen and then the location of a school run by his daughters, had been saved once before with City help. In response to a question from Jim Robertson, Alice Ingerson explained that some federal CDBG funds had been used in the 1980s to convert the building into rental housing with restrictions keeping some units affordable for a finite term, which had expired a few years ago. Ingerson noted that after public funds were used to convert the building from a school into housing, additional public funds were now being requested to do the reverse. She hoped the currently proposed project would allow the building to support itself without future additional public funding.

Farnsworth and Hartzell explained NCA's vision for the building as a facility for multiple arts activities and as a tourist destination, with a business model intended to sustain the building indefinitely. It will include performance spaces and both indoor and outdoor community spaces and will attract people interested in the career of educator and abolitionist Nathaniel Allen. NCA is still working on the zoning waivers and approvals needed to implement their plan. They have had a first meeting with the Newton Historical Commission (NHC), which holds a preservation restriction on the property and must approve changes to the property as a local historic landmark. A second meeting with NHC is scheduled for the end of May. NCA has also met with the abutters and has held two public, neighborhood meetings to date. They feel the neighbors support NCA's vision, so City approvals are the final prerequisite so they can begin applying for grants and raising private funds.

In response to questions from Leslie Burg and Nancy Grissom, Farnsworth and Hartzell explained that the Suzuki School of Newton would be the property's main tenant, with a 3-classroom preschool during morning or school hours and a music school occupying the same spaces after school and on Saturdays. The barn will have indoor play space, art gallery space, and performance space. The main

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house will include a community/performance space in the double parlor and a recital space in the dining room. A catering kitchen is included in the plans. NCA's business plan includes revenue from wedding rentals. The second floor of the house will have music teaching and practice rooms, and the third floor will have offices for nonprofits. The preschool will have 15 children per class. Suzuki School director Sachiko Isihara explained that the school is a nonprofit 501(c)3 and has been operating in Newton for 27 years. It provides early childhood music education with strong parent participation and an emphasis on learning classical music by ear. Music practice is part of the preschool curriculum. About 55% of the music students are from Newton. Nearly all the preschool children are from the northern part of Newton.

The classrooms will be in the barn. The barn's foundation needs significant work, partly because it is below current ground level in places. The project architect is planning a sunken garden to provide light and ventilation and allow exterior access to an elevator, which will make the major spaces near the connection between the main house and the barn wheelchair-accessible. Tom Turner understood that the building includes the first indoor gym in the United States, which should be preserved. The presenters explained that the NCA planned to use this space as the largest of the 3 classrooms, preserving its basic dimensions but adding appropriate new furnishings.

In response to Grissom, the presenters said de-leading would be required for the preschool, but not for rooms used only by the music school, since nearly all of the music students were over 6 years of age, and the music students would not be in the building for long periods. Turner thought some parts of the building had already been de-leaded.

Much discussion to date has focused on the parking required to support the planned uses. The preservation restriction allows up to 40 parking spaces on the site; NCA's current plan calls for 33. NCA originally proposed angled parking along Columbus Place (a cul-de-sac off Webster Street), but the neighbors there prefer most parking off Cherry Street, to preserve the current view of the property from Webster Street. NCA thought the Historical Commission had endorsed the neighbors' plan, but NHC/CPC member Nancy Grissom felt the NHC had not actually come to any conclusions, and suggested confirming the NHC's actions with its staff person, Senior Preservation Planner Brian Lever, before investing in revised site plans.

In response to Joel Feinberg, Farnsworth and Hartzell noted that Inspectional Services Commissioner John Lojek had not yet confirmed whether the project could be done "by right," as an educational use under the Dover Amendment, or would need a special permit. They were not sure when this decision would be made but hoped it would be soon.

Robertson encouraged NCA to explore other sources of funding to reduce their \$1.5 million potential CPA funding request. Most CPC members agreed with Ingerson's suggestion that having a certain minimum of non-CPA funds in hand would probably be a condition for releasing any CPA funds recommended or appropriated for this project. In response to Grissom, the presenters noted that the only confirmed non-CPA funding to date was the \$250,000 private donation used to acquire the property. Feinberg suggested that as a 501(c)3 nonprofit NCA might be able to sell tax-exempt bonds, as was done for the Presentation School in Brighton, Mass (<http://www.psf-inc.org/>), though raising the funds needed for that project took a long time. The presenters felt NCA would get a development grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which had already provided a planning grant; and that Mass Development would be willing to guarantee the Village Bank loan. NCA is also investigating federal and state historic tax credits.

Given the poor condition of the building, Ingerson asked whether and how some basic repairs could be made to stabilize the building while other funds were raised. She noted that for the Angino Farm barn, the nonprofit Newton Community Farm, Inc. had raised private funds for work on the foundation and exterior before requesting CPA funds for the interior. The presenters explained that NCA planned to phase work on the Allen House, so the main house could begin generating revenue while funds were still being raised for work on the barn.

Burg, Feinberg, Robertson and Turner asked about the project's annual operating budget. Farnsworth said it was based partly on her long experience as chair of the Buildings and Grounds Committee at the First Unitarian Society of Newton, which is also a historic building. Robertson suggested asking utility companies for past costs, though after renovation those costs should be half of what they had been before. Turner suggested asking the building's former owner, the Allen House and School Preservation Corp., for their documented past maintenance costs. Ingerson asked whether NCA as the building owner would be willing to raise the rents it charges to its member organizations, to keep up with rising costs for the building itself. Farnsworth noted that the Suzuki School would be signing a long-term lease with escalator clauses. Feinberg and Burg asked that the operating budget also include a significant replacement reserve. NCA would need to raise about \$31,000 annually to bridge the gap between the building's operating costs and rental income, but already raises about \$50,000 annually. Moving to Allen House will reduce some costs, so the total annual need will be less than the sum of those two amounts. Feinberg asked for a firmer fundraising plan as part of any full proposal to the CPC and noted that development or building costs were generally easier to fund than annual operations.

In response to Turner, Farnsworth noted that the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) had accepted a large part of the Nathaniel Allen archives acquired with the property, but those archives were not a plausible source of revenue to maintain the building. MHS had requested funds along with the collection, to cover the cost of cataloguing, etc. – funds which NCA was unable to provide. Materials not accepted by MHS, including some historic portraits that NCA hopes to re-install in the building, are currently being stored at Farnsworth's home.

Ingerson had advised NCA that the CPC preferred to consider construction funding requests based only on completed designs, because after receiving both design and construction funds based on pre-design cost estimates, several past projects had needed supplemental funding. However, if NCA was able to complete design work over the summer with private funds, the sense of the meeting was that the CPC would consider a fall full proposal solely for construction funding.

Ingerson also noted that, in contrast to past projects, construction work using CPA or other public funds controlled by the City of Newton would be bid competitively through the City's Purchasing Department. She would ask the Purchasing Dept. how to coordinate this requirement with the use of private or non-Newton public funds, especially if the different funding sources could not be applied to clearly separate phases of work or parts of the building.

Several members were willing to discuss a revised pre-proposal before the fall full proposal deadline, as time was available on future CPC agendas. Rather than discuss the project in multiple times, Burg suggested requesting one additional discussion after reaching some major project milestone, such as zoning approvals. The sense of the meeting was to defer a site visit for the CPC until the fall.

VOTE Grissom's motion to consider a full proposal for Allen House in the next regular funding round was seconded by Don Fishman, and approved unanimously 7-0.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Encouraging submission of pre-proposals: discussion

As a preamble to this discussion, the Committee reviewed its current “available funds” spreadsheet (posted on the website’s ‘Reports’ page). This list is arranged in order of “decreasing certainty”: from actual appropriations by the Board of Aldermen (for the Angino Farm barn and Eddy Street), to CPC recommendations pending before the Aldermen (for the Homebuyer Assistance Program), to CPC recommendations that have been voted but not forwarded to the Aldermen (Museum Archives and Myrtle Village) pending final confirmation of project costs, to projects for which the CPC has received only pre-proposals (Affordable Housing Trust, City Hall Windows, and now Allen House). Ingerson noted that she had asked the Public Buildings Dept. and Historic Newton to provide an update on the Museum Archives project at the CPC’s May 9th meeting. She reported that Housing Program Manager Trisha Guditz was working with the Aldermanic Zoning and Planning Committee to answer their questions about housing trusts. Ingerson was not sure where the City Hall Windows project stood. Although listing a pre-proposal on the spreadsheet did not imply a commitment to funding the project, de-listing it could close down the option of future funding open – so she would prefer to base de-listing decisions on formal Committee votes.

Ingerson and Robertson both found it frustrating to have received so few pre-proposals, after a year of outreach and community plans that had documented many millions of dollars of CPA-eligible needs. Robertson felt that the CPC owed it to the taxpayers to put Newton’s CPA funds to work. Ingerson was particularly concerned that no pre-proposals had been submitted for City projects.

Robertson wondered whether the CPC should move its pre-proposal deadline from June 1st to July 1st. Fishman was not concerned by the prospect of having only a few proposals to consider in the fall funding round. Burg felt that if the deadline were moved, nothing would be submitted until the last minute before the new deadline. Fishman, Burg and Grissom all felt moving the deadline would set a bad precedent.

Feinberg wondered whether the CPC chair and vice chair should send a letter to City department heads reminding them of the June 1st deadline. Burg felt most City departments were already aware of the June 1st deadline. Ingerson noted that she had explained the pre-proposal requirement and deadline several weeks earlier, when giving a version of the CPC’s *Funding Guidelines* presentation to the City’s Capital Improvement Plan working group, which includes the heads of most City departments with CPA-eligible resources. Burg also felt the greatest stimulus for additional pre-proposals would be the submission of other, competing pre-proposals. The sense of the meeting was to leave the current deadline in place.

For 2014, Ingerson suggested making the deadlines earlier: March 1st for pre-proposals, so the April budget presentation to the Board of Aldermen could include the list of pre-proposals received for the following year; and October 1st for full proposals. In the past, deadlines had been set later because some sponsors felt they could not work on their proposals during the summer. Ingerson felt that groups that could not write a proposal during the summer were not well-positioned to receive and manage project funds, particularly for construction, since the construction season in New England is simply too short for projects and their managers to “take the summer off.” Grissom suggested making the fall deadline even earlier, perhaps in mid-September, but other members felt it should still be after the Jewish holidays that are often in mid-September.

VOTE After further discussion, Robertson moved and Fishman seconded a pre-proposal deadline of 1 March 2014, followed by a full proposal deadline of 1 October 2014. The motion was adopted by a vote of 7-0, with Grissom reiterating her preference for an even earlier fall deadline.

Fy14 program budget corrections

Ingerson explained that corrections by the City's Dept. of Human Resources to the fy14 staff compensation costs they had provided to her in February had slightly increased the fy14 administrative budget, requiring a corresponding small reduction in the budgeted general reserve. Since this same problem arose last year, Ingerson suggested next year approving a budget with a rounded maximum for program administration and a linked minimum for the general reserve, and allowing staff to approve minor changes within those limits without a second Committee vote.

VOTE Grissom moved and Robertson seconded the corrected budget as submitted. The motion was adopted by a vote of 7-0. The corrected budget is appended to these minutes.

Expectations for terms & election of CPC officers

Ingerson noted that the combination of the Community Preservation Act, Newton's CPA ordinance, the CPC's published *Funding Guidelines* and proposal instructions thoroughly covered most issues and procedures covered in other committees' bylaws, but that she had requested a discussion clarifying the Committee's current expectations for its officers. Burg explained that the Committee's original procedure had been based on seniority, with each member in turn serving a year as vice chair, followed by a year as chair. More recently, two members have served a two-year term as a team of chair and vice chair, without switching roles.

Ingerson felt the original system encouraged all members to invest in the Committee's collective decisions, since all members knew they would eventually take a turn defending those decisions to the Board of Aldermen. Fishman felt the original system was egalitarian and guaranteed that at least one person always had a full year of experience as an officer. On the other hand, he felt some people might not be ready or have the time to serve as officers, so a different approach might recruit people who were better suited to the positions. Burg and Grissom felt it had been useful to have officers serve as a team, in which each member had complementary skills. Burg asked all members to give this question further thought for discussion and a decision at a future meeting.

Minutes for 14 March 2013

After a motion by Grissom, seconded by Robertson, the minutes were unanimously approved as submitted. Feinberg abstained because he had not attended the March meeting.

The committee adjourned by consensus at 8:45 pm.