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Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

10 October 2013

Candace Havens
Director

The meeting was held on Thursday 10 October 2013 at 7:15 pm in the Principal's Conference Room at Newton North High School, 457 Walnut Street, Newtonville.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present: chair Joel Feinberg, vice chair Jim Robertson, Leslie Burg, Beryl Gilfix, Thomas Turner, Dan Green, and Don Fishman. Member Mike Clarke was absent.

Also attending from the History and Social Sciences Department at Newton North were faculty member William Joiner and chair Jonathan Bassett.

Staff program manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder.

Site Visit

The group began with a site visit to the location where the main panel of the WPA mural will be displayed if it is restored, in the corridor outside the cafeteria known as "Main Street." This panel portrays Newton residents and students in the 1930s. "Main Street" already displays a mural portraying Newton North High School in the 1990s, completed in 2000 by Elli Crocker and intended as a companion piece for the 1930s mural. The school also hopes to display the restored side panels of the 1930s mural, which portray factory and dock workers, near the current career and vocational education classrooms.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Joel Feinberg thanked Leslie Burg for her service as chair and offered her a gift certificate on behalf of the committee as a whole.

PRE-PROPOSALS

WPA Murals (Newton North High School)

During the site visit and the first part of the meeting, William Joiner and Jonathan Bassett summarized the proposed project, to restore a large, three-part mural painted by Maurice Compris under the auspices of the federal Works Progress Administration in the late 1930s for the library of the original Newton High School, on the site of the current Newton North High School. The central part of the mural represented Newton as a community, particularly its schools, and the two wings represented steel mill and dock workers. The mural was dedicated Stafford Leighton Brown, Newton High School class of 1915, who volunteered in World War I prior to America's entry into that war, but died in an aviation training accident before seeing active service. His mother, Mrs. Eugenie Stafford Brown, also set aside a scholarship fund of \$50,000 to be awarded "on the basis of character, leadership, scholarship, and need to boys who are graduates of Newton High School."

When a new Newton North High School was built in the 1970s, the mural's main panel was installed in the cafeteria, where it was protected by a large plexiglass panel attached directly through the

canvas to the frame. The two side panels were never displayed at the 1970s school. All three panels, currently stored at Newton South High School, require significant restoration as well as remounting.

Art conservators have advised leaving the panels rolled until they can be laid flat for the actual restoration. The cost estimates in the pre-proposal were therefore based primarily on information provided by the company that removed the main panel from the 1970s school and put it into storage. These estimates also excluded the cost of a climate-controlled workspace large enough for the restoration.

Joel Feinberg, Jim Robertson and Leslie Burg asked the presenters to clarify the project timeline and how CPA funds would actually be used. Joiner thought the work would take 10-12 weeks to complete, once the murals were unrolled. The main use of CPA funds would be to employ a professional art conservator and restorer. The school's carpentry program will build the new frames and duplicate the carved caption that hung under the mural when it was originally installed.

Robertson applauded the school's faculty for taking on this project but wondered who would be the actual project manager. Feinberg, Burg and Ingerson felt the faculty did not have enough time available to write the scope of work for public bidding, or to hire and oversee the professional conservator. Bassett agreed. Ingerson suggested including the cost of a project manager with these skills in the project budget.

For a workspace, Bassett and Joiner said school staff had considered various options, looking for spaces where the public could watch the restoration process, but had not identified a space that could be used at no cost. Joiner noted that the project's timeline was too long to use any school space during the summer vacation. Robertson suggested adding the cost of an appropriate workspace to the full proposal.

Burg asked that the community needs section of the proposal form, citing needs identified in previously published Newton plans, be completed more fully than in the pre-proposal. Ingerson offered to help with this.

In reviewing the list of required attachments for a full proposal, Ingerson noted that to be eligible for CPA funding, the project needed the Newton Historical Commission to declare the mural significant to Newton's local history. A more detailed summary of Joiner's background historical research than had been included in the pre-proposal would be helpful for this.

Robertson also noted that the CPC looks for at least some community fundraising in all projects. In this case that leverage could include in-kind contributions, such as the carpentry program's work. Dan Green and Joel Feinberg suggested asking the PTO for support. Green and Ingerson thought Newton parents might help to find an appropriate workspace that could be contributed, through connections to the Museum of Fine Arts or a private restoration. Gilfix suggested asking Newton artists to donate work for sale to support the project. Turner suggested looking to alumni for support. Bassett thought support might also come from a graduating class gift contribution.

Green noted that more people, and especially young people, were likely to see this project's results than those of most CPA-supported projects in Newton. Gilfix suggested involving students in interpreting the murals and educating the public about the WPA more broadly.

Feinberg and Ingerson suggested that getting these different constituencies involved in the project would not only demonstrate current support, but would also help to ensure that the mural would be maintained in the future, since CPA funds could not be requested for this.

VOTE After a motion by Dan Green, seconded by Leslie Burg, the committee voted 7-0 to consider a full proposal for this project if one is submitted in the fall 2014 funding round.

New Art Center (Newtonville)

This pre-proposal was presented by Dan Elias, the center's new executive director, assisted by Stacey Handler, Connections Program Coordinator, and Diana Bailey, Board president.

Elias explained his own background. Most recently, he worked at the Peabody Essex Museum. He is also a former host of the WGBH television program "Antiques Road Show" and has experience working with underserved communities.

The Board and staff see the New Art Center as both a school and gallery, which can bring learners together with professionals in spaces that will be respectful of the building's history, and its historic neighborhood, while welcoming to people of many backgrounds and abilities, including people with limited physical mobility. Elias hopes to raise the center's local, regional and international profile. He feels that many of these goals are compatible with the vision of Newton's community character in the city's *Comprehensive Plan*.

In response to Feinberg, Elias and Bailey explained that the center's overall plan is to preserve the historic exterior's combination of Gothic and Arts and Crafts elements, which Elias felt was unique in a building constructed all at the same time, and to rehabilitate the major interior spaces for new uses, while retaining as much evidence as possible of its complex history of uses. The center had already received a Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) grant to assess the building's capital needs, including energy efficiency and accessibility. The MCC grant requires installation of an accessible restroom, which will also be challenging because the building has 9 levels, only one of which is currently accessible, and the current bathrooms are not on that level. The basement floor is dirt and rubble. To support the intended future program, the building probably needs a full foundation slab as well as climate control, lighting, and security systems to reduce operating costs and protect valuable art works loaned for display. Though the center has already replaced some of its outworn mechanical systems, the stained glass windows are a special energy challenge

Robertson agreed that the construction budget outlined in the original pre-proposal budget seemed very rough. He felt the building had great presence but suggested that the plan might consider moving the main entrance from its current location at the side back to the front, or installing two elevators rather than one that stopped at all floors.

Elias asked for the Committee's advice on transforming the submitted pre-proposal, which was for a construction grant, into a proposal for a comprehensive rehabilitation plan, to be followed by a later proposal for construction funding; and on the best timing for requesting both a planning grant and a construction grant. For example, without a clearer sense of where the full project is going, there is some risk that an accessible restroom installed now will have to be moved or redone later. Bailey suggested that the center would phase the project, rather than attempt to do a \$6 million renovation all at once.

Burg said she would not oppose a planning grant. This is a potentially huge project, for a program and a building the community wants to maintain. An overall plan would help leverage funds from other institutions. Feinberg noted that, even if the CPC recommended funds for a plan or design, this would not commit them to support the next phase of the same project. In this case, he felt the total project

would probably not be within the means of the CPA program, so the center would need to tap all other possible sources.

Feinberg asked about the statement in the pre-proposal that it is difficult for the center to get private bank loans due to the provision in the center's deed, giving the City of Newton a right of reversion if the building is taken out of use as a community art center. Elias acknowledged that the center had taken out and then retired a private bank mortgage in the 1990s. He was recently told that the previous mayor (Mayor Cohen) had written a letter in 2007 relinquishing the City's right of reversion, but he has not seen that letter. Feinberg thought that the best way to protect the building's historic character might be to give up the City's right of reversion and instead impose a preservation restriction as a condition for CPA funding. This might also allow for private bank lending.

In addition, Robertson and Feinberg suggested that historic tax credits might be an option; if the center could not use them directly, they could be sold.

In response to Feinberg, Elias said that he would be the project manager for a planning grant, but for actual design and construction the center would hire a professional project manager to work under him, the Board, and a broader group of citizens. Green emphasized that a stable project team was critical for success. Ingerson noted that the management difficulties and delays of many past CPA-funded projects in Newton were due in part to having too many, rather than too few, people involved in steering the project.

The sense of the meeting was that the center was well positioned to submit a planning grant proposal by the 1 October 2014 deadline. However, the earliest funds might be available from such a grant was probably February or March 2015. This might make it difficult for the center to complete its plan in time to submit a full design and construction proposal by October 2015.

Elias asked whether the center could start its planning with private funds, then continue it with CPA funding. Ingerson explained that the CPC had a longstanding policy of not reimbursing grantees for work done prior to the appropriation of CPA funds. She summarized the City of Newton's newly published policy requiring private projects that receive any CPA funds to procure all goods and services through the Purchasing Dept. She encouraged the center to ask the City's Chief Purchasing Officer directly whether or how this policy might apply to planning or design work begun with private funds, then continued with CPA funding. She also thought Elias's previous experience with the procurement requirements for federal and state grants would assist the center in implementing City procurement policies. Finally, she noted that the best way to ensure that any public request for proposals would attract highly qualified "responsive and responsible bidders" was to include thoughtful, rigorous qualifications in the request for proposals.

Elias asked how much funding it would be appropriate to request for a planning grant, and how much non-CPA funding the CPC might require. Robertson noted that the more non-CPA funds the overall project could leverage, the more favorably it would be seen by the CPC. Feinberg thought it would be difficult to leverage other funds for planning per se. Green agreed that other funds would be easiest to raise for the construction phase. For comparison, Ingerson noted that Historic Newton's Durant-Kenrick Homestead project had: received a CPA planning grant of roughly \$75,000; the CPC had then required Historic Newton to raise \$900,000 in non-CPA funds to release about \$2.7 million in CPA funds for design and construction. Although the project budget had evolved after the CPA appropriation, the CPA grant amount was not increased. To complete the project, Historic Newton had to raise a total of about \$2.1 million in non-CPA funds.

VOTE As moved by Burg and seconded by Green, the Committee voted 7-0 to consider a full proposal for a master historic rehabilitation plan for the New Art Center building in the fall 2014 funding round.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Program Finances

Ingerson provided a handout showing that the state Dept. of Revenue had just updated its estimate of the state match Newton would receive in fy14 for its confirmed fy13 local CPA revenues from the budgeted 26% to about 57.2%. However, the final amount would not be confirmed until after Newton had to set its local tax rate for fy14. The City's Dept. of Revenue advisor and the City Comptroller had supported Ingerson's suggestion to make all revenue in excess of budgeted amounts, including both these state funds and the local CPA surcharge on the override adopted in March 2013, available through the unspent fund balance carried forward from fy14 to fy15. During that transition, the CPC would need to allocate 10% of each additional funding source to the statutory reserves for affordable housing, historic resources, and open space.

Procurement Policy

Burg suggested that the Committee write a letter to the City's Chief Financial Officer and Chief Procurement Officer expressing its concern about the potential impacts of the new procurement policy for private organizations receiving CPA grants. Robertson felt it was difficult to criticize the policy's stated goal of stretching public dollars as far as possible. Although he and Turner agreed that in practice, the new policy would probably make private projects more expensive, they felt grantees were in the best position to make this case, by citing actual impacts on their projects. Ingerson thought it would also be important to hear from other funders and donors, if the policy discouraged them from supporting projects that requested Newton CPA funds. Feinberg suggested that given the role of the Board of Aldermen in appropriating CPA funds, they might be the most effective spokesmen for concerns about this policy.

Current Status Updates

Ingerson briefly summarized the proposals expected by the 15 November 2013 deadline. Feinberg believes these proposals will be well-prepared and solid but reminded the Committee that it would have a heavy workload in the first part of 2014.

Ingerson explained that the state legislature was currently considering a bill to give Newton a right of first refusal to acquire the Waban Hill Reservoir, in Chestnut Hill. Burg noted that, after the recent presentation on this project to the Planning and Development Board, she had reiterated her concern that current, tentative plans for the property's future use did not take a sufficiently City-wide perspective, partly because immediate abutters had been overrepresented on the advisory committee appointed for the project.

Minutes for 12 September 2013

Ingerson noted that she had found a number of typographical and grammatical errors in the minutes. After a motion by Robertson seconded by Gilfix, the minutes were approved with the proposed corrections by a vote of 7-0.

The meeting was adjourned by committee consensus at 8:50 pm.