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MINUTES

Happy 10th Birthday, Newton CPA! Community Meeting for South Newton (Ward 8 & Beyond)

3 October 2012

The meeting was held on Wednesday 3 October 2012 at 7:00 pm in the Cafeteria at Newton South High School, Brandeis Road, Newton Centre.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present: Leslie Burg, Michael Clarke (arr: 7:20 pm), Nancy Grissom, Thomas Turner, Jim Robertson.

Also present: Alderman Greg Kalis, former CPC Chair Doug Dickson, and Planning and Development Director Candace Havens (arr. 7:45 pm). Approximately 15 members of the public also attended.

Program manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder.

Committee Chair Leslie Burg opened the meeting at 7:05 pm.

PRESENTATION: Happy 10th Birthday, Newton CPA! Focus on South Newton (Ward 8 & beyond)

Chair Leslie Burg explained the format of these events: a PowerPoint presentation, followed by audience discussion/Q&A and an "open house" with refreshments. She asked everyone to record their attendance on one of the circulating signup sheets, and to consider filling in and submitting a survey, at the meeting or online.

CPC member Jim Robertson presented an overview of the Community Preservation Act: a short history of the state law & Newton's adoption of it; fundable resources & actions; the prohibition on using CPA funds for operating expenses, including maintenance; sources of local & state funding; the roles of the Community Preservation Committee and Newton's Board of Aldermen in the funding process; and recent amendments to the CPA, which allow communities to commit other funding sources in addition to a property tax surcharge and allow the use of CPA funds to rehabilitate recreation land not created or acquired with CPA funds in the first place.

Alice Ingerson then reviewed the work done by Newton's CPA program since fy2002, including sources of funds and the funding forecast for the next 5 years; the balance of yearly and cumulative appropriations among the fundable resources; and specific projects funded in the focus neighborhoods. Ingerson also presented a series of maps and graphs illustrating the idea that "community preservation is making choices about change," starting with historic photos showing how

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South Newton has changed since the 19th century, with a special emphasis on changes made to this area's extensive historic wetlands, the history of farming in South Newton, and the area's limited development for other land uses until the 1950s and 1960s. She also presented versions for South Newton of the same maps as at previous "Happy 10th" neighborhood events, including: the turnover of real estate around the City from before 1980 to the present, coded by decade; the growth of Newton's village centers and development in parts of the City outside the village centers; current housing values and needs; the distribution of both current buildings by their approximate date of construction and of recent demolition permits in the City; the loss or re-engineering of the City's historic wetlands and streams; the sub-watersheds that link Newton neighborhoods to each other and to the Charles River; and the present distribution of parks, playgrounds and conservation areas.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

The presentation finished at about 7:55 pm, and Burg then encouraged the audience to comment or ask questions about the new *Guidelines*, as well as any other aspect of the program, and to share their funding priorities for this part of the City over the next 5-10 years. In response to a question from Dede Vittori of Newton Community Farm, Inc., Ingerson said she was not aware of any systematic, statewide effort to repeal the CPA as a state statute, but that there certainly were some people who favored revoking it in Newton. The statute requires local revocation to use the same process as local adoption, so in Newton, the Board of Aldermen would need to put CPA revocation on a local ballot. Ingerson was not aware of any current movement by members of the Board to do so.

The CPA as recently amended does allow communities to count additional local revenue sources to get the maximum state match, but acceptance of those "blended" revenue sources also requires approval through a ballot. Ingerson was also not aware of any move in Newton to propose that sort of local ballot measure. Burg pointed out that although Newton's state match had recently declined, after remaining at 100% for the first 7 years of the program, the current state match of 22-23% for Newton's 1% surcharge was still a much larger return on local funds than the community could get from any other source. Dickson noted that Newton's program also did not include any of the exemptions allowed under the CPA, such as the first \$100,000 of residential property. Ingerson also explained that the state legislature had committed to adding an extra \$25 million to the state fund divided among all CPA communities in fy14, but that this was optional in all following years. Ingerson also explained that the recently adopted amendments were intended to encourage more large, urban communities to adopt the CPA. If that were to happen, Ingerson thought Newton would not see a major increase in its state funds, even if the extra annual \$25 million were committed every year.

In response to an audience question about "green building" standards, Burg explained that although the CPC did not absolutely require these, housing proposals to the CPC usually emphasized sustainability, in order to minimize the project's operating costs over time. In response to another question, Burg noted that Newton's stringent zoning and permitting process often meant that funded projects could not begin construction until many months after funding was initially approved. Ingerson introduced Planning and Development Director Candace Havens, and explained that the interdepartmental Development Review Team, led by her department's staff, now reviewed proposals before they came to the CPC, to make sure the sponsors were aware of – and included in their timelines and budgets – all permits and approvals their projects were likely to need.

Burg also described a recent attempt to streamline the Board of Aldermen's committee review process for CPC funding recommendations, by eliminating the special Aldermanic 'Committee on Community Preservation' in the hope that these recommendations could be reviewed only by the

Board's Finance Committee. Instead, the Board had decided each recommendation should be reviewed by a subject-appropriate committee in addition to Finance, which Burg felt could actually lengthen the process.

In response to another question about the weight given to public comments, especially those by the League of Women Voters, Ingerson noted that Newton's CPC had established a tradition from the program's beginning of holding a public hearing on every proposal, though this was not required in the CPA per se. Burg felt the CPC solicited and carefully considered public comment on every potential project. Robertson noted that this was sometimes a challenge, especially for affordable housing, when some members of the public might strongly support a proposal but others might strongly oppose it. Ingerson noted that the Committee's operating philosophy, available online, required them to "work for the people whose money is being spent, not for the people who want to spend it." Yet most of the people who attend public hearings and meetings are those asking for funds, so it takes conscious effort for the CPC to consider the interests of the people who are not in the room – the majority of residents who seldom participate personally in the review process. Burg and Robertson noted that the CPC often accepted public comments at meetings that were not public hearings, as time was available. Dickson pointed out that residents who want to participate in reviewing a particular proposal can do so by attending Aldermanic committee meetings as well as meetings of the CPC itself.

Ingerson encouraged attendees to explore the program website, which includes the full text of major documents for all proposals and projects, regularly updated reports on currently available funds and the status of current proposals and funded projects, and a funding forecast.

Dickson commented that he had served on the CPC for its first 7 years and found the presentation very reassuring. He particularly supported the proposed target funding allocations, and the idea of building a reserve in advance for future land acquisitions, to minimize the need for debt financing. Though the CPC had not adopted these ideas when he was a member, they had discussed them, and he felt they both made good sense. In response to a question from the audience, Burg explained that there was no legal obstacle to building a reserve; the CPA explicitly says that funds may either be allocated as they become available, or reserved for future spending.

Burg and Robertson noted that Newton's new *Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)* was the first to list future projects in a clear priority order, and that the CPC intended to take those priorities into account, but also believed that CPA funds should be reserved for non-City projects. Robertson noted that the CPC was still actively discussing the factors used to prioritize projects in the *CIP*, such as "risk and impact of failure." Some attendees at other community meetings in this series, and many CPC members, felt that other factors such as historic significance were more appropriate for prioritizing CPA projects.

On the other hand, Ingerson noted that having projects that must be funded through City departments, including parks and playgrounds, highly ranked in the *CIP* might be the best way to ensure that, if they were funded, they would actually proceed. In the past, when City departments received funding for projects that were not high priorities for them, or for City government as a whole, those projects often had not received the staff time and attention necessary for prompt completion. The resulting delays had been very frustrating for the neighborhood groups that had originally proposed these projects. Coordination with the *CIP* might help to prevent such delays.

CPC member Nancy Grissom pointed out that the CPC had also addressed the challenge of prioritizing by funding several systematic assessments of City resources in recent years. These assessments had covered Newton's historic or heritage landscapes, its archaeological resources, all City archives and all City buildings, and its open space and recreation sites and needs. Another survey currently underway was assessing all of Newton's surviving buildings dated to 1850 or earlier. These surveys would help the CPC and the public evaluate the relative urgency and importance of future proposals for these resources. Ingerson noted that the reports from these surveys were all available from the program website.

OPEN HOUSE At approximately 8:30 pm, Burg thanked the audience for coming and invited everyone to adjourn for refreshments and continuing conversation.

MEETING MATERIALS Presentation materials from this meeting are online under "Presentations & Special Reports" on the "Reports and Presentations" page of the program website, www.newtonma.gov/cpa.

For slides on the draft *Guidelines*, see minutes of 19 September 2012 public hearing.