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MINUTES

Happy 10th Birthday, Newton CPA! Community Meeting for Nonantum, Newton Corner & Newtonville (Wards 1 & 2)

15 November 2011

The meeting was held on Tuesday 15 November 2011 at Newton North High School, 457 Walnut Street, Newtonville.

Current Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present: Leslie Burg, Joel Feinberg, Wally Bernheimer, Zack Blake, Michael Clarke, Nancy Grissom, Thomas Turner, Dan Green, Jim Robertson. Also present: former CPC chairs Jeffrey Sacks and Charlie MacMillan and Aldermen Stephen Linsky (for the entire meeting) and Scott Lennon (for part of the meeting).

Approximately 30 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 Nonantum, Newton Corner & Newtonville (Wards 1 & 2)

Chair Leslie Burg opened the meeting and explained the format: a PowerPoint presentation, followed by audience discussion/Q&A and an "open house" with refreshments and time to annotate the interactive exhibit. She asked everyone to record their attendance by filling in at least their names on the surveys at their seats, then leaving these with the Committee at the end of the meeting.

Vice chair Joel Feinberg 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 the currently proposed amendment to the CPA, which would mandate that state funds match at least 75% of the revenue raised locally, and allow for the rehabilitation of 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 Wards 1 and 2.

Ingerson then presented a series of maps and graphs illustrating the idea that "community preservation is making choices about change," starting with historic photos showing how Nonantum, Newton Corner and Newtonville have changed since the late 19th century, but also 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 those parts of the City outside villages

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.

DISCUSSION

At approximately 7:40 pm, Burg invited audience questions and comments, with a special focus on funding priorities for this part of the City over the next 5-10 years. Speakers are identified in these here by both name and the title of the previous CPA-funded project with which they were most closely associated, whenever this is possible.

Jay Walter (affiliated with the Newton Historical Society) and Gayle Smalley (affiliated with the First Unitarian Society of Newton) noted that other communities had used CPA funds to support the preservation or restoration of historic churches, and suggested that Newton should use some of its funds in a similar way. Charlie MacMillan noted that the past CPC had chosen not to recommend funding a proposal for the stained glass windows at Grace Episcopal Church, out of concern that the public benefit was not proportional to the public funds requested, though the church had promised to hold occasional open houses for non-members during each year. Jeffrey Sacks noted that there was no prohibition on funding historically significant private properties, and that Newton's program could acquire preservation restrictions in return for such funding, as it had done when funding the preservation & rehabilitation of historic windows at the West Suburban YMCA, which was heavily used by the public and sponsored programs open to non-members. Feinberg and Burg emphasized that the CPC did not initiate proposals, and suggested that the current CPC had not received any such proposals, but would be willing to take a fresh look at this possibility. Feinberg also noted that the CPC would probably continue to require significant leverage or matching funds from other sources in return for CPA funding of private properties.

Ingerson asked for audience comments on what proportion of CPA funds, and when, should be allocated to public vs. private historic buildings. For example, she wondered whether it would be appropriate to fund capital needs for City-owned historic buildings first, then move on to funding private buildings in the following generation of CPA projects.

Wally Bernheimer noted that if the CPA is amended, the City would probably submit at least two parks projects totaling \$4 million; and with or without the amendment, City properties including buildings could absorb the bulk of the funds available for the next several years.

MacMillan noted that for the program's first few years, the CPC could do little more than respond to the large number of proposals submitted, which reflected a backlog of needs and large projects already waiting for funds when Newton adopted the CPA. He felt the CPC might now have the option of being more proactive, though he continued to favor allowing proposals to "bubble up from the neighborhoods."

Ingerson, Burg and Nancy Grissom noted that the CPC had proactively requested several proposals, or that it had actively called for, over the last 2-3 years, including surveys of archaeological resources and City archives, a new *Recreation & Open Space Plan*, and a new, multi-year Capital Improvements Plan for City assets.

Josephine McNeil (CAN-DO) noted that it was difficult to set long-term goals or plan proactively for affordable housing, and asked the CPC to take this into account when thinking about taking a new

approach to allocating funds among resources. Grissom noted that some people had suggested setting a specific proportion of available funds aside for housing in general, perhaps in a way that would streamline and shorten the funding process for housing compared to the current system.

Burg and Ingerson noted that the Board of Aldermen might be about to eliminate its Committee on Community Preservation (CCP) but would then refer each CPC recommendation to a different, substantive committee. Ingerson noted that most of these substantive committees met more frequently than the CCP, which might shorten the Aldermanic part of the funding process a bit.

Wally Bernheimer felt that, overall, open space and housing were higher-priority uses of CPA funds than most City buildings, only a few of which are truly historic. Burg noted that deteriorating public buildings and infrastructure were a problem across the country, but she also would not like to see most CPA funding go to City projects.

Margaret Doris (Albemarle Community Commons) endorsed MacMillan's comment about the importance of projects that "bubble up from the bottom," which she felt could be completed more quickly and raise more funds from non-CPA sources than City projects could. She felt that the unpopularity of the CPA among some residents was due in part to a feeling that it had become a tool for funding primarily City projects, or primarily large projects. She also recognized that the neighborhood sponsors of some smaller projects had run into difficulties working through and with City departments, including the City bidding process.

McNeil suggested that the CPC should require matching funds from non-CPA sources for City projects, just as it did for non-City projects.

Phil Herr (Comprehensive Plan) noted that the City's new *Capital Improvements Plan (CIP)* was a very able inventory of needs, especially compared to past capital plans for Newton, but even compared to most such plans for other cities. It seemed like an open invitation for dialogue with the CPC about the funding of City projects over the next few years. Burg and Ingerson noted the CPC had actively urged the creation of this new plan, to help prioritize City requests for CPA funds. Ingerson also noted that the total cost of CPA-eligible projects in the new 5-year *CIP* was more than the total of all CPA funds available in that period. The new *CIP* might actually be a 10- or 15-year plan for CPA funding of City projects, depending on the proportion of CPA funds the community at large tells the CPC should be made available for City projects.

Ingerson and Grissom noted that the Newton CPC had made the federal (Secretary of the Interior's *Standards*) a requirement for historic resources projects, partly to screen out proposals for the deferred maintenance needs of neglected, older buildings, if those buildings were not truly historically significant, and the projects were not truly conceived and planned as historic preservation or rehabilitation.

Herr then noted that, although several CPA-funded projects had involved multiple resources, he did not sense that the dialogue across interest groups representing each fundable resource during the campaign to adopt the CPA had really continued or deepened since then. Jeffrey Sacks felt that this dialogue occurred within the CPC itself, and was an important benefit of the program. Burg and Grissom felt that each CPC member actively participated in discussion of proposals for resources other than the one he or she represented.

McNeill felt there should be such a dialogue beyond the CPC itself, the way there is a city-wide dialogue about zoning reform. Ingerson noted that the CPC had made a deliberate choice to organize its 10th-anniversary community meetings by neighborhood, rather than by resource, in hopes of

provoking more cross-resource thinking. In contrast, most ideas expressed at its previous 2008 community meetings had stayed in single-resource “silos,” perhaps because the meetings were organized by resource.

Herr felt that the current CPC did not necessarily favor projects that involve two or more resources, over projects that involve only one. Sacks and Ingerson noted that the *Community Preservation Plan* continued to list multi-resource projects as a priority. McMillan encouraged the CPC to consider more innovative ways of encouraging the different resource constituencies to collaborate, over the next 2-3 years.

Keith Jones (Farlow Park) prompted brief applause by saying that the CPA was a wonderful thing, especially given how heavily it relies on volunteer effort, that it had allowed Newton to accomplish things that might never have been done without the CPA, and hoped that it would continue.

Margaret Doris felt that the CPC is less approachable now than it used to be. Ingerson noted that the CPC now required and would discuss pre-proposals, which are less formal and lengthy than full proposals. She felt that this provided a new avenue for discussing experimental or less fully formed ideas.

OPEN HOUSE

At approximately 8:40 pm, Burg thanked the audience for coming and invited everyone to adjourn to the lobby for refreshments and continuing conversation.

Backup materials

- The PowerPoint & interactive exhibit materials will be posted online from www.newtonma.gov/cpa