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Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

6 December 2011

The meeting was held on Tuesday 6 December 2011 in Room 202 of Newton City Hall.

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

Program manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder.

Committee Chair Leslie Burg opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

PROPOSALS & PROJECTS

Archaeology Survey (final report)

As team leader, consulting archaeologist Chris Donta from the University of Massachusetts Amherst made a presentation. Team member and consulting archaeologist Barbara Donohue also attended. The third member of the team was Mitch Mulholland, who did comparative work on archaeological bylaws or ordinances in other Massachusetts communities.

The survey used site visits, interviews, maps and other historical sources to identify and predict archaeological sites from periods prior to European settlement through the 19th century. Native American sites are highly probable along freshwater and in areas of flat, well-drained soils. Historic sites were identified or predicted along old roadways and other factors in the city's development history. Survey areas were based on the official definitions of Newton's villages. So "Newton Centre" covered most of the City's southern portion, including Oak Hill.

Newton is one of the few cities per se that has conducted such a survey. The city had 13 previously recorded Native American archaeological sites, and this survey added 7 more, mostly near sources of fresh water, especially the Charles River and ponds. Newton had 16 previously recorded historical archaeological sites, and the survey added 56 more. There are undoubtedly many more historical sites; the stopping point for additions was dictated basically by the time available for study.

In response to Committee questions, Donta explained that indigenous populations in this area had been reduced by 50-75% through disease before Europeans arrived to provide written descriptions of Native American life, and if there was artwork, it has mostly not survived.

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Donta explained that the survey's detailed technical final report is confidential, to protect the resources surveys, but will be on file in Newton's Planning Department, where staff will use it to require additional, site-specific surveys for any proposed project using state or federal funds at locations with either identified archaeological sites or a high probability of archaeological resources. The team will also provide a less detailed public report for publication online and educational use. The final report recommends using signage, websites, educational programs and more research to document and protect Newton's archaeological resources. It also recommends enacting a local ordinance to create finer-level review requirements.

City Archives – Combined (final report)

Ryan Hanson, Assistant Director of the Newton Free Library, presented the report on this project, which involved the Library, the City Clerk, and Historic Newton. The project team decided to focus on digitizing late 19th and early 20th century materials, which they felt were of greatest public interest and therefore most subject to wear and tear from public use.

Over 1,000 items have been digitized for the Library's "Digital Newton" collection (online from <http://www.newtonfreelibrary.net>), and more are being added steadily. City directories were digitized up to 1934. Later directories will be digitized in future as their copyright protection expires. The City staff will apply what they learned from this project to future projects, with or without CPA funds. A new proposal has already been submitted to Boston Public Library, which has been funded by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners to provide free digitization services to other libraries.

This project produced metadata (data about the data digitized, such as the type and age of each document) that are compatible with the "Digital Commonwealth" project. That project was designed primarily to serve researchers, so the actual digital documents were posted through a different system that was easier for the general public to use. The system will help people from outside as well as inside Newton find these resources. It also accepts comments from users; for example, users may suggest more precise locations or dates for images not fully identified in the original collection.

City Clerk David Olson noted that one of the project's benefits was access by the City Archives to assistance from Library staff, since the Archives no longer has its own staff position.

Alice Ingerson hoped that the websites of the City Clerk, Historic Newton and the Library would all link to each other. Leslie Burg and Nancy Grissom encouraged creating a shared portal for these online resources.

City Archives Survey (final report)

David Olson, City Clerk, and Nancy V. Kougeas, the consultant, made this presentation. The project's primary goal was to set priorities for preservation of City-held records. Information about all the collections surveyed was entered in an Excel database that is now maintained by the City Clerk.

The survey started from state records retention schedules, which determine which records can be discarded and when, as well as which records must be kept permanently and in what format. Storage spaces are needed both for paper records and for other media, including 9-track tapes, etc.

Kougeas found great concern throughout the City about records preservation. In Newton as in many other municipalities, staff cuts have eliminated community memory about where records are kept, as well as about what they document and how they can be used. Newton was one of the first

municipalities in the state to have a city archivist, but that position has been eliminated. In contrast, Boston has a model system, which is run efficiently by staff that is very small for a city of its size.

Many of Newton's historic records are kept at City Hall, which has no central climate control. Kougeas noted standing water in the sub-basement, and water damage throughout the building. Collections particularly at risk include: any records stored in the City Hall basement, which is inappropriate for this purpose, including the originals of the Engineering Division's photograph collection; building and inspectional services records stored in the City Hall sub-basement, where Kougeas observed standing water; records of the Executive Department; and records being stored off-site. The Engineering Division's plans and maps are important, but other collections are in more immediate jeopardy.

Kougeas found historic works of art in scattered locations, noted in her final report.

Newton's best records storage area is in the main Library. The new Newton North High School has an excellent archives storage room. The CPA-funded compact storage system in the City Clerk's vault is good, but there is no way to install a fire suppression system there.

The report recommends closer collaboration in cataloguing and archival management among the City Clerk, the Newton Free Library, and the Jackson Homestead/Historic Newton.

Kougeas acknowledged that due to time constraints, this survey probably did not locate all significant collections of City historical records. For example, most of the work was done during the summer when many School Dept. staff and buildings were not accessible. The School Dept. has its own retention schedule; all annual reports must be kept, but student records are confidential and are must be destroyed at a specific time.

Several Committee members commented on records they had seen in less than ideal storage conditions at various public schools and the Fire Dept. headquarters. Kougeas noted that very early Law Dept. records were in the City Archives, but many records have been discarded and current Dept. files only start in the 1980s. The Police Dept. has a small museum and is looking to acquire and preserve materials, having realized that they discarded too much at an earlier time. Mike Clarke commented that the Parks and Recreation Department used to produce a detailed annual report; resuming that practice might allow some bulkier records to be discarded.

Leslie Burg felt that Newton does not currently have a good reputation for its records systems. David Olson felt the City needs both an archivist and a records management person to deal with short-retention materials, as well as more storage space. Kougeas noted that the Boston archivist annually visits all City departments to advise them on what can be destroyed and what should be kept, and where. In contrast, each department in Newton's City government makes its own records decisions.

Historic City Buildings Survey (pilot report on phase 2)

Public Buildings Commissioner Stephanie Gilman introduced Alicia Svenson, Cory Trembath and Andrea Gilmore, the consultants from Building Conservation Associates, who are conducting this survey. Gilmore estimated that the survey would be done by January-February 2012.

Trembath summarized the work done to date. Phase 1 identified 32 of the City's 77 buildings as having significant historic merit. Phase 2 produced a pilot report for 5 buildings, which met the CPC's requirements for historic resources proposals by documenting each building's historic significance and significant features, and also outlined basic treatment recommendations that would meet the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Buildings*. Digital Newton has been a helpful resource for this phase. The project team revised the model for phase 2 reports in response

to suggestions from Alice Ingerson, to produce more succinct recommendations that focused on truly critical historic features and allowed for a broader range of treatments, depending on the future use of each building. The Committee as a whole agreed that this second approach was acceptable, though they were also very impressed by the longer, even more detailed first draft reports for Phase 2. In response to a question from Joel Feinberg, Gilman noted that the City's overall capital needs assessment team included engineers, who would vet technical recommendations from this survey. Gilmore noted that the Svenson and Termbath are architects and are qualified to comment on the buildings' physical integrity.

Gilman noted that the work and level of detail produced by this survey are very impressive. Phase 1 has already been a great reference tool for many different City depts. Nancy Grissom felt that this survey was a significant improvement over earlier, CPA-funded reports about single buildings, which focused on deferred maintenance needs rather than historic character.

Gilman asked whether it was ever acceptable under the CPC's standards to replace deteriorated historic windows with exact replicas. Grissom, Termbath, and Burg all felt that restoration was preferable if at all possible. Robertson noted that in a project he was doing, the costs of restoration and replacement were roughly comparable.

Newton's Community Preservation Fund and *Fy13-17 Capital Improvements Plan*

Public Buildings Commissioner Stephanie Gilman described the process used for the new CIP, using weighted assessments of the risk, probability, and consequences of each asset's failure, and comparing all kinds of assets across departments. Some projects had been moved from the capital to the operating budget, including projects that cost less than \$75,000 or assets with a relatively short useful life, such as computers. Gilman explained that the overall list now needed to be divided and re-grouped into annual workplans, based on the City's management capacity as well as priorities.

Ingerson explained that most CPA-eligible projects in the CIP would qualify for funding as historic resources rather than on any other basis. She then asked for the Committee's reactions to her recommendation that the City submit a combined pre-proposal for all eligible CIP projects in a given one year, rather than separate pre-proposals for multiple, individual projects. Ingerson described the request by the Aldermanic Real Property Reuse Committee that Gilman submit a pre-proposal to the CPC for the current Newton Health Dept. Building, the former Newton Centre Library. Gilman explained that the Board wanted to know whether the CPC would recommend CPA funding to stabilize the building and stop current leaks before the Board appointed an advisory group to explore possible future uses for the building. Grissom, Robertson, Burg and Feinberg felt that such work was really maintenance and not CPA-eligible.

The Committee as a whole urged Gilman to submit a pre-proposal for this building only as part of a multi-project "program" or "package" pre-proposal as described by Ingerson. Burg and Robertson emphasized that the CPC wanted the City to decide which individual projects were its priorities in a given year, rather than submit multiple proposals and ask the CPC itself to set priorities for the City.

Ingerson then reviewed that part of the Committee's 10th anniversary presentations showing the allocation of funds among CPA-eligible resources year by year, and the cumulative average for the program to date. She hoped that by the end of the 10th anniversary events, in the fall of 2012, the Committee would articulate its preferred allocation among resources for the next 3-5 years, and perhaps farther into the future. Ingerson thought that preferred allocation might change over time, with a greater emphasis in the immediate future on City historic resources and building up an open

space reserve; then a shift toward affordable housing, as the one-time capital needs of City historic resources were gradually met, and if no major opportunities arose for open space acquisition.

As a starting point for discussion, she explained that, if funds were split into even thirds among affordable housing, historic resources and open space/recreation, about \$1.5 million in current balances and about \$680,000 in new funds annually could go toward each of the three categories. (The graphics from this discussion are included at the end of these minutes.)

Jim Robertson and Joel Feinberg both felt that City historic resources could and probably should absorb nearly all the funds the CPC would be willing to commit to that category over the next few years. Ingerson suggested that the critical issue was public benefit, and that active, daily use by the public or for providing public services seemed like a greater benefit than simply admiring the view of a historic building from the public way, or the building's interior on special occasions.

The Committee then discussed the difficulty of distinguishing preservation or rehabilitation, which are CPA-eligible, from maintenance, which is not. Ingerson summarized that after exhaustive research, the City Law Dept. had concluded that this distinction was extremely difficult to make. Ingerson suggested that the CPC needed to keep good records so it could simply decline to recommend a second proposal for a given building or site, if the work done the first time with CPA funds had not been adequately maintained. Gilman explained that as part of the new CIP, the City had begun to include more funds for monitoring and preventive maintenance in its operating budget.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Committee briefly discussed the results of their first 10th anniversary community meeting, on 15 November 2011. They hoped that future meetings would attract more people other than those already familiar with the CPA, or who had already received grants. Feinberg and Burg offered to reprise their roles as presenters at the next event, scheduled for 24 January 2012. Ingerson noted that Blake had previously offered to provide refreshments for that event, and said she would confirm these roles with members by email. She also noted that the January site, Warren House, had offered to be available for a snow date exactly one week later, if needed.

The Committee approved the final design distributed by Ingerson for printed color inserts that would be distributed in the next round of Newton water bills beginning in January 2012. The estimated cost of printing 25,000 of these through Newton North High School was less than \$2,000.

Nancy Grissom moved, Mike Clarke seconded, and the Committee unanimously approved the minutes for 18 October 2011 and 15 November 2011.

Chair Leslie Burg adjourned the meeting at 9:50 pm.