

To: Members of the City of Newton Community Preservation Committee (CPC),
Mark Armstrong, Chair
From: Adrienne Hartzell Knudsen, Managing Director, Newton Cultural Alliance
Date: March 27, 2020 for April 14, 2020 presentation
Re: Allen House - Historic Preservation and Adaptive Re-use Rehabilitation

In keeping with the Community Preservation Grant Agreement between the Newton Cultural Alliance (NCA) and the City of Newton dated August 5, 2016, the NCA is pleased to submit this final report summing up the uses of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding for the historic preservation and adaptive re-use of the Nathaniel Allen House, 35 Webster Street, West Newton.

This presentation includes a final report on two CPA grants; the \$2,000,000 referenced above as well as the \$600,000 specified for a geothermal HVAC system approved on January 28, 2019. This report brings to the present time our work since the last update and presentation to the CPC on September 10, 2019. The construction period for which these grant funds were used began in December 2018 and will reach final conclusion in or around June 2020, subject to the restrictions and delays resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

The NCA is incredibly grateful to the CPC for their support and interest over the last 7 years in this project and we are delighted to present herewith an overall summary of the work that has been completed since our last update in September 2019. We look forward to the opportunity to show you this new space in person in the not too distant future.

NOTE: the numbers (1) in the following text refer to the slides in the power point presentation.

Some project basics:

The Nathaniel Allen House adaptive reuse project undertaken by the Newton Cultural Alliance (NCA) has taken the 19thc. home of pioneer educator, Nathaniel Allen and has converted the buildings and grounds to a community arts and cultural center providing office, work, rehearsal, gathering and small performance space for Newton's arts and cultural organizations and the community. This property is on the National Registry of Historic Places and is also a Newton landmark. For clarity, the roughly 1.25-acre property is referred to in three parts; the house (1840's), connecting ell (late 19th c.), and barn (18th c.)

Construction updates since 9/19:

Fall 2019: At the time of our last report, the interior walls, a major exterior wall, the barn ceiling, and floors throughout the barn were all being framed (2 & 3). After the framing was complete, insulation (4) was installed in the ceilings, exterior walls, etc. In addition, a trench from the new utility pole and transformer on Cherry Street was excavated and conduits installed to provide utility services to the Allen House project underground instead of overhead, in order to preserve the historic landscape.

In January 2020, once the main exterior wall of the building ell was restored after months of being open to the elements, the framing of the windows and doors (5) in this space began, and the installation of a 100% pine board ceiling (6) in the barn began. This amazing carpentry project, was completed by just one craftsman and has created a beautiful ambiance in the barn performance and gathering space, which is deemed one of our successes. In addition, January saw the start of the installation of the geothermal HVAC system throughout the building. (7)

In February, as the carpentry work continued in the barn, restoration of the field stone wall (8) and the tiling of the new public bathrooms (9) in the lower level of the barn was done along with the first hanging of the foyer chandeliers and building of railings and stairs. Carpentry detail work continued, the staircases got new treads and there was continued work on trim of all kinds. Running in a parallel path through the winter has been the installation of a full service elevator as well as the restoration of the historic bowling alley that Allen built to provide physical education for his students in the 1850's.

In March, given the good weather, the landscape and exterior work began. The brick walkways to the lower level of the barn and the Webster street entrance along with the Webster street drop off area and handicapped ramp have now been completed (10). Porches, railings and trellis work have been restored on the Webster Street side of the property. The underground electric service was also connected, after which the process of commissioning of the geothermal HVAC system began. The rear parking area and patio work along with the landscape and irrigation system fed by a groundwater well will follow shortly.

Slides 11 – 13 show the almost finished project. Projected final work and opening is now on “pause” as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given this unexpected delay, we hope to complete this project--currently about 8 weeks of work--by late June, with opening as soon as permissible thereafter.

Successes and surprises along the way:

The preservation and community contribution of bringing this beautiful corner of Newton back to a new vitality and life is our over-riding sense of success in this project. That said, as with every historic rehabilitation project there have been a number of surprises and at the same time we feel strongly that the ultimate success of this project, being realized as we meet, will be a beautiful space for the Newton community; creative and general, to gather to enjoy and experience.

Successes:

Consistent with our conviction that the development of the Nathaniel Allen House as a key element in the historic fabric of Newton, we see our success through a variety of lenses.

- The preservation and adaptation of this historic gem for community and creative use
- An answer to the much needed appeal for “space” by the creative community
- A versatile multi-function generic kind of space for community, social and creative functions
- A geothermal HVAC system that is environmentally sustainable

Surprises:

- **Crumbling walls and no foundation.** Upon excavation to increase useable space under the barn, time and time again the contractors discovered little or no foundation. To the extent a foundation existed, invariably what had been built, in some cases 100 - 150 years ago, simply crumbled when exposed. This in turn led to the need for additional and strengthened support in each one of the basement support walls, as along with a corresponding increase in expenses.
- **The most dramatic surprise - the coronavirus pandemic.** This world-wide crisis has caused the NCA to press the pause button on the remaining construction until such time as it is deemed safe to have crews working in close proximity again. When we are finally permitted to open this new resource, we expect to provide a new, safe, comfortable space where the community can gather. We will not open for public use unless and until we have proper safeguards and procedures in place to deal with whatever the requirements for public spaces are at that time.

It is with extreme appreciation that the NCA submits this Final Report on this Historic Preservation project so generously and thoughtfully funded by Newton's CPC.

Respectfully submitted,

Adrienne Hartzell Knudsen, Managing Director, Newton Cultural Alliance