



Setti D. Warren  
Mayor

**City of Newton, Massachusetts**  
Department of Planning and Development  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459

Telephone  
(617) 796-1120  
Telefax  
(617) 796-1142  
TDD/TTY  
(617) 796-1089  
www.newtonma.gov

James Freas,  
Acting Director

## Community Preservation Committee Funding Recommendation for 1930s MURAL (NEWTON NORTH HIGH SCHOOL)

date: 18 November 2015  
from: Community Preservation Committee  
to: The Honorable Board of Aldermen/City Council

### PROJECT GOALS & ELIGIBILITY

This project will rehabilitate a three-part mural by WPA artist Maurice Compris that was first installed in the library of Newton High School in 1936. The mural was dedicated to the memory of Newton High graduate Stafford Leighton Brown, who served as an ambulance driver and pilot in France during World War I beginning before the United States entered the war. He died in a test flight crash just 6 months before the war's end. His mother, Eugenie Brown, also established a scholarship in her son's name that is still awarded at Newton North. After the mural was removed from the old Newton High School, only the central panel ("Education") was installed in the cafeteria at the new Newton North High School. Just before that school was demolished, the side panels ("Industry" and "Commerce") were rediscovered – unfortunately too late to design a space at the current Newton North to accommodate the three-part mural's original configuration. However, the School Dept. has committed to displaying all three panels in a way that helps viewers see them as a single work of art. The Newton Historical Commission made the mural eligible for CPA funding by voting on 24 September 2015 to declare it significant in the history and culture of Newton.

### RECOMMENDED FUNDING

On 5 November 2015 by a vote of 6-0 (members Michael Clarke, Joel Feinberg and Richard Kronish absent) the Community Preservation Committee recommended appropriating \$114,900 for this project from the Community Preservation Fund's fund balance and reserves for historic resources and general fund balance, to the control of the School Department for the overall purposes summarized in this budget:

**Project Budget for 1930s Mural - Newton North High School**

Uses		
Restoration Conservators	See reformatted/corrected budget from 18 December 2015, posted separately on Newton CPC website.	\$82,200
Project/Administrative Support		\$15,600
Installation Subcontractor		\$8,800
Installation Materials		\$8,300
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$114,900</b>
Sources		
CPA funds		\$114,900
Note: The School Dept. is also submitting a request to the Newton Cultural Council to support interpretive materials, which are not in themselves eligible for CPA funding.		\$2,000

website [www.newtonma.gov/cpa](http://www.newtonma.gov/cpa)

contact Alice E. Ingerson, Community Preservation Program Manager

email [aingerson@newtonma.gov](mailto:aingerson@newtonma.gov) phone 617.796.1144

## **SPECIAL ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE CPC**

**Funding Leverage** The CPC's current funding guidelines and comments from the League of Women Voters encouraged raising some funds for this project from non-CPA sources, such as Newton North's PTO or alumni. However, some CPC members felt it would be difficult to raise non-CPA funds for the project, or that PTO and alumni funds should be reserved for supporting classroom education. Given the relatively small amount requested, the CPC decided not to require additional leverage.

**Installation & Maintenance** Given the mural's difficult recent history, the CPC was particularly concerned to ensure its future maintenance. Since the School Dept. does not have in-house the skills needed to evaluate proposed installation locations and required conservation measures (such as UV film to reduce light exposure from windows), or to design a long-term maintenance program for the mural, the CPC asked that these tasks be included in the contract for the restoration conservator hired with CPA funds.

**Research & Interpretation** The City of Newton seal and Newton High School letters and colors in the central "Education" panel support the School Dept.'s view that this mural was intended to depict Newton's history or at least Newton's self-perceptions as of the 1930s. On the other hand, some aspects of the mural do not easily fit into this interpretation, such as the longshoremen loading (or unloading) an ocean freighter in the "Commerce" panel. Several questions about the mural's creation and intentions remain unanswered: Comprised other work for the New Deal's Works Progress Administration (WPA), but no connection between this mural and the WPA has yet been documented. A 1936 student newspaper article credits Mrs. Eugenie Brown with providing "materials" for the mural, but no documentary evidence has been found for who actually commissioned the mural, or why. The CPC hopes the School Dept. will follow through on its stated intention to sponsor further student research on these and other questions raised by the mural. The CPC also hopes the School Dept. will engage the general public in discussing the mural's history and meanings, especially in the context of current debates about Newton's community character and economic diversity.

## **ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS** (*funding conditions*)

1. The CPC assumes all recommended funds will be appropriated within 6 months, and the project will be completed within 18 months, after the date of the recommendation. If either of these deadlines cannot be met, the School Dept. should submit to the CPC a written request to extend that deadline.
2. The contract with the restoration conservator should include evaluating proposed installation locations; recommending and implementing any measures needed to protect the mural in the final location chosen; and producing a brief (one-page) "preservation maintenance plan," with cost estimates, to guide the School Dept. in caring for the restored mural.
3. The School Dept. should sponsor additional research, ideally by Newton students, on the mural's history; encourage broad community discussions of that history; and hold a public re-dedication ceremony for the restored mural once it has been installed in its new location.
4. Within a month of completing the project, the School Dept. should provide the CPC with a final in-person and written report on the project's results, including the preservation maintenance plan in **2** above.
5. Any CPA funds appropriated but not used for the purposes stated herein must be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.

## **KEY OUTCOMES**

The Community Preservation Committee will evaluate this project based on goals 1-4 above and in the long term, on appropriate maintenance and continued student and public engagement with the restored mural .

## **ATTACHMENTS**

(Delivered to the City Clerk and clerk of the Finance Committee)

- Copy of the CPC's webpage for this project, with links to additional information:  
[www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/cpa/projects/art.asp#1930s-mural](http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/cpa/projects/art.asp#1930s-mural)
- School Dept. funding proposal and slide presentation to the CPC in October-November 2015

Maurice  
Compris mural  
in its original  
location,  
Newton High  
School Library,  
date unknown  
(photo supplied  
by Newton  
School Dept  
2013)

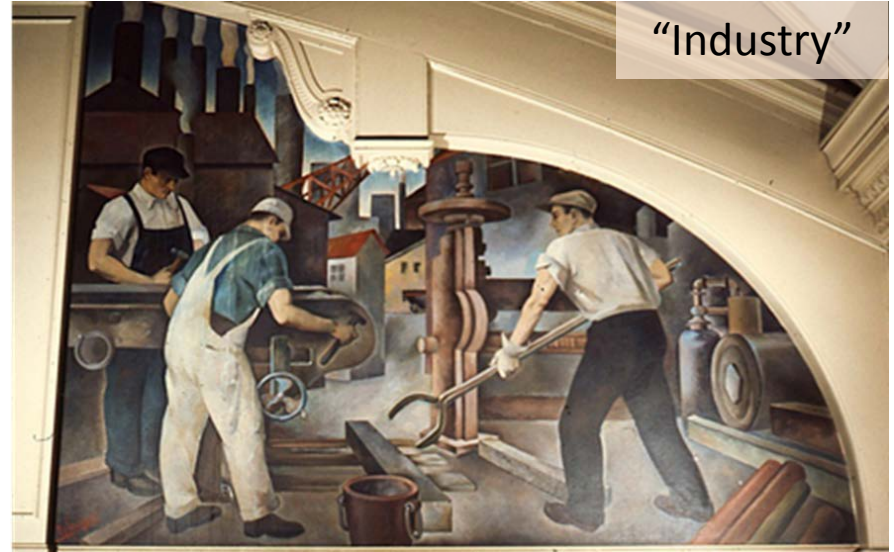


“Education”

“Commerce”



“Industry”



Maurice Compris mural, 21 August 2015,  
Unrolled on the floor of Newton City Hall War Memorial Auditorium



Maurice Compris mural,  
21 August 2015,  
unrolled on the floor of  
Newton City Hall War  
Memorial Auditorium



Maurice Compris mural, 21 August 2015,  
Unrolled on the floor of Newton City Hall War Memorial Auditorium



closeups from  
central panel



Maurice Compris mural, 21 August 2015,  
Unrolled on the floor of Newton City Hall War Memorial Auditorium



closeups from  
central panel

