

Memorandum

Newton Housing Rehabilitation Fund

To: Community Preservation Committee

From: Mike Duff – Rehabilitation Program Manager

Date: January 17, 2006

Re: Housing Office Review of CPA application for Brigham House renovations

The Housing Office has reviewed the Brigham House application and specifications. Attached are our findings and recommendations to the CPC relating to same.

As this is the first Project that we have provided any preliminary evaluation for the CPC we are feeling out just how to best advise you. The format I used is based one I developed in the early 1970's when I evaluated homes in Boston for possible purchase by the Dept. of Public Welfare. Haven't used it since, but only dusted it off to make myself feel old I suppose!

I see my role as being totally objective, and to stick to what we know best and what we were requested to do. That is to evaluate the structure and the proposal and give our opinion on if the proposal best meets the needs of preserving the structure.

The Brigham House Project is an interesting "trial balloon" for this process. It is a building that has lots of problems and lots of promise and is a good candidate for CPA Preservation Funding. However our evaluation of the building's needs leads us to suggest the applicant consider some alternate approaches to rehabilitation/preservation for the structure.

Please let me know if the attached is not what you envisioned our role to be and/or how we can better provide the information you need to evaluate future proposals.

I have done my best to keep the applicant apprised on my role and my conclusions/suggestions. We have inspected the site several times with Bob Staulo and John Rice. We have had discussions with the Architect and several City departments.

CC: Stephen D. Gartrell – Assoc. Dir. For CD and Housing
Jennifer Goldson CPA Planner

Word/my docs/1-10-06 CPA memo

Newton Housing Rehabilitation Fund

Brigham House Renovations

Below are our findings and comments relative to the Brigham House Proposal for CPA funding for the property at 20 Hartford Street, Newton Highlands.

Property Profile

Brigham House is a 2-1/2 story wood frame structure, originally constructed as a one family home. A modern one story frame addition exists at the right side. The original Queen Anne style building was constructed circa 1886. The structure has a total of 10 habitable rooms with 2 "half baths" and no kitchen facilities. The four third floor rooms are vacant and unusable due to egress limitations.

Structure:

The structure and framing as visible are in generally sound condition. In the areas we were able to inspect no damage from termites or other wood destroying insects was noted. Vertical support in the basement is predominantly brick piers which have minor to serious deterioration at the bases. The random wood posts should be replaced with lally columns on proper footings.

The foundation is fieldstone with poured concrete at the addition and is in generally sound condition with some expected settlement cracks which are minor, and random holes requiring patching. Efflorescence was evident around most of the foundation and other evidence of dampness affecting walls, brickwork, ductwork etc. was noted. Measures to stop water penetration at the bulkhead and other measures to reduce dampness should be considered. Chimneys are brick in externally sound condition except the bases (as noted above with brick piers). The chimneys are in desperate need of cleaning and the cleanout door and frame at the furnace flue that has been covered over needs to be reinstalled. There is some indication that a flue at the rear chimney has structural failure. Since this chimney services the water heater this should be fully inspected and the appropriate repairs made.

The concrete slab at the basement is deteriorated in random locations and should be repaired after disposal of all debris at entire basement.

The entire bulkhead area is in disrepair. This is a concern as it allows the elements and possible animals into the building and is a security concern.

Roofing:

The roof material on the main structure is asphalt strip shingle in generally sound condition and should service the structure for the foreseeable future. The roofing at the ell/addition and rear is EDPM. While relatively new it certainly will not survive the extensive abuse it will see during needed exterior rehab. and will need extensive repair or preferably replacement, especially since new rails are proposed.

Exterior Fabric:

Siding:

The primary siding material is cedar clapboard in generally deteriorated condition. There are areas with damaged/rotted clapboards and there exists a chronic peeling situation that necessitates extensive repair and replacement of some or most clapboards. The proposed blown in wall insulation will impact any decisions on clapboard treatment.

The gables, dormer, and rear watershed are clad in cedar shingle. The decorative cut shingle at the front gable appears sound and should be maintained. Most of the remaining shingles are deteriorated and we recommend replacement.

Wood and Trim:

Much of the extensive trim at corners, porches, window and door casings etc. is deteriorated, rotting and peeling. Many watersheds, window sills, column bases are in similar condition.

Paint:

Chronic paint failure is a major concern.

Soffits:

Wood gutters exist on the original soffit system.

There is extensive deterioration to the entire system and major repairs and gutter repair/replacement is imperative including plancia, fascia and downspouts.

Steps/Porches:

The front steps and porch are generally sound needing some minor carpentry to replace some flooring at treads. The rear porch and steps are deteriorated and rotted. Immediate replacement/repair is needed. The ramp system at the left side is structurally sound but needs fairly extensive repairs to wood and metal rail systems.

Front Walk:

The front walk is poured concrete and is deteriorated. Deterioration will rapidly get worse and since this is the access to the ramp and is used extensively by the disabled it should be repaired and use of rock salt discontinued if possible.

Windows and Doors:

The majority of the windows are replacement double glazed 1/1 or 2/2 sashes installed on existing frames. They are in generally acceptable condition. Attic and basement windows are in poor condition and need replacement. Doors throughout were only casually viewed. General repair is needed and the pocket door at the second floor hall is scheduled for removal.

Ceilings and Walls:

The plaster walls are in generally sound condition except at the third floor where plaster failure is noted and at the second floor front hall. Ceilings are a mixture of plaster and block and are in mixed condition. Some ceilings require replacement.

Interior Trim:

A mixture of original woodwork and new exists throughout. The ornamental woodwork is sound but has multiple layers of stain and/or paint.

Floors:

Wood flooring is used throughout most of the occupied structure; a mixture of oak, maple and hard pine. While generally sound, though well used, most areas need refinishing. The oak floor in the first floor ½ bath is rotted and a waterproof flooring material is needed if the bath is to remain at this location. The vinyl tile ell flooring is in worn condition. It may contain asbestos and should be tested before any removal etc. The second floor ½ bath has sheet vinyl floor covering in sound condition.

Interior Stairs:

The wood stairway to the basement is sound but needs tread repair if use is to be continued. The stairs to the second and third floors are wood and are sound. The front stair balustrade needs repair.

Environmental Issues:

It must be assumed that lead paint exists at the property. The current usage by the applicant does not require abatement under State Code. Since this is a City owned property, lead paint abatement would be something to consider; especially if extensive remodeling and redecorating are to be done inside and out. At a minimum, we recommend all interior repair be done using "Lead Safe" practices and that proper cleaning and clearance measures be undertaken.

Except as noted, we found no presence of accessible asbestos or any areas with excessive mold or mildew. Areas of past leakage are noted at random areas however. Unless the exterior repairs needed to prevent water infiltration are done soon there will be future problems with mold mildew and rot.

Insulation/Ventilation:

A full energy evaluation of the building is recommended. Several suggestions we have are discussed below

Mechanical Systems:

Plumbing:

The water service is 1" copper in sound condition and interior supply piping as inspected is copper. Some obsolete or leaking shut offs were noted. Drain piping is generally in sound condition. The obsolete WC and sink at the basement should be removed and drain plumbing should be sealed.

Electrical:

A 200 AMP OH service exists which is adequate for the usage. The system is properly grounded. Wiring is a mixture of EMT, BX and Romex and much is exposed to abuse and not securely stapled. Some BX at the basement is rusted. Some bare wiring was noted at the third floor. We strongly recommend an inspection by the Wiring Inspector, updating of all obsolete outlets, fixtures etc., replacement of missing or obsolete fixtures, switches and junction boxes, installation of GFI protected receptacles where needed and general upgrading of the wiring to meet code and ensure safety. Due to the scope of proposed work, the Fire Alarm and related systems should be evaluated and updated as needed.

HVAC:

A FHA by oil system services the inhabited areas of the structure. The furnace is of “uncertain age” and was providing adequate heat at the time of our visits. The oil burner is a 3450 RPM model that is not properly maintained and should be upgraded. There are a number of safety issues with the system and it does not seem to be regularly maintained. At a minimum, we recommend protecting the exposed oil line where the concrete floor is broken, and installation of a fireproof ceiling above the oil burner. The rusted smoke pipe should be replaced. A full inspection of the safety switches at the furnace, tank and first floor is imperative with attendant repairs, and the unit needs servicing and a regular maintenance plan. We suggest a full evaluation of the safety and efficiency of the furnace to see if upgrading is the best long term solution.

An external heat pump provides air conditioning to much of the structure but was not tested.

Hot Water:

The gas fired Hot water heater is relatively modern and adequate for the minimal use it gets.

Proposed Preservation/Rehabilitation/Access Work

This is a brief synopsis of the work proposed in the application for Preservation funding

- Upgrade Soffit/Gutter/drainage Systems
- Repair exterior siding trim porches ramps etc
- New accessible Bath – kitchenette
- Bulkhead/rear entry reconfiguration
- Insulation/vapor barrier
- Electrical upgrade and fire alarm etc.
- Interior decoration
- Window and door upgrading
- Other Misc. repairs

Use of CPA Preservation Funding – eligible activities:

The definitions for Preservation and Rehabilitation in Chap. 44B are wonderfully vague. We have discussed interpretation of the definitions with Jennifer Goldson, and based on those discussions our guideline in evaluating the work scope is as follows:

CPA Legislation relating to CPA funding of “Preservation/Rehabilitation” includes work to preserve, rehabilitate and restore historic Structures. This does include accessibility work but does not include maintenance.

The property is considered as of “Contributing” architectural/historical significance and this is a structure well deserving of preservation and an admirable candidate for CPA funding from an architectural point of view. We agree with the applicant’s proposed use of Preservation funds for much of the work with several exceptions.

My understanding is that CPA funding activities are not subject to approval by the Newton Historical Commission. However, CPA “Preservation” funded projects must be in accordance with The Sec. of the Interior’s Guidelines - 36CFR68 thus I recommend that plans and specifications of the applicant be reviewed by the commission for their approval as a requirement for funding. My

understanding is that the Commission has not been approached by the applicant regarding the proposed project. I am informed that the applicant did meet with the Preservation Task Force and advised them of their general intent to preserve the structure. I recommend Task Force review of final specifications.

We question if interior redecoration or floor refinishing fit the definition of "Preservation" or if they should be considered maintenance items. We question if the proposed landscaping fits the definition. We did not review portions of the proposal dealing with "Recreation" funding.

Gutter/Soffit Restoration:

We feel that a more traditional approach to the soffit restoration be considered. It is unlikely that this structure would have been constructed with the copper gutter liners or downspouts the specifications propose. Also, covering the plancia, even with thin plywood, will affect the profile and could hide and accelerate rot. An alternate suggestion, to replicate the original, would be installation of fir gutters without gutter liners, 3" G.I. downspouts, replacement of fascia, plancia and bed mouldings as needed. Unobtrusive venting of the soffits (and elsewhere) is also something to consider. Certainly the Newton Historical Commission would be a valuable resource in evaluating soffit restoration. It is likely that early photographs of the structure are available at the Jackson Homestead that would indicate the original design.

Exterior Sidewall Restoration:

We recommend the applicant consider a more aggressive approach to the exterior fabric. The shingles and clapboards are seriously deteriorated in many areas as is much trim. Areas of clapboard that are not deteriorated simply don't hold paint. As stated in the application an extensive restoration was done about 10(?) years ago. Now, almost universal paint failure to the clapboard has again occurred, in addition to deterioration due to gutter/soffit failure. The applicant proposes only 5% clapboard replacement which is minimal. Certainly some of the siding, particularly cut shingles at the front gable, and random areas of both shingles and clapboards could be retained.

I recommend total replacement of shingles and clapboards with vinyl siding and full aluminum coverage of all ornamental trim..... Gotcha!! Ok, Ok, just kidding folks, just kidding. Relax and take a deep breath. What I do recommend is new cedar clapboards and shingles for most all of the structure. Use of new clapboard will give the opportunity to back prime and finish with stain to alleviate the peeling problem. Since the applicant's proposal allocates \$12,000 just for scraping and sanding siding/trim, I think comparison of the cost and future maintenance cost of painting versus new siding might show the cheapest long term solution is replacement.

Insulation of Sidewalls:

While there are arguments in favor of blowing in insulation I think the risk of moisture build up within the walls might outweigh the energy conservation gain. There are other energy savings measures which may be more practical for this building, including weather-stripping, insulating beneath the ell and along the sill etc., heating system updates and the like. For a variety of reasons, use of vapor barrier wallpaper in this building may or may not effectively protect from moisture build up inside the walls if insulation is blown in.

Bathroom/Kitchen/Bulkhead/Egress renovations at first floor rear:

Creation of an accessible ½ bath at the first floor, and the reconstruction of the bulkhead area and rear entry are necessary and are eligible preservation activities. It is important to understand the relationship of the proposed accessible bathroom installation with the proposed reconstruction of the bulkhead and rear entry. They must be evaluated as a total package.

Here is what the applicant has proposed to make better use of the rear first floor space and allow for a larger and fully accessible 1/2 bath:

- Relocate the first floor bathroom to the area of the basement stairs and install accessible fixtures in a new ½ bath.
- Reconfigure the rear entry; remove existing porch, steps, roof doors etc.
- Eliminate the interior access to the basement
- Relocate rear entry and create new entrance to first floor and basement with new stairs platform and bulkhead on the existing sidewalk behind the existing structure.

Though the reasons behind the existing proposal are valid, our concerns with the proposed work involve cost, feasibility and architectural appropriateness. We recommend a careful review of the proposal and that the applicant explore if other solutions are desirable. I spoke at some length about this issue with Russ Feldman of TBA who is the architect on the project. He is aware of my concerns and will be prepared to discuss this at the Working Session.

Bathroom relocation involves major cost for feeding, venting and draining the fixtures and affects the entire structure. Moving the bathroom to the proposed location necessitates creating exterior access to the basement as the interior stairs will be eliminated.

This leads to my major question as to the feasibility of the proposal. Of primary concern is the wood entrance and stair system proposed to be located on the sidewalk that separates the building from the city parking lot. I have spoken with Nick Parnell, Commissioner of Public Buildings, Juris Alksnitis, Chief Zoning Officer, and John Lojek, Commissioner of Inspectional Services about this proposal, and they raise numerous issues that must be addressed before any final decisions can be made.

Below are issues that concern us:

- The appropriateness of using Preservation CPA funds to radically change the exterior of the structure.
- Not all affected city departments are aware of the proposed work, especially Public Works which may be the most affected.
- The new structure will be within a foot or so from public parking. There are concerns with protecting it from cars and, if it is protected, will that cost parking spaces. Public parking is dear in Newton Highlands.
- Parking meters will have to be removed to erect the structure. It is unclear if they could be replaced even if parking is maintained
- It appears that it is a building code requirement that the new porch/step structure be fireproof or have a fire rating. That will drastically alter the applicant's plan to make it architecturally consistent with the building
- The application states that the project requires no new zoning as it is a public building. Even though this is a city building abutting a city parking facility there may be zoning concerns

under Sec 5-58 (Site plan approval for municipal buildings) of the *Revised Ordinances of Newton, Newton Code-Buildings*. Both Juris and Nick feel this may require review by the Law Department and Design Review Committee.

Summary:

It is our opinion that this is a structure that is in sound but threatened condition. Extensive repairs are needed that are eligible CPA funded "Preservation" activities. There are some safety concerns as noted in our "Property Profile" that should be addressed. This is a valid project for CPA funding; both the access work at the interior and the exterior preservation.

I would suggest exploring if a way could be found to meet the needs and desires of the applicant to improve the rear first floor space, and provide an accessible bathroom and kitchen facilities without the extensive work in the existing proposal. I further propose taking the potentially considerable savings and using those funds towards more comprehensive restoration of the exterior. I suggest that all the safety concerns noted in our inspection be rectified as part of the funding or as a condition of the funding.

I would hope that effecting any revisions would not adversely impact the approval process of the project. It should be a rapid process to make revisions, finalize plans and secure competitive bids. (Much of this work is still needed for the existing proposal anyway). Conversely, if some of the issues raised about the rear entry affect the project, going ahead with the project as proposed might create a longer process.