



City of Newton, Massachusetts
Community Preservation Committee



**DOCKET
ITEM NO.**

#274-10

Setti D. Warren
Mayor

FUNDING RECOMMENDATION

DATE: 14 October 2010

TO: The Honorable Board of Aldermen

FROM: Community Preservation Committee

RE: **recommended funding for CITY ARCHIVES SURVEY**

PROJECT GOALS & ELIGIBILITY

This project will survey each of the 25 City departments to determine the scope, condition, and historical significance of documents in each department's care and to recommend broad preservation priorities for these collections. The survey will be undertaken by an outside consultant under the supervision of the City Clerk, with assistance from the staff of the Newton Free Library and the Jackson Homestead.

The Newton Law Dept. has confirmed that this project is eligible for funding under the Community Preservation Act, which includes "documents and artifacts" in its definition of historic resources. A more detailed discussion of funding priorities is included at the end of this recommendation.

RECOMMENDED FUNDING

On 16 September 2010 the Community Preservation Committee voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend that the requested funding of **\$46,640** be appropriated for this project, as described in the attached proposal. This appropriation should be allocated 100% to historic resources, and drawn entirely from the current historic resources reserve of the Community Preservation Fund.

The proposal's more detailed budget shows how this total funding request was derived: by combining a standard hourly rate for qualified consultants with the estimated time required to evaluate records held by each City Department.

SPECIAL ISSUES

This proposal was submitted outside the CPC's regular funding cycle at the urging of the Committee itself, for reasons laid out in its February 2010 funding recommendation for the "City Archives - Combined" project:

Interdepartmental Archival Survey & Priorities: ... Historically significant archives are held, often in conditions that fall far short of current best practices for either preservation or public access, by a wide range of City departments, including but not limited to the Engineering Division of the Public Works Department, the Fire Department, and the School Department.

Before any City department submits an additional funding proposal for archival collections, the Committee hopes the City will conduct a basic, interdepartmental survey of all such archives and will identify broad funding priorities across those collections, based on a combination of current condition and historic significance. Without committing funds in advance, the Committee would welcome a funding proposal for such a survey and priorities.

— from 2 February 2010 CPC funding recommendation
to the Board of Aldermen for "City Archives – Combined" project

(continued on p. 2)

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Community Preservation Committee further recommends that:

1. Funds be appropriated to the spending authority of the City Clerk, who will act as the project manager. Project managers provide the CPC with regular project updates upon request and with a final report comparing planned vs. actual project expenditures.
 2. As cosponsors of the proposal, the Newton Free Library and Jackson Homestead provide additional staff assistance in planning and managing the project, as well as in disseminating and publicizing its final report, and in developing and submitting future archival funding proposals based on that report.
 3. The project be completed within one year of the date when appropriated funds become available, or by any extension of that deadline granted in writing by the Community Preservation Committee.
 4. Understanding that a broad survey cannot catalog or assess individual documents, the project's final report include the following information for each major collection of records surveyed. This list both reinforces and extends the goals listed in the proposal as submitted:
 - ◆ historical significance
 - ◆ current storage location & condition, with specific threats (moisture, light, acidity, etc.)
 - ◆ current use & users, and probable future use & users if the collection is preserved and made accessible
 - ◆ legal retention requirements, if any (period of retention, level of public access, location)
 - ◆ for the body of all City archives:
 - preservation priorities among collections, based on the combined factors above
 - a brief analysis of the relative costs and benefits of conserving or digitizing documents themselves, vs. creating storage spaces that help to conserve untreated documents by providing climate control or other special conditions
 - ◆ identification of any high-priority departmental or division collections that are so large or complex that they need their own, detailed plans for phased preservation funding
 5. Any portion of the Community Preservation Fund grant not used for the purposes stated herein be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.
- ◆ **Attached:** Full proposal to the Community Preservation Committee, dated 19 August 2010, Law Dept. email confirming CPA eligibility
 - ◆ **Available on request from proposal sponsor:** Sample resumes of qualified consultants and summaries/sample budgets from similar projects completed successfully elsewhere.

Appendix:
DETAILED FINDINGS on FUNDING PRIORITIES

Newton Plans & Priorities

Given the range of competing demands for Newton's finite community preservation funds, it may be difficult to justify the costs of archival preservation if

1. the only option considered is the extremely expensive one of preserving every individual archival document in the City's care
2. once preserved, the archives are used only by historians and researchers

However, the Community Preservation Committee believes that the proposed survey of all City archives is critical for

1. setting priorities and identifying cost-effective options for archival preservation, including but not limited to the physical conservation of individual documents or collections
2. ensuring that funding for archival preservation benefits as many Newton citizens as possible, in as many ways as possible

Chapter 9 of Newton's current *Comprehensive Plan*, entitled "Planning for and with History," opens with a vision of Newton as "nationally recognized for its innovative, community-based approach" to "planning with history" for many different purposes and users, including these:

- ◆ The City uses historical images and examples in presentations and meetings about all planning and development issues, to help residents understand and make choices about change over time, evaluate interactions between what otherwise seem like unrelated or competing issues, and see their neighborhoods in a citywide context.
- ◆ New local landmarks and local historic or neighborhood conservation districts are often proposed and adopted as a result of neighborhood-initiated research and education, to protect special places even when those places are not facing an immediate prospect of redevelopment.
- ◆ Residential and commercial realtors market Newton's history as one of the community's major assets ...
- ◆ Planners, architects, contractors, and property owners use the City's online "history index" to find documents, maps, and photographs that can inform their conversations with neighbors about new projects. Often, they use and pay for research assistance by Newton's "history corps" of high school and college students. ...

A basic survey of all City archives is a crucial first step toward realizing this vision.

SOURCE NOTE:

The full *Comprehensive Plan* is linked to the Community Preservation Program website here:

www.newtonma.gov/cpa/program.htm.