

**4) Grace Episcopal Church's Tower Project FAQs (prepared December 4, 2020)**

Provided by Grace Episcopal Church

### 1. What will happen to the tower if the CPA grant is not approved?

- A structural deficiency has rendered the 1873 tower unstable resulting in a threat to public safety. The situation has required us to close portions of our property to all visitors. Although major donors have stepped forward with major gifts to start us off, Grace does not have the resources to restore the tower without public support. We are seeking a partnership with the city and the greater community in support of Historic Preservation. Absent CPA funding, as a leverage for other grants and our capital campaign, the church will have to resolve an emergency situation, leading to the likely removal of the tower and bells.

### 2. Is Grace Church an especially significant historic building?

- The City noted Grace Church for its “**outstanding architectural quality**” in its listing of the building as part of the Farlow and Kenrick Parks National Register District in 1982.
- The 1986 Historic Resource Inventory of Newton lists Grace Church as “**Most Significant**,” one of only 250 of some 5,000 historic structures to earn this highest level of distinction.
- The same survey lists Grace Church as one of only 22 houses of worship in the city to earn this highest historical and architectural status.
- The Newton Historic Commission highlights Grace Church in its historic walking tour, noting “**the corner tower serves as an important local landmark.**”

### 2. What makes the Eldredge Chime a unique community resource?

- Cast in 1873, the nine-bell Eldredge Chime is one of only two operable bells in the city.
- This chime has been rung at the end of world wars, for 9/11, for the Boston Marathon Bombing, to celebrate Juneteenth as part of the City’s recognition of Black Lives Matter and at the request of local teachers, to honor Newton’s class of 2020 as they graduated during the pandemic.

### 3. Is it appropriate to fund a project associated with a church?

- There is strong precedent in Massachusetts for granting public funds to support landmark church restoration.
  - The Massachusetts Historic Commission established a precedent for providing state funds for church building restoration many years ago, funded projects at Grace Church in 1998 and 2007, and just granted a \$50,000 emergency fund grant to the project.
  - Cambridge and Boston and 89 other municipalities in Massachusetts have provided CPA funds for over 300 such project over the past 10 years. There are a dozen active projects in Boston currently, including two church towers.
- Legal rulings have clarified the appropriate allocation of CPA grants to religious organizations and eliminated uncertainty:
  - In 2017, U.S. Supreme Court confirmed the US Constitution prohibits disqualifying eligible recipients from a public benefit solely because of their religious character.

- In 2018, the issue was tested, when an out-of-state group sued the Town of Acton for approving a grant to a local church. While it was determined that the Acton grant was inappropriate because it funded stained glass windows with religious imagery, the MA Supreme Judicial Court determined that:
  1. **religious organizations cannot be categorically excluded from receiving CPA funds** without raising serious constitutional concerns, and
  2. **religious organizations cannot be treated differently from other applicants** because of their religious affiliation.
- The MA court established a 3-part eligibility test.
  3. Through that test, the CPC and the MHC determined that structural and other exterior repairs are eligible for CPA funding.
- A grant of CPA funds to preserve the tower is consistent with Newton’s recognition that **“historic churches and synagogue contribute significantly to the character of the City’s neighborhoods”** and with the Newton Historical Commission’s characterization of the tower as a **“an important local landmark.”**
- Two of other landmark churches designed by the same architect as Grace Church, Emmanuel Church and Union United Methodist Church in Boston, have received CPA funding.

**4. What about other religious organizations?**

- While Grace Church, the oldest stone church in the city and listed as one of 22 houses of worship to be "Most Significant", is more eligible for funding than structures without historic landmark status, there are recognized historic buildings from a variety of faiths in Newton:
  - 1912 Agudas Achim Anshei Sfard Synagogue, Adams St. Nonantum
  - 1889 Congregation Bnai Jacob, Beacon Street
  - 1885 Hellenic Gospel Church, Church Street
  - 1895 Temple Beth Avoda House, Hunnewell Ave.
- In addition, we belong to the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association and have statements of support from Rabbi Stern of Temple Beth Avoda, Rabbi Berman of Temple Reyim and Rabbi Berry of Temple Shalom. These community leaders understand the unique circumstances of our eligibility and grant request and therefore support it.

**5. Is there general community support for this project?**

- We have over 670 signatures of support from across the city and statements of support from prominent community members including:
  - Paul Holtz, Program Director, MA Historical Commission
  - Doug Cornelius, Chair, NHC
  - Lisa Dady, Executive Director, Historic Newton
  - Brooke Lipsitt, Newton Historical Society Board member
  - Ann Larner, Newton Historical Society Board member

- Jay Walter, Newton Historical Society Board member
- Peter Vieira, Chair, Chestnut Hill Historic District Commission
- Keith Jones, Friends of Farlow Park

**6. Does Grace Church provide a public benefit to the City of Newton?**

- Newton's 2007 Comprehensive Plan stated: **"Religious Institutions offer architectural variety and open space in their neighborhoods and can no longer be taken for granted."**
- Newton's 2010 Heritage and Landscape Report stated: **"Churches, synagogues and other places of worship help to define Newton's villages and neighborhood and support important public functions by housing various social services."**
  - Now limited by the pandemic and **by the partial closure of the facility due to the tower instability**, our building supports a variety of educational and social service agencies by offering space at under-market rate rents to at-risk groups that have been turned away at other locations. Our partnerships include:
    - Riverside Community Health Clinic
    - Over five 12-Step programs that meet on a regular basis
    - Still Dancing which provides chair dancing for elders
    - Social Science Club, at Grace Church since 1886
    - Zdravets, a traditional Bulgarian Dance group
    - Kids4Peace, an Interfaith Peace Leader Program
- **Newton's 2019 Comprehensive Arts and Cultural Plan lists Grace Church a venue for arts and cultural events.** Grace Church has provided an active roster of public programming, including:
  - Tanglewood Festival Chorus recital
  - Choir of King's College London
  - Blue Heron Renaissance Choir
  - Folk and World Music Concert with Four Shillings Short
  - Recitals on the restored Hook & Hastings organ
  - Regular community youth piano recitals
  - Weekly short-format bell concerts
- **Tower restoration is required to allow these activities to restart post pandemic.**

**7. Does Grace's grant limit CPC funding for Affordable Housing and Open Space?**

- No. Per the CPC plan, the Grace Church grant of \$1.43M will be distributed over the course of two to three fiscal years, **allowing all funds to be drawn from the restricted fund for Historic Resources.**
- Some additional considerations:
  - Newton CPC's established goal for Historic Resources is 20% of total CPA grants in any year. Only 17% of all Newton CPA funds have been allocated to Historic Resources since 2001 and only 13% of has been granted for historic resource projects in the last five years.

- 70% of Newton CPC Historic Resource funds have gone to city owned properties.
- Total 2021 accumulated CPA Funds (after admin costs and Webster Woods debt service): \$15,357,325, including:
  - Restricted Fund for Historic Resources: \$1,233,270
  - Unrestricted Fund: \$12,807,134