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Barney S. Heath
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Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

March 9, 2021

The virtual meeting was held online on Tuesday, March 9, 2021 beginning at 7:00 P.M. Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present included Mark Armstrong, Dan Brody, Eliza Datta, Byron Dunker, Susan Lunin, Robert Maloney, Jennifer Molinsky, Martin Smargiassi, and Judy Weber. Community Preservation Program Manager Lara Kritzer was also present and served as recorder.

Chair Mark Armstrong opened the Community Preservation Committee's public meeting at 7:00 P.M. and welcomed those in attendance. Mr. Armstrong also reviewed the items to be discussed during the meeting and introduced the Committee Members.

West Newton Armory Affordable Housing Development Public Hearing

Present on behalf of the City for this project were Director of Planning and Development Barney Heath, Director of Housing and Community Development Amanda Berman, and Housing Development Planner Eamon Bencivengo. Mr. Heath explained that the City had an opportunity for a very exciting project with the West Newton Armory. The State has offered the property to the City for \$1 so long as it is used for affordable housing. The City has spent the last year considering whether an affordable housing development would be feasible at this location, working with affordable housing developers Affirmative Investments to evaluate the project. On February 1, the City Council had approved going ahead with the project and the City was now moving forward with the purchase. Before the purchase could take place, the City had to meet HUD requirements which includes a Phase II environmental study of the property. Mr. Heath explained that they did not think that this would be too difficult to complete but it was not something that the City had previously budgeted for and so they were requesting CPA funding to complete the requirement.

Mr. Bencivengo gave a presentation on the history of the property and the proposed project at this time. He explained that the property included 30,000 sf. and was located on Washington Street next door to Trader Joe's. The head house of the armory was a brick structure in a castle style design with a large dome roofed structure behind which housed the gymnasium. The property was declared surplus by the State in 2018, after which DCAMM (Department of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance) went to the State legislature for approval of two potential options for the property. The first was to offer the property for \$1 to Newton for development of 100% affordable housing for those at or below 80% AMI, and the second was to offer it for municipal use at a price to be based on an appraisal of the site for its proposed use. In June 2019, the City Council authorized the Mayor to move forward with the potential purchase and in December 2019, the West Newton Armory Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG) was established to consider the property's purchase. The JAPG hired Affirmative Investments (AI) to consider the feasibility of the project. AI looked at options that

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included both no demolition on the property and the partial demolition of the property for the new development, eventually settling on an option which preserved the head house and constructed affordable housing in place of the gymnasium at the rear. AI had also considered using the property for other public purposes and had found that it would be insufficient to the City's needs for any other municipal use. In November 2020, the JAPG issued their recommendation that the property be developed into 100% affordable housing and in February 2021, the City Council approved the purchase of the site.

Mr. Bencivengo stated that they were currently working with AI to complete the closing materials for the purchase of the site and the RFP for an affordable housing developer for the site. Both were expected to happen this summer and the City estimated that they were four years away from beginning construction. Mr. Bencivengo explained that before the City could purchase the property, they needed to complete a noise assessment and Phase II environmental study for HUD, as well as a Memorandum of Agreement with the Mass. Historical Commission. The current request for \$21,250 would cover the anticipated cost of the Phase II environmental assessment, while the other two requirements would be funded through state grant funds to the project.

Mr. Armstrong thought that this was a pretty straight forward request and a good project for the City. Ms. Datta agreed, noting that she had been tracking this project since 2019 and wholeheartedly supported the development. Mr. Smargiassi also thought this was a great opportunity for the City.

Discussion was opened to the public at this time. Luis Marin, 175 Adams Street, thought that it was a wonderful project but was concerned with the amount of time necessary to complete it. She noted that the Haywood House project had been under review for two years and was still not started.

The public hearing was closed as there were no other comments. Ms. Datta moved to recommend that \$21,270 in CPA funding be allocated to the West Newton Armory Project as proposed. Ms. Lunin seconded the motion which passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Gath Pool Study Project Pre-Proposal Discussion and Review

Present on behalf of this project was Parks, Recreation, and Culture Commissioner Nicole Banks, Open Space Coordinator Luis Perez Demorizi, Aquatics Director Sean Nickerson, Carol Schein, and Public Buildings Commissioner Josh Morse. Commissioner Banks began by noting that this project had the support of the Mayor, the Friends of Albemarle and Newton's swim teams. She noted the value of Gath Pool to the community over the last sixty years. Commissioner Banks stated that she had 15 years of experience leading a recreation department and had just finished her first year here in Newton. She commented on the importance of this resource to the Community.

Mr. Demorizi explained that the Parks, Recreation, and Culture department has overseen Gath Pool for sixty years and that it was the only public pool available to Newton residents. The property had 30,000 guest entries last season as well as being the home of the Blue Fish swim team, which hosted an annual summer championship and regular swimming classes. The current facility was deteriorating, and its systems were past their useful life. Both the pool and deck both needed significant rehabilitation and repair work, and the site had grading and access issues as well. The City was pursuing a consultant to look at the existing conditions of the site and develop a feasibility

assessment of the property and the changes necessary to meet the community's needs. Mr. Demorizi explained that this was a first step necessary to retain this resource.

Mr. Nickerson stated that he was both the aquatics director and Gath Pool's official operator and had worked full time in this role for two years. He explained how the pool's chemical and infiltration systems must work together and explained the problems that were caused when this was thrown out of balance. The proposed feasibility study would review the property and develop a list of changes and improvements for the components and equipment on the site as well as the resident's experience of the property. He noted that in 2018, the City had discovered that the pool was leaking a tremendous amount of water through unknown sources. The pool now lost 18,000 gallons a day, or approximately 5% of its overall volume. Mr. Nickerson stated that his predecessor had conducted dye tests to find the source and had checked all of the valves, but nothing revealed the cause of the leaks. They now thought that the loss of water could be cumulative from a number of sources. A renovation of the site would include replacing all of the joints and piping at the very least. Mr. Nickerson added that the leaks were not just a waste of water, but also threw off the chemical balance of the pool, requiring the use of more chlorine which could cause the pool to close if the balance was off. He also noted that the constant addition of fresh water to the pool meant that it never warmed up, even in the summer.

Mr. Demorizi stated that the study would also look at equipment upgrades, such as adding spray features and improving its accessibility. He also anticipated that the renovations would include more shade structures, additional lap lanes, and more tables and site furniture. He explained that they had included a list of the anticipated improvements on page 2 of the pre-proposal. The proposed feasibility study would both take a look at the City's needs and complete an existing conditions survey of the property. It might also include a geotechnical survey of the site and consider the public health and other compliance needs for the property. A result of the study would be to complete both a list of conceptual costs and draft plans for the site. Mr. Demorizi stated that they would also receive a cost differential for modifying the existing pool configuration versus replacing it, and the anticipated operating costs of the new system.

Commissioner Banks highlighted the large number of supporters which had already come out for this project and the creation of the new Friends of Albemarle organization to support the work. She noted that Gath Pool was built during a renaissance period for municipal pools in the 1950s and 1960s and that 60 years of use and weather had taken its toll on the structure. She added that she had overseen municipal pool systems in other jobs and that two other communities, Lexington and Needham, had also used CPA funds to restore their aging pools. This type of work and the proposed funding was not unusual in the area.

Mr. Armstrong asked if the study would include an annotated list of improvements and whether a landscape architect would be included in the future to further the design. Ms. Banks answered yes, that they were hoping that whoever they found to do the feasibility study for the project would also be able to stay on for the construction itself. Mr. Maloney asked if any of the experts that they had spoken with had offered any indications for how to find the leaks. Mr. Nickerson answered that it was generally a process of elimination. Based on his conversations with other pool experts, the options appeared to be to either live with the problem or to completely replace the systems. No one had had any creative solutions for the problem, but they were able to track the amount of lost and

replacement water with meters. The leak had been consistent throughout the previous summer but if it appeared to be leaking more, then they would need to bring in an expert to evaluate the suction concerns for the pool. He also noted that the cost of fixing and replacing the pipes and systems at this point were close to the cost for a full replacement system. Mr. Demorizi noted that if they needed to do borings to check the soil, that they would likely need to replace the decks as well.

Ms. Molinsky asked about the study itself and whether it would be possible to get a sense of the additional costs of each option. She noted that it sounded like the plan was to restore the site instead of replacing it and wondered if that was the right solution. Mr. Demorizi answered that the RFQ was being written to not exceed \$60,000 and was anticipated to be enough to provide answers to both options for the site. Public Building's Deputy Commissioner Alejandro Valcarce spoke up to add that the study would look at both the physical condition of the site and what would be needed to expand and repair it. They expected the consultants to do some investigations on the site as part of this. He agreed that at some point, the City would need to consider what was worth doing if they already knew that they needed to reconfigure and remove some existing pool elements. This study would begin to put together future options for the site which would allow the City to determine how best to proceed. Ms. Molinsky asked who would make the decision to renovate versus replace the site features. Mr. Valcarce thought that the study would get into that decision and would help the City to clarify the options and issues involved. Ms. Molinsky asked if the work would include any of the buildings. Mr. Demorizi stated that the buildings had been updated over the last few years so the study would focus on the systems and infrastructure at this time.

Mr. Smargiassi stated that he would be interested in seeing the difference in cost between the rehabilitation of the existing site and the construction of a new pool. Commissioner Banks suggested looking at the Town of Lexington's pool, which was a good example of a rehabilitation project on a pool of similar age. She noted that Newton had a concrete pool which had been built to last, but which was at an age where repairs and work were needed. Ms. Weber thought that it sounded like this might not be the City's last request for funding for this project and stated that she was not sure that she understood the full scope of the project. She asked if there were more steps in the report process. Commissioner Banks answered that the funding requested would provide a report that included several options for the City to choose from, as well as recommendations and additional information to help make the choice on how to proceed. Mr. Demorizi added that the City would get a preferred plan of action out of this process. Mr. Valcarce noted that one option will be to replace the pool's shell and deck, and that this study would give a clear idea of what the City would get from that process and how much it would cost. The applicants agreed that Gath Pool is a major resource for the City and that everyone wanted to see it restored and improved.

Newton's Blue Fish Swim Team coaches Mary and Scott Pohlman spoke about their long history with the Gath Pool and Newton's swim programs. They explained how the pool was used and its challenges and hoped that the City would consider a solution which allowed the pool to be used for more than two months each year. They noted several other communities that used solutions that allowed for year-round swimming. They stated that Gath Pool was a gem and hosted one of the area's biggest summer swimming competitions. They noted that Gath Pool was a premier pool in the area and one of the few that could host such an activity. They also reiterated that due to the leak in the pool, it was generally too cold for swimmers to use for too long for the first several weeks of the summer.

Other members of the public were given the chance to speak at this time. Laura McGeigle of Washburn Street stated that she was a longtime user and loved the pool. She had been using the pool since it was opened and was very sad that the City had not yet put together a state-of-the-art aquatic facility. Cedar Pruet, Wyoming Road, and Jacqueline Freeman were present on behalf of the Friends of Albemarle. Their group had formed because they saw the restoration of Gath Pool as a priority and noted that there was support for this project from all over the City including 50% of the City Councilors, Senator Creem, and many more who love the Gath Pool.

Ms. Lunin stated that she appreciated the note on amortization, in that this would be an important project for the City for the next 50-60 years. Members were asked if there was any additional information that they would like to see in the full proposal. Mr. Smargiassi thought that there should be a mandate that the study include options for both the complete redesign of the pool complex and fixing the existing structure. Commissioner Banks stated that they would make sure that was part of the discussion. Mr. Armstrong stated that he would also like to see a timeline for the project.

Ms. Lunin moved that the applicants be invited to submit a full proposal for project funding. Ms. Weber seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Discussion with Commissioner Nicole Banks on potential future Parks and Recreation Projects

Commissioner Banks stated that she wanted to let the CPC know that their department had a number of projects which they were planning to bring in for review over the next few months. She explained that since she began working in Newton a year ago, she had tried to learn as much as possible about their sites and facilities. The pandemic has brought more people outdoors and the City's tennis courts, fields, and golf course are all in high demand to the point where their department has had to increase trash collections. Commissioner Banks explained that she had previously worked in New Hampshire and Westwood and had completed projects on ice rinks, parks, and court lighting at those positions. She thought that Newton had so much to offer and was excited to partner with the CPC in the future to complete additional projects. In the next few months, they planned to submit proposals for Levingston Cove on Crystal Lake, work at the City's athletic fields, and trail improvements at the Upper Falls Greenway and Albemarle Park. She noted that the Cultural team had also joined their department and were considering future outdoor performance stages. She thought that their department had a great team of dedicated professionals as well as volunteers to accomplish these goals. Mr. Demorizi also noted that their department had recently completed the Heartbreak Hill Park at the Waban Reservoir and that he would be back before the CPC soon to provide an update on the completion of that project. Commissioner Banks expressed her appreciation for the CPC's support and feedback.

Approval of Changes to the Golda Meir House and Haywood House Funding Terms

Ms. Kritzer explained that the applicants for both the Golda Meir House and Haywood House affordable housing projects had requested that their CPA funding be considered as loans rather than grants to meet the requirements of the other funding going into the project. Ms. Datta explained that many affordable housing projects used the same tools to put together their project funding and that this was most likely due to the Low Income Housing Tax Credits that were going into the project. She

explained how changing the CPA funding to a loan benefited these projects. Members agreed that in the future this issue should be clarified when housing proposals are submitted. Ms. Weber noted that housing projects had made a big switch in recent years and that many traditional grants were now becoming project loans. Members agreed that they had no issues with staff addressing these questions administratively in the future.

Continue Discussion on Guideline Changes

Further discussion on the CPC's guidelines was continued to a future meeting.

Review of Finance Reports

Ms. Kritzer reviewed the updated financial information and noted the changes in the fund balances since the previous meeting.

Approval of Minutes

As there were no minutes to approve at this time, this item was continued to the April meeting.

Other Business

Ms. Kritzer updated members on the status of the Grace Tower Restoration project. The City's Comptroller had raised an issue with authorizing the FY22 funding before the funds were available on July 1. As a result, the Mayor had vetoed the Council Order, which would now go back to City Council to be revised to include only the funds currently available for use. To address the FY22 funding, the CPC will need to send a new recommendation to City Council in July for the remaining funding.

Mr. Armstrong announced that he was ready to step down as chair of the CPC when his term ends in June. Mr. Brody thanked Mr. Armstrong for staying on as chair for an additional year. It was noted that the Vice-Chair usually moved up to Chair but that this was not a requirement, and other members were asked if they were interested in serving as chair. Ms. Weber asked if it was tradition that the Chair and Vice-Chair change each year. Mr. Brody answered that officers had occasionally served for two years but not for any longer than that.

Mr. Brody stated that he had checked in with President Albright on the Grace Tower situation as he had previously written to her about the use of CPA funding on religious properties. He noted that they had discussed the CPA Ordinance's requirement that the CPC meet annually with the City Council and thought that this should be scheduled. Ms. Kritzer stated that she would reach out to the Clerk's office to see about setting a date in the near future.

Mr. Maloney moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Lunin seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 P.M.