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Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

April 13, 2021

The virtual meeting was held online on Tuesday, April 13, 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, and Judy Weber. Committee member Martin Smargiassi was not present at this meeting. 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.

Gath Memorial Renovation Project Public Hearing

Parks and Recreation Commissioner Nicole Banks, Open Space Coordinator Luis Perez Demorizi, and Aquatics Director Sean Nickerson were present for this project. Commissioner Banks noted that they had come to the CPC in March with the pre-proposal for this project and to discuss other future Parks and Recreation projects. She introduced her project team and noted that Public Buildings Commissioner Joshua Morse and Project Manager Rafik Ayoub Public Buildings was also present as the Public Buildings Department was a co-applicant on the project.

Commissioner Banks explained that the CPA proposal requests \$60,000 in CPA Recreation funds to complete a full assessment of the Gath Memorial Pool facility. Mr. Demorizi next gave a presentation on the existing facility and proposed project. He explained that Gath Pool has served Newton's 85,000 for sixty years now. The site hosted the summer suburban swim league and was used by the Bluefish swim team. He noted that both the surface and systems were past their useful life and that the facility has had issues with leaks and that the deck and grading created issues for accessibility. The facility is located at the center of Albemarle Park and Mr. Demorizi presented a map to explain how tightly the site was surrounded by much needed playing fields. Over the years, the City has patched and repaired both the aging pool deck and shell. Mr. Demorizi showed the dedication plaque on the front of the building and photos of the newer and original systems and equipment, noting the deterioration visible in the photos.

Mr. Demorizi explained that the facility needed new equipment and decks and reviewed what had been done in the past, adding new wading pool features and shade equipment, and what was currently needed. They had not been able to pinpoint the source of the leaks, although the expansion joints in the shell and the pool gutters were considered to be likely sources. At present, the

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pool loses 18,000 gallons of water each day and because it was constantly being refilled, the water never warmed up.

Mr. Demorizi stated that they had decided after the last discussion to ask the consultants to also consider the cost of new construction as part of the proposed feasibility study. He expected the study to take three to four months to complete, with another six to eight months to complete design work. He reviewed the project phases and noted how the goals had been revised based on the March discussion. Mr. Demorizi ended by noting the project's supporters.

Mr. Armstrong noted that this was considered to be a restoration project. He thought that if the pool gutters needed to be removed as part of the repair work, that it would be wise to consider what other larger changes might be useful for the site. Ms. Weber appreciated that the applicants had integrated the comments from the last meeting by including the timeline and additional project options. Mr. Maloney noted that the study would begin in August and wondered if the project could begin sooner. Mr. Demorizi stated that he hoped that they would be able to start in late August or early Fall, explaining that they could not begin the procurement process until the project funding had been secured. The proposed timeline was conservative and if possible, they would like to start the study sooner. Mr. Armstrong stated that he understood that the pool was well used and had a very confined site plan. He asked if there were any constraints that would prohibit expanding the facility. Mr. Demorizi noted that there were slopes on either side of the facility and a retaining wall on the third side. He stated that it would be expensive to expand the site when taking these elements into account. He added that there was also a need for playing field space and that they were trying not to take away from the existing field space. Mr. Dunker noted that the New Cal facility had previously been suggested for this site and that the neighborhood had been against it.

Discussion was opened to the public at this time. Elana November, 3 Briar Lane, Newtonville, shared that there was a petition in progress urging the City not just to consider fixing what was broken at the pool but to expand the facility to be all that it could and should be for the community. This petition had stated with her neighbors and now had 212 signers asking that the study go beyond the existing facility. She stated that she would like to see the City look at what this site could be, including more options and communal space. Suggested changes included not having to walk through the locker room, expanding the time and season of the facility, etc. She stated that she would like to see the Gath Pool become a community hub and that this was a create opportunity for making changes. She noted that the petition had only been out for a week and anticipated that their response was just the tip of the iceberg. Mr. Armstrong stated that he thought the project was trying to supply as much as possible within the limited space available.

Jacqueline Freeman stated that she had created the Friends of Albemarle Park with Cedar Pruitt. She stated that Gath Pool was a huge part of her life and part of the fabric of the City. She felt that they should do anything that they could to support completing this project. Cedar Pruitt spoke next, stating that she was a daily user of Gath Pool and felt this was a matter of equity and that the facility was part of the community. She had noticed the gap in the community last year when the pool was closed and explained how the Friends group had formed quickly as there is a lot of enthusiasm in the community for Gath Pool. Councilor Malakie also spoke in support of the study and agreed that she would like to see it become more expansive. She stated that she would like the facility to have an expanded season and thought that this was a great project for CPA funding. Mr. Dunker agreed.

Mr. Armstrong closed the public hearing at this time.

Commissioner Morse stated that the scope of the study was the main concern. The study will look at the cost and requirements for a new pool, zero entry area, and adding lap lanes. He added that he thought it should also look at the locker rooms and was sympathetic to those who signed the petition for a new facility. He thought that this was a great chance to do more for the next generation of pool users. Mr. Demorizi noted that the City had recently put money into restoring and fixing the locker rooms. Commissioner Morse agreed that a good amount of money had gone into the building but that they would also look at security, accessibility, and code improvements with this study. He stated that the building had good bones and already had enough square footage for any new equipment. He thought that it was adequate for the programs needs but that they could look at the locker room setup and see if there were possible improvements that could be made. He noted that the building was important but not the main focus, as visitors come to the site for the pool.

Mr. Demorizi noted that this was not to say that they would not consider some of the things raised in the petition, noting that this was an opportunity to consider new options and alternatives. Commissioner Morse stated that the purpose of the feasibility study was to refine and define the scope of the project. He thought that some things would happen organically through the process, which would focus on the pool but would also naturally extend to the building. He added that there would also be opportunities throughout the process for the public to have input into the study and proposed designs.

Commissioner Banks stated that the focus of the study would be on the pool, deck and kiddie pool needs as there was an understanding that these elements needed to be addressed asap. The team also realized that accessibility was a big piece. Commissioner Banks thanked the petitioners for their comments and stated that these would be considered as well either through the study or by the internal team working on the project. She also noted that there would be lots of opportunities for continued public input.

Ms. Molinsky asked about the process moving forward. Mr. Demorizi stated that the project would go through a design review committee and that an RFP which included some flexibility as to the extent of the project was being drafted. Commissioner Morse explained that if the CPC recommended funding, then the project would go to the City Council for review and if approved, an RFP would be drafted. The project would also have to be reviewed by the state. The process was reviewed and it was noted that the draft study would go through a public review process with the community before it was finalized. Commissioner Morse stated that they would work with the Friends group and Parks and Recreation to publicize the process and would also use existing list serves and the Mayor's emails. He noted that they did not want to host meetings before they were ready, though, and would wait until there was something to show the community. Commissioner Banks also noted their community outreach efforts and encouraged the public to take part in the grassroots efforts to preserve the pool.

Councilor Malakie asked if there was any possibility that the consultants could see the site while it was still in use. Mr. Demorizi agreed that that would enrich the study and thought that it might be possible if everything moved smoothly through the procurement process. He added that they hoped to get several options for accessibility and usage for the City to consider and discuss.

Ms. Lunin moved to accept the proposal and recommend the Gath Memorial Pool Improvement Project for full funding as requested. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion which was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Waban Hill Reservoir Project

Open Space Coordinator Luis Perez Demorizi presented the final report on the Waban Hill Reservoir Project, which is now known as the Heartbreak Hill Park @ Waban Hill. Mr. Demorizi gave a PowerPoint presentation outlining the project and its results. Phase I of the work on the park had been completed in Fall 2020. The park encompasses the former Waban Hill Reservoir and consists of 45% open water, 10% walking path, and 15% steeply sloped hillside. He noted that this was a very small area for recreation.

Mr. Demorizi explained that the City had purchased the reservoir with CPA funding. The original granite steps leading up to the top of the reservoir did not meet code and the gatehouse was in bad condition. The project had reused 99% of the stone on the site to create seating and play areas, replacing the former steps with new code compliant concrete staircases. The project had also installed fencing around the open water and a stabilized stone dust pathway with curbing to delineate the edges of the path. They were also able to create a new accessible entry to the pathway by installing a flush entry from Manet Road which included a walking aisle to the trail.

One of the challenges of the project was the construction budget. During Fall 2019, the project had to be rebid multiple times before they received a workable price. Mr. Demorizi reviewed the construction photos of the site and explained the unusual situation of working at the top of an historic dam. The contractor was able to continue working through the Winter and Spring of 2020 due to the weather and the project was substantially complete by Summer 2020. Mr. Demorizi noted that they had etched the name of the park into the reclaimed granite and that they had gone ahead and opened the park when it was substantially complete due to the neighborhoods eagerness to put it to use. Mr. Demorizi reviewed issues during the project including unknown buried structures and utility lines, toad migration, and the constant issues caused by geese who laid their eggs in the work area.

Mr. Demorizi showed the final design for the project and noted some of the aesthetic and functional decisions which had been made with the reused granite and that the finished track measured a quarter mile. The estimated project costs had been lower than the initial bids due to construction constraints with the dam and dam safety requirements. Because of the limited access to the work area, they had had to find contractors willing to do work with small equipment and by hand. The total project had cost \$368,500 which was \$40,000 over the construction estimates. The cost of the land purchase and miscellaneous improvements at that time was \$531,532 and the City's staff costs had amounted to a 7% match to the CPA funding. All of the CPA funding was used in the project.

Mr. Armstrong asked if this was still part of the municipal water system. Mr. Demorizi answered no, explaining that the water now in the reservoir was just standing rainwater. The City was allowed to have up to 11 feet of water in the reservoir but no more based on the dam safety requirements. He noted that the Dept. of Public Works had installed a drain gate to control the water level and that the water would be used to irrigate the surrounding site.

Ms. Weber asked if the project had really taken seven years to complete. Mr. Demorizi answered yes, that they project had begun in FY15 with the land purchase, followed by the completion of the Master Plan for the site and the public review process. The construction documentation was completed in 2018 and it took about a year after it was completed to find a contractor as the project had had to be bid out four times. Mr. Armstrong asked if the City had ever considered dismantling the dam. Mr. Demorizi answered that the City had considered filling in the dam but was advised against it due to issues with the dam's engineering and the cost of that project. Mr. Armstrong thought that it was interesting project and wondered why completely dismantling the dam was not considered. He noted that none of the current CPC members had been on the Committee when the project was originally approved. Mr. Dunker did remember that the site had been discussed for use as a park for wider use. Mr. Demorizi explained some of the challenges of the site, including clearing out the reservoir as a lot of litter had accumulated there over time. The project had included assessing how to clear the reservoir and remove vegetation. He added that the end result of the project was a park that was already well used.

Ms. Datta thought that this was a creative way to reuse a challenging site. Ms. Weber thought that it would be curious to see if the City ever decided to drain and use the reservoir space. Commissioner Banks noted the benefits of the accessibility improvements at the site and how they had created a nice, flat surface to provide access to a different type of space. Mr. Demorizi added that DPW was also planning to install sidewalks and curb cuts on the streets surrounding the reservoir to make the plaza more accessible. The far corner of the park was also noted to be a popular sledding hill for the neighborhood. Mr. Armstrong thought that this was a great project, noting that it adapted existing infrastructure for current uses.

Ms. Lunin moved to accept the final report and consider the project complete. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion with passed by unanimous roll call vote.

OTHER BUSINESS

Review and Approval of FY22 Program Budget

Ms. Kritzer presented the FY22 budget for the CPA program, noting that it was based on a conservative estimate of 20% matching funds from the State CPA Trust fund. She reviewed the administrative funding proposed for this year and the differences in spending between the proposed budget and the CPA program's FY21 budget. Ms. Weber moved to approve the budget as drafted. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote.

Review of Current Finances

Mr. Brody explained that he had worked with staff to create a new "At a Glance" document to provide up to date information on the CPA program which would replace the existing "Current Finances" document used by the Committee. He reviewed the different spreadsheets included in the document and their purposes. He explained that the green tabs in the document were sheets that were meant to be shared and could be converted into pdfs for the public, and that the other tabs included the background information for those tabs. Members reviewed the format of the document

and the information collected. Mr. Brody stated that he planned to make a few more adjustments to the document and would send out copies for members to review following the meeting.

Ms. Molinsky left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Kritzer next presented the updated Cumulative Report for the CPC Program. Ms. Kritzer briefly reviewed the document with members and was asked to send it out to members for review following the meeting. Mr. Brody explained that the report could be used when the CPC met with the City Council as a way to explain the program's spending percentages over time.

Ms. Weber suggested that the CPC try to put together projections for CPA spending over the next few years. Several members noted a concern with how the CPC picked projects without necessarily knowing what other options were out there to be considered. Ms. Datta asked if there was a way to show the bond investment at Webster Woods more clearly. She was concerned that Open Space looked underrepresented because the bonding was broken up over thirty years rather than shown as a single vote. Members discussed how this could be addressed in the discussion and presentation. Ms. Lunin noted that Webster Woods had been presented to the CPC as the last big open parcel available and that there was really nothing else like it left in Newton. Members agreed that they would like to consider how to better reflect the bond spending and its impact on the CPA fund. Ms. Weber wondered if the CPC needed to find better ways to advocate for projects to keep the percentages as proposed. For this reason, she thought that the CPC should be flexible in its funding. While the percentages might not be reached in an individual year, she thought that the important focus should be on how the CPC worked to achieve those percentages over time. Ms. Datta suggested that Mr. Brody's numbers should also be converted into graphs to provide a visual way to communicate the information in addition to the numbers. Members also discussed specific changes to the presentation slides.

Approval of February 9, February 25, and March 9 Minutes

Members had reviewed and submitted revisions to the three sets of minutes prior to the meeting. Mr. Armstrong moved to approve the February 9, February 25, and March 9 minutes as revised. Ms. Datta seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote.

Mr. Maloney moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Lunin seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 P.M.