



Ruthanne Fuller,
Mayor

Barney S. Heath
Director

Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

May 11, 2021

The virtual meeting was held online on Tuesday, May 11, 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.

Pre-Proposal Review of Levingston Cove Improvements Project

Open Space Coordinator Luis Perez Demorizi presented the pre-proposal for CPA funding of the proposed improvements project at Levingston Cove on Crystal Lake. Mr. Demorizi presented a PowerPoint presentation on the project, explaining that this was a small site with a lot of activity. The City had already completed an initial study and plan for the site. Mr. Demorizi reviewed the proposed project schedule, stating that they hoped to have the full proposal ready for the CPC's review in June. The project's permitting with the State and Conservation Commission was anticipated to take about 9 months and they hoped to be able to break ground on the project in Fall 2022. Mr. Demorizi stated that Crystal Lake was Newton's only Great Pond and was annually stocked with Rainbow Trout. Levingston Cove was one of three public access points to the Lake and Mr. Demorizi pointed out the other ones on an aerial view of the Lake. He noted that the topography at this location could be steep and that there was significant erosion in the area at both the beach and fishing wall.

Mr. Demorizi next reviewed the proposed improvements to the site, which will include an accessible walkway and paths, railings, and a cantilevered path/deck which would extend out over the pond for both fishing and viewing. The upper walkway could be used by those just walking by and would include retaining walls to address the grade and erosion issues and provide seating. This area provides access to the Pond and they wanted to maintain a water access but also needed to stabilize the landscape. Mr. Demorizi explained that they planned to add stones and river rocks to prevent erosion and create seating areas along the beach. To the south, the project would add benches and low shoreline vegetation, code compliant stairs, and bike racks. The project was designed to funnel people towards the access points on the site, and guardrails would also be added to help with that function. Mr. Demorizi also reviewed the stormwater flow and planting areas, noted that the upper slopes and banks would have more plantings to stabilize them. Mr. Demorizi also noted that there would be opportunities in the project for adopt-a-space gardens as well.

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Reviewing the existing site, Mr. Demorizi noted that the existing concrete retaining wall along the shore was 90 years old. The cantilevered deck would extend past it on either side, providing accessibility and easing the slope in that area. The design of the new deck was reviewed and noted to be anchored in front of the wall using micro piles and light weight fill to minimize the weight against the existing retaining wall. They also planned to plant new vegetation on the slope above the deck to control erosion. Mr. Demorizi explained that the existing shoreline was badly eroded and the hillside washes into Crystal Lake with each rainstorm.

At the existing beach access, the City proposed to install a new at-grade deck for accessibility. The area would still include access into the water with crushed stone and stepping stones installed at the beach to prevent further erosion. Mr. Demorizi presented a section of the area to show how the project steps down to grade in this area. The south lawn would remain mostly untouched, but a rain garden was proposed here to control runoff. The remainder of the shoreline would have a few plantings added but would otherwise remain untouched.

Mr. Demorizi shared samples of the materials under consideration for this project, explaining that they wanted to ensure whatever was used here would be long lasting and easy to maintain. The new pathways would be a mix of concrete for accessibility and stonedust for a more natural appearance. Views of the seating wall were also shown along with the plants under consideration in this area. It was noted that as of April 30, the City had received the 60% Constriction Documents and Specifications, and that the 90% documents were anticipated to be ready by mid-late June.

Parks, Recreation and Culture Commissioner Nicole Banks was also present for this discussion. Mr. Armstrong asked how this project played into the department's overall project plans. Commissioner Banks answered that the Department was doing well in putting together its list of future projects and explained Levingston Coves importance. She explained their project review process and that they next anticipated coming back to the CPC for a playing fields project. She added that they wanted to stay focused on moving these projects which were already in development towards completion. Mr. Armstrong noted that Parks and Rec had a number of projects in progress and asked who would be managing this one. Ms. Banks answered that Weston and Sampson had previously overseen the design team for the project and would continue to work with Mr. Demorizi, who would be managing the project. She thought that a key element in managing the project would be to minimize the procurement process and that they were looking to work with in-house landscape architects and engineers to cut back on the time needed for procurement. They also anticipated that they would have Department interns to assist in the project. Commissioner Banks added that she was conscious of the CPC's concerns with project management and would continue to look carefully at this issue.

Mr. Armstrong asked what jurisdictions had review over work along the waterfront. Mr. Demorizi explained that the project team has been looking into this issue. Because there was no digging in the water, the project did not need to be reviewed by the Army Corp of Engineers, but it would require state and Newton Conservation Commission approval. He noted that using the cantilevered deck minimized the permitting process but that this did come at a premium.

Ms. Weber noted that several of the letters of support had raised concerns about limited access to the water. Mr. Demorizi stated that they were conscious of this concern and were working with the project engineers to find a creative way to balance continued water access with the best practices

necessary to preserve the lake. Ms. Weber asked whether there were questions as to whether and how the lake should be used. Mr. Armstrong asked if the Levingston Cove area had deteriorated because of how it was used or water erosion. Mr. Demorizi answered that both had caused damage to the site. Mr. Armstrong asked how this would be controlled in the future. Mr. Demorizi explained that they were proposing to control how the site was accessed as when people walked through the landscape, the ground was trampled and compacted which made erosion easier when it rained. The City was working closely with the design team to deal with this issue by guiding people to pathways on the site and installing new vegetation to slow down water and erosion.

Mr. Armstrong asked if the at-grade deck could be used for swimming access. Mr. Demorizi answered that it could provide access and that this seemed to be the best approach so far for both accessibility and water access. It was also noted that Cronin Cove had a dock with additional water access. Mr. Dunker noted that whether swimming should be prohibited was a constant debate here. Ms. Weber noted that the proposed plantings seemed to discourage rather than encourage swimming here. Both Mr. Dunker and Mr. Demorizi agreed that they would be maintaining the existing 40' wide beach access. Mr. Demorizi showed photos of the existing site and explained how it would be altered. Mr. Dunker also noted that there were more accessible locations to the south towards the Crystal Lake Bath House, where there was a significant open area with available access to the lake. Mr. Armstrong asked if the proposal would try to organize rather than eliminate access and Mr. Demorizi answered yes.

Ms. Molinsky asked how close the project was to construction. She noted that the project had some great features and was concerned that they would not all survive the planning and permitting process. Mr. Demorizi stated that they were looking to keep as much of the current plan as possible, noting that there would be more options for public comment before the 90% design was complete, and that the planting and public access design was still evolving. Mr. Dunker noted that this plan had been approved several years ago and that this would not be the first public process for this site. Mr. Demorizi agreed but noted that this would be the first time that the Conservation Commission had reviewed the plan and that they would be concerned with the treatment of the pond and surrounding banks. For example, they knew that Conservation would not approve the use of sand here and so had not included it in the beach design as they were trying to minimize any hiccups in the process. Commissioner Banks added that the project had had a public meeting several months ago and that representatives from the Crystal Lake Conservancy and other neighborhood groups had sent letters in support of the project.

Ms. Lunin liked the native plants chosen for the project and that the project would not be losing many trees. Mr. Demorizi agreed, noting that one tree would be coming out near the water but that another one would be planted elsewhere. Ms. Lunin moved to invite the applicants to submit a full proposal for the Levingston Cove Improvements Project as detailed in the pre-proposal. Mr. Dunker seconded the motion which passed by unanimous roll call vote.

It was noted that this project had been submitted as a Recreation project but that there were elements that could be considered Open Space as well. Members agreed to consider the funding category further after the full proposal was submitted.

Pre-Proposal Review of the Nonantum Village Place Senior Housing Preservation Project

Ms. Weber noted that she is on the board of the Newton Housing Authority which had made contributions to this project when it was constructed. She did not believe that she had a conflict but wanted to make this association clear in case anyone thought she should recuse herself. No one had any concerns and Ms. Weber continued to take part in this discussion.

Marcia Hannon, Senior Project Manager for CASCAP, a local non-profit affordable housing organization, was present to explain their pre-proposal for funding to restore Nonantum Village Place, a 100% affordable senior housing facility. Ms. Hannon explained that CASCAP was invited to work in Newton because of its experience with HUD's 202 program. The project was built in the early 2000s using CPA, CDBG, and Newton inclusionary zoning funds. The property has 35 units including seven handicap accessible units and one unit for a residential manager. Their residents are in their 60s to 80s with annual incomes between \$9,000 – \$21,000. She noted that residents regularly hold common area events and teach art classes to the community, have welcomed formerly homeless residents to the building, and include several who are frail and disabled.

Ms. Hannon next shared photos of the building and explained the project's scope which includes both building envelope rehabilitation and energy conservation. The building has three roof levels, all of which need to be replaced. She explained that water was ponding on and leaking through the roof, which had been repaired but was deteriorated to the point that it needed to be replaced. The proposed new roof would be a white TPO roof and they planned to add additional insulation during the installation. The work on the building would also include replacing damaged wood trim with Hardiplank/composite trim and replacing the 35 individual HVAC units located on the roof. Ms. Hannon shared the proposed budget and explained that the facility had not been able to build up a sufficient reserve to deal with this work. She had received bids for the lower and middle roof, siding, and HVAC at this time. She stated that they appreciated the support they had received from the community, including City Councilors Leary and Greenberg, and multiple area residents.

Mr. Armstrong agreed with using Hardiplank or Azek in place of wood trim as it would last longer. Mr. Dunker asked about the estimates and whether the applicant was worried about increases in construction costs at this time. Ms. Hannon stated that the quotes had all been received in just the last few weeks but agreed that construction prices were becoming an issue. Mr. Brody asked if they had considered installing solar panels on the roof. Ms. Hannon explained that they had considered it in the past but had been stopped by the condition of the existing roof. The currently proposed work would make the building ready for a future solar project. Ms. Weber noted that this is a HUD 202 project and asked if they had considered refinancing. Ms. Hannon explained that the building did not have a mortgage. Ms. Weber wondered if refinancing and tax credits might be considered for future renovation projects. Ms. Hannon explained that they had not considered those options at this time because refinancing for 202 projects was very limited and had only recently become an option for existing projects. She thought that it might be a potential option in the future but was concerned that going that route would require them to cap their rent increases in the future. She explained that they had been trying to work with HUD for some time to raise rents to meet the building's needs.

Ms. Molinsky asked if they had any sense yet as to how much energy this work would save. Ms. Hannon stated that she was working the Massachusetts Low-Income Energy Affordability Network

(LEAN) on this question. They expected a 35% increase in efficiency with the new HVAC systems and were currently modeling a 5,000 – 6,000-watt savings.

Ms. Datta appreciated the overview of the program. In terms of energy savings, she wondered if they had looked into the Mass Save program which was great in looking at resident energy systems. She asked that they also look at the project costs on a per unit basis so that the CPC could better understand if this is a reasonable amount to be investing into the building.

Councilor Leary stated that she was pleased to support this project which served very low income, vulnerable Newton residents. She suggested that Ms. Hannon reach out to the new City Energy Coach and explained that she would like to see more projects take advantage of the City's resources in approaching sustainability. It was also suggested that CASCAP consider changing the building from gas to electricity and other more environmentally sensitive energy options.

Ms. Hannon was asked if they had money in the bank for other future improvements. She answered that the HUD 202 program worked under the theory that rent increases would be able to handle the costs of maintaining the building over time. This did not work in practice, though, and they were forced to consider future rent increases versus debt. She agreed that it would be beneficial to work towards reducing the environmental impact of the building. It was noted that while they had 34 senior units, they only had 12 parking spaces as not every resident had a car. Instead, residents relied on local transportation services when necessary. Mr. Armstrong asked if the building would have any insulation upgrades. Ms. Hannon noted that they would go from an R30 to R50 in roof insulation. The windows were noted to still be in good condition.

Ms. Datta moved to invite the applicant to submit a full proposal for improvements to the Nonantum Village Place development. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion which passed by unanimous roll call vote.

OTHER BUSINESS

Review of Current Finances

Ms. Kritzer noted the changes in current finances since the last meeting. Ms. Weber stated that she did not feel well informed about the financial side of the CPA programs. She found it hard to decide whether it made sense to fund a project without having a better sense of the CPA fund balance and was concerned with seeing a fuller financial picture. She noted that the project reviews were generally less focused on financial options and was concerned that they could not compare the merits of current proposals to potentially more worthy project in the future.

Members discussed the proposal process and the timing of funding requests over the course of the year. Mr. Brody suggested that the Committee look more closely at finances in the future. Ms. Kritzer offered to include more information on the program's financial status in the Reader's Guides for individual projects.

Approval of April 13 Minutes

Members had reviewed the draft minutes prior to the meeting. Mr. Armstrong moved to approve the April 13 minutes as submitted. Mr. Brody seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote.

Other Business

Mr. Armstrong reminded members that elections would be held at the June meeting. He stated that he had spoken with Ms. Molinsky about serving as Vice Chair and that she had agreed to be nominated.

Mr. Maloney moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 P.M.