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**Community Preservation Committee**  
**Funding Recommendation for the**  
**New Art Center's Church of the Open Word Restoration Project**

**Date:** January 21, 2022  
**From:** Community Preservation Committee  
**To:** The Honorable City Council

**PROJECT GOALS & ELIGIBILITY** This proposal requests \$94,600 in CPA funds, under the category of historic resources, to investigate the condition and current preservation needs of the former Church of the Open Word site, which includes a ca. 1893 Gothic Revival stone church designed by prominent nineteenth century architect Ralph Adams Cram and the adjacent ca. 1886 stone parish house. The New Art Center is looking for a larger and more accessible facility and is currently investigating the feasibility of relocating to this property. In addition to an assessment of the buildings, the project will also develop plans to restore the spaces and convert them into performance and exhibition space, classrooms, offices, and studio space.

This project is eligible for CPA funding under historic resources as the property at 19 Highland Avenue is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Newtonville National Register Historic District.

**RECOMMENDED FUNDING** At its monthly meeting on Tuesday, January 11, 2022, the Community Preservation Committee unanimously recommended, with a vote of 9 to 0, that \$94,600 in Community Preservation Act funding be appropriated, with \$74,978.29 to come from the FY22 Unrestricted Funds and the remaining \$19,621.71 to come from the FY22 Historic Resource Reserve Fund, to the control of the Planning & Development Department for a grant to the New Art Center to complete the plans and studies necessary to move forward with the restoration of the former Church of the Open Word located at 19 Highland Avenue.

<b>Proposed CPA Funding Accounts for the Newton Art Center's Church of the Open Word Restoration</b>			
<b>Account Name</b>	<b>Account Number</b>	<b>Amount Currently Available in Account</b>	<b>Proposed Amount for New Art Center's Restoration Project</b>
<b>FY22 Unrestricted Funds</b>	<b>#58R10498-579000</b>	<b>\$2,537,003</b>	<b>\$74,978.29</b>
<b>FY22 Historic Resource Reserve Funds</b>	<b>#58B10498-57900B</b>	<b>\$37,122</b>	<b>\$19,621.71</b>
<b>Total Project Funds</b>			<b>\$94,600</b>

[www.newtonma.gov/cpa](http://www.newtonma.gov/cpa)

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### **SPECIAL ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE CPC**

**Community Need:** The CPC noted that the project will meet several goals of the City’s Comprehensive Plan by adapting an existing historic structure into a cultural facility that will create a new cultural attractive which will bring people into Newtonville’s existing village center and utilize its easy access to existing public transportation, facilities and infrastructure. The project also meets the historic resource preservation and sustainability goals of Newton and improves the existing streetscape by bringing a vital community resource to a now vacant site. Lastly, the proposed designs to be created as a result of this funding will incorporate environmental and energy improvements into the new design to meet the City’s energy and climate goals.

**Project Budget:** The recommended CPA funding represents 50% of the project budget. The Applicant proposes to match these funds with an equal amount of funding to come from the organization’s CARES Act Tax Credit Savings. It was noted during the CPC’s project review that in addition to the work of a consultant to address the physical restoration and preservation of the existing buildings, the project’s scope of work will consider the New Art Center’s programmatic and development needs as an organization. While the Committee recognizes that this is an important step in planning to relocate their facility, this organizational work is not eligible for CPA funding. The CPA fundable portion of the project is estimated at \$106,100 and includes the cost of the Architect for the Conceptual Design, Property Survey, Building Existing Conditions Survey, Geotech/Abatement Survey, Miscellaneous Engineering, Construction Cost Estimate, and 50% of the Project Contingency costs.

**Historic Significance:** Both the ca. 1886 parish house and ca. 1893 Gothic Revival stone church building are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Newtonville Historic District. The historic resource inventory form for the property was updated in 2014 (available [here](#)) and includes both information on the history of the site as well as photos of the interior and exterior of the building. The architectural firm of Cram & Ferguson Architects LLC, the successors of Cram and Wentworth who designed the original church building, also completed a detailed assessment of building’s physical condition at that time. That document is also available on the project website [here](#). Until an updated assessment is completed on the current condition of the building and its restoration needs, it is not possible to address the treatment options for the building. Should the Applicants request additional CPA funding in the future, the proposed work will be required to meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Restoration.

### **Sponsor Finances, Qualifications, and Institutional Support**

The New Art Center has operated from their existing facility for over forty years and has a long history of working with the City on cultural activities and projects. The organization has completed similar projects at their existing facility and has included detailed financial information on the New Art Center’s operations and programs with their proposal materials.

The Newton Historical Commission voted to unanimously support this project and has issued a letter of support. The project has also received numerous letters of support from the community including residents, other cultural facilities and surrounding property owners. These letters are attached for review.

### **Site Control**

The New Art Center has entered into an agreement with the owners of the property (Massachusetts New Union Church) to spend the next twelve months researching the development potential of the property before moving forward with purchasing the site. The Mass. New Union Church has submitted a letter of support for the proposal which is available [here](#).

**Prior CPA Funded Work:**

The New Art Center received CPA funding in 2015 to complete an assessment of their existing facility at 61 Washington Park. That funding was used to develop plans to update and improve accessibility which ultimately led the Center to decide that their current facility could not meet the growing needs of their organization.

**ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS** *(funding conditions)*

1. CPA Funding will be used to hire consultants to complete the work necessary to develop plans and designs for the preservation of the existing historic structures and their conversion into fully accessible exhibit, studio, office and classroom spaces.
2. The New Art Center will provide periodic reports on the status of the project to CPC staff over the course of their work.
3. If at any time prior to the completion of this project the New Art Center decides that it will not pursue the purchase of the site, the CPC will be notified immediately and the project considered to be canceled.
4. All studies, plans and designs completed as part of this project must be submitted to the CPC for its files as part of the required final report. These materials will be made available to the public and to any future property owner for use in preserving the building if the New Art Center decides for any reason not to move forward with the project.
5. All recommended CPA funds should be appropriated by the City Council within 6 months and the project should begin within 1 year of the date of any CPC recommendation. If either deadline cannot be met, the New Art Center may submit a written request for an extension from the CPC, which the CPC may grant at its discretion.
6. The release of CPA funds should be governed by a grant agreement that includes but is not limited to the usual conditions for the phased release of CPA funds for historic resource projects, including a final report to be presented to the CPC at the close of the project.
7. Any CPA funds appropriated but not used for the purposes stated herein should be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.

**KEY OUTCOMES**

The Community Preservation Committee anticipates that the project will complete a full assessment of the physical condition of the existing structures that will be used to develop plans for their preservation and rehabilitation as a new community arts center. This is considered to be only the first phase of the project, and it is anticipated that the New Art Center will likely return in the future for additional funding to complete the renovations and new construction.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- Proposal and selected attachments submitted to the CPC for their January 11, 2022 review
- All letters of support received for the project during the review process

Additional information not attached to this recommendation, including petitions and letters of support, are available on the CPC’s website at:

<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/planning/community-preservation-program/proposals-projects/new-art-center-church-of-the-open-word-restoration>