



Ruthanne Fuller,  
Mayor

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Director

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**Community Preservation Committee**

**APPROVED MINUTES**

**January 11, 2022**

The virtual meeting was held online on Tuesday, January 11, 2022, 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 Dan Brody opened the Community Preservation Committee's public meeting at 7:00 P.M. and introduced the CPC members present at this time.

**Public Hearing on Proposal for the Newton Architectural Survey, 1940-1972**

Chief Preservation Planner Valerie Birmingham presented the City's proposal for CPA historic resource funding of the FY22 Newton Architectural Survey. She explained that the City has been invited to submit an application for the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) Survey and Planning Grant program to identify and plan for the preservation of the City's resources. The total of the project is \$35,000, with half the project funding, \$17,500, requested from CPA funds. Ms. Birmingham explained that that project will look at structures built between 1940 and 1972 and would be managed by Ms. Birmingham and the City's Senior Preservation Planner Barbara Kurze, both of whom have experience with this grant program. She explained that during recent discussions on revising the Demolition Delay Ordinance questions had been raised about the significance of structures built between 50 and 75 years ago. They planned to use the previous studies completed in the early 2000s as a starting point for their review work but had expanded the review period to include everything built between 1940 and 1972. Ms. Birmingham noted that the Demolition Delay discussion had led to the realization that this period has been vastly under surveyed. There were approximately 3,200 buildings that have yet to be reviewed constructed during this period and Ms. Birmingham explained that half of the demolition requests received by the Historical Commission each year were from this period.

Ms. Birmingham explained how the preservation staff would work to narrow the list of properties to be reviewed from the initial 3,200 properties down to the 140 that would be included in this project by starting with the 54 areas recommended for further review in the earlier studies. She noted that 15 of those areas were documented in 2009 and that they planned to use the City's GIS program to create a map of the building's constructed between 1940 and 1972 to narrow down the list to 24 areas that appeared to be cohesive and intact. She added that they were also considering the City's institutional and commercial structures built during this period. Staff would conduct a windshield survey of potential areas and use the Inspectional Services and Historical Commission files to further narrow the list of potential properties. To do this, staff would consider the historical significance of

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the resources, their neighborhood cohesiveness, and known threats to the neighborhood. Ms. Birmingham expected this work to create a list that included a range of neighborhoods Citywide that reflected its diverse building stock.

Ms. Birmingham stated that this background research would be completed by February in time for the submittal of the full grant application. She then reviewed the timeline for the project and the MHC grant requirements and pointed out that they were fortunate to have a project team that was familiar with managing these projects and who had experience working with MHC staff. If all went well, the RFP for the project consultants would be completed over the summer so that they could be in place and ready to start work in the fall. The MHC grant project included four phases which would be completed between Fall 2022 and June 30, 2023.

Ms. Birmingham stated that the benefits of the program were that it would provide a comprehensive understanding of the period and a high level of information on the individual properties included in the work. The project would provide an understanding of the development, social, and cultural patterns in Newton during the mid-twentieth century and would also give staff recommendations for where additional study and possible future designations should be considered. She noted that given the number of properties yet to be surveyed, this could be the first of several phases of future survey work and reiterated how helpful this information was to the City's officials, staff, and the public. It was also noted that the information would be available online.

Councilor Albright thanked the Committee for taking on the full proposal. She thought Ms. Birmingham had given a good summary of the background on the project and had sat on the committee to rewrite the Demolition Delay and Landmark ordinances. She explained that one of the suggestions made during that discussion was to change the demolition delay requirements to only apply to structures built before 1945 and that the main reason that suggestion had not been considered was that there were 3,200 buildings constructed after 1945 that had not been surveyed. She explained that they had felt that they did not know enough about a period that was important for the City and that their committee had wanted to learn more about what was out there and what needed to be preserved.

Mr. Armstrong reiterated the importance of the survey information to the Newton Historical Commission. He explained that the public did not understand the styles of this period, which includes ranches and split level buildings with little or no ornament and thought that it was undervalued. He noted that there were an infinite number of bad interpretations also represented in this period and that it was a time where construction methods were changing. He thought that a survey that codified and reflected the history of this period would be very important to the community.

Mr. Armstrong moved to recommend full funding of the Newton Architectural Survey, 1940-1972, as submitted. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion which was unanimously approved by voice vote. Members noted that it was good to see a proactive project. Mr. Armstrong added that the project would be very helpful to the NHC by providing criteria that will help the Commission narrow down the less important examples of this period.

**Public Hearing on Proposal for the New Art Center/Church of the Open Word Restoration Project**

Executive Director Emily O'Neil stated that she was pleased to present their proposal and that the New Art Center was very excited about this project with the Church of the Open Word to restore their historic structures. She began with an update on the project since their pre-proposal presentation. She explained that they were looking to complete a study to consider the current condition and restoration needs of the existing building as part of their plans to relocate the New Art Center to this location. Their project was now more focused on sustainability and they would be considering the elements mentioned in the Community Preservation Program guidelines as part of this project. She noted that the project would look at how the new development could be more energy efficient by avoiding the use of fossil fuels, installing heat pumps, and exploring passive house design elements for the new additions.

Ms. O'Neil explained that their CPA funding request had increased since the pre-proposal discussion to \$94,600. The revised budget would give them a more realistic look at the design costs for the project, would include increased costs associated with the site survey, and now included an engineering line item and contingency funds. Ms. O'Neil also noted that their timeline had shifted as well. They planned to begin working on the site survey within the week and to do the conditions assessment for the property in February. The needs assessment for their organization was already in progress and they hoped to now have the project completed August rather than June/July as originally proposed. Ms. O'Neil noted that their proposal also included several new letters of support including a clarifying letter from the owners of the property, Council President Albright, and several neighbors of the existing site.

Mr. Maloney asked how the New Art Center would fund the project if they decided to move forward with it. Ms. O'Neil stated that they were working with the consultant on that question now. Their first task was to complete the needs assessment for their organization and if all looked good, to work with the consultant to develop a new business plan and better understand the costs of relocating and expanding their programs. Mr. Maloney asked what would be done with their existing facility. Ms. O'Neil stated that they needed to reengage with the City on that question. Michael Kaufman, the New Art Center's project manager, stated that they were not planning on using their existing site once work was completed at the new location. Ms. O'Neil explained that there were deed restrictions on their existing site which ran to the City and needed to be addressed before any decisions were made.

Ms. Maloney stated that he had lived on Otis Street for 25 years and would love to see the former Church of the Open Word restored and renovated. He worked in real estate development and was trying to better understand the costs of the project and the amount that would be needed to restore those buildings. Mr. Kaufman stated that they expected to have that information by the time they were \$10,000 - \$15,000 into the current project. Mr. Maloney asked if the applicants could speak to where things stood with the purchase price negotiations. Ms. O'Neil stated that they had been very fruitful so far but that there was no set price yet. Their vision for the facility aligned with the owner's vision as they were not inclined to consider options for the site that included demolition and were interested in seeing the property have a public purpose. Mr. Maloney thought that the proposed project was the reverse of how these developments were usually done, as the cost of the site and general restoration expenses were usually known by this stage.

Ms. Weber asked what the New Art Center needed to be able to tell the owners in the next twelve months and asked for anything that they could provide that would help the CPC to better understand the process. Mr. Kaufman noted that the New Art Center was not a real estate company and was beginning by gaining a better understanding of what they wanted to do at the new location first. In the process, they would also be gaining an understanding of the current conditions and what would need to be dealt with as part of a restoration project. Once they understood the costs to convert the site into their new art facility, then they hoped to have a better understanding of what they could spend to buy it.

Ms. Weber asked for more information on the program's marketing consultants. Ms. O'Neil stated that they had hired experts in cultural facility planning, Webb Consulting, who would be working with them to develop a two phase plan for the site. The work would begin with developing and understanding of the organizations needs and programs as part of Phase I. Phase II would include the physical work needed for the site and business planning. Ms. Weber noted that the proposed process was backwards from what was typically done in a traditional real estate project. Ms. O'Neil stated that it had been clear from the beginning that they would not be able to offer the church the highest dollar for the site. Mr. Kaufman agreed and noted that the owner had expressed a strong preference for a buyer that would preserve the existing buildings.

Ms. Molinsky thought that this project could be a win/win for both the relocation of the New Art Center and the preservation of the site but wondered what would happen if the New Art Center decided at any point that they would not be going forward with the project. Mr. Kaufman stated that they expected to know whether or not they would precede long before the project was complete. Mr. Maloney thought that the grant agreement should state that the documents are the property of the Committee and be made available to any possible user. Members agreed that any documents for the preservation of the buildings produced by this project should be available to the public and that this condition should be written into the grant agreement if the funding was approved.

Mr. Smargiassi stated that he was also interested in knowing what would happen to the project if the New Art Center did not move there. He supported going forward with the project but was concerned with the level of uncertainty. Mr. Kaufman noted that they would be completing a structural and property assessment of the existing buildings and that any information that could be useful to other possible owners would be made available to the CPC. Mr. Maloney asked at what point in the project's timeline would they have a good sense of how much they could raise and afford for the building. Ms. O'Neil stated that the idea was that they would not need a capital campaign to buy the property but would have one for its renovations. Mr. Kaufman added that they would have those discussions as late in the project as possible so that they had all of the information they needed to make that decision. He also noted that the negotiations for the purchase of the property were not expected to be a major hurdle but that they first wanted a good sense of the renovation costs.

Mr. Brody asked if they planned to come back for additional CPA funding in the future. Ms. O'Neil stated that yes, they expected to come back for additional funding after they had purchased the building and had hard numbers for the restoration. Ms. Datta asked if they were considering using historic tax credits, assuming that they purchased the building. Ms. O'Neil answered yes, and that they would also planning to request cultural grants and CPA funding and to possibly have some funds from the disposition of their Washington Park building. Ms. Datta asked about the matching funds for this project. Ms. O'Neil explained that they had received Employee Retention Tax Credits and

would have \$140,000 returned to them from the Treasury. The match represented what they had had returned so far and Ms. O'Neil explained that they had not been sure originally how they could allocate those funds, which is why they were not noted on the pre-proposal.

Mr. Dunker echoed the concerns raised by other members about the amount of funding requested for a project with so much uncertainty. Mr. Kaufman stated that this was why a feasibility study was needed as they needed to understand the unknowns about the site before the project could move forward. He added that the CPC had previously funded a similar feasibility study on their current building which had found that the site needed \$7 million in renovations. That study had led the New Art Center to the decision that they could not go forward at the Washington Park site and began their search for a new location. He thought of this CPA funding request as seed money and noted that it would be needed for any project, but that the nature of the New Art Center was that it did not have other sources for those funds.

Mr. Brody thought that this was a reasonable approach to the project. He thought that if they wanted a developer to pay these costs, then they would lose this site as a public resource. Mr. Armstrong agreed and thought that there were benefits to paying for this information. He noted that Councilor Norton had asked about the options for this site in the spring and that there was a lot of enthusiasm in the community for this project. He added that when they did apply for construction funding, they should have good research and information behind the request.

Dewey Nichols, President of the New Art Center's Board of Governors, stated that they wanted to bring value to the community and thought that this building could be an icon of a future cultural district in Newtonville. He reiterated the value of their organization and its programs to the community.

Mr. Maloney stated that buyers usually knew the cost of a site before spending a \$100,000 on it. He stated that he was familiar with the New Art Center and would like to see the existing buildings on Highland Avenue preserved. He agreed that this was a good project that everyone wanted to see succeed and was willing to rely on the New Art Center's confidence for now. The Applicants offered to come back to the CPC with quarterly reports and Mr. Maloney agreed that that would be helpful. Members discussed the details of the potential funding conditions to be included with a recommendation and asked Ms. Kritzer to create a draft for review. It was suggested that no more than 50% of the funding would be released before the applicants decided on whether or not to buy the property. Mr. Kaufman expressed concern with that approach and the logistics of how it would be implemented. Mr. Brody thought that the request was a relatively small amount and preferred to not put any unnecessary strings on the funding. Ms. Molinsky agreed that they wanted to support the project but that they also needed to insure due diligence. She asked if there was a way to fund the feasibility study and have the applicants come back to the CPC at the end of the project once they had more detailed information. Mr. Kaufman reiterated that this was only a feasibility study and that the New Art Center also had a stake in the process as they were funding 50% of the work. Ms. Molinsky asked how much funding was provided for the last feasibility study and Mr. Kaufman stated that it was around \$72,000.

Mr. Maloney moved to recommend full funding of the New Art Center's proposal to complete the feasibility study and plans necessary to restore and renovate the former buildings of the Church of

the Open Word located at 19 Highland Avenue. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote.

Ms. O'Neil stated that she would be happy to set up a tour of the site for any members who would like to see it. Members were asked to contact Ms. Kritzer if they were interested in a future site visit.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Review and Approval of CPC Representative to new Affordable Housing Trust**

Ms. Weber had volunteered prior to the meeting to become the CPC's representative to the new housing trust. Ms. Weber stated that she had volunteered because of her background and because she thought that there was a need to focus on the back end of these projects and their long term use. She felt that she might represent how the CPC would like to think about these projects in conducting reviews for the Trust. Members briefly discussed the new Trust and appointment process before Ms. Datta moved to nominate Ms. Weber as the CPC's representative to the Newton Affordable Housing Trust. Ms. Lunin seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote.

Mr. Brody asked about the timing of the Trust process and Ms. Kritzer explained that they were currently working on putting together the list of potential candidates for the Mayor's appointees. It was anticipated that it would be summer before the new Trust was ready to ask for CPA funding and next fall at the earliest before it would be ready to review applications.

### **Review of Annual Reports**

Ms. Kritzer had sent out drafts of the annual reports for FY19-FY20 and FY21 prior to the meeting and had received several edits. Members had no further comments at this time. Mr. Maloney moved to approve the draft reports as submitted. Ms. Weber seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote.

### **Review of Current Finances**

Ms. Kritzer noted that there were no changes in the At A Glance information since the previous meeting.

Ms. Kritzer then reviewed the Current Project Update and noted the projects which had moved forward over the last month. She also gave a brief update on the West Newton Armory project and stated that they were expected to submit a pre-proposal for the next meeting.

### **Approval of December 14 Minutes**

Ms. Lunin moved to approve the December 14 minutes as submitted. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote.

### **Designate Member for January Minute Review**

Ms. Datta agreed to review the next set of minutes.

**Update on New Logo and Project Signage**

Ms. Kritzer stated that Ms. Weber had emailed a picture of the new CPA funding banner which had been installed at Grace Church and offered to share it with members after the meeting.

**Other**

Ms. Datta asked to have a brief discussion about the proposal funding process for the New Art Center project. She expressed concern that the Committee members had missed an opportunity to request more information about the New Art Center's process and other project details at the pre-proposal stage, which made the discussion and vote for the full proposal more complicated. Ms. Molinsky stated that she was also uncomfortable with the fact that the project was not clearer. Ms. Weber agreed that she loved the idea of the project but missed having more detailed information. Members discussed what questions should be asked at the pre-application stage, what information should be needed for future applications and what additional information should be submitted or reports provided before additional funding is recommended.

Mr. Armstrong moved to adjourn. Ms. Lunin seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 P.M.