

City of Newton



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Community Preservation Committee

APPROVED MINUTES

May 10, 2022

The virtual meeting was held online on Tuesday, May 10, 2022, beginning at 7:00 P.M. Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present included Mark Armstrong, Dan Brody, Byron Dunker, Susan Lunin, Robert Maloney, Jennifer Molinsky, Martin Smargiassi, and Judy Weber. Committee member Eliza Datta was not present for this meeting. 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 Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway Redesign Additional Funding

Project Manager Nicole Freeman, Director of Transportation Planning, presented the new proposal for additional funding of the Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway Redesign project. She explained that the project was moving forward and was on track to go out to bid in April 2023 for construction in FY23. The project would be constructed with \$5.9 million from MassDOT which made it subject to State review and requirements. She explained that this had become an issue at the signal at Ash Street and Commonwealth Avenue, which was regularly used by the Islington Road residents but did not meet State requirements. The signal was located in the design area but according to MassDOT, it would not remain in the project as it did not meet their engineering requirements or standards. The City had worked on other options for the intersection which met the State's requirements over multiple community meetings but residents of the area wanted to see the signal remain in place. Addressing this issue has caused a tremendous amount of extra work and meetings for the consultants.

Ms. Freeman showed two presentations with the different options that had been created for the intersection both with and without the signal. She explained that the default option was to remove the intersection from the project, but that both accessibility and bike advocates were in favor of seeing the signal removed. Ms. Freeman stated that they would like to see this intersection reconstructed if possible, and the City Council had had a split vote on which option to go forward with two weeks before. She was not sure which option would go forward at this time. She stated that a lot of hard work had gone into creating the conceptual and 25% design and that once this decision was made on the intersection, the design would be largely set with the rest of the work to include engineering and technical elements for the project. Because this phase had taken more time and design work than anticipated, they had requested an estimate from the consultants on what

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additional funding would now be needed to complete the 100% design. Ms. Freeman stated that the additional funding requested covered all of that expense and was expected to be the only extra funding requested.

Mr. Dunker asked why the traffic signal was part of a recreation project. Ms. Freeman answered that this is a unique project. She noted that most of Commonwealth Avenue had the roadway only on one side but that this section had it on both sides of the median. The project was intended to remove the roadway from the north side and return it to bicycle and pedestrian use. She reviewed the project area with members and noted the existing conditions and the changes proposed with the new design. She explained how the new design would provide two pedestrian/bicycle lanes and would connect to the overall MassDOT project by extending the pathway west over the Charles River where it would connect with other projects that would provide bicycle lanes to Natick. She added that this work would also connect to other existing pathways along the Charles River.

Mr. Armstrong asked where the extra project costs had come from. Ms. Freeman answered that they had planned to spend \$360,000 to get the project from the 25% design phase to the 100% design phase. They already knew that they had spent more to get to this point in the project than they had planned for and would run out of funding before the project complete. The additional funding requested would allow them to complete the project as originally planned.

Mr. Dunker stated that this project had been presented to the Parks and Recreation Committee and that there was a lot more work going on to complete this project than it might seem. Mr. Armstrong believed that they had already achieved a huge benefit by getting the State funding. He understood that the public was concerned as there are a lot of changes proposed but thought that they were doing a good job of working with everyone. Ms. Molinsky asked about the decision process for the design of the Ash Street signal. Ms. Freedman explained that the City Council was required to approve any projects that changed the road design. This was usually done through the Public Facilities Committee at the 25% design stage. Ms. Molinsky asked if the initial design for the project had been approved without the signal. Ms. Freedman stated that they had had a meeting on the concept design and had heard from Islington Road residents that they wanted to keep the signal. They had included the signal in the 25% design and had thought that it might be allowed by the State since it was already there but MassDOT later stated that they could not fund the intersection with the signal as it did not meet their requirements. Ms. Freedman noted that some of the project's neighbors were now fighting hard to remove that intersection from the project so that the signal could remain in place and showed slides with three potential options for the intersection. Ms. Freedman stated that the first option was to entirely remove the intersection at Ash Street, the second option was to remove the intersection from the project and leave it in its existing condition, and the third option was to make the intersection signal ready but not install it. She explained that MassDOT's concern was that in cases like Ash Street where the light was usually green, there was a higher rate of rear ending accidents and people running the red light because people were not expecting the light to change.

Mr. Brody asked if the additional funding would be adequate no matter which option was chosen. Ms. Freedman answered yes and confirmed that the \$133,002 requested was the amount quoted by the consultants to complete the work. Mr. Smargiassi stated that he was an Auburndale resident and thought that this project would connect areas that were currently separated in a wonderful way. He

supported the use of the first option and liked that the project would connect with the Charles River Bridge and Boathouse. He added that he saw this project as giving a lot back to Newton residents. Ms. Weber also thought that the project sounded great and was the type of project that CPA funding should be used for. She noted that she had not been on the CPC when the funding was initially requested and asked if the City would be back for any construction funding. Ms. Freedman answered no, that MassDOT would take care of all construction costs. Ms. Freedman also noted that this type of project normally took 10 to 20 years to be designed and constructed but that MassDOT had quickly found bike and pedestrian funding for it and had moved it up for construction next year which was very unusual.

There was no public comment at this time and the public hearing was closed. Mr. Smargiassi moved to recommend the additional project funding for the Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway Redesign Project as requested. Ms. Lunin seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote.

OTHER BUSINESS

Review of Updated Logo Design

Mr. Armstrong had drafted four category depictions for the new CPA logo which were shared with Committee members prior to the meeting. Mr. Armstrong explained that he had looked for ideas on the internet for images that were identifiable for the project categories but did not think that they could completely do away with having the descriptive words as well. He had abstracted the proposed designs based on his research.

Ms. Weber stated that she like the proposed designs and had no problem knowing which image was for which category. She thought that the proposed designs would be easy to reproduce and colorize. Mr. Armstrong suggested that the proposed designs be relayed to the Newton North graphic design students to compile into the logo. Ms. Weber asked what the students would be asked to do. Mr. Armstrong thought that they could look at the designs in a new way and make suggestions for the overall design such as whether to use color. It was suggested that the Committee should send the designs in to the students with the explanation that the intent for each category was to keep the logo simple and iconic and see what they come up with. Mr. Brody liked the proposed images and asked to what extent they had been taking from internet designs. Mr. Armstrong explained that he had used the internet for ideas but had drawn and altered all of the proposed images so there were no proprietary issues.

Mr. Brody noted that the new logo should include the CPC and City. Members agreed that the City map and symbols did not need to be included. It was noted that the new logo should have visual symmetry and be eye catching and that the current logo was too heavy to read easily. Ms. Kritzer was asked to send the proposed designs to Newton North with the changes suggested.

Review of Project Review Materials and Spreadsheets

Ms. Kritzer stated that a question had been raised several meetings ago about whether or not to make the document compiled for the W. Newton Armory discussion on previously funded affordable housing projects publicly available on the website. Ms. Weber noted that that document had started with a question about whether the CPC was evaluating large housing projects consistently. She felt

that the information compiled there was valuable and noted that it showed that CPA funding had been used in the past for both new construction and existing unit preservation and wondered if the Committee should consider looking at future projects on a funding per unit basis. She noted that it was not always clear as to how a project should be evaluated in comparison to other opportunities. Mr. Brody thought that the document was a helpful tool and that it would be easier to remember to use the information in the future if it was easily available. Mr. Armstrong noted that the CPC had been able to rely on Ms. Ingerson's institutional knowledge in the past which was no longer available. He thought this document worked to fill in that gap and noted that it could be useful in the future to drive questions on what a proposal needed to prepare to address in the future.

Members agreed that the document should be added to the website for public review. It was also suggested that the Committee develop a simple "dashboard" for project reviews which considered what the most common questions were and what the Committee wanted to have more information on. In addition to finances, information might be necessary on the design, operation, impact, energy use, etc. of the new development, as well as who they were serving. It was suggested that an impact statement explaining how the project might be serving the community would be helpful.

Review of Current Finances

Ms. Kritzer noted the new projects that had been approved and added to the At A Glance report this month. She also briefly reviewed the status of the CPC's ongoing projects and updated members on the status of the new Affordable Housing Trust. The Trust was anticipated to have its members approved by City Council by June 6 and to begin meeting by the end of the month.

Approval of April 12 Minutes

Ms. Kritzer stated that the minutes had been revised after the project packet had been sent out. Members agreed to continue the approval of the April 12 minutes to the June meeting to allow time to review the additional edits.

Designate Member for May Minutes Review

Mr. Armstrong volunteered to review the draft minutes for the May 10 meeting.

Ms. Kritzer updated members on the possibility that in-person meetings might be beginning again over the summer. Members expressed a preference to still have an online option for attending meetings and suggested that staff reach out to the Allen House as a potential future meeting location.

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