

Town of Great Barrington Community Preservation Committee (CPC)

Minutes of October 20, 2015

Great Barrington Fire Station

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 PM by Chair Karen W. Smith.

Members present: Ed Abrahams, Thomas Blauvelt, Jessica Dezieck, Martha Fick, Suzanne Fowle, Kathleen Jackson, William Nappo, Deborah Salem, and Karen W. Smith.

Also present: Town Planner/CPA Administrator Chris Rembold

Members absent: none

Administrative Business

Dezieck moved to approve the minutes of October 15, 2015 as amended, Blauvelt seconded. All were in favor.

Review and Evaluation of FY17 Step 2 Applications for Open Space and Recreation

1. Town of GB Parks Commission, for Memorial Field accessibility and bathrooms planning

Smith turned the Chair over to Dezieck.

Smith explained that there are no public bathrooms in the Town and that secondly, there is an issue of handicapped accessibility to the Memorial Field. This request from the Park and Rec Commission is to examine both issues. Blauvelt asked if these funds are available through normal budget. Smith said no, not at this point. It would have to be put into the budget. Salem asked if the study will look at maintenance. Smith said yes. Fick asked if plans would be the result. Smith said yes. Dezieck asked if the work could be completed if the grant is not for the full \$25,000. Smith said that is the cost figure given to DPW. Fowle asked if the Railroad Street Youth Building is owned by the town. Smith said no. Fowle asked if there are bathrooms in that building. Smith said yes but they are not open at all times and they are not accessible.

2. GB Land Conservancy, for RiverWalk restoration

Rachel Fletcher and Christine Ward were present for the applicant. Fletcher said this proposal is to undertake extraordinary repair work on the Riverwalk, due to unusual weather and climate patterns taking a toll on the downstream section. This area is primarily fill material and is vulnerable to scour and erosion. This 130 foot linear section has emerged as particular concern because it has eroded the bank to within 6 feet of the trail and the trail is in danger. She said they need to install fiber logs to trap sediment which will help stabilize and build up the bank again. The bank would then be fortified with strong rooted plants. She said they have been working on River Walk since 1988. It is a unique trail. It is a National Recreation Trail.

Fletcher said they would be comfortable receiving the funds over three years or on a reimbursable basis. This is a large budget for a small organization. It would be helpful to know the full amount will be granted. Smith asked whether a soft commitment of future funds would be acceptable. Ward said it would be most helpful to know the full amount was committed.

With regards to plans to continue the Riverwalk south, Fletcher said GBLC has been working with land owners to resurrect a vision plan that has been on the books for over 15 years. It is not part of this project. Ward said the Riverwalk would be a model for the trail south, but it is a different, longer term, project.

Fletcher said they are ready to file the necessary permit (an RDA) to the Conservation Commission for this proposed restoration work.

Rembold asked about the possible contribution to RiverWalk from the hotel project. Fletcher said if we get those funds from the project it would fund ongoing stabilization in other areas and would support the annual operating budget. She said this proposed CPA project is different. Ward pointed out that the possible contribution from the hotel is not guaranteed; it's just a proposal at this point.

Nappo asked if this project was an emergency repair. Fletcher said yes.

3. CHP, for creation of trails

Mary Feuer was present for the applicant. She gave an overview of trail route and how it supports the CHP mission. She said that as part of the WIC program CHP helps families get healthier. A walking trail is one of those solutions. CHP would use this trail as a teaching technique. She said it would be open to public. There is parking. There will be a sign there. They will give guided walks when they're open.

Feuer said the value of in-kind services on this project is over \$5,000. They will have BNRC mow the trail for us and we can house their equipment. She said there are federal grants out there through Mass DCR but they must have matching funds to go after the grant. She said that CHP is seeking a full award, but they would be grateful for even a partial award.

Smith asked CHP is putting any money into this. Feuer said no, but a lot of in-kind support. Will Conklin of Greenagers was present and he said that the work will be about 6 days of 9 people or close to 500 hours. He said professional crews cost \$5,000 per week or 60 dollars per hour. He said Greenagers does not even charge their full cost.

Jackson asked about the route. Feuer said it is relatively flat and should be easy for all abilities.

4. Berkshire Natural Resources Council, for acquisition of APR for Windy Hill Farm

Narain Schroeder was present with property owner Dennis Mareb. The Committee did a site visit today.

Schroeder gave a summary. He said the APR will cover approximately 40 acres of the farm. The APR permanently restricts the development of the property, and it goes with the deed so the restriction stays in place. He said BNRC works throughout Berkshire County and assist farmers in these programs. BNRC will not hold the property or restriction in this case; they are assisting Marebs who will own the property. The State holds the restriction.

Schroeder explained the appraisal commissioned by the State. He said the full value is what it is worth today. The after APR value is what it would be worth with the restrictions. The difference between the two is the value of the APR. That is what the state is paying for.

He said the State can only pay up to a certain maximum amount, however. In this case the State can pay only \$585,000. To make up the difference BNRC is seeking CPA funds, they will fundraise, will seek tax credits, and the Marebs will accept less money from the sale.

Schroeder said the public benefit of this project is to (1) preserve local agriculture and agricultural soils; (2) preserve a productive business that contributes to the community and local employment, and (3) preserve a significant scenic gateway of Great Barrington. Smith said this is also a primary view from the top of Monument Mountain.

Schroeder said there would not be continuous open public access to this site. He said it is open of course when the business is open. There are aspects of farm activities that are sometimes not conducive to public access. Mareb said the land is not posted however and it is adjacent to State forest and wildlife management areas.

Schroeder said the Town would be a co-holder of the restriction under the APR and CPA program rules. He said the Town would not have any enforcement duties.

Smith asked what somebody would buy the land for once the APR was in place. Would it be the \$78,000 agricultural value? Schroeder said no, that is just the land value. It would not account for the nursery stock and other improvements to the farm. A possible buyer could offer more, and the state could allow that purchase to proceed, as long as that higher offer was a legitimate offer based on the agricultural uses. Then the State would be ok with it, and not step in to buy it themselves.

Smith asked about types of crops and potential values. Mareb said agriculture is changing and who knows years from now what will be grown there. He said farming is difficult and demands change and flexibility. That is the point of preserving it for agriculture. It allows an owner to do that rather than opting to sell at a high value and get out.

Schroeder said funding this year is important. The project is in the State pipeline to be funded in the fall, so having this CPA commitment is important. All the money is required at the time of closing. Fick asked if the state is ready. Schroeder said yes, the state is fully committed.

Schroeder added that partial CPA funding will jeopardize the deal. It would be a different type of sale. He said they do have other funds pulled in, and this CPA amount is needed to make our budget.

Nappo asked what different type of sale means. Schroeder said that means the APR wouldn't close but then owners might then sell it at full fair market value. Jackson asked what would happen if they dropped out of the APR list. Schroeder said they might accept us in future again but there is no guarantee and no sense how many years it would be.

5. The Trustees of Reservations, to support open space acquisition for a Housatonic River Trail

The Committee did a site visit today.

David Santomenna was present for the applicant. He said this is to support open space acquisition for a river trail in Housatonic. He said this property would link up the whole trail system including the Flag Rock parcel the Trustees own, and also the Village and Flag Rock.

Santomenna said this would be start-up funding for due diligence and planning to seek the acquisition funding in a subsequent year. He said the plan is to have a permanently protected link from the river over Grove Street, to Flag Rock, over to Monument. It would also create open space on river in the village which does not exist today. There is no public access to the river in Housatonic.

Santomenna said this would be meet town Open Space and Economic Development goals. He said they consider it to be both open space and recreation. It is preservation, but it is not just passive activity. It would be more park like.

There was a question at the last meeting about the name of the property and tying it into the history of the area. They might call it the Flag Rock river front park. They could use signs or a kiosk to give people a sense of the history of the site and the manufacturing heritage.

Santomenna said last year's CPA project is underway. He said work being completed on the Hickey Trail at Monument and a firm is under contract to lay out the larger trail network. They have not gone ahead with Grove St trail head planning because this project might be an alternative that addresses some of those neighborhood concerns.

Salem asked about the assessed value. Santomenna said it is just under \$300,000 and they are working with the assumption that the sale will be for a total of 400,000. He said the owner is willing to do 50% bargain sale which would be a 200,000 purchase price. He said they might apply for \$100,000 or more in acquisition next year.

Fick asked about the immediacy of the need this year. Santomenna said at the moment CPA is the only source of funding. He said there are potential private donors to augment that, and the owner is giving us two years to help us plan.

Nappo asked what would happen if there are environmental issues. Santomenna said they know there is an Activity and Use Limitation. If there are more serious issues they negotiate. The appraisal will consider the AUL.

Fowle asked for an overview of the group's mission. Santomenna said The Trustees of Reservations is a statewide land conservation organization that protects places that are defining about our landscape and heritage. Some Trustees properties locally are Monument Mountain, Naumkeag, and Notchview.

Fick asked if this would be paid parking. Santomenna said no we are not doing that at every property. Monument is very busy. Fowle objected to the paid parking question. She said that, as funders, we should not say organizations are not allowed to raise money.

Santomenna said they are fully committed to this project. It is the logical next step to Flag Rock and the natural connection to the Village.

Committee Member Reports: None

Next Meeting:

Tuesday, October 27 historic resources - in-depth reviews and presentations
Thursday, October 29

Citizen's Speak Time: None

Adjourn: Dezieck moved to adjourn, Blauvelt seconded, all in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM.

Materials presented or distributed for this meeting:

- Draft minutes of October 15 meeting
- Step 2 applications from Town, GBLC, CHP, BNRC and The Trustees

Respectfully submitted:

