

**Town of Great Barrington Community Preservation Committee (CPC)**  
Minutes of September 8, 2015  
Great Barrington Fire Station

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

Members present: Ed Abrahams, Thomas Blauvelt, Jessica Dezieck, Suzanne Fowle, Kathleen Jackson, Deborah Salem, and Karen W. Smith. Also present: Town Planner/CPA Administrator Chris Rembold  
Members absent: Martha Fick, William Nappo

**Administrative Business**

Dezieck moved to approve the minutes of August 18, 2015, Salem seconded. All were in favor.

**FY 17 Step 1 Applications**

Smith explained that the meeting tonight is to review the Step 1 applications received since the last meeting and determine if they meet the criteria to be eligible for the CPA. She said three other applicants have already been deemed eligible for Step 2.

**Open Space and Recreation**

*1. Community Health Programs (CHP) for creation of walking trails*

Blauvelt asked if the trails would be free and open for the public. Philip Morrison from CHP said yes. Dezieck was unclear as to whether this was eligible as the creation of open space or the creation of a recreational resource. Morrison said there are no trails now, so this is creating the trails.

Fowle asked if the land was owned by CHP. Morrison said there are three owners: CHP, Mass DCR, and BNRC. Fowle asked if they were all protected open space. Morrison said the DCR and BNRC lands are protected as open space but CHP's is not. Fowle said in that case she agrees they are creating new recreational trails but not permanent open space.

Dezieck moved that the CHP application is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Blauvelt seconded; all were in favor.

*2. Parks Commission for Memorial Field*

Smith explained the Parks Commission is seeking funds to determine how to make the field handicapped accessible and create public bathrooms at the field. Fowle asked whether Smith could vote on this item. Abrahams said yes she can, since she serves on this Committee and on the Parks Commission in the public interest and not her own interest. All agreed.

Smith said this request is just for a feasibility study. Jackson asked where the estimate comes from. Smith said these are engineers' estimates to do the study. Fowle said she hoped the study would include a wide spectrum of options including composting toilets.

Dezieck moved that the Town Parks Commission application is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Blauvelt seconded; all were in favor.

### 3. *BNRC application for Windy Hill Farm APR*

Dennis and Judy Mareb from Windy Hill were present as well as Narain Schroeder from Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC). Smith asked if this was to preserve 40 acres. Schroeder said yes. Smith asked how much money was committed. Schroeder said \$670,000 was committed. He said the State Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) is a state program where the state holds a restriction on the land so it cannot be developed. The funds would be released in fiscal year 17, so they would close on the deal in July, 2016.

Smith asked who valued the property. Schroeder said Land Vest did that working for the state APR program. Smith asked about the owner's contribution? Dennis Mareb said he and his wife are getting older but want to make sure the farm is preserved as a farm when they need to retire. To make this happen the Marebs would accept \$88,000 less than the appraised value so that is the contribution.

Schroeder said APR is for conserving prime agricultural soils. Since there are not any of these in the back wetland areas, we could not get a very large amount from the APR program. So we needed to make up the appraised value with fund raising, the owners' contribution, and CPA. The difference between the APR grant and the actual land value is large.

There was a question about how the acquisition was appraised. Schroeder said it is appraised for the highest and best use by Land Vest for the APR program. The difference between the value as a farm and value of the highest and best use equals the amount that the agricultural restriction costs.

Salem asked about the back portion. Schroeder said the back land totals 30 plus acres. It is near the brook and it is protected by statute so there is no development potential there, and so no restriction would be needed there. Fowle suggested that in the Step 2 application they include maps showing prime agricultural soils, the location of the restriction, and other resources so we can understand better the benefits to the town.

Dezieck moved that the BNRC application is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Salem seconded; all were in favor.

### 4. *Project Native for trails*

David Ellis was present for Project Native. Smith asked where the rest of the money for the project would come from. Ellis said they have other grants and will apply for more. He said these trails are open to the public. Salem asked if there is adequate parking to accommodate users. Ellis said yes. He said they had 3,000 visitors this year. Fowle suggested they include maps in the Step 2 application indicating resource areas and connectivity potential, as well as the invasive species to be removed and how that will be done.

Dezieck moved that the Project Native application is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Salem seconded; all were in favor.

### 5. *The Trustees of Reservations to purchase land for a river walk in Housatonic*

Becky Ferguson was present for TTOR. Smith asked how this was different from last year's CPA project. Ferguson said the Flag Rock work applied for last year was for trail planning on land the Trustees already owned. This is to purchase land near the River on a different parcel, so they can connect trails together eventually and create a walk along the river in Housatonic. She said it is an opportunity that has come up and they could address some of the concerns about parking from last time. It would increase open space in Housatonic, create river access, and link to Flag Rock.

Jackson asked if the river walk existed yet. Ferguson said they would create it. Blauvelt asked how they arrived at the \$200,000 amount. Ferguson said that was through conversations with the land owner. They have not had an appraisal yet but they will. Jackson said they should do that before Step 2.

Salem asked if this was for the same parking as last time. Ferguson said the parking could go here, but not necessarily. Blauvelt asked if there would be a fee for parking. Ferguson said no. Salem asked if they did not get these funds are they still continuing the other planning project. Ferguson said yes.

Fowle said the Step 2 needs to be clearer about which CPA boxes they fit. If it is preservation are you willing to put on a Conservation Restriction? It is creation or acquisition. It might be open space rehabilitation but they need to be clear. Smith said the matrix they turned in is very unclear—somebody scribbled in the boxes. She said they needed to be clear and use the right box.

Dezieck moved that The Trustees of Reservations application is eligible under at least a minimum of one of the CPA areas and invited a Step 2 application. Blauvelt seconded; all were in favor.

*6. Sean Stanton and Tess Diamond to purchase an APR on North Plain Road*

Sean Stanton summarized the proposal. He said they are at same stage as the Marebs, but the only difference is that they are the buyers not the owners. He said APR requires a local match but in Great Barrington that match is only 10%, not 20%. He said the whole property is 82 acres but this is restriction would be for 70 acres. Smith asked what the benefit to the town would be. Stanton said this would preserve of agricultural land, prime soils, so it would never to be developed. Smith asked if they had matching funds. Stanton said the appraised value of the agricultural land is \$850,000. The state and federal government will pay \$765, and we requesting a local 10% match of \$85,000.

Smith asked about the other 12 acres. Stanton said we could carve out one additional building lot and another six acres would be for a small solar installation.

Fowle suggested the Step 2 application provide appropriate maps and plans. She said there is a big difference between the value for the Mareb property versus this one. Stanton said the Windy Hill was appraised at higher than \$20,000 per acre but that is more than the APR can pay. This one is less than \$20,000. The APR can be more and so not as much CPA is requested here.

Jackson said this would be new land for young farmers, and maybe that warrants a different approach for how the Committee views leverage. Smith said that might be a good point. Diamond said they are going to purchase the entire acreage but they cannot disclose their offer, since they are in negotiation. The balance of the money for those extra acres is our contribution.

When Stanton disclosed who the current owners are Dezieck recused herself since there might an appearance of a conflict of interest. Stanton said the official name of his farm is North Plain Farm LLC.

Blauvelt move that the application from North Plain Farm LLC is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Fowle seconded; all were in favor. Dezieck abstained.

Smith asked Rembold to see if the Committee could convene in executive session on this matter if needed. Rembold will check on that.

**Historic Resources**

### *7. Town Historical Commission*

Paul Ivory presented the Commission's plan to update and digitize the town's 30 year-old Inventory of Historic Resources. It would update everything that they do have, and do research on buildings or sites that they have not yet inventoried. He said it's a multiple phase project and this request is for \$15,000 of a \$36,000 first phase. Blauvelt asked who could access the records. Ivory said it is public. Fowle said that in a Step 2 we will want to know why this is not regular town money and why you are applying to CPA for this. She asked why it was not part of the Town budget. Ivory said CPA is the appropriate source for this sort of work. Dezieck moved that the Town Historical Commission application is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Blauvelt seconded; all were in favor.

### *8. St. James Place Inc.*

Fred Harris was present for the applicant. Smith asked about project scope. Harris said this is to restore the clock and carillon within the tower. The tower itself needed some repointing. He said they are paying for the tower work. That will hold the bells and clock. This application is essentially for what is inside—related to the clock, the bells and electrical work. Jackson suggested the Step 2 be clear and tell the full story that you will have a strong tower to put these things into. Dezieck moved that the St. James Place application is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Salem seconded; all were in favor.

### *9. GB Historical Society*

GBHS Director Debbie Oppermann said this is the next step in their project at the Museum / Farmstead. This is Phase 1B which is the electrical project. She said they replaced the electrical panel but now they need to replace all the knob and tube wiring and bring the museum up to standard. She said they are bringing another \$10,000 to the budget. Fowle asked if this is to bring electricity to a building that didn't have it before. Smith said yes it exists, but it is deadly. Fowle said she did not doubt the need. Oppermann indicated the restoration category and said this is to make an asset intended for functional use. Smith said it encompasses both preservation and restoration. In order to have a museum you must have electrical. Jackson agreed. Dezieck moved that the Historical Society application is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Salem seconded; all were in favor.

### *10. Fairgrounds cowshed project*

Roger Reed was present for the applicant. Jackson asked how old the building was. Reed said he didn't know but they are rebuilding it. He said the original one was condemned by the Town. He said they are recreating it using old timber frame techniques. Smith asked if the Historical Commission designation was for site as a whole or whether it was specific to this building which is no longer there. Smith asked if a building is gone does rebuilding it count as restoration or rehab. She asked Rembold to get clarification about this from the CPA Coalition. Fowle said that by rebuilding the building they are restoring the site as a whole, so she thought it would be eligible. Abrahams said he agreed with Fowle. Smith, Jackson, Dezieck, and Blauvelt were not sure it would be eligible. Abrahams and Fowle did. Jackson said she thinks CPA could be used to build new housing, but not new historic buildings.

The Committee agreed the time remaining to prepare a Step 2 is short and that they should be able to start that at least. Smith said she would take a motion to give the applicant a provisional go ahead. Dezieck moved to judge the Fairgrounds application provisionally eligible and to go ahead to Step 2 pending further clarification. Salem seconded; all were in favor. Smith reminded Reed that all Step 2 applications are due October 1 at 4:00.

### **Affordable Housing**

### *11. CDC for housing at 100 Bridge Street*

Tim Geller of the CDC said last year the Committee made a soft commitment to an additional \$250,000, to this project, and this is to formally request those funds. He said last year the CDC did not want to ask for all \$450,000 in one year, so they were willing to split it over two allocations. He said the plan is to build 45 rental units all of which would be affordable for families earning 60% or less of the area median income.

Smith said there are many components to the entire project, and asked if the housing part of the site was codependent on any other part. Geller said no; this is an independent project on a discrete portion of the property with its own funding. It could happen on its own. Geller said, regarding the cleanup situation, that there is a perception that the project has been delayed. He said that is absolutely inaccurate. At this point Mass. DEP will not let them bioremediate, so they will go to what is Plan A, which is capping the site as they redevelop it. He said what is driving the housing schedule is the funding queue schedule for state tax credits. Smith asked whether the housing was permitted. Geller said there are many permits for the site but the housing permit would be submitted town in several weeks.

Dezieck moved that the CDC application for housing is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Salem seconded; all were in favor.

### *12. Town for an Affordable Housing Trust Fund*

Rembold gave an overview of a housing trust fund. The Town would use the funds for local initiatives, public or private, to create, preserve, and support affordable housing. It could be used to partner with local advocates like Construct or CDC. He said it would have to be approved by town meeting. Smith said this might be something deserving of an annual contribution. She said this is a small amount that won't do much but it would be a start. Dezieck moved that the Town's application for the Housing Trust Fund is eligible and invited a Step 2 application. Salem seconded; all were in favor.

### *13. St James Community Housing and Berkshire Housing Corporation*

Elton Ogden and Lynn Wood explained that St. James Housing is an entity set up to work with Berkshire Housing. The church at the time put seed money up for the original Bostwick Gardens senior housing that exists now. They are planning to expand that project and add more units. Blauvelt asked how they arrived at the \$400,000 price for the land. Ogden said that is what the owner wants. He said there would be an appraisal. Smith said there should be an appraisal. Fowle asked what other funds would be involved. Ogden said first they need site control in order to apply for funds. Then they would get other funding which will be about \$9 million. Other funds would include state funds and tax credit equity. Rent income is part of the operating budget. Jackson asked if the existing building needed work. Ogden said no. It is in excellent shape due to work a few years ago including upgrades. It has its own capitalized replacement reserve fund.

Fowle said that part of your application is for open space. She said don't forget about that aspect and describe what the surface would be, accessibility, connections, and so on.

Dezieck moved that the St. James Community Housing & Berkshire Housing Development Corp application is eligible under at least one box and invited a Step 2 application. Blauvelt seconded; all were in favor.

### **Next Steps**



Smith said there will be an estimated \$800,000 so the Committee will need to be asking some hard questions of applicants in the next round. For example what if you are not funded or funded at 100%, will your project go ahead.

Abrahams suggested Rembold email each applicant inviting their Step 2 and remind them that we will want to know the public benefit of each project.

Jackson asked that the next meeting start with a discussion on what our funding criteria will be and what we think is most important.

It was agreed that the Committee would not formally use the score sheets like last year. However Rembold will send them, so members could use them if it is helpful. Smith said we need to work out for ourselves the strengths and weaknesses of each project.

Jackson said some towns are more specific than others in terms of CPA priorities. She wondered if we should do that next time. We could be clearer about what we most want to fund.

#### **Citizen's Speak**

None.

#### **Reports from Committee Members**

There were none

#### **Next Meeting Dates**

Upcoming meeting dates are as follows:

- October 6: begin review of Step 2 applications
- October 15: continue review
- October 20: continue review
- October 27: continue review
- October 29: continue review

#### **Adjourn 7:35 pm**

Hearing no further business, Smith adjourned the meeting at 7:35 PM.

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Materials presented or distributed for this meeting:

- Draft minutes of August 18 meeting
- Step 1 applications from CHP, Parks Commission, BNRC, Project Native, TTOR, Stanton/Diamond, Historic Commission, St James Place Inc., GB Historical Society, Fair Ground CRP, CDCSB, Town of GB, and St James Housing/BHDC

Respectfully submitted: 