

Town of Great Barrington Community Preservation Committee (CPC)

Minutes of November 5, 2015

Great Barrington Fire Station

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Chair Karen W. Smith.

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

Also present: Town Planner/CPA Administrator Chris Rembold

Members absent: Deborah Salem,

Administrative Business

Fick corrected a typo and Nappo sought a clarification. Dezieck moved to approve the minutes of October 29, 2015 as amended, Fowle seconded. All were in favor.

Review and Evaluation of FY17 Step 2 Applications

Smith began by saying additional information has been presented from the Historical Society, the Unitarian society, and the St. James / Bostwick Gardens housing projects. Smith suggested going through the project list and discuss at what level Committee members were willing to fund.

Fowle said she was trying to get under \$800,000 total. She subtracted 15% from projects that at last meeting were going to be fully funded, and reduced others where applicants had provided new reduced figures. She left Riverwalk at full funding. This was her approach to get below \$800,000.

Some members appreciated this approach, but not everyone wanted to make reductions across the board, in case a cut would make a project not viable.

Abrahams suggested getting from each applicant the lowest amount that they could move forward with this year, and then make a soft commitment of the project's balance. That will help us make the budget this year. He said after Town Meeting, assuming the first amount was approved by Town Meeting, the Committee would vote and recommend to the next Town Meeting the balance of the request from each applicant. He suggested this be done before any new applications are accepted for the next year. That way those that received soft commitments were first in line the next year.

Dezieck said she was not comfortable with that process. Abrahams said this suggestion is just another way of trying meet our budget. Jackson said she understood but it was just putting off the pain until next round. Fick agreed. Blauvelt thought it might discourage people from applying next year.

Construct, for housing at 316 State Road:

Jackson recused herself. At least a majority supports full funding for this project.

St James Community Housing / Bostwick Gardens:

Elton Ogden presented his letter which requests \$25,000 for predevelopment costs rather than the original \$400,000 amount. He said a CPA commitment is very important to their funding sources. It is critical. The support of CPA is important to appear to state funding sources as a legitimate project. Ogden said if they cannot submit a competitive funding application in the coming spring, they would have wait a long time until the next funding round. He said it is a vote of confidence.

Rembold suggested to the Committee that they fund this project, at the expense of the Town Housing Trust Fund. He said they would likely approach the Trust Fund anyway, so why not just allocate the money to the housing project now. It is very important to show town support in order to get other funds from other sources.

Blauvelt thought that would be a good approach. He would rather money go to an experienced organization. Fick said she might fund an appraisal only. Ogden said they have a draft appraisal. Nappo

likes it as a project for seniors, but he thought the project was not ready. Abrahams said this approach is exactly what we asked applicants to do. Jackson said an appraisal was important to do, but she would not vote for funding at this time. Dezieck felt the project was still not ready.

Smith said predevelopment funding is risky. She said it seems clear the members want a higher comfort level. Smith asked the Committee if there were conditions that could raise their comfort level. Nappo said yes, but he is not sure what. Others were not sure.

Rembold said future CPA funds could not reimburse for work already done. It can only pay for work done in the same fiscal year.

Ogden thanked the committee for the consideration.

CDC, for housing at 100 Bridge St:

At least a majority supports full funding for this project. Fowle said she could take funds off, unless the applicant said a cut would make it not viable. Dezieck said small cuts might help us make our numbers. Fowle reiterated that she would not cut the 15% if it meant a project could not go ahead.

Tim Geller of the CDC said he could reduce this year's CPA request. He could balance his budget by reducing the CPA and plug the gap by reducing the CDC development fee, as long as there was an agreement or soft commitment that the CDC would be made whole next year. He said you are not going to have these huge asks on the housing front every year. So if you take a small amount and push it off another year, it might work. Jackson asked if the CDC would then make an application next year. Geller said yes but it would only be \$50,000.

Fowle asked if a CPA grant of \$200,000 would work. Geller said yes it could, as long as they could apply for another \$50,000 CPA next year. They need \$250,000 from CPA, but not all of it this year if the Committee wants to spread the funding around more.

Abrahams thought this was a good example of his earlier approach. He said this project, which we like, can move ahead with a smaller amount. That gives us funds for other projects. A majority of members wanted to commit the full funding amount.

There a discussion about bonding. Rembold said the Committee recommends to the Town how to finance a project. If bonding was considered, then it would have to pass by a 2/3 vote at Town Meeting. Then annually thereafter for the term of the bond, the Town Meeting would be asked each year to commit the amount required to meet the bond payment.

Town, for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund:

Two members were not in favor of funding this. Three members were in favor of the full \$20,000. Three others supported partial funding. Fowle said this is a relatively small ask, but since it is not construction, the funding is not tied to actually completing something. She thought it was a good project but not critical. It could be moved to last. Smith said it is not a high priority for her.

Rembold said you also do not know exactly what the Trust would spend the funds for. It would have to be CPA-eligible, but it could be anything from a housing study, helping somebody with a down payment, or assisting a nonprofit project. On the other hand, you know that the St. James housing project would spend it on predevelopment towards building actual units. Rembold said if the Committee is concerned about giving money to actual housing projects, you have actual projects who applied to you this year.

CHP for the Health Walks Trail:

Four members were in favor of full funding and one in favor of cutting by 15% if possible. Three were not in favor of funding.

River Walk restoration:

All members were in favor of full funding.

Town, for Memorial Field bathroom and accessibility:

There was no support for funding this.

BRNC for the Windy Hill APR:

Fowle recused herself. Smith asked the applicants if the project could move ahead with less than the \$200,000 CPA requested. Narain Schroeder said they have negotiated the price with the land owner, and that includes the owners accepting less than market value. He would have to speak with the owner to determine how to move ahead. Several Committee members would prefer the applicant to contribute more to the deal. Schroeder said they would absolutely try to make the project happen. He either would have to seek extra funding or speak to the Owner about accepting a lower offer. Three members were in favor of \$175,000. One favored \$160,000. Two favored \$150,000. One was in favor of \$100,000.

Rembold reminded the Committee that the leverage here also includes a substantial grant from the State APR program, more than double what they are asking the CPA for. That is significant leverage.

Smith said getting this land preserved from development is what we will get. It is difficult to put a number on that but she would like to see the applicant revisit the numbers. Smith asked Schroeder to think about this now that there is a range.

TTOR for Housatonic Village trail:

Five members would support \$10,000 for due diligence, stating the TTOR is not quite ready. Last year TTOR came with a good idea but was not ready and this is the same story. Smith said that would be the highest amount she would agree to. One was not in favor, and one was undecided.

Unitarians for preservation of 1089 Main Street:

Peter Bluhm was present and explained the budget he sent the Committee. He said a \$79,650 project is doable. It would focus on the structure but not the windows and doors. He said they would do Phase 1 first, and if those bids were low, they would move ahead with Phase 2 immediately. Nappo asked for a clear statement of their priorities. Bluhm said the basement is first, the roof structure and chimney is next. Smith asked what they could do with a \$60,000 grant. He said they would do the basement and move on to the roof and chimney. Bluhm will email Rembold these details for the next meeting.

GBHS Phase 1 B restoration:

Fick said she does not think museum quality lighting is eligible for CPA historic funds. Debbie Oppermann for the applicant said her approach is that the lighting is part of the capital improvement to get the building ready for its intended use. She said they are not just restoring a building. They are restoring it to create a museum. Smith said they do need some lights.

Jackson said she would cut this project in order to fund other people who have not been funded before. Abrahams was in favor of the new amount of \$27,500. Blauvelt was in favor of partial funding. Dzieciek and Nappo also were in favor of the new amount.

Fowle said she asked the question about the lighting in Step 1. She is operating under the assumption that the question was answered and favorably, so she would vote for the new amount. Fick said she was not at that meeting and must have missed the discussion. Smith said she would like to clarify the issue.

Rembold will seek some guidance from the CPA Coalition and will follow up with Oppermann.

Town Historical Commission:

A majority was in favor of a \$15,000 award. One member was willing to cut some off of the full amount. One member was at \$10,000, and one was not in favor of funding. Fick said CPA is an opportunity to use Town money for projects and there will be contribution from the state's CPA. But in this project, it would use local CPA funds, state CPA funds, and state Historic funds. So the cost to the Town is less for this project. Rembold said that is correct, if you were to fund this only out of the Town general fund that would be 100% tax money. In this case, local CPA is a surcharge on the tax bill, state

CPA is a fee at the registry of deeds, and in this case they would also apply a state Historic grant. Nappo said it costs taxpayers less to fund this through CPA than the general fund.

St James Place bell tower:

A majority would favor \$52,600 as previously presented by the applicant. Fowle said it would add the sound dimension to the character of our town. Fick said she was in favor of that amount, if we can meet our budget. Abrahams said this is a want and not a need and would not fund it.

Fred Harris for the applicant said the overall project will open next summer. He said this aspect will enhance the building's contribution to Main Street.

Jackson thought so also, but might support partial funding. Blauvelt does not see it as a pressing need right now. Dezeick and Nappo would try to fund it partially. Jackson thought it would help Main Street. It's tough to put a dollar amount on that. Fowle agreed saying the bells are important for downtown on deep level.

Smith said she sees this and some of the trail work as nice-to-haves. She would like to give something but it is not one of her priorities.

Rembold tallied amounts discussed tonight in the far right column of the table below. Amounts assigned to all items are understood to be for discussion purposes only. No votes were taken.

	Oct 29 discussion	Nov 5 discussion
Construct	220,000	220,000
CDC	250,000	250,000
St James Hsng	0	0
Town hsng	20,000	15,000
CHP	10,000	10,000
River Walk	26,412	26,412
Mem Field	0	0
BNRC Windy Hill	150,000	150,000 and possibly more
TTOR Housatonic	10,000	10,000
Unitarian Univ Meeting	70,000	60,000
GB Hist Society	20,000	27,500
Town Hist. Comm.	15,000	10,000
St James Place	52,600	52,600
total Project spending	844,012	831,512
plus Administrative spending	23,000	23,000
total CPA spending	867,012	854,512

Next Meeting:

The Committee scheduled meetings for following days: 11/17, 11/19, and 12/1. If we do not have the state trust fund numbers by the 17th we will not meet that day.

Citizen's Speak Time:

Mary Feuer spoke in favor of the St. James Place church bells. She said the children's chimes in Stockbridge are lovely to hear. She said she knows it is a want and not a need, and that affordable housing is important. But when people visit the area, they like to hear sounds like this. She also said more and more people come to the area for our trails.

Committee Member Reports:

Blauvelt said the Finance Committee and Selectboard has started their budget process.

Nappo said the Town got an award for \$2.1 million for Bridge Street work. Some work is in the CDC housing project area.

Adjourn: Dezieck moved to adjourn, Blauvelt seconded, all in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:40 PM.

Materials presented or distributed for this meeting:

- Draft minutes of October 29 meeting
- Additional budget information from Great Barrington Historical Society, Berkshire Housing/St James Community Housing, and Unitarian Universalist Meeting of South Berkshire.
- Emails to Committee from Town Planner dated November 3, 2015

Respectfully submitted: 

