

Town of Great Barrington, Community Preservation Committee (CPC)

Minutes of October 7, 2014

Great Barrington Fire Station

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Karen Smith.

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

Absent: Suzanne Fowle.

Also present: Town Planner Chris Rembold.

Administrative Business

Salem suggested two corrections to the minutes. Dezieck moved to approve the minutes of the October 2, 2014 as amended. Salem seconded. All were in favor.

General Discussion

Smith asked Rembold to provide some information about CPA bonds. Rembold said bonds may be issued for 30 years or the term or useful life of the asset as set by state law. He noted that the debt service amount to be paid every year counts as an annual project. So a 30-year bond will have 30 years of payments. So the CPA will have an automatic project for 30 years. If Town Meeting rescinds the CPA, the Town is still obligated to pay the bond. Because the state CPA trust fund contribution cannot be guaranteed from year to year, it cannot be counted on to pay debt service; CPA bonds can only be issued against the local CPA collections.

Nappo informed the Committee that the Historical Commission has drafted criteria by which to judge whether projects are historically significant to the Town and therefore eligible to CPA. Smith requested the criteria be shared with the Committee once the draft is finalized.

Dezieck asked the Committee if they felt projects should have permits in place to get CPA funds. Rembold said he believed receipt of permits was a reasonable condition for receiving CPA funds. However, it is also reasonable to provide funds for predevelopment costs, i.e. costs that are incurred prior to permits being received.

Salem asked if the Committee was right in determining the eligibility of each Step 1 application. Smith said there may have been some difficult or incorrect decisions, but the details provided in Step 2 will help the Committee weed out any projects that should not be funded.

Abrahams asked Rembold if he would be informing Step 1 applicants of the Committee decisions and whether he will be meeting with the Applicants. Rembold said that when he informed them he also noted the Committee had not yet finalized its decision process. Applicants would be welcome to contact him to review the Committee's process.

Nappo asked the Committee, since there were so many history preservation applications, should we fund Town-owned projects only. Smith answered by saying the Committee will discuss these things tonight, but that Committees across the state try to maintain a balance of town projects and private projects. Rembold pointed out that the Committee in its CPA Plan did write that that town projects would be preferred over private projects.

Leverage and Timing of CPA awards

Smith introduced Southern Berkshire CDC Director Tim Geller, who she asked to come to share his experience applying CPA funds in other towns to CDC projects, and how a small amount of CPA funds support a much larger budget. Smith said this is a lesson in how small money can make big money.

Geller handed out budget spreadsheets from CDC affordable housing in Lenox and Stockbridge. They show all of the various fund sources that are involved in complex projects. In these cases, CPA made up only 2% and 5% of the budgets, respectively.

He said the \$317,000 of CPA funds for the Stockbridge project were contributed over a period of four years, not all at once. Some funds were very early, then more was committed for architectural work, and then additional funding were released after it was built. For the Lenox project, there was early money from CPA to pay for feasibility and engineering, and the Town made another commitment to additional funds if certain milestones were met. The milestones were not met, so the Town recaptured those additional funds.

He said early money in a project is risky, because the project might not turn out, but the early money is very small in comparison to the project. Also, when the larger funding sources like the State see a CPA commitment early, they are confident that the municipality is backing the project, so they in turn are more likely to commit their bigger pot of money. Then, once other funding sources are committed, towns can feel more comfortable releasing additional CPA funds.

He suggested that this model of using project milestones and funding commitments can work for any type of CPA project. It is important often for project sponsors to know a Town has made a multi-year commitment, even if the money is not received until a milestone is met.

Rembold asked whether the CDC proposed to those towns exactly what the CPA funds would be used for. Geller said the predevelopment or feasibility money is pretty clear—it's for hiring an architect for example—but after that it's general construction funding usually.

Rembold asked whether the CDC requested those CPA funds from one fiscal year, or from multiple years. Geller said that these were requests from a specific year budget, but the funds were released over several years of the project. However Towns could decide to fund only part of a request from that fiscal year, but make a "soft commitment" to fund the rest from future fiscal year budgets. The developer then comes back each year with a CPA application, with some confidence that it will be successful.

Rembold asked whether developers propose funding milestones, or whether the CPC would decide on it. Geller said it could be done either way, as long as the parties discussed the milestones and they were practical.

Discussion about Process for Step 2 Applications

Smith asked the Committee to discuss how they will screen Step 2 applicants, and to develop a scoring system and meeting process.

Jackson said that priority should be on projects that can actually be completed and that benefit from the town in the long term. The Committee should not spread the money around to everyone, but focus it on those that are best for the town now and in future generations. CPA should make lasting impacts. Jackson also suggested that there should be a way to make a first cut. There should be a vetting process before we invite people to come present their applications.

Fick agreed and said if the application is unclear it could be indicative of a shaky or questionable project. There was some discussion about whether the Committee should review poorly written application. Rembold said incomplete applications should not be entertained. The Committee agreed.

Abrahams reviewed the CPA Plan and used each of the "project considerations" listed in the Plan as a category. The Committee discussed these and assigned each a minimum and maximum score. The Committee agreed the first item would be whether the project is consistent with town plans. If not, then the application would be rejected with no further scoring.

The Committee agreed on the following scoring system:

Criteria	Score
1. Consistency with Master Plan / Open Space Plan, etc.	Yes or No. If No, STOP
2. Quality of Application	0 no good – 5 = very good
3. Public benefit	0 – 5 (5 = high benefit)
4. Leveraging / Match / Multiple funding sources	0 – 5 (5 = high % of other \$)
5. Multiple CPA purposes	1 – 3 (either 1, 2, or all 3 of the CPA areas)
6. Community input and support	0 – 5 (5 = highest level)
7. Project team / expertise	0 – 5 (excellent team)
8. Viability of applicant	0 – 5 (5 is best)
9. Readiness to proceed / permits in hand	0 – 5 (shovel ready = 5 also n/a = 5)
10. Projects that are already in progress	0 – 5 (5 is best)
11. Timing – does it need to be done now?	0 – 5 (5 is most immediate)
12. Town –wide / long range perspective (Project has long term or perpetual benefit)	0 – 5 (5 is best)
13. Town projects (this is a tie breaker)	Yes or No (yes is better)

Abrahams then suggested a three step process, which was discussed and revised by the Committee.

Meeting 1 – all members have read the applications beforehand and come to the meeting to discuss the applications. The strengths and weaknesses of each application is discussed by the members without the input of the Applicants. A supermajority (2/3 of those present) can decide who should be cut. Therefore if enough of the members do not think the project is viable, it will not be discussed further. To get 2/3 there would have to be a good argument to reject an application. By the end of the meeting, a consensus score is reached for each category for each remaining application. The score is a way to quantify the Committee members' impressions of each application and will help move the process forward. Projects will not be decided solely on the scores.

Meeting 2 – At this meeting the remaining Applicants will be able to briefly present their proposal and the Committee can ask questions. It was unclear whether this can happen in one meeting or need several.

Meeting 3 – Projects are grouped by topics and their merits discussed further, and viewed against the CPA Plan priorities for that CPA category. If it meets the CPA plan priorities, it would rise higher on the list. Project scores may be revised at this time. The result of this meeting would be that each applicant gets a final score that is the consensus of the Committee. This may take several meetings, perhaps one meeting per CPA topic.

The Committee may wish to do site visits to better understand projects.

After they are scored, the Committee will decide who to fund and over the next meetings decide how much to fund.

Salem suggested at some point after the approval process, in May or June, applicants who were rejected can come and discuss their project in detail in order to prepare an application for the next year. The Committee thought this was a good idea.

At the next Committee meeting, the Committee will review these procedures, and will also review the items that will be considered under each CPA category, as outlined by the CPA Plan

Reports from Committee Members

Nappo indicated the Historical Commission would be meeting Monday October 6. Rembold suggest the Commission schedule a meeting in November as well, in order to review the historical significance of CPA projects needing the Commission's determination.

Next Meeting

The Committee set the following dates for meetings. All will be at 5:30 at the Fire Station unless otherwise noted.

Tuesday, October 28
Thursday, November 20
Tuesday, December 9
Tuesday, December 16
Thursday, December 18
Tuesday, December 30
Saturday, January 3, 2015 at 10:00 AM
Tuesday, January 6
Thursday, January 15
Tuesday, January 27
Thursday, January 29

Adjourn

Hearing no further business, Smith adjourned the meeting at 8:15 PM.

Materials presented or distributed for this meeting:

- Minutes from October 2, 2014 meeting
- Sample CPA budget handouts for affordable housing projects in Stockbridge and Lenox

Respectfully submitted: 