



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Community Preservation Committee

Town Hall Offices • 63 Main Street • Northborough, MA 01532 • 508-393-5019 • 508-393-6996 Fax

Approved 9/3/15

Community Preservation Committee Meeting Minutes May 7, 2015

Members in attendance: John Campbell, Chairman; Todd Helwig; Kathleen Polanowicz; Michelle Gillespie; Andy Clark; Peter Martin

Members excused: Christopher Kellogg; Debra Comeau; Sean Durkin

Others in attendance: Kathy Joubert, Town Planner; John Coderre, Town Administrator; Elaine Rowe, Board Secretary; Rick Leif; Terry Giannetto; Diane Smith, Trillium Tree and Landscape; Amy Poretzky; Carolyn Guarino; Karen Ares; Amy White

Chairman Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:14PM.

Chairman Campbell commented about the busy agenda for the meeting, including discussion of the following:

1. Affordable Housing
2. Town Common in the downtown area
3. Potential for historical preservation at White Cliffs
4. Draft of the Community Preservation Plan, with a goal of providing feedback to Trish Settles in an effort to position us to be ready to schedule a date for the public hearing

Rick Leif provided the board with an update on the activities of the Northborough Affordable Housing Corporation (NAHC). He explained that the four senior housing units that were constructed on Centre Drive are now finished, with two tenants scheduled for June move-in and two for July. He noted that the NAHC has formed a good relationship with the Northborough Housing Authority, who will manage the units on behalf of NAHC. He also indicated that the NAHC is close to completing agreements that will allow these four units to be counted as part of the subsidized housing inventory.

Andy Clark arrived.

Mr. Leif asked about the status of the funding agreement, which he would like to get executed before the end of the fiscal year. Chairman Campbell voiced his understanding that it is nearly complete.

Mr. Leif stated that his group has been evaluating which project to pursue next, including efforts to find a building to renovate. He also noted that the Housing Authority has an undeveloped parcel near the Colonial Village development that might offer options. He explained that the Northborough Housing Authority has been in touch with DHCD, and there are some thoughts about a joint project between the NAHC and the state to build additional senior housing on the lot. He also noted that, if this joint project moves forward, only a portion of the money used to finance the project will be from CPA funds, with the balance to come from other sources.

Mr. Leif also indicated that the group has been in discussions with the Greater Worcester Habitat for Humanity, who has expressed interest in doing a project in Northborough. He noted that a meeting is scheduled for May 21, 2015 to discuss where there might be some opportunities in town to do so. He stated that, if a project is identified, the NAHC will fund the land acquisition and Habitat for Humanity will handle construction and placement of eligible families into the housing.

Mr. Leif stated that the NAHC continues to keep an eye on the foreclosure market, but the issue with these types of properties is that there is typically a short window to close the deal that does not afford sufficient time to obtain approval from the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Leif indicated that he would like to get a better idea about the potential for the projects discussed so that an application can be submitted for this year's CPA cycle and/or he can attempt to find alternate sources of funding besides CPC monies.

Mr. Leif voiced his understanding that the Community Preservation Coalition will be highlighting Northborough's Centre Drive project on their website in an upcoming article, and agreed to keep the board informed.

Peter Martin arrived.

Ms. Polanowicz expressed appreciation to Mr. Leif for his efforts.

Mr. Leif spoke about the parcel at 39 West Main Street, and suggested that it might be possible for affordable housing to be part of a project there. He expressed his willingness to work with the CPC if any possibility exists. Chairman Campbell indicated that any momentum in that direction would come from Mr. Leif and the NAHC. Mr. Leif stated that he will discuss this parcel during his upcoming meeting with Habitat for Humanity.

Downtown open space proposal – Members of the Northborough Town Common Committee appeared before the board to discuss the potential for creating a town common in the downtown area. Ms. Giannetto noted that the group has learned of some parcels in the downtown area that they would like the town to acquire and preserve as open space.

Using a PowerPoint slide presentation (attached) to convey their vision, Ms. Giannetto emphasized the group's goal of creating a useable town space that will act as a magnet to draw people to the downtown area and could potentially be a starting point to reinvigorate the area.

Ms. Giannetto explained that the town owns the parcels at 39 West Main Street and the site of the war memorial, and noted that there are two abutting parcels for sale. She indicated that both property owners have signed permission letters to allow the parcels to be appraised. She also noted that the total area of all parcels is slightly over one acre. She mentioned that the owners of the rear Gale Street parcel are interested in the prospect of creating green space, and Bucky Rogers is also open to the idea, but an appraisal is needed for both parcels to determine if they can be pursued. Ms. Giannetto indicated that she is seeking approval from the CPC to spend up to \$4,000 from the administrative fund to obtain two independent appraisals on each of the two parcels. She also stated that she is looking for some input about the application process as well as creating a clear, definable timeline for the project.

Ms. Giannetto noted that, of the four lots, two have never generated any substantial tax revenue and reiterated her group's desire to revitalize the downtown area. She also indicated there will be less traffic if the parcel is developed as green space.

Ms. Giannetto voiced her opinion that this project meets the guidelines for use of CPA funds by providing open space that will protect water quality and quantity, creating passive recreation and greenways, and providing space to preserve and expand the town's war memorial.

Diane Smith from Trillium Tree and Landscape presented a drawing illustrating plans for the town common. She indicated that there will be a large open area to gather, dedicated space near the existing memorial for additional memorials, walking paths, sitting areas, a flagpole garden, reflecting bench, and additional trees and shrubbery. She also discussed adding a stone wall along Route 20 and Monroe Street to help define the space and blend with the walls and pillars at Assabet Park.

Ms. Smith also discussed plans to include an area within the new common to honor Brian Arsenault, which has already been proposed to his family and received their support.

Ms. Giannetto reiterated that the group is seeking input from the CPC to help make the process move smoothly. She noted that the group has some key questions that they would like the CPC to address. Chairman Campbell explained that the board can address some but not all of the questions at this point. He stated that the town only requires one appraisal for each parcel. Ms. Joubert indicated that there are a few appraisers that both she and the Town Assessor have worked with on previous projects.

Andy Clark asked if the Conservation Commission can serve as a vehicle for funding and/or management of the project. Chairman Campbell explained that the town has voted and approved CPA funding of the conservation fund for the purpose of land acquisition and preservation, so it could ultimately be a parcel that the Conservation Commission would oversee. Mr. Helwig suggested that it would more likely be

Recreation Land. Ms. Ares voiced her opinion that this parcel should not fall under conservation land since there is no wetland.

Mr. Helwig mentioned that he is generally opposed to spending taxpayer money without some assurance that we will get something with it. He emphasized that the possibility exists that we could spend \$4,000 and not gain anything if the project doesn't move forward. Ms. Giannetto noted that, based on Mr. Campbell's indication that only one appraisal per parcel is required, the group needs only \$2,000.

Ms. Poretsky voiced her understanding that money from the administrative fund was used to hire a historical preservation specialist for the White Cliffs without a binding agreement. Chairman Campbell explained that the specialist was hired to determine if obtaining a historical preservation for the White Cliffs might be possible.

Ms. Polanowicz asked if either of the two parcels is currently on the market. Ms. Gillespie stated that nobody knows the value of the landlocked parcel, and her understanding is that Bucky Rogers is asking \$300,000 - \$350,000 for his property. Ms. Poretsky discussed the difficulty in speaking with the landowners when the numbers are all over the place. Chairman Campbell commented that speculation about the selling price is not something that this committee can address, and asked whether either seller has expressed any interest in selling to the group. Ms. Poretsky confirmed that the property owners have agreed to allow for the appraisals. Ms. Giannetto commented that appraisals on these properties will also benefit any other town group that may be interested in a use on the property. She also emphasized the need to determine the market value of these parcels.

Ms. Giannetto stated that, when the group presented their plans to the Open Space Committee and the Recreation Commission, several people expressed a willingness to pay for the appraisals but it was suggested that they first obtain support for their proposal. Ms. Smith asked Mr. Helwig what he would suggest the path forward to be. Mr. Helwig voiced a desire to get more concrete information about the value of the parcel owned by Bucky Rogers as well as what his asking price might be. Mr. Coderre stated that he had suggested that the group go through the channels to get buy-in for the concept before expending any money for appraisals. Ms. Polanowicz expressed interest in knowing what the property's value is prior to agreeing to any buy-in. Mr. Coderre questioned whether the landowners are willing to accept appraised value. Ms. Giannetto questioned how spending money for the appraisals differs in any way from allocating funds to affordable housing or for the assessment of the historical relevance of White Cliffs. Chairman Campbell confirmed that this request is within the realm of allowable uses for CPA funds. Ms. Smith asked about next steps. Mr. Helwig reiterated the need to get confirmation that the owners are willing to sell their parcels to this group. Ms. Smith stated that the owner of the landlocked parcel has been open to conversation with the group because she is in favor of green space only.

Ms. Harris noted that the group has a petition with 500 signatures from residents interested in this proposal. Chairman Campbell voiced his understanding that the group is building toward a CPC

application with the first step being a request for administrative funds, but he also finds validity in Mr. Helwig's concerns. In response to a question from Chairman Campbell, Ms. Smith stated that Bucky Rogers did indicate a willingness to sell to this group if he could get the price he is seeking. He has also agreed to refrain from selling to someone else for the time being. Chairman Campbell asked if Mr. Rogers will enter into an agreement that stipulates he will sell the parcel to this group for \$320,000 if the appraisal comes through at that amount.

Mr. Martin and Ms. Polanowicz questioned who the purchaser of the land will be. Mr. Helwig suggested that a non-profit entity be formed. Ms. Polanowicz stated that the land will still ultimately be a town-owned parcel, with this group simply doing the leg work. Chairman Campbell reiterated his desire to know that the property owner is interested in selling.

Mr. Coderre discussed the value of having an appraisal done in order to negotiate, and voiced his opinion that this is a valid use of administrative funds because the project cannot move ahead without it. Ms. Polanowicz stated that the CPC guards the administrative fund so it can be used for important uses, and is not in the position to dole out these funds for every applicant. Mr. Clark commented that the CPC has learned a great deal about public projects and how they must be done, and cited an artificial sense of urgency because of the Board of Selectmen's intentions to put the 39 West Main Street parcel up for sale if a viable use is not identified within the year. Given the issues that exist when dealing with a public project, Mr. Clark encouraged the town common committee to consider a less aggressive timeline. Chairman Campbell noted that the project as proposed involves four parcels, two of which will need to be purchased. He asked if the group had considered whether a viable project can be done with just the two parcels currently owned by the town. Ms. Smith confirmed that this was part of the initial discussions.

Ms. Guarino explained that the ideal scenario is to have all four lots and, while this is the group's current focus, they are willing to alter the plan if it is necessary to do so. Mr. Clark asked about the appraiser to be used. Mr. Coderre stated that the town will handle getting the appraisal done, if the CPC approves. Mr. Clark asked what entity would handle a Purchase and Sale Agreement (P&S). Mr. Helwig suggested that the group could request money from the administrative fund to hire an attorney to handle the P&S. Mr. Coderre suggested that it might be possible to negotiate with Bucky Rogers for a gentleman's agreement, which would allow for Town Counsel to draft the agreement.

Ms. Gillespie asked about the possibility of using private funds to make up any difference between the appraised value and asking price. Ms. Joubert stated that this would not be possible since the town is prohibited from paying more than appraised value. Ms. Guarino asked if the group can work directly with Bucky Rogers once the appraisal has been done. Chairman Campbell confirmed that they are able to do so, and emphasized the value of personal relationships.

Ms. Giannetto asked if part of the purchase price can be gifted to the town for the acquisition. Chairman Campbell reiterated that the town's appropriation cannot exceed the appraised value. Ms. Polanowicz suggested that the board vote on the request for administrative funds. If approved, the next

step would be to secure an appraisal after which she would encourage the group to come back to this board for more guidance. Chairman Campbell noted that many of the questions that were raised are premature and will be addressed if and when the project gains approval.

Ms. Giannetto discussed the group's intention to submit an application in July, and noted that they have some specific questions about how to do so. Chairman Campbell suggested that some of the questions can be handled through emails and phone conversations.

Ms. Joubert stated that the Recreation Commission had not voted on the matter, but the consensus was that they would support the proposal. Chairman Campbell stated that this was the case with the Open Space Committee as well.

Peter Martin made a motion to authorize the use of \$2,000 from the administrative fund to obtain appraisals for 45 West Main Street and 20 Rear Gale Street. Kathleen Polanowicz seconded; motion carries by unanimous vote.

Draft of Community Preservation Plan – Ms. Joubert noted that Trish Settles from the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) has met with all of the town boards, but only yesterday was able to meet with the Town Administrator and DPW Director. She noted that, after yesterday's meeting, Ms. Settles drafted a quick outline that highlights what she intends to include in the draft plan. Ms. Joubert indicated that Ms. Settles is available to meet with the board on June 18, 2015 and polled the members for their availability. Members of the board agreed to meet on June 18, 2015.

White Cliffs – Ms. Polanowicz explained that she has been working with the historical group and others who are interested in preserving the White Cliffs. Mr. Coderre noted that Ms. Polanowicz has been helping the town work with Representative Jim McGovern's office, which has proven to be very helpful. He also noted that people from various town boards and committees have been meeting since mid-February to brainstorm in an effort to find ways to advocate for the preservation of the White Cliffs.

Mr. Coderre stated that the town had reached out to the preservation consultant, who has cautioned about creating a historic district on the land as it might restrict what can be done there. He noted that the consultant suggested re-applying to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for a preservation restriction. In addition, a third suggestion made by the consultant was for the town to obtain a market analysis of what might be viable uses for the property. Mr. Coderre noted that, to date, the current owner has not yet shown any interest in doing that. He indicated that the owner's primary goal is his business interest, while the town's goal is preservation. Mr. Coderre recommended that the town commission a market analysis that will focus on the best use of the property with preservation in mind. He also mentioned that he had recently met with a historic preservation developer, who agreed with the recommendation to commission a market analysis that will determine options for viable economic redevelopment that will preserve the property. Mr. Coderre indicated that he had contacted vendors to request a scope of services and associated costs, and has received information from one vendor.

Mr. Coderre reiterated that a market study will show the highest and best uses for the property with historic preservation in mind. He noted that the analysis will focus on use and give the town the ability to pursue businesses that might be viable. He stated that, on behalf of the Historic Commission, he is requesting money from the administrative fund, not to exceed \$7500, to cover the cost of a market analysis.

Ms. Polanowicz stated that she cannot think of a better use of the administrative fund than to find a way to preserve White Cliffs. She noted that the CPC has already approved the use of \$1500 from the administrative fund to re-apply for the historic preservation restriction, and suggested that a different focus might help us to better qualify for that. Ms. White voiced her understanding that the original application was denied because two porches had been added and one of the original turrets is missing.

Chairman Campbell commented that the market study will also apply for other uses. Ms. Polanowicz voiced her opinion that the market study could be used as a bartering chip with the owner. Mr. Coderre suggested that funding the study will enable the town to better target potential buyers. Mr. Martin asked if the presence or absence of a preservation restriction would affect the conclusion of the market study. Mr. Coderre agreed that it could. Ms. Polanowicz voiced her opinion that the market study will answer that question.

Mr. Clark expressed concern about the town helping to define the potential for the property with nothing binding. He stated that the town could come up with a great plan for the parcel and still end up with a gas station on it. Ms. Polanowicz agreed that this could happen, but noted that a use study could suggest viable uses for the property that could preserve the building and keep the seller economically whole. She voiced a desire to find a way to move forward to prevent it from becoming the site of a gas station. Chairman Coderre commented that the seller is under no obligation to sell to a party that the town identifies.

Mr. Helwig commented that he was never in favor of the town spending any money on this property. Ms. Smith suggested that, since this was the summer residence of someone connected to a national park, it might be possible to obtain funding from park money. Mr. Helwig reiterated his position that no town money should be spent on this property, and emphasized that the seller can ultimately opt to do whatever he wants to with the property.

Chairman Campbell asked about CPA applicability for the funding of the market study. Ms. Polanowicz voiced her opinion that the use of funds qualifies under historic preservation and potentially under open space. She also noted that the Town Hall roof repair was funded under the historic category even though the building is not on the historic register. She expressed concern about what might happen to this incredibly historic building if the CPC fails to support this proposal. She reiterated that she does not find a better historic preservation use than to save the White Cliffs, and suggested that if we don't do so the building will be demolished and the CPC will have failed as a committee. Ms. Gillespie noted that the local historical commission has deemed the building to be historic.

Ms. Polanowicz suggested that Highfield House in Falmouth is an excellent example of how such a project can materialize and how a market study can support an idea.

Peter Martin made a motion to allocate up to \$7500 from the administrative fund to obtain a market study on the White Cliffs. Kathleen Polanowicz seconded; motion carries by a vote of 5 in favor and 1 opposed (Todd Helwig opposed).

Adjourned at 9:43PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine Rowe
Board Secretary