

MINUTES

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE WILLIAMSTOWN, MA

TOWN HALL

February 24, 2015 AT 7:00 P.M.

MINUTES

PRESENT: Philip McKnight (Chairman), Linda Conway, Peter Fohlin, Jane Patton, Mark Reinhardt, Michael Sussman, Jeffrey Thomas

Absent: Chris Winters

The Meeting was called to order at 7 p.m.

- 1. Approval of the minutes:** the minutes for the January 20, 2015 CPC meeting was deferred to the end of the meeting.
- 2. Trustees of Reservation:** \$15,400 for restoration of items at the Main House at Field Farm. Mr. Wilson requested removal of the amended proposal and a return to their original application, because the three pieces of furniture are being deeded as a gift to the Trustees. A copy of the deeded gift will be provided to the town to show ownership before Town Meeting. No new motion was required, because the committee had previously approved this application.
- 3. Discussion with invited prior CPA recipients as to their experience with the CPA process and their use with the funds:**

A. Highland Woods project: \$100,000 for the project, to be used on or before June 16, 2015.

Mr. Elton opened by saying how valuable this money was for the project's success: some might say that this is not a lot of money, he finds but the CPC's commitment to the project invaluable.

Allegrone broke ground in October. Anticipated closing date was overly optimistic, but the financing portion of the project did close last week. Three different lender are involved: an equity investor, the town, and state government. Now he is looking forward to getting the work done, although this winter's harsh weather has slowed down this process. Half the perimeter walls are in. Pouring foundations is slowed due to the cold weather, but Allegrone is re-figuring the plan in order to bring us into line with our completion date. Mr. Elton expressed confidence that Allegrone will bring the building in on time - January 2016.

Regarding the process of the CPC, Mr. Elton remarked, "It was a deliberate process that got us where we needed to go." He mentioned that anytime where things can be

streamlined is appreciated and suggested having the CPC funding process and the Affordable Housing Trust funding process be made into a single process. However, the project was ultimately successful, and Mr. Elton expressed his appreciation.

Discussion followed regarding the January 2016 completion date, and the target of March 2016 when FEMA requires current residents to vacate the Spruces. Mr. McKnight asked if there was any flexibility in the FEMA date due to bad weather. Mr. Fohlin responded that the town continues to navigate the process for Sprucians, some of whom are banking on Highland Woods as their next stop, which may be a tenuous plan. He suggested that this is not the moment to ask for an extension on the FEMA date, because in the past they it has said there is no flexibility. The committee inquired about the responsibility of the town to Sprucians. Mr. Fohlin responded that the town does not have responsibility to house residents and former residents of the Spruces in Highland Woods. Elton Ogden noted that the Fair Housing Law is unclear, but they have hired an attorney who specializes in this law and so far the state's Department of Housing and Community Development has accepted this preference, but there is a second hoop to travel through. The goal continues to be that preference will be set aside for those affected by the natural disaster.

B. Chimney Restoration, Benjamin Simonds House. This project received \$2000 for the restoration of the chimney at the historic Simonds House. David reported that the restoration project went very well and expressed his gratitude. He found the CPC's process to be very easy and encouraged the committee to welcome small projects like this that can make a difference to our town. He encouraged people in town to come forth and apply and invited the community to visit the Simonds House.

C. Williamstown Community Pre-School, \$250,000 towards the purchase of the former Methodist church. Ms. Katy Swabe, board member, explained their grant. The church was for sale for \$350,000. The school, already renting part of the space, put \$100,000 of their own money in. This purchase gave the school access to the sanctuary for school use, play groups and community gatherings, and a small space for younger kids, which allowed them to start taking on younger children, filling an important need in our community. Having this additional space took this population off their waiting list, although there is still a large number on this list. The families they serve rose from 57 to 70. Ms. Swabe reported that in general their revenue has risen, even given the increased cost due to bringing the building up to code. The school has worked closely with the Historical Commission, which is pleased with their progress. Ms. Swabe listed several other increased public benefits, including a bilingual playgroup, an upcoming nutritional movie "Fed-up" free to public, a Girl Scouts meeting space, and the music festival Billstock, which brings in revenue. Teachers are thrilled, families are happy. Ms. Conway of the Historical Commission inquired after maintenance issues. Ms. Swabe reported that their maintenance fund has started to build, and the projects next in line are the painting of trim and the bell tower, with a new roof planned. The Methodist church still owns the organ and is responsible for maintenance until June 2016, unless they remove it and repair the wall where it is. The pre-school is responsible for preventing damage. Projections for attendance 5 -10 years ahead are still strong: their continual waiting list is not getting smaller. Ms. Swabe expressed gratitude to the committee for supporting them: "It has been a blessing to the children and the families." The process was tedious but worth it. One issue they faced was that, after the purchase, the

town's assessment process lowered the building's value by half. If the pre-school had known this was going to happen, they would have negotiated a lower sales price. Better coordination among town offices might have saved them, and the committee, a lot of money.

D: Margaret Lindley Park:

Mr. McKnight reports that drilling the well was successful, leaving some money over to refurbish the bathhouse. However, the bathhouse work went over the \$65,000 budget, because the Environmental Protection Agency required more extensive testing than originally thought. Statistics are not kept for attendance, but anecdotal evidence says parents are overjoyed at not having to use Port-a-Potties. Mr. McKnight reports that the work is finished and looks spectacular. Mr. Thomas inquired where the money came from to fill this gap, and Mr. McKnight reported that there was \$7,000 in a conservation commission trust fund, and some available town fees, which made up the difference.

E. Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation:

\$68,000 awarded last year towards putting the Galusha Farm into agricultural restriction. A letter from Leslie Reed-Evans was presented to the CPC stating that their next step is to conduct a survey to learn the precise acreage in order to proceed with the agricultural preservation restriction. WRLF had stated they would match the committee's funds, and they reported that they have raised these funds. WRLF found the committee's process fairly straight forward, but suggested that applicants should know in advance that they may be asked to provide additional info, and suggested holding a workshop to explain the process. Mr. McKnight mentioned that there is such a meeting but getting the word about this informational meeting is a challenge. Discussion followed about how best to get the word out.

The Committee thanked Mr. Thomas for his excellent handling of this review process.

5. Other business:

A. The Chairman requested that the minutes reflect the CPC's appreciation of Mr. Fohlin's work, especially for his determination to keep the Cable Mills project going. Mr. Fohlin reported a joyful and relieved phone call from owner Bart Mitchell that final financing for the project finally closed and expressed appreciation that our town had never faltered from our eight-year commitment to the project.

B. Minutes: Phil McKnight recommended that we approve the minutes for this meeting and Jan. 20th meeting at our next meeting, in early October of 2015, unless a statutory reason for meeting in May exists. Discussion followed, and agreement was reached.

C. October meeting to do: discuss revising the application for CPA funds.

Motion to adjourn was made by Jeffrey Thomas and seconded by Jane Patton. Approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned 8:35 P.M.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Robin Lenz, Acting Secretary