WILLIAMSTOWN COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

WILLIAMSTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

MINUTES

FEBRUARY 18, 2025

The meeting of the Williamstown Community Preservation Committee was held in person with remote participation via Zoom and streamed live on Willinet.org., and broadcast live on Willinet Spectrum cable TV channel 1303.

Present: Phil McKnight, Nate Budington, Randal Fippinger, Ken Kuttner, Polly Macpherson (by zoom), Molly Magavern, Alison Bost and Steven Dew after 7:45 PM. Absent: Barbara Halligan

Phil McKnight, the chairman, opened the hearing at 7:00 PM.

The Committee heard the land acknowledgement read by Alison Bost.

Molly Magavern moved and Ken Kuttner seconded a motion to present for consideration the minutes of the Committee's January 29, 2025, meeting. The motion was approved 7-0-0. The January 29, 2025, minutes were discussed and approved without change by a vote of 6-0-1.

The Committee considered, by a motion approved with a vote of 7-0-0, its review of its proposed FY26 warrant articles previously distributed to all members. The discussion resulted in the addition of certain language to the Affordable Housing Trust article which had been inadvertently left out and the withdrawal of the allocation previously agreed to in favor of Sand Springs as having been improvidently granted and contrary to the requirements of the governing statute, the Community Preservation Act. By a vote of 7-0-0 the Sand Springs allocation was deleted. The remainder of the warrant articles were approved with identical votes of 7-0-0: the CPC's FY26 expenses ($2,000), Images Cinema ($33,000), Williamstown Historical Museum ($5,000), Store at Five Corners ($19,000), Williamstown Affordable Housing Trust ($64,000), New England Mountain Bike Association, Purple Valley Chapter ($16,000), Purple Valley Trails ($32,000), and Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation ($9,000).

The Committee agreed to accept for consideration by a vote of 7-0-0 a Revised Application February 14, 2025, filed by Sand Springs Recreational Center, Inc., requesting $10,000 for certain capital improvements to its facility. After thorough discussion the Committee voted to reject the Application by a vote of 7-0-0 for not being in conformance with the statute under the requirements of the "recreation" category.

The Committee heard a report from its working group, Polly Macpherson, Ken Kuttner and Randy Fippinger, on its progress in creating a new, revised FY27 application form. Ken Kuttner distributed an interim report, a copy of which is attached to these minutes, entitled Progress Report from the Application and Evaluation Working Group dated February 18, 2025, outlining the progress of the group. The Report was discussed and helpful comments were provided to guide the group in its further efforts. A meeting of the Committee to review its efforts was set for Tuesday, March 11, at 7 PM in the Town Hall meeting room

There being no further business to come before the Committee, a motion to adjourn was made by Molly Magavern and seconded by Ken Kuttner. The vote was 8-0-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Philip McKnight

Acting Secretary

Progress Report from the Application and Evaluation Working Group

Williamstown Community Preservation Committee

Polly Mcpherson, Randy Fippinger and Ken Kuttner

February 18, 2025

The Subcommittee has met twice: once in person and a second time via Zoom. In preparing for the meetings the Subcommittee members reviewed application procedures and forms from several other communities and, based on the discussions that took place at previous meetings of the Committee, compiled a list of possible "criteria" (21!) to consider.

Our discussions are leading us in the direction of the following three-step process. This roughly parallels what other communities are doing, and also contains elements of our existing procedure.

(1) **Pre-application**, in which the applicant submits a brief description of the project to see whether it is eligible for CPA funding (according to our "founding document" and the Mass DOR's guidelines). This is comparable to what we are already doing in our preliminary meetings with the applicants, although we seem to be asking for the application to be completed in full.

After eligibility is verified, the applicant submits a full-blown application, which is evaluated in two ways.

(2) **Does it meet the "primary qualifications"** (or **"prerequisites"**)? These qualifications include things like whether cost estimates are provided, whether there is sufficient institutional capacity to complete the project, the timeline, whether there are mechanisms for accountability, etc. These criteria are not "scored," all must be satisfied for the application to be considered. These correspond to items (2) through (5) on our current application form.

(3) **Evaluation**. We are leaning towards proposing breaking the evaluation step into two pieces: "merit" and "funding need." This is somewhat novel: other communities' evaluation "scorecards" have criteria that pertain to both, but we feel that distinguishing the two could be helpful.

(a) **Merit**. This is where we would use an agreed-upon set of criteria to assess the project's benefits.[1]

- After a lively discussion (plus extensive use of Ken's office whiteboard) we arrived at a set of only three: (1) How widespread are the benefits – how many people are served, and do the benefits flow to underserved communities and/or demographic groups? (2) Does the project align with the priorities expressed in

[1] Considerations interpretable as "merit" criteria appear in two places in our existing application form. Item (1) asks (a) why the project is needed, (b) what population groups will benefit and (c) how will it improve the quality of life. In addition, item 5 in the "CPC Application Review Process" section of the form mentions "community impact" and "return on investment."

the Comprehensive Plan? (3) Does it promote economic development?[2] This is a much smaller set of criteria than other communities.[3] Each Committee member also awards an overall merit rating, *reflecting the member's informal aggregation of criteria* (1) *through* (3).[4]

- Next comes the question of aggregating Committee members' preferences. We are leaning towards a novel system in which each member is given a number of "stars" equal to two times the number of applications (e.g. 10 applications = 20 stars). Committee members who are obliged to recuse themselves from evaluating an application receive two times the number of applications they are *allowed* to rate (e.g. Phil can't rate WRL's so he only gets 18). Each member can then award one, two, or three stars to each application (except those that require recusal), corresponding to the "overall merit" score. This imposes a "curve" so to speak – members have to prioritize and can't award 3's to all the applications. This differs from other communities' systems, in which evaluators can give as many "A"s as they like. Projects are then ranked according to the *average* number of stars they receive.

- We are still thinking through some of the specifics of how this would work. For example: Will members have the option of including text remarks to accompany their ratings? Presumably the aggregate scores will be public, will the individual scorecards be public as well? Anonymous, or with attribution? (Are there any "open meeting" considerations that apply to these questions?)

(b) **Need**. Our view is that "merit" ratings alone don't provide enough information to make an enlightened decision about funding, the project's "need" for the funding should also matter in years when we don't have the money to fully fund all the projects. We haven't yet formulated a specific set of "need criteria," but they may include the following: (1) "Criticality" – are CPA funds required for the completion, or needed to "catalyze" other funding sources? (2) Would the project be able to go forward with partial funding, or is it an "all or nothing" proposition? (3) "Urgency" – is the project "long overdue," is the funding needed right away to take advantage of a unique opportunity, or is the item to be "preserved" in imminent danger of disintegration? We are still thinking about an appropriate set of "need" metrics, and how the "need" and "merit" considerations should come together to determine the funding decision.

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[2] None of the other communities' CPA application forms we reviewed includes an "economic development" criterion.

[3] Greenfield has 11 criteria, committee members assign 1, 3 or 5 points to each. Groton has eight criteria, with the same scoring system. New Bedford has 11 main criteria, to which committee members assign scores of 0 to 4; plus five "secondary criteria" which are rated "yes" or "no"; plus a number of category-specific criteria, also rated "yes" or "no."

[4] For what it's worth, this is similar to the way in which the Williams Economics Department evaluates job applicants.