

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT (CPA) COMMITTEE MEETING

Organizing Meeting

Wednesday, May 29, 2024, 5:30-7:00 P.M.

Via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Elaine DeRosa, Mary Flynn, David Lyons, Ellen Schacter, Taha Jennings, Kathy Watkins, Kevin Foster (arrived 5:37), Chandra Harrington (arrived 5:52)

Committee Members Absent: Victoria Bergland,

Staff: Daniel Liss, Charlie Sullivan, Jen Letourneau, John Nardone, Gary Chan, Melissa Peters, Chris Cotter

Introduction:

Taha Jennings (TJ) opened the meeting and gave an overview of the agenda.

Election of Chair

The committee elected TJ chair by a vote of 6-0-3.

Approval of minutes

The minutes of the December 18, 2023 meeting were approved by a vote of 7-0-2.

Background / Introductions

Daniel Liss gave a brief overview of the history of the Community Preservation Act and an overview of the process in Cambridge:

- CPAC meetings are held annually from the spring into the fall.
- After public meetings, the City Manager forwards CPAC recommendations to the City Council to review and approve Housing, Historic Preservation and Open Space allocations and projects.
- City is required to provide a minimum allocation of 10% to each CPA category.

FY25 Funding Estimates

Fiscal staff are currently working to get a sense of what the FY25 CPA allocation will look like. The City anticipates that funding will be slightly higher than the \$20.6 million amount from FY24. State matching funds will likely be reduced due to reduced revenues, but the City will likely compensate through the use of CPA fund balance.

2024 Meeting Schedule & Process

TJ gave an overview of the planned FY25 process. There will be an RFP available soon with a deadline for submissions of July 12. The remaining meetings need to be scheduled, including public hearings to solicit project ideas and on the allocation of funding between Affordable Housing, Open Space, and Historic Preservation. There will also need to be a meeting to make recommendations to the City Council in September, before the tax rate is set.

TJ proposed reversing the typical order of the hearings, having the hearing on allocations before the hearing on project ideas. Discussion with the committee and staff followed:

- Daniel Liss explained that the actual decisions will still happen in September, but this revised schedule will allow for the hearing on project ideas to line up with the deadline for proposal submissions. Doing so would make it less likely that a submission would be made after the hearing, which could prevent the organization submitting the proposal from testifying.
- Several committee members expressed concerns that project submissions may influence the testimony on the allocation. For example, if there were several strong Open Space or Historic Preservation proposals discussed, the public might support a higher level of funding than the minimum 10% for those categories. Others were comfortable with the change and wanted to make sure public submissions had enough time to complete the proposals.
- Kathy Watkins recommended keeping the same order, but having the hearings later. The rest of the committee agreed with this approach. Daniel Liss said he would reach out to committee members soon about potential dates with the goal of scheduling them consistent with a later timeline.

TJ stated that based on the meeting in December, there will be increased attempts at outreach for the CPA process, using new resources within the City. Daniel Liss will send an update to the committee via email outlining outreach plans.

Review of Balances Available for Transfer

TJ explained that finance team has been working with departments to review available balances from projects that no longer need them that can be transferred to the appropriate reserve accounts. Funds will be reserved so that they can only be used for the same purpose, either Open Space or Historic Preservation, as they were originally allocated. Funds appropriated from the reserve account would not count towards the 10% minimum for each category, and would supplement the regular annual CPA allocation.

Daniel Liss presented a chart showing the open space balances:

Project	FY	Available Balance
Purchase of Railroad Rights of Way	FY13	\$33,438.11
Clarendon Avenue Playground	FY16	\$75.00
Sennott Park	FY17	\$30.82
Amigo & Morse School Playground	FY18	\$0.08
Peabody School Playground	FY19	\$800,000.00
Peabody School Playground	FY21	\$200,000.00
Total Transfer		\$1,033,544.01

TJ explained that the first four projects had relatively small amounts of funds left after the projects were completed. Kathy Watkins explained that the Peabody School Playground project is being funded with other City funds; the City is concerned that the playground would fall under the state's Article 97 rules. The City may want to reconfigure the footprint of the adjacent school buildings in such a way that would not decrease the amount of open

space, but might rearrange it, as happened in the Tobin Montessori project. Using CPA funds on projects that are not immediately next to school buildings would avoid this potential complication down the road. The alternate source of funding has already been identified, and the project is under way; this transfer will not slow the implementation of the project.

The proposed transfers of \$1,033,544.01 from the above listed projects to the Open Space Reserve Fund were approved on a vote of 8-0-1.

Daniel Liss presented a chart showing the historic preservation project balances:

Project	FY	Available Balance
Digitization of CHC Photos	FY11	\$5.24
City Engineer Archives	FY12	\$11,821.03
City Engineer Archives	FY13	\$15,000.00
Copy/Bind City Directories	FY17	\$447.50
Library Reports Digitization	FY18	\$0.50
Brattle Street Sidewalks	FY18	\$25,000.00
Council Chambers Painting	FY18	\$50,000.00
Boardman School Exterior	FY18	\$255,000.00
Electric Department Garage Windows	FY19	\$200,000.00
Winthrop St. Wall Restoration	FY22	\$200,000.00
689 Mass Ave Roof	FY23	\$300,000.00
Total Transfer		\$1,057,274.27

Charles Sullivan went through the projects and explained each:

- The Digitization of CHC photos, City Engineering Archives, Copy/Bind City Directories, and Library Reports Digitization projects all had balances left after completion.
- Brattle Street Sidewalks was completed using different funding, so these funds are no longer required.
- It does not make sense to restore the painting in the Council Chamber until the exterior envelope project in City Hall is completed.
- The Boardman School and 689 Mass Ave roofs longer are priorities and will likely be completed with other funding at the right time.
- The property owner of the Winthrop St. wall has declined to participate in the project, so the funds have been revoked.

Mary Flynn requested updates on projects that the CPA committee recommended funding for, but that ultimately were funded with other means.

The proposed transfers of \$1,057,274.27 from the above listed projects to the Historic Preservation Reserve Fund were approved by a vote of 8-0-1.

Committee Discussion

Ellen Schacter suggested having a combined meeting with the Affordable Housing Trust to discuss their process.

Chandra Harrington recommended inviting Jackson Price, the Director of Community Engagement to a meeting to discuss outreach strategies.

Mary Flynn encouraged communication with neighborhood associations to solicit feedback and potential proposals.

Public Comment

The committee then moved to public comment:

- James Williams, of North Cambridge, spoke. He expressed concern at the low interest from the public in the CPA process. He encouraged the committee to involve the tenant community in the process. He encouraged using CPA funds to support people who have lived in Cambridge for some time that are in jeopardy of losing their housing.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by a vote of 8-0-1.