

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT (CPA) COMMITTEE HEARING
Public Hearing on FY 25 Funding Allocation Percentages
Wednesday, July 31, 2024, 5:30 P.M.
Via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Elaine DeRosa, Mary Flynn, David Lyons, Ellen Schacter, Taha Jennings, Kathy Watkins, Chandra Harrington, Kevin Foster (arrived 5:53)
Committee Members Absent: Victoria Bergland
Staff: Daniel Liss, Gary Chan, Jen Letourneau, Chris Cotter, Charles Sullivan, Adam Corbeil

Introduction

Taha Jennings (TJ) opened the meeting.

Summary of Committee Process

TJ gave a brief overview of the CPA process. The committee had an organizing meeting on May 29, 2024. On July 17, 2024, the Committee had its hearing on project requests for FY25 funding. This meeting is the hearing on allocation percentages. On September 12, 2024 meeting the committee will vote to recommend funding allocation percentages and on projects for funding. Anticipated FY25 funding is \$21,310,000. In addition, there is approximately \$1.1 million each in the Historic Preservation and Open Space reserve funds after the transfers of available balances completed in the May organizational meeting. The reserve funds do not count towards the percentage allocations being discussed tonight.

Review & Adopt July 17, 2024 Minutes

The committee approved the minutes of the July 17, 2024 public hearing by a vote of 7-0-2.

Public Comment

Public comment was opened for people attending the meeting:

- Barbara Wilson, 264 Putnam Ave, spoke in support of 80% funding for affordable housing. People who work in Cambridge can't afford to live here because of the cost of housing. Affordable housing could build an inclusive community and bring stability to people with low incomes.
- Cathleen Higgins, 345 Norfolk St., is strongly advocating for the CPA committee to continue allocating 80% of funding for affordable housing. She recently met someone who recently received a letter accepting him for housing after five years on the CHA waitlist, who was happy to finally have a home. Cambridge needs to send more letters like that out.

- Tina Alu, 113½ Pleasant St, spoke on behalf of the CEOC and its participants to encourage the committee to continue to allocate 80% of funding for affordable housing. CPA funding is an extremely important resource that the City has to invest in affordable housing preservation and development. When talking with participants in the Rise Up program, most say that maintaining housing is their number one issue. Many families have been waiting for larger units for over a year because three- and four-bedroom apartments are so rare. It's critical that every dollar of CPA funds be available to devote to new opportunities.
- James Williamson, 30 Churchill Ave, stated that affordable housing is very expensive to build. The large scale of affordable housing projects such as Jefferson Park or the new Walden Square project alienate neighbors by increasing density. He supports reducing the housing allocation to 78% or 75% to increase funding for open space to help offset the increased density.
- Carl Nagy-Koechlin, Executive Director of Just-A-Start, spoke in favor of preserving 80% funding allocation for affordable housing. There were 1,900 applicants for 24 new units at the new commons building on Rindge Ave. Every time agencies house someone in Cambridge, they're being set up to succeed and move forward economically. There is a good pipeline of projects queued up and there is good alignment of public resources between the City, housing trust, community, and housing providers.
- Noah Sawyer, Real Estate Director of Just-A-Start, said that CPA funding allows projects to move forward more quickly because there are fewer complications and restrictions compared to federal and state funding.

Daniel Liss briefly summarized comments received as of 3:00 on July 31 for the record. The full comments were provided to committee members via email after the meeting.

- Daniel received petitions from residents of eight affordable housing developments signed by a total of 199 people in support of allocating 80% of CPA funds for affordable housing.
- Michael Johnston of the Cambridge Housing Authority wrote about how critical affordable homes are to the 8,000 families, elders, and persons with disabilities that CHA supports, as well as the 21,000 households on the waiting list.
- Joe Deignan of HRI wrote about the impact of CPA funds for housing, including helping to support 218 units in three different projects, will be applying for funding for two additional projects. HRI supports 80% allocation for affordable housing so they can continue to provide housing for families throughout Cambridge.
- John Manson, 215 Norfolk Street, wrote in support of funding for homeownership programs. While living in an apartment, he was always worried about a rent increase he couldn't afford or the landlord selling the apartment and forcing him out. He is asking to expand funding for the program to preserve the soul of the city for the future.

- Peter Munkenbeck, 33 Sparks St and a board member of Just-A-Start, wrote in support of an 80% allocation to affordable housing. The City has more high quality all-affordable housing opportunities on its plate than can be completed with limited funding. This puts households waiting on the housing in limbo and risks permanent loss of the opportunity if the sites are no longer available.
- John Goodman, 8 Fairmont Ave, wrote that there's nothing more important to Cambridge than its character and vitality and there's nothing that will ensure that vitality more than affordable housing. He's particularly concerned about the struggles of young people who can't afford to live here.
- Jean Hannon, 7 Woodrow Wilson Court, wrote in to voice strong support to allocating 80% of the FY25 CPA funds to Affordable Housing. It is important because of the rising cost of construction, the number of projects in the 'funding pipeline' since the AHO was passed in Cambridge, and the extreme need for more affordable housing.
- Gerry Zipser of Just-A-Start submitted comments on behalf of two Cambridge residents that wanted to remain anonymous:
 - The Cambridge/Boston area is a very expensive place to live. More affordable housing means a lot to the community. Affordable housing helps people's mental health; allows people to focus on career development; reduces stress; and creates community.
 - Creating more affordable housing is important to allow low- and moderate-income folks a pathway to increased economic mobility, stability, and well-being. The person wrote of their experience in the affordable homeowner program, which has given them the opportunity to live in a much better housing than they would otherwise have access to.
- Paul Fallon, 618 Huron Ave, wrote in support of the 80% allocation. He rents out two units in his triple-decker at below market rates, but not all landlords can or do. That is why a full range of affordable housing programs are necessary.
- Samuel Gebru wrote to strongly support investing in housing, including through an 80% CPA allocation. Affordable housing is not just a matter of providing shelter but a fundamental element in ensuring human rights, equal opportunities, and a higher quality of life for all residents.

Committee Discussion

Ellen Schacter stated she will be absent for the next meeting and asked whether it would be possible to vote by proxy. TJ stated he did not know the answer and would find out.

Mary Flynn expressed concern about open space and encouraged developers to find ways to include it in their infill projects. She supports the 80% for housing, but wanted to acknowledge that there are competing goals and trade-offs.

David Lyons stated that he has been impressed at how different types of CPA funding are supporting multiple goals. He mentioned past projects where historic preservation funding went to support affordable housing projects and noted that the Raymond Park restoration under consideration is close to current and planned affordable housing at Walden Square.

Elaine DeRosa noted that there was an amendment to the Affordable Housing Overlay zoning that required open space for places with higher density. Funding housing is of critical importance given increased costs post-COVID, and while some neighbors object to specific projects, it is important to proceed because people are waiting for housing.

Ellen Schacter noted that there are significant other sources of funding for open space projects and that the City is placing a priority on funding it through other means.

Kathy Watkins described the importance of connecting people to existing open spaces. She noted that the City recently received federal funding to design a pedestrian bridge that would connect Rindge Towers to Danehy Park so that residents could access the large existing open space. There is also work on a rail trail connecting Danehy Park to Fresh Pond. 20 years ago, the Yerxa Rd underpass created a safe connection from Walden Square to the park and Peabody School. All those projects are classified as transportation projects, but they give people access to parks they couldn't get to before.

Next Meetings

TJ stated that the next meeting will be Thursday, September 12 at 5:30 to vote on recommendations for funding allocations and projects. The City Council will vote on recommendations shortly after that meeting. The project request booklet with information will be provided to the community before the meeting.

Adjournment