



KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE



MEMBERS

Heather Heimarck, Chair
Rose White, Vice-Chair
Dick Bauer
Laura Beretsky
Jon Bronenkant
Jahan Habib
David Turin

STAFF

Roberta Cameron

MINUTES MARCH 22, 2023

The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) virtually held its monthly meeting at 6:30 pm on the GoToMeeting platform in compliance with Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2022 regarding the Open Meeting Law during the COVID-19 crisis.

Members Present Heather Heimarck, Jahan Habib, David Turin, Dick Bauer, Laura Beretsky, Jon Bronenkant

Members Absent Rose White

Staff Present Roberta Cameron, Alan Inacio, Lydia Lopez, Sarah White

Others Present

Roll Call

Chair Heather Heimarck opened the meeting at 6:35. She reminded everyone that the meeting was being held virtually and being recorded in accordance with Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2022 and the Mayor's order. Heimarck invited committee members and invited guests to introduce themselves.

Agenda Item 1: Annual Public Hearing

Heimarck explained the format of the public hearing.

CPA Manager Cameron shared a slide show and presented an overview of the CPA program. She talked about the sources of revenue over the history of the program, the ways that the funds can be used, and the way that the City has allocated funds between the program areas and what types of projects have been funded across the city. She further estimated the amount of funding from other sources that CPA grants leveraged over the history of the program.

Heimarck invited input from attendees and received no comments.

Senior Planner Sarah White gave a brief presentation to orient CPC members on the City's historic preservation staff, Historic Preservation Commission, and initiatives they are responsible for. She described the importance of telling the story of Somerville and researching to give voice to communities who have been historically underrepresented. She talked about efforts to advance sustainable preservation, collaboration with neighboring municipalities, and creating new historic districts. She offered suggestions that the CPC consider outreach to encourage more engagement with underrepresented communities and blended projects, encouraging projects on City buildings, and projects that uplift and highlight the stories of BIPOC communities.

Lydia Lopez of the Office of Housing Stability gave a brief presentation describing the staff and staff and services provided by OHS. This includes helping Somerville residents to access support to address housing security, as well as advocacy for local and state policies and programs. They help to provide access to some housing stability programs funded by CPA through the Affordable Housing Trust. Specific initiatives include seeking funding to continue or replace Covid-era emergency rental assistance programs that are expiring, and are working on the creation of a municipal voucher program. They are especially looking for funding to help households who don't qualify for other programs. They would encourage the CPC to think about ways they might facilitate expansion of rental assistance programs and relaxing some guidelines that inhibit access to assistance.

Jon Bronenkant gave a presentation introducing the staff and mission of the PSUF division. He reviewed their roles and responsibilities and the context of open space planning in Somerville. Since 2010 the City has created 21 acres of new open space, working toward the goal of creating 105 acres as envisioned in the SomerVision plan. He shared a map showing areas of the city that have been identified to conserve, enhance and transform. They work with developers to create open spaces and civic spaces through POPS (privately-owned public spaces) through which they anticipate creating approximately 60 acres. They are also working on "road diets" and realignments to create more open space along public ways. A third strategy is land acquisition, which is very expensive but still an important strategy. They are looking at purchasing parcels of land in areas that currently lack walkable access to parks.

Heimark again invited members of the public to offer input. Tori Antonino (65 Boston Street) expressed appreciation for the plan to create open space and highlighted the importance of funding to acquire open space and having more wild natural spaces. She asked if it is possible to use CPA funds to regenerate landscapes with native plants following the example of the Morse Kelley Butterfly garden – can it be used to acquire planting materials for volunteers to use. Cameron responded that the organization could submit an Intent Form for a specific project and that she and City staff would determine whether the project is eligible and identify the staff who would need to be involved. Antonino highlighted a need for a Miyawaki garden. She also acknowledged the needs for affordable housing and historic preservation. She would like to see restoration of City Hall. Heimark cautioned that CPA funds cannot be used for maintenance. Heimark also noted that the CPC previously funded design for historic preservation of City Hall. Cameron reported that the design project was completed and that the implementation of the design is anticipated in connection with restoration of the 1895 building to create a campus for core City services.

Beretsky asked where Somerville eviction cases are filed. Lopez explained that cases are filed at Somerville District Court and at the Eastern District Housing Court which is located in Boston.

Member Bauer moved to public hearing portion of the agenda, seconded by Beretsky. The motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

Agenda Item 2: Approval of Meeting Minutes from March 1, 2023

Member Habib moved to approve the meeting minutes from January 25, 2023, seconded by Beretsky. The motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

Agenda Item 3: Continued Deliberation on FY23 Funding Round

Affordable Housing Trust Allocation: Cameron explained that the CPC has to vote to transfer the funds that were committed for affordable housing in the spring to the Affordable Housing Trust. Member Bauer

moved to recommend the transfer of \$1,618,683 to the Somerville Affordable Housing Trust, seconded by Beretsky. The motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

Adams Magoun House: Cameron reviewed the conclusions from the previous meeting on this project. The CPC had come to a consensus that they would support a grant of \$150,000 to undertake the most urgent repairs to the house (as the homeowner preferred to limit the project to the priority scope) with conditions that were suggested by the Law department and Planning staff. Committee members had agreed in principle that this is a uniquely significant property that merits the investment of a large grant of CPA funds, but asked that the Historic Preservation Commission make a determination about the building's unique significance. The HPC reviewed the request at a meeting earlier in the month and submitted a memorandum stating the importance of the Adams Magoun house.

Cameron clarified that the process for moving this grant forward will be for the CPC to make a recommendation with conditions, then the homeowner would be asked to sign a memorandum of agreement committing to execute the covenant and PR before the funds would be received, and then the recommendation would be submitted to City Council together with the MOA and draft/model restrictions. Since the model covenant/restriction that the legal department attaches to the MOA may not exactly correspond to the conditions that the CPC specifies in their recommendation, Committee members will have the opportunity to review the MOA and amend their recommendation if necessary before it is sent to City Council.

Bauer suggested that it would be preferable for the property owner to accept a grant for all three phases that the architect recommended to restore the house. Cameron pointed out that the homeowner was most comfortable with a smaller project focusing only on the highest priority tasks identified by the architect. In addition to the concern about the amount of equity she would be taking out of her house she was uncomfortable with the volume of work. Heimarck asked Senior Planner Sarah White whether the limited scope would still be a beneficial project to preserve the house without undertaking the full restoration. White responded that replacement of the windows and cornice repairs will help to prevent further damage from elements and may uncover further work that needs to be done. White sees merit in undertaking these key elements alone. Cameron shared the budget from the full application showing the tasks included in the Phase 1 scope. There was discussion about the amount of contingency included within the \$150,000 grant.

Bauer noted that the scope specified copper gutters and downspouts which he did not believe to be historically appropriate. White suggested that she would likely recommend aluminum gutters and not wood gutters because of the expense, high maintenance requirement, and lack of durability. Turin agreed that for environmental reasons he would prefer not to see copper or lead gutters. Heimarck asked whether the CPC should comment on design to reflect a change from the application. The draft Recommendation Letter was amended to state that the design would be approved by HPC and that they may require some changes from the scope provided in the application by the architect.

There was discussion about the definition of a transfer and the requirement for a right of first refusal. Committee members were favorable to allowing the homeowner to pass the property onto her children, a trust, or other family members without repayment but would like to see the grant repaid if the house is sold to an unrelated buyer.

The committee returned to the question about how long of a term over which the covenant should require that funds be repaid if the property is sold or transferred. Heimarck suggested a shorter term of 20 years because she felt that it would encourage property owners of uniquely significant homes to allow the City to invest in their preservation and put them under Conservation Restrictions. Bauer stated that he would prefer to see a longer term in order to avoid the property owner receiving a windfall as a result of the grant, where the purpose is simply to preserve the house. Bauer stated that the interest free loan is a substantial benefit, although Turin pointed out that the work that the grant is paying for has a depreciating value over time. Cameron noted that some communities use provisions that step down the amount of the grant that has to be repaid over time. Several members agreed that they would be more comfortable with a longer term repayment provision if it stepped down. After some discussion a consensus was reached to draft the condition as requiring repayment after 50 years without stepping down the amount that needs to be repaid.

Member Turin moved to recommend \$150,000 for the preservation of the Adams Magoun House, seconded by Beretsky. The motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

Member Turin moved to apply the following conditions to the recommendation for the preservation of the Adams Magoun House, seconded by Habib. The motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

1. The property will be placed under a covenant that requires the funds to be repaid to the City upon sale of the property within 50 years.
2. The City will have the right of first refusal to acquire the property at the time of sale.
3. The Grantee agrees to execute and record a perpetual preservation restriction on the property, governing exterior and interior alterations. The restriction will include a provision that the house remain visible from the street and will not be obscured by vegetation or the erection of a fence or other structure between Broadway and the existing fence at the rear of the house.
4. A permanent sign with interpretive information will be installed at the front of the property, visible from the sidewalk.
5. Upon commencement of the Project the Grantee agrees to post a sign stating that the Project was funded through the City of Somerville's Community Preservation Act program.
6. The CPA-funded portion of the project must be initiated within three years unless extension is granted by the CPC.
7. CPA funds will be used only for CPA eligible expenses.

Agenda Item 4: Review Application Process and Draft Application Materials

Cameron shared a draft of the application instructions for the FY24 funding round. She explained changes from prior years' application instructions – she reorganized and simplified the instructions without making substantive changes. Heimarck agreed that the new instructions are more user-friendly but suggested that the Key Dates on the first page more clearly reflect flexibility for non-City applicants with respect to the due date for Intent Forms, depending on the type of project.

Cameron introduced a discussion about the three phases of the application process, asking whether it might be preferable to simplify the process. The Intent forms and Eligibility Determination Form steps provide some utility, but they can also create barriers to applicants who don't meet the mandatory deadlines. Turin asked whether applicants are able to obtain HPC approval prior to determination of eligibility and Cameron explained that in the past round the applications were determined to be "eligible pending HPC review" and then letters were submitted by HPC in support of the historic preservation

projects before the CPC began their deliberations. Turin suggested eliminating the EDF stage and moving the full application deadline earlier. Cameron pointed out that due to the August recess the committee would have to make its initial review in September or July – or move the recess month to July instead of August. Heimarck pointed out that the eligibility determination step has been more important for some projects than others. Another option could be to make the eligibility determination phase optional. Members invited Cameron to draft a revision to the application calendar and present a final version in April.

Agenda Item 6: Other Business

Cameron previewed the agenda for the April meeting and gave an update on committee membership.

Adjournment

Beretsky moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Bronenkant. The motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

Documents and Exhibits

1. Agenda
2. CPA FY24 CPP Presentation
3. Historic Preservation Planning Update Presentation
4. Draft Minutes 3-1-23
5. FY23 Application Materials
 - a. Affordable Housing Trust Draft Funding Recommendation
 - b. Adams Magoun House Application
 - c. Adams Magoun House Draft Funding Recommendation
 - d. HPC Adams Magoun Comments 03-2023
6. FY24 Application Packet