



KATJANA BALLANTYNE  
MAYOR

## CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE



### MINUTES

JANUARY 24, 2024

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

Jahan Habib, Chair  
Ryan Kiracofe, Vice Chair  
Laura Beretsky  
Jon Bronenkant  
Joe Capuano  
Heather Heimarck  
Eric Parkes  
David Turin  
Rose White

#### STAFF

Roberta Cameron

**Members Present** Jahan Habib, Ryan Kiracofe, Heather Heimarck, Laura Beretsky, Eric Parkes, Joe Capuano, Jon Bronenkant, Rose White, David Turin

#### Members Absent

**Staff Present** Roberta Cameron, Alan Inacio

**Others Present** Melissa Woods and Elizabeth Gallaway, Capital Projects Division

#### Roll Call

Chair Habib opened the meeting at 6:35. He reminded everyone that the meeting was being held virtually and being recorded in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023. CPA Manager Cameron called the roll.

#### Agenda Item 1: Introduction of new officers

Chair Habib and Vice-Chair Kiracofe introduced themselves and shared some goals as they initiate terms as officers for the CPC.

#### Agenda Item 2: Approval of Meeting Minutes

Member Beretsky offered a correction of a minor typo. Member Capuano moved to approve the meeting minutes as amended from December 13, 2023, seconded by Beretsky. The motion passed unanimously, 8-0.

Member White arrived at 6:40 PM

#### Agenda Item 3: Off-cycle Application – City Hall Cupola Restoration

Melissa Woods, Director of Capital Projects explained the background and the scope of the City Hall Cupola restoration project. She noted that the Capital Projects Division is amending their request from \$1M to \$650,000 to align with the available funding in the CPA reserves. They are in discussion with the Finance Department about other potential sources of funding to complete the budget for this project. The application has received an advisory review by the HPC and will be reviewed by HPC through the permitting process.

Member Bronenkant asked for clarification about the schedule for the project. Director Woods explained that they anticipate an emergency procurement process starting in April, aiming for project completion in September.

Member Parkes asked and Woods explained what is the emergency procurement provision.

Member Capuano asked about the design of the roof. Woods described that the flat roof is sloped to allow for drainage, and that the project will correct existing deficiencies in the function of the roof drainage system.

Member Beretsky asked whether they anticipated a challenge getting interested contractors. Woods recounted that they had previously used the emergency procurement provision to ask for bids on restoration of just the cupola in the fall and learned through talking with contractors who responded at that time that the project would require a crane, which would significantly increase the cost. Due to the mobilization costs, they determined that the City should proceed with restoring the entire roof, so that they would not duplicate the cost of the crane when they restore the larger capital improvement plan for the building.

Turin asked whether the CPC had a procedure for receiving off-cycle applications. Cameron explained that the CPC allows for applicants to submit off-cycle requests for funding that are of high priority and have a timeline driven by factors outside the control of the applicant. The CPC has discretion to determine whether a request for off-cycle consideration meets this criteria.

Heimarck asked what the City would do if they didn't receive CPC funds for this project. Woods offered further background about the Building Master Plan which envisions the renovation of the 1895 building and City Hall.

Turin asked whether the project is consistent with historic preservation standards. Woods explained that they are selecting materials with HPC approval that will minimize the need for future maintenance. Parkes concurred that the materials are appropriate considering the visibility from the street and maintenance needs. Cameron explained that the purpose for the advisory review is to provide the CPC with assurance that the proposed scope that they are requesting funds for is generally consistent with the eventual need for HPC approval to be implemented. Turin asked whether the project would involve replacing the gutters and downspouts, noting that he advocates against introducing copper where possible because of environmental impacts. Woods pointed out that this project will only extend as far as the roof, and will not address the gutters and downspouts.

Heimarck observed that the need to fix City Hall is frequently mentioned when the CPC receives public input.

Habib asked whether there were concerns about unexpected costs. Woods acknowledged that cost overruns have happened frequently since Covid. The City is using a 3<sup>rd</sup> party cost estimating firm and they hope that any bids above the estimate can be absorbed in the assumed contingency. Habib further asked whether the building is continuing to deteriorate while waiting for repair. Woods noted that the cupola has been stabilized, but that water damage due to the condition of the roof is a significant threat.

Committee members agreed that they would like to see a memorandum from Capital Projects showing the scope of what will be funded by CPA versus other funding sources.

Cameron shared the spreadsheet showing the CPA budget and FY24 funding requests. She explained that the requested \$650,000 would leave \$771,444 in the Undesignated Fund account, just over the CPC's

target to carry over a minimum of \$750,000 in Undesignated Funds. Committee members reiterated their consensus to maintaining the \$750,000 minimum.

Committee members discussed the merits of funding the requested amount for City Hall, given the visibility of the building, available funds in reserve for this year, the premium cost of preserving historic elements. Suggestions were offered for funding conditions.

Heimarck moved to recommend the transfer of \$280,010 from the Undesignated Fund to the Historic Preservation Reserve, seconded by Beretsky. The motion passed unanimously 9-0-0.

Heimarck then moved to recommend the award of \$140,548 from the Budgeted Reserve and \$509,452 from the Historic Preservation Reserve to restore the cupola and roof of City Hall. The motion was seconded by Bronenkant and passed 9-0-0. The recommendation was approved with the following conditions: 1) The CPA-funded portion of the project must be initiated within 3 years unless an extension is granted by the CPC. 2) CPA funds will only be used for CPA-eligible expenses related to the preservation of historic elements of the City Hall cupola and slate roof with approval of the Historic Preservation Commission. 3) Vida Real will install a permanent sign noting CPA funding at the completion of the project and a temporary sign during construction, and 4) Unspent funds will be returned to the CPA fund.

#### **Agenda Item 4: Continued Deliberation of Somerville Museum's FY24 Funding Request**

Heimarck expressed support for funding \$9,600 toward the Somerville Museum's request, representing the portion of the application related to restoring the iron railing in front of the building.

The Committee reviewed the budget provided in the SM's presentation showing the five elements of the scope. It was noted that the railing was fourth in the order of priority given by SM, and also that restoration of 3 paintings (both higher and lower in priority) could be completed for a similar level of funding as the railing. Committee members concurred that they would like to invite the SM to come back to answer the question directly of what would be their highest priority use for up to \$10,000, which is the amount that the CPC has available to fund this year.

#### **Agenda Item 5: Annual Review Process for FY25 Funding Round**

Cameron shared the Agenda Calendar and explained that the Annual Review process is a period for the CPC to reflect on its goals and application process before opening the next funding round. She noted that this typically entails gathering public input, including a public hearing (required in the legislation) among other methods. Committee members provided feedback on the public engagement process. Bronenkant asked whether the CPC has funds that could be used to enhance the outreach efforts or to hire an engagement specialist. Kiracofe commended the City's outreach efforts for participatory budgeting last year. Turin pointed out that, if money is to be spent on outreach it would be preferable to target eligible applicants to broaden the applicant pool. Beretsky suggested direct outreach to nonprofits. Bronenkant suggested creating or updating an advertising pamphlet to distribute through City Councilors who can share with their constituents. Cameron suggested that committee members might reach out to City Councilors and to nonprofit organizations to share information about CPA. Beretsky suggested joining in the Ward Meetings (formerly Resistat).

Cameron offered to prepare an announcement about what was prepared this year and to provide input and learn about CPA overall. Committee members discussed forming a subcommittee to draft an outreach message, including Turin, Habib, Beretsky.

An idea was proposed to prepare a simple screening survey that could be used to educate people about what can be funded with CPA, as well as to simplify the Eligibility Determination Form.

Heimarck supported continuing with the survey despite its limited utility compared with other techniques discussed. Some ideas were offered to improve some of the questions from the draft survey.

The public hearing will take place in March, and the committee will discuss the format for the hearing in February.

#### **Agenda Item 6: Discussion of community needs for Open Space & Recreation Plan**

Bronenkant explained the purpose of the City's Open Space & Recreation Plan. He asked the committee to answer the following questions:

- What do you see as the most pressing issues for open space and recreation in Somerville today?
  - The City is actively trying to acquire more land but this is challenging due to limited funds and high cost. Committee members agreed that this comes up a lot when the CPC gathers public input. There is a tradeoff between preserving/increasing land dedicated to open space and increasing the supply of housing.
  - Failings of MBTA -> need for more alternatives, i.e., bike paths.
  - Boynton Yards example of POPS that don't feel like public spaces. There needs to be more rigor toward creating more cohesive and successful open spaces. Further examples at Assembly Square and 10 Hills neighborhoods.
  - Impact of new dense buildings on open space and trees (light and climate impacts)
  - Public input highlights need for more street trees
  - Viewsheds – i.e., view of Boston or Charlestown Monument, need to plan to protect important views.
  - Equitable access to open spaces, safe walking and biking. Example – Foss park is the biggest park in the city but is hard to get to because of adjacent highway.
  - Question about how to classify private open spaces that contribute environmental benefits but not public use. (Such as slivers or green roofs.)
  - Privately-owned open space is also important – are there policies to encourage preservation of private open space? "Greenscore" standards to incentivize quality open space features in approving new development. Maybe financial incentives could accomplish more.
- Have things changed over time? What is different or unique about today?
  - Increase in bike infrastructure and traffic calming is a positive change. Like neighborways. Streets are open space.
  - Openness to small-scale interventions like pocket parks.
  - Covid highlighted the need for open space, fresh air.
  - Applaud use of native plants, biodiversity and pollinators in landscaping strategies.
  - Not a fan of play surfaces in playgrounds – not environmentally sustainable. Would it be possible to capture the runoff where it has to be used?
  - Climate change is more visible, stressful.
- What would you like to see 7 years in the future?

- Would like to see balance of playgrounds and passive parks offering enjoyment of open space to people of all ages.
- Would like to see more trees – example Lincoln Park doesn't have enough shade.
- Stone dust in dog parks washes out with rain. Would like to see something like pea stone (as used in Arlington) that doesn't wash out.
- Increase awareness of recreational programming (i.e., enjoys teen program at Powderhouse).
- Increase amount of programming for teens
- Would like bike trail from Kennedy to Harvard
- Invasive species education, eradication, and arbor care
- Rat control at parks, sensitive to poisoning nontarget species

### **Agenda Item 6: News and Updates**

Cameron shared the following announcements:

- 5-Year Consolidated Plan Process – all are invited to take and share the survey (link/QR code in flyer in meeting packet)
- Lunar New Year Festival invitation to attend and host a table

### **Adjournment**

Bronenkant moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Beretsky. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

### **Documents and Exhibits**

1. Agenda
2. Draft Minutes 12-13-2023
3. Application Evaluation Spreadsheet
4. Applications
  - a. City Hall Clock Tower
  - b. Somerville Museum FY24 CPA Application and Itemized Budget
5. Draft Recommendation Letters
  - a. City Hall Clock Tower
  - b. Somerville Museum FY24 CPA Application
6. Draft 2024 Survey
7. CPC 2024 Calendar
8. OSRP Questionnaire
9. 5-Year Consolidated Plan Flyer
10. Lunar New Year Invitation