



KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE



MEMBERS

Ryan Kiracofe, Chair
Eric Parkes, Vice Chair
Carlos Ayala
Mary Jo Bohart
Jon Bronenkant
Joe Capuano
Heather Heimarck
Michael McNeley
David Turin

STAFF

Roberta Cameron

MINUTES

JANUARY 22, 2025

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

- Members Present** Ryan Kiracofe, Eric Parkes, Heather Heimarck, Joe Capuano, David Turin, Jon Bronenkant, Michael McNeley, Mary Jo Bohart
- Members Absent** Appointee Ayala observed the meeting but did not participate due to not having been sworn in yet.
- Staff Present** Roberta Cameron
- Others Present** OSPCD Director of Finance, Alan Inacio; Senior Public Space Planner, Estello Raganit

Roll Call

Chair Kiracofe opened the meeting at 6:30. 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: Welcome new members

Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

Agenda Item 2: Approval of Meeting Minutes

Member Heimarck moved to approve the meeting minutes from 12/11/24, seconded by member Beretsky. The motion passed 6-2-0, with Members McNeley and Bohart abstaining because they were not present at the 12/11/24 meeting.

Agenda Item 3: Update on Fall Report

Cameron updated committee members that the potential change she had identified in the previous meeting has not been processed yet, so the annual report with the original data she presented at the last meeting is the final report for this year. If the AHT interest is returned to the CPC as she described at the prior meeting, this will be reflected in the unanticipated revenue that shows up in next year's annual report.

Agenda Item 4: Continued Deliberation on FY25 Applications

Quincy Street Park Renovation

Cameron recalled that the CPC had asked for clarification about the budget for this project. Senior Public Space Planner Estello Raganit gave a brief presentation to explain how the budget was derived.

Member Parkes asked how the City will ensure that the new plantings are more successful than the original plantings. Raganit explained that PSUF will follow the recommendations of the Pollinator Action Plan to design a plan that will be low maintenance and more appropriate for the conditions of the site.

Member McNeley asked about the genesis of a condition included in the draft recommendation that requires that the project be initiated within 3 years unless an extension is granted by the CPC. Cameron explained that there had been some City projects that were in limbo for several years, all of which have now been resolved. Projects with non-City entities are subject to a limit of 3 years before a contract extension is required. The CPC created this requirement for City projects to create parity, and to ensure that the CPC can request updates, and if necessary, cancel funding for projects that are not moving forward. However, Cameron also highlighted that she has incorporated the conditions that the CPC intends to apply to all projects into the General Conditions that are attached to Grant Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding, so that the recommendations can include only the project-specific conditions.

Cameron shared the spreadsheet summarizing the availability and utilization of funds from this funding round. She explained that there are sufficient funds to cover both of the projects that are under consideration, leaving \$197,936 potentially available in the Undesignated Fund Balance to cover any off-cycle applications received before the end of the fiscal year.

Member Heimarck moved to recommend that the City of Somerville OSPCD PSUF Division be awarded \$500,000 for the renovation of Quincy Street Park, seconded by Vice-Chair Parkes. The motion passed 8-0.

50 Bow Street Brickwork

Kiracofe gave a brief overview of the request for funding to restore the masonry on the street-facing side of the former Police Station in Union Square. Contributing to the CPC's decision to delay its decision on whether to recommend funding for this project is the complexity of awarding a CPA grant to a private condominium association, as this is the first time this situation has been considered.

Cameron provided some additional background. When granting CPA funds to private entities Somerville's CPC has always required that the properties be placed under a Preservation Restriction. A permanent preservation restriction requires not only the signature of the property owner, but also assent forms signed by any mortgage holders to ensure that they will abide by the PR in case of foreclosure. There have been some grantees who have never complied with the requirement to record a PR on their properties – at least one of which was due to the failure to obtain an assent from their mortgage holder. A term-limited PR could be put in place more quickly and without the assents from mortgage holders, but would not offer the level of protection that a permanent PR gives. In consultation with the Community Preservation Coalition and the City's Law Department, the suggestion is given to include the following conditions in a recommendation for funding for the 50 Bow Street project (or any CPA grant to a similar entity): 1) A term-limited PR must be recorded before any funds are distributed. 2) A Covenant must be recorded at the same time requiring that the grant be repaid after 10 years unless a permanent PR has been recorded. 3) The building must be placed under a permanent PR.

Cameron also noted that the last time the CPC recommended funding for preservation of a privately-owned building the Law Department required that the property owner sign a Memorandum of

Understanding affirming their consent to terms of the grant before the CPC's recommendation could be forwarded to City Council for approval.

Turin asked for clarification on the difference between the existing LHD, a term-limited PR, and a permanent PR. Cameron explained that the way the City intends to manage the PRs that it holds under the CPA program, it will require projects to undergo a similar review process with the HPC as is required for properties that are within the LHD, except that the PR on the deed triggers the review rather than the LHD. The main difference is that the LHD is an ordinance which could be changed or repealed by City Council, while the PR is temporarily or permanently attached to the deed. Turin pondered whether the City is receiving a benefit that is commensurate with the grant award in the case of a property that is already under an LHD.

Parkes recalled that in a previous case where the CPC recommended a large grant to a private property owner to preserve the Adams Magoun House, the CPC had included a condition that the grant would be repaid if the property was sold within 50 years. Cameron pointed out that the property owner did not actually consent to that condition which is why the project has not been able to advance for City Council approval (and will be brought back to the CPC for discussion later this year.) Cameron suggested that the CPC may want to reconsider the precedent as their understanding evolves.

Bohart expressed concern that the project qualifies as deferred maintenance rather than historic preservation, and that it might be setting a slippery precedent for other condo associations and owners of historic buildings across the City to look for City assistance to maintain their buildings. Bohart pointed out that in buying these condos the owners took on the added expense of maintaining a historic building. Turin agreed, and recalled that the CPC was swayed by the economic need of the owner of the Adams Magoun House and yet she didn't consent to the condition that the CPC put in place to ensure that she would not profit from a windfall. Kiracofe posited that the project meets the CPA eligibility criteria in that there is a public benefit identified, but that the question is whether there are other sources of funding that could be used to cover this cost, and if the CPC's scarce funds could be better allocated elsewhere.

Kiracofe asked whether the CPC has taken need into consideration for historic preservation projects in the past. Cameron explained that income is not a part of the calculation for the public interest in historic preservation projects. However, it may be relevant to consider an owner's capacity to pay for improvements contributing to the risk that a property will fall into a serious state of disrepair.

Committee members recalled that a member of the condo association gave a presentation of their funding request several months ago and that they have already completed or commit to funding repairs to three sides of the building, and are asking the City for funding only for one side. Member Heimarck stated that she supports giving CPA funds to preserve residential properties, as the historic residential landscape of Somerville is important to preserve. Cameron brought attention to a statement of the building's unique significance by HPC that was included in the CPC's meeting packet to contribute to the committee's consideration of this grant.

McNeley asked whether the CPC could reduce the window of time that a grantee has to implement a project from three years to one year, so that the CPC can reclaim the funds if the project does not move forward. Cameron provided some context that it often takes a long time for grant agreements to be executed enabling projects to move forward, so that the City's slow processes might conflict with a shorter timeline. Turin asked whether the applicant is aware of the grant terms. Cameron stated that the

terms are described in the application materials, but she feels that there may be a need to improve the application materials going forward to ensure that the requirements are fully understood going into the application process.

McNeley asked what is the enforcement mechanism to repay the grant if the conditions aren't met. Cameron explained that in theory the City can take legal action to seek pay back by any of the previous grantees who have not filed PRs, but that the Covenant will ensure a stronger understanding that this is the expectation.

Committee members agreed to defer a decision until a future meeting, and that it would be helpful to codify a framework for making historic preservation grants to private entities.

Agenda Item 5: Annual Review for 2026 Funding Round

Cameron shared the 2025 Agenda Calendar and another calendar listing the tasks associated with the annual review period. She asked committee members to reflect on how the past application cycle worked, and to offer thoughts about how the application process could be improved.

Member Bohart asked whether there are conversations with City Councilors or City staff to identify projects that might be candidates for City funding. Cameron reported that she is initiating conversations with City staff across several departments to identify potential projects to apply for CPA funds. City Councilors are included on the mailing list for newsletters that she periodically sends out to request input and inform people about the availability of CPA funds. It is also helpful for committee members to reach out to their own Ward Councilors for their input or to share information with their constituents.

Committee members felt that the past funding round was managed efficiently. Meetings were a manageable length, and information was provided that helped the committee to keep track of the overall funding availability and the specific information relevant to each project they were deciding on.

There was discussion about Intent Forms. The deadline for projects that are required to use this step in the application process is so early in the year that it can be a barrier to applying for funds. It is also confusing because the Intent Forms are not required for all applicants. Cameron pointed out that the goal of the Intent Form is to prompt a matching of partners for projects where more than one stakeholder should be involved, and acknowledged that the current process has not guaranteed that outcome.

Cameron asked whether the CPC might consider adopting a more streamlined application process for City-owned open space projects, since PSUF has been the sole applicant for most of the CPA open space projects to date, and PSUF has an established procedure for identifying its annual priorities for CPA funding. Since OS/R and HP projects have different types of applicants and different types of information required to inform the CPC's decision, it might make sense to use different application procedures. Committee members articulated that they would want to be able to vote on the individual components of a consolidated PSUF application. It should also still be possible for non-City applicants to apply for OS/R projects.

Cameron asked whether the CPC would like to eliminate some monthly meetings in the summer to increase the frequency of meetings during the annual funding cycle deliberation period. Some committee members pointed out that this might be a hardship given that they serve on multiple boards, and that they would prefer to maintain the once-monthly pace if practicable.

Cameron highlighted the upcoming Lunar New Year Festival and invited committee members to join her in tabling at this event.

Adjournment

Bronenkant moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Heimarck. The motion passed unanimously, 8-0.

Documents and Exhibits

1. Agenda
2. Draft Minutes 12/11/2024
3. FY25 Financial Workbook
4. Evaluation Criteria
5. Draft Funding Recommendations
6. Supplemental Application Materials
 - a. Quincy Street Open Space Renovations Memorandum and Updated Budget
 - b. 50 Bow Street Brickwork Staff Communication 1-15-25
7. CPA 2025 Annual Review Timeline
8. CPC 2025 Agenda Calendar
9. 2025 Lunar New Year Flyer