



KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE



MINUTES
MARCH 23, 2022

MEMBERS

Heather Heimarck, Chair
Rose White, V/Chair
Laura Beretsky
Alan Bingham
Jahan Habib
Rebecca McKevez
Tatiana Shannon
David Turin

The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) virtually held its monthly meeting at 6:30 pm on the GoToMeeting platform in compliance with Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021 regarding the Open Meeting Law during the COVID-19 crisis.

Members Present Chair Heather Heimarck, Vice Chair Rose White, Alan Bingham, Tatiana Shannon, Rebecca McKevez, David Turin, Laura Beretsky,

Members Absent Jahan Habib

Staff Present Roberta Cameron, Alan Inacio, Victor Nascimento, Melissa Wood, Christine Blais

Others Present Invited speakers: Josh Safdie, Kathryn Aucello, Sam LaTronica, Ashley Tienken
Public attendees: 17 persons

STAFF

Roberta Cameron

Agenda Item 1: Roll Call

Chair Heather Heimarck called the meeting to order at 6:40 PM. She welcomed panelists and members of the public and explained the format and goals for the public hearing. She read the CPC's mission statement "We as members of the Committee are deeply invested in the Mission of the CPA Committee which is to administer public monies for good of Somerville citizens' quality life by investing in affordable housing, historic preservation, and open space and recreation."

CPA Manager Cameron gave a brief presentation about CPA in Somerville and the Community Preservation Plan, to provide context for the way that the CPC will use the information gained from the public hearing. She showed the program area allocation and priorities articulated in the previous CPP update, and suggested that these may be updated based on the input gathered through the Hearing, survey, and other outreach, as well as the CPC's experiences in implementing the program. He described the way public input is gathered and incorporated into the planning process.

Agenda Item 2: Invited Testimony

- a.) Victor Nascimento gave an overview of City planning, including Somervision and Neighborhood plans. Key Somervision goals include meeting a goal of 20% of housing stock being affordable, acquiring 105 acres of new open space, and exploring opportunities to create new gathering spaces for youth. Current or recent neighborhood plans include Gilman Square, Winter Hill, and Union Square. The web page Somerville by Design provides a catalog of previous planning efforts. Recommendations typically include zoning suggestions, streetscape and traffic concepts, new or changed open space concepts, broad design guidelines for new development, suggestions

for commercial development and business types, and any other neighborhood-specific issues brought up by the community.

Member Beretsky asked about the potential impact that the Green Line Extension will have on housing prices in the city. Nascimento responded that the City is working on ways to mitigate the pressure on housing while expanding transit access.

Member Turin asked how the goals for open space changed between the 2040 Somersvision plan and the previous version. Nascimento explained that the current plan of 105 acres recognized the fact that the City had achieved the creation of 15 acres toward the previous goal of acquiring 120 acres. The City is looking for ways to continue progress toward this goal.

- b.) Melissa Wood, Director of Capital Projects spoke about projects that her department is working on that overlap with CPA, in particular Somerville City Hall, the 1895 Building, and Edgerly Education Center. She referenced the Building Master Plan, which identifies goals to co-locate City departments, improve the office environment, invest in long-term buildings and divest of buildings that are no longer suitable, and move out of leased space. She also described the Public Safety Building project which is incorporating the Climate Forward goals, and they are looking to create public open space over a geothermal well field beside the building. She also discussed 90 Union Square (the SCAT building) which Capital Projects anticipates bringing to the CPC to restore the historic cupola.

- c.) Christine Blais, Acting Director of the Office of Energy & Environment described her department and highlighted areas of overlap between their objectives and CPA program areas. They work on resiliency, mitigation, adaptation, response, and education for climate change, municipal energy conservation and clean energy, waste reduction, and hazardous conditions and materials in public spaces. They are responsible for implementation of the climate action plan, Somerville Climate Forward. Climate change impacts they are focused on include extreme heat, precipitation, and coastal flooding. They are working on strategies to reduce carbon emissions levels, while additional overlapping goals relate to the creation of public spaces, equity and access to carbon-free transportation, and creating ecologically restorative City landscape. Blais provided specific initiatives related to CPA program areas: Housing - to make affordable housing net-zero and to apply resiliency and sustainability standards to new development and major renovations; Historic Preservation - to support resiliency and conservation of publicly-owned buildings through energy project manager's work; Open Space & Recreation – interdepartmental and regional partnerships to understand risks and influence policies, design, and use. She called out projects they are working on that relate to CPA – suggested that they could work with the CPC to create resiliency criteria/scoring rubric for CPC projects. Tools to improve resiliency of open space and public spaces are included in the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, Hazard Mitigation Plan Update 2022, Keep Cool Somerville Strategies Toolkit, and Flood Ready stormwater management.

Member Bingham asked Blais to elaborate on what are privately-owned public spaces, and what are hazardous conditions and material in public spaces. Blaise deferred to Rebecca McKevez of PSUF to talk about privately-owned public spaces, as PSUF oversees this initiative. The environmental manager of OSE oversees mitigation of hazardous materials such as asbestos in public buildings, as well as hazardous waste collection.

Member White asked whether there has been feedback from affordable housing development partners and the Affordable Housing Trust relating to the layering of environmental and housing goals. Blais said that they are looking at what resources could help to support improving the capacity for energy upgrades in existing buildings. They are looking forward to future state building code to set standards by way of a stretch code for net-zero construction.

- d.) Member Rebecca McKevez gave a presentation on behalf of the Division of Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF). PSUF works on parks, public spaces, and streetscapes. She pointed out that the City only owns about half of the open space in the city, with the remainder being either state- or privately-owned. Two guiding documents the division has developed are the Open Space and Recreation Plan and Urban Forest Management Plan. CPA has helped in the past to acquire new land for parks and to improve existing parks. She described ways that PSUF has gathered public input in parks plannings, in particular for Somerville Junction Park, School yard public meetings, the Reimagine Union Square process, public meetings for development projects that include Civic Spaces, utilizing the SomerVoice web page, staffing four committees, direct outreach from City Councilors and residents, and collaboration with the City's Communications Team. McKevez provided an example of public open space at Assembly Row as an example of Privately-owned public space.
- e.) Josh Safdie introduced himself – a resident of Central Street in Somerville and member of the Board of Appeals who works in the area of accessibility in architecture. He described the nexus between civil rights, accessibility, and historic preservation. He pointed out that state and federal law require accessibility improvements: if you alter it, it must be made accessible. "Alteration" is defined as changes that could affect the usability of the building or facility (ADA) or a change or modification that requires a building permit (MA). For ADA, alterations to a primary function area trigger "path of travel" accessibility requirements. For MA law, cost thresholds trigger additional accessibility requirements.

Member Bingham commented that hearing and vision are also disabilities that should be considered. Bingham supports universal design in affordable housing, noting that the population who needs affordable housing has a correlation with the population who need more accessible living spaces. Bingham finally observed that many public spaces in Somerville are not accessible.

Cameron asked whether churches are subject to the same accessibility requirements as non-religious organizations. Safdie explained that churches and religious organizations are not subject to ADA, but that they are governed under the state accessibility code 521CMR which is under the state building code. The state code is triggered by renovation work. Any work being done on a church or synagogue would trigger obligations for accessibility under cost thresholds, which is often missed in project planning.

- f.) Kathryn Aucella from Elizabeth Peabody House talked about how CPA has benefitted EPH in past funding cycles for a full roof replacement, a conditions assessment, a fire alarm system, and design to make their upper floor functional by current building standards to enable them to use the space for their programs. The organization has owned the former church building since 1979, hosting a preschool program and a food pantry. The current executive director (since 2017) has been focused on catching up with capital improvement projects. An application that EPH made to the CPC in a previous funding round to have the face of the building restored, repairing wood

trim and replacing clapboards with shingles as it was historically designed to have was denied as it was deemed to be "maintenance", which is an ineligible activity. EPH has had to take funds out of their operating budget and their endowment in order to address projects relating to the safety of their students, and does not have resources to address the exterior envelope of the program building and the neighboring rectory which they use as administrative space. EPH shares a goal with the City to make the building be a "crown jewel of Somerville", and anticipates future initiatives to give the building a facelift and renovate stained glass windows, as well as securing the third floor and making it an accessible space.

Heimarck pointed out that the building assessment that EPH completed was a very useful roadmap to help EPH and the CPC to prioritize the needs to preserve and restore the historic building, and she encourages other organizations to apply for building assessments.

Bingham encouraged EPH and other prospective applicants to come to the HPC for advice with planning historic preservation projects. Bingham also described the LHD Small Grants Program.

- g.) The Somerville Hispanic Association for Community Development was invited to provide testimony about the programs that operate from their building and the Somerville residents who are benefiting from the improvements the CPC has funded at their site, but no one from the organization was present. Cameron explained that the organization runs a large food pantry. They previously had a childcare program operating in the building which had to move because of serious structural problems discovered when restoring the roof over the space they occupied. SHA4CD hopes to restore the childcare program at their site in the future. A homeless shelter has also occupied the second floor of their building. Cameron hoped that they would be able to share more about this and other programs the organization houses.
- h.) Sam LaTronica from the Somerville Community Corporation spoke about how CPA funds have been used to support the 100 Homes program, which acquires properties all over the city. SCC also uses CPA funds to provide staff support to the program. LaTronica highlighted a constraint they have encountered, which has been that they cannot use CPA funds to improve properties which were not acquired or created with CPA funds. About 49 units out of their 117 unit portfolio were acquired with non-CPA funds. There continues to be a strong need for permanent sustainable affordable housing. SCC is interested in exploring how to combine the goals of sustainability and affordability.

Member White suggested that renovations related to comprehensive life-cycle improvements (as opposed to smaller maintenance-type projects) may be more likely to be eligible, as they would preserve the life of the affordable units. It may be helpful to discuss the question of eligibility for projects like this with the AHT. Cameron encouraged applicants to reach out and communicate early in the planning stage for projects so that they can evaluate together how the projects might fit within our eligibility criteria.

- i.) Ashley Tienken of the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) spoke about the services that her organization provides. The mission of the organization is to help families and individuals achieve financial security while addressing the root causes of economic injustice. With respect to housing the organization targets housing affordability and advocates for residents confronted with evictions, accessing rental assistance and public benefits, applying for affordable housing,

and case management. CAAS has received \$240,000 in CPA grants from the AHTF for multiple programs they provide, with direct client assistance for displacement prevention being the largest. There have been fewer requests for start-up assistance. The program allows participants up to 100% AMI, but most of their clients have 30-50% AMI or lower. Challenges with this program include the \$3,000 lifetime cap on assistance, the requirement for a Notice to Quit before clients can receive assistance, and they must be determined to be self-sufficient after a one-time payment covering rental assistance or start-up cost. CPA has an advantage over other funding sources because the time to process a request for assistance is much shorter. Tienken highlighted the top community needs which they gathered through a community survey: 1) Inadequate supply of safe and affordable housing, 2) inadequate access to employment that meets basic needs, and 3) inadequate supply of affordable, suitable care for children. A strategic goal of CAAS resulting from these needs is to preserve and increase the supply of affordable housing and help low-income residents achieve sustainable tenancies. Rental assistance is critical to prevent displacement. CPA funding has a place in the fight the intensification of gentrification and to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Bingham commented that he is concerned about gentrification and people being priced out of the market. Somerville is in danger of losing its diversity. Tienken responded that CAAS is working to prevent displacement and preserve the community.

Agenda Item 3: Public Comment

Cameron enabled members of the public to speak in the webinar platform and gave instructions for members of the public to communicate within the webinar or to contact her via email.

One question had been submitted via comment within the platform by Ron Cavallo: Can the CPA address issues of the City infrastructure. I am very safety conscious and am aware of a number of issues that are significant to public safety. There is a condemned walking bridge as an example. There are roads and sidewalks in great disrepair. These are not beautiful things to address, but there is huge need.

Cameron responded that transportation and roadway infrastructure projects are not eligible for CPA funding except in unusual instances when they may be historic or classified as outdoor recreation (not part of a street right-of-way). Bingham noted that there are no footbridges recognized as historic structures within the city, and that the footbridge may not be owned by the City. Heimarck noted that a footbridge may have a recreational function. Member Turin recommended using the 311 network to reach out to the City to report infrastructure concerns.

Turin suggested keeping the survey open until May 14, as the presentation gave May 14 as a deadline for submitting comments to be incorporated into the CPP.

Heimarck asked that CPC members continue to share the Facebook page and other opportunities for engagement and submitting ideas and suggestions.

Member Bingham moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by member Beretsky. The motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

Documents and Exhibits

1. Agenda
2. Presentation