



TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON MASSACHUSETTS

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Report to Annual Town Meeting, May 1, 2023

With Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2024 Funding

The Great Barrington Community Preservation Committee (CPC) is pleased to present this report to Town Meeting. This report summarizes the appropriations we are recommending for FY24 and includes details about each of the proposed Community Preservation Act (CPA) projects. It also reports on the status of previously-funded projects.

CPA Overview

CPA was adopted by the voters of Great Barrington in 2012. CPA raises money for the creation of community housing, preservation of historic buildings and landscapes, open space preservation, and creation of recreational resources, via a 3% surcharge on the property tax bills (after discounting \$100,000 of value). Therefore a home valued at \$399,600 (the FY23 estimated median value of a single family home) paid about \$126 into the CPA fund in FY23. Low-income households and low- and moderate-income senior households may annually apply to be exempted from the surcharge. Also, the Town receives additional CPA funds from the State each year.

The CPC is the entity which administers the CPA funds for the Town. Each fall, the CPC receives applications from projects seeking CPA funding, and then recommends projects to Town Meeting for funding approval. The CPC also writes and adopts, after a public hearing process, a Community Preservation Plan to guide CPA funding decisions. Each year the Plan is finalized after hearing public input.

Recommended projects only receive funds if Town Meeting voters approve the CPC's recommendations. It should be noted that a vote for or against a particular CPA project will not have an impact on the total Town budget, or on property tax bills. CPA funding is collected annually, and the Town Meeting vote is about how to spend the funds that have been or will be collected.

For the current fiscal year (FY23), which closes on June 30, total CPA revenues will be approximately \$920,000. That includes an estimated \$550,000 from local collections and \$370,000 already received from the State. Since its inception in Great Barrington, through FY23, the CPA has generated almost \$5 million in revenue and received almost \$2 million from the State. Voters at Town Meetings (2015-2022) appropriated a total of \$6.5 million to housing, historic preservation, and open space/recreation projects.

The CPA budget available as we enter into this Town Meeting on May 1, 2023 includes unexpended funds from previous fiscal years, as well as revenues that will be collected in the coming fiscal year.

Recommendations to 2023 Town Meeting for FY24

This year the CPC recommends Town Meeting voters approve three CPA articles, summarized below.

Article 25 is the first CPA article. This is the annual "bookkeeping" article. This is a simple step we must take in order to ensure we comply with the State's CPA law, which requires that Towns either reserve *or* spend at least 10% of its estimated annual revenues (which are estimated at \$550,000) towards each of the CPA categories: Historic Preservation, Community Housing, and Open Space.

This year the CPC recommends meeting the legal requirements in the following manner: (1) reserve \$55,000 each for the Historic Preservation and Housing categories, and (2) for the Open Space category, appropriate \$62,000 to pay for the bond issuance costs and first payment for the Memorial Field project (the borrowing was approved at the 2022 Town Meeting). In that way the Town will meet the minimum requirements of the CPA law.

Article 25 also includes an appropriation of \$15,000 (less than 5% of estimated revenues), to the administrative account in order to pay for items such as legal costs, appraisals, administrative support, and other expenses necessary to implement the CPA and its projects. Any unspent funds in this account roll back into the trust fund after each year.

Finally, Article 25 recommends the balance of estimated FY24 funds be appropriated into the budgeted reserve account, so that the funds could be available in case voters at a Special Town Meeting between now and the next Annual Town Meeting wanted to consider granting money to another project that might come up.

Article 26 is the second CPA article. This is the proposed appropriation for specific projects. After reserving funds in the previous article (above) this article asks for voters to use those funds and previously budgeted funds to make grants totaling \$1,170,000 to nine (9) projects recommended by the CPC. All projects were vetted by your CPC, which determined, among other things, that these projects meet the goals expressed in the Community Preservation Plan: they provide a needed public benefit, they have strong community support, and, that the CPA funds will not, in most cases, be the only funds used for the project. All of the recommended projects are summarized below and are located on the map in Figure 1 (page 3).

COMMUNITY HOUSING

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|---|-----------|
| 1. Town, Affordable Housing Trust Fund – housing acquisition, creation, & support | \$265,000 |
| 2. Construct, Inc. – study of feasibility for affordable housing expansion | \$150,000 |
| 3. Alander Group – affordable housing at 322 Main Street | \$250,000 |

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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| 4. Town – preservation of the Brown mausoleum at the Mahaiwe Cemetery | \$20,000 |
| 5. First Congregational Church – restoration of Manse exterior (phase 2) | \$225,000 |
| 6. Alander Group – preservation of 322 Main Street | \$150,000 |
| 7. BAB Capital 77 LLC – preservation of The Cove (phase 1) | \$50,000 |

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

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|---|----------|
| 8. Town, Conservation Comm. – McAllister wildlife refuge project next phase | \$20,000 |
| 9. Berkshire Natural Resources Council – Three Mill Hill trail improvements | \$40,000 |

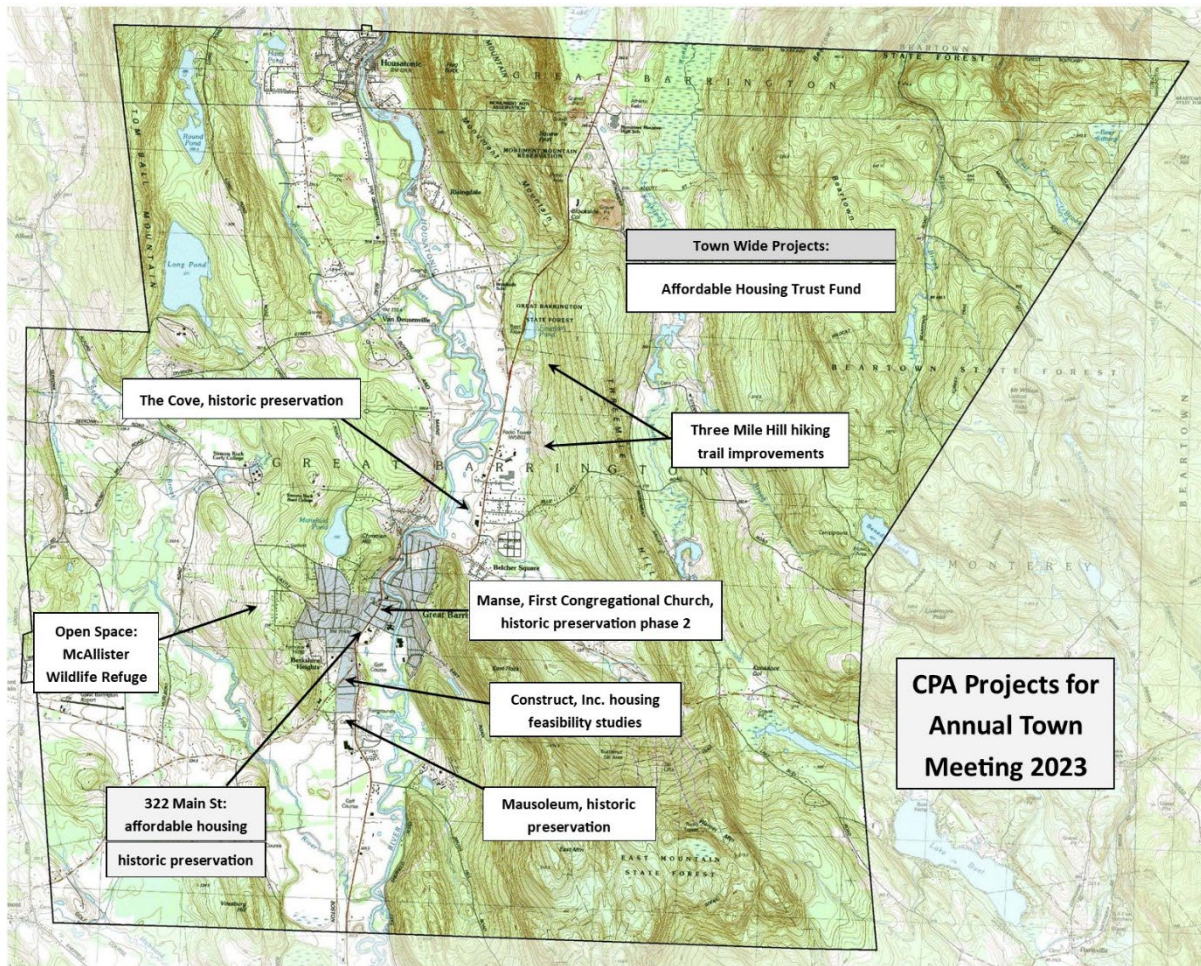
TOTAL: \$1,170,000

Summary of this Year's Recommended Projects

1. Town, Affordable Housing Trust Fund – housing acquisition, creation, & support (\$265,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which will use it in a variety of ways to acquire, create, preserve or support affordable housing across Town. The Trust is an entity of the Town which is able to acquire land or buildings for affordable housing, create new affordable housing (usually through down payment grants or funding for development partners), and support affordable housing (through rental assistance, for example). If approved, this grant will provide funds for the Trust to implement the Town's affordable housing priorities over the next year.

Figure 1: Map of Nine Recommended Projects for Town Meeting 2023



2. Construct, Inc – predevelopment feasibility studies to expand affordable housing (\$150,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to Construct, Inc., a local housing nonprofit, which will hire the professionals - engineers, architects, etc. – required to determine whether three existing Construct-owned properties in Town could accommodate additional affordable housing. If feasible, and subject to local zoning and permitting requirements, up to 16 new housing units could be created.

3. Alander Group – affordable housing at 322 Main Street (\$250,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to the Owner and developer of 322 Main Street, a historic building at the corner of Main Street and Castle Street, downtown. The property is three floors: a commercial first floor and two upper floors containing 22 apartments. With this grant, two of those apartments will be guaranteed to be affordable for a minimum of 10 years, to households earning not more than 80% of area median income. In recommending support for this project, the CPC recognizes the desirability of integrating affordable housing into the fabric of the community whenever possible, rather than restricting it to isolated, concentrated complexes.

4. Town – preservation of the Brown mausoleum at the Mahaiwe Cemetery (\$20,000)

The CPC recommends this grant for the Town DPW towards the preservation of the historic mausoleum to repair the slate roof and roof structure. The building anchors the northwest corner of the Mahaiwe Cemetery,

the Town's oldest burial ground. The cemetery contains impressive open space, architecture, and historical interest, and was designated by Town's Historical Commission to be significant to the town's history.

5. Manse at the First Congregational Church – Phase 2 of the restoration of exterior stone and masonry (\$225,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to the FCC of Great Barrington, which, after the successful restoration of the west and north facades of the Manse last year, will restore the east and south sides. The structure is listed on the National and State Register of Historic Places. The CPA grant represents just 34% of the projected costs, the balance of which will be paid by the Church's fundraising and other grants. The community benefit of this project is the historic preservation of a landmark Main Street building; the grant does not fund the religious activities of the Church.

6. Alander Group – restoration and repairs at 322 Main Street (\$150,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to Alander Group towards the historic restoration of 322 Main Street, another significant downtown landmark. The historical requirements include restoration of masonry and cornices, as well as historically accurate (but modern and energy efficient) windows for the renovated apartments on the second and third floors.

7. BAB Capital 77 LLC – preservation of The Cove (phase 1) (\$50,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to the new owner of "The Cove" bowling alley building, recognized as an iconic structure of historic significance. The grant will fund a portion of the capital investment required in order to install sprinklers and insulation inside of this unique barrel vault roof, improvements which are necessary to bring the building up to code and keep it useable.

8. Town, Conservation Commission – McAllister Wildlife Refuge (\$20,000)

The CPC recommends this grant which will continue the Conservation Commission's multi-year open space preservation effort at this 90+ acre wildlife preserve and open space. This project focus will now involve planting climate-ready trees in areas where the canopy has been destroyed by invasive plants and invasive pests (like the ash borer). The Commission supplements the CPA funds each year with grant funding from the State.

9. Berkshire Natural Resources Council – Three Mill Hill trail improvements (\$40,000)

The CPC recommends this grant towards the BNRC's rebuilding of the Three Mile Hill Trail. This project will rebuild trail bridges, bog boardwalks, and sections of the trail, which runs north-south along the three mile ridge and takes hikers through multiple permanently preserved forest areas. The trail is part of a continuous network from Fountain Pond State Park to the Berkshire South Community, and connects with CHP and the town's recently completed Old Route 7 Greenway.

Status of Projects Funded in the Past Three Years

In 2020 Town Meeting funded eight projects for a total of \$828,500 for FY21. Here is a brief status report:

Community Development Corp.: \$250,000 was awarded, supplementing the FY20 grant, to create 49 affordable apartments at 910 Main Street. Construction of this project is almost complete.

Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust: \$185,000 was awarded to the Trust to purchase 7.25 acres of land on which up to 20 affordable homes will be built. The parcel was purchased in July 2020. Grant funds were received in 2021 for design and infrastructure engineering, and in 2022 for construction, which is expected to begin late 2023 or in 2024. Habitat for Humanity will develop the project. As a CPA project on Town land, the homes will be affordable in perpetuity.

Town, Historical Commission: \$15,000 was awarded for a historic resources survey, to inventory historic properties in Housatonic Village. As with all its historical research, the results will be compiled into a public

report that will be accessible on the Town website and at the libraries. The project has been delayed several times and should begin in 2023.

Town, Historical Commission: \$50,000 was awarded for the preservation of the historic trolley shelter at Weir Park / Belcher Square (the intersection of Stockbridge Road and State Road). The project will be underway shortly and will be completed in June or July 2023.

Historical Society: \$145,000 was awarded to the GBHS for another phase of preservation and restoration of the Wheeler Farmstead, specifically to renovate the second floor into an education and research center, finish the Wagon House and summer kitchen, and depending on costs, begin work on restoration of the barns and silo. Work began in 2021 and continues steadily. Recent work includes a new roof on the large barn.

Berkshire Natural Resources Council: \$30,000 was awarded to BNRC to create a trailhead access point to the Tom Ball ridge trail system, including almost 360 acres of conserved land with public trails. This project is delayed but is scheduled for 2023.

Town, Conservation Commission: \$33,500 was awarded for continued invasive plants removal at the McAllister Wildlife Refuge, to improve forest and field habitat and access. This phase of work is complete.

Town: \$120,000 was awarded to develop detailed engineering plans to stabilize the lake edge along Lake Mansfield Road, to mitigate stormwater runoff, and to replace the road with a new recreational path. Work began in 2020 and continues, with permitting under the Wetlands Protection Act now. With these designs, the Town received nearly \$1 million in grant funds from the State for construction, which could begin in late 2023.

In 2021 Town Meeting funded nine projects for a total of \$652,959 for FY22. Here is a brief status report:

Construct, Inc.: \$50,000 was awarded to be used for affordable housing rental assistance and microloan programs. The rental assistance program helps low- and moderate-income people stay housed when they are unemployed, underemployed, and has been especially important in a health crisis when people need to quarantine, and it has a benefit of helping small landlords stay afloat. Assists average less than \$1,000.

Town, Historical Commission: \$6,000 was awarded for research of various sites scattered around town. This project will be coordinated with previously funded research projects to begin in 2023.

Town, Ramsdell Library: \$9,800 was utilized for an archeological study of the library grounds. The study was required in order to seek state funding for improvements on the site and the building. The study is complete.

Manse at the First Congregational Church: \$240,859 was awarded towards the restoration of exterior stone and masonry on the west and north walls of the Manse, and this project is completed.

Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center: \$15,000 was awarded to replace emergency exit doors at this landmark building. Not only are these needed to make the historic building functional, they can also serve as additional access points. The project is completed.

Clinton Church Restoration (now the DuBois Freedom Center): \$200,000 was awarded for an additional phase of restoration work at this oldest extant Black church building in Berkshire County. At this former church, the Phase 1 emergency structural issues were addressed. This grant will fund phase 2 structural repairs, remediation, and utility work, and will be matched by over \$400,000 from other grant and fundraising sources.

Town: \$30,000 was awarded for Housatonic Rail Trail improvements. Crushed stone will be added to improve accessibility. The path connects to the new Main Street sidewalk and also the cemetery, making for an important walking / recreation loop in Housatonic. This is scheduled for fall 2023.

Town: \$70,000 is being used for a 3-year study of water quality at Lake Mansfield. The Town has partnered with Bard College at Simon's Rock and the Berkshire Environmental Research Center. The work began in 2021.

Town, Conservation Commission: \$31,300 was awarded for more restoration work at the McAllister Wildlife Refuge. The work includes removal of invasive plants and trail clearing. This phase, which received additional funding from Mass DCR, is completed.

In 2022 Town Meeting funded eight projects for a total of \$1.4 million. Here is a brief status report:

Town, Affordable Housing Trust Fund: \$200,000 was awarded towards housing acquisition, creation, & support, to be administered by the Trust. To date the Trust has committed \$100,000 towards the creation of new affordable housing in a downtown building on Main Street, and up to \$50,000 towards the rental assistance program. The Trust meets regularly and all meetings are open to the public.

Construct, Inc: \$50,000 was awarded to fund predevelopment of new housing at Eagle Cliff, one of the buildings on the old Eagleton school campus on Route 23. The project is in the early stages and is investigating how designs will influence whether it can receive construction grants from the state.

CDC of South Berkshire: \$350,000 was awarded towards predevelopment of the Berkshire Cottages housing site, the remaining two acres of land at the former log homes site at 100 Bridge Street. Work is underway and to date has included required environmental testing and initial site designs.

Alander Group: \$250,000 was awarded for the historic restoration of the building at 343 Main Street. Work is well underway on the renovation of this 22,000 square foot historic downtown building, directly across from Town Hall. The Town will have a historic preservation restriction on the building.

Town: \$25,000 was awarded so that DPW could hire structural engineers to determine what repairs are needed to preserve the historic Castle Street pedestrian railroad underpass. Engineers will present preliminary findings and recommendations to DPW this summer.

Town: \$7,500 was awarded to complete an updated aquatic weeds study at Lake Mansfield. The work has been completed and the report is posted on the Town web site, under the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force web page.

Town: \$31,300 was awarded for the Conservation Commission's preservation work at the McAllister Wildlife Refuge. This phase of the multi-year open space preservation effort continues the removal of invasive shrubs and bittersweet in the forests and fields, to protect wildlife habitat and preserve views.

Town: \$500,000 was awarded for improvements to Memorial Field. The Town approved this grant as a bond, to be paid yearly for 15 years by appropriations from the CPA. Designs are complete and work is preliminarily scheduled for the fall of 2023. Work will include a new backstop and fencing to stop foul balls, new dugout shelters, and handicapped accessible connections to the sidewalks on Bridge Street and to the handicapped parking at the Railroad Street youth building.