



# TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON MASSACHUSETTS

## COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

### **Report to Annual Town Meeting June 2022**

### **With Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2023 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 FY23 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**

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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 \$348,400 (the FY22 estimated median value of a single family home) paid about \$110 into the CPA fund in FY22. 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 (FY22), which closes on June 30, total CPA revenues will be approximately \$960,000. That includes an estimated \$550,000 from local collections and \$409,878 already received from the State. Since its inception in Great Barrington, the CPA has generated nearly \$5 million in total collections, and voters have appropriated \$5.14 million (Town Meetings 2015-2021) to housing, historic preservation, and open space/recreation projects.

The CPA budget available as we enter into this Town Meeting scheduled for June 6, 2022 includes the unexpended funds from previous fiscal years, as well as revenues that will be collected in the coming fiscal year.

### **Recommendations to 2022 Town Meeting for FY23**

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

**Article 17 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 towards each of the CPA categories: Community Housing, Open Space, and Historic Preservation. Ten percent of the estimated total FY23 revenue of \$550,000 equals \$55,000 (note: we

underestimate revenues in order to be conservative in our projections). Therefore the CPC recommends that the Town approve this article to reserve \$55,000 to each of the three CPA categories, to meet the requirements of the CPA law.

This article also includes an appropriation of \$20,000 (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, this article would place the balance of FY23 funds 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.

*This year the CPC recommends a total of eight (8) projects. Seven (7) projects are described below, and the eighth, a borrowing for Memorial Field improvements, is described in the third article below.*

**Article 18 is the second CPA article.** This is the proposed appropriation for specific projects. After parking the funds in the first article, this article asks for voters to appropriate funds to worthy projects. Seven (7) of which are the subject of this article. The CPC recommends the expenditure of \$917,000 in CPA funds for these projects. The funds will come from revenue expected this coming fiscal year and from last year’s unexpended funds. All projects are vetted by your CPC, which determined, among other things, that these projects meet the goals expressed Community Preservation Plan, provide a needed public benefit, demonstrate strong community support, and, usually, that CPA funds will not 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 4).

COMMUNITY HOUSING

- 1. Town, Affordable Housing Trust Fund – housing acquisition, creation, & support \$200,000
- 2. Construct, Inc Town, Historical Comm. – predevelopment of Eagle Cliff housing \$50,000
- 3. CDC of South Berkshire – predevelopment of Berkshire Cottages housing site \$350,000

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- 4. Alander Group – preservation and restoration of 343 Main Street historic building \$250,000
- 5. Town – Castle Street pedestrian railroad underpass phase one, design/engineering \$25,000

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

- 6. Town – aquatic weeds study at Lake Mansfield \$7,000
- 7. Town, Conservation Comm. – McAllister wildlife refuge project next phase \$35,000

TOTAL: \$917,000

**Article 19 is the third CPA article.** This is a proposed borrowing authorization to pay for improvements to Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Field, the baseball field on Bridge Street. This field requires significant upgrades, totaling \$500,000, which the CPC recommends be paid by borrowing the funds. The borrowing will be paid back with CPA funds over 15 years, at about \$35,000 per year. This project is a separate article from the other seven because borrowings require a supermajority vote at Town Meeting.

**Summary of this Year’s Recommended Projects**

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- 1. Town, Affordable Housing Trust Fund – housing acquisition, creation, & support (\$200,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. 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.

2. Construct, Inc – predevelopment of Eagle Cliff Housing (\$50,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to Construct, Inc., a local housing nonprofit, which will reutilize a building on the old Eagleton school campus on Route 23 for affordable homes. With this grant Construct will be able to do design and engineering drawings from which construction cost estimates can be developed. Then, Construct will be able to seek grants from the State in order to pay for the renovations. As with many of the units created through CPA grants, a grant of this type from the CPA is important “early money” that demonstrates local support and helps secure funding from other sources.

3. CDC of South Berkshire – predevelopment of Berkshire Cottages housing site (\$350,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to the Community Development Corporation (CDC) of South Berkshire. This grant will also fund design and engineering studies. With these funds, the CDC will be able to engage the community in a design process, design the site and the new homes, and seek grants from the State in order to build the homes. The project site is the remaining two acres of land at the former log homes site at 100 Bridge Street. This is another example of the CPA being important “early money” that shows local support and helps secure funding from other sources.

4. Alander Group – restoration and repairs at 343 Main Street (\$250,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to Alander Group, the new owner of 343 Main Street. The 22,000 square foot building is in the town’s historic downtown, directly across from Town Hall, and it used to be the Berkshire Community College (BCC) South County Center. The building has been declared historically significant by the Town’s Historical Commission, thus it is eligible for CPA funds. Alander will restore and repair the historic façade and masonry of the exterior of the building, which in many places is in serious disrepair. In exchange for the grant, the owner will agree to a historic preservation restriction. The building is preleased for the Sustainable Food Lab and Community Health and Wellness Center, with Berkshire Health Systems, CHP, and BCC as tenants.

5. Town – Castle Street pedestrian railroad underpass phase one, design/engineering (\$25,000)

The CPC recommends this grant which will pay for the Town’s first step in restoring the historic railroad station pedestrian underpass at Castle Street. An engineer will investigate the structure and architectural systems of the stairs and kiosk/over-structure, to determine needed repairs which may include, for example, drainage, lighting, reset stairs, restored kiosk, and installation replica historic windows. Resulting construction documents and cost estimates will be the basis to secure funds for a future construction phase.

6. Town – aquatic weeds study at Lake Mansfield (\$7,000)

The CPC recommends this grant to assess the types of vegetation growing in the lake. This will help us understand if previous weed control efforts have been working, and what, if any, continuing efforts are needed. Understanding the weed growth, and refining if necessary our ongoing plans, is important to our work to preserve Lake Mansfield's role as an open space and recreation resource.

7. Town, Conservation Commission – McAllister Wildlife Refuge (\$31,300)

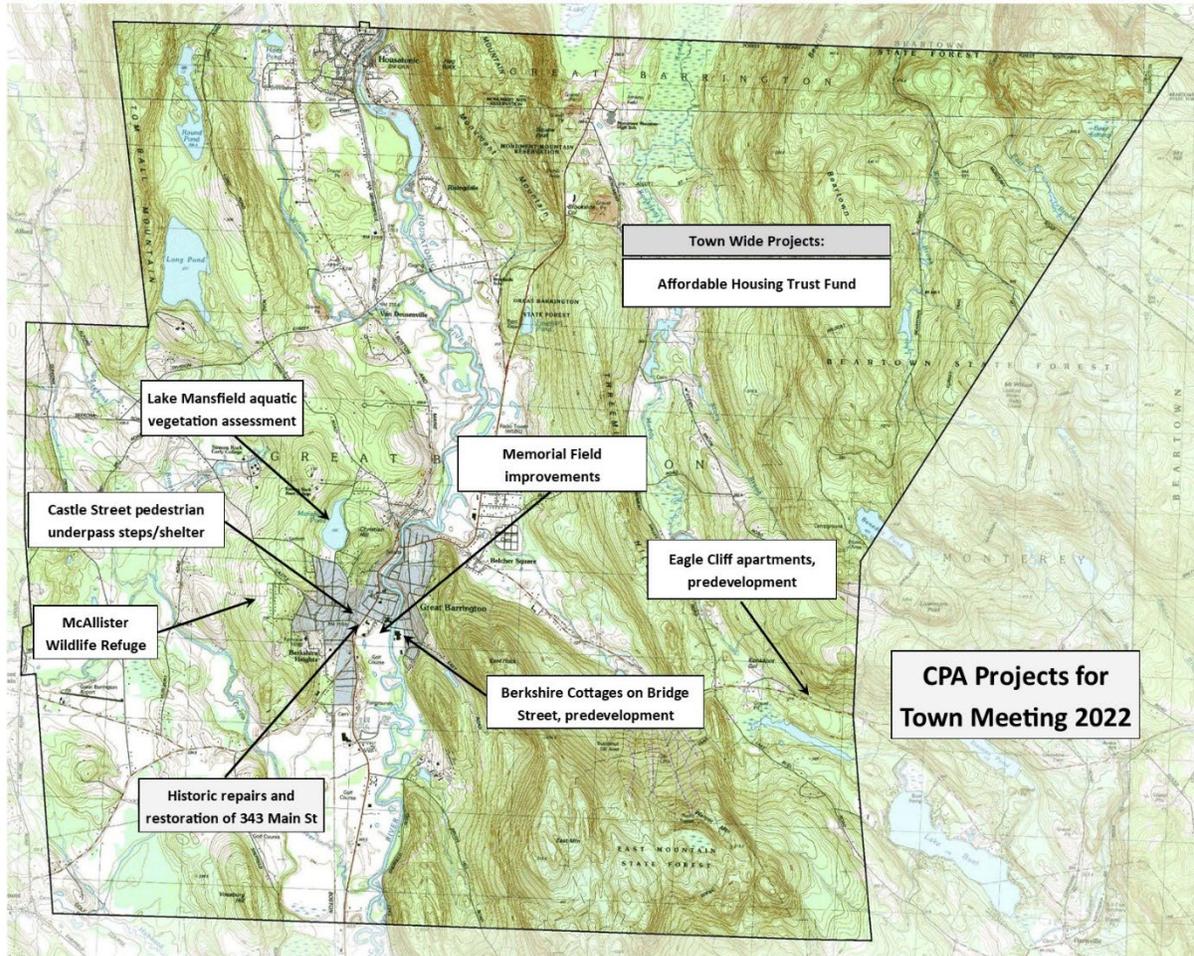
The CPC recommends this grant which will continue the Conservation Commissions multi-year open space preservation effort. This project will continue removal of invasive shrubs and bittersweet in the forests and fields, to protect wildlife habitat and preserve views. The Commission regularly supplements the CPA funds with grant funding from other sources. Several years of work are now paying off with improved bird habitat and increased bird nesting activity.

8. Town – Memorial Field Improvements (\$500,000)

The CPC recommends this grant, to be paid by a 15-year bond, to make improvements to Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Field on Bridge Street, and it will make the field accessible to handicapped persons. Work also includes 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. The project is designed and ready to be bid for construction.

Figure 1: Map of Eight Recommended Projects for Town Meeting 2022



**Status of Projects Funded in the Past Three Years**

In 2019 Town Meeting funded eight projects for a total of \$814,800 for FY20. Here is a brief status report:

Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust: \$100,000 was awarded to the Trust to create affordable housing town-wide, through a continuation of the down payment assistance program. Also, \$65,000 was utilized for an emergency rental assistance for households whose ability to pay rent was impacted by the COVID crisis.

Community Development Corp.: \$200,000 was granted to create affordable housing at 910 Main Street. The CDC will construct 40 permanently affordable apartments at 910 Main Street. The new housing units will be affordable to households earning not more than 60% of area median income. This FY20 grant was supplemented with an FY21 grant of \$250,000. Construction of this project began in early 2022.

Town, Historic District Commission: \$27,000 was awarded for a historic resources survey for the Taconic - West Avenues National Register Historic District. This project will research approximately 100 properties within the existing historic district. After the research is completed the report will be public, and appropriate

signage can be installed to identify the district boundaries. Work is planned to begin in 2022, to be coordinated with other historic surveys.

Town, Ramsdell Library: \$30,000 was awarded for a building needs assessment, which is a step towards future state grant funding to renovate the historic Ramsdell Library. The study was completed.

Town, Housatonic School: \$300,000 of CPA funds (and \$300,000 from the Town's sale of real estate fund) was awarded for the preservation of the historic school. Planned work includes roof replacement, exterior masonry repair, and window repair, and was originally scheduled for 2021. Work is delayed pending the resolution of the RFP for developers; RFP responses are due in early June 2022.

Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center: \$34,350 was granted to make the main doors and bathroom doors of this historic theater handicapped accessible. This project is complete.

McAllister Wildlife Refuge: \$31,300 was granted to the Conservation Commission for phase 2 of the restoration of the Refuge. This phase will focus on removal of invasive shrubs and bittersweet that has overgrown the meadows and portions of the forest. This project phase is complete.

North Plain Farm agricultural preservation restriction: \$92,000 was granted towards the \$920,000 cost to permanently preserve agricultural land at 180-190 North Plain Road. The state and federal agricultural resources programs will contribute an additional \$828,000. This is scheduled for completion in 2022.

**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 affordable housing at 910 Main Street. The CDC will construct 40 permanently affordable apartments at 910 Main Street. The new housing units will be affordable to households earning not more than 60% of area median income. This FY20 grant was supplemented with an FY21 grant of \$250,000. Construction of this project began in early 2022.

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, and the Trust seeks authorization at this June 2021 Town Meeting to utilize the balance of funds for design and permitting. Design and permitting is expected to last into calendar year 2022. Grant funds were received in 2021 for design and infrastructure engineering, which is underway. The Town will seek construction grant funds in 2022. 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 was delayed by COVID and is scheduled to begin in 2022.

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 was delayed by COVID and is scheduled to begin in 2022.

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 is moving steadily despite some supply and material delays.

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 will be completed in 2022.

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, with additional work proposed for FY22 (see below summary of FY22 grants). The Commission stewards this preserve for the Town, with goals of forest management and trail improvements.

Town: \$120,000 was awarded to begin 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 is scheduled through 2022. The project will result in construction ready plans enabling the town to seek construction grants. Designs have been shared through public input process (in person and virtual) and are at 75% completion. With these designs in hand, the Town will apply for construction grants.

**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.

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.

Town, Ramsdell Library: \$9,800 was utilized for an archeological study of the library grounds. The study was required in order to do 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. The church received additional grants and fund-raised for the other 50% of the project cost. The restoration of this landmark building on Main Street is now underway.

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 underway.

Clinton Church Restoration: \$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 2022.

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

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. It is scheduled for 2022.