

**Town of Great Barrington  
Community Preservation Committee (CPC)**

**Minutes of September 5, 2023**

This meeting was held in-person and via Zoom as noted on the meeting agenda.

**Call to Order:** Chair Smith called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

All members were present: Leigh Davis (Selectboard), Martha Fick (Citizen rep.), Richard Geiler (Finance Committee), John Grogan (Housing Authority), Jeremy Higa (Planning Board) via Zoom, Jim Mercer (Historical Comm), Patricia Sharpe (Citizen rep.), Kate Van Olst (Conservation) via Zoom, and Karen W. Smith (Parks Comm).

Also present: CPA Administrator / Assistant Town Manager Christopher Rembold.

**Reorganization:** Rembold asked for nominations for a Chairperson for the coming year. Davis recommended Smith for Chair, and Fick seconded. There were no other nominations. On a roll call vote, all were in favor.

Smith asked for nominations for Vice Chair. Mercer nominated Sharpe as Vice Chair, and Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor.

**Minutes:** Geiler moved to approve the minutes July 31, 2023. Davis seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor except Grogan, who abstained.

**CPA Plan Public Hearing:** Smith opened the public hearing at 5:05 PM.

Michelle Loubert of Division Street spoke about allocating a larger proportion of the funding to affordable housing. She indicated this was not previously supported by the CPC, but it has recently come up as a possible alternative to recent discussions of a real estate transfer fee to fund the Housing Trust.

Higa said the advantage of allocating CPA funds to the Housing Trust is that the CPA law allows the Trust to acquire property for housing more quickly than if they used other public funds. Fick said the CPC has in the past funded every housing project that has applied for funds.

Van Olst said the CPC cannot fully direct where the money goes. We receive applications and see that they are legitimate and fundable. So some of this process of allocation of where funds end up has to do with who requests the funding and we have funded fully or large majority of all of the affordable housing projects.

Grogan said that other than the 10% minimums required by law, plus 5% for administrative costs, it could be foolhardy restrict even more than 35% of the funds.

Hearing no further comment, Smith closed the hearing at 5:20 PM.  
Davis moved to approve the Plan, and Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor.

## **Review Step 1 Applications – Special Funding Round**

### Construct, Inc.

Davis recused herself.

Jane Ralph, Executive Director of Construct, presented the application for \$92,400 to implement emergency housing for families in South Berkshire. She said in advance of the winter, this is really urgent. She said Service net is going to be providing some emergency housing in South Berkshire for individuals who are homeless. She said: that does not apply to families, however, and they have learned from doing this in motels is that the need continues to grow. She said homelessness is increased from something like 300 to over 600, and just in the Berkshires. She said we have a space we can use to house one family at a time that already has an exit plan to be able to move on, so that the family does not end up falling deeper into homelessness. She said the space is a four bedroom house at the Wind Flower property. She said the idea is to use it for these families, one family at a time. She said this way the family gets the privacy that they need, and it's not like a shelter setting. So they can be safe while they secure their next housing.

Higa moved to invite a Step 2 application for this special round. Mercer seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor.

### Marble Block

Craig Barnum presented the application. He is the owner of the building at 268 – 278 Main Street which has a commercial ground floor and eight residences on the upper two floors. He said he was able to purchase the property and intends to keep the residences but upgrade the building. He said there are items that are fundamental to the building. The roof, electrical, heating and other items need to be replaced as it has been a very long time since it has had significant investment. He is seeking CPA funds now as the roof is under contract and he could begin. He said with CPA funds he can keep the residents in the building and not disrupt them. If he had to make a large capital outlay of other funds he might have to increase rents to pay back the capital. He said the request here is for \$150,000 which will be \$75,000 each for two units that will be not more than 100% AMI for ten years minimum. He said he we will have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in the upcoming 12 months in particular, and the roof by the end of this year. He said right now he is carrying the building without bank financing, but interest rates are going up quickly.

Sharpe said she thought this could be an application to replace the roof of a historic building, not a housing application. Barnum said the building is mixed use workforce housing, so he thought housing was appropriate. Smith said she agreed with Sharpe that this might be a good candidate for historic. Smith said was not in favor of moving this along because she did not see the urgency. She added she is not sure the 10 years is enough and last time almost this very thing was turned down by Town Meeting. Higa said if there is Step 2 we should be able to clearly see the gap in the rental with this grant and without it. He added that we do need workforce housing downtown.

Mercer moved to invite a Step 2 application for this special round. Geiler seconded. On a roll call vote, the motion passed 6-3 (Grogan, Davis and Smith voting no).

Davis realized she should have recused herself from this vote since this is a housing-related item.

### Farmsteads for Farmers Project - 200 North Plain Road

Present for the applicant, Berkshire Community Land Trust, were Erik Aulicino, Sarah Downie, Susan Witt, and Peter Puciloski.

Downie said the project involves purchasing 200 North Plain Road to be used as a farm. She said the Land Trust is seeking to buy and own the land and have the farmers own the buildings. She said we are grateful Jane Iredale owns the land and was able to buy it. Now how the farmers have an important half million dollar grant to build a large facility for the farm. It will house the chickens and the egg operations. The grant needs to be spent by the end of June, but to use the money the farmers need to own it. She said that is the urgency of this application. Funds are needed so the land can be purchased and the building work completed. The purchase price for Jane was \$1.2 million, and she has put another \$400,000 into the property. So the purchase price now that the applicant must reach is \$1.6 million.

There was a question from the Committee about why the community housing eligibility box was checked. The Applicants said the farm employees will live there.

Van Olst said from the Conservation Commission perspective having this contiguous area of land preserved for farming and green space is important.

Van Olst moved to invite a Step 2 application for this special round. Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, the motion passed 8-0-1 (Smith abstained).

### Ramsdell Library

Trustees Ruby Chang and Patrick Hollenbeck presented the application. Smith said she would like documentation that the board of trustees has approved this request.

Fick said it's not clear how the \$200,000 request will be used. The applicants responded saying that in order to preserve this historic building we need millions of dollars, and to get that we must apply for this state grant for construction. That is due at the end of May. That will help get an elevator to the second floor, upgrade electrical systems and windows, and HVAC systems. They said with a Town Meeting in May they would barely make the application deadline so they applied for this CPA round. The CPA money will be for a building program study and also to meet the requirement to have design funds committed.

Smith said nobody knows what this will cost and it's been piecemeal. She wants to see a cogent and clear plan that states what is needed and the total cost. She said she wants to know the expectation of cost: is it two, three, four 4 million dollars? She said we already have a functional library.

Grogan said regardless, this building is critical to Housatonic.

The applicants said we had a survey just in August in 2023 which many of you may have seen, and 97% of people requested that we save the building. So the town does want the library. And this is like a repetitive question over the years and the answer is we do need the library.

Fick asked if the applicants has a company ready to do the building assessment study. Hollenbeck said no, we do not; we do not have the funds.

Davis asked what the study will do. Hollenbeck said the assessment study will see exactly the condition of the building as of now. And so then we can assess how much money we would need to put in to fix it. It's

a very comprehensive assessment from the brick and mortar to the electrical system, to the windows, to the HVAC, to the sustainability of the humidity of that building. asked, is that the only obstacle from you submitting a grant application?

Hollenbeck said we need the money to through the building program, the conditions assessment and 150,000 of design funds. Davis said the state grant is extremely competitive. She

Van Olst said The only way we will get an answer as to what the building needs and how much it will cost is to have engineers and architects and professionals come in there and assess it.

Rembold said part of the committee's job tonight is to judge eligibility and urgency. Clearly, it's a historic building. It's on the state and national Register and clearly eligible for historic CPA funding. We've heard \$50,000 is recommended as an estimate for the building needs study, and the building needs study is a prerequisite to do anything else. But the \$150,000 for design, the requirement of the grant is that it is voted by the Town, not spent, by the grant application. He said he knows that state grant which depend on Town Meeting votes in the spring give some sort of flexibility as to when the funding commitments can be verified. He asked, so is that \$150,000 urgent now or can it wait until the May Town Meeting?

Hollenbeck said it's urgent because it will help with fundraising. It shows commitment.

Davis said it's clearer now that \$50,000 is urgent. She asked whether they would have to wait for an RFP process and how long it would take to get the assessment study.

Smith said she understands the emotional case and need for community center, but we need a town wide vote. We need taxpayers to know the cost and the tax impact and then vote.

Grogan moved to invite a Step 2 application for this special round for the \$200,000. Mercer seconded. There was some discussion about whether or not to amend the motion to a lower amount. On a roll call vote, the motion passed 6-3 (Davis, Fick, and Smith voting no.)

**Citizens' Speak:** Eileen Mooney asked how much money is available. Smith said \$600,000. James Garzon encouraged the CPC to set aside more funds to affordable housing.

**Adjourn:** Grogan to adjourn, Davis seconded. The meeting adjourned meeting at approximately 7:10 PM.

Minutes prepared by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christopher Rembold', written in a cursive style.

Christopher Rembold