

Town of Great Barrington Community Preservation Committee (CPC)

Minutes of November 8, 2023

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

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

Members present: Leigh Davis (Selectboard), Martha Fick (Citizen rep.), John Grogan (Housing Authority) Jim Mercer (Historical Comm) left at 5:50, Patricia Sharpe (Citizen rep.), Kate Van Olst (Conservation) joined at 5:10, and Karen W. Smith (Parks Comm).

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

Not present Richard Geiler (Finance Committee), Jeremy Higa (Planning Board).

Minutes: Davis moved to approve the minutes September 14, 2023. Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor.

Review Step 1 Applications

GB Historical Society: Bob Krol, Executive Director, provided an overview of the current application and a summary of recent work. He said they are very proud to continue their work to develop the town museum at the historic Wheeler Farmstead. He said the goal has always been to create a museum and to make the archives that they have in the collection accessible to the public. He said they have funds from other sources to supplement CPA. Eventually they hope to bring all the archives from Ramsdell Library to the museum. Davis moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Sharpe seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor, 5-0. Mercer recused himself because he is on the Society's board.

Van Olst joined the meeting.

Town DPW - Mason Library sconces: Superintendent Joe Aberdale and Buildings & Ground Supervisor Steve Larkin presented the application, which is to remove the historical sconces, restore them, and replace them. Rembold asked if the sconces were part of the historic building. Aberdale said yes. Smith asked about the price. Aberdale said they have some preliminary estimates from a contractor who does historic work in the Town. Mercer added the Historic District Commission will review and approve any work. Davis moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Fick seconded. Roll call vote: all were in favor. 7-0.

Town DPW - Mason Library clamshell: Aberdale and Larkin said this request is to restore the clamshell canopy over the front entrance which is original to the building. Grogan moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Davis seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 7-0.

Town DPW - Mason Library front steps: Aberdale and Larkin presented. Aberdale said the proposal is to restore and reset the front steps. Smith read a statement from Julie Michaels of the statue committee, which said the statue group will provide funding for new stone benches and the statue itself. The area in front of the new benches will be level so it can better serve as a gathering place for the community. Aberdale said the Town would pay for the steps, which are original. He said engineering work is already in process. Davis moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 7-0.

Town DPW – Dewey and Grove Street parks: Aberdale and Larkin presented. Aberdale said the proposal for Dewey is to create a new court. The proposal for Grove Street is to rehabilitate the existing play court. It will be widened a little to make it a multipurpose court. There is not much room behind the base line now. Davis moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Sharpe seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor except Grogan. 6-1.

Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center: Director Janis Martinson presented along with Lucas Pawleski, Production Manager. They said the proposal is for exterior improvements, including the slate roof, painting, and repairing the glass ceiling of the marquee. They indicated the project will be about \$500,000 total. Martinson said the marquee is an exact replica of the 1930 marquee. She said it was part of the 2005 project funded by historic tax credits and is required by their state historic preservation requirements. Davis moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 7-0.

Unitarian Universalist Meeting of South Berkshire – 1089 Main Street: Bill Young, Board Chairperson, presented the project. He said they are seeking funds to support roof replacement and restoration of the street-facing stained glass windows. He said the stained glass windows are decorative stained glass windows. He said if one of your questions is, is there religious representation in stained glass windows? There is not. There are no crosses. There are no things like that; the only thing that there is at all is a book. Davis moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 7-0.

Mercer left the meeting.

Town – Ramsdell Library: Trustees Patrick Hollenbeck and Ruby Chang presented. Chang thanked the committee for their support in the special round recently. She said this request is for \$150,000. The state library commissioners (MBLC) requires this amount to be allocated by the town towards architecture and design as part of the application to MBLC in late May. The Committee asked questions about timing of CPA funds, as well as the competitiveness of the MBLC applications. Chang said they have completed the required strategic plan and will do the required library assessment soon. The MBLC grants are due in May and they should hear in the fall.

Van Olst said she understands that once every 10 years or so towns have an opportunity to apply for significant grant funding for assistance in doing major infrastructure projects like this, and, in order to get through the first rounds of that grant project, you have to do certain steps, including this \$50,000 update of buildings program. Chang said that is correct. Van Olst said if the building deteriorates, then in 10 years it will cost more to fix in 10 years, and we won't have any additional money to leverage against it. She said the whole burden will be on the town taxpayers versus part of it being funded through CPA.

Van Olst moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Grogan seconded. Roll call vote: Davis and Smith no. Sharpe, Fick, Grogan, Van Olst yes. Passes 4-2.

CDC of South Berkshire: Davis recused. CDC board members Jim Harwood and Phil Orenstein presented the proposal, which is to create at least 14 units of affordable housing at 453 Stockbridge Road. Harwood said the CDC is in contract to purchase the property. The existing 14 rooms will be affordable housing and they hope to add four more in the building, for 18 units in total. He said they are targeting a closing date in January, and they hope for CPA funds in the summer, for the renovations to create units. Sharpe moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 5-0.

Construct, Inc.: Davis recused. Director Jane Ralph presented. She said Construct is requesting funds for the support aspect of affordable housing. Part of it is to make sure that our transitional housing meets the needs of folks who are homeless in Great Barrington and the South Berkshires, and to not have to prioritize folks from elsewhere, and then also to expand the rental assistance program. She said they are finding that people are in much more dire straits financially and are not climbing out of that. So we're also partnering with some of the financial institutions to try to provide a little bit more money to help people climb out and then develop financial sustainability. So these both fit within a portable affordable housing support, category. Fick moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 5-0.

Town – Affordable Housing Trust: Davis recused. Chair Fred Clark and Vice Chair Ananda Timpane presented for the Trust. Timpane said the Trust has made an unusual request to the committee to apply for the maximum amount that would be available for housing purposes. She said each housing eligibility is checked off because they do all of those things. She said we make grants to partners who large scale development projects, grant to homebuyers, support like rental assistance, and acquisition. She said our track record of leveraging funds is very good. She added that to be funded means the Trust can act quickly on the real estate market. She added that CPA is the way to fund the Trust if the Town does not do a transfer tax. Grogan moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Fick seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 5-0.

Van Olst suggested a joint Housing Trust / CPC meeting in April.

Marble Block affordable housing: Davis recused. Property owner Craig Barnum he has viewed the priorities that are clearly detailed in the CPC plan for the housing portion. Those priorities are clear including direct, and grow village centers, and rehabilitate existing buildings when possible. He said this project is a request or opportunity to deed restrict 2 apartments for affordable housing for 15 years for 100% area median income. He said all the apartments will be remolded and upgraded. He said the people in the building now will have first choice to stay. He will lease the apartments at the restricted rent and no more. He said I think that after hearing from the CPA over and over, he feels it is important to enfranchise the private market, which is much larger than the few good nonprofits around here, and it would be much more significant and impactful to creating housing overall. Grogan moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Fick seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 5-0.

Berkshire Natural Resources Council, High Road connection to Thomas and Palmer Brook trail. Deanna Smith of BNRC presented. She said they are requesting funds from the town to instruct new hiking trailers and Palmer reserve as part of a larger route which, once finished will eventually connect to Fountain Pond and total approximately 6 miles. She said last year's grant was to restore a portion of that route, and this application to build a new trail a few miles south in the route. She said this is part the BNRC high road initiative which aims to create trail connections between towns with the explicit goal of creating an asset for community members and visitors. She said the new trail section that they are looking to build is approximately three quarters of a mile long. Davis moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 6-0.

Van Olst left the meeting.

GB Land Conservancy, Pfeiffer Arboretum: Doug Brown presented for the Land Conservancy's board. He said they are seeking to restore their trails. He said there are wetlands on the property so they will hire a wetlands specialist and go through the Conservation Commission permitting process. Davis moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Sharpe seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 5-0.

Town Conservation Commission – McAllister Wildlife Refuge: Rembold summarized the application for the Committee. Davis moved that the application is eligible and can move to Step 2. Sharpe seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor. 5-0.

Reports from Committee Members: Sharpe said she, as a citizen rep on the Committee, received a comment about the Housatonic Rail Trail work. She said the work presented to the Committee did not discuss widening or cutting so many trees. She was concerned that what happened was not what was presented to us. Smith said many of the trees were small saplings. Sharpe said the width was to be 6 to 8 feet but it is 9 feet. She said she feels the town should have come back and said, Oh, now we've decided that we're going to hire a contractor with a giant machine and mow down 130 trees. She said it raises the question of how much control we have and when projects should come back to the Committee with updates.

Citizens' Speak: None

Adjourn: Fick moved to adjourn. Hearing no objection, Smith adjourned the meeting at 7:20 PM.

Minutes prepared by:



Christopher Rembold