

Town of Great Barrington Community Preservation Committee (CPC)
Minutes of December 3, 2018
Great Barrington Fire Station, 37 State Road

Blauvelt called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.
All members were present.

Minutes: Smith moved to approve the minutes from October 9 and 16. Higa seconded. All were in favor.

Application Reviews:

Town – with Grayhouse – for Housatonic School

Chris Rembold and Bill Nappo were present. Rembold said this application is for \$650,000 in order to preserve and rehabilitate the historic Housatonic school. He said we request the initial 50,000 from existing funds, not next fiscal year funds, so it is available right after Town Meeting. That will help the study in step 1 begin with no delay.

Rembold said the Town and Grayhouse Partners are working together on this and the Town is the applicant. GHP's team, including architects and engineers, has identified a possible total development cost of approximately \$5 million. He said we need to move forward in the meantime to preserve the exterior of the structure, so that the building does not further deteriorate during that time. He said there some pictures with the application to illustrate the very poor conditions. He said this CPA request is only 13% of the total \$5 million project budget. Nappo said we are also looking at an emergency MHC grant for the roof repair, so it's possible our CPA need won't be as much.

Rembold said the school has been threatened in recent years by a lack of clear support for keeping the building, and there have been no major repairs to the building for a decade at least. He said in 2017-2018, through the issuance of the RFP and signing of the MOA with GHP, the Town has made a clear decision to keep, preserve, and reuse the building.

Rembold said this is consistent with the Master Plan initiatives of protecting community character, enhancing neighborhoods, and promoting redevelopment of village centers, and to concentrate preservation funds on properties that also include other community objectives such as creating or preserving affordable housing and jobs.

He said this application includes a letter from the Historical Commission confirming their vote that the building is significance to the Town, and therefore eligible for CPA funds. Nappo said all work will be done according to the Secretary of Interior guidelines.

Fick asked who made the decision to preserve the building. Rembold said the decision is the Selectboard's. Nappo said we are exploring many other resources for this building. Fick asked how do you know what to do, if you do not have tenants yet. It looks speculative. Rembold said what we know is that we need to preserve the structure, regardless of what is happening inside. Fick said

she would much more supportive if you also said this would be affordable housing. Nappo said it is under consideration. There are various uses being explored.

Bozutto asked about the brownfields assessment. Nappo said this is a grant to assess lead and asbestos and the work was done last week. The remediation itself would be part of the inside work, not part of this project scope.

Higa asked what would happen with partial funding. Nappo said the MHC emergency grant will help reduce our CPA need. Rembold said the roof needs to be done. Maybe the masonry would be removed if we didn't have all the money, but you can see from the photos the masonry is in bad shape.

Blauvelt said this is a big application, and is Grayhouse committing its own funding? Nappo said I am exploring other grants and loans and tenants.

North Plain Farm APR

Sean Stanton explained the North Plain Farm project. He said the state's appraisal is in – it is still draft but the numbers are ready – and the value of the agricultural preservation restriction is \$920,000. He said the state and federal grant portion will cover \$828,000 of that price and we require a local match of \$92,000 to make up the difference. He said we originally asked CPA for \$88,000, and now would like to request the full \$92,000. He said if the CPA cannot fund that amount we will go raise the rest.

He said the land has prime agricultural soils and this is what the APR program goals are to protect, because prime agricultural soils are limited in the northeast and are always under development pressure. He said there is also an open space aspect to this project because it is visible from Monument Mountain and Route 41.

Smith said this request is for 10% of the value then. Stanton said yes that is right.

Fick asked about the two proposed lots. Stanton said those are not part of the APR purchase.

Rembold pointed out that the program pays for development land, not farmland, but in return the land is protected. In effect the landowner is paid to preserve it, because otherwise it could be developed.

Higa asked about future use. Stanton said the State APR program must approve any future owner as a real agricultural use. The future use must be agricultural. It cannot be developed.

Housing Trust Fund

Bill Cooke and Jonathan Hankin summarized the Trust's applications.

1. Downpayment assistance.

Cooke said the Trust has given out its first downpayment assistance grant. He said the program is geared towards households making 80% of AMI or less. However he said our banking partners are indicating that 5% is rarely enough to help families at this 80% or less of AMI to purchase a home. Cook said they would like to increase to that to 10% of price of house, and increase the income level to 100% of AMI. He said last year's grant was for 80% AMI and would like to ask you to allow us to go to 100% AMI.

Fick asked how it works. Cooke said it is a zero interest deferred payment loan. They do not pay it back until they sell the house. Fick asked if there is any stipulation that they need to maintain the house? Cooke said there is not too much incentive to require that. If there was people would not go for this program. This is only 5%.

Higa said this 5% is leveraged by all the other money for the value of the house. Howe asked what if the house is foreclosed; would we lose the value? Hankin said the town is in the second position.

2. Property Acquisition Program

Cooke said this proposed program has been successful in Concord, Dartmouth, Wellfleet, and Yarmouth among other towns. This is where the Trust can purchase property without the 30B procurement process, which we can do only if we use CPA funds, so we can acquire property on the market without waiting for town meeting.

He said the example of what we could do is purchase a house on the market for \$280,000. We would maybe need to put money in, perhaps \$20,000 for a roof. That is now a \$300,000 house. That is a price the 100% AMI family could not afford. But the Trust could sell it to an income qualified household for only \$225,000, recouping all but \$75,000, but we would put on a permanent deed restriction. That would limit resale price to the AMI. He said at future resale the homeowner would not get more than what a 100% AMI household could afford to pay. While the homeowner would be building equity by paying on the mortgage, they would not get a windfall if the values go way up.

He said in this example, the Trust has used CPA funds to provide a permanently affordable home for a local family, for just \$75,000. It could not be built that cheaply, for sure.

Howe asked how do you get the money back? Hankin said the \$225 K comes back essentially. The \$75 K is permanent money in the house. It is the value to keep it affordable. Don said this is a potential loss every time. Cooke said no, this is a permanently affordable home for just \$75K.

Smith asked about bank leverage and grants. Cooke said banks are lenders and homeowners put in funds as well. He said if the Trust uses other funds, we must go by 30B rules which hinders the program.

Bozutto asked about requiring an equity account for reserve funds for things that need to be done. Cooke said in theory we will sell them a house that doesn't have any problems, but in 15 years they put in 1,000 per year they have 15,000 in an account for an expensive repair.

Fick said we do not have enough rental housing and she wonders if we should concentrate our CPA funds on that. Higa said there is a lot of state and federal money for rental, but not much other than CPA money for homeownership.

Cooks said rental is good, but the advantage of this program is that you would have homes spread around town, not just in one spot like the rental projects.

CDC, for new housing at 910 Main Street

Tim Geller summarized the application and provided a summary sheet and renderings of the buildings. He also provided a letter of support from the Town, signed by the Town Manager, for this application.

He said this project has all the permits it needs and we are in a good position. It is also a great location. He said the current plan is for 40 affordable units and 9 market rate units.

Fick asked about the rent levels versus Constuct's project. Geller said these will be essentially the same, and 15 of these will be very low levels.

Bailly asked about timelines. Geller said they hope to be invited into the February funding round. If so then they would apply and hear back in August 2019, and start construction 10 months later. It would be a 15 month construction. He said he suspects however based on the state's practice is you don't get funded the first time. So instead of 2019 it would be 2020 funding and a 2021 start date. This would be right after 100 Bridge Street is done.

Geller said this is a multiyear CPA request. He hoped the CPA's vote would be to fund this year and indicate it will fund the balance in the next year.

Historic District, for Historic Inventory Project

Don Howe summarized the proposal. He said the gist of this is similar to what the Historic Commission did with CPA funds two years ago. He said this is for a different section of town – the Taconic West National Register Historic District. He said we want to follow the Master Plan recommendation of highlighting our resources and doing education, so we want to put signage in this area. Also we have the DPW to put up historic signs to indicate you are in the district. But first we need to have a better idea of the houses that are up here and the original Historic report was not thorough. Nowadays these reports are 8 times as long. He said there are about 200 properties in this area and it costs about \$220 per property inventory. He said he has put in application to MHC for grant funds as well.

Sharpe asked if they could ask homeowners in the district to contribute to the cost. She thought homeowners would be willing because people who live in these old houses take pride in them. She said if there was personal support that could influence her in supporting this project.

Howe said some have said they would contribute. He said \$220 is a good bargain for the research you are getting.

Howe said if we get the MHC grant we can do more areas of town. For example we need more research downtown, like on Railroad Street, and also on Main Street in Housatonic.

Lisa asked if this would have any negative impact on property values. Howe said no. Rembold clarified this is about information and it does not restrict rights.

Committee Member Reports - Howe said he invited Patrick Hollenbeck to come talk to the Historical Commission about Ramsdell, and he agreed. Howe also said the Commission is beginning to look at what needs to be done to repair the old trolley carousel at Belcher Square.

Citizens Speak - None

ADJOURNED at 7:07 PM

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Christopher Rembold".

