



TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON MASSACHUSETTS

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Report to Annual Town Meeting June 2021

With Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2022 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 FY22 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 \$313,950 (the FY21 estimated median value of a single family home) paid about \$103 into the CPA fund in FY21. 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 voters are invited to participate in crafting the Plan.

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 (FY21), which closes on June 30, total CPA revenues will be approximately \$740,000. That includes approximately \$500,000 from local collections and \$240,000 from the State. Since its inception in Great Barrington, the CPA has generated nearly \$5 million in total collections, and voters have appropriated \$4.48 million (Town Meetings 2015-2020) to housing, historic preservation, and open space/recreation projects.

The CPA budget available as we enter into this Town Meeting scheduled for June 22, 2020 includes the unexpended funds from previous fiscal years, as well as revenues that will be collected in the coming fiscal year.

Recommendations to 2021 Town Meeting for FY22

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

The first CPA article 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 FY22 revenue of \$600,000 (includes local collections and state contributions) equals \$60,000. Therefore the CPC recommends that the Town approve this article to reserve \$60,000 to each of the three CPA categories, as required by 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 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.

The second CPA article is the proposed appropriation for specific projects. The CPC recommends a total expenditure of \$652,959 in CPA funds for nine (9) projects. The grants will be made from last year’s unexpended funds plus revenue from this coming fiscal year. 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. The nine recommended projects are summarized below and are located on the map in Figure 1 (page 4).

COMMUNITY HOUSING

- 1. Construct, Inc – emergency rental assistance and microloan program \$50,000

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- 2. Town, Historical Comm. – historic research of landscape/open space sites \$6,000
- 3. Town, Ramsdell Library – archeological study \$9,800
- 4. First Congregational Church Manse – restoration of stone and masonry \$240,859
- 5. Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center – replace emergency exit doors \$15,000
- 6. Clinton Church Restoration – phase two of restoration project \$200,000

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

- 7. Town – to make improvements to the Housatonic rail trail \$30,000
- 8. Town – for water quality studies at Lake Mansfield \$70,000
- 9. Town, Conservation Comm. – McAllister wildlife refuge project next phase \$31,300

TOTAL: \$652,959

The third CPA article is a recommendation to reprogram the balance remaining from the Affordable Housing Trust’s purchase of land on North Plain Road. The Trust received a grant of \$185,000 from the CPA last year, and intended any funds remaining, after purchase and closing costs, to be used for predevelopment (design and permitting) expenses. But the Town Meeting vote (Article 19 from June of 2020) was not clear on that point, and so the Trust seeks formal Town Meeting approval to spend the remaining funds, \$14,815, on predevelopment costs. This will help the developer, Habitat for Humanity, begin to advance the project designs far enough to begin permitting and to begin seeking grants for construction costs.

Summary of this Year’s Recommended Projects

- 1. Construct, Inc – rental assistance and microloan program (\$50,000)

Construct will continue its emergency rental assistance program and its microloans program. 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. The microloan program is for renters who need funds for first month, last month, and security deposits; the program has had no defaults, helping to build credit scores.

- 2. Town, Historical Commission – historic research of landscape/scattered sites (\$6,000)

The Town will hire an expert historical consultant to conduct research on, and catalogue and document, a variety of sites around town. A preliminary list of sites important to town history includes old river crossings, old railroad infrastructure, remnants of historic sites such as the Day Rubber Factory, charcoal hearths, and early electrical transmission and trolley infrastructure.

3. Town, Ramsdell Library – archeological study at Ramsdell (\$9,800)

The Town will utilize these funds for an archeological study of the library grounds. This study is required in order to do seek state funding for improvements on the site and the building, including anything from a temporary handicapped ramp or a full scale building renovation.

4. Manse at the First Congregational Church – restoration of exterior stone and masonry (\$240,859)

The FCC of Great Barrington must make extensive exterior repairs to the historic manse. The structure is listed on the National and State Register of Historic Places. This phase will repair the Main Street and Pleasant Street facades of the building, parts of which are in danger of failure and collapse. The CPA grant represents 50% of the project cost of this phase, and the Church is seeking grants and fundraising for the remaining 50%. The benefit of this project is historic preservation of a landmark Main Street building, and the grant does not fund the religious activities of the Church.

5. Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center – replace emergency exit doors (\$15,000)

The Mahaiwe needs to replace the emergency doors on the west side of the building. Not only are these needed to make the historic building functional, they can also serve as additional access points. The project will replace the doors and regrade a portion of the alley to prevent stormwater intrusion that damaged the existing doors. The CPA funds will be matched by a private grant, to cover the \$30,000 total estimated cost.

6. Clinton Church Restoration – restoration work (\$200,000)

The non-profit Clinton Church Restoration (CCR) purchased and is steadily restoring the former Clinton AME Zion Church building, the oldest extant Black church building in Berkshire County. Over the decades it was instrumental in community affairs and is directly associated with W.E.B DuBois. In Phase 1 emergency structural issues were completed. In phase 2, CCR will implement structural repairs, remediation, and utility work. This CPA grant will be more than matched by over \$400,000 from other grant and fundraising sources.

7. Town – Housatonic Rail Trail improvements (\$30,000)

The Town will improve the existing rail trail by installing a crushed stone path, improve accessibility and fixing the ponding and mud problems. The path connects to the new Main Street sidewalk and also the cemetery, making for an important walking / recreation loop in Housatonic.

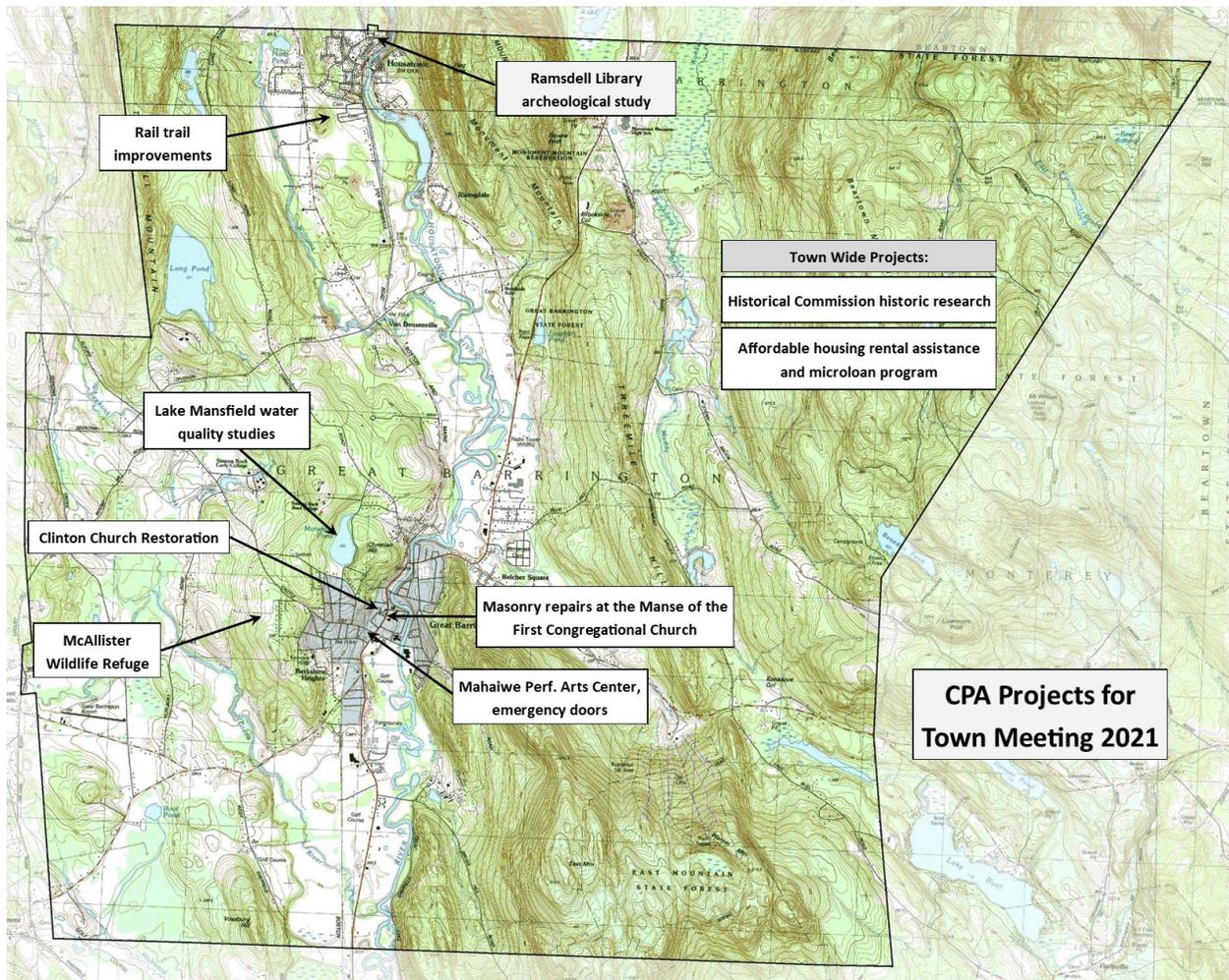
8. Town – Lake Mansfield water quality studies (\$70,000)

The Town will conduct a multi-year study of Lake Mansfield's water quality as part of the long term preservation of this critical open space and recreation resource. The project will judge the long term success of previous stormwater improvement projects in the watershed, help the Town understand how the lake is changing over the years, and how it might be impacted by climate change. The Town will partner with Simon's Rock and the Berkshire Environmental Research Center.

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

The Conservation Commission proposes to continue its multi-year preservation work of this well used open space by removing areas of invasive shrubs and bittersweet in the forests and fields, preserving views, clearing public trails, and improving wildlife habitat. The Commission supplements the CPA funds with grant funding from other sources.

Figure 1: Map of Eight Recommended Projects for Town Meeting 2021



Status of Projects Funded in the Past Three Years

In 2018 Town Meeting funded eight projects for a total of \$513,626 for FY19. Here is a brief status report:

Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust: \$100,000 was awarded to the Trust for a down payment assistance program, to benefit low and moderate income first time homebuyers. Grants of up to 10% of the purchase price or \$25,000 are available. The program works with local banks so that grantees are income qualified and credit worthy. Four grants have been awarded thus far, totaling just over \$74,000. There continues to be need and interest in the program, but few homes are for sale within a reasonable price range.

Town Hall steps: \$120,000 was awarded to replace the historic brownstone steps at Town Hall. This project is ready for construction in the summer and fall of 2021.

Clinton Church Restoration: \$100,000 was awarded to the Clinton Church Restoration (CCR) nonprofit group towards the restoration of the former Clinton AME Zion Church on Elm Court. Significant funding from other sources including the National Park Service was received. Roof leaks were repaired and rotted structural walls repaired. Work on this first phase is complete. Funds for phase 2 are requested at this June 2021 town meeting.

Old Route 7 Greenway Phase 1: \$25,000 was awarded for the Town to begin survey, engineering, and permitting of a new recreational trail that will provide a walking/biking link along Route 7 to Community Health Programs. Phase 2 was construction, which was funded by town capital funds and a Mass DOT grant, and it should be completed by the end of June 2021.

Lake Mansfield accessible loop trail: \$15,000 was awarded to supplement a grant from the GB Land Conservancy to complete the handicapped accessible trail in the 29-acre Lake Mansfield conservation forest. Non-profit partners improved the section that connects to Christian Hill Road. Work is complete.

McAllister Wildlife Refuge: \$18,950 was awarded to the Conservation Commission as phase 1 of its multi-year plan to preserve open space by removing invasive plant species from the hedge rows and fields. This work is completed.

HVA: Housatonic River access project: \$19,676 was awarded to the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) to create a new canoe/kayak access to the Housatonic River at Division Street. This project is complete.

Great Barrington Land Conservancy (GBLC): \$115,000 was awarded towards the construction of riverfront greenway trail. Trail construction began in 2019 and will result in two sections of the riverfront trail along the Housatonic River south of Bridge Street, and north of Brookside Road. The project is complete.

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. The project will break ground in late 2021.

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 did not begin in 2020 as planned, but is planned for 2021-2022.

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 is complete.

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 scheduled for 2021. Work is delayed pending further direction from the Selectboard. Note: these funds are not for the emergency roof repairs.

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 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 and additional \$828,000. This is scheduled for completion in late 2021.

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. The project will begin in late 2021.

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, with work possible in late 2022, depending on grant funds for construction.

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 2021.

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 2021.

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 will take two years.

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 2021.

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 (funds requested at this June 2021 town meeting). 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 2021, and the first designs have been released for public input. The project will result in construction ready plans enabling the town to seek construction grants.