Report to Annual Town Meeting June 2020
With Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2021 Funding

The Great Barrington Community Preservation Committee (CPC) is pleased to present this report to Town Meeting. This report summarizes the expenditures we are recommending this year 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 $313,650 (the FY20 median value of a single family home) paid about $101 into the CPA fund in FY20. 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 (FY20), which closes on June 30, total CPA revenues will be approximately $665,000. That includes approximately $478,000 from local collections and $187,000 from the State. Since its inception in Great Barrington, the CPA has generated $4.1 million in total collections, and voters have appropriated $3.7 million (Town Meetings 2015-2019) 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 2020 Town Meeting for FY21 Projects

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 FY21 revenue of $500,000 (includes local collections and state contributions) equals $50,000. Therefore the CPC recommends that the Town approve this article to reserve $50,000 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 $828,500 in CPA funds for eight (8) 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 demonstrate that CPA funds will not be the only funds used for the project. The eight recommended projects are summarized below (beginning on page 3) and are located on the map in Figure 1 (page 4).

**COMMUNITY HOUSING**
1. CDC of South Berkshire – housing at 910 Main Street $250,000
2. Great Barrington affordable housing trust fund – to acquire land on North Plain Rd for housing $185,000

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION**
3. Historical Comm. – historic research in Housatonic Village $15,000
4. Historical Comm. – preservation of the trolley shelter $50,000
5. Historical Society – restoration/preservation of the Wheeler Farmstead $145,000

**OPEN SPACE & RECREATION**
6. BNRC – trail/public access to Tom Ball ridge $30,000
7. Conservation Comm. – McAllister wildlife refuge project $33,500
8. Lake Mansfield Road – engineering for open space preservation and recreational land $120,000

**TOTAL:** $828,500

The third CPA article is a recommendation to reprogram $100,000 of downpayment assistance funding appropriated to the Affordable Housing Trust by Town Meeting last May, so that the funds could be used for either downpayment assistance or rental assistance. This recommendation is in response to the economic disruption and unemployment caused by the COVID-19 emergency.

At this time many Great Barrington residents are experiencing a sudden, dire need for financial assistance, and it is predicted that this could last for many months. The rental assistance program was begun in April by the Affordable Housing Trust to assist low- and moderate-income families in Great Barrington. Without the additional funds recommended by this Article, the initial rental assistance fund of $35,000 probably will be expended by July, but the crisis facing Great Barrington families will continue.

The program is administered by Construct, Inc., an experience local service provider. Rental assists are limited to the lesser of $1000 or 70% of a households’ monthly income. So far, actual incomes ranged from $0 to $2,250 per month and assists were between $300 and $1,200. Households are required to apply for all other state and federal resources for which they are eligible. Other available funds are used prior to using these rental assistance funds. Households needing a repeat assist will be considered on a case by case basis.
### Summary of this Year’s Recommended Projects

1. **Community Development Corp – creation of affordable housing at 910 Main Street ($250,000)**
   - The CDC of South Berkshire 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. The project has plans developed and will be ready for building permit as soon as the balance of state funding is received. These CPA funds demonstrate to other funding agencies that the project has local support. The project budget is approximately $16.5 million.

2. **Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust – acquisition of land for affordable housing ($185,000)**
   - The Trust Fund has an agreement to purchase a vacant 7+ acre parcel on North Plain Road in Housatonic. The Trust anticipates working with housing partners like Habitat for Humanity to develop the site with housing that is affordable and will include open space such as community gardens as well as a buffer to the surrounding homes. The site will have a permanent deed restriction as per CPA laws.

3. **Town, Historical Commission – historic resources survey in Housatonic Village ($15,000)**
   - The Town’s HDC will conduct research on properties in the village, many of which are a century old and represent distinctive architecture and/or important periods of the village history, but about which there is little public knowledge. 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.

4. **Town, Historical Commission – preservation of the historic trolley shelter ($50,000)**
   - The Weir Park Trolley Shelter (at the intersection of Stockbridge Road and State Road) is a rare tangible expression of the chief means of public transportation in the Berkshires during the early 20th century. It is one of the last trolley stops/shelters still in existence in the area. If allowed to continue to deteriorate, this historic structure, which is listed on the State's database of historic sites and will be nominated to the National and State Register of Historic Places, will be lost. Plans are already done; this grant will fund the construction phase.

5. **Historical Society – preservation and restoration of the Wheeler Farmstead ($145,000)**
   - After twelve years of concerted efforts in preserving the original Historic farmhouse, and readying it to be a public, accessible museum of Town history, the Society is moving into the next phase of preserving this historic property. Using CPA funds and private grants, this phase will 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.

6. **Berkshire Natural Resources Council – trailhead and access to the Tom Ball ridge trail system ($30,000)**
   - These funds will be used to create a parking area and public trailhead off of Long Pond Road, so the public can access the trail system on Tom Ball ridge, the mountain overlooking Long Pond and Round Pond, on the border of Great Barrington and Alford. CPA funds will be matched by 25% for the trailhead project. The trail will access over 600 acres of newly preserved land that features lake, pond and stream frontage and core habitat for threatened animal and plant species.

7. **Town, Conservation Commission – McAllister Wildlife Refuge ($33,500)**
   - The Conservation Commission proposes to preserve the open space by removing areas of invasive shrubs and bittersweet that has overgrown the meadows and portions of the forest. This grant will continue recent success in improving bird habitat and preserving the vistas at this 90-acre Town-owned preserve. The grant will be matched by private donations and a Mass. Working Forests Grant. The Commission stewards this preserve for the Town, with goals of forest management and trail improvements.

8. **Town – Lake Mansfield Road engineering to preserve open space and create recreational land ($120,000)**
The Town will use these funds to engineer solutions to stabilize the lake edge along the road, to mitigate stormwater runoff, and to replace the road with a new recreational path, with emergency vehicle access. This process will include community meetings and regular reporting to the Selectboard and Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force. These plans will enable the Town to compete successfully for grants to construct these improvements.

Figure 1: Map of Eight Recommended Projects for Town Meeting 2020

Status of Projects Funded in the Past Three

In 2017 Town Meeting funded eight projects for a total of $668,630 for FY18. Here is a brief status report:

Berkshire Housing Development Corporation (BHDC): $200,000 was awarded and to create 31 new units of affordable housing at Bostwick Gardens. Work is complete; the project opened in October 2019.

Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust: $50,000 was awarded to the Town’s new Affordable Housing Trust Fund. These funds have been used to put a downpayment on the land purchase (see item 2 on page 3) and $35,000 has been used towards the first several months (April-June) of the emergency rental assistance program.
Berkshire Pulse: $30,000 was awarded to retrofit a freight elevator in a former mill building in Housatonic to make it handicapped accessible. The project is complete.

GB Historical Society: Wheeler House Museum Accessibility: $33,000 was awarded to retrofit door hardware, bathrooms, and add an entry ramp to make the building accessible for handicapped people. This project is at 75%, with completion expected by 2021.

Town Hall roof replacement: a total of $170,000 was awarded towards the replacement of the roof at Town Hall. This project is complete.

BNRC Thomas and Palmer Preserve Access: $41,230 was awarded to BNRC to create a parking area, trail head, and bridge over the Thomas and Palmer Brook for the public to access this 231-acre parcel. The work is complete and the preserve is open to the public.

GBLC: Riverfront Trail: $58,000 was awarded to GBLC to complete survey and design work for the Riverfront Trail extending along the west bank of the Housatonic River from Bridge Street to Brookside Road in Great Barrington. Work is complete (and now construction is underway).

Town - Lake Mansfield Road: $106,400 was awarded to conduct preliminary design and engineering work to determine how to best design the road improvements, bank stabilization, and outlet repairs. The work is complete: an outlet is designed and permitted, and wetland and road data is compiled, which will inform the final engineering work for this project (see item 8 on page 3).

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. Two grants have been awarded thus far, totaling $35,000. There is a great deal of 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. Design, including a new foundation, is complete and construction should start in 2020.

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. Work is well underway and is about 50% complete.

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. Designs are completed and the Town hopes to move to Phase 2, construction, in 2020 using a Mass Trails grant and Town capital funds.

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. Work is complete. Non-profit partners improved the section that connects to Christian Hill Road.

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, and the Commission will focus similar efforts in other areas of the Refuge in the coming years.

HVA: Housatonic River access project: With an award of $19,676 the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) project to create a new canoe/kayak access to the Housatonic River at Division Street 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, a 1.25-mile-long walking path along the Housatonic River south of Bridge Street. The project is 50% 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 downpayment assistance program for low- and moderate-income 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.

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 will be supplemented with an FY21 grant of $250,000 (see item 1 on page 3).

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 will begin in 2020.

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 underway.

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. Work is tentatively scheduled for 2021 and will include roof replacement, exterior masonry repair, and window repair/replacement.

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.

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 2021.