



TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON MASSACHUSETTS

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Report to Annual Town Meeting May 2018 With Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2019 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. In 2018 a home valued at \$301,000 (the median value of a single family home) paid about \$120 into the CPA fund. 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 (FY 18), which closes on June 30, total CPA revenues will be about \$570,000. That includes \$450,000 from local collections and \$120,000 from the State. Since its inception in Great Barrington, the CPA has generated \$2.7 million, and voters have appropriated \$2.3 million to specific housing, historic preservation, and open space/recreation projects.

Therefore the CPA budget available as we enter into this Town Meeting on May 7, 2018 includes the unexpended funds from previous fiscal years, as well as the estimated \$430,500 that will be collected in the coming fiscal year.

Recommendations to 2018 Town Meeting for FY 19 Projects

This year the CPC recommends Town Meeting voters approve two 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 FY 19 revenue of \$430,500 (includes local collections and state contributions) equals \$43,050. Therefore the CPC recommends that the Town approve this article to reserve \$43,050 to each of the three CPA categories, as required by law.

This article also includes an appropriation of less than 5% of estimated revenues, \$19,178, 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 \$513,626 in CPA funds for eight (8) projects. Your CPC 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 and located on the map in Figure 1.

COMMUNITY HOUSING

Great Barrington affordable housing trust fund – down payment assistance and housing rehabilitation	\$100,000
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Town Hall – restoration of historic steps	\$120,000
Clinton Church Restoration – restoration of the former church	\$100,000

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

Old Route 7 Greenway Phase 1	\$25,000
Lake Mansfield accessible loop trail	\$15,000
McAllister wildlife refuge project	\$18,950
HVA: Housatonic River access project	\$19,676
GBLC – riverfront greenway trail	\$115,000

<u>TOTAL:</u>	\$513,626
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Summary of this Year's Recommended Projects

1. Great Barrington affordable housing trust fund (\$100,000)

The Trust Fund was created by Town Meeting in 2017 to provide for the creation and preservation of affordable housing for low and moderate income households in Great Barrington. With its initial grant of \$50,000 last year, the Trust Fund has launched a down payment assistance program, to benefit low and moderate income first time homebuyers. The program works with local banks to identify qualified and credit worthy borrowers. The Trust Fund seeks to continue the program in the coming year.

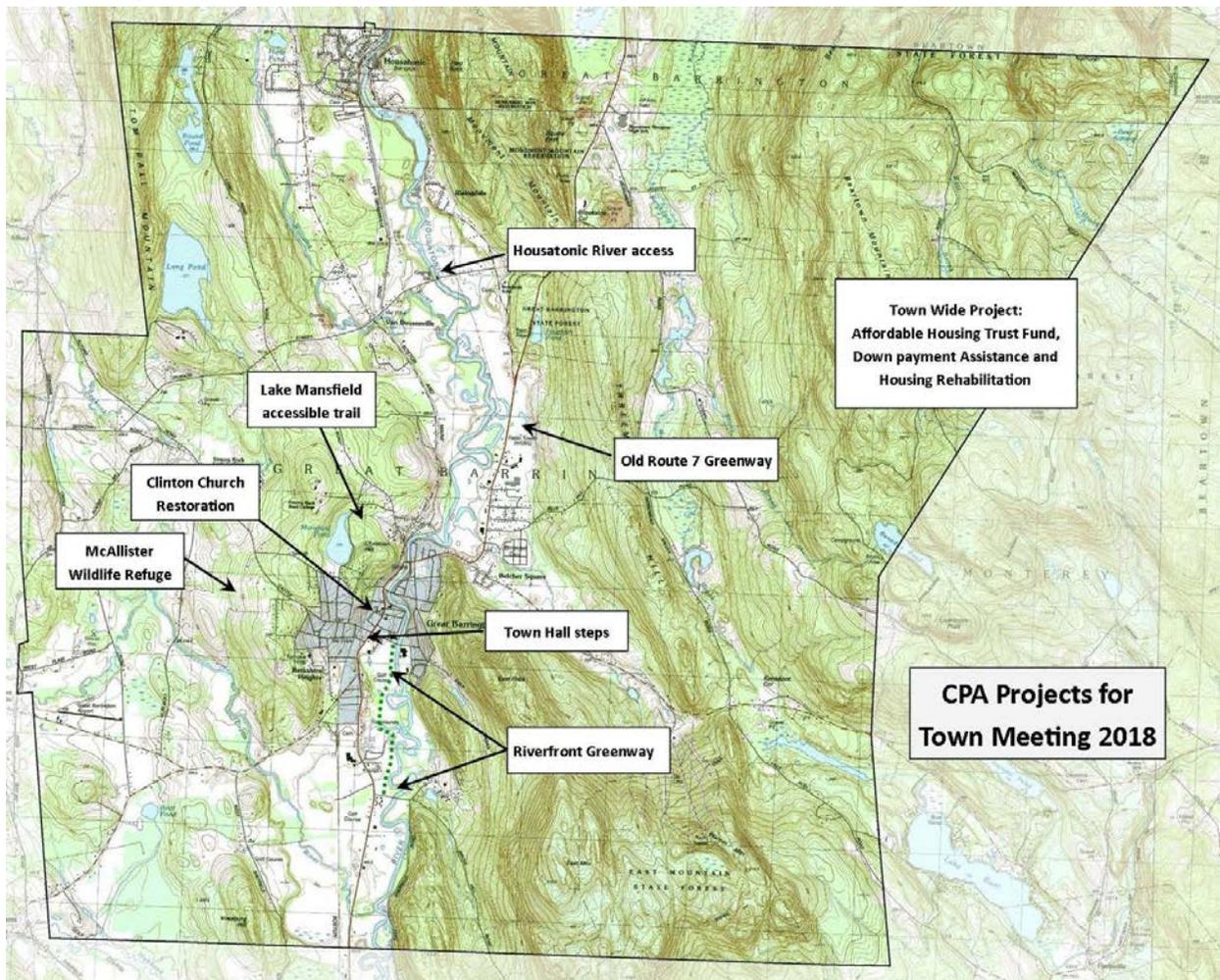
2. Town Hall – preservation of the historic steps (\$120,000)

The historic brownstone steps at Town Hall are original to the building (circa 1875). They have deteriorated significantly over the years, are shifting, and breaking. This project will put a foundation under the steps, and replace the steps with like material.

3. Clinton Church Restoration (\$100,000)

The purchase and restoration of the former Clinton AME Zion Church on Elm Court is led by the non-profit Clinton Church Restoration (CCR). The structure is the oldest standing black church in its original building in Berkshire County. Over the decades it was instrumental in community affairs and is directly associated with W.E.B DuBois. CCR is seeking this CPA grant for its Phase 1 work, which focuses on stabilizing and protecting the building. The work includes a new shingle roof, mold abatement, improved drainage, and replacement of the basement floor. Additional funds have already been raised from private donations and a nationally-competitive African American Civil Rights Grant Program award from the National Park Service.

Figure 1: Map of Eight Recommended Projects for Town Meeting 2018



4. Old Route 7 Greenway Phase 1 (\$25,000)

The Town is seeking to take advantage of a rare opportunity to create a new recreational trail that will: (1) improve pedestrian and bicycle safety along Stockbridge Road, (2) provide a walking/biking link between community service centers (Berkshire South Community Center and the Community Health Programs, CHP) separated from the busy highway, and (3) complete a major loop in the Fountain Pond / 3-Mile Hill trail system. This grant will allow the Town engineer and permit the 0.4-mile trail. Next year the Town would seek grant funds for construction.

5. Lake Mansfield accessible loop trail (\$15,000)

The Town is proposing to complete the trail in the 29-acre Lake Mansfield conservation forest so that it is accessible to people in wheelchairs, those with strollers, and of course walkers. This would bring Town and private funds together to complete the trail, which was begun 10 years ago, using non-municipal grant funds, donations, and in-kind services. In fact, this is the third phase of a ten-year, \$83,000 trail project and this CPA grant request represents just 18 percent of the total project cost. Private funding, already in place, is supporting 40% of this current project, with CPA as the other 60% of this phase. The end result will be a completed accessible trail system.

6. McAllister Wildlife Refuge (\$18,950)

This grant will preserve open space by removing invasive plant species from the hedge rows and fields. This will also result in improved habitat for endangered bird species, and it will preserve the vistas at this 90-acre Town-owned preserve. The Conservation Commission stewards this preserve for the Town, and its future goals include forest management, a trail map and kiosk, and trail improvements.

7. HVA: Housatonic River access project (\$19,676)

The Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) is creating a new canoe/kayak access to the Housatonic River at Division Street. HVA, a nonprofit watershed organization formed to protect and utilize the River as a community resource, will improve the steep and difficult access point into something more useable for the public. A parking area will be created and all permitting is in place for the work to begin.

8. GBLC: riverfront greenway trail (\$115,000)

Following the work of last year's grant for design and permitting of the trail, this grant to the Great Barrington Land Conservancy (GBLC) will be used for construction of two sections of the Riverfront Trail, a 1.25-mile-long recreational path along the Housatonic River from Bridge Street to Brookside Road. Along most of its length, the trail will be a level, compacted, and mowed pathway, 6 to 8 feet wide with portions built to ADA accessibility standards, with views of open space and the River. GBLC is also raising private funds and seeking grants to cover the balance of the construction costs. This project will bring to life a riverfront trail that connects downtown to the ball fields, the historical museum, senior housing, medical offices, and the southern shopping district.

Status of Previously Funded Projects

In 2015 Town Meeting funded nine projects for a total of over \$866,000. Most of these projects are completed.

100 Bridge Street: \$200,000 was awarded for predevelopment work (design and permitting) towards the creation of 45 units of affordable housing. The permit plans have been approved and funding applications have been made to the State. The DEP approved the remediation plan.

St. James Place: \$150,000 was awarded to repair and replace the slate roof. Work is about 100% complete and the building was opened in 2017. It is already hosting concerts and events.

Mahaiwe: \$30,000 was awarded to remediate drainage issues in the theater basement. The project was completed.

Wheeler Farmstead: \$50,000 was awarded to restore the Dutch Wagon House. Foundation, framing, siding, windows, and roof have all been finished. The work will be complete this year.

Newsboy Statue & Fountain: \$31,640 was awarded for the restoration of this landmark. The work was completed under budget and a re-dedication celebration was held October 10, 2016. Also, Gary Leveille authored a companion booklet about the history of this unique monument.

Town Hall: \$20,000 was awarded to investigate under the eaves to develop design and repair plans for the Town Hall roof. The work is complete and bid-ready plans and estimates were produced. The Town is now proceeding with construction (see the 2017 grant below).

Mason Library: \$65,000 was awarded to restore the library cupola and roof. The project is complete.

100 Bridge Street / open space: \$300,000 was awarded towards the creation of a riverfront park along the Housatonic River. The project will begin as part of the first phase of site work, and will be open to the public in perpetuity.

The Trustees of Reservations: \$20,000 was awarded for the restoration of existing trails at Monument Mountain and the creation of new trails at Flag Rock. The restoration is complete, and the trail planning has begun. Community meetings will be held this year.

In 2016 Town Meeting funded eight projects for a total of \$775,662. Some of these projects are completed, and all are well underway.

Construct, Inc.: \$220,000 was awarded to fund a project that will build 11 new affordable rental apartments at 316 State Road. Construction was completed in just one year, and it is now open for residents.

100 Bridge Street: An additional \$250,000 was awarded for this project to create 45 units of affordable housing. This funding is only available after other funding sources are secured. The permit plans have been approved, funding applications have been made to the State, and the CDC should hear this coming July.

Unitarian Church: \$60,000 was awarded to be used for significant structural repairs for this National Register listed building in Housatonic. Work is underway and about 50% complete.

Wheeler Farmstead: \$24,250 was awarded to the Historical Society to make necessary upgrades to the electrical system in the historic farmstead for the Town Museum. Work has been ongoing all winter and is approximately 75% complete.

GB Historical Commission: A \$15,000 grant of CPA funds was matched with \$15,000 of state historic funds, and the inventory project began in the summer of 2016. Professional architectural historians produced inventories of significant buildings throughout town. Work is complete, though the Historic Commission will seek funds for more inventory work in the coming years.

CHP trails: \$10,000 was awarded to CHP for the creation of a loop trail. The trail was completed in October 2016, and a kiosk will be installed. The 1.5 mile trail route winds through forest and scenic fields and is open to the public.

Windy Hill Farm Preservation: \$170,000 was awarded towards the purchase of a permanent preservation restriction of Windy Hill Farm, and the state's APR program committed \$558,000 as well. The farm is now permanently preserved for agricultural uses, and cannot be developed.

GBLC River Walk: \$26,412 was awarded towards the restoration of a section of bank that was badly eroding, undercutting the downtown Housatonic River Walk. The project began with the installation of vegetation that will hold the bank in place. The project will last through another planting season.

In 2017 Town Meeting funded eight projects for a total of \$668,630. Following is a brief status report of those.

Berkshire Housing Development Corporation (BHDC): \$200,000 was awarded and BHDC has begun the work of creating 31 new units of affordable housing at Bostwick Gardens. Funding and zoning permits are in place and work is projected to begin in 2018.

Affordable Housing Trust Fund: \$50,000 was awarded to the Town's new Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The Trustees convened in 2017 and have created a down payment assistance program for low and moderate income new homeowners. The program is similar to the successful models elsewhere in the Berkshires.

Berkshire Pulse: \$30,000 was awarded to retrofit a freight elevator in a former mill building to make it accessible to the public. Berkshire Pulse, which serves over 600 youth and adult community members each year, is on the third floor and is currently accessible only by a steep staircase. Funds are in place, a historic restriction has been recorded, and the project should begin this year.

GBHS: Wheeler House Museum Accessibility: \$33,000 was awarded last year to make the building needs accessible for handicapped people. This project is required not only to comply with the code, but also to truly make the museum functional for public use. Designs for the ramp and accessible bathrooms are ready and permitting is nearly complete. Work will begin shortly.

Town Hall roof replacement: \$150,000 was granted towards the replacement of the roof at Town Hall. Water infiltration during heavy rains and snow melt is leading to rot and moisture issues, and the roof and cornices need complete replacement. The project has been awarded and work will begin this spring.

BNRC Thomas and Palmer Preserve Access: \$41,230 was granted last year 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. Wetland permitting is underway and work should begin this year.

GBLC: Riverfront Trail: \$58,000 was granted last year 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. Permitting is underway, surveys are complete, and routes have been coordinated with landowners. GBLC is raising funds for construction now and hopes to begin construction this year.

Town - Lake Mansfield Road: \$106,400 was awarded last year for the Town to conduct design and engineering work to determine how to best design the road improvements, bank stabilization, and outlet repairs. The engineering work is now well underway. Surveys have delineated the rights-of-way, and engineers have examined subsurface conditions and other challenges such as the outlet, ledge conditions and wetlands. The Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force continues to meet regularly to review the work, which is a critical first step in determining what solutions will be necessary to support the health of the environment and provide safe access and recreational opportunities for all, and will help formulate the Town's future decision about the roadway itself.