

Town of Great Barrington
Community Preservation Committee (CPC)
Minutes of January 6, 2022

This meeting was held via audio/video teleconference as noted on the agenda for this meeting.

Call to Order 5:00 PM by Chair Blauvelt.

Eight of the nine members were present: Tom Blauvelt, Leigh Davis, Martha Fick, Jeremy Higa, Don Howe Jim Mercer, Patricia Sharpe, Karen W. Smith. Absent: Kate Van Olst.

Also present: Christopher Rembold

Minutes: Smith moved to approve the November 9, 2021 minutes as written; Davis seconded. Roll call vote: Blauvelt-aye; Davis-aye; Fick-aye, Higa-aye, Howe-abstained, Mercer-aye, Sharpe-aye; Smith-aye. Passed 7-0-1.

FY23 CPA Step 1 Applications for the Housing and Historic Preservation categories

Applications were distributed to the Committee in advance and are posted on the Town's website.

Housing: Davis announced she would recuse herself from the discussions of the housing applications since she works for Construct, one of the applicants.

- Town of GB Affordable Housing Trust:

Housing Trust chairperson Fred Clark was present, along with trustee Bill Cooke.

Chair Blauvelt asked if the Committee had any questions. Fick asked why the Trust is applying for rental assistance and not Construct. She said she is not sure the Trust has the facilities and personnel to administer a rental assistance program.

Clark responded saying we do already run a rental assistance program. And in this case it is a partnership with Construct, who does the intake and counselling. So Construct runs this project for us, and we pay a small administrative fee to them. The Trust ensures the bills and spending are appropriate. He said there is a summary of the rental assistance program in the application packet.

Fick asked why Construct is not the applicant for the rental program. Clark said it is a very important program for keeping people in their homes and addressing health and housing insecurity, He said it doesn't matter who runs the program but this year the applicant is the Trust. It would be a shame if it wasn't run. He said Construct is a partner helping to operate this program.

Smith asked if the Trust would run the rental program, or if the Trust would contract with a contractor to run the program. She said under the Parks Commission's contract with Berkshire South for programming, the Commission is not in the day to day. She asked is that is the way the Trust will run this program?

Housing Trustee Bill Cooke said yes.

Blauvelt asked if rental assistance funds are repaid. Clark said no, the assists are grants. He said this program is primarily needed to respond to the pandemic, and assist renters. He said tenants who lost jobs were hit hard and couldn't pay bills and so the rental assistance can also keep small landlords afloat.

Howe noted that the rental assistance program is a part of the Trust's proposal this year, and the Trust is asking for a larger sum to run a number of programs. Howe said often times, as a Committee, we like to know exactly what the funds will go for. Clark said yes this request would allow us to fund any of the affordable housing programs. He said we aren't coming to the Committee with shovel ready projects, but with programs that need funding.

Mercer asked if the \$143,000 of rental assistance noted in the report was for Great Barrington residents. Clark said yes those are only Great Barrington. Mercer asked if there were other programs like this. Clark said yes; he believes there is in Lenox and Williamstown.

Higa noted the Trust is asking for a sum of funds to run all of its Housing programs including this rental assistance. He said the \$200,000 CPA application is not all for rental assistance. We the CPA can only make funding decisions once a year, at Town Meeting. Funding the Trust's request with a lump sum allows them to provide affordable housing programs throughout the year. This is why we as a Town established a Trust. It's what they do. And they have oversight. Affordable housing is only one part of what our CPC does.

Smith said it's interesting that of all the programs CPA funds rental assistance is the only one we do not get a return on our investment.

Higa said we always talk about how affordable housing is a crisis. He said he has a big problem and is upset with the notion that we don't get anything back from affordable housing programs particularly at his moment in time. What we are getting back is that we are helping families remain in our community.

Clark said the first two recommendations of the Housing Needs Study report, which was commissioned by the CPC, are to continue funding both rental assistance programs and homeowner down payment programs. He said the Housing Trust is how we as a Town actualize those and put those in place. So our application is consistent with your CPA goals. He said if this program is not funded that program could end.

Fick asked how the Trust determined how much money to ask for rental assistance. Clark said we have a track record now and we know what the needs are. The difficulty is knowing where we will be in the pandemic. He said local funding is more important now however since federal and state assistance for this has dried up.

Trustee Cooke said the Town needs a fund to respond to affordable housing needs and opportunities as they come up. We cannot predict what will come up or what we will spend this on exactly. Several years ago we were able to grant funds for three affordable homes on Manville Street, though it didn't ultimately happen. And we also had the funds to be able to respond to the first round of emergency rental assistance. If we don't have funds in the Trust then the town cannot act when there is an opportunity.

Fick asked how those funds are approved by the Trust. Rembold said the Trust meets in open session and votes on the projects.

- Construct, for Eagle Cliff apartments:

June Wolfe and Jane Ralph, Executive Director, from Construct were present.

Smith noted this request is for predevelopment funds and that Construct would be back next year with a construction funding request. She asked if the parcel was acquired yet, and what the purchase amount would be. Wolfe said the negotiation is not yet complete but it would be in the 275,000 to 300,000 range. She said this request for CPA is to see if the project will be a feasible affordable housing project. She said one of the questions here is whether the water systems and septic systems can be separated from the other campus buildings. Another question is how many units can be built in the former administration building and/or on the parcel across the street. This project does not involve the former gymnasium.

Blauvelt asked what AHTF means in the proposed funding chart. Ralph said that is the state's Housing Trust fund, not the Town's. FHLB is federal home loan bank. CBH is community based housing, another state source.

Blauvelt thought the estimated construction cost seemed too high for just eight units. Wolfe said costs have skyrocketed. She said not long ago they were building units at 200,000 per unit, but costs have tripled.

Higa reminded the committee that Construct has a very good track record including the 11 new units on State Road. CPA funds were granted there also.

- CDC, for Berkshire Cottages:

Allison Marchese, Director of the CDC, was present. She said they are seeking predevelopment funding to build out the rest of the Bridge Street site.

Fick asked if after predevelopment will we have clear idea of what the site will be like. Marchese said they are getting an architect on board soon, and will have some community meetings to review a few possible designs. She said yes, the goal is to arrive at a plan for this site.

Smith said she didn't see a problem with this in particular, but she is concerned we won't have enough money.

Historic: Blauvelt recused himself from the 343 Main St discussion since he is an owner at Wheeler & Taylor which abuts 343 Main St.

- 343 Main Street, Alander Group, Ian Rasch:

Ian Rasch of Alander Group was present, along with Kara Anderson, his team member who is from the Architectural Heritage Foundation.

Fick while this is a lot of money, it is important for us to sponsor this project because there is somebody willing to reuse a historical building in downtown on Main Street that contributes to the appearance of our town. And it will complement the historic work at

Smith asked about the ownership. Rasch said it will be privately owned by Alander Group. He said this is a \$5.25 million project. He said Alander has committed over \$1 million, and we have a mortgage of over \$3 million from Lee Bank. He said the public benefit of historic preservation is not just the preservation, but also because the town will have increased tax revenue from this building when its renovated.

Smith asked if the rent would be enough to cover the mortgage. Rasch said we have a low rate over ten years and we have closed on the financing. He said it works.

Mercer asked if Rasch would be amenable to a deed restriction condition. Rasch said yes, for a reasonable time frame. He said for historic tax credits for example, the term is five years. He added that the current building value is low, and with this investment resulting in a higher tax assessment, the CPA grant would be paid back in tax revenue. He said a restriction in perpetuity would not work.

Howe asked if historic tax credits for this project. Rasch said no because the tenants are nonprofits, and that precludes historic tax credits. He said also the project is also a little small for a tax credit project.

Davis asked if there were historic photos. Photos will be sent to the committee members. [The photos were emailed by Chris Rembold on 1/7/2022.]

- Town, for Castle Street pedestrian underpass:

Smith asked what the total cost might be. She also asked about the 1907 Selectboard report included in the application. Rembold said the cost is not known. At the end of this study, if funded, we will have an estimate of the needed work and costs. He said the document was included in the application in order to show that the steps and over structure on the west side are owned by the Town, and that the public has the right to use it. He said the tunnel itself, under the railroad tracks, is the responsibility of the railroad company or Mass DOT.

Reports from Committee Members:

Howe reported that the Town's Historical Commission has been invited by MHC to submit a full application for grant funds to match the CPA grant for the historic survey work.

Citizen's Speak: None

Next Meeting: January 11, 2022, at 5:00 PM.

The meeting adjourned at 6:22 PM.

Minutes prepared by:



Christopher Rembold