



City of Lowell – Community Preservation Committee

Community Preservation Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 25, 2021 6:30 p.m.

Conducted via Zoom

Note: These minutes are not completed verbatim. For a recording of the meeting, visit www.ltc.org

Members Present

Adam Baacke, Chairman
Eric Slagle, Vice Chairman
Troy Depeiza, Member
Sinead Gallivan, Member
John Linnehan, Member
Sidney Liang, Member
Philip Shea, Member
Bradley Buitenhuys, Member
Kara Keefe Mullin, Member

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Dylan Ricker, Assistant Planner
Francesca Cigliano, Senior Planner
Jess Wilson, Associate Planner
Peter Cutrumbes, Assistant Planner

A quorum of the Committee was present. A. Baacke called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

I. Minutes for Approval

3/25 Minutes

E. Slagle motioned, and P. Shea seconded the motion to approve the minutes for March 25, 2021. The motion passed unanimously, (9-0).

II. Continued Business

III. New Business

Public Hearing

A. Baacke thanked and welcomed members of the public in attendance at the public hearing. A. Baacke requested that members of the public interested in speaking indicate their interest in the zoom chat, and people will be called on in the order they respond. A. Baacke introduced D. Ricker of DPD to introduce the Community Preservation Act in Lowell.

D. Ricker stated that Lowell voters approved the Community Preservation Act in the City of Lowell in the 2019 municipal election approving a 1% surcharge on local property taxes to fund Open Space, Recreation, Historic Preservation, and Community Housing projects. D. Ricker said the goal of the public hearing is to receive community input about where the public feels CPA funds should be spent. D. Ricker stated that there is a requirement that at

least 10% of the annual CPA funds must be spent or reserved for each of the 3 categories, Open Space/Recreation, Historic Preservation, and Community Housing. The remaining funds can be used for projects in any of the 3 categories. D. Ricker stated that DPD also has a CPA survey open and residents can provide input via the survey as well.

A. Baacke opened up the public hearing to members of the public.

Cathy Mercado

C. Mercado introduced herself as the Associate Director of the Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership. C. Mercado expressed support for utilizing CPA funds to create housing equity in the City of Lowell. C. Mercado said that the City of Lowell has provided funding for down payment assistance for first-time homebuyers programs which has helped many families achieve homeownership, but the program has many restrictions which CPA funds do not have. C. Mercado proposed funding a program similar to OnePlus Boston which is a collaboration between the City of Boston, the Massachusetts Housing Partnership, and the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance. Adapting this program in Lowell would provide a pathway to homeownership for low- and moderate-income Lowellians, and provide a means to lower the generational wealth gap. Since September 2021, OnePlus Boston has closed 52 loans for condos, single-families, and multi-families, 80% of which were obtained by people of color. C. Mercado stated the OnePlus program helps low- and moderate-income families by providing subsidizing loans to have lower interest rates. C. Mercado said that this program is a good way for the City to take action on the recent City Council vote to create housing equity in Lowell.

Jim Wilde

J. Wilde added that the OnePlus program uses CPA funds to buy down the interest rates on loans, and the rate received by people utilizing the program varies depending on their level of income. People that earn 80% or less of the AMI receive loans 1% lower than current rates, and people that earn 100% or less of the AMI get rates 0.5% lower. This program utilizes a small amount of CPA funds to have a significant impact on housing equity.

Peter Aucella

P. Aucella expressed concern about the condition of the Smith-Baker center, and the property falling into disrepair. P. Aucella stated that this is the largest unrenovated historic building in the Downtown Lowell Historic District. The City Council has voted on multiple occasions to encourage rehabilitation of the property, however as time goes by and the property falls further into disrepair it is becoming more expensive. P. Aucella said that the City has had multiple different arrangements to redevelop the property, and is unsure what the current status is. Allocating CPA funds to stabilize the building may make the property a more attractive investment for a developer interested in rehabilitating the property. P. Aucella stated that the last he was aware, the City was using the property for storage, and feels that this is an inappropriate use of the building. P. Aucella said he supports utilizing CPA funding to invest in the rehab of the Smith-Baker Center.

A. Baacke clarified that at least 10% of the annual CPA funds must be allocated or reserved to be used for each of the three funding categories, Open Space/Recreation, Historic Preservation, and Community Housing.

John Hamblet

J. Hamblet stated he is representing the Pawtucketville Citizens Council, and sees 2 areas of greatest interest. The first being looking into opportunities for Open Space, specifically the Wildlife Corridor between the State Forest and Merrimack River in Pawtucketville. J. Hamblet said that the project is about 90% complete, and with the Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust managing the Varnum Family Hawk Valley Farm, there are only a few remaining connections necessary. The second area of interest is Historic Preservation, specifically preservation of Lowell's colonial history. The major focus of historic preservation in Lowell has been its industrial history, however more attention should be given to colonial history in Lowell. J. Hamblet cited the Pawtucket Congregational Church, and the Bowers House, both of which hold historic importance. J. Hamblet stated he supports the historic preservation of many of the older properties in Lowell, specifically the oldest house in Lowell which is currently owned by a local developer who does not take care of the property. J. Hamblet summarized that he feels the two best uses for CPA funds are for the wildlife corridor, and preserving Lowell's colonial history.

Kim Scott

K. Scott stated she was interested in the restoration of the boat ramp at Muldoon Park, the park is frequently used by people in the neighborhood as it provides access to the Concord River. There is currently a concrete boat ramp that is in disrepair. K. Scott said she supported area to access the river for kayaks, canoes, and fishing. K. Scott added that creating a park on Centennial Island and incorporating the old mill remnants into the park could create open space and include parts of Lowell's history. K. Scott said that many older South Lowell residents remember utilizing the Concord River and park improvements could provide a great resource for this part of the city.

Connie Martin

C. Martin stated she is speaking on behalf of Community Teamwork, Inc. C. Martin said that Community Teamwork is in support of replicating the OnePlus Boston program in Lowell to support affordable housing and to support individuals making investments in the community. C. Martin stated that 7 or 8 years ago Community Teamwork ran a match savings program which partnered with other Lowell homebuyer assistance programs, the program helped upwards of 45 families purchase homes primarily within Lowell. The program had a significant impact not only on the families that participated, but also the communities they became a part of. The OnePlus program allows eligible people to reduce interest payments and impact how much an eligible family could borrow. C. Martin stated that it can be only a small amount of money which can make a big difference in allowing a family to purchase a permanent asset. Community Teamwork is a proponent of the OnePlus program, and hopes to bring the program to Lowell, and would be an enthusiastic partner in working with the Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership.

Fred Faust

F. Faust stated the properties he wants to talk about are the Gorham Street properties that include Dana's Market, the Landmark, and the old fish market. F. Faust said that he has been working with Steve Stowell in the Division of Development Services, the Dana's Market, and old fish market are in severe disrepair, the three buildings are some of the oldest in downtown Lowell. F. Faust said that he has also been in contact with the Lowell Plan about assisting with renovations, but the owners had not been cooperative. F. Faust said that these buildings are in immediate danger.

F. Faust stated the second item he is advocating for is the Lower Locks, which is one of the most important historic locations in Lowell. The Lower Locks is currently in disrepair and currently boats cannot pass through the locks, and the project requires substantial renovations. State Senator Ed Kennedy got about \$100,000 of state funding to start the project, but the project will be a long effort with a need for community attention. The project would improve access to the canals.

Paul Belley

P. Belley stated that Lowell has a lot of history, but there is not a lot about Lowell's Native American history. P. Belley supported a living museum which recognizes the Native Americans that lived along the Merrimack River. P. Belley said that not a lot has been done to preserve the history of the area's Native Americans and funds could be used to preserve this history.

Jane Calvin

J. Calvin stated the City's Open Space and Master Plan are critical documents that are important to follow in decision making. J. Calvin said she is supportive of protecting the Bowers House, and is supportive of the idea to update the boat launch at Muldoon Park in South Lowell. Muldoon Park is the only place to access the Concord River by boat in Lowell. J. Calvin stated she is also supportive of constructing a park on Centennial Island near the fish ladder. J. Calvin stated the Concord River whitewater rafting program cannot use the Lower Locks right now, the locks are critical to the whitewater rafting program. J. Calvin stated that she supports the wildlife corridor and said area with higher acreage especially in Pawtucketville should be a high priority.

Corey Robinson

C. Robinson asked if CPA funds were for the preservation of all public space, not just historic places. A. Baacke stated there are 3 target areas, historic preservation, affordable housing, and open space/recreation.

C. Robinson supported using funds for recreation targeting areas in need. C. Robinson said there are many people in Centralville without access to a splash pad or other recreational activities. Many residents of the neighborhood do not have access to transportation to get to Shedd Park, or Dracut, etc. to access adequate parks. C. Robinson said he is supportive of improving parks serving moderate and low-income families providing accessible recreational opportunities for kids in all areas. C. Robinson said he is supportive of creating a Riverwalk area in Centralville as well, and said creating bike or walking paths along river could be beneficial.

Marty Hogan

M. Hogan said that having an open and transparent process around the allocation of CPA funds is important. M. Hogan agreed that there are many parks in Centralville that are in need of investment. M. Hogan stated that investment in historic preservation throughout the city is important.

Bobby Tugbiyele

B. Tugbiyele agreed that having as much community engagement and input as possible is important to ensure that everyone is included in the process. B. Tugbiyele stated his primary focuses in Lowell are quality of life, economic recovery, and upward mobility, and is supportive of projects which cover these areas, specifically community housing and open space. B. Tugbiyele said it is important to have well maintained parks, and specifically cited Derby Park in Downtown Lowell. B. Tugbiyele stated there may be opportunities to partner with Cultural groups, and other organizations to improve parks. B. Tugbiyele said he is supportive of using well more than 10% for Open Space and Recreation, and ensuring there is housing that is affordable to Lowellians of all incomes.

Deb Bellanger

D. Bellanger stated she is most interested in open space and outdoor recreation, and is supportive of the idea to improve the boat ramp at Muldoon Park, and the wildlife corridor in Pawtucketville. D. Bellanger asked if there is funding that can be used to market projects completed using CPA funds. D. Bellanger stated that if it is an eligible use

for CPA funds, utilizing funds for murals, including ones honoring the region's Native American or Colonial history would be beneficial to the City.

John Hamblet

J. Hamblet stated there is a large parcel owned by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation on Varnum Ave adjacent to Hawk Valley Farm, the address is listed as 459.1 Varnum Ave. The lot is undeveloped and could be a potential cheap land transfer to the City of Lowell. J. Calvin stated that this lot is in the care and custody of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation, and said it would be an excellent parcel for the City to gain control of.

Allison Lamey

A. Lamey supported utilizing CPA funds to redevelop key, signature downtown buildings including the Hildreth building, the Wyman's exchange, the block on Gorham Street including Dana's Market. Whether historic preservation and/or affordable housing there are significant opportunities in these properties. These properties face financial hurdles to being redeveloped, and access to CPA funding would be important in the redevelopment of these buildings.

Mona

Mona stated she is concerned about dilapidated homes in Centralville, and the potential to turn those spaces into open space. Overall she is supportive of using CPA funds to improve the neighborhood. Mona said that she would support using community housing CPA funds toward equity and inclusion it would be beneficial. Mona stated that capital improvements to parks and increased housing would be beneficial, especially via funding homeownership programs.

Bobby Tugbiyele

B. Tugbiyele agreed about the importance of utilizing CPA funds to revitalize downtown historic buildings. Funds can ensure that entrepreneurs and businesses are attracted to the City. B. Tubiyele said some buildings require funding to bring them back to life and modernize them for businesses. This could help reduce downtown vacancies.

Councilor Rodney Elliott

R. Elliott stated he is happy with the amount of participation in the public hearing, and it will be challenging for the CPC to make funding decisions. R. Elliott said that he was going to speak in support of the Smith-Baker center, and is supportive of many of the ideas that have been brought up.

E. Slagle said that he is appreciative of all of the people that appeared and provided public comment. This is the first time the committee is going through the CPA process and it will be a learning process. E. Slagle stated receiving public feedback is important. E. Slagle explained that the CPC will vote on funding recommendations which are sent to the City Council for appropriation. The public hearing process is part of the committee's role in creating a Community Preservation Plan, this plan will be presented to the City Council. E. Slagle said that starting in June the CPC will begin accepting applications, after submitting an application applicants present the project to the CPC. The more people who share feedback on potential projects the better the end result will be for the City.

P. Shea thanked the public for their participation, and was impressed with the number of participants that tuned in. He said he is appreciative of the public input and the CPC will focus on making good recommendations to the City Council.

Louisa Varnum

L. Varnum stated she has been a Conservation Commissioner for many years and Conservation is an area of interest. L. Varnum said it is important to look at projects in a measured way because there may not be certain opportunities for open space and historic preservation if affordable housing is maximized. L. Varnum said there are many historic properties in perilous condition which have time sensitive issues, and there has been little money directed to open space. L. Varnum applauded projects such as the Jean D'Arc project which proposes to construct Condos rather than rentals, and stated she is unsure if CPA funds are best used for Community Housing. L. Varnum said she is supportive of preserving resources that will go away if they are not preserved.

Stacey Thompson

S. Thompson said that she is looking through this with a lens of equity. S. Thompson stated that last year the City Council voted to accomplish many things surrounding equity, including housing equity. S. Thompson said it is important to ensure the City has housing which is affordable and this helps revitalize a city and its people. S. Thompson stated that it is important to ensure the City is accessible for people throughout Lowell of all ages and abilities. It is important to think outside of the box when looking at open space and thinking about different options for kids in Lowell. S. Thompson said she is hopeful there will be areas of collaboration and opportunities to meet in the middle.

B. Buitenhuys thanked residents for their feedback, and stated he is a Conservation Commissioner. B. Buitenhuys said he is advocating for invasive species removal, especially along the Merrimack River, the landscape is changing due to invasive species. B. Buitenhuys also stated his support for using funds to recapture abandoned properties and putting them to better use. B. Buitenhuys advocated for options to create direct action volunteer opportunities to construct neighborhood parks which can enhance the beauty and infrastructure of Lowell's neighborhoods.

S. Liang stated that he hopes the public stays up to date with CPC actions. There are limited funds and many good project ideas, and there are good opportunities to work together.

A. Baacke thanked the public for their participation, stated it would be challenging to choose between the many good projects, and closed the public hearing.

IV. Other Business

Review Updated CPA Recommendation Form

A. Baacke stated that staff has prepared and produced forms that will be used for recommendations and applications for projects. A. Baacke opened the floor to staff to describe the forms and explain any feedback staff is seeking at the meeting.

D. Ricker stated that the proposed forms are similar to what was proposed at the previous meeting, these forms incorporate changes which were discussed at the prior meeting. The documents are being presented to the CPC again to gather any additional feedback.

Review Updated CPA Application Forms

There were no additional comments on CPA application forms.

Annual CPA Budget Appropriation Vote

A. Baacke stated that the vote is to provide an appropriation recommendation to the City Council which meets the CPA requirements. D. Ricker stated that the appropriation is required by the CPA, and the proposed appropriation

was designed to meet the minimum CPA requirement of 10% annual CPA funding to each category, open space, historic preservation, and community housing.

S. Liang asked if the budget reserve is to be utilized in FY2022. E. Slagle stated he talked to Conor Baldwin, the City of Lowell CFO, he contacted the Department of Revenue to ensure the appropriation was being done correctly. E. Slagle said the funding numbers are anticipated funding numbers for FY2022, starting in July 2021 through June 2022, and is an estimate of the 1% revenue that will be received. E. Slagle said that similarly to the City Council requirement to do their appropriation prior to the fiscal year, this is a recommendation that will be sent to the City Council that they will vote on to divide the FY2022 CPA funds into the 3 categories. The CPC will have access to these funds in addition to CPA funds raised in FY2021 and FY2020. E. Slagle stated that this motion is to have the City Council appropriate the minimum requirement amounts into each category so that when projects are approved the CPC can determine which funding reserve funds should be allocated from.

P. Shea said that he believes the CPC makes a recommendation to the City Manager and it is up to the City Manager to accept or amend the recommendation to be forwarded to the City Council. P. Shea asked if this understanding is correct. E. Slagle said that he is unsure whether there is an intermediate step, the final appropriation votes are made by the City Council. E. Slagle said we will follow the correct process. P. Shea stated that he wasn't sure whether the City Manager determined whether CPC recommendations were made to the City Council. A. Baacke stated that it would be helpful to get clarification on the CPC recommendation process.

Motion:

S. Liang motioned, and J. Linnehan seconded the motion to approve the Community Preservation Act Budget Appropriation for FY2022. The motion passed unanimously, (8-0).

V. Notices

VI. Further Comments from Community Preservation Committee Members

J. Linnehan stated that he missed the previous meeting due to a technical issue, but watched it on LTC, and it was nice to be in attendance.

S. Liang thanked staff and public for their participation and outreach to the community, and said he is hopeful there will be good participation on proposed projects.

VII. Adjournment

K. Keefe-Mullin motioned, and E. Slagle seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously, (8-0). The time was 7:39pm.