

**COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE
TOWN OF NEEDHAM, MASSACHUSETTS**

**Public Hearing
April 15, 2008**

Present: Paul Siegenthaler – Chairman, Jane Howard – Vice-Chairman, Janet Bernardo, John Comando, Bruce Eisenhut, Brian Nadler, Shelia Pransky, Sandy Tobin

Town Staff: Patricia Carey, Staff Liaison
Nikki Witham, Recording Secretary

Guests: Richard Creem, Bill Tilburg, Bob Smart, Moe Handel, Louis Hutchins, Kate Fitzpatrick, Jim Healy, Michael Niden, Christopher Coleman, David Davison, Lisa Zappala, Scott Brightman, Mark Gluesing, Carol Boulris, Polly Attridge, Paul Attridge, Jerry Wasserman, Sam Bass Warner, Carolyn McIver, Gloria Greis, Elizabeth Handel, Dan Matthews, Diana Kleiner, Jeff Kristeller, Gail Fischer, Denise Garlick, Lisa Standley, John Bulian, Janice Hunt, Roger Hunt

The meeting convened at 7:05 PM in the Pollard Middle School Auditorium.

Mr. Siegenthaler welcomed everyone to the formal review of the projects seeking Community Preservation funds at the May 2008 Town Meeting. He explained that the organizations who had submitted proposals were present to give brief presentations on their projects. He also informed the audience, that the proponents of two of the articles had asked to withdraw their articles, but that they would likely come back in the future. Each project had a liaison from the Committee who introduced the applicant. The applicants gave their presentation and then answered any questions from the public.

Town Hall Renovation FY2008-1:

The Board of Selectmen and Town Manager are seeking \$1 million in design funds for the historic preservation and renovation of Town Hall. Ms. Fitzpatrick presented information on the work that has been done to date to present the renovation plan. It has been estimated that 91% of the project would be eligible for CPA funds. Selectmen Chairman Jim Healy stated the Board of Selectmen's view that the project was an efficient use of space and funds, and that the Selectmen altered their earlier plan to insure the historic features would remain. Mr. Healy noted that numerous public meetings and hearings have been held over many years to reach this plan. Selectman Denise Garlick stated that she was not in agreement with the other members of the board, and felt that additional community input was needed before a decision was made, and that the Historical Commission be invited to be more involved with the discussions.

Moe Handel, Town Meeting Member

As a member of the Citizens to Preserve Town Hall, Mr. Handel gave a presentation on the merits of the restoring the assembly hall, and to correct the mistake made 50 years ago when the hall was converted to office space. His group has submitted a Citizen's Petition to the Town Meeting warrant, but it will be amended. The original petition asked for design funds for the option that would create an annex building behind Town Hall. The preservation committee would now recommend moving some of the offices intended to be at Town Hall to the proposed public service building on Dedham Avenue as it would not be an additional cost. They are also recommending the creation of a study committee that would recommend the best use of the second floor of Town Hall. Mr. Handel noted other communities that had halls within their government buildings. Mr. Handel raised a concern that the Historical Commission had not been part of the decision making process. He urged the Community Preservation Committee to not support the funding of the proposal.

Louis Hutchins

Mr. Hutchins was a member of the Study Committee that recommended adoption of the Community Preservation Act in Needham. He stated that the preservation of Town Hall was discussed throughout the study. He noted that Town Hall was on the National Registry due to its significance in architecture, governmental use and community use. The proposal before the CPC was only related to office space. Mr. Hutchins urged the CPC not to support the proposal.

Carol Boulris, Chairman of the Historical Commission

Mrs. Boulris gave an overview of the role of the Historical Commission and their support for preservation of buildings for their original purposes, along with the preservation of the historic character. Mrs. Boulris stated that the Historical Commission was not consulted on the project plans as they were being developed. The Historical Commission supported Option 3, as it felt it was the best option of the three presented, but had not been given the choice to consider Option 1A, presented by the Citizens for the Preservation of Town Hall. She supports Option 1A that would move some Town staff to Dedham Avenue, and will be asking the Historical Commission to vote at their next meeting.

Michael Niden, Town Meeting Member

Mr. Niden feels that the community has not been asked to be involved in the review process for the renovation of Town Hall, and he supports the creation of a new study to review the best options for the assembly hall. Mr. Niden believes that the economic development opportunities for the downtown are important when choosing how to renovate the building.

Dan Matthews, Vice-Chairman Board of Selectmen

As a member of the Board of Selectmen for thirteen years, Mr. Matthews noted that the problems with the Town Hall building affect residents as well as employees. During his tenure on the Board, Town Hall has been part of numerous studies. The recent

discussion revolves around using Town Hall for government operations as well as cultural events. It is his belief that the cultural events would be better suited for a separate facility without conflicts. Mr. Matthews asked the CPC to vote to support the project as proposed.

Jean McKnight

Ms. McKnight stated that the Town had a unique opportunity to choose to restore its hall. As a former resident of Weston, she highlighted the events that she had attended in their hall that co-exist with the daily operations of their town government. Ms. McKnight asked the CPC to not vote to support the proposal.

Elizabeth Handel

Dr. Handel highlighted the benefits of having performances in the downtown area, in conjunction with the other services provided in the area, including restaurants. The restoration of the hall would be an economic boost and this was the opportunity to help build the sense of community.

Moe Handel

Mr. Handel noted that there was no effort to delay the renovations of Town Hall, but that the timetable could still be reached if some additional time was provided to all the stakeholders. His hope is that the Selectmen will ask to alter their proposal to avoid further delays.

The CPC asked if there was any change in the National Registry status of Town Hall if the second floor continued to be used for offices. Though he did not support the proposal, Louis Hutchins stated that the National Registry status would not change.

Preservation of Trails/Access to Municipal Land - FY2008-4:

Conservation Commission Chair Lisa Standley gave a presentation on the request for \$5,500 for projects related to the improvement of the trails, based on the recommendations from the Trails Master Plan. Approximately \$4000 is for the building and installation of wooden kiosks to be used for maps, and additional hiking information. The remaining \$1500 will be used for aluminum trail markers. There will be four kiosks at Ridge Hill and four kiosks at the Town Forest. With the proper signage, a person will always know they are on the right path, and signs are also helpful on sidewalk connections. She feels the trail system is highly valued by the public.

Sandy Tobin, CPC member

She feels this is a great project but is wondering about the maintenance plan.

Dr. Standley said that the maintenance plan is included in the Master Trails plan. There will be regular inspections of the trails. A key element is having active involvement from the community to continually upgrade the maps and signs. The maps will also be available on the Town's website.

Louis Hutchins

He stated his support for the project, and in particular noted the improvements that would be made to trails around Rosemary Lake.

Jean McKnight

Ms. McKnight stated her support for this project, and the assistance it will provide to those new to the trails.

Transfer of Funds to Conservation Fund - FY2008-3:

Dr. Standley also presented for this proposal. The Conservation Fund is an existing fund created in the early 1960's under Massachusetts General Law. The Town had provided annual contributions, until the early 1980's. There is about \$145,000 currently in the fund. The last time it was used was for preliminary costs related to the purchase of the Wiswall property, adjacent to Ridge Hill. The fund can be used for purchases of land, deed restrictions or easements, or for work related to any of those uses.

Bruce Eisenhut, CPC member

Mr. Eisenhut asked if this would be an annual funding request, or a one-time request. Dr. Standley said it would be annual.

Jane Howard, CPC member

Ms. Howard asked how long the Town had made contributions to the fund. Dr. Standley did not have an answer, but former Conservation Commission member and chair Roger Hunt was in the audience and said that it was an annual contribution during his tenure. He noted his support for the proposal.

Paul Siegenthaler, CPC Chairman

Mr. Siegenthaler asked if there was a fund limit that the Conservation Commission was looking to reach, and Dr. Standley stated that it was \$250,000.

John Comando, CPC member

Mr. Comando asked if the Conservation Commission could request funds from the Reserve Fund as opposed to having use of the Conservation Fund. Assistant Town Manager Dave Davison did not want to speak on behalf of the Finance Committee, but he stated that the purpose of the Reserve Fund was to handle emergencies, and that a request from the Conservation Commission would need to be considered an emergency to qualify.

Sheila Pransky, CPC member

Ms. Pransky asked about the oversight of the fund. Dr. Standley stated that the Town Treasurer had oversight.

Jeff Kristeller, Town Meeting Member

Mr. Kristeller asked if the Conservation Commission had approached the Board of Selectmen in the past to request appropriations be presented to Town Meeting. Dr.

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Standley said that it was the impression of the Conservation Commission that such a request would not have likely been approved by Town Meeting in light of other funding requests, so they had opted not to make requests. Mr. Kristeller asked if there was an estimate on how much might be needed for particular projects. Dr. Standley noted that \$10,000-15,000 might be needed to do a survey of the land, appraisals, title searches and other related work.

Mr. Siegenthaler thanked all those in attendance for the questions and comments. He reminded the Committee of their meeting on April 16th at 7:30pm at the Newman Conference room.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nikki Witham
Recording Secretary