

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

**Minutes of Meeting
March 16, 2022 – Public Hearing**

LOCATION: Hybrid, Committee members and members of the public had the option to attend virtually or in person.

PRESENT: Peter Pingitore, Chair, Artie Crocker, Vice Chair, Joe Barnes, Robert Dermody, Laura Dorfman, Jeanne McKnight, Reg Foster, Chris Gerstel

REMOTE: Rick Zimbone

STAFF: Cecilia Simchak, Kristen Wright

P. Pingitore called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and completed a roll call for Committee members and staff, the results of which are noted above. P. Pingitore reviewed meeting rules and disclosed that the meeting, which was conducted in-person and via Zoom in accordance with Governor Baker's emergency order regarding Open Meetings, was also being recorded.

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

P. Pingitore welcomed attendees to the Public Hearing regarding applications for funding for FY2023 and noted that this was the first time the committee has met in person since March 2020. He proceeded to explain, generally, the purpose of the CPA and the committee's process. He then outlined the rules and procedures for the hearing.

DISCUSSION OF APPLICATIONS

1. FY23-01 – Needham Housing Authority (Property Existing Conditions Reports; Property Survey)

This request is for \$123,632.00 under Community Housing for existing condition property surveys with respect to renovation and modernization of four buildings at Seabeds Way, six buildings at Capt. Robert Cook Drive, and the redevelopment of the sixty High Rock Estates bungalows into sixty duplexes. L. Dorfman introduced R. Foster, who presented this application. The Needham Housing Authority intends to match the funds requested from its Management Reserve, thus the total project cost is a little less than \$247,000. This project is a prerequisite to a repositioning application planned for Fall 2022 which will allow the NHA to take advantage of new federal funding streams, unlocking \$43M in new funding over the next 20 years. The funding and planned modernization/redevelopment will allow the units to continue as deeply affordable housing for people making less than 50% of the median area income.

Public Comments & Questions:

Ross (? last name) noted that residents have not been included in the process and the report he just obtained is the first time he is seeing the proposals in this form. He urged the NHA to include residents in the planning process, and urged the CPA to include historical considerations with respect to the veterans cluster housing. He also urged the NHA to consider post-pandemic /open space considerations in the plan.

Anna Aguilera (written submission): She supports investment in affordable housing.

2. FY23-02 – Needham Housing Authority (Pre-Development Design Costs, Linden-Chambers Redevelopment)

This request is for \$1,386,000 under Community Housing to prepare preliminary design required to obtain zoning relief and complete other due diligence for redeveloping the Linden-Chambers properties, consisting of 152 units of housing for seniors and disabled. L. Dorfman introduced R. Foster, who presented the application. Completing this pre-development and schematic design phase will allow NHA to obtain appropriate zoning relief and move one phase closer to being a shovel-ready project. From there they can seek funding needed to complete the project. The prospective redevelopment project will allow Needham to continue to provide deeply affordable senior housing for people making less than 50% of the median area income.

Public Comments & Questions:

Joe Leghorn wholeheartedly supports the project.

P. Pingitore noted that the CPC received emails in support of this project.

3. FY23-03 – Needham Housing Authority (Purchase of East Militia Heights Drive Property)

This request is for \$1,826,000 under Community Housing to purchase twelve three-bedroom single-family homes situated on 3.5 acres of land. The property is a surplus currently owned by the United States Army. C. Gerstel introduced R. Foster, who presented the application. The funding request is based on a full appraisal of the fair market value of the property. If the NHA is able to acquire the property, it would be able to provide twelve additional units of deeply affordable housing for people making less than 50% of the median area income. R. Foster noted the late arriving letter from the Charles River Center conveying its strong desire to also acquire the property and develop housing for its residents. The NHA Board has not yet met to discuss this late development, and it is one outstanding item related to this application.

Public Comment & Questions:

Bruce Eisenhut, 106 Marked Tree Road: He strongly supports this project with some hesitation around certain zoning issues that may require a friendly 40(b) application. Perhaps NHA could work with the Charles River Center on a joint project. With respect to Zoning, R. Foster stated that zoning issues were extensively evaluated during the appraisal process. There are four different approaches for dealing with the fact that it is a non-conforming property depending on how you interpret and apply the Town Bylaw, but a friendly 40(b) application is option number 1 and not a serious concern at this point.

Susan Welby, 857 Webster Street: It is her understanding that access to this property is by right of way through Babson College. Will Babson allow access? R. Foster stated that there is an easement over land owned by Babson coming up East Militia Heights Drive. There is also another access to the property over Dwhite Road that comes up from Central Avenue. Consultants from the Cambridge Housing Authority analyzed the easement/access and it is a cloudy record going back to the 1950's. If NHA acquires the property it will approach Babson and Town of Needham to clarify.

Jim Flanagan, 863 Webster Street: He is in support of all NHA funding requests, particularly the Militia Heights project as he has heard no informed opposition to the acquisition. It is time to redevelop this

property into a safe and vibrant neighborhood. He understands that the homes were historically built by the army to house African American service members and their families because local neighbors would not rent to them. He feels this is an opportunity to redress past housing discrimination.

Rachel Green, 55 Sargent Street: She agrees with Jim Flanagan's comments. She is in support of all four NHA applications, particularly the Militia Heights acquisition. She further hopes that the CPC will prioritize affordable housing in this and coming years.

Oscar Mertz, 67 Rybury Hillway: He is in support of this unique opportunity for the NHA and loves the collaborative benefits with the Charles River Center. He is intrigued, as a member of the Housing Plan Working Group currently looking at housing opportunities in town, by the potential for public-private partnerships. Because of its unique location there is a lack of immediate abutter concern so perhaps there is an opportunity in the distant future to make the area denser and build additional market rate and subsidized housing. Would like to see more economic diversity in the town.

Penny Kirk, 100 Rosemary Way: She is support of all three NHA projects.

4. FY23-04 – Needham Housing Authority (Funding for NHA Ass't Executive Director Position)

This request is for \$97,500 under Community Housing to support 50% of the cost of a two-year position during the MRI's pre-development period. C. Gerstel introduced R. Foster who presented the application. The total cost of the salary for two years is \$195,000. Half will be funded through the CPA and half from the NHA Management reserves. The consultants recommended that NHA recognize the burden on the NHA executive leadership will grow considerably as they get into the modernization and redevelopment work. It is important to make sure that they stay on top of their primary mission which is to manage 336 units of deeply affordable housing to the best of its ability. The expectation is that after a couple of years the additional revenue they will generate from FY23-01 will enable NHA to continue funding the position out of its own resources.

Public Comment and Questions:

None. The Chair takes note of general comments in support of the NHA requests that were made earlier in the evening and received via email.

5. FY23-05 – Emery Grover Renovation Project

This request is for \$6,000,000 under Historic Preservation for the comprehensive renovation of the Emery Grover School Administration Building. The project includes historic rehabilitation of the building envelope, renovation and modernization of the interior, and comprehensive code required upgrades. The project includes 57 outside parking spaces and use of the Hillside Elementary School as a swing space during construction. B. Dermody introduced Dan Gutekanst who, in turn, introduced Joel Bargmann who presented the application. The total estimated project cost is \$20,875,000, of which they believe \$12,900,000 would be considered CPC eligible. The instant request is for \$6,000,000.

Public Comment and Questions:

Gloria Greis, 384 Webster Street: She is the Executive Director of the Needham Historical Society and in support of the project for the proven economic benefits and sense of stability that come from investing in historical preservation in a town.

Susan Welby, 857 Webster Street: She is in strong support of the project.

Joe Leghorn, (address and comment inaudible).

Connie Barr, 205 Edgewater Drive: She is in strong support of the project as the only historical project on the docket at this time.

Michael Greis, 384 Webster Street: He is a current member of the School Committee and a Town Meeting Member. He is fully in support of the project and creating improved working conditions for school administration employees.

Daniel Matthews, 31 Rosemary Street: He is a current member of the Select Board and in support of the project as a longstanding need and valuable town asset. The availability of matching funds for this project was a factor for voters when considering the initial approval of the CPC surcharge in 2004.

R. Zimbone left the meeting.

6. FY23-07 – High School Tennis Court Improvements (Design)

This request is for \$50,000 under Recreation for a design and feasibility study with respect to improvements to the High School Tennis Courts. The project will evaluate the current condition of the courts and provide design options for either a resurfacing project or full renovation. Joe Barnes introduced Stacey Mulroy, Needham Park and Recreation Director, who presented the project.

Public Comment and Questions:

Question: When does the public have access to these courts? S. Mulroy: During the school year the public has access to the courts Monday-Friday from 6:00 p.m. on, and all day Saturday and Sunday. During the Summer the public has access all day unless Park and Recreation is running a summer program.

Matt Haggerty, 110 Pine Grove Street: Online question about the possibility of corporate sponsorship. S. Mulroy: The Park and Recreation Department has not partnered with corporate sponsors in the past, as far as she is aware, but it is not uncommon for departments to seek out corporate sponsorships and it is something that they could start looking into.

Georgina Ruetenik, 236 Greendale Avenue: She is in favor of this project.

7. FY23-09 – Boat Launch

This request is for \$285,000 under Recreation for the construction of a new boat launch to improve access to the Charles River. Reg Foster introduced Stacey Mulroy who presented the project. There was

a previous application for \$30,000 in 2015 for design funds to upgrade the launch; however, due to Covid and other reasons design work did not begin until 2021. The instant project contemplates reconfiguration of the parking area and accessibility improvements to the path allowing more equitable access to the river, including a concrete ramp to allow vehicles to back down to the water for loading and unloading.

Public Comment and Questions:

Name inaudible, 11 South Court: He is in strong opposition to the project. He feels there has been no meaningful community notification or input, and no studies completed or usage statistics shared that would support such spending.

Question: Jim Flanagan, 863 Webster Street: Can you navigate to the south under the bridge from the proposed launch? S. Mulroy: it depends on the weather and amount of rain.

8. FY23-11 – Construction of Growing Beds Available for Seasonal Rental

This request is for \$200,000 under Open Space and Recreation for the construction of 150 raised growing beds at the Community Farm for lease by the public and provide increased accessibility. Artie Crocker introduced Joe Leghorn, Vice President of the Needham Community Farm, who presented the project.

Public Comment and Questions:

P. Pingitore noted for the record that several emails were received in support of the project.

Anna Aguilera, 12 Glenwood Road: She strongly supports this project for all of the reasons mentioned by J. Leghorn and also because local agriculture has important climate mitigation benefits.

Georgina Ruetenik, 236 Greendale Avenue: She is in favor of this project.

PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE CPC ALLOCATION TO THE COMMUNITY HOUSING RESTRICTED FUND FROM 11% TO 22%

P. Pingitore presented this proposal. The committee determined that the use of CPA funds over the past 15 years has been weighted heavily towards historic preservation and recreation, driven in some part by large projects such as the town hall restoration and building the community pool. The committee would like to address this and also build a reserve account that will make funds available for future projects anticipated from the Needham Housing Authority.

Public Comment and Questions:

Name and address inaudible: She is in support this proposal. There is a lack of affordable housing across the Commonwealth and this allows Needham to step up and address that need.

ISSUES NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATED BY THE CHAIR WITHIN 48 HOURS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

A. Crocker made a motion to adjourn the public hearing at 9:00 p.m. Mr. Gerstel seconded the motion. The roll call vote was as follows: **McKnight:** aye, **Dorfman:** aye, **Crocker:** aye, **Foster,** aye, **Barnes:** aye, **Gerstel,** aye, **Dermody:** aye, **Pingitore:** aye. Motion passes 8-0.

A. Crocker made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Dermody seconded the motion. The roll call vote was as follows: **McKnight:** aye, **Dorfman:** aye, **Crocker:** aye, **Foster,** aye, **Barnes:** aye, **Gerstel,** aye, **Dermody:** aye, **Pingitore:** aye. Motion passes 8-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren Spinney
Administrative Coordinator