

**Town of Great Barrington  
Community Preservation Committee (CPC)**

**Minutes of September 14, 2023**

This meeting was held in-person and via Zoom as noted on the meeting agenda.

**Call to Order:** Chair Smith called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Members present: Leigh Davis (Selectboard), Martha Fick (Citizen rep.), Richard Geiler (Finance Committee), Jim Mercer (Historical Comm), Patricia Sharpe (Citizen rep.), Kate Van Olst (Conservation), and Karen W. Smith (Parks Comm).

Jeremy Higa (Planning Board) arrived late.

Also present: CPA Administrator / Assistant Town Manager Christopher Rembold.

Not Present: John Grogan (Housing Authority)

**Review Step 2 Applications – Special Funding Round**

Smith asked for a discussion of each application, and then a discussion of possible funding recommendations.

Construct, Inc.

Davis recused herself.

Jane Ralph, Executive Director of Construct, reviewed the more detailed budget in the Step 2 application, appearing on page 9 and in the chart on page 1 of the step 2 form. She said this is a pilot project, so we do not have a large number of funding sources. We are exploring other sources. Much of the expense is for staffing and occupancy. She said we would pair these assists with micro loans to the families which is a chance for them to better their credit and help with first and last month security deposits.

Fick wanted to clarify that nothing needs to be done with the house. Ralph said that is correct, it is in great shape.

Marble Block

Davis recused herself.

Smith asked Craig Barnum, owner, about the electrical work and supply chains. Barnum said we hope it is not an issue, and that is one reason we would like get going soon.

Geiler said we hoped to see how this \$150,000 request was arrived at, and how that translates to the 10 year term of affordability. Barnum said he is applying for \$75,000 for each of two units for a private market solution to providing affordable housing. The reason for the 10 year term and the 100% AMI is that the building needs to be financed through banks and lenders. Permanent restrictions are difficult when there is financing. Nonprofits can do that, and they are much more expensive per unit.

Fick said this is different than the Alander request; this owner is leaving the tenants in the building, and the request is half of Alander's request. She mentioned the CDC tried to buy this building but could not. She

said this is something we should support. Barnum said the tenants are long term, and they live and work in this area. He said there are low rents. Barnum added that while there are large expenses like roof, HVAC and electrical, he does not have to put in an elevator. Mercer asked about Section 8; Barnum said no.

Geiler asked about the use of the funds. Barnum said the funds would be used for the infrastructure to serve the apartments. Geiler asked about the market rents versus affordable rents. Barnum said the downtown market rents are \$1,600 to more than \$3,000 depending on the age, size, and quality of the units.

Smith said that this seems more like building historic preservation not community housing. She said it is not clear. She said she does not see the urgency of the proposal.

Barnum said, to be clear, this is to subsidize two units for 10 years each.

Rembold addressed to Committee and said that even though there are apartments there, they are not deemed affordable units. This proposal is therefore creation of affordable housing.

Van Olst said she does not see the urgency clearly either. She understands the money requested goes towards the larger capital needed, and it will make two affordable. She likes this approach for housing. She said she hopes for some sort of partnership or involvement from partners. Barnum clarified while he does not have experience in front of the CPC, and he may be new to that, he has a reasonably extensive amount experience in development and managing hundreds of apartments, particularly here in the county.

Sharpe said she is sympathetic to this, and to creating housing and helping the building, but she does not see it urgently needed in this round. She said it would be good to see it in the regular round.

#### Farmsteads for Farmers Project - 200 North Plain Road

Present for the applicant, Berkshire Community Land Trust, were Erik Aulicino and Peter Puciloski. Aulicino reiterated that the urgency here is there is a grant pending from the state, for \$500,000, to build farm buildings on the farmstead. One building is a winter building for chickens and one is an egg washing building. He said there are permanent employees and about three seasonal employees to be at this farm. He said in total we will spend \$1.65 million for this property. He said the Community Land Trust is requesting \$400,000 from the CPA towards the acquisition.

Smith asked how this fits in to what the CPA can fund. Aulicino said this is for permanent conservation of farm land which is open space.

Mercer said this is already chapter 61A land. Rembold said 61A is not permanent open space protection. He said this situation is similar to the Marble Block, where there are apartments, but they are not restricted as affordable. They could be market rate. This is open space, but it could go on the market.

Van Olst said this is clearly eligible for CPA. She said page 16 of the application has the budget which clearly shows the funding. She said the CPA grant is only 25% of their total budget. This applicant is bringing funds in to leverage CPA. And they already have a grant to build the buildings, and they need the land on which to build the farm buildings. Sharpe seconded Van Olst's statements, and she said the applicant makes a strong case for urgency.

Fick said this CPA application is similar to the Windy Hill Farm preservation and the North Plain Farm preservation. This is a great project and we should support it like we did those.

Geiler said he likes this, but he does not think we can fund the entire request.

Puciloski added that the lease terms of the farmstead are included in the packet. He said it requires the house to be used for farm workers and workforce housing. While it is not the subject of the grant request, it is another benefit of the project. And he added that the closing date to purchase the property is February, so this is urgent for this round.

#### Ramsdell Library

Trustees Ruby Chang and Patrick Hollenbeck presented the application. Smith asked if the Board supported this application. Chang said the Board voted yesterday to support the application. Hollenbeck said back in March we voted to pursue the state grant, and this CPA is just part of that.

Smith remarked on the statement that CPA has been used for other libraries across the state. She said other cities cited have many more people per library than Great Barrington. Chang said the argument makes sense, but we are not building a new library. This is a historic building that is deeded to be a library.

Smith asked who would take charge of this. Hollenbeck said the Board of Trustees will, and will hire a firm to manage it. Chang said so far this process of applying to the state is being done by the volunteers on the board. Fick said she wonders how the state will feel about the grant request, since there are few librarians on staff. Chang agreed, it is difficult, but it is not a unique situation; libraries all over have this problem.

Mercer asked about the cost of the building assessment. Chang said they have to redo the recent Building Program Study. It has to be updated. The conditions assessment looks at code, ADA compliance, and the building improvements.

Sharpe asked if they have filed a letter of intent to the State. Chang said yes; it is dated April 28.

Davis said she appreciate the Trustees efforts. She said she wishes there was a library strategic plan included here. She would love to see the strategic plan to get the big picture. Hollenbeck said we will have it done by October 1. That is a State requirement and we will have it completed.

Sharpe said she appreciates the urgency because the state grant is only available this coming year, but she said she is finding it hard to see how they will make a viable application to the State however.

Fick said she does see that they need some funds to move the process forward.

#### **Recommendations for Special Town Meeting:**

##### Farmsteads for Farmers Project - 200 North Plain Road

Smith asked for a motion on the Farmsteads proposal. Higa was not present for the discussion and abstained from the vote.

Davis moved to recommend funding at \$200,000. Mercer seconded. Sharpe proposed an amendment to fully fund it at \$400,000, Van Olst seconded. On the amendment, Sharpe, Van Olst and Fick voted yes. Mercer, Geiler, Davis and Smith voted no. The amendment failed 3-4.

Van Olst proposed to amend the original motion to fund it at \$300,000 and Fick seconded. On the amendment, Van Olst, Sharpe, Geiler and Fick voted yes. Mercer, Davis and Smith voted no. The amendment passed 4-3.

On the amended main motion to recommend funding at \$300,000. Van Olst, Sharpe, Geiler and Fick voted yes. Mercer, Davis and Smith voted no. It passed 4-3.

Ramsdell Library:

Mercer moved to recommend \$50,000, Davis seconded. Van Olst, Mercer, Geiler, Fick, and Davis voted yes. Sharpe and Smith voted no. Passes 5-2. Higa abstained.

Construct, Inc.

Geiler moved to recommend full funding at \$92,400. Mercer seconded. Van Olst, Mercer, Geiler, Fick, and Smith voted yes. Sharpe voted no. Passes 5-1. Higa abstained; Davis was recused.

Marble Block:

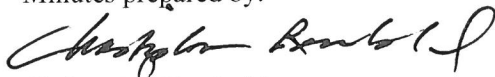
Geiler moved to recommend full funding of \$150,000. Fick seconded. Geiler and Fick voted yes. Sharpe, Van Olst, Mercer, Smith voted no. Motion failed 2-4. Higa abstained; Davis was recused.

**Minutes:** Geiler moved to approve the minutes September 5, 2023. Higa seconded. On a roll call vote, Fick abstained, and all others were in favor.

**Citizens' Speak:** None

**Adjourn:** Fick moved to adjourn. Seeing no objection, Smith adjourned the meeting at 6:45 PM.

Minutes prepared by:



Christopher Rembold