

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

Minutes of December 12, 2023

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

Members present: Martha Fick (Citizen rep.), Richard Geiler (Finance Committee), John Grogan (Housing Authority), Jeremy Higa (Planning Board), Jim Mercer (Historical Comm), Patricia Sharpe (Citizen rep.), Kate Van Olst (Conservation), and Karen W. Smith (Parks Comm).

Not present: Leigh Davis (Selectboard) – recused from housing discussions

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

Minutes: Grogan moved to approve the minutes November 8, 2023. Grogan seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor.

Review Step 2 Applications

Marble Block Realty LLC

Craig Barnum said he intends to remodel the existing building. He said there are 8 units now. There used to be 9, and he will bring it back to 9. He proposes to rent at least two units for 15 years at 100% AMI. He said the building will have new infrastructure, new cabinets, roof on the west side, new HVAC and electric. He said with funding approval he would have the units ready for rent at the end of 2024. He said he will not need to shut down or clear the building in order to do the renovations. He said the rent will be about \$1,776 per month for the affordable units. He said market rent is \$2300 to \$2400 per month.

There was additional discussion about the rent levels, appreciation of having rental housing in the downtown, and that this would not cost as much per unit as a new apartment building. Barnum said this project provides reasonably priced housing much faster than by building new buildings, and the building stays on the tax rolls.

Construct, Inc.

Jane Ralph, Executive Director, said the application seeks CPA support for transitional housing for individuals who are homeless, to continue their rental assistance programs, and to expand their microloans program. She said the transitional housing is for those who are homeless and this can serve them for up to 2 years as they work on underlying issues that may have contributed to their homelessness. Whether it's family dynamics, mental health, other help, and then also develop some financial stability to be able to save for the first, last and security deposit for an apartment.

Ralph added that they are seeking to provide assistance for people in this area. She said currently they provide housing but sometimes people's support services are up in North Adams. She said Construct does not think that is a good model and will focus on serving the area of Southern Berkshire and Great Barrington. She said what's different about our application, than what we have done before, is we are talking about expansion, possibly given \$2,500, matched by a \$2,500 micro loan to help people climb out rather than be able to just manage one month and then have to come back for assistance again and again. She said Construct has a housing navigator on staff to help people access the other resources they need, and can tap the state's rental assistance fund which they spend before using CPA.

Affordable Housing Trust Fund

Fred Clark and Ananda Timpane presented the Trust's proposal. Timpane said this request is a very big ask of the CPA, and would be a paradigm shift. She said they hear voters saying CPA is how the trust should be funded, and that is your purview as CPC. We would like to have that conversation. She reviewed the proposal components, including emergency rental assistance, the 0% down payment loan program, the accessory dwelling unit pilot project. She reiterated the special relationship between CPA funds and acquisition of property, that allows a Trust that uses CPA funds to move at the pace the market moves.

Clark said last year's proposal anticipated a project in the Mahaiwe Street / Pope Street area but that doesn't look like a good fit. It was proposed last year as a goal, but based on their due diligence it will not work right now. He said the Trust will therefore pivot funds it would have used for that project to another project. For example the Trust funded the CDC acquisition of the Sumner Block for affordable units, which was not even known as a possibility last year. He said also the Trust is reviewing a project where they might grant funds to create two affordable units on Front Street in Housatonic. There is also a down payment application for the house at 40 Grove St. Rembold said these are examples of why the Trust was established – if it has funds it can act quickly on opportunities as they come up. If the Trust does not have the funds, they cannot do that.

There was a discussion of the Trust keeping the CPC informed of how it is using CPA funds. And there was a comment that the Trust needs to keep better minutes and share its reports with the CPC. Timpane said the Trust is positioned to use CPA funds well and it is a public process. She said yes they can do much better reporting to the CPC. There was discussion that the Trust is the town body that is set up to accomplish housing, and it needs CPA funds to do that. The CPC members in general reiterated that if the Trust wants all the housing money then it needs to be much better at reporting and communicating. There was a discussion about providing quarterly reports to the CPC.

CDC of South Berkshire - for the Thornewood Inn

Phil Orenstein, Director, and Jim Harwood, Board President, presented the application. Orenstein said CDC is in contract to buy the property which has 14 rooms and several more can be added. He said the property is in very good shape. Harwood said there will be workforce housing units for up to 100% AMI which fits a crucial niche in the local housing needs.

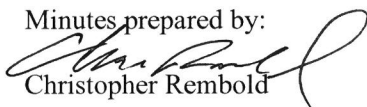
There was a discussion about whether there was a market for this project. Harwood said there is a large need for workforce housing – businesses cannot hire, so they are impacted. He said this proposal is a great opportunity for singles and couples who need housing and they need it in the short term, for say 3, 6, or 9 months, a seasonal nature. These are the people we need to work in our local stores, hospitals, etc.

Smith asked about the affordability. Orenstein said 10 of the units will be for 100% AMI, for 15 years, which is the length of the mortgage.

Citizens' Speak: None

Adjourn: on a motion by Geiler, seconded by Grogan, Smith adjourned the meeting at 7:25 pm.

Minutes prepared by:


Christopher Rembold