

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

**Minutes of December 13, 2023**

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

All members present: Leigh Davis (Selectboard), 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).

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

Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC)

Deanna Smith from BNRC presented the application seeking \$30,000 from CPA for a three-quarter mile long hiking trail at the Thomas and Palmer Preserve. The project is part of the BNRC High Road initiative, and this section is a critical connection in the 6 mile trail from Fountain Pond State Park to Thomas & Palmer. There were questions about the proposed trail width of 8 to 10 feet. Smith said the recommended standard is to create a corridor that wide; that is the US Forest Service recommendation and it has to do with maintenance – the wider the corridor the less maintenance needed annually to clear the trail. She said we are not clear cutting that width; it would be similar to the recent trail at the Preserve up to Whale Rock. It's not wide. Sharpe said she would not support a trail of that width. Fick asked about the easement at the cemetery. Smith said BNRC seeks an easement so they can connect through an unused portion of town land. She said we are not going to direct people or cars into the cemetery.

Great Barrington Land Conservancy (GBLC)

Doug Brown, Vice President and Christine Ward President, spoke for GBLC. Brown said the proposal is to realign and restore trail sections at Pfeffer Arboretum. Some of these sections are quite wet so they want to reroute them and/or install or rebuild bog bridging there. The work needs to be permitted and so they need to hire a wetlands scientist to comply with wetlands regulations. They would outsource the work to trail crews like Greenagers, and the signage jobs to BEAT. Ward said it is popular and during COVID the trail use skyrocketed and conditions became difficult because of rains. There are no proposed changes to the parking area.

Conservation Commission for McAllister Wildlife Refuge

Jess Toro of Native Habitat and Shep Evans, Conservation Agent spoke. Toro said they are seeking funds to continue the restoration work. This year the plan is to replant around the stream area with 135 climate-ready trees. She said now one of the streams is opened up by the invasive species removal, so we want to get canopy back in there, using the right trees. Evans said the CPA funding helps secure other funding, from the Mass. DCR to remove invasives and to restore bird habitat. He said the Conservation Commission has a long standing relationship with DCR, and the CPA represents a match to funds from DCR. Toro said over the years the CPA has resulted in about 85,000 from the state. There were questions about the number of visitors there. Evans said even in the winter there are people there. On a nice day in the warm weather there are a dozen cars parked.

Town DPW - Grove Street park

DPW Superintendent Joe Aberdale said the Parks Commission has been working throughout town recently and is looking to further improve Grove Street park. It's been made ADA accessible, old play equipment was removed and replaced, all by using the Parks budget. He said we have invested a lot and now we are

seeking CPA to help complete the project. He said now the proposal is to renovate and upgrade the park including the paved court surface. He said they will widen the court about 8 feet, to accommodate all the different court games, and apply an epoxy coating. Mercer said this has become a vibrant part of Town again.

Mason Library – 3 Town DPW applications:  
for the historic sconces, clamshell entry, and front steps

Aberdale said the first proposal is to remove the sconces from the front of the Mason Library and restore them. He said they do not work, and they also have a bracket for flag poles. He said we will take them off, get electric working, and recondition them and hang them back up.

He said the second is to remove the clamshell canopy over the front doors and restore it. He said it's falling apart. Geiler asked if it should be removed before it falls. Aberdale said it could be removed if needed and restored later.

Davis and Geiler asked about the steps, and how they are part of the project to create the DuBois statue. Aberdale said a group is raising money for stone benches and the statue, and the steps would be integrated into that work. He said the group can't raise money for everything, so the Town needs to do the steps. He said the Town owns the steps. Smith said the steps are integral to the bench statue project, and it makes sense to work together with that group. There was a discussion of which of the Mason Library proposals to CPA were priorities. Aberdale said the steps are first priority. They are closed now because they are dangerous. He said the clamshell is second priority, and the sconces third.

Ramsdell Library

Library Trustee Ruby Chang said the request from the CPA is for the \$150,000 which is required as a deposit essentially in order to apply for a MBLC construction grant to renovate the library. She said the grant will encompass two things: the planning and design, and then the construction. She said to enter and be competitive you need to show there is \$150,000 committed. She said if the CPA request is funded, it stays in the account until October 2024, which is when we will know if we get the MBLC grant. She said at that point the state puts in another \$100,000 and we can start detailed design. She said for the construction, if we assume the cost is \$5 million, we would get 60% of that from the state to renovate the building. She said the building is falling apart as you can see in the photos provided. She said the handicapped ramp wonderful, but there is no ADA bathroom and no other egress. There is no sprinkler system, and there is no dehumidification system.

Fick asked what if the Town doesn't want to spend the \$2 million towards the construction. Smith said communities of our size do not have two libraries. She said she would not allocate funds for a library when we already have one, but maybe for a community center. Chang said really that is the trend – that a library is a gathering place.

Geiler said it seems that only 10 libraries will get grants from the state. He asked Aberdale if DPW is looking to make repairs. Aberdale said DPW is conducting a town wide building asset management program report which is due soon. There are improvements that can be done.

Van Olst said we need to recognize how state funding works and that the cycle is not every year. She said if we pass up participating in this current round of grant funding, we still have an aging building with a bad hvac system and not ADA accessible for many more years. She said we will be no closer to a community center, and it will all be more expensive five years from now. She said we need to take advantage of the state funds and to take care of the building.

Sharpe said she hopes the Trustees get the grant but she finds it hard to tie up CPA funds that may not be used if you do not get the grant. Fick suggested this request be in the Town capital budget rather than tying up CPA. Higa agreed. Davis said the Town has some big ticket costs coming, and she is not comfortable without seeing the rest of the Town capital budget needs.

Mercer thanked Chang and the Trustees. He said this grant would like a refundable application fee. He said if the state doesn't give the grant then we don't spend it. Sharpe said she understands, but she does not think this year we can afford to grant \$150,000 and let it sit.

#### Unitarian Universalist Meeting of South Berkshire for 1068 Main St

UUMSB Chairperson Bill Young described the application to address exterior needs. He said the painting and gutters will be repaired using loans and fundraising, but the roof needs to be replaced and the stained glass on the front needs to be restored. Geiler asked whether the project was urgent. Young said the roof is very old but it is not leaking now. He said the UUMSB since it bought the building in 2014 has had to patch the roof. He said it is a priority item.

Sharpe asked who would oversee the work. Young said they have a facilities management group that has been working effectively. Smith asked about the use of the building. Young said they have about 75 full time members, a lot of visitors, and the building is used for community functions. They host music, community organizations and other groups on an ongoing basis and can seat about 100 at tables. He said we are asking for CPA funds because we want to be good stewards of a historic building.

#### Mahaiwe Performing Art Center

Executive Director Martinson said the building is from 1905 and on the historic register and in the Historic District. She said the Mahaiwe has 36,000 people per year and 5,000 come on free or discounted tickets. She said we are very community based, with an active education programming and also Spanish language programs. They have an \$8.6 million economic footprint.

There were questions about the project costs and the organization's fundraising efforts. Martinson said operations are largely contribution driven but the building is expensive to maintain. The historic requirements are great and we want to respect them. For example the chimneys need to remain even though they are not used. The 1905 slates on the roof need to be replaced. They erode. She said we cannot wait for or afford a leak. The work is expensive also because of all the scaffolding required. She said they have been fundraising and so far have \$150,000 from MCC, and funds from donors and two foundations.

#### Great Barrington Historical Society - Wheeler Farmhouse and Museum

Mercer recused himself because he is on the Board, but he has no financial interest.

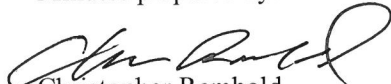
GBHS Director Bob Krol presented the project. He said the project will be for work on the main house and the barns. Krol said the society feels obligated to stabilize all the outbuilding structures. He said they have except for the silo, which was impacted by the 1995 tornado and the east barn. He said the largest barn has received a new roof. He said they are working to archive materials and ensure the items are available for research or for viewing. He said the project includes a request for funds to finish the renovation of the farmstead second floor interior, to create the archival storage area, and for the silo. He said an archivist, paid by a grant, will help bring materials from Ramsdell to our site. He said this is important because we need to be able to access the materials in order to answers people's questions.

Davis asked about the total project cost, and about which components were priorities. Krol said the second floor is a priority, as well as the wagon house component. He said \$77,000 would be the number, and would be the minimum to get a match from the Massachusetts historical commission.

**Citizens' Speak:** None

**Adjourn:** Grogan moved to adjourn. Hearing no objection, Smith adjourned the meeting at 7:40 PM.

Minutes prepared by:

  
Christopher Rembold