

Canton Community Preservation Committee

Minutes of meeting – February 13, 2023

In Attendance: John McSweeney, Shaun Chu, George Comeau, Kathy McCormack, Lisa Lopez and John Leonetti

Absent: Kendall O’Halloran and Melissa Mayer

Armando Center Meeting Room, 92 Pleasant Street

Co-Chairman John McSweeney called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

1) Public Comments:

Steven Hughes of 7 Reservoir Circle noted that he had come to a meeting last fall and asked about seeing the results of the survey and other community engagement outreach that was done in April of 2022. He had requested it via email and the administrator had sent, at the direction of the co-chairmen, a portion of the survey results. He had seen that at the last CCPC meeting it was agreed to post the majority of the outreach results on the CCPC committee website and Mr. Hughes wondered when that would be available. Administrator Allison Neff explained that she was in the process of posting it, pending some further website training. Co-Chairman McSweeney recommended that the documents be emailed to Mr. Hughes so he didn’t need to wait for them to all be posted. Mr. Hughes asked to confirm that it would be the results in their entirety, to which Administrator Neff responded that the committee had decided that the individual comments should not be shared publicly as there was identifying data included in some comments, so the results shared publicly would include the aggregate answers but not the individual comments. Administrator Neff went on to explain that she had written a report that reflected the topics brought up in all those comments, and that report would be posted/sent. Mr. Hughes went on to point out that one of the survey questions was regarding how familiar citizens are with the Community Preservation program and the majority were not very familiar with it. He felt that more community education is required so the citizens going to Annual Town Meeting were informed about the program and what it funds.

Committee member John Leonetti explained to Mr. Hughes that the committee had made the decision to not share individual comments because Jen Goldson (who managed the survey and responses) had said that it was not made explicit to the survey-takers that the responses would be public, and therefore suggested they not be shared publicly.

Mr. Hughes questioned whether these documents would fall under the Freedom of Information Act, and if so it should be released.

Committee member George Comeau noted that this issue would need be addressed in future outreach, but for these existing documents there was an expectation of privacy for those who took part and left comments, but the information is all included in the summaries from Ms. Goldson and Administrator Neff. Co-Chairman Shaun Chu agreed. The entire Committee discussed and agreed that this issue would need to be considered for future surveys, though it may impact how willing members of the public are to participate in a survey when comments are not private.

Peter Hennessey of 4 Sumner Street brought up the financial reports available on the website and asked if these figures were complete and up-to-date, and also asked if the CCPC tracks expenditures by bucket (Open Space, Recreation, Historical, and Housing) by year and for all years total. Administrator Neff agreed to post this information on the CCPC website.

Mr. Hennessey went on to ask specifically about the Tilden House project from fiscal year 2016. Mr. Comeau explained there was a second CPA grant for the Tilden House in fiscal year 2021 and Mr. Hennessey pointed out that information is not online since the records are not all up to date. He asked for confirmation that approximately \$900,000 total of CPA funds has gone to the Tilden House at this point. Administrator Neff confirmed updated financial tracking would be

going up on the website soon. Mr. Hennessey asked if the 3 bucket amounts of CPA spending were equal. Co-Chairmen McSweeney and Chu, along with Committee members Lisa Lopez and Mr. Comeau, explained they are not equal and there is no requirement for them to be equal as long as 10% of funds each year goes to each bucket or is set aside for each bucket. Administrator Neff agreed to email the spreadsheet under discussion to Mr. Hennessey so he would not need to wait for it to be posted on the website.

Mr. Leonetti started a discussion regarding the Paul Revere Heritage Site bond and how it is presented on the spreadsheet. Administrator Neff explained that the bond expenditure was reflected in the yearly amount paid, rather than as a lump sum the year it was voted on. Mr. Leonetti pointed out that it is important to make sure the total spent (and promised) to the Heritage Site is reflected somewhere. A discussion ensued regarding presenting the bond with yearly expenditure figures vs. as its own entity. It was agreed that all charts and spreadsheets should be as clear as possible and make note of the full amount spent/promised and not just the yearly expenditure. Ms. Lopez suggested that these charts and spreadsheets get a few pairs of eyes on them before they are posted to the website to make sure they are easy to understand and posted correctly the first time.

2) Minutes of January 9, 2023

Mr. Comeau moved that the minutes of the meeting on 1/9/23 be approved. The motion was seconded by Mr. Leonetti and passed 6-0.

3) Financial Report

Co-Chairman McSweeney informed the committee that Stacey Gorman had resigned her position with the CCPC for personal reasons. The committee will need a volunteer to become the new Treasurer. The Parks and Recreation Committee will appoint a new member to the CCPC.

The committee looked at the financial report from the end of December, 2022. Administrator Neff explained that she uses these monthly MUNIS reports to update the funds spent for CPA projects. Several committee members expressed their confusion with the MUNIS report layout and information. Mr. Leonetti requested that the discussion be delayed until the next meeting when someone from Finance or Accounting could be invited to help the committee go over the report. Co-Chairman McSweeney pointed out that some closed out projects still had funds reflected in the report. Administrator Neff explained that there is a delay when it comes to Accounting closing out the projects because it has to wait until after the minutes are approved for the meeting where the project was voted to be closed, which is usually 1-2 months later.

Mr. Leonetti expressed that Stacey Gorman had an excellent handle on these reports and the financial situation, and asked Administrator Neff if she had good command over the information and how much catching-up a new volunteer for the Treasurer position would have to do. She responded that she was fairly comfortable and could understand the information, and she is able to keep up with the financial tracking and there shouldn't be any gap in the numbers. Mr. Leonetti expressed that there should be a deadline by which the CCPC has information about what moneys are in the accounts and what is projected. Administrator Neff assured the committee that the numbers were as up-to-date as they could be at this point, and that the Financial Manager of the town sent the projections each January. Ms. Lopez pointed out that the committee does have time, and it is fortuitous that the Treasurer resigned during this "paused" year which gives more time for the new Treasurer to familiarize themselves with the numbers and accounting.

4) FY25 Funding Timeline

Co-Chair McSweeney opened the discussion about when to close the pre-applications for FY25 (which are currently open). Co-Chair Chu recommended keeping pre-applications open until the fall when they have normally been closed in past years to keep consistent. It was pointed out that there may be more requests to go through this coming winter as there will be 2 years worth of funding to grant, so perhaps the pre-applications should close earlier to get the process started sooner. Several Committee members agreed and Mr. Comeau suggested a pre-application closing date of August.

Ms. Lopez suggested reviewing pre-applications as they come in, on a rolling basis, allowing those whose pre-applications have been approved can begin working on the full application right away. Committee member agreed, and a discussion ensued regarding the usual process of assigning a committee liaison to each project, which usually happens after pre-applications close and before the full application deadline.

In past years pre-applications closed around the beginning of October and full application opened at that time and liaisons were assigned. Full applications closed at the end of November and the public hearings took place in December and January. In past years there has often been a time-crunch to finish the public hearings in time for town meeting preparation, so it would be made worse by more or larger applications reflecting the larger amount of CPA funds that will be available.

Mr. Leonetti suggested keeping the earlier schedule in future years to prevent the time crunches and holiday conflicts. Some committee members felt that the schedule from past years worked well despite the crunch but that this year it was necessary due to the funding pause of FY24 and would be a good “test run.” Co-Chair Chu also noted that starting things sooner would allow the public hearings to be spread out and prevent applicants from having to attend meetings and sit around waiting for other applicants to finish their interviews.

Mr. Comeau recommended that the closings happen on Mondays or Fridays, and Administrator Neff reminded the committee that in past years the closing had all been on Fridays. Mr. Comeau made a motion to close pre-applications for funding cycle FY25 on Friday, August 18th at 5pm and they will be reviewed on rolling basis as they come in. The motion was seconded by Kathy McCormack and passed 6-0.

A clarification was made by Ms. Lopez that the process would work as such: the administrator would review pre-applications as they come in and seek input from the CPA Coalition, town council, etc. for eligibility and any issues with the application.

Full applications would not have a specific opening date as it will be on a rolling basis as pre-applications are approved, so the Committee moved on to deciding the deadline for full applications. Mr. Comeau suggested a 10 week window, making it the end of October. He made a motion to close the full application cycle on October 27th at 5pm. The motion was seconded by Ms. McCormack and passed 6-0.

Liaisons will be assigned by the Chairs as approved pre-applications are brought forth by the administrator at CCPC meetings.

5) Community Preservation Plan – discussion of key data points from community outreach data

Ms. Lopez began the discussion with her thoughts. She observed that residents are very interested in how CPA \$ is spent. It's clear more education is needed, but it validates the committee's efforts in building the CPA in Canton. She also noted that the data suggests the committee's funding decisions have been aligned with the community input and in encouraging. She feels it is the committee's job to take this data and put it in context and try to see trends. Her 3 main takeaways from this data were: 1) Committee needs to put a focus on using funds for adding to current outdoor amenities by making them more affordable, accessible, and sustainable to be available for more people. 2) There is a desire for big projects that are unlikely to ever get funded by the yearly municipal budget and can, ideally, meet several CPA goals. She used the Paul Revere Heritage Site as an example of this as a large project that intersects open space, recreation, and historical preservation. 3) She went on to point out that Canton is blessed with many water resources and there's a lot of enthusiasm for water access projects and mentioned the revitalization of the Elizabeth Wentworth Recreation Area (Bolivar Pond) specifically, as that would be an opportunity to do something big that checks multiple category boxes.

Ms. McCormack mentioned the enthusiasm shown in the data for water recreation. She recalls that things like canoeing and sailing lessons used to exist in the town and no longer do, and the committee needs to focus on projects that will provide more water-based recreation and activity as it is under-used now.

Mr. Comeau notes that the Wentworth project would have opened up a path between Bailey and Bolivar Streets and given water access that currently does not exist. He also mentioned a Conservation project brought in last year that was ultimately not recommended for funding, but it was for purchasing a piece of land that would have also given access to Glen Echo. Both projects were as fully fleshed-out as was needed to move forward but perhaps this will be the year that these projects can happen as it's clear the citizens want that.

Ms. McCormack noted that the Glen Echo area and areas nearby are also underserved by the town. Mr. Comeau agreed, saying that there are some areas where the citizens don't feel heard or seen as they get minimal services; there are few sidewalks, no playgrounds, no town sewage, etc.

Mr. Leonetti shared that, assuming the respondents to the community outreach were a good cross-section of the town's population, he feels that CCPC expenditure recommendations have reflected the community data to a good degree. He specifically noted that the survey comments contained 5 times the number of comments about open space/recreation compared to housing or historic preservation. He also shared that he feels that this makes sense and is what he (and many citizens) have in mind when they think about Community Preservation, which is projects that allow residents to enjoy the community and their surroundings. He added that the committee was well-served by this survey/outreach effort, and that it's also important to keep in mind that the CCPC does also need to go where the applications lead. Mr. Comeau agreed and reminisced about how difficult it was for the Committee to not recommend the Glen Echo and Wentworth projects, but there were too many unanswered questions and loose strings.

Ms. Lopez brought up the enthusiasm for biking shown in the outreach data. While it can be complicated as it depends on whether the roads are suitable and requires joint effort with other town and/or state departments, it's worth pursuing and including in the new Community Preservation Plan.

Co-Chair Chu brought up coordinating with the Master Plan Implementation Committee as they have an open space and recreation "Trail Master Plan" which includes comprehensive maps and may be a resource it would be wise for the CCPC to look at. This dovetails with Ms. Lopez's comments on biking amenities as there were possible trails next to railroads which could be possibilities for future study. It also identified area through town which are utility easements which could become access points/walking trails. Since this work has already been done it should be looked at. Ms. Lopez added that the new property acquisition of St. Gerard provided areas that could become access/walking paths.

Co-Chair McSweeney and Ms. Lopez brought up the community outreach being done at this time for the uses of the St. Gerard property. There are forums and meetings as well as an online survey, and these are great opportunities for the CCPC members to listen to what the citizens are saying and wanting.

A discussion ensued regarding the Wentworth project and Mr. Comeau stated that he believes the original proponents of the plan are still investing in making it happen.

Co-Chair Chu praised the discussion and ideas and pushed the discussion over to the new Community Preservation Plan, saying that the committee is in general agreement about the priorities and takeaways from the outreach data, and now needs to think about how to translate this into updates for the new Plan. Some of

what has been discussed is already present in the current version of the plan, so the next step needs to be finding the gaps where the Plan doesn't cover the newly ironed-out priorities. He would like the committee to propose amendments to the current plan to fill the gaps.

The committee proceeded to discuss the idea of starting fresh and creating a new plan rather than editing and adding to the old one. Some felt that the committee would not be best served by continuing to edit an old plan, which was put together with many different sources of input and wasn't written cohesively in one voice. Others said that the consensus is that the outreach data shows the committee has been doing a good job of following the wishes of the community and there is a lot of great data in the current plan, and therefore it may not make sense to completely start over.

Mr. Comeau pointed out that the committee should consider sharing the outreach data with the various committees whose input is needed for the new plan so they can see the trends and desires of the community, especially as other town committees are the most common applications for CPA funds. Co-Chair Chu asked whether the CCPC should edit the document and then send it to the various committees whose input is requested (housing, historic, recreation, conservation, schools, planning, etc.) or if the CCPC should get perspectives from those committees before creating a new plan. Multiple committee members agreed that it should be the latter.

It was decided that the outreach results should be shared with each of the committees who have representation on the CCPC and information brought back to the CCPC about their perspectives and priorities. The Committee agreed that each member who represents a town committee should bring this to the next meeting (all committees meet at least monthly) and get feedback by the time of the April CCPC meeting. It is hoped that some committees who meet more often or who have meeting coming up soon could have responses by the next CCPC meeting in March. Mr. Comeau mentioned that this needs to be done soon as applicants need to have the updated plan to look to for information when filling out their applications. Getting feedback by April means that a draft can be created and sent out and the committees can give feedback again by May or June, allowing the new plan to be done by the summer.

The administrator was directed to divide up the plan and send the appropriate sections to different CCPC members to bring to their respective committees to get feedback (sending it to the chair of the Parks and Recreation Committee as there is no current representative on the CCPC), as well as communicate this task to the CCPC members who were absent from this meeting.

6) Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chairmen 48 hours in advance:

Administrator Neff shared a form for property owners to fill out with the pre-application if the sponsor of the project is not the same entity as the owner of the property. The problem this form is hoping to fix is that some applications were being brought in by members of the public who had not spoken to the owner or town committee/board in charge of the property or land where the project would take place. This is intended to stop that from happening as it will necessitate the property owner's attention before an application can come before the CCPC to be approved. Committee members briefly discussed whether this was necessary (given that a note about property ownership was already added to the application and the screening done by the administrator on every application) or if the language on the form made sense. It was suggested it be sent to Mr. Comeau for him to look over as he has experience with these type forms and brought back before the Committee at the March meeting.

Administrator Neff informed the committee that the Warner Trail Study (funded in FY22) appears to be ready to be voted close and all funds returned to the CPA coffers. The project sponsor (Walk, Bike, Hike Committee)

got a \$50,000 grant matching the \$50,000 received in CPA funds, but the entire design cost was \$50,000. The grant had an expiration date approaching and those funds needed to be used first, so any funds that had been spent on the \$50,000 from the CPA were returned and grant monies used instead. While the most recent emails said the project was closed the CCPC wants definitive confirmation that none of the \$50,000 in CPA funds is going to be used. The administrator will follow up and, if it is ready to close, it will be voted on at the March meeting.

Administrator Neff brought up the Canton Heritage Festival which will be taking place at the Paul Revere Heritage Site on May 20th, 2023. One aspect of the event is a Community Tent which houses various local non-profit groups, cultural groups, and town organizations. Administrator Neff suggested that, as community education about the CCPC is needed, that the CCPC have one of these tables. Committee members liked the idea and Ms. Lopez suggested that there be colorful charts and attention-grabbing displays showing what CPA funds have been spent on in the town.

Administrator Neff asked about approvals for expenditures on these visual aids for the event. This would come out of the administrative budget, which each year is reserved as 5% of the projected CPA funds. Any unused administrative funds at the end of the fiscal year go into the general CPA fund to be used for future projects. Mr. Comeau made a motion to approve up to \$300 in expenses on public education materials. The motion was seconded by Ms. Lopez and passed 6-0.

The next meeting will be on Monday, March 20th at 7pm in the Armando Center Meeting Room.

Mr. Leonetti made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:09pm. The motion was seconded by Ms. McCormack and passed 6-0.