



JOSEPH A. CURTATONE  
MAYOR

Somerville CPA



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
JANUARY 12, 2015**

**MEMBERS**  
Michael A. Capuano, Chair  
Dick Bauer, Vice Chair  
Tanya Cafarella  
Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello  
Michael Fager  
Arn Franzen  
Ezra Glenn  
Courtney Koslow  
Uma Murugan

**STAFF**  
Emily Monea

The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) held a community meeting at 7:00pm in the community room at the Visiting Nurse Association, 259 Lowell Street, Somerville, MA 02145. An audio recording of the meeting is available upon request.

**Members Present** Chair Michael Capuano, Vice Chair Dick Bauer, Tanya Cafarella, Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Michael Fager, Arn Franzen, and Courtney Koslow

**Members Absent** Ezra Glenn and Uma Murugan

**Staff Present** Emily Monea

**Others Present** Erik Neu, Karl Thidemann, Sara Rostampour, Reverend Molly Baskette, Josh Safdie, Paul Mackey, Chris Mancini, Barbara Mangum, Marilyn Sager, and community meeting attendees

The Chair opened the meeting at approximately 7:00. The Committee members and community meeting attendees referenced the materials listed at the end of these meetings, all of which are available online and upon request.

**Agenda item 1: Introduction**

**a. Committee introductions**

The Committee members introduced themselves. The Chair explained how the hearing would proceed.

**b. Overview presentation**

Ms. Monea gave an overview [presentation](#) on the Community Preservation Act (CPA).

**Agenda item 2: Presentations on project proposals and questions from CPC members**

**a. 56 Bow Street: Exterior Restoration (Siding)**

Erik Neu, co-owner of property, gave a [presentation](#) on the [56 Bow Street](#) project proposal.

The Chair asked why the CPC should consider this application, which is for a private property that will either be a for-profit B&B or a private home, versus the other historic applications, all of which have a public purpose. Mr. Neu stated that the \$15,000 could make the difference in being able to open the B&B, and he thinks there would be a public benefit to the neighborhood in having such a hospitality resource. He said he feels it is up to the Committee to make a decision on the larger philosophical question. Mr. Neu recommended that in future funding cycles, applicants whose project proposals are determined eligible receive notification of the other projects that have been submitted and determined eligible. He said that he may not have applied for funds had he been aware of the other applications before the CPC. The Chair asked whether the project could wait a year if the CPC decides not to recommend funding the project this year, and Mr. Neu said that they most likely could wait.

Michael Fager asked whether the request is contingent upon receiving approval to operate a B&B out of the property. Mr. Neu stated that if CPA funds were not available and his family only undertook a home renovation, they would pursue the renovation regardless of whether or not they receive CPA funds. He said the CPA funds could make the difference in moving forward with a B&B but that he did not think to make the request contingent on the approval to operate a B&B as he did not know it was an option to do so.

**b. Community Growing Center – Upgrade Design/Community Build Planning**

Karl Thidemann and Sara Rostampour of the Friends of the Community Growing Center gave a [presentation](#) on the [Community Growing Center](#) project proposal.

Mr. Fager asked for specifics on what exactly the applicant wants to do with the requested funding. Mr. Thidemann asked Eva Leung from Terra Cura, one of the design non-profits engaged in the project, to speak. She said that Terra Cura designs regenerative permaculture systems and that the proposal would fund Terra Cura's design fee to allow them to design such a system at the Growing Center as well as \$10,000 in materials. Ms. Rostampour stated that some of the specific issues with the Center are that the water collection system and the solar system do not really work and the size of the greenhouse section for growing plants is inadequate and in poor condition.

Mr. Thidemann stated that the Growing Center has played a role in the growth of the urban ag movement in Somerville which makes the city a more liveable and unique place.

Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello asked whether the budget for the request includes creating the construction and education documents described in the proposal or whether the goal is to determine where the design of those documents fits within the master plan for rehabilitating the Growing Center. Ms. Leung stated that a key component of Terra Cura's design will be to integrate the community into the process so that they remain engaged in the project and sustain it in the future.

**c. First Congregational Church of Somerville UCC Renovation Phase 2**

Reverend Molly Baskette of First Congregational Church gave a [presentation](#) on the [First Congregational Church](#) project proposal.

Mr. Fager asked Reverend Baskette to clarify the ownership of the building. She said that the 145 formal members of First Congregational Church of Somerville own the building.

The Chair asked whether there are any other sources that the Church could use to fund the proposed work if the CPC and Board of Aldermen do not award CPA funds to cover the full cost of the project. Reverend Baskette stated that she is not aware of any. They have researched grant opportunities and will continue to do so, but she said they will likely have to resort to using cheaper building materials if they do not receive CPA funds (e.g., poured concrete instead of granite at the entryway, vinyl siding).

Courtney Koslow asked whether the Church anticipates future capital needs beyond the proposed work. Reverend Baskette replied that they have some additional work to do, including replacing the foundation (they have secured funding for this project) and cosmetic upgrades to the Sunday school classrooms but that the most important need remaining is additional bathrooms, especially accessible and all-gender bathrooms. She said that if more CPA funding is available in the future, they may make an additional request for this purpose.

Ms. Duclos-Orsello asked if the Church has taken care of the most critical work needed, and Reverend Baskette said yes.

**d. Healey School to Mystic**

Josh Safdie, a member of the Friends of the Healey School and the Healey School Site Council, gave a [presentation](#) on the [Healey School to Mystic](#) project proposal.

The Chair asked what authority the Friends of the Healey have to do any of the actual work that would result from the master plan. Mr. Safdie said that part of the work involved for the individuals hired to create the master plan would be to think about these issues and research actions like land acquisition.

Ms. Duclos-Orsello asked why this proposal was not put forward by the City. Mr. Safdie said they have spoken with the City but that the City has a lot of projects going on and that there are a lot of players involved who do not always talk to each other.

The Chair asked for clarification around the historic resource aspect of the project, which was not determined eligible due to a vote of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). Ms. Monea stated that in the eligibility determination phase of the application process, the application

included the preservation and rehabilitation of a historic resource, the Blessing of the Bay Boathouse. However, the boathouse is not yet 50 years old, so the HPC determined that the structure is not eligible to be a historic resource. The project is therefore not eligible as a historic resources CPA project, but it is eligible as a recreational land project.

**e. Mystic Water Works**

Paul Mackey, Deputy Director of the Somerville Housing Authority, gave a [presentation](#) on the [Mystic Water Works](#) project proposal.

The Chair noted that the request before the CPC is only for the historic portion of the project and that the Affordable Housing Trust (the Trust) will hear the affordable housing portion of the project. Ms. Koslow and Ms. Duclos-Orsello asked for clarification on the request amount. Mr. Mackey stated that the gap for the project is \$500,000 and that the Housing Authority is requesting this amount in CPA historic resources and community housing funds. He said the proportion that comes from historic resources funding and the proportion that comes from community housing funding is up to the CPC and the Trust to decide.

The Chair asked about the traffic and roadway issues near the property. Mr. Mackey stated that the state owns the roads and that the Housing Authority is working closely with the state delegation to improve the situation but that progress is slow.

Mr. Fager asked how the Housing Authority will fill the project gap if CPA funds are not awarded. Mr. Mackey said it would be great to receive support for the project through CPA funding but the Housing Authority will ultimately find a way to move forward with the project if CPA funds are not granted.

**f. School Garden Classrooms**

Chris Mancini, Executive Director of Groundwork Somerville, gave a [presentation](#) on the [School Garden Classrooms](#) project proposal.

Ms. Duclos-Orsello asked about the status of the USDA Farm to School funding mentioned in the application and how it impacts the CPA request. She also asked about the sustainability of the beds, materials, and labor and the availability of funding to keep the project on track in the future. Mr. Mancini said that Groundwork did not receive Farm to School funding this year and that they were asked to apply again in the spring. He noted that this source fulfills a different project need than the CPA funding, mainly coaching teachers on how to best use the resource. He stated that the CPA request is not contingent on receiving the Farm to School funding and that Groundwork will continue to support the project even if they do not receive USDA funding. He noted that for the foreseeable future Groundwork will have a consistent staff to keep the project going. Regarding materials, the main issue is with replacing the cedar frames, which must happen every five to seven years.

Tanya Cafarella asked whether the proposal includes building longer-lasting frames at some schools like the ones at Argenziano. Mr. Mancini said that each school has its own unique needs and the design for each school garden will address these, so in some cases they may decide to build more permanent frames.

**g. Somerville Museum – Capital Improvements**

Barbara Mangum of the Somerville Museum gave a [presentation](#) on the [Somerville Museum](#) project proposal.

Mr. Fager asked what the impact would be if the CPC recommended funding one or two of the three parts of the project (ADA accessibility, emergency back-up systems, and environmental improvements). Ms. Mangum said she hoped the CPC would not make that decision. She stated that the museum will try to fundraise but that is very difficult because the museum is not eligible or competitive for most grant opportunities because it is a local history resource and because the museum's members have already donated generously to the project.

**h. Temple B'nai Brith Fire Safety and Accessibility Project**

Marilynn Sager, a member of the Board of Directors for Temple B'nai Brith and co-chair of the synagogue's accessibility and safety committee, gave a [presentation](#) on the [Temple B'nai Brith](#) project proposal.

The Chair asked whether the request before the CPC covers all the work that the synagogue needs, and Ms. Sager said yes.

Arn Franzen asked for details on the request and what the impact would be if the CPC recommended funding less than the full request amount. David Bell, a member of the synagogue's accessibility and safety committee, said the synagogue would be grateful for whatever CPA funds are granted and that they could complete the two parts of the project separately (elevator installation and fire prevention system installation). Ideally the whole project would be completed at one time, however, as the project would be more costly if the phases are done separately. Nancy Bernhard, Board President, also noted that the building is constantly in use so it would be far less disruptive to the synagogue to do all of the work at once.

Ms. Duclos-Orsello asked for confirmation on the project costs, noting that in the full proposal the cost estimate for the sprinkler system is roughly \$171,000 and the cost estimate for the elevator reconfiguration is roughly \$368,000. Mr. Bell confirmed these estimates.

Ms. Koslow noted that it appears that the plans for the synagogue have been scaled back. Frank Valdes, the synagogue's architect, responded that, facing funding constraints, he and the Board

prioritized the most needed work and decided to pursue life safety and accessibility improvements.

### **Agenda item 3: Public comment**

**Brian Harris** stated that many of the City's proposals result from neglect and many request the full project cost be covered by CPA funds. He suggested that the City provide at least provide a match for these projects and urged that CPA funds be used for projects that are over and above what general funds should cover. He noted that the City is well behind its goal of providing open space and that there are no proposals before the CPC for increasing open space. He encouraged the CPC to push to find projects for the creation and acquisition of open space and to be proactive in funding projects that do so, perhaps by submitting a response to the RFP for the Powder House School.

**Todd Kaplan**, a member of the congregation of Temple B'nai Brith, encouraged the CPC to prioritize projects like the Temple that leverage other funding, have worked hard to raise other funding, and will make a substantial difference in the community.

**Dyan Blewett**, Treasurer of the Somerville Museum, spoke in favor of the Somerville Museum project. She said the museum had spent years fundraising and the request before the CPC is the last push needed to finish much-needed improvements. She said the elevator will allow the museum to apply for grants by making it ADA accessible and emphasized that their budget is specific and provides exact dollar amounts. She also expressed support for the other projects before the CPC.

**Linda Conte** seconded Ms. Blewett's comments.

**Abby Friedman**, Vice Chair of the Historic Preservation Commission, noted that many historic buildings are neglected for a long time. At a certain point, deferred maintenance becomes a preservation and restoration issue rather than a maintenance issue, so these types of projects should be considered eligible for CPA funds.

**Helem Brown** said that she is a member of the Friends of the Healey School and a volunteer at the Growing Center and Groundwork. As a parent of a child in Winter Hill, she supports anything that can be done to expand or improve open green space and access to it for children.

**Frank Valdes** noted that the City is working toward expanding open space. The RFP for the Powder House disposition, for example, requires that a minimum of 40% of the property be devoted to open green space. He spoke in favor of the Temple B'nai Brith project, noting that he chose to move to Somerville and join the synagogue because of the unique community and because of the sense of belonging they offer. He noted the tremendous things the temple has done for him and his family.

**Josh Safdie** spoke to Mr. Harris' point, stating that the purpose of the Healey School to Mystic project is to transform underutilized, inaccessible open space into usable space. He spoke in favor of the Temple B'nai Brith accessibility project, noting that he is not a member of the synagogue but that he is an accessibility professional and has worked with the temple on the project and knows how hard they have worked to fund the project. He sent a letter to the CPC supporting the project. With regard to the Somerville Museum project, Mr. Safdie noted that if the CPC is only able to fund a portion of it, it should prioritize the only piece that has to do with civil rights, the elevator project.

**A member of Temple B'nai Brith** (name inaudible) spoke in favor of the Temple B'nai Brith project. He spoke of his family's history with the synagogue and noted the difficulty members of his family have had using the building due to its lack of accessibility. He noted the struggles the congregation has been through to keep the building up and running and encouraged the CPC to fund this project.

**An member of Temple B'nai Brith** (unidentified) spoke in favor of the Temple B'nai Brith project. She spoke about wanting to bring her parents to the synagogue but being unable to do so because it is inaccessible. She said part of the reason the temple has been unable to fund the project is because of the inclusive nature of the congregation, where individuals are accepted regardless of ability to contribute financially. She noted that as people age, spirituality becomes increasingly important and that she hopes the CPC funds the project to allow the building to be open to individuals of all ages.

**Janie Katz-Christy** spoke in favor of the Temple B'nai Brith project and her and her family's history with the building. She noted how inclusive, welcoming, and diverse the congregation is and how beautiful and historic the building is.

**Susan Chimene** spoke in favor of the Temple B'nai Brith project. She noted that her daughter Sara started the earliest iteration of the accessibility project in 2001 at her bat mitzvah when her great-grandmother could not attend the event because of the building's inaccessibility. Sara committed some of her bat mitzvah gifts to the accessibility project. Fourteen years later, Ms. Chimene urged the CPC to provide the funding to complete the project.

**Brandon Wilson** spoke as a resident and encouraged the CPC to give funding proportional to need and to give funding to each of the projects so they can leverage other funding.

**Ellen Stone** spoke in favor of the Temple B'nai Brith project. She told a story about when the Temple was offering a program, and a couple came to the synagogue wanting to participate but had to drive back home because the building was inaccessible.

**Rabbi Eliana Jacobowitz** said that while she would love for the CPC to grant funding to Temple B'nai Brith, she also is aware of the state of the entryway stairs at First Church Somerville. She spoke about how both First Church and Temple B'nai Brith prioritize opening their doors to everyone but that

individuals and groups looking for community space often cannot meet at the temple because it is inaccessible. She encouraged the CPC to consider both projects.

**Evelyn Battinelli** spoke in favor of the Somerville Museum project. She discussed the history of the museum and noted that the museum has always operated almost exclusively through volunteers. Today the museum has about 60 volunteers. She emphasized the extent to which work to the building has been done thanks to member contributions as well as the value of the museum to the community.

**Dyan Blewett** emphasized how important it is for the Somerville Museum to be ADA compliant. They can no longer host Somerville's Preservation Awards and open the building to the community to the extent they would like. They are also not eligible to apply for many grants. She also emphasized how many treasures the museum has in its collection and how important it is to preserve them.

**John Willett**, one of the chairs of the Friends of the Healey, spoke in favor of the Healey School to Mystic project. He spoke about his son's experiences at the Healey School. He also spoke to the difficulty of navigating and accessing the areas addressed in the project proposal and the opportunities for improving them.

**Mark Niedergang** spoke as a resident. He noted that he is involved with and supports the Growing Center, Groundwork Somerville, and the Somerville Museum and urged the CPC to support these organizations. He encouraged the CPC to prioritize projects from the community organizations over projects sponsored by the City, noting the community organizations need this funding more than the City does, which has access to far more resources. He spoke in favor of the Temple B'nai Brith project and noted the extent to which the synagogue has opened its door to the community. He also spoke in favor of the Healey School to Mystic project, noting that the school serves some of the neediest children in the district, the extent to which it leverages parent involvement, and the extensive work put in by parents and teachers to improve the Healey recreational space.

**An unidentified woman** noted that First Church Somerville works with many organizations and non-profits in Somerville and asked the representatives of the Temple B'nai Brith project what organizations they work with and how they would open their building to the public with the accessibility improvements.

Rabbi Jacobowitz and Ms. Bernhard said that the temple works with a number of community groups including the Welcome Project and Save Our Homes Somerville but that many groups cannot use the building because it is inaccessible. As soon as the elevator is in place they look forward to allowing many more groups to use the building.

**Reverend Baskette** spoke about the decline of religious organizations in Somerville over the past several decades. She noted that Temple B'nai Brith and First Church are two of the most vibrant congregations left in the city and that there are very few funding streams available to religious organizations. She

emphasized that aside from membership contributions, the CPA is the only funding source available to them.

**Agenda item 4: Next meeting: Wednesday, February 4<sup>th</sup> at 7pm (Visiting Nurse Association)**

The Chair encouraged the meeting attendees to attend the Committee's next few meetings during which the CPC members will discuss the applications.

**Meeting Adjournment**

Upon motion from the Chair, seconded by Ms. Cafarella, the Committee voted 7-0 to adjourn at approximately 9:25.

**Documents and Exhibits:**

1. [Meeting agenda](#)
2. [CPA overview presentation](#)
3. [Summary of FY15 CPA project proposals](#), prepared by Emily Monea
4. [Community Preservation Plan Summary](#), updated January 7, 2015, prepared by Emily Monea
5. Presentations on project proposals
  - a. [56 Bow Street: Exterior Restoration](#)
  - b. [Community Growing Center - Upgrade Design/Community Build Planning](#)
  - c. [First Congregational Church of Somerville UCC Renovation Phase 2](#)
  - d. [Healey School to Mystic](#)
  - e. [Mystic Water Works](#)
  - f. [School Garden Classrooms](#)
  - g. [Somerville Museum - Capital Improvements](#)
  - h. [Temple B'nai Brith Fire Safety and Accessibility Project](#)