



City of Westfield

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Community Preservation Committee

Meeting Minutes

April 13, 2023

Members attending:

Members absent:

Staff attending:

Michael Tirrell

Richard Salois

Cynthia Gaylord

Daniel Kelly

Joe Muto

William Porter

Jay Vinskey

Christine Fedora

1. Call to order

With Chair Sharp resigned, Vice-Chair Muto called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. and members introduced themselves.

2. Public Participation & Annual Public Informational Hearing

No members of the public presented themselves on either topic.

3. Review and Approval of 1-12-23 Minutes

Member Gaylord MOTIONED, seconded by Member Porter to approve the minutes as submitted. All in favor.

4. Review of Current Funds & FY24 budget

Planner Vinskey gave a brief review of the balances; total is close to \$2 million. The current year open space has already been spent on Russell Road. He expected to be receiving the hard numbers from the Auditor.

With the state match collections are now near \$750,000, and the required 10% for each category (historic, housing, open space) hasn't been met in recent years. Proposed budget increases to \$79,000 into each category, which means the undesignated is down to \$95,000. Members were in agreement.

5. Review of New/Pending Applications

Acting Chair Muto asked for a 3 minute time limit per person speaking.

- Old Burying Ground front gate repair (historic) - \$7,086

The CPC was addressed by Carly Bannish of the Historical Commission, which used a good portion of their funds when they previously restored the gate at the Old Burying Ground. In

October, a vehicle went straight through the gate and blasted it into pieces. Unfortunately, insurance will not cover this. The Commission depleted their funds last year to restore the gate. A "Go Fund Me" page was set up and they received \$2500.00. The money received will not cover the cost to repair the gate, they are asking the CPC to help.

Acting Chair Muto felt that is a good matching percent. It was noted they have a lot of community support. Board members felt this was a terrible mishap. Member Kelly MOTIONED, seconded by Member Salois to approve the \$7,086.00 for the funding of the Old Burying Ground gate.

- Pine Hill Cemetery stone gates (historic) - \$109,400. cemetery

Kali Fantakis, office manager, thanked the CPC for their support of the previous funding for the fence. She is here for funding for the stone gates which are in serious disrepair; seeking funding in the amount of \$109,400. The gates are between 75 and 80 years old, and repairs were done over the years. Ms. Fantakis mentioned the funds the Cemetery receives go into the running of the cemetery, but the funds coming in have been dwindling. Her hope is they can move forward with this with the help of CPA, they would like to put a fresh new face on the cemetery. She stressed the urgency of the situation.

Eric Dirats - thanked members for their grant to the cemetery last year. Photos of the gates showing the structural damage were shown to the Commission. Further delay in fixing these gates will cost more to fix as time goes on.

Ms. Fantakis stated this funding will help with the operation of the cemetery, it will help to maintain the fabric and image of the cemetery. When people see the cemetery looking decrepit they don't purchase lots. The gates also serve as memorials.

Joan Correll gave a brief history as well of the Cemetery. She stated this was not just the idea of a cemetery, it was a garden cemetery, people used the cemeteries as parks in the old days and they are still used that way. If you sit around there for a period of time, you can see people walking and sitting on the benches. It's used by the community, an important asset.

Acting Chair Muto inquired about the additional \$5,000 amount? Additional funding was added in case the east gate requires additional work on the inside, that would not be determined until they can see the inside of the gate. Ms. Fantakis was confident in the bids received. She also mentioned the \$5,000.00 is included in the ask.

Member Gaylord stated Ms. Fantakis has gone above and beyond, she has done so much work on this. It would be embarrassing not to repair the gates. Ms. Fantakis added if they are not able to secure funding the cemetery won't be able to build the gates as grand as they were, memorials would have to be much smaller.

Member Porter asked if the cemetery has a historic designation? Member Gaylord replied in Westfield. Mr. Porter asked if it would be eligible for the National Historical list? Ms. Gaylord replied it could be, there are many prominent people buried there.

Member Porter asked if she has investigated other sources of grant? Ms. Fantakis has tried those avenues, as well as fund raising, she has done a lot of research and has a lot on her plate with running the cemetery. She felt going through the city would be the best. Ms. Fantakis stated it's difficult to find the right avenue, it took a lot of time to write this grant, she would like to do more to try and get more grants but it is a learning curve. She mentioned the cemetery is a 501(c)(13), which means they can't get a lot of funding like other nonprofits.

Member Salois expressed his feelings regarding the cemetery and how it's been a central area in the City. It is a premier property, it has always been a good place in the city and well maintained and cared for. The gates are impressive, Pine Hill is a cornerstone in the city, he felt it's important to keep the gates the way they are, it makes sense to follow through and do this. He did mention Pine Hill is slowly reaching a point where they will be saturating the CPC's funding, but he felt they should look at keeping the cemetery in the forefront and it makes sense to approve this funding. Ms. Fantakis said she understands, and that she does not necessarily intend to come back.

Member Muto agreed he felt this will be impressive with the improvements to the stained glass on the chapel, the fence and the gates as well as the improvements to Western Avenue this will be very impressive.

Member Gaylord MOTIONED, seconded by Member Porter to approve the \$109,400.00 grant request for Pine Hill Cemetery gates. All in favor.

Members were in agreement that a formal historic restriction was not warranted. Planner Vinsky mentioned the restriction that would be attached to the grant agreement: a 30-year restriction that gates cannot be altered without Historical Commission review; he would use the same language as the previous grant. Agreed. The Committee to discuss funding sources later.

- Westfield Legion Post 124 building - 38 Broad St. (historic) \$600,000.00

The Commission was addressed by Dan Call, member of Post 124, Veteran. The Post is not something that is just needed for himself but is needed for a lot of other reasons, there are tons of veterans, veterans have been through a lot in the last 20 years. Mr. Call stated they are here before the Commission asking for help, they don't want to see the building that has been in Westfield on South Broad Street moved, they don't want to sell or move; asking for CPC assistance with the exterior renovations and repairs.

Commander Eric Volk, has been in the city since 2016. He has talked with members who grew up in the building, talked to senior members who remember how it was inside. The building will be 150 years old this year. The City gave the building to the Legion to use in 1920.

Mr. Volk gave a brief summary of the work they would like to have done on the building: The wood facade across the front needs to be replaced, they are not looking to change the front of the building, just to restore it. They have had estimates done and Engineers have looked at it, they said it is failing, and it won't be able to stay there much longer without repairs.

Commander Volk spoke of the financing of such a large project. The lodge spends more of their time raising money and giving it back to the community, most of the fundraising goes into the community. Westfield has the most active post in Western MA, the only way to continue with that is to keep the Lodge at home. If they cannot get as much funding as requested they will do their best with whatever they receive

Wade Brunelle, member post 124 -asked the Commission to take a look at the detailed analysis which shows the deep detail of the minutiae which totals the \$600,000. He as well as his colleagues feel this is important to the city, its veterans organizations. The structure is failing, if they fail to act now, it's possible the building will collapse. The Post has tried efforts internally to help with the funding by soliciting memberships, working with the state senator, and various resources. The Post is looking at a phased approach.

Kathy Martin Nurse Practitioner- Army Nurse Corp Senior Vice Commander. They will be holding a spaghetti dinner fundraiser usually the money goes to the March of Dimes; they still will be donating some but a portion of the funding will be shifted to the building fund. She is new to Westfield; this is a wonderful organization and they do so much for their veterans and community. She asked the members to please consider this project.

Jane Okscin, Westfield Taxpayers Association - stated she watches numbers and dollars in the city. She stated she reviewed the property card and this building was built in 1900, its worth \$390,000. They pay nothing in real estate taxes, she felt it might be time to look around and find another building.

Acting Chair Muto thanked the veterans for their service, as well as Post 124 which always participates in local events, parades, church services, and is active in the community, he feels they are a very important piece of the Westfield community.

Kathy Martin informed the Board the architect that the Westfield Woman's Club is the architect that will be doing this as well.

Member Kelly asked if the \$600,000 included the elevator and the other repairs? Yes. He asked if they had looked at other properties. They looked at other properties but some of them were not zoned properly for what they needed, and they also had accessibility issues.

Member Salois also stated that the cost of preserving a historic building cost more than a modern building because you can't use modern materials, there is additional cost in repairing and preserving historic buildings. The CPC is designed to help with these types of projects.

The Legion is coming up with \$50,000. Hard working groups see what they do for the city. Think will put in more money. Fixing a building adds to the historic view in that area, by fixing the building we have now.

Member Gaylord agreed the visibility is important, she loves the flags that are on the buildings, and its welcoming to the Veterans. She would hate to see them move somewhere. The historic significance of the building was noted.

Member Porter asked if it is open to the public. No, it is not open to the public, veterans can bring a guest.

Member Porter stated he was supportive of helping out and restoring the building. He mentioned he had heard someone say they may come back later and someone else say it was a phased approach. He asked if it would be possible to repackage the request so that the funding could occur over the course of a few years, and this one request didn't take a big bite out? Member Kelly thought they said it could be done in phases as well. Mr. Call felt yes it is a definite possibility. The main focus is brick, mortar foundation, floor beams bring that part back first would be half of asking for. Based on last year's prices. Might be \$300,000 to that part.

Following discussion regarding phases Member Salois MOTIONED, seconded by Member Gaylord to approve the full funding for the American Legion Post 124 Building in the amount of \$600,000.00. Member Porter noted there would be a historic deed restriction needed to be put on the building. Acting Chair Muto noted the motion should include "with a perpetual deed restriction"; agreed. All in favor.

- Hampton Ponds Playground – Recreation \$107,858.50

Peter Miller, Director of Community Development, gave a summary of the improvements the City has made to some of its playgrounds over the past 15 years: Chapman, Sadie Knox, Cross Street, Municipal Playground.

The application is for the renovation of Hampton Ponds playground. Hampton Ponds community feels neglected as it is on the outskirts of the community, there have been no investments in the playground since 1983. Currently there is a 90-foot baseball field, small playscape, tennis court, and basketball court. The City has been working on redoing this park for 5 years, but it has taken a back seat to Cross Street Playground.

Mr. Miller reviewed the leveraged funding that would be used. The Community Development Block Grant program (C.D.B.G.) will be used to facilitate the replacement of the playscape. Other updates to the park with CPA will be pickleball conversion of the tennis courts; this will be a light lift on this project as they do not have to replace the pavement, they will have to paint and replace some of the posts.

A major cost is to resurface and repair the basketball court, which has been a traditional use of the playground, no work has been done on the courts for 10-12 years. The hope is this work will return the activity to the park. Mr. Miller stated there will be matching funds from the CDBG for the playscape in the amount of \$87,000.00. The baseball field will not be done as the senior league has taken an interest in it over the last 2 years. There would not be a restroom, a port-a-potty will be available as residents expressed concerns about night time activities.

Member Kelly MOTIONED, seconded by Member Gaylord to approve \$108,000.00 for Hampton Ponds Playground. All in favor.

Source of funding to come from undesignated. Vinsky will categorize other 3 projects' funding to spend down FY23 and historic category balances before tapping undesignated. Agreed.

6. Open Projects.

Vinskey briefly listed the open projects.

7. Potential projects

8. Annual needs discussion & review, update and adoption of CP Plan

Planner Vinskey noted he refreshed some parts of the plan (distributed prior), particularly regarding limitations on funding maintenance. Member Salois asked if anyone actively looks for land for the city to purchase, he also felt that land acquisition is weak as well as housing. Member Gaylord mentioned she had heard that Ann Lentini may be coming in the near future with a housing project. Members felt some emphasis on land/open space preservation should be made in the plan; Vinskey to edit. With no public comment having been offered earlier to consider, the committee unanimously adopted the updated plan as to be amended.

9. Other business.

Vice Chair Muto suggested voting at the Board's July meeting regarding filling the Chair position.

10. Adjourn

Upon a MOTION made and seconded and all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 8:12.

APPROVED