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TOWN OF AYER  
TOWN CLERK

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**Town of Ayer**  
**Community Preservation Committee**  
Town Hall \* One Main Street \* Ayer, MA 01432  
Minutes for 6/3/2020

Location: Remote Meeting via Zoom, accessible to public, due to Pandemic State of Emergency  
Members present on-line: Janet Providakes (JP) [Housing Authority]- Chair, Beth Suedmeyer (BAS) [At Large], Barry Schwarzel (BES) [Historical Commission], Jason Mayo (JAM) [Parks & Recreation], Jess Gugino (JG) [Conservation Commission]- Clerk, Julie Murray (JUM) [Planning Board], Colleen Krieser (CK)[At Large]  
APAC Taped and Broadcast

**7:03 PM – Open Meeting**

- **Approval of Meeting Minutes**
  - BES moved to accept the minutes for 5/6/2020 as written; JG 2<sup>nd</sup>.
    - Motion approved unanimously by Roll Call Vote 3-0 (JP, BES, JG voted Aye; JAM abstained, not having been present).
  - BAS moved to accept the minutes for 5/20/2020 as written; BES 2<sup>nd</sup>.
    - Motion approved unanimously 6-0 by Roll Call Vote (JP, BES, JG, JAM, BAS, CK voted Aye)
- **Correspondence / Bills**
  - JP received an email on 6/3 from Stuart Saginor, Executive Director of the Community Preservation Coalition, with a copy of the “CPA Update” newsletter congratulating the town of Ayer for its successful passage of the CPA surcharge increase by ballot vote at the Town Election on 6/2.

**OLD BUSINESS**

- **CPC Ballot Question #1**
  - Following passage at Fall Town Meeting 2019, Question #1 on the Annual Election Ballot asked residents to approve increasing the CPA property tax surcharge from 1% to 3%.
    - The ballot question passed by 39 votes, 235-196, successfully completing the two-step process begun last fall.
  - Based on the election outcome, actual figures can now be added to Article 27 on the Warrant for Spring Town Meeting, 6/15/2020.
    - Regarding the distribution of annual CPA revenue for FY2021, Art. 27 will now allocate:
      - \$67,984 to the open space and recreation category (10%, the minimum required by CPA for its categories);
      - \$67,984 to the historical preservation category (10%);
      - \$67,984 to the affordable housing category (10%);
      - The remainder, approximately \$458,885, will go into to the undesignated reserve fund.



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- In reaction to comments made by some residents about the ballot question on Ayer social media posts prior to the election, JG stressed for the record that CPC only reviews and recommends projects to Town Meeting, but that it is always Town Meeting vote by residents that determines the final decision to approve or reject the use of local CPA funds for each and every project.
- JP added a point repeatedly made by BAS, that, importantly, CPC funding grants can also be used as leverage to help secure outside grant money.
  - As an example, in 2017 residents voted at Fall Town Meeting to approve \$20,000 in local CPA funding for the Community Dog Park.
    - The total cost for the dog park was approximately \$200,000.
    - 90% of the funding came from a grant received from the Stanton Foundation.
    - The Foundation required a 10% funding contribution from Ayer for the town to be eligible to receive the grant – as a local ‘buy-in’ and demonstration of community support.
  - Local CPA money has been used as leverage for affordable housing grants to programs like Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).
    - Currently the “Historic Ayer Central Fire Station” project is using its 2019 affordable housing grant from CPC to apply for a much larger CDBG grant.
  - JP estimated the Town has benefitted from over \$1 million in outside grant money for local projects, and the participation of CPC funding has contributed greatly toward strengthening such grant applications.
- Participating remotely, resident Sara Withee said she thought CPC did a wonderful job generally, but with the pandemic and economic downturn, did not think this was the right time to raise taxes.
  - JG agreed about the unfortunate timing, but explained that once the two-step approval process started (with Fall Town Meeting 2019’s initial vote), the ballot question had to go forward.
    - At the urging of CPC members, earlier in the spring JP had inquired whether this ballot question could have been deferred until there was less uncertainty about the economic impact of COVID 19, but had been told that Question 1’s removal from the ballot was not possible.
  - Ms. Withee said she appreciated hearing that information.

**NEW BUSINESS**

- **Sandy Pond Schoolhouse Restoration and Preservation Project PHASE II**



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- Irv Rockwood, President of the Sandy Pond Schoolhouse Association (SPSA), was present on-line via Zoom.
- SPSA has submitted its formal application for a new CPA grant to move forward with Phase II work on Ayer's oldest public building, built in 1869, just prior to the 1871 founding of Ayer as its own town independent from Groton.
  - The schoolhouse closed in 1906, and the Town ceded ownership of it in 1908 to the newly-founded SPSA.
  - It was subsequently used for a number of years as a community center, hosting reunions, lectures, dinner dances, meetings, and the like.
  - Some alterations were made to the building in 1912 to enlarge and improve its community use.
  - Over time, and as people moved away, the schoolhouse fell into disuse and began to deteriorate.
- Seeking help to preserve this historic structure, SPSA approached CPC.
  - At Spring Town Meeting 2016, residents approved a CPC grant request for \$20,000 to contract for a professional "Conditions Assessment" of the schoolhouse, including prioritized recommendations for work needed to preserve and restore the building.
    - The Conditions Assessment was done by Spencer & Vogt – now Spencer, Sullivan & Vogt.
  - At STM 2018, residents approved a CPC grant request for \$108,000 for Phase I work, per recommendations in the Conditions Assessment.
    - Phase I focused on the urgent work needed to save the building from further deterioration and preserve its structural integrity.
    - Spencer, Sullivan & Vogt continued to serve as architect and project manager, and Gerald O'Doherty as general contractor.
  - Phase I included foundation repair and stabilization, masonry repair, classroom ceiling replacement, and other priority structural repairs deemed urgently necessary – as well as some add-on electrical work and installation of new shutters with remaining funds left over.
- This new application for Phase II seeks additional CPC funding to continue the preservation and restoration work identified in the Conditions Assessment.
  - The amount requested in the application is \$208,870.
- Project Scope
  - The project scope for Phase II includes:
    - construction and installation of a new, fully accessible restroom;
    - installation of a handicapped-accessible entrance and door;
    - repair, re-glazing, and repainting of windows and exterior trim;



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- interior improvements (ceiling hatch to access crawlspace, wall insulation, floor & ceiling repair, repair of wall cracks)
  - HVAC and electrical work, including installation of mini-split HVAC system, burglar and fire alarms;
  - exterior maintenance and repair.
- Recognized Historical Status
  - The Sandy Pond Schoolhouse (aka District 11 School) is now listed on both the Massachusetts and the National Register of Historic Places.
  - The importance of the building to the community has also been identified in various Ayer documents, including the Comprehensive Master Plan, the Open Space & Recreation Plan, and the most recent Community Preservation Plan.
- Goals
  - Mr. Rockwood said SPSA was working on the basis of two goals:
    - 1) to finish the job of preserving the historic schoolhouse;
    - 2) to restore the schoolhouse to a state where it can once again function as a community center for Ayer.
  - Upgrades to install a restroom, electrical work, insulation, and HVAC will all contribute to allowing the building to be used on a regular basis, year-round, by the community.
    - Mr. Rockwood cited two recent events as illustrative of this goal:
      - the Open House in September 2019, featuring live music, food, and activities for kids, and with appearances by State Senator Jamie Eldridge and State Representative Sheila Harrington;
      - its use on Feb. 28, 2020, prior to the pandemic shutdown, for an Air Force Promotion Ceremony, for the promotion of the wife of an Ayer military family to the rank of Major.
        - The schoolhouse was packed for this event, with family, visitors, and Air Force officers.
  - Mr. Rockwood estimates the occupancy capacity of the schoolhouse is approximately 40 people.
    - Once fully restored and renovated, Mr. Rockwood said SPSA anticipates the entire Ayer community can benefit.
    - SPSA anticipates working with local schools for programs, as well as with the Friends of Ayer Library, the Ayer Cultural Council, and other local organizations to host jointly-sponsored events.
- Budget and Timeline
  - Mr. Rockwood said the current budget was still a work in progress.



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- The application estimates Phase II project costs by using the tasks and projected costs identified in the Conditions Assessment as a cost-basis, then adjusted 15.1% higher to account for inflation.
- Spencer, Sullivan & Vogt is in the process of preparing a precise line-by-line current estimate, and this should be ready by the time a Public Hearing to review the project is held.
- The application also contains an alternative budget, estimated cost \$261,088, on the possibility that CPC and the Town won't fund the entirety of the project.
  - In that case the project would be expected to extend over several years to full completion.
- If approved with full CPC Phase II funding, Mr. Rockwood said the project would go out to bid for a qualified architectural and engineering firm in late fall 2020-winter 2021, with a contractor agreement commencing in March 2021.
  - The goal for completion of the project would be late 2021, but it is hoped that the building would be usable for a fall open house in 2021, in coordination with events to be planned for Ayer's 150<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary.
- Since the building is now listed on state and national historic registers, preservation work must be done in accordance with strict standards set by the Secretary of the Interior.
  - As few vendors are qualified to fully meet these standards, SPSA anticipates Spencer, Sullivan & Vogt, as well as O'Doherty, will continue their participation in Phase II.
- Cost-sharing
  - The estimated total cost for Phase II is \$208,870, and the application seeks the entirety of this funding from CPC.
    - Mr. Rockwood said part of the reasoning for this is simply timing, seeing this as the fastest path forward to have the building ready in time for Ayer's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.
    - A second reason has to do with the uncertainty of the economy and the grant market.
      - For example, the Massachusetts Preservation Project Fund (MPPF) does award a limited number of cost-sharing grants, however:
        - MPPF's matching grants require an applicant to already have 75% of the funding in hand, even if



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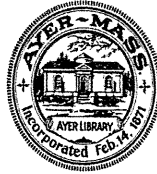
MPPF were to award a grant covering 50% of the project;

- It is uncertain if MPPF will be awarding any grants in 2021, and their announcement to this effect won't take place until late summer or early fall this year.
- As for other sources of funding, Mr. Rockwood said they are not aware of any that could give more than perhaps \$10-12,000.
- BAS and others encouraged SPSA to continue to seek out other grant money and funding sources.
  - This is a great project for CPC to support moving forward, but it would also be great to see more cost-sharing.
- The 1772 Foundation Program was mentioned as one possibility.
  - It limits its awards to \$10,000.
  - JP suggested that as Spencer, Sullivan & Vogt work on the budget breakdown, they consider wording that would be appropriate to an application to the 1772 Foundation.
- JAM asked if SPSA was soliciting any private donations or holding any fundraising activities.
  - Mr. Rockwood said they've had little success with private donations, while fundraising events, such as SPSA's periodic open houses, have contributed only a small amount.
    - This money is usually used for ongoing operations costs and is by no means enough to contribute to capital development.
    - Even so, SPSA board members often wind up paying for things like insurance out of their own pockets.
- JP reminded everyone that even if the full amount asked for in the application is sought, Town Meeting can always adjust grant award amounts downward, to a lesser amount – just never upward.
  - In other words, if other funding is found prior to Fall Town Meeting, the CPC grant request can be adjusted down accordingly.
- Preservation Restriction
  - Mr. Rockwood said that no one from the Town has contacted SPSA to have them formally sign a Preservation Restriction (PR).
  - JP asked BES to bring this to the Ayer Historical Commission to see how a PR actually gets implemented.
    - BAS suggested BES contact Alan Manoian, Director of Community & Economic Development, for help on this as well.



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- Vote
  - There being no public feedback, BES moved to support advancing this application to a Public Hearing review; CK 2<sup>nd</sup>.
    - Motion approved unanimously by a Roll Call Vote 7-0.
  - After discussion, it was decided to schedule the Public Hearing for September 2.
    - This will enable SPSA to work on the budget, investigate other funding sources, and secure letters of support.
- **Committee Updates**
  - Historical Commission (BES)
    - The Commission has not met, but individuals are working to provide input to Freedom's Way's request for pictures and/or stories that might detail Ayer's participation in the suffragette movement that led to the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.
  - Housing Authority & Affordable Housing Committee (JP)
    - The Housing Authority has not been able to meet during the shutdown.
    - The Affordable Housing Committee has met and will be moving forward with applying to CPC for the creation of a Housing Trust at Fall Town Meeting.
  - Parks & Recreation (JAM)
    - The Park Commission now has 3 new members (on a 5-person board) following the recent Town election, and is working to get them up to speed.
    - The Commission is awaiting COVID 19 guidelines from the State and the Board of Health before it makes a decision on whether to open the Town Beach on Sandy Pond.
      - Summer recreation programs and camp are also up in the air until these guidelines are clear.
      - At issue is that once the State announces its guidelines, the Park Commission needs to be sure that, in practical terms, it can actually meet those guidelines.
        - For example, depending on the guidelines required for PPE (personal protective equipment) and cleaning, will the Town be able to afford or obtain needed materials?
    - JAM also said that Richard Durand, who used to be the Park Commission's representative on CPC, is no longer a member of the Park Commission for health reasons.



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- JP said CPC greatly appreciates Mr. Durand's past service and wishes him a speedy recovery.
- Planning Board (JUM)
  - The Board is currently reviewing the parking design outside the ongoing Central Fire Station project at 14 Washington Street ( supported with CPC grants for historic preservation as well as affordable housing).
    - Because of the historic aspect of the building, the Planning Board would prefer there be no parking in front of the big fire doors that will remain as part of the exterior design.
  - The Board will also be doing a site visit to the Ayer Solar II project to review the project's relocation of the access roadway from Washington Street.
    - JG noted this project is also before the Conservation Commission and that a third-party consultant has been engaged to review the project in light of design changes, etc.
- Conservation Commission (JG)
  - ConCom passed a Certificate of Vote that will enable its Agent to sign permits, following a ConCom vote, on behalf of the commissioners.
    - ConCom meets regularly but via remote Zoom, not in-person, and some permits need original ink signatures for recording at the Registry of Deeds.
  - The Commission is also developing reasonable criteria by which to evaluate project applications and whether, at its sole discretion, the Commission will choose to move forward with an application during the State of Emergency.
    - One criterion is estimating the amount of public interest or controversy.
    - The Commission would be reluctant to open public hearings on higher-interest or controversial projects where, because of the shut-down, members of the public would not easily be able to participate.
- Open Space & Recreation Plan Update Committee (BAS)
  - BAS said the Wild & Scenic Committee has been unable to meet for the last few months, and that they are still working on their bylaws.
- **8:09 PM – Adjourn Meeting**
  - CPC's Next Meeting: July 1, 7 p.m
  - BES moved to adjourn; JAM 2<sup>nd</sup>.
    - Motion approved unanimously.

Minutes Recorded and Submitted by Jessica G. Gugino, Clerk

Date and Signature Indicating Approval:

7/1/2020 