

Town of Ayer
Community Preservation Committee
Town Hall * One Main Street * Ayer, MA 01432
Minutes for 5/20/2020

Location: Remote Meeting via Zoom, accessible to public, due to pandemic State of Emergency

Members present: 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

SPECIAL INFORMATIONAL MEETING

7:15 PM – Open Informational Meeting

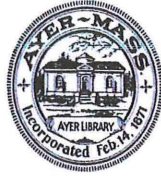
- JP opened the special informational meeting regarding Ballot Question #1 at the upcoming Annual Town Election, currently still scheduled for Tuesday, June 2.
 - Question 1 asks voters to approve or reject raising the CPA property tax surcharge in Ayer from 1% to 3%.
 - The Election was postponed from April to June 2 due to the pandemic.
 - The two-step process requesting the surcharge raise began with its passage at Fall Town Meeting, Oct. 28, 2019.
 - Passage is not complete unless also approved by ballot vote.
 - Because the first step has already been accomplished, the second step, the ballot question, must go forward regardless of the changed social and economic conditions due to the pandemic between last fall and now.
- JP read the letter posted below, which is also posted on CPC's Town website:

An Open Letter to Residents and Business Owners of Ayer

Re: Information about Question #1 for the Annual Town Election

The new pandemic virus of COVID-19 has shaken us all. Each of us has reacted in different ways. We here at the Ayer Community Preservation Committee (CPC) are no different. We know these are troubling times, affecting our families, friends and residents within the Town of Ayer. Many of our businesses have also been affected by this crisis. We understand the financial issues being faced by our community.

Per the laws and guidelines of M.G.L. 44B, last fall CPC began the two-step process to seek voter approval to raise the Community Preservation Act (CPA) property tax surcharge from 1% to 3%, still with the opportunity to opt out of



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this surcharge if qualifications are met. This shift would make the Town eligible to receive not just a greater amount but a greater percentage of available State matching funds. The first step was to seek approval from Fall Town Meeting vote, which was accomplished on October 28, 2019. The second step requires approval via ballot question at the annual Town election. Because of COVID-19, this election was postponed from April and is currently rescheduled for June 2, 2020. Since the surcharge increase request process started last fall before the pandemic, the ballot question cannot be removed from this upcoming town election.

On the one hand, CPC members do not want to put any additional strain on the residents and businesses within the Town of Ayer. On the other hand, no one knows how long the pandemic or its economic impact will last, meaning there is value in taking a longer term view of how CPA funds might be used to help during difficult times. Our members are also torn on this question, given the continuing impact of the pandemic and the uncertainty of its future course. This surcharge increase could be of real use and value to the Town by raising extra funds for use in the Housing Category. It is our hope The Affordable Housing Committee will go before Town Meeting in fall 2020 to seek voter approval in creating a Housing Trust. This Trust would have a community-based Board of Trustees and would allow CPC money to potentially be used to help residents who might fall in between the cracks of federal and state assistance for things like rental payments.

Please think about our long-term future when you go to the polls on June 2nd and see our ballot question. Currently, the Town is actively looking for funding resources to help residents and businesses through this difficult time. A community-board run Housing Trust, seeded with CPC revenue, could become one of those resources. This Housing Trust would be run by a community board of local residents, for the benefit of our own town. If we need funds to assist our local residents long-term, now is the time to begin to set up those future mechanisms that could make this community effort possible. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this ballot question.

Thank you,

Janet Providakes
Chair - Ayer Community Preservation Committee

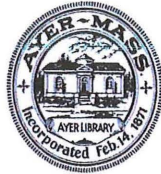


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- JP then responded to questions she'd received prior to the meeting.
- First had to do with the actual financial impact of the surcharge increase.
 - JP presented the Committee with an updated assessment from the Town Assessor's office as to the impact of a surcharge increase on residents and businesses.
 - On average, individual homeowners would see their property taxes increase about \$99/year.
 - On average,, business owners would see their property taxes increase about \$172/year.
 - JP underscored the fact that residents can contact the Town Assessor and, if they meet certain qualifications (i.e. income, age), ask to opt out of paying the surcharge.
 - The opt-out option does not apply to businesses, just homeowners.
- A second question JP has encountered has to do with how CPC disperses surcharge revenue at Spring Town Meeting (currently scheduled for June 15).
 - By law, CPC must put a minimum of 10% of surcharge revenue into each of the three CPA categories of Housing, Historic Preservation, and Open Space/Recreation.
 - This year, CPC is allocating just 10% dispersement to each category, with the remainder to be put into its Reserve Fund.
 - Once money is allocated to a category, such as Housing, that money can *only* be used for Housing-related projects.
 - But money put into the Reserve Fund can be used across the CPA categories, depending on what projects are active and in need of funding.
 - This gives CPC and Town voters greater flexibility in the actual use of the revenue, although all use of funds must meet the strict criteria of the Community Preservation Act regardless.
- Regarding a future Housing Trust:
 - If approved by Town Meeting, this would be initially seeded with CPC funds, also via approval of a Town Meeting vote.
 - Once approved, the Trust would operate independently of CPC, governed by a citizen-run board of trustees.
 - Similar to the Conservation Fund, use of the Trust would therefore not require new Town Meeting votes, giving it the ability to be immediately responsive if needs arose.



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- JP said she and Alicia Hersey, of Ayer's Economic & Community Development office, have been working with CHAPA (Citizens Housing & Planning Association) to learn more about how to set up and operate a Housing Trust.
- It was also noted that something like rental assistance would go directly to landlords, streamlining the process and protecting funds from misuse.
- In terms of promoting information about the Ballot Question, JP will be placing privately-funded signs at the Transfer Station and the Rotary, and possibly at a couple other entrance areas into town.
- JP asked for public input but there was none.
 - If people do have questions between now and the Town Election, residents can email JP at jprovidakes@ayer.ma.us, or call Town Hall.
- CPC's Town website also provides access to CPC's "Success Stories" describing the various projects in Ayer that CPC has been able to help over the past 19 years, from housing projects like the Pleasant Street School, Habitat for Humanity, or Nutting/Fletcher Building, to projects like the Community Garden, the Dog Park, the historic renovations of Town Hall, or currently to the old Central Fire Station.
 - It was emphasized that final approval to fund each of these projects rests with Town Meeting voters, not CPC.
- In terms of the greater benefit the surcharge increase would bring to Ayer, JP described how, at the 1% surcharge rate, the Town is eligible for one round of distribution of State matching funds.
 - At the 3% rate, the Town would be eligible for an additional 2 matching fund rounds.
 - Thus, the Town would not only receive more State matching funds at the 3% level, but a higher percentage of State funds than available at the 1% rate.
- In looking at the future, increased CPC revenue could not only be used to help with a Housing Trust, but could also potentially be used for implementing some of the goals set in the Town's new Master Plan, as well as in the new Open Space & Recreation Development Plan.
- BAS added what she described what she considered to be one of the greatest uses of CPC funding grants: as leverage for eligibility to other matching funds.
 - For example, other sources for project funding often require evidence of community support behind a particular project before they can qualify for, say, federal or private foundation funding.
 - The Dog Park received a CPC grant, but the bulk of the park was funded by a foundation that required demonstration of Town backing.
 - The same was true for the housing and historic renovation work done on the Pleasant Street School, now affordable housing for seniors.



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- In this way, CPC grants used as leverage enable a much greater return on that local investment, to the benefit of the Town as a whole.
- JP asked again if there was any public input and there was none.
 - Those watching were encouraged to vote on June 2, and advised as well to contact the Town Clerk's office for information on mail-in voting if desired.
- **7:56 PM – Adjourn Meeting**
 - CPC's Next Meeting: June 3, 7 p.m.
 - BES moved to adjourn; JUM 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously.

Minutes Recorded and Submitted by Jessica G. Gugino, Clerk

Date Minutes Approved by CPC: 6/3/2020

Signature Indicating Approval: Jessica T. Gugino