



Town of Ayer
Community Preservation Committee
Town Hall * One Main Street * Ayer, MA 01432
Minutes for 9/28/2022

Location: Remote Meeting via Zoom, accessible to public, due to ongoing pandemic

Members present: Janet Providakes, Chair (Housing Authority); Julie Murray, Vice-Chair (Planning Board); Beth Suedmeyer (At Large); Barry Schwarzel (Historical Commission); Jess Gugino, Clerk (Conservation Commission)

Not present: Jason Mayo (Parks & Recreation); Colleen Krieser (At Large/Affordable Housing Trust)

APAC taped: Yes

7:30 PM – Open Meeting

- **Confirmation of Agenda**

- B. Schwarzel moved to confirm the agenda as posted; J. Gugino 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously by Roll Call Vote 4-0 (Providakes, Murray, Schwarzel, and Gugino; Suedmeyer not yet present, signing in via Zoom at 7:49 p.m.)

- **Public Hearing: Application for CPA funding, “Ayer Howitzer Restoration Project”**

- J. Providakes called the Public Hearing to order at 7:35 p.m.
- The Public Hearing was advertised in the *Nashoba Valley Voice* on 9/16 and 9/23/2022.
- Present via Zoom were: Town Manager Robert Pontbriand; Alan Manoian, Director of Office of Economic & Community Development; and Chuck Schultz, Facilities Director.
 - (See CPC minutes for 9/7/2022 for additional details.)
- Mr. Pontbriand gave an overview of the application that seeks \$32,232 to fund the restoration of the Howitzer cannon and the relocation of the related monument, monies to come from the CPA Historical Preservation category.
 - Total cost for the project is estimated to be \$40,232; the remaining \$8000 will come from the Facilities budget.
 - Letters of support for the project, now on the CPC website, have been received from the Select Board, Ayer Historical Commission, Freedom’s Way, Devens Enterprise Commission, and Ayer American Legion Post 139.
- Mr. Manoian described the project to restore the original 1943 Howitzer cannon:
 - restoring it to its original U.S. Army combat olive-green color;
 - restoration or refabrication of the original wheel rims that are deteriorating or rotting;



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- replacement of the tires;
- installing a proper circular base and pad underneath the restored cannon so that it does not rest on bare ground;
- and additional restoration work also to be done by Certified Welding & Fabrication of Shirley.
- The cannon came to the Town of Ayer directly from Fort Devens in 1985, donated by the Cote family in memory of their son, Army Staff Sergeant Leon A. Cote (1919-1944).
 - Mr. Manoian said the Howitzer is a rare piece, with not many remaining in existence today, so that it is a “true authentic local heritage treasure.”
 - Anti-tank Howitzers were devastating weapons of war that were dropped from planes onto the battlefields of France during World War II.
 - Fortunately, however, this Howitzer is, and will remain, inoperable, with its muzzle welded shut.
 - (As a side note, Mr. Manoian said the town of Paxton, MA, buries the muzzles of its cannons in the ground to show they will not be used again!)
- B. Schwarzel expressed a question from a resident who could not be at the meeting, asking why the Howitzer was to be illuminated when other memorials in town are not?
 - Mr. Pontbriand said the flag by Town Hall is illuminated, as is the Town Hall sign, so it seemed appropriate to do the same for the cannon – but is optional and not absolutely required.
 - Different views were expressed on the subject of illuminating the Howitzer:
 - unnecessary lighting with perhaps negative impact to wildlife, insects (B. Suedmeyer);
 - area is already lit up (street lights, etc.) so area already not completely dark (J. Providakes).
 - Mr. Schultz said the cost of illuminating the cannon is \$2200.
 - There are various styles of lighting as well, from bright to dim.
 - Resident Pauline Conley asked that, if the Howitzer is to be illuminated, solar lighting be considered as Ayer is a green community and that would be cheaper in cost.
 - Mr. Schulz said past problems with solar in that area have had to do with vandalism of that kind of lighting.
 - Community input will be sought on this topic.
- On the issue of cannon orientation, Mr. Manoian said his research indicated there was no established protocol for what direction to point a cannon and that



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communities seemed to make their own decisions, usually based on significant local symbolism.

- The Howitzer's current orientation has it pointing westward to where Fort Devens was originally established in 1917.
 - Given the cannon's original connection to Fort Devens, it might therefore make sense to keep this orientation.
- Ms. Conley recalled a discussion held by the Select Board somewhere in the 2002-2005 timeframe that indicated the cannon had previously been oriented pointing eastward, to the East Main Street Bridge, as if to protect the town.
 - (This was before it was moved in 2002 for Town Hall restoration work, then returned when that was completed to its current position (unfortunately on bare ground) and the current orientation westward.)
- It was decided that community input, the 'will of the community', will be solicited to resolve three decisions for the cannon:
 - its location on Town Hall grounds to which the Howitzer will be returned once it is restored, and the granite Cote monument (dedicated to all Ayer Veterans) will also be relocated next to it;
 - the orientation of the cannon, in what direction it will point;
 - lighting – to illuminate the cannon or not to illuminate it; and if so, what style of lighting.
- Means of soliciting public feedback may include a survey, an information session on the grounds of Town Hall, Fall Town Meeting feedback – to be determined.
- B. Suedmeyer moved to advance the funding application for the restoration of the Ayer Howitzer to Fall Town Meeting; B. Schwarzel 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously by Roll Call Vote 5-0.
- At 8:14 p.m., J. Murray moved to close the Public Hearing; B. Suedmeyer 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously by Roll Call Vote 5-0.
- **Review of Fall Town Meeting (October 24) CPC Warrant Articles**
 - The Town Warrant closes at noon on Friday, 9/30.
 - Mr. Pontbriand made clear that Town Counsel will then review the Warrant so some slight changes in wording may be made at that point.
 - Mr. Pontbriand also said that the Warrant should list the Community Preservation Committee as the Sponsor of both CPC Articles.
 - For the following discussion, J. Providakes used the edit suggestions provided by B. Suedmeyer, and which Mr. Pontbriand said looked to be correct and appropriate.



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- The first CPC Article is for the Ayer Commons Affordable Housing Project.
 - Mr. Pontbriand said the issue of how to split the \$400,000 between the Housing category and the Undesignated Reserve category was not necessary to resolve at this time.
 - The Warrant Article alerts voters to the use of both categories and limits the grant to no more than \$400,000, however its category sources are divided.
 - Briefly discussed again was the issue of whether the Housing restriction could be worded as permanent, suggesting in perpetuity versus a specific length of time (e.g. 50 years, 99 years).
 - B. Suedmeyer said it would be a disservice to the Town not to advocate for such restrictions to be in perpetuity, with resident Pauline Conley in agreement.
 - CPC proceeded to vote on the following wording, subject to Town Counsel revision:
 - “To see if the Town will vote to transfer from the Community Preservation Fund Housing and from the Undesignated Reserve categories, the sum of money not to exceed \$400,000 to support the Affordable Housing Project, Phase I named Ayer Commons to be utilized by Neighborhood of Affordable Housing, Inc., for affordable community housing, towards the costs to construct 64 affordable rental dwelling units at 65 Fitchburg Road and other costs related thereto, all of which will be subject to a permanent affordable Housing restriction that runs to the benefit of the Town or take any action thereon or in relation thereto.”
 - B. Suedmeyer made a motion to accept the Warrant Article [as worded above] for Ayer Commons Affordable Housing Project as amended; B. Schwarzel 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously by Roll Call Vote 5-0.
- The second CPC Article is for the Ayer 1943 Howitzer Restoration Project.
 - CPC proceeded to vote on the following wording, subject to Town Counsel revision:
 - “To see if the Town will vote to transfer from the Community Preservation Fund Historical Preservation Category the sum of money not-to-exceed \$32,232 to support the Town of Ayer’s restoration of the 1943 Howitzer and placement of the monument for Staff Sgt. Cote on the grounds of Town Hall or take any action thereon or in relation thereto.”



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- B. Schwarzel made a motion to accept the Warrant Article [as worded above] for the Howitzer Restoration Project as amended; B. Suedmeyer 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously by Roll Call Vote 5-0.
- **8:36 PM – Adjourn Meeting**
 - CPC's Next Meeting: October 5, 2022, 7 p.m.
 - B. Suedmeyer moved to adjourn; J. Gugino 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously.

Minutes Recorded and Submitted by Jessica G. Gugino, Clerk

Date / Signature Indicating Approval:

10/5/2022 *Jessica G. Gugino*