

Lenox Community Preservation Committee

May 16, 2016

Minutes

Members in Attendance

Gene Chague (At Large); Tom Delasco (Planning Board); Channing Gibson (Board of Selectmen); Al Harper (At Large); Catherine May (Housing Authority); Tony Patella (Chair, Community Center); Joe Strauch (Conservation Commission); Olga Weiss (Historical Commission)

Members Absent with Notification

Frederick Keator (At Large)

Staff in Attendance

Chris Ketchen (Town Manager); Gwen Miller (Town Planner)

Members of the Public in Attendance

Carolyn Barry, Resident
Ariel Boche, Shakespeare & Co.
Deborah Ferro Burke, Lenox Affordable Housing Committee and Trust
Rachel Coll, Ventfort Hall
Becky Cushing, Mass Audubon
Eric Federer, Lenox Environmental Committee
Ken Fowler, BoS
Mackenzie Greer, BNRC
Ken Kelly, Lenox Land Trust
Kate McNulty-Vaughan, Lenox Land Trust, Affordable Housing Committee
Rob Murray, Lenox Chamber of Commerce President
Michael Nathan, Stockbridge Bowl Association
Charlene Rosen, Lenox Affordable Housing Committee
Dave Roche, BoS
Patty Spector
Betsy Strauch
Charlene Tavares, LPM

Mr. Patella called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

Ms. Miller gave a brief presentation about the Community Preservation Committee. It was adopted in Lenox in 2006 and is funded through a 3 percent surcharge on local property taxes plus a state match. Since its inception, the CPC has funded 45 projects for a total distribution of \$3,784,805. The mission of the CPC is to study the needs, possibilities and resources of the town in the areas of open space and recreation, historical resources, and affordable community housing. To date, the majority of funds have been spent in the area of historic preservation (e.g., projects at Ventfort Hall, The Mount, restoration of an antique fire truck, Church on the Hill cemetery).

She mentioned that the CPC is funding one project in this cycle (funds to be available July 1, 2016) – work at Laurel Lake to make the area compliant for people with disabilities.

She described a new schedule for funding in the upcoming cycle. Applications will be accepted in a two-step process: step 1 is a brief summary of the proposed project; Step 1 applications will be reviewed by the CPC and those accepted for further deliberation will be asked to submit a more detailed proposal (Step 2). Step 2 applications will be reviewed from November-January, and recommendations for funding will be presented to the Board of Selectmen on February 1, 2017. Final applications will be presented for a vote at the annual Town Meeting on May 5, 2017. Pending the outcome at Town Meeting, funds will be available July 1, 2017.

The public hearing portion of the meeting began at 6:22 pm with a reading by TP of the public hearing notice. He noted that he has received two emails from people who were unable to attend: Molly Elliot, 185 West St., and Thomas Romeo, president of the Lenox Land Trust.

Speaker #1: Ken Kelly, 74 King William Rd., a member of the Lenox Land Trust.

He asked whether CPC funds could be used for a project that has already begun, such as a wildlife preserve that has a conservation restriction on it; part of the project is construction of boardwalks as trails for public access. The Land Trust would like to create such public access this summer, noting that if CPC funding was not available until the summer of 2017, the public would not benefit from access for more than a year

AH said the question would need to be asked of town counsel, but that the CPC would get back to Mr. Kelly with an answer.

Mr. Kelly noted a few other possible projects in which the CPC might be interested: Edith Wharton Park (near Laurel Lake); the Toole wildlife preserve; and Undermountain Farm.

JS reminded Mr. Kelly and the audience that the CPC cannot take action on a project until it receives an application, and urged those with projects to complete an application.

Speaker #2: Debbie Burke, 216 Hubbard St. She is chair of the Affordable Housing Trust and Committee. She said the work of the Affordable Housing Trust and Committee is a valuable asset in helping first-time home buyers obtain affordable housing by offering grants to supplement a down payment (six families helped to date).

She commended the CPC for providing annual funding for this purpose. She asked whether the CPC could consider making their annual 10 percent allocation for community housing a more stable source of funding by applying it directly to the Affordable Housing Trust and Committee. She said the housing market in general is picking up and more mortgage money is available so more people will be able to buy first homes. She hopes to have enough money in the trust at any time to be able to make grants to prospective homeowners as the applications come in, rather than having to wait for the CPC annual funding cycle. She said at present, there is \$90,000 in the Trust; \$50,000 of that is already committed.

Regarding the Saw Mill project that would provide some affordable housing, she said that the project cannot happen without federal and state money. And the Baker administration has indicated that most of the state money for affordable housing will be applied to rental housing rather than home ownership.

Finally, she mentioned the May 19 “Battle of the Bartenders” at the Old Heritage Tavern, a benefit for the Affordable Housing Trust and Committee.

Speaker #3: Charlene Rosen, 89 W. Dugway. She is a new member of the Affordable Housing Committee. She submitted copies of two recent news articles for the CPC’s review: one notes that the City of Cambridge gives 80 percent of its CPC funds to affordable housing; the other was a Washington Post article whose theme was that the best thing well-to-do parents can do for their children is to bring them up in a city or town with excellent schools.

Speaker # 4: Michael Nathan of Stockbridge. He represents the Stockbridge Bowl Association. He gave a presentation about the dramatic need for funding to help clear several decades worth of silt from the southern portion of the bowl. While he appreciates that the bowl is in Stockbridge, not Lenox, he made the point that “this is a community lake,” located in Stockbridge but used by many residents of Berkshire County and appreciated by tourists from around the world. The \$4 million project will go out to bid next summer (\$3.5 million has already been raised).

Speaker # 5: Mackenzie Greer, with the Berkshire Natural Resources Council. She spoke about the continuing need to support work related to the conservation of Undermountain Farm and Parson’s Marsh. At Parson’s BNRC is beginning due diligence (cost estimates, trail design, etc.) for work on a trail project, including parking, signage, a kiosk and trail into the marsh. She expects to present an application to the CPC later this year.

CG asked about a trail system for Yokun Ridge. Ms. Greer said they are working on it, but she could not give specifics.

Speaker # 6: Kate McNulty Vaughan, a member of the Lenox Land Trust, Affordable Housing Committee, Planning Board. She spoke in favor of the concept of partnerships and collegiality among town committees. She hopes for a more free flow of information among groups, particularly those with related or overlapping projects and interests.

Speaker #7: Rob Murray, 332 Old Stockbridge Rd., President of the Lenox Chamber of Commerce. He spoke in favor of developing a detailed and comprehensive map of what’s available in Lenox for open space and recreation, including trails and other resources. He also envisions a walking trail between Lenox and Lee. He said the town needs to “think big” on projects such as this. Patty Spector, an audience member, also agreed that this would be a good project. TD urged them to put together a proposal.

CG moved and AH seconded a motion to close the public hearing portion of the meeting; after a unanimous vote, the public meeting was adjourned at 7:15 pm. Brief, Informal breakout sessions followed.

JS moved and TD seconded a motion to adjourn; after a unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned at 7:32 pm.

Submitted by
Alison Snider