

**Town of Lenox
Community Preservation Committee
6 Walker Street Lenox MA
Meeting Minutes
November 6th, 2023
6:00 p.m.
Town Hall/Land Use**

Documents Available: 11/6/23 agenda, 9/13/23 meeting minutes, balance sheet

Members Present: Tom Delasco- chair, Shannon O'Brien, Kim Graham, Olga Weiss, Frederick Keator
Neal Maxymillian, Mark Smith

TD called the meeting to order at 6:03pm

1. Approval of Minutes—September 13th meeting minutes

Motion made to approve minutes by KG with the addition of Mark Smith as present at the 9/13 meeting, seconded. All were in favor

2. Presentation of FY25 Applications

The board reviewed the balance sheet, showing their available balance as \$691,984

- **Pennrose—Brushwood Project, \$500,000**

Rebecca Schofield, the project manager for Pennrose, presented their project. The project at Brushwood Farms is an affordable housing development of 13 condo buildings, with a total of 65 units. They are expecting to close on the property in April and will start construction in May. RS showed pictures of the property and explained various features, including a playground, clubhouse and parking spaces. She explained the different unit sizes that will be available- one, two and three bedroom units. Pennrose will be applying for permits for each building separately, so they will become available as they are completed. TD reminded everyone that the CPC awarded the project \$500,000 last year; this year they are asking for an additional \$500,000 to make the one million referenced. NM questioned the open space at the property and RS explained their plan to connect trails to the existing system on the abutting conservation land. RS clarified that they want the clubhouse on the property to be community accessible so that it can be used by the public as event space, recreation, etc. It was questioned whether there would be enough spaces around the clubhouse for people to park for community events; it was determined there would be around 20 spaces. RS explained they are held to a certain number based on the topographical restrictions.

- **Pennrose—238 Pittsfield Road, \$500,000**

RS went on to explain Pennrose's second project, one mile down the road from Brushwood. This development will have a mix of 68 one, two and three bedroom units, 50 of them being tax credit. It is very similar set up to Brushwood but is slightly denser. There will be ten 3-level buildings, with 6-7 units per building. None of them have an elevation over 14,000 feet. RS mentioned that keeping the existing forested area is very important to Pennrose. The buildings are oriented to take advantage of the existing grade so they will have to do less cut and fill as they develop the site. She overviewed the site plan.

They created an additional parking lot for overflow and visitor parking to minimize the number of spaces in the center of the property. There will be accessible spaces near the units for those living in the buildings. A board member questioned whether a bus stop would be put in; RS said they plan to investigate that in the future to see if it is feasible. It was questioned whether these would be rental units; RS answered they would be for rent. KG asked what the square footage would be for a two bedroom unit; RS said it depends on the unit, as there will be both flat and townhouse style, so there is a range. But the state does have minimum and maximum requirements on the size of the units. She showed the images of the layouts. OW pointed out the playgrounds seem designed for younger children and questioned whether there would be space for older children to recreate, particularly a basketball court. RS explained there would be picnic tables/benches and said they will look into a court. OS also questioned the fencing along the property and whether it is safe enough for young children. It was brought up that the images shown are schematic, conceptual drawings at this point- nothing is finalized. The board agreed that a secure playground area would be best. KG asked how many accessible units there are; RS answered that 5% of them must be accessible, per state requirements, so roughly 4. She explained there will be a superintendent, an assistant superintendent and a maintenance supervisor floating over both properties, with staff on site 8am-4pm and a 24 hour on call service for property and maintenance issues. RG asked if they have average monthly rental pricing available; RS said they are currently doing a market study and will follow up once they have more data. MS verified that the access road will contain both left-turning and right-turning exit lanes. They are trying to get DOT approval for a signal but it looks like that may be difficult. A board member questioned the timeline on the project; RS answered that they are currently completing the pre-app for this project and if the state invites them in, they would need to submit the full application in February. They would expect an answer on that by roughly June so they would hope to close by the end of 2024 and start construction in the Spring of 2025. If the state does not invite them in for this round, they would have to reapply in Spring of 2025. They are hopeful having Brushwood Farm as a sister project would help their case. She explained that the state will only approve a project that has funding and support from the Town.

- **HomeFarm at Undermountain, \$189,750**

Gary Knisely, chairman of the board, along with the executive director Lori Pestana and various members of the board, were present. GK explained that HomeFarm has only existed as a non-profit since April of 2023 but have been able to pay the town over \$100,000 towards the debt owed on the property. He explained they have begun to hay 20 acres of land that has been sitting dormant for many years, which will save the farm lots of money in the long run. And they have created a partnership with the USDA to take care of drainage problems that have been ongoing for many years. He said they are now at an important point where they are able to start focusing on preserving the historic buildings on the property, built in 1902. The buildings are in good shape currently but they need funds to keep them that way. They are specifically asking for funds to take them through the first stage of preserving the large barn along Undermountain Road so that it will not get any worse. NM asked GK to discuss long-range plans for the property and how CPC funding will benefit residents of Lenox. GK explained that because the farm itself is currently self-sustaining, any money given/raised will go right back into the property. He said they are working with the schools to bring kids to the farm for various educational events, as well as a business in Pittsfield aimed at rehabilitation for those with PTSD. Lori Pestana explained the building will be a resource as it has huge potential as an event/community space. GK went on to discuss a handful of grants they plan to apply for. TD asked that if they were not awarded the full

amount they are asking for, if they would be able to make up the difference from donors; GK said they would work very hard to make that happen. KG asked for verification that they have \$100,000 committed for the barn restoration; GK replied that the money is pledged, not currently in their account. LP confirmed they have \$25,000 in hand for the project. GK said they have a general outline for the next four years as to the sequence of projects and estimated funds needed to complete them.

- **Church on the Hill, \$76,000**

Dave Dyer, treasurer of Church on the Hill, presented their application. He introduced Liz Goodman, pastor at the Church, and Janice McCormick, management consultant to the project. They are seeking \$76,000 of the \$200,000 they need for the project, which is the restoration of the iconic clocktower. DD presented images showing the current conditions of the clock, cupola and railings. There is significant degradation to the actual structure of the tower, it is not all cosmetic. There were no questions from the board.

- **Ventfort Hall, \$156,685**

Wendy Healey, executive director at Ventfort Hall, was present with the board president and their director of operations. She explained they are asking for funds to help restore the 4 massive chimneys on the mansion. This project is the most critical of the projects that were identified in the Master Restoration Plan completed for the property back in 2016. There is a significant masonry work that needs to be done on various parts of the building and they are tackling those in order of priority. There are safety hazards with the current state of the chimneys as falling bricks can cause bodily harm. Currently in their bank account they \$43,100 and they have \$100,000 approved in grants from two private foundations. They also have been approved by the Mass Cultural Council fund for \$149,000 so they are looking to the CPC for the remaining money needed for the project. She went on to detail the impact Ventfort Hall has on the economy and culture of Lenox. WH believes funding from the CPC will help leverage the donations they've already received and positively influence more in the future.

- **The Mount, \$77,000**

Susan Whissler, executive director of the Mount, explained that they are seeking funds this year under the Open Space and Recreation pocket to undertake a trail expansion and accessibility enhancement project. They have been partnering with Greenagers for the past 4 years to complete numerous improvements to the trail system. However, the trails are not user friendly for those with any kind of mobility issue so they are aiming to improve that this year. A board member asked how the current trails are constructed; SW answered that they are a mix of hardpacked gravel, grass and woodland trails and they aim to make them all hardpacked, making it much easier for wheelchairs and walkers to pass. KG commented that the improvements would greatly impact Lenox residents, as well as tourists.

- **Lenox Affordable Housing Trust \$37,000**

Marybeth Mitts, chair of the Affordable Housing Trust, explained their request of \$37,000 for community housing funds. This year they will be increasing their first-time homebuyer grant amount by \$20,000. They will also be applying for a community development grant through Bailey Boyd that will help Lenox residents make repairs to their homes, such as a new roof, furnace or windows.

3. Schedule Subsequent Meeting as Needed

The board agreed to meet on Thursday January 18th at 6pm

4. Review, Discussion, Approval Decisions if Appropriate

The board recapped the presentations from earlier. They discussed various aspects of the traffic impact due to the Pennrose projects. They talked about the second project at 238 Pittsfield Road and whether or not the timing is right for it; it was suggested they go forward with the Brushwood project and put a hold on funding for the second project for the time being. The board discussed the Church on the Hill project and the best way to handle their request, as they have already supplied money for the clock tower in the past. They talked about HomeFarm's request and how the benefit to the town isn't as apparent as it is with some of the other applicants, but that it is definitely an issue of historic preservation. The board generally agreed that they are all in support of the projects but they may need to scale the numbers back.

Motion to adjourn at 8:40, all were in favor.