

Town of Lenox
Community Preservation Committee

Meeting Minutes

January 11, 2023

In-person

APPROVED 4-27-23

Documents available in advance: November meeting minutes, FY24 applications from the Mount, Lenox Library and Lenox Affordable Housing Trust

Members present: Tom Delasco, Planning Board and Chairperson; Frederick Keator, Vice Chair and At Large; Shannon O'Brien, Community Center; Mark Smith, Conservation Commission; Kim Graham, Lenox Housing Authority

Also present: Gwen Miller, staff; Susan Wissler, The Mount; Marybeth Mitts, Lenox Affordable Housing Trust; Amy Lafave, Lenox Library

Absent: Neal Maxymillian, Selectboard; Chuck Koscher (At Large), Olga Weiss, Historical Commission

Approval of Minutes

Review, discussion, approval of FY24 Applications:

The Mount, \$110,000 toward the purchase of the Edith Wharton Farmhouse on Laurel Lake

Susan Wissler, Executive Director of Edith Wharton's Home The Mount, presented the Mount's request for \$110,000 toward the purchase of the farmhouse located on the parkland co-owned by the Towns of Lenox and Lee on Laurel Lake Crossroad. She explained there is a Purchase and Sale agreement between the Mount and the Towns of Lenox and Lee for the Mount to purchase the farmhouse at Edith Wharton Park. The farmhouse has been linked to the original plan and construction of Edith Wharton's The Mount. Both Town meetings have voted to approve the sale, and Lenox has voted to deregister the land. The next step is closing. The appraisal for the house was \$170,000.00. There will be a Conservation Restriction on the property to maintain public access on the house parcel and along shoreline Towns will maintain an option in case Mount ceases to exist; \$100,000 will be 31% of the total cost; estimates \$281,000 in total. The Mount has put in \$60,000 in legal fees to date. SW explained the level of effort for deal is same with the appraisal no matter the cost and the total cost for restoration plus acquisition will be around \$1.7 million. They will install a sign to explain historical significance and use the house for a writer in residence. FK asked what other investments to expect—Susan said the building is structurally sound, the basement is dry and roof is good, but interior needs a complete renovation. Allegrone has estimated \$750,000 to \$1 million, and that work will be privately funded. Visitors will be able to walk from the Mount to the farmhouse

and back. MS asked if there would be more legal fees, SW estimated another \$15,000. MSK asked how the towns have split the environmental remediation. SW said the septic pit had petroleum in it and the Towns split the cost (\$19,000 in total). Maple trees on Laurel Lake Road had to be removed as well, which cost \$4,000. MS asked where Lenox expended funds to date had come from to date. FK clarified there would no formal gathering space at the site, but will remain residential in nature. SW confirmed and said the exterior will be fully restored.

FK moved to fund purchase from the Historic Preservation category of CPC funds. KG seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Lenox Affordable Housing Trust, \$150,000 toward the creation, preservation, and support of affordable housing

Marybeth Mitts, Chairperson of the Lenox Affordable Housing Trust, presented the Trust's request for \$150,000. She explained past successes by the Trust including the recent purchase and sales of two deed-restricted single-family homes to income eligible households, and described what the funds would be used for going forward. Future use included helping match a housing rehabilitation program through Department of Housing and Community Development's Community Development Block Grant program and the Attorney General's abandoned home initiative. There was some discussion as to how housing rehab fits in with the CPA community housing category, and the line of credit the Housing Trust has with Lee Bank.

FK moved to grant the Trust \$50,000. This was seconded by KG. The group had a lengthy and robust discussion on the purpose of the Housing Trust, and whether it was more transparent to have the Trust be the guardian of Community Housing funds or to have CPC be the guardian and continue to have Town Meeting approve individual requests. FK suggested the Housing Trust return with more wins; with their line of credit and \$281,000 in the bank he feels they have ample funds. There was also discussion about what might happen if a dishonest developer were to come and request funds of the Trust and be unable to achieve their plan—that puts the Trust in a vulnerable position fundwise.

The Committee returned to the motion, and the following vote was taken.

Lenox Library, \$3,132 to preserve the 1774 Non-Consumption Agreement

Amy Lafave, the Lenox Library History Librarian, presented her request to preserve the original 1774 Non-Consumption Agreement, which was a signed document expressing the town members' intent to not purchase British goods. There was discussion about the number of resources similar to this in the archives that Amy is still discovering, and what level of financial resources may be needed in the future to continue preserving historical documents like this.

The grant was approved.

FK moved to place \$50,000 from Undesignated fund balance into Historic Preservation to fund the Mount purchase of the EWP Farmhouse.

The group voted on the standard appropriations as well, including library debt repayment.

These motions were approved.