

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT (CPA) COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, December 18, 2023, 3:00 P.M.

Via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Elaine DeRosa, Mary Flynn, Chandra Harrington, David Lyons (left early at 4:00), Ellen Schacter, Taha Jennings

Committee Members Absent: Victoria Bergland, Kevin Foster, Kathy Watkins

Staff: Daniel Liss, Charlie Sullivan, Jen Letourneau

Guest Speaker: Stuart Saginor, Community Preservation Coalition

Introduction

Taha Jennings (TJ) opened the meeting and gave an overview of the agenda.

Review and adopt minutes

The minutes from the 9/7/2023 meeting were approved by a vote of 6-0-3.

Summary of Cambridge CPA Process and history

TJ gave a brief history of the CPA program in Cambridge and the annual process by which the CPA Committee makes funding recommendations to the City Council.

Presentation by Community Preservation Coalition

TJ introduced Stuart Saginor (SS) of the Community Preservation Coalition for a presentation.

SS explained the services provided by the Coalition, as well as the successes of the CPA in Massachusetts. Since its passage, the CPA has been adopted by 196 communities and funded more than 16,000 projects.

SS described the revenue sources used to fund CPA. He noted that because transactions at the Registry of Deeds are down due to economic conditions and because the legislature did not make any supplemental appropriations, the state CPA trust is at a lower level than it has been in recent years. This means that state matching funds will likely be lower for the next few years.

SS then discussed different CPA models. Many smaller communities with less professional staff capacity have a “Bottoms up” model, in which the CPA committees tend to receive raw applications from community organizations that apply for funding. In “Top down” models, like the one Cambridge has, communities with more professional staff capacity may do an initial screening of proposals before they are submitted to the CPA committee. SS stressed that there is no one correct way to do it and that different communities may have different needs.

SS shared several examples of ways that other communities do CPA outreach/engagement. Many communities have robust CPA websites with a great level of detail. Some CPA committees make presentations to community organizations in order to encourage them to apply for funding. Some communities also use newspaper ads, press releases, social media outreach, and brochures and flyers to try to spread the word. Some communities (including Cambridge) put signs noting CPA funding during project construction or after construction has been completed. Most communities have dedicated CPA administrative staff (usually part time) paid for out of CPA funds, of which up to 5% are allowed to support administrative expense.

SS also noted that Cambridge has more resources for CPA than most other communities because of the full 3% surcharge and the size of the tax levy.

Committee Discussion

Elaine DeRosa said she felt community participation was quite robust when it came to supporting funding for housing, particularly when there were specific projects that needed funding from the trust (such as preserving affordability of Fresh Pond Apartments).

Ellen Schacter said she believes the consistency of funding housing has discouraged advocates for Open Space and Historic Preservation, and that the fact that the housing trust makes decisions on allocating funding for housing projects. The process does not leave as much room for grassroots participation.

Mary Flynn said she thought the City's professional staff could be more proactive with engagement within the areas they work on, informing the public about CPA as part of their normal work.

Ellen Schacter said she thought more collaboration with the housing trust would empower the committee, instead of just allocating a lump sum of funding.

TJ said he appreciated the discussion and looks forward to thinking more about the topics in SS's presentation and the committee's discussion.

David Lyons suggested that Participatory Budgeting serves as a good model for channeling input into the budget.

Mary Flynn encouraged opportunities to let people know about sources of funding for unique projects. She also thought it was important to look at City resources comprehensively.

Public Comment

- Suzanne Blier encouraged the committee to add administrative staff for the CPA process, although had questions about the mechanism by which it would be paid for. She also supported bringing more voices in from the community.

Closing/Adjournment

TJ said that the next planned meeting would likely be in May, but encouraged committee members to pay attention to emails in case that changes.

The meeting was adjourned by a vote of 5-0-4.