

**COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT (CPA) COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Public Hearing on FY26 Project Requests**  
Monday, July 28, 2025, 5:30 P.M.

Committee Members Present: Elaine DeRosa, Kevin Foster, Mary Flynn, Chandra Harrington, David Lyons, John Nardone, Ellen Schacter, Taha Jennings  
Committee Members Absent: Victoria Bergland  
Staff: Daniel Liss, Charlie Sullivan, Gary Chan, Jen Letourneau, Chris Cotter, Cortney Kirk, Daniel Messplay, Kevin Beuttell

**Introduction**

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

TJ informed the committee that Kathy Watkins resigned from the CPA committee after being appointed Deputy City Manager. The City Manager appointed Acting DPW Commissioner John Nardone in her place.

**Review and Adopt Minutes**

The minutes from the June 4, 2025 meeting were approved (8-0-1).

**FY26 Process & Funding Estimates**

TJ offered an overview of FY26 CPA funding process. The deadline for outside organizations to submit Letters of Interest (LOI) was July 11. The current hearing was held to receive recommendations on projects to receive FY26 CPA funding. There will be another public hearing on August 20 on the allocation of funding between Affordable Housing, Open Space, and Historic Preservation. The vote meeting in September is still being scheduled.

TJ then gave an overview of the FY26 CPA finances. The estimated funding level for FY26 will be \$22,110,000. The 10% minimum funding level for any category will be \$2,210,000. The 80% maximum funding level will be \$17,680,000. This also includes \$10,000 for the membership fee for the Community Preservation Coalition. In addition, there is about \$113,000 in the Historic Preservation reserve fund and \$361,000 in the Open Space reserve fund.

Daniel Liss (DL) provided an overview of the outreach strategy for the FY26 CPA process. Information was shared with CPA stakeholders by members of CPA committee. A press release was distributed on June 11 to the City Council, local Cambridge and Boston media, business associations, places of worship, and neighborhood associations. CPA funding availability was featured in June 26's City Daily Update e-newsletter and reissued as a reminder over the following 4 nights and published as a City news story, including being featured on the homepage. Information distributed to neighborhood associations by Community Development. Information was also distributed to contacts/partners of the Historical Commission and Conservation Commission. Information was sent to housing agencies to distribute in their buildings. The CPA process was featured in summer Participatory Budgeting newsletter on June 25. Finally, information shared with any organizations that reached out for information since the close of last year's process.

## **Public Comment**

The following public comment was offered during the meeting:

Laurie Rothstein (Cambridge Volunteers): Spoke in support of funding for the Multicultural Arts Center (MCAC). After her mother had a stroke, she took her to MCAC to provide distractions. The MCAC was a good place that transports attendees into a magical mental space. However, the lack of an accessible bathroom is a significant barrier in an otherwise very inclusive program.

Adria Katz (Managing Director, MCAC): MCAC is an arts center that puts artists first and has prioritized accessibility in its front of house. However, the backstage area does not meet the needs of performers. MCAC is in the historic Middlesex County Courthouse complex and was last renovated in the 1980's, before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The building needs to be brought up to ADA standards.

James Williamson (30 Churchill Ave): He lived in a Housing Authority property that was demolished and is being rebuilt with CPA funding at a much higher density. He has concerns about the cost of creating affordable units (\$1 million per unit) and believes the CPA committee should provide scrutiny. He also was concerned about CPA-funded projects that are angering members of the community because of their excessive size. If CPA came up for a vote again, he would vote against it.

Elizabeth Peters: She spoke in support of funding for Maher Community Garden, which is at Fresh Pond next to Neville Place. The garden has raised beds for people with disabilities, but the gate is difficult to operate because of disrepair. Physical therapists from Neville use the garden as a destination for their patients so they can observe nature, but it is difficult to navigate with wheelchairs and walkers. Animals also can enter the garden and eat the vegetables. The state of the garden does not reflect well on the city and is not indicative of the caliber of life in Cambridge.

Kashif Hoda (440 Cambridge St): He is the president of MCAC, which is an organization that builds communities within Cambridge. It is a valuable resource that is limited by the age of the building and should be made accessible to remove barriers for the community using the center.

Lijia Wang (55 Magazine St): She is a board member of MCAC, which is a gem in Cambridge. She talks to artists and performers who bring such joy to everyone. It is difficult for people with disabilities to participate, and one artist told her that accessibility is love.

Ellice Patterson (Abilities Dance): She has a disabled dance company called Abilities Dance that has used the MCAC for the past eight years. MCAC was the only venue that would rent to the company, but having to move up and down the stairs is harmful to her health and requires additional sick time to recover from performances. The arts has a positive impact on the economy by bringing in visitors that use Cambridge's hotels, restaurants and other businesses. Disabled artists should be able to perform without jeopardizing their health.

Mary Verhage: She stated that Maher Community Garden is an uplifting place for residents of Neville Place, staff, and visitors, but the fence is a big problem. It creates a challenge for users in wheelchairs, which is an important problem. She also encouraged committee members to visit Maher.

Sarah Adkins (Green Cambridge): She is the Deputy Director of Green Cambridge, which has been doing work at Alewife Reservation since acquiring the Friends of the Alewife Reservation

in 2019. The organization does critical work removing invasives and protecting the waterway, which flows into the Mystic River, then the Harbor, then the Atlantic Ocean. She supports funding for Green Cambridge's request.

DL provided a summary of the following written comments, which were received prior to the meeting:

- Mary Verhage: She wrote in support of Maher Community Garden repairs. Maher garden means a lot not only to the gardeners, but also Neville residents, employees, and guests. If Maher deteriorates further, it will leave a negative impression of Cambridge on visitors.
- Ellen Kramer (Malcolm Rd): She is a gardener at Maher Community Garden. Many treasure the garden and the opportunities it provides for community connection. However, the fence is unsafe and unsightly and does not reflect well on the City's reputation. She is supporting funding for the garden.
- Johanna Kasubowski: She is a gardener at Maher Community Garden, which is a stunning garden within the larger Fresh Pond Reservation. Unfortunately, it is in an unsafe and unsightly state of repair. She supports funding to bring the garden to a state the city can be proud of.
- Victoria Rafalski: She and her husband are gardeners at Maher Community Garden. She wrote that the fence is unsafe and unsightly and many of its posts are rotten, and encourages funding to fix it.
- Elizabeth Peters: She is a gardener at Maher Community Garden. Many treasure the garden and the opportunities it provides for sitting in green space. However, the fence is unsafe and unsightly and does not reflect well on the City's reputation. She is supporting funding for the garden.
- Anne Snyder: She is a co-coordinator at Maher Community Garden, and she wrote in support of rehabilitating the garden. The current facility is a challenge for visitors that use walkers or wheelchairs, which is particularly important because of the impact on neighbors at Neville Place. The fence is past its normal lifespan and the beds have rotting and splintered boards.
- Rowan Murphy (Gurney St): She and her husband have a plot at Maher Community Garden, and her in-laws live at Neville Place. Her mother-in-law is in the early stages of Alzheimer's, and bringing her to the garden brings her great joy even as other activities she can participate in are becoming limited. However, it is a challenge to maneuver the wheelchair through the gate and into the garden. She supports addressing this accessibility issue.
- Irene Sarkisian (Concord Ave): She is a 96-year-old resident at Neville Place who has a plot at Maher Community Garden. She wanted to highlight the sense of serenity and community she gets from the garden. However, she sometimes struggles to operate the gate. She supports funding to improve the garden's accessibility.

- Kathy Watkins: She is a former volunteer coordinator of Maher Community Garden. She is particularly concerned about rats, bunnies, and other wildlife that get into the garden. Because the gates do not close properly, it is impossible to keep them out. She is requesting funding to replace the decayed, dangerous fence.
- Mary Trainor: She has a plot at the Maher Community Garden and wanted to support that proposal. The garden is a treasure.
- Christine McKay: She wrote that she visits the Maher Community Garden daily and that it brings cheer to families bringing loved ones from Neville Place. She is encouraging making the replacement of the fence a priority.
- Olivia Rosario: She is a new gardener at Maher Community Garden. She finds opening the gate very cumbersome and is concerned about animals making holes in it. She supports rehabbing the fence.
- Alice Jarrard (Notre Dame Ave): She wrote in support of funding for the Maher Community Garden, a wonderful resource for Cambridge growers who otherwise would have no access to soil, sun, and the wonder of growing plants. She noted that there have been attempts to fund this through Participatory Budgeting that failed, so she is hoping CPA will be able to.
- Michael Randall: He wrote in support of funding for the Maher Community Garden. He wrote that at a time when distrust of government is on the rise, places like Maher Garden offer proof of how programs benefit the lives of ordinary people.
- Sue Putnam: She was the garden coordinator at Maher Community Garden from 2015-2021 and supports funding for the fence. There are problems with animals digging under the fence and eating gardeners' plants.
- Gargaret Gadon: She is a gardener at Maher Community Garden and is supporting the funding request. When she has tried to grow vegetables, she has lost many of her crops.
- Tamene Tedla: He is a gardener at Maher Community Garden and uses the space with children with special needs. He is supporting the request for improvements to the garden.
- Julia Danielson: She is the Director of Programming at Neville Place. She noted that Maher Community Garden offers valuable sensory engagement to their residents and often evokes cherished memories. She supports CPA funding for the garden.
- Veronica Williams: She is the Life Enrichment Director and Neville Center, and she supports funding for Maher Community Garden. She wrote that their residents, staff, and visitors all benefit greatly from the garden.
- Michael Campbell: He is a regular at the Lynch Family Skatepark, which he called an important cultural institution where creativity, movement, and community intersect. The skatepark could be improved with more permanent seating, public restrooms, water fountains, and better lighting. He supports the request for additional funding for this iconic and inclusive space.

Daniel stated that he would send copies of written public comment to the committee after the meeting so members can read them in full.

### **Overview of Public Proposals**

DL shared preliminary information about LOI's received from outside organizations, noting that proposals are subject to change:

#### **Affordable Housing/Open Space:**

- Community Renewal & Wellness Hub (STEP Nation Inc): This proposal relates to a drop-in center to allow access to hygiene needs, computers, and programming related to wellness and trauma-informed care. This proposal is not eligible for CPA affordable housing or open space funding because it is requesting funding to operate programming rather than infrastructure meeting CPA criteria.

#### **Historic Preservation**

- The Mass Ave Baptist Church (146 Hampshire St.) submitted an LOI related to roof repairs. The request is being assessed through the Historical Commission's CPA-funded Institutional Grant Program.
- The Multicultural Arts Center on Thorndike St in East Cambridge submitted a request related to accessibility updates. The estimated request will be \$100,000.
- The Cambridge Economic Opportunity Council (11 Inman St) inquired about eligibility for CPA funding. After meeting with Charlie Sullivan, they indicated plans to submit a request in next year's cycle once they're further along in the design process.
- CASPAR (11 Russell St) made an inquiry after the deadline. They were referred to the Historical Commission's Institutional Preservation Grant program.
- A resident inquired about whether the Gift of the Wind sculpture outside the Porter Square MBTA station would be eligible. In theory, it might be eligible if the Historical Commission determined it was historically significant. However, the MBTA would have to agree to the historic preservation restrictions that would come with CPA funding, which seems unlikely. Charlie Sullivan also noted that the MBTA would need to submit a request before in order for it to be considered.

#### **Open Space**

- Native Species and Tree Care at Hell's Half Acre (Charles River Conservancy): Hell's Half Acre is a marshland along the Charles River in West Cambridge next to the cemetery. This proposal is the continuation of work that CRC has done on behalf of DCR at this site to remove harmful invasive species, and will plant native species. The estimated request will be \$30,000-\$40,000.
- Lynch Family Skate Park (Charles River Conservancy): This proposal would continue work on the public art at the Lynch Family skate park project, expanding it to different surfaces and adding other amenities to the park. The estimated request will be about \$40,000.
- Riverside Press Park Community Garden (Green Cambridge): This project would rebuild the community garden at Riverside Press Park in Cambridgeport. The MWRA has an

easement related to underground infrastructure at that location, and at some point they will need to remove the garden to repair or replace their infrastructure (possibly with little notice in an emergency). DL requested an opinion from the City Solicitor on whether the easement is compatible with the conservation restrictions. While that is pending, the proposal is on hold; it may be resubmitted next year if the Solicitor's office finds that there isn't a conflict.

- Alewife Reservation Trails and Signage (Green Cambridge): This proposal is for design work for trails and signage in the Alewife Reservation. It is anticipated that there will be future requests to pay for the actual construction. The request will be about \$70,000.
- The Salvation Army Playground (402 Mass Ave): The Salvation Army's playground is in the middle of their parcel, in between the building and a parking lot. Staff recommended that they consult with their attorney about the conservation restriction that is necessary for CPA funding. The proposal was withdrawn.

### **Overview of City Proposals**

Chris Cotter provided an overview of the need for affordable housing in Cambridge. He noted that CPA funds are appropriated to the Affordable Housing Trust, which continues to be very busy. There are currently 12 projects to create affordable units moving forward across the city and additional commitments to preserve and support other existing affordable housing. He noted that Neville Place has received funding for capital improvements. Upcoming developments that will need additional construction funding include an HRI building on Wendell, 2072 Mass Ave, and Just-A-Start projects on Broadway and Brookline. The Housing Authority is also undertaking the community process related to replacing the housing at Corcoran Park. He also noted that the Homebridge program had 19 buyers close with funding, which is the busiest year yet through that program. The program receives some CPA funding.

Charlie Sullivan listed city proposals for Historic Preservation Funding:

- Four Proposals related to digital preservation (from the Arts Council, City Clerk, and 22-Cityview)
- City Hall projects related to the lobby and Council Chamber
- Additional funding to complete the Fresh Pond Golf Course Clubhouse
- Barn at the Stony Brook Reservoir
- Historic Markers Coordinator to complete previously-funded CPA projects
- Replacement of the carriages for the cannons located on Cambridge Common
- Replacement of the Washington Elm marker at the location where George Washington took command of the Continental Army in 1775

Gary Chan listed proposals from the Open Space Committee in priority order:

- Danehy Park improvements first phase
- Maher Community Garden Rehabilitation
- Fresh Pond Golf Course environmental work
- Rafferty Park improvements
- Wilder-Lee Park playground improvements

## **Committee Discussion**

TJ opened the floor for committee discussion.

Ellen Schacter asked if there were estimated amounts for the city projects. DL explained that final amounts are still being determined, but that the Historic Preservation projects would likely be below the 10% minimum funding threshold and Open Space would likely be slightly above the 10%, but within the amount in the open space reserve. Final numbers will be available at the August 20 meeting.

Chandra Harrington asked whether outside organizations indicated how they learned of the process. DL responded that he did not ask, but that it is apparent because of the timing that organizations were responding to outreach.

Kevin Foster asked whether the open space project list had already been culled and whether there were enough projects to potentially require 15% or 20% of funding. Gary Chan responded that while there are more projects in the pipeline for future funding consideration, the listed projects reflect the current priorities.

David Lyons stated that he thought the process worked to get a range of submissions. He then asked whether \$1 million per unit is an accurate description of the cost of building affordable housing in Cambridge and why. Chris Cotter responded that building is very expensive. He explained that the cost of land, increased construction costs, and high interest rates are all contributing factors. He noted that the contributions of the Affordable Housing Trust are only \$200,000-\$300,000 per unit and have been relatively steady as projects receive additional funding from other sources.

Ellen Schacter noted the tension between city policies, such as environmental requirements, and impact on costs. She encouraged the city to continue to look into what it can do to help control costs, such as continuing work to streamline the permitting process, in order to get the most out of the money spent. She also thought it would be helpful to learn more about what the Housing Trust is doing with CPA funds.

Chandra Harrington asked whether new technologies like 3D printing or tiny houses could be deployed. Chris Cotter responded that Cambridge is participating in a regional initiative to generate factory-built housing. So far it has not had an impact, but as part of a larger initiative it might generate lower costs.

Mary Flynn noted that the Planning Board has also been discussing the high construction costs and trying to understand the issue. She said the board supports spending money as effectively as possible.

Elaine DeRosa noted that she is a member of both the Affordable Housing Trust and the Cambridge Housing Authority boards. She noted that the Housing Authority needs to comply with the Davis-Bacon Act, requiring higher wages on projects. She observed that with 5,000 people on the Housing Authority waitlist, it is urgent to continue to build as much housing as possible, even if it is dense. She supported a combined meeting between the CPA Committee and the Affordable Housing Trust.

TJ stated that he can work with Housing Trust staff to try to schedule an additional meeting outside of the FY26 process.

Kevin Foster asked whether CPA is committing to increased density in neighborhoods such as Cambridgeport with residents that may not want the higher density. Chris Cotter responded that any increased density is a function of changes to zoning rather than the CPA; there may be some CPA-funded projects increasing density, but they are doing so within the underlying zoning. The project request book will include a map with CPA-funded projects so committee members will be able to see the distribution across the city.

Elaine DeRosa acknowledged the work Daniel Liss did coordinating outreach for the CPA process.

### **Closing**

TJ announced that the next meeting will be 8/20/25 and reminded committee members to provide their availability for the September meeting.

The meeting was adjourned by a vote of 8-0-1.