



# TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Community Preservation Committee

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## Community Preservation Committee

April 6, 2023 Minutes

Approved 9.7.23

**Members Present:** John Campbell, Chair; Todd Helwig, Peter Martin, Andy Dowd, Millie Milton, Andy Clark, Sean Durkin, Jeff Leland

**Members Absent:** Leslie Harrison

**Others Present:** Laurie Connors, Town Planner; Norm Corbin

The meeting opened promptly at 7pm after an introduction by the Chair.

### Discussion of Presentation of FY2024 CPA Articles at Town Meeting

Article 30, White Cliffs Bond Payment (\$188,000)—Mr. Campbell shared slides of what he intended to present at Town Meeting. The presentation began with information on what the CPA is and how it's funded; that the fund is over \$3 million in state matching since the first state matches were received; reminders of what the obligations are; what the estimated revenue and reserves are; and what the budget is per the Town Accountant.

Historical CPA fund allocations were shared next. The graph showed that almost half of the projects have been concentrated in the category of Open Space and Recreation but the percentage to Historical and Affordable Housing projects has been less. He noted that was a segue to the fact that the first CPC article will be the sixth White Cliffs bond payment. His goal is to emphasize that the purchase of White Cliffs has been affordable; the bond payment has averaged 25% of the yearly new Revenue and will be paid in the next four bond payments and will be affordable again with CPA revenue. He wondered if it was appropriate to point out that proposals have come into the White Cliffs Committee with the recommended proposal being from Metro West Collaborative. The proposal was in keeping with the CPA's goals that would be met if their proposal was adopted. It asked for the Town's portion of \$800,000, compared to approximately \$24M that they are committing, which Mr. Campbell felt was very affordable through the reserves. Mr. Campbell asked for feedback on where this committee stands on supporting this process of reviewing the proposal and of supporting White Cliffs in general.

Mr. Campbell continued. He said the best proposal received was a project to restore the mansion and create significant housing as a result. He wanted to re-emphasize the affordability of the original purchase. He has heard comments regarding the original warrant article in 2016, what the CPC's role is and did they fulfill it. He said he remembered that the main point that night was that the owner was going to demolish it, if it were to be saved, how could it be paid for. The CPC presented that it was affordable through the CPA through the process of bonding on future CPA revenue; they have met that commitment and it's not limiting the CPC's ability to use CPA for other projects.

Mr. Martin was thinking of this discussion considering the pie chart, of how the CPC can directly or indirectly increase the pie slice for affordable housing. He thought that would be worth doing, people may be saying that there is a real affordable housing problem in Town and what is being done about it? He felt this would provide that answer.

Mr. Campbell felt Mr. Martin was on target. What he didn't portray in the slide was how closely the proposal mirrored the Master Plan regarding improvements to the Downtown, and that it checked boxes that the Town and Town boards have supported.

Mr. Clark said that Mr. Campbell's opinion carries weight within the community and while they are just voting on the bond payment, the update is that there is finally tangible action on this significant, historical asset. He felt Mr. Campbell was expressing how the proposal meets the goals of the CPC, which is the funding mechanism, and that there are statutory obligations for this development to meet those goals as it was purchased with CPC money. The point is to keep the process alive without going into the details of the proposal.

Ms. Milton felt that is a risk, that people may focus on that portion and may be confused about what they are voting for.

Mr. Clark said he expected that although the proposal was not up for vote, people were seeking venues for venting, and some will use this opportunity to try to malign the project or misconstrue that this is an endorsement of the project beyond what they have already committed.

Mr. Corbin suggested using two slides instead; one slide is Article 30, the next slide is a basic update regarding the proposal being evaluated, and that it will be addressed at an upcoming Select Board meeting. Ms. Milton agreed with that idea.

Mr. Martin felt two slides will separate out the discussion advocating for Article 30 on behalf of the CPC. The second slide is simply a point of information and is not within the purview of the CPC to take a position on.

Mr. Helwig said he'd intended to specifically ask that this committee take a position tonight and submit a letter to the Select Board in favor of this proposal because \$2M has already been invested, this proposal is the only one received that has any chance of working, and the CPC contribution going forward would be about \$800,000. If the Town were to fund the project without this proposal, the only other option is to pay \$10M in restoration costs with no end user, which he didn't see happening. Otherwise, the building will be demolished. He said that Stuart Saginor from the CPA Coalition called him to say that this project was on his watch list as a project of particular concern to the Coalition because CPA money has been spent on the building with the possibility that it may not exist in three years.

Mr. Campbell added, not to mention the legal ramifications that the Town would have to do to get out of the obligation of keeping it restored once CPA funds have been used to do so. He said he preferred to emphasize how the proposal met the goals of the CPA and Master Plan.

Mr. Helwig said he didn't expect Mr. Campbell to make the pitch that he did, other stakeholders in the building have submitted letters of support for their own reasons and he would like the CPC to do that as well. Mr. Campbell's presentation at Town Meeting could include that letter, and then it's up to the Select Board.

Mr. Clark said that the Town Moderator could help limit the amount of debate that may occur if people decide to weigh in on the presentation; it is not the appropriate venue or time for that.

Mr. Campbell said the moderator allows presenters to make an introduction, he would include the preliminary slides and the pie chart which would explain how the connection works to further support the

White Cliffs restoration and the affordable housing portion. He felt it important to keep in context that continued support is needed in the form of voting for the bond.

Mr. Dowd agreed that it was appropriate to provide an update first and then when Mr. Campbell reads the motion for the article, the moderator can control conversation since it may not be relevant to the article being voted on, which should limit some debate. Mr. Dowd said the Housing Authority had met the night before and had submitted a letter of support for the project. The long waiting lists for housing are discussed at each meeting and this potential project would help meet some of that need.

Mr. Campbell said there would be another opportunity to reinforce that when the article comes up for the Affordable Housing Reserve.

Ms. Connors suggested providing more detail: 52 units of affordable housing would be added. Metro West's proposed investment is \$24M, which includes upgrading the White Cliffs mansion (including full restoration of the mansion's first floor for community events), and affordable housing development.

Mr. Martin suggested not going into detail about the proposal, as it could look like the CPC endorsed it when the point is to advocate for Article 30. Ms. Milton agreed.

Discussion followed regarding the CPC's support of the project. Mr. Campbell said although the CPC supported the purchase of the mansion, has continued to support that and that it's paid for with CPA funds, the CPC is not technically called to vote on the proposal, they would only be called on to fund the extra portion they're asking for, should it go to that step. Metro West was asked to present it first to the White Cliffs committee and ultimately to the Select Board.

Mr. Corbin explained the approach of the Historical District Commission, which was to ask the Select Board to continue to vet the process and not take an early vote to discontinue it. Ms. Connors read aloud a portion of that letter.

Mr. Martin suggested writing a letter saying this committee agrees with and endorses the approach taken by the NHDC as reflected in their letter. Mr. Helwig agreed. Mr. Campbell suggested restating that this committee is in favor of the process continuing. Ms. Connors will draft the letter and forward it to the committee for review.

Mr. Martin made a motion to approve sending a letter to be drafted by Ms. Connors with editorial comments with the purpose described here of supporting the same proposal that the commission has supported. Mr. Helwig seconded the motion. Roll call vote followed, eight members were in favor, none opposed.

Article 31, CPA Administrative Expenses Account (\$38,500)—Mr. Campbell said they always request the maximum 5% and reinforce what it is used for, if it isn't spent, it is returned to the reserve.

Article 32, Affordable Housing Reserve Fund (\$77,000)—Mr. Campbell said this committee agreed to support the application for the minimum, keeping a maximum in the unreserved account was in the best interest of flexibility.

Article 33, Dog Park—Mr. Campbell said that generally there is great community support. He asked Ms. Connors to clarify that although the committee agreed to \$347,500 from CPA funds, that doesn't finish the project. Ms. Connors said the Town also received a design grant from the Stanton Foundation for \$25,700. She said that typically when the Foundation approves a design grant, they also approve a

construction grant, however they require a commitment from the Town in order to submit the application. She planned to apply for a total of \$225,000 but the total cost is based on an estimate. They may have to either phase the project or change the design to meet the amount on hand. Mr. Campbell will update the slide with this new information. Ms. Connor thought it was important to mention that this has been a proposed project for 18 years, the advocates for this park have been very patient. She has heard that the Stanton Foundation is going to stop funding dog parks in 2025.

Mr. Dowd had a comment to add on behalf of the Housing Authority regarding the family housing that will abut the dog park. There was a request at one point for double fencing to provide an added barrier, they understood that may not be feasible regarding cost, so the Housing Authority made a verbal commitment to potentially put up some fencing on their own at the side of that property.

Mr. Durkin added that the DPW Director indicated that he'd be willing to help.

Mr. Dowd said he believed most of the concerns expressed by the Housing Authority had been addressed.

Article 34, ADA Accessible Trail (\$370,000)—Mr. Campbell asked Ms. Connors if the amount requested will finish the construction of the trail. Ms. Connors said that it depends on how the bids come in, a lot of that depends on the economy at the specific time of going out to bid. Mr. Campbell asked if there were plans to apply for any other grants for this project. Ms. Connors said that Mr. Charpentier applied for a \$10,000 grant to the AARP, but she didn't think he'd had a response yet. They decided not to apply for the Mass Trails grant this year because the timing wasn't right; the design was not advanced enough and when it's a single Town project, it's not as competitive as a multi-town project.

Article 35, Library Historic Marker (\$5,060)—Mr. Campbell didn't expect much objection to this article.

Members thanked Mr. Campbell for the work he'd done in preparing for the presentation.

### **Old/New Business**

Consideration of Minutes from February 2, 2023—Mr. Campbell said he'd sent some edits to staff. Mr. Helwig made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Mr. Martin seconded the motion. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.

Other Business—Mr. Durkin asked if, going forward, they can ask successful applicants to provide periodic updates to this committee. Mr. Campbell agreed they could do that at the beginning of their season.

Mr. Martin made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Helwig seconded. All were in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:12pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Cilley  
Recording Secretary