

TOWN OF SHREWSBURY
Richard D. Carney Municipal Office Building
100 Maple Avenue
Shrewsbury, Massachusetts 01545-5398

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

April 3, 2023

LOCATION: Select Board Meeting Room

This meeting is being recorded and can be viewed through Shrewsbury Media Connection.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jason Molina, Chair
Debra Mooney, Vice Chair
Gail Aslanian, Historical Commission Representative
Kathleen McSweeney, Housing Authority Representative
James LeMay, Parks & Cemetery Commission Representative
Purna Rao, Planning Board Representative
Rajesh Velagapudi, At Large Member

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Martha Gach, Conservation Commission Representative
Melanie Magee, Clerk

STAFF PRESENT:

Christopher McGoldrick, Town Planner

Chair Jason Molina determined that a quorum of committee members was present and called the meeting to order at 7 pm. The first order of business was to approve the minutes of the March 6, 2023 meeting which were approved, as amended, unanimously.

The next item on the agenda was a Public Meeting for consideration of the application for land acquisition for open space use. Town Manager Kevin Mizikar and Select Board member Michelle Conlin repeated their presentation to the last CPC meeting for the acquisition of land at 443 Lake Street, 457 Lake Street, and 104 Grove Street. This request is for a CPC

recommendation in favor of the contribution of \$435,000 from the CPC, which would cover about 50% the purchase, the remainder to come from ARPA funds that the town has set aside for open space purchases. He spoke about the history of the property and its relation to nearby town properties. Michelle Conlin expanded on the details and how this would make possible connected trails from Route 140, through Camp Wunnegan and via various paths to areas to the north and west of Lake Street Park. Mr. Mizikar noted that this purchase would be in keeping with previous plans (Master Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan, Strategic Plan). The land purchased would have a conservation restriction held by the Greater Worcester Land Trust. The sum requested covers 50% of the sale price of the land plus an additional amount of \$15,000 for closing costs and necessary incidental expenses.

Jason Molina asked if there had been any further discussion on the removal of various items on the property, and whether the property would be surveyed. Mr. Mizikar said that those things would be taken care of.

Purna asked if, by using ARPA funds there was a requirement for any other matching funds. Mr. Mizikar said that the town had set aside \$1.5 million of the ARPA funds for open space, so there were no additional restrictions.

The committee then opened up the public discussion of the issue. Tony Bonaventura asked why the Select Board is asking for half the funds to come from the CPC when they have enough money to fund the total through ARPA. Mr. Mizikar said that the idea was to spread the funding burden over the two funding sources. Jason added that having CPC involved insured that there would be a conservation restriction. Mr. Bonaventura asked further questions about any other restrictions such as wetland setbacks that might protect the land. He suggested that the properties might be protected by those setbacks alone. Mr. Mizikar noted that the land had been subdivided by the owner and was okayed for at least three houses. Mr. Bonaventura suggested that instead of trails it might be more cost effective to install a sidewalk on Grove Street. Jason said that the business before the committee only involved the purchase of the land for open space, and any other uses were outside the purview of the CPC. Mr. Bonaventura said he was opposed to the expenditure of the sum of money for this land, and said that the amount of time allotted to the discussion was too limited.

Maurice DePalo of the Select Board noted that land in Shrewsbury is more expensive than people may realize, and the professional appraisal undertaken by the town represented it as a fair value. He also noted that while the purchase might seem rushed, talks with the landowner had begun last fall, and time was expended getting all parties to review the appraisal. He said that the landowner offered to wait until the May Town Meeting. He also said that there was no doubt that the land was buildable, having been surveyed and wetlands flagged. Mr. Bonaventura then

commented that if landowners wanted to have their property preserved as open space, they should be open to accepting a lower price for their property, as the preservation should have value for them. There could also be tax benefits to selling at a lower price. Mr. DePalo noted that he raised that issue with the owner but the seller was not interested. This public discussion of the issue was then closed, and the committee went on to the vote to recommend. The motion was made to approve the application for the expenditure of \$435,000 from the reserve account and recommend the approval of Article 44 at Town Meeting. The vote was 7-0 in favor.

Next, Jason presented a history of the CPA and its function, as a review to lead into a discussion of any new CPC priorities that members of the public might want to suggest. He also mentioned the more recent history of the CPC and the projects the committee has recommended to be passed at Town Meeting. He noted that the committee is considering altering its work timeline to make its functioning more flexible. At this point there was a motion to open the public hearing, which passed unanimously.

Kathleen Spangler, local real estate professional, had a question about what takes precedence, the need for low-income housing, or the zoning, which frequently requires large lot sizes. The Town Planner, Chris McGoldrick, mentioned that Chapter 40B was one option. He also said that the Planning department frequently proposes zoning changes and that could be one avenue if a small affordable housing project was envisioned.

Rachel Sharifipour, president of the Beal PTO, spoke about using CPC funds to improve playgrounds, as the PTOs have many other worthwhile uses for their funds. Jason noted that the current round of CPC proposals includes a town-wide playground assessment, which is intended to inform the work necessary to upgrade these facilities. It is entirely possible that the CPC will be called upon for some of the funding. Debra said that this cannot take effect until it is voted on at the May Town Meeting and that it was important to remind all town meeting members about it.

Mr. DePalo spoke about how CPA money could be used for the extension and improvement of Shrewsbury trails. He mentioned that he was in discussions with the New England Power Company for the permission to build trails along the power lines that cross Shrewsbury from south to north. This could lead to long trails that could run from Grafton to Boylston, and have other useful offshoots and connections. Having access to CPA funds could greatly help in developing these.

He also said that the Select Board is working on a policy to acquire open space. In an effort to advance this goal, he had researched all the undeveloped privately owned property in town that might be appropriate for this use. He said that this is a necessary step in developing goals for

open space acquisition. These parcels are not necessarily large; there may be small parcels that might be useful additions to our protected lands.

Jason added that the CPC looks forward to working with the town on anything like this. He said in addition to open space, the committee has interests in locations for historic preservation and community housing, and there is a need for inventory in all these cases. He noted a proposal for using the old trolley line right-of-way (the Boston-Worcester Air Line Trail). Kathy Spangler talked about trails that need to be identified and can create a vision for uses for everyone.

Robert Sallese spoke about his interest in the area around Jordan Pond. He was interested in a path that would completely encompass the whole pond. The west side of the pond is currently well maintained and well used. Chris McGoldrick described a grant that has become available for design work for a multi-use trail on the east side of the pond. Additionally, DCR is looking at two fishing piers that would be built that would come off of the existing trail. He said that the funds for building the trail will be requested from Mass Trails, but if additional funds were needed CPC funds may be requested.

Jason asked if anyone had any ideas about Lake Quinsigamond, and mentioned a historic asset that is underwater in the lake. He noted that CPC money can be used for items outside of Shrewsbury if that fulfilled the requirements of the CPA law. There was then some general discussion about how CPC funds are divided into categories and how they might be used to serve the most people.

Stephanie Gauguet spoke of her knowledge as a medical professional in the mental health benefits of the wooded landscape, not only in parks but in every neighborhood. She said that she regretted seeing so many trees cut down for construction and urged that tree density be considered a public benefit for mental and physical health.

Kathy Spangler asked how old does a house have to be to be considered historical. Gail Aslanian replied that age was only one factor; if there was a famous occupant, or if the building had a specific use that would be considered.

Carol Baker spoke about research she has done about the possibility of a tunnel that might have been part of the Underground Railroad. There is little solid evidence for it and she would like CPC funding for further investigation. She also mentioned some of the crypts in Mountain View Cemetery that have aroused her curiosity and could benefit from investigation. Jason and Debra suggested alternate sources of funding. Comments for additional town needs or projects can still be accepted on line before our next meeting

The meeting was then closed to public comment.

The committee then considered next steps.

The committee will be collecting and evaluating the responses both from the public meeting and online and will produce a 'heat map' that will weigh responses as to how many people supported the same idea. These ideas will be used to see if our CPC Plan needs to be revised for the coming year.

Jason also said that we have reached out to other town committees and asked for inputs into the Plan. Arrangements were considered about ways to gather opinions from these committees, as well as other town organizations. There was information from Jim about sports organizations that fundraise for their own projects. Chris noted that sports events might be useful for asking participants to fill out questionnaires. Jason stressed that personal connections are often the most effective.

Gail suggested that the town might be able to help people find sources of project funding. Jim said that they should probably start with their town co-sponsor on any particular project. Purna mentioned that a small town in western Massachusetts hired a grant writer who brought in funds that more than equaled his salary. He also cited Mass One Stop, as a source for grant money and related information. The committee agreed to continue the discussion on providing information to fund-seekers on possible sources of grant money available.

Jason and Gail will reach out to the Library Board of Trustees, the Select Board, and possibly the Lake Quinsigamond Commission and Council on Aging.

Jason wanted to discuss the possibility of changing our eligibility application, the impact of special town meeting becoming a regular occurrence, and how to more smoothly accommodate off-cycle funding requests. Due to the lateness of the hour, it was decided to have an extra meeting to do justice to these topics. Tuesday, April 25,(6 pm, Conference Room A) was chosen for the extra meeting. The April 25 meeting will be devoted to the application process and any changes to the application form. Following meetings will be on May 1, June 5, and July 17 in the Select Board Meeting Room.

The committee then voted to adjourn.