

Project Name: Newton Pre-1820 Architectural Heritage and Archaeology Project

Submitted by: Mike Kruse: Director Planning and Development Dept.
Brian Lever: Senior Preservation Planner

CPA Category(ies): Historic Preservation

Location: Newton

Cost: From CPA funds: \$37,000 for Phase I (total = \$57,000)

Description: Conduct a citywide systematic survey to identify, map, and evaluate historic resources from the Federal period (ending approximately 1820) and earlier.

To be accomplished in two phases. CPA funds are being sought for Phase I.

This phase involves an archaeological survey identifying areas of archaeological sensitivity, including existing sites, and a ground penetrating radar survey of the East Parish Burying Ground to assess the presence of remains. There are presently 29 documented archaeological sites in Newton with possibly 120 others. Phase I would be done by a consultant with assistance from city staff.

The final product would be a report filed with the Planning Dept. for use in project review and for the proactive preservation of such sites.

Comments/Questions: This is both a worthwhile and an inexpensive endeavor that is likely to offer considerable benefit to the work of the Historical Commission. We suggest that the final survey be distributed to that commission as well as to other bodies that deal with property and development, such as Land Use and Planning, to maximize the opportunity for it to be used rather than simply archived.

Recommendation: Support.

Project Name: 192 Lexington St.

Submitted by: SEB (STOCKARD ENGLER BRIGHAM LLC, Bob Engler)

CPA Category(ies): Community Housing

Location: 192 Lexington St., Ward 4

Cost: \$4 million total
\$1,542,859 CPA
\$742,866 Newton HOME funds
\$2,045,100 construction loan

Description:

Construct and sell 10 permanently affordable 3-bedroom homes, incorporating sustainable design and energy conservation features, one at 50% AMI; two at 70% AMI; and seven are at 95% AMI (Area Median Income for the Greater Boston area in 2006=\$64,000.)

Comments/Questions:

Our readers found this proposal intriguing. For Newton, it is a very bold and ambitious idea. The proposal seems reasonable and straightforward. It is easy to follow, and well-organized.

Our recommendations are based on our understanding that there will be restrictions in perpetuity maintaining the units as affordable.

In light of recent housing development costs, we are concerned that the allotment for construction may be less than what it takes to build quality housing in Newton, especially if it is to meet EnergyStar and/or LEED benchmarks.

We would like to see a durability plan and a commitment to clear performance objectives, like EnergyStar.

This project may need more funds to meet high-performance and durability standards, or if the site preparation costs increase due to unexpected conditions found below the surface. We are pleased to see the developer is using the Green Roundtable as consultants. The developer will need to understand the hard costs of doing EnergyStar or LEED more thoroughly.

Site Concerns: Is the site a bog? Old maps show the site either adjacent to or on top of Scribner's Bog (1870 map, revised in 1901); on a swampy area with lagoons (1892, "Areas Requiring Drainage"; and on swamp known locally as "Flowed Meadow" (1946 US Geological Survey topographical map). In addition, we note that the former dump is nearby, raising the additional question of whether the site is on landfill. Last, we would like to know what is included in the condo fee.

Recommendation: Support.

Project Name: Lower Falls Rail-to-Trail Charles River Bridge Conversion

Submitted by: George Kirby, Newton Bicycle/Pedestrian Task Force Chair
Beth Schroeder, Newton Conservators President and project manager
Kevin Hollenbeck, DCR West District Urban Park Manager

CPA Category(ies): Historic Preservation and Recreation

Location: Connecting Newton & Wellesley Lower Falls between Concord and Washington Streets – Newton Ward 4

Cost: total cost: \$400,000. Requested CPA: \$100,000.

Description: Convert an unimproved former rail bridge over the Charles River and its approaches into a pedestrian-friendly trail connecting Newton Lower Falls to Wellesley trails as part of the eventual creation of a pedestrian corridor from Wellesley to the Riverside train station.

Comments/Questions:

The plan is well presented and fits CPA requirements as well as the Comprehensive Plan. It leverages outside funds and builds on existing resources. For instance, \$12,000 for the design study will come from the Wellesley Natural Resources Commission and Newton Conservators, matched by \$24,000 from DCR.

Ultimately, the construction will cost a total of \$400,000; this is the application for \$100,000 from Newton's CPA. An additional \$100,000 is to be requested from the Wellesley CPA and \$200,000 will be requested from the DCR. When completed, the entire project to extend a pleasant, walkable trail link from Lower Falls to Riverside will cost \$1.2 million, of which Newton CPA will be asked for \$600,000.

Our readers wondered whether the bridge is really "historic". They also thought the proposal should mention that the Wellesley Natural Resources Commission has been working on this connection with DCR for several years and that the benefit for Newtonians lies in direct pedestrian access to Wellesley's extensive walking trails. It also does not discuss whether businesses, particularly the developer of the Grossman properties, might contribute to the costs; perhaps some firm commitments should be sought from them so the Newton CPA contribution can be smaller than \$100,000. Finally, the proposal would benefit from more letters to demonstrate community support given the unfortunate possibility of local opposition to the Riverside extension.

Recommendation: Support.

This is a great idea. The League has long supported developing our linear parks for recreation and to connect open space. We enthusiastically support this proposal, but would like to see the proponents explore private funding.

Project Name: Newton History Museum Exterior Preservation

Submitted by: Newton History Museum/Jackson Homestead & City Public Buildings Dept.

CPA Category(ies): Historic Preservation

Location: 527 Washington St., Newton Corner 02458; Ward 1

Cost: \$155,144 total:
\$136,244 requested in CPA funds
\$18,900 in architects' fees to cover specific development and project oversight from building department (city budget)

Description: Restore exterior of the Jackson Homestead building including roof, storm windows, shutters, bulkhead doors, and chimney in time for its 200th anniversary in 2009.

The building is a designated National Historic site and was a stop on the Underground Railroad. Major physical needs of the exterior have not been addressed for about 10 years. The time line proposes approval for CPA funds by late February 2009, bids out and contractor selected in March-April 2009, and construction in April-July, 2009.

CSS Architects, Inc. of Wakefield has already been hired and has produced a 153-page Project Manual for the city Purchasing Dept to use. CSS Architects are described as "on-call architects with experience with historic buildings." CSS will continue to have responsibility for this project, managing project meetings and insuring high standards in its implementation.

The application's cover letter states that funding for this project will flow through the Public Buildings Dept, with input from the Newton History Museum. The designated Project Mgr. is Nick Parnell, Public Buildings Commissioner.

Comments/Questions: Overall, we are impressed with the thoroughness of this proposal. We are a little less impressed with its fit with CPC goals. While the property is undoubtedly historic and repairs are undoubtedly needed, painting may not be quite the "restoration" envisioned by the Act.

Construction Plans: The specification included appears nearly complete and ready for bidding. The construction schedule is ambitious, but if the committee and Aldermen can expedite approval, we think it's do-able.

The specification appears to be boiler-plate. Therefore, it deserves one more careful review before it is ready to bid (i.e. see p. 62, 1.05 paragraph is incomplete; p 70, 1.21 B: we are not in the town of Rockport!)

Is it possible for our Building Commissioner to give this project the attention it will need, given that he is also overseeing the complex, multi-million dollar building of Newton North High school and the renovation of several fire stations? If he does remain project manager, it will be important that CSS Architects maintain close contact with the contractor to insure that work complies with their Project Manual.

How will the unique, valuable records housed in the Jackson Homestead be protected

from damage during the construction? (There is no way to replace them if there should be a fire or water due to rain getting into the building where they are housed.)

Durability: If the Museum blew in high density cellulose insulation into the shell of the house, it would need repainting less often. Such an investment would also make the building more comfortable and would lower its energy bills.

CPC Plan: Community support is strong and well-documented.

The Jackson Homestead is an historic museum, and the authenticity of its restoration is critical. We note that artificial materials are being considered for the roof and several other areas (aluminum downspouts, plastic trim). Do these conform to Department of Interior standards? If so, we recommend the museum consider using GAF “slateline” shingle, which is a very good-looking product without the price tag of either slate or its more recent substitutes.

We do question the portions of this proposal that look like routine maintenance, although we know that CPA can be used to fund such items. Should the City be required to schedule and pay for regular repainting of its only house museum?

Recommendation: Support.

Project Name: Warren House Apartments

Submitted by: Newton Community Development Foundation (NCDF)
CPA Category(ies): Community Housing, Historic Preservation
Location: 1600 Washington St., Ward 4
Cost: \$1,247,423 total
\$1,080,000 from CPA
\$67,423 from the city's Inclusionary Zoning fund (the total amount)
\$100,000 from Warren House reserves

Description: Preserve the historic 1927 (former) school, containing 59 units of mixed income housing (21 affordable) by repairing, restoring and/or replacing the original slate roof and flashings, above roof-line masonry, cast stone and connections which have developed leaks that threaten the building's integrity.

Comments/Questions:

History: This applicant returns seeking funds to preserve this privately-held historic building having more fully investigated many of the issues raised in the last review. There is now a comprehensive, test-based assessment of the total building envelope and an understanding of the cost of repairing and restoring the exterior walls and roof on a larger, more sustainable and cost-efficient scale.

Warren House was converted to housing 17 years ago, but has undergone and still requires extensive repair, particularly of the building exterior, since that time. This suggests insufficient work/investment at the time of the conversion. The cost and scope of the required work have increased over time.

In the last application, we asked whether the 21 units' affordability, scheduled to expire in 2016, could be guaranteed in perpetuity. Has this been done? Without that guarantee, we believe this project does not qualify as Community Housing.

Current Application: This application could be strengthened with an explicit narrative summary as well as a quantitative schedule of what exactly will be funded and how the cost estimates were developed. The application currently has three reports from different years covering different sections of the building and is difficult to parse. Transparency and clarity are critical when requesting public funds.

The reports detail the need for extensive re-pointing of the exterior brick facade, but the CPA application is only for the roof and structures above it. Several other specified capital needs are not being addressed via the current funding request. We agree that the roof is the most urgent need at this time. Including the other reports is confusing (they could be placed in appendices) and raises numerous questions regarding the on-going financial needs of the building.

Durability: Apparently, the overall objective here is to make the building watertight, which is commendable. However, there seems to be more than \$4 million worth of work required. We recommend that in future, the whole building envelope be tested for its air

tightness also.

We agree that the chiller and heating duct work should be replaced, as this will save energy costs and make the building more comfortable, and recommend that the applicant consider financing such work by using an ESCO (Energy Services Company), as the City is now doing for its municipal buildings.

The slate roof replacement appears to cost only marginally more than roof repair, and we agree that replacement makes sense. Repairs have been made on the low-sloping roofs, as was noted above, but are failing. Were there any guarantees on this work that could be used to finance it?

Financial Status: After studying as much of the NCDF and Warren House financial information as we could obtain, our readers were quite concerned with the fiscal health of this complex. In short, we believe that Warren House may be financially unsustainable. This means that NCDF will need additional funds to make further essential repairs.

We are concerned about how the Warren House will repay its liabilities. According to the Notes to the 2007 Audited Financial Statements, NCDF owes more than \$4.6 million on its original mortgage with MassHousing (originally \$6 million+) at 6.9%. It also owes the Department of Housing and Community Development \$500,000 in principal and \$375,000 in interest. There also is a ground lease with the City of Newton for which Warren House is accruing a liability of \$75,000 annually. Currently, the ground lease has a balance of more than \$1.98 million including interest. Neither the ground lease nor the DHCD loan is being serviced at this time. A total of approximately \$7.5 million owed on a property assessed at just over \$6 million is highly troubling. As the term of the ground lease approaches its end, the property becomes less attractive for future buyers. In addition, the city itself needs the revenues from this property.

It appears that NCDF has tried unsuccessfully to refinance its loan with MassHousing. The NCDF provided a Capital Needs Assessment indicating an opening balance of \$41,000 in Warren House reserves. We wonder where the \$100,000 in reserves for the roof will come from and would like NCDF to explain this.

Compatibility with CPC Plan and City Plans

This project has some elements that could be included under Historic Preservation. We agree with the city Legal department that the CPC cannot fund this as Community Housing unless there is some binding arrangement made to secure the expiring use apartments for affordability at least until the property reverts to the city in 2056. There are other elements that the CPC will need to be careful it does not fund, as they are clearly not historic.

Newton's Comprehensive Plan supports maintaining and expanding affordable housing and retaining Newton's sense of place. Both are addressed here.

Questions: Our investigations into and beyond the application left many unanswered issues, including:

- The application mentions the Historic Register. Has this property been confirmed

historic? We saw no evidence of the certificate in the proposal.

- Do the recommended repairs meet Department of Interior guidelines for Historic Preservation—particularly: have they been cleared with the local historic commission?
- If the Newton History Museum/Jackson Homestead can use alternatives to slate in its roof, can Warren House? Would it be less expensive and equally durable? We have learned that it is possible to get a lifetime warranty on certain asphalt shingles made to resemble slate, for example.
- Are there any guarantees on previous roof repair work (which is now failing) that can be brought to bear and lower the overall cost of the roof repairs?
- Are the wooden decks needed? Do they pose a liability issue if people/children climb over balustrades and onto the roof? Could such use damage the roof?
- Can the deteriorated wood arch windows be better protected and insulated, perhaps with plexi-storms?

Recommendations:

We agree that fixing and replacing the roof elements is essential to preserving the structure as well as controlling operating and maintenance costs. The cost of the repair looks about right for the extent of work required. Absent an extension of the ground lease, this building reverts to the city in 2056, and critical repairs like those being proposed could ensure the future of this historic structure, and as well serves to protect the housing units within.

The financial structure of Warren House seems unsustainable. Because the roof repair is critical to the building, we support funding at this time. However without the CPC and the City requiring NCDF to develop a long-term funding plan for the building we would not support any future funding. Currently, Warren House does not generate sufficient funds to maintain this building. It appears that NCDF now owes more than \$7 million on a structure assessed at \$6,214,100. From what we saw of the financial information, that situation is only getting worse as time goes on.

Besides refinancing the original, 6.9% mortgage, we suggest that NCDF consider in its planning:

- Explore the use of an ESCO to finance any energy- and water-saving improvements.
- Explore upgrading the market rent apartments in order to raise the rents.
- Look at rents for such tenants as the daycare, and whether they can be restructured to be more favorable to the development's bottom line.
- Explore possible reductions to the apparently large maintenance personnel fringe benefit line item.
- Explore the possibility of pre-paying its mortgage with other lenders.
- Explore restructuring of the ground lease to forgive current and upcoming

accruing liabilities and reset the 8% interest rate.

- Get guarantees on any repair work, and call them in if the repairs fail.
- Return to limited partners for additional funds and then return to Mass Housing for loan restructuring.