

# West Tisbury Community Preservation Committee

## Minutes of December 13, 2023 Meeting

Via Zoom Technology

Approved January 10, 2024

Call to Order: 5:30 PM

Committee Members Present at Call to Order: Cheryl Lowe, John Christensen, Bea Phear, John Rau, Jeffrey Dubard and Ernie Thomas

Staff Present at Call to Order: Maura Valley, Administrative Assistant

Members of the Public Present: Rebekah Thompson and Molly Doyle representing the Field Fund; Tyrene Johnson representing the MV Garden Club; Kristin Leutz and Lisa Belcastro representing Harbor Homes; Nevette Previd representing the Preservation Trust; Greg Orcutt representing Habitat for Humanity

Town Officials Present: Kathy Logue, Town Treasurer

Approval of Minutes of December 6, 2023 meeting: Jeffrey Dubard moved, Bea Phear seconded and all voted unanimously to approve the minutes as presented (Cheryl Lowe – yes, John Christensen – yes, Bea Phear – yes, John Rau – yes, Jeffrey Dubard – yes, Ernie Thomas – yes)

### PUBLIC HEARING FOR FUNDING INTERVIEWS:

5:30 PM      The Field Fund  
                  West Tisbury School playground resurfacing

Rebekah Thompson spoke on behalf of the Field Fund proposal. She was joined by Molly Doyle, Field Fund President.

Ms. Thompson began by providing background information on the need to resurface the playground as the Community Preservation Committee provided funding for the existing playground surface. She explained that the existing surface has not worked out the way the school had hoped. The surface is deteriorating and developing holes and pebbling that results in a slippery surface and tripping hazards. In addition to the deterioration, surface temperatures at times reach 150 to 170 degrees even in moderate temperatures with partly cloudy conditions.

Ms. Thompson reported that the playground is in close proximity to the school's well. Toxins in rubber and plastics are not uniformly regulated and drinking water contamination and physical exposure to these toxins is concerning.

According to a playground inspector hired for the project, rather than remove everything, they are able to excavate around the playground equipment and remove the existing material without removing the actual fixtures. Wood chips will be used to replace the rubber surface, although some rubber will need to be reinstalled to maintain ADA compliance. The use of wood chips is beneficial because it's a natural product that's easily replenished. Local contractors will be hired for the project, with wood chips being provided by John Keane and the installation of the surface completed by Oscar Hanson.

In response to questions from the Committee, Ms. Thompson explained that a stone base will be used under the woodchips to allow for adequate drainage and prevent rot. She also explained that, although the surface is still under warranty, the most that will be covered is repair of the existing surface. Since the inspector has noted that the surface is close to the end of its useful life, repair is not a solution at this point. She also responded that she believes the school will budget maintenance funds for the new playground surface and the Field Fund will provide support. Other playgrounds using this type of surface are located at the Chilmark Community Center, the new playground in Aquinnah, the Charter School and the Oak Bluffs School.

5:45 PM      MV Garden Club  
                  Old Mill Safety Improvements

Ty Johnson, current Vice-President of the Garden Club spoke on behalf of their proposal for safety improvements to the Old Mill building.

Ms. Johnson began by explaining that the Old Mill was a very old building on the historic registry which is open to the entire island. The building currently has limitations that they would like to improve to bring the property up to code and allow for easier access for the public. The existing staircase to the second floor has extremely high risers with narrow treads, making the staircase almost ladder like.

The Garden Club is requesting \$10,000 from each towns' CPC with a total project budget of \$80,000. The project entails rebuilding the interior stairs, installing dehumidifiers to alleviate mold and moisture in the basement level meeting area and adding ceiling fans to improve air flow.

6:00 PM      Harbor Homes MV  
                  Homelessness Program Funding

Kristin Leutz, Executive Director of Harbor Homes, and Lisa Belcastro, Director of Overnight Winter Shelter, were present on behalf of Harbor Home MV.

Ms. Leutz began by explaining that, although their plan for a permanent shelter on Hudson Avenue in Oak Bluffs has been withdrawn due to stiff resistance to the project, they would like to proceed with their CPC funding application to be used toward a down payment on another site. Ms. Leutz believes that the financials for a new site will be similar to those noted in their application and will require approximately \$400,000 for a down payment and upfront costs. At least one town so far has committed to future funding if they find the right site and they are asking for the same consideration from West Tisbury.

Ms. Leutz stated that, with the recognition that zoning is going to be a challenge wherever they propose the shelter, they're focusing on outreach work at this time. She noted the increased demand for their overnight shelter this year and that Lisa Belcastro could answer any questions the committee might have.

John Rau brought up the shortage of CPC funding this year and questioned the impact of the committee putting off funding until next year as they don't currently have a site and it will take a while to get the necessary approvals once they do find one. Ms. Leutz replied that the biggest risk is that they wouldn't have the necessary upfront funding to secure financing if they did find the right property.

Bea Phear then brought up the previous West Tisbury CPC funding award of \$80,000 for a women's shelter that hasn't been used yet and questioned whether a warrant article could be submitted to change that prior commitment to funding for a family shelter. Ms. Leutz responded that, although that funding was before her time with Harbor Homes, she believes it was for a congregate home for women. Jeffrey Dubard agreed with Ms. Phear's point but suggested that rather than transition to funding a family shelter they could expand the funding to cover either a family or women's shelter. Ms. Thompson agreed, stating that Harbor Homes currently owns a property on New York Avenue in Oak Bluffs that could be expanded with the use of those funds so opening up restrictions would be helpful. Cheryl Lowe noted that the CPC funding has a 5-year shelf-life and must be used in that time.

6:15 PM      MV Preservation Trust  
                  Grange Hall Foundation Repairs

Nevette Previd, Executive Director of the Preservation Trust, spoke on behalf of the MV Preservation Trust proposal to repair the Grange Hall foundation.

Ms. Previd presented a slide show with pictures of the current condition of the foundation as well as plans showing potential future expansion of the building. She went on to explain that last year the Preservation Trust had received CPC funding to replace the roof. During structural assessments of the building for the new roof project the structural engineer uncovered that the current trusses and supports are fine for the roof that's there but a new cedar roof will require more structural reinforcements. As the structural supports go all the way down to basement the basement and the structures underneath need to be reinforced.

There is currently about 8 inches of space under the building, which is not enough to install reinforcements. There is adequate space to allow for digging under it rather than raising the building. While digging under the building and installing a 3-foot crawl space would provide adequate support the Preservation Trust is proposing to install a full basement to make real usable space since they're already digging out and installing concrete. The back third of the building already has a basement which is currently used for storage. The proposed additional basement space would provide a total of up to 3,525 square feet of usable space in the basement.

The proposed renovation schedule would be to complete the foundation first then the new roof in 2024 then look to make additional energy efficiency upgrades in 2025 and 2026. The West Tisbury CPC has already provided \$235,000 funding for the new roof. The entire Grange Hall renovation project is estimated to be 3 million dollars.

After receiving clarification on the scope of the proposed foundation project, Ernie Thomas questioned whether the project would curtail the use of the building for a considerable amount of time. Ms. Previd confirmed that the property would definitely need to be taken offline for a period of time. There are a tremendous amount of approvals that will be required and it will be on the Preservation Trust to have everything in place and ready to go so they can hopefully do it in a couple of months.

John Christensen then commented that he feels that if they're going to have to dig under the building to install a crawl space they should go ahead and put in a full basement. He also noted that the energy committee is questioning whether solar panels will be installed.

Jefrey Dubard questioned whether the additional space provided by the basement will be used to accommodate the current uses or if they envisioning an expansion of use of the property. He further questioned whether the funding would be limited to restoration of the existing historic structure rather than expanding capacity if the application category is Historic Resources. He also questioned how much the cost would be reduced if they only installed the crawl space. Ms. Previd stated that they don't have a master plan for the use of the expanded space but suggested it could be used for municipal employees or operations. They could also consider leasing the space to a group or organization that fits within the acceptable use parameters. It is her understanding that the additional costs for a full basement vs. a crawl space would predominantly be for the additional labor which should not be a significant amount of money.

Bea Phear then spoke to the question of whether the funding could be used for expansion of the facility as opposed to strictly restoration work by stating that she believes the project is an acceptable use of the historic preservation money. The rehabilitation/restoration section of CPC guidelines allows for reconstruction or making extraordinary repairs to make assets functional for intended use, including improvements to comply with federal, state or local building or access codes or standards for rehabilitation of historic properties.

6:30 Habitat for Humanity  
Red Arrow Road Development

Greg Orcutt, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity, appeared on behalf of Habitat for Humanity to speak on their Red Arrow Road Development proposal.

Mr. Orcutt explained that they were working on the project, a 4-home development on Red Arrow Road in West Tisbury, in conjunction with South Mountain and Island Housing trust. Three of the homes will be identical and roughly 960 square feet with a full basement, 2 bedrooms and one bath. Those three homes will be for ownership and will remain part of the West Tisbury affordable housing stock in perpetuity. The fourth dwelling will be a larger rental unit. Only one of the smaller dwellings is a Habitat for Humanity home.

Mr. Orcutt stated that Habitat for Humanity Homes are built with volunteer labor and donated materials. Successful applicants for housing are required to contribute 200 hours of sweat equity. He went on to report that a recent Habitat for Humanity project in Oak Bluffs used repurposed materials from Island demo projects to provide all appliances, kitchen cabinets, interior and exterior doors and flooring. Dry

wall is done at cost by Howie Sashin. Bob Crane provides any necessary appliances at cost and Granite City supplies electrical components at or below cost.

Families are selected through an application process that includes background checks and access to all financial records. Eligible applicants must be employed on the Island for at least the past 2 years and income must be 60 – 80% of median income. If the homeowner decides to move on and sell the property, Habitat for Humanity has a right of first refusal and will repurchase the home to keep it affordable.

When questioned on the process if the successful applicant doesn't fulfill the requirements for ownership, Mr. Orcutt stated that they pre-qualify 3 families for each property so if the first choice falls through they can move on to the next approved applicant. All habitat homes are single family homes.

Ongoing Business for Discussion:

Kathy Logue, West Tisbury Treasurer joined the meeting to discuss affordable housing funding issues and the possibility of bonding as a means of funding the Island Housing Trust 401 State Road 55+ housing project. She explained that the 401 State Road project was the only CPC proposal she felt was eligible for borrowing. If the committee decides to proceed with bonding this project she would like to know as soon as possible so that she can have bond counsel review draft warrant language.

Ms. Logue went on to state that a decision needs to be made on what the warrant article language will look like. She added that the language could be based on the article used for Scotts Grove. Bond counsel will need a letter from an appropriate town official describing the affordable housing project in more detail, including a description of the housing to be constructed, expected ownership/management of the property, any agreements related to the sources and uses of funds for the project, including any grant or lease payments to be distributed by the town and any other parties or entities involved in the project. In other words, they would like to see the whole funding picture. It becomes more complicated if other State or Federal funds are involved because other requirements might arise. That's the level of clarity that would be needed in the next month in order to be ready before the warrant closes.

Jefrey Dubard stated that the Affordable Housing Committee has oversight of this project and most of the information Ms. Logue needs is readily available. Ms. Logue added the importance of knowing whether this is a West Tisbury project for West Tisbury residents or an Island wide project. She added that the borrowing authorization is just that, an authorization to borrow up to a certain amount, not a requirement to borrow that amount. For example, if town meeting votes to authorize borrowing one million dollars but the project comes in at \$750,000 you only need to borrow the \$750,000. Consideration also needs to be given to whether the borrowing will be excluded from Prop 2 ½ in which case it will also need a ballot vote

When questioned Ms. Logue stated that bond counsel is an attorney hired by the town to come to an independent opinion on the project. She also noted that, according to reports from the Town's fiscal advisor at Unibank, based on what's closed recently the long term 20 – 30-year bonding is still in the 3

to 4% range. If the CPC anticipates paying off \$100,000 per year through CPA revenues borrowing may not be required. The question then becomes whether the committee wants to tie up that money on an annual basis going forward.

The committee discussed bonding issues further, bringing up potential changes in interest rates and the need to fund the Howe's House renovation next year. It was the consensus of the group that current projects before the Committee should be prioritized and potentially funded at less than the amount requested before considering borrowing. Maura Valley will redistribute the CPC funding request spreadsheet and individual members will make edits indicating their suggested allocations to share with the group.

Due to the need to make decisions as soon as possible the committee decided to meet on January 10, 2024 to discuss final funding decisions. If decisions are made on that date the meeting on January 17<sup>th</sup> may not be necessary. Ms. Valley was asked to contact Habitat for Humanity to ask if, as a national organization, they had other funding sources to draw on. Cheryl Lowe raised the possibility of having to recuse herself from decisions on three of the projects due to family involvement. She will seek a determination from Jen Rand.

General Discussion: Cheryl Lowe brought up the Mill Pond Study project and questioned whether Ernie Thomas would like to be the liaison for that project at the previous liaison had been Angela Luckey. Mr. Thomas requested additional information on the project before he made a commitment. John Christensen reminded everyone to complete the governance survey if they have not done so already.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to discuss Bea Phear made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 PM, seconded by John Christensen and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Maura Valley  
Administrative Assistant