

MEETING MINUTES

Town of Acton of Acton Community Preservation Committee

January 3, 2008
Acton Memorial Library

Attending: Walter Foster, Andy Magee, Ken Sghia-Hughes, Susan Mitchell-Hardt, Corrina Roman-Kreuze, Nancy Tavernier, Ed Starzec, Jon Benson, Ron Schlegel, Tory Beyer, Kristin Alexander (Planning Department), Anne Forbes (HDC Observer) and Steve Noone (FinCom Observer).

Ken Sghia-Hughes called the meeting to order at 7:35PM.

Project application presentations were made on behalf of the Elm Street Playground, the Trail Through Time (Wheeler Farm) and the Conant Nature Trails Project.

Cathy Fochtman, the Town's Recreation Director, made the presentation for a new Elm Street playground facility. The new facility would replace the present playground which is outdated and in substantial disrepair. The application seeks \$75,000 in CPC funding for the project. The request to CPC would be augmented by \$25,000 in funds from the community, including \$15,000 from Pop Warner for the purchase of a new storage shed. Ms. Fochtman noted the Town would contribute approximately 164 man hours in work crews to install the new play ground.

In the opinion of Town Counsel the project application is a "close call" whether the project is eligible for funding under the CPA. It is left to the Committee to determine whether the proposal is "the rehabilitation and restoration of...land for recreational use" (which is not eligible for CPA funding as the underlying Elm Street land on which the project would be constructed was not acquired with CPA funds) or "the complete removal of the existing outdated and potentially unsafe structures and the creation of a brand new recreational facility" (which is eligible for CPA funding).

The new playground would replace the entirety of the existing facility with a 65 by 65 square foot playground with approximately 75% of the playground geared for toddlers and 25% for six to eleven year olds. On the basis of a responsive

online survey conducted by Ms. Karen Jarsky of the Recreation Commission, Ms. Fochtman reports there is considerable support for the project from the surrounding community. The new playground would add to the "unique area" the Elm Street recreation area has become with new basketball courts, updated tennis courts and lighted multi-use field (softball and Pop Warner practice field).

Linda McElroy made the presentation for the restoration of the stone remains of the Wheeler Farm coupled with improvements to the surrounding landscape and a proposed "non-intrusive archaeological Field School in collaboration with Acton's Discovery Museum". The amount requested is not to exceed \$30,000. The Wheeler Farm application is the first part of Ms. McElroy's "Trail Through Time" historic preservation project.

Town Counsel offered a "Qualified Yes" to the project's eligibility for CPA funding. Mr. Anderson views the application as a "hybrid proposal": in substantial part, the "historic preservation of the Wheeler Farms historic resources"; and "other elements (such as the landscaping and field school elements) may relate to historic preservation or may simply make the restored historic resource accessible for the enjoyment and edification of the public" (and eligible for CPC funding as the "creation of open space and the "creation...of land for recreational use"). To be eligible for CPA funding as an historic restoration, the application must demonstrate that Wheeler Farm has been "(a) listed or eligible for listing on the state register of historic places, or (b) determined by the local historic preservation commission to be significant in the history, archeology, architecture or culture of the Town".

Ms. McElroy noted she is requesting 100% funding for the Wheeler Farm restoration. Her expectation is that considerable volunteer time would offset the lack of outside funds. Ms. McElroy remarked that good "PR" and the success of the Wheeler Farm restoration might open future "Trail Through Time" projects to outside funding.

Chris Price, Principal of the Conant School, made the presentation on behalf of the Conant School's Nature Trails Project. The request for \$15,000 of CPA funds is for partial funding to help create a series of nature trails on the school's property. The trails would be handicapped accessible, open to the public and extend the school's environmental science curriculum.

It is the opinion of Town Counsel that the project's eligibility for CPA funding is a "Judgment Call". The project applicant states, "Many years ago there were a number of trails crossing the wooded areas of the property but these have fallen into disrepair and have overgrown. Reestablishing and expanding the trails network offers tremendous learning opportunities for fifth grade students who will be the primary participants in the creation of the trails and the accompanying trail guide..." As such the committee must determine the threshold question whether the project is the "creation" of "trails" of open space land for recreation use (which is eligible for CPA funding) or the "rehabilitation" of open space land for recreational use (not eligible for CPA funding as the Conant School property was not acquired or created with CPA funds).

During her presentation Ms. Price reported that on the advice of Andy Magee and Tom Tidman (following a site visit) the Conant School will seek the input of a professional land use consultant to determine the optimal siting and construction of the trails. The \$15,000 funding request was amended to cover the cost of the land use consultant.

Given the lateness of the hour, several other matters on the evening's agenda were put over until the meeting on January 10.

The meeting adjourned at 10:05PM.

Jon Benson