

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY PRESERVATION REPORT

TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2008

Present: Ald. Lappin (Chairman), Parker, Hess-Mahan, Yates, Sangiolo, Linsky; absent: Ald. Vance and Ciccone

Others Present: Alice Ingerson (CPC Project Manager, Planning Dept.), Nancy Grissom (CPC Member), Amy Yuhasz (Community Development Program Manager, Planning Dept.), Harry Lohr, Cindy Stone (Director, Newton History Museum), Bettina Urcuiolo (Newton History Museum)

**REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY PRESERVATION
AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

#119-08 THE COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE recommending that the sum of \$10,500 be appropriated from the FY08 Community Preservation Fund's general reserves to hire a consultant and cover the cost of associated work by the City of Newton Law Department, to solicit community nominations, review, and prioritize a Newton Heritage Landscape Inventory of landscapes that should be treated as historic resources for planning, funding and management purposes, including but not limited to certain parks, playgrounds and conservation areas. [03-07-08 @ 5:23 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 5-0-1 (Ald. Parker abstaining)**

NOTE: Amy Yuhasz, Community Development Program Manager for the Planning Dept., presented this item. She explained that the purpose of this proposal was to facilitate a community process whereby heritage or historic landscapes that were important to the community were identified. The consultant would do necessary research and field work, with much staff support, developing what the DCR called a "reconnaissance report" which would list priority resources and other resources identified by the community. The reports would be broken down into the identification of the resources, critical concerns, existing resource documentation and planning tools, and general planning and preservation recommendations. She distributed sample reports to the committee and DCR's "Reading the Land" document which described what heritage landscapes were and why they were important to the community. It also gave examples of what has been identified in other communities and DCR regional plans.

Usefulness of Inventory

Newton would be the first community to do this type of inventory on their own. In the past DCR has worked on a regional basis. The importance of how this document would be used in the future would be to help the CPC and the Aldermanic committees make

decisions on CPA funding and other historic funding. It could also be an important tool for local community groups to try to leverage funding for different projects in their neighborhood. They hoped it could also be an important component of the City's recreation and open space plan. The DCR has offered support to communities and they will be letting Newton use their sample of an RFQ and help with the community meeting planning.

Nancy Grissom, member of the CPC, said that she was a member of several of the historic commissions and this would also be an historic document. The various historic groups look for information like this when making decisions on areas and properties. In addition to public spaces, it would include private spaces as well if they were considered historic. This is, however, strictly an inventory of spaces that would be determined by the community and the consultant to be important, historic or heritage in some way. This is not meant to be a designation or some plan to purchase private land or spaces – simply a list of these spaces within the City.

It's helpful to the CPC in terms of making recommendations for building or demolitions. If a project was near one of these identified landscapes, it might have some bearing on what would be allowed. Restoring or rehabilitating parcels that were not purchased with CPA funds can only be allowed if they are designated as historic. Cindy Stone pointed out that many proposals from the Parks Department come up in the historic category and this inventory could help prioritize and determine which ones were legitimate.

This would be a useful document for the City as well, not just for the CPA, and that's why all properties, city owned or private would be included. For instance, Durant Kenrick and Crystal Lake properties were not in City ownership, but they did have historic elements to them and a list like this would be just another source of information to help make determinations. Ald. Linsky pointed out that this also may help identify a potential CPA project. Ms. Yuhasz explained that this list would be recommendations and that upon review by any other committee, that committee may not feel the same. It would be like testimony made by experts that could be followed or not. This list could also be the first step in getting something designated as historic on the National Historic Register.

Process and Guidelines

The first step in the process will be to get nominations from the community of potential sites. Ald. Parker felt that the guidelines were far too broad and could encompass almost any site in Newton. He would like to see more objective criteria. Ms. Yuhasz noted that any site could be nominated but the consultant would determine whether or not it was a legitimate nomination. The Heritage Landscape criteria include the National Register guidelines plus "places of the heart". The concern was that "places of the heart" could open things up so widely. Ald. Parker wanted to have some stricter Newton guidelines so that the document did not become so broad as to be meaningless. He wanted to be sure that a site had historic significance and not just sentimental significance. Ald. Lappin wanted to be sure that people knew that when they nominated sites in their neighborhood,

it could have an impact on what people could do with their homes near the site. Nancy Grissom said this wouldn't necessarily stop someone from doing something with their property. It would just be another piece of information.

Alice Ingerson said she gave the Law Department and CPC a memo regarding how one makes a case for designating something as historic. She hoped that one of the things that would come of the community meetings would be a sense of what Newton's "character" was and how that should be highlighted and preserved. She didn't feel this inventory would be ready in time for this year's projects, but hopefully in time for next years.

Ald. Hess-Mahan moved approval of this item. Ald. Parker asked that there be specific criteria for inclusion that include a requirement of one of the historic components, presumably from the National Register criteria. This would be for sites that might be considered primarily as a "places of the heart". He then read one of the sample reports and saw that "places of the heart" was indeed included within an historic framework.

The Committee voted to approve by a vote of 5-0-1 with Ald. Parker abstaining as he would like to discuss these criteria further in the Finance Committee.

Law Department

The Law Department would be given \$500 to work on this project. Ald. Lappin was concerned about the money the Law Department gets for CPA related projects and didn't understand why an extra amount needed to be appropriated. Alice Ingerson explained that the \$30K the Law Dept is awarded is for work done prior to any project being approved and they have stated that most of that money has been used. She noted that she just received a year-to-date accounting from the Law Dept. of how the money has been spent and in fact it showed most of the money expended.

Historic Burial Ground Project Report

Cindy Stone, Director of the Newton History Museum, Harry Lohr, Chair of the Trustees of the Jackson Homestead, and Co-Chair of the Historic Burial Grounds Committee, and Bettina Urcuioli of the Newton History Museum provided a status report of the Historic Burial Grounds Project.

Ald. Lappin explained that she asked them to provide an update because theirs was a CPA projects for which money had been allocated but not fully spent. The Committee was reviewing such projects.

Harry Lohr provided a document detailing the accomplishments, challenges and outlook for this project. Please refer to this for the full substance of his presentation. It is attached to this report. Only extraneous comments made outside of his document are noted below.

Accomplishments

Harry Lohr spoke to the Committee to explain the progress of the project. He said they've made much progress in the East Parish Burying Ground on Centre St., West Parish Burying Ground on the corner of River and Cherry Streets, and the South Burying Ground at Winchester and Needham Streets.

For tree related issues, they have a very stable and secure situation at West Parish. It's also very good at the South burying ground. The East burying ground is the most wooded and was a serious undertaking with a successful outcome. Experts went in to identify old and sick trees that might fall down in the next 5-10 years, as well as taking care of the ones that were dangerous or had already come down.

Cindy Stone said that they have hired a preservation planner with a lot of experience in gravestone and graveyard management. When stones are broken in many pieces, the tradition is to bury the pieces in the ground. Ald. Yates wondered if there were any buried that there suitable for reconstruction. Harry Lohr said the number of stones that were buried was limited. Some stones were lost to time and elements.

Mr. Lohr reported that they have added the West Parish and South Burying Grounds to the National Register of Historic Places. They were also selected by the National Conference of State Legislators as a model of historic presentation. He gave a tour when their bus showed up. Because it's flat and smaller, it was a good location for touring.

Challenges

They learned that there were a very limited number of companies that do this kind of work and they are in great demand all of the country. They have to be fit into their queue. They are also at the mercy of weather. They feel they can now see some acceleration in the restoration of the tombs, and then they can move onto fences and gates and interpretive signage.

They had originally envisioned a 5-6 year project but they now think it's more like a 6-8 year project. They have accomplished so much so far and now they know the increased timeframe will have no adverse effect on the project. These burying grounds have been around for 300 years.

Committee Questions

Ald. Yates asked what the status was of the money and the phases of the project. Ms. Stone said that they had spent \$92,000 with \$76,000 remaining. They originally hired a consultant who worked quite slowly. He did an excellent job they wanted to pick up the pace of the work so they hired someone else (Monument Conservation Collaborative) from Holbrook, CT. This company did the work in Phase IIa. It was done quickly and very competently and they will be working to finish up the work in Phase I that the slower consultant was not able to finish. Ms. Stone said that \$30,000 was spent in Phase IIa and they have quite a bit of money left. She said she expected that Phase I would be

completed before the deadline of May 31, 2010. The consultant would have to deliver all of the documentation to be considered complete. By October of 2009, the actual work would have to be done due to weather. Mr. Lohr said that it was possible that it might be done before then, but this was very time consuming work with each stone a huge project unto itself. All work was done onsite which was why weather limited the time they could work. Many stones were broken and for stones that were buried, excavation work would need to be done. They gave the consultant ample time to finish the work so that they would not have to go through a re-contract process with them. Ms. Stone said they do have enough money to finish these projects and in fact came in under budget and returned some money. Mr. Lohr said they're getting tremendous value for their money and they appreciate the patience as they're learning how much time this takes do the work right. He felt confident that they were going to meet all their goals and get all the work done.

Ald. Yates asked what the blue tarpaulins were covering in the South burying grounds. Mr. Lohr said they were tombs and they were in Phase IIb, and all the Revolutionary War tombs would be attended to. The CPC approved that phase but it has not been brought forward to the Board of Aldermen because they wanted to complete Phase I and Phase IIa first. The CPC requested that Phase II be broken into 2 pieces. The tarps have been placed to limit plant growth and to keep people off of them. Ald. Parker said the Committee had originally been told that each phase corresponded to about a year and the Board approved Phase IIa based on that. Ms. Stone said the contract was signed in March of 2004 and this kind of work could not be done in the snow. The tombs go 12 to 20 feet down in the ground and people were buried on top of each other and collapsed, as was intended. The ground underneath the tomb has become weakened by plants, trees, weather and frost heaves and the mortar has disintegrated and weakened the sides as well. The restoration help from the DPW engineers would keep them from collapsing.

Ald. Yates asked if there was any restoration that could be done to improve the original inscriptions on the stones so that they can be more easily read. Mr. Lohr said they really could not do anything about it. This is a widespread problem in preservation. Ms. Stone said that in doing preservation work, you would not want to do anything that was not reversible. The ethic is that you do not change them – this is what they look like. Other grounds in Boston have been re-arranged and the stones do not match the bodies. Mr. Lohr said that the Newton burying grounds were still pretty much laid out as they originally were. These were historic landscapes in what they looked like so they wouldn't want to erect any permanent structures to protect the stones and change the look of the grounds. The slate used to make the monuments was from Newton and came from the grounds of Boston College.

Ald. Parker said he would like to know the status of the public access in terms of walking tours, designated paths, informational plaques and so forth, and felt that they were certainly not ADA compliant. Mr. Lohr said that he was very concerned about handicapped accessibility but it was a tricky balance with the burying grounds. He said they were not required, with historic landscapes, to provide cements paths and so forth, to accommodate wheelchairs. Mr. Lohr said it was included in later Phases of this project

to work on interpretive signage, self-guided walking tours, etc. East Parish is unlocked and has posted sign saying it's not open to the public after dark. West and South Parishes have closed gates and it will soon be time for that to change. Ald. Parker asked that the public access component be incorporated as they are working and not wait for a future Phase. Mr. Lohr said they could do that now at a certain level, and do more with a later Phase.

Ald. Linsky felt they should arrange tours so that the public can see what's been going on. Mr. Lohr said they have had some tours, and will be working on scheduling more. Ms. Stone said that tour schedules can be found on the Newton History Museum calendar. There was also a page on the website for the burial grounds and addresses the historical significance of the burial grounds, photographs, and articles. Mr. Lohr said he wanted to raise awareness and visibility and they were exploring ways to use the website to that end. The Committee suggested putting a map and list of the names of those buried in the grounds. Ms. Urciolo said they could link into interment.org which is a national database. One can type in whichever site one wanted and get the full list, inscriptions, and sometimes links to other sites that have more information. Mr. Lohr said they have a list of each person buried in each site and will endeavor to get more information on the website. Ald. Linsky also wanted to arrange for a "CPA Day" so that the citizens can see all the completed projects in the City

A booklet, Where Newton Began, was provided to each of the Committee members. It is a guide to the East Parish Burying Ground. Mr. Lohr said the 200th anniversary of the Jackson Homestead is in a year, and they'll probably have many members of that family coming from all over the country and will have a high profile event featuring their ancestors buried in Newton.

Mr. Lohr reminded the Committee that on April 13, Newton Serves day, all three sites would be participating.

The review of the basics of the Community Preservation Program was postponed and will be taken up at a meeting in the near future.

Meeting Adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cheryl Lappin, Chairman