

Selectmen's Projects Win CPC Endorsements

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By: William F. Galvin

HARWICH — Selectmen sent a message to the community preservation committee last week that they are looking for the committee to be part of a team seeking to address the important needs of the community that cannot be funded through the town budget.

CPA funds are raised through a 3 percent surcharge on property taxes and a match from the commonwealth to assist with housing, historic preservation, open space and recreational needs in the community. Selectmen have not been pleased with some of the projects the committee has not recommended for a town meeting vote in the past year, nor were they happy with sentiments expressed by committee members on certain projects proposed for the coming year.

“Our message has fallen on deaf ears,” Selectman Julie Kavanagh said in a recent selectmen's meeting. “I hope the CPC reconsiders and looks at their job as part of a team, not a dictator.”

In that meeting selectmen took three votes on proposed CPA funding requests. They declared as highest priorities the purchase of the 24.5-acre Judah Eldredge property adjacent to Hawksnest Road in East Harwich, the funding of the Harwich Affordable Housing Trust fund and funds for a part-time housing coordinator.

Stressing the need to clean up Hinckley's Pond through an alum treatment as is called for in the town's comprehensive wastewater management plan, selectmen endorsed funding for the project and endorsed the request for an additional \$300,000 for historic preservation for the face of Brooks Free Library.

Last Wednesday the CPC convened its meeting to vote on the 16 applications for funding in the annual town meeting. A negative vote would preclude an application from receiving CPA funding.

Before the CPC began its deliberations a number of people provided one last pitch for project support. Kavanagh noted the importance of the housing trust funding, calling the proposal a pivotal tool, the best vehicle for moving forward with affordable and workforce housing in Harwich.

Referring to concerns mentioned that the organizational component was not in place for the trust, she said officials were not recreating the wheel, but

copying the model established in the town of Yarmouth. There is no risk, she said, pointing out if the money is not used this year, it is still available for housing use in the future.

Board of selectmen Chairman Michael MacAskill challenged \$400,000 for a housing buy-down program proposed by the housing authority using available housing funds. He said members, past and present, of the committee have worked for the Housing Assistance Corporation, which does advertising for the buy-down program and who have not recused themselves from deliberating on the funding request.

MacAskill questioned the program that would provided \$125,000 to assist three property owners with a buy-down of a home, and he criticized another \$25,000 for administration fees, stating there is no guarantee those funds will go to local residents as people state-wide can apply for the buy-down funds for a home here. He urged the committee to use those funds for the housing trust program.

“This is the vehicle we can see to address the housing crisis in this town and statewide,” MacAskill said.

The buy-down program request did not receive a positive recommendation. The housing trust request for \$500,000, which includes the part-time housing coordinator, drew several questions from the committee. James Atkinson wanted to know if they could provide a lesser amount to allow the organization to get set up this year before jumping into housing programs. The answer was yes.

Committee member Katherine Green questioned whether the committee had enough knowledge about the trust program. There were questions about the committee having to provide a specific amount of money for the program each year. Committee chairman David Nixon said the money is not automatic each year.

Member Mary Maslowski said she was in favor of putting the money in the trust now, explaining the committee can come back and reclaim it if it is not spent. There was also a question relating to the amount of money in the CPA housing account for the program. In the end, the committee voted unanimously for \$490,000 from the housing account and an addition \$10,000 from the undesignated fund.

Conservation Administrator Amy Usowski cited the ecological importance of the 24.5-acre Judah Eldredge property to the town. MacAskill said it will also take 10 houses off the sewerage list. Its proximity to Hawksnest State Park and other open space was noted and MacAskill said the town will get \$369,000 in back taxes with an eminent domain taking of the property.

There were questions about whether there is enough money in the open space account, given the CPC vote to recommend \$200,000 for the town's conservation restriction on Harwich Conservation Trust's purchase of the 15 acres with 1,000 feet frontage along Cornelius Pond. In the end the committee voted 4-3 to recommend \$159,301 in open space funds and take an additional \$200,000 from the undesignated account for the Judah Eldredge purchase.

Selectman Larry Ballantine pushed the \$650,000 request for restoration and improved public access to Hinckley's Pond, which he said was a critical part of the wastewater management plan. Several area towns have used CPA funds for similar programs. The committee last year rejected funding for the project, but the CPC voted 5-2 to support the request this year.

Chris Harlow, vice chairman of the Capital Outlay Committee, urged the CPC to support the \$300,000 request for additional funds for the historic preservation of Brooks Free Library. He emphasized the COC's position on the need for better maintenance of town assets for better and longer life.

“This library is the most recognizable, beloved, and popular building in town,” Harlow said. The committee voted 6-1 to support the request.

Several other funding requests, including \$333,500 for Brooks Park lighting and \$300,000 for Habitat for Humanity's West Harwich project, received positive recommendations.

In this week's selectmen's meeting, MacAskill praised the CPC for doing a “great job” with their recommendations this year.