Natural Resources Commission: Potential Funding Requests

Brandon Schmitt, Director of Natural Resources, opened by thanking the CPC for its ongoing support of Wellesley open spaces.

Mr. Schmitt reviewed current status of CPA-funded projects. The project at Church Park in the center of town near the Village Church, is underway and the concrete pad from the old bus station has been removed. The bid for the large weed harvester for Morses Pond is open and will close on October 21. CPA funding for this purchase was approved at the 2021 ATM. The Morses Pond shoreline restoration project is ongoing with much of the work to this point being completed by the DPW, with an outside contractor completing some of the plantings. Some of the work in the next phase, particularly at Pine Point and the area referred to as Location 13, may be completed by an outside contractor through a public bid process due to the size and scope of the project which is beyond the capacity of the DPW. The restoration of the sports court at Perrin Park is nearly complete. NRC is still working on the “fish ladder” in the Fuller Brook and has consulted with the MA Fish and Wildlife to come up with a possible solution using sandbags to create a kind of damn structure to assist the fish swimming upstream.

Mr. Schmitt then presented the request for the retrofitting of the existing lights at the Hunnewell Fields complex. CPA funds were appropriated at the 2020 ATM to engage an independent consultant to evaluate the existing lights and the potential for lights at the high school track and field. That evaluation of existing conditions is complete. The existing lights are old technology and produce excessive amounts of light trespass and glare. Mr. Schmitt discussed the ecological impacts as well. The lights at the tennis courts and the Diane Warren Multi-purpose Fields are more problematic than the lights at Reidy Field.

Replacing the existing lights with modern LED fixtures would reduce light trespass and glare. New fixtures require less energy consumption, will have better controls and require less maintenance. The consultant estimates that there would be a $13,000 per year savings in energy costs and maintenance.

Mr. Schmitt estimated the budget for the complete retrofitting project to be $376,200 though this could be subject to some fluctuation with current supply chains issued. Mr. Schmitt reported that funding for
this project has been included in the NRC 5 year capital plan and is in the FY23 capital budget. There is the possibility some funding could come from remaining private funds raised for the softball field rehabilitation project. A Green Communities grant does not appear to be an option and Mr. Schmitt will explore the possibility of receiving We Care Funds from the MLP opt out program. This is a brand new MLP program and details and criteria are still being developed. Mr. Schmitt has submitted a CPC application requesting $400,000 in CPA funds for this project.

Ms. Maitin asked for confirmation on the estimates for cost savings brought about by this project. Mr. Schmitt reported that the estimate is for approximately $183,000 in savings over the life of the fixtures.

There was some discussion as to the CPA-eligibility of the project. Mr. Port questioned if this project would qualify due to the improved environmental impact aspects of the project. Ms. McMahon expressed her belief that the project is CPA-eligible due to the enhanced recreational use and experience that will result and that as the existing fixtures are at their life expectancy and will need to be replaced or become a lost recreational resource.

Mr. Port reminded the group that cost sharing and other sources of funding is something the CPC usually looks for and expressed his hope that the Town would share the cost. Ms. Smith pointed out that CPA funds are from taxpayers and therefore Town funds.

The CPC will continue the discussion of the lighting retrofit at a future meeting. Ms. McMahon stated the CPC could come back with a proposal for appropriating CPA funds for half the cost of the project.

Mr. Schmitt presented two more potential requests for funds. The NRC is recommending the Town conduct an Open Space Utilization Study. This would involve an outside consultant undertaking a full review of the Town’s fields and open space, how they are maintained and how they are scheduled for use. This type of analysis was a recommendation of the Town’s Unified Plan produced four years ago. The project would involve input from all the stakeholders – the DPW, Recreation Department, Schools, and the Playing Fields Task Force.

Mr. McHale added that the analysis will involve looking at best practices from other communities and part of the goal is to use the existing fields more effectively and efficiently and to make information about field use and availability more accessible. Ms. McManus reported that she has already reached out to the Schools and Recreation Department and stated her belief that it is important to have an objective look at this topic, that the timing of doing this is good as the Town gets ready to undertake school building projects. Mr. McHale thinks it is important to look at field usage, see how it has changed and determine if there are fields that need to be reconfigured. There is also the possibility of using new scheduling software to help with efficiency.

Mr. Schmitt reported that the cost of this study is estimated to be $30,000 and has been included in the FY23 capital budget.

The NRC is also considering a request to fund a Lawn Conversion pilot program which would entail converting fields and spaces that are typically grass maintained by mowing to more natural meadows of
flowers or grasses that require less maintenance. The NRC has used the Greenway in Boston for inspiration and is working with Cricket Vlass, the Town’s Landscape Planner, on the concept. One possible location for a pilot program is the Town-owned land at the intersection of Cedar and Walnut Streets. The goal would be to increase the environmental value of the space while decreasing the maintenance needed and making the spaces more pollinator friendly.

Mr. Murphy recollected that many years ago the Town had discussed a similar type of project and suggested the NRC follow up with Ms. Vlass to see what was discovered or learned from that.

Mr. Schmitt reported that a lawn conversion such as this would take 2 ½ or 3 years to bring about. Mr. Schmitt anticipates submitting a request for funds for this initiative but is not sure yet as to the dollar amount.

Mr. Port asked Mr. Schmitt about funding for the Morses Pond Shoreline Mitigation project, noting that the CPC Financial Plan has an additional $150,000 planned in FY23 for that project. Mr. Schmitt reported that some funds remain from the original $150,000 appropriation and he will have to report back on the timing and amount of future funding.

Mr. McHale reported that the Aqueduct Bathroom is moving along with the plans getting stamped and the order for the prefab building placed. The hope is for the bathrooms to be in place before the Spring ’22 season starts.

**Review CPC Financial Plan**

Mr. Port reviewed changes to the financial plan, highlighting that the appropriations for the Morses Pond Bathhouse and Beachfront project have been moved out another year to FY24 and FY25, due to the number of building projects the PBC is overseeing.

Mr. Port reported that CPC saw 3% growth in revenue (not the typical 5%) and that interest income fell off. He expects 5% growth going forward. Mr. Port emphasized the good financial position of the CPC with $5.6 million in available funds, $3.5 million of that from undesignated funds.

Mr. Port reminded the CPC that Wellesley does not appropriate funds we are EXPECTING to receive – we are traditionally conservative and only appropriate funds already in hand – we do not appropriate future revenues.

Collections at the State’s Registry of Deeds are up and the Community Preservation Coalition is anticipating the State match to be 35%.

**Old Business/New Business**

Ms. McMahon reported that the Wellesley Housing Authority is waiting on the commitment letter from MA NAHRO on the capital assessment at Washington Street and Morton Circle.
Ms. McMahon reported that she received an update from Barbara Searle on behalf of the Wellesley Historical Society (WHS). There will not be a request from the WHS for the 2022 ATM but she anticipates there will likely be a request in 2023.

Ms. Lanza reported that the Select Board has announced a guideline for 2.75% for department operating budgets and 6.8% for capital budgets.

Ms. Lanza reported that the Wellesley Housing Development Corporation has held two meetings and continues to get organized. One thing the WHDC is discussing is reworking the WHDC criteria for developing affordable housing which is currently very restrictive.

Ms. Lanza indicated that the Wellesley Housing Authority is working to bring in an interim director while they do a search for a new permanent Director. Ms. McMahon reported that the WHS is also looking for a permanent Executive Director.

Ms. Lanza is working with Janice Coduri to develop a list of potential WHA projects, indicating there may be some ARPA funds available but there could be some potential CPA projects on the list.

**Minutes – September 2021**

Stephen Murphy moved to approve the September 2021 CPC meeting minutes with minor edits; Mark Wolfson seconded the motion. The minutes were approved with Emily Maitin abstaining.

A motion to adjourn was made at 9:00 by Allan Port, seconded by Stephen Murphy. The motion was unanimously approved.

The next meeting of the CPC will take place on Wednesday, November 10, 2021.