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## **Response to Questions raised during Grace Episcopal Tower Restoration Project Review**

**Date:** January 28, 2021  
**From:** Lara Kritzer, Community Preservation Program Manager  
**To:** The Honorable City Council

Below are the answers to the questions and requests for additional information which were raised during the joint review of the CPC funding recommendation for the Grace Episcopal Tower Restoration Project by the Finance and Zoning and Planning Committees on Monday, January 11.

### **1) List of Historic City Owned Buildings**

The City of Newton currently owns approximately 85 buildings throughout the City. Of those 85 buildings, 62 are over 50 years in age. Approximately thirty of these buildings are included on the City's Historic Resource Inventory, meaning that information on their architecture and history has been recorded and is on file with the Newton Historical Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission. This does not necessarily indicate that these buildings are historic, but it gives a sense of the level of research that has been completed to date on the City's existing building stock.

In addition to the inventoried buildings, the City also has sixteen buildings which are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places and three which were considered to be eligible for listing on the National Register when last reviewed. National Register listing is one of the criteria for historic preservation funding under the Community Preservation Act. The table below lists all of the City owned buildings which are currently listed or are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Name	Address	Village	Date	NR Status
Plummer Memorial (Auburndale) Library	371 Auburn Street	Auburndale	1927	Listed
Waban Library	1608 Beacon Street	Waban	1929	Listed
Fire Alarm Headquarters	1164 Centre Street (25 Willow St)	Newton Centre	1928	Eligible
Health Department (Newton Centre Library)	1294 Centre Street	Newton Centre	1927	Listed
Police Annex (West Newton Library)	25 Chestnut Street	West Newton	1926	Listed
City Hall & War Memorial	1000 Commonwealth Avenue	Newton Centre	1932	Listed
Crafts Street Stable	90 Crafts Street	Newtonville	1896	Listed
Elliot Street Stable	74 Elliot Street	Upper Falls	1926	Listed
Newton Highland Library/Brigham House	20 Hartford Street	Newton Highlands	1886	Listed
Crystal Lake Bathhouse	16-30 Rogers Street	Newton Highlands	1931	Eligible
Newton Centre Field House (Hut)	69 Tyler Terrace	Newton Center	1892	Eligible
Underwood School	101 Vernon Street	Newton Corner	1924	Listed
Newton Corner Branch Library/Chaffin House	124 Vernon Street	Newton Corner	1848	Listed
John Crowninshield Gazebo	124 Vernon Street	Newton Corner	1848	Listed
Senior Center	345 Walnut Street	Newtonville	1938	Listed
Jackson Homestead	527 Washington Street	Nonantum	1809	Listed
Police Headquarters	1321 Washington Street	West Newton	1932	Listed
Police Garage	1321 Washington Street	West Newton	1959	Listed
Horace-Mann School	687 Watertown Street	Newtonville	1965	Listed

## 2) Facilities Assessment – What might not be done if Grace Tower is funded?

Included in the CPC's funding recommendation for this project is a requirement that any funding for the Grace Episcopal Tower Restoration project come only from Historic Resource Reserve funds. As a result, funding of this project will have no impact on future proposals for open space, affordable housing, or recreation projects. In the last two years, the CPC has received only two applications for historic preservation funding, both from Historic Newton. The total of both projects is less than \$50,000, and can be accommodated either from existing Historic Resource Reserve Funds, requiring that more of the Tower Restoration project funding come from FY22, or from CPA General funds, without having a negative impact on any other known projects.

Because the CPC accepts proposals on a rolling basis, it is difficult to know what might come in for funding yet in FY21. At present, it appears unlikely that the funding of this project would prohibit the funding of any future municipal or other projects based solely on available funds. The CPC has a current fund balance of over \$13 million dollars. If all of the projects currently

recommended by the CPC were approved by the City Council, there would still be nearly \$7 million remaining in the CPA fund for future projects.

### 3) Are there any upcoming plans for projects on the City's Historic Structures?

The City has no current plans to submit CPA funding proposals for City buildings projects. The CPC highly recommends that all proposed projects include some form of funding match which can make projects on the City's many buildings challenging to develop.

During discussions with City staff on this question, the following projects were noted as potential future CPA funding proposals. All the projects listed below are included in the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and their CIP rating is also shown. Please note that these projects have been identified only as potential projects which could qualify for CPA funding – the City has no plans at present to submit proposals for their funding.

CIP Rating	Address or Project Name
#25	Crescent St. Park - This project was previously reviewed by the CPC and was placed on hold in 2018. It is still listed on the CPC's current proposals list with its original funding request.
#26	Levingston Cove Shoreline Improvements
#27	Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway (Already Funded FY21)
#44	Gath Pool Study
#64	War Memorial Stairs – Pre-Proposal submitted. CPC agreed to consider full proposal if City provided some matching funds. On hold since March 2019.
#97	West Newton Armory – This project is currently moving through the Reuse Committee and is anticipated to apply for Community Housing CPA funds for a future affordable housing development.
#103	Waban Branch Library – Accessibility Improvements
#104	Old Cold Spring Field Renovations
#113	Burr Park Field House – Accessibility Improvements
#115	Forte Park field renovations (synthetic)

In addition to the projects listed above, the CPC also annually reviews the CIP to identify potential City projects which could be eligible for CPA funding. This list is included in the CPC's Community Preservation Plan and a copy of the table is attached here as well.

Lastly, the City is considering two additional projects not currently on the CIP which would complete work at multiple City sites. The first is a proposal from the Parks and Recreation Committee to use CPA Recreation funding to renovate the City's grass athletic fields. The second potential future project would request Historic Resource funds to complete a conditions and structural assessment of some or all of the City's historic structures.

### 4) The Benefits of Landmarking vs. Preservation Restrictions

There are a number of similarities between placing a preservation restriction on an historic site and designating it as a local landmark.

Preservation Restrictions protect historically significant properties from inappropriate changes by requiring that any changes to the property such as demolition, additions, renovations, or new construction be reviewed and approved by the Newton Historical Commission.

Preservation restrictions are legal documents in which the property owner grants control over the historically significant elements of the property to the City via a deed restriction that is approved by the Massachusetts Historical Commission and registered with the Registry of Deeds. Deed restrictions have the flexibility to be individually customized to protect all or part of a building or site (interior, exterior, landscape, etc.) and to run for either a set number of years or in perpetuity. The Community Preservation Act requires that restrictions be placed on properties in perpetuity and that they be structured to protect the historically significant elements which have been restored or preserved with CPA funds. In general, CPA required preservation restrictions will be placed on the entire building or site to ensure that no changes are made to the property which might have a negative impact on what the public's funding has restored. Preservation restrictions can also be placed on interior spaces of an historic structure, but this is generally only done when CPA funding has been used to restore an interior feature.

Newton's Local Landmark Ordinance is one of the City's more powerful preservation tools, allowing the Newton Historical Commission to place the protections of a local historic district on individual properties through a  $\frac{3}{4}$  vote of the Commission. This process was established in 1993 to protect the City's oldest and most significant historic structures, and can be initiated by the Commission, Mayor, City Council Members, the Director of Planning and Development, or the Commissioner of Inspectional Services. Similarly to Preservation Restrictions, landmarking requires that any changes to the structure or property, such as demolition, additions, renovations, deterioration by neglect, or new construction, must be reviewed and approved by the Newton Historical Commission. Unlike Preservation Restrictions, landmarking does not require the approval of either the property owner or the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and can move more quickly to protect endangered properties when needed.

In the case of Grace Episcopal Church, the existing preservation restriction on the property states that "The Grantor agrees that no alterations shall be made to the Premises, including the alteration of any interior, unless (a) clearly of minor nature and not affecting the characteristics which contribute to the architectural, archaeological or historical integrity of the Premises, or (b) the Commission has previously determined that it will not impair such characteristics after reviewing plans and specifications submitted by the Grantor." As the City already has full review over the interior and exterior of the building, a landmark designation would be largely symbolic. While it would be a recognition of the architectural and historical significance of the building to the community, the designation would not provide the City with any more control or review than it already has.

#### **5) Potential Conditions for Funding of Non Municipal structures/sites**

The Community Preservation Committee is planning to take a look at its existing guidelines and requirements for potential projects beginning at its next meeting on February 9. This may include looking at previously discussed requirements such as how to evaluate the public benefit of a project. The CPC will need to look carefully at the benefit of any proposed restrictions to the public, as well as on their authority to require or oversee them. For example, while a landmark requirement has been suggested, the CPC does not have the authority to initiate the landmark process and both the landmark report and designation vote is solely the purview of the Newton Historical Commission. Further, the CPA allows for historic

resources to be funded that are locally significant or are listed on the state register of historic places, while landmarks must be listed or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. It is possible that the City may wish to use CPA funding in the future to preserve something that meets the requirements of the CPA but that may not for whatever reason be eligible for the National Register. In those cases, a requirement that any property must be landmarked could unnecessarily limited how the City chooses to allocate its funding.