



# TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Community Preservation Committee

Town Hall Offices • 63 Main Street • Northborough, MA 01532 • 508-393-5019 • 508-393-6996 Fax

**Approved 12.02.21**

## Community Preservation Committee

### Zoom Meeting Minutes

**April 8, 2021**

**Members (Remotely):** John Campbell (Chairman), Millie Milton, Peter Martin, Andy Clark, Todd Helwig, Leslie Harrison, Andrew Dowd

**Members Absent:** Jeff Leland

**Others (Remotely):** Kathy Joubert (Town Planner), Norm Corbin

Chair John Campbell called the Zoom meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Order of March 12, 2020 due to the current state of emergency in the Commonwealth due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. In order to mitigate the transmission of the virus, we have been advised by the Commonwealth to suspend all public gatherings and, as such, the Governor's Order suspends the requirements of the Open Meeting Law to have all meetings held in a publicly accessible physical location. All members of the CPC were allowed and encouraged to participate remotely. The Order allows the CPC to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so the public can follow along with the deliberations of the meeting. This meeting will not feature public comment. The process for the meeting was explained.

Consideration of Minutes (03.04.21) – Ms. Harrison made a motion to approve the March 4, 2021 meeting minutes; Mr. Martin seconded; roll call vote: Harrison-aye; Milton-aye; Martin-aye; Helwig-aye; Clark-aye; Campbell-aye; motion approved (Dowd abstained).

White Cliffs Update – Five years ago it was brought to the town to preserve White Cliffs rather than have it demolished and developed; the town supported it with the hope that it could be brought to a productive use again in some form. An architectural firm was assigned and their final report published in December 2020. Mr. Campbell asked for updates from members of White Cliffs Committee.

Mr. Helwig said before the pandemic hit, there was some frustration over how long this has taken, but said it is complicated. The building was saved from imminent destruction. Now that the danger of destruction has passed, the town has the time to act thoughtfully about the restoration and the re-use. We are now evaluating correctly and in a fiscally responsible way.

The money allocated not only paid for the acquisition, but allowed the town to hire an architect, prepare a laser scan of the building that can be turned into drawings, replace the roof, replace flashing and chimney cricket, repair fire damage, and perform some dormer restoration. The building has been largely stabilized. The goal of a re-use plan is that revenue derived from the property could be used to perform both the restoration and the cost of any additional development with minimal additional town funding. He said what has slowed down the thinking is that the range of options to restore the property is between \$11 million and \$30 million of which \$7 million alone is needed to restore the building. From

the various propositions that might take place at the property, they are starting off with \$7 million that is needed to restore the building into something they can use.

Mr. Helwig discussed the re-use options and costs:

1. Residential (\$20,000,000)
  - a. Construct multiple additional buildings on property
  - b. Condo fees used to pay for restoration
  - c. Massive impact on site
  - d. The projected per unit price is not enough to pay for restoration.
2. Cultural (\$7,000,000)
  - a. No non-profit is going to pay this
  - b. No ability to support once restored
  - c. Examples of successes are rare
3. Municipal (\$30,000,000)
  - a. Incorporate White Cliffs into a new town hall
  - b. Massively expensive
  - c. Far from the center of town
4. Commercial
  - a. Office rents are too low to support restoration costs plus construction costs
  - b. No one is going to build the offices without a significant tenant first
5. Hospitality/Event Space (\$11,000,000 to \$15,000,000)
  - a. Deemed most likely based on need
  - b. Cost difference based on addition, new kitchen, etc.
  - c. Very hard to see how a business could pay these costs and use this property without massive Town support.

Where do we go from here? Do we hire a broker, do we send out an RFP to see what kind of interest there is, is this the right time to do that, would town meeting support such an investment, would CPC support a number like that, would the town want all of the CPC funds to go to this building for the foreseeable future, or do we wait?

Mr. Campbell asked if an historic preservation document was ever developed and executed. Mr. Helwig believes there is always going to be a historic preservation restriction on that property, but is not in favor of contemplating until we know what the end user is. Mr. Campbell said there is no easy path forward and asked if there were any other alternatives; Mr. Helwig said not at this time.

Norm Corbin said there was discussion of the Town Administrator along with DPW putting together an RFP, but not sure of the status due to the pandemic. Ms. Joubert said John Coderre was going to look into the cost to prepare an RFP, not the actual preparation. She also said the cost to replace the chimney (which has not been done yet) is \$100,000. The RFP would be for someone with a business plan that would utilize the building and part of the plan would be to partner with us in restoring it. Mr. Corbin said the RFP needs to go to people with different financial resources and was optimistic that we may find someone like that.

Mr. Clark said a developer could look at \$30 million but would take a 20-year expectation on that kind of investment. The single building will not return anything close to justifying that kind of investment; it will need a significant component of new development to it; left the way it is, it could never be a part of the solution. Ms. Joubert said regarding the residential use, there would only be two units because the town will keep some access for public space. Mr. Campbell asked if there was discussion about demolishing certain additions that were not historically significant and leaving the main property at a more affordable restoration price for a smaller event space or restaurant. Mr. Helwig said most of the renovation costs included taking down the additions, bringing it back to its original state, and possibly building on some of them. Ms. Joubert said because of the cost for the town to remove the additions versus getting the building weathertight, which was more important, the additions remained. Mr. Campbell asked where the majority of the \$7 million costs was coming from. Mr. Corbin thought it was more for code. Ms. Joubert said the basic plan included removing most of the additions, restoring the exterior (but only if needed), code updates, mechanical, and new plumbing. Mr. Campbell thanked Mr. Helwig and Mr. Corbin for the updates.

Member were asked if they had other ideas or direction for the White Cliffs Committee or any way CPA can contribute; restoration would qualify under CPA. Mr. Helwig said there are carrying costs which are being paid for from the original funds. He was not sure where the funds would come from once it is used. Ms. Joubert said as of December there was \$190K left from the CPA allocation. Mr. Campbell said his Committee supported it, the town voted for it, it's been to town meetings with no issues, but feels at some point they will be asked what's going on with it what are what are they doing with the money being spent. The re-use plans are not viable without a large pocket developer or an idea that hasn't been devised yet.

Mr. Corbin regretted not getting examples of what could have worked rather than what could not work from the contractor who did the cost analysis of the different options. It is an unreal expectation if people are expecting a profit without a serious change to the way the property will look or function. Mr. Campbell asked if there was any thought of the original building being part of a multi-retail area. Mr. Helwig said there is not enough demand for retail space. The next White Cliffs Committee has not been determined.

Mr. Campbell said one-third of the CPA yearly revenue is put toward the White Cliffs; there is still a reserve and it has not restricted us from doing any other projects. Mr. Clark commented that the Committee is doing its due diligence; the options have been outlined; it is now moving to the next phase.

Mr. Campbell does not anticipate any obstacles at town meeting. The application for Pickleball will be well supported as well as the application for the Conservation Fund.

#### **Old/New Business:**

The 2021 Annual Town Meeting Presentation is May 1<sup>st</sup> at 9:00 a.m.

Unless needed, the next meeting will be scheduled in the fall.

Mr. Martin made a motion to adjourn; Mr. Helwig seconded; roll call vote: Harrison-aye; Milton-aye; Martin-aye; Helwig-aye; Clark-aye; Campbell-aye; motion approved.

The meeting ended at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Melanie Rich, Recording Secretary