

Community Preservation Committee Fiscal Year 2013 Report

The members of the Shutesbury Community Preservation Committee (CPC) during all or part of fiscal year 2013 were Leslie Bracebridge; Susan Essig, Secretary; Rita Farrell; Donald Fletcher, Chair; Allen Hanson Susanne Personette; Linda Scott, and Al Springer.

During fiscal year 2013 the CPC reviewed newly approved legislation that amended the Community Preservation Act and what we learned during fiscal year 2012, especially in regards to requests for funding for privately owned property. As a result of these reviews, the Shutesbury Community Preservation Plan was revised and subsequently approved in October 2012.

The CPC received one application for community preservation funds during FY 2013 – a proposal to protect and restore Shutesbury’s cemetery hearse house. During the first of the two phase CPC application process, the Shutesbury Building Committee’s proposal was determined eligible for community preservation funding. The CPC then reviewed and compared the proposed project with the goals and funding criteria included in the Shutesbury Community Preservation Plan. A public hearing was convened for interested citizens to hear details of the proposed project and to ask questions of the Building Committee representatives as well as those from several town groups that had submitted letters of support. After hearing from interested citizens and completing its review, the Shutesbury Community Preservation Committee voted to approve a motion to recommend \$21,650 to support the project. On May 4, 2013, Town Meeting voted to approved the CPC recommended warrant article.

Below is background information about the Community Preservation program and the proposed project to protect and restore the cemetery hearse house.

Background information about Community Preservation: The Community Preservation Act (CPA) became law in 2001. It added a \$20 fee for deed filings to create a State trust fund to ‘match’ funds raised for community preservation by towns that choose to add a property tax surcharge of between 1 and 3% and approve a town bylaw consistent with the requirements of the statute. Shutesbury joined in 2009 by approving a bylaw that added a 1½ % surcharge to property tax bills, with exemptions for the first \$100,000 of valuation and for low-income residents. Towns that add the maximum 3 % surcharge are guaranteed a 100% state match. As more towns have joined, those with less than a 3 % surcharge have experienced a declining state match, estimated at 22% next year.

The CPA requires that Towns transfer 10% of its estimated annual community preservation revenue to each of three designated accounts – Open Space, Historical Resources, and Community Housing. The almost 70% that goes to the community preservation fund balance can be used in any of those areas and also to create recreation resources. Shutesbury’s by-law created a Community Preservation Committee (CPC) with nine members. Seven members represent town groups with related interests – Open Space, Historical Commission, Conservation, Recreation, Housing, Planning, Finance, and two at-large members.

The State's Community Preservation Act establishes both strict requirements and a strong role for Community Preservation Committees. Town Meeting can approve funding for Community Preservation projects, but only if and, as recommended by the CPC. The Community Preservation statute created a structure for member towns that insures input by requiring:

- a Community Preservation bylaw that is approved at both Town Meeting and in a town-wide state ballot vote,
- a Community Preservation Committee with members representing town committees and commissions with responsibilities that are related to community preservation,
- the development of a community preservation plan that is updated annually, and
- an annual public hearing.

If interested in more information about Shutesbury's CPC activities, the minutes of CPC meetings, Shutesbury's Community Preservation Plan, and other documents are on the Town's website.

Cemetery Hearse House: The Shutesbury Community Preservation Committee (CPC) recommended \$21,650 to support the rehabilitation of the 1840 cemetery hearse house. This is exactly the kind of project the community preservation fund was created for – to protect and restore a rare historical resource. This project has long been a priority for the Town Building Committee and the Historical Commission, but there was never enough money in the Town's operating budget. Again, that dynamic is why the Community Preservation Fund was created.

One of only two pre-Civil War town-owned buildings in Shutesbury, the Cemetery Hearse House reflects another a time, before there was a funeral industry. The town hearse transported deceased Shutesbury residents from their homes to the church and to their final resting place in the town cemetery. Almost all towns once had hearse houses. Our research indicates that Shutesbury's may be one of only six remaining in Massachusetts. Our hearse house remains at its original site, at the entrance to the Town cemetery, along one of Shutesbury's most travelled roads.

The Shutesbury Building Committee proposed and will oversee the project. Several other Town and private groups provided testimony and letters of support for the project, as well as in-kind and monetary contributions. These include the Cemetery Commission, Town Center Committee, Historical Commission, and Friends of the Historic Commission. Restoration of the hearse house has long been a priority for both the Historic Commission and the Town Building Committee.

The specifications for the project were provided in a handout for those who attended Town Meeting. Briefly, the project will involve shoring and lifting the building, digging out the concrete and decayed sills, building a dry stone foundation so the restored building sits 12-18" higher, replacing the building's sills and the bottoms of the posts, replacing the decayed vertical sheathing boards, painting the building and putting on a new roof. The Town Building Committee has the expertise and experience to oversee this project and has determined the specifications for it.

In addition, the CPC's guidelines encourage those that apply for funds to identify and secure privately donated funds and volunteer contributions. The Building Committee has secured \$2,250 of private donations, and more than \$7,000 of in-kind contributions.

The warrant article that was recommended by the CPC and approved by Town Meeting on May 4, 2013 is:

Article 3. To see if the Town will vote to appropriate the sum of \$21,650.00, \$4,500.00 from the CPA Historic Resources Fund and \$17,150.00 from the CPA Fund Balance, to rehabilitate the West Cemetery Hearse House as detailed in the Shutesbury Building Committee's Cemetery Hearse House Project proposal, with all the work to comply with the Standards for Rehabilitation stated in the United States Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties, said funds to be expended under the direction of the Shutesbury Building Committee, or take any action thereto.

The Community Preservation Committee thanks the citizens of Shutesbury for its continuing interest, contributions, and support for our community's preservation projects. Please join me in thanking the other members of the CPC: Leslie Bracebridge; Susan Essig, Secretary; Rita Farrell; Susanne Personette; Al Springer; Linda Scott, and Allen Hanson.

Respectfully submitted by,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Donald Fletcher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Donald Fletcher, Chair
Community Preservation Committee
June 30, 2013