

AMHERST HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Report to the 2016 Annual Town Meeting
~ Requests for Fiscal Year 2017 CPA Funding ~

The following historic preservation projects are recommended for the FY17 round of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding.

Amherst Historical Commission – Appraisals, Surveys and Related Studies, \$10,000

Request: \$10,000. AHC recommendation: \$10,000. CPA recommendation: \$10,000.

The AHC requests CPA funds to cover expenses of appraisals, surveys, forensic architectural studies, preliminary archeological surveys, site-specific historical studies and research, and other due diligence required as part of the work of the Historical Commission. As the pace of development in Amherst increases, the Historical Commission will encounter more frequent requests for demolition of potentially significant historic resources and will need to assess historic and archaeological resources related to significant pending Town capital projects. These funds will enable the Commission to carry out its state-mandated responsibility for preserving Amherst's historic and archaeological resources, by carrying out basic due diligence in circumstances both anticipated and unforeseen.

Amherst Historical Society and Museum - Strong House Repairs and Dendrochronology Study.

Request: \$42,500. AHC recommendation: \$42,500. CPA recommendation: \$24,500.

The Historical Society requests CPA funds for three purposes, in order of urgency: (1) legal services clearing the title to the property and collection to provide relief from testamentary restrictions that impede and are counter to the function of a modern museum (\$18,000—these funds not approved by CPAC). AHC agrees that this is an essential step in promoting preservation of the organization's historic resources; (2) Carpentry and related repairs to the building envelope (\$20,000), and; (3) Dendrochronology research (sampling building timbers and comparing them to samples of known date) to determine the structure's age and construction history. This information will enable AHS to apply preservation treatments appropriate to the building's period of significance and design intent.

The Evergreens/Emily Dickinson Museum - Fire Suppression System.

Request: \$200,000. AHC recommendation: \$200,000. CPA recommendation: \$190,000.

The Emily Dickinson Museum requests CPA funds to help protect The Evergreens from catastrophic loss by fire. Built in 1856, The Evergreens was the home of Emily Dickinson's brother Austin and his family, whom she often visited. The building and collection are highly significant to literary and cultural history locally and internationally. Its most unique feature is the intact survival of its 19th-century décor and furnishings, selected by Dickinson family members themselves. A component structure of the Dickinson National and Local Historic Districts, it is open to the public ten months a year. This project is among final systems improvements that will allow further restoration of the family's homes. Amherst College will match CPA funds.

Amherst Historical Commission – Christopher Thompson Memorial Stone.

Request: \$5,000. AHC recommendation: \$5,000. CPA recommendation: \$5,000.

As an interpretive sign, this proposed memorial stone will serve three purposes. First, it will be a memorial to Christopher Thompson, an African American resident of Amherst who fought for freedom in the Massachusetts Fifth Colored Cavalry during the Civil War. Christopher Thompson was one of five Thompsons who enlisted at Amherst to serve in the Union Army. He was buried in Amherst's West Cemetery in 1898, but has no gravestone; this memorial stone will give him the recognition that he deserves. Secondly, the stone will make visitors aware of the part of West Cemetery that has served over the centuries as a principal area for African American family burials. Thirdly, by commemorating the Civil War service of five members of the Thompson family—Christopher, his three brothers and Christopher's son Charles—the stone will alert visitors to the fact that a significant number of black men from Amherst (more than 20) enlisted in family groups and fought for the Union. The permission of the family has been obtained to place the stone in the family plot of Christopher Thompson's son, Charles, within easy sight of the cemetery loop road.

North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset Historical District Inventory/Study

Request: \$5,000. AHC recommendation: \$5,000. CPA recommendation: \$5,000.

The North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset Local Historic District Study Committee is seeking CPA funding to hire part-time assistance in updating, researching, documenting and digitizing information about almost 200 historic properties, some of the oldest and best preserved in Amherst. The inventory of properties will be used to propose creation of a new Local Historic District at a future Town Meeting. Many of the properties are included in two existing National Register Historic Districts, but documentation of individual properties is inconsistent. Completion of the inventory will provide an invaluable asset for the town's history, population, and growth, and for preservation of its historic resources.

First Congregational Church –Fire Suppression System.

Request: \$357,647. AHC recommendation: \$200,000. CPA recommendation: \$200,000.

The First Congregational Church at 165 Main Street seeks CPA funds to support installation of a fire sprinkler system while other improvements to the building are made, including an elevator, electrical system upgrade, and enhanced restroom capacity. Built in 1867, the building is a major presence in the historic environs of the Dickinson Homestead and Evergreens and is part of the Dickinson Local Historic District. There is at present no automatic fire sprinkler system. A fire would spread rapidly through the timber-framed building, be difficult to fight, and would likely cause irrevocable damage leading to demolition. The church is used by the public for a preschool, meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous, and the Not Bread Alone food program.

The Amherst Historical Commission urges Town Meeting's support for CPA funding for these important projects.

NOTE: In all cases where public historic preservation CPA funds are approved for use by private entities, unless there are existing superseding restrictions already in place, an historic preservation deed restriction is required to be granted to the Town to protect the public's investment in preservation.