

FY21 CPP Public Comments

I'm Mark Alston Follansby a resident of Waltham and I work at the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS). I oversee the program that disperses the CPA funds which help people with their rent. We have had the CPA funds for almost a year and we are receiving about one application a week. The applications started to pick up in January and in April they increased to over 20 applications. The CPA funds are very important for the work we do because they help to keep people housed in Somerville, and help people who are out of housing to get back into the housing. I attended training from Chapa about using CPA funds for emergency housing requests, and I learned something that I didn't know before about using CPA funds outside individual communities. While we would wish for everybody to be able to stay in Somerville, the reality is that we are not able to find housing for everybody that needs it in Somerville. I request that the committee considers using CPA funds to help people move to nearby cities or wherever they have to go which will be really beneficial to those people and as well as the community. I also suggest expanding the lifetime cap of \$3,000 per client upwards so that families with the most need can access those funds to enable their stability. I thank the committee very much for the grants that they give the Affordable Housing Trust and for the opportunity to speak about our needs.

I am Tory Antonino and I live at 65 Boston Street and I work with Green and Open Somerville. We received a CPA grant in 2016 for a native meadow which provides a bit of nature in the city which is unfortunately landscaped in a very sort of sterile way. I request the committee for more open spaces and recreation projects and to prioritize those which have an ecological restoration component. These don't have to be huge pieces of land but can be simple, integrating more native planting in the existing parks which can lead instantaneously wildlife returning to the city. I believed that it is possible to have co-existence and it is one of my goals as a member of Green Somerville and as well as a volunteer with the Growing Center which has a wonderful project that will be opening soon so people can really enjoy it. The meadow IS coming in and the insects are coming back and that it is important that everyone has access to nature so that it is not just privileged people who can go into the fallows. It possible to create the forest in the city and the committee has the capacity to do that. There is also need for food equity and the community or city gardens to be accessible to everybody. I think it is important to make every bit of small space in the city to be within walking distance of fresh food. I thank the committee very much for you work.

I'm Brielle Short the Director of Programs with the Somerville Homeless Coalition. I am a resident of Woburn but through my involvement with the Somerville Homeless Coalition and as a trustee on the Somerville Affordable Housing Trust fund, I wanted to attend the hearing to advocate for an increase in CPA funds for affordable housing. Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, it has become even more apparent how unaffordable housing is in Somerville. Presently households from every income level are having trouble paying for their rent and mortgage which is the reality that low income households face on a monthly basis, and have been long before the pandemic. Although affordable housing projects are supported by CPA funds and benefit households with a broad range of income, I want to speak a little more towards the impact that CPA funds has towards the most vulnerable (that is the homeless population and households who are facing near homelessness) in our community.

The Somerville Homeless Coalition presently has two programs that are benefiting from CPA funds. Ms. Heidi Burbidge has briefly mentioned them and the first program provides short term rental subsidies which support low-income households as they get back onto their feet. Those households have received long-term mobile vouchers which increase their income through employment or other funds to sustain their housing. The second program provides a leasing differential which allows formerly homeless and disabled individuals to continue to live in our community. This is very important because oftentimes our provider network and their community support networks are within Somerville. Without CPA funding, many of the most vulnerable in Somerville would not be able to continue to afford to live in Somerville. I encourage the committee to consider putting more money towards affordable housing. I know the importance of open spaces and historic preservation but the city is going to lose a lot of the diversity that makes its community so wonderful if the committee doesn't prioritize affordable housing going forward. I thank the committee for allowing me to speak at the hearing.

I'm Ellen Schechter a resident of Cambridge, and the Director of the Somerville Office of Housing Stability. I thank the committee for all the great work you do. I sit on the CPA Committee in Cambridge and I am pretty familiar with all the work that the committee do and I am very grateful for it. She echoed some of what Ms. Short and Mr. Follansby have said about the need for an increase in allocation to affordable housing. I She urge the committee to allocate 65% of its unallocated portion of funds from the last year to housing. The office of housing stability has gotten absolutely inundated with intakes for rental assistance. About 90% of those intakes are from non-English speaking persons and although currently there is an eviction moratorium in place, I am afraid that once that eviction moratorium is done, the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak is going to fall predominantly on immigrant community on the lowest income communities. They will need to have rental assistance to be able to bridge that gap until they can reenter the economy. It is going to be a lot slower for some things than it is for others to get on their feet again. The 65% allocation can assist both permanent housing and rental assistance programs. I am suggesting two things, one is an issue that has come up repeatedly in that as it is currently understood CPA funding goes to affordable housing, there is a question about whether or not there needs to be a 12 month lease. I encourage the committee to lobby to relax the requirements. In my experience, immigrant people of color and non-English speaking people all have much less of a chance of being tenants under lease or tenants under at will and that it is that huge population currently that is able to ask some of the CPA rental assistance that is available. Although it is a state issue, I request the committee to reach out and think about connecting with other communities and the Community Preservation Coalition around that issue. I request for support in restructuring the way the Trust makes decisions about allocations but I agreed with Mr. Follansby on being really thoughtful about who provides seamless rental assistance in the most flexible way possible to make it the most useful in the COVID-19 pandemic. I thank the committee very much.

I'm Kathy Arnelle a resident of Somerville for about 20 years and a housing planner in Cambridge, and I am on the board of the Somerville Community Corporation. I agree with what Ms. Schechter, Ms. Short, and Mr. Follansby said about the need for affordable housing. It is more challenging than ever to create and preserve existing affordable housing in Somerville and the COVID-19 outbreak just underscored the urgent need to continue expanding housing in the city. it is good that the city has set the goal of 20% affordable housing by 2040. I feel aspirational but that I would love it if we could come together and

make that close to a reality because that will make a huge difference in Somerville community and in the lives of a lot of people who are currently struggling.

I urged that the maximum amount should go to affordable housing projects and when housing projects come before the committee. I am supportive of open space and historic preservations and I agreed with Ms. White that there are more opportunities for combined projects. Housing money is leveraged by the state, federal, and private, and city funding and investing in affordable housing can hopefully keep some families that are vulnerable in the community. I appreciated the work of the committee and thank you for allowing me to speak.

I'm David Kissel a project manager at the Somerville Community Corporation and I manage the 100 homes program. I thank the CPC for its ongoing support for the program and I advocate for increased funding for housing support and affordable housing in general. We have a lot of tenants who are currently struggling and although there are different programs out there. The local rental assistance programs that are funded through the CPC are crucial and other systems should be currently expanded and in order to do so, we needed to allocate more CPA funding for housing. The 100 homes program that I managed, as Ms. Heidi Burbidge mentioned earlier, has 53 units that have been funded through the CPA funds which is great and with additional funding from other sources the units have increased to about 97 (which was under their management). There are different other kinds of subsidies but the CPA fund is an important source of funding that help us leverage other kinds of funding to purchase and preserve as permanently affordable different units of housing throughout the city and keep the vulnerable people in them. I appreciated what Ms. Cassiarnaud was talking about earlier. We have a lot of tenants in units when we buy buildings and we try to keep everyone that is in the building and in some cases we also assist tenants with relocating to housing that fits their needs. We have building we purchased on Austin Street in East Somerville that is mostly immigrants from Central America and many of those families were overcrowded and we assisted some in relocating to other buildings that we owned which were primarily affordable. We have been able to also lower the rent for the people that are there, so they can have the right family size space for the affordable amounts. I thank the committee for ongoing assistance to 100 homes and hope that the committee will continue to support housing.

I'm Robert Kevin Kelly and I work at the Somerville Public Library and volunteer with the Somerville Community Land Trust. I seconded what everyone said in support of prioritizing in affordable housing. Working at the Somerville Public Library, I interacted a lot with lower income Somervillians, particularly immigrants. The need for affordable housing is urgent and dire, and if those people are displaced, not only will that be a social injustice but Somerville will be losing a vital part of its community given its diverse character.

Ms. Diane Bluett a resident of Somerville, a trustee and treasurer of the Somerville museum. The museum has been trying to get access for full funding for a while. People cannot enter the museum with wheelchairs, or have trouble walking up the stairs. We have been trying to get that project done for a while but we had a major lawsuit against us which made us lose more than a year of time despite winning the lawsuit. Due to COVID-19 outbreak, the prices for doing construction in Somerville are

increasing, and the museum gives a lot back to the community, to the high school, to all parts of Somerville. I hope the committee can consider the museum. All the other projects are also worthwhile and I can't imagine housing right now for people during COVID-19 outbreak, not being able to pay their rent. I hope when things get better, the people will go to the museum and see their exhibits, and learn a sample of their history. I thank the committee.

Voting Results from April 22 Public Hearing

Category	Total	Percentage
Affordable Housing	52	53%
Historic Resources	18	18%
Open Space/ Recreation	20	21%
Flexible	8	8%
Total	93	100%