

Statement to the Waltham Community Preservation Committee, April 14, 2015

Good evening. My name is Martha Creedon. I have lived at 731 South Street for about 33 years. I have served on the board of Waltham Fields Community Farm and I currently serve on the boards of the Waltham Land Trust, First Parish Unitarian Universalist church, and am one of the current organizers of the Waltham Farmers' Market. I am a member and volunteer at several other local organizations, some represented here tonight.

I very much support the purpose and intent of Community Preservation funds and am happy to pay my share through my tax bill.

In addition to supporting the Mass Central Rail Trail and affordable housing vouchers, another reason I am here tonight concerns my interest in doing something about the all-too-many vacant City-owned properties in Waltham.

Those who know me know that in my spare time I like to dream up ways that the Waltham community could restore, reuse and recycle these properties. I am especially concerned with 92 Felton Street, 14 Church Street, and the Fitch School.

I do not agree with those in Waltham who advocate that the City sell these properties to increase the City's tax revenues. In my opinion, once sold, these precious historical resources are forever gone and out of reach to the general public except through some unknown, somewhat random for-profit commerce.

I don't have specific plans for a proposal to the CPC, but I have been frustrated and increasingly concerned over the years that the City does not have a public input process to determine a good public use for these properties.

I believe that the City needs to use some of its CPA funding to address issues that will prevent these properties from falling into further disrepair, beginning with full engineering reviews and basic stabilization as may be allowed under CPC rules. Next, why not engage the public in forming a vision for these sites? Ideas could be crowdsourced and additional funding could be raised to take over where the CPC funds cannot be used. Some ideas for these sites might include:

- A non-profit center with affordable office and meeting space
- A community food center with business incubation, outreach and retail possibilities with an indoor winter farmers' and artisans' market
- A cool and funky event space for small catered private and public functions and pop-up shops and art exhibits
- A public bicycle workshop with tool and knowledge sharing
- A community maker space similar to the one run by the Watertown Public Library

I've learned what I can about historic criteria and goals of the CPC and believe these vacant and deteriorating city properties would make ideal projects. As you know, the historic criteria and goals are to:

- Protect, preserve, enhance, restore and/or rehabilitate historical, cultural, architectural or archaeological resources of significance, especially those that are threatened
- Protect, preserve, enhance, restore and/or rehabilitate city-owned properties, features or resources of historical significance
- Protect, preserve, enhance, restore and/or rehabilitate the historical function of a property or site.
- Projects must demonstrate a public benefit and must have the ability to provide permanent protection for the historic resource

So, at this time I don't have a specific project, but I would love to get some guidance from you and the City about how to get something done on these properties before it's either too late to physically save them or they get sold off to private commercial entities. I really believe we can try to get creative about this and come up with some great ideas and a specific plan of action.

Thanks for your help, and thanks for all you do.