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**To:** malakiephoto@aim.com,

**Subject:** Busy week: Covid-19 housing assistance public hearing: School Budget; Open Space Plan public hearing, vote on Library parking lot site plan

**Date:** Mon, May 4, 2020 9:40 am

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## Public hearing 7pm tonight, May 4, on use of \$2M in CPA funds for Covid-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program

The Community Preservation Committee and the Planning & Development Board will hold a joint public hearing on a request to use \$2 million of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds, and \$500,000 of federal CDBG funds for a Covid-19 Rental and Mortgage Housing Assistance Program. Zoom meeting login info

here: <http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/103223>

Income-eligible households that have lost income due to the Covid-19 emergency could enter a lottery. Selected households would have 70% of their rent paid directly to their landlords (or 70% of mortgage payments on subsidized ownership units only), up to a maximum of \$2,500 per month for three months. The \$2.5 million total appropriation would pay for an estimated 330 households, and a 7.5% administrative fee to MetroWest Collaborative Development.

\$2 million represents a substantial portion of the available balance in the Community Preservation Fund of about \$13.7 million. When initially passed by the state legislature, and adopted in 2001 by Newton voters, the CPA was limited to acquiring or rehabilitating assets for purposes of affordable housing, open space & recreation, and historic preservation. The legislature amended the CPA in 2012 to allow for rental assistance and other programs to make housing affordable.

More information on the CPA proposal is on the project page

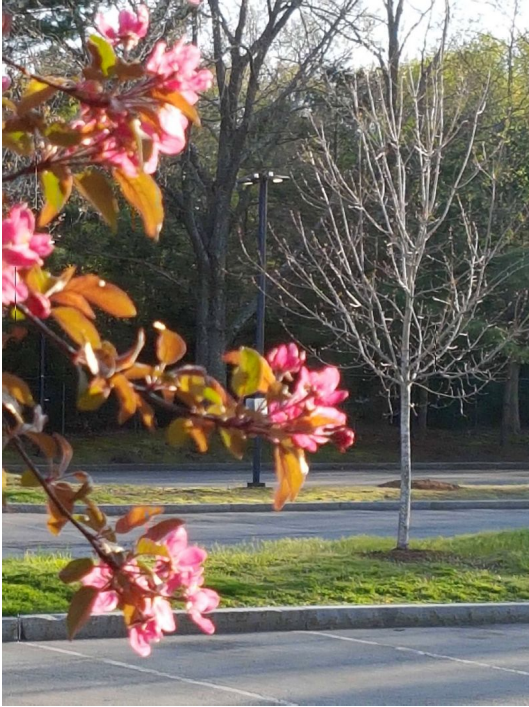
here: <http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/cpa/projects/covid19housing.asp>

The last two [Letters](#) from affordable housing advocates, and [Public Comment](#) I think raise valid concerns. I also have questions about the selection process, and about diverting funds from capital uses to current spending.

The \$500,000 in CDBG funds would come from the \$1.1 million Newton

received in Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus Funds (CDBG-CV -- more info [here](#)).

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## **Also tonight: Library parking lot site plan to replace trees with solar carports goes to full City Council**

On April 22, the Public Facilities Committee voted 6-1-1 (Gentile opposed, Laredo abstaining) to approve the Site Plan ("5-58") for reconstruction of the Library parking lot to replace trees and grass berms with solar carports. This item goes to the full City Council tonight. I've asked that it be put on Second Call (debated). If approved, the city will proceed to spend the remainder of the \$175,000 design money approved last year to come up with a proposed stormwater management plan. (After the Public Facilities meeting, I was told that \$38,688 has been spent, with the remainder committed to the engineering design consultant). There is still no good estimate of construction cost. \$750,000 is earmarked for the parking lot paving, but it's unclear how much more the stormwater improvements would cost, or how much just repaving the current parking lot, without the reconstruction, would cost.



Unlike a special permit, the 5-58 Site Plan only needs a simple majority to pass, and unfortunately, a majority appears to believe asphalt and solar carports are better than trees and grass, no matter the cost, for electricity savings that by the administration's own estimate is only \$17,500 per year.

The Public Facilities [April 22 Report](#) includes some of my questions, but not my comments in opposition. Also, I take issue with claims that the parking lot project has nothing to do with the solar project. The Library trustees were initially fearful that if they rejected solar, repaving wouldn't happen. Promised drainage improvements and added parking spaces were used as a selling point for the carport. And later, Public Facilities was told the parking lot project was being delayed to wait for the solar.

And this expensive project is being pursued at a time that both the [Climate Action Plan](#) and the next [Open Space and Recreation Plan](#) (more on that below) emphasize the need for more trees.

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## Wednesday, May 6, 7pm - FY21 School Department Budget

Due to the financial impact of Covid-19, the FY21 School Department Budget approved earlier in April by the School Committee of \$244.6 million, has been reduced by \$1.5 million, to \$243.1 million. The revised Budget Book is included

in the Friday Packet [here](#). The Programs and Services and Finance Committees will review this budget tomorrow, Wednesday, May 6, 2020 at 7:00 pm. To view on Zoom use this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86814394716> or call 1-646- 558-8656 and use the following Meeting ID: 868-1439-4716

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## Thursday, May 7 -- public hearing on 7-year Open Space & Recreation Plan

This once-every-seven-years event -- the drafting of a new Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP), is coming at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic and emergency have given many a new appreciation for parks, trails, recreation facilities, and other open space. A recent Newton Conservators newsletter explains why this document is important:

"It provides a list of goals and priorities for municipal actions regarding land acquisitions, recreational facility and open space improvements, and accessibility improvements. In addition, it inventories all existing areas of recreational use and open space, both City owned and privately owned. The plan must be reviewed and approved by the state Department of Conservation Services and is valid for seven years once approved."

The public hearing Thursday will be at a joint meeting of the Zoning & Planning Committee and Planning & Development Board. Agenda and Zoom info [here](#). You can also send your comments by May 14 to [concom@newtonma.gov](mailto:concom@newtonma.gov).

material including the February 6 community meeting, here: <http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/lrplan/os/default.asp>. Section 8 Goals and Objectives, and Section 9 Seven Year Action Plan, are particularly important to check to see if your priorities are reflected. If there is open space you'd like to see acquired or improved and you don't see it in Section 9, speak up. Section 5 Inventory of Lands (public and private) is a helpful reference. And tell the city councilors and Planning Board what you like, too.

For West Newton, I am happy to see both improvements to the River Street Playground (pictured above), and expansion of the Reverend Ford Playground (below), listed among possible park improvement projects.



I'm also happy about Objective 2E: Increased street tree canopy coverage throughout the City, especially in Environmental Justice communities, to increase native habitat and compensate for impending hotter temperatures, increased precipitation, and urban heat islands, and its accompanying detail, including a tree inventory, canopy coverage goal, and strengthening the Tree Ordinance "if needed" (it is) to better protect private trees.





## Also Thursday 5/7 at ZAP & PDB: proposed changes to Landmarking Ordinance

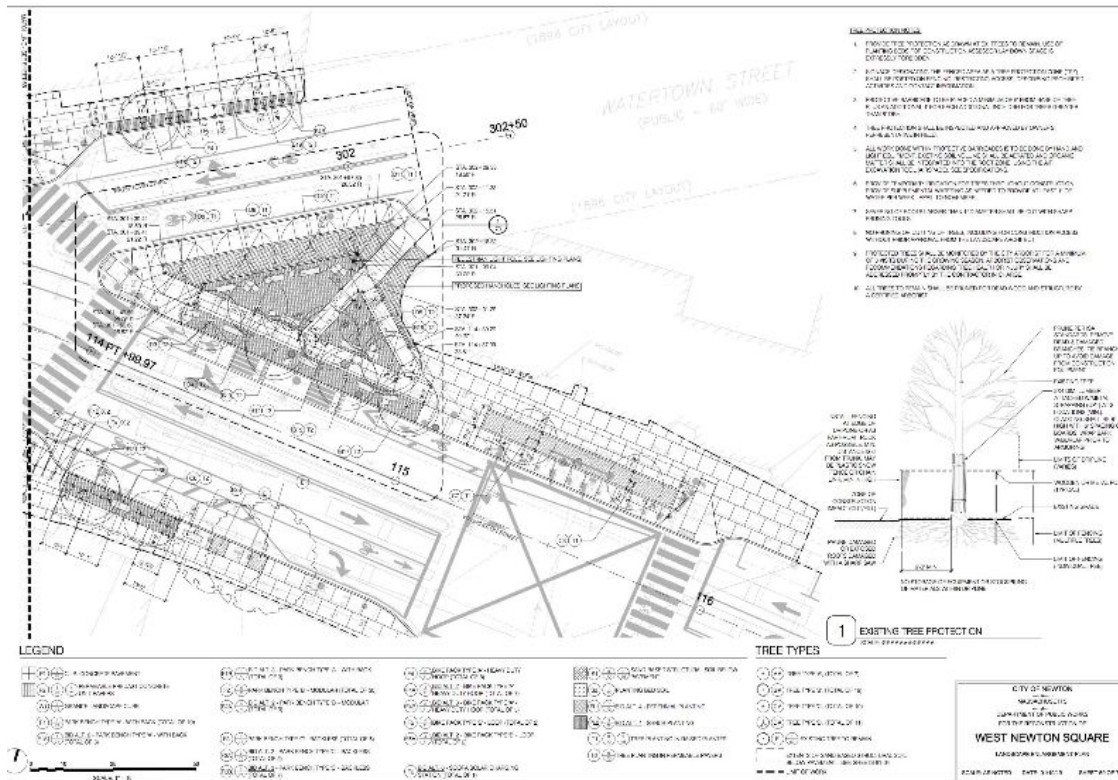
After the Open Space public hearing ZAP and the Planning & Development Board will review the Landmark Ordinance Working Group's proposed changes to the landmarking ordinance and process. I have not yet seen the draft, but a memo with the [ZAP agenda](#) describes most of the proposed changes, which can be expected to make landmarking somewhat more difficult, while making needed updates. Stay tuned.



## West Newton Square Enhancement project ahead of schedule

In case you've been staying so close to home you haven't been to West Newton Square lately, the Enhancement project timetable has benefited from the Covid-19 slowdown and lighter than usual traffic. These photos are already a few days old. Trees (mostly in bad shape) that were always destined to be removed, were removed on an expedited basis to enable sidewalk work to proceed. I've got a detailed plan that's too big to upload, but here's a section

PDF):



I'm told by Marc Welch that based on bid documents, the new tree species will be Valley Forge Elm, Red Maple, Tree Lilac, and Ginkgo, but I haven't figured out which is which (A,B,C,D) on the plans. Elms, maples, and ginkgos are all large-maturing species. Tree lilacs are suitable for planting under utility wires. Wherever they go, it's going to be a great improvement in tree canopy, and that doesn't include the rest of the landscaping.



The Davis Tavern, seen at left with West Newton Square Enhancement Construction underway, is thankfully now landmarked, by a unanimous 5-0 vote of the Newton

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