

# Community Preservation Act Committee Proposal Request Form for FY 2016

## CPA funding category

Check all that apply

- Community Housing
- Open Space
- Historic Preservation
- Recreation

Date: Dec 10, 2014

Submitting Entity: Amherst Historical Society

Contact Person: James Wald (incoming Board President)

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**Overview of Proposal:** – Please describe your project and your feasibility analysis

### Describe how your request meets the CPA criteria:

1. Description of funding needed including:
  - a. Documentation of cost estimates
  - b. Other sources of funding, e.g., grants, self-funding, fund-raising
  - c. Timeline on how CPA funds, if awarded, would be spent including over multiple years
2. Urgency of the Project, if any
3. Estimated timeline from receipt of funds to Project completion
4. Acquisition or preservation of threatened resources
5. Population(s) to be served by the Project
6. How will the CPA investment in your property, facility or project be maintained over time?
7. How the Project is prioritized by requesting Town committees or commissions?
8. Other information regarding the Project deemed necessary for CPAC

## **Amherst History Museum CPA Request FY16**

### **Archaeological Survey: \$ 25,000**

The Amherst Historical Society and Museum is to material culture what its neighbor, the Jones Library, is to books and manuscripts: the repository of the town's heritage and collective memory. Good stewardship of these resources means not simply holding them but also maximizing the potential for deriving information from them and providing for their conservation and secure storage, so that future generations may enjoy and benefit from them, as well.

As in public policy, we follow a process of: inventory, assessment, and action.

We are grateful for past Town Meeting allocations from CPA funds, which assisted in the work of preserving our collections (e.g. inventorying, conserving, and providing better storage for our over 1,500 artifacts) as well as our eighteenth-century building, one of the earliest surviving in Amherst (e.g. repairs to roof and windows, upgrades to electrical system).

The building, one of the earliest surviving in Amherst, is the most valuable asset in our collection. Our parallel request for funds for painting the building this year thus fulfills two purposes at once: stabilizing and preserving this structure—a historic resource in its own right—and thereby contributing to the preservation of the individual artifacts housed therein.

Ultimately, in order to bring our museum into line with proper professional standards and maximize the public benefit our resources, we will need to acquire up-to-date facilities for the housing and display of our collections in accessible, climate-controlled conditions. To that end, we several years ago (FY12) received an allocation of \$ 35,000 for feasibility studies relating to a potential expansion of our facility. In the interim, we postponed action as we realized that our planned process needed further refinement and addressed other needs. We are now ready to begin to move forward.

We come to you with this request for two reasons: Conducting an archaeological survey of our property is (1) part of good stewardship, the complement to the Historic Structure Report (HSR) we commissioned in 2002; (2) the sine qua non for any potential building addition or expansion, which would at once reveal and jeopardize any archaeological resources currently in the ground. We need to know how and where any new construction can safely take place.

As the HSR puts it:

The Strong House property is a long-occupied and heavily utilized site that has a high potential for containing archaeological evidence about the history of the house and the yard areas that comprise the present AHS property. The lot is at the center of the remains of a much larger farm and almost certainly contains archaeological evidence for a wide range of agricultural and domestic work activities, structures and artifacts. Any new activities on the property that might significantly disturb the ground (utility work, new construction, new walkways, tree removal, new planting beds and so forth) should take into consideration the potential for disturbing or destroying archaeological remains from the historic use of the property. Archaeology should be employed, as necessary, in a planned and systematic way to protect and document evidence for the history of the site that lies buried beneath its current ground surface.

The Historic Structure Report represents exhaustive research on the origins and condition of our eighteenth-century building. To date, no such comprehensive archaeological work on our property (35,000 square feet) has been undertaken, but the Structure Report does outline a plan for future work. UMass Archaeological Services undertook 9 sample excavations in 1990. Although the area bordering the Jones Library has been disturbed by the various phases of construction there, the HSR identifies the remaining open areas of the property—at both the rear (to the north) and front (to the south, between the house and Amity Street) as prime areas for research. (In 2011, faculty from the University of Massachusetts conducted some small sample excavations, as an educational enterprise in collaboration with the Amherst Public Schools, but only in the immediate vicinity of the house.)

Conducting a physical archaeological survey involving even only sample areas and test pits would be complex and intrusive. We are therefore proposing to undertake a comprehensive non-intrusive survey of the property using ground-penetrating radar (GPR). GPR, widely used to survey historic sites nowadays, is able to determine what lies under the ground by measuring radar reflections from subsurface structures. It can thus identify not only geological formations or physical artifacts, but also the various types of soil disturbances indicative of human activity (for example, compacted soil from farmyards, remains of fences and foundations, paths and gardens etc.) A GPR survey would thus constitute the next phase in the inventorying of our historic resources and offer guidance for future construction.

Based on similar surveys undertaken in the Pioneer Valley in recent years, we estimate the cost of the complete project (survey, analysis, report) at \$ 25,000.

### **1. Feasibility of the Project**

The project is eminently feasible as it involves well-tested methods over a modest, clearly delimited surface area.

### **2. Documentation for Estimated Costs**

We developed this figure through consultation with other history organizations in the area and are in the process of securing written estimates from providers of this service (among the leading such enterprises: University of Massachusetts Archaeological Services).

### **3. Funding available, possibility of multiple sources of funding, and expectations for additional funding in future years**

This will be one-time project. We have no other funding sources at this time.

### **4. Urgency of the Project**

High. We cannot proceed with any plans for construction on the property until we determine whether and where there are archaeological resources.

### **5. Estimated timeline from receipt of funding, if awarded, to start and to complete the Project**

This is a clearly delimited project, which can easily be completed within the fiscal year: ideally in the summer of 2015.

**6. Acquisition and/or preservation of threatened resources**

The project fulfills a dual purpose: documentation/recovery of any resources is a preservation goal in itself and at the same time will tell us where and how any future construction can take place.

**7. Population(s) to be served by the Project**

As the repository of the Town's material culture, the Amherst History museum serves the entire population. We hope that the survey will serve as a means of bringing our organization and its resources to the attention of a wider public.

In addition or more specifically, we will explore the possibility of using this project as an educational endeavor, for example, through student participation in the survey process.

**8. How will the CPA investment in your property, facility or project be maintained over time?**

The results of the archaeological study will be kept on file at the Museum, and a copy donated to the Town.

**9. Priority of your Project set by requesting Town boards, committees or commissions.**

[to be ranked by the Historical Commission]