

Friends -

Some of you may have heard that Second Congregational Church (SCC) has applied to the Cohasset Community Preservation Committee (CPC) for matching funds to help us do long-awaited renovations to the historic front facade, windows and bell tower. **The application was considered at the CPC meeting scheduled on Monday, 3/22, and will be addressed again on Monday, 3/29 at 6:30 pm on Zoom.** The agenda and invitation information is below.

Some of you may also remember that there was pushback when SCC applied for a historic preservation grant several years ago. As I understand it, the energy for this began when First Parish was awarded \$65,000 to replace their historic windows in 2012. When SCC came before the CPC a few years later, the opposition was better prepared and our application was denied. Apparently, the committee vote on our project was close. The primary objection was the use of public money for potentially religious purposes.

Recognizing both those concerns AND the historical and cultural significance of churches in our communities, a Massachusetts's Supreme Court case was decided in 2018 that established a 3-point test for evaluating projects with community benefit that are put forth by a local church. In short, the test asks "what is this for?" "who does it benefit?" and "is there a reason to be concerned that these benefits will compromise the Constitutional relationship between church and state?"

When one understands the boundaries and makes an appropriate request, those criteria can be met. In our case, (1) the purpose of the grant is to responsibly address age- and element- related damage to features of a historically significant building that is widely used both for and by the community within a recognized Historic District. (2) Public safety and the shared appreciation of the beautiful Cohasset Common are matters of community concern. The only separable value of such work is the fact that the small and aging membership of Second Congregational Church cannot commission this work on its own. We have been both consistent and prudent in committing available funds to maintaining our building. We simply can't do everything that is currently needed to preserve this important part of Cohasset's history on our own. The project we propose is appropriately distinct from our identity as a church. We ARE a community resource. And, with respect to point (3), there is no compromise. We are part of, not at odds with, Cohasset.

SCC is not the only town-focused church to be in this position. Nor are we alone in making an honorable request. Between 2017 and 2020, 59 grants for appropriate building-related projects have been awarded to churches in Massachusetts, totaling over \$5.5 million. Which brings us to this note. Church leaders from SCC's Trustees and Finance Committee have worked with me to put together our current application to the Cohasset CPC for funding assistance.

Please take a few minutes to look through the presentation, above. It is important that you understand what we are asking for and why. It is also important that we generate energy for this project -- not only with the CPC but also when (we hope) it comes before the town at Annual Meeting.

Please let me know if you have questions or concerns. And, please, if you support this initiative and are able to attend, come to the virtual CPC meeting on Monday. Even in this virtual arena, community support has an impact.

With gratitude,  
Pastor Karen

PS Be sure to look at the remarkable letters of support from SCC's many community partners!