

Dear Needham Town Meeting members,

We are so grateful to Town Meeting for granting Community Preservation Act (CPA) historic preservation funds to preserve and restore exterior portions of the two oldest houses of worship in our town: First Baptist Church and First Parish in Needham, Unitarian Universalist. We take our stewardship of these historic Needham buildings very seriously. Regardless of our particular religious affiliations and the work we do for the benefit of the wider community, we want to ensure these iconic buildings — which include Needham's centennial Paul Revere Bell (First Parish) and its original town clock (First Baptist) — remain part of the Needham landscape. This is why we applied for CPA funds, and why we will conduct additional capital campaigns to secure funding for the restoration of our front porch (First Baptist) and bell tower (First Parish).

Both of us were present at Town Meeting for the deliberations; we are aware there were many concerns about using CPA funds for church projects, and that the vote was far from unanimous in favor of our applications. We recognize the complexities involved in the deliberations of each constituent and Town Meeting member and appreciate their thoughtful contributions to the discussion of our articles. We regret that our applications may have inadvertently been cause for division and confusion at Town Meeting, especially in the wake of last week's "Needham Times" article that implied funding our projects might leave the town open to legal challenges. We are grateful to Town Counsel for assuaging those concerns. It has been an honor and joy to work with the Community Preservation Committee on our applications, and we thank those who spoke and voted in favor of our proposals and the preservation of these significant architectural landmarks in our town.

We also acknowledge, as was brought up by some Town Meeting members, that religious discrimination in our region means that CPA funding for historic preservation most frequently goes to Christian and Unitarian Universalist houses of worship; many religious groups were not able to establish houses of worship in early New England. If you are interested in learning more about redlining and other exclusionary practices in our nation's housing history (and present), please consider attending the At Your Neighbor's Table event, "What Kind of Communities Do We Want to Live In?" on October 18th on Zoom (email info@coopmet.org for more information). Both of our congregations are co-sponsors of this important event.

We hope that the Town of Needham will continue to enjoy the beauty of our two historic buildings and that they will remain a valued asset to the Town of Needham for years to come. Please feel free to be in touch with either of us if you have questions, concerns, or curiosities about our buildings and their service to the town.

Thank you again to Town Meeting!

Blessings,

Rev. Catie Scudera, Minister of First Parish in Needham, Unitarian Universalist
Rev. Daryn Stylianopoulos, Pastor of First Baptist Church of Needham

