

Cape Vincent Town Board unanimously approves sponsoring Restore NY grant for Carleton Villa

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The Cape Vincent Town Board unanimously approved sponsoring an application for a Restore NY grant for the stabilization of the Carleton Villa. Watertown Daily Times

CAPE VINCENT — The Cape Vincent Town Board unanimously agreed Thursday night to sponsor a Restore NY grant application for stabilization of the Carleton Villa.

Scott Burto, who is writing the grant application for developer Ronald Clapp, of Lantana, Florida, and who serves as the mayor of West Carthage, said the grant is solely for stabilization of the villa. It has nothing to do with any other portion of the project, including the potential campground/glampground.

“The application is specific to stabilizing and protecting the villa from future damage while he continues to revitalize the building,” Burto said while adding that the application does not mention any other plans.

Burto also stressed that Clapp has paid for the \$250 fee for the application in advance to the town.

“There is no cost to the town for this application,” he said.

The grant is a 90% grant with a 10% local share that will be paid for by Clapp.

“Part of the application is a commitment letter from the developer committing to the 10% of the project cost,” Burto said. “The town is not committing any funds to this project.”

Clapp will also need to prove that he has the 10% to New York state. Burto says he has seen documentation showing Clapp is able to pay for the 10% share.

During a public comment portion of the meeting, residents voiced concerns over benefits to the town, hurting the Cape’s reputation with the state, and the overall viability of the grant application.

Sarah Dayton, a Cape Vincent resident who said she worked with state and federal grant opportunities, said she is concerned about future projects receiving this grant.

“It concerns me for the reputation of just putting in grants that probably will not be funded,” she said. “It’s something that would be good for the board to consider and think that through because we don’t want that impacting our reputation. Cape Vincent has been incredibly successful in putting in grants and amazing things have happened and I just, because of the work that I’ve done, that always gets my attention.”

In addressing residents, Clapp said this project would benefit the town by potentially hiring local residents and even if local residents aren’t on the job, money will be coming into Cape Vincent by people buying groceries, eating at restaurants, and “doing all the things that we do.” He also said that materials may be from some north country distributors.

“My intent is to bring as many of those dollars to the local community,” Clapp said.

Clapp added he believes that the tourism could be a good thing from the town.

Tim White also spoke at the meeting and said he was in favor of the project as he believes that if the villa is restored it could be a landmark for the Cape in addition to the lighthouse.

“I think the developer deserves a shot,” he said.

Town Supervisor Paul Aubertine said that he believes any restoration of a historical property is a good thing for the town, but understands it’s not “at any cost.”

“I think if we have the ability to be the vehicles for a private business to come in and apply for funding, which they potentially qualify for, we don’t feel it’s necessary to stand in their way to submit an application,” he said. Restore NY grants must go through the town, even if the town is not fronting any costs.

He said it will then be up to the state if the stabilization qualifies for the grant.

Clapp purchased the property in July 2022. His proposal includes renovating the villa into a boutique hotel with a restaurant in addition to a campground/glampground. It is important to note again that the Restore NY grant would not cover the campground/glampground.

Applications are due on Dec. 20 with an announcement from the governor expected early in 2025 detailing the recipients.

If Clapp is approved by the state, he will need to complete the project outlined in the grant agreement within three years. The state may allow for a two year extension on top of that.