

In last month's election, eight communities across Massachusetts adopted the Community Preservation Act (CPA), including Hatfield, Monson, Lenox, and Hubbardston. These towns join 111 others, bringing the number of municipalities accessing CPA funds to 119—over 1/3 of the Commonwealth.

The CPA was designed to help communities implement the projects that are always on their wish lists but rarely make it to the "To Do" lists. The CPA raises funds through a small surcharge of 1-3% of a household's property tax, which is matched by the state and spent on land conservation, community housing, historic preservation, and recreation projects.

In 2006 alone, towns participating in the CPA enjoyed over \$58 million in additional funds from the Commonwealth. Yet few towns in western Massachusetts are benefiting from the program. The CPA is a flexible, locally-controlled investment in a town's land, heritage, housing, and future. CPA funding removes some of the financial burden from our communities, allowing them to undertake projects crucial for retaining their rural character and way of life. Through the CPA, communities are preserving their historic buildings, cemeteries, and archives, improving housing for families and senior citizens, preserving farms, forests, and water supplies, and building ball fields and trails across Massachusetts.

Many people are surprised to learn of the CPA's benefits:

- **It's locally controlled:** A local committee reviews potential projects to spend the CPA funds, which requires the approval of Town Meeting only, not any state agency. The CPA funds stay in town coffers for town projects.
- **It's flexible:** The funds can be used for preserving and maintaining historic structures or landscapes that are important to the heritage or character of the town, such as painting town hall, planting maple trees along scenic roads, or rehabilitating privately owned barns.
- **It can adapt to community needs:** The financial burden of the surcharge can be tailored to community needs by exempting low-income families and moderate-income senior citizens.
- **It supports a community's housing needs:** CPA housing funds can be spent on maintaining or converting existing housing to be affordable for current residents, making homes handicapped accessible for the elderly or infirm, or helping families with down payment assistance on their first home.
- **It's dependable:** The state matching funds come from fees at the Registry of Deeds (landowners in every city and town are paying them!), and are not appropriated by the legislature. Because of this separate funding stream, CPA matching funds are much more dependable than other forms of state funds.

For a region that is known for its rural character and extraordinary forests, farms, and rivers, the CPA is too valuable for small towns to ignore. There is still time to take advantage of the CPA's benefits, and the Highland Communities Initiative, a program of The Trustees of Reservations, is available to help you learn more about your town's options. Contact HCI at www.highlandcommunities.org or 413.268.8219 for more information or visit the Community Preservation Coalition's website at www.communitypreservation.org to learn about putting the CPA to work in your town.

Sincerely,
Wendy Sweetser
Director, Highland Communities Initiative