

Our View: Community Preservation Act in New Bedford offers high return on investment

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It looks like a tax grab to some, but the Community Preservation Act that will be on the ballot in New Bedford this November represents the chance to make a wise investment.

Even for elderly and fixed-income homeowners, the 87 cents per week it would cost the owner of a \$300,000 house ought to be affordable. The tiny contribution to the proposed Community Preservation Act fund would leverage a match from the state to fund projects involving open space, parks and recreation, and historic preservation, all of which contribute to the quality of life in New Bedford's public spaces. CPA funds can also be used toward affordable housing, which assures the valuable diversity of the city.

The proposal would exempt the first \$100,000 of property value from the 1.5 percent surcharge. A property owner with the city average \$183,305 home would pay \$19 into the fund each year; a \$300,000 property would incur a \$45.48 surcharge.

A landlord with multiple properties would see the first \$100,000 exempted on each of the properties.

The city estimates that under current property valuations, more than \$768,000 would be raised the first year.

That does not include the state's match.

It works as a double investment, first in the state match for the funds collected, second as an expenditure on improving life in the city.

Polls suggest that taxpayers are less resistant to increases when they know where the revenue will be spent. We don't know about that, but we do believe that if taxpayers realize that the surcharge is very small, that it goes to improving life for all in the city and those who visit, and that the state adds a significant match, they'll conclude that they should vote in favor of the Community Preservation Act in November.

Our View: Community Preservation Act is good government

October 05, 2014 12:00 AM

Local supporters of New Bedford's campaign to adopt the Community Preservation Act say that, so far, there has been no sign of organized opposition to the Nov. 4 referendum question.

An initiative that some interpret as "another tax" doesn't usually need organized opposition. But those who take that opinion have really gotten the wrong message.

The law as proposed for New Bedford has taken into account the struggles of low-income property owners and senior citizens, both of whom are exempt from mandatory contribution to the CPA fund.

In fact, the contribution, based on the average New Bedford residential property valuation, would be \$18 per year, \$60 per year for commercial. The first \$100,000 of valuation for both residential and commercial properties is exempt, and everything above that would have a 1.5 percent surcharge to raise, according to city estimates, about \$768,000 in the first year. that would get a match from the state, which last year would have been 52 percent.

The fund would be added to every year, and would be spent according to the determination of the City Council based on recommendations of a Community Preservation Committee. The committee would be made up of representatives of local boards and commissions, such as the Planning Board and Historical Commission. Four council-appointed members of the community would fill out the membership of nine.

The committee would evaluate proposals on projects that would improve or expand open space, affordable housing, recreational areas and historically significant properties, and not just public properties, as long as a private project has a public use. That makes projects like restoration of the city's historic First Baptist Church eligible. It means dog parks, school playgrounds, hiking trails, bike paths, parks and ballfields are all eligible.

Advocates for the ballot, speaking with the editorial board of The Standard-Times last week, said that CPA funds act as leverage on larger projects, attracting other public sources, but especially private philanthropy, bringing to bear funds far beyond the community's investment and which often would not be available without the CPA incentive.

Until 2012, there had been very little urban interest in the CPA, but recent incentives added to the law that don't limit expenditures to projects purchased with CPA funds have made it more attractive to the cities. This Nov. 4, CPA votes will be on ballots in Woburn and Arlington, as well as the Whaling City.

According to Derek Santos of the New Bedford Economic Development Council, who was in the meeting with the editorial board, there are many benefits to adopting the act:

- Projects are initiated locally by New Bedford residents. Decisions are made democratically.
- Projects improve the quality of life, stimulate travel and tourism, beautify neighborhoods and invite new business.
- Funds can be used to acquire open space to protect drinking water supplies, scenic vistas, coastal areas and wetlands.
- Funds can provide access to new, safe parks, playgrounds, trails and athletic fields.
- Low-income homeowners and seniors would be completely exempt.
- The act leverages a state match from the Community Preservation Act Trust Fund.
- Private entities can apply for grants as long as the project serves a public purpose, creating jobs.

The Standard-Times has supported the CPA every time it's come up for a vote on SouthCoast, where only New Bedford, Rochester, Freetown and Lakeville have yet to adopt.

New Bedford should follow the lead of Fall River and adopt the act, and those other communities should do so, as well.

The Community Preservation Act improves the quality of life for all citizens, and takes into consideration a property owner's ability to contribute. It is fair and forward thinking.

It is good policy.

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