

# *Why Williamstown needs to adopt* **The Community Preservation Act**

## **What is the Community Preservation Act?**

It is a law that allows towns to raise and dedicate funds for affordable housing, historic preservation and open space protection. To be adopted, it must be approved at both a town meeting and town election. The May 2001 town meeting has already authorized the Selectmen to place the question on the May 2002 election ballot.

## **How does the town raise the money?**

Two ways: one through a *surcharge* of up to 3 percent on residents' property tax bills and the other through guaranteed matching funds from the state.

## **What is a surcharge?**

It is a tax on the property tax bill. It is *not* a tax on the assessed value of the property.

## **How is the surcharge calculated?**

Williamstown is recommending a 2% surcharge (the act allows up to 3%) However the first \$100,000 of your property value will be exempt. On a home assessed at, say, \$150,000, the total surcharge would be \$16.32 a year.

## **What about people who can't afford to pay it?**

Low and moderate income seniors and low-income residents can apply for an exemption.

## **Why do we need an extra tax? Shouldn't the town live within its budget and the limitations of Proposition 2 1/2?**

Most of the money raised through the local property tax goes to support the schools and to public safety and public works. There is seldom funding available for the preservation of open space or historic resources or the creation of affordable housing. The Community Preservation Act provides a way to dedicate money especially for these important programs and to have it matched by the state.

## **Where does the state money to match the local funds come from?**

Through transfer fees charged at the registries of deeds. The money goes into a special trust fund to be distributed to the towns.

## **How much can Williamstown raise?**

About \$103,000 could be raised annually through a 2 percent surcharge. The state would match at least 5% and up to 100% of this amount.

## **Who decides how the money is spent?**

You do. All expenditures will be voted on at Town Meeting. The act requires that a local community preservation committee of five to nine members be appointed, including representatives from the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission, Parks & Recreation Commission and Housing Authority, plus two at-large members named by the Selectmen. They will study the town's needs and recommend projects in article form to the Town Meeting.

## **What could the money be spent for in Williamstown?**

A variety of projects could benefit. Some possibilities are affordable housing at Southworth School, a riverfront park and recreation area near the Photech mill site, biking trails, a skateboard park, acquisition of Sand Springs as a community swimming facility, landscaping of Bloedel Park in South Williamstown, needed renovations to the Little Red Schoolhouse in South Williamstown and preservation of the historic coal silos off Cole Avenue.

## **Can the money be saved up?**

Yes. The money can be accumulated over several years to help finance a large project. The town can also borrow against future income.

## **What if it gets to be a burden?**

The town meeting can vote to eliminate the surcharge after five years.