

Northampton votes overwhelmingly to keep Community Preservation Act

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A group of people react as returns against the repeal of the Community Preservation Act are announced Tuesday at Northampton City Hall.

NORTHAMPTON - Six years after city voters first approved it by a small margin, they overwhelmingly endorsed the Community Preservation Act, a program that has paid for popular projects such as the restoration of Forbes Library and the preservation of the Bean/Allard farmlands.

Northampton voters soundly rejected a referendum to repeal the CPA by a vote of 6,204 to 2,732, a margin of better than 2 to 1. The question was defeated in every ward. Only one precinct, 6A, by a vote of 378-369 went for repeal of the CPA.

Those totals are in stark contrast to the vote approving the CPA in 2005, when the city adopted it by only 175 votes.

Ward 7 City Councilor Eugene Tacy wrote the ballot question asking voters if they wanted to repeal Northampton's six-year-old CPA. The program assesses a 3-percent property tax surcharge to fund community improvement projects in four categories: historic preservation, land preservation, affordable housing and recreation.

"The people have spoken," Tacy said, as he stood in a crowded hallway at City Hall watching the vote totals come in. "This shows they really like the CPA."

Lilly Lombard, head of Grow Food Northampton, a nonprofit that has received CPA funds to preserve the Bean/Allard tract, cited the program's track record as the reason voters rejected the repeal referendum.

"We have a five-year record of success," said Lombard, who helped get the CPA on the ballot six years ago. "It's hard to deny the value the CPA has contributed to our community."

Lombard noted that people around the state were watching the results of Tuesday's vote closely. Northampton would have been the first community in the state to repeal its CPA if the vote had gone the other way.

"We're all really, really proud of Northampton for standing so soundly behind its program," Lombard said.

Hingham is the only other community in the state to put a CPA repeal question before voters. Five years ago, residents in Hingham voted to keep their CPA by a margin of 72 to 28 percent.

A draw to polls

In interviews at polling places around the city, many voters cited the CPA repeal question as a key issue drawing them to the polls.

Paula Yolles, who was voting at JFK Middle School, said she went online to read about the issue.

"I think having land is important for the community," said Yolles, who teaches at the Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School in Haydenville. "People have done really great things with the CPA."

Romney Biddulph, who was also voting at JFK, said he could understand why some people are feel the property tax surcharge that funds the program is a burden.

"But as hard as it is to pay more taxes, the CPA does a lot for our community," Biddulph said.

The current annual surcharge averages around \$79 per family, according to city officials.

Tacy said he had no regrets about placing the repeal question on the ballot. "My constituents asked me to put it there and that's what I did," he said.

"The city of Northampton is very generous with overrides and such," Tacy added. The vote to retain the program "is no big surprise," he said.

Tuesday's vote to retain the CPA means Northampton will remain eligible for state matching funds from a Community Preservation Trust Fund paid for through registry of deed transactions. Since it started, the city's CPA program has drawn more than \$2 million in state funds for local improvement projects, according to program staff. Among

them are restoration of the Academy of Music building, affordable housing on King Street and the Manhan Rail Trail project.

Northampton is currently one of 148 municipalities in the state that have adopted CPAs. Among the other area communities with CPAs are Amherst, Belchertown, Easthampton, Hatfield and Southampton.

Here is the breakdown by precinct — Ward 1A: Yes (repeal) 97, No (keep) 288; Ward 1B: Yes 267, No 570; Ward 2A: Yes 77, No 467; Ward 2B: Yes 42, No 359; Ward 3A: Yes 164, No 458; Ward 3B: Yes 122, No 361; Ward 4A: Yes 51, No 245; Ward 4B: Yes 186, No 609; Ward 5A: Yes 185, No 466; Ward 5B: Yes 235, No 499; Ward 6A: Yes 378, No 369; Ward 6B: Yes 316, No 528; Ward 7A: Yes 264, No 473; Ward 7B: Yes 348, No 512; Total: Yes 2,732; No 6,204.