

# Community preservation funds in Massachusetts bolstered by \$25 million from state budget surplus

By [Dan Ring, The Republican](#)

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Memorial Hall in Monson, an historic community building shown in this photo, may be able to open to the public again in the spring, with help from money raised through the town's adoption of the Community Preservation Act. The preservation money, generated by a local surcharge on property taxes and a state match, will be used for repair of safety and code violations in the building.

*(Lori Stabile/The Republican)*

BOSTON — Cities and towns around the state this year are benefiting from a doubling of state-matching money for a program that raises local funds for land **conservation, historic preservation** and affordable housing.

The state contribution, totaling \$55 million, doubled from last year mainly because the program – the **Community Preservation Act**– for the first time received \$25 million from the **state budget** surplus.

Each year since 2003, communities have received a state match if voters have adopted the act by approving a property tax surcharge of up to 3 percent to raise local money.

A total of 148 communities on Nov. 15 received a state contribution, including about 30 in Western Massachusetts.

Previously, the state money came strictly from \$10 and \$20 fees on real estate transactions. Now, the money from the real estate fees is being bolstered by the \$25 million from the budget surplus for the fiscal year ending June 30.

About \$400 million in state dollars has been pumped into the program over 12 years, starting in 2003.

Stuart Saginor, executive director of the Community Preservation Coalition, said the coalition is "very grateful" that state legislators and Gov. **Deval L. Patrick** recognize the importance of the preservation act.

Saginor said supporters of the act will work to renew the provision for \$25 million in next year's state budget.

"It's a program that generates a lot of jobs and economic activity and preserves the quality of life for close to half the municipalities in the state that have adopted the Community Preservation Act," Saginor said.

The money can be used for historic preservation, open space, affordable housing and recreation.

A bipartisan effort on **Beacon Hill**, including Rep. Stephen Kulik, a Worthington Democrat, and House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones Jr. of North Reading, prompted approval of the \$25 million from the surplus.

All communities in the program will receive a 52.2 percent match on the first round of the state distribution this year, or twice as much as last year's 26.6 percent initial match, according to the coalition.

Communities that approved the full 3 percent property tax surcharge will receive additional state money during the second and third rounds.

State matching money began to plummet after hitting a peak of \$68 million in 2008, because of a real estate slump. Also, more communities adopted the law, further stretching out the state money. State money for the law was about \$26 to \$28 million annually prior to this year.

 **Each town is making a financial commitment. It's not that we are getting free money from the state.**  
– **Leslie Duthie, Monson**

Sarah LaValley, community preservation planner for **Northampton**, which has a 3 percent surcharge, said the city will benefit from a big increase in the state match to \$591,261. That's about 64 match on the estimated \$928,000 raised locally.

"It will have great benefits for the community," she said.

The city's community preservation committee has voted to recommend \$194,500 be used for designing improvements to Pulaski Park, the downtown park that hosts the annual holiday tree lighting.

It would be the first time preservation money would be used in Pulaski Park.

Under a 2012 change to the state community preservation law, funds, including the state match and money generated through the local surcharge, can be used to make capital improvements on existing recreational land that was not created or acquired with funds from the law. Previously, funds could only be used on recreational properties bought or created with those funds.

The committee is also recommending \$250,000 for extending the Norwottuck Rail Trail from Leeds to Williamsburg. The project depends on the city obtaining a separate federal grant.

Another \$170,000 would go toward purchasing 58 acres at the Saw Mill Hills conservation land off Sylvester Road and an additional \$250,000 for restoring the exterior of the South Street Apartments.

Leslie Duthie, chairwoman of the **Monson** Community Preservation Committee, said the town is very excited to receive \$174,618, or 100 percent of the money generated with its surcharge.

"Each town is making a financial commitment," she added. "It's not that we are getting free money from the state."

She listed a number of projects in the works, including completion of repairs to a stone wall at the historic Hillside Cemetery. The town needs to finish restoration to the section of the wall along Thompson Street.

About \$100,000 in preservation money was used to restore the windows on the south side of Memorial Hall, a distinctive granite building in the town center listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

The building, currently closed to the public, may open next spring with the help of preservation money.

The committee recently approved another \$171,750 for restoring windows and doors at Memorial Hall with a provision to first repair code and safety violations to allow the building to open to the public again. The committee also suggested the Monson Historical Commission apply for a state grant to possibly help the restoration.

A total of \$70,000 of Community Preservation money was used to help purchase 135 acres of open space off Reimers Road in Monson, but other sources funded the remainder of the \$350,000 purchase, Duthie said.

Like many other communities, Monson attempts to direct preservation money to projects that include grants from other sources. In that case, preservation funds can go further, local leaders said.



Paul H. Boudo, chairman of the community preservation committee in West Springfield, said \$220,000 in preservation funds and a state grant will pay for an overhaul to Mittineague Park, including new trees, walkways and paths, parking, a community garden, a picnic pavilion and other improvements. *The Republican* [file]

West Springfield, for example, just received state grants for projects also funded with preservation money.

West Springfield, which has 1 percent surcharge, received \$191,615 in state money, or 52 percent of its \$366,900 in local funds.

Paul H. Boudo, chairman of the community preservation committee in **West Springfield**, said \$220,000 in preservation funds and a state grant will pay for an overhaul to Mittineague Park, including new trees, walkways and paths, parking, a community garden, a picnic pavilion and other improvements.

A state grant plus \$207,000 of preservation money will also be used for West Springfield to purchase land in Southwick for possible expansion of town water wells, he said.

Another \$52,295 in preservation funds went toward planting new trees and pruning and removing damaged trees on the West Springfield Town Common. The work, completed about a month ago, was needed following the tornado of June 2011.

Agawam was one of the earliest communities in the state to adopt the program, approving a 1 percent surcharge at the polls in 2001. The town this year received \$230,936 state match for \$442,193 raised locally.

Henry A. Kozloski, chair of the community preservation committee in **Agawam**, said \$1.6 million in preservation money was used to help create a new park off School Street, including several athletic fields, hiking trails, bocce courts, horseshoe pit, basketball court and a modern children's playground. The committee approved another \$1.8 million for a second phase including a band shell, pavilion and picnic areas.

Agawam has used preservation money for various other projects, including upgrading low-income housing for the elderly, purchasing open space next to Agawam High School, and replacing a brass plaque that honors George Washington, who traveled through the town.

About \$300,000 in preservation money was used to restore the historic Thomas and Esther Smith House, Kozloski added.

"It's amazing what it has done throughout Massachusetts," he said of the preservation law.

According to the coalition's web site, preservation funds have been approved for about 6,600 projects across the state. Without the preservation money, many of the projects might otherwise be difficult, or impossible, to finance, local officials said.

Some of the funds in **Belchertown**, for example, were used to help buy 60 acres of forest, ponds and open fields and preserve an historic dam at the Scarborough Brook Recreational Area, buy the development rights of 80 acres of farmland off Bardwell

Street, upgrade the Hope United Methodist Church and restore the Lake Vale Cemetery including preserving and repairing gravestones.

In addition, **Westfield** used some of its preservation money for a strategic housing plan and buying five parcels, or about 3 acres, on Hampton Ponds, including Free Beach, to protect drinking water, wetlands, shoreline and preserving public access, and restoring the historic Joseph Dewey House, the Westfield Whip Factory and City Hall.

**East Longmeadow** spent preservation funds to renovate the town's original fire station, purchase 76 acres of open space, replace the perimeter fence at the Greenlawn Cemetery where four soldiers from the Revolutionary War are buried, purchase the home and property of the historic Norcross House on Maple Street, scan and digitize the town's historic documents and renovate the 60-year-old Pine Knoll pool.

The state match jumped this year also because Registry fees increased with the improving real estate market.

Because the state distributed the money a month later than usual this year, the match included an additional month in Registry fees, the coalition said.

Source: The Republican

[http://www.masslive.com/politics/index.ssf/2013/12/state\\_preservation\\_funds\\_in\\_ma.html](http://www.masslive.com/politics/index.ssf/2013/12/state_preservation_funds_in_ma.html)