

**INFLUX OF STATE FUNDS LIFTS AID FOR COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PROJECTS**

By Matt Murphy

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, NOV. 27, 2013....A \$25 million influx of surplus state funds from last year has contributed to making this the most lucrative round of financing in five years for cities and towns that rely on the Community Preservation Act to support open space and other projects.

The state last week began distributing \$55 million from the Community Preservation Trust Fund to 148 cities and towns that have opted into the program, which allows municipalities to levy a property tax surcharge of up to 3 percent in exchange for state matching grants to fund open space preservation, housing or historic rehabilitation projects.

“It’s been a number of very lean years for cities and towns that have the CPA. It’s good news they’ve been waiting for and communities will be doing a robust slate of projects in the coming years that will create jobs,” said Stuart Saginor, executive director of the Community Preservation Coalition.

Lawmakers approved the additional funding for the Community Preservation Act as part of the fiscal 2014 budget, pledging to commit surplus funds at the end of fiscal 2013. The books on that fiscal year were closed in October.

Though the appropriation was a one-time allocation, Saginor said House Ways and Means Vice-Chairman Stephen Kulik told the group that House leaders were committed to doing it again on a year-to-year basis, and the coalition will be asking for similar surplus funding from the fiscal 2014 budget.

“This coming spring we’ll be asking or the match will slide back down to being dangerously low again,” Saginor said.

All CPA communities will receive a 52.2 percent match from the state on funds raised locally through property taxes, double the 26.6 percent state match from 2012 and the highest state contribution since 2008.

Supporters said the high state match was due to the surplus state funds and improvement in the real estate market that led to increased recording fees collected at the Registries of Deeds used to fund the CPA. The Department of Revenue also waited an extra month until November to distribute its first round of CPA funds, allowing an extra month of Registry fee collections.

Saginor said the addition of seven new communities who will qualify for matching funds in fiscal 2015 along with the inclusion of only 12 months of deed fees could cause the state match to dip below 50 percent again next year unless lawmakers approve more than \$25 million from a potential surplus for the CPA next year. Beverly, Canton, Fall River, Great Barrington, Salem, Somerset, and Somerville all become newly eligible for state matching funds next year.

“We’ll have to talk to the Legislature and see what they’re thinking,” Saginor said.

According to the coalition, the Community Preservation Act has helped fund over 6,600 projects statewide, creating or supporting more than 7,300 affordable housing units, preserving nearly 19,200 acres of open space, and enabling 3,200 historic preservation projects.

For the first time this year, changes made by the Legislature to the CPA will allow participating communities to use preservation funds to rehabilitate existing parks, playgrounds and athletic fields, rather than only build new ones.

Now that communities have received their funds, Saginor said cities and towns can begin accepting applications for CPA projects. "There's definitely a pent-up demand," he said.

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