

Malden voters adopt Community Preservation Act, officials begin implementation

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MALDEN

Residents voted yesterday to adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA), 3,365 in favor to 2,149 against. This morning, while many local residents are celebrating, city officials have to begin the work of getting a game plan together to implement the law.

Lisa Sulda of Preserve Malden is one of many people who this morning are celebrating the passage of question 3 during yesterday's election.

"Oh, my, gosh, that was a great night," she said. "That was a big victory for Malden. It was huge."

City Clerk Karen Anderson is one of many city officials who will be involved in the process of implementing the CPA. The city, she said, is starting from ground zero and the first step is for officials to have a meeting to delve into the state statute in detail.

"We're going to have to take a look at it and see what we need to do," Anderson said.

A committee will be formed to solicit proposals, collect them and recommend projects to the City Council for use of CPA funds, she said.

Then, there is the actually nitty-gritty of collecting and managing the funds, including the 1 percent surcharge on real estate tax bills and the estimated 25 percent state match. The CPA will kick in for fiscal 2017, which begins July 1, 2016. But, the tax year, Anderson said, runs differently.

Treasurer Mark Good said, "I have more questions than answers at this point."

One of those questions is can the surcharge kick in with the January 2016 bills to property owners, and should it?

Like Anderson, Good, who said he wasn't expecting the CPA to be approved yesterday, also emphasized that city officials need to examine the law before saying exactly what will happen next. However, he said his department's software is set up to handle collection of the funds, and he has looked into changes that will have to be made to both the online bill paying system and the paper bills that are mailed to property owners.

"There are technical aspects that people aren't seeing on their end that I see on my end," Good said.

Anderson said it remains to be seen exactly how much money the city will raise, especially since the amount of matching funds may not turn out to be 25 percent. The pot from which the state distributes funds to communities under the CPA is under more pressure now than it was in the early years after the state statute went into effect.

"More communities are adopting the CPA," Anderson said, "so the slice of pie is getting smaller."

In 2001, Anderson said, the match was almost dollar for dollar, but last year it was 25 percent.

The CPA is designed to create a fund dedicated to four specific areas, open space, historic preservation, affordable housing and outdoor recreation. So, the committee will need to have representation from each.

Steven Keleti of Preserve Malden said that while the City Council will work out the wording of the ordinance with regards to setting up a committee, the statute has guidelines for who should be on it. The Conservation Commission, the Historical Commission, the Planning Board, and the Housing Authority will each have a representative on the committee, and there will be someone representing parks and recreation.

In terms of implementation, Keleti said, the city will have many resources to draw on as officials move forward.

"We're a little late to the dance," he said.

Many communities in the state have adopted the CPA so instead of reinventing the wheel, he said, Malden can draw on the experience of officials from other communities.