

# **Fall River CPA Campaign Strategy: How We Won**

*In 2012, CPA advocates in Fall River successfully passed CPA adoption during their November election. When advocates in neighboring New Bedford began planning their own CPA adoption efforts, the members of the Fall River CPA campaign gave a presentation on lessons learned during their own attempt. Below is a list of advice, suggestions, and talking points that were reviewed during this presentation. In 2014, the New Bedford campaign succeeded and the city adopted the Community Preservation Act.*

## **When is the Right Time for a CPA Campaign?**

- ❖ Go for it in even years in the fall! State elections have a higher turnout and better odds.
- ❖ Start early: beginning in January gave us enough time to ramp up to November.

## **How to Get Started?**

- ❖ This is an election campaign: your job is to change minds.
- ❖ Get assistance: we had had help from land protection nonprofits, but seek out allies in the areas of historic preservation, open space & outdoor recreation, and affordable housing.
- ❖ Assemble the core group and create a larger political committee – our core had three individuals.
- ❖ Determine your political champions. We had several City Council members on board; otherwise we would have had to go with a signature petition.
- ❖ Decide on a rate and determine the cost. A 1.5% surcharge gave our city \$1 million in annual revenue with an average cost of \$20 per household.
- ❖ Get the wording right on the ballot question; the Community Preservation Coalition can help.

## **The CPA Campaign: Laying the Groundwork and Building Support**

- ❖ Use the Spring and Summer to prepare the foundation of your campaign.
- ❖ For a full-scale campaign, we recommend raising at least \$10,000. Smaller communities will need less.
- ❖ Prepare a basic presentation that reflects your community's likes and issues (and have AV equipment ready so you can make a presentation in any setting).
- ❖ Put your basic message on a web site. Use photos effectively. Include an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section to explain the main elements of your CPA proposal.
- ❖ Create your elevator speech and your campaign's moniker. Be ready to use it with everyone you meet.
- ❖ Print a basic flyer and distribute everywhere.
- ❖ Create an email list of your basic supporters: keep in touch and keep encouraging them: "We are going to win." Our campaign had a list of 100 engaged advocates.

## **Communicate Your Message: It's Time to Adopt CPA**

- ❖ Focus on what people want, not what they are afraid of. What emotional issues (or signature sites) unite the city?
- ❖ Why do we need it? Speak to the needs or concerns of the various constituencies; make them want the CPA. Speak to what people want in their neighborhoods.
- ❖ Go to the groups you need to convince in order to build support: neighborhood organizations, the senior community, etc. Our campaign held twelve presentations for seniors with food provided.
- ❖ Meet with everyone who will meet with you, particularly your potential opponents (Chamber of Commerce, local realtors, individuals).
- ❖ Attend local events – get the word out to the community.
- ❖ Begin getting endorsements from organizations and politicians. Who would benefit from the CPA? We had 25 endorsements on our final mailing.
- ❖ Use free advertising: radio, letters to the editor, cable TV, web site, social media. We also advertised in the Portuguese newspaper and radio stations.
- ❖ Phone banks, literature drops.
- ❖ Examples of concerns that we heard during the campaign: affordable housing; distrust of elected officials to use the funds properly; who will be on the Community Preservation Committee; raising taxes.

## **The Final Weeks Before the Election**

- ❖ Prepare for a final mailing two weeks before the election.
- ❖ Use Lawn signs. Have a plan to replace signs when they blow down. Go door to door. Cluster signs in key locations.
- ❖ Plan for Letters to the Editor during the last three weeks: line people up and “speak from the heart.”
- ❖ Election Day visibility - have advocates stand out with signs near your key polling locations.
- ❖ Hold your breath and wait for the results!
- ❖ Fall River CPA campaign succeeded 58% to 42%. We won in all precincts!