

My Turn: Shelburne voters — Let's vote yes on Question 5

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In the town of Shelburne, Question 5 on the Nov. 8 ballot asks voters if we want to approve the Community Preservation Act (CPA). The CPA is a local option tax that towns can voluntarily adopt in order to raise additional funds for community projects and receive state matching funds.

A yes vote adds a 3% surcharge to our property taxes. A no vote makes no change to property taxes.

For the average priced home in Shelburne — assessed at about \$300,000 — the CPA surcharge will add \$93 per year to the tax bill. As it turns out, the village home my wife and I have been slowly fixing up fits that description. I will be voting yes on Question 5 and I'm asking my fellow Shelburnians to join me. Here's why:

If we each give a little, we get a lot. Together, we can raise about \$90,000 per year for our town with the CPA. Opting for the 3% level allows Shelburne to qualify for a 100% state funding match. We are positioned to gain a dollar for every dollar we put in. Not many investments offer a potential 100% return!

With the full match, Shelburne would have an additional \$180,000 each year to invest locally. How likely are we to get the full 100% match? Our neighboring CPA towns of Conway, Whately, Sunderland and Leverett have each earned the full 100% match for at least a decade. The CPA has a rare funding formula that actually favors small rural towns like ours. The state matching fund is generated from real estate transfer fees on property transactions statewide. Approving the CPA brings those matching dollars back to Shelburne.

What can we do with CPA funds? The CPA law allows towns to spend CPA funds on community projects in four areas: historic preservation, open space, recreation and community Housing. We already spend town funds on projects in those categories. These include repairing our historic Hill cemetery and renovating town buildings. With CPA funds, we can buy new windows for Arms Library, finally fix up our 400-seat Memorial Hall Theater, and get half the dollars from state matching funds.

We could also do things we have not yet asked voters to fund — preserve ecologically sensitive areas, secure land for our future farmers and create affordable homes on our abandoned tax title properties. With the CPA, we could make a real dent in the affordable housing crisis facing our next generation, and make sure that the workers who care for our elders and kids, who work in our shops and factories and plow our roads can afford a place to live in town. With CPA seed funds, we can also competitively leverage many times what we invest by securing private, state and federal grants and tax credits.

Who decides what projects to fund? We do. If we approve the CPA, Shelburne Town Meeting will create a committee to review projects proposed by community groups and town boards. Recommended projects then get voted on at Town Meeting. We are in charge together. And if we decide we don't want the CPA any more, we can lower the surcharge or end it altogether. Unlike state and federal taxes, towns can decide on CPA locally.

What about folks on a tight budget? The CPA surcharge applies only to property owners. Under the proposal Shelburne will vote on, the first \$100,000 in assessed property value is exempted for everyone, reducing the proportional burden on lower priced homes, commercial property and land. Low-income property owners, and low- and moderate-income seniors can apply for a complete exemption from the CPA surcharge. The CPA surcharge will primarily apply to middle and upper-income property owners who can afford to invest an extra \$93 or more in our community each year. I don't earn \$1 million dollars, but I can afford a little more to help fix up the Little League ball field, renovate our town theater or help our elder care workers find an affordable place to live. CPA will help us invest to preserve what we love most about Shelburne and make our town more accessible to elders and working families.

CPA is a well-tested program initiated by the Legislature over 20 years ago to help towns like ours invest locally. One hundred and eighty-nine towns in Massachusetts have already adopted the CPA, including eight towns in Franklin County. What say, Shelburne? Let's vote yes on Question 5!

To find out more about CPA, go to **Shelburne-cpa.org** website. A final CPA online public forum also is scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 27 at 7 p.m. The Zoom link for the forum is posted on the web site: **<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9504232156?pwd=VFRRQU85VnV6NGFTS1E1dTBLy1RKQT09>**

Andrew Baker currently serves as chairman of the Shelburne Selectboard. He has worked with a group of town board members on Finance, Planning, Open Space & Library boards over the past year to learn about the Community Preservation Act and inform fellow citizens about this local funding option.

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