

## **POPULAR PRESERVATION PROGRAM WOULD GET \$\$\$ JOLT UNDER HOUSE PLAN**

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STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, APRIL 16, 2019.....Having watched the state's financial support dwindle for a program that promotes affordable housing and open space preservation, advocates are newly hopeful that the Community Preservation Act will get an infusion of funding through this year's state budget.

The idea of the Community Preservation Act was for the state to match 100 percent of what each participating municipality raised through its own property tax surcharge to preserve open space, renovate historic buildings and parks and to build new playgrounds and athletic fields.

Almost two decades since the passage of the CPA, about half of the communities in Massachusetts have opted into the program.

But as more communities adopt the CPA, each town's share of the pie has become smaller. The fee structure -- state matching funds are derived from a \$20 fee assessed on certain real estate transactions through registries of deeds -- and match rate formula have not been changed since the CPA went into law in 2000.

"CPA has grown to become one of the most popular, bipartisan, and successful partnerships between the state and local communities," Jennifer Ryan, director of policy for the Trustees of Reservations and vice chair of the Community Preservation Coalition, said.

An outside section to the House Ways and Means budget would increase the recording fees that flow into the CPA Trust Fund from \$20 to \$50 for most documents and from \$10 to \$25 for municipal lien certificates. The committee and the Community Preservation Coalition estimate that the proposal would provide the CPA Trust Fund with an infusion of \$36 million in new money each year.

The state matched every penny that municipalities raised for the first six years of the CPA after Gov. Paul Cellucci signed the program into law in 2000, but the partnership has become more one-sided in the last decade-plus.

If not for a late infusion of \$10 million in surplus funds in a supplemental budget bill last year, the state would have matched a record low 14 percent of what CPA communities took in via

their assessments in fiscal year 2019, the Community Preservation Coalition said. The extra \$10 million boosted the state's match to about 19 percent, a small increase over the roughly 17.2 percent match in fiscal 2018.

The coalition said the Department of Revenue estimated that fiscal year 2020's state match rate would be a record low of 11.5 percent of what communities raised if there is no adjustment to the funding mechanism or formula.

Advocates at the coalition praised House Ways and Means Chairman Aaron Michlewitz, an advocate for CPA funding before he took over the powerful budget-writing committee, for including the adjustment in his first budget.

"Since 2016 when Boston adopted CPA, Rep. Michlewitz has led the effort to increase funding for the program," coalition Chairman Thomas Callahan, the executive director of the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance in Boston, said. He added that the additional funding "will create jobs, build affordable housing and help preserve the quality of life in our communities."

During last year's gubernatorial campaign, Gov. Charlie Baker indicated that he would support an increase in the registry of deeds fees that seed the CPA Trust Fund.

"Eighteen years is a long time. It's obvious that there needs to be an adjustment made," Baker said at a Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations convention in October in response to a question about the CPA funding formula. "We would support that mechanism being increased, and I'm assuming it will probably be taken up again in the legislative session and if we happen to be in office and it does get taken up, we would support it and we would sign it."

Previous efforts to change the Community Preservation Trust Fund funding formula have failed -  
- CPA advocates have supported legislation to change the funding mechanism every session since 2007 -- and lawmakers have instead tried at times to divert money from the CPA Trust Fund to other purposes.

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