

CPA backers say they will try again soon

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By GORDON VINCENT

WOBURN - In the wake of a defeat by just 131 votes this week, local proponents of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) are vowing to put another referendum question on the ballot, perhaps as soon as the city election next year.

"We hope to get it on the ballot next fall," said June Mackenzie, a Woburn resident who has been one of the leaders of the effort to pass the CPA. "We work with the Community Preservation Committee and one of the things they've said is some communities in which the CPA is narrowly defeated often pass it (in an ensuing election cycle)."

On Tuesday, 6,298 residents voted in opposition to the local adoption of the CPA, while 6,167 voted yes. There were 1,425 blanks.

In order to put the CPA on the ballot again, proponents would either need the City Council to endorse the referendum, as it did this year, or collect enough signatures through a petition drive.

Mackenzie notes proponents would have another year to educate the public about the impact of adopting the CPA. She said there was a lot of misinformation and over-estimation of how much the CPA would cost taxpayers.

"I'd like to thank all the volunteers who worked hard and put in the time to help," she said.

The CPA allows communities to levy a 1-3 percent property tax surcharge that would be set aside for the acquisition of open space land, development of recreation space, renovations to historical property and creation of public housing for veterans and seniors.

Passed into law in 2000, the CPA has an opt-in clause for communities, which may choose their own surcharge. In 2001, Woburn placed it on a ballot as a referendum question with the maximum 3 percent surcharge, but it was soundly defeated by a nearly 2-1 margin. At present, 155 - nearly half of the communities in the state - have adopted the CPA.

Proponents from the Woburn Community Preservation Committee asked for a more modest for a 1 percent surcharge this time.

The CPA works thusly: A portion of the money that is collected from the Registry of Deeds is rationed into the CPA fund, which is then distributed to the communities in which the CPA has been adopted. The state Legislature last year augmented the funding with \$25 million.

Residents and owners of commercial property pay a surcharge based on their property assessment, with an exemption of the first \$100,000 of assessed value. Thus, a home valued at \$250,000 would pay 1 percent of the tax rate - currently \$10.44 in Woburn - on \$150,000, or around \$15.66, according to the Woburn Community Preservation Committee.

A home valued at \$400,000 would be assessed \$31.32 toward the CPA, and the median-priced home of \$372,000 would be assessed about \$26.