

CPA campaign kicks off in New Bedford

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NEW BEDFORD — Using an historic property in disrepair as a backdrop, members of community groups backing adoption of the Community Preservation Act kicked off the campaign and spoke about the benefits it could bring to the city.

"The Community Preservation Act is about getting projects done," Lee Blake, president of the New Bedford Historical Society, told a small crowd gathered in front of the historic Congdon House in Hazelwood Park. "It's a wise investment ... a great bang for our buck."

Blake said New Bedford residents have paid into the statewide CPA fund since 2000, when the act was adopted by the state, and that it's about time for a return on investment for the city. The CPA will be on the November ballot for adoption.

"Parks are the lungs of the community," said Jean Bennett, quoting the famous park planner Frederick Law Olmsted. Bennett, a member of Friends of Buttonwood Park, said the CPA is a tool to accomplish projects such as upgrading the park's basketball courts, completed this month.

"We're all in the same boat, trying to improve New Bedford," said Fred Toomey, president of the Port Society, about the different groups involved in the campaign. "Our basic goal is to make New Bedford a better place."

"When we're trying to attract a company, we want to show them a good quality of life in the city for them and for their employees," said Derek Santos, executive director of the New Bedford Economic Development Council. He said that when times are fiscally tough, the projects CPA funds are often the first to be slashed, making the act good insurance for those times.

The Community Preservation Act, which most SouthCoast suburbs and Fall River have adopted, allows a surcharge on residential property taxes that funds projects including open spaces; parks and recreation; historic preservation; and affordable housing.

In the city, the proposed CPA is a 1.5 percent surcharge based on residential property tax bills, exempting the first \$100,000 in property value, or an average of \$19 a year for taxpayers.

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