



# New Bedford voters to decide fate of Community Preservation Act

By **Jonathan Carvalho**

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NEW BEDFORD — City residents will decide more than just state issues on the November ballot; they'll also vote on whether to adopt the Community Preservation Act.

Community and city officials are talking about what purposes the CPA could be used for after the City Council voted 10-0 last month to send it to the ballot.

The CPA, which most SouthCoast suburbs and Fall River have already adopted, is a property tax surcharge used for purposes like maintaining open space; funding parks, playgrounds and recreation areas; preserving historic structures; and funding the creation or rehabilitation of affordable housing.

New Bedford's proposed Community Preservation Act would be a 1.5 percent surcharge based on residential property tax bills, exempting the first \$100,000 in property value.

The city rate would be about in the middle of SouthCoast communities. The surcharge for Dartmouth, Fall River and Acushnet is 1.5 percent; Fairhaven, Westport and Marion is 2 percent; Mattapoisett is 1 percent and Wareham, 3 percent. Freetown, Lakeville and Rochester do not use the CPA.

A coalition of community groups supporting passage of the CPA has formed; a statement on Monday announcing its effort to pass the act included the link to a website, [www.cpanewbedford.org](http://www.cpanewbedford.org), which was not yet online on Monday or Tuesday.

According to Planning Board Chairwoman Colleen Dawicki, the CPA could have funded repairs to the basketball courts at Buttonwood Park, which isn't eligible for federal Community Development Block Grants because the neighborhood's average income is too high.

## COMMUNITY PRESERVATION SURCHARGES

The Community Preservation Act allows communities to impose a surcharge on property taxes that funds projects involving open spaces, parks and recreation; historic preservation; and affordable housing. The proposed surcharge for New Bedford of 1.5 percent would increase property tax bills:

Value Surcharge

\$150,000 \$11.37

\$183,305 (city avg.) \$19

\$200,000 \$22.74

\$250,000 \$34.11

\$300,000 \$45.48

Source: Community Preservation Coalition

"I think what's great about the Community Preservation Act is there's a built-in process for a community first figuring out how they want to use the money," said Dawicki. That would start with a Community Preservation Committee.

"It's an opportunity for a community to look at plans it has already done, and say 'Hey, what are the things we keep saying we want or need or are key opportunities?' " she said.

"The first thing that comes to mind is improvement to water access," said Mark Rasmussen, president of the Buzzards Bay Coalition, including the riverwalk planned for the upper harbor in the city's North End along the Acushnet River. He said a forested area in the North End near Turner Pond could use CPA funds to develop recreational trails.

"Every year we see great things happening in other communities and it's a shame those things don't happen in New Bedford," Rasmussen said.

"I see it providing opportunities to save many of the properties in the city of New Bedford, and to expand programs for many of our neighborhoods," said City Councilor David Alves, a council sponsor of the CPA.

Liz Isherwood, chairwoman of the Greater New Bedford Industrial Foundation, said that it could raise low and stagnant property values and spur real estate investment.

"If more people invest in real estate in the city, the tax base will be more broad, which will potentially reduce the amount of future tax increases that will be needed to fund schools and other vital services," she said.

Isherwood, a public relations specialist, said reminding voters that the first \$100,000 worth of property is exempt and providing concrete examples of uses for the CPA would be ideal from a messaging standpoint.

City Planner Jill Maclean said another example residents would recognize that could have used CPA funds is the new park at Custom House Square. That's because land already owned by the city, like the parking lot that was previously at the square, can be converted into uses for passive or active recreation.

Maclean said improvements to Fort Taber Park could fulfill two of the CPA's potential uses, open space and historic preservation of the fort building itself.

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## Clarification

This story was modified on Wednesday, Aug. 20, 2014 to reflect the following:

The fourth paragraph of this story was changed to: New Bedford's proposed Community Preservation Act would be a 1.5 percent surcharge based on residential property tax bills, exempting the first \$100,000 in property value.

