

# STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

## **VOTERS IN RECORD 11 COMMUNITIES AGREE TO COMMUNITY PRESERVATION TAXES**

By Colin A. Young  
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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, NOV. 9, 2016.....The results of Tuesday's election signaled a high-water mark for the Community Preservation Act, with more communities voting to adopt the open space protection measure than in any previous election.

Of the 16 cities or towns that had the CPA on their ballots, 11 voted to adopt it, according to the Community Preservation Coalition and the Associated Press. The 11 adoptions Tuesday surpassed the 10 communities that voted in November 2004 to adopt the CPA, according to the coalition.

Adopting the CPA allows a city or town to levy a surcharge on property taxes to preserve open space, renovate historic structures or build new athletic fields, among other things.

"As time has gone on, CPA has turned from a program that was an unknown as to what it can do, to a proven commodity," Stuart Saginor, executive director of the Community Preservation Coalition, said. "Communities voting these days don't have to look too far from their borders to see CPA successes elsewhere ... it's easy to see the value of the program."

Billerica, Boston, Chelsea, Holyoke, Hull, Norwood, Pittsfield, Rockland, Springfield, Watertown and Wrentham voted to adopt the CPA. Voters in Amesbury, Danvers, East Bridgewater, Palmer and South Hadley rejected the CPA.

Saginor said the fact that six of the eight cities that put the CPA on Tuesday's ballot approved the measure shows that changes the Legislature made to the program in 2012 to make the CPA more appealing to cities have been effective.

"If you look at who has adopted CPA since 2012, it's been almost all cities," he said. "That tells me what the Legislature set out to accomplish with that important legislation in 2012 was an absolute home run, it did exactly what they wanted and intended to do."

One of the cities to adopt CPA on Tuesday was Boston, where 74 percent of voters OK'ed a new 1 percent real estate tax surcharge on the net tax owed on a property starting in fiscal

2018. The margin of victory in Boston was the fourth largest ever on a CPA adoption vote, Saginor said.

Boston had previously rejected the CPA, in 2001, when the question was defeated 57 percent to 43 percent, according to Saginor.

Each community tailors the CPA to fit its needs, determining the surcharge rate, up to 3 percent, and selecting from four pre-approved exemptions, like an exemption for senior citizens.

Since the CPA first took effect, 172 cities and towns have now adopted it (49 percent of the total), helping to raise more than \$1.6 billion to finance more than 8,100 open space and historic preservation projects, including the protection of 23,400 acres and the rehabilitation of more than 9,400 affordable housing units, according to the coalition.

When Gov. Paul Cellucci signed the CPA into law in 2000, it was with the promise of state matching funds from a CPA Trust Fund to preserve open space, renovate historic buildings and parks and to build new playgrounds and athletic fields.

But that partnership, during the first six years of which the state matched 100 percent of what each municipality raised by its property tax surcharge, has become more one-sided in the last decade, with available matching funds falling to an all-time low in 2011 and rebounding just slightly since.

Last year, \$36.29 million from the trust fund was split between 156 cities or towns so that each municipality received from the state 29.67 percent of what it collected on its own.

Now that 11 new communities have opted into the CPA, the trust fund could be further stressed by the time 10 of the communities could first claim a state match, in 2018.

"Certainly this does put the spotlight on the CPA Trust Fund and really starts the clock ticking a little bit on what changes we can work on with the Legislature to accommodate the tremendous interest we see in CPA, particularly among cities," Saginor said.

The Department of Revenue is due to set the state match rate for 2016 by Nov. 15, Saginor said, but in an April memo to municipalities, DOR's Division of Local Services said it expects to be able to match 19 percent of what each city or town collected.

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