

## Protecting open space: A tool within our reach

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Looking to pack Gloucester City Hall? All you have to do is present a proposal to transform some piece of beloved natural open space into a "development" and you're guaranteed a crowd.

Think maybe a snowstorm, sweltering heat or a Red Sox playoff game will keep your opponents at home and quiet? Think again. Gloucester citizens cherish the city's vistas and deep woods; the sturdy granite ledge as old as the Earth itself.

No matter whether you own the parcel, the bond between Gloucesterites and their natural heritage transcends any token respect for property rights and the 21st century march to develop. After all, generations of families have combed the moorlands for blueberries, walked to the shore to fish or climbed to the top of a dome to picnic and admire a view.

Newcomers arrive, captivated by the unique juxtaposition of sea, rock, sand, forest and field and swell the ranks of those passionately defending the right of our open spaces to remain untouched.

And yet the developer almost always gets his way. The law is on his side, aided by modern high-tech land development tools.

The plans may get tweaked here and there, but by and large, we neighbors and lovers of open space leave City Hall mournfully anticipating months of listening to trees being crunched and backup-beeping trucks, followed by the smell of asphalt and the shocking sight of new buildings.

What once may have been home to tiny saw-whet owls, spotted salamanders, delicate orchids, jewel-like damselflies, ancient lichens and a family of otters is transformed forever.

Is there anything the rest of us can do besides gather our strength for the next round of permit applications?

As a matter of fact, the answer is yes. We can go to our polling place in November and vote yes to adopt the Community Preservation Act.

If adopted, the Community Preservation Act would not only help fund open space protection but also help create reasonably priced housing, preserve the city's historic sites and renovate and improve recreation fields and parks.

The mechanics of the act, as presented on the November ballot, are simple. (You can skip reading this part if you are a renter or a property owner who qualifies for low-income

housing or low- or moderate-income senior housing - you're exempt from contributing to the community preservation fund - already existing exemptions also apply - but please come out to vote YES!)

1. Take your assessed property value.
2. Subtract \$100,000.
3. Divide that amount by \$1,000.
4. Multiply the result by your municipal tax rate (currently \$8.68 residential).
5. Multiply that amount by 1 percent - the proposed community preservation surcharge rate.

That's how much you'll contribute each year to the Gloucester community preservation fund. Thirty-five dollars for the average assessed home value of \$503,200. That's, what, about three pizzas a year?

But wait, it gets even better. The community preservation money raised in Gloucester will be matched from a dedicated state fund. Currently, the 127 municipalities in the state that have adopted the Community Preservation Act receive a 100 percent match.

Where does that match money come from? A percentage of every fee paid for each real estate transaction in Massachusetts goes into the Community Preservation Act match fund.

Every Gloucester resident who has done real estate business since the act was enacted in 2000 has paid into the community preservation fund. But Gloucester won't receive a dime until we adopt the Community Preservation Act.

You can learn more about the community preservation initiative in Gloucester at [www.preservegloucester.org](http://www.preservegloucester.org). And [www.communitypreservation.org](http://www.communitypreservation.org) has all you need to know about the act and how other cities and towns are benefiting.

I hope you will join me in voting yes for the Community Preservation Act next November.

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