

CPA LAW SUPPORTERS CELEBRATE ITS IMPACTS ON MASS. CITIES AND TOWNS

By Colleen Quinn
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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, JAN. 14, 2013...When the Community Preservation Act passed more than a decade ago, it had the potential to become a law that sat “ gathering dust on a shelf” if local communities did not adopt it, according to Stuart Saginor, executive director of the Community Preservation Coalition.

That was not the case, Saginor said during a ceremony Tuesday to mark the success of the Community Preservation Act and honor its supporters.

Cities and towns that vote in favor of the CPA levy a property tax surcharge of up to 3 percent in exchange for state matching grants to fund open space, historic preservation, or create and rehabilitate affordable housing. In 2012, the Legislature passed a law updating the CPA to authorize spending on parks, playgrounds and athletic space projects.

It took more than 12 years of fighting for the idea before advocates finally saw the Community Preservation Act pass, Sagnior said, holding up a picture of Gov. Paul Cellucci signing it into law in September 2000 at a ceremony in Waltham.

“ I’ m not sure anyone could have predicted the kind of success CPA would see back when that photo was taken. CPA could have easily been a state law that gathered dust on a shelf because it is what they call a local option law, so nothing happens until cities and down individually vote at the ballot box to adopt CPA,” Saginor said. “ But the concept really did take off.”

Across the state, 155 communities have adopted the CPA designation, protecting more than 19,200 acres of open space, creating or rehabilitating approximately 7,300 affordable housing units, and funding over 3,200 historic preservation projects. In addition, nearly 1,000 recreation projects have been funded since the law was updated.

Supporters are now pushing for the Legislature to repeat what it did last year when it transferred \$25 million from a state budget surplus to the CPA Trust Fund. The additional money funded a slate of projects, and the coalition is asking for similar surplus funding from the fiscal 2014 budget.

Although the additional appropriation was a one-time allocation, House Ways and Means Vice-Chairman Stephen Kulik, who co-sponsored the 2012 legislation updating CPA, said last November that House leaders were committed to doing it again on a year-to-year basis.

During the ceremony, Kulik (D-Worthington) credited Speaker Robert DeLeo with supporting the ideals of community preservation. He called DeLeo a “ champion” of efforts to strengthen CPA.

DeLeo (D-Winthrop) told the crowd CPA has a “ transformative” effect in communities by preserving important spaces while creating jobs. Projects funded by CPA employ professionals ranging from the building trades to artisans, along with tourism jobs, he said.

“ The CPA draws from the state’ s strengths, both past and present. And in doing so, it gives us a vehicle to turn our challenging issues, troubled neighborhoods and untapped assets into economic drivers,” DeLeo said.

Among the 12 people honored was Somerville Mayor Joseph Curtatone, who led the push in the city to persuade residents to approve CPA in 2012. Curtatone approached the Somerville Board of Alderman to put the question on the city ballot, and actively campaigned for it. On Election Day, 76 percent of the residents voted yes.

“ It was extraordinary leadership from the top that we don’ t often see in CPA campaigns,” Saginor said.

Curtatone credited Rep. Denise Provost (D-Somerville) – who attended the award ceremony - with introducing the idea to Somerville officials while she was still on the board of aldermen several years ago.

Colleen Brown, of Swansea, was another advocate honored for her perseverance in getting CPA passed. Brown began a campaign to pass CPA in 2002, but the ballot question failed with 71 percent of the local voters saying no. It was the fifth worst defeat of CPA ever, according to Saginor.

Brown didn’ t give up and talked to as many people in town who would listen. Six years later, 62 percent of local voters approved CPA. “ Basically, Colleen and her group turned the whole town around,” Saginor said.

Avery Lee Williams and Edmund Hands, both of Easton, were honored for their work to preserve open space.

“ Easton would be a different community than it is now if we hadn’ t passed CPA,” Colleen Corona, a member of the Easton Board of Selectmen, said before the ceremony. Approximately 20 percent of the community is preserved open space, according to Corona.

Philippe Jordi was honored for his work in building affordable housing on Martha’ s Vineyard, and Derrill Bazy was recognized for his work, which includes his current project to move the Gay Head Light House in Aquinnah to prevent it from falling into the ocean.

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