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LETTER: CPA can help Swansea retain smalltown character, 05-07-08

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What makes living in Swansea so special? The historic town halls, churches, and schools; the Swansea Dam with its walking trails; the ducks and swans that so many children delight in feeding; the farm lands; the open woodlands, and yes even the swamplands.

These are the things that give Swansea its rich but smalltown, rural character. But these very elements, considered fundamental to smalltown life, are threatened without the money to preserve them. We are losing farmland and woodland at an alarming rate. In the last seven years, there have been more than 500 house lots approved, and we are down to only three working farms in what used to be an agricultural town.

In addition to the irreversible loss of wood and farmland, new development strains the town's infrastructure. Contrary to what may people believe, new houses do not help the tax base. The real estate tax the town receives from a new house does not offset the cost of schools, roads, police and fire departments.

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) can help Swansea retain some of its farmlands and open space. The CPA is statewide legislation that enables cities and towns to raise a small property tax surcharge, which is then matched by state funds to acquire open space and public recreation areas, preserve historic buildings and support accessible housing.

State funds are collected through surcharges at the Registries of Deeds on transactions in all Massachusetts municipalities. You are already paying for 127 other towns in the state that have adopted the CPA. By adding the local CPA fees, Swansea would bring some state funds back to the town. Once in the towns, the local residents control these funds for local projects.

The CPA fee for the average home in Swansea with a value of \$311,726 would be \$26 a year. For 50 cents per week, you can help the town buy and forever preserve the heritage that makes Swansea so special.

My fellow citizens of Swansea, I urge you to attend the Town Meeting on May 19, 2008 and vote to approve the Community Preservation Act before it's too late, for once this open space is developed it can never be returned.

CathyLee Hague
Swansea

