

Yarmouthport church earns preservation funding

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YARMOUTHPORT — The First Congregational Church of Yarmouth, with a congregation tracing back to the town's founding in 1639, recently benefited from a \$300,000 award from the town's Community Preservation Fund to help with much-needed restoration.



Now, the congregation wants to say thanks to the townspeople who footed the bill.

Members will hold an open house from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday at the 19th-century white-spired church that crowns a hilltop overlooking Route 6A. The event will feature food, music, tours and rousing tales about people who shaped the town.

The state's Community Preservation Act, signed into law in 2000, allows cities and towns to approve a surcharge on their real estate taxes of up to 3 percent. The funds may be used for open space purchases, affordable housing, historic preservation and recreation.

Statewide, 155 communities have adopted the act, according to Stuart Saginor, the executive director of the Community Preservation Coalition.

On the Cape, the participation rate is much higher, Saginor said. "Every single town on the Cape and Islands has adopted it."

Yarmouth approved a tax surcharge of 3 percent in 2005.

CPA funds allowed the 350 members of the First Congregational Church to spruce up exterior siding, install an accessibility ramp, complete some interior repairs, fix windows in the sanctuary and replace the arched woodwork above the church's entrance.

YARMOUTH

2006: Yarmouth New Church
interior - \$161,500*

- 2009: Yarmouth New Church exterior and windows - \$236,205
- 2010: First Congregational Church of Yarmouth interior work - \$65,000
- 2012 First Congregational Church of Yarmouth siding, handicapped ramp - \$158,000
- 2012: South Yarmouth United Methodist Church - clock, bell tower, exterior, spire - \$266,200
- 2013 First Congregational Church of Yarmouth windows - \$105,376

DENNIS

- 2006: Dennis Union Church steeple, siding, windows, foundation - \$160,000
- 2013: South Dennis Congregational Church fire sprinklers - \$102,785 (proposed STM 11/19)

FALMOUTH

2012: The Stone Church bell tower - \$63,000

BOURNE

2010: Swift Memorial United Methodist Church slate roof - \$125,000

ORLEANS

2008: Federated Church fire suppression system - \$65,000

BARNSTABLE

- 2006: Unitarian Universalist Church windows and door to graveyard, library room - \$19,620
- 2007: First Baptist Church stained glass windows - \$115,360
- 2013: West Parish Memorial

The current church building, built in 1870, is 70 feet long and 45 feet wide. The steeple is 135 feet tall. Like many old Cape churches, it's taken a beating from centuries of salt-laced winds.

"The building is very old, and it was in need of major, major work," said the church's pastor, the Rev. Phil Jackson. "The Community Preservation Act has been very generous helping us with large renovations."

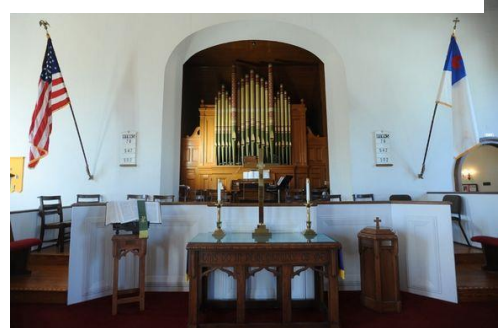
The congregation outgrew three earlier church buildings — built in other locations in 1639, 1716 and 1830. All that remains of the original church is a large boulder marking its location in the area of the Ancient Cemetery off Center Street.

Historic preservation has been a popular use for Yarmouth's community preservation funds, according to Jennifer Copeland, the town's community preservation program coordinator.

"We've had 32 applications for historic projects, worth around \$4 million," Copeland said. Of that total, church projects have received nearly \$1 million.

"The town of Yarmouth has contributed resources regardless of a building's present or future use," Copeland said. "These buildings have architectural, historical and cultural value."

While it has been controversial in some towns to use CPA funds for projects related to private entities, such as churches, the state considers historic value to be an acceptable criteria.



"They are parts of the communities that have been there from the beginning," said Brian McNiff, spokesman for the Massachusetts Historical Commission. "The First Congregational Church of Yarmouth is on the National Register as part of the (Old King's Highway Historic District)."

The state has awarded grants to several churches over the years through its own Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund, he said.

"It happens all the time with historic buildings," McNiff said. "Not every grant round goes to a church, but it does frequently."

Meanwhile, Dennis voters will be asked at a special town meeting Tuesday to use \$102,000 in community preservation money to pay for a sprinkler system at the Congregational Church of South Dennis, built in 1835.

The church, on Main Street in South Dennis, "sits right in the middle of an historic area," said Frank Dahlstrom, co-chairman of the Dennis Community Preservation Committee.

"Sprinklers not only protect the inside of the building but also an ancient one-of-a-kind organ along with some paintings."

Photos by: Cape Cod Times/Steve Heaslip