

## City moves closer to Community Preservation Act

By **Jonathan Carvalho**

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NEW BEDFORD – The city has inched closer to sending a Community Preservation Act to the ballot in November.

The CPA, something many SouthCoast suburbs have, is a property tax surcharge used for purposes including maintaining open space; funding parks, playgrounds and recreation areas; preserving historic structures; and funding the creation or rehabilitation of affordable housing.

While the state allows a surcharge of up to 3 percent, lead sponsors Councilor-at-large David Alves and Ward 2 Councilor Steven Martins have proposed a 1.5 percent surcharge for New Bedford.

Under the CPA, the city would also be eligible to receive matching funds from the state's Community Preservation Trust Fund; last year's state match was at 53 percent.

The council's Committee on Appointments and Briefings voted unanimously Tuesday to send the act to the full council. It would have to be approved by the council and sent to voters for a referendum during a state or municipal election (the next being the state election in November).

More than 25 city residents turned out at Tuesday's meeting to support adoption of the act, with several of them speaking to support it. Before the meeting, several officials familiar with the CPA offered their thoughts on the CPA.

Former Mayor John Bullard said there is “no question there's need” for the funding the CPA provides: preserving open space and historic buildings as well as affordable housing. The city, he said, could benefit from the funding especially in historic buildings it hasn't been able to save, and CPA has been popular in towns where it has been adopted.

“The usual complaint about the Community Preservation Act is, 'Oh, you're raising taxes,’” said Bullard. “And I guess the easiest response to that is, if it were a bad deal, why has virtually every single town in southeastern Massachusetts passed it and kept it?”

“WHALE has been involved in working to put that on the ballot and we're highly supportive,” said Waterfront Historic Area League Executive Director Teri Bernert, who also spoke at the meeting to support the adoption of the CPA, adding that it would fund not only historic preservation but also recreation.

William Roth, Fairhaven's director of planning and economic development, said the CPA has helped the town accomplish projects it otherwise wouldn't be able to tackle, including a recent investment of about \$1 million to rehabilitate Fairhaven Town Hall.

Colleen Dawicki, a city resident who sits on the Planning Board and works in urban policy, also spoke in favor of the act at Tuesday's meeting. Beforehand, she said the CPA can be a way of funding projects that are otherwise neglected.

Fall River passed a CPA in 2012, the first Gateway City to do so, and Dawicki said that was made possible in two ways: using a low 1 percent surcharge and making it clear to the neighborhoods how it would tangibly benefit residents.

"This allows cities to do the fun stuff that gets people excited," she said, such as reviving historic Congdon cottages at Hazelwood Park. "In a city, it helps do the projects that everybody always wishes they could do."

Peter Barney, former administrative assessor for the city and a conservative, called the CPA "a tax on a tax" because it's a surcharge on property tax bills.

He also said he found it "interesting" the council raised the issue as state legislators voted to raise Massachusetts' minimum wage, saying that minimum wage earners are largely tenants whose rents could rise after landlords are hit with a larger tax bill.