

Report of the Community Preservation Committee

The Community Preservation Act (CPA), MGL Chapter 44B, is statewide enabling legislation enacted to help communities preserve and protect open space and historic resources, create and support community (affordable) housing, and develop outdoor recreational opportunities. The CPA helps strengthen the state and local economies by expanding housing opportunities and creating construction jobs, and it supports the tourism industry through preservation of the state's historic and natural resources.

The CPA has allowed Ashland to create a local Community Preservation Fund for supporting open space protection, historic preservation, community housing and outdoor recreation through the imposition of a surcharge of the tax levy against real property. Monies are also raised through fees collected at the Registry of Deeds, and through a transfer of state surplus funds, which are placed in a statewide Trust Fund administered by the Department of Revenue (DOR), and distributed each year amongst the communities that have passed the CPA.

Property taxes traditionally fund the day-to-day operating needs of safety, health, schools, roads, maintenance, and more. But until CPA was enacted, there was no steady funding source for preserving and improving a community's character and quality of life. The CPA gives a community the funds needed to control its future.

The Town adopted the CPA on May 7, 2002, with a 3% surcharge and an exemption for the first \$100,000 of the taxable value of a residential real estate parcel. An additional exemption for property owned and occupied as a domicile by any person who qualifies for low income housing, or low or moderate income senior housing in Ashland as defined in §2 of the Act, was approved at Town Meeting on October 19, 2005. **Since its adoption in 2002, Ashland's CPA fund has collected a total of \$12.6 million from the local surcharge and the state match.**

Each CPA community must create a local Community Preservation Committee (CPC) upon adoption of the Act, which makes recommendations for CPA projects to the community's legislative body, which for Ashland is Town Meeting. The Act specifies the composition of the CPC. Ashland's 7-member committee is comprised of the following members, noted along with the town boards they represent:

Tim Connors – Citizen At Large
Micki Eldridge - Housing Authority
David Foster – Planning Board
Steve Greenberg – Affordable Housing Committee
Cheri Rigby – Conservation Commission
Glenn Rigby – Historical Commission
Beth Rosenblum – Open Space and Recreation Committee

The role of the CPC is to study the needs, possibilities and resources of the town and to consult with existing municipal boards in conducting such studies. The CPC shall also hold one or more public hearings on an annual basis. In the spring of 2013, the CPC underwent a review of the Goals, Guidelines and Project Criteria used for project submissions to determine whether a proposal qualifies for funding. Working alongside the various town groups we represent and with input from the public, we revisited the original criteria drafted in 2002, and updated it to ensure that our goals remained current and consistent with the changing needs of the community.

As stewards of the town’s CPA funds, the CPC meets monthly to discuss its role as a facilitator for community preservation in Ashland and strives to:

- Be a funding source for community-based projects
- Utilize community goals previously set forth in other public documents that have received wide scrutiny and public input
- Attempt to meet multiple community preservation goals in each project
- Encourage public participation throughout the process

Every spring, upon the recommendation of the CPC, Town Meeting shall spend, or set aside for later spending, not less than 10% of the annual revenues in the Community Preservation Fund for each of the three specified funding accounts: 1) open space and recreation, 2) historic preservation and 3) affordable housing. Each year, Town Meeting shall make appropriations for the administrative and operating expenses of the CPC, and such appropriations shall not exceed 5% of the annual revenues in the Fund. The remaining 70% of each year’s funds may be allocated to any one or a combination of the three main uses, or be placed in the Undesignated Account, which has typically been the CPC’s recommendation.

Revenues

The following table summarizes the revenues Ashland has collected from our local surcharge and the state matching funds received each fiscal year since its adoption:

Fiscal Year	3% Local Surcharge	State Match
2003	\$436,967	
2004	\$492,430	\$452,091
2005	\$570,532	\$499,082
2006	\$635,743	\$568,794
2007	\$664,913	\$644,325
2008	\$670,675	\$668,383
2009	\$671,904	\$523,858
2010	\$706,575	\$294,205
2011	\$719,950	\$231,189

Fiscal Year	3% Local Surcharge	State Match
2012	\$724,190	\$239,117
2013	\$739,017	\$245,452
2014	\$749,559	\$489,834

As is very clear from the chart above, for the first 6 years after adopting CPA, Ashland saw record high numbers from the state match, bringing in nearly a 100% match over that time period. 2010 saw the national economic decline, and CPA was not exempt from that. As real estate transactions diminished, fees paid at the Registry of Deeds did as well. Since the state matching funds are provided through Registry fee surcharges, the state's CPA revenues declined and with it so did the state matching funds. For the 3 years between 2010-2013, Ashland's state match was greatly reduced but still provided exceptional return on our investment in comparison to interest being earned at your local bank. Fiscal year 14 saw a dramatic increase in our state match, up to 66.75%. This was a direct result of the legislature in 2013 deciding to replenish the CPA state coffers with \$25 mil from the budget surplus. Since this was a one-time distribution, unless our legislators are convinced of the importance of continuing this transfer of surplus funds, our state match will once again diminish. At this point, the DOR is projecting an approximate 23% match for FY15.

Bonding

Three (3) projects approved by past Town Meetings (the purchase of the Oak Street parcel for expanding the Town Forest, the acquisition of Warren Woods, and the development of the Athletic Field complex at the High School) required the need for the Town to issue general obligation bonds in anticipation of revenues to be raised to fund a portion of the project. This need occurred since the total costs of these projects exceeded the amounts that were available in the Community Preservation Fund at the time.

In 2008, the town bonded \$2.8 mil for a period of 20 years for the Oak Street purchase.
 In 2011, the town bonded \$4.2 mil for a period of 15 years for the athletic fields complex.
 In 2012, the town bonded \$2.5 mil for a period of 20 years for the Warren Woods purchase.

The CPA specifies that bond payments be paid using the local Community Preservation Fund, and not be funded through the state match since there is no guarantee that the state match will occur each year. Bond payments that Town Meeting will vote to appropriate this year are:

Oak Street	High School Fields	Warren Woods	TOTAL
\$212,275	\$369,250	\$189,375	\$770,900
100% funded from Undesignated Account	100% funded from Undesignated Account	Payments are split between Undesignated, Historic and Open Space Accounts	

2013 Warrant Articles

At the Fall 2013 Special Town Meeting, the CPC sponsored three (3) warrant articles, which were all passed overwhelmingly. These were:

1. To appropriate \$6,000 from the Historical Resources Reserve Account for the purchase, replacement and installation of fifty-four (54) Scenic Road signs to identify the town's existing seventeen (17) designated scenic roads
2. To appropriate \$12,400 from the Historical Resources Reserve Account to create a Historical Home Plaque program for the creation, outreach, purchase and installation of up to one hundred twenty-four (124) historic "circa" plaques for properties identified in the 2010 Communitywide Historic Properties Survey
3. To appropriate \$6,000 from the Historical Resources Reserves Account to enable the Town to conserve, preserve and manage the digital archiving and database creation of historic planning and zoning documents.

The CPC is sponsoring nine (9) warrant articles at the Annual Town Meeting. The full text of the articles are found in your official warrant and summarized below:

1. Annual appropriation and reserve set asides
2. Bond payment of \$369,250 for H.S. Athletic Fields complex
3. Bond payment of \$212,275 for Oak Street property
4. Bond payment of \$189,375 for Warren Woods
5. Historical Commission request of \$27,000 for Telechron Clock Project Phase II
6. Historical Commission request of \$8,000 for restoration and improvements to the Simpson-Jones Family Burial Ground on Union St.
7. Ashland Fields Management Group request of \$135,000 for improvements to and development of recreational assets at Mindess School, Middle School and Stone Park
8. Board of Selectmen request of \$275,000 to acquire 329 Pleasant St. to expand Marathon Park
9. Town Clerk request of \$13,600 for purchasing a reporting system for town historic records.

Current CPA Account Fund Balances with FY 15 Projections

	FY14 Current Balances	Proposed FY15 Expenditures	Anticipated Balances if all articles funded	FY15 Projected Revenues including State Match
Undesignated	\$888,748	\$859,169	\$29,579	\$700,000
Open Space & Recreation	\$268,512	\$261,131	\$7,381	\$100,000
Historic Resources	\$209,344	\$109,200	\$100,144	\$100,000
Affordable Housing	\$860,846	\$0	\$860,864	\$100,000

The CPA has been and will continue to be an extremely useful funding source for projects that fall outside the typical funding stream and yet does wonders to improve community morale and the quality of life for our residents. Next year the fund will be at historically low levels, and it will take some restraint to build it back up and once again have adequate resources for any significant spending for open space, recreation and historic resource projects.

There are still considerable monies remaining in the Affordable Housing account, and we as a community should engage in creative visioning to determine how we can best use these monies to provide housing opportunities and related assistance to our fellow residents. Please come to one of our monthly meetings if you have ideas for projects using these funds. We want to hear from you!

As a community, we should take pride in the meaningful and varied projects that we have approved for funding. Most of us are keenly aware of at least one of them, and we have all reaped their benefits, as will generations to come.

Past Projects which have been funded through CPA

- Marathon Park creation
- Town Hall Historic Renovation
- Town Forest Gates
- Fire Station Floor Restoration
- Public Library Historic Renovation
- Purchase of 125 Front Street
- Tree Planting along Pleasant Street
- Creation of accessible parking at Housing Authority
- Renovation of Stone Park Pavilion
- Creation of an Affordable Housing Plan
- Preservation of Town Historic Records
- Lake Waushakum water quality study & improvements
- Purchase of Weston Nurseries property
- Purchase of Sibson property
- Construction of Community Center Pavilion
- Creation of Open Space and Recreation Plan
- Hydrogeology Study near Water Treatment Plant
- Development of Rail Transit and Downtown Plan
- Funding for the Affordable Housing Trust
- Creation of Early Childhood Playground at Warren School
- Restoration of Henry Warren clock downtown
- Preservation of historical assets displayed at Town Hall
- Creation of pilot Community Gardens at Stone Park
- Purchase of Oak Street property
- Development of the Athletic Fields Master Plan and update
- Purchase of Warren Woods
- Development of the Sports Complex at the High School
- Restoration of the Warren Telechron clocks
- Preservation of Historic Town Maps and Plans
- Creation of Town Forest parking area
- Field improvements to Middle and Mindess Schools
- Historic Home Plaque Program
- Scenic Road Signs
- Digital archiving of historic town records

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Rosenblum, Chair