

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 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 158 communities that have passed the CPA.

Property taxes traditionally fund the day-to-day operating needs of safety, health, schools, roads, maintenance, and more. 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.

Ashland 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 more than \$13 Million between 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
John Dudley – Planning Board
Micki Eldridge - Housing Authority
Steve Greenberg – Affordable Housing Committee
Beth Rosenblum – Open Space and Recreation Committee
Cathy Van Lancker – Conservation Commission
Elizabeth Whitham – Historical Commission

The role of the CPC is to study the needs, possibilities and resources of the town and to consult with existing municipal boards and residents when 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 our Goals, Guidelines and Project Criteria, which are used 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.

In 2014, the CPC changed its longstanding membership when original members David Foster and Cheri Vallone Rigby (representing the Planning Board and Conservation Commission respectively), and Glenn Rigby (representing the Historical Commission) decided to move on. In addition, the vacant Housing Authority seat was filled. Please join me in welcoming our newest new CPC members John Dudley, Cathy Van Lancker, Elizabeth Whitham and Micki Eldridge. Each one has brought fresh ideas, a new perspective and a desire to enliven the committee.

The CPC is proud of a number of accomplishments this past year. Among them: staffing the town table at the Farmers Market; designing and purchasing (and soon installing) signage which will identify CPA funded projects throughout town; starting a discussion on the development of a 5-year funding plan; and sponsoring a well-attended and lively Public Forum at the library with special guests Sen. Karen Spilka, Rep. Tom Sannicandro, and CPA Coalition Executive Director Stuart Saginor.

As stewards of the town’s CPA funds, we meet monthly to discuss our role as CPA facilitators 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 our recommendation, 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 makes appropriations for the administrative and operating expenses of the CPC, which 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 past five (5) years of revenues that Ashland has collected from our local surcharge and the state matching funds received each fiscal year:

Year	3% Local Surcharge	State Match
2010	\$706,575	\$294,205
2011	\$719,950	\$231,189
2012	\$739,017	\$245,452
2013	\$749,559	\$489,834 (66.75%)

Year	3% Local Surcharge	State Match
2014	\$761,130	\$307,361 (40%)

The chart above illustrates how the 2010 national economic decline affected the CPA matching funds. 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 three (3) years between 2010 and 2012, Ashland's state match was reduced but still provided exceptional return on our investment in comparison to interest being earned at your local bank. In 2013 (FY14), we saw a dramatic increase in our state match, up to 66.75%. This was a direct result of the legislature deciding to replenish the CPA state coffers with \$25M from the budget surplus. In 2014, the legislature again voted to transfer \$25M to the CPA from the budget surplus. Unfortunately, the state surplus was smaller than expected and just \$11.4 mil was available to be transferred. The up and down nature of the state budget highlights the need for a more stable funding source to supplement the CPA Trust Fund. The CPA Coalition¹, with support from CPA communities, continues to work with the legislature and Governor Baker to identify possible funding sources for a more permanent solution.

Bonding

Three (3) projects approved by past Town Meetings required the need for the Town to issue general obligation bonds in anticipation of revenues to be raised to fund a portion of the projects. This need occurred since the total costs of these projects exceeded the amounts that were available in the Community Preservation Fund at the time of consideration.

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 shall be paid using the local Community Preservation Fund, and not be funded through the state match, as 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
\$205,625	\$363,650	\$186,875	\$756,150
100% funded from Undesignated Account	100% funded from Undesignated Account	Split among Undesignated, Historic and Open Space Accounts	

¹ The Coalition helps municipalities understand, adopt and implement CPA, and advocates for CPA at the state level, thereby advancing smart growth and sustainable development in communities across Massachusetts.

Warrant Articles

At the fall 2014 Special Town Meeting, the CPC sponsored two (2) warrant articles, which passed overwhelmingly.

1. To appropriate \$100,000 from the Affordable Housing Reserve Account for the design, removal and replacement of 20 entry doors for the Housing Authority property at 59 Park Road.
2. To adjust the dollar amounts previously set-aside in FY14 to reconcile the CPA accounts to reflect the increased state match of 66.75% the town received.

The CPC is sponsoring five (5) warrant articles at the Annual Town Meeting. The full texts of the articles are found in your official warrant and are summarized below:

1. Annual appropriation and reserve set asides
2. Reconcile FY15 state match monies
3. Bond payment for Oak Street property
4. Bond payment for H.S. Athletic Fields complex
5. Bond payment for Warren Woods

Current CPA Account Fund Balances with FY16 Projections

	Undesignated	Open Space	Historic	Housing
FY15 Current Balances	\$1,660,647	\$ 245,556	\$ 275,118	\$ 876,305
FY16 Projected Revenues	\$2,365,735	\$ 347,517	\$ 376,933	\$ 980,097

The CPA has been and will continue to be an extremely useful funding source for projects that fall outside the typical funding stream; these projects help to improve community morale and quality of life for all of Ashland's residents. As a community, we should take pride in the variety and significance of what CPA has funded, as will generations of Ashlanders who will come after us.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Rosenblum, Chair

