

Annual Report of the Community Preservation Committee for 2008 February, 2009

The Town of Easton's Community Preservation Committee (CPC) is comprised of four citizens "at large" and five members selected from other Town boards and committees. The citizens-at-large include; Patricia Hunt, Esq., former selectwoman and former FinCom member; James D. Mullen, Jr., former selectman and former FinCom member; Avery Lee Williams, businessperson active in many community organizations; and Colleen Less, Esq., former selectwoman. John Grant serves on the committee for the Easton Conservation Commission; Edmund Hands serves for the Easton Historical Commission; Len Cidado for the Recreation Commission; Christine Santoro, Esq., Chairperson of the Easton Planning and Zoning Board, serves for the PZB; and Dennis Sheedy for the Easton Housing Authority. We want to thank departing Recreation Commission representative Mike McDonald and at-large member Michael Boyle for their service on the committee. A warm welcome is extended to our new members Colleen Less and Len Cidado.

As mentioned in prior reports, the Community Preservation Act was signed into law in September of 2000, to provide a dedicated funding stream for the preservation of open space, historic resources and community housing. At that time, statistics were showing that open space in Massachusetts was being developed at a rate of 44 acres per day and our legislators realized that funding would be needed to preserve our fast-disappearing open spaces. Today, development of our open spaces and historic sites continues. CPA funding is provided through a local real estate tax surcharge and a statewide registry of deeds surcharge. The state funds are distributed to participating communities as matching funds in October of each year. The state match can be as much as 100% of the total amount raised by a community in the preceding fiscal year, depending upon how much revenue is collected by the state and how many communities are participating. Easton's CPA surcharge has two exemptions: the first \$100,000 of value of each residence and an exemption for property owned by lower income persons.

Since 2002, the Commonwealth has distributed six rounds of 100% state CPA matching funds to participating communities. Easton, together with 33 other communities, has participated from the start, receiving that first 100% state match in 2002 and in the following five years. In 2008, because 127 communities now participate in CPA and due to the economic downturn, the state match this year was not 100% for the first time since the passage of the Community Preservation Act. This year's state match was 67.62% - not a bad return on an investment, especially in this economy. As Easton has a 3% CPA surcharge, it is eligible for an enhanced state match and received 75.75%, for a total of \$643,135. Because Easton voters had the foresight to adopt CPA at the outset, Easton has maximized its receipt of state matching funds. This latest award increases Easton's total state matching funds to \$4.25 million.

As of December 31, 2008, Easton's CPA reserves are as follows: \$927,352 in CPA housing reserves; \$469,352 in historic preservation reserves; \$670,535 in open space reserves; and \$6,934,121 in unreserved CPA funds. The separate reservations are required by CPA - 10% must be set aside for: historic preservation; community housing; and open space preservation. The balance of CPA funds are not reserved for any particular purpose, but must be spent only on community preservation projects. The money cannot be directed to ordinary town expenditures. Litigation this past year in other communities has helped to clarify eligible CPA projects. CPA funds can only be spent as the CPA law states and upon a favorable recommendation of the CPA Committee and town meeting approval.

This year, CPA funds were used to restore the historic World War I Memorial in front of the Grammar School building on Main Street. New playgrounds with modern equipment were created at the Olmsted and Richardson Schools. Feasibility studies were performed on parcels located on Washington Street and Williams Street for their potential use for recreational playing fields. A parcel on Bay Road was also reviewed a second time for recreation playing fields. All three parcels were found to have site issues that increased development costs and limited the number of potential fields and all three parcels were not recommended. This year, the four units of affordable housing created by the May Institute, previously funded (in part) with CPA funds, were finally certified in the town's affordable housing inventory. Final payment for the Unity Church's historic preservation project was made this year. The Committee also held

preliminary discussions regarding an affordable housing proposal of the Easton Housing Authority on Poquanticut Ave.; examined the preservation of the historic Dean Mill and the potential for acquiring an historic preservation restriction; and held discussions with the owner of open space off Poquanticut Ave for the acquisition of that parcel for conservation purposes.

As previously outlined during town meeting presentations and in prior reports, the Committee anticipates the major expenditures from CPA funds will be in land acquisitions. If we follow the town's Open Space and Recreation Plan, the town's long-term open space and recreation needs can be satisfied – to protect water supply and watershed areas; to preserve the town's major scenic vistas and historic landscapes; to connect important wildlife habitat and green spaces; and to accommodate the community's current and future needs for passive and active recreation and for recreational field space. One of the priority parcels identified in the Open Space and Recreation Plan contains more than 100 acres and is suitable for a new recreational playing fields complex. We believe that such an important acquisition would satisfy the town's current and future needs for recreational playing fields. Because that parcel was still not available for acquisition this year, the committee again worked with the Recreation Commission to identify other sites for interim playing fields. This year, the town also faced new challenges in protecting its historic sites. Thankfully, we have an active Historic Commission to guide historic preservation in Easton - we look forward to working with them to help further their efforts.

The town's CPA expenditures so far:

Historic Resources: \$100,000 - Olmstead Rockery restoration project; \$380,000 - Unity Church Restoration project and purchase of historic preservation/public access restriction; \$5000 - Historic Preservation Plan; \$3000 WWI Monument restoration project.

Open Space and Recreation: \$142,614 - Olmsted/Richardson Playground Creation Project; \$1.375 million - acquisition of 40-acre parcel of land located on Dean Street; feasibility studies for the creation of new recreation fields on town-owned parcel on Foundry Street and parcels on Depot Street, Washington Street, and Williams Street.

Community Housing: \$25,000 - four units of affordable housing - May Institute Project; funding for Town's Affordable Housing Plan.

There are two websites that contain information on the Community Preservation Act. One is the website of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs at www.state.ma.us/envir and the other is at www.communitypreservation.org. Easton's CPA Committee also lists information on the Town's website at www.easton.ma.us. The Committee meets on a monthly basis at the Town Offices and more often, as needed. Our meetings are open to the public and we encourage the public to attend. We hold one public hearing each year and report to the Town Meeting on an annual basis. All CPA projects must be approved by Town Meeting. We can be reached through the Easton Town Offices, 136 Elm St. Easton, MA 02356.

In closing, we want to thank Town Administrator David Colton for his assistance. We also want to thank Town Accountant Wendy Nightingale for her valuable financial and accounting assistance and Mike Deltano for assisting us with our webpage. We thank the Selectmen for their continued support of CPA and the Committee's efforts. Primarily, appreciation is due to the people of Easton for their foresight in passing the Community Preservation Act and for their continued support of its goals.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Hunt, Chair; James D. Mullen, Jr., Vice Chair; Avery Lee Williams, Clerk ; Len Cidado; John Grant; Edmund Hands; Colleen Less; Christine Santoro, Esq.; and Dennis Sheedy