

# The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

**Framingham, MA**  
Find Your Town

Weather

72°

High: 79°  
Low: 63°  
[Full Forecast](#)

Tools

[Subscriber Services](#)

[Newsletter:](#)

Go!

WICKED LOCAL SEARCH

Go!

- Home
- News
- Business
- Sports
- Obituaries
- Lifestyle
- Entertainment
- Multimedia
- Blogs
- Classifieds
- Homes
- Jobs
- Wheels

## Editorial: A study's challenge to the CPA

ADVERTISEMENT

GHS  
Tue Jul 24, 2007, 12:45 AM EDT

Story Tools: [Email This](#) | [Print This](#)

The Community Preservation Act is working as intended, prompting a Harvard think tank to wonder whether that's a good thing.

Enacted in 2000, the CPA allows cities and towns to impose a property tax surcharge of up to 3 percent on residents, which is matched out of a state fund collected from real estate transaction fees. The money can only be used for specified purposes: open space acquisition, historic preservation and affordable housing. The money is locally controlled and reflects local priorities.

To date, 127 Massachusetts communities have enacted the CPA, which must be approved by a referendum vote. In a study to be released this week, the Rappaport Institute at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government matches that list of communities with household income and property values and pronounces the CPA to be something of a Robin Hood in reverse.

"Any time a public policy is redistributing money from poorer to richer communities it's worth looking at again," said David Luberoff, one of the study's authors.

But by focusing on the wealth of the communities, the study misses other variables that are more to the point. Two of the CPA's three purposes - open space preservation and affordable housing - are especially high priorities for communities under development pressure. In the fast-growing cities and towns along I-495, saving the town's last farm from becoming its next subdivision is critical. Providing affordable housing, even if only to escape the threat of unwieldy Chapter 40B developments, is important.

Such communities also face budget pressures older urban areas don't. Rapid residential growth strains schools and public safety departments. Proposition 2<+>1<+>/<->2<-> restricts revenue growth, and other revenue

## Special Sections

- Coupons
- Goodlife
- MothersTown
- Parents & Kids
- Camp Directory
- Readers Choice



You Spotted. We Spotted. [Share your photos.](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

### DIANETICS WORKSHOP

Attain your goals  
Feel good about yourself  
Attend this One Day Dianetics Workshop- June 23, 2007- 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. \$50.00

WICKED LOCAL

ADVERTISEMENT

streams simply aren't available.

By contrast, preserving open space isn't as much a priority for urban areas that hit build-out 50 years ago. Housing is more affordable in places such as Brockton and Springfield already. Cities have access to other revenue - hotel taxes, state grant programs, commercial development and state aid - that make the CPA seem less necessary.

The CPA allows different communities to make different decisions in terms of how large to make the surcharge and what to spend the money on. While the Rappaport study criticizes communities for spending money on open space - there are several good reasons why those projects were the first approved in many places - Cambridge has earmarked 80 percent of its CPA receipts for affordable housing.

The CPA is not a one-size-fits-all program. While the Rappaport study makes much of the wealthy communities that have adopted the CPA, poorer communities including Quincy, Waltham, Westfield and Fairhaven have found it suits them as well. Other communities have considered and rejected it, notably Boston, Framingham and Natick, often because of business opposition.

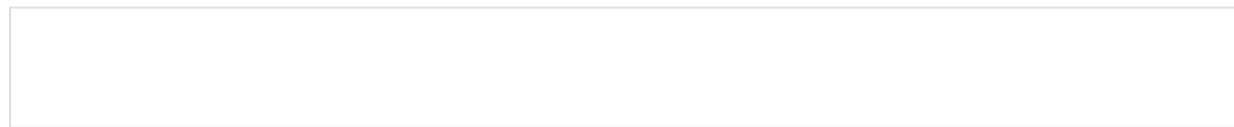
That's not just OK, that's the point. Not every state program is of equal value to every community. Inland towns don't apply for seawall restoration grants. Rural villages don't participate in state gang intervention programs. The CPA is no different.

We don't question the Rappaport study's data, but we wonder about its assumptions. Must every single state program disproportionately benefit urban areas?

There is room for discussion on some of the Rappaport study's conclusions. Because the CPA is locally-controlled, definitive information on how the money is being spent and whether each decision is in keeping with the law's intent is hard to find. Disputes have arisen over the proper uses of CPA funds that may be best resolved by a tightening of the legislation's definitions.

The Legislature is also considering a bill intended to make the CPA more appealing to cities that have not enacted it, including provisions to put more power over the CPA funds in the hands of mayors.

Such proposals deserve a full debate, which will benefit from the data compiled by the Rappaport Institute. But that debate should not rest on flawed assumptions that the CPA isn't a success if Boston and New Bedford haven't adopted it, or that there's something necessarily wrong with a program that helps "affluent" communities.



### Wicked Local Advertising

Visit the Wicked Local Marketing Center to help you reach thousands of local consumers. Creating custom ads is easy as 1, 2, 3, simply click here to begin

### PILLOWTOP MATTRESS SETS: \$100

Brand New Pillowtop Mattress & Box Sets. Factory Sealed in Plastic With Full Warranty. King \$175, Queen, \$125, Full \$115, Twin \$100. 781-626-0843.

