

Could state budget woes impact CPA funding?

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As the state budget continues to be tight and with predictions of a decline in state tax revenue, some wonder how long Beacon Hill will continue to match Community Preservation Act funds at 100 percent.

"We're concerned about it," says Katherine Roth, assistant director of the Community Preservation Act Coalition in Boston. "But there is a lot of political clout behind the CPA. As more communities adopt it, the chances that the fund would be raided decreases."

All towns on Cape Cod and the islands are among the 103 communities in Massachusetts that have adopted the CPA. Roth noted that having the entire Cape region as members of the CPA gave a big boost to the political power behind maintaining 100 percent matching funds from the state. According to Roth and Cape & Islands Sen. Robert O'Leary, D-Barnstable, Gov. Mitt Romney, a Republican, has tried several times in the past to "raid" the fund, most recently last January. But his efforts were always thwarted by the Legislature.

"This is a contract with taxpayers," says O'Leary. "It is outrageous for the governor to try and take that money and put it somewhere else."

"There is a commitment there and we should honor that," says state Rep. Shirley Gomes, R-Harwich. "I would not support a raid on the fund by the House, the Senate or the governor."

Gomes notes that while the

governor has tried to dip into the fund, several legislators from both parties have tried as well.

There is \$46.3 million in the state's CPA fund for fiscal 2006, according to Gomes. Those funds are generated by fees associated with real estate transactions across the commonwealth. The 103 CPA communities raise their own revenue through a property tax surcharge that may be as high as 3 percent. With the matching funds from the state, CPA communities then fund projects in the areas of historic preservation, affordable housing and open space preservation within their town.

In addition to political sticky fingers, others worry that as more communities adopt the CPA or if real estate transactions continue to slow across the state, there may be less money available. In 2006, 12 more Massachusetts communities will vote on the CPA.

"But we are still a far cry from 351," says Roth, in reference to the total number of municipalities in the state. "Over the next few years the 100 percent match should hold."

While Roth gives no specific date, many involved with the CPA say that 100 percent matching funds should be safe until at least 2009.

The CPA is not only growing in popularity in Massachusetts, where it was created, but other states are taking notice. New York, Connecticut and Rhode Island are all in different phases of developing their own Community Preservation Acts, according to Roth.