

# Spending Spree: How the towns allocated CPA funds in 2006

By Cape Codder staff

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**B**rewster buys 60 acres to be preserved as open space. Harwich fixes up Brooks Academy. Truro renovates a donated home that will be turned into affordable housing.

These are just a few examples of how Town Meeting voters in the Lower Cape chose to spend their Community Preservation Act funds this year. The act was passed in 2000, but most Cape Cod towns voted just last year to adopt it, with the exception of Chatham and Provincetown, which signed on in 2002 and 2004, respectively.

The CPA replaced the land banks that most towns had (Provincetown still has one) and this year provided \$46 million in matching funds throughout the commonwealth.

## Brewster

Brewster used part of its CPA funding to set aside the largest piece of open space since the Punkhorn was created. Voters approved two articles allocating \$4.2 million to purchase a 51-acre parcel and another 8.5-acre plot.

The acquisition was supported by the Brewster Community Preservation Committee to help protect habitat, open space and a critical watershed for Brewster and Dennis, which voted to contribute \$1 million to the purchase. Two separate grants of \$500,000 will help offset the purchase price and community preservation funds will be applied to the bonds.

The Higgins Farm Windmill will receive a facelift with \$13,000 granted to help repair and preserve the 211-year-old Brewster landmark. Another \$6,500 was given to the Brewster Cemetery Commission to hire a consultant to advise on ways to preserve and protect gravestones of historic interest in the Breakwater Cemetery. About \$98,000 was moved into the reserve fund for use in the future.

Affordable housing got a boost when voters earmarked \$43,270 to the Lower Cape Community Development Corporation for the purchase and management of an affordable housing unit at Nickerson State Park condominiums.

Habitat for Humanity's plans to construct four affordable housing units on Slough road is moving forward with a grant of \$95,000 to provide engineering services for the 4-acre property, including the installation of town water, utilities and septic systems.

The final allocation of funds, \$61,828, covers administrative and operating expenses relating to the operations of the Community Preservation Committee and the town administrator carrying out the operations of the committee.

Unused monies were transferred to reserve funds, including \$489,190 for the future acquisition of open space, and \$331,621 for the future expenditure on historic preservation, community housing and recreation.

## Chatham

Chatham voters embraced the spirit of the CPA with approved expenditures of \$734,226 contained in 11 articles.

The largest allocations included \$150,000 to help purchase 3.2 acres downtown, to be preserved as open space; \$156,226 for the completion of four affordable

housing units at 15 Balfour Lane, and \$130,000 for first-time home buyers' assistance.

An additional \$60,000 was granted to Habitat for Humanity.

Recreation got its share of monies, including \$75,000 for the demolition and reconstruction of the Veterans Field Playground; \$40,000 for new skateboard ramps at the town skate park, and \$30,000 to improve disabled access to two tees at Seaside Links Golf Course.

Also, voters approved \$20,000 for conservation land management; \$40,000 for the development of an open space acquisition strategy; and \$25,000 for an archaeological survey of the town to determine resource sensitive areas. A last request of \$13,000 was approved to cover community preservation committee administrative costs.

### **Eastham**

Eastham voters agreed to spend \$300,000 to help the town buy an eyesore - the old Neighborhood Gas Station off Route 6 - that has been abandoned since 1989 due to a gasoline spill that contaminated the groundwater. The state, which did the cleanup, has a lien of \$830,000 on the property, and this allocation of CPA funds will help pay off that lien. The goal, if the town can acquire the land, is to turn this eyesore into affordable housing for up to five workers.

Voters also agreed to spend \$250,000 to provide a foundation and help restore the historic School House Museum and one of its wings. On top of this, they agreed to spend \$8,000 to preserve and identify trails in Wiley Park, and \$7,000 to restore historic grave markers at Cove Burying Ground and Bridge Road Cemetery

### **Harwich**

In Harwich, the community preservation committee went eight for eight, winning passage of every article it proposed. Total spending was about \$570,000.

Voters approved \$100,000 for renovations to Brooks Academy, which houses the town's historical museum. The funding supplements \$185,000 appropriated in previous years.

Harwich residents allocated \$95,186 to build a playground in Brooks Park, \$98,850 to expand the parking lot and install a public restroom at Earle Road Beach in West Harwich, and \$25,000 to create an inventory of historic properties in town.

CPA money will also be used for "pre-development" studies; \$25,000 will analyze renovations for the recreation building on Sisson Road, \$30,000 will be used to study affordable housing on Main Street Extension in North Harwich, and \$40,000 will analyze the possibility of affordable housing on the recreation building property on Sisson Road and at the old West Harwich School on Bell's Neck Road.

The town also bought five acres of open space near the Herring River for \$150,000.

### **Orleans**

In its first crack at spending CPA money, Orleans Town Meeting approved a total of \$1.2 million.

Of that amount, \$769,356 is being spent on open space - \$486,000 from the town's 3 percent surtax that is earmarked for land bank debt payments through 2020, \$223,356 from the land bank fund balance for that same purpose and \$60,000 from the balance toward pre-acquisition costs for more open space.

Out of the \$467,000 in state matching funds, Town Meeting approved \$10,000 to compile data on the four town-owned cemeteries as a first step toward restoration and \$26,012 to digitally archive 213 plate-glass negatives and reproduce some for an Orleans Historical Society exhibit scheduled to open New Year's 2007.

Two sprinkler projects received funding - \$28,000 for a new system at Eldredge Park and \$75,000 for fire protection at the Academy of Performing Arts.

The joint committee on affordable housing received \$40,000 for design work at the affordable housing project on town-owned land at 247 Route 6A, and another \$175,000 was placed in the community housing reserve.

The committee kept \$47,650 for its own expenses, including studying town preservation needs and possible projects. Any funds not used will be added to unallocated funds.

Along with an unallocated \$65,338, approximately \$430,000 in state funds will be available for a special Town Meeting in the fall.

## **Provincetown**

Town Meeting appropriated \$1 million to buy 2.5 acres of land on Shank Painter Road, which will eventually become about 40 affordable rental units. It was the only allocation of CPA funds in 2006, however, several major expenses were approved since Provincetown adopted the act in 2004.

Among them was funding for Cape End Manor Nursing Home.

The town for years had tried to develop a plan to keep the facility open, but it was a burden to taxpayers. New England Deaconess came to the rescue, agreeing to take control of the nursing home and create an expanded facility to include assisted living units. A significant portion of those units will be marked as affordable thanks to funds from the Community Preservation Act. At special Town Meeting in 2005, voters approved \$1.9 million to help subsidize those units, which will be mixed in with market rate units, allowing for senior citizens of all economic brackets to live in Provincetown.

Unlike most towns on Cape Cod, Provincetown kept the land bank when it adopted the Community Preservation Act. So while most of its open space purchases and debt payments come from the land bank, the CPA did come in handy when it came to helping the town sustain its fresh water supply.

In 2005 the town used \$750,000 in CPA funds to purchase almost five acres of land in Truro to protect a wellhead area. Preserving the open space not only keeps the land above pristine, but the vital fresh water supply underneath safe for years to come.

Provincetown Town Hall hosts everything from town meetings to concerts by Eartha Kitt and Melissa Etheridge to burlesque shows and singing drag queens. Built in 1885, the historic structure is where the eclectic and diverse Provincetown community comes to vote, debate, dance and sing. But it was starting to show its age. So much so that the balcony needed to be closed a few years ago after an inspection showed stress fractures and sparked concerns if not repaired could be a safety hazard. The Community Preservation Act provided the town almost \$1 million for repairs last year.

## **Truro**

Donated to the town in 1912, the Cobb Memorial Library is a centerpiece in tiny Truro Center. The 94-year-old building has sat empty since 2000, when the books that once filled its shelves moved to the new Truro Public Library. But thanks to \$51,000 generated by the CPA, the Cobb Library will once again be open to the people of Truro.

The allocation will turn the facility into a year-round museum and research center of Truro history. The historical society will transfer the vast and diverse archives, currently hidden in storage, once renovations are completed sometime next year. These priceless artifacts will finally be available for viewing by the public as the facility will be climate controlled, to further preservation efforts.

With less than 1 percent of its housing stock marked as affordable, Truro has a long way to go to get to the 10 percent threshold mandated by the state to help solve Massachusetts' housing crisis. But how best to proceed? What income level needs housing assistance? Where should it go? Those questions and many more will get answers as the housing authority uses the more than \$200,000 of Community Preservation Act funds approved by Town Meeting for public outreach, education and administrative support.

The housing authority will also use those approved funds to pay the debt and renovate a donated home they moved to Snow's Road so that it may be turned into an affordable home, taking the town one step closer to its goal.

With \$15,000 approved by Town Meeting, the recreation commission will study recreational possibilities for Snow's Field and the old burn dump off South Highland

Road. Funds will also be used to study the possible expansion of bike paths in Truro.

### Wellfleet

Wellfleet's community preservation committee did not hold its first meeting until last fall, so it didn't have a lot of time to get the word out that more \$1 million in CPA funds was available for allocation at annual Town Meeting.

So voters agreed to reserve \$594,432 in CPA funds, with \$2,500 set aside for administrative purposes. They also reserved \$59,193 for open space, and another \$59,193 for historic preservation.

The knowledge that this money has been set aside for historic preservation purposes was like a gift from the blue to Janet Erickson, a member of the historic preservation committee, who said they've been operating for years on a budget of \$60. Now the committee will get to work preparing funding requests for next year that will include restoration of Uncle Tim's Bridge. But that lies ahead.

Voters did agree to transfer \$59,193 to the Wellfleet Housing Trust Fund. They agreed to reserve \$125,000 to help with the development of five affordable homes that will be built on town-owned land off Gull Pond Road. The homes will be owned by the lottery winners, and will remain affordable through deed restrictions.

Matthew Belson, Steve Desroches, Bill Fonda, Douglas Karlson and Marilyn Miller contributed to this report.

### About CPA funds

Community Preservation Act funds are a combination of locally generated monies and matching state grants. The state funds are generated by fees associated with real estate transactions, while the towns raise revenue through a property tax surcharge that can be as high as 3 percent. With the matching funds from the state, CPA communities can finance projects in the areas of historic preservation, affordable housing and open space preservation within their town.

Under the act, a minimum of 10 percent of the annual revenues of the fund must be used for each of the three core community concerns. The remaining 70 percent can be allocated for any combination of the allowed uses, or for land for recreational use. This gives each community the opportunity to determine its priorities, plan for its future, and have the funds to turn visions into reality.

#### Box chart

2006 Town Meeting allocations

Brewster

Open space: \$4.2 million

Affordable housing: \$138,000

Historic preservation: \$117,473

Chatham\*

Open space: \$235,000

Affordable housing: \$346,000

Historic preservation: \$25,000

Eastham

Open space: no allocation

Affordable housing: \$300,000

Historic preservation: \$250,000

Harwich

Open space: \$150,000

Affordable housing: \$70,000

Historic preservation: \$150,000

## Orleans

Open space: \$769,356

Affordable housing: \$215,000

Historic preservation: \$111,012

## Provincetown\*

Open space: no allocation

Historic preservation: no allocation

Affordable housing: \$1 million

## Truro

Open space: \$15,000

Affordable housing: \$237,480

Historic preservation: \$51,000

## Wellfleet

Open space: \$59,193

Affordable housing: \$125,000

Historic preservation: 59,193

## TOTALS BOX:

Open space \$5.43 million

Affordable housing \$1.43 million

Historic preservation \$764,000

TOTAL \$7.6 million