

Draft
LTA to MAPC

May 7, 2004

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William J. Mauro, Jr., President
Metropolitan Area Planning Council
60 Temple Place
Boston, MA 02111

Dear Mr. Mauro:

We believe that the State Community Preservation Act is a wonderful example of the legislature and local government working cooperatively to preserve unique local historical assets and open space, as well as to increase affordable housing and recreational opportunities. Rather than create yet another government assistance program, which, if existing programs are any indication, would shortchange suburban communities such as Acton, the state legislature took a bold step with the passage of the CPA, demonstrating that the state is willing to help those communities who are willing to help themselves.

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To that end, a diverse group of citizens came together in Acton to organize a campaign to adopt the CPA. Their efforts were extraordinary, and despite the economic downturn, reductions in state aid and significant increases in local property taxes, Acton voters saw the wisdom in taxing ourselves more, by adopting the CPA. The public promise of State match to only those communities who have passed CPA was a strong reason for local adoption. Acton recently received its first annual CPA match and just appropriated the first round of funding for local CPA projects.

Our understanding is that the first attempt to raid the state's CPA matching fund was also initiated by the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition in order to gain access to additional revenue for operating budgets to offset other cuts in revenue. That first raid was defeated and this latest attempt is just a small twist to the first proposal in that the Coalition is now saying that funds received from the "surplus" would be limited for CPA-type projects. While that may sound reasonable to citizens who live in communities struggling to balance operating budgets, the Coalition's proposal is an insult to every community that had the courage and foresight to adopt the CPA, many of which are also struggling to exist within the confines of proposition 2 1/2. Communities represented by the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition rely on the overly regressive property tax for approximately 45% of their annual revenues, while those communities who have adopted the Community Preservation Act derive over 60% of their revenue pie from the property tax. Having 33% more of your revenues under the control of Proposition 2 1/2 is a burden that should not be underestimated. (Make the point/conclusion - They are already getting a lot more hand-outs?)

We applaud the efforts of our State Representatives and our State Senator for their efforts and leadership in defeating this and all previous attempts to raid the CPA fund, and we are confident that should other proposals make it to the legislative floor for a vote, they too will be defeated. If the legislature is to tinker with MGL Chapter 44B (The Community Preservation Act) in a manner consistent with the original Act, in order to address the so called "Surplus", we suggest that second and third round distributions be broadened to include all the communities who have accepted the Act, rather than only (??) those communities who have adopted the maximum percentage of 3%.

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I respectfully suggest that rather than continuing to figure out different ways to raid the CPA fund, that the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition spend its energies and resources on developing an effective citizen outreach program that focuses on educating citizens about the benefits of the CPA and then, further, to assist coalition member cities in launching their own campaigns to adopt the CPA. After all, every city and town in the Commonwealth is eligible for the matching CPA funds - as long as they adopt the CPA and implement the property tax surcharge.

In Acton, there are strong doubts that MAPC serves any useful purpose that Acton could identify with. MAPC's recent support of the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition to attempt a raid of CPA funds, or to study ways to raid it, causes MAPC's image to plummet further.

Cc: Marc Draisen, Executive Director, MAPC

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