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# Survey: Worcester voters want ballot question on Community Preservation Act

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WORCESTER - City voters appear to clearly want the opportunity to decide at the ballot box whether to adopt the Community Preservation Act.

The question remains, however, whether the City Council will give them that opportunity.

According to a recent survey of registered voters, 82.7 percent of the respondents indicated they support an effort to place the Community Preservation Act question on the November ballot, while only 10.4 percent opposed it and 6.9 percent were unsure.

In addition, 83.6 percent of those surveyed said even if a city councilor personally opposes the Community Preservation Act, they should at least still allow Worcester voters to decide the question at the ballot box.

Yes for a Better Worcester Coalition, composed of some two dozen organizations, is pushing to get the CPA question put before the voters.

The survey was conducted by IMG Survey Research for CSC Solutions and the coalition June 13-14 and had 528 respondents. The survey has a margin of error of 4.25 percent.

“This poll shows that the people in Worcester want the chance to vote and that the City Council should put the item on the November ballot and let the voters decide,” said Robert Thomas of the New American CDC. “The poll also sends a clear message that even if a councilor doesn’t personally support CPA, the voters still want them to put the question on the ballot.”

Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, said what the Yes for a Better Worcester Coalition is asking for is similar to what has been done in several other communities.

“The poll indicates that the people want to vote and I think the councilors should respect that,” Ms. Packard said. “Nineteen other cities in Massachusetts have had their City Council put this on the ballot. Let’s do the same in Worcester and let the citizens decide.”

The Yes for a Better Worcester Coalition petitioned the City Council in April, asking it to initiate the process for placing the ballot question before the voters in the Nov. 6 election.

The council referred the petition to its Finance Committee, but there has been no further discussion about it since.

Last week, a resident, Odemaris Garcia, petitioned the council, also requesting the Community Preservation Act question be placed on the ballot. Her petition was tabled and appears on Tuesday night's meeting agenda.

The Community Preservation Act, which was enacted by the Legislature in 2000, allows municipalities to add a surcharge on local property taxes of between 0.5 percent and 3 percent.

Revenues generated through the surcharge would go into a dedicated fund that could be used to finance historic preservation projects, open space acquisition and parks improvements, and community housing.

By adopting the Community Preservation Act, the city would become eligible for matching contributions from the state for those projects.

But for the city to qualify for those funds the act must be adopted by voters at an election. A simple majority vote is needed for adoption.

The Yes for a Better Worcester Coalition is suggesting the city consider a 1.5 percent surcharge on local property taxes.

It is also suggesting that the first \$100,000 of residential and commercial-industrial property value be exempt from the surcharge.

In addition, the group is recommending that low-income families and low- to moderate-income senior citizens who own homes be exempt from the surcharge.

According to the group, the average Worcester homeowner would pay \$30 a year more in property taxes if the Community Preservation Act were adopted.

The survey posed 13 questions to its participants, some of which had nothing to do with the Community Preservation Act. The demographic breakdown of the respondents was as follows:

- 45.8 percent male, 54.2 percent female.
- 43.7 percent registered Democrats, 45.5 percent unenrolled and 10.8 percent Republican.
- 15.3 percent under age 30; 30.6 percent between ages of 30-49; 30.6 percent between 50-65 and 23.5 percent over 65.

According to the survey, 36.6 percent of the respondents said they would like to see the city spend more money for improvements to city parks and playgrounds, while 17.4 percent said less money should be spent and 32.6 percent feel what the city is already spending is sufficient and 13.4 percent were not sure.

In regard to the preservation of historic buildings, including churches, businesses and city-owned properties, 36.6 percent said they favored seeing more money spent for that, while 22 percent said less should be spent, 27.3 percent said what the city is already spending is sufficient and 14.1 percent were not sure.

Meanwhile, the biggest support for Community Preservation Act funds was registered for housing. Nearly half (48.5 percent) said they would like to see the city spend more money on housing for low- and moderate-income senior citizens, veterans, and low- and moderate-income families, including home ownership programs.

Only 19.9 percent said the city should be spending less money for such housing, while 20.3 percent said what the city currently is spending is sufficient and 11.4 percent were not sure.