

# Holyoke City Council mulls procedure for ballot question on preservation funding

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HOLYOKE — Holyoke City Council is considering placing a question before voters in November that would ask them if they want to reduce a tax that funds the city’s community preservation fund.

In November of 2016, Holyoke voters approved a program that imposed a surcharge on their tax bills that flowed into a fund to help the city create affordable housing, protect open space and rehabilitate historical buildings.

City councilors tabled a motion last week to reduce the Community Preservation Act surcharge from 1.5% to 1% and place a question on the November ballot that would give residents an opportunity to approve or reject the reduction. The City Council is scheduled to pick up the matter at its next meeting on March 6.

City councilors couldn’t agree whether voting on the proposed tax reduction and placing the question on the ballot would take one vote or two. Also, they must agree on how much to reduce the rate and the language that will appear on the ballot.

Assistant city solicitor Kathleen Degnan said City Council had to vote on the rate change before the question could be placed on the ballot. “We have to do the same thing we did initially,” Degnan said, otherwise it would open the city up to liability.

Councilor Patricia Devine did not agree with the reduction rate and therefore she wanted to keep the vote to reduce the rate and the vote to place it on the ballot separate.

“Originally when the CPA first came out, I was against it, but I have seen what great things that the CPA has done,” she said. “I will be voting no on the 1% reduction.”

City Councilor Kevin Jourdain said he would like residents to have a vote on the reduction and to have specific language in the summary so they understand the City Council is neutral on the issue.

“Voting on the reduction will be a procedural step. Without it, residents cannot vote on it in November,” he said. “We need to allow the public to vote. This is their government, bottom line.”

City Councilor Linda Vacon said a petition asking the council to send the question to the ballot has been circulating in the city.

“We have had citizens come into the public hearing repeatedly asking to vote on this. The taxpayer’s association that represents the businesses in this city, we are saying we want to be friendlier to them, say they are hurting. ... They are seeking from us the opportunity to let them vote on it,” Vacon said.

Councilor Howard Greaney Jr. said financial records show the Community Preservation Act Committee has \$147,944 in its coffers. [On its website](#), the committee says over the last five years, the program has helped bring \$43.4 million to the city.