2015 Autumn Newsletter

Autumn in Franklin County is a season of harvest and the return of the school year for the many students and employees of our educational institutions. At the FRCOG, it is the end of the federal fiscal year for many grants, the start of our next continuing education series for local officials, and the beginning of a new year of budget planning. The FRCOG staff work hard to ensure that a transparent financial planning process is complete by the end of January, so that towns have the information they need to plan for the next fiscal year. We are fortunate to be guided in this process by our Finance and Personnel Committee volunteers, our Executive Committee and by the many local members of the oversight committees and advisory boards for our programs. The last step will take place on January 29, 2016, when the full Council will take the final vote on our budget. Our warmest thanks to the tireless volunteers who are part of this process!

Looking ahead to the next few months, we will again be soliciting input from towns on their priorities for technical assistance for planning and regionalization projects. This annual survey of towns and all the work that comes out of it are made possible by Local Technical Assistance (LTA) funds from the state Department of Housing and Community Development. Over the past few years, LTA funds have supported a great deal of meaningful and creative work in Franklin County towns, including the creation of the South County Emergency Medical Service, numerous solar and wind zoning bylaws, regional Fire Department collaboration, municipal tree surveys, food planning projects, and our popular select board essentials series. We look forward to hearing your great ideas this year!

Scenic Byway Campaign Aloft!

You’ve seen the attractive signs on many of the pastoral roadways you travel, but did you know that local planners helped the project take flight? The Western Massachusetts Scenic Byway Marketing Project is a collaborative effort of the FRCOG and the Berkshire, Central Massachusetts and Pioneer Valley Planning Commissions, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. These remarkable transportation and tourism resources are the Mohawk Trail (Route 2), the Connecticut River Scenic Byway (Routes 47 & 63; also a National Scenic Byway), Route 112, Route 116, Route 122, Mount Greylock, and the Jacob’s Ladder Trail (Route 20). Each of the byways has its own unique character and story, and the project developed unified materials to highlight these qualities. Visit the website at www.bywayswestmass.com for maps, information on farm stands, recreational activities, historic sites, and other points of interest, as well as links to chambers of commerce and visitors’ bureaus for food and lodging.

FRCOG’s CORE VALUES:
service >> advocacy >> community >> quality and professionalism
Local elected officials have to contend with an ever-changing regulatory structure, and FRCOG’s local official training series was designed to cover the basics while also keeping officials abreast of state and federal governing policies. Trainings include Selectboard Essentials workshops, planning and health board trainings, and many more. This continuing education season is up and running for the fall! More details below on upcoming workshops.

MORE DETAILS ON ALL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES AT WWW.FRCOG.ORG OR REGISTRATIONS@FRCOG.ORG

Upcoming FRCOG opportunities to sharpen your skills include:

⇒ **November 18: Managing Conflict on Boards and Committees**: For our November local official workshop, FRCOG is partnering with the Mediation and Training Collaborative to create a dynamic and useful conflict management skill-building opportunity. TMTC has interviewed local select board members and other officials and is preparing a workshop designed to help out with some of the hardest parts of public decision-making, as identified by people from Franklin County. RSVP by clicking here.

⇒ **November 18: Joint Use of Public Buildings and Land**: A training for school committees, school administrators, recreation commissions, and others on how to protect your community from liability while increasing use of schools, parks, and gyms for community purposes. Dinner served.

⇒ **December 10: Minimum Town Contributions to school budgets — how are they set?** The Shelburne Selectboard presents a meeting with Roger Hatch, School Finance Programs Administrator of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at the Olver Transit Center.

⇒ **December 16: Rural Funding Resources for Your Town**, presented by representatives from the USDA Rural Development Program, which supports funding for housing, public infrastructure, community facilities (i.e. police/fire stations, libraries, schools) and business growth.

Community Compact Conference

Town officials interested in learning more about the Baker/Polito Administration’s Community Compact Program are invited to register for the “Elevating Municipal Partnerships: New Tools and Resources” conference to be held on November 12, 2015 at Holy Cross in Worcester. The FRCOG along with the other Regional Planning Agencies in MA have been asked by Lt. Governor Polito to organize this half-day conference. The morning will begin with an overview of the Program and a discussion with several state Secretariats about new funding opportunities for municipalities. This will be followed by two sessions of workshops highlighting best practices across the state that can be replicated. Registration is now closed.

[Click here](#) for information on the program.
FRCOG hosts new Coalition

Following a national trend, Massachusetts has altered the way it organizes its healthcare and public health emergency preparedness planning. Starting in July 2015, all of the hospitals, emergency medical services, community health centers, long term care facilities, and local board of health coalitions in western Massachusetts now have their emergency preparedness planning, training, and response work coordinated through the Franklin Regional Council of Governments. The state Department of Public Health (DPH) hopes this will provide for a more efficient and effective response between all public health and healthcare partners in the region during an emergency.

FRCOG was awarded a ten-year, $9 million grant to be the sponsoring organization for the new Western Massachusetts Health and Medical Coordinating Coalition encompassing 94 towns, four public health coalitions, 14 community health centers, 56 emergency medical services and ten hospitals. Staff now work with these entities to improve the integration of plans and emergency response systems. We also contract with hospitals and county-level public health coalitions receiving federal preparedness grants from the DPH. Visit the HMCC web page for more information.

Town Financial Teams at work

The FRCOG Town Accounting Program staff are hard at work during this season, simultaneously closing the books and reporting on fiscal year 2015, setting up the account structure for fiscal year 2016, and promptly preparing bi-weekly warrants to make sure the town’s bills are paid. It is an all-hands-on-deck challenge across the 12 towns we serve, one that’s far easier to meet when local officials use a team approach to complete the tasks of municipal finance.

The treasurer, tax collector, and assessors are naturally vital to the process, but the town clerk, town administrator, select board and finance committee members also have roles to play at various times during the fiscal year. The entire team must work collaboratively to complete all tasks required in a timely manner to keep a town’s finances in good health.

A few years ago the Town of Wendell developed General Accounting and Financial Policies and Procedures, a good, workable example of the finance team approach. Contact Bob Dean for a copy of the Wendell document or with your questions.

More resources and information:
- Information about the financial management team
- 12-Month Municipal Finance Calendar
- A Guide to Financial Management for Town Officials
- General best practices
**New Faces in New Places**

As the Regional Preparedness Program transitions into its new role as host for the Region 1 Health and Medical Coordinating Coalition (HMCC), the need for new roles and several new staff members has emerged. Tracy Rogers continues as the Regional Preparedness Program Manager with a greater focus on the HMCC. Mark Maloni is now the HMCC Planning and Operations Coordinator managing the work of sub-regional planning staff for the four counties and five disciplines. Ted Harvey is now the Emergency Preparedness Coordinator and administrative liaison to the Regional Emergency Planning Committee and Franklin County Emergency Communications System Committee. He also works with the HMCC. The Regional Preparedness Program has also added Greg Lewis to the team. A recent graduate of the Regional Planning Master’s program at UMASS, Greg is the new Public Health Emergency Preparedness Planner. Greg works primarily with the Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition on public health preparedness, as well as with the new HMCC.

Jessica McMillin, a recent Amherst College grad, has joined the staff to split her time between Transportation Planning and our Mass in Motion projects to increase exercise and access to healthy foods.

Melissa Ward, a Greenfield native, was recently hired as the Prevention Strategies Coordinator for the Partnership For Youth. She will be working on youth prevention efforts in Franklin County and the North Quabbin region, as well as joining PFY’s Amanda Doster in the work of providing technical assistance to similar coalitions in other parts of the state.

**Spotlight on Composting**

The FRCOG staff incorporates sustainability into its programs and projects. So why not incorporate sustainability into our workplace? Out of this question have come changes around the FRCOG’s workplace, including the practice of composting food scraps in our kitchen. Climate Change Working Group member Ted Harvey says, “It may seem like a small thing, but reducing food waste in our solid waste stream reduces our carbon footprint.” Staff regularly add to the compost, which is then added to one of many staff home comports. We will soon be sharing a compost bin with a neighboring building, owned by Mark and Barb Zaccheo. They too see the value in reducing the organic waste in our solid waste stream, which ultimately gets shipped to Springfield and incinerated. The fully composted organic material will be used at a nearby community garden.

At the regional level, the folks at Franklin County Solid Waste Management District (FCSWMD) are old pros at composting. FCSWMD implemented a compost collaborative program for business owners in Shelburne Falls, which has resulted in significant reductions in waste and in haulage costs for participants.

At the state level, focus on food waste is happening as part of the MA Food System Plan, a project managed by a team of regional planning agencies, including the FRCOG. Increasing composting at the household, municipal and regional level has been identified as a key strategy to reduce food waste in landfills, improve soil fertility and generate energy. Click here for more information on the MA Food System Plan.
Inflatable Shelter Ready to Roll

The Western Regional Homeland Security Advisory Committee (WRHSAC) recently purchased a portable, inflatable shelter for use by Franklin County towns and responders in the event of an emergency. With electricity, the 20 by 15 foot shelter can be set up within five minutes and has cooling and heating units ready for use in all weather conditions. The shelter can be used where immediate, portable shelter is necessary, such as search and rescue operations, disaster response, and fairs or parades and other large pre-planned events. It can house an incident command center, a responder shelter and rehab operation, a victim or survivor station, or any other operation in need of shelter.

Housed and maintained by the Berkshire County Sheriff’s Office, the shelter is available to any response agencies or municipality throughout western Massachusetts. The shelter can be requested by contacting Berkshire County Sheriff’s Control Dispatch at (413) 445-4559.

Children in Disasters: Keeping Kids Safe

WRHSAC’s Children in Disasters project kicked-off with a region-wide conference on Thursday, September 24. This project helps the region be more prepared to include the needs of children in emergency planning and response and recovery operations. Nearly 200 participants attended the event with representation from first responders, emergency planners, schools, child care, public health, and hospitals, among others. Nationally recognized experts shared information and best practices, and discussions regarding the specific needs of the region were lively. WRHSAC will use information gathered at the conference to identify and prioritize gaps in the emergency care of children to be addressed and to develop a detailed plan to address those gaps. For ongoing updates, visit www.wrhsac.org, www.facebook.com/WRHSAC or check Twitter @wrhsac.

Franklin County Multi-Agency Coordination Center Planned

Over the last several years, significant emergencies like Tropical Storm Irene and the 2011 October snowstorm have demonstrated the need for increased coordination, the sharing of scarce resources, and a regional approach to emergency management. Major disasters overwhelm towns’ ability to rapidly establish a common operating picture by fully consuming local resources and staff in order to address immediate response needs. Through the WRHSAC, the Franklin County Regional Emergency Preparedness Committee is establishing a regional approach to managing large emergencies and disasters in Franklin County by utilizing a multi-agency coordination center. Planning meetings will begin in November. For more information, contact regionalprep@frcog.org.
The Franklin County Cooperative Inspection Program’s (FCCIP) Building Inspectors are experiencing an increase in construction work conducted without builders and homeowners having obtained the required building permits. These permits are essential to protecting public health and safety, ensuring against building failures and preventing unsafe living conditions. This trend has been observed throughout most of Franklin County.

For this reason, FCCIP has implemented a ticketing policy allowed by Mass Building Code, 780 CMR and MGL c.148A, which authorizes the Building Commissioner to issue non-criminal building code violation notices to those not complying with the Code. The first ticket is $100; the second, $500, and the third or any subsequent ticket is $1,000. Seventeen tickets and warnings have been issued since 2013.

FCCIP executes this policy judiciously and with great reservation with the sole purpose of promoting compliance with the building code. These tickets cannot be issued for zoning or minor code violations. If an individual feels a fine is not justified, a state-certified hearings officer is in place to rule on ticket appeals. State law dictates that proceeds from the tickets may only be used for the purpose of continuing education for the inspectors.

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**Opioid Task Force Update**

The FRCOG is a partner organization in The Opioid Task Force of Franklin County and the North Quabbin, and our staff are working with the Task Force on efforts to prevent and treat substance use disorder and reduce overdose deaths in Franklin County. We want to make you aware of Tapestry Health’s Upcoming Overdose Prevention Trainings. Participants will learn how to recognize and prevent an opioid overdose, what to do if one occurs, how to perform rescue breathing, and how to administer nasal naloxone or Narcan. Free Narcan will be available after the training. Funding for the workshops is provided by Baystate Franklin Medical Center.

- Tuesday, November 3 at 6 PM
  Sunderland Public Library
- Tuesday, November 10 at 6 PM
  Mahar Regional School Orange

For more training info: 413-586-0310

FRCOG’s Kat Allen speaks on a panel of local experts at an Opioid Task Force event with the White House’s Office of National Drug Control Policy at Greenfield Community College.