Council Chair Update

**Next Council Meeting:**
April 17, 2019

Meetings are held in the Transit Center.

**Seeking Board Members**
A vestige of county government is our responsibility to appoint members to the Boards of the Franklin County Community Development Corporation and the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA). The HRA Board of Commissioners is in particular need for new Board members. The Board meets in the evening on the first Monday of each month at the HRA offices in Turners Falls. Commissioners govern the HRA in its role as a public housing authority and in its other activities, including community development and housing consumer education. Candidates with expertise in finance, law, construction or management are of particular interest. If you are interested in serving on one of these boards or can recommend a candidate, it would be appreciated.

Executive Committee Update

In its meetings this quarter, a very busy FRCOG Executive Committee:

- Convened in their role as The Greater Franklin County Economic Development District Board to consider and provide input into the new CEDS committee bylaws related to its membership, recruitment, and nominations processes.
- Considered and consented to easements on East River Street in Orange, MA, requested by a low income housing developer for the purpose of relocating a sewerage lift station.
- Heard updates on the status of the Franklin County Emergency Communication System (FCECS). The committee discussed strategies for informing state officials and local and federal legislators about the challenge of keeping the system operational.
- Learned of the desire of two towns situated in other counties to join the FRCOG.
- Considered the idea of using a flat fee billing business model for some of the Partnership For Youth’s services in an effort to retain the program’s staffing at current levels, and in light of the cap on federal grants awarded for their work.
- Voted to draft a letter to FERC asking for intervenor status and for a 90-day comment period for FirstLight’s recently filed “Applications for Approval of Transfer of License, Substitution of Applicant, and Request for Expedited Consideration”. FirstLight has requested to transfer its existing hydropower licenses to 2 new Limited Liability Corporations. FirstLight also requested an expedited, 30-day response/approval from FERC for their requests. Staff recommended filing a letter requesting a reasonable comment period (90 days) and objecting to the issuance of two licenses, which will hamper
coordination between the projects and possibly negate many of the studies done to date that assumed
the two projects were one. The Executive Committee also voted to pursue FERC Intervenor status if
staff feel this action is also necessary.

Finance Committee Update

Presentation of the FRCOG FY20 Budget

The bulk of this quarter’s Council meeting will be presentation and discussion and request for adoption of the
FRCOG FY20 budget, which is included with the meeting materials. The budget was developed with the
following conditions:

- Important priorities as described to the Council in the October meeting are included:
  - Fund a project to renovate or rebuild the FRCOG website.
  - Fund a strategic planning process that includes succession planning of key staff within 10 years
    of retirement.
- 2.5% Competitive Market Increase (salary adjustment) – no COLA, step or merit.
- 5% increase in employer health insurance premium costs, conservatively estimated with information
  from the Hampshire Group Insurance Trust.
- OPEB contributions included at $205,000, which is predominantly funded through grant revenues and
does not impact municipal assessments.

FY20 indirect revenue, based on total dollar value of grant contracts, is conservatively projected in this budget.
We do not know of any cancellations in major programs that fund FRCOG grant work although the continued
shutdown of the federal government could/will eventually impact FRCOG resources.

Because the formula used to calculate the FRCOG membership assessment uses EQV (90%) and population
(10%), EQV changes from 2018 will impact towns, as there was some change since 2016, our last assessment
base year. This budget results in a +3% increase to the Regional Services Assessment when considered alone,
but as statutory assessment drops, the increase when considered in sum is 2.3%. Because of the change to EQV
that is impacting many member towns in FY20 and because the FRCOG ended FY19 with healthy excess
revenues, the Finance Committee voted to cover the 2.3% assessment increase with FRCOG reserves of $12,471
(see budget page 1 Revenue “Fund Balance Used for Operating”). As a result, other than formulaic changes due
to revised EQV figures, the membership assessment will be level-funded.

Program Specific:

- The Cooperative Health Program is adding a permit member, Shelburne, resulting in a projected
  revenue increase. As budgeted, it does not use fund balance to cover expenses, as has been the
  Program’s goal.
- The Accounting Program is level-serviced in this draft of the budget. Currently the Program is down one
  part-time staff person that we have been unable to fill. We are working with the state to develop a
  western MA town accountant training program using state funds which we would use initially to
  stabilize our program and then expand to help other communities needing trained town accountants.
  Since this program is in development now, potential changes are not yet reflected in this version of the
  budget and at this point we do not anticipate a cost to participating towns.
• The Cooperative Inspection Program revenues year to date in FY19 are strong and should support the salary and benefits increases in expense budget. There will be no increase to member town assessments.

• Collective Purchasing is level-serviced in this budget; expenses increase only due to salary and benefit projections. The Program does not intend to ask for increases in bid fees or hourly service rate for procurement services (this will be many sequential years without raising fees). We are prioritizing this stability to participants, but without any fee increases, may have to ask for Finance Committee approval for use of fund balance as some point mid-year (March 2020).

• Precipitated by the hiring of a Radio System Manager, funded in part with Council-allocated FRCOG undesignated fund balance in FY19, the FCECS budget increases in FY20 by $32,517. The FCECS Oversight Committee asked that increases to assessments be limited, which is only possible if capital reserve assessments are reduced. The FRCOG Executive and Finance Committees both feel that reducing capital assessments is unwise given the fragility of the current FCECS infrastructure. The Finance Committee instructed staff to develop a 3-year phase-in of the budget’s increased cost. As a result, the Finance Committee will request use of $21,000 of FRCOG undesignated fund balance to balance the FCECS budget in FY20 (see budget page 1 Revenue “Fund Balance Used for Operating”) and the assessment to users will increase by $71.09/user unit.

Advocacy

Executive Director Update

Advocacy, Boards, Commissions and Committees

• The Special Commission on Local and Regional Health is finalizing recommendations for local health department workforce credentials and minimum services. The Commission will wrap up by March, with a final report and some legislative, regulatory, and budget recommendations. Phoebe, who serves on the Commission, will present about its findings at our April meeting.

• Phoebe is also sitting on the Statewide Community Health Initiative Advisory Committee, helping craft the guidelines for expenditure of hospital community health improvement funds associated with capital projects. The Advisory Committee is working to come up with an equitable distribution of a few million dollars a year in communities without major clusters of hospitals.

• The Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) wrapped up a series of listening sessions across the state with a final session in Franklin County on 12/13/18. The purpose of the listening sessions was to review the proposed contents of a MA Rural Policy Plan and to identify top concerns of rural municipalities. Franklin County’s session boasted the largest attendance and a robust discussion. The RPAC will now write a MA Rural Policy Plan that is intended to highlight rural issues, propose legislative and policy improvements and act as a guiding document for policy development in the future. Because the RPAC is an unfunded Commission, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the grant managers of DLTA, are allowing all DLTA grant recipients to pool a small percentage of DLTA for the writing of the Plan. 4% of FRCOG’s DLTA funding will be allocated for the writing of a MA Rural Policy Plan.
Green Communities Technical Assistance
FRCOG staff continue to assist Franklin County towns with Green Communities activities to reduce municipal energy use. In December, the MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER) announced 30 new Green Community designations across the state, including the towns of Charlemont, Colrain, and Heath. Each of these Franklin County towns have been awarded grants of just under $130,000 to be used towards energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements in municipal buildings, vehicles, and lighting. FRCOG planning staff assisted these towns in the fall with their designation applications. Staff are assisting towns with Green Communities annual reporting, competitive grant applications, and procurement for grant funded projects over the course of FY19. This work is being funded by the DOER through a META grant. More Information: Alyssa Larose at alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and Related DLTA Projects
Work is underway to draft the 2019 CEDS Annual Report. This report will be the last annual update to the 2015 CEDS Plan submitted to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) in June. After that, we will launch the strategic planning process to create the next five-year regional economic development plan for Franklin County.

Under the DLTA program, an economic development project for Orange is being completed. It includes an inventory of businesses and available commercial spaces in the Downtown, and an online mapping platform to encourage greater downtown business development. More information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

Regional Brownfields Program
The FRCOG’s current EPA contract to conduct environmental site assessment activities successfully closed on September 30, 2018. Over the course of this nearly four-year contract, 19 properties in ten Franklin County towns were assessed for hazardous substances or petroleum products. FRCOG will apply for EPA Brownfields assessment grant funding in January 2019 to continue this program. If a community has a site that may be appropriate for the Brownfields Program, they should contact staff to have it be considered for the program’s waiting list. More information: Peggy Sloan at PSloan@frcog.org or ext. 133.
**U.S. Census Data Release and 2020 Preparations**

The U.S. Census Bureau recently released its latest American Community Survey (ACS) Five-year Estimates. Starting in 2010, the ACS replaced the decennial “long form” survey. The ACS survey goes to a sampling of households across the country every year. It takes five years to accumulate a sufficient number of responses to produce estimates at the town level. As a result, the 2017 ACS Five-year Estimates were produced from surveys collected from 2013 to 2017.

The 2020 Census will take place on April 1st next year. FRCOG will be coordinating efforts to encourage all households to respond and will be considering whether to lead a Census Complete Count Committee this month. An accurate Census is important! This data is used to determine legislative districts, in formulas for state and federal funding distribution, and is the basis for future demographic data. **More information:** Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

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**Collective Procurement of Rental Equipment / Heavy Equipment**

Contracts were just signed with five companies for a new three-year fixed price contract for Rental Equipment/Heavy Equipment for emergency use or for enhancing your towns’ highway department operations. Excavators, Loaders, Bulldozers, Road Graders, Dump Trucks, and Paving Rollers are included. These standing contracts will helpful during any event requiring FEMA reimbursement. Towns should sign the acknowledgement form provided to each Town Administrator for use of this contract and send it to bids@frcog.org. This contract is available to all towns participating in the Collective Highway Purchasing Program. **More Information:** Andrea Woods at bids@frcog.org or ext. 104.

**District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Project Solicitation**

The FRCOG is seeking project priorities for this year’s DLTA grant. The contracted focus of this year’s grant is housing, economic development, regionalization and Community Compact projects. In late December all municipalities were sent a project request form in both email and hard copy format. The form offers project ideas that were generated over the past year during a variety of meetings and discussions and offers opportunity for new project ideas. Our hope is to have all municipal requests in by the end of January so projects can begin in February. As in all past years, FRCOG staff will choose projects based on contract obligation, number of municipalities served, and ability to complete the project in the grant period’s timeframe.
**Drone Services Now Available**

The FRCOG has contracted with three vendors to provide drone services to the FRCOG and to Franklin County municipalities on a fee basis. Drones are now being commonly used for planning and engineering projects and for emergency response. Ryan Clary, FRCOG GIS Specialist and a member of the Western MA Incident Response team that was deployed to Florida after the devastating hurricane and floods, reported that drones were routinely sent into a ravaged area in advance of first responders. Several communities are using drone imagery to visualize proposed intersection improvements. Below is a drone image of an intersection in Nantucket with a proposed roundabout superimposed on top. Use of the imagery helped secure community support. **More information**: contact Andrea Woods for pricing and contract information at bids@frcog.org or ext. 104 or Ryan Clary for project scoping assistance at gis@frcog.org or ext. 124.

*Drone imagery provides the means to more clearly envision a variety of infrastructure projects. L: the original drone image; R: the same image imposed with a proposed roundabout.*

**Regional Animal Control Officer**

Staff are working with the Franklin County Sheriff’s office and a group of towns interested in sharing an Animal Control Officer through the FCSO Dog Shelter. The current plan is for the regional ACO to begin work in the spring or summer of 2019. **More information**: Phoebe Walker at walker@frcog.org or ext. 102.

**Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness**

**Cybersecurity Preparedness Conference**

The Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council hosted a Cybersecurity Preparedness Conference on December 5, 2018 at UMass Amherst. The conference was attended by first responders, municipal officials, and private sector partners. The conference raised awareness around cybersecurity threats, demystified cyber threats, and provided participants with practical steps to take to prevent, mitigate and respond to cybersecurity attacks. Presenters included the Director of the Massachusetts Fusion Center, and experts Department of Homeland Security, Massachusetts State Police and more. Linda Dunlavy was present to speak to possible regionalized approaches to cybersecurity. More than 200 people from local, regional and state agencies attended the conference. **More Information**: Raine Brown at raine@frcog.org or ext. 138.
Exercises, Exercises!
The Emergency Preparedness team hosted two tabletop exercises last fall. The first was assisting the Pioneer Valley Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD) to run through one operational cycle of their emergency operations plan. Over 30 representatives from human service agencies in the Pioneer Valley were involved and identified the need for a plan to receive donations of cash and goods, including finding warehouse space to store donated goods, and a great need to recruit more members into the COAD so it can provide diverse and comprehensive assistance when called. The second exercise focused on a failure of the Harriman Dam and the resulting flooding of the Deerfield River Valley. 54 players from 15 towns, along with state officials and a representative of the dam owner, worked through the reality of the need to rapidly evacuate downstream residents, including how they would get the message out and coordinate with their neighboring towns. More Information: Tracy Rogers at emergencyprep@frcog.org or ext. 118.

Franklin County Emergency Communication System Update
We are hosting a county-wide meeting on Thursday, January 31st, 7:00 p.m. in the dining commons at Greenfield Community College to update everyone on the status of our discussions with the Commonwealth about joining their 800 MHz system and to hear your feedback. As we’ve been alluding to for months, we must decide whether to invest in upgrading the current system or join the Commonwealth’s statewide system. Anyone is welcome to attend, but we are particularly asking selectmen, prudential committee members, public safety chiefs/directors, and municipal finance committee and finance department members to join us. More Information: Dan Nietsche at dnietsche@frcog.org or ext. 105.

Officer Down Rescue Instructor Training
The purpose of Officer Down Rescue Instructor course is to reduce the loss of life of civilians and first responders through practical training emphasizing techniques in providing emergency care and rapid extraction in challenging and violent environments. The Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council offered a session of this training in late fall 2018. The course provides guidance in different methods of extrication in order to save an individual who may be either pinned down or unable to escape on their own power. Students engage in high-energy scenarios meant to simulate an active threat environment and are called upon to apply life-saving techniques to themselves and each other. Students were from all four western Mass counties and from the disciplines of law enforcement, fire and EMS. More Information: Raine Brown at raine@frcog.org or ext. 138.
WRHSAC Presents: When Controversy Comes to Campus: Gators, Haters & the First Amendment

Drawing on lessons learned by the University of Florida, this January 10th conference informed participants on actions needed for a unified response composed of university, local, state, and federal partners, when a known controversial speaker or event comes to campus. Emergency Management, Police, and Student Engagement of the University of Florida, along with Florida Highway Patrol, shared their experience and insight of preparing for a large-scale event where passion and politics are raised, safety and security capacities are challenged, and media attention is heightened. Participants gained practical steps and valuable perspective in preparation for events on their campus. **More Information:** Raine Brown at raine@fr cog.org or ext. 138.

Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) Project

The purpose of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Project (MTWP) is to bring recognition and additional financial and technical resources to the 21 municipalities in northwestern Massachusetts, primarily via special designation by the State and the U.S. Forest Service:

- Increase natural resource based economic development
- Increase forest land conservation and sustainable forestry practices on private lands
- Improve fiscal stability and sustainability of the municipalities

State legislation to create a Special Designation for the 21-town region and formally establish the MTWP was passed as part of the Environmental Bond Bill and was signed by Governor Baker on August 9, 2018. At least 11 of the 21 towns must opt in by either Select Board or Town Meeting vote in order to establish the MTWP Board whose purpose is to coordinate and oversee activities of the Partnership. At the October 2018 MTWP Advisory Committee meeting, UMass presented preliminary findings from their Wood Heat & Air Quality Study. Given the large amount of data that must be analyzed, complete findings are expected next spring 2019. **More information:** Peggy Sloan at psloan@fr cog.org or visit the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership Project at [http://www.mohawktrailwoodlandspartnership.org](http://www.mohawktrailwoodlandspartnership.org).

Public & Community Health

**CPHS wraps up flu season**

The Cooperative Public Health Service, FRCOG’s 11-town health department, hosted twelve flu clinics throughout the region, vaccinating over 1,000 people. For next year, CPHS Public Health Nurse Lisa White is looking into expanding the pneumonia vaccine offerings, and adding shingles vaccine.
**Food Safety Update**

This fall, the FRCOG’s health district, the Cooperative Public Health Service, provided 20 local business people with low cost food safety training -- ServeSafe, Chokesaver, and Allergan certifications. The CPHS staff are starting off 2019 with a new tablet-based food inspection system supported by a grant from the Food and Drug Administration.

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**Franklin County/North Quabbin Community Health Improvement Plan**

The CHIP is kicking off its third year of collective health assessment and health improvement planning for the region with a public meeting on 1/29 from 2:30-4:30 at the Transit Center. The CHIP was fortunate to receive funding from the Baystate Health System this fall. The three-year grant will allow the collaborative to gather better data and support the rollout of strategies that will improve the health gaps in our region. More information on this collaboration between the FRCOG and numerous institutions and community organizations here: [www.frcog.org/chip](http://www.frcog.org/chip). See flyer in your packet.

**Municipal Policy to Reduce Youth Substance Use**

The Communities That Care Coalition continues to work with school, town and agency partners to implement effective strategies for reducing youth substance use and improving youth health, and will be updating their Community Action Plan this year. Through DLTA funding, staff have been meeting with towns interested in taking action to reduce youth substance use to share information about what municipal policy options exist. Wendell, Sunderland, and Montague have held meetings so far. Interested? **More information:** Kat Allen at kallen@frcog.org or ext. 119.

**Partnership for Youth Presents on Marijuana and the Developing Brain**

Kat Allen from FRCOG’s Partnership for youth will present on Marijuana and the Developing Brain: Raising Youth in the Age of Legal Marijuana; Tuesday, January 29, 2019 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM at Baystate Franklin Medical Center 164 High Street Greenfield, MA 01301. Register [here](http://www.frcog.org/chip). More information: Kat Allen at kallen@frcog.org or ext. 119.

**School Food Service Workshop and Networking Session**

Partnership for Youth/Mass in Motion Franklin County is working with Mass Farm to School to organize a School Food Service Workshop and Networking Session on Thursday, January 31 from 2:00 -5:30 pm at the John W. Olver Transit Center (snow date February 7). Content will include procurement of local foods and culinary skills training. Register [here](http://www.frcog.org/chip). **More information:** Rachel Stoler at rstoler@frcog.org or ext. 121.
Welcome, Shelburne!
The town of Shelburne has been a member of the public health nursing program of FRCOG’s Cooperative Public Health Service for years. However, as of November, the CPHS welcomed the town of Shelburne as a comprehensive member of the health district. District Health Director Andrea Crete and Food Safety Agent Randy Crochier are now supporting the Shelburne Board of Health by conducting all local sanitary inspections, including restaurants, septic systems, camp inspections, and more. More information: Phoebe Walker at walker@frcog.org or ext. 102.

Local Officials Workshops
The FY19 Local Officials Workshop series continued this fall with a packed house of Finance Committee and Selectboard members and others for Municipal Financial Management Review on November 6.

The Emergency Preparedness Program held a workshop on December 6th entitled State of Emergency Preparedness in Franklin County, where we presented on how far we’ve come in accomplishing items identified as needing improvement in past after action reports and asked for help in identifying what still needs to be done and how we should go about getting it done. Discussion focused on five main challenges: technology; awareness of, and access to, resources; awareness and customization (operationalization) of plans; awareness, expectations, and acceptance of emergency preparedness roles; and maintaining commitment to emergency preparedness. Feedback collected that evening will help us write a comprehensive report recommending policy changes, structural changes, and programming changes to be implemented by FRCOG Emergency Preparedness staff. We will reconvene in late 2019 to unveil the report and double check with our stakeholders that our plan for implementation is in line with their expectations.

Materials from both of these workshop are available at: https://frcog.org/program-services/municipal-resources/
Bicycle Friendly Business Program
The FRCOG launched a Bike Friendly Business Program aimed at recognizing and marketing Franklin County businesses that welcome and support the bicycling community. A mailing was sent to 300 businesses with information about the program and the positive reasons to become bicycle friendly. It included a pledge card that allows businesses to sign up by providing some amenities that support bicycling that can draw cyclists to their establishments including bike parking, water and restrooms, repair stations, snacks, bike rentals and more. More information: Beth Giannini at giannini@frcog.org or ext. 125.

Expansion of Passenger Rail
Planning is underway to develop a marketing strategy to promote the expansion of the north-south passenger rail service, currently expected to begin in June of 2019. The 2 ½ year expansion will include four additional round trips between Springfield and Greenfield (two morning and two afternoon/evening), and one new weekend round trip. This will allow Franklin County residents to get to and from New York City in one day. The pilot will be evaluated primarily by ridership numbers. The FRCOG will work with PVPC and other local stakeholders, like Chambers of Commerce, to market the service in the coming months and to monitor ridership, customer satisfaction, and any anomalies (like rerouting passengers from train to bus during track repair) that could impact ridership. Pending funding from the Economic Development Bond, the FRCOG and Chamber will work together to examine options for weekend transportation service between the Greenfield train station and recreational opportunities throughout the county. More information: Maureen Mullaney at mmullaney@frcog.org or ext. 129.

High Risk Stream Crossings in the Deerfield River Watershed
Recently, UMass and MassDOT teamed up to conduct a pilot project to assess the vulnerability of road-stream crossings in precipitation events. The final product was a database and online mapping tool that documents culverts in the towns of the Deerfield River Watershed. FRCOG staff took information from that database and the North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative (NAACC) stream crossing database to compile town by town reports and maps to help municipal staff locate culverts most at risk to flooding in their towns, and to provide guidance on how to use the online mapping tool. In turn, this allows towns to prioritize bridge and culvert upgrades in their town. The reports also provide information on how to make road-stream upgrades more resilient to current and projected precipitation conditions, and lists potential funding sources for upgrading crossings. More information: Alyssa Larose at alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127.
Update to the Long Range Regional Transportation Plan

Staff is currently working to update the region’s long range transportation plan, an assessment and vision for mobility in Franklin County. Using a time horizon of 2040, the Plan looks at all modes of transportation to assess its current status, and identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and funding constraints. The draft Plan will be available for public review and comment in April, 2019, and will be endorsed by the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization in May or June, 2019. Public outreach is currently underway with staff holding public meetings, attending meetings of other local organizations, and through a survey on our website: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2019RTPsurvey. More information: Megan Rhodes at mrhodes@frcog.org or ext. 132.

Staff Updates & Changes

Staff Changes

- Patricia Smith, Senior Land Use Planner will retire on January 18, 2019.

- We have hired Greenfield firefighter Kurt Seaman as a part-time employee to fill the role of Radio System Manager. Kurt is already addressing a backlog of projects, such as getting an accurate inventory of the equipment, pictures, and as-built documentation for the tower sites. Welcome, Kurt!