Council Chair Update

Next Council Meetings:

Meetings are held in the Transit Center.

FY20 meeting schedule:

- January 30, 2020 (snow date February 6, 2020)
- April 16, 2020

Please make every effort to attend the January Council meeting as it is the meeting at which the FRCOG’s FY21 budget will be presented for endorsement. A financial quorum is required.

On January 16, the Finance Committee will meet to review and approve the final FY21 budget. The committee welcomes Council members’ attendance at that meeting for advance review of the budget.

Executive Committee Update

In its meetings since July, the FRCOG Executive Committee:

- Reviewed and approved the Memo of Understanding between FRCOG and county municipalities regarding the Franklin County Emergency Communication System’s (FCECS) impending move to the state interoperable radio system, and eventual decommissioning. The memo outlines the responsibilities of both the FRCOG and its member municipalities related to radio system equipment, insurance, financing, licensing, operation, and so on. The committee also discussed and voted to approve the FCECS Oversight Committee Operating Procedures manual, revised to reflect the transition from an external system manager to an internal staff member.

- Learned of the FRCOG’s Information Technology (IT) security measures. These include daily server back-up onsite; weekly server back-up off-site; the use of firewalls; virtual private network (VPN) use for off-site work; strict access protocol for the accounting program; screening and quarantine of emails as needed; and a maintenance contract with Northeast IT, with whom staff members regularly consult.

- Received two county road action petitions from the City of Greenfield for a portion of Woodard Road and for Court Square. The committee held a public hearing at which members discussed and approved of discontinuance of the Woodard Road section and its transfer to the city. The public hearing and decision regarding Court Square discontinuance and transfer is forthcoming.

- Learned of the staff’s intention, along with Representative Natalie Blais and Senator Jo Comerford, to convene a forum focused on wastewater issues in Franklin County towns at the end of the month.
• Convened as the Economic Development District Governing Board to appoint suggested members to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) committee.

Finance Committee Update

Fiscal Review and Budget Development Schedule

The Fiscal Review for FY21 Budget Development has been sent to members in advance. It will be reviewed and discussed at the Council meeting. Its purpose is to provide Council members with a thorough understanding of the fiscal operations of the FRCOG in advance of FY21 budget development. At the January Council meeting, members will be asked to endorse the budget. All Council members are welcome to attend Finance Committee meetings. The meeting schedule is listed in the front of the Fiscal Review.

Executive Director Update

Advocacy, Boards, Commissions and Committees

• The rollout of the Massachusetts Rural Policy Plan occurred at the Statehouse on October 2nd. The FRCOG took the lead in the development of the Plan. The Rural Policy Advisory Commission hopes that the Plan will generate greater focus on the needs of rural municipalities. A copy of the plan can be accessed via the FRCOG website at: https://frcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Rural_Policy_Plan_10.01.19.pdf

• The Cannabis Control Commission approved new regulations on September 24, 2019 for additional license types including Marijuana Social Consumption Establishments (aka Marijuana Cafes) and Delivery-Only Retail of marijuana products to consumers. The Commission voted in favor of a Social Consumption Pilot Program that would permit Marijuana cafes in up to 12 municipalities statewide. The Pilot Program would not be able to begin until there is a change in State Law that would allow cities and towns to authorize social consumption in their community. More Information: contact psloan@frcog.org for planning and zoning related questions and walker@frcog.org for health related questions.
River Corridor Management Toolkit

Over the last 10 years, FRCOG has been using the science of Fluvial Geomorphology to develop and pilot cost-effective, sustainable river and watershed assessment, restoration and management techniques in the Franklin County portion of the Deerfield River Watershed. Historic land clearance and the legacy of channel modification are two of the main stressors still affecting the rivers and streams in this watershed. Continued development and encroachments in the river corridor, along with the more frequent and intense rain events due to climate change, also stress these unstable river systems.

In 2017, FRCOG was awarded a $155,000 s.319 grant from MassDEP to develop a river corridor mapping protocol and a River Corridor Management Toolkit, which will soon be available on FRCOG’s website. The toolkit includes two innovative tools: a Model River Corridor Protection Overlay Zoning District Bylaw and a draft River Corridor Easement Restriction.

The Toolkit can be used by state agency staff, communities and landowners in the Deerfield River Watershed and across the Commonwealth who are interested in river restoration and protection, climate resilient land use, and the reduction of threats to critical infrastructure caused by increasingly severe and frequent flood events. More Information: Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frcog.org or ext. 130.

Regional Energy Planning Assistance (REPA)

FRCOG was recently awarded $65,000 from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) to assist 15 Franklin County towns with Green Communities program related projects and clean energy planning. Currently 24 of the 26 Franklin County towns are designated Green Communities. This State program provides grant funding for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects to reduce municipal energy use. FRCOG staff will be assisting towns with Green Communities annual reporting, grant applications, and procurement for grant-funded projects. More Information: Alyssa Larose at alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127.

Buckland Green Streets Project

FRCOG staff is working with Buckland Town Highway and Water Superintendents to assess opportunities for implementing Green Infrastructure (GI) to: improve water quality in the Deerfield River, help the village and surrounding watershed become more resilient to increasingly frequent and intense precipitation, and mitigate the flood hazards resulting from heavy rain events.
After assessing 9 sites, the team selected a concept design for Crittenden Hill Road to capture and clean large volumes of stormwater before it enters the storm sewer. The design, which proposes to retrofit an abandoned water tank in tandem with new green and grey stormwater infrastructure, will be developed to 25% along with cost estimates by a Professional Engineer. Construction can coincide with work currently needed to repair the road and address erosion hazards affecting residential properties and steep slopes flanking the road. FRCOG will provide the Town with a guide for continuing GI implementation in conjunction with future transportation projects, which includes a replicable site assessment methodology and links to clean water tools and funding sources. FRCOG is also working at the scale of Franklin County to assess opportunities for green infrastructure to foster water quality and watershed resilience across the region. **More Information:** Helena Farrell at hfarrell@frcog.org or ext. 134.

**Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program**

To participate in this new state-funded program, communities first apply for MVP Planning Grants, which are used to identify key climate-related hazards, vulnerabilities and strengths, and prioritize next steps to address climate change impacts. Once the planning process is completed, a town is designated as a MVP Community. MVP Communities are eligible to apply for MVP Action Grants to implement key priorities and projects identified through their planning process. To date, Montague and Deerfield have been awarded MVP Action Grants for projects that include engineering design, local bylaws, redesigns and retrofits, natural infrastructure and storm protection, and education/outreach.

FRCOG staff is currently working with the City of Greenfield and the Towns of Leverett, Orange, Sunderland, Wendell, and Whately to complete the MVP planning process and request MVP designation. The FY20 MVP Planning and Action grants will be available soon and we encourage more towns to participate in this program. **More Information:** Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frcog.org or ext. 130.

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**Economic Development**

**Brownfields**

The FRCOG has received a contract from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for a $200,000 Brownfields grant to assess sites potentially contaminated by hazardous materials. One of four grants awarded to towns or regional planning commissions in Massachusetts, the Brownfield work will begin in October 2019. If your town has a site that needs a Brownfields assessment, please submit it to Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org. **More Information:** Peggy Sloan at psloan@frcog.org or ext. 133
Census 2020 Preparations

In March 2020, households throughout Franklin County will receive a letter requesting they respond to the 2020 US Census survey by April 1st. For the first time, the US Census Bureau is asking respondents to complete the survey online. Respondents will also have the option to respond by phone or by mail, but are strongly encouraged to respond online. FRCOG is working with the US Census Bureau, MA Secretary Galvin’s Office, the Mass Census Equity Fund and our local Complete Count Committee partners to share information about the importance of responding to the 2020 Census and on how to respond to the survey. FRCOG is seeking partners, such as town halls, libraries and senior centers, to establish computer access points available for residents seeking to complete the Census survey online. More Information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Work is underway to create a new CEDS Plan for Franklin County. The 2020 CEDS Plan will be our region’s roadmap for implementing economic development initiatives over the next five years. Guiding its creation is a newly restructured CEDS Committee, which has members from across the county and representation key partner organizations, such as the MassHire Regional Workforce Board, Franklin County CDC and others. Their first meeting will be November 19 at 3:30 pm in the 1st floor of the JWO Transit Center.

The Plan will use a framework from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), which examines economic conditions; identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; and establishes action items to be implemented through 2024. The Plan will maintain the region’s eligibility to apply for select EDA funding programs, such as for infrastructure projects or feasibility studies. In November, FRCOG will reach out to member municipalities and regional economic development entities to solicit project ideas for possible inclusion in the Plan. More Information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

Finance & Municipal Services

Purchasing Program - October 1 Contracts

New Collective Contracts with a start date of October 1 include Water Treatment Chemicals, Road Sand, Winter Rock Salt and Treated Salt, Liquid Road Pretreatment, and the ordering of Dog Tags and Licenses.

Winter Rock Salt prices for our towns were very competitive with the State bid and the FRCOG bid has the added benefit of offering two contracts for every town. In the event of a shortage, our towns can fall back on a secondary
contract and protect themselves from shortages that have plagued the industry in past years. We feel confident that we have offered the towns on our contract an excellent value with experienced contract administration to help them when they need it.

Integration of Hampshire County towns who formerly bid with the Hampshire Council of Governments is going smoothly and the intention is for staff to visit Hampshire County officials in the fall months to develop a smooth transition into the budget season and preparation for FY21 bids. More Information: Andrea Woods at bids@frcog.org or ext. 104.

**Regional Animal Control Officer**

A new Regional Animal Control Officer has been hired by the Franklin County Sheriff’s Office to serve the towns of Northfield, Gill, Colrain, Heath, Monroe, Buckland, and Shelburne. The ACO, Kyle Dragon, grew up locally, and comes to the position with previous experience. For the last month he has been out meeting town officials as the program gets up and running. The shared position is the result of a year or more of planning facilitated by FRCOG staff. More Information: Phoebe Walker at walker@frcog.org or ext. 102; to contact the ACO: kdragon@fcso-ma.us.

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**Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness**

**Tips & Tools for Responding to People with Disabilities: Strengthening Response and Protecting Dignity**

The Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council has researched tools and other supports to strengthen first responders’ abilities to address the needs of people with disabilities in response calls. A web-based “Tips Tool” will be rolled out in late 2019. Responders can utilize the tool to find tips to help address the needs of people with disabilities, ranging from mobility impairment to cognitive disorders, during response calls.

An all-day, region-wide conference Tips & Tools for Responding to People with Disabilities: Strengthening Response and Protecting Dignity, will be held on Wednesday, December 11, 2019 at UMass Amherst. The conference will raise first responders’ awareness and help them hone skills necessary when assisting people with disabilities. Keynote speakers, Tips Tool demonstration, and disability awareness training sessions specifically designed for first responders are included. A conference announcement is forthcoming. Registration will open in November. More Information: Raine Brown at raine@frcog.org or ext. 138.

**Franklin County Emergency Communication System (FCECS) Update**

On September 5, 2019, the FRCOG and FCECS held a second regional forum that focused on the future of emergency communication in Franklin County. Curtis Wood, Secretary of Executive Office of Technology Safety
and Security (EOTSS), was in attendance along with several members of the team responsible for the upgrade and expansion of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Interoperable Radio System (CoMIRS, the statewide emergency communication system). Secretary Wood pledged to include Franklin County in the CoMIRS expansion project. His team addressed the five criteria that EOTSS has studied to ensure that Franklin County can and should move to CoMIRS:

1. Coverage — The transfer will result in better overall coverage for our towns.
2. Capacity — The CoMirs engineering study is nearly complete and it is clear that CoMIRS has adequate capacity to absorb Franklin County. The engineering study is expected to be final in October.
3. Subscriber units — Radios will need to remain compatible with the existing CoMIRS and after the completion of the state-wide project. There are two radios that meet the requirements – a lower cost Kenwood option and more expensive Motorola option. EOTSS will provide an allowance to each department at the price of the Kenwood model. Towns/departments would be allowed to upgrade to Motorola but would be required to pay the cost differential (at roughly a $400 to $600 difference in price). FRCOG has offered to assist with procurement.
4. Functionality — EOTSS will require that we maintain FCECS until paging and all other issues have been resolved and the full migration has occurred.
5. Standards adherence — A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between EOTSS and munis/depts. will be developed and required before transition is made.

FRCOG staff have redrafted the FCECS agreement between towns and the FRCOG to reflect the expected transition to CoMIRS. The MOU has been sent to all towns for signature. More Information: Dan Nietsche at dnietsche@frcog.org or ext. 105.

Crimson Contagion

In August, the Western MA Health & Medical Coordinating Coalition was chosen by the MA Department of Public Health to participate in a federal communicable disease exercise involving fourteen states. The scenario involved a flu pandemic that, five weeks in, had caused 158,000 hospitalizations and 13,000 deaths nationwide and another 18,000 cases in over 20 other countries. Holyoke Medical Center, Berkshire Medical Center, and Fairview Hospital participated, as well as local health departments from Holyoke and Pittsfield. The role of the HMCC was to provide situational awareness and gather information on resource needs. More Information: Tracy Rogers at emergencyprep@frcog.org or ext. 118.

Land Use & Natural Resources

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 21 municipalities in Franklin and Berkshire Counties in northwestern
Massachusetts, primarily via a special designation by the State and the U.S. Forest Service. The goals of the MTWP are to:

- 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. As of September 23, 2019, fourteen communities in the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership region have voted to opt in. Consequently, the FRCOG is assisting with the formation of the MTWP Board that will assume responsibility for future activities of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership in accordance with the State legislation. In addition, funding to support the goals of the MTWP is being pursued. **More Information:** Peggy Sloan at psloan@frcog.org or ext. 133, or visit the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership Project at [http://www.mohawktrailwoodlandspartnership.org](http://www.mohawktrailwoodlandspartnership.org).

**Franklin County Small Town Housing Working Group**

As a follow up to the Franklin County Affordable Housing Roundtable event in April, FRCOG has launched a Small Town Housing Working Group to bring together housing stakeholders to continue working on issues and challenges identified, with a focus on smaller towns with limited housing or planning staff capacity. This will be an opportunity for towns to share their community’s current housing efforts, network with other towns, and to develop possible shared solutions to address housing needs and barriers. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 23, from 6:00 – 7:30 PM at the JWO Transit Center in Greenfield. **More Information:** Alyssa Larose at alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127.

**Local Officials Workshops**

The FY20 Local Officials Workshop series rolled out this fall with a packed house at a Municipal Financial Management workshop hosted by the MA DOR Division of Local Services on October 3. Coming up later this fall will be a session on Mosquito Control District services and costs, in response to the current statewide Eastern Equine Encephalitis outbreak, and a December session on Age-Friendly Community Planning. Stay tuned! Materials from all the municipal workshops are available at: [https://frcog.org/program-services/municipal-resources/](https://frcog.org/program-services/municipal-resources/).

Have ideas for the upcoming workshop series? Let us know by contacting Rebekah at admin@frcog.org or Phoebe at walker@frcog.org.
Welcome, Randy!

FRCOG is happy to welcome Randy Crochier, longtime Gill Board of Health and Select Board member, to the role of Cooperative Public Health Service Regional Health Agent. As many of you may know, Randy has been the health district’s part time Food Safety Agent for the past four years. Before that, he was involved as a board of health member in the creation of the district. He started full time on 10/7, and can be reached at rcrochier@frcog.org or 413-774-3167 x 106. The CPHS district currently serves as the comprehensive health department for the towns of Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Gill, Hawley, Heath, Leyden, Monroe, Rowe, and Shelburne. The towns of Erving, Deerfield, and Conway are members of the district for public health nursing only.

CBD Edible and Vaping Bans

In the past month, two major public health changes were announced in Massachusetts. The first clarified that currently sales of food products and cosmetics with Cannabidoil (also known as CBD) in them are banned. This ban came about based on the national legalization of hemp in the most recent Farm Bill. Local boards of health have been charged with ensuring that establishments with food permits are not selling edible items with CBD in them. For more information, see: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/cbd-in-food-manufactured-or-sold-in-massachusetts.

The second major announcement was a four-month ban on the sales and display of all vaping products, in response to a national outbreak of lung disease associated with heavy use of e-cigarettes. Enforcement of this ban has been assigned to both police departments and boards of health. For more information, see https://www.mass.gov/guides/vaping-public-health-emergency or contact Phoebe Walker at walker@frcog.org.

Efforts 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. Join us on October 25th from 10am-1pm at the Great Falls Discovery Center as we release the 2019 Teen Health Survey data, unveil our updated Community Action Plan, and host a facilitated discussion about the importance of leading with race in a predominantly white community. RSVP at registrations@frcog.org.

Coalition staff are also available to meet with towns interested in taking action to reduce youth substance use to share information about what municipal policy options exist. Staff are also available to share their presentation “Marijuana and the Developing Brain: Raising Youth in the Age of Legal Marijuana” with interested audiences. More Information: Kat Allen at kallen@frcog.org or ext. 119.
**Expansion of Passenger Rail**

Expanded passenger rail service started on August 30. A 2-year pilot program will provide two additional roundtrips per day during the week between Greenfield and Springfield, with one more roundtrip on weekends and holidays. This additional service will make it possible to travel to New York City and back in the same day. The FRCOG has recently received a contract from MassDOT to develop marketing materials for the expanded service. Be on the lookout for a marketing and branding campaign later this fall! **More Information:** Maureen Mullaney at mmullaney@frcog.org or ext. 129.

 Residents, legislators and FRCOG staff await the inaugural ride of expanded rail service on 8/30.

**Staff Updates & Changes**

**Staff Changes**

- As noted above, we welcome **Randy Crochier** to the role of Regional Health Agent for the CPHS health district.

- We bid a fond farewell to **Jeanette Voas**, who has served as the Evaluation Coordinator for the Communities That Care Coalition and the Partnership for Youth. Jeanette has shepherded the regional Teen Health Survey and brought us high quality, clearly and beautifully presented qualitative and quantitative data for the last 13 years. We will miss her tremendously.