



This version of FRCOG Council Updates focuses on COVID-19 response, activities and impacts. Please be in touch with questions, thoughts, needs or concerns. Until we meet again, stay safe.

Next Council Meetings

As you have already been notified, the April 17th FRCOG Council meeting will not be held. We will try to reschedule the meeting to late May or June when we feel we can safely meet in person or need to meet by Zoom.

Executive and Finance Committee Updates

Time-Limited Emergency Benefit Pool

The FRCOG Executive Committee met in person on March 12th to discuss a proposed staffing plan through the COVID-19 crisis. Some of what was discussed at that meeting changed almost immediately by Executive Orders. For instance, a staggered work schedule was developed that has now been changed. Most staff are now exclusively working at home and staff in the office are limited to approximately 5 at any one time and to staff that have no broadband at home and/or are deemed essential.

In recognition that it would be difficult for some staff to continue to work their full schedules either because their work depends on an active economy (Inspection) or childcare constraints, the Executive Committee approved a time-limited, emergency benefit pool. This new pool allows staff to charge up to 20% of their regular work schedule to this emergency funding source if they are unable to complete their regular work schedule. The Executive Committee authorized up to \$30,000 to this pool, which is available from our Benefits Pool budget without need for amendment or use of Unrestricted Fund Balance.

Estimating Impact of COVID-19 on FY20 FRCOG Budget

On April 9th, the FRCOG Executive and Finance Committees held a joint meeting to review the impact of COVID-19 on FRCOG operations, projects and services (see below) and on FRCOG finances.



Time-Limited Emergency Benefit Pool

Use in last three weeks totaled only \$3,279. We expect use of this emergency benefit will increase over time, especially if the work-at-home order lasts into June.

Families First Corona Virus Response Act

This new federal law allows employees to use up to 2 weeks of earned sick time to provide child care at home. It further allows employees to use earned sick time for another 12 weeks at 2/3 pay. Although we believe our offer of the COVID benefit time and accrued leave at full pay exceeds the benefits offered by the new law, we also know that our employees could take advantage of this law and we further know that some staff are extremely challenged by childcare responsibilities.

Exceeding Available Grant Resources and Administrative Budget

Some staff, mostly our Emergency Preparedness Program (EPP) and Cooperative Public Health (CPHS) staff, are working very long hours because they are directly engaged in regional response. Emergency Department of Public Health (DPH) funding will cover much of the CPHS nursing time but maybe not entirely. And while our EPP staff are fully grant-funded, we are using the grant funding at an accelerated rate because of the unexpected and unavoidable extra hours. Additionally, there has been significant extra spending in the FRCOG's administrative budget to manage IT and remote working, web site changes and additions, communication needs, and to manage new policies and procedures.

Summary of COVID-Related Costs

Combined, our early estimate of FY20 COVID costs (both direct response and use of benefit time) will be in the range of \$40,000-80,000.

FEMA Reimbursement Possible

Costs in excess of grants or other budgeted time are being tracked in the case of a 75% FEMA reimbursement. Such reimbursement would not be received in FY20.

Projection of FY20 Year-End

After the joint meeting last week, staff spent some time projecting FY20 year-end revenues and expenses. Despite the projected costs of COVID-19, FY20 year-end looks remarkably strong for a variety of reasons. As is often the case because of our need to project so early, our conservative expectation of grants was too conservative. Projections indicate that we will exceed our indirect revenue expectations even before COVID-19. With COVID-19 travel

restrictions, the usual high use of vacation and other time in the spring and early summer will not occur, which means that even more indirect revenue will be accumulated. Current projections are that FY20 will end with an excess of \$100,000 revenue over expense even with the COVID-related costs described above. A strange year to be sure and stranger times ahead as we face an uncertain future of the status of state and federal grants as both levels of government face daunting costs and sharply declining revenues.

Organizational Assessment

As discussed last quarter, the Personnel Committee authorized staff to pursue an Organizational Assessment study to analyze the existing structure of the FRCOG and recommend any potential changes to it. Staff issued an RFQ in February and two proposals were received just as COVID-19 struck Massachusetts. The low bidder was Community Paradigm Associates led by Bernie Lynch, a long-time and now retired Town Administrator and Manager. Bernie's knowledge of municipal government and familiarity with the FRCOG will be an asset. Despite the hope to have the study done to inform FY22 budget development, the Executive and Finance Committees recommended that the project start be delayed until June-ish once staff are more able to dedicate time to the project and, if available, to incorporate the findings of a COVID-19 After Action Report.



Advocacy

Executive Director Update

Advocacy, Boards, Commissions and Committees

- Early on, staff worked closely with our state legislators to quickly identify laws and regulations that needed to be changed to accommodate remote municipal and regional government operations.
- Staff are working with the state and federal delegation to ensure that rural regional and municipal needs are being built into state and federal stimulus and recovery packages.
- Staff are participating in regular statewide and regional calls to advocate for the needs of Franklin County.

FRCOG Annual Report

The production of the FRCOG Annual Report has been delayed and the Report itself will be somewhat condensed so staff can remain focused on present issues rather than past reporting. We have also

decided that hard copies of the Report will not be made and distributed at this time. We will prepare town-specific reports as in previous years, which will be available before Town Meetings are held.



Climate Resilience

Municipal MVP and Hazard Mitigation Projects

Projects with a 6/30 deadline have not been extended. Work is continuing but is challenged because of the difficulty in assuring good public process. As soon as work-at-home restrictions are lifted or eased, municipalities with ongoing projects should anticipate a flurry of public meetings, especially in towns with broadband constraints that limit ability to hold Zoom meetings.



Economic Development

COVID-19 Business Impact Survey

FRCOG staff led the creation of a COVID-19 impact survey for businesses/organizations based in Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties. Of the 284 respondents, 49% were from Franklin County. Survey results were summarized and distributed to partnering regional organizations (i.e. Chambers, Career Centers, Franklin County Community Development Corporation, etc.) and municipal officials across Pioneer Valley, and to legislators, state and federal officials. Survey findings report can be found [here](#). The survey findings are being used to determine how emergency funding should be distributed to impacted small businesses and how grant funds, like CDBG, can be reallocated to help small businesses in our county.

COVID-19 Business Resources

Resources and guidance materials to support businesses/organizations have been posted on FRCOG webpage ([here](#)). This information is continually updated and shared with regional partners, as well as emailed to FC Town Administrators and shared via Facebook (most recent Facebook post reached 4,957 people, thanks to it being shared).

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Staff are redrafting 2020 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan to incorporate COVID-19 recovery.

Economic Development Administration CARES Act Funding

Staff are working with regional organizations in Franklin County and statewide to prepare for Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding opportunity from the federal CARES Act. We anticipate seeking grants to support capitalization of a small business loan fund with flexible terms and robust business technical assistance services, as well as industry specific and infrastructure economic development projects.

Franklin County 2020 Census Response

We did receive some great news late last Friday afternoon from the Census Bureau. Franklin County's Census response rate was among the highest in New England and is currently at 51.1%! Due to COVID-19, the Census Bureau is adjusting its timeline for field operations. This resulted in a delay of 2020 Census questionnaire packets being dropped off in some areas of western Franklin County. However, with this timeline shift, the deadline for when households must respond has been extended. Staff will continue to work with partners and encourage promotion of the 2020 Census. More information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

Small Business Relief Strategy Program

The Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General (AGO) has just announced the Small Business Relief Partnership Grant Program. The grant program will provide funds to municipalities and regional planning agencies in order to assist with the provision of financial relief to local small businesses most impacted by closures, policies, or general loss of revenue due to COVID-19. Grant funds may be used by small businesses to help address fixed debt, payroll, accounts payable, lost sales, lost opportunities, and other working capital expenses that could have been recognized had the COVID-19 pandemic not occurred. We will be in touch with Town Administrators soon to discuss this program and if the FRCOG can assist with applications.



Finance & Municipal Services

Collective Purchasing Program

Status of FY 21 Bids

FY21 Highway Products and Services bids have been released.

FY21 Fuel (Gasoline, Diesel and Heating Oil) bids will be released soon. Excellent pricing is expected.

IT WILL BE IMPERATIVE THAT EACH TOWN'S GOVERNING BODY STILL MEET AND VOTE TO LOCK IN FIXED PRICING WITHIN 72 hrs of BID OPENING which is scheduled for May 18.

Challenges related to both the Highway Products and Services and the Fuel Bids, included:

- Release of bids delayed one week due to late surveys from towns and unavoidable delays in bid production.
- Hard copies of proposals are still required so we are utilizing the Post Office and encouraging Bids by Mail.
- Any pre-bid meetings for the foreseeable future will be held outside, with attendees requested to pre-register to ensure prior knowledge of group size and ability to accommodate social distancing.
- Bids must still be opened in public so we are holding them outside to ensure social distancing.

Other Bids

Several towns have Small Bridge Grant construction contracts that will need to be issued this spring. As with other work, production challenges by limited staff and limited availability of town personnel may affect timing. Also the COVID 19 Construction Guidelines are strict and ever-changing which is challenging for writing specifications to meet them.

Stay in touch for more Information: Andrea Woods at bids@frcog.org or ext. 104 or Ellen Batchelder at ebatchelder@frcog.org or ext. 131.

Franklin County Cooperative Inspection Program (FCCIP)

Not surprisingly, this is the FRCOG program most immediately impacted by COVID-19 as it is so closely linked to the status of the economy. We are monitoring permit activity and revenues carefully but building permit activity has already experienced a major slowdown.

For now, interior inspections are discontinued. Staff are still doing outside inspections and are available to discuss zoning and other issues.



Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness

Emergency Preparedness Program Active in Region's Response

We are extraordinarily proud of the work and response of our Emergency Preparedness Program. Their active work includes:

- In early days, the EPP's Health and Medical Coordinating Coalition (HMCC) distributed the county's cache of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to hospitals, other healthcare facilities, and first responders (of the 84 first requests for PPE fulfilled statewide by the 6 HMCCs, 24 were in Franklin County thanks to the advance planning of our EPP staff).
- HMCC now processing requests for PPE for the direct medical care providers in the 4-county region by making connections between regional donations of PPE and those who need it. Requests that cannot be filled regionally are submitted to the MA Dept. of Public Health to be filled through the Strategic National Stockpile.
- Providing a daily presence in the Greenfield Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to ensure a regional coordinated response and coordinating meetings with CPHS, HMCC, the Franklin County Multi-Agency Coordination Center (FC MACC), and Greenfield EOC to identify regional-scale response priorities.
- Assisted in acquiring Medical Reserve Corps volunteers to provide Community Resource Line assistance to Greenfield so the line can be available to all Franklin County residents.
- Staffing a weekly phone call of locals Boards of Health on behalf of the Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition (MAPHCO). From these phone calls, staff create a joint message from the Coalition, the Cooperative Public Health District, the Regional Emergency Planning Committee, and the FRCOG as a whole that is distributed to muni officials, public health, emergency management, public safety, and state legislators.
- Opened the Franklin County Multi-Agency Coordination Center (FC MACC) this week that will provide situation reports to muni officials, human service agencies, public health, emergency management, and public safety officials twice per week and will try to coordinate needed response actions identified. This is coordinating the efforts and needs of multiple organizations and all municipalities, which required that we re-assign some of the time of 4 staff to get the needed staff capacity. Additionally, one of our recently retired staff has volunteered to come back to provide statistician assistance to the MACC.



Land Use & Natural Resources

Open Space and Recreation Plans

Projects with a 6/30 deadline have not been extended. Work is continuing but is challenged because of the difficulty in assuring good public process. As soon as work-at-home restrictions are lifted or eased, municipalities with ongoing projects should anticipate a flurry of public meetings, especially in towns with broadband constraints that limit ability to hold Zoom meetings.

Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) Town Implementation Grants

The next round of grants is available to towns that have opted into the MTWP which can support natural resource based economic development and other goals of the MTWP. For more information click on the following link: <https://www.commbuys.com/bsi/external/bidDetail.sdo?bidId=BD-20-1042-ENV-ENV01-50045&parentUrl=activeBids>.



Training & Education

Local Officials Workshops

All workshops are postponed until at least June.

Have ideas for the upcoming workshop series? Let us know by contacting Amanda Doster, Regional Projects Coordinator, at adoster@frcog.org or ext.120.



Public & Community Health

Public Health Staff Efforts

- Managing a COVID-19 Municipal Resources page on FRCOG web site.
- Development of a Board of Health messaging exchange page on FRCOG web site
- Convening weekly coordination meetings of all public health nurses managing cases in Franklin County to ensure smooth information flow, consistency across communities.
- Creations of a contact list for all local public health COVID case managers/public health nurses and shared with primary care, hospitals, home health care, and other stakeholders.

Cooperative Public Health Service (CPHS) efforts include:

- Monitoring all confirmed cases in 19 Franklin County towns and managing the municipal responsibility of reporting to the state's infectious disease reporting system (MAVEN).
- Currently conducting the contact tracing for all confirmed cases in 18 towns.
- Hired two part-time nurses to assist.
- Providing regular support to local Boards of Health through calls, emails, and online meetings.
- Ensuring businesses in the district are aware of and complying with new state public health orders as they are issued, e.g. business operations, social distancing requirements, rental of lodging.
- Participating in numerous weekly statewide briefing calls.
- Created a board of health messaging exchange page on FRCOG web site
- Convening coordination meetings of all public health nurses managing cases in Franklin County to ensure smooth information flow, consistency across communities.
- Created a contact list for all local public health COVID case managers/public health nurses and shared with primary care, hospitals, home health care, and other stakeholders.

DPH Emergency Funding for Local Boards of Health

The FRCOG is managing and distributing \$150,000 in emergency funding for all local Boards of Health in Franklin County to support the work of isolation and quarantine. A third allotment of money is possible.

Family and Behavioral Health Supports

The Communities That Care Coalition is collaborating with the Greenfield Safe Schools Safe Streets Coalition (4SC) and the Gill-Montague Community-School Partnership to launch a new weekly e-

newsletter with resources for parents and caregivers of school-aged kids to highlight useful resources about topics such as family connection, youth mental health promotion, and parental stress management. The newsletter will be launched this week, and will be made available directly to parents and service providers who want to subscribe, as well as to schools, towns, and partner agencies who want to include all or some of the information in their own communications.



Transportation

Traffic Counting and Other Fieldwork

All fieldwork related to our current Planning projects is postponed until 5/4 and likely longer. This includes all trail work, ADA assessments, culvert assessments, and traffic counting. If fieldwork can begin sometime in May, we currently expect to meet June 30th grant deadlines. If the stay-at-home order extends into June, we will need to reassess. More information: Maureen Mullaney at mmullaney@frcog.org.

Valley Flyer Service Reduced/Marketing Campaign Postponed

With more than a 95% decrease in Amtrak ridership nationwide, we were not surprised to hear that Amtrak had to reduce Valley Flyer service to Greenfield. Trains are now limited to the Vermonter once per day. MassDOT will not count the duration of COVID-19 travel restrictions as part of our 2-year pilot period and the marketing campaign related to the Valley Flyer is postponed. More information: Maureen Mullaney at mmullaney@frcog.org.



Staff Updates & Changes

Staff Changes

The FRCOG thanks **Meg Burch** and **Melanie Zamojski** for joining our CPHS nursing team and other volunteer school nurses that are helping with case monitoring and contact tracing.