Nominating Committee

A Nominating Committee made up of the outgoing chair of the Council and the Council’s two regionally elected members will meet prior to the 7/16 Council meeting and will recommend a slate of officers for the following positions.

Chair
Vice Chair
Secretary
West TPO Member
Central TPO Member
East TPO Member

New this year is the Council’s responsibility to appoint Transportation Planning Organization members. The Transportation Planning Organization is responsible for overseeing transportation planning activities at the FRCOG, most importantly approving the annual staff work plan and assessing and prioritizing municipal road projects eligible for federal transportation funding. The TPO is comprised of state, regional and local representation. Local representation includes a member representing the western part of the county (Ashfield, Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Hawley, Heath, Monroe, Rowe and Shelburne), the central part of the county (Bernardston, Conway, Deerfield, Gill, Leyden, Montague, Sunderland and Whately) and the eastern part of the county (Erving, Leverett, New Salem, Northfield, Orange, Shutesbury, Warwick and Wendell). As Franklin County’s largest municipality, Greenfield holds its own voting seat. An update to the operating procedures of the TPO changes appointment of the seats from the Franklin County Selectmen’s Association to the FRCOG Council in hopes of selecting people to the TPO that have an interest in transportation issues and are better able to serve in this important function.

Council Chair Update

FY21 Council Meetings
FY21 Council meetings will be held via Zoom until we can safely meet again in the Transit Center. Please mark your calendars with the dates of your FY21 meeting schedule:

October 15, 2020; January 28, 2021; (Snow Date, February 4); April 15, 2021

Welcome New Council Members
Not all towns have made their appointments to the FRCOG Council as of this writing. We will plan to announce and welcome new members at the 7/16 meeting.

We will hold a Zoom orientation session for new members that will outline the responsibilities of the Council as well as review our operations and finances. All Council members are welcome to attend the session.
Executive Committee Update

In its meetings since January, the FRCOG Executive Committee:

- Convened twice as the Economic Development District Governing Board to review the Draft 2020 Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan and then to adopt the final Plan. The new five-year CEDS Plan serves as a roadmap for strategic partners to advance policies, programs, and projects that support economic opportunity for all and contribute to the wellbeing of Franklin County communities.
- Discussed the current and continuing role of the FRCOG during and following the Franklin County Emergency Communication System’s (FCECS) transfer to the Commonwealth’s interoperable radio system.
- Authorized a letter expressing concerns regarding Trump administration changes to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that significantly reduced the rigor of requirements.

The Executive Committee met several times jointly with the Finance Committee to deliberate many COVID-related issues, including impacts to FRCOG programs, projects, and services; staffing challenges; regional collective purchase of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for municipalities, businesses, and non-profit agencies; and convening an emergency Council meeting to discuss funding for the PPE initiative. During these joint meetings the committees also approved the establishment of a COVID-19 pool of benefit time for staff struggling to meet the demands of the job while working remotely.

Finance Committee Update

Welcome and Happy New Year - Fiscal Year 2021

Despite dealing with many of the same unknowns faced by Towns, FRCOG opened Fiscal Year 21 on July 1, 2020. Our budget is in place and we begin the year in a good place financially with many of our contracts extending into the new year.

Towns should have the invoices for the first quarter of the yearly assessments by the time of this update. Please phone or email finance@frcog.org if this is unclear.

FY20 Close

The practice of the Finance Committee has been to budget conservatively, in part because we begin the budget process so far in advance (October of 2018 was the start of the FY20 budget development) and, in part, because it is just good practice. We generally assess current secured funding and anticipated funding that we feel is relatively probable. In October of 2018, we were concerned about the future of the Partnership for Youth program whose multi-year finding was expiring (but has since secured multiple competitive grants), we did not anticipate several grants for our Planning Department and COVID-related funding from DPH. All of these new grants resulted in an expansion of staffing and generation of indirect revenue to the general fund. In addition, the COVID crisis resulted in staff taking little time off from March through June both because work was unrelenting for many, and because there was simply little reason to take a vacation. Staff kept working and indirect revenue, normally slowed by vacations, continued at pace. As a result of all of this, it is anticipated that FY20 will close with a revenue surplus of somewhere in the range of $200,000. FRCOG performance to budget
on the expense side will be very close. After the year is officially closed and audited, the Finance Committee will assess what to do with the unexpected and large surplus.

**Personnel Committee Update**

There is no Personnel Committee update as their spring meeting was canceled when the Governor issued a state of Emergency. Members were invited to a meeting of the Executive and Finance Committees that discussed staffing issues related to COVID.

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**Advocacy**

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**Executive Director Update**

**Advocacy, Boards, Commissions and Committees**

- In May, the Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) and the legislative Rural Caucus co-authored a letter to the Governor and House and Senate leadership outlining and identifying numerous programs and initiatives that could aid in rural economic recovery. The suggestions spanned the topic areas of Food Security, Housing, Infrastructure, Municipal Government, Rural Policy, Small Business Development and Workforce.
- Last week the RPAC and FRCOG submitted testimony on H. 4529 – An Act Enabling Partnerships for Growth, the Governor’s economic development bill. Five priorities were identified: establishment of the Office of Rural Policy, support and increased funding for the Governor’s Rural Development Fund, establishment of an Office of Outdoor Recreation, development of a statewide growth management plan and assurance that rural areas would be eligible and competitive for the funding programs in the Governor’s bill, and support and increased funding for the Broadband Incentive Fund.
- On April 29, Governor Baker signed into law the State Action for Public Health Excellence (SAPHE) Bill providing recommendations for standards, credentialing, and state funding for local public health. FRCOG had been closely involved in the development and advocacy for this bill.
- Last week FRCOG’s Phoebe Walker spoke at a Senate Listening Session on Coronavirus and the healthcare and local public health system.
- FRCOG has a seat on the Coalition for Local Public Health, a statewide network representing all the membership organizations of the local public health workforce. The Coalition is working with the Administration and the Legislature to address lessons learned in the pandemic by moving forward changes in the local public health infrastructure and funding in MA in accordance with the SAPHE Act.

**Organizational Assessment Study of FRCOG**

Community Paradigm Associates, led by Bernie Lynch, a well-known MA municipal advocate, has been hired to conduct the FRCOG’s Organizational Assessment. The Organization Assessment will recommend a leadership
and staffing structure for the FRCOG that matches the FRCOG’s evolution and structure and prepares for upcoming retirements of long-time staff. Bernie has brought on two additional colleagues to assist with the study, both known well to the FRCOG – Deb Radway and Bernie Kubiak. The three-member team are currently reviewing several FRCOG documents including the Fiscal and Program Review, organizational chart, wage and salary schedule and categorization process, and job descriptions. Future work will include a staff survey and at least three focus groups with FRCOG stakeholders – a focus group with staff, with Town Administrators and with Council members. Each focus group will be 8-9 people. If you would like to be part of a focus group, please let Linda know.

**Municipal Support Requested for Strengthening Local Public Health System**

Over the last few months, it has become clear that the ability of Massachusetts boards of health and health departments to respond to the pandemic has been hampered by a fractured and underfunded system. Currently, unlike nearly every other state, each Massachusetts municipality operates its own board of health and receives no direct state funding for core functions. This contributes to inconsistent messaging, interpretation, and capacity to enforce critical state COVID-19 guidelines and orders. Varying abilities to collect and report data impedes critical information sharing across municipalities.

FRCOG and the Cooperative Public Health District encourages select board members, mayors, and town administrators to advocate for accelerated state investment in our local public health system. Please join the state’s professional public health nursing, health officer, environmental health, and health board associations’ efforts by reviewing and signing-on to a letter to the Administration by clicking here. Board of health members, nurses, and health agents/directors can sign on here.

**Climate Resilience**

**Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) Regional Adaptation & Resilience Project**

The Commonwealth’s Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program awarded a $1.5M Action grant for this regional project. In Franklin County, the participating towns are Ashfield and Conway. The towns prioritized projects that address failing culverts, flooding and erosion, and repairs to the Ashfield Lake Dam in their joint MVP Resiliency Plan. FRCOG will be working with the towns to:

- Prepare bids for up to 5 priority flood resiliency projects to protect critical infrastructure and improve habitat.
- Provide outreach to the Planning Boards and interested landowners on the use of a River Corridor Protection Overlay Zoning District and a River Corridor Easement Restriction.
- Prepare bid documents for 3 phases of repairs for the Ashfield Lake Dam.
- Inventory drainage culverts in Conway. (FRCOG is also currently doing this for Ashfield with other funding.)
- Develop a right-sizing protocol for drainage culverts that do not cross a perennial stream and identify climate resilient standardized culvert replacement sizes.
- Fund installation of a new culvert on Ashfield’s Baptist Corner Rd that meets state Stream Crossing Standards.
- Provide 30% design plans for up to 5 culverts to meet MA Stream Crossing Standards.

More information: Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frcog.org or ext. 130.
Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) and Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plans
The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs provided planning grant extensions for all MVP projects due to challenges associated with COVID that require shifting in-person stakeholder events to a virtual format. Municipalities that previously had a 6/30/2020 deadline to complete the initial plan now have until 6/30/2021. FRCOG staff are actively working with several towns to conduct outreach and develop a virtual Community Resilience Building Workshop. Using a variety of methods over Zoom, the virtual workshop format will engage community members and allow towns to gather critical information. Ongoing stakeholder outreach includes an informational packet outlining the ways in which Franklin County is likely to be impacted by climate change, in addition to a survey geared to gather accounts of how local businesses, farmers, and municipal departments have already been impacted by natural hazards.

MEMA also provided a grant extension for Hazard Mitigation Plans; the deadline is now 12/31/2020. FRCOG staff are working with Committees to finalize plans and open the public comment period by the end of the summer. More information: Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frcog.org or ext. 130

Regional Energy Planning Assistance (REPA) Green Communities Activities
This winter and spring FRCOG staff assisted five communities with applying for Green Communities Competitive Grants for municipal energy projects including LED streetlight conversions, HVAC improvements in municipal buildings, hybrid police cruisers, and an EV charging station. Grant announcements are expected in July. Staff assisted multiple towns with completing FY19 Annual Reports, and continue to support new Green Communities with moving forward on energy conservation projects. In June, staff were trained on a new municipal energy data analysis tool developed by UMass Clean Energy Extension, and will be assisting four towns over the next year with analyzing municipal energy use to identify priorities for continued energy reduction efforts. This work is funded through a Regional Energy Planning Assistance (REPA) grant from the MA Department of Energy Resources. In June, FRCOG was awarded an additional $18,000 under the REPA program to supplement the current budget through May 2021. More information: Alyssa Larose at alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127.

Business Support in Response to COVID-19
Resources and guidance for businesses and organizations in response to COVID-19 are updated on our website. Information about grant and loan programs, links to small business webinars, and more are included. More information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)
The new five-year 2020 Franklin County CEDS Plan was created under the guidance of the CEDS Committee and submitted to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) in June. To support implementation, FRCOG
was awarded an EDA annual planning grant and invited to apply for a supplemental grant funded by the CARES Act. The application requested funds to address regional economic resilience, critical infrastructure, business technical assistance and project development support. More information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

Regional Brownfields Program
FRCOG’s contractor, Weston & Sampson, is conducting environmental assessments on sites potentially impacted by hazardous substances through our latest EPA award. Activities are occurring on sites in Buckland, Greenfield, Montague, Orange, and Warwick. If you know of a property with potential contamination, check out the program sheet and let us know. More information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

2020 Census Preparation
As of June 28, 68% of Franklin County households had responded to the 2020 Census – more than the state (64%) and nation (62%)! However, we still have households that need to respond. It has been particularly challenging in some rural areas as delivery of survey forms were delayed. Please continue to encourage your neighbors to respond, if they have not yet. Materials about the 2020 Census are on our website. More information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

Finance & Municipal Services

Collective Purchasing Program – Heading into FY21
We have successfully merged our Collective Highway Bid Program with another 25 towns from Hampshire, Hampden and Berkshire Counties resulting in the volume purchasing power of 51 towns benefitting our Franklin County towns. It was a challenging year to change our entire program, but all the contracts are in place as of July 1. Anyone wishing to view the pricing and contracts for each town can view it under Highway Awards at https://frcog.org/bids.

The Collective Fuel Bid program also grew from 20 towns to 33 towns this year. Not surprisingly, we were able to lock in fuel pricing reminiscent of a decade ago. We were happy to see the Towns and Non Profit Agencies in this group get a good price break this year.

The Fire Extinguisher Collective bid formerly under the HCOG umbrella is now a FRCOG program and we just awarded that contract to Fire Control Inc. of Westfield for 26 Towns, Schools and Non Profits in Western Mass.

Staff have been busy with summer construction bids as well including Small Bridge Replacements, Electrical Upgrades, Water Tank Upgrade, Site, Sidewalk, Roadway and Parking Lot Improvements, Roof Repairs, Solar Installations, and Truck purchasing. See the bid page on the FRCOG website for a complete list. More Information: Andrea Woods at bids@frcog.org or ext. 104 or Ellen Batchelder at ebatchelder@frcog.org or ext. 131.
Regional IT and Cybersecurity Services Feasibility Study
In February 2020, IT firm Novus Insight conducted onsite interviews with representatives from 10 Franklin County towns in order to assess and identify opportunities for shared municipal IT services and cybersecurity enhancements. The interviews involved town administrators, police chiefs, and department heads, and included hands-on observations of existing systems, policies & procedures, and overall IT infrastructure. In June the Regional IT and Cybersecurity Services Feasibility Study was completed and presented to FRCOG staff. We are now working with Novus Insight to create a condensed version of the report and are planning an informational session with participating towns for later this summer. This project is currently funded by the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council. More information: Amanda Doster at adoster@frcog.org or ext. 120.

Water & Sewer Issues
On March 9th, Sen. Jo Comerford and the FRCOG facilitated a follow-up meeting to last November’s water & sewer forum. 29 people gathered at the FRCOG’s offices at what turned out to be our last large, in-person, indoor meeting for the foreseeable future. Representatives from our state and federal legislative delegation, as well as representatives from organizations that support municipalities with water and wastewater issues, state and local community development and planning organizations, and researchers were in attendance. The conversation was focused on three main areas: helping communities with aging and over-sized systems; helping communities with limited/no infrastructure; and operator issues.

Since then, FRCOG has been working with MADEP and the UMass Water and Energy Technology Center to address the regional shortage of water operators by increasing access to pre-certification trainings; 10 Franklin County residents received a fee waiver to attend a virtual training in June 2020, and additional trainings are being planned for the fall. Additionally, the FRCOG continues to work closely with local and state partners to pursue funding and solutions for a number of the priority areas identified in the March and November meetings. More information: Amanda Doster at adoster@frcog.org or ext. 120.

WRHSAC New Online Trainings
The Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council (WRHSAC) has published two self-paced, interactive online trainings. The trainings accompany WRHSAC’s Disaster Debris Management Template and the Spontaneous Unaffiliated Volunteers Toolkit and can be found on WRHSAC’s website.

The Spontaneous and Unaffiliated Volunteer (SUV) Training Toolkit is designed to provide the resources necessary to effectively plan for and safely operate a volunteer management system for both small and large scale emergencies. Unaffiliated, self-deployed volunteers will show up at emergencies, especially large-scale disasters. Managing these volunteers is essential to effective and coordinated response efforts. The SUV Toolkit helps officials learn how to manage volunteers. The new self-paced, online training walks officials the resources of the toolkit and how to use it.

The interactive training for the Disaster Debris Management Template details concerns officials must consider and walks them through building their own Disaster Debris Management plan. More information: Contact Raine Brown at raine@frcog.org
**Franklin County Emergency Communication System (FCECS) Update**

The FCECS Oversight Committee is continuing to maintain the system when issues arise and has the goal of restoring the system to its originally designed coverage levels. This included completing a microwave link between New Salem and Royalston, installing a new antenna at Royalston, and completing a system wide battery replacement. Preventative maintenance was just completed in June and the Oversight Committee will be working to address any issues which we discovered and reported on.

**Public Safety Radio System Migration**

Since the last update EOTSS has advanced the migration project by the following actions:

- They have invested nearly a half a million dollars into their current system to increase radio system capacity in Franklin County. This system improvement was required to be able to bring all of Franklin County’s public safety entities onto the system much more quickly than if the project was not completed.
- EOTSS has produced a set of computer generated coverage maps which will allow stakeholders to see the differences in theoretical coverage between the FCECS, current CoMIRS, and future CoMIRS. Because the computer generated coverage software assumes our system is fully operational and in perfect condition the FCECS will be employing driving testing to verify the computer models.
- EOTSS has announced and described the grant system that will allow Franklin County public safety stakeholders to receive their per radio credit to offset the cost of migration. The actual grant application is expected in the first few months of FY21.
- They have drafted an initial MOA that outlines the future relationship between the region and EOTSS.
- EOTSS has said they expect the request for proposals, to complete the statewide CoMIRS upgrade project, in early July 2020.

The FRCOG and FCECS Oversight Committee have been working on the following:

- Started an e-commerce website project to streamline the radio ordering process.
- Maintained consistent contact with EOTSS, including to get questions answered from stakeholders.
- Is planning a near future public forum to prepare for migration. This forum will be scheduled once coverage modeling has been field tested; we have a more definitive schedule for radio purchases and migration; and have a more final draft of the MOA that will outline roles and responsibilities of EOTSS, FRCOG and users. Hopefully this forum will occur sometime in August. Details forthcoming.

**COVID-19 Response**

**Franklin County Multi-Agency Coordinating Center (MACC)**

The Franklin County Multi-Agency Coordinating Center (MACC) finally became operational for the first time. Originally operating out of the Greenfield Emergency Operations Center, the MACC helped bring PPE that MEMA was distributing to public safety departments up to Greenfield so each town wouldn’t have to travel to Agawam to access their allotment. The MACC issued situation reports twice a week for a few weeks until the worst of the crisis was over and created a data dashboard that provided information on cases by municipality. The MACC is now operating virtually, ready to stand up at a moment’s notice when the need arises.
Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition (MAPHCO)
The Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition has been providing sample risk messaging that towns can use to get COVID messages out to their residents. These messages have covered the importance of social distancing, proper hygiene, travel restrictions, and contact tracing.

PPE for First Responders
The Emergency Preparedness Program has been working non-stop since early March to assist public health and healthcare entities fight COVID-19. Through mid-May, we worked primarily on obtaining PPE from the Strategic National Stockpile and distributing it across western MA to frontline workers who needed protection from the virus so they could continue their work with patients. As of June 30th, we have processed 531 PPE requests.

PPE for Franklin County Municipalities and Businesses
Once the normal supply chain started rebounding, we began helping our local businesses and towns get the PPE they needed to reopen their doors through a bulk PPE purchasing program. Working with the Franklin County CDC, CISA, and the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce we supplied PPE for 24 farms, 14 municipalities, 7 schools or school districts, 16 non-profits, and 41 for-profit businesses for a total of 100 different organizations. The total cost of PPE purchased comes to just under $50,000 that will be reimbursed by the purchasers. As the supply chain continues to return to normal, we have determined that the COG is not saving enough on prices or getting the items any more quickly than if organizations purchased them directly through the vendors. Therefore, rather than continue the program, we will write up a technical assistance guide that organizations can refer to if they want to know where we found the best prices, which vendor representatives they should contact, how to set up an account directly with the vendor, etc. Should we find that the supply becomes scarce again and our help can make a difference, we will reopen the program.

Buckland Green Streets
Recently completed with 604(b) grant funds for nonpoint source water quality planning from MassDEP, Buckland Green Streets provided the town with a series of stormwater resources for becoming more resilient to increasingly frequent and intense precipitation and resulting flood hazards in the Shelburne Falls village and surrounding watershed. Deliverables included 9+ stormwater site assessments, a replicable Green Infrastructure assessment methodology with links to clean water tools and funding sources, a “Road Map” for integrating Green Infrastructure into the Town’s planned future roadwork, and a 25% level design engineering plan set from GZA Associates for a series of Green Infrastructure stormwater best management practices, to be constructed in tandem with needed drainage and transportation upgrades on Crittenden Hill Road. The design repurposes two abandoned sites along the road to serve as small recreational amenities, or “pocket parks”, for the community, in addition to capturing and cleaning large volumes of stormwater runoff from Goodnow Hill and helping to improve water quality in the Deerfield River. 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.
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 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

The first meeting of the MTWP Board was held on January 28, 2020 at the Berkshire East Ski Lodge in Charlemont. Eighteen Board members attended, representing MTWP towns and regional organizations. Towns in the region have two years from the passage of the State legislation creating the MTWP (August 2018) to opt-in to the partnership through a vote by the Select Board, Mayor, or Town Meeting. To date, 16 towns in the MTWP region have voted to opt-in to the partnership. Once a town opts-in, they can appoint a representative to the MTWP Board.

Ten MTWP towns were awarded grants of $20,000 through EEA’s MTWP Grant Implementation Program, established specifically to fund projects in the MTWP region related to the goals of the partnership. The grants will fund recreational trail improvements, forest stewardship plans, environmental education, forest carbon project assessment, and an inventory of the region’s nature-based tourism infrastructure. A second round of implementation grants was announced in March and applications were due June 18, 2020. MTWP PROJECT WEBSITE: mohawktrailwoodlandspartnership.org

Regional Pollinator Plan

FRCOG has undertaken preliminary mapping and draft development of the Regional Pollinator Habitat Corridor Action Plan and has initiated outreach to stakeholders in the eight Franklin County towns that will be participating in the plan: Heath, Shelburne, Conway, Bernardston, Montague, Wendell, Greenfield and Orange. The stakeholder networks that we have reached out to are very actively working on this issue, have a lot of knowledge to bring to the table, and are excited to start the critical and creative planning work with us on this project. FRCOG staff will meet with town planning boards to update land-use regulations to foster more native plantings and pollinator-friendly management practices across Franklin County communities. Staff will meet with local and regional groups to inventory specific habitat resource areas and potential landscape strategies for each town to foster the resilience of native, wild pollinator species in Massachusetts as well as the sustainability of our local farms and food systems. A Pollinator Habitat Corridor Implementation Toolkit will be another key deliverable of the plan to help guide municipalities working independently to develop local level pollinator strategies that respond pro-actively to the stressors of climate change, pesticide use, and habitat loss. More Information: Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frcog.org or ext. 130.

Training & Education

Local Officials Workshops

After opening the new year with a workshop on safety for libraries & other lightly-staffed municipal offices, and a roundtable discussion for Town Moderators, a workshop titled “It Takes a Village to Run a Town: Finding & Keeping Volunteers for Town Boards, Commissions, and other Town Needs” was scheduled (& enrolled to
capacity!) for March 12th. That workshop was canceled at the last moment due to the unfolding pandemic. The majority of those registered did not wish to attend a virtual workshop and instead elected to wait until such a time that in-person workshops could resume. The Local Officials Workshop series then went on hiatus as towns and workplaces (and the FRCOG!) adjusted to remote work.

Staff are currently planning for a limited series of virtual workshops in the fall, with topics and dates to be announced soon. Have ideas for the upcoming workshop series? We are particularly interested in topics suitable for a short & efficient virtual meeting, in light of the Zoom fatigue many people are experiencing. Send suggestions & questions to: Amanda Doster at adoster@frcog.org or ext.120.

**Advancing Racial Justice**
The Communities That Care Coalition’s Racial Justice Workgroup has continued to meet regularly, by zoom, and is discussing ways to contribute toward solutions in this moment. With the help of the Racial Justice Workgroup and with the support of our school partners we wrote and received a 5-year grant for Advancing Racial Justice in Schools, and we played a supporting role in Welcoming and Belonging Franklin County receiving a 5-year grant for helping Franklin County workplaces become more welcoming to people of color.

**Addressing Abandoned Housing**
FRCOG’s CPHS health district received a three year grant from the DPH Office of Local and Regional Health to address abandoned and distressed housing in district member towns. First steps included conducting a thorough inventory of the problem houses in two communities, and a July 9th joint meeting of five boards of health with the Attorney General’s Abandoned Housing Initiative. Contact Randy Crochier or Lisa Danek Burke with questions.

**CHIP Continues Planning Work**
After taking a break during the pandemic, the region’s Community Health Improvement Planning Network is back at work developing a three year Plan for 2021-23. Contact Phoebe Walker with questions.

**CPHS Health District**
The member towns of the Cooperative Public Health Service Health district recently welcomed the Town of Northfield as a new member of the Public Health Nursing program. The CPHS district currently serves as the comprehensive health department for the towns of Bernardston (except Title 5 work), Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Gill, Hawley, Heath, Leyden, Monroe, Rowe, and Shelburne. The towns of Erving, Deerfield, Northfield, and Conway are members of the district for public health nursing only. In addition, we are having a busy Title 5 season across the district.
COVID Response
FRCOG’s CPHS Health District has been working around the clock since the pandemic began. Two additional nurses were hired to assist with the contact tracing, isolation and quarantine work for the 14 member towns and three additional towns. The district nurses have worked with over 200 people who are either diagnosed with COVID or close contacts of someone with the diagnosis to answer their questions, support their household, and prevent the spread of the disease. As the numbers have slowed significantly in the region, nurses have turned their attention to planning for disease response when schools and colleges re-open. Staff are also very busy planning drive-through flu clinics in many towns, which will also serve as drills for COVID vaccination clinics.

The district’s health agents have been busy working with boards of health to educate business owners and the public about the ever-changing state reopening guidance. Restaurants, summer camps, and many workplaces are among those with numerous questions and need for support and information.

Expansion and Other Activities
The member towns of the Cooperative Public Health Service Health district recently welcomed the Town of Northfield as a new member of the Public Health Nursing program. The CPHS district currently serves as the comprehensive health department for the towns of Bernardston (except Title 5 work), Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Gill, Hawley, Heath, Leyden, Monroe, Rowe, and Shelburne. The towns of Erving, Deerfield, Northfield, and Conway are members of the district for public health nursing only. In addition, we are having a busy Title 5 season across the district.

Coalition Connections Parent Newsletter
In collaboration with our partners at the Greenfield Safe Schools Safe Streets Coalition, the North Quabbin Community Coalition, and the Gill-Montague Community School Partnership we are currently publishing a weekly newsletter with curated resources for parents and people who work with youth. If you haven’t seen it or you’re not a subscriber yet, please check it out here. If you have resources that you’d like to have considered for the newsletter, please send them to ilana@frcog.org.

Parent Outreach
The Parent Education Workgroup has received several new grants that together are allowing us to create and launch a new PEER Community Ambassador program. PEER stands for Parent Engagement, Enrichment, and Support. We have an amazing and diverse core team of 8 PEER Ambassadors from 5 Community Organizations (see zoom photo) who are helping to develop a self-paced, self-directed training program for parent leaders to learn about online and community resources to share with their peers through
community outreach. Another goal for this program is to have meaningful, paid, trained roles that make it easy for a diverse range of community members to be able to participate in the coalition’s workgroups and activities.

Regional COVID Response
FRCOG serves as the Command Center’s Regional COVID Emergency Response Affiliate. This has included distributing funds to support local public health response across the county, convening stakeholders like public health nurses and health agents and board of health members, and bringing concerns and input back to the state. This work will continue in FY21 with funding from the state. Contact Phoebe Walker at walker@frcog.org with questions.

Shared Streets and Spaces
MassDOT has launched the Shared Streets and Spaces Program to provide cities and towns with funding to improve sidewalks, curbs, streets, on-street parking spaces, and off-street parking lots in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. Every city and town is encouraged to apply. The grants range from $5,000 and $300,000 for “quick-build” projects (can be completed within 15-30 days). Eligible projects should advance one or more of the following goals: increase safety and enable social distancing while walking and/or biking; complete roadway, sidewalk and/or street modifications to better support curbside/sidewalk/street retail and dining; support safer and more reliable bus transit; create safer routes to school, daycare and/or programs for children; or complete another type of innovative project. The projects can be temporary modifications or pilots of potentially permanent changes. Further information on the program can be found at https://www.mass.gov/shared-streets-and-spaces-grant-program. For further assistance please contact Beth Giannini at giannini@frcog.org or ext. 125.

MassWorks Grant Round
The Commonwealth has opened its 2020 MassWorks round for public infrastructure improvement project grants. Applications are due Friday, August 28, 2020. For details go to https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massworks-infrastructure-program. While FRCOG cannot assist in writing the application, we’ve created a general tip sheet to address common questions, which can be viewed at https://frcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Tips-for-MassWorks-Applications.pdf.

Traffic Counting
Although traffic patterns are not typical at this time, the FRCOG is still conducting certain traffic counts to understand the impact of the COVID-19 response on travel behavior. In addition, we are offering to conduct speed counts for municipalities on a first come – first served basis. If you would like a traffic or speed count in your community, please contact us to see if there is room on the schedule. More information: Laurie Scarbrough at lscarbrough@frcog.org or ext. 139.
Valley Flyer Marketing
Expanded passenger rail service commenced on August 30 with a 2-year pilot program that provides two additional roundtrips per day during the week between Greenfield and Springfield, and one additional roundtrip on weekends and holidays. This new service makes it possible to travel to New York City and back in the same day during the week. During the fall, the FRCOG and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission hired “the watsons”, a marketing firm based out of New York City, to develop ads, promotions, tag lines and other marketing tools to boost ridership. Just as we were planning to launch the campaign in April, everything shut down due to COVID. For obvious reasons, it no longer made sense to launch the campaign and we set about rethinking our strategy. At this point, the Valley Flyer pilot has been suspended, and the marketing campaign has been postponed. Amtrak continues to operate reduced Valley Flyer service, but we are not currently tracking ridership for pilot evaluation. Amtrak states that they will continue to increase trains and service on their lines as consumer confidence increases and other metrics are achieved. We will continue to monitor Amtrak’s actions, and will work with MassDOT and our large group of stakeholders to determine when the Pilot will resume and how to move forward with ridership evaluation and marketing. More information: Maureen Mullaney at mmullaney@frcog.org or ext. 129.

Staff Changes
The Partnership for Youth has hired a new Community Engagement and Programs Associate, Keyedrya Jacobs. Keyedrya will be helping to launch our new PEER (Parent Engagement, Enrichment, and Resources) Community Ambassador program (more info above), as well as helping with our new Advancing Racial Justice in Schools program (more info above), and much more. We are excited to have this new position on our team and to have Keyedrya in this position.