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 the FY21 meeting schedule:

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

As always, the January meeting includes adoption of the FRCOG’s next fiscal year budget so the 1/28 meeting requires a financial quorum and region-wide municipal participation. Please try to attend the January meeting.

Welcome New Council Members

- Philip Kantor, Conway Select Board member
- Barbara Jacque, Northfield Select Board member

A Zoom orientation session for new members that will outline the responsibilities of the Council as well as review our operations and finances is scheduled for Thursday, November 19th at 5:30. All Council members are welcome and encouraged to attend the session. We will also record the session and make it available on the FRCOG web site. An invitation, with Zoom link, will go out in a few weeks

Executive Committee Update

In its meetings since July, the FRCOG Executive Committee:

- Learned of the progress of the Franklin County Emergency Communication System’s (FCECS) transfer to the Commonwealth’s interoperable radio system (CoMIRS). The Committee reviewed and offered suggestions for edits for a Memorandum of Agreement between the state and FRCOG, regarding operations. The agreement indicates, among other things, that FRCOG will act as the contact between the towns and the state, as well as manage grants, assist the towns with procurement of radio equipment, and assess costs for system users. The committee also reviewed the MOAs between FRCOG and the 26 Franklin County municipalities.

- Learned of past negotiations and the future “High Ground” lease agreement between the state Department of Conservation and Recreation and the FCECS. FRCOG leases land on behalf of the county’s emergency communication system users for placement of radio towers and equipment.
• Considered adding Juneteenth (June 19, the nationally recognized celebration of the end of slavery) as an employee holiday.

• Convened as the Economic Development District Governing Board to make a CEDS committee appointment.

• Received a petition and discussed public hearing logistics during the pandemic for relocation of Conway, Summer, and South Streets; and Conway Road in Buckland.

Finance Committee Update
This update will arrive at the same time as the Fiscal Review report. Please read the report and bring your questions to the meeting. The report is one of the major annual summaries of the finances of the COG. Completion of this summary of FY20 and FY21 will launch the budget process for FY22, which will be prepared for Council review in January.

FY20 ended well for FRCOG and our expected General Fund balance will exceed $1 million for the first time in our history. FY21 is moving forward with all programs fully funded.

Personnel Committee Update
The Personnel Committee is meeting on the afternoon of October 15th and will provide an overview of their meeting at the Council meeting. The agenda will include an overview and status report of the organizational assessment currently underway (see Executive Director update), proposals from staff to make some changes to the FRCOG holidays observed, and other minor changes to the Personnel Policy.

Advocacy

Executive Director Update
Advocacy, Boards, Commissions and Committees

• Through the FRCOG’s leadership role on the MA Association of Regional Planning Agencies, close attention is being paid to H.48 – legislation that would require Regional Planning Agencies to pay a significant annual fee to the Massachusetts State Retirement System. As long-term Council members will know, the FRCOG has been including the cost of such an assessment in its annual budgeting since 2015. The legislation was submitted by the MA Treasurer’s Office and was reported favorably out of the first legislative committee. Advocacy efforts are underway to prevent passage of this bill. If successful, MARPA will focus on crafting legislation to finally, permanently resolve this issue.
• Thanks to Senators Hinds and Comerford, the recently passed IT Bond includes a provision to study cell phone service coverage in counties with a population density of less than 500 people per square mile (Berkshire and Franklin Counties) and significant funding for capital improvements. While it can be difficult to secure funding for such projects from a Bond, the project was a primary goal from the Rural Policy Plan’s telecommunications chapter and we are working closely with both senate offices to move this project forward.

• Rail advocacy included reviewing and commenting on the draft scope of work for a Boston-Greenfield-North Adams passenger rail feasibility study; joining other Advisory Committee members in providing final comments on the MassDOT alternatives analysis of East-West rail between Boston and Pittsfield; and continuing to monitor ridership and conditions along the Valley Flyer corridor.

• Phoebe Walker is serving as one of the co-chairs of the coalition working to pass a piece of legislation known as the Statewide Accelerated Public Health for Every Community (SAPHE 2.0) Act (SD3063/HDS306), which respond to the lessons learned in the pandemic by accelerating investment in and the modernization of the local public health infrastructure in MA, as recommended by the Special Commission on Local and Regional Health. The Bill is supported by Reps Whipps, Mark, and Blais and Senators Hinds and Comerford (lead sponsor). We encourage town officials and boards to sign on as members of the coalition here: https://mapublichealth.org/saphe2-0/

Organizational Assessment Study of FRCOG

Community Paradigm Associates, led by Bernie Lynch, 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 Deb Radway and Bernie Kubiak to assist with the study. The three-member team reviewed several FRCOG documents including the Fiscal and Program Review, organizational chart, wage and salary schedule and categorization process, and job descriptions. They also spent the last few months conducting interviews with FRCOG staff, Council members, other stakeholders and similar organizations.

Annual Report

The FRCOG’s 2019 Annual Report development was hindered by the pandemic. Staff simply did not have time to look back on the activities of 2019 during the initial onslaught of COVID-19. As a result, this year’s Annual Report is less robust than in prior years. Fortunately, we had already submitted entries to each Town Report. The 2019 Annual Report will soon be available on the FRCOG’s web site, but hard copies were not made this year. We intend to be back on our game for the 2020 report.
Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) and Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plans

Congratulations to Heath and Leyden for receiving MVP Planning Grants to complete the process to become designated MVP Communities! With the work currently underway and planned FY21 for Franklin County, 22 of our 26 towns will be MVP communities. In response to COVID-19, FRCOG staff developed successful formats for socially distanced in-person MVP Workshops, which were held in New Salem and Wendell. Virtual workshops will be held in the coming months for Bernardston, Greenfield, Rowe, and Whately, and the joint Northfield-Warwick project.

FRCOG staff recently submitted Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plans for Ashfield, Buckland, Conway, Deerfield, Gill, Leverett, and Whately to MEMA/FEMA for review and will submit plans for Bernardston, Colrain, Monroe, Shelburne, Sunderland, and Orange after the public comment period closes. Final approval of these plans by FEMA ensures towns maintain eligibility for pre- and post-disaster grant funding for the next five years. More information: Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frog.org ext. 130.

Regional Energy Planning Assistance (REPA) Green Communities Activities

This past 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. In September 2020, grant announcements were made, with all five communities receiving funding – Deerfield ($165,754), Leverett ($17,192), New Salem ($35,000), Northfield ($162,303), and Warwick ($86,564). FRCOG staff will support these communities with implementation as needed. Staff also assisted the Town of Ashfield with applying for a META grant of $12,500 to study a heating system conversion to air source heat pumps in the large meeting rooms at the Town Hall. Staff are now assisting Green Communities with completing their Annual Reports, which are due November 6 to DOER. More information: Alyssa Larose at alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127, or Allison Gage at agage@frcog.org or ext. 136.
Business Support in Response to COVID-19

Resources and guidance for businesses in response to COVID-19 continues to be updated on our website [here](#). Recent posts include the opening of the Regional Micro-enterprise Assistance Program led by the City of Greenfield and open to eligible businesses with five or fewer employees in 24 Franklin County communities. Businesses can apply for a forgivable loan of up to $10,000, as well as links to small business webinars, and industry specific guidance. More information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

EDA Economic Development District Supplemental Award

FRCOG is an U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) designated Economic Development District. Due to this role, FRCOG successfully applied for a supplemental EDA planning grant funded through the federal CARES Act. The two-year, $400,000 grant will fund the following activities:

- **Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan** - Staff will develop a plan with strategic partners that focuses on experiences from the current crisis and prepares the region to withstand and recover quickly from future economic shocks.

- **CEDS Project Technical Assistance** - Staff will provide assistance to municipalities, non-profits, and other stakeholders to support the development, securing of resources, and implementation of transformative projects consistent with the 2020 CEDS Plan.

- **Business Technical Assistance Services** - Through an RFP process, the Franklin County Community Development Corporation was contracted to provide direct business technical assistance to entrepreneurs, businesses, and organizations in Franklin County that need support in responding to changing conditions due to the pandemic. The contract is to June 2022.

- **Public Water & Wastewater Critical Infrastructure Study** – A contractor will be hired to inventory public water & wastewater infrastructure and related systems across the county to identify gaps and barriers to development, and make recommendations.

More information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

2020 Census Preparation

As of September 24, 72.9% of Franklin County households had self-responded to the 2020 Census. This is a higher rate than the state (68.8%) and nation (66.3%). These rates do not include responses collected by the official US Census takers visiting households. The last day to respond to the Census was September 30. The Census Bureau will use this newly collected data to deliver population counts to the President and Congress for use when apportioning Congressional seats to the states. Then in March 2021, data will be provided to the states to redraw legislative districts. 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.

Collective Purchasing
Pricing for Road Salt for the 52 Participants was excellent primarily due to low fuel costs. Participants have a choice of MA “Statewide Contracts”, their own bids, or FRCOG. The average low price per ton for regular salt awarded to Primary Contractors under our contract was $52.70 vs. the State price of $55.89; and the average for Treated Road Salt with FRCOG Primary Contractors was $64.74 vs the State price of $71.59. Over the 52 participants and their expected usage, we saved the group $287,593 over the State bids plus each of our towns has two contracts (Primary and Secondary) in the event that a company cannot perform which the State does not offer.

DID YOU KNOW: Treated Salt is Rock Salt treated with Liquid Magnesium Chloride (LMC) or LMC with an organic byproduct added which, in effect, makes it “sticky”. Distillery byproduct, Molasses, Beet juice, and a Xanthum gum are the most typical of these. The benefit is that the salt will not “bounce” off the road as much and will stay more stable in the pile and prevent “leaching” of the LMC which is the chemical which prevents ice from sticking to roads. That is why you might see salt on the road in many different colors, from “broken glass green” to reddish to brown.

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
Over the summer, IT firm Novus presented the results of the Regional IT and Cybersecurity Services Feasibility Study to the 10 towns who had participated in the study earlier this year. The study maps out a 3-phase approach to building a regional IT and cybersecurity program. The FRCOG is currently seeking funding to implement Phase 1 of the study, which will consist of a series of capacity building workshops for municipalities. The full study and a condensed version of the report, are available upon request. This project is currently funded by the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council. More information: Amanda Doster at adoster@frcog.org or ext. 120.
WRHSAC Emergency Communications and Information Sharing Equipment Enhancements

The Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council has recently enhanced regional communications and information sharing equipment resources.

- **New Video Downlink Receivers** are now located in Franklin, Berkshire and Hampden County. The units receive live video feeds from Massachusetts State Police helicopters for coverage of emergency incidents such as industrial or wildfires and search and rescue efforts, or from planned events such as the Holyoke St. Patrick's Day Parade or other large gatherings. On the ground incident commanders can use the information to direct fire response to hot spots, rescuers to a fallen hiker, or oversee areas of traffic congestion due to the planned event.

- **Radio Duplexers** have been added to the WMLEC Rapid Comm mobile trailer housed in Monson. The duplexers allow the radios to act as repeaters, extending communications coverage, for UHF, VHF and 800 systems radios.

The equipment is available to all first responders departments on a first come, first serve basis. A full listing of all WRHSAC equipment available can be found online at [www.wrhsac.org/resources/](http://www.wrhsac.org/resources/). More information: Raine Brown at rainefrcog.org or ext. 138.

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. We have brought on Goosetown Communications, as our new maintenance and repair vendor. They have already toured the sites and are making a list of areas that could be improved. They understand that the current system is at its end of life and will only be making suggestions that have a low cost to high benefit ratio. More information: Dan Nietsche at DNietsche@frcog.org or ext. 105.

Public Safety Radio System Migration to the Commonwealth Interoperable Radio System (CoMIRS)

Significant progress has been made in our effort to migrate emergency communications to the state’s system before our regionally owned system goes into catastrophic failure. It is anticipated that transition activities will ramp up weekly and migration will begin in the January-February timeframe.

Since the last update, with much thanks to the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS), progress on the migration project has included:

- We have begun to hold weekly meetings to address migration issues with representatives from EOTSS, MSP technicians, and representatives from the chiefs’ associations of Franklin County.
- A task list has been developed with stakeholders’ assigned tasks and dates by which to complete them.
- An MOA between EOTSS and the FRCOG that outlines the future responsibilities of both entities has been executed.
• A public forum was held to explain the need for and contents of an MOA between the FRCOG and users that outlines responsibilities of all entities. The MOA was sent to municipalities and districts for signature and return. To date, more than half of the MOAs have been returned. The deadline for users to return their agreements to FRCOG is October 15.

• EOTSS has announced and described the $2.7m grant process that will allow Franklin County public safety stakeholders to receive their per radio credit to offset the cost of migration. The actual grant application will be sent to the FRCOG once all memoranda of agreement between FRCOG and users have been signed.

• EOTSS has expanded the funding that Franklin County will receive so that the county has funding to program all radios, which is currently expected to be done by qualified FRCOG staff and volunteers, and for radio installation, which is expected to be done via pre-existing or newly procured vendor contracts.

• We have received equipment lists from dispatch centers to determine what equipment will need to be upgraded for the migration.

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, acting as a conduit to get questions answered from stakeholders. This includes weekly meetings with EOTSS and Massachusetts State Police (MSP) radio technicians.

• A finalized version of the channel banks and radio aliases, the names of which show up in dispatch, have been approved and submitted to EOTSS and MSP.

• Computers and associated cables have been purchased so that the FRCOG will be able to program radios.

• MSP will be sending out specifications on digital vehicle repeaters. They also have offered to provide an informational presentation on those units. A public meeting will take place with MSP on October 13 at 6:30 p.m.

• There will be a separate meeting to discuss paging options. FRCOG/FCECS and MSP will be in on that discussion.

• We have started to revise the draft migration plan. A survey of the towns, asking who is financially prepared to migrate, will be sent out in an effort to gain additional insight into the order that departments should be migrated.

• The FRCOG has dedicated funding for FRCOG staff Dan Nietsche to oversee the migration on behalf of the FRCOG and is exploring other funding sources and opportunities to enhance the system through in-vehicle repeaters, etc.

More information: Dan Nietsche at DNietsche@frcog.org or ext. 105.

Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition (MAPHCO)

The Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition has been working closely with the Cooperative Public Health Service to plan and execute flu clinics this fall. These clinics provide a perfect opportunity for local boards of health to practice mass vaccination skills for the eventuality of a COVID-19 vaccine. Emergency Preparedness Program staff are using these flu clinics to develop a drive-through dispensing annex to add to regional emergency dispensing plans. To see the flu clinic schedule, visit www.frcog.org/flu-clinic. More information: Lauri Solomon at lsolomon@frcog.org or ext. 110.
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 second meeting of the MTWP Board was held on June 9, 2020 remotely via Zoom. Towns in the region had two years from the passage of the State legislation creating the MTWP (August 2018) to opt into the partnership through a vote by the Select Board, Mayor, or Town Meeting. Sixteen towns opted into the MTWP prior to the deadline and have appointed a representative to the MTWP Board. The remaining towns will have another opportunity to join after a 3-year waiting period in accordance with the MTWP legislation.

A second round of $20,000 grants were awarded to eight MTWP towns for a variety of projects including increasing carbon storage in town forests to signage and access improvements at recreation sites supporting tourism. In addition, one regional grant was awarded to Lever, Inc. an economic development non-profit to create a support network and provide technical assistance to entrepreneurs within the MTWP region looking to launch or expand natural resource based businesses. More information: Peggy Sloan at psloan@frcog.org or ext. 133.

Housing Access Grant

FRCOG was recently awarded a 5-year grant from the Massachusetts Community Health and Healthy Aging Funds to implement a multi-faceted Housing Access project in the region. The Housing Access project falls within the MA DPH’s priority to work on long-lasting, community-driven policy, systems, and environmental changes that will make it easier to lead healthy lives and which will reduce health inequities. Community Legal Aid and the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority will lead key elements of the project including re-entry attorney and housing navigator services for people with a history of incarceration or substance use disorder. Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association will engage community groups and organizations to form coalitions to support local housing initiatives. FRCOG Planning staff’s role in the project will be to provide in-depth and sustained support to municipalities to help move housing initiatives forward such as addressing abandoned housing, utilizing CPA funds for housing, and passing zoning changes to support a diversity of housing options. More information: Alyssa Larose at alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127.

Western MA Housing Conference / HCI Small Town Capital Grant

FRCOG Planning staff recently presented at a workshop for the Western Massachusetts Housing Conference, hosted by the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP), on zoning to support a diversity of housing options in small towns. The conference features a series of virtual workshops over the course of the fall and is geared towards local officials and residents interested in housing. To register for workshops: https://www.mhp.net/community/events.
FRCOG staff are also available to assist towns interested in applying for the Housing Choice Initiative’s Small Town Capital Grant program. The grant can award up to $100,000 for capital projects on Town-owned land/infrastructure, with priority for projects that support housing. Applications are now open, and are due by December 11, 2020. Contact Alyssa Larose for more information: alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127.

Local Officials Workshops

Workshops are back up and running virtually, which has had the unexpected benefit of drawing audiences beyond our region at times. Online workshops launched late summer with a virtual version of our annual “Selectboard 101” session, and then a panel and discussion about fall COVID testing capacity for Boards of Health, public health nurses, and school nurses. Additionally, we collaborated with the Small Town Administrators of MA (STAM) and the Rural Policy Advisory Commission to host a webinar on CARES Act funding for small towns that drew over 100 folks from across the county and the state.

Up next: FinCom 101 on November 5th; OSHA for Town Administrators on November 12th; and a collaborative webinar with the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative. Keep an eye out for registration emails going out shortly!

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.

CHIP Workplace Diversity Webinar

The Community Health Improvement Plan Network hosted by the FRCOG recently held a workplace diversity webinar attended by leaders from many local organizations, including the CDC, Community Action, the Community Health Center, Life Path, the City of Greenfield, Community and Support Options and the Franklin Regional Housing Authority. Participants learned a great deal about the ways in which our hiring processes and workplace practices can help us build more diverse workforces. Contact Phoebe Walker at walker@frcog.org or ext. 102 with questions.
Regional COVID Response

FRCOG serves as the Massachusetts Regional COVID Emergency Response Affiliate. This has included distributing funds to support local public health response across the county in FY20, convening stakeholders, and bringing concerns and input back to the state. This work in the last quarter has included:

- A workshop on local COVID testing featuring presenters from Baystate Health Systems, Community Health Center of Franklin County, and Valley Medical Group.
- Regional meetings bringing together school nurses and public health nurses every two weeks to work out good communication systems for COVID case investigations in school settings.
- Printing of new signage for distribution (let us know if you want some!)
- Bi-weekly COVID Coordination Roundtables open to all municipal officials to discuss the latest state guidance and share concerns and best practices with each other. Click here for a flyer for the series.
- Pulling together and distributing information on the municipal role in approving Remote Learning Enrichment Programs. Click here to view that (also posted on the FRCOG’s home page)

More information: Phoebe Walker at walker@frcog.org or ext. 102.

Flu Clinics

The flu season is beginning! Everyone six months of age or older needs a flu vaccine. When most of us are vaccinated, we build community immunity that protects the elderly, children, and those with compromised immune systems from the terrible effects of influenza. During the current coronavirus pandemic, flu vaccination is all the more important for staying healthy and conserving needed health care services. In addition, the state has mandated flu shots for all students. The Cooperative Public Health Service (CPHS) is offering influenza vaccines (with no insurance co-pay) to area residents at 12 flu clinics in member towns. All of the clinics are either pivoting to a drive-through mode, or are indoors with a great deal of social distancing. District Nurses Lisa White and Melanie Zamojski are deeply grateful for the enormous team of board of health members, EMDs, EMS, police, Medical Reserve Corps and other volunteers that is making it possible to meet the enormous demand and the significant challenges of flu clinic season this year. To see the schedule, visit www.frcog.org/flu-clinic.
Advancing Racial Justice
The Communities That Care Coalition’s Racial Justice Workgroup, with the support of school partners, wrote for, received, and are now beginning work on a 5-year grant for Advancing Racial Justice in Schools; we also 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. On Monday, October 19th from 6:30-9:00pm we will kick off this work with a screening and discussion of the film *I’m Not Racist...Am I?* The remote event – which will happen both online (through GCTV.com) and on our Community Access Television Stations – is co-sponsored by the Communities That Care Coalition, Mesa Verde, GCTV, Greenfield Savings Bank, and GCC. The 90-minute movie can only be viewed through community screenings like this. Please help us spread the word and take full advantage of this opportunity! More information: Kat Allen at kallen@frcog.org or ext. 119.

CHIP 2021-23 Goals Set
Members of the region’s Community Health Improvement Planning (CHIP) Network recently met for a three hour planning retreat to finalize the 2021 priorities of the new three-year plan. Three implementation groups will kick off with the release in December of the final report on 2017-2020 and the CHIP for 2021-2023. You can visit the CHIP web page at www.frcog.org/chip. More information: Phoebe Walker at walker@frcog.org or ext. 102.

CPHS Health District News
As COVID numbers have dwindled (but not disappeared) the FRCOG’s Health District Nurses have focused on flu clinic planning and rollout (see below) and on working with the 11 schools in the district on communication plans for managing COVID concerns and communication as schools open. The district’s health agents have been working with boards of health to educate business owners and the public about the state reopening guidance. In addition, the District continues to do its regular work, which includes restaurant inspections, Title 5 work, and well permits (well permit activity has increased due to the drought - 9 in the last month alone). More information: Randy Crochier at rcrochier@frcog.org and Lisa White at lwhite@frcog.org.

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 publish a biweekly 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. More information: Ilana Guerjoy at ilana@frcog.org or ext. 143.

Parent Outreach
The Communities That Care Coalition’s Parent Education Workgroup launched a Parent Engagement, Enrichment, and Support (PEER) Community Ambassador program. We are building a diverse core team of PEER Ambassadors from 5 community organizations that have developed 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. The group’s next step is to develop a set of “warm hand-off” videos that can introduce community members to essential community services. More information: Keyedrya Jacobs at kjacobs@frcog.org or ext. 155.
Shared Streets and Spaces

The MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces Program was expanded in September to provide $10 million in funding for cities and towns to quickly implement or expand improvements to sidewalks, curbs, streets, on-street parking spaces and off-street parking lots in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce in their communities. Each municipality was encouraged to apply for grants ranging from $5,000 to $300,000. Applications closed on September 22. The FRCOG assisted the Town of Gill with an application for temporary pedestrian accommodations in the town center for which the Town was awarded $20,023. The FRCOG also advised the Town of Montague on their successful Shared Streets & Spaces application for $35,300 for temporary traffic calming and pedestrian facilities on Third Street, L Street and at Unity Park. Additional Shared Streets and Spaces grants in Franklin County were awarded to Buckland, Greenfield, Orange and Shelburne. More information: Beth Giannini at giannini@frcog.org or ext. 125.

Regional Pedestrian Plan

The FRCOG is currently updating the regional Pedestrian Plan, taking an in depth look at existing infrastructure, related concerns, and potential improvements. It also provides information and recommendations to create an environment where walking is a practical and pleasant transportation option. The draft plan will be available for review on the FRCOG website. More information: Beth Giannini at giannini@frcog.org or ext. 125.

Outdoor Recreation Inventory

The FRCOG is currently compiling a database of outdoor recreational facilities in the County. This database will eventually be accessible through an interactive online map in which users can click on points to learn more about those facilities and what is available in the region. The map will include facilities such as: trail heads, parks, playgrounds, and boat ramps. In addition, there will be pictures for each site along with information about parking, restrooms, accessibility, and much more. More information: Megan Rhodes at mrhodes@frcog.org or ext. 132.

Traffic Counting and Speed Studies

In response to the ongoing pandemic and the resulting changes to our regular traffic patterns, the FRCOG Traffic Counting Program has focused its efforts this year on tracking traffic volumes at key locations across the region.
and conducting vehicle speed studies for municipalities upon request. Speed studies include analysis of speed data, providing data-driven guidance for targeted speed enforcement. Speed studies have been conducted for Ashfield, Leverett, Northfield, Warwick and Whately. Traffic data collection will be available until winter. To request a speed study or other traffic count, contact Laurie Scarbrough at lscarbrough@frcog.org or ext. 139.

Tourism Itineraries

The FRCOG is developing tourism itineraries for Franklin County. The itineraries highlight regional scenic, historic, recreational, and natural assets while directing visitors to local businesses. The tours include options for traveling by bicycle, foot, or automobile, and are intended to be diverse and appeal to a wide variety of interests. For example, one tour is a drive through central and western Franklin County with stops at fiber stores, and for local candy, coffee and baked treats. Another excursion highlights shops with antiques and unique finds in central and eastern Franklin County. There are also several highlighted bike rides to fun destinations, and two provide itineraries for overnight stays. The project will include 10 different tours, and maps will be produced that detail the tours and lists the stops. More information: Beth Giannini at giannini@frcog.org or ext. 125.

Local tourism itineraries wouldn’t be complete without including the shops and sights at the Montague Bookmill.

Staff Updates & Changes

New Staff Members

We welcome Lauri Solomon as a member of the Emergency Preparedness Program team. Some of you may know Lauri from her role several years ago on the Communities That Care coalition (at that time, her name was Turkovsky). Lauri has worked in the public health field for over twenty years and became involved with emergency preparedness while working for the Washington State Dept. of Health where she chaired the state’s Security and Emergency Management Committee. She will work on many different projects within the Emergency Preparedness Program, and will be the primary point of contact for the Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition. You can reach Lauri at lSolomon@frcog.org or ext. 110.

We also welcome Sage Shea, newest member of the Partnership For Youth team at the FRCOG. Sage joins the staff as the Coalition Technical Assistance and Evaluation Coordinator, working both locally on the teen health survey and evaluating Communities That Care projects and as part of a team that provides coaching and support to youth prevention coalitions across the state. They (Sage uses they/them pronouns - click here if you'd like to learn more) come to us with a wealth of data analysis, web design, and graphic design skills. Sage can be reached at sshea@frcog.org or ext. 107.