Council Chair Update

FY21 Council Meetings

Where has FY21 gone? After the January meeting, we have only one FY21 quarterly meeting left! All Council meetings will be held via Zoom until we can safely meet again in the Transit Center. Please mark your calendar with the April meeting, to be held on April 15, 2021, and our first FY22 meeting, scheduled for July 15, 2021.

FRCOG Price is Right

On November 19th, new and a few seasoned Council members played the FRCOG Price is Right, a game that provided a fun and informative way to learn about the FRCOG. Hopefully we can bring the game to this body in the future, when we have an agenda that’s not quite so full.

Newly Re-elected Executive Committee Representative

Congratulations to Jay DiPucchio, re-elected as the regional representative to the FRCOG Executive Committee in November’s state election, with 30,802 votes.

Executive Committee Update

In its meetings since October, the FRCOG Executive Committee:

- Held the first-ever remote public view and hearing to consider a petition from the Town of Buckland for relocation of the county layouts of Conway, Summer, and South Streets; and Conway Road. Buckland seeks state funding and assistance to rectify public safety and storm-water drainage issues along these roads, and to bring the route up to ADA compliance with newly constructed sidewalks and other improvements. The committee signed the order of layout and taking, approving the engineer’s relocation plan, which will result in a single continuous route.
- Appointed 3 members to the Franklin/Hampshire Housing and Redevelopment Authority Board of Commissioners.
- Learned of the progress of the Franklin County migration to the Commonwealth’s interoperable radio system (CoMIRS). (See the Emergency Preparedness section in the Executive Director Update.)
- Was briefed on the quickly evolving plans for FRCOG’s role in dispensing the COVID-19 vaccine; the planning department’s involvement with FERC’s relicensing of FirstLight hydroelectric facilities in Northfield and Montague; and the implementation of the FRCOG Organizational Assessment study, all referenced in other sections of the Council Updates.
Finance Committee Update

The Finance Committee spent the last quarter drafting the FRCOG’s FY22 budget that will be presented to the Council for endorsement. Highlights of the budget are:

- A reduction to the Regional Services Assessment of $30,000 (-5.8%). This reduction was prioritized in recognition of the potential municipal revenue shortfall as a result of the COVID impact on the economy.
- An assumed 1% increase to health insurance costs.
- A 2.5% Competitive Market Increase (FRCOG nomenclature for COLA).
- OPEB Trust contribution equaling 5% of annual payroll.
- The addition of a part-time Public Information Officer; web site consultant; increased staffing in the administration budget to help with the transition to CoMIRS and with vaccination logistics; and funding for the FRCOG to respond to the First Light relicensing application.
- Four municipal service programs will be level-assessed – Collective Purchasing, Cooperative Inspection Franklin County Emergency Communication System and Regional Emergency Planning Committee; Town Accounting will see an assessment increase of approx. 4% to accommodate new staffing and salaries; and the Cooperative Public Health Service health district will have a 20% increase to the assessment but it is anticipated that some of the increase will eventually be offset by grants, which will lower the budget and assessments.

We may also have a budget amendment request for the current year to allow the Emergency Preparedness and Cooperative Public Health Service staff groups to continue to collaborate on COVID-19 vaccination operations.

Personnel Committee Update

Personnel met jointly with the Finance Committee to set budget priorities. The Personnel Committee advocated for a 2.5% CMI and supported the OPEB contribution priority and hiring of a Public Information Officer.

Executive Director Update

Advocacy, Boards, Commissions and Committees

- The FRCOG is working on a list of priorities for the next legislative session and is facilitating the same effort in its leadership role on the Rural Policy Advisory Commission.
- 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/HD5306), 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. While the Bill did not make it through during the current
session, it did have a great hearing, with over 55 pieces of testimony submitted, and will be re-filed in January. Associated funding, however, was included in the FY21 Budget at $1.7 Million.

- Thanks to Senator Comerford and the rest of our delegation, for the first time the MA Budget included funding for local public health functions -- $10 million to be spent in this fiscal year.

Organizational Assessment Study of FRCOG

Community Paradigm Associates conducted the FRCOG’s Organizational Assessment. The intent of the Organizational Assessment was to 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. A draft report was recently submitted. Preliminary recommendations include:

- Restructuring the administrative team to include a Deputy Director that focuses on internal operations, as well as the addition of more levels of leadership within the organization so there is greater opportunity for growth and advancement.

- Addition of a Public Relations and Information position that would ensure timely and comprehensive reporting of the FRCOG’s work, oversight of the FRCOG web site and social media presence and acting as Public Relations Officer during regional emergency events.

- A revamping of the FRCOG Program and Budget Review to be more in-line with the FRCOG budget and budget priorities (it is now more of a look back than a prognostic tool).

- Strategic planning to refine a mission and vision statement that does a better job of honing the focus and priority of the FRCOG’s work.

- More involvement of Town Administrators in FRCOG priority-setting.

In anticipation of some of these recommendations, the FRCOG’s FY22 budget does include funding for the addition of a PR person who will manage a web site overhaul, and shifts some administrative expense.

Because the study was submitted as we are focused on vaccination logistics, the study will be vetted more thoroughly by various Committees in the coming months and is expected to be a focus of the April Council meeting barring any other unexpected emergencies. More Information: Linda Dunlavy at lindad@frog.org ext. 103.

Culvert Inventory and Assessments

FRCOG Transportation Planning staff spent the summer inventorying and assessing all culverts in the Towns of Ashfield, Conway, and Leverett. This information is used by town’s Highway Departments and Select Boards so that they can have an understanding of the location and condition of the town’s culverts in order to prioritize
maintenance and better conduct capital improvement planning. In addition, the inventories in Ashfield and Conway were used to leverage a Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership (MTWP) MVP grant to determine a process for right-sizing of future culverts and to select five sites in each town for 30% designs to upgrade existing culverts. **More Information:** Megan Rhodes at mrrhodes@frcog.org or ext. 132.

**Franklin County Stormwater Plan**

FRCOG staff spent the summer and fall working with Highway Superintendents of nine stormwater pilot communities to identify suitable locations and opportunities for using stormwater best management practices (BMPs) in our rural region to manage stormwater. Over the winter, staff will develop conceptual designs for the assessed sites in each of the nine pilot communities and identify existing funding opportunities and priorities for towns so that future transportation and development projects can be leveraged to include more sustainable stormwater management practices. The benefits of this approach include: reducing the amount of polluted stormwater entering our rivers and streams; increasing groundwater recharge; alleviating stresses on our Towns’ aging drainage and transportation infrastructure, and mitigating flooding. **More Information:** Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frcog.org or ext. 130.

**Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP)**

FRCOG staff are moving forward to complete the virtual MVP planning process for several communities. The Towns of Bernardston and Whately successfully held workshops online and generated many ideas about building resiliency to climate change at the local level.

MVP planning Committees are interested in hearing from community members and have recently expanded outreach efforts with assistance from FRCOG staff. The Town of Whately and City of Greenfield are publicizing their projects and collecting feedback through interactive StoryMaps, and the Town of Whately is publishing monthly newsletter articles on climate change topics with corresponding surveys.

The spring will be a busy time for more workshops and listening sessions. Workshops will be held for the joint Northfield-Warwick project, Greenfield and Rowe, while listening sessions will be held for Bernardston, New Salem, and Wendell. FRCOG staff are looking forward to kicking off MVP planning projects for Heath and Leyden. The Towns of Orange and Leverett recently completed their planning efforts; both will seek official MVP designation from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. **More Information:** Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frog.org ext. 130.

**Regional Energy Planning Assistance (REPA) Green Communities Activities**

This Fall FRCOG staff assisted towns with completing their Annual Reports to remain in good standing with the Green Communities program. This winter staff will begin assisting towns with energy data analysis, grant-funded project implementation, new Green Communities designation, and developing new project ideas for future competitive grant applications. **More Information:** Alyssa Larose at alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127, or Allison Gage at agage@frcog.org or ext. 136.
Regional Pollinator Plan

Over the summer FRCOG staff conducted outreach to municipal boards and committees working in the eight partner communities of the Regional Pollinator Plan: Greenfield, Heath, Shelburne, Conway, Bernardston, Montague, Wendell, and Orange. FRCOG convened stakeholders in a series of three workshops with the City of Greenfield to map existing pollinator habitats, to develop strategies for linking pollinator corridors, and to choose a site for a pollinator concept design. Between now and the end of June 2021, this process will be completed with all eight partner communities. In addition to the local pollinator resource maps and a custom pollinator habitat site design, staff will provide recommendations for land-use regulation updates tailored for each partner community that include requirements for native plantings for development and pollinator-friendly landscape management practices. Local level strategies such as these are critically needed to respond to climate change, genetic modification, pesticide use, and habitat loss. Sustainability of our food systems and local farms is linked to pollinators. The plan will include a Pollinator Habitat Corridor Implementation Toolkit so that with additional funding and interest from other Franklin County towns, regional pollinator corridors can be expanded across the county. More Information: Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frcog.org or ext. 130.

Business Support in Response to COVID-19

Resources and guidance in response to COVID-19 continue to be updated on our website here. Recent posts include information about grant/forgivable loan programs for businesses as well as opportunities for municipalities and community groups to fund village center/downtown improvements to spur economic activity and meet COVID-19 precautions. More Information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

Economic Recovery and Resiliency Efforts

As funded by an U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant, FRCOG is undertaking efforts to address economic impacts due to COVID-19. Through an RFP process, FRCOG contracted with the Franklin County Community Development Corporation to provide direct business technical assistance to entrepreneurs, businesses, and organizations that need support due to the pandemic. The contract is to June 2022.

Work is underway to create an economic recovery and resilience plan. With support from Hodge Economic Consulting, strategic partners to better understand economic impacts and the current and future needs. The information will be summarized and posted on FRCOG.org in April. These inputs will help inform the creation of a framework to be used moving forward and at times of other economic shocks.

Also coming up soon, an RFP will be issued to hire a consultant to conduct a study of existing water and/or wastewater systems and areas identified as in need of these systems. They will evaluate system needs and challenges, and make recommendations to improve the efficient operation of systems and to prioritize investments. More Information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.
**Latest Census Data**

Last month, the US Census Bureau released its latest American Community Survey (ACS) data set. This data set includes estimates on age, race, Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, educational attainment, income, poverty, housing characteristics and more. It is developed using survey responses from a sampling of households across the country. Data is produced annually for larger populated areas, like metropolitan areas and counties. At the town level, it takes five years of survey responses to produce estimates.

This latest release is the 2019 ACS Five-year estimates, which means surveys were collected from 2015 through 2019. According to this data set, Franklin County has a population of 70,577, which was a 0.5% decline from the previous estimate, and a median age of 46.7 years, which is higher than the state (39.5) and nation (38.1). The town with the lowest median age is Sunderland (34.1) and the highest are Monroe and Shelburne (57.1). The median household income is $60,950, which is close to the national median ($62,843) and significantly below the state median ($81,215). The town with the lowest median household income is Monroe ($28,750) and the highest is Conway ($95,781). To look up data, go to [https://data.census.gov/cedsci/](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/). More Information: Jessica Atwood at jatwood@frcog.org or ext. 123.

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**Finance & Municipal Services**

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**Collective Purchasing**

The FRCOG Collective contract for DRONE services for use in Planning and for Emergency use has been renewed for 2021. If a town is interested in getting drone aerial photography or more advanced surveys, assessments, and mapping, please contact bids@frcog.org or gis@frcog.org.

During the last quarter, staff has inquired with Towns about initiating a collective contract for Drug and Alcohol testing for truck and equipment drivers. Although the results didn’t point towards conducting a new collective bid, comparison information and suggestions for cost containment were discovered by comparing town’s contracts. More Information: Andrea Woods at bids@frcog.org or ext. 104 or Ellen Batchelder at ebatchelder@frcog.org or ext. 131.

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**Regional IT and Cybersecurity Solutions**

The FRCOG recently received approval for funding from the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council to implement the first phase of establishing a regional IT and cybersecurity program for Franklin County, as outlined in the Feasibility Study commissioned earlier this year (detailed in last quarter’s updates). The FRCOG will engage a consultant to conduct a series of workshops for municipal leaders centered on enhancing capacity for regional solutions to IT and cybersecurity challenges. A RFQ will be issued in early 2021; workshops will be conducted virtually over the next 8-10 months. More Information: Amanda Doster at adoster@frcog.org or ext. 120.
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. The FCECS has recently authorized the replacement of an antenna at the Charlemont tower location which will be completed prior to February 15th. A spare generator will be utilized to replace a damaged unit at the Orange tower location. The Oversight Committee is reviewing its inventory in an effort to begin the planning process for decommissioning. More Information: Dan Nietsche at DNietsche@frcog.org or ext. 105.

Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition (MAPHCO)/Regional Emergency Planning Committee (REPC)

After 10 years of consideration, MAPHCO and the REPC are in serious discussion about merging! COVID response and planning has proven how having all emergency partners at the table working together is essential for efficient operations. A subcommittee comprised of members of both groups is meeting to draft operating principles for a new joint committee, yet to be named. Meanwhile, the two groups are holding joint meetings to work on COVID vaccination planning for the county as a way to get the ball rolling.

CPHS and EPP staff assisted the Greenfield Health Department, Greenfield Fire Department, Greenfield Community College, and American Medical Response in conducting two days of COVID drive-thru testing at GCC. And staff worked with the Greenfield Health Department, Greenfield Fire Department, Community 911 Training, and the Northwest MA Incident Management Team to plan COVID-vaccination clinics for Franklin County first responders. More Information: Tracy Rogers at emergencyprep@frcog.org or ext. 118.

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

Continued progress was made in our effort to migrate emergency communications to the state’s CoMIRS system. Since the last update, on the migration project has included:

- We continue to hold weekly meetings to address migration issues with representatives from EOTSS, MSP technicians, and representatives from the chiefs’ associations of Franklin County.
- All MOAs between the FRCOG and users that outline the relationship and responsibilities of the FRCOG and Users before, during and after migration to CoMIRS have been executed.
- EOTSS released the grant application information to the FRCOG that outlines the process and timing of equipment purchases.
  - The grant will go to the FRCOG and the FRCOG will manage the grant.
  - The total grant is valued at more than $2.7 million.
  - It will fund approximately 1,300 new units to the police, fire and EMS departments serving Franklin County municipalities based on a regionally approved inventory submitted to EOTSS last year and will upgrade the Greenfield and Montague Dispatch Centers.
The grant will finance the base model of either Kenwood or Motorola radios that have been specified and procured by EOTSS.

- All departments will have the option, at their expense, to add additional equipment or upgrade the radios utilizing the favorable pricing secured by EOTSS.

- FRCOG has already submitted the grant application to upgrade the Greenfield and Montague Dispatch Centers to be compatible with the CoMIRS system and is preparing the application for the larger equipment purchase. To submit the larger equipment application, departments must provide information to the FRCOG:
  - As a condition of the grant being provided by EOTSS, nearly all departments have provided a listing of existing equipment, with serial numbers, that will eventually be replaced with new CoMIRS-compatible units. (Please note that department’s existing equipment will remain their property and not be actually retired until FCECS is fully decommissioned.)
  - Departments do not need to decide on upgrades and additional equipment now but are required to choose which vendor, Kenwood or Motorola, they will use.
  - It is the FRCOG’s goal to get the equipment grant submitted to EOTSS within the next two weeks. If this happens, EOTSS expects a quick contract turnaround and equipment purchasing can begin.

- A Firefighter Equipment Grant was recently announced that can be used to offset the cost of equipment upgrades and peripherals. The FRCOG submitted a regional grant at the request and on behalf of seven fire departments and will manage the grant if it is received. The grant allocates funding based on population.

More information on how the EOTSS grant will work financially:

- The grant from EOTSS is a disbursement grant. The FRCOG will place the order for radios, notify EOTSS that an order has been made and EOTSS will send the FRCOG its share of the expense.

- Before an order is made, departments will determine what upgrades they need or want. Any upgrade that requires a model other than the base model and/or configuration of the equipment by Motorola or Kenwood must be included in the grant-funded order. Departments/municipalities can purchase other peripheral equipment like back-up batteries or shoulder microphones at a later time – EOTSS pricing is secure and available for three years.

- The FRCOG will place the order, including the municipally-requested upgrades and will pay the full invoice when it is due. The FRCOG will use money received from EOTSS, money allocated to a fire department from the regional Firefighter Equipment grant if received, and will cover the municipal/district upgrade cost, and then invoice the municipality/district the difference.

- While the county is receiving nearly $3 million in grant funds, our estimate of upgrades could be as high as $1 million. As a result, the FRCOG will place 2-4 orders between February and the end of the fiscal year to manage cash flow and currently intends to prioritize ordering based on which municipalities/districts have already or can appropriate money in FY21. The final order will include equipment for municipalities/districts that do not expect to appropriate money until FY22.

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

Vaccination Planning

FRCOG’s Emergency Preparedness Program and Cooperative Public Health Service staff are working together and with other municipal health departments and private providers to develop a comprehensive and
coordinated vaccination plan for the county. Still in development and to be presented in more detail at the 1/28 Council meeting, the current plan has many stages and partners:

1. It is anticipated that the vast majority of vaccines will be distributed by private health care providers including local MD offices and pharmacies and large statewide sites like at UMass.
2. Greenfield, along with a few other FC towns, opened clinics to vaccinate first responders.
3. Using what was learned from those clinics, planning is underway to open Phase 2 clinic(s). These sites are expected to open in mid-February.
4. These clinics will stay open through the beginning of Phase 3 when the general public can be vaccinated, which is currently expected to be in April. At that point, the small, indoor clinics will close and three large outdoor sites will open in Deerfield, Greenfield and Charlemont (confirmation of site locations in process).
5. In addition to these sites and plans, CPHS nurses will vaccinate homebound and other medically compromised residents in CPHS member towns and may provide site-based clinics of essential workers in CPHS member towns.

**Western MA Health & Medical Coordinating Coalition (HMCC)**

As hospitals across the state see a resurgence in COVID-positive patients, the HMCC is working with the MA Dept. of Public Health (DPH) to convene each western MA hospital’s chief nursing and chief medical officers to coordinate balancing of patients. As of January 7th, all DPH regions escalated to a Tier 4 (Red) Capacity, indicating “active, ongoing constraints warranting DPH intervention.” While western MA has maintained some med/surge and ICU bed capacity, the beds are becoming more scarce. Other regions in the state are beginning to actively transfer patients between facilities because of lack of beds. **More Information:** Mark Maloni at mmaloni@frcog.org.

**WRHSAC: Building Healthy Workplaces Training: How to promote mental health in first responder organizations**

The Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council (WRHSAC) is kicking off its First Responder Mental Health Resiliency project with a training focused on supporting first responder leadership to foster positive mental health work environments in their organizations. The training includes two parts: an online, self-paced introduction followed by a comprehensive, interactive, virtual four-session series.

Building Healthy Workplaces will cover key aspects and provide a tool kit of recommended practices and resources for leaders to support mental health in the workplace. Participants will explore the recommended practices as they pertain to their individual organizations, apply the framework and principles outlined in the guide, and develop strategies that can be used to promote positive mental health in their respective workplaces.

The live, virtual sessions will be held on four consecutive Fridays, January 22, 29, February 5 and 12, from 10am to noon. Learn more about the training and how to register on WRHSAC’s website. **More Information:** Raine Brown, raine@frcog.org.
FERC Relicensing Update

FirstLight filed the Amended Final License Applications (AFLA) for the Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage and the Turners Falls/Cabot Station hydropower projects. FirstLight requests 50-year FERC licenses for these projects and in return offers very little for the use of this important natural and public resource – the Connecticut River. FirstLight proposes to maintain existing recreation facilities in Northfield, Gill and Montague but does not plan significant investments that would bring these aging facilities more in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. FirstLight is not proposing any measures to mitigate the extensive bank erosion. The AFLAs are a disappointing end to a process that started in 2012. FRCOG will continue working with our Towns and stakeholders to submit comments to FERC and to engage in dialogue with MassDEP, the state agency that will provide important conditions in the new FERC licenses through the 401 Water Quality Certificate (WQC). FRCOG will continue talking to the Franklin County Legislative Delegation, which was instrumental in getting funding for MassDEP to hire a consultant to review FirstLight’s erosion causation studies that claim the operation of Northfield Mountain is not responsible for the widespread and ongoing erosion. These studies were roundly criticized by FRCOG and stakeholders and we are happy MassDEP is taking a close look at FirstLight’s claims. Recently, FRCOG staff participated in a Zoom meeting with state agency staff to discuss recreation and erosion concerns that we would like to see addressed in the 401WQC. This is truly a “once in a lifetime opportunity” to have our collective voices heard. More Information: Kimberly Noake MacPhee at kmacphee@frcog.org or x130.

Improving Housing to Improve Health (IH2)

The IH2 Initiative is funded through a 5-year grant from the Massachusetts Community Health and Healthy Aging Funds to implement a multi-faceted housing access project in the region. Through the grant, Community Legal Aid and the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority are providing re-entry attorney and housing navigator services for people with a history of incarceration or substance use disorder. Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) presented at this year’s first Local Officials Workshop on January 14th about strategies to diversifying housing in Franklin County, and will work with interested community groups and organizations to form coalitions to support local housing initiatives. FRCOG Planning staff are working collaboratively with FRCOG Regional Health Agents on abandoned housing inventories in the towns of Gill and Buckland. This fall, staff convened local officials in each town to review the inventories. A second meeting in each town will be held this winter, with the goal of prioritizing properties to take action on, including participation in the Attorney General Office’s (AGO) Neighborhood Renewal Program. In December, staff convened a meeting with the AGO’s program staff and local non-profit affordable housing developers to learn more about the program and the role of the receiver in rehabbing properties. More Information: Alyssa Larose at alarose@frcog.org or ext. 127.

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

In September, the State Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs issued a Request for Responses (RFR) seeking a non-profit organization to act as the Administrative Agent for the MTWP Board. The MTWP Board voted at their November 17, 2020 meeting to proceed with contract negotiations with New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF). NEFF will take over the responsibilities for the MTWP from the Regional Planning Agencies and an initial 3-year contract is anticipated. At the November meeting, the MTWP Board also voted to request that the State include the MTWP region in the Forest Legacy Program which can provide funding to protect forest land from development via conservation restrictions.

A second round of $20,000 grants were awarded to eight MTWP towns in FY 21 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 provide technical assistance and funding to entrepreneurs within the MTWP region looking to launch or expand natural resource based businesses. Finalists are expected to be announced in January 2021.

More Information: Peggy Sloan at psloan@frcog.org or ext. 133 or visit http://www.mohawktrailwoodlandspartnership.org

Local Officials Workshops

Workshops continue to run virtually. Since the last update, we convened the following workshops: FinCom 101 with staff from the Division of Local Services’ Technical Assistance Bureau; OSHA Compliance at Transfer Stations (in collaboration with the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District); and Roles & Responsibilities of Planning and Zoning Boards (in collaboration with the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission).

Next up: “Diversifying Rural Housing Opportunities: a virtual presentation & discussion about undoing racial and economic inequities in Franklin County’s housing market” on January 14th. All workshop details (including registration information) are listed on the calendar on the FRCOG’s website.

HAVE TOPIC IDEAS FOR FUTURE WORKSHOPS?

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, with the support of school partners, is working on a 5-year grant for Advancing Racial Justice in Schools. On Tuesday, January 12, we hosted a community screening of *Virtually Free*, a documentary about unlikely allies who partner to transform the juvenile justice system and stop mass incarceration. Produced by the non-profit media company Shine Global, the 40-minute documentary Virtually Free is directed by André Robert Lee. The remote event was a great success, and the film is still available through January 19.

1. Go to https://watch.eventive.org/.../play/5ff4f57b11dc40003797020a
2. Click Login at the top
3. Fill out your information to create an account
4. Click on “Unlock for Free” to watch the movie and the discussion afterwards.

**More Information:** Keyedrya Jacobs at kjacobs@frcog.org

**Annual Teen Health Survey**

The Communities That Care Coalition is working with all 9 middle and high school districts in Franklin County and the North Quabbin to facilitate the annual Teen Health Survey. This year’s survey will be abridged, will be completely online, and will gather important data on the impact of COVID-19, quarantine, and online or hybrid schooling. Schools will administer the online survey between February 1 and 12. **More Information:** Kat Allen at kallen@frcog.org

**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, convening stakeholders, and bringing concerns and input back to the state. This work in the last quarter has included:

- **COVID Vaccine Workshops**, in collaboration with the Western Regional Homeland Security Advisory Council. See WRHSAC update for more information
- **COVID Vaccine Coordination Meetings**. FRCOG is bringing together local vaccine providers to coordinate efforts to roll out the vaccine throughout the 3 phases. For more information on the COVID vaccine please visit: https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine-in-massachusetts
- **Regional Public Health Nurse and School Nurse Coordination meetings**, including public health nurses from throughout the region and school nurses from at least 9 school districts.
• **Regional COVID Coordination Roundtables**, which are bi-weekly gatherings for all local officials with round-robin updates and a brief agenda that has included:
  - Review of latest regional COVID data
  - COVID vaccine planning
  - Thanksgiving and holiday travel and celebration safety planning
  - Regular state guidance updates

• **Regional Health Agent Re-Opening Coordination Meetings**.

• **Public Education**, including radio messages, social medial messages, and newspaper ads to encourage holiday gathering safety.

• **Signage**. Produced and distributed signage for any business, government office, or non-profit in Franklin County. This fall, 100+ signs/posters distributed:
  - Holiday safety while eating, gathering and traveling posters and social media posts. [https://frcog.org/holiday-safety-tips/](https://frcog.org/holiday-safety-tips/)

• Served on the Advisory Group for the development of the Public Health Institute of Western MA COVID dashboard, and shared information about it. Presented at a workshop on the new metrics hosted by PHI and attended by over 50 people. [https://www.publichealthwm.org/covid-19/data/Franklin](https://www.publichealthwm.org/covid-19/data/Franklin)

• Maintained a Municipal Resource page on the FRCOG web site [https://frcog.org/covid-19-resources/](https://frcog.org/covid-19-resources/)

• Maintained a Board of Health COVID Resource page on the FRCOG web site [https://frcog.org/local-board-of-health-covid-19-resources/](https://frcog.org/local-board-of-health-covid-19-resources/)

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

**Flu Clinics**

What a busy flu season! The Cooperative Public Health Service (CPHS) administered double the number of vaccines usually provided -- 2038 -- to area residents at 12 flu clinics in member towns. All of the clinics were COVID-safe, in either walk-through or drive-through mode. 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 made this possible.

**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 Gerjuoy 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.

Transportation

Complete Streets

FRCOG staff provided assistance to towns participating in the Massachusetts Complete Streets Funding Program. FRCOG staff assisted with the development of Complete Streets Prioritization Plans. A Prioritization Plan is one of the program eligibility requirements and enables towns to apply for up to $400,000 in implementation funding per year. The Prioritization Plan lists specific projects to improve the transportation infrastructure for all users including bicycle, pedestrian, and transit access. Sidewalks, curb accessibility improvements, crosswalks, and bicycle accommodations are examples of the types of projects that can be funded. To date, the FRCOG staff has assisted Buckland, Montague, Sunderland and Whately, and most recently Erving and Northfield (completed in 2020). By completing their Prioritization Plans in April 2020, Erving and Northfield became eligible to apply for construction funding in the FY 21 funding round. The FRCOG staff assisted Erving and Northfield to apply, and each town was awarded construction funding (Erving was awarded $399,596 and Northfield was awarded $372,620). In addition, Montague was also awarded $399,686 in funding in the FY 21 round. This was the second award of construction funding for Montague under MA Complete Streets Funding Program. Buckland, Sunderland, and Whately have also received construction funding during past funding rounds. More Information: Beth Giannini at giannini@frcog.org or ext. 125.

MassDOT Shared Winter Streets and Spaces

MassDOT has launched a new Shared Winter Streets and Spaces Program which will provide $10 million in funding to municipalities to quickly implement or expand improvements to address the particular challenges of winter during the ongoing public health crisis. The program builds on the success of the Shared Streets and Spaces Program during the summer of 2020. Shared Winter Streets and Spaces provides towns or regional transit authorities with grants between $5,000 and $500,000 to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, parking areas, bus stops, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. Applications are currently being accepted, and decisions are being made in four rounds. The deadline for the final round of applications is February 26th, 2021. The implementation of projects that are awarded funding must be completed by May 31, 2021. For more information about the details and eligible projects please visit https://www.mass.gov/shared-winter-streets-and-spaces-grant-program. The FRCOG staff is available to provide assistance to towns interested in developing an application. More Information: Beth Giannini at giannini@frcog.org or ext. 125.
**Rideshare Pilot Project for Franklin County**

FRCOG staff have been hard at work putting together a Rideshare Pilot for social service agencies in Franklin County. This pilot has been funded by an earmark Senator Comerford secured in the state budget. The FRCOG has chosen Lyft to provide rides to selected clients of partner agencies. These agencies include: Baystate Franklin, the Brick House, Community Health Center of Franklin County, Center for New Americans, MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center, Tapestry Health, and United Arc. These agencies will be able to book rides for their clients to get to doctor appointments, job trainings, and more when the FRTA bus services are not available. This will help fill critical transit gaps and provide more general transportation options in the region. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the launch of this pilot has been put on hold for now. Stay tuned! **More Information:** Megan Rhodes at mrhodes@frcog.org or ext. 132.

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**Staff Updates & Changes**

**New Staff Members**

We welcome Jen Audley as the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Public Health Planner. Jen joins us with a strong background in public health improvement and education in our region. Jen is a resident of Turners Falls, where she chairs Montague’s Finance Committee. She will be working on a number of different health improvement projects that came out of the regional priority setting process facilitated by the CHIP Network over the last year. Jen can be reached at jaudley@frcog.org.

**Retirement**

Our thanks to Brian Morton for his service to the FRCOG and the Town Accounting Program. Brian retired on January 5th.