



NEWSLETTER: LATE WINTER 2021



Advocacy

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 was re-filed in January. Associated funding, however, was included in the FY21 Budget at \$1.7Million.
- 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.

More Information: Linda Dunlavy at lindad@frcog.org or ext. 103.

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Economic Development

Economic Recovery and Resiliency Efforts

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 the FRCOG website in April. These inputs will help inform the creation of a framework to be used moving forward at times of other economic shocks.

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 systems and to prioritize investments.

Resources and guidance in response to COVID-19 continue to be updated on our website [here](#).

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



Training & Education

Local Officials Workshops

Since the last update, we convened the following workshops:

- Finance Committee 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);
- Roles & Responsibilities of Planning and Zoning Boards (in collaboration with the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission);
- Diversifying Rural Housing Opportunities: a virtual presentation & discussion about undoing racial and economic inequities in Franklin County's housing market".

Materials from all municipal workshops are available at: <https://frcog.org/program-services/municipal-resources/>.

Have ideas for the upcoming workshop series? Contact Amanda Doster, Regional Projects Coordinator, at adoster@frcog.org or ext. 120.



Public & Community Health

COVID Response

The 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;
- COVID Vaccine Coordination Meetings;
- 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 a review of latest regional COVID data, updates regarding vaccine planning, and regular updates on state re-opening guidance;
- Regional Health Agent Re-Opening Coordination Meetings;
- Public Education, including radio messages, social media messages, and newspaper ads to encourage holiday gathering safety;
- Produced and distributed signage for any business, government office, or non-profit in Franklin County;
- Maintained a Municipal Resource page on the FRCOG web site <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/>

More Information: Phoebe Walker at walker@frcog.org.

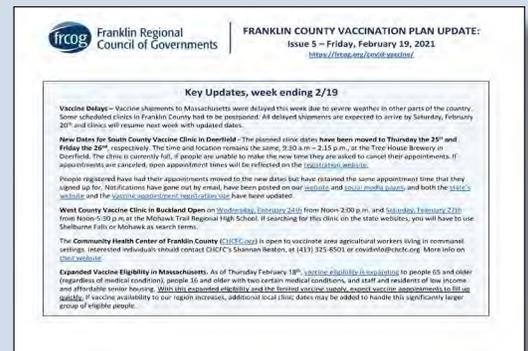


Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness

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. The [current plan](#) has many stages and partners, and changes as vaccine availability and state policy evolves. We now issue a weekly situation report regarding Franklin County vaccination clinic planning, found on our comprehensive [Franklin County vaccine web page](#) as well as 24/7 phone line with the most up to date information possible - access it at 413-774-3167 x 153.

More Information: Tracy Rogers at emergencyprep@frcog.org or ext. 118.



The FRCOG issues a Franklin County Vaccination Plan situation report at the end of each business week..



Transportation

Complete Streets

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



Finance & Municipal Services

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. 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.



Climate Resilience

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP)

FRCOG staff are completing 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 Rowe is publishing monthly newsletter articles on climate change topics with corresponding surveys.

The spring will be busy with 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 look 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@frcog.org or ext. 130.



Land Use & Natural Resources

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. 130.



Staff Updates & Changes

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.

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



Have a great winter from all of us at the FRCOG!

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