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City and Town

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Construction Reform Plus Low Interest Rates Equal New Schools

by Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey

After one year in office, the question I am most frequently asked is, "What surprised you most about Beacon Hill?" While I have learned many things in the last year, one realization that stands out is how poorly the state manages and finances public construction projects — school buildings, police stations, bridges and highways. I still find it hard to believe how slow, inefficient and expensive it is to do even the simplest project in Massachusetts.

One of the most troubling examples is the backlog in the School Building Assistance (SBA) program, which helps pay for local school building projects. The SBA waiting list currently has 420 school projects, with cities and towns awaiting promised state aid totaling $4.1 billion with no guarantee they'll get it anytime soon. Almost half of the schools on the list have already been built, funded in advance by the municipalities, and the state's portion of the debt grows larger each day we delay sending them the first reimbursement check.

In these tough economic times, when local tax dollars are precious, other school districts have decided to postpone needed construction or repairs to schools until they are certain the state will honor its promise to help with the costs. As I tour the state as the Governor's municipal liaison, I hear time and again from local officials that delays in SBA reimbursements only make it harder for budget-strapped municipalities to make ends meet.

The Governor and I believe that cities and towns have a right to know that the state will stand by its commitment to help build schools. We also believe that our teachers and students deserve safe and modern facilities in which to teach and learn. Clearing the SBA waiting list makes fiscal sense, too. Further delays in meeting our commitments will only cause the cost of the wait-listed projects, both for the Commonwealth and our local communities, to skyrocket. For all these reasons, the Governor and I have made eliminating the SBA waiting list and jump-starting school building projects a top priority.

Our proposal to reform the SBA program takes advantage of today's historically low interest rates to refinance school debt so municipalities will be able to receive their full reimbursement as soon as projects are completed, not over 20 years. Combined with key construction reforms, our proposal will clear the waiting list in the next five years, so that cities are towns will not have to wait a decade to be paid.

Construction reform is key to the success of our SBA proposal. Right now, the cost of construction for schools and other public buildings is 20 percent higher in Massachusetts than in other states, even adjusting for higher wages, climate and cost of living. Both the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation and Pioneer Institute have called for construction reform in Massachusetts. Construction reform will save literally hundreds of millions of state and local tax dollars in the years to come, raise the quality of work done on public projects, make public contracts more accessible to minority and women-owned businesses and accelerate building projects that will keep our construction industry healthy long after the Big Dig is completed.

What type of reforms do we need?

We need to allow more flexible and creative procurement methods. Currently, our state is constrained by a number of artificial barriers to efficient construction practices that no private entity would tolerate.

For instance, the state should not be required to take the lowest bid without regard to quality. This often ends up costing more in the long run because of cost overruns and lawsuits over faulty work.

We need to allow the use of alternative project management approaches, like Design/Build, where the architect and

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From the Acting Deputy Commissioner

In July 2003, the Division of Local Services (DLS) discontinued mailing various publications and notices. These publications are now posted on our website and issued by e-mail only. Local officials, or individuals with an interest in municipal finance, can "e-subscribe" to receive Cherry Sheets, *City & Town* and IGRs and Bulletins, etc.

The e-subscription service has many benefits. For example, local officials can submit multiple e-mail addresses and receive DLS publications at the town or city hall as well as at home or at the office. Multiple subscribers from a community decrease the likelihood that an IGR or Bulletin may be overlooked. Also, e-mail dissemination eliminates the time and cost of mailing. E-subscribers also receive publications and notices faster than they normally would if the materials were mailed.

I would like to encourage local officials who have not yet subscribed to do so. Simply click on the link at the top of the DLS home page at www.mass.gov/dls and follow the directions. It only takes a few seconds to enter a subscription. If your e-mail address changes, simply use the e-subscription service to cancel the old e-mail address and enter the new one.

Gerard D. Perry
Acting Deputy Commissioner

Legal

in Our Opinion

Questions & Answers

by James Crowley

Q: *Can assessors abate the value which appears on a motor vehicle excise bill based on the amount paid by the taxpayer for the vehicle?*

A: No. Pursuant to M.G.L. Ch. 60A Sec. 1, the excise is based on the value of the vehicle as determined by the Commissioner of Revenue upon certain percentages of the manufacturer's list price in the year of manufacture. The excise differs from a sales tax which is based on the purchase price. The Supreme Judicial Court has ruled that the statutory valuation methodology is constitutional. The Court rejected the taxpayer's claim that the excise must be based on the sale price of the vehicle. The decision is *Lily Transportation Corp. v. Assessors of Medford*, 427 Mass. 228 (1998). In the Court's view, the statutory purpose was not to apply a fair cash value standard to the valuation of each individual vehicle. Rather, the intent of the statute was to value collectively all vehicles in the same classification based on the manufacturer's list price. In keeping with the legislative purpose, the Commissioner of Revenue used standardized Blue Book values rather than an individualized approach to value. According to the Supreme Judicial Court, the value for purposes of motor vehicle excise was not statutorily required to be the actual purchase price of the vehicle.

Q: *A taxpayer who has a vehicle registered on January 1 subsequently in the year cancels the registration and takes the vehicle off the road for six months. The taxpayer later in the calendar year registers the vehicle again. The town issues two excise bills. Is the taxpayer entitled to an abatement?*

A: An excise is assessed for the privilege of registration. The excise is in lieu of a personal property tax and the Legislature has not afforded an abatement where the taxpayer merely cancels the registration but retains ownership of the vehicle. Accordingly, the taxpayer is liable for the first bill that was issued for the entire calendar year. Upon proof of payment of the first bill, however, the taxpayer can receive an abatement of the second bill. M.G.L. Ch. 60A Sec. 1 provides an abatement of an excise bill issued where there is the subsequent registration of the same vehicle in the same year by the same person.

Q: *Should the assessors abate and recommit an excise bill for the current year if the taxpayer in the prior year moved to another city or town in the Commonwealth but never notified the Registry of Motor Vehicles of the address change?*

A: No. The taxpayer is obligated under M.G.L. Ch. 90 to notify the Registry within 30 days of an address change. It is not sufficient that the taxpayer merely notified his insurance agent. Accordingly, the Registry properly provided data to issue the tax bill to the municipality where he formerly resided. No abatement should be granted.

Q: *What motor vehicle excise information would the Driver Privacy Protection Act bar from disclosure?*

A: This federal Act (18 USC 721), which went into effect in Massachusetts on September 13, 1997, limits disclosure of personal information held by the Registry of Motor Vehicles or obtained by municipalities from the Registry. The Supervisor of Public Records in an Advisory Opinion (SPR 97/775) has held that the types of information from the Registry which are personal and cannot be disclosed include: the photograph, Social Security number, driver identification number, name, address, telephone number, and medical or disability information. Local officials, how-

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Focus

on Municipal Finance

Motor Vehicle Excise Update

by Joan E. Grourke

The total motor vehicle excise (MVE) collected statewide increased almost 48 percent over the past six years, from FY97 to FY02. Despite the fact that the nation entered into a recession during this period, there were increases in motor vehicle excise collections ranging from almost 5 to 13 percent in four of the six years. Looking back 10 years, there was a 90.6 percent increase in total statewide MVE collections from FY93 to FY02.

The MVE is paid to the community where the vehicle is garaged.[1] The Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) calculates the amount of the motor vehicle excise due by multiplying the excise value of the vehicle by the $25 per thousand rate specified in the Massachusetts General Laws. The excise value of a vehicle is the applicable percentage of the manufacturer's suggested retail price for the year the vehicle was manufactured. The applicable percentages are:

In the year preceding manufacture 50%
In the year of manufacture 90%
In the second year 60%
In the third year. 40%
In the fourth year. 25%
In the fifth and succeeding years 10%

City & Town's last analysis of motor vehicle excise receipts appeared in January 2001, when it was noted that there was a slowdown in collections (less than one percent) from FY98 to FY99. There were concerns that this slowdown may be signaling a declining trend in terms of statewide motor vehicle excise collections. Subsequent years' collections, however, have laid that theory to rest. As shown in *Figure 1,* there was a substantial increase (12.9 percent) in statewide total collections from FY99 to FY00. From FY00 to FY01 there was another sizeable increase (9.2 percent). While not as large as the increases seen in the two previous fiscal years, motor vehicle excise receipts rose another 4.6 percent from FY01 to FY02.

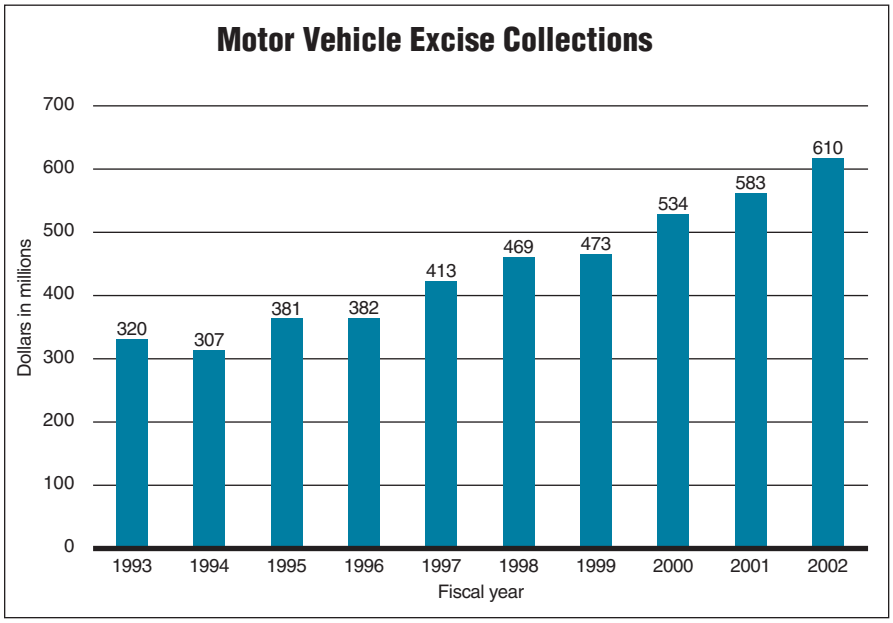

Figure 1

In 2003, an interest group filed a petition with the Attorney General's office to have a question placed on the statewide November 2004 ballot that would abolish the motor vehicle excise. However, this group failed to clear the hurdle of collecting the 65,825 signatures of Massachusetts registered voters necessary to have the question go before the voters.

It is interesting to note that over the past 10 years, motor vehicle receipts as a percent of the total municipal budget statewide were highest in FY00 (3.74 percent), FY01 (3.83 percent) and in FY02 (3.77 percent). This indicates an increasing dependency on motor vehicle excise receipts as a funding source for municipal operating expenses. While some car owners may have applauded the prospect of the demise of the annual motor vehicle excise bill, approval of the question would have left a sizeable hole in the budgets of some cash-strapped cities and towns.

An analysis of various economic factors provides one model that accounts for the tremendous upsurge in motor vehicle excise receipts from FY99 to FY02. *Figure 2* shows how factors such as the stock market, increases in personal income, declining interest rates and the housing boom all converged to contribute to a boom in new auto sales from 1999 to 2002. This, in turn, ultimately resulted in significant increases in motor vehicle excise collections in Massachusetts over the past few years.

As shown in *Figure 2*, the stock market was booming in 1999 and 2000, and not coincidentally, 2000 was a very healthy year in terms of personal income, with an increase of 8.0 percent over the pre-

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Motor Vehicle Excise FY01–02

Municipality	FY01 actual	FY02 actual	Avg. age CY2002	Avg. bill	Rank in avg. bill
Abington	1,480,007	1,401,931	8.68	95.07	176
Acton	2,550,606	2,715,908	7.55	127.37	37
Acushnet	880,277	993,028	9.21	79.91	283
Adams	747,102	776,984	9.10	82.20	268
Agawam	2,658,053	2,906,814	8.73	93.63	188
Alford	66,552	64,573	9.42	111.07	90
Amesbury	1,420,853	1,517,408	8.78	92.00	196
Amherst	1,381,646	1,430,071	9.17	83.11	265
Andover	4,530,611	4,422,916	7.33	146.60	9
Aquinnah	25,737	38,664	12.69	70.38	329
Arlington	3,832,194	4,108,738	7.95	111.57	88
Ashburnham	538,069	613,590	8.78	83.83	260
Ashby	256,363	329,556	9.62	80.15	280
Ashfield	144,333	148,641	9.69	71.13	327
Ashland	1,704,803	1,732,322	7.89	117.59	67
Athol	824,308	833,823	9.77	71.82	324
Attleboro	3,539,362	3,739,606	9.14	89.95	214
Auburn	1,840,068	2,193,485	7.76	116.51	72
Avon	740,550	773,499	8.73	118.74	64
Ayer	716,362	742,799	10.81	95.81	169
Barnstable	5,565,934	5,398,324	9.29	97.17	158
Barre	397,327	471,146	9.50	77.25	301
Becket	174,999	171,927	10.52	72.91	319
Bedford	1,477,693	1,533,986	8.16	119.97	58
Belchertown	1,075,623	1,204,628	9.23	81.71	270
Bellingham	1,484,527	1,613,293	8.74	94.86	177
Belmont	2,560,334	2,576,511	7.92	126.16	41
Berkley	547,228	607,820	8.74	90.31	212
Berlin	299,492	312,362	9.59	93.13	190
Bernardston	186,756	212,600	9.08	81.64	272
Beverly	4,260,252	3,994,430	8.57	106.25	113
Billerica	4,862,602	4,819,846	8.35	105.62	119
Blackstone	744,761	812,240	9.23	86.67	236
Blandford	174,175	98,076	9.95	80.78	278
Bolton	604,678	672,981	7.75	137.59	25
Boston	41,821,433	42,764,112	9.13	119.40	60
Bourne	1,838,140	2,038,081	8.70	95.85	167
Boxborough	591,163	619,585	7.45	117.89	66
Boxford	1,217,786	1,343,048	7.77	150.69	8
Boylston	536,074	693,724	7.60	126.91	39
Braintree	4,193,457	4,351,894	7.93	119.83	59
Brewster	1,072,477	1,120,623	9.13	91.20	208
Bridgewater	2,207,577	2,313,890	8.19	104.75	123
Brimfield	350,158	365,800	9.58	83.44	263
Brockton	5,182,949	5,971,229	10.00	78.76	294
Brookfield	282,158	343,592	8.66	90.40	210
Brookline	5,289,785	4,956,946	7.60	143.76	13
Buckland	126,826	127,266	9.85	66.31	342
Burlington	3,262,270	2,973,008	7.58	123.74	47
Cambridge	5,904,560	5,895,998	8.97	105.91	118
Canton	3,038,961	3,506,108	7.35	141.12	19
Carlisle	752,701	752,653	8.13	143.33	16
Carver	959,422	1,053,054	8.73	85.87	241
Charlemont	97,013	102,654	10.67	65.67	345
Charlton	1,142,585	1,325,297	8.25	95.93	166
Chatham	971,510	972,561	9.87	98.78	147
Chelmsford	3,834,680	4,014,532	7.92	109.91	96
Chelsea	1,905,700	2,170,362	9.12	118.99	63
Cheshire	329,791	357,443	9.20	84.67	252
Chester	95,423	108,709	10.41	71.99	322
Chesterfield	96,452	106,233	9.37	70.35	330
Chicopee	3,767,083	3,945,204	9.79	78.60	295
Chilmark	145,005	197,290	12.06	91.94	198
Clarksburg	134,882	146,827	8.73	86.00	240
Clinton	1,016,407	1,160,275	9.06	85.63	244
Cohasset	1,135,920	1,075,043	8.25	139.66	22
Colrain	123,889	141,808	10.29	69.28	335
Concord	2,314,373	2,215,729	7.73	143.73	14
Conway	150,504	175,541	8.82	82.99	266
Cummington	76,813	91,779	10.18	71.59	326
Dalton	627,961	678,565	8.15	91.33	206
Danvers	2,991,579	3,097,345	7.93	115.34	74
Dartmouth	2,664,091	2,923,372	8.78	93.17	189
Dedham	2,718,953	2,651,419	8.29	114.18	76
Deerfield	579,169	599,774	9.05	96.63	162
Dennis	1,678,175	1,938,491	9.25	94.45	180
Dighton	580,071	649,071	9.26	85.63	243
Douglas	689,216	775,520	8.88	92.81	192
Dover	952,541	992,515	8.02	172.36	2
Dracut	2,886,384	2,519,802	8.41	98.27	151
Dudley	1,048,459	968,559	8.58	91.39	205
Dunstable	400,553	401,246	8.30	118.67	65
Duxbury	2,020,616	2,119,742	7.87	129.98	35
E. Bridgewater	1,133,620	1,257,426	8.99	86.80	234
E. Brookfield	212,595	246,545	8.83	87.75	232
E. Longmeadow	1,445,210	1,517,396	8.65	98.67	148
Eastham	517,935	725,402	9.71	83.36	264
Easthampton	1,181,507	1,264,346	9.25	75.77	310
Easton	2,405,545	2,544,412	7.92	116.97	69
Edgartown	580,009	678,388	11.84	90.84	209
Egremont	184,499	155,939	10.08	95.55	171
Erving	118,236	113,283	10.30	63.74	347
Essex	415,464	453,320	9.11	98.44	149
Everett	3,354,469	2,916,080	9.23	97.02	160
Fairhaven	1,162,284	1,404,520	9.06	79.18	290
Fall River	5,080,488	5,524,175	9.61	75.85	308
Falmouth	3,549,709	3,685,466	9.01	95.46	173
Fitchburg	2,511,060	2,745,277	9.76	78.48	296
Florida	48,838	62,403	10.17	66.56	341
Foxborough	2,047,951	2,275,560	7.69	120.11	56
Framingham	6,879,281	6,988,684	8.46	105.98	117
Franklin	3,488,644	3,665,045	7.66	126.73	40
Freetown	926,094	1,066,327	8.95	89.54	218
Gardner	1,308,777	1,577,856	8.72	83.44	262
Georgetown	969,300	910,127	8.54	105.05	122
Gill	183,172	173,100	9.38	85.03	248
Gloucester	2,670,309	2,719,489	9.05	95.24	175
Goshen	98,576	86,721	9.44	69.39	332
Gosnold	92	6,306	10.38	53.87	350
Grafton	1,697,145	1,694,213	7.94	105.52	120
Granby	510,210	563,533	9.56	78.45	297
Granville	133,795	169,684	10.81	81.14	273
Grt. Barrington	709,330	688,447	9.60	89.04	225
Greenfield	1,272,769	1,325,050	9.84	77.22	303
Groton	1,207,261	1,213,754	8.13	112.75	80
Groveland	597,430	599,964	8.61	95.52	172
Hadley	444,969	489,705	9.24	88.50	229
Halifax	653,867	755,829	8.70	88.81	227
Hamilton	807,650	943,620	8.72	111.04	91
Hampden	547,066	551,321	9.01	94.01	184
Hancock	68,976	115,433	9.32	97.81	154
Hanover	1,679,933	1,821,438	7.83	121.98	50
Hanson	940,606	1,017,247	9.37	91.63	202
Hardwick	204,716	238,764	10.07	75.70	311
Harvard	777,887	760,843	8.39	125.77	42
Harwich	1,432,329	1,429,651	9.07	96.89	161
Hatfield	393,358	423,535	9.23	97.95	153
Haverhill	4,722,143	4,966,805	8.83	93.87	185
Hawley	24,833	23,091	10.99	59.19	349
Heath	57,482	62,334	9.82	71.81	325
Hingham	2,748,584	2,726,504	7.85	132.05	33
Hinsdale	180,778	181,399	9.55	79.59	287
Holbrook	960,718	1,043,770	8.90	92.08	195
Holden	1,704,895	1,834,378	7.53	109.58	98
Holland	198,952	227,998	9.93	73.67	317
Holliston	1,675,250	1,681,368	7.96	116.62	71
Holyoke	1,803,907	1,991,447	11.22	70.04	331
Hopedale	633,041	684,230	8.31	119.12	62
Hopkinton	2,272,117	1,988,769	7.39	140.23	20
Hubbardston	411,702	442,409	8.98	89.62	217
Hudson	1,811,411	1,801,853	8.65	100.37	137
Hull	933,798	1,021,017	8.92	96.47	164
Huntington	171,072	186,769	9.98	68.36	336
Ipswich	1,365,629	1,757,610	8.42	106.24	114
Kingston	1,252,570	1,409,293	8.39	103.91	128
Lakeville	1,048,934	1,115,296	8.56	95.84	168
Lancaster	540,262	506,088	9.08	91.52	204
Lanesborough	340,483	349,738	9.12	88.98	226
Lawrence	3,257,494	3,063,345	11.35	67.77	339
Lee	559,520	552,907	8.94	84.52	253
Leicester	827,115	981,801	8.75	84.51	254
Lenox	540,759	611,784	8.70	105.09	121
Leominster	3,752,183	3,789,416	8.62	92.30	194
Leverett	145,753	162,104	10.09	75.80	309
Lexington	3,921,089	3,782,090	7.45	139.37	23
Leyden	40,865	75,990	9.50	75.41	314
Lincoln	902,274	878,835	7.95	143.51	15
Littleton	1,054,073	1,095,081	8.19	109.14	101
Longmeadow	2,123,635	2,007,714	7.91	135.24	29
Lowell	6,142,390	6,287,208	9.86	80.97	276
Ludlow	1,489,142	1,804,955	9.11	83.89	259
Lunenburg	1,059,995	1,237,735	8.73	92.61	193
Lynn	4,689,629	5,478,480	10.60	78.14	298
Lynnfield	1,657,896	1,763,560	7.61	146.15	10
Malden	3,823,101	4,142,019	8.78	96.60	163
Manchester	775,006	788,187	8.20	134.81	30
Mansfield	2,461,970	2,643,404	7.78	120.34	55
Marblehead	2,689,466	2,684,652	8.23	135.65	28
Marion	584,899	602,425	8.75	104.05	125
Marlborough	3,745,861	4,076,471	8.38	103.77	129
Marshfield	2,863,532	2,925,065	8.37	107.00	107
Mashpee	1,377,240	1,366,619	8.38	103.99	127
Mattapoisett	669,067	774,005	8.40	99.62	143
Maynard	927,030	1,050,297	8.70	97.58	156
Medfield	1,554,586	1,451,634	7.49	138.96	24
Medford	4,741,801	4,679,783	8.36	108.24	103
Medway	1,299,507	1,423,823	8.82	112.11	84
Melrose	2,404,297	2,576,993	7.94	111.64	87
Mendon	712,931	721,042	8.47	110.79	92
Merrimac	619,682	637,232	8.52	96.26	165

Municipality	FY01 actual	FY02 actual	Avg. age CY2002	Avg. bill	Rank in avg. bill
Methuen	3,871,423	4,598,319	8.68	93.67	187
Middleborough	1,784,082	2,051,036	8.95	85.72	242
Middlefield	41,450	50,267	10.68	71.11	328
Middleton	949,896	995,756	8.07	124.70	44
Milford	2,752,855	2,909,605	8.40	103.59	130
Millbury	1,066,419	1,479,016	8.52	94.37	181
Millis	879,987	819,038	8.43	107.28	106
Millville	245,997	288,430	9.13	84.95	249
Milton	2,731,346	2,770,540	8.16	123.76	46
Monroe	8,080	10,116	9.28	94.51	179
Monson	711,281	805,114	10.03	79.34	288
Montague	532,467	566,490	10.13	65.82	343
Monterey	104,588	98,091	9.64	89.10	224
Montgomery	80,195	87,596	10.35	80.12	281
Mt. Washington	11,418	18,364	12.51	79.26	289
Nahant	420,860	449,340	8.59	113.67	78
Nantucket	1,613,682	2,003,138	12.34	112.20	83
Natick	3,744,668	4,156,493	7.73	121.46	52
Needham	4,016,475	3,941,905	7.19	145.97	11
New Ashford	21,853	30,078	8.90	84.73	251
New Bedford	4,778,977	5,418,279	9.73	74.40	316
New Braintree	90,978	104,378	11.15	79.00	292
New Marlborough	188,441	133,599	10.79	91.23	207
New Salem	80,020	84,722	10.37	67.96	338
Newbury	766,652	909,997	8.57	109.56	99
Newburyport	1,779,829	2,163,847	8.15	112.57	81
Newton	9,747,954	9,848,559	7.50	141.39	18
Norfolk	1,063,752	1,185,561	7.99	125.17	43
N. Adams	877,312	902,618	9.82	74.49	315
N. Andover	3,519,338	3,447,080	7.57	135.68	27
N. Attleborough	2,643,572	2,834,672	8.37	99.73	141
N. Brookfield	350,275	397,150	9.59	76.94	304
N. Reading	1,860,327	1,952,490	8.25	122.78	49
Northampton	1,827,557	2,137,831	9.40	82.38	267
Northborough	1,750,466	1,850,757	7.84	121.61	51
Northbridge	1,184,194	1,270,633	8.74	87.56	233
Northfield	262,587	291,585	9.24	78.85	293
Norton	1,746,920	1,829,476	8.43	100.36	138
Norwell	1,776,449	1,601,868	7.69	139.83	21
Norwood	4,123,028	3,531,738	7.70	119.19	61
Oak Bluffs	380,777	509,353	12.05	79.68	286
Oakham	169,641	176,494	9.53	84.90	250
Orange	473,165	537,324	10.37	64.48	346
Orleans	992,862	903,450	9.35	99.46	145
Otis	157,936	173,485	10.72	88.53	228
Oxford	1,174,735	1,467,499	8.31	94.23	183
Palmer	1,012,983	1,102,581	9.71	77.87	300
Paxton	408,171	592,118	7.39	120.07	57
Peabody	4,911,711	5,221,779	8.20	106.57	110
Pelham	108,505	121,994	8.92	76.82	305
Pembroke	1,687,889	1,847,635	8.40	101.04	135
Pepperell	1,059,396	1,215,829	8.98	91.70	201
Peru	61,262	58,721	9.79	69.29	333
Petersham	102,904	105,194	9.37	81.12	274
Phillipston	139,515	152,722	9.51	79.10	291
Pittsfield	3,670,551	3,756,330	8.83	89.69	215
Plainfield	45,459	52,561	10.15	65.82	344
Plainville	854,130	855,281	8.02	102.18	133
Plymouth	5,768,325	5,631,421	8.37	99.85	140
Plympton	263,351	343,040	9.48	89.52	219
Princeton	433,153	435,424	8.80	106.72	108
Provincetown	380,336	422,292	10.70	101.02	136
Quincy	7,356,739	7,791,210	8.33	106.16	116
Randolph	2,896,682	2,894,283	8.55	104.01	126
Raynham	1,472,382	1,500,367	8.09	107.44	105
Reading	2,697,552	2,654,966	7.48	121.27	53
Rehoboth	1,080,040	1,235,169	9.41	93.83	186
Revere	4,182,410	4,058,420	8.85	111.69	86
Richmond	197,214	203,855	9.31	104.45	124
Rochester	515,620	576,435	9.31	91.98	197
Rockland	1,522,184	1,629,947	8.97	89.51	220
Rockport	681,300	771,346	8.86	99.37	146
Rowe	34,497	34,163	10.93	75.46	313
Rowley	702,516	738,059	8.53	106.16	115
Royalston	98,026	83,922	10.64	68.28	337
Russell	134,384	141,565	10.21	73.34	318
Rutland	733,069	732,337	7.83	97.58	155
Salem	2,925,787	2,901,526	9.15	89.40	221
Salisbury	810,000	894,461	9.61	89.66	216
Sandisfield	77,743	90,335	9.87	75.62	312
Sandwich	2,182,404	2,390,501	8.34	106.32	111
Saugus	2,821,726	2,900,183	8.23	108.67	102
Savoy	63,321	66,101	9.69	72.21	321
Scituate	2,000,748	2,007,261	8.35	109.40	100
Seekonk	1,497,330	1,716,866	8.95	99.96	139
Sharon	1,933,973	2,532,491	7.15	137.48	26
Sheffield	428,239	374,838	10.78	84.04	258
Shelburne	145,854	161,902	9.86	77.95	299
Sherborn	642,752	666,805	8.10	151.28	6
Shirley	470,039	574,712	8.81	90.24	213
Shrewsbury	3,919,368	4,127,776	7.50	127.09	38
Shutesbury	140,400	135,766	9.52	71.96	323
Somerset	1,477,250	1,651,145	8.56	86.56	237
Somerville	4,464,410	5,364,693	9.17	87.77	231
S. Hadley	1,360,238	1,594,353	8.57	94.35	182
Southampton	511,007	587,899	9.12	86.69	235
Southborough	1,675,940	1,570,374	7.51	151.71	5
Southbridge	1,126,985	1,280,961	9.53	81.70	271
Southwick	789,936	937,018	10.14	81.89	269
Spencer	1,117,698	1,159,219	9.02	89.18	222
Springfield	6,804,860	8,049,061	11.37	72.44	320
Sterling	847,947	1,031,833	8.03	106.28	112
Stockbridge	303,298	289,214	9.57	102.75	132
Stoneham	2,439,120	2,589,077	7.81	115.95	73
Stoughton	2,869,341	3,101,861	8.05	107.57	104
Stow	689,795	733,088	8.29	109.61	97
Sturbridge	891,486	958,812	7.86	102.97	131
Sudbury	2,558,043	2,550,667	7.55	157.42	4
Sunderland	285,473	309,199	9.32	84.25	257
Sutton	858,768	1,175,035	8.08	110.31	94
Swampscott	1,759,513	1,694,117	7.93	129.69	36
Swansea	1,363,893	1,502,615	9.11	84.41	255
Taunton	4,798,001	4,647,390	8.95	86.31	238
Templeton	557,667	554,477	8.90	85.11	247
Tewksbury	3,710,690	3,555,823	7.86	111.83	85
Tisbury	551,594	689,706	11.48	97.04	159
Tolland	40,788	49,474	10.92	80.78	277
Topsfield	851,602	919,702	7.92	132.23	32
Townsend	852,308	890,684	8.95	85.30	246
Truro	271,765	314,521	10.43	97.20	157
Tyngsborough	1,303,468	1,411,228	8.51	113.17	79
Tyringham	42,725	57,671	8.97	91.89	199
Upton	731,364	782,110	8.31	110.72	93
Uxbridge	1,144,260	1,369,391	8.70	94.75	178
Wakefield	3,007,008	2,931,145	7.86	117.24	68
Wales	143,814	147,137	10.51	67.13	340
Walpole	2,901,454	2,777,181	7.90	124.32	45
Waltham	5,634,915	5,634,222	8.48	106.67	109
Ware	705,027	715,452	9.97	77.22	302
Wareham	1,617,491	1,932,017	9.26	80.07	282
Warren	323,135	353,922	10.14	69.28	334
Warwick	53,047	62,005	9.59	60.21	348
Washington	58,369	57,857	9.96	79.70	284
Watertown	3,276,731	3,319,651	8.11	115.05	75
Wayland	1,871,892	1,887,663	7.74	145.96	12
Webster	1,416,384	1,502,112	9.19	88.07	230
Wellesley	3,837,247	3,903,497	7.42	164.40	3
Wellfleet	340,935	344,643	10.17	86.26	239
Wendell	60,942	60,757	11.24	53.27	351
Wenham	465,270	495,890	8.63	132.83	31
W. Boylston	840,133	847,506	8.08	109.93	95
W. Bridgewater	759,598	885,661	8.96	99.71	142
W. Brookfield	350,541	369,607	9.34	81.11	275
W. Newbury	449,021	578,856	8.48	113.75	77
W. Springfield	2,373,853	2,529,815	9.38	91.59	203
W. Stockbridge	154,078	170,530	9.12	98.07	152
W. Tisbury	267,101	290,028	11.90	89.14	223
Westborough	2,778,226	2,346,204	7.52	130.04	34
Westfield	3,671,556	3,595,478	9.34	90.38	211
Westford	2,680,560	2,694,689	7.61	123.07	48
Westhampton	152,193	150,887	9.36	83.63	261
Westminster	782,857	923,268	8.79	95.60	170
Weston	2,411,836	2,035,263	7.48	191.05	1
Westport	1,462,040	1,475,711	9.19	84.32	256
Westwood	2,034,010	2,130,210	7.22	150.87	7
Weymouth	5,184,104	5,437,788	8.56	98.31	150
Whately	147,908	153,849	10.23	80.17	279
Whitman	1,074,892	1,254,807	8.83	92.83	191
Wilbraham	1,523,738	1,670,243	8.25	112.41	82
Williamsburg	224,577	229,428	9.75	79.68	285
Williamstown	626,114	630,279	8.97	99.59	144
Wilmington	2,739,069	2,968,025	7.77	120.55	54
Winchendon	660,748	880,593	9.39	76.58	306
Winchester	2,715,222	2,638,523	7.73	142.35	17
Windsor	89,521	92,794	9.16	85.32	245
Winthrop	1,238,825	1,733,457	8.82	102.09	134
Woburn	5,219,647	4,762,901	8.23	116.75	70
Worcester	12,108,557	13,309,452	9.06	95.24	174
Worthington	103,111	118,439	8.97	76.25	307
Wrentham	1,290,382	1,257,249	8.40	111.51	89
Yarmouth	2,733,700	2,496,662	9.15	91.81	200
State total	**583,164,568**	**609,933,729**			

Table 2

Motor Vehicle Excise Update **continued from page three**

Economic Trends

Year	New Vehicle Sales (000s)	Annual change	Personal Income (000s)	Annual change	NASDAQ	Annual change	Mortgage rates	Annual change	House price index	Annual change	Statewide excise	Annual change	Fiscal year
Dec. 94	15,412.8		5,878,362		751.6		8.3%		131.4		381,495,196		FY95
Dec. 95	15,117.6	-1.9%	6,192,235	5.3%	924.7	23.0%	8.1%	-0.3%	135.8	3.3%	381,538,377	0.0%	FY96
Dec. 96	15,456.1	2.2%	6,538,103	5.6%	1,165.4	26.0%	7.9%	-0.2%	141.4	4.1%	413,125,946	8.3%	FY97
Dec. 97	15,498.3	0.3%	6,928,545	6.0%	1,468.0	26.0%	7.7%	-0.2%	147.1	4.1%	469,266,235	13.6%	FY98
Dec. 98	15,963.7	3.0%	7,418,497	7.1%	1,793.0	22.1%	6.9%	-0.8%	155.1	5.4%	472,968,007	0.8%	FY99
Dec. 99	17,413.6	9.1%	7,779,521	4.9%	2,721.2	51.8%	7.4%	0.5%	163.5	5.4%	543,082,837	12.9%	FY00
Dec. 00	17,816.9	2.3%	8,398,871	8.0%	3,777.9	38.8%	8.1%	0.7%	175.3	7.2%	583,164,568	9.2%	FY01
Dec. 01	17,472.2	-1.9%	8,677,490	3.3%	2,030.5	-46.3%	6.9%	-1.2%	189.5	8.1%	609,933,729	44.6%	FY02
Dec. 02	17,137.8	-1.9%	8,922,320	2.8%	1,543.2	-24.0%	6.3%	-0.6%	202.9	7.1%	575,043,728	-5.7%	FY03 est.
Dec. 03	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.4%	-0.8%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	

Data provided by the City of Boston's Office of Budget Management. All figures used in this analysis, with the exception of statewide excise amounts, are national figures.

Figure 2

vious year. Although auto sales in 1999 set a record, 2000 sales surpassed that record.

In March 2001, however, the recession began to take hold. After the recession started, interest rates fell each year from 2000 onward, which in turn set off a housing market boom. While some people sold their property, many chose to refinance their mortgages. With more expendable funds as a result of refinancing, many took advantage of the auto makers' "zero percent financing" and purchased new automobiles. Despite the recession, new auto sales remained very strong, decreasing only slightly in the next two years after 2000, by 1.9 percent from 2000 to 2001 and by and another 1.9 percent from 2001 to 2002. These record new vehicle sales resulted in the upsurge in statewide motor vehicle excise collections discussed above in fiscal years 2000 through 2002.

However, the FY03 budgeted amount for statewide motor vehicle excise collections is $575 million or 5.7 percent less than the FY02 actual amount collected. This figure is skewed since it reflects a conservative budgeting approach. Actual FY03 receipts should be more in keeping with the trend of increasing motor vehicle receipts (statewide).

Local Trends

Table 1 shows MVE collections for each of the 351 communities in Massachusetts for FY01 and FY02. It gives collections in FY01 and FY02, the average age of vehicles, the average MVE bill and the rank of the average bill. Generally, as average age increases, the average bill decreases. However, in some communities, more expensive initial prices increase the average bills even though the vehicles are older.

The RMV provides billing information, including vehicle identification numbers and the amounts of excise due to the community in which those vehicles are registered. This information is called a commitment and there are usually several commitments to each community within one year. The community is responsible for sending out the bills and collecting the amounts due. Average bills for calendar year 2002 (CY02) have been calculated by dividing the total MVE that the Registry committed to each community by the number of bills in that community. The total average tax bill statewide for motor vehicle excise is $103.04.

When communities are arrayed starting with the highest average MVE bill, Weston is first at $191.05 and the town of Wendell is last with $53.27. The five communities with the highest average bills are Weston ($191.05), Dover ($172.36), Wellesley ($164.40) Sudbury ($157.42) and Southborough ($151.71). Only one of these communities, Wellesley, is among the 10 communities with the newest vehicles. Wellesley ranks eighth with an average age of 7.42 years.

The communities with the lowest average bills are Wendell ($53.27), Gosnold ($53.87), Hawley ($59.19), Warwick ($60.21) and Erving ($63.74). With the exception of Gosnold, these are all small towns in western Massachusetts. Although all are in the bottom third when ranked by average age of vehicles, none are among the 10 communities with the oldest cars.

The communities with the oldest vehicles tend to be located on the island of Martha's Vineyard. Aquinnah (12.69 years), Chilmark (12.06 years), Oak Bluffs (12.05 years), West Tisbury (11.90 years), Edgartown (11.84 years) and Tisbury (11.48 years), are all island communities where summer residents often leave an old car to avoid the hassle of bringing a vehicle on the ferry, yet have transportation available while on the island. Mount Washington ranks second in terms of average age of ve-

continued on nine

DLS Update

Collaboration Increases Between DLS and MassGIS

by Neil MacGaffey and Christian Jacqz, Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS)

Recently, MassGIS and the Division of Local Services (DLS) have been collaborating on two projects: property valuation and sales data at DLS, and GIS (digital map) data at MassGIS. Interest in this collaboration has been sparked by two factors: 1) the use of the Internet to provide access to map information, and 2) the increasing availability of assessing data and assessors' maps in a digital form that can be used in geographic information systems.

The following is an overview of these two projects.

Online Assessing Data and Maps

DLS has worked for many years with a consortium of communities on a computer-assisted mass appraisal (CAMA) system. Many of those communities have been making their assessors' data, and sometimes their assessors' maps, available via the Internet. Some communities have submitted parcel data to MassGIS that comply with the MassGIS digital parcel standard (see http://www.state.ma.us/mgis/muniparc.htm) and will have their parcel maps served to the public from the MassGIS website along with basic assessing data. However, for some communities, especially rural communities, this has not been an option. DLS has worked with the Town of Hardwick on a prototype website for providing online viewing of assessing information for such communities. MassGIS has supported this project by making available to DLS staff training in the use of a highly accurate color drum scanner. This has made it possible for the prototype website to include scanned assessors' maps from Hardwick. The project has been very successful for the town (see the result of this project at http://csc-ma.us/hardwick and click on the link "Hardwick Real Estate Lot Maps").

MassGIS is now investigating how well the scanned Hardwick maps can be tied to actual locations on the earth ("geo-referenced"). Geo-referencing the maps would make it possible to display the map scans over a backdrop of the MassGIS/MassHighway color aerial photographs ("orthophotos") or a street map. This additional capability would enable users of the website to more easily see the assessors' maps in the vicinity of the property that is the focus of their inquiry. To see a range of online mapping examples, go to http://state.ma.us/mgis/mapping.htm.

Online Statewide Recent Sales Data on a Map

DLS collects information from cities and towns about recent real estate sales. This is provided to DLS, which then aggregates it in what is referred to as the "LA3 file." DLS stores the LA3 file in an Oracle database.

MassGIS is proposing to take the LA3 file and derive estimated locations as points on a map corresponding to each sale. These points would then be displayed on an Internet site with other map features (e.g., town boundaries, roads, surface waters). Users of this Internet site could search for sales by location, date, use code, and price. Search results would be displayed on the Internet site.

Web Map Services

Web map services (WMS) are a recently developed Internet technology that makes possible combined display on one website of information from multiple sources. Using a WMS, a website developer can include a map on their site without having the specialized map-making software or GIS map data. Instead, the developer sends requests in a standardized format to another website (the WMS) that does have the mapping software and data; this other site responds to that request by returning a map for display on the developer's website. The user's address, along with information about the area to be shown and the desired map features (e.g., roads, property boundaries, surface waters), are included in a request to the WMS. As long as the WMS request is constructed so that the address and map feature information is presented in the expected standard manner, then the WMS will return the requested map for display on the original website.

Conclusion

The new and exciting aspect of these projects is that GIS capabilities can be provided to cities and towns through Internet tools that allow for pulling information from different sources or even different locations. Using WMS achieves a result with an impact that is greater than the sum of the parts. In the above projects, these tools are, on the one hand, the database developed by DLS and the geocoded sales locations by MassGIS, and on the other, WMS developed and provided by MassGIS.

The above projects are only a beginning. More and more communities are converting their assessor's maps to a format suitable for using in GIS and other computer mapping environments. The registries of deeds index their holdings in computer databases and are now starting to make those indices as well as scanned versions of their documents available via the Internet. With Web services, we may be able to link all these together on an Internet site, providing assessors maps and databases together with digital registry information in a win-win combination. ■

DLS Update

Summary of 2003 Laws

Recently, the Division of Local Services issued Bulletin 2004-03B entitled "Summary of 2003 Municipal Finance Law Changes." This Bulletin includes any legislative changes affecting municipal finance found in Chapters 1–172 of the Acts of 2003. This Bulletin is available on our website (www.mass.gov/dls) in the Quick Links Box or by linking to http://www.dls.state.ma.us/PUBL/bullidx.htm. Copies of these new laws can be obtained from the website of the State Legislature: www.mass.gov/legis or the State Bookstore (617-727-2834) in Room 116 of the State House.

Multiple Stabilization Funds

The Division of Local Services (DLS) has issued Informational Guideline Release (IGR) No. 04-201 entitled "Creation of Multiple Stabilization Funds and Proposition 2½ Overrides for Stabilization Funds." This IGR informs local officials about this new legislation that was adopted in July 2003 as part of the Municipal Relief Act.

Previous legislation provided for a single stabilization fund into which cities, towns and districts could appropriate monies to be reserved for future appropriation for any lawful purpose. Under this new legislation, a community may now establish one or more stabilization funds for different purposes by a two-thirds vote of its legislative body.

In addition, this new legislation authorizes a property tax levy limit override under Proposition 2½. Under this new provision, a city or town that has an override approved by its voters for the purpose of making appropriations to any stabilization fund must now allocate the additional levy capacity resulting from that override to the same purpose in subsequent years.

For more information, this IGR is available on the DLS website at http://www.dls.state.ma.us/PUBL/IGR/2004/igr04_201.pdf.

Guide to Town Meetings

In accordance with statute, annual town meetings, unless otherwise provided by special law or charter, must be held in February, March, April or May. The Board of Selectmen may delay the annual meeting, but it must be completed by June 30.

With the annual town meeting season upon us, a timely reference is the Secretary of State's *Citizen's Guide to Town Meetings*. This guide is available online at http://www.state.ma.us/sec/cis/cistwn/twnidx.htm. Although each town has a different way of running its town meeting, depending on its bylaws or charter, this guide provides a broad overview of the way town meetings operate. In a question and answer format, it addresses such topics as the differences between open and representative town meetings, the warrant, the differences between special and annual town meetings, citizen participation in town meetings and town meeting procedures and motions.

This guide is a good resource for town meeting newcomers as well as those who just want to brush up on town meeting basics. ■

Construction Reform **continued from page one**

the contractor work together as a team from the beginning of a project. Massachusetts is only one of five states not to permit Design/Build.

We should also adopt "Construction Manager at Risk" on larger projects, so that the contractor and not taxpayers pay for cost overruns.

Municipalities need to hire a professional project manager to oversee the building process. Having professionals on hand will reduce the burden on volunteer board members, help avoid costly errors, ensure quality and hold contractors accountable.

Finally, it is time to eliminate something called "filed subcontractor bidding." Massachusetts is now the only state in the nation to require that all the subcontractors, as many as 17 on a typical job, bid separately and independently from the contractor. This results in the hiring of subcontractors who have no incentive to work together toward the success of the overall project. Almost 25 years ago, the Ward Commission highlighted the extraordinary waste and corruption associated with the Commonwealth's filed sub-bid laws. It's time to abolish filed sub-bids.

In the coming weeks, our Administration looks forward to working with the Legislature's Special Commission on Construction Reform to take action on these and other initiatives. Time is short: the current favorable interest rates may not last until the budget is passed in June. We need to act now on School Building Assistance and construction reform as a package.

The Legislature is sure to hear from special interests opposing any reform; they also need to hear from parents, teachers and taxpayers who care about our children and who want their tax dollars spent wisely. For the sake of your community and your schools, please contact your State Representative and State Senator to let them know that construction reform matters to you — and that it can't wait. ■

DLS Profile: BOA Supervisor

Richard Sciarappa is a veteran staff member who has worked in the Bureau of Accounts (BOA) for 25 years. During that time span, he has worked under five Directors of Accounts.

Richard Sciarappa

For the past three years, he has been the supervisor of the five BOA field representatives who work in the Boston office. He is also the BOA field representative for Everett and Medford.

Rich began his career in BOA as a municipal auditor. He eventually moved to the Bureau's debt section, which conducts the State House Note program. For many years, he reviewed balance sheets for cities, towns and regional school districts statewide for certification of free cash.

One town official who has been especially appreciative of Rich's work is Medford Finance Director, Ann Baker. Ann has known Rich for several years. She said that Rich "understands the needs of the cities and towns. He also is good at conveying the needs of the Department of Revenue, as well." Ann also pointed out that "Rich is attentive to his clients. He does a good job at keeping us informed."

A native of Cambridge, Rich has worked for the Bureau since shortly after his graduation from Boston University in 1978. He holds a bachelor's degree in business administration. Rich and his family reside in Somerville and he is the father of twin teen-aged daughters. ■

Q&A **continued from page two**

ever, can disclose the vehicle identification number, license plate number and excise tax amount. The Act also specifically permits disclosure of information on vehicular accidents, driving violations and driver's status.

Q: *What is the DRIVE program and is it consistent with the Driver Privacy Protection Act?*

A: The Registrar of Motor Vehicles implemented the Distributed Registration and Information Vehicle Entry (DRIVE) program, which allows automobile dealers to communicate electronically with the Registry concerning new vehicle registrations and title transactions. A company which provided "runners" to bring paperwork from car dealers to the Registry on behalf of new car buyers challenged the legality of the program. At issue was M.G.L. Ch. 90 Sec. 3A, which states in pertinent part that "The Registrar shall not allow direct or indirect use of the computer terminals under his control, whether for inquiry into computer data files or otherwise. …" The Supreme Judicial Court ruled in *Bombardieri v. Registrar of Motor Vehicles*, 426 Mass. 371 (1998) that M.G.L. Ch. 90 Sec. 3A barred outside use of the Registry's terminals to search data files but did not bar inquiry by other means. In the Court's view, M.G.L. Ch. 90 Sec. 3A does not bar usage of or electronic access to the Registry's computerized data. ■

MVE Collections **continued from page six**

hicles at 12.51 years. Located on a mountain in Berkshire County, with one of the smallest populations in the state, many of its vehicles are trucks.

The communities with the newest vehicles are "commuter communities" close to Routes 95 and 128. Sharon (7.15 years), Needham (7.19 years), Westwood (7.22 years), Andover (7.33 years) and Canton (7.35 years) are the five towns with the newest cars.

The information on MVE collections used in this article comes from actual receipts reported on the FY02 tax rate recapitulation sheets. The Registry of Motor Vehicles provided information on the average age of vehicles and the total number of bills and excise committed in each community used to calculate the average bills. This data is available on the Division's website at www.dls.state.ma.us/allfiles.htm. ■

1. The Division of Local Services' website (www.mass.gov/dls) features a section on "Frequently Asked Questions" about the motor vehicle excise. To access, use the link in the "Quick Links" box on the home page.

City & Town
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