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City and Town

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DLS Gateway Brings Local Officials' Submissions Online

David Davies

A new suite of applications called DLS Gateway will allow a dozen cities and towns to begin pilot-testing online submission of tax rate, assessment certification, Schedule A and other municipal accounting data this summer. A prominent graphic and link for DLS Gateway will be at www.mass.gov and on DLS website pages. Local users will sign on with passwords to fill in forms, check for errors, run analytical reports, digitally sign, and formally submit financial and other required information. The information is stored in the DLS's Municipal Databank, and local officials can check on their community's status anytime, in real time. One objective is to remove telephone tag from the process of knowing when classification hearings can be scheduled or tax bills printed.

In preview presentations of DLS Gateway to municipal officials the most enthusiastic response has been the ability

to see the edits, error checking, and statistics that will apply to their submission **before** it is submitted. The highly complex annual filings of assessors and accountant/auditors always involved considerable communication back and forth. All too often, elected or appointed officials are new and untrained in their responsibilities. DLS Gateway will take some of the "wait and see" out of local submissions. It will give officials immediate feedback on whether they are meeting DLS benchmarks or requirements so that their actual submissions contain fewer issues and stand to be reviewed and approved faster.

Municipal pilot testing in fiscal year 2007-2008 will ensure that the programs are easy to use, that provisions for training and support are adequate when all 351 communities are involved and that all programs and permissions work as intended. About a dozen com-

munities have already volunteered to try out the new approach. Pilot communities should have a good track record in meeting tax billing and other deadlines, Internet access for affected departments, and a general willingness among the officials in assessing and accounting offices to spend some extra time working through the new programs.

The Division of Local Services determined two years ago that it should centralize all divisional information and activity in one online database. In addition to the local data submissions, all internal DLS processes have been moved to this Internet-based central system, so the information is available to all staff, managers as well as field representatives, through any Internet connection. Local Services will electronically store documents, publications, incoming mail, and any other types of files that are significant to DLS programs.

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DLS Commentary

The rising cost of health care is one of the largest single factors driving up the cost of local government in cities and towns. Governor Deval

Patrick, as part of his Municipal Partnership Act, has filed legislation that would allow municipalities to join the Commonwealth's Group Insurance Commission (GIC).

In order to assist communities the Division of Local Services has developed an [interactive spreadsheet](#) available on our website. This spreadsheet allows you to select your community and compare the increases in your community's health care expenditures with those of the Commonwealth's and other cities and towns.

The local health care expenditures are reported to the Division on the Annual Financial Report (Schedule A). For most communities this comparison is being done between FY01 and FY06; however there are a handful of communities that we are still reviewing the FY06 Schedule A. From FY01 to FY06 the GIC health care costs increased by 47.95 percent. During that same period 307 communities have seen their health care costs increase by a larger percentage than the GIC cost, and 144 communities costs are greater than 100 percent of what they were in FY01.

Each city and town is encouraged to use this data when evaluating their own plan as well as when considering the benefits of the governor's proposed legislation. Should you have any questions regarding this data, please contact Lisa Juszkiewicz at 617-626-2386.

Robert G. Nunes

Robert G. Nunes
Deputy Commissioner &
Director of Municipal Affairs

Best Practices

Lowell: GIS Upgrade

The City of Lowell through its Management Information Systems Department (MIS) has upgraded its online Geographic Information System (GIS). Lowell City Manager Bernard F. Lynch said the "upgrade marks the first major overhaul of the city's public GIS system since it was introduced in 2004, and positions the system for future expansion and additional features." This online tool provides the public with better access to geographic information on various data sets such as parcels, zoning, schools, historic districts, election wards, precincts and trash pickup. Upgrades include a streamlined interface, an auto-refresh feature, enhancement of the parcel attributes and their display frame, a drill down ID tool, .pdf printing and .jpg image saving. The consolidation of all of the GIS layers into a single database ensures consistency across all maps and dramatically increases the system's speed and performance. This upgrade allows the flexibility and functionality to eventually tie other external databases to the GIS layers further increasing their usefulness to the city.

Previously, the city contracted with vendors to host the site. It is estimated that Lowell will save approximately \$25,000 in hosting fees by doing it themselves, and give users access to a tremendous amount of information they would not otherwise have.

Transitioning to the new GIS was a little daunting to some users but was overcome by the fact that so much additional data is now available to everyone. Two thousand plus layers of data are incorporated into the updated integrated public site, with only public safety or sensitive data reserved for internal access only.

GIS Manager, Joe Donovan explained how useful this website can be. For example, when reviewing a business building permit the zoning officer must be knowledgeable about the proposed site and its potential effect. How will the city be impacted, does a proposed business fit within the zoning code, are floodplains involved, etc.? GIS can address all of these issues at once so that the city officials can make an educated informed decision. Using the GIS website the applicant, the public and the zoning officer see the same map data and all parties know if the proposal meets the zoning criteria eliminating research time by all parties. Generating an abutters list for a potential hearing can now be done with the click of a button thereby saving time and money.

In addition, Web GIS can be used to assist in city planning, zoning, facilities maintenance and public awareness. Residents can obtain data such as finding voting locations, trash day pickups, nearest schools, etc. without a fee and without a visit to City Hall.

The new tool continues the GIS department's mission "To help further the transformation of the relationship between local government and the community by making technology a tool for better government."

The City's GIS tools may be accessed via www.lowellma.gov/services/gis/. ■

Editor's note: Please submit your community's Best Practices to dlswebcontacts@dor.state.ma.us.

Legal

in Our Opinion

Firing of Employee over Benefits Upheld

James Crowley, Esq.

Sheryl Parker had worked for several years for the Town of North Brookfield. She was annually appointed by the board of selectmen as the town dog officer/animal control officer. Under M.G.L. Ch. 32B §2(d) she was eligible as a town employee to receive insurance benefits. In early 2004 she notified the selectmen that she wanted to enroll in the town's health insurance program effective July 1, 2004. This matter was discussed at a selectmen's meeting. Due to the high cost of insurance, the selectmen voted to terminate Parker's employment at the close of the fiscal year on June 30, 2004 and transfer her duties to the town police department. In October 2004 Parker filed suit in Superior Court on the grounds of wrongful termination. The trial judge dismissed the case, and Parker appealed to the Appeals Court. This recently issued decision is *Parker v. Town of North Brookfield*, 68 Mass. App. Ct. 235 (2007).

The Appeals Court first agreed that Parker had standing to file the lawsuit since M.G.L. Ch. 32B implicitly provided a private right of action. Although it was not expressly granted in the statute, and despite a judicial reluctance to infer a private cause of action, the Appeals Court held that a private right of action, in this instance, must be inferred. In the court's view, the Legislature had given to a limited class of individuals a right to receive health insurance benefits which would prove to be an illusory right unless there was some remedy for its enforcement. Nevertheless, the Appeals Court also held that M.G.L. Ch. 32B merely provided insurance benefits for

town employees and did not operate to provide job security for Parker who claimed the town could not discharge her solely to avoid paying health insurance. In agreement with the trial court, the Appeals Court held that eligibility for insurance did not protect the employment status of a town employee. According to the court, Parker's status as an at-will employee, subject to annual appointment, was not converted to guaranteed employment by virtue of her request for town insurance benefits. The court rejected plaintiff's argument since it severely limited the ability of a town to select at-will employees, and this was not the intent of the Legislature when it enacted M.G.L. Ch. 32B. The Appeals Court found no merit in Parker's reliance on federal legislation to strengthen her claim for job protection. Even though the Employment Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) expressly provided job security for employees exercising their rights made available under ERISA, the Massachusetts Legislature did not take a similar approach in its enactment of the insurance benefits provisions of M.G.L. Ch. 32B.

The plaintiff also contended that her job termination was contrary to public policy. Parker alleged that her legally guaranteed right to obtain insurance benefits should not be denied solely due to monetary considerations. The court rejected this argument since the increasing financial cost of insurance was a critical concern for municipalities. According to the court, a city or town should not be barred from considering the cost of insurance benefits in the appointment of at-will employees. In the case at hand, the Town of North Brookfield should have discretion in fiscal matters and

flexibility in employment "without fear of having to deal with the prospect of either having her locked into the position on a permanent basis or providing other consideration as redress."

Consequently, the court upheld a town's termination of an at-will employee in order to cut the cost of insurance benefits. ■

Local Aid Distributions and Reimbursements

Any distributions and reimbursements administered by the Division of Local Services' Municipal Databank are posted on the DLS website to assist communities or districts in identifying payments. MS Excel files are posted prior to the actual payments being made, including the quarterly local aid distributions, reimbursements for property tax exemptions, sewer rate relief funds, elderly exemptions, state-owned land reimbursements and community preservation state matching funds. All of these can be found on the DLS website under [Local Aid Distributions](#). For payments not administered by the Division of Local Services you can confirm the payment using the Office of the State Comptroller's [VendorWeb](#). To use VendorWeb you must know your community/district vendor code. [Vendor codes](#) can be found in the Municipal Databank section of the website.

If you need assistance using the Municipal Databank files or accessing payment information on VendorWeb, please contact Jared Curtis at 617-626-2320 or Donnette Benvenuto at 617-626-2360. ■

Focus

on Municipal Finance

Sewer Rate Relief, FY1994 to FY2007

Lisa Juskiewicz

In FY94, the governor and Legislature created a state program to mitigate sewer rate increases due to debt service obligations for qualified sewer construction projects. The Sewer Rate Relief Trust Fund was authorized under [Chapter 29, Section 2Z](#). The FY94 state budget allocated \$30 million to mitigate these increases in sewer rates resulting from eligible debt incurred. Since that date the total distributed from the Sewer Rate Relief Trust Fund has been \$472.6 million.

Under the provisions of Chapter 29, Section 2Z, eligible debt is defined as sewer debt issued on or after January 1, 1990 for a term greater than five years or for water pollution control projects.

Any project that receives a state grant is ineligible as are projects funded through the Massachusetts Water Pollution Abatement Trust (MWPAT), unless the debt exceeded \$50 million on June 30, 1995. Annual relief is calculated on 20 percent of eligible debt service. This program is administered jointly by the Division of Local Services (DLS) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Annually DLS issues a Bulletin with the application for Sewer Rate Relief Funds, which are reviewed by DLS and DEP to certify that the requirements of the legislation are being met each year. The [FY07 Bulletin 2006-13B](#) can be found on the DLS website; however the deadline for filing an application for FY07 was September 15, 2006. Applications for FY07 Sewer Rate Relief were reviewed by DLS and DEP and awards were calculated and distributed to communities,

districts and authorities with eligible debt service on April 5, 2007.

In the 17 years the program has existed, it has provided Sewer Rate Relief to 124 communities, districts and authorities. In the first year we distributed \$21.5 million to 33 eligible jurisdictions. In the eight years that followed, Sewer Rate Relief grew to over \$60 million, with the highest distribution occurring in FY01 at \$61.8 million. For FY01 the program provided relief to 101 communities, districts and authorities.

An economic downturn and state fiscal crisis in FY03 forced the elimination of the funding for Sewer Rate Relief. The program was revived in FY04 with an allocation of \$5 million in the final state budget. When FY04 funds were distributed they provided relief to 68 jurisdictions.

[continued on page four](#)

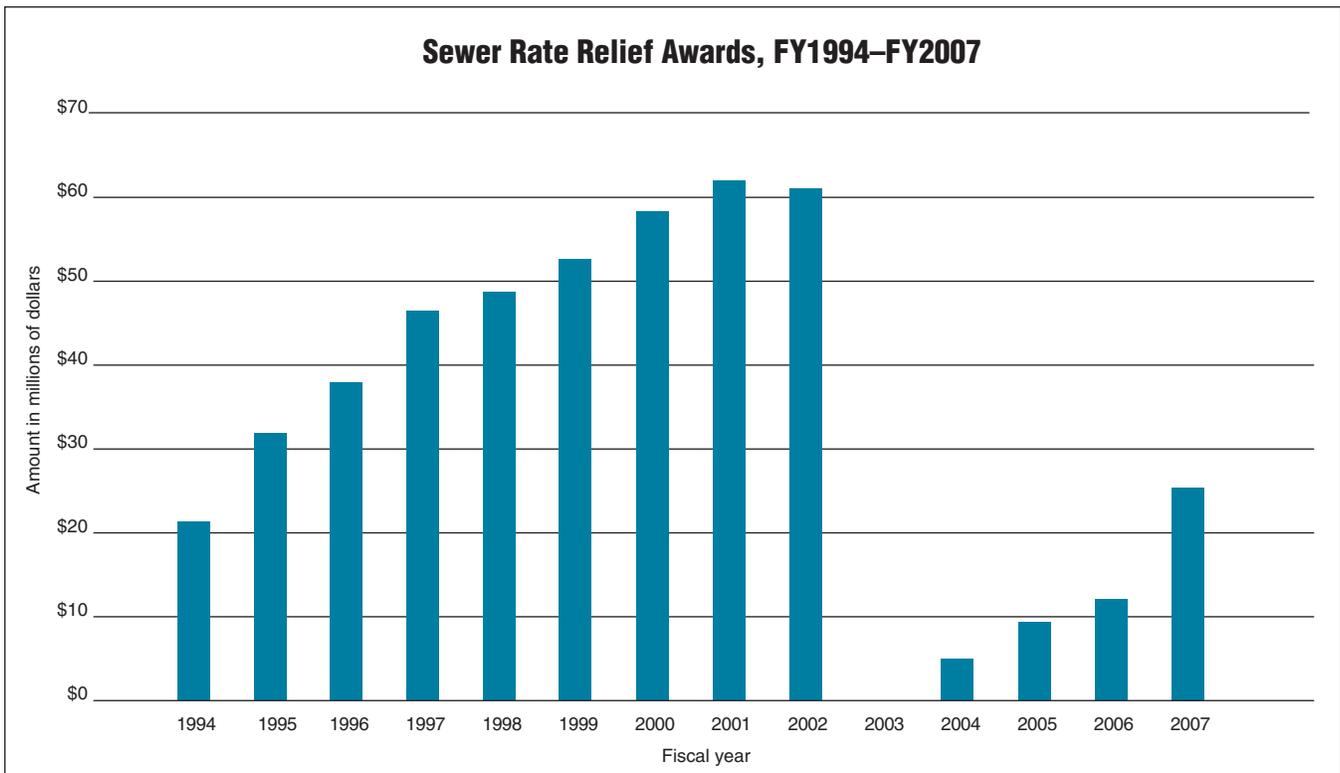


Chart 1

Sewer Rate Relief

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Sewer Rate Relief

Number of recipients and total amount awarded by fiscal year

Fiscal Year	Number of recipients	Award amount
FY1994	33	\$21,449,683
FY1995	51	31,720,095
FY1996	57	37,928,995
FY1997	68	46,389,840
FY1998	80	49,035,732
FY1999	88	52,255,630
FY2000	98	58,948,689
FY2001	101	61,816,989
FY2002	104	60,528,339
FY2003	0	0
FY2004	68	5,028,412
FY2005	62	9,978,667
FY2006	92	12,491,301
FY2007	98	25,006,057

Table 1

tions. There have been slight increases in the annual appropriation for FY05 through FY07. The FY07 appropriation of \$25 million saw 98 eligible jurisdictions. *Table 1* shows the number of communities, districts and authorities receiving assistance as well as the total amount of assistance awarded from FY94 to FY07. *Chart 1* graphically displays the Sewer Rate Relief Awards for fiscal years 1994 to the present.

Most communities receive direct assistance for eligible debt through this program, except for communities in the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA) and other sewer districts such as the South Essex Sewerage District (SESD). In the case of the MWRA and SESD, the sewer rate relief aid goes directly to the sewer authority/district and the member communities re-

ceive relief through lower sewer assessments from those districts.

Table 2 lists the amounts of relief awarded to each jurisdiction since the program began. Relief for FY94 through FY03 is combined and FY05 through FY07 are listed individually. The total awarded since FY94 has also been included. From FY94 to FY03, \$420.1 million has been awarded and since FY04 and additional \$52.5 million has been paid as part of the program. The overall total distributed to communities, districts and authorities since the program began is \$472.6 million.

An MS Excel [spreadsheet](#) showing all Sewer Rate Relief funds distributed to each jurisdiction for all fiscal years since FY94 is available on the Municipal Data-bank website.

Additional information regarding the Sewer Rate Relief Fund can be obtained from William Meehan of the Bureau of Accounts' Public Finance Section at 617-626-2382. ■

Sewer Rate Relief, FY1994 to FY2007

Municipality	FY1994 to FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	Total
Abington	0	0	0	36,216	67,813	104,029
Amesbury	170,791	4,201	18,022	17,749	33,198	243,961
Amherst	0	0	0	0	26,196	26,196
Andover	178,749	23,053	62,219	77,917	148,010	489,948
Ashburnham	173,858	0	0	0	0	173,858
Ashfield	64,457	525	968	1,204	765	67,919
Athol	20,608	0	0	3,318	6,160	30,086
Attleboro	438,624	0	0	17,162	58,799	514,585
Auburn	354,068	0	0	19,343	36,501	409,912
Ayer	75,640	0	22,351	25,402	47,643	171,036
Barnstable	748,089	4,039	7,457	15,445	41,612	816,642
Barre	0	4,439	0	10,407	24,654	39,500
Bellingham	638,845	5,285	10,037	12,787	24,184	691,138
Beverly	279,180	2,532	0	0	0	281,712
Billerica	2,256,079	53,219	96,273	130,127	236,031	2,771,729
Blackstone	0	0	0	0	72,751	72,751
Boxborough	0	0	0	467	4,548	5,015
Braintree	217,760	9,622	17,694	19,824	37,391	302,291
Brockton	1,287,854	10,050	18,511	20,653	38,869	1,375,937
Brookline	197,207	0	0	21,134	57,486	275,827
Cambridge	498,622	58,793	146,318	240,386	697,742	1,641,861
Canton	312,043	9,461	18,515	20,770	46,294	407,083

Municipality	FY1994 to FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	Total
Charlton	243,833	0	0	13,274	14,283	271,390
Chatham	8,157	0	0	0	0	8,157
Chelmsford	2,424,157	56,932	115,633	138,653	242,884	2,978,259
Chelsea	261,109	0	14,176	23,681	41,358	340,324
Chicopee	484,353	0	0	0	0	484,353
Clinton	2,448	0	0	0	0	2,448
Cohasset	60,376	5,446	0	11,458	21,332	98,612
Danvers	114,470	4,643	0	15,165	28,544	162,822
Dartmouth	339,663	4,362	0	16,144	34,948	395,117
Douglas	8,735	0	0	0	0	8,735
Dracut	392,123	22,178	40,703	45,659	75,683	576,346
Dudley	183,557	4,779	0	9,620	16,928	214,884
East Longmeadow	44,483	0	0	0	0	44,483
Easthampton	79,972	0	0	0	0	79,972
Edgartown	1,113,518	18,272	33,497	36,909	69,449	1,271,645
Fairhaven	0	0	0	27,586	52,070	79,656
Fall River	134,298	0	19,079	21,562	40,807	215,746
Fitchburg	673,548	11,678	33,953	37,348	87,630	844,157
Franklin	106,302	4,267	0	11,062	47,471	169,102
Gardner	227,986	0	0	5,072	9,335	242,393
Gloucester	129,876	0	0	0	0	129,876
Grafton	421,564	0	15,524	17,284	32,377	486,749
Great Barrington	586,952	7,739	14,146	15,752	29,512	654,101
Greenfield	90,120	801	1,452	0	0	92,373
Groton	6,172	229	0	470	883	7,754
Hingham	76,499	0	0	5,730	10,790	93,019
Hinsdale	8,644	0	0	0	0	8,644
Holbrook	334,164	0	0	39,106	74,149	447,419
Holyoke	264,985	0	3,475	3,867	7,230	279,557
Hopkinton	771,252	6,545	0	13,349	25,077	816,223
Hudson	72,736	1,309	0	2,666	4,964	81,675
Ipswich	181,447	5,206	0	0	0	186,653
Lexington	230,886	4,365	0	0	0	235,251
Lowell	1,261,088	18,310	28,923	23,813	55,300	1,387,434
Malden	121,927	1,221	689	778	1,436	126,051
Manchester	49,477	750	1,371	1,219	2,786	55,603
Marion	197,262	0	13,352	14,742	24,555	249,911
Marlborough	0	0	0	0	83,103	83,103
Marshfield	152,339	6,481	11,716	13,903	25,071	209,510
Mattapoissett	67,368	0	0	3,963	17,473	88,804
Merrimac	3,718	0	0	9,837	18,651	32,206
Methuen	358,341	0	7,775	8,731	8,001	382,848
Milford	376,782	7,789	13,807	15,372	42,181	455,931
Millbury	56,290	0	0	11,350	21,444	89,084
Milton	139,718	865	0	0	0	140,583
Monson	23,832	369	0	0	0	24,201
Montague	0	1,320	0	2,319	4,345	7,984
Nahant	19,156	0	0	0	0	19,156
Natick	39,026	0	11,963	13,002	24,399	88,390
Needham	626,497	8,848	13,755	19,738	25,986	694,824
New Bedford	6,331,503	82,208	154,872	175,648	365,091	7,109,322
Newburyport	191,173	0	9,937	10,860	46,822	258,792
Newton	74,936	1,268	0	2,541	5,173	83,918
North Andover	212,978	8,458	15,423	24,607	55,532	316,998
North Attleborough	566,514	0	25,493	28,375	55,262	675,644
North Brookfield	270,276	3,660	6,852	7,712	14,611	303,111
Northampton	530,404	0	0	0	0	530,404
Northfield	151,950	0	2,606	2,944	5,598	163,098
Otis	14,727	0	0	0	0	14,727
Palmer	203,781	2,218	6,518	6,723	14,630	233,870
Peabody	0	0	0	10,033	18,704	28,737

Municipality	FY1994 to FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	Total
Pepperell	590,146	9,950	0	21,525	43,854	665,475
Plymouth	172,285	4,580	8,193	9,105	17,018	211,181
Provincetown	0	0	0	0	7,240	7,240
Quincy	367,699	5,549	0	0	0	373,248
Randolph	30,360	0	0	0	0	30,360
Raynham	0	0	16,529	18,469	34,796	69,794
Rockland	1,905,089	20,027	23,799	26,347	46,139	2,021,401
Rockport	0	0	0	20,029	37,625	57,654
Rutland	101,444	0	1,460	1,602	2,952	107,458
Salisbury	500,711	13,431	24,238	26,806	49,838	615,024
Saugus	842,875	0	0	0	0	842,875
Scituate	177,338	0	0	0	0	177,338
Somerset	451,653	5,447	0	11,138	20,898	489,136
Somerville	424,408	0	0	0	0	424,408
South Hadley	175,211	0	0	0	0	175,211
Southwick	30,669	6,718	12,640	17,181	43,245	110,453
Sturbridge	57,776	10,861	19,886	22,363	42,277	153,163
Templeton	291,934	0	0	5,393	16,648	313,975
Tewksbury	336,938	7,357	25,070	54,754	166,334	590,453
Uxbridge	0	0	0	0	6,028	6,028
Wakefield	0	2,189	0	4,536	8,570	15,295
Walpole	83,073	1,949	3,568	5,653	10,250	104,493
Waltham	125,551	3,942	12,109	14,497	27,242	183,341
Wayland	143,312	1,294	0	0	0	144,606
West Springfield	283,216	0	17,671	14,777	20,572	336,236
West Stockbridge	82,951	0	0	2,659	5,004	90,614
Westborough	144,563	5,499	10,063	17,852	44,903	222,880
Westfield	426,153	6,095	10,220	11,262	19,038	472,768
Westwood	0	0	0	0	13,799	13,799
Weymouth	414,379	0	17,106	66,953	126,416	624,854
Whitman	1,255,143	12,754	22,602	20,539	26,224	1,337,262
Williamstown	28,316	2,635	4,895	0	0	35,846
Worcester	801,565	18,685	42,959	56,007	129,395	1,048,611
Boston Water & Sewer	9,073,906	101,750	191,531	275,571	530,917	10,173,675
Charlemont Sewer District	27,196	302	570	654	1,263	29,985
Cherry Valley Sewer District	0	5,512	10,370	11,896	22,982	50,760
Lynn Water & Sewer	1,230,894	16,779	48,832	68,279	133,914	1,498,698
Mass. Water Resources Authority	353,450,359	4,063,294	8,018,696	9,630,651	18,937,082	394,100,082
Oxford-Rochdale Sewer	75,346	1,014	1,865	2,088	3,936	84,249
South Essex Sewerage	15,514,042	183,190	342,653	378,335	674,569	17,092,789
Upper Blackstone Sewer	425,569	29,874	56,087	64,442	124,584	700,556
State total	420,073,992	5,028,412	9,978,667	12,491,301	25,006,057	472,578,429

DLS Gateway

continued from page one

Figure 2

The online [Local Officials Directory](#) stores the identities of local officials as well as DLS employees. To have a login account to DLS Gateway, an official must be in the Local Officials Directory, which now contains almost 10,000 local officials. City and town clerks assist in keeping the directory accurate and current, using it to file electronic reports to the Secretary of State on elections of local officials.

Because city and town clerks must have access to update all municipal departments, these officials have local system administrator accounts, enabling them to grant access and authorize specific rights to other officials in their community. Because local system administration involves tasks ordinarily associated with information technology staff or town administrators, DLS invited communities to identify the most appropriate person to manage local administration of DLS Gateway. Hundreds of communities responded. Local account administration is essential to this system's success, because local officials and their duties constantly change. When a new assessor, for example, needs an account, it takes a local account administrator a minute to create a username and password, knowing that this assessor is indeed who they say they are and should be allowed to submit assessing information to DOR. A state helpdesk would have to first worry about the true identity of the person requesting an account and then worry about how to send a username and password in a

secure way, all of which takes unnecessary time and effort. Pilot testing will help determine how much support the state will have to plan for to make local account administration practical and the first choice of local officials needing account assistance.

Not all communities have the same level of access to the Internet. At one level, about 10 percent of communities in Massachusetts have no access to so-called broadband Internet providers, typically DSL or cable companies. DLS Gateway will run on slower dial-up connections with the kind of performance to which dial-up users are accustomed using other Internet sites. That, however, may not be fast enough to justify using the online approach as opposed to the older Excel-based programs, downloadable from the DLS website. At another level, some municipal departments may not have easy access to any Internet-connected computer during business hours. In some very small towns, one PC connected to an ordinary phone line serves all departments. While maintaining two systems involves significant costs for DOR, until all cities and towns have fast and reliable connections to the Internet, Local Services will continue to update, accept, and upload the Excel-based Automated Tax Recap and Automated Schedule A files.

Development of DLS Gateway reflects the Commonwealth's commitment to make all websites fully accessible to those with disabilities (under Section

508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act). Creating interactive forms that are equally user friendly for those with and without disabilities sometimes requires considerable skill and sometimes means sites cannot depend on flashy visual elements that are common on commercial websites. Pilot testing will help determine if DLS designers have struck the right balance in making pages fully accessible while also easy to data enter and navigate.

What is included in Phase I of DLS Gateway?

For Municipal Officials

Tax Rate Setting (Including Assessment Certification) forms for Bureau of Local Assessment and Bureau of Accounts

Schedule A

LA-3 Real Estate Sales Reporting for Certification and EQV

Miscellaneous Accounting Forms:

- Combined Balance Sheet,
- Community Preservation Act CP1 & CP2,
- Snow & Ice Report,
- Cash Reconciliation,
- Statement of Indebtedness,
- Outstanding Receivables,
- Quarterly Cash Report,
- Balance Sheet Checklist.

For all Internet Users

Direct access to the Municipal Database through report writer that allows for user defined parameters.

Phase II will expand and enhance these offerings and build additional programs.

Communities interested in participating in pilot testing should contact David Davies at 617-626-2383. ■

DLS Notices

Bulletin 36

The Division of Local Services will be distributing *Bulletin 36, "Laws Relating To Municipal Finance and Taxation"* in June 2007. We have updated this publication through May 2007.

The Division will distribute copies of the book to over 3,700 state and local officials. Offices included in the mailing will be Massachusetts legislators, mayors, selectman, town managers, city/town councils, finance directors, accountants, assessors, clerks, treasurers, collectors, moderators, town counsels and city solicitors, finance committees, school superintendents and district treasurers.

Additional books will be available for purchase through the State House Bookstore in July.

State Bookstore, State House, Room 116, Boston, MA 02133; Telephone: 617-727-2834; www.state.ma.us/sec/spr.

Mark Your Calendars

What's New in Municipal Law

The Division of Local Services' legal staff will offer the seminar "What's New in Municipal Law" Friday, September 28, 2007, at the Clarion Hotel & Conference Center (formerly known as the Best Western Hotel) in West Springfield, and Friday, October 12, 2007, at The Lantana in Randolph. Presentations will include new legislation and recent court decisions pertaining to local government.

Contact Donna Quinn, training coordinator, at 617-626-3838 for additional information.

Assessors' Fall Course 101

The Department of Revenue's basic course for assessors, Course 101, *Assessment Administration: Law, Procedures, Valuation*, will be offered during the evening at Westfield State College, Westfield, MA on Tuesdays from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. beginning October 16, 2007 through November 20, 2007. Participants must attend a minimum of five out of the six sessions to qualify for the exam, which will be posted online

at the conclusion of the course. Assessors, and assistant assessors with valuation responsibilities, must fulfill minimum qualifications within two years of the date of their original election or appointment. Participants who successfully complete this course will receive a certificate.

Contact Donna Quinn, training coordinator, at 617-626-3838 for additional information. ■

Procurement

The Operational Services Division (OSD)

Cities and towns looking to save money on purchasing should consider making themselves familiar with the Commonwealth's Operational Services Division (OSD), the state's central procurement office responsible for establishing statewide commodity and service contracts that are also available to local government. To introduce public purchasers to statewide contracts and explain the Commonwealth e-procurement system known as Comm-PASS (www.comm-pass.com), OSD's Outreach Division offers onsite training sessions to cities and towns upon request. These sessions help municipalities, eligible non-profits and other public purchasers to become more familiar with the operations of OSD and the potential benefits and cost savings associated with using statewide contracts. Presentations have already been provided onsite to many communities across the Commonwealth.

If you would like to know more about statewide contracts, Comm-PASS, \$ave \$mart opportunities and prompt payment discounts, we would be delighted to schedule a presentation in or near your community for your procurement and purchasing staff. Please send an e-mail to osdoutreach@state.ma.us and include a contact name, phone number and approximately how many people would be attending the presentation. If you are a small community or organization, we will try and coordinate the meeting with other neighboring municipalities to present to an audience of at least 10–20 people. This session is interactive and works best with Internet connectivity. Dates for future sessions are being confirmed now; updated schedules will be available shortly on the events calendar or in the "Outreach" link located at www.mass.gov/osd.

If you have specific questions or would like additional assistance, please contact Pam Brasill, Operational Services Division, Outreach Coordinator at 617-720-3117 or e-mail Pamela.brasill@state.ma.us.

Thank you and we look forward to seeing you at an upcoming event. ■

DLS Profile

Christopher J. Ketchen, Technical Assistance

The Municipal Data Management and Technical Assistance Bureau (MDM/TAB), overseen by Bureau Chief Frederick Kingsley, is responsible for managing all municipal data reported to DOR, distributing various local aid appropriations, and providing technical assistance to municipalities, among other duties. **Christopher J. Ketchen** has been with the Technical Assistance team for the last year. In coordination with other bureau staff members, Chris researches and writes Financial Management Reviews, develops Best Practices and communicates with municipal officials and groups on a variety of budgetary and financial matters.

Chris came to Technical Assistance after serving local governments in Massachusetts and Maryland. Most recently, he worked as the Budget Projects Manager for the Town of Wellesley where he was responsible for coordinating financial planning activities for each phase of the budget process. Prior to Wellesley, he worked in Prince George's County, Maryland, where he was responsible for strategic planning and budget analysis. As the county's legislative analyst for budget and finance, he also dealt with all county-related fiscal issues pending before the state legislature in Annapolis.

The opportunity to work with different cities and towns across the Commonwealth is what attracted Chris to the position in

DLS. According to Chris, "the ability to serve as a communications platform for new ideas and best financial practices makes for fascinating work. To be in the room and witness the moment when a local official embraces a concept that you've presented to them is really gratifying."

Chris grew up in Alford, Massachusetts (pop. 400) amidst the bucolic hills and small towns of Berkshire County. Having a school teacher for a mother and a father who was a selectman made for spirited dinner table conversations as a boy — an environment which later inspired him to pursue a career in public service. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts in 1998. He went on to complete his graduate work at UMass in 2000, receiving a master's degree in public administration through the university's Center for Public Policy and Administration.

His wife, Kimberly, is a fourth grade teacher in Somerville. The Ketchens live in Watertown with their cat, Waldo. ■



Christopher J. Ketchen

Reminder to Clerks

The Division of Local Services requires that city and town clerks notify the Municipal Data Management/Technical Assistance Bureau of the results of all questions placed before the voters concerning Proposition 2½. This includes override or underide questions as well as debt or capital exclusion questions whether or not the voters approved the question. Please send or fax the results to Municipal Data Bank, PO Box 9569, Boston, MA 02114. Fax: 617-626-2330. Thank you for your cooperation. ■

Municipal Fiscal Calendar

July 1

Collector: Mail Annual Preliminary Tax Bills

July 15

Accountant: Certification Date for Free Cash: Anytime after Books are Closed

Accountant: Report Community Preservation Fund Balance: Anytime after Books are Closed

School Business Officials: Certification Date for Excess and Deficiency (E&D) Fund

Assessors: Deadline for Appealing Commissioner's Pipeline Valuations to ATB

July 31

Treasurer: File IRS Form 5500 (Report of Employee Benefit Plan)

City & Town

City & Town is published by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services (DLS) and is designed to address matters of interest to local officials.

Marilyn Browne, Editor

To obtain information or publications, contact the Division of Local Services via:

- website: www.mass.gov/dls
- telephone: 617-626-2300
- mail: PO Box 9569, Boston, MA 02114-9569