

City and Town

Amy Pitter, Commissioner • Robert G. Nunes, Deputy Commissioner & Director of Municipal Affairs



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Goodbye 2011, Hello 2012

The Bureau of Accounts and the Bureau of Local Assessment have just finished their busiest time of year – the annual year-end rush to approve tax rates and certify property valuations.

These are core services that the Division of Local Services provides to cities and towns, and the smooth processing of tax rates and property valuations is essential to timely local governance.

As of this week, the Bureau of Local Accounts has approved tax rates for 330 of the Commonwealth's 351 cities and towns, and has also approved 11 pro forma recaps which allow those communities to issue estimated tax bills. The Bureau has also approved tax rates for 55 special purpose districts and two pro forma recaps. The Bureau of Local Assessments has certified triennial property valuations for 81 of 97 communities. Of the 16 remaining communities, 13 have requested authorization to issue estimated tax bills and the other three are well on their way to receiving final certification.

I'd like to congratulate both bureaus for their hard work. I'm continually impressed with the professionalism and dedication exhibited every day by the entire staff of the Division of Local Services.

On a related note, below you will find an article written by Joe Markarian of the Technical Assistance Section. I highly encourage municipalities to consider accessing their services.

Finally, I'd like to remind you that the Patrick-Murray Administration, through the Executive Office for Administration and Finance, is soliciting plans and proposals for its Community Innovation Challenge Grant Program. These grants are intended to support cities and towns and foster new ideas. The deadline is January 17th, 2012. Please visit [this website](http://thiswebsite) to find the grant application and more information. If you have further questions, please call (617) 727-2040 or email CICgrants@state.ma.us.

On behalf of the Division of Local Services, we look forward to working with you in the new year.

Robert G. Nunes
Deputy Commissioner & Director of Municipal Affairs

DLS Technical Assistance Section Nears Three Decades of Service

Joe Markarian, Technical Assistance Section Director

The year was 1984 and Ronald Reagan was re-elected President over Walter Mondale, the country was coming out of

depression years in 1981 and 1982, when the prime rate reached an unfathomable 20.5 percent, and *Ghostbusters* was the year's top grossing movie with *Amadeus* winning the Academy Award for Best Picture.

In Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis was Governor and John Kerry was Lieutenant Governor. Thomas W. McGee was in his last year as Speaker of the House and William M. Bulger was in the middle of his run as Senate President. Proposition 2½ was only in its third year of implementation and 18 municipalities voted on 25 override questions, of which 14 passed. The Division of Local Services was directed by Deputy Commissioner Edward J. Collins. The Red Sox finished 18 games out of first place and the Patriots were five losses behind the Dolphins. The Bruins climbed to first in the conference, but were bumped from the playoffs, while the Larry Bird-led Celtics won the NBA Championship. Doug Flutie's Hail Mary pass fell into the arms of Gerard Phelan and delivered a victory for Boston College in the famous Miracle in Miami.

It was among these events and circumstances that Deputy Commissioner Collins sought to expand the DLS mission with the creation of the Technical Assistance Section (TA). TA was paired with the Data Management/Local Aid section of DLS, which together became the Municipal Data Management/Technical Assistance Bureau. Today, MDM/TAB is one of five bureaus in DLS, sharing floor space with the Bureau of Accounts, Bureau of Local Assessment, the Municipal Finance Law Bureau and the Information Technology Bureau. In this mix, some DLS bureaus have a regulatory function, but Deputy Commissioner Collins envisioned a different role for TA. Its sole mandate was, and is, to serve as an advisor and a resource for Massachusetts cities, towns and counties in their efforts to improve local government.

In its first year, TA completed a financial analysis for 14 cities and eight towns. Since that time, TA has provided consultant-type services, at no cost, to 244 of 351 Massachusetts municipalities and one county - returning to many multiple times. Eight separate reports have been completed for the City of Lawrence and six for the City of New Bedford. The cities of Chelsea and Fitchburg and the towns of Hadley, Southampton and Swampscott have taken advantage of TA services on five separate occasions each. Assignments have taken TA project managers as far west as Pittsfield and east to Wellfleet, to Amesbury to the north and Martha's Vineyard to the south.

Among over 470 assignments, TA has completed 193 financial management reviews; 33 city or town financial analyses; 50 fiscal impact studies for proposed regional school districts; 40 revenue & expenditure forecasts; ten charter reviews and meetings with local government study committees; 25 financial analyses for the State Joint Labor Management Commission. Many other reports, more limited in scope, have focused on individual finance departments or specific problems, addressed water, sewer or light operations or provided a variety of cost analyses.

Smaller towns of Massachusetts have been primary beneficiaries of TA expertise through the years. Of the 244 municipalities which have received TA services, 115 or almost half have a population under 10,000 people and 64 have fewer than 5,000 residents. TA reports have prompted action to create efficiencies, protect reserves, enhance fiscal controls and generally improve municipal operations. The insights offered by TA project managers have helped guide local efforts to reorganize government through regionalization initiatives and the adoption of new charters.

There have also been high profile reports. In 2000, an analysis completed in Pittsfield for the Joint Labor Management Commission revealed serious, previously undetected financial issues that demanded immediate attention. A 2002 report on the condition of the City of Springfield influenced the Administration's decision to propose a finance control board for the city. The 2009 Hamilton and Wenham Merger and Enhanced Regionalization Study represented the first comprehensive look at what would happen if two Massachusetts towns combined into one.

Today, whether in meetings, by telephone, email or in written reports, TA continues to provide independent, objective and highly professional advice and recommendations to communities on all aspects of local government. A wide range of resources is also made available online to assist local officials at the Technical Assistance website (<http://www.mass.gov/dor/local-officials/municipal-data-and-financial-management/financial-mgt-assistance/>). For more information or to talk about or request services, please contact Rick Kingsley, MDM/TAB Bureau Chief, at (617) 626-2376 or kingsleyf@dor.state.ma.us.

January Municipal Calendar

January 1: Assessors

Property Assessment Date: this is the effective date (not for exemption purposes) for statewide assessed value for all property for the following fiscal year.

January 31: DESE

Notifies Communities/Districts of Estimated Net School Spending Requirements for the Next Year

As soon as the Governor releases the ensuing year's budget, DESE notifies communities/districts of the estimated NSS requirements. These figures are subject to change based on the final approved state budget.

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