



**November 18th, 2021**

**Training Highlight: Property Tax Abatement Videos  
Municipal Finance Training and Resource Center**



DLS recently added assessing training modules covering property tax abatements to our YouTube page. These modules provide an overview of abatements, assessors' powers to abate property taxes, and the role of the Appellate Tax Board. The topics covered include:

**In this edition:**

- **Training Highlight:  
Property Tax  
Abatement Videos**
- **Highly  
Recommended: Steps  
to Consider when  
Converting Financial  
Management Systems**
- **FY2022 Community  
Preservation State  
Match Distributed**
- **Attention Municipal  
Clerks: Preparing for  
Your Community's  
Classification Hearing**

- [Overview and Definitions](#)
- [Assessments](#)
- [Applications to Assessors for Abatement](#)
- [Procedures for Granting or Denying Abatements](#)
- [Appealing Assessors' Decisions on Abatements](#)
- [Appeal Procedures](#)

With the addition of these videos, all of our assessing training modules are now available on YouTube. While new assessors are required to complete the formal Course 101 Training through our Gateway system, we hope adding these informational trainings to YouTube will make them more accessible to broad range of local officials and interested taxpayers.

Be sure to bookmark the [Municipal Finance Training and Resource Center](#) page and subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#) to stay updated on new items added. Is there something you would like to see added? We would love to hear from you!

Please email DLS's Data Analytics & Resources Bureau at [DARB@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:DARB@dor.state.ma.us).

## By the Numbers

*City & Town* provides updates on the progress of the tax rate and certification season while also allowing you to follow the tax rate setting process in real time. Thanks to our Municipal Databank staff, this public information is available 24/7 by [clicking here](#).

Preliminary Certifications  
Approved: 54

Final Certification: 42 (of  
74 total)

LA4 (Assessed Values)  
Approved:  
241 (273 submitted)

LA13 (New Growth) Approved:  
239 (270 submitted)

Tax Rates Approved: 65

Balance Sheets Approved: 191

Total Aggregate Free Cash  
Approved: \$1,253,085,736

## Important Dates & Information

### Sewer Rate Relief Fund -

## Highly Recommended: Steps to Consider when Converting Financial Management Systems

### Financial Management Resources Bureau

The [DLS Financial Management Resources Bureau](#) has been offering financial management advice to municipalities across the state for over 30 years. To share this guidance more broadly, we thought it would be helpful to highlight some of our more useful, timely, or interesting recommendations for the benefit of *City & Town* readers. In this edition, we focus on steps to consider when converting financial management systems.

Communities rely heavily on their financial management systems to handle accounting, assessing, collection, and treasury functions. As technology advances, city and towns are automating manual operations, integrating off system applications, and making improvements to eliminate tedious work and streamline fiscal processes. Rather than upgrading an existing system, some communities choose to convert to a different system. Purchasing a new financial management system takes a team effort—internal staff, the software vendor, and potentially specialized consultants—to plan and execute a software conversion efficiently and effectively, while also performing ongoing daily financial office work. When deciding such a move, the community should consider the following.

**Contact Other Communities:** Reach out to communities that have converted to the proposed system to discuss the planning process, successes, and things they would have done differently.

**Create a Timeline:** Work with the vendor or consultant to develop an implementation schedule that balances ongoing operational needs, while allowing adequate time for the conversion and enough training for each module. Factors to

## **FY2022 Application Deadline Extended**

The Division of Local Services has issued [Bulletin 2021-10](#) containing application instructions for Sewer Rate Relief in FY2022.

For FY2022, \$1.5 million has been appropriated. We have extended the application deadline to Friday, November 19, 2021.

To review other recent DLS Bulletins and Informational Guideline Releases, please see [this page](#) on the DLS website.

## **IGR Related to Property Tax Exemptions for Solar/Wind/Fuel Cell and Energy Storage Systems**

The Division of Local Services (DLS) has issued and posted Informational Guideline Release (IGR) 2021-24 informing local officials about property tax exemptions for solar powered systems, wind powered systems, fuel cell powered systems and energy storage systems, including under a negotiated tax agreement.

[IGR-2021-24 – Property Tax Exemptions for Solar Powered, Wind Powered, Fuel](#)

consider are the services offered by the vendor, time requirements, how much data will be brought into the new system, and an allowance to reconcile the data across the two systems. The timeline should be module specific to ensure the data quality is checked and the system is fully implemented before moving onto the next module.

**Review Chart of Accounts:** Review the chart of accounts to make sure that it is designed to meet the uniform standards for financial reporting, budgeting, and accounting. Work with the vendor and external auditor, if applicable, to make sure the chart of accounts provides for a comprehensive, flexible, and systematic arrangement of accounts and adequate levels of detail for use in recording and reporting financial transactions, programs, and activities.

**Research/Close Older Accounts:** Review all accounts with department heads to determine which accounts should be closed prior to converting to a new financial management system. This should be a collaborative effort between the accounting officer and the chief administrative officer and/or finance director.

**Prioritize Essential Modules:** Identify modules that should be implemented and tested first to ensure they are fully functioning sooner than later. Key among these are revenue entry to enable independent recording and tracking of revenue transactions and the payroll system to record time and attendance, code and calculate payroll types, and track accrued absences centrally and accurately.

**Require Conversion Documentation:** Develop a detailed crosswalk of accounts, documenting old and new account structures, as well as prior system and new system balances. The crosswalk should be developed before the conversion begins and updated as any changes are made during the process. This documentation is important with a change in the chart of accounts and closing of older accounts.

**Schedule Training:** Make sure initial and ongoing training is scheduled. Following the vendor's recommended training guidelines, instruction on the functionality and features of

[Cell Powered, and Energy Storage Systems](#)

To access additional IGRs and Bulletins, please visit this [webpage](#).

**8 of 58 Abatement Applications Now Submitted Via DLS Gateway**

Starting Wednesday October 6, 2021, applications to abate a locally assessed tax or charge pursuant to G.L. c. 58, § 8 should be submitted through DLS Gateway. Upload of a completed [Schedule 58.8](#) is required for submission. Visit [the Municipal Finance Law Bureau's 8 of 58 webpage](#) for more information on the application process. Step-by-step instructions for submitting 8 of 58 applications using Gateway can be found on the Gateway landing page.

For general guidance on the standards and policies governing applications for authority to abate local taxes and charges under G.L. c. 58, § 8, please refer to Informational Guideline Release [\(IGR\) 2020-10](#).

**Latest Issue of *Buy the Way***

the new system will lay the cornerstone for understanding how it is designed, integrated, and best used towards continuous improvement in the workflow process.

**Confirm Sufficient Funding:** The project budget should include additional funds for potential change orders, unforeseen conversion issues, staff training, and required post-conversion support not covered by the original contract. An unfinished conversion is not a successful conversion.

Ongoing communication with the vendor following the conversion is important. The ultimate success of any product depends on the users' ability to use it as expertly as possible. Post-implementation, the team will identify areas of success, but also recognize issues that require additional work and follow-up training needs. With appropriate time and attention from the team, the new system can meet the intended goals of the community to streamline financial management activities for more efficient operations.

**FY2022 Community Preservation State Match Distributed  
Lisa Krzywicki - Data Analytics and Resource Deputy Bureau Chief**

On November 15th, the Data Analytics and Resource Bureau (DARB) distributed the FY2022 state match from the Community Preservation Trust Fund. The balance available for the state match this year was \$88,086,785.

The trust fund receives revenues from surcharges on documents filed at the Registry of Deeds. When there are insufficient funds to match 100% of the surcharge collected, the Community Preservation Act (CPA) authorizes three levels to the state match. The first round allocates 80% of the fund balance to provide all eligible communities with a base match. The remaining balance is allocated in two additional rounds called the equity distribution and surplus distribution. The additional rounds are only paid to communities that have adopted the CPA at 3%.

## Now Available

Don't miss Issue #12 of [Buy the Way](#), the monthly magazine of the Operational Services Division (OSD).

[Click here](#) to get news and updates from OSD delivered to your inbox.

## Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Planning 2.0 Request for Responses

The [Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness \(MVP\) program](#), created in 2017, provides support for cities and towns in Massachusetts to identify climate hazards, assess vulnerabilities, and develop and implement action plans to improve resilience to climate change. As the program reaches its 5-year anniversary, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) is looking to work with a partner team to formulate a planning process, trainings, and resources for updating the MVP plans and the priority actions identified within them.

We are looking to formulate an update process (nicknamed MVP Planning 2.0) that is

Of the 177 communities eligible this year, 76 have a 3% CPA surcharge rate and will receive allocations from all three rounds. In addition, a community adopting a lower percentage could be eligible for the second and third round if two conditions are met:

- The CPA was approved by the voters as a "blended" version
- The community appropriates additional local dollars to bring the match up to 3%

Five communities have approved the CPA as "blended:" Boston, Littleton, Malden, Salem and Somerville. In FY2021, however, none of these communities appropriated additional revenue to the local CPA fund. They are therefore ineligible for the second and third round distributions.

In FY2022, the base match equals 39.4% of the local surcharge committed (net of abatements and exemptions). In the first round, \$70,469,435 will be paid to all communities. 76 communities will receive distributions from rounds two and three amounting to \$5,988,793 and \$3,294,953, respectively. The total state match in FY2022 is \$79,763,181. Of the 177 communities receiving a state match in FY2022, 101 will only receive the base match of 39.4%, 17 of them received 100%, 36 received a state match of 50% or higher and the remaining 23 received less than a 50% state match.

The [state match calculation and distribution breakdown](#) by round and additional information on CPA are available on the DLS [website](#). Contact DARB with any questions by email at [databank@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:databank@dor.state.ma.us).

## Attention Municipal Clerks: Preparing for Your Community's Classification Hearing Bureau of Local Assessment

The municipal clerks oversee the posting of the public

accessible, inclusive, engaging, equitable, collaborative, and actionable. Project tasks include stakeholder engagement, developing step-by-step guidance of the update process, and creating tools and trainings to go along with the refreshed approach.

The MVP program is committed to centering environmental justice and equity in MVP Planning 2.0 and is seeking to engage with a partner(s) that has expertise in this area as well as with climate resilience planning, creating engaging and accessible content, and working with local MA governments.

[The Request for Responses \(RFR\) can be found here](#) and **closes at 5pm on November 22, 2021**. Questions can be submitted through the Commbuys "Bid Q&A" or at the Bidders' Conference (see the Procurement Calendar within the RFR).

Responses to questions are estimated to be posted to Commbuys on November 2, 2021.

## **Departmental Revolving Funds IGR**

hearing held to determine a community's local property tax allocations for the four classes of real and personal property. A paid newspaper advertisement announcing the *hearing is no longer required*. The hearing, however, must fully comply with all [Open Meeting Requirements](#). Additionally, it must also comply with any other applicable local provisions, by-laws, ordinances, or rules.

If your community is contemplating posting the hearing to a website, the requirements for posting your public hearing to a website are fully detailed in the Open Meeting Requirements.

Municipal clerks must report the date, time of the hearing and the date of tax rate adoption in [DLS Gateway](#). This is done by selecting LA-5 Options and Certification under the Tax Rate tab. Additionally, they must also complete, sign, and upload to the LA-5 Options and Certification page the [Clerk's Certification of Vote](#). It is a downloadable form.

Once completed, the Certification of Vote must be uploaded to the LA-5. When completed, a majority of the board of assessors and the town clerk must sign the form and submit it to DLS. For a city, the mayor's signature is also required on the LA-5. If you are a new municipal clerk, verify you have DLS Gateway credentials and can access these options within DLS Gateway. If you need Gateway credentials, contact your Local Accounts Administrator or [DLS Gateway Support](#).

The Division of Local Services (DLS) has issued and posted Informational Guideline Release (IGR) 2021-23 informing local officials about the procedures and requirements of departmental revolving funds.

[IGR-2021-23](#)  
[– DEPARTMENTAL REVOLVING FUNDS](#)

To access additional IGRs and Bulletins, please visit this [webpage](#).

### **Webinar on Yarmouth's Streamlined Tax Rate Recap Process**

On August 4th, local officials from Yarmouth joined DLS in hosting a webinar to walk through how their financial management team completes prepares the tax rate recap. In their presentation, the team in Yarmouth highlighted not only the technical aspects that streamlines this process, but also how collaboration amongst the financial management team leads to success.

The town is routinely amongst the first communities to submit its tax rate recap to DLS for review each year. The [recorded version](#) of the

webinar is now available online. In addition, the slides from their presentation are available for reference [here](#). You can also find [DLS' Budget and Tax Rate Planning Tool](#), which the team Yarmouth uses as part of their automated process, on our website, along with other helpful [tools and templates](#).

### **Municipal Audits Webinar and Training Materials**

Thank you to all who joined our *Overview of Municipal Audits* webinar hosted by the Office of the Inspector General and the Division of Local Services. The [recorded webinar](#) is now available on [the DLS Municipal Finance Training & Resource Center](#). The training provides information on the different components of the audit, the benefits of having an audit completed, the best practices for procuring a local audit, and how often a community is required to have an external audit completed. DLS and OIG staff also answered other questions from attendees. The [slides](#) from the presentation are also available online.

In addition, you can review the [Municipal Audits: FAQs](#) document that provides

answers to common questions regarding municipal audits, including procurement and preparing for audits.

We look forward to offering training opportunities on this and other municipal finance topics in the future! Be sure to bookmark the [Municipal Finance Training & Resource Center](#) and subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#) to stay updated on new items added.

**Land of Low Value Post Affidavit Process and Deeds in Lieu of Foreclosure IGR**

The Division of Local Services (DLS) has issued and posted Informational Guideline Release (IGR) 2021-22 informing local officials of the administrative foreclosure process following the receipt of a Commissioner of Revenue's affidavit pursuant to a Land of Low Value tax title foreclosure application and how communities may accept title from the owners of properties on which there are municipal liens as an alternative to tax taking and foreclosure proceedings.

IGR-2021-22 – [LAND OF LOW VALUE POST AFFIDAVIT PROCESS AND DEEDS IN LIEU OF FORECLOSURE](#)

To access additional IGRs and Bulletins, please visit this [webpage](#).

### **Cybersecurity Health Check Program**

The Office of Municipal and School Technology provides the following program available to Massachusetts municipalities and schools. If you have any questions, please contact [Catherine.Marques@mass.gov](mailto:Catherine.Marques@mass.gov)

#### [Cybersecurity Health Check](#)

The Cybersecurity Health Check Program provides opportunities for local government to access basic cyber security services at no cost.

These services can be a good first step in discovering, assessing and identifying cybersecurity gaps that could impact IT systems that support essential business functions. This is a rolling application.

#### **DLS Links:**

[COVID-19 Resources and Guidance for Municipal](#)

[Officials](#)

[Events & Training Calendar](#)

[Municipal Finance Training  
and Resource Center](#)

[Local Officials Directory](#)

[Municipal Databank](#)

[Informational Guideline  
Releases \(IGRs\)](#)

[Bulletins](#)

[Tools and Financial Calculators](#)



**Editor:** Dan Bertrand

**Editorial Board:** Sean Cronin, Donnette Benvenuto, Linda Bradley, Emily Izzo, Marcia Bohinc and Tony Rassias

Contact *City & Town* with questions, comments and feedback by emailing us at [cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us). To view previous editions, please [click here](#).

To unsubscribe to *City & Town* and all DLS alerts, email [dls\\_alerts@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:dls_alerts@dor.state.ma.us).