



May 20th, 2021

An Update Regarding Sales, Meals and Rooms Tax Distributions

Geoffrey Snyder - Department of Revenue Commissioner



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DOR remains committed to keeping our constituents in local government informed of operational and policy changes that might directly or indirectly impact them. To that end, the Department recently issued a further extension of the [previously announced](#) deferral of regular sales tax, meals tax, and room occupancy taxes for small businesses. Eligible businesses may now defer until October 30, 2021 returns and payments otherwise due from March 20, 2020 through June 1, 2021. These updates include resuming monthly return filing and payment remittance as scheduled starting June 30, 2021 for vendors and operators, only on a going forward basis, beginning with returns and payments attributable to May tax collections.

Businesses that collected less than \$150,000 in regular sales plus meals taxes in the twelve-month period ending February 29, 2020 are eligible for relief for state sales and state and local meals taxes, and businesses that collected less than \$150,000 in room occupancy taxes in the twelve-month period ending February 29, 2020 are eligible for relief with respect to state and local room occupancy taxes. For these small businesses, no penalties or interest will accrue during this extension period. Businesses with meals tax and room occupancy tax obligations that do not otherwise qualify for this relief, late-file and late-pay penalties for returns due from March 20, 2020 through June 1, 2021 are

waived through October 30, 2021.

Important Dates & Information

American Recovery Plan Act Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund Resources

In the coming weeks, both the Executive Office for Administration and Finance (A&F) and the Division of Local Services (DLS) will continue to provide information and guidance related to American Recovery Plan Act Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund.

DLS will issue alerts as that material becomes available, so we recommend local officials encourage colleagues and any other interested parties to sign up by [clicking here](#). As it becomes available, information and guidance will be posted on the [Executive Office for Administration & Finance Federal Funds Office webpage](#) and on the [DLS COVID-19 Resources and Guidance for Municipal Officials page](#).

DLS and OIG Offer Live "Overview of Municipal Audits" Webinar

We are excited to announce that the Division of Local Services and the Office of the Inspector General are collaborating to host

For FY2020, the deferral will impact local option distributions for both room occupancy and meals taxes for those establishments eligible to defer tax filing. In addition to the deferral, the FY2021 state budget contained language requiring businesses with tax liability in excess of \$150,000 to make advance payments, however the return is not due until 30 days after the filing period. For the April filing period, those returns are not due until May 30th. As you may know, May 30th is a Sunday and therefore that revenue will not be captured until June 1st. (The revenue cut-off date for the June local option distribution is all revenue received and attached to a return by May 30th.)

Recognizing the impact this would have on the June local option distribution, DOR will include all revenue recorded by June 1st in the distribution. This is a one-time fix to lower the impact on local governments, however in the future there may be instances where the advance filing and return date will impact quarterly local option tax distributions. DOR has identified unique circumstances whereby the new due dates will impact local option distributions within a fiscal year and across fiscal years. We anticipate the first occurrence that will result in a payment extending into the next fiscal year will occur in FY2026-2027.

The Department of Revenue implemented administrative measures including emergency regulations [830 CMR 62C.16.2](#) & [830 CMR 64G.1.1](#) and a [Technical Information Release](#).

DLS Now Offering Sample Workflow and Personal Property Online Trainings Frank Gervasio - DLS Director of Special Initiatives

We're excited to share [sample workflows](#) that demonstrate how the revenue turnover, accounts payable, and payroll processes can be managed in your community. The charts provide an outline of roles and responsibilities that bring

a webinar entitled "Overview on Municipal Audits" on **Wednesday, June 9th at 10am.**

External audits are an important local tool that can assist a community in improving its financial controls and practices. This helps with the protection of the community's assets, potential upgrades in its bond rating and increased public confidence in the local government.

This webinar will answer important questions including:

- What are the different components of an audit, and what do they cover?
- What are the benefits of having an audit completed in my community?
- What are the best practices for procuring a local audit?
- How often is my community required to have an external audit completed?

DLS and OIG staff will also be available to answer other questions you may have related to this topic.

various local officials together in these procedures that take place in every city and town hall. While the workflows include internal control and other best practices that should be incorporated in your individual municipality's processes, they can be tailored to your specific community for local staff to reference. As the outlines show, the success of these and other financial management procedures rely on the interconnectivity and communication between a community's financial officers.

In addition, modules providing an [overview of the taxation of personal property](#) are now available on our YouTube page. These cover [exempt property and accounts](#), [individual and unincorporated entity exemptions](#), [the corporation book](#), and personal property [tax administration](#). Note that new assessors are still required to complete Course 101 in Gateway, and that these versions are available for reference. Please refer to our [Personal Property Taxation FAQs](#) for additional information on this topic.

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'd like to see added? We'd love to hear from you! Please email DLS's Data Analytics & Resources Bureau at DARB@dor.state.ma.us.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Local Officials Directory

Donnette Benvenuto - Data Analytics and Resources Bureau Data Analyst

Following up on our previous [Local Officials Directory guidance in the last edition of City & Town](#), below please find some frequently asked questions and their answers. We hope you find it helpful and informative.

Is the city or town clerk the only local official authorized to make changes to the Local Officials Directory?

To register, please click [here](#). You can also include any specific questions you think you might have ahead of time so that we can be better prepared to answer them! We look forward to seeing you there!

MassWorks Application Deadline is June 4th

Does your city or town plan to apply for MassWorks in 2021? **If so, do not miss the deadline coming up on June 4th, 2021!**

What about Site Readiness or Housing Choice Capital Grants? These programs, as well Urban Agenda, Mass Downtown Initiative, Brownfields Redevelopment, and the NEW Community Planning, Underutilized Properties, and Rural/Small Town Development Fund grants, are now all part of the Community One Stop for Growth.

The deadline to apply for all of these programs is June 4th at 11:59 PM, so start your application(s) today. If you haven't already, you'll need to register for an account on the online application portal. Visit www.mass.gov/onestop for all the details.

New IGR Related to Supplemental Tax Assessments

No. While every city and town clerk is considered to be the primary Directory editor, other local officials can be assigned editing rights, either for the entire Directory or just specific departments. It's a local decision.

Can a local official have a Gateway account without being listed in the Directory?

No. Being listed in the Directory is a required verification step in opening an account. It confirms a person's role as a local official.

I'm trying to enter a new official and don't see the correct election date in the drop-down list. How can I enter the correct date?

Election and town meeting dates are entered in another Directory screen. Go to the Election and Meeting Dates screen to enter the election date. After entering it there, you'll see it in the drop-down list when adding a new official.

I entered a new official into Directory but there's a typo in the name. Can I correct it without starting over?

Yes. Simply correct the name and click Save. Gateway will ask, "Are you adding a newly elected or appointed official to Directory, or are you correcting the data of an existing official?" Click the "Correct" button to correct the name.

Why is there additional information to enter when adding someone in the Assessor's department?

The date of the assessor's election or appointment is necessary because there is a two-year timeframe for them to pass "Course 101" or they are ineligible to sign any official tax related documents. When entering someone in the assessor's department, Gateway needs to know whether the person is on the board, an assistant assessor or a member of the staff without valuation duties. Board members and assistant assessors will be automatically reminded about the educational requirement if they are properly identified.

and Abatements Due to Fire or Natural Disaster

The Division of Local Services (DLS) has issued and posted Informational Guideline Release (IGR) 2021-12 informing local officials of the requirements of G.L. c. 59, § 2D allowing supplemental tax assessments and abatements due to fire or natural disaster.

[IGR 2021-12 – Supplemental Tax Assessment on New Construction](#)

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

MassDOT Shared Streets & Spaces Grant Program Bonus Round

MassDOT is pleased to announce a new round of the Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program, which is now open for applications. All municipalities and transit authorities in the Commonwealth are eligible to apply.

The new phase will operate similarly to previous iterations of the Shared Streets and Spaces Program by supporting municipalities and transit authorities to improve plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other

What do I do if we have a Proposition 2 ½ vote?

Whether the vote passed or failed, we need to be notified as soon as possible. Scan a certified copy of the specimen ballot with the vote counts written in on it and send it to databank@dor.state.ma.us. We no longer need hard copies.

We accepted a Local Option, now what?

You will need to fill out a Local Option Notification of Acceptance Form, you can find all the forms [here](#). If you are unsure as to whether you have notified us or not, please check the following links: [Local Options Relating to Property Tax](#), [Property Tax Exemption Clauses](#), [Meals and Marijuana](#) and [Rooms](#) for your submissions. If you do not see an adoption listed for your community, email the completed Notification of Acceptance Form to databank@dor.state.ma.us. All of the above links can be found on our Local Options page found [here](#).

For Gateway questions, please email us at dlsgateway@dor.state.ma.us and for Local Option questions, please email us at databank@dor.state.ma.us.

A Long Journey: Remembering the Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal Program

Paul Corbett – Bureau of Local Assessment

The email announced they were “pulling the plug” on the old CSC Cama system. I should have expected it. I knew it was coming, but it hit me like an unexpected blow. I leaned back in my chair as my memory raced across the years, all the way back to the beginning.

In 1987, the Division of Local Services (DLS) launched the state’s Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal (Cama) Program. The Cama program offered local assessors an option of low-cost mass appraisal software and related DLS training and

public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce. Bonus points will be awarded to projects seeking to address an identified safety concern through measures such as street reconfigurations and traffic calming. Bonus points will also be awarded to projects with the following features:

- Environmental Justice communities. An additional bonus point will be awarded to projects that are situated in Census Blocks in which the area median household income is below the statewide median household income
- Municipalities designated as a COVID-19 'higher risk (red) community' at the time of application (check status [here](#))
- Cities and towns that have not previously received a Shared Streets and Spaces grant in either summer or winter cycles
- Proposed projects with a budget of \$50,000 or less

technical support with the understanding that the community would be responsible for its own appraisal/assessment work. A year later, the Town of Southborough became the "pilot" community, the first municipality to convert their real property assessment data to the Cama software. Later that year, Southborough successfully generated assessments with the Cama system that were certified by the Bureau of Local Assessment (BLA). Soon thereafter, four more communities followed suit. The number of communities in the program steadily grew over the next several years and at one point there were over 70 communities using the Cama software to generate their property assessments.

In the beginning, the Cama program was funded by the Department of Revenue (DOR). Dave Davies was hired to direct the program and he not only supervised the project, he was also responsible for all administrative duties required by the program including dealing with the software vendor, Sigma Systems. He arranged training sessions for the staff and reviewed community requests to join the program. Twelve members of the DLS staff were assigned to support Cama operations. Two members of this new staff had a technical background in computer hardware and software. Amongst the staff, we had varying degrees of computer experience. Our job was to provide training and technical support to the communities that joined the program. Primarily, we taught the local assessors and their staff how to use the new software, but first we had to learn how to use it ourselves. It was a constant challenge. In the end, the members of our staff and the local officials often learned together. I believe this scenario created a connection between our staff members and the local officials they worked with that became the strength of the program.

As the years passed, some communities dropped out of the program, primarily due to changes in the mass appraisal systems of private vendors that offered the additional benefit of appraisal/assessment services. By 1996, state budget constraints forced consideration of a new source of funding for the program and the Community Software Consortium (CSC) was created. The CSC was made up of the

- Quick-build projects that can be implemented by September 7, 2021
- Projects that are proximate to schools, senior centers, transit and transit connections, and open space and parks

Applications will be accepted until Friday, May 21st. Award notifications will be made by June 25th. Please visit the Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program website for more information on eligible project types and how to apply. Please send any questions to sharedstreets@dot.state.ma.us.

For examples of previously funded Shared Streets and Spaces projects, please visit the [MassDOT Google Photo Drive](#) or the [Metropolitan Area Planning Council Flickr page](#) for photos of successfully implemented projects. We also encourage applicants to refer to the [Award Announcements](#) page on the Shared Streets and Spaces Program website for descriptions of previously funded projects. Prospective applicants may also be interested in viewing the [Shared Streets and Spaces resource library](#) for case studies and other evaluation materials.

61 communities that opted to continue using the Cama system. Each community paid mutually agreed upon dues to fund the program. The CSC took over the administration of the program but DLS continued to provide training and technical support for the system. From that point on, the software became the CSC Cama system.

During these years, attrition from job changes and reassignments reduced our numbers. What began as Director Dave Davies and 12 staff dwindled to seven. Each of us was assigned a group of communities to handle their requests for support on an ongoing basis. Out of necessity, we were all routinely called upon to take on additional tasks that were new to us. It was an “all hands on deck” mentality as we wrote instruction manuals for the system, created and conducted group training sessions for local officials, documented recommendations for performance improvements to the software and tested all updates to the software. We also expanded the software offerings to the member communities by developing a Tax Administration system and a Personal Property system. These modules were designed, tested, and documented by our staff. The job required extensive travel throughout the state with communities in the program extending in the east from Merrimac to Provincetown and in the west from Williamstown to Sheffield. There were a lot of long drives on the job. To my surprise, I discovered I could drive for over 3 hours and still be in Massachusetts. There were many small communities in the program, but larger ones too like Needham, North Andover, Saugus, and Framingham. Over the years, the evolving training and technical support needs of the local officials in our client communities required our staff to accomplish a wide variety of challenging tasks. It was rarely boring.

By 2016, the CSC Cama system was nearing the end. It was determined that the CSC software was no longer sustainable in the new operating systems and could no longer be supported. A plan was developed to convert the remaining CSC communities to a different Cama system within the next couple of years. Budget constraints led to early retirement incentives that resulted in a significant reduction in staff.

Bulletin 2021-2: FY2022 Budget Issues and Other Related Matters

This [Bulletin](#) addresses several issues that cities, towns, regional school and other districts should consider for FY2022 budget issues and other related matters including:

- **Coronavirus Relief Fund (CvRF) and The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**
- **Dedication of Revenue Stream to a Stabilization Fund**
- **Estimating FY2022 Receipts**
- **Estimating FY2022 Enterprise Revenues**
- **Appropriations from Free Cash to Reduce the Tax Levy**
- **Appropriating from Free Cash or Enterprise Retained Earnings**
- **Balance Sheets as of 6/30/2021 and Revenue Recognition**
- **Betterment Reserve**
- **Special Accounting Treatment for Intended FEMA Reimbursement**
- **Early Voting Law**

Changes were required and after 28 years I was reassigned to the Bureau of Local Assessment with new responsibilities. In 2020, all the remaining CSC communities were converted to different mass appraisal systems and the CSC was dissolved.

I thought of the many talented and dedicated people I was privileged to work with in those years. They were coworkers and local officials and private consultants with a common motivation. They cared about their work and they wanted to do a good job. 30 plus years is a good run and I was proud of the work we accomplished together. Yet, I was sad. It hurts to say goodbye to an old friend.

- **911 Reimbursements**
- **Borrowing Purposes and Terms**
- **Borrowing - Premiums, Surplus Proceeds and Debt Exclusions**
- **Certification of Notes and Receipt of Audit Reports**
- **Court Judgments**
- **Departmental Revolving Funds**
- **Emergency Expenditures**
- **Energy Generating Facilities Enterprise Fund**
- **Energy PILOTs under G.L. c. 59, § 38H(b)**
- **Estimating FY2022 Medicaid Receipts**
- **Expenditure Budgeting for FY2022**
- **Expenditure of Federal Funds Threshold**
- **Free Cash Update and Non-Recurrent Distributions to Cities and Towns**
- **Advances in Anticipation of Issuing Debt**
- **Minimum Performance Bond – Treasurers, Collectors and Clerks**
- **Year End Transfers**

- **School Finance**

To review other Bulletins and Publications recently issued by DLS, please see this [webpage](#).

New Informational Guideline Releases

The Division of Local Services (DLS) has issued and posted the following Informational Guideline Releases (IGRs) regarding the form and content of tax bills and cost of living adjustments for FY2022.

[IGR 2021-3 - Fiscal Year 2022 Tax Bills Semi-Annual Payment System](#)

[IGR 2021-4 - Fiscal Year 2022 Tax Bills Semi-Annual Payment System – Optional Preliminary Bills](#)

[IGR 2021-5 - Fiscal Year 2022 Tax Bills Semi-Annual Payment System – Annual Preliminary Bills](#)

[IGR 2021-6 - Fiscal Year 2022 Tax Bills Quarterly Payment System](#)

[IGR 2021-7 - Social Security Deduction for Fiscal Year 2022](#)

[IGR 2021-8 - Optional Cost of Living Adjustment for Fiscal Year 2022 Exemptions](#)

The Bureau of Accounts has also

posted its updated Enterprise Fund Manual. [See IGR 2021-11 - Enterprise Funds.](#)

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

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program FY22 Funding Round Now Open

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Planning Grants

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) is seeking proposals for Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Planning Grants, which provide support for Massachusetts cities and towns to complete climate vulnerability assessments and develop action-oriented climate resiliency plans. The program helps communities define extreme weather and natural and climate related hazards; understand how their community may be impacted by climate change; identify existing and future vulnerabilities and strengths; and develop, prioritize, and implement key actions. State-trained MVP providers offer technical assistance to communities in completing the assessment and resiliency plans.

Communities that complete the MVP planning grant program become certified as an MVP community and are eligible for MVP Action Grant funding. The link to the COMMBUYS website hosting the RFR and required forms can be accessed through the new [MVP program website](#).

Planning Grant applications are due by 4:00 p.m. on June 4, 2021 (via email, see RFR for details) for MVP planning processes that must be complete by June 30, 2022. Please reach out to kara.runsten@mass.gov with questions.

Cybersecurity and IT Health Check Programs

The Office of Municipal and School Technology has announced the following programs available to Massachusetts municipalities and schools. If you have any questions, please contact 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.

[IT Health Check](#)

An IT Health Check is a high-level assessment of current IT assets. A Health Check can be a good first step in discovering, assessing and identifying gaps that could impact IT systems that support essential business functions.

The discovery will result in a completed score card that will identify the current state of critical IT systems, and platform and vendor agnostic suggestions. 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](#)



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