



Gov. signs FY13 state budget

By John Robertson

On July 8, Gov. Deval Patrick signed a \$32.5 billion state budget for fiscal 2013 that increases funding for a variety of important municipal and education aid accounts and begins a recovery from the deep cuts that go back to fiscal 2009, when the last recession hit Massachusetts.

In signing the spending plan for the new fiscal year – and issuing only a handful of vetoes totaling \$32 million – the governor said that the budget makes “record investments in K-12 education.”

The final budget bill increases local aid by almost \$300 million over the fiscal 2012 level and roughly \$140 million above the amount originally recommended by the governor in January.

The Legislature increased

funding for the Cherry Sheet Unrestricted General Government Aid account by \$65 million, from \$834 million to \$899 million, consistent with the growth in Lottery profits that are expected to set a record when the final numbers for fiscal 2012 are reported later this year. The MMA strongly supported the Legislature’s municipal aid appropriation, which was a top state budget priority for cities and towns this year, to help pay for municipal services and avoid over-reliance on the property tax.

Chapter 70 education aid was boosted from \$3.99 billion to \$4.17 billion, an increase of \$180 million. The appropriation ensures that every school district is able to at least reach the “foundation” level of school spending that forms the basis of the

state’s landmark education finance reform law. The budget also restarts equity provisions that had been put on hold and ensures that all districts receive an increase this year of at least \$40 per student.

In addition to the main local aid programs, several other important municipal

aid and public safety grant programs were funded in the budget signed by the governor.

The Cherry Sheet Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILOT) account for state-owned land was level-funded at \$26.3 million.

This is an important ac-

BUDGET, continued on 15

Dukakis hails graduates

Former Gov. Michael Dukakis speaks during the June 19 graduation ceremony at Suffolk University for municipal employees who completed the newly created Certificate Program in Local Government Leadership and Management. (See story, page 12.)



INSIDE

Energy bill includes tax exemption.....3

Gaming Commission issues advisory....4

SJC allows sewer hook-up fee.....6

U.S. transportation bill signed.....6

Mass Innovations14

People20

Classifieds22

Calendar28

Health insurance reform marks 1 year

By Katie S. McCue

Last July, Gov. Deval Patrick signed landmark legislation changing the way health insurance plans are negotiated with municipal employees.

The law gives municipal managers a tool to offset the dramatically increasing cost of health insurance; communities may choose to enter the Group Insurance Commission or change the features of their health plan up to the dollar amounts offered by the most-subscribed plan of the GIC, which covers all state employees.

The reform was originally expected to save cities and towns \$100 million statewide. One year later, the communities that have used the reform so far have saved an estimated \$175 million, surpassing expectations.

As of the anniversary date, 130 communities and school districts had scheduled or taken votes to adopt the reform. Of those, 77 had started and finished negotiations within the 30 days allowed for in the regulations, and the remainder were in their negotiation period.

More than a dozen communities have votes scheduled. Another 50 reached agreement on plan design changes since legislative negotiations began in January 2011, but without adopting the law.

Only one community, Falmouth, could not reach agreement with its unions within the 30-day negotiation period and had to use the three-member review panel provided for in the law. The unresolved issue was what to do with the 25 percent of first-year savings set aside in a mitigation

HEALTH, continued on 15

AROUND THE COMMONWEALTH

Lincoln

Tick Task Force completes report

Lincoln, one of many Massachusetts communities in which Lyme disease is a concern, in late June issued a report summarizing the work over the past year of the town's Tick Task Force.

The nine-member volunteer committee, backed with a \$2,225 grant channeled through the Department of Public Health, focused on relatively simple preventative measures, such as encouraging proper outdoor attire and the use of a gel that kills deer ticks. The group also sought to quantify instances of Lyme disease in the community.

Among the more notable projects was the dispensing of hundreds of "tick tubes" – small cardboard structures containing cotton soaked with the insecticide Permethrin. The tubes are designed to attract mice, which carry the cotton to their nests, where the insecticide kills the Lyme disease bacteria-carrying ticks that feed on the mice.

Lincoln Assistant Town Administrator Anita Scheipers said a local Eagle Scout coordinated the production of hundreds of the tick tubes, demonstrating that such a project can be carried out at no real cost.

"You don't necessarily have to buy these things," Scheipers said. "It's possible to make them."

Local officials said it has become more difficult to gauge the extent of Lyme disease-carrying ticks in a community since the state shifted reporting responsibility from local health departments to physicians' offices, which appears to have led



Black bears sightings have become common in Northampton, where the City Council has approved an ordinance banning the feeding of the animals. This photo shows a female bear, which was trapped inside a Northampton home with her three cubs, bursting through a window. The photo is reprinted with the permission of the Daily Hampshire Gazette.

to under-reporting.

In Lincoln, task force members encouraged people to stick pins on a town map marking the approximate spot where they or someone they know had a deer tick on them. The results suggest that encounters with ticks in Lincoln are widespread.

The next step for Lincoln is to work with nearby communities, Scheipers said. She noted that the Tick Task Force included one member from Wayland, with a Lexington resident participating in a less formal role.

For more about the Tick Task Force, visit www.lincolntown.org.

– Mitch Evich

Northampton

Ordinance imposes fines for feeding bears

Responding to complaints from residents who claim to have seen neighbors feeding black bears, the Northampton City Council on July 12 approved an ordinance that makes the practice subject to fines of \$100 or more.

The ordinance may be the first of its kind in Massachusetts. Tom O'Shea, assistant director of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, said that while a number of communities have banned the feeding of geese and other waterfowl, he is not aware of instances where the feeding of bears has been banned.

Northampton, according to city officials, has an unusually high number of bears within its roughly 35 square miles. The animals are often seen close to the city center, thanks to adjoining conservation lands, said Daniel Wasiuk, the town's interim health director.

The Health Department helped draft the ordinance, which also sets forth conditions for the proper storage of trash. If bears or other wild animals gain access to trash containers, the resident must remove the trash, or remedy the problem, within 48 hours.

The feeding of bears will bring a \$100 fine for a first

offense, \$200 for a second offense, and \$300 for all subsequent offenses. Among possible enforcing officers are local police, Board of Health agents, and state Environmental Police officers.

Wasiuk said that in the past, the city's animal-control efforts focused more on avoiding the destruction of property or attacks on pets. But, he said, the number of residents who were providing food to the bears required a new approach.

"Some of them really had the bears programmed to a feeding schedule," Wasiuk said.

– Mitch Evich

Marlborough

City collaborates on job fair

Nearly 500 job-seekers attended a job fair in Marlborough, which grew partly out of Mayor Arthur Vigeant's effort to gauge what local businesses needed in order to grow and remain in the city.

Vigeant, a longtime city councillor who became mayor in January, said he called and met with numerous business officials to find out what the city could do to help. The outreach effort revealed that many companies were having trouble filling positions, ranging from entry-level sales to engineering positions.

The June 13 job fair was called "Marlborough Works!" It involved the city, the Marlborough Economic Development Corporation, and Quinsigamond Community College. The event featured roughly 30 employers with a total of more than 100 job opportunities. Among the participating companies

COMMONWEALTH, continued on 17

Web forum for energy activities grows

By Victor Nascimento

When MMEGweb, the online community designed to support the Massachusetts Municipal Energy Group, went live earlier this year, it became one of the first services of its kind in the nation.

Six months later, it now reaches more than 160 members and is opening new paths of communication. MMEGweb is designed to facilitate sharing, collaboration, and networking among local, state and nonprofit professionals engaged in clean energy and sustainability in Massachusetts.

The online community is funded by a grant from the Department of Energy Resources' Green Communities

Division and administered by the MMA.

To ensure that MMEGweb is used exclusively for the benefit of municipalities, membership is "by invitation only" based on each user's affiliations. Interactions through the site – moderated by experienced clean-energy professionals – require attribution to ensure transparency, accountability and professionalism.

MMEGweb also has strict rules against using the site for marketing purposes.

With nearly 100 relevant documents and links shared by members and administrators, the site boasts a wealth of information on topics such as grants, renewable energy programs, proposals, and community

outreach strategies. Users who are engaged in and knowledgeable about municipal energy post all the resources found on MMEGweb, which ensures far greater reliability than one would find through a simple Web search.

MMEGweb is unique in offering municipal energy professionals the means to easily find and connect with one another. Users can contact each other individually and post their questions on forums open to the entire MMEGweb community, tapping into a wealth of information with just a few clicks. Web administrators and users also share relevant events and workshops through the MMEGweb calendar.

"Overall, MMEGweb is an invaluable tool to keep its users up to date and connected with what matters to them as professionals," said Paul Bockelman, the MMA's director of administration and finance.

More improvements are coming in the next several months, including a larger team of facilitators to answer questions and connect users, more resources, and further technical improvements.

A new in-person MMEG group meeting will also be announced soon.

To join the MMEGweb community, send an email to mmegweb@mma.org with your full name, title and organization to receive an invitation. ■

Commonwealth

continued from page 16

were Embassy Suites, Ken's Foods, and IQuum, the developer of biological-sample testing technology.

The city, according to Vigeant, has received positive feedback from both companies and job-seekers, and city officials and business leaders are planning to discuss how they can improve such initiatives.

"If we have a need, I want to help out businesses and residents to fulfill that need," Vigeant said.

While the vast majority of job seekers were from Marlborough, participants also came from Southborough, Northborough, Westborough, Framingham and other nearby towns, according to Michael Berry, a mayoral aide.

"Marlborough Works!" also included a resume workshop at Marlborough High School three weeks earlier. The number of participants

was limited so that each person would be assured of receiving individual counseling, Berry said.

– Katelyn O'Brien

Medfield

Foundation helps generate \$1.3M for nonprofits

Slightly more than a decade after its creation, a volunteer-run organization known as the Medfield Foundation has facilitated the raising of more than \$1.3 million for roughly 20 local nonprofit entities.

A key benefit of the program is that it spares volunteer groups from the cumbersome process of creating a 501(c) 3 nonprofit entity on their own, according to Medfield Selectman Osler "Pete" Peterson. And because the Medfield Foundation's overhead has remained low – the only notable expenses

are insurance and accounting – only 1 percent of the money that individual groups raise goes to cover administrative costs.

The Medfield Foundation "facilitates a lot of things that are at the edges," said Peterson, an original member of the organization's steering committee. "This is about getting things done that otherwise might not happen."

Peterson said that the foundation has been especially useful for raising money for school-related projects that don't fit neatly into any school budget category, such as improvements to the football stadium. One fund, called "Field of Dreams," raised \$600,000 for synthetic turf; a second collected \$175,000 for bleachers.

Other organizations under the Medfield Foundation umbrella include the annual "Medfield Night" fireworks; a

neighborhood art gallery; a college-scholarship fund; the local Medical Reserve Corps unit; a Council on Aging bus-transit program for seniors; and "Fest Fund," which enables the Parks and Recreation Commission to host concerts by teenage musicians.

The Medfield Foundation also honors outstanding volunteers, many of whom are teenagers, Peterson said.

When the foundation was created in 2001, it was touted as a means of alleviating the town's reliance on property taxes. Peterson described the average annual tax increase over the past decade of 2.6 percent as relatively modest, given that three new schools were constructed during that period.

For more about the Medfield Foundation, visit www.medfieldfoundation.org.

– Mitch Evich