CSC Connections

New Year—New Newsletter

Tech Talk is so last fiscal year…

Welcome to CSC Connections!

Why the change? Besides just wanting to jazz things up a bit, it seemed to me that the CSC is actively redefining and expanding its mission. In 1988, the year I joined the Division of Local Services, there were 16 member communities sharing two software applications (RPIS and IQ.) Fast-forward 24 years, and 68 member communities share seven applications, Web hosting services and an online public access system. The CSC used to be for assessors only—now collectors have their own Tier group, and any community can join as a general member. As the CSC migrates its major applications to the Cloud (without raising membership dues) it's also moving forward with plans for expanding its software offerings into accounting, municipal finance and other related areas, Many more communities will likely connect with the CSC to explore

Photo by David L. Davies

The dawn of a new day… (Sure, it's a tired metaphor—but it's still a nice photo)

how membership can offer necessary technology and services at a price point even the smallest town can afford. Towns connecting with each other to find new solutions to persistent problems makes sense, and it's a process the Division of Local Services both encourages and supports. So re-branding *Tech Talk* as *CSC Connections* seemed to make sense on a number of fronts.

While the format and layout might be snazzier, you'll still find familiar sections like Tech Tips, highlights from the DLS Municipal Calendar and important news from DLS and the CSC. Have ideas for article topics or recurring features? Personal connections are the most important kind, especially in government. Shoot me an email or give me a call. I'd love to hear from you.

Kirsten Shirer, Editor

2012 EQV Program Complete

DLS's Bureau of Local Assessment has completed the 2012 Equalized Valuation (EQV) Program. EQV is used as a basis of comparison between the Commonwealth's 351 cities and towns for certain purposes including the calculation of certain Cherry Sheet charges, the allocation of State aid to public libraries, and the calculation of Chapter 70 funding. It is also used in calculating a community's debt limit according to MGL Ch. 44, §10.

Final figures for each municipality appear on BLA's Form LA-19, Equalization Study. Because these figures impact a number of local programs, assessors should review the form as soon as possible. Appeals must be filed with the Appellate Tax Board (ATB) no later than August 10, 2012. Click here for the LA-19: www.mass.gov/dor/docs/dls/bla/eqv/fy12proposed/la19webeqv12proposed.xls

CSC Annual Meeting

Former CSC Treasurer Dick Finnegan receives an award from Tammy Blackwell, Chairman of the CSC Board of Directors

As required by its bylaws, the Community Software Consortium held its annual meeting on May 9th, 2012 at the Publick House in Sturbridge, MA. More than 30 member communities attended, along with representatives from DLS and the Executive Office of Administration and Finance. Highlights of the meeting included:

- The Assessors Tier voted to keep its FY 2013 dues stable, with no increase.

- The Collectors Tier voted likewise, with no dues increase planned for FY 2013.

- CSC Board Member Rebecca Krause-Hardie (Tax Collector, Town of Royalston) gave an initial

report on the Cloud migration project, funded by the Commonwealth's Community Innovation Challenge (CIC) grant program. Stonewall Solutions, Inc. of Providence, Rhode Island, the selected vendor, had already begun design work at the time of the meeting (more details on Page 3.)

- Long-time CSC member and Treasurer Dick Finnegan was honored for his many years of devoted service; Dick left the Board after retiring as Duxbury's principal assessor.

- Two bylaw revisions were discussed and

passed by majority vote; see the CSC Web site for details.

- The membership voted to continue to waive "buyback" fees for communities joining the CSC. New members will continue to pay only the dues established for all members, without additional fees.

- David Davies, DLS Director of IT and Kirsten Shirer, Deputy Director of IT, reported on software and support-related developments, both past and future.

More details can be found on the CSC's Web site:

www.csc-ma.us

From the Municipal Calendar

Dates to remember in July and August

July 1 Collector – Mail Annual Preliminary Tax Bills (quarterly or semi-annual)

July 15 Assessors – Deadline for Appealing Commissioner's Pipeline Valuations to ATB

July 20 DOR/BLA Notification of Changes in Proposed EQVs (even numbered years only)

August 1 Taxpayer — Deadline for Paying 1st Quarterly Tax Bill Without Interest

August 1 Taxpayer – Annual Boat Excise Return Due

August 10 Assessors – Deadline for Appealing EQVs to ATB (even numbered years only)

August 15 Assessors – Deadline to Vote to Seek Approval for Authorization to Issue Optional Preliminary Tax Bills

For semi-annual communities issuing **optional** preliminary property tax bills, the Assessors must vote to seek authorization to issue the bills

from DOR by this date. Taking this vote simply allows the option of sending a preliminary bill should the need arise; to proceed with issuing a preliminary bill, assessors must submit the Pro Forma Recap to the DOR for approval. DLS recommends that all semi-annual communities vote to authorize optional preliminary bills by August 15th.

August 31 Assessors Begin Work on Tax Rate Recapitulation Sheet (to set tax rate for semi-annual bills) Early completion of the Recap will ensure that semi-annual bills can be mailed timely (October 1st.)

CIC Grant—Project Update

The Town of Royalston (TOR)/CSC Cloud migration initiative, funded by the State's Community Innovation Challenge grant program, is now well underway. Project Manager Rebecca Krause Hardie, Royalston Tax Collector and member of the CSC Board of Directors, filed the project's 1st Quarter Report as required; a copy of this report should be available on the CSC Web site shortly. In summary, the TOR/CSC project is ahead of schedule and on budget. A few key points from the CIC Grant 1st Quarter Report:

All participant roles have been defined, with Royalston taking the project lead and the CSC Board and member communities actively participating and contributing. Stonewall Solutions, the project vendor, has been working with both Rebecca and the Division of Local Services' IT staff to establish the technical working environment. This includes a Sharepoint online collaboration site as well as a test environment with current versions of the CSC's RPIS, CSC Personal Property and CSC Tax Administration applications.

Real estate and personal property data from two CSC member communities (Royalston and Shelburne) has been successfully loaded into a centralized test database.

The CSC booth at both the MCTA and MMA conferences generated a lot of interest. Many communities have asked to be kept in the loop as the project progresses.

Rebecca Krause-Hardie updates members at the Annual Meeting

DLS Deputy Commissioner Announces Strategic Plan Initiative

Robert G. Nunes, Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Local Services & Director of Municipal Affairs, recently announced a Division-wide strategic plan for improving and enhancing the services DLS provides to cities and towns. Deputy Commissioner Nunes said in the July 5th edition of *City & Town*:

"The Division of Local Services is in the process of developing a strategic plan…that will result in more efficient use of DLS resources and better service for cities and towns. The strategic plan initiative was kicked off in February, when Gov. Deval Patrick signed Executive Order 504, an order requiring performance management across state agencies. I've just concluded a series of six meetings with all DLS staff… DLS employees offered a multitude of suggestions that we'll be rolling out in the coming weeks and months. It was exciting for me to see first-hand the high level of engagement and enthusiasm employees brought to these meetings."

Mr. Nunes continued, "As one of the initial efforts coming out of the strategic plan process, I am pleased to announce that the Bureau of Accounts intends to schedule four regional half-day workshops in September to review best practices in the steps leading to the setting of local property tax rates. Dates, times and locations will be published over the summer. At these and at other meetings, we will also actively seek comments and suggestions from our stakeholders on how we can improve our performance. Please don't be shy if you have something to say. There will be more to talk about in the next few months as we finish the plan and begin implementation and I hope to receive ideas from you that can be worked into future strategic plans "

Deputy Commissioner Nunes can be contacted by email at:

nunesr@dor.state.ma.us

"At these and at other meetings, we will also actively seek comments and suggestions from our stakeholders on how we can improve our performance.."

The Community Software Consortium is a self-governing municipal organization consisting of 60+ Massachusetts communities. It was established in 1996 under M.G.L. 40, § 4A to give every member access to quality technology products and services at a reasonable cost, through the power of joint purchasing. In FY 2012, the CSC was awarded a $290,700 Community Innovation Challenge Grant by the Commonwealth to fund migration of its property appraisal and tax administration software applications to The Cloud.
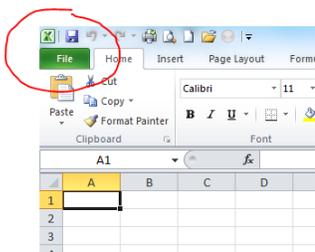
For more information about the Community Software Consortium, contact the current Chairman of the CSC Board of Directors:

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(413) 413-229-7001 Ext. 155
tblackwell@sheffieldma.gov
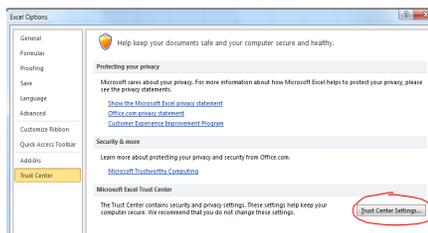
Tech Tips: Enabling Macros in Excel 2010

In new versions of Microsoft Office, macros are automatically disabled to protect your computer; they can contain malicious code and should be treated with caution. Macros can also be very useful, however, and many workbooks authored by DLS (the Automated Recap and Schedule A, for example) rely on macros to function properly. In this article you will learn a very simple way to enable macros in Excel 2010:
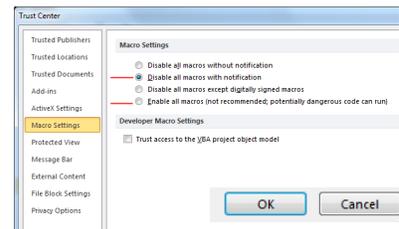
Open Excel and click the File tab.

Click Options from the list on the left.

Click Trust Center, then click the Trust Center Settings button on the right.

Two options will allow macros to run:

Safer option - click the "Disable all macros with notification" radio button. Excel will display an "Enable Macros" button each time it opens a workbook containing macros, so you can choose to enable them (or not.)

Less safe: choose the "Enable all macros" radio button (not recommended.)

Click OK to save your choice, then click OK again to close the Trust Center window.