CSC Connections

VOLUME III   ISSUE I   **MARCH 2014**

THIS MONTH

- *CSC Receives $128K Grant*
- *FY2015 Cost Tables now available*
- *3 new Cloud-based initiatives*
- *XP Support ends, but XP will Soldier On*

CSC RECEIVES $128K GRANT FOR CLOUD PROJECT PHASE 2

The CSC received great news in February: its grant proposal for the 2014 Community Innovation Challenge Grant was funded in the amount of $128,000. With the Town of Washington as lead participant, this grant funds the expansion of the CSC's Cloud initiative in three ways:

1. Provides funding for a re-write of CSC Public Access to accept data from the CSC's new Cloud database, plus enhancing the system to provide tie-ins with GIS and mapping data from MassGIS and possibly other vendors, and will add an option for

Town of Washington and CSC receive $128,000 CIC Innovation Grant for Connecting the Dots: Public Access, Cloud Accounting, and Security

PATRICK ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES $4 MILLION IN COMMUNITY INNOVATION CHALLENGE GRANTS FOR MUNICIPALITIES, REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND PLANNING AGENCIES ACROSS MASSACHUSETTS   BOSTON – Thursday, February 6, 2014 –Secretary of Administration and Finance Glen Shor today announced the 37 projects slated to receive funding from the $4 million Community Innovation Challenge (CIC) grant program. Now in […]

non-DOR CAMA communities to upload data to CSC Public Access regardless of their existing CAMA product

2. Funds development and startup of a new "Virtual IT Director" service that will provide, at a very low price point, basic backup, recovery and malware protection services to smaller communities lacking in-house IT staff

3. Lay the groundwork for adding accounting, treasury and other financial management software to the CSC's Cloud applications suite.

While the project did not receive full funding (the proposal requested $287,400 in total) the grant award will be sufficient to accomplish a lot this year. Details of each project are inside this newsletter; for more information, check out the CSC's Cloud site (http://csc-cloud.us/cloud/) or contact Becky Krause-Hardie, CSC Executive Director (978-575-1454)

Rebecca@csc-cloud.us.

FY2015 COST TABLES AVAILABLE NOW

CSC members should have received an email from CSC Executive Director Rebecca Krause-Hardie announcing the release of the FY 2015 RPIS Cost Tables. As usual, these tables include residential, commercial and detached structure values based on Marshall and Swift data of January 2014. These updated values should be used by communities undergoing DOR certification of values in FY 2015; all members of good standing, however, are entitled to receive the updated tables each year, and those in an interim year may also wish to use them. Base values increased roughly 3-4% when compared to the FY 2014 (January 2013) tables.

Need the tables? Contact Rebecca Krause-Hardie for instructions. DLS IT Support staff can assist with importing and activating the tables once you have them. Call (617) 626-2350 for DLS IT support.

Coming Soon:
CSC Virtual IT Director

One of the most difficult challenges facing small and medium-sized towns is ensuring that critical data is kept secure and virus-free, and that it's also regularly backed up. Larger communities have the funds to pay for full or part-time IT professionals, either in-house or by contract with a vendor. Small towns don't have that luxury, yet protecting data critical to town operations still has to happen—and sometimes it doesn't, with dire consequences.

The Town of Washington and the CSC are jointly addressing this concern by development of a new service: Virtual IT Director. Startup costs are being funded by the CSC's 2014 CIC Grant award (see page 1) and the goal is simple: Offer municipalities lacking IT expertise a remotely monitored backup/disaster recovery and basic malware protection service at a very affordable price point ($500-$1000 annually.) Grant funding will kick-start the project, with 10 communities participating in the initial evaluation phase through December 31, 2014. During this time, the CSC and DLS staff will install necessary backup and malware protection software on municipal computers, do all required software configurations and will actively monitor, test and evaluate the services, making adjustments when needed. After the test phase, the CSC plans to expand the service, adding up to 90 additional communities to the program during the remainder of FY 2015.

An RFI (Request For Information) has been issued, for online backup and recovery companies to respond to the CSC with interest. Further details will appear in Connections, but to be kept informed you can also express interest to the CSC's Executive Director and Cloud Project Manager, Rebecca Krause-Hardie: Rebecca@csc-cloud.us or call her at (978) 575-1454. For general concept info, see DLS's City & Town article from May 2013:

http://www.mass.gov/dor/docs/dls/city-town/2013/ctown-may2.pdf

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Dates to remember in March and April

From the Municipal Calendar

March 1 Personal Property Owner Submits Form of List

March 1 Non-Profit Organization Final Filing Date for 3-ABC Forms

March 1 DOR/BLA Filing Deadline for Telecommunications Forms of List

April 1 Collector Mail 2nd Half Semi-Annual Tax Bills

In communities using a regular semi-annual payment system, the 2nd half actual tax bill, or the actual tax if an optional preliminary bill was issued, should be mailed

by this date.

April 1 Taxpayer Deadline for Payment of Semi-Annual Bill Without Interest (Annual Preliminary billing system, mailed by Dec. 31)

If the actual bills were mailed after Dec. 31, payment is due May 1, or 30 days after the bills were mailed, whichever is later.

May 1 Taxpayer Deadline for Payment of Semi-Annual and 4th Quarterly Tax Bill Without Interest

This is the deadline for receipt of the semi-annual 2nd half actual tax payment, or the actual tax payment if an optional preliminary bill was issued. This is also the deadline for the 4th Quarter tax payment.

Cloud Accounting—First Steps

Although the 2014 CIC grant didn't fully fund every project in the proposal, the CSC and the Town of Washington are moving forward with development of a Cloud-based municipal finance system. Backtracking a moment: the CSC was given a Microsoft Access-based, multi-module finance suite developed in-house by the Town of Hanover, which used it for many years (and still does in its DPW department.) Hanover has since moved on to a larger-scale product, but was willing to give it to the CSC at no cost. The CSC sees this as a potential solution for small towns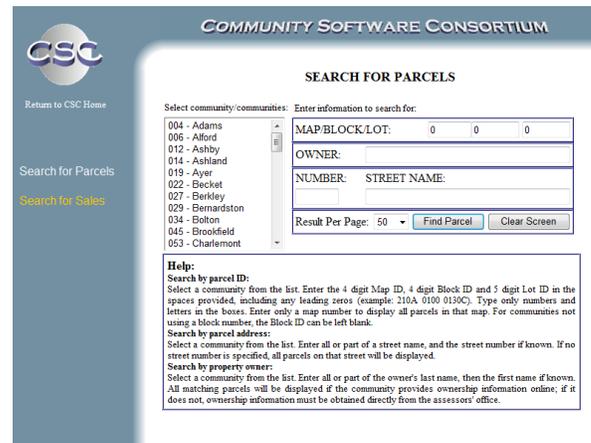 currently "making do" with their own home-grown solutions, or scrambling to afford vendor-based products due to limited resources. The Town of Washington is one such town, signing on as the lead community for the 2014 CIC grant and the Cloud-based accounting project in particular. By the end of FY 2014, Washington's accountant will be running the former Hanover accounting software, converted for the CSC's Cloud site, concurrently with his existing software. This pilot program is the first step towards providing a more comprehensive Cloud-based financial suite to small towns in need of an affordable finance solution.

Also Coming Soon:
New & Improved Public Access

The CSC's Web-based Public Access system has provided members, their community's residents and the general public with parcel and sales information for many years. At the 2013 annual meeting, CSC members voted to fund a study to identify technological and functionality improvements to Public Access; Stonewall Solutions, Inc., the CSC's primary technology vendor, is working on that now. In addition, the CSC received $30,000 in CIC Grant funding to improve and expand Public Access in two ways:

1. Develop a generic import process whereby communities not using the DOR/CSC CAMA system could upload their data to CSC Public Access.

2. Add tie-ins with MassGIS and possibly other imagery vendors to provide maps and other visual representations of the real estate data.

The last major update to CSC Public Access was done in 2008, so it's due for a major refresh. Certain records and data fields have been noticeably absent from the system because they were added after the upload program was designed ten years ago. In addition, condo records are about to change ,with RPIS 3.3 soon to be released with the condo enhancement package funded by the CSC Assessors Tier. So there are a number of reasons to be excited about a "new and improved" version of CSC Public Access.

As DLS and the CSC move forward with this initiative, it would help us greatly to gain insight into the features and functionality CSC members already love, could live without or would love to see added. Please give your DLS IT Advisor a call, or contact Rebecca at the CSC, or contact Kirsten Shirer or Dave Davies at DLS, to let us know what you'd like to see addressed in the new version of CSC Public Access. What would "wow" you and your constituents? Give us your opinion as we start the enhancement project. It's your system—together, we can make it even better!

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. The CSC awarded Community Innovation Challenge Grants by the Commonwealth in 2012 and 2014 totaling $418,700 to fund development of affordable Cloud-based programs and services that CSC members want and need.

For more information about the Community Software Consortium and its services, please contact the CSC's Executive Director and CEO, Rebecca Krause-Hardie:

rebecca@csc-cloud.us

(978) 575-1454

CSC-Cloud.us

STILL HAVE WINDOWS XP? REMAIN CALM

Windows

WORKSTYLES   PRODUCTS & TECHNOLOGIES   APPS   CUSTOMER STORIES   FOR YOUR INDUSTRY   RESOURCES

Support for Windows XP ends in:

24 : **12** : **12** : **44**
Days   Hours   Minutes   Seconds

DLS IT Support has received a few calls from CSC members concerned by the news that Microsoft Windows XP has "reached the end of its life cycle." That means after April 8, 2014, Microsoft won't release any more security patches for XP. If you still have a computer running Windows XP, do you need to buy a new computer by April 8th? No. There's no need to panic. Here's why:

1. Your PC will not melt down, catch fire or be immediately infected with malware on April 9th just because Microsoft won't issue any more patches. It will soldier on as if nothing happened. Really.

2. Do you regularly install Windows patches? If you do, gold star for you—but you're in the minority. Chances are, you haven't been installing the security updates Microsoft has issued up to now, so not receiving any new ones isn't much of a change.

3. Protecting Windows by installing patches, while certainly a positive step, mitigates only a certain amount of risk. I would argue that you can better protect yourself by keeping more high-risk software up to date (like Adobe Flash player, Web browsers, and MS Office to name a few), by using current anti-malware software and by always using cautious behavior when opening email and clicking links. Windows is only part of your PC's ecosystem. Using a good Internet security suite and keeping THAT up to date will offer you decent protection until you buy a new PC.

Should you start looking for a new PC? Yes. If yours is running XP, it's OLD. Old computer equipment will fail one way or another, probably at the most inopportune time. Call DLS IT to discuss upgrading and we'll offer you suggestions, including what to consider buying if you're planning a move to the Cloud system this year. If your IT staff or consultant insist that you make a change now, CALL DLS FIRST. DOR/CSC software has certain requirements that you must consider when purchasing a new PC. We also want to make sure that critical files are backed up before the XP box disappears. Call or email your DLS IT Advisor, or call (617) 626-2350 or email DLSITGroup@dor.state.ma.us for assistance.

Kirsten Shirer, DLS Deputy Director of IT