

Regionalizing Municipal Services and Group Procurement Survey

Results

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Appreciation and Acknowledgements

With deep appreciation and gratitude the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) and staff wish to acknowledge the significant input of many local officials, especially those of the North Quabbin Region and the staff of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) for its staff's valuable contribution into the development of this survey.

Executive Summary

The highlights of the data analysis for the 27 communities surveyed are as follows.

- Municipalities have much experience in the area of sharing municipal services and executing inter local agreements (ILA) also known as inter municipal agreements (IMA).
- Solid waste collection, solid waste management and household hazardous waste collection were high on the list of items to be shared.
- Most respondents indicated that their community conducts some level of joint purchasing already.
- Local officials responding to the survey are interested in jointly sharing for the purchase of road maintenance and building consumables (office supplies, asphalt reclamation, road crack sealing, computer hardware, diesel fuel , highway painting and paint products, liquid asphalt, calcium chloride and aggregates and loam).
- In the area of public safety, regionalizing dispatching is virtually the only area that public safety officials are willing to consider regionalizing.
- The willingness to implement the sharing of municipal staff was limited to part time employees (animal control, IT, municipal hearing officer and plumbing and wiring inspectors).
- Very few communities are willing to share highway maintenance equipment.
- Cost savings is the primary reason why municipalities want to regionalize services.

Survey respondents indicated low interest in sharing the majority of public safety services, municipal administration of multiple full time paid positions, and the joint purchase of vehicles. However, for several communities, these areas have very high interest.

Cities, towns and their respective partners should not be discouraged if some of their interests were found to be “minority interests” in the results detailed below. There is a high degree of interest to share a significant number of municipal services and joint goods purchasing. Local officials should use these results as a starting point of discussion with their counterparts in neighboring cities and towns to identify and implement projects of common regional interest.

Survey Strengths, Weaknesses and Next Steps

- Strength: More than one half (55%) of the 27 communities survey responded.
- Weakness: The survey response rate was too low among respondents (7%).
- Next Step: A better survey may be completed within one year to reassess the level of interest in these and related topics.

- Next Step: a more in-depth analysis of the results will be conducted throughout the summer of 2009. Additional findings will be published in the summer or fall of 2009.

Purpose/Intent

The intent of the MRPC survey has been to gauge the willingness of communities to regionalize services and which services they are sharing and willing to share in the future.

Methodology

The MRPC:

- Mailed and emailed the fourteen question survey to 467 persons/boards/commissions in 27 communities comprising the Montachusett and North Quabbin Region. (See complete survey and questions and all results attached.)
- Allowed the respondents to complete the survey online at www.surveymonkey.com (19 [58%] respondents) or mail in a hard copy of the survey for the MRPC staff to data enter (14 [42%] respondents).
- 37 (7%) of the 467 potential respondents responded.
- Four of the 37 did not leave contact information.
- 17 (62%) of the 27 communities responded. 7 (77%) of the nine communities responded from the nine town North Quabbin Region.
 - Responding communities were: Ashburnham, Ashby, Athol, Ayer, Erving, Fitchburg, Lancaster, Lunenburg, New Salem, Orange, Petersham, Phillipston, Royalston, Shirley, Templeton, Townsend, and Westminster.
 - Communities that did not respond were: Clinton, Gardner, Groton, Harvard, Hubbardston, Leominster, Sterling, Warwick, Wendell and Winchendon.

- Breakdown of the number of departments that responded to the survey follows

Selectmen	12
Public Works	4
Police Departments	3
School Departments	2
Fire Departments	2
Boards of Health	2
Zoning	2
Land Use/Planning	2
Town Clerk	1
Wastewater	1
Accountant	1
Board of Assessors	1

The department with the highest number of respondents was the Selectmens' Offices at 36%, followed by the Public Works Departments at 12% and Police Departments at 11%. 11%.

Preliminary Survey Analysis – All Respondents

There is a reasonably high level of interest among survey respondents to share municipal services and to participate in the joint purchase of municipal consumables and services.

Analyses of the data collected from all survey respondents follow.

Question 1

- Respondents were asked about their level of interest in the joint purchasing of 28 items. At least one-half of the respondents were interested in participating jointly in purchasing 15 of the 28 items. The items with the highest level of interest were office supplies (64%), asphalt reclamation (59.1%), road crack sealing (57%), computer hardware (56.5%), diesel fuel (56%), highway painting and paint products (54.5%), liquid asphalt (54.5%), calcium chloride (52.4%), and aggregates and loam (52.4%). Road Salt, Cold in Place Asphalt Recycling, and Stone Seal, also held high interest for joint purchasing.
- 31 (94%) of respondents indicate that they participate in a cooperative purchasing system for the following items: Heating fuel (30.8%), vehicles (20.8%), gasoline (16.7%), diesel (12%), computer software (12%), office supplies (8%), computer hardware (8.7%), road salt (9.1%), bituminous concrete (4.8%), and dog tags and licenses (4.8%).

Question 3

- Towns are less willing to share equipment than join in a regional purchasing collective. One in three survey respondents were willing to share some equipment. Equipment with the highest degree of interest in being shared included street sweeper (34.6%), brush cutter (32%), and wood chipper (32%), followed by catch basin cleaner (29.6%).

Question 4

- Municipal services sharing with the highest degree of interest included animal control facility (54.2%), animal control officer (48%), municipal hearing officer (related to MGL Chapter 148A) (45.5%), and computer information technology (IT) support (42.9%). (35%) 12 respondents already share a Veteran's Agent with another town and five share an Animal Control Officer.

Question 5

- The areas of most interest in sharing Permitting services include a wiring inspector (54.2%) and plumbing and gas inspector (50%). Seven respondents stated that they already share a Health Agent and six share a Building Inspector.

Question 6

- The public safety service of highest degree in interest in sharing was dispatch(ing) at 46.7%. Slightly less than two in ten of the respondents were interested in sharing police (17.4%), fire (18.2%), fire districts (4.3%), or EMT (18.2%).

Question 7

- Within the area of public works solid waste collection (39.1%) and solid waste management (37.5%) were areas in which communities would be willing to share services. Vehicle mechanic (30.4%) and household hazardous waste collection (28.6%) were in close 3rd and 4th place, respectively. Some towns do share public works services with other towns such as household hazard waste collection (28.6%), solid waste collection (21.7%) and management (20.8%) and wastewater treatment (5%).

Question 8

- Concerning schools, collaborative purchasing (47.8%), shared transportation contracts (35.0%), and regionalizing with other districts (34.6%) were top on the list of interest of survey respondents regarding areas in which respondents were interested in sharing services.

Question 9

- When asked to prioritize the “benefits to your Town” for services presently shared, more professional service (58.8%) and improved efficiency (52.9%) were high on the list. However, these were exceeded by financial savings (70.6%). These data illustrate and verify the assumption that the future sharing of municipal services will save money. Future analyses are needed to quantify past and anticipated cost savings through the regionalization of municipal services.

Question 10

- Cities and towns have a great deal of experience with executing and implementing municipal agreements. Sixty percent (60%) of survey respondents

indicated that their municipality has at least one inter local agreement (ILA) with another community for the delivery of municipal services.

Question 11

- Very few survey participants responded to the survey question concerning what “prevented” them “from entering into an inter local agreement”. Concerned about getting a “fair share” of service” netted the highest response (44.4%), followed by “too difficult to negotiate an agreement” (33.3%), “we receive the service through a regional organization “ (33%), and lastly “no need or interest” (22.2%).

Questions 12 and 13

- The majority of the communities (56.7% of the respondents) are aware of MGL Chapter 40, Section 4A which eases the process of executing ILAs. 27.8% of the survey respondents indicated that their communities entered into a ILA since the passage of MGL Chapter 40, Section 4A (June 2008)].

Preliminary Survey Analysis – Respondents Within the North Quabbin Region

The nine-town North Quabbin Region consists of Athol, Erving, New Salem, Orange, Petersham, Phillipston, Royalston, Warwick, and Wendell, Five of the nine communities submitted answers to all of the survey questions for a response rate of 56%.

Ninety-one (91) local officials received the survey in June. Only ten staff, boards or commissions replied for a response return rate of 9%.

Analyses of the data collected from the North Quabbin communities are found below.

Question 1

- Respondents were asked about their level of interest in the joint purchasing of 28 items. At least one-half of the respondents were interested in participating jointly in purchasing 12 of the 28 items. The items with the highest level of interest were office supplies (60%), and asphalt reclamation (60)%. Computer software, calcium chloride, highway painting and paint products, catch basin cleaning, cold in place asphalt recycling, cold planing and milling, aggregates and loam, stone seal, liquid asphalt, and diesel fuel also held high interest for joint purchasing each at 50%.
- 6 (60%) of the ten total survey respondents participate in a cooperative purchasing system: Those responding indicated that the items they already procure as part of a cooperative process include, computer software, road salt, bituminous concrete, heating fuel and dog tags and licenses.

Question 3

- Up to half of survey respondents are interested in sharing some sort of roadway equipment. Equipment with the highest degree of interest in being shared included street sweeper (50%), brush cutter (50%), and wood chipper (50%), followed by catch basin cleaner. Petersham, was the only responding town that already shared a road grader and roller with another community.

Question 4

- Municipal services sharing with the highest degree of interest included animal control officer (60%) and animal control facility (50%), All five towns responding indicated they already share a Veterans Agent with another town. Other positions that were shared with other towns included Town Management, Assessor's clerk, Town Counsel, Public Health Nurse, Accountant, Treasurer,

Computer IT Support, Wiring Inspectors and Zoning Enforcement Officers and Council on Aging.

Question 5

- The areas of most interest in sharing Permitting services including wiring inspector (50%) and municipal hearing officer (50%). Three towns share building inspectors, health agents and plumbing and gas inspectors.

Question 6

- The public safety service of highest degree in interest in sharing was dispatch(ing) at 40%. Only slightly more than one in ten of the respondents (10%) were interested in sharing police, fire, fire districts, or EMT. 60% of towns responded that they were already sharing dispatching and EMT services. Twenty percent stated that they shared police and fire.

Question 7

- Within the area of public works vehicle mechanic (40%) was an area in which communities would be willing to share services. DPW Superintendent, highway management and solid waste management were tied for second each at 30%. Four (80%) of the five responding towns answered that household hazardous waste collection is shared with another community.

Question 8

- Concerning schools, collective purchasing (60%) and shared administrative functions (50%) were top on the list of interest of survey respondents. Only one community shares the following services: collaborative purchasing, shared administrative functions, special education services, and a transportation contract.

Question 9

- Financial savings and more skilled employees were high on the list for municipalities already sharing municipal services, but these were exceeded by more professional service. Only 30% of respondents were interested in achieving financial savings and 50% thought they would obtain more skilled employees by sharing the delivery of municipal services on a regional basis.

Question 10

- Towns have some experience with executing and implementing municipal agreements. Four out of ten (40%) survey respondents indicated that their municipality has at least one inter local agreement (ILA) with another community for the delivery of municipal services. Thirty-percent of survey respondents and 20% of towns indicated they already receive service through a regional organization. Twenty percent of survey respondents indicated they were concerned about getting their fair share and that it was too difficult to negotiate an agreement. Ten percent did not have an interest or need to enter into an interlocal agreement. There was no response from the remaining 40%.

Questions 12 and 13

- All responding communities are aware of MGL Chapter 40, Section 4A which eases the process of executing ILAs. None of the survey respondents indicated that their communities entered into a ILA since the passage of MGL Chapter 40, Section 4A (June 2008).

APPENDIX

Survey - Questions and Results