

Local officials meet to discuss regional transit authority

STURBRIDGE — On Wednesday, July 31, State Rep. Peter Durant (R-Spencer) welcomed about a dozen Southern Worcester County local officials as well as Regional Transit Authority Administrator Stephen O'Neil, Central Mass Regional Planning Commission official Mary Ellen Blunt and Kirstie

Pecci, Staff Attorney with the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (MASSPIRG) to the Sturbridge Town Hall to discuss the state of the Worcester Regional Transit Authority, one of 15 RTAs in Massachusetts.

The conversation comes about six months after the expansion of RTA services in Worcester County, and two months after the grand opening of the RTA Transportation HUB at Union Station in Worcester. Through the recently passed transportation funding bill, the WRTA will now receive forward funding, rather than operating on a credit card, and will receive an additional \$300,000 in funding this fiscal year.

The largest portion of the meeting consisted of a discussion of success metrics to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the WRTA. This includes measures of on time service, infrastructure breakdowns, volume of ridership and implementation of technology to allow for vehicle tracking and real time passenger updates. Of particular interest was the imple-

mentation of new services such as a bus line into Southbridge and Charlton, and the potential improvements that can be made to that line.

"Our South Central Mass Communities have a huge and until now under-served need for public transportation," Durant said. "It is great to see the Commonwealth's commitment to regional transportation programs such as the WRTA which provide these communities with much needed service. I am excited to take part in this conversation to make sure that we are doing the very best that we can with the money that we have."

"Interest in public transportation has really grown in recent years," Mary Ellen Blunt added. "It's a national phenomenon — and we need to expand the system to reflect that."

Stephen O'Neil said, "Thanks to the new transportation law passed by the legislature, we'll be able to expand services for the first time in years. They realized you can't keep kicking the can down the road."

Kirstie Pecci added that she thought the discussion was very informative and was glad that further meetings around local transportation needs were proposed for this fall. "Folks like



Courtesy photo

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Stephen O'Neil of the WRTA, Mary Ellen Blunt of the CMRPC and Tim O'Day from South Central Mass Elder Bus are working really hard to make new technology, better metrics and a little better funding translate into much better service for the region. MASSPIRG wants to make sure they continue to hear from

the community as well. Then they know what the community needs and any changes to the system will be much more successful."

The meeting consisted of elected officials, Town Administrators and Managers, Chamber of Commerce officials, transportation providers, and additional interested parties.

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Brewer announces dates for sales tax holiday

BOSTON — Sen. Stephen M. Brewer (D-Barre) announced last week that the Legislature has voted to enact the sales tax holiday for 2013.

The legislation would suspend the state's 6.25 percent sales tax on Aug. 10 and 11 for purchases less than \$2,500.

"The sales tax holiday has become an annual occurrence and it is beneficial to businesses and encourages retail spending particularly as parents are preparing for back-to-school shopping," said Brewer. "Both consumers and retailers will benefit from the increase in sales typically spurred by this occasion."

Items excluded from the break in the sales tax are: telecommunications, tobacco products subject to the excise, gas, steam, electricity, motor vehicles, motorboats and meals.

The bill is now on the desk of Gov. Deval Patrick, who

has 10 days to sign the bill for this measure to become law.

FD to bolster fire prevention efforts with grant

STURBRIDGE — The Sturbridge Fire Department has received a \$3,000 fire prevention grant from FM Global, one of the world's largest commercial property insurers.

FM Global representatives presented the award to Acting Fire Chief Thomas J. Ford, III and Lieutenant John Marinelli at the Public Safety Complex located on 346 Main Street in Sturbridge. The award will be used to assist with pre-fire planning to efficiently collect and track data related to local community buildings. The information will help the fire service respond in an emergency situation.

Because fire continues to be the leading cause of property damage worldwide, during the past 35 years FM Global has contributed millions of dollars in fire prevention grants to fire service organizations around the globe. Locally, the company has awarded grants to a number of Massachusetts-based organizations.

"At FM Global, we strongly believe the majority of property damage is preventable, not inevitable," said Michael Spaziani,

manager of the fire prevention grant program. "Far too often, inadequate budgets prevent those organizations working to prevent fire from being as proactive as they would like to be. With additional financial support, grant recipients are actively helping to improve property risk in the communities they serve."

Through its Fire Prevention Grant Program, FM Global awards grants quarterly to fire departments-as well as national, state, regional, local and community organizations worldwide-that best demonstrate a need for funding, where dollars can have the most demonstrable impact on preventing fire, or mitigating the damage it can quickly cause.

To learn more about FM Global's Fire Prevention Grant Program, or to apply for a grant, please visit www.fmglobal.com/grants.

Photo contest at Norcross

WALES — The Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary, 30 Peck Road, is having a photo contest, so grab your camera and capture a beautiful scene, plant, bird, insect, animal...

Our trails are now opened for the season. The contest will continue until the closing of the season in November.

Entrants must follow the following rules: Photographs must be taken from the walking trail system during open hours only.

The photos will be framed and displayed in our visitor center for all to enjoy and the winner of the contest receives a van tour of the beautiful Sanctuary.

For more information, call 413-267-9654.

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VILLAGER ALMANAC

— QUOTATION OF THE WEEK —

"I've been here a long time, very long, and it's getting bigger and bigger every year."

- The Sturbridge Host's Banquet Captain Bill Stanton, commenting on the turnout at the Pan-Mass Challenge last weekend.

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\$320,000, 8 South Road, Amber L. Dieffenwierth to Sumanth Thatiparthi. \$218,000, 23 Cedar St., 23 Cedar St. LLC to Amber L. Dieffenwierth.

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