



# Worcester County Assessors Association Newsletter

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## President's Message

Jonathan Steinberg, MAA  
Westborough

It's October already! As I drive to work I'm surrounded by the beauty of the transition from summer to fall. Then I walk into Town Hall and am immediately reminded of all work in front of me to get my rate set. Many of you early filers will already have their growth approved and moving into the final phase. This year, for me, not so lucky. With my LA3 approved, I am forced to, once again, shift focus to non-value related responsibilities.

Seems to be one of those years where things have gone sideways where ever possible. As with many offices, we've had some turnover. I'm not sure who came up with the "2 week" standard but it sure isn't a lot of time to prepare for someone's departure. I quickly realized that I've always worked in an office that had an administrative clerk. I've never had to do a lot of the tasks that fall to our clerk. It certainly gave me a new level of appreciation of having a full-time person in that position. You can only hope to get qualified candidates. In full disclosure, filling my vacancy created vacancy

in another community. The domino effect of any vacancy is unfortunate but can be real.

Once again, it became clear that we work in a very specialized office. While this creates opportunity, it is also difficult for "outsiders" to break into the field and launch their career into Assessing. Let's face it, outside of our financial municipal world, how many really know the breadth of what we do and how we do it? This isn't something taught in school. We received a lot of applicants who really had no idea what our office does. In fact, the only opportunity is "on the job" training and education. This, of course, happens in offices that are short on staff, funding and time.

The time we're able to spend in our office becomes so valuable as the fall marches on. While working on my growth and starting to hear about Fiscal 21 budget planning, we have a Special Town Meeting in October.

*(Continued on page 2)*

Despite being an annual event, it is still a “Special Town Meeting”. The origin was to only address mid-year items that have come up during this Fiscal Year. Since the budget was voted on last March approved spending in October presents amended projections and meetings prior to the actual Town Meeting. Along with other Assessors who have a late Town Meeting, the tax classification hearing will be bearing down on me before I know it followed by bills and the abatement period. Around and around we go. Or, shall we say, “Rinse and repeat”.

I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage members to reach out and become active in the Worcester County Executive Board. Either by joining or offering opinions and suggestions. We are continuing to evaluate new locations for programs and our Annual Meeting. This year we are excited to be heading further north along Route 2 to Apple Hill Farm in Leominster. This highly regarded venue close to Routes 2 and 190 should be a great way to wrap up the year.

I wish you all a smooth certification of values and rate and look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting.

## **Analyzing Location Data for Better Land Valuation**

*By Christopher Wilcock, MAA  
City of Melrose Chief Assessor– Director of GIS*

In real estate location has a major impact on the price that a buyer will pay for a property, as the saying goes “location, location, location”. Are we capturing all of the location data needed to put a fair value on the property or are we just looking at pre-defined neighborhoods in our CAMA systems? What are the sales telling us, are the neighborhoods expanding or shrinking? How does a desirable school, abutting affluent community, a train station, or access to the water impact a land valuation? I believe that mapping sales trends and other location based features might help us better define land valuations.

Our CAMA systems use location data based on neighborhood codes, land influences, property sizes, usable area, and much more. But have we studied

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(Analyzed Cont'd)

proximity to desirable elementary schools or proximity to a popular rail station? I can only speak for myself and my answer is not really, I do not look at those specific factors currently. When we look at other Assessor's Offices across the country, large Counties are building GAMA systems instead of CAMA. GAMA stands for Geographic Assisted Mass Appraisal. This is a cutting edge way of looking at property sales statistics and physical location data in one system. This new type of valuation method is based on Waldo Tobler first law of Geography, "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things". With the addition of artificial intelligence with machine learning capabilities, computers can study patterns in location data that will lead to better assessments. Even without machine learning processes, what is the location data telling us? I think the first step is to map our sales and look at other factors like

grouping ASR's over a five year period, then check for irregularities in neighborhood delineations. With the DLS LA3 export function in Gateway, we can look at all the sales back to 2005. Data is more abundant now than any time in history we need to know where to acquire it.

Some of the limitations on GIS review processes are budget related, steep software learning curves, lack of usable data, and time restrictions. I get it, I have been through it and it is frustrating. My first exercise in GIS was with a city map of Salem, MA and a box of color pencils back in September of 2001. I learned really quickly that paper mapping was time consuming, ineffective, and not the best way to consume location data. Fast forward to 2019, what has changed and are the same obstacles in place? I would have to say that GIS is easier, cheaper to run, and good data sets are easier to find. In Melrose, I have

(Cont'd on Page 4)



### " A Taste of Worcester County"

Our gift baskets for our guest speakers and various raffles are filled with an assortment of products made in Worcester County.

To name a few:

The Edge Olde #43 .....	Root Beer, Worcester
Arcade Snacks .....	Pub Mix, Auburn
Trappist Monks .....	Jam Preserves, Spencer
Quissett Hill Farm .....	Maple Sugar Candy, Mendon
Brozzian Spices .....	Herb Spice Mix, Whitinsville
Wicked Twisted Pretzels .....	Pretzels, Mendon
Confectioners Chocolates .....	Chocolate, Sutton

\*\* If you know of any locally made products that can be included, please let me know\*\*

Mary Oliver

Oliverm@grafton-ma.gov



# Education Committee Report

By Bill Connor, Education Chairman



The WCAA started its educational offerings this year again at Leicester Country Club with a full day program that hosted three presentations. The day began with **Director of Regional Housing Services Office, Elizabeth Rust** providing a detailed look at affordable housing planning and monitoring. The second part of the day started off with our friends from the **RMV** with an introduction to the new **Atlas Program** roll-out, and how it can be used in your office. To wrap up the day we were treated to an insightful panel discussion about Overlay. **Kathy Stanley** (Paxton, Princeton), **Cindy Cosgrove** (Auburn), and **Jon Steinberg** (Westborough) represented four communities that need to treat Overlay with different approaches regarding who determines how much, when to release, and whether there is enough.

In April we held our Annual Clerks Meeting at the Grafton Police Station to a packed house. We were glad to have representatives from the RMV join us again for a brief presentation in the morning. They were more than happy to help the Clerks on the front lines of our offices get a chance to look at the new Atlas Program rollout and have an opportunity to ask some questions. The rest of the day belonged to **Bill Mitchell** (Leominster) and his outstanding overview about **Understanding Your Assessment**. Mr. Mitchell's presentation was an opportunity for Clerks to get a better understanding of the Assessor's job and why the Clerk position is so important. A heartfelt thanks goes out to our presenters and especially to our Vice President, **Mary Oliver** who did a fantastic job of organizing all the details at the Grafton Police Station.

I'd like to thank everyone who attended our programs so far this year. The new faces and familiar friends who gather at these events make it very

rewarding to those of us who serve in the WCAA. We are always interested in your feedback and would love to hear from you not only at events but anytime you have a question or comment. We are looking forward to some more great events this year, I hope you will have the opportunity to join us.



[Analyzed Cont'd](#)

been using ESRI Arc Online for spatial analysis, interactive public facing apps, and interdepartmental data exchanges. It has been a game changer. Melrose pays about \$320 per license annually to run things on the Arc Online cloud software. The online GIS software is filled with easy to use templates and help guides to make anyone look like a proficient mapper. Over the past couple of years Mass GIS has added hundreds of layers to the online ESRI library for anyone to acquire. This means that all standard 3 data is live on the ESRI site. Over the next year I hope to provide some education to the benefits of this software through the MAAO Educational Offerings. Please stay tuned.

Valuation processes are not changed overnight and you might ask where do I begin? Start simple with understanding your current data, find pockets of missing data, and understand what data you would like to have. Leave your office and inquire with other departments to harvest non-assessing municipal data. Read new publications on GIS like Fair and Equitable, study other municipal GIS webpages to see what people have in place, and most importantly talk to other Assessors that have built GIS valuation tools. Location data has been used as a tool to sell homes based on proximity to places and with the GIS tools today, I think we can start to use that data, display it spatially, and create a better valuation model for assessments.



## REMINDER SCHOLARSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE

T. M. Gonsalves

The Worcester County Assessors Association has available funds for scholarships. To apply you only need to be a paid member of the WCAA, the scholarships are available to new and seasoned office staff and Assessors. A community may not receive more than one scholarship in a given year. The maximum amount of any awarded scholarship cannot exceed \$450. The scholarships are available for the summer conference and the classes offered at UMASS each summer. However, a scholarship can only be used for tuition not room and board.

If you have a financial need for a scholarship please complete an application (found on WCAA's web site [www.wcaa-ma.org](http://www.wcaa-ma.org) ) and send the completed application to the address listed at the bottom of the application. The on line application is a fillable form.

Continuing education is important to Assessors and the office staff. By attending workshops, meetings and conferences you have the opportunity to share your knowledge and experiences, as well as learning various ways to deal with some of the unique and sometimes interesting problems they we encounter.

The WCAA Board would like to thank all of the members for their participation in our origination.

**Education is not only important to the members, it is also important to the public. Education and updated information helps make our jobs easier.**



## Income and Expense Information as of August 31, 2019


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Account Balance as of June 1, 2019	\$2,986.93	
Income 6/1/19 - 8/31/19	\$87.50	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,074.43</b>	
Less Expenses 6/1/19 - 8/31/19	<b>\$828.24</b>	<b>\$2,246.19</b>
Available Checking Account Funds as of 8/31/19	<b>\$2,246.19</b>	
<b>Certificates of Deposits (6 month CD)</b>		
Milford Federal Savings & Loan Association	8/31/2019	<b>\$12,050.44</b>
<b>Savings Account</b>		
Milford Federal Savings and Loan Association Account	8/31/2019	<b>\$4,346.17</b>
<b>Total CD and Savings Value</b>		<b>\$16,396.61</b>
<b>Total available cash as of 8/31/19</b>		<b>\$18,642.80</b>

## Statement August 31, 2019

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# Minutes of the Annual Meeting

## December 5, 2018

President Kathleen Stanley called the meeting of the Worcester County Assessors Association to order at 6:30 p.m. at the Castle Restaurant in Leicester on December 5, 2018 with 75 members and 10 non-members registered for this meeting.

A motion was made, seconded and voted unanimously to accept the Minutes of the March 22, 2018 meeting as written in the December Newsletter.

A motion was made, seconded and voted unanimously to accept the Treasurer's Report as written in the December Newsletter.

A motion was made, seconded and voted unanimously to accept the Budget for 2019.

Bill Mitchell, MAAO president made a speech about his association and the 5-year plan. They will have the executive board meetings scheduled around the state, open to all members and will work with all the counties.

A Legislative Update was given by Lane Partridge, Legislative Chairman of the MAAO, who reported that the following list of bills will be re-filed: Solar Tax Exemption Modernization, Streamline Chapter Land Filing Deadline Dates, Boat Modernization Bill, Right of First Refusal for Tax Exempt Property, Condominium Phase-In Bill and Tax increment Financing Reform Bill. A summary of these bills will be released soon. He also urged everyone to attend Day on the Hill in Boston on Wednesday, May 8, 2019.

Awards Committee Chairman, Molly Reed, presented the Fred Grabert Award to Cindy A. Cosgrove, MAA, Auburn for her continued service. The Reedy J. Nealer Jr. award was presented to John Valade, MAA, Worcester for his dedication and service to the WCAA.

President Kathy Stanley proposed the Slate of Officers for 2019 as written in the December Newsletter. A motion was made, seconded and voted unanimously to accept the slate for 2019.

<b>President:</b>	Jon Steinberg, MAA, Westborough
<b>Vice-President:</b>	Mary Oliver, MAA, Grafton
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Teri Gonsalves, MAA, Hopedale
<b>Secretary:</b>	Donna Wentzell, MAA, East Brookfield Christopher Reidy, MAA, Shrewsbury

<b>Executive Board:</b>	Bill Connor, MAA, Leominster Arthur K. Holmes, MAA, Southborough Christopher R. Reidy, MAA, Shrewsbury Cindy A. Cosgrove, MAA, Auburn Rosemary Scully, Holden Molly Reed, MAA, Berlin Tracy Tardy, MAA, Upton John Valade, MAA, Worcester Seth Woolard, MAA, Auburn
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<b>Past President:</b>	Kathy Stanley, MAA, Princeton & Paxton
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President Jon Steinberg presented a plaque to Past President Kathy Stanley for her service as president for two years. Numerous excellent door prizes were raffled to members. Winners: Priscilla Johnson, Lane Partridge, Bob Cumming, Rosemary Scully, Susan Reagan, Karen Berger, Tracey Tardy, Jean Berthold, Lisa Aldrich, Jen Sclar, Joann Wynkoop, Patty King, Tammy Kalinowski, Mary Oliver, Seth Woolard, Teri Gonsalves, Ken O'Brien and Heidi Lindsey.

The 50/50 Raffle was again won by Cindy Cosgrove of Auburn. The charity picked by the President is "Sweats for Vets" for the 50/50 Raffle proceeds.

With no further business, a motion was made and seconded to dissolve the meeting at 8:12 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Donna M. Wentzell, Secretary



**WORCESTER COUNTY ASSESSORS ASSOCIATION**  
**SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION FORM**

The Worcester County Assessors Association Scholarship Fund was established to help Assessors or their office staff, who are members of the WCAA further their knowledge in the field of assessing when they have no funding available to them in their own budgets. These scholarships are available for all courses that offer credits towards a designation or recertification, including IAAO courses.

Scholarships cover the cost of tuition only. Scholarships are awarded during the year and are based upon financial and educational need.

**Scholarship Conditions:**

- Applicants must be employed by a town/city participating in the WCAA
- Scholarships are open to new & seasoned office staff and Assessors
- Scholarships are for course tuition only, not room & board
- Only one scholarship will be available per community
- \$450.00 will be the maximum amount an applicant will receive

**Please Complete the Following:**

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
M.I. \_\_\_\_\_

Business address: \_\_\_\_\_ City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Business Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in the Assessing Field?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you have your MAA designation?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Which course do you wish to take?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What are the course date(s) and location(s)?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is the cost of tuition/registration?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How much money is budgeted for educational purposes in your dept.?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you wish to take this course, and why do you need a scholarship?  
\_\_\_\_\_



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# **Worcester County Assessors**

## **2019 Officers**

**President:** Jonathan Steinberg, MAA, Westborough  
**Vice-President:** Mary Oliver, MAA, Grafton  
**Treasurer:** Teri Gonsalves, MAA, Hopedale  
**Secretary:** Donna Wentzell, MAA, East Brookfield

**Executive Board:** William Connor, MAA, Leominster  
Seth Woolard, MAA, Auburn  
John Valade, MAA, Worcester  
Arthur K. Holmes, MAA, Southborough  
Christopher Reidy, MAA, Shrewsbury  
Cynthia Cosgrove, MAA, Auburn  
Rosemary Scully, MAA, Holden  
Molly Reed, MAA, Berlin  
Tracy Tardy, MAA, Upton

**Past President:** Kathy Stanley, MAA, Princeton & Paxton

**Newsletter Editors:**

Lisa Berg, Dudley      [lisab@dudleyma.gov](mailto:lisab@dudleyma.gov)  
Cindy Cosgrove, Auburn      [ccosgrove@town.auburn.ma.us](mailto:ccosgrove@town.auburn.ma.us)

**Your Ideas and Input  
Are always  
Welcome!**

