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**Planning Commission funding multiple projects
in region, including rural network to combat
domestic violence**



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The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission offices on Congress Street in Springfield. gazette file photo

By [JAMES PENTLAND](#)

Published: 03-01-2024 11:19 AM

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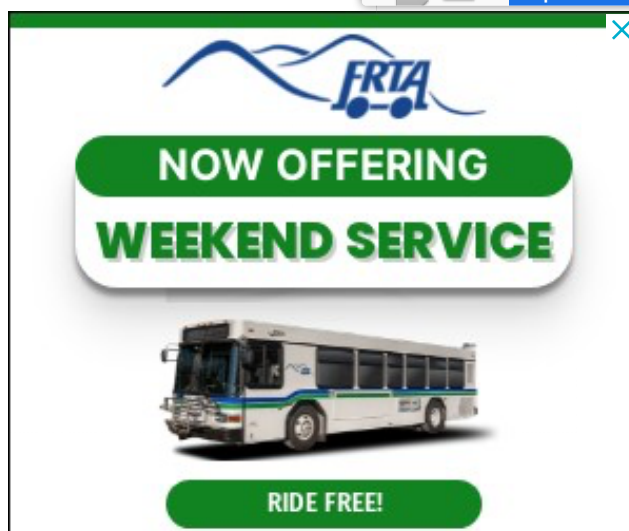
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NORTHAMPTON — Grants to support a rural network combating domestic violence and to help South Hadley’s two fire districts explore shared services are among numerous awards announced recently by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission through its Direct Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program.

Groups working to prevent domestic violence in a dozen rural communities will receive a \$15,000 grant to create the “Rural Network to End Domestic Violence.” The initiative will bring together a number of existing task forces that have been working in isolation, said Monica Moran, who manages the regional planning commission’s Domestic Violence Prevention Project.

“There’s a special need to focus on what we’re doing as a state (to combat domestic violence),”

she said. “This is going to support that.”



The application came from the town of Chester, which has been a leader on the issue, Moran said. The Southern Hilltowns Domestic Violence Task Force, for example, has been at the forefront of efforts to provide resources for 25 years. It will join with a number of other task forces operating in small communities, from Tolland in the west to Palmer and Ware in the east, to form the new network.

The grant pays for staff time to coordinate and support the work of the new network, which has already begun to meet and set goals. It will last until July 1, and Moran is working on grant applications to help sustain the effort beyond then.

Moran noted that, during the pandemic, the PVPC led the effort to launch a statewide helpline for people who abuse — the first in the country.

South Hadley fire districts

In South Hadley, the \$7,500 grant, secured by Fire District 2, will pay for a closer look at services that could be shared, such as information technology and legal services, with planning commission employees facilitating conversations and conducting research.

Kenneth LeBlanc, chair of the District 2 Prudential Committee, told the Gazette recently that the committee pursued the grant in the face of rising costs. He said the town’s two firehouses and water districts organize operations and personnel differently, and coordination will require a large amount of planning and communication.

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“None of this will be all of a sudden, but you have to pave the foundation and start planning ahead,” LeBlanc told the Gazette in February.

Representatives of both districts said the grant is not the beginning of a merger, but rather a way to reap the financial benefits of one district without reorganizing the entire government structure.

“The idea here is the efficient consolidation of services to improve for the long term how things are done,” Eric Weiss, director of economic and municipal collaboration at PVPC, said previously.

The last attempt to merge the districts was defeated at Town Meeting in 2009.

Other grant recipients

In total, the PVPC allotted \$288,682 in this round of grants to support projects across the region. The concepts include shared regional emergency services, broad-scale rezoning, housing development and drinking water protection. Projects are set to begin over the following weeks.

“A huge portion of our work at PVPC is providing technical assistance to communities across western Massachusetts,” said Executive Director Kimberly H. Robinson said in a statement. “We applaud the creativity and thoughtful proposals put forward and we are eager to work hand-in-hand with these municipalities and see them come to life right here in the Valley.”

The grants are made possible by funding provided by the Legislature, with the support of local legislators, under a contract with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. Communities are asked to provide an in-kind match equivalent to 5% of the total budget for each project, which can include community staff time or volunteer board members time spent on the project.

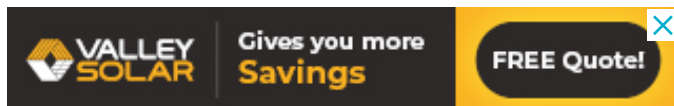
Other initiatives awarded grants include:

- Exploring the feasibility of Chester and Blandford combining their fire departments and sharing a fire chief.
- A comprehensive zoning bylaw review and diagnostic plan in Goshen.
- Exploring a Chapter 40R Zoning District on Route 9 in Hadley.
- Technical assistance for the Hilltown Community Ambulance Association
- Open space, recreation and capital planning in Granby, Huntington, Middlefield and Worthington.
- Planning for future needs following a 40B project approval in Pelham
- Creation of affordable housing in South Hadley
- Protection of drinking water supplies in Southampton.

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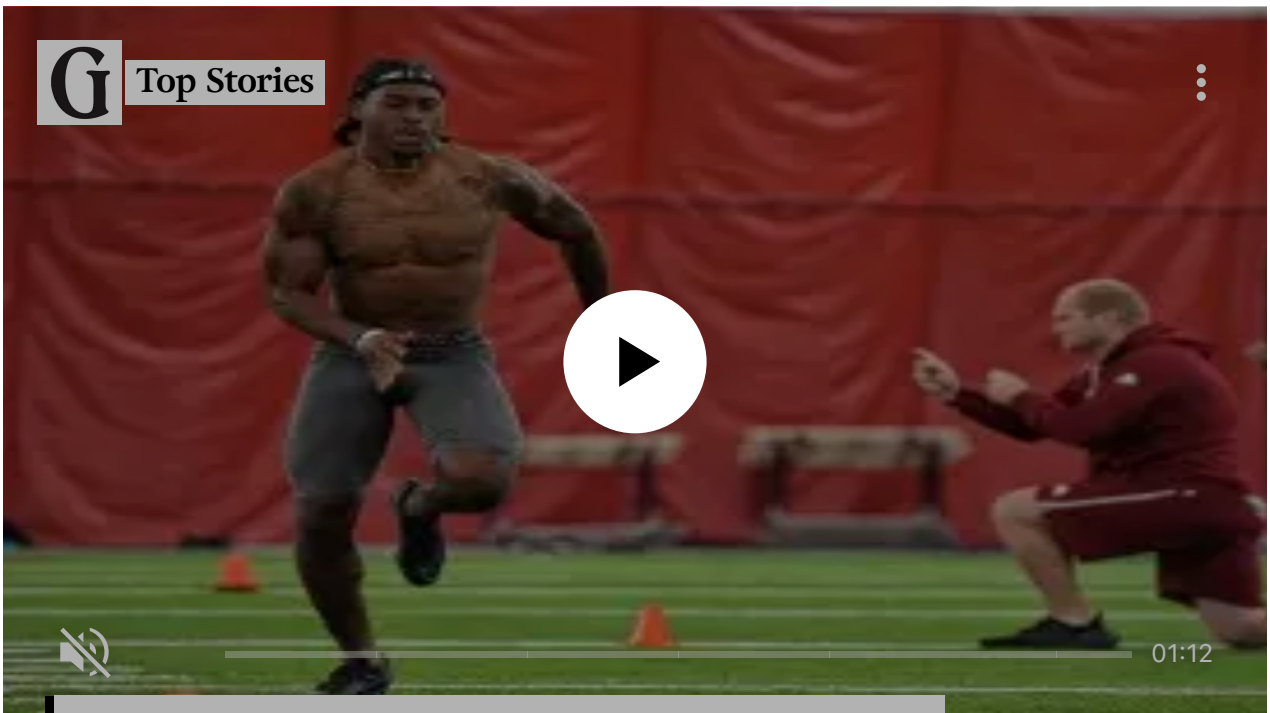


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