



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Common Cause Massachusetts to Present e-Government Award
to 181 Municipalities, Releases Municipal Transparency Report**

BOSTON – Common Cause Massachusetts released the findings of [its annual survey of municipal websites](#) today and will present its 2010 e-Government Award to 180 cities and towns next Tuesday, March 16th at 11am in hearing room A-1 at the State House. The survey and ceremony coincide with the national initiative known as “Sunshine Week” in which media outlets and others address issues of governmental transparency.

Municipalities who post their governing body’s minutes and an agenda, their budget, their bylaws, and, if applicable, their town meeting warrant and results will receive the 2010 e-Government Award and are listed below.

Those who additionally post a year’s archive of minutes and agendas, their calendar, their zoning bylaws, their school committee’s minutes and agenda, and the minutes and agenda for another board or committee will receive the award with distinction and are bolded.

*Acton, Agawam, **Amesbury**, Amherst, Andover, Arlington, Ashburnham, Ashby, Ashland, Attleboro, Avon, Ayer, Barnstable, Becket, Bedford, Bellingham, Belmont, Billerica, Bolton, Boston, Bourne, Boxborough, Boylston, Braintree, Brewster, Brockton, Brookline, Burlington, Cambridge, Carlisle, Charlton, Chatham, Chelmsford, Chelsea, Chicopee, Chilmark, Cohasset, Concord, Dartmouth, Dedham, Dennis, Douglas, Dover, Dracut, Dudley, Dunstable, Duxbury, East Longmeadow, Eastham, Easton, Edgartown, Egremont, Essex, Everett, Falmouth, Fitchburg, Foxborough, Framingham, Franklin, Freetown, Gardner, Georgetown, Gill, Gloucester, Grafton, Great Barrington, Groton, Halifax, **Hamilton**, Harvard, Harwich, Haverhill, Hingham, Holden, Holliston, Holyoke, Hopkinton, Hubbardston, Hudson, Ipswich, Kingston, Lakeville, Lancaster, Lenox, Leominster, Lexington, Littleton, Longmeadow, Lowell, Lunenburg, Malden, Mansfield, Marblehead, Marlborough, Marshfield, Maynard, Medfield, Medway, Melrose, Methuen, Millbury, Milton, Montague, Monterey, Nantucket, Needham, New Bedford, Newburyport, Newton, North Adams, North Andover, North Brookfield, North Reading, Northampton, Northbridge, Northborough, Northfield, **Oak Bluffs**, Orange, Orleans, Otis, Paxton, Peabody, Pembroke,*



*Pepperell, Plympton, Princeton, **Reading**, Rockland, Rockport, **Salem**, **Salisbury**, Sandwich, Saugus, Scituate, Seekonk, Sharon, Sheffield, Shrewsbury, **Somerville**, **South Hadley**, **Southampton**, Southborough, Southwick, Spencer, **Springfield**, **Sterling**, **Stow**, **Sudbury**, Sunderland, **Sutton**, Taunton, **Topsfield**, **Truro**, Upton, Uxbridge, **Walpole**, Waltham, **Wareham**, **Warwick**, Watertown, Wayland, **Wellesley**, **Wellfleet**, Wenham, **West Boylston**, **West Springfield**, **Westborough**, **Westford**, Westminister, **Weston**, **Westwood**, **Weymouth**, Wilbraham, Williamstown, **Wilmington**, Winchester, Woburn, **Worcester**, **Wrentham**, Yarmouth.*

“We are pleased to be able to honor over half of Massachusetts cities and towns this year,” said Common Cause Massachusetts’ Executive Director Pam Wilmot. “Many communities rose to the challenge and significantly improved their websites over the past year. By making it easier to obtain important information online, citizens will be empowered to actively participate in their local governments.”

Common Cause Massachusetts launched this project in 2006. At that time, only 24 communities met the campaign’s minimum standards and posted essential governance records. This year, 91 will receive the basic award, and 90 will receive the award with distinction, making 181 communities in total, seven-and-a-half times more than the original 24.

In addition to the awards presented, Common Cause released a full survey of the Internet presence of all 351 cities and towns. 25 communities, many of them small towns, had no website at all. 23 municipalities have websites but none of the documents posted. 20 communities came very close to earning an award and only had one document missing.

For more information, go to www.commoncause.org/egov10.

ABOUT COMMON CAUSE

Common Cause Massachusetts is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, government watchdog, dedicated to citizen participation in an open, honest, and accountable government. An independent, member-supported organization, Common Cause has more than 200,000 members nationwide and 10,000 in Massachusetts.

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Transparency in Massachusetts Municipal Websites

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Common Cause Massachusetts is a non-partisan, non-profit government watchdog, dedicated to citizen participation in an open, honest, and accountable government. An independent, member-supported organization, Common Cause has more than 400,000 members nationwide, including 10,000 in Massachusetts.

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SUMMARY

In January of 2010, Common Cause Massachusetts began its annual review of all 351 Massachusetts municipality websites to determine how many post important governance records online. These items—the governing body’s agenda, the governing body’s minutes, the current year’s budget, the by-laws or ordinances, and if applicable, the town meeting warrant and results—are by no means comprehensive, but do provide a critical baseline for transparency.

Our research found that 326 municipalities have some presence on the Internet, while 25 do not maintain a website at all. Of those with websites, we concluded that 181 municipalities, or 51.5% post all of the targeted records. 90 municipalities, or 25.6%, also post additional governance documents¹—an archive of the governing body’s minutes and agenda, a calendar, zoning by-laws, and a recent agenda and minutes from the school committee and another board or committee. Additionally, the review found that 303 municipalities maintain a website with at least a single targeted document. Despite having gone through the effort of building a website, there are 23 communities that did not post any of the documents we were looking for.

It should be the priority of government, at any level, to make information readily available to the public it serves. As is evident from the results of this study, an overwhelming percentage of Massachusetts municipalities possess the resources to make government accessible to their constituents. The findings in this report demonstrate that the past three years have seen a significant increase in the number of municipalities meeting our criteria—unfortunately there is still much work to be done.

INTRODUCTION

Common Cause Massachusetts launched the Massachusetts Campaign for Open Government (MACOG) in March of 2006 to determine the prevalence and quality of municipal websites in the state. As a result of the growing prominence of the Internet, there have been several recent studies which provide comprehensive analysis of what is variously called referred to as e-government, digital government, online government at state level—there is even a journal devoted to the subject.² On the federal level, the White House hosts an ‘open government’ blog in order to inform the American public

¹ In 2008, Common Cause Massachusetts began looking for additional governance documents. Those municipalities that also post these documents receive the e-Government Award with Distinction.

² See Holzer et al. 2008. ‘U.S. States E-Governance Report: An assessment of state websites’, *National Center for Public Performance*. Rutgers, NJ; the International Journal of Electronic Government Research (IJEGR) has been in publication since 2005.

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on how President Obama's Open Government Directive of December 2010 is being implemented across the federal government and even solicits recommendations from the public.¹

Our study shows that there is a trend in local Massachusetts government towards maintaining a stronger Internet presence.² However, some municipalities still do not maintain any Internet presence at all. There are compelling reasons why Massachusetts municipalities should care about maintaining a strong online presence—doing so is a simple way for a municipality to provide frequently requested documents, to serve and educate its citizens, and to fulfill, its obligation under the constitution to, at all times, be accountable to the people.

Access to information concerning government activities is a right granted by the open meetings law³ and the public records law⁴. The open meeting law states that an individual has the right to attend the meeting of any local governmental body, while under the public records law an individual has the right to request copies of public records regarding the activities of local governmental bodies. The greatest practical limitation here is time, as most people find it difficult to commit the time required to attend a meeting or wait up to ten days for their request for documents to be processed. These laws are also restrictive because an individual needs to know these rights exist and has to understand how to exercise them. Requests under the public records law also have the potential to be costly. Maintaining a strong Internet presence is the best way around these limitations. When a municipality posts public records online, anyone at any time may obtain important information about their local government at no cost.

More and more people are becoming increasingly proficient with Internet technology. The social networking site, Facebook, has more than 400 million active users, 50% of whom use the site every day and 25% of whom access the site through their web-enabled mobile phones.⁵ Additionally, a National Retail Federation survey found that almost 100 million people planned to shop online the Monday after Thanksgiving (referred to as "Cyber Monday").⁶ Massachusetts municipalities must recognize that as Internet technology becomes easier to use, more people will make it an integral part of their life and will come to expect a high level of online content from their government. The Massachusetts constitution

¹ See www.whitehouse.gov/open/blog; as part of Obama's Open Government Directive, websites for every major government agency were created in order to provide the public with a way of tracking how each agency is conforming to the Open Government Directive. It acts as an online mode of civic engagement.

² See e-Government Awardees figure.

³ M.G.L. c. 39, §§ 23A-23C, 24 (Open Meeting Law provisions applying to municipal and district governments).

⁴ M.G.L. c. 4, §7, clause 24; M.G.L. c. 66. See Also 950 CMR §§ 32.01-32.09.

⁵ See <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

⁶ See http://www.nrf.com/modules.php?name=News&op=viewlive&sp_id=842

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reminds us that the government is at all times accountable to the people.¹ This being the case, municipalities must ensure that they utilize the technology that their constituents rely on to its full effect.

FINDINGS

Our review period began mid-January 2010 and lasted through mid-February in order to determine which municipalities were posting governance documents online. During this window, researchers combed through each municipality's website twice looking for the basic criteria and the additional criteria². On March 16, 2010, those communities that meet the basic criteria will receive the e-Government Award and those who meet the additional criteria will receive the same award but with distinction.

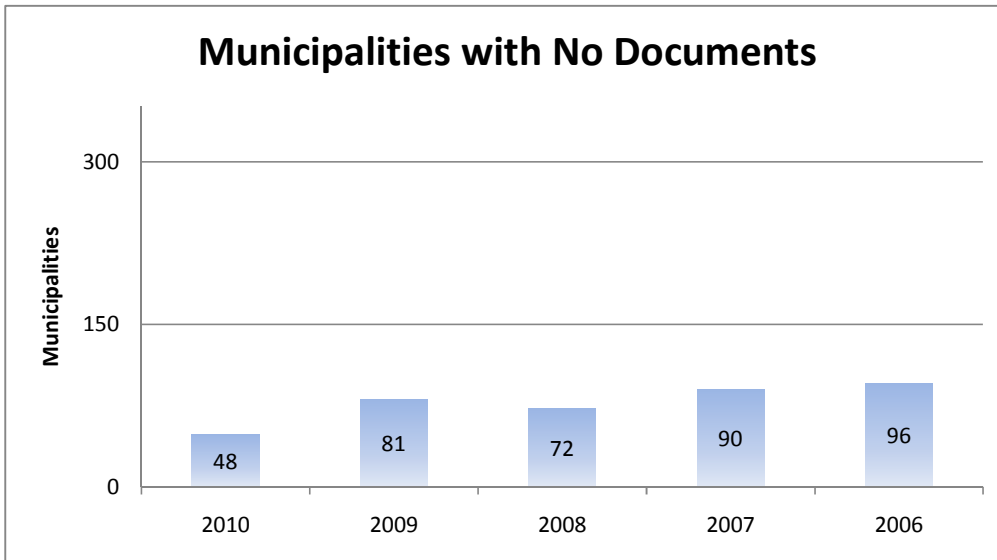
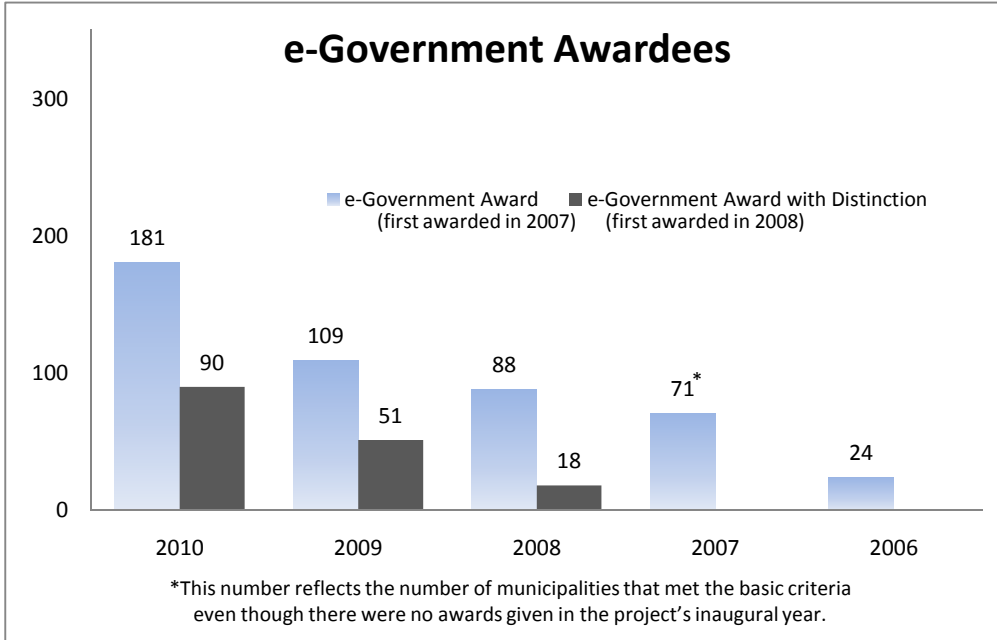
Our research found that 181 municipalities, or 51.5%, post all of the essential records online while out of these 181 municipalities, 90 of them post the additional documents. 2010 saw the largest increase in the number of municipalities posting all the required documents online. In 2009 there were 109, in 2008 there were 83, in 2007 there were 71, and in March of 2006 there were only 24. While there were only 18 municipalities who met the additional criteria when it was introduced in 2008, there are 90 this year. In the past year, significant strides have been made in the quantity and quality of information posted online by cities and towns.

We found 23 municipalities maintaining a website that do not have any of the targeted documents posted. An additional 25 municipalities do not maintain a website at all. If these numbers are combined, then 48 municipalities are not providing their constituents an easy and efficient way to find any governance documents. While these results are still high, they are encouraging nevertheless. In 2006, our review found that 96 municipalities, or 27%, did not post any of the key governance records online; the subsequent three years did not see much improvement either—90 in 2007, 72 in 2008, and 81 in 2009. Our review also found there are 20 municipalities missing just one of the targeted documents.

¹ As Article V of the Massachusetts Constitution states, "All power residing originally in the people, and being derived from them, the several magistrates and officers of government, vested with authority, whether legislative, executive, or judicial, are their substitutes and agents, and are at all times accountable to them."

² See Appendix A

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The municipalities which post the targeted documents had a median population of 14,285. Those that did not post these documents, or had no website, had a median population of 5,426. Regardless of a municipality's size, however, there are significant benefits to posting these targeted documents online:

- Improved public access to information about local government.
- More political accountability.
- Probable increase in civic participation.

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- Less time and money spent responding to requests for documents.
- Improved communications and less misunderstanding about governance issues.
- Increased ability to compare with other municipalities.
- Market the municipality to outside interests.

Since 2006, there has been a steady rise in the number of Massachusetts municipalities posting documents online, greatly increasing access to information about local government for millions of Massachusetts residents. We expect the trend to continue as the Internet becomes a central part in the lives of more people. With municipalities recognizing the importance of maintaining a strong Internet presence, democracy can only become stronger and civic engagement more vibrant.

BACKGROUND

The Massachusetts Campaign for Open Government has worked since 2006 to dramatically increase the number of municipalities that post records online. This ongoing effort is a grassroots project that accomplishes its goal by mobilizing the members of Common Cause Massachusetts and other concerned citizens.

For those cities and towns that already have a website, we encourage interested citizens to contact their municipal officials to ask them to post all the key governance records online. For those communities that have no website, we encourage interested citizens to convince their municipal officials to create and maintain a website, not only because it is an effective method by which the municipality can make public information available to its residents, but also because having a website can benefit the municipality in so many other ways.

Tools for grassroots activism are located on our website as is up-to-date information on which towns post which documents. As more towns and cities are persuaded to post all the key governance records online, we will announce it on the website and update the information. The website also has forms for citizens to report apparent noncompliance with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law and the Massachusetts Public Records Law by local officials. Unfortunately, the state does not maintain records on noncompliance issues unless legal action is pursued.

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APPENDIX A

The criteria we used in evaluating each website focused on whether the essence of the particular public record had been posted, rather than strictly whether the actual targeted records have been posted. The following is the criteria used in determining whether a municipality had posted the targeted record:

CRITERIA FOR e-GOVERNMENT AWARD

- Agenda for a governing body (board of selectmen, town council, city council, board of aldermen, etc.) meeting held or scheduled within the two (2) weeks previous to or two (2) weeks after the review period. It must contain a list of items to be discussed, not just, date, time and location of a meeting.
- Minutes for a governing body meeting occurring any time during the two (2) months prior to the review period.
- Budget information for the current fiscal year (July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010). It must be *at least* a detailed operating budget, which can be a separate document or contained in another record such as a finance committee report to the town meeting, a mayor's report to the city council, the town meeting warrant, the town meeting results, or the town's annual report.
- Complete general bylaws, code, or ordinances (with or without zoning bylaws).
- Town meeting warrant for any annual or special town meeting occurring in the previous 12 months or a warrant for the next scheduled town meeting. Warrant articles can be included in the town meeting results.
- Town meeting results for any town meeting occurring within the past 12 months. Results can be in any format as long as the decision or vote on each article is indicated. For example, acceptable formats include a copy of the warrant with notations under each article as to whether the article passed, with or without a vote tally; a spreadsheet with a row for each article, a short description of the article, and a vote tally; and actual minutes with a description of who spoke, who made motions, and what the vote was.

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CRITERIA FOR e-GOVERNMENT AWARD *WITH DISTINCTION* (Only applies if municipality's website meets the basic criteria.)

- A year's history of past governing board minutes.
- A year's history of past governing board agendas.
- Zoning by-laws.
- A community calendar which includes meetings of local government committees and boards.
- Agendas for school committee (if none, the regional school committee) or a link to a separate website that contains the school committee meeting agendas for a meeting held or scheduled within the two (2) weeks previous to or two (2) weeks after the review period. It must contain list of items to be discussed, not just date, time and location of a meeting.
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- Agenda for at least one other town or city committee or board for a meeting held or scheduled within the two (2) weeks previous to or two (2) weeks after the review period. It must contain list of items to be discussed, not just date, time and location of a meeting.
- Minutes for at least one other town or city committee or board for the most recent meeting occurring anytime during the two (2) months prior to the review period.

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APPENDIX B

LIST OF MUNICIPALITIES. The municipalities in black are the 2010 e-Government Award recipients, the municipalities in bold are recipients of the 2010 e-Government Award with Distinction, and the municipalities with an asterisk are the 2009 e-Government Award recipients.

	Blandford	Conway	* Gardner
	* Bolton	Cummington	Georgetown
Abington	* Boston	* Dalton	* Gill
Acton	Bourne	Danvers	* Gloucester
Acushnet	* Boxborough	Dartmouth	Goshen
Adams	Boxford	* Dedham	Gosnold
Agawam	Boylston	Deerfield	Grafton
Alford	Braintree	* Dennis	Granby
* Amesbury	Brewster	Dighton	Granville
* Amherst	Bridgewater	Douglas	Great Barrington
* Andover	Brimfield	Dover	Greenfield
Aquinnah	Brockton	Dracut	Groton
* Arlington	Brookfield	* Dudley	Groveland
* Ashburnham	* Brookline	* Dunstable	Hadley
Ashby	Buckland	* Duxbury	Halifax
Ashfield	* Burlington	East Bridgewater	Hamilton
* Ashland	* Cambridge	East Brookfield	Hampden
Athol	Canton	* East Longmeadow	Hancock
Attleboro	Carlisle	* Eastham	Hanover
Auburn	* Carver	Easthampton	Hanson
Avon	Charlemont	* Easton	Hardwick
Ayer	* Charlton	Edgartown	Harvard
* Barnstable	* Chatham	* Egremont	Harwich
Barre	* Chelmsford	Erving	Hatfield
* Becket	* Chelsea	Essex	* Haverhill
* Bedford	Cheshire	* Everett	Hawley
Belchertown	Chester	Fairhaven	Heath
* Bellingham	Chesterfield	Fall River	Hingham
* Belmont	Chicopee	* Falmouth	Hinsdale
Berkley	* Chilmark	* Fitchburg	Holbrook
Berlin	Clarksburg	Florida	* Holden
Bernardston	Clinton	Foxborough	* Holland
Beverly	Cohasset	Framingham	* Holliston
Billerica	Colrain	Franklin	* Holyoke
Blackstone	* Concord	* Freetown	Hopedale

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* Hopkinton	Mendon	Norwood	* Sandwich
Hubbardston	Merrimac	Oak Bluffs	* Saugus
* Hudson	* Methuen	Oakham	Savoy
Hull	Middleborough	* Orange	* Scituate
Huntington	Middlefield	* Orleans	Seekonk
* Ipswich	Middleton	* Otis	* Sharon
* Kingston	Milford	Oxford	* Sheffield
* Lakeville	* Millbury	Palmer	Shelburne
Lancaster	Millis	* Paxton	Sherborn
Lanesborough	Millville	Peabody	Shirley
Lawrence	* Milton	Pelham	Shrewsbury
Lee	Monroe	* Pembroke	Shutesbury
Leicester	Monson	* Pepperell	Somerset
Lenox	Montague	Peru	* Somerville
* Leominster	* Monterey	Petersham	* South Hadley
Leverett	Montgomery	Phillipston	Southampton
Lexington	Mount Washington	Pittsfield	Southborough
Leyden	Nahant	Plainfield	Southbridge
Lincoln	* Nantucket	Plainville	* Southwick
* Littleton	Natick	Plymouth	Spencer
* Longmeadow	* Needham	Plympton	* Springfield
* Lowell	New Ashford	Princeton	* Sterling
Ludlow	New Bedford	* Provincetown	Stockbridge
Lunenburg	New Braintree	Quincy	Stoneham
Lynn	New Marlborough	Randolph	Stoughton
Lynnfield	New Salem	Raynham	Stow
* Malden	Newbury	* Reading	Sturbridge
Manchester-by-the-	* Newburyport	Rehoboth	Sudbury
* Sea	* Newton	Revere	Sunderland
Mansfield	* Norfolk	Richmond	Sutton
Marblehead	North Adams	Rochester	Swampscott
Marion	* North Andover	* Rockland	Swansea
* Marlborough	North Attleborough	* Rockport	Taunton
* Marshfield	North Brookfield	Rowe	Templeton
* Mashpee	* North Reading	Rowley	Tewksbury
Mattapoisett	* Northampton	Royalston	Tisbury
* Maynard	* Northborough	Russell	Tolland
Medfield	* Northbridge	Rutland	Topsfield
Medford	Northfield	* Salem	Townsend
Medway	Norton	* Salisbury	Truro
* Melrose	Norwell	Sandisfield	Tyngsborough

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Tyringham	Wayland	Westborough	* Williamstown
Upton	Webster	Westfield	Wilmington
Uxbridge	Wellesley	* Westford	Winchendon
Wakefield	Wellfleet	Westhampton	* Winchester
Wales	Wendell	* Westminster	Windsor
Walpole	Wenham	* Weston	* Winthrop
Waltham	* West Boylston	Westport	* Woburn
Ware	West Bridgewater	* Westwood	* Worcester
Wareham	West Brookfield	* Weymouth	Worthington
Warren	West Newbury	Whately	* Wrentham
Warwick	West Springfield	Whitman	Yarmouth
Washington	West Stockbridge	* Wilbraham	
Watertown	West Tisbury	Williamsburg	

CAMPAIGN FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT e-GOVERNMENT AWARD CRITERIA

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