



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: February 7, 2020
Re: Town Manager Report for February 10, 2020

Town Manager Update:

- Outreach:
 - Coffee with Town Manager: The next will be on February 14th from 7:30 – 9:00 a.m. with the Town’s new Principal Assessor, Liz Duffy at Bruegger’s Bagels.
- Appointments:
 - I referred appointments for the Council on Aging, Cultural Council, and Participatory Budgeting Commission to the Town Council which the Town Council will review at your meeting.
 - I have also referred appointments for the Energy and Climate Action Committee and Public Shade Tree Committee to the Town Council.
 - I am seeking and interviewing applicants for several committees including the Conservation Commission, Public Art Commission, Redevelopment Authority, and Board of License Commissioners.
- Massachusetts Municipal Association:
 - It was great to have such a strong showing at the MMA Annual Meeting and Trade Show. Many Amherst attendees commented on the value of the sessions and networking. I thank the Town Councilors who devoted their weekend to Town business!
 - I am very proud that three members of the Amherst team were presenters at workshops. I received very positive reviews on the Human Resources Director’s and the Communication Manager’s presentations. I was on a third, well attended session on social media. MMA noted, “Amherst is really showing off these days!”
 - Evelyn Rivera-Riffenburg was put forward to serve on the MMA’s Personnel and Labor Relations Policy Committee. The MMA Board of Directors will be voting on committee rosters on Tuesday, February 11, at which time appointments will be final.
 - I was re-elected to the Massachusetts Municipal Management Association’s Executive Committee.
- Outreach and Community Participation Officers (CPOs):
 - Black History Month:
 - There will be a celebration of Black History Month on Saturday, February 8th from 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at the Bangs Community Center.

- There will be food, entertainment, and outreach to encourage people to register to vote and complete the U.S. Census.
 - This year the theme is “African Americans and the Vote”. 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment which secured the right of Black men to vote and it also marks the 100th anniversary of the culmination of the women’s suffrage movement which resulted in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment which secured the right for women to vote.
 - This event will be organized in cooperation with the Senior Center and the Town Clerk’s office. CPOs will work with local businesses, the Business Improvement District, and Chamber to display material celebrating the month.
- Regionalization:
 - There was a Four Towns Meeting February 1st at 9:00 a.m. in the Amherst Regional Middle School library. Minutes from that meeting are in your packet.
 - Staff have been working on a regional services agreement with the South Deerfield Water District. This will come to the Town Council at a future meeting.
 - Staff have been working with representatives from the Town of Hadley to explore ways we can work together on water and sewer issues. Currently, we are focused on a “mutual aid agreement” that would provide redundancy and back-up for both communities. Any inter-municipal agreement will require the approval of the Town Council.
 - K-P Law represents both the Town of Hadley and the Town of Amherst. I have provided written permission to them to review these documents for both communities. They are awaiting permission from the Town of Hadley.
- Town-Gown:
 - Strategic Partnership Agreement:
 - We will be making an announcement early next week on a portion of the Agreement.
 - Staff are meeting regularly with representatives of the University on a renewal of the Strategic Partnership Agreement.
- Kanegasaki Sister City:
 - Fourteen students and three chaperones from the Town’s sister city in Kanegasaki, Japan will be visiting the Town from March 18-22. There will be a modest welcoming reception on March 18th at a time to be determined. All Town Councilors are invited to attend this reception.
 - Seven families from Amherst Regional Middle School will serve as hosts, and have already started to send out information to families and staff in the community.
 - At this time, we are still seeking someone to chaperone the guests for a weekend day trip.

Departments:

- Conservation and Development:
 - 132 Northampton Road:
 - Valley Community Development Corporation submitted its request for a Project Eligibility Letter for 132 Northampton Road to the State.
 - The Department of Housing and Community Development notified the Town on January 31st that Valley Community Development Corporation had applied under the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program for preliminary approval of the proposed Studio Apartment Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road project in Amherst.

- The project will include 28 small studio apartments affordable to extremely low to low income individuals, with support services provided on site.
 - The 30-day review began January 31st.
 - More information on this project can be found on the project page on the Town of Amherst's website: <https://amherstma.gov/3520/Valley-CDC-132-Northampton-Road>
 - Comments may be submitted from this webpage under the "Project Eligibility" section.
 - Comments may also be made in writing via email addressed to: planning@amherstma.gov or on paper addressed to Christine Brestrup, Planning Director, Town of Amherst, 4 Boltwood Avenue, Amherst, MA 01002
- Economic Development:
 - The Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies will hold a public informational hearing on February 25th at 1:00 p.m. at the Old Chapel at the University of Massachusetts. The public is invited to offer testimony on issues related to the regional economy.
 - The Assistant Town Manager and I have been meeting with interested parties to assess the roles and responsibilities of an Economic Development Director as we develop the profile for advertising the position.
- Town Hall:
 - Elections:
 - February 12th is the last day to register to vote in the Presidential primary election.
 - February 24-28 are the Early Voting dates for the Presidential primary election. All early voting will occur in Town Hall.
 - March 3rd is the Presidential Primary election.
 - September 1st is the State Primary election.
 - October 19-30 are the Early Voting dates for the November election. We are working to hold some of the Early Voting sessions on the campus of the University as we had done previously.
 - November 3rd is the Presidential and State election.
 - Town Hall Doors: The front doors and wooden surrounds of Town Hall were removed this week and a temporary door was installed. The entire structure was taken to the contractor's workshop to be rehabilitated. This work is scheduled to take several months. In the meantime, a basic wooden replacement structure will remain in place and the front entrance will continue to be available for use. Access for the disabled will continue to be available at the Main Street entrance.
 - Human Rights Commission: The Commission has been active organizing and participating in several events celebrating the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and Black History Month.
 - U.S. Census: The Town continues to work to ensure full participation in the 2020 U.S. Census. The Census is very important to the Town for state and Federal funding.
 - We are considered 9th hardest to count community in the State due to the demographics of our participation, so a concerted effort to engage residents and help them return census forms is a priority for Town staff.
 - There was a press conference on Friday, February 7th at 9:00 a.m. in the Town Room to further promote efforts to encourage members of the community to participate in the census. The Town Council President delivered the welcome.

- Public Safety:
 - Work is underway to prepare for the potential spring events at the University. We project that this event will occur on March 7th this year.
 - The Fire Chief has been named the Vice Chair of the Massachusetts Fire Training Council.
 - Two firefighters graduated from the Fire Training Academy last week. They are now able to return as fully certified firefighters.
- Human Resources:
 - The Town's Communications Manager is featured in a new campaign to encourage young people to choose a career in local government. The campaign is entitled, MassTown Careers and you can see the advertising campaign videos and material here: <https://masstowncareers.org/>
 - Geoff Kravitz tendered his resignation on January 17th to become the new Town Administrator for the Town of Sunderland. Geoff's last day was January 31st. We are consulting with key stakeholders about the future direction of the position and will begin recruiting in the very near future.
- Public Works:
 - The Town received an additional \$83,898 in Chapter 90 State funds which brings the total Chapter 90 funds for FY20 to \$922,883. These funds may be used for the maintenance, modernization, and resiliency of local roads.
 - I have requested that the Town Council reallocate funds that were not utilized for the Station Road Bridge to take on other projects including the installation of a temporary smart traffic light at the Bridge/Meadow/North Pleasant Streets intersection.
 - The Town received a \$140,438 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as part of the Volkswagen emissions settlement funds.
 - With roughly \$50 million remaining in the settlement funds being overseen by the DEP, the town will likely apply to the next round of these grants.
 - We will respond when the solicitation for proposals becomes available and we will craft our request in response to the solicitation to ensure we have the strongest application possible.
- Finance:
 - Health Insurance:
 - I am very pleased to report that our renewal rates for group health insurance increased only 1.89%. This is very good news for employees and for the budgets of the Town, Library, and Schools. We had been budgeting a 6% increase, which is how health insurance costs have been trending.
 - We will be reviewing these rates and other potential cost saving initiatives with our union employee partners and retirees who sit on the Insurance Advisory Committee next week.
 - The decision to move to a fully-insured plan has paid significant dividends for the Town.
 - Audit:
 - A draft of the audit is being reviewed. The final draft will be sent to the full Town Council and reviewed through the Finance Committee.
 - This year we asked the auditors to focus on the Senior Center, since we had a change in leadership and it was the right time to do a complete assessment of the Senior Center's financial operation.

- I-Net:
 - Planning for the installation of the new I-Net – a condition of the contract with Comcast – is well underway. We are working with all departments to ensure all locations are connected, if they make financial sense and we have the funds to do the work.
 - We are including costs to extend the I-Net to other Town facilities, such as the wastewater treatment plant and a radio tower in Pelham. These will require additional funds, but will be offset by the reduction in monthly costs for telephone lines that we are paying now.
 - I have reached out to the Town of Pelham to see if there may be some mutual benefits to both towns as we will be doing work in Pelham to reach our water facilities there.
 - I anticipate that work will be done this spring/summer.
- Budget:
 - We are in high gear as we go through all operating and capital budgets a second time with the individual departments. Many needs are being identified, but there are few funds for new additions. We also look at the ongoing and lifecycle costs of adding positions and services.
 - The Superintendent is presenting a budget to the Regional School District on February 11th. This budget, which was previewed at the Four-Towns meeting, projects an overall budget increase of just 1.54%, below even the already low five year average of 1.7%. The Regional School Committee is expected to act on the budget request at its March 10th or 24th meeting.
 - The first Joint Capital Planning Committee will be held on February 13th at 8:30 a.m.
 - The School Committee will be represented by Eric Nakajima and Allison McDonald.
 - The Library Trustees will be represented by Tamson Ely and Alexandra Lefebvre.
- Fees:
 - Based on the recommendation of the Fire Chief and Interim Finance Director, I increased ambulance fees effective February 1st to bring them in line with our neighboring towns. Our rates have not been changed for many years and are substantially below the fees charged by other communities. This, along with the significant loss of revenue due to Hadley’s decision to go to a private ambulance company, has adversely impacted our ambulance fund.
- Sustainability:
 - The Town received a \$100,000 Municipal Vulnerabilities Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEA). The grant funding is designated to hire technical assistance, interpreters/translators, and to engage a community liaison in the development of a Climate Action, Adaptation and Resiliency Plan. These advocates and advisors will work closely with the Town’s Sustainability Coordinator and other staff with advice from the Town’s Energy and Climate Action Committee (ECAC). Congratulations to the Sustainability Coordinator for advocating for this grant.
 - The three communities involved with the Joint Purchase of Electricity initiative will be reviewing the work of the task force that has been studying the issue.
 - The Town is exploring the addition of two more Valley BikeShare locations to expand the network. While the bikes and equipment will be provided, there will be a request for

Town funds to prepare the space and bring electricity to the locations. There will also be an ongoing fee for operations that I am reviewing for inclusion in the budget.

- Community Services:
 - Senior Center:
 - The Senior Center took their Senior Advice booth on the road to Amherst College during finals week. See the attached article at the end of this report.
 - Health Department:
 - The Health Department has been working with the Police and Fire Departments, the colleges and University, neighboring communities and nonprofit partners including local hospitals to prepare for the Corona Virus. There are protocols in place and standards for identification and transport. Communication between local and State authorities is very high.
 - The effort to count the homeless – a nation-wide effort to gauge the number of people – occurred in January with support from Town staff.
 - The Board of Health is continuing to review tobacco regulations and determine the impact of State regulations which have a significant impact on local retailers and a new set of very high fines.
 - Leisure Services:
 - On Saturday, February 8th from 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. the WinterFest Grand Finale will take place at the Cherry Hill Golf Course. The afternoon will feature family fun events, music, food contests and more! This event is free!
 - Strategic Plan: The strategic plan for LSSE continues after two public information sessions. 300 surveys were returned to the Donahue Institute, the firm conducting the study.

Delegated Authority (January, 2020):

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons:
 - April 24-25, 2020: Sustainability Fair – Town Common (South)
 - May 17-24, 2020: Community Fair – Town Common (South)
- Short-Term Parking Requests: None
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures:
 - April 26, 2020: Big Brothers/Big Sisters Annual Road Race – Spring Street, Boltwood Avenue, and Main, North Whitney, Strong, and North Pleasant Streets closed during the time runners are passing
 - May 9, 2020: Business Improvement District entertainment – Boltwood Walk
 - November 8, 2020: Hartford Marathon Foundation half marathon and 5 K road races – Massachusetts Avenue, North Pleasant, South Pleasant West, Shay South East Streets, Station Road, North East, Henry, Pine, East Pleasant Streets, Eastman Lane, North Pleasant Street

Major Capital Projects:

- Groff Park: Work has concluded for the winter. We are now looking forward to opening the park by Memorial Day in 2020.
- DPW/Fire: The Town continues to explore and be open to other sites that might meet the needs and requirements of a location for DPW.

- Schools:
 - The Crocker Farm School study RFP had two responses. The evaluators – Maria Kopicki, Rupert Roy-Clark, and Derek Shea - unanimously recommended TSKP Studio for its strong proposal, which included specific project ideas and a timeline, and for its experience. I selected TSKP Studio as recommended. TSKP subsequently submitted its total fee for all tasks to be \$40,000. This amount is within the Town’s budget for the project. We have sent a draft contract to TKSP and we await the firm’s review and signature on the contract.
- Library: The Library is seeking cost estimates of the work that would need to be done to the building if the renovation is not approved. They have selected Kuhn-Riddle to complete this work. This will provide a firm cost estimate so the Town Council and Board of Library Trustees can make a more informed decision.

Project Update:

- Destination: Amherst!
 - Kendrick Park Playground: Staff are working to advance this project as they review the public input on the project.
 - Performing Arts Shell on the Town Common: The Business Improvement District is working with staff to prepare a more detailed presentation to the Town Council in the near future. The presentation would provide concepts, location, financing, and management suggestions for consideration.
 - Parking Structure on Town Land at North Pleasant Street Parking Lot: We will schedule this for the Town Council discussion at an upcoming Town Council meeting.
 - North Common Restoration/Main Street Parking Lot: The preferred plan has been prepared by the Town’s consultant. This plan, along with other options, will be presented to the Town Council later this year.
 - Infrastructure Improvements: The Town received a grant to repair a walkway and crosswalks downtown. This work will be designed and work will be done during the construction season.
- Hickory Ridge: As reported previously. Awaiting word on the solar program.
- East Street School: We met to discuss the next steps. The Town will be doing additional due diligence to gather additional information on stormwater, wetlands, and the condition of the existing building. Once this work is completed, we will reevaluate the RFP.
- North Amherst Library: On the Town Council agenda.
- Solar on the Landfill: As previously reported.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- February 17th – Presidents Day Holiday
- February 24th – Town Council meeting
- March 9th – Town Council meeting
- March 23rd – Town Council meeting

Other events:

- February 8th – 11am – 3pm - Black History Month celebration
- February 8th – 1pm - 5pm - WinterFest Grand Finale Event at Cherry Hill Golf Course

- February 14th – Cuppa Joe with Paul
- March 13th – Cuppa Joe with Paul
- March 18th – Kanegasaki Sister City Welcoming Reception

2020 Massachusetts State Primary and State Election Schedule

Last day and hour (8:00p) to register to vote,
Change an address or party enrollment for the
Presidential Primary.

Wednesday, February 12, 2020

Early Voting

February 24- 28, 2020

Presidential Primary Election

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Last day and hour (8:00p) to register to vote,
Change an address or party enrollment for the
State Primary.

Wednesday, August 12, 2020

State Primary Election

Tuesday, September 1, 2020

Last day and hour (8:00p) to register to vote,
Change an address or party enrollment for the
State Election.

Wednesday, October 14, 2020

Early Voting

October 19 -30, 2020

State Election

Tuesday, November 3, 2020



The sign over one “Wise Elder Advice” stand advertised “Opinions” for five cents, “Thought of the Day” for 10 cents and “Flawless Advice” for \$1. But in fact, the wisdom was available at no charge—and it came with free baked goods.

I stopped by Frost Library on Dec. 13 and watched from a distance as Amherst students took turns sitting down at the two stands to seek counsel from local senior citizens. I didn’t want to eavesdrop too closely, but later I asked the elders themselves: What kinds of things were the students asking about?

“Sometimes relationship advice. Sometimes strategies for managing stress or preparedness for whatever’s coming next in their lives,” said Sue Lowery, a retired primary-care physician who was running a stand with John Magarian, a retiree from the Army Corps of Engineers.

And did they feel qualified to advise the students? “I wouldn’t say we have expertise, but we have experience, and a certain amount of resilience to get to this point in life, and an understanding that what might seem like a really critical problem, if you wait a little while, you can put it in perspective,” Lowery said. Then she allowed me to sample her homemade lemon ginger pound cake.

Magarian and Lowery had dispensed wisdom at a similar booth, sponsored by the Town of Amherst’s Senior Center, at a town-wide block party last September. “And we got people right up to the time we left at 9 o’clock at night,” Magarian said.



The popularity of the advice stand at the block party is part of what inspired this event at Frost, said Mary Beth Ogulewicz, director of the Senior Center—but the main impetus was that some “amazing students came to the Senior Center out of their own initiative and wanted to connect with our community.”

Ng Yi Ming, a student visiting Amherst from Yale-NUS College in Singapore, had heard Ogulewicz speak about aging at the local Unitarian Universalist Society last fall. “Mary Beth wanted to redefine senior citizens from seniors to elders, from a notion of childlike neediness to one of wisdom and independence. Bridging the existing divide between the Amherst town and college communities was another goal,” he later [wrote on Facebook](#). So he began visiting the Senior Center, which is a short walk from campus, along with Margot Lurie ’21, leader of the Amherst College Humanists, and Theresa Tian ’20, who last year co-founded the College’s chapter of the Rotary Club.

Rotaract is the young-adult branch of the community service organization Rotary International. “We really want to emphasize getting out of the bubble and learning more about the town and the people that live in the town,” Tian said. The Amherst Rotaract Club has also done town cleanups and visited elderly residents of a nearby assisted-living facility.

Joyce Yourga, who was sitting at the other of the two advice booths in Frost, praised the many activities and programs of the Amherst Senior Center: “I go to yoga class, ‘Healthy Bones and Balance’ class. I’m in a book club there. I go to all sorts of different interesting talks that they give around the year on all different subjects.” She is a person of wide-ranging interests and experience, having studied history and French and worked in real estate, health care, education and other fields.

Her husband, Dick Yourga, next to her at the booth, has lived in Amherst since 1963. He started an auto-body shop and also worked on the police force, in banking, and in radio. Today he’s on the board of the Friends of the Amherst Senior Center. He and his wife, he said, “volunteer at the Bread and Produce program on Wednesday mornings, where we gather food from all the local grocery stores, and sort it out, and distribute it to seniors who come and pick it up.”

The Yourgas seemed especially well-suited to counsel Amherst undergraduates on matters of love—they began as college sweethearts at UMass and have been married for 52 years. Said Dick, “We consider that a good start.”