



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: February 20, 2020
Re: Town Manager Report for February 24, 2020

Town Manager Update:

- Outreach:
 - Coffee with Town Manager: The last coffee was on February 14th with the Town's new Principal Assessor, Liz Duffy at Bruegger's Bagels. The next coffee will be on March 13th.
 - District One Neighborhood Association: I will be presenting the proposal for the privately funded renovations to the North Amherst Library at the Association's meeting on February 23rd. This will be much of the same information that I presented to the Town Council at its last meeting.
 - District Three Meeting: I will be attending the District Three meeting on March 1st to discuss the capital projects utilizing the presentation that was used for the Listening Sessions. The Town Council President and other Town Councilors will also participate and/or be present.
- Appointments:
 - I referred appointments for the Energy and Climate Action Committee and Public Shade Tree Committee to the Town Council.
 - I am interviewing applicants for several committees including the Conservation Commission and Board of License Commissioners.
- Outreach and Community Participation Officers (CPOs):
 - Complete Count – United States Census: Town staff continue 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.
 - The Complete Count team and the leadership of State Representative Domb continues to do outreach throughout the Town such as:
 - Establishing Census help stations at multiple locations throughout the Town;
 - Working with the University to reinforce participation by those students who don't live on campus;

- Training frontline Town office staff so there is a wider understanding of the Census by Town employees who interact with the public on a regular basis;
 - Utilizing existing Town mailings to broaden those who receive the message about participating in the Census;
 - Developing Op/Eds for publication in local newspapers; and
 - Working with the Schools to spread the word through those communication channels.
- CPOs are working with the leaders of the Tibetan community to ensure full engagement for the annual Free Tibet Day flag raising, proclamation, and march.
- Regionalization:
 - At and after the Four Towns Meeting February 1st, the Regional School District received significant feedback from member towns. In addition, the District received favorable financial information about the official health care rate for next year as well as about regional transportation aid projections. As a result, the District is able to offer new financial figures to reduce assessments. The Regional School District Committee is reviewing the Superintendent’s recommendation of moving forward with the 45% Statutory method. With the new figures, each town’s assessment is either very close to or less than it was under the 40% Statutory method presented on February 1st.
 - 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. The Town of Hadley has subsequently also provided permission so the Town Attorney can move forward on reviewing the agreements.
- Town-Gown:
 - Strategic Partnership Agreement:
 - The Town and University reached an agreement that addresses the cost of educating K-12 students who live in tax-exempt housing in Amherst. The University will provide approximately \$185,000 per year for three years, starting in the current fiscal year, to support the schools.
 - The funding addresses the financial impact of K-12 students who live in tax-exempt housing on campus and attend Amherst schools. The University and the Town of Amherst, with direct involvement of the Amherst schools, reached the agreement following an independent study conducted by the Donahue
 - The agreement mentioned above is one aspect of a broad, multi-year Strategic Partnership Agreement, which is still being negotiated. Institute, which explored different funding formulas. Staff are meeting regularly with representatives of the University on a renewal of the Strategic Partnership Agreement.
 - Hampshire College will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first entering class on October 16-18.
- 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:
 - Additional information has been submitted to the Town regarding the Flood Insurance (FIRM) maps. With this information, we will have the consultant revise the maps. This will restart the 90-day comment period. I will update the Town Council – and the public – when the comment period restarts.
 - I attached the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission’s top ten resolutions for 2020 to the end of this report.
 - 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 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. I anticipate we will be prepared to advertise in the next couple of weeks.
- Town Hall:
 - Library: The Library was awarded a \$1,500 grant from Eversource for its annual “On the Same Page” event that will be happening during the end of February/beginning of March this year.
 - Elections:
 - The Presidential Primary is on March 3rd.
 - The Town Clerk announced that there will be two early voting locations for voters registered in Amherst for the Presidential Primary, Town Hall and UMass Amherst Campus.
 - Town Hall voting is available at Town Hall Monday – Friday, February 24-28 from 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Reminder, the front

entrance to Town Hall is under construction. The front door is operational. The accessible entrance is on Main Street.

- University of Massachusetts voting is available at Bartlett Hall, Room 316A (130 Hicks Way) Tuesday – Thursday, February 25-27 from 4:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
- All voting locations will be equipped with an Automark machine to assist any voters who may be visually or hearing impaired.
- The State Primary election is on September 1st. There is no early voting for the State Primary.
- The Presidential and State elections are on November 3rd.
 - There will be early voting on October 19-30. Times and locations are to be determined.
- 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.
- Professional Presentations:
 - The Human Resources Director has been invited to speak to the Massachusetts Water Works Association on Human Resources issues. The Assistant Superintendent of Public Works is the past president of the Association.
 - The Communications Manager will be making a presentation to the International City Management Association Regional Conference in Cambridge on April 2nd entitled, “Not the Way We’ve Always Done It: New Approaches to Mentoring”
 - The Communications Manager will be making a presentation to Civic Summit 2020 in Buffalo on May 3rd entitled, “Democracy’s Last Stand: How Citizen Engagement Technology Can Strengthen Communities”. The presentation will discuss how we use technology for citizen engagement.
- Public Safety:
 - The Collector has been working to collect on outstanding parking tickets from those who repeatedly park illegally. Her work, in cooperation with the Police Department and Parking Enforcement Officers, has increased collections.
 - 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.
- Human Resources:
 - Staff continue to advertise and recruit candidates to serve as minutes takers.
- Public Works:
 - The Town has been doing extensive work on educating elementary school students on water and sewer issues. The article at the end of this report is an excellent summary of this work. DPW is seeking to add a 6th grade storm water curriculum next year to meet our MS4 permit requirements
 - 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.
- 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 reviewed these rates and other potential cost saving initiatives with our union employee partners and retirees who sit on the Insurance Advisory Committee.
 - Audit:
 - The final draft was sent to the full Town Council and will be reviewed through the Finance Committee.
 - 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 presented his 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 was held on February 13th at 8:30 a.m.
 - The School Committee was represented by Eric Nakajima and Allison McDonald.
 - The Library Trustees was represented by Tamson Ely and Alexandra Lefebvre.
- 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.
 - Town departments are working with the sustainability coordinator to explore alternatives to vehicles that only burn fossil fuels.
- 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 flu season is not the only health topic on our minds but still, now in February, flu is one of the most important health issues in Massachusetts. The Town has been reinforcing the message from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health that Flu Severity has increased to a “Very High” Severity Level this week. This is

the highest of four severity levels and means that the number of people reporting and diagnosed with flu symptoms has increased dramatically this past week.

- 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.
- Leisure Services:
 - On Saturday, February 8th from 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. the WinterFest Grand Finale took place at the Cherry Hill Golf Course.
 - 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 will be conducted by TKSP. The Committee had its first meeting last week.
- 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. The presentation is scheduled before the Town Council on March 23rd.
- 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: I will be presenting information to the North Amherst Neighborhood Association on Sunday, February 23rd. I will be working with the anonymous donor to secure the donation in a fund that is accessible to the Town and available to move the project forward.
- Solar on the Landfill: As previously reported.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- March 9th – Town Council meeting
- March 21st – Town Council retreat
- March 23rd – Town Council meeting
- April 6th – Town Council meeting
- April 27th – Town Council meeting

Other events:

- March 13th – Cuppa Joe with Paul
- March 18th – Kanegasaki Sister City welcoming reception
- March 19th – Kanegasaki Sister City dinner
- April 10th – Cuppa Joe with Paul
- April 20th – Patriots Day Holiday
- April 30th – Jones Library Sammy Awards

Amherst Elementary Students Know the Water Cycle

December 20, 2019



Through the town's drinking water permits, the Amherst Department of Public Works (DPW) funds Hitchcock Center educators, Helen Ann Sephton and Aemelia Thompson to teach a series of Water Conservation classes in all Amherst and Pelham classrooms grades 2, 4, 5, 6. By engaging youth in water system cycles and uses, these standards-based classes help develop communities that can more effectively use and manage water resources.



The programs guide students in understanding the water cycle, where our water comes from, how our water is managed, and how water issues, like pollution, in our community may impact our lives through drinking water. This year, the one-hour hands-on programs reached 37 classrooms and approximately 740 students.



Second grade students learn about water conservation. They talk about where their own water comes from and how much they think they use in a day.

Students learn that typical average use is 60 gallons per day per person in the US and that most of this high quality drinking water gets flushed down toilets. But students also learn alternatives for using less water, including the simple use of an aerator on a faucet, and are able to observe this simple solution in action.

In fourth grade, students learn about the water cycle – evaporation, condensation, and precipitation — about local Atkins and Pelham reservoirs, wells, and surface versus ground water — and complete a hands on activity extracting ground water from a clean well and documenting how quickly nearby pollution will make its way into the well, to understand how contaminants might infiltrate a water supply.



Fifth graders learn about what happens to waste water in Amherst.

This includes how the waste is treated, how much waste water is managed in town, and how soils naturally filtrate and clean our ground water. Students complete hands-on projects filtering water and hypothesize on effective ways to remove pollutants from this water.

In 6th grade, students get to work with a groundwater model to observe how pollution works its way into water. The hands-on portion of the lesson requires solving a mystery of arsenic contamination in a community's water supply. Will they drill wells for more information? Look at surrounding land uses? Or, will an alternative solution be more effective to determine causes and solutions.



These water education classes are offered annually and the Hitchcock Center appreciates being a partner with the Amherst DPW to encourage water resource protection through education.

Look for more news on this growing program as the Hitchcock Center expands its partnership with the Amherst DPW's Environmental Scientist Beth Willson to add storm water programs to the established water conservation program next year!

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission - Top 10 Resolves for 2020

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Members & Staff Resolve to:

- Work with legislators and public administrators at the state and federal levels to inform and advocate for policies and programs that will benefit the Pioneer Valley and its residents. This includes continued focus on championing smart policy and increased funding for transportation, economic and community development, and sustainability and resiliency work. A major focus will be the continued push for resources that allow the Commission to assist our member municipalities in overcoming the myriad of challenges and opportunities they face, assistance which our agency is uniquely capable of providing.
- Work with municipal officials, community organizations, state agencies and area nonprofits to support education and outreach activities to ensure that the 2020 U.S. Census results in a full and accurate count of Pioneer Valley residents. These activities will be coordinated with the U.S. Census Bureau through the Pioneer Valley's regional Complete Count Committee.
- Accelerate region-wide efforts to advance climate action strategies and projects that can reduce green-house gas emissions consistent with the reduction targets that Massachusetts has adapted for years 2020 and 2050. This includes working with PVPC member communities to increase resilience and adaptation measures that can counteract the adverse impacts of climate change while protecting at-risk populations, critical infrastructure and other regional assets.
- Champion the need for multiple modes of transportation in the Pioneer Valley.
This includes:
 - supporting the need for expanded passenger rail service in the Pioneer Valley through marketing the new Valley Flyer and encouraging ridership;
 - participating in MassDOT's East-West Rail Study through membership on the Project Advisory Committee; advocating for PVRTA to receive the funding necessary to both maintain existing transit service and expand transit service for the region; and
 - Identifying opportunities to enhance the existing regional transportation infrastructure to provide better access for bicycles and pedestrians, using such approaches as integration of complete streets, traffic calming, parking and connectivity into transportation improvements.
- Work with member communities in addressing the on-going diverse housing needs of the region. This will be accomplished by seeking new funding and expending current funds for:
 - infrastructure improvements (water, sewer, roads, sidewalks, drainage) in support of neighborhood housing;
 - housing rehabilitation of existing housing occupied by low-to-moderate income households;
 - housing improvements assistance to seniors allowing them to remain safely in their homes; and
 - removing architectural barriers in houses occupied by persons with mobility limitations. PVPC will also work to develop long-term housing strategies designed to improve access to safe and healthy housing for all Pioneer Valley residents. Currently, the PVPC is undertaking this task by working on an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing in the four core cities.

- Promote regional collaboration with all 43 member communities on projects of common interest, necessity and efficiency. The PVPC strives to work with communities on projects that have regional value inherent in their goals and priorities, including shared municipal services and the sharing and implementation of best practices.
- Collaborate with the Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies to actively support and implement the mission and objectives of the Commonwealth's first Rural Policy Plan, which was issued in 2019. This includes supporting the establishment of a state office regarding rural policy planning.
- Continue integrating climate resilience considerations into various planning efforts, including identification of appropriate land for conservation, and maintain engagement with the Statewide Resilient Lands Initiative to assure the use of state of the art information and tools.
- Expand the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission's assistance in the area of historic preservation and cultural resources planning through facilitation of regional educational programs; providing general technical assistance and support on historic preservation issues; and offering a longer term "fee for service" option for on-going support to local historical boards and commissions.
- Conduct a strategic planning process to collectively guide the future of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and its' work. This will include engaging the 43 member communities, planning commissioners, staff of the PVPC and other community stakeholders.