



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: April 2, 2020
Re: Town Manager Report for April 6, 2020

Town Manager Update:

- COVID-19: Responding to the demands of a pandemic is unlike anything we have ever faced. Although we have consistently planned and are prepared for disasters large and small, the sheer scale and length of this pandemic is stunning. Everything has happened so quickly. I review my notes from just three weeks ago and sit in amazement in the number of challenges we have had to face and address.
 - New COVID-19 Website.
 - The Town has a dedicated website – www.AmherstCovid19.org – that holds all information from the Town and schools in one location. It has a lot of information and is updated every day. And there is information being added all the time. Check it out!
 - CoReTeam.
 - We rely on our trained and experienced staff to make real-time decisions based on facts that are usually insufficient and always changing. As the pandemic was beginning, I established a “Covid-19 Response Team” or CoRe Team.
 - At first, this group met weekly to address the medical impacts of the disease. We then very quickly expanded the group and ramped up to three times per week and then daily for the past month.
 - We now meet every day, seven days a week for up to two hours. This Team is providing the overall guidance to me as we navigate this crisis.
 - I would like to recognize and thank these experienced individuals for their commitment to the Town and to each other: Health Director Julie Federman, Assistant Town Manager David Ziomek, Fire Chief Tim Nelson, Police Chief Scott Livingstone, Superintendent of Public Works Guilford Mooring, and Interim Finance Director Sonia Aldrich. This experienced team of managers averages over 20 years’ experience with Fire Chief Nelson being the “newbie” with just a decade serving the Town.
 - I am so very, very fortunate that these career professionals have decided to dedicate their professional lives to Amherst.
 - In this situation, experience matters most because we must draw on a life-time of experience to make day-to-day decisions. Over the years, they have built the

- professional and personal networks, been part of previous crises, and they know the Town and its people.
- I just can not tell you how important to have this team sitting together – now virtually – every morning addressing the next challenge this beast of a disease throws at us.
 - We have a long way to go and other people will need to bring their skill sets into play as we move from crisis response and management to recovery.
- CoRe Team Meetings. I organize our daily meetings with check-ins on the following:
- *Incident Command:*
 - Were there any incidents in the prior 24 hours? We review this department by department but mostly revolve around incidents relating to the Health Department and Public Safety.
 - *Force Protection:*
 - We review each department, individually, as to the health of the workforce and their families, steps taken to ensure safety for those on the job, potential threats that could arise for staff in the coming days/weeks, and
 - *Departmental Review:*
 - We review each department and receive a verbal report on the operations for the past day and operations expected in the future. We focus on supply lines and shared policies for work.
 - *State/Federal Policies:*
 - We spend time reviewing the State’s decisions and guidance. We abide, as much as possible, to the guidance being provided by the Centers for Disease Control and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.
 - *2-4-6:*
 - We spend time looking down the road – 2 weeks, 4 week, 6 weeks. That’s about how far out we feel it is worth looking down the road. Things change quickly...daily and, even, hourly. We are planning for the surge and asking the key questions about readiness.
 - *Special Topics:*
 - These are the areas that are urgent at that moment. It could be something to do with the homeless shelter, state communications, supplies, schools with the Superintendent, etc.
- Values. These are the core values that I have used in decision making:
- *Public Health, Public Safety.*
 - All of our decisions are based on what is the best decision for the public’s health and the public’s safety.
 - *Rely on the science.*
 - I and my team read and listen to as much as we can to be aware of the changing nature of this event. But we aren’t experts on everything so we rely on the built-in expertise of the Centers for Disease Control and Massachusetts Department of Public Health to provide broader guidelines.
 - *Depend on my people.*
 - We have superb, experienced staff working daily in every aspect of our Town government. I trust their judgement and rely on their frank give-and-take to ensure I am making the best decisions in the Town’s interest.
 - *Each Person has a Role.*

- We all know our roles. We all speak to our roles. The Health Director speaks to the primacy of public health. The Fire and Police Chiefs and Superintendent of Public Works focus on public safety and the delivery of essential services. The Interim Finance Director keeps an eye on all things financial. And the Assistant Town Manager is central to every discussion.
 - *Town is our Focus.*
 - The health and safety of our Town – taxpayers, residents, businesses – is our staff’s primary mission. Our taxpayers pay us to make the best decisions we can for the Town and community at large.
- Outreach:
 - Coffee with Town Manager:
 - The last coffee was on March 13th at Jake’s at the Mill with Assistant Town Manager Ziomek. – Seems so long ago! - Looking back, this was one of the last public events and we were already implementing social distancing on a modified level.
 - The next Cuppa Joe will be on Friday, April 10th from 8am – 9:30 a.m. It will be a Zoom time to get together. BYOC – Bring your own coffee!
 - I distributed a video to all staff to share my thoughts and good wishes to all of them during this difficult period.
 - I held a “Call-in” show on April 2nd. Set-up and hosted by the Communications Manager, we had the Superintendent of Schools and Health Director on the show. There were two sessions, one at 12noon and one at 5pm. We had 64 people log in via Zoom for the 12noon show and 46 people log in for the 5pm show. The questions were very good and we will continue to hold these open forum sessions.
- Appointments:
 - I am preparing appointments for the Conservation Commission and Board of License Commissioners.
 - I hope to have an appointment for the Finance Director in the near future.
- Outreach and Community Participation Officers (CPOs):
 - Community Clean-Up: This event has been canceled.
 - Complete Count – United States Census: Staff and others in the community continue to work to ensure the Town has a complete count of its residents. As of this writing, the Town is at 48.4% response rate. This may be artificially low due to the status of the colleges and University. Town-wide, North Amherst census tract has the lowest response rate at 42.8%. East Amherst census tract, by contrast, is at 58%.
 - CPOs have worked with the leaders of the Tibetan community to ensure full engagement for the annual Free Tibet Day flag raising, proclamation, and march. The flag raising occurred on March 10th.
- Regionalization:
 - Staff have been working with representatives from the Town of Hadley to explore ways we can work together on water and sewer issues. The agreements have been reviewed by the Town Attorney and will be presented to the Town Council in the near future.
 - I have reached out to the Select Board in the Town of Pelham to determine if the I-Net project we are preparing could benefit the Pelham communication issues at its school, communications tower, and other municipal offices. This could reduce the costs to the Town of Pelham and offset some of the expenses for the Town of Amherst.
 - I have reached out to the Hadley Town Administrator to explore other areas of cooperation between the two communities.

- Town-Gown:
 - I have reached out to Amherst College, Hampshire College, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst to seek resources and mutual support on the myriad of issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Hampshire College has been especially responsive to our requests.
 - The Town has continued to support our institutional partners on the COVID-19 issue. The Health Director continues to work with staff and faculty at Amherst College.

Departments:

- Town Hall:
 - Information Technology (I.T.):
 - The Town’s I.T. Department has been working overtime ensuring that the Town’s elective officials are able to conduct their business; that Town staff are able to work remotely (sounds easy, but it is incredibly complex due to the nature of some of the work that needs to be done); that equipment and software are procured, set-up, and distributed; and that the Town’s I.T. infrastructure continues to perform when it is being highly stressed. Thank you to this team who have really delivered during the crisis.
 - Amidst all of this, for the past two months I.T. has been setting up a completely new server cluster. This work has continued during this crisis because it is a very high priority and has become even more important now. I want to note that we are doing this all with existing staff. This project is highly technical and wouldn't be possible without the technical expertise and organization of our current staff. To contract this project out would have cost us \$250,000 for labor, or maybe even more, and it would have taken twice as long to do so. This project affects every employee in Town because it handles the software and hardware we all use every day to do our jobs.
 - By moving our servers to this new technology, we are able to:
 - Greatly improve the speed and reliability of tools that people use every day including finance and accounting (Munis), geographical information systems for Planning and DPW (GIS), and our public safety software that drives our dispatch and police/fire management jobs (IMC).
 - Improve the ability to recover from a major hardware failure.
 - Improve backup consistency, speed, and reliability.
 - Reduce the use of electricity dramatically.
 - Teams/Zoom: We will be expanding the use of Microsoft Teams among staff and utilizing that platform for most staff interactions. It is solid, has proper security features, and is fully integrated into our Microsoft Outlook and Office standards. We will utilize Zoom for public meetings. Zoom has a terrific user interface and is easy for the public to access. That ease of use, however, brings with it serious security concerns. Several town meetings have already been “Zoom Bombed” by outsiders swooping in and making racist and offensive comments. We have purchased a fairly high level of Zoom and developing setting protocols that should minimize these disruptions in the future.
 - Town Clerk: We are fortunate that we do not have a spring Town Meeting or Election this year. Towns that do are struggling with rescheduling decisions and getting their budgets

passed. The Town Clerk has implement staggered shifts to ensure they are able to serve the public. Dog licenses will be going out by Wednesday.

- Public Safety:
 - While it seems a long time ago, the events on March 7th were more significant than previous years. Preparations were similar to previous years' preparations with the entire 42 members of the Amherst Police Department being utilized and upward of 150 members of mutual aid partners and State Police providing assistance in Town.
 - The Fire Department was fully staffed to ensure all five ambulances were available in addition to other needs for emergency response. A mutual aid ambulance was stationed at the Mullen's Center during the large concert being promoted by the University. The star performer refused to go on stage but there was not serious negative aftermath.
 - Emergency Operations Centers at the Amherst Police Station and at the University's Police Station were and running all day on Saturday.
- Human Resources:
 - Day-to-Day. The crisis has presented many challenges to the H.R. department. Changed work circumstances and environments require careful communication and discussion with union leaders and staff. In addition, the normal work of the department – such as responding to grievances and complaints – continues.
 - Health Insurance Open Enrollment. In addition, H.R. is working with the School Department and Accounting and, especially I.T. to ensure that we could transition to an online portal for health insurance re-enrollment for all Town and School staffs. This opened on April 1st and much credit is due to all who worked to make this available to our employees during this sensitive time.
 - Finance Director. We are entering a very, very challenging time for the Town's finances. We have advertised for a Finance Director who can work with our current staff to help lead the Town to our new future.
- Public Works:
 - Paving. All of this work is subject to change, of course.
 - Sidewalk work is continuing on East Hadley Road.
 - Roadwork on Henry Street, Pelham Road, and South East Street is now scheduled for May 4th.
 - Staffing. DPW has gone to a staggered shift schedule to maintain social distancing among various crews. Employees are working seven days a week, but there are different groups working different days.
 - Work. DPW crews worked to repair a significant water break on Pondview on Friday. Other work on sewer mains is scheduled for this week.
- Finance:
 - Today. We are in a good financial position because we have had such great discipline in maintaining health reserves. These reserves come from careful and prudent planning and they come from frugal decisions in our day-to-day operations. We have focused on developing redundancies in all departments and succession planning.
 - Budget:
 - I will be calling a meeting of the Budget Coordinating Group for a date later in April. We won't know much when this group meets, but I feel it is important to bring these representatives together now so we understand their role. The members of the Committee are: Lynn Griesemer and Cathy Schoen from the Town Council,

Allison McDonald and Kerry Spitzer from the School Committee, and Chris Hoffman and Robert Pam from the Library Trustees. I will also invite the Town's Interim Finance Director, the Superintendent of Schools and his Finance Director, and the Library Director.

- I am grateful that the Town Council has agreed to move the deadline for submission of budget to May 1st for the School Department and Library and June 1st for the Town Manager.
- The first Joint Capital Planning Committee will be meeting later in April or early in May. The School Committee is now represented by Peter Demling and Kerry Spitzer. The Library Trustees are represented by Tamson Ely and Alexandra Lefebvre.

- Sustainability:

- The Town awarded the bid for our \$100,000 Municipal Vulnerabilities Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEA) to Linnaen Solutions, which worked on the first phase of the grant. The grant funding has allowed us 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.
- I met with the Mayor of Northampton and member of the Select Board in Pelham to advance the efforts of the three communities seeking to establish a relationship through a Joint Powers Agreement to purchase electricity. Our State Senator and Representative secured funding of \$50,000 in the FY20 budget to support the study and legal exploration of this initiative. We continue to work through the process of moving this initiative forward.
- The Valley BikeShare program is on hold at this point.
- Town departments are working with the sustainability coordinator to explore alternatives to vehicles that only burn fossil fuels. We will be seeking funding for hybrid cruisers and ambulance, lighting retrofits for Town Hall, Police Station, and Munson Building and, possibly, additional charging stations.

- Community Services:

- Leisure Services:

- Sports. All spring sports programs have been cancelled and refunds for participants have been processed. "How To" manuals for all of our major sports programs are being developed by the Sports Director. They are also creating an Amherst Youth Basketball Parent Board. All aquatics programs have been cancelled and refunds for participants have be processed.
- Facilities. All basketball and tennis facilities have been taken out of service.
- Golf Course. The golf course has been closed and signage has been posted at various entry sites. In addition, a line of safety cones and more signage have been placed at the parking lot entrance. The course will be maintained at the minimum level required in order to preserve this Town asset and have it playable shape when we reopen it.
- After School/Camps. The Town's Primetime Afterschool program and the April Vacation Camp have been cancelled and refunds for participants have been processed. Staff from this program are assisting the Senior Center. In addition,

staff have created numerous activity videos with program content ranging from arts and crafts to cooking that has been distributed through social media and the LSSE website. They have also created a 25-page activity resource handbook for parents that will be distributed in collaboration with the Baby Berk food distribution at various housing areas.

- Independence Day. We are monitoring events and reviewing options for Independence Day.
- Senior Center: The Town Council heard from our Director of Senior Services a couple of weeks ago. The staff of the Senior Center – and other Town staff – have really stepped up during this crisis. We have learned – we knew it already, but this brought it home – that the Senior Center is much more than a physical space, a center.
 - As the Director of Senior Services has written:
 - “We are a community of people who have rippled out into Amherst. Exercise teachers are lifting spirits teaching their classes on Zoom. 95 year old’s are “Zooming into class”. Our yoga teacher is working with to get her home recorded classes on television. Writing classes are sharing their work and common feelings online. Other groups that previously met together to dance or learn about Shakespeare are calling one another and holding each other tight. There is no end to the creativity and warm caretaking that is going on person to person that is also the work of the Center.”
 - “That being said, as the weeks go on, emotional contagion is real. Our staff has been providing sure footing in the midst of change. We are each learning new ways to respond to difficulties and create workaround solutions for systems that are changing daily. We aim to perceive opportunity in new and challenging situations, and remain a beacon of calm and hope. We continue our service and are meeting the needs of an increasing new population of “young seniors”, those still in the workforce who are newly unemployed. They have not previously accessed support and are now to asking for help. Asking for help is an act of courage too!”
 - Outreach.
 - A focused media campaign to share resources for seniors has been updated & maintained on the website, Facebook, and flyers to apartment complexes and community houses of worship.
 - Staff have made 1,006 calls to seniors to check on their well-being and review any issues they are facing. Another 300 calls were made by volunteers.
 - Staff mailed 3,400 newsletters to seniors in Town.
 - Volunteers. A
 - As with all services, the need for volunteers has increased at precisely the same time as people are being encouraged to stay home. Our biggest source of volunteers for seniors are other seniors, who are identified as a vulnerable population. The Senior Director makes 40 phone calls to get a dozen volunteers.
 - It takes a special person to step in right now and the Senior Director works hard to retain volunteers by providing protection, clear direction, and praise...and I want to echo that praise. We need volunteers, especially younger volunteers, to deliver meals to those who need food.

- Food Security.
 - 675 meals were delivered to the doors of seniors. A second meal delivery program was set up by the Senior Director to provide take-out lunches to Clark House and Ann Whalen Apartments which is operated by the Amherst Housing Authority.
 - 80 bags of groceries provided by the Food Bank were delivered and 15 Senior Center food pantry bags were delivered.
 - 25 new Meals-on-Wheels volunteers have been recruited and trained covering meal delivery to our five daily routes. Thanks to all who have stepped up!
- Health Department:
 - This department has taken on so much during the past two months. There is not enough space to recognize what this small department has done with a combination of professional expertise and social intelligence.
 - We have expanded the capacity of the Department of Public Health by bringing both part-time staff to full-time status.
 - We have added several school nurses to the team to assist with important tasks like responding to residents' questions and contact tracing support.
 - It is interesting to look back to what we were saying exactly one month ago. This is from the Town's website at that time. If we knew then, what we know now... The message, interestingly, is the same today as it was then:
 - *COVID-19, commonly referred to as the Coronavirus, has caused concern for many of us. This page contains information specifically for the residents of the Town of Amherst.*
 - ***First, we're on it!***
 - *The Town has systems in place to address just this type of situation. We have experienced experts who are actively monitoring and managing the situation in the Town.*
 - *The Amherst Public Health Department is the local end of a chain that starts with the Federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and goes through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Hampshire Public Health Preparedness Coalition (HPHPC). **The Town is the local point of contact and source for local information for residents and businesses of Amherst.***
 - *At every level, emergency response plans – plans that have been set-up, reviewed, and updated regularly for years - and are being reviewed for this particular situation.*
 - *We are in continuous contact with the CDC and DPH, with our local institutions of higher education, with our local hospital and we are working very closely with the Amherst Regional Public Schools (ARPS).*
 - ***What do we know now?***
 - *Planning for and preventing the spread of communicable disease is an ongoing process at all levels of government. We in Amherst are part of a robust system of planning, communication and response to disease outbreaks. Amherst healthcare providers, our local hospitals, and Emergency Medical Systems are in communication with DPH regarding the virus and potential cases.*

- *As of March 4, 2020, the risk of infection in our area is low and there is no “community-level spread” of the virus. There is one confirmed case in Massachusetts and one “presumptive positive” case identified, which is still pending confirmation by the CDC. We can’t predict the spread of the virus and it’s possible that we’ll see cases of COVID-19 in our community.*
 - *The good news is we are prepared and have time to get ready.*
- **Conservation and Development:**
 - **Chapter 40R/Smart Growth:** The Planning Department is looking to schedule presentation by the consultants at a Planning Board meeting on May 6th. The consultants’ work will be put online and available for public review and comment.
 - **Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road:** Valley CDC has received its Project Eligibility Letter from DHCD and is expected to file its Comprehensive Permit application with the ZBA for the 28 unit supportive housing project sometime around the end of April. This will begin the review process for this project. The ZBA has 30 days to open a public hearing from the date of the application. The ZBA must complete its review within 180 days. We will have support from our Town Attorney during the permitting process.
 - **Housing Choice Designation:** The Planning Department is submitting an application to renew its Housing Choice Designation. This designation makes the Town eligible for funds that benefit low and moderate income people.
 - **Flood Insurance Maps:** A property owner has challenged the maps and a new review process is underway.
- **Economic Development:** Town officials met with the directors of the Chamber of Commerce and Business Improvement District. We are taking a three phase approach to the changed circumstances:
 - **Response.** Determine the role, resources, and responsibilities of all parties with regard to current businesses who are forced to close or reduce operations. Federal, State, and local resources to be examined. Goal of actions.
 - **Resources.** Share information on resources available to small business. Develop expertise on these programs to provide guidance and targeted outreach for specific programs.
 - **Recovery.** The Town, BID and Chamber have agreed to work together to present a united approach to accessing resources, providing guidance, and supporting our businesses throughout the Town.
 - **Resilient Amherst.** Going forward, we will need to envision a new future for our economic development. This includes a resilient down town and village centers, a resilient commercial tax base that provides relief for residential property owners, and a new understanding from the colleges and University of the need for a vibrant and strong Amherst.

Delegated Authority (March 2020):

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons: None
- Short-Term Parking Requests: None
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures: None

Major Capital Projects:

- **Groff Park:** Minimal work is being done on site.

- 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.
- Library: The Library has 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: DPW designers have prepared the site plan for the Kendrick Park and we are working with equipment vendors who are on the State bid list. LSSE, DPW, and the Planning Department will be uploading the design online soon along with a mechanism for people to comment. Staff is preparing to present designs to both the Design Review Board and the Planning Board in the coming weeks. This project must move forward due to stringent timelines that have not, as of yet, been adjusted.
 - Performing Arts Shell on the Town Common: The Business Improvement District has put this request on hold due to the change in the economy.
 - Parking Structure on Town Land at North Pleasant Street Parking Lot: This has been put on hold.
 - North Common Restoration/Main Street Parking Lot: This has been put on hold.
 - Infrastructure Improvements: The Town will be working on other infrastructure improvements so that we are prepared to apply for “shovel-ready” project should the government seek to jump-start the economy.
- Hickory Ridge: As reported previously. Awaiting word on the solar program.
- East Street School: No developments
- North Amherst Library: No developments.
- Solar on the Landfill: The State Department of Environmental Protection has approved the applications for a post-closure use permit for both the north and south landfills. We are still awaiting the results of the utility study required by state regulators and being conducted by Eversource. We have secured a management plan with the Kestrel Trust for the south landfill.
- Dog Park: The dog park is moving forward with significant funding from the Stanton Foundation. Bids for construction are due in two weeks and an award will be made soon thereafter.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- April 13th – Town Council meeting
- April 27th – Town Council meeting

Other events:

- April 10th – Virtual Cuppa Joe with Paul
- April 20th – Patriots Day Holiday