



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: April 24, 2020
Re: Town Manager Report for April 27, 2020

Town Manager Update:

- **COVID-19:** We are nearly two months into the pandemic. Not a day goes by where there isn't an issue that come up because of this crisis. We are prepared for what happens next. At the same time, we are planning and preparing for what lies ahead: reopening Town government step-by-step; reopening our economy; making decisions on timing. I have been asked to be engaged with the State administration as we determine the next steps forward.
 - **Current Status:** We are at the height – evidence suggests – of the pandemic. Our planning and management seem to be paying off as our hospital networks have not been overwhelmed as had been feared. Our numbers will continue to climb as the disease spreads relentlessly. This is the time to ensure continued compliance and rigor in our efforts to encourage people to stay home and, if they must leave their homes, to obey physical distancing protocols.
 - **Stay at Home Advisory:** The Governor had identified May 4th as the expiration for his stay at home advisory. I anticipate he will extend this soon. The Town aligns its policies with those of the Center for Disease Control, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and directives and advisories from the Governor.
 - **Town buildings:** All town buildings, including schools, remain closed.
 - **School Year:** School buildings will not reopen for the rest of the academic years. Education continues remotely.
 - **Committee meetings:** In March, all meetings were canceled except those of the Town's governing bodies (Town Council, School Committee, Board of Library Trustees). In April, we permitted meetings by the adjudicatory bodies (Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Board, Board of Health, Conservation Commission, Historic District Commission, and Historical Commission) to comply with time deadlines and ensure building projects could continue moving forward. In May, we will begin to ramp up the meetings of all other committees, as technology and staff support allows.
 - **COVID-19 Website:** The Town has a dedicated website – www.AmherstCovid19.org – that holds all information from the Town in one location
 - **CoReTeam:**
 - The “Covid-19 Response Team” or CoRe Team began meeting weekly to address the impacts of the disease back in February. We then very quickly expanded the

group and ramped up to three times per week and then daily for the past month including weekends. We now are back to meeting 3-4 times a week as we are more in a maintenance/management phase of the pandemic and to ensure key staff have the rest and stamina as we progress through this extended emergency.

- 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. We check in on the number of cases and identify if there are any trends that need to be addressed.
 - *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 discuss employee attendance, testing, and any other issues.
 - *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 supplies on hand, 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 discuss what things will look like 2, 4, and 6 weeks down the road. That's about how far out we feel it is worth looking down the road.
 - *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, use of parks and conservation areas, 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 April 10th on Zoom. I was joined by the Health Director and had a very good turnout with active participation from callers/participants.
 - The next Cuppa Joe will be on Friday, May 8th from 8am – 9:00 a.m. It will be a Zoom time to get together. BYOC – Bring your own coffee!
 - Call-in shows: We continue to hold twice-weekly (Tuesday and Thursday at 12:00 noon) call-in shows. The Communications Manager organizes and runs the shows. On Tuesdays, I and a special guest participate. We have had the Police Chief and Director of Senior Services the last two Tuesdays. Tuesday, April 28th will feature the Emergency Management Director/Fire Chief. Every Thursday features the Health Director.
- Appointments:
 - I have submitted an appointment for the Conservation Commission and an appointment and reappointment to the Board of License Commissioners.
 - I have submitted an appointment for the Finance Director.
 - I will be reviewing reappointments for July 1st and begin to forward them to the Town Council for its review.
- Outreach and Community Participation Officers (CPOs):
 - CPOs are organizing the production and distribution of cloth masks for those members of our community who do not have access to cloth masks. CPOs are working with the large apartment complexes to coordinate distribution. Press will be going out on this shortly.
 - Complete Count – United States Census: We continue to advocate for people to complete their census forms. Many people have not done this task yet. I encourage members of the Town Council to share the message for everyone to do it now!
- Town-Gown:
 - Hampshire College has offered the use of one of its dormitories to house those experiencing homelessness and who have been diagnosed or tested positive with COVID-19. This is an extraordinary gesture on the part of the College and we appreciate it very much. We are working to open this shelter on April 29th and it will house those who are homeless and are required to quarantine.
- Farmers Market:
 - Staff are working with the manager of the Amherst Farmers Market to develop a plan to open the market in May, if possible. We are expecting an application to reserve the Spring Street parking lot and portions of Boltwood Avenue the week of April 27th. This would be on the agenda of the Town Council on May 4th with the expectation that it would be referred to the Town Services and Outreach Committee. The hope would be to have a recommendation to the full Town Council on May 18th.
- Buildings:
 - We have utilized the time when our buildings have been closed to the public to do a deep clean of the premises such as stripping and waxing floors and making improvements to Town Hall including reconfiguring offices and refinishing the wood floors.
 - We have also made major modifications and improvements to the Senior Center. Many thanks to those whose daily work life were disrupted when construction was happening.

Departments:

- Information Technology (I.T.):
 - The I.T. Department continues to work to ensure Town employees are able to work remotely. Equipment and supplies are in high demand at this moment as all employers are

seeking the same type of equipment and the production lines in and supply lines from China are not able to keep up with demand.

- I.T. has been expanding the staff trained to manage Zoom meetings so that we can continue to move into a more regular meeting schedule for many of our committees.
- Town Clerk: The Town Clerk continues to help residents and are staffing the office daily.
- Public Safety: Police, Fire, and Dispatch continue to perform at a very high level. All needed supplies are on hand and we have projections for the “burn rate” to ensure we continue to have enough supplies to keep our personnel safe. Calls for medical services and police are down by nearly 50%, which speaks to the impact the University has on the Town’s operations.
- Human Resources: The crisis continues to present 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.
- Public Works:
 - Water and Sewer Rates. We will hold an information session on block rate pricing structures on Friday, May 1st at 10:00 a.m. The President is calling this as a special Town Council meeting in case a quorum of Councilors choose to attend. Specifically, our consultants, Tata and Howard, will provide information about ascending block rates and flat rates, which is how we price discuss briefly agricultural rates, which the Town instituted a year or so ago.
 - Paving. All of this work is subject to change, of course.
 - East Hadley Road. Sidewalk work is continuing by a private contractor.
 - South East Street. A private contractor will be providing a 1.5” overlay.
 - Pelham Road. A private contractor will be milling the road removing 1.5” of material and overlaying it with 1.5” of new asphalt. There will be no work done on the sidewalk. DPW crews have been busy preparing the area by trimming trees and clearing brush.
 - Bids are being reviewed for new work utilizing existing funds including a full depth reclamation with asphalt injection of Henry Street.
 - 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 sewer break on Red Gate Lane. They are also replacing a culvert on South East Street that was in danger of collapsing. Other work on sewer mains is scheduled for this week.
- Finance:
 - Budget:
 - I called a meeting of the Budget Coordinating Group for April 23rd. There is a report from the Town Councilors being made and the four recommendations from this meeting are on the Council’s meeting agenda.
 - The Interim Finance Director and I will make a major budget presentation on May 11th to the Town Council, School Committee, and Board of Library Trustees.
 - The Interim Finance Director is reviewing options for FY20, FY21, and beyond. I characterize these options as bad, worse, and worst case scenarios. We are fortunate that we have reserves and strong management that will sustain our finances through this crisis. But difficult decisions will be required.
 - All staff are looking forward to the Town Council’s discussion and, hopefully, its support of the appointment of a permanent Finance Director.

- Sustainability:
 - Community Choice Aggregation has received funding through the efforts of our State Representative and State Senator. These funds will support the development of an aggregation plan that will be submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities and the creation of a legal Joint Powers Agreement that would be entered into by the Towns of Amherst and Pelham and the City of Northampton. The purpose of the Aggregation is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency and the development of local renewable distributed energy resources.
 - The Municipal Vulnerabilities Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEA) is funding work by Linnaen Solutions 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).
 - I am hoping we can open the Valley Bike Share service on or around June 1st. But can not guarantee that can happen.
- 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 been processed. A series of instructional sports videos for children is set to begin broadcasting on LSSE’s social media platforms.
 - Facilities. Signage has been created and put up at all parks and conservation trailheads. Its purpose is to remind people to physically distance and to practice other anti-virus related protocols. All Town basketball courts have had their hoops removed and tennis court gates have been locked to discourage play.
 - 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. Staff is also working with the American Camping Association and examining ways that summer camp might be delivered on a virtual platform. LSSE has developed *Art from the Heart*, a program that encourages children from our community to create art to honor front line workers and first responders. This is scheduled to begin in early May.

- Independence Day. We are monitoring events and reviewing options for Independence Day. Many events are being canceled due to the pandemic but also because a substantial amount of fundraising is required to make the event a success.
 - 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.
 - Support groups for Caretakers and those experiencing Grief and Loss have migrated to online version - Zoom or conference calls - as determined by the participants' comfort with technology.
 - The Center is offering an online Boosting Resilience skills-based educational group in collaboration with UMass Psychological Services Center for Older Adults. Dr. Bruna Martins-Klein and her doctoral fellow students presented at the Live Your Best Life program at the Senior Center and were very warmly received for their skillfulness and relevance. This program will be open to all seniors age 60+ residing in Amherst. Details on how to sign up will be forthcoming in May.
 - The Center donated ten boxes of material from its craft club and recruited people to sew and donate a supply of hand sewn masks for seniors. The masks are available free of charge to all Amherst seniors.
 - With social distancing anticipated to continue for the near future, the Center is working to build a more solid presence online to engage our community. The Center's yoga teacher is now offering classes via Amherst Media. She also recorded a Children's Yoga class for those residents with young children at home. The Center's ukulele group has been strumming together on Zoom and its memoir writing group is working on a project to publish a collection of their work.
 - As the Director of Senior Services said, we do not live by bread alone. The Center's Director previously provided three pop-up concerts for residents of senior housing. Residents enjoyed the music and sang and danced from their balconies. As we await the return of sunshine and warmth to offer more, this time there will be a twist. Sara Snyder of Joy of Song has agreed to be a sort-of traveling troubadour and each week will travel to several seniors' homes to serenade them with a selection of rousing songs. Where will she show up in Amherst?
 - 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.
- Conservation and Development:
 - Chapter 40R/Smart Growth: The Planning Department is looking to schedule presentation by the consultants at a Planning Board meeting. 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 meet weekly with the directors of the Chamber of Commerce and Business Improvement District. We are taking a multi-phases 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: Project delays due to construction issues are being resolved.
- DPW/Fire: No developments
- Schools: We have a meeting with staff of the MSBA to review the timeline and expectations for the MSBA funding. I will be seeking applicants to serve on a building committee for this project.
- Library: A small group reviews the library project and scope out options for the future.

Project Update:

- Destination: Amherst!
 - Kendrick Park Playground: LSSE, DPW, and the Planning Department continue to move this project forward.

- All material can be found on the project page found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/3527/Kendrick-Park-2020>
 - On April 15th, there was a preliminary presentation to the Planning Board about the proposed design with the opportunity for public input.
 - On April 22nd, the Design Review Board reviewed the project with opportunity for public input.
 - On May 6th, there will be a Public Hearing before the Planning Board for Site Plan Review of the design of the playground with the opportunity for public input.
 - The Town must submit its plans to the State by June 1st.
 - Construction is expected to begin in September with a completion date of June, 2021.
- 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: The anonymous donor has expressed interest in continuing with this project so we will be moving this forward.
 - Solar on the Landfill: Slow, steady progress continues to be made as we work through the permitting and interconnection approvals. We are projecting construction to begin in November of 2021 and operation to begin in April of 2022.
 - Dog Park: The dog park is moving forward with significant funding from the Stanton Foundation. Bids for construction are in and an award will be made soon.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- May 1st – Town Council workshop on water/sewer block rates
- May 4th – Town Council meeting
- May 11th – Town Council meeting
- May 18th – Town Council meeting
- May 25th – Memorial Day holiday
- June 1st – Town Council meeting
- June 15th – Town Council meeting
- June 29th – Town Council meeting

Other events:

- April 28th – 12:00 noon – COVID-19 Call-in Show
- April 30th – 12:00 noon – COVID-19 Call in Show
- May 5th – 12:00 noon – COVID-19 Call-in Show
- May 7th – 12:00 noon – COVID-19 Call-in Show
- May 8th – 8:00 a.m. – Cuppa Joe with Paul
- May 8th – 8:00 p.m. – BID/Chamber Luminaria to thank frontline workers