



To: Town Council  
Fr: Paul Bockelman  
Town Manager  
Dt: May 30, 2020  
Re: Town Manager Report for June 1, 2020

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**Town Manager Update:**

- Top Line:
  - ARHS Graduation:
    - The high school celebrated the end of the academic experiences for seniors through a variety of activities including;
      - Virtual Town Hall with Principal Jones on May 22<sup>nd</sup>;
      - Farewell to the High School by cleaning out lockers on May 26<sup>th</sup>;
      - Day-long graduation procession on May 27<sup>th</sup>;
      - Car parade scheduled for June 5<sup>th</sup> from 3:00 – 4:40 p.m.
      - Congratulatory signs placed throughout the Town.
    - Farmers Market: The Farmers Market was a great success today. Hundreds of people were there (including the Town Council President who was the first customer of the day!). Twenty-three farmer/vendors were there and many reported selling out all their goods. We have things to change, things to improve, and things to communicate better. It was a glorious day. One complaint and many compliments and thanks.
  - COVID-19:
    - Reopening Committee:
      - The staff reopening committee led by the Director of Human Resources and includes staff from throughout the building and the Town's maintenance manager.
      - The Committee is working to determine the steps we need to take to bring staff back to work – especially in Town Hall – as safely as possible. There are human resources issues to address, adoption of standard operating procedures, physical changes to ensure safe social distancing, and the very important mission to listen to and communicate with employees. We must abide by the Governor's directive regarding building capacity and rules.
      - This group will also determine the steps we need to take to reopen the building to the public. We have already completed some tasks, such as installing Plexiglas at some of the counters. But more work needs to be done in this area. I do not

anticipate opening Town Hall or the Bangs Center until all physical changes and protocols are in place.

- Key Points:
  - DPW staff returned to a regular schedule on May 18<sup>th</sup>.
  - Department Heads will be returning beginning June 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - Additional staff will be returning on a modified basis on or about June 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - There is no date set for Town Hall to reopen.
  - There is no date for the Library to reopen.
  - There is no date for the Senior Center to reopen. I believe the Senior Center will be closed for the rest of the calendar year.
  - I do not anticipate opening buildings to publicly accessible, posted, in-person public meetings any time soon. I will reevaluate this around Labor Day.
- In the meantime, staff have done a superb job of serving customers remotely and through curbside pick-up/drop-off. There are other services we may begin to provide as systems are put in place.
- My approach is that we will be operating in some kind of social-distancing fashion for a significant amount of time – months, not weeks – and that it makes sense to get it done right.
- Town Zoom Committee:
  - A team from I.T., Town Clerk, Town Manager, and Clerk to the Council has developed protocols for (a) scheduling a Zoom meeting and (b) scripts for convening a Zoom meeting. This group will also provide training to all staff who support Town boards and committees and chairs, as needed. We will continue to work to adjust the protocols based on feedback from users.
- Sumer Events:
  - Independence Day Fireworks have been canceled.
  - Summer camps are being reviewed as we attempt to stay in conformity with State guidance.
  - Pools are being prepared to be open, assuming guidance from the State supports opening.
  - Puffers Pond is being monitored by the Police Department. The Police Chief and Assistant Town Manager have developed a plan for the summer that includes limited use of the beach and additional staffing. We are looking toward a June 6<sup>th</sup> implementation date.
- Case Numbers:
  - The case numbers reported previously as wrong have been corrected. As of May 29<sup>th</sup>, there are 94 cases in the Town, 845 in the County, and 94,895 in the State.
  - Cases in Amherst continue to rise, however, with one cluster (defined as >4 cases) at the Center for Extended Care accounting for the bulk of our cases.
  - We are looking how to report this information in a different way to better serve the public.
- The Town continues to stay ahead of the game with regard to our stock of PPE specifically to address the pandemic. The Emergency Management Director/Fire Chief is coordinating all PPE for the Town and distributing it to departments (DPW, Library, LSSE, etc.) as needed and supporting other groups like congregate housing for homeless individuals and seniors as well.
- 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 Cuppa Joe was on Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup> with Tony Maroulis from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst as our special guest. We had a great turnout and it turned out to be graduation day at the University, graduation day for our Communication Manager, AND Mr. Maroulis’ birthday.
    - The next Cuppa Joe will be on Friday, June 5<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 a.m. with Finance Director and Comptroller as our guests.
    - These sessions are expertly organized and managed by our Communications Director
  - Call-in shows: We have reduced the frequency of our twice-weekly call-in shows and go to once per week. On Tuesdays, I and a special guest have participated. We have had the Police Chief, Director of Senior Services, and the Emergency Management Director/Fire Chief, the Assistant Town Manager/Director of Conservation and Development, and Superintendent of Public Works. Every Thursday features the Health Director. We will now stick with once a week on Thursdays. These call-in shows are all available for viewing by going here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySXkNrb1J1g>
  - The Town’s efforts to boost the morale of our employees was recognized by the Massachusetts Municipal Association in this recent article featuring one of our employees in the lead photo! You can read the article here: <https://www.mma.org/local-leaders-work-to-boost-morale-and-keep-employees-connected/>
- Appointments:
  - I have submitted the first group of reappointments for July 1<sup>st</sup> to the Town Council for its review.
  - Additional appointments are forthcoming.
  - I am seeking members to serve on the Elementary School Building Committee. This Committee is required by the Massachusetts State Building Authority with specific roles designated such as the principal, superintendent, town manager, etc.
- Outreach and Community Participation Officers (CPOs):
  - There has been an overwhelming response to the initiative by the CPOs to make and distribute masks and face coverings which are now required for being in public when

social distancing is not possible. Many people have jumped into action by making masks and donating them or material to the Town, which we then distribute for free to those in need.

- In response to one of our social media Tweets, Dodo Case from San Antonio, Texas contacted the Town and offered to provide a box of masks at no charge. Dodo Case is a company that makes high quality phone and iPad cases. They switched production to cloth facemasks and pledged to provide one free mask for every mask they sell. This is a very generous offer. Here is the company's website:  
<https://www.dodocase.com/products/cloth-mask>
- Complete Count – United States Census: The Town received a grant of \$25,000 from the Secretary of State's office to expand our efforts to ensure all people in Amherst are counted. Our Census team is working with the Secretary of State's office to determine how to utilize these funds in a relatively short timeframe. These funds must be expended by the end of the fiscal year.
- The Communications Manager is working with a senior tax work-off program photographer to update the Town's photo inventory (for the website and other future uses).
- The CPOs have hired a summer intern from Amherst College to work on engagement, research, youth strategy, etc. The position is funded by an AC Houston Scholarship. The intern selected will be a great addition and bring the perspective of being a first-generation college student.
- Town-Gown:
  - Hampshire College:
    - The College announced that it would have students on campus in the Fall, unless specifically prohibited by the Governor.
    - The College held its virtual commencement on May. A link to the event is here:  
<https://www.hampshire.edu/student-life/hampshire-college-commencement-2020>
  - Amherst College will hold its virtual commencement on May 31<sup>st</sup>. A link to the event is here: <https://www.amherst.edu/news/specialevents/commencement>
  - University of Massachusetts at Amherst:
    - Students were invited back to campus from May 18-22 to retrieve their belongings and conclude the move out period. 9,000 students were moved out during these four days.
    - The University estimates that there will be about 130 students on campus during the summer.
    - All orientation activities are being conducted online.

## **Departments:**

- Town Clerk:
  - The Town Clerk has been on State-wide calls with her colleagues to discuss modifications necessary for the September and November elections. In addition, we are reviewing locations in the Town, recognizing clear concerns over holding elections in school, fire, and other buildings. We are exploring alternatives over the next several weeks.
  - The office is receiving more requests for absentee ballots for the upcoming fall elections amid concerns with COVID-19.
- Public Safety:
  - Police have responded to more frequent requests to enforce complaints about the lack of social distancing on private parties and the failure to wear masks in public. The Police

always respond and typically use the opportunity to educate all involved about the law and the value of proper social distancing and mask wearing.

- There have been reports of increased speeding throughout the Commonwealth. Officers continue to patrol Town roads for compliance with traffic laws, including speeding. The public is encouraged to notify the Police Department if there are areas that you believe needs additional enforcement efforts.
- The Town will continue to have a police presence at Puffers Pond, especially as the weather warms up, to prevent gatherings and educate visitors about social distancing.
- The Fire Department is still answering calls for service and encourages people not to wait to call for help. They have seen people waiting to seek care because of fears of contracting COVID-19 if they go to a hospital.
- Recent storms have created a small surge in calls in response to tree limbs falling on houses.
- Human Resources:
  - Three staff members graduated from the Leadership Institute of Political and Public Impact (LIPPI) hosted by the School of Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. These three rising leaders are: Jennifer Brown, public health nurse; Athena O’Keeffe, Clerk to the Council; and Brianna Sunryd, Communications Manager. Congratulations to all three and thanks to the University for sponsoring such a great program.
  - The Human Resources Director is leading the Staff Reopening Committee mentioned above.
  - The Health Director announced her retirement effective in September or October. We are updating the position description in preparation for conducting a search.
  - All Human Resources functions continue including providing support to employees and managing union relationships.
- Public Works:
  - Hydrant Flushing: The Water Division is conducting its annual systematic water main flushing program to clean the distribution system on May 18<sup>th</sup>, weather permitting. This is an annual chore to flush the water mains and exercise the fire hydrants.
  - Paving:
    - East Hadley Road. Sidewalk work is continuing by a private contractor.
    - South East Street. The paving is complete. Line painting is complete.
    - Pelham Road. The paving is complete. Line painting is complete.
    - Bids are being reviewed for new work utilizing existing funds including a full depth reclamation with asphalt injection of Henry Street.
  - Staffing: DPW returned to its regular shift schedule for most divisions on May 18<sup>th</sup>.
  - Work: Street cleaning is underway.
  - Downtown: DPW will be conducting a deep-clean of downtown sidewalks, street furniture, etc. by power-washing and then sealing the sidewalks to ensure a longer life-span.
- Finance:
  - Budget:
    - The new Finance Director started work on May 11<sup>th</sup>, and not a day too soon!
    - He is working closely with the Comptroller and have delivered the Town’s One-Month budget.

- The finance department is working with the Joint Capital Planning Committee on a significantly modified capital list to provide to the Town Manager for consideration.
  - The finance department is working on the FY21 budget, which is being unpacked and repacked after the reduction in funds available.
  - The accounting department has developed an important method of tracking all COVID-19 expenses to facilitate reimbursement from FEMA and the CARES Act.
  - The collector's department has been processing a large volume of tax bills, which are due on June 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - The treasurer's office has processed the extensive paperwork required for the Town to borrow funds for the coming year.
- Sustainability:
  - Community Choice Aggregation: CCA 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: This grant was received from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEA) to fund work by Linnaen Solutions for 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).
  - ValleyBike: ValleyBike will start reopening on June 1st, although it will take a while to reset all the stations. The Governor's orders clearly allow essential transportation services. Technicians will wear safety equipment and they will disinfect any bicycle they service, relocate, or even touch. They will not be making extra trips to stations, however, just for cleaning bikes. Given CDC guidance about risks, and the experience from many urban area bike share, while any surface provides some risk, outdoor bikes where users follow CDC guidance are lower down on the list.
- Community Services:
  - Veterans Services: The Director of Veterans Services produced a virtual Memorial Day ceremony in cooperation with the American Legion and VFW. The Town Council president, State Senator, State Representative, volunteers, veterans and I were part of the production. A Vietnam Veteran who grew up in Amherst to be the main speaker. Here is a link to the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUSiUokU9K0&feature=youtu.be>
  - Leisure Services: LSSE has opened Cherry Hill Golf Course after the Governor gave permission for golf courses to open. We have reassigned full-time staff to the golf course and will not be hiring part-time staff this year. The Governor's order has strict rules of how golf courses may operate. LSSE staff have been doing a great job of maintaining the course during the time it has been closed.
  - Senior Center:
    - The Director of Senior Services has been tapped to serve on the state-wide committee studying the circumstances under which senior centers may reopen.

This will provide guidance for local senior centers that those centers can choose to follow or not.

- The Senior Center continues to provide creative and innovative programming for seniors and offering home delivery of food.
- We have reassigned parking enforcement officers to assist with the delivery of meals.
- Health Department: With the announced retirement Health Director Julie Federman effective in the Fall, I will be developing a position profile for recruitment.
- Conservation and Development:
  - Amherst Media Proposal on Main Street: ACTV has submitted its Site Plan Review application to the Planning Board for the proposed office and studio building on Main Street. The public hearing for this application is scheduled for July 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road: Valley CDC has submitted its Comprehensive Permit application to the Zoning Board of Appeals for the supportive studio apartment project, including 28 units for low income individuals, proposed to be constructed at 132 Northampton Road. The public hearing will be held on June 25<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m.
  - Emergency Rental Assistance program: The Town's Procurement officer sent a Request for Quotation (RFQ) to four organizations that could become the administrator for this program. These organizations have been substantially informed about our planning since we initiated this process and will be able to respond very quickly. The tight deadlines and quick responses will enable the Town to get the program off the ground more quickly. I anticipate awarding the contract on June 12<sup>th</sup>. Then, we would seek applicants seeking support from the program to submit applications at the end of June.
  - ADA Transition Plan:
    - The Town is updating its Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation & Transition Plan. The project is grant-funded through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).
    - The existing Self Evaluation Plan & Transition Plan was last prepared in 2006 and is now outdated. Utilizing a consultant with expertise in this area, the Town will conduct a thorough self-evaluation of the Town's public facilities, programs, services, activities, and events to determine compliance with the ADA and any barriers to accessibility.
    - Once the Self-Evaluation is complete, the Town will develop a Transition Plan to prioritize the identified barriers and how they will be corrected.
    - We are seeking input from the community, organizations assisting persons with disabilities, and Town Staff to assist in addressing and prioritizing current and future accessibility needs. Here is a link to the survey: <https://www.amherstma.gov/3530/ADA-Self-Evaluation-Transition-Plan> The deadline for completing the survey is July 11<sup>th</sup>.
  - 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.
- Economic Development:
  - The Business Improvement District organized a luminaria candle lighting with candles and ribbons placed throughout the central business district. This event was to honor those who have been serving in the medical field and other essential workers.

- Staff will present a proposal to the Town Council that would provide for a temporary moratorium to expedite the permitting of restaurants as part of the reopening of the local economy.
- Staff and our business partners have submitted an application to utilize CDBG funds to provide support for local businesses during this difficult time.
- The Amherst Farmers Market opened successfully on May 30<sup>th</sup>.
- Information Technology (I.T.): Even though the department has limited hours on-site, the staff is able to service all needs either virtually or through socially-distanced hand-offs. For instance, a server at LSSE was damaged by a leaky roof in the Middle School and I.T. were able to be on-site and work remotely to repair the damage so that registration for Cherry Hill Golf Course could continue.

#### **Delegated Authority (April 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: Construction work is moving along and the project may be completed within the next month or so. We are working on plans to staff the new park so that residents may enjoy it this summer if we determine this type of facility can be safely opened to the public. The Park looks amazing and will be a dramatic improvement over the old park.
- DPW/Fire: No developments
- Schools: We met with staff of the MSBA 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 scopes out options for the future.

#### **Project Update:**

- Destination: Amherst!
  - Kendrick Park Playground: The Planning Board approved the Site Plan Review application for the playground proposed for Kendrick Park at its meeting on May 20<sup>th</sup>. The approved plans and cost estimate will now be sent to the state for approval. The project is expected to be bid this summer and construction is expected to start in late summer or early fall.
  - Performing Arts Shell on the Town Common: No developments.
  - Parking Structure on Town Land at North Pleasant Street Parking Lot: No developments.
  - North Common Restoration/Main Street Parking Lot: No developments.
- Hickory Ridge: No developments.
- East Street School: No developments
- North Amherst Library: We are working with procurement to move to the next phase for this project.
- 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:**

- June 8<sup>th</sup> – Finance Committee public hearing on One-Month and Region budgets (Town Council meeting)
- June 15<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting (Capital Improvement Program presentation at 5:30 p.m.; Capital Improvement Program Public Forum at 6:00 p.m.; Water and sewer rates public hearing at 6:30 p.m.)
- June 15<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- June 29<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- July 13<sup>th</sup> – Town Council public hearing on the FY21 budget

Other events:

- June 4<sup>th</sup> – 12: 00 noon – COVID-19 Call-in Show
- June 5<sup>th</sup> – 8:00 a.m. – Cuppa Joe with Paul