



To: Town Council  
Fr: Paul Bockelman  
Town Manager  
Dt: September 11, 2020  
Re: Town Manager Report for September 14, 2020

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### **Town Manager Update:**

- Top Line:
  - Election: Much credit to the Town Clerk's office for managing a complex election (early voting, mail-in voting, election day voting with social distance). The election was held with no disruption and a minimal number of issues. The next challenge will be the general election on November 3<sup>rd</sup>.
  - COVID-19:
    - Hot Line:
      - The hot line started August 30<sup>th</sup>
      - 95 calls/emails were received through September 10<sup>th</sup>
      - All calls were in answered in person or received a return phone call. All emails received a response. Some concerns have been anonymous
      - Those not answered by CPOs divided among: Inspection Services, Health Department, Police/Ambassadors.
      - Areas of Comments/Questions: Noise, Gatherings, Mask wearing, Testing
    - Ambassadors:
      - Ambassadors started September 4<sup>th</sup>. The ambassadors work in teams with support from Town staff. The ambassador coordinator coordinates with UMass efforts with off-campus students
      - Data through September 13<sup>th</sup>
        - Total people hired: 6
        - Total shifts: 2 shifts + 1 group orientation shift
        - Total number of individuals interacted with: 154
        - Total number of masks distributed: 10 (white town masks), 23 (black UMass masks [only given to UMass students])
        - Community presence at Farmers Market
  - Racial Equity:
    - The Town has joined the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). GARE is a national network of government cohorts working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. They believe government's proactive

work on racial equity has the potential to leverage significant change, setting the stage for the achievement of racial equity in our communities. GARE goal is to catalyze community, government, and other institutions to dismantle structural racial inequity and create equitable outcomes for all.

- Town staff have established a staff-driven core group to direct efforts for all Town staff.
  - I have reached out to dozens of local leaders of the BIPOC community and its allies to inform the report I am making to the Town Council
- Outreach:
    - Coffee with Town Manager: We will continue outreach efforts on September 25<sup>th</sup> with Town staff joining me at various locations around Town to connect with people informally in one-on-one settings.
    - In the Community: The Community Participation Officers and I were present at the Mobile Food Market at Fort River School with census outreach workers. We will continue to seek venues for the CPOs and Town staff to be available and present for members of the community. We welcome suggestions.
    - Call-in shows: We are reviewing the value of continuing the call-in shows to determine whether we should continue them into the Fall
    - Appointments:
    - I continue to seek members to serve on the Agricultural Commission, Affordable Housing Trust, Cultural Council, CDBG Advisory Committee, Council on Aging, Leisure Services and Supplemental Education (LSSE) Commission, Public Art Commission, and Public Shade Tree Committee. Interviews continue with several of these groups.
  - Outreach and Community Participation Officers (CPOs):
    - Complete Count – United States Census: The CPOs have been promoting the census in many ways with mailings, social media, and personal appeals.
    - Free Masks:
      - The Masks for All initiative continues to draw interest and remains very popular.
      - The Town has maroon “Town of Amherst” cloth masks that we are distributing.
  - Town-Gown:
    - UMass: The Town and University reopening working group meets weekly.
      - This group held a community forum on September 3<sup>rd</sup> at 5:30 p.m. Over 200 people participated through Zoom or Livestream. Dozens of questions were posed and the group was able to address about 20 of them during the time allotted.
      - The University has conducted over 30,000 tests to date with a very low positivity rate – which is a good thing. This is the fourth largest number of tests in the State (only Boston, Worcester, and Cambridge are testing more). This includes 10,000 unique individuals.
      - The University has sent an email to all matriculated students in the Amherst inviting them to be tested, whether they are on-campus or off-campus. This is good news. Off-campus students are not required to be tested, but they have access to free, frequent testing.
      - The University continues its “knock-and-talk” program where University officials and Town officials jointly visit households that have generated complaints to the Town.
    - Off-campus students: The University is collecting data to determine the number of students who are living off-campus in Amherst and surrounding areas.

## **Departments:**

- Town Clerk:
  - Election: As stated above, the Town Clerk’s office has done a fantastic job running a very complex election. Voting tallies are attached to this report. Staff will provide a report on the voting locations to the Town Council at an upcoming meeting. The Town Clerk’s office is holding a debrief meeting with the election wardens to gather advice and suggestions for the general election.
    - Early Voting: Early voting was held from August 22<sup>nd</sup> to August 28<sup>th</sup> at the Bangs Community Center.
    - Mail-in Voting: Voting by mail has proven to be very popular with the electorate.
      - The Clerk’s office purchased and installed a box on the Main Street side of Town Hall. This box will be available for the general election, too.
      - Additional staff have been assigned to support the Town Clerk’s office during the work day, after hours, and on weekends between now and the election.
    - Election Day:
      - The Town Clerk’s office implemented successfully the Town Council’s vote to move three voting locations to the Amherst-Pelham Regional High School and maintain the other locations.
      - The Clerk’s office worked closely with the Facilities Manager, Public Works Department, and School Department and other voting location hosts to ensure voters were able to vote in safe, accessible locations on Election Day.
      - Day after the election cleaning and disinfecting was completed by a professional industrial cleaning company that provided viral disinfection services to each of the election polling locations.
  - The next challenge will be the general election on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Planning, staffing, and supplies are being done now.
- Public Safety:
  - Police officers have been responding to numerous complaints about house parties and noise disturbances. Labor Day weekend was a particularly busy weekend with numerous calls for service, mostly noise complaints.
  - The Police Department’s new “comfort dog” was sworn into office on Thursday. Canine colleagues from area police departments were also in attendance.
- Human Resources:
  - Human Resources Manager Joanne Misiaszek is serving as the Temporary Human Resources Director. The Town Council will receive the appointment on August 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - Public Health Nurse Jennifer Brown is serving as the Temporary Health Director. She will be supported by the Assistant Town Manager for administrative issues. I have contracted with a neighboring health director to provide additional support during the transition.
- Public Works:
  - Pine/Meadow/North Pleasant Street Intersection: Town staff and our Traffic Signal Contractor have completed the installation of the new traffic signals and controller at the above intersection. The camera detection system is in operation and the new signal phases are now in operation. The biggest change to the signal phases is the addition of protected left turns.
  - Wastewater Testing:

- As reported in prior Town Manager Reports, the Town is working with the University of Massachusetts to conduct innovative COVID-19 testing on wastewater sample. The Town will provide influent wastewater samples and space, and appropriate housing and/or cooling for the sampling equipment.
    - The purpose of the research is to compare testing methods and assess the reliability of different methods. The three distinct flumes from a relatively small sewershed makes the Town of Amherst and University a very interesting case study.
    - The researchers are actively curating and vetting the reverse transcription quantitative polymerase chain reaction (RT-qPCR) data of SARS-COV-2 signal in Amherst wastewater. After weeks of data collection, the researchers are analyzing the informaiton
    - In addition the researchers have received funding from the University to sample wastewater collected on campus. If you are interested, we would be very interest in continuing to sample Amherst wastewater flumes as well as part of this fall study. I suspect there would need to be a discussion and a new MOU created for this effort to describe data sharing if we were to continue. I would very much look forward to studying it.
    - The research work is very promising. Trends will provide a dimension of public health information that is mutually beneficial to both the Town of Amherst and the University.
  - West Street Pedestrian Bridge: A small pedestrian bridge that carries the sidewalk over the Plum Brook on West Street north of the Pomeroy Village center is closed due to accelerated deterioration. This was required when a State inspection found deterioration on the bridge’s eastern side. Pedestrians who use the bridge are being detoured into the road, where they will be protected from passing vehicles by Jersey barriers. Until the bridge is removed, repaired and reinstalled, likely by the end of September, a guardrail is being adjusted and asphalt access ramps are being installed so the sidewalk remains accessible.
  - Paving:
    - Paving is being done on North East Street.
    - DPW crews are now on Old North Pleasant Street and Kendrick Park to make the changes necessary to connect the new park to the sidewalk system.
- Finance:
  - COVID-19: The finance department continues to submit reimbursements for COVID-19 funding from FEMA and the Federal CARES Act.
  - Intermunicipal Agreements: I am hoping to bring all of our annual intermunicipal agreements to the Town Council at one time in the near future.
- Sustainability:
  - Community Choice Aggregation: The Town is working on 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. We are about to engage a specialized law firm to provide legal advice utilizing State funds to pay for the legal time.
  - The Municipal Vulnerabilities Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant: The Energy and Climate Action Committee is holding a series of subcommittee meetings with Community Leaders and stakeholders. There are four Task Groups holding a series of three meetings each through September. Additional community outreach meetings are scheduled, the next

one being October 30<sup>th</sup>. The group will prioritize strategies and rankings by sector in November.

- Community Services:

- Unhoused Population:

- We are working on with Craig's Doors to develop alternative arrangements for overnight sheltering this upcoming season.
    - Town staff are investigating options for a day shelter in preparation for the colder weather.
    - Director of Senior Services will be the lead for issues revolving around homelessness policies and activities taking over from the retired Health Director. She will be supported by the Assistant Town Manager.

- Leisure Services:

- Some Fall sports are getting ready to debut including golf, track, and cross country.
    - Mill River pool hours will be extended into September in recognition of the reduced number of ways that people can exercise.
    - Cherry Hill golf course has had a busy summer after a weak spring season.
    - Town staff are working with the School District to develop options for child care under the Governor's recent order making it easier to provide this essential service to the Town's staff and community at large.

- Senior Center: The Senior Center continues to extend its work into the community with creative services, friendly phone calls, and online programming.

- Health Department:

- The Town is unable to offer a flu clinic this year for its employees so we have engaged in a campaign to encourage every staff member to get a flu shot at a local physician's office or pharmacy. It is particularly important for staff to get a flu shot this year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
    - Health staff are conducting targeted flu clinics as they have done in the past. These efforts have been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
    - Health staff is responsible for disease investigation, contact tracing, and notification for all infectious diseases. The School Department's Nurse Manager has been very cooperative in this effort as have several school nurses.
    - Health staff are preparing for offering the COVID-19 vaccination when it becomes available.
    - Health staff are working with other Town staff (inspection services, LSSE, Town Manager, etc.) to develop plans for upcoming events such as the sale of trees on Kendrick Park, Halloween, Merry Maple, and Winterfest. There will be changes in how all of these events will be conducted.

- Public Art:

- More electrical boxes around Town will be decorated by artists under a program conceived and sponsored by the Public Art Commission.
    - The Public Art Commission is seeking to enliven and re-energize the outdoor exhibit area on the Boltwood Plaza which currently houses the non-functioning Poetry Window.

- Conservation and Development:

- Licensing: On September 10<sup>th</sup> the Governor extended the period for outdoor table service by licensees licensed for on-premises consumption from November 1, 2020, for any period up to

dsixty (60) days after the end of the state of emergency. The LLA may issue extensions automatically to all licensees, or may do so on request from individual licensees.

- Puffer's Pond: We will maintain staffing at Puffers Pond through September as that is often the time when the area can become more crowded during warm weather.
- Emergency Rental Assistance Program: The Town has dedicated \$250,000 in taxpayer funds to support income-eligible renters in meeting their rental requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional information can be found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2672>
- Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road: A public hearing began on June 25<sup>th</sup> on Valley CDC's 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 ZBA will take numerous meetings listening to public comment and reviewing this proposal which has received significant Town financial support.
- ADA Transition Plan: Consultants were in Town surveying all Town buildings to identify the barriers to full accessibility to those who are disabled.
- Information Technology (I.T.):
  - I-Net: I.T. is moving forward on a contract to construct a replacement I-Net loop to replace the current Comcast loop which the Town must abandoned in compliance with the contract we have with Comcast. Delays in obtaining the fiber due to the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed this project.
  - Cybersecurity: The Town is participating in a State-sponsored cybersecurity awareness training program designed to help staff spot threats, change behaviors, and reduce risk at every level of the organization.

#### **Delegated Authority (August 2020):**

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

#### **Major Capital Projects:**

- DPW/Fire: No developments
- Schools: The first meeting of the Elementary School Building Committee will be scheduled soon.
- Library:
  - July 2021 – The MBLC will award Amherst a provisional grant
  - December 2021 – the date by which the Town will have to vote to approve its share of the project cost – but there is still nothing preventing Town Council from voting on the project before December 2021.

#### **Project Update:**

- Groff Park: The spray park was turned on and tested. Some leaks were detested and the contractor was called back to fix the problems.
- Kendrick Park Playground: The construction is expected to start in late summer or early fall. DPW is busy preparing the walkways around the playground.
- 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: See memo in the Town Council's packet.
- 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.

#### **Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

- September 21<sup>st</sup> – Town Council meeting
- September 28<sup>th</sup> – Town Council Public Forum on the Master Plan

#### **Other events:**

- September 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5:30 p.m. – Town/University Community Forum