



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: September 18, 2020
Re: Town Manager Report for September 21, 2020

Town Manager Update:

- COVID-19:
 - Hot Line: The hot line has been very popular and staff have returned every call/email within a few hours of receipt. We have monitored the frequency and timing of calls and will be staffing the line for a limited number of hours on weekends.
 - Ambassadors: Ambassadors started September 4th. The ambassadors work in teams with support from Town staff. The ambassador coordinator coordinates with UMass efforts with off-campus students.
 - Free Meals: The USDA announced an extension of the program that provides free meals to everyone 18 and under without having to track which student is taking the meals until the end of the calendar year.
 - State Changes: The Governor issued an order that extended the period of outdoor table service by licensees licensed for on premise consumption of alcohol from November 1st until sixty days after the end of the State of Emergency.
- 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. Town staff are working to implement the recommended steps from GARE.
 - I will be establishing a Community Safety Working Group after I receive any feedback from the Town Council at its meeting on Monday.
- Outreach:
 - Coffee with Town Manager: The next Cuppa Joe with Paul will be on **Friday, September 25th from 8:00 – 9:30 a.m.** via Zoom. We will be joined by Community Police Officer Bill Laramee and COVID-19 Ambassador lead Kat Newman. We may also get a celebrity sitting if Winston, the Town's new comfort dog, is able to join us!
 - In the Community: The Community Participation Officers and I were present at some of the Mobile Food Markets such as the Fort River School the last two Thursdays and the Mobile Food Market on East Hadley Road on Saturday. Representatives from the United States Census were also present at the Mobile Food Market. We will continue to seek

venues for the CPOs and Town staff to be available and present for members of the community.

- Appointments: I continue to seek members to serve on the Agricultural Commission, Cultural Council, CDBG Advisory Committee, Council on Aging, Public Art Commission, and Public Shade Tree Committee. Interviews continue with several of these groups.
- Community Participation Officers (CPOs):
 - Complete Count – United States Census: Only 66.5% of the Town has responded to the U.S. census. This is low and will impact many, many funding programs over the coming decade. Ask your neighbor, ask you kids and parents, if they have completed the census. Ten minutes – is all it takes – and it impacts the Town for 10 years!
 - Web Site: The redesign and refresh of the Town’s website is continuing. We are working to ensure the site is fully accessible to those who have barriers to traditional viewing of the web site.
 - Digital Services: We continue to expand Town offerings electronically with Inspection Services introducing an online permitting portal and the Collector’s office introducing an online parking pass system. I will be assigning staff to reorient many of our core services to a digital platform. This will make all of our services easier to access by the public.
 - Zoom Crew: I am establishing a Zoom Crew, existing staff members who are have the time and ability to support the significant increase in the number of Zoom meetings being held by Town committees. I appreciate the openness and willingness of our staff to step up to take on these new responsibilities.
- Town-Gown:
 - UMass: The Town and University reopening working group meets weekly.
 - The University is conducting over 10,000 tests per week 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).
 - 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. Initial indications are that there are not as many students in off-campus housing as initially thought.
- Town Manager Goals: I have shared the goals voted by the Town Council with Department Heads. We will address the progress on these goals regularly.
- Town Hall: Town Hall will remain closed to the public for the foreseeable future. We are developing an option for the public to interact with Town staff in a secure, in-person area.
- Town Staff: With the start of remote schooling, many of our employees have been challenged to meet both the needs of their families and the demands of their work. We are exploring ways we can help these staff members meet their child care needs.

Departments:

- Town Clerk:

- Election: The next challenge for the Town Clerk’s office will be the general election on November 3rd. Many thanks to the office staff who have stepped up at an important time due to the planned medical leave of the Town Clerk.
- The Acting Town Clerk held a debrief meeting with the election wardens to gather advice and suggestions for the general election.
- Public Safety:
 - The Police Department received a significant grant of \$400,207 multi-year grant to improve Criminal Justice Responses to Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking.
 - The Police Department’s new “comfort dog” was sworn into office on Thursday. Canine colleagues from area police departments were also in attendance.
 - Ambulance and emergency calls continue to be low with calls coming in at about half of what they are normally.
- Human Resources:
 - I appointed Donna-Rae Kenneally as the next Human Resources Director. The TSO Committee reviewed the appointment and recommended approval to the full Town Council by unanimous vote. Human Resources Manager Joanne Misiaszek is serving as the Temporary Human Resources Director.
 - I appointed Emma Dragon as the next Health Director. The TSO Committee reviewed the appointment and recommended approval to the full Town Council by unanimous vote. 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:
 - Rest Rooms: Staff are looking at securing modular rest rooms at key areas in the Town including at Plum Brook and Kiwanis Park. Other locations are also under consideration including the downtown area.
 - 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 information
 - 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.
 - Capital Program and Inventory:
 - The Finance Director is working with Department Heads to put together a comprehensive inventory of capital assets.
 - The Finance Director is introducing a new capital planning process for Department Heads with the goal of preparing a realistic five-year capital plan to the Town Council. This means there will be hard choices made and that items may be put into a "parking lot" if they are not able to be funded in the five-year capital plan.
 - The Finance Director is introducing new budget forms for Department Heads to complete. The goal is to have a budget that is 100% online and has all of the components recommended by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA).
 - The Finance Director is working with Department Heads to review fees for services.
 - 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 30th. 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 go with clinics for youth football, tennis, ultimate Frisbee, cross country, track, and soccer. Staff have also organized a “Girls on the Run” program.
 - The Mill River pool, whose hours were extended into September in recognition of the reduced number of ways that people can exercise, has been very popular with several swimmers expressing appreciation for the added opportunity to swim. The last day for swimming is September 27th. LSSE is exploring ways to provide lap and open swim during the school year.
 - Cherry Hill golf course has had a busy summer after a weak spring season. We had one of the best Augusts in recent memory due to the very dry weather. LSSE staff were redeployed to manage the course without adding temporary summer staff.
 - 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.
 - LSSE is developing plans for a Halloween carnival and parade.
 - 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 looking for ways to offer flu clinics to our employees. We have also 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.
 - Public Art:
 - More electrical boxes around Town are being 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 10th 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 sixty (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.

- I am reviewing the request to delay/decrease fees for liquor license holders. License fees are due November 1st.
 - 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>
 - ADA Transition Plan: Consultants were in Town surveying all Town buildings to identify the barriers to full accessibility to those who are disabled.
- Sustainability: The Town received a \$125,998 grant from the Department of Energy Resources Green Community Division to update lighting at the Munson Library, Police Station, and Town Hall and to implement idle reduction technology for Town vehicles.
- 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 in October.
- 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 detected 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: Staff are reviewing the plans developed by the architectural and engineering firm to determine if the work can be modified to move forward with an additional appropriation from the Community Preservation Act fund.
- Hickory Ridge: No developments.

- East Street School: No developments
- North Amherst Library: With the Town Council’s positive vote, we will now contract with the architect to move to the next phase of design. We will be utilizing a new form of public involvement to engage the community in a different way, because I don’t anticipate we will be able to have public meetings on this – or any other – project for some time.
- 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 29th – Town Council Public Forum on the Master Plan
- October 5th – Town Council Meeting
- October 12th – Indigenous Peoples Day Holiday
- October 19th – Town Council Meeting
- November 9th – Town Council Meeting
- November 11th – Veterans Day Holiday
- November 16th – Town Council Meeting
- November 26th – 27th – Thanksgiving Holidays
- December 7th – Town Council Meeting
- December 21st – Town Council Meeting
- December 24th-25th – Christmas Holiday
- January 1st – New Year’s Holiday

Other events:

- September 22nd – District One Neighborhood Meeting
- September 25th – Cuppa Joe with Paul
- October 4th – District Three Neighborhood Meeting
- October 22nd – District Two Neighborhood Meeting