



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

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Town Manager Reports are available on the Town's website here: [Town Manager Reports](#)

**Town Manager Update:**

- COVID-19:
  - Hot Line: Calls continue to come in to the hot line, both by telephone and email. Every contact receives an immediate and/or follow-up response as the situation warrants.
  - Ambassadors:
    - The Ambassadors are on a reduced staffing schedule but still present in the downtown area.
    - Senator Comerford and Representative Domb expect the Town will receive a \$50,000 appropriation to support the Ambassadors program through the winter and spring.
- Racial Equity:
  - Community Safety Working Group: The Community Safety Working Group continues to meet weekly. Most recently they explored similar work being done in other communities including Cambridge, Newark, Newton, Northampton, Salem, and Somerville.
  - Core Equity Team:
    - Our Core Equity Team, the employee empowered and led group that is working on racial equity in Town government, continues to actively engage employees. Most recently, Community Participation Officer Jennifer Moyston conducted a racial equity presentation/discussion for the group.
- Outreach:
  - Coffee with Town Manager: and featured Business Improvement District Director Gabrielle Gould, Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce Director Claudia Pazmany, and Director of Placemaking & Special Projects at The Mill District Hanna Rechtschaffen.
  - Community Chats:
    - The Communications Manager and I hosted our 35<sup>th</sup> Community Chat with special guest Emma Dragon, the Town's public health director.

- Our next Chat will be on Thursday, January 7<sup>th</sup>.
  - The Community Chats are every Thursday for 30 minutes...and recorded so you can listen at your convenience.
- Belchertown: I met with the Belchertown Select Board as they are considering changes in the position of Town Administrator.
- Office Hours: The Communications Manager and I are working to establish virtual office hours via Zoom. This will allow individuals who would like to meet one-on-one with the Town Manager the opportunity to schedule a time during established office hours. We hope to launch this after the New Year.
- Web Site: We launched a web refresh, with custom domains for the Police Department and Amherst Recreation on December 14<sup>th</sup>. While this is a refresh, and not a full-blown redesign, it has taken a big commitment from the Communications Manager and department content managers.
- Engage Amherst: We are working on a new platform, called “Bang the Table”, that we will utilize to engage members of the public as an additional way for the public to learn about and comment on specific projects. Our first test project with this platform will be the North Amherst Library but we anticipate utilizing this platform for the North Common public engagement effort and the Pomeroy Village intersection discussion.
- Appointments: I have submitted appointments to the Town Council to serve on the Agricultural Commission, Disability Access Advisory Committee, Public Art Commission, Public Shade Tree Committee and Community Safety Working Group.
- Town-Gown:
  - Committee: The Town and University reopening working group will meet on January 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Town Staff:
  - Department Heads engaged in a workshop on how to manage employees working remotely. This 4-hour session was well done and beneficial to our supervisors.
  - With the increase in prevalence of COVID-19, I have instructed staff to de-densify Town office buildings to ensure our Town staff can continue to conduct business for the people.

## Departments:

- Town Clerk:
  - We will begin advertising for a new Town Clerk next week and continue recruiting in the New Year.
  - The Temporary Town Clerk developed a calendar for the 2021 election. Nomination will be available on July 1<sup>st</sup> with nomination papers due by September 14<sup>th</sup>. The Town election will be on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. The election will elect 13 Town Councilors, six Jones Library Trustees, five School Committee members, one Oliver Smith Will Elector, and three members of the Amherst Housing Authority. A copy of the election schedule can be found on the Town’s website here:  
<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/53890/2021-Election-Calendar?bidId=>
- Public Safety:
  - Ambulance and emergency calls continue to be at an all-time low with calls coming in at about half of what they are normally. Police calls and noise disturbance calls are lower.

- We continue to employ five additional full-time firefighters to support the Fire Department and ensure adequate support staff are available for our critical first responders.
- The Fire Chief and his team are busy securing resources for the next several months and working with other communities to find emergency accommodations for first-responders and others in the event quarantine quarters are required.
- Human Resources:
  - The Town's part-time wage study is under further review by staff to craft a plan to get Town employees to the \$15.00/hour minimum wage as soon as financially feasible. The Town will observe the increase in the state minimum wage on January 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Public Works:
  - DPW crews worked a long shift on Thursday (began Wednesday night) to clear the snow from the significant snow fall this week. We have received several "thank you's" and few complaints from the public.
  - DPW crews will be working overnight on Friday/Saturday to continue clearing snow from the downtown area and from intersections to ensure proper visibility for motorists.
- Finance:
  - Staff are preparing financing options for the four major capital projects for presentation to the Finance Committee in January.
- Sustainability:
  - Solar Suitability Analysis:
    - The Town contracted a study to determine the suitability for solar installations. The analysis is designed to provide guidance to the Town as to where to focus its efforts for future municipal solar development. They are using a high-level Geographic Information System based analysis to identify opportunities for larger scale solar opportunities such as solar farms, solar canopies on parking lots, or solar installations on suitable roofs.
    - The goal is to be able to accommodate battery storage nearby.
    - This study is in support of the Town's Climate Action, Adaptation, and Resiliency Plan funded through our Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant.
    - The goal is to establish next steps to meet the Town Council's long-term climate action goals.
  - BRIC Grant Application: The Town submitted an application under the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant for capacity and capacity building. We are seeking funds to study a renewable power supply to serve the community during extended power outages. We are seeking to site a facility within, or closely adjacent to, environmental justice neighborhoods.
- Community Services:
  - December Dinner Delights:
    - The Town has joined with the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce and Amherst Business Improvement District to provide 100 meals twice a week to Amherst families affected by Covid-19. The Town's financial commitment to this program ends at the end of December. The Business Improvement District is interested in extending the program through January with funding it has obtained.
  - Town Social Worker: The Town has contracted with Family Outreach of Amherst to secure the services of a social worker to work with families negatively impacted by

Covid-19. In the first two weeks of the program, about a dozen families were served. Most are facing multiple issues such as job loss, food insecurity, health needs, and housing needs. The working poor are among the hardest hit members of our community. The upward trend for assistance is anticipated to continue.

- Senior Services Initiative:
  - The Director of Senior Services is moving towards conducting a needs assessment of seniors in low income housing and developing supports for aging in place at a time when movement to a long-term care setting carries increasing danger of disease transmission.
- Unhoused Population:
  - The Town's service providers have reached capacity at both sites operated by Craigs Doors indicating the wide need for housing in the area. This is similar to experience in other communities including Northampton, Greenfield, Holyoke, and Pittsfield.
  - The Town is well represented at the Western Massachusetts COVID-19 Task Force meeting that meets regularly to discuss the overall situation in Western Massachusetts. There is a commitment to addressing the needs of the unhoused on a regional, instead of a town-by-town, basis. It is important for the Town of Amherst to be part of that regional approach and that the State recognize its responsibility to being an active partner in meeting that need.
- Recreation:
  - Name Change: After concluding outreach and its strategic plan, the LSSE Commission will be changing its name to Amherst Recreation. They have established a name change subcommittee to update the Commission's logo and work on logistics for rolling out the name change. The winter brochure will include the name change.
  - Staff are working with the School District to develop plans to utilize the Middle School pool for lap swimming. This is likely to happen in mid-January.
  - LSSE-run childcare services opened on October 26<sup>th</sup> at the Middle School after securing all required licensing and staffing. There are about 20 children in the program.
  - Staff are working with the Chamber and the BID to develop creative programming for Winterfest, which is likely to come at a bleak time during February.
- Health Department:
  - Symptomatic Testing:
    - The Health Department arranged for and staffed a symptomatic test site set up at the Mill River Recreation Area with the assistance of the Department of Public Works, Fire Department, and Police Department. The Town contracted with County Ambulance to conduct the tests.
    - The drive-up test offering is for symptomatic Amherst residents and Town of Amherst employees, close contacts, as well as for residents/employees who need testing in order to be released from quarantine. Children of all ages are also able to be tested at this site, whether they have symptoms or if they are without symptoms but their age precludes them from being tested at other sites. The Town of Amherst is partnering with County Ambulance to conduct the drive-up testing.

- We weren't sure how much demand there would be but 74 tests were conducted in three hours. It seemed like every car had someone say, "thank you so much for doing this".
  - The next date for testing is planned for Tuesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> from 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.
  - We hope to offer testing one more time during the week of December 28<sup>th</sup>.
  - These tests are by paid for by CARES Act funds.
- Economic Development:
  - Small Business COVID Recovery Grants Program: The Town has been awarded federal funds through the CARES Act to support local small businesses hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Valley Community Development Corporation will act as Program Administrator for the application and selection process to award one-time grants up to \$10,000 for businesses located in Amherst. Those interested may visit the [Amherst Small Business COVID Recovery Grants Program webpage](#) for eligibility criteria, resources and full details. The online application portal opened for applications on November 2nd.
- Conservation and Development:
  - Grant: Working with the Department of Public Works, Chamber of Commerce, and Business Improvement District, the Town was awarded a Shared Streets grant of \$129,472.20. The grant will pay for increased pedestrian and cyclist safety with lighting improvements and ADA improvements, expanded outdoor dining areas and lengthening the time for dining (heaters), promoting bus ridership with customer-activated heated bus shelters, and creating an inviting streetscape with improved landscaping. This grant will be extended into the spring to enable construction to occur when the warmer weather returns.
  - ADA Transition Plan: Consultants are finalizing a draft of the transition plan. This plan will be reviewed with the Disability Access Advisory Committee. We will then utilize the plan as a tool to prioritize ADA improvements in Town buildings and public spaces.
- Information Technology (I.T.):
  - Town I.T. staff have been especially challenged to meet the large number of needs of Town staff seeking to work remotely and online. (The I.T. department has one of its staff on paternity leave.)

**Delegated Authority (November 2020):**

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons: None
- Short-Term Parking Requests: None
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures: None
- Other: Approved use of Kendrick Park for use by the Boy Scouts of America Troops 500B, 500G, and 504 from November 11, 2020 to January 3, 2021.

**Major Capital Projects:**

- DPW/Fire: Town staff are working on a Request for Proposals for a location for the public works facility and working on a Request for Qualifications for a designer for the fire station on South Pleasant Street.
- Schools: The Elementary School Building Committee is now meeting and elected Councilor Schoen as its chair and Councilor Schreiber as its vice-chair.

- Library: The Finance Director, Library Director and I met with staff of the Board of Library Commissioners to review the requirements and schedule for the grant that will be awarded to the Town for renovations to the Jones Library.

### **Project Update:**

- Kendrick Park Playground: The work will be done in the spring as work must be completed by June 30, 2021.
- 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 met with the TSO Committee on December 17<sup>th</sup>.
- Hickory Ridge: No new developments.
- East Street School: No developments
- North Amherst Library:
  - The trees behind the library were removed because they sit where the addition's north wall will be. They needed to come down for the addition and removing them now makes the work we have to do this week easier. They were not shade trees and do not fall under There was a drilling rig at the library taking soil samples to be used in designing the foundation for the library.
  - DPW are removing the stumps and digging one or two test pits next to the existing wall.
  - With this work, we should have all the information needed to complete the design and there will not be a lot more activity until construction.
  - I have invited five members to advise me on the project: Library Trustee Alex Lefebvre, Library Director Sharon Sharry, Superintendent of Public Works Guilford Mooring, former president of the Jones Library Trustees Molly Turner, and North Amherst architect Laura Fitch.
- Solar on the Landfill: We are projecting construction to begin in November of 2021 and operation to begin in April of 2022.
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant: I will present a memo to the Town Council at its January 4<sup>th</sup> meeting outlining plans for decision-making and public engagement on this important project that has received significant funding from the State.

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

- December 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Holiday
- January 1<sup>st</sup> – New Year's Holiday
- January 4<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- January 18<sup>th</sup> - Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
- January 25<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting