



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: December 24, 2020
Re: Town Manager Report for January 4, 2020

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

Town Manager Update:

- A Sweet Anecdote to End the Year:
 - It seems one of the Jones Library's homebound patrons gets the numbers for the Library and the DPW mixed up.
 - She called the Department of Public Works last week by accident...but instead of telling the woman to call the Library, the DPW took the message and delivered it to the Library.
 - They wrote, "Ms. Price thinks you guys are great. She called to see if she could get a few books." They then listed the four books she wanted and concluded, "She keeps getting my number mixed up with you guys. It is actually kind of a nice break. I hope you know who she is."
 - Turns out, this patron well known to Library staff. She is 99 years old and is an amazingly voracious reader.
 - Library staff report that sometimes she cannot remember where she put her library books and staff have gone to her house to help look for them. Once, she instructed this staff member to look under her favorite chair. No book there, but she found a 20 dollar bill and some jewelry. She was so impressed that she found these things, she asked her to look around and find her red address book.
 - Our Jones Library staffer finally found the library books that day, on a book shelf with her own books, so not too hard to find, but was never able to find her address book with all her phone numbers in it, which may explain why she calls Guilford sometimes...
 - So a BIG THANK YOU to Town staff at the Library and DPW
 - Just a very sweet holiday story that can be filed under "other duties as required."

- COVID-19:
 - Hot Line: The number of calls has trailed off, but are still coming into the Hot Line.
 - 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 has meet weekly through December. They will not meet on December 27th but will meet again on January 6th and then every Wednesday in January.
 - The Working Group is planning two public forums to hear comments from the public on Wednesday, January 13th at 5:30 p.m. and on Saturday, January 16th at 3:00 p.m.
 - The Working Group has submitted a significant number of questions to the Police Chief on a wide range of issues involving police data and operations.
 - I have offered stipends to the members of the Working Group in recognition of the large amount of work and intense demand on the Working Group's time during their time-limited term.
 - 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. The Team will meet again in early January to work toward goals and an action plan for the Town Manager's review.
- Outreach:
 - Coffee with Town Manager: The last Cuppa Joe with Paul 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. The next coffee is planned for January 15th.
 - Community Chats:
 - The Communications Manager and I hosted our 35th Community Chat with special guest Emma Dragon, the Town's public health director.
 - Our next Chat will be on Thursday, January 7th.
 - 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 quietly updated the Town's website this week and are working on continual improvements to content and navigation.

- We have added a footer to the web pages to encourage user feedback so we can continue to improve the website. Visit us amherstma.gov where you can submit feedback from footer of any page.
 - We created a designated website for Amherst Recreation that is in the same family as the Town's design: www.amherstmarec.org/
 - We did the same for the Police Department which can be found here: www.amherstpd.org/
 - We have added all Town Manager reports to the Town Manager page.
 - We will be systematically standardizing committee web pages so that there is a consistency of appearance and inclusion of committee members, committee charge, staff liaison, minutes, links to videos, etc.
 - Engage Amherst: There is much interest in our community engagement platform, “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. This will be tested on the North Amherst Library project as we work to train other employees to utilize the system.
 - Appointments: No appointments have been submitted to the Town Council for action.
- Town-Gown: The Town and University reopening working group will meet on January 7th.
- Town Staff:
 - The holiday season brought out the best in our Town employees. Every year during the holiday season, Town of Amherst employees across all departments demonstrate their care and concern for older adults by donating towards the purchase of gift cards for seniors. This year, employees outdid themselves in recognition of the particularly traumatic year it has been for our seniors. Town staff, led by Theresa Fleurent of the Accounting Department, redoubled their efforts and created gift tins filled with gift cards to local grocers and pharmacies, holiday masks, socks, and sundry items of care. Town staff then delivered these gift boxes lovingly donated and assembled by Town of Amherst employees to 59 seniors, who were deeply touched by the expression of generosity.
 - 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.
- General Updates:
 - Hampshire Council of Governments:
 - The dissolution of the Hampshire Council of Governments (HCoG) has been ongoing for two years. It required legislative action because HCoG was formed through Chapter 300 of the Acts of 1998 (when the state took legislative action to dissolve all county governments). All Hampshire County municipalities voted to authorize the creation of HCoG.
<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/1998/Chapter300>
 - In July 2019, faced with mounting financial difficulties, HCoG announced its plans to dissolve and “find new homes” for its programs and assets.
<https://www.recorder.com/b1-HCOG-to-dissolve-24947773>
 - When HCoG ceased operations, millions of dollars’ worth of liability and various assets remained. The Hampshire County legislative delegation has been working on this challenge. The delegation’s main goal was to finalize a legislative

dissolution to HCoG in such a way that the remaining liabilities and assets would not unduly burden Hampshire County cities and towns.

- Working united as a delegation over the past legislative session, the “HCoG delegation” negotiated with the Governor’s office, HCoG Board Chair Rus Peotter, and multiple state agencies to develop three pieces of legislation that dissolve HCoG in full and resolve all *known* outstanding liabilities. Two of these pieces of legislation have passed into law. One is pending and must be resolved by the end of this legislative session (January 5, 2021).
 - This last piece of legislation is particularly important to the Town of Amherst because it moves the pension liability for retired Hampshire County employees to the State.
 - While the delegation has been thorough in investigating all aspects of HCoG’s operations and commitments and have taken steps to address all of them, there is still the possibility that there could be an unknown liability out there. So the legislation limits liability for unknown claims to a ten-year horizon.
 - I thank the legislators who took on this crucial issue and advocated aggressively at the State level on behalf of all of the County’s cities and towns.
- Housing Authority:
 - The Amherst Housing Authority conducted an election for the open seat on the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners for a tenant representative in accordance with the requirements of Section 4.4 of the Town Charter which states that there shall be “1 member elected by the Housing Authority tenants.”
 - The tenants elected Mr. Kevin Collins for this position.
 - The Housing Authority has been asked to record the name and term of office as provided by the general laws with the Town Clerk.

Departments:

- Public Works:
 - East Hadley Road:
 - Our DPW team recently completed construction of the East Hadley Road Multi-Use path project, in line with our Complete Streets Policy by providing an integrated multi-modal transportation network that contributes to the safety, health, economic vitality, and quality of life for residents in this neighborhood.
 - Various design layout alternatives were explored to minimize impacts to resource areas within the project site adjacent to the Fort River.
 - Final design resulted in improvements through additional stormwater treatment and infiltration, and elimination of existing Stormwater discharge points to the Fort River, general clean up and debris removal along edge of the Fort River and East Hadley Road.
 - The project consisted of the roadway widening on East Hadley Road to accommodate three new bus pull offs, east and west bound bicycle lanes, and the replacement the existing 5 foot wide sidewalk w/ a 6-10 foot wide paved ADA accessible multi-use path.
 - Completed work extends from the West Street intersection to the Amherst-Hadley Town Line.
 - Final roadway paving and line striping improvements will be completed at a later date.

- Pelham: We are exploring options with representatives from the Town of Pelham regarding the extension of the Town's sewer system to serve a small segment of customers in Pelham as requested by the Town of Pelham.
- Town Clerk:
 - We have advertised for a new Town Clerk and hope to move expeditiously on the appointment.
 - The Town Clerk's office is now able to swear board/committee members in via Zoom.
 - The annual Town census (not to be confused with the Federal census) will be mailed out in January. Residents will be asked to mail back their census forms, which are used to update the voter list.
 - This mailing will also include the ability to renew dog licenses which may be done online this year.
 - Campaign finance forms for elected officials are due on January 20th. Reminders will be sent out to the elected officials required to file.
 - The Town conducts required conflict-of-interest trainings every other year. 2021 is our year for the trainings, so all appointed and elected officials will be asked to take the online training and test during 2021.
- 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.
 - 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 1st.
 - The Department is developing proposals to submit for Employee Wellness Grants.
 - The Human Resources Director and Health Director have developed COVID related protocols to ensure a safe working environment.
 - H.R. is also processing a lot of FFCRA paperwork which is required when an employee is out of work due to mandated quarantine or isolation.
 - The H.R. Director is looking into ways to improve employee onboarding/off-boarding and performance management.
 - The H.R. staff have taken a leadership role in working with the Core Equity Team to plan some foundational/basic training, and then later deeper issue training, related to diversity, equity and inclusion issues.
- Finance:
 - Four Capital Projects: Staff are preparing financing options for the four major capital projects for presentation in January.
 - FEMA/CARES:
 - The Town is winding down spending from the first package. Working with department heads including schools and library to allocate funds where the greatest need exists.
 - We are monitoring progress on the new a new stimulus package. We know the needs will continue well into 2021.

- Financial Policies: Town staff are reviewing the Town's Financial Policies for possible updates.
- Retirement costs:
 - The Town completed its actuarial study for OPEB liabilities and we are working on an updated OPEB financing plan that will be shared in 2021.
 - As mentioned above, we are pleased our legislative delegation is working to reduce pension costs by removing Hampshire COG assessment to the Town.
- Transportation: Parking and enforcement fees are down significantly from prior years, putting strain on the Transportation Enterprise Fund.
- Fees: Town staff perform a review of fee levels as part of the budget review process.
- Cannabis: Town staff are preparing a cannabis update to summarize the financial status of cannabis in Amherst.
- Inventory: Town staff have implemented a new inventory reporting system to begin in January of 2021
- 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.
 - Town staff have continued internal discussions to find a long-term solution for the unhoused.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - The first day of testing was December 18th (changed from the 17th due to the snow storm). 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".
 - A second testing occurred on December 22nd and conducted 87 tests in a two-hour period.

- The next date for testing is planned for Tuesday, December 29th from 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.
 - 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 expecting a response from the MSBA on its enrollment projections. The response will be discussed at the next Committee meeting on January 13th.
- 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 17th. The next meeting with TSO will be on January 28th.
- 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 4th 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:

- January 18th - Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
- January 25th – Town Council meeting