



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: February 20, 2021
Re: Town Manager Report for February 22, 2021

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

REPORT ON \$80K

Town Manager Update:

- COVID-19:
 - Increase in cases:
 - A significant increase in identified cases of COVID-19 at the University resulted in it raising its operational posture to “high” in consultation with the Massachusetts Department of Health. The posture was in place for 14 days. Students are required to self-sequester, whether they are living on campus or living off campus in the surrounding areas.
 - I was pleased to see the State (including direct involvement by the Secretary of Education and Secretary of Health and Human Services) involved early during the increase as it was significant. The Secretary's office encouraged the University to take decisive action which they did.
 - Friday, the University announced that it will step back its operational posture effective Monday. This decision is supported by the State Secretary of Health and Human Services and the State epidemiologist who will continue to monitor the situation very closely.
 - Here is a link to their operational postures:
<https://www.umass.edu/coronavirus/operationalposture>
 - The Town has also been consulting with discussing the situation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services and neighboring communities and will be looking at additional actions the Town can take to address the situation.
 - Orders: With the significant increase in cases in the Town, primarily among young people, the Health Director issued two orders. We believe that the community is not out of the

woods with this surge and believe continuing with additional restrictions on Town establishments protects the broader community.

- A. Continuation of the [Mandatory Early Closing Order issued by the Governor as Executive Order #53](#), which has required certain businesses to close by 9:30 PM each night, which is due to expire on Monday, February 8, 2021 at 5:00 a.m.
 - B. Continuation of [Sector Capacity and Limits issued by the Governor as Executive Order #59](#), which will established sector capacity and limits which is due to expire on February 8, 2021 at 5:00 a.m.
 - These orders will remain in effect, at least for another week. The Health Director will reassess the need for continuing the orders based on the number of cases and trends.
- Vaccination:
- The Town has been doing an exemplary job of distributing vaccines to its residents and others in eastern Hampshire County. Town staff – especially from the Health, Fire, Police, and Facilities departments – were able to stand up significant vaccination clinics in very short order.
 - We, along with Northampton, are delivering practically every dose delivered to us with the State recognizing our delivery rate of 97% (State requires 85%).
 - Due to changes in the statewide distribution of the limited supply of COVID-19 vaccine, the Town of Amherst is unable to schedule additional first shot vaccination clinics. At this time, all persons who have already signed up for or received a first shot at an Amherst clinic should still be able to receive their second vaccination here as well.
 - The Town will continue to deliver second doses to all who have received first doses from the Town.
 - We have been working with the State Department of Public Health to receive special designation with the City of Northampton (as the lead community) to continue to provide vaccines to our residents, and any eligible resident in the Commonwealth. I expect to make an announcement along these lines in the very near future in the hope that we can launch our site in early March.
 - The newly expanded group eligible to receive doses includes those over 65 years of age.
- Hot Line:
- The Hot Line has been slammed with phone calls. We have made a commitment to answer as many calls as we can and to call back each and every caller who left a message. We added staff during the day and added Covid Ambassadors to staff the Hot Line on the weekends. The Hot Line will be staffed this weekend, as well.
 - While some people are simply seeking information, many are being registered for their tests by our staff over the phone...a time-consuming task but one that is needed by our residents.
 - The Senior Center has fielded hundreds of calls, as well, and utilized robo-calls to keep residents on their call lists informed.
 - We have utilized the facilities of the Police Department to handle telephone calls on weekends. Our I.T. Department has implemented new telephone technology to facilitate accepting and returning calls remotely, as well.
- Covid Outreach:

other strategies to dismantle structural racism in our community. While there are many demands on a very constrained municipal budget, I believe obtaining the answers to the questions that have been raised are important and will serve me and the Town Council as we consider future commitments of Town resources.

- Outreach:
 - Coffee with Town Manager: The last Cuppa Joe with Paul was held on February 19th with special guest Finance Director Sean Mangano who discussed the plan for Four Major Capital Projects. We had a very large turnout, indicating a lot of interest in understanding the challenges of funding these projects. The most recent Cuppa Joe can be watched here: [Cuppa Joe with Paul](#)
 - Community Chats:
 - The Communications Manager and I continue to host our weekly Community Chats. This week we hosted the Town’s Health Director and Director of Senior Services for a robust conversation on vaccines.
 - Previous guests included Planner Ben Breger to discuss the Wayfinding Signs and Superintendent of Public Works Guilford Mooring and the architects from Kuhn-Riddle on the North Amherst Library.
 - The next Community Chat will be February 25th: Jones Library Project with Library Director Sharon Sharry, Library Trustee Alex Lefebvre, and fund-raising lead Kent Farber.
 - All recordings of our Community Chats can be found here: [Community Chats](#)
 - Office Hours: I have established monthly 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. The next set of office hours is on Friday, February 26th.
 - 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. We will be releasing the platform for the North Amherst Library shortly and the Four Capital Projects which can be found here: <https://engageamherst.org/financing-the-future>.
- Town-Gown:
 - The Town and University reopening working group has increased the frequency of its meetings to weekly. Representatives from the State Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Public Health, and State Epidemiologist’s office have been participating during the increase in cases at the University.
 - The Town is in discussions with the University to plan for the spring and the traditional socializing that happens around March 17th. This year will be different, and all parties are monitoring the situation to ensure we have multiple plans and options available.
- Statewide Committees:
 - Councilor Hanneke has been appointed as a member of the MMA Municipal and Regional Administration Policy Committee.
 - She joins Councilor Brewer who will continue as a member of the MMA’s Fiscal Policy Committee.
 - I have been appointed as member of the MMA’s Public Works, Transportation, and Utilities Policy Committee.

- I have been serving on the Massachusetts Municipal Management Association Executive Committee and have joined the MMMA's Form of Government Committee.

Departments:

- Public Works:
 - **Station Road Bridge Replacement:** The Town has been successful in advancing in our request for additional funds from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program to replace the Station Road bridge. The application is now being reviewed at the Federal level by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This would provide a second source of significant funding for this large capital project.
 - **Leverett:** We are working with the Town of Leverett to extend the Town's water line to service homes that have had their wells negatively impacted by the Leverett landfill. The Town has published its notice of permitting, so this project may be moving forward.
- Town Clerk:
 - The 2021 Annual Street Listing (Census) has been arriving in residents' mailboxes in accordance with MGL Ch. 51, Section 4(c). Compliance with this State requirement provides proof of residence, protection of voting rights, veteran's bonus, housing for the elderly and related benefits, and information for the selection of jurors. Note: This annual census is not the same as the 2020 Federal Census that was recently conducted.
 - Residents may also license their dogs by using the back of the census form per the instructions on the form. Dog licenses may also be renewed online here: www.amherstma.gov/payments Dog licenses expire March 31, 2021 and must be renewed by May 31, 2021 to avoid a late fee.
 - The Acting Town Clerk reminds Town employees – and elected and appointed officials – that they must complete the [Ethics Commission's Online Training Program](#) within 30 days of becoming an employee, and every two (2) years thereafter within the Commission's compliance cycle from December of every even-numbered year to the first week of the following April. Amherst employees are required to take the online training and submit Certificates of Completion of online training to the Town Clerk no later than April 5, 2021.
- Public Safety:
 - **Police:** The Town has received a grant of \$50,000 from the State for costs associated with COVID-19 expenses, specifically funding to continue our innovative Ambassadors program. These funds were secured through the efforts of our State Senator and State Representative. Many thanks to both.
 - **Fire:** Fire Department paramedics have been instrumental in ensuring the Town can continue to provide vaccines to the general public and to specialized populations. Much credit goes to the Chief and Assistant Chief for their work in organizing, staffing, and overseeing these important operations.
- 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.
- Finance:
 - Four Capital Projects:

- The Finance Director presented a model for moving forward on the four capital projects to the Finance Committee and full Town Council on February 16th. His presentation will be available online.
 - The Town has released a dedicated community engagement website which can be found here: <https://engageamherst.org/financing-the-future>.
 - Budget: Finance staff have been working with individual departments in developing budgets that fit within the constraints of available resources. There are, of course, many more needs and requests than there are resources. We are in the middle of our second round of budget meetings which includes the Town Manager, finance staff, and individual departments. There is significant work to complete the budget to meet the Charter requirement of a budget presented to the Town Council by May 1st.
 - Capital Plan: The Finance Director presented a first draft of the Capital Plan to the Joint Capital Planning Committee at its meeting on Thursday. This plan will be reviewed by the Committee during the coming weeks with individual meetings with department heads presenting their capital requests.
- Sustainability: The Town has received delivery of its roll-off container truck which was funded by a sustainability grant.
- Community Services:
 - Senior Center: The Senior Center is dedicating itself to answering questions about the availability of vaccinations. The Senior Center staff have been core members in helping to develop, staff, and promote the vaccination programs. The Senior Center is collecting names of seniors who want to be contacted when for seniors to sign when the vaccine is available. Seniors can call (413) 259-3038 to have their names added to the list.
 - Unhoused Population:
 - Town staff have continued internal discussions to find a long-term solution for the unhoused, in accordance with the new goal approved by the Town Council.
 - I will be establishing a working group to develop alternatives for meeting the needs of the unhoused.
 - The Town's health staff has continued to work with and manage health issues at the Town's non-profit shelter.
 - Health Department: With everything being about the COVID-19 pandemic, the Health Department must still deliver on its mission of monitoring and managing other communicable diseases. This work is led by the Public Health Nurse, for the most part.
- 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:
 - The opportunity to comment on the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) and Flood Insurance Study (FIS) on February 25th. To date:
 - Town Planning staff have completed work on the study and analysis to create accurate federally approved maps for land affected by flooding in order to provide

information to landowners, the Amherst Conservation Commission, the Planning Board, and other interested parties.

- Amherst's federal flood maps (FIRM maps) were last updated in 1983.
- Here is the timeline of the project:
 - 2012 – Project began
 - July 19, 2016 – Public Meeting; presented draft maps; received public comment
 - September 12, 2017 – Public Meeting; presented Preliminary Maps; received public comment
 - September 2017 – new methodology introduced; project delayed
 - May 2018 – Town Meeting – TM appropriates additional money for consultants to update maps using new methodology
 - June 25, 2019 – Public Meeting; presented Revised Preliminary Flood Maps; received public comment
 - November 2019 to February 2020 – First Appeal Period
 - January – June 2020 – Property owner appealed; appeal resolved
 - November 2020 to February 2021 – Second Appeal Period
 - February 25, 2021 - End of Appeal Period
 - February 25, 2021 to August 24, 2021 – Compliance Period
- 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.

Delegated Authority (January 2021):

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons: Note - I anticipate the Amherst Farmers Market will be requesting use of the Town Common for the summer. The Town Council is scheduled to review this request at its March 8th meeting.
- Short-Term Parking Requests: None
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures: None

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 Fort River Elementary School project was invited into the Feasibility Study phase of the project.
 - On February 11th, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) announced that the MSBA Board of Directors had invited the Town to collaborate in conducting Feasibility Studies for potential MSBA school construction projects.

- March 3rd – Jones Library Information Meeting
- March 6th – Jones Library Information Meeting
- March 8th – Town Council meeting
- March 22nd – Town Council meeting
- April 5th – Town Council meeting
- April 12th – Town Council meeting
- April 19th – Patriots Day holiday
- May 3rd – Town Council meeting
- May 17th – Town Council meeting
- May 24th – Town Council meeting
- May 31st – Memorial Day holiday