



To: Town Council  
Fr: Paul Bockelman  
Town Manager  
Dt: March 5, 2021  
Re: Town Manager Report for March 8, 2021

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

**Town Manager Update:**

- COVID-19:
  - Increase in cases:
    - The University is closely monitoring COVID-19 test results. During this week the latest data available shows 117 positive cases occurred Monday through Wednesday. This is a 24 percent increase compared to the previous period last week.
    - Given this week's uptick in positive cases, the University is asking its students to recommit to take the steps necessary to limit transmission of the virus.
    - The University's data analysis shows that most of the cases result from students participating in small and large gatherings, both on and off campus. If such gatherings continue, the campus risks facing a new surge and the need to impose additional restrictions.
    - The University's operational posture is "Elevated". Here is a link to their operational postures: <https://www.umass.edu/coronavirus/operationalposture>
  - Orders: The Health Director has rescinded the Town's orders on occupancy levels and hours so the Town is now consistent with those issued by the Governor. The Health Director will reassess the need for continuing the orders based on the number of cases and trends.
  - Vaccination:
    - As of March 3rd, the Town of Amherst has delivered over 5,050 vaccine doses to eligible individuals.
    - The Town is now working the Northampton Health Department to become a regional collaboration to distribute COVID-19 vaccine to eligible Massachusetts residents. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) will provide up to 5,000 coronavirus vaccines a week to the region. Amherst will be operating at

the Bangs Community Center. Sites are open to all Massachusetts residents who are currently eligible to receive the vaccine.

- The supply of vaccine is woefully inadequate. While we are prepared to offer 1,250 doses per week at the Bangs Community Center three-times that if at the high school, we received about 280 doses this week.
- Hot Line:
  - We continue to dedicate significant resources to answer the Hot Line which is staffed during the normal business hours and on weekends.
  - The Senior Center and Health Department have fielded hundreds of calls, as well. We have redeployed Recreation Department staff to the Health Department to support the overwhelming need in that department.
  - 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:
  - The Town has been coordinating efforts to reach homebound individuals in a commitment to ensure they have access to a vaccine. Amherst Public Health Director, Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief, and Senior Center Director have been planning and organizing for a number of weeks to identify and serve homebound individuals in Amherst and eight other Eastern Hampshire County communities. It is expected to take several weeks to complete the plan to vaccinate the over 100 homebound individuals that have been identified.
  - The Senior Center Director, working with the Fire Chief and Ms. Moyston in the Town Manager's office, has taken on the task of identifying populations who need special outreach and making individualized calls to these individuals. We have utilized multiple languages, including one of our Parking Enforcement Officers who is a native Mandarin speaker. We have also done special outreach to seniors living in congregate public housing with a special vaccination session scheduled at the Bangs Community Center on Saturday.
- Ambassadors:
  - The Ambassadors have been crucial in staffing the Hot Line, patrolling the streets, and serving as helpers all day at the vaccination site.
- Racial Equity:
  - Community Safety Working Group:
    - The Community Safety Working Group continues to meet weekly.
    - An Invitation for Bids was released with responses due on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. The winning bidder has received a draft contract and we are awaiting a signed contract so they can begin their work.
    - The work plan, with the consultants, means that I will likely be requesting a second extension of time from the Town Council.
- Outreach:
  - Coffee with Town Manager:
    - The last Cuppa Joe with Paul was held on February 19<sup>th</sup> 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](#)

- The next Cuppa Joe will be on March 19<sup>th</sup> with a special guest.
- Community Chats:
  - The Communications Manager and I continue to host our weekly Community Chats. Previous guests included Planner Ben Breger to discuss the Wayfinding Signs; Superintendent of Public Works Guilford Mooring and the architects from Kuhn-Riddle on the North Amherst Library; Jones Library Project with Library Director Sharon Sharry, Library Trustee Alex Lefebvre, and fund-raising lead Kent Farber; and the Core Equity Team’s work with Jennifer Moyston.
  - The next Community Chat will be March 11<sup>th</sup> when we will discuss zoning with Planning Director Chris Brestrup, March 18<sup>th</sup> when we will have Police Captain Gabe Ting and Officer Bill Laramee to discuss spring activities and outreach to students; and March 25<sup>th</sup> to discuss the Pomeroy Village MassWorks project with Town Engineer Jason Skeels and Public Works Superintendent Guilford Mooring.
  - 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, March 26<sup>th</sup>.
- 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 have released the platform for the North Amherst Library 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 number of cases at the University continues to cause concern and we are pleased the State Epidemiologist has committed attending our meetings as we work through this group of clusters.
  - The Town is in discussions with the University to plan for the spring and the traditional socializing that happens around March 17<sup>th</sup>. This year will be different, and all parties are monitoring the situation to ensure we have multiple plans and options available.

## **Departments:**

- Public Works: The Public Works Department is preparing for and managing numerous projects now including:
  - Paving Henry Street from North East Street to Market Hill Road.
  - Reconstructing the sidewalk on Old North Pleasant Street
  - Constructing a sidewalk through Kendrick Park to connect with the new playground
  - Overseeing the design of the Pomeroy Village MassWorks construction project.
  - Overseeing the design of the Centennial Water Treatment Plant.
  - Overseeing the design of the gravity belt thickener at the Wastewater Treatment Plant.
  - Reconfiguring the outdoor dining areas in the downtown area.

- Kendrick Park playground construction.
- Dog park construction.
- Town Clerk:
  - The 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:
  - Recreation Director Barb Bilz announced her retirement effective June 11<sup>th</sup>. I am meeting with staff of the department and members of the Recreation Committee to better understand the organization and skills needed in a new leader.
- 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 16<sup>th</sup>. His presentation is available online.
    - The Finance Director is presenting the Capital Projects tool at two information sessions with the next one scheduled for Saturday, March 6<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m.
    - 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 nearing completion 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 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - 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:
    - Craig's Doors has secured the rental of 19 rooms at the Econo-Lodge in Hadley. This augments the rooms they have rented at the University Motor Lodge in Amherst. The non-profit has reopened the Unitarian Universalist Church and is expected to house ten guests there.
    - I will be establishing a working group to develop alternatives for meeting the needs of the unhoused. The Homelessness Advisory Committee draft charge includes:
      - Determine the Scope of Need for a homelessness shelter, review demographic and other data regarding unhoused individuals and inventory services in the Amherst area.
      - Determine Services Necessary to be included in a shelter location, gather input from guests and service partners for shelter services, case management and continuum of care necessary for rehousing unhoused individuals.
      - Review surplus Town buildings or land suitable to meet need and services.
      - Make a recommendation to the Town Manager regarding operation of a seasonal shelter and/or suitable sites for a permanent seasonal or year-round shelter.
  - Recreation:
    - The basketball skills development program at Pelham Elementary School continues through mid-March. It serves about 84 children.
    - Amherst Recreation's Recess Van has been very popular, visiting free-lunch delivery sites providing outdoor recreational activities and the opportunity to socialize safely with their K-6 peers. Many thanks to the Amherst Booster Club for its support of this program.
    - Due to maintenance issues with the Middle School pool, indoor aquatics has been postponed indefinitely.
    - The Recreation Department is planning to open the Mill River Pool a week earlier than usual, targeting June 19<sup>th</sup>.
    - Volunteers continue to do a superb job of grooming the cross-county ski trails at Cherry Hill Golf Course. Amherst Regional High School was able to host its first Nordic ski meet in February.
    - 38 children have been participating in the Recreation Department's remote learning assistant and child care program held at the Middle School. Most of these student are referred to the program by the school district.

- The Ice Sculptures on the Town Common was a huge success with an estimated 2,000 people attending. Private funds were raised to support this installation.
    - The Recreation Department has engaged the public in a logo contest that will soon be unveiled.
  - 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:
  - The Town of Amherst, in conjunction with the Amherst Downtown Business Improvement District (BID), has received a Local Rapid Recovery Program grant from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) under the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. Under the terms of the \$60,000 grant, the Town will engage a firm to advise the Town on its reopening plans.
- Conservation and Development:
  - The Town received a grant of \$192,600 from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) as part of the “Winter Shared Streets and Spaces Program” to improve pedestrian access around the Bangs Center and to activate the plaza in Boltwood Garage. The project is anticipated to begin very soon. Specifically, the grant will be used to construct a new, fully ADA-compliant ramp and walkway system which connects the Boltwood Garage to the entrance of the Musante Health Center and improve the safety of a crosswalk in front of the Bangs Center, both of which serve to enhance access to the health center and to downtown for the hundreds of seniors who live in this area.
  - The Governor announced that the Town will receive \$825,000 for projects that include a new multi-use path on Mill Lane to help the Pomeroy Village Center/East Hadley Road neighborhood access Groff Park, modernization of Watson Farms in collaboration with the Amherst Housing Authority, technical assistance for up to 25 microenterprise businesses provided by Valley CDC, and support for five local social services. The award will also support social service programs such as the Food Pantry at the Amherst Survival Center, youth mentoring by Big Brothers Big Sisters, housing services for those experiencing homelessness by Amherst Community Connections, family stabilization support offered by Family Outreach of Amherst and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and career preparation assistance for immigrants provided by the Center for New Americans.
  - Town staff are preparing to relocate the Civil War tablets that are in storage. We will be re-crating these invaluable plaques and a company that specializes in moving stone will transport the plaques to the Pole Room in the Bangs Community Center. Specially construct steel frames will hold the plaques. A professional conservator will assess their condition to determine steps the Town needs to take for their preservation. We are hoping to have them moved by the week of March 22<sup>nd</sup>.
  - 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.):
  - I.T. staff has secured a Cybersecurity Awareness Grant to provide end-user cyber-security training plus assessment and simulation tools. The purpose is to bolster the Town's cyber-security by educating staff to the most likely dangers and threats.

**Delegated Authority (February 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 8<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- Short-Term Parking Requests: None
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures: None

**Major Capital Projects:**

- DPW Building:
  - RFP: Staff will issue an RFP for a site in the coming week or so. The Town can proceed to schematic design once it has selected a location for the project.
  - OPM: The Owner's Project Manager (OPM) selection will move forward. An OPM is not needed if Town staff are charged with this function.
  - Consultant Selection: Not needed if the plan is to continue to utilize the existing consultant.
  - Schematic Design: Schematic design includes site-specific analysis involving existing conditions, environmental and geotechnical investigations, and a traffic impact assessment. The final report will include detailed drawings showing all interior spaces, exterior spaces, operational adjacencies and a detailed construction cost estimate. I am hoping this will begin in June and be completed by October.
- Fire Building:
  - OPM: The OPM selection will move forward. An OPM is not needed if Town staff are charged with this function.
  - Consultant Selection: Not needed if the plan is to continue to utilize the existing consultant.
  - Schematic Design: Schematic Design includes site-specific analysis involving existing conditions, environmental and geotechnical investigations, and a traffic impact assessment. The final report will include detailed drawings showing all interior spaces, exterior spaces, operational adjacencies and a detailed construction cost estimate. I am hoping this will begin in June and be completed by October.
- Schools:
  - The Fort River Elementary School project was invited into the Feasibility Study phase of the project.
  - The Committee has submitted the Owner's Project Manager (OPM) Request for Services (RFS) for review by the MSBA. The goal is to have the MSBA OPM Panel review the RFS at its June 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- Library:
  - The Board of Library Trustees and Library Director made a presentation to the Town Council at its meeting on February 22<sup>nd</sup>.

- The Council is hosting two public forums: one on March 3<sup>rd</sup> at 6:00 p.m. and one on March 6<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m.

### **Project Update:**

- Kendrick Park Playground: The contractor will be returning in the next week or so to continue work once the ground is thawed enough.
- Dog Park: The contractor will be returning in the next week or so to continue work once the ground is thawed enough.
- 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: On the Town Council agenda for March 8<sup>th</sup>.
- Hickory Ridge: No new developments.
- North Amherst Library:
  - The project page is now up and available for public comment. It can be found here: <https://engageamherst.org/north-amherst-library-project>
  - The page includes a new, 9-minute video with the architect explaining the project. The video can also be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEEjDADKZ\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEEjDADKZ_A)
  - We hosted a well-attended virtual Community Chat on February 18<sup>th</sup> which included the architects and Superintendent of Public Works. All Community Chats can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcnmFtV6BPFPLtaEn4ixY3ONH\\_ePa6TpV](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcnmFtV6BPFPLtaEn4ixY3ONH_ePa6TpV)
  - The Town initiated the permitting process – which will take 2-3 months. Here are the upcoming meetings:
    - March 8<sup>th</sup> – Design Review Board
    - March 9<sup>th</sup> – Disability Access Advisory Committee
    - March 17<sup>th</sup> – Planning Board
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant: The TSO Committee reviewed the outreach plan. The outreach schedule includes:
  - March – outreach to committees:
    - March 8<sup>th</sup> – Design Review Board
    - March 9<sup>th</sup> – Disability Access Advisory Committee
    - March 17<sup>th</sup> – Planning Board
    - March 18<sup>th</sup> – Transportation Advisory Committee
  - March – staff outreach to neighbors, property owners, businesses
  - March – project website launched
  - March 25 and 27 – public information forums hosted by the TSO Committee
  - April 3 – Pop-up tent outreach onsite
  - April 8 – TSO Committee discussion
  - April 22 – TSO Committee vote
  - May 3 – TSO Committee report to Town Council
  - June 21 – Town Council vote
- Solar on the Landfill: In the coming months, crews will be working on the Northern Landfill to mow, set the access road, and set preliminary sediment control. The “real” construction work is scheduled for August, along with the fence around the Southern Landfill. Below is the proposed project schedule:

| <b>EPC Milestone</b>      | <b>Anticipated Completion</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| EPC RFP Release           | November 2020 (completed)     |
| EPC Contract Negotiations | January/ February 2021        |
| EPC Agreement Signed      | May 2021                      |
| Mobilization              | August 2021                   |
| Placed in Service         | March 2022                    |
| Substantial Completion    | May 2022                      |

**Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

- March 22<sup>nd</sup> – Town Council meeting
- April 5<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- April 12<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- April 19<sup>th</sup> – Patriots Day holiday
- May 3<sup>rd</sup> – Town Council meeting
- May 17<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- May 24<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- May 31<sup>st</sup> – Memorial Day holiday