



To: Town Council  
Fr: Paul Bockelman  
Town Manager  
Dt: April 30, 2021  
Re: Town Manager Report for May 3, 2021

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

**Town Manager Update:**

- **COVID-19:** Cases are leveling off. For the first time, we are finding that there are more vaccines available than appointments being made. Supply is finally catching up to demand. The Governor has begun the process of opening up and relaxing certain restrictions.
  - **Testing:** We continue to urge people to be tested, especially if they have not received the vaccine. Testing at the University's Mullins Center is quick, free, and easy to access. Appointment-based testing will continue through May 17<sup>th</sup>. At that point, it will change from an appointment-based center to a walk-in testing center. No appointment will be necessary. Also, testing is now available for anyone 4 years of age or older. Here is the link to sign up anytime between now and May 17<sup>th</sup>: <https://uma.force.com/covidtesting/s/>
  - **Vaccination:**
    - The Town continues to operate vaccination clinics. We are offering a clinic today and offering three clinics next week. As of today, we have provided over 9,500 vaccines at our sites. We continue to operate out of the Bangs Community Center.
    - The homebound program was halted due to the pause on delivery of the J&J vaccine but is now operating again. We have provided 251 homebound people vaccine, provided 137 second doses. And have 66 people on our waiting list.
    - We are utilizing our 25% allocation in conjunction with the Community Participation Officers who are present after church services to reach those who don't have ready knowledge of how to sign up for a vaccine. We are exploring other ways of providing the vaccine without the need for an appointment.
    - We will be one of the first communities in the State to offer special vaccine clinics at the high school for seniors and others.
  - **Covid Outreach:**
    - Community Participation Officers are meeting residents at local churches with special attention to Spanish-language services and can schedule appointments right then and there.

- Community Participation Officers have been at the Amherst Survival Center signing people up for the vaccine.
  - Ambassadors:
    - The Ambassadors have been crucial in staffing the Hot Line, patrolling the streets, and serving as helpers at the vaccination site.
    - We will continue to utilize the ambassadors during the summer by expanding their work to cover other areas of Town including staffing Puffers Pond, Groff Park, Mill River Park, and other duties in coordination with the Conservation and Development and Public Works Departments.
  - Masks: While the Governor has relaxed the requirement to wear a mask outdoors, the Town's Board of Health still has its requirement for mask wearing in the downtown area in place. The Board will review whether it will keep that mask mandate in place at its next meeting. As you know, the Town attempts to stay aligned with State policy to make it easier for people to know what they should be doing.
- Town Hall:
  - While DPW, Fire, Police and many other employees have been working throughout the pandemic, Town Hall has been closed to the public, although most employees are working in the building. Some employees have been working remotely during this time. We are working with our reopening committee to provide the circumstances to have all employees back to work on a regular basis in the near future.
  - We are also working on the protocols needed to reopen Town Hall to the public. I anticipate this will happen within the next month.
  - The Police Station will be reopening to the public within the next week.
- Outreach:
  - Cuppa Joe with Paul: Future guest includes the Finance Director and Comptroller. President Martin of Amherst College has also expressed a willingness to be a guest during the summer following up on an appearance by Hampshire College President Wingenbach.
  - Community Chats:
    - The Communications Manager and I continue to host our weekly Community Chats. Previous guests included Health Director Emma Dragon on the Homebound Vaccination Program; Kat Newman and other Ambassadors on the development of their program; Town Engineer Jason Skeels and Public Works Superintendent Guilford Mooring to discuss the Pomeroy Village MassWorks project; Police Captain Gabe Ting and Officer Bill Laramee who spoke on the violence against Asian Americans and the outreach the Town does during the St. Patrick's Day time; Planning Director Chris Brestrup and Building Commissioner Rob Morra discussing zoning; 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; Sustainability Coordinator Stephanie Ciccarello; 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.
    - Upcoming guests include the School Superintendent and Finance Director to discuss the budgets.
    - All recordings of our Community Chats can be found here: [Community Chats](#)

- Office hours: I continue to offer virtual office hours to those who are interested in talking one-on-one with me.
- Engage Amherst: We are adding comment sections for the North Common and the Town Budget. These will join Pomeroy Village, North Amherst Library, and the Four Capital Projects which can be found here: <https://engageamherst.org>.
- Town-Gown:
  - University of Massachusetts at Amherst:
    - The University is projecting to have about 13,000 students on campus in the Fall. (Normally, about 13,700 students are on campus.) They are finding a high demand for housing in campus dorms.
    - The University will be in full, on-site teaching and are not anticipating offering hybrid or remote classes. They will require students to be vaccinated.
    - Staff will be returning to work on campus during the summer and all will be back on site by August 1<sup>st</sup>.
    - The University is moving forward with its two major housing initiatives: Lincoln Apartments/Massachusetts Avenue and North Village.
      - Balfour Beatty Campus Solutions has been hired to oversee the two projects.
      - The Massachusetts Avenue site includes plans for a 600-bed dormitory plus 15,000 square feet of community space. The goal is a Fall 2023 opening.
      - The North Village project for graduate families will provide 200 beds with a community center, family play areas, and bike storage. The goal is a Fall 2022 opening.
      - Additional work needs to be done before the projects are presented to the University's Board of Trustees later in the year.
    - Commencement:
      - Graduating students may invite up to two guests and are responsible for registering those guests prior to the ceremony.
      - Graduates planning to attend commencement must register as well and must comply with testing requirements. They must wear a mask to gain entry to the ceremonies and practice social distancing in compliance with the state's commencement requirements.
      - Mask wearing and social distancing will be required of all attendees, including graduates and their guests throughout the ceremonies.
      - The ceremonies will be livestreamed for those unable to attend, or who wish to celebrate from a distance.
  - Amherst College:
    - Amherst College is following many of the same standards as outlined above.
    - The College will be requiring students to be vaccinated.
    - They anticipate about 2,000 students will be living on campus with another 50 or more living off campus.
    - The College is moving aggressively in implementing its Climate Action Plan and developing a plan to transition from fossil fuels for the campus.
  - Hampshire College:

- Hampshire College expects to be at normal operating levels in the Fall.
  - Information on all commencements can be found here: [Commencement | www.fivecolleges.edu](http://www.fivecolleges.edu)
- Racial Equity:
  - Community Safety Working Group:
    - Chair Paul Wiley has resigned from the Working Group for personal reasons.
    - The Working Group elected Brianna Owen and Elisha Walker to serve as co-chairs.
    - The Working Group continues to meet weekly and move forward on its work.
    - The Working Group's consultant has finalized its report. The Working Group will utilize the consultant's findings to write its report which is scheduled to be completed by May 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - Core Equity Team:
    - I had previously reported to the Town Council that \$12,653 was remaining in the FY21 appropriation to begin the process of addressing systemic racism in the Town. \$67,347 had been committed for stipends for the Community Safety Working Group and the contract for the consultant supporting the work of the Working Group. The Town's Core Equity Team had two proposals totaling \$11,000 that they asked the Town to fund utilizing available funds to support their work. However, in the meeting today, they determined it was equally important that the work of other groups in Town be supported as well. As a result, I will be supporting the first contract of \$6,500 to support the immediate work of the Core Equity Team. The second contract, for \$4,500, will be held and reviewed for the next fiscal year. All members of the Core Equity Team who were present supported this approach.
  - Reparations: I have reached out to the Reparations4Amherst group to determine the requests and process for supporting their work.

## Departments:

- Public Works:
  - Road construction projects moving forward this spring include Henry Street, Bridge Street, and part of Pine Street.
  - There will be work downtown to fix crumbling crosswalks, supported by a State grant obtained by the Town.
- Town Clerk:
  - Census: Census information is being released. The Town Council will be appointing a Districting Advisory Board to develop a proposal for establishing precinct and district boundaries.
  - Ranked-Choice Voting: Our State Representative has informed us that the Ranked-Choice Voting legislation has been received by the House Clerk. It will not move forward until the House and the Senate resolve the rules they will use to move legislation forward.
- Public Safety:
  - Police:
    - The Police Department received a grant of \$133,008 emergency dispatch operations.

- The Police Department received a grant of \$19,390 to support enhanced 911 dispatchers. This grant will offset training costs for our continuing education process that includes 16 hours of State mandated trainings to maintain their credentials as Certified Emergency Telecommunicators.
    - Fire:
      - The Fire Department was awarded an Interoperable Communications Investment Proposal (ICIP) grant from the State Fire Marshall’s office in the amount of \$19,952.90 as part of the FY 2021 Firefighter Safety Equipment Grant program. The project is intended to enhance emergency communications in the field between responders (including mutual aid and inter-agency) and the Town’s dispatch and command staff, which will increase fire fighter safety and service to the public. Specifically, the grant will pay to relocate a key receive-only polling site from the town's Wastewater Treatment plant to the roof of the Tower Library at the University of Massachusetts. This equipment would be co-located with existing equipment for Amherst Police Department.
  - Human Resources:
    - Human Resources are recruiting for Recreation Director and Economic Development Director positions.
    - Human Resources is recruiting, hiring, and onboarding numerous positions, mostly seasonal or associated with our COVID response.
  - Finance:
    - Budget: The Town’s operating budget and capital improvement program will be presented to the Town Council at your meeting.
      - This has been an extensive The FY22 budget and capital improvement program will be presented to the Town Council on Monday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>. (The Town Charter states these two items are due on May 1<sup>st</sup>, but since that is a Saturday, the deadline becomes the “next day which is not a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday.”)
      - In keeping with past practice, the budget will be presented to the Town Council on Monday and the contents of the budget will go live on the Town’s website at the time of the Town Council’s meeting.
      - The budget will look different from previous years. We are working to make it more readable and accessible. It is also our goal to present the budget in in line with the best practices established by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA).
      - Sean Mangano, Sonia Aldrich, and Holly Bowser have worked tirelessly on these documents. It was a much larger task because we decided to move in this new direction. I also want to thank and credit Brianna Sunryd for her work in helping to make the document and presentation material more accessible.
      - All material will be available online.
    - Bond Rating: Town staff are meeting with the bond rating agency next week to seek an updated bond rating. We are hoping to retain our current bond rating, even though we are in the middle of a pandemic and economic low point. This is in anticipation of the borrowing the Town will be doing in the next couple of years.
    - Residential Exemption: The Town’s Principal Assessor is working with the Board of Assessors to complete the Residential Exemption study and to provide information to the Council this fall. As a refresher, the Residential Exemption is a local option “*that shifts the tax burden within the residential class from owners of moderately valued residential properties to the owners of vacation homes, higher valued homes and residential*

*properties not occupied by the owner, including apartments and vacant lands”* according to the Division of Local Services. This option would result in a significant structural change in the way property taxes are assessed so it is important to understand all of the implications. The team working on this project has requested clarification of the Council’s goals for this study so they can ensure the proper data is gathered.

- Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE): The Assessor’s Office is exploring another local option called PACE. This option helps finance energy improvements for Commercial, Industrial, Not for Profit, and Multifamily properties through the Town’s property tax assessment system. This program will be presented in greater detail to the Town Council at an upcoming meeting.
- Federal Funds: Congressman McGovern submitted the Town’s request for funds for the Town to be considered for inclusion in the House’s surface transportation reauthorization bill. Here’s a link to the Congressman’s website where his transportation requests are posted: <https://mcgovern.house.gov/issues-list/member-designated-transportation-projects.htm>.
- Sustainability:
  - We have received two proposals to provide municipal aggregation consulting services for the Town of Amherst, City of Northampton, and Town of Pelham. I am reviewing the two proposals and expect to award the contract shortly.
- Community Services:
  - Health:
    - The Amherst Health Department and Board of Health will be reviewing its current “masks required” order for the downtown area. They will discuss whether this is still needed in light of the Governor’s relaxing of mask wearing outdoors.
    - The Health Department is looking at the requirements to opt out of State mosquito aerial spraying and initiating that process.
      - This is not an imminent threat to the Town. Spraying has not occurred as far as anyone knows in this region for many years. Last year, there was one aerial spraying in the State and that was in Plymouth County due to health indicators that were widely discussed prior to spraying.
      - The decision to opt out is made by the Town Council. For the Town to opt out, it must prepare an alternative mosquito management plan, receive the advice of the Board of Health, and provide for public comment. Here is a link to the actions necessary: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/application-for-municipality-opt-out-of-srmcb-spraying/download>
      - In the meantime, I will communicate to the State officials informing them that the Town is in process of considering this, that we do not want mosquito spraying and that they give me prior notice if they intend to spray.
      - Individual property owners may opt out by filling out this form: <https://www.mass.gov/forms/request-for-exclusion-from-wide-area-application-of-pesticides>
  - Senior Center:
    - The Senior Director has been appointed to serve on the State “Opioid Recovery and Remediation Fund Advisory Council”.
    - The Fund is administered by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the Opioid Recovery and Remediation Fund Advisory Council, which shall develop recommendations for the expenditure of the

- Fund and submit an annual report detailing the activity, revenue, and expenditures to and from the Fund with the Legislature by October 1st of each year.
- The first meeting of the Advisory Council has been scheduled for May 14<sup>th</sup>.
  - Unhoused Population:
    - The Building Commissioner, at the request of Craigs Doors, has extended the use of the Unitarian Universalist facility on North Pleasant Street through July 31, 2021.
    - The Director of Senior Services will serve as facilitator for the new Homelessness and Rehousing Task Force that is being organized.
    - We are working with Craig’s Doors to secure appropriate showering and daytime sheltering options.
    - The CDC eviction moratorium has been extended to June 30<sup>th</sup>. In Hampshire county (individual community statistics on filings are unavailable) there are several hundred eviction executions filed. With an economy that has not yet rebounded, there remains a need to redress the impact of COVID-related losses. Once the moratorium ends, we are anticipating a demand for services. Effective service delivery will be enhanced by retaining this person, whose local knowledge and trust with marginalized communities needing assistance is building. We will continue our work and support of Family Outreach of Amherst to work on these challenges.
  - Recreation:
    - The Recreation Department expects a full range of sports programs for children this summer including a new lacrosse skills development program in the spring, a youth cross country program, and Ultimate program.
    - The Mill River pool will open on June 19<sup>th</sup> this summer (usually it would open on June 26<sup>th</sup>). We are also hoping to extend the season to Labor Day.
    - Cherry Hill Golf Course opened on April 9<sup>th</sup> and was very busy.
    - The Remote Learning Center concluded its important work. All children in all grades will be back in school beginning May 3<sup>rd</sup>.
  - Economic Development:
    - The Business Improvement District received a \$175,000 grant to start an exploration of its “Revitalize Downtown Amherst Project,” branching out from the Town’s “Destination Amherst” outlined prior to the pandemic. The BID will be studying whether to lease the largest and most prominent building in downtown Amherst to become a destination as a hub for live music and poetry performances, artists in residence, a makers space, a farm-to-table market, and a cafe or brewpub.
    - The Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce has been awarded a Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT) Marketing Travel & Tourism Recovery Grant of \$116,655 to leverage a comprehensive marketing campaign to attract visitors to the Amherst area.
    - The Amherst Center Cultural District is up for renewal this year. (There are 49 districts in the State.) There is a process that will lead to a vote by the Town Council on the renewal in the summer. A cultural district designation is effective for five years. Designations may be renewed for an additional five years. The vote

by the Town Council will be to recommit to the cultural district in line with the resolution passed in support of the proposed cultural district five years ago.

- Conservation and Development:
  - Planning:
    - Zoning:
      - A zoning change that would impose a moratorium on new buildings in certain zones has been submitted. A joint public hearing of the Planning Board and the Council’s CRC Committee will be held on May 19<sup>th</sup>.
      - A second zoning change has been submitted by staff to make amendments to the Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw.
    - Flood Plain Maps:
      - The (second) 90 day appeal period ended on February 25, 2021, with no appeals.
      - The Town’s consultant will work with FEMA to prepare the maps for the Town Council to adopt. You may recall that Town staff met with Town Council for a preliminary meeting on February 10, 2020.
      - The Town Council will need to act during the “Compliance Period” – six months which ends on or about August 25, 2021.
      - The Town Council will be asked to adopt the new Flood Maps, the Flood Insurance Study and the text of the Zoning Bylaw amendment relating to the 100-year Flood Zone (this is being drafted) before August 25, 2021. We are working with the President to put this on an upcoming Council agenda.
  - Information Technology (I.T.):
    - The Communications Manager has earned a Professional Certificate in Leading Smart Communities from a well-respected program at Pepperdine University.

**Delegated Authority (March 2021):**

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons: None
- Short-Term Parking Requests: None
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures: None

**Major Capital Projects:**

- DPW Building/Fire Building: The Request for Proposals for a site for a new Department of Public Works building has been advertised.
- Schools: The Elementary School Building Committee established a subcommittee to review proposals from consultants seeking to serve as Owner’s Project Managers. There was great interest in this project with many fine applicants. One firm has been selected and the Town Manager will be working to agree on a contract. The goal is to have the MSBA OPM Panel review the RFS at its June 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- Library:
  - Town Council approved the borrowing and CPA funds on April 5<sup>th</sup>.
  - A Voter Veto petition was initiated but failed to produce enough signatures.
  - The petitioners brought a complaint to the Superior Court requesting (i) additional time to submit signatures, (ii) a reduction in the number of signatures needed, and (iii) permission

to submit signatures electronically. The hearing on this case is scheduled for Wednesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>.

- The Judge in the case denied the request by the plaintiffs.
- I submitted all signed documents to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners prior to the required April 30<sup>th</sup> deadline to receive funds this year.
- We will be creating a Building Committee to oversee the project.

### **Project Update:**

- Kendrick Park Playground: The contractor has returned to work and is moving quickly with construction. We anticipate their work will be completed by June 1<sup>st</sup> after which there will be a period of time to allow the grass to grow and final fixes before it is opened officially.
- Dog Park: The contractor is continuing work on this project.
- 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:
  - The Council will hold a public hearing on the proposed parking changes on May 17<sup>th</sup>.
  - Work will begin on the schematic drawings.
  - Congressman McGovern has listed additional work on the roadways surrounding the Town Common for funding as stated above.
  - Town staff continue to seek out additional sources of funds to substitute or supplement the Town's current funding plan.
- 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>
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant:
  - Public forums were held March 25<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. (1-hour) and March 27<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m. (2-hours). These forums were convened by the Town Services and Outreach Committee, begin with a brief presentation by Town staff, provided prompts to the public for structured feedback, and included the opportunity for questions and answers.
- 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.

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

- May 17<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- May 24<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- May 31<sup>st</sup> – Memorial Day holiday
- June 7<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- June 19<sup>th</sup> – Juneteenth Events
- June 21<sup>st</sup> – Town Council meeting
- July 5<sup>th</sup> – Independence Day