



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: October 14, 2021
Re: Town Manager Report for October 19, 2021

All Town Manager Reports are available on the Town's website here:
<https://www.amherstma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=240>

Town Manager Update:

COVID-19:

- Case counts: The 4th pandemic wave continues to show signs of receding in both the Town and at the University. Most hospitalized cases and COVID-related deaths occur in the unvaccinated population.
 - Daily case counts along with 14-day average incidence rate are provided here:
<https://www.amherstcovid19.org/>
 - The Town has links to the websites of all three institutions of higher education here:
<https://www.amherstcovid19.org/schools>
- Vaccination:
 - Booster Shots: The State announced that eligible Massachusetts residents may access Pfizer COVID-19 booster shots. In accordance with updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Pfizer COVID-19 Booster is now available to individuals 65 years of age and older, individuals 18-64 years of age at risk for severe COVID-19 due to underlying medical conditions, and individuals 18-64 years of age who are at increased risk for COVID-19 because of occupational or institutional settings who have previously received the Pfizer vaccine. These residents are eligible to receive their Pfizer booster shot at least 6 months after their second dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.
 - The Town is offering booster shots along with 1st and 2nd doses in three ways:
 - Thursday afternoon 3:00 - 6:00 in the Bangs. More information on this follows.

- Continuing outreach (senior housing, large apartment buildings, churches, restaurants, Amherst Survival Center, Craigs Doors, etc.). We have two clinics scheduled now at two apartment locations in addition to clinics at Clark House and Ann Whalen.
 - For people at risk secondary to occupational risk (first responders, health care workers).
 - We are offering booster or third dose vaccines at our weekly clinic. These will be smaller scale clinics and likely will not be able to accommodate everyone who got their original series with the Town. We are encouraging people to check with the many sources in the community, such as local pharmacies and urgent care facilities. VaxFinder is an excellent and up-to-date resource to use, please see list below of where else you can receive vaccines and boosters.
 - Boosters at the Bangs Community Center will be offered every Thursday from 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm at the Bangs Community Center. Appointments are required. To schedule an appointment, go here: <https://home.color.com/vaccine/register/townofamherst?calendar=1647d54b-9340-4d5b-865f-e8c15dedb323> Appointments will be populated there on Monday at 12PM. For those coming for a 2nd, 3rd, or booster dose, we ask that they bring their vaccination record card or other proof of their vaccination.
 - The School District is preparing for providing vaccinations to their students. They have had discussions with the Health Department plus other partners to help vaccinate 5 year old - 11 year old students.
- Testing:
 - Community Testing:
 - The Town's Health Department is now able to offer asymptomatic, unobserved community testing for Covid-19. These PCR testing kits are free. Adults and children ages 4 and older without symptoms of COVID-19 are eligible for testing. Individuals with any COVID-19 symptoms should not come to the Health Department, and should make an appointment with their physician for testing. This new service is in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Many thanks to our Health Department staff and Facilities Department for helping to making testing available in Town.
 - How it works:
 - Pick up test kits:
 - Bangs Community Center *side entrance*, 70 Boltwood Walk. Hours: Monday thru Friday 10:00 AM - 2:00PM, or;
 - Jones Library in the front hallway. Hours: During regular [Jones Library opening hours](#).
 - After picking up your kit, please administer your test *outside of the building* (home, car, etc.)
 - Drop off test kits:
 - All test kits should be returned to the secure drop box outside the *main entrance* of the Bangs Community Center.
 - Make sure to read all the instructions on the slip of paper in your kit.

- First-time testers need to fill out the questionnaire on the back of the instructions or the test will be void!
 - Drop off is 24/7 and you can expect results within 24-48 hours.
 - Note: if you deposit your kit on Friday or over the weekend, expect results by Monday evening or Tuesday.
 - If you test negative, expect an email.
 - If you test positive, expect a call with instructions.
 - The University of Massachusetts continues to provide testing for members of the community utilizing the self-test drop-off system. More information may be found here:
<https://www.umass.edu/coronavirus/coronavirus/covid-19-testing>
 - The University has offered to help the School District with testing their unvaccinated faculty and staff until the state gets the pool testing set up. The University will provide an additional 150 tests to the schools for the few weeks to help bridge this gap with the state's vendor. The District is grateful for this offer and partnership.
- School Vaccination Requirement:
 - The Amherst Regional School Committee Tuesday voted 7-0 to mandate the vaccination, a decision that came following a Sept. 9 Amherst Board of Health vote. The health board, based on a request from the public schools, added any COVID-19 vaccine receiving full FDA approval to the list of immunizations students must take.
 - All Amherst public school students eligible for FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines will be required to get their shots by Dec. 1 to continue attending classes.
 - With the vote, Amherst is believed to be the first district in the state to require its eligible students to get the COVID-19 vaccination.
 - So far, the only fully authorized COVID-19 vaccine is Pfizer's, and only for students ages 16 and up.
- University/College Relations:
 - Hampshire College: Hampshire College will be celebrating its 50th anniversary the weekend of October 15-17. This is a celebration that had been delayed a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They are expecting hundreds of alums and former faculty and staff to participate in the celebration.
 - Amherst College: Amherst College will continue celebrating its bicentennial with a two-part event on October 15 that provides an opportunity for Amherst College students, faculty and staff to celebrate this historic milestone for the College.
 - University of Massachusetts at Amherst:
 - Covid-19: The PHPC also launched adaptive testing two weeks ago. Selected students both on and off campus are being asked to come for additional testing so we can better understand the transmission of the COVID-19 virus in our community.
 - The University will hold a special in-person commencement ceremony recognizing undergraduates who earned their degrees as part of the Class of 2020 on November 7th at 11:00 a.m. at the Mullins Center.

- Racial Equity:
 - Community Safety Working Group: The Working Group continues its work driving toward making a presentation to the Town Council on October 25th.
 - Reparations: The African Heritage Reparation Assembly continues its weekly meeting schedule.
 - Community Safety and Social Justice Committee:
 - At its last meeting, members of the Town Council were supportive of successor committee to the Community Safety Working Group and voted the designation of Special Municipal Employee status. I have since advertised for members to serve on this committee.
 - Stipends:
 - In the announcement, I stated that the appointments would strive to represent a broad range of the Town’s socio-economic diversity. To that end, financial stipends will be provided to support the work of Committee members.
 - I have determined that I will provide stipends of \$1,500 annually to members of the Committee.
 - I will also be conducting a study of stipends for all committees, comparing our practices to other communities, developing criteria for offering stipends, and identifying the budget requirement if stipends are to be offered. We will be looking to complete this study prior to our budget process.
- Outreach:
 - Candidates:
 - Presentation: Many Town Council candidates participated in a presentation by Town Staff on Town government October 12th. This program was similar to what I did prior to the election in 2018.
 - One-on-One meetings: I have offered to meet all Town Council candidates to offer time to sit down to discuss any issues that they would like. Many have taken me up on this offer.
 - Cuppa Joe: We held a Cuppa Joe with Paul on Friday, October 8th with Finance Director Sean Mangano as my guest and Communications Manager Brianna Sunryd as the host. We had a fantastic turnout and discussed how the major capital projects are being funded with special emphasis on how the Library fits into the funding plan. A recording of the event can be found here: [Cuppa' Joe with Amherst Town Manager Paul Bockelman & Finance Dir. Sean Mangano - YouTube](#)
 - Community Participation and Outreach:
 - Communications Manager Brianna Sunryd will be a panelist on a panel at the Massachusetts Municipal Association in January.
 - Ms. Sunryd also served as a panelist on the Massachusetts Municipal Association Boot Camp for aspiring Town Managers on October 14th.
 - Town staff has been working with a research team at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst over the past few months to introduce new ways to engage with our community members. Part of this larger study is a short survey to better understand digital engagement capacity for our community members. We

have been sharing it out through various channels. The survey will be open for responses until the end of October. Town residents are asked to fill out a survey to help us better tailor our outreach and engagement efforts to reach a wider, more diverse audience? Here is the link to a short survey at: https://umassamherst.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0lzdIgA6ApVCwdM?source=CouncilorComms The survey is available in English, Spanish, and Mandarin at this time.

- Finance:

- Free Cash: Free cash has been certified and congratulations to the Comptroller for having our projections off by just one dollar. The Free Cash will be shared with the Town Council by the Finance Director and reviewed at the next Finance Committee meeting.
- ARPA: The Finance Director has held two public engagement sessions this week and will hold two additional public engagement sessions next week. In addition, members of the public may weigh in at the Town's EngageAmherst website here: <https://engageamherst.org/arpa>
- State Auditor: I participated in a meeting of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission where the State Auditor presented her report on the dire state of infrastructure in Western Massachusetts and the need for investment of Federal funds. She also addressed the responsibility of the State in funding its rightful share of State-owned land.
- Outreach:
 - Finance Director Sean Mangano has been elected as a vice-president of the Massachusetts Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), the premier public finance association in the country.
 - The Finance Director also presented at a webinar that covered the municipal finance personnel shortage and the areas of accounting, collection, treasury, assessing, school finance, and town finance. The webinar was designed to introduce college student and others to a career in municipal finance.
- Resident Capital Requests: The Resident Capital Request window is now open until November 19, 2021 at 4:30 PM. Residents who would like to add a capital project to the request list may submit the request online. [Click here](#) for the submission form.

- Public Works:

- Curbside Leaf Pick-up: Curbside pick-up of bagged leaves, using the Town-approved, 30-gallon paper biodegradable bag, will begin Monday, November 1, 2021. There is no curbside collection of loose leaves. Loose leaves maybe brought to the Transfer Station if you have a current sticker. Residents should place bagged leaves at the curb by 7:00AM. on the day your area is scheduled for pickup. Bags are available from many retailers, and prices may vary – please check that bags are biodegradable. The pick-up schedule by street can be found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2992>
- Water: We are through the month of September and I'm pleased to report that the water system has held up very well.
 - The Wells and Atkins have been able to keep up with demand. Our strategy of maximizing water production to match demand has kept the East Pleasant Street water tank above the 55 foot level during the day while meeting demand.

- We have been starting every day at the 58 foot level or a little higher. The wells have also been able to shut down during the nights to allow for some recovery in the aquifer.
 - We will continue to monitor the situation but
 - Northampton Road: The State Department of Transportation intends to begin the reconstruction of Northampton Road from South Pleasant Street to University Drive. The work is projected to continue through April 2024. This will be an extensive construction project that includes replacement of Town utilities, relocation of poles, installation of a multi-use path, and other work. Initial work this fall will involve construction signs and erosion controls and tree work. Spring work will focus on drainage systems. The project will then move in excavation, milling and paving the road, and adding pedestrian ramps and new granite curbing, and putting in new traffic signals, signs and pavement markings.
 - Waterline Extension to Leverett: Work has begun to extend the water line from North Amherst into the Town of Leverett. Paving of East Leverett Road is expected to conclude prior to Thanksgiving.
 - Paving: Paving work is nearing completion for the season with the Mill River basketball courts being paved. DPW will paint temporary lines on the newly paved courts. An outside, professional painting company will be in Town as soon as the weather warms up in the spring to line the basketball courts properly.
 - Mill Lane: The multi-use path on Mill Lane that will connect East Hadley Road to Groff Park is in design. We expect to complete permitting by the end of the calendar year, issue a Request for Proposals in the beginning of 2022, in the hope that work could be done in the March-May timeframe.
- Town Clerk:
 - Elections:
 - The Town Clerk has posted the deadlines for nomination papers, etc. on the Town's website here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/1079/Running-for-Elected-Office>
 - Early Voting: Early voting will be held as follows:
 - Monday, October 25, 2021; 8:30 am to 4:00 pm
 - Tuesday, October 26, 2021; 8:30 am to 4:00 pm
 - Wednesday, October 27, 2021; 8:30 am to 4:00 pm
 - Thursday, October 28, 2021; 8:30 am to 8:00 pm
 - Friday, October 29, 2021; 8:30 am to 4:00 pm.
 - Ballots: Ballots have arrived and absentee voting is available in Town Hall and ballots are being mailed to those who have applied for mail-in voting.
- Economic Development:
 - Licensing: The Board of License Commissioners is preparing to renew alcoholic beverages licenses for the annual renewal.
 - On-Street Dining: We are reaching out to the downtown restaurants asking if they are interested in offering outdoor dining next year. Staff have been meeting to plan for the continuation of on-street dining into the Spring. Staff is requesting an extension of Article 14 to permit continued ease of permitting as we recover from the pandemic.

- Boy Scout Tree Sale: Boy Scout Troops 500B, 500G, and 504 will again host a tree sale from November 26 – January 8 at the southern-most end of Kendrick Park.
- Public Safety:
 - Fire:
 - Ambulance: The new ambulance which was ordered months ago is on its way from Ohio and is expected to arrive in Town in the coming weeks. It will go through a thorough evaluation and outfitting by Town staff before being placed in service.
 - Cardiac Monitors: I have submitted a request to the Council for approval to enter into a three-year lease-to-purchase agreement for seven cardiac monitors, critical equipment for our first responders.
 - Community Responders:
 - We are waiting to hear from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Equitable Approaches to Public Safety (EAPS) on our application to its grant program to support the Community Responder initiative.
 - The Implementation Team reviewed call information from its consultant at its most recent meeting.
 - We are finalizing job description and will be meeting our duty to discuss with our collective bargaining units and advertising the position as soon as possible.
- Human Resources/Human Rights:
 - The H.R. Department continues to offer wellness programming and events for Town employees utilizing mini-grants from the MIIA Health Benefits Trust. Currently, employees have the opportunity to sign up for a walking competition among employees. Participating employees receive a free Fitbit watch.
 - Human Resources is working with the Town’s health insurer as we review claims data in preparation for our health insurance renewal for FY23.
- Community Services:
 - Health:
 - The Town is working with the City of Northampton as a participant in a Public Health Excellence grant in which the Town will benefit with additional nursing services. The nurses can support the Health Department with MAVEN cases other than COVID, other initiatives, plus clinics. This work is looking forward to a more collaborative public health presence for Hampshire County over the next few years.
 - The Health Department and Assistant Town Manager have been working with Craig's Doors as they finalize their new location, which will provide the organization with a congregate shelter plus the ongoing rooms secured at the University Motor Lodge. The Assistant Town Manager will be meeting with a possible host congregation on Sunday.
 - Recreation: The new Recreation Director continues his orientation, meeting with staff and members of the Recreation Commission, and developing his plan for his upcoming work.
 - Senior Center:
 - Senior Aide: We are pleased that the Town will be participating in the SCSEP Senior Aide Program which provides for our bilingual outreach worker, Juana Trujillo, to work for the Town 20 hours per week at no cost to the Town. Ms.

Trujillo already been volunteering two mornings a week and now is able to increase her hours. She's been a huge help working in two languages and bringing a strong presence to the Senior Center.

- Dementia-Friendly/Age-Friendly Community: The Town is working with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, with funding from Tufts Community Health Plan, to attain the designation and align our resources to move forward with the goals and values.
- Conservation and Development:
 - Writers Walk:
 - The recently completed Amherst Writers Walk and associated website are installed and available to the public.
 - Many thanks to the Department of Public Works for assisting in the installation of the signs.
 - The Writers Walk consists of 12 informational signs located at the residences of notable writers in Amherst's history, which together form a walking tour, allowing people to engage with and learn more about the lives of these writers.
 - A launch event and walking tour is planned for Friday, October 22nd at 4:30 PM meeting outside 97 Spring Street, to celebrate the opening of the Writers Walk. Informational cards for the Writers Walk can be found at Town Hall, the BID/Chamber Visitor Center, Jones Library, and Amherst Books. More information on the Writers Walk and the writers' biographies can be found at www.amherstma.gov/writerswalk
 - Hickory Ridge: The Town held three outreach sessions for the former Hickory Ridge Golf Course to learn more about this soon-to-be Town owned space. *More information on these sessions below.*
 - Protected Land: The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and Kestrel Land Trust celebrated the newest Food Bank Farm, a large tract of rich Hadley farmland that provides fresh, organic vegetables to households and schoolchildren facing food insecurity.
 - This is an innovative partnership of farmland conservation that strengthens food security for all and our local food economy.
 - A 193-acre farm in North Hadley and North Amherst has been completely conserved for the benefit of the community—the culmination of a multi-year project led by Kestrel Land Trust with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Town of Hadley, Town of Amherst, and The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts to permanently protect land from sprawling development, protect and create a community farm, support private farmland conservation, and expand public conservation area and trails.
 - Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Commissioner John Lebeaux was present to celebrate this partnership and achievement.

Delegated Authority:

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons:
- Short-Term Parking Requests:
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures:

- “Trick or Treat My Ride” Halloween Car Parade sponsored by Amherst Recreation beginning at Amherst Regional High School and continuing down Triangle Street to Main Street to North Pleasant Street back to Triangle Street. October 30th, 4:00 p.m.

Major Capital Projects:

- Jones Library: Awaiting the vote scheduled at the Town election in November.
- DPW Building/Fire Building: Staff are exploring multiple options for a new site for the Department of Public Works, including the Town-owned Ruxton site.
- Schools: This process is driven by the MSBA standards and protocols. We are now scheduled for designer application review at the MSBA Designer Selection Panel on November 2nd, and interviews on November 16th.

Projects Update:

- Dog Park: The work on the dog park continues. Increased costs were identified and a request for funds will be presented to the Town Council in the near future.
- Performing Arts Shell on the Town Common: This project was presented to the Town Council at its meeting last Monday.
- North Common Restoration/Main Street Parking Lot: Awaiting action from Congress.
- Hickory Ridge:
 - The Town held three outreach sessions for the former Hickory Ridge Golf Course to learn more about this soon-to-be Town owned space. Over 150 people, including many Town Councilors, took time to explore the area at this family friendly event and share ideas for future use of the land. Town staff will be on hand to share information, lead activities, and answer questions.
 - With the Discover Hickory Ridge events, including the interactive website: www.engageamherst.org/hickory, the Town is officially kicking off engaging the community in what will likely become a year long process to create a Master Plan for the site. During this process there will be additional research, study, tours and meetings to gather information from the community. This is just the beginning. Here is some additional information:
 - The Town does not own the property yet. The closing will take place in the next 45-60 days. The process to acquire the land began more than 4 years ago. The Town will own the all of the land including 4 buildings.
 - The property is very special and unique: 150 acres, more than 1-mile of frontage along the Fort River, extensive wetlands, floodplains and vernal pools. Its proximity to multiple neighborhoods to the north, east and south makes it a strategic acquisition for the Town.
 - The Town will spend \$520,000 to purchase the land. This is a ‘bargain sale’ and well below the ‘market’ value of the property.
 - A 6.2 megawatt solar array will cover 26 acres of the 150 acre parcel. The location of the solar has been determined through a rigorous review process with the Amherst Conservation Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals. The project has also been approved by multiple state agencies. The solar company will lease the land from the Town for at least 20 years and they will pay a PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) estimated at \$45,000/year.

- Much of the land is recognized by the State as ‘rare habitat.’ Any development here, including the solar, requires mitigation in the form of habitat restoration. To mitigate the impact of the solar array, 18 acres of land along the northern section of the river will undergo ecological restoration. The solar developer will pay for the mitigation.
- The clubhouse is in poor condition. Years of deferred maintenance have taken a heavy toll on the structure. It will be expensive to re-use/rehab for any purpose. There are no immediate plans for the building rather we will look at the structure and site as part of the site Master Plan.
- The Town did look at the former golf course as a possible location for a new Fire and/or DPW building. The site is too far south and west for a fire station and too wet and ecologically sensitive for a DPW.
- Areas for re-development are limited to just a few areas due to environmental factors – including a large floodplain area and buffer zones around wetlands and the Fort River. Portions of the land could be re-envisioned for uses compatible with the natural resources of the site and abutting neighborhoods.
- Passive recreation options for the site include low-impact activities which don’t require facilities, such as walking, picnicking, photography, birding, wildlife viewing, Frisbee golf, biking, fishing, canoeing, etc. Another major component of this project is providing better connectivity between the neighborhoods to the north and the Pomeroy Village Center. A central path could be created allowing residents to access stores, restaurants and services near the intersection of Rt. 116 and Pomeroy Lane.
- Once the Town owns the property the buildings will be ‘winterized’. There are no other improvements planned for the site this fall. The land will remain open for passive enjoyment this winter.
- North Amherst Library: We are developing construction documents and have funding available through bidding. There has been some a slight delay and I anticipate construction documents will be completed by the end of October with bidding to take 6-8 weeks after that.
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant: The Town Council approved the development of plans for a roundabout at this intersection. Town staff expect to return to the Town Council at an upcoming meeting with plans that are 25% complete.
- Solar on the Landfill: The “real” construction work is scheduled to begin shortly, along with the fence around the Southern Landfill.
- Belchertown Road/East Street School:
 - Town issued a Request for Proposals to lease the properties located at 31 South East Street and 72-80 Belchertown Road for the development of affordable housing.
 - The Request for Proposals is here: www.amherstma.gov/bids
 - The pre-proposal walkthrough for potential bidders will be held on October 6th.
 - Proposals are due on November 19th.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- October 19th – Town Council meeting (scheduled)
- October 25th – Town Council meeting

- November 2nd – Election Day
- November 8th – Town Council meeting
- November 11th – Veterans Day holiday
- November 15th – Financial Indicators presentation
- November 15th – Town Council meeting
- November 22nd – Town Council meeting
- November 24-25 – Thanksgiving Day holidays
- December 3rd – Merry Maple Celebration
- December 6th – Town Council meeting
- December 20th – Town Council meeting