



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: January 21, 2022
Re: Town Manager Report for January 24, 2022

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

COVID-19

- Vaccine:
 - The Town continues to offer weekly clinics from 3:00 – 6:0 p.m. at the Bangs Community Center with the following offerings:
 - Weekly clinics for Pfizer for ages 12 and up.
 - Weekly clinics for Moderna for ages 18 and up.
 - People can learn more here: <https://www.amherstcovid19.org/vaccine>
 - Appointments for the Bangs Center clinics can be made here:
<https://home.color.com/vaccine/register/townofamherst?calendar=1647d54b-9340-4d5b-865f-e8c15dedb323>
 - Vaccine appointments can also be found on the State's website:
<https://vaxfinder.mass.gov/>.
 - UMass will reopen its community vaccine clinic on Thursday, Jan. 27 and Friday, Jan. 28. Sign-up for appointments will begin on the morning of Tuesday, Jan. 25.
 - It is important to reiterate:
 - People aged 12 and older who live, work, or study in Massachusetts can now get vaccinated.
 - If you are uninsured, you can still receive a vaccine.
 - **The vaccine is free – there is no cost to the recipient.**
 - Vaccine sites may request documentation, but you are not required to have it to receive the vaccine and you cannot be denied access to the vaccine for not having ID.
 - **Documentation is not required to be vaccinated.**

- Sites will NOT ask for proof of immigration status. Any data collected for the COVID-19 vaccination program may only be used for public health purposes – not for civil, criminal, nor immigration enforcement.
 - The Town is developing pediatric-only clinics in the coming weeks.
 - Massachusetts residents can obtain a proof of vaccine on their phones by visiting www.myvaxrecords.mass.gov, a web portal that follows national standards for security and privacy and provides residents a way to electronically view and save their COVID-19 vaccine record.
 - Testing:
 - Rapid Antigen Tests:
 - The Town has received shipment of at-home rapid antigen test kits from the State. These were distributed before the holidays through our school district and to our most vulnerable communities.
 - Amherst was one of 102 communities selected based on the proportion of families living at or below the poverty level within their respective communities.
 - PCR Tests:
 - The Town’s Health Department continues to offer asymptomatic, unobserved community testing for Covid-19. These PCR testing kits are also free. This service is in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts Amherst.
 - The University’s Public Health Promotion Center (PHPC) offers unobserved testing to the local community. Effective, Tuesday, January 18, the PHPC is offering unobserved testing only.
 - Kits can be picked up at these locations, on and off-campus:
 - Public Health Promotion Center on the lower level of the Campus Center
 - University Health Services (UHS), at the rear of the building
 - Bangs Community Center, 70 Boltwood Walk in the center of Amherst
 - Jones Library, 43 Amity Street in the center of Amherst
 - Completed test kits can be returned to these drop boxes:
 - Outside Mullins Center, near the ATM
 - University Health Services, at rear of building
 - Campus Center, main floor, near the top of the escalators
 - Bangs Community Center, outside
 - Results from tests done dropped off in a kiosk on Monday through Thursday and Friday before Noon are ready within 24-48 hours. Results from tests dropped off on Friday after Noon, Saturday through Sunday are ready the following Monday evening or Tuesday.
 - Case Counts:
 - Case counts continue to increase. Family gatherings and large social events are the most likely places to see the spread of the virus.
 - The Town updates the public dashboard daily during the week, so please feel free to check here <https://www.amherstcovid19.org/home>
 - This is happening even with a large percentage of the Town’s population being vaccinated. This percentage is calculated weekly with the assumptions and calculations posted here: <https://amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/4401>

- 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>
- **Mask Mandate:**
 - The Health Director anticipates continuing the current mask mandate.
 - Complaints about indoor mask non-compliance should be forwarded to the Health Department for follow up.
- **Meeting Remotely:**
 - Based on advice from the Town’s Health Director on the status of the Covid-19 pandemic, I announced that Town committees and boards will continue to meet remotely and will not be meeting in person until April 1, 2022, at the earliest.
 - This decision is in accordance with “An Act Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency”. This Act includes an extension, until April 1, 2022, of the remote meeting provisions of the Governor’s March 12, 2020, Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. The new law has two major parts.
 - First, the new law allows public bodies to continue providing live “adequate, alternative means” of public access to the deliberations of the public body, instead of holding meetings in a public place that is open and physically accessible to the public. “Adequate, alternative means” may include, without limitation, providing public access through telephone, internet, or satellite enabled audio or video conferencing or any other technology that enables the public to clearly follow the proceedings of the public body in real time.
 - Second, the new law authorizes all members of a public body to continue participating in meetings remotely; the Open Meeting Law’s requirement that a quorum of the body and the chair be physically present at the meeting location remains suspended

University/College Relations

- **University of Massachusetts:**
 - Classes begin January 25th.
 - Covid-19:
 - The University policy is that students are required to be fully immunized against COVID-19, including the booster shot. In addition, there is an expectation that all students will be tested two weeks prior to the start of spring classes. Those tests are being processed by the University now.
 - Town staff and the University continue to meet to review case numbers, discuss plans for the return of staff and students, and contemplate the status of the virus into the Spring semester.
 - The University’s dashboard, updated weekly, can be found here: [UMass Covid Dashboard](#)
 - The University continues to serve the region by offering both community testing and vaccine clinics. (See information above.)
 - Strategic Partnership Agreement:

- Discussions with the University for a Successor Strategic Partnership Agreement continue.
 - P-3 Development:
 - The demolition work at the old Lincoln Apartments has been moving along steadily.
 - On December 20th, the University contractor put up construction fencing around parking lot #32 at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Lincoln Avenue. This is so the contractor can prepare the site for construction of the undergraduate housing building.
 - The University closed Lincoln Avenue from Massachusetts Avenue to the entrance of lot 32.
 - The University will revive the UMass community relations newsletter which has been dormant for a couple of years so that it can share construction updates with the neighbors directly through the newsletter in the future.
- Amherst College:
 - Classes begin February 7th.
 - Covid-19:
 - All students must be fully vaccinated before returning to campus.
 - The College's dashboard, updated weekly, can be found here: [Amherst College Covid Dashboard](#)
 - Strategic Partnership Agreement:
 - Active discussions for a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the President and staff continue.
 - Long-time staff lead for the College, Jim Brassord, announced his retirement. He will retire in March but maintain a contractual relationship with the College for a year after that to support the transition.
- Hampshire College:
 - Classes begin on January 26th.
 - Covid-19:
 - All students must be full vaccinated before returning to campus.
 -
 - The College's dashboard, updated regularly, can be found here: [Hampshire College Covid Dashboard](#)
 - Strategic Partnership Agreement:
 - The College has advertised for sale a 7.69 acre land site for development located directly across from Hampshire College, next to Atkins Farm Market and Applewood. The two parcels wrap around (to the West and Southwest) 1151 West Street and Atkin's Farm Market.
 - Active discussions with the College about its needs and the Town's needs continue.

Racial Equity

- Reparations:
 - The African Heritage Reparation Assembly continues its meetings.

- The Committee is bringing recommended changes to it charge to the Town Council for approval.
- The Town is contracting with the Economic and Public Policy Research group (EPPR) at the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) to help provide basic demographic and geographic data and relevant maps on the African-American/Black population in the Town. This work is expected to begin on February 1st.
- Community Responders Program:
 - The Implementation Team continues to meet weekly to work on the numerous details of developing and implementing the new community responder (CRESS) program.
 - The Implementation Team held or will hold public forums on the CRESS program on January 20th and 22nd. The team is giving an update on the program, will answer questions, and looks forward to hearing input from the community.
 - The interview team is reviewing applicants for the CRESS Director position.
 - The Town was invited to participate in the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government's Government Performance Lab Community of Practice meetings. The last session on January 11th covered managing calls for service data with a case study from Durham, North Carolina's Community Safety Department.
- Other Initiatives:
 - Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (DEI) Department has been approved by the Town Council and the interview team will be reviewing candidates for the DEI Director. Ms. Moyston assumed her duties as the Assistant Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on January 3rd.
 - Recruitment for the Community Safety and Social Justice Committee continues. We are struggling with recruiting enough applicants to create a viable pool. I have established a special interview team for this and other committees. The interview team (Barbara Love, Sid Ferreira, and Keisha Dennis) also conducted the interviews for the Community Safety Working Group. This group will work with me to determine if the applicant pool is sufficient to move forward with interviews. We have developed a special outreach effort to attract a strong group of candidates that represents the Town.
<https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=3020>

Outreach

- Elementary School Building:
 - Website: The Elementary School Building Committee unveiled its project website this week. The site can be found here: <https://www.amherst-school-project.com/>
 - Educational Visioning: Visioning workshops will be held virtually on January 26th and March 2nd at 6:30 p.m.,
 - Community Forum: Community forums will be held virtually on February 3rd and February 17th at 6:30 p.m.
- CRESS:
 - Public Forums: The Implementation Team held or will hold public forums on the CRESS program on January 20th and 22nd. The team is giving an update on the program, will answer questions, and looks forward to hearing input from the community.
- Cuppa Joe with Paul: Our Cuppa Joe outreach efforts will resume in 2022.

- Translation Services: The Town has received a grant of \$80,000 for “Translation, Civic Engagement, and Participation” efforts by the Town. These are funds that were secured by our State Representative and State Senator in the State budget. The purpose of the funds is to “support translation services, promote engagement and inclusion, and facilitate participation in civic activities for BIPOC and ESL communities.”

Legal Update

- Jones Library Litigation and Complaint:
 - The Superior Court rendered its decision that denied the plaintiffs’ Motion to Amend to add a claim alleging that the November 2, 2021 ballot question required a two-thirds vote for approval. In ruling in favor of the Town, the Court found that the plaintiffs’ argument was without merit and that the Town properly authorized the borrowing by the Town Council’s earlier two-thirds vote.
 - The Court also denied the plaintiffs’ Motion to Amend to add a new claim challenging the Town Clerk’s signature certification guidelines based on the plaintiffs’ lack of standing.
 - In addition to denying the plaintiffs’ Motion to Amend, the Court granted the Town’s Motion for Summary Judgment, ruling in the Town’s favor that all remaining claims in the complaint were rendered moot upon placement of the question on the ballot by the Town Council.
 - The entry of judgment on the docket starts the clock on the plaintiffs’ thirty-day time frame to file a Notice of Appeal. As the Judgment is dated January 13, 2022, the plaintiffs have until February 14, 2022.
 - Copies of the Judge’s decision has been shared with the Town Council and is available upon request.
 - An Open Meeting Law complaint filed with the State against the Board of Registrars was determined to be without merit by the Attorney General’s office. In its decision, the Attorney General’s office stated: *“Following our review, we find that the Board did not violate the Open Meeting Law. In reaching this determination, we reviewed the original complaint, the Board’s response to the complaint, and the complainant’s request for further review.”*

In the Wings

- Water Regulations: Updated and revised water regulations are prepared and will be scheduled to be presented to the Town Council in February.
- Sewer Regulations: Updated and revised sewer regulations are being prepared and will be scheduled to be presented to the Town Council in March.

Department Updates

- Finance:
 - The Finance Department is in the middle of reviewing capital and operating budgets with departments.
 - The Office issued a reminder that real estate tax is due on Tuesday, February 1st for all parcels in Amherst.
 - The Finance Department is implementing initiatives under ARPA.

- Small Business Grant Program: Complete package ready. Includes a project overview needed for ARPA and the grant agreement to the BID to manage the program.
- Information Technology:
 - The I.T. Department is rolling out new, digital phones having deployed 80 to date with 40 more to go.
- Public Works:
 - 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.
 - Eversource began relocating utility poles along Northampton Road on January 10th. This utility pole work is expected to last 3-4 weeks.
 - The Mass DOT roadway reconstruction project was awarded to Caracas Construction Corp.
- Economic Development:
 - Wi-Fi Downtown: The Town has been awarded a FY22 Community Compact Cabinet IT grant in the amount of \$74,625 to undertake the construction of a downtown public Wi-Fi network. This will supplement and, in some cases, supplant the existing Wi-Fi network. The competition for funding was especially intense, and Amherst's application was chosen due to "its ability to fulfill the core mission of the grant program, which is to drive innovation and transformation at the local level via investments in technology." Congratulations to our I.T. Department for preparing such a compelling grant application.
 - Performance Shell: The Town Council voted to support the placement of the Performance Shell on the Town Common. The BID will move forward with fund raising and developing more detail schematic design plans for Town staff to review. The BID anticipates the performance shell would become a reality in 2023 or 2024.
 - Small Business Grant Program: Utilizing ARPA funds, the Town is working with the BID to develop a program that would support small businesses develop proposals for retail establishments and navigate the permitting system.
 - Economic Empowerment: Utilizing ARPA funds, the Town is developing options for adding contracted staff to support economic development.
- Public Safety:
 - Police:
 - Accreditation: The Police Department is undergoing an on-site assessment by the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission. This is a necessary step to continue to be recognized as an accredited agency.
 - In 2000, the Amherst Police Department was the second police department in the Commonwealth to obtain accredited status.
 - The Department must demonstrate that it is in compliance with the Commission's mandatory standards as well as optional standards.

- Assessors will be examining the Department’s policies, procedures, facilities and equipment.
- The assessors were in Town from January 17-19th.

○ Fire:

- Ambulance: The Town has taken delivery of our newest ambulance.



- The vehicle is a custom Horton ambulance built on a 2021 Ford 4WD chassis. The new unit replaces a 2011 International ambulance. This ambulance is assigned as the “A-1” unit responding out of the Central Fire Station.
- Although it may look the same as other Town ambulances, this ambulance is a hybrid vehicle, as it incorporates an idle mitigation system into its design. The idle mitigation system, manufactured by “ZeroRPM” is designed to turn off the diesel engine when the vehicle is parked idling at emergency scenes. The ambulance switches over to a battery power system that keeps all essential systems, such as emergency lights, radios, heat/AC, etc., functioning.
- Since ambulances and fire engines typically spend more time idling than actually driving over the road, this system is considered to be a more sustainable

model, significantly reducing emissions. It is projected to pay back its initial cost within 5 years of operation, based on savings for fuel and engine maintenance.

- The idle mitigation system cost an additional \$25,000. This cost was paid for by a Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) Green Communities Competitive Grant, which was secured through the work of the Town’s Sustainability Coordinator.
- This is one of the first hybrid ambulances to be used in Massachusetts. As the Town prepares to order a new fire engine this year and another ambulance next year, the plan is to incorporate the same idle mitigation system into those vehicles to continue working to meet the town’s sustainability goals.
- Fire Pumper: The Town appropriated funds for a new Fire Truck. The costs truck exceeds the appropriation, requiring staff to seek additional funds from the Town Council.
- Grant – Personnel Safety Accountability System: The Town was awarded \$25,000 a personnel safety accountability system during emergency incidents. The grant

from the Commonwealth's Firefighter Safety Equipment Grant Program will allow the Fire Department to acquire a system enables an incident commander to account for personnel at a scene. This is particularly important at dynamic incidents such as fires, wide area searches, or multi-casualty events. The system will enhance the ability to communicate with the personnel on scene. Most importantly it will increase the firefighter's level of safety by allowing an incident commander to maintain situational awareness during risky operations.

- Grant - Firefighter Safety Equipment Grant: The Town received a \$15,000 grant from the Commonwealth's Emergency Management Performance Grant program. This funding will be used to acquire an intercom system for the frontline fire apparatus. The system incorporates noise attenuating headphone/microphones sets, which will decrease extraneous noise and improve the quality of communication between personnel in the apparatus. Chronic exposure to engine and exhaust noise has long been the source of early degradation of hearing in firefighters.

- Town Clerk:

- Reprecincting: The reprecincting maps prepared by the Town and submitted to the State have been approved by the State. The Local Elections Districts Review Commission informed the Town that the Town's reprecincting meets the requirements of State law. The effective date of the reprecincting is December 31, 2021.

- Human Resources:

- The H.R. Department has been busy recruiting for the numerous openings in the Town including the two newly created department head positions.
- In addition, the department has been active in ongoing collective bargaining, preparing for collective bargaining for FY23.
- The H.R. Director has also initiated discussions with collective bargaining units to meet the requirement to conduct impact bargaining with several bargaining units as we work through the details of establishing the CRESS program.

- Conservation and Development:

- Planning:

- Making it Public Art Program: The Town has been selected to participate in the "Making it Public" art program.
 - This is a free training facilitated by Forecast Public Art designed to equip administrators in strengthening local capacity to support, create, and promote public art. The work is funded by the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA).
 - The program will cover practical and tactical subject matters for administrators at all stages of their career facilitating public art, such as stakeholder considerations, community engagement, preparing a call-for-artists, equitable selection processes, contracting, and more.
 - Our participation will make us eligible to receive a \$10,000 grant from NEFA to fund artists selected by way of a Call for Temporary Public Art in 2022.
 - Planner Maureen Pollock and Public Art Commission Chair William Kaizen will be participating in the program.

- Our goal is to accelerate our efforts at promoting public art in Amherst by helping us train our staff and establish a template for best-practices as we move forward with our Percent for Art Program. Like many municipalities, the Town struggles to attract the diversity and quality of applicants for our initiatives. We are seeking peer support and advice to address these challenges.
 - More information may be found here: [Making It Public Link](#)
- Cultural Center District:
 - The Amherst Center Cultural District has been renewed for 5 more years by the governing Board of the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The District has members representing town center’s cultural entities including the Town, the Emily Dickinson Museum, the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College, the Jones Library, the Amherst Cinema as well as Town committees such as the Public Art Commission and Amherst Cultural Council. The Amherst Business Improvement District manages the District.
 - The District received a \$7,500 grant for use in promoting arts in Amherst.
- Architectural Barriers: The Town was awarded a \$75,800 grant to eliminate architectural barriers found at the main entrance to the Bangs Community Center, including auto door controls, entrance improvements, and signage. Congratulations to our talented staff who continue to win grant awards in a highly competitive environment.
- Flood Maps:
 - The Town is updating its Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) and Flood Insurance Study (FIS). Maps have been available for review since July 2020 and are now in a 90-day statutory appeal period, which ended on December 9th.
 - FEMA now has a 60-day period to conduct quality review of the maps.
 - In February, Town staff will present an updated overview of the project to the Town Council.
 - After FEMA’s review, there will be a six-month compliance period during which the maps, zoning bylaw text, and Flood Insurance Study Report will be presented to the Town Council for adoption.
 - The Town expects the flood-mapping project to be concluded by the summer of 2022.
- Sheltering:
 - Craig's Doors is operating its new Congregate site at the Lutheran Church up to a maximum number is 23 guests.
 - University Motor Lodge is at capacity with 28-31 guests.
 - The Town is committing \$1 million for permanent shelter/supportive housing and \$1 million for affordable housing. We continue to have productive conversations with the leaders of Craig’s Doors about possible locations.
 - The Town is building a new rest room for Craigs Doors in the trailer they own and operate on the lot at the First Baptist Church.

- Craig’s Doors has secured the former VFW building on Main Street as a day shelter for those experiencing homelessness. Town officials (inspections, fire, etc.) have worked with Craig’s Doors to get the building inspected and ready for occupancy. This is a very positive development for our community.
 - The Town’s Health Department holds regular vaccination clinics at Craig’s Doors shelter.
 - The Town’s Health Department has been providing Craig’s Doors with rapid antigen tests so that staff and guests are forewarned if someone presents has COVID-19.
 - Conservation:
 - Fearing Brook Floodplain Creation Project: The Town received a grant of \$227,606 from the State Nonpoint Source Pollution Competitive Grant program. Work has been progressing and is nearing completion.
- Community Services:
 - Senior Center:
 - Welcome: We welcomed new Director Haley Bolton on January 3rd.
 - Thanks: I want to especially thank Temporary Director Helen MacMellon has been remarkable at managing the Senior Center’s activities and continuing her important social work. She has been managing two jobs under extenuating conditions and I thank her for her hard work.
 - Age and Dementia-Friendly Community:
 - The Town is working with staff from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to achieve designation as an Age and Dementia-Friendly Community.
 - Co-led by staff from the Senior Center and Planning Department, the Town is forming a working group to provide oversight of this work. The working group will assist with community engagement strategies and development of a community assessment and action plan. The working group will meet monthly throughout 2022.
 - The Town held a kick-off working group meeting on January 20th that attracted over 40 participants. The meeting provided an overview of the project, project timeline, and to answer any general questions.
 - The Town will distribute surveys targeted to older adults in Amherst and caregivers to assess the areas where older residents may be facing the greatest challenges. The survey will be posted online and will also be available in hard copy form.
 - The working group will host a series of listening sessions to engage seniors. The public forum topics are based on the domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. This model, developed by the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative, combines the eight domains of livability model developed by the World Health Organization for assessing communities’ ability to support an aging population and the Ten Domains of a Dementia Friendly Community. The model includes elements of the physical and social environments that are key determinants of whether people can remain healthy, independent and autonomous as they age.

- The Town has developed a site on **Engage Amherst** where people can check for updates and engagement opportunities, which can be found here: www.engageamherst.org/agefriendly
- Health: See above.
- Recreation:
 - The Recreation Department and Business Improvement District are working in partnership to bring back the ice sculptures on the Town Common February 18-26 which will be a drive-through experience. Private funding will support this much-needed break from winter.
- Sustainability:
 - CAARP: The Town is seeking funding to develop and implement an innovative rental efficiency policy, one of the five priority initiatives in the Town’s Climate Action Adaptation and Resiliency Plan.

Delegated Authority:

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons:
 - February 18-26, 2022: Winter Ice Sculpture by Amherst Recreation Department and Amherst Business Improvement District (North and South Common)
 - May 18-20, 2022: Plant Sale by Garden Club of Amherst (South Common)
 - August 22-29, 2022: Community Fair by Amherst Rotary Club (South Common)
- Short-Term Parking Requests:
 - November 27, December 4, 11, and 18, 2021: Free Parking Downtown by Amherst Business Improvement District
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures: None

Major Capital Projects:

- Jones Library: The Jones Library Building Committee held its first meeting this week. Its next meeting will be January 12th.
- DPW Building/Fire Building: Staff are exploring multiple options for a new site for the Department of Public Works.
- Schools:
 - The Amherst Elementary School Project is making fast progress with the selection of DiNisco Design to lead the design of the project. The Town’s [Elementary School Building Committee \(ESBC\)](#) will be working with DiNisco and Anser Advisors, the Owner’s Project Manager.
 - The goal for the project is to create a high-performance elementary school that supports excellent child-centered education, meets the diverse educational needs of the Town’s children in daylight-filled spaces, uses the outdoors for education and play, and does so in a cost-effective “green” building that incorporates “net zero” energy principles.
 - In order to share project information, a [new webpage](#) (noted above) has launched that will provide information and updates about the project.
 - The Building Committee held a joint meeting with the School Committee on December 14th where the design team was introduced to the School Committee.
 - Amherst Elementary School Educational Visioning Group (EVG) — a group of administrators, teachers, School Building Committee members, parents and community

partners—will participate in two Educational Visioning Workshops run by New Vista Design and DiNisco Design.

- Each workshop will be a collaborative virtual session designed to inform the elementary school feasibility study that has been awarded to the town of Amherst by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA).
- Participants will be led through a step-by-step visioning process aimed at capturing their best thinking about Amherst elementary schools’ current and future educational goals and priorities, building on previous visioning work done by the district, and exploring best practices and possibilities in innovative school facility design.
- The workshops are designed to be highly participatory, engaging, and informative.
- The educational and architectural goals set during these workshops will have a direct and tangible impact on the design approach and features of the new school facility.
- The meetings will be recorded and posted to the Elementary School Building Committee (ESBC) website at <https://www.amherst-school-project.com> which will also accept feedback and comments.

Projects Update:

- Dog Park: The work on the dog park has concluded for the season. Increased costs were identified and a request for additional funds was approved by the Town Council.
- North Common Restoration/Main Street Parking Lot: Staff are developing the plans. We will be convening regular public meetings of stakeholders to ensure all opinions and views are heard.
- Hickory Ridge: The parking lot has been reconfigured to accommodate use during the winter. Details on the sale continue to be negotiated and finalized. We are looking forward to announcing the closing of the transaction
- North Amherst Library:
 - The Jones Library Building Committee held its first meeting.
 - The Town has contracted with Colliers to be the Owner’s Project Manager for the Library.
 - The Building Committee will be voting on the architect at its next meeting.
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant: Town staff presented the 25% plans to the Town Council at its meeting on November 29th.
- Solar on the Landfill:
 - Construction work on the North Landfill has begun, along with the fence around the South Landfill. The work will be able to continue through most of the winter.
- Belchertown Road/East Street School:
 - Town issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) 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
 - Two proposals were received November 19th. A committee reviewed the proposals to ensure they are compliant with the RFP and submitted a recommendation to me for the award. I met with the review committee and we are following up on questions I had prior to awarding the bid.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- February 7th – Town Council meeting
- February 12th – Town Council retreat
- February 21st – Presidents Day holiday
- February 28th – Town Council meeting
- March 7th – Town Council meeting
- March 21st – Town Council meeting
- April 4th – Town Council meeting
- April 18th – Patriots Day holiday
- April 25th – Town Council meeting

January 18, 2022

Dear UMass Amherst Community,

In advance of the upcoming spring semester and the return of our students from winter break, campus staff and administrators have been engaged in extensive planning and preparation to manage the impact of COVID-19 and allow us to move ahead with in-person teaching, learning and research activities.

Having implemented a universal vaccination requirement, a comprehensive COVID-19 testing regime, and extensive public health protocols, we are looking forward to an in-person spring semester. In making the commitment to an in-person return, I want to assure you that we are vigilantly monitoring the current surge in COVID-19 cases. We do anticipate there will be a significant number of cases among our campus community in the early weeks of the semester, and we all share the concern related to the spread of the Omicron variant. However, we must keep in mind that the current scientific data show that those who are vaccinated and boosted and become infected are generally asymptomatic or experience mild symptoms. Our campus's 97% vaccination rate and booster requirement, coupled with the reduced severity of infection for vaccinated and boosted individuals, significantly diminish the health risks associated with the resumption of on-campus activities.

Assessing How We Function Over the Long Term

The generally mild symptoms of vaccinated and boosted individuals infected with COVID-19 also suggest that the number of positive cases may not be the most meaningful metric to evaluate the status of campus public health. With the prevalence of COVID-19, whether it be Omicron or some future variant, so pervasive, it is time to start considering how, over the long-term, we function as an institution in the context of this new reality. In light of the reduced health risks of COVID-19 among our vaccinated UMass population, tracking case numbers becomes less important as we redouble our focus on the prevention of severe illness and hospitalization.

This shift in focus, however, does not mean that we will let up on our efforts to keep everyone safe, including the most vulnerable members of our community. We will continue to serve the town of Amherst and the surrounding area by providing access to vaccinations and testing, and the extensive public health protocols that have served our campus so well in previous semesters will continue, including masking, vaccination and COVID-19 testing. Our approach to testing, for example, has been one of the most rigorous and effective aspects in our COVID-mitigation efforts. The combination of wastewater testing, adaptive testing and unobserved voluntary testing enables us to continuously analyze the state of the virus on our campus and enact real-time COVID-mitigation measures to keep our campus and the surrounding communities safe. These measures have made the spread of COVID-19 in our classrooms, research labs and workplaces virtually non-existent and have contained the positivity rate on our campus at a level significantly below the rest of the state.

In these last few days of winter break, I urge those of you who are eligible to get your booster shot before returning to campus. As I am sure you know by now, this is a requirement for faculty, staff and students. Also, for students who haven't mailed in your advance test kit, you can email the results of a test obtained elsewhere to testing@umass.edu. Although current modeling suggests that Massachusetts may be at or near the peak of the current surge, we still have a ways to go and vaccines, boosters and testing are the vehicles that will return us to the campus life that we all cherish so much.

Key aspects of campus COVID-19 protocols, which can be found in detail on the [UMass Spring 2022 website](#), include:

Vaccines and Boosters

- [All eligible UMass Amherst students are required to receive a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot](#). You can make an appointment by identifying a location through the [Massachusetts COVID-19 vaccine finder](#) or [Vaccines.gov](#). The Public Health Promotion Center (PHPC) vaccine clinic on the lower level of the Campus Center will also be open. [Please visit the clinic's website to book an appointment](#). If you

contracted COVID-19 during winter break, per CDC guidance you can receive a booster shot once your symptoms are resolved and your isolation period is complete.

- [All eligible faculty and staff are required to get a vaccine booster.](#)

Testing

- [All UMass Amherst students are expected to undergo an advance COVID-19 test](#) prior to the start of spring classes on Jan. 25, 2022. Students who fail to undergo advance testing should, upon their return from winter break, promptly pick up an unobserved test kit at the PHPC in the Campus Center.
- Students who did not pick up PCR test kits on campus before leaving for break and live in the Greater Boston area have access to self-administered, unobserved COVID-19 testing on the Mount Ida Campus (100 Carlson Avenue, Newton). You can pick up a test kit at Campus Security (Building 17) on the Mount Ida Campus. There is a drop box there as well for you to return your test. We recommend you drop off your test on Wednesday or Thursday before noon because test kits are picked up every Thursday afternoon for processing.
- As a final reminder, all faculty and staff should take a COVID-19 PCR test by today, Jan. 18. Unobserved test kits are available at the PHPC in the Campus Center [and can be dropped off at a designated test collection site.](#)
- Wastewater testing and adaptive testing will continue to be employed as key components of our full population screening approach. The combination of wastewater, adaptive and voluntary testing using sensitive PCR-based tests far exceeds what can be accomplished performing only individual surveillance testing because of its frequency and comprehensive nature.

Face Coverings

[Face coverings are required in all campus buildings](#) regardless of vaccination status. We strongly urge you to use a high-grade mask, such as KN95, KF94, or N95, or double-mask. Cloth masks should be used only when double masking with a close-fitting surgical mask underneath. While UMass Amherst community members are expected to supply their own masks, the university recently placed a large order for KN95 masks, which will be available to faculty, staff and students who are not able to obtain their own.

Events

Campus events will continue as planned. Organizers are asked to ensure compliance with current campus masking and vaccination requirements. Consideration should be given to reduce consumption of food and beverage to limit periods where participants may be unmasked.

Self-Monitoring

Everyone must continue to monitor themselves for [COVID-19 symptoms](#) every day before coming to campus. If you feel unwell, stay home. [Testing is free](#) and available at the PHPC. All students, faculty and staff should seek COVID-19 tests when exhibiting [COVID symptoms](#).

Isolation

On-campus isolation space is extremely limited and will be made available to residential students only in extenuating circumstances. In most cases students should be prepared to return home for isolation. In the event that positive cases quickly escalate and exhaust our supply of isolation rooms, alternative isolation guidance may be issued.

I am grateful for your patience, perseverance and commitment to UMass. I look forward to a safe, healthy and productive spring semester.

Sincerely,

Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy

