



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: February 4, 2022
Re: Town Manager Report for February 7, 2022

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

COVID-19

- Case Counts:
 - Case counts have stabilized. The Health Director continues to monitor local, regional, and State data as we manage through this phase of the pandemic. The Health Director utilizes the layered public health strategies (vaccines, testing, masks, modifying social behaviors) as a way to manage each phase of the pandemic.
 - The Town updates the public dashboard daily during the week, so please feel free to check here <https://www.amherstcovid19.org/home>
 - The Town has links to the websites of all three institutions of higher education here: <https://www.amherstcovid19.org/schools>
- Bangs Community Center: The Bangs Community Center will reopen its doors in the very near future so that people can access Town services more easily. The building will observe basic business hours so residents and others can access the Senior Center and Health Department directly.

University/College Relations

- University of Massachusetts:
 - Classes began January 25th.
 - Strategic Partnership Agreement: Active discussions with the University for a Successor Strategic Partnership Agreement continue.
- Amherst College:
 - Classes begin February 7th.
 - Strategic Partnership Agreement: Active discussions for a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the College continue.
- Hampshire College:

- Classes began on January 26th.
- Strategic Partnership Agreement: Active discussions with the College about its needs and the Town's needs continue as the College reviews its options for its assets.

Racial Equity

- **Reparations:**
 - 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.
- **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 two public forums on the CRESS program on January 20th and 22nd.
 - The CRESS Implementation Manager has been hired with an expected start date of February 7th.
 - The interview team is reviewing applicants for the CRESS Director position.
 - The Town is participating in the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government's Government Performance Lab Community of Practice meetings. The Town's consultant's report [The Amherst Community Responder Report](#) is being featured. Prepared by Law Enforcement Action Partnership in November of 2021 the report was shared by the Town with the larger Community of Practice group. Of particular interest to the group was the fact that, "It contains a robust set of recommendations about call types for alternative response, training and staffing. Relevant to our last session, the report notably contains an analysis for staffing needs utilizing call volume data by day/time. It also contains sample evaluation questions for the Amherst pilot." It was noted by the organizers that, "It's so comprehensive and the recommendations around staffing and training are some of the most robust I've seen thus far in a preliminary analysis." Kudos to the Community Safety Working Group and our Implementation Team for their hard work.
- **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 website can be found here: <https://www.amherst-school-project.com/>
 - Educational Visioning: Visioning workshops will be held virtually on **February 17th** at 6:30 p.m.
 - Community Forum: Community forums will be held virtually on **March 2nd** at 6:30 p.m.
- Community Chats:
 - We are reviving the Community Chats. We initiated the Chats in April of 2020 and produced over 50 during 2020 and 2021. They are all available on the Town’s YouTube channel here: [Community Chats on YouTube](#)
 - The next Community Chat will be on Thursday, **February 17th at 12:00 noon**. The Chat will focus on the Elementary School Building project with guests ESBC chair Cathy Schoen and School Committee chair Allison McDonald.
- 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.”

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 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:
 - There has been an explosion of potholes in our Town roads as a result of the freeze/thaw cycles of the winter.
 - Town staff will be making a presentation on the Town’s roads at an upcoming TSO Committee meeting. We will also be discussing sidewalk paving at this meeting.
- 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 Drake: The new downtown performance venue – The Drake – is looking to open in May. The Downtown Amherst Foundation has been successful in raising nearly 70% of its ambitious \$1.3m fundraising goal.
- Performance Shell: 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:
 - “First Weekend in March”: The Town and University are preparing for the possibility of events that have historically occurred on the “First Weekend in March”, March 5th. The University will maintain restrictions on visitors to residence halls and the Town and University will determine appropriate staffing levels in advance of the weekend.
 - 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:
 - 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.
 - 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.
- 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.
 - We are now awaiting the Secretary of State’s update of the Voter Registration Information System (VRIS).
 - The Town will then review the Secretary’s work to confirm its information with our data to ensure all voters are assigned to the correct precinct.
 - Once this is updated, all residents of the Town will receive a mailed notice of their precinct and voting location. All residents will have new voting precincts due to the renumbering of the precincts (from precincts being numbered 1-10 to precincts being numbered 1a, 1b...5a, 5b). We hope to do this mailing in March or April.
 - The Town Council will be asked to review and confirm the voting locations in the near future.
- 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:
 - Community Development Block Grant (CDBG): The Town was awarded an \$825,000 grant from the Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant fund. These funds will be allocated after reviewing recommendations by the CDBG Advisory Committee. Information on the projects being funded can be found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/3632/2021-CDBG-Recommended-Proposals>
 - Inclusionary Zoning: Planning staff estimate that approximately 20 new affordable units will be produced through the Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw. This estimate is based on two projects: 11-13 East Pleasant Street and the planned expansion of Colonial Village. 11-13 East Pleasant has been permitted and will have 90 total units with 11 affordable units. Colonial Village plans to add 90-100 units this spring, which would include an additional 11-12 affordable units.
 - 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. This work will be done after we exit from winter.
 - 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.
- 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.
 - Charging Stations:
 - The Town was awarded a \$43,000 grant from the State Department of Environmental Protection's Electric Vehicle Incentive Program - Direct Current Fast Charging Grant program.
 - The station with two ports will be located in the Town's Kellogg Street Parking lot.
 - The station will join the seven Level 2 charging stations with 13 ports available to the public that are owned by the Town.
 - Three stations are at Boltwood Garage – one upper level and one lower level (dual ports); one port available to the public on the town's dedicated dual port charging station also located in the lower level of Boltwood garage
 - Pray St – one dual head station
 - Kellogg Street lot – one dual head station
 - Town Hall – parking lot has a dual head station
 - Middle School – one dual head station
 - Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) Update:
 - The three communities (Amherst, Northampton and Pelham) have temporarily shifted from entering into a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) to entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in order to move the CCA process forward – specifically to enable signing a contract with a consultant that will oversee development of the CCA.
 - We have conducted a procurement process and the consultant has selected. We are now moving forward to identifying the most appropriate pathway to engage their services.
 - Upon legal review of the JPA, questions arose that will require further consideration. So as not to prolong the CCA process any further, the communities are finalizing a draft MOU.

- Pelham’s next Select Board meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 7th at which time they will review and hopefully approve the draft for legal review.
 - The Northampton and Amherst representatives will submit the draft to the Northampton Mayor and Amherst Town Manager after review by the Town Attorney.
 - The goal is to have the three communities sign the MOU and enter into a contract with the consultant in early March.
 - Development of the CCA will take at least a year, which is usually driven by the Department of Public Utilities’ review of the Agreement.
 - During this time, the consultant will be working with all three communities to conduct outreach efforts and engage and educate residents and businesses about the CCA.
- Sheltering:
 - Craig’s Doors is operating its new Congregate site at the Lutheran Church up to a maximum number is 23 guests.
 - The Church has been very generous during the cold weather to allow the building to be used 24 hours/day so guests can remain safe, warm, and fed.
 - 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.
 - Craig’s Doors is operating the former VFW building on Main Street as a day shelter for those experiencing homelessness.
 - 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:
 - The Director of Senior Services attended a District 3 meeting with the District Councilors.
 - The Town has developed a site on **Engage Amherst** site for the Age-Friendly and Dementia-Friendly initiative where people can check for updates and engagement opportunities. It 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.

- With the cancelation of WinterFest, the Recreation staff have developed additional programming to support families during the February school break.
 - There will be two mini community gatherings over February School Vacation Week. They will be communicating that it is “safe to come out and play” that will allow the staff to continue pandemic dialogue with the broader community regarding changing health restrictions. The events will include free sledding at Cherry Hill Golf Course on Tuesday, February 22nd and Thursday, February 24th from 12 pm-3 pm that will include Giveaways and Wild Life Scavenger Hunt.
- Other Recreation Department activities include:
 - Sandlot Volleyball: Tuesdays 7:00pm – 9:00pm. Middle School gym.
 - Sandlot Basketball: Sundays 8:00 – 11:30am. High School gym.
 - Sandlot Baseball: Sundays 4:00pm – 6:00pm. Middle School baseball field.
 - Coed Softball: Tuesdays & Thursdays starting at 6:00pm. Starts May 10th.

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)
 - August 22-29, 2022: Community Fair by Amherst Rotary Club (South Common)
 - May 18-20, 2023: Plant Sale by Garden Club of Amherst (South Common)
- Short-Term Parking Requests: None
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures: None

Major Capital Projects:

- Jones Library: The Jones Library Building Committee is meeting every two weeks. Library Trustee Austin Sarat was elected to chair the committee and Christine Gray-Mullin was elected as vice-chair.
- 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.
 - In order to share project information, a [new webpage](#) (noted above) has launched that will provide information and updates about the project.

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. We are waiting for the decision on a major grant that will have substantial impact on the funding of this project. I anticipate work will begin in the Fall.
- 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: This project will be out to bid shortly.
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant: Town staff have been working with property owners to tweak the design to minimize the impact on neighboring properties.
- 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 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