



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: March 3, 2022
Re: Town Manager Report for March 7, 2022

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

COVID-19

- **Update:** The Health Director is expected to make a decision on requiring masks prior to March 10th. The Board of Health will meet that evening to interpret COVID statistics and decision points. Updated data will be reviewed at that meeting and public health strategies will be decided.
- **Stop-the-Spread Testing:** The State Department of Public Health has decided the Stop-the-Spread Testing program will downsize to 11 sites, effective April 1, 2022. The testing site in the Town of Amherst hosted by the University of Massachusetts will discontinue operation as a Stop-the-Spread site. Eleven 11 sites will continue to offer PCR testing, free to any Massachusetts resident, with no insurance or ID necessary. There are only two sites in Western Massachusetts, both in Springfield.
- 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>

University/College Relations

- **University of Massachusetts:**
 - Strategic Partnership Agreement: Active discussions with the University for a Successor Strategic Partnership Agreement continue.
- **Amherst College:**
 - Strategic Partnership Agreement: Active discussions with the College for a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the College continue.
- **Hampshire College:**

- Strategic Partnership Agreement: Discussions with the College for a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the College have begun.
- The College has received a number of proposals to develop the land they own adjacent to Atkins Market. They are currently reviewing these development proposals.

Racial Equity

- **Reparations:**
 - The Town has contracted 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 will begin in mid-March and end several weeks later.
- **Community Responders Program:** The new Director has been appointed and is on the Town Council’s agenda for its consideration. If approved, he will begin work on March 21st.
- **DEI Department:** The interview team has begun the review of candidates for the Director position.
- **CSSJC:** Interviews for the Community Safety and Social Justice Committee were held this week.

Outreach and Advocacy

- **Swim Team – State Champs!:** The Amherst Regional Public School high school Women's Swim and Dive Team won the State championship! To honor this great accomplishment, the School District will be holding an indoor parade and then meeting in the gymnasium to hold a celebration. Parents/guardians of team members, along with Town Councilors and School Committee members, are welcome to attend!



- **School Award:** Amherst Regional Public Schools Athletic Director Victoria Stewart was named recipient of the Massachusetts Secondary Schools Athletic Directors Association (MSSADA) Theodore “Ted” Danko District A Award which is presented to “an athletic administrator with 3-5 years’ experience who has exemplified the highest standards of their profession and has made significant contributions to their school and community.” Congratulations, Victoria!

- **MMA Committees:** Three’s Company! The Town has a strong presence on policy committees of the Massachusetts Municipal Association. The Town has members on three of the five MMA policy committees:
 - Councilor Steinberg is on the Fiscal Policy Committee,
 - Councilor Hanneke serves on the Municipal and Regionalization Policy Committee, and
 - I serve on the Public Works, Transportation and Public Utilities Policy Committee.
 - Assistant Superintendent of Public Works Amy Rusiecki also serves as a technical consultant to the Public Works, Transportation, and Public Utilities Policy Committee.
- **Massachusetts Municipal Councilors Association (MMCA):** The MMCA is holding a statewide dinner on March 9th at 5:00 p.m. in Waltham. Mass Inc. Polling President Steve Koczela will be the speaker. This event is free and Town Councilors may register here: [MMCA Dinner](#)
- **ICMA Conference:** I and Police Captain Gabe Ting will be speaking at the International City Management Association (ICMA) Regional conference on April 7th. Out session topic is titled: “Organizational Change in Policing”
- **Elementary School Building:** Community Forum: Community forums will be held virtually on **March 9th** at 6:30 p.m.
- **Community Chats:** The next Community Chat will be on March 25th (a Friday) at 12:00 noon and feature a discussion about the Jones Library Building with special guests Austin Sarat, chair of both the Jones Library Trustees and the Jones Library Building Committee and Library Director Sharon Sharry.
- **Recognition:** Communications Manager Brianna Sunryd was recognized by the International City/County Management Association as one of the “Women to Know – The Next Generation in Local Government”! We are fortunate to have leaders in our community who are recognized for their leadership skills and commitment to public service.
- **Recordings of Meetings:**
 - We have established a system to ensure that all meetings that have been recorded on Zoom are uploaded to the web in a timely manner. Every Friday, I.T. staff will upload all meetings from the previous week to the Town’s YouTube channel.
 - In 2021, our most popular playlists were (note: Town

WOMEN TO KNOW

**The Next Generation
in Local Government**

What is your biggest accomplishment?
I'm hopeful that my biggest accomplishment is somewhere in the future still. For now, I am extremely proud of the work I have been leading in my organization around increasing public participation and improving the civic experience for our community members through technology and design thinking. Making improvements to the quality of the community's experience with their government is a challenging, tall order, but for me is the most rewarding. Even small system or process improvements can contribute to the bigger picture. I make it my work to discover these opportunities to bring us closer to our goals.

Tell us about a woman or women who currently inspire you.
I am a newer member of our state municipal association's Women Leading Government committee and each time we meet I'm so motivated by the membership of this group. The women on the committee are all trailblazers in local government here in Massachusetts and are committed to elevating other women in the profession through trainings and networking opportunities. They say a rising tide lifts all boats and this group of women works hard to make opportunities for the rest of us in our field.

What would you tell young women who are just starting in the profession?
I am lucky enough to get to do a lot of work with students who aspire to work in public administration. I often tell some of these young women who are just starting out that there is no place like local government to really learn how stuff works. And I mean all the stuff! As young people in the profession, they'll often be tasked with figuring out new technologies or researching emerging issues. This makes local government the ideal chance to become a subject matter expert on topics you may never have been exposed to. I'd emphasize that they are the next generation of change makers and how this is the best time to get started in local government, as the opportunities and needs are both ample. Lastly, I'd tell them to never apologize for their strengths, skills, or professional achievements.

What is your superpower?
I would say my superpower is empathy. I am always thinking about how a resident or staff member perceives a problem or a process from their own perspective. This is always my first step when approaching the creation of a solution or a policy. Since at the core our purpose is the public, this mindset has served me very well in centering our community members and team in everything we do as a government.

*** Brianna L. Sunryd, MPP
Communications Manager,
Community Participation Officer
Amherst, Massachusetts**

What sparked your interest in working in local government?
A stint as a work study student during my undergraduate studies, in the same community where I now serve, really gave me that initial exposure to local government. Before that, I had been on track to join the federal government ranks. My proximity to the community impact of the programs I was working on was like nothing else I had ever experienced at the time. I hadn't known I wanted to help build and improve communities as my profession until I got to the chance to do it. I was hooked after that. It has informed the rest of my career path since.

*** Chantal C. Gaines, MPP, MUP
Deputy City Manager
Palo Alto, California**

What sparked your interest in working in local government?
I am a proud native of Flint, Michigan,

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Council meetings are recorded and managed by Amherst Media):

- Elementary School Building Committee
- Community Chats
- Community Safety Working Group
- Planning Board
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- So far in 2022, our most popular playlists have been:
 - Elementary School Building Committee
 - African Heritage Reparation Assembly
 - Planning Board
 - Jones Library Building Committee
 - Board of Health

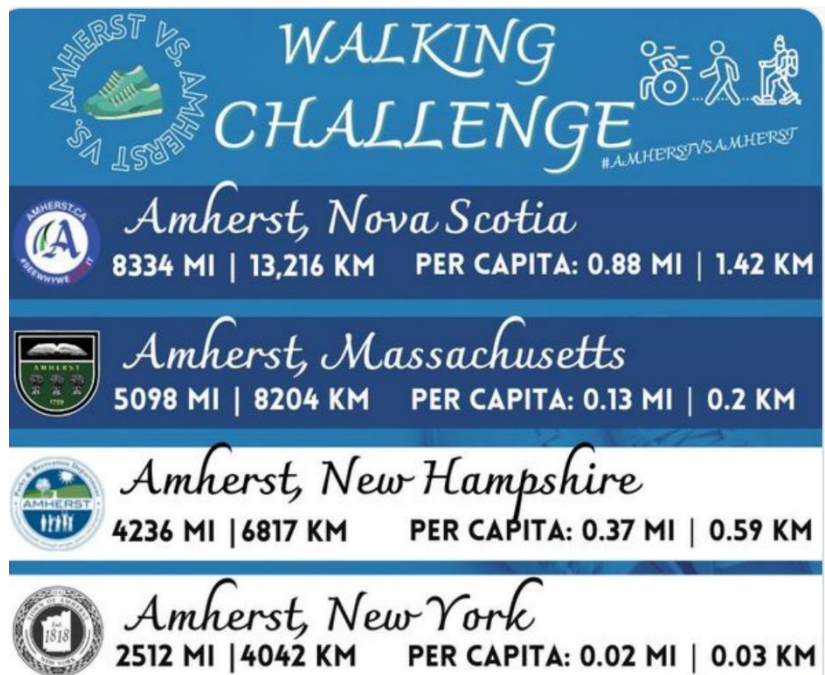
- Walking Challenge: The Town came in second in the walking challenge by the other Amhersts in New York, New Hampshire, and Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia blew us all away, but our Amherst came in second! Thanks to all who participated by recording the miles you walked.

In the Wings

- Sewer Regulations: Updated and revised sewer regulations are being prepared and will be scheduled to be presented to the Town Council at an upcoming meeting.

Department Updates

- Finance: The Finance Department and Town Manager are dedicating many hours to reviewing capital and operating budgets with departments.
- Information Technology: The I.T. Department continues to roll out new, digital phones. The last departments to be transferred our Police and Fire.
- Public Works:
 - The Tree Warden has determined that the Merry Maple on the North Common is beyond repair and will need to be taken down. I anticipate a public hearing on the decision in the coming months.
 - There has been an explosion of potholes in our Town roads as a result of the freeze/thaw cycles of the winter.
 - The State Legislature is considering two bills, each of which would provide \$100 million for grants to municipalities. One grant would be an addition to the existing Chapter 90 funds. The other grant would be for a winter recovery assistance program. Funds could be



used for projects including the rehabilitation, reconstruction, resurfacing or preservation of roadways. Grant funds could also be used for the repair or replacement of traffic control devices, signage, guardrail, storm grates, road striping or painting.

- 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.
- I recently signed a contract with a surveying company to survey a substantial part of East Pleasant Street for a new sidewalk. The surveying and research will take about 12 weeks. The survey and research will help establish the scope of a construction project and impact on neighboring properties. We hope to obtain costs estimates, as well.
- Economic Development:
 - Pleasantrees:
 - The Cannabis Control Commission approved a license for Pleasantrees, Inc. to operate out of its location at 422 Amity Street. This is the old Rafters building. Here is a link to the executive summary of the establishment:
<https://masscannabiscontrol.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/FL-XS-PLEASANTREES-MR282036-v.3-1.pdf>
 - The Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce will host a Grand Opening Day and Ribbon Cutting on Saturday, March 5, 2022, 12:00p.m. at 422 Amity Street.
- 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.
 - Pelham: I have had very preliminary discussions with the Town of Pelham about cooperating on public safety issues.
 - Fire:
 - Fire Chief Legislation: H. 4356, the legislation that the Town Council submitted to permit the Fire Chief to continue employment beyond his 65th birthday, completed a hearing in front of the Joint Committee on Public Safety on February 11th.
- Town Clerk:
 - Reprecincting:
 - The reprecincting maps prepared by the Town and submitted to the State have been approved by the State.
 - We have received the Secretary of State's update of the Voter Registration Information System (VRIS). Town Clerk and I.T. staff reviewed the update for accuracy and returned the file to the State. The State will make the changes in the resident/voter database, and then we'll be able to get the census form mailing out.
 - Once we receive final approval from the Secretary of State's office, 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 expect to do this mailing in April.

- The Town Council will be asked to review and confirm the voting locations at an upcoming meeting.
- 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 continues numerous ongoing collective bargaining negotiations including preparing for collective bargaining for FY23 and addressing impact bargaining rights of the employees as we discuss ARPA premium pay and introduce the new CRESS Community Responder program and Police Resident Oversight Board.
 - 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:
 - Affordable Housing:
 - East Street School/Belchertown Road: The review team has completed its analysis of the two competing bids to develop these two parcels. A financial analysis was conducted with the support of a technical advisor at the Massachusetts Housing Partnership. A bid award is imminent.
 - 132 Northampton Road: Valley CDC is preparing to begin construction of 28 small studio apartments for low-income individuals, including more than a third that will be set aside for those who have recently been homeless, in March. Named “East Gables”, the development will build on the site acquired by the agency three years ago, and which received a comprehensive permit from the Town in November 2020. A recent newspaper article reported a significant escalation of prices of about 20%, which will necessitate seeking additional funds to move the project forward.
 - Planning:
 - Parklets Grant: The Town was awarded a Regional Economic Development Organization Grant (REDO Grant) for \$80,750 to install two ADA accessible parklets in downtown Amherst in order to create permanent outdoor dining/retail spaces. Each 36 foot long parklet would take over two on-street parking spaces in front of a restaurant or retail shop. The adjacent sidewalk to each parklet location will be maintained as a pedestrian pathway. This grant is administered through the MA Office of Business Development and Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts (EDC). The selected sites, if intended to be permanent, would be reviewed with the Town Council.
 - Making It Public Grant: The Town was recently selected as one of eight municipalities in Massachusetts to participate in Making it Public, a free training designed to equip administrators to strengthen local capacity to support, create, and promote public art. At the conclusion of the training, participants will have the tools needed to create their own Call for Temporary Public Art and will be eligible to receive a \$10,000 grant from the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA). The two Town representatives who will participate in the program are William Kaizen, Chair of the Public Art Commission, and Maureen Pollock, the Town Planner. Making it Public in MA is a dual-track professional development series,

designed and facilitated by Forecast Public Art, to foster more equitable opportunities for public art making while also preparing more artists to respond to calls for public art across Massachusetts.

- Flood Maps:
 - The Town staff made its presentation to the Town Council on February 28th. This project 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.
 - On Monday, 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:
 - Comments: Attached to this report are the comments submitted on behalf of the Town on planning for natural gas.
 - Solar Study: I submitted a charge for the working group that will be studying solar siting for the Council's comments.
 - 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. The CCA Advisory Working Group will continue drafting the JPA while the CCA effort is under development. The goal is to have the JPA established in time for submission of the draft CCA agreement to the DPU.
 - 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. Development of the MOU decided as the best option to engage the consultant with Amherst serving as Lead Community.
 - 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.
 - The Northampton and Amherst representatives will submit the draft to the Northampton Mayor and Amherst Town Manager after review by the Town Attorney. Draft is currently under review by Northampton's City Solicitor and by the Town's Attorney, who is representing both the Towns of Amherst and Pelham with full disclosure and agreement of all parties.

- The goal is to have the three communities sign the MOU and enter into a contract with the consultant in 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:
- Lutheran Church:
 - Craig's Doors is operating its Congregate site at the Lutheran Church up to a maximum number is 23 guests.
 - The Church continues to permit the building to be used 24 hours/day so guests can remain safe, warm, and fed.
 - University Motor Lodge: The motel is at capacity with 34 guests.
 - Unitarian Church: The Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst is providing space at its location at 121 North Pleasant Street as an overflow shelter with a focus on sheltering women. There are 14 beds available at this location.
 - VFW: Craig's Doors is operating the former VFW building on Main Street as a day shelter for those experiencing homelessness. It is not getting much use, with the other two shelters available for guests during the day.
 - Town Support:
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - Census: The Three County Continuum of Care at Community Action Pioneer Valley is in the process of conducting its annual "Point-In-Time Count" of all homeless persons in the region including people living outdoors, people in shelter or transitional housing programs, people who are couch surfing, people who are experiencing homelessness but staying in a program or institution temporarily, and a variety of other settings where someone may be without a safe place to stay. They conduct this count annually in order to get a better understanding of the amount of unmet need in our communities. The count began on February 23rd and will continue until March 2nd.
- 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:
 - Livable Amherst Community Survey Age & Dementia Friendly Community Project:
 - The Town is working with staff from Pioneer Valley Planning Commission who are assisting with the project. Additionally, I formed 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 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

Delegated Authority:

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons (Section 1a of the Town Council Policy):
 - 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 (Section 2a of the Town Council Policy): None
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures (Section 3b of the Town Council Policy):
 - April 24, 2022 – Big Brothers Big Sisters for annual Daffodil Run includes reserved metered parking on Boltwood Avenue and use of roads for 10k and 5k races including Main Street, North Whitney Street, Strong Street, East Pleasant Street, and North Pleasant Street starting and ending at the Town Common
- Placement of Road and Temporary Signs (Section 3d of the Town Council Policy):
 - Stop sign on Potwine Lane at West Street
 - Yield signs (4) on cut-throughs on South Amherst Common between Shays Street and South East Street
- Anticipated:
 - The Town Council will review a request from the Amherst Farmers Market for the 2022 season at its March 21st meeting.
 - The Town Council will review a request from the Amherst Mobile Market for the 2022 season at its March 21st meeting.
 - The Rotary Club’s Community Fair will be held on the Town Common the week of August 22-28.

Major Capital Projects:

- Jones Library: The Jones Library Building Committee is meeting every two weeks.
- DPW Building/Fire Building: Staff are exploring multiple options for a new site for the Department of Public Works.
- Schools: The Elementary School Building Committee is meeting every two weeks. Updates can be found on the project’s [new webpage](#)

Projects Update:

- Dog Park: No updates.
- North Common Restoration/Main Street Parking Lot: No updates.

- Hickory Ridge: We are very close to closing on this important piece of property. The closing will bring to the Town ownership of about 150 acres of land, much of it environmentally sensitive, at a bargain sale rate. Included on the site will be over six megawatts of solar arrays.
- North Amherst Library: Bids are out. Pre-bid conference was held on site and there seemed to be a fair amount of interest. When bids are submitted, we will review for compliance with procurement procedures and the requirements of the bid. Then we will review the bids with the advisory committee.
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant: Additional design work by the Public Works Town Engineer has addressed most of the concerns of the abutting property owners. Plans continue to be developed.
- Solar on the Landfill: The work will be able to continue through most of the winter.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- March 21st – Town Council meeting
- April 4th – Town Council meeting
- April 18th – Patriots Day holiday
- April 25th – Town Council meeting
- May – Memorial Day holiday
- June 19th – Juneteenth celebration
- June 20th – Juneteenth holiday

March 1, 2022

Feedback from the Town of Amherst on the Future of Gas, February 2022

For submission via the comment portal <https://thefutureofgas.com/contact>.

The Town of Amherst is grateful for the opportunity to offer the following comments on the Future of Gas planning. We regret that our feedback could not be sent earlier in the process, when we could have had more influence, but we were only given notice by Berkshire Gas in late January 2022.

Our ideal vision for the future of gas usage in buildings is that it will be ramped down to zero. That is what is needed for all fossil fuel use according to the IPCC, the state [2050 Decarbonization Roadmap](#) and Amherst's own [Climate Action, Adaptation and Resilience Plan](#). We cannot wait to start reducing greenhouse gas emissions from methane, which is the main component in natural gas, because methane [causes 80 times more powerful](#) impacts as a greenhouse gas than CO2 over a twenty year period. In the next twenty years, we must swiftly reduce gas emissions to have any hope of leaving a healthy climate to our children and grandchildren.

We are already concerned about the health and justice issues associated with the current gas system. [Environmental justice communities already are exposed to more leaks](#) on their streets than other communities are. As recently reported in the New York Times (Raymond Zhong, Jan. 27, 2022), gas stoves cause significant indoor air quality issues, [even when not in use](#). Children are especially vulnerable to the [toxins](#) in leaking gas and emissions from stoves, which increase children's risk of developing [respiratory diseases by 20%](#).

The decarbonization of our buildings must be accomplished through a systemic transition to renewable energy sources for heating, cooking, and hot water. Natural gas piped under our streets and into our homes and workplaces is [prone to leaks](#). Fixing and replacing pipes is an [expensive and futile process](#). We do not think alternative combustible gasses, such as hydrogen and biogas, will work as clean, safe substitutes for the current system. These gas alternatives cannot be manufactured using clean energy until there is a surplus of clean electricity, which means they are not real solutions for retail use in the near future.

Seven years under Berkshire Gas's moratorium, which halted new gas hookups in their Eastern Division, has provided us with a real life experiment in the promise of building electrification. It has led to the private development of some large all-electric, efficient new buildings. We applaud this trend in private development and the Town will be building several major net-zero projects in the next few years.

We would welcome innovative approaches like [geogrid district heat](#) in our town centers and clustered communities. Ground-sourced district heat will be pursued on the university and college campuses in town and we would be interested in extending that effort to our residential and commercial areas. If Berkshire Gas would consider a pilot of this, Amherst would like to discuss the possibilities.

We hope that Berkshire Gas and other local distribution companies will see the benefit of maintaining their customers and workers by changing their business model to selling renewable heating systems instead of unsafe and unhealthy piped gas that is unsustainable in the face of the climate crisis.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide a response on the future of gas and hope that our points made relative to public health, justice, equity and environmental impacts are carefully considered.

Sincerely,
Paul Bockelman,
Town Manager

Laura Draucker,
Chair, Amherst Energy and Climate Action Committee

