



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: March 31, 2022
Re: Town Manager Report for April 4, 2022

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

COVID-19

- **Mask Mandate:** The Health Director and Board of Health lifted the mask requirement for indoor public spaces effective March 10th. While the Town's mask order has been lifted, some people may make the choice to wear a mask. This would include those who are unvaccinated, older, immune-compromised, or who have other underlying conditions that put them at higher risk and those who live with such people, and anyone who wants to reduce their risk of acquiring COVID-19 infection. The Health Director recommends the use of a high-filtration mask like a KN-95 or similar mask.
- **Testing:**
 - **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. This means the testing site in the Town of Amherst hosted by the University of Massachusetts has discontinued operation for community testing. The University-run site will continue to offer tests to students, staff, and affiliates. The Council President, Health Director and I wrote to Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders requesting that the State continue to operate the site in Amherst, at least through May. This request was rejected.
 - **Rapid Antigen Testing:** The State sent the Town an allocation of 6,120 tests (3,060 kits) for a 'month's bridge'. These Rapid Antigen tests are being distributed from the Bangs Center 10:00 – 2:00, Monday through Friday, beginning April 1st and will end when the supply is depleted.
 - **When to Test:** Residents should test themselves after first symptoms. Rapid home tests are readily available. Higher-risk patients with new respiratory symptoms are encouraged to consult their healthcare provider, even if one or two rapid tests are negative. PCR tests are

available at locations in Amherst, Hadley and Northampton and locations can be found here: [COVID-19 Test Site Locator](#) or the new Federal site [COVID.gov](#).

- Vaccines:
 - Vaccination, including one or more boosters, is still one of the most important interventions one can do to protect one's health. During the omicron surge, those who were vaccinated and boosted were 21 times less likely to die from COVID compared to those who were unvaccinated, and seven times less likely to be hospitalized. Vaccination dramatically decreases the chance of developing "long COVID" and confers additional protection from severe disease even in people who have already had COVID.
 - Vaccines are free, safe, and readily available. Free vaccines are offered every Thursday from 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm at the Bangs Community Center. This clinic is open for 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or booster doses. To schedule an appointment, please click here www.amherstcovid19.org/vaccine
 - If you are coming for a 2nd, 3rd, or booster dose, please bring your vaccination record card or other proof of your vaccination.
- Public Gatherings: One of the key strategies for public health safety continues to be to reduce room capacity and improving ventilation and/or air filtration to decrease viral particles in the air and reduces disease risk for any COVID variant or airborne respiratory disease. Town buildings will retain the reduced room capacity limits for the foreseeable future.

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. The Donahue Institute will be presenting the Black/African American census on Monday at the AHRA meeting (3pm).
 - Councilor Miller was invited to participate in the 2022 Reparations Conference at Howard University in Washington, D.C. The theme of the conference is "Understanding the roles of legislators, academia, and attorneys in supporting descendant communities".
 - The Town's Finance Department has established a gift account so that anyone can make a donation for Reparations. Checks may be made out to the Town of Amherst, with "Reparations Gift Account" in the memo line and mailed to the Treasurer/Collector at Town Hall.
- Community Responders Program: The new Director began work on March 21st and already has made a positive impact in Town as he continues to meet people, approve job positions, develops scheduling options, and works through the details of the new department.
- DEI Department: The interview team has begun to review and interview candidates for the Director position. A small list will be recommended to me for final interviews next week.

Outreach and Advocacy

- Cuppa Joe with Paul: We are resuming the in-person Cuppa Joe events. The first one will be on **Friday, April 15th from 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.** at the Bangs Community Center. My special guest

will be Earl Miller, the Town's new Director of Community Responders (CRESS). I will bring coffee and treats to share. Anyone is welcome to stop by for a chat.

- Spring Clean-up:
 - The Community Participation Officers, working with the business and college community are working to hold the Spring Clean-up on Saturday **April 30th from 10am – Noon** with lots of satellite locations all over Town. We will be inviting Town Councilors to participate as site leaders if you are available.
 - The Clean-up event will be followed by a celebration on the Town Commons sponsored by the Business Improvement District and will include magicians, music, food, and drinks for all ages.
- ICMA Conference: Police Captain Gabe Ting and I will be speaking at the International City Management Association (ICMA) Regional conference on April 7th. Out session topic is titled: "Organizational Change in Policing". We are serving on a panel that includes the Police Chiefs from Arlington and Carlisle.
- Community Chats: The last Community Chat was on March 25th and featured 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.
- Public Meetings: I have continued authorizing Town boards and committees to continue meeting virtually through July 15th. We will be working with specific committees and boards to develop the ability to host hybrid meeting with the least amount of staff intervention.
- Antisemitism Summit: I, along with dozens of other municipal chief executives, participated in the "Two Steps Forward against Antisemitism Summit" hosted by the Lappin Foundation.

In the Wings

- Sewer Regulations: Updated and revised sewer regulations are being presented to the Town Council on Monday night.

Department Updates

- Finance: The Finance Department and Town Manager have met multiple times with all departments to review their capital and operating budgets. We are now in the process of finalizing decisions and preparing the actual budget in preparation for presenting to the Town Council on May 2nd.
- Public Works:
 - Street Sweeping: The Department of Public Works has begun sweeping the Main routes and hills that receive the most sand during the winter months. After completing these areas, the DPW will begin sweeping the various sections of town, if all goes well this will start on April 4, 2022.
 - Trees:
 - The Tree Warden has determined that two trees on Sunset Street near the intersection of Fearing Street should be removed. The Public Shade Tree Committee held meetings at the site and recommended that one of the trees not be removed. Members of the neighborhood are opposed to this decision and it removes the decision to the Town Manager.

- 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.
- Roads:
 - Potholes:
 - There has been an explosion of potholes in our Town roads as a result of the freeze/thaw cycles of the winter.
 - We have been informed that the State will be awarding an additional \$351,800 from the Winter Recovery Assistance Program (WRAP) which will support the Town’s work in repairing roads that have suffered so much during the winter. Thanks go to our Legislators for pushing for this important additional funding.
 - Northampton Road: Caracas Construction working on road construction along Northampton Road. This project is part of the Mass Department of Transportation roadway reconstruction project, that extends between University Drive and South Pleasant Street. This work will be a major disruption to local travel. Town staff met with District Councilors to discuss how the work will impact their constituents.
 - Snell Street and University Drive South: The developer of the project at the intersection of Northampton Road and University Drive South will begin construction of a new mini-roundabout at the intersection of University Drive South and Snell Street.
- Survey: I recently signed a contract with a surveying company to survey East Pleasant Street from Olympia Drive to Pine 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:
 - Concerts: The Business Improvement District will again host concerts at Sweetser Park on June 24, July 30, August 19 from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
- Public Safety:
 - 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.
- Town Clerk:
 - Reprecincting:
 - 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 has been asked to review and confirm the voting locations at an upcoming meeting.
 - Dog Licenses: The Town Clerk is reminding dog owners that it's time to obtain their 2022 dog tag and license. The licensing year starts April 1st and ends March 31st of each year. Current tags will expire as of March 31st. State law requires all dogs six months of age or older to be licensed and wearing a tag (MGL c. 140, s. 137).
- Human Resources:
 - We will again be training Town staff in "Alice" training. This training offered by trained police officers prepares Town staff for potential violent situations. This training is available to the Town Council and other committees, if desired.
 - 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 introducing the new CRESS Community Responder program and Police Resident Oversight Board.
- Conservation and Development:
 - Planning:
 - Parklets Grant: The Town and Business Improvement District were awarded a Regional Economic Development Organization Grant (REDO Grant) for \$80,750 to install 2-3ADA accessible parklets in downtown Amherst in order to create 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 Massachusetts Office of Business Development and Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts (EDC).
 - Sustainability: I have finalized the solar bylaw working group and am contacting committees for members.
 - Sheltering:
 - 132 Northampton Road: Valley CDC has begun 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.
- Community Services:
 - Senior Center: The Town is working with staff from Pioneer Valley Planning Commission who are assisting with the Livable Amherst Community Survey Age & Dementia Friendly Community Project. 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):
 - April 2, 2022: Autism Awareness Month by Hazel's Blue Lagoon (North Common)
 - August 22-29, 2022: Community Fair by Amherst Rotary Club (South Common)
 - May 19-21, 2022.: Plant Sale by Garden Club of Amherst (South Common)
 - October 13-14, 2023: Cider Run by Amherst A Better Chance
- Short-Term Parking Requests (Section 2a of the Town Council Policy):

- April 24, 2022: Big Brothers Big Sisters for annual Daffodil Fun Run (25 parking spaces on Boltwood Avenue on Sunday)
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures (Section 3b of the Town Council Policy):
 - April 24, 2022: Big Brothers Big Sisters for annual Daffodil Fun 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
 - May 7, 2022: Cushman Scott Children’s Center to close Henry Street from Market Hill Road to Pine Street for annual May celebration, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon.
- 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

Major Capital Projects:

- Jones Library: The Jones Library Building Committee is meeting every two weeks. We are finalizing the contract with the design firm who will then be moving forward on design work.
- 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.
- North Amherst Library: The bid deadline and opening for the North Amherst Library was rescheduled to April 4th.
- Hickory Ridge: Town staff are inspecting the existing buildings on the site to determine their safety and insurability.
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant: Additional design work by the Public Works Town Engineer has addressed most of the concerns of the abutting property owners.
- Solar on the Landfill: Substantial work has been completed on the installation of the solar panels.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

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