



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: June 25, 2020
Re: Town Manager Report for June 29, 2020

Town Manager Update:

- Top Line:
 - Downtown and Business Reopening: Town staff have been aggressive in assisting restaurants to reopen.
 - Restaurants open with expanded outdoor seating, most with alcohol service:
 - The Hanger
 - Bistro 63
 - Johnny's Tavern
 - IYA
 - Mission Cantina
 - The Harp
 - Jake's at the Mill
 - Momo
 - Arigato
 - Taste Thai
 - Antonio's (for takeout)
 - Restaurants who are submitting applications in the near future:
 - Fresh Side
 - La Veracruzana
 - Oriental Flavor
 - Other actions:
 - Placed two picnic tables on the Cushman Common that are being maintained by Cushman Café
 - Placed numerous picnic tables on Boltwood Walk to accommodate take out dining
 - Discussing use of parking spaces in front of Johnny's Tavern for use by the Tavern

- This continues to be a true team effort with Inspection Services assisting businesses and expediting permitting and the Public Works Department establishing safe dining areas on our streets seemingly overnight.
- The Business Improvement District and Chamber of Commerce continue to be fantastic partners, even taking to painting the Jersey barriers on North Pleasant Street. They are working with individual restaurants to visualize and bring to reality ways to conduct their businesses outside.
- One local business/property owner was kind enough to take the time to write that the Town went “beyond-expectations” and “made me realize we businesses have allies in Town Hall.” Also that the Town staff “had the public health and safety at heart” but “was advocating for the economic and social future of community.”
- Summer Events Summary:
 - Camps: There will be no LSSE summer camps. Instead, LSSE staff will focus on operating the Mill River and War Memorial pools.
 - Town Pools: Town pools will open on June 27th. Hours will be limited. New rules require that those using the pools will need to arrive in their bathing suits, as changing spaces will not be open. Bathhouses at Mill River and War Memorial will be for bathroom use only. Social distancing on the pool deck will also be in place.
 - Puffer’s Pond: Puffer’s Pond is open. To achieve social distancing on the beach, the number of parties/individuals allowed on the beach at one time is limited. Attendants are present to provide guidance and monitor usage. Great team effort led by the Assistant Town Manager, DPW, and Police. Staff from Parking Enforcement, LSSE, Senior Center, Finance Department office, and even the Town Manager’s office are on site at Puffers or Cherry Hill to make the staffing work.
 - Playgrounds: Town playgrounds are now open. Playgrounds are open. The Town will not be sanitizing equipment and surfaces between uses.
 - Recreation Fields and Team Sports: Recreation Fields are open to groups of 10 or fewer who may use the fields but no scrimmages or games are authorized. All summer sports programs including Adult Softball are cancelled. LSSE will be looking at offering various sports clinics during the summer that are held outside and limited to 8 children at a time.
 - Cherry Hill Golf Course: Cherry Hill Golf Course is Open.
 - Independence Day Fireworks and Celebration. Independence Day fireworks and celebration are canceled.
- Reopening Committee:
 - Most staff from Town Hall, Bangs Center, and LSSE are back in the office. Procedures are in place for entrance to the building and Standard Operating Protocols have been reviewed with each individual to ensure a common understanding of what we all need to do to ensure each other’s safety.
 - We have installed Plexiglas at some of the counters and high traffic areas.
 - We are laying out plans to make Town Hall available to the public on an appointment basis only. There is no date set for Town Hall to reopen to the public.
 - Key Points:
 - The Library Director and her staff have developed a plan to provide services to their patrons, with all services based out of the Jones Library with certain staff functions using the North Amherst and Munson branches.

- There is no date for the Senior Center to reopen. I believe the Senior Center will be closed for the rest of the calendar year.
 - I do not anticipate opening buildings to publicly accessible, posted, in-person public meetings any time soon. I will reevaluate this around Labor Day.
 - In the meantime, staff have done a superb job of serving customers remotely and through curbside pick-up/drop-off. There are other services we may begin to provide as systems are put in place. My priority at this point is protecting the staff so they can continue their work.
 - Town Zoom Committee:
 - A team from I.T., Town Clerk, Town Manager, and Clerk to the Council are aware of the concerns expressed by Town Councilors and members of the public to be able to see participants in meetings. There are trade-offs between the security and being able to view all people in the audience.
- Outreach:
 - Coffee with Town Manager:
 - The last Cuppa Joe was on Friday, June 5th with Finance Director Sean Mangano and Comptroller Sonia Aldrich.
 - The next Cuppa Joe will be on Friday, July 10th at 8:00 a.m.
 - These sessions are expertly organized and managed by our Communications Director
 - Call-in shows: We continue our Community Chats on a weekly basis. We have had the Police Chief, Director of Senior Services, and the Emergency Management Director/Fire Chief, the Assistant Town Manager/Director of Conservation and Development, Superintendent of Public Works, and Director of LSSE. Thursday's Chat had the Town Council President as the featured guest. The next few shows will focus on the budget and schools. These call-in shows are all available for viewing by going here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySXkNrb1J1g>
- Appointments:
 - I continue to seek members to serve on the Elementary School Building Committee, Agricultural Commission, Affordable Housing Trust, Cultural Council, CDBG Advisory Committee, Council on Aging, Disability Access Advisory Committee, Human Rights Commission, Leisure Services and Supplemental Education (LSSE) Commission, Public Art Commission, and Public Shade Tree Committee.
- Outreach and Community Participation Officers (CPOs):
 - Complete Count – United States Census: The CPOs are developing creative ways to utilize the \$25,000 grant from the Secretary of State's office to expand our efforts to ensure all people in Amherst are counted.
 - The summer intern from Amherst College has begun work – virtually - on engagement, research, youth strategy, etc. The position is funded by an Amherst College Houston Scholarship. The intern selected will be a great addition and bring the perspective of being a first-generation college student.
- Town-Gown:
 - Hampshire College: The College will be open to its residential students as scheduled in the Fall.
 - Amherst College: The College will be open to some of its residential students with significant restrictions on the campus and on the staff and students.

- University of Massachusetts at Amherst: The University will be open to some of its residential students with significant restrictions on the campus and on the staff and students.
- Off-campus students: We anticipate a larger than normal number of students will be in Town this summer and that many students will be living off-campus during the Fall. Staff have been discussing the impact this may have for public safety and public health and we will be meeting with the colleges and University to discuss the issues this population of students is likely to raise.

Departments:

- Town Clerk:
 - The Town Clerk is leading a team that includes the Fire Chief, Superintendent of Public Works, and Facilities Manager to determine alternatives to voting in the usual precinct locations. Any change would require approval from the Town Council in advance of the election.
- Public Safety:
 - The Police Chief and Captain Ting and I participated in a session with members of the community to discuss multiple issues including:
 - What are our use of force policies, including reporting of use of force?
 - Do we require de-escalation, if so in what manner?
 - What is our policy for 911 operators in regards to determining if the person in need is experiencing a mental health crisis? Do we implement a different protocol involving mental health professionals and ambulances when this need is identified?
 - Is there any citizen oversight of the department in place?
 - How are resident complaints collected, are they made available to the public and what accountability system is in place for the officers involved in those complaints?
 - Is the town looking to shift funds away from policing and towards other human services such as affordable housing, youth programming, mental healthcare, education, etc.?
 - We will be participating in a follow-up session later in July.
 - The Town Council will hold a special meeting on Police policies, procedures, and activities on July 6th. Staff will make a presentation and be available to answer questions from the Council and to listen to public comment.
- Human Resources:
 - The Health Director announced her retirement effective in September or October. We have advertised and are conducting a robust search.
 - The Human Resources Director announced her retirement effective June 30th. The Human Resources Manager will serve as Interim Human Resources Director. We have advertised and are conducting a robust search.
- Public Works:
 - Paving:
 - The House and Senate approved a compromise bill that would fund the Chapter 90 local road and bridge program at \$200 million for FY21. The bill (H. 4803) awaits the governor's signature. Both branches had increased Chapter 90 to \$300 million in bills passed this spring, but ultimately reverted to the \$200 million level due in large part to the coronavirus pandemic's impact on state revenues.

- Bids are being reviewed for new work utilizing existing funds including a full depth reclamation with asphalt injection of Henry Street.
 - Work on Summer Street is complete.
 - DPW crews have been working on University Drive to make changes to the multi-use path.
 - Next, the crews will be on Old North Pleasant Street and Kendrick Park to make the changes necessary to connect the new park to the sidewalk system.
 - Downtown: DPW continues to work on a deep-clean of downtown sidewalks, street furniture, etc. by power-washing and then sealing the sidewalk. DPW placed picnic benches in the Boltwood Garage area and we are seeking additional seating areas in Sweetser Park and, perhaps, on the North Common. DPW have been fast in establishing outdoor dining areas on North Pleasant Street, South Pleasant Street, and Amity Street.
- Finance:
 - Budget: The finance department completed work on the FY21 budget, which will be delivered to the Town Council on Monday and made available to the public Monday evening.
 - FY20 Close-out: Accounting is moving to close-out the FY20 fiscal year, which is an intense, time-consuming activity.
 - COVID-19: The finance department has secured the Town's first reimbursement for extraordinary expenses related to COVID-19.
- Sustainability:
 - Community Choice Aggregation: CCA has received funding through the efforts of our State Representative and State Senator. These funds will support the development of an aggregation plan that will be submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities and the creation of a legal Joint Powers Agreement that would be entered into by the Towns of Amherst and Pelham and the City of Northampton. The purpose of the Aggregation is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency and the development of local renewable distributed energy resources.
 - The Municipal Vulnerabilities Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant: This grant was received from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEA) to fund work by Linnaen Solutions for technical assistance, interpreters/translators, and to engage a community liaison in the development of a Climate Action, Adaptation and Resiliency Plan. These advocates and advisors will work closely with the Town's Sustainability Coordinator and other staff with advice from the Town's Energy and Climate Action Committee (ECAC).
 - ValleyBike: ValleyBike has reopened the bike share locations in Amherst.
- Community Services:
 - Leisure Services: Staff have been reallocated to work at Cherry Hill, Puffers Pond, and Groff Park.
 - Senior Center:
 - The Director of Senior Services has redirected, with the grantor's permission, a grant to provide food tokens to the Amherst Farmers Market to seniors in need.
 - The Senior Center has received a National Dislocated Worker grant from the State Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to become a work site for temporarily unemployed food service workers. The grant will pay wages and benefits of four drivers and a general laborer to help coordinate daily routes of meals.

- I wanted to share a statement that was in the Senior Center’s newsletter recently written by the Director of Senior Services. She wrote:

There are times when sheltering in place has felt like an interminable long car ride, strapped in the back seat, with frequent musing, when will this be over? The discomfort we have experienced in the pandemic, the losses, collective grief, and loneliness seem hazy as we are shattered by the horrific agonizing death of George Floyd, the painful loss for his family and community, and the exposition of raw degradation and racism towards black and brown people, reflecting their experience of our country and community. We need to listen, to learn, and make real the promise of our laudatory words. We have been called to educate ourselves, and use our voices to support the potent outcry for equal justice and treatment.

What does social justice look like at the senior center and with senior services? The question I have asked myself since the day I arrived, has been “Who is not at the table?” and “Why?” In the months I have been here, I hope you have seen progress. And, in the years ahead, my intention is that our actions demonstrate a response, not just a reaction, as we reaffirm the commitment to equality, dignity, and promoting and securing the equal rights of black and brown people in all circles of service and power.

How can we do this together? We can continue to donate and support events and organizations that do antiracism work. We can continue to offer scholarships for equal access to health services and classes. We will continue our outreach and conversations. We will not remain silent when it comes to the injustice of racism and violence against black lives. A way to begin to educate ourselves is to read. The Senior Center has purchased from black-owned bookstores a limited supply of reading resources that have been recommended that we will make available for distribution to older adults in our community.

- **Health Department:** The Health Director continues to guide all of our work with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. She has been working closely with the School Superintendent and providing guidance and support to Amherst College.
- **Conservation and Development:**
 - **Solomon Grant:** The Planning Department secured a \$10,000 grant from the Solomon Foundation to support the changes to the public way downtown. This grant is in conjunction with the Business Improvement District which will utilize the funds to purchase umbrellas and shade structures for the outdoor dining areas.
 - **DOT Grant:** The Planning Department and Public Works Department will review options to apply for funds available from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.
 - **CDBG-CARES Act Funding:** We are awaiting word on our application requesting \$400,000 in CDBG-CARES Act funding from the Department of Housing and Community Development. The request includes:
 - \$200,000 for a Town-sponsored grant program for micro businesses in cooperation with Valley CDC;
 - \$100,000 for costs associated with increased demand for food at the Amherst Survival Center;
 - \$63,000 for a caseworker position at Family Outreach of Amherst to help with COVID impacts such as rental assistance, budgeting, employment, and child care;
 - \$22,000 for support for the resource center to help those experiencing homelessness operated by Craig’s Doors; and,

- \$15,000 for costs associated with distance learning and job training at The Literacy Project.
 - Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road: A public hearing was begun on June 25th on Valley CDC's Comprehensive Permit application to the Zoning Board of Appeals for the supportive studio apartment project, including 28 units for low income individuals, proposed to be constructed at 132 Northampton Road. The ZBA will take numerous meetings listening to public comment and reviewing this proposal which has received significant Town support.
 - Emergency Rental Assistance program: The Town is moving quickly to set up this program.
 - ADA Transition Plan: We are seeking input from the community, organizations assisting persons with disabilities, and Town Staff to assist in addressing and prioritizing current and future accessibility needs. Here is a link to the survey: <https://www.amherstma.gov/3530/ADA-Self-Evaluation-Transition-Plan> The deadline for completing the survey is July 11th.
- Information Technology (I.T.):
 - I-Net: I.T. is moving forward on a contract to construct a replacement I-Net loop to replace the current Comcast loop which the Town must abandoned in compliance with the contract we have with Comcast. This project will extend the Town's I-Net to more municipal facilities, upgrade the fiber to state-of-the-art capacity fiber, and retain ownership for the future.

Delegated Authority (May 2020):

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons: None
- Short-Term Parking Requests: I have approved a request from the Library Director to dedicate several parking spaces in front of the Jones Library for fourteen days. The Director will determine if there is a continuing need for this parking and, if so, will submit a request to the Town Council.
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures: None

Major Capital Projects:

- DPW/Fire: No developments
- Schools: I have submitted the second group of appointees to the Elementary School Building Committee.
- Library: The director met with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners and requested a delay in awarding any grants for one year.

Project Update:

- Groff Park:
 - The New Spray Park and Playground will be open in the near future. Work on the playground is nearly complete. There is some electrical work that needs to be completed before we can open the spray park. We will be staffing the new facility to provide guidance and information to users.
 - We are looking at a Grand Opening Ribbon Cutting to be scheduled on July 8th with a rain date of July 9th. Hold the date. Details to follow.
- Destination: Amherst!

- Kendrick Park Playground: The project is expected to be bid this summer and construction is expected to start in late summer or early fall.
- Performing Arts Shell on the Town Common: No developments.
- Parking Structure on Town Land at North Pleasant Street Parking Lot: No developments.
- North Common Restoration/Main Street Parking Lot: No developments.
- Hickory Ridge: Staff continue to actively work toward a conclusion on this project conducting the required due diligence on behalf of the Town
- East Street School: No developments
- North Amherst Library: We are working with procurement to move to the next phase for this project.
- Solar on the Landfill: Slow, steady progress continues to be made as we work through the permitting and interconnection approvals. We are projecting construction to begin in November of 2021 and operation to begin in April of 2022.
- Dog Park:
 - Funds are in hand. The bid has been awarded.
 - The Amherst Dog Park Committee has created a superb website that you can find here: www.amherstdogpark.wordpress.com
 - We are looking at a Ground Breaking ceremony to be scheduled on July 22nd with a rain date of July 23rd. Hold the date. Details to follow.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- July 4th – Independence Day holiday
- July 6th – Special Town Council meeting on Police
- July 13th – Town Council public hearing on the FY21 budget
- July 13th – Special Town Council meeting on Library
- July 20th - Town Council meeting

Other events:

- July 2nd – 12:00 noon – Community Chat
- July 9th – 12:00 noon – Community Chat
- July 10th – 8:00 a.m. – Cuppa Joe with Paul
- July 16th – 12:00 noon – Community Chat
- July 23rd – 12:00 noon – Community Chat
- July 30th – 12:00 noon – Community Chat