



To: Town Council  
Fr: Paul Bockelman  
Town Manager  
Dt: July 31, 2020  
Re: Town Manager Report for August 3, 2020

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### **Town Manager Update:**

- Top Line:
  - Mask Order: The Board of Health approved a mask order for the general downtown area effective August 3<sup>rd</sup>. The order and map can be found here:  
<https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2692>
  - UMass: The Town and University have established a working group to facilitate communication and provide a place for sharing information and making decisions in real time. The press release can be found here:  
<https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2693>
  - Parking: Parking enforcement officers will be redeployed to the downtown area to restart parking enforcement beginning August 3<sup>rd</sup>. The press release can be found here:  
<https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2694>
  - Puffer's Pond: Puffer's Pond is a real success story. We have had a lot of positive feedback on the changes. It started with the creative reorganizing of State Street – a project by the DPW with input from Police and Fire Departments – that made State Street one-way and rationalized parking in marked spaces. Then, with the onset of COVID-19, the Assistant Town Manager introduced a new monitoring system at the entrance on State Street and at the entrance to the pond with an assemblage of staff from various departments. This new team has melded well and created a welcoming atmosphere that has been welcomed by regular pond-goers. Congratulations on a great team effort to create a better place.
- Outreach:
  - Coffee with Town Manager:
    - The last Cuppa Joe was on Friday, July 24<sup>th</sup> with Chamber of Commerce Director Claudia Pazmany and Business Improvement District Director Gabrielle Gould will be the guests.
    - The next Cuppa Joe is scheduled for August 14<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 a.m.
  - 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, Director of LSSE, Council President, School Superintendent, Finance Director, and Town Clerk. Thursday's Chat focused on issues for

seniors featuring the Director of Senior Services. The show can be found here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8nALNqJ\\_g4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8nALNqJ_g4&feature=youtu.be)

- Appointments:
- I continue to seek members to serve on the Agricultural Commission, Affordable Housing Trust, Cultural Council, CDBG Advisory Committee, Community Preservation Act 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.
- I have appointed Assistant Town Manager M. David Ziomek as the Temporary Town Manager for the period of August 16-22, 2020.
- I will be submitting names for the Elementary School Building Committee to the Town Council on August 4<sup>th</sup> to ensure the Town Council has ample time to review the appointments.
- Outreach and Community Participation Officers (CPOs):
  - Complete Count – United States Census: The CPOs have been promoting the census in many ways with mailings, social media, and personal appeals.
  - Free Masks: The Masks for All initiative continues to draw interest and remains very popular.
  - Outreach: CPOs have been pivotal as we continue to conduct outreach in these strange times and are successful by making themselves available in a variety of settings.
- Town-Gown (this information is repeated from the last report):
  - Hampshire College:
    - The College will be open to its residential students beginning August 20<sup>th</sup> and the semester will run until November 20<sup>th</sup>.
    - The Spring semester will run from February 2<sup>nd</sup> until May 15<sup>th</sup>.
    - The College expects to be at ~50% occupancy which is about 550 students.
    - The College will utilize UMass contact tracing services, have daily health monitoring, and offer Isolation and Quarantine shelters on campus.
    - There will be a limitations on visitors and they have few students off campus (~25)
  - Amherst College:
    - The College will be open to its residential students beginning August 24<sup>th</sup> and the semester will run until November 20<sup>th</sup>.
    - The Spring semester will run from February 3<sup>rd</sup> until May 23<sup>rd</sup>.
    - The College expects to have 1,200 – 1, 250 students on campus (~60% capacity).
    - The College conduct daily testing, have daily health monitoring, and offer Isolation and Quarantine shelters on campus or in neighboring motels.
    - There will be a limitations on visitors and they have few students off campus (<50)
    - Students are required to sign a “Statement of Shared Responsibility” and are expected to restrict their time to being on-campus only.
  - University of Massachusetts at Amherst (see above):
    - The University will be open to its residential students beginning August 24<sup>th</sup> and the semester will run until November 20<sup>th</sup>.
    - The Spring semester will run from January 19<sup>th</sup> until May 6<sup>th</sup>.
    - 85% of classes will be purely remote.
    - The University will be open to an unknown number of its residential students with significant restrictions on the campus and on the staff and students.

- The University is building the capacity to conduct daily testing, have daily health monitoring, and offer Isolation and Quarantine shelters on campus but only for those students living on-campus.
- 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. We are told from large landlords that parents are seeking to rent apartments so that their students can have “a true college experience.”

## Departments:

- Town Clerk:
  - The Town Clerk presented an option for centralized voting to the Town Council at its meeting on July 20<sup>th</sup>. The Town Council will determine if this is a good idea or not at its meeting on August 3<sup>rd</sup>.
  - Voting by mail is available to all voters this year, no excuse required – or accepted! Information may be found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2683>
  - The Clerk’s office has an enormous amount of work this year with the introduction of mail-in voting and the expansion of early voting. The various options has created confusion among voters generating numerous calls to the office.
- Public Safety:
  - The Town is gearing up for the academic season. Police officers have been responding to numerous complaints about house parties and noise disturbances.
  - The Police Department is exploring the possibility of obtaining – at no cost – a “comfort dog” who will prove useful during stressful situations for people and be a good “ice-breaker” when interacting with the public.
  - I have authorized the Fire Department to fill two vacant positions and fill a third position in anticipation of an upcoming retirement to maintain adequate staffing. I have also authorized the employment of additional temporary staffing which will be paid out of COVID-19 CARES act funding.
- Human Resources:
  - Searches are being conducted for the Health Director and Human Resources Director positions. Review teams are reviewing applications and conducting interviews. We have two strong pools of applicants and will move forward with deliberate speed in filling these positions.
  - I have interviewed and filled two vacant firefighter positions and hired a third position in anticipation of an upcoming vacancy in the Spring.
  - The new travel order from the Governor has required the Town to establish new rules for Town employees traveling outside the 8 approved states. Information can be found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2686>
- Public Works:
  - Household Hazardous Waste Day: DPW will hold the collection at the Fort River School on August 15<sup>th</sup>. Information can be found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2682>
  - Mill River Basketball Courts: With passage of the capital funds, the DPW will be repaving the basketball courts at Mill River.
  - Paving:

- Bids have been awarded for new work utilizing existing funds including a full depth reclamation with asphalt injection of Henry Street, Pine Street, and Bridge Street.
    - Design work is underway for North East Street and Snell Street.
    - Sidewalks were completed on Summer Street and University Drive.
    - DPW crews are now on Old North Pleasant Street and Kendrick Park to make the changes necessary to connect the new park to the sidewalk system.
  - Downtown: DPW placed picnic benches in the Boltwood Garage area and we are seeking additional seating areas in Sweetser Park and on the North Common. DPW has been fast in establishing outdoor dining areas on North Pleasant Street, South Pleasant Street, Main Street, and Amity Street.
- Finance:
  - Budget: The Town Council approved the budget as presented at its meeting on July 20<sup>th</sup>. The Town Manager will be working to examine alternatives to policing and will hold filling two anticipated vacancies in the Police Department in abeyance until that review is completed which will be no later than January 31, 2021.
  - COVID-19: The finance department continues to submit reimbursements for COVID-19 funding from FEMA and the Federal CARES Act.
  - State Aid:
    - The Department of Revenue reported that the two major sources of State Aid to the Town would be level funded at this time.
    - The Governor and the Legislature stated that they are committing to no less than the FY20 level of funding for UGGA and Chapter 70 education aid as a baseline amount for FY21 funding.
    - The FY21 funding commitment also includes Chapter 70 increases for inflation and enrollment that will keep all school districts at foundation, under the law as it existed for FY20, providing an additional \$107 million in aid over FY20. This increase comes in addition to approximately \$450 million in new federal supports for K-12 schools to assist with educating students during the pandemic.
    - This is the scenario we had presented to the Town Council and, if the State holds true, the Town will not have to access its reserves for FY21.
- Sustainability:
  - Community Choice Aggregation: The Town is working on 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. We are about to engage a specialized law firm to provide legal advice utilizing State funds to pay for the legal time.
  - The Municipal Vulnerabilities Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant: The Energy and Climate Action Committee is holding a series of subcommittee meetings with Community Leaders and stakeholders. There are four Task Groups holding a series of three meetings each through September.
- 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 is engaged in fund-raising effort to raise enough money to purchase iPad type devices for seniors who may not have access to the digital world.
    - She says, “Do you love going on social media seeing what your friends are up to? Social hours on Zoom? Taking virtual classes? So do older adults! Please help me raise money to purchase tablets to create a technology loan program for the Amherst Senior Center so older adults can visit family & friends, access telehealth medical visits, take classes, and socialize.”
    - She will be running almost 200 miles (like running to Provincetown) to encourage people to donate.
    - You can support her in her “Move and Groove to Close the Digital Divide” here: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/move-amp-groove-to-close-the-digital-divide>
  - Health Department:
    - The Board of Health voted to implement a requirement for facial coverings in the downtown area. Signs will be installed. See attached order and map.
    - Signs will be placed at the entrances to the “masks required” area to help inform the public.
    - With the support of the Department of Public Works, new signs have been installed throughout Town encouraging people to wear masks, maintain social distance, and avoid social gatherings.
- Conservation and Development:
  - Emergency Rental Assistance Program: The Town has dedicated \$250,000 in taxpayer funds to support income-eligible renters in meeting their rental requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional information can be found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2672>
  - DOT Grant: The Town applied for funds from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation for temporary changes. We are refining the grant application to make it more competitive in the eyes of the Department of Transportation.
  - CDBG-CARES Act Funding: The Town was awarded \$321,577 in CDBG-CARES Act funding from the Department of Housing and Community Development. This is less than was requested and we are reviewing the award to determine next steps. The following is the adjusted program budget. I prioritized small businesses, food security, and support for those in need.

Agency	Program Description	Budget
Town of Amherst & Valley CDC	Grants eligible micro businesses (less than 5 employees)	\$160,000.00
Amherst Survival Center	Costs associated with increased demand for food pantry	\$90,000.00
Family Outreach of Amherst	Caseworker position to help with COVID impacts such as rental assistance, budgeting, employment, and childcare	\$52,000.00
The Literacy Project	Costs associated with distance learning and job training	\$0.00
Craig's Doors	Support for Resource Center to help with case management and housing placement for homeless individuals	\$19,577.00

TOTAL FUNDING REQUEST	\$321,577.00
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- Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road: A public hearing began on June 25<sup>th</sup> 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 financial support.
- ADA Transition Plan: Consultants were in Town surveying all Town buildings to identify the barriers to full accessibility to those who are disabled.
- 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.
- Economic Development:
  - The Town is supporting a grant application by the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce for a Resurgent Places Grant to install plantings and wayfinding signage in three areas of Town: Pomeroy Village, East Amherst Village Center, and Echo Hill Village and to adapt the Visitor Center to an outdoor model.

**Delegated Authority (July 2020):**

- Short-Term Event Uses of Town Commons: None
- Short-Term Parking Requests: None
- Short-Term Road or Sidewalk Closures: None

**Major Capital Projects:**

- DPW/Fire: No developments
- Schools: I am interviewing applicants for the resident members of the Committee and will forward the appointees to the TSO Committee within the next week or so.
- Library:
  - Since 2010, the Library Trustees and staff have been identifying the needs and planning for improvements to the Jones Library.
  - The Trustees presented analysis and costs for fixing the building’s major problems to the Town Council and the public.

**Project Update:**

- Groff Park:
  - The new park is receiving rave reviews...especially from the most important critics, the kids. Really rewarding to see so many have fun in this time when that is in short supply.
  - Still to come! The spray park! The parts for the spray park are expected to be in next week with the goal of having the spray park ready to be tested in the second week of August.
  - Press release on the ribbon-cutting can be found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2673>
  - Kendrick Park Playground: The construction is expected to start in late summer or early fall. DPW is busy preparing the walkways around the playground.

- 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: No developments.
- East Street School: No developments
- North Amherst Library: The anonymous donor has continued interest in moving the project forward. The next step is to present the concept to the Town Council.
- 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:
  - There was a Ground Breaking ceremony on July 22<sup>nd</sup> with comments by the Town Council President, Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, and Dog Park Task Force Chair. Additional information can be found here: <https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2685>
  - The project has been bid and construction will begin after Labor Day. It will take 2-3 months to complete construction and then there will be a season of rest to allow for the grass to grow.
  - Many thanks to the Dog Park Task Force, Animal Welfare Officer, Assistant Town Manager, Conservation team, and Public Works staff.

### **Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

- August 17<sup>th</sup> – Town Council meeting
- August 31<sup>st</sup> – Town Council meeting
- September 7<sup>th</sup> – Labor Day Holiday

### **Other events:**

- August 6<sup>th</sup> – 12:00 noon – Community Chat
- August 13<sup>th</sup> – 12:00 noon – Community Chat
- August 14<sup>th</sup> – 8:00 a.m. – Virtual Cuppa Joe with Paul
- August 27<sup>th</sup> – 12:00 noon – Community Chat