



To: Town Council
Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager
Dt: April 9, 2021
Re: Town Manager Report for April 12, 2021

This Town Manager Report is noticeably briefer because of the Town Council's meeting last week. All Town Manager Reports are available on the Town's website here: [Town Manager Reports](#)

Town Manager Update:

- COVID-19:
 - Testing: We continue to urge people to be tested, especially if they have not received the vaccine. Testing is quick, free, and easy to access. Here is the link: <https://uma.force.com/covidtesting/s/>
 - Variants: We are working under the assumption that these variants will make their way to the Town, which reinforces the need to continue to follow basic public health protocols such as wearing masks, maintaining social distance, and being vaccinated – or tested regularly if not vaccinated. There are no additional public health recommendations to follow.
 - Vaccination:
 - The Town continues to operate our vaccination clinics. We offered three clinics this week – one exclusively for educators and child care workers – and provided over 1,000 doses of vaccine. We continue to operate out of the Bangs Community Center.
 - Covid Outreach:
 - The Town has been coordinating efforts to reach homebound individuals in a commitment have been vaccinated.
 - Ambassadors:
 - The Ambassadors have been crucial in staffing the Hot Line, patrolling the streets, and serving as helpers all day at the vaccination site. We will be expanding their work to cover other areas of Town including staffing Puffers Pond, Groff Park, Mill River Park, and other duties in coordination with the Conservation and Development and Public Works Departments.

- Outreach:
 - Community Chats:
 - The Communications Manager and I continue to host our weekly Community Chats. Previous guests included Health Director Emma Dragon on the Homebound Vaccination Program; Kat Newman and other Ambassadors on the development of their program over the months since it began; Town Engineer Jason Skeels and Public Works Superintendent Guilford Mooring to discuss the Pomeroy Village MassWorks project; Police Captain Gabe Ting and Officer Bill Laramee who spoke on the violence against Asian Americans and the outreach the Town does during the St. Patrick’s Day time; Planning Director Chris Brestrup and Building Commissioner Rob Morra discussing zoning; Planner Ben Breger to discuss the Wayfinding Signs; Superintendent of Public Works Guilford Mooring and the architects from Kuhn-Riddle on the North Amherst Library; Jones Library Project with Library Director Sharon Sharry, Library Trustee Alex Lefebvre, and fund-raising lead Kent Farber; and the Core Equity Team’s work with Jennifer Moyston.
 - The next Community Chat will be April 15th and feature soon-to- retire Recreation Director Barb Bilz talking about upcoming programming for the summer and – I hope – reflect on her years of experience working for the Town.
 - Other guests this month include Library Director and others to discuss the Library budget and Superintendent Mike Morris and others on the School budget.
 - All recordings of our Community Chats can be found here: [Community Chats](#)
 - Engage Amherst: We will be adding information on the North Common to the EngageAmherst website in advance of the Town Council’s public hearing in May. It joins Pomeroy Village, North Amherst Library, and the Four Capital Projects which can be found here: <https://engageamherst.org>.
- Town-Gown: With the warmer weather, the Town will be fully staffed and prepared to respond to incidents this weekend. In addition, we will have extra staff on duty on Saturday evening due to the NCAA Hockey Finals game that includes the University of Massachusetts.

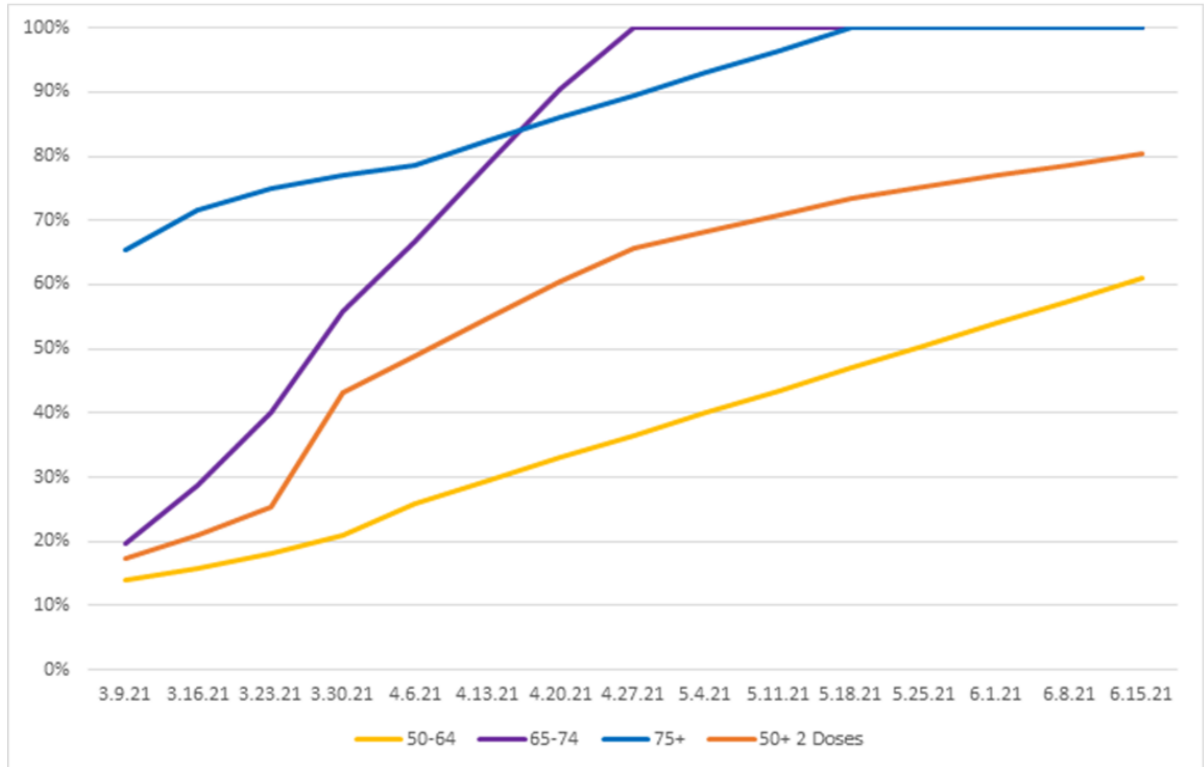
Departments:

- Public Works:
 - You will see work crews performing “crack-sealing” on our roads. This is to seal the cracks in roads that would prevent moisture from infiltrating the roads which accelerates road deterioration.
 - Road construction projects moving forward this spring include Henry Street, Bridge Street, and part of Pine Street.
 - There will be work downtown to fix crumbling crosswalks, supported by a State grant obtained by the Town.
- Town Clerk: Our State Representative has informed us that the Ranked-Choice Voting legislation has been received by the House Clerk. It will not move forward until the House and the Senate resolve the rules they will use to move legislation forward.
- Public Safety:
 - Police: The Police Department are taking into account the fact that people are unable to renew their automobile registrations due to the inability of the State Registry of Motor Vehicles to process inspections.

- Fire:
 - The Fire Department was awarded an Interoperable Communications Investment Proposal (ICIP) grant from the State Fire Marshall’s office in the amount of \$19,952.90 as part of the FY 2021 Firefighter Safety Equipment Grant program. The project is intended to enhance emergency communications in the field between responders (including mutual aid and inter-agency) and the Town’s dispatch and command staff, which will increase fire fighter safety and service to the public. Specifically, the grant will pay to relocate a key receive-only polling site from the town's Wastewater Treatment plant to the roof of the Tower Library at the University of Massachusetts. This equipment would be co-located with existing equipment for Amherst Police Department.
 - Fire Captain John Ingram received accreditation from the Massachusetts Fire Service Commission, a process for consistent credentialing for fire chiefs and others in fire departments with the rank of lieutenant and above. He successfully completed the Massachusetts Fire Academy’s Chief Fire Officer Management Training Program, obtained his master’s degree, and attended workshops and training sessions.
- Human Resources:
 - Human Resources will be recruiting for Recreation Director and Economic Development Director positions.
 - Human Resources is recruiting, hiring, and onboarding numerous positions, mostly seasonal or associated with our COVID response.
- Finance:
 - Residential Exemption: The Town’s Principal Assessor is working with the Board of Assessors to complete the Residential Exemption study and to provide information to the Council this fall. As a refresher, the Residential Exemption is a local option “*that shifts the tax burden within the residential class from owners of moderately valued residential properties to the owners of vacation homes, higher valued homes and residential properties not occupied by the owner, including apartments and vacant lands*” according to the Division of Local Services. This option would result in a significant structural change in the way property taxes are assessed so it is important to understand all of the implications. The team working on this project has requested clarification of the Council’s goals for this study so they can ensure the proper data is gathered.
 - Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE): The Assessor’s Office is exploring another local option called PACE. This option helps finance energy improvements for Commercial, Industrial, Not for Profit, and Multifamily properties through the Town’s property tax assessment system. This program will be presented in greater detail to the Town Council at an upcoming meeting.
 - Budget: Finance staff have been working with individual departments in developing budgets that fit within the constraints of available resources. There are, of course, many more needs and requests than there are resources. We are nearing completion of our second round of budget meetings which includes the Town Manager, finance staff, and individual departments. There is significant work to complete the budget to meet the Charter requirement of a budget presented to the Town Council by May 1st.
 - Capital Plan: The Finance Director finalized the review the Capital Plan with the Joint Capital Planning Committee, which will make its recommendation to the Town Manager.

- Federal Funds: I have submitted a list of needs to Congressman McGovern which included upgrades to the Centennial Water Treatment Facility, development of a Reuse Water Treatment System, improvements to the Wastewater Treatment Facility and sewer lines throughout the Town, and funds to support the renovation of the Historic Amherst Town Common.
- Sustainability:
 - The Town has received delivery of its roll-off container truck which was funded by the V.W. settlement grant. \$140,438. Total vehicle cost was \$180,500. The grant helped replace a large vehicle that is used daily with a more efficient vehicle.
 - We have received two proposals to provide municipal aggregation consulting services for the Town of Amherst, City of Northampton, and Town of Pelham. I am reviewing the two proposals and expect to award the contract within the next two weeks.
- Community Services:
 - Health:
 - The Amherst Health Department has started using the new vaccine software provided by the State called “Color”. Our clinic is one of the first two regional sites in the State to be using it. This new expanded platform has the ability for first and second appointment registration while on site. We also have the ability to engage the state pre-registration system and already have appointments allotted for that with coming week. Residents should be getting notifications that are preregistered and eligible if selected. They will be notified of the appointment availability and able to book an appointment within 24 hours.
 - The Board of Health held a public hearing on regulations intended to protect the health of employees in their workplaces from exposure to secondhand smoke and to protect the health of the general public from extended exposure to secondhand smoke in places where they congregate. Written public comment will be accepted until April 30th. The Board expects to act on the regulations in May.
 - Senior Center:
 - The Massachusetts Municipal Association – my former employer – has appointed Senior Director Mary Beth Ogulewicz to serve on the State “Opioid Recovery and Remediation Fund Advisory Council”.
 - This council is charged with advising on how funds are to be distributed from settlements made in connection with claims arising from the manufacture, marketing, distribution or dispensing of opioids.
 - In the appointment letter, the MMA stated:
 - *“Ms. Ogulewicz was a former Assistant District Attorney in Springfield and trained Clinical Social Worker with a long professional interest in community mental health and substance use. We believe Ms. Ogulewicz will bring knowledge and expertise necessary to be a highly effective member of the advisory council.”*

- The Director of Senior Services uses this chart which shows a projection of senior vaccination rates specific to Amherst. This projection uses the previous 5 weeks increases. In assessing accuracy, over the past month and a half, these projections have been demonstrated consistency for operational knowledge. It assumes a 3.5 % increase in fully dosed individuals age 50-64 years old week by week and an 11.75% increase for 65-75 year olds.



- Unhoused Population:
 - We are working with Craig’s Doors to secure appropriate showering and daytime sheltering options.
 - We are engaging with our non-profit partners and others to direct coordinated efforts to find a suitable shelter site for November.
- Recreation:
 - Recreation staff organized a “Member Clean-up Day” at Cherry Hill Golf Course last weekend. Over 20 members offered their time to clear branches and twigs from the fairways and rake areas that needed it. It was the first time we tried this and were gratified by the turnout.
 - Thanks to the Amherst Nordic Ski Association who planned, organized, and implemented an excellent year of cross country skiing at the Cherry Hill Golf Course. The Association reports that a big storm in mid-December got the season off to a great start and with stretches of time from late January into February. Cross country skiing at Cherry Hill appeared to experience an all-time high level of participation. A highlight of the winter was the first ever home race for the Amherst Regional High School Hurricanes, who hosted a race on its home turf.

○ Economic Development:

- Town departments – DPW, Planning, and Facilities – have worked to help local businesses reopen outdoor dining. Streets have been re-striped, parking barriers installed, planter boxes introduced, banners hung, heating lamps taken out of storage and placed. We are ready for a strong season of outdoor



- This has been a cooperative effort with the Business Improvement District (BID) and the Chamber. Attractive new planters have been purchased locally and installed throughout the Town.
- In its newsletter, the BID said:
 - *We have made it to a new season and there is more than a little light at the end of this tunnel! I wanted to take a moment to extend some very deep-felt gratitude on this beautiful day! If and when you are downtown you will see that we have returned our outdoor street side dining! To this I NEED to shout out to several people who made this all possible: Benjamin Breger in our Town Planning Department - you have been an invaluable ally and I thank you so much for your work on procuring the stunning locally made planters for our restaurants! The DPW, Guilford Mooring, and crew for not only returning our public art in the way of safety barriers for our diners BUT returning them to their EXACT location from last fall. Rob Morra for going WAY out of your way to locate and bring to Amherst 50 outdoor heaters and Ralph for installing them on a windswept day as Ann and I laid giant X marks for where tables will be! ANDREWS Greenhouse for filling our community - once again and with more coming - with flora! And to our downtown caretaker, Tyler Page for keeping the town clean and always being so fastidious, seeing you on the golf cart with the rakes and the blowers always makes me smile! Downtown is open and ready for business, vaccines are coming online with speed and efficiency and we enter into this spring season with great hope!*
- The Amherst Center Cultural District is up for renewal this year. (There are 49 districts in the State.) There is a process that will lead to a vote by the Town Council on the renewal in the summer. A cultural district designation is effective for five years. Designations may be renewed for an additional five years. The vote by the Town Council will be to recommit to the cultural district in line with the resolution passed in support of the proposed cultural district five years ago.

- PVTA and the Quaboag Connector are proposing to operate a new pilot service connecting Amherst and Worcester, operating primarily along Route 9 via Belchertown, Ware, West Brookfield, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Spencer and Leicester. The service will operate 3-daily round trips, timed to connect with MBTA commuter rail trains to/from Boston. PVTA will charge a unique distance-based fare on this route. The PVTA will be holding public hearings on this proposal on April 26th at 10:00 a.m. and again at 3:00 p.m. You can attend by logging in here: www.gotomeeting.com/meeting/join-meeting
- The BID/Chamber “Dinner Delights” that contracted with local restaurants to provide meals to those in need has concluded. Over 15,000 meals were distributed during the pandemic. The Town participated with grant funding for the first part of the program. The Senior Center helped coordinate distribution. A great program that benefitted people across the residential and business communities.
- Conservation and Development:
 - Planning:
 - Housing Choice Grant: The Governor announce the award of a FY21 Housing Choice capital grant for \$174,300 to complete the multi-use path along Mill Lane from Route 116 to Groff Park
 - Supportive Studio Apartments: The State Department of Housing and Community Development announced that it will provide the project with 10 Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program vouchers to assist in the effort to house ten homeless individuals. Sponsored by the non-profit Valley CDC, this project consists of the creation of 28 enhanced single-room occupancy (SRO) units. The building, which will achieve Passive House certification, will include one office for onsite property management and a separate office for a Resident Services Coordinator. The location is highly walkable, less than 1/2 mile to the Town Center and numerous service providers. These rental subsidies enable tenants with extremely low incomes to pay approximately 1/3 of their income for rent and utilities (housing cost); the balance of each tenant’s housing cost will be paid by the State through the MRVP program.

Delegated Authority (March 2021):

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

Major Capital Projects:

- DPW Building/Fire Building: No developments.
- Schools: The Committee has submitted the Owner’s Project Manager (OPM) Request for Services (RFS) for review by the MSBA which was approved. The goal is to have the MSBA OPM Panel review the RFS at its June 7th meeting.
- Library: Approved by the Town Council. We will be creating a Building Committee and moving the project forward.

Project Update:

- Kendrick Park Playground: The contractor has returned to work and is moving quickly with construction. We anticipate their work will be completed by June 1st after which there will be a period of time to allow the grass to grow and final fixes before it is opened officially.
- Dog Park: The contractor is continuing work on this project.
- 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: Town Council approved the plan for the North Common. Work will now begin on the schematic drawings once the Town Council holds its public hearing and votes the parking changes it wants.
- Hickory Ridge: No new developments.
- North Amherst Library:
 - The project page is now up and available for public comment. It can be found here: <https://engageamherst.org/north-amherst-library-project>
 - The Town continues to progress through the permitting process with review by the Planning Board continuing.
- Pomeroy Village MassWorks Grant:
 - Public forums were held March 25th at 6:00 p.m. (1-hour) and March 27th at 2:00 p.m. (2-hours). These forums were convened by the Town Services and Outreach Committee, begin with a brief presentation by Town staff, provided prompts to the public for structured feedback, and included the opportunity for questions and answers.
- Solar on the Landfill: In the coming months, crews will be working on the Northern Landfill to mow, set the access road, and set preliminary sediment control. The “real” construction work is scheduled for August, along with the fence around the Southern Landfill.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- April 19th – Patriots Day holiday
- May 3rd – Town Council meeting
- May 17th – Town Council meeting
- May 24th – Town Council meeting
- May 31st – Memorial Day holiday