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To: Town Council

Fr: Paul Bockelman, Town Manager  
Brianna Sunryd, Communications Manager/Community Participation Officer

Dt: November 10, 2021

Re: Existing Use of Public Way Extension Request

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**Recommendation:**

Approve the extension of the existing one-year pilot use of the public way for information and communication signs at three locations in Amherst for the period of one additional year. These locations include:

- One (1) Information Sign on North Pleasant St. by the crosswalk (across from Central Fire Station/in front of former Starbucks location)
- One (1) Information Sign at the northwest corner of Amity St. and North Pleasant St.
- One (1) Information Sign at the sidewalk of South Pleasant Street and Spring Street (in front of the Town Common by the Spring St. Parking Lot)

**Background:**

Town Council voted on December 7, 2020 to approve the temporary use of the public way to install public information and emergency communication signs, known as the Soofa Solar Information and Communication Signs Project, for one year from installation. The three signs were installed on December 30, 2020. The current permission will expire on December 30, 2021.

The Town of Amherst was the first municipality in Western Massachusetts to adopt the Soofa technology. Recently, the City of Northampton has also introduced the Soofa signs in their community as well as many communities in the Commonwealth and other states. Soofa signs are 100% solar powered and are an additional tool to enhance town communications and wayfinding.

The Town of Amherst entered in to the pilot program for several reasons back in 2020. We wanted to reach constituents with important COVID-19 information and public health guidelines, engage passersby who might not be engaged with the town already with updates and information, ensure access to information for those without internet and provide our local businesses with a platform to reach customers.

**Considerations:**

The Town would like another pilot year – in a non-pandemic year - to continue developing the Soofa information and communication signs. This extension of use of the public way for a period of one year would allow us to continue to integrate the sign’s features with our expanding digital engagement tools, such as Engage Amherst.

Soofa has been very responsive to feedback on how the technology works and has implemented several of our suggestions to make the tool more productive for Amherst. The extension of our use of the public way will allow us additional time to gauge the utility of the new features, such as the live community polling and planned language translation improvements.

The Town has also been collaborating with the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce and Amherst Business Improvement District to make better use of the signs to highlight local tourism and economic development.

The cost to the Town of Amherst for a second year of the Soofa signs and the associated technology is \$6,000 for all three signs. The Soofa signs will receive updated vinyl appliques with updated information on them if extended. Funds will be allocated from existing budgets.

Picture #1



Picture #2



Picture # 3

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**Town Leverages Soofa To Push Out COVID-19, Public Health Updates**

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the Town of Amherst uses the Soofa Signs to post updates about evolving public health guidelines, building closures, adjusted Town services, and vaccine clinics.

Town of Amherst messaging is on display in the Local Updates block at all times.



