

Andrea Miles, Chair
Jeff Cyr, Vice-Chair
Carol Constant, Clerk
Nicole Casolari
Renee Sweeney

Lisa Wong
Town Administrator

Town Administrator's Monthly Report September 2024

NOTE: The report format has changed from a highlights report for each Selectboard meeting to a more comprehensive monthly report. If there are additional updates there will be supplemental reports.

Administration, Finance and Operations

- **Accounting:** End of Year closing procedures are being worked on. Various journal entries and closing processes are being compiled in order to get the balance sheet information submitted for free cash certification to the state, and the Town should hear in the next month or two about what has been approved.
- **Assessor:** The office has been busy processing property exemption requests, which can be requested starting on July 1, for those that meet the status and other requirements. They have also been assisting the consultant for the Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan with information layers. Staff is currently working to finalize all data entry to then make market adjustments to values. FY2025 is a Recertification year for the Town with the Department of Revenue and they have been working with both the DOR representative and their consultant.
- **Collector/Treasurer:** The new trash fee increase from \$125 to \$225 per year is in effect and reflected in the most recent bill. The sewer fee increase from \$360 to \$450 will be reflected in the upcoming billing. The Town will include a notice to residents with information in the next billing. The Town will be holding a public auction for 144 Pearl Street as part of its tax title taking. The state has changed regulations for the tax title foreclosure process that will take effect November 1 including reducing the interest rate from 16% to 8% and requiring a real estate agent for at least one year before a public auction. There is also a retroactive ruling that allows claims against municipalities for "excess" funds obtained in the process. The Town has not had any auctions in that timeframe.
- **IT:** Staff that are part of the digitization project took part in a demonstration of the new TCM software. A contract has been signed for the digital document storage system that aligns with the existing MUNIS system the town uses.
- **Cable:** The Town has renewed its zoom licenses (10 licenses, 2 zoom rooms and 3 webinars) for another year. The prices increased from \$5,067 to \$5,267. The quarterly franchise fee payment from Comcast is \$22,966. This is down from the payment during the same period last year of \$26,136. The current 10 year license expires December 31, 2029.

- **MMA/ICMA:** The Town Administrator has been invited to speak at the upcoming ICMA conference in Pittsburgh at the end of September, as well as the Massachusetts Municipal Association's Women Leading Government meeting in November.

Building and Zoning

- **ADU Bylaw:** There are new Accessory Dwelling Unit provisions as part of the 40A sec 3 state law going into effect in February 2025. The Town will draft a new bylaw to comply with these changes for the Annual Town Meeting in May 2025. From when the law goes into effect until the new bylaw is passed by Town Meeting and approved by the Attorney General's office, any application for an ADU which is 900 sq ft or less and has a parking space and meets the dimensional requirements will likely be issued a building permit.
- **10 Edition State Building Code:** Still to be officially signed by the governor, was expected July 1st. When signed, it will run concurrently until January 1st when it fully takes effect. New code addresses ADUs, tiny homes, shipping containers, short-term rentals, and other contentious items common through the local communities.
- **Hadley St./40 Sullivan Lane:** Building Commissioner scheduled to appear at the Board of Health meeting on 9/10 to discuss current status of the North Pole Estate (Chicopee Concrete) site.
- **0 East Main St:** Probate hearing resulted in an additional 30 days granted (expires 9/26) to propose a will compromise. Status hearing scheduled for 9/30. Hopeful further action to take place upon probate determination. Quotes to be gathered to better secure the site in case that action does not occur. All communications now through a probate attorney.
- **27 Bardwell St:** Building permit was reissued to allow work to restart on the condominium conversions. No units completed at this time, at least two still in rough framing stage, two in finishing stages.
- **460 Amherst Road:** The hearing regarding the use of the convenience/package store was continued to 9/12 at 4pm.

Clerk

- **Early Voting:** Successful administration of in person early voting was held from August 26 to August 30. Residents utilized this opportunity to vote early for the September 3 State Primary.
- **State Primary:** The state primary held on Tuesday September 3 at the High School went well. The results are posted on the town website: www.southhadley.org/186/Election-Results. 22.8% voter turnout (2,995 out of 13,091 registered voters). 76.2% voted early (vote by mail, in person early voting, absentee, overseas). 23.8% voted in person on election day.
- **National Voter Registration Day:** Tuesday, September 17. Assistant Town Clerk Zoe Ingram will be at the Library from 10am to noon to answer questions about voter status and register new voters. Town Clerk Sarah Gmeiner will give a presentation at 3:30pm at the Senior Center outlining voting options for the upcoming election in November.

- **2024 Annual Town Meeting approvals:** The Attorney General's Office approved warrant articles #21 ,22, 23, 25 and 26 from the May 2024 Town Meeting. They have a 30 day extension to review article #27. Their office reviews bylaw and zoning changes from Town Meeting to ensure compliance with state laws and regulations. The town posts their decision on our website: www.southhadley.org/1356/2023-to-2024

DPW

- **Joffre/Viviani drainage outfall for Queensville Dam/Mountain Ave. Conservation project:** In-house work by DPW staff.
- **CWMP in progress:** BETA will present a progress report at the Sept 24 Selectboard meeting.
- **Judd Brook Lining:** Fall inspections for vegetation growth/slope stability to complete the project.
- **Ch. 90 Road Paving:** Titan's Pier, Sorbi Circle, Charles St., The Knolls, Upper River Rd., Henry Rd. are completed. This Fall's work will commence in Sept and include Berwyn St. Ext., Laurie Ave., Maple St., Silver St. above Chapel Hill, Cottage Ave., Ashton Lane (2/3), Parkview Dr.
- **Main Street Pump Station: Permanent By-Pass:** Tighe and Bond is finalizing construction plans and specifications. Out to bid and NOI with Conservation expected during September.
- **Landfill Environmental Monitoring:** The Mass Dept of Environmental Protection recently directed the town to begin PFAS analysis at the town's capped landfill. The Town's contractor, Tighe and Bond, will comply. This is part of MassDEP's ongoing statewide efforts to address Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). MassDEP and other federal and state environmental agencies have become aware that municipal solid waste landfills are potential sources of PFAS in groundwater and surface water. The results of the environmental monitoring required above shall be submitted to MassDEP and the South Hadley Board of Health within 60 days of the date of sampling.

Facilities

- **ADA Grant:** The application and project design for emergency egress and accessible pathway to fields has been submitted and are awaiting grant approval.
- **Capital Meetings:** Scheduled for Sept. 11. Topics include reallocation of unused funds and format change for a 5 year plan.
- **Town Hall-Facilities and Veterans offices moved.** Water damaged walls were repaired and carpet installed in the facilities office. HR/Clerk office move scheduled for Sept. 26-27. Card reader installation in progress for courtyard door.
- **Buttery Brook Park-**Abatement and building demolition completed for new pickleball courts.
- **DPW-**The new furnace is installed at Parks garage.
- **PD-**Ductwork insulation installed to address condensation throughout the building, working on camera issues and replacements. Fire alarm system replaced.
- **Library-**Patio pressure washed and stone dust pathway in back repaired.

- **Ledges**-The pump station and the river pump were both replaced. Shed repairs scheduled. Sourcing quotes for capital improvements.
- **HS**-New walk in cooler/freezer project and kitchen upgrades are complete. Auditorium and bleacher seating repairs are scheduled for November. Phase 1 of the building automation system nearing completion (many mechanical issues have been identified and will need to be repaired). Tree removal and pruning done. Design in process for parking lot and drainage project. Building inspections done and passed. Roof hatch guardrails installed. Roof safety railings installed. Roof thermal study field work complete, waiting on report. Air quality inspection was performed in several areas. ADA grant project designed and submitted.
- **MS**-New flooring and vapor barrier installed in two classrooms. Kitchen upgrades complete. Roof hatch guard rails and roof safety railings installed. Pool safety railings installation in process. Building inspections completed and passed.
- **Mosier**-Repaired subfloor and tile in modular classrooms. Roof hatch guard rails and roof safety railings installed. Lock replacement project complete. Electrical installation for AC's in classrooms complete. Trees removed and pruned for security camera project. Building inspections completed and passed. Roof repairs completed.
- **Plains**- Roof hatch guard rails and roof safety railings installed. Boiler maintenance and glycol fill/balance are scheduled. Batteries replaced in exit signs throughout the building. Building automation system repairs done. Building inspections completed and passed.
- **Green Community**-The application has been submitted and reviewed. We are waiting for the official designation.
- **MSBA**-Facility Maintenance Plan and capital and maintenance work sheets are complete and submitted.
- **MIIA**-We received a \$10,000 grant through the rewards program and we used the funds to add freeze protection and status to the boilers and univents as part of the automation system upgrade.

Health

- **West Nile Virus:** The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) announced several more human cases of West Nile virus (WNV) in Massachusetts. WNV is usually transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. DPH has advised the public to avoid mosquito bites, mosquito proof homes and protect animals.
- **Local Monitoring:** South Hadley Health Department is continuing their Mosquito Surveillance program to test for EEE & WNV and has treated over 200 catch basins as a precautionary measure.
- **Testing:** Health Department is continuing their weekly wastewater testing for High Risk Substances; Fentanyl, Xylazine, Methamphetamine, Cocaine, Nicotine. Data should be released in September.

- **Grant:** Applied for and received a MassDOT grant to display information on the need to vaccinate. MassDOT will display on 250 billboards across the state. Public Health Excellence Grant funding will allow the information to be displayed on 20 (in English) & in 26 (English & Spanish) buses, locally.
- **Animal Control:** Reached out to the Mass Department of Agriculture regarding Dangerous Dog Laws and was referred to a State Police Officer who would be willing to do an educational training for hearing officers and staff on the legal issues surrounding Dangerous Dog Proceedings.
- **Groundwater:** Draft groundwater protection regulations for the Board of Health are being reviewed by Town Counsel. A draft can be found in the BOH July board meeting packet: <https://southhadley.org/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/1924>
- **Annual “Drive-thru” Vaccine Clinic:** To be held Wednesday, October 16th from 2:00 - 6:00 pm at Beers & Story, 646 Newton St., South Hadley. (VX’s available: Influenza, RSV, Shingrix, Tdap, Pneumonia and COVID may be limited.)
- **COVID TESTS:** Health Department requested COVID test kits from MDPH and has received 1,000. They have been distributed to the COA and Library for South Hadley residents.

Human Services

- **Department Meetings:** Staff have held meetings with other town departments and groups to gather information and priorities, including a recent meeting with the Commission on Disabilities to find ways to support all members of the community. Staff are also making recommendations for the newest round of Community Compact Funds.
- **Recreation:** Working with the BATTERY BROOK PARK COMMITTEE to set the final design and budget. Have fundraised an additional \$145,000 to date; however, we are still short about \$150,000 from what we think we need. Had a very busy summer with various programs and have now moved on to fall and winter programming. Thanks to SHELD and St. Germain Investment Management Group for donations that offset the cost of the new High School Scoreboard
- **Veterans:** The Governor signed the HERO Act in August to support veterans benefits including expanding the definition of veterans to include those that served in the National Guard or as a reservist. Veterans will be reimbursed for visits to outpatient behavioral health providers, receive increased annual payments from \$2000 to \$2500 over 2 years to disabled veterans, waive veterans motor vehicle plate fees, increase tax credits for small businesses that hire veterans, and allow municipalities to double exemptions for veterans and tie to inflation.
- **Council on Aging:**
 - The COA has had a busy summer, with a well attended concert series and many other programs to enjoy time out of the sun in a cool environment.
 - Late nights at the COA were on hold for the summer. Evening hours will now be on Thursday with the COA open until 7 pm. **On September 5, an Open House will be held to reignite interest in the late night hours, running from 4 pm - 7 pm.** All are welcome.

- We are also running a Go Green initiative to reduce waste and decrease costs associated with mailing our newsletter.
- Our Coffee & Conversations program has restarted. If you would like to speak at the COA, please contact us.
- We have updated our registration process to include the gathering of important demographic information necessary for grant reporting and as a baseline for the populations our center is currently serving. This will allow us to identify growth in these areas as we work to increase our reach to underserved populations.

Human Resources

- **New Hires:** The Human Services Department has hired Selena Rodriguez as the Human Services Coordinator. She started July 29 and is a recent graduate from Smith College. Also within the Human Services Department, the Council on Aging hired Maria Heffernan on September 5, 2024 as the grant-funded Technology Instructor. Maria is a Tech-savvy professional with experience in technology training, project management, and social media management. Council on Aging has also hired Dakota Lyman as the Food Services Coordinator who will start on September 10, 2024. Dakota has worked for the Eagle Brook School as a cook for over 7 years, and has had various roles in the food industry including recently managing dining services at a camping resort in Alaska! Also The Building Department has hired George Daviau of South Hadley to be Local Inspector/Code Enforcement starting September 4. He has decades of experience as a Superintendent in the construction field. The Police Department will be posting for an additional dispatcher.
- **DEI Training:** The all board and staff training will be held virtually on September 5th at 6pm, there will be a zoom webinar training for elected and appointed members of Town boards, committees, and Town staff, on foundational concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) within our work in local government and the community.
- **Hiring:** The town is seeking qualified candidates for positions in the Council on Aging and the Police Department. <https://southhadley.org/jobs.aspx>
- **Health and Wellness:** The Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust is kicking off a “Move It” challenge for employees on September 16.

Library

- **Library Card Sign-Up Month:** Celebrate Library Card Sign-up Month! Visit SHPL or Gaylord in September to sign up for a library card and be entered into a raffle to win a \$50 gift card to the Odyssey Bookshop in the Village Commons. Already have a library card? Play our Library Card Bingo for a raffle entry!
- **10th Anniversary of Building:** The Library building on Canal Street opened September 2014. The Library is planning an event in October to mark the occasion.

- **9/11 Virtual Event:** *Capturing the Human Drama of 9/11 and D-Day Through Oral History* with Garrett Graff, Tuesday, September 10th 2:00 PM EDT. Register online <https://libraryc.org/shadleylib>
- **Small Appliance Swap: Saturday, September 21 at 10:00.** Do you have a kitchen item sitting on your counter that is clean, still works, but you no longer use? Bring it down to the library and swap it for something new to you! Examples include a rice cooker, coffee maker, or air fryer- bring it in. It must be in working condition and clean, if it is not clean it will be refused. **Drop offs will begin on Tuesday, September 3 through Friday, September 20.** You will receive a ticket for each item you bring, then come to the swap on Saturday, September 21. The library doors open at 9:30 and you can begin to line up at the Community Room door. Doors won't open until 10:00.
- **Summer Reading Program:** The 2025 summer program was a big success with almost 1,000 patrons of all ages registering to read this summer. Attendance was similarly strong at all programs.
- **FY24 Circulation:** Total circulation of library materials increased 13% from the previous year, with 191,315 items being checked out from South Hadley Public and Gaylord Memorial libraries.

Planning and Conservation

- **Valleybike:** The bikes are now operating at Woodlawn and Mt. Holyoke. The Police Station bikes are awaiting a rack for the bikes.
- **Routes 202/33 Corridor:** The Town of South Hadley is exploring new zoning options along Routes 202 and 33 to support appropriate growth and development along the 1-mile corridor. Potential rezoning under consideration is based on recommendations from a Corridor Study adopted in January 2022. This section of roadway links South Hadley to Granby in the north and Chicopee in the south and is the most heavily traveled route in town. The corridor contains a broad mix of residential, commercial, and open space and recreation uses. The intersection of Routes 202 and 33 at the heart of the corridor is centered between the Plains Elementary School and the Big Y shopping Plaza. Zoning recommendations will be informed by public input at a series of four community forums, the first of which is on Monday September 16th at 6pm at the South Hadley Council on Aging at 45 Dayton Street. Can't make the community forum, share your thoughts on the future development of the corridor on the interactive project website through the online mapping exercise: <https://community.innesassocltd.com/south-hadley>
- **MVP Action Grant:** \$1,283,063 award for the construction of the Pearl Street at Elmer Brook Culvert Replacement. Construction will commence in spring FY25.
- **DCR Community Forest Challenge Grant:** \$20,000 award matched by \$20,00 at ATM (capital planning) to complete a Shade Tree Management Plan.
- **Dry Brook Aquifer Study:** UMASS Amherst is in the final phases of completing a study of the Dry Brook Aquifer and will submit a report this Fall. The study objective was to determine the extent of the geographic area recharging the aquifer.

- **MVP 2.0 Seed Project - Affordable Housing Trust:** The MVP Program has approved a \$50,000 grant for the Town to create an Affordable Housing Trust. The first step will be to bring on a consultant to advise in the establishment of the Trust Board, development of rules and regulations for the Trust, and identify a funding source to capitalize the Trust.
- **DLTA - Review of Falls Smart Growth 40R District Zoning Bylaw:** The Town received a DLTA Grant from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to evaluate the zoning bylaw to determine if amendments could be made to encourage new mixed use and affordable housing development in the Falls.
- **Flexible Development Bylaw Amendments:** The Planning Board will send to Fall Town Meeting amendments to the bylaw aimed at encouraging denser housing developments that protect open space and encourage the creation of affordable housing units and small dwellings (800 sq.ft. or less). This bylaw amendment package also includes a new Common Open Space Bylaw and a Common Drive in support of promoting dense housing developments with small affordable homes and access to open space.
- **Subdivision Regulations Amendments:** The Planning Board is developing amendments to the Subdivision Regulations to support walkable neighborhoods, Green Stormwater Management, and better administration and enforcement procedures for compliance with permit requirements.
- **Falls Business Improvement Grants:** Three businesses were awarded \$5,000 grants for physical improvements to the exterior of their buildings. All are scheduled to be completed later this Fall.

Public Safety

- **Police Staffing Study:** Public Forum date will be determined soon, which will be attended by Chief Gundersen, Lt. Gagne and Lt. Baran.
- **Accreditation:** The Police Department and Accreditation Manager Sgt. Barry O'Connor is preparing for re-accreditation with the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission, Inc. Accreditation is awarded on a 3 year cycle. The mock accreditation is mid November, 2024 with the re-accreditation scheduled for January 15, 16 and 17, 2025 .
- **Unmanned Aircraft:** Sgt. Ray Hebert was certified in drone operations on August 27, 2024. In partnership with the Fire Districts and Emergency Management, the Department hopes to have this important public safety technology early 2025
- **Comfort Dog:** Recently, Ofc. Emily Tebo met with the chosen breeder for the comfort dog, Freedom Labradors from Sandwich, MA. After researching and meeting with the owners and some of the puppies, the Department is confident that an English Labrador from Freedom is the right fit for the South Hadley community. Ofc. Tebo's new partner should be arriving near the end of this year.
- **Crisis Intervention:** From August 26-28, 2024 and supported by grant funding, officers of the South Hadley Police Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) and CIT Technical Assistance Team (TTAC)

attended the CIT International Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. Officers Boyle, Whelihan, Cebula, Tebo, Co-Responder Heather Messer, and TTAC members Carolyn St. Andre and Monica Bellucci attended the three-day conference. Members attended presentations on de-escalation, officer wellness, veteran, elder population as well as comfort dog programs.

- **SHPD is 150 years young!** In honor of the 150th year of the South Hadley Police Department, the Department is in the planning stages of a Safety Fair to be held at the PD.

Schools

- **School Opening:** The first day of school was August 29 for grades 1-12, September 5 for Kindergarten and September 9 for PreK.
- **Staff:** The Middle School welcomed a new principal over the summer, Luis Danile Martinez, as well as a new Assistant Principal, Jessica Rose Nardizzi.
- **Public Safety Meeting:** The School Resources officers led a safety meeting prior to the start of school between local, regional and state public safety officials and school and town leadership. The ongoing partnerships and teamwork help to ensure adequate planning, communication, and best practices to ensure the safety of the school community.
- **MSBA:** The town is a few months away from a final determination about acceptance into the feasibility period, and preparing for the Building Committee to begin officially meeting later this year. Most recently the Town submitted Capital and Maintenance information, and will be requesting the approvals for the Study Enrollment Certification prior to the MSBA's October 30 board meeting. MSBA has determined that with the current enrollment of 360 students in Grades 2-4, that the proposed Grades 1-5 enrollment would be 590 students.

State and Regional

- **Affordable Homes Act:** On August 6, 2024, the Governor signed into law the Affordable Homes Act. The Act makes sweeping changes to various matters including revisions to G.L. c. 40A, the Zoning Act. While it is anticipated that additional guidance may be issued by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities ("EOHLC").
- **PVPC:** PVPC is wrapping up a study requested by Fire District 2 to explore efficiencies if the 2 districts worked together.
- **PVTA:** The Pioneer Transit Authority's management vendor and the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 448, which includes bus drivers, were able to reach an agreement before the contract deadline of September 1, avoiding a strike that would have had service impacts.
- **MMA:** The September edition of The Beacon newsletter is now online - www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/MMA-Beacon-September-2024.pdf

Boards & Commissions

- **Cultural:** The South Hadley Cultural Council (SHCC) invites the public to attend a reception to showcase the work of this year's grantees and learn how to apply for funding for the 2025 grant cycle. The SHCC Grantee Celebration and Information Session will take place in the Community Room of the South Hadley Public Library, 2 Canal Street, South Hadley, MA, on Thursday, September 19, from 5:30-7:00. Refreshments will be served. Attendees can also learn about applying for a grant to fund a project in 2025.
- **Historic:** The public hearing for the "Old Firehouse Museum Local Historic District" will be September 21 at 10am at the Old Firehouse Museum at 4 Main Street. Hosted by the South Hadley Historic District Study Committee. A tour will follow the hearing.

Community

- **Pioneer Valley Health:** The state recently appointed a receiver after the facility. The Town has reached out to the receiver and the Town is in touch with the state.
- **Chamber of Commerce:** Funded by an ARPA grant from the Selectboard, the Chamber has awarded 7 grants of \$4,500 each to local businesses to use for marketing and social media. The businesses will work with Allen Media grants. The Chamber also solicited proposals for \$5,000 grants to businesses for capacity building as part of funds received by the state.
- **Mt. Holyoke College:** The annual Convocation to mark the start of the school year was held on September 3rd and livestreamed on their website.

Selectboard

- **Dangerous Dog Hearing:** An appeal has been filed against the Selectboard to euthanize a dangerous dog on Pynchon Road. As of 9/4/24 the town has not received any official notice. A Clerk Magistrate hearing will need to be held and Town Counsel will work on regathering witnesses to have them testify again and prepare all other evidence that the Board relied upon in its decision, for the Magistrate hearing. Then if the Magistrate hearing goes in favor of the Town/Board's finding, the owners have the right to submit a further appeal to the District Court.
- **SHOWCASE South Hadley 2025:** The group will propose the next SHOWCASE festival date, scope, and strategy, and ask the Selectboard to consider the request for a second installment of funds to help support the festival budget.
- **Land Donation:** The Selectboard will consider the donation of 654 New Ludlow Road for conservation. The board voted one year ago to move forward with due diligence for this project.
- **Community Compact Grants:** The Selectboard will consider proposals for the next round of Best Practices grants.
- **Trash warrant:** The Selectboard votes on the latest trash warrant in the amount of \$1,475,775. In the last few years, the warrant amount at this time was just over \$810k. The additional amount reflects the increased fee that will be used to purchase barrels and cover the new contract costs.