

***Town Administrator's Monthly Report
March 2026***

Administration, Finance and Operations

● **Administration:**

- **Town Meeting:** Special Town meeting votes are now available online <https://southhadley.org/1480/2025-to-2026>. The warrant for the Annual Town Meeting will be voted on in April with a discussion of possible warrant articles at the 3/17 Selectboard meeting.
- **State/Federal news:** The Governor's budget provides a net reduction of ~\$6k to the town in FY27 compared to FY26. The House Ways and Means are now developing their budget and is holding a series of public hearings.
- **Elementary School Building Project:** The committee voted to recommend Option 5 - a 1 to 5 grade on the existing site. The committee is working on submitting the Preferred Schematic Report (PSR) to MSBA in April 2026.
www.southhadleyschools.org/our-schools/south-hadley-elementary-building-project/home
- **Proposition 2 1/2:** Information including a tax impact calculator is now online: www.southhadley.org/1528/Proposition-25-Override-Information. The ballot sample will be on the town website on the election page: <https://southhadley.org/620/Elections>
- **Needs Assessment:** The town is seeking volunteers to be part of the Needs Assessment advisory committee. Contact Selectboard@southhadleyma.gov for info. Project is 100% grant funded
- **Municipal Roundtable:** The town hosted a regional budget summit earlier this month. Video and presentations will be posted: www.southhadley.org/1527/Western-Mass-Roundtable
- **MMA:** The Town Administrator attended her first meeting of the MMA's Fiscal Policy Committee and the Spring Women Leading Government conference. The TA was also re-appointed to the Legal Advisory Fund committee.
- **Health Insurance:** The town continues to explore the best option for providing health insurance for employees, comparing the recently plan design changes with the current Hampshire County Group Insurance Commission with other current alternatives. The town's consultant NFP is supporting the town in looking at alternatives.

- **Accounting:**

- The annual audit for FY25 has begun, with the auditors working on their fieldwork. Various reports and financial information has been provided.
- The department has updated the annual financial disclosure report information.
- The department continues to work with the various budget scenarios and updating information including the indirect costs for the enterprise funds and SHELD.

- **Assessor:**

- Continued work to ensure folks understand the impacts of the override and how they correlate to their valuation and tax bills.
- Provided fiscal 2026 data for use in with the Town's override impact calculator.
- Continued work on educating folks to understand the valuation (assessment) process.
- Continued review of fiscal 2026 real estate abatement requests.
- Motor vehicle Excise - commitment 1 for 2026 was processed with an issuance date of March 16.
- Working with business folks on filing their fiscal 2027 Form of List as well as the 3ABC filings for charitable organizations (mailed 1/1 due 3/1).
- Various reports and data have been provided to the auditors for the fiscal 2025 audit.
- Co-instructed Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers (MAAO) Course 200: Principles of Assessing Procedures to 26 students as well as an instructor trainee.
- Finalizing calendar year 2025 parcel splits and combinations mapping updates with vendor to update property maps for fiscal 2027.
- Continued work with IT on correcting the bridge between Vision (real estate data) and Open Gov (permitting software).
- Starting to review building permits from July 2025 forward for fiscal 2027 processing.
- Training office support staff provided through Administration.
- Participation in educational opportunities regarding laws and software processes.
- Department staff continue on working to restore, replace, update and streamline digital data and processes.

- **Cable:**

- Cable Studio staff assisted in coverage of Municipal Meetings including Special Town Meeting and Special Community Forums.
- Community Events at the Public Library, PVPA and MHC were also covered and will be broadcast/archived upon completion of editing.
- Assisted SHHS in Sports Network and Tiger Times broadcasts.
- Facilitated the repair of SHHS Auditorium lights and Fire Curtain
- Helped to produce the bi-monthly recording of BHMA's Good News
- Worked with DCR and filmmaker Gwendolyn Clancy to enhance a digitized version of "Summit House" movie from 1976.

- **Collector/Treasurer**
 - Motor Vehicle Excise Commitment #1 will be mailed March 16 and due April 15.
 - Working with auditors on FY25 information
 - Filed annual Continuing Disclosure as required for debt service
- **IT:**
 - Work with vendor on AudioEye ADA platform
 - Purchase equipment for BBP Wireless Network
 - Configure tax calculator for website
 - Finish Potability Permit for Health Department
 - Work with counterparts on Phone issue RE: Dispatch Regionalization
 - Upgrade Phone System Software

Building and Zoning

- **Mini-Splits:** Debate at the state level surrounding permits for mini-split systems from the state level. Training recently attended to confirm the variation in control for ducted versus non-ducted systems. As these become more prevalent throughout the town it will add a layer of burden to homeowners that inspectors throughout the state were trying to avoid.
- **Short Term Rental:** Training covering state guidance was attended on 2/25 to ensure interpretations are well understood before moving forward with town properties. All newly registered properties which will need to comply immediately. We are continuing to investigate dozens of properties throughout the town to have visual confirmation of these properties in operation that are not in compliance with the local or state regulations. To date, no new properties have been registered with the town
- **Certificates on Inspection (3 families and above):** Fines continue to accrue for any long-standing non-compliance addresses (about 20 properties currently.) We are over 75% of buildings in town now compliant (from just over 10% when we started) with nearly a dozen more working through final details.
- **Problem Properties:** All notices have been resent to properties with long-standing issues (unregistered vacancies, zoning/building code violations). Fines for several properties have been accruing daily.. All accrued fines will be added to quarterly tax bills going forward as soon as possible. List available to any/all parties interested.

Clerk

- **Ballot set for Town Election:** Visit southhadley.org/Elections to see sample ballots and view your options for voting in the Annual Town Election. Our office can answer questions related to the election, but not questions related to content on the ballot.
- **Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF):** <https://www.ocpf.us/> The Office of Campaign and Political Finance is an independent state agency that administers Massachusetts General Law Chapter 55, the campaign finance law. OCPF has a full guide for public employees on public resources and political activity. You can access it

here: <https://www.ocpf.us/PublicSearch/ViewDocument?id=3018> Three of the main rules for public employees are:

- Public paid employees may not solicit or receive funds for any political purpose, directly or indirectly.
 - Example: Sharing a Facebook post for a ballot committee fundraiser
- Funds may not be solicited or received in buildings used for governmental purposes.
 - Example: Using a public building as a return address for contributions or using a phone number in the building as a contact for buying tickets to a fundraiser.
- Public resources may not be used for political purpose.
 - Example: Paper and photo copying equipment in a Town building is used to print flyers asking people to vote for a ballot question.
- State Ethics Commission and public employee political activity: The conflict of interest law restricts certain activities public employees may engage in political activity. You can find their full guide here:
www.mass.gov/advisory/state-ethics-commission-advisory-11-1-public-employee-political-activity
The guide discusses different types of employees, including elected, policy-making, appointed and paid public employees.
- **Early Voting Options:** Ballots for the Annual Town Election on April 14 will arrive in a few weeks. Voters have the option to vote by mail, vote in the Clerk's Office and vote in person the day of the election. Visit southhadley.org/Elections for more information. Visit VoteinMA.com to register to vote, apply to vote by mail, or check your voter status.
- **Census - Not too late to return:** Have you recently found your 2026 census under 'that' pile of papers? It's not too late to return it to our office. We're still accepting and updating the census.
- **Dog Licenses:** Dog License renewal season ends March 31, 2026. Dogs registered after March 31, 2026 are subject to a \$5.00 late fee. All dogs over 6 months old residing in the Town of South Hadley must be licensed annually. Residents can register their dog(s) in our office or online:
<https://southhadleyma.portal.opengov.com/categories/1084/record-types/6425>
- **Additional Liquor Licenses:** You can follow the progress of the Act submitted submitted by Representative Gómez here: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/HD5438

Department of Public Works

1. **Center/Warner/Graves Project:** All drainage, tree work, concrete sidewalks and granite curb completed. Spring 2026 road reconstruction and paving, loam and seed to complete project.

2. **Buttery Brook Park:** Project completed, except for pickleball court issue: engineering contract awarded to Levesque. Spring 2026 construction.
3. **Main Street TIP Project:** MassDOT approved all utility conflicts. Design Public Hearing date: April 23, 2026, 6pm at Library. January 2028 bid date: PVPC.
4. **DPW:** Stanton Avenue drainage install; easement approved with MHC. Construction spring 2026.
5. **RT 33 paving:** Spring 2026, recessed markings and solar x-walk stanchion install, to complete project.
6. **Spring 2026 Ch. 90: Road Paving and Cracksealing Projects:** Prep work in progress for April/May projects to take place. Finalizing lists to budget funding.
7. **Main Street pump station permanent by-pass project:** Bypass work completed. Spring 2026 loam and seed to complete project.
8. **WWTP: CWMP:** Final Report presented to Selectboard, and filed with DEP. Next step, decide upgrade plan order, and choose a design engineer for phase 1 design work.
9. **WWTP:** AMP grant approved. Capital project: \$50k needed: \$25k for FY27 and \$25k for FY28.
10. **2025/26 Sidewalk Program:** new sidewalk installations: plans in progress for new installations on : Park Street, Brainerd Street, Hartford Street, Lathrop Street, bidding/oversight/construction as funding allows. DPW removal of existing sidewalks: Upper Prospect Street, Bombardier Street, Douglas Street, Berwyn Street, Camden Street during 2026.
11. **Rt. 116 brick sidewalk lighting upgrades:** In review with lighting consultant/engineers. Will provide safer lighting. **UPDATE 3/10/26:** SHELD has issued a P.O. for the first phase (1/3 of the fixtures) and hope to begin change out this May. Replacements will begin at the southern end of College Street near Leahey Avenue. This is for replacement of streetlight heads on the black, decorative poles: the original 1986 fixtures have become obsolete.
12. **Winter: Snow and Ice:** The winter costs are trending much above average, with numerous small storms, requiring salt/chemical treatments, and 11 plowing events (18 total storm events addressed) requiring contractors for plowing events. Reduced public works staffing and hired contractor lack of interest has resulted in longer clearing times, and increased costs. Salt supplies have been a challenge, due to 8 years of minimal winter weather.
13. **Landfill:** Contracted services required for gas well repairs, and run-off swale repairs from heavy rain events: Spring 2026.
14. **RRFB Installs:** MassDOT grant: Spring St. at Main St.: Spring 2026; ADA ramps installed January 2026.
15. **Morgan Street Bridge:** meeting with MassDOT on March 13 to discuss bridge improvement options to extend the lifespan of the structure, to include concrete, steel and

decking upgrades. MassDOT FAIR (Funding for Accelerated Infrastructure Repair) Program. Fully funded by MassDOT.

16. Eversource Gas: gas system infrastructure improvement project to begin in March 2026: Summit Street, Young Circle, Upper Prospect Street, Carlton Street. Main line and service line replacements.

17. Regional Household Hazardous Waste Day (South Hadley/Granby): Tentative: May 9, 2026: pre-registration REQUIRED: contact Kevin Quesnel, Solid Waste Coordinator at 423-538-5030 ext. 6500.

Emergency Management

- **Snowstorm** – Held virtual Emergency Operations communications with first responders/SHELD for the snowstorm.
- **Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA):** Working on follow-up reporting of the February 22-23 snowstorm for possible reimbursement from the State.
- **Drone demonstration at Police Dept:** Participated in a drone demonstration by BRINC, for an indoor tactical drone.
- **Hazard Mitigation Grant:** Working on closing out the grant for Hazard Mitigation Planning.

Facilities

- **MS:** The elevator modernization project will start on March 21st and will be completed within a week. The contractors did a lot of work over the February vacation, and the building automation system replacement project is 50% complete.
- **PD:** Camera system bids are in and under review and should be awarded by 3/6.
- **Capital Planning:** All FY27 requests have been submitted and the CPC will be ranking the requests and making their recommendations at the March 24th meeting.

Human Services

- **Recreation:**
 - Pickleball bid awarded to B.R. Bak and construction will begin shortly.
 - Spring registrations are open. Summer registrations to open in March.
 - Buttery Brook Park pavilion and log cabin rentals are open.
 - The grand opening event for Buttery Brook Park will be Saturday, May 16.
 - Fireworks will be Friday, Jul 3, 2026 with a raindate of Sunday, July 5, 2026.
- **Veterans:**
 - Veterans Council full up with members first meeting tentatively scheduled for Friday March 20th at 6 p.m Location To be determined.
 - Vietnam War Veterans Day event hosted by American Legion to be held at SH Public Library Thursday March 26th at 6 p.m.
 - April 18th there will be a 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War event at Evergreen Cemetery at 11:00. A similar event will follow at Village Cemetery. There is

to be a plaque installed listing Revolutionary War Veterans at both sites. This is being run by the American Legion

- **Council on Aging:**

- Fuel Assistance application assistance will take place until April. For any recipients, all funds must be expended in full prior to April 30, 2026. Fuel Assistance has additional program aspects, which include furnace repair/replacement for recipients and home energy audits.
- The COA has a SHINE counselor on site multiple times a month to answer insurance questions for older adults. Appointments can be booked at the Welcome Desk.
- There are now copies of the Golden Chronicle in Spanish available at the Welcome Desk.
- For individuals seeking used medical equipment, Dave Fenton from the Hampshire County Sheriff's Department can be contacted at 413-582-7787. Pick up and delivery are provided.
- AARP tax appointments are now taking place at the COA. All appointments are full at all local sites.

Human Resources

- **Now Hiring!:** The Town seeking a qualified and passionate individual for the position of **Council on Aging Director** within the Human Services Department. Located at the Senior Center, this position oversees all aspects of the Council on Aging operations including social services, food, transportation, facility operations and staff management. Interested candidates can find [the full posting and application here](#). The posting will be open until filled with an anticipated first review of candidates happening week of 3/23/26.
- **Insurance/Benefits:** The Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust (HCGIT) Insurance Advisory Committee (IAC) voted to approve a 12.5% increase and plan design changes to be effective FY27 (7/1/26). See [2/25/26 presentation from HILB group](#) on rate setting process and recommendations. Now that the Trust's IAC has voted on rates and plan changes, the Trust will finalize FY27 informational materials and as soon as available, the Town will communicate to staff and union groups as necessary. Once rates are finalized, updated rate charts and related information will be shared with employees and posted on the [Human Resources page of the Town website](#). Employees with questions may contact GCongram@SouthHadleyMA.gov or HR@SouthHadleyMA.gov.

Library

- **Local History Program:** In the 1800s Pearl City was the northern center of manufacturing for the town and known as one of the world's first makers of pearl buttons. On Wednesday, March 25 at 6:00 Leo Labonte will look at more than 170 years of this little hamlet's history supported by the energy of Batchelor Brook.

- **Think Spring:** The Seed Library at the Gaylord Library is hosting a Seed Starting Party on Thursday, March 26 at 6:00. Bring your own seeds or check out some from our seed library. You can also bring empty paper towels or toilet paper tubes, yogurt cups, Keurig cups, or other recycled containers and learn how to use them to start seeds.
- **Musical Petting Zoo:** Families with budding musicians: we're thrilled to welcome the Springfield Symphony Orchestra's Musical Petting Zoo back to the library on Saturday, March 28 at 10:30. Kids can try out a tuba, a cello, or flute!
- **Teen Night Craft:** Tweens & teens ages 11-19 are invited to our monthly Night Craft happening on Tuesday, March 31 from 6:30-7:30. Participants should dress for a mess, we will be creating Shaving Cream Art.

Planning and Conservation

- **Floodplain Bylaw Update:** The Town is required to update their Floodplain Bylaw. Public Hearing is scheduled for 3/9/26, and attempt to get it to Town Meeting in May 2026.
- **Subdivision Regulations Update:** The Planning Board adopted updated Subdivision Regulations 2/9/26; to be posted through the Town Clerk.
- **Agricultural Uses Zoning Bylaws:** Advisory Committee has submitted recommended draft bylaws to the Planning Board for a public listening session on March 23rd.
- **Sign Bylaw Amendment:** Planning Board is working to create a content neutral sign bylaw in compliance with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Reed v. Gilbert.
- **Planning Board Permit Applications:** Current applications under review by the Planning Board may be viewed online: [Permit Applications | South Hadley, MA - Official Website](#)
- **Conservation Commission Permit Applications:** Current applications under review by the Conservation Commission may be viewed online here: [Project Plans | South Hadley, MA - Official Website](#)
- **Redevelopment Authority:** Board has submitted a request for \$150K capitalization to be added to the ATM Warrant. Applications are being accepted for the Falls Business Improvement Grants [Falls Business Improvement Grant | South Hadley, MA - Official Website](#); Falls Digest February edition available [Redevelopment Authority | South Hadley, MA - Official Website](#)
- **Arbor Day Celebration:** Friday, April 17th 9:30-10:30 at the Hahn-Warner Arboretum, up the hill from MES Middle School. Join the Tree Committee & 5th Graders in this annual celebration that includes planting a new tree in the arboretum in honor of someone who has worked tirelessly to the protection of trees and/or natural resources in our community. This year's recipient is TBD.
- **Tree Planting Program:** roughly 50 residents have signed up for a free tree to be planted this spring. Those interested in signing up or learning more should visit the Tree Planting Program website here.
<https://www.southhadley.org/1063/Tree-Planting-Program>.

Public Health

- **Hampshire Public Health Preparedness Coalition:** There have been some changes in the coalition. MDPH has changed the requirements for the grant, which was previously administered by the Northampton Health Department. Currently, there is a new grant round and Amherst Health Department is stepping up to oversee the coalition. Our focus will be to put together a Public Health tabletop exercise in Hampshire County.
- **Harm Reduction, Impaired Driving and Medication Management Presentation:** March 18, from 1-2:30 pm along with TAPESTRY, we will have a presentation on harm reduction, impaired driving and medication management at the COA, featuring an engaging activity with goggles.
- **SHELD new building:** Director and Assistant Director will be witnessing soils/percolation test for the stormwater at the new location.
- **School “walk-thru” with Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) [Asthma in Schools](#)** Project is being scheduled for the Michael E. Smith Middle School.
- **Pilot Project: Air Quality Meeting:** We met with Dr. Angelica Patterson, Curator of Education and Outreach from Mount Holyoke College and Dr. Krystal Pollitt, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Chemical and Environmental Engineering from Yale University who will be working with the data from our Air Quality Sensors, that we received from a Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection grant, and providing the Health Department with information/dashboard that we can then make available to the community.
- **Public Health Excellence Grant:** Grant check in Term 2 (T2) meeting with our Program Coordinator for the Office of Local and Regional Health (OLRH) at Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). Our workplan-related activities are on schedule.
- **Department Head Meeting:** Participated in.
- **All Employee’s Department Meeting:** Participated in.
- **BIOBOT:** We will be providing an update on the findings to Police, Fire and

Tapestry.

Biobot Wastewater testing started in November and will continue until next November for

High Risk Substances (HRS): Cocaine, Fentanyl, Nicotine, Methamphetamine, Xylazine, Ketamine, Metedomidine, Alprazolam (Xanax)

Substance Use Disorder Treatment (SUD): Naloxone, Buprenorphine, Methadone

Opioids: Heroin, Morphine, Oxycodone, Acetyl fentanyl, Carfentanil, Codeine, Dihydrocodeine, Hydromorphone, Hydrocodone, Oxymorphone, Sufentanil, Tianeptine, Tramadol, Para-fluorofentanyl

OPIOID -

- **Harm Reduction 101 & Impaired Driving** - Facilitated by Tapestry Health and Public Health Department on Wednesday, March 18, 1-2:30pm at the Council on Aging. Will evaluate and plan to offer the program at other locations, too.
- **Biobot Wastewater Analyses** - First four months (November-present) of regular wastewater analyses provided by Biobot indicates presence of non-prescription opioids,

specifically fentanyl and norfentanyl, at steady, but low concentrations. Cocaine was also present at low but steady levels, with a slight uptick from mid-January to mid-February, alongside a steady presence of methadone. Carfentanil and medetomidine were briefly detected in late January/early February and xylazine in November and December. We will get a better sense of South Hadley's "baseline" as time goes on and additional samples are analyzed. It is important to consider contextual factors when interpreting wastewater data and to have a clear sense of the proportion of a detected substance relative to the total residential population.

- **Regional Policy & Norms Workgroup Discussion on Kratom** - Public health and youth-supporting professionals from Western MA municipalities came together to learn about kratom and discuss municipal kratom regulations. When discussing the reasoning behind restricting the sale of kratom, municipal public health professionals noted how difficult it can be to discern between synthetic products and unadulterated products on shelves due to marketing. They also noted that, from conversations with the American Kratom Association, people who are using natural kratom tend to purchase it online or through established sources.

Public Safety

- **Activity:** During the month of February, police personnel conducted investigations for 32 incident reports that did not result in criminal charges, while Dispatch personnel handled 1,577 calls for service. A detailed call summary is [available here](#).

Summary of reported incidents:

Larceny or Fraud – 7 | Property Destruction (Felony) – 2 | Assault and Battery – 1 | Motor Vehicle Leaving the Scene of a Crash – 2 | Civil Dispute – 1 | Missing Person – 1 | Restraining Order Violation – 1

- A total of 19 individuals were criminally charged during the month.

Summary of offenses charged:

Motor Vehicle Registration and Licensing Offenses – 7 | Burglary – 2 | Threats – 2 | Bylaw Violations – 3 | Possession of Narcotics – 1 | Warrant Arrest – 1 | Larceny of a Motor Vehicle – 1

- **Regional E911 Dispatching Evaluation:** Chief Gundersen met several times with Chief Stark of South Hadley Fire District 1 and Chief Moore of South Hadley Fire District 2 to discuss the feasibility of South Hadley joining a regional E911 Dispatch Center. As part of this effort, Chief Gundersen and Town Administrator Wong also met with Mayor McCabe of Westfield to explore entering into an intermunicipal agreement for the City of Westfield to provide dispatching services for police, fire, and EMS. The regionalization process is expected to take approximately six to nine months. A target implementation date of September 30, 2026, has been identified.
- **Community Outreach:** The week of March 8, Chief Gundersen, School Resource Officer Faginski, and School Resource Officer Helems joined students and staff to

celebrate Read Across America. A huge thank you to the incredible team at Skala school for welcoming us into your classrooms

- **Recognition:** Congratulations to Officers Spencer Hart, Corey Whelihan, and Josh Helems, who were honored with the Exceptional Service Award on February 20, 2026. Their quick thinking, decisive actions, and unwavering commitment exemplify the professionalism and dedication of the men and women of the South Hadley Police Department. These officers responded to a report of a masked individual breaking into a residence. Upon arrival, they made the decision to enter the home to locate the suspect and ensure the safety of anyone inside. During their search, they encountered the suspect, who was armed with a firearm. Through coordinated action and sound judgment, the officers safely took the individual into custody without further incident. Their courage, teamwork, and commitment to protecting the community reflect the highest standards of law enforcement service. The South Hadley Police Department is proud to recognize Officers Hart, Whelihan, and Helems for their exceptional performance and dedication to duty.
- **Boating Season:** The Hanson-Milone Boater Safety Act goes into effect this spring, requiring anyone born after January 1, 1989, who operates a motorboat to complete an approved boating safety course. This important legislation is intended to enhance boating safety and ensure operators have the knowledge necessary to safely navigate Massachusetts waterways. With the Connecticut River being a popular destination for recreational boating, this training requirement will help improve the safety of everyone enjoying the river.
- **Chief's Community Office Hours:** [Police Chief Jennifer Gundersen](#) will hold the following office hours for community members to stop by and share questions or suggestions:

March 10, 2026: . 9:30 a.m. *Loomis Village*

March 20, 2026: *10:30 a.m. Council on Aging*

March 25, 2023: 12:00 p.m. – *Newton Manor*