



July 8, 2017

Honorable Selectboard,

Please accept this abridged accounting of activities and initiatives which have been occupying my time and the time of other public employees during the past weeks. Thank you in advance for your attention and interest.



Ted Belsky Lookout; This “Town” supervised project continues to take shape. As you have heard me say this is a \$200K project being done for under one hundred thousand, in my humble opinion.

Mitch Resnick and Bill Bacis from the Canal Park Committee continue to be invaluable “clerk of the works” volunteers stopping by to check progress on a regular basis. DPW Superintendent and his crew have fit work appropriate for the department on top of an already tight spring/summer schedule.

Thank you to the DPW! Thank you Bill and Mitch.

The granite curb is in place, the new grassy area has been seeded, the new sidewalks have been poured replacing the uneven safety hazard previously there, we still have the paving, fencing and lighting as part of the project. That you to Dean Development for their patience on this project as well. I believe we have taken care of the “safety” concerns from the original design in an attractive manner, however we have had some complaints about the lattice blocking or detracting from the view.

The paving will be part of the Bardwell Street paving, we have request out for a fence estimate and then we will see if we have any money left for the lighting. I would also like to thank Tree Warden Ryan for his work with Northern Tree Service in restoring the vistas, it is worth a look.



Retirements, re-organizations and other summer fun; We have embarked on some significant changes in Town Hall which effect the entire operation. It is hard for one to imagine who does not work every day in Town hall how each change, whether it a retirement, a staff retrenchment or retraining (or even scheduled training) an office renovation, an equipment upgrade or just planning for vacations.

Fortunately for the Town of South Hadley there are many caring and dedicated employees, this includes the retirees and those left behind. That makes the “retirees” sound somewhat like survivors and in ways they are.

Treasurer/Collector Deb Baldini has served for decades and has been part of South Hadley her whole life, she has worked hard, been extremely cooperative through many changes throughout her career, she has transitioned from an appointed, to elected and back to an appointed employee with grace. The Acts of 2012 were put in place by the voters, but without cooperation and coordination from Deb and Clerk Hamlin, I believe we would still be mired in an outdated form of government which would have continued to impede progress. Treasurer Collector Baldini was integral to numerous changes and innovations. We will miss her dearly, as will South Hadley!

Assistant Treasurer/Collector Joan Germain , was a foundational member of Town Hall, her over 30 years of service she witnessed many changes. Joan provided a steady hand through those deviations and alterations from the early days of MUNIS to the more recent afore mentioned changes she served the town well. Conservation Administrator Janice Stone also served this community well during her tenure and we wish them all a long and healthy retirements.

These organizational challenges are reflective of the state of municipalities across the Commonwealth, South Hadley is more alike other towns than we think, as is the situation in so many cases,. The aging work population in the employ of cities and towns, is causing concern and requires multi-pronged innovative thinking. As recently as May the Mass Municipal Association had nine communities across the State of Massachusetts looking for a Treasurer/Collector(T/C). The facts are, accelerating retirements, a shallow pool of experienced municipal employees and to a lesser extent the variations in how municipalities address their organizational dynamic challenges is intensifying.

There also is a salary escalation (assistant Treasurer/Collector Natick \$80K, Treasurer/Collector W. Bridgewater \$104K), employees are expected to have a higher educational attainment, more experience and higher certifications/trainings to fill these vacancies, for good reason, they are handling millions of dollars. After considering where we fall in the salary range presently and re-evaluating the talent pool in-house, I have decide to use a “train–up” model which has already be in play for a few weeks.

To make the best use of talent and to put the right people in place there has been some changes. Laurie Vautrin a Senior Clerk in the T/C Office has been expanding her responsibilities and understanding of the T/C functions and responsibilities. I have decided to move Gail Chadwick from the Building Department to the T/C Office. Gail has experience in respect to money management through her previous experience in the bank industry which is applicable and helpful to the adjustment to operations. We will continue to provide various training along with both internal and external oversight of the office to produce a more efficient and effective model for the office. This is an opportunity for change and is in no way a reflection on the previous T/C, it is way to move forward.

Our Payroll and Benefits Coordinator will serve as the Acting Assistant Treasurer/Collector Jacqueline Iskander. She will oversee the daily operation and primary functions of the department, as she is afforded additional training, as well. The staff will report directly to her for assignments and other managerial matters. I have directed the payroll function to be folded in to the T/C function, a task already performed by Jackie Iskander.

Administration has a high level of confidence Ms. Iskander is up to the task and we will provide support in every way possible to make her and the staff successful. For some indeterminate period be the Acting Treasurer/Collector. My role will primarily continue to be deeply involved in borrowing and investment portions of the T/C functions. I will also provide oversight to staff, if Ms. Iskander is not readily available.

We continue to work with Scanlon Associates (Auditors) to ensure we are employing best practices and keeping the Town of South Hadley's financial assets safe and secure through this transitional period in the T/C Office.

The Conservation Administrator position will be filled in an "acting" capacity by Anne Capra Maddocks, she has experience working for over ten years at the PVPC and as a conservation consultant throughout Massachusetts. The position will continue to be overseen by the Town Planner Richard Harris as part of the Planning/Conservation Office function.

The Building Commissioner position will be filled in an acting capacity by Marc Guillemete, he has all the certifications need through the state (and there are quite a few) to perform the duties and responsibilities of a Building Commissioner. He is presently the assistant building Commissioner in Westborough, but has Western Mass roots. We will have limited inspectional access for a few weeks, but we encourage applicants and the public to stay in contact with the Building Department Administrative Senior Clerk Gail Chadwick (soon to be in the T/C Office) or via email mguillemette@southhadleyma.gov .

One other change we are making is Senior Clerk Claudia Frappier will be cross training and eventually assigned to the Building Department. Ms. Frappier will bring her work ethic and exceptional customer service skills to the department. It will also give us some significant cross-training flexibility with in the organization. As we will have personnel who know functions in the Building Department and the T/C Office. Always handy when the need arises and with a smaller staff it will happen I am sure.

I assure the SB and the citizens of South Hadley we are doing everything we can to lessen the impact of the changes, but must ask in all cases for your patience. It also speaks to the continued need to increase compensation while reducing or maintaining cost of government. To have this occur we need to keep pushing technology, expand training and increase responsibilities where appropriate and warranted.

I would also like to commend other departments for their "how can we help" attitude during this transition, chief among them would Missy Couture, Jamie Doolittle and Sharon Hart, their assistance and encouragement are invaluable. Both I and the ATA appreciate the teamwork.

PVTA Route Changes; these are the remarks which I read into the record on behalf of the SB on June 27 at the South Hadley Library:

Please accept this statement as part of the public hearing record, the Town of South Hadley stands opposed to any change in service to the community.

We greatly appreciate the partnership we have experienced with the PVTA over the past four years, especially with Josh Rickman Municipal Service Coordinator. Through our partnership we have cultivated the increased rider count of the X90A into one of the fastest growing routes in the PVTA system. The municipality was happy to create bus stops and agree to install bus shelters as part of a future Main Street Improvement Program. We feel confident with some adjustments we can grow the routes being threatened by the recent budget cuts including the X90A.

The Tiger Trolley has not shown the increases in ridership we had hoped with this innovative service, we are hopeful the PVRTA will be able review the challenges and opportunities this new concept affords. I truly believe this could play a part in reducing the costs associated with “dial-a-ride” and create a new customer base for the PVRTA.

The R29 has been a staple for South Hadley and we feel strongly it has potential to grow. Earlier departures and additional return times will open this route up as a viable means of access for some of the poorest members of our community and the Flats section of Holyoke. The retail and other entry level jobs associated with institutions and retail establishments in the South Hadley/Hadley/Amherst area could be vital to the economic survival for these citizens, particularly if there was earlier service. It also serves Mount Holyoke College students well, especially on weekends, as they seek access to other transportation.

The “39” from South Hadley Commons to Northampton also provides an important link for the Five College network. If the Pioneer Valley is going to continue to compete for students to live, work and matriculate in this area, we will need to continue to provide transportation which is viable for students. As we see much of the state revenue go to fund the MBTA, while the PVRTA serves a much more economically distressed ridership these cuts are felt like a lash.

The Town of South Hadley understands fully the issues surrounding difficult budgets and we stand ready to advocate at every level to increase funding for the PVRTA. As we continue to work to grow our transportation options, by promoting cycling, including through the Valley Bike Share initiative, adopting “Complete Street” planning, developing elder car sharing or just walking once and awhile, we hope you understand our passion and not allow our bus service roll back on us.

We would specifically ask for two consideration maintain the 39 at the present service level and seek to increase the R 29 service for early and late service. As for the Tiger Trolley we hope you will consider the concept in future route designs.

The recent hiring of Sandra Sheehan as the PVRTA Executive Director is a wonderful sign for the organization. I understand the difficult situation she finds herself, but having worked with her before I am sure that her solution to this crisis and strategy going forward will be fair and professional. I wish Ms. Sheehan and the entire PVRTA organization well in making these decisions.

There was good attendance, including representation from Mount Holyoke and Hampshire College, residents from South Hadley, Chicopee, Granby and State Representative John Scibak all encouraging protecting all routes, including the “Tiger Trolley”, I believe strongly there needs to be a longer period to adopt and understand this innovative transportation option.

Hopefully the funding is increased and we see ridership throughout the PVRTA system increase in FY 18, as it will become another component part to a smaller more sustainable carbon foot print.

Toth Property Discussion; on June 21 the BWC assembled a public discussion in the Town Hall Auditorium which they asked me to speak about the cleanup at the property, including the expenditures and the scope of the work performed by the low Bidder Jay-Mor Associates.

Pete Westover from ConservationWorks also gave expert testimony about trails, the planning, the pitfalls, the realities once constructed and the successes for various trails which he has acted as an environmental consultant on throughout the state. He was not charging for this visit, only acting as an oracle of experience.

There were about 40 or more interested citizens in attendance, most attendees were opposed, and the vast majority were respectful with only a few exceptions. Selectboard members Etelman and Forcier were both in attendance (which I greatly appreciate).

As is often the case some of the concerns were exaggerated or fantastical, but there were a number of good points made. I agreed to do basic and preliminary review of the concept through a contract with Pete Westover. I met with Mr. Westover this week and he will provide the following

- *Initial walk-through of the Toth property to develop a preliminary proposed loop trail route with connections to adjacent schools*
- *Preparation of preliminary trail maps showing a potential trail route, parking, topography, wetlands, NHESP estimated habitats, and location of potential bridge sites to cross wetlands*
- *Subsequent meetings with the Town Administrator and the Bike-Walk Committee to review and discuss preliminary plans and recommend next steps*
- *Preparation of final recommended trail plans with cost estimates for trail and bridge construction and signage*
- *Engagement of an engineering firm to examine the culvert pipe on the west side of the Toth property and to recommend necessary clean-out or repair measures*
- *Other analysis or design work connected with Toth property trail planning effort as may be requested by the Town within the \$2,500 ceiling for the project.*

Of all the different tasks the most expensive would be the culvert examination. It was agreed I would not use any of the \$98K balance left from the original Town Meeting appropriation. That money will be closed out to unreserved free cash as is the procedure when the scope of an article is met. We will also remove some debris which was cited, but will not attempt to sanitize the property which would be far beyond the scope of the articles or the funds within it.

The BWC is working diligently to find some common ground with the abutters, my recommendation if there is not something encouraging or acceptable for a majority of interested parties in the preliminary report from Mr. Westover the municipality should refrain from expending any more funds on this tract of land until such time an acceptable plan can be brought forward to the SB, something I believe if everyone remains reasonable such a plateau could be reached.

Final Plains School Borrowing; I would like to thank Deb Baldini, Bill Sutton and David Eisenthal for completing another successful borrowing, just as we begin another. It seems to never end.

We will have a borrowing in July, (reissuing the Ledges at a lower rate and the annual rolling debt re-issuance) and one in August (sidewalks) as well. We continue to monitor short-term interest and economic news through our advisors to determine if we need to lock in, so far that is not the case.

It appears we will be getting a good chunk of the MSBA money requested, when we have some final numbers I will get them to you.

Elevator Upgrades; the elevator at this writing is still out of order, we continue to work with citizens who have access challenges, including offering curbside service if necessary.

We apologize for the delay, but there has been significant changes ordered by the FD1 Chief to enhance safety which were not previously. We are working with the contractor to accommodate those requests, but unfortunately the equipment to accommodate the request was somewhat foreign and surprised the contractor, but it looks like we will be able to elevate in the near future

Thank you to Walter Morse for lending his art work to Town Hall (up until July 12), as we get set to welcome Christine Villeneuve Topor to the Town Hall Selectboard Meeting Room Art Show for August. We are getting to the point where if there are new artists interested I would ask you send them my way so I can discuss the process and schedule.

The Planning Department renovations are nearly complete, stop by for a look, we will add another conference room through these latest improvements. A final report for FY 17, including the Ledge's should be available for the August 8 SB Meeting, as the books are in process of being closed now and through July.

As always thank you for your support in all matters South Hadley,

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan

Town Administrator, South Hadley