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Jeff Cyr, Vice-Chair
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Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator

October 31, 2019

Honorable Selectboard:

Please accept this abbreviated accounting of activities and projects the dedicated municipal employees are performing on your behalf to better serve the Town of South Hadley.

As the seasons change, we are reminding both staff, board/commission members and the public to update their information on our Civic Ready platform so we can quickly and accurately disseminate cancellations or emergency information which may affect those groups or individuals. If you haven't signed up yet, please visit: <https://ma-southhadley.reggroup.com/signup>

Town Hall Requests: There have been some recent requests made to use town hall for non-government, off-hour (weekend or holiday) functions. I continue to discourage these requests. While I respect the fact town hall is an important public space and the citizens of South Hadley should be provided reasonable access, I must also consider the safety, maintenance and costs associated with providing expanded access.

Having access without significant controls could possibly lead to injuries or significant damage to the building as a whole or in part. Take for instance the after-hour incident where a resident was trapped in the elevator at 6 p.m. on Oct. 23. The elevator was recently inspected, was nearly completely revamped from a mechanical perspective 18 months ago, and had additional work done to remove water collecting at the bottom of the shaft.

The fire department was called and the person was extricated from the elevator cab without incident. The elevator contractor was called immediately the following morning and arrived that evening at 5:15 p.m. where Facilities Coordinator Matt Cowie was told during the extraction the doors were dislodged and the contractor would have to return the next day with more help to repair the damage.

While departments will work to make accommodations including meeting customers with limited abilities out at their car, having an elevator down in this building causes a great deal of stress. There are some school department employees who rely heavily on its operation to get to their respective offices.

Again, this is just one example. We also have door locks which occasionally cease to work, electrical lighting which is less than ideal, heat challenges, and bathroom situations which would be hard to believe.

An unpleasant and unmentionable situation occurred at the library recently in a bathroom that came under siege by a poor person with a bowel issue of the worst magnitude. The library's part time janitor (The only town building other than the schools still lucky enough to have a custodian) did a great job

stabilizing the area. However, the issue was so egregious and so troublesome we needed to call in a professional cleaner to sanitize the area.

While we do not see this problem often, thankfully, it is emblematic of why I feel so strongly about the dangers of trying to operate with volunteers and limited staff. It is why the schools appropriately charge to have staff on duty while a building is being occupied in off hours. This would be a reasonable and practical assurance that the building will be treated properly, that the building will be empty when everyone leaves, that equipment will be working properly and visitors are safe during their visit to town hall.

Please refer anyone who expresses deep concern about these concerns directly to me so I can discuss the more complex foundation of this policy. Thank you for your support on this matter.

“Moving Together” Conference: Town Planner Richard Harris and I attended the annual Moving Together Conference at the Boston Park Plaza in Boston.



It is hard to see from this photo but one of the featured projects funded by MDCR was the South Hadley Bachelor Brook Trail. When they placed it up on the screen I felt a sense of pride in representing South Hadley and seeing that the efforts of the Bike/Walk Committee, the DPW, Anne Capra and Richard Harris were being recognized at the state level.

There was a significant amount of discussion about the growing need to regulate e-assisted transportation such as bikes, scooters or skateboards on multi-use trails. It was relayed that some of the newer vehicles can achieve speeds of up to 40 MPH.

The other subject of interest was the three-fold increase in the State Trails Grant Program to \$3 million annually. In the Boston metro area, these investments are being acutely seen as means to lower congestion, fuel consumption, reduce replacement costs for roads and add a health factor to transportation needs. In Western Mass it still has a recreational or health vibe, but does have a substantial economic value to businesses near the paths and ones who deal in bikes, running shoes, etc.

Professional Development Day: It was another very interesting PD Day. Thank you to all who participated and special thanks to the Deputy Town Administrator for coordinating the event. It is heartening to see more involvement from all, as it has become commonplace now for employees to suggest some options for future PD days.

There was a change in practice where we offered multiple morning options for people to attend and then focused on larger topics toward the late morning and afternoon. Town Counsel Lisa Mead did a great

presentation on public meetings, information requests and conflicts of interest. In our line of work, you cannot repeat the message often enough.

There was a robust discussion about “First Amendment Audit,” which are a relatively new phenomenon across the United States. It is an issue where we want to make sure the public has appropriate access to public space and that South Hadley employees understand both the law and its limitations. I have copied a couple of videos below to get a flavor of this burgeoning challenge.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edVf0DcotuE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edVf0DcotuE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPjMJ0WjTn8>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0C5ifdWbCe4>

Town counsel has provided us with a memorandum as to steps the municipality can take to protect public access and ensure employees are not feeling threatened or revealing sensitive or protected information. It seems that the people filming are applying a passive/aggressive approach to this important legal right.

The presenter in the afternoon, Jon Wortman, spoke on how we can deal with stress in the workplace and received vaunted praise from many. The message was well timed considering we had just watched a “First Amendment Audit” video.

DOER Green Community: We are doing our best to prepare an application requesting designation as Massachusetts Green Community for the revised deadline, but unfortunately it seems we will not have all the necessary engineered documentation and quantification of the energy reductions.

In discussing the process with Beth Greenblatt (Beacon Solutions) one challenge we have is having the documentation of how our 20% (15% plus 5% soft) savings will be achieved. It is particularly challenging as some of the areas revealed in the most recent audits will likely produce less than 10%, but we still are working on steps we have taken since the baseline year (2017) and what they may produce. My guess is it may only be one or two percent, leaving us far below the threshold. Both Matt Cowie and I will stay at it to find a path to success.

Special Town Meeting Warrant: After dozen or more changes this week I believe the final draft will be suitable for your consideration. The two late additions are for a URFC transfer to the Unemployment Insurance and a request for a transfer from WWTP Retained Earnings to do an inflow and infiltration (I&I) required study for our permitting.

We had cut the Unemployment Insurance (UI) for FY20, as much of the previous claims came from the Ledges. While those claims are no longer our concerns, we were impacted by some of the staffing changes at the COA, the WWTP and a couple of school lay-offs. The WWTP costs we can recover at the end of the year from the enterprise fund, and I do believe we will still be lower than previous years.

The I&I will seek to determine how much infiltration is impacting the storm water system and if possible how those incidents can be mitigated or eliminated. Again, this is required and is part of the permitting requirements. Thank you to Melisa Labonte for her diligence and patience on these matters.

DPW, MuniBid, Recycling and Trash: I recently had the opportunity to spend some time at the Industrial Drive facility. I learned a great deal from the staff, particularly Kevin Quesnel, Kellie Lempke and Viv Price. These are frontline employees who are dedicated to their jobs.

Some of the discussion was about trash, recycling and the transfer station, and how they all fit together or in some case do not fit well. In the discussions it became clear that the Swap Shop, just by its nature and positioning, add to the bottle neck. I made some suggestions as to how we might look at or place the shop differently to allow people who are not there to browse more access to the bins and containers for materials and trash.

We also discussed the need to re-double our effort in terms of large items being quickly placed up on MuniBid. There was an argument made that some of these items were being reserved as “back-ups.” I suggested when the vines have fully engulfed machinery it is no longer a back-up option.

The bucket truck depicted does not meet any of the OSHA-like requirements to which we must now adhere. In our conversations I encouraged exploring the possibility of fully using rental equipment for back-up or something that is not used often. It is the direction private companies which use like- equipment have been doing to reduce costs for years.



The discussion about trash both inside and outside the Town of South Hadley has generated interest from many. I discussed with the Selectboard chair and vice chair about appointing two members of the board to work directly with me on this subject.

Thank you all for your patience and guidance.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley