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Michael J. Sullivan
 Town Administrator

Town Administrator’s Report to the Selectboard for August 11, 2020

Honorable Selectboard,

Please consider and review the information presented in this report. Thank you for your attention, patience, and leadership!

COVID Update

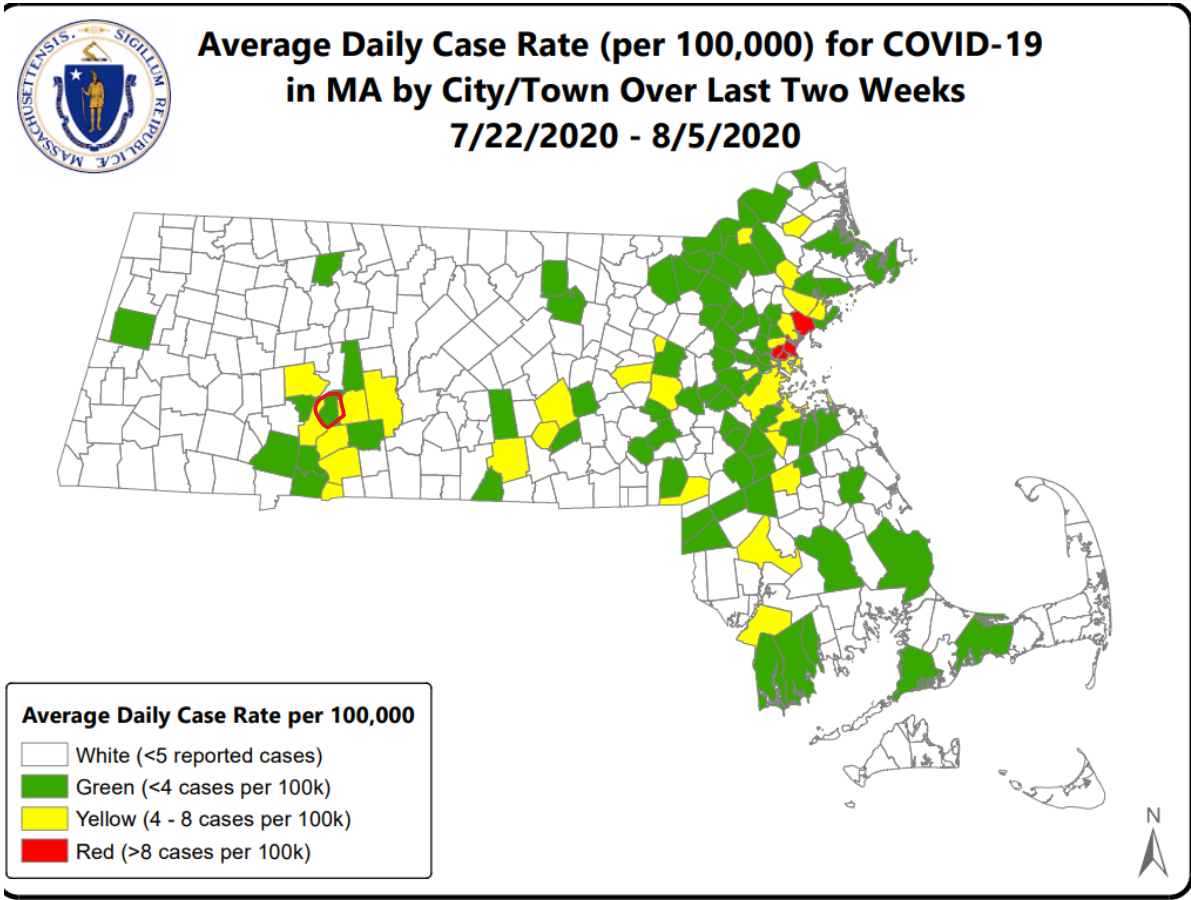
Disease	Status	Num of Cases
Novel Coronavirus	CONFIRMED	185
Novel Coronavirus	CONTACT	167
Novel Coronavirus	PROBABLE	9
Novel Coronavirus	SUSPECT	3

The above chart shows the data reported to the South Hadley Health Department as of Aug. 11, 2020. There were no new deaths reported to MAVEN, which is the Commonwealth’s standard reporting. The data in the table above is also from that system. Comparing this to previous weekly reports suggests another increase in the number of COVID cases (17 more CONFIRMED). This would be the sixth consecutive week of increases for South Hadley.

The public health threat remains significant and we hope people will continue to adopt the protocols as suggested on our COVID-19 information page at southhadley.org promulgated by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. We all understand the challenges and appreciate the incredible level of cooperation. Success in fighting this enemy of health is dependent not on government intervention - it will only be effective through citizen adherence to the guidelines. Thank you for your interest.

Regionally, Hampshire County is among the lowest concentration of cases per county, though it should be noted South Hadley has a higher rate than much of the county. In the following map I tried to circle the Town of South Hadley in red. As you can see, we are sandwiched in between communities with higher rates (i.e. Chicopee, Holyoke, Northampton, Granby etc.), but in our case still below the state average.

There will be a new mapping tool (see early preview below) coming on the state website (Mass.gov) on Aug. 12 to give a better view of communities. I look forward to using this new tool.



Aug. 4 Storm Damage



The town continues to work to overcome the consequences of Tropical Storm Isais which brought down trees, caused power outages and created situations where numerous streets had to be closed. My compliments to Emergency Management Director Sharon Hart for making sure the different departments essential to dealing with the storm were prepared in advance. She called the necessary meetings in advance and stayed in communication during the storm. SHELd, the fire districts, DPW and police did an outstanding job of prioritizing needs and working to ensure public safety needs were met effectively.

SHELd did an excellent job of addressing the more-than 300 calls for service. They were assisted in the operation from other crews from Groton, Massachusetts, as part of a municipal power and light inter-department mutual aid agreement. Nice work SHELd! Lights were back on in less than 48 hours while other communities were still in the dark.



While relatively short in terms of time the tropical depression did pack a wallop. There were nearly a hundred calls for service withing a two-hour period, and dispatchers performed in an exceptional manner.

We continue to work with the DPW and Republic Services to arrange some relief for residents who are still dealing with brush and debris which came down on their private property, as we also are working to deal with the issues we suffered on public properties and ways. Until it can be worked out, we would suggest that you prepare the debris in four-foot manageable bundles with twine. The smaller debris can be placed in paper lawn bags or open containers. The public’s patience is critical in times like these and greatly appreciated, always.

There have been calls to open up the gates at the compost station by a few, however, the vast majority of

the population understands we are in the early stages of putting a very important control and convenience in place in order to preserve the service and not walk away from the trash challenge, as there will be more “challenges” in the future. Interestingly, other communities have adopted the scheduling method for their drop-off areas. Some others have just walked away from providing the service as mentioned, telling people they must go to private haulers. Again, your patience is greatly appreciated and will be needed in these trying times!



Diversity and Inclusion



The picture to the left is from one of the videos which will be part of a training series for municipal employees. This is the link to the full video (https://youtu.be/DVasYQ_fND8). I would really appreciate if everyone receiving this report would take the time to click on the link, watch it, think about it, watch it again, think about the message for another five minutes, and then talk about what you saw with someone whose opinion you respect.

The message is, in my mind, incredibly powerful and really can help us to be more thoughtful human beings. It helps frame the issue of inclusion which could help us. This short video I believe really is at the heart of what culturally we need to address. It is in my mind rather basic.... how do we accept differences at a personal level?

The Deputy Town Administrator and I are working on a series of these short videos. We will also be including other web and media accessible tools to increase awareness of employees, particularly in how colleagues, customers or other contacts may interpret their words or actions. We will be developing a schedule for these vignettes to be viewed and subsequently be discussed in groups (virtually).

We also have scheduled to virtually meet with Dr. Lauren Appio, an expert in the psychology of inclusion in the workplace. We have been presenting similar personal learning opportunities in our quarterly professional days for more than five years and it has made a difference in how employees interact internally and externally regarding the workplace. However, we fully acknowledge we still have more work to do to make South Hadley's municipal service more aware and inclusive.

South Hadley Dog Park



The South Hadley Dog Park project continues to take shape. 75% of the funding of this project has come from a grant (\$218K) from the Stanton Foundation. The balance was appropriated by Town Meeting in 2018 (\$30K).

There is both anxiousness and excitement related to this project. We are somewhat worried, as when appropriate we want to make sure we temper the excitement when we open to avoid having large crowds initially. There will be COVID related restrictions put in place for the park, but as previously mentioned success will largely depend on public cooperation.

Town Hall Operations

As Town Administrator I would like to express my gratitude in relationship to the cooperation and understanding of the citizenry of South Hadley. We realize the inconvenience of town hall and other municipal buildings being closed has thrust upon everyone. We continue to strive to adopt to your needs. As many of you know we have numerous online applications, the ability to live contact, and if there is no other way to provide the service we may consider offering an outdoor appointment if we can do it safely.

In town hall and at other municipal facilities employees are fully engaged in processing and working to provide the necessary support for online services and other needs as they present themselves. There is strict face covering, distancing and other practices being adhered to in order to protect staff. We have had the need to have about eight or so COVID tests administered to employees (those cases are protected under the law from public disclosure). Thankfully we had only one positive case among those tested and the appropriate steps for that employee and those who may have come in contact with the employee were taken immediately. At the time of this writing everyone tested is back at work and, more importantly, healthy.

We have put an employee travel restriction policy in place. That will require an employee to quarantine if they travel outside of New England, New Jersey, or New York. The policy is subject to change as other regions or states experience spikes in numbers or severity of COVID cases. If your work cannot be

reasonably be performed remotely during the quarantine you will need to take unpaid leave or use accrued time for the quarantine.

New Phone System

The installation of the new phone system is nearing completion, thankfully. I can see the new phone on my desk, but it is somewhat still in the distance. I appreciate the diligence of Jamie Doolittle on this three-year odyssey.

It will provide several new features and hopefully will not be as susceptible to outages as the present system. It will provide interoperability to other municipal buildings and allow transfers to the School Department. It also will identify callers, so the person who likes to leave the personal expressions on my phone - I will be able to call you back 😊 It also will reduce the cost to the town annually. Let us hope it works!



In-person Voting, Mail-in, Early Voting



It was all-hands-on-deck recently to get more than 3,000 ballot requests out in 48 hours for mail-in or “absentee” ballots to which they have been historically referred. The process of getting the party-affiliated ballot into the appropriate requester’s envelope is no easy task when you have this many requested. Richard Harris, Mellissa Couture, Colleen Canning, Andy Rogers, Jennifer Picard, Lynn Hogan, yours truly and of course the Clerk and Assistant Clerk all took a turn at the table. Everyone was appropriately masked, social distanced and there was plenty of hand sanitizer.

You can return your ballots to the “Tax Collector” mail box located between the back corner of the Police Station and the back corner of the Town Hall (enter the PD lot from Bridge Street and just as you go between the two buildings it is on your left). We ordered - and so has almost every other town in America - a larger, clearly marked drop box three weeks ago. As soon as we get it, it will be installed just past the Tax Collector box and again will be clearly marked for SoHa ballots. There are multiple cameras trained on this area to provide security for you and your ballot.

For the upcoming state primary, the “Early Voting Schedule” is as follows:

- Saturday, August 22: 9 AM - 1 PM
- Sunday, August 23: 9AM - 1 PM
- Monday, August 24 - Wednesday, August 26: 10 AM - 2 PM

116 MAIN STREET, SUITE 107, SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS 01075-2070

- Thursday, August 27: 3 PM - 7 PM
- Friday, August 28: 10 AM - 2 PM

The Early Voting will be held at the South Hadley Public Library 2 Canal Street. The last day to register is Saturday Aug. 22. The Clerk has arranged for anyone who may need to register at the library on Aug. 22 during the “Early Voting” hours. Thank you, Clerk Hamlin, for all the opportunities you have created to have the people’s voice heard. On Tuesday, Sept.1 at South Hadley High School there will be the traditional in-person voting, as well.

Cyber Access Project

I will be presenting to the Selectboard at their next meeting a proposal to use a portion of the PEG Access Funds to provide access to families and individuals who lack internet access. This program will be designed to reflect the “Comcast Essentials” program. It will have some income restrictions and if you are or were a Comcast customer in the last three months you may not qualify.

We also will be attempting to have an equipment lending component to the project, as necessary. It will be targeted at families with school age children and seniors who qualify. However, we will be making provisions for any South Hadley residents to be part of the program to lessen the digital divide, including veterans and persons with different abilities. There are still many details to work out, but this will be just another way the Town of South Hadley is considerate of the those who are underserved in the community.

SHELD Fibersonic will be part of this program where it is available. As more areas have Fibersonic available in South Hadley it will give us yet another tool to close the digital divide.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley