

Jeff Cyr, Chair
 Sarah Etelman, Vice-Chair
 Christopher Geraghty, Clerk
 Andrea Miles
 Bruce Forcier

Michael J. Sullivan
 Town Administrator

Town Administrator’s Report to the Selectboard for August 18, 2020

Honorable Selectboard,

Please consider and review the information presented in this report. The next Selectboard meeting will be held August 25, as the schedule was adjusted at your Aug. 4 meeting.

I would remind other readers that the Selectboard voted to adjust the September schedule as well to accommodate the upcoming election. Meetings will return to the 7 p.m. start time. Please go to <https://www.southhadley.org/156/Clerk> for comprehensive information on the September 1 election.

COVID 19 Update

LBOH Count - Events Per Disease and Classification in Jurisdiction

Classification: confirmed, contact, probable, suspect

Event Dates from 03/01/2020 to 08/19/2020

Jurisdiction(s) selected: SOUTH HADLEY

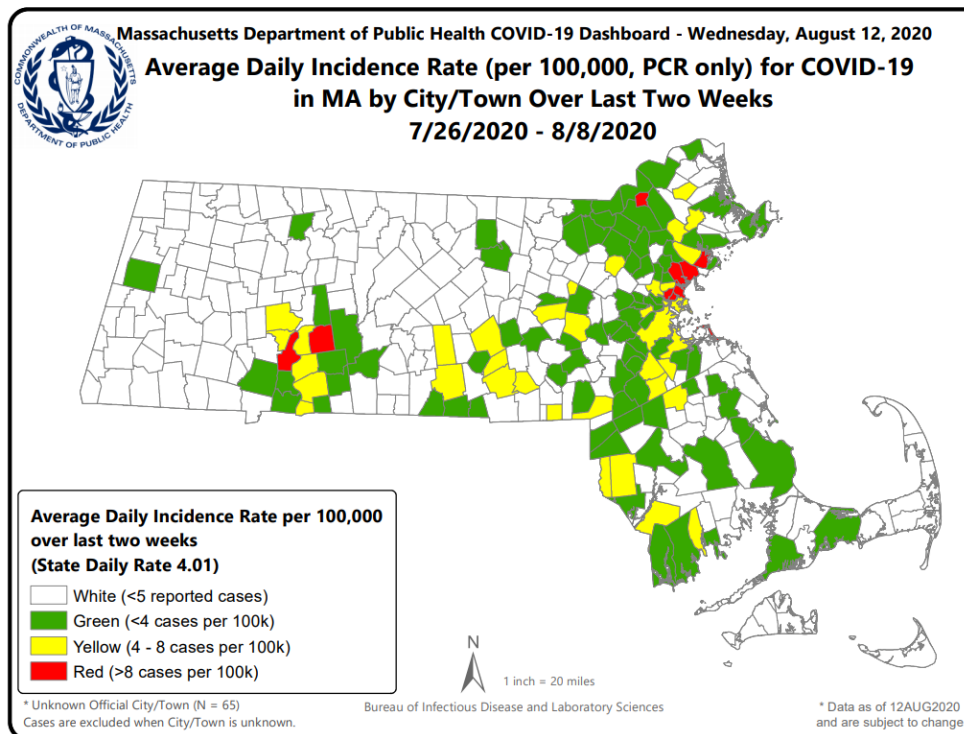
Disease	Status	# of Cases
Novel Coronavirus	CONFIRMED	203
Novel Coronavirus	CONTACT	195
Novel Coronavirus	PROBABLE	9
Novel Coronavirus	SUSPECT	3

As you can see from the above table, the number of active cases continues to rise in South Hadley. As anyone following the news is aware, the two communities (Granby and Holyoke) I mentioned in my previous report went from the cautionary yellow designation to a heightened concern as a “red” community. South Hadley went from “green” to the cautionary “yellow” status. There were no new reported deaths in South Hadley.

It is a crucial time for all of us to look at what this means overall in terms of the progression of the virus. As much as it pains us all it is wise for us to consider what part we can play in fighting the spread of COVID 19.

As I am writing this report, I have been informed by both South Hadley Health Director Sharon Hart and our State Senator Jo Comerford of information about an additional 18 confirmed cases that will be logged into the MAVEN system within the next hour. They will not appear in the mapping system until next week, but will send us clearly into the “red.”

Early reports suggest the case age group will be 19 to 21 years old and be related an apartment party (still unclear if it was in South Hadley or a nearby community). We can expect more of these flare ups if people do not embrace the safety practices outlined on the COVID 19 page on southhadley.org. I am sure more about this incident will be revealed in the coming days and we wish all involved to play it safe and recover quickly.



South Hadley Police Department

Recently there has been a much-needed conversation about policing in America. It also has invited a conversation more broadly in respect to inclusion and understanding diversity.

Chief Jennifer Gundersen has instituted several measures to have the South Hadley Police Department become a more transparent, open, and informed public safety resource. The chief has instituted an “Unbiased Policing” internal policy (Policy #31) which in part says:

“ The South Hadley Police Department is charged with protecting these rights, for all, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, political status, disability, religion or other belief system. Because of the nature of law enforcement, officers are required to be observant, identify unusual occurrences and violations of law, and to act upon them. It is this proactive enforcement that keeps citizens free from crime, streets, and highways safe to drive upon, and that detects and apprehends criminals. This policy is

intended to assist officers in accomplishing their mission in a way that respects the dignity of all persons.”

This policy clearly articulates the means and goals of providing public safety is expected to provide every person respect and to never allow bias to cloud one’s perspective. We all wish it were as easy as writing a policy and we could absolve ourselves of any bias or prejudice. Unfortunately it will take a greater effort than just a swipe of the keyboard. However, having policies which clearly frame the expectations in advance and embedded in all training makes a huge difference.

The Chief and I have taken a closer look at UCR’s as there have been a great deal of seemingly suburban myth about who and why people interact with the South Hadley Police Department. When we look at traffic stops from Jan. 1, 2016 through Aug. 10, 2020, (some of that period proceeds Chief Gundersen) there is nothing that jumps out as irregular from prior to her arrival statistically. There were 2,899 traffic stops during that period, of which 90.27% were White, 5.35% were Black, 1.24% Asian and 3.14% “Unknown.”

The “unknown” was interesting as in traffic stops the officer needs to make a judgement call as to the category and can choose “unknown” if she/he is unsure. There is legislation pending which would allow drivers to self-identify, taking away need for police personnel to guess. When reviewing these statistics, the Chief noticed that when there was a stop, or a “warning” issued, there was no recording as to a category. This flaw in the system has been corrected so the department will have better data to review the level of equity stops.

When reviewing “arrests” there are two categories which need to be considered - someone who was taken into “custody” and someone for whom an arrest warrant was issued by the courts. Over the same period there were 1,567 arrests of which 90.5% were White/Hispanic, 7.8% were Black and 1.8% either unknown or Asian. Given that many of the arrests are not technically controlled by South Hadley, but by the courts, it does give somewhat of a skewed perspective. For instance, out of the 122 arrests of persons statistically listed as Black, 81 were court summons and outside the control of the local police.

These are some of the important data points which need to be sifted through to get a true depiction of the needed reforms if we want to bring equity to our justice system. There is much work to do, but unlike so many departments across the country, the South Hadley Police Department is starting from a reasonable place. There is no statistical history of abuse or complaints against individual officers or the department in general. Please do not think that we are satisfied - the Chief is not content to suggest these statistics are evidence that the department has been cured of all bias The men and women of the South Hadley Police Department remain dedicated to improving, becoming more transparent, more understanding of the populous and more skilled at keeping the peace without the use of force.

This is a work in progress from which input from all is important. I would however ask as a community we never lose sight of the inherent differences between each of us and how the same perspective has to be fairly applied to organizations in recognition of how they are unique from the peer organizations. Lots of work still to do!

Ballot Drop-off Box



The secure ballot drop box I expect will be installed at the rear of the South Hadley Police Station where there will be two cameras trained on it to protect your vote. The installation will take place by the end of the week and directional signs will be placed at the Bridge Street entrance to the Police Department parking lot guiding voters to the drop box.

We also would like to let voters know that if you mail an “absentee” or “mail-in” ballot as a South Hadley voter in South Hadley it never leaves South Hadley. Let me explain - when you normally mail a letter, even in the same town, it often goes to a sorting center like in Hartford. Then the letter travels back to its destination.

In the case of the ballots, the Town Clerk has discussed with the local postmaster an arrangement to collect all the ballots at the South Hadley Post Office and arrange their secure delivery to the Town Clerk. This significantly reduces the possibility of the ballots getting misplaced. Town Clerk

Hamlin is going above and beyond to ensure your vote is counted.

“Early Voting” will begin at the South Hadley Public Library this Saturday and Sunday from 9 AM to 1 PM. Please go to the Clerk’s web page for more voting information. Thank you!

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley