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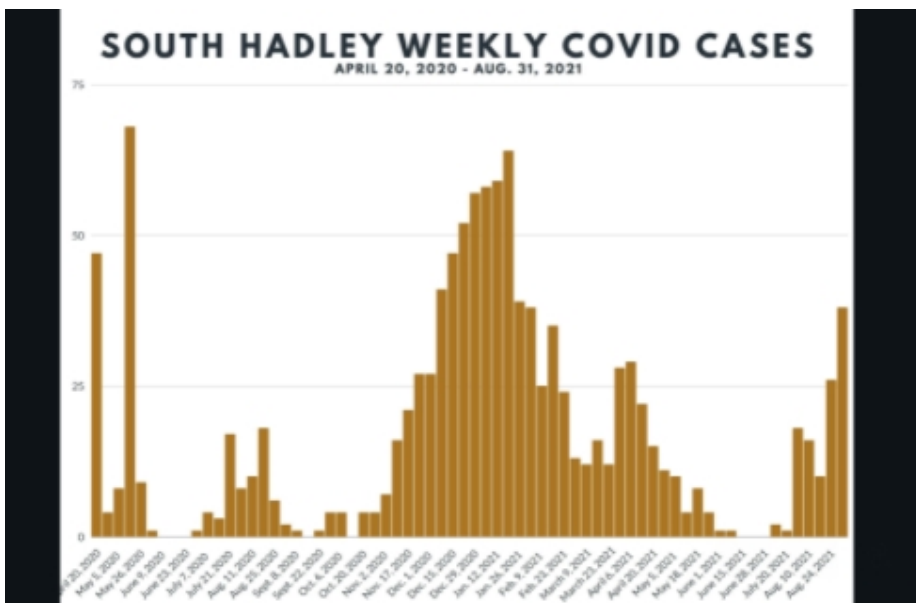
Town Administrators Report to Selectboard September 10, 2021

COVID 19 Update

I truly am dismayed that this continues to be the lead story for my report, however it is the primary issue occupying my days as well as many others in Town Hall. It is very unfortunate and disheartening.

As you can see by the numbers below, we are trending significantly upwards. We have gone from weeks in the beginning of the summer where we were seeing one (1) increase a week to three weeks in a row of 25 or more.

Status	Num of Cases	8/31/2021	8/24/2021	8/17/2021	8/10/2021	8/2/2021	7/20/2021	7/13/2021
CONFIRMED	1191	1163	1125	1099	1089	1073	1055	1054
CONTACT	923	917	903	885	871	864	857	857
PROBABLE	113	109	102	100	99	98	94	93
SUSPECT	43	39	35	34	34	34	34	30



This visual created by Kristin Maher really shows the trajectory of the increased case since April 2020, as you can see, we are seeing a precipitable spike.

As many of you are aware the Town of South Hadley has begun working with MIT at the start of the pandemic to collect data at the Water Pollution Control Facility often referred to as BioBot data. As a precursor to where the case count in South Hadley is

headed, BioBot clearly says we are headed in the wrong direction and likely will be for the near future.

It should be clear to everyone by now the way we start to fight back is clear, vaccines and masking. We have put a mask mandate in place in South Hadley for public buildings. Which many surrounding communities have adopted as their policy as well. In Town Hall we have seen a high level of compliance. However, it is well known some people object and are unwilling to comply. We are not asking staff to engage or escalate those rare situations, we offer a mask, if they refuse, we try to accommodate their needs as quickly as possible and send them on their way.

In other settings (i.e. Library, Senior Center) where someone would be visiting for 15 minutes or more we may take additional measures to have the person(s) removed and possibly trespassed from the facility if warranted. It should be understood we have a responsibility to take all reasonable measures to protect staff in the workplace.

It also makes sense from a service model; people should realize we do not have a lot of “extra” staff waiting on the bench to deliver the requested services to the public. The Town of South Hadley is a lean organization where if only a few people are out, it may cause an entire office to be closed. We continue to encourage citizens and appreciate the cooperation we have seen in using on-line services.

There have been several calls referring to media reports about “other” towns having community wide mask mandates. I assure you every community is struggling with this issue and have had no success in forcing people to wear masks, all success is through cooperation, not coercion. I have asked Town Counsel to look at state laws to enforce a mask edict and beyond the media representations, misrepresentations or misunderstanding there is no law which allows us to enforce the mandate on properties privately held (supermarkets, restaurants, convenience stores etc.).

The Health Director is working with a provider to offer a testing site once a week at a location to be determined. It will likely be Saturday morning somewhere accessible in the Falls, it will be a drive-or-walk-up arrangement and will be no cost to the town. There will be more information as soon as it is finalized.

The Health Department and Administration have asked business particularly who have direct dealings with the public to adopt a mask mandate for their establishment or at least post a sign requesting customers to do so, some have some have given a flat out “no”. Each of you have the power of the consumer, if you feel your view is being devalued by a retailer or company you patronize, then I would encourage you to speak to a manager, go on-line to their website or send a good old fashion letter.... or maybe just not shop at the place anymore. The power is with the person. Thank you to all those South Hadley residents who continue to do the right thing!

Mold Situation @ High School

This unfortunate situation has caused some significant levels of frustration and rightfully so throughout the community. Students and parents are upset about the undetected presence of mold

at the high school, and we are as well. As we have witnessed in other settings (Elms College, Roderick Ireland Court House, Northampton High) this is a growing problem.

There are several contributing factors and as I learn more about how mold spores are introduced into a building and what conditions they thrive in it is no surprise. The spores are likely introduced through building air intake, the CDC recommends an air exchange of between 30 and 50% for outside air, but early on for COVID 19 public building were recommended to change their outdoor flow to 85%. Those spores love warm moist areas where there is little or no circulation. So, we introduce more air, more spores into a closed building with warmer spaces creating a big petri dish. The higher temperatures and highest rain fall on record all contributed to the growth I suspect.

Yes, it is easy to say at this juncture you should have had more dehumidifiers or air purifiers, which we did add in public buildings including schools. We should have identified it sooner, that goes without saying. There should have been more money invested in training, staffing or equipmentand maybe that would have prevented it. These and countless other reasons have merit and should be part of any postmortem for the outbreak, but for now we should focus on getting this taken care of in the quickest and safest method possible.

It is my strong belief and recommendation to the Selectboard we considering using ARPA funds to address this issue sooner than later. While there is some room in the assessment to suggest this is not “only” COVID related, I think there is sufficient evidence changes that having the building closed played a major part, but that musing does not solve the problem.

Superintendent Mosley is diligently reaching out to DESE and other sources to seek “any and all” relief or assistance related to the likely substantial costs which are necessary to abate this unwanted growth. This includes getting the training and equipment for staff to ensure this does not happen again. He has set multiple tracks to explore any and all ways to get students back in a classroom safely. I can assure you no one is more frustrated, upset or working hard to solve this problem than Dr. Mosley, even though he should be enjoying a the “honeymoon” period of his tenure.

I know the Selectboard, Administration, the Facilities Coordinator, Health Director and all other departments are willing to help in any way they can to address this situation. Hopefully it will be a “remember when” item sooner than later.

Transfer Station Research

DPW Director Chris Bouchard has recently completed some research about how various surrounding communities are servicing the waste disposal needs of their citizenry. Here is some of what was found, the transfer station for Chicopee the fees are similar for drop off by appointment, hours are similar and there is no “annual” fee as it is part of their taxes, similar to Holyoke where there is no charge for materials dropped of at the Transfer Station where you get 8 visits per year, and it is open Tuesday and Thursday 7:30 AM to 2 PM. Belchertown the fees are higher, schedule similar and no lawn waste drop off. Easthampton only has drop off for lawn waste only on Saturday morning.

The other interesting highlight from the research was that Chicopee, Easthampton, Amherst, Granby, Holyoke, Belchertown or Hadley do not have “swap shops” and like us recommend people use Hartspring, Salvation Army, Savers, Goodwill or other non-profits which accept donations of textiles and other goods. In my humble opinion South Hadley now provides a sustainable and competitive service in terms of cost to the residents in comparison to other communities. The analysis also looked at other operators like Valley Green in E’hampton and Cassella in Holyoke. Although these are commercial operations, they do offer service to the general public. While I have never used Cassella I have become quite familiar personally with Valley Green. As I am downsizing, I have found the need to dispose of some furniture, lawn tools and other “debris” and Valley Green is reasonable and efficient to use and they take anything, well so far.

Fireworks Labor Day Weekend

The fireworks although shorter than in previous years due to supply issues and rising cost for pyrotechnics came off without a hitch. Generally, reports suggested that people were more inclined to keep social distanced, there was some mask wearing and many people sought alternate sites. There were 19 people who received vaccines at the event. We will see in another week or so if the event had a direct effect on infection rates, it was a tough decision to allow the event to go forward and was planned as you know when the cases had dropped to historical levels.

Thank you to Rec Director Andy Rogers for coordinating the event. Also Thank you Fire Districts 1 and 2 for their cooperation and the South Hadley Police for keeping everything orderly. I would also like to thank the Parks Division and the DPW for all their work before and after the fireworks, great job all.

9/11

I would like to express my condolences to all those who lost a friend, family member or co-worker in the tragic events of September 11, 2001. It is true none of us will ever forget the devastating effect it had on our nation the nearly 3,000 lives lost due to that act of cowardice, yet in some strange way brought us together as a nation in our resolve. Maybe the remembrances planned for later today and tomorrow will inspire togetherness, a sense of common good and a newfound civility in our everyday interactions.

Thank you, Bob Blaney, Chief Caulkins and VSO Mike Slater for organizing to all those who lost their lives or were physically or emotionally affected by that infamous day. Stay safe!

Respectfully submitted

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley

