



March 17, 2016

Honorable Selectboard;

Please accept this as an abridged accounting of recent activities of the Town Administrator on your behalf and related to various projects and initiatives.

**Ledges Update;** The golf season is on track to begin April 1<sup>st</sup>, with a soft opening perhaps sooner. General Manger/ Recreation Director Andy Rogers has been diligent in getting the course on track on a number of fronts, including communicating to pass holders some of the changes. The Golf Coordinator (James Falco) position has been filled with an experienced and energized PGA professional, he comes with a great deal of experience both in public and private courses. Both the Golf Coordinator and Mr. Rogers attended the Golf Commission Meeting this week to discuss the progress and review their respective roles.

The Food and Beverage Coordinator applications have been coming in and we should have the position filled by the end of March and someone in place for early April. There will be a limited refreshment menu and basic "grab and go" items for the course opening. This will allow a smaller staff to begin with, but as the staff hiring and training gathers momentum the restaurant will open shortly thereafter. It was disheartening this week to see we had to dispose of out date food products (some over a year) including steaks, pork chops and lobsters. It reinforced our strategy to simplify the menu and concentrate on offering a quality product at a reasonable price.

The reduced budget being presented will hopefully offset some of the annual losses the course has experienced and thereby reduce the taxpayer's annual contribution to operations. This is not to say that everyone will like all of the changes, but I assure you there has been ample thought and discussion at the management level prior to implementation. It will be a best effort to improve the operations, but may take more than one season.

**PVPC Roundtable Municipal Finance;** Town Accountant William Sutton and I attended a recent PVPC Roundtable dedicated to best practices associated with budget a long-range forecasting. It seemed we were doing a number of things well and like most communities we needed to improve in some areas. The two most notable was to create financial policies which address the need to fund OPEB formulaically (some communities have not even started a fund) and secondly to start a basic projection of revenues and costs.

The Town Accountant has already started reviewing some of the financial policies with relevant department managers. As far as best practices for budgeting we were either close to or ahead of what

was being suggested, long range forecasting we were about where everyone else is and need to better job.

Division of Local Services (DLS) (former Belmont Finance) Director Sean Cronin was one of the presenters and Eric Kinshurf a well-respected and knowledgeable certified public accountant from the Boston Area, who specializes in municipal accounting spoke to the “cycle of budget” and gave some suggestions as to how to prepare. Again, in speaking to many communities we are ahead as far as the schedule goes in the budget process.

The roundtable covered the DLS role in annually certify the tax rate and each communities free cash and some of the expected changes from the State House for this coming year. Over 20 Western Massachusetts communities were in attendance, this series is hosted by PVPC at no cost to participants.

**Western Mass Economic Development Partnership (EDP);** On March 10, I attended the monthly meeting of the EDP. The focus was on the June Developers Conference, which I have suggested to the RDA Vice-Chair, South Hadley may want to participate with assistance from some of the property owners who have vacancies (i.e. Woodlawn Plaza, US Gaylord Properties).

The conference invites developers from across New England to meet with communities, developers and anyone who is interested in growing the economy in the Pioneer Valley. It is in my opinion a worthwhile exercise for South Hadley and one where I will continue to promote a conversation.

**Mount Holyoke Anthropology Class;** Professor Josh Roth and his Anthropology Research class at Mount Holyoke recently invited me to speak to the class about renewable energies and how South Hadley was working towards expansion. The landfill methane to energy project was discussed and the solar array at the landfill. I also expressed to the group that the SB was very much in favor of growing those opportunities to harness renewables, as well as reduce consumption of fossil fuels.

They asked about how some of the change contemplated and being discussed at SHELD may benefit the efforts for South Hadley to increase renewables. I replied, “any project has to make sense to the town and the municipally owned utility”. It is important, particularly with some of the diminishing credits for solar we carefully chart a course which will pay dividends to all corners of the town.

**Hampshire County Health Insurance Trust;** On Wednesday morning I attended the HCHIT Executive Committee meeting in NoHo. The most important discussions were centered on the rising costs of pharmaceuticals and how this issue will likely significantly impact the rates in future years. There is continued discussion about plan design change to update co-pays and deductibles which may help with the cost for those who do not use the benefit as often. This as you all know, is a common practice for groups to consider. This will be difficult, as it would have to get a majority vote of all unions in each towns as prescribed in Section 19 to move forward.

It seems we have successfully completed the ACA reporting required for all employees this year and I have to credit the hard work of the ATA, Payroll and Benefits Coordinator Jacqueline Iskander with assistance from HCHIT.

**Devens Massachusetts Municipal Managers Meeting;** The subject matter could not be more timely for us to understand changes at the Joint Labor Management Committee. Mayor Dean Mazzarella,

Management Vice-Chair and a host other presented on the topics challenging management when it comes to labor negotiations.

I attended along with the ATA/HR Director Jennifer Wolowicz. There was some difficult subject matter, the main premise was we should never give up on striking a deal with unions. It underlined the importance of making it clear what management needed and seeking consideration from the unit in respect to those needs.

**Warrant Articles for 2016 ATM/STM;** The deadline for departments to submit articles to the Town Administration is March 30. Presently there is about 14 articles which are required or are being requested for the ATM and about three for the STM. I still believe the key is making sure a department or board is ready to put an article on the warrant, there is always another Town Meeting and if it has been “that way” for years another seven months will not make a great difference in the grand scheme of things in most situations.

**Synthetic Turf @ High School:** The project bids have come in under the \$900 K cap and if the Selectboard approves the contract (or authorizes me to sign) it will allow the turf to be installed over the next few months with minimal or no interruption to recreational services.

This project has been coordinated by the Recreation Director Andy Rogers and has wide support from the Schools, youth leagues, players and parents according to his reports and from what I have heard, as well.

Thank you for your support and guidance. Happy St Patrick’s Day!

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan

Town Administrator, South Hadley