

Sarah Etelman, Chair
John Hine, Vice-Chair
Andrea Miles, Clerk
Ira Brezinsky
Bruce Forcier

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator

February 2, 2018

Honorable Selectboard Member:

Please accept this report as an abridged accounting of activities I and the hardworking town employees have been addressing in South Hadley Town Hall and beyond. There is a lot happening, I hope this report will frame some of the more contemporary and demanding tasks at hand.

As always, thank you for the support, direction and leadership you provide!

Dog Park Project; There will be another opportunity for any interested parties to voice their opinion on having a "Dog Park" in South Hadley on March 7th in the Selectboard Meeting Room (Town Hall 116 Main Street) at 4 PM. Thanks to the civic effort of Sue Kelsey, Bob Berwick, Kathleen Harwood, Planning Chair Jeff Squire and Selectboard Member Bruce Forcier (all in attendance at this meeting), along with support from Planner Richard Harris this initiative seems like it is about to start wagging its tail.

As I suggested to the group it is critically important this project is driven by involved dog owners, ultimately it cannot be a singularly municipal project. We need their advocacy and experiential knowledge to build the right model. When you look around South Hadley (or any town) the ideas which take hold and flourish are those driven by passionate advocates (i.e. MASH, Memorial Day Parade, Youth Baseball, Youth Soccer, Youth Football, BWC Treks...), the municipality does facilitate, but does not necessarily create.

This upcoming meeting will allow people to talk about possible sites, suggest amenities, consider fundraising options, and reflect on who should make the rules and what type of oversight may be needed. It is always best to get all ideas and suggestions out early to avoid trying to fit them in later or worse start from the beginning, so if you have recommendations please attend.

There will be another meeting held on Saturday April 7 @ 10 AM in Town Hall Auditorium, but I would encourage people who want to be integral and have a seat at the table should not wait until April. I am confident the pioneers of the project will not take kindly to "starting over" each time there is a meeting and rightfully so, I encourage you if you want to be part of the movement, do not wait.

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Clerk's Office Schedule; As you are aware we have been suggesting openly for over two years the service model in Town Hall is evolving and similar to so many "ways" we see other parts of our lives changing. From retail where Amazon has shaken how we receive goods to the core or how that little rectangle of circuitry we have in our pocket or on a belt has changed phone service and communication, or how/where we watch movies... the world is changing.

Municipal service models must change, as well. While we invest more in platforms to allow people to pay on-line, report issues via a website or email, review budgets on our website, post FAQs, apply for permits and communicate emergency information are both investments and examples of change.

The evolution of service delivery in cities and towns is also altered by compensation demands without growing budgets. We compete for and invest in training to generate higher skilled employees, we must think creatively to succeed in a changing world.

When we look at other communities such as Easthampton in which town offices are closed every Friday, or Granby which closes at noon on Friday and has limited hours in several offices it becomes apparent towns need to innovate and reallocate resources including schedules.

The Clerk's Office will continue to fill the needs of South Hadley residents, for dog or tag sale permits, birth or death certificates, election issues or marriage certificates, census processing and a host of other services. While the hours will be limited temporarily to (8:30 to 1PM) people will be able to apply on-line for permits or simply send the Clerk an email to request information. Of course we will still do our best to assist people when unexpected situations arise, but ask residents to try to conduct their needed face to face business for the next two months during the new schedule.

During this period we will be re-allocating time on task to process the over 5,000 census returns, prepare for the April election, continue to navigate public information requests, comply with other various state and federal filings and prepare for the May Town Meeting, plus process various other reports and documents to different agencies, along with other "Clerk" tasks. We also will be utilizing staff from other offices to help with processing and petition verification as they are trained. The change will be monitored by Administration to see how it effects service. I would like to thank all of those individuals who have volunteered to train and assist in the various projects, thank you.

It should be noted the service modeling does consider efficacy take in to account to facilitate seasonal and long term needs when re-allocating resources. That does not always mean "reduction". Recently we served two dozen or more residents with extended hours in the Treasurer/Collectors including a Saturday opening which netted

eleven customers. We also on occasion have provided extended hours for voter registration, early voting and trash permits, in an attempt to make access easier. We always appreciate the cooperation and reasonableness of the vast majority Citizens of South Hadley, as we evolve. These exercises are solely meant to find innovative ways to spend your tax dollars wisely, it would be much easier to use a method used by so many towns ...just through money and new employees at the problem, but long term that did not and will not, work well.

Professional Development Training, Friday January 26 we had our quarterly Professional Development Day. As you know these sessions are important training opportunities for municipal staff. It gives employees a chance to move back from the frenetic pace of their jobs and take a look at the bigger picture which they/we are part of.

The subject matter at this PDD was 'diversity'I know previous sessions have covered this subject, it is continually part of the news, where will it all end?
I would offer two observations, one if nothing these sessions have demonstrated the need for more training on this subject and it will end when we see tangible signs of growing tolerance and understanding.

Cally Ritter from All-One-Health did a great job of starting the conversation, exposing some deeply held biases, highlighting some typical defense mechanisms and most importantly made some modest impacts on a employees about improving our vision of the true "big picture".

This work is too often shrugged off as unimportant and easily deflected with lines like "...people need to grow thicker skin" or "...now you cannot say anything to people". While both of those may be true in the short term the hope is we can all become more aware, more thoughtful, more accepting and generally ...nicer.

This training dovetails nicely into the listen sessions being offered by way of the Symposium of Understanding. I believe it is generally accepted the issues we face about hate and bias are deep seated, they are no greater or less than other communities and it will not change in one meeting or presentation. The path will be long and will need engagement from as many citizens as possible. Thank you to so many who are working to facilitate change.

Tax Title Process; The Assistant Treasurer/Collector Jacqueline Iskander and I have been working with Attorney Allison Finnell who works for D'Ambrosio & Brown our tax title legal support to craft some regulations and equitable standards for delinquent taxpayers.

As we have implemented some of the reasonable an industry best practices we have had a smattering of push back from those who would suggest doing it the old way,

even though the “old way” in some situations have created a seemingly insurmountable liability for the taxpayer.

We will be instituting a process where if a person is in arrears for fifteen months (5 quarters) and owes more than \$300 the property. When those parameters are met we will be lienning the property and placed in tax title. This does not necessarily mean the property will be placed into tax title “foreclosure”, the taxpayer will be afforded an opportunity to work with D’Ambrosio to settle the debt with the town over a reasonable period. If during that period the debtor shows no effort or just are not able to address the outstanding tax liability the property will in most cases be moved to foreclosure. In all situations the town is in communications with D’Ambrosio about individual cases.

It is worth noting of the over 6,000 taxpayers in South Hadley less than 20 will find themselves in foreclosure and only 3 or 4 will be candidates for a taking in the end. I cannot stress enough we are willing to work with people, but the law says we must use “any and all means” to collect taxes. I believe having a policy which is well crafted, equitable and adhere to by all will make the process work well.

Metras Insurance; Recently I had the opportunity to meet with Bruce Piquette who provides some insurance lines to the Town of South Hadley and at one time provided P&C. Due to price and value we migrated over to MIIA several years ago. I believe the price and value continues. Mr. Piquette has asked if he could provide a competitive quote from a new line he is offering at no expense to the town, I agreed and am working to collect the data he will use as a basis for the quote.

In our conversation I was very upfront and explained we are very happy with our present provider, especially with the free risk aversion training and the MIIA Premium Rewards along with the resulting premium abatement we receive (about 10K annually). I speculated that given previous price quotes and the programs offered by MIIA we are unlikely to change, but if the price is right and the quality is there you never know.

Lithia Springs; On Wednesday January 31 I had the opportunity to attend a BWC at the Library, numerous interested parties and constituencies were in attendance, including Selectboard Members Forcier and Hine.

While there was some time spent reminiscing about a trek back in the Fall of 2017 which accessed private property, The Chair of BWC Mariann Millard did an excellent job looking forward and seeking to find a long term solution. A solution which is well planned and engages all the constituencies.

There were property owners, representatives of the District 2 Prudential and Water Commissions, and at least one Town Meeting Member from the precinct where the properties are located. Unfortunately, the DCR representative bowed out of the

meeting. They are a necessary and likely partner in finding the right solution. Thank you to the BWC for their continued and important work.

Capital Planning List; At the request of the Chair of the Capital Planning Committee, I have updated the list and have sent it the Chair. This document is ever evolving as you know given the nature of projects and equipment needs. I have asked for key departments (Library, School, Police, Ledges, Media, IT and Town Hall) to review the Capital List with instructions as to adding or making changes.

As I have mentioned prior I am hoping we will be able to schedule some Appropriation and Capital meetings in February either jointly or separately in February to create some context and discussion for both the Capital Plan and the budget for FY19.

Please note both the Town Accountant's Office and the Treasurer/Collectors Office have added to their heavy load a project to update the Finance Policies as requested by Appropriations Committee. While those policies were updated two years ago it is a part of the municipal complex which is changing rapidly, especially since last year's Municipal Modernization Act, as ever community is working to get comfortable with the over 100 changes the bill brought to our doors.

Update on New Employees; Associate Planner/Conservation Administrator Anne Capra has completed her six month probationary period. It is my belief she has been an incredible asset for the Town of South Hadley. Her knowledge and demeanor has made process and communication a pleasure.

Administrative Assistant Courtney Hummel in three months has become a future rock star. She works well with citizens, is accommodating and stays in her lane really well. She also has be a great in assisting me in staying on task and helping me focus on my work.

Employee Engagement Specialist Kristin Maher, is also becoming an important part here in Town Hall. She has a reports curiosity to understand issues and is learning more everyday about the idiosyncrasies and sometimes near insanity the municipal work place can be.

Town Hall Renovations; Thank you to ATA Jennifer Wolowicz for her coordination of the "sample" entrance way (closest to SB Meeting Room). This project will continue through the first floor hallways (second floor in subsequent years) and will include painting and updating fixtures and other features where warranted and financially feasible. I believe this to be regular on-going maintenance and not necessarily a "capital" project. The roof work including the new gutters have been completed this week so that is another large project out of the way. We are seeking estimates for some updates

including a new floor in the Auditorium, which may be presented in a separate article in May. This all intended to continue creating an atmosphere of professionalism in Town Hall.

Abandon Housing Initiative; The Town of South Hadley continues to benefit from the relationship we have forged with Assistant Attorney General Kara Cunha. There have been a number of projects which have been hastened by our working together with her office.

Presently we are working on about a dozen projects throughout South Hadley. 366 Granby Road and 55-57 Lamb are among those properties. We are made to understand the Granby Road property which is owned by JP Morgan Bank is about to be offered for sale and 55-57 Lamb Street is looking for a buyer.

If there is not substantial progress for these two properties and a few others by April 2 we will seek remedy in court to have a receiver appointed by the court to make the necessary improvements. It is easy to see how getting just two blighted buildings repaired can effect a whole neighborhood, just by traveling up Ludlow Street.

Thank you for your support!

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley