



September 12, 2013

Honorable Selectboard;

September! It is hard to imagine we are sailed through the summer and have charted course towards the dreaded winter. It is the time we start to think about a Fall Town Meeting (which the Selectboard has already begun to discuss) and as hard as it is to believe, Fiscal Year 2015.

Thank you for your guidance and support and please let me know if there are treacherous waters I should avoid as we continue along the course.

**Harper's Payroll System;** A team of implementation specialist joined with key staff recently to discuss changes to the payroll system. The attendees were (available) staff from Police, SHELD, Accounting, Treasurer's, Collector's, the ATA, schools, Selectboard staff, Assessor's and sometimes in multiples. Over twenty employees were at each of the two sessions.

This was intended to be "soft opening" for Harper's, an opportunity to explain the benefits and discuss in a very cursory way the way the platform operates. It was interesting to hear that over 40% of the municipalities and school districts use Harper's as a payroll platform. It was encouraging to see the level confidence rise when it was stated, as unique as each community sees their issues, Harper's has seen the problem in other cities and towns.

They will be processing all end of year materials for employee taxes, coordinating all federally required forms and payments. Harpers will be (eventually) tracking all accruals, print and send all (payroll) checks and process all direct deposits. Any employee who has direct deposit will have a personalized portal to sign in to see all past checks. The system allows for contracts to be embedded, to ease the complications which ritually occur on contract anniversary dates. As part of a comprehensive package of safe guards and sign offs, Harper's protects employers by using an exception report notification system to alert responsible parties when an employee is outside the parameters set by the contract or employer.

I believe the value of this system will be well beyond the \$2,000 per month cost. One misstep avoided could reasonably produce a savings equal or greater than that cost. The other failsafe is, if it does not work we can cancel at any time and there is no penalty or cost for doing so.

**Re-organization Update;** Progress is a slow dance replete "stepped on toes".

The memorandum of agreement has been presented in its final form to both Ms. Baldini and Ms. Hamlin. I have no reason to believe from my interactions that issues or complications exists between what was scribed and what was negotiated. I have briefed the Appropriations Chair as to what or goals and objectives are in regards to these sweeping changes. The range of emotion for the staff involved seems to be somewhere nervousness and impatience.

We still are working through the logistics of physical space and staffing levels. The payroll changes and responsibility adjustments will not really hit until January 1, 2014 (again, scary how close that actually is), the complete metamorphosis may not be realized until the summer of 2014. I can assure you, I wish we could change the charted course more quickly, but it is not easy as it seems, to turn a frigate in a pond.

**CDBG South Hadley Housing Authority Joint Grant;** I recently met with Jim Mazik (PVPC) and Heidi Hiesler (SHHA) about the possibility of submitting a CDF2/CDBG application to primarily address some deficiencies in accessibility at Newton Manor. The conversation expanded into the need to address other critical needs in respect to housing in South Hadley, particularly in the areas of available units for handicap and/or affordable units.

Mr. Mazik will be considering an application strategy and will be discussing his ideas with Erica Moody, who as you may recall doing the A&B Study in the Falls. The early good or bad news from Erica's work is that there is not as much "blight" according to some standard indicators used to measure decay. The good news is the Falls is in better shape than some may have thought, the bad news it will not be an asset to future grant applications.

There will be more discussions on both the report and the grant application in the future, but I thought it was important to provide an early view.

**South Hadley Falls Neighborhood Association;** On Saturday September 7<sup>th</sup>, I had the pleasure of being invited to the SHFNA by the Chairperson Gillian Woldorf. There was a range of discussions during the meeting. I attempted to bring them up to date on some Falls related issues (Texon, Fibremark, Town Hall, soon to be Old Library).

We had some conversations about the limits of municipal responsibility. This is always a difficult discussion and one that is most often met with frustration and debate, both of these reactions are natural and necessary. I will continue to contend there needs to be clear boundaries for private versus public property which demands to be respected by both. I thank you as a board for understanding that message and showing the necessary political fortitude when faced with the hardline it presents.

**CEDC;** Jeff Labrecque and I met to discuss the movement of the Redevelopment Authority warrant article for Fall Town Meeting. I explained that we have received a few sample town meeting articles from communities seeking similar change (Dudley, Medway). We agreed that I would forward draft of the South Hadley article in a couple of weeks. The CEDC would be called to a meeting in mid-October to discuss the article.

The PVPC study on the Falls Blight and Abandonment should be complete or in draft form by that time and would be part of the CEDC conversation as well. I do hope that once the South Hadley Redevelopment Authority is in place you consider two steps to strengthen the mission of the authority. First, I would ask that the CEDC is folded into the Redevelopment Authority and secondly, there is consideration given to fund the RA through sale of abandon properties. I also would hope that SHELd is asked to assist in financially supporting the RA efforts.

These and other conversation will need to happen around this change, I am thankful that the SB and others are willing to have creative dialogue to find solutions.

**FibreMark;** The hazardous material abatement of FibreMark has begun. SMI has been onsite since September 10 and will likely be here through September and most of October. We will begin the process of putting the demolition out for RFP in the manner recently discussed at a SB meeting. The goal will be to receive proposals which will grant the selected party rights to develop the land post demolition in lieu of payment. We would be thankful if the proposals came back with a remittance to the Town of South Hadley to defray some of the costs already incurred.

The land would be subjected to zoning, the building would have to be razed and a portion of the building (close to the New Library) would be a no build zone to protect sight distances. It is likely there will be a residential component, wouldn't it be great to have a new home across from this incredible library near the most beautiful natural resource in New England, I almost wish I could submit a proposal.

Although the date is fast approaching I am not giving up on getting the Texon and FibreMark down in 2013.

**Bynum Reserve;** Jack Fleming from Conservation and Janice Stone Director of Conservation came in to the office to discuss some of the issues that may affect the plans being developed for the "methane pipeline". We all agreed that it was very early in the discussion and exploration to tell how this may or may not shape up, but getting their concerns and ideas early was certainly helpful.

There is much discussion about the restrictions as "Article 97" land and that is a concern that has been discussed at length. We are compiling information in respect to that issue, early indicators would suggest it does not trigger restrictions that are part of those protections.

We also discussed the changes in staffing. I assured them that I am doing everything I can to make the contemplated reassignments effective in allowing all departments to service the public at a higher level and stay within budget.

**Youth Commission Facilitator/Adult Task Force;** It is a compliment to the Town of South Hadley to have adults who are so actively involved in creating a growth zone for youth that reflects the values of the community. I had the pleasure to meet with the Chair and Co-Chair of the Adult Task Force. Tracey Stefanowicz and Barry Waite both are immediately recognizable as dedicated, passionate and involved community leaders. Their interest in youth development is both palpable and laudable.

They were very respectful of my plan to have the facilitator/director have a greater and regular interaction with town hall and management. I explained my thinking behind merging the position with another existing part time position and how I felt it would have positive effects for both. I will meet with Tracey and Barry next week to discuss it further, before I make the appointment. I look forward to bringing the position into a tighter orbit and have the position better leverage available resources.

**By-Law Review Committee;** Town Moderator Ryan presided over the By-law Review Committee and I was in attendance, as well as Chief Labrie and ConsCom Director Stone on September 11, there were six items presented for consideration. Only the request to change the town election from a Monday in April to a Tuesday in April was recommended all other matters were tabled and requested to have additional information made available. I told the members I am willing to work with them to get the information and articles in order.

The “Good Neighbor By-laws” had the most discussion. There was some support, but there was also concerns about the sensibility, the capacity to enforce and the fact that much of the underlining law already exists. There will be more discussion at future meetings ...I am sure.

**Upcoming Events:** Friday September 13<sup>th</sup> I will be at Loomis Village to speak to the residents and I will be a judge at the Chowda Fest on Sunday ...both I believe are considered free meals ...like I need it. Maybe I will ride my bike to the Chowda Fest ...but then a whole day in spandex.

We also are very excited about the French Counsel General visiting South Hadley on Monday to present Warren McAvoy with the French Medal of Honor, a piece of history in this little hamlet. Congratulations Warren.

Please let me know if there is any additional information I should address or that you are concerned about in regards my role as Town Of South Hadley Administrator.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Sullivan