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Town Administrator

March 1, 2018

Honorable Selectboard;

Please accept this report as an abridged accounting of projects and activities we are undertaking here in Town Hall on behalf of you and the citizens of South Hadley. It seems to be getting busier in each office every day, even with inclement weather conditions.

**Changing Faces;** As you are aware we recently have seen Courtney Hummel leave her position as Administrative Assistant to Administration, first I believe we should make a title change to Executive Assistant to Administration, I also was incredibly impressed with Ms. Hummel's acclimatization in respect to the duties and responsibilities. She quickly established herself as a key part of the organization, only to be stolen away by the private sector. I wish Courtney every success in her career.

This has caused me to ask Kristin Maher to move into the Exec Assistant position where I am sure she will take the job to even another level. Unfortunately, Jackie Iskander (assistant Treasurer/Collector, soon to have been Treasurer/Collector) has announced she also is headed to the dreaded private sector for a position she feels better suits her needs and skills. I cannot thank Jackie enough for the dedication and drive she has brought in her nearly two and a half years in South Hadley Town Hall. Amazing is the only word I can use to describe her acumen and performance.

I wish it stopped there ...we also had one employees leave the DPW a recent hire Patrick Harris (we never even got a chance to introduce him to the SB). We have found a great replacement at the Recycling Center internally, but that will cause us to have to back fill. This also places a strain on existing employees who are tasked with additional responsibilities, but we also continue to look for efficiencies to off set.

The municipal setting is not an easy environment to work in, lots of demands with few platitudes. It also is a sign of a robust economy, talented young employees are getting offers elsewhere with "career" positions. SoHa is not the only community to be best by this drain unfortunately. We will continue to look for opportunities to attract the highest quality employees to deliver services as best as possible.

**Cable Sub Committee;** Selectboard Member John Hine, Studio Director Bob Smith, IT Coordinator James Doolittle and I met on February 27 to discuss some of the concepts and ideas for the next Comcast contract.

As you are aware there are key areas which are not part of cable contract negotiations according to FCC rules. Programing, rate setting, product selection, internet, phone are chief

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among those areas. The primary areas of discussion are length of contract, origination grant and percentage surcharge.

There was an ensuing discussion about high speed internet, streaming programs, SHELD efforts, the much anticipated new phone system and the future of the world, or at least the tech part of it. This discussion was actually very helpful for this process in making sure we have a primary grasp on the changing landscape. Having individuals who know our internal needs, our deficits and concern, participate in a robust conversation is very constructive to seeing the bigger picture.

The process remains on schedule with a goal of having a final recommendation by October or December 2018 (contract ends December 2019). The Selectboard will, of course, see the final recommendation and will be called upon to sign the final draft as soon as it is completed.

**PVTA Hearing at MHC;** I attended the recent hearing regarding the service reductions to express the Selectboard and administration's concern about back to back years of South Hadley getting less transit service. Kevin McCaffrey Assistant to the MHC President had asked if I would attend this MHC Student Government Association sponsored hearing.

PVTA Executive Director Sandra Sheehan was in attendance, representatives from PVPC, Berkshire Hills Academy students, South Hadley residents and MHC students. I would estimate there was about 60 attendees. The MHCSCGA has created a petition which has garnered nearly 3,000 signatures in a few weeks on to protest the reductions.

It was impressive to hear the students not only advocating for themselves, but for riders who are impacted beyond convenience, for those riders who cannot make it to their jobs, for MHC employees who count on PVTA service, the selfless ness was palpable.

One point I felt need to be made was the lion's share of state aid to transit systems is earmarked to MBTA who has the most affluent ridership. PVTA is the second highest system ridership next to the MBTA, but has the poorest ridership as well. It is as, if not more important for us to focus on getting the minimum wage rider to their job as it is for us to get someone to their \$200K job in the Financial District. Transit funding should be shared in a socially responsible way, not just sheer number passengers, it is who they are that should count.

The attendees appreciated having the South Hadley SB as part of their advocacy for more funding and less if any route reductions. We should be growing not shrinking our transit offerings in the Pioneer Valley or whatever they call it now.

**Tax Time;** I have discussed this before, but as an annual reminder I believe it is helpful bring it to your attention. There is always a number of people who call the T/C Office in search of what they paid for excise or sometimes real estate tax in the previous calendar year in the next few weeks. It is somewhat surprising where they call from and what is their service expectation.

We have provided a link on the Collector/Treasurer page (<http://southhadleyma.gov/FormCenter/Collector-Treasurer-14/Tax-Statement-Request-Form-63>)

to request local tax information for tax preparation. Once a request is filed we reply with accurate information as soon as possible.

The challenge is when people call expecting instant response over the phone or in person we too often give information which later is deemed to be inaccurate. It also significantly impacts work flow in the office, potentially causing mistakes elsewhere.

As is normally the vast majority of callers understand and are extremely cooperative, but they also are not the ones we (or you) hear complain about our slow service responding to their poor recordkeeping. We will continue to work on the balance.

**District Elections;** Recently I, along with Town Clerk Carlene Hamlin attended a meeting with District 1 and 2 (Mike Wozniak and Monica Walton D1 and Rick Constant and Barbara Miller D2) and Atty. Mark Beauregard in Town Hall about coordinating the District annual elections with the annual Town elections.

There was what I believe a great first step suggested by Atty. Beauregard to move the April 2019 District Elections into the high school on the same day and have each District run their own elections simultaneously in to be determined separate areas.

While the goal is to increase voter turnout and add convenience to the process for all. It also gives the Districts an opportunity to consider additional steps to have a unified election. There are procedural and regulatory obstacles to say the least, but this is a good first step to simply coming together. Congratulations to all for your willingness to cooperate.

**Capital Planning/Appropriations Senior Center Meeting;** Thank you to Tim Eagles and Leslie Hennessey for communicating all that has been done in respect to the Senior Center Conceptual Plan. It was evident by this evening's presentation although this process is two years in the making there has been a great deal of thought and consideration put in to the conceptual plan.

You may recall in May 2016 the SB placed on the Town Meeting warrant an article for \$40K to evaluate a number of public buildings and to create a conceptual plan for Senior Center. The concept now resides on the COA web page and will be reviewed at the upcoming SB Meeting. It was great to hear recently about Senator Rosenberg getting a \$1 million dollar jacket appropriation on the senate version of the state FY 19 budget. While it is not money we should consider spending soon, it would be helpful if it stays in place.

There seemed to be some general support of the concept and the various funding strategies. No one in the room thought the plan was nearly refined to the point it needs to be, but we will stay at it. Thank you also Appropriations and Capital Planning

**Final notes;** I recently had the pleasure to meet with the new Loomis Communities (LC) Director Maureen O'Toole and discuss her vision for the property and future relationships with the town. She was with Carol Constant one of South Hadley's great promoters and Community Engagement Specialist for Loomis. The LC will be conducting a major self-evaluation in the

coming months and the Director sounded very much committed to continued investment and expansion.

I also had an opportunity to tour and taste the new dining common at MHC (they dragged me out) recently with several new faculty and staff, Kevin McCaffrey and Nancy Apple (South Hadley SEC). The food was great and the facility was off the hook (do people still say that). There will be an official grand opening in September that MHC is hoping the SB will be able to attend and taste the delights ...can I come with you?

We did get to talk about VBS and the River to Range Trail. Again I apologize for not getting an update to you sooner on some of the staffing issues. Thanks for your guidance and support!

Respectfully submitted;

Michael J. Sullivan  
Town Administrator, South Hadley