

Ira Brezinsky, Chair
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Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator

September 21, 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!

Western Mass Economic Development Partners Presentation; On September 13 South Hadley was the featured community before the Western Mass Economic Development Partners in Springfield. I have been a part of this group for about 4 years. The "Partners" is a think tank group (I know "how did I get on") made up of planners, Chamber of Commerce leaders, with representatives from the Regional Employment Board, FRCOG, PVPC, CDCs and Mayor Sarno's Office. The participation is by invitation so the group is limited to about 15.

We meet about 9 time a year and are the host of the regional economic development meeting held in June at the Mass Mutual Center. At almost every meeting a different community presents about an important part a community plays in the region's economy.

I worked with Bob Smith, Richard Harris, Anne Capra and Jennifer Wolowicz to create a PowerPoint presentation to introduce the "partners" to the jewel called South Hadley.

While we have a few growing manufacturers, a smattering of retail and healthy number of service industries, SoHa is hardly a behemoth in any of those various categories. What is SoHa? "A great place to live". Great schools, safe neighborhoods, financially sound, committed to investing in infrastructure are part of the town's composite. We also have great allies in Loomis Communities and Mount Holyoke College.

It is no surprise South Hadley's economic contribution is largely centered on housing. With commercial/industrial/personal property representing less than 5% of our overall tax revenue, with residential contributes the rest. From a regional perspective South Hadley, is where employees live, from CEO's to part-time staff.

The daytime population of South Hadley according to ClearGov (US Census) drops nearly 20% to 14,606. It is the citizens of the town who work elsewhere to make the regional economy hum. Unlike cities like Holyoke which grow in population during the day, South Hadley shrinks.

Using just Holyoke Medical Center as an example there is 114 employees working there that reside in South Hadley generating over \$8,237,000 for the South Hadley and Pioneer Valley Economy. It is important for South Hadley for regional businesses/organizations to be healthy, like HMC. It is also important for those organizations to have solid communities like South Hadley, with great education, important quality active life amenities (i.e. hiking, biking, golf, and boating) and other pastime forms such as restaurants and theaters to keep talent here in the Valley.

Both Richard Harris and Anne Capra had embedded interviews and were very helpful thinking through the presentation. I am blessed to be working with such talented and knowledgeable individuals. South Hadley is really a great place to live!

Hampshire Health Insurance Trust; I attended the most recent HHIT Executive Committee meeting in Northampton. You may recall a year or so ago we discussed measures the Trust was taking on. The trust was attempting to put in place some controls for the ever increasing premium costs. There was a sensible plan for redesign of benefit offerings presented by some unions throughout the 60 communities and entities who are members challenged whether all the intricate steps to establish "Section 21-22-233" for bargaining purposes were done properly. The HCIT Executive Committee recommended backing away from process for one year to ensure everything was done properly.

So here we are 4 months later resuming the enterprise adjusting the plan design. As part of it I will be coming back to you to affirm the vote to accept Section 21-22-23 or some combination less or minus of those regulations. First, HCIT is working with a law firm to create a template that the 60 communities can use to ensure everything was done procedurally correct. As the TA I always remind myself that the Town of South Hadley wants to provide excellent health insurance for its employees to access. However I cannot lose sight of the fiscal role the municipality plays in providing 60% of the cost, therefor 60% of all increases.

We will likely be discussing this at greater length, but I felt it was important to provide an update. The other issue the EC voted to recommend an increase to the Medex rates for retirees by 2.6% (\$11.36 per month) for calendar year 2019. This increase annually is largely predicated on rates set by the federal government.

MPIC; I had the opportunity to meet with MPIC members recently to discuss a number of items. Their chief concern is being involved with the process the Planning Board will be using to update the master plan.

Any update they feel their role is essential. The members pointed out the need today significantly different than what was contemplated when the original plan was being developed, I agree. MPIC has been the oracle for the plan update from year to year. The knowledge and understanding of what is needed for South Hadley this committee has compiled is essential to the update.

They do not see themselves as being tethered tightly to by-law or zoning needed changes, as some fear. But they have a real understanding of the need to assist the municipal organization with visionary aspects and continued pursuit of the broader plan.

My suggestion to the MPIC Chair was to create a direct dialogue with the Planning Board Chair to forge a strategy which helps to make this plan better than the last version. I truly believe that is what we all are hoping, as good as the last plan was.

MHC Safety Meeting; We continue to dialogue with MHC and will be meeting in October to consider ways we can make the pedestrian experience in the MHC area safer for all. MassDOT will join us at the table at the next gathering.

MHC has already started circulating pamphlets to students and faculty encouraging them to be more aware of their surroundings when approaching crosswalks. There are several ideas, less crosswalks, more crosswalks, red lights, bridges, tunnels, neck downs, plateaus and crosswalk guards. Also an app on your phone to alert you on on-coming traffic, CCTV cameras and bright vest for people to wear have been mentioned. I was thinking catapults ...maybe not

We continue to wait for the State Police Re-enactment Team report. I continue to suggest we need to have that report in hand before any significant planning for remedies.

Missing South Hadley Teen; The Chief has been keeping our office up to date on the disappearance of the young woman from the front of the Library. The search has stretched into other states and they are following leads provided by fellow students and others. We should keep her in our thoughts and any information about her whereabouts should be given to the South Hadley Police Department.

Team Weight Watchers; I am now an official member of the SH COA Weight Watchers Friday noon group. For the next 12 weeks I will be trying to learn how to control my weight. This is an initiative of the employee Wellness Committee. I thank Maureen

Cronin (Assessor's) Jennifer Jernigan (Health), ATA Wolowicz and everyone else on 'Wellness' for putting this program together for employee. I considerate a effort of motivation, at least for me.

There is about 40 people participating, nine of those Town employees. Hopefully it will be great team building and weight losing program.

Green Communities; We continue to try to find a path to become a member of DOER Green Communities which is feasible. As you are aware meeting the required 20% energy reduction number is somewhat of an unrealistic challenge on top of the previous 32% reduction achieved in a previous initiative.

This Friday we had a phone conversation with the Deputy Director, DOER Staff and consultant Beth Greenblatt about what wiggle room their might be with Criterion #3 (20 % energy reduction). The results were we need to create a plan to save 20%. It became evident as we surfed through the possibilities that the Senior Center needs to be a major part of any energy savings going forward. We may be able to squeeze some savings out of the Plains School replacement, but that remains to be seen.

We do have a number of projects which would provide significant reduction, but in most cases the savings relative to the cost of implementation is not practical.

Thank you for all your support on so many fronts, it is greatly appreciated!

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley