



July 30, 2014

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.

The Bridge at Bachelor Brook; In a recent meeting with Anne Capra of Conservation Works, Town Planner Richard Harris, Conservation Director Janice Stone, ConsCom Chair Jack Fleming and I we were debriefed on the progress being made in researching a span over Bachelor Brook.

Ms. Capra is taking into consideration a wide range of issues to incorporate into a final plan. This would include skill levels and abilities for hikers, the use of bicycles along the pathway, the environmental impact, maintenance of the proposed structure, cost of construction, use of electronically motorized wheelchairs and safety/security. She also will be bridging (sorry, couldn't resist) other issues, such as invasive species, necessary warnings for groves of poison ivy, habitat preservation and the presence of high tension wires.

As per our discussions I clearly expressed the Selectboard's support for having an accessible, sensible means of traversing Bachelor Brook. I explained the need to make such an amenity suitable for all levels of ability, convenient, safe and fairly easy to maintain with the least impact on the environment and habitats.

The early design would require a 100 foot span which will climb over ten feet of elevation toward the northern bank of the brook, both a suspension and an expansion design are being considered, both present challenges and have limitations. The pre-design estimates using similar projects suggest the cost may likely be over \$300,000 to the Route 47 state grant.

There will be a series of trails on the northern side of the brook which will suit different challenge levels for hikers and hopefully at least one path suitable for mountain bikes, modified wheel chairs and strollers.

The southern side will primarily be along the edges of the hay field owned by the town and managed by McCray's Farm. Consideration for hunters is being made and there will be restrictions on all-terrain vehicles. It was also made clear we are anxious to have a reasonable interface with other bike/pedestrian way planning going on in Town. As this project is being overseen by PVPC having that agency involved in the town efforts also will help to create a deeper planning perspective of the needs and relationships, in my estimation.

Town Hall IDs: Most citizens you speak with feel having an ID system seems to be low on the "Innovative Idea" meter, internally one can clearly see why it has never been put in place before in South Hadley. The level of concern from employees is quite interesting. This initiative first and foremost

is to take a basic safety and security step. The cards will have a barcode which is unique to the employee. Having the employee check in and out with their unique ID card will allow us to know who is in the building in an emergency is vital. Each card will be color coded as to work place location (i.e. Town Hall orange, WWTP red), it will have the employee's first name and last initial, and will state what department the person is assigned. Safety and security has been our most primary concern all along.

It will also allow residents to know readily who they are speaking with, what department they are from, where is their primary workplace location. Inspectors who have a cause to visit residents at their home will have a standardized form of identification and one if we were called, as we are occasionally are during the scam seasons, we could instruct the resident to demand the ID. Of course we are aware scammers could produce facsimiles which may be mistaken for a real ID, so we will be asking residents if they are still suspicious, call us and we will verify the person is our employee (is not in the building) and is supposed to be at your address for the reason stated.

The card will have the capacity to be used for clocking in, using equipment (i.e. copier), gaining entry into buildings and even shutting down lights. The ID system may be expanded to board and commission members or program participants in the future. Right now we are just excited to get the project off the ground, thanks to Julie Gentile and Jennifer Wolowicz. I even got my haircut for the ID picture.

“Team” Inspection: We are stepping up our measures on derelict properties through a team approach. The Districts through each Fire Chief has been on board and engaged every step of the way. Having the Health Department, Building Department, Fire Districts and even the Police Department is considered a best practice approach by Housing Court who would be the final frontier to demand property improvements. Having the Atty. Julie Dattres from the Attorney General's Office adding their tools to the task presents a strong and united front.

As we move along there will be a vigorous attempt at public outreach through mass media to make other property owners who are teetering on the abyss of disinvestment to address their situation sooner than later. We are more than willing to work with residents where and when we can, but most of the egregious situations are where people have totally ignored our attempts to help early in the process and property/building is unsalvageable. Often, the property which is in physical distress is also in fiscal distress.

The Treasurer has made great strides in reducing outstanding tax balances including some tax title properties. We have collected over \$160,000 in liens, some going back as many as six years. There are numerous contributing factors as to why historically these taxes remained uncollected for years, we now have some focused resources and a renewed attention on the issue. While we still have more than six hundred thousand in taxes outstanding through renewed tax title collection strategies we hope to introduce soon, auctions and property sales the goal is to recoup fifty percent or more in the next eighteen months. This would be an amount far greater than previously collected.

Lastly, as painful as it has been we are insisting the Building Department equitably enforce the code to the standard required by the Commonwealth. It seems this is a new approach in town, but one which is important to the quality of the community. I believe everyone would like to have South Hadley seen as a community where if you are buying a new home, you know it is of a level of quality befitting of the cost and reflective of the community.

Recently I went to the grand opening of Brunelle's Marina with Chairman Hine, the place is spectacular and the quality is obvious. The Brunelle family invested in quality equipment in the marina, in the restaurant, on the grounds and I like to think through our efforts we have added to their quality building. I wish the Brunelle's every continued success and await some of their already burgeoning expansion plans.

Vice Chair Frank DeToma was at the ribbon cutting for the new Elegancia Banquet and Meeting Room facility on Granby Road. The place is beautiful and my compliments to the Fernandez family for their diligence and investment. This spot also has expansion plans which will unfold in the upcoming months. I wish the Fernandez's every success in South Hadley.

These are two examples of substantial economic investment and development. In a community with less potential for commerce there could be two properties left fallow. The naysayers will comment well the "Town" had nothing to do with it, I can say they are categorically wrong. Without the support of citizens and efforts on behalf of the municipality these projects would not happen. Both were required to be built to a high standard for their benefit and the safety of the community, their need for expansion was incorporated into the oversight process and the Town of South Hadley is better for the effort and investment.

Website Rebuild; After a formative process of reviewing municipal and county government websites across the country, meeting with website development groups, seeking input from other communities and comparing the features "most used" by cities and towns by our IT Specialist and I over the last several months to work with Civic Plus in reinventing the Town of South Hadley's website. This contractor has been highly successful with communities across the country and in the Commonwealth (please see Nantucket, Northampton, League City, Texas sites) in terms of upgrading their websites.

Civic Plus presented the most up to date features, accessibility, functionality and adaptability. I have placed this subject on the August 19 Selectboard for a more robust discussion about both the contractor and the strategy to garner input. The most important constituencies are the employees who would share information and the citizens who need to obtain information. There will be ample opportunity for any interested person or parties to give their input, however there is a need for speed and having a website by committee is likely to be a disaster. It will be necessary to modulate input to ensure groups who need the most access, get to be the loudest voices.

Civic Plus will start to do some mock ups and begin building the foundation and by October we will be looking at the more detailed "asks" from departments and increase commitment to training when necessary. The SB directive to make sure there is a greater capacity and diligence in making sure the website is updated and refreshed on a regular basis is branded into this project. Civic Plus has this built into their model. As one of their desirable features noted during the vetting, Civic Plus has a complete rebuild (to the desired extent) every three years built into their price. I am confident we will have a robust discussion on August 19th, you as a board have been a driving force to get this done ...in a timely manner. It will be great to use the "How do I?" button every time I face a problem in Town Hall.

Library Final Stretch: In the same vein as the Brunelle/Fernandez projects, the new Library is also being scrutinized to make sure it is meeting code, we fully understand the building design and the building will be a lasting value to the owner, in this case the Town of South Hadley.

It is common place to hear in hush tones that enforcement of code or other safety requirements are being applied in an overly burdensome manner. It is also common place when a project is a year old and there is flaw the same hush tones are muttered asking why the Building Commissioner did not catch that issue. I would ask this to be filed under “You Just Can’t Win” or “Double-edged Sword”.

Chairman Resnick, Commissioner Baiardi, Mark Sullivan (D.A. Sullivan, owners project manager) and myself met to discuss the last items to be addressed. I am sure in the “hushed tone” circle there would be plenty of eye rolling for items like lighted exit signs, floor guards around bubblers or reduced fall zones. Luckily when reasonable people sit, see it is required, the rationale behind it and make an attempt to understand the risk avoidance, it turns from eye rolling to head nodding.

Of course there are those who will say, “These are all change orders and cost us money”, often these are the same people who do not mind paying for leather seats in their car. I stand by my contention it is better to invest now to correct flaws then to try to do it later. It is well worth an extra \$10,000 or even \$20,000 to make upgrades during construction ...particularly on projects which will cost millions of dollars. Just to be clear not all the seats are leather.

RFPs; Bardwell Street Library, Ledge’s Maintenance Contract and the voting machines are all out on the street. One Canal Street (Fibermark) will be out in another week and we have several surplus items advertised on MunicBid, so it is a busy procurement time, also very exciting. Please let anyone know who may be interested in any of these efforts to check them out. The RFPs are on the town website and available to be downloaded.

I will be on vacation August 11-15 and also 22 and 25, you can always call or contact the Assistant Town Administrator Jennifer Wolowicz. Thank you for your interest and support.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley