

Ira Brezinsky, Chair  
Andrea Miles, Vice-Chair  
Jeff Cyr, Clerk  
Sarah Etelman  
Bruce Forcier

Michael J. Sullivan  
Town Administrator

November 9, 2018

Honorable Selectboard,

This is certainly shaping up to be a very busy period. This report will briefly capture some of the issues and projects which have been occupying my time, as well as others in town hall, over the last two weeks.

Before I delve into the activities, I want to take the time to thank the Selectboard members again for your support. It is not always easy to watch issues take shape, or worse, lose shape, as elected officials when you are being asked, "Trust me, it will work out," by a manager (in this case Town Administrator). You have collectively shown great fortitude in that regard. I hope you and the citizens of South Hadley are nearly as happy as I am to be afforded the opportunity to serve as Town Administrator through June 30, 2021. I assure you I will work hard right up to the end of the agreement and will assist the Town of South Hadley in any way I can beyond the last day.

**Mass Mobility Conference:** South Hadley was well represented at the annual MasDOT/UMass sponsored "Moving Together Conference 2018" at the Boston Park Plaza.

Planner Richard Harris, Associate Planner Anne Capra, DPW Super Jim Reidy, BWC Chair Mariann Millard and I all piled into the mini-van (child car seats were removed) to attend this informative and timely gathering of traffic engineers, public officials, state and local practitioners from across Massachusetts.

In the first session I attended, the subject matter was about the state "Traffic Records Coordinating Commission" (TRCC), which is a group of police (state and local), court officials, traffic engineers, MassDOT personnel, trauma physicians and others who develop crash standards for all towns and reporting parties in the Commonwealth.

Some interesting statistics: Automobiles/bikes account for 3.1% of all vehicular accidents. There were 74 pedestrian fatalities in 2017 and they represent 21% of deaths. The presenters discussed some of the more common devices to calm traffic, and also touched upon some relatively new gadgetry on the market. At the end of the day there is not anything as effective as being aware and going slow in equal measures.

**Symposium of Understanding:** On October 18, about 25 residents of South Hadley got together to create a profile of what they felt a police chief would need to serve this town well and what they should know about South Hadley should they accept the job.



There were many attributes articulated through a group process by the attendees. Having the ability to build a team effectively, having empathy, understanding social justice, and possessing the ability to make tough decisions all made the list.

It was very helpful input for me as the Town

Administrator. When reviewing the complete list it was evident it would be hard, if not impossible, to be all of what the group there that night or what each citizen may call for in a Police Chief. However, many of the concepts resonated with me and I did share the list with the candidate I felt was best suited and ultimately my appointment. I asked, "Do you understand the needs as described?" and she said she did in our interview.

**Police Chief Appointment:** So, let me tell you a little about the process. There were 27 good candidates who applied for the South Hadley Police Chief position. To protect the process, the applicants were blind to me and coordinated by Human Resources Director Jennifer Wolowicz. There was a panel of three, as is standard policy, on the vetting committee - the HR Director, Northampton Police Chief Jody Kasper, and Town Accountant William Sutton.

Over a two-day period, they offered interviews to seven of the most qualified applicants based on experience, education and other factors related to the profession. Once their work was complete, I met with the panel to hear their impressions and receive their recommendations and the reasoning for those endorsements.

The panel felt there were three, possibly four, which could reasonably take on the challenges ahead in South Hadley. Interestingly enough, the panel recognized a number of the same traits expressed by the Symposium attendants. I asked some more questions, and it came into focus there was a candidate which was perhaps a better fit than the others. So naturally I started with that applicant. I immediately set up an initial interview and set about asking questions about the candidate.

Chief Parentela, to the Town Manager who serves the community she is in, to police who served under her command, to others who worked with her or knew of her professionally, I was determined to ask people who I trusted their opinion to tell me about the candidate. To say it all checked out would be an understatement.

She served a community – Amherst - with a diverse population; she understood ‘Town/Gown’ relationships; she had a primary understanding of the need and process for becoming an accredited police department - just for starters. While South Hadley is a smaller community, the experience is very scalable and significant for the department.

Captain Jennifer Gundersen is presently with the Amherst Police Department where she has made impressive and continuous progress from patrol officer to the rank of captain in her 24 years of service. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Stonehill College, a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice Administration and another Master of Liberal Arts degree in Public Administration. She has a solid reputation throughout the region, including Amherst, and is highly regarded by her colleagues. Captain Gundersen resides in Easthampton with her wife and family.

My appointment is bolstered by every confidence she will be an outstanding leader in the mold of those who have proceeded her as Town of South Hadley Police Chief, and will help set a course for the future of the department in a complex field of work. I would like to thank everyone who gave input to this process, especially ATA Wolowicz and Chief Parentela, who offered great insight and guidance. Thank you to the citizens who participated in the Symposium of Understanding and as always to the SB for their support. Captain Gundersen also recognizes she is coming to a department with a great deal of talent, which she is anxious to harness.

**“Coaching from Good to Great:”** Peoples Bank invited ATA Wolowicz and I to attend a seminar on improving organizational function. I am so glad I went. There were about 50 participants from more than 30 different entities - for profit, non-profit, quasi-governmental groups - and it really was cross section. The crowd was also fairly diverse, all which added to the discussions.

The leader of the seminar was School Committee Member Christine Phillips who is the Vice President of HR at Peoples. She was very impressive. She engaged the attendees, brought real life situations to the discussion, and most importantly helped everyone understand their own organizations better. It was intimidating to recognize how much organizational work we have ahead of us, but in a sick way a relief to find we were not the "most dysfunctional."

**MHC/TOSH Safety Group:** Jim Reidy, Chief Parentela and I met with VP Shannon Gurek, Paul Breen and Chief Ray Labare from MHC for a third installment of the Town/Gown Safety Collaborative. Boa Lang and Kristen Moskal were representing MassDOT at the gathering.

As per usual there was ideas brought to the table which came from our various constituencies. It was very helpful to have Lang in attendance as a traffic engineer, but also the vast knowledge he brings to the table. We all agree we need to take a measured and pragmatic approach to this issue and not rush to a solution.

The goal of this group is to make it safer for all in the 116 corridor near MHC, to create learning tools like the MHC video (now on our website) encouraging pedestrians to be more aware, ultimately to improve the overall safety of the area, and to take best practices gained and use them as a templates in other places throughout town.

Now that the driver has been charged with vehicular manslaughter and the state police have attributed it to being a distracted driver (looking at phone for GPS) in the accident which caused this review, I can say without reservation my hope is something good will come out of the tragedy which has ruined at least two lives. I also feel strongly we should take steps to improve pedestrian and vehicle safety in a sensible manner and avoid doing something just because it keeps us busy or looking like we are taking action.

We have asked PVPC through a DLTA grant to start some traffic counts along College Street. Once we have that, we are planning to engage a traffic engineer to make some recommendations. Also, we have asked SHELD to look at some street lighting improvements and the possibility of allowing MHC to place some video cameras along the way.

**Special Town Meeting:** Thank you to everyone who helped to make the STM run so smoothly. Especially, thank you to the Selectboard for their time, effort and support to make it a success. I appreciate it and I am confident the community does as well.

The Town Clerk and her staff did great planning and making sure the meeting went was orderly. With the addition of election this could have gone sideways, but the Clerk

planned well and executed to perfection. Thank you to Town Counsel Brian O'Toole for coming prepared and being patient with me leading up to November 7.

I thought Temporary Moderator Jody Miller did an exceptional job leading the body, allowing people to express their views without having the meeting become atrophied. The subject matter did not seem to be overly contentious and it goes without saying South Hadley Town Meeting Members once again displayed how civic duty can be conducted in a civil manner.

The Town Meeting Members once again came prepared, asked sensible questions and displayed respect for differing opinions. Plus, we were out in one-and-a-half hours.

It is truly a pleasure working with such an august governmental body. You may have heard it is not always this way!

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J Sullivan  
Town Administrator,  
South Hadley



*“Now, that’s a welcome sight! I was just beginning to miss decision-making.”*