



September 11, 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.

Abandon and Distressed Housing Initiative; There is great progress on the list of six properties we began to address in the beginning of the fiscal year in regards to disinvestment or generally in derelict condition. All have received some level of attention from the owners. One has been razed, another is reported to be demolished next week, two have engaged a realtor and plans are being put in place going forward for all the “list of six” properties in some fashion.

Last week the Julie Datres (AG’s Office) both Fire District Chiefs, the Building Commissioner and the Health Director met in my office to discuss progress and adding to the list of challenged properties. Please know that a causal effect of these interventions has been some additional money coming in from outstanding taxes. Neighbors are encouraged by the municipal effort as they take care of their properties and most importantly properties and neighborhoods are stabilized.

Health Director Sharon Hart has been an incredible force in making this initiative an impressive success over a very short period of time. I would also like commend the Districts, Building Commissioner, Julie Datres, mortgage holders and neighbors all for having an active and vital part in making this work for the good of the community. We will keep on moving. Below is just one picture of 103 College and the next picture is a view from the back of the 50-52 School Street property. Hopefully in another week we will have a similar view of 36 Bridge Street.



I did have the opportunity to speak with one of the property owner’s attorney who called to protest the fact we were calling for a structural engineer to determine all the necessary issues which were non-code compliant. It would have been imprudent of me to suggest to the barrister that the homeowner had the time and resources to call a lawyer, but not a structural engineer seems in itself to be contrary to our request.



67 Amherst; By way of an update we are moving to housing court to have this house evacuated and to have the new owners cease and desist using it as a boarding house. It has been incredibly difficult to piece together this international jigsaw. Not allowing the municipal officials to fully understand the use of the property places the inhabitants of the property in danger and raises concerns for the surrounding community. I have received several calls from neighbors, particularly seniors, who feel uncomfortable knowing that even the town does not know who lives in the house. Fire District Chief Keefe has been very helpful in adding his knowledge of fire safety to the mix.

Presently we believe there are between nine to sixteen students from the Hartsbrook-Waldorf School in Hadley being boarded or intended to be boarded at 67 Amherst Road. The representative claimed to live in Amherst, but we later learned he was not a US citizen. He claimed they were part of non-profit, but later recanted and stated they would be soon. They said they operate other such facilities in the Commonwealth, but could not give any addresses and he was unsure what towns they were operating in.

This unfortunately will become more difficult if we do not get the answers necessary to make this group compliant. The Chief of Police has been involved with this as well, under the guidance of the AG's State Police detail.

Everbridge Sign-ups; We have had over three hundred residents sign up with no difficulty reported, we have near complete participation from the Selectboard members. We also have about another forty employees which need to log-in. The most confusing part seems to be that when you sign-up as an employee you should also sign up as a resident. There will at times be some messages only targeted for employees and likely some which will be residents only.

As we used the communication system a few times this week, each time reaching over 5,000 homes. There are a few hiccups, but considering we have had only three nasty-grams, I would say we are headed to success. The challenge is accomplishing what it needs to, get information out to the public. It is unfortunately there is always an inordinate amount of attention paid to those that are the loudest, even when they have little understanding of the intended improvement. We also had two people call and say how much they liked the new system, it is all good feedback.

QECB: The audit from the IRS at first blush seems to be disconcerting, but Treasurer Baldini, Town Accountant Sutton and I am very confident in the representation being provided by Edwards Wildman (bond counsel). The challenge is the rarity of these instruments. You may recall only one other

community was granted the opportunity to use this savings tool to lower the cost of debt for energy saving improvements.

The technical matters revolve around the issuance date not meeting the definition of a whole year as it was filed on the 6th day of January instead of the 2nd and a potential windfall which the town may realize after 2021. All parties including David Eisenthal our Unibank Bond Advisor agree these are defensible positions which will be worked out.

The qualifications were significant, the oversight was thorough, but QECBs are still a rare bird. You were very wise to choose such a professional group as Edwards Wildman for bond counsel, as a true professional firm, they have committed to protect South Hadley, stand behind their work, defend us at no cost and make us whole from any losses which may occur. You cannot get much better than that in this day and age.

Personnel, Benefits and Workplace Manuals; As you can readily see the Human Resources Department has been very busy. I appreciate the effort of Julie Gentile and Jennifer Wolowicz in this regard. Both Jen, Julie and I have met several times to review progress and we have had these policies poured over by labor counsel.

We looked at a number of other communities and had conversations with others about how and why they have approached these matters in this manner. The issues of employee consciousness and understanding of the delineation need for these policies, along with expedience of having the separation. I will highlight some of the changes in the personnel policy, which generally governs a small number of non-union employees. There was a reduction of sick leave from 12 to 10 days, we redefined employee "time", strengthened our recruitment process, merged the changes from legislation in terms of TA responsibilities and generally meshed best practices and legal advice to produce an updated and a streamlined manual.

It seemed to make sense to have separate Benefits and Workplace Manuals. The Benefits and Workplace capture some of those issues which are not necessarily directed at the employees. We continue to look at more policy codification in a number of different areas.

The Ledges RFP; There should be decision made by your meeting on Tuesday evening. The committee has been thorough in seeking clarification on the proposals and vetting the nuanced differences in how the proposals are articulated. All persons involved have been open minded and professional, you could not ask for more.

I look forward to the library grand opening Saturday and the Canal Park being finished soon, not to mention 36 Bridge Street being demolished. Enjoy the weekend!

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J Sullivan

Town of South Hadley, Administrator