

Andrea Miles, Chair
Jeff Cyr, Vice-Chair
Christopher Geraghty, Clerk
Sarah Etelman
Bruce Forcier

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator

February 16, 2020

Honorable Selectboard;

Please accept this report an abbreviated synopsis of the various projects and initiatives the municipal team is engaged in on your behalf.

As we head towards the close of one fiscal year and start of another it is a time of significant planning and organizational reflection. There are numerous departments where we continue to encourage change...as hard as challenge can be for each department or division it must be foremost on our minds.

Thank you as always for your support and guidance.

Service Kiosk; Some of you have seen or even had the opportunity to play with the new service kiosk outside of the Assessors Office on the first floor of Town Hall.

This is another opportunity to access information and apply for various permits when an office may be closed. Some of the available access points include getting information from the South Hadley Town website, property cards and maps and print the information directly at the kiosk. It has a direct connection to Census 2020, and ViewPermit.



You can pay for permits and scan in attachments as part of the application if you have a credit card and an email address. I say “you” because thus far I as an individual have been unable to execute some of the functions, but we are working on some tutorials to be displayed on the kiosk to assist citizens in using the service.

Admittedly we have some ways to go on this venture, but I am happy to report we are up and running. When we are confident in the performance, we will consider expanding. We will be asking you to allow us to expand this service

to other locations perhaps the Police Station, Senior Center, or maybe even a retail location(s).

Tree Warden ; After some fits and starts we worked out a solution to fill this important position, you may say we have created a redundant solution.

We had looked at possible regional solutions, returning to stand alone part-time position, even contracting the responsibilities. Each had its downside and defects, some long term and some

short term and some concepts were economically challenged. We had advertised for a part time warden and internally for a full-time answer. Nothing seemed to be the right fit and we need the right fit for this crucial position.

As I became more frustrated with the prospects for finding the “right” solution two employees came forward to the HR Director Jennifer Wolowicz with an idea. Geoff McAvoy and Shawn Schmitter proposed the idea of being co-Wardens. They each have tree experience, one had worked in the field for a well-known tree company prior to becoming an employee of the Town of South Hadley, the other held a pesticide license, and both agreed to obtain arborist certification and attend classes and seminars conducted by the Massachusetts Tree Warden Association.

The concept has been discussed with the union and at the time of this writing has not met with any direct criticism or grievance in association with the changes. We feel that the changes benefits and helps to retain two employees, encourages innovative thinking and promotes team building. It also provides a stronger model that one employee and certainly a part timer.

They agreed to be available and attend South Hadley Tree Committee scheduled meetings. In return their rate of pay is being increased appropriately and the DPW management will work to adjust work schedules and responsibilities as to accommodate the new responsibilities. The total cost will be slightly less than the part-time positions was budgeted for and I believe will greatly enhance the actual performance regarding preserving and expanding the urban forest in South Hadley.

This change I am sure will be seen with skepticism and doubt by some and admittedly it would have been much easier to just hire someone and do it the way we always have, but I strongly believe the previous model was not making the progress we need to make to preserve trees in South Hadley. This model will take some time to blossom, but like trees, with proper care, nurturing and time for this idea to take root we will see this model branch out to something we can be proud.

We are revising the job description(s), they will begin their new responsibilities March 1, 2020. Their primary focus will manage the contract associated with tree pruning and maintenance, assist in developing more plantings, work with the Tree Committee in moving their goals forward and beginning to establish an accurate “town” tree inventory.

DPW Management will be working with the “Co-Wardens” to adjust their schedule to meet the stated priorities. This will also allow us to have two individuals available for emergency who will be familiar with problem areas and will have a better understanding the protocols and protections to maintain “Tree City USA” designation and how trees are integral to creating a climate resilient community.

Transfer Station; As we become more familiar with DPW operations through closer communications and relationship building so is the realization we must do things differently than in the past. Our expanded operational understanding is largely due to the increased time being spent at the 10 Industrial Drive by the Deputy Town Administrator Jennifer Wolowicz, The DTA has been assisting the Interim DPW Director Viv Price with some the vast managerial and personnel duties including reviewing performance-based evaluations.

There has been some re-occurring themes in the DTA's conversations with personnel at the DPW. Which is critical to making changes which are thoughtful and impactful on areas of weakness.

There has already been some discussions about the effectiveness and appropriateness of the "Swap Shop" and although a popular amenity, it is necessary for administration to review it in terms of whether it is a core function in respect to the mission of the transfer station. We must also consider whether it achieves the goal of lowering consumption in a meaningful way and does not increase risk factors for the municipality. These are very difficult questions against a backdrop of are we aiding and abetting hoarding by providing a platform to do so?

It is also important we analyze resources available to the public, if there are other ways to share items either electronically or through other supported means. Asking the important question, is this a core function of the municipality and or the transfer station. Should we be duplicating what Goodwill, St Vincent DePaul or some internet services are already offering? What are the fiscal costs? These are all important managerial questions.

There has been continual criticism of how long it takes to access and or navigate the transfer station, the long lines and some suggest the lack of organization in the process of dropping off goods or trash. It has become clear part of this strain is due to ill-defined process and poor design. As part of our discussions with haulers we will ask for their interest in operating or at least their assistance in redesigning the transfer station.

As part of the changes we have implemented a new procedure for dealing with deposit containers. Previously we allowed organization to come and take the cans and bottles, even in some case allowing them to forage through some trash to get them, which is not a safe practice for volunteers. We will start to collect the deposit cans and bottles and work with a third party to pay the Town of South Hadley directly for the asset. One of the structures which are presently being used for municipal hoarding will be emptied out and set up for the cans and bottles to be separated appropriately and safely.

Safety Coordinator Matt Cowie will be working to ensure we develop practices which protect employees and allow assets to be monetized or destroyed properly. Some of the rickety stairs "volunteers" were allowed to use must be replaced and secured and the practice of allowing equipment to be crossing the transfer area while residents are roaming about has to be curtailed. We must become serious about how we operate in terms of safety, appropriateness and cost controls in respect to the transfer station. I realize these changes will be difficult for some residents, but it is necessary to regain control of the operation.

Financial Policies; We are starting to make substantial progress on the updating of the Town of South Hadley's financial Policies and Procedures. This past week the Treasurer/Collector, Town Accountant and I had several conversations with Melinda Ordway from the DOR. Most of the conversation centered around practices we have in place for prudent investment, but may have not adopted at Town Meeting.

There has been nothing identified in this review as a glaring defect in our practices and several times the DOR personnel has complimented for a conservative approach to finance and the reflected success seen in our annual audits. This does suggest we do not have room for improvement, we continue to seek a reasonable policy for annual contributions to stabilization funds, OPEB and other “savings” type accounts.

It is our goal to have this all finished up and in final form prior to Town Meeting. I am confident we can achieve that goal and perhaps have it even sooner.

FY 21 Budget; I realize we will be discussing the “draft” FY 21 budget Tuesday evening; I just want to reiterate this is an early version. While we are confident there is no sign of revenues being impacted in any significant negative manner, I encourage a healthy dose of caution at this time.

The school “number” does show an additional \$350K over what was voted last May at annual town meeting, it does not reflect the \$67,000 added at the STM in November. It also does not include the \$600,000 from the Governor’s announcement about additional aid to schools. I am confident I will be able to find the \$67,000, I am hopeful the state will also allow the additional aid to be agreed upon. IF it all falls into place the South Hadley Schools will have nearly a \$1 million dollars more than the FY 20 budget was formed under...not what anyone should consider an insignificant increase, but also one which might not meet all the growing needs.

We are also aware of the history of outgoing tuition cost (born by the General Fund, not the schools) and other “Cherry Sheet” assessments tend to change dramatically as the Statehouse process wears on. This process may have a significant effect on the General Fund or “Town” budget. We will continue to monitor it closely...the cautionary warning is “it is early”.

Thank you again for your leadership!

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley