

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

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator

March 6, 2020

Honorable Selectboard,

Please accept this report as an abridged accounting of the activities and initiatives the municipal employees are engaged in on your behalf. Our central focus continues to be working to provide the best service to the citizens of South Hadley within prescribed policies, procedures and under applicable regulations. -

DPW Transfer Station; As we have reviewed process and policy at the Transfer Station (TS), we have started to learn more about some of the issues we have heard anecdotally about from residents and public officials which may impede the recycling process at the TS. We have also come across some other issues of concern.

There have been some very clumsy attempts to make changes, for which I would like to apologize as to how they unfolded, were communicated and/or would be implemented. It is critical for us to fully articulate changes to staff, including when and where appropriate for public announcement. Not all organizational change has an effect on the public. The services we provide are necessary to have external input. In this case, when we changed the way we would handle deposited containers going forward, or the flag drop-off, I should have made sure everyone internally had a full understanding and everyone externally related to the change was contacted and apprised of the adjustments being made.

We have been aware for some time the deposited containers received at the TS should be considered a municipal asset and the redemption and/or disposal of the asset should be handled internally. While reviewing the practice of allowing charitable organization(s) to remove the asset to seek refunds and convert them to a revenue source for the non-public entity - even if the proceeds eventually were used to support public purpose - was non-compliant with procurement law and/or best practices. It was determined to suspend the practice and adopt another path to recover the deposits and add them to the General Fund. The Selectboard and Town Meeting will be able to appropriate those funds as those bodies deem necessary and appropriate, including using them for Buttery Brook Park.

While I believe the process, which has been put in place recently, is compliant and better suited for the municipality, our articulation of the change to good people who volunteered countless hours to the previous process was appalling. I could go over the laundry list of missteps to illuminate the deficiencies, but I believe such an exercise will not serve any benefit. Internally, we have had ample discussions about how we need to improve models of communication. This would include having policies written prior to any implementation, reviewed with key personnel, and when appropriate widely circulated with the public

or even individual persons intimately affected by the changes. Change is always difficult. There is no need to make it even more so.

Solid Waste Proposals; The Solid Waste Subcommittee has now received proposal from all four of the solid waste industry leaders which were invited to participate. Those proposals are being reviewed by the members as the committee continues to develop a comprehensive plan to recommend to the full Selectboard.

As you are aware, there are several ideas, opinions and rumors swirling around this issue. I commend Vice Chair Jeff Cyr and member Bruce Forcier who serve on this committee for drawing out those ideas and really taking an approach which is innovative, not retrained by “how we always did things” mentality, but also not looking to make change for change’s sake. The issue of the recycling industry changing seemingly overnight, and South Hadley’s hauler contract ending - both coming at us a top speed - would make some hold their breath or bury their heads in the sand. I am excited to see SoHa’s leadership is doing neither. In attending regional meetings, I would match the leadership of this community against any other elected local official.

There is no way to avoid change and I would suggest there are two things I believe we can agree upon: a cost increase is unavoidable and at the end of the process not everyone will be happy. However, I believe the SB will continue to strive to create a model which will be able to stand the test of time and will be adaptable to changes in the solid waste and recycling industries.

Unlike a “normal” public procurement process, solid waste service procurement allows “negotiations” with vendors after proposals are made in order to explore costs centers or components of proposals which could be adjusted. I believe the subcommittee will work through those steps as quickly as possible and ultimately present a model to the full SB, which is cost effective, equitable, reflects the public input and is as close to sustainable as possible.

The “next steps” for the sub-committee in my mind is to decide on the specifics of the model for SoHa. Some of those may be whether we adopt a toter model, stay with or modify the PAYT, and other challenges. I believe based on your constituency outreach we will stay with the “dual stream” recycling, but then do we adopt a three-prong toters? Separating glass, redesigning the TS, monitoring use of the TS more closely, the policy for “condos” and other questions need to be answered, but we need to get by the pressing issue of “what are we going to do?” Thankfully the SB has not waited until the last minute to do so. Much more to come on this important and complex issue.

Senator Markey Office/Melissa Olesen; Senator Edward Markey’s Regional Coordinator Melissa Wagoner Olesen recently came to visit and inquired about issues we are facing in South Hadley which are of national prominence.

As you would suspect it is some of the same topics you discuss regularly. We did discuss COVID 19 and Melissa promised to keep us apprised of any initiatives or grants which may be available to prepare for this pandemic.

We also discussed the need for federal funds for infrastructure for the WWTP, roads, transportation, land preservation, resource protection, sub-terranean utility investment and elderly/veteran/workforce housing

subsidies through HUD. It was no surprise no promises were made. However, I appreciate her effort to visit and I told Ms. Olesen I would continue to be in touch about projects which may be of interest.

Dog Park Update; DPW Interim Director Viv Price, Facilities Director Matt Cowie, Berkshire Design Landscape Architect Jeff Squire and I met with JAM Construction's Project Coordinator Paul Tonelli about the project. Mr. Tonelli presented a copy of the agreement signed by JAM Construction.

They are very anxious about getting this project done (as am I), but as I have explained previously it would be imprudent to sign the agreement until we have the grant funding in hand from the Stanton Foundation. I called the Stanton Foundation Executive Director Kate Dumeer immediately and she reviewed the internal process for Stanton now that I provided her with a "half signed" agreement and a letter stating if we receive the grant, it will build a dog park.

It will be the 38th dog park built in the Commonwealth through the Foundation. I was told the check will arrive here on or about March 12. Once received I will be able to fully execute the agreement and we can start the project. The role of the "Friends" as part of the construction has changed significantly, as they will be utilized for tasks closer to the end of the project as opposed to the start.

We will be sending out public notice once we have a completed contract, and would like to schedule a groundbreaking in early April. I believe this will add another recreational and social amenity for residents. The Friends of South Hadley Dog Park continue to fundraise and are anxious in taking over their roles and responsibilities as outlined in the license signed previously. As always, this project would not be possible without the support and patience of the Selectboard. Please accept my thanks.

Center Street Design Project; PVPC Planner John O'Leary has been authorized to apply for the design money from CDBG for the Center Street Area which was discussed at a public hearing at a recent SB meeting.

As was discussed at the public meeting, we are hopeful that once we have a shovel-ready design to make improvements to sidewalks, sewer & water lines, road surfaces and other infrastructure, we will be in a position to seek grants and other funding for the Center/North/South/Graves Street area.

As we now see (finally) some progress on the 1 Canal Street project, and more indications there will be investments at the various industrial concerns on Gaylord Street, along with the sidewalk and road improvements on Lamb Street in 2019, it is very apparent the dedication to investing in the Falls is real and growing.

PVPC Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting; the South Hadley Main Street Project remains on the TIP (Transportation Improvement Plan) for 2022. We are near 75% design and the project has ballooned again from \$3 million to \$5 million. While it was not completely unexpected this project would increase (started at \$2.5), these increases are jaw dropping.

It has been some time since I have attended an MPO meeting (Paper City days) as that is normally a function of the DPW director. I did want to make sure MassDOT understood South Hadley is interested and engaged regarding to these projects

Tree Warden Position(s); The new wardens have begun their work and education with great enthusiasm. Shawn Schmitter and Geoff McAvoy suggested this team approach and now are showing great determination to make it successful.

They have already addressed some long-standing issues for a number of street trees in need of trimming, and have started to compile a list of priorities. They will be meeting with the Tree Committee later this month and have already met with the chair of the Tree Committee.

Bartholomew Investments Update; The Town of South Hadley investment portfolio continues to grow. Treasurer/Collector Donna Whiteley and I recently met with Senior Vice President Charles Patterson of Bartholomew and Company to review South Hadley's investment portfolio performance.

Our General Fund portfolio grew over the last 6 months at a rate of 2.23% for an estimated annual income of \$489K for a new balance of \$21,955,176. The OPEB which is invested at a different level of risk and is allowed some additional high yield investments grew at 5.52% and the balance now stands at \$1,481,522. I am happy to report the Town of South Hadley investment portfolio is very organized and continues to grow. I applaud Bartholomew's work as well as Treasurer Whiteley's leadership and guidance on this important matter.

The investment strategy continues to be one which will realize benefit when times are good by investing in safe vehicles, but only those which the state allows municipality to invest.

FY 21 Budget Update/Appropriations; I recently met with the Appropriations Committee to discuss the FY 21 budget. There were several great questions and inquiries for additional information made by the committee members.

Chair Tom Terry mentioned they would be setting up a meeting soon with the School Committee. I let the appropriations chair know we are continuing an internal analysis of revenues in hopes we will be able to add some additional funds to the budget for the school district. However, we are moving with intentional caution with one eye on the local permit and taxation revenues and the other on how the state is trending.

It is my intent to have a final "warrant ready" budget to the Selectboard by April 7, although I expect little change between now and that date. I am confident that all major increases and expenditures have been accounted for at this juncture. In discussions with Capital Chair Ted Boulais, we are likely to hold off until a Fall STM to consider the bulk of warrant article requests.

My expectation is there may be three or less capital items for warrant articles and perhaps one more (King Info) separate article which demand funding from Unreserved Free Cash, and perhaps another one or two from retained earnings (Ledges, Solid Waste)

March 3 Election/Early Voting; Beyond the issue of parking, the local/national/district elections on March 3 in South Hadley went rather well. The clerk estimated there was more than a thousand participants in "Early Voting," and with just over 42% total voters when all was said and done, it is commendable.

The Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk and all the Election Staff deserve a round of applause for avoiding some of the difficulties which seemed to plague other voting places across the Commonwealth and country. Great work!!!!

Unclaimed Bodies: While the Town of South Hadley has not faced this dilemma, our Health Director Sharon Hart, and the President of the Western Massachusetts Association of Health Directors, are working to ensure we are prepared for this relatively new problem. Director Hart assembled over 25 subject experts from health directors to funeral directors to police to state representatives and staff to discuss the issues surrounding unclaimed bodies and whose responsibility they become financially on Friday.

Agawam, West Springfield and Hadley were attendance and spoke to their experience with situation where a citizen had passed and there was no familial support person willing to take responsibility for the deceased. They spoke to how a police officer is required to be posted at an unattended death until either a family member or the Medical Examiner signs off or a funeral director is willing to take responsibility with no hope for payment and at some exposure to legal risk.

The fear for municipalities is they will eventually be responsible for the costs. It was mentioned some communities are already budgeting for the inevitability. As the culture changes and we see a much more nomadic movement or dysfunction in families it is not hard to understand how we ended up here. As sad as it is, this issue needs to be addressed. It cannot be left up to cities or towns where some poor soul may take their last breath to take charge. There has to be a more responsible and humane way.

On that note....

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan
Town of South Hadley, Administrator