



January 16, 2015

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.

CivicPlus Website Rebuild: Many have you have gotten a sneak preview of the new website as it is under construction and all but a few defects and necessary adjustments the overall expression has been, WOW!

This week nearly twenty staff will have more than four hours of training on the web site functionality. CivicPlus flew in a trainer from the Manhattan, Kansas home office for three days of in-house training and they have modular training available through webinars. You may be hearing from some citizens they had trouble getting in touch with various departments during the last few days, but it was greatly due to the need to have responsible parties attend trainings relative to their duties.

I had four hours on Tuesday and will be in a larger group on Thursday morning, I am not convince two sessions will be enough for me, but I will hunt and peck my way through the system.

The uncluttered appearance of the new site, the "How do I?" button and the Agenda Center feature have gotten the most interest. When the Agenda Center is fully functional, a person will be able to send a meeting notice which will reserve the room, notify other members and cause the Town Clerk to print, stamp and post a paper copy as required. There will be a more robust subscriber option, which will allow a client to modulate the receipt of information from the site.

Jamie Doolittle has done a yeoman's job on this project and is busily trying to work out the bugs, before taking on the next challenge. I would like to publicly thank him for his efforts.

IGM Tyler Minamy, Mike Fontaine: I had the pleasure of meeting with the local representative and the district representative of International Golf Management. They are very excited about the new contract and specifically stated the longer term will allow them to plan in a more exacting manner to the benefit of the Ledges Golf Course.

The new beekeeping project will get started in the spring as one of the sustainable eco-system projects and IGM will continue to look for other opportunities expand the awareness of the environmental sensitivity of this important space. The honey produced will be made available to Valley View Grill, the South Hadley Public Schools and Neighbors Helping Neighbors in that order based on production.

I have asked the team to take a look at capital improvements which may be needed in the future. They seemed to have some ideas already simmering in regards to capital.

Hampshire County Health Insurance Trust IAC: Julie Gentile our Payroll and Benefits coordinator and I attended the Insurance Advisory Committee (IAC) in Hatfield on Wednesday January 7. As you are aware the Selectboard had taken a vote directing me to offer a motion to reduce the proposed 2 1/2% increase to the HMO and 3% to the PPO health insurance plans. In this, as in so many instances, the SB support and action was strategically important.

We prevailed after little debate due to the weighted vote, I have to admit many of the small towns voted against the amendment and I suspect would have supported a higher increase which would have cost the Town Of South Hadley an additional \$40,000 at least in FY 16. Given the obese trust fund the HCHIT maintains from historical overpayments from South Hadley, I was happy to see about \$500K of the reserves used to blunt the rise in rates. This measure also saves the employee money as well, something we are always sensitive to when representing the taxpayers and employees of South Hadley at the IAC.

We still face a complicated and costly future in terms of health insurance benefits for the town, one which we will eventually have to take some rather bold measures to assuage.

Quarterly Professional Development Day: The Winter PD was held on Friday January 9, it featured the unveiling of the Financial Policy Manual. Town Accountant William Sutton and Treasurer/Collector Deb Baldini were the primary presenters and the guest presenter was Tom Scanlon from the auditing firm Scanlon & Company.

Bill and Deb did a outstanding job of organizing the presentation to reflect the new policy manual. The manual covers the budget process, contracting, cash turnover practices, end of year close-outs and delivered the most important message, if you are unsure just ask Bill or Deb or me, but ask!

Thank you to ATA Wolowicz for coordinating the training and we are looking forward to the April PD on emergency management, with Health Director Hart and Chief Labrie presenting. I continue to see the value in these meetings and I appreciate your continued support in relation to the effort.

Thirsty Mind: Selectboard members Brezinsky, DeToma and attended the most recent offsite meet and greets. About four hearty citizens braved the artic temperatures to have a warm cup of coffee and a fireside chat (sans the fireside). The subject matter ranged from public education to SHELDT to Lithia Springs, but not necessarily in that order of discussion, vigor or importance.

It should be noted all who were in attendance seemed to appreciate the effort of the Selectboard to make themselves available. I believe as the weather get more agreeable people will start to use these opportunities more readily.

MPIC: Chairperson Judy Gooch and I had a chance to visit and discuss the MPIC Survey. I am always impressed by the positive approach of Judy, as a President of the United States once suggested of someone; she is a "Uniter". I enjoy working with her a great deal.

The MPIC hopes to glean some insight into the direction the public feels the community needs to move on issues ranging from economics to bike ways. I did caution the Chairwoman the questions may mislead citizens to believe the town has more sway over privately held commercial property than it

actually does. It is similar to the growing number of people who actually do not want to rent apartments they own. We can only encourage and inform people of the importance to the community to have properties work for their intended purpose.

The questionnaire is well constructed and hopefully will reveal the feelings of the citizenry. I have agreed to print out a limited number of forms for circulation and allow the survey to be promoted on various town mediums. I will certainly get the SB a copy as soon as I get one, I was shown a "draft". I have pledged to Chairwoman Gooch administration will support their efforts to learn the truth.

Abandon Housing Initiative: We will be reinvigorating the AHI and look forward to working with the Atty. Dattres as the AG's Office has committed to continuing the program. You may see an article in the Hampshire Gazette which will hopefully spur some interest and give some of the property owner's incentive to invest in their properties. It will also draw a minority opinion about my strident approach, I assure you it is not all that strident.

Last year of the five properties on the original list two were demolished (154 Newton and 36 Bridge), one was taken off the list when we found out someone was living at the address (19 Ludlow), one we still are seeking compliance (103 College) and one we saw some modest improvement (154 Main).

There is a much longer list of properties (10 Canal, Street, 20 Spring, 12 Harvard etc.) which we saw some increased cooperation as a result of all the hard work of the Building Commissioner, Health Department and others. Next week we will be doing a kick-off meeting to assess what tools and tactics we will use this year to encourage investment in properties.

Please be aware we will be doing an eviction next week at 8 Graves Street and have started foreclosure on a home on Lawrence. I know you all realize these are measure of last resort after years of attempting to have a lien satisfied. If left unaddressed it does become both a financial burden and an inequity to the legions of taxpayers who remit their payments on time and abide by the rules, in some instances even when they disagree. In at least one case the property has gone into disrepair and is adversely affecting the neighborhood. The neighbors have made us aware of this challenge on a regular basis.

Route 47 Trail Project: Anne Capra Maddocks from Conservation Works, acting as a contractor consultant for PVPC on the hiking trail portion of this enormous long awaited project will meet in the Selectboard Office to have more discussion on the Bachelor Brook or "River to Ridge" portion of the larger project. Representatives from HG&E will attend, as their cooperation, going forward will be important to the success.

Chris Curtis will attend Tuesday night's meeting to discuss a "match" for the project. I have had initial discussions with Chris and it seems consideration or at least support of a ATM article to fund the "match" would be warranted and a wise investment. Suffice to say it will be a worthwhile presentation. There will be material to be included in the package later today according to PVPC, for your review and consideration. It look like one strategy would be to commit over two years, there is also an opportunity to do some "in-kind", something I would always be cautious about as we are looking to reduce play in our budgets.

Western Massachusetts Development Plan: On January 8 at 8 AM I was invited and attended a EDP meeting in Springfield hosted by the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council. These

sessions allow communities from the Pioneer Valley to exchange success stories and hear about best practices when laying the seeds for economic growth in the region.

Westfield, Chicopee, Easthampton Greenfield, Springfield, Northampton and Palmer all had representatives. The gathering is chaired by the President of the Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce Kathy Anderson, who also sits on the important statewide EACC which South Hadley and Mohawk Paper had a very successful recent appearance. These relationships have reasonable value and build a network for information sharing. It is a learning opportunity for me as the Town Administrator and as I committed to the Chair, as long as they have value I will continue attend with the SB's consent.

Chapter 90 Funding: I am sure you are all aware of the good news from Governor Baker about the substantial increase in Chapter 90 funds. I have asked the DPW Superintendent to revise and update the "street/sidewalk construction" list in preparation for review from Capital Planning and the SB. These funds will be of great assistance in moving the projects listed forward. Thank you Governor Baker!

As we begin the 2015 I wanted to again thank you and the citizens of South Hadley for allowing me to work in your town. I look forward to another exciting year of change, for the better. Thank you!

Submitted by,

Michael J. Sullivan

Town Administrator, South Hadley