



September 16, 2017

Honorable Selectboard,

Please accept this abridged accounting of some activities and initiatives which have been occupying my time and the time of other public employees during recent weeks. Thank you in advance for your attention and interest.

Again, I apologize for being unable to get this report to you with the Friday packet as per usual due a variety of personal and a work related distractions.

Valley Bike Share (VBS), this is a very exciting regional opportunity for South Hadley to be part of, I am sure you would agree. I attended a meeting in Northampton on Friday afternoon with the five communities and UMass. Northampton is the grant lead community and we appreciate them taking that role. The primary task for this meeting was to express ideas and concerns to Wayne Feiden the City Planner for NoHo as he tries to craft a “contract” with the chosen vendor, Beewegan.

This project will experience some serious growing pains over the next few years and we need to approach it both regionally and as member town with flexibility. This is a “for profit” venture for Beewegan and new experience for the Pioneer Valley. The expectation is that some if not most of the proposed 29 kiosks/stations throughout the five member communities may have to be adjusted. Including but not limited to, the chosen sites, the number of bikes at stations, weather conditions, more bikes, less bikes, advertising strategies, seasonal storage and seasonal availability. The VBS Committee and PVPC is working diligently to address these issues and concerns prior to launch, but inevitably they will need tailoring once the bikes are rolling.

The bike which has been chosen is an e-bike which allows a power assist mode. This does complicate the installation of the kiosks as they will have to have access to power for charging. Also there are some “restrictions” on some of the MassDOT bike paths which would not allow e-bikes to travel on bike path systems. Fortunately or unfortunately at this time SoHa is not necessarily affected by the bike path prohibition, as we do not host any “rail trails”, but everyone effected seems confident it will be worked out.

These bikes can only be used by riders 18 or older, I was surprised that is a standard for these types of bike share programs throughout the country. The bike helmet issue was raised, but it seems it will be ironed out within all applicable laws. While helmet is not required, it is encouraged, just how riders would get reasonable convenient access to helmets is part of the discussions.

If asked I would say the e-bikes are a great thing, not only in case I am ever forcedor let's say “tempted” to use one of the bikes. I stand a better chance of making it to another kiosk. More importantly it is believed these type of bicycles will encourage more people to consider cycling as a

viable alternative for transportation, it also could help to cultivate a bike culture which would find more people buying their own bikes. The sustainability and health benefits seem fairly evident.

The contractor will be investing about \$1.3 million, along with the \$1.1 million the program has received in grants. The seasonal nature of the bikes is another issue being cultivated, as Northampton and Springfield have had citizens encouraging the facilitation of “year round” service, but a final decision on that concept will likely come when there is better system data and more user feedback.

We expect South Hadley will see our two “original” stations (there may be more added) open for business by September 2018 at the latest and June 2018 by the earliest. I hope to have a demonstration of the new bikes before the Selectboard just after New Year holiday.

RDA Chair meeting, RDA Chairperson Frank DeToma continues to develop and promote understanding and support for the RDA plan. Recently the Selectboard Chair, the Planning Board Vice Chair, the Town Planner and I met with Frank for an update and an outline of both opportunities for citizens to hear more and give opinion on the plan.

It always is difficult to hit a moving target which is what anyone does with a “draft” plan, of course a “final” plan also has its challenges when you cannot or should not change the plan. As the RDA has received suggestions the RDA refined and rework the plan to include the offered suggestions, when the plan is revamped it must be reviewed again by DHCD at the state. It is easy to see why editing the draft can be time consuming. The RDA has stuck with it and seems to be drawing closer to a final draft for the Selectboard and then Town Meeting to process. Although there is work to be done in many ways.

I think there are some very important basic considerations which need to be part of formation of the final Redevelopment Plan and understanding its purpose. First of all it is a “plan” not a directive, law or inevitability, often RDA plans like those of “mice and men” need to be altered or have parts which become unattainable allowed to lay fallow. These diversions are caused by how communities evolve public thought. Technology, municipal needs, availability of resources, even if the citizenry were to shift position the plan may be amended or reworked. The plan which will be presented is the “best effort” of the RDA members, filtered through their consultant and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development.

It is meant to give a cogent blueprint to public how the Town of South Hadley will address some of the issues facing primarily the Falls, but also the town as a whole. It does not raise taxes, does not take land, does not build housing, and does not give license to blanket development without other approvals. There is in plain language or may be inferred or could be “read into” the RDA plan which may give pause, the goal will be to consider the plan as a whole of the parts.

The RDA plan process is an important exercise to communicate the limits being considered, so there should be little surprise to anyone as to its intent, which when distilled down is to simply seek reinvestment in the Falls, to assist in bringing a vibrancy that other communities have been successful in using the Acts or Redevelopment to achieve, to avert decay by neglect in all its manifestations. Congratulations to the South Hadley RDA members for moving closer to the finish line for the plan and closer to starting the long journey of implementation.

Professional Development Day Planning/Symposium of Understanding, October 13 will be the next Professional Development Day which will focus on equipping our municipal staff with tools to better

understand the diverse public we serve and our individual roles in making sure everyone is treated with respect.

The Selectboard Chair Sarah Etelman has taken a leadership role in this project and I would like to thank her personally for the effort. The Town of South Hadley is blessed to have Selectboard members who are committed and accept additional commitments beyond their significant SB duties, from serving on SHELD, to coordinating MASH, to working to rebuild the Youth Commission, to lending a hand to planning the Senior Center project and more goes well beyond the call of duty for a SB member. Thank you!

This PD Day will be the next step in creating a statement of humanity for South Hadley, how we treat all people and as importantly how we expect people treat others. I hear you ...this has been a wish ...hope ...vision of leaders, communities, and nations for generations why would South Hadley succeed where others fail. We succeed by giving thought and consideration to this age old problem, which has become seemingly epidemic across this country. We will only fail by feigning ignorance of the existence of hatred, bigotry in all their forms.

The Town of South Hadley is a wonderful thoughtful community which I am proud to be a small part of your efforts to make a difference this enormous challenge. The day after the Professional Day we will not wake up to a world or even a Town Hall which has been eradicated of all bias, hopefully we will just wake up with a greater understanding of the role we each play in thoughtful acceptance of our differences. The next step will be to convene a larger public discussion to gather input for a future community statement on understanding.

Canal Park Ted Belsky Overlook, I recently met with the Canal Park Chair Mitch Resnick to discuss where we are both at in respect to the project and to discuss some of the feedback we are both receiving. The feedback has generally been good, I would even say extremely positive. There has been a singular complaint about the lattice work obscuring the view. While this may be the case, prudent safety and the building code made it necessary. The risk of having a visitor or child fall five feet or more down in to a void behind the benches was a greater threat to safety than the lattice presented.

The structure needs to cure for one year, so it will not be stained until next year during a dry spell. We are still trying to address the poison ivy infestation around the outlook and along the paths. ConsCom Coordinator Anne Capra is working with state officials on herbicide application for the ivy.

So far the suggestion has been to hand remove the plants by cutting and then use a paint like herbicide to "paint" the remaining stalks and stems. This strategy presents a few problems for us, the hand removal of such a toxic plant could result in some significant sick days (work related) for DPW workers, the "paint" needs to be applied by a certified herbicide applicator (we only have two or maybe three individuals who hold those licenses) and using a contractor could be very expensive. The idea of using volunteers has its own obvious challenges given the nature of the problem, but we will try to work through the challenge to find a reasonable and workable solution. In the meantime we are going to post signs warning the public of the danger.

The fence project should start soon and the lighting options are being evaluated.

e360 General Code, is up and running it can be accessed on the South Hadley website home page. Users have been impressed with the various functions and on September 6 several primary Town Hall users took part in an interactive webinar with General Code to review various features.

One of the features which has not been as much a part of the public discussion is the ability to use the search word feature not only to look up our by-laws, but what other communities across the Commonwealth or the network of communities served by General Code have in place. I believe this is a tool which will grow in importance and be a significant asset for employees and citizens alike. Please take a moment to play around with e360 and offer your feedback or questions, as an investment I hope we all get a substantial return.

Abandon Housing Initiative, we are back at this never ending task. On September 12 Health Director Sharon Hart, Building Commissioner Marc Guillemette, AG Housing Specialist Attorney Kara Cunha and I met (Districts were invited, but were engaged in a table top exercise at the PD) to update and discuss the 30 or so abandon or blighted housing issues throughout South Hadley.

There has certainly been some progress made over the last several years, but still a great deal to go. Recently there seems to be an uptick in foreclosures by banks, most likely due to a very healthy demand market for housing in SoHa. These banks as you are aware are mostly large faceless, far off entities who are difficult to even make direct contact. 55 Lamb Street is a great example of a note holder doing just the minimum to comply and not readily available to discuss other options ...like selling the property.

We have had some success like 24 Tampa (a great example of a local bank working with us, Peoples) 16 Ludlow and others in getting them into new ownership by various means. I am sure the residents of Ludlow Road are happy with 16 Ludlow and wondering when 19 Ludlow will start to take shape. We have some indication that 19 Ludlow's new owner is preparing plans for demolition and construction a duplex (as allowed) which will be a vast improvement for that neighborhood. Thank you to David Miner who purchased at auction 16 Ludlow for his cooperative efforts in garnering such a quick transformation of the property.

As Building Commissioner Guillemette has more time to catch up on many of the "pending" projects the Building Department has been unable to execute over the last few years, I feel confident we will see even greater and more expeditious results from this team effort. This includes better use of the abandon building registration program. While the number of blighted property seems to be growing slightly, this may be just a temporary spike as the market seems solid for sales and interest in moving or staying in SoHa remains high.

Building Commissioner Granby/South Hadley, some of you are aware we have been helping Granby, as they are without a Building Commissioner for about four weeks. We have attempted to explore a longer term relationship which may benefit both communities including taking over some of the code enforcement functions for our neighbor.

However I cannot let this experiment linger and/or allow it to adversely affect South Hadley. I have strong affinity for regionalization, but there has to be an upside for this town and hopefully for both towns. Given all the challenges we need to cease our largess related to lending this service by the end of September if we are not closer to a more formalized plan.

River 2 Range Phase II, as I have explained prior we have run into some unexpected issues surrounding Phase II related to endangered plant life. I have been working closely with the Richard Harris and Anne Capra on the future of the Phase II grants and how we might alter or modify the applications to accommodate some reasonable changes.

In looking at those changes I have suggested in all instances the appropriation would have to come back to Town Meeting to be reauthorized. While the grantor (the state) does not seem to be focused on how we got the match money, just that we have it. I feel that the Phase II application was clearly articulated as our match for engineering related to a bridge which would traverse the mouth of Bachelor Brook, which not seems with the discovery of a rare cat-o-nine tails plant all along the bank of the stream to be out of the question or at least not within a reasonable budget. Therefore, we will should return to Town Meeting with a request to re-appropriate and a description of the new plan for Phase II. It continues to be a work in progress.

Special “Fall” Town Meeting, as you may have seen this is a topic of discussion for the upcoming Selectboard meeting (September 19). When looking at the governmental calendar it seemed to make sense to consider November 15 as likely date.

Two of the pillars of needing a STM vote were the 40R and the RDA plan. I learned late Thursday from Planning that DHCD would likely not have the final plan for the 40R back in time for November 15 or in time to give reasonable review time for Town Meeting and the public in order to make an informed decision. The RD plan is still waiting on the same DHCD for a preliminary review of their plan and it seems they will not be adversely harmed by additional time to present their work. The person assigned to our RDA plan has recently announced her retirement from the agencyhmmm!

We do not at this time have any “pressing” appropriations or financial needs that I am aware of at this writing, however, delaying this STM may have consequences related to the approval needed by Town Meeting to seek permissive legislation cited by the AG’s Office in regards changing local elections from April to September. The causal effect may be that the elections would remain as is until 2019 if the legislature cannot dispatch the order immediately (that may be true for any date) or we hold off having a STM now to deal with this issue and whatever else is ready and/or consider a December, January or even later date.

Looking at all the issues it may makes sense just to wait until October 8 to consider options for a STM in hope they will become clearer at that juncture. As always I suggest we do not go forward with any warrant article which is not in a reasonable state of finality for the TMM to make a cognizant decision. Having multiple TM without any absolute need to do so, is not something I would recommend.

Thank you for your patience on this report and again, I apologize for not having it in time for the agenda packet.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan

Town Administrator, South Hadley