

Sarah Etelman, Chair
Andrea Miles, Clerk
Ira Brezinsky
Bruce Forcier
Jeff Cyr

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator

April 15, 2018

Honorable Selectboard,

Please accept this as an abridged version of the work Town employees and I are engaged in on your behalf. Please note the date of the TA Presentation of Town Meeting Warrant Articles has been scheduled for April 25 at 6 PM. Appropriations will hold their hearing the same evening.

Annual Town Elections: The recent South Hadley Town Elections were a great success. Town Clerk Carlene Hamlin did an admirable job at coordinating the process. Thank you to the Registrars of Voters, the poll workers and the staff from Town Hall once again lent a hand to the Clerk for the election. Also, to all the candidates your participation in the process is crucial, the issues raised and debated is central to the local democratic process.

With 24% of the voters coming out a rain/snow soaked miserable day it clearly indicated just how diligently each candidate worked getting out the vote. I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to all the newly elected and re-elected citizens. I hope for the best for each and every one of you and hope your public service enriches the community and your lives.

The Selectboard, which I serve and work most directly, saw the hard work of Jeff Cyr create a new voice on the Selectboard. I am confident his deep seated knowledge of the Town of South Hadley will be valuable to him and all residents as he asserts himself as part of the town government. Selectboard Member Bruce Forcier will return to the board, bringing his commitment and advocacy for Battered Women's Issue, veteran's issue, BWC and so many other important concerns back for another three year term.

Change is necessary and a positive force in government. I do have abiding faith in the political process, yet I must say without rancor or acrimony, but with steadfast respect for the public servant, John Hine was an asset to South Hadley's leadership and progress. He will be missed and I truly wish him well in all of his endeavors.

MIA Rewards; Key staff assembled Friday in Room One in Town Hall with Deb Williams (Massachusetts Interlocutory Insurance Association's Risk Advisor) to discuss training opportunities for key departments. DPW, Police, Human Resources, COA, Emergency Management/Health were all in attendance. The schools were invited but there was a conflict in schedules, but they are aware, have participated in the past and I have already discussed with the School department Facilities Manager some of the additional training they are already involved in which may give provided additional credits.

You may recall the MIA Rewards program allows us to participate in a long list of training meant to help us understand and avert risk. We have successfully used this program to acquire subsequent year credit to our Property and Casualty Insurance of between \$9,000 and \$12,000. The Town of South Hadley continue to enjoy a financial value and the training creates a heightened awareness of the risks involved in

the municipal world. This will be come all the more important in the next few years as cities and towns lose their exemption from OSHA standards. This will be a positive in creating a safer workplace, but also a complex teaching exercise for management and staff. We spent a fair amount of this meeting considering the changes and how they will effect various departments. MIIA will be offering a great deal of on-line, local, regional and statewide opportunities for all levels of management and staff in respect to OSHA regulations and requirements. Thank you to the Selectboard Members who attended classes at the MMA Annual Meeting, as it added to our credits and ultimately translates into savings.

Hampshire County Insurance Trust; Early last year (May) I informed the Selectboard and the various unions there was consideration being made at the Trust level of design plan changes. I am sure any of you who have a health insurance plan have likely had some experience with changes, increases or even loss of plans over the last decade, if you haven't you should consider yourself very lucky. The plan design changes were comparatively modest to what was happening with other plans for communities who are not part of HCIT and considering there has not been any changes since 2002 it should not have come as a huge surprise.

The intent was to try and stem some of the rising premium costs. Whether everyone agrees I cannot say, but industry experts will state that the purpose of changing co-pays and deductibles is to slightly shift the relative cost of health care to the person who uses the benefit the most and away from the person who rarely uses the benefit. The unions will argue it also helps the town control its cost, I would agree.

The truth of the matter the base reason for HCIT considering these changes was ensure the Trust will be around to serve the towns and the employees for a long time. In recent years trust across the state have seen significant if not catastrophic loses to their reserves due to taking no preparatory action for the future of their trusts (see Amherst Pelham Trust). I had notified the unions of these changes and followed the instructions from the HCIT on acceptance of state laws. However, issues were raised about how South Hadley and most of the rest of the 70 communities in the Trust issued those notifications.

On Monday (April 9) I and Joe Shea (Executive Director of the Trust) met with union leadership from almost all the various unions (all were invited), including SHEA, the school para-professionals and IBEW SHELD. While we sent out email notification last October and receipt of the notice was generally acknowledged, SHEA's consultant claimed the notification must be by registered mail. This is similar to what they claimed in other towns. The instructions from HCIT did not include a directive to use registered. I would note it is not solely their (HCIT) responsibility on this matter and I have to accept some of the blame, as others like me are in several other communities.

After the conclusion of the meeting it was clear this would cost nearly all the member communities' significant amounts in legal fees and/or contractual increases. To avoid the un-pleasantries of litigation, a meeting of the Trust Executive Committee was called for 9 AM April 12 just prior to the Trust Advisory Committee to consider some alternatives to a 70 community battle and to consider some of the concerns expressed by unions not only in South Hadley, but Easthampton, Belchertown and others.

Under consideration was two plans, first increasing the premiums for July 1, 2018 by 10% or using Trust reserves to offset the estimated \$2.5 million expected realized value if the design plan changes were implemented and stay with the 4.7% increase as planned. The later was proposed by the Executive

Committee and accepted by the Trust IAC. This avoided significant increased cost to the employees who are members of the plan and increased budgetary costs to the member communities.

This decision was well served by a few things, first reserves actually grew over this past year, by way of a good investment year, a calming of claims and about a half million dollars from two new member communities, as their entry fee. Not one of those factors are even a nearly sure thing in the future. The Trust remains very solvent with over \$19 million in reserves, but continued erosion without taking action will caused the Trust to flounder, as other like have recently experienced.

River Lodge Road, Recently I met with John Rosenthal and Atty. Jerry Belair of Meredith Management the owners of Riverboat Development. It was a very productive and useful meeting and I appreciated their time and effort to discuss a reasonable course of action in improving River Lodge Road.

They had been at Riverboat Village prior and when they left the property to come to Town Hall they witnessed the DPW busy at work repairing potholes. Naturally, they suspected I had orchestrated the work to coincide with their planned visit. I assured them if I had attempted such a feat the crew would have been their promptly the day or perhaps the week after our meeting.

The truth of the matter is the DPW have been diligent about going to Riverlodge on at least three occasions filling the potholes and erecting caution signs since some of the residents of that area attended a SB meeting. I stated and they understood we have been fulfilling and will continue to fulfill our commitment to keep the road passable to emergency vehicles. Both were aware of the winter challenges for DPW when “hot patch” is not available and cold patch work only slightly better than packing a pothole with snow.

Both John and Jerry stated they were aware and willing to continue work with other developers who are part of an agreement to plan on a rebuild the road with cooperation and guidance of the town. They will be installing signs encouraging drivers to slow down on Riverlodge Road.

We all agreed to keep an open dialogue about how Meredith and the others in the group may restore the road to satisfactory level and condition where it makes sense for Town Meeting to consider accepting the way. I would caution anyone about thinking this challenge is soon to be in the rear view mirror, there is still a lot to done, but cooperation goes a long way towards success.

Dog Park Meeting; Saturday April 7 I hosted a South Hadley Dog Park discussion, again it was well attended. This meeting was twofold, to entice new attendees and second to give wings to the group.

Again a special thanks to Sue Kelsey, Bob Berwick and Jeff Squire who have been incredible in helping build momentum for the nascent idea. There already is a FaceBook page for the group and over thirty individuals who have expressed interest in becoming involved. Jon Camp has also offered to help the group set up a 501C3 non-profit so they can start raising money.

All parties are getting ideas from visiting other parks with their “besties”. It also once again should be said, this is still a conceptual idea, it should be citizen driven and eventually a evolved plan will need to come before the SB and perhaps Town Meeting, for now it is exciting to watch people brought tighter for the love of dog.

On-line Training “Leveraging Personalities”, ATA Jennifer Wolowicz recently took part of a webinar about leveraging personalities in the work place. It was another one of the previously mentioned MIIA trainings.

These types of trainings I cannot help think it sounds so easy, “place the introvert with the extrovert” and call it a day does not catch the complexity of reality in the municipal workplace. However the importance of this exercise for the HR Director and I, is to continue to evaluate and recognize the potential of each individual employee. This includes the needs challenge our impressions of all employees. The Town of South Hadley has some incredibly skilled employees. As this seminar eluded to as managers we need to do our best and moving the puzzle pieces so we can maximize the talents. This is a work in progress to say the least, luckily we have some good material to start.

Projects;

River 2 Range, Associate Planner/Conscom Administrator Anne Capra is doing an excellent job steering this project. For those of you have not been down the bottom of Ferry Street to witness the construction it is worth a peek.



Valley Bike Share; Thank you to Richard Harris Town Planner, Mark Gilmore SHELD and Jim Reidy and the crew at DPW for getting this project moving. On Saturday April 7 they laid the conduit for the power for the E-Ink Falls e-bike kiosk. The Mount Holyoke sponsored kiosk is also moving along at the edge of the Common. I look forward to trying the bikes out soon.



Town Hall/PD Parking Lots; This project also is being moved forward by the DPW. While some preliminary work began at the site. We should see paving in the next few weeks.



Thank you for your patience and support, I apologize for not getting the TA Report in the packet on Friday. I hope you understand it is a very busy time and there is a lot of moving parts.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley