

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

Michael J. Sullivan  
Town Administrator

Nov. 30, 2018

Honorable Selectboard,

Please accept this report as an abbreviated account of developments and issues which have occupied my time at town hall over this past ... week. As always, my colleagues here in town hall and throughout the municipal complex contribute significantly to our work of serving the public.

South Hadley continues to be an exciting place to work. With so many projects in play it is often hard to see the breadth of those endeavors. Thank you for allowing me to be a small part of those initiatives and thank you for your work, as well.

**2019 Tax Rate.** As you are aware the Selectboard under the guidance of the Assistant Assessor will hold a public hearing to set the tax rate on Tuesday evening. Both District 1 and 2 will be part of the public hearing, as per usual.

If the Selectboard was to accept a minimum residential factor (MRF) of "1" the rate per thousand of value would increase slightly from 2018, but still be positioned below the 2017 rate. You will hear the "Town" values have been healthy and you remain in a strong financial position. However, the caution signs are starting to pop up, housing starts and sales have slowed regionally, nationally and locally, inflation is a topic of discussion again and unemployment is starting to creep up. The news is a buzz with stories of layoffs and business closures.

There is good news, fuel prices seem to be stable and the availability of people seeking employment may be used to our advantage. It will be an interesting FY 20 for sure.

**PVPA Lighting.** In the last few weeks, Building Commissioner David Gardner, Town Planner Richard Harris and I have been trying to facilitate and mediate a concern of neighbors about Pioneer Valley Performing Arts School (PVPA).

As part of a recent renovation project, the PVPA repaired and re-lamped their exterior lighting. It has been stated by both parties that throughout the years, the parking lot lights were not replaced when burned out. Time marched on ... as it tends to ... and the neighbors became accustomed to the unintentional minimization of the lighting. When the switch was flipped after the reno, there was new light cast on the area, and the concerns arose.

Like most issues, it is much more complex than it appears - with several different views adding to the complexity. During the conversation with the person representing the "neighbor's" view, they suggested numerous solutions beyond our bylaws. I attempted to try to draw clear lines about what we may be able to help with and what was not within our lane of authority.

First, I explained that regardless of the PVPA non-profit status, it remains a private property which grants them rights, such as if they choose to illuminate their property while they are closed, that is their choice. As long as it is not between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. in accordance with the Town of South Hadley bylaw (subsection 171-8). PVPA, according to all parties, abides by that regulation.

Another concern is the fact they rent out the facility to other groups and whether that is in conflict with the "Dover Act," which provides various exemptions for non-profits. I explained to the complainant that this issue would be something the Attorney General, Secretary of State, or maybe even the Internal Revenue Service would have to investigate - not the Town of South Hadley.

The other significantly distressful issue for the neighbors, according to the spokesperson, is performance noise - particularly the "African" drum music which is part of a curriculum. Questions were raised about whether this created an objectionable nuisance. There has been a threat from the neighbor that he may seek an "order to enforce" from the courts against the "town." It would be unfortunate, but certainly within his or their rights.

The complainant has not been completely satisfied by my assertion that we have nothing to enforce as there is no violation we can find. However, we are willing to continue discussions with PVPA and the neighbor to find some common ground. PVPA followed the proper procedure when constructing the auditorium addition, plans were reviewed, and public hearings were held on the expansion.

PVPA has held a neighborhood meeting in the last two weeks and will be holding another one in a week or so to see if they can avoid more derision over these issues. PVPA reported that after the first meeting almost everyone seemed to understand the primary reason they kept the lights on were for safety reasons and to facilitate off-hour activities. I understand the neighbor position, but also recognize PVPA is trying to cooperate and educate on the matter. Hopefully this can be resolved amicably. In my separate meeting with principles from PVPA, they displayed a genuine desire to be a good neighbor and community partner, pledging they will do all that they can to help.

**Stanton Foundation.** There has been continued discussions between myself and Kate Dumeer of the Stanton Foundation. I believe we are making progress on both sides to understand their needs and limitations. She thought the hyper-engagement of the Friends of the South Hadley was good thing, although she wanted to make sure the town understood the municipality would be the underlying responsible party on the MOU.

I made it clear that this project from a construction perspective cannot exceed a town expenditure greater than \$30K total - end of story. If the plan came back with a higher estimate, we would have to scale it back to fit in the budget or not proceed. She felt that was very possible within the context of the grant.

**OPM Colliers-Senior Center.** We have come to an agreement as to price - \$392,700 for 28 months paid for on a monthly basis at \$14,025. This is within the range of early estimates and industry standards. This will cover the scope of services as presented in the RFP submittal, including selection of an architect, controlling associated design costs, overseeing construction and participating in a closeout process.

Colliers was very excited to be working with the Town of South Hadley, and this construction will dovetail nicely with the Hadley Senior Center project where they also will serve as the OPM. They are pleased to hear there is an active and engaged Senior Center Building Committee to assist and advise appropriately. They clearly understand the significance and importance of this project for the town, and understand their role as a facilitator reporting to the Selectboard on matters of major concern and significant importance.

**Hangar Pub.** The ABCC has approved the transfer and there is a real "buzz" around this regional casual dining group having a presence in the Town of South Hadley. The principals are a little uncertain at this juncture when they will be open and may be waiting until my 12-week Weight Watchers program has ended. Both are coming soon.

**MIIA Property and Casualty.** Mick Garrold, our MIIA representative, was in to discuss our property and casualty coverage, including a review of our coverage. The premium rate will be announced at the MMA Annual Meeting in January, but based on our claims experience I am confident the increase will be reasonable. We also will have more than \$12,000 in participation credit, due to the diligence of town employees in respect to training programs. This is to be credited to next year's premium.

I did commit to adjusting some building values based on estimate replacement costs after discussing it with Mr. Garrold, and based on valuation estimates done for MIIA by CBZ Valuation Group, LLC. We also increased our coverage of computer equipment from one million to one-and-a-half-million. We will be working with MIIA to update our inventory of equipment throughout the next year.

**Budget 2020.** Over the next several weeks I will be meeting individually with each department manager about their proposed budgets. As stated earlier, there are a number of economic concerns which will continue to push the costs upward. However, I will work with departments to continue to work to perform at a high service level without unnecessary swelling in the budget.

It does look like the health insurance costs could rise as much as \$500K. Retirement is up \$400K and the PD budget is up as well. Each of these increases have good explanations as to why, but it does not make it any easier.

**Some fun facts about VBS,** we will get more on SoHa breakdown soon:

Making a Difference since June 28, 2018!

- 95,272 miles ridden
- 36,116 trips taken
- 882 active members
- 5,986,803 calories burnt
- 39,156,964 grams co2 reduced



Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan  
Town Administrator, South Hadley



*"I feel a genuine sense of relief when meetings like that are over."*