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Town Administrator

October 11, 2019

Honorable Selectboard,

Please accept this report as an abbreviated accounting of activities within the Town of South Hadley. As always, I encourage all to contact Administration if they have questions or concerns about the material contained in this report or in regard to other municipal services or projects.

Director of Public Works Search; I have been informed by HR they have received seven applicants to date for the position and their process of qualifying the applicants in accordance with the posting and description has begun.

As I have explained previously, I am blind to the applicants until HR and the vetting panel make a recommendation to me as the appointing authority. Once I have the recommendation I will review the process and make a decision based on the recommendation to seek your approval of the incumbent.

Just as reminder - if I feel we do not have a suitable candidate I will suspend the search until after Jan. 1. This will certainly be a strain on the DPW, but I feel confident by way of the strength of the existing staff and support from administration we will make it through.

Two other related items: We have advertised for a part-time "Project Manager" position where the responsibilities will include those related to Tree Warden. Secondly, Deputy Town Administrator Jennifer Wolowicz will be spending time directly at the DPW. The DTA will be assisting with administering the DPW PBEs, learning about process and culture of the department, and looking for ways we may streamline or exact efficiencies at the DPW.

She will not be managing the department. That will be in the capable hands of the Acting Director Viv Price. Her primary function will be to assist Viv and use her HR skills to improve process and performance.

Performance Based Evaluations; Nine evaluation updates done, about ten more to go. While the PBE process is time consuming and I suspect there are a number of responsive groans when the participants receive the email inviting them in for the "session," I feel it is an important use of their time and mine.

Each session takes between an hour and an hour-and-a-half. I am enlightened each time we meet and I believe most leave with a sense of pride in their work. If they do not they should. It is very impressive some of the projects they are engaged in and inspiring to hear these passionate professionals go off on a tangent about their work. Not that the TA ever strays in these meetings.....hmmmmm.

The scope of the work we do is really incredible, from the Health Department's work on opioids or vaping to the numerous regional and state organizations our people find themselves leading in some capacity to mandates like Census 2020 to how managers are deeply involved in projects like the Senior Center. It is hard for the public to clearly see the length and breadth of municipal work. These PBEs remind me of all the hard work in which each department is engaged and as important how they are moving their department in a positive direction.

Hampshire County Health Insurance IAC; At a recent IAC meeting in Deerfield it was voted to lower the retiree health insurance rate for retirees \$355 a month to \$337 a month. There was an increase on prescription co-pays from \$5/\$10/\$25 to \$10/\$20/\$35 as part of the adjustment. There still will be prescription options (CanRX, extended supplies) which will hopefully offset cost for individuals who have numerous scripts.

In other news I was re-elected to serve on the Executive Committee, more so due to the fact no one else ran for the position. I do believe it has served South Hadley well by having the TA serve in this capacity. It enhances our regional presence, provides the TA with contacts in other towns for other issues and gives voice to our concerns.

The rates for active employees will be set in January. I am confident there will be no changes in the design plan (i.e. co-pays, deductibles) and I expect there to be a zero percent increase. The Trust continues to have healthy reserves and although prescription prices continue to be a concern, investments and experience trends remain stable.

Green Communities; Facilities Coordinator Matt Cowie and I had the opportunity to meet with Mark Rabinsky, the new Regional Director for "Green Communities," and the State Director Joanna Bissetta about the state of affairs in South Hadley relative to becoming a "Green Community." Beth Greenblatt also called in and greatly contributed to the conversation.

Beth advocated for the DOER to consider some of the savings above and beyond the 20% energy reduction, as we try to identify another 20%. The director was unmoved but did indicate the DOER would work with us to on our "savings" plan.

Beacon Associates will be working with Matt Cowie on the energy reduction plan from the new baseline (being developed) in preparation for hopefully submitting an application to the DOER for South Hadley to become a "Green Community," although the Nov. 22 deadline is of concern to complete said grant application.

Bartholomew/ Investments; Treasurer Donna Whiteley and I met with our investment team from Bartholomew, Sue Kelly and Brian Jamros. While there is much doomsday talk about the economy, the Town of South Hadley is doing well. While the picture is uncertain for next year the General Fund portfolio grew by just under a million dollars last year (including unrealized gains) and our investments out performed industry benchmarks.

Our OPEB, which has a more aggressive composite, also has done well. It is up about \$80K and now is over \$1.2 million....I know, but it is a start. All in all it is positive!

Special Town Meeting; Nov. 20 is coming quickly. I am doing everything I can to get the warrant organized and moving toward finalizing the articles language. Next, I will start to work on the motions and finalize the final versions of the appendices.

Recently I met with Frank DeToma from the Historic District Study Committee. After careful review and consideration he has suggested the article be pulled to allow further public discussion and debate on the merits of the district.

As requested I asked Town Counsel about whether earth removal operations presently operating under proper permits would be allowed to continue under this General Bylaw and it was Attorney Mead's opinion it would not be allowed to continue as written. If the Selectboard so chose, there could be a clause added to allow grandfathering in some manner or form.

There also has been discussion about whether the Health Department will go forward with an article for vaping and or "flavors" or just write a regulation under the lawful authority of the Board of Health.

Tag Sales; There have been more than thirty tag sales applied for throughout the Town of South Hadley. A list can be viewed on our website. I have asked the Police Department to take notice of the tag sales and encourage residents to apply online for the proper permit if they have not already.

This is a signature event for the community and we have been fielding calls from interested parties from Franklin, Hampden and Worcester Counties. We always remind callers this is an event which is organic by nature and is a success by not having municipal coordination.

"What's New in Municipal Law"; Selectboard Member Forcier was in attendance last week at the Log Cabin to hear about the ever changing landscape of municipal finance. I know most of you have attended this exciting (sarcasm) event in years past.

Maureen Cronin, Melissa Rimbold (both from Assessor's Office), Treasurer/Collector Donna Whiteley, Town Accountant William Sutton and I were there to hear DOR Representatives inform the gathering of representing more than 65 municipalities from Dudley to Dalton. Each of us took something of value relative to our position away from the seminar from the labyrinth of subject matter that is municipal finance.

Commissioner Harding spoke about the robust economy in the Commonwealth, but was less enthusiastic about the growth in Western Massachusetts. There also was interesting discussion on tax title "bundling" and some of the problems which are growing out of this practice and the lawsuit it has spawned. We appreciate the efforts of the DOR and the amount of work they put into the event.

I hope you all have a wonderful autumn weekend!

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley