



September 15, 2016

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.



**Columbia Sidewalk Project;** As we work through the challenges of rebuilding the sidewalk system throughout the Town of South Hadley there are some unfortunate “tradeoffs” which are never easy to navigate. One of those is maintaining the beauty of the tree lined streetscapes which are the hallmark of New England villages and towns. South Hadley should be proud of its commitment to maintaining the municipal forestation, the dedication of the Tree Committee, the annual revenue commitment for planting, pruning or removal of “diseased” trees and the efforts of Tree Warden Ryan has appropriately earned South Hadley to be called a Tree City USA.

Unfortunately, sometimes various initiatives can seem to be a cross purposes. An example has arisen out of the Columbia Street rebuilding sidewalk project. Making neighborhoods more walkable does not mean we have to remove trees, but in the Columbia Street area it does. We will have to remove nine Pin Oaks, one Norway Maple, one Honey Locust and one Red Oak, so we may make the sidewalks be accessible and reduce some of the root related trip hazards and hopefully prevent future damage to persons or public, in some case, private property.

If there was a reasonable and cost effective way to meet both goals of walkability and communal forestation in this case we would have taken such a path, I thank everyone who gave input and worked on this strategy and greatly appreciate the fact we were able to reduce the number of trees being removed. The estimated cost of the tree removal is \$14,000 and will be paid out of the article earmarked for the Columbia Street project.

**Bike/Walk Steering Committee,** On Wednesday September 14 the Bike Walk Steering Committee met with representatives from PVPFC to review the final draft of the Comprehensive Bike Study. The target is to have a completed product by early October to be released to the public.

There will be several strategies for the “Town” to explore and consider including an interesting idea of a “Bike Ferry” which would take interested cyclists across the Connecticut River to access bike ways in NoHo and E’Hamp. The plan will also suggest grant and funding opportunities and how we might partner to better utilize assets internal and external of the community.

The public hopefully has been seeing South Hadley mentioned as part of the Valley Bike Share Project along with UMass, Amherst, Northampton, Holyoke and Springfield. The original communities (which South Hadley was not a part of, have successfully secured \$1.7 million in National Highway (TIP) money for Phase 1, we would be part of Phase 2. There will be an bike share kiosks in town, one near the Commons and one in the Falls (exact locations are yet to be determined) where users will be able to get a shared bike, and drop it off at any of the terminals in SoHa or the other communities. This program has been a great success in many communities across the country. This fits nicely in to our goals to increase cycling in South Hadley.

**OpenGov;** We have met with the first of the “fiscal transparency” platforms to better understand how something like this might serve the citizens of South Hadley. While each product I am sure has its advantages and strengths, it will be important to give appropriate review to each in order to make a decision whether to put forward a one of these products or whether the investment will benefit the public. If we were to have recommendation I would foresee it being made for the spring ATM.

These platforms would allow us to show budget and expenditure information with full transparency. A resident could go to the town website and see what is being budget for the next year and also see in nearly real time what has been expended for the present year. The software will except any Excel based data or a CSV file and with little effort allow citizens to use comparative tools like graphs and pie charts to relate data sets.

It also would allow us internally to map crime, health stats even new tree plantings. Being able accurately and easily forecast expected costs and revenues out for multiple years is another dynamic part of these tools. Tracking resource usage and allocation of costs will become more a part of managing every city and town, so understanding what is in the marketplace to help us with those needs will be vital.

**Cable Television Advisory Committee,** Recently I was invited by Chairman Eric Zahm the CATV Advisory Committee meeting. It was a good opportunity to see how new life has come to this committee, much through the persistence of the Chair and the commitment of new members. Like so many re-invigorated committees they have a store of ideas which they would like to explore. They range from much needed studio improvements to increased local programing to having a greater role in the studio operations.

I did express my concerns, I am sure that comes as surprise to the SB, about the suggested changes to the management model and how it might affect some standard practices we have put in place recently in South Hadley from a personnel management vantage. As I have discussed centralization of message has been a historic defect in my opinion and with the SB support we have made great progress in that

regard. I did encourage the CATVC to craft a plan which outlines their ideas to present to the SB for your review.

As I stated at the meeting has been quite some time since the advisory committee advised the SB and there will need to be a period to reestablish credibility. I thank the CATVC for resurrecting this committee and particularly congratulate the new members Steve Fox and Denise Pressley for their willingness to be a part of the rising.

**Library Integration MOU;** As part of the packet you have received the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for your review. This document outlines responsibilities between The Town of South Hadley and the Gaylord Memorial Library and is intended to allow both parties to move forward with integration of the libraries under a set of clearly stated parameters.

There is a fabled history on this integration, some which is relevant to the integration, some less so, all illicit very passionate responses. I did my level best to remain somewhat agnostic during the preparation of the MOU. I met with the Chair of the Gaylord Memorial Library and the Chair of South Hadley Public Library Trustees, spoke with the South Hadley Public Library Director, attended some of the integration meetings, considered some defined itemized requests from the Gaylord Trustees, reviewed drafts with Town Counsel, considered the integration report and mostly did my best to be fair and consistent while remaining responsible to my employer. It is not as easy as it looks.

The MOU allows either party to extract themselves from the agreement and each has defined responsibilities. The South Hadley Public Library (SHPL) Director Joe Rodio will manage and allocate resources provided by the town. He will schedule and direct all staff, manage collections, oversee operations and follow all policies put in place by the Town and/or the SHPL Trustees.

The MOU is intended to offer a path towards integration of the two library systems with the resolve to have them become one. This is a first and cautious step towards consolidation, it is understandable it will be difficult for all parties to be in cadence.

**Ted Belsky Overlook Project,** In the Selectboard packet there was a Capital Planning request for your consideration. You may remember earlier this year I met with the Canal Park Committee at the property and we discussed some of the needs to address at Upper Canal Park. This was also the subject of discussion at the 2015 ATM where it was voted by Town Meeting to have administration to develop a plan to place before the body.



The plan I would like to present is fairly simple, invest \$97K to refurbish and make safe the 1981 structure and surrounding areas of the Upper Canal –Bicentennial Park. I would consider this as part of Phase 1, Phase 2 would focus on trails and contemplation areas along the river's edge.

This phase would repave the parking areas, replace the sidewalks, trim some vistas, reinstall the lighting, replace the fence and rebuild the decking to code. After completing the work I would suggest there be a dedication in memory of Ted Belsky by dedicating the site as the Ted Belsky Riverview Outlook or something appropriate and acceptable to the family and community. I would hope to receive the appropriation at the Fall STM so we may have the project completed by May or June of 2017.

**Hampshire Flood Plain Maps;** The Building Commissioner Charlene Baiardi, Health Director/Emergency Management Director Sharon Hart and I met with Joy Duperault Director of Flood Hazard Management for Mass DCR. Ms. Duperault works for the state and with FEMA to oversee flood plain mapping. I can tell you it was a very interesting and educational meeting.

There was a number of interesting topics, 59 properties (\$11 million in insured value) in South Hadley have flood insurance, there have been 17 claims made on the insurance since 1978. The national rate is 26% of the insured parties make a claim over a thirty year period. One of the most interesting tidbits was the fact a structure can be built in a flood zone, as long as they get local ConsCom approval. The building simply has to meet building code. If you need a mortgage that may present another issue, but there is no prohibition from the feds or state about building in a flood zone. We spoke about the new maps and again heard, Hampshire County is still in the work. This was an informal visit, there will be another more formal visit in a few months to discuss next steps in the mapping. It will be a longer and more detailed visit. Interesting!

Thank you for your support and interest on matters South Hadley.

Michael J. Sullivan

Town Administrator, South Hadley