



February 16, 2017

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.

MIIA Sewer Risk Abatement, Over the past year our deductible claims associated with sewer related back-ups has ballooned to over \$25,000 for FY17. Although our overall Property and Casualty costs is still low by comparison this is a concern. The growing number of successful claims has caused us to ask questions about how we might shed risk and or ancillary costs to our provider. We want to make sure if we are responsible to pay a claim we do so, but also need to make sure we are putting in place “best practice” to lower our deductibles and save residents the aggravation of having a sewer back-up.

Recently MIIA generously offered to have their Risk Control Manager Robert Marinelli meet with DPW Superintendent Jim Reidy, Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler and myself to discuss how claims are processed, what are the key criteria for determining who is responsible, how do we protect the Town of South Hadley against unwarranted claims and what additional steps should we take to avert back-ups generally.

Mr. Marinelli suggested we are already taking commendable steps to protect the Town Of South Hadley. The DPW Superintendent does address “root” issues in sections of the system his department has identified as highly likely to be impacted by tree or other root systems. We keep logs of grease trap, manhole and pump station inspections. This is a critical step to protect the municipality in an event of a significant failure in order not to be deemed to be negligent and lose claim limit protections under Mass General Law.

Some of the areas we would like to step up our game includes video documentation of the sewer’s sub-terrainian infrastructure. Robert suggested we apply in the next MIIA grant round for a mobile unit which can be deployed in the sewers to examine blockages or otherwise assess condition. He stated that other communities have gotten such equipment for this purpose and has become a successful tool for those towns. The grant in most cases would cover the full cost of the equipment, the next round will start in July. Mr. Marinelli is on the grant committee.

Hampshire County Health Insurance Trust, I attended the February 15th meeting of the HCHIT in Northampton. Topics of discussion included adjusting the benefit plan in an attempt to control the growing costs associated with the plans rising costs. The present plan is considered by many to be lavish, with few deductibles and very low co-pays. The change would be to increase prescription co-pays and introduce some new deductibles common to other plans.

This will be a difficult if not impossible “sell” to many of the unions and employee groups which under the law would weigh in on the changes. HCHIT may choose to make the changes and therefore communities where their IAC does not accept the adjustments to the plan would have seek getting their insurance from another group or carrier.

Another interesting “surprise” topic was from the Hampshire Council of Governments which is ostensibly the oversight entity in respect to HCHIT. They had sent a message they would like to become more involved in the rating setting, something I am told has never been the case in the past. The HCHIT has always set rates through their Executive Committee and the Insurance Advisory Board. I expressed that any change to this process which would give HCOG more influence or control of the \$26 million dollars in holdings managed by HCHIT would be seen by South Hadley as a breach of practice and may cause us to seek guidance from the State Inspector General.

Remember about \$2.6 million of the trusts \$26 million came from South Hadley employees and tax payers. Given the recent track record of the HCOG, this should be seen as a “red flag” in regards to the future stability of the fund. The fund already pays a premium to HCOG which confounds many HCHIT Executive Committee members, including this one.



Snow Storm(s), So winter was going along nicely until the SB voted we accepted the annual snow and ice spending plan. It is either irony or a coincidence, either way we could have done without the results. There were some inquiries about the early call of Town Hall closing, but not nearly as many as the late closing in regards to schools. It suggests you cannot please everyone, but we will continue to try.

As far as the Town Hall closing, you may recall we were received fair criticism from a number of people in regards to a small storm in late January. Citizens made it clear they want decisions made early based on the most accurate available information. The next two storms were much more significant and stressful for all parties and in both cases were declared “State of Emergency” storms by the Governor. In the declaration he implored citizens to err on the side of caution and stay of the streets. Thus allowing the plows and other equipment to do what they needed to do to open up roadways.

On Saturday February 11th I came to the office to decide the best course of action, put calls into the DPW Superintendent, checked with our trash hauler, spoke with the SB Vice Chair and ultimately made the decision to put a closure in place and post the weather related bans. We had been experiencing some “issues” with the Civic Ready platform and I did not want revisit those problems, or at least all of them. You may recall some subscribers got multiple messages and some did not get any. I successfully got the information on Saturday and everybody seems to have heard Town Hall was closed, including

those who had no intention of going to Town Hall and some who also missed there was a parking ban. I would like to thank IT Coordinator James Doolittle for his diligence in working with the vendor to get the Civic Ready system up and running.

Thankfully most citizens were appreciative of a decision being made in advance so they could plan and understand if we were open it was likely to be dependent on a skeleton staff who may have not been able to serve the needs of visitors, only adding to the frustration. I would point out two issues, there was not less work when everyone returned on Tuesday and while I was here during office hours on Monday I received about eighteen calls (as all calls drop down to my phone) about a dozen were from Corr-logic a (business which tracks tax payments for banks nationally), a couple calls trying to sell software, a few looking for the Veterans Office, one request for a birth certificate and two asking if Zumba was cancelled. Each caller was polite and did not express any concern about

GML Discussion, On Thursday I met with representatives from Gaylord Memorial Library (Barbara Erwin, Win Lavallee, Peter Millard) , the South Hadley Public Library (Joe Rodio, David Morrell) and Selectboard Member Frank DeToma in Town Hall to clarify the MOU. Thank you Frank for your assistance in this matter.

The time and care that Win and Barbara are taking to dispel as many concerns to allow this MOU to take hold at the GML Trustee and staff level is admirable. Unfortunately there are late comers, pot stirrers and uninformed critics who want to wordsmith and obfuscate the intent of the MOU to the peril of the agreement. It is unfortunate as this causes precious time being spent on covering trampled paths of information, time which could be better allocated to other important projects.

We went over some basic issues (again), Gaylord Memorial Library Trustees will be responsible for the upkeep of the building, grooming of the property, which it was determined by Town Counsel at the recent Special Town Meeting was GML's property, the present janitor would be paid by GML, as an employee of the municipality he cannot be paid by two budgets under MGL and Town policy, the collections (papers, artwork or other valuables) will not be moved from GML unless specifically authorized by the GML Trustees, if "temp" services were used at GML there would be no involvement of GML Trustees in the process. The municipality would be responsible for the procurement of a temp service. There is no intent of using a temp service, we have not used at the public library, we would have to discuss any such use with the AFSCME and such a service would be consistent with staffing, therefore in the hands of the SH Public Library Director.

There were a few more questions respectfully brought by the GML President, all of which were satisfactorily answered, again, I believe. I explained that I would recommend the budget for GML would be presented in a separate warrant article. As you know in the past when we have funded new issues (RDA, OPEB) the first year they were presented separate. Given the keen interest by a number of parties and the anticipated discussion having it separate will allow the level of debate and scrutiny which comes with transparency.

Budget FY 2018, The FY 2018 expense side of the "draft" budget will be presented at the upcoming meeting. There will be summary sent with the packet and I will work from an expanded "draft" document at the meeting. I should mention this is a "draft" budget. I have made some reductions and have considered some increases which are needed and appropriate. The PD budget is up as it reflects

some of the changes to the contract settled after the FY 17 budget was completed, I have also increased “training” for the department.

Health insurance costs have jumped significantly, we also will see an increase in Veteran Benefits which is refunded by the state at 75% (usually), but still shows as a sizable increase in the budget. We also saw increases in IT as we add platforms and services, increase in legal fees to facilitate Cable TV Contract negotiations and there has been some discrepancies found by our talented Town Accountant related to debt which will be worked out by Tuesday hopefully, but it is likely to increase.

This is the “moving target” period of the budget, particularly since we are a week or more from having all the revenue projections finalized. I would like to thank all the department managers who have been extremely cooperative and especially Bill “I mean William” Sutton and the staff of the Accounting Department for their diligence!

Mosier Statement of Interest, I am sure the Selectboard has been getting input from citizens in regards to the discussion about the Mosier School study at the last meeting. I was aware of one email, but you may have received others, along with comments you are likely gathering as community leaders. I know as a board you would like as much input as possible, so if TMM or others read this report I would ask you consider making your opinion known to the SB.

Simply replying to the email you receive with the SB packet and this report or send it directly to the SB in any form you would like. If you would like to see the video and hear the discussion it is on the website. I encourage you to make your comments, concerns or praise heard on this important issue.

BWC Meeting, On Wednesday evening I was able to attend the BWC meeting. They are rightfully determined to keep the PVPC Bike/Ped Study from gathering any dust. I expressed to the group how thankful the SB is to receive their views and thankful for their important advocacy. It has to be said the SB with the BWC assistance has gotten many projects related to the BWC efforts rolling (to easy). They would like to get more and I applaud them for their zeal. However, I do have to temper their enthusiasm to some degree ...or try.

They will be looking at a plan to create a loop trail at the Toth property. Their ideas sound very promising and I look forward to their plan coming together. I also suggested (as was suggested to me by some of you) that you hope they come to SB Meetings, similar to MPIC, to assist us in recognizing our success and identifying new opportunities. There will never be dust on this report!

Reminder please clear your sidewalks, do not push snow into the road and chant sunshine, sunshine, sunshine, continuously. There is no fine for the last one ...yet.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan

Town Administrator, South Hadley