

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

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator

March 29, 2019

Honorable Selectboard,

Please accept this report as a condensed version of the issues and projects we, in Town Hall, have been involved in over the last two weeks. It has and will be a busy period over the coming weeks with elections and soon to follow Town Meeting.

This is always a time of year which brings great consternation and often raises citizen's ire. It may be due to third quarter tax bills (or bills in general), municipal budget concerns, potholes or spring sports for their children and grandchildren...or maybe a combination of these and more challenges they are facing. I assure you we will continue to try and give the best advice, best service and greatest empathy possible.

Thank you for your patience and understanding, it sincerely means a great deal to all of us in Town Hall.

Budget 2020; Since the most recent review of the FY 20 budget by the Selectboard there has been little in the way of change, but here has been a reasonable amount of interest and a concerning level of misunderstanding about the product.

It is my belief much of the misunderstanding is a healthy by-product of the concerns over the school budget. I would like to respectfully make some important observations. The schools are not getting "cut" they are receiving about \$275 K more from the town in FY20 than they did in FY19.

Tranquillo, I am not suggesting and never have that the schools cannot make a relevant argument as to why an additional \$1 million dollars is more than reasonable and why cutting \$850K from the original request is incredibly painful. I would also like to make the point I needed to make reductions from requests on the General Fund side of over \$500K, money that would have helped with Police, DPW, Parks, COA and other services to serve the public.

While we have avoided lay-offs for municipal services, we continue to look at ways to have less overall positions, but reserve the right to look at new positions when critical and beneficial to the Town of South Hadley.

Having had experience with lay-offs, I agree, there is nothing more painful than making decisions that put good employees...good people and their families in economic peril.

The magistrate in the Housing Court always reminds me of how well it worked out for him when I laid him off from the building department in another community. He was a hard worker, bright, pleasant to deal with (and still is) and he had a young family. I do not want to sound "Pollyanna", as they all do not turn out as well as this one.

If I could give any advice to someone in such a position stay positive, I have been there more recently than one would expect. I remember in 2010 having just left a job, which does not afford unemployment benefits (full-time elected officials cannot collect unemployment), looking for a job, it was a scary three months.

My closing point is this, we are not out of the woods on this yet, if there was a clear way to use reserves to have gentle landing, I would be the first to make that suggestion. As it stands now we will likely see more dramatic budget challenges in coming years. I strongly suggest we must stay the course, do the best we can to deliver services within our revenue parameters and take drastic and imprudent measures.

Water Forum April 27; We recently had a planning meeting for the Saturday April 27 the South Hadley Water Resource Educational Summit to be held beginning at 10 AM in Town Hall Auditorium.

The featured presenter will Stephen Estes-Smargiassi, he is the Director of Planning for the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA) and consider an expert on water quality and infrastructure delivery systems effects on water coming for the tap.

Selectboard Member Jeff Cyr will introduce the program to start. Then acting as Water District 1 Superintendent he will give some brief remarks about District 1. This will include their system, infrastructure, protections, capacity and source. He will be followed by Mark Aiken District 2 Superintendent, who will give a similar overview for his district.

Director Smargiassi will then present information on the MWRA about their system and speak to the issue of lead in drinking water. There will be a short Q&A on the presentation at that point. Then a 15 minute **water break** and then Stephen will return and address water quality in the public space, municipal building, schools, parks etc. followed by more opportunity for questions and optimistically ... answers.

The program should be finishing up at around noon and hopefully gives a better understanding of practices to keep you and your family safe in terms of water quality.

IAC/PEC Meeting; On March 28th the Public Employees Committee met, on March 22 I met with the Insurance Advisory Committee. Just add to the confusion, it is actually the

same people on both committees, but one member pointed out there had to be two separate meetings ...so I did so.

The task set in the law for the PEC is to decide on how to distribute the "estimated" and predicted savings calculated by a third party actuary for BC/BS. Blue Cross administers the Hampshire Health Insurance Trust plan for the 69 city, town(s) and public entities who are part of the "Trust". The portion to be paid to approximately 285 union and non-union employees \$38, 233, based on their contribution rate.

There was an incorrect amount for distribution inserted on a PowerPoint. I presented \$70K, it was corrected in the meeting and an updated copy indicating the correct amount (\$38,233) was sent to the members. I apologize for the added confusion, that amount (\$70K) indicates what would be left to the town as a smaller increase, often referred to as savings, for the Town it is not a "savings".

The estimated average for each employee would be somewhere around \$135, although the \$135 "estimate" does not take into account some variables such as dates of qualification (set by PEC), accurate number of participants as of that date, the disbursement process chosen by PEC and the percent of recipient contribution.

It was offered to the PEC three ways to receive the mandated repayment to employees; the PEC set qualifying standards for recipients and we send a check after July for the repayment to each qualified employee, second we deduct their repayment from their monthly premium, lastly we hand the \$38, 233 over to a third party to be administered to the qualified recipients.

Third, I was asked if we would administer the fund and I stated "no". The municipality should avoid being in the middle of a drawn out disbursement where the town could find itself in making judgement calls or worse having HIPPA information revealed to internal staff. These should be two considerable concerns for any community thinking about administering the plan in this manner. The option where we administer is how lawsuits are conceived. These methods are the most common.

As a review I offered to the PEC that the Town is amenable to direct payment on July 1, a "premium holiday" discount or handing over to a third party the total amount. The SHEA President made comments suggesting he does not feel this can be resolved by "May 2" and further suggested it would have to go to the "Three Member Panel". I do not agree, unless the goal is to use the process to undermine section 21-22. I do not think it is that complicated to disburse their equitable share of \$38, 233 back, saving legal fees and time away from finding solutions to budget constraints is that difficult.

I am more concern employees do not have an unexpected interruption in coverage due to ego and false bravado.

School Lane; Unfortunately one of the harbingers of spring is the DPW has to take time away from other spring challenges and other important tasks (potholes, street sweeping, preparing parks) to deal with a quaint little sliver of land acting as a pedestrian way between Bridge and School Street which is adversely affected by a absentee landlord who has been warned before, but seems oblivious to what his role is in managing this property.



GZS Reality Management LLC, 86B Center Street, Chicopee Massachusetts is listed on the deed as the owner. We have dealt with this every year I have been in South Hadley. Gregory Z Szyluk has owned this property or been involved in the LLC since 2000 according to public records. I understand in the past he has been prone to claiming this is the fault of tenants, while I understand that may be the case, he is the owner and the responsible party. I will not allow him to obnubilate his obligation as an owner. We will be demanding he clean up the property and encourage him to take a look at what this on-going situation has done to the neighborhood....next time he is town picking up the rents.

Town Meeting Warrant; The warrants are coming along, I do not deny the fact I wish they were further along. Planning has added six more zoning articles and one general by-law.

As you know I am susceptible to complaining or generally whine about "zoning" articles. In this case I am going to keep my whining to a minimum, as there was great silver-lining in this case. At least a few of the articles came from responsible productive discussion and cooperative effort by the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and the Board of Health. I appreciate their sincere efforts which avoided a divisive debate, the art of consideration and compromise is critically important, especially in small towns like South Hadley.

Thank you Richard Harris and Anne Capra for helping to facilitate the dialogue and the opportunity to stand as community in respect to these by-laws.

Town Combined Elections; Recently I met on behalf of the Town with D1 Clerk Monica Watson and D2 Clerk Barbara Miller to try and set parameters in regards to the upcoming conjoined elections. Thank you for meeting!

This election is sometimes are being referred to as “combined”, I think we should avoid the term. They will be taking place at the same time, in the same building on the same day. However, it must be understood they are three separate elections, run by three separate political bodies, for three separate purposes. Yes there are similarities, but the sovereignty of each is very important to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and South Hadley.

Each Clerk, including Town Clerk Carlene Hamlin are well versed in their responsibilities. The common tabulator vendor LHS will be in the building to assist in any hiccups. It is not to say there is not some strained nerves and probably more on Election Day. The raw nerves should not be interpreted as disrespect or lack of competence, it is borne out of these professional Clerk’s respect for the voting process and their sworn responsibilities to ensure it unfurls by the book.

Dog Park; I have spoken to the Berkshire Design and they have nearly completed the re-design of the park on the other side of Mulligan Drive away from the driving range and wetland issues. It is a smaller configuration than the previous design. It would be situated farther up Mulligan Drive across from the path into the driving range area.



As you may have guessed I was taken completely off-guard by the assertion by the President of the Friends of the South Hadley Dog Park which suggested there was some expectation the Town of South Hadley would be taking over the bulk of the

responsibilities for the dog park operation, as means of saving the association money. I thought it was made clear to me by Town Meeting and the Selectboard the expectation was this park was intended to be citizen sustained.

The fundraising aspect is always difficult and I understand all too well the difficulty. My guess is the degree of difficulty was significantly underestimated by some in respect to fundraising. I also was told, but must have been removed from the email list that the President of the FOSHDP has resigned. This is another reason for pause. I hope the project can be re-invigorated by other members of FOSHDP, as we are so close to a successful model.

It may be in the best interest of the SB to wait until the project advocates re-group. I would ask the SB to offer some guidance on the project going forward. There was commitment made to have this citizen driven and it may be best to ask the Stanton Foundation if they could consider granting appropriate time to SoHa to re-group if necessary.

South Hadley State Delegation; Senator Comerford's Aide Elena Cohen and Representative Carey's Aide Kelly O'Reilly (sans Blaine) conducted office hours in South Hadley Town Hall on March 27th, it was well attended for the nearly the entire 4 hours they were in house.

The previous week Representative Carey stopped by in person with Kelly to discuss legislative issues and to remind us that he would like to hear any and all comments on legislation being considered under the Golden Dome. Both delegates are getting off to an eager start, I have enjoyed getting to know them and their staff.

Thank you very much for your continued support and guidance,

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J Sullivan
South Hadley, town Administrator