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Town Administrator

August 16, 2019

Honorable Selectboard,

Please accept this report as a condensed version of the issues and projects we in town hall have been working on over the last ~~two~~ **five** weeks...wow, it has been that long. We are headed toward a busy season of public hearings for a number of important projects, including the Falls Historic District Study Committee and the South Hadley Urban Redevelopment Plan.

Thank you for your patience and understanding. It is critically important for each of us in town hall knowing we have your support.

“Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation” Food Drive: Town hall employees are joining with South Hadley’s Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Pantry (NHN) to help in their efforts to alleviate hunger in South Hadley. With reductions to federal SNAP program, and an ever-increasing number of citizens seeking assistance, the need is growing. This town hall drive is for the month of August, but the need goes on all year long.



There were 75 new NHN clients seeking food assistance in the months of June and July alone. The situation is always difficult during the summer - donors are often away, there is less access to lunch programs for children, and there are few food drives. Town hall employees have been incredibly generous.

So far we have filled three baskets. Our goal is to fill five by months end. The troubling part is five baskets will not even last a week relative to the demand. Residents are welcome to drop off food at town hall through August. NHN needs packaged non-perishable goods, canned proteins, cereals, tomato products and extra reusable shopping bags if you can spare them, as well.

I sincerely appreciate everyone in Town Hall who has contributed to the cause. Thank you to Mary Lou Guarnera and Julie Gentile at NHN for getting the basket rolling and a special thanks to Kristin Maher for coordinating the Town Hall efforts. The need NHN for South Hadley residents is great, fortunately this is a generous community. Please go to www.nhnfoodpantry.org for ideas and ways you can help or get help from Neighbors Helping Neighbors. Thank you!

116 MAIN STREET, SUITE 109, SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS 01075-2896

Energy Audits, SHELD, Columbia Gas, Green Communities; There has been significant progress made in working towards satisfying the final criteria associated with becoming a “Green Community”. Our Consultant Beth Greenblatt has been critical to ensuring we progress in a concise and appropriate way for South Hadley.

We had a recent conference call with Beacon Associates, Department of Energy Resources (DOER) “Green Communities” Division, CET (audit contractor for Columbia) and SHELD (Manager Fitzgerald and Engineer Gilmore). The call was to simply define the most expedient way to establish an energy baseline which the 20% savings could be applied.

The result was we now have the right type of audit needed being conducted by GDS Associates for electricity through SHELD and CELD (WWTP). Columbia Gas has authorized their contractor CET to begin the necessary research and data collection for the public buildings using natural gas in South Hadley to establish baselines.

The final criteria to become a Green Community is to develop a plan which will reduce our energy consumption by (another) 20%. As we have discussed before this is a particularly high hurdle, as you have been very successful in a prior non-green Communities effort to reduce energy consumption.

It is also critical we weigh the cost benefits of improvements, including possible grants and cost savings when we determine which projects are viable. There are multiple facets to any of the savings concepts which need to be investigated in an open manner without prejudice or myopic views.

MVP Climate Change PVPC: Recently PVPC held a round table on the related topic of climate change and its association with municipal vulnerability preparedness. Associate Planner/Conservation Agent Anne Capra and I were in attendance. We have received a planning grant as you know from DOER to address the dramatic change in hydrology in various areas throughout town.

We realize “hydrology” is not the only manifestation in the community of “climate change”, however this is the issue which most often crosses our desks in Town Hall. We are seeing trees falling over in areas which drainage patterns have changed, water accumulating on public and private land where it never did before and flooding in basements more regularly. On the topic of basement flooding, we encourage all residents to consult their sewer bill in reference to the importance of a back flow device.

Another of those other issues and areas of concern has been on display this summer with extended periods of high temperatures. This causes the municipality to open “cooling centers” and consider additional back-up generators. We will need to consider adjustments to work schedules for anyone working outside (DPW, camps, etc.) in the future in the trend remain true to the pattern.

We will continue to participate in regional meetings and monitor climatic change locally in search of answers. I am confident this will go on for generations, but no community should deny the possibilities and ignore opportunities to plan.

Western Mass Economic Development Presentation; September 12 the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts has asked South Hadley to present to their Western Mass “Planner’s

Group” about projects and investments being made in SoHa. We are listed on the Western Mass Development website which is circulated to investors and developers (<https://www.westernmassedc.com/south-hadley-falls-opportunity-zone/>), check it out.

Associate Planner Anne Capra has taken over attending most of the monthly meetings at EDP, as she continues to build her influence and knowledge on the economic opportunities for the town, I will also participate in this presentation. The presentation will focus on how we attempt to open doors for developers, particularly in the face of occasional localized resistance.



We will share the stage on this date with Springfield, I suspect they wanted to get the major communities in for the first meeting of the year.

Building Re-pointing; As is often the case the preparation of materials which leads to a RFP document is arduous and almost makes the actual repair work seem mundane. We have been working with a team from Dietz Architect Associates and Fuss and O’Neill Engineering Associates to develop the underlying technical specifications required for the RFP.



I have explained to all parties this is a repair job, not necessarily a restoration job. It would be nice to be able to restore the façade to the original circa appearance or original state of conditions, but the starting price for such an approach would be over a million ...probably well over. Our goal is to stabilize the building exterior, preserve the character and do it for under \$289K.

Health Director Sharon Hart was kind enough to assist by using her personal drone to film the roof and provide pictures of some hard to reach areas. The Architect and Engineer were enthusiastic

about the opportunity to use a drone as opposed to climbing up on the roof, however they will likely not discount their bill.

This will be a major project and very well may need additional funding phases, given what we are learning and the fact the estimate was five years old. I assure you we will get as far as we possibly can on what has been appropriated and approved by Capital Planning.

Lieutenant David Gagne; On August 8, 2019 Lt. Gagne was promoted from Sergeant to Lieutenant on The South Hadley Police. The process was as to policy beginning with the Civil Service list, then the three person interview panel, Chief Gundersen, Deputy Administrator Wolowicz and Recreation Director Andy



Rogers were on this particular panel.

The panel made a recommendation to the Town Administrator as the appointing authority, I reviewed the process, discussed the recommendation with Chief Gundersen and completed the appointment process by accepting the recommendation. Lt. Gagne's family was on hand for the swearing in ceremony. The actual "swearing-in" was handled

nicey by Assistant Town Clerk Sarah Gmeiner. Selectboard Member Bruce Forcier was in attendance to represent the SB, thank you. Congratulation Lieutenant Gagne!

Short- Term Rentals; Recently there was an unfortunate occurrence at 67 Amherst Road, some of you may recall issues we had with this property prior regarding improperly housing young (estimated 12 years old) international students. The situation was difficult to rectify, but the danger posed to those unsuspecting students was real. Eventually through cooperation with FD#2 the Building Commissioner and the attorney for the property owner it was resolved.

However, the absentee property owner has continued to find ways to optimize income from the property without regard for his neighbors. The latest challenge comes from an AirBnB weekend rental which brought as many as 300 people (neighbors estimate) to the property causing dangerous and disturbing situations for all. The South Hadley police did respond to quell the activity, but the neighborhood concerns remained long after the last part goer.

The neighbors rightfully would like to see the property owner stay within the law and avoid these situations. Chief Gundersen has contact the property manager and informed her this type of activity will not be tolerated and the property owner may be held personally responsible for any infractions of the law caused by his disregard for the same.

We have been informed the owner intends to convert the property in to a two unit condo. While we have not seen any plans or request for permits, the idea of a continuously irresponsible owner selling their property does have an appeal. We will continue to monitor the situation.

TA PBE Process Progress; I have met with all members of the SB at this point to discuss the TA 2020 PBE. There have been a number of areas which have been suggested where I should allocate my time and resource for the year.

It would be my suggestion when we meet on August 20th we discuss the draft PBE and as the Selectboard has in the past give the public an opportunity to make suggestions as well. Thank you all for taking the time to give consideration to the issues which face South Hadley and how I may be able to make difference in my role as Administrator.

I do believe there will be some very important issue which will need attention, chief among them ADA requirements, aging infrastructure, the changing town demographic, opioid addiction and education. These will challenge resources at every level for years to come.

MTC Office Hours; August 8th Attorney Lisa Mead was in Town Hall for four hours meeting with various department managers, board chairs and administration about challenges and concerns they each face in respect their municipal work. Atty. Mead offered straight forward and candid advice and reports back from participants was the sessions were very helpful.

Health Director Sharon Hart, BOH Chair Dr. Diane Dietzen met in one session, myself, Chief Gundersen, Building Commissioner David Gardner and Health Director Sharon Hart were in another session and Conservation Administrator Anne Capra, ConsCom Member Jim Canning and ConsCom Chair Bill Deluca (via phone) were in another session and Deputy Administrator Jennifer Wolowicz and I were in the final meeting.

While I was not part of two of the sessions I understand they were about board powers and parameters on various subjects. The first one I was in we discussed steps and considerations we should make when trying to regulate and enforce “short term rentals” (i.e. AirBnB, MiCasa, Home Away). The short answer is it is not easy and we have some work ahead of us.

The second session I attended with the Deputy Administrator was generally to discuss how the arrangement with the new Town Counsel was going overall. It seems by reports to this office it is going well and has been in my opinion very cost effective. Atty. Mead is gearing up for the September 18 meeting which SB Chair Andrea Miles has invited all the board and commission chairs to attend, but is open to all interested parties.

ADA Report; The “draft” ADA Report sans the schools (they continue to work to gain access to the buildings) is daunting to say the least. As you may recall this is a subject matter which I have been mentioning by me for some time, as well as others. The final report will be available by October.

Even though the “draft” is not for the nebbish, there is some low hanging fruit which is where I would suggest we start. Creating a standing ADA Committee to vet the report and develop strategies

Health, Safety and Facilities Coordinator; Matt Cowie South Hadley resident and our new Health, Safety and Facilities Coordinator will begin his duties August 18. We are all looking forward to his arrival and how this new position will evolve and continue the progress we have made.

Selectboard Room Reno Update; We continue to work with Conklin Furniture and our ADA advisors to increase the capacity to Selectboard Meeting Room. The actual improvements will likely not happen until after the first of the year due to timing with the various parties. In the meantime we will do our best to accommodate some of the increased size of various boards the best we can.

Trash Talks; The internal committee for “trash talks” met recently. They included Kellie Lempke, Jim Reidy and Kevin Quesnel from the DPW, Anne Capra from Planning/Conservation, Kristin Maher, Jennifer Wolowicz and I from Administration.

The mix was intentional, I felt having key people who hear often from the public about trash pick-up in South Hadley (Kellie, Kristin, Jim, Kevin and I). Also the idea was to have people who are personally familiar with other “ways” (Sharon, Jim, Jennifer and I), participants in the discussion who understand the costs/industry (Jim and I). Plus a number of South Hadley residents (Kellie, Kristin and Kevin) This group had an initial conversation on a broad set of relevant experiences and expertise.

Here are a few concerns and timelines we began to explore; the Town’s agreements run out next June 2020 with Republic, at the same time we will know more about the future of the Springfield Materials Recycling Facility which we have been part of for years. The issue globally, regionally and locally in regards to refuse is a shifting landscape to say the least.

First idea discussed, looking at other communities, (Southampton, Easthampton, and Amherst) who moved away from the municipality being involved in the “residential pick-up business” (or any trash) and require property owner’s to contract with private carriers. The advantagewe as a municipality are out of the business. While that is appealing, everyone acknowledge a number of substantial challenges to such a model. Increased illegal dumping high on the list, along with political willingness.

Reminder alert, these are just ideas, not recommendation which will hopefully come later in the process. It should be said we need to explore even bad ideas when doing an exercise of this nature, as there may be a component part of a “bad” idea which has merit. Also we need to honestly say in future public forums “we considered that idea” and here is why we feel it does not merit further consideration.....

We also explored the idea of getting out of the “bag” business and going to toters. Similar to what Chicopee recent implemented. A week earlier DPW Superintendent Jim Reidy and I met with Dan Higgins and Brian Van Dam from our contractor Republic Services in anticipation of this meeting. We discussed a number of ideas and issues chief among them was toters and how green bags effect the trash biz in SoHa.



If the “Town” was to supply each home with a trash toter the initial outlay would be about \$400,000. That cost could be blended into a contract if the SB felt toters were the future or purchased outright. Toters would allow us to get out of the “green bag” business, but would likely substantially raise the annual fee. The toters could come in different sizes and prices (35, 65 and 95 gallon). Residents could use any or no bag liner, personal choice. The question was posed would people accept a higher annual fee (\$125 to \$175, still to be calculated) in exchange for no cost of green bags. It was discussed this approach may be seen as unfair to lesser trash producers (i.e. small families, uber recyclers etc.). Again, not a recommendation.

There was robust conversation about removing food waste from the stream and the related complications. While the anaerobic digestion and composting technologies continue to advance, we simply do not seem to be at a point where people are willing to dedicate the additional time and resource to separating out food from their waste stream. One could argue a \$175 and likely growing fee in the future may be enough to encourage the investment in time. Food waste is said to be 25% of the waste stream in an average community.

As we have discussed in our conversations at SB, tipping fees are likely to go over \$100 per ton on average in Massachusetts in the next five years (up from about \$62 a ton just four years ago). If we were to change the trash process in SoHa we would be seeking a model which would remain the stable for an extended period, would be relatively easily understood and we would like to avoid having the cost of the changes conflated with the rising cost of tipping.

We also discussed the idea of “weekly” pick up. There was widespread agreement it would be a welcomed change, however would the consumer be willing to accept the added cost. Jim Reidy and I spoke with Republic about the possibility of them extending their services by request and billing the resident directly. They said it was possible, however they would like to give it some thought as to what it would look like to the consumer, before recommending it as an option.

The group “imagined strategy” was a property owners could contact Republic and get a price for regular of week pick up, seasonal (i.e June, July, August and September) or a call in system for an occasional pick up all billed to the property owner. It would be a transaction completely between the resident and the hauler.

We also discussed single stream the upside and the downside. The future of recycling and the need to become more uniform in our policies, presently that does not seem to be the case. It was acknowledged we need to “recycle” recycling education to the public.

My intention is to meet with the group and hope to have a proposal with three strategies before the SB on September 17. Post report I believe there will need to have a wide ranging discussion on the matter, now is the time to have the conversation with the changes in trash and recycling agreements just over the horizon.

Pastor Souder, Center Church; I recently was invited to meet with Pastor Souder and Center Church Elder Brian Lapis (aka 22 News Weatherperson) to give them my perspective on how their congregation can help South Hadley with some of the social and cultural challenges we face in my opinion. This is an exercise they take on every five years. I was reminded this was my second time through wringer, I was surprised to be asked twice.

We also discussed how Center Church are exploring ways to for their church to be safe in today’s reality. By way of the discussion, it may or may not come as a big surprise to you, Center Church is challenged by some of the same issues as the municipality. It does make sense as both share a main ingredient, their congregants are also primarily South Hadley residents.

One of the topics we explored is how we each deliver messages to somewhat closed minds. Those shared constituents who have already formulated a lead lined, cement encased, and impenetrable opinion. No evidence or contrary fact will be considered or even allowed to be ruminated. The pastor spoke of the occasions when she has spoken from the pulpit about uncomfortable topics and was vehemently challenged by members as she left the altar. I shared with her some similar situations in my experiences as TA and other parts of my public life.

Most of the conversation was around the issue of acceptance associated with recent affordable housing discussions and who it is intended to benefit. The image is often the housing is for people moving into South Hadley and rarely about longtime residents who are struggling to stay in South Hadley. Both Brian and the Pastor had an evolved sense of the need for housing opportunities at all levels of the economy and how that message coincided with their message to church congregants. They see some members of their flock struggling to stay in town.

Pastor Souder was cognizant of the fact that even when hardliners presented with telling data, such as 30% South Hadley residents are single higher than the state average while “family households” are lower than the state average. The number of seniors living alone is 28% higher than the state average and represents 16% of the overall population and is growing. These statistics reflect a sizeable category of the populous which is one key earner away from poverty, an endangered group which may sometime in the future need a different housing model to stay living in South Hadley.

These are just some of the data points which lend credence to a greater local understanding of “who” is seeking housing or other services such as Neighbors Helping Neighbors provide. It was encouraging to see Center Church as a place of courage and perseverance. Thank you Pastor for the invitation.

Hamp Health and the IAC; I was happy to receive the news that Hampshire Health Insurance Trust is very close to the final extrication from HCOG. There has been discussion about liability for retirement costs and other run-out costs from HCOG employees and retirees. I do have empathy for their situation as individuals, however my role as the South Hadley representative to the Trust is to protect the employee investment and the town’s investment in the system which has been made over decades.

There is legislation making its way through the Statehouse which would codify the separation of the two entities, Senator Comerford’s Office has assured me there is language in the bill, supported by the Senator which would protect the South Hadley employees present and past and the taxpayers from being harnessed with cost related to HCOG employees.

Given that when at the time there was a dissolution of Hampshire County government HCOG was given assets which were squandered by the organizational leadership and in light of the reported “severance” packages which have been offered, it would seem patently unfair to insult the taxpayers of South Hadley with a levy they had little or no control in creating.

September 18 Chairperson/Committee Seminar; Thank you Chairperson Miles for reaching out to your colleagues who act as Chair on the list of boards and commissions who serve the Town of South Hadley. Replies have been trickling, but so far there seems to be great enthusiasm for this forum.

While the primary target is board and commission chairpersons, it is open to other members of those boards and commissions and the public at large. Presently it is scheduled in the Selectboard Meeting Room as the room has the technology already set up. I suspect if the interest remains at this pace we will invest the time and considerable effort in setting up the Town Hall Auditorium for this important meeting.

Atty. Lisa Mead the managing partner of Mead, Talerman, Costa the firm who took over South Hadley Town Counsel duties will be the primary speaker. The hope is to have a session which covers a lot of ground, but does not get bogged down on specific situations or challenges facing individual boards.

The forum will focus on open meeting laws, ethics regulations, board policy development, meeting “best practices” and other related areas for boards and commissions. The long term goal would be for the boards and commissions across the town to become more uniform in policy and practice for meetings, minutes, agendas, familiar with each individual board’s role and general operating procedures.

Tree Warden; Recently I met with Tree Committee Chair Ted Boulais to discuss the importance of the Tree Warden position. He made it clear that the Tree Committee would encourage the Town leadership to increase the importance and scope of the tree warden’s work.

The Tree Committee would like to escalate the impact of the Tree Warden in terms of education, tree hearings and as a general resource for residents. They also would like have someone who is knowledgeable, especially in the area of invasive species to protect the communal forest.

These tools would extend to having a skill set to engage the community in discussion about how we each can play a role in improving the health of our trees. We also discussed the importance of a Tree Warden to be spry enough to inspect trees in difficult terrain or areas, grant writing, able to develop an inventory, multi-year planting plan, multi-year pruning plan, exceptional communication skills and be able to leap a tall oak in a single bound.

These are all admirable needs and would definitely benefit the Town of South Hadley strong desire to protect its tree portfolio, however it will be a tall task to find someone for the \$30K salary and harder to accomplish given the \$65K allotted in the “expense” budget to accomplish this miracle of forestation. The challenge is where in the municipal budget you cut to find space to grow the investment in tree care and planting. To me there is nothing that stands out as obsolete in the budget presently. I do not disagree we need to find more to invest in this municipal “need” and asset, but this all comes back to the zero sum nature of town business, where do you subtract so you can add.

There is many pressing issues for South Hadley finically, the town forest health is among them, recently we have stated on a pressing project to cut about 18 trees at Buttery Brook which are threatening homes on Hollywood and Tampa Streets. The project will cost about \$20,000 to remove the trees and then could cost more than \$10,000 to meet the intended two to one replacement requirement of trees.

This is just another reminder about how a great project, with a noble purpose has a significant price tag. To expand programs beyond our present capacity ...the money would have to come from somewhere in the budget. This is one of the primary reasons we work so hard to consolidate and reorganize in order to add more funding to budget action items, as opposed to more long term costs associated with employment.

MHC/Town Traffic Safety Committee Meeting; Superintendent Jim Reidy and I met again with Mount Holyoke College representatives (Kevin McCaffrey, Ray Labarre) to discuss progress on the Route 116-College Street PVPC study and other traffic safety related ideas we would consider in making the area safer.

MHC has been working with SHELD to improve lighting in the area around the cross walks, they will be doing some tree trimming in the next few weeks to also allow more new LED lighting to hit the targeted areas around the crosswalks.

Pioneer Valley Planning Authority is about 40% through their “MHC Crosswalk Use Study”. Their findings are interesting they found that 90% of the students during their physical observation periods complied with standards for using the crosswalks. Including stopping, observing and/or pushing the button for the lights to blink. 87% of the cars complied with their required action, primarily stopping when someone is in the crosswalk whether they pressed the button or not. Both of these were higher than the norm under standard engineering practices.

The two crosswalks which have been studied so far were those closest to the Town Common (one near Common and the other near the stone bus stop) during the school year. They will do the remaining crosswalks along 116 in front of MHC once the students return. PVPC is already considering some recommendations for the crosswalk closest to the Common and College Street By-pass.

In this most recent meeting we also focused on back to school, both for MHC and South Hadley Public Schools and stepping up our campaign to remind drivers to be extra aware of students crossing streets, riding bikes or walking on sidewalks or unfortunately sometimes having to walk on the edge of the street. We also hope parents will remind their children about the importance of practicing safety when getting on the bus or walking to school or the bus stop.

Safety is part of all our jobs! Thank you for practicing with us.

Census 2020; We are quickly approaching this important exercise, the information below is important for everyone to be accounted. Decennial census counts predict almost all federal and state funding, it also gives much needed data to regional and local planners. Please encourage everyone to participate.

Each year we have a small number of people who object to what they feel is an intrusion of their privacy, while I can understand this line of thinking and do not disagree, the Town Clerk and all town officials are bound by their municipal duty to participate and promote the counting of all people in South Hadley.

We strongly encourage residents to call the South Hadley Police Department anytime they have concerns about people at their door or in their neighborhood who seem out of place. Thank you all for your cooperation. I have recopied some of the contact information and links which should help citizens verify canvassers and avoid scammers.

Verify Census Workers in Your Area” <https://2020census.gov/en/census-takers.html>

If you are visited by someone from the Census Bureau, and want to verify their identity and occupation, here are some tips to assure the validity of the field representative:

- Census takers must present an ID badge that includes a photograph of the field representative, a Department of Commerce watermark, and an expiration date.
- [Follow this link and enter any field representative's credentials.](#)
- Note that census workers may be carrying a Census Bureau phone or a laptop as well as a bag with a Census Bureau logo.
- This link shows a map of locations where Census workers will be working. <https://gis-portal.data.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=1a0004d1745547888c8fd2f4d929d42f>
- If you still have questions, call [800-991-2520](tel:800-991-2520) to speak with a Regional Census Bureau representative.

Please remind all motor vehicle operators in your household to increase their attentiveness while operating on South Hadley roads. This time of year, as the season's change and Mount Holyoke, Berkshire Hills, PVPA, South Hadley Public Schools and others return to sessions your attention is important. Please also take the time if you have school age children to review all the important measures to stay safe!

Thank you as always for your support, input and understanding!

Respectfully submitted;

Michael J. Sullivan
Town Administrator, South Hadley