

CHAPTER

FOUR

PUBLIC SERVICE

Reports of the Council on Aging,
Public Library, Veterans Services,
Planning & Sealer of W&M



ATHOL COUNCIL ON AGING

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ATHOL, MASSACHUSETTS 01331
TEL: (978) 249-8986 * FAX: (978) 575-0277

Cathy A. Savoy
Executive Director

Margaret L. Young
Chairman

July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014

To: The Honorable Board of Selectmen

The Citizens of Athol

Mission Statement

Councils on Aging are the principal agencies of local government that serve older adults. First authorized by special legislation in 1956, there are now over 347 Councils in the Commonwealth. The three core responsibilities of the Councils on Aging are but not limited to:

- To identify the needs of senior citizens along with the available resources within the community.
- To educate the community at large in the challenges of aging and advocate for the needs of its senior citizens.
- To design, promote and put in place services that are needed and to coordinate the efforts of agencies which serve older people.

The Athol Council on Aging office and Senior Center is located at 82 Freedom Street in Lord Pond Plaza. The COA office hours are: Mon. Wed. & Thurs. 8:00-5:00, Tues. 8:00-8:00. The Senior Center is open 9:00-3:30 Monday through Thursday with occasional scheduled night and weekend programming.

Over the past year approximately 2,000 community seniors were served by the Council on Aging and Senior Center by the numerous programs provided through funding from the Town of Athol, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs Formula Grant, Frank S. Parmenter Trust Fund, Franklin County Home Care Corporation Title IIIB, Friends of the Athol Council on Aging and individual contributions.

The Athol Senior Dining Center provided 2,306 congregate dinner meals served Tuesday through Thursday at 12 noon. The dinners are prepared by the meal site dining manager, a position funded by Franklin County Home Care, along with volunteer staff.

Activities at the Senior Center include health related activities/screenings, hearing tests, foot screening, blood pressure clinics, senior fitness, yoga, congregate meals, bingo, red aces, craft classes, movies, meetings, hosts senior organizations, art classes, tax preparation, social services, educational programs, information and referral and special events.

Through a Title III D Grant administered through Franklin County Home Care and the Executive Office of Elder Affairs the Council was able to offer a “Wellness for Life” program “Yoga for Every Body” facilitated by Pat Roix. The innovative Birthday Card Outreach Program continues and is funded by donations.. Approximately 307 seniors received Birthday cards along with the monthly Senior News Flyer and other pertinent community information.

Through Formula Grant funding, the Council was able to continue the well attended “Senior Fitness” program, instructed by certified staff of the Athol area YMCA two mornings a week at the Senior Center. The fitness program served 30 unduplicated seniors for 96 sessions. Summer fitness classes were held in July & Aug. at the request of the class..

The monthly Brown Bag distribution continues with approximately 125-135 elders receiving surplus food donated and delivered by the Western Mass Food Bank. Approximately 55 of the brown bags are delivered by volunteer drivers. The program is supervised by the COA staff. There are approximately 25 volunteers who unload the truck, package the brown bags and distribute or deliver to homebound seniors and the disabled.

145 seniors received assistance in the preparation of their state and federal income taxes through the AARP tax assistance program and the Council on Aging. Through outreach efforts the tax preparation program has shown a significant increase in demand over the past several years. Twelve seniors were assisted with “Circuit Breaker” Tax Rebates.

The Council has maintained blood pressure clinics with 309 pressures taken at 48 clinics. Doctor referrals are made to those who indicate issues. This program is supported by the Frank S. Parmenter Trust Fund.

The “Shine” program, that assists area seniors with health insurance issues and questions, has served approximately 260 clients, and assisted with the Prescription Advantage program and the changes in the H.M.O. programs. Two volunteer S.H.I.N.E. counselors trained through Franklin County Home Care Corporation and supported by the Council on Aging provides assistance.

The Council has maintained the foot-screening clinic available to seniors twice a month. 259 screenings were performed during the 22 sessions.

Fuel assistance – The Council on Aging provides intake assistance in applying for fuel assistance. Over 40 elders were served through referrals.

Senior Transportation – is currently available through Management Transportation Services (MTG), formerly Community Transit Services, through Montachusett Regional Transit Authority.

Through the generosity of the North Worcester County Board of Realtors and their “Adopt a Family” Christmas program, the Council was able to deliver 50 Christmas gifts to isolated, less fortunate elders.

The Council on Aging provided assistance and referred seniors to free legal assistance offered through North Central Legal assistance and the Franklin County Bar Association.

On Christmas Day, approximately 250 homebound elders and disabled were delivered a complete ham dinner. With the assistance of the COA Board and the *MANY* volunteers, the dinners were cooked, packed & delivered. The Christmas dinner program is a three day project.

The Council on Aging provided assistance with the Wm. J. O'Brien Thanksgiving community dinner where over 100 community residents were served a sit down meal on Thanksgiving Day at the American Legion Post 102.

Throughout the year the Council on Aging Director contributed to various boards and committees that included, the Friends of the Athol Council on Aging board, Athol Housing Authority board chair, and Traffic Safety committee member.

The Director and Board members participated in the Mass. Council on Aging, Western Mass. Council on Aging, Mass. Public Health Assoc., local school programs, (Inter-generational) and numerous other senior and municipal connected classes and seminars.

The Council on Aging applied for and received four grants to support various programming for the Fiscal Year 2014.

In June, a volunteer recognition luncheon was held for volunteers at the Athol Senior Center. Senator Steve Brewer, Representative Denise Andrews, Representative Ann Gobi, acting Town Manager and Select board chair Steve Raymond, Executive Office of Elder Affairs Emmett Schmarsow and Rebecca Bialecki from the North Quabbin Community Coalition were among those who honored the volunteers for their continuous commitment in assisting the COA with the many programs it offers to elder and disabled community residents. Guest Speaker Pat Roix spoke on stress and relaxation.

In June the following slate of officers were elected for the coming year:

Margaret Young, Chairperson

Stephen Larry, Vice-Chairperson

Kathy Cygan, Secretary

Other board members include:

Jean Ryder

Walter Lehman

Lillian Batchelder

Ruth Black

Karen Lachance

Linda Grenier

The Board would like to thank the 180 volunteers that make the Council on Aging programs possible. We are indebted to the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, the Massachusetts Councils on Aging, Franklin County Home Care Corporation, the Friends of the Athol Council on Aging, Athol, Frank S. Parmenter Trust Fund, Athol Memorial Hospital, the local Cultural Council grantors, Senior Center meal site volunteers, AARP tax preparers, Western Mass Food Bank, Management Transportation Services/Montachusett Regional Transit Authority, the North

Central County Board of Realtors, Athol Lion's Club and many other clubs, organizations and individuals.

The Council on Aging is still working on the interior completion of the Athol Senior Center. During the past year a construction project addressed the health/outreach room build out. Funding was sought by working with the Friends of the Council on Aging (a 501c3 non-profit organization) who submitted a request for funding on behalf of the Council and received a \$40,000. grant from the John W. Boynton Fund, Bank of America, N.A. Trustee. Future build out plans include the completion of the front foyer space.

In conclusion, the Council on Aging wishes to thank the Town Manager, Board of Selectmen and the citizens of Athol for their support and assistance throughout the year. If any citizen has questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact our Council office at (978) 249-8986.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cathy A. Savoy

Judy Thayer

Executive Director

Program Assistant

**Athol Public Library
2013-2014 Annual Report**

To: The Honorable Board of Selectmen and the Citizens of Athol

“When you are growing up there are two institutional places that affect you most powerfully: the church, which belongs to God, and the public library, which belongs to you. The public library is a great equalizer.” - Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones

Building News

See also the Library Trustees Report.

Everyone was thrilled to be moving back to the new building in November. However, it was also another year of chaos and confusion while we packed up and made the move back to the library in the winter months. Learning the building systems and trying to figure out how to operate in the expanded facility was time consuming. There were many who stepped up to help and please know that the library staff and Trustees appreciate those people who lent a hand.

On opening day December 30, 2014, we used all our old furniture and folding tables and chairs while we waited for our new furnishings to arrive bit by bit. Maybe a little history on this is in order. When the furniture and fixtures line item was transferred to fund construction, Barbara Robichaud, a member of the executive board of the Friends stepped up to the plate and organized a Naming Opportunities Campaign. On her Committee were Bill Kessler, Zach Rand, Patricia Roix, and Claire Starrett. The L.S. Starrett Company donated \$25,000 to this campaign and then issued a \$50,000 match challenge grant to individuals for donations of any size. This challenge was met within two months! Once we had the money in hand, we were able to start selecting and ordering new furniture. It was exciting to see the delivery truck pull up and find out what new piece of furniture arrived that day. We thank the Friends and the Naming Opportunity Committee for their successful campaign that allowed the building to be beautifully furnished.

The Friends were fortunate to be able to engage Sammis Woodworking to do a Giving Tree donated by Donald and Carol Ambrozy. The ‘leaves’ on the tree featured the names of donors. This gorgeous tree is located in the library lobby. It quickly filled up and the Friends voted to have Mr. Sammis create a second tree which is also in the lobby. There are plenty of spaces available on this new tree so ask at the circulation desk if you are interested.

Mr. Sammis also fashioned custom end panels for the book shelves and a number of pieces of furniture far less expensive than ordering from a catalog and also tailored to our library. The library circulation desk features a 22 inch burl that is magnificent.

Committee member Hal Gillam wrote a \$170,000 grant to DOER for the heating system so the furniture money moved originally to fund that heating account, was moved back to furniture. Additionally Carol Ambrozy wrote a \$35,000 grant to the John Boynton Foundation for movable archives shelving and Deb Blanchard wrote a \$2,500 grant to Frank S. Parmenter for large print

shelving. Between grants and fundraising, over \$400,000 was raised. Many, many thanks to all!

Just prior to moving back into the building, the Friends of the Library sponsored a Gala Event for the donors who gave over \$2,500 to get a sneak preview of the new library. While we did not have our new furniture yet, people still enjoyed getting tours from staff and finding out what the new spaces were for. Barbara Robichaud, her daughter Stephanie Donaldson, Mark Wright, Claire Starrett, Jean Shaughnessy, Deb Blanchard and their team of volunteers put on a delicious buffet while the Gypsy Wranglers provided lively music. Stan's Liquor Mart and Berkshire Brewing provided a complimentary bar.

The same weekend in December, there was a staff, Trustees, and Construction committee preview holiday party. Santa and his elf made an appearance and children in attendance got books and candy canes. It was a busy weekend as we had a sled, wagon or other vehicle parade to march the children's books back up to the library. Randy Mitchell provided music to get us there and the Friends provided cider and candy canes. Participants enjoyed the chance to tour the library.

When opening day came on December 30th at 9:30, Allen Young had the privilege of being the 'first customer'. He was given a private tour of the building and hearty congratulations. He went on to write a very pleasing column in the Athol Daily News about the opening.

The official Dedication Ceremony happened on Saturday, January 26th at 1 p.m. Over 300 people were in attendance to listen to speakers such as Senator Stephen Brewer, Representative Denise Andrews, Trustee Chair Margaret Young, Jeff Hoover from Tappe Architects and many others. A special art exhibit was held in the program room of the late Barbara Ellis's works. The new art display rail system was donated by Susan Paju and Heidi Kleiner. Tours and refreshments were enjoyed by many.

The library opened for the Downtown Fall Festival and many people stopped by for tours, refreshments and to enter raffles sponsored by the Friends. Thanks to David Brothers who had a wonderful art exhibit and Susan Paju who handed out flyers downtown.

Construction of the new park began in June and design changes were made to the original plans once we could see what was in the ground out there. The site work sub-contractor Sykes came forward with an offer to let us use reclaimed granite blocks that they had salvaged from the old Main Street bridge. This slice of history was well received by the Trustees and staff and it was voted to substitute these for the new radius granite that was specified.

A new program was started this year with the introduction of the Friends of the Library Greeter Station. Since the adult department has always been on the second floor, we did not anticipate any real changes. However once we reopened with a new entrance, it quickly became apparent that users entering the library did not see a human face to greet them and direct them. Barbara Robichaud from the Friends Executive Board, jumped in and volunteered to organize a roster of volunteers who would take turns sitting in the lobby to direct people and give tours. The Friends paid for a new Greeter Station desk to be created by Sammis Woodworking.

This new program has been very successful with patrons and staff alike commenting on how nice it is to see a friendly face when they arrive. We are always looking for new greeters and will be holding more trainings in the future. Please sign up at the adult circulation desk if you are interested.

Adult Services from Robin Shtulman, Kelsey Matthews and Anne Cutler-Russo

Hundreds of patrons attended programs ranging from internet safety to sprucing up your wardrobe to learning about what 'fair trade' really means. People also had fun at theatrical and educational programs, cooking programs, searching for spirits, and making crafts. As always, the library's mystery and lunch-time book groups were well-attended and had great discussions. We also introduced a new book discussion group, focusing on meditation and spirituality, led by volunteers George Roix and Nancy Griffin. Our knitting group, the Knit-Wits, (headed up by volunteer Jean White), continues to grow in number and spirit, welcoming anyone who would like to learn.

The APL provided delivery service to more than a dozen home-bound readers, thanks to our senior tax abatement volunteers Jeanne Forand and Mike Cygan. Our new private study rooms proved to be very useful and popular, as did the 6 additional new public access computers. We hosted an event in the region-wide Mount Wachusett Community College series of readings, films, and discussions focused on the work of Thoreau.

An On the Same Page program was developed with the focus on the book *The Book Thief* by Marcus Zusak. We were thrilled to have Eileen Allen and Deb Blanchard, teachers at the middle school, lead a book discussion, we viewed the film *The Book Thief*, and hosted Amy Pattee, professor at Simmons Graduate School of Library and Information Science, who talked on the history of book burning and censorship with an emphasis on Nazi Germany.

It's wonderful to be back home in our own building, and we look forward to providing opportunities for even more great experiences for library visitors.

Young Adult Department from Anne Cutler-Russo

Summer of 2013 found the library in the Senior Center with the summer reading theme of "Beneath the Surface". Students learned about soil, seeds, and types of plants with Beth Jaillet from McMannis Florist. We made newspaper pots, planted them, and then students took them home to care for.

We explored caves by making a cave diorama and a mural of a cave painting. Robin Shtulman, our assistant director and a trained archeologist, explained the science, tools, and procedures of archeology. Jeff Cole from Witty's Funeral Home and Rich Verock from Athol Granite Works talked about gravestones and obituaries. We created another mural, this one about what we could find below the surface of the sea. We took a walk to Athol's water and waste water treatment plants where we were treated to a tour of the facilities. Finally, we created a picture frame with a variety of sea shells.

As during previous summers, our multi-talented library volunteer Jean White guided students through two sewing projects, aprons and quilted totebags. Sewing machines were generously loaned by the middle school.

ATAC resumed meeting monthly in August. Members created a time capsule which is located in the Carnegie section of the new library. We celebrated Banned Books Week in September and in October we created scarecrows. Several members were able to help with the giant book sale which was held in November at the Town Hall and we were pleased to be able to have a tour of the new library before it was opened to the public. We packed the teen books for the move and then in January of 2014 had our first meeting in the new library. We participated in Teens for Jeans, attended a Forensics program which included fingerprinting, DNA extraction, and real crime information; hosted Cynthia Crosson, author of *Only Daddy's Dog* and founder of an organization which provides service dogs to veterans; picked up trash at Silver Lake Park; and helped Anne with suggestions and ideas.

French Club met weekly in October, November, and January through June. The Wild Knights Chess Club was formed with David Price as our volunteer moderator. The Friends of the Library and generous donors provided funds for supplies for the group. During February school vacation a Crazy Craft session was held and an Anime movie was shown. The Girl Scouts came to the library three times for book and library related activities. We made pasta planes and then during the April school vacation held a multicultural cooking program and a Wii gaming session.

Community Reading Day was held in October at the elementary schools in the district and at the middle school. All the disgusting information in *How They Croaked, the Awful Ends of the Awfully Famous* by Georgia Bragg delighted the middle school students and their volunteer readers, and made us all realize how lucky we are now with better medical care and antibiotics.

Children's Department from Jean Shaughnessy

In June 2013, the library was still located at the Athol Senior Center temporary location. The "Dig Into Reading" Summer Reading Program began in June 2013 and ended seven weeks later in August. Wednesday morning Story Times themes and activities included rocks, geodes, mud, and snakes. Children read 2835 books or 57,100 pages to earn 132 prizes provided by the Friends. There were nineteen programs, including story times and crafts, attended by 352 children. Paulette Morin presented "Having Fun with Fossils and Dinosaurs" for 55 children and parents to end the summer program. Chrissy Bailey was available through the school district's Title I funding to help children with their reading skills and choosing books.

Regular programming resumed at the end of September with story times, playgroup time, Y Nursery School story times, LEGO Club, and a half day of school movie. In addition to the 12 Story Times offered in October 2013, movies were shown to 30 children on each of the half day/no schools days. Community Reading Day was held in both the elementary schools and at the middle school, featuring the books – "How They Croaked", "Just A Few Words Mr. Lincoln", and "Abe Lincoln's Hat". The Halloween Stroll only saw about 150 children making their way through the big parking lot for candy.

The big event in November 2013 was the fun and successful Book Sale held at the Athol Town Hall. The library closed for the last two weeks of November until the "Book Parade" back to the new library on December 29. Wheelbarrows, two wheelers, and wagons replaced the shopping carts of the July parade and hot chocolate and candy canes were enjoyed by participants.

Programs, Story Times, and LEGO Club resumed in January 2014 in the beautiful new library. A cub scout troop met, had a tour, and checked out books. Despite three snow days in February, it was a busy and full month. Eight Story Times, a half day movie, and two craft programs were held. February Vacation Week featured Candy Bingo, a 50th Birthday Party for Flat Stanley with stories, games, and cake, and a very well-attended Kindergarten readiness and Story Walk program organized by Valuing Our Children. A Girl Scout troop visited, toured, and donated several new dolls to the library. Anne and Jean attended the meeting of the North Quabbin Community Coalition to promote library activities.

During March 2014, Ken Vaidulas arranged for and paid for transportation for the two first grade classes at Pleasant Street School to visit the library. Students enjoyed a tour, stories, getting library cards, and a chance to pick out a book to take back to school. April, especially Vacation Week, featured many special programs. Donna Osborne and her therapy dog, Tazer, volunteered to present a "PAWS to Read" program and spent three evenings this month listening to children read. The first Rotary Reads program was presented by Tanya Quinn of TDBank. She read "A Chair for My Mother" and "Alexander Who Used to be Rich Last Sunday". Children then painted banks to keep and each family received a copy of the books to keep. April Costa, a local, self-published author, read her book and talked about her experience writing it. The Springfield Orchestra presented a "Musical Instrument Petting Zoo", coordinated by Valuing Our Children. Nichol Wander presented a puppet show on healthy foods. The movie "Frozen" was shown during vacation week, also. Entertainment for the Friends Annual Meeting, held during April vacation, was "Swords Through the Ages". Story Times, LEGO Club, and Tazer, the Listening Dog with PAWS to READ all continued until the end of May. Mitch Grosky presented "Bartholomew and the Oobleck" as the May Rotary Reads program. Four classes visited the library for tours, library cards, and stories. Each classroom in the Athol elementary schools was visited to promote the summer reading program before school ended. The Summer Reading Program, "Fizz! Boom! Read!" began in June.

MEMORIAL DONATIONS

Materials were purchased in memory of: Viola Brothers, J. Arthur Chiasson, Ryan J. Colturi, Joan Davidson, Lois Dugan, Lisa Marie (Maillet) Dupuis, William O. Foye, PHD, Natalie C. (Prusky) Goldstein, Chet Hall, Ray Holden, Jean Joy, Anne Killay, Gerard J. Maillet, William McIntosh, Cathy Robuccio, Barbara Warner, and Charles Worth.

YOUR LIBRARY STAFF

ADULT DEPARTMENT

Debra A. Blanchard, *Director*

Robin Shtulman, *Assistant Director*

Marie Lehmann, Anne Cutler-Russo, Kelsey Matthews, *Senior Library Technicians*
Robin Brzozowski, Carol Fisk, Rheba Gagne, *Part Time Library Technicians*
Tom Deam, *Computer Aide*
William Adams, *Part Time Custodian*
Brenda Buck, Sharman Prouty, Sean Tomlinson, *Substitutes*

CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT

Jean Shaughnessy, *Children's Librarian*
Karen McNiff, *Children's Assistant*
Samantha Skinner, Krystal Kilhart, *Pages*

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

A special thanks to our faithful treasurer Lillian Bachelder and secretary Jean White both of who do such a splendid job. Thanks for all the many events the Friends sponsor and the support they give the library!

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY BOARD

Treasurer: Lil Bachelder
Secretary: Jean White
Trustee Rep: Margaret Young
Directors: Nancy Griffin, Rita Grimes, Karen McNiff, Julianne Matthews, Christine Miranda, Patricia Ray, Mary Roberts, Barbara Robichaud, and Jean White.
Join the Friends Today!

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY VOLUNTEER GREETERS

Ellenmarie Babin, Sandi Bachelder, Carolyn Corsiglia, Jude Geikie, Nancy Griffin, Anne Grosky, Bonnie Hodgdon, Muriel Holden, Jean Laakso, Terry Mulligan, Florence Pelletier, Joyce Phinney, Patricia Ray, Barbara Robichaud, Margaret Robinson, Patricia Tedford, Patricia Vandenberg.

LIBRARY BUILDING COMMITTEE (mission complete and disbanded)

Chairman: Carol Ambrozy Recording Member: Debra Blanchard
Voting Members: Bonnie Benjamin, Sharon Brighenti, Tony Brighenti, Eric DeHays, Susie Feldman, Joe Hawkins, Linda Oldach, George Roix, Jean Shaughnessy, Ken Vaidulas, Charlie Winters, Margaret Young. Non Voting Ex-Officio Member: Hal Gillam.

SENIOR TAX ABATEMENT VOLUNTEERS

Brenda Buck, Michael Cygan, Jeanne Forand, George Roix, Bruce Fowler, Jean White.

Lastly from the Director's Desk

The return to the beautiful new building was accomplished thanks to many helping hands and we were able to open to the public on December 30, 2013. I was determined that we reopen in 2013. Although the project was delivered three months late and moving back in the winter was no picnic, the facility has been widely enjoyed by the public. Circulation and usage has more than doubled, sometimes tripled. Special thanks are due to the staff, trustees, construction committee and Friends of the Library for their support. I would be remiss not to mention the huge donation

from Castine Movers who moved everything back to our new building free of charge. This was a huge gift to the staff who have endured a lot and were thankful not to be moving heavy boxes and furniture in subzero weather.

This will also be my last annual report to the town after 43 years of service. I started at the Athol Public Library as a high school page under Alice Newton and have appreciated the training I got from her and many other wonderful librarians such as Myrtle Scribner and Dorothy Simonetti along with librarians from the Athol Junior High School and Athol High School: Jeanne Forand, Mrs. Parker, Dorothy Grace and Ann Hyer. I have many wonderful memories of working at the Athol Public Library and am grateful to the town for employing me these many years. It is time for someone else to bring the library to the next level and for me to enjoy retirement. It will be great to be a volunteer at the library without the daily budget hassles. Thank you Athol for the faith you placed in me.

*Respectfully submitted,
Debra A. Blanchard, Library Director*

STATISTICS

Note: this has been another abnormal year with closing six weeks to move back to the library.

CIRCULATION FY14

Adult	69,767
Young Adult	3,996
Children's	<u>28,179</u>

TOTAL	101,942
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Interlibrary Loan

Received from other libraries	13,294
Provided to other libraries	10,913
Nonresident circulations	15,916

Programs

Adult	25
Adult attendance	670
Young adult	114
Young adult attendance	971
Children	170
Children's attendance	3,236

<u>Registered borrowers</u>	4,515
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Volunteers

Number	95
Approximate hours worked	6,800

Website hits 22,332

Computer Use 14,832



NORTHEAST QUABBIN DISTRICT

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES
584 MAIN STREET, ATHOL, MASSACHUSETTS 01331
PHONE: 978/249-6935 FAX: 978/575-0269
email: vetagnt@townofathol.org

SERVING VETERANS FROM ATHOL, PETERSHAM, PHILLIPSTON AND ROYALSTON

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan." – A Lincoln

FY14 ANNUAL REPORT

HISTORY & SERVICES

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts began providing for its needy veterans immediately following the Revolutionary War. At the start of the Civil War in 1861, the state legislature formalized the assistance provided to veterans by establishing M.G.L. Chapter 115 and Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services. State and local government leaders wanted to provide benefits to men and women (both living and deceased) who had borne the burden of military duty—and to their families. Chapter 115 enables every eligible Massachusetts veteran to receive certain financial, medical, educational, employment, and other benefits earned by military service. Veterans' Services Officers in 351 municipalities across the state help veterans and families connect with state and federal benefits.

VETERANS' BENEFITS, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- Chapter 115 Benefits – Provides a needs based means tested program of financial and medical assistance to eligible veterans.
- Annuities – Provides \$2,000 annually to 100% service-connected disabled veterans, Gold Star parents, and to unremarried spouses of deceased veterans whose death was service connected.
- Wartime Bonuses – Provides bonuses to eligible wartime veterans.
- Massachusetts Veterans' Memorial Cemeteries – Eligible veterans can be buried at no cost and a nominal fee for spouses in one of two state veterans' cemeteries.
- Women Veterans' Network – Provides women veterans with information on benefits; expand awareness of the needs; and identify health and human resources to meet those needs.
- Homeless prevention – Provides outreach services and a network of assistance to at-risk veterans and their families.
- Transitional Housing – Provides safe housing, a variety of services, and counseling for up to 24 months to eligible veterans.
- SAVE Program – Provides peer outreach, veteran to veteran, to prevent suicide and advocacy of veterans benefits and services. The SAVE Team is mobile and meets with veterans in the field.
- SHARP Program – Provides peer support, mental health services, psychiatric evaluation and linkages to emergency shelters, and may enroll eligible veterans in the HUD-VASH program.
- Additional services and programs: Employment, Property Tax Exemptions, Soldiers' Homes, and access to federal and local nonprofit benefits programs and services to eligible veterans.

NQD ACTIVATION & REACTIVATION

Secretary, Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) authorized the district to continue operations through May 8, 2016. District towns are Athol, Petersham, Phillipston and Royalston.

There were four Veterans' Services Districts operating in the Commonwealth on July 1, 2007. There are now 22 Veterans' Services Districts serving 126 communities with a population approaching 1.2 million residents.

NQD GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 115: Section 11: For every district established under authority of M.G.L. Chapter 115: Section 10 there shall be a Board of Directors consisting of a representative as appointed by the board of selectmen of each member municipality.

The Board established By-Laws dated January 11, 2006, and amended April 25, 2007, November 3, 2008 and July 12, 2011, which define district operations. Pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 115: Section 11 & NQD By-Laws:

1. At the November Board meeting, Director of Veterans' Services presents the next fiscal year's Administrative Budget to the Board recommending the funds required for district operations
2. The Board reviews, discusses and votes to approve the Administrative Budget. It includes each member community's assessment of the total budget.

M.G.L. CHAPTER 115 – VETERANS' BENEFITS

Veterans' benefits are monies paid by towns to eligible recipients. The Commonwealth reimburses a community at least 75% of dollars paid in benefits. See chart:

FINALIZED FY14 VETERANS' BENEFITS DATA

Town	Benefits Expended	State Reimbursement	% Reimbursed
Athol	\$159,869.41	\$120,539.57	75%
Petersham	\$2,213.12	\$1,659.84	75%
Phillipston	\$17,138.83	\$12,854.14	75%
Royalston	\$213.12	\$159.84	75%

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

NQD assisted veterans with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and other U.S. Departments and Agencies.

The office witnessed an increasing number of local area veterans diagnosed with Agent Orange illnesses, Mesothelioma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), etc.

VA applications for service-connected disabilities; increasing existing service-connected disabilities; Dependency & Indemnity Claims for spouse of deceased veteran; pensions; burial expense assistance; Veterans Grave Markers; Healthcare, etc.

The district has acquired military personnel records; medical records; medals, decorations and awards not previously issued to the veteran. Veterans have received assistance with DoD applications to correct Military Records and formal requests to review and upgrade type of discharge.

I look forward to serving veterans, spouses, dependents, and surviving spouses of deceased veterans, who reside in the District.

Respectfully submitted,

Neil P. McGuirk

Neil P. McGuirk, Director of Veterans' Services



FY14 Annual Report

Office of Planning & Development
Andrea Buglione, Director

Overview

The Office of Planning and Development works to maximize quality of life for Athol residents and businesses. Through long-range planning, grant administration, public outreach, and economic development tools, we strive to ensure that Athol continues to be a desirable place to live, do business, and visit. The Office works collaboratively with a range of community groups, local and regional agencies, town committees, and the public and private sectors.

The Director of Community & Economic Development, Andrea Buglione, was hired in July 2013. Mary Ann Murphy has continued as the department's part-time fiscal manager for the CDBG program.

Grants Management

Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)

FY12 CDBG Grant. Continued management of the FY12 (18 month grant), housing rehabilitation program. During the span of 7/2013 to 7/2014, 6 units of housing were rehabilitated.

FY14 CDBG Grant. In February 2014, working with Breezeway Farm Consulting, we submitted an application for another round of funds (roughly \$900,000) for (1) Grove and Highland Street Reconstruction and (2) Housing Rehabilitation. It was approved in July 2014. Athol's housing stock will continue to benefit from the program --- in Athol, almost 50% of the housing stock was constructed before 1940, and much is in need of rehabilitation. Funding from this year's grant will help homeowners on the waiting list make the necessary renovations to their homes. For the infrastructure portion, sidewalks, sewers, and pavement will be refurbished on Grove and the first half of Highland. Some Chapter go funds will be used for the infrastructure project as well.

One of the grant requirements was an update of the town's **Community Development Strategy**. It can be found on the town's website on the "Community Development" homepage, or by contacting the Planning Office via phone or email.



North Quabbin Commons, Water Infrastructure, MassWorks, DIF

MassWorks. In collaboration with EDIC, MassDevelopment, the office of the State Representative, and others, the Town of Athol secured a \$1 Million grant from the state Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development. The funds have been used to pay for part of the \$3.6 million water infrastructure project for the North Quabbin Commons development. The state announced on May 5, 2014, that \$1 million would be awarded. The three primary components of the project included:

- ☒ Water Main along Templeton Road
- ☒ Booster Pump Station
- ☒ Water Tower



District Improvement Financing (DIF). To fund the rest of the project costs, Athol voters approved a Fall 2013 Town Meeting plan to designate the 316-acre “North Quabbin Business Park” as a DIF-District.

DIF became an approved local financing mechanism by the Commonwealth in 2003. Essentially, the establishment of a DIF District enables some portion of the public infrastructure expenditures to be paid for by the future incremental property tax revenues generated within the defined district. The Town will see a significant increase in property taxes from Market Basket, for example, and a certain portion – but not all – of the new property taxes will be channeled into the DIF fund rather than the municipality’s General Fund, for a period of 10 years or so, to pay off the bond. No new taxes are levied on properties in the district.

Other Grants

North Quabbin Loan Fund. Originally part of an FY2010 Economic Development Fund (EDF) grant, the Town of Athol continues to be the lead manager of the North Quabbin Loan Fund. Funds are available to eligible businesses in the 9-town North Quabbin region. The Planning Office works with RCAP Solutions, Inc., and the North Quabbin Community Coalition to promote the program. While no loans were awarded in FY14, a number have been in the year since.

MIIA: Secured \$5,000 to use toward purchase and installation of the Silver Lake Park security cameras.

Long-Range Planning Projects

Master Plan

Overview. Every ten years a Massachusetts municipality is charged with creating a long-term vision, or blueprint, for the future vitality of the community. A Master Plan’s topics include economic development, natural resources, community services, transportation, infrastructure, housing, and land use. The Town of Athol’s Board of Planning &



Community Development has been working with the Planning Office to create the plan.

Public Outreach. In addition to data collection (e.g. compiling census data to see how the community is evolving demographically and economically), a significant source of inspiration for the Plan comes from community members. So far, BPCD has co-hosted a few forums to gather ideas, as well circulated an online-survey. This information will help create a draft plan to be available by Spring 2015.

Housing Plan

In early fall 2014, the Town was awarded a DLTA (District Local Technical Assistance) project through MRPC. The Board of Planning and Planning Office worked with Sam Lawton of MRPC to collect data and investigate solutions for various housing-related issues and initiatives. The major issues discussed in the plan are residential vacancy, the aging housing stock, and locations to focus future housing development. For more information about this plan, or to see the draft, please contact the Planning Office.

Downtown Revitalization Projects

Downtown Vitality Committee. In November of 2013, the Board of Selectmen voted to approve a new committee of 7 members. The members are Athol residents interested in generally promoting and advocating on behalf of Downtown Revitalization and aesthetics. One of the initiatives spear-headed by this committee is the Storefront Arts Project, described below.

Storefront Arts Program. The purpose of this downtown initiative is to provide a place for local artists to showcase their work while simultaneously beautifying the downtown area and increasing

attention to available properties. Three artists and three different property owners participated in this pilot project. We hope to bring more artists and properties into the program.



Walk Audit. A joint project between the Planning Office, Board of Health, and Montachusett Public Health Network, the purpose of this project was to observe the positive and negative aspects of the walking (and biking) environment in and around downtown Athol. It took place in April 2014. Results will be used in parts of the Master Plan update.

Slum & Blight Report. This ongoing project started in the Spring of 2014. The Building Inspector and Planning Director, plus the DPW, have evaluated over 250 properties in the "downtown Athol" area as well as infrastructure like roads and sidewalks. The purpose of this report is to potentially receive grant funding to improve the downtown area.

Other Projects

Adaptive Reuse Overlay Zoning. Throughout the summer and fall of 2014, ZBRC, BPCD, the Planning Dept., Building Dept., Town Manager, and Town Attorney drafted a zoning policy with the goal of proactively dealing with vacant town buildings (e.g. elementary schools). Since these schools are located in residential zones, the most restrictive district, the change would allow more creative uses for re-using the facilities. The zoning policy was approved by Town Voters in the October 2014 Meeting.

To the Board of Selectmen, Town Manager, and Citizens of Athol:

This is the 2013 - 14 Annual Report of the Sealer of Weights & Measures.

Items tested Adjusted Sealed Not Sealed

Scales	2	106	2
Weights	0	96	0
Fuel Trucks	0	4	0
Gas Pumps	0	100	0
Bottle Return	0	6	0
Scanning Systems	0	2	0

Total of fees collected is \$3,591.00, which were turned into the Town Treasurer, whose receipts I hold.

Co - operation was received from all merchants, and all complaints were resolved.

J.R. Greene
Sealer of Weights & Measures