



**Shaun A. Suhoski**, Town Manager  
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## **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Athol Board of Selectmen  
FR: Shaun A. Suhoski, Town Manager  
RE: Town Manager Update – Week Ending 1/30/15  
DT: February 2, 2015

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Dear Board,

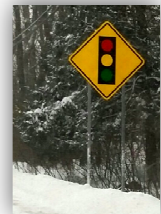
Please see the following update through January 30.

**Special Town Meeting:** The Board will review the proposed warrant for the Special Town Meeting scheduled for Monday, March 2, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. in Memorial Hall. There was a zoning amendment article submitted for inclusion, however, I would recommend the article be held to the next town meeting rather than forcing the Planning Board to cram in a Public Hearing in late February and whereas the proposed amendment is a restatement of existing statutory process and thus redundant. This can be discussed at your meeting on Tuesday.

**Memorial Building Repairs:** Working with the architect, the plans and specifications for both the exterior stairway repairs, and the cupola repair project, are going to be put out for public bid with a deadline of Monday, March 1. It was determined that this would allow for better information for Town Meeting and also provide for the ability to promptly initiate the repairs upon the return of warmer temperatures.



**Loose Ends:** As noted in the inset photos, the propane tank pad, fencing and piping at the Senior Center is complete, and, the North Quabbin Commons developers completed installation of “signal ahead” signage associated with the new traffic lights at Exit 18.



**Municipal Electricity Cost and Planning:** As the Board is aware, I met with key staff concerning the spike in electric rates for some departments and learned that the temporary hike is only applicable to a half-dozen of the town’s 36 electric accounts. As part of this review of accounts, I also conducted extensive research and issued a separate report dated January 29, 2015 outlining the Town’s electricity consumption and long-term management plan. The Executive Summary of the report states:

*In summary, through the diligent and proactive work of former Town Manager David Ames, the Board of Selectmen and Town Counsel, the Town of Athol is in a strong position to ensure predictability, consistency and efficiency of its electricity costs.*

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*This posture was made possible through: (1) a favorable generation/supply contract providing for 6.5 cent electric supply costs from July 2012 through June 2015, (2) a robust Power Purchase / Net Metering Credit Agreement associated with the solar field under construction in Hardwick, and (3) the pending installation of a rooftop solar facility on the roof of the renovated Library.*

*With the solar facilities expected to be in production before June 2015, the next action required of the Town will be to seek a new supply/generation contract to succeed the NextEra Energy agreement.*

*This solicitation may include aggregating the Town's annual 2.5 million kWh demand with the 1.5 million kWh demand of the regional school district to obtain favorable pricing. The Town will also explore joining a larger aggregation collaborative if it is in the Town's best interests.*

*I will be working on the procurement of the supply agreement in February and March (post winter season pricing) to secure the best market outcome.*

**Budget Matters and MMA Conference:** At the annual Mass. Municipal Association conference held in Boston on January 23 and 24 the new Governor pledged to hold local aid harmless as he seeks to wipe out a FY15 projected state budget deficit of over \$700M. There is no word yet on how the Administration will handle FY16 local aid.

Unfortunately, while the Mass. Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) typically announces "maximum" health insurance premium hikes at the annual conference, this year, the MIIA board of directors stated additional time was needed as there may be changes to the state GIC "benchmark" plan. For Athol, it is hoped that the additional time will allow underwriters to determine whether the claims ratios in November and December 2014 can help reduce potential double-digit rate increases.

On a positive note, I attended educational programs on labor law and various financing mechanism for infrastructure in support of economic development. The labor law seminar will provide a modest discount on the Town's insurance costs through the MIIA Rewards program.

Until we have further information from Beacon Hill on revenue expectations the local budget process is in a temporary "hold" pattern although I will be meeting with department heads to review their individual budget requests.

**Miscellaneous Items:**

- Met with Chairman of EDIC, Community Development Director and principals of development and leasing at North Quabbin Commons concerning general timetable of build-out and communication with Town.
- Met with Finance Team regarding various matters; further drafted written report responsive to MassDOR management review.
- Attended annual dinner and installation of officers of the Franco-American Club.
- Reviewed budget request for summer recreation program with director.

W/E	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WEDS.	THURS.	FRI.	TOTAL
1/30/15			11.5	4.0	10.0	11.0		36.5
				8-SNOW				44.5