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MEMORANDUM

TO: Athol Board of Selectmen
FR: Shaun A. Suhoski, Town Manager
RE: Town Manager Update
DT: June 12, 2015

Dear Board:

Please see the following. There are **two action items requested** and several informational only.

- 1. Special Legislation re: Group Health Insurance:** Pursuant to the authorization provided by Annual Town Meeting's approval of Article 28 on June 8, I hereby request that the Board of Selectmen vote to petition the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for special legislation relative to group health insurance benefits for eligible active employees and retirees as printed in the Warrant (copy of proposed legislation attached). With the Board's official direction I will provide all required information to our state legislators to initiate this action at their earliest convenience.

This is an important reform that required both management and employee collective bargaining units to understand and accept. The net result is that new employees hired on or after July 1 will receive a 70 percent premium contribution from the town as opposed to the 80 to 83 percent currently.

Beyond providing some immediate relief to the health insurance line item in the annual operating budget, I believe that the Town will also realize a substantial reduction in its long-term Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) liabilities once the next biennial actuarial evaluation is complete.

- 2. Vacation Leave Buy-back:** With the end of the fiscal year upon us, and my pending move to Athol in August, I would request that the Board allow me to buy-back six days of accrued vacation leave. If approved, the Town Manager salary line will close with a credit balance of roughly \$800. It will leave me with 10 days of vacation leave of which I plan to use half this summer for my move and a long-weekend trip with my children.

Requested motion: move that the Board of Selectmen authorize the buy-back of six days of vacation leave for the Town Manager in fiscal year 2015.

Town and Library Solar Update: As we seek to close each of these projects out I plan to keep an update on my report so that the Board is apprised of progress.

On Thursday, the DPW Supt. and I were able to take a tour of the solar fields constructed in Hardwick just off Route 32 north at the Dunroamin Country Club. The facilities are visible from the road and include the 1.0MW Eagle Hill School site and the Town of Athol's 1.8MW field.

We met with representatives of NextEra Energy as well as Borrego Solar (the installer) and were pleased to note that National Grid showed up on site during our tour to install the new pole required for interconnection and approved on June 8 by the Hardwick BOS.

The meeting was positive and the general consensus is that it will take another six to eight weeks for interconnection, commissioning and witness testing before the site goes live. But, we are very close!



NextEra, Borrego and Athol Officials at Hardwick Solar Field

NextEra Energy has also brought forward a senior master electrician to finalize the interconnection of the Library roof-mounted system with the grid and to the satisfaction of the Wiring Inspector. The electrician found some deficiencies which are already being resolved and I trust the final arrangements with the inspector will be resolved at this point.

Town Hall Flagpole Replacement: The old flagpole has been removed and the DPW has also removed the old concrete walk. Through funds raised over the cost of the flagpole itself the Town is "cleaning up" the general area of the new pole.



Using recycled materials from another project the DPW will construct a brick walkway from the sidewalk to the stairs to dress up the area.

The vendor is tentatively scheduled to install the underground sleeve for the new pole on Thursday.



You will also notice that the Tree Warden has trimmed back the limbs in the area and that L.S. Starrett Co. has begun the rehabilitation of the memorial plaque which is bronze. The post has been scraped and primed for painting and I'm told the refurbished plaque will be in fine condition.

MART and CTS Concerns: The COA Director and Selectman Raymond have shared some concerns over the level-of-services being offered by CTS to our senior population. The Administrator from Montachusett Area Regional Transit Authority (MART) will meet with several local officials on Tuesday morning to discuss these concerns. Selectman Raymond and I can update the Board on Tuesday night of the topics discussed.

Forestry Services RFP: Reviewed responses to the Forestry Services RFP issued in collaboration with Conservation Commission and Community Development Director. Bob Muzzy and I have narrowed the respondents (total of five) to three finalists that will be interviewed. The three foresters invited for interviews are: North Quabbin Forestry (Mike Leonard), of Petersham; Valcourt Forestry Services (Richard Valcourt Sr. and Richard Valcourt Jr.), of Phillipston; and Joseph Smith of Phillipston.

The scope of work will be to develop and manage a forest cutting plan on six town-owned parcels. This is good for long-term forest management and should also provide some revenue to the Town from the sale of timber. The parcels under review are:

Property Name	Location	Acres
Ward Hill	Map 36, Lot 3 and Lot 2 (Phillipston)	8
Filter Plant 1	Map 37, Lot 54	10
Filter Plant 2	Map 37, Lot 53	10
White Pond	Map 51, Lot 30	20
Cobb Hill	Map 43, Lot 14	38
Bidwell	Map 19, Lot 4	100

Miscellaneous Items: Some other items include:

- Attended Annual Town Meeting.
- Met with SEIU to agree upon logistics surrounding the reductions in hours across six Town Hall staff. Met with and issued 30-day notices to all impacted employees.
- Attended training seminar sponsored by the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston relative to "Affordable Housing Program" loans and grants. At the invitation of Athol Credit Union, the Town was represented by me and EDIC chairman Jim Meehan. The AHP may provide an additional tool in combating housing distress and vacancy in neighborhoods.
- Attended the annual meeting of the Small Town Administrators of Massachusetts held at the Tower Hill Botanic Gardens in Boylston. Topics covered included the MassWorks program, process of initiating Transportation Improvement Program projects and an interesting vehicle to finance infrastructure through MGL c. 23L the "local infrastructure development program".
- Reviewed documentation of land acquisition and parking allowances surrounding Town Hall and the Library with the Library Director. Essentially, the lot in front of the new Library entrance is for Library use only with the exception of the electric vehicle slots. There are also two slots reserved for Cornerstone Insurance as a trade-off for a right-of-way. Town Hall staff and other general public use should be directed to the rear lots.

W/E	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WEDS.	THURS.	FRI.	TOTAL
6/12/15	2.0		11.0	11.5	8.0	9.0	1.0	42.5