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MEMORANDUM

TO: Athol Board of Selectmen
FR: Shaun A. Suhoski, Town Manager
RE: Town Manager's Report
DT: December 5, 2016

Dear Board: Please see the following report for your meeting on December 6:

Athol Radio Improvements Status Update: As the Board is aware, after conflicting information was issued concerning Athol's radio system challenges, I asked our consulting expert to provide a clear update for the Board and general public. The following bullets are my takeaways:

Current Status

- Athol does use UHF for primary radio coverage
- UHF requires "near line-of-sight" for communication between devices
- Radio expert says the down link from the water tank transmitter provides about 73 percent coverage of Town

Future Plans

- State 911 Department has stated that they do not want a "band aid" solution in Athol
- Radio expert and state EOPS counterpart are working together on "final" solution
- Proposed solution is to add second transmitter and have a two-site "UHF simulcast system"
- Two site option is expected to achieve nearly 100 percent coverage in Athol
- Estimated cost of solution is currently \$600,000 range
- Radio expert says state 911 Department will fund the upgrades as part of regional system

Given the estimated \$600,000 cost of the upgrades I spoke with the executive director of the State 911 Department in late November and confirmed the following:

- If Athol is part of regional dispatch center: State 911 Department can fund the upgrades
- If Athol is stand-alone dispatch center: there is no state grant assistance (thus, local taxpayers will be asked to fund the upgrades)

Please review Mr. Cromack's detailed update which is incorporated into this memorandum.

MRPC Route 2 Studies: Further to goals established by the Board of Selectmen, I had requested that the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) assist the Town with updating prior reports and plans for a new exit in off Route 2 in Athol. The MRPC allocated funding for this effort in the federal fiscal year that began October 1 and is also completing another study:

- A feasibility study for a new interchange at South Athol Road and Route 2, and
- A “before and after” look at Route 2 safety improvements and crash data along a longer stretch of Route 2 that includes Athol.

An organizational meeting will be held in the coming weeks to be attended by police, public works, fire/ems, planning and management staff. Participation from a member or two from the Board would be appreciated. This meeting is to discuss the scopes of work and timelines as well as what entities should be involved in the advisory groups once the work begins.

Separately, I will be requesting the planning board and town planner to initiate a review of zoning along this corridor as well as other key commercial routes (Route 2A, Route 32 south of Millers River, and Daniel Shay’s Highway) to facilitate preferred future beneficial use.

Athol Police K-9 Program Update: Good news. The Town has received the grant documents from the Stanton Foundation that would allow reinstatement of a structured K-9 program. The foundation will grant \$25,000 in start-up costs and up to \$14,000 in costs associated with mandatory training and shift coverage. The Stanton Foundation approved the Chief Kleber’s selection of Officer Craig Deveneau as the K-9 handler and the new unit may be on the street by June 1, 2017. After the initial training, the foundation will offer narcotics training to the K-9 and handler in late 2017 or early 2018.

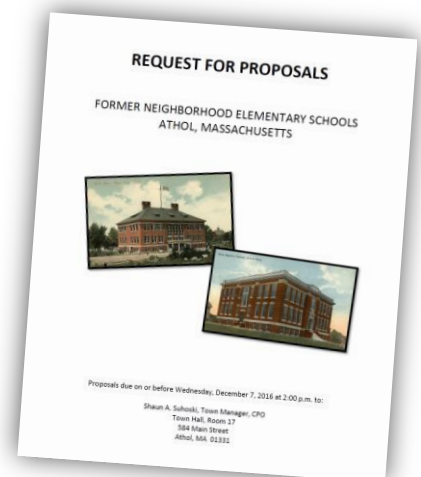
Pleasant Street School Disposition Planning Committee: There were six applicants for the five citizen-at-large seats on the planning committee. I have appointed the following individuals:

- Rebecca Bialecki
- Eric Jack
- Steve Wills
- Aimee Hanson
- Ken Vaidulas

The Director of Planning and Development has scheduled a start-up meeting set on December 13 at 5pm at Liberty Hall.

Miscellaneous Items:

- Conducted mandatory walk-through of Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend schools; deadline for responses to RFP is Wednesday, December 7 at 2pm.
- Participated in YMCA survey; conducted Finance Team meeting; co-hosted portion of AOTV benefit auction with Orange town administrator.
- Met with DPW Supt. and water/sewer manager regarding budget, rates and capital needs.



Athol Radio System Update

Reprint from Email of Gary T. Cromack – November 22, 2016

Current Status

Both Athol Fire and Police utilize the UHF frequency band (450-470 MHz) for “primary” radio coverage throughout the Town of Athol. Additionally, the fire department utilizes some Low-Band (30-50 MHz) frequencies: (a) in the old days (c. 1970’s) as primary; and (b) currently for mutual aid communications to surrounding towns who also use Low Band. The UHF band has the electrical characteristic of needing near line-of-sight between communicating devices. For that reason repeaters are employed, typically at a high elevation tower sites, and actually two frequencies are used: one for the mobile/portable device up to the repeater; and a second channel (called the down link) from the repeater out to the system’s mobiles and portables. It’s the down link frequency that people put into their scanners – in that way they hear both sides of the conversation. Starting with the feasibility study that I did with Tom Kennedy of CTC a couple of years ago, we identified, with coverage prediction software, that the UHF repeaters did not cover the entire town. Both Fire and Police repeaters are located at the same water tank location. However, the fire and police chiefs at the time didn’t express any “major” concern about coverage (both are retired now). There was some feedback from the previous fire chief that they had looked at putting an extra receiver downtown to aid in portable radio (and in-building) talk back up to the repeater. For that reason we (CTC) did put a place holder, in the proposed State 911 FY’17 grant request, for a minor radio upgrade. However, a closer look at UHF coverage in Athol has shown us that down link from the water tank site only covers about 73% of the town.

Future Plans

The FY’17 budget request was partially funded by State 911 in November 2016. A partially funded grant from State 911 is their way of telling us that they do not expect the 911 consolidation to go-live in FY’17. Therefore, a FY’18 grant request is anticipated. Feedback from State 911 did tell us they weren’t interested in funding a Band-Aid solution to the Athol coverage issues in FY’17. Follow-up conversations with State 911’s radio expert, Steve Staffier of the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) allowed me to put forward what I think is the final solution, and EOPSS was receptive to that concept. Said “final” solution for Athol is to add a second radio site and build a two-site UHF simulcast system with channels for both the Fire and Police. The current UHF frequencies will not change, but two repeater sites will allow the system to achieve near 100% town area coverage. My current task, in preparation for the FY’18 grant request (~spring 2017), is to start to identify high elevation property (hopefully Town owned) that a second radio site can be constructed on. The cost of a second site and the 2-site simulcast radio gear will be in the range of \$600,000. Since State 911, and specifically EOPSS’s radio expert, headed us in this direction, I expect that that size budget request will be funded. This is where the radio project is as of this date.

So, this is the story and I hope that it fills in all of the blanks. All other information spread about is simply extraneous, and doesn’t help solve the problem.

Gary T. Cromack, MSEE, MBA
Cromack Industries, Inc. | President & CFO

END OF STATEMENT
