



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  
DT: February 26, 2015

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Dear Board,

Please see the following update through February 26.

**Memorial Building Repairs:** Bids for the exterior stairway repairs, and the cupola repair project, are due at 2pm on Monday. Having actual bid costs will allow Town Meeting to consider appropriating sufficient funds for the stairway so that work can initiate once the weather allows.

**Municipal Electricity Cost and Solar Project Update:** Also on Monday, I am hosting the Hampshire Council of Governments for a presentation on their municipal aggregation program for purchasing electric supply. Currently, HCOG says they act as the aggregator for over 40 municipalities. Their program may also allow the town's residential and business community to participate in the bulk purchase and I have invited the Chamber of Commerce and North Quabbin Community Coalition to attend. This meeting – to be held in Liberty Hall beginning at 10AM – is open to the Board as well. The Town has also requested an electric supply cost proposal from its current provider, NextEra Energy, for comparison.

As for the solar project in Hardwick, and the rooftop program for the Library, the project manager offered the following update:

*RE: Hardwick: "Currently the project is mechanically complete. The utility has not provided interconnection or back feed, they are not providing us a schedule for this work to start until next week due to a finalized design on protection systems, and the work needed to upgrade their substation in that area. It is my understanding from Borrego that the substation work is currently underway, with the understanding that storm and weather related outages take precedent."*

*RE: Library: The library roof snow load must melt, we cannot shovel that area due to warranty issues, as advised by the roofing contractor. Since there has only been one day in the last few weeks that the temperature has gone above freezing, there has been very little snow melt or a chance to remove snow, allowing for RGS to do the work for the project. "*

National Grid will take approximately eight weeks to finish work on their end including feeders and upgrades to a sub-station after which the solar field can go online.

**Tax Bill Insert:** As part of the response to the Mass. DOR report wherein a more aggressive pursuit of receivables was recommended, the Finance Team proposes to include a friendly reminder of the more

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diligent collection efforts so that taxpayers have advance notice of the Town's expectations and actions. The proposed insert would read:

*Notice to Athol Taxpayers*

*Because the community relies upon predictable collection of assessed taxes in order to meet its obligations, the Town will continue pursuit of outstanding taxes through the tax title process.*

*If you are behind on your taxes, you are strongly encouraged to arrange a payment agreement with the Collector before your property goes into tax title status and accrues additional charges and legal fees. To make payment arrangements call the Collector's office at 978-249-8484.*

**Recommended Action: that the Board of Selectmen authorize the Collector to include an insert concerning tax obligations and payment arrangements within the next mailing of the tax bills.**

**Budget Update:** Although we have been working "in-house" on budget matters, from an outside perspective the process will appear to go from first to fifth gear all within the next 10 days. Key inputs necessary to develop the FY16 spending plan are still unknown as of this writing, but, anticipated to be released next week. Some needed information:

March 2:	Special Town Meeting action on local revenue options.
March 3:	Athol's health insurance rate hike by percentage.
March 4:	Governor's Budget and resulting Cherry Sheet of likely state aid (CS-1).
March 5:	General liability insurance premium estimate.

Receipt of the above inputs – and hopefully closure on union contract talks – will translate into a flurry of activity to present a balanced budget proposal for fiscal 2016. The Charter requires that the Town Manager issue the budget to a joint session of the BOS and FWAC which is scheduled for April 7.

**Miscellaneous Items:**

- Appointed Richard Hayden to the Board of Community Development and Planning to complete an unexpired term through May 31, 2015.
- Appointed Patrice N. Davis to the position of full-time dispatcher (to fill position of Christine Sawin who recently resigned) subject to completion of background check and any required certifications.
- Attended the following: grand opening of Market Basket along with all selectmen; North Quabbin Community Coalition meeting for update on Heywood Healthcare plans in Petersham and Athol; and "Americanism Night" program sponsored by the American Legion at Town Hall.
- Met with new owners of Pequog Apartments, Building Commissioner and Fire Chief to discuss planned maintenance projects.
- Met with Police Chief, Community Development Director, ACO and Orange CD Director to review plans and status of regional animal control shelter.
- Held meeting with Gardner and Athol officials, regional dispatch consultant and invited members of police, fire and dispatch unions to discuss findings and timeline.

W/E	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WEDS.	THURS.	FRI.	TOTAL
2/27/15			11.5	11.5	4.0	8.0	3.0	38.0
					4.0-PERS			42.0