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MEMORANDUM

TO: Athol Board of Selectmen
FR: Shaun A. Suhoski, Town Manager
RE: Town Manager Update
DT: May 28, 2015

Dear Board:

Please see the following update.

Railroad Tie Removal by Pan Am Railways: During the recent brush fire that jumped the Millers River and began to spread into the Bearsden area it was obviously noticed that piles of railroad ties were engulfed in flames and emitting a noxious odor.

Chief Duguay expressed to me concern that the railroad had not cleared the tracks as the fumes can be problematic in addition to the obvious concerns about trains sparking fires with the fuel source so readily available.

As a result of the above, I sent a letter to Pan Am requesting their immediate action plan.



Today, I received a response from Pan Am's corporate counsel advising that the railroad has a consent order with MassDEP for a system-wide removal of old railroad ties and that Pan Am expects the work in Athol to begin "on or about June 15". Given the prompt response by Pan Am, Chief Duguay and I will monitor for compliance at the end of the month before elevating our concerns to DEP.

Town Hall Flagpole Replacement: Depending upon the weather Tuesday, June 2, the existing flagpole may be missing from the Town Hall landscape.

Castle Tree Company, of Athol, had recently purchased a new, 14-ton crane for their operations. This acquisition allowed the company the ability to remove the existing 55-foot steel flagpole. And, the company donated their services, thus saving \$1,000 from the original estimated cost.

Separately, I received a final quote from Central Discount Flag and Flagpole, of Leominster, to furnish and install a new 40-foot (exposed height) fiberglass pole with internal halyard and revolving truck at a cost of \$2,489. As of this writing, donations to the project have just exceeded \$2,800.

Once the existing pole is removed the DPW will trim the nearby trees and then CDF will install the “sleeve” for the underground portion of the flag pole. The contract requires completion prior to June 30, so, the new flagpole should be flying the colors for Independence Day.

At this time we can safely state that donations are sufficient to complete the project. There may be some additional minor expenses associated with ensuring the existing lighting is sufficient and/or simple landscaping in the grassy area. Lastly, Ken Duffy has confirmed that Starrett Co. will refurbish the smaller post with the memorial plaque. Once complete we’ll release a list of all the donors and have a short ceremony in front of Town Hall.

Town and Library Solar Update: Each of these projects have taken a bit longer than anticipated to reach fruition.

With respect to the Town’s host agreement to receive net metering credits from the solar field recently completed at Dunroamin Country Club, in Hardwick, it is my understanding that the remainder of work falls primarily under the responsibility of National Grid.

I have confirmed with Hardwick’s town administrator that NGRID has a pole placement hearing scheduled for June 8 before the Hardwick Board of Selectmen. Once approved, National Grid will undertake installation of the pole and the inter-connection line. NGRID shows inter-connection by mid-September. I have requested them to expedite the work as it would be nice to gain some revenue from the summertime sun.

The Library’s roof-mounted system is installed, but, the Wiring Inspector found a concern on how the solar will be inter-connected due to plans for a future generator to be installed at the Library. This issue is being analyzed from both perspectives and – once this inter-connection is complete – the Library will be able to use the energy created from the rooftop system.

Upcoming Road Projects: June will become busy with roadwork through Chapter 90 and the CDBG program.

Grove and Highland Streets – An informational meeting with the residents of Grove and Highland Streets will be held at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, June 2, at the corner of Grove and Highland. Representatives of the contractor (A. Martins Construction, of Ludlow), Weston & Sampson engineers, DPW and CDBG staff will be present. Work is scheduled to begin in mid-June.

The work zone runs from the parking lot area of 14 Grove Street to its end at the Summer Street intersection together with roughly 360 lf on Highland Street from its intersection at Grove Street to house no. 72. This is a comprehensive program of improvements that includes pavement, sidewalk and curb replacement, drainage improvements, retaining wall reconstruction, and new fire hydrants, water and sewer lines.

Chapter 90 Road Improvements – DPW Supt. Doug Walsh reports that the final course of pavement will be applied to Chestnut Hill Road and Patridgeville Road within the next month to close-out those projects. The DPW will also manage guard rail replacement work along North Orange Road and Pinedale Ave. and oversee “spot paving” throughout the community.

The DPW Supt. is finalizing the budget for additional Ch. 90 projects to include work on: Bearsden Road, South Athol Road, Dorset Road, Exchange Street, Tunnel Street, Canal Street, Cass Circle and Freedom

Street. It is likely that substantial portions of those roads will be reclaimed or cold-planed and receive a binder course of pavement this season with final pavement in the spring of 2016 after allowing the work to settle over a winter.

Looking ahead, Ch. 90 funds (remember that the \$100 million increase allowed by Gov. Baker was for one-year only) will be targeted towards Hapgood Street and Starrett Ave. The Town will seek to combine Ch. 90 with external grants to undertake road and sidewalk improvements on Pleasant Street once the heavy equipment traffic for the new school construction ceases.

MART and CTS Funding: As you are aware, the Board and I have authored letters supporting the reallocation of state transit assessment funds from the FRTA to MART which is our current provider. The board also authorized correspondence supporting efforts by our state legislators to seek \$770,000 to operate the CTS transportation program in the next fiscal year. These efforts are underway, however, there are also concerns that have been brought to my attention by the COA Director and Selectman Raymond indicating that the level-of-service offered by CTS to our senior population may be slipping.

I have requested that MART's Administrator and senior staff meet with local stakeholders to discuss these concerns and I will keep the Board apprised.

Ambulance Fund Federal Reimbursement: One of the final projects that former Fire Chief Tom Lozier worked on was putting together paperwork for a new federal reimbursement program for certain ambulance costs associated with MassHealth. Through his efforts, and other fire and town hall accounting staff, the Town has anticipated receiving nearly \$40,000 in reimbursement. Today, state Sen. Anne Gobi's office advised me that the federal reimbursement from this program is due to arrive in early June. This is good news because it will help mitigate the use of ambulance revenue funds towards the FY16 budget.

Miscellaneous Items: Some other items include:

- Discussed future development plans with Steve Goodman and Jim Meehan relative to parcels adjacent to Market Basket. It is anticipated that there would be a "fast food" chain restaurant at one site with commercial / retail at others. A hotel is planned but will require more surrounding build-out before coming to fruition. Another key wish of Mr. Goodman is to develop a convenience store and fueling station opposite the lights at Orchard Street, however, this will require zoning relief. The Town probably should look at the zoning of Templeton Road generally to ensure this main thoroughfare is zoned appropriately.
- Met with Council on Aging and several dozen interested persons to discuss my overall thoughts for looking to have the Town divest itself of Lord Pond Plaza. I will reach out to the COA and Friends group once I have more information for a follow-up discussion. However, I stated again that any plan would require at least 15-20 years of leasing at the existing location with the potential for additional option years.
- Met with union and staff regarding pending reductions in hours (subject to ATM vote on budget)
- Town staff have been signing-on to a MIIA-sponsored initiative to increase walking and activity (and thus the health) of Town employees. We'll be part of an informal competition with staff from the town of Templeton as MIIA is providing "Fit Bits" to track our progress... stay tuned!

W/E	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WEDS.	THURS.	FRI.	TOTAL
5/28/15			8.5 Holiday	11.5	11.0	9.0	2.5	41.5