



## TOWN OF EAST LONGMEADOW

Town Manager's Report

September 8, 2020

Good Evening:

We received notice last week that the Town of East Longmeadow was again voted "Best Town to Live In" by Reader Raves polling. To mark the achievement, all staff and Council members were invited to a photo session with the photographer for the Republican which took place on Wednesday, August 27, 2020 at the entrance to Town Hall. We are happy that the community appreciates the hard work and dedication of the Town's employees and the amenities offered to residents.

Community involvement and participation is needed to fill a number of vacancies on Town Boards and Commissions. The CPC currently has 3 open seats, Conservation and Library Trustees are also in need of volunteers. I also strongly encourage residents to complete our Master Plan Community Survey. I implore everyone to please take a few minutes to complete the survey which is available on the Town's website news flash page. There are a number of questions pertaining to preferences for economic development opportunities, open space, housing needs, recreation, transportation options and many other issues which are facing the community now and in the future. Your input would be very important to our ultimate planning.

The Finance Department has begun the closing procedures for FY 20 and a preliminary report will be offered tonight later in the meeting. The cost cutting measures instituted in March and April at the onset of the Covid virus have resulted in significant savings in many Departments, adding to the Town's free cash balance. Those cuts, although painful, will help alleviate anticipated revenue shortfalls in the remaining months of this fiscal year and next. Once again, I am grateful for the cooperation of the Town Department Heads and all Town employees for the sacrifices they made in the last six months while working through the maze of issues facing them daily.

The audit for FY 20 has been scheduled for mid-September. Once again, Covid impacts normal business operations. Typically, the audit firm sends in a team which takes up residence in the Town Hall for 7 to 14 days to conduct the examination. This year, the analysis will be performed by allowing limited, remote access to our financial information.

Our review of the outstanding approved, but unfunded, capital projects as well as existing bonds is underway, all in the context preparing a realistic five year capital project plan. Issues regarding manageable debt service levels will be key to the amount of bonding that will be pursued and the timing of the bonding.

The Finance Department's unfilled vacancy continues to hamper the ability to bring various outstanding matters to current status. A pending grievance makes it unlikely that this situation will improve in the near future. I expect projects to languish and progress on resolution of many other issues to be further delayed.

The Human Resources Department continues to post job openings, interview candidates for those positions and update personnel files. Organization is the primary goal. We have used time this summer to clear out old files and work on our Town policy handbook.

Recreation, ELCAT and COA collaborated on a special event on Friday, 8/28/20 at 2 p.m. This event was an Intergenerational Program, and brought many different age groups together to talk and socialize with senior citizens. The content was a general discussion of what it was like to grow up during the depression, war years, and there was much casual conversation about how the world, and life, has changed for everyone. It was an enjoyable event for everyone who participated and future events will be planned if possible.

Don Maki, Ryan Quimby and I had an initial conversation with Spectrum's representative regarding the renewal of its cable license, due to expire in May 2021. A revised contract template was forwarded to us and is under review. The issue of affordable internet access in the community was also discussed (in light of remote learning situation) and available options will be followed by our IT personnel.

Several departments, (COA, Planning, DPW and TM) conferred with John Leary of Pioneer Valley Planning Commission regarding the Town's 2018 Community Development Block Grant which expires in December of this year. The \$800,000 grant was used to successfully aid low to moderate income families in Town (12) on housing rehabilitation projects, (\$360,000). Funds were also used to re-roof the Inward Commons Housing area (\$180,000), a project which was completed in November 2019. The grant also funded the Mobile Food Pantry by providing funds to purchase a

vehicle and hire the coordinator for 19 hours per week. The van has been “wrapped” in graphics to identify it and has provided a much needed service to the community. Lastly, grant funds of \$50,000 were used toward the costs of improving Town Hall accessibility, in particular, design and planning for installation of an elevator.

The COA is conducting a food drive for the pantry on Tuesdays during September, notices will be forthcoming.

Legal update: there are three cases pending against the Town which are being defended by our insurance carrier. Two of those cases are awaiting determination by the MCAD, one case involves a claim for discrimination based on a lack of accommodation, the other is a claim for age discrimination based on failure to be selected for a position. There has been no activity by MCAD since last November on either matter. The third case is pending in Federal District Court and involves a claim for discrimination based on an alleged denial of FMLA benefits. The case is in the discovery period.

Two other matters are being defended by private counsel for the Town and involve decisions arising from PB decisions. The appeal of the Pease Rd. solar farm matter (PLH, LLC) has been remanded to the PB by the Land Court for a public hearing which has been scheduled for 9/29/20. This appeal by the Plaintiff is the result of the PB’s denial of the Plaintiff’s application for site plan approval last March. The denial was by a 2-2 vote, with one member absent and the decision did not articulate specific reasons for the denial, hence, the Plaintiff’s appeal. The public hearing will allow an opportunity for the Board to hear any new information about the project, take a new vote on the application and act on the application in any way it sees fit, including denial, approval or approval with conditions.

The Town’s Motion for Reconsideration of the adverse Summary Judgment decision from August of 2019 is still under advisement with the Land Court Judge who issued that decision.

The other matter in litigation involves Pride Convenience Inc.’s claims against the Town regarding the PB’s denial of its requested amendment of its special permit regarding closing times, one decision in 2018, another in 2019 and a third in 2020, which was a reaffirmed denial of the 2019 request. There were two parallel cases pending between Pride and the Town, one in Land Court, one in Superior Court. The parties have stipulated that only one case will go forward, thus saving time and money. The Stipulation will not be prejudicial to either party.

DPW continues work on a number of infrastructure projects and has submitted a grant application through MassWorks (\$550,000) and also a Shared Streets application through DOT, (\$133,000). The MassWorks grant would be used to meter the six sewer connections to SWSC, installation of 110 linear feet of sewer pipe, manholes, electrical conduit and the associated pavement repair and surface restoration costs. This project would ensure that the Town residents are being properly charged for sewage flow. The Shared Streets application would fund a paved connection for biking and walking between the rail trail and Leahy Field. An area of the parking lot would be repaved and provide an outdoor seating venue.

Planning expects the award announcement of a grant from PVPC to pursue the development of an updated Master Plan in the very near future. The application sought \$84,833.36 for use in developing various aspects of the Master Plan in FY21. In the meanwhile, the survey of needs previously mentioned will assist greatly in the development of the overall Master Plan and it has garnered almost 3,000 “looks” to date.

A request by the Recreation Commission to CPC to fund a playground construction at Pine Knoll (\$180,000) was the subject of the CPC agenda on Sept. 2, 2020. I asked the CPC to pause their review of this project for several reasons, the first of which was to allow sufficient time to see how the project integrated with the Town’s overall plans for use of Pine Knoll and potential Town planning decisions regarding the use of the Town’s open space in general. We are on the cusp of a comprehensive Master Plan and I think it is wise to determine how various projects fit together in the larger scheme of Town planning

The Police and Fire Departments applied for and were awarded funds from the Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program sponsored by the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, (\$4,084 and \$23,879 respectively). These funds are to be used for overtime spending and additional PPE needed by the Public Safety Departments.

The Clerk’s office did an outstanding job accommodating early voting ballot requests and conducting the August 22-28, 2020 early voting as well as the Sept. 1, 2020 election day. Jeanne may elaborate on election day procedures.

As I reported recently, our schedule of meetings for Council, Boards and Commissions has caused overload on our IT Department in its role as host for these meetings. The Town has purchased a second Zoom license. Don Maki has created a Master calendar of meetings through June of next year in an effort to identify and avoid conflicts in advance.

A meeting of the Westcomm Board of Directors was held on Sept. 2, 2020. The main topic was review of the purchase and sale agreement for the purchase of the premises at Salter College in Chicopee by the district as the future home of the dispatch district operations. Financing of the purchase was also discussed. At some future point, each member municipality will be asked to approve of the district's financing decisions.

I have made several appointments to Boards and Commissions. Of note to the Council are the appointments of Dr. Sarah Perez-McAdoo to the Board of Health for a three year term and appointments of Philip Abair and William Gelinis to the Board of Public Works for terms of three years. Other appointments were as follows:

Zoning Board of Appeals: Mark Beglane and Charles Gray  
Recreation Commission: Nancy Roberts and Carolanne Elmendorf  
Cultural Council: Ann Paquette, Patricia Duperre and Jonathan Torcia

Respectfully submitted,

Mary E. McNally  
Town Manager