

Town Manager's report to the Town Council
October 23, 2018 Council Meeting

Good evening -

I have a brief report today as I have been away for a few days and came back to lots to that needed to get done on the last two days of this week.

We received notification on Friday, October 19 that our free cash has been certified.

The Directors of Finance and IT and I are in the process of looking at Statements of Work from 6 companies for implementation of the Human Resources/Financial software Capital Project. It is a rather complex project that, when completed, will allow for greater efficiencies and accuracy with many of our human resource and financial functions.

Finally, I have attached an article about East Longmeadow that was in BusinessWest last week. East Longmeadow is a great community!

Respectfully submitted,

Denise Menard

East Longmeadow Crafting a Plan

For Progress

By **Joseph Bednar** October 16, 2018

Community Spotlight

With projects like the convenience store on Shaker Road complete, East Longmeadow is anticipating progress on higher-profile developments, like the health complex at the Longmeadow line and a possible mixed-use project on Chestnut Street.

Denise Menard has witnessed plenty of growth in East Longmeadow's Town Hall since becoming the community's first town manager two years ago, from the creation of a seven-member Town Council to the creation of a Human Resources department, a new director of Finance and director of Planning and Community Development, and the establishment of a Board of Health overseen by a full-time director.

But she says the most important change in the city offices may be the ease with which new businesses to town can navigate the permitting process.

"I see myself as a business manager for the town - a business manager that has the authority to make the kinds of decisions that need to be made to streamline the process," she said. "Just being here day to day, helping implement the priorities of the council and all these other things, is a real a plus for the community. And in the last two years, we've seen a lot."

Take, for instance, the 18,000-square-foot medical office building at 250 North Main St. constructed by Associated Builders last year for Baystate Dental Group. The dental office occupies the first floor, and the second floor is being rented for medical and office space. "That's a great credit to the community; they just wanted to locate in East Longmeadow," Menard said. "We've been told by regional economic-development groups that we are one of the hottest communities right now to try to locate businesses in, and that's an awesome example."

Another, more complex project in the health realm is a joint venture with the town of Longmeadow - a medical complex that will add to East Longmeadow Skilled Nursing Center at 305 Maple St., cross town lines, and provide benefits to both communities.

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The project includes four structures on a 20-acre site: a 50,000-square-foot medical office building in Longmeadow that will be occupied by Baystate Health; a two-story, 25,000-square-foot office building in East Longmeadow; and an assisted-living facility and expansion of an existing skilled-nursing facility run by Berkshire Health.

"It's really moving along," she said, adding that the buildings on the East Longmeadow side should be up by the spring. Meanwhile, the two towns have worked together to improve road infrastructure at the site. The project encompasses three intersections on Dwight Road - two in Longmeadow and one in East Longmeadow. Longmeadow is managing the road improvements, and East Longmeadow is receiving contributions from the nursing-home developer, which will pass through to Longmeadow to offset the cost of the street improvements.

"The road improvements have been painful to say the least, but it will be such a great improvement at the end of the day," Menard said. "It's so nice to have a joint venture with Longmeadow, and both sides are going to win with that. Longmeadow and I are good neighbors. The two town managers really work well together."

Major projects like these are complemented by a number of other developments in town, a trend she says was boosted by

the town's change in government two years ago.

"I've had developers come in and say, 'we waited because we wanted to see what the new charter was going to be like before we decided to come to East Longmeadow,'" she recalled. "So there was a change in the philosophy of people looking in from the outside, as to what they would like to see here, and I think they're happy with what they see now with the new government."

Setting Down Roots

Menard said East Longmeadow has a decent stock of developable land.

"We have industrial space, and we also have agricultural land, and we're wondering what's going to happen with that because farming is getting more difficult. But we want to be agriculture-friendly and hope to continue down that path."

The new director of Planning and Community Development, Constance Brawders, has been taking the land stock into consideration as part of a master plan that's in the early stages, Menard added.

"That master plan will focus on what residents here want," she explained, adding that a series of public forums will focus on topics like recreation, traffic, and what kind of land-use mix residents want, balancing residential neighborhoods with the need for commercial and industrial investment.

East Longmeadow at a Glance

Year Incorporated: 1894 **Area:** 13.0 square miles **Residential Tax Rate:** \$20.94

Median Household Income: \$62,680

Type of Government: Town Council, Town Manager

Population: 15,720

County: Hampden

Commercial Tax Rate: \$20.94

Median Family Income: \$ 70,571

Largest Employers: Cartamundi; Lenox; Redstone Rehab & Nursing Center; East Longmeadow Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation

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"It will take a little while, but it hasn't been updated in a long time," she told Business West. "So it's time for us to take a snap shot of today and see what we want to look like in the future."

It's healthy to conduct such an exercise because society changes a lot over the years, and that affects how businesses operate and how towns cater to their needs.

"Think about the changes in the world just in the past 20 years. There are huge differences," she said. "The big businesses that required a lot of space because they needed a lot of employees - now maybe they don't need so many on site because a lot of them can work from home. My son works from home, and he's part of a huge organization; they don't require the footprint they used to. "So a lot of things have changed since we've updated our plan," she went on, "and it'll be time to just address what we have now and what the current businesses and residents and everybody that has anything to do with East Longmeadow wants, so we can move forward. That's really exciting."

Some projects in the works have the potential to create vibrancy in town, such as an ongoing plan to create a mixed-use development at 330 Chestnut St., in the former Package Machinery building. The project would include commercial, retail, and possibly office space in the front part of the building, and above will be some residential apartments or condominiums.

The applicant for that project, MM Realty Partners, withdrew the proposal last winter, but they are now moving forward. The exact nature of the project is still being hammered out, but Menard says mixed use is a promising model for the site, due to the energy and foot traffic it would create.

"That's the interesting part about it, but we've got to make sure it's the right fit in the right spot for East Longmeadow," she noted. "It certainly is an interesting concept."

Other projects have come on line recently, including a gas station and 6,500-square-foot convenience store at 227 Shaker Road, a lot that had been empty for many years. That development was delayed when Atlantis Management Group bought out the property, but after a second round of permitting and approvals, construction went forward and was completed this year.

"The whole change in ownership delayed them applying for the permits they needed to bring it all together," she added, "but now that's on board, and they're always busy."

Attractive Mix

Part of what makes East Longmeadow attractive, Menard said, is a healthy mix of properties of all kinds, both residential and commercial.

"We have some very high-end housing, but we have some very moderate housing as well," she noted. "We have a great Recreation Department, and our schools have a great reputation."

Residents and businesses also appreciate that the town is conservative when it comes to taxation and spending, she added.

"Businesses see that our tax rate isn't fluctuating up and down; it is really just gradually going to a level of what we need to address the needs of the community. And it's a community that people are saying they want their children to grow up in. They want to own houses here."

Employers feel the same way, she added. "In fact, we had a business come in - he was going to be leasing from somebody in East Longmeadow - and he said, 'I want to come here because my staff, my workers, would be able to live in a nice community with good amenities and good community spirit.'"

Maintaining that culture takes planning, of course, and the woman who sees herself as a business manager is pleased that those plans will be carefully crafted - and hopefully implemented - in the coming years.

"This is a moving, growing community, to be sure," Menard said. "We have a lot going for us."

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