


## MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Council  
FROM: David E. Cox, Town Manager   
DATE: January 7, 2022  
SUBJECT: Town Manager's Report

The following information includes follow up from general items that were discussed at previous Council meetings as well as updates of a general nature from the departments. The items are organized by department and are intended to provide information on activities currently being undertaken by the Town's departments and those matters that are upcoming. Not all departments will be represented in each Report.

### **Collector's Office**

- Supplemental motor vehicle tax bills were mailed on December 10, 2021 for any vehicle registered after October 1, 2020 and before August 1, 2021, the bills are due on January 1, 2022 and delinquent after February 1, 2022. The second installment of real estate and personal property tax bills over \$100 are due and payable on January 1, 2022 and delinquent after February 1, 2022.
- As the Council is aware, the Town is working toward a Tax Sale in the spring. Residents with significantly delinquent tax and sewer accounts have been notified several times and many have made payments to catch up. The total to be Collected as of October 1, 2021 was \$1,313,964. Of that amount, \$374,945 has been collected currently leaving about \$940,000 in delinquent accounts that may result in auction. As a reminder, the list included delinquencies of three years or more, not including any bills issued this year. Property Taxpayers have until the auction to pay their past due amounts before a property might be sold. Further, even after a property is "sold," the original owner has several months to pay the delinquency and regain the property.

### **Land Use**

- At the January 5, 2022 meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission, a Public Hearing was held for the new application to change the zone from R-2 to Commercial at the corner of Main Street and Route 16 on three parcels to allow for the reconstruction and expansion of the existing fueling station and convenience store. Approximately 15 people attended the meeting in person and another 50 attended on zoom. Letters were submitted from 51 individuals, mostly in opposition, and two petitions opposed to the zone change were submitted with approximately 250 signatures. After approximately 1-1/2 hours of testimony and public comment, a motion to approve the zone change failed by a 2-5 vote.
- The Commission received a verified pleading under Section 22a-19 of the Statutes for intervenor status regarding the application for a site plan modification at 265 West High Street, the former

Sports on 66 complex. As such, several changes were made by the Developer to the proposed site plan in order to address some of the concerns brought forth by the intervenor. Having less than two hours between receiving the documents and opening the meeting, the Commission moved to continue the application to the February 2 meeting. A decision will likely be rendered at that meeting.

- The Lower Connecticut River COG is holding a public meeting on January 24 at 7:00pm to update the public on the ongoing Regional Housing Plan. The meeting will be held entirely online. Attendance is encouraged for anyone interested in housing in the region. The RiverCOG will also hold a meeting on February 10 specific to the East Hampton chapter of the plan. As the Council may recall, Section 8-30(j) of the CT General Statutes requires that every municipality in the State adopt an Affordable Housing Plan before June 30, 2022. The East Hampton chapter of the Regional Housing Plan will fulfill this requirement. As more details are made available on the time and location of the February 10 meeting, they will be passed along.

### **Library**

- The Library, along with other area libraries, received another donation from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County and the Peach Pit Foundation, in the amount of \$2,500. The intent of this donation, according to the Community Foundation, is "to spread kindness" in East Hampton. The Council may recall that a similar donation was made last year to spread joy and the Library produced the life-sized Candy Land game. There are no other restrictions on the new grant other than it should be used as soon as possible. Staff is brainstorming ideas and has asked the community for input as well.
- Story times have resumed in the Library community room in January. Three weekly story times will be offered, with required registration and COVID protocols in place.
- The Library has been chosen as the beneficiary of a local teen's Eagle Scout project. The project is to create a permanent story walk/story stroll at Semester Park. A story walk is series of outdoor displays set up along a path that contain the pages of an early-reader-level book set up in a progression. They are intended to encourage outdoor physical activity and reading/literacy to youth. The Library has committed to managing the book in the display by changing it periodically.

### **Parks and Recreation**

- The Sears Park Boat Launch project is coming along well and is about 95% complete as of Friday, January 7. All concrete slabs are in place, rip rap installed along the sides and ends of the ramp and a new concrete slab will be poured and protected with a warming blanket as needed. The project will shut down for the remainder of the winter and will open back up in early spring with

the finishing touches of an asphalt apron connecting the concrete slab to the parking lot. The project is currently slated to come in under the contracted amount (\$99,870) and is currently estimated at \$82,620. This is primarily due to the contractor not needing sub-contract for a cofferdam on site. Instead, by lowering the lake further, the contractor was able to use large sandbags and a suction pump on site to complete the in-water work. This process saved the Town \$17,250.

- The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board is currently reviewing the fee structure and policy pertaining to the rental of the Sears Park Pavilion. The Board is researching surrounding town fee structures for comparison purposes before recommending any changes to the Town Council.
- The Needs Assessment survey was corrected in response to the issue noticed by a member of the Town Council. The survey only allows one response per device/IP address, which helps prevent multiple responses from the same person but does limit responses from multiple people in a household. There is only one week left to complete the online needs assessment survey. A summary of the results to date follows:
  - 278 responses, no duplicate IP addresses
  - Only 1 non-resident response, 36% have lived in East Hampton 20+ years, 26% 10-19 years, 15% 5-9 years and 22% less than 5 years
  - Parks and Recreation is very important or important to 88% of the respondents
  - Community Events 81%, Outdoor Recreation 60% and Adult Education 50% are the top 3 activities
  - Health and Wellness, Land Preservation and Family Oriented Activities were the top 3 priorities to focus on improving followed very closely by Maintenance of Parks and Facilities
  - Top 3 greatest needs were Indoor Aquatic Facility 45%, Connection to the Air Line Trail 42%, and Indoor Multi-sport Facility 40%
  - The survey will close on January 15 as approved by Council.
- The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board is reviewing the financials of the Special Revenue account to come up with a recommendation to the Town Council on how to fund a Full time Office Assistant/Program Lead position. The Department continues to seek ways to increase its program offerings and has used two part time Program Lead positions which were successful. Turnover in these positions and difficulties in finding replacements is causing the Department to explore other options, including expanding an existing position to full time.

## Police

- The Department will hire its newest member, Vincent Garofalo IV, on January 10. He was a member of the United States Air Force, Security Forces Squadron, from September of 2016 to May of 2020. He currently resides in East Haddam with his wife and will start the Connecticut Police Academy on January 21 with an expected graduation date sometime in July. He is filling the vacancy created by the retirement of Sgt. Timothy Dowty.
- K-9 Ardo's surgery went well to repair his torn lateral meniscus and torn lateral condyle. He is at home recovering and will start physical therapy next week. It will be several months before he will return to work.
- The Department has been hit hard with four officers and one civilian employee testing positive for COVID since Christmas. So far, all members have recovered with only two employees remaining out of work while they fulfill their quarantine requirements.
- During the month of December, the Department responded to a medical emergency involving an unresponsive 57 year old male. It was determined by responding officers that the male had overdosed on some type of drug, so two doses of NARCAN were administered to the patient. The patient regained consciousness and was transported to a local hospital. This was the only NARCAN use during December.

## Public Works

- Over the past few weeks, Public Works crews have been called out multiple times for de-icing. The majority of these events have been relatively low impact but frequent enough that they have engulfed the majority of the work over the last few weeks. The remainder of crew time has generally been spent washing out material from trucks and preparing equipment for the next event. The Town's new salt supplier, Eastern Salt out of Providence, has been very prompt with deliveries and has worked out very well. As a reminder, the Town purchases its salt through the State bidding process. The cost of salt has gone up significantly this year from \$66 to \$76 per ton; a 15% increase.
- With the arrival of the replacement Ford F550 in November, the old Truck (#7) was put up for auction. After several issues with non-paying bidders, the vehicle has finally been sold and picked up last week for \$6,200. Additionally, in October staff liquidated the 2007 Crown Victoria, which has served as a Police vehicle and then the Fire Marshal's vehicle, for \$550. The Town has an additional Crown Victoria that will be auctioned in the coming weeks that is expected to be garner a similar final bid.

### Senior Center

- Senior Center attendance has hovered at about 112 for several months. However, due to an oversight, the count did not include off-site attendance in programs like Yoga at Town Hall, virtual programs, and other off-site activities. The attendance going forward will include those attendees. December attendance was 167, unduplicated numbers.
- The Senior Center hosted three Micro Holiday Parties at Po's Rice and Spice. Thirty (30) people were served at each celebration, totaling 90 people. Po opened her restaurant on a Sunday to accommodate the holiday schedule, for which staff and participants were so grateful. It was a holiday event(s) like none other from the Senior Center!
- Senior Center Directors from the Chatham Health District met with the Health Director in December to discuss best practices for getting through the winter surge. It is felt at this time, there is no need to curtail or cap activities at the Centers. Safety protocols were reviewed as were criteria related to exposures, illness isolation guidelines for symptomatic vs non-symptomatic individuals, response to positive test results and guidelines for those with no known illness.
- Applications for energy assistance continue to be taken and staff continues to assist with follow up, especially when users have run out of fuel. All cases are resolved within a few days. Further, AARP tax assistance is resuming service in East Hampton. People will have a brief interview for their appointment with a Tax Preparer and then the tax preparer will call them to pick up their returns in the afternoon.

### Youth and Family Services

- Youth and Family Services was again the recipient of the Police Stuff-a-Cruiser event. The Department assisted 30 families with gift bundles for the holiday from the toys and items donated by the community. Families either came to the office to pick up gift bundles or Department staff delivered personally. Staff made several in-person deliveries to our older adult clients, which allowed us to visit briefly with them and check in on them.
- Phase two of the mental health art project with Epoch Arts goes up on the walls on Monday, January 10. Artwork for two of the three therapy rooms has been completed and will be hung soon and staff will soon be announcing plans for an art night with our elementary school students.
- Staff continues to receive walk-in visits and calls from people looking for assistance finding rental housing. The department is working to create a master list of rental properties in the area that can be handed out and is reaching out to landlords.

- Currently, the Department is working on 40 energy assistance cases; 1 Eversource-direct case; 4 SNAP applications; 1 CT Water assistance application; 2 Operation Fuel cases; 1 Long Term Support Loss case; 2 Unite CT rental assistance cases; 12 general intakes and other miscellaneous services.
- The Department is also working with a disabled veteran who recently suffered damage to his home. The family is safe and rehoused on their own, but our department has been providing them with clothes, toys, and other supplies. Local veteran resources were also contacted and will now be working with the gentleman and his family to provide some financial support.
- Therapy cases are going well, and referrals continue to come in. Many of the referrals are for school-aged students experiencing anxiety and emotional distress. However, the Department has only two student clinicians currently and may soon need to pause new case intakes. The Department Director will continue working with the school by seeing students to help with the uptick in emotional issues facing students in the pandemic era.

#### **Town Manager/Other**

- The Town's COVID rate jumped further in the recent figures and the Town remains in the "Red Alert" level under the State's framework along with all of the State except one town. In the recent reporting, the Town saw an average of over 12 new cases each day or 98 cases per 100,000 population. All who are eligible are being encouraged to receive the COVID vaccine, which is available through Chatham Health District and other locations. About 70% of the Town's residents are fully vaccinated.

DC

cc: Management Staff