


MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Council

FROM: David E. Cox, Town Manager 

DATE: September 8, 2020

SUBJECT: Town Manager Report Supplement

This memo supplements the Town Manager Report that was produced September 7, 2020 and includes additional information on Council meeting follow up items and questions received from Council members.

Lake Aeration/BioBlast Treatment

As of this morning, we have received an electronic copy of the signed permit for the BioBlast treatment in Lake Pocotopaug. In general accordance with the plans that were announced on Friday, EverBlue, the Town's contractor, will begin "brewing" the BioBlast treatment at Sears Park tomorrow and will begin putting the product in the lake Thursday morning. That work is expected to continue Friday and Monday.

The permit received is a one-year permit and carries a number of required water tests including some that the Town does not normally perform. Staff is working with our lake scientist (NEAR), our contractor and the staff at the WPCA to plan for the enhanced testing to ensure consistent results.

Union Discussions

During discussions with the Council regarding the Town's 2020/2021 budget (current year), there was a stated goal of asking the various unions working with the Town (both education and general government) for a proposal regarding employees taking no wage increase. Both Superintendent Smith and I approached our various union groups to address the question, with mixed results.

General government is served by members of three union groups representing Police Officers, non-Department Manager supervisory staff and Public Works and support staff. The Police Officers and supervisory staff, whose contracts expired in June 2020, offered proposals that called for certain contract changes in exchange for skipping salary increases in the current fiscal year. After discussion, it was determined that the Town would reject these proposals and would negotiate a full contract renewal instead. The Public Works and support staff, whose contract expires in June 2021, chose not to offer a proposal citing a "recent" year in which they did not take an increase. Thus far, non-union employees except those impacted by the change in State-mandated minimum wage and those in unions that have open contracts have not received any increase.

Education is served by members in multiple groups including teachers, administrators and custodial and cafeteria staff. The custodial and cafeteria staff agreement expires in June 2021 and the teachers and

administrator agreements expire in June 2022. The administrators group chose to take a furlough day in 20/21, which Superintendent Smith indicated helped fund the education program offered through RHAM. This group also accepted a step freeze in the 19/20 fiscal year whereby no member of the group advanced through the pay scale that year. The teachers would not commit to a wage freeze in 20/21 but the group did accept a step freeze in the 19/20 fiscal year. Additionally, they have indicated a willingness to discuss a freeze in the 21/22 fiscal year. Generally, employees have received a general wage adjustment this year.

Building Department

- Mr. Roraback, the Marlborough Building Official who is assisting in the East Hampton Department, previously worked for the Town for a time about a year ago until the funds ran out. At that time, he performed field inspections and limited plan review. The intent this time is to use him exclusively for plan review.
- Based on staff observations and Council comments, staff has looked at the use of video inspection through Zoom or some other platform to assist in making certain inspections more efficient. Despite some reported success in other communities, staff is also finding that some have not found it helpful or quite limited. Thus far, staff have not pursued it vigorously in EH so that focus can be placed on some other changes to the current system.
- While the use of interns to assist in the review of older, inactive building permits to close them out has been discussed, it has not yet been explored with the area colleges to determine whether this will be interesting to them. Staff plans to pursue it for this fall.

Water System and UMASS Study

- UMASS will be providing information on the private party financial aspects of a proposed water system in the Village Center and immediate areas around the Center including the Rt 66 corridor. The school has been provided some information, including historical information and current owner information for the study target area, and will be getting more information this week. As noted, the UMASS students will conduct this work as a fall semester project and the Town would anticipate completion and a report in November.

Christopher Road Property Purchase

- Staff is moving ahead with the process related to the proposed purchase of the Christopher Pond property on Christopher Road. As of this point, the property has been divided in cooperation with the owners to allow the developed portion to be sold. Appraisals have been received on the property for purchase and the grant application has been submitted to the State. While there is a Purchase and Sale Agreement in place based on actions of the Council from earlier this year, the next steps, which involve the various final approvals, are on hold in anticipation of getting a definitive answer from the State on the grant. The agreement allows

the Town until November to gain final approvals. If a determination or grant award from the State takes too long, it is possible that Council will be asked to consider moving the purchase ahead without the grant. The usual process would be followed including Board of Finance, Planning Commission, Town Council and Town Meeting action prior to an actual sale.

Watrous Street Properties

- Staff has just received word that the next steps in the environmental evaluation process are set to occur later in September for the 1 Watrous Street property. Primarily, this involves soil and subsurface examination. It is not known when the environmental evaluation will be done. The Broker agreement on this property expires on October 1, 2020 but certain sales that occur after the agreement expires would still net a commission to the broker. The Town, through the Brownfields Agency, has performed a second round of soil remediation on the 13 Watrous Street property. However, that work did not yield a clean site. For the time being, the site has been restored and the Agency is exploring options for further cleaning or use of the site.

DC