

Town of Hamilton

Town Manager's Office

Town Manager Report to the Board of Selectmen Monday, October 18, 2021

I am pleased to be able to offer the following report on programs and initiatives that are on-going in the Town of Hamilton, as well as some updates on a variety of things that have happened since our last report.

STM Saturday, Oct. 23 – A quick reminder for all, that there is a Special Town Meeting this Saturday, October 23, beginning at 9 a.m. at the Patton Park, where we will once again be under a tent to help Town Meeting voters feel safer amid the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. As of today, the long range forecast was calling for slightly cloudy skies with a high of around 60 degrees; although it might be a little cooler than that when we get started. Town voters should have received their STM Warrant by mail last weekend. Anyone who doesn't have one should contact Town Hall.

COVID in Hamilton – As of this morning, the Town of Hamilton has six active cases of COVID in town, including a toddler and one parent. There are also four students on campus at Gordon Conwell and seven other residents quarantining due to being identified as a close contact of a positive case. The numbers of reported cases, hospitalizations and deaths are down over the past seven days across the state and in Essex County.

FY'23 Budget process to begin – Following our Special Town Meeting this weekend, the focus at Town Hall will turn quickly to the FY'23 budget process. Finance Director Alex Magee and I will be having conversations with the Board of Selectmen and Finance and Advisory Committee in the days and weeks ahead, as we prepare to re-focus our departments on how we deliver services to our residents and how we present that information to the public. Our prior budget process and document were technically sound for the management of the budget throughout the year, but the budget document is not particularly helpful in getting our residents to understand what services we provide to residents, or how and why we provide the services we do.

This year, we will be looking at explaining the various programs and services that are provided to residents through the budget and at the same time we will be reviewing those programs and services and questioning if there are better, more efficient ways to deliver those same services. We are extremely excited to begin this process this year, as we expect it will create more conversation and an exchange of ideas about how to better utilize the limited resources we have at our disposal.

Budget discussion among towns and school district – The chairs of the Hamilton and Wenham Select Boards and Finance and Advisory Committees, the Chair of the School Committee and the Superintendent, along with the senior administrative leaderships of the towns all met together last week, for a short discussion about the upcoming budget season and how we plan to work

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collaboratively throughout the upcoming budget process. Wenham and the School District have both created their draft budget calendars and we in Hamilton are putting ours together this week. The discussion last week was about finding ways to create more opportunities for candid conversations between the District and the towns, while being mindful of the towns' financial realities and need to provide other services to residents as well. The discussion did not get into budget specifics such as revenue forecasts and anticipated needs, but rather focused on process and clear lines of communication and engagement.

All sides agreed that continued on-going discussions about the evolving processes in each town would serve to better prepare all parties for the process ahead.

Progress on filling vacant positions – The town is preparing an offer letter this week for a new coordinator of the Patton Homestead and we are conducting a final interview with a candidate for the vacant Health Director position that was created at Annual Town Meeting in May.

We are in the process of trying to hire for a new Minutes Taker, as we recently had a minutes taker depart.

We will also be re-advertising for the Regional Public Health Nurse and Regional Public Health Social Worker – the two positions that were created and funded by the Department of Public Health (DPH) Public Health Excellence Grant we received this past spring.

The positions and the grant had been put on hold when Manchester chose to withdraw from our four town regional, but fortunately the Town of Rockport has asked to join the group and DPH has consented.

CARES Funding and ARPA Funding – On October 29, the town will submit for our final reimbursement for COVID related expenses from the CARES Act funds that were first made available to us in the spring of 2020. The town had access to almost \$714,000 for costs that were anticipated and were directly related to our local response to the pandemic. The CARES funding was primarily a reimbursement program, through which we could apply to the state and to FEMA for various expenses related to pandemic response and be reimbursed for those.

In the coming weeks Finance Director Alex Magee and I will be preparing a presentation for the Board of Selectmen, to discuss the use of ARPA funds that are available to Hamilton to assist us in our recovery from the pandemic.

The ARPA funds will not be reimbursable grant, as we will get access to much the funds available to us up front, but we will have to the funds to specific eligible costs based on the priorities that were outlined in the federal legislation.

The Town of Hamilton will get close to \$2.4 million that we can spend, but we will only be able to spend it in specific ways. The presentation we make to the Board of Selectmen and later to the Finance and Advisory Committee and the Capital Committee will highlight the restrictions on the ARPA funding and seek input to develop priorities.

All of the ARPA funds MUST be spent by December 31, 2024, and the reporting and certification of expenses will be a heavy lift for our town departments. We look forward to discussing this program in detail with you shortly.