

Town of Hamilton

Town Manager's Office

Town Manager Report to the Board of Selectmen Monday, October 4, 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.

HWRSD accepted into next step in MSBA process – The town received communication last week from HWRSD Superintendent Eric Tracy, that for the first time the Regional District's Statement of Interest in a new school has been advanced to the next step in the process – the Senior Study Phase. This does not mean that MSBA has invited the District to work through the school building process, but it does mean that MSBA is doing its due diligence on the District's statement of interest to replace the Cutler School. This phase will involve several meetings and site visits between MSBA staff and District staff and administrators. It is a positive development in the process and an exciting one for the School District.

Request to re-open the Regional School Agreement – School Committee Chair Dana Allara informed me late last week that the School Committee had briefly and informally discussed the Hamilton Board of Selectmen's request that the School Committee re-open the Regional School Agreement to address a variety of matters the town would like to improve on.

I also received a copy of correspondence from the Wenham Select Board with a similar request, which had been sent to the School Committee as well.

Chair Allara said that she would also be contacting Board of Selectmen Chair Bill Olson to discuss the matter with him and that the topic will be on upcoming agenda in October and November for a vote of the School Committee.

I told her that the board sees a variety of ways to work together to improve the agreement and help us formalize a more collaborative and predictable working relationship with the School District.

Special Town Meeting at Patton Park on Oct. 23 – Just a reminder that Special Town Meeting will be held on Saturday, Oct. 23 and this time it will be under a tent at Patton Park.

We'd like to encourage residents to plan on being present at the Special Town Meeting, to consider a short list of important issues facing the town. The STM Calendar calls for the Warrant and Book of Recommendations to be mailed to voters the week prior, on Friday, October 15.

Latest progress on the cell tower – National Grid completed the bulk of its work to reset a pole and transformer and connected the new pole to the conduit that was buried underground several weeks ago. This means that the tower will have power to be able to operate very soon.

On a call with Everest, the company that erected the tower and owns the cell tower, they are in contact with Verizon to be able to schedule Verizon to begin putting their equipment on the pole once it is energized.

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However, as we noted last month, National Grid only recently notified the town that they require a utility easement to be in place, before they will energize the tower. That easement is one of the warrant articles that has to be adopted by Town Meeting on Oct. 23.

Upcoming Mater Plan meetings – The Master Plan Steering Committee has several meeting dates coming up, as the Committee and the town's consultants begin the process of outreach into the community to gather input from residents.

The next scheduled meeting dates include Thurs., Oct. 14 at 6 p.m., Thurs., Oct. 28 at 6 p.m. and Sat., Nov. 13 at 9 a.m.

Update on filling vacancies in town government – You may recall that back during the summer the town had eight vacancies and virtually no applicants for many of them. Since then, we've made progress and hired for several positions, and have progress to report on a few others. In September we hired for Assistant to the Town Manager/Community Preservation Coordinator position, with Hamilton resident Laurie Wilson accepting the permanent position after filling in on a part-time temporary basis during the summer.

We also moved forward with hiring Kerrin Nixon, as the part-time Health Department Clerk at the same time. Kerrin had been working as a Contact Tracing Assistant in the Health Department and applied for the opportunity to work with us in a more permanent role.

We recently also hired Tim Morris to return to the COA in the part time role of Outreach and Activities Coordinator. Tim, a Hamilton resident, had left that same position during the pandemic, but was eager to return. He begins again on Oct. 12.

We have also recently completed interviews for the Patton Homestead Coordinator position and the new Part-time Health Director position. We will be making decisions on those positions this week and contacting the candidates.

That leaves us two key openings 1) the Council on Aging Director and the 2) Director of Assessors, though we have provided temporary assistance to both of those departments.

We will be moving forward with a hiring process for the COA Director beginning next week.

Kristin Crockett who has been assisting as a part-time consultant in the COA, will continue during this search and will help to get Tim re-acclimated into the organization as well. While we conduct that search, we have moved forward in our conversations with Wenham about how to collaborate and possibly share expenses and programming between the two Councils on Aging.

Our hope is to continue developing a plan for shared service delivery to both towns' seniors over the next few months, and through the annual budget process.

For the Assessing Department, we have also identified some temporary resources that will allow the department to function, while we work on a shared service model for Hamilton and Wenham assessing departments through the budget process.

Lastly, we had been advertising for two new, regional grant funded positions to the support the work of our health department staff and some of our neighboring towns. After one of the towns withdrew from the collaboration we decided to pull back the job postings, while we re-evaluated the proposed program. We have had some productive conversations with the state and have elicited support from at least one other community to join the regional effort, so we will be re-posting those regional health positions in the coming weeks.