



MEMORANDUM

TO: Select Board

FROM: John C. Curran, Town Manager

CC: Clancy Main, Assistant Town Manager

SUBJECT: Town Manager's Report, July 18, 2022

DATE: July 15, 2022

ARPA Payments

I understand that the Board has received calls from some employees that do not feel recognized for their efforts during the Covid Pandemic. These calls were precipitated by premium pay being awarded to some but not all employees in Public Safety, Board of Health and Public Works.

It certainly was not the intention to have certain employees feel unappreciated for their efforts during the pandemic. This is of particular concern to me because this office took extraordinary measures to protect employees from the exposure to the virus. Equally as important, this office took unprecedented steps to ensure that all employees were not financially harmed in any capacity. I am proud to say that no employee in Town lost any pay because of closures or furloughs. The Town also maintained vacation time accruals during these periods which was as much as 22 weeks. Additionally, through the height of the pandemic employees were not charged sick time if they were isolated as a result of COVID. Finally, employees accumulated so much vacation time during this time period because many of them were not working anyway and as a result they were in danger of losing accrued vacation time because they can only carry over a finite number of days. This office suspended this rule and allowed employees to carry over all their time and have an opportunity to use it in the following year.

The Select Board through their March 7th meeting moved to recognize employees in Police, Fire, Dispatch, Paramedics, Board of health and DPW *that worked throughout the pandemic*. This office executed this directive as policy in the following way:

Employees that were out on medical or military leave would not qualify. Employees that left employment with the Town during this period or retired would not qualify. Additionally, many employees that were not required to come to work from March 17th through June 8th of 2020 and December 23, 2020 through January 26, 2021 would not qualify.

However, it was a goal of the Town to ensure that Town employees did not lose pay. Accordingly, these employees were paid for 22 weeks without requiring them to work. Many of the employees in this category were affiliated with the clerical union. Approximating the financial impact for a step five principal clerk – this loss of pay for the first period from March 17, 2020 to June 8, 2022 would have been \$15,706 from these individual's salaries. Additionally, many of these same employees were not required to come to work but receive compensation from December 23, 2020 to January 26, 2021 – 5

weeks. This loss of pay would have amounted to \$4,725 for the same clerk for a total compensation of \$20,431. This compensation provided to these employees far exceeds the \$2,500 received by employees that worked throughout the pandemic.

Most employees in the DPW worked split shifts. Based on my records a supervisor at the Wastewater Treatment Plant received compensation for at least 10 weeks – many people in the private sector received no compensation for not working. The monetary value of this was \$16,080 for these weeks that split shifts did not come to work. Similar to the clerks, this position received a compensation almost 7 times higher than those that received the \$2,500.

While I do recognize that there were times during that 10 weeks that some of these employees may have been called upon to call in or log on or even come in, for the great majority of this time nothing was required of these employees. Some employees have compared this to being on-call. On-call pay is typically a \$200 stipend for the week it is not full weeks' pay. This is not analogous to an on-call situation.

DPW employees that worked split shifts received significant pay in lieu of working. The Town appreciates the efforts all employees made during this time to keep services available to the residents of the Town. So much so, that you were kept whole financially in those periods that you did not work.

There were many higher-level department heads, like me, that worked throughout the pandemic and did not receive this recognition, but that is as it should be. The goal of the Town was to ensure that all Town employees were not financially harmed by this unprecedented 2-year pandemic. This came at a great expense to the Town and the taxpayer.

State Budget Earmarks

This office has been working with Representative Lombardo to get earmarks in the House Budget. Representative Lombardo was able to earmark \$500,000 for Billerica. \$125,000 was allocated for public safety equipment, \$125,000 allocated for sidewalks, \$125,000 allocated for Town Hall improvements and \$125,000 allocated for COA/Recreation feasibility study funds. Senator Friedman also was able to earmark \$200,000 for Town Hall Improvements on the Senate side. Senator Friedman is also working on a \$2 Million earmark in the Transportation Bond Bill that will be earmarked for the Town Center Project. These bond bill earmarks are less likely to come to fruition.

Financial Strategy Session

This office met with Lori Lombard and Brianne Susel of Unibank Fiscal Advisory Services on Wednesday, July 13, 2022 to discuss future debt, fiscal policy, outstanding liabilities and improving the credit rating. Paul Watson, Clancy Main, John Clark and Elaine Russo were in attendance as well.

In the short run, some low hanging fruit to improve our outlook would be to memorialize fiscal policy. This office will be putting something forward in the August Meeting. OPEB liability and further policy changes to lower that liability were also discussed. The Town will be reassessing projected debt on sewer, water, general projects and schools. Woodard and Curran will update Sewer projections. Left Field will assist with School debt projections. One of the issues to be explored is funding projects outside of MSBA and does that offer any financial advantage as well as other benefits. I have a meeting with them on this topic next week. Future revenue projections is also being explored through this process. Improving the credit rating is also a goal for the future.

DPW Update and Fiscal Efficiency in the Sewer Department

The Parks and Trees department has spent the past few months over at the Marshall School Fields. These fields were in tough shape when they were handed over and have seen frequent use recently. The crowning in the center of the field has been a long-standing issue. Parks and Trees excavated, regraded, and hydroseeded the area in an effort to have it ready for Pop Warner Football.



Roadway paving, patching, and pavement preservation will begin to take place shortly. The bid was awarded in early July.

The Sewer Department recently did some preventive maintenance and painting in house this month. They rented a 45-foot boom lift to clean and paint multiple buildings at the Sewer Treatment Facility.



Recreation Director Update -

Below is an update from David Grubb about what his department has been working on this summer.

Upcoming Special Event – “Summer Block Party”

The Recreation Department is thrilled to announce the return of community events! Join us on Saturday, July 30th from 11am-2pm at the VVP Upper Lawn for our first ever “Billerica Summer Block Party”. We will have FREE activities for families, including: inflatables, games, music, an air show put on by the Middlesex County R/C Flyers, a small animal petting zoo, and more! This event is made possible through the generous donations of many local business sponsors. Food trucks will also be on hand as well!

Dog Park Update

In a recent conversation with the Dog Park Committee, they shared just how popular the Billerica Dog Park has become. According to their estimates, there have been around 28,000 visits to the Dog Park in the past year – breaking down to roughly 2,300 per month! 91% of visits used the All-Dog are, with just 9% using the Small-Dog area. According to counter records, the winter months did not stop people from visiting, as the average daily visit count in February was only 12 less than in June! By all accounts, the Dog Park has been a very successful addition for the Town.

Summer Concerts

The Recreation Departments Summer Concert Series is back in full swing. This year, the Town has partnered with the Billerica Community Farmer’s Market to provide a unique dinner and a concert opportunities for those in attendance. Concerts are held on Monday nights on the Common, starting at 6:30 now through August 8th.

Beach/Splash Pad

Micozzi Beach is open Thursdays-Sunday, 10am-7pm now through August 28th. The Town had an aggressive recruiting campaign for lifeguards this year. The wages were raised and the Town was willing to reimburse new hires for their lifeguard certification if they worked a certain amount of hours over the summer. Additionally, the Manning Park Splash Pad is running smoothly and is another great resource for families to have fun and cool off. The Splash Pad is open every day, 9am-7pm. A parking fee for both Manning and Micozzi is \$5/car, or a season pass good for both locations can be purchased at the Recreation office for \$50.

Police Department Update

In the FY23 Budget a Dispatch Supervisor was included. My Office and the Police Department have interviewed eight candidates. The screening committee has narrowed it down to two candidates. These candidates will go through a second round of interviews that will be scenario based.

The Police Department has also expanded their relationship with Front Line Initiative. The Town now has a dedicated full time Clinician for Billerica. The Town now also houses the Middlesex County's Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC) which coordinates and oversees all Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for police officers in Middlesex County. This program is funded by a grant through the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health.

Griggs Farm Update –

During the August 23rd 2021 Select Board Meeting I had informed the Board about the Griggs Property Tax Title Issues. As of July 13, 2022, the tax liability on Griggs Farm (2 properties) is \$288,105.38 with interest accruing at \$88.48 per day. Last year at this time the tax title foreclosure process was placed on hold due to Mr. Griggs agreeing to a payment plan. The Town attempted to work out a payment plan but was unsuccessful. The Town Treasurer has had several conversations with Mr. William Griggs and his Attorney in an effort establish a payment plan that is acceptable to the Town of Billerica and Mr. Griggs. However, after several months, Mr. Griggs is unwilling or unable to provide the Town with the required personal information needed to complete the payment plan. Therefore, the Town has removed the “on hold” status for the Griggs Farm properties and the Town will move forward with the tax title foreclosure process.

Community Farms

This office has arranged a visit to the community Farm with Wayne Smith. He is the founder of this program and knows the most about the program. There are 41 plots over at VVP. There are seven people on the waiting list. The Parks Superintendent and the DPW Director will be attending the visit as well. The Town is looking at whether this site can accommodate future expansion of the program. Additionally, the Town will be looking at the agricultural property owned by the Town on Boston Road for this purpose. I will report back to the Board.

Peggy Hannon Rizza Complex

With soil grating done Quirk has moved onto leveling the gravel/stone on the fields to create an even leveled surface to roll out the turf. Most of the electrical work around the site has been completed. The poles and wires having been installed by both Comcast and Verizon over the last month. The next priority is the paving of Ed Hayes Way, this will not only bring functionality back to the traffic patterns of the site but will also increase the walkability of the area. The Town continues to the drilling of irrigation test wells to ensure we can water the fields even during times of extreme drought (like right now!). Finding a sufficient water source is proving to be a challenge but we'll keep doing the tests with the hope of finding a permanent solution.

Talbot Dam Informational Meeting

On June 29th the Town hosted a meeting for NOAA and a number of state agencies to present to the public the proposed project at the Talbot Dam. The meeting was run by Eric Hutchins from NOAA and there were well over 100 Billerica residents in attendance and approximately 60 attending virtually making for very lively discussions. Mr. Hutchins explained the environmental impacts of the Dam, primarily the problems the Dam creates for fish passage on the Concord River. The Town of Billerica highlighted to Mr. Hutchins the issue with the removal of the dam as it relates to our water intake more so our access to safe/clean drinking water. Mr. Hutchins understood the towns perspective and assured everybody that the State would work with the town to secure either a second water intake or MWRA hook up. There will be more informational sessions to come over the next several months, and the Select board is strongly encouraged to attend.

Would also like to mention that during the informational session the power went out at Town Hall and the backup generator worked perfectly, turning on in seconds bringing everything back to life like nothing happened. An amazing showcase of the progress the Town has made.

Marijuana Land Conveyance

The Town has prepared an RFP for this project and is putting it out for bid next Thursday. This project was approved byk at Town Meeting when the voters passed Article 23 – To dispose of Town-owned land on republic road for the purpose of Marijuana Cultivation.

Affordable Housing Land Conveyance

At Town Meeting voters passed Article 22- to dispose of town-owned land for the purpose of affordable housing. The two properties are located on Parkway Avenue and Saville Street, the Town Counsel is vetting the deed issues prior to bidding. Once these deed issues are resolved the Town is prepared to put out an RFP for this project.

Masonic Hall

The Town met with the architects for the project, PRA, and reviewed options for a renovation at Masonic Hall. The goal of these renovations is to create a structurally safe building that provides functionality for the Billerica Food Pantry, at a reasonable cost to the taxpayers. There's a meeting scheduled this week to go over the plans with the food pantry, to ensure they can accomplish everything they wish to in the space provided. After that meeting the Town will be ready to enter the next phase of design on this project.

Capitol Facilities Committee Meeting

On June 23 the Capitol Facilities Committee met to discuss the feasibility study for the Recreation and COA building, and to determine a path forward for the project. The Committee gave this office some direction on the scope of the Feasibility Study. The RFP for the OPM is scheduled to go out in August. The RFP for the design firm will gout out the following month.

Verizon Cable Contract

The Verizon Contract is a five-year contract expiring in 2024. This office met with Bill Solomon to begin working on a new contract. A first draft has been sent to Verizon.