**Town Manager Update**

*March 20, 2023*

I’m pleased to report that GZA Geoenvironmental has completed the 25% design drawings and the Basis of Design Memorandum for Walker Brook. We’re waiting only for one section to come in from a sub-contractor, who is working to finalize the Geomorphic Assessment Report (Attachment D), which we expect to have from them this week. I will then be able to submit the final report and file for reimbursement.

The DPW head has submitted new Expression of Interest for a grant for Orchard Road. We are hopeful, as we incorporated the feedback we got from MassDOT to separate the drainage and paving work after last year’s submission was not approved.

I had a last-minute opportunity to present very brief written testimony to a House hearing on Chapter 90. I noted the Street Scan results, including the projected cost, and compared it to our Chapter 90 money. I also supported the MMA’s request for a 67% increase in Chapter 90 funding, noting that towns would still be paying for the majority of their road work.

The Governor has announced a new position, Director of Rural Affairs, which closely parallels the top priority of the Rural Policy Advisory Commission. The Director would offer office hours to hear about rural issues and in particular examine grant and economic development opportunities that rural areas may not have as easy access to as more urban areas.

As you may have heard, on March 15, Governor Healey announced that the Public Health Emergency will be ending on May 11, 2023, coinciding with the ending of the Federal Public Health Emergency.  This means that any mandates or waivers/flexibilities that were allowed under the public health emergency will be lifted at that time, unless legislative action is taken. We are still waiting to see whether and how the Legislature will allow continued remote participation in meetings. A previous draft of a bill had made remote participation mandatory, which would be an excessive burden on towns with committees that are not traditionally staffed. There has been talk of maintaining the status quo, which would allow but not mandate public participation. The House and Senate have both passed extensions to 2025, which I expect will be signed by the Governor.

Dalton police officers have asked for a detail rate hike, from $50 to $60, based on neighboring towns. They would still charge the schools and the CRA $40 per hour. Since this would involve a change in their contract, I will be scheduling an executive session to discuss it soon.

Citizens Energy’s special permit for a solar farm on the Warren landfill was approved by the Planning Board with a number of conditions, including full payment of back taxes and fees.

There’s an MMA Legislative Breakfast this Friday in Adams, upstairs in their library, light breakfast starting at 8; I can forward the invitation if you’d like me to. Please also consider the Western and Rural Mass. Conference, sponsored by the Mass. Select Boards Association, April 1 at the Delaney House in Holyoke.

Bud and I will have a final stump grinding policy, improved by Town Counsel, ready for your consideration on next week’s agenda.