



Hubbardston
Massachusetts

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

JANUARY 22, 2024

As we start 2024, I hope everyone was able to find some moments of joy this holiday season after a challenging couple of years. Unfortunately, the recent winter weeks have seen many impacted by widespread illness, including flu, COVID-19, RSV, and stomach bugs. We wish all those fighting illness a speedy and full recovery. Please reach out if you need any help accessing medical or other support services.

I was pleased to attend the **Massachusetts Municipal Association's (MMA) Annual Meeting** on Friday, January 19. This conference provides a valuable opportunity to connect with fellow municipal leaders from across the Commonwealth, learn about new innovations and best practices, and meet with vendors about potential services or partnerships. At the MMA meeting, Governor Healey announced her proposed Municipal Empowerment Act, a reform package aimed at providing cities and towns with more tools and resources to address challenges. For example, the Act would give towns the option to increase certain local taxes, make permanent helpful COVID-era allowances, and provide more flexibility around procurement rules and post-retirement employment. The Governor also committed to increasing Unrestricted General Government Aid by 3% and fully funding the fourth year of the Student Opportunity Act education investments in her upcoming FY2025 budget. I am continuing conversations with peers to understand how components of the Municipal Empowerment Act could potentially benefit Hubbardston if implemented.

Earlier this month, I released the **Quarter 2 Financial Report**. Based on Q2 revenue collections and expenditures, Hubbardston remains on target with the FY2024 approved budget. The finance team continues close budget monitoring to ensure our town stays fiscally stable. Steady progress also continues on drafting next fiscal year's spending plan and capital budget. The proposed 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan for FY2025-FY2029 will be presented to the Select Board on February 5th. Community input is essential as we shape priorities.

This week, we anticipate **Governor Healy's House 1 budget proposal for state FY2025**, to analyze any changes for municipal and education aid, public safety grants, road funds, and other key local funding categories. This data will inform Hubbardston's own FY2025 budget development.

I want to highlight our **Legislative Delegation Public Forum** on February 5th. Senator Durant and Representative Berthiaume will hear resident priorities for the second year of the legislative session on Beacon Hill. This event represents a key opportunity for you to share what's important in terms of policy, budget items, local aid, and more.

As always, reach out with any municipal questions or concerns.

Project Briefs

The **Gardner Road communications tower project** remains a top priority infrastructure initiative for connectivity and public safety radio improvements. We have made considerable progress securing easements from private landowners in strategic locations identified as optimal sites. The next phase is releasing a Request for Proposals to solicit partnerships with commercial carriers interested in locating equipment on the tower to offset construction costs. We aim to have the RFP on the street by mid-February.

Staff has been working on a **comprehensive review of various municipal fees, permits, licenses and fines**. The goal is to ensure costs for provided services are accurately aligned with comparable communities. Findings and recommendations will be compiled into a report and advisory memo for Board consideration.

My office has been supporting the Planning Board with the **Marijuana Special Permitting** process for existing establishments in Hubbardston. All current licenses need renewal by the end of the year.

I recently met with the new owners of the large **Pitcherville Road** site. The owner is actively weighing options for residential or mixed use redevelopment of the property. I am encouraged by their clear interest in collaborating with the Town to explore ideas that align with our community vision for appropriate uses on that site. We will continue an open dialogue as their plans progress.

Community engagement remains central to our work, and we are excited to launch the new **Hubbardston Citizens Academy** on February 26th. This 8-week course provides residents an inside look at local government operations. Participants will connect directly with department heads and gain a deeper understanding of how our Town functions.

We recently held a kickoff meeting to launch our **Technology Efficiency Study** being conducted in conjunction with the Collins Center at UMass Boston. This project is funded through a Community Compact Best Practices grant awarded to Hubbardston. The Collins Center team walked us through the project goals, timeline, deliverables, and risks. Over the next few months they will conduct an inventory of current technology systems, interview staff about processes, and host a public input session. Their work will culminate in an actionable set of recommendations for enhancing efficiency through technology improvements and optimization of resources. This initiative has potential to significantly streamline workflows and free up staff capacity.

The **2024 Annual Census** and street listing forms were mailed in early January to all households per state guidelines. Completing and returning these forms promptly helps ensure Hubbardston receives our full share of state aid funds. We urge everyone to fill them out accurately.

Additionally, I collaborated with Emergency Management Director Judie O'Donnell on updating the town's **Comprehensive Of Emergency Operations Plan (COOP)**. I am hoping to present this in Q4 of 2024. Thank you to Judie for her dedication and expertise in keeping our emergency preparedness current.

As always, I welcome your questions on these initiatives or any other topics related to our Town's progress.

Departments Updates

Office of the Town Clerk:

The Office of the Town Clerk has been inundated with paperwork over the past few weeks as residents respond to the annual census mailing that went out in early January. A steady stream of completed census forms, dog license applications, and requests for vote-by-mail ballots are coming in daily. Town Clerk Candace Livingston has her hands full processing this influx, on top of their usual licensing, records management, election preparation, assessors and customer service duties.

We appreciate Candace for keeping all these time-sensitive tasks on track during an extremely hectic season! Her diligent efforts behind the scenes helps maintain clean voter rolls, accurate census data, and compliant dog licensing to benefit the Hubbardston community.

Hubbardston Department of Public Works

Over the past couple weeks, the Hubbardston Department of Public Works has continued making repairs and improvements to maintain safe, passable roads around town. Significant time was spent plowing, treating, and clearing snow and ice during and after the January 7th nor'easter that impacted our area. Crews worked extended hours through the storm aftermath to open roads and sidewalks. Other maintenance activities included hot patching potholes and washouts on several roads including Brigham Street, Thompson Road, and Old Princeton Road among others. Ongoing vehicle repairs were conducted on trucks and heavy equipment to ensure the fleet stays operationally ready. Looking ahead, the DPW team is preparing for potential winter weather by checking equipment, loosening salt in the storage shed, and opening storm drains around town.

In addition to storm response and road repairs, DPW staff spent time on other key tasks like brush clearing along Bickford Pond Road and Tahanto Road for visibility. Several culverts and beaver dams were cleared of blockages to improve drainage. Loader work was completed on gravel roads such as Halfrey Road and Root Road. Some behind-the-scenes work like parts organization and shop cleaning also ensures smooth infrastructure operations. Overall, the bi-weekly log reflects the wide range of critical responsibilities performed by our dedicated DPW team to support safe travel and quality of life around Hubbardston.

Hubbardston Fire Department

The Hubbardston Fire Department responded to 789 calls for service in 2023, a 5% increase making it the busiest year on record. Calls included 329 EMS emergencies, 135 service requests, 84 good intent incidents, and 70 motor vehicle accidents. The department also handled 62 alarm activations, 32 electrical emergencies, 18 mutual aid mobilizations, 13 illegal fires, 12 smoke investigations, 8 brush fires, 8 hazmat incidents, 7 structure fires, 5 vehicle fires, and 3 each for search/rescue and technical rescue situations. This wide range of critical response activity was handled adeptly by Chief Williams plus 4 full-time and 9 call firefighter/EMT/paramedics.

In addition to emergency response, Hubbardston Fire personnel regularly participate in fire inspections, code enforcement, training and various non-incident tasks daily to maintain skills and readiness while also preventing fires. As call volume continues rising year-over-year, the department's customer service focus and depth/diversity of expertise positions them well to keep the community safe. We appreciate the hard work and dedication of Chief Hayes and the entire Fire team. 2023 was demanding yet Hubbardston Fire continues stepping up whenever called upon.

Recent Meetings and Constituent Outreach

I met with the Capital Planning Committee to review priorities and answer questions on the proposed capital plan. I presented an overview of the plan which should be finalized at their January 25th meeting. Thank you to the committee members for their dedication and thoughtful input during our discussions.

I held my second coffee chat with constituents on January 17th. These open meetings will continue on the last Tuesday of each month through March as a forum to hear community feedback.

I attended Bob Beauregard's retirement party along with Chair Jeff Williams on January 18th. It was held at The Country Hen Farm Office and catered by Gardner Ale House. There was a great turnout to celebrate Bob's 28 years with the company and transition into retirement. I enjoyed hearing from Bob's colleagues and family members and wish him the very best.

My weekly check-ins with Director Anne Gobi of Rural Affairs continue to be valuable for alignment. She has added a new staff member focused specifically on assisting towns with securing grants for local projects.

I also met with Kevin Kuros from the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) to discuss resources available as a local couple considers establishing a commercial kitchen. MOBD provides assistance with licensing, operations, financing and more. I supplied information on key steps like registering as an LLC, obtaining federal and state tax IDs, and filing with the Secretary of Commonwealth.



I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Library Director Christine Barbera for going above and beyond this past weekend when the library's boiler stopped working. Upon learning of the issue Chris immediately came in to assess the situation and implement solutions. She worked tirelessly to set up portable heaters and monitor building temperatures to ensure the safety of the building. Ms. Barbera also coordinated with multiple HVAC companies and contractors to get estimates and provide access for repairs. Her dedication and hands-on effort during a stressful equipment failure made a significant difference in getting the issue resolved as quickly as possible. The entire community owes Ms. Barbera their thanks for giving up her weekend plans to personally oversee this emergency for one of our most valued public resources.

Have Feedback?

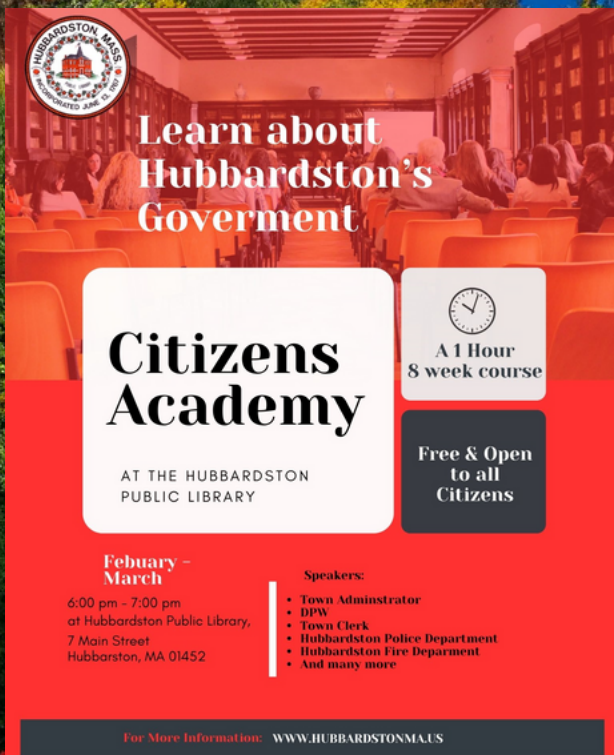
Please contact the Town of Hubbardston via phone at 978-928-1400 or email us at admin@hubbardstonma.us with questions, comments or suggestions regarding the information in this report. Additionally, you may review the Town's other Reports on the Town website.



Hubbardston ANNUAL TOWN REPORT PHOTO CONTEST

Capture Hubbardston's beauty through your camera lens by February 1st and your photo could be featured on the 2023 Annual Town Report cover! Submit up to 3 photos showing what Hubbardston means to you - landscapes, events, and scenes that showcase Hubbardston - to bc@hubbardstonma.us for a chance to be showcased.

www.hubbardstonma.us



Learn about Hubbardston's Government

Citizens Academy

AT THE HUBBARDSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

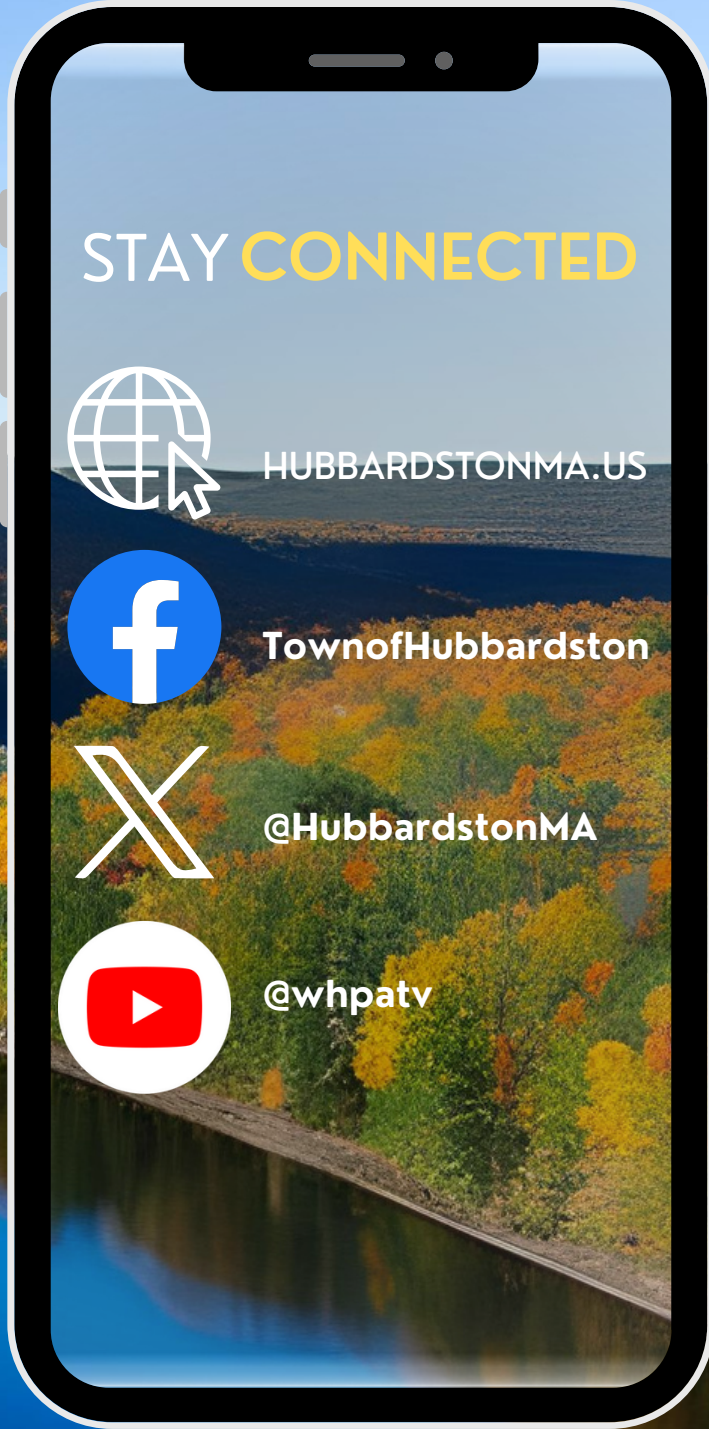
February - March

6:00 pm - 7:00 pm
at Hubbardston Public Library,
7 Main Street
Hubbardston, MA 01452


Speakers:


- Town Administrator
- DPW
- Town Clerk
- Hubbardston Police Department
- Hubbardston Fire Department
- And many more


For More Information: WWW.HUBBARDSTONMA.US




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