

**Interview conducted by Gardner Magazine Publisher Werner Poegel with Hubbardston Town Administrator Nathan Boudreau and Hubbardston Administrative Coordinator Leanne Moses on July 23, 2025**

**Poegel:** Today, we have the honor of speaking to two people who represent the town of Hubbardston in today's interview, Town Administrator Nathan Boudreau and Administrative Coordinator Leanne Moses. Good morning.

**Boudreau:** Good morning, Warner. Thank you for having us.

**Poegel:** And hi there, Leanne.

**Moses:** Thank you. Good morning.

**Poegel:** So, in the town of Hubbardston, I understand the town has undertaken a brand new website to foster greater transparency with residents. It's called HubConnect. What can you tell us about that?

**Boudreau:** All right. HubConnect isn't necessarily the website, but it is the back-end workflows for the website. It is our currently-in-creation, ever-evolving digital government platform, built using CIVIC-optimized Microsoft 365, Power Automate, and SharePoint to modernize how we serve residents and support staff. It connects services, automates tasks, and centralizes records. It's not off-the-shelf, and that's what I like about it. It's not finished, and that's what I like about it. It's actively rolling out, improving least by week. We're building while using it, and that's the point. Real work, real feedback, real results. And I couldn't speak higher on the potential of this project to really allow us to utilize the existence of modern technology to enhance our ability to serve the public. A good example of some of the things we're going to be doing with this is HubFix, a automated routing system for constituent reporting. We do job licenses. We're doing HR. I have automated our accounts payable system. We're going to be using it in almost any way over the next year that used to be a paper form. There will still be paper forms available for those who wish to utilize them, but we are also going to be rolling out a fleet of iPads that are going to be on the front desk, and staff will be instructed to lean into the mobile-first mentality and utilizing it. In addition, on the back end, there's something I've been calling HubStaff, which is a budget tracker, onboarding module, AP, and finance. It's also the way we're going to do incident reports, requests for reimbursement, again, anything that has been form-based throughout history. Right now, it's pretty focused heavily on staff, but in the coming months, it will be rolled out into different departments, first being the Select Board and General Government Licensure, followed by the Board of Health and their licensure, followed by the Planning Board. We're going to take this as slow as possible, but in reasonable, and we're already rolled out in the Dog Licensure and the Building Department. I will let Leanne speak to that, because she led that whole rollout literally weeks after starting here.

**Poegel:** So, Leanne, how is this affecting your work in the Town of Hubbardston?

**Moses:** So, I've gotten to know, pretty intimately, a variety of departments, which has been super helpful, because while we have stand-alone departments, they do interact quite frequently, and what happens in one may impact what happens in another. So, while I don't work directly with the Building Department, helping launch the online permitting forms for building electric and gas and plumbing has taught me a lot about what goes into building a home in Hubbard Center, which has impacted my work in the Planning Department. So, I have worked very closely with all of our inspectors, as well as the Building and Board of Health clerk, to make a totally unique online permitting system. We utilize kind of information that we have from other platforms that informs the necessary requirements in all of these

permits, and then we've been able to speak it through feedback from both our inspectors, as well as residents, as to what works best, and what might be improved upon to make it as beneficial to our constituents and to our employees as possible. So, we've continually been updating it and making sure that all of our workflows are working correctly, making sure that everyone's happy with how it's working, and working towards making it easier for everyone.

**Poegel:** Now, I understand you're both excited about this because it's something that's out-of-the-box. It's not off-the-shelf, so it gives you greater flexibility. What will make this different from some of the software that other towns are using on their websites? What makes this better?

**Boudreau:** So, to close out on Leanne's side, licensing and the project she did when she first started over the last six months is where digital meets practical, and Leanne's work proves that we can meet in the middle. We now have a reputable model that is flexible enough for all license types throughout the whole community, and I'm excited over the course of the next calendar year to roll that out. But, you asked for what makes this better than other out-of-the-box opportunities, and that is that it is designed for rural government. It is built with tools we already use, no new logins, no third-party complexity. The government technology sector is very, very good at the front end. Where they're lacking is the back end, is the actual understanding of what goes on when the license is turned in, what goes on when the job permit is done for the year. So, now people are going to get automated reminders, they're going to get emails that help them reapply and make it as seamlessly as possible, and overall, this helps our small teams do more with less while maintaining compliance and absolute transparency. This is adaptable for any small town department, and I believe that we have the staff capacity already to utilize this equipment moving forward and to create the opportunity for staff to seriously do more with less. This isn't necessarily about scaling up tech. It's about scaling down the burden for staff. In small towns, people wear five hats. HubConnect helps manage those hats.

**Poegel:** All right, so to put it in layman's terms, you take two towns. One doesn't have HubConnect. You have HubConnect. You say that the other off-the-shelf products don't know the back end. What does that actually mean to the public as far as the two experiences compared?

**Boudreau:** Less paperwork getting lost in email confusion and clutter. Less back and forth. What I've been putting this akin to is there is no modern-day version of the old town clerk's vault. It's musty, but everyone knows what's in there, and it's reliable. The HubConnect and the overall arching platform that it stands for is about filing appropriately for retention, filing appropriately for management, and filing appropriately for transparency. The town of Hubbardston uses Laser Speech, where we upload all of our historical documents, not the real historical ones that we need to keep, but anything that is of historical nature, like building permits, electrical permits, the old planning board minutes, and we were able to get rid of a lot of the paper. That's online, and now HubConnect takes this, automates, files it, and we're setting up a process where it auto-dumps into the Laser Speech system. So all of this documentation will be readily available and live for members of the community and staff to pull up on these iPads and computers that we're going to be rolling out. It is creating a centralized vault for modern technology. And it allows, because it really takes a lot of time to do the small things, and when your small wins add up, it's a great thing. I can't tell you the amount of times myself and other staff members have fallen behind in filing, have fallen behind in making sure that things make their way to Laser Speech, have fallen behind in just ensuring that nobody forgets the small stuff. By automating the small stuff, it allows us to focus on larger projects. We're not currently there quite yet, but every week there will be fewer emails, fewer paper forms, and much, much less confusion.

**Poegel:** So let me ask you this. If I were to characterize this as more accurate, easier, and streamlined, would that be accurate?

**Boudreau:** Once fully rolled out, all of that will be accurate. Right now there are definitely, there's definitely a learning curve, and I taught myself how to code for most of this just utilizing AI, so I'm kind of doing it down and dirty. So that has added a little bit of time to what's going on, and in addition we've had some implementation woes with some of the companies that we were forced to work with to make this happen, and that is what brought me to the understanding that I needed to automate and centralize the work of the Town of Hubbardston, because the Town of Hubbardston is very small. Turnover rate, although we have an outstanding team right now, turnover rate is still very high. There have been issues with new employees starting and people trying to pull the wool over their eyes. With all respect, but we just need to have a centralized management system that helps understand, no matter who's in the seat, what has been done and what there is still to do and where you can find the proper forms and proper historical documents. But that is a tremendous value both on the staff side and on the constituent side.

**Poegel:** So it sounds like in one area you're getting your heads completely out of the sand, but then in another area you're proposing to get your heads into the sand. What can you tell us about the proposed Sandpit Commercial Overlay District?

**Boudreau:** Absolutely. So the Sandpit Overlay District is a project that we've been working on for about six months now. We're working with an engineering firm called Niche Engineering, and it is to take the very large sandpits owned by approximately six to eight individuals on the Hubbardston-Gardner border and figure out what would be appropriate there. We're looking to maintain the rural charm of the Town of Hubbardston while also understanding that these sandpits have been dangerous. Every couple of years there's a death there. We get calls about ATV accidents and trespassing all the time. So we were able to receive a rural community funding grant through the Community One Stop, which is a grant portal, in 2024. And after putting out the request for proposal and receiving the award to Niche Engineering, we are finally at a point where we're going to be able to seek public input. And I will let LeAnne talk about what that's going to look like and when that will start.

**Moses:** Yes. So it's very important to the Town of Hubbardston that we hear what the people are interested in seeing in this potential development. We want to make sure that it's something that the community is involved in, has a say in, and is listened to about because we're aware of the history of this location. So on August 4th, we'll be launching a survey to the residents of Hubbardston to complete and give us their input on what they would like to see there, what they wouldn't like to see there, what they would like it to look like, what they wouldn't like it to look like, how big or how small they would like it to be. And then, additionally, on August 26th, it's a very important date. We are going to be having a community discussion in the Senior Center, and it's going to be a public forum to review the initial concepts that Niche has presented to us and gather in-person feedback. We're going to have an opportunity to engage in breakout sessions as small groups, come back together as a large group, and relay that feedback that the small groups gathered. We will be having mapping activities where we can physically get our hands on maps and kind of draw and outline what we want to see. And it will be an opportunity for folks in town to ask questions, raise concerns, and shape the draft overlay that we're working to create for this area.

**Poegel:** Can you give me an example of what you need to decide as far as a sand pit? Because in my mind, you know, I'm not a big sand pit aficionado. I just see there's sand there, and you have to figure out a way to utilize the sand. So what do people actually have to decide?

**Boudreau:** So what I want this project to be known as is we're not just changing zoning. We're asking the community what belongs there and for help building the plan. There is an owner of a very large parcel. He would like to do something there, but currently it is not zoned appropriately to do so. There are avenues in the state to go and force his way into doing something. It's called 40B. But I want to ensure that the town is zoned appropriately and thinking about A, the rural charm, and B, what fits there. Like we wouldn't be interested in something potentially like a horse track or a giant mall or a big box store, but there may be interest in mixed-use community-centered housings with a little park and a business district and some limited housing and a senior housing section and maybe some additional recreational opportunities. And that's what we want to know because the town has turned down several development ideas for this project in the past. Previously there wasn't a main access from Route 68, which the owner of the largest parcel now does have. So that's something that is going to change the scope and understanding of this project. But we just want to really put it out there and say, Hubbardston, this is your community. What would you see here? Because the other side of that is do nothing, keep it the way it is, and accept whatever is forced our way.

**Poegel:** So what I'm hearing you say is that all options are open. It could be commercial. It could be a strip mall. It could be residences or any combination of the above. And you want to know what residents want in that area.

**Boudreau:** Absolutely. That's the end goal because we're aiming to streamline future development by taking what isn't wanted in that area off the table through zoning.

**Poegel:** Now, when you get this out to the public to comment on it, how will the public physically comment? How would you like them to get in touch with the town and provide their input?

**Boudreau:** Leeanne, go ahead.

**Moses:** So, again, we will have a survey that will be launched online on August 4th that I would encourage folks who are interested in commenting on something out there. It's an open-ended question. It's a survey where they can provide any additional feedback that isn't directly addressed in the survey itself. And then I would really encourage folks to come to our public engagement session on August 26th. That will be the best opportunity to speak to the board directly, to speak to the engineering firm who is the driving force behind this overlay with the town, and speak to their other constituents who might have similar opinions or who might have opposing concerns or opinions, and bring that together as a whole.

**Poegel:** All right. Moving on to other topics for the town of Hubbardston, what else is going on in Hubbardston, Nate?

**Boudreau:** Hubbardston has a lot going on. We just finished up the roof and outside of 48 Gardner Road, which is the new municipal offices, and soon will be the public safety building. Within the next five years we have mock-ups of that opportunity that we're going to be putting forward for public input very soon. There were three debt exclusions passed recently for a fire truck, a brush mower, and a snow plow. We're going to be taking out the debt for those borrowed in the month of September with the complete and utter intent to retire that debt and other debts ahead of asking the town of Hubbardston to approve the public safety building project, which I am anticipating to be started in FY30. We are building a community meeting space, which I've recently sought public input on. It is at 48 Gardner Road, and we are aiming to make it accessible and to increase the availability for hybrid opportunities,

increased meeting opportunities for different community organizations, and to create, just long story short, the overarching deal here is I'm trying to increase and make better the way residents of Hubbardston work with their government. I want to ensure that whomever is looking to do whatever they are looking to do, from building permits to development to meetings, it is easy for them to find, easy for them to do, and headaches are off the table. In addition to those projects, which are sort of 48 Gardner Road-centric, we are in the process of taking on the historic meeting house, which is being donated by the First Parish Congregation in Hubbardston. That is going to be a longstanding project, and we are going to be putting together a group to oversee that, acting as trustees and stewards of the project. The first step there will be maintaining the structure of the building and doing some sort of feasibility study to figure out what we need to do next and what is most important. In addition to that project, right across the street, we are redoing the ground floor of the library to be more opening and welcoming to everyone. That's an ongoing project that was made possible by the fact that the town clerk and community development and planning offices have moved out of the basement. For the last 60 or so years, that space has been unavailable to the Hubbardston Public Library, and they were unavailable to get certain grants that are really, really library-specific. It's just going to be a, it's going to take a while, but it's going to be a big win for the community. We're looking to optimize it and really create a useful space down there, and we're exploring what that means. The Senior Center is also expanding slightly into what used to be the Slade Building conference room and the administrative and finance offices. That is being done mostly by volunteer efforts, and the very committed Senior Center director we have over there, Claudia Provencal. Claudia is an absolute boss and knows how to manage people and get things done, so I have no doubt that that project will be done. Further, once the police department is out, in approximately five years, the Senior Center will expand even further to encompassing that whole building. A lot of what we're doing is just ensuring that the town has the flexibility to do what it needs. We're going to be focused on facility management, facility maintenance, ADA requirements. It's going to be a lot of getting our hands dirty, but it really, really, really is going to be worth it, and I hope that the whole community gets involved in some of these projects.

**Poegel:** We know that fiscal 2026 just started. State funding is very important to local communities. How has this year's state budget affected Hubbardston?

**Boudreau:** So the state budget affects Hubbardston in the largest way through the school system. When the Chapter 70 monies fluctuate, it makes it harder on the small communities to manage their assessment within the parameters of Proposition 2.5. We are very much capped on how high we can go with certain aspects of the budget and the taxpayer revenue, but it is very hard to fund things like police and roads and community development when the school's assessment takes up 90% of our new growth and tax revenue. That is something we are very, very open and transparent with both the Quabbin Regional School District and the Hubbardston Legislative Delegation. They're aware. I beat that drum as loudly as I can. There just needs to be some balance for rural communities, and that is something that gets determined on the state level, but I am looking forward to being part of that conversation. It's something that I really push through my work with the small town administrators of Massachusetts, where I serve on the legislative subcommittee. We put out surveys to all of the communities to find out their legislative priorities for small and rural municipalities in Massachusetts and are going to push really hard. The former town administrator here in Hubbardston, Ryan McLean, is actually taking on the role of president of that organization, so I am very happy to work with him in that capacity. But there are always ways to advocate for the town of Hubbardston or the town in which you live to your local delegation. Make sure that your state reps and senators know how you feel because it does have a true and lasting impact.

**Poegel:** How is the funding this fiscal year comparing to the funding last fiscal year? Are you doing better, are you doing worse, or about the same?

**Boudreau:** About the same. This year it worked out in some ways and it was a little easier than last year, so I'd say better. We are taking steps in a positive direction, which is very challenging for small and medium-sized municipalities to balance the needs of the school budget with the needs of the municipal budget. And when everything is important, competing priorities sometimes don't align and it's very unfortunate. And things like HubConnect and the Sandpit Project will help alleviate some of the burden on the taxpayer, increasing the revenues across the board for the town and making things easier and allowing us to do more with less. So that's really the end game. That was full circle. I'm like, wow, I'm glad we got to that point. Because that's what it's all about.

**Poegel:** So bringing Leanne back into this, Leanne, what else would you like to tell people about what you do in the town of Hubbardston and what the residents can get at the Hubbardston Town Offices?

**Moses:** Absolutely. The Hubbardston Town Offices moved in February of this year. So we are located in a bigger and more accessible building. We are all located in the same building, hopefully alleviating some confusion about where you are meant to go. The tax collector's office is right next to the assessor's office, the land use office, and the clerk's office. It's in the same wing of the building. And the administrator's office is located upstairs along with an executive assistant. So hopefully that will make things easier at the town. And as always, we are readily available. We're here Monday through Thursday, and we are always happy to help our residents. We love when they come in and chat with us and give us the time of day to kind of show them what we're doing on their behalf, because ultimately they are who we serve.

**Poegel:** Well, I want to thank both Nathan Boudreau and Leanne Moses for taking the time to speak with us today. Thank you both, and continued good work in Hubbardston.

**Boudreau:** I want to say thank you for taking the time to talk to us today, and thank you for really promoting all that is good in Central Massachusetts in the Gardner region. It is truly appreciated by municipalities and people alike.

**Poegel:** All right. Well, thank you. And we'll look forward to getting as much material as you can. We'll get it out to the public.

**Boudreau:** All right. Thank you, sir.

**Poegel:** Take care. Have a great day.