

TOWN OF WESTMINSTER

AN EVALUATION OF STRUCTURE & OPERATIONS OF WESTMINSTER GOVERNMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MODIFICATIONS

JUNE 2018



REPORT TO THE WESTMINSTER BOARD OF SELECTMEN
BY THE TOWN GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEE



COMMUNITY PARADIGM ASSOCIATES, LLC

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I. Introduction

In 2016 the Town of Westminster formed a Town Government Study Committee (TGSC) in accordance with a recommendation from the Town's 2014 Master Plan, which had identified a number of issues related to the Town Government's overall operation. The Master Plan identified issues related to: 1) administrative and management capacity, 2) organizational communication and coordination, 3) municipal spending and taxes, and 4) concerns regarding the long-term viability of town government based primarily upon volunteers. The applicable excerpts of the Master Plan are provided in *Exhibit A*.

The Master Plan made a number of recommendations to address the identified issues and to achieve the proposed Goals and Objectives, including the establishment of a Town Government Study Committee with a charge to:

... " Review and analyze how Westminster's town government is currently organized and make appropriate recommendations for re-organization that will enable town government to function with maximum effectiveness. "

It was expected that such a reorganization of Westminster's governing structure and many of its operational processes could, and would, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Town's local government in allocating and maximizing resources. This would, in turn, allow Westminster to address challenges and opportunities that the Town faces in its delivery of services and future development, many of which were identified within the 2014 Master Plan.

In the spring of 2016 the Board of Selectmen, acting upon the recommendation of the adopted Master Plan, appointed a nine member Town Government Study Committee with a seven-point charge:

1. *Conduct an in-depth review of the town's current organizational structure,*
2. *Obtain information regarding various models of government structure from other Massachusetts communities similar in size to Westminster,*
3. *Identify strengths and weaknesses in Westminster's current form of government and areas for improvement,*
4. *Recommend changes in the Town's organizational structure, including but not limited to the terms of office and the method of selection of officials, consistent with the needs of the Town; for example, consider changing the name and duties of the Advisory Board to Finance Committee or changing the Town Clerk's position from elected to appointed,*
5. *Report its findings and recommendations to the Board of Selectmen and then Town Meeting within two years, (amended by the Board of Selectmen to December 2019)*
6. *The ultimate goal of the Town Government Study Committee is to gain the support and confidence of the public through the creation of a new town charter establishing the framework for an improved structure of government for the Town of Westminster*
7. *Provide recommendation as to which boards/commissions should receive a stipend.*

Community Paradigm Associates, LLC was retained by Westminster in the summer of 2017 to work with the TGSC in the charge of the Board of Selectmen. This Report reflects the work that has been performed by Community Paradigm in concert with the TGSC since August of 2017.

II. Approach and Methodology

To understand the dynamics of the Town of Westminster and its government, a representative of Community Paradigm conducted the following activities, in addition to reviewing the extensive documentation and surveys that had been conducted by the TGSC:

- Reviewed documents and materials regarding the existing structure and operational processes including organization chart, bylaws, special acts, policy books, notable legal opinions, recent annual reports, budgets and audits, 2014 Master Plan, etc.;
- Interviewed the Town Administrator and all members of the Board of Selectmen as Town executives to discuss Town structure and operations, and review project goals;
- Interviewed key department heads, who made themselves available to review their operations and issues regarding the larger Town operations, positive and negative;
- Met with key elected bodies, or representatives of such bodies, to gain perspective on their consideration of Town issues and operational strengths and weaknesses;
- Met with representatives of various appointed boards and committees to discuss Town functions and opportunities for improvement;
- Interviewed the Town Moderator over two sessions;
- Reviewed reports prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) regarding Town operations.

Additionally, Community Paradigm compared structure and operational processes of Westminster to similarly-sized communities. The comparable communities were approved by the TGSC and consisted of Ashburnham, Ayer, Groton, Harvard, Hubbardston, Lancaster, Lunenburg, Pepperell, Rutland, Shirley, Sterling, and West Boylston. Information regarding the structure and processes of the comparable communities is summarized in *Exhibit B*.

As a result of this work, Community Paradigm Associates developed a Status Report (9/21/17) that included a SWOT analysis that analyzed the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the current structure of Westminster's government. This analysis established the framework for deliberations by the TGSC. This report is included as *Exhibit C* and includes information relative to materials reviewed and the local officials that were interviewed during the process.

The deliberations of the TGSC were facilitated by Community Paradigm and worked through a series of prepared decision points as well as other issues raised by members of the TGSC. These included:

- Method of establishment of form of government
- Structure of legislative body
- Election or appointment of specific officials and multi-member bodies
- Potential authority and responsibilities of the Chief Operating Officer
- Other Issues including: Advisory Board or Finance Committee, payment of stipends to elected bodies, Strategic Planning, and Charter review process.

III. General Observations and Findings

This project has been focused upon a central question of whether the Town of Westminster's local government, as currently structured, is able to most effectively work on behalf of its residents and taxpayers. While government services are being delivered in Westminster and the Town's finances appear to be relatively stable at present, this study focused specifically upon the effectiveness of the existing structure and mechanisms of the Town. Evaluation was conducted in accordance with the findings, goals and objectives as set forth in the 2014 Master Plan and identified best practices in municipal government.

There are many opinions and tests to determine whether an organization, in this case a municipal organization, is effective. The core responsibility of producing outcomes related to the organizational mission is a simple means of determining whether the organization is achieving its most basic function. An *effective* organization must be able to determine the parameters of its mission, the definition of specific outcomes, the efficiency of achieving outcomes, and organizational flexibility to respond to changing internal and external conditions. In order to assess this broader and more complete concept of effectiveness focus was placed upon ten questions, as set forth by Community Paradigm:

1. Does the organization have clear lines of accountability such that it can appropriately manage the delivery of services, the essential function for which it exists?
2. Is the organization structured to facilitate communication between its decision-makers and service delivery personnel?
3. Is the organization prepared for some future state of opportunities or challenges, and does the organization have the structure in which strategic planning for some future state exists and occurs?
4. Is the organizational structure designed for maximum efficiency of operations with quick and flexible response, without duplication of effort, or without less than optimum use of resources?
5. Does the organization have the structure and processes to properly manage and develop its human resources?
6. Is the organization prepared for the succession of its human resources to ensure continuity of high performance?
7. Is there an appropriate level of leadership within the organization to establish consistent values, vision, direction, performance expectations, service delivery focus, and a management system that produces results?
8. Is the structure, and its operational processes, easily understood by its owners, members and users?
9. Is there confidence and trust with the organization and its processes from stakeholders?
10. Does the organization continually review its processes for improvement, through data and information that measures performance and goal attainment?

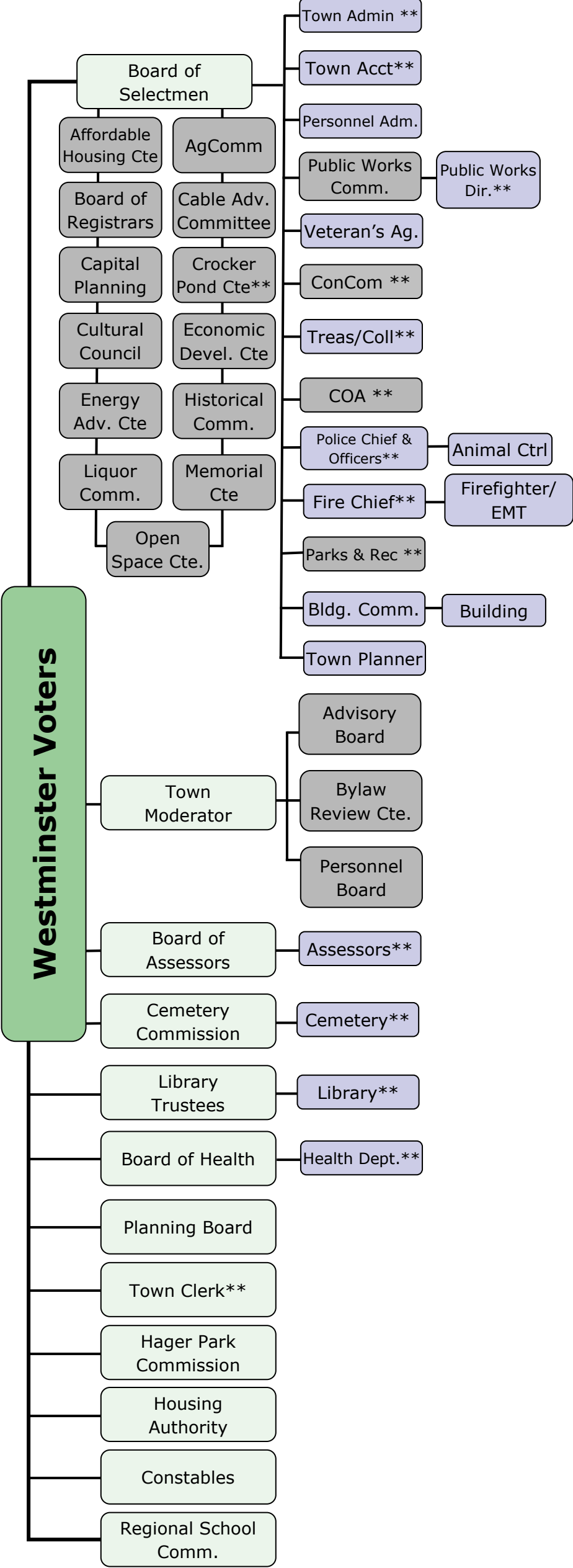
Every municipality can and should consider these questions to determine whether their governmental organization meets these standards of maximum effectiveness, and where improvements can be made. The TGSC's work in executing its charge by the Board of Selectmen has conducted such an analysis and found that there are deficiencies, many of which were previously identified within the 2014 Master Plan Report. The work of the TGSC and Community Paradigm has identified that many of the deficiencies occur as a result of the presently established governmental structure and associated processes, or in some cases, lack thereof.

While the TGSC and its consultant have identified a number of deficiencies, there are a number of positive takeaways from the analysis that has been conducted through this project. It is certainly worthy of noting each of these as a foundation upon which to make positive changes that will further improve the operation of Westminster's local government for the benefit of its current and future residents and taxpayers. These positive observations include:

- A history of many committed and conscientious elected and appointed officials that care about the Town.
- Devoted and talented department heads affirmatively acting to ensure the success of their departments.
- A willingness of some number of citizens to serve or volunteer in elected or appointed positions.
- The employment of conservative financial practices that have produced a general condition of sustainability for the near term.

The findings by the TGSC and Community Paradigm regarding the deficiencies of Westminster's governmental structure, operations and processes are summarized below, and in most part reinforced the tentative findings made by the TGSC in their work prior to Community Paradigm being engaged:

- Westminster's form of government is too decentralized and results in a lack of accountability as responsibilities are so diffuse as to render full responsibility difficult to determine. A common issue identified during the review process was that there was "no one in charge". The Organizational Chart for the current form of government, which is included as *Figure 1*, reflects the dispersal of authority and accountability.
- The decentralized structure of government dilutes authority and impedes functional coordination and collaboration.
- The actuality of the government structure being so fragmented results in some level of frustration by users of the local government as they find that key local officials, notably the Selectmen and the Town Administrator, may be held accountable but have no actual jurisdiction and/or authority on a variety of matters.



KEY

Voters

Elected Officials

Appointed Positions (paid)

Volunteer Board/ Committee Appts

**supervises paid staff

- The existing fragmented structure makes communication and coordination of effort a difficult endeavor as multiple channels exist for dissemination of information, internally and externally. Simultaneously, as no single entity can speak for the entire organization, internal and external communications are poor.
- Relatedly, there is inadequate attention to creating a comprehensive organizational culture of shared values and mission with coordinated strategic goals and objectives.
- The Board of Selectmen needs to provide more policy guidance and overall vision through a process for comprehensive strategic planning. This is again attributable to the fragmented nature of the organizational structure as well as an emphasis on tactics rather than strategies due to a vacuum in formal management capacity.
- A stronger executive is needed to manage operations, as there is inadequate formal town-wide management in place. Instead, management occurs on an *ad hoc* basis, and often without utilization of best practices that could maximize the efficiency of service delivery.
- Without a strong executive, there is a lack of integrated and effective management capacity to handle complex issues.
- There are a number of inconsistencies in current operations especially personnel as human resource administration is splintered among the various departments, boards and officers of the Town thereby preventing a coordinated approach that maximizes management and development of the organizations' most important assets.
- It is increasingly difficult to get qualified volunteers for the high number of appointed and elected positions.
- A number of elected positions are technical, thereby requiring expertise, proper training and experience, as opposed to policy setting roles based upon community values. A lack of proficiency in these positions provides some level of risk and liability to the Town.
- The inefficiencies in operations exposes the Town to potential fiscal pressures in the short- and long-term with a duplication of resources, staff and equipment as each "island" operates independently.

IV. **Recommendations**

Based upon the identified deficiencies and deliberations of the appropriate course of action for Westminster as determined by the TGSC, the following recommendations have been compiled. These recommendations would establish a plan for restructuring the Town government and provide a system of self-government by the Town through the creation and adoption of a Home Rule Charter. This Charter would act as Westminster's own constitution by establishing a locally controlled governmental structure and distribution of legal authority and responsibilities to the Town's officials.

The adoption of a Home Rule Charter for Westminster lies at the core of the TGSC's recommendations. All other recommendations flow from this central theme, focusing upon the importance of the Town determining the manner in which it will be structured and operated. Absent this core, guiding document, the town functions under an assortment of general state laws, special acts and local bylaws. Operationally, these laws are often vague, sometimes contradictory, and fail to describe a complete and methodical statement of the Town's organizational structure and the relationships between its various parts. In adopting a Home Rule Charter Westminster will join over 160 of the 351 communities of Massachusetts that have established home rule through a Special Act Charter or a Home Rule Charter.

Recommendation #1 – Method of making changes to the form of government

Utilize a Special Act to adopt a Home Rule Charter for the Town of Westminster:

- Maximizes public participation – the Charter will require approval of the Open Town Meeting, and after approval by the State Legislature, it will require ballot approval of Westminster voters. Other options could be accomplished by simple vote of the Board of Selectmen, or of Town Meeting, and do not require approval by the voters.
- The Special Act process would utilize the extensive work of the Town Government Study Committee, rather than starting the process over and electing a Charter Commission as provided in MGL, Chapter 43B.
- The process gives some permanence to the governmental structure while allowing modifications to be made in a proscribed manner. The alternative is the utilization of by-law provisions, which can be modified frequently and repeatedly thereby reducing organizational and operational stability.

Recommendation #2 – Legislative Body: Retention of Open Town Meeting

Retain Open Town Meeting and establish standing Spring and Fall sessions with dates established by By-law. The addition of a regular Fall Town Meeting provides some certainty to an already near-certain occurrence, thereby providing improved opportunities for scheduling for local officials and the voters that attend Town Meeting.

- Retain Advisory Board (as opposed to changing to a Finance Committee) – 5 members – and use language from existing by-law to detail authority of the Advisory Board in the Charter.
- No Quorum requirement, unless provided in By-Laws
- Additional Special Town Meetings as Needed

Recommendation #3 – Determination of specific multiple-member bodies and officials to be elected or appointed

Elected bodies and officials should be limited to those that function to drive policy decisions for the Town based upon value judgments that reflect the will of the voters. Technical and administrative functions should be appointed based upon merit, fitness and established expertise. Accordingly, elected multiple-member bodies and officials would be reduced to the following:

- Board of Selectmen
 - Assumes Duties of elected Cemetery Commission
- Regional School Committee
- Town Moderator
- Library Trustees – reduced to five members

Recommendation #4 – Establishment of Town Manager as Chief Operating Officer

A central theme in discussions with staff and local officials was the need for a single voice and authority, to be empowered to operate the local government on a day-to-day basis and held accountable in this charge. In conjunction with these sentiments was the identification of the importance of expertise related to the operation of the Town government particularly in areas of finance, human resources, procurement and contract administration, collective bargaining, municipal issues and general operational management skills related to a municipal organization. Accordingly, the TGSC proposes the creation of a Chief Operating Officer with appropriate levels of authority and accountability to be known as the Town Manager. The Charter would establish:

- Qualifications for appointment
- Conditions of Appointment/Removal
- Circumstances related to Temporary Absences
- Selectmen may appoint screening committee to assist in the selection
- Town Manager Authority and Responsibilities:
 - Operational Responsibility/Direct and supervise all administration
 - Keeping the Selectmen fully informed of operational needs and issues
 - Financial and Administrative Recordkeeping
 - Management of all Town facilities and maintenance of Town inventory
 - Power of investigation
 - Procurement, which may be delegated, and By-laws established regarding the necessity of certain Selectmen approvals
 - Appointment of Department Heads and certain multiple-member bodies
 - Personnel Administration including collective bargaining
 - Budget and Financial Management
 - Powers of Re-organization, subject to Selectmen approval
 - Participates in Strategic Planning with Board of Selectmen

Recommendation #5 – Previously elected multiple-member bodies and officials to become appointed by the Town Manager with approval of the Board of Selectmen

The corollary of the recommendation to retain the election of policy-making officials is the recommendation to convert administrative, technical and expertise based officials to an appointment-based selection process, where qualifications and expertise are used to determine selection, or in cases where responsibilities are ministerial as opposed to policy-making. Accordingly, the following positions are converted to appointment, with such selection made by the Town Manager, subject to Board of Selectmen approval, unless otherwise noted:

- Board of Assessors
- Board of Health
- Planning Board
- Housing Authority
- Town Clerk - **Selectmen's approval not required**
- Constable - **Selectmen's approval not required**
- Hager Park Commission-duties assigned to a newly established Recreation Committee

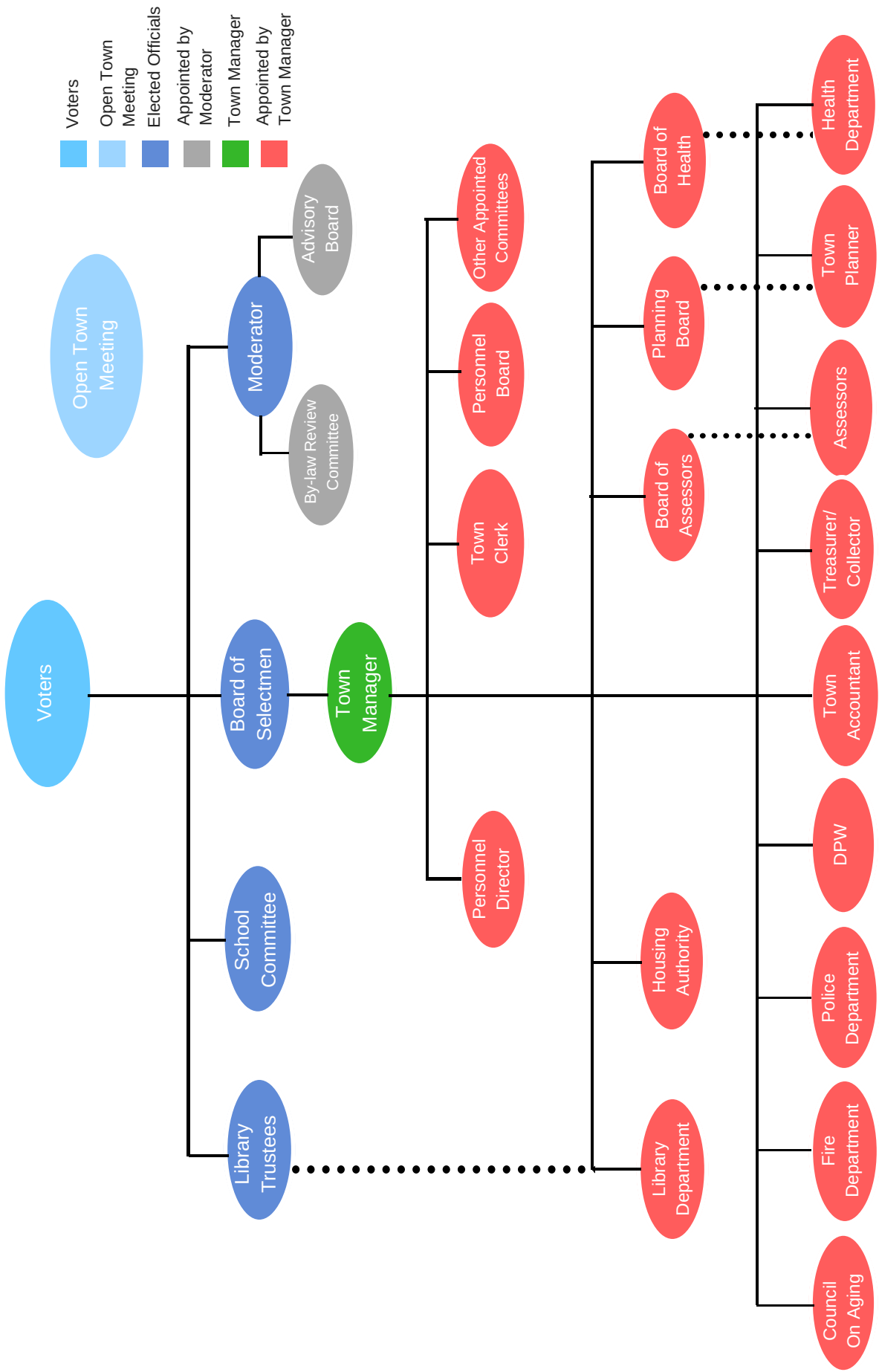
Recommendation #6 – Consolidation of some Boards, and assignment of operations to consolidated departments

The Town has a myriad of Boards and Committees that fragment operation and impede strategic decision-making and operational efficiencies. Accordingly, the TGSC has determined that a streamlined organizational structure, shown in *Figure 2*, will produce positive effects for the operation of the Town in addressing issues and opportunities, as well as providing openings for increased efficiencies in the delivery of services and management of Town infrastructure. Accordingly, the following Board/Committee consolidations are recommended:

- Board of Selectmen to also serve as Liquor Commission, which is the most common structure within Massachusetts municipalities.
- Board of Selectmen assume the responsibilities of the Public Works Commission and the Cemetery Commission which are to be eliminated; and the Board of Selectmen assume the statutory responsibilities of Water Commission, Sewer Commission, Road Commission, Parks Commission, and Cemetery Commission for purposes of policy-making and setting of fees, not for purposes of administration.
- Create Recreation Committee by Bylaw and incorporate the duties of the Hager Park Commission, and Crocker Pond Committee into their responsibilities and eliminate the separate commission and committee.
- With Board of Selectmen assuming responsibilities of Parks Commission and Cemetery Commission, operational responsibilities for park and cemetery facilities are shifted into the responsibility of the existing Department of Public Works.

Figure 2

Town of Westminster Proposed Organizational Chart



Recommendation #7 – Appointment of Staff and Board /Committee Members

A key function in any organization is staffing. In a municipal organization “staffing” refers to the selection of managers to lead departments, the selection of individuals to work within those departments, and given the utilization of citizen volunteers to work on various boards and committees, the selection of members to these multi-member bodies. The TGSC devoted a considerable amount of time to considering different staffing concepts, placing an emphasis on ensuring installment of the most appropriate and qualified individuals while retaining appropriate checks and balances. Care was also taken to align staffing responsibility with the official most impacted by performance outcomes according to the organizational structure. Based upon these factors, the TGSC proposes the following:

- Advisory Board reduced to five members, and continue to be appointed by Moderator.
- By-Law Review Committee, when deemed necessary, will continue to be appointed by Moderator.
- Other multi-member bodies appointed by the Town Manager with Board of Selectmen approval unless otherwise provided by Charter.
- Department Heads appointed by Town Manager.
 - Police Chief, Fire Chief, DPW Director, Treasurer/Collector and Town Accountant – Town Manager appointment, with Board of Selectmen power to veto within 14 days.
 - Consultation with boards as applicable in Departments in which there is an elected or appointed Board.
- Departmental Staff
 - Appointment by Department Head, with Town Manager approval.

Recommendation #8 – Human Resources

The greatest asset, and often the largest cost center, of an organization is its human resources which serves as the means by which the organizational mission is executed. Accordingly, an organization seeking effectiveness must be able to recruit, develop, retain, and utilize its employees in the most successful manner. Further, uniformity in the implementation of personnel practices is essential for guaranteeing fair treatment of all employees, and consistency for ensuring proper employee morale. The Town Manager, in the capacity of Chief Operating Officer, should be the lead official in the management of human resources as a reflection of administrative authority within the organization. The TGSC proposes the following:

- Administration of the Personnel System by Town Manager with HR Administrator
 - Collective bargaining by Town Manager, subject to Selectmen approval
- Board of Selectmen, with consultation of the Personnel Board, for approval of:
 - Personnel Regulations
 - Classification and Compensation plans
- Retain five member Personnel Board in an advisory role to Selectmen and Town Manager. Members appointed by the Town Manager with Selectmen approval.

Recommendation #9 – Financial Management Issues – Budget, Capital, and Other Finance Provisions

Essential to any municipal organization is proper financial management practices. This includes proper annual budgeting, multi-year financial projections, planning for capital investments, formal financial policies which govern overall fiscal operations, appropriate internal controls, and adequate financial record keeping. The TGSC has included financial management within its review of Town operations, and recommends including relevant provisions within a Charter including the following:

- Operating Budget
 - Town Manager sets budget guidelines with approval of Board of Selectmen and Advisory Board
 - Town Manager prepares annual operating budget as complete fiscal plan in form determined by the Town Manager
 - Advisory Board reviews and makes recommendation to Town Meeting
 - Town Manager Budget presented to Town Meeting
- Capital Plan and Capital Budget
 - Town Manager prepares five-year capital plan and annual capital budget article(s) in consultation with Capital Planning Committee, which consists of membership as currently provided in Town By-law.
 - Advisory Board reviews and recommends capital budget article(s)
- Other Financial Management Provisions
 - Five Year revenue and expense forecast by Town Manager
 - Accounts Payable warrants approved by Town Manager
 - Management of Funds by Treasurer
 - Annual Audit required – Board of Selectmen selects the audit firm and receives a presentation of the Audit Report in open session, and with invitation provided to the Advisory Board

Recommendation #10 – Reorganization

The Town Charter is intended to establish a basic structure of the Town government and assign major functions regarding Town operations. However, it is also anticipated that situations and needs may arise in the future, which do not rise to the level of requiring major modifications. As such, the Charter is intended to allow for some level of flexibility in order to ensure that it can nimbly respond to changing needs and opportunities through minor reorganizations of department responsibilities, reporting mechanisms, staffing, etc. The TGSC recommends that such operational and organizational decisions rest with the Town Manager through reorganizations, subject to Board of Selectmen approval. Organizational restructuring, as approved, may include:

- Transfer of funds
- Transfer, abolish, establish, or re-assign departments
- Transfer, abolish, establish, or re-assign Boards except those with statutory authority

Recommendation #11– Strategic Planning

The restructuring of the Town organization strengthens the day-to-day administration by vesting such responsibility within the position of the Town Manager. The changes in organizational structure and processes change the role of the Board of Selectmen to perform less routine administrative tasks, and have more of a strategic purpose, as well as having an oversight function in hiring the right Town Manager, setting goals for that individual, and then evaluating the performance of the individual in reaching goals and managing day-to-day operations. The TGSC review of the existing Westminster government identified the lack of strategic direction as being a deficiency that needs to be addressed. Accordingly, the TGSC recommends that the Charter contain language that responds to this issue:

- Strategic planning is a joint responsibility of the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager whereby Selectmen approve and establish multi-year and annual goals and objectives
- Conducted every three years
- Town Manager Annual Goals tied to Plan

Recommendation #12 – Other Provisions

In establishing a Home Rule Charter there are frequently stand-alone items and transitional provisions that are included. Currently, the TGSC has identified three such provisions, which include

- Recall Provision that reiterates current Special Act Language
- Charter would authorize the Board of Selectmen through adoption of a policy to establish standing or *ad hoc* committees, detailing the authority and responsibilities, number of members, and sun-setting of the committee
- Charter Review language to ensure that the document remains relevant and up-to-date addressing operational and organizational needs that may arise through a formal review, though amendment can occur pursuant to statute at any point in time.
 - First review after five years, thereafter every ten years, with first review to include consideration of size of Board of Selectmen
 - *Ad hoc* Charter Review Committee appointed by BOS

Recommendation #13 – Additional issues to be addressed by means other than a Charter

In addition to issues that would be addressed through a Home Rule Charter, the TGSC also reviewed other issues with recommendations for subsequent action including:

- Stipends for elected officials may be addressed through a bylaw – specifically not permitted, but reimbursement of expenses is permitted, subject to funding.
- A Land Use Department is a positive idea and should be considered by the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen as part of the initial organizational structure.
- Consideration should be given to joining the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health for cost savings and improved service delivery.
- Consideration should be given to creating an Assistant Director in the DPW – for workload and succession planning purposes.
- Consideration should be given to utilizing a “lottery” for the order in which warrant articles are considered to reduce any potential for the “packing” of Town Meeting by single issue constituencies.

V. NEXT STEPS

With the presentation of the recommendations set forth in this report, the Town Government Study Committee has completed most of the charges that it received in its establishment. The next steps in the process are a review of the findings and recommendations by the Board of Selectmen and a decision by the Board to proceed with the simultaneous drafting of proposed Special Act to create a Home Rule Charter for the Town of Westminster, subject to any proposed modifications, and the presentation of the Report's recommendations to the community and its various stakeholders.

The Town Government Study Committee unanimously and wholeheartedly recommends approval to proceed with the drafting of such a Charter for the Town and is anxious to engage with members of the community in reviewing the report and its recommendations and identifying the need for any modifications to the proposed organizational and operational changes outlined within the Report and a proposed Charter.

With an affirmative decision by the Selectmen the TGSC will work with Community Paradigm Associates to develop the specific language of a Westminster Charter, in conjunction with Town Counsel. In addition, the TGSC and Community Paradigm Associates will consult with the Town's State legislative delegation to review the specific language of the Home Rule Charter and review the schedule for the process of approval.

It is anticipated that the process of writing the Charter, consulting with the community and stakeholders, and meetings and discussion with Town Counsel and the legislative delegation would occur during the summer of 2018. At the completion of this work it is expected that a meeting with the Board of Selectmen would occur in September of 2018 for a formal vote to place the drafted Home Rule Charter on a Town Meeting warrant to be held in October of 2018.

With the approval of Town Meeting the Charter would be submitted to the state legislature as a Special Act on behalf of the Town of Westminster with legislative action expected to be completed in late 2018. The final step of the approval process would be a ballot vote by the voters at the Annual Election in April 2019 to adopt the Home Rule Charter as the legally guiding document of the Town of Westminster, at which time the provisions of the Charter would be implemented.

EXHIBITS

EXHIBIT A

The following are excerpts from the 2014 Westminster Master Plan that apply to the work of the Town Government Study Committee.

TOWN GOVERNMENT ISSUES IN WESTMINSTER

Westminster's municipal government has a number of issues to address over the next decade including: how much it spends on municipal government; how it plans for new facilities, buildings and infrastructure; its overreliance on residential property taxes to cover the cost of municipal services; its overreliance on a dedicated group of volunteers to run town government whose local knowledge will be hard to replace; management issues such as inter-departmental coordination and communication.

- Administrative capacity and ability to effectively manage Town government.
- Communication and coordination between municipal departments.
- The cost of funding town government and its impact on the local property tax rate.
- Lack of a prioritized roadway improvement plan.
- Sewer system's capacity issue has the potential to hinder future economic development.
- The need to find a new solid waste disposal site once the landfill closes.
- Maintaining continuity on local boards/commissions/committees that rely heavily on dedicated volunteers and longtime public officials whose local knowledge will be hard to replace.

MAJOR ISSUES FACING WESTMINSTER: DISCUSSION

1. Administrative Capacity: Increasing legal and regulatory demands exceed the capacity of the Selectmen to manage all departments, even with the assistance of a full-time Town Administrator. With every passing year, the Town and its various departments have more and more administrative work. State and Federal reporting requirements have increased substantially over the past 25 years and show no signs of slowing down. As municipal departments and their budgets continue to grow, the Board of Selectmen often struggle with keeping the train on the track, so to speak. The result has been that many projects get delayed, extended, or forgotten altogether. During the past decade, the Town has moved from having a Town Coordinator to a Town Administrator because of the increase in administrative demands, as was pointed out in a 2009 Financial Management Review of the Town, prepared by the MA Department of Revenue. It is quite likely that the Town may reach a point within the next decade where a Town Manager is needed with increased powers and duties to ensure the smooth functioning of Town government. There are two large departments that do not fall under the Selectmen's management umbrella. The Fire Department is managed by a "strong" Fire Chief under MGL Chapter 48, Section 42, which means that the Chief has absolute authority regarding the Department's administration. Also the Department of Public Works does not report to the Board, but rather the DPW Commissioners. There are also two elected positions (Town Clerk and Treasurer-Collector) that many Massachusetts communities have chosen to appoint as regular municipal staff. At some point in the future, the Town may want to consider establishing a

Town Government Study Committee or Charter Study Committee to take a close look at how Town government is organized to ensure a coordinated management system for the delivery of municipal services. It should be noted that Westminister is one of very few communities in Massachusetts to not have a Town Charter.

2. **Communication and Coordination:** The Town's attempts to improve communication and coordination have improved significantly over the past decade, but there are still opportunities for improvement. Town departments rarely meet to discuss their current projects or coordinate activities, and this has led to a situation where many departments don't know what projects the other departments are working on, thus precluding any meaningful input or assistance from other departments. Many communities of Westminister's size have monthly departmental coordination meetings. Also, many of the Town's boards, commissions, and committees do a poor job of distributing their agendas and meeting minutes, leading to a situation where some boards don't know when other boards are dealing with subject matter of relevance, thus hindering inter-municipal communication and coordination. It is hoped that the Town's new website will help improve communication between municipal departments and citizen committees, but especially between Town officials and citizens.
3. **Municipal Spending and Tax Rate Implications:** It has been previously documented that Westminister has been spending more to operate its municipal government than its immediate neighbors. While all of the spending has been approved at annual Town Meetings, it has had implications for the local tax rate. The cost to operate the Town's municipal government has grown faster than its neighbors during the past twelve years and this has resulted in the Town's average single family home tax bill growing at a faster rate than those of Westminister's neighbors. With the Town's economic development tax base growing at a slower pace than the residential tax base, Westminister homeowners are covering an ever-increasing share of the expense to operate Town government. This trend will likely intensify when one considers that there are substantial infrastructure needs to be addressed in the next decade (aging road system, improvements to the water and sewer systems) and the as yet uncalculated cost of waste disposal once the Landfill is closed (not to mention the loss in tax revenue, which currently averages over a million dollars per year). The only way to arrest this trend is for the Town to carefully monitor its budget on an annual basis and create more opportunities for economic development.
4. **Lack of a Prioritized Long-Range Roadway Improvement Plan:** The Department of Public Work's Highway Division currently does not have a prioritized list of roadway improvements or any long-range plan for roadway improvements. Rather, the Division tackles roadway repairs on an as-needed basis. The current funding level of \$500,000 is the base minimum that the Department believes is acceptable for maintaining the current road system, but there is a need to increase this amount to stay ahead of the Town's aging roadway network. As mentioned previously, unless the Highway Division starts using a portion of its annual Chapter 90 funding allotment for road maintenance, the Town would need to spend approximately \$750,000 per year for the next ten years in order to bring its road network up to what is considered "fair" condition. The Division's Pavement Management System (PMS) should serve as the foundation for a prioritized long-range roadway improvement plan.

5. Sewer System as Impediment to Economic Growth: Without addressing its sewer capacity issue, the Town will not be able to accommodate new businesses and industries wishing to locate in Westminster. The Department of Public Works is currently evaluating two options for addressing the Town's sewer capacity issue:
 - a. In-Line Sewer Storage Station: DPW's primary option for addressing the sewer capacity issue is to construct an in-line sewer storage station in the vicinity of the Whitman River. The design for the station is complete and, once built, it will be able to accommodate peak flows and provide the ability for the Town to add flows from the Phase II, V sewer expansion areas and I outlined in the Town's Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan. This design would prevent the Town from having to significantly alter the existing Whitman River Pump Station, force main and downstream piping systems. The project replaces an existing 18-inch influent gravity sewer upstream at the existing Whitman River Pump Station with an 850-foot long in-line "storage tank", which is basically a box culvert with a 4x8 internal dimension. The cost of this option is currently estimated at approximately 2.25 million dollars.
 - b. Three-Barrel Siphon: A second option would be to eliminate the Whitman River pump station and replace with a three-barrel siphon under the Whitman River, as well as replace and increase the diameter of the existing gravity sewer to Fitchburg. At a cost of approximately five million dollars, this option would enable the Town to initiate all phases of the sewer expansion plan the outlined in the Town's Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan, and provide system capacity that could accommodate up to 50 years of new development.
6. The Need to Find a New Solid Waste Disposal Site: At present, the landfill operated by Waste Management is slated to close in 2026, although the implementation of new technologies may extend the landfill's lifespan to beyond this date. Once the landfill closes, it will continue to serve as a transfer station for solid waste. However, where the Town's solid waste will go to from here and what it will cost has yet to be determined. It is recommended that within five years of receiving a definitive closing date for the landfill, the Town should start investigating its solid waste disposal options, the costs involved, and their impact on Town Finances.
7. Volunteer Committees and Continuity: As with many small communities, Westminster makes great use of citizen volunteers to staff its various boards, commissions, and committees. In fact, there are many citizen volunteers that serve on multiple committees. Many committee members are longtime residents and longtime committee members, possessing a great deal of local knowledge and institutional history. However, as the number of committees continues to expand, the Town will have a harder time finding enough volunteers to staff them. Moreover, as longtime volunteers leave their committees, much of their knowledge and institutional history will be lost. Also, new committee members will need a considerable amount of time to get up to speed with their committee's activities and duties.

TOWN GOVERNMENT GOAL:

Westminster desires to have a professionally managed town government that is efficient, fiscally sound, responsive, forward thinking and accessible to all, where decision making is fair and transparent, the quality of life for its citizens is enhanced and the character of the community is respected.

TOWN GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES:

- The Town must commit itself to following through on the recommendations contained herein and strive to maintain the Master Plan as a living document.
- Utilize an improved and transparent capital planning process in combination with a robust municipal economic development strategy to stabilize the amount of taxes paid by Westminster property owners.
- Increase inter-department communication and coordination by having department heads work collaboratively to ensure the overall excellence of municipal services and their delivery. Such efforts should include, but not be limited to collaborative grant writing, the sharing of vehicles, office space and staff, calendar planning and coordination, and setting capital planning priorities.
- Provide necessary police, fire and public services to ensure proper public safety.
- Provide a quality well-rounded education that promotes enthusiasm for learning and knowledge for all Westminster students.
- All newly appointed board and committee members should receive a Town-sponsored orientation session and take advantage of education and training opportunities that will help the new board/committee members become effective community volunteers.
- Foster an improved relationship with our legislators, neighbors, and regional and state partners to make them aware of Westminster's interests and forge a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Encourage our citizens and municipal officials to work towards finding common ground on the issues we will face in the future and create an environment where all voices are heard and respected.
- Support those community events that bring our citizens together.

EXHIBIT B

COMPARABLE COMMUNITIES

	Ashburnham		Ayer		Groton		Harvard		Hubbardston		Lancaster		Lunenburg		Pepperell		Rutland		Shirley		Sterling		West Boylston		WESTMINSTER		Summary (not inc. Westminster)	
	Population	6,081	7,427	10,646	6,520	4,382	8,055	10,086	11,497	7,973	7,211	7,808	7,669	7,277	7,946													
Method of Establishment																												
Selectmen's Policy			.				X			X			X								X				X			3
Acceptance by Town Meeting																				X						X		0
Bylaw																											1	
Special Act	X	X																					X				3	
Home Rule Charter			X	X	X	X		X	X																		5	
Legislative Body																												
Open Town Meeting - no quorum	X			X		.	X	.	X										X						X		5	
Open Town Meeting with quorum		50	2% for STM	150	50			100	75	10											50		100				7	
Representative Town Meeting																											0	
Town Council																											0	
Advisory to Town Meeting																												
Advisory Board	X																								X		1	
Finance Committee		X	X	X	X	X	ELECTED	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	x	X	X				11	
Bylaw Committee																				X							1	
Who is CEO																												
Board of Selectmen - # of members	3	3	5	5	5	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	5	5	3	63-member, 65-member		0	
Town Administrator/Town Manager																												
Town Clerk																												
Elected			X	X	X			X				X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X			5	
Appointed						.																						
By Board of Selectmen		X					X					X									X						3	
By COO (Town Administrator/Town Manager)	X					X				X				X								X					4	
Elected/Appointed Boards*																												
Many Electd Boards		11	9		8		9	6													6			8			6	
Several Elected Boards	3								5						4				5								5	
Elected BoS and SC and 2 or fewer Elected Boards				2																							1	
Elected BoS and SC - all other Boards are appointed																											0	
Elected Town Council and SC - all other officials and Boards are appointed by COO																											0	

EXHIBIT B

COMPARABLE COMMUNITIES

		Ashburnham		Groton		Harvard		Hubbardston		Lancaster		Lunenburg		Pepperell		Rutland		Shirley		Sterling		West Boylston		WESTMINSTER		Summary (not Westminster)	
Population	6,081	7,427	10,646	6,520	4,382	8,055	10,086	11,497	7,973	7,211	7,808	7,669	7,277	7,946													
Staff Appointment and Personnel Management																											
Some DH/Staff appointed/managed by Elected Board - remainder by BoS		X									X							X					X			3	
DH/Staff appointed by BoS, managed by COO																											
DH/Staff appointed/managed by COO subject to BoS approval/non-approval of appointment				X																						1	
DH/Staff appointed/managed by COO, some DH (P&F Chiefs) subject to BoS approval	X												X	X						X		X				5	
All DH/Staff appointed/managed by COO			X		X																					3	
Budget and Finance																											
Budget/CIP developed by Advisory/FINCOM; BoS sign warrant		.								X														X		1	
Budget/CIP developed by BoS				X											X				warrant signed by BoS	warrant signed by BoS			warrant signed by BoS			2	
Budget/CIP developed COO; Warrant signed by COO	X	X							X																	9	
Reorganization																											
Town Meeting approves all changes to organization as a bylaw		.									X						X		X	X				X		4	
COO proposes re-org subject to BoS hearing and then approval by Town Meeting		X							X			X														4	
COO proposes re-org subject to BoS hearing and approval	X																					X				4	
COO proposes and implements re-org																										0	
Stipends All Boards get reimbursed for Expenses																											
The following Boards get stipends*																											
Selectmen	\$1,000	\$2,280	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100	\$1,000	\$100	\$1,500	\$1	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	.	
School Committee	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0		
Planning Board	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$500	\$0	\$100	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0		
Assessors	\$0	\$2,254	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$500	\$100	\$1,500	\$100	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0		
Board of Public Works	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$600	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0		
Health	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$250	\$0	\$103	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0		
Moderator	\$100	\$510	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$75	\$0	\$500	\$1	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0		

* No towns have expressed prohibitions on stipends

Westminster



Town Government Study Committee Status Report

September 21, 2017

Community Paradigm Associates

I. Introduction and Overview

Community Paradigm Associates, LLC was retained by Westminster to undertake the Town Government Study Committee project, with a scope of services included in Appendix A to this report. The initial phases of the project were conducted between August 2017 and the current date.

To understand the dynamics of the Town of Westminster and its government, a representative of Community Paradigm Associates LLC (CPA) conducted the following action items:

- Reviewed documents and materials regarding the existing structure and operational processes including organization chart, bylaws, special acts, policy books, notable legal opinions, recent annual reports, annual budgets, audits, etc. (a listing is included in Appendix C);
- Interviewed the Town Administrator and all members of the Board of Selectmen as Town executives to discuss Town structure and operations, and review project goals;
- Interviewed key department heads, that made themselves available, to review their operations and issues regarding the larger Town operations, positive and negative (a list of interviewed Department Heads is included in Appendix B);
- Met with key elected bodies, or representatives of such bodies, (a list is included in Appendix B) to gain perspective on their consideration of Town issues and operational strengths and weaknesses;
- Met with representatives of various appointed boards and committees (a list is included in Appendix B) to discuss Town functions and opportunities for improvement;
- Reviewed reports prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) regarding Town operations.

Next steps, under the scope of this project, are proposed to include:

- Comparing Westminster to other similar-sized communities for structure and operational processes. (A list of the proposed comparable communities is included in Appendix E);
- Developing a community outreach program;
- Meeting with the Board of Selectmen to discuss findings and recommendations;
- Developing a final report with findings and recommendations, and proposed next steps.

Following these steps, Community Paradigm Associates, LLC is prepared to work with the Town Government Study Committee and the Board of Selectmen to develop a proposed Special Act or Home Rule Charter, if requested to do so.

II. General Observations

In undertaking this project, we focused upon a central question of whether the Town of Westminster's local government, as currently structured, can most effectively work on behalf of its residents and taxpayers. Clearly, services are being delivered and currently, the Town's finances appear to be stable, but the core question that needs to be addressed is whether the existing structure and processes of the local government meet the standard of being an effective and efficient organization.

There are many opinions on ways to determine whether a municipal organization is effective. Certainly, the core responsibility of producing outcomes related to the Town's mission is a simple means of determining whether the organization is achieving its most basic function. However, an effective organization must be able to determine the parameters of its mission, the definition of specific outcomes, the efficiency of achieving outcomes, and organizational flexibility to respond to changing internal and external conditions. To assess this broader and more complete concept of effectiveness we focus upon 10 questions:

1. Does the organization have clear lines of accountability such that it can appropriately manage the delivery the essential services for which it exists?
2. Is the organization structured to facilitate communication between its decision-makers and service-delivery personnel?
3. Is the organization prepared to meet future opportunities or challenges, and does the organization have the structure in which strategic planning for some future state exists and occurs?
4. Is the organizational structure designed for maximum efficiency of operations with quick and flexible response, without duplication of effort, or without less than optimum use of resources?
5. Does the organization have the structure and processes to properly manage and develop its human resources?
6. Is the organization prepared for the succession of its human resources to ensure continuity of high performance?
7. Is there an appropriate level of leadership within the organization to establish consistent values, vision, direction, performance expectations, service-delivery focus, and a management system that produces results?
8. Is the structure, and its operational processes, easily understood by its elected and appointed volunteers, staff, residents, and customers?
9. Is there confidence and trust in the organization and its processes from stakeholders?
10. Does the organization continually review its processes for improvement, through data and information that measures performance and goal attainment?

Every municipality can, and should, consider these questions to determine whether their governmental organization meets these standards of maximum effectiveness, and where improvements can be made.

The following summarizes the information gleaned from the interviews of 25 Westminster officials as detailed in Appendix B, as well as the review of the various documents including those detailed in Appendix C. Generally, comments listed below were provided by more than one source, and this is therefore more of a consensus listing than a complete list of every comment made by each of the participants. This list is organized as a SWOT listing – i.e. organized as a listing of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The following are the summarized consensus comments.

STRENGTHS

Westminster has a strong sense of community with a small-town feel that residents value. There are good schools and some very strong departments – Police, Fire, Library. For the most part, the Town is well run despite its current structure.

Westminster has good dedicated elected and appointed board members. Some volunteer boards have a good variety of expertise and experience. The Town often gets board members with experience on other Town boards. Generally, board members have the interest of the community at heart, but in the few instances of people serving because of special interests, these people do not last long and are often not re-elected.

The Advisory Board and Board of Selectmen do a good job organizing and keeping things on track. The Town seems to be on a good track financially. It has excellent reserves, a good bond rating, and has six Stabilization Funds. Warrant articles are well vetted by Advisory. Town Meeting attendance can be around 200 people. Quarterly reports to the Board of Selectmen are the major form of communication and are helpful but difficult to read – there is no commonality as to format and type of information conveyed.

Most employees and department heads are dedicated to the community, and many are local to Westminster. The hiring process has improved for major positions within the past dozen years.

The Master Plan process was very effective – got good community participation, and was well supported by the community. It succeeded in getting many parts of Town government working together.

WEAKNESSES

The Town is parochial. Some boards and staff don't want to consider new ways to do things – “We never did it that way before.” People are often afraid to encourage innovation.

There are too many bosses, yet nobody is really in charge. Roles of staff and boards are not clearly defined. Departments work in silos – especially those with an elected board. This results in wasted efforts. There are mixed messages from the Town, and there are often conflicting messages and information. It makes the Town appear as though it doesn't know what it is doing.

Some boards and staff tend to dig in their heels. Sometimes board members are not willing to work out solutions to issues.

Internal and external communications are poor. There is sometimes dysfunction and even sabotage. It is difficult for residents to understand how to request things (road improvement, for example) and difficult to understand how government in Westminster is structured. Residents don't feel that Town Hall listens to people or respects their opinions.

The Town Administrator is seen to be hard working, but not able to be effective at communication – the position is sometimes seen as a communication bottleneck. There are few if any department head meetings any more. The Town Administrator has a lot of responsibility but no authority. Some staff members are overwhelmed sometimes due to cuts made during weaker budget situations, and

staff has not been restored to needed levels – for example, DPW and Town Administrator. Some staff members do not have the skills required for the job they are doing.

There is a shortage of volunteers. Boards often need to recruit members to run for vacancies on boards. Volunteers (particularly elected) are seen as “old boys network.” Newer residents and younger people are not volunteering to serve their local government as volunteers. There are too many boards, given constraints on the available volunteer talent pool. Many of the elected boards are a holdover from times when there was little or no staff and the boards did the actual work, rather than providing policy direction.

Town Meetings are held two times per year and it is often difficult to fit the flow of Town business into that kind of schedule. There is poor attendance at Town Meeting. There is no quorum requirement.

The hiring process is convoluted and cumbersome – time consuming. Some employees are promoted to management positions with no management experience or training with a resulting lack of knowledge about policies and how to administer them.

The Town does not have the universal capability to address complex issues like dealing with surplus property (Old Town Hall), or addressing its technology needs. There is no strategic planning, and the Town tends to rely on the recently completed Master Plan as its Strategic Plan. Even though the Town is financially strong, the recent audit indicates there are some improvements needed to existing procedures (tax title balances, department turnover, unrealized gains and losses, and payroll) and that the unfunded pension liability needs to be addressed – potentially through a stabilization fund, and there are other challenges ahead in addressing other GASB requirements.

Having an elected Town Clerk is problematic – there is a significant risk of getting the wrong person into the job and having very negative results for elections, vital statistics, etc.

The service by the DPW is not great if you don’t live in center of Town. There is a poor history of building construction. For example, the Library needed considerable re-doing and Town Hall costs were underestimated but the product was well done.

OPPORTUNITIES

It is important to get people on Boards with good/complementing skills. Some elected positions should be appointed – it would give the Town the opportunity to recruit and appoint people with needed qualifications, particularly for “technical” positions like Board of Health, Board of Assessors, Town Clerk. Does the Town need all the boards it has – could some be eliminated or consolidated?

Some boards delegate well to staff, and serve as policy-making bodies. Many others do not.

Many interviewees would welcome a Town Manager with improved centralized decision making. “The Town needs a decision maker who is recognized as such by the entire Town government and the community.” There is a need for a day-to-day manager who can address issues and problems as they come up, with the authority to lead the entire organization.

Some issues mobilize the community (sometimes in a positive way, sometimes in a negative way) such as the Master Plan, Rod and Gun Club, proposed ban on sale of tobacco products, and school issues. This demonstrates that the community is paying attention and can be mobilized.

There are significant opportunities for good financial planning and policy making. The Town has an improved Capital Planning process, planning proactively for the use of Landfill Host Community funds, and planning for the time when those funds will no longer be available

A five-member Board of Selectmen would allow the board to get more done, have members as liaison to more boards, and give opportunity for two members to talk without violating the Open Meeting Law. The Board of Selectmen is a sounding board and policy-making board (Board of Directors).

There is an opportunity to re-organize Town government to more effectively provide coordinated services. Some thoughts are: enlarge DPW to include Cemetery, Building Maintenance, Parks, and move all staff and resources from those functions to DPW; create a Land Use Department including planning, building, conservation (perhaps others such as health and historical); create a Finance Department to coordinate the activities of the Town Accountant, Assessors, and Treasurer/Collector.

THREATS

There is a significant difference of opinion among community leaders as to what the strengths and weaknesses of the community are. The community at large does not understand the workings of its Town government. There is a perception that the elected officials are part of an “old Boys” network, and that new people are not welcomed to be part of the system. Elections are generally uncontested. How do you get younger people involved in the community? It is hard to find people to be appointed or elected to boards, particularly if they work and have a difficult time balancing home, work, and volunteering for the Town. With so few volunteers, how do you prevent conflicts with people serving on more than one board, and staff serving as members of boards? For example, if the Town Clerk is to become appointed by the Board of Selectmen, the board or an individual member could be seen to be having influence over the Chief Election Official.

Taxes are high. The Town is residential and the community doesn’t seem to want business development. It is hard to provide funding for what the community wants from a residential tax base.

While the schools are an asset, the two communities in the regional school district are very different. This affects policy issues for the school, including funding – a recent Proposition 2½ override was passed in Westminster, but took two elections to pass in Ashburnham (and it passed then by less than 10 votes).

Town Meeting can be stacked for a particular issue – like the school budget.

There is a lack of succession planning, both among volunteers and staff.

III. Discussion of Alternative Models of Governance

Fortunately, in Massachusetts local communities have a great deal of flexibility in designing a system of local government that reflects the needs of that community. We have found that the following model is a good way to focus discussion on the alternative governmental structures that meet the needs of the Town. The following areas are key to determining whether a municipal organization can effectively address the 10 questions outlined earlier in this document.

Decision Points for Major Elements of Local Government

Method of establishing the form of government

Legislative Body

- Open or Representative Town Meeting / Town Council
- Quorum
- Number of required meetings per year

Chief Executive Official

- Board of Selectmen or Town Council / Town Manager
- Number of members
- Policy making / Administrative

Elected/Appointed Boards/Officials

- Which boards are elected
- Who appoints appointed boards
- Number of members of boards
- Elected/appointed Town Clerk

Administrative Functions

- Appointment of department heads
- Appointment of employees
- Personnel management
- Appointment of Boards/Committees/Commissions
- Development/Administration of budget
- Development/Administration of Capital Improvement Program
- Sign warrants for payment
- Procurement
- Authority to organize/re-organize

APPENDIX A

Scope of Services

A. Evaluate Existing Organizational Structure and Processes

1. **Background Document and Materials:** Assemble and review documents and materials regarding the existing structure of government and operational processes including bylaws, special acts, policy books, recent annual reports, recent annual budgets, and notable legal opinions.
2. **Initial Consultation with Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator and Town Government Study Committee:** Meet with the above entities individually and as a group to obtain perspective on current operations via recent experiences, issues and identified shortcomings.
3. **Elected Boards and Commissions:** Meet with representatives from the Town's elected Boards, Commissions, Committees and officers to receive input and information relative to their perspective on the operation of the Town.
4. **Appointed Boards and Commissions:** Meet with representatives from the Town's appointed Boards, Commissions, Committees and officers to receive input and information relative to their perspective on the operation of the Town.
5. **Department Heads:** Meet with Town department heads to receive input and information relative to their perspective on the operation of the Town.
6. **Community Input:** Hold one community input session to gain information and perspective regarding the operation of the Town government specifically related to experiences in addressing particular requests for services and more generally addressing public policy issues.
7. **Other Input:** Reserved to meet with individuals and organizations identified in #1-6 as key community leaders including civic organizations, business leaders, former government officials, media organizations, etc.

B. Analysis and Recommendations

1. **Preparation of Findings Report:** Review all information gathered during Task A and consolidate into a memorandum report with recommendations for the Board of Selectmen and Government Study Committee.
2. **Presentation of Findings:** Meet with the Board of Selectmen and Government Study Committee to present and discuss findings, recommendations and determine any needed follow-up prior to moving onto the next phase.

C. Develop and Draft Home Rule Charter

1. **Draft Charter Document:** Based upon findings identified in B1 and after discussion with the Selectmen and Government Study Committee in B2, prepare a Westminster Home Rule Charter to establish a locally controlled governmental organization and processes which include those provisions that are designed to improve the overall

efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of the local government, and enhance civic participation within the Town.

2. **Town Counsel:** Review draft Charter with Town Counsel to insure all appropriate clearances with State laws and any locally controlling provisions.
3. **Presentation of Charter to Selectmen and Government Study Committee:** Meet with the Board of Selectmen and Government Study Committee to review provisions of proposed charter and its consistency with initial findings. Also, included in this meeting is a review of an implementation plan for the Charter as described below in Task D.

D. Outline Process for Charter Adoption and Implementation

1. **Charter Adoption Process:** Develop a schedule/timetable outlining specific actions and steps needed to approve and adopt the charter by the Town.
2. **Charter Implementation:** Prepare a report outlining recommendations for the step-by-step implementation of the Charter upon its adoption.

APPENDIX B

The following 25 individuals were interviewed for approximately an hour each (with some extended into a second session),

- All three members of the Board of Selectmen
- Six of the eight members of the Town Government Study Committee (TGSC) (there is one vacancy on the committee)
- Seven non-Selectmen community volunteers including elected and appointed volunteers
 - Michael Popik - Board of Health
 - Scott Ryder - Public Works Commission
 - Vance Butterfield – Public Works Commission
 - Lorraine Emerson – Public Works Commission
 - Don Frigoletto - Board of Assessors
 - Jon Wyman - Planning Board (also TGSC)
 - John Cappellini - Personnel Board
 - John Bowen, Town Moderator
- 11 staff:
 - Town Administrator Karen Murphy
 - Town Accountant Julie Costello
 - Police Chief Sam Albert
 - Fire Chief Kevin Nivala
 - DPW Director Josh Hall
 - Town Clerk Ellen Sheehan
 - Personnel Director Julie Belliveau
 - Executive Assistant to BoS/TA Stephanie Lahtinen
 - Library Director Nick Langhart
 - Treasure/Collector Melody Smith
 - Town Planner Steve Wallace
 - Health Agent Elizabeth Swedberg

The purpose of selecting the 25 individuals was to talk with a broad cross section of community officials – elected and appointed volunteers, and staff. Everyone was very cooperative and engaged in this process, and people were very candid as to what they believed worked well in the community, and what improvements might be needed.

APPENDIX C

The following documents were provided by the Town at Community Paradigm Associates' request, and have been reviewed:

- Annual Report
- Organization Chart
- Background material from the website
- 2014 Westminster Master Plan (Chapter 04 "Town Government Chapter: Facilities and Services")
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Local Services August 2016 report "Town of Westminster Technology Review – A Community Compact Cabinet Initiative"
- Massachusetts Department of Revenue report "Town of Westminster Financial Management Review"
- RCA CPA Town of Westminster, Massachusetts Management Letter, Year ended June 2016
- Citizen Survey for Westminster Community Master Plan
- Quarterly Report – April-June 2017
- Update on the Town Planner work program, 6-30-17 and 7-21-17
- Westminster Annual Report 2000 and 2002 – Town Government Study Committee
- Roster of Elected and Appointed Officials
- List of Special Acts and Resolves

APPENDIX D

Detailed non-duplicated comments received from Westminster elected and appointed officials and department heads:

STRENGTHS

- Strong sense of community
- Good community – easy to find friends
- Good schools
- For the most part the Town is fairly well run, in spite of the way it is structured
- Some very strong departments – Police, Fire, Library
- Police are responsive – do a good job with communications
- Fire Department is dedicated and responsive
- Town Hall – “no complaints”
- “Library is excellent”
- Good dedicated elected and appointed board members for the most part
- Selectmen get along and are effective
- The Selectmen reach consensus
- Board members and staff are respectful of each other, and listen to all sides
- The Board of Selectmen are deliberative and don’t rush into decisions
- If there is not a good member of an elected Board, that member does not last
- Many of the employees and department heads are local to Westminster
- Master Plan process was very effective – got good community participation, and well supported by the community
- Advisory Board and Board of Selectmen do a good job organizing and keeping things on track
- Town seems to be on a good track financially
- Elected and appointed boards have a good working relationship with the Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator, but understand that this is tenuous
- Having a member of the Board of Selectmen as liaison to Boards and Committees, and attending their meetings is good
- Some volunteer boards have a great variety of expertise and experience
- Often get board members with experience on other Town boards
- If someone wants to volunteer for their local government, there is almost always an opportunity
- Roles of staff and their boards are clear
- Generally, board members have the interest of the community at heart, but there are some instances of people serving because of special interests. People do not last long and are often not re-elected
- The Master Plan survey got a lot of returns – people were engaged in the process and in giving input
- The Master Plan process was good, gave good direction to the community, and got a lot of parts of Town government working well together

- There is a strong definition of staff and volunteer roles
- Quarterly reports are helpful but difficult to read – there is no commonality as to format and type of information conveyed
- Attendance at Town Meeting is often 200 people
- Warrant articles are well vetted by Advisory and Town Meeting attendees respect that
- Capital Planning is well done
- Board members work well together
- Volunteers have a good variety of qualifications
- The hiring process is very much improved for key positions since the hiring of the current Police Chief
- The Town is financially strong – has six stabilization funds and has begun to fund OPEB

WEAKNESSES

- People (B/C/C members) tend to dig in their heels
- Don't want to consider new ways to do things, i.e.: "We never did it that way before"
- The Town is parochial
- People are afraid to encourage innovation
- Sometimes B/C/C members are not willing to work out solutions to issues
- There is a shortage of volunteers
- Often need to recruit members to run for vacancies on boards
- Volunteers (particularly elected) seen as "old boys network"
- Many of the elected boards are a holdover from times when there was little or no staff and the boards did the actual work, rather than providing policy
- Some staff is overwhelmed sometimes due to cuts made during weaker budget situations, and staff has not been restored to needed levels, for example, DPW, Town Administrator
- Town Meetings are held twice a year and it is often difficult to fit the flow of Town business into that kind of schedule
- Roles of staff and boards are not clear
- The Town Administrator has a lot of responsibility but no authority
- The duties of the Town Administrator are not well defined
- The community does not do strategic planning and goal setting
- The Board of Selectmen could and should delegate more
- Communications are poor throughout the organization
- Departments do not feel that the Town Administrator has authority or responsibility
- The Town Administrator position is viewed as a messenger – the Town Administrator position is viewed by some as a bottleneck to communications
- There seems to be an adequate amount of staff, but some of the staff do not have the right skills for the work they are doing
- There are too many elected boards – everyone is in charge
- There is a lack of accountability – nobody is in charge
- The community has a difficult time in getting new volunteers

- Some functions are not staffed (Parks and Recreation) and could benefit from some regular staff help
- A major method of communications is through reading minutes and they are not routinely available in an easy-to-use manner
- Generally, board members have the interest of the community at heart, but there are some instances of people serving because of special interests. Those individuals do not last long and are often not re-elected
- Poor attendance at Town Meeting. There is no quorum required
- It is difficult for residents to understand how to request things (road improvements for example) and difficult to understand how government in Westminster is structured
- The hiring process is convoluted and cumbersome – time consuming
- Some employees are promoted to management positions with no management experience or training; this results in a lack of knowledge about policies and how to administer them
- The Town does not have the capability to address surplus property issues (Old Town Hall)
- Not great service by DPW if you don't live in center of Town
- Poor history of building construction, for example, the Library needed considerable re-doing and the Town Hall costs were underestimated but the product was well done
- Internal and external communications are poor
- Departments work in silos, especially those with an elected board. This results in wasted efforts
- There are no regular department head meetings
- There are mixed messages from the Town, and there are often conflicting messages and information. It makes the Town look like it doesn't know what it is doing
- There is dysfunction and sabotage
- Residents don't feel that Town Hall listens to people or respects their opinions
- There are not a lot of younger people volunteering for the Town
- Town Meeting attendance is poor unless there is a major issue
- There is not succession planning for staff or volunteers – the issue is more critical for volunteers
- Not enough planning – strategic or financial
- Some departments are very dictatorial – power trip
- Having an elected Town Clerk is problematic – there is a significant risk of getting the wrong person into the job and having very negative results for elections, vital statistics, etc.
- Poor communications among elected/appointed boards
- Don't always hire/promote best person – sometimes just take the next person in line
- There is not uniformity in the hiring process and in personnel issues
- The Town should consider a purchasing department
- Personnel issue resolution – not supported by “Town Hall”

OPPORTUNITIES

- It is important to get people on boards with good/complementing skills – easier to accomplish with appointed boards
- Does Town need all the boards it has – could some be eliminated or consolidated?
- Would welcome a Town Manager with improved centralized decision making
- Some issues mobilize the community (sometimes in a positive way, sometimes in a negative way) – Master Plan, Rod and Gun Club, proposed ban on sale of tobacco products, school issues
- Some boards delegate a lot to staff, and serve as policy-making bodies
- Some elected positions should be appointed – it would give the Town the opportunity to recruit and appoint people with needed qualifications, particularly for “technical positions like Board of Health, Board of Assessors, Town Clerk
- Improved capital planning
- Planning proactively for the use of Landfill Host Community funds, and planning for the time when those funds will no longer be available
- Five-member Board of Selectmen would allow the board to get more done, have members as liaison to more boards, give opportunity for two members to talk without violating the Open Meeting Law
- Enlarge DPW to include Cemetery, Building Maintenance, Parks, and move all staff and assets from those functions to DPW
- Create a Land Use Department including planning, building, conservation (maybe others like health, historical)
- Board of Selectmen as a sounding board and Board of Directors
- Impending retirements over the next five years present the opportunity for change
- The Town needs a decision maker
- Reduce elected boards and consolidate some boards
- Consolidate departments

THREATS

- If one transitions from an elected Town Clerk, and the Town Clerk is appointed by the Board of Selectmen, the board or an individual member could be seen to be having influence over the Chief Election Official
- Town Meeting can be stacked for a particular issue – school budget
- There is a lack of succession planning, both among volunteers and staff
- Elections are generally uncontested
- It is hard to find people to be appointed or elected to boards, particularly if they work and have a difficult time balancing home, work, and volunteering for the Town
- The Town is residential – community doesn’t want business development. It is hard to provide funding for what the community wants from a residential tax base
- While the schools are an asset, the two communities in the regional school district are very different

- Taxes are high
- How do you get younger people involved in the community?
- Don't like staff serving as members of boards
- Open Meeting Law is a drawback to candid discussions in strategic planning
- People elected with a personal agenda
- People should not be on more than one board at a time unless the purpose is specifically stated
- Most residents do not know much about their Town government
- A Town Manager could be dictatorial
- Lack of communications
- There are different opinions on what works well in Town government
- It is easy to "stack" Town Meeting because of lack of a quorum requirement, and because of generally low turnout
- It is unclear to residents as to how to get things accomplished
- "Amazed that the current system works at all"
- There is little coordination among boards and departments

APPENDIX E

Comparable Communities

Communities for use as comparisons with Westminster form of government

- Ashburnham
- Ayer
- Groton
- Harvard
- Hubbardston
- Lancaster
- Lunenburg
- Pepperell
- Rutland
- Shirley
- Sterling
- West Boylston