

TOWN OF WESTMINSTER

Town Government Study Committee (TGSC)

Meeting Minutes for September 21, 2017

Members Present: Dan Bartkus, Adam Collette (arrived at 9:15 PM), John Fairbanks, Roy Hughes,
Lisa Rocheleau, Wayne Walker, Jon Wyman

Members Absent: Dan Gilbreath

Others Present: Bernard Lynch, Peter Hechenbleikner

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the chairman.

A motion was made by Jon Wyman to approve the minutes from the August 10th meeting, and Wayne Walker seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, and the minutes were approved.

The committee met with Bernard Lynch and Peter Hechenbleikner of Community Paradigm Associates (CPA), who were contracted to assist the TGSC with the its activities in fulfilling the committee's charter. The group reviewed work performed by CPA as shown in the PowerPoint presentation at Attachment 1.

CPA provided a second handout, TGSC Status Report (21Sep17), as shown at Attachment 2. Each TGSC member was tasked to read this report and provide opinions and comments to the Chair who will compile a list and forward to CPA.

The group discussed a possible timeline to completion. CPA will draft a timeline and will forward to the chairman for approval at the next meeting. All members agreed that the current two year charter from the Board of Selectmen (BoS) which expires in February 2018 will provide insufficient time to complete the tasks; the chairman was authorized to draft a letter to the BoS to request a one-year extension until February 2019.

The next meeting is set for November 1st at 7:00 PM.

Jon Wyman made a motion to adjourn at 9:40 PM. Wayne Walker seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Submitted by:

John F. Fairbanks

Chairman, Town Government Study Committee

2Atchs

1. PowerPoint Presentation
2. TGSC Status Report (21Sep17)

Town of Westminster MA

Presentation to the Government Study
Committee

September 21, 2017

By Community Paradigm Associates LLC

Process to Date

- Interviews:
 - 3 members of the Board of Selectmen
 - 6 members of the Government Study Committee
 - 7 non-Selectmen volunteers:
 - 3 Public Works Commissioners
 - 1 Boar of Health
 - 1 Board of Assessors
 - 1 Personnel Board
 - 1 Planning Board
 - 10 staff – Town Administrator, DPW Director, Police and Fire Chiefs, Town Clerk, Planner, Town Accountant, Treasurer/Collector, Library Director, Personnel Director, Health Agent

Process to Date

- Review data
 - GSC material
 - Annual Reports
 - 2016 Audit
 - Organization Chart
 - 2 reports from the State – Financial Management, and Technology Review
 - Master Plan
 - Sample Quarterly Report to the Board of Selectmen
 - Westminster acceptance of Acts and Resolves

Process to Date

- Identification of Comparable Communities
- Utilize the following 11 communities for purposes of comparison to Westminster form of government:
 - Ashburnham
 - Ayer
 - Groton
 - Harvard
 - Lancaster
 - Lunenburg
 - Pepperell
 - Rutland
 - Shirley
 - Sterling
 - West Boylston

Findings- Strengths

- Strong Sense of Community; small town feel
- Good schools
- Some good departments – Police, Fire, Library
- Dedicated volunteers
- Dedicated employees – many are Westminster residents
- Advisory and Selectmen keep things organized
- Financially strong – good CIP, good credit rating, Stabilization Funds
- Master Plan process was very effective; Master Plan provides good community direction.

Findings- Weaknesses

- Town is parochial; reluctant to change; shun innovation
- Too many bosses - nobody/everybody is in charge
- Hard for community to understand how government works and decisions get made
- Departments work in silo's (esp. Departments with Elected Boards)
- Lack of definition and understanding of roles of staff and volunteers
- Poor internal and external communications
- Town Administrator works hard; lot of responsibility but little authority; communications bottleneck
- Shortage of volunteers; not recruiting newer/younger volunteers

Findings- Weaknesses

- Town Meeting process - roadblock to operations – and easy to “stack”
- Personnel – cumbersome hiring process; lack of uniformity of adherence to personnel processes and policies; lack of training
- No strategic planning – Master Plan is used as a substitute
- Some financial processes need improvement (see audit management letter and DOR report)
- Risks related to having elected Town Clerk (not a comment on the immediate past or current Town Clerks)
- Service by some departments is uneven

Findings- Opportunities

- Strong potential volunteer pool – well educated and interested community on certain issues
- Some good models of staff/board interaction and definition and understanding of roles
- Many interviewees would welcome more centralized decision making and mentioned having a Town Manager
- Potential for very strong financial planning and implementation
- Going to a 5 member Board of Selectmen has some benefits
- Opportunities for re-organization – lots of thought about it in land use, DPW, Finance

Findings- Threats

- Lack of broad agreement on strengths and weaknesses of the community
- Lack of understanding by the community and some of Town Government, on how Westminster Town government works
- High Taxes – may have an impact on support for needed/proposed changes
- Is there a potential rift between the 2 communities in the regional School District?
- No quorum requirement at Town Meeting – Town Meeting can be “stacked” by supporters of a particular issue
- No succession planning – for staff or volunteers.

Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options

Method of Establishing the Form of Government

DECENTRALIZED

Selectmen's policy

Town Meeting Approval

Town Bylaw

Special Act

Home Rule Charter

CENTRALIZED

Westminster

Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options

LEGISLATIVE BODY

DECENTRALIZED

Westminster

Open Town Meeting - no
quorum

Open Town Meeting - with
quorum

Representative Town
Meeting

Town Coouncil

CENTRALIZED

Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

DECENTRALIZED

Westminster

Board of Selectmen

Town Council

Town Manager

CENTRALIZED

Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options

ELECTED/APPOINTED TOWN CLERK

DECENTRALIZED

Westminster

Elected Town Clerk

Town Clerk appointed by Board of
Selectmen

Town Clerk appointed by Chief
Administrative Officer

CENTRALIZED

Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options

ELECTED/APPOINTED OFFICIALS

DECENTRALIZED

<p>Elected Selectmen and School Committee and many Elected Boards & Town Clerk</p> <p>Elected Selectmen, School Committee and several Elected Boards and Town Clerk</p> <p>Elected Selectmen, School Committee, & several Elected Boards - Appointed Town Clerk</p> <p>Elected Selectmen, School Committee, and up to 2 other Boards. Appointed Town Clerk</p> <p>Elected Selectmen and School Committee. All other Boards and Town Clerk Appointed</p> <p>Elected Town Council and School Committee - all other Officials/Boards Appointed</p>	Westminster					

CENTRALIZED

Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options

STAFF APPOINTMENT/PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

DECENTRALIZED

Department Heads/Staff
Appointed & managed by
applicable Elected Board

Some Department Heads/Staff
appointed & Managed by Boards -
Some by Selectmen

Department Heads/Staff
appointed by Selectmen, Managed
by CAO subject to personnel

Department Heads/Staff
appointed and managed by CAO,
subject to applicable Board

Department Heads/Staff
appointed & managed by CAO,
some DH (P/F) subject to

Department Heads/ Staff
Appointed and Managed by CAO

CENTRALIZED

Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options						
APPOINTMENT OF BOARDS						
DECENTRALIZED	Westminster					
	Many Elected Boards, Appointment of Remainder by Board of Selectmen					
	Fewer Elected Boards, Appointment of Remainder by Board of Selectmen					
	Elected Selectmen, School Comm, and 2 other Boards, Board of Selectmen Appoints remainder					
	Elected Selectmen, School Comm, and 2 other Boards. CAO and Selectmen appoint remainder					
CENTRALIZED						

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Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options							
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Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options						
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		Westminster				
CENTRALIZED						

[illegible]

Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options

BUDGET AND FINANCE

DECENTRALIZED

Budget and CIP developed by
Advisory and Selectmen,
Selectmen sign Warrant

Westminster

CENTRALIZED

Budget/CIP developed by CAO,
reviewed by Selectmen and
Advisory, CAO signs Warrant

Town of Westminster MA - Form of Government Options									
REORGANIZATION									
DECENTRALIZED	Town Meeting approves all changes to organization, as a Bylaw	Westminster							
	CAO proposes reorganization, subject to hearing and approval by Town Meeting								
	CAO proposes reorganization subject to approval by Selectmen								
	CAO reorganizes, and moves budget/CIP to reflect organizational structure								
		CENTRALIZED							

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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 Frigolette - Board of Assessors
 - § John Wyman - Planning Board (also TGSC)
 - § John Belliveau - Personnel Board
- 11 staff:
 - § Town Administrator Karen Murphy
 - § Town Accountant Julie Costello
 - § Police Chief Sam Albert
 - § DPW Director Josh Hall
 - § Personnel Director Julie Belliveau
 - § Executive Assistant to BoS/TA Stephanie Lahtinen
 - § Library Director Nick Langhart
 - § Treasure/Collector Melody Smith
 - § Town Planner Steve Wallace
 - § Town Clerk Ellen Sheehan (Elected)
 - § Health Agent

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
- Lancaster
- Lunenburg
- Pepperell
- Rutland
- Shirley
- Sterling
- West Boylston