

Town of Hardwick
Assessment Report
To Plan for a State of the Town Forum

Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration
University of Massachusetts Boston

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Executive Summary

MOPC Town of Hardwick Assessment Report to Plan for a State of the Town Forum

In November 2013 the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration at the University of Massachusetts Boston (MOPC) was asked by the Town of Hardwick to undertake an initial assessment of the community's long-term planning and participatory budgeting process, including the opportunities for civic engagement, in preparation for a public forum to be held prior to this year's Annual Town Meeting. The Board of Selectmen has scheduled this "State of the Town" forum on Saturday May 10th at the Hardwick Elementary School so as to more effectively communicate with and engage the town's voters in the FY 15 budget process and planning for the Town's capital needs. Dr. John Mullin from UMass Amherst will serve as the moderator for the forum.

MOPC Assessment process

The MOPC Assessment has been designed to identify the best issues for discussion at the "State of the Town" public forum and the best methods for improving the town's participatory budgeting process, including how to effectively communicate capital planning and budget information to the voters prior to important Town Meeting decisions. MOPC has found that in similar situations that it is important to undertake a careful assessment before engaging in an open civic engagement process such as the planned "State of the Town" public forum. This important assessment step involves a confidential written survey and interviews. The confidential survey questions that MOPC asked as a part of this assessment were divided into two categories: questions about town government services, budgeting and long-term planning, and questions about the most important capital planning issues for the Town of Hardwick.

Section I of the report provides background information and Section II discusses the survey questions and the respondents. MOPC received survey responses from 27 people or about one-half of the requests that we made, which is the response rate that we generally find for this type of a confidential town government and community questionnaire. The responses included 15 written surveys and 12 telephone or in-person interviews. About 75% of those who responded are currently actively involved in town government as either an elected or appointed employee of the Town or member of a board or committee. Those who responded to the survey are presently very involved in town government or community activities, and in most cases, they have been for many years. They have lived in Hardwick for anywhere from 8 to 60 years – some for all of their lives. This represents a very important community resource and source of knowledge about town government, the villages, and the residents and activities of the community.

MOPC Summary of Survey Responses and Recommendations

In section III of the report, MOPC has summarized the survey responses, grouped by key themes, into five categories. The compilation of the survey responses is included in Section IV:

- Capital planning issues
- Potential Sources of Revenue and Opportunities for Sharing Resources
- Communication of Information
- The Budgeting Process, and
- Town Government

Based upon the survey responses, MOPC has provided the town with recommendations for topics to be discussed at the May 10th State of the Town Forum. The topics suggested for the morning are:

1. Economic re-use of underutilized town buildings, using the information from the study that is currently being done for the town.
2. Suggestions for increasing revenues by encouraging more local businesses and reducing expenses by sharing resources with other communities and non-government entities.
3. Municipal facility needs and priorities – what we know and what we need to know, using the studies that have already been completed for the town.
4. Potential ways to fund capital improvements – a discussion of the range of both existing and new funding sources that could meet the needs of Hardwick.

The information that will come out of these four groups can be used by the discussion groups suggested for the afternoon part of the Forum:

1. Repairing and remodeling existing town buildings in Gilbertville and Hardwick Center to meet the Town's facility needs
2. Building new single-purpose facilities – a separate Senior Center, Municipal building etc.
3. Building a new multi-purpose facility on land at a location such as the School or the ball field off of Prospect that could include a number of town functions
4. Renovating a larger existing building such as the Mill or the School for multiple town functions and other community or business uses.

MOPC has also provided a number of recommendations for next steps in Section III of the report:

Step #1 – The State of the Town Forum

Step #2 – Joint Meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee

Step #3 – A Plan for Communicating Information to the Community

Step #4 – Priority Funding Requests for Town Meeting

Step #5 – Immediate Needs for Municipal Facilities and Equipment

Step #6 – Sharing of Resources

Step #7 – Additional Sources of Revenue

Step #8 – Long-term Facilities Planning

Step #9 – Long-term Planning for the Town Government Structure

Step #10 – Five-year Capital Planning and Budgeting for Future Years.

Introduction

The Town of Hardwick faces a number of critical participatory budgeting and capital improvement implementation issues including:

- An aging set of municipal buildings that are either underutilized or ill-suited to the current needs of the town,
- A tax base that is heavily reliant on property tax revenues from a population that includes many low and moderate income residents,
- An inability to attract small scale economic development to expand this tax base, due to a lack of consensus on either the need or the infrastructure improvements that are needed to support more businesses,
- A town government that relies heavily on volunteer boards that often do not have the training, sufficient resources or the necessary structure to address all of the service needs of the community, and
- Voters who are not sufficiently informed on the benefits of critical capital improvement decisions to move some of the proposed solutions forward from the study phase to implementation.

To address some of these issues, the Board of Selectmen has scheduled a “State of the Town” public forum on Saturday May 10th at the Hardwick Elementary School so as to more effectively communicate with and engage the town’s voters in the FY 15 budget process and planning for the Town’s capital needs. Dr. John Mullin from UMass Amherst will serve as the moderator for the State of the Town forum. He has led a number of community forums for the town in the past.

At the Special Town Meeting held on November 18, 2013 voters approved the request of the Board of Selectmen for funding for planning and preparation assistance from the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration at UMass Boston (MOPC) and the Center for Economic Development at UMass Amherst (CED). In addition, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) is providing technical assistance to the Town of Hardwick to prepare for the forum and Eagle Hill School has offered to provide publicity and logistics support for the forum.

I. MOPC Assessment and Other Town of Hardwick Studies

A. Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration Assessment to Prepare for the Forum

The Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration at the University of Massachusetts Boston (MOPC) was asked by the Town of Hardwick to undertake an initial assessment of the community’s long-term planning and participatory budgeting process, including the opportunities for civic engagement, in preparation for the “State of the Town” public forum to be held prior to this year’s Annual Town Meeting. The MOPC Assessment has been designed to identify the best issues for discussion at the “State of the Town” public forum and the best methods for improving the town’s participatory budgeting process, including how to effectively communicate capital planning and budget information to the voters prior to important Town Meeting decisions.

For over 25 years, MOPC has served as the state office that focuses exclusively on assisting public agencies as a neutral forum and state-level resource for accessing quality services, proven

programs, and national knowledge-based networks for consensus-building, public engagement and dispute resolution. The state office of public collaboration was established to provide effective forums for conflict resolution, public decision-making and community involvement on complex and often contentious public issues, and to build capacity within public agencies, municipalities, and other governmental entities. Additional information concerning MOPC's history and services may be found on our website, www.umb.edu/mopc.

MOPC has found that in similar situations that involve important public policy issues and diverse viewpoints in a community, it is important to undertake a careful initial assessment before engaging in an open civic engagement process such as the planned "State of the Town" public forum. This important assessment step involves a number of confidential interviews, a confidential written survey, and the review of other information concerning the issues so as to recommend a course of action for civic engagement and participatory governance.

The MOPC Facilitation Team for this project included John Goodrich and Mette Kreutzmann under the overall supervision of MOPC Executive Director, Susan Jeggelian. Mr. Goodrich has been a facilitator or mediator on numerous projects for MOPC since 1990 and a resident of Hardwick for the past 14 years. Mette Kreutzmann is a Program Manager at MOPC and has been a co-facilitator with Mr. Goodrich on a number of MOPC municipal projects.

MOPC's Assessment included the following tasks:

1. Design an interview survey questionnaire and conduct confidential in-person or telephone interviews with town officials that represent a range of town functions and perspectives on long-term planning and participatory budgeting.
2. Design and conduct a confidential written survey of additional town officials and community leaders who represent a cross-section of viewpoints on topics and issues that have been identified.
3. Prepare a summary report on the topics and the issues, maintaining the confidentiality of the information, to include recommendations for discussion topics at the forum and suggestions for improving the capital planning, participatory budgeting and civic engagement processes.
4. Present the results of this initial assessment to town officials at a public meeting, including a discussion of the next steps to prepare for the State of the Town forum.

B. Central MA Regional Planning Commission & Center for Economic Development Studies

At the Special Town Meeting held on February 24th, some 200 voters overwhelmingly approved an article that will move the proposed sewer extension project from Gilbertville to Eagle Hill School forward by authorizing the Board of Selectmen to petition the General Court for Special Legislation concerning how the construction work will be undertaken. It is anticipated that the Special Legislation will be approved this fiscal year. Both the technical assistance to be provided by CMRPC and the preparation assistance to be provided by CED assume that this project will continue to move forward to completion this year.

CMRPC will be reviewing the current zoning and other regulatory information for the corridor that will be served by this sewer extension, particularly the area surrounding the Hardwick Common, to provide the town prior to the State of the Town Forum with information on the long-term development opportunities and the appropriate by-laws, regulations or town government guidelines that could help to ensure that the community will be able to balance the growth that may

develop in the future along this sewer line with the ability of the Town's infrastructure to handle that growth.

John Mullin's graduate students at the Center for Economic Development at UMass Amherst have been asked to look at the potential for economic benefits from the possible disposition of several municipal buildings that are currently available for re-use or may be found to be no longer suitable for their current municipal use in the future.

Two of these buildings are located on or near the Hardwick Common, the voters have already approved their disposal, and now that they are expected to have the ability to connect to the proposed sewer extension in the future, their economic re-use potential should be higher. The other two buildings that the CED graduate students will be assessing for potential economic re-use are the Municipal Office Building and the Senior Center in Gilbertville. Dr. Mullin and his graduate students are currently conducting research, site visits and interviews and will be presenting their findings to the Board of Selectmen on April 28th in preparation for the State of the Town Forum on May 10th.

C. Other On-going and Completed Studies and Projects

There are a number of other studies that have been completed in the past that can provide important background information for the preparation for the forum. In addition, Caitlin Architecture is currently undertaking the Hardwick Senior Center Planning Project with financial assistance from an FY 12 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from the MA Department of Housing and Community Development. The goals of that study are to evaluate whether or not the current Senior Center building is a realistic long-term home for the center and, if not, what are the most suitable and viable alternative locations.

A town-wide survey showed that those who currently use the facility are pretty evenly divided as to whether they agree or disagree that the current facility should be renovated, and nearly the same number of respondents agreed that there is a need for a new stand-alone facility as those who disagreed that there is such a need. For those who do not use the facility, while they also are evenly divided as to whether they agree or disagree that the current facility should be renovated, fewer than 40% feel that there is a need for a new stand-alone facility.

An initial list of 8 sites was evaluated based on a number of factors and was narrowed down to two options, a new facility on the site of the existing Senior Center or a new Senior Center located on open land below the Hardwick Elementary School that were discussed at a second public forum held on February 26th.

Some of the previous studies that may be useful as background information include:

- Paige Memorial Library Building Plan, dated 2007, prepared by Mary E. Braney
- Detailed Energy Audit, dated February 2010, prepared by New England Trane
- Town of Hardwick Accessibility Plan, dated December 2009, prepared by James M. Mazik
- Hardwick Municipal Needs Facilities Assessment, dated August 2011, prepared by Ronald Bujold
- Hardwick Senior Center Building & Infrastructure Assessment, dated July 2007, prepared by Clark & Green Inc.

- Municipal Building & Gilbert Building Report, dated 1986 prepared by Architects Inc.
- Municipal Bldg. Load Limit Report, dated 1996, prepared by Spaulding Associates
- Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment Municipal Bldg., dated January 2012, prepared by Fuss & O'Neill
- Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment Gilbert Bldg., dated May 2011, prepared by Fuss & O'Neill
- Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment Hardwick Knitted Fabrics, dated 2010, prepared by Fuss & O'Neill
- Hardwick Center Sewer Extension, prepared by Wright Pierce, dated 2011
- Feasibility Analysis for Redevelopment of Hardwick Knitting Mills, dated August 2013, prepared by Bryan Nichols
- Master Plan Services and Facilities Update, dated 2010, prepared by Sherry Patch
- Heritage Reconnaissance Report, dated Spring 2008, prepared by Dodson Associates
- Hardwick Community Development Strategy, dated 2012, prepared by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

In addition to these studies and the on-going projects that are being undertaken by CMRPC and Caitlin Architects, Wright-Pierce is working on the Gilbertville Waste Water Pollution Control Facilities Improvement Project with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and CMRPC is seeking approval for several other projects that will benefit the Town of Hardwick, including assessing the opportunities for economic development, housing and/or municipal uses for the former Hardwick Knitted Fabrics Mill in Gilbertville, an energy efficiency program and Agri-tourism studies, and more extensive "brownfield" studies for the municipal buildings located in Gilbertville. In addition, a \$40 million information technology bill is pending in the Senate.

The MA Broadband Institute has moved ahead with support from grant funding to complete the installation of the fiber optic network that will serve public safety and other municipal buildings in the region, but how to serve "the last mile", which includes a large portion of Hardwick, has yet to be resolved or funded.

The June 2011 Annual Town Meeting authorized the creation of a Capital Planning Committee (CPC) charged with studying proposed projects and improvements involving major non-recurring tangible assets and projects. The Board of Selectmen appointed representatives from the Finance Committee, the Selectmen, the School Committee, an Assessor, and an At-Large Member to this committee, with the Town Administrator, Treasurer and Town Accountant serving as Ex-Officio Members.

Prior to the June 2013 Annual Town Meeting, the Capital Planning Committee recommended the following guidelines for prioritizing capital projects:

1. Imminent threat to health and safety of citizens, employees or property.
2. Maintenance and improvement of capital assets
3. Requirement of State and Federal laws

4. Infrastructure improvements
5. Improvements to productivity
6. Improvement of overburdened situations

The committee also voted a number of other recommendations for consideration by the voters at the Annual Town Meeting or by the appropriate town board including the funding of the Capital Stabilization Account, the need for new or improved facilities, discontinuing use of the George H. Gilbert building due to increasing costs to operate and maintain the building, and the sale of the Paige Agricultural Building and Ruggles Hill School.

At the June 2013 Annual Town Meeting, the Finance Committee did not support the capital projects that were proposed and none of them were approved. And a proposal to engage consulting services to conduct a building needs/suitability assessment of the town's municipal services buildings to determine the necessary improvements for its continued use was also not approved by the voters at the 2013 Annual Town Meeting.

D. Annual Town Census Survey of Topics for the State of the Town Forum

In preparation for the State of the Town forum, a brief questionnaire was sent out in January with the Annual Town Census. About 1000 census forms were sent out to all of the households in Hardwick and 110 people indicated the topics that they are most interested in discussing at the State of the Town Forum from the list that was provided:

- 77 Potential re-use or disposition of town buildings
- 76 Long-term planning for municipal facilities including our school and our libraries
- 60 Economic development opportunities for the area of Gilbertville re-zoned for mixed use
- 55 How to meet the needs for social services for our residents in the future
- 48 Improvements to infrastructure that may be needed including the water and sewer systems
- 44 Ways to make town government structure as efficient as possible in the future
- 28 People also listed a wide variety of other topics of interest to them.

II. MOPC Assessment Survey Questions and Respondents

The confidential survey questions that MOPC asked were divided into two categories: questions about town government services, budgeting and long-term planning, and questions about the most important capital planning issues for the Town of Hardwick.

A. Questions about town government services, budgeting, and long-term planning

- What aspects of town government do you think are working the best now, and what aspects of town government do you think may need some improvement?
- Do you have any suggestions for ways to make the Town government structure as efficient as possible for the delivery of services to the community?
- Do you have any specific suggestions for how the Town could provide information to the public more efficiently, including increased use of computer-based or online technologies?
- Do you have any specific suggestions for service areas that the Town should consider multi-town or public-private sharing of facilities, equipment or personnel?
- What aspects of the budgeting and capital planning process do you feel work the best now, and what aspects of these processes do you feel need the most improvement?
- Can you suggest some specific ways to improve the interactions between town departments and town boards for the provision of financial information, the budgeting and the capital planning process?
- Can you suggest some specific ways to improve the communication of financial information and major spending requests to residents and Town Meeting voters?
- Do you have any suggestions for how the Town could increase revenues in the future from existing or new sources other than the property tax?

B. Questions about the most important capital planning issues for the Town of Hardwick

- What do you feel are the 2 or 3 most important major capital planning issues that the voters need to address in the next few years, and why?
- For each of your 2 or 3 suggested issues, what steps do you feel will need to be taken to develop a recommendation that the voters will be able to support, and to actively engage residents in the development of a recommendation?
- For each of your issues, what specific steps do you think should be taken to inform all of the members of the community about the importance of this issue so that they may be more interested in supporting the recommendation?
- What one major capital planning issue do you think has the best chance of being approved by the voters in the next year or two?
- What specific steps do you think will be needed to get voter approval for this issue?

C. Profile of the Survey Respondents

MOPC received survey responses from 27 people or about one-half of the requests that we made, which is the response rate that we generally find for this type of a town government and community confidential questionnaire. The responses included 15 written surveys and 12 telephone or in-person interviews. About 75% of those who responded are currently actively involved in town government as either an elected or appointed employee of the Town or member of a board or committee.

Those who responded to the survey are presently very involved in town government or community activities, and in most cases, they have been for many years. They have lived in Hardwick for anywhere from 8 to 60 years – some for all of their lives – with an average of more than 30 years of residency in the town. This represents a very important community resource and source of knowledge about town government, the villages, and the residents and activities of the community. Forty percent have also worked in town anywhere from one to 38 years.

The list of town boards, committees, organizations and town government roles that these 27 people are currently involved in is both long and impressive:

Elected and Appointed Town Gov't	Historical Commission
Police, Fire and Rescue Squad	Cable Commission
Board of Selectmen	Youth Commission
Finance Committee	Agriculture Commission
Planning Board	Wheelwright Water District
Board of Health	Hardwick Village Water Commission
School Committee	Paige Memorial Library Trustees
Board of Assessors	Town House Advisory Committee
Constable	Central MA Regional Planning Delegate
Capital Planning Committee	Ware River Watershed
Master Plan Implementation/CDAG	East Quabbin Land Trust Board
Zoning Board of Appeals	Hardwick Farmer's Coop Board
Personnel Board	Hardwick Farmer's Market
Insurance Committee	Paige Trustee
Recycling Commission	Hardwick Food Pantry

Given their many years of residency in town and their involvement in community activities, the list of town government and community roles they have had in the past is even longer and includes the Conservation Commission, Energy Committee, 250th Town Anniversary Committee, School Building Committee, Hardwick Community Playground, Hardwick Preschool Cooperative, Taxpayers Association, Tri-Parish Community Church, and the Eagle Hill Community Outreach Program.

III. MOPC Summary of Survey Responses and Recommendations

As explained in the introduction to the Town of Hardwick Participatory Budgeting and Long-Term Planning Survey, the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration at UMass Boston (MOPC) was asked by the Town of Hardwick to conduct an assessment of the community's long-term planning and participatory budgeting process including the opportunities for civic engagement. The information from this assessment will be used by MOPC to assist the town with the planning for the State of the Town Forum to be held at the Hardwick Elementary School on Saturday May 10, 2014. The purpose of the State of the Town Forum is to bring together residents from all of the villages and areas of the town to learn about and discuss some of the future opportunities that could benefit the community and the role of town government in providing services that voters would like to have. It is hoped that this Forum can help to get the word out to residents that the town needs more participation and that voters will need to be more engaged in the discussions and decisions regarding budgeting and capital planning issues. MOPC has summarized the responses from the survey so as to identify the best issues and topics for discussion at the Forum.

MOPC has also used the information from this survey to provide suggestions concerning the best methods for improving the capital planning, participatory budgeting and civic engagement processes of the town.

The MOPC assessment involved a survey of more than 50 town officials and community leaders who represent a range of town functions and perspectives on long-term planning and participatory budgeting. The 50% response rate to this survey is similar to the response rate that MOPC generally finds for similar community surveys. As is MOPC's customary practice, the survey responses are confidential – including the names of those who replied – and only non-identifying information has been included in this report. In particular, no specific comments about individuals or events have been included.

This section contains MOPC's summary of the survey responses, grouped by the key themes that were identified. The remainder of the report consists of the compilation of the survey responses grouped into five sections containing the comments about:

- Capital Planning Issues
- Potential Sources of Revenue and Opportunities for Sharing of Resources
- Communication of Information
- The Budgeting Process, and
- Town Government

This section concludes with MOPC's suggestions as to the best capital planning and potential sources of revenue topics for discussion at the Forum, as well as the suggested next steps for addressing some of the communication, budgeting process and town government issues that have been identified.

A. Capital Planning Issues

The most important capital planning issues that were identified through the survey are improved municipal facilities, re-use or disposition of underutilized buildings and sewer system improvements, followed by encouraging businesses to create local jobs, improved Internet services, and provision of services for seniors, youth or those needing social services assistance. There is a very wide range of opinions and suggestions on how to approach these issues and when and how to implement the suggested solutions. Opinions on what taxpayers can afford range from “we can’t afford to wait any longer” to “we can’t afford to spend anything for the next 5 years”.

Developing consensus among town boards, particularly the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee, involving community members from all parts of town and having a good plan and communicating it effectively are seen as necessary steps for bringing a proposal forward successfully. Voters are likely to support issues and proposals that are well thought out and presented if they do not raise taxes significantly. Any proposed capital improvements will require a lot of communication of factual and unbiased information in-person, through newspaper articles, meetings at locations throughout the town, sign-boards and handouts, and through the Internet including the Town’s website.

The survey shows that there is considerable interest in focusing on the municipal facility and community services needs in Gilbertville. There are both advocates and skeptics for most of the proposals that have been suggested for fixing up existing municipal buildings, the construction of new facilities - for example for the Senior Center or the Police Department or Municipal Offices and the disposition of their current building -or for the combining of a number of municipal functions as well as other services or business uses in either a remodeled Hardwick Knitters Mill or a new location in town.

These very different viewpoints will probably be difficult to reconcile until there is a shared understanding of the short-term and long-term municipal facility needs and the costs and benefits associated with the different options for meeting those needs. Without a good workable plan that the voters in the different villages and parts of town can get behind, it is unlikely that very many of the proposed capital improvements will proceed. At the same time, there are immediate needs for building maintenance, reducing heating costs and other operating expenses, and vehicle and equipment replacement that should be met.

There are also a number of related issues raised in the survey responses concerning the consolidation of facilities or functions such as libraries, the senior center, and the highway, police and fire departments, as well as the water and sewer systems, and the potential to reduce costs and facility needs by sharing additional facilities and equipment with other towns. Again, there is a very wide range of viewpoints that are expressed for these issues, with those who currently enjoy the use of the specific services and facilities preferring to maintain them as they are while others are looking to save costs to the town by making changes to some of these services or facilities.

Some of the comments support the concept of selling older municipal buildings in Hardwick Center or in Gilbertville that are costly to maintain and repair or remodel for the town’s future needs and using the revenue and cost savings to fund new facilities that would be more suited to the town’s needs. And a number of people feel quite strongly that finding a private developer who will renovate the Hardwick Knitters Mill for a wide range of uses including housing, businesses, community social services and municipal facilities that are leased, not owned by the town, will benefit the entire town and particularly the residents of the village of Gilbertville. Others disagree and favor a number of other locations for the municipal facilities.

In addition to the need to upgrade the Gilbertville Waste Water Treatment Plant as required by the Mass. Department of Environmental Protection, a number of people have suggested that over the long-term, the sewer users would benefit financially if the sewer department were combined with other departments, such as the highway department, and if the private water companies were to become part of the town government so that metering could be installed and a more equitable billing system used. This would allow the town to then consider a combined Dept. of Public Works that would include highway, water and sewer services and potentially achieve cost savings through the sharing of personnel and equipment.

Other important issues raised include encouraging new or expanded businesses that will create local jobs, providing better Internet broadband service for both residents and businesses, working collaboratively with other communities and organizations to provide the social services and housing that residents need, particularly for the seniors and the youth in town, and addressing the long-term demographic trends and costs of education.

B. Potential Sources of Revenue and Opportunities for Sharing of Resources

The initiative of Barton Associates to renovate the Wheelwright School is a successful example of the re-use of an underutilized building by a new business that has located in town. The creation of more local jobs from existing or new businesses should be encouraged according to the survey responses, through the continuation of “business friendly” town government policies and regulations, pushing for enhanced Internet and communication services for areas where businesses would like to locate, and the active promotion of businesses that can attract people to Hardwick, such as tourism and farm and food-related activities. At the same time, there is recognition that there are limits to the amount of additional revenue that the town can bring in from businesses.

Other suggestions for increasing revenues include selling underutilized buildings or town land, passing the Community Preservation Act which will bring in matching funds from the state, and identifying additional opportunities to increase PILOT revenues, including from solar fields or wind power facilities.

The Town is already doing a considerable amount of sharing with other towns for the highway, police and fire departments and continues to explore additional cost-saving ways to share equipment and personnel through regional cooperatives, grants for shared equipment and other means. There may be opportunities to achieve cost savings through a multi-town ambulance service, sharing of health agents, building inspectors, licensing agents, dog pounds, human resource officers or information technology resources, or through regional insurance or personnel benefits initiatives.

Some of the survey suggestions focused on the need to explore regional social services assistance, and to look at utilizing the Barre and Ware Senior Centers for some or all of the town’s senior center activities. This is a controversial issue that will require considerable discussion before policy decisions can be made, and the on-going Senior Center study by Caitlin Architects will provide useful information for the community discussions.

C. Communication of Information

While some people feel that the current communication of town government and financial information is adequate and effective, others don’t. Given the diverse population in Hardwick – life-long residents, newer residents, those with good broadband access who prefer to get their information from the Internet and those who would rather read the local newspaper or hear the latest from a friend they trust, as well as a wide range of income levels – a diverse set of

communication media and tools are recommended to be used to provide information to town residents and voters and to encourage them to be informed and engaged in the important decisions that Town Meeting is asked to make.

The town needs to improve both the timeliness and the delivery of information to residents and voters through the channels that they will pay attention to. The survey responses provide a lot of suggestions for how to do this, but the town will need to draw upon its volunteers to help ensure that information gets to people in the future. And, it will be up to the sponsors of the proposals and the leadership of the town – including the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee – to ensure that the financial information is timely. The suggestions include greater use of neighborhood volunteers who are willing to get the word out in their area, well-publicized meetings before important decisions are to be made, improved sign-boards and media coverage, perhaps a town newsletter on a quarterly basis before Town Meetings or other important decision times, and improved use of the Town's website, the Internet, email and the Code Red alert. A number of newer more innovative communication approaches were also suggested.

Many people pay attention to the issues and information that pertains to their village or part of town, or to an activity that they are very interested in, such as the schools or the sewer user rates, or the Senior Center, or filling the potholes, and are a lot less interested in other issues. There is a fear that taxes will go up and a suspicion that they are not being told the whole story. Town leaders who want to bring forward an important proposal that has costs and tax rate implications need to be forthcoming with all of the information and address the questions and concerns that people have. This was done successfully for the recent Town Meeting vote for the sewer extension from Gilbertville to Eagle Hill School.

The current process for finalizing a budget before Town Meeting and providing clear information to the voters ahead of time received quite a bit of criticism, with the suggestion that the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee will need to work together to improve the process for discussing and then disseminating information in a timely manner so that voters can be informed when they come to Town Meeting and are asked to make important financial decisions.

D. The Budgeting Process

The survey responses point fingers in a number of directions for what is described as a budgeting process that happens too much at the last minute, results in disagreements between town boards, leads to an ill-informed and confused group of voters, and therefore many proposals that both volunteers and town employees have spent a lot of time on – and a lot of taxpayer or grant money on – are defeated. While many of the other diverse viewpoints and disagreements described in the survey result from honest differences of opinion, this one results more from a failure of town government to do its job.

As some have pointed out, this is not a new problem, and the MOPC Assessment team has seen that quite a few other communities have disagreements as to the respective roles of their town boards for the budgeting and capital planning process. Nevertheless, the buck stops with the current members of the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee to work out their differences and to improve this process as soon as possible since it is negatively affecting the work of many volunteers and town employees. In particular, quite a few of the survey responses stated that not all of the members of the Finance Committee appear to be fully engaged in the budgeting process, they often provide recommendations at the last minute, and they are not always transparent enough about the reasons for their decisions. At the same time, the Selectmen need to show more leadership on these issues.

Following the vote of Town Meeting several years ago, the town has engaged in a more formal and long-term (i.e. more than one year....) capital planning process, but that is “on hold” right now following the lack of consensus before the 2013 Town Meeting as to what capital planning recommendations should be brought to the voters. Until the responsible town leaders resolve this issue, it will be difficult for either the Capital Planning Committee or other volunteers and town employees to move forward with this important activity.

The survey responses also provide a number of very good specific suggestions including the role that good information and both public and departmental meetings can play in the budgeting process and in the management of the finances of the town, a caution that given the town’s reliance on grants, some of the studies and recommendations can be grant-driven rather than in the best interests of all of the community, and insights on the particular budgeting complications of certain town functions that the state has a say on, and the need for all town functions to be treated equally and fairly during the budgeting process.

E. Town Government

As was the case with the survey responses about the budgeting process, the comments about town government were quite critical at the same time that they praised a number of town employees for their dedication and expertise. For those who are outside town government, the procedures seem to work pretty well, while for those who are inside town government, how town government functions needs improvement. That is an interesting distinction. It is clear that without the dedication of the many volunteers who serve on boards and committees and the dedication of town employees who work many more hours than they are budgeted and paid for, the town could not function as well as it does.

Different survey respondents have different views as to which town functions work the best and which don’t or should be changed in some way, including the consolidation of some functions. Concerns are raised that some meetings and decisions are not open and transparent and welcoming to new comers or to those who have different viewpoints or would like to suggest changes to the way things are done.

Some have suggested that an outside entity should look at how the town is structured while others like it just the way it is. And there are very diverse and strongly held views concerning the pros and cons of elected versus appointed positions. Increasing regulations and requirements imposed from outside the town burden town government and increase the pressure for changes to how town government works. The current structure with elected and appointed employees and a heavy reliance on volunteer board and committee members decentralizes authority and responsibility, and this may be one of the causes for the lack of leadership that a number of the comments mentioned. A number of people suggested that fairly major changes to the town government structure might be needed in the future to address some of the leadership, coordination, capital planning and financial management issues that have been identified through the MOPC survey and other activities.

F. Suggested Topics for Discussion at the Forum

Based upon the survey responses, MOPC recommends that the town consider discussing the following topics at the May 10th State of the Town public forum. In the morning, the forum attendees could have the opportunity to participate in one of four discussion groups that would be led by one or more persons familiar with that topic. In addition, John Mullin’s graduate students

from the Center for Economic Development have offered to facilitate each of the discussion groups. The four topics suggested for the morning are:

5. Economic re-use of underutilized town buildings, using the information from the study being done by John Mullin's graduate students.
6. Suggestions for increasing revenues by encouraging more local businesses and reducing expenses by sharing resources with other communities and non-government entities.
7. Municipal facility needs and priorities – what we know and what we need to know, using the studies that have already been completed for the town.
8. Potential ways to fund capital improvements – a discussion of the range of both existing and new funding sources that could meet the needs of Hardwick.

The information that will come out of these four groups can be used by the discussion groups suggested for the afternoon part of the Forum. The afternoon can be an opportunity for a “friendly competition” between four groups. Anyone can self-select as to which group they would like to participate in, but it will be more interesting if there are participants in each group from all parts of town including those who aren't in favor of the approach as well as those who would like to advocate for the particular approach:

5. Repairing and remodeling existing town buildings in Gilbertville and Hardwick Center to meet the Town's facility needs
6. Building new single-purpose facilities – a separate Senior Center, Municipal building etc.
7. Building a new multi-purpose facility on land at a location such as the School or the ball field off of Prospect that could include a number of town functions
8. Renovating a larger existing building such as the Mill or the School for multiple town functions and other community or business uses

G. MOPC Recommendations for the Next Steps

Most of the capital planning, communication, and town governance issues that have been identified through MOPC's Assessment survey are common to many other smaller towns in Massachusetts, particularly to older communities that have both a mill village and rural history, have experienced slow growth and limited economic development opportunities in recent decades, and have limited financial resources to deal with the increasing costs resulting from federal and state regulations, regional district arrangements, and the local needs for both basic services and social services assistance.

The town has a sizeable population that cannot afford increases in taxes or fees. And, one of the reasons that some people enjoy living in Hardwick is that it still does have a “small town” feel and change comes slowly. Taken together, this means that the town continues to have a small and largely volunteer government structure and an emphasis on “making due with what we have” rather than spending a lot of money on new buildings, equipment or personnel. In recent years with an increasing reliance on the residential property tax as other revenue sources have stagnated or decreased, this has also meant putting off some of the capital purchases and improvements that many other towns have been funding on a regular basis through multi-year capital plans. As a result

the town faces a relatively large number of short-term maintenance and equipment requirements as well as many long-term capital improvement needs at the same time that money is very tight.

As pointed out in some of the survey responses, the Town's reliance on grants as a funding source for its planning studies and capital improvements has sometimes channeled community resources and priorities to single-purpose efforts that can be grant-supported, rather than to some of the other important priorities of the community. Combined with the understandable situation that the most energetic volunteer committee work is often done by those who are passionate about moving a particular project forward, some of the proposals for capital improvements can move through a study phase to a Town Meeting vote to spend money on implementation without broad community support.

On the other hand, the recent large turnout and overwhelmingly favorable vote at the February 24, 2014 Special Town Meeting for the sewer extension from Gilbertville to Eagle Hill via the Hardwick Common demonstrated that there is a willingness to move forward with major capital improvements particularly when:

- There is strong leadership that is willing to spend the time to promote a project
- The community is both informed and engaged, and feels that their questions and concerns have been addressed
- The project is affordable and the benefits outweigh the costs – in this case, with no additional costs to either the taxpayers or to the current sewer system users, and
- There are potential benefits to many, not just to a few or to only one part of town.

To begin to address some of the other important capital planning, budgeting and town governance issues that have been identified through MOPC's confidential survey and to implement some of the excellent suggestions that have been made, the MOPC Assessment team recommends that the community consider taking the following next steps:

Step #1: The State of the Town Forum

- The Board of Selectmen should work with John Mullin to prepare an agenda for the meeting that will encourage participation from all of the villages and parts of town and engage more residents in a dialogue about the town's needs and priorities. There will be an opportunity to publicly discuss the topics for the Forum at the April 28th Selectmen's Meeting when John Mullin and his graduate students present the results of their study of the re-use potential for four town buildings. This could be the beginning of an annual town planning forum.
- Use the Forum as an opportunity to begin discussing and implementing some of the steps listed below.

Step #2: Joint Meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee

- As soon as possible schedule a joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee to discuss how the two boards can work together more effectively and the steps that they are willing to take together to address some of the issues raised in the survey that was conducted by MOPC.

- A commitment from these two boards for their support and continuing involvement will be needed in order to build on the positive steps that town government has recently taken to improve working relationships, as well as to successfully implement the following steps.
- Schedule a meeting of the two boards at least a month before the 2014 Annual Town Meeting to jointly review the status of the FY 15 budget requests and any capital plan requests so as to allow sufficient time to communicate financial information to the voters prior to the Town Meeting.

Step #3: A Plan for Communicating Information to the Community

- With the approval of the Board of Selectmen, the Town Administrator should consider soliciting an informal group of volunteers with representation from town government and all of the villages and parts of town that would be willing to design and implement a community-wide communication program concerning town government and financial information. The discussions at the Forum and the survey responses may provide this group with some ideas as to the best ways to communicate with the townspeople, such as face-to-face conversations, newspaper articles, public meetings and forums, information on the Town's website and through the Internet, email blasts and Code Red calls.
- Each board that is sponsoring a major expenditure article at Town Meeting should consider developing a specific plan for engaging voters and informing them about the proposal well in advance of a Town Meeting vote. The recent information program that was implemented for the sewer extension from Gilbertville to Eagle Hill School may serve as a useful model for developing other project-specific communication plans.
- The Town should seek grants or in-kind donations to cover the additional costs associated with an increased town government communications program, such as the provision of information kiosks in town buildings and other locations.

Step #4: Priority Funding Requests for Town Meeting

- The Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee should consider holding a joint "summit meeting" with the Capital Planning Committee and other town boards and the department heads to discuss priorities for capital funding requests that should be brought to the voters at Town Meeting over the next one to two years. This could become the first of a series of regular capital planning priority discussions that could lead to progress on some of the other recommendations, particularly #5, #8 and #10.
- The survey responses provided suggestions for capital improvements that may have the best chance of voter approval and this could be a useful starting point for these discussions: the Gilbertville Waste Water Treatment Plant upgrade and a Capital Plan for more immediate building repairs and vehicle purchases. The next most likely project to be approved was listed as the Senior Center.

Step #5: Immediate Needs for Municipal Facilities and Equipment

- The Town Administrator, department heads, and the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee, and the Capital Planning Committee should consider working together to develop a priority list of the most immediate needs for municipal facility repairs and equipment purchases for the FY 15 budget. The work of the Capital Planning Committee can serve as a good starting point for this effort.

- If there can be agreement on the priorities for these expenditures for the FY 15 budget, then this could serve as a model for how to jointly prepare the financial information in advance of Town Meeting to inform the voters as to why these requests are being made. If there is not agreement in time, then this step should be taken for the next budgeting cycle.

Step #6: Sharing of Resources

- Town employees and departments will need the support of the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee if they are to make the changes needed to share more resources and thereby reduce some of the cost of town government. The two boards should consider forming a joint working group with a member from each board and department heads to explore additional ways to share resources.
- If the department heads have an incentive to share resources and feel that all departments will be treated equally in the budgeting process, greater cooperation is likely to occur. The town boards should consider reinvesting any savings in other shared resources that the departments need, such as a town offices assistant that can support several departments or an additional employee that the highway department and the sewer department could share.
- The survey responses suggested a number of possible areas for both in-town, multi-town, and public private sharing of resources that could serve as a starting point, including insurance and other benefits management, public safety including fire and ambulance, human resources, accounting, health agent, building inspector, licensing, and a dog pound.

Step #7: Additional Sources of Revenue

- The discussion groups at the Forum will probably identify a number of good suggestions for additional sources of revenue, including the disposition or re-use of some of the municipal buildings. Following through on these recommendations may require the formation of a new community committee since the steps may involve buildings, private-public partnerships, potential tax or infrastructure incentives, better Internet service, and seeking of grants to promote types of businesses such as recreation or local food businesses. Someone will need to step up to take the lead.
- The Board of Selectmen, together with other appropriate town boards, should consider exploring additional opportunities for surplus sales, increased PILOT revenues, and the potential for solar, wind and other projects that can produce additional revenues.
- Some of the survey responses suggested that the Community Preservation Act could be a good source of additional revenue in the future since the state match is now above 50% again and the funds can be held aside for the right project that the voters support. Someone will need to step up to take the lead on this effort, too.
- In order to encourage town departments and volunteers on committees or community groups to invest the time and energy in these projects, the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee should consider establishing a policy that additional revenues generated through these efforts will be targeted for priority capital improvements that will benefit the entire town.

Step #8: Long-term Facilities Planning

- The discussion groups at the Forum will probably identify a number of good long-term facilities planning priorities. Following through on these recommendations and the suggestions from the survey comments may require a coordinated effort by a number of town boards, including the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee, Planning Board and the Capital Planning Committee. In order to get this process going, the town may want to draw on some of the resources discussed in the next section.

Step #9: Long-term Planning for the Town Government Structure

- Any process to discuss, recommend and implement changes to the town government structure should fully involve the people who may be affected in an open and transparent manner.
- The comments from the survey show that there is a wide range of viewpoints on this issue and, given the small number of town employees and the sensitive nature of the issues, MOPC recommends that the town consider obtaining outside professional assistance to look at these issues carefully, drawing on some of the resources discussed in the next section.
- One possible first step might be facilitated discussions involving elected officials and department heads to explore some of the ways to achieve the benefits that could be obtained with a more structured town government organization within the current structure by relying on increased cooperative efforts of both elected and appointed town employees. This is a win-win approach: for those who favor a more structured government with fewer elected positions, some of the benefits can be achieved, while for those who would like to keep certain positions elected, this can demonstrate that the current system can work as well as a more structured one.

Step #10: Five-year Capital Planning and Budgeting for Future Years

- Following this year's Annual Town Meeting, the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee should consider how to implement a 5-year capital plan and budget process for future years, building on the work that has already been done by the Capital Planning Committee and other town boards.

H. Potential Resources for the Next Steps

There are a number of resources that may be helpful to the town for implementing some of the next steps recommended by MOPC. This is in addition to the many resources that the community already looks to and that are described in the survey responses that have been compiled in this report. These resources can supplement the many community volunteers who are in the best position to take the lead for most of the next steps, including summarizing all of the studies and recommendations that have already been done, and developing a town-wide communication program to implement some of the suggestions contained in the survey responses.

The following resources may be particularly helpful for the tasks that are listed:

Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC)

CMRPC has been an important source of technical assistance, grant support, and information on opportunities for multi-town and regional sharing and funding. The regular participation of the Town Administrator in CMRPC activities is an important link to these resources and CMRPC can continue to be a resource for technical assistance and support including:

- Assistance with identifying both resources and examples from other communities for a more comprehensive assessment of the needs for municipal facilities, both short-term and longer-term, including the best opportunities for multi-town and regional sharing of facilities based upon their knowledge of the needs of neighboring towns. Given Hardwick's location at the edge of a county and a planning region, it will be important to coordinate this effort with any similar work that is being done by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Hardwick could benefit from a joint study by the two regional planning agencies if that were a possibility.
- Assistance with identifying public and private funding opportunities and development approaches for multi-function facilities, including how to take advantage of single-purpose grants as a part of any multi-purpose facility planning that the town decides to look at. The work that CMRPC and the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QVDC) have already done or will be doing for the Hardwick Knitters Mill and other mills in the region can serve as a resource to build on for this effort.
- Continued technical assistance and grant support for the capital planning and town governance priorities that are identified by the town and identification of funding opportunities to support improved communication and the resources listed below.

Center for Economic Development at UMass Amherst

John Mullins and his colleagues and graduate students at CED can be a continuing resource for analyses and studies concerning economic development and municipal facility priorities for the Town of Hardwick including:

- Moderating future community forums such as the May 2014 "State of the Town Forum" and focus groups that bring together members of the community from the different villages and parts of town who share an interest in moving forward together to deal with a particular capital planning issue.
- Undertaking additional economic and development analyses for facilities and plans that are identified as a priority for the town, including the expected revenue and cost implications of the recommendations that are proposed and the likelihood of success based upon similar situations that have been implemented or tried in other communities.

Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management at the John W. McCormick Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies at UMass Boston

The Collins Center can be a very useful resource for information and recommendations on a number of town governance issues including:

- Sharing of support personnel among town departments and functions, including the recruitment and management procedures that can ensure successful transitions.
- Examples of successful consolidation and regionalization programs involving public safety, fire and ambulance services, and for highway, water and sewer departments, including the transition to a municipal governing structure from private and non-profit services that may have separate employees and governing boards.
- Guidance for the most appropriate multi-town and regional sharing of functions for Hardwick, such as information technology, personnel management, insurance and benefits, health agent or other services that the town may not require or be able to afford town employees for.
- Successful models for long-term transitions from volunteer and elected positions to town employee and appointed positions, including the organizational stages that similar towns may have gone through to meet their changing needs and how they have dealt with the succession planning that is needed for important positions that may be difficult to staff in a small town.

Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration at UMass Boston (MOPC)

MOPC can be a resource for training and facilitation services to help guide the standing town boards and committees as well as any newly-formed working groups to work together more effectively and collaboratively including:

- Training for town officials, town employees and volunteers who serve on committees in collaborative problem-solving and open and transparent decision-making for situations where there may be diverse and strongly-held viewpoints concerning how to resolve town governance issues.
- Facilitation of initial working group meetings to assist with the development of a “road-map” for agreeing on the town’s needs including identifying the most pressing needs, assessing the possible approaches for meeting these needs, engaging the community in the prioritizing of both the needs and the approaches, and developing a plan for communicating to the community so that the voters will be fully informed when they are asked to implement a recommended approach.
- Facilitation of initial focus group meetings with John Mullins from the CED and community volunteers to provide training and guidance for successful civic engagement involving people with diverse viewpoints and backgrounds.

IV. Survey Responses

A. Survey Responses about Capital Planning Issues

More than one-half of the 27 survey respondents feel that the 2 or 3 most important capital planning issues that need to be addressed in the next few years are:

- Improved municipal facilities, including the facilities for town offices and the police, fire and highway departments
- Re-use or disposition of underutilized municipal or privately owned buildings, and
- Water or sewer system or recycling center infrastructure improvements.

Next in priority is encouraging new business or expansion of existing ones to create local jobs, followed by improved access to communication and Internet services including broadband, and providing services and facilities for seniors, youth, or those needing social services assistance.

Note that the 110 people who responded to the Annual Town Census survey of topics for the State of the Town forum also listed long-term planning for municipal facilities and potential re-use or disposition of town buildings as the top two priorities, with economic development opportunities for the area of Gilbertville re-zoned for mixed use and meeting the needs for social services for our residents in the future as the next most important topics. The next most important topic was improvements to the Town's infrastructure.

General comments are noted below with specific comments for each priority listed under the heading for that priority. The comments have been compiled, grouped by topic and summarized, and do not include specific comments about individuals or events so as to ensure the confidentiality of the survey responses. Since a number of the comments concerned the possible re-use of the Hardwick Knitters Mill in Gilbertville, they have been separated out and grouped together as a topic.

A. General comments about the most important capital planning issues

In addition to the comments below for each of the priority topics, the following other general comments were made:

Survey question general comments: What do you feel are the 2 or 3 most important major capital planning issues that the voters need to address in the next few years, and why?

Don't spend money for a while - the next 4 to 5 years. Live within our means. Everyone thinks someone else has money. It will be hard if the town goes broke. Some towns will go broke; perhaps when some people read this, it will hit home that this could happen in Hardwick. Do an honest job regarding how much there is to spend; show people how a small increase here can snowball there. Air the "dirty laundry" so people can see how dire strait the situation is.

Put more emphasis on the benefits of the Community Preservation Act (CPA).

Concentrate the focus of the townspeople on the physical needs of the town and Gilbertville, the area with the biggest population. At a number of town-wide meetings that have looked at local needs, Gilbertville was the area that most people decided on as the first priority. Town-wide interest in the historical environment and architectural beauty and consistency of the village could

actually make a big difference. There are many studies that have pointed out that fairly small visual improvements to neighborhoods have completely changed the way communities see them and spurred vision and development efforts. It's easy to dismiss this kind of thinking and crucial to incorporate it.

Hold absentee landlords accountable.

Survey question general comments: For each of your 2 or 3 suggested issues, what steps do you feel will need to be taken to develop a recommendation that the voters will be able to support, to actively engage residents in the development of a recommendation, and to inform all of the members of the community about the importance of this issue so that they may be more interested in supporting the recommendation?

Communication and accurate information. Provide good information on a consistent basis that attracts the citizens' interest in the town's finances and needs.

Get information out to the public. Misinformation and miscommunication is the biggest enemy. A lot depends on the opinion of a few. Put everything out ahead of time. Put factual, unbiased information out there and let people read it and discuss it.

As we have done in the past, we need more informational meetings and inclusion of the general public in the decision-making process. Transparency is important. Transparency allows the public to make informed decisions, not decisions based on rumor, misinformation and emotions. Both sides of the issue need to be presented.

Contact residents in target areas, listen to their complaints and develop a plan all are satisfied with. Much can be accomplished with volunteers. Ask the community, hold forums, go door to door if necessary.

Hold informational meetings to address questions and concerns. Well-publicized events – not all of them serious – using sign boards and packed with financial points that gather people together and create an environment of interest in the issues.

Establish a committee, provide a monthly acceptable agenda and expect monthly reports.

Need a focused committee, a project master plan, public hearings with input and a proposal. Use the State of the Town Forum to engage people and to inform them about the importance of these issues.

About 75-120 people attend town meetings, but rarely the same people. People come in for their one article that they are interested in and then don't come back. Not sure how to engage people. Perhaps better newspaper coverage. People have to make an effort to get involved – have to meet town government half way.

The town boards need to make sure that they have representatives from all socio-economic, generational, and geographical areas of the community. We will need casual informational meetings held at several different times before any votes, as well as articles in the local paper and informational flyers sent to citizens.

Whatever venue is found or decided on for dissemination of information, offer reports on active projects as they progress. How many meetings or reports can one stand? Maybe a booth at the Fair would grab some residents' interest? The State of the Town forum may be a good venue. To get voter approval of an issue will take many, many information meetings and newspaper articles.

Voters will support issues that do not raise taxes significantly. Residents will become engaged by creative ideas and solutions that do not cost them tax money. Committees with energetic and motivated citizens are needed to lead the effort on specific issues. The Ware River News and the Town's website are two helpful sources of communication. Other outlets to consider include YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and other social media communication tools.

Capital Planning projects are likely to be approved by voters as long as taxes are not increased. Finance Committee approval can be very helpful for voter approval.

To get something passed, you need to have consensus between the Selectmen and the Finance Committee and then need to sell it to the town. A presentation at Town Meeting is needed if you want to push an economic plan and show the benefits. Special Town Meetings for a topic don't draw.

Need a vision and a plan to get voters behind it. With a good plan, then market it every chance you get. Any capital change that includes a new building would take years to realize, and people need to understand that.

Push the big picture and discuss ways of working through the period of planning and preparation – delayed gratification is always difficult to push, but with real vision, it is possible to accomplish with the townspeople.

Decide on a workable plan, something that will generate interest in the different villages – Hardwick, Gilbertville, Wheelwright and the West part of town – and to different economic groups. Get key people from the different villages to participate and have them spread the information and also determine what is important to them. Sift through this information and determine what is feasible and attainable. Get that information out to as many citizens as possible, plan the work, and work the plan. Will need to have village or neighborhood information meetings by the participating citizens. We should try not to drag issues out over long periods of time and we should try to make decisions quicker that show results.

If the Eagle Hill School/Town sewer project goes forward, that would make a good model for how to develop a recommendation that the voters will be able to support. Need to draft well known people from each of the villages to work on any project. We are "balkanized" into four distinct residential areas, with attendant class distinction issues. We need local "captains" who can report to their "neighborhoods". Bring on board people who are looked up to in our several villages who can speak the local talk and show folks what is in their best interests; taxes will have to rise, too. Will need enough informational meetings, fairs and events to get momentum up for projects.

Many times it appears that there is negative or disruptive engagement on these issues, with one village or part of town against another. We need to get the parties all working together and that may be impossible because of social and economic perspectives. This provincialism is very counter-productive. The "us" versus "them" usually boils down to money. You have a few naysayers that stir the pot.

B. Improved municipal services or facilities, including the facilities for town offices and the police, fire and highway departments

1. General comments

Number 1 priority is improved municipal services or facilities including the facilities for town offices and the police, fire and highway departments. The Municipal building is filthy with dust all over the place and has issues with heating, electricity and plumbing.

Number 1 priority is for improved facilities – it's overdue. Do we go with new facilities? Need to explain the need and explain it again. It's a tough sell, because lots of people are on fixed income and are affected by the tax rate. Be truthful, explain fully, rationalize the need.

Number 1 priority is for facilities for town offices and the police. Fire and Highway are okay right now and more or less centrally located. The Municipal building does not have a good flow and it is chopped up. A new building could be welcoming and incorporate the police. If it is a single floor, not need an expensive ADA elevator and can have parking.

We need to have a modern and useful Municipal Complex with adequate space for meetings and parking. Close and sell the Senior Center building and the Municipal building. Plan for a new or remodeled Municipal building by presenting the information to a wider base of citizens and get them to participate in the process. Get citizens from different sections of town to participate and report back to other citizens from their sections of town. Focus on a date when it might be possible to have a new Municipal complex.

Town offices and the police department need improvement. Maybe the fire department, too? The Municipal Offices building is outdated and the police department space is outdated. Those functions have changed so much in the past 10 years, so they need to be brought up to date.

We need a new or remodeled municipal complex housing several of the town departments with adequate meeting space and parking – municipal employees, police department, senior center, youth center, Board of Health, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Recycling Committee, etc. The present building is an old brick school – the roof needs repair, some of the brick work is loose and there is limited parking. The police department is in the basement and has to run an air conditioner in the winter because it is next to the furnace room. It does not have an elevator to the second floor, it is not ADA compliant and it is expensive to heat. The fire department and the highway department will need additional space and updating as well.

Number 2 priority is town offices. Where to put it? Not much land at the school. Difficult issue with taxes; the cost of sewer and water in Gilbertville have increased so much in the past 10 years, so people fight a tax increase.

Re-use and dispose of municipal buildings. Combine services. Improve municipal services.

A building that housed the senior center, food pantry, youth center, town offices and veteran's services would be a great thing.

If we sell the current buildings for their assessed value, or even less, and no longer have the high operating and maintenance costs, this would cover all or most of the yearly payout for municipal facilities including the Senior Center and Public Safety in a new location. There would be some grants for the facilities.

Sites for a new municipal building: the ball field off of Prospect does not get much use and has water and sewer. Could also tear down a building and use that site. What about municipal facilities at the school site? The Town owns the school, site has ample water and septic, but the downside is that is not in the center and use may be limited by the septic system. It is one story and ADA compatible so would be excellent if the district closes the school.

The timing for a new building for town offices should be in 3 to 5 years.

I do not recommend building new facilities for the police, town offices, fire or highway departments, at least for now, since I do not believe that they will generate any near-term benefit, improvement to the business climate or return in revenue to the town.

Separate new buildings are wastes of space and money in the name of progress, as are having dedicated spaces for everything instead of being willing to use the space in one building for large events or meetings, such as the Elementary School or the Town House.

In many ways, the town may be better off leasing space from a private entity as opposed to building new facilities. The town would have a known price for a known period of time. When the building became obsolete, the town would not be stuck with a "white elephant" such as the Senior Center, and the owner could easily change the use of the building.

Get out of buildings – Town offices and Senior Center. Heat costs alone would cover the costs to move to new facilities. Could build a decent Senior Center on the old ballfield and pay the mortgage for what pay now for the heat. Can probably sell the building for rehab, and the cost to demolish and build on the site is expensive. Need money for town hall and senior center with a meeting room – one building. Long-term loan can be paid with what paying now for heating costs.

We are in dire straits with the Municipal building. It was condemned as a school 15 years ago and has holes in the roof.

If we stay in the Municipal building, should gut it and do it over with an elevator and add other space, such as for the Council on Aging, and move the police out. Include room for meetings. This building needs investment by the town. You have to present it well to get anything passed. Most important and best chance for a capital improvement: the Senior Center building is 3 times the size of the Municipal building with many fewer people in it. Tear it down and use the space in the Municipal building better. The space in that building is not being utilized. There is brownfields money – tear the Senior Center building down and replace it with something that will bring people into town, like a branch bank, a clothing store, or a strip mall that will generate new revenue sources.

Need to spend money on existing buildings that are currently in use and do this immediately to save money on heat and to make them sustainable until longer-term projects can be developed and completed.

Need to remodel the Senior Center and town offices for energy efficiency.

2. Senior Center, Youth Center and Libraries

Need a temporary location for the Senior Center – it is expensive to heat and has lots of liability problems. Maybe could use Municipal building, the Library, or the Quabbin Estates meeting room?

Closing and selling the present Senior Center, which also houses the Youth Center and Food Pantry, would save money. The Senior Center is an old school building and is expensive to heat. The seniors would be able to go to the Barre and Ware Senior Centers. This type of an arrangement has already been approved by Barre and Ware. The Youth Center can go to the second floor of the Municipal Building. The MART transportation and Meals on Wheels can be run out of the Municipal building as well. The Food Pantry, which is a private group of volunteer citizens, may be able to use space on the first floor of the SMOC Windsor Rooming House. The SMOC building might be able to hold the Youth Center. The Hardwick Elementary School student population has declined in the past ten years. There might be space available in the school building for the Senior Center or the Youth Center. The regional school administration is not in favor of this arrangement but it might be a good use of extra space in a good building; the school is about 25 years old.

It is frustrating that projects take so long; it is important that we make decisions on issues and not let them linger. For example, the town has talked about doing something with the Senior Center building for years. Studies have been done and put on shelves. We are almost through a \$25,000 grant to study what the needs of the town senior population are concerning having a new or refurbished Senior Center. The town cannot afford a new Senior Center and people are skeptical that it will not get used. Meanwhile we have an underused Senior Center in a building that is not very attractive. It has code issues, it is expensive to heat and closing it will cause strife in the town.

Raze the former elementary school in Gilbertville village and make sure a senior center and a youth center are part of future building plans.

Should be out of the Senior Center immediately – it is a money hole. Have suspicions about the number of people being served since never see very many people in there.

Building a new senior center, separate from other buildings, in a location outside of Gilbertville would be a misuse of funds.

There needs to be consideration given to the impact that a town library has on the community – it is one of the only spaces where townspeople can gather for enriching activities.

The idea of consolidating the two libraries was discussed about 5 years ago and the private Gilbertville library did not want to lose control of their finances, their collection and their building, which is what would have had to happen in order to become a town entity. The Paige Library's Building Committee attempted to put into place the Board of Library Commissioners (BOLC) and the Architect's suggestions for renovating and expanding the Paige Library building to meet the town's needs, including a community room for public use, but the vote to submit an application was defeated by a narrow margin after the expense of working with the architects had already been incurred, even with the enticement of the possibility of 60% of the costs being reimbursed to the town by the BOLC.

3. Public safety, fire and highway departments

Number 2 priority is a public safety building. Get it out of town offices.

There should be more of a push for a public safety complex for current needs with some expansion potential, at a location that can have police, fire and highway, but start off with the police facility. Not many police facilities are being funded now – North Brookfield built a new one and Brookfield is voting on a new one. The only grants out there now are through Homeland Security for things like new radios. Need to agree on a location, preferably on town-owned land, such as by the elementary school, and then agree on the size to include the current functions plus an evidence area and

training area. Funding will need to go to the sewer department first and then after that should go to public safety. Will need a plan.

Build a “safety complex” with the police department, fire department and ambulance. It is very inadequate right now for all three of these. It is critical to replace fire trucks. Need to provide an informational hearing and get the word out about the need, why something is needed and how it can help people in the long term to fund this. The performance and age of fire equipment affects homeowner insurance premiums because if there is a fire and equipment is not up to standards, there is less chance of salvaging anything. If the town’s fire department scores high in terms of these standards, premiums are lower. This is one way to explain to people that getting a new fire truck helps not only if there is a fire, but also provides savings to all.

Would like to see a public safety building like Paxton but not that big. Right now, if they arrest someone, they have to handcuff them to a bench in the office until they can transport them to the jail in Spencer.

Consolidate the physical structures for the police department, fire department and highway department. Makes no sense that they are in three different locations. Should be a central location.

The Police Department does not have a generator – need to deal with this. Relied on private donations through their Association to pay for the carports and a snow blower.

We need a new fire truck with an extension since there are 2 and 3 story buildings and now they have to call for a truck from another town. We could buy a used truck.

C. Re-use or disposition of underutilized municipal or privately owned buildings.

In addition to the comments under improved municipal facilities above and the specific comments about the re-use of the Hardwick Knitters Mill that follow, these comments were made concerning the re-use or disposition of underutilized buildings:

The Barton building sat idle for 35-40 years with no tax base; a few more businesses like that would be good.

The reuse of underutilized buildings and improved access to Internet services should be our greatest priority since they all go together to make the business climate in Hardwick more attractive.

Hardwick needs to encourage and promote the redevelopment of our existing industrial sites. The market may not be where we would like it to be at the moment, but we must continue to look for future development potential. Although I would prefer to see private properties developed for private business purposes, I would recommend any use, public or private, that is supported by the town as a whole.

We should sell off old buildings even if they don’t cost much to maintain currently. Businesses could buy them, which would create revenue. People in town talk about their fond memories re: this and that building and so they don’t get sold.

Perhaps a regional housing authority could help these small towns put all of the empty buildings to good community use.

D. Specific comments about the re-use of the Hardwick Knitters Mill

Hardwick needs to encourage and promote the redevelopment of our existing industrial sites. The market may not be where we would like it to be at the moment, but we must continue to look for future development potential. I would prefer to see private properties developed for private business purposes, but that is my preference and I would recommend any use, public or private that is supported by the town.

Develop the Hardwick Knitters Mill with a mixed use of business, senior over 55 housing – this would provide more tax revenue and provide jobs as well as make Gilbertville more attractive.

The old Mill: better to use that building for economic development rather than municipal. A mom and pop grocery store? Young couples won't be attracted to live here unless there is a grocery store, a bank, etc.

Use the Gilbertville Mill by the Hardwick House of Pizza for public-private sharing of facilities. Develop more tourist activity – hiking, biking, snowmobiling. Also, advertise food movements in Hardwick: cheese, bakery, farms, wine, maple syrup, brewery. Hardwick is a local food paradise.

Renovating the Mill may not bring in a lot of small businesses, but it would help.

The Mill – if you spend all that money to fix it up, will they come?

Rehab the Gilbertville mill to house municipal offices, police and create a business incubator and/or housing in the facility. Develop a proposal to seek out a Preferred Developer for the rehab of the mill site.

Rehab the old mill and move the Town offices, Senior and Youth Center, Police, some senior housing and 1 or 2 senior services and a restaurant or two into it. If you rehab the old mill in Gilbertville, you could incorporate a number of capital planning priorities, including re-use of buildings, encouraging new businesses, encouraging remodeling for housing, and providing services for seniors and youth.

The Mill would be an excellent place to put the municipal offices. We need a municipal needs assessment and inventory of what is going on, what is needed, status of buildings. Put all town functions in the mill except for Highway and Fire since they belong where they are. Town can't afford two libraries, so consolidate them in the mill. State library person said the Mill would qualify for funding, since the space available can meet the 10,000 sq.ft. Board of Library Commissioners' space requirement. The MCDBG scope for the Senior Center only allows Caitlin Architects to look at the Senior Center, so they can't look at other uses, which eliminates the mill option. For the Mill, the estimate is \$11/sq.ft. for raw space rental and we would not incur any town debt, per the Brian Nichols report. A Mill owner/developer needs the Town as an anchor tenant and there is a need for housing like the Ware Senior Housing. What about a non-profit developer who doesn't need a profit? Or, what about a Housing Redevelopment Authority? We should look at regional housing needs since some nearby towns like New Braintree don't want to develop their own housing.

The Board of Library Commissioners was not willing to consider funding a project in the Mill building if it did not have other residents/active plans in place. They were not willing to renovate the space (for a library...), without the commitment from the town that they were not to be the sole inhabitants of that building.

Impossible to separate the needs for municipal services, social services, affordable housing, new businesses, library facilities, re-use and attention to architectural landscape, space for early childhood education that is accessible to people in Gilbertville – should be successfully changed and improved by centering them in the mill. Some of the residents of Gilbertville find that it is a difficult place to live because there is no public transportation, no grocery store, no recreational space.... We need to develop the mill and move many services and programs there as well as giving space for affordable housing and small businesses – making current centers available for development of housing and/or playground space.

The Mill project could address several important priorities: providing services for seniors and youth, improved municipal facilities, and encouraging remodeling of unused buildings.

The possible Mill renovation will provide many benefits to everyone. I'll need senior housing myself.

The Mill project can be combined with other needs: re-use of municipal or privately owned buildings, affordable housing, and improved municipal services. We have the numbers now, it's time to move on it.

It's impossible to separate most of the needs. Municipal services, social services, affordable housing, new businesses, library facilities, re-use and attention to the architectural landscape and space for early childhood education that is accessible to people in Gilbertville have to be changed and improved by centering them in the Gilbertville Mill. We need to develop the mill and move many services and programs there as well as giving space for affordable housing and small businesses, making current centers available for development of housing and/or playground space.

If there were vision and backing on the part of the selectmen and other offices that are charged with town planning and finances to support the redevelopment of the mill and commit to leasing a portion of it, and an effort to find a commercial developer and begin the process, the town could get behind the project. Make job training, elder housing and recreational space part of the vision. Promote the importance and promise of the big picture. This would not be a quick fix, but trying to find quick fixes will end in more money being spent and fewer benefits realized. The future of the town would be living around collapsing buildings that would keep new businesses and residents away because the landscape would signal a town in decline.

We need to find ways to sustain the present buildings by investing in buildings to keep them going until a larger vision is realized by redeveloping the mill.

E. Water and sewer system or recycling center infrastructure improvements

1. General comments

We have aging systems and the need to protect our water resources. The water and sewer needs are on-going with an aged system, forced by EPA and DEP. We are currently doing a patch-work, which is more costly.

Infrastructure (sewer, water etc.) improvements would be a great benefit to the town and the business climate.

Without having modern water and sewer systems, limits new business and expansion of current business. Hardwick Town Common town buildings and churches are underutilized because of no

sewer system. Eagle Hill should take the lead for the sewer extension – they will benefit the most and with this improvement, both the town and Eagle Hill will benefit.

2. Comments about the sewer system

We have been upgrading the sewer system and Phase 2 still to come. The Gilbertville Plant is 40 years old and will need upgrading.

Complete the Gilbertville Waste Water Treatment Plant upgrade. The wastewater treatment plant in Gilbertville needs updating and the engineering study has already been done. The town may have to provide funding from the tax base to pay for some of the expense of the project. The former Sewer Commissioners should have put money away for this needed update so now the whole town, not just the sewer users, have to pay for the update. We need to tell the citizens why the plant needs to be upgraded and also tell them that, if the plans were made in the past to put money aside from sewer user fees, the sewer users could have paid for the upgrade without the whole town having to pay for Gilbertville's sewer upgrade. Most of the town residents have septic systems. We should plan for future upgrades now by setting aside money from the sewer user fees.

A sewer line from Hardwick Center to Gilbertville will put new life into the public buildings in Hardwick Center. Also a turnover of home ownership may upgrade the houses in the center.

We think that the sewer system is about to be expanded and improved with the help of Eagle Hill School and that the new system from Hardwick will ultimately help the older one in Gilbertville.

3. Comments about the water systems

Would like the Town to take over the private Gilbertville and Wheelwright water systems that have their own boards and are owned by the users. If the Town owned them, could have a DPW.

Because there are three water systems, this is a high priority. Would like to see a Department of Public Works created that would host water, sewer and highway – combine the services under one department. This could save money. Wheelwright water system is private, people aren't paying their bills, and they can't collect – they want the town to collect the overdue bills. They have started to turn off water after the allowed time period. A suggestion: charge fees to collect the overdue payments. There are no meters for the Wheelwright system – everyone pays the same \$750 amount. Gilbertville has meters, but they are old models inside people's homes and so they have to ask permission to read the meters, when people say no, they can't bill them. Gilbertville water district is in dire straits and has done no planning for the future.

4. Comments about the recycling center

Recycling needs to be encouraged (should be mandatory?) and supported more to keep the landfills from expanding.

Trash haulers who have replaced Fijal also do curb recycling, so will people use the Recycling Center as much?

The local trash collector went out of business overnight and didn't tell anyone. Now three trash haulers from Worcester and other bigger towns around us come in and get the trash. Not sure how that will affect the local recycling center because recycling now happens at the curb.

F. Encouraging new businesses or expansion of existing ones to create local jobs

Encourage more local jobs – if we could pull it off, could create revenue and the only issue that can. Encourage new or expanded businesses to increase revenues in town.

We should do more to encourage businesses to locate and expand in our town. More and growing businesses and the local jobs that come with them will bring a larger tax base. That larger tax base can then be used to fund improvements to the other municipal services, schools and libraries. The Planning Board has already taken a step by updating the Zoning Bylaws making it easier for businesses to expand and locate in Hardwick, specifically in the Village of Gilbertville. This initial step must be built upon by keeping the bylaws up to date and making any necessary changes that can benefit business development in our town. Times change and the bylaws must be changed to reflect current developments in community planning practices.

Encouraging new business or expansion of existing business – with improved Internet access – would help with rehab of housing stock and could justify public transportation. Need to find grants or programs that teach/support business models, tax requirements or things that a new or improved business might need.

Encouraging business is more of a mindset, rather than a budget line item. The simplest step to support the goal of encouraging business is improved Internet service.

G. Improved access to communication and Internet services including broadband

I agree with many people on the importance of improved Internet services.

Improved access to communication and Internet services including broadband is needed because people are frustrated about lack of services. Also cannot get businesses to start here when there is poor Internet service.

The cable situation is not town-wide and progress is slow. This is beyond our control. No amount of negotiation will move the cable and telecommunications companies into upgrading the existing services.

The reuse of underutilized buildings and improved access to Internet services should be our greatest priority since they all go together to make the business climate in Hardwick more attractive. We need to press our cable provider, Comcast, to expand cable access to our more rural sections of town.

Seek to provide the entire town with high-speed Internet and cell service. This infrastructure improvement is critical toward encouraging new businesses and improvements to public safety. End the cable contract with Comcast if they are unwilling to connect the entire town. Request FCC assistance in gaining total cell service for Hardwick. Seek assistance from the Broadband Institute on alternative Internet providers.

Access to high-speed information is the most critical utility the town can provide because businesses are suffering due to the lack of high speed internet. The problem is not solved by providing access to high speed to the population centers since many of the businesses that need high speed internet are and will be located in other parts of town. The town's service provider will not wire the town as it is not cost effective for them, and they are a "Cable TV" company that makes their money on the cable fees, not the high speed internet. The Mass Broadband Initiative (MBI) is just bringing the high speed to selected town buildings in the population center and is not bringing

it to the “last mile”, which in Hardwick’s case is the last several miles. Their technology is cable, not fiber optic, which is an obsolete technology. One option would be for the town to administer the installation of a wireless system to cover the locations not currently covered by fiber optic or cable, dovetailed with the MBI connections to the town buildings. The expense could be covered by a “user’s fee” for the wireless users as opposed to the whole town paying for it. If and when technology changes, all one would have to do is exchange the wireless boxes as opposed to string new wires.

H. Providing services and facilities for seniors, youth, or those needing social services assistance

In addition to the comments under municipal facilities above:

Number 1 priority – providing services and facilities for seniors and youth – could be joint with another town. It may be easier to share youth services with another town since the seniors who use the facilities are old natives who live in Gilbertville and it will be hard to get them to go to another town’s facility. Those residents in other parts of town that have moved here more recently don’t have such strong family bonds and ties and are more okay with change.

Money is always the issue for seniors, youth services, and outreach for social services. The Senior Center does some outreach but is limited. Any services require full time people and if funded thru grants will only last until the money runs out. Town does not have the money for these issues.

Need to provide for those who need social services assistance.

We are helping the youth that we are getting to. There are more now and we don’t know the people who are on the street the way we used to.

Low-income people move to Gilbertville because of the availability of housing, but few are able to improve their lives because there is no public transportation, no grocery store, no recreational space – thus they are very transient.

I. Other topics: Education services and school facilities; Library services and facilities; Recreation, organized sport or playground facilities; Encouraging remodeling or new construction to provide affordable housing, including housing for the elderly or the disabled

In addition to the comments under municipal facilities above:

Need more money for library services. In the past, Town Meeting does not support these issues.

Recreation may happen privately – possibility of zip lines at the Hardwick Winery?

Educational services and school facilities are long-term issues that will need to be addressed. The local educational budget is by far the largest item on the local budget. By definition, it impacts all other departments and activities overseen by the town. The current system is expensive and takes away resources from other town programs. This issue also transcends questions of finances to include equity and fairness. Over the past several decades, teacher’s salaries and benefits have continued to increase at a steady rate while, unfortunately the salaries and benefits of the people in the local communities who ultimately pay for the school salaries and benefits have stagnated. The result is many people in town feel they are working for the school system, as opposed to the school system working for them. This situation is not unique – it is becoming the norm throughout the country. There are public/private education alternatives. For example, New Orleans has initiated a

Charter School system for the entire school population and their schools are now operating with considerably less cost and with improved education scores.

School facilities and educational services for elementary and high school students are good, but it would be a disaster if a serious and a successful effort were made to move the elementary school students from Hardwick to another school, among these the detriment to our children that would come with non-local education and a responding diminished interest in them and their needs, a total loss of the potential for a tax base in town, the bottoming out of real estate sales and many other things. Who wants to move to a town where there's no school?

If we don't have housing that is affordable to young working families (and the Ware CDC study on Hardwick housing makes it clear that we don't.....), then how can people start businesses and why would businesses move here?

I. Capital planning issues that have the best chance of being approved by voters

Survey question comments: What one major capital planning issue do you think has the best chance of being approved by the voters in the next year or two, and what specific steps do you think will be needed to get voter approval for this issue?

Upgrading the Gilbertville Plant will be a hard fight, but we have to do it, and this needs to come first. The engineers have reviewed the plans for the Plant, there is USDA loan and grant funding, and we can do it when the long-term debt ends for the Administration building at the School and the Wheelwright fire tank. We need to be clear with the voters that it is better to do this than to wait for DEP to tell us to do it. This will be a capital improvement so it should be on the tax rate, the same as when the Plant was built. It is for the whole town like the schools – if the Plant fails, the whole town will have to pay for it.

The Gilbertville Waste Water Treatment Plant upgrade, because it is needed and under a DEP order. Need to provide regular and consistent information, let people know that it might raise taxes and why, and then have a plan for the future upgrades so the whole town does not have to pay for it.

Reduced sewer rates.

Sewer extension, with proper information has a shot of passing. All of the houses in the center will have problems in the future. You need very good PR; you need to ask the people that others listen to what information they need. A lot of people vote the way a few people tell them to.

The sewer system will likely go through. Not against the project itself, just question the amount of money and would like to have it spelled out who is responsible for what.

Sewer is at the top of the heap. If you do not do this, it inhibits everything else. Without sewers its like paving Rt. 32 without fixing the water lines underneath it first. Need a campaign of how it could and should be.

The proposal to run a sewer line from Eagle Hill School, through Hardwick Center, to the sewer treatment plant in Gilbertville seems to be a project worth pursuing.

Extension of the Gilbertville sewer system to Hardwick center. Need informational meetings that highlight the benefits of expansion to all residents of the community, not just the end users.

Both the Sewer and the Senior Center will be on the table. With the partnership with Eagle Hill and the widely known and acknowledged need for sewer in the Center, the Sewer project should make

it. The Senior Center will be more difficult because of the debt load, but if it is coupled with a Youth Center, it may make it. The Sewer needs pressure from the state DEP to get voter approval, while some tough love from the Selectmen, Board of Health or Building Department may be needed to shut the Senior Center building down.

Probably the senior center - the present building is obsolete and extremely expensive to heat. If a new facility for a senior center were privately built and leased to the town, the town would have a known price for a known period of time and this might make the proposal for a newly constructed facility more palatable.

Improvements to the Senior Center may be approved.

Some buildings need improvement while we work on projects that will take longer – we need to educate people to understand this. For example, putting a new forced air heating and cooling system in the Senior Center would pay for itself almost immediately in its savings of funds now being poured into oil heat.

We need the roof fixed at the Municipal building. This will depend on the Finance Committee to get it passed; people listen to their recommendations, but they often don't make favorable recommendations or offer information for why they are rejecting something. They are often privy to information that they cannot share for ethical reasons so we don't know why something does not go through. It is the same in other towns – they can't or won't provide information.

People don't want to spend money, but hopefully they will fund a fire truck.

If people can digest a Capital Plan, then vehicle purchases should be in the capital plan to keep costs down. Voters will need to be able to understand the Capital Plan and needs – why you need to add \$10,000 a year to the account for vehicle purchases. For example, we have 4 police cruisers and we need to replace a cruiser every 2 to 2-1/2 years because we are running them on calls for service 24/7.

I believe the Internet connection issues interests enough people that it will be dealt with in the very near future.

B. Survey Responses about Revenue and Sharing of Resources

The confidential MOPC survey also asked respondents for suggestions for how the town could increase revenues in the future from existing or new sources other than the property tax, and suggestions. The following suggestions were made in addition to the comments that were included in the previous sections.

A. Suggestions for how the Town could increase revenues in the future from existing or new sources other than the property tax

1. Comments about additional business revenue

Wheelwright School made the transition to attract business.

We need to create an environment that encourages people to set up businesses in the community. The first step is attracting younger citizens to move to the town, which will create more demand for shopping and restaurants run by local people.

We should be encouraging new businesses to locate their facilities and the expansion of existing facilities to increase our tax base.

The town is “business friendly” towards small and local businesses. This philosophy should continue and be highly encouraged. Not only will the businesses add to the tax base, they will support other local businesses and employ local people who add to the tax base too. Infrastructure such as high speed Internet would be a great asset in luring and keeping local small businesses.

Actively interact with the present businesses in town to see how they might expand to provide more jobs and tax base.

Develop more tourist activity – hiking, biking, snowmobiling. Eco-tourism in a well-planned business model.

Look into tourism such as hiking, fishing, hunting, golf, river sports using the Quabbin Reservoir, East Quabbin Land Trust lands, and the farms and unique businesses in town. Partner with Eagle Hill School in the summer for use of the Sports Complex and student housing for a specialized sports summer school.

Advertise food movements in Hardwick – cheese, bakery, farms, wine, maple syrup, brewery. Hardwick is a local food paradise.

Growing our agricultural community and increasing local business could help with creating stronger local economy.

Continue the Rural 11 type initiatives as integrated with the Town’s Finance and Capital Planning activities.

Develop the Hardwick Knitters Mill with a mixed use of business and senior over 55 housing. This would provide more tax revenue and provide jobs as well as make Gilbertville more attractive.

No one is using all of the old mills in town well. Need to promote to businesses in the area – have to sell it right, with incentives like a start-up tax break for 5 years, or for 2 years and see how they are doing.

Try to create business opportunities at the Mills and along the railroad. This is not easy without an outside developer and Internet access.

There is not much business in Hardwick. Provide tax incentives or something of that sort to attract business and to encourage people to set up shop in town.

We are limited as to the amount of business we can bring in and small businesses will not increase revenue a lot.

There are very few companies that show any interest. We just don’t have the economic assets to entice these companies to locate in town.

Increasing fees above what is reasonably expected for the product or service the fee is intended to cover will be quickly viewed as a tax. This would not be viewed favorably unless the town can see a direct and well-managed use of the monies raised.

Licensing fees? But, would hurt businesses and we don’t have a lot.

We could raise fees for services and permits, but that would be a limited source of revenue.

2. Other comments about potential sources of revenue

We are pretty tapped as to where to get more money from.

No ideas to offer – town must realize that it has to rein in spending for a while.

Increased Recycling Center fees? Hesitate to do so since many residents are struggling financially.

Sell town-owned assets, i.e. land. There is town-owned land in the West part that could be sold and put back on the tax rolls.

Dispose of underutilized town buildings and put back on the tax rolls.

Sell off old buildings even if they don't cost much to maintain currently. Business could buy them, which could create revenue. But people in town talk about fond memories of this and that building so they don't get sold.

Surplus building sale is only one-time revenue source.

Roach field is town-owned land. In the back, there are thousands of yards of gravel that we should use – this was discussed in the past, but nothing happened. We should screen and stockpile to offset costs of gravel.

Pass the Community Preservation Act (CPA). We are not attractive to many businesses that are looking for trained workers because of a lack of housing for working families who might move here, and a lack of real services to help the low-income people who live here to form a real workforce. At the same time, we have a lot of old buildings that need to be addressed with adaptive re-use in mind and that need to be repaired first. The CPA can give us funds to address affordable housing, historic preservation and environmental health.

PILOT programs (payment in lieu of taxes).

More appropriate compensation from the state for the presence of the Quabbin Reservoir adjacent to town relative to the impact on infrastructure. It is of great benefit to have an “accidental wilderness” adjacent to town, however as a result, certain constraints to infrastructure and development result. Compensation in lieu of property taxes does not seem equitable.

There will be solar fields on Lower Road by the Golf Course – the Town has done the PILOT and will get \$24,000 a year plus the property tax.

Expansion of solar arrays and installation of wind power facilities are worth consideration.

Explore solar and wind energy for the town to sell back to the grid.

There is a question as to how much farmland we should use for solar projects.

Farmland will go into conservation – some will not like that, but in the long run it makes the town what it is.

A well-managed marijuana dispensary and tightly controlled marijuana farm could be potential sources of local revenue.

Selling carbon credits in a cooperative.

Lotteries

B. Suggestions for service areas that the Town should consider multi-town or public-private sharing of facilities, equipment or personnel

1. General comments

I think we're already on the right track with sharing of equipment.

There is a regional study committee on rural town services that the Town Administrator attends regularly.

Regionalization does not work well because of the isolation. It is difficult to do more than what we are doing now, other than for non-essential highway equipment.

Some "regionalization plans" don't make sense.

We could share anything that is not either confidential or is required to be instantly accessible, such as highway equipment and personnel, fire and police when necessary, as well as town positions which will not be compromised by multi-town use.

It should be obvious that the sharing of equipment, facilities and personnel between Hardwick and neighboring communities would be a good idea. We already are part of a regional school district and share a police and fire dispatch center and other services.

Some of this is already in place. Historically this has been difficult with the concerns for who will oversee the agreement on behalf of the Town and the liability concerns, as well as the loss of local control. Opinions have moderated recently and if you can tie some funding to the initiative, this can influence the willingness. This may be a good topic for some group brainstorming at the Forum.

This all depends on all parties seeing the same problem – some do but others seem to want to protect their turf.

Multi-town sharing of equipment is a good idea for some larger more expensive items, but it is okay to leave things pretty much as they are despite the apparent lack of efficiency. This is because there are cultural as well as financial issues – New England towns were self-sustaining units for the better part of 300 years and to this day, they remain independent. County government in New England is almost non-existent compared to other parts of the country where shared resources happened at the same time towns were started.

We have looked at multi-town personnel benefits – that would be good if worked with local towns and good qualified people. Same would be true with group insurance.

Building department, a Human Resources Officer, and the Health Agent seem logical to share.

Perhaps a shared or regional health agent for the Board of Health? Currently a member of the Board of Health is paid to be the agent, which is a conflict of sorts, but it is what we have at the moment.

Could do with accounting.

There is the potential for some significant efficiency with private/public sharing of facilities and equipment if the town follows business guidelines for such practices. The town may be better off

leasing space from a private entity as opposed to building facilities since codes, mandates, demographics and technology seem to make buildings obsolete within 20 to 30 years. The town would have a known price for a known period of time.

A great example of public-private shared facilities would be the redevelopment of the Mill with town offices, police, retail, and housing.

Partnering with Eagle Hill School will solve some long-standing problems.

2. Highway department

Share highway equipment with other towns.

Doing now with highway department with other towns and its working pretty well.

There is a lot of sharing that is already being done with specialized equipment, such as storm drain vacuums. Another town owns the storm drain vacuum equipment, but Hardwick can use it when we need to. There are many examples of this that are already being done and which people may not know about.

The town is part of a six-town highway cooperative to share equipment. They have received grants for equipment such as a pavement roller and trailer and sign-making machine to be shared by all six towns. They are applying for a \$250,000 grant for a catch basin cleaner. They are also exploring hiring an employee to work for all six towns operating the catch basin cleaner and other equipment.

Association is buying equipment with a grant, which is good, but we may need to incur costs with operators. As long as we keep it small and focused, it is good, but we don't want another regional school type of situation or bring in larger towns. The views of other towns on cost management are unknown.

Put the water, sewer and highway under one structure so one department does maintenance and repairs – a DPW. Down the road, work with New Braintree or other towns on roads and plowing where a road is more convenient for the other town to plow or maintain.

3. Public safety, fire and ambulance services

The sharing of dispatch with 10 communities works well now.

Mutual aid agreements are in place where they make sense.

Often thought that the police department could combine services and equipment; in the past, the force was smaller and relied more on the state police. Now the force is much bigger and the town hasn't really grown that much. The state is requiring a lot of equipment and training to keep the force current.

I am surprised that the police, fire and ambulance services have not been combined yet, and expect that this will happen at some point. Not against this, but would like to see examples of other towns where this has happened. We should look to Barre and New Braintree to learn their needs and current facilities. Of course you've probably got better control if you are your own entity, but it may be better to join forces to get better facilities and equipment.

It is important to help each other out. Another town's fire department needed funds for gear for the ice rescue team and \$500 was given to them, which makes sense since Hardwick may need that team to come do a rescue and you want them to have the gear.

Will have to do something with the ambulance service, perhaps contract with Ware rather than buy a new ambulance.

The Town has looked into a regional ambulance service with the Town of Ware. Hardwick's Rescue Squad is private and has had problems in the recent past with funding, equipment and trained personnel. Central MA Regional Planning Commission was studying a regional ambulance service.

Create a regional dog pound with other towns. The dog pound person takes the dogs home.

4. Senior Center, Youth Center and social services

The current state of most of the town's buildings make it very unlikely that sharing is possible, due to the already inadequate space, or the deteriorated condition of the buildings. The situation with the town's senior center, partnered with the church's food pantry is a good fit, except that the building creates a huge energy and financial waste, and it would be good to see that building vacated and its environmental hazards dealt with, and that public-private collaboration moved into another building, perhaps the mill.

Senior Center – a tremendous burden that could be shared with another town. Hard to change because those who are using it are old natives and don't want to change.

Investigate conducting Senior Center activities in either Barre or Ware. This would eliminate the need to maintain the current facility, which is cost prohibitive.

Perhaps regionalize the senior center with Barre or Ware. It costs about \$40,000 to \$50,000 to heat the building and not many people use the center; if they went somewhere else, this cost would go down to \$7,000 to \$8,000 so there would be significant savings.

Transportation is key and critical – that's a common concern and there is a transportation work group in Ware that we should be included in.

The town should become more involved in regional and area boards and committees that are concerned with social services assistance because it increases our advocacy clout and gets us information about available services, programs and grants that can be passed on to the schools and the police department. The social service agencies that are located in Ware or Hampshire County and are represented in the Quaboag Hills Community Coalition have a service area that covers 15 small town on the borders of three counties, but the people in those communities don't seem to know that they can be involved. Participating in those meetings has made us aware of and eligible for social services grants we would not otherwise have known about.

C. Survey Responses about Communicating Information

The following suggestions in response to the survey questions about communicating information to the public have been compiled, grouped by topic and summarized, and do not include specific comments about individuals or events so as to ensure the confidentiality of the survey responses.

A. Providing information to the public more efficiently, including through increased use of computer-based or online technologies

1. General comments

This questionnaire makes me realize that communication needs to be addressed in-house first.

The current state of affairs is very effective – if you want to know, the information is there. The town website is very complete and up-to-date. For those without Internet, the material is published in the local paper the week before, and it's also posted at the Municipal Building. I don't see the already tapped volunteer base managing call lists. The remoteness of many parts of the community forces reliance on folks who want to be engaged.

Town residents receive the bulk of their information from only a few sources despite a variety of media choices – this includes the Barre or Ware paper, Ware public access cable, and the Town's website.

The citizens get their information for the most part from word of mouth, the weekly Ware River News or if they attend a public meeting. Not many people attend the various public meetings including the Selectmen's meetings.

Most of the people in Hardwick do not know or are misinformed about what is happening in their town government. The general public gets much of its information through word of mouth or coverage in the local media (Ware River News or Barre Gazette) and is too busy with work and family to attend meetings or even know when and where there are informational meetings scheduled.

We need to develop a good system of communication so that the departments know what each other are doing and so that the citizens know what the town is doing. Town employees, committees, commissions and boards do not exchange information with each other unless it is necessary by regulation. Minutes to meetings are not available on the town website and have to be requested from the various boards.

Minutes and meeting information are already posted on the town website and we have reverse 911. There is not cable in all parts of town so not every household is likely to have a computer – until that is addressed, we are stuck in a technological void.

Need a combination – have an older population that does not use computers, and have website users. Need information meetings when there is an important issue. I hope that the State of the Town Forum will develop into a regular forum – quarterly or semi-annually to update people on where projects are and the finances. Quarterly would be good.

There is information on the town's website, but not sure how many people actually go there for information. The Police Department will make calls from time to time if there is a bear in the area or such. Provide information through Internet, local newspapers and local TV. Also, look at the Town Administrator's job description and if the town feels that dissemination of information is important, then make that more of a priority.

Get more information out there for people to read. Get factual, unbiased information out, let people read it and form their own opinions. State government advocates all the time for something these days – people don't just get the facts.

Need to improve the communication of information to the community. A lot of people don't have computers so we need to insert information in the tax bills. The sign-board outside the Town offices is used for lots of things, but we still need mailings that reach the whole town. Can post information at the three post offices and the website is good, but can't depend on that.

The three villages are forever divided, plus there is a fourth area on the outskirts. Those people always feel left out, but they don't come into town to learn what is going on. Also, Internet connection in Hardwick is terrible and not everyone has a computer.

Having spent years trying to figure this out, I think that it's about the most frustrating and complicate issue in town. Improvement has to happen by spreading information throughout the town in many different ways – website, email blasts, newspaper articles, signs.

People with limited means don't like people with money telling them they should do something.

2. Internet, email and websites

Should use town website and email alerts more. But now, information is available through mytown.gov and people don't know that they can get email alerts.

The town needs to have a friendlier website that is more informative. The website provides information on what board is meeting when. The minutes should be posted.

Online monthly newsletter. Include summary of meetings that month and upcoming calendar of future meetings with topics.

Email alerts are a good way to get a message out to those who are actively involved in Hardwick, but emails will not get information out to the community at large and the email postings must be sent out on a regular basis. An online bulletin board may not work either although it would include a large portion of the community. There are always going to be individuals who will either not sign up for a service or not check on something that is available online. A lower-tech community bulleting that is posted at locations throughout Hardwick in addition to being online and that appears in local newspapers would get the message out to more people than just an online posting.

An interactive website that posts information about town business, meeting minutes and allows the citizens to correspond with the town. Other larger towns use this so their citizens can keep up to date and also alert the town about potential problems like potholes.

Larger towns have interactive websites with many useful features. This might be a good idea if the cost is not too great, but hiring additional personnel or upgrading the computer system may be too costly.

Internet is key. What if Selectmen's meetings were taped and on the air? Probably not make a difference here – people may not watch the meetings. Those looking for information are going to the Internet now. In the old days, people talked politics in all the bar rooms, at the Polish Hall, etc. People aren't talking about politics much today.

The last time I inquired, I was told that the town website could not post information on community activities or recreational activities in the area, including local sports programs. I think that when people are visiting a town's website, perhaps when considering moving to an area, they are looking for what community and recreational activities are available for their families. I don't understand

why the website can advertise for local businesses, but not give information about other community-based activities taking place in town.

High-speed internet access remains a troublesome problem in Hardwick. The cable company wants to charge huge fees for services to many of our rural addresses.

There is some difficulty with computer-based services when not all parts of town have access to cable or when some cannot afford a computer and services. There are computers at libraries and there will be one at the Town offices at some point. Should have information on specific active projects on the town's website and maybe a newsletter, but both would need someone to enter the information. Mailings are probably too expensive.

3. Newsletters, local media and mailings

Detailed announcements in local newspapers; we don't have coverage of what's going on in town. You need the newspapers – as long as they up front, it's okay.

The Ware River News did not have a reporter for awhile, and very little news about Hardwick meetings was being reported – they do have a reporter now who is covering some of the meetings.

Gilbertville and Wheelwright residents are regular readers of the Ware River News, but there is a problem with the accuracy of the reporting. Need news releases to newspapers and the libraries. Mailings are expensive – do them with the Census. It is still true that Wheelwright families gravitate to Worcester and the T & G while Gilbertville families gravitate to Springfield and the Republican.

Maybe do a newsletter once a month and get people to read it.

Maybe more mailings?

4. Electronic signs and bulletin boards

A modern electronic bulletin board at the Municipal building for people to see as they are driving by the building.

A new message board at the Town offices would be good, as well as a secondary town message board in the town, for those people who live far from the Municipal building and do not travel that direction.

Create an electronic bulletin board so that people can see what is happening for upcoming meetings and other events.

Should have an electronic sign with higher definition and rolling information like in Holden – we can do fundraising for that. Should be at town offices and at the Recycling Center.

Electronic or more bulletin boards at businesses with their permission, like the Whistle Stop. Pin up notices, use TV, electronic media. Could we use interns from college to start a program? Use locations like the Recycling Center or Cumberland Farms. Use these for any public information or notices of forums or meetings.

5. Meetings, forums and reports

Reports from all boards once a month at Selectmen's meetings.

The Selectmen can implement forums to educate people on Town Meeting articles, publicized through the Internet and the media. It is difficult to get people interested unless it is a hot button issue.

6. Personal contacts

Need personal relations too.

The more one-on-one you do, the more you can get to people. We only lost the CPA vote by 12 votes, we did educate people, and if we had gotten to 12 more people.... Door to door is good for communicating and educating at the same time.

7. New approaches

Use Red Alert more often, the way Ware does.

Make use of Red Code service system because everyone has a cell phone. The Town could upgrade the number of minutes they currently contract for and use this system to send notices out to people. People don't go online themselves to find information. Volunteerism is way down – people are busy.

One could create a voluntary town-wide phone or email list; the local phone book is obsolete as many people are switching to cellular phones. Many people may be willing to have their email address linked to the town database and the need for an electronic database is only growing.

Need a Facebook page. Need to use what's free to use. Kids want text and email, etc, but a lot of people don't have access.

A possibility would be to have a town YouTube site where meetings and bulletin boards can be easily available for residents. This could reduce the need for a local access TV station dedicated to Hardwick.

B. Improving communication of financial information and major spending requests to residents and Town Meeting voters

1. General suggestions

The town government seems to work well but needs to communicate better with their constituents.

I believe that the information is available to those residents that have the interest and time to look into it. A greater web presence can help with sharing information.

The website and signs are the existing methods. Better reporting by local papers might improve the flow of information. People have to want to find out what's happening.

Most people don't want to listen to information unless it has a direct bearing on their lives. They don't understand town finances – exclusions, overrides, 2-1/2. They confuse debt exclusion with a 2-1/2 override and they are confused about what it does to the tax rate.

This is a funny town – better information won't bring people to any meetings other than Town Meeting. Some read the newspaper and others don't, and some use the Internet. There are lots of people at Town Meetings and that's the time to inform them. When the taxpayers are together, give them enough of a presentation so that the voters have the information.

Property owners do not want to see increased taxes. When we tried to pass an article so we would have more funds to work with for water and department services, it failed, although anything to do with the schools gets passed. The regional school needed its roof repaired and we were just sent the bill, but this never happens if the request is for the municipal building or the fire department.

Be completely truthful, including the cons and the negatives so people are aware. Present all sides. There can be suspicion that you are trying to slide one by me. For example, people did not understand the concept of a “moratorium” on new outdoor wood stoves and thought the Town was going to close down existing stoves. Being open, clear and explaining all of the information eliminates suspicion.

At the end of the day, the individual citizen needs to take some responsibility. If an individual does not go to the town website, refuses to get an email update, and does not read the local paper, that is their problem. Equal access and opportunity to information does not mean equally informed.

2. Town Meeting, Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen information

Publicize when the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen meetings are held. Conduct a survey to learn if another location, day and time would be better for people in the community; for example, we may want to have important meetings on the weekend so that people can attend.

Once the budget has been worked out with each department, then you need to print it and distribute it so people can look it up and mull it over. Information is a good thing. People have to understand where the money is going. Attorneys make so much money to make things complicated, but it doesn't have to be so complicated.

The budget needs to be available at public locations and online as early as possible. Maybe have an informational meeting before Town Meeting?

Finalize the budget a week or town before we go to the public hearing so that people have time to look at it and think about it. Now, sometimes items are still being decided 30 minutes before Town Meeting.

The issues should be presented in tables and charts that simplify and show both pros and cons to the issue. Showing both sides should be relatively simple since the matters are brought up in discussions during Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen meetings, and meetings between both of these groups.

For the Hardwick annual town budget, the Finance Committee wields more power than the Selectmen. Even some voters want to bypass the formal Selectmen's budget and vote on the Finance Committee recommendations.

Prepare a summary of why “X” is needed for every article. Hand them out to people ahead of time so they have time to think about things. We tried this last year for the first time and it went over really well.

Answer questions at Town Meeting with common sense information.

3. Publicizing financial information

Continue doing what is being done now. People have a low interest in what is going on in town. It is even difficult to get people to run for town office.

Public informational meetings would be nice. The planned informational meetings sound like the answer – time will tell.

Public forums are always the best way. Get the discussion public; take the time to engage the public in the Public Information Forums. It just takes a while.

If we had more public information meetings, that becomes more of the norm. Quarterly to keep up with major projects. For example, one month before each of the town meetings and in January for budget information.

Put information on the town website and tell people if they have questions, contact the appropriate department or person depending upon the issue.

An interactive friendly website presenting current information.

Sign boards to direct people to websites, and have printed sheets available at schools and libraries, and at post offices if possible.

Online newsletter. Greater use of email and social media.

Potentially send out a newsletter.

Articles in the local paper.

Mandatory reports

Need to know and influence the key players, and we often don't know who the key players are. It is a big plus if you can sit down with those who are vocally opposed and then they end up supporting the proposal when they understand it.

When Eagle Hill realized they needed to deal with the issue about the taxes for the houses they owned, and then they sat down with those who were opposing the sewer, it made a big difference.

D. Survey Responses about the Budgeting Process

The following suggestions in response to the survey questions about the budgeting process information have been compiled, grouped by topic and summarized, and do not include specific comments about individuals or events so as to ensure the confidentiality of the survey responses.

As MOPC has found in other similar municipal assessments, there is not only a wide range of opinions on how well the current budgeting and capital planning processes are working, but there is also a considerable amount of frustration, much of it related to the lack of clarity as to the respective roles of the town departments, the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee. Although this is a common problem in small towns that rely heavily on volunteer boards, it is an increasingly important town governance issue that needs to be dealt with, particularly during the difficult financial period that Hardwick and other towns find themselves in.

The comments in this section are more critical than in the previous sections of the report because of this frustration with the current process, but there are also some very good suggestions for how to improve the process and the working relationships between the town departments and the two town boards.

A. Aspects of the budgeting and capital planning process that work the best now

Snow is plowed, roads are taken care of, brush is cut back; the Town runs well and is maintained.

For the most part, given its size, the town is not out of line. Hardwick is an honest town, structured in a way that can only spend so much. That is the benefit of a small town – money can't slip away like it can in a big city.

The structure is in place.

The process is as good as it can be right now but would be much better with public input and with higher expectations.

Many good ideas of where the town should be heading have been presented to the community over the past few years. Presentation of the ideas has been good and an excellent effort has been made to include the community in formulating these ideas.

The Finance Committee serves as a "check and balance" on spending levels. In the end, however, it's the voters that decide the level of expenditures.

The Selectmen are taking more of a front seat role now when it is budget time. In past years, the Finance Committee drove the bus. It is more of a fair atmosphere now.

Budgeting is going well because of the individuals and we do not need to improve or change that. Town Administrator prepares the fiscal budget with the help of others.

The Town Administrator is the glue that keeps this town together with regards to budgeting and capital planning. I trust her and know that she works on what is best for the town.

The town's budgeting process is going well, but not very well.

Meetings with the Finance Committee after a budget has been submitted and the Finance Committee is considering the budget can be more or less effective depending on what members show up, in terms of their ability to listen, ask questions and collaborate on a plan.

Capital planning is finally coming together, in as much as the town is addressing suggestions made by the Capital Planning Committee.

Capital planning is happening more than ever, but decisions and implementation are what needs to happen. There have been some improvements in the capital planning but it is slow.

We have taken a stab at planning – not a lack of trying by the Town Administrator, but participation has not been uniform. You need full participation so there is input from everybody. Members need to accept responsibility to participate; need working committees.

B. Aspects of the budgeting and capital planning process that need the most improvement

1. General comments

A small number of citizens who attend town meetings and are vocal about their issues decide the business of the town.

Unfortunately, after the presentation of the good ideas and the community input phases, the town does not seem to follow through completing the process. We have to consider that Hardwick's

voters make the ultimate decision and that, no matter how good an idea is, how clearly it is presented or how great the inclusion of the community in the planning process, if the people living in Hardwick do not want the change that change will not happen.

Ability to sell the project, including being completely truthful about the cons and negatives so people are aware.

Given the state of affairs – the condition of town infrastructure – I would say nothing is working well now. It takes focused long-term work from committees and some degree of state commitment to facilitate these initiatives.

Where would I find out about this process since the budget and capital planning are not online?

Although I have been involved for many years, I still don't understand the process for budgeting and capital planning – it seems to me and most people that I know to be completely arbitrary and unclear and sometimes whimsical.

More regular meetings (ugh!) of planning personnel as budget and spending is tracked through the year to follow trends and stay updated.

The town should be able to budget without using stabilization fund and free cash. Should have zero budgeting rather than start with last year's budget.

We shoot from the hip now – departments don't know how to do planning or a 5-year budget.

Don't really have capital planning right now. None of the department heads have a 5-year plan, nothing on paper, although some probably have it in their head. There is no plan where we want to be in 5 years with town buildings.

Capital improvements are not working because it is not funded and department heads are scared to put something into the capital budget. They lease equipment because if the cost is more than \$5,000, it has to be in the capital budget, and they are concerned that it won't be funded. There is not enough information available to townspeople to get the capital items passed. It's better to start with just a few items – there may have been too many items listed last year.

Capital planning should have priorities 1 thru 10 and then a funding source for each – could be grants, a capital account that requires 2/3rds Town Meeting vote to use. Could put 20% of free cash each year into a capital account.

Need a full-time grants application person; the Town Administrator is overloaded.

2. The Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen

Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee need to practice working together – they are too separate.

Biggest problem is between Selectmen and Finance Committee. The rest of town government works well together. There has always been friction between these two boards – not just the current members. The Finance Committee has a huge thankless job – they need to be on top of things, like watching the school budget.

Finance Committee needs to be involved in the budgeting and capital planning processes because voters at Town Meeting have assumed that the Finance Committee has done its homework, and votes according to their recommendations.

There is supposed to be a joint meeting of the Selectmen and the Finance Committee to iron out differences before Town Meeting, but the Finance Committee sometimes cuts the budget at the last minute. They seem to like to do everything at the 11th hour. The Selectmen need to be more vocal.

The Finance Committee is upset because the Selectmen have taken over.

We need the Finance Committee and the Selectmen to sit jointly with the departments and have them explain their budgets. Until about 2 years ago, the Finance Committee was involved in the meetings, but not recently. It's a thankless job. The Town Administrator has done most of the work, invited the Finance Committee to the meetings, and there was a several month gap when they didn't meet during the budgeting cycle.

The Selectmen and Town Administrator made a budget for the town last year and the Finance Committee wanted to make changes to the town budget an hour before the Annual Town Meeting and questioned some aspects of the budget. This caused problems with capital planning and budgeting.

There does not seem to be any thought process on how the money is divvied up and the Finance Committee comes into the loop at the last minute.

The budget process is confusing now that we have to deal with the Finance Committee more – they do the cutting.

We need long term planning instead of dealing with issues on a crisis basis. We need an active Finance Committee to oversee and manage the budgets of the town departments and more information presented to the citizens so that they could become involved and share ideas and support long term planning.

Frustration with the Selectmen's seeming lack of awareness that they are supposed to hold a larger vision for the town – both in terms of what taxes people can or can't bear and of what the deep needs of the community are calling for in terms of services.

We have an excellent Planning Board, but it doesn't seem that they have the ear of the Selectmen or other administrators in town.

Some selectmen are very outspoken and they put their foot in their mouths, but the rest are also too quiet and they let too much go by.

Board of Selectmen should be more proactive negotiating contracts with the police union.

Need more people to volunteer for the Finance Committee and need the Moderator to appoint people who will be more involved in the budgeting and capital planning process.

There should be a requirement that the Finance Committee members have a financial background.

Some of the Finance Committee members seem to have either lost interest or not have the time needed.

The Finance Committee does not meet regularly and no one wants to be chairman. The Finance Committee needs a permanent chairperson and they need to meet on a regular basis. The Finance Committee met very few times last year. Few people seem to want to volunteer for this committee.

The Town still has reserve fund transfers from July and August of 2013 that are not yet signed by the Finance Committee so the bills can't be paid.

Town departments are frustrated with the Finance Committee because they seem to be unwilling to look at anything that could potentially raise taxes, no matter how good the idea or how it might be in the best interest of the town. They sometimes vote no without giving an explanation. Lots of things are outside the control of the departments like the pricing for gas, insurance etc.

The Capital Planning Committee was meeting on a regular basis but stopped meeting after the Annual Town Meeting; the actions by the Finance Committee at the Annual Town Meeting put a damper on the Capital Planning Committee plans for the town. Since last June's actions by the Finance Committee and the Town Meeting vote, there have been no more meetings of the Capital Planning Committee.

Capital planning – no one from the Finance Committee participated. The committee came up with a \$300,000 proposal and needed Town Meeting approval to borrow, but the Finance Committee turned that proposal down and suggested putting funds into the department budgets instead – that costs more for the town! If you spread the \$300,000 out over 20 years at a low interest rate, it will have less impact on the tax rate than putting it in the budget. We should be expanding services in the cheapest way. There are lots of low interest 30-year USDA loans and bank interest rates are low. The impact on the tax rate would be small.

3. Specific budget and planning issues

If you have the money update buildings, purchase new equipment.

All maintenance and repairs are done in a reactive mode, after the damage. It would be great to switch to a proactive mode.

The fire department is not properly funded. The fire department has to maintain a lot of equipment and conduct lots of training for their volunteer crew, and standards are going up for these kinds of training. If you don't comply, the town is looking at a liability issue. The police department is closer to budget funding compared to other towns than the fire department is.

Focus on the items that are geared to just serve the town best – sewer, water etc. When you accept a grant, the town gets suckered into paying more than they need. If there are smaller items and the town can handle them, they work well. The government gives out grants but then doesn't follow through, like building a new school.

For the sewer plant, we know that we have to upgrade but not how, when or phasing.

The regional school budget takes half or more of the town' budget and for several years the five towns have been rejecting the school budget, leading to a prolonged budgeting process, disputed figures, heated discussions and funding decisions by the Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education. The school district wants school choice students because the \$5,000 per student the district receives can be used by the district for supplemental purposes and does not go towards the general school budget.

The school budget is a big number for our small town and must be examined carefully. With concern, I see a clear trend of wage stagnation in the private sector in our community in contrast to increasing compensation for our public school employees. A few foreclosures in a small town like Hardwick has a significant impact on tax revenue. Educational trends point to the increasingly greater value of the vocational school system compared to a public high school like Quabbin; increased enrollment in Pathfinder should be encouraged for our younger generation to gain viable skills in the trades in order to earn a living wage.

So much of what happens is grant driven. For example, there is grant money available for building senior centers so we grab it, design a center around the grant rather than consider wrapping the desire for a senior center into a larger plan for moving town offices, the library, a youth center, affordable housing together.

C. Suggestions for improving interactions between town departments and town boards for the provision of financial information and the budgeting and capital planning process

1. Meetings and communication

More joint and public meetings throughout the year. Well-advertised informational meetings during which finances are clearly presented and all questions are answered.

I think communication between the town departments is relatively good. Being a small town has its advantages in this area. We have several key people who truly have the town's interest in mind. These people also facilitate communications between department heads and boards as part of their job description or their personality.

I see departments within the town work together with the possible exception of the two libraries – that rivalry is silly and a waste of time and resources.

Need more communication. Chair of Board of Selectmen meets once a month with people in charge of the departments.

Selectmen do schedule meetings between all departments to share this information.

Finance Committee Chairman needs to sit down with each department and iron out the budget. This is very labor intensive, but it works better that way. Most items are not an issue, but you have to hammer out the other items and come up with a budget before it goes to public hearing.

All is working pretty well. There are monthly meetings where things are discussed, but nothing happens – nothing comes out of it. People work well together it seems but implementation is lacking.

The department head meeting is a good model. Usually one Selectmen is present but unfortunately there is seldom someone from the Finance Committee. This model is a chance for a more informal discussion among departments and people who know each other, work together – don't all like each other or feel the same, but it's a time when one is reminded that the department is part of a whole force where the townspeople's interests are the goal. The Town Administrator is the de facto chair of these meetings and has a fund of knowledge to bring to them.

Continue the monthly department meetings and sometimes break the discussion down into topic areas, like emergency services, maybe at least quarterly. At least quarterly, need a discussion on public safety issues – the police respond when there is a fire or ambulance call, so need these

discussions. Because a lot of the people are part-time, probably need to have such a discussion in place of a monthly meeting or shorten the monthly meeting and then discuss a specific topic.

The Capital Planning Committee should meet on a regular basis with a specific focus of short and long-term needs.

An online newsletter.

2. Other suggestions

Town boards or departments that consistently level fund their budgets should be commended for their efforts. There is the feeling that while some boards level fund, as requested, others continue to ask for additional money throughout the year without there being any ramifications.

Ability to listen and have a feel for the needs of all departments. Some departments want the latest toy – do we need it?

Some town functions like the Library have more complicated budgets because of outside requirements that are imposed on them, and it is important that the Finance Committee understand the role that the Board of Library Commissioners (BOLC) play in determining the library budget request. The library has had some difficulty in the past with helping the Finance Committee understand their budget requests, and it may be helpful if the Finance Committee were to be given an outline of the guidelines from the BOLC to make sure that they do not reduce the library budget request without having all of the pertinent information.

Difficult to say as many people don't take criticism well. It is hard to tell people that some things are not getting done because you feel that they will hold it against you.

More dialogue and negotiation is needed with the Quabbin Regional School District administration since this is a huge amount of our town budget.

E. Survey Responses about Town Government

The following suggestions in response to the survey questions about town government have been compiled, grouped by topic and summarized, and do not include specific comments about individuals or events so as to ensure the confidentiality of the survey responses. However, since a number of survey respondents made a point of singling out departments and individuals for praise, that information has been included in this section.

As MOPC has found in other municipal assessments, the Town of Hardwick is facing the same kinds of governance and structure issues that many similar small towns have had to deal with or are currently dealing with. Fortunately, this means that there are resources and examples that the town can turn to for addressing some of these important issues, both in the short term as well as over the longer term.

As was the case with the previous section, some of the comments in this section are more critical than in some of the earlier sections of the report and the opinions are more diverse. And, as in the previous section, there are a number of good suggestions to consider as well.

A. The aspects of town government that are working the best now

1. General Comments

I have lived in Hardwick xx years and have loved it as our home.

The town works pretty well with what and who we have.

The small things – the people who work for the town doing their jobs. I enjoy the people living and working here.

People who have chosen to serve in elected office are doing the best they can – I admire people's willingness to participate in town government, big and small.

We are truly a local government run by citizen volunteers. If a citizen wants to make some difference locally, the ability is present. We have some key town volunteers and employees who have the town in their best interest. To them it is not a question of ego or money. One does not find this too often in a larger and more vertically integrated system.

The town has an extremely diverse population, including retired people, artists, blue and white-collar commuters and workers. The town includes farms and small businesses. Unlike many towns, this eclectic group of people have managed to work together to run the town and many have become friends.

The town runs pretty smoothly regarding preparation for Town Meeting and setting the tax rate, which is important since the taxes need to come in timely to keep the town operational. Very few problems arise because many of the key players are experienced and are able to work independently without supervision, with each knowing what needs to be done and when.

In a small town, the elected positions should stay elected. There is a younger base of people in town to draw on now.

2. Specific departments and town functions

Day to day operations are good, due to good people in critical positions, including the administrator, accountant, town clerk, fire and police chiefs.

Hardwick has excellent dedicated and caring town employees, including in town offices, the police and highway department and at the recycling center.

Capital Planning Committee, Planning Board, Police Department are working the best now. We are happy with the work of the Highway Department, and feel that the schools are doing good work given the weight of reduced budgets, more regulations and many under prepared children. The Youth Commission is doing a good job and the libraries are run well. The Town Administrator does a very good job. These are groups that have vision, are articulate, are sensitive to the diversity and the present and future needs of the community, but some of their work is hampered, and in some cases stymied, by other less-well functioning groups.

The core of people with continuity – particularly Town Administrator, Assessor, and Town Clerk – is very important because of all of the part-time people and boards that are always changing. We rely heavily on their knowledge. They hold everything together because the boards do not have continuity.

The administrative personnel – Town Administrator, Town Clerk, Tax Collector, Police Chief, Highway department etc. The people are available, knowledgeable and helpful, correctly answering questions when necessary and giving extra effort to make sure things run smoothly in the town government.

Highway, fire and police work well now. We have the ability to always update equipment and utilize personnel.

Fire department, police department and building inspector work well together.

The Town Clerk and administration are active and effective.

We have a great Town Administrator – one of the best working parts of the town. The police department is better off, more professionally run than before.

Board of Selectmen and Planning Board are working in the best interests of the town. Police and fire departments also work cooperatively with the Selectmen.

The Board of Assessors has regular meetings, satisfies requirements and deadlines and processes various duties in a timely manner.

The Paige Library board and staff have the best interest of the town's finances and townspeople in mind when making all decisions. They bring a varied representation of the town's socio-economic and generational make-up to the table and consider all of these factors when making short and long-term plans for library programming and budgeting.

The Board of Selectmen works the best and there is a stronger board now. The current board has a fight because people don't want to change – if they are lucky, they will make some changes. It used to be very political, controlled by the Polish Hall with connections to the Kennedys.

The Town Administrator and the Selectmen do a good job. This current Board of Selectmen looks out for the town's best interest – they have the guts to make tough decisions unlike previous boards who didn't want to make waves in case it made their friends upset.

Hardwick's saving grace is the experience and competence of the Town Administrator. As a result, the complex expansive array and volume of information, strategies, grant opportunities and overall community improvement opportunities are managed and capitalized on very effectively.

The town used a committee process to appoint the police chief and have that position and the Town Administrator under 3-year contracts rather than an annual appointment, which is good.

Some of the town departments work well on their own without much supervision. The Town Administrator is the day-to-day supervisor of the appointed town employees and the town employees who have been elected technically do not have a supervisor and do their jobs according to state regulations and their budget. The town employees that work in the Municipal building seem to function well, get their work done, and take care of meeting the state regulations. They seem to put in more hours than they get paid for. Some of them have been in their positions for a long time, and when they decide to retire or resign, who will have the experience to replace them?

There is a surface cooperation among everyone – it's nice, and political.

B. Aspects of town government that may need some improvement

1. General Comments

We need more people to take the time to serve on local government. It needs to be de-politicized.

We are on the cusp of a change in attitude and generational growth. The time has never been better for hoping for change.

Hardwick has a long way to go to have a solid long-range plan in place. There are many financial and social obstacles to bypass, and it is going to be a very difficult road ahead.

In small towns things are highly personal and public, but not at all transparent. Even while it is important to be transparent, the public nature of discussions dampens and even silences a lot of serious work in a small town. There is no structure in place to review work and people don't dare be public about complaints partly because friends, neighbors and family members are the very people holding the positions. Last fall the head of the Conservation Commission was suddenly not reappointed, with no public information even within the Commission, and lots of talk that he was not reappointed because of one person who complained about a Commission decision.

The climate and culture of Hardwick town politics and government is one that is not particularly welcoming to its citizens, particularly those that would like to discuss changes and new directions for Hardwick. There is often a lack of open-minded discussion among townspeople and leaders about the possible benefits of changes that could lead to a better and more secure future for the town. There is a lot of negativity and a sense that "outsiders are not welcome" at many of these meetings. The same people tend to be at all the meetings and there is a huge lack of representation from the younger generation. Meetings are often scheduled at times that make it impossible for younger citizens with children involved in sports and activities to attend.

Having an unbiased entity look at the current makeup of town government positions, the current long-range plans, and the current community offerings would be a great way to get a sense of whether the current direction of the town is one that will offer future success, or if changes need to be made.

We are winging it with services and facilities needs. We need a municipal needs assessment – an inventory of what is going on, what is needed, and the status of buildings. The 2008 Assessment of Needs was more of an inventory and not an engineering review.

One area of concern is access for handicap – all buildings should be reviewed and updated. The Municipal building has no access to the police and no access to offices located upstairs, so these individuals have to meet with handicapped persons on the first floor. There is some access for individuals with a chair lift, which is acceptable.

The ability to both work and communicate with its citizens needs to be more effective. Unfortunately there are constraints currently in place that can make this challenging because Hardwick is forced to comply with numerous laws and mandates geared for large cities that only hinder operations here. Examples include the cumbersome "conflict of interest" requirements just to become a volunteer and the multiple bid process that is set at a very low financial threshold. This is an extremely inefficient method of procurement if one includes the wasted time of volunteers.

There is no real solution to address the ever-increasing time required by the ever-increasing scope and structure of committees to support the Town's compliance and livelihood. The current

demographics do not favor any near term relief as younger and middle age citizens have full lives without excessive amounts of volunteer time. The real contributors are the financially secure and retired community.

The state is adding all kinds of items that have to be bought or implemented whether the town wants it or not. The town does not have a lot of ability to contain or control this spending. These are very difficult times and different from a few years ago.

People don't read the fine print. When a grant is waved at them or say the money from Eagle Hill School for the sewer system, limits and restrictions are put on things in the small print and the often the town says yes to something and then can end up shelling out more than anticipated. Can the town afford it? The town may not be in a position to say no, but people must read the fine print or it all sounds good. It is a very difficult place for the town to be in. Some people who have money get things implemented because they can, leave town, and the town is stuck with maintaining it. I have sympathy for people who try to do their jobs without extending the town, and they are not appreciated for their efforts.

Need better use of road frontage so that land is not "locked" and could then be used for agriculture. Right now with 200-foot road frontage for a house, part of the land can't be used for anything else, such as by a farmer on the adjacent lot.

Sewer costs in Wheelwright are very costly and compliance with Title 5 for residents is an enormous expense. Alternative systems such as composting toilets and innovative sewage treatment solutions must become viable options in the future.

Many residents feel that property taxes are a significant burden. The regional school system is the largest expense for local taxpayers.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

There is very little leadership in town. Leadership is key – on a scale of 1 to 5, it's a 1 now, with planning being the next biggest problem.

Selectmen seem to prioritize certain issues that give the appearance as the most important to them and not to the town.

It seems that the members of the Board of Selectmen stay for a few years and then leave, which makes for a lot of stop and start as new members come in, get comfortable, and get "trained". Continuity would be good if people could stay longer.

The Board of Selectmen lacks vision and is confused about its role. They spend time thinking narrowly and ineffectively about the town's future by hiding in the role of themselves as the de facto Finance Committee. The board should present respectful leadership at regular town meetings and not all of the board members do so. The Finance Committee has too few people who are too tired, while other members are doing laudable jobs.

The Town Moderator is not paying enough attention to the Finance Committee and not appointing the right people, and not doing enough to find people.

The Finance Committee is not working well – they don't meet often enough and people don't want to serve on this committee. At some point in the past, an article was brought to a vote to move from appointment to election, but the article didn't pass.

Financial planning is a little rocky with a non-functioning Finance Committee who seem to participate only marginally around Town Meeting time and has not had good communication skills. Does the Dept. of Revenue have guidelines or training for Finance Committee members?

There is a lack of follow-up on projects, ideas and issues. Unless something has become really critical, it tends not to be addressed. The Finance Committee needs to be more involved and a part of the policy and budget planning.

Need better communication between town libraries. This needs serious improvement. It has become political. Better cooperation is needed.

Although a proponent of regionalization, struggle with how the school system is run. The Superintendent needs to understand that Hardwick has a lower income than the other towns.

The Master Plan Committee focused on an open space and recreation plan, looking at where money is spent and how to be more efficient, because the state said that we would be better positioned for grants if we did this, but then they changed their mind. The document has been completed with professional assistance that was provide through the Quaboag Valley Community Development Commission, but now we will need to rely on organizations like the East Quabbin Land Trust for any implementation. The Selectmen are not paying attention to this issue and there is no town board follow-through.

Would like to see committees meeting either more often or on a different schedule. With part-time town offices positions, sometimes town employees have to wait until the next month to access committee members.

Cooperation across various disciplines could be better, with more sharing of plans and resources.

There is no sincere cooperation, and that's engrained. It hurts. There was little cooperation in the past, either. It's a me-me-me attitude by the departments. 15 years ago a consultant evaluated the job descriptions from the viewpoint of the current occupant, so it led to an attitude that "I am more valuable than you think".

3. Organizational Issues

Part-time town employees don't have enough paid time for the jobs that they need to do and work more than the time in their budgets.

The Town Administrator needs an assistant since there is too much for one person to do. Everyone in the town offices could use the assistance of a person, shared across the departments. This person could also fill in when someone is sick. Currently, everyone is a one-person department and no one knows how to do someone else's job. This is not good.

There is a lack of department oversight – there is little sense that the Selectmen know who is or isn't doing his or her job or the quality of the work. This is complicated by the lack of ability to oversee elected positions, but it extends into various departments, too, and is highly personal. One of the town government employees is rude and many committees and volunteers complain about the work that this employee does.

Not sure how to make the Enterprise Fund work – relies way too much on leachate. We may be better off if it were back under the town and taxpayers contribute to it.

Would like to see more positions under contract and would like to see some elected positions appointed because the pool of candidates for elected positions is so small. We have been lucky that we have had qualified candidates. We can't control anyone in an elected position now.

Elected positions are a disaster, especially for Treasurer and Collector. The Town is lucky to have had the Assessor for as long as we have, but the next person may not be as good. The Treasurer and the Collector need to know a lot – cash reconciliation, trust fund management. Barre found out the hard way with a theft and the Dept. of Revenue recommended that they change from an elected to an appointed position and they did.

The elected positions are not supervised by anyone and this needs to be changed. The town's population is around 3,000 and the only people who can run for the elected positions are the town's 1,700 registered voters – this creates a small pool of qualified people for any elected position. If the positions were appointed, the town could advertise for a person with certain education and experience for the position and determine who is the most qualified. This issue was brought up at the last Annual Town Meeting and was soundly defeated – the people who spoke thought that their right to vote was being taken away. There was and typically is a lack of information presented before and during Town Meetings for citizens to make informed decisions. Since the meetings are not well attended, people will ask their friends and neighbors to come to the meeting to get their issue passed, or defeated.

Some positions need to be appointed rather than elected. Several key people would be hard to replace, including the Town Clerk and the Assessor, and some elected positions are very hard to fill off the street. The capable people are busy and we don't always elect the ones that can do the job. We need to have confidence in the Board of Selectmen to appoint people.

Need to sunset some elected positions so they can be appointed. A problem that the Treasurer is an elected position when they have to manage investments and anyone can run for the position.

The Selectmen did not sell what they were promoting with the change from elected to appointed positions.

The Highway Surveyor or supervisor is elected every three years and the Selectmen do not supervise this position. There are problems with the way the department is run and with the amount of work the employees do when they are not plowing snow. It reflects poorly on the town and it is a constant source of complaints. When citizens complain to the Board of Selectmen about the Highway department, they can only relay the complaint to the Surveyor and that is about it.

C. Suggestions for ways to make the Town government structure as efficient as possible for the delivery of services to the community

1. General Comments

Key is getting townspeople to come to meetings – they need a reason to come. There is always a handful of people that are interested.

Need higher expectations from boards and committees.

One would be through the Internet because people in town only attend meetings or forums if they have a specific interest – people just care if it affects them. Attendance may be good in the first meeting and then taper off. The Selectmen are implementing the tools.

Expand on department head meetings.

Each department and function should handle their area in a more professional manner.

We should be focusing, instead, on providing the resources, financial and otherwise, that our municipal personnel need to perform their duties in an efficient manner. Changes made to our town's governmental structure would have little or no effect on how efficiently municipal services are delivered.

Most of the tax money goes to the school system and so improvements in efficiency need to be considered.

Centralize the highway, fire and police departments.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Need a structure in place to offer town programs and departments opportunities for assessment of work, discussion of work and needs, evaluation with a broad range of input so that one disgruntled person doesn't carry all the weight, or one elated person either.

Education on how a town government works, the roles, and the negative effects at a personal and family level if proper involvement is not present.

Need clarity about who does what: the role of the Selectmen and the Finance Committee.

Need clarity about how decisions get made – both for the decision makers and the public.

The Selectmen do not meet often enough. And, they function as the Sewer Commissioners and the Sewer Commission does not meet often enough – only 30 minutes every two weeks before the Selectmen's meeting. They should meet alternate weeks as the Selectmen and the Sewer Commissioners.

We need a more active and accessible Finance Committee.

Need better long-term planning – the focus seems to be short-term, but you have to look 10 years ahead when planning so you can anticipate growth. For example, if you purchase a building, will it be right in 10 years too? If not, it may not be the right purchase.

3. Town government structure

Need shared positions and consolidated departments.

Need a DPW and combine the highway department, private water systems and sewer with it all managed by one person. A problem with sewer rates is that with the private water not being metered and now way for the town to tell them to do so, the low use residential user is charged the same as the higher use residential user.

Explore the consolidation of the Highway and Sewer departments. The employees from these two departments could increase the manpower available and the use of equipment. However, the Sewer department is funded through an Enterprise Fund, which may complicate this.

This is 2014 and we have two libraries. The issue is one library is private and the other is public. Perhaps we could have the senior center meet at each one? The Senior Center costs \$40,000 a year to heat.

The town has two libraries, both with long time trusts. Both receive funding from the town. We should have one good library that is open for more hours than the two competing libraries.

The Board of Health does not enforce the bylaw that states that trash haulers have to pick up and recycle materials as well as trash. The price for picking up trash might be less expensive for the citizens if the whole town is under contract from one hauler. The town could get a competitive bid from trash haulers who will also pick up recycle materials. The town funds the Recycling Center for around \$36,000 a year and could consider closing or limiting the Recycling Center if we had the whole town under contract, including picking up recycling materials.

Need a part-time planner.

This community needs a Town Manager. The Town Administrator is simply overwhelmed, although continues to attempt to fill this need to maintain compliance with regulations and state requirements. Improved and more effective operations would easily pay the salary. There are many opportunities, but would be a leap of faith for the town which (says it) has no money.

The Town Administrator needs an assistant. The Town Administrator could then spend more time interacting with the town departments, boards and committees.

A Town Manager approach and continuity would be good and that would improve communication. The Town Administrator does most of that role now without the authority.

We need a Town Manager – a professional whose job it is to take responsibility and make decisions currently decided by the Board of Selectmen. The town is a big enough entity to require a professional running it.

There should be a Town Manager in the future who is qualified and this could be regionalized.

Explore a Charter-type government.