

Town of Exeter, NH

**Planning and
Community Development System
Review, Analysis
and Recommendations**

October 2015

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Overview

This report is the product of our review of the planning and community development operations of the Town of Exeter.

MRI was engaged to conduct an outside review and assessment of the Town's Community Development and Land Use Regulatory Operations, and to make recommendations regarding the management set-up, organizational structure and staffing approach to best meet the service levels and support expectations of the various elected, appointed and volunteer officials involved with the process and ensure a responsive, efficient and customer service orientated system for residents, property owners, and developers.

Situated at the junction of NH Route 101 and I95, Exeter is a quintessential New England community with a beautiful village center dominated by many historic homes and Phillips Exeter Academy, an attractive, but somewhat tattered, downtown area bordering the Exeter River and a comfortable rural residential character. Given its location within the NH seacoast region and with easy access to metro Boston, Exeter faces significant potential growth and development opportunities and challenges in the coming years and must seek to strike a viable long-term balance between protection and preservation on one hand and economic growth and sustainability on the other.

Exeter has done much to preserve and protect its physical environment over the past 2 or 3 decades; however, a focus on efforts to regulate and control development has outpaced planning activity. Exeter now finds itself, like many communities, facing questions about growth, financial capacity and long term sustainability without a foundational plan in place to guide and balance community and economic development activity. The Town is increasingly constrained by tax base limitations and suffers from a perception as being somewhat unfriendly towards business and development with some developers and property owners. It has become increasingly challenging for the Town's elected and appointed officials and staff to chart a course of action without a clear common vision or definitive plan to pursue realignment and

rebalance itself in the regional market where it must compete for desirable growth and development to effect tax base expansion.

Recent efforts by the Town to refocus on economic development activity have been undertaken with little consideration to the fact that the Town's Master Plan (the theoretical tool for guiding growth) is little used and seriously out of date and that there is no formal economic development plan or strategy in place. Consequently, the effort to advance positive, responsible economic development has met with both support and apprehension. This is evident in the Epping Road TIF District which was handily approved at the same Town Meeting that rejected proposed wetland ordinance changes that were, at least in part, tied to advancing new development within the TIF District. In addition, the role of the new Economic Development Director has been the focus of a fair amount of controversy and debate which is clearly exacerbated by the lack of a clear plan or strategy against which performance can be monitored and measured; the result is that the debate begins to focus on the person in the job rather than the job itself.

In our view it would be best to focus near term energy on development on a written economic development plan, prepared in the context of a creating a Master Plan chapter for economic and financial sustainability.

The goal of this review was to compare the authorities assigned by statute, local ordinances, regulations and policy with the actual structure, staffing, implementation, operations, and responsiveness of the present "community development system". This report also presents some ideas for actions the Town may wish to consider and adopt in order to improve the responsiveness and overall effectiveness of these activities.

This report is designed to be a useful planning and decision document for citizens and elected officials who may not be experts in these fields, but are responsible for making the key decisions which will set the future course of these activities to meet current and future challenges.

Our work involved an on-line survey of the volunteers involved in the land use process for the Town along with review of the enabling documents and legislation, interviews or phone conversations with each of the staff persons, the Selectmen, representatives of the Boards and Commissions involved in land use regulation, a number of recent applicants and professional project / developer proponents. Throughout, careful attention was paid to the degree of responsiveness to the public and the degree of cooperation and coordination with which the staff went about their daily activities.

There are so many ways in which the public interacts with planning, zoning, and permitting activities that it is difficult to effectively evaluate and address various detailed situations and



individual concerns in a report of this type. However, we hope that a report of this nature can provide a valuable initial and continuing evaluation tool for the responsible parties by setting forth a general overview of planning, land use and community development activities to which a more detailed review of the actual implementation of these activities in Exeter can be compared. In fact, even our recommendations can be compared with this baseline and we hope they will be.

Throughout the work we were impressed by the attitude and level of cooperation which we received from the various individuals and organizations involved in plan review, permitting, and code enforcement. Clearly there has been a sincere effort over the past months to develop and improve that coordination. However, we believe that the substance of these activities can be improved through a more consolidated management and coordination of the various activities. We also believe that the planning activities can be more focused to applied planning, i.e. planning for economic and community development rather than in developing more detailed and complicated ordinances.

Accordingly, in addition to the "do-nothing" or "leave everything as it is" option, we present two other options for improving the overall value and responsiveness of these activities for the community. One of these would complete the organization by filling the position of Town Planner with the intention of modifying the role so the selected person functions as Director of Planning with clearly designated responsibility to coordinate the land use regulatory approval process as their primary function. The second, and the one which we recommend, is to recognize the commonalties and interrelationships in permit / plan review, code enforcement, as well as the community development elements that are found in the Department of Public Works and the Economic Development function and establish the position of Community Development Manager to oversee, direct, coordinate and manage the activities currently vested separately in Planning, Code Enforcement, Department of Public Works and Economic Development.

We hope that, as the reader digests this report, the rationale for implementing this option becomes clear; however, and perhaps more importantly, we hope that this report will provide the basis for the evaluation of any and all options which may flow from constructive discussions of this work.

Scope of Study

This report is the product of a review of the planning and community development operations of the Town of Exeter, NH. The goals of this review were to compare the authorities assigned by statute, and local ordinances and policy with the actual structure, staffing, and operations of the Planning and Land Use activities, evaluate areas of potential coordination and cooperation

of the various activities, compare the existing structure with alternative models as well as industry standards and conventions and make recommendations for future actions.

Methodology

MRI utilizes a team approach in all its studies. In this case the team included Donald Jutton as Project Manager and Carol Ogilvie, Senior Planning Associate.

Mr. Jutton has more than 35 years' experience in local government operations and community development positions. He holds master's degrees in Community & Economic Development and a bachelor's degree in Planning & Management. He founded MRI in 1989 and has served as Senior Consultant on more than 350 consulting engagements over the years. Mr. Jutton has a broad government management and operations background, having served as Manager in Meredith, Littleton, Salem and Wakefield, New Hampshire. While maintaining a strong working knowledge of local government process and organizational planning, the primary emphasis of his work has been in the area of creative community & economic development and pursuit of systemic change in management and delivery of core community services. He is noted for continually challenging client communities to rethink traditional approaches and explore innovative alternatives to service delivery, emphasizing collaborations and partnerships that expand conventional thinking and extend to all corners of the community. Mr. Jutton has overseen and managed more than 100 organizational and operational assessments of local government departments and operating units in the past 20 years.

Carol Ogilvie is a graduate of Keene State College with a BA in Sociology and holds a Master's Degree from Kent State University in Policy Planning. She recently retired from the Town of Peterborough, NH, after more than 10 years as the Community Development Director. Ms. Ogilvie has more than 25 years of experience in local, regional, and state government, with a focus on town land use planning, as well as economic and community development. Prior to her role in Peterborough, Ms. Ogilvie was employed for 14 years with the Southwest Regional Planning Commission in Keene, NH, a planning agency serving 35 towns, where she provided planning and zoning assistance to local boards, and was involved in the development of numerous local master plans, hazard mitigation plans, and the drafting of model regulations for subdivision, site plan review, and earth excavations. In addition, Ms. Ogilvie regularly provides training for planning and zoning board; has taught the class on the Selectmen's Role in Planning and Zoning for the annual Antioch NE Selectmen's Institute since its inception in 1999; and is an Adjunct Professor at Antioch New England in Keene, NH, where she teaches a course in Land Use and Community Planning.



Exeter Governance Model

The Town has adopted the Town Manager form of Government, utilizing the Australian Ballot (SB2) Town Meeting process. A five member Selectmen serve staggered 3 year terms of office and the Chair, who is elected by the Board, presides at Selectmen meetings and generally serves as the ceremonial head of the Town. The Board of Selectmen appoints the Town Manager and makes appointments to the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Conservation Commission, Heritage Commission and the Historic District Commission. All administrative duties and responsibilities prescribed by the general statutes, or required to be carried out by the policies set by the Selectmen or ordinance established by Town Meeting are generally exercised by the Town Manager, who coordinates and consults with the Selectmen as required to ensure smoothly running management structure.

Overview of Town Demographics

The town consists of 20 square miles and had a population of approximately 14,306 at the 2010 census. There were 6,114 households with 29% having children under the age of 18. The median age is 44.3 years compared to the state average of 41.1 years and median annual income for a household in the town was \$68,777 compared to the state median household income of \$64,916. The 2014 tax rate was \$26.06 which is ranked 130 of 234 communities in NH.

Data from US Census Bureau QuickFacts & Town-Data.com

Planning, Zoning, Land Use Regulation, Code Enforcement & Economic Development: A General Overview

For the purposes of this report the functions of planning, zoning, land use regulation, code enforcement and economic development will be considered the Community Development System for the Town of Exeter. These operational elements of Exeter's municipal government present themselves in many manifestations to the various interests and individuals in a community. While there are substantial differences between these functions and activities, there are many points of overlap and intersection as well. These differences include how planning is undertaken and utilized in decision making, how land use rules and regulations are developed and implemented, which level of government makes what decisions, and how and to whom appeals are funneled when, for one reason or another, the needs, desires or action of the citizen applicant does not quite fit nicely into a pigeon hole of the law, rule or regulation. There are also differences in how the various decision bodies are constituted and how much latitude is afforded them in making their decisions. Therefore, it is important to start out with a basic understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the various functions within the system.

In Exeter there are 7 operational elements involved in the Community Development System although only 5 are official bodies recognized in state statute; the Economic Development Commission is a locally created standing committee:

- 1) The Planning Board
- 2) Zoning and Building Codes
- 3) The Zoning Board of Adjustment
- 4) The Conservation Commission
- 5) The Heritage Commission
- 6) The Historic District Commission
- 7) Economic Development Commission

The Planning Board in Exeter is appointed by the Board of Selectmen and has planning responsibilities and regulatory authority, both of which are defined in state statute. While primarily responsible for establishing a vision to guide development and land use within the community through the development and maintenance of a master plan, the Planning Board is also charged with the promotion of planning, the recommendation of programs designed to carry out the elements of the plan and making recommendations concerning zoning ordinances and a zoning map. Their mandate also incorporates consideration of such potential topics as economic development, historic properties, community heritage, the protection and conservation of natural resources and capital improvement planning.

The Planning Board's regulatory or enforcement powers stem from their planning activities, but are most specifically associated with site plan reviews required by the zoning ordinance and the grant of authority to control the development and subdivision of land. Zoning and subdivision powers become effective after they have been adopted and granted, respectively, by the governing body (Town Meeting) of the community. From these delegations, a planning board itself has the authority to develop and adopt subdivision and site development regulations.

The zoning ordinance may also require that development plans which incorporate certain land uses and/or specified special conditions must be approved by the Planning Board. In this instance the Planning Board must develop regulations which serve to provide guidance and direction to those who wish to secure approval. Site plan review regulations address standards for presentation of plans for specific development activity. Subdivision regulations deal with the subdivision of land. Both can be heavily laden with construction requirements and engineering details dealing with roads, utilities, drainage, traffic flow, landforms and physical conditions, as well as easements and condominium agreements. Typically the professional staff of the municipality works with the developer/applicant to address the technical issues and ensure that the plans which are submitted for review and approval by the Planning Board comply with local and state rules and regulations.



The Town Planner, with assistance from other professional staff of the Town and outside consultants (as determined necessary on an individual application basis), supports the activities of the Planning Board.

Zoning and Building Codes are major elements that affect development within the community. The Zoning Ordinance sets the parameters for uses that are allowed within the community and sets standards for development of those uses. The Building Codes deal with the specific standards for buildings being developed, its structure, electrical and plumbing systems, and fire protection systems. Building Codes and Zoning Regulations must comply with state and federal regulations and be adopted by Town Meeting action. In Exeter the BI / CEO / Zoning Administrator interprets and enforces the Zoning Ordinances and Building Codes and the Fire Inspector interprets and enforces relevant fire and life safety codes. When interpretation is in dispute the appeal mechanism is to the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Once the building permit is issued the various elements of the construction work must undergo and pass inspection. The code enforcement activity related to the permit ends when the work passes the final inspection or, in the case of more complex projects, the Certificate of Occupancy is issued which allows the building to be occupied and used.

The Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) in Exeter is a quasi-judicial appellate body, appointed by the Board of Selectmen that must be established if / when a zoning ordinance is adopted by a municipality. The zoning ordinance itself governs what land uses are allowed by right within the various zones of the community, which land uses are allowed under specified special conditions and which land uses are prohibited. Decisions concerning zoning ordinance conformance, including “Official interpretation” of the ordinance are made by the Zoning Administrator who is typically one of the professional staff members of the municipality. The ZBA’s function is essentially to introduce a judgment factor into the regulatory process where ambiguity in regulations requires impartial interpretation or where strict enforcement imposes a hardship on the property. In some communities where land use regulations provide for special use exceptions, the ZBA has responsibility to grant (or deny) such uses. In each case, the Board must measure the request against requirements of the ordinance itself or criteria set forth in State law.

The CEO and Deputy CEO provide administrative support for the ZBA.

The Conservation Commission is an advisory body that may be established in a municipality by vote of Town Meeting pursuant to NH RSA 36. According to the ***NH Association of Conservation Commissions***, “*Conservation commissions are local conservation volunteers who work to study and protect natural resources. Conservation commissions are very active in New Hampshire! These active volunteers are studying natural resources and developing long-term plans and strategies for the protection of important places, they are providing educational programs &*

hikes, they are working to permanently protect land, they are educating the public about renewable energy, they are managing city and town lands for timber production, recreation and wildlife, they are researching the latest tools and advising other boards on the importance of the town's natural resources, they are able to work with the state's Department of Environmental Services to provide local comment on wetland permits.” In Exeter the Conservation Commission is a 7 member body appointed by the Board of Selectmen, including one Selectman member. Their role in the land use regulatory process can be viewed as advisor to the community on matters that affect the environment generally, and to provide information that will help inform decisions / discussions about matters that impact the environment being addressed by the BOS, Planning Board, ZBA and Town Meeting.

The Heritage Commission is an advisory body that may be established in a municipality by vote of Town Meeting pursuant to NH RSA 673:1(II), 674:44-b36. According to ***Preserving Community Character: Preservation Planning Handbook for New Hampshire***, “*Basically, a heritage commission does for historical resources what a conservation commission does for natural resources: it advises and assists other local boards and commissions; conducts inventories; educates the public on matters relating to historic preservation; provides information on historical resources; and serves as a resource for revitalization efforts. A heritage commission can also accept and expend funds for a non-lapsing heritage fund, acquire and manage property, and hold preservation easements.*” The Exeter Heritage Commission was established in 2006 and is a 7 member body appointed by the Board of Selectmen with a representative of the Planning Board and an ex officio Selectman representative. Their role in the land use regulatory process can be viewed as advisor to the community on matters that affect historic or cultural assets of the community generally, and to provide information that will help inform decisions / discussions about matters that impact these assets that are being addressed by the BOS, Planning Board, ZBA and Town Meeting.*

The Historic District Commission was established in 1970 when Historic Districts were first designated in Exeter under the provisions of NHRSA 673. The Commission website explains that their purpose is to “*safeguard the architectural heritage of the Town. Preserve elements of the community’s architectural, cultural, social, economic and political history. Conserve property values. Foster civic pride. Promote the use of the historic districts for the education, pleasure and welfare of the citizens of Exeter*”. The Commission includes a member of the Board of Selectmen and a member of the Planning Board along with five other members appointed by the Board of Selectmen. It has limited regulatory authority within the Historic Districts of the community and must operate within the provisions and constraints established in the law and specifics of locally adopted zoning regulations. The Historic Districts Commissions role in the land use regulatory process is limited to applications within the designated Districts and for proposed impacts (largely architectural in nature) that are placed within its jurisdiction in land use regulations. The commission may also be viewed as advisor to the community on matters that affect aesthetic, historic or cultural assets of the community generally, and to provide

information that will help inform decisions / discussions about matters that impact these assets that are being addressed by the BOS, Planning Board, ZBA and Town Meeting.*

* The roles of the Heritage Commission and the Historic District Commission overlap and seem to be duplicative in some respects. According to the NH Department of Cultural Resources some communities have opted to vest the roles and responsibilities of the Historic District Commission into the purview of the Heritage Commission. Finding interested volunteers to serve appears to have been an increasing problem in Exeter, if that continues it might make sense to explore the benefits of consolidating these two commissions.

The Economic Development Commission was established by Town Meeting action in the form of an adopted ordinance in 1968 to *“further the efforts of economic development in the Town of Exeter. The EEDC was established in May of 1968 via the adoption of a Town Ordinance to facilitate relationships between the town and local businesses, thus supporting the economic foundation of the town and bolstering the vitality of the community.”* The Commission is a nine member committee appointed by the Board of Selectmen and according to the establishing ordinance, includes the Selectman Chair, Planning Board Chair and Town Manager as ex officio members. The Commission is a Non-Profit Corporation under NH RSA 292. According to its website the Goals include:

- Retention and expansion of existing industries and businesses
- Attraction and development of new industries and businesses
- Redevelopment of targeted areas
- Fostering a cooperative effort with organizations involved in the economic development of the area
- Marketing Exeter as a choice industrial and business location

While the Commission has no formal role in the land use regulatory process they can be viewed as advisor to the community on matters that affect economic development generally, and to provide input that will help inform decisions / discussions about matters that impact or regulate development activities within the community that are being addressed by the BOS, Planning Board, ZBA and Town Meeting.

Generally speaking, implementation of the Zoning and Building Codes after adoption, while emotional issues for the applicant or the abutters, is relatively cut and dried from a process point of view and lies within the express authorities of the code enforcer.

On the other hand, activities of the Planning Board in their site plan reviews, often involves more negotiation and a less certain and local process. For instance, above and beyond the strict conformance with the specified rules and regulations, most of which are addressed by the

professional staff and reported to the Board, the site plan review process allows the opportunity for the Planning Board to range farther afield and into things like aesthetics, landscaping and similar issues, as well as imposing additional technical studies concerning various potential impacts of a project. This part of the process can frequently become difficult because considerations are often very subjective and may seem to have little relationship to the functionality of the proposal. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, appeals from Planning Board decisions which are based on the Board's own rules such as subdivision regulations and site development regulations must be taken to Superior Court, a process that is extremely more time consuming and expensive than an appeal to a local Zoning Board of Adjustment. This gives the Planning Board the opportunity to stand on a bully pulpit from which it can negotiate and exact concessions which might be considered by some to be beyond their authority.

Consequently, if a Planning Board is not scrupulously careful, these discussions can create the impression (real or imagined) that the regulators are exacting all they can from an applicant regarding issues which may not be legitimately a matter of law, public safety and functionality, but rather a matter of personal preference of Board or staff members. Free wheeling requests and negotiations can quickly become emotional and leave lasting negative impressions as to the conduct of the Board and the entire planning process as well. Without care, Board members and professional staff attitude and demeanor can have a significant impact on perception.

At the same time however, it should be noted that the development process often involves other Town personnel and Departments, as well as State personnel who can impact the perceptions of the process as well. For example, driveway permits and street cuts are the purview of the Public Works Department, as are the provision and/or extension of public utilities. The Fire Department has the authority and responsibility relative to fire and life safety codes and the State is called upon to approve the design and installation of septic systems where public services are not available and the disturbance or filling of wetlands.

The Professional Staff: Where Do They Fit In

The Town's professional staff contributes their expertise across the entire spectrum of planning, zoning and code enforcement activities. First, they provide information to the public and are, therefore, an initial purveyor of the Town's image to citizens. Then, at the general policy level, they may be called upon to provide the information and expertise required to draft new ordinances or policies. Still at the general level, but significantly more specifically, they provide a coordinated review of specific projects or proposals for which application has been made to the Board. Finally, they have a role to help support the volunteer boards and committees in conducting the business of the various bodies and coordinating their activities so



that the work of the individual bodies can be integrated into an effective and efficient decision making system.

In day to day operations, the professional staff provides initial advice to potential applicants regarding conformance of proposed applications with laws, rules, and ordinances. In this regard, it is important that the staff conduct themselves professionally; displaying objectivity, consistency and evenhandedness so that both applicants and the land use Boards have confidence in and can rely on their advice and recommendations throughout the regulatory process. The staff also performs specific reviews of the implementation of approved applications and permitted activities to ensure conformance with codes and the approvals or permits which have been granted. In this role, they should have some latitude for professional judgment and be expected to use it when appropriate.

The Town Manager can also play a key role in this activity as well. Given the variety of concerns, the number of individuals involved the degree of detail and the immediacy / urgency typically and naturally connected with development activity, construction and the implementation of permitted activities, professional disagreements often arise. Some of these defy solution unless all the parties are called together in a neutral context to discuss the issues forthrightly, to reach an understanding of the real nature of the disagreement, and to search for solutions. A Town Manager who takes the responsibility, when appropriate, to assemble all parties to clarify the issues and guide the professionals on all sides through discussions to identify concerns and solutions, while treating all with respect, can add immeasurably to effective, responsive and responsible development activity for both the permittee and the community.

Overall, the individuals on the staff are the paid professionals who must make the Community Development System work efficiently and effectively for the applicants, project proponents and opponents alike, volunteer decision makers and the community as a whole. Consequently it is critically important that the staff has a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities assigned to them, an understanding of the needs and expectations of the volunteer body(s) they are assigned to support, have clear written processes and procedures to follow and are supported while being held accountable.

Current Organization and Staffing

In our view the current organizational set up of the community development functions in Exeter lacks sufficient structure to operate as a cohesive system. The team consists of a number of individuals who endeavor to work cooperatively as co-equal participants in a loosely knit “system”. The Building Inspector / CEO / Zoning Administrator and the Assistant CEO, the Natural Resources Planner, the Town Engineer, Assistant Engineer, Fire Inspector, a Police



Liaison and a peer review engineering consultant have been loosely coordinated by the Town Planner under the umbrella of a Technical Review Committee.

The Building Department provides the Town of Exeter with Building Inspection Services, Code Enforcement and Zoning Administration as well as serving as the primary point of entry into the land use regulatory process. One full-time individual serves as Building Inspector (BI), Code Enforcement Officer (CEO) and Zoning Administrator (ZA). The individual presents a positive attitude and after 24 years, he has a very solid understanding of the three functions that are assigned to him. The incumbent seems to have a significant appetite for work and is clearly dedicated to the job. He expressed concern about the workload volume at certain times of the year which is exacerbated by increasing difficulty in finding and retaining qualified part-time staff to support inspections and address building code complaints during peak periods.

The Deputy CEO serves as the primary administrative and clerical person within the operation and seems to be the glue at the center of the land use regulatory process. The incumbent is the contact point where the average applicant can find someone to talk to at practically any time and she is a wealth of institutional knowledge. She sits squarely at the heart of the “system” since it seems that virtually every activity associated with land use finds its way to her desk, most typically, early in process. The Deputy CEO’s workload, is significant, especially since she also provides the required administrative staffing and coordination for the Zoning Board of Adjustment (including taking minutes at ZBA meetings), and while she has access to part-time clerical support, depending upon possible reorganization as the new Planner is hired, it would be advisable to expand the clerical support that the Deputy CEO receives so that she can assume more responsibility for coordination of the various elements of the development approval process.

Both the CEO and Deputy have long tenure with the Town and are a wealth of institutional knowledge of the Town’s development history over the past several decades. It is critical that a transition plan be developed that ensures, to the extent possible, that in addition to being prepared for their future retirement, the operational and historical knowledge and understanding they have in their heads is captured, organized and documented.

The Planning Office consists of the currently vacant position of Town Planner and a permanent part-time Natural Resources Planner, who works under the direction and oversight of the Town Planner; administrative / clerical support is provided by the Deputy CEO and her part-time clerical / administrative support person. The Planner and Natural Resources Planner work in support of the Planning Board in helping them with planning matters related to the Master Plan, research and drafting of policies, codes and zoning regulations intended to guide and control community development. The Planning Office is also tasked with providing staffing and expertise to the Conservation, Historic District and Heritage Commissions and other study or focus panels as may be established from time to time to address specific issues or matters of



concern related to community development. However, there appears to be no clearly defined process or procedures for the assignment or provision of such support. It was clear that the Natural Resources Planner provides some support for the Conservation Commission but it is unclear exactly what is expected to be provided and the lines of authority and accountability are fuzzy. Operational responsibilities of the office reportedly include occasionally helping the Zoning Administrator make decisions regarding conformance of a permit request or plan; conducting planning studies and research in order to advise and inform decision making by Department Heads, the Town Manager or the Board of Selectmen; and staffing the technical review processes associated with subdivision regulations and / or the site plan review process under the authority of the Planning Board.

The Town Engineer and Assistant Engineer are considered key members and participants in the Technical Review effort that accompanies the subdivision and site plan process since both processes are predominantly technical in nature and involve consideration of both long and short term municipal infrastructure impacts. It is generally perceived that the Town Planner is functions as the convener of the technical review process, however, the process and the participants seems to be loosely defined and participation seems to be voluntary. It was reported that most, if not all, site plans are required to go through a peer review process conducted by an independent 3rd party engineer at the project proponent's expense and it is unclear how and where the overlap occurs between the Town engineering staff and the consultant. It was clear from the conversations with the DPW Director and the engineering staff that they prefer the role of plan review to be left with the outside consultant since the unpredictability and urgency associated with the approval process is felt to be disruptive to their DPW project schedules. Underwood Engineers seems to be the primary (exclusive?) peer review consultant utilized by the Town. There was concern and some frustration expressed by developers and project representatives about the justification, cost and scheduling impacts that the 3rd party review requirement has on the time and expense of Exeter's approval process. There was also a fair amount of frustration expressed about the perception of inconsistency in the level and depth of review required and the way in which the information is supplied to and utilized by the Town. It was pointed out that delivery of the peer review comments is often out of sequence with the hearing schedule, that there is no consistent format for presentation of input to the Planning Board and the Planning Board often seems to duplicate the inquiry / level of review that occurs at the staff / peer review level which adds even more time to the approval process. It would be beneficial for the Town Manager to address these concerns in consultation with the staff and the Planning Board and develop a written procedure that clarifies how the review is intended to flow, if and when the Town engineering staff will perform reviews and work with the Planning Board to establish a criteria for determining when peer review is necessary, who the reviewer will be and ensuring that cost and schedule controls are clear in plan review assignments. It should be noted that the quality and accuracy of the work done by the Town engineering staff or Underwood Engineers was never cited as an issue; timing was the



major concern followed by cost – either for the review itself or delay / additional cost of developer consultants associated with review meetings.

Public Safety Input is provided by representatives from the Police and Fire Departments. The Fire Department is reportedly a more consistent participant in the process presumably due to that department's involvement with fire and life safety issues associated with the building process. Police input is reportedly more project specific and is seen to warrants participation much less frequently.

Comparative Staffing

As part of this assessment MRI developed comparative staffing information for several communities that we believe are relatively comparable to Exeter. Exeter is the only community that employs an Economic Development Director but all of the communities accommodate a local economic development function locally except for Conway. Exeter is the only community that assigns a full-time staff person to attend and take minutes at the ZBA. Although the Deputy CEO professes to enjoy providing ZBA clerical support, it undoubtedly impacts her workload. Each community seems to organize their land use and community development functions and assign associated staff differently. There are similarities among all of the communities but some of the differences might be worthy of exploration as Exeter looks to restructure its operations. The model employed in Hooksett is quite different, rather interesting and might be further evaluated as a structuring option given the depth of engineering expertise in the Town's DPW.

Amherst NH: (pop 11,201)

- Community Development Director/ Zoning Administrator (FT)
- Code Enforcement Officer/Building Inspector (FT)
- Secretary (FT)
- Secretary, Planning Board meetings and minutes (PT)
- Secretary, ZBA meetings and minutes (PT)
- No Economic Development Committee: part of Community Development Director's role

Windham NH: (pop 13,592)

- Community Development Director (FT)
- Planner (FT)
- Building Inspector (FT)
- Code Enforcement Officer/Zoning Administrator (PT 30 hours)
- Clerk, General Office (PT 25 hours)
- Clerk, Planning Office (PT 20 hours)
- Clerk, Planning, Zoning & Conservation Commission (PT 20 hours)
- Secretary, Planning Board meetings and minutes (PT)



Secretary, ZBA meetings and minutes (PT)
Economic Development Committee – contact Community Development Director

Conway NH (pop 10,115)

Town Planner (FT)
Asst. Planner (FT)
Building Inspector (FT)
Code Enforcement/Zoning Admin (PT; 24 hours)
Receptionist/Clerk (FT) (Shared by DPW/Engineer and Bldg. Inspect.)
Secretary, Planning Board meetings and minutes (PT)
Secretary, ZBA meetings and minutes (PT)
Economic Development efforts through Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council

Pelham NH: (pop 12,897)

Planning Director (FT)
Office Manager (FT)
Zoning Assistant (FT)
Code Enforcement Officer (PT)
Building/Electrical/Plumbing inspectors on call as needed
Secretary, Planning Board meetings and minutes (PT)
Secretary, ZBA meetings and minutes (PT)
Economic Development Committee – contact through Planning Office

Hooksett NH: (pop 13,451)

Under the Direction of the DPW Director
Community Development Director / Deputy DPW Director (FT)
Town Planner (FT)
Assistant Planner (FT)
Code Enforcement/Zoning Administrator (FT)
Administrative Assistant (FT)
Secretary, Planning Board meetings and minutes (PT)
Secretary, ZBA meetings and minutes (PT)
Economic Development Committee – contact Town Manager

Survey Results

MRI prepared and distributed invitations to take an on-line survey to 59 volunteers representing the membership of the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Zoning Board, Heritage Commission, Historic District Commission and the Economic Development Commission. Immediately after issuing the 1st invitation we discovered

that the 12 survey questions had been duplicated in the survey instrument such that each questions was asked twice. The survey form was immediately corrected and new invitations were sent to all. Because response was slow we reissued invitations 2 additional times in an effort to secure more responses. In the end 32 responses were received and reviewed. The survey results are attached so that the reader may review them and draw their own conclusions; the following observations result from MRI's review of the responses:

- 1) About 50% of those who were invited actually responded to the survey (32/59) and of the respondents only about 33% (12/32) bothered to offer comments or suggestions. While it's not clear why the level of participation was so low, it suggests that it may be prudent for the Board of Selectmen to pursue answers by engaging each of the groups in a sit down discussion focused upon mutual understanding of issues, concerns and direction.
- 2) There is relatively little communication or interaction taking place between the various groups involved in the land use development / regulation process.
- 3) The Master Plan does not appear to be a reference document that is regularly employed by the volunteers or the staff as part of the planning review and approval process.
- 4) It appears that there is difficulty scheduling and coordinating workflow so that information can be provided be submitted on a timely basis. This suggests the need for clearer expectations and priorities for the professional staff involved in supporting the process.
- 5) There is clearly a need for more clarity and mutual understanding with regard to roles / responsibilities and authority within the local government structure – an effort to reestablish open lines of communication and move toward a common vision between and among the Board of Selectmen and the various volunteer boards and commissions should be a high priority.
- 6) While the number of responses was small, the negative ratings of the Economic Development Commission, when combined with other inputs received by MRI throughout this assessment, suggest that recent efforts to focus on economic development need more discussion and explanation within the organization and within the community as a whole.

Interview Results

MRI conducted interviews, both face to face and by telephone with:

- The Town’s professional staff involved in supporting the community development system;
- Each of the Selectmen;
- Representative of each of the volunteer boards & commissions;
- Representative property owners;
- Representative developers;
- Professionals involved in representing development project proposal in Exeter.

Observation & Suggestions from Interviews with Town Professional Staff

1. The Town has a solid professional team supporting community development activities and, with a bit more leadership, coordination and direction they will become even more efficient and effective as their teamwork improves.
2. There is no designated staff leader of the Community Development System at the moment. Consequently there seems to be a lack of common vision and shared priorities. Each of the participants operates cooperatively but independently, consequently there seems to be a fair amount of difficulty and confusion in establishing direction and scheduling associated with the plan review and approval process. Operationally, it would be helpful to designate one person as the process manager and delegate sufficient authority and responsibility for that person to assign tasks, set schedule and hold team members accountable for performance. Given the relatively small size of the organization and the workload requiring coordination, the role of process manager is not a full-time role and should be incorporated into one of the existing roles in the system. Ideally, a new Town Planner can be found with both planning and project management/coordination skills.
3. The work load within the organization is somewhat unbalanced – the CEO and Deputy CEO seem to be near or at operational capacity. This is particularly noteworthy since both are very seasoned and long serving in the positions they hold so their subject expertise and historical perspective likely contributes significantly to efficiency. Future hires to fill this role will likely require a significant learning curve and time research that consume additional capacity. Since both are nearing retirement, it is important to develop a succession plan that anticipates accommodates the additional requirements.
4. The engineering staff is challenged by the intermittent nature of the plan review process while trying to balance their departmental workload. The land use regulatory process is not viewed as being within the Public Works purview and is therefore frequently seen as an unwelcome intrusion that interrupts more import engineering work. The Town



Manager needs to determine if and how the engineering staff is going to fit into the community development process and then work with the DPW Director to ensure that, whatever the role, it and the associated priorities are clear and understood.

5. The amount and nature of the work assigned to the Natural Resources Planner seems a bit unclear; the vacancy in the Town Planners position may account for some of this but now is a good time to clarify her responsibilities to support the Conservation Commission as well as revisit the staff support needs for the Heritage and Historic District Commission and consider allocating some of her time there as well.
6. More effective utilization of technology could enable more effective planning, coordination and improve staff efficiency and volunteer participation. The Town's GIS provider (People GIS) is an industry leader and can quickly guide the staff in the use of the existing system (which is on-line and can be available to anyone) so that it can easily become a management, planning and communications tool for all departments as well as the land use boards and commissions. This will require a minor investment in training since the system is very user friendly and requires almost no technical sophistication to make full use of the system. Utilization of a simple permit processing and tracking system will also help with scheduling and coordination.
7. There is a bit of a "gatekeeper" mentality that seems to permeate the thinking of the staff associated with the site plan review process. While not excessive, there was little emphasis on or mention of cooperation or collaboration and a lot of emphasis on the need to double check and control for compliance. There seems to be somewhat of a disconnection or lack of understanding at the staff level of the mutual goals and benefits for both the developer and the Town when responsible, sustainable development occurs. The relationship between developer and regulator does not have to be adversarial and based primarily upon the presumption that every developer is intending to cut corners and avoid compliance wherever possible. Input from developers and their professional representatives suggests that many of the past interactions between Town staff and development agents has been based upon suspicion and presumption of ill intent by the project proponents. While there is no question that there are some developers who will endeavor to cheat and exploit the system, approaching all proposals with skepticism and suspicion is largely counterproductive and the staff should be coached and encouraged to avoid conveying this type of message. One of the roles on the new Economic Development Director could be to help the staff (and the community) understand the common interest in quality, compliance and sustainability shared between project proponents and regulators when dealing with local development.

8. There is not a clear understanding of the role, responsibilities and authority of the new Economic Development Director within the Town staff, in general or in the context of the community development process. While it seems that this role is an essential component of the local system without clarity and definition it will continue to be an unclear and potential misunderstood appendage to the system both inside and outside of the municipal organization. It is essential the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen provide clarity for the role in the form of an action plan, expectations and an explanation of where and how the position fits into the “Community Development System”.

Observation & Suggestions from Interviews with Property Owners, Developers, and Project Proponents

1. There is difficulty understanding the process which has seemed inconsistent to a number of professional representatives and project proponents who have represented multiple developments. They suggest that requirements seem to shift without clear expectations or consistency. Without a documented process and written standards, it's difficult to defend the review and approval process so it's important to both perception and reality that the rules of the game be clear and documented. To that end the Town Manager should ensure that a clear written process and procedure is established to guide the development approval process through the staff level and that it be integrated with the Planning Board rules and procedures.
2. The complexity of regulations and multiple interpretations thereof seems to create problems and frustration for developers and their agents. In the short term it would be helpful to develop a “quick guide to the process” for use by applicants; in the long run it would be beneficial to undertake a comprehensive review of ordinances and regulations in the context of achieving the goals and objectives of an updated Master Plan while simplifying the system for users.
3. A number of those interviewed suggest that the process seems duplicative. The developer is typically expected to pay for the cost of a peer review as part of, or in addition to, a Technical Review process at the staff level and then the same issues / questions are reportedly revisited by the Planning Board in their hearings. It is important for the Planning Board to clearly articulate how the plan review process will work under normal circumstances, especially when it comes to additional, independent technical reviews at the developers expense, and make every effort to ensure that the process is observed throughout the review and approval process.
4. A number of the professional representatives indicated that the process in Exeter is no worse than many other communities where they present development plans, however

all pointed to other communities in the area that are seen as much more user friendly. In the end, everyone in this segment spoke to the general perception that Exeter review and Exeter is not particularly user or business friendly.

5. All of those interviewed were aware of the hiring of the Economic Development Director and the recent personnel change in the planning office and all saw these as potentially positive indicators.

Observation & Suggestions from Interviews with Selectmen & Volunteers

1. In one way or another all of the Selectmen and each of the volunteers expressed a strong desire to see the community grow and prosper while ensuring that the character and quality of life is preserved and protected. There were varying opinions regarding the best way to work towards a positive, sustainable future; however, everyone expressed dedication and commitment to helping the Town grow responsibly and to make things better.
2. A common theme with all those interviewed was the decline in civility and respect that seems to have increasingly accompanied discussions about community development matters. From proposed changes in regulations to recent discussions about how the Economic Development Director should perform and even including the motivation for commissioning MRI's assessment, there is concern that the discussion / debate is becoming heated and personalized in ways that are tearing at relationships and the fabric of the community. Exeter has so much to be proud of and thankful for, it would be a shame to head down a destructive path where pursuit of a common vision and the future of the community cannot be discussed openly, honestly and with respect and decorum. While it may sound trite, the Board of Selectmen could adopt a simple code of conduct for the Town, starting with themselves and then request (require?) that each employee and volunteer agree to abide by the code while engaged in conducting the business of the Town. This same code could serve as a guideline for citizen participation in public meetings in hopes of defusing the trend of disrespect and incivility that some see creeping into community affairs.
3. Many of the volunteers, especially more recent appointees, spoke to the need for orientation, familiarization and training to help them understand and perform the duties associated with the board or commission they serve. The Selectmen, as the appointing authority of all the land use boards and committees should set expectations for process and support for boards and committees; set written standards for service and convey this in immediate "all Boards meeting" and then annually following elections and during vetting of potential appointees. An orientation program for new appointees should be developed to provide training (with readings) for boards & committees.

Peterborough, NH actually requires specific readings be completed before appointment and lists them on their web site.

4. It seemed that most of those interviewed in this segment expressed frustration or concern about not fully understanding the roles, responsibilities and authority of the board / commission on which they serve. Even some of the longer serving members, were not clear about how the review and approval process really works. A representative of the Planning Board expressed confusion about who decides that a peer review is required and who selects the consultant. Others expressed frustration that their recommendations or suggestions don't seem to get Planning Board consideration. It would be productive to establish a work session for each of the land use boards and committees with a subject expert from one of the state wide associations and / or the Municipal Association to discuss roles, responsibilities and answer question and then share operating approaches employed in other jurisdictions that seem to work efficiently and effectively.

Conclusions

As stated at the overview meeting with the Board of Selectmen, there are two important things to keep in mind when reviewing these conclusions and recommendations: 1) There are no right answers – only consequences; and 2) Exeter is not unusual, most communities continue to struggle with controlling, managing and organizing community development activities – it is a never ending pursuit.

With that said, we found our work in Exeter to be enjoyable and challenging. We found everyone cooperative, helpful and generally open and forthright in our discussions. Securing responses to the survey and scheduling the number of face to face interviews that were requested added to the time required to complete our work, but in the end we are confident that we have good handle on the situation and we hope the observations will be instructive and provide some objective insight and that the recommendations will be helpful in charting a refined course.

Exeter is a beautiful community, home to one of the premiere village centers in New Hampshire with great community character, tremendous assets with an active, engaged community and a talented municipal staff. The location is ideal with quick and easy access to the seacoast, the NH Lakes Region, the White Mountains and all the many assets of NH while at the same time being close to the many educations, medical, cultural and historic assets of metro Boston. Its character, local assets and location result in a great reputation regionally and New England-wide.

The town has a long history of successful stewardship, preservation, and conservation. Volunteers and public employees have worked hard to shape the community into what it is today and there is a strong desire to enhance and protect what exists today and to grow and develop responsibly in ways that ensure long term viability and sustainability. It has begun to deal with the challenges of economic growth and will need to constantly search for an elusive balance between affordability for a diverse population and a most desirable quality of life.

The Planning Review & Approval Process is unclear both inside and outside the organization resulting in negative external perceptions and project proponent frustration. It also creates uncertainty, confusion, and frustration for the staff and the volunteers who serve on the Boards and Committees. This can be solved easily by establishing and documenting a standard processing procedure that involves critiquing the critical aspects of each project on the first day, alerting support staff and assigning responsibility for follow-thru.

The current Master Plan is outdated (although there has been some updating) and does not seem to have a role and is not used in the community development process. Beyond that the Plan does not address financial / economic or sustainability questions. It makes little meaningful use of demographic, marketing or economic data. For example it does not address the aging population, the shift from retail to e-commerce throughout the national economy, declining student population, the growth of tele-commuting, or the narrow distribution of the Town's tax base. It also fails to address realistic assessment of constraints in the water & wastewater utilities or the imposition of Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) requirements. In short the Master Plan needs to be updated and packaged as a more useful tool and guidebook for municipal management and decision making.

It appears that the previous Town Planner, who served as the point person in the regulatory process, was a strong environmental protection advocate whose bias influenced the entire system and contributed to an "anti-development" tone. If the Town is going to place more emphasis on positive, responsible, sustainable economic development it will need to place more emphasis on collaboration / partnerships with landowners & developers with the focus on achieving mutual interests and treating those who want to make an investment in your town as allies since you have what they want / need in the form of approvals and they have what you want (and really need) – tax base.

Recommendations

- The Town needs to recognize the importance of Planning (the 30,000 foot view) VS Regulation (the 100 foot view) as they move into the future and ensure that the next Town Planner is capable of operating at both levels so that regulation does not outpace planning (or vice versa).

- There desperately needs to be a lead person assigned to ensure that the site plan review and approval process is effectively coordinated such that that the calendars for the Planning Board & Conservation Commission Tech Review, peer review and other advisory roles are properly sequenced. The site plan approval / application process should start with a critique and flow chart for each new project. This decision should be driven, in part by the talent pool available to fill the Town Planner position; the selection process should be conducted with an eye towards reorganizing and restructuring.
- In the near term the regulatory review and approval process needs to be better defined and clearly documented with the roles & responsibilities of the staff & volunteers clarified in order to reduce ambiguity and improve predictability for developer and project proponents.
- The Selectmen and Town Manager should coordinate with the Planning Board to initiate an effort to update and repackage the Master Plan in a way that it will be a more useful tool and guidebook for municipal management and decision making. They should emphasize the importance of incorporating more meaningful data driven goals and objectives (demographics, economic, financial, market, and physical), assignment of responsibilities for implementation and measurable outcomes.
- There needs to be a concerted effort to introduce an expanded notion of coordination and collaboration into the culture at the staff and volunteer level – perhaps incorporating President Reagan’s view of “trust but verify”.
- The staff involved in the community development process currently operate in independent silos rather than as an integrated system with several individuals reporting directly to the Town Manager. It’s a solid group with plenty of talent that needs to be structured for follow-thru and coordination so we recommend that they be organized under a single Department Director who reports directly to the Town Manager. This should improve coordination, cooperation, consistency and accountability.
- The relatively recent effort to become more “business friendly” seems to have developed quickly and has resulted in concern about abandoning concerns for preservation and protection in return for tax base. It would be advisable to focus the energies of the Economic Development Director on developing a written plan of action that can be vetted by the Board of Selectmen and shared and discussed with the community instead of maintaining an aggressive implementation effort that seemingly has no parameters of measures for success built in. From the outside, it seems that the focus on economic development effort is contributing significantly to a sense of unease bordering on mistrust in some segments of the community and it makes sense to slow



down enough to produce a plan and provide an opportunity for additional community discussion and, hopefully, some buy-in, even knowing that there will always be opposition. The Town Manager should initiate creation of an Economic Development Plan and Strategy that results in preliminary data driven area plans for Epping Road, Portsmouth Avenue, and the Village / Downtown area.

- As the appointing authority the Board of Selectmen have the right and responsibility to select volunteers to represent the various land use boards and committees. It is incumbent upon them to select candidates that can approach the roles with an open mind and conduct the affairs of the Town with evenhandedness, fairness and respect. The Selectmen should set written expectations for volunteer service on each Board and Committee that they appoint. Requirements should include a commitment to such things as objectivity, open minded, respectful participation, a willingness to learn, and sufficient time to be available for training and meetings. The BOS should require participation in training as a condition of appointment / reappointment and include the cost in their budget.
- The Board of Selectmen should task the Town Manager to take the steps necessary to refine and better structure and define the community development and planning / approval process:
 - a. Define staff roles and clarify responsibilities
 - b. Establish a point person to coordinate
 - c. Reset priorities to emphasize collaboration and assistance
 - d. Set performance measures – example: all 65 day waivers to be reviewed by Board of Selectmen and conduct 3 annual focus group sessions: one with a representative group of applicants; the second with a representative group of board / commission volunteers and; the third with the staff, to discuss problems, issues and opportunities for improvement.
- The Board of Selectmen should convene a meeting of all board and committee volunteers and their support staff to explain and address questions and concerns about the desire for better coordination and communication, and focus on the need for a more responsive, user friendly approach.
- The Board of Selectmen and Town Manager should establish a Community Development Coordinating Committee consisting of the Chairs of all board and committees involved in

community and economic development along with the Board of Selectman Chair, the Town Manager and the Tech Review staff members. Meetings should occur at least quarterly for the purpose of establishing and maintaining open communication, identification and discussion of community development opportunities and challenges, and identification of needs for and ways to refine and enhance the community development process.



APPENDIX A




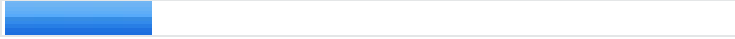





Survey: Exeter NH Community Development Survey


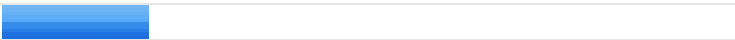


Report: Default Report

| Survey Status | | Respondent Statistics | | Points Summary |
|---------------------|------------|-------------------------|----|------------------------------------------|
| Status: | Live | Total Responses: | 32 | No Points Questions used in this survey. |
| Deploy Date: | 07/29/2015 | Completes: | 30 | |
| Closed Date: | | Partials: | 2 | |

1. Please indicate which Board / Committee you serve on:

| | Responses | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Planning Board:  | 12 | 37.5% |
| Zoning Board:  | 4 | 12.5% |
| Conservation Commission:  | 10 | 31.25% |
| Heritage Commission:  | 6 | 18.75% |
| Historical District Commission:  | 4 | 12.5% |
| Economic Development Commission:  | 4 | 12.5% |
| If other, please specify:  | 4 | 12% |
| Total Responded to this question: | | 32 100% |
| Total who skipped this question: | | 0 0% |

2. How long have you served?

| | Responses | Percent |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| two years or less:  | 0 | 0% |
| more than two years but less than five:  | 6 | 18.75% |
| between five & 10 years:  | 16 | 50% |
| more than 10 years:  | 10 | 31.25% |
| Total Responded to this question: | | 32 100% |
| Total who skipped this question: | | 0 0% |

3. What have you found to be the most challenging aspect of serving on your particular Board / Committee?

| Response | Response Text |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | There have been few challenges until the past few years, when the atmosphere (particularly in the Town Office Building) seemed to change dramatically. Doors closed, and there was a palpable sense of paranoia and distrust at every turn. Friendly and open communication no longer exists, making it unpleasant and extraordinarily difficult to be a participant in Town affairs. (Even members of the community have felt that the welcome mat has been removed) Having been a Planning Board member during the George Olson reign, I have experienced the Town during much more genial circumstances and I find this current trend very disturbing. Perhaps because things have become more insular, I have also noticed a trend whereby committee members and staff are no longer communicating well with one another, and this has resulted in numerous problems (some, quite significant) over the years. This is not sustainable. What I see as secrecy and bullying has poisoned the waters. The agendas of the Town Manager and certain Selectboard members has made for challenging times for the Planning Board and other Town committees. I hope every day for a reversal of this disturbing trend. This is a small community, and in many ways, it no longer feels like such. Somehow, we need to reestablish enthusiasm for community participation, and regain the community's trust in 'the process.' Circumstances revolving around the 2015 proposed wetland buffer zoning amendment, and the 2015 PB election of officers were probably the absolute low points in my fifteen +/- years on the Planning Board. |
| 2 | Dealing with wetlands as there doesn't seem to be much flexibility which at times is most challenging for all parties. |
| 3 | becoming familiar with the applicable rules and regulations |
| 4 | The conservation commission over time has had difficulties in finding volunteer members who have the time and commitment to fully engage in the roles and responsibilities of the commission, beyond attending meetings. Those activities are consistently addressed by only a few members. |
| 5 | Education of members Relationship to other boards/other board awareness of HC duties and supposed interactions Filing of documents Budgeting left up to Commission even though it falls under Planning Dept. |
| 6 | The Demolition Review process can be challenging given the time constraints especially if property owners are not cooperative. Communication with other town Boards and Commissions but this is improving now that we are receiving their agendas in advance of their meetings. Securing volunteers to serve on the Heritage Commission. |
| 7 | Sense of input being timely and actually being able to influence development decisions. |
| 8 | Having the applicant and public understand our members come with backgrounds of various interests/expertises. We are provided a meeting material packet in sufficient time prior to the meeting to permit study, reasearch and site viewing if deemed helpful; there is no walking into the meeting and voting as |
| 9 | Limited Budget compared to responsibilities for protected land Recognition by the Town and the CC of the need to monitor annually conservation land and existing trails. |
| 10 | By State Statue, the Conservation Commissions of NH are only advisory and and we can only hope the agencies reviewing the proposal after appearing before the ConCom share our opinions. Also, having the public and applicants understand our questions and comments come only after members have received the meeting material sent out by the Natural Resource Planner in a timely manner to allow time for review and a site visit if one feels it would be helpful |
| 11 | Explaining to property owners why preserving is better than razing -especially when razing is easier and cheaper |

- 12 becoming familiar with the Town Zoning Ordinance and its Site Plan Review and Subdivision Regulations
- 13 understanding applicable rules and regulations for a non-technically qualified person
- 14 Staying focused on following existing regs, ordinances and master plan when rendering decisions and NOT imposing your own personal beliefs. See training below.

4. If you could change one thing that would dramatically improve the operation or performance of your Board / Committee, what would it be?

| Response | Response Text |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | The Planning Board members work hard and have earned the respect of the community. We are regarded as being professional, reasonable, and easy to work with. We do not need or wish to be the puppets for the Town Manager, the Economic Development Director, or the members of the Selectboard. Give us back our autonomy. Let us do our job. And let the doors of honest communication and dialogue open between us, and the members of other boards. |
| 2 | Have the planning board members be elected rather than appointed buy selectmen |
| 3 | no comment |
| 4 | Increase the hours of the Natural Resource Planner to full time; or provide other additional resource hours. |
| 5 | Education of members on architectural styles, periods and construction |
| 6 | A clear Town supported application process for applicants requiring approvals from multiple boards and commissions. |
| 7 | An introduction or orientation that makes it clear how the commission decisions and activities tie in with the rest of the town planning activities. |
| 8 | Since the CC has responsibility to review wetland permits, training on the reading of plans and wetland regulations for most members should be ongoing. |
| 9 | Again, by State Statue we are charged with certain stewardship duties. Exeter has a significant number of easements, conservation deeded lands that require monitoring. I would like to see the size of the membership increased to we may attend to the must dos, should dos and then the wanna dos. Or better yet, increase our operating budget to allow to contract with outside vendors to assist in the monitoring. |
| 10 | The respect and understanding of other boards, specially the ZBA |
| 11 | member attendance |
| 12 | no comment |
| 13 | For Planning and Zoning Boards - more in-house(local) training |
| 14 | More in-house(local) training for new board members More screening of volunteer candidates to try and flush out 'special agendas' for serving. SEE ATTACHED SUPPLEMENT |

5.

Based upon your experience on the Board / Committee, please answer the following:

- Always
- Frequently
- On Occasion
- Infrequently
- Never

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| How frequently does your Board / Committee establish conditions for approvals?: | 14.29% | 42.86% | 28.57% | 7.14% | 7.14% |
| Are these conditions clearly spelled out in a written decision?: | 61.54% | 23.08% | 7.69% | 7.69% | 0% |
| Does your Board / Committee maintain a listing of outstanding approvals and associated conditions?: | 41.67% | 16.67% | 16.67% | 8.33% | 16.67% |
| How typical is it for someone to inspect projects to ensure approval conditions are satisfied?: | 27.27% | 18.18% | 36.36% | 9.09% | 9.09% |
| Does your Board / Committee receive status reports on approvals and associated conditions?: | 8.33% | 8.33% | 41.67% | 33.33% | 8.33% |
| Is your Board / Committee made aware of failures to comply?: | 16.67% | 25% | 41.67% | 8.33% | 8.33% |

6. Please rate that following:

| | Extremely Strong | Strong | Neutral | Weak | Very Weak |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|
| Interaction between members on my board/committee: | 33.33% | 50% | 8.33% | 8.33% | 0% |
| Interaction between members and applicants: | 0% | 58.33% | 33.33% | 8.33% | 0% |
| Interaction between members & Town staff: | 0% | 75% | 16.67% | 8.33% | 0% |
| Communication between our board/committee & The Selectmen: | 0% | 25% | 75% | 0% | 0% |
| Communication between our board/committee & other land use boards: | 0% | 16.67% | 41.67% | 41.67% | 0% |
| Adequacy of input from Town Manager when / if required: | 0% | 15.38% | 69.23% | 7.69% | 7.69% |
| Adequacy of input from planning staff when / if required: | 38.46% | 30.77% | 15.38% | 15.38% | 0% |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Adequacy of input from Police when /if required: | 8.33% | 25% | 58.33% | 8.33% | 0% |
| Adequacy of input from Fire when/ if required: | 8.33%) | 33.33% | 50% | 8.33% | 0% |
| Adequacy of input from Public Works when / if required: | 16.67% | 41.67% | 41.67% | 0% | 0% |
| Sufficiency of information required of applicants: | 7.69% | 53.85% | 30.77% | 7.69% | 0% |
| Clarity of information provided by applicants: | 8.33% | 50% | 33.33% | 8.33% | 0% |
| Sufficiency of information provided by Town staff: | 30.77% | 46.15% | 23.08% | 0% | 0% |
| Clarity of information provided by Town staff: | 23.08% | 61.54% | 15.38% | 0% | 0% |
| Sufficiency of technical input provided by outside consultants: | 23.08% | 46.15% | 30.77% | 0% | 0% |
| Clarity of technical input provided by outside consultants: | 3(25%) | 6(50%) | 3(25%) | 0(0%) | 0(0%) |
| Adequacy of legal advice and counsel: | 16.67% | 8.33% | 66.67% | 8.33% | 0% |
| Clarity of legal advice and counsel: | 16.67% | 8.33% | 58.33% | 16.67% | 0% |

7. Please rate the following based upon your personal experiences & observations:

| | Excellent | Very Good | Average | Below Average | Poor |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|------|
| Overall, how would you rate the performance of the Planning Board in providing balanced decisions that are "true" to the intentions of land use regulations?: | 23.08% | 61.54% | 7.69% | 7.69% | 0% |
| Overall, how would you rate the performance of the Zoning Board in balancing the integrity of the land-use regulations against mitigating true individual hardship?: | 7.69% | 61.54% | 15.38% | 15.38% | 0% |
| Overall, how would you rate the performance of the Conservation Commission in preserving, protecting and enhancing the natural environment?: | 30.77% | 53.85% | 15.38% | 0% | 0% |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Overall, how would you rate the performance of the Historic District Commission in overseeing, advocating for, and preserving the Historic Districts within the Community?: | 7.69% | 53.85% | 38.46% | 0% | 0% |
| Overall, how would you rate the performance of the Heritage Commission in identifying and preserving key historical or cultural elements throughout the community?: | 15.38% | 30.77% | 46.15% | 0% | 7.69% |
| Overall, how would you rate the performance of the Economic Development Commission in advocating for and advancing balanced economic development efforts within the community?: | 0% | 7.69% | 53.85% | 30.77% | 7.69% |
| How would you rate the performance of the land use staff in documenting and ensuring follow-up on conditions of approval established in the approval proceed?: | 15.38% | 61.54% | 7.69% | 15.38% | 0% |
| How would you rate the performance of the Code Enforcement Office in ensuring compliance with conditions of approval during construction?: | 16.67% | 58.33% | 16.67% | 8.33% | 0% |
| How would you rate the performance of the Code Enforcement Office in ensuring compliance with conditions of approval post construction?: | 8.18% | 54.55% | 18.18% | 9.09% | 0% |
| How would you rate the clarity, understandability and simplicity of our Zoning Regulations?: | 7.69% | 38.46% | 30.77% | 23.08% | 0% |
| How would you rate the clarity, understandability and simplicity of our Site Plan Review Regulations?: | 8.33% | 50% | 41.67% | 0% | 0% |
| How would you rate the clarity, understandability and simplicity of our Wetlands Regulations?: | 8.33% | 50% | 33.33% | 8.33% | 0% |
| How would you rate the ease and "user friendliness" of the land use processes overall?: | 7.69%) | 46.15% | 38.46% | 7.69% | 0% |

8. The Masterplan (MP) is the theoretical foundation for almost all community development; zoning and land use regulations should support attainment of the visions and ideals articulated in the MP. Please share your views on the following statements:

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| The current MP is reflective of the vision, goals and ideals that the community has for the future.: | 0(0%) | 53.85% | 46.15% | 0% | 0% |
| The MP current serves as a viable & helpful road map for the planning and regulatory functions of my board/committee.: | 0% | 61.54% | 30.77% | 0% | 7.69% |
| Current Zoning and land-use regulations are in alignment with the MP.: | 0(0%) | 61.54% | 38.46% | 0% | 0% |
| Community growth & development has been largely consistent with the visions & ideals in the MP. | 7.69% | 38.46% | 46.15% | 7.69% | 0% |
| Land use staff has been effective in keeping the MP updated & meaningful. | 0(0%) | 23.08% | 61.54% | 7.69% | 7.69% |
| Land use staff has been effective in their efforts to keep zoning and related land use regulations consistent & in alignment with the "living" MP. | 0% | 46.15% | 30.77% | 23.08% | 0% |
| The MP is a frequent reference point in discussions with project proponents. | 0% | 0% | 61.54% | 38.46% | 0% |
| The MP is a frequent reference point contained in information & recommendations provided by the land use staff. | 0% | 0% | 69.23% | 23.08% | 7.69% |
| The MP is a frequent reference point in discussions and related decisions made by my board/committee.: | 0% | 7.69% | 61.54% | 15.38% | 15.38% |
| My board/committee is aware and mindful of the elements of the MP that fall within our purview. | 7.69% | 30.77% | 23.08% | 30.77% | 7.69% |

9. What thoughts or suggestions do you have to improve the information and materials that are provided to you in advance of your meetings? Is there enough info? Too much? Could it be better organized? Are there things that should be added?

| Response | Response Text |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | The Planning Department has done an excellent job in the preparation of materials for the Planning Board members prior to the Planning Board's review of cases at the regularly scheduled meetings. Sylvia's notes were enormously helpful and thoughtful, and I am happy to see that Mr. Greenwood is continuing that practice. Sometimes the technical notes are a bit over our heads, especially for those of us who don't have an engineering background, but I think it is best to have them to look over and reflect on, than to have them edited or eliminated entirely. The Planning Board staff, the members of the Technical Review committee, all have done an outstanding job preparing materials for the PB to review. They get high praise for their efforts. On the other hand, and although there are some engineers who are consistently thorough in their preparation of materials for us to review, there are many who come to the table with incomplete plans. Our Town engineers and planners and volunteers should not have to do that work for the applicants. We should not be the designers of a project. Somehow this point needs to be made clear when applicants walk through the door of the Planning Office. |
| 2 | Currently we receive materials the Friday before the next Thursday meeting the majority of time. It would be great if plans were in color to help identify the site and it's conditions. |
| 3 | no comment |
| 4 | The information and materials is adequate and sent in a timely way. |
| 5 | The Heritage Commission operates as an individual board with no input from staff. The only documentation provided is for requests for demolition reviews. The staff is not apparently interested in the participating in the accomplishment of the goals of the HC. Attendance at Commission meetings and/or demolition reviews, at least occasionally, would be nice. |
| 6 | NA |
| 7 | At times it is too much and/or not clearly stated what is needed from the Conservation Commission. Occasionally it is after the fact and makes input seem useless or unproductive. |
| 8 | Well done |
| 9 | Please permit me to elaborate or further comment on my above choices in these boxes. Question 5: the last 5 questions are preformed by member of Planning Dept. staff Question 6: The Commission has a BOS rep. as a member but most often they report back to their Board on our activities and no not bring back requests/opinions. With the TRC and Planning dept. 99% of what we see has been formatted so it is ready for action. However what is often provided by outside consultants is inadequate or lacking because they are not seen by TRC or brought on board after requests by TRC. As for legal counsel I do find it puzzling how quickly some opinions are received, even in the most complex of cases, and how long other opinions can be dragged out. Question 7: Again DES can override any decision or opinions determined by the ConCom. As a former recording secretary for the HDC, Heritage and ConCom, my experience with applicants needing to come back with more information, revisions etc. is often because the applicant has not done their homework in reviewing minutes or watching TownHallStreams to see what the boards have asked/required in similar situations. And then there are those who wished to push the boundaries; often they are repeat applicants because they do not do what was request or decided to try it another way.. |
| 10 | Information provided is enough and on time |
| 11 | information and materials have been sufficient in most instances |
| 12 | no comment |
| 13 | Great help from office staff thanks primarily to 30 year employee Barbara McAvoy. Fear the day she retires (approx 1 year)! |

10. Please provide any thoughts or suggestions with regard to how the current land use processes might be better organized or structured to perform more effectively and effectively as an overall system.

| Response | Response Text |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | I continue to voice my support for a Zoning Ordinance Review committee that could work on examining current regulations: revising old regulations and writing new Zoning ordinances that would then go to the Planning Board for closer examination and discussion. This would help foster open dialogue between all land use boards, and would help to assure that the Zoning regulations are always being examined, revised, and updated. We will need, and will need SOON, another exceptional Town Planner to oversee future projects, to work on updating the Town's Master Plan, and to work with applicants, and the Town land use boards as we move forward. (That said, I would also like to see members of the Planning Board participate in the hiring process.) |
| 2 | The Zoning Ordinances & Regulations Committee (ZORC) needs to be an ongoing committee lead by the Planning Board to better communicate and assist with efficiency within the system. |
| 3 | no comment |
| 4 | Provide a master plan summary for public consumption. Provide a public seminar on the town's land use planning process and articulate ways and means of productively engaging the process Show through process communication and process simplification that "Exeter is open for business and economic development" |
| 5 | Our zoning calls for demolition review before any project proposing demolition goes before the planning board. This does not occur leaving no possibility for suggestions from the Commission on siting and architectural design that might affect the PB's decisions. |
| 6 | I have had over 35 years as a professional supporting clients through the approval process in municipalities throughout NH, MA and ME and can say with experience that the Exeter boards and commissions get an A+ when compared to what I have faced in the past. The recent criticism of the Planning Board and staff are unfair and untrue. |
| 7 | There should be a clear orientation of commission members as to the MP and the function of the commission in town planning. There should also be a greater effort to orient the commission as to how their function fits into the broader context of town planning. |
| 8 | Potential source for CC funding. See above. |
| 9 | I feel bring back ZORC so zoning issues can be dealt with in a timely manner. As the demographics and needs change let there be some flexibility in land use changes and this Committee would be helpful |
| 10 | No ideas |
| 11 | no comment |
| 12 | inapplicable to HDC |
| 13 | SEE SUPPLEMENT |

11. Please provide any thoughts or suggestions with regard to how the process might be improved or how your role on behalf of the community could be better supported, made easier, or simply more enjoyable.

| Response | Response Text |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Nothing to add, beyond what I've written in other sections of this questionnaire. Note: I think it would be helpful to have an attractive message board in front of the Town Office Building where notification of upcoming meetings/dates/times could be read by community members driving by. This would put upcoming meetings on everyone's radar, and might encourage more people to participate. |
| 2 | When the Selectmen have an issue with the Planning Board and procedures it would be appreciated if they would, through their representative, to discuss the concerns rather than come in "from on high". This would provide the Planning Board with their thinking / concern and allow conversation and dialogue to address the concern in a cooperative manner. It seems some times that our chairman gets cornered and brings in the "bad news" thus causing a poor reactions from the members. |
| 3 | no comment |
| 4 | See #10 |
| 5 | Don't undo all the good work that has been done planning and conserving what the community felt important in the quest for economic development. |
| 6 | More resources and support for the commission to carry out its primary objective of looking after the town conservation properties of which there are many and they are mostly poorly delineated and monitored for lack of time and resources. These properties play a vital role in the health and beauty of the Town of Exeter and yet a very small part of the town budget is dedicated to their monitoring and management. The town faces the serious threat of increasing encroachments and abuses of town conservation property with a potential high cost of resolution in the future. |
| 7 | On several occasions the Planning Board and the CC have managed to lack clarity on conditions on land for which the CC is to be responsible for the long term. |
| 8 | Perhaps more of a dialogue between PB and Con Comm. on projects seen by both boards. |
| 9 | We are trying to "sell" Historical Preservation by working with the historical society with walking tours, pamphlets and public programs |

12. Please provide any observations, ideas or suggestions that you have to better focus, organize or manage the overall "Community Development System" for the Town of Exeter so that it is responsive, balanced and transparent.

| Response | Response Text |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | There has to be more communication between staff, land use boards, and the community. We desperately need to focus on TRANSPARENCY. For this to happen, changes need to be made from the top down. Staff members cannot be made to feel that their jobs are at stake if they say too much, or say the 'wrong thing'....especially if what is being said is truthful and honest. |
| 2 | Perhaps we could continue the "All Land Boards" meetings a couple times a year to get to know each other and suggestions or ideas that might be tried to become more balanced and transparent in our work. |
| 3 | no comment |
| 4 | Apply the suggestions in question 10 to the Community Development system. |
| 5 | Technical Review should include input from HC when proposals require demolition or change view shed. |
| 6 | See above. |

- 7 There should be better communication between boards, committees and commissions. There should be clear orientation as to the the master plan, especially as it relates to each planning group. There town appears to be getting away from a clear objective of reducing the footprint of all future development so as to reduce the environmental cost of this development. The focus should be on quality of growth and not just quantity making the most efficient use of current developed areas before extended further into marginal lands that would better serve to protect the natural resource base.
- 8 Sounds great but I am not sure I understand the question. That said, there seems to need to be better sharing among departments. I believe the individual departments in the main do their assignments well, but on occasion they appear isolated in spite of the efforts of individuals. For example: I believe that the Town in the next few years will have to deal with the AOC. That will require all departments, various citizens groups, industrial/ commercial groups and individual home owners to change their behavior. Exeter needs to be ready.
- 9 Lets discuss the MP questions here: There has been much discussion recently on updating the MP but no real mandate has been sent out. We know the PB is responsible for a Master Plan but the last session involved many voices and consumed a great amount of time. They remember the process clearly and seem to be hesitant to take it on at this time. However, there is no chapter in the MP on Economic Development and that has been discussed by the EEDC members in their visioning sessions and individuals volunteered to research and set up a draft but nothing has happened. As the recording secretary for this Commission for some four years and attended all meetings I am saddened to see the enthusiasm and vitality of the original group diminish and in reality become almost a do nothing group. Often it is a challenge to get an agenda together in the required 24 hrs notice and that leaves little to no opportunity for members to follow up on agenda items. If saying yes to anything that is said to be "good for the Town" is the function of the Commission then I guess it is a success. Personally I do not find it responsible and done through self education. When the EDD arrived the group was thrilled to have some assistance with some of their goals, the Economic Chapter for MP being one. But it was made very clear from the onset he does not like to work with committees, posted agendas, minutes etc. He assured the group it would get done but felt he was very busy so not sure when that might be. (His preference for working alone was perhaps evident in the Warrant Article #8 on wetland buffers that was soundly defeated by the residents at election time. There were basically two issues here: one being the re-adjustment to the most minimal of wetland setbacks and the lack of transparency. No input from the Planning Dept, Planning Board, Conservation Commission. This is an educated town and citizens are willing to work toward responsible solutions; the public needs to be involved.
- 10 We've got a lot of dedicated people volunteering on the boards and an excellent professional staff in the Planning office. Now we need to get the public on board...
- 11 transparency may be an issue to be addressed
- 12 transparency is very important