

To: Town of Exeter Select Board

From: Communications Advisory Committee

Date: June 2, 2023

Re: Recommendations to Improve Town Communications Part 2

Overview

This report by the Communications Advisory Committee (CAC) reviews the progress the Town has made to improve its communications since the CAC's report to the Select Board in August 2021 (the 2021 Report), and makes specific recommendations steps that should be taken to build on the progress made since the improvements recommended in the 2021 report were implemented. As outlined in detail below, the CAC makes the following specific recommendations for the Select Board's consideration:

1. Give the Communications Coordinator better, faster, and more direct access to what's going on in town government so that the information that needs to be shared with the public be packaged and distributed on the appropriate town platforms.
2. Establish a routine practice of sharing all communications content created by Town staff or outside contractors with the Communications Coordinator in advance of publication so that the content may be included on the Town website, disseminated on other platforms, and integrated with other town messaging, as appropriate.
3. For the budget for fiscal year 2024, invest in developing up-to-date communications tools and work to enhance the communication skills of Town staff, such as townwide accounts for MailChimp and Canva, training and education budget to build the skills of internal Town staff, and Memberships in local and national government communications organizations. Internal staff capacity building should be the default solution to handling communications matters rather than spending on outside services. It's generally better to invest rather than just spend our communications dollars. This approach will allow us to reap additional human resources benefit by making the Town of Exeter a more attractive place for prospective employees because it invests in its staff and infrastructure.
4. Actively support the development and publication of a regular email townwide newsletter to serve as a single, unified, and reliable source of up-to-date topical information about the town and events of interest to residents.
5. Adopt a strategic communications plan to provide a framework and process for the Town to assess communications needs and set its priorities in a proactive, analytical manner.

Communications Advisory Committee Progress Report

The Town of Exeter has made significant improvements to its communications since the CAC's 2021 Report to the Select Board.

- The Communications Coordinator has been designated to oversee the implementation of the communications policies and procedures adopted by the Select Board and the Town Manager and to serve as a resource for all Town staff with respect to communications matters to ensure that information about the Town is presented in a coherent, accurate and positive manner.
- The Town website has been revamped and serves as a central, reliable, and primary source of information about the Town and its activities.
- The social media policy has been reviewed and is in the process of being formally updated.
- Town staff have been trained to use, maintain, and update the Town's website on a regular basis in accordance with best practices.
- The Communications Coordinator improved the responsiveness of the Town website homepage by rotating through highlighted content and writing news releases for major projects and developments.
- Exeter TV started to produce Meeting Minutes to publicize various Town governing bodies' activities in a user-friendly format
- Exeter TV expanded its Biweekly Report as a video newsletter to recap activities going on around Town and highlight upcoming events of general interest.
- The CAC met regularly throughout 2022 and 2023 and focused on broader communications goals and how to achieve a more strategic approach to improving Town communications, which has led to the recommendations outlined in this report.

A detailed discussion of each of the CAC's recommendations follows.

1. We need to improve the Communications Coordinator's access to town information and recognize the importance of fostering a townwide culture of communication.

We strongly recommend bringing the Communications Coordinator closer to the sources of information that needs to be shared with the community by having the Communications Coordinator report directly to the Town Manager, attend regular department head meetings, and have access to other sources of significant information about the town. Our research has shown that towns with a robust communications function place their communication staff within the executive offices to ensure better and faster access to the information that needs to be communicated to the public. Some towns have gone further to establish separate communications departments that report to the executive.

Elevating communications to the executive level would demonstrate a firm commitment by the Select Board and the Town Manager to fostering a culture of communication

throughout the town and will signal to all department heads and town staff the importance they attach to working closely with the Communications Coordinator in the course of their everyday activities.

Currently, our communications staff, the Communications Coordinator and the Exeter TV media technicians who assist him, are isolated in the IT department away from the center of decision-making and developments that take place in the Town Manager's office and other departments on a daily basis. With the pending retirement of the IT Coordinator, the Town has a convenient opportunity to separate Exeter TV and Communications from the IT Department, whose priorities, goals, and skillsets differ from those required for effective communications work. With the Communications Coordinator reporting directly to the Town Manager, the Town Manager and the Assistant Town Manager will be able to have a more proactive and effective role in guiding the Town's communications priorities and will be in a better position to lead and motivate other departments to participate in the Town's communications efforts.

Irrespective of the organizational structure, what we are trying to accomplish is giving the Communications Coordinator a closer working relation with the Town Manager's Office and the Select Board so that the Coordinator is involved directly and on a timely basis in discussions and updates that need to be communicated. Being "in the room" and having a good situational awareness of town operations is not feasible within the current structure, but is easy to change with the adjustments we propose to allow faster and more effective communication with the public.

We would also encourage all town staff to be more cognizant of the need to share information about their activities so that they may receive appropriate publicity. In addition, timely sharing of plans can avoid scheduling clashes. For example, on May 3, the Police Department posted on their Facebook a notice about a Bike Rodeo, a children's bike safety event that they are hosting at Lincoln Street School with Exeter Hospital on May 13. The town's annual Alewife Festival, another event with children's activities, had long been scheduled for the same day at Founder's Park. A great deal of work probably went into planning both events but it's unfortunate now that they'll both be competing for attendees. If there had been better interdepartmental communication, this conflict may have been avoided or planned together for a joint event. The Bike Rodeo was posted on the website only after the Communications Coordinator came across the Police Department Facebook posting and contacted the Police Chief about the event..

Let's step back and consider the big picture for a moment.

The Select Board's recognition of the need to modernize Town communications by appointing a Communications Coordinator, updating the website, revising the social media policy and taking other steps to engage with the public in new creative ways marks a profound cultural change. Over the years, each Town department had become accustomed to being individually responsible for handling its communications about its

own activities and now we have asked them to conform to a townwide communications strategy. It may have taken time for the benefits of the new system to be realized: posting of information on websites and social media reduces phone volume, residents are pleased to get alerts about roadwork and traffic disruptions, taxpayers see what their money is being spent on. Nevertheless, inertia and growing pains make change difficult and can prevent the Town from getting all the potential benefits of its new communications strategy. At this stage, it's important for the Select Board and the Town Manager to stand behind the communication plan and prioritize collaboration and communication within town government to allow effective, timely and accurate dissemination of information.”

2. We must establish a routine practice of sharing all communications content created by town staff or outside contractors with the Communications Coordinator on a timely basis so that the content may be evaluated, and if appropriate, included on the town website, disseminated on other platforms, and integrated with other town messaging, as appropriate.

Centralized oversight of Town communications is essential to maintain its coherence, accuracy, and reliability. A fundamental reason for having a communications policy and a communications coordinator is to ensure the reliability and accuracy of information that is made public in the name of the Town of Exeter, to present it in a consistent and clear manner, and to preserve records as required by law. So, it is vital that all town communications be conducted with the knowledge of the Communications Coordinator. The Town website is the primary source of information about the town and all relevant information should be made available there. The Communications Coordinator is also best positioned to determine whether the same content should be distributed on other town platforms such as Facebook, newsletters, or on Exeter TV. Each department remains responsible for providing content about its activities and ensuring its accuracy, completeness and timeliness. The Communications Coordinator serves as a resource to help them deliver their content effectively across suitable platforms in a manner prescribed by the Town's best practices.

The social media contractor hired independently by the Police and Fire Departments in the past year to create social media posts provides an example of why the Select Board and the Town Manager should require that the Communications Coordinator be kept in the loop on all town-related communications.

The contractor has created several social media posts designed to improve community relations by showing the more human side of the departments' work and occasionally highlighting community events they have hosted. Yet the content the contractor created was not made available for inclusion across other town platforms such as the town website or email newsletters.

Residents who may have seen a Police Department Facebook post could have headed to the Town website for more information or to confirm the event, only to find no

mention of it. This information could have been good content for an email newsletter. However, without a requirement to share that work, the content that the Town had paid for would be restricted to only social media platforms and would not be available on the town's main platform, the website.

Similarly, the DPW has been requiring contractors for major projects to keep constituents in the community who will be affected by their work informed about the project's status. It is important that these contractors keep the Communications Coordinator apprised of their work as well so he can disseminate information about the projects across multiple platforms as needed.

A simple, no-cost solution is to create a workflow requirement for the departments to funnel information created internally by Town staff or by external contractors to the Communications Coordinator who will be able to repackage and distribute content on appropriate platforms.

3. In this budget cycle, invest in developing up-to-date communications tools and enhancing the communication skills of town staff.

In this budget cycle, invest in developing up-to-date communications tools and enhancing the communication skills of Town staff, such as townwide accounts for MailChimp and Canva, training and education budget to build the skills of internal town staff, and Memberships in local and national government communications organizations. Internal staff capacity building should be the default solution to handling communications matters rather than spending on outside services. It's generally better to **invest** rather than just **spend** our communications dollars. This approach will allow us to reap additional human resources benefit by making the Town of Exeter a more attractive place for prospective employees because it invests in its staff and infrastructure. The CAC's budget recommendations are attached as *Exhibit A*.

We recommend that the Town invest in three key areas in the upcoming budget:

- i. Additional communications tools and services, such townwide accounts for MailChimp and Canva, to allow more effective use of email and newsletters;
- ii. Staff training and education, with a training and education budget for communication staff in different departments in order to build the skills of internal town staff, enhance the town's ability to recruit workers, and capacity to reduce the need to rely on outside contractors; and
- iii. Memberships in local and national government communications organizations, which are a cost-effective way to enable the Communications Coordinator and other Exeter town staff with communications responsibilities to network with their counterparts elsewhere and gain access to a wealth of communications resources.

The Town will need to decide whether to budget for these expenses as a separate central communications expense or spread the expenses across individual departments or some combination of both approaches.

4. We should actively support the development and publication of a regular email townwide newsletter to serve as a single, unified, and reliable source of up-to-date topical information about the town and events of interest to residents.

The Town would significantly enhance its communications capability by publishing a regular townwide electronic newsletter to serve as a single, unified, and reliable source of up-to-date topical information about town news and events of interest to residents. Initially, we recommend publishing on bi-weekly or monthly basis, eventually transitioning to possibly weekly if it is successful and demand grows. Our research shows that many towns use a general eye-catching, user-friendly newsletter as a tool to drive resident engagement, keep people informed about recent news and inform them about upcoming events that they might otherwise miss and that residents often look to these newsletters as substitutes for their disappearing local newspapers. Sean Dugan, the Director of Communications and Special Projects for Lexington, Massachusetts, reported that after a few months of getting used to the production process, he was able to streamline time for gathering content for and assembling the newsletter to a few hours a week.

Over the last few years, many of the Town departments have established their own newsletters or specialized mailing lists tailored to the specific interests of their constituencies. For example, Parks and Rec has ConstantContact with over 6,000 contacts; DPW and Exeter TV use MailChimp each with over 300 subscribers, and the Library utilizes LibraryAware. A complete list of the various separate newsletters and mailing lists is attached as *Exhibit B*. A complete list of email newsletter services can be found on the Town website at <https://www.exeternh.gov/community/e-news-alerts>.

This may have been useful to address the individual needs of that department, but by addressing only a narrow audience, they are missing the opportunity to reach a broader town-wide audience. By incorporating each department's news in a town-wide newsletter, we can get each department's message to folks who may not have known about something that turned out to interest them. We can also foster a sense of community by informing folks about what's going on around town, and we can simply let people know what their neighbors are up to. It is important to note that by consolidating into one account, each department will still maintain their current email newsletter services targeted at their specific audience, but will now have another method of reaching a wider audience through a consistently published newsletter produced by the Communications Coordinator.

The newsletter will build on the success of The Exeter Biweekly Report produced every other Friday by Exeter TV staff. The show consists of three to five short video segments highlighting news and updates from Town departments and committees as well as information from local area nonprofits. For over a year, the Communications Coordinator has been using MailChimp to email the video report to over 300 contacts.

Included in The Exeter Biweekly Report email blast are links to more information on topics discussed in the video and also sections covering one or two other updates from the Town. This consistent email format can be expanded to include the regular updates from departments and committees as well as other messages the Select Board or Town Manager want to communicate to the public. Using The Exeter Biweekly Report email blast as the vehicle to deliver news to the community will also bring more awareness about Exeter TV's services which include meeting and event coverage.

This would require a greater degree of centralization than Exeter currently practices.

We recommend:

- enhancing the Communications Coordinator role to encompass this function.
- having the Town Manager require each department to contribute a weekly report in a specified format
- Having the PD and FD consultant, and any other independent consultants such as those who may be contracted to work on specific projects, share their output with the Communications Coordinator so the output is incorporated in townwide platforms as well as in the newsletter

The newsletter could be abstracted on Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms. Over time, we may decide to publish a hard copy if there's demand or if certain demographics could benefit by having a print version. Some towns spend a considerable amount of money mailing out print versions of newsletters, but our research found many municipalities with digital-only versions that are much more cost-effective and this is what the committee is recommending as a key next step for improving communications.

5. The Select Board should adopt a communications plan that reflects a strategic analysis of the town's communications priorities and objectives.

The Committee proposes to undertake a more in-depth review of the Town's communications priorities, processes, and needs. The purpose of this review would be to create a Communications Plan that reflects a strategic analysis of the town's communications priorities and objectives.

Such a plan would require us to step back and determine what guiding principles and goals for effective and sustainable communications we as a town want to establish. We would then need to decide: (1) what do we spend our communication efforts and dollars on; and (2) how do we make those decisions. The plan would also serve as a guiding document for staff in various departments tasked with communication for the Town.

To this end, the Committee would like the Select Board to identify the Town's communication priorities and objectives to help guide the Communications Coordinator and the Committee in drafting the Communication Plan. The Communications Coordinator has referenced the Exeter Master Plan and taken relevant excerpts where

it mentions the topic of communication. These excerpts and notes are attached as *Exhibit C*. The Communications Plan should take into consideration the Master Plan as well as the more current goals and priorities of the Select Board to help chart a path forward for the Town's communications efforts.

**Communications Advisory Committee Report to the Select Board
June 2, 2023
Exhibit A
FY24 Communication Budget Items**

Software & Services

MailChimp - An online email marketing service used to send digital newsletters and alerts via email. Currently the Parks and Rec Department uses Constant Contact for \$1,500/year while Exeter TV and Public Works use free MailChimp accounts. Consolidating into one account will allow the Town to have a singular landing page for email alerts. This excludes the Public Library, which uses Library Aware, and any emergency notifications sent out via email from Police and Fire through their Smart911 system.

Parks and Recreation currently has over 6,000 contacts, Public Works has over 400, and Exeter TV has over 300. When the accounts are merged we expect to have fewer contacts to start with as many people are not currently opening the emails that are now being sent.

An **annual cost of \$1,620** would allow the Town to purchase a Standard plan with five user accounts, reach an audience of up to 10,000 contacts, and send up to 120,000 emails per month [one email to 10,000 contacts counts as 10,000 emails]. The user accounts would be split up into Parks and Recreation, Public Works, the Communications Coordinator, and possibly one other department, if needed.

The Town Manager has suggested using Parks and Recreation Funding and Select Board funds to implement the joint account in FY23 with the following breakdown for the \$135/month fee: \$52 to the Select Board and \$83 to Parks and Recreation based on usage. This would represent a \$500 savings annual for Parks and Recreation if carried over to FY24.

The Economic Development Director also has a MailChimp account with over 12,000 contacts used for Business Outreach efforts in Exeter and Rockingham County. The **cost of \$175/month** (\$2,100/year) is currently covered by the Economic Development Department. Due to the specific audience and the size of the contact list, this MailChimp account will not be merged with other departments. The figure for the Business Outreach emails is not in the total for this report.

Canva - An online digital design tool that allows users to create posters, social media posts, and more. The service also includes premium stock photos and graphics which can be used copyright free in materials created through the website. The Town has in the past been liable for using copyrighted material and this will help prevent that happening in the future. Parks and Recreation currently pays for a basic account with five users. In FY23, they shared the account with Public Works, Planning & Sustainability, and the Communications Coordinator allowing everyone to benefit from the copyright free designs.

The **annual cost of \$120** is set to be billed on December 21st, 2023 for \$120. The IT Coordinator approved this funding to come from IT's Internet Services line item, saving Parks and Rec \$120 in FY23. In FY24, the cost is expected to be \$120

Communication Education

UNH Certificate Program Options - UNH offers several Certificate Programs that allow students to take a variety of elective courses related to a specific topic.

Digital Marketing Certificate - Six elective courses over a two-year period which covers a variety of topics including "Social Media - The Platforms, Google Analytics, Email Marketing Strategy and Execution, Local Search and SEO, and the like.

Cost: \$1,674 [Six elective courses at \$279 each]

Total Cost for Three Staff: \$5,022

More info: <https://training.unh.edu/digitalmarketingcertificate>

This is a course that would be valuable to several staff members who use digital marketing on a regular basis, including the Assistant Parks and Rec Director, Communications Coordinator, and DPW Office Manager.

Making Moves Course - This is a specialized course designed to assist communicators with outreach efforts designed to motivate people to take action for the planet. With the shift to include Sustainability within the Planning Department, this course could help the Conservation and Sustainability Planner communicate about the various ways the Town is helping to make a more sustainable future and how the public can be a part of the solution. This course would promote both the goals of improving communication and work towards the Town's sustainability goals.

Cost: \$800

More information: <https://brooketully.com/making-moves/>

Membership in Government Communications Organizations

National Association of Government Communicators - This is a national group dedicated to advocating and promoting excelling in government communication. They provide opportunities for professional development, networking, and share best practices. Members receive discounts for webinars, the NAGC Communications School, and other events. Speaking with a member from this organization, they found it invaluable to meet, network, and learn from professional government communicators from across the country.

Cost: \$160 for one membership

General Marketing/Advertising Costs

Facebook/Instagram Advertising - The Town may want to employ the use of advertising or “post boosting” on Facebook and Instagram to help promote various initiatives or communications items throughout the year. This can be a lower cost method of reaching more social media users.

Cost: \$500

Print Advertising - The Town may also want to use posters, banners, flyers, and other materials throughout the year. As the Town improves its digital offerings, physical advertising can help reach viewers in Town offices, facilities, and in the downtown area, pointing them to where they can find online services. The Town currently has several sign boards that are rented out at no cost to community groups to promote local events but sit empty when there are no events. Using these signage areas more often and having banners promoting Town services and projects available to fill the gaps in the sign board schedule would allow the Town to utilize the spaces more effectively.

Cost: \$500

Total Cost for Communications Budget

Software and Services: \$1,740
Education - \$5,822
Memberships - \$160
Marketing/Advertising - \$1,000

Total: \$8,722

Other Considerations

It is important to note that the consulting services contracted by the Police and Fire Departments, totaling \$7,500 in FY23, and the Communications Contractor Stipend are not included in the above total figure. The figure also does not take into account any additional funding as a part of salaries, stipends, or other contract services proposed for FY24 that may be needed to implement the Communications Plan. It is recommended that these items be addressed in the Town’s current reclassification plan.

The CAC has also expressed interest in pursuing grant opportunities to cover or recoup costs associated with the items above. Along with the Communications Coordinator, they will be seeking guidance from the Town Manager’s Office and Finance Department on how best to proceed with grant applications.

Communications Advisory Committee Report to the Select Board
June 2, 2023
Exhibit B
New Hampshire Newsletter Research

Examples of digital newsletters:

- [Town of Durham | Durham Friday Updates](#)
- [City of Portsmouth weekly email newsletter](#)
- [Town of Amherst monthly email newsletter](#)
- [Town Newsletters | Fremont, NH monthly email newsletter](#)
- [City of Lebanon weekly digital newsletter](#)

Information from the NHMA about the benefits and uses of newsletters:

“E-newsletter services offer a way to efficiently create and deliver eye-catching communications via email. These products feature colorful design templates and tools to help you manage your distribution list and invite new subscribers. E-newsletters are ideal for sharing a series of brief messages that link out to your website for full details. This format also enables you to launch a dialogue or inspire an action. For example, you might ask a question and provide an email address for direct communication or survey link to collect a response.

These tools can be surprisingly affordable when you consider the cost savings in reduced staff time for manually updating and managing multiple email lists. These products take care of this step for you, and allow new subscribers to be added automatically. And while the learning curve varies for individual products, once you’ve completed the initial set up, the publishing process can be quite easy. Many companies offer free trials, allowing you to test the product to determine its ability to meet your needs and goals.

In addition to design and email list management, many services provide tools to help you track the number of recipients that open your message and number of readers that click links. While these statistics can be helpful to show interest in topics or programs, remember that these reports don’t tell the full story. Recipients can view the message in a preview window without actually opening the message. And a well-written news brief may provide sufficient detail, or the reader may seek more information on your website at a later date.

As budgets are squeezed ever tighter, it becomes increasingly difficult to find resources for such projects. Yet consider the potential rewards to be found as you connect with your citizens and your citizens reconnect to their community.”

**Communications Advisory Committee Report to the Select Board
June 2, 2023
Exhibit C**

Excerpts from the Town Master Plan that Refer to Communications

To better inform the Communications Advisory Committee on the communication priorities of the Town, the Communications Coordinator looked toward the Exeter Master Plan for references to communications. A search through the Master Plan document for :”Communica*” shows up only 24 times in the Master Plan. There was no mention of Exeter TV services in the Master Plan.

The section of the Master Plan dedicated to Communication is from page 38 to 40.

Below are several excerpts from the Master Plan that the Coordinator found helpful in guiding discussion around developing or improving the Town’s communication. For several excerpts, notes on those items progress, related projects, or plans to address these items are listed as notes.

Page 9:

“Communicate. Maintaining a high quality of life in Exeter will continue to become more complex as time goes on. Effectively sharing information among municipal departments, boards, and committees; different local government agencies; the business community; and the general public, will require continued commitment, innovative procedures, and investments in technology.”

- Incorporate this sentiment into a vision statement or guiding principle of the Communications Plan

Page 31:

“Exeter should establish formal lines of communication with downtown business owners to identify emerging challenges, aspirations for expansion, upcoming vacancies, or unexpected challenges for local businesses.”

- The Economic Development Director is regularly in contact with business owners
- In 2020, the Economic Development Director worked with the now Communications Coordinator to launch an email newsletter targeted at Exeter (and Rockingham County) businesses to keep them in the loop regarding COVID aid and programs.

Page 38:

“Communication is arguably the most influential force shaping every aspect of American and global culture today. The power of communication technology provides instant access to information in almost every corner of the globe, and it is evolving at a staggering pace. Local governments often find it difficult to keep up with the technological upgrades demanded by increasingly tech dependent communities. The call to action for municipalities amidst this revolution is to **create a sustainable system of communication technology that provides an excellent level of service**. Communication in Exeter’s local government takes many forms...”

- Incorporate this into the guiding principles of the Communications Plan

“Sharing Information with the Public:

The work of local government, discussed above, is performed in large part to serve the interests of the residents, businesses, and institutions in the community. Accordingly, decision making at the government level must be well-documented, participatory, accessible, and transparent. Further, the increasing complexity of issues faced by communities like Exeter, and the speed at which information is produced, increase the complexity of effective communication between town government and the public.”

- Meeting Minutes by Exeter TV is helping to publicize decisions made during government meetings
- Email newsletters may offer another avenue to help keep residents in the know about decisions made by their government

Page 39:

Speaking of Boards/Committees/Town Staff:

“The work of these bodies is extremely valuable, providing services to the community that are essential to the health, safety, and quality of life of our residents. Each of these bodies should examine how to most effectively make residents aware of the services that are available and how these services can be accessed. “

“Social Media and E-Communication

At the Exeter Master Plan Public workshop, residents indicated that they rely on websites, email, and social media as their primary source for information about the Town. Similar to the issue of communications inside local government, improved communications out to the public will have a significant technological component. In the US, the vast majority of people age 64 and below own smart phones, and almost half of Americans over the age of 64 own smart phones. In addition to the tools built into cell phones (e.g., calendars, automatic notifications), social media outlets and news streaming have changed the way people expect to receive news with small “bite size” notices designed to grab a reader’s attention and pull him or her into a closer investigation. **The Town will need to continue consideration of how important initiatives, meetings, and other information can be packaged and pushed into the public**

realm in a manner that can compete for the attention of Exeter’s residents and business owners.”

- Social media use by all departments have been more regular, increasing every year
- Email newsletters, bite sized videos, and other tactics can help address getting information out to the public with their increasingly busy media environment

“Public outreach for Capital Improvement Projects...

Roads, sidewalks, bridges, parks, municipal buildings, and many other elements of public infrastructure are a critical part of Exeter’s everyday quality of life. Importantly, these facilities require maintenance, repair, and sometimes large-scale replacement. **Regardless of what causes the need for such capital improvements, communication around these activities is an important part of the process.**

On a very practical level, construction in the public realm can be disruptive. Streets may need to be closed or temporarily narrowed, causing problems with local traffic and temporary access problems for local business. **Communication to residents and business owners must continue to be a high priority in these instances, providing specific information so people can plan accordingly.** On a more aspirational level, many capital improvements impact parts of Exeter that people consider important to their everyday enjoyment. Upgrades to parks, streetscape improvements, and other public improvements touch places that are important sources of everyday enjoyment. **Public engagement around improvements to these spaces can lead to higher quality outcomes for everyone.**

- The Communications Coordinator helped standardize email newsletter services for Public Works and has plans to assist them in the future if needed.
- Exeter TV does periodic video updates and press releases about construction projects.
- Going forward, Public Works should work to keep residents informed with weekly or daily updates on large projects such as paving, sewer replacements, or other projects that impact daily life. Working with the Communications Coordinator, these updates can be included in wider outreach efforts.

“Consultants, Outside Vendors, and Outreach

From time to time, the Town needs to hire outside experts to help with a variety of projects...It will be important for the Town to set expectations with consultants regarding public outreach associated with their work during this process. **Language in the RFP and questions within the interview should address the need for outside consultants to provide information about their work during the course of a project, and a description of how the public will be engaged in a manner that provides meaningful input.** RFPs should provide examples of approaches that have worked well, emphasize that large public meetings are not the only way to engage the public, and stress the importance of using social media as a component of public engagement. Recognizing the considerable resources required for this type of work, the Town must also budget for these projects accordingly.”

- Some RFP's have included public outreach such as the Salem Street project which had consultants liaising with the public in person and via a private Facebook group for residents in the area.

Page 40:

"Importance of Community Forums

While the Town certainly needs to be able to communicate at the speed of technology (see previous section), well designed and facilitated group discussions will be needed to grow local involvement and a sense of community between individuals."

- The Town regularly holds public forums on a variety of topics, especially large projects. Many of these forums however are sparsely attended.
- The Town may want to look into how they can advertise these events with digital and traditional marketing .
- The Town may want to consider how virtual options can be added.
- The Town may want to look into technology and services dedicated to increasing engagement.

[Overall Comment]

Exeter recognizes the need to build communication networks within government and between government officials and the public:

Providing effective communication requires both public investment in technology and commitment of town staff and resources.

The public should have access to information about projects, programs, and decisions being made at the local level and be encouraged to provide input.

Local boards, commissions, and committees should collaborate on common objectives and meet regularly as a group to facilitate coordination."

- These will be incorporated into the guiding principles and other areas of the Communications Plan.
- Boards and Committees can help inform each other by writing brief reports, separate from their minutes, to be included in email newsletters or other communications.

Page 52:

[Action Plan for Communications Items]

#2: “Develop a more frequent official, regular system of interdepartmental meetings to review current initiatives and workload in each department and potential efficiencies that could occur by combining efforts.”

^Could the Communications Coordinator start a Communication Task Force made up of staff designated to communicate on behalf of their departments? This group would build on the information sharing of Department Head meetings to keep each other in the loop about upcoming projects and areas where they can cooperate. These meetings could be held in person, remotely, or simply as an email chain with monthly updates.

#3: “Develop materials (paper and/or digital) for the Town to be used to attract businesses, residents, and visitors. Work with the Chamber of Commerce, HERON, Historical Society, PEA, and other community groups and organizations.”

^this has shown helpful recently with the Exeter Mills. The CAC Chair worked with the building management team to send an email to all residents informing them about The Exeter Biweekly Report and email blast resulting in 70 new subscribers in a two-day period.

#5: “Evaluate the ways in which the Town communicates with the public and ensure that strategies maximize citizen engagement across multiple platforms. Determine the strategies that could be strengthened and move forward with ways for improvement... TBD”

^This is where the CAC comes into play

#6: “Develop language to be included in municipal RFPs that requires the inclusion of diverse and effective public engagement processes as part of municipal planning, design, and construction processes.”

^Success of the Salem Street Project – consultants had a staff person dedicated to doing community engagement. They hosted a [Facebook group](#) and corresponded with residents in the area to answer questions or talk through concerns.

^Is this still being followed by all departments issuing RFPs?