

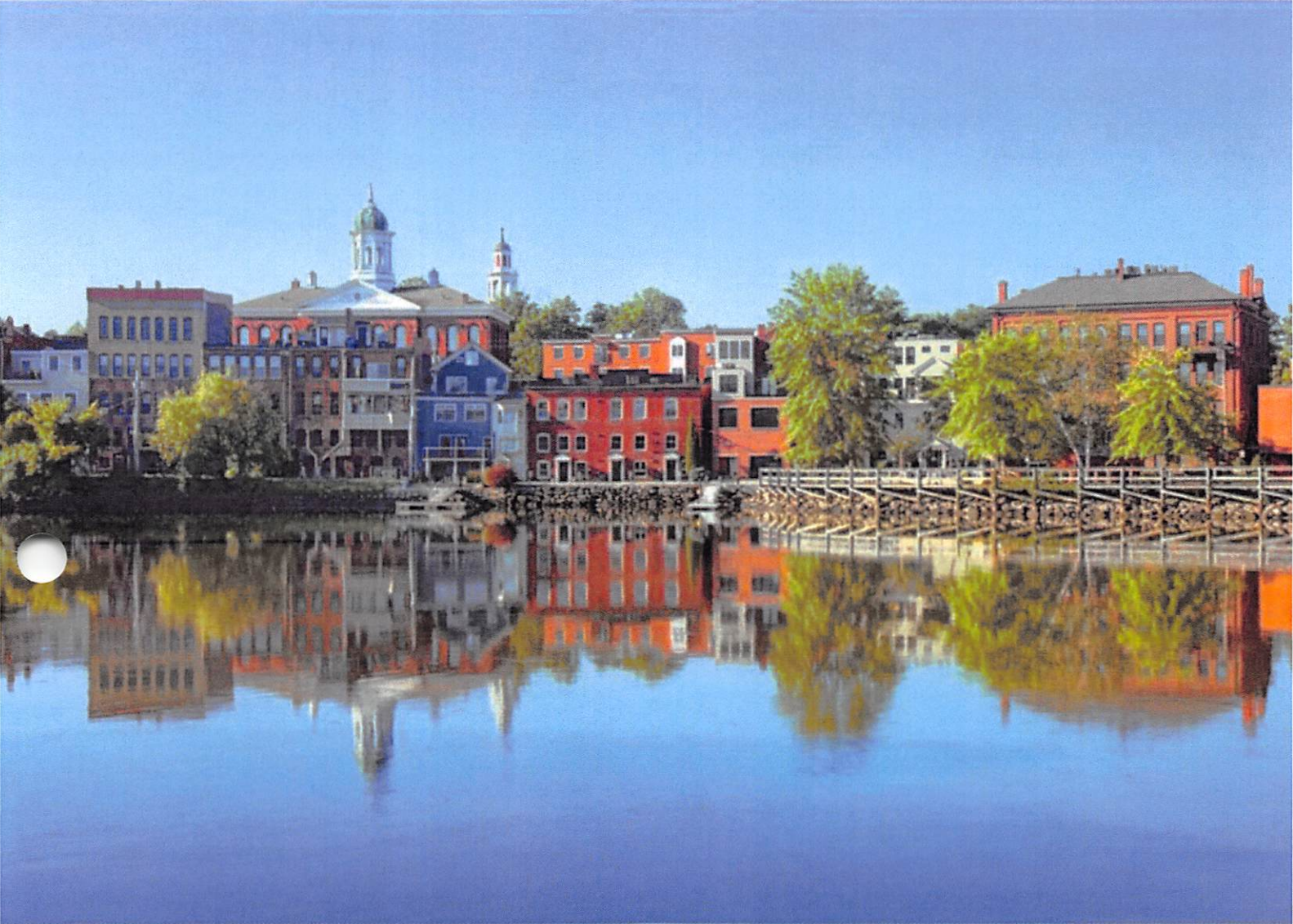


# Town of Exeter, New Hampshire

## Management Study and Strategic Recommendations



January 2024





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I want to acknowledge the work of Paul Guevremont, a Junior at St. Michael's College in Vermont, for his technical support in developing charts and supporting information for this report.

Without your collective support, this important work could not have been accomplished.

William G. Keegan, Jr, ICMA-CM,  
President



## *Executive Summary*

The Town of Exeter, New Hampshire engaged our firm to evaluate several important aspects of their current organizational structure and to determine if opportunities exist to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the local government. Specific areas that we were tasked with included:

- Working with the Select Board, the Town Manager, and the Exeter Management Team to evaluate existing management practices;
- Performing an organizational analysis to determine if there is room for operational efficiency and collaboration;
- Performing an analysis of the Town Manager's Office to see how the team is currently working and to determine if some changes are needed to help improve collaboration and efficiency, both internally and externally; and
- Evaluating the entire organization to determine if long-term succession planning has been established for all key operating departments.

Our firm conducted several interviews with key members of the leadership team including Select Board Members, the Town Manager and his staff, department heads, division heads and leadership of the local municipal unions to determine how the Town operates currently and to see if opportunities emerged for helping to improve the organization.

One of the key recommendations that emerged was to shrink the number of departments that report directly to the Town Manager. The current organizational structure makes it difficult for the Town Manager to stay ahead of key issues that arise each week. A smaller number of direct reports should help to increase the level of communication and understanding among all operating departments.

Another important area of concern was the ability to develop succession plans for critical operating departments. Our firm was able to assist in some areas of this concern and we recommend some short-and long-term options to help meet this vital need.

Finally, we have attempted to offer a realistic timetable to implement many of the recommendations that we have offered to help the organization. Given the limited budget options that are available, many solutions will have to be phased in or implemented following the departure of a particular staff position.



## *Project Overview and Purpose*

The Town of Exeter, New Hampshire approached our firm to look at the current organizational structure and provide an outsider's perspective as to how the local government organization is operating today and what could be done to help it operate better in the future.

The Town wants to know if there are structural inefficiencies that may not readily be noticed by an organizational insider. If there are inefficiencies, the Town wants to know how they can be effectively addressed. Further, the Town wants to know if each department within the organization has fully planned for the next generation of leaders for each of its operating departments. Relatedly, the Town has asked whether it is even capable of developing a succession plan given its limitation on the capacity of its human resources.

The purpose of this study is to achieve the following objectives:

1. To work with the Select Board, the Town Manager, and the Exeter Management Team to **evaluate the existing management practices** and structure of the Town and provide guidance and suggestions on how the organization may be structured differently based on the findings of that evaluation. The mission is to note what works well and offer ideas on how to improve in areas needing attention.
2. To perform an **organizational structure analysis** to determine if there is room for enhancing operational efficiency and collaboration. Many times, organizations build department structures based on what was convenient at the time rather than taking a more wholistic and strategic view of how departments perform their work. Reviewing this can often lead to building a better organizational structure that is both cost-effective and conducive to a more collegial work environment for the staff.
3. To perform an **analysis of the Town Manager's Office** to see how the team is currently working and to determine if any changes are needed to help improve collaboration and efficiency, both internally and externally. This includes meetings with the Select Board and the staff of the Town Manager's Office to determine if expectations are being met and whether decision-making and policy development processes may be made more meaningful and insightful through any modifications within the Executive Team.
4. To **evaluate succession planning across the entire organization** to determine the existence and sufficiency of such plans in all key operating departments. Departments with succession plans will be noted and provided with ideas for improvement, if needed. For those without such plans, we will present guidance on how they should be developed. This will involve meetings with the staff of all Town operating departments to determine if there are opportunities for leadership development and management training for





## *Project Overview and Purpose*

candidates who possess the necessary skill sets (“The Right Stuff”) for leading the organization into the future.

As part of this project, interviews will be conducted with local labor unions to determine the labor climate in Exeter. If changes or ideas for improving the labor climate are indicated, they will be presented as part of the report’s recommendations.

Finally, once the recommendations in the report are presented, we are prepared to assist the Town in developing the next steps and the timeline needed to achieve those results. The project includes management training and mentorship for any department needing this added assistance.



## *The Town of Exeter*

The Town of Exeter was founded in 1638 by John Wheelwright and a group of religious exiles from Massachusetts Bay colony. After its provisional declaration of independence in January of 1776, Exeter served as the capital of the new State of New Hampshire during the Revolutionary War. Exeter is a very historical community that is known as being the “Birthplace of the American Revolution”.

Exeter is the birthplace of Daniel Chester French, sculptor of the figure of Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial. It is also the home of Phillips Exeter Academy, a private preparatory school that is world renowned. One of its more notable graduates is Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, which is now known as META. Exeter is also famous as the birthplace of the renowned author John Irving.

The American Independence Museum, located on Water Street, is caretaker of one of the rare original versions of the Declaration of Independence, which was found in the wall of the museum during a renovation in 1983.

Exeter is also known for its beautiful natural resources, including the Exeter/Squamscott River, Swasey Parkway, the Oaklands and Henderson-Swasey Town Forests, Raynes Farm, the Jolly Rand Trail, and the Dolloff Conservation Easement.

The Town has actively pursued the redevelopment of its downtown area which now has many new thriving restaurants and unique shopping opportunities. It has also developed an important 587 Acre TIF (Tax Increment Financing) Zone located off Epping Road to spur additional economic development in this undeveloped and underdeveloped area of Town. This new zone has the potential to generate up to an additional \$130 Million in new tax base for Exeter.

The Town is strategically located near Interstate 95 and less than 30 minutes from Interstate 93 with easy access to the cities of Boston, Portsmouth, Manchester, and Portland. It is a short drive to the Atlantic Ocean and the popular summer destination of Hampton Beach. In the winter, Exeter offers many recreational opportunities and is a “tank away” from some of New Hampshire’s best skiing and winter sport resorts. In 2020 the Town had a population of 16,049 of which 94.15% were citizens born in the United States and 5.85% were born outside of the country.

Exeter’s local government operates under what is known in New Hampshire as the “SB2” form of government. This includes an Annual Town Meeting called a “deliberative session”, where articles are debated and amended, but not approved. The Town Election is held on the second Tuesday in March each year and is the “second session” of Town Meeting, where ballot voting occurs on all articles in the Town Warrant promulgated by the Select Board. From time to time the Select Board may call for a Special Town Meeting that will include a deliberative session and a voting session held on dates set by the Board.



## *The Town of Exeter*

The Town's governing body is a five-member Select Board. The Board appoints a Town Manager under NH RSA (Revised Statutes Annotated) 37 to administer the day-to-day operations of the Town government.

The School Systems in Exeter (elementary) are governed by a local school board and administered by the Superintendent of Schools of SAU16. Exeter Middle School (CMS) and Exeter High School (EHS) are regional schools under the SAU16 which include the neighboring towns of Stratham, East Kingston, Kensington, Newfields, and Brentwood.

Exeter's housing stock continues to increase in value which makes it a highly desirable place to live. However, rising housing costs are starting to impact the younger generation who would like to live in Exeter but are finding it more difficult each year to afford a home. It is also becoming more challenging for the elderly members of the community and for local government employees, as well as teachers at Phillips Exeter Academy to live in the community based on yearly escalations in housing cost.



## *Existing Form of Government*

The Town is governed by a five (5) person elected Select Board with staggered terms. The Select Board appoints a Town Manager who runs the day-to-day functions of the Town Government.

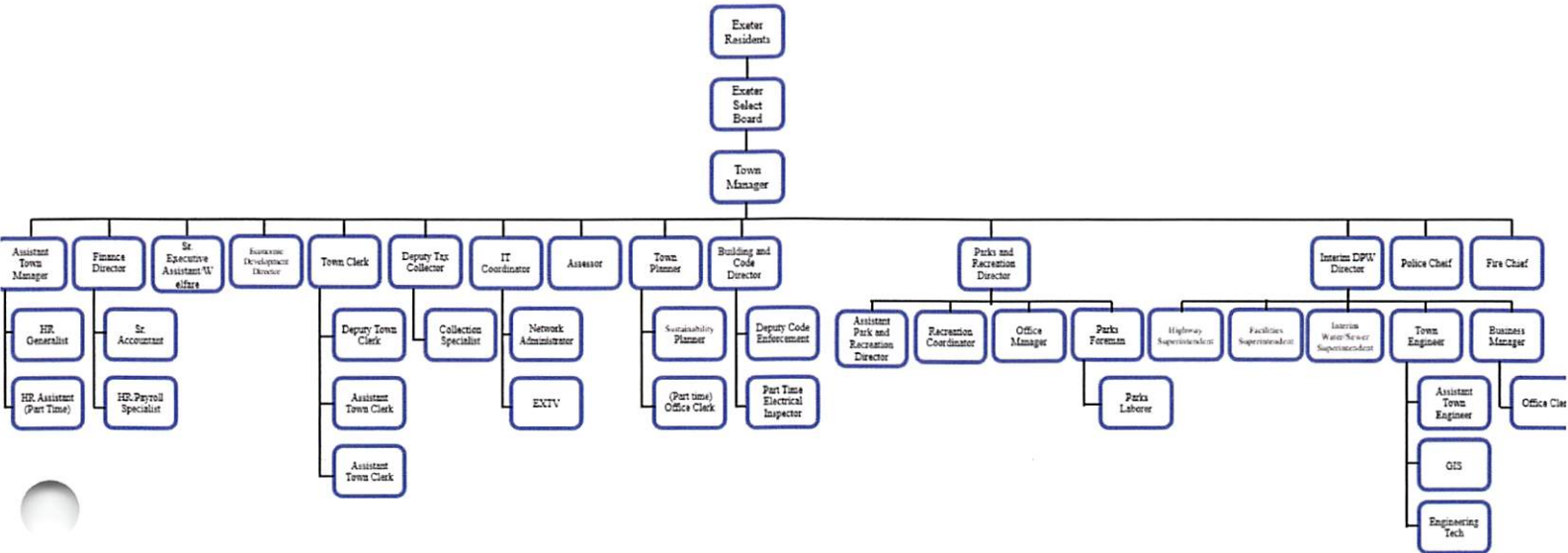
Currently, the Town operates with the following Departments which all report to the Town Manager, except for the Town Clerk who is an elected official.

1. Town Manager's Office, which includes Welfare and Human Services,
2. Human Resources
3. Police Department, which includes 911 Communications,
4. Fire/EMS Department, which includes the Health Division,
5. Planning and Sustainability, which includes Planning and Conservation,
6. Building Inspection, Zoning and Code Enforcement,
7. Economic Development,
8. Public Works, which includes Engineering, Water, Sewer, Highway, Facilities, Trash Collection and Recycling,
9. Parks and Recreation,
10. Finance and Accounting,
11. Tax, Water and Sewer Bill Collection,
12. Assessing,
13. Information Technology
14. Town Clerk
15. Media Communications

Town Services also include Education and a Public Library, which were not addressed as part of the scope for this report since their organizations are governed by separately elected Boards and Committees.



# Current Organizational Chart



## Administration

Administration of the Town of Exeter is structured with the following elements:

- Select Board: The 5-member Select Board are elected in 3-year staggered terms. They serve as the chief governing body for the Town and serve as the appointing authority for several boards and committees. The current role, member, and term of each Board member are as follows:

<i>Niko Papakonstantis</i> , Chair	Term Ends: 2025
<i>Molly Cowan</i> , Vice Chair	Term Ends: 2024
<i>Julie D. Gilman</i> , Clerk	Term Ends: 2025
<i>Nancy Belanger</i> , Member	Term Ends: 2026
<i>Daniel Chartrand</i> , Member	Term Ends: 2026

- Town Manager's Office: The Town Manager's Office serves as the chief administrative office for the Town. The current roles and members of each staff position is as follows:

*Russell Dean*, Town Manager  
*Melissa Roy*, Assistant Town Manager and HR Director  
*Pam McElroy*, Senior Executive Assistant

- Budget: One of the most significant roles of the Town Manager's Office is the preparation of the annual operating budget for the Town. With the assistance of the Assistant Town Manager, Finance Director, Town Department Heads, the important work of the Budget Review Committee (BRC) and the Select Board, as well as other key staff members, the annual operating budget often takes several months to prepare and review. This process generally begins in September and concludes in March of the following year. This is a collaborative process which requires hearings, comments, suggested changes, and public review. Once the annual operating budget is prepared, reviewed, and approved, it is up to the Town Manager and the Town's department heads, boards, and committees to manage the spending and stay within the parameters of the approved budget for each fiscal year.

- Town Ordinances: The Town Manager's Office is responsible for guiding the process of adopting general Town ordinances by the Select Board. The Office will coordinate with various departments, boards, and commissions to prepare and suggest language for the Select Board's consideration. Once adopted by the Board, the language is distributed and sometimes interpreted by the Town Manager's Office, or the staff will help to direct interested parties to the proper source for the correct application of the ordinance. A complete listing of Town Ordinances can be found in either the Town Manager's Office, the office of the Town Clerk or on the Town's website ([www.exeternh.gov](http://www.exeternh.gov)).



## Administration

- Welfare & Human Services: In accordance with New Hampshire State law, Exeter complies with RSA 165 by providing emergency crisis assistance to residents of the community. The Welfare and Human Services Department is currently managed by the Senior Executive Assistant to the Town Manager. This individual provides financial assistance as the situation requires but also provides guidance to individuals by directing them to state agencies and organizations who can provide more direct assistance to the individual or family.
- Human Resources, Labor Relations, and Collective Bargaining: The Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager act as the primary personnel management functions for the Town. The Assistant Town Manager has a dual role, also serving as the Human Resources Director. Only recently has the office added some additional help by hiring a Human Resources (HR) Generalist. Collectively, these individuals are charged with the responsibility of hiring, maintaining compliance with various state and federal requirements, payroll and benefits administration as well as providing competitive compensation programs for the Town's workforce.
- Media Communications which includes Exeter Television (EXT). This was a recent change in the Town that was designed to provide a more centralized communication approach of keeping the community informed on all aspects of local government and its offerings to the public.



## Administration

### **Department Interview:**

*Interview of Russell Dean Town Manager, 7/26/2023 at 9:00 AM and on 9/25/2023 at 9:30 AM*

Russ Dean has served as the Exeter Town Manager since 2005. He operates under the provisions of the State Town Manager Act, otherwise known as **RSA -37**. This State statute was adopted by the Town of Exeter in 1953.

The Town's Economic Development Program was started by Russ in 2014. The program has performed successfully under the direction of Economic Development Director, Darren Winham.

Aside from the significant amount of redevelopment that has occurred in Exeter's Downtown during Russ's tenure, he has also supported the formation of a Tax Incentive Financing (TIF) District in Exeter. Property located within a TIF District is assessed at the full taxable value of the property, but all the collected taxes go into a corresponding TIF Fund. The TIF Fund can then be used for various public improvements such as new water/sewer lines, sidewalks, lighting, and road improvements. The TIF District in Exeter is located on Epping Road. State Statute **RSA 162K** was adopted by the Town to allow for this district to be established.

Russ noted that other State Statutes used by the Town include **RSA 79E** which helps to incentive redevelopment in the Community Revitalization District.

**RSA 37-16** defines the authority of the Town to name the Town Manager as the Tax Collector. This provision was adopted by the Town in 1983. While the Town Manager is the designated Tax Collector, in practice, the Deputy Tax Collector performs this work on behalf of the Town under the direction of the Town Manager.

We talked about the challenge of replacing the DPW Director. Hiring an Engineer for this role is not as critical as finding someone who can manage projects and a diverse staff. He noted on 9/25/23 that they now have several candidates for this position because the upper range of the salary was recently elevated to \$150,000. Russ admits that filling vacancies, has been particularly challenging for him and his organization during the past three years.

The Town received close to \$1.6 Million dollars in ARPA funds from the federal government. The Town is using these funds to purchase new voting booths, to pay for IT improvements and a host of other capital improvements. Russ views these funds as one-time spending opportunities to improve capital needs that the Town has not been able to afford in recent years.





## Administration

If there is a vacancy in the Town Manager's role, Russ believes that Melissa Roy could be an option as a viable replacement. This could happen if she starts to get some formal training as a future Town Manager, sooner rather than later. If a vacancy occurs within the next three to five years, that should be more than ample time for Melissa to complete her training. If she could balance her current workload and continuously participate in training opportunities during the next few years, she could be ready sooner.

Organizationally, Russ would prefer to oversee fewer direct reports. This would require some consolidation of departments, so that more frequent leadership meetings could be held. I agreed with his observation and indicated to him that it is difficult for anyone to stay ahead of all the Town's issues if you are constantly managing people. As such, a smaller, more robust organization is the best way to move forward. This could also include giving some direct oversight of departments to the Assistant Town Manager. Russ was open to that concept.

The Town Manager recognizes the challenge of having the Welfare Department run directly by his Office. Practically speaking, Welfare should be overseen by the Town Manager's Office but should not be run directly by the Senior Executive Assistant in the Town Manager's Office. We talked about the creation of a Social Services department or division that could help many departments, but also be responsible for the Welfare Program.

I also mentioned to Russ that the Finance Director's span of responsibility should be expanded to include Assessing and Tax Collections. Organizationally, all aspects of finance should be under the leadership and direction of the Finance Director. This would enable the Finance Director to serve as a close advisor to the Town Manager with respect to budget, revenues, and expenditures. He thought that this could be very helpful. He did think that some of this was already happening informally, but creating a new organizational structure with clear oversight and better lines of communication would be optimal.

Russ felt he could use better guidance and assistance in developing policies and policy updates. Given the current demands of the organization, this area needs some support.

Melissa is the Assistant Town Manager/HR Director who oversees an HR Generalist and one additional part-time staff person in HR that has yet to be filled. A more robust Human Resources function for the Town could be very supportive for the Town Manager's Office.

Russ feels that he has a good relationship with the Board, and he would like to stay in his role for the long term.

In talking about how Russ and his team interact with the Select Board, he described that they work with the Chair of the Board on a bi-weekly basis to prepare for each Board meeting. He speaks more frequently with the Chair of the Board and only as needed with the remaining Board members. He indicated that the Board has a diverse number of roles and responsibilities. He described that the Planning Board includes a Select Board member as a voting member, and that the Conservation Commission includes a Select Board member as a representative, but that member does not have a vote.



## Administration

The Select Board does a good job of understanding strategic planning, and they scheduled an All-Board meeting in October, which is in line with the Master Plan's goals. Russ feels that this meeting will help the Board to further its strategic initiatives.

The current Select Board has many different focuses. For example, Nancy is focused on what is happening right now on matters that need the Town's attention. Julie is interested in the more historic perspective of the Town and is also a State Representative. Molly is the communicator and does a very good job of that for the Board and the community. Dan is economic development focused. He wants to see the Town continue to thrive and be sustainable for the long term. Niko is broad-based and has a good handle on the pulse of the community. They are all very effective members who are highly dedicated to the Town.

I spoke with Russ about the prospect of having him interact more closely with the Town Departments. After meeting with various Board members this seemed to be a general concern that they would like to see him address. A more refined organizational structure should help him address this concern. The Board's concern in this area may or may not be an accurate reflection of what is happening but because it is a perception that I observed, it should be addressed in a proactive way. Having more frequent leadership team meetings could help address that concern.

Russ conveyed that the Board is highly focused on the Budget and the Capital Improvement Program. They play an active role in these areas in making sure that the Town has what it needs to provide services for the residents and the Town's operations.

Another important issue we discussed is that there will soon be some additional space available for Town operations when the Parks & Recreation Department moves from its current location at 32 Court Street to their new location at 10 Hampton Road. The questions the Town should be examining are how should this new available space be utilized, and would a new organizational structure help answer this question?

*Interviews of Assistant Town Manager/HR Director, June 26, 2023, at 8:30 AM and on September 26, 2023, at 11:30 AM*

Melissa Roy is the Assistant Town Manager/HR Director for the Town of Exeter, a position she has held since August of 2021. She was the former Assistant Parks and Recreation Director prior to her current role. She has become a quick study in her latest position. She likes what she is doing and thinks that her new responsibilities are very interesting and challenging. She does have an interest in possibly becoming a Town Manager someday which makes her a natural succession for the current Town Manager, if he were to vacate his position for any reason in the future. Ideally, this transition is years away to allow some time for Melissa to learn and be trained in this key leadership role. Some say that she needs four to five years to reach that position, but I do not share that perspective. While not necessarily ideal, there have been many instances where individuals with very little executive experience have been forced into this role and it has worked out very productively. It really depends on the individual.



## Administration

She thinks that the Town is “flying thin” in the Human Resources area because there are a lot of competing issues with her role as the Assistant Town Manager. She is currently developing and mentoring the new HR Generalist, *Christina Restuccia*.

Melissa notes that the vast amount of her responsibilities falls on the operations side of the Assistant Town Manager role. Given the circumstance of the past year, where there were many competing issues, sometimes things fell through the cracks. Melissa essentially served as the Acting Town Manager during a period where the Town Manager was out on extended leave. This forced her to do more than she had the capacity to perform. This is certainly understandable given the high volume of issues and demands placed upon this Office.

In talking with Melissa and the Town Manager, it was my observation that there needs to be more robust assistance in this office to assist with the management of Human Resources and Labor Relations issues. Areas such as wellness programs, employee development initiatives and proactive labor relations discussions are not able to gain any traction given the operational demands of the office.

Right now, the biggest issues facing the Town are personnel vacancies and rising wage demands. The labor market is particularly difficult in this area due to Exeter’s geographic location and proximity to the Massachusetts labor market. Massachusetts typically pays more for its base wages because of the existence of State income taxes (not something that New Hampshire imposes) and the cost of living is generally higher for housing and education. The higher wages offered by Massachusetts act like a syphon in drawing many potential candidates for positions out of the local labor market.

Organizationally, it was Melissa’s observation that the Town Manager’s Office deals with a high volume of inquiries that limits the ability of the staff in the Office to stay on top of important issues. It is our belief that if the Town were to reorganize with some departments reporting directly to the Assistant Town Manager and fewer to the Town Manager, this “divide and conquer” approach would make the workload more manageable. This approach has proven to be effective in many organizations with similar challenges.

Melissa seemed to feel that the culture and general employee morale are positive in the Town, but employees are getting frustrated by the lack of support resulting from unfilled positions. There is a high turnover rate in the Police Department and DPW cannot find candidates to fill many key positions, including the Director. Even the Electrical Inspector position has been vacant for multiple years, which is reflective of the low level of candidates for positions at several levels. Employees also see their wages as being less competitive in this environment and the high turnover rate may be a symptom of that concern.

Melissa thinks that with some additional support for HR in the Town Manager’s Office, they could be more proactive and less re-active to issues that face the workforce. Human Resources issues are far more complex and time-consuming in today’s environment than ever before. This means that if time is being spent in this area, many other things in the Town Manager’s Office are not being proactively addressed.



## Administration

Melissa's observations are not uncommon in local government today. Many cities and towns are not adequately staffed to address the many personnel-related issues that happen daily. I am inclined to agree with this observation in Exeter and I will address this concern in the recommendations chapter of this report.

*Interview of Pam McElroy, Senior Executive Assistant on August 21, 2023, at 9:30 AM.*

Pam McElroy has held the position of Senior Executive Assistant since July of 2019. She has a wide range of responsibilities in the Town Manager's Office. I was somewhat surprised to hear that she is the only full-time support staff member in the Town Manger's Office. Her responsibilities not only include supporting the Town Manager, but also aiding the Economic Development Director with permits and reports. She administers all the Town's property and liability insurance coverages and is the primary contact for any claims that may arise in the Town.

She pulls together a monthly activity report for the Town Manager that identifies nearly all the activities that she has been responsible for during that period of time.

One of the biggest surprises to me was her involvement in administering the Town's Welfare Program. New Hampshire statutorily requires each Town to provide benefits to anyone who qualifies under the Welfare Program. The qualification for these benefits is very generous.

At one time, the Town employed a part-time administrator for this Program but that individual retired and the responsibility landed in the Town Manager's Office. Over the past four years the Town has spent anywhere from \$46,000 to just under \$92,000 on Welfare. Interestingly, the current year (2023) is trending to be the highest year of the past four with expenses running just under \$67,000 through the first six months of the calendar year.

The number of clients having reached out for benefits has correspondingly grown as well. In the past four years, the Town has assisted anywhere from 800 to 1300 inquiries during the first six months of each year. 2023 landed at the high end of that number for the first six months of this year with a significant jump in the number of clients seeking shelter. That is indicative of the economic times we are experiencing, as the cost of housing and rising interest rates are forcing many individuals into a housing crisis. This increase in demand for assistance is significant, both because of the benefits but also for the adverse impact it is having on the ability of the Executive Assistant to balance all the highly significant tasks for which she is responsible.

It was also my observation that the office area where clients are met to determine eligibility for the program is not sufficiently private for sensitive discussions. This is an area that must be looked at going forward.



## Administration

Pam provided further information on the numerous daily tasks that she is responsible for completing. Specifically, she leads the Annual Report process of assembling all the reports from various Town Departments. That, coupled with the responsibility of supporting the Town Manager, assisting with resident complaints, and follow-up from Select Board Meetings, makes the job very challenging for one person to handle.

The number of diverse responsibilities placed on this one person's plate is concerning from two perspectives. One, this level of responsibility for any one person to perform can result in a burnout scenario where the individual will become increasingly less productive over time if expected to perform all these duties at a high level. Another equally important concern is the creation of what I refer to as a "critical point of failure". If Pam were to become incapacitated or decided to leave unexpectedly, a crucial gap would be formed in the organization that could cause significant delays in delivering high quality services from this Department. Moreover, the pressure it would place on the Administration to back fill this gap would further complicate their ability to perform their regular responsibilities.



## Administration

### **Select Board Interviews:**

As part of the organizational review process, I met with each of the sitting Select Board Members to get their perspective on how the Town is performing and what they think the Town should be focused on. This perspective is important and is key to the long and short-term success of the community. The Board members did not disappoint me with their responses. However, they did cover a wide range of topics. Below is a sampling of what I learned.

#### *Interview of Select Board Member Niko Papakonstantis 7/26/2023 at 1:00 PM*

Niko Papakonstantis is the Chair of the Exeter Select Board and has held this role for four years. He has a good command presence as Chair of the Board and a favorable relationship with all his fellow Board members. This is a very desirable quality for a Board Chair. He loves the community and wants the Town to succeed in all aspects. He thinks the Town is headed in the right direction and wants the Board to continue to play a strategic role in moving it forward. He has a solid understanding of what the community wants and knows how to read the community when it comes to important issues. He knows that high taxes are an important issue for the residents and businesses, but he also knows that the Town must continue to invest in its staff, infrastructure, and capital facilities to keep the community moving forward and to preserve the value of property in the community. He thinks that it is critically important to do succession planning for all the Town Departments so that the Town's services will not be significantly interrupted if a vacancy occurs in any one of the Town's leadership positions. Vacancies in some of the major operating departments such as DPW must be addressed to ensure the delivery of important daily services to the community. He is focused on the Town's primary leadership team and wants to make sure that the Town Manager's role is continuously staffed so that critical projects and the financial well-being of the Town are not adversely affected at any time in the foreseeable future.

#### *Interview of Molly Cowan Select Board Member, 9/25/2023 at 5:15 PM*

Molly Cowan has been a Select Board Member for the Town of Exeter since 2018. She has served as Vice Chair of the Select Board for the past four years. She cares deeply about the community and ran for the Select Board on the basis that she wanted Exeter to be a nice place where her kids could grow up and hopefully be able to afford to live here when they get older. While the latter statement remains a question because the cost of living continues to grow way beyond the means of many, it is still a highly appropriate aspiration to have as a community leader.

Molly wants Exeter to be a forward-looking community that focuses on things that matter and that will leave a lasting impression for the Town. She is concerned that sometimes this may hinder progress and usurp discussion of issues that truly matter.



## Administration

She wants the community to be laser focused on having enough employees in the future so that the Town will continue to provide quality services for the residents. She thinks that we should try and grow our employees organically by providing on-going training and promotional opportunities to keep employees engaged, fulfilled, and interested in staying here for the long term.

She would like the Board to leave a legacy of strategic initiatives that will continue to move the community in the right direction. Specifically, she wants to develop old and new staff members so that each generation will benefit from the Town's institutional knowledge and stability. She thinks it's important for the Town to index its progress against other communities to see how Exeter is really doing. She acknowledges that Exeter is generally well-run but there is always room for improvement. She is a strong believer that well-run organizations constantly seek to improve themselves and that Exeter should be no different.

Molly believes that the Board is effective because they are trusted by their constituents. Larger projects often take time to get approved because residents want to make sure that they are getting the "best bang for their buck". However, she acknowledges that sometimes when you wait too long the project can become more difficult to afford. Creating a more balanced approach on this point is important for the future.

She thinks that the community should look at the regional library model more closely because the current library system could be more responsive to the needs of the community. She observes that the Police and Fire Departments are generally performing well but that the number of new members of the Police Department is a little disconcerting with only a limited number of seasoned veterans who can help impart their knowledge to the newer officers. Public Works is more concerning because they are struggling to fill positions at all levels of their organization.

Finally, she is concerned that the level of volunteerism has generally gone down in the Town since the COVID Pandemic. The Town needs to make a concerted effort to draw upon the community's talent base and get new individuals involved. With fewer people volunteering to serve the community, it becomes harder to fill vacancies on Boards and Committees with experienced candidates.

*Interview of Select Board Member, Julie Gilman, 7/26/2023 at 10:00 AM*

Select Board Member Julie Gilman is a lifelong resident of Exeter who also serves as a State Representative for this area. She has a strong understanding of the community's needs since she participates through multiple layers of government.

Julie is also a big supporter of succession planning. She views this as critically important for the public safety departments of Police and Fire Departments as well as DPW. She acknowledges that the situation with multiple vacancies in the DPW is a substantial challenge.



## Administration

She also thinks that the Planning and Building Departments need backup plans. As these departments begin to age out, there needs to be a plan to fill these resulting voids. The Electrical Inspector's position has been open for well over two years. How do we handle that one? She suggests that job sharing may be something to explore.

Julie indicated that New Hampshire does not provide much State Aid for cities and towns. They do provide some assistance for water and sewer projects.

Other topics we discussed included the State's recent adoption of a transportation tax from car rentals that was originally slated to be used exclusively for elderly transportation. However, it's now possible that this may be used for all transportation projects.

She thinks that the current Library System works well, and they have a good staff.

The Town Clerk's Office is fine for future succession planning because it is an elected position, and the Town Clerk has been training members of her staff to be her replacement.

Assessors have a consultant doing the valuation with only one regular staff member. If that person leaves, the Town will be faced with a decision on how to proceed forward from there. As an aside, she noted that the current valuation is about 68% and could be a real shock to taxpayers when tax bills come out next year.

She notes that it is difficult to keep the cost down. The Fire Department staffing has more than doubled due to growth in the Town. Twenty-four-hour coverage is a challenge for the Fire Department. Data shows that fire related events occur mostly during the day. To meet this need, they have added more help during the day shifts.

She thinks the Town might be well served by having a Grants Manager who coordinates all grant efforts for the Town. Currently, every department takes on that role so there is no unified effort.

Julie observes that the Historic District Commission (HDC) has no staff to help citizens fully understand Historic District Regulations. This is an important consideration in a community that prides itself on being an historically rich destination. She feels that the Historic Districts are not promoted as a key tourism consideration and attraction for developers.

She supports the concept of a centralized Community Development Department that encompasses planning, economic development, building and conservation.

She believes that communication is important and would like to know more about labor negotiation strategies before the final agreement is brought to the Board for approval.

Julie would like to meet more with the Town Manager, but she has been busy with many issues at the State level. She used to meet with Russ more often and perhaps this can be reestablished as a good communications step.

There appears to be no succession plan for the 32 Court Street Property once Parks & Rec. move to their new location. She thinks a process for determining this should be discussed







## Administration

with the community so that once the decision is reached, it will have better support.

Julie thinks that a public building evaluation process is a good idea. The Public Works Department is currently performing this study and will be finishing up the details this year. Julie would like to know if any changes to the buildings are being proposed, that they should be shared with the Board so that everyone is aware of them.

She feels that the Philips/Exeter Academy is a great asset for the Town but would like to see the Town build a better working relationship with the Academy through enhanced communication.

Julie believes that Parks and Recreation programs are the number one (1) service that the Town provides. It's her perspective that the Department needs more staff support. However, she would like to have a better understanding of how the finances work in this department so that a plan could be developed to help support the hiring of more staff.

Julie thinks that Tax, Water and Sewer Collections are running well.

### *Interview of Select Board Member Dan Chartrand, 7/26/2023 at 2:30 PM*

Dan Chartrand served on the Select Board from 2012 to 2018 and was elected again recently to serve in 2023.

He noted that during his previous terms, the Select Board was very controversial, but the current Board works well together.

He feels that a weakness in the Town is that it never formerly adopted a Charter. He thinks that the current structure is not well defined, which tends to slow things down. Dan observed that after coming out of the pandemic the Town's volunteer strength had diminished. This could be an area where the Town Manager, with the support of the Board, comes up with a strategy to help rebuild this base of support. A strong volunteer corps can solve many issues and the Town needs reinforcements in this area.

Downtown is a huge strength of the Town, and redevelopment has been very successful. He also likes the idea of a consolidated Community Development Department. Such a combined talent pool would serve to support each other and in turn, development projects that have been vetted in a comprehensive and cohesive way by the Town.

He is a big fan of regionalism and thinks it needs to be stronger in this part of the State.

Dan thinks that the Public Safety Departments, Library, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation all do a pretty good job and that residents appreciate their services.

In Dan's opinion, the senior population is not well served, and the Town could do more to help improve their quality of life.

Riverwoods is a strength. It's a facility located out on the edge of Town. It includes three different campuses that provide continuing care for Seniors. The population is in their mid



## Administration

to late 70's. Dan thinks we need to have more of this type of development for the community as our population continues to grow older.

Phillips Exeter Academy (PEA) is a big piece of the community. They provide a lot of indirect economic value to Exeter. Students use the downtown and parents use our restaurants and hotels. He thinks they will be challenged this year. A lot of their faculty live in Exeter, and it is getting more expensive for them to continue to reside here.

Exeter Hospital is a plus in the community and thinks that now that they are affiliated with Beth Israel Hospital in Boston that the quality of care will only increase.

Dave Sharples has been a big plus for the community in leading the Planning Department. When he speaks people listen. Very knowledgeable and a very wise individual.

He thinks that both the Police Chief and Fire Chief do a good job for the community.

He would like to see the Town Manager sync more with the Assistant Town Manager to become an unstoppable force. Dan supports organizational changes for the Town because he thinks that we will become more efficient and focused on the things that are important. That is critically important as we continue to move forward in this ever-changing world.

*Interview of Select Board Member, Nancy Belanger 7/26/2023 at 8:00 AM*

Nancy Belanger was born in Exeter and has been a life-long resident. She served on the Board from 2014 to 2017, was reelected in March of 2022, for a one-year term and was elected to her current three-year term in March of 2023.

She had similar observations to Dan Chartrand about her first experiences on the Board. She also thinks that the hiring of Dave Sharples has made a big difference in the Planning Department. She loves doing committee work, has worked on housing policy, and loves to work on the budget. She feels she was not ready to serve on the Board when she ran the first time. This time around, all she wants to do is to do the best things for the Town.

The Town has come a long way ever since Darren was hired as the Economic Development Director. The Town has seen some favorable changes in the Downtown.

There are over 100 volunteers who serve the Community, but that number has gone down over time. Serving on boards and committees is a training ground for future Select Board or School Committee members. People who serve on committees learn a lot and tend to see the bigger picture.

Hiring is a big challenge for all departments and Nancy thinks that we need to come up with a strategy to offset any future employee gaps.

Short term, we should take a hard look at what the Town is doing on a day-to-day basis. What are we doing well in and where can we be more fiscally conservative?

Doug and Dave are very good in the Building and Planning Departments respectively.

Nancy sees the advantages of looking at reorganizing some Departments and how that could help keep the Town moving forward.

She thinks that the promotion of Melissa to the position of Assistant Town Manager/HR Director has been beneficial for the Town.

Nancy feels that we need to find a way to provide more affordable housing for everyone, particularly Town employees who provide services for the residents.



## Administration

Parking is a challenge in Downtown. When a Winter Parking Ban is called, where do people park their cars? There needs to be a more global study of parking. A parking inventory is needed, and it is in the works. Big challenges are the lack of bike paths, walkways, and age 55 and older housing. “We need to take care of those who can’t walk somewhere”.

The Town’s Planner is big on educating the public on issues. This is a very sound method of gaining support for any proposed changes!

She wants to support the Town Manager and provide him with whatever he needs to succeed.

She suggested that I speak to Jay Perkins in the DPW, (which I did, See the Public Works section, below).

### **Key Takeaways:**

- The Town Manager’s Office is thinly staffed. When one person is out, certain priorities must be deferred. The Town Manager is aware of this concern and is open to ideas on how this can be addressed.
- Human Resources and Labor Relations are a challenge because these important functions do not get the level of attention that they need to be successful and to manage risks in this area. Everyone works hard but there are too many priorities and not enough staff to perform all the duties. New laws on many levels of government have made the management of the HR function more complex.
- The hiring of Melissa Roy as the Assistant Town Manager/HR Director has worked out well for the Department and has been widely supported by staff and the Select Board.
- Managing Welfare in the Town Manager’s Office is a challenge for many reasons, but one of the key reasons is that it takes away from the many priorities that are supported by this Office. After reviewing the caseload and the time impact on the Office, moving this function outside the direct administrative responsibility of the Town Manager’s Office is something that must be addressed and will be discussed in the recommendations section of this report.
- The Select Board members identified several common goals during their interviews. One is finding a way to fill vacancies in several Departments. This is a critical concern that must be addressed, particularly in the Public Works Department. Secondly, the Board likes the idea of consolidating some of the Town’s Departments to create greater efficiencies and a more robust internal support system for employees. Third, the Board wants to see a rational plan for transitioning departments who are facing retirements or who have a limited leadership team. Public Works, Building Department and Planning and Zoning were most mentioned.
- Finding a solution to rebuilding the “Volunteer Corp” for the community was also mentioned as a critical need. A Board and Management strategy should be prioritized.

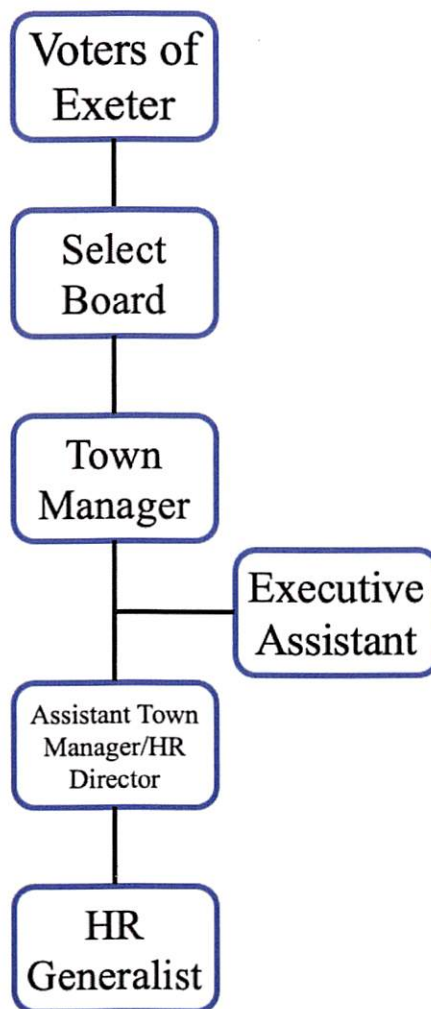


## Administration

### Succession Plan:

While there is a lot of information in this Section, there really is only one key staff succession plan that is contemplated. The Town Manager succession plan is one of the most critical priorities for any Town to consider. In this current environment, where there is a limited pool of candidates to consider for these positions, the Town is wise to develop an internal candidate to help meet this need. With the recent promotion of Melissa Roy to the position of Assistant Town Manager/HR Director, the Town has an opportunity to develop this individual to be a future Town Manager. Melissa has expressed an interest in this role and now is the time to pull together an action plan to help her prepare for this work. This means that there will have to be a balance of her current workload coupled with some specialized training and development that will help meet this objective. This is an important strategic consideration presently while the Town Manager, Russ Dean, is able to assist with this effort.

### Current Organizational Chart:



## *Finance Department*

One of the most critical functions of any Town is the ability to manage its finances well. If this function is performed correctly, the Town is in a much better position to provide quality services to the community, capital projects are funded in a timely and appropriate manner, and revenue and expenses are managed to maintain taxes at a reasonably affordable rate and are conducive to resident and business retention.

In Exeter, this Department is managed by Corey Stevens, the Town's Finance Director. He is supported by Senior Accountant- Laura Zogopoulos, Human Resources and Payroll Accountant- Gail Morin and Susan Penny- Town Treasurer. The key functions of this Department are the following:

- Accounting/General Ledger: This is where funds and expenses are managed to ensure the Town does not spend more than what has been approved in budgets and that expenses are incurred and accounted for in accordance with accepted municipal accounting practices and principles.
- Budget: The Finance Department is an "important player at the table" in shaping each fiscal year budget. The Finance Department performs revenue forecasting and suggests budget guidelines to the Town Manager as he, the Assistant Town Manager and the finance team make critical budget recommendations to the Budget Review Committee, the Select Board and Town Boards, Committees, and ultimately, Town residents.
- Treasurer: The Treasurer performs the critical component of cash management in the Town and makes sure that cash is properly accounted for and invested to achieve the most favorable position for the Town using risk averse investment vehicles. This individual also manages any borrowings or bonds that the Town takes on to pay for any long-term debt. Up until this past year, this was an elected position but it has recently become appointed by the Town Manager.
- Audit: Annually the Town performs an audit using an outside accounting firm that evaluates all the Town's financial practices to make sure that they are compliant with State and Federal reporting requirements. Moreover, this process is important for identifying any strengths and weaknesses in the Town's existing financial practices.
- Payroll: The Payroll function is self-explanatory but it is important to note that having this function as an integral part of the Finance Department's responsibilities is vital to managing costs and maintaining compliance with federal, state and local pay and human resource practices.
- Purchasing: The Purchasing responsibility in the Finance Department assures that all purchasing practices are performed lawfully and consistently. It provides guidance to Departments who may not be skilled in this area and can offer advice on how to attain quality products and services using competitive procurement practices.
- Policies and Procedures: The Finance Department offers guidance and direction as it relates to the financial policies of the Town. Moreover, the department serves as the oversight arm of the community making sure that the financial policies are practiced properly and consistently. It also serves as an important partner with Human Resources in assuring that employees receive the right benefits while being paid timely and accurately.



## Finance Department

- Grants Administration- The Finance Department is responsible for determining if expenses charged against a grant are consistent with the intent and purpose of the grant. If the expenses of a grant were questioned or audited, this Department would take the lead in that review process.

### **Department Interview:**

*Interview of the Finance Director, Corey Stevens 7/25/2023 at 1:00 PM*

Corey Stevens serves as the Finance Director for the Town of Exeter. He was first appointed to this role in April of 2022. He oversees three other staff members. They include Susan Penny, who serves as the Town Treasurer; Laura Zogopoulos, the Senior Accountant; and Gail Morin, the Human Resources/Pay Roll Accountant.

He feels that his department could use some additional staffing support. He feels that they are performing well on a day-to-day basis but if anyone is out of the office, the operational needs of the Department begin to suffer.

Laura Zogopoulos serves as the Acting Finance Director if Corey were to be out for any length of time.

Organizationally, Corey recognizes that there are some challenges in filling vacancies. Operational delays are sometimes caused because of the vacant positions. In several instances throughout the organization, there are “points of critical failure” because there are simply not enough back up individuals to step into roles when the primary person is out of the office.

His department works on the Budget, produces a payroll and expense warrant on a bi-weekly basis, manages the accounts payable and general ledger activity, and assists the Treasurer in preparing bond issuances.

With respect to Bonds, the State of New Hampshire has a Bond Bank and that is where most capital projects are funded for cities and towns.

Some of the more recent projects that have required bonding include \$12.5 Million dollars for an Inflow and Infiltration project, road improvements, and underground utilities including water and sewer for the Epping Road TIF Project and \$3.5 Million for the Cyphon Project which was recently supported by the Community for completion by early next year.

One project that failed to achieve approval was funding for the new Public Safety Complex for Police and Fire. The most recent vote for the project received a voter majority for approval but failed to achieve the necessary 3/5 majority vote that was necessary for the funding.

Like most communities there are more projects than there are funds to support them. As such, the Town must be very vigilant and strategic in its choices for funding projects.

Corey supports the notion of reorganizing Departments for greater efficiency. He believes that an outside look at the organization is a good thing to help the Town see things that they would not normally recognize because they are working too closely to the issues.

He did further indicate that he currently works outside of Town Hall on the first floor of the old Town Hall building located across the street. His preference would be to stay in his



## *Finance Department*

current location since he believes that the Department operates very efficiently in the current environment.

### **Key Takeaways:**

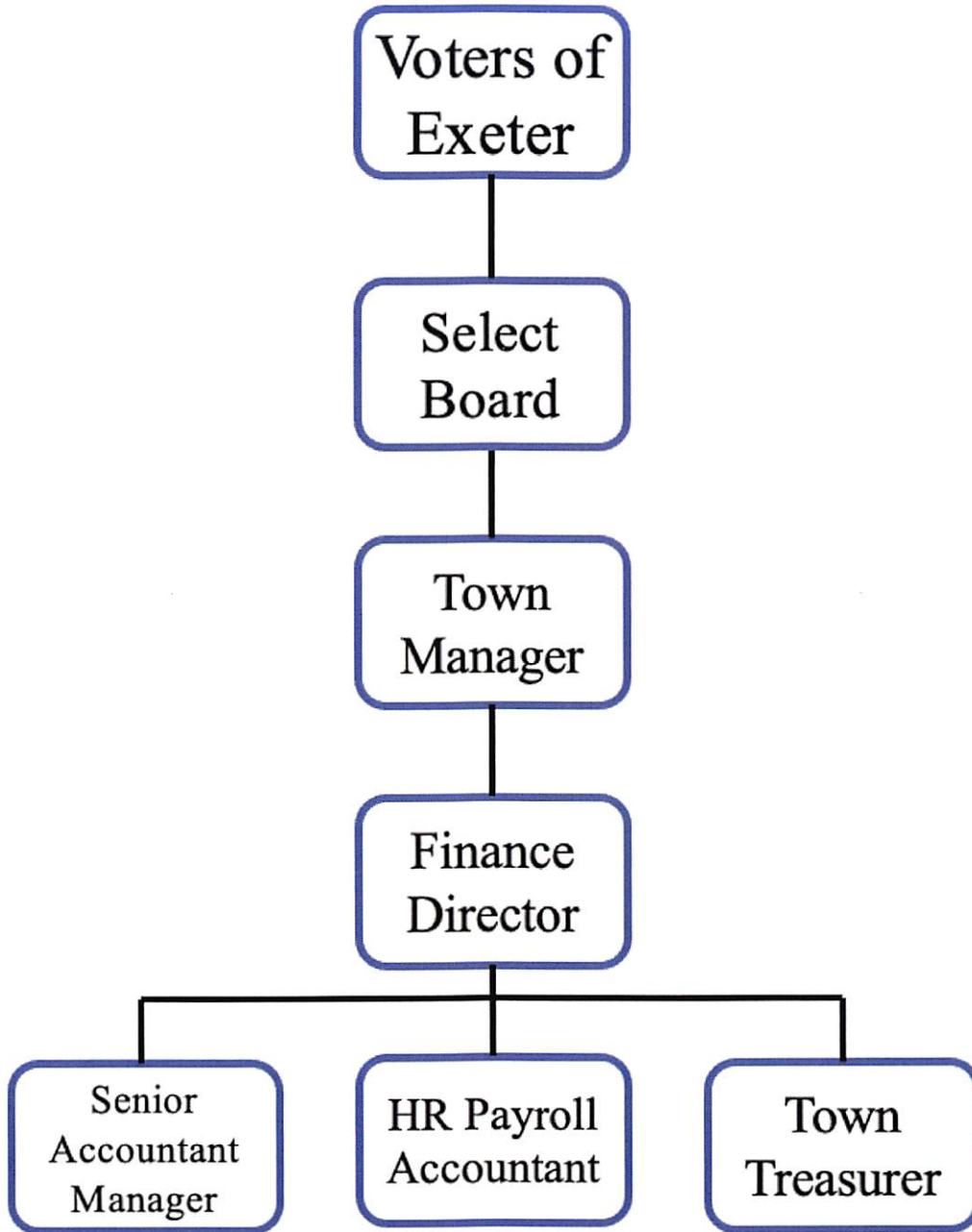
- Cory Stevens, the Town's "new" Finance Director, hired in 2022, appears to be a very good fit for the Town. He has not been afraid to jump right in and help the Town as one of the key members of the executive staff.
- Corey has a limited staff who work outside of the Exeter Town Hall in a space located across the street on the first floor of the Historic Town Hall building. He would prefer to stay in this location going forward, even if a reorganization plan were to be recommended. The staff is professional, and very competent.
- The present Finance Department structure appears disjointed and could function more effectively if it were combined with other financial services in the Town.

### **Succession Plan:**

Corey indicated that there is a short-term succession plan in place for short term absences in his organization. In that instance, Laura Zogopoulos, the Senior Accountant, has and will continue to fulfill the obligations of this role very easily. However, this is not a long-term solution as Laura has not expressed any interest in taking on this role as a full-time replacement for the Director. Perhaps over time that perspective could change but for now, this solution should only be considered temporary. No other long term options for filling the Finance Director's role have been identified at this time. The good news is that Corey is relatively new and likes the work that he is doing. More importantly, he is doing his work well and has a great strategic approach to the Town's finances.



Current Organizational Chart:





## *Assessing Department*

Janet Whitten, runs the Assessing Department which is responsible for valuing all real estate within the Town of Exeter. She does receive help from the consulting firm Municipal Resources, Inc. (MRI), who do most of the fieldwork. They report back to Janet with the property changes from the field. She then determines a value for the property and applies the prevailing tax rate to determine the overall property tax value. These actions translate into the individual tax bills for each property owner.

### **Department Interview:**

*Interview of the Town Assessor on August 21, 2023, at 3:00 PM.*

Janet Whitten is a certified assessor and serves as the Town's only full-time employee in the Assessing Department. She is aided by the consulting firm, MRI, that performs all the fieldwork to determine the preliminary value of any new property that should be added to the tax rolls of the Town of Exeter. She is essentially a one person show in the Assessing Office. She indicated to me that the Town is undertaking a full revaluation of the Town's property. Much of this work has been outsourced. The project will need to be completed by April 1, 2024. Janet is serving as the project manager for this effort and has been providing guidance and direction to the consulting firm while they perform their efforts. The Department uses Vision Government Solutions as their internal property valuing tool.

She has not had any office back up for over a year and a half other than the support that she gets from MRI. She indicated that she has been working in the Department since 2014 under the tutelage of previous Assessor, Jack Devatore who left for retirement. Janet was elevated to her current position in 2021. She notes that there are approximately 7,000 taxable properties in Town and that there is approximately \$10 Million in new value that will be added this year.

### **Key Takeaways:**

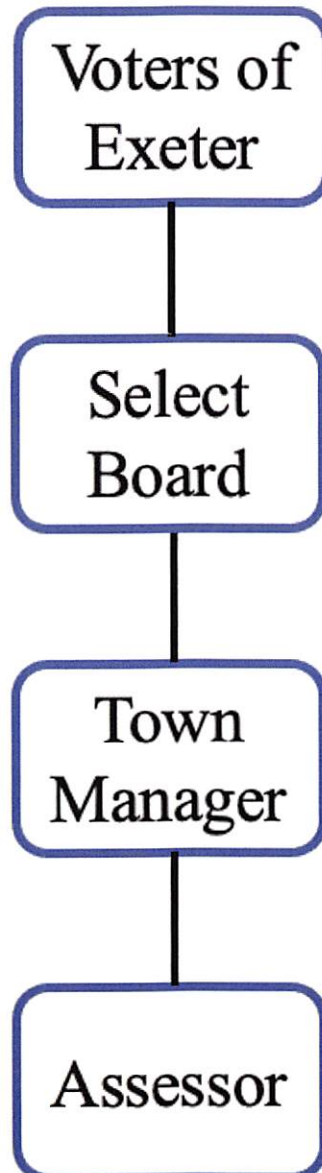
- This is a one-person operation that is supported by an outside consultant.
- There is no Succession Plan currently. It's possible that this entire function could be placed in the hands of a consultant who would then report the assessing data to the Town.
- This function makes sense to be placed under Finance to provide better structural support and to keep all financial functions under the direction of one department.

## Assessing Department

### Succession Plan:

The Succession Plan is uncertain for this Department as there is only one person who performs this work for the Town on a full-time basis. In talking to the Assessor about this plan she was uncertain on what that plan might be, but she surmised that if she were to leave, the functions of this Department could conceivably be outsourced entirely to a consulting firm.

### Current Organizational Chart:



## *Economic Development Department*

The Economic Development Department is also a one-person Department that receives support assistance from the Town Manager's Office, the Planning and Sustainability Department and the Building and Code Enforcement Department. The Department is run by the Economic Development Director, Darren Winham. The Economic Development Department performs a very important role in the Town by advocating and influencing the kind of development opportunities that are most desirable for the Town. In today's competitive world economy, unless a Town is proactive in this area, the community tends to be more defensive toward development situations, only acting when someone knocks on the Town's door with a proposal. In Exeter's case, and by the work of the Economic Development Department, Darren will advocate for proposals from developers who provide quality and sustainable businesses and housing opportunities that will enhance the community. More specifically, the Economic Development Department performs the following:

- Recommends and Promotes Sound Economic Development Strategies: This is usually performed with the Town's leadership and key stakeholders. The Department researches and investigates development strategies that have worked well in other communities. If those strategies are successfully adopted, the Town, acting through the Department, can then use its "toolbox" of incentives to help lure successful development opportunities to Exeter. Economic Development Strategies are developed through the input of many Town leaders, staff members and citizens who offer direction and guidance to key policy makers such as the Select Board, as to what types of development the community would prefer to see throughout the community.
- Incentive Programs: For the Department to be successful in luring preferred development opportunities to Exeter, economic development incentives are needed to make Exeter an attractive landing spot for certain types of projects. These incentives may include things such as offering favorable taxing conditions or relaxing density requirements so that the land cost of the project can become more favorable to the developer and, also more cost effective for the end user. This kind of incentive can sometimes be equally favorable to the community from an environmental perspective.
- Recent Projects: Much of Exeter's Downtown has been revitalized through the cooperative efforts of the Town and by the successful work of the Economic Development Department. In 2015 the Department recommended that the Town adopt a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District on Epping Road. This is a 587-acre area that is primely located for establishing the Town's key commercial corridor.
- Affordable Housing Initiatives: in 2017, Avesta Housing applied for a \$500,000 CDBG Grant that would be used to complete the final phase of a 140-unit, one- and two-bedroom, housing project. With the assistance of the Economic Development Department, the grant was used to help reduce the cost of the units and provide a more affordable alternative to market rate housing.





## *Economic Development Department*

### **Department Interview:**

*Interview of Darren Winham, Economic Development Director, June 26, 2023, at 1:00 PM*

Darren Winham has been the Economic Development Director for the Town of Exeter since 2014.

He was previously an economic development consultant in Vermont. He also worked for a non-profit, the federal government with the Department of Labor, and with the Regional Planning Commission.

The Town Manager, Russ Dean, proposed the establishment of this position in 2013 and it was later approved in 2014. It was a controversial issue for the Town to fund a position at the time, but it did pass, and Darren has since served as the first and only Economic Development Director for the Town.

Prior to creating this position, a study of the Planning Department was performed by the New Hampshire consulting firm, Municipal Resource, Inc., or more commonly known as MRI. The results of the report indicated that staffing changes were needed and that one of the positions that was recommended was the creation of an Economic Development Director. At the time of the study, Economic Development was an important issue for the Town so the effort was made to bring in a person who could focus more on revitalizing the Downtown by looking at other ways to bring in new businesses while supporting those businesses that were already established in the community.

Darren does not have any staff that reports directly to him, other than an occasional intern or consultant. Over the years he has had periodic support from the Town Manager's Office and assistance from the Planning and Building Departments.

He reports directly to the Town Manager and has a well-established working relationship with the Building and Planning Departments. He stated a few times during this interview that he prefers not to report to anyone other than the Town Manager. He thinks that is very important to the success of his economic development efforts. He does work well with many Town Departments as part of his professional role but prefers no daily oversight in his role other than from the Town Manager.

One of Darren's most significant accomplishments has been the revitalization of the Downtown. He has worked hard to attract investors and new businesses to relocate to the community. From what I could see, his efforts have been very effective. He appears to have a good relationship with many of the Downtown businesses and he actively works to market and entice new interest in the Downtown area.

He tries to market the Town through local and regional publications and has a good network of individuals in the development industry who enjoy working with him.

He described some of the challenges in utilizing the former Town Hall- located across from the existing Municipal Office Building. While the long-term use remains unclear, the historic Town Hall is often rented out for several different uses and currently houses two Town Departments- Finance and the Communication and Media Departments. The Chamber of Commerce also has offices in this building.



## *Economic Development Department*

Darren expressed an interest in seeing a Charter for the Town which would help define the roles and responsibilities of everyone who provides services on behalf of the Town.

There is no succession plan for this Department as he is the only full-time employee.

One of the more notable projects that Darren spearheaded in the Downtown was the Sea Dog Brewery revitalization project. This was a complicated project because of all the moving parts, including luring the owners to take an interest in the Exeter site. The location was a challenging site with difficult renovations in an area located along the environmentally sensitive Squamscott River.

Darren's most important goal is to continue to make the Town, and particularly the Downtown, more economically vibrant.

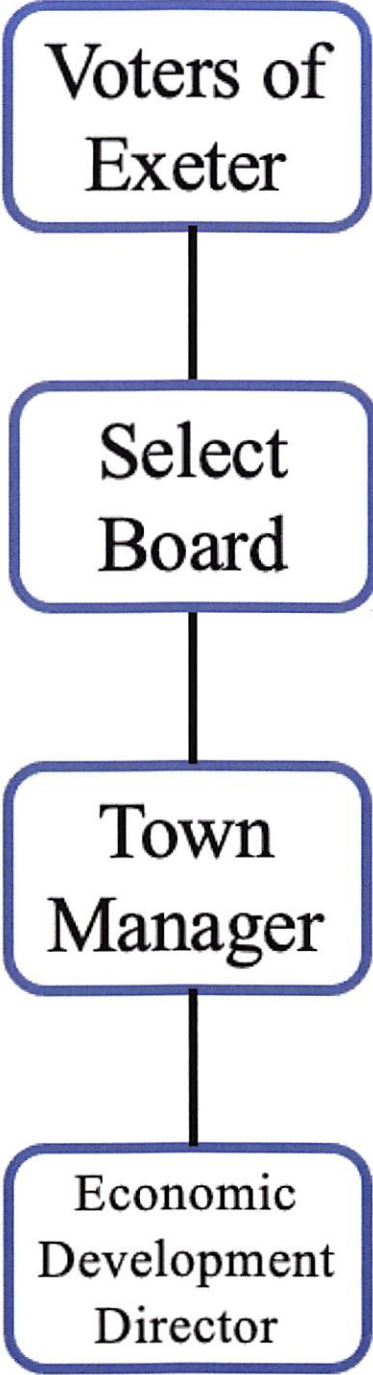
### **Key Take Aways:**

- The Town has done a very good job in its economic development efforts. The Downtown appears to be thriving and there is a genuine interest in businesses wanting to do business in Exeter. The strategy for redeveloping the downtown area and fostering a successful tourism business has worked well.
- The Economic Development program has been run primarily by one individual, with limited staff support. One person departments are generally not good models for long-term success. Despite the successful efforts of the Economic Development Director, if he were to leave tomorrow, the Town would face a challenge in finishing projects and supporting local businesses.
- Making Economic Development a key component of the Town's long-term success is important, but the Office needs to be part of a larger land use team to be sustainable for the future.

### **Succession Plan:**

As a department of one person there is no plan for succession. The only option is to hire a replacement for Darren from outside the organization. If Daren were to leave, the Town could consider the prospect of discontinuing the Economic Development role, but given the level of success that has been achieved by this Department, that prospect may not be in the Town's long-term best interests. The better approach would be to incorporate economic development into a new, more global land use department that incorporates economic development as a key component of the Town's comprehensive land use strategy.

*Current Organizational Chart:*



## **Building & Code Enforcement Department**

The Exeter Building and Code Enforcement Department is responsible for all building code-related inspectional services in the community. Building permits are issued by this Department which provide property owners and contractors with legal permission to construct residential and commercial projects on their property. The Department prefers to work with property owners and contractors by meeting with them initially so that they can address any major concerns that may arise before a building permit process is initiated. The Department also serves as the Zoning interpreter and Code enforcement office for the Town of Exeter. This means that the Department will review each project to determine if it is compliant with the Town's zoning ordinances, bylaws, and code requirements.

The Department is led by Building Inspector and Code Enforcement Officer, *Doug Eastman*. He is assisted by Deputy Code Enforcement Officer, *Barbara McEvoy*. The Department also has a part-time Electrical Inspector position that is currently vacant. More specifically, the responsibilities of the Department are to interpret and enforce the following:

- Zoning Ordinances are the documents that define the specific and allowable uses of land within the community. They also define how high a building can be built in a certain area of Town or how far a building should be set back from the road. In short, the zoning ordinances define where and how development can occur within the community. If a property owner disagrees with the interpretation of the Building Inspector, the property owner has the right to file an appeal of that decision with the Zoning Board of Adjustment who will meet with all interested parties and serve as an appeal process of the Inspector's decision.
- Building Inspection/Code Enforcement: Now that the how, what, and where of developments have been defined for the community, someone must make sure that developers or individual property owners stay compliant with the wishes of the community. The Building Inspector and Code Enforcement Officer provides that type of assurance by inspecting developments and interpreting the Town's zoning rules and regulations.

### **Department Interview:**

*Interview of Building Inspector, Doug Eastman on June 26, 2023, at 11:00 AM*

Doug Eastman is the Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer for the Town of Exeter and is currently one of the longest tenured employees in the Town. Doug is well respected and has a wealth of knowledge and experience. He is also limited by staffing issues, particularly as it relates to inspectors. He has not been able to hire an electrical inspector in over a year and a half and has not seen any prospects for hiring one. Doug receives a stipend to perform those inspections in addition to the other inspections he performs as part of his daily responsibilities.



## *Building & Code Enforcement Department*

His Deputy Code Enforcement Officer is Barbara McEvoy, and she is more administrative in her role than an actual inspector (we may want to relook at this job description to provide a more accurate reflection of what she does). She is also a long-term (35 year) employee who is nearing retirement. Doug and Barbara represent a significant wealth of knowledge for the community. The concerning thing is that there are no real plans to replace either one of them when they retire. Given that this is a very important operational department this is a critical economic development and safety concern for the community, the Town needs to prioritize its efforts in planning for the eventual replacement of these individuals.

We talked about some possible organizational changes. One which had been mentioned earlier was the possibility of merging Inspections with the Fire Department. The Fire Department had talked about this possible merger at an earlier interview and Doug seemed to be supportive. In many respects there are some natural connections between the two departments as they are both considered public safety functions. This is something to consider along with another possible merger opportunity with Planning and Land Use since the Building Inspector is also the Code Enforcement Officer for the Town.

Doug works with the Economic Development Department, Planning, Zoning Conservation Commission, and the Historic District Commission on a regular basis. The challenge is that there are more work requirements than there are staff to perform these functions so that often falls on Doug and Barbara to get this work done.

Doug spends a lot of time with the Zoning Board and has developed a good working relationship with that Board. He considers the support that he gets from the Town, the State and from local Boards and Committees to be very good. He thinks that communication between departments seems to be effective. Internally, he is located adjacent to planning and conservation and each morning they meet and get together to collaborate over what the priorities are for the day and then get them done. It is a favorable team atmosphere. Doug works well with Dave in Planning.

Before working in Exeter, Doug worked at the Seabrook Nuclear Power Station. He finished his role there and decided to come to work for the Town. He has essentially fulfilled the requirements of two separate careers and is a very knowledgeable and pleasant individual. He will certainly be missed when he goes, and his departure should be planned for now so that the Town is not left in a precarious position. That is why it is critical to address this and Barbara's anticipated vacancy sooner, rather than later.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- Doug Eastman, the Building Inspector and Barbara McEvoy, the Deputy Code Enforcement Officer are the two longest standing employees in the Town of Exeter. They have a wealth of knowledge and are highly respected. The biggest concern is that there is no plan to replace either one of these valued employees and their time leading to retirement is very short.





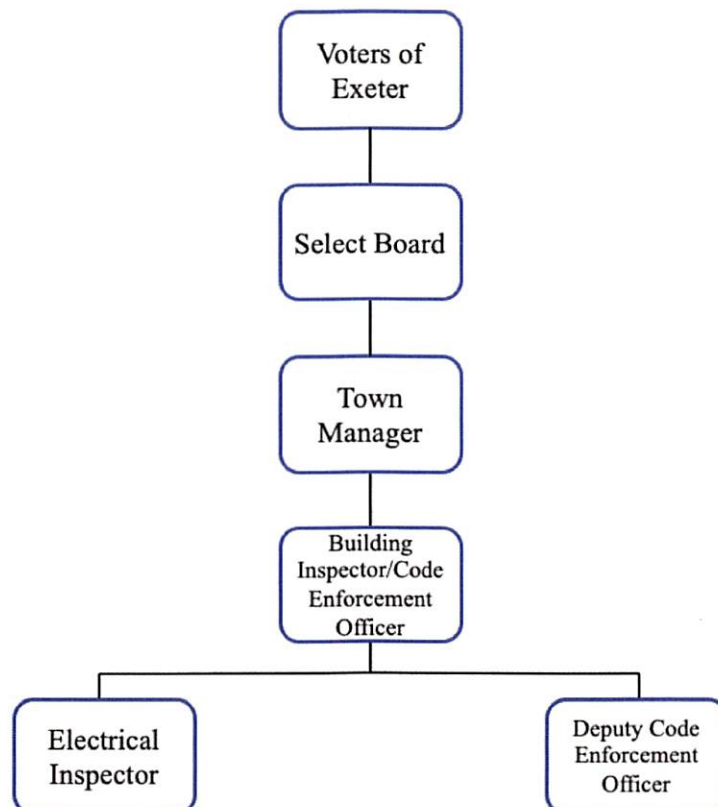
## *Building & Code Enforcement Department*

- Doug has not been able to locate a Part-time electrical inspector for his department in over a year and half.
- Doug works well with all the key economic development team members and has a great working relationship with the Fire Department. A merger of the Building Inspection and Code Enforcement Department with the Fire Department and Zoning Administration with the proposed Land Use Department warrants consideration.

### **Succession Plan:**

Currently there is no succession plan in place for this Department and that is very concerning. This Department is a key operating department with some highly knowledgeable individuals operating it. This will be something that will be addressed in the recommendations but requires immediate attention.

## *Current Organizational Chart:*





## *Fire, EMS, and Health Department*

The Exeter Fire and EMS Department is responsible for providing services that are critical to the health, safety, and welfare of the community. They provide fire suppression, advanced medical services, safety education and hazard response. The department is led by:

Fire Chief: *Eric Wilking*

Assistant Fire Chief: *Justin Pizon*

Administrative Support is provided by *Jenna Gosselin*

Health Officer: *Madison Baily*

- Fire Suppression: Over the years, the Fire Department's need to respond to fire suppression calls has continued to diminish as building codes have improved, sprinkler systems have increased, and fire prevention education has informed residents and businesses of how to take important steps that can significantly reduce the chances of a major destructive fire. Exeter has done a very good job in all aspects of fire suppression by providing a well-trained, well-equipped department that can provide a timely response to these challenging situations. Much of Exeter is an older, established community that still reflects has historically significant structures that could be susceptible to a significant fire at any time. The Department's Fire Education and Code compliance efforts have done an effective job of diminishing this risk.
- Emergency Response: While the need for fire suppression response has generally diminished over time (as it has in most Fire Departments), emergency and medical response calls have gone in a much different direction. The calls for service have increased significantly as the population is aging and connectivity to these services through mobile devices has become much more prevalent in society. Moreover, emergency response has increased due to climatic change along with increased use of drugs, alcohol, and an expanding mental health crisis.
- Ambulance: Exeter provides its own ambulance and transport service through the Fire Department, and it is available 24/7/365 to the greater Exeter community. This service also provides additional revenue to the community as ambulance transport is an eligible cost that is reimbursable to the Town through third party insurance companies. Exeter is one of the few departments in New Hampshire that provides its own ambulance and transport service. For this reason, the service can sometimes be impacted by neighboring communities who do not have this service but still require a reasonably timely response to life threatening situation.
- Health Department: Exeter Fire also supervises and houses the Town's Health Department. This division is headed up by Health Officer *Madison Baily*. The Department is responsible for inspecting construction, evaluating any food service operations for either temporary or on-going use, inspection of day care facilities and investigating any health-related complaints or concerns. This Department recently played a significant role during the Covid-19 pandemic.



## *Fire, EMS, and Health Department*

### **Department Interviews:**

*Fire Department Interview, 6.26.23 at 1:00 PM of Fire Chief- Eric Wilking and Assistant Fire Chief- Justin Pizon*

I was able to interview the two primary administrators of the Fire & EMS Department at the same time. We talked about a wide array of issues. One of the initial items we discussed was not necessarily a concern about the Department's operation, but more along the lines of understanding how the Town's revenues increase year over year. More specifically, it was unclear to this department as to how the growth in revenues is divided year over year with each of the operating departments. That is a question best posed to the budget decision makers. It is understood that services are important on all levels of government, and it is a matter of policy on how available funds are divided among departments each year.

We then moved on to a discussion of the structure of the Department. I was impressed by the management structure of the Department (it is very similar to the structure that I was used to managing in a former community). I noted that the Department also manages the Public Health function and is now actively exploring Community Paramedicine. In my opinion, these functions provide very good alignment for a 24-7 emergency response team.

Staffing for the Department was noted as being "appropriate" in that there were no noticeable gaps in how the Department is structured and commanded. I was struck by the fact that labor relations appeared to be quite good and that there were no notable grievances within the Department during the past four years. The two Chiefs attributed this to a proactive labor relations approach that seems to have served the Department well. I will be providing the representatives of the Fire Union's perspective on this topic later in this report. That perspective will not be limited to the relationship with the Fire Administration but will also include the Town Administration's relationship with the Union.

The two biggest issues facing the Department are Recruitment and Retention and the building of a new Public Safety facility. Both issues are completely aligned with what I learned from the Police Department.

I was able to obtain a list of the Department's equipment (16 vehicles) and learned that the Chiefs feel that the Department is up to date with its equipment and has been adequately supported by the Town to keep their equipment needs modern and well-maintained.

Fire Truck responses are up slightly for the current Fiscal Year (441 this YTD vs 417 for the previous YTD) with only 5 months of results reported for this Calendar Year reporting. Roughly half of those calls involved ambulance assists with an Engine responding as backup. However, Ambulance Service Calls in total for the Department this year are up by 115 calls YTD. This increase in calls has also had a resulting increase in the amount of revenue that this service yields. Whenever an ambulance response or transport occurs, the Fire Department is



## *Fire, EMS, and Health Department*

reimbursed for the cost of that response through private insurance payments. So far this year the amount received by the Department is \$237,000. It was noted that this revenue is treated as a general fund revenue and is not returned to the Fire Service directly (unlike the structure I have witnessed in Massachusetts). Overall, nearly 80% of the Department's responses are EMS related, which is not uncommon for many communities who provide this combined service.

Response times to Fire/EMS calls from the Department are running in the 6.5-to-7-minute range which is a little on the higher end. That is primarily due to the single station model which can elevate response times for calls when they occur on the geographic fringe of the Community.

The two Chiefs spoke about how some town wide efficiencies could be derived from some possible restructuring plans. One thought was to place all inspectional services under the management of the Fire Department. We talked about how this might also be customer friendly and how this might be an operational improvement. For example, a customer who seeks a building inspection could effectively come to a window at most times of the day (since Fire is a 24/7 operation) and either schedule an inspection or get the inspection performed that same day. This would contrast in a positive way with most inspection offices that are generally open during the same office hours as Town Halls and have limited availability after hours (unless in an emergency). Conceivably, this approach would be like the Health Department model, though certain building inspections would likely remain on the Town Hall schedule because inspectional services are not 24/7 in nature. That said, the scheduling of these inspections may be easier for the customer in a 24/7 facility.

### **Health Division:**

Unlike many Fire/EMS structures, the Town of Exeter has incorporated the Health Division as a working component of their overall service offerings. I could not meet with Health Officer *Madison Baily* as this individual was in the hiring process at the time of my interviews. It would only be appropriate to allow this person to get settled into their new role before any reviews are conducted. No changes to this division are contemplated at this time.

### **Other Topics:**

Other topics that came up during the Department's discussion were the way capital plans are currently reviewed and adopted throughout the Town. It was suggested that instead of looking at plans individually with each Department and then forming one collective plan, it might be more productive to have the administration first review Department plans and have some agreement on what each Department's priorities are. The next step would be to have a meeting with all Departments to determine how the entire plan could be realistically funded. There is some merit to this approach in that it would be transparent to everyone as to how the priorities were determined and paid for with available funding. The perspective is that there may



## *Fire, EMS, and Health Department*

be a better way to support final funding decisions if everyone understands how those decisions were derived.

- More support for Human Resources (HR): HR is a complex world and this area needs more help to make sure that employee issues are addressed on a timely basis. I took this in the context of being a very supportive suggestion for the Town's Administration Department.

### **Key Takeaways:**

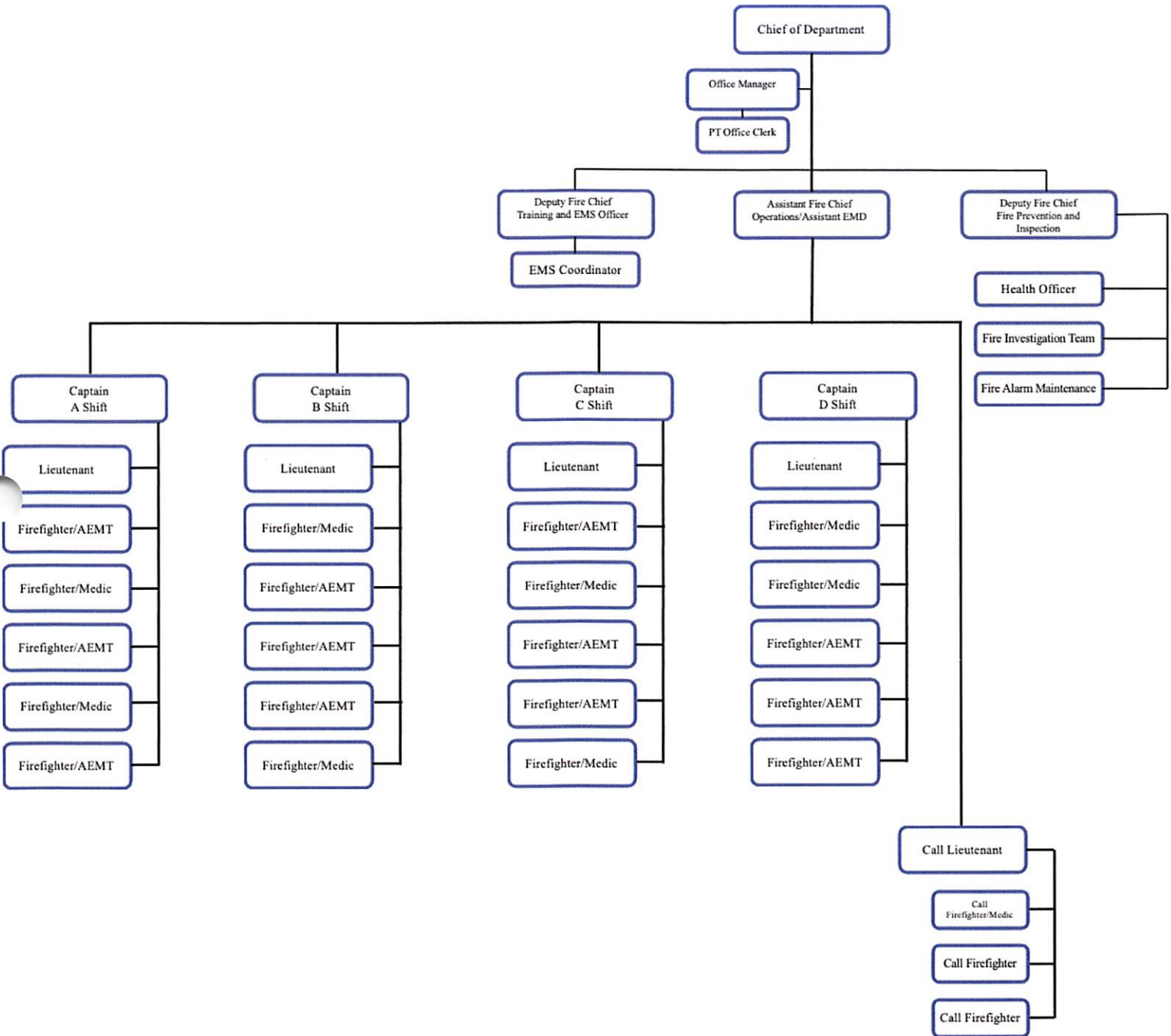
- The Fire, EMS and Health Department are very well run. The Chief and his command staff have built an organization that is responsive to the needs of the community.
- Chief Wilking and Assistant Chief Pizon have a sound understanding of their department's needs. They both like the idea of merging Building Inspections into their department. The idea has some merit, but an argument could also be made that a merger between Building, Planning and Zoning also makes sense.
- The Chiefs also made some worthwhile suggestions about how capital planning should be performed and communicated. Their suggestions were based entirely on how the decisions for the capital plan are communicated and how the decisions are derived. They did not quarrel about the final decision, but simply the process.
- The Fire, EMS and Health Department were all disappointed in the result of the vote to not build the new Public Safety Department Complex. They remain hopeful that a new vote on the project in the next few months will be more favorable. If any department restructuring occurs, it should happen prior to that building being built.

### **Succession Plan:**

Like the Police Department, the Fire Department has already built into its organizational structure for the Assistant Fire Chief to assume the responsibilities of the Fire Chief in the event of a short-term absence. While nothing is ever guaranteed when it comes to appointments, the current structure does provide the Town with the opportunity to consider a trained internal candidate if the Chief were to step down from his role on a more extended or permanent basis.



# Current Organizational Chart:



## *Information Technology & Exeter TV Department*

The Information and Technology Department has responsibility for maintaining, supporting, and providing technical assistance for nearly all of Exeter's digital needs. In addition to this important function, the Department also provides technical support for the Exeter Television system. Exeter Television provides live and taped coverage of Board and Committee Meetings and of major events held throughout the Town. The IT Department is managed by IT Coordinator, *Andy Swanson*, and by Network Administrator, *Steve Bailey*. Exeter TV is supported by Media Communications Coordinator, *Bob Glowacky*, who oversees Exeter Television coordination and coverage of the various Town meetings and events.

Specifically, the IT Department provides support and maintenance for the following IT Services:

- Computers
- Servers
- Networking Equipment
- Websites
- Databases
- Backups
- AV Equipment
- Telephones
- Security Cameras

### **Department Interviews:**

IT Interview conducted on June 27, 2023, at 9:00 AM with IT Coordinator, Andy Swanson and Network Administrator, Steve Baily.

I met with these two gentlemen for the first interview of this project. They offered to go first since their office was located right behind the Select Board's conference room.

I started off by asking how they thought things were going in their department. Andy did most of the talking and he indicated that he was getting close to retirement and had seen many changes in the time that he had been the Director. He noted that he had worked in the private sector for many years and finally got tired of climbing the corporate ladder. He stepped away from his previous role and became the IT Director almost by accident. He indicated that initially his role was limited but that over time, as the digital world more fully emerged, things became a lot more complicated. I got the distinct impression while sitting in their very limited quarters that the IT Office capacity had not grown with the need for the services.

Andy did note that he did not have very good internal communications with the previous Town Manager but that things had improved under the current Town Manager, Russ Dean.

Andy indicated that there is one Town Budget for IT and that the service is not shared with the School System.





## *Information Technology & Exeter TV Department*

The Town uses MUNIS for its financial services, including accounts payable and general ledger and this system was adopted in 2017. Interestingly, Andy noted that the IT department did not have any input into the purchase of this software platform. That response did surprise me initially but when I look back on my career experience, coordinated IT systems purchasing was not nearly as common as it is now. I would venture to guess that today that approach is much different. I will confirm that and recommend a change (if needed) to that practice as part of my recommendations.

Andy indicated that he feels that his department is supported by the Town in terms of what they need to continue to provide quality IT services to the Town's departments.

Regarding capital purchases of equipment, the Town has a 3-5-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and the IT Department has kept pace with its schedule of equipment updates and replacements. Each year, the Town replaces twenty (20) percent of its desktops and laptops with new equipment.

The Town uses Google Mail for its internal e-mail system and that system automatically provides for a two-stage verification system to help avoid any system hacks.

Both Andy and Steve both emphasized that the biggest challenge that IT Department's face today is security. They focus a lot of their time updating and addressing this challenge. The proactive steps they are taking are a reflection of the world we now live in, and they remain fully dedicated to the mission of maintaining the integrity of the Town's information systems.

Andy and Steve are also progressive in their approach to training and teaching employees on how to avoid misleading e-mails or phishing schemes. These training efforts are highly effective and can serve as an important deterrent to any hacking efforts. Much of the training is presented through on-line webinars, which makes it convenient for employees to receive this training based on openings in their own schedules. This education targets security awareness and is referred to (most appropriately) as "Know B4".





## *Information Technology & Exeter TV Department*

In 2009, the Town built its own Fiber Network for connecting all its assets. The system is considered very stable and provides a great platform for the use of its financial budgeting and accounting systems (MUNIS) and for submitting payroll. Having its own fiber network is also advantageous for the Town that communities which are at the mercy of third-party providers for this service are subject to outages that can occur at any time and with little notice. Outages that occur on a town-owned fiber network can often be rectified more quickly and are generally limited to weather related incidents.

One of the bigger concerns for the Department is the management of town-wide communications and the Local Cable Television system. Andy feels strongly that communications should be managed through the Town Manager's Office. His theory is that this Office is the central hub for Town information and that updates, changes and the establishment of many Town activities could be managed most effectively through this Office. A report was recently assembled by the Communications Committee suggesting some structural changes be made to this very topic. I will be reviewing that report before I make my final recommendations on this specific issue.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- Andy Swanson, the IT Director for the Town, is to be credited with a significant number of technological improvements in Exeter during a time when most Towns were just learning about technology. He has his fingerprints on nearly all the new ways that Exeter performs its business.
- Not to be outdone, Steve Baily has done an equally impressive job of connecting all the Town's Departments and making sure that the IT systems continue to perform at a high level.
- Andy Swanson is leaving in 2024 and the heir apparent is Steve Baily. The Department and the Town of Exeter will remain in very capable hands under Steve's leadership. The Town should be forever grateful to Andy for his contributions to Exeter. However, work should begin immediately (and may already be under way) to find a replacement for Steve as his role is vital for maintaining the operational integrity of the Town's IT Systems.
- One of the nagging concerns that Andy had during his time in Exeter was the placement of Exeter TV in his shop. He does not think this is a good approach for the Town and thinks that it would be better managed through the Town Manager's Office.





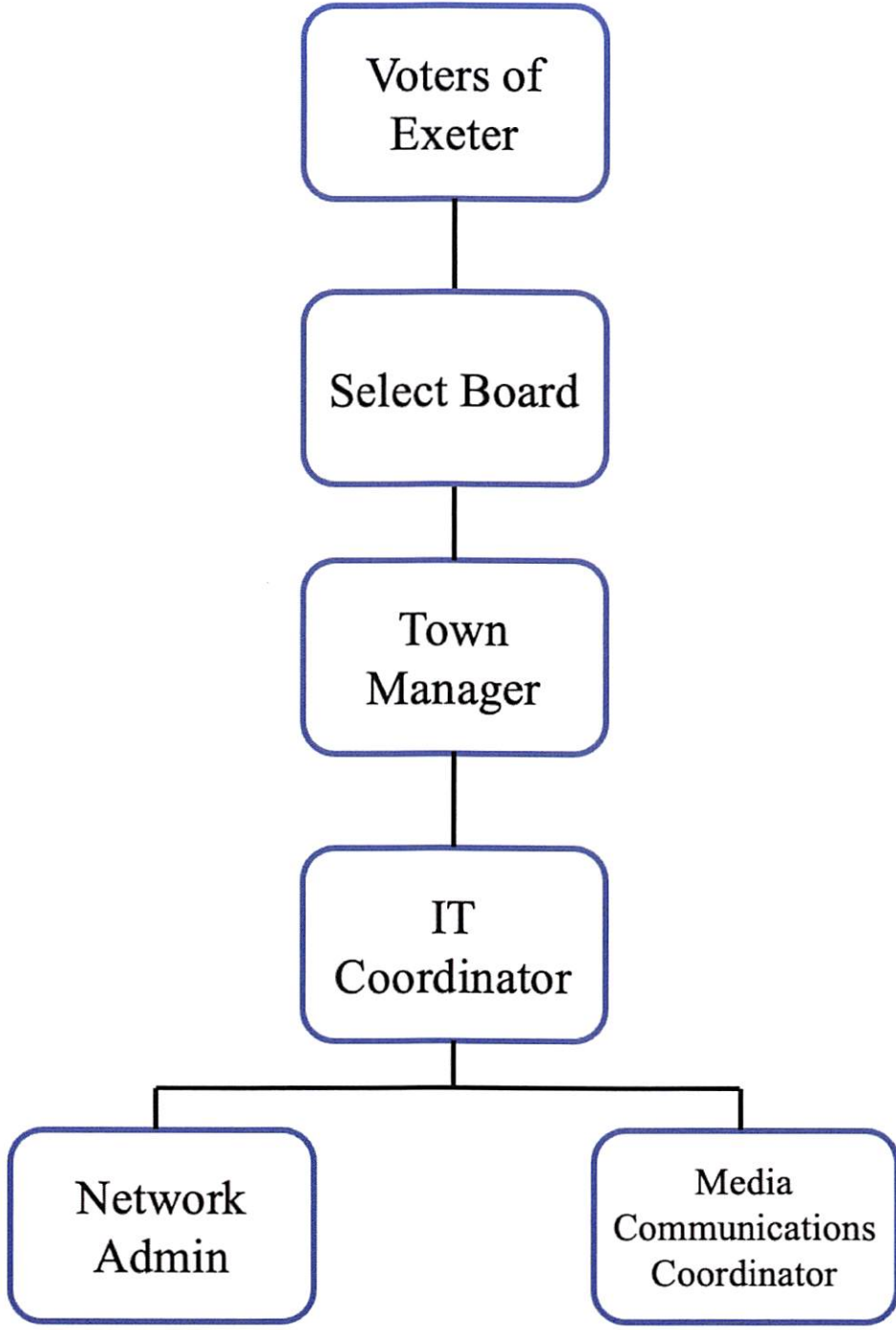
## *Information Technology & Exeter TV Department*

### **Succession Plan:**

The IT Department and the Town have been appropriately planning for the transition in this Department with the imminent departure of Andy Swanson. While ultimately this is a Town decision as to who should succeed Andy, the Town has been training and Andy has been investing a lot of time, effort, and resources into Steve Baily to eventually take over this role. I think the Town has been very progressive in its thinking by planning for this very important “changing of the guard”. Having Steve who has been like a “sponge” during Andy’s tenure could provide for a very smooth transition for the community. I do want to wish Andy well in his retirement. From what I could see, he has been a highly valuable asset for the Town of Exeter.



*Current Organizational Chart:*



## *Parks and Recreation Department*

The Exeter Parks and Recreation Department, like other Town Departments, offers a wide range of activities designed to enrich the lives of the residents of the community. Unlike a more traditional Parks and Recreation Department that focuses on children and young adults, the Exeter programs offer a wide range of activities that encompass all age groups, including seniors.

The Department's Age Friendly Programming, which is updated twice a year, is a tremendous resource for the community.

The focus of this department is to provide programs that enhance the overall quality of life of Exeter residents of all ages.

The Department is led by Director, *Greg Bisson*, and he is assisted by Assistant Director, *David Tovey*. The Recreation Coordinator is *Caroline Thuma*, who is responsible for putting many of the department's programs together. The Office Manager, *Nancy Bugbee*, assists with the administrative responsibilities of the Department including registration of the participants in many of the Town's program offerings. Parks Forman, *Jason Bastien* has a tremendous amount of responsibility for keeping the recreation facilities fully operational throughout the year. A sampling of what the Department offers includes:

- Parks: Exeter maintains over 56 acres of parks, playgrounds, and cemeteries. Some of the more notable park areas include Recreation Park, Brickyard Park, Kids Park, and John Littlefield Memorial Skate Park.
- Cemeteries: The Department maintains one of the oldest cemeteries in the country at the Winter Street Cemetery. Having been named as a State and National Historic Site with tombstones dating back to the 1700's, the Department takes great pride in its maintenance efforts at this very special resting ground.
- Pool: Each June, the Department reopens the Daniel R Healy Memorial Pool for recreational swimming. For the next three months, individuals can use the facility for community swim, lap swimming, swim lessons and Aquatic Exercise Classes. The facility can also be rented for private events and birthday parties.
- Programs: As mentioned earlier, the Department offers recreational programs for a wide array of individuals and ages. Most significant is that programs are offered year-round so that residents can participate whenever the opportunity works best for them.
- Special Events: The Department takes great pride in offering special events that typically commemorate holidays or seasons of the year. These special events are ideal for bringing the community together to create a fun and positive opportunity for people to meet and create new friendships. The most widely recognized event of the year is the beer and chili festival, otherwise known as the "Powder Keg".

Details of each of these programs and offerings can be seen on the Department's website at [Parks and Recreation | Town of Exeter New Hampshire Official Website \(exeternh.gov\)](http://Parks and Recreation | Town of Exeter New Hampshire Official Website (exeternh.gov))



## *Parks and Recreation Department*

### **Department Interview:**

*Interview of Parks and Recreation Director Greg Bisson on June 26, 2023, at 1:00 PM*

Greg Bisson is the Director of the Parks and Recreation Program. He has been with the Town of Exeter for over 20 years and has been the Director of the department since 2018. Greg was originally from Rochester, NH but now lives in Sandow, NH.

Greg indicates that the Town is very supportive of the Department and the services they provide. He is only the fourth Director in the program's history.

Exeter does not have a Council on Aging or Senior Center, but his department provides many of these services for the elderly in the community.

On March 9, 2022, voters in Exeter overwhelmingly approved a \$1.25 Million Dollar Bond issuance to purchase land and buildings located at 10 Hampton Road. The acquisition allows the community to relocate the Parks and Recreation offices and to create more ADA accessible recreation programs for the Town's residents. The property abuts the existing Recreation Fields located on Hampton Road and will provide an additional 45 parking spaces for the fields and include good access to the Parks and Recreation offices. What was most significant about this action was that this purchase helped to reduce the need for several costly capital spending projects to address a growing need to expand and improve the capacity of existing Parks and Recreation Programs. The 1.64-acre site with a 6,000 square foot building and garage, is a prime candidate for the future development of a multi-generational center.

The Department is not large from a personnel perspective. There is the Director, Greg Bisson, David Tovey serves as the Assistant Director. There is a full-time Office Manager, a Recreation Coordinator and two maintenance staff members.

Fifty percent of the Department's funding comes from the Town and the remainder of the funds comes from fees raised from participants in the various recreation programs.

In the summer the Town's Pool Program is very popular with residents and non-residents. The Pickle Ball Program is the latest rage in Exeter, as it is in many cities and towns all over the country. This presents opportunities for the Department as this new program can serve as a draw to new people who have never participated before. It also presents a challenge in that Pickle Ball participants are often in competition for courts with Tennis players. This is a conflict that is growing as fast as the interest in this new sport. Fortunately, the Town is taking their planning efforts seriously. Greg was recently able to secure \$50,000 in funding to develop a Parks Master Plan. That work is underway now. The evaluation of current and future recreation facility needs will be a very significant consideration in this Plan.

Regarding Parks Maintenance, the Department has two full-time employees that do a great job. My immediate observation is that two individuals for maintaining the park's grounds and facilities appears extraordinarily thin. If something happens to one of these individuals (injury, illness, vacation, or other leave options), that puts a huge strain on the other person to get all the work done. This is something worth looking at in more detail. According to the Director, private contractors do provide some support for this effort. However, he was very complimentary of the two-existing maintenance people and considers them to be "awesome"! He went on to say that previous maintenance crews were not always as effective as the current one but due to some turnover in recent years, the current crew has been very effective.



## *Parks and Recreation Department*

One developing staffing consideration is the need for a Senior Events Coordinator. As the “Baby Boomer” generation continues to age, many seniors today are considered “young seniors” and want to remain active. This is another national phenomenon. Greg is being proactive in trying to address this need sooner rather than later so that Exeter continues to offer programs for all generations to come.

My observation is that Greg is a good leader from behind the scenes and likes to promote and support his staff by listening to their ideas and suggestions for new program models. He is active with the State Association and is a big promoter of training for his staff.

Some of the departments new program considerations involve doing more with the waterways to further promote a healthy and active lifestyle within the community. In the winter they want to do more snowshoeing and cross-country skiing programs.

These efforts will require further collaboration between Parks and Conservation staff and their respective Commissions.

With the growing interest and popularity of the Parks and Recreation Programs, their growth and long-term sustainability will largely depend on building an organization that is both fiscally achievable and operationally capable. The Department has needs in maintenance, program support and in marketing/ communication.

One of the highly acclaimed programs developed and promoted by the Parks and Recreation Department is the Annual Fall Beer Festival. This event is viewed by many as being one of the most popular festivals in the State of New Hampshire and in the Region. Over 3000 people each year will visit Exeter and experience all that is great about this community. Capitalizing on events such as this not only creates a great social atmosphere for residents, but it also has positive economic development implications for Exeter.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- Greg Bisson has a large role in managing one of the most visible departments in the Town. Parks and Recreation provide a lot of services for the Town that include all the Town sponsored recreational activities, as well as programs for the elderly.
- New programs such as Pickle Ball are causing some challenges at times with Tennis Players, but they are managing this well.
- Greg and his department are developing a Parks Master Plan at the present time which will provide them with a good road map forward.
- Recreation will need additional staff for programs if they want to continue to grow.
- The Parks Maintenance Staff is great, but it entirely too small to manage a growing program.





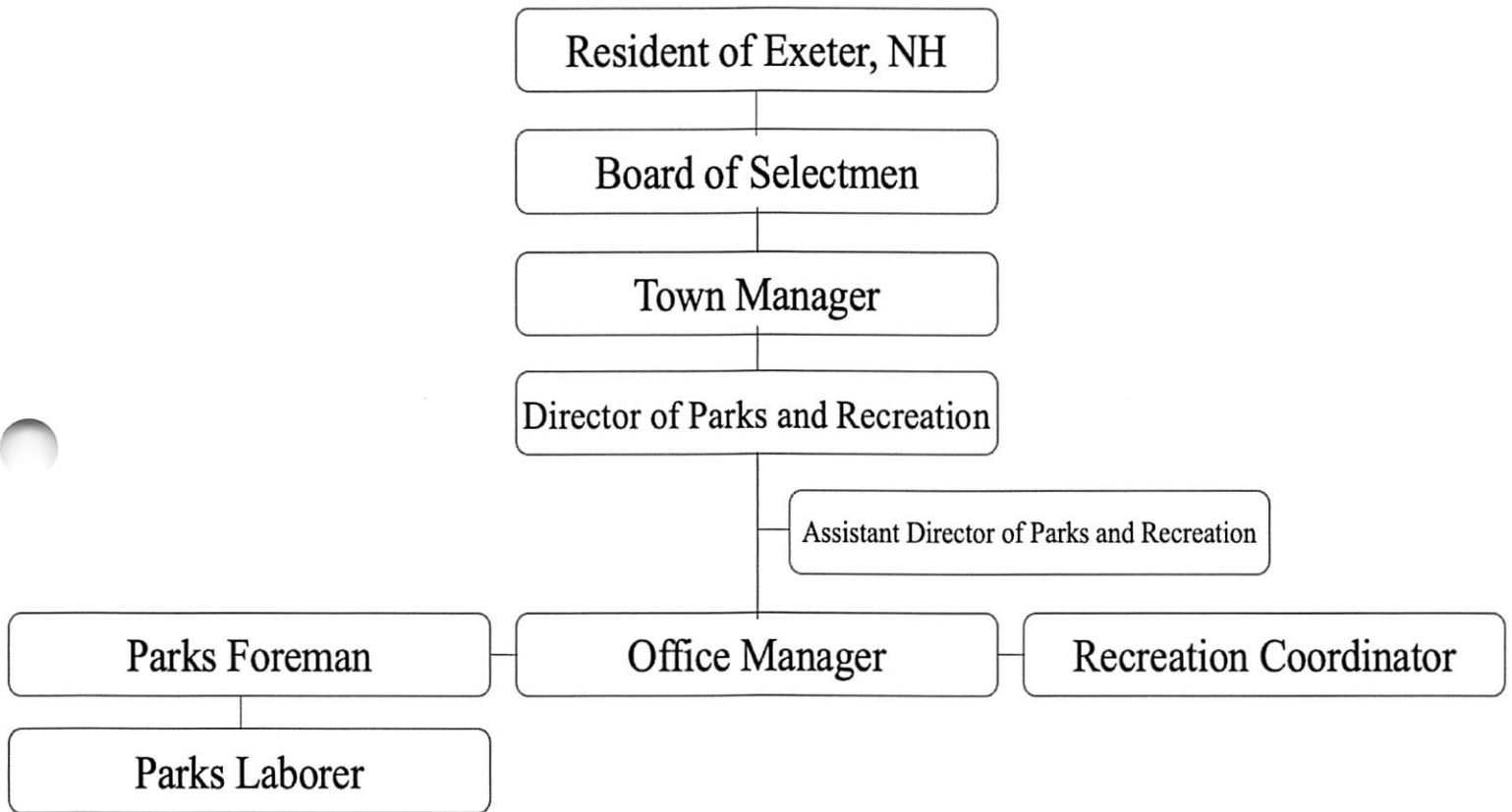
## *Parks and Recreation Department*

### **Succession Plan:**

The Parks and Recreation Department already has an organization that is structured for success by including an Assistant Director position who can be trained and developed into a future leader of this Department. However, this Department needs to make sure that the responsibilities of the Assistant are clearly defined, and that this person is properly trained so that they can grow into the Director's role whenever that opportunity presents itself. This approach will help to maintain a consistent understanding of the program's offerings and provide a stabilizing force for the Department into the future.



## Current Organizational Chart:







## *Police & Dispatch Department*

The Exeter Police Department is comprised of three operating divisions and is managed by the Police Chief, *Stephan Poulin* and by Deputy Police Chief, *Josh McCain*. The three operating divisions include the investigative or detectives' division along with the patrol division and the Dispatch division. The Department operates 24/7 and provides community safety for everyone within the jurisdiction by delivering professional law enforcement services with compassion and without prejudice. Their motto is "Committed to Our Community". The command staff is rounded out by Lieutenants, *Steven Bolduc* and *Devin West*, an Officer Manager, *Norma Ryan*, and Administrative Assistant *Colby Krafton*.

The three operating divisions provide the following services:

- Investigative Division: Under the command of Deputy Chief *Josh McCain*, this Division is primarily responsible for the investigation of felony level offenses and conducts investigations of crimes that often lead to a court related resolution. The other members of the Division include a Detective Sergeant, three (3) detectives and a Community Resources Police Officer who works with community related matters and spends time within the School System to help protect the student population and develop a positive working relationship with teachers and students.
- Patrol Division: There are seventeen (17) uniformed officers that make up the Patrol Division. Under the command of Lieutenant *Devin West*, the Division provides 24/7 protection of the community by responding to calls for service, performing pro-active vehicle stops relating to excessive speed, suspicious activity or in response to criminal warrants. The Patrol Division is often the first public safety service to respond in the event of an emergency due to the mobile nature of their deployment.
- Dispatch: This Division provides a vital link between the public and public safety. In responding to a call for service, the public's first communications are often with a Dispatcher. This Division is operated under the command of Dispatch Supervisor *Jess Shupe* who supervises five (5) Dispatchers. This Division provides critical communications for both Police and Fire Department calls for service.



## *Police & Dispatch Department*

### **Department Interviews:**

On the day that I arrived in Exeter, the Chief was not available to meet as he was out of Town at a meeting, but the Deputy Chief was available. As such, the decision was made to start by interviewing the Deputy Chief and go back to interview the Chief at a later date.

*Interview of Deputy Police Chief (DPC) Josh McCain Interview- 6/26/2023 Started at 11:00 AM*

I met with DPC Josh McCain who has served as the Exeter Deputy Police Chief for approximately 1 year. He is from Exeter but was originally hired by the City of Portsmouth, NH where he served for over 18 years as a Patrolman, Sergeant, Detective and as a Lieutenant in charge of Detectives before being offered the position as Deputy Chief in Exeter. He is actively involved in the administration of the Police Department and serves as the Chief's right-hand person in running the Department.

DPC McCain indicated that from his perspective, the biggest challenge facing the Department is recruitment and retention of Police Officers. In the past year, this has been a challenge for most Police Departments in New Hampshire (NH). He attributes this turnover to a couple of factors. One, the pension system vests Officers in the system after 10 years and once they vest, there is a tendency to move on to other careers. This latest generation of candidates appears to be non-committal toward life-long careers in Law Enforcement. A similar problem has been occurring with the State Police in NH where that agency is currently down over 70 Officers and cannot fill positions.

A second contributing factor is that there is only one training academy in NH and it is based out of Concord. They apparently hold three training academies per year, and they are limited to 55 candidates per class. Given the growing rate of vacancies occurring in Cities and Towns throughout the State, this limited number of candidates is not enough to support the need.

A third contributing factor is that wage gaps are starting to occur throughout the State because of the constant and competing need to fill vacancies with qualified candidates. This is creating upward pressure on wages throughout the State to attract candidates and communities are using non-traditional methods to secure candidates. Clearly, every department wants to maintain a safe complement of Police Officers to protect their communities. Some Departments have resorted to offering incentive bonuses to Officers if they are willing to transfer to their communities just to keep their rosters full.

This is a growing observation and concern that is not just limited to Police Departments but is almost universally true across all departments.

DC McCain noted that labor relations in the Police Department are considered "Productive" and that management and labor have been able to work well together to help resolve operational issues. It was most notable that recently the issue of Body Cameras for Police Officers was resolved through great dialogue and understanding between management and labor. It was also noted that there has been a recent change in the parent union for the Police Officers with the Teamsters now taking over the labor representation for the Department.



## *Police & Dispatch Department*

The Department's structure seems generally to be adequate, though the DC noted that ideally, he would like to see (and I will confirm this with the Chief) a third Lieutenant or Captain should be hired from within the ranks. This person would be the Lieutenant in charge of Detectives but would also provide flexibility to the administration of the Department by providing another member of midlevel management.

It was the DC's observation that the Department is generally well supported by the Town but that continued pressure on wages will be a challenge as the cost of living and a reduced number of candidates entering the law enforcement profession will continue to take its toll if not proactively addressed. This Department's contract is not currently open for such a discussion, but if the DC's observations are accurate, the Town may need to consider measured compensation responses to help maintain reasonable staffing levels within the Department.

Injuries within the Department are considered manageable and have not adversely impacted the day-to-day operations of the Department.

Probably the most disappointing development for the Department within the past year was the defeat of the funding for a new Public Safety Building. The margin of defeat was very small and allegedly the vote occurred on a snowy day where the turnout for the vote was very narrow. The DC said that this one action was detrimental to the moral of the Department, and he hoped that the Town would put this question before the voters again for reconsideration. We discussed the reality that delaying or postponing the construction of major capital facilities will not diminish the need for that facility, but will, in nearly every instance, increase the project cost. This same level of disappointment was expressed by the Fire Department, which also recognizes the need for a new facility based on the growing needs of both Public Safety Departments.

One other item that was discussed was the essential service of public safety communications, now widely referred to as 911 Dispatch. Dispatch is also part of the Police Department's oversight. More and more communities are starting to see the value of Regional Dispatch, primarily due to the cost of operating this function for each individual community. The cost of equipment and the cost of training personnel to meet today's 911 response standards make regional dispatch an option worthy of consideration. Regionalization of this service would require agreement from several communities and support from the State to help assist in the funding of such an initiative. There are many good examples of where this has worked well so it does make sense to at least understand how this option might be pursued. However, regionalization of this function has not been widely discussed in Exeter at this time.



## *Police & Dispatch Department*

*Police Chief Stephan Poulin Interview- 7/25/2023 Started at 11:00 AM*

I met with Police Chief Stephan Poulin to get his perspective on how he feels his department is operating and to determine if he sees any emerging operational challenges. Chief Poulin has been the Exeter Chief since 2019 but has been with the Exeter Department since 2002. He was previously employed by the Somersworth Police Department in New Hampshire. The Chief echoed many of the same sentiments described by the Deputy Chief in describing how his department functions. He does feel that the Town and the community's residents support the Police Department. Organizationally, his department performs well though the average age of the department has been reduced rather substantially during the past four years. He attributes this to a growing number of police officers who have retired or left the profession and those positions have been backfilled by younger, less experienced officers. While the officers coming in are well-trained, the less experienced officers are no different than anyone else who has not fully experienced some of the more challenging aspects of their roles. This causes concern for any organizational leader who commands a team who will often learn on the fly. The Chief also noted that being a Police Officer today is significantly different in this post COVID era and in this current social media society environment. The post COVID world has seen a significant upward tick in mental health cases and domestic violence. Today's social media society seems to catch more and more law enforcement officers in seemingly compromising positions without the benefit of the circumstances leading up to an incident. This makes for a challenging position for law enforcement in general in which officers become engrossed in "no win" situations. In many cases, particularly involving newer, less experienced officers, the officer is thrust into a situation requiring them to make significant judgement calls with only limited knowledge of the situation. Today's world requires more assistance from Social Service professionals to help train officers and to serve as support for public safety in general.

The Chief and I talked about his current command structure to see if any adjustments were needed to help lead his department on a day-to-day basis. One suggestion that was made, which was also supported by the Deputy Chief, is to create a Captain position. This added command role will help with Shift command and with overall department coordination. This is particularly important with respect to the management of Dispatch. The current command structure includes a Chief, Deputy Chief, and two Lieutenants. However, only one Lieutenant oversees Patrol and Operations. The other Lieutenant oversees professional standards, Detectives and Dispatch. If any one of the Lieutenants is out due to illness, injury or vacation, the other Lieutenant is given an overwhelming amount of responsibility that can leave the department vulnerable to operational errors. The Department staffing is thin overall in most areas, but it is well run, and they provide the Town with a highly professional law enforcement service.

The Chief noted that some of the biggest challenges facing his department right now are traffic management and mental health related responses. These challenges have become standard concerns in nearly every community in the country these past few years. There is an increasing need for mental health experts to assist police officers in their responses and to help



## *Police & Dispatch Department*

communities with a growing illegal drug problem that has become epidemic across the country. Exeter is not immune to these effects.

We talked about the challenges of recruiting new Police Officers at a time when law enforcement in general is faced with a decreasing number of interested candidates. This is a nationwide challenge that cities and towns are facing with no simple solution emerging currently. I was advised recently that a large department in Rhode Island has historically seen as many as 800 candidates for police officer vacancies. In the past year, that number has decreased dramatically to only 18 candidates for those same vacancies. Something needs to be done now to help change this disturbing trend.

The Police Department also oversees Dispatch Communications. This Division currently includes one supervisor and five dispatchers. At the time of the writing of this report, one of those dispatch positions was vacant, so the overall compliment of staff was down to five from six. The same challenge that plagues police departments in recruiting is also affecting Dispatch. *There are simply not enough trained or interested candidates to fill these positions.* With all the new training requirements that have been thrust onto these positions, it has become more and more challenging to find individuals who want to take on the responsibility of these roles. Competitive pay in general is also a contributing factor to the significant drop in interest. I mentioned to the Chief, as I did with the Deputy Chief, that there is a growing nationwide interest in regionalizing this function. For several reasons, particularly fewer candidates, but also the cost and maintenance of the high-tech equipment and the level of training that is now required in dispatch centers, more and more communities are finding that regionalization of this service is fast becoming one of the most sustainable options for this service in communities.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- The Police Department is very well run under the leadership of Chief Poulin and Deputy Chief McCain. The Department is young from an age perspective, but they do a lot with a limited staff.
- One of the biggest challenges facing the department is the recruitment and retention of Police Officers. There are multiple factors causing this concern.
- The structure of the Department seems well defined though the Chief and Deputy Chief think the addition of an additional Lieutenant or Captain would help the organization run more effectively.
- The Chief noted that the two biggest challenges facing the department are traffic management issues and mental health related responses.



## *Police & Dispatch Department*

### **Key Takeaways (Continued):**

- The department faces a similar recruitment challenge in Dispatch. There are simply not enough candidates who are trained and who can fill dispatch positions. I mentioned to both the Chief and the Deputy Chief that regionalizing communications is an option that is gaining popularity.
- Competitive pay and a reduced interest in candidates wanting to choose law enforcement as a career are primary concerns for maintaining the stability of police departments in general.

### **Succession Plan:**

The current structure of the Department indicates that if the Chief were to leave his position, for any reason, the Department has already planned for a short-term, and possibly long-term solution, by having the Deputy Chief assume the Chief's role. That long-term solution would be determined by the Administration of the Town as they consider the overall direction of the Department at that time. But having a trained and experienced Deputy Chief in this role provides a good option for the Town and provides stability for maintaining day-to-day operations.





# Current Organizational Chart:

Chief of Police

Deputy Chief

Patrol  
Lieutenant

CID

Professional Standards  
Lieutenant

Communications  
COM Supervisor

Sergeant  
Sergeant  
Sergeant  
Sergeant

Sergeant  
Prosecutor  
Detective  
Detective  
Detective

Dispatcher  
Dispatcher  
Dispatcher  
Dispatcher  
Dispatcher

Officer  
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Officer  
Officer

SRO  
Dare Officer



## *Public Works Department*

The Exeter Public Works Department strives to provide the best services it can to Exeter taxpayers. They are a highly trained and diverse department that covers many service areas. The Department is currently led by Interim Public Works Director *Paul Vlasich, P.E.* *Jay Perkins* is the Highway Superintendent and *Steve Dalton* serves as the Interim Water and Wastewater Superintendent. *Jeff Beck* is the Facilities Maintenance Director, a position he has held for the last six (6) years.

One of the biggest challenges facing the Department is their inability to secure a permanent Public Works Director along with several key support and management positions in Engineering, the Water and Wastewater Divisions and the Highway Division. Vacancies in some of the line positions such as truck drivers, operators, and general laborers have been difficult to fill due to license requirements for these positions. Due to a shrinking labor supply, the Department has been plagued by several current vacancies along with additional vacancies planned for the next two years due to impending retirements. Despite their limited work force, the Interim DPW Director, Highway Superintendent, Facilities Director and the Acting Water and Wastewater Superintendents have all remained responsive to the Department's mission of providing service to the community when they need it.

The Department's span of responsibility is listed below:

- Highway Maintenance: Responsible for the filling of potholes, repaving, and rebuilding Town Roads along with a host of other outside maintenance responsibilities. This Division prides itself in being the "Jack/Jill of all Trades",
- Snow Removal: Responsible for the plowing and sanding of roads, sidewalks, and Town facilities whenever the snow starts to fly. The Department offers several suggestions on how businesses and the public can assist in reducing any storm impacts following a major storm scenario. While the Department does do a great job of clearing most public areas, assistance from homeowners and from business owners in helping to keep sidewalks clear is always welcome,
- Trash, Recycling and Transfer Station: The Department manages a comprehensive program as it relates to household waste and recyclable items. The curbside collection program is performed by the outside vendor Waste Management. Waste Management provides curb side collection services for trash collection and for recyclables. A complete listing of what can be disposed of or recycled through this program is listed on the DPW website under the subcategories of "Trash and Recycling". For the disposal of any large items that cannot be picked up at curbside, the Department also manages a Transfer Station. A full explanation of how and what can be disposed of at the Transfer Station is also listed under the Department's website under the subcategory "Transfer Station".
- Drinking Water System Maintenance and Repair: Exeter relies on a combination of surface water and groundwater sources to meet its water supply needs. All the water is treated through the Town's Water Treatment Plant. Many water systems throughout the





## Public Works Department

country are now required to treat their potable water supplies due to the significant tightening of water quality regulations issued through the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Meeting these standards requires significant investment on the part of each community to build treatment facilities and by hiring highly qualified staff members to run the system once it's built. Running a safe drinking water supply system is not limited to just building and running a great treatment facility, but also requires constructing and maintaining a reliable distribution system. Exeter currently has over 55 miles of water pipe in its system.

- Sewer and Wastewater System Maintenance and Repair: On the other end of the spectrum, the Town's wastewater system is also highly sophisticated and effective. In 2020 the Town spent nearly \$54 Million to upgrade its wastewater treatment facility. The investment paid off because in 2021 the Town of Exeter Wastewater Treatment Plant received the USEPA Region 1 Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant Operation and Maintenance Excellence Award. This is a significant achievement for this Department and for the Town. Achieving this award has brought national recognition to a high-quality service for the Town. Like the Drinking Water System, the Wastewater System is not just limited to building and operating a high-quality plant. It also requires the maintenance of a large sewer collection system throughout the Town. I mention each of these critical considerations because having an organization and staff to maintain the system are critical components to maintaining a high quality of life for this community.
- Water and Sewer Billing Information: This information is collected by this Department through an automated meter reading system. Data is collected and then used to generate a bill for both the water and sewer usage for each customer. The Tax/Water/Sewer Collection Office collects the funds from these bills on behalf of the Department and the Town.
- Town Engineering: This Division of the Public Works Department provides engineering services for many aspects of Town government. Engineering provides services to the Planning Board by providing technical assistance in evaluating site plans and subdivisions. They perform construction inspection to assure the Town that roads and projects are built to the standards that the DPW will accept for maintenance purposes and to assure that the construction is compliant with acceptable construction practices. The Division performs the Town Boundary Perambulations periodically to make sure that other communities are not encroaching on the Town's land; as well as confirming that Exeter is not encroaching on the borders of its neighboring communities.
- Capital Project Management: An important aspect of the DPW Department's mission is to provide support and assurance that capital projects are built and managed according to the expectations of the Town. The Engineering Division is a key participant in this process.
- Facility Maintenance: One often overlooked aspect of a soundly run community is its attention to the maintenance of existing facilities. Exeter's Facility Maintenance Division is run by *Jeff Beck*, and he is particularly challenged with the task of not only keeping new facilities running and properly maintained but his division also has the significant



## Public Works Department

responsibility for maintaining several historic Town assets. The Facilities Division is in the middle of a comprehensive facility assessment process to determine what level of investment is needed by the Town over the next several years to help keep the Town's assets running effectively well into the future.

- Storm Water: One of the newest challenges facing cities and towns throughout the country is the evolving climatic conditions in the world. To avoid major flooding and improper overflow into existing sewer systems, Town's need to have a strategy to plan, develop and maintain a fully functional stormwater system. The State of New Hampshire and the EPA are requiring that all communities embark on this process; particularly given the severity of storms that have been occurring more frequently throughout the State. The Town of Exeter has been proactive in this effort through the work of the Department of Public Works and its Engineering Division. They have been active in identifying areas that are subject to flooding and are recommending offsetting measures that will help limit the severity of each flooding event.

### **Department Interviews:**

*DPW Interview 6.26.23 with Acting DPW Director Paul Vlasich, PE 3:00 PM*

I met with Paul Vlasich, the Acting DPW Director who oversees a department that has multiple vacancies. The Acting Director showed me the organizational chart that identified 10 vacancies that currently exist (including the position that he currently serves in) and an additional 13 vacancies that could occur over the next two years due to planned retirements. I asked him what he thought the reason was for all these vacancies and he noted that it is a challenging labor market for these candidates who perform this work and that he also thought that the compensation level was not where it should be.

I asked him if he had given any thought to any alternative methods of filling these positions. His response was interesting in that he said that he would prefer to fill the vacant positions with candidates that are currently within the organization. That approach would then create vacancies for the entry level positions but that is also a challenge with no easy answer. He went on to say that he was only serving in an acting role and that the long-term staffing strategy for the department should be left to the next director. We talked briefly about possibly contracting out for some of the department services, but he did not think that was a good idea as many engineering companies, who would typically fill these roles, are more specialized in their services and they do not always provide the best general engineering services. This is the kind of service which is most needed by the Department. Filling the engineer position vacancies is a critical need for the Department.

I asked him about morale in the department and he indicated that he felt that some of the employees were disgruntled primarily due to the lack of employee support that exists in the department. As the Interim Director he was not familiar with how grievances were being



## *Public Works Department*

handled and he was not even familiar with how the labor contract worked. I assumed that labor matters were being addressed by the Town Manager's Office (and I later confirmed that). The Interim Director complimented the existing staff and described them as being good "fixers" of day-to-day needs within the Town.

We talked about employee training, and he said that many employees do go to training (I confirmed this with Asst. Town Manager/HR Director) and that DPW type training programs are run primarily by two organizations in New Hampshire, T (2) UNH and the NH Municipal Association. I told him about the MIIA Program training that occurs in Massachusetts, but he was not familiar with that program.

Mr. Vlasich appears to be a very conscientious employee who wants to keep the operation running but has limited long-term perspective as he will be leaving for retirement in the next year. The biggest challenge is filling the engineer vacancies and the DPW Director role. The Town is actively pursuing a solution for this vacancy. Unfortunately, what is happening in New Hampshire is also happening in Massachusetts when it comes to filling DPW Director positions as well as DPW staff roles. The candidates simply do not exist in the current labor pool and when they do, the competition to secure their services is very intense.

Paul also mentioned the capital process and how he felt that it could be handled differently and communicated better. Suggestions made earlier by the Fire Department could possibly help to address this concern.

One side note that Paul shared with me is that it did not make sense to him as to how the Town's budget calendar works for the ensuing Fiscal Year. In New Hampshire, the Fiscal Year is the same as the Calendar Year. It was explained to me that the spending plan is deliberated in the Fall of each calendar year, but the ensuing budget is not approved by the Town until the third month of the following fiscal/calendar year (effectively three months after the start of the year).

A very useful document that is produced by the DPW Department is the rolling status list of approved capital projects. This list is updated every two weeks by the Interim Director so that the Town Manager's Office is kept apprised of the progress being made on each project. One issue that Paul raised was that he was unaware if the Select Board was being updated with this information. I said that this seemed something that could easily be confirmed.

Communication is a key concern for him. He feels that he is supported by the Town Manager, but he has not spoken with him in over a month and needs direction on the priorities of his department. This lack of communication was primarily due to the Town Manager's June and July absence, but that concern has since been resolved with the return of the Town Manager to his current role.

We talked about how priorities were being set by the entire organization and it was not clear to him how that is being done. This is a process-oriented discussion that is often led by a permanent director, but I have some suggestions on how this can be addressed on a limited basis with an acting department director. I will present these ideas later in my recommendations.

Vacancies and their lack of ability to fill key leadership positions are the biggest challenges facing the department. As such, I took extra time to meet with some of the Division heads in Public Works to see how they were performing given the inability of the Town to fill the key leadership role of Public Works Director.





## *Public Works Department*

I did this for two reasons: 1- I wanted to see if there was any potential for an internal candidate to fill this position (an internal succession plan) and 2- To see how this vacancy has affected their ability to perform their roles within the Department.

*Interview of Steve Dalton, Acting Water/Sewer Superintendent- August 21, 2023, at 8:30 A.M.*

Steve Dalton was promoted to the role of Interim Water/Sewer Superintendent in January of 2023. At the present time his division is down a total of five (5) employees including the Division Superintendent, a Maintenance Technician, a Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) Senior Operator, and two (2) Heavy Equipment/System Operators. We talked about the prospects of trying to recruit and retain individuals to fill these positions from within the ranks. He said that the challenge is that many of these positions require licenses and that once the individuals get their licenses, they often will go to work for someone else. He said competition for these positions is very high at this time. He felt that there is a lack of incentive to entice candidates to go for their licenses because they can only get higher compensation if they (1) get the license and (2) fill a vacant position. We talked about the prospect of training staff internally and then paying them a stipend when they get their license and then paying them the higher regular pay when they compete and get the internal licensed position. That seemed to make sense to him, but this is something that will have to be discussed with management and the union to see if it makes sense or to determine if this incentive already exists in a different form within the current contract.

*Interview of Jay Perkins, Highway Superintendent- August 21, 2023, at 12:30 PM*

Jay Perkins has been the DPW Highway Superintendent since 2006 but has worked for the Town since 1979. Jay appears to be a person who likes to “lead by example” and I think he does. He is a hardworking, consistent, and honorable person who looks out for his staff and leads them in a good direction. He readily recognizes that the next generation of workers does not seem to embrace the same work ethic that the previous generation has displayed. The next generation is not always easy to train and teach in the field but is also very smart in their use of technology. He believes that this new workforce may still be effective if we are willing to be patient and learn from each other. He does not think that getting workers to perform at a high level is simply based on compensation. He thinks that sending workers home to get some rest and paying them during long duration winter events or extended utility repairs can be just as effective. He is compassionate and shows empathy for his staff and thinks that they should be respected for what they do and that they should always be treated fairly. That is truly a sign of a good leader. He is concerned about his staff and when the staff recognizes that, they will generally respond in a very positive way.

Asked about his long-term prospects of staying with the Division, he indicated that he is getting close to the end. He did think that there may be candidates within his ranks who could step into his role when he leaves but he was not specific in identifying who that might be. This



## Public Works Department

is even more of a reason that a plan should be in place now to train one or two candidates who might be able to step into the Superintendent's role; and that training should begin as soon as possible.

*Interview of Jeff Beck, Facilities Director for the Town, August 21, 2023, 1:30 P.M.*

Jeff Beck has been the Director of Facilities for the Town of Exeter for six (6) years. He has been with the Department of Public Works for thirty-four (34) years. He provided one of the most stable narratives for the Department in all my interviews. Jeff not only manages the Town's thirteen (13) Buildings, but he also manages the Town's fleet of vehicles, which number seventy-five (75) in total.

Jeff supports and works on a regular basis with the Facilities Advisory Committee. One of the big projects they are working on right now is a strategic plan with new software for their facilities from a company called **Bureau Veritas**. This software will measure energy use and help schedule repairs for the buildings when it is estimated that the item in the building has reached its full life potential. This should be a big help for Jeff in prioritizing maintenance of buildings so their useful life can be maximized.

One of the big concerns that Jeff has is that there is no second in command in his division. While his departure is not imminent, he does think it would be wise to have someone trained and have a full understanding of what he does if his schedule for departure might suddenly change, for any reason. Beyond that it doesn't make sense to me to have only one person available to manage the facilities and the fleet, as it is a significant responsibility. One thing I always look for in organizations are "critical points of failure". By this I mean that if something were to suddenly happen to a person with significant responsibility, a knowledge and information gap would suddenly occur that could be highly detrimental to an organization. This may be one of those instances where it should be avoided if possible.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- The number one takeaway from this department is the number of vacancies in key leadership positions. Filling the Public Works Director position is the number one priority.
- Filling the remaining positions in Engineering and the Water and Sewer Divisions is the next most important priority.
- I was impressed by the fact that the Department is still taking on several major projects despite being limited by staff leadership.
- Paul Vlasich, P.E has been the Acting Director for several months and is approaching retirement himself. He has done a good job of managing the department under the circumstances, but lacks help in supervising day-to-day responsibilities with employees, labor relations and with project management.





## *Public Works Department*

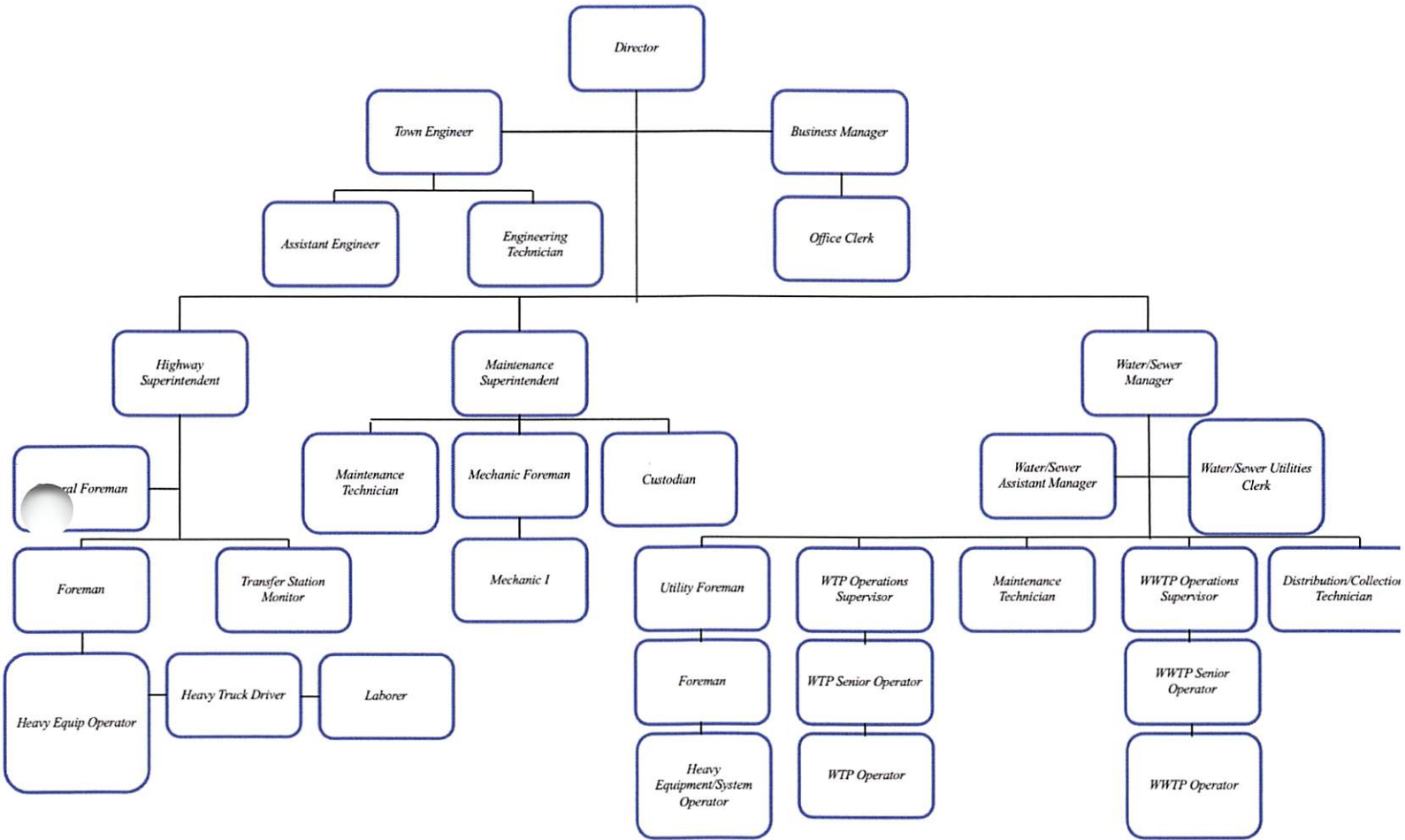
- The Division Directors seem to be doing a good job. The Water and Sewer Division needs a lot of assistance right now as they have several vacant positions.
- Developing a Succession Plan for this department is a priority for the Town.

### **Succession Plan:**

There are no succession plans in place for any of the Divisions of the DPW Department.



# Current Organizational Chart:



## *Tax/Water/Sewer Collections Department*

This Department is primarily responsible for the collection of taxes and water/sewer revenue and any other revenue sources for the community. While the Town Manager is technically the Tax Collector for the Town, in practice the Department is run by the Deputy Tax Collector, *Melissa Heitz*, with the assistance of the Collections Specialist, *Stacie Byrnes*. The structure of this function, with the Town Manager serving as the Tax Collector, is unusual in many ways. Most significant is that the Department generally operates (though on a limited basis) with the Assessing and Finance Departments, and not with the Town Manager. The Department is the primary agency for collecting nearly all the Town's revenue.

### **Department Interview:**

*Interview of the Melissa Heitz, Deputy Tax Collector, on June 27, 2023, at 4:00 PM*

I spoke to Melissa Heitz in her office in Town Hall and tried to do this interview toward the end of the day so that I would not interrupt her collection responsibilities. Melissa described for me that the Town Manager is technically the Tax Collector for Exeter but in practice, she and her department staff members perform this role for the Town. As the Deputy Tax Collector, they collect taxes, water revenue and sewer revenue. When asked as to why the department is structured in this way, she was unclear other than to say that is how the current RSA's and organizational structure reads.

We talked about the possibility that it may make better sense to place Tax Collections under the Finance Department umbrella. This would require a change in the Statute and would have to be voted for by the Town, but it does make better operational sense. Our research indicates that there are only two communities structured like this in New Hampshire and Exeter is one of them.

Melissa noted that she has very little discussion with the Town Manager about her role. This observation generally makes sense to me as the Town Manager would not normally get involved in a collection matter. The only times it might come up is if anticipated collections were notably off or if someone was disputing one of their bills from the Town.

Melissa has performed this role in two other jurisdictions. She thinks the staffing level in her office is adequate.

Currently, she is in the process of trying to streamline the tax collections process. However, it is notable that there does not appear to be a good backup plan for staff in this office in the event of a vacancy.

Like many of the individuals I have spoken to throughout this study, compensation continues to be a concern.

She feels that she is supported by the Administration. A move to place this function under a consolidated Finance Department seems to be a logical plan for this Department even though there are very few discussions that occur between the two departments currently.





## *Tax/Water/Sewer Collections Department*

### **Key Takeaways:**

- This Department is an oddity of the organization and should not be functioning under the Town Manager. I recognize that this was approved by a Town Meeting vote in 1984 but now would be a good time to revisit this structure and come up with a more functional approach.
- The preferred approach would be to reassign this Department and make it a Division under the direction of the Finance Department.
- Melissa Heitz and her staff do a great job for the Town and my observations are strictly structural and are not any reflection of how the staff is performing.

### **Succession Plan:**

The Succession Plan for this Department is a little uncertain because it remains unclear if the Collections Specialist has an interest in taking that next step. Perhaps with the right training, encouragement and compensation considerations, this individual might want to move in this direction. Beyond this option, and unless there is another candidate in the Town who has this training and interest, the Department and the Town would have to look outside the organization to replace this position.

*Current Organizational Chart:*



## *Town Clerk Department*

The Town Clerk is one of the few remaining elected department heads in the Town. This Office provides a wide array of services for Exeter. Every Town Clerk in a Town in New Hampshire must be elected and may not be appointed; with the exception being a City Clerk who is appointed by a City Council. In Exeter, the Town Clerk is *Andrea (Andie) Kohler* who is assisted by Deputy Town Clerk, *Sonya Littlefield*. There are two Assistant Town Clerks in the Office, and they are *Jennifer Shupe* and *Lee Ann Simpson*.

Like other Town Departments, this Department performs many diverse functions for the Town. These functions include:

- Keeper of the Public Record- This is a function that is vital for the community to help maintain an historic perspective of the Town's actions. However, there are also many statutes that require that certain records be legally on file with the Town Clerk to be binding and effective.
- Motor Vehicles and Registrations- Unlike many other States, New Hampshire allows motor vehicle registrations to be performed through the Town Clerk's Office. Moreover, if the Town Clerk chooses to do so, they may seek approval through the Select Board to ask the State to become a Municipal Agent which allows the Town Clerk's Office to collect both municipal and state vehicle registrations. This added feature is more convenient for residents as it provides for one-stop shopping of vehicle registrations.
- Vital Statistics Records- The Town Clerk maintains records of all births, deaths, and marriages for the community, which in turn are then reported to the State.
- Marriage Licenses- The Town Clerk's Office is responsible for issuing marriage licenses for couples seeking to get married in the State. The marriage license does not become effective until it is signed by the person who performs the marriage ceremony.
- Dog Licenses- The Town Clerk also has the responsibility for issuing licenses for all dogs and cats, if cats are licensed in that community. Licenses are only issued if the Town Clerk's Office is satisfied that the animal has been properly vaccinated for rabies.
- Elections- The Town Clerk is an elections officer for the Town and provides many services associated with the election process including the initial stage of a candidate filing for election candidacy.
- Absentee Ballots- The Town Clerk must process requests for absentee ballots.
- Town Meeting- After each Town Meeting the Town Clerk must record all votes taken at the meeting to become the official record of the Town and the Office must certify the minutes taken at the Meeting as being an accurate reflection of what actions acted on by the Town.
- Reporting- Each year the Town Clerk must report the names and addresses of all Town Officers for Exeter to the State's Department of Revenue and must file two copies of the Town Report with the State Library.



## *Town Clerk Department*

### **Department Interview:**

*Interview of Andrea Kohler, Town Clerk occurred on 8/21/2023, at approximately 3:30 PM*

The Town Clerk, Andie Kohler was elected to this position in 2012. “Andie” knows her position well and she has been training her staff in all aspects of her role so that one day, when she decides not to run for reelection or retire, there will be a trained candidate who could run for this position. Obviously that decision will rest with the voters, but it is good to know that the Town Clerk has supported a replacement path for the time when she decides to step down.

Andie works very hard to coordinate all the elections in the Town, but she did note that even though there are nearly 12,000 voters, only 7-10% of those individuals cast a vote on election day. The one exception to that rule is Presidential Elections. On that day anywhere between 50% and 70% of all voters will cast a ballot.

It is a bit unusual for me (coming from outside of New Hampshire) to see four (4) people working in a Town Clerk’s Office for a community of this size. However, it is also noted that most communities do not process motor vehicle registrations in communities outside of New Hampshire. That added responsibility is process intensive and would require additional staff to keep the process moving smoothly.

### **Key Takeaways:**

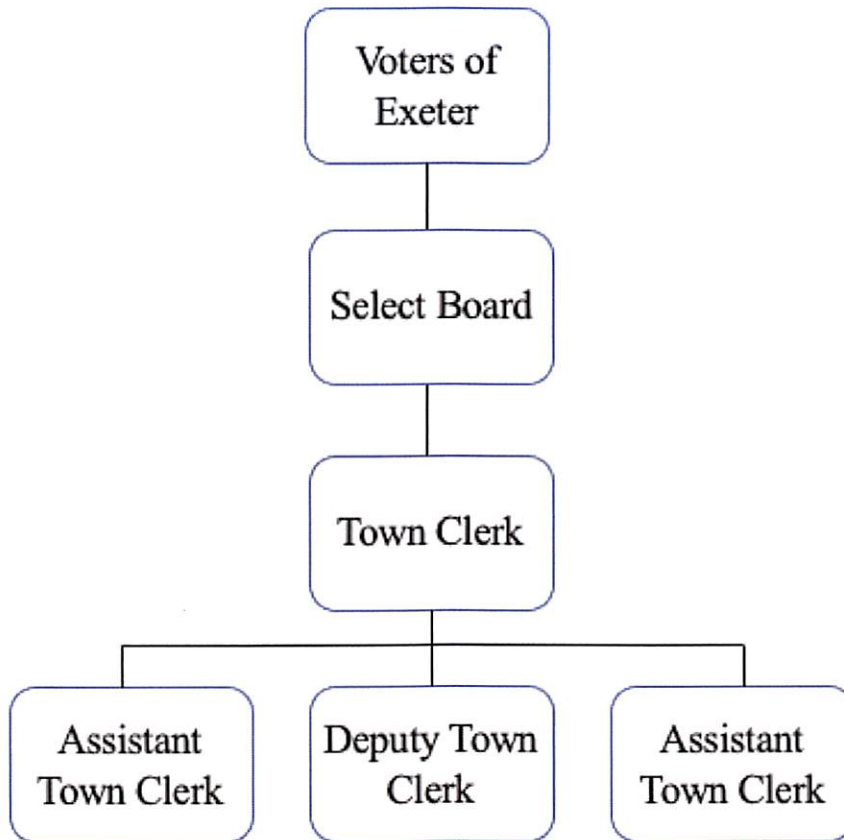
- The Town Clerk’s Office performs well and is properly staffed.
- I did not witness any reasons for making any changes to the existing staff structure.
- A Succession Plan is in place for the Department but that is subject to the vote of the public. Andie has been training her staff for the inevitable day when she will step down.
- Voter turnout is generally low, except for Presidential elections or for controversial projects in the community.

### **Succession Plan:**

The Town Clerk has taken steps to help position the Deputy Town Clerk to be the next Town Clerk. However, because this is an elected position, there are no guarantees that this action will take place. Despite this acknowledgement, it is still very good practice on the part of this Department to train a successor who is aware of all the responsibilities that are associated with this Office. This action generally provides comfort to the voting public that they can vote for a candidate who understands the role that they are seeking to be elected to.



## Current Organizational Chart:



## *Planning and Sustainability Department*

The Exeter Planning and Sustainability Department is responsible for overseeing municipal, residential, and commercial development, performs plan reviews and serves as the primary source of land use regulations and revisions. This Department is the lead agency for performing strategic and community planning activities in Town. It is led by Town Planner, *David Sharples* who works with Conservation and Sustainability Planner, *Kristen Murphy* and Administrative Assistant, *Kathleen Croteau*.

A summary of this Department's responsibilities includes the following:

- Capital Improvement Program: The Capital Improvement Program, more commonly referred to as the "CIP", is the Town's plan for improving its infrastructure over five (5) increments for any capital expense over the amount of \$25,000. The Plan is updated every year with new suggestions on how capital items should be acquired, updated, renovated, newly constructed, or purchased that will further enhance the Town's overall capital infrastructure. This includes the replacement of vehicles, as well as improvements to fields, buildings, equipment, and open space. It is, in many ways, one of the most important planning documents for the Town which helps departments to prioritize these investments over five-year increments so that the financial capability of the Town can keep pace with the cost of these investments.
- Master Plan: Another critical planning document is the Master Plan. This is the key document that helps define how the community will prioritize and define locations where certain land uses should be located. This is a "visioning document" that provides guidance for key decision makers to help maintain the quality of life that the community expects to achieve and preserve. The document places an historic reference on development decisions while serving as a strategic document for helping to identify the pressing needs of the Town so that the Town continues to prioritize its financial investments in a sound and responsible manner. Master Plans are generally updated every 5 to 10 years so that the priorities of the Town remain relevant and up to date.
- Site and Subdivision Regulations: Planning Boards and Planning Departments have the important responsibility of developing these regulations that serve as guidelines and guard rails as to how development occurs in the community. Zoning maps identify where certain types of development should be encouraged to occur. Site and Subdivision Regulations provide developers with a road map as to how the development is expected to occur within that zone. For example, such regulations will determine how wide a road should be within a development, or if it should include sidewalks or certain types of public utilities to help ensure public safety.
- Sustainable Exeter: With all that is changing in the world today relating to climate change, communities have actively engaged in water and energy conservation actions and have taken pro-active sustainable actions to help protect the community future generations. The Sustainable Exeter initiative has consistently been recognized for its efforts in proactive land use management. From solar arrays to resilience plans to tax

## *Planning and Sustainability Department*

credits for sustainable development plans, Exeter is leading the way in this all-important future planning initiative.

- Coordination with other key land use agencies including the Conservation Commission, Historic District Commission, the Planning Board, and the Zoning Board of Adjustment: With all these plans and initiatives in place, there must be one Department that keeps the efforts all coordinated. Planning and Sustainability perform this all-important function. It is critically important to maintain the vision for a community that all land use initiatives must remain under a coordinated “roof”. This approach has largely been deployed in this Department.

### **Department Interview:**

*Interview of Planning Director, Dave Sharples on 6/27/2023 at 10:00 AM*

Dave Sharples has been the Town Planner for the Town of Exeter since 2016 by way of Somersworth, New Hampshire. In talking to various folks around Exeter, Dave is a pretty well-respected individual who is known for getting things done but is also respected for how he educates the public on issues before they are taken to a vote. This is a rare, but highly sought after skill set in the public sector.

Dave has been actively working with the Town’s Master Plan and has also been working on the Downtown redevelopment efforts with the Economic Development Director. Dave was a big promoter of the Master Plan and has used it as a map and working document for development efforts throughout the community. His department essentially is comprised of three people, himself as the Planner, the Administrative Assistant and the Conservation and Sustainability Planner and a fourth who works with the Department but reports to the Building Inspector, that being the Code Enforcement Officer. It’s a relatively simple organizational chart that seems to function adequately, but it could also be more encompassing if a more global perspective were taken regarding land use as a single department.

Dave has been developing new land use ordinances which look at the advantages of developing certain lands as well as looking at other lands that should remain undeveloped for the community. He has been leading several educational sessions on how the new ordinances would work and the community appears to be receptive to the slow but steady process.

The current relationship between the Planning Board and the Zoning Board could be improved and he is working on ways to bring the Boards into a more closely aligned mission with respect to land use.

Dave feels that the current staffing levels are acceptable. He feels that the group works well together and that they have a high efficiency rate in how they perform their work. However, having a staff planner who could help with managing projects and the work of Historic District Commission could be very helpful.

## *Planning and Sustainability Department*

As it stands right now, the Planning Department works with the Planning Board, the Zoning Board, the Conservation Commission, and the Energy Committee. For a limited staff, this is a big commitment of time.

One of the big questions facing the Town right now is whether the Town wants to grow or stay as it is. Not knowing this answer can result in clashes with developers who see Exeter for all the good things that it represents. From an economic development perspective, this question needs to be answered soon.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- Dave Sharples is a highly respected member of the organization who has a wealth of knowledge, experience, and leadership capabilities as the Town Planner.
- Like many other Departments in Town, Dave is stretched thin, but he gets a lot done with limited resources. His staff is also dedicated to the work that they do, and they are taking on some important land use challenges at a time when the Town is facing the important question of how much the Town should develop and how much of it should be preserved.
- There is not a lot of staff support for Committees who have important responsibilities in setting policy for the Town. In particular, the Historic District Commission could use some help from the Town in supporting their efforts.

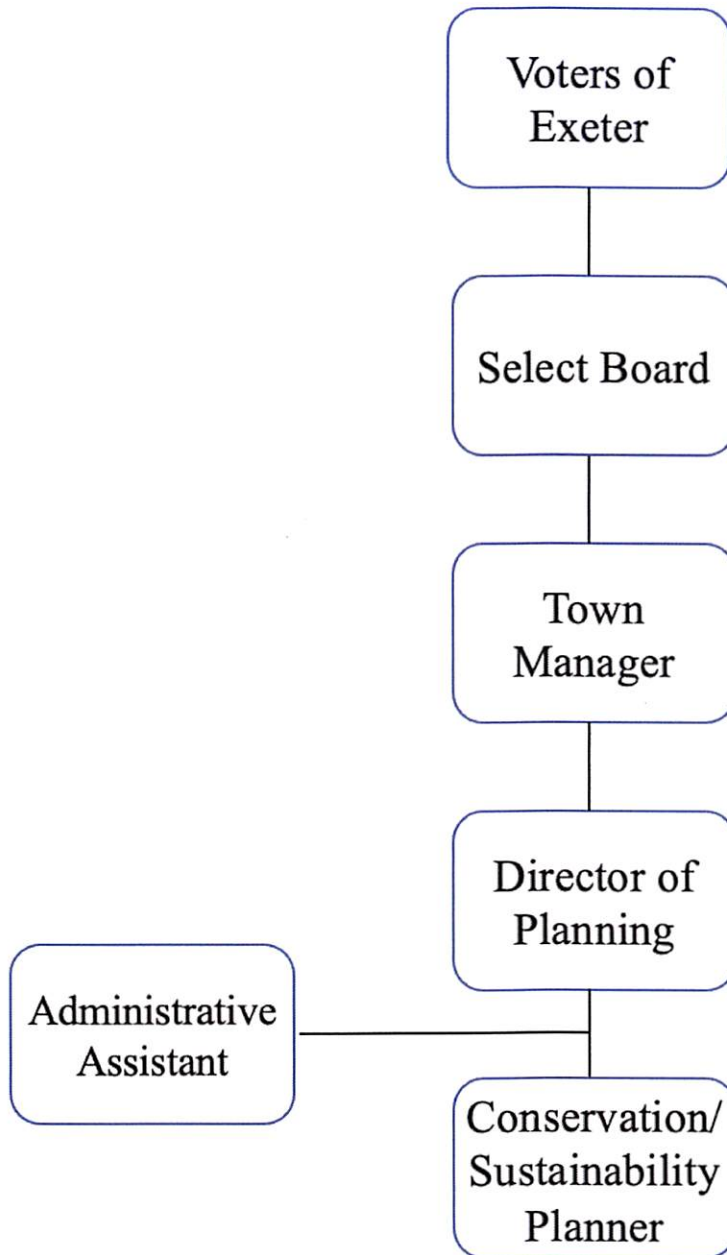
### **Succession Plan:**

Presently, there is no succession plan in place for this department. This is a relatively small department regarding staff, but the department's mission includes some very important projects and land use actions that could have wide ranging effects on the future of the Town. Lacking a succession plan is a challenge that needs to be examined more closely as soon as possible. The answer to this question will help determine if the Department will continue to function effectively for years to come.





## Current Organizational Chart:



## Labor Climate

A highly functional labor climate is important to the success of any unionized organization. This does not mean that there is always agreement on labor topics but if there is collaboration and sharing of ideas between management and labor, this can lead to a positive working relationship. In New Hampshire, labor organizations are not protected by State law but are nonetheless representative of most labor forces in local government. In Exeter, there are three labor organizations that exist. They are the Police Officers who are represented by the Exeter Polic Association, Teamsters Local 633, the Fire Fighters who are represented by the Exeter Professional Firefighters' Association, Local 3491, and the remaining organized employees are represented by the State Employees Association, Inc., SEIU Local 1984.

I took the time to meet with representatives of all three unions to get some perspective on the working environment that currently exists in Exeter. It is not the intention of this report to single out any one union vs. the other nor is it the intention to make commitments on behalf of the Town that subvert the ability of the Town to work cooperatively with their employees. Some of the key takeaways of those meetings were the following:

All three of the Unions appreciated the opportunity to meet and express their thoughts. All three also agreed that one of the key issues facing the Town is the ability to attract and retain a trained workforce. The constant turnover of the labor force puts pressure on those employees who remain behind because they are often forced to pick up the slack.

Many felt that competing wage tables from communities all around New Hampshire have attracted employees away from Exeter to other communities. This is a notable problem all over the Northeast, but it is particularly difficult for New Hampshire border communities to compete with Massachusetts' employee salaries. Massachusetts communities simply pay more, and it does not really matter why they pay more, especially to New Hampshire employees who could work in Massachusetts and return to their homes in New Hampshire at the end of their workday or night.

All groups thought that more training was very important for employee retention and that the strategy of growing talent from within for supervisory positions was the most preferred approach to growing a management team.

There was some indication that more frequent communication with the unions from management would be welcomed. Some felt that they were not being heard on important issues or that they were surprised about not hearing of certain changes in the workplace when they occur and then hearing of such changes after the fact.

The general labor impression I received was that the employees want to see stability in the workforce. They want to be able to come to work and do the job that they signed up for and not have to do someone else's role at the same time. Employees want to be paid competitively and be assured that communities around them do not pay more for similar roles and responsibilities. Finally, employees want to be heard more by management about how they think the workplace can be improved. They want to know that if they have an idea that there is a means to present it and while it may not always be implemented, they at least know that it was heard and considered.



## *Labor Climate*

These impressions are not uncommon for most communities and their work forces. What is interesting is that while these concerns may seem difficult to overcome, one can also view them as an opportunity for improving the labor/management relationship. Some sample strategies on this topic will be presented in Section 5. “Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements”.



# *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

## *Objective One*

The first objective of this study was to:

*“To work with the Select Board, the Town Manager, and the Exeter Management Team to evaluate the existing management practices and structure of the Town and provide guidance and suggestions on how the organization may be structured differently based on the findings of that evaluation. The mission is to note what works well and offer ideas on how to improve in areas needing attention.”*

This project began on June 26 of 2023 with a meeting with the Board Chair and the Assistant Town Manager. The Town Manager who was unavailable on this day for this meeting. This initial meeting was held to describe the focus of the work being performed and to explain the initial phases of the study.

Shortly after that meeting, a second meeting was held at Town Offices with the Town’s Department Heads. The purpose of this meeting was generally for introduction purposes and to help explain the project’s objectives. An opportunity was afforded to everyone who attended to ask questions and understand the schedule of Department Meetings that were about to begin. This meeting lasted for about sixty minutes and then individual department head meetings began shortly after that. The summary findings of those meetings have been presented in the previous chapters of this report.

## **General Findings**

The Town of Exeter performs well under the current Select Board/Town Manager model. I find that the Select Board has a genuine interest in supporting the interests of the Town and they are supportive of their employees and management team. I also find that the Town, as an organization, is comprised of hard-working, dedicated individuals who generally have the best interests of the community in mind.

With the goal to find ways to improve the organization, I found that the Town operates with very minimal staff support to the point that when a person is absent for any reason, certain functions do not get done or are performed minimally until the absent employee is able to return. While some may view this as being staff efficient, another more valid view is that the inability to get work done due to limited staff support is also *inefficient*. The better approach is to look at the structure of the entire organization and determine if new efficiencies can be created which will limit staff additions while creating support systems throughout the Town.

Exeter’s current organization is relatively flat with a Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager and fourteen operating departments. Some of these departments are comprised of just one individual. The overall organization is very “compartmentalized” with all the departments reporting directly or indirectly to the Town Manager.



## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

After meeting at length with each of the departments, the Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, and each of the Select Board members, it became apparent to me that the current organizational structure is not built for efficiency. During several interviews, I observed that having one person managing fourteen different functions while supporting the chief executive board does not result in maximum communication capability nor does it establish a successful path of accomplishments for the organization. This does not mean that the organization is not capable of being successful. There have been many successes achieved under the current structure. However, looking at the organization from a broader perspective, I believe that a structural opportunity exists whereby the current organization could be altered to achieve a greater level of success in less time and perhaps with fewer constraints.

It is my belief that Exeter should be restructured by having fewer departments report directly to the Town Manager. This would mean that several departments that currently report directly to the Town Manager would be consolidated to create a few larger departments with several divisions. I also see the opportunity to have the Assistant Town Manager (ATM) take on a greater role by effectively becoming the Operations Director (*but with no change to the Assistant Town Manager title*). This new role for the ATM would not be a dramatic shift in how the Town currently operates. The ATM already operates within this realm, but on an informal basis. It is our belief that this proposed realignment would provide more opportunities for the Town Manager to work directly with key department heads and with the Select Board on strategic initiatives and help lead the Town to a new level of service for the community.

### **A New Organizational Look**

The vision for Exeter's new management structure would have the Deputy Tax Collector, the Assessor, the Treasurer, Accountant, Payroll, and Information Technology all reporting directly to the **Director of Finance**. This newly constituted **Department of Finance** would have the Director of Finance as the only member of this team reporting directly to the Town Manager. In this structure, the Director of Finance would serve as a strategic partner on all matters involving the finances of the Town.

The **Police Chief** and **Fire Chief** will continue to report directly to the Town Manager, but additional changes are contemplated within each of these respective departments and those changes will be explained later in this report.

The **Public Works** Director will continue to report directly to the Town Manager but like the Police and Fire Departments, some internal realignments are recommended to take place to help with the flow of work and for succession planning purposes.

A new **Land Use Department** is recommended to be formed that will absorb the functions of Economic Development, Planning, Conservation, Historic Preservation and eventually Zoning Administration (this is explained further below). The new position of **Land Use Director** will report directly to the Town Manager and will serve as the Town Manager's internal expert regarding all matters relating to the use of land throughout the community.



## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

The **Town Clerk** will continue to report to the Town Manager on an operational level but because this is an elected position, there is limited performance oversight that can be provided by the Town Manager.

A new **Social Services Department** is proposed which will assume the responsibility of managing the Welfare Program and Human Services. This new Department will also provide important social service assistance and guidance to many of the Town's operating departments.

Social service needs have grown exponentially since the pandemic and communities across the country are finding that they don't have the level of expertise to address these concerns every day. This new Department would hopefully provide a new level of support for the community. The Department would be led by a new Social Services Director who would report directly to the **Assistant Town Manager (ATM)**. This new addition to the organization will help keep the Town administration fully informed of the kinds of social challenges facing the community. While this would be a one-person department for now, I believe that this is an area that may continue to grow over time given the number of social service issues that are beginning to impact local government.

I propose that Building and Code Enforcement be eventually absorbed into the Fire Department as strictly a building inspection, electrical inspection, plumbing inspection, and code enforcement function. Under this structure, the **Building Inspector** and his staff would physically move to the **Fire Department** and would report directly to the Fire Chief or Assistant Fire Chief (to be determined). This change is similar to the Dover, New Hampshire model which has had some measure of success since it was adopted.

This proposed change is largely dependent on two considerations. First, there currently is no physical space to house the Building Inspector and the Deputy Code Enforcement Officer in the Fire Department. If a new Public Safety Building is approved by the Town, this relocation question could be addressed at that time.

Secondly, the Building Inspector currently serves in a dual role as the Zoning Enforcement Officer. Under a new structure, Zoning Administration would be reassigned to Land Use (for which this function is more properly aligned). The Land Use Department will need to add a staff member to perform this function. In looking at the needs of land use planning in Town and zoning enforcement an argument can be made to hire someone who could serve as both a **Zoning Administrator/Staff Planner**. This added support position could also provide some important staff assistance for Historic Preservation. However, until the physical space impediments and the staffing questions are resolved, the plan would be to leave the Building Inspector position as is and continue to have him report directly to the Town Manager.

The **Parks and Recreation Director** should no longer report directly to the Town Manager but should report directly to the **Assistant Town Manager**. This realignment is not designed to diminish the significance of the Parks and Recreation role in the community. Rather, the function of this department would now be consistent with the newly proposed oversight responsibilities of the Assistant Town Manager.



## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

As is explained below, the ATM would now be responsible for operations and for community impact roles such as Social Service and Welfare. Moreover, the current Assistant Town Manager is acutely aware of the Parks and Recreation operational functions, having previously served as a Parks and Recreation Director before coming to Exeter..

The Assistant Town Manager should have oversight of the **Human Resources Department** but should no longer serve in the dual role of director of this Department. Over the years, it has been my observation in several communities that combining the HR Director with the ATM made sense on paper but in practice, the responsibility of managing both functions well is simply not practical. Human Resources has become a far more complex and demanding role that demands the full attention of a trained professional in the human resource field of work. This would mean that a full-time Human Resources Director should be added to the staff to lead this Department in the future.

As mentioned earlier, the Assistant Town Manager should serve as the **Operations Director** for the Town while also having the departments of Park and Recreation, Social Services, Human Resources and Communications serving as direct reports.

The **Communications** function was added only recently to the Town Manager's Office. While the Assistant Town Manager has direct oversight of this function, the Town Manager and the Assistant Town Manager will work collaboratively with the Communications Coordinator, the Select Board, Town Boards and Departments to develop the messaging and communications strategies for the Town.

### *Objective Two*

The second objective of this project was to:

*“To perform a departmental analysis to determine if there is room for operational efficiency and collaboration. Many times, organizations build department structures based on convenience at the time rather than taking a more wholistic and strategic approach toward achieving a desired performance outcome. This includes understanding work relationships and how those relationships foster progressive work results. This review can often lead to building a better organizational structure that is not only cost-effective but can also lead to a more collegial work environment for the staff.”*

The first objective of this study was to evaluate the overall structure of the organization and recommend changes that could provide greater efficiency in how the Town operates. This next objective was designed to evaluate individual departments to see how they could improve their overall performance and output.



# *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

## **General Findings**

There is good news to report in that I did not find a need to make a significant number of wholesale changes to many departments; particularly the larger departments such as Police, Fire and Public Works. Their individual organizational structures seem operationally sound but suffer from a lack of support from a challenging labor market.

In other instances, structural changes were proposed because there was no structure, and it made no sense to have one-person departments reporting directly to the Town Manager. There were other cases where creating a department in which collaboration should happen naturally based on the commonality of purpose will make better sense for the mission of the department.

## **Recommended Changes for Departments**

After meeting with each of the operating departments, the following adjustments are being recommended for each of these Departments.

***Administration***- The Town Manager's Office is comprised of the Town Manager, the Assistant Town Manager/HR Director, and the Senior Executive Assistant. The Assistant Town Manager also oversees an HR Generalist, and the Media Communications Coordinator. That position was reassigned to the Town Manager's Office. The Senior Executive Assistant provides support for the Town Manager, the Economic Development Director and manages the Welfare and Human Services Program for the Town.

My observation is that there are entirely too many functions flowing through this office on a day-to-day basis. The Town Manager is the chief administrative officer of the Town and has oversight responsibility for all Town Department Heads. The Town Manager is also the direct liaison to the Select Board through the Chair of the Board. He is responsible for making sure that the direction of the Town is being followed daily and for making mid-course corrections as needed.

The Assistant Town Manager provides operational guidance for many Town departments and has principal responsibility for Human Resources administration in the Town. With the addition of Media and Communications oversight, this is just an additional layer of responsibility that competes with the many important roles assigned to this Office. The fact that no administrative support person is assigned to support this individual who also happens to have responsibility for managing an important social services support program makes no sense to me operationally.

Ideally, there should be two administrative support staff members in the Town Manager's Office to support the Town Manager and the Assistant Town Manager. The Welfare Program





## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

should be offloaded to a new individual, located outside the Town Manager's Office, who can also serve as a social service support mechanism for the entire organization.

As noted in objective one, Human Resources should be managed by a full-time Human Resources Director who would also manage any staff member(s) assigned to the HR Department. The Assistant Town Manager should serve as the unofficial Operations Director for the Town while also having Human Resources, Social Services, Parks and Recreation and Media/Communications as direct reports.

The Senior Executive Assistant should provide full administrative support to the Town Manager, the Assistant Town Manager, and the Select Board (as needed), daily. No other departments should be supported by this position. Moreover, there should be a second administrative support position for this Office to serve as a backup to administration when the Senior Executive Assistant is out of the Office.

To be clear and to fully achieve the goals of this Department's realignment, the Town would need to add the services of a full-time *Human Resources Director*, a full-time or thirty-hour *Social Services Director* and one full-time *Administrative Assistant*.

We recognize that achieving all these recommendations at once is not practical in a tight budget environment. It is certainly acceptable to achieve some of this restructuring as positions become vacant and opportunities to redefine positions present themselves. However, it is important that these recommendations be incorporated into future budget planning when adequate funding is identified.

**Police and Dispatch-** During my interview with the Police Chief and the Deputy Police Chief the case was made that their organization would perform more efficiently if they were to add a third Lieutenant to their rank structure. The third Lieutenant would provide oversight of the Detectives Division, a responsibility that is now shared by the Deputy Police Chief. More importantly, the third Lieutenant would provide a second back up to each of the existing Lieutenants who could fill in as a shift manager whenever one of the other Lieutenants was off duty. This one additional position would provide a solid command structure that provides important layers of supervision. I think this is particularly important in this organization at this time when there has been a large turnover of officers with only a few veteran officers remaining among the ranks. This added level of supervision is an important step towards creating a stable support environment for new officers.

To fully achieve the goals of this realignment, the Town would have to fund a third Lieutenant's salary, but this position would likely be filled within the ranks through the promotion of an existing Sergeant position so that direct change would be incremental. However, the promotion of a Sergeant to a Lieutenant would then create a Sergeant vacancy. The Sergeant vacancy would then need to be filled by a Patrolman. That promotion would ultimately leave a Patrolman's position vacant. To fully achieve this change, the Town would then have to fund one additional Patrolman's position to maintain the current level of Patrol capacity.



## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

Finally, I did want to mention that Dispatch should be evaluated periodically to determine the viability of regionalizing this service. The challenge facing this service is that there are only a limited number of candidates who want to perform these duties. I think the staff who perform this work for Exeter do a great job, but the training requirements and the cost to replace communications systems with state-of-the-art equipment are difficult for any single community to absorb. While there may not be good examples of regional communications in this State at this time, there is a growing level of interest in supporting this service with regional centers on a nationwide level. It does not appear that this is a viable option for Exeter today, but it could be an option in the not-too-distant future.

**Fire, EMS and Health-** The one change that was identified in this Department was the prospect of absorbing the roles of the Building, Plumbing, Electrical and Code Enforcement under the Fire Service umbrella. It was pointed out that this was a model that was recently adopted in Dover, New Hampshire. Early indications are that this new approach has worked well. The Fire Departments organizational structure is already well established and is performing well. They already house the Health Division and by adding **Building Inspection** this would essentially make the Fire Department a one-stop-inspection shop for builders, homeowners, and contractors. The concept also aligns with the notion that inspectional services are a public safety service and this would only serve to reinforce that reality. In discussing this change with the current Building Inspector, Doug Eastman, he was supportive of the change provided that Zoning Enforcement (something that he currently performs) would remain in Planning (or Land Use) as that role is better suited to that Department.

Doug and the Fire Chief agreed that this realignment would not be practical at this time since there is no physical space in the Fire Station to house this added service. They also understand that adding another position to Land Use to absorb the Zoning Enforcement work will also take some time to achieve due to the cost of adding an additional staff member.

**Economic Development** – After meeting with the Economic Development Director on two occasions I believe that this Department should be realigned. The Director, Darren Winham, has done some great work for the Town, so my conclusions are not based on a performance concern. Rather, this change is proposed simply based upon my belief and experience that the function of economic development should be part of a broad-based land use strategy. The danger of not having this alignment is that the cultural values of a community can sometimes become compromised over time. Ideally, a town's land use strategy should encompass such vital interests as protecting land that should be protected, preserving buildings that should be preserved, protecting history that is part of a community's very fiber, developing diverse housing options for the entire spectrum of affordability within the community, all while supporting development projects that are supported by the Town's water and sewer capacity and are designed to help maximize the economic vitality of a community.

As a former Town Planner and leader of many successful economic development projects throughout my career, I have come to believe that economic development as a stand-





## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

alone function does not align with a well-balanced, land use strategy for a community. To offset this concern, I am proposing that Economic Development become part of Land Use and that the **Economic Development Director** report directly to the **Land Use Director**.

To achieve this realignment, the Land Use Department (details discussed below) would have to be formed first so that the Economic Development Director would have someone to report to other than his current supervisor, the Town Manager.

*New Land Use Department* – As noted above, I am recommending that the Town take the functions of Planning, Conservation (Sustainability), Economic Development, Historic Preservation and Zoning Administration and form a new department called Land Use. I would recommend that this new department be led by the Town Planner and that his title be changed to Land Use Director and that he reports directly to the Town Manager. To fully enact this realignment, the Town would have to fund and hire a full-time *Zoning Administrator/Staff Planner*.

*New Department of Finance*- Throughout the course of my meetings with Town Departments, one change became very clear to me from the outset. As I met with the Deputy Tax Collector, the Assessor, the Finance Director including Treasury and Accounting, Purchasing and Information Technology, I immediately saw the need to align all these important financial functions under one department. The new Department of Finance should be led by the Director of Finance who should then report to the Town Manager. Having a Finance Director with oversight over all the town's financial control centers will enable and ensure that the Finance Department always has a comprehensive understanding of the Town's financial position. To achieve this realignment, there are no new positions proposed at this time. This change could be achieved with the support of the Town Manager and all the departments identified as part of this change.

*Department of Public Works*- One relatively minor but important change proposed in this Department is to change the Town Engineer's title and responsibilities to become the Deputy Director of the Department of Public Works. The new Deputy position would still require the credentials for a Town Engineer but would expand the responsibilities for this position to have a more comprehensive understanding of the entire Department. It also provides for a proper succession plan to be developed for the Director of Public Works. This is primarily a title change to the Town Engineers Title with no new responsibilities added to the role.

*Parks and Recreation*- This is a department that provides some very popular programs for the community. Like many of the Town's departments, they operate on a very slim margin of staff support. The growth of their department will depend on their ability to add new programs and services as much of their programs are financially self-supporting. They will eventually need a Senior Program Coordinator as the Baby Boomers continue to age out but who are also much more active as Seniors. The Department has immediate needs in field and facility



## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

maintenance. They are about to take on a new property to manage. The current staffing number of two employees in this area should be doubled to keep fields, facilities and buildings always operating smoothly. To address this change, the Town would need to fund two additional maintenance workers for this Department.

### *Objective Three*

The Third Objective for this Study was to:

*“To perform an analysis of the Town Manager’s Office to see how the team is currently working and to determine if some changes are needed to help improve collaboration and efficiency; both internally and externally. This includes meetings with the Select Board and the staff of the Town Manager’s Office to determine if expectations are being met or if suggestions can be made to help solidify the Executive Team for a more meaningful decision-making process and a more insightful policy development approach.”*

This third objective was more singularly focused on the Executive and Administrative functions of the Town and how some approaches might be adjusted to operate more smoothly and effectively. The following observations were made, and some recommendations are offered to help assist in this area.

### **Observations and Suggestions**

After meeting with the Town Manager’s Office staff and the Select Board, I made a few observations and suggestions for improvement that I hope can be beneficial to the operation of this key administrative team.

*The Value of “Reset” Meetings-* As I mentioned in the previous section, the number of responsibilities placed in this office seems overly intense given the limited number of staff that must oversee these multiple tasks. That being the case, the need for internal communication daily is important so that priorities continue to be addressed. This means that the three principals in the office need to meet almost daily to make sure everything stays coordinated and everyone’s role is clear. This daily “reset” meeting is important to nurture a collegial environment and to solidify the team. The Town Manager should call for this 15–30-minute meeting each morning, or at least three times a week, one at the beginning of the week, one in the middle of the week and one at the end of the week. The purpose of the first meeting is to make sure everyone is clear on what the week’s priorities will be. The middle of the week’s meeting is a progress check, and the end of the week’s meeting is a recap of what was done and a look forward into the next week. Everyone understands that priorities can change daily, and sometimes by the hour, as

## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

unexpected challenges arise. Mid-course corrections are commonplace in most administrative offices. That is why multiple reset meetings are important to make sure everyone continues to stay on task and is rowing in the same direction. To be effective, the Town Manager should have an agenda of no more than five items that need to be reviewed. The Assistant Town Manager and the Senior Executive Assistant can offer their input on where projects are and how the priorities are going to be addressed. The meetings are ideally held in 15 to 20 minutes intervals, maximum 30 minutes. The rules of engagement for these meetings are that there are no phones, no interruptions, *unless there is a true emergency*, and everyone stays focused for this short duration. The number of times this may need to happen can be shortened to twice or even once a week if the team is comfortable with the progress being made for that week. I do not recommend that the meetings be held less than once a week.

*Weekly Operations Meetings*- I strongly recommend that the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager hold weekly Operations Meetings with all Department Heads under the new structure that has been proposed. Those Departments reporting to the Assistant Town Manager are also encouraged to attend this meeting. The meeting should be held on a Wednesday morning starting at a fixed time each week because it is usually after a Select Board Meeting and any item that came up during that Board Meeting that requires operational attention can be discussed at that time. Like the “Reset” Meetings, these meetings should have an agenda but should be limited to no more than 60 minutes. The discussion can be casual but focused on key issues happening that week so that everyone’s time is respected, and important work can get done in short order. The significance of Weekly Operation Meetings is that it builds a team atmosphere, and everyone understands what is going on in Town at the same time. The value of these meetings cannot be understated and can certainly not be captured by simply sending an e-mail. Leaders need time to be with leaders and there is no better opportunity to do that than to sit down in the same room and solve issues together.

*Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager Meetings with the Chair of the Board*-This type of meeting is already happening to a degree when the agenda for the next Board Meeting is discussed and prepared. However, this important discussion should not be limited to just the agenda. The TM and the ATM should take this opportunity to keep the Board Chair updated on key issues and projects happening in Town. This provides the Chair with a comfortable understanding of what is going on in the Town and he/she can be prepared to talk about some of these topics at the next Board Meeting if it is appropriate to do so.

*Town Manager updates with the remaining Board Members*- I strongly recommend that every Town Manager or Town Administrator have periodic meetings with Board Members to make sure that they feel fully informed of what is happening in the Town. The Town Manager can always direct certain issues to the Assistant Town Manager if that is an area of their expertise. I always recommend that Town Managers adopt the motto of “No Surprises” with Board Members and staff so that no one is caught in an uncomfortable moment. This does not



## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

eliminate the possibility of a surprise occurring, but periodic meetings with Board Members certainly diminish the chances of that happening. More importantly, holding periodic meetings with Board members builds a working relationship between the Town Manager and the Board which is always a key element in any successful organization. In addition, it has been my experience that these impromptu discussions can often lead to good problem-solving ideas.

*Periodic meetings at different Town Departments-* Are always a benefit because the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager can witness firsthand what kinds of challenges are being encountered at the operations level. I never suggest interfering with the work being performed in the field, but I do recommend interaction with the workers and observing how the work is being completed. If ideas or suggestions emerge from those field visits, it is always best to talk one-on-one with the Department Head and provide them with that feedback after the visit.

*Proactive Labor Meetings-* As part of my interviews I took the time to meet with the Town's Labor Union leadership to help understand the labor climate in the community. I purposely want to generalize my responses from those meetings so that the candor of our conversations is respected. Some of the key concerns of labor are the inability of the Town to establish a stable work force and to attract new talented individuals to fill vacant positions. I learned a lot from these discussions and some interesting ideas were presented that could be put into practice and help address this concern. I will share these suggestions with the Town Management team.

Another key concern is related to wages in that the Unions believe that the Town's wages are not competitive for attracting and retaining a consistent workforce. I am not able to judge whether the Town's wages are competitive or not since that was not the charge of this study. However, it is notable that the concern of labor with respect to vacant positions is the same as management, so it seems reasonable to me that there is common ground for a discussion on this topic. Perhaps a solution could emerge that works for both management and labor.

Finally, labor relations do not mean only meeting periodically with the Union to talk about a new contract. Rather, labor relations is an ongoing relationship building practice that is used to help solve problems before they emerge.

My suggestion here is to have periodic meetings with labor to talk about issues that are important to both Labor and Management. These meetings can often be very productive where problems can be jointly resolved simply because everyone can weigh in and offer ideas. I note that during the brief time that I spent with the Unions, they offered some sound ideas on how some vacancies could be filled more effectively.

These proactive labor meetings should include the Department Heads who supervise the union employees who are present and should be held at least two to three times a year. These meetings can be used to help to set the agenda for upcoming contract negotiations with both sides having a good understanding of the facts before the discussions begin.

In summary, the purpose of using each of these meeting models is to communicate, communicate, and then communicate some more.





## *Opportunities for Structural and Operational Improvements*

I want to note that some of my meeting suggestions are already happening to some degree through the Town Manager's Office. However, my emphasis for any new or existing meetings is to focus on structure, purpose, and time efficiency. I do have some specific examples of how this can be done, and this can be taught as part of a coaching session that will be conducted following the conclusion of this study.



## Succession Planning: Challenges and Opportunities

The fourth and final objective of this study was to examine succession planning throughout the Town. More specifically, the fourth objective was to:

*“To evaluate the entire organization to determine if long-term succession plans have been established for all key operating departments. For those departments who have identified succession plans, they will be noted and supported with ideas for improvement, if needed. For those who do not have plans, we will present ideas on how such plans should be developed. This will involve meetings with the staff of all Town operating departments to determine if there are opportunities for leadership development and management training for candidates who possess the necessary skill sets (“The Right Stuff”) for leading the organization into the future.”*

This fourth objective was certainly not the least of the four. In fact, it was clearly the most challenging. Some departments, particularly in the areas of Town Clerk and Public Safety, have developed very good succession plans for their departments. Others have some ability to plan but others simply have no ability to plan because there aren't any back-up staff to support such an effort. There are, however, opportunities by using the newly proposed organizational design to further develop some individuals within the organization to be leaders in the future. Those instances will be highlighted as I go through the individual situations for each department. I have taken the liberty of using the newly proposed organizational design to help outline some succession plan possibilities.

**Administration-** The Administration of the Town depends on someone being there who can lead the Town daily. This requires someone who understands how the Town operates and who is familiar with the workings of municipal government. That is why it is critically important to have a succession plan for the Town Manager's Office. I was pleased to see when I arrived that the position of Assistant Town Manager/Human Resources Director had been established in the community. The existence of this position provides an opportunity for someone to support the Town Manager daily, but it also provides a layer of protection for the Town whenever the Town Manager is unable to perform his duties or is simply away on vacation. More important, it provides a natural succession plan for the Town Manager when he/she decides to move on from the position or retires. Having the day-to-day experience of working closely with the Town's leadership provides an important foundation for that person to advance to that higher role whenever the opportunity arises. In Exeter, I do recommend that the Assistant Town Manager begin a training regimen through professional organizations such as the International City Manager's Association (ICMA) or through the Municipal Management Association of New Hampshire (MMANH). The New Hampshire Bureau of Education and Training offers a Certified Public Manager (CPM) Program that is designed specifically to train the next generation of municipal leaders. I recommend that the Town invest in training the Assistant Town Manager with this program so that she has a proper foundation for performing all the important aspects of being a Town Manager.





## *Succession Planning: Challenges and Opportunities*

Regarding other succession considerations in this office, there is only one Executive Assistant for the Town Manager's Office. I noted in a previous section that this is not an ideal practice as there should always be back-up to individuals who perform important administrative roles. I often refer to these gaps as *critical points of failure*. As such, I recommend that the Town add a second administrative support position to this office to not only support the work of both the Town Manager and the Assistant Town Manager but especially to serve as a backup whenever the Executive Assistant is out of the office. This individual should also be trained to learn many of the Executive Assistant's roles and then eventually be prepared to step into that role if the opportunity presents itself on a more permanent basis.

**Finance** - Another important function for the Town is the Department of Finance. Without sound financial management practices being performed in this department, the Town is unable to operate effectively and catastrophic mistakes could result. The recent addition of Corey Stevens adds great stability to this department for the next several years but now is the time to plan for a future replacement. It does not appear that anyone on his existing staff is interested in taking on this role in the future. However, if a vacancy does occur on Corey's staff, that would be the time to hire someone who could be trained over several years to eventually succeed him in the role of Finance Director.

I can personally share that I had a similar experience in my last position as Town Manager. At one point we were looking to create succession plans for all departments but could not come up with a solution for the Finance Department. What eventually happened was that we had a vacancy in a staff accountant role. We looked hard at this position with an underlining goal of hiring an eventual replacement for the Finance Director. We decided on hiring a candidate who was eager to learn and who had excellent skill sets. Shortly after we hired her, we started sending her to multiple training opportunities to learn the role of Finance Director. Over the course of the past four years, she became very adept in her knowledge of municipal finance. Earlier this year, that candidate was elevated to the role of Finance Director in that community. In short, if there is not an opportunity for a candidate to rise through the organization currently, the plan should be to focus on that replacement as part of the next vacancy in the office. This same approach should be applied to any of the staff level positions in the department. A good practice is to hire well at the lower levels of the organization and then train the individuals to aspire to higher positions in the organization. If that does not become apparent in the first few years of experience with that candidate, then the Town should consider if that hire was in the best long-term interests of the community.

**Public Works** - This is one of the biggest concerns that I see in both the long and short term for the Town. The Town needs to prioritize the hiring of a Director of Public Works immediately. Having this vacancy linger for so long is not good for morale in the Department. The Acting Director is doing as well as he can, but he was not hired to perform this role for the long term. Filling the Director's role will then allow the Department to prioritize the filling of several other vacancies in the Department. This will require the development of a hiring strategy that will be unique for this Department, but that strategy cannot be developed without the input of that



## *Succession Planning: Challenges and Opportunities*

organization. The old saying, “It starts at the top” holds true in this instance.

**Police and Fire Department** - Public Safety Departments do a very good job of creating rank structures that involve greater responsibility with each promotion. This means that if there is a vacancy at the top, there are almost always candidates who are trained and who can fill these roles from within the ranks of the departments. The only time that this does not work is when the leaders of the Department have not done a good job of promoting and training the right candidates for leadership roles. That is certainly not the case for Exeter in their Police or Fire Departments. The Town has done a very good job of selecting strong candidates for their second-in-command roles. This should make the transition process very smooth if either one of the Chiefs decides to leave the organization.

**Building Inspection** - Another critical function that has no succession plan in place is that of the Building Inspector. While there are no immediate plans to replace the current inspector, the Town needs to start a discussion now about how this position will be replaced while the current Inspector is in place. This starts with an understanding of the amount of time the Town needs to replace Doug if he plans to step down. An understanding of this time frame will allow the Town to plan for an orderly transition. This requires an understanding of the licensing requirements for an inspector and how much time it takes to acquire those licenses.

Given that there are no Assistant Inspectors, the Town needs to consider the possibility of hiring a part-time inspector who has the proper licenses and who could eventually serve as a viable replacement candidate. Building Inspectors are hard to find because many of the candidates who would normally serve in these roles come from the building trades. The challenge is that workers in the trades are also limited in numbers and most of them are already earning very good wages. As such, attracting candidates is very difficult.

The one opportunity that could emerge is that builders will sometimes grow restless with the building business and the headaches that go along with it. Under those conditions, a candidate may emerge who wants to explore a career change. They could be looking for a career that provides good benefits such as a pension and health insurance, along with a reasonable work schedule. I would recommend sitting with Doug and allowing him the opportunity to discuss his plans for transition and to determine if he knows of builders who may be interested in exploring the scenario I just described. The same situation holds true for the Assistant Code Enforcement Officer. Understanding the window of time for when this position will transition provides the Town with the ability to plan for the change. However, once that window of time is framed, the Town needs to act swiftly and develop a realistic transition plan.

**Land Use and Economic Development** - The next area of concern is succession plans for the Town Planner/Land Use Director and the Economic Development Director. While both positions are currently filled with incumbents who enjoy their current roles and have not indicated any possibility of leaving the organization at any time soon, that does not mean that succession



## *Succession Planning: Challenges and Opportunities*

planning for each of these positions should not be discussed and put in place. Due to the unique nature of these roles, it does not appear that there are any viable internal candidates for this work now. If the Town decides to add a Staff Planner/Zoning Administrator, that person may be a possible candidate to replace the Town Planner/Land Use Director if the timing is aligned with a vacancy in that role. With respect to the Economic Development Director, that position would likely require recruitment to refill the role. However, if the Director provided some lead time to the Town in determining when he was planning to leave, that would create a more desirable transition for the Town. Communication relating to transitions in any organization is a critical element of a sound succession planning process.

**Town Clerk** - The Town Clerk's Office is another one of those offices that has a built-in mechanism for replacement. While this is an elected position, the Town Clerk has been training her staff to understand the role and potentially be a candidate for Town Clerk. If the current Town Clerk decides to step down from her role, one of her three Assistants are already trained and one of them likely will run for the position.

**Parks and Recreation** - Parks and Recreation have an organizational chart that has a viable option for replacing the Director of the Department if that person ever decided to go somewhere else or retire from the Town. However, and like the Assistant Town Manager's development program, the Assistant Parks and Recreation Director should also be attending training sessions now and should be developing the skills needed to perform the work of a director. That training should be on-going and occurring as soon as possible.

**Social Services and Human Resources** - With respect to these two "new" positions, there are clearly no plans to replace these positions yet. However, what is important is that succession planning should be an important consideration of the developmental steps for both new positions.

### **Developing Succession Binders**

One final consideration that I encourage all organizations to do is develop "Succession Binders". A Succession Binder is a collection of all the important tasks, contacts and daily responsibilities that are performed by each position in the Town. We used to refer to these Binders in one of my previous communities as "Truck Binders". The reason for the acronym is that in case any member of the staff was to leave suddenly or fictiously get "hit by a truck", the person who would step into the role to replace that person would have a guide/manual of all the key functions and tasks for that position. Succession Binders almost function as *owner's manual* for each role.

I am happy to provide examples of this work as part of the follow-up training to this study.



## Next Steps

The next important discussion that follows a study of this nature is to determine what plans are viable now, what plans should be phased in over time, and what plans are longer-term or not viable at all. Obviously adding any new positions requires budget planning and support from the Town and its voters.

The study does recommend that several positions be added to the Town's operations so that there is adequate backup and support for town services. Other positions have been recommended for sound operational practice and structure. There are also some title changes and expanded work responsibilities that will have to be considered for certain positions as well.

The list of new positions that have been identified throughout the study as possible additions to the staff include the following:

*Administration-* (1) Full-time, Administrative Assistant

*Human Resources-* (1) Full-time, Human Resources Director

*Social Services-* (1) Full-time or thirty-hour Social Worker/Director

*Parks and Recreation* (2) Maintenance Workers, (1) Senior Programs Manager

*Police-* (1) Lieutenant who would be promoted from within the ranks of Sergeant. This promotion would create a vacancy at the rank of Sergeant. The promotion of a Patrolman to fill the rank of Sergeant would create a vacancy in Patrol. The net effect of creating a new Lieutenant Rank would require the addition of one Patrolman and some incremental funding for the new Lieutenant.

*Land Use-* (1) Zoning Administrator/Staff Planner

*Building Inspection-* (1) Part-time Inspector. The primary reason for this recommendation is to help provide a path for succession for the current Building Inspector. Having someone who understands the local systems and practices in Exeter will certainly help if a transition were to occur.

We fully recognize that all these changes cannot be financially supported at once. However, this document should be viewed as a plan for transition. We acknowledge that plans are subject to change and affordability by the Town.

Enacting the organizational changes and the priority for these changes is something that would have to be determined by the Town following a meeting with the Select Board and the Town Manager. These proposed changes should also be reviewed with the Town's Attorney to determine if any legal steps should be observed to make sure that they are enacted properly. Our firm is prepared to assist with this effort as you deem necessary.



# Proposed Organization Chart

