

# Town of Washington, New Hampshire

## Master Plan 2015

### 3. COMMUNITY SERVICES and FACILITIES

#### INTRODUCTION

The Town of Washington provides a range of services for its residents and property owners that includes emergency services (i.e., police and fire/rescue protection), public works (i.e., road maintenance and solid waste disposal/recycling), municipal governance and administration, education and social services. Many of these services require facilities either for operations or storage of equipment and records. The following summarizes existing facilities in the Town and public input regarding the quality of services. We also review existing deficiencies and suggested enhancements.

Generally, the size of a community dictates the level of services that the municipal government needs to provide. Community planning necessarily includes evaluating the capacity and capabilities of the facilities and services available and working to anticipate future demands and to manage existing facilities. At present, Washington provides services in a manner that adequately meets the needs of residents and landowners. However, there are deficiencies, especially in relation to some of our facilities. There clearly exists a need for improvements to existing facilities to improve safety for personnel and property, preserve the historical significance and provide long-term integrity of town buildings. It should be a priority for the municipal government to address these needs.

#### OVERVIEW OF CURRENT SITUATION:

In addition to information collected as part of the Master Plan Update process, this chapter also considers information contained in the Municipal Buildings and Space Needs Task Force Report (2010) and the Planning Board's Capital Improvement Plan Subcommittee Report (2012). These reports have extensive information relating to needs analysis of the various Town facilities and have contributed much to the planning that has been done. They are available on the Town's website.

#### Municipal Governance and Administration

***Governance/Administration:*** The Board of Selectmen manages the day-to-day work of the town, while major decisions affecting the town are made at each year's annual Town Meeting. Other administrative tasks are handled by the Town Clerk, the Tax Collector, the Board of Adjustment and the Planning Board. While an elected Board of Assessors once managed property assessment, this town management function is now subcontracted to

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M&N Assessing. The Town administration also includes a Welfare Department and a Health Officer, each with staff hired by the Select Board.

Offices for Town administrators are located in the Town Hall/Meetinghouse, though town-wide meetings are regularly held at Camp Morgan Lodge. The Meetinghouse was built in 1789 and has been in continuous use since that date. Since passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the second floor of the Meetinghouse has not been used for public meetings because it is not handicapped accessible. A study of the building structure has noted that the foundation and under-footings need improvement and that wiring and plumbing need to be upgraded. In addition, heat loss could be contained through installation of insulation and work on the windows (storm windows/window rehab). There is a need for appropriately ventilated/dehumidified space for storage of town records. A plan for doing this renovation work, adding new stairways and an elevator to the rear of the building, providing ADA access and bathrooms, has been proposed but not adopted at Town meetings in 2013, 2014 and 2015.

#### Emergency Services

**Fire and Rescue:** The Washington Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department operates under the direction of an elected Fire Chief. Fire is staffed by about 25 volunteers, while Rescue has about 12 staff members and its own Rescue Captain. Rescue members are expected to respond to in-town fire calls, and Fire members assist Rescue in helping to move patients from their residences and/or in driving the ambulance. Fire responds to an average of 30 calls a year, while Rescue's average call number is 100 calls per year. Both services rely on mutual aid for assistance and also provide mutual aid, when needed, to the towns of Lempster, Hillsboro, Windsor and Bradford, among others. Rescue, within recent years, has lost several long-time members and has been seeking ways to replace them, adding new members who are available to respond to daytime and weekend calls. The squad has asked the Town (at Town Meeting) and the Selectmen to start thinking about hiring rescue staff who would be available at times when volunteers are not. Emergency dispatch for both Fire and Rescue calls is currently under contract with the Hillsboro Police Department.

Fire and Rescue have seven vehicles: three engines, two tankers, a forestry truck, a utility vehicle, and an ambulance. In addition they have a range of rescue equipment for use in water and ice rescue as well as for search operations and wildfire control. These vehicles and equipment as well as offices and meeting space for Fire and Rescue are housed in the Washington Center Station and the East Washington Fire Station. The Center Station was

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built in 1966 on land initially leased but now owned by the Town. The East Washington Station is on privately owned land with no space for expansion. (The Town has purchased a parcel of land in East Washington for the eventual construction of an expanded facility.) Both buildings have significant deficiencies and do not have space for additional or larger vehicles and equipment for Fire and Rescue. The Center Station does not meet ADA requirements, so it cannot be used for training for groups that might include individuals who are not Washington Fire/Rescue members. A Safety Complex Committee met during recent years and in both 2014 and 2015 presented recommendations for construction of a new facility to replace the Center Station. The current plan includes keeping the old building for storage and other uses. As with the Meetinghouse, these plans were rejected by the voters at the 2014 and 2015 Town meetings.

**Emergency Management:** The Washington Emergency Management Team is comprised of an Emergency Management Director appointed by the Board of Selectmen and a deputy chosen by the Director and approved of by the Selectmen. All other department heads, including the Chair of the Select Board, facilitate the delivery of emergency response to deal with disasters that affect the Town and surrounding communities. It operates under a comprehensive Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP) and is housed in the Center Station, which becomes the Emergency Operations Center when the plan is activated. In addition, The Emergency Management Team updates and utilizes a comprehensive Hazard Mitigation Plan to identify and target specific weather and man hazards. The plan is used for grant funding to mitigate these hazards. Both plans were updated in 2015.

Emergency Management does not have any dedicated space for operations or storage. This is one of the space requirements that have been included in the Safety Complex plans.

**Police:** The Washington Police Department has a staff of four (one full-time chief and three part-time officers). They handle all protection and safety issues for the Town—from traffic violations to animal control. Two of the officers are also EMTs on the Rescue Squad and two are also part of the Fire Department. A proportion of each officer's shift time is spent on patrol within the town, but officers must also go to Hillsboro if or when they need to place a person in custody, to Newport if they are required to attend a court hearing or to Swanzey for animal control placement. Washington Police has mutual aid agreements with all neighboring towns and is a signatory to an extended authority agreement encompassing all municipal agencies in Sullivan County. Dispatching is handled through an agreement with the Hillsboro Police Department.

The Town has one police cruiser. It is garaged in the Old Highway Garage on Halfmoon Pond Road at night and in winter months, but that facility is not heated. The officers operate out of

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the Old School House in the center of Town, next to the Meetinghouse. The cruiser is equipped with a digital radio and a computer for recording call information/reports. The officers share three portable radios. The Old School House does not meet ADA code, nor is it compliant with regulations for juvenile processing, nor is it in keeping with industry best practices for current police stations (in terms of both privacy and safety concerns). In 2014, the Safety Complex Committee had recommended that Police be part of the proposed new building, which would have allowed for heated garage space for the cruiser as well as secure areas for police equipment, records, and activities. In 2015 police facility needs were not considered in the revised plans for the Safety Complex. Addressing these issues is a priority for the Town.

#### **Public Works**

The Public Works Department is responsible for maintenance and repair of all town roads and bridges and for repair, winter maintenance and work for other Town departments, as well as for the operation of the Washington Transfer Station. Washington has a director of Public Works, appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The department employs four full-time staff and several part-time plow and wing operators, as well as a Transfer Station manager and attendants.

Public Works operates out of a newer building located on the same property as the Transfer Station and Recycling Center. This facility is adequate at this time but will need additional covered storage in the foreseeable future. The current Transfer Station and Recycling Center, established in 1996, is located on Rte. 31 about two miles southeast of the center of Town. The Old Highway Garage on Halfmoon Pond Road is used for off-season equipment storage and to garage the police cruiser. This building is not heated and has moisture problems; there is a plan in place to remedy that issue.

**Highway, Road and Bridge Maintenance:** Washington maintains approximately 12 miles of paved road and 30 miles of dirt roads. These are the Town's only transportation system—there is no public transportation of any nature (train, boat, bus or taxi), nor has there been since the stagecoach era. During the 1800s more than 50 miles of Town roads reached out from the main thoroughfare—the Second New Hampshire Turnpike (now Route 31), but by the middle of the century, farming and local industry began a decline, reducing the need for road maintenance. During the 1920s and 1930s several miles of Town roads were officially discontinued. By 1958, less than half of the original mileage was maintained in a condition suitable for motorized travel. The “old” roads, class VI Highways, continue to be used for recreational purposes and are an essential part of a regional system of snowmobile trails.

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A vote of the Selectmen designated all Class VI Highways as Fire Lanes enabling the Public Works Department to do minimal maintenance for forest fire protection.

Maps in the Town Hall show Town roads and their classifications. Three roads are State maintained: a) ½ mile of the road from E. Washington into Bradford, b) a one-mile Class 3 recreational road in Pillsbury State Park and c) approximately 12 miles of Route 31, the main artery through Town. Two of these roads are paved, while the one in Pillsbury State Park has a gravel surface. The Town maintains four paved Class 5 roads, totaling about 12 miles: a) East Washington Road (5.4 miles), b) Lempster Mountain Road (2.5 miles), c) Faxon Hill Road (3 miles) and d) Washington Drive (1.7 miles). Most of these roads were built on existing cart paths and were never engineered to carry the traffic counts and loads of today's modern vehicles. Significant reconstruction has been completed on Lempster Mountain Road; however, the rest of the paved roads are in serious need of rehabilitation.

The Town also maintains about 34 miles of gravel or dirt Class 5 roads. Some of these roads are heavily used, especially during the summer when many seasonal residents live in Washington. There are also roads that are privately maintained, e.g., those in the Ashuelot Pond development; these also have increased traffic during the summer.

Public Works is also responsible for the care and maintenance of nine bridges. Many of these bridges, dating from the 1800s or early 1900s, were built with whatever stone and timber was available at the time. Most were constructed on hand-laid stone abutments and have inadequate width and load-bearing capacities for today's traffic. The highway department (Public Works) has replaced or rehabilitated seven of the bridges and has plans in place to replace or repair the remaining two red-listed structures.

***Solid Waste Disposal:*** This facility serves the Town of Washington and Stoddard residents on the eastern side of Highland Lake and accepts both private and business generated recyclables and solid waste. These are deposited into roll-off containers for transportation to a Materials Recovery Facility or marketer. Household waste is compacted on site and transferred to an approved disposal facility in Berlin, NH. Glass, metal and plastic containers, as well as paper, cardboard, tires, old appliances and construction or demolition waste are all collected for recycling. Hazardous wastes are collected on designated dates for proper disposal. Brush and garden waste are also collected and disposed of separately. The facility is well run and appears to be functioning adequately, although some categories of materials may be approaching a critical point because of the expense or inconvenience of disposing of them. The sale of recycled materials is deposited into a trust fund and used for the replacement of equipment for the Recycling Center. Demolition and construction debris

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is accepted, and a fee is charged for its transportation and disposal. The scale fees are deposited into the general fund and used to offset the cost of operating the facility.

#### Education

Washington is part of School District (SAU) 34, comprising the towns of Hillsboro, Deering, Windsor and Washington. In 2001 the Duncan-Jenkins Trust was created and endowed by the last will and testament of Sally E. Jenkins of East Washington. The purpose of the trust is to benefit the schools, staff and students of the Washington and Hillsboro-Deering schools by adding enrichment above and beyond what taxpayers are expected to finance. It provides scholarships for students entering college and grants for a variety of supplemental programs for student and teacher enrichment.

While at one point in the past Washington had as many as 10 schools, today it has only three school buildings. One of those, in East Washington, is a museum owned and run by the Washington Historical Society. A second of the old schools, in the center of Town, was in use until the 1990s, and is now the Police station. The third, Washington Elementary School, is a modern facility, built in 1992 and enlarged in 2000. It currently serves preschool through fifth grade students. The school contains classrooms, a large recreation and assembly hall, a computer room, cafeteria facilities, a nurse's room, special needs space and office space. It is located on Town land that was part of the Camp Morgan property.

Students in grades six through 12 attend the Hillsboro-Deering Middle and High Schools, for which the Town pays both tuition and transportation costs. In 2003-2004 an independent study was done on the advisability of returning the sixth grade students to Washington rather than busing them to Hillsboro, but a Town vote showed a sizable majority favored the continuance of the out-of-town arrangement.

#### Library Services

The Shedd Free Library is on N. Main Street in the Town Center. It was founded in 1869 from a bequest in the will of Sarah Shedd, who worked in the mills in Lowell, MA, and left her life savings and a few books to start the library. The library itself is a small brick building, constructed in 1881 with funds donated by Luman T. Jefts. The building does not meet ADA standards, but the library provides services to individuals who cannot access the site (outreach/home delivery). Because it is located on a small lot, there is no way to expand

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library space or make the building ADA accessible. The parking area for the library is across the street at a distance that is also beyond ADA requirements.

The library has more than 1,000 registered patrons and a “Friends of the Library” organization that sponsors and/or funds events to promote reading and library use. Services the Library provides to town residents include an up-to-date collection of current bestsellers, access to other books through the State’s interlibrary loan service, movies in both DVD and VHS format, audio books on CD, photocopying and fax services, public access computers with DSL internet, and free Wi-Fi, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It also sponsors a number of special programs: story-time for infants, toddlers and preschoolers; monthly exhibits of art, crafts or collectibles, book club discussions, summer story-time at Camp Morgan, gifts of books to children at Christmas and to new babies in town. The Town Archives are housed in the Library basement. If they could be moved to a renovated Town Hall/Meetinghouse, this would free up that space for Library use.

#### **Camp Morgan Lodge and Beach**

The Camp Morgan property was purchased by the Town in 1980 and the Lodge is used for public meetings, including the annual Town Meeting, town events and private events sponsored by town organizations or by individual town residents. More information about this facility can be found in the Recreation Chapter.

#### **Town Website and Communication**

**Website:** The Town has an official website – [www.washingtonnh.org](http://www.washingtonnh.org) – that is used for information and document sharing, including minutes of committee meetings and announcement of events. The website was started in 2005 when the Town realized it needed a single site that could provide full-time access to Town information. Police Chief Steve Marshall created the original website. It is managed today by the firm Virtual Towns & Schools; two local webmasters post news and information and keep the site current. All Town services are represented, each with its own web page. You can subscribe to e-news from the Select Board, the Library or the Police through the website, and you can also sign up to receive the Select Board’s minutes by e-mail. The website has improved Town communications and made it easier to find Town documents and information.

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**Nixle:** Nixle is a text/e-mail/webserver service that provides weather alerts, road closings, notices of crime trends, other emergency information and routine notices and town announcements. You must sign up on the Town website to receive this service.

**Other Town Communication:** Local Washington and area town news and announcements are reported in two Hillsboro-based weekly newspapers: *The Villager* and *The Messenger*. At the 2015 Town Meeting, residents voted to have an informational sign installed at the Transfer Station along Rte. 31 for announcement of Town events.

**Cell Phone Service:** Because there is only one cell tower in Washington (providing AT&T coverage), cell service is spotty to nonexistent in most parts of town if you subscribe to a different cell company. Four more cell service providers can be accommodated on this tower in the future. More information on cell, broadband and internet services can be found in the Utilities Chapter.



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#### SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY INPUT:

Through the **Community Survey**, the following input was received relative to Community Services and Facilities:

#### SERVICES

**Quality of Town Services** rated by more than 50% of the respondents as Excellent or Very Good

Solid Waste Disposal & Recycling	68% Excellent – Very Good
Highway Maintenance	62% Excellent – Very Good
Town Clerk	61% Excellent – Very Good
Tax Collector	56% Excellent – Very Good
Police Department	54% Excellent – Very Good
Rescue	51% Excellent – Very Good

**Note:** Town Communication and Information Sharing was the only service that received a rating of Fair or Poor by at least 20% of respondents.

**Usage of Town Services** was high within the last five years for the following services:

Tax Collector	89%
Solid Waste Disposal & Recycling	88%
Town Clerk	87%
Website	81%
Highway Maintenance	71%
Police Department	70%

#### Cost of Town Services

Most respondents felt we should continue to spend the SAME for town services.

Services that 15% or more of respondents indicated we should spend MORE included:

Rescue Services	25%
Highway Maintenance	22%
Fire Services	19%
Library	16%

**Note:** NO area was identified by more than 15% of respondents indicating we should spend LESS.

#### Future Services for Consideration or Not

- Transportation assistance for residents-in-need (medical visits, shopping, etc.): 69% of respondents **agreed** the town should investigate.
- Animal control officer: 74% of respondents **disagreed** that the town should consider hiring an animal control officer.

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#### FACILITIES

Town facilities rated by 40% or more respondents as being in Very Good or Excellent condition included:

Transfer Station	56% Excellent – Very Good
Camp Morgan Beach Area & Recreational Facilities	49% Excellent – Very Good
Camp Morgan Lodge	42% Excellent – Very Good
Washington Elementary School	42% Excellent – Very Good
Public Works Garage	40% Excellent – Very Good
Library	40% Excellent – Very Good

Town facilities rated as Most Important for improvement included:

Fire & Rescue Station	25%
Town Office/Meetinghouse	21%
Police Station	19%

94% of respondents agreed the Town offices should remain at the Meetinghouse.

The **Community Workshop** generated the following strengths/weaknesses/opportunities relative to Community Services and Facilities in the various breakout groups:

**STRENGTHS:** Fire and Rescue squad-- response time and ability have saved lives; our strong road crew/road plowing, the recycling crew; WES is equipped for growth and our students excel; great services onsite for townspeople at Town Hall; the Town web site; the library (great access to other libraries); sense of community; summer reading; focal point within town and a lot of social apps; Camp Morgan (good facilities, summer program, great beach, summer employment for youth).

**WEAKNESSES:** Services for families with young children seem limited; Meetinghouse (may be reaching limits, wasn't built for technology/internet); the library is small and has limited access for folks with physical limitations; small space for police facility- needs upgrade of building (is space appropriate for safety and confidentiality?; same applies for rescue and fire); cell and internet service needs to be improved; lack of services to support seniors (a coordinated network of transportation, etc.); all services in town cannot be volunteer- we must judge which services need to be paid for.

**OPPORTUNITIES:** Improvement in Fire and Rescue facility (update as needed); services and facilities need to be planned up front to respond to changes anticipated 10 years hence, so infrastructure will be appropriate.

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The **Community Workshop** voting on top priorities for the town resulted in five of the top 10 items having an impact on Community Services and Facilities:

- Ranked #1- Improved cell phone service (\*was merged with Economic Development item for voting).
- Ranked #2 – Local newsletter and community website for marketing social events and business; better communication and publicity.
- Tied for #4- Improvement of important government facilities (Fire & Rescue, Meetinghouse and Police).
- Tied for #4 - Appropriate infrastructure (i.e. roads, internet, cell phone service, etc.) and energy efficiency.
- Ranked #7- Improve/Establish in-town paramedical services.
- Ranked #10- Maintenance of our quality of life. Maintain services to protect life and property.

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#### GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Goal A:** Provide adequate municipal governance and administrative services and facilities that meet the needs of the Town's current population and future growth.

**Recommendations:**

1. Ensure that administrative services used often by the public, such as Tax Collector, Town Clerk and Welfare, continue to be conveniently available and easily accessible.
2. Encourage all Town boards, commissions and committees (i.e., Select, Planning, Assessor, Adjustment, Parks and Recreation, Conservation, Health, etc.) to conduct business transparently, encourage public input, publish minutes in a timely manner and work collaboratively for the betterment of the Town.
3. Continue the planning and design efforts for necessary upgrades to the Town Hall/Meetinghouse for town offices and storage; determine the critical success factors for ensuring public support of the project at Town Meeting.
4. Continue and expand private fundraising to support Meetinghouse restoration and accessibility.
5. Determine whether additional services are needed for families with young children and/or seniors and investigate transportation assistance for residents in-need.
6. Ensure funding level of town services is adequate to meet the technological changes that provide more secure and efficient business conduct (software, computers, networks, servers, printers, wifi, large screens, etc.).

**Goal B:** Provide adequate public safety through the Police, Fire and Rescue Departments' services and facilities that meets the needs of the Town's current population and future growth.

**Recommendations:**

1. Emphasize the Capital Improvements Program and reserve funds for the replacement and addition of police, fire and rescue equipment and vehicles.
2. Continue the planning and design efforts for a new safety complex or campus at the Center Station location that meets the current and future needs for adequate public safety; determine the critical success factors for ensuring public support of the project at Town Meeting.
3. Continue and expand private fundraising to support Police, Fire and Rescue building needs and ancillary activities.
4. Ensure appropriate funding level of these departments to ensure a qualified/trained level of volunteer and professional providers; investigate paid staff to fill potential gaps in volunteer resources.
5. Investigate the feasibility of in-town paramedical services.
6. Refer to Goals and Recommendations in the Hazards and Emergency Planning Chapter.

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**Goal C:** Provide for safe and efficient movement of traffic within the Town and appropriate emergency access to remote locations.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continue long-term plans to improve any Town roads that do not currently meet the Town road standards to enhance safety and traffic flow.
2. Continue with the Capital Improvement Program to plan and reserve funds for bridge, culvert and road maintenance/upgrades; perform maintenance and replacement as needed and planned.
3. Similarly, use the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to plan and reserve funds for heavy equipment needed for road maintenance.
4. Preserve the class VI roads for emergency access to remote locations for fire and safety protection and for public recreation; enforce existing vehicular ordinances for use of these roads during mud season to preserve them.
5. Continue with CIP plans for a cold-storage addition to the Public Works garage to provide better storage for equipment currently stored outside under tarps.
6. Remedy moisture issue at the old Highway Garage on Halfmoon Pond Road in order to better preserve the equipment stored there.

**Goal D:** Manage the solid waste recycling and disposal center to meet the needs of a Town population that doubles during the summer season and is projected to grow another 28% in the next two decades.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continue to deposit scale revenues into the Recycling Equipment Trust Fund to plan and reserve funds necessary for upgrades to the transfer station such as additional enclosed storage for miscellaneous recyclables (tires, batteries, propane, fluorescent bulbs, etc.) that can be accessible by mechanized equipment/forklift.
2. Continue to partner with the Regional Planning Commission for hazardous waste disposal opportunities.
3. Continue to promote public awareness of the practical necessity of a comprehensive solid waste management program that protects human health and the environment and encourage household composting to reduce solid waste.
4. Investigate the pros and cons of alternative solid waste programs such as “pay as you throw” (PAYT) and/or “single stream” to understand the risks and/or results of such programs.

**Goal E:** Provide educational opportunities that meet or exceed state standards in an environment conducive to high scholastic achievement.

**Recommendations:**

1. Provide liaison to the School Board to ensure continual provision of quality facilities.
2. Encourage the School Board to consider alternatives to Hillsboro-Deering for middle and high school students.
3. Continue and expand opportunities for public involvement in Washington Elementary School activities, particularly activities that provide mentorship to students.

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**Goal F:** Provide library services and facilities that appeal to all age segments and interests of the community.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continue providing the excellent variety of activities and services currently offered.
2. Relocate the Town's archives out of the Library basement to provide more library storage space.
3. Expand the "marketing" of the Library special events, exhibits and services through various media and in conjunction with other Town organizations/activities.

**Goal G:** Provide a comprehensive Town website and ensure communication of Town information and events.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continue to fund the efforts to maintain the Town's website and provide notification of Town activities, events and emergency notifications; also continue to fund Nixle, the community alert service.
2. Encourage all Town boards and committees to submit all announcements and minutes of public meetings for posting on the Town's website and ensure that the website serves as an up-to-date repository of Town ordinances, regulations and permit applications.
3. Encourage the use of the new community information sign at the Transfer Station for announcement of Town events.
4. Consider a part-time communications position to promote the Town's rich history, cultural events, Town artisans and both Town and school current events through a variety of media and channels.