

Report Of The Cambridge Municipal Structure Task Force

Background

The Town of Cambridge is governed by three elected members of the Selectboard. Within the Town there are two chartered Villages, the Village of Cambridge and the Village of Jeffersonville. Each of the Villages is governed by an elected Board of Trustee, three Trustees for Cambridge Village and five Trustees for the Village of Jeffersonville. The attached maps set forth the boundaries of each Village within the Town of Cambridge. *See Attachment A.*

The Cambridge Village Trustees are primarily responsible for the Cambridge Village Water System and other publicly owned infrastructure within Cambridge Village other than roads. The Jeffersonville Village Trustees are primarily responsible for the Jeffersonville Village Water and Sewer systems, sidewalks and recreational property like Brewster River Park. Although located within Jeffersonville Village, the Town owns the Municipal Garage, Town Hall (site of the U.S. Post Office and Town Offices), Fire Station, Rescue Building and various parcels of land including the “ball fields” contiguous to Cambridge Elementary School. All streets and roads are the responsibility of either the Town of Cambridge or the State of Vermont.

One of the four goals identified during the Cambridge Community Visit sessions was to evaluate our municipal structure of governance (excluding schools) and to consider if there are duplications, inefficiencies, or more unified ways to provide municipal functions and enable communications.¹ At the community-wide breakout session orchestrated by the Vermont Council on Rural Development, the individuals most interested in working on this goal decided to move forward with the following action steps:

- I. Identify and describe the responsibilities of and resources available to each municipality.
- II. Identify and evaluate existing inter-municipal and public communication channels utilized by each municipality.
- III. Analyze and assess our current municipal governance structure.
- IV. Consider how other communities have addressed similar issues/opportunities.
- V. Report out our findings and recommendations.

¹ A copy of the report may be accessed at <http://vtrural.org/programs/community-visits/reports> .

I. Identify And Describe The Responsibilities Of And Resources Available To Each Municipality.

The following information was developed during through late 2014 to early 2015 with input from all three municipal entities. Some of the information may be incorrect or incomplete, but represents a best attempt to delineate jurisdiction and human resources.

Color codes describe the jurisdictional reach of each function.

Numbers describe how many positions (volunteer or paid) are engaged in that function.

Please note that the Cambridge Town Selectboard has variable jurisdiction depending upon the given activity or role.

Elected Officials	Cambridge Town	Cambridge Village	Jeffersonville Village
Selectboard/Trustees	Selectboard, 3	Trustees, 3	Trustees, 5
Agent to convey real estate	1		
Agent to Prosecute & Defend	1		
Auditors	3	1	1
Board of Civil Authority: JPs, SB & Clerk	13		
Cemetery Directors	2	None	None
CES Directors	5		
Clerk	Clerk-Treas. 1	1	1
Constable	1		
Grand Juror	1		
Justices of the Peace	9		
Library Trustees	4		
Listers	3		
LUHS Directors	3		
Tax Collector	1	1	1
Treasurer	Clerk-Treas. 1	1	1
Trustee of Public Funds	1		
Appointed Officials	Cambridge Town	Cambridge Village	Jeffersonville Village
Assistant Clerk	2		1
Conservation Commission	8		
Development Review Board/ Board of Adjustment	DRB, 7		BoA, 5
DRB/BOA Admin Officer	1		1

Economic Development Advisory Committee	#		
Emergency Management Director	1		
Fence Viewers	2		
Finance Committee	7	None	None
Fire Warden	1		
Flood Hazard Permit Review Board	3		3
Health Officer	1		
Lamoille County Planning Commission Representatives	2	1	1
Lumber Inspector	1		
Other Maintenance Staff	Contract	Contract	Contract
Planning Commission	7		7
Recreation Board	7		
Road Foreman	1		
Road Maintenance Crew	5		
Service officer	1		
Tree Warden	1		
Water/Sewer System Staff	None	1	1
Infrastructure & Services	Cambridge Town	Cambridge Village	Jeffersonville Village
Electricity Accounts	Yes	Yes	Yes
Municipally-managed Cemeteries	Yes	None	None
Offices	Yes	None	Yes
Parks/Forests	Yes	Yes	Yes
Public Sewer System	None	None	Yes
Public Water System	None	Yes	Yes
Sidewalks	None	Yes	Yes
Fire Department buildings, equipment and property	Owned		
Cambridge Rescue buildings and property	Owned		
Public Safety (Policing)	Contract		

Notes on Outliers:

Cambridge Elementary School and Lamoille Union Schools Board members are locally-elected, jurisdiction over these institutions falls to the Lamoille North Supervisory School District.

Cambridge Fire Department is a non-profit volunteer organization serving Cambridge Town, including both Villages and Fletcher Town. The buildings and equipment are owned by the Town of Cambridge and annual allocations are made by the Town.

Cambridge Rescue Squad is a non-profit volunteer organization providing emergency medical services for the Town, including both Villages and Fletcher Town. Squad buildings & property are owned by the Town of Cambridge.

Cambridge-Jeffersonville Infrastructure Report:

In 2012 the Town of Cambridge and Village of Jeffersonville worked with the Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC) to develop a community infrastructure report. This report provides valuable information that supplements the information available here. The report is available at the LCPC website here:

http://www.lamoillecounty.govoffice.com/vertical/sites/%7B3C01460C-7F49-40F5-B243-0CA7924F23AF%7D/uploads/Final_Infrastructure_Report.pdf

Position Descriptions:

The descriptions below are provided using a mix of local and Vermont Statute definitions and information available at the Vermont League of Cities and Towns website. These descriptions are generalized and not intended to be completely representative of the full scope of any position. For additional information, we recommend referencing the Vermont Statutes Online which can be found here: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/>
<http://www.vlct.org/league-resources/handbooks-online/>

Elected Officials

- **Selectboard/Trustees-** General supervision of the affairs of the town and shall cause to be performed all duties required of towns and town school districts not committed by law to the care of any particular officer.
- **Agent to Convey Real Estate-** The decision to convey municipal property rests with the community and the Selectboard. The Agent's responsibility is limited to executing deeds on behalf of the municipality.
- **Agent to Prosecute and Defend-** The decision to prosecute and defend lawsuits rests with the Select Board. The Agent's responsibility is limited to assisting the Select Board/Trustees in connection with a lawsuit, e.g. monitoring a lawsuit.
- **Auditors-** Examine and review of financial statements prepared and maintained by the Treasurer and prepare a detailed report on municipal financial condition.
- **Board of Civil Authority-** Assist in elections including delivering and counting ballots and maintaining check lists; hearing tax appeals. The Board is comprised of the Town Clerk, members of the Select Board and the Justices of the Peace.

- Cemetery Directors- Maintain cemetery grounds under the municipality's purview.
- Cambridge Elementary School Directors- Liaison between the community and the school. Essential roles include: Create a vision for education in the community, Establish policies, Hire and evaluate superintendents, Monitor vision and progress, Develop and adopt budgets, Engage the community, Negotiate contracts and Resolve disputes.
- Clerk- Maintain land records (recording all conveyances, deed restrictions, records of underground storage, and local permits); maintain vital records (deaths, births, marriages); issues licenses (dog and marriage); assist other municipal officials; and record and maintain records of public meetings.
- Constable- This is a part-time law enforcement position. Assists other law enforcement and emergency service personnel with traffic and related safety matters and the enforcement of certain ordinances such as nuisance dogs and fire permits, and may serve legal notice.
- Grand Juror- Inquire into and report on criminal offenses occurring within municipal boundaries. This traditionally local role is now accomplished by the State's Attorney for Lamoille County.
- Justices of the Peace- Administer oaths of office, perform marriages, and perform responsibilities as members of the Board of Civil Authority.
- Library Trustees- Oversee how municipal funds are spent regarding Library operations.
- Listers- Determine the fair market value of real property; distinguish between residential and non-residential property and maintain the Grand List (a list of all real property, its ownership and value).
- Lamoille Union High School Directors- Liaison between the community and the school. Essential roles include: Create a vision for education in the community, Establish policies, Hire and evaluate superintendents, Monitor vision and progress, Develop and adopt budgets, Engage the community, Negotiate contracts and Resolve disputes.
- Tax Collector (Current taxes)- Collect current taxes (Cambridge Town accomplishes this through the Town Treasurer).
- Tax Collector (Delinquent taxes)- Notify taxpayers when property taxes are overdue; make arrangements for payment and formal collection; administer tax sales.
- Treasurer- Maintain the accounts of the money, bonds, notes, and other evidences of debt paid or delivered; prepare or oversee the preparation of financial statements; and work closely with the auditors, Select Board/Trustees.
- Trustee of Public Funds- Manage real and personal property, including money, held by the municipality in trust for any purpose, such as donated property.

Appointed Officials

- Assistant Clerk- Provide support to the Clerk in their duties.
- Conservation Commission- Stewards of the Town's natural resources and educate the community on matters of conservation and natural resources.
- Development Review Board/ Board of Adjustment (DRB/BoA)- A quasi-judicial permitting function (acts like a court) that hears appeals from actions or decisions of the administrator. It may also consider conditional use applications, decides requests for waivers, and rules on variance requests.
- Development Review Board/Board of Adjustment Administrative Officer- Assist the DRB or BoA in administrative functions; Assist landowners and interested parties with required forms and provide information about permit requirements; Refer matters for review by the appropriate municipal panel; Issue permits and certificates of occupancy; Answer public information requests; Assist individuals who are researching the permit history of a property; Enforce violations.
- Economic Development Advisory Committee- Identify, examine, and advise the Select Board on various economic development opportunities.
- Emergency Management Director- Coordinate the various components of the emergency management system: fire, law enforcement, emergency medical services, public works, volunteer groups, and State resources. By incorporating the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery, the Local Emergency Management Director can effectively respond to all situations that might occur.
- Fence Viewers- Examine and determine the proper location a fence or boundary line between adjoining parcels of land.
- Finance Committee- Assist with development of the annual budget by collecting information and making recommendations to the Select Board.
- Fire Warden- Appointed by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation with Select Board approval. Determine if/when conditions are safe for open burning or not. Oversee the issuance of permits for open burning.
- Flood Hazard Permit Review Board- Functions much like the Development Review Board or Board of Adjustment but deals exclusively with Flood Hazard Area permitting.
- Health Officer- Investigate complaints of unsafe conditions at public or private property and is authorized to take action to enforce health regulations and work with property owners to abate health risks.

- Lamoille County Planning Commission Directors- Represent the interests of their municipalities at the regional planning commission level. Liaison between the regional planning commission and municipality.
- Lumber Inspector- At the request of any party interested, an inspector of lumber, shingles and wood shall examine and classify the quality of lumber and shingles, measure lumber, shingles and wood and give certificates thereof.
- Other Maintenance Staff- Contracted staff providing various municipal services such as mowing, sidewalk clearing, etc.
- Planning Commission- Prepare the municipal plan and amendments, undertake studies and make recommendations on matters of land development, transportation, historic and scenic preservation, renewable energy.
- Recreation Board- Facilitate recreational activities aimed at promoting healthy life styles, maintaining and developing recreational assets and programs for all members of the community.
- Road Foreman- Develops and implements plans for maintaining and improving the Town's roads including; plowing, sanding and salting, ditching and grading, installing and replacing culverts, reviewing proposed location for driveway access on Town roads and driveway and private road conformance to Town standards.
- Road Maintenance Crew- Conduct operations as assigned by the Road Foreman.
- Service Officer- Assist individuals with immediate emergency food, fuel or shelter and with contacting appropriate long-term resource providers.
- Tree Warden- Oversee maintenance and care of municipally-owned trees and those located within municipal right-of-way. Includes removal of dead and dying trees and implementation of tree planting and protection programs.
- Water/Sewer System Staff- Oversee the maintenance of municipal systems.

II. Identify And Evaluate Existing Inter-Municipal And Public Communication Channels Utilized By Each Municipality.

The Task Force examined three communication relationships that had a bearing on the effectiveness of the municipalities: municipality to resident, resident to municipality, and inter-municipality communications. While the Task Force expected to examine routine and emergency communications, it discovered a third type – welcoming and integrating new members to the community.

Through the survey set forth below, it was revealed that all three municipalities had very different philosophies as to how to communicate information. As a result of the survey and subsequent discussions, the Task Force identified three actions which could be implemented immediately to increase communication effectiveness:

1. municipal leaders engaging in twice yearly meetings to update each other and examine how to work together on projects;
2. develop and provide a new community member welcome packet that would explain the different services offered by the municipalities; and
3. provide contact information, and implementation of the VT Alert for Jeffersonville Village.

Question	Cambridge Town	Cambridge Village	Jeffersonville	Notes
Where are public notices posted?	Town office, Jeffersonville P.O. Lobby, Cambridge Village P.O. and the Web. News and Citizen	PO Village market, pharmacy, trusted hands, Angelina's, churches, News and Citizen	The Village posts notices at the Village office, Hanley's store, and the Post Office. If more than 3 locations are required, we use the Town bulletin board and the community bulletin board at the Union Bank.	Postings must be within the jurisdiction, so the municipalities can co-locate some, but not all.
What methods does the municipality have for providing information to the community?	Town Report, Website and Front Porch Forum	Written notices, annual report, mailings to tax payers	The Village sends out a quarterly newsletter with billings. We have a contact list for phone calls to customers. Certain public notices are placed in the News & Citizen and Transcript.	

What methods exist for the community to contact the municipality?	Telephone, E-mail and Selectboard meetings	Call or go to the town clerk's office, through Selectboard members.	Calling, mail, or email. For non office hour communications, contact phone numbers are on the answering machine.	
What methods do the villages use to communicate with the town?	Telephone, E-mail and meetings	Call or go to town clerk's office, through Selectboard members	The Trustees talk to Select Board members, the offices call or email each other.	The boards have recently discussed regular joint meetings.
Are there areas where the village communicates with regional or state organizations directly that may or may not be duplicated by the town?	None identified	LCPC and State of VT about water resource issues	The Village is in contact with LCPC, with the State Agency of Natural Resources, etc. The most contact is in regards to the water and wastewater systems so not duplicated by the Town.	The villages are water system operators and report to the state directly. The town does not operate a water system.
Are there community communications that the municipality uses with community groups such as the chamber of commerce, rotary, school etc?	The Web	Occasional phone contacts, but very little. Village board serves the village residents. That's it.	No.	
What social media platforms does the municipality use?	The Web and Front Porch Forum	No, staunchly against. Not even front porch forum. Residents may discuss issues on these forums, but official business and information is conducted at meetings.	Front Porch Forum is sometimes used. The village does not have an official website or social media platform.	

Are there any systems for emergency communications within the village?

2 way radio with the road department and telephone

Call town EMD. Water system - posted in regular places, paper, hand delivery every residence in the village. Apt buildings-tenants notified by hand. Town Constable to assist in service.

Media, phone and address listing of all water accounts

Since the survey was done Jeffersonville has begun the process of establishing a VT Alert account for water system notifications.

Are there any other areas of communication that aren't mentioned above?

Person to person Mon-Fri 8-4

Not really. Come to the village meetings. People attend sometimes, usually with a particular issue to discuss.

None identified.

Does the municipality direct or monitor subcommittee communications?

No

N/A, No committees

No

IV. Analyze And Assess Our Current Municipal Governance Structure.

In connection with this action item, the Task Force performed a SWOT analysis. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The analysis is a valuable tool to quickly analyze various aspects regarding how an organization currently conducts business. It allows the group to look internally and externally and the outcome provides a useful framework for an organization to take steps to build on strengths and take advantage of opportunities.

Some common definitions the group used as they did the SWOT analysis were:

Strengths:

Anything that the assessed group does well.

May include experienced personnel, effective processes, IT systems, customer relationships, or any other internal factor that leads to success.

Weaknesses:

Those things that the assessed group does poorly or not at all. Weaknesses are also internal.

Opportunities:

External factors that the assessed group may be able to take advantage of. May include new markets, new technology, changes in the competitive marketplace, or other forces. Opportunities exist beyond the scope of control of the assessed group; the choice is whether or not to take advantage of one when it is identified.

Threats:

External factors that can negatively affect the assessed group. They may include factors such as the entrance into the market of a new competitor, economic downturns, or other forces. Threats are also outside of the group's control.

The results of the Task Force's SWOT analysis is set forth on page 12 and is followed by a second table that sets forth takeaways and next steps to consider on pages 13 and 14.

Three Municipal Boards- SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific / Defined Spheres of Responsibility ○ Autonomy / Less Bureaucracy ○ Ability to spread duties/responsibilities across 3 boards more leaders/executives ○ Fosters the development of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● expertise ● local knowledge ● institutional memory ○ Scale/nimble (example: the ability to address development in the flood plain) 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The patchwork approach to problems/issues fosters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● confusion ● lack of coordination ○ Potential for “Silo” thinking ○ Lends itself to a “Us vs. Them” thinking ○ Is the present 3-part model sustainable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● multiple boards requires more volunteers putting a strain on the executive/leader resources within the community ○ Potential for issues/opportunities to fall through cracks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Example: maintenance/expansion of the bike/pedestrian path ○ Spreading Resources Thin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Economies of Scale
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sharing Expertise (Resources) ○ More Unified Planning (Zoning, Economic Development, More Global/Town wide Thinking) ○ Ease of Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Single Point of Contact ○ Economies of Scale ○ Technology ○ Infrastructure 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the 3-part model a sustainable model ○ Missed Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Economic growth ● Human resources/Community (involvement-engagement) ○ Ability of each Board to go own direction that may not always be in the best interest of the larger community ○ Inability to share expertise, local knowledge, institutional memory

Key Takeaways and Next Steps to Consider

Strengths	Takeaways and Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific / Defined Spheres of Responsibility ○ Autonomy / Less Bureaucracy ○ Ability to spread duties/responsibilities across 3 boards more leaders/executives ○ Fosters the development of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● expertise ● local knowledge ● institutional memory ○ Scale/nimble (example: the ability to address development in the flood plain) 	<p>Working together could the three Boards seek out opportunities to work on municipal projects that build a community of one.</p> <p>The three Boards would still operate following their governance structure, however this would give them a way to come together to leverage their strengths</p> <p>For example, the Boards could work together on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A community wide economic development plan. ● Infrastructure upgrades to sidewalks/ street lighting, and green/open space projects.
Weaknesses	Takeaways and Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The patchwork approach to problems/issues fosters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● confusion ● lack of coordination ○ Potential for “Silo” thinking ○ Lends itself to a “Us vs. Them” thinking ○ Is the present 3-part model sustainable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● multiple boards requires more volunteers putting a strain on the executive/leader resources within the community ○ Potential for issues/opportunities to fall through cracks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Example: maintenance/expansion of the bike/pedestrian path ○ Spreading Resources Thin ○ Economies of Scale 	<p>Is there the potential for a Board to be left out of community wide efforts such as economic development and strategic planning?</p> <p>Could the Boards come together and assess how a town manager could be utilized? What are the advantages and disadvantages? How could a Town Manager work with three Boards?</p> <p>Could the three Boards do joint planning to address and mitigate the weaknesses?</p>

Opportunities	Take A ways or Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sharing Expertise (Resources) ○ More Unified Planning (Zoning, Economic Development, More Global/Town wide Thinking) ○ Ease of Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Single Point of Contact ○ Economies of Scale ○ Technology <p>Infrastructure</p>	<p>What is being done to include /develop the next generation of community leaders?</p> <p>Are there succession practices to ensure a smooth transition as Boards members' turnover?</p> <p>Could the three Boards work proactively to share expertise by outlining common goals that benefit the entire community?</p> <p>Could Front Page Forum and similar media be used to post Board Agendas, links to meetings minutes, etc.?</p> <p>Could the three Boards build a common data base or information repository to share their expertise? This repository could include a directory of local expertise to call upon when addressing infrastructure projects such upgrades to water systems, lighting, or roads.</p> <p>Could the information repository be a common web site for meeting minutes, policy and procedures?</p> <p>Could pages be set up on the Town Web site where Village information could reside?</p>
Threats	Take A ways or Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the 3-part model sustainable model ○ Missed Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Economic growth ● Human resources/Community (involvement-engagement) ○ Ability of each Board to go own way regardless of greater good ("fiefdoms") <p>Inability to share expertise, local knowledge, institutional memory</p>	<p>How can the three boards work together to help the Villages and Town develop the local economy that includes farming, tourism, and small business?</p> <p>Could the three Boards do joint planning to address and mitigate the threats?</p>

V. Consider How Other Communities Have Addressed Similar Issues/Opportunities.

To understand how other communities have addressed concerns of duplication, inefficiency, and division within their municipal entities, the Task Force examined other communities that have merged or have considered merging municipal structures and functions (e.g., town and village government). A selection of towns were identified by the Task Force along with community members or individuals knowledgeable of the initiatives to share information on the underlying rationale, intent, process, facilitators, barriers, and lessons learned when exploring and/or establishing consolidation of municipal structures and functions. Considerations and lessons learned from other communities' experiences addressing concerns of duplication, inefficiency, and division within their municipal entities are summarized. Following the Key Considerations & Lessons Learned are summaries of information and stories collected for each town.

Key Considerations & Lessons Learned

Based on the experiences of these communities' efforts to consolidate and merge, the following themes and lessons learned have been identified as considerations for the Task Force and the community members of Cambridge.

- ❖ Communities exploring consolidation of all or some of their municipal entities, structures and functions generally stem from challenges with:
 - Duplication of efforts and resources,
 - Inefficiencies in navigating systems and/or conducting business,
 - Competing priorities, lack of coordination, and division or discord across governing bodies, boards, and community members, and
 - Contradictory direction and guidance provided to shared management and staff.
- ❖ Maintaining an open mind to a merge is necessary; don't set out with established conclusions that a merger is or is not the right step. Consider pros and cons and be prepared to accept that a merger of all or some municipal structures or functions may not be the right answer at this time.
- ❖ A successful merger requires significant time, energy, and commitment, including community member capacity and engagement to ensure thorough planning, strategic action, and strong communication throughout the process.
- ❖ Exploring whether municipal structures and functions should merge should be a transparent, well-communicated, and community driven process. For example:
 - A majority of a community should be in favor of exploring a merger.

- Public meetings should be announced in advance and minutes available and accessible.
 - A variety of communication channels (e.g., social media, email, newspapers) should be used to ensure broad reach and awareness of the initiative.
 - Establishing trust and credibility in the process among the community is integral.
- ❖ Exploring whether municipal entities, structures and functions should merge should be a multi-phase process (e.g., petition for support, committee work, proposed plan, town meeting vote, etc.) in which community members are actively engaged and involved to provide input, ask questions, and participate in shared decision making along the way.
 - ❖ Although many communities in Vermont have or are currently exploring a merger of municipal entities in an effort to resolve issues of duplication, inefficiencies, and division, other communities are using different approaches. For example, in the town of Colchester, the Colchester Select board and the community's Heritage Project tasked the Governance Committee with three main fields of investigation: proposing updates to the Town Charter; examining options to optimize the accountability, transparency, effectiveness and cost of Colchester's government; and improving citizen participation. More information on the Colchester Governance Committee work can be found on their news blog.²
 - ❖ Whether a community merges municipal structures and functions or not, a strong town management system is essential to ensure strong organization, coordination and communication. A town manager or clear management systems (e.g., roles, responsibilities, and processes) have proven to facilitate efficiencies and communication. Developing ad hoc and standing committees of the municipal Board(s) have also proven a successful mechanism for providing review and recommendations to the Board(s) regarding community issues or considerations. The town of Randolph is an example of using both a town manager and strong management systems.

Hardwick

Community members of Hardwick long had concerns around duplication of equipment and human resources within the town and village, which were the impetus for exploring a merge of governance, resources, and infrastructure. There was also interest in sharing the economic benefits derived from the electric company located in the village of Hardwick. The electric company provided significant income and enabled the village to accrue wealth in resources and equipment, but also resulted in some duplication in resources and equipment across the village

² <http://colchestergovernance.blogspot.com/>

and town, and fostered an unhealthy power dynamic between the village and town. Because the electric company was a valued asset among the village, there was resistance to merging or consolidating municipal structures and functions.

The town of Hardwick and village of Hardwick successfully merged in 1988. Implications included the development of an 18 month budget to align the village and town fiscal years (budgets that followed were developed on an annual basis) and streamlining from a town clerk and village clerk to one clerk that serves both the village and town. This resulted in simplified accounting systems, including one tax rate for both the village and the town.

Although there were some growing pains during the first year following the merger related to town residents expressing discontent about paying for infrastructure within the village, such as sidewalks and streetlights, these sentiments went away over time. Overall, the community generally feels there is no downside to having merged; community members would likely not consider re-establishing separate municipal structures.

Lyndon

The town of Lyndon and village of Lyndonville have explored merging for years due to duplication, inefficiencies, and division among governance and community members. For example, (1) although one clerk serves both the village and the town, the clerk maintains separate accounting books for each; (2) the town maintains their roads separately from the village, with each municipality having their own road maintenance equipment and garage; and (3) a financially sound electric company is a substantial asset to the village, leading to duplication of resources. Some community members felt having separate municipal governance and infrastructure was not in the best interest of the town as a whole and not an efficient way to conduct business. However, the idea of sharing the wealth generated by the electric company across both the village and town has resulted in significant resistance to a merge.

Despite resistance, a proposed charter to merge the town and village governance and infrastructure passed in 2006. However, many community members did not support it. Soon after, a petition was circulated to rescind the merge. A re-vote of the proposed charter in early 2007 did not pass.

Although the municipal entities remain separate, some progress has been made in collaboration and establishing efficiencies. The town and village have since merged their garages by building a joint facility to store and share equipment. The village and town boards have warmed up some to the idea of consolidation via merge, however the process takes significant effort, energy, and commitment and therefore has not yet been redressed since the 2007 re-vote.

Northfield

The town of Northfield and village of Northfield had a history of efforts to merge, largely because of the argumentative relationship of the village trustees and town select board, competing budgets and priorities for highway services and staff that had become a community sore point, and unnecessary division within the community. Northfield approved a merger in 1979 which was recalled by a subsequent petition. In 2008, a town charter was proposed by a citizen work group that didn't include merging. This elevated public discussion on the issues of governance, management, fiscal responsibility, and collaboration that had been gnawing at the town and village for years. However, this effort failed.

In 2010, a group of community members with interest in unifying the town revived conversation on a merge and launched an initiative intended to improve ability of the community to manage its affairs efficiently, transparently, and with greater accountability. A merger was also intended to allow Northfield to focus its attention on economic opportunities through a unified governance structure. The group initiated a grassroots community campaign to increase awareness on the concept of a unified, efficient, effective, and accountable Northfield. They branded the initiative "One Northfield" and used social media, email, phone trees, and print (e.g., flyers, banners, lawn signs) to disseminate information on the initiative throughout the community.

Engaging community members in a thoughtful and transparent process resulted in a successful merger in 2013. The proposed town charter was voted on during Town Meeting Day and approved with a 2-to-1 margin in favor of the merger. The town charter included a plan to merge governance structures and utilities, and was considered general operating procedures for the town. A 1-year transition period was planned in which the existing select board members and village trustees were maintained to avoid any elected official losing their seat. In 2014, the select board composition changed back to a 5 member board. Additional details on Northfield's merger process are provided in Attachment B.

Since the merger, the new select board has settled into the joint oversight of utilities and collective management of rural and village highways. There has been some simplification in systems and processes, and there is now one town manager as opposed to one for the town and one for the village.

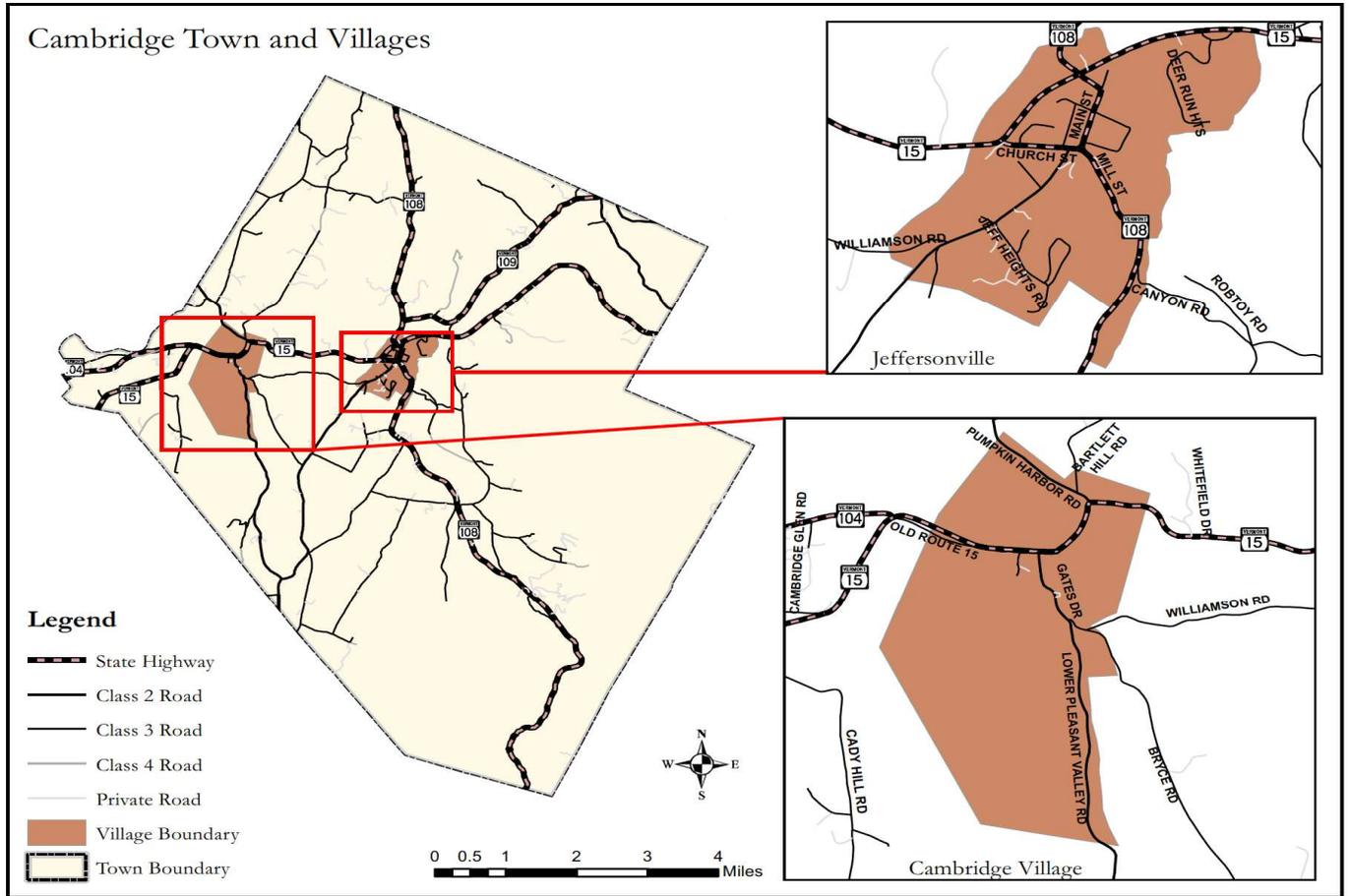
Community members in general are satisfied and continue to feel a merger was the right course for Northfield. There is some residual concern among community members related to inequitable allocation of resources across the town and village, however, overall, the new structure is working well.

VI. Recommendations /Conclusions

We recommend that the Trustees of each Village and the Members of the Selectboard:

- 1.** Meet at least twice each year in order to foster greater collaboration on issues facing the larger community as well as those specific to each municipality. We believe doing so will provide greater opportunities for sharing information and experiences in ways that will take advantage of the expertise and institutional knowledge that resides in each governing body and the individual members.
- 2.** Consider using common communication channels in order to reach more members of the community, avoid confusion and foster greater participation.
- 3.** Consider hiring a community and economic coordinator or administrator to assist the Trustees and Selectboard with their functions as well as coordinating the activities of other community organizations.

Attachment A



Attachment B

Summary of Northfield Merger Process and Experience

The town and village of Northfield merged in 2013. The town and village had a history of efforts to merge, largely because of the argumentative nature of the relationship between village trustees and town select board, competing budgets and priorities for highway services and staff that had become a community sore point, and unnecessary division within the community. Northfield approved a merger in 1979 which was recalled by a subsequent petition. In 2008, a town charter was proposed by a citizen working group that didn't include merging. This elevated public discussion on the issues of governance, management, fiscal responsibility, and collaboration that had been gnawing at the town and village for years. However, this effort failed. The story of Northfield's merger is summarized below:

- A group of community members with interest in unifying the town via a merger in the town and village governments and assets initiated a grassroots community campaign to increase awareness on the concept of a unified, efficient, effective, and accountable Northfield. They branded the initiative “One Northfield” and used social media, email, phone trees, and print (e.g., flyers, banners, lawn signs) to disseminate information throughout the community on the initiative.
- A petition was circulated to residents of Northfield town and another to residents of Northfield village requesting the select board and village trustees include a question on the ballot at town meeting to appoint a committee to study the question of a town-village merger. The petition process received an overwhelming number of signatures and the vote to appoint a committee on town meeting day was a resounding yes.
- The appointed committee included members of both the town and village and those initially in favor and not in favor of a town merger. Having all perspectives at the table were crucial ingredients to considering whether a merger would be the right step for Northfield.
- The process and committee work was open to the public, well communicated, and transparent to community members (e.g., meetings announced in advance and minutes publicly available).
- Addressing how utilities would function within a town-village merger, including revenue and expenses, was carefully considered as this issue and any issue regarding taxes often resulted in diverging opinions and contention among community members. To address this, the committee established a citizens board to work in conjunction with the utilities and the committee reassured community members that tax rates would not be disturbed as a result of a merger. The committee and grassroots community campaign were also careful not to suggest community members might realize a cost savings or tax impact (positively or negatively) as a result of a merger. Rather, simplification and efficiency of systems would be gained.
- When the committee came to a decision proposing a merger of the town and village, they provided an information brief in plain speak on their rationale and proposed town charter that would merge government and assets—specifically, a plan to merge the governance structures and utilities in an effort to end the divisions in municipal government. The

town charter was considered general operating procedures for the town. Town ordinances were left to be addressed as needed after the merger.

- Again, a vote by community members to move forward with the merger and institute the proposed town charter was addressed at Northfield's town meeting. The merger passed with a 2 to 1 margin in favor. The proposed plan included an overlap of the select board members and village trustees for a 1 year transition period (to avoid any elected official losing their seat). The following year, the select board composition changed back to a 5 member board.
- Since the merger, the new select board has settled into the joint oversight of utilities and collective management of rural and village highways. There has been some simplification in systems and processes, and there is now one town manager as opposed to one for the town and one for the village.
- A separate proprietary fund was established for the electric company that was previously owned by the village. The fund now serves the town and the village, but is separate from the general fund and highway fund.
- Community members in general are satisfied and continue to feel a merger was the right course for Northfield. There is some residual concern among community members related to inequitable allocation of resources across the town and village, however, overall, the new structure is working well.

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