

# **DPW AD-HOC COMMITTEE**

## **Report to Board of Selectmen May 8, 2003**

### **Introduction**

The Board of Selectmen, following a recommendation from the Special Town meeting held in February 2003, established the Ad-Hoc DPW committee. The purpose of the committee was to evaluate the formation of a new department of public works (DPW) by combining the highway department, the water department and the cemetery commission into a unified department reporting to a DPW Director who then will report to the Town Administrator.

The DPW committee membership is:

Robert Markel, Town Administrator  
Remo R. Vito, Jr., Highway Superintendent  
Larry Kennedy, Water Commissioner  
Tim Walsh, Appointed Member  
John Olivieri, Appointed Member  
Harvey Nasuti, Appointed Member  
Robert Garrity, Appointed Member  
Ellen Friedman, Appointed Member  
Ed Melanson, Appointed Member  
Marc Waldman, Advisory Board Liaison

### **Background**

The highway department is responsible for the management, maintenance, and rehabilitation of municipal roadways, storm water systems, solid waste, municipal grounds and green spaces including schools, cemeteries and recreation areas. The department also provides maintenance and repair service for all municipal vehicles which includes police, fire, COA, animal control, building and water. The highway department has 19 full-time employees and reports to the Board of Selectmen through the Town Administrator.

The Water Department is responsible for pumping, treating, and delivering potable water in sufficient quantity and quality to meet the needs of our residents now and in the future. The staff reports to a water superintendent who by state statute must possess both water treatment and distribution licenses. The superintendent reports to a three-member publicly elected board that is responsible for planning, regulatory compliance, and rate setting. The department has four full-time employees, five part-time and seasonal employees.

The Board of Selectmen appoints the Cemetery Commission members as authorized by Town Bylaw. The three-member commission is responsible for setting burial rates, coordinating burials with the highway department, and addressing other cemetery issues that may arise with Town citizens, funeral directors and Town departments.

### **Committee Objective**

The mission of the Committee was to determine whether or not there was justification for creating a DPW.

The formation process requires four steps as follows:

Step One – To determine if the Town will benefit from forming a DPW, to draft enabling legislation outlining the structure of the DPW, and receive approval to seek authorization of the enabling legislation at Town Meeting.

Step Two – To submit for review and approval by both houses of the State legislature the enabling legislation approved at Town meeting.

Step Three – Once legislation is approved, to seek town wide authorization to form a new DPW through a ballot vote at either a special or general election.

Step Four – To form the new department while dissolving the existing highway department, water commissioners and cemetery commission.

The scope of our charge was step one with a focus on the larger issue of verifying benefits to the Town. For our review we focused on two specific topics – financial savings and managerial accountability.

### **Financial Analysis**

The Committee reviewed the salary structure of the highway and water department, and a brief analysis on the proposed salary structure for the new DPW. Many of the positions overlap, and the primary change is the creation of a new DPW Director.

We also look at equipment, material, and facility costs. There is some opportunity for cost savings through improved efficiency and the consolidation of resources to common facilities. These savings are unquantifiable at this time, and for the purposes of our analysis, we have assumed zero savings.

One other area that we did not investigate was the consolidation of engineering to the DPW. Presently, roughly six departments in Town contract for engineering services. By hiring a Town engineer, the Town will realize some unquantifiable savings by reducing the dependency on outside consultants.

### **Managerial Analysis**

Our managerial analysis focused on the overall structure of the departments as they exist now, the leadership and ability within the departments with respect to defining missions and meeting goals, the demonstration of responsiveness to Town needs and the ability to keep the departments aligned with the Town's vision.

### **Highway Department**

The department has both an operating and capital plan for the current and short-term future. This highly detailed plan is documented in several spreadsheets and memoranda and projects both immediate and anticipated future needs and expenditures. The plan is updated annually to reflect changing conditions within the department.

The highway department superintendent is accessible to all Town citizens, and the department adequately responds to issues raised by both Town officials and residents. The superintendent

manages staff through daily oversight and regular staff meetings, and he routinely coordinates with other Town departments. The highway department operates as one department of many within the organizational structure of our Town government.

#### Water Department

The department has both an operating and capital plan for the current and short-term future. This plan is more simplistic, and does not contain sufficient detail to demonstrate long-term planning or a clear strategy for future enhancements. The annual budget spreadsheets provide some detail on anticipated operating expenses, and they clearly demonstrate a strategy of outsourcing virtually all water department services. The department superintendent is accessible to all Town citizens, and the department generally responds to issues raised by both Town officials and residents. There are some outstanding regulatory issues confronting the department that date back many years, and there are other issues concerning water quality and quantity. The superintendent manages staff through daily oversight and regular staff meetings, and reports solely to the Water commissioners through bi-weekly meetings. The water department is a separate entity not connected with or under the jurisdiction of our Town government. Specifically, there is no connection between the water department and other town departments from an organizational perspective.

#### Findings and Recommendations

The establishment of a Department of Public Works would bring individual departments under one common umbrella. This would not result in a merging of departments, but rather, would enable the individual departments to report to one person who would be charged with the responsibility of overseeing the newly created DPW. The DPW will be structured so that there is a chain of command resulting in increased accountability for each of the sub-departments. With this new structure, ideas can be discussed and "bounced off" of various individuals, resulting in better decision-making ability of the new department as a whole.

We do not believe that there are significant measurable cost savings achievable by forming the DPW. By creating the new DPW, the Town will have opportunities to generate undetermined future cost savings through efficiencies that the new structure will provide. For our analysis, however, we have assumed zero annual cost savings.

Finally, to provide a mechanism of bridging from our existing organizational structure to a new DPW, we recommend forming an interim DPW Board consisting of five members. The membership would include two water commissioners and three members appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The DPW Board would be responsible for establishing the new department, interviewing and recommending for hire the new DPW Director, and for addressing other formation issues that may arise. The Board would automatically dissolve on the third anniversary of the formation of the DPW, and oversight of the department would transfer to the Board of Selectmen similar to most other Town departments.