

CHAPTER 11

Capital Facilities and Human Services

*Westport Master Plan * 2004*

11 Capital Facilities and Human Services

11.1 Introduction

As Westport develops, the burden on services and facilities will also increase. The need for improved or expanded town facilities is potentially driven by three factors in any community: 1) town population growth, 2) the desire for improved services and recreational opportunities, and 3) the need to correct current facilities' deficiencies and space shortages. Westport is experiencing all three factors. There are many concerns in the face of current development pressures. One immediate concern is to identify the specific potential land needs of different Town departments and then develop strategies to acquire land to meet those needs before most of the suitable and desirable parcels are developed privately. In a climate of diminishing state and federal funds, the challenge for Westport is to meet the needs of its citizens without driving the tax rate beyond their reach.

In the past, in order to stay under the Proposition 2 ½ cap, capital expenditures, maintenance and repair work that exceeded a department's annual budget was often completed on an emergency basis. Historically Westport's Annual Town Meeting has seldom considered long-range approaches to meeting anticipated needs. The immediate needs of large departments with substantial capital improvement needs have subdued appropriations directed towards smaller departments and long-range planning.

More recently Westport has seen a need to take a more planned approach. The Town has been resourceful in utilizing existing resources and leveraging volunteer help and alternative sources of revenues to fund improvements. The Head School on Reed Rd. was converted into a senior center. The Earle School was wheelchair accessed and houses seven offices as it was converted to the Town Hall Annex and Community Center. A community playground was built at the Annex. New courts have been built behind the Community Center and with the help of the Police Department the Bicentennial Park now includes a skate park. A 3.3 million dollar bond was passed for school renovations and repairs. More storage space was built onto the Briggs Road Fire Station. The landfill was capped and converted into a recycling center and transfer station. In 1999 Town Meeting established a Capital Improvement Planning Committee. The 2000 Town Meeting voted to adopt a Phased Growth By-Law, the express purpose of which was to slow growth to give the Town time to plan. In 2001 Town Meeting approved a \$1.5 million Agricultural/Open Space Preservation Trust Fund aimed at helping the Town preserve farmland and other open space in Town. The Town has already taken advantage of the Trust Fund by purchasing thirteen acres of the Russell Davis farm on Sanford Road; more projects are under consideration. At the 2002 election voters adopted the Community Preservation Act, which is a state sponsored program designed to raise money for agricultural/open space preservation, historic preservation and affordable housing. Such actions demonstrate the Town's resolve to proactively plan and manage Westport's growth

Over the next several years, the Town will need to explore creative ways to fund services and needed improvements. We must focus immediately on strategies to acquire land to meet the present and future needs of some departments. We should be prepared to acquire, as they become available, strategically located land parcels that will potentially allow expansion of current facilities or building of new facilities for:

- Fire Station, Police Station or Public Safety Facility
- Schools and playing fields
- Public Water Supplies
- Waste Water Facilities

- Highway Department
- Recreational Facilities
- Additional land for Town cemetery
- Stormwater management along several public roads with severe drainage problems

In light of escalating needs for the Town and diminishing availability of funds to meet these needs, Westport must, more than ever, utilize every opportunity for generating revenue. After the Town audit for fiscal year 2003 the auditors provided the town with a Management Letter (Appendix D.) which they do every year after the audit. The Management Letter suggests ways Town government could improve its efficiency and make the best use of opportunities for raising revenues. In the area of revenue enhancement, the auditor recommended the following:

- "Review all departmental fees and miscellaneous receipts. Consideration should be given to a possible 20 to 30% increase in fees and charges.
- Continue to review all receivable balances, specifically departmental and tax title. Allocate the necessary resources to assure these are administered as efficiently as possible...
- Assure that the Town is taking optimum advantage of all State and Federal reimbursement programs. (See further discussion regarding grants administrator"

- **Grants Administrator**

The Town recently terminated the position of Grants Administrator. This is an essential position to any Town government. This person assures that the Town is receiving all the State and Federal Grant and reimbursement money it is entitled to receive. Quite often, the "found" money more than pays for the position. Under Chapter 645, the State reimburses from 60% to 90% of all School Building construction costs*. The fact that the Town has gone through two multi-million dollar School construction projects in the last twelve years without receiving any reimbursement under Chapter 645 is an unacceptable oversight and exemplifies more than ever the need for such assistance. Consideration may be given to combining a grants administrator for both Town and School, as quite often it is not a full-time job. ** "

* (Westport's experience is closer to 55% on some qualifying projects)

** (In 2003 the Board of Selectmen established a policy of hiring a consultant grant writer for specific grants, which is a positive step towards expanding the revenue enhancing capabilities of the Town.)

The Management Letter of 2002 urged the Town to go for a Property Tax over ride to serve the general operating and debt service. Westport typically resists general over rides, and seldom approves over rides targeting specific debt exclusions. Proposition 2 ½ included the over ride provision to enable towns to meet capital improvement needs and periodically adjust their tax levy to compensate for the inevitable pressure on their budget caused by increases that pushed expenses beyond 2 ½%. The frequent failure of over rides to pass in Westport has presented a revenue crisis that has been addressed by removing or reducing services. Since Westport is considered by the State to be a "growth community" it will inevitably need to both expand existing services and facilities and respond to new demands generated by population growth and by potentially more intensive new commercial and industrial land uses. In addition to growth pressures, the Town, by law, must respond to increased requirements, especially regulatory requirements such as stormwater management and provision of affordable housing, transferred by the federal and state government to

the towns, or face reprisals, such as fines or loss of eligibility for state and federal funding. The Town needs to devise ways to fund the operating budget, service debt, and fund capital improvements without continuing the trend of cutting existing Town services. Proposition 2 1/2 overrides are likely to be needed initially and from time to time, as recommended by the 2002 management letter, to build municipal government capacity, but the Town's long-term response should include transferring some of the cost of development and provision of services to developers and users through impact fees and increased fees for services that reflect the actual cost of providing those services. Increased fees for direct services are relatively easy to administer, but must reflect actual costs. The Department of Revenue provides guidelines for costing services for municipalities.

Development impact fees, which can be very difficult to implement and administer, are another mechanism to fund the increased demand for services and facilities caused by growth. They require a detailed capital improvement plan in order to be implemented and to resist legal challenge, and may require that a home rule petition be approved by the state legislature. It should be noted, also, that there are costs inherent in administering programs such as development impact fees. Additional staff positions would likely be necessary to administer such programs.

11.2 Goals and Objectives

Our goal is to provide and maintain adequate capital facilities and human services as the town continues to grow.

Objectives:

1. *Determine how escalating real estate trends in Westport will impact the future land needs of the Town and how that development will increase stress on existing services and facilities.*
 - *Inventory existing Town land and fixed assets of the Town. (This task was substantially completed in Spring, 2003)*
 - *Assess current use and potential future uses of municipal lands.*
 - *Identify parcels suitable for acquisition to meet future needs in various areas of Town.*
 - *Develop creative strategies to acquire land for the future expansion of the departments, the community facilities and human services, as well as for recreation, conservation and open space.*
 - *Continue to monitor the effect of Town growth on public school enrollment and determine level at which a major infrastructure expansion is triggered by this increased enrollment. The major impact from new developments is routinely felt several years after the development is built, since school age children don't enter the system for four to five years. This emphasizes the importance of forecasting school enrollments years in advance, so the Town can anticipate major impacts.*
 - *Evaluate the need for imposing impact fees for certain larger developments to offset the increased burden on Town services and infrastructure.*
2. *Pursue a study of Town departments in terms of allocated resources, personnel, and manpower to:*
 - *Determine if current organization is as efficient and coordinated as it could be.³²*
 - *Determine if it would be feasible to combine and/or re-arrange some departments.*
 - *Assess the pros and cons of a Westport DPW.*
 - *Evaluate the need to expand the Town nurse department.*
3. *Using available resources, including current staff and volunteer help:*

³² Annual Town Meeting of 2004 approved an article to contract with the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth to conduct such a study.

- *Facilitate more dialogue between departments.*
- *Better coordinate the review and permitting processes for private land development.*
- *Monitor the Town's land requirements for public facilities, the current use of town-owned land, and the availability of suitable parcels for acquisition.*
- *Create balanced strategies to meet the Town's needs as Westport continues to grow.*

11.3 Existing Conditions

11.3.1 Introduction

Map 11-1 shows all land currently owned by the Town and the present location of Westport's public facilities, including Town Administration offices, public schools and the School Administration offices, Police Department, two Fire Stations, Highway Department, Cemetery Department, Housing Authority, Harbormaster & Wharfinger, Senior Center, and the Town Recycling Center and Solid Waste Transfer Station.

In 2001 the Capital Improvement Planning Committee produced a report outlining a five-year plan for capital projects and improvements for the Town. Town departments represented in the report were the Police, Harbormaster, Council on Aging, Board of Health, Highway Department, Selectmen (Town Hall, Town Hall Annex), Library, Fire Department and Schools. The total capital outlay required to meet this goal was almost \$8 million, with \$3.1 million coming from a Capital Planning Article and \$4.9 million from bonds and grants. The plan sought to complete these projects and improvements by the end of 2005. With the recent fiscal difficulties that the Town has been experiencing, very little has been done to meet the goals outlined in this plan. Those needs still exist. Each year that passes sees those needs growing more urgent, and new issues arise that add to the laundry list of improvements and projects that are needed to attain even a minimal level of Town services. The Town has reconvened the Capital Improvement Planning Committee, and that group has worked hard to address the Town's needs in this important area of planning. They presented recommendations at the 2004 Annual Town Meeting. The Town meeting voted to place the recommended items on a special election ballot the following summer, and all but one failed to pass at that special election. Such results point to the need for a more creative strategy to assure that these important Town needs are recognized by the Townspeople as essential and receive the funding they require.

The 1999 Open Space Plan includes in Appendix A a Section 504 self evaluation of Westport's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This is a comprehensive assessment of all Town facilities and identifies improvements needed in order to comply with the Act. The Town has performed many of the listed improvements, but it is essential that the Town's 504 Coordinator identify where improvements remain to be performed and advocate for them. In 2004, the Town discussed increasing accessibility at the Town beach.

11.3.2 Town Offices

11.3.2.1 Town Hall

In the 2001 Capital Improvement Plan the following projects and improvements were listed for the Town Hall:

- 1. Upgrade ceiling lights (\$30,000)- to be completed in 2001. Nothing has been done as of March 2003 to complete this project.*
- 2. Drywall Ceilings (\$10,000) – to be completed in 2001. Nothing has been done as of March 2003 to complete this project.*
- 3. Repair Town Hall parking lot (\$50,000) – to be completed in 2002. Nothing has been done as of March 2003 to complete this project.*
- 4. Computer Upgrade (\$80,000) – to be completed in 2003. Some computer upgrading has been achieved, but more needs to be done to complete the Local Area Network (LAN) and tie together Town departments both in the Town Hall and Town Hall Annex. In*

2004 the Selectmen hired a computer network administrator to coordinate the completion and administration of the Town's computer network. At the 2004 Annual Town Meeting funds were appropriated to launch the final phase of upgrading the system and completing the LAN. Once the system is functional, there will be a need for staff training in using the system and any new software associated with the network. The role of the Network Administrator will expand to servicing the network, supporting network users, troubleshooting problems as they occur.

5. Town Hall Floors – (\$25,000) – to be completed in 2004.

In 2000 the Town purchased a new emergency generator for the Town hall for \$20,000. A new boiler was recently installed, but some more service to the heating system is still needed. The building does not have central air conditioning, and that is another item on the wish list of Town employees. The new HVAC system at the Town Hall Annex is substantially complete, with some bugs still being worked out. Individual units from that building have been made available to the Town Hall.

The Town Hall is also in need of exterior repairs, including repointing of the exterior brick. The Town Hall windows are in urgent need of either complete overhaul or replacement. The front steps, which had deteriorated to such an extent that the front entrance was closed for several months, were repaired by Town employees in 2002 and the entrance re-opened.

Another serious issue is the poor state of the plumbing system in the building.

In 2004, the Selectmen proposed a project to the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to address the exterior brick, the windows and the ceilings. The CPC presented the project to the Town at the 2004 Annual Town Meeting and it was approved for funding with CPA funds. One major improvement to the Town Hall within the last ten years was the addition of an elevator on the south side to make the building handicap accessible.

11.3.2.2 Town Hall Annex

The Town Hall Annex resides in the old Milton E. Earle School building at 856 Main Rd., just over 300 yards south of the Town Hall. The Town decided in the 1990's to preserve the building and modify its use to accommodate Town offices that were overcrowding the Town Hall. The Annex now houses land use and inspectional services departments (Building Department, Board of Health, Conservation Commission, and Planning Board), Human Services (Town Nurse and Veteran's Agent) and the Public Educational Government (PEG) Cable Access TV office. The Cable Access TV office's mission is to teach residents how to express themselves via Westport's public access TV network. The Town has hired two part-time coordinators for the cable access network. Through their efforts and that of the Cable Advisory Committee, the technical capacity and sophistication of the network has increased in recent years; for example, there is greatly increased replay capability and more sophisticated in-house graphics and editing capability. Bringing cable access TV more closely into Town government has benefited the Town in several ways. The two coordinators are able to respond much more effectively to the Town's specific needs than in the past. In addition, the location of the office in the Annex allows easy access by the public.

A large meeting room on the first floor accommodates public meetings by many Town boards. The Annex also serves as the Community Center. A basketball court on the ground level is used extensively by Town leagues. It is also used by local residents for informal basketball, health and dance classes, and as a good general gathering place for local activities. It serves as the polling station for precinct B. Events such as plays by a community theatre group and some musical events have also been held there. The Town leases a portion of the basement to the Codim Monk Pre-School.

Within the last five years the Annex was made handicap accessible via an exterior wheelchair ramp and an interior stair lift. Vinyl replacement windows were installed and the south parking lot was repaved. The Town has just completed installing a new HVAC system.

Students and staff from the Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School performed the

work, which was a money saving strategy conceived by the Town's Building Inspector, who has taken on the job of handling building improvements and repairs at the Annex. In the 1990's, parents and other volunteers built a community playground on the north side of the Annex, which enjoys virtually constant use. The Recreation Commission built outdoor basketball courts behind the Annex, as well as a beach volleyball court. There are plans to build a bandstand for outdoor plays and concerts, supported by private donations and local businesses. In the summer of 2003 a stage was constructed and summer concerts were held. As an office building, the Annex lacks certain amenities to make it a more comfortable place to work. There is no place for employees to take breaks or eat lunch other than their offices or in small rooms such as the copy room and rest room area. There is little storage room for public records. The wiring and phone systems are also sub-standard. Access to the Internet is restricted to dial-up access.

In the 2001 Capital Improvement Plan the following projects and improvements were listed for the Town Hall Annex:

1. Replace Annex Roof (\$30,000)
This project was to be completed in 2001 and it has been completed.
2. New/Used Generator (\$25,000)
This was to be completed in 2001. In 2000 the Town Hall got a new generator and the old one was to be moved to the Annex. However, further study revealed that it was not a viable option, so the Annex does not have a generator as of March 2003.
3. Exterior sidewalls and insulation (\$30,000)
This was to be completed in 2001. It was completed in the latter part of 2002.
4. Computer Upgrade (Part of Town Hall project mentioned previously)
The most important element of this project remains to be completed, and that is the completion of the Local Area Network (LAN) that will connect all Town departments. The LAN will also serve to make the Town's Geographic Information System (GIS) more accessible to Town departments. *

* GIS Maintenance – The Town needs to appropriate money to update the Town's GIS. It is presently only current to January, 2000. New subdivisions need to be digitized, and the reconciling of the GIS to the Assessor's Office needs to be completed. The Town created a revolving fund dedicated to maintenance of the GIS and funded through fees paid by developers. This fund will ultimately support GIS maintenance, but the Town needs to appropriate funds beyond the revolving fund to bring the system up to date.

The preservation of the Milton Earle School building has proven to be a winning situation for the Town. A significant historic structure was saved, and it is providing valuable service to the Town at a time when Westport is struggling to maintain services due to the fiscal crisis.

11.3.3 Public Safety

11.3.3.1 Public Safety Land/Building Committee

Historically Westport has housed the Police and Fire Departments in separate facilities. Both departments are experiencing a need for upgrading and expansion, as indicated by the following profiles. In 1999 the Selectmen appointed the Public Safety Land/Building Committee to investigate the needs of the Fire and Police departments and to make recommendations on how best to meet those needs, including the feasibility of building a Public Safety building that would house both the Police and the Central Village Fire Station. Their report concludes:

"Land planning and cost considerations lead the Committee to conclude, after considerable discussion, that further planning should focus on development of a joint facility and that such future planning should proceed as expeditiously as possible."

This concept is not fully supported by both departments. Given the urgency of resolving the needs of both departments and the fact that available land to meet those needs becomes a more serious issue as time passes, Westport must grapple with this problem immediately.

11.3.3.2 Police Department and Facilities

Westport's Police are housed in one building next to the Town Hall at 818 Main Rd. The building was constructed in 1976. A Police substation was established in 2000 in a vacant storefront next to the Cumberland Farms at the intersection of Rte. 6 and Davis Road. A summary of the deficiencies of the main building as expressed in the final report of the Public Safety Land/Building Committee states:

- 1. The building is 25 years old, and several of the building systems and components are at or beyond their useful life. Notable are the heating system, the windows, and the potable water system.*
- 2. The staff of the police station has outgrown the present size of the building. This is due to both an increase in staff, and the changing nature of police work. Much of the modern police force involves work by officers in an office environment. This includes various types of administrative work, interviews, interrogations, computer usage, meetings and training. Some interim measures have been undertaken to maximize the building, notably finishing off the basement for training, storage, offices and locker rooms and exercise.*
- 3. The building does not meet several present building, life safety, and accessibility codes and police department certification requirements.*
- 4. The building lacks adequate locker rooms and has no shower facilities.*

Another shortcoming of the existing facility is lack of space to park or garage vehicles. Mechanical work is farmed out to local garages. There are 10 to 15 operational cruisers, both marked and unmarked.

Communications equipment has been upgraded over the last several years, although there are still problems with it. In 1997 the police had one transmitting tower and one portable radio. They now have walkie-talkies for each officer and four receiving towers located around town. Degraded phone lines, wear and tear on equipment and some inconsistency in the manner in which the equipment is used and maintained by individual officers contributes to some of the problems, but some incompatibility of hardware has complicated the issue. The department has been dealing with the problems in house due to budgetary constraints.

There are now twenty eight (28) officers on the force. Federal standards suggest that with our population of 14,000, Westport should have 33 officers. The leadership of the Police force feels more officers are required due to the fact that Westport covers over 50 square miles, four miles wide and fourteen miles long, and borders two urban centers. There is also the added burden of serving the summer visitors who visit Horseneck Beach. Ten officers have been added since 1997. A Federal program to help towns upgrade their police forces subsidized six out of the ten, which helped ease the strain on upgrading the force. The Federal subsidy has run out, which forced the department to downsize from 33 officers to the current 28, which is all the Town of Westport tax base will accommodate when State and Federal funds to municipalities are shrinking.

At present there is one Administrative Assistant who handles the routine administrative duties for the force and supervises dispatch. This person is overloaded with work and has a difficult time completing tasks due to interruptions caused by phone answering duties and dealing with visitors to the Police station. There is a serious need for a Head Dispatcher position to handle those duties.

By applying for grants and State and Federal reimbursement programs, the Police Department has actively pursued revenue enhancement and received \$1.2 million in grants over the last few years, despite not having the staff time to pursue every grant available to them.

11.3.3.3 Fire Department and Facilities

Westport's Fire Department is housed in two facilities. The oldest is the Central Village Station; the more modern facility is at Briggs Road at the intersection with Rte. 88. The Briggs Rd. Station has recently received a new addition.

At this time two stations are adequate to cover the Town; however the Central Village Station needs to be relocated or have substantial modifications done to solve some of the problems. Some replacement vehicles must be specially ordered to fit into the station, which adds an extra cost to the vehicle. Much of the equipment is old and needs frequent service and repair. Some trucks are antiques and are getting harder to repair due to the difficulty in getting parts. Unlike the Highway Department, the Fire Department does not have its own repair garage or mechanics. Except for some minor service, the major repairs are done by outside mechanics. The report of the Public Safety Land/Building Committee lists in detail the present problems with the current equipment and the Central Village Fire Station.

Westport mans its stations with a five-man shift: three in Central Village and two at Briggs Rd. These five people must provide for fire and ambulance response. Most of the time it is adequate, but the difficulty in attracting new recruits, particularly to the call firefighters, sometimes puts a strain on the department. Ambulance calls represent most of the emergency vehicle runs from the two stations. Out of 2027 runs by the primary emergency vehicles in the year 2000, 1371 were ambulance runs; nearly 68%. The Town voted to have two ambulances on 24hour call in the mid 1980's, and it is beginning to look as though there should be three ambulances to meet the growing needs of the Town.

11.3.4 Public Health and Works

11.3.4.1 Municipal Solid Waste (B.O.H.)

Westport completed the capping of its landfill in 1998 and now handles its solid waste through a transfer station and recycling center located at the old landfill site on Hix Bridge Rd. Some residents subscribe to a private trash collection service, which helps reduce the load on the transfer station. In capping the landfill Westport acquired a new roll-off truck and five roll-off containers. Town Meeting approved the purchase of a new loader. The Town has a contract with the city of New Bedford to receive our solid waste at the Crapo Hill landfill; it is delivered by the new roll-off truck driven by one of two Board of Health Transfer Station employees.

Given the hours spent by one employee handling equipment and delivering containers to Fall River, there is usually only one attendant at the guard shack to monitor trash entering the transfer station. There is a need for one additional attendant to monitor the recycling center. Westport's recycling center handles a wide range of recyclables, including cardboard, newspaper, junk mail, metal, glass (clear, brown & green), fluorescent bulbs, crankcase oil, paint, tires and batteries. It provides a space for the local Music Boosters to sort and handle returnable bottles and cans. One continuous challenge for the Board of Health is finding markets for recycled materials. The State keeps a list of dealers who will receive certain materials, but the list changes frequently and occasional gaps occur.

The recycling center is not a big money maker for the Town, but balancing those materials we do get money for against those we have to pay to get rid of reduces dramatically the volume of trash we need to truck to New Bedford at the cost of \$67 to \$87/ton.

11.3.4.2 Town Nurse

Westport's Town Nursing Department exists in the person of one Registered Nurse. The office is located in the Town Hall Annex at 856 Main Rd. and is open on Monday, Tuesday and Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

The services provided by the Town Nurse include:

1. *Well Child Clinic*

Clinics are held once a month with an attending physician and provide all State mandated immunizations, lead screenings and health exams.

2. *Adult Immunizations*

The Nursing Department provides Tetanus Diphtheria Boosters, Diphtheria, Flu, and Pneumococcal injections. Flu clinics are held yearly.

3. *Blood Pressure Clinic*

Held at the Town Hall Annex every Monday 9:00 am to 12:00 noon and at the Senior Center every 3rd Tuesday of the month. Clinic includes healthy life choices and education regarding medication and nutrition.

4. *Other services include maternal and newborn home visits, WIC (Women, Infant and Child) Satellite Program once a month, glucose screenings, B12 injections per order of physician, TB testing, other vaccines for high risk adults, referrals, loan of durable medical equipment, and communicable disease investigation and reporting as required by Mass Dept. of Public Health (MDPH).*

The Nursing Department feels it provides adequate service to the Town at this time, although they do recognize some gaps in the visiting nurse programs, controlled by Medicare, which dictates the length and number of visits it will pay for. There are private nursing organizations that provide service, but for some residents it is beyond their reach financially and the Town would be providing a needed service if it could contribute more to this need. Adding an LPN as one additional staff person in the Town Nurse's office would improve services provided, but the need is not urgent at this time.

11.3.4.3 Highway Department

Westport's Highway Department is located behind the Town Hall at 820 Main Rd. in the middle of Central Village. Its primary building is a metal building containing the office, repair garage and sign shop. That building was built over forty years ago and is in need of maintenance. The office space is too small and there will be a need for more garage space in the not too distant future. Accessory structures include a pole barn for storing salt and another smaller metal structure for cold storage. There are also aboveground fuel tanks that supply all Town vehicles.

There are eleven (11) full time employees, one office clerk, a General Foreman and the Highway Surveyor. The department has lost two positions recently due to cutbacks. The Highway Department does most of its own maintenance and repairs on vehicles and equipment. Ninety percent of the department vehicles are garaged in the main building. Some equipment is so old that parts are hard to find and the Town will need to consider some major capital expenses to replace them in the near future. The department owns a grader that is over 30 years old.

A high percentage of the work done by the department is tree work. In order to make that work more efficient the Town would need to invest in a bucket truck. As an alternative, the Town might consider contracting that work out to a private contractor, since providing that service by Town employees may not be as cost effective when considering equipment costs and using Highway Department staff.

The base communications system is out of date and in need of upgrading. Radios in vehicles are upgraded with the vehicles.

Subdivisions built in the last several years have been constructing more sophisticated stormwater management systems than in previous years. The proliferation of stormwater retention and detention ponds, as well as alternative drainage structures, has created new and more complex maintenance responsibilities for the Highway Department. This new task has not burdened the department yet, since these new systems are still relatively clean and haven't experienced degradation or overgrowth over time. The need to attend to these

systems will come over the next few years and represents a substantial burden to the present resources available to the department. It is inevitable that this workload will translate into a demand for higher appropriations for the Highway Department at Town Meeting. To make this situation even more serious, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed new stormwater management requirements for cities and towns mandating more oversight on any work impacting the discharge of stormwater into rivers and streams. Not only will this increase the workload for the department, it will require the Town to pay for engineering services to meet the new regulations. This may push the Town to consider a permanent position of Town Engineer and perhaps the formation of a Department of Public Works (DPW). This would help not only highway maintenance, but also serve to consolidate Town resources to more efficiently and economically manage and maintain public facilities. With talk of future expansion of public water and sewer in parts of the north end, the Town needs to consider forming a Water and Sewer Commission.

Chapter 90 highway funds, which are allocated from the State yearly to all Towns and Cities in the Commonwealth, have historically provided the bulk of the necessary revenue for road improvement projects in Westport. Chapter 90 funds may not be used for routine patching and maintenance, which must be funded from the Highway budget. Chapter 90 funds may be used only for "road improvement" projects, and Westport primarily uses its Chap. 90 money for road overlay projects. Previously, Westport has received approximately \$500,000 of Chapter 90 funds every year; however, recent crises at the State level have dramatically cut into State funds to municipalities, and Chapter 90 funds have been reduced severely. Only \$163,000 came from the state in FY00, and in FY03 and 04 that number fell further to around \$80,000. It is unknown when this situation will improve. If any road improvements are to be undertaken, it would be prudent for the Town to seek innovative strategies to raise needed revenues through means other than impacting Westport's tax rate. Chap. 90 funds may be "saved" from year to year. They can then be applied to projects of larger scope. Because the cost of a roadway reconstruction project (for new pavement, drainage improvements or widening) is significant, Towns often cannot fund a "major" construction project with their Chap. 90 money. However, the State allows Chap. 90 funds to be used for the design of road improvements to roads, which then qualify for State/Federal construction funding. Other communities similar to Westport have used their Chapter 90 funds in this way to obtain significant road construction of some local roads to be funded by the State. In Westport, roads classified as "Rural Major Collectors" on the state classification list, including East Beach Road, Adamsville Road, Old County Road, Hix Bridge Rd. and Pine Hill Road, would be eligible for projects of this type. Improvements to State roads in Town will be totally funded by the State, but they must be coordinated through the State planning agency and Massachusetts Highway Department. This is how the recent improvements to Route 88 were performed. Other state funds or grants may also be available for certain road improvements, including enhancements or safety improvements, for which the Town could apply. Such strategies are dependent on local State Representatives and the Highway Surveyor being involved with regional and state agencies in leveraging available State and Federal funds for local road projects.

11.3.4.4 Cemetery Department

Westport's Cemetery Department manages 36 cemeteries under perpetual care. There are four primary cemeteries where interments are still performed. They include the cemetery at Westport Point, Maple Grove and Linden Grove on Reed Rd., and the Beech Grove Cemetery on Main Rd. The department is staffed by one department head and two permanent employees. Part time help has been employed in the summer, but the current fiscal crisis has suspended that opportunity for the department to get much needed extra help in its busiest season.

Housed in a small shed at the Beech grove Cemetery, the department garages what equipment they can. There is a small storage shed at the Reed Road location. All maintenance equipment, such as mowers and trimmers, is transported from the main building to the various cemeteries around town. The building is in need of expansion and maintenance. Historically any improvements to the buildings have been done by the cemetery staff. Limited staff and time have prevented some building projects from being completed. They own two dump trucks, a trailer and one pickup truck.

The Highway Department offers substantial assistance to the Cemetery Department with heavy equipment and manpower for some land clearing operations. It is a Highway Department backhoe that performs the excavations for interments.

There are many more than 36 cemeteries in Town; it would be beneficial to map all of them in the Town's GIS. This would not only help the Cemetery Department manage these assets, but it would help the Town protect these invaluable cultural and historic resources and help the Veteran's Agent to efficiently service veteran's graves. If the department had more staff and equipment they could provide maintenance to more of the local cemeteries.

The most pressing need perceived by this department is that of acquiring land for meeting the needs of the Town well into the future. It is estimated that there may be enough land at the Beech Grove Cemetery to provide service for another 60 to 80 years. If a study of the Town Forest reveals that it would be the best location for the new Central Village Fire Station or Public Safety Building, that period of service could be cut in half. This is a long range planning issue that the Town must address.

11.3.4.5 Harbormaster

The primary issue facing the Harbormaster is siltation caused by sand washed into the river from the sand dunes. In his report to the Capital Improvement Planning Committee in June of 1999 the Harbormaster stressed the need for dredging of the entire working harbor and reconstruction of the jetty at Horseneck Point (Boat Beach).

Funding for this project is a serious concern. The recommendation for the Capital Improvement Plan was for the Town to set aside \$50,000 per year as matching funds, starting in the year 2000, until State and Federal money was available. Due to fiscal emergencies faced at Town Meeting, that money has not been put aside. In fact, \$25,000 that was reserved for that purpose was swept into the General Fund to help reduce the deficit.

In 2002 the urgency to address the river dredging moved the Selectmen to form a committee dedicated to moving that project forward. Since no funds had been put aside for this purpose, the committee is seeking any other means to fund the project. State and Federal funds are available, and the committee has received support through the Community Preservation Committee to contribute to the Town's share. Some funds are also available from an enterprise fund that was established to support these kinds of projects.

The dredging project is divided into two separate projects. The first addresses the main channel from Half Mile Rock to just west of Crack Rock. The channel will be dredged from 100 to 150 feet in width, and 9 feet in depth at low tide. This is a Federal project run by the Army Corps of Engineers. The Town has already contributed \$25,000 as matching funds and may have to come up with as much as \$100,000 more. Sampling studies of the bottom material has determined that it is suitable for beach renourishment, so it will be pumped onto the beach. It is expected to begin in the fall of 2005.

The second dredging project focuses on the area around the Town docks at the Point. This is a State project with local matching funds and in-kind services. Sampling studies have determined that the bottom material will not be suitable for beach renourishment, which places an additional burden on the project to locate a disposal site. Two options are being considered. The first is ocean disposal, requiring finding a suitable ocean site. The second is upland disposal, and a site for that is being sought. The Town gravel pit on Drift Rd. is being

considered. This project may only be performed in November, December and January. There is a lengthy permitting process that is underway and it is the hope of the dredging committee to have the permitting in place before the end of September 2004 and start the project the following November.

The health of Westport's river and working harbor has a direct impact on the health of our commercial fishing industry as well as all activities related to recreational boating and fishing. This is a resource that cannot be ignored and the Town must support the strategies put forth by the committee to guarantee the success of the project.

11.3.4.6 Wharfinger

The Town Wharf at Westport Point was completely rebuilt in 2001. Money raised through docking fees goes into an enterprise fund that supports the department. At this time the wharf is in good shape and under good management.

11.3.4.7 Landing Commission

The Landing Commission serves to maintain landings in Town that exist for the purpose of giving Westport's residents access to the Town's rivers and ponds. Map 11-1 shows the known Town Landings, as well as the two Public landings at Gooseberry Island and the foot of the Fontaine Bridge. Access to Westport's rivers and ponds is an important amenity for Westport residents, and it is vital that the Town protect the rights of its citizens to take advantage of these special resources. Some landings are no longer used or maintained. Some are heavily used and the commission spends most of its meager budget on the maintenance of these facilities. The notable Town landings that are most heavily used include one on the south side of Hix Bridge, one at the Head, and one off River Road near Adamsville.

11.3.5 Schools

Westport's schools represent the largest department in Town in terms of facilities and personnel. They also utilize over 65% of the Town's annual budget. The schools are particularly vulnerable in times of fiscal difficulty since much of the annual increase in the costs of running the schools are driven by mandates by the state. They are also subject to contractual agreements with a large labor union. Current development trends are yielding subdivisions that house young couples raising or planning to raise families. For the Town this represents a potential burden on the tax base, but one that will not be felt until those children grow to school age and enter the system. This is one area where long range planning is essential to anticipate the future impacts of new development. Westport must plan, design and construct renovations and/or additions to existing school facilities in order to be prepared for the impacts of this growth.

11.3.5.1 The Alice A. Macomber Primary School

The Alice A. Macomber Primary School is a Pre-kindergarten through Kindergarten facility currently housing approximately 250 students in 29,000 sq. ft. on approximately four acres. Built in 1956 with a four-classroom addition constructed in 1966, the program offers Integrated Pre-school, Early Elementary Development, Full Day Kindergarten. The grounds contain a recently renovated playground and fields used by some Town athletic teams.

11.3.5.2 The Westport Elementary School

The Westport Elementary School, serving Grades 1 through 4, currently houses 650 students in 60,000 sq. ft. set on five acres. Built in 1977, it is a square building constructed around a central open courtyard. The grounds contain playing fields used by a variety of Town sports teams. The WES is the newest public school facility.

11.3.5.3 The Westport Middle School

Built in 1970, the Westport Middle School serves Grades 5 through 8 and currently houses approximately 650 students. The 108,000 sq. ft. building consists of two levels. The grounds contain athletic fields and tennis courts.

11.3.5.4 Westport High School

Westport High School is a complex that consists of 123,340 sq. ft. currently housing approximately 485 students. Built in 1954, with additions at both north and south ends constructed in 1972, this building also houses the central administration offices and the district maintenance department for the school system. In 1999, Town Meeting approved a 3.3 million dollar bond for school repairs, with most of the projected work targeted for needed high school renovations. The high school is underwent NEASC reaccreditation in 2001-02 and 2002-03.

11.3.5.5 Westport Community Schools Administration Offices

The Westport Community Schools Administration Offices and the district's Maintenance Department are located in two converted classrooms and several offices at the northern end of the Westport High School.

11.3.5.6 Regional Schools

Westport, along with Fall River, Somerset, and Swansea, support the Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School and Diman Regional School of Practical Nursing. In each class year Diman prepares approximately 20 Westport students to enter employment as skilled apprentices or to go on to more advanced technical training.

11.3.5.7 Current Status of Facilities

*Upon the completion of several system wide building renovation projects currently underway, the schools will meet all American with Disabilities Act requirements. Facilities maintenance is also addressed in the district's strategic plan for 2000-2005, **Destination: Excellence**, which was developed through extensive community participation. The plan gives readers a glimpse of the upcoming programs and initiatives that Westport citizens can expect to see in the future, including "more extensive facilities planning, improved reading and writing across the curriculum, and increased achievement of all students in keeping with 21st century workforce standards."*

11.3.5.8 The Specific Westport Community Schools Action Plan

*The Westport Community Schools' overall action plan is incorporated in its 2000-2005 strategic plan document, **Destination Excellence**. This comprehensive plan, developed through series of focused discussions reflecting the views of a broad cross section of the community, provides the guiding principles in setting the direction for the school system. In this report, emphasis is placed on "a healthy, safe, and structured environment...conducive to learning", "(an environment) that supports and encourages quality teaching," and facilities that "ensure that Westport Community Schools enhance the value of the community." The School Committee has set, as one of its ongoing priorities, the need to: advocate for quality facilities that can accommodate smaller class size despite enrollment growth; provide accessibility to state of the art technology and information systems; and, adhere to national and regional school accreditation standards.*

To meet the objective within this goal, the School Committee has established a School Growth Planning Subcommittee, which has continued to monitor the status of the system's facilities as they reflect the academic goals of the instructional program. In December 2001, the subcommittee recommended, and the School Committee approved, a Long Range Planning study to assess the current status of the system's facilities, as well as its enrollment trends. That study, conducted by the McGuire Group, was completed in May 2002. In addition, the renovations scheduled for completion by Fall 2003 include complete renovation of the high school science labs in order to provide a more suitable environment for instructional needs in this area. Other renovations in three of the system's four schools, while not undertaking any structural changes, do improve the quality of the learning environment through renovated heating, lighting and flooring systems.

11.3.6 Library

After eighty years in varied locations, the Westport Free Public Library moved to its current home at 408 Old County Road in 1971. The current 7,056 sq.-ft. building, constructed in part

with federal funds, is a one-story, flat roofed, cinder block structure. The stucco sides with a false facade of shingles give the appearance of a mansard roof. The Library is maintained primarily by Town funds, supplemented by state grants and trust income.

The interior of the library provides an open floor plan housing eleven public service areas including circulation (176 sq. ft.), reference (541 sq. ft.), and public access computers (36 sq. ft.). The adult collections are located in the following areas: fiction (532 sq. ft.), non-fiction (770 sq. ft.), new books (176 sq. ft.), large print (36 sq. ft.), audiovisual (54 sq. ft.), and periodicals (96 sq. ft.). The children's area is approximately 704 sq. ft.; and the young adult area 162 sq. ft. Current shelving is filled to capacity with 35,000 books, 300 audiocassettes, and 300 videos.

A separate multipurpose room with an adjacent small kitchen can accommodate up to sixty people. It serves a dual function, providing an 882 sq. ft. space for library programs and community meetings.

With the exception of the front door, which must be opened manually, the Library is handicapped accessible. A 7,500 sq.-ft. parking lot provides one handicapped and fifteen regular parking spaces.

In 1971 the Westport Library was 2,800 sq. ft. below the minimum space requirements recommended by the American Library Association for a town the size of Westport. In fiscal year 1999 (FY'99), 0.87% of the Westport "municipal pie" was spent on the library. For libraries in the same population group (10,000-14,999), the average was 1.45%; and statewide the average was 1.35%. When compared with other libraries in its population group for FY'00, Westport ranked 44 out of 49 for total appropriated municipal income and 45 out of 49 for total operating expenditures. It is clear that while the Town has under funded this department, the Library has been a well-managed and maintained facility, with support from the Friends of the Westport Library, and has served the population well.

11.3.7 Recreational Facilities

Recreational facilities have been inventoried and assessed in the Open Space and Recreation section 8.3B and 8.5.3

11.3.8 Social Services

11.3.8.1 Senior Services and Needs

The Council on Aging is housed in the Senior Center located at 75 Reed Road. Built in 1907 as the Head School, renamed as the Hazel Tripp Building, the building underwent renovations, and the Senior Center opened in 1996, with renovations continuing in the basement area. The primary function of the Council is to identify and meet the needs of Westport's elder population and to inform elders and the community of available services. To fulfill this mission there are four branches to the department.

- *Social Services, which include help with concerns about health insurance, pharmacy programs, fuel assistance, Medicare advocacy and various health care needs which include working with various other Town Departments.*
- *Dial a Ride Transportation - Currently the COA has 4 vans with drivers who are first aid and CPR trained.*
- *Senior Social Day Program - currently open 5 days a week from 9 to 3. The program is self-sufficient.*
- *Senior Center Programs and Activities include physical classes aimed at keeping healthy and active; creative arts and craft classes and activities; education opportunities including using current technology; and just plain having food and fun.*

The Friends of the Council on Aging is a volunteer group of citizens who lend support throughout the year to help this department deliver needed services.

In order to assess how they were meeting the needs of the Town's elders, the council conducted the 2001 Town of Westport Needs Assessment of Persons Age 55 and Older. From this survey it is clear the three main concerns of the elderly are:

- 1. Having to give up their home and be dependent on others.*
- 2. Isolation.*
- 3. Transportation.*

Senior Services and Needs - Meeting the above 3 needs will keep the Council busy for the foreseeable future. The elders will need the Town's continued support.

11.4 Implementation/Action Plan

11.4.1 Impact of growth on Capital Facilities and Human Services

1. Examine and evaluate current use of Town owned land
2. Strategize acquisition of land to meet Town needs
3. Study long range impact of growth on Capital Facilities and the threshold at which major improvements or expansion would be triggered.

11.4.2 Town Department Study

1. Evaluate current organization of departments.
2. Study benefits of combining/reorganizing some departments.
3. Evaluate benefits of forming a Westport Department of Public Works (DPW).
4. Make decision on recommendation of Public Safety Land/Building Committee
 - a. If decision is made to proceed with a Public Safety Building combining the South End Fire Station and the Police, evaluate existing Town owned land to site the facility. If none can serve that purpose, conduct a land search to identify and acquire the necessary land.
 - b. If decision is to keep both departments separate, conduct a land search to meet the needs of both departments.
5. Hire additional employee for solid waste transfer station.
6. Acquire land for expansion of cemetery.
7. Plan/Design/Construct addition to Library
8. Plan/design/construct renovations and/or additions to existing school facilities.
9. Continue implementing improvements to Town facilities to meet compliance requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
10. Complete construction of the Local Area Network in Town offices and provide for local administration and maintenance of the network through a new Town position or private contractor.
11. Appropriate funds to complete the implementation and upgrading of the Town's Geographic Information System (GIS).

11.4.3 Revenue Enhancement

1. Study available options to leverage more money from State for road maintenance and improvements.
2. Aid all Town departments in finding revenue enhancement opportunities to support their programs.
3. Increase user fees where appropriate to enhance the Town's revenue stream.

NOTES

- 1. For the complete action plan for Capital Facilities and Human Services, please refer to Section 12.9 of Chapter 12.**
- 2. During the public meeting of February 26, 2003, a member of the public expressed the opinion that "things are going to change" and that it is important that there be continuity in the management of Town government functions by professional staff because there will be more problems to be addressed as the Town grows, there is a limited pool of volunteer government officials, and the number of hours people are willing to serve as volunteers will be inadequate to respond to these challenges.**
- 3. One member of the Planning Board questioned whether the Town was ready for a Department of Public Works, and suggested a small engineering department instead.**
- 4. Proposition 2 1/2 overrides continue to be a controversial topic among Planning Board members and the general public.**

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