

GOVERNANCE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Town Government in Dedham

Dedham adopted its first charter in 1974. A municipal charter is a written description of a community's form of government and distribution of powers. Massachusetts cities and towns have two options for establishing their own charter, and Dedham chose to pursue a *home rule* charter under Article 89 of the state constitution. The Home Rule Procedures Act (M.G.L. c.43B), which the legislature enacted to implement Article 89, requires municipalities to establish a Charter Commission to create or amend a home rule charter. In the mid-1990s, Dedham initiated the process for making substantial changes to its 1974 charter. Dedham's Charter Commission completed a study, but only some of the Commission's charter proposals were accepted by the town. Establishing the position of town administrator was among the changes that voters agreed to support. Replacing the former position of executive secretary with the more powerful role of town administrator marked a significant shift in Dedham, enabling the town to move toward a more centralized form of government. However, elements of a decentralized government structure remained, as evidenced by the retention of several elected boards and oversight of some professional staff by boards or committees. Today, Dedham appears to be poised to examine the distribution of powers allotted in the current charter, reflect on this structure's performance over time, and consider its governance needs as it looks to the future.

Dedham's charter provides for a five-member Board of Selectmen, an appointed Town Administrator, who serves as chief administrative officer of the town, and a representative town meeting. The charter instituted what could be called a "three-quarters" approach to centralized government. While the majority of Dedham's boards and officials are appointed by either the Board of Selectmen or the Town Administrator, several are elected offices, including the Planning Board, Town Assessor, and Town Clerk.

Board of Selectmen

The Board of Selectmen leads the executive branch of Dedham's town government. As the town's chief elected officials, the Board of Selectmen is responsible for formulating and promulgating policy directives and guidelines to be followed by all town agencies that fall under the Board's jurisdiction. The Board serves as town's licensing authority, issuing licenses for the sale of alcohol, food, and other consumer products. In addition, the Board of Selectmen appoints a number of prominent town positions and boards, including the Town Administrator, Board of Appeals, Registrars of Voters, Director of Finance, and the Building Commission. (For a complete list of appointed boards and positions, see Table 1.)

DRAFT*Town Administrator*

In 1995, the Board of Selectmen appointed Dedham's first Town Administrator, replacing the position of executive secretary. The Town Administrator is generally responsible for the day-to-day operations of local government, handling matters assigned to the position by charter or delegated by the Board of Selectmen. Specifically, the powers and duties of the Town Administrator include:

- ◆ The efficient administration of town functions and activities;
- ◆ Appointments of a number of department heads, commissions, boards and committees;
- ◆ Administration of the town's personnel system and negotiation of collective bargaining agreements with town employee unions;
- ◆ Jurisdiction over the rental and use of town facilities and oversight of their maintenance and repair (except for facilities under the control of the School Committee or Conservation Commission);
- ◆ Preparation and presentation of the annual operating budget and proposed capital outlay program; and
- ◆ Service as the town's chief procurement officer; and related duties.

While Dedham's Town Administrator has authority to appoint, remove, and supervise a number of offices, the position does not have jurisdiction over departments administered by elected boards.

Elected and Appointed Offices

Dedham's government consists of thirty-two elected and appointed officials (not including the Town Administrator) and twenty-seven elected and appointed boards, commissions, or committees. Some offices have regulatory powers, such as the Board of Health and Planning Board, while others serve in a policy-making role, such as the Trustees of the Public Library and Parks and Recreation Commission. Further, some offices are advisory, such as the Commission on Disability, Transportation Committee, the Building, Planning, and Construction Commission, and the Design Review Advisory Board. Other elected or appointed offices function in an administrative or operational capacity. The Town Administrator appoints the police and fire chiefs, building commissioner, director of finance, and the director of public works, which play major roles in the delivery of town services. The Town Clerk, a key administrative office, is elected by voters.

Elected Boards

In addition to the Board of Selectmen, Dedham has eight elected boards and committees as well as an elected Town Clerk and Town Moderator, and Treasurer-Collector. Some elected officials essentially serve as full-time paid employees, such as the Town Clerk, while members of the elected boards typically serve as unpaid volunteers, notably members of the Board of Selectmen, Board of Health,

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and Planning Board. Some of these offices employ additional staff, like the Board of Assessors, which oversees a Director of Assessing and three assessing specialists. The town's elected officials and number of members per elected board or commission include:¹

- ◆ Board of Selectmen; 5
- ◆ Board of Assessors; 3
- ◆ Board of Health; 3
- ◆ Commissioners of Trust Funds; 5
- ◆ Housing Authority; 5
- ◆ Parks and Recreation Committee; 5
- ◆ Planning Board; 5
- ◆ School Committee; 7
- ◆ Town Clerk; 1
- ◆ Town Moderator; 1
- ◆ Trustees of the Public Library; 5

Appointed Boards

In Dedham, the Board of Selectmen or Town Administrator has appointing authority for most of the appointed offices. The Town Charter assigns authority to the Board of Selectmen to appoint the Town Administrator, constables, registrars of voters, the board of appeals, conservation commission, and the historic district commission. The Board may also appoint additional boards or commissions that function primarily in a policy-making or advisory capacity. Table 1 lists the town's appointed boards and committees.

¹ Sources: Town of Dedham, Dedham Town Report: 2006. Town of Dedham, official website, <http://www.dedham-ma.gov/>. Note: the Housing Authority includes one member appointed by the governor, as required by law.

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Table 1: Appointed Boards, Committees, and Statutory Offices

Appointed office	Number appointed	Appointed by
Town Administrator	1	Board of Selectmen
Board of Appeals	7	Board of Selectmen
Building Commissioner	1	Town Administrator
Building, Planning, & Construction Commission	7	Town Administrator
Canine Controller	1	Town Administrator
Capital Expenditures Committee	5	Moderator
Civic Pride Committee	29	Town Administrator
Civil Defense Director	1	Town Administrator
Commission on Disability	5	Board of Selectmen
Conservation Commission	5	Board of Selectmen
Council on Aging	10	Town Administrator
Cultural Council	5	Board of Selectmen
Design Review Advisory Board	5	Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Historic Design Commission
Director of Finance*	1	Town Administrator
Director of Public Works	1	Town Administrator
Endicott Estate Commission	9	Town Administrator
Finance Committee	9	Moderator
Fire Chief	1	Town Administrator
Historic Districts Commission	7	Board of Selectmen
Police Chief	1	Town Administrator
Registrar of Voters	4	Board of Selectmen
Scholarship Committee	6	Board of Selectmen
Sealer of Weights and Measures	1	Town Administrator
Town Counsel	1	Board of Selectmen
Transportation Committee	2	Town Administrator
Treasurer*	1	Director of Finance
Collector*	1	Director of Finance
Veteran's Agent and Procurement Officer	1	Town Administrator
Water Commissioners	3	Board of Selectmen
Wire Inspector	1	Town Administrator
Youth Commission	7	Town Administrator

* Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2002 created the position of the Director of Finance, and made the previously elected positions of Town Treasurer and Town Collector appointed positions. At the Dedham Town Meeting of 2008, a home Rule Petition was approved to consolidate the positions of Treasurer and Collector. This change is still pending in the legislature. Mariellen Murphy (Director of Finance, Town of Dedham, MA), communication to Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 2 October 2008.

Source: Town of Dedham, Dedham Town Report: 2006.

DRAFT*Municipal Departments*

Dedham's seventeen municipal departments provide services to residents and businesses and maintain the municipal facilities and infrastructure. The Town Administrator appoints a number of department heads and senior staff, while other staff are appointed by the official or boards that oversee them. Although some of the town's elected and appointed officials work as town employees, most of Dedham's 400+ municipal workers are the staff of departments.²

Form of Town Meeting

Dedham's legislative branch of government is a Representative Town Meeting. Currently, the Town is divided into seven precincts. According to Dedham's Charter, the representative town meeting is to consist of "not less than 270 members and not more than the closest higher number of members necessary to achieve an equal number of members from each district."³ Today, Dedham has 273 elected representatives (thirty-nine from each precinct) for its nearly 24,000 residents.⁴

Dedham is one of thirty-six municipalities in the Commonwealth with a Representative Town Meeting form of government. Dedham combines its town meeting format with a "strong" Town Moderator and also holds "mini-town meetings" the week prior to regular scheduled town meetings. The mini-meetings provide residents with an opportunity to discuss items on town meeting warrants and provide municipal staff with feedback prior to the official town meeting vote. In addition, this "preview" process allows the Moderator to conduct a tightly-run town meeting during which articles on the warrant are referred to by number only. Avoiding the warrant text facilitates an unusually efficient meeting that most often concludes in a single night. District representatives take their responsibilities seriously. They function as "precinct captains," personally approaching constituents to gather information and opinions. Town board members and officials and residents appreciate both the Town Meeting process and its efficiency. There does not appear to be strong sentiment in Dedham to a change town meeting to a town council – in Massachusetts, a less common type of legislative body that also holds some executive powers.⁵

² See Chapter XX, Community Facilities and Services.

³ Dedham Home Rule Charter as amended at 1992 Annual Town Meeting Article 22, Chapter 134, Acts of 1992. Prior to 1992, Dedham's Charter only required that representative town meeting consist of not less than 270 members.

⁴ Town of Dedham, Official Town Website, <http://www.dedham-ma.gov/index.cfm?pid=13707>.

⁵ Meeting with Town Administrator and other Department Heads (Town of Dedham, MA), verbal communication to Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 21 May 2008; Various boards, commissions, and officials (Town of Dedham, MA), verbal communication to Community Opportunities Group, Inc, 10 September 2008.

DRAFT*Regional governance*

Although many types of regional services exist in Massachusetts, there is little in the way of regional government. Until recently, Massachusetts had a total of fourteen counties governments, each with administrative responsibility for county courts, jails, and a registry of deeds, and maintenance of county roads. In the late 1990s, the Commonwealth abolished the governments of four Massachusetts counties. Two other counties have since secured special charters to become regional councils of government, with an additional county special charter still pending in the legislature. These county governments provide a variety of services to their participating cities and towns (who pay an annual assessment), including planning, public safety, engineering, water and waste disposal. The remaining six county governments remained substantially unchanged. Norfolk County, for which Dedham is the county seat, is one of the six remaining county governments.⁶

All Massachusetts counties, regardless of whether they have maintained their county government, still elect their registrar of deed and probate, sheriffs, and district attorneys. Counties whose governments are still intact provide additional services. In Norfolk County, these services include the registry of deeds, county engineering department, Norfolk County Agricultural High School, the sheriff's department, the Wollaston Recreational Facility, appellate tax jurisdiction, the county treasurer's office, county land and open space management, some statutory jurisdiction over roads, and retired and senior volunteer programs.⁷ Although Dedham experiences more of a county presence than other communities, county government is a minimal part of the day-to-day operation and governance of Dedham.

Despite the lack of any single framework of regional government, there are many organizations that contribute to the web of regional *governance* that involves and affects Dedham. Since Dedham is a part of the Boston metropolitan area, which most define as 101 cities and towns around Boston, the nature and extent of regional organization is greater for Dedham than other suburban communities. While all communities are part of systems and have problems that are regional in nature, Dedham's part in a major metro area make awareness of and participation in regional cooperation and problem-solving all the more important.

Dedham is a part of the following regional organizations:

- ♦ Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) – A planning and advocacy organization for the 101 cities and towns in the metropolitan Boston area. This region is divided into eight subregions, including the Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC), of which Dedham is a member. Each member town of the MAPC has a Local Council Representative, who may or may not attend the

⁶ The League of Women Voters, Your Government, "Massachusetts Government: County Government," <http://lwvma.org/govcounty.shtml>, (accessed 8 October 2008).

⁷ The County of Norfolk Massachusetts, "About Norfolk County," <http://www.norfolkcounty.org/index.cfm?pid=10436m> (accessed 8 October 2008).

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TRIC subregion monthly meetings. In Dedham, the Local Council Representative is the Town Clerk, who attends the TRIC meetings. Other staff from the Town also attend TRIC meetings—including the Town Administrator and Economic Development—giving Dedham the reputation of being activist and interested in regional issues.⁸

- ◆ Charles River Watershed Association – A non-profit organization that leads a range of law, advocacy, and science-based initiatives along the Charles River and the thirty-five communities that comprise its watershed. The CRWA monitors water quality along the river, provides policy guidance for communities (for instance, model stormwater bylaws or best practices for low-impact development), give educational talks to companies, local government, and community groups, and numerous other activities.
- ◆ Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization – Comprised of the 101 communities that define the Boston metro area, the Boston MPO conducts the federally-mandated transportation planning process for metro areas with populations of over 50,000. The MPO conducts long-range and implementation planning for multi-modal transport projects and decides how to allocate federal and some state funds among its member communities.
- ◆ Minuteman Library Network – A consortium of forty-one library with sixty-four locations in the Greater Boston area. The MLN is governed by a nine-member executive board and a Membership Committee comprised of the library directors from each of the forty-one participating communities.
- ◆ Dedham-Westwood Water District – A locally controlled public water supply for Dedham and Westwood. Operating as a self-supporting unit of local government, the DWWD is governed by a six-person board with three members from each town, who in Dedham are appointed by the Board of Selectmen.⁹

Communities often have informal, cooperative arrangements with neighboring towns, too, such as mutual aid (public safety) and occasional equipment sharing. Most of these programs and services reflect decisions made by municipalities to seek resources beyond their own corporate boundaries – within limits. Dedham’s government framework is mostly a local one, and relies relatively little on regional collaboration and this is true for most Massachusetts communities.¹⁰

⁸ Steve Winter (TRIC Subregional Coordinator, Metropolitan Area Planning Council), communication to Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 9 October 2008.

⁹ Dedham-Westwood Water District www.dwwd.org.

¹⁰ Note to Steering Committee/Subcommittee: does Dedham have cooperative inter-local arrangements that should be mentioned here?

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Civic Engagement

Many of Dedham's elected and appointed board members have served in their positions for several years. The most active boards include the elected Board of Selectmen and School Committee (which are often the most contested races), as well as the Planning Board and Finance Committee. In addition to participating in local government through elected or appointed office, Dedham has numerous local civic and service organizations and clubs that offer volunteers service opportunities. Until recently, however, local advocacy groups have not had as profound an impact on Dedham's governmental policy as in other communities. One of these organizations is Dedham Square Circle, a non-profit corporation that organizes and advocates for economic and physical improvements to Dedham's historic downtown.¹¹ Another recently formed advocacy organization is the Mother Brook Community Group in East Dedham. Currently seeking nonprofit status, the group works to improve the condition of the Mother Brook and other local amenities such as Condon Park and the Avery Elementary School.¹² Each of these groups has initiated improvement projects in their respective areas and has lobbied local government for assistance with specific activities. The Dedham Civic Pride Committee is a longer-running, appointed committee with non-profit status that works to improve the overall physical appearance of Dedham.

Aside from the activities of these organizations, citizen participation in town government primarily occurs through its election process, public meetings and town meeting. Additionally, the town's municipal website allows people to be more involved and up to date in Town affairs. Sensing the website could be better utilized, Dedham is considering placing more municipal information and processes on-line. In addition to internet information, Dedham televises many of its public meetings through its local cable access channel, Dedham Public TV.

Recent Changes to Town Government Structure

The amendments to Dedham's Home Rule Charter in 1998 and the subsequent restructuring of several departments moved the town toward a more centralized form of government with more professional staff as opposed to volunteers. Besides increasing the efficiency and expertise of local government, another reason for some of these changes was to limit the town's reliance on outside consultants, although it is not clear whether this has been successful. The town continues to rely on appointed boards to oversee many government functions.

In 2002, a charter amendment authorized creating the position of Director of Finance and made the Town Collector and Treasurer positions appointed offices within the Finance Department.¹³ Town

¹¹ Dedham Square Circle, "Our Vision" <http://www.dedhamsquarecircle.org>

¹² "Move to Nurture Mother Brook," *Daily News*, 17 April 2008, <http://wickedlocal.com/dedham/archive>.

¹³ Mariellen Murphy (Director of Finance, Town of Dedham, MA), communication to Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 2 October 2008.

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Meeting approved a Home Rule Petition to consolidate the Treasurer and Collector into one position in 2007. At the time of this writing, this change is still pending in the legislature.¹⁴ In 2005, the Town separated most engineering functions from the Department of Public Works and created the Department of Infrastructure Engineering, which reports directly to the Town Administrator. This change was the result of many years of discussion within the department, including management and labor issues. Previously, one Public Works Commissioner was responsible for overseeing all public works operations as well as the limited engineering services that occurred. At the time, most engineering services were contracted to private consultants, which some considered inefficient. Providing a professional engineer on staff allows the town to review private development proposals in terms of impacts on local services. Today, the Director of Public Works now oversees Highway, Sewer, Forestry, Cemetery and Fleet Maintenance while the Director of Engineering oversees engineering services, but the two departments work closely together. The Director of Engineering functions as a Town Engineer.

Since 2005, Dedham has added a total of five new full-time positions (this does not include the addition of part-time staff or school department personnel). These positions include:

- ◆ A Network Support Technician in the Finance Department's Technology Division in 2005;
- ◆ A building Code/Enforcement Officer in the Building Department in 2007;
- ◆ An Economic Development Director in 2007;
- ◆ An Environmental Coordinator in 2007; and
- ◆ A GIS Manager in 2008.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL TRENDS

Form of government in surrounding towns

Approximately two-thirds of the communities in Massachusetts with a town form of government have some sort of professional manager or administrator and 88 percent have an open town meeting. Thirty-six out of the Commonwealth's 301 cities and towns have a representative town meeting. However, this number was higher until several changed to a city form of government beginning in the late 1970s. Table 2 summarizes the basic characteristics of local government in the communities surrounding Dedham.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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Table 2
Forms of Local Government in Dedham's Region

Community	Population*	Type of Town Meeting	Type of Charter*	Executive Structure
Canton	21,916	Open	N/A	BOS/Exec. Sec.
Dover	5,627	Open	N/A	BOS/Town Ad.
Foxborough	16,298	Open	Special Act	BOS/Town Mgr.
Medfield	12,266	Open	N/A	BOS/Town Ad.
Milton	25,691	Representative	N/A	BOS/Town Ad.
Needham	28,263	Representative	Special Act [‡]	BOS/Town Mgr.
Norwood	28,172	Representative	Home Rule	BOS/Gen. Mgr.
Randolph	30,168	Representative	N/A	BOS/Exec. Sec.
Sharon	17,033	Open	N/A	BOS/Town Ad.
Stoughton	26,951	Representative	Home Rule	BOS/Town Ad.
Walpole	23,086	Representative	Home Rule [‡]	BOS/Town Ad.
Westwood	14,010	Open	Home Rule [‡]	BOS/Town Ad.

*Massachusetts Department of Revenue, *Population Estimates, 2007, Municipal Data Bank*, <http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=dorhomepage&L=1&L0=Home&sid=Ador> (accessed 3 Oct 2008).

[‡] Those without Charters operate under the provisions encompassed in MGL c.39 through c.44.

[‡] Town Charter available on-line

Note: Communities are member of the Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC) sub-region of the MAPC.

Sources: Official Town websites of the above listed communities.

REGIONAL COOPERATION

Although Massachusetts lacks any sort of robust or consistent framework for regional governance, many municipalities partake in some type regional affiliation, Dedham included (see “Existing Conditions – Regional Governance”). Beyond the Town’s existing regional affiliations such as the MAPC, the Dedham-Westwood Water District, and its mutual-aid agreements with neighborhood towns, Dedham has collaborated with nearby communities to address regional issues.

In 2002, Dedham partnered with the neighboring towns of Canton, Norwood, and Westwood to form a regional working group charged with studying, development-related issues such as traffic, environmental issues and contaminated sites.¹⁵ The study spurred the formation of the Regional Working Group (RWG) through the Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce. This group—which now includes the towns of Dedham, Canton, Norwood, Westwood, and Walpole¹⁶ – meets quarterly to coordinate and manage large development projects with regional impacts and also to pursue

¹⁵ Daylor Consulting Group, *Municipal Growth Planning Study Phase II*, May 2002, 1.

¹⁶ The towns of Sharon and Norfolk occasionally join the RWG, but are not official members.

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regional economic development initiatives. Each member community pays annual dues which go to the Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber provides a number of services, including training and professional development, project monitoring, facilitation between member towns, and advocacy at the state level for funding and support for member communities. Currently, the RWG is focused on branding the region in order to attract desirable industries, such as the life sciences. The group is a way to move forward with these large objectives, while also to get member communities around the table to discuss current issues of regional concern.¹⁷

Another initiative that recognizes Dedham's role within its greater region is the establishment of Dedham's Economic Development Director. Created in 2007, this position seeks to allow Dedham to better communicate with and compete within the greater economic region. Specifically, the Economic Development Director is responsible for preparing a town-wide Economic Development Plan, overseeing the Legacy Place development, participating in the Master Plan update, serving as a resource to the Town on creating additional affordable housing, and facilitating the revitalization of Dedham Square.¹⁸ The Director is a member of the Economic Development Committee of the Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce and works closely with the Massachusetts Office of Business Development and the Massachusetts Municipal Association.¹⁹

The most pressing issues—including traffic, pollution, affordable housing, and sprawl—facing communities today are regional in nature. Therefore, these sorts of regional relationships and initiatives will continue to be an important aspect of ensuring a high quality of life at the local level, and Dedham should continue its record of participating in regional dialogue and action.

PAST PLANS AND STUDIES

There has been little concerted study of governance in Dedham since the Charter Commission's work from 1992 and 1994. In drafting proposed amendments to the charter, the Commission studied the structure of government in Dedham. The Commission produced a Majority Report on its findings. Many of the Majority Report recommendations were not carried forward as proposed charter amendment, but some aspects were, and they were compiled into a Minority Report that became the basis for the warrant articles for Town Meeting. In 1995, voters acted on the charter amendments at a general town election and agreed to establish the position of the Town Administrator. This marked the most substantive change to Dedham's government structure since the first Home Rule Charter in 1974.

¹⁷ Susan McQuade (President, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce), to Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 9 October 2008.

¹⁸ Town of Dedham, Official Town Website, Town Departments, Economic Development, <http://www.dedham-ma.gov/index.cfm?pid=14667> (accessed 9 May 2008).

¹⁹ Karen O'Connell (Dedham Economic Development Director, Town of Dedham, MA), communication to Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 19 June 2008.

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ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Elected and appointed boards

Dedham's charter provides for a fairly common form of town government—a board of selectmen-town administrator arrangement with a legislative body of representative town meeting. The charter consolidates most but not all executive-branch operations under the town administrator and locates responsibility for most but not all executive-branch policy with the Board of Selectmen. However, though mostly centralized, this structure nevertheless divides authority and procedures in ways that raise issues for those within local government. Currently, the Dedham's Town Charter empowers the Town Administrator with the responsibility of hiring and firing authority over most town employees, but not for those who serve as staff for elected boards. (The Town Administrator is, however, involved in contract negotiations and budget decisions with all town employees). In some instances, the disconnect between elected and appointed officials can result in friction and stalemates, and in extreme circumstances can politicize policy and regulatory approvals.

Dedham has taken steps to improve interdepartmental dialogue. Soon after being appointed, the Town Administrator began holding regular meetings with senior staff in the town's major operations departments. However, departments that serve as staff to elected boards or committees are not typically represented, including the town planner, yet these departments work together on a daily basis. In the planner's case, the issue is complicated by the fact that Dedham funds the position as a consultant to the Planning Board, not as a salaried town employee.

Development review and permitting

The divide between elected and appointed boards can cause a breakdown in communication that raises particular problems for development review and permitting. Development permitting usually benefits from inter-board consultation, particularly for large or complex projects. The different procedures and timetables of development review and permitting authorities can make it very difficult for local officials to communicate. For these reasons, it is extremely important for boards and departments to maintain regular and clear communication throughout the duration of a development project. Dedham's current structure of government scatters offices with development-related charges in different areas of government: the Conservation Commission and Board of Appeals are appointed by the Board of Selectmen, the DPW director, Economic Development Director, Environmental Coordinator, Fire and Police Chiefs, and Building, Planning, and Construction Commission are appointed by the Town Administrator, and the Planning Board and Parks, Recreation Commission, and Board of Health are elected by voters. All of these offices have a role in the development process and need to be informed as projects unfold and the need for various inspections, reviews, and approvals arise. Currently, Dedham's boards, commissions, and officials have a difficult time managing their workloads during times of increased development activity. When new projects arise suddenly, they have a difficult time responding quickly to the abrupt increase.²⁰

²⁰ Various boards, commissions, and officials (Town of Dedham, MA), verbal communication to Community Opportunities Group, Inc, 10 September 2008.

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Another development-issue stemming from fragmented communication between departments is the occasional reliance on outside consultants for services that could be completed in-house. Currently, the town does not require that all town departments review development proposals during the permitting process or that all proposals be referred to the in-house engineer. For example, the Parks and Recreation Department built new recreation fields at the recently-acquired SMA property. This project relied in part on the donated landscape architecture services of a local resident. However, the plans were sent to an outside consultant for review at a significant cost to the town (paid from bond proceeds) when the Engineering Department could have conducted the review.

In efforts to improve the development process where possible, Dedham has established a Development Review Team. Composed of department heads with a role in permitting and development, the Development Review Team meets informally with developers to discuss project proposals in the preliminary stages of project development before the more formal permitting and review process starts. This is an opportunity for the developer to sit down with all the town departments at the same time and discuss a proposal, a pre-emptive gesture which helps to avert future pitfalls and hopefully setting the stage for a more informed and smoother process going forward. The participating department heads include include the Town Planner, Economic Development Director, Building Commissioner, DPW Director, Town Engineer, Environmental Coordinator, the Chiefs of Police and Fire, and the Health Department Director. However, committees and boards without staff, such as the Historic District Commission, are not represented at these meetings.²¹

Other recent changes may help to improve the efficiency and clarity of the development review process. For example, the Economic Development Director's position is expected to foster and improve interdepartmental and board communication related to nonresidential development in Dedham. Additionally, Dedham's recently adopted permitting software system, ENR Govsolutions, should increase efficiency between permitting departments and also encourage greater departmental and board cooperation on economic development projects viewed beneficial to the town.²² However, economic development and community planning are different disciplines and the Planning Board's statutory responsibilities exceed the purview of the Economic Development Director. An equally pressing concern for the town is to reassess the wisdom of having a Town Planner work on a consulting basis to the Planning Board.

Changes to Form of Government

In addition to improving communication within the existing governmental structure, some Dedham residents and officials have advocated for seeking to change the form of government itself. In 2007, the Citizens for Dedham Neighborhood Alliance, Inc. proposed the adoption of a new Commission

²¹ **Note to Subcommittee: We are not confident that this description of the development review team is complete. Please advise.**

²² Karen O'Connell, communication to Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 19 June 2008.

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on Dedham Government to review the structure and organization of Dedham's government and to "compare it to other towns, enhance the economy, efficiency and quality of decision-making and service in town government, enhance the openness and transparency of town government and identify best practices in government operations."²³ Ultimately the Finance Committee recommended that this article be postponed indefinitely. Dedham is hardly alone in its interest in reviewing the structure of its local government; surrounding communities are also examining their local governments in order to increase efficiency of their operations. For example, in 2004, a study committee in Sharon recommended establishing a Charter Commission, and at an all-boards meeting in September of 2008, attendants expressed concern that all departments do not report to the Town Administrator. Some board members have suggested that the Town establish a Charter Review Committee to look at the current government structure and determine whether adjustments should be made.²⁴

Efficiency vs. effectiveness

Conversations with municipal employees and officials suggest that many are dissatisfied with inefficiencies that seems to result, in part, from the organization of town government in Dedham today. However, a deliberative process and citizen influence and participation seem to be highly valued aspects of Dedham's political culture. While Dedham officials want more *efficiency* in their government, they also want an *effective* government—one that is responsive to people, works slowly and deliberatively by design, and gives citizens the opportunity to influence or participate directly in decision. For example, the two-year timeline used to review and permit recent large-scale development projects in Dedham was apparently a conscious decision to ensure that an adequate review of these projects occurred; it was a deliberative rather than efficient structure for development review. At an all-board's meeting in September 2008, participants described Dedham as a process-oriented town where people enjoy the opportunity to debate issues prior to Town Meeting.²⁵ Dedham has taken noteworthy action to improve communication and increase efficiency in important ways, such as appointing an Economic Development Coordinator and investing in technology to expedite and clarify the permitting process. As Dedham examines the overall structure of government and the manner in which the town makes and implements decisions, the relationship between efficiency and effectiveness and the role each should play must be considered as well.

²³ Town of Dedham, MA, "Dedham Finance Committee Report and Recommendations for the Annual Town Meeting, 2007," 50.

²⁴ Various boards, commissions, and officials (Town of Dedham, MA), verbal communication to Community Opportunities Group, Inc, 10 September 2008.

²⁵ Ibid.

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Citizen Participation

Besides enhancing communication between the agents/element of town government itself, another key concern for Dedham is how to communicate with citizens and provide access and transparency in local government. One obvious vehicle for citizen participation in local government is Town Meeting. This form of government is supported by dedicated Town Meeting members and facilitated by the “mini-town meetings” held before the Annual Town Meeting. Another important vehicle for citizen participation is the municipal website. In Dedham, some boards and commission post adopted meeting minutes on-line, while others do not. There is a general sense that minutes need to be made available to the public through the town’s website.²⁶

Posted meeting minutes are not a substitute for face-to-face discussion and generally reflect decisions that have already been made. Therefore, Dedham needs to consider other avenues to allow residents to access local boards and commission and to gather citizen input *before* making a decision. For example, access to a monthly calendar of public meetings, the record of minutes from previous meetings, and contact information for elected and appointed officials are important. These are steps that Dedham could take immediately without making structural changes to its website, and some of these changes are already underway.

Dedham’s online permitting system is helping to make steps toward greater public awareness about new development. One of the features of the software is the establishment of an on-line database of development projects through which the public can track the progression of projects through the permitting pipeline. This resource will improve the transparency of the development process and allow for more organized and timely public input.

Another avenue for encouraging greater citizen participation is to enable and encourage independent neighborhood organizations throughout Dedham. Dedham has a substantial number of neighborhood organizations and associations. These groups have organized and networked independently. While some are connected to their Town Meeting representatives, there is no overall coordination of these groups with local government. Creating a structure of outreach and communication between Town Hall and neighborhood groups would increase the capacities of both local government and neighborhood groups, make town officials more aware of public concerns, problems, and events, and improve communication between Dedham’s government and residents and businesses. Dedham needs a way to capture and respond to the energy and knowledge of its neighborhood organizations. The town could consider appointing a staff person to lead the coordination of these important groups. Once a structure and method of communication is selected, neighborhood coordination efforts would likely only take minimal effort, but would have a significant impact—both practically and symbolically—on Town Hall’s relationship with Dedham residents.

²⁶ Ibid.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does Dedham still need independent boards and commissions to oversee professional staff? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this arrangement? Who benefits?
2. To what extent do areas of overlapping jurisdiction among Dedham's boards and commissions present problems for the day-to-day operation of town government?
3. A master plan is not the best place for a thorough review of any community's form of government. That is the province of charter commissions or, in communities with special act charters, the duty of town government study committees. However, government organization, departmental capacity, division of responsibilities, and shared authority have an impact on development review – and clearly, on the quality and character of growth. Presumably the master plan should examine ways to assure that Dedham's development review process furthers the town's master plan goals and policies. On balance, are there steps the town should take, beyond what it already has done and/or has underway, to improve the development review process? What would the ideal development review and permitting process look like?
4. In terms of planning and development, how should the roles and responsibilities of the Town Planner, Economic Development Director, Environmental Coordinator, and related town staff be defined?

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Town of Dedham MASTER PLAN

Government Structure

