

Chapter 7: TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Introduction

Pomfret's Town government provides services and facilities funded by property taxes. The most expensive of these are education (75 percent of the Town budget) and highway maintenance (20 percent), both of which are discussed in separate chapters. The subject of this chapter is the remaining 5 percent of the Town budget: the cost of Town government, fire and police protection, disposal of solid waste, planning and zoning, and recreation. As towns grow and residents raise their expectations of services their town should provide, the overall cost of these services has the potential to grow at a disproportionately faster rate than the tax base.

Town Government

Pomfret is governed by an elected five-member Selectboard. The Selectboard also has a part-time administrative assistant.

The Pomfret Town Clerk and Treasurer are also elected at Town Meeting and are part-time, salaried positions. The Town Clerk and Treasurer each have assistants. In addition to performing official duties, the Town Clerk serves as the liaison between other Town officials and the public. An increase in land sales and the rate of development could increase the administrative workload of the Town Clerk.

The three elected Listers are paid by the hour to perform a highly technical job of evaluating Town property. The Town's core employees and officers – the Listers, Town Clerk, Treasurer, and anyone else working on Town business – share space in the Town Office in the recently updated historic Center School across the road from the Town Hall. The Selectboard meets there regularly, and most of the Town's records are protected there in a fireproof vault.

Emergency Services

FAST Squad and Ambulance

The Pomfret FAST Squad is a group of volunteers with either First Responder or Emergency Medical Training who respond to medical emergencies in the Town. They are dispatched at the same time an ambulance is called but arrive sooner and administer first aid and stabilize the patient until the ambulance arrives. Their equipment is purchased with donated funds.

Ambulance service in Pomfret is provided by the Town of Woodstock which has two ambulances and full-time dispatch service. The Town pays an annual assessment to have this service available, and the patients are charged for actual usage. Unpaid bills are charged to the Town.

Fire Protection

In November of 2012, Pomfret's two independent fire departments merged into the Pomfret-Teago Volunteer Fire Department and now benefit from a coordinated department with improved

training, a single efficient leadership team, and streamlined administrative, budgetary, and long-range planning.

Pomfret's fire protection is enhanced through mutual aid agreements with neighboring towns. Fire protection is supported by annual municipal funds, donations, and grants.

Fire protection in Pomfret can be addressed from other perspectives. The best fire protection is prevention, which is the responsibility of the entire community, not just the fire department. Community financial support and able volunteers are essential to fire protection in Pomfret. It is important that all new development be accessible to standard fire equipment in all seasons. Where possible, water should be available in all areas of the Town through hydrants on new and existing ponds. Anyone planning to build a new pond or to upgrade an old pond should consider consulting one of the fire departments about installation of a dry hydrant. An inventory of all dry hydrants is on the Town's GIS system and easily available to firefighters. Existing burning regulations must be strictly enforced. Houses and other inhabited buildings should be permitted if they are designed to specifications allowing evacuation by existing municipal fire equipment. Houses and access roads should be designed for access by fire and emergency vehicles at all time of the year. Houses with steep access roads, those that are very large, or those without a nearby water source should consider installation of a sprinkler system.

Community volunteers can assist the departments in such non-firefighting jobs as fundraising, collecting important information, informing homeowners of the state law requiring smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and recommending fire extinguishers in appropriate locations. They can also assist the Pomfret Fire Department in sales of this equipment.

911 and Emergency Dispatch

Emergency dispatch services for fire and ambulance emergencies are handled by the Town of Woodstock. Since updated road numbering is complete in Pomfret, all residents can now call "911" to reach this emergency dispatch center.

Police Protection

Pomfret residents depend on contracted service from the Windsor County Sheriff's Department and Troop D of the Vermont State Police located at the Royalton Barracks in Royalton for speed control, safety and police protection. The State Police outpost there covers nineteen towns, sometimes with only one or two officers available to respond to emergencies. Often no officers are on the road between 2:30 and 7 a.m., although they are "on call" during those hours.

The Selectboard can appoint First and Second Town Constables. The Town Constable handles violations of the dog ordinance and assists in other emergencies. If the citizens want a higher level of protection, options include hiring a sheriff to be available certain hours, having the Town Constable trained, certified and officially on call for emergencies, or sharing an "outpost" trooper with a neighboring town.

Emergency Planning

Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan

The Pomfret Selectboard adopted a Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Plan in January 2005 that lays out local hazards and actions to reduce damage from future disasters. When combined with the Regional Pre-Disaster Mitigation plan, the local PDM Plan is the mitigation plan for the town. The Plan includes a critical facilities map that cites flood zones and frequently flooded areas.

Local Emergency Planning Committee

Pomfret has four representatives on the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) #12. LEPC #12 covers 27 member towns in east-central Vermont. While LEPC #12's statutory responsibilities are related only to hazardous materials, the LEPC is also planning for floods and fires.

Solid Waste

Pomfret is a member of the Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District (GUVSWMD) created by 12 member towns to cooperatively manage regional solid waste in an environmentally sound manner. The District is responsible for locating sites and acquiring permits for replacement landfills. The district has obtained permits for access to a new landfill in Hartland and is currently contracted with the City of Lebanon to use their landfill. The GUVSWMD also contracts for recycling and hazardous household waste disposal with a facility in Hartford. For any single town, regional cooperation is more cost effective than applying for permits, building and operating its own transfer station and recycling center facilities.

Child Care

As of early 2014, there are two providers in Pomfret registered with the State of Vermont for in-home childcare. Pomfret supports the private development of additional facilities to meet the child care needs of its residents and may assist with seeking funding to develop these facilities.

Planning and Zoning

The administration of planning and zoning in Pomfret is the responsibility of the Planning Commission, the Zoning Administrator, and the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

The Planning Commission prepares the Town Plan for adoption by the Selectboard and prepares zoning and subdivision regulations for approval by the Selectboard and by the Town. The Planning Commission also sits as a quasi-judicial board to hear and review applications for major subdivisions and all development within the Ridgeline Zone.

The Zoning Administrator issues building and use permits and is responsible for enforcement of the regulations.

The Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) is a quasi-judicial board that hears and reviews applications for conditional use permits, requests for variances, and appeals of decisions of the Zoning Administrator.

Planning and zoning activities have cost the taxpayers very little in Pomfret. The Zoning Administrator is a paid position, and the Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Adjustment are volunteer boards without paid staff. Fees are charged for building permits and for applications requiring a hearing. State planning funds awarded to the Town as grants have substantially contributed to covering the cost of rewriting planning and zoning documents in Pomfret. The Town is a member of the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC), and pays a yearly assessment from Town funds, allowing access to technical assistance on planning and other land use issues.

As long as volunteers continue to be available and the process is kept simple, the present system seems to work. However, if the regulations are changed to require a more extensive review of projects, the result will be more work for these boards and for the Administrator. Should administrative help become necessary, permit fees comparable to those of other towns in the area would cover that expense without using tax money. Any changes in Town zoning regulations should take into consideration the cost of administration and the source of those funds.

The Town Garage, which houses all the highway equipment, is in marginal condition and needs a major overhaul with a small addition. It is important that all the equipment used in the winter be stored in a heated building with adequate space for regular maintenance and repair work. Improvements to the Town Garage are long overdue: it is not in compliance with waste handling best practices and safety issues. Energy efficiency issues need to be addressed. The town will need to study and decide as to whether a major renovation will be more cost effective than short-term fixes.

Long Range Planning and Capital Budgeting

In March 2016, Town residents voted and the Pomfret Selectboard appointed a Long Range Planning and Capital Budgeting Committee with the purpose of developing long-range plans and cost estimates relating to the capital needs for Town equipment and facilities. A Capital Equipment Replacement Plan was established and annually updated for Highway equipment, but no long range plan has been established and maintained for town buildings and the Fire Department. In 2009, the town offices were moved from the old town clerk building next door to the newly renovated Center School building.

The Town Hall and the Highway Garage are both in need of major renovations. Although a new roof has been put on the Town Hall, as well as other repairs, the building is in need of substantial structural repairs, energy efficiency improvements, modifications to meet ADA accessibility standards, and life safety code compliance upgrades. The Highway Garage has many functional deficiencies. A Town Building Reserve Fund was established in December of 2013 but a long range plan for upgrading and maintaining town buildings has not been created.

Geographic Data

Pomfret has access to VCGI (Vermont Center for Geographic Information) data and maps of the Town's roads, structures, land cover, surface waters, ridgelines, and wetlands. New data are added to the system regularly, the last major update occurring in 2012 from statewide digital orthophotography. Geographic data is an important tool in reviewing proposed development as it pinpoints issues to be addressed early in the process.

The Geographic Information System (GIS) is useful for long-term planning. Information on soils, roads, topography, natural resources, etc. can be combined to determine areas of Town appropriate for future development or areas where development should be limited. The fire departments and FAST Squad already use maps produced by the GIS for emergency response.

Recreation

Pomfret's organized recreation facilities consist of a baseball field, a soccer field, and a playground, all at the school grounds in South Pomfret. The school's multi-purpose room is also used for basketball and volleyball. Pomfret sports activities are organized by volunteers and the Woodstock Recreation Department. Baseball and soccer teams receive heavy participation from girls and boys in the elementary school. All students in the Town and several surrounding communities are served by Ski Runners, a non-profit ski club, which offers alpine skiing at Suicide Six and cross-country ski programs at the Woodstock Touring Center, both at a very low fee. Ice skating and hockey are available at Union Arena in Woodstock.

Opportunities for organized recreation at the adult level are available through the Woodstock Recreation Department using Woodstock's facilities. Pomfret residents pay a non-resident fee to participate in the Woodstock programs that include many sports in all seasons, arts and crafts, dance, yoga, and theater. In addition, rock climbing is available at The Wall in Taftsville.

Organized sports and other recreational activities are limited in Pomfret by the lack of facilities and the small population. Extensive recreational facilities would be expensive to build and maintain, and it is more cost effective to utilize the facilities of larger towns. Pomfret has land available at the Prosper Valley School for more facilities. If facilities could be built with donated, State and/or Federal funds (with their inherent restrictions), a real benefit to the residents, particularly young residents, could be realized. It is hoped such facilities could be maintained with minimal local tax money. The community is fortunate in having a high quality family ski area, Suicide Six, which offers a variety of skiing terrain.

Informal recreation such as hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, bicycling, hunting, and fishing contributes significantly to Pomfret's quality of life. Protected areas such as the Appalachian Trail Corridor and the Amity Pond area will always be available. However, as more land is divided and developed, less land will be available for recreation. Existing rights-of-way on Class 4 roads and legal trails should continue to be held by the Town. Whenever possible, easements should be secured from cooperating landowners for future trails.

Cemeteries

There are currently three Pomfret cemeteries: Burns, Hewittville, and Bunker Hill. Space in them is extremely limited, and the Town must plan to use existing space efficiently and acquire more

cemetery space. Interest from the perpetual care accounts currently pays for all Town cemetery maintenance.

Abbott Memorial Library

Thanks to supportive community funding through town appropriations and private donations, the Library has met state accreditation standards continually since 1999.

Town Owned Buildings and Land

- Town Hall with land
- Town Offices, Brick Building, and town shed with land
- Town Garage with land
- The Prosper Valley School with 38 acres of land, more or less
- Burns Cemetery
- Bunker Hill Cemetery
- Land, 35 acres, more or less off Joe Ranger Road
- Land, 100 acres, more or less off Joe Ranger Road (former “Lease Land”)
- Land, small parcel, at Kenyon Hill Bridge
- North Pomfret picnic area (near firehouse)

Building Improvements

- Town facility
 - Estimated Cost
 - Funding Source
- Town facility
 - Estimated Cost
 - Funding Source

Long-Range Goal

Provide Town services and facilities that meet the needs of residents in a cost-effective manner.

Policies

1. Support availability of high-speed internet access throughout the town to facilitate economic development, education, and delivery of healthcare services to all homes and businesses in town.

2. Continue Town government as a volunteer effort to the greatest extent possible, but utilize technical and administrative assistance when necessary and cost effective.
3. Supplement future fire protection facilities and equipment with community-based fire prevention programs and support for the volunteer fire department.
4. Design roads and driveways in Pomfret to be accessible to emergency vehicles year-round.
5. Where feasible, install approved hydrants in new and existing ponds. Such water sources should be accessible to fire trucks in all parts of the Town.
6. Augment the limited police protection in Pomfret by community awareness and a willingness to look out for the welfare of one's neighbor.
7. Consider the cost and complexity of implementing and enforcing the regulations when creating new zoning, subdivision, and other land development regulations.
8. When appropriate continue and expand regional cooperation in solid waste disposal, emergency services, and recreation facilities as the most effective way to provide quality services.
9. Retain Town rights-of-way as recreational trails. New rights-of-way should be accepted by the Town, when offered, for permanent recreational trails.
10. Acquire enough cemetery land for the future needs of the Town.
11. Continue to develop the Abbott Memorial Library as a resource and gathering place for residents of the Town.
12. Support private sector efforts to seek funding to assist with the development of child care infrastructure.
13. Ensure that no barriers to increasing child care capacity are created by future changes in zoning regulations.

Recommended Actions

1. Form an ad-hoc committee to keep track of how many homes and businesses in Pomfret have access to high-speed internet. This committee should also investigate options to expand high-speed internet to those residences and businesses that would like to have it, including engaging with providers to understand their abilities to provide the Town with this service.

2. Update population and household growth projections as new information becomes available so they can be used for planning future services and facilities. (Planning Commission)
3. Study the short- and long-term needs of Town for government operations including facilities, administrative help, and technology, and develop a capital budget based on conservative estimates. (Selectboard)
4. The volunteer fire departments should continue to enlist the help of non-firefighter volunteers to assist in community fire prevention and preparedness through education, inspections, updating dry hydrant and fire pond inventories, location of new fire ponds, etc. (Emergency Services Committee)
5. Encourage other methods of internment other than land-intensive cemeteries. (Selectboard)
6. Advise the Selectboard on appropriate permit fees for land development regulations to cover the cost of administering the regulations. (Planning Commission)
7. Routinely evaluate the use of town owned parcels of land to ensure they are being used according to agreements or deed restrictions (Planning Commission)
8. Annually fund building reserve account through tax dollars or private contributions. (Selectboard)