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Report Relative to the Land Use, Permitting, and Health (“Second Floor”) Operations of the Town of Hanson, Massachusetts

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Report Relative to the Land Use, Permitting, and Health (“Second Floor”) Operations of the Town of Hanson, Massachusetts

EDWARD J. COLLINS, JR. CENTER FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

February 2012



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Hanson retained UMass Boston's Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management to perform an assessment of ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness within the Town government. This report addresses the "second floor" departments, which include: Building Inspections (along with wiring, plumbing, etc.), Conservation, Health, Planning, and Zoning.

Findings:

While the first floor departments are doing the work to keep Hanson functioning today, the second floor departments are doing the work to keep Hanson strong tomorrow, protecting the resources of the Town for the future. "Resources" should be taken in the broadest sense of the term, which would include financial resources, natural resources, environmental resources, and the health and safety of the public. Fortunately, second floor staff have a wealth of institutional knowledge and a remarkable level of commitment to the well-being of the Town. Board members are also to be commended for their dedication and the time they take from their personal lives to contribute to Town governance.

Against these strengths, the Town obviously faces challenges. The most obvious short-term challenge is the vacancies in second floor positions. Yet it is also an opportunity to rethink the staffing model of the second floor over the long-term.

The study team found that:

1. The lack of technology hinders the efficient and effective functioning of the second floor.
2. Staff on the second floor communicate to get their work done, but not because of any overarching structure, plan or directive.
3. Morale on the second floor is low, just as was found during the first floor assessment.
4. Even during periods of financial constraints, investing in the programs on the second floor is sound public policy.

Recommendations:

The Center has identified several options on how to restructure the departments on the second floor and improve operations.

The study team recommends that the Town of Hanson:

1. Consider implementing one of the three restricting models described in the Recommendations section of this report.
2. Increase the use of information technology to improve processes and record keeping.
3. Align the hours of the second floor windows.
4. Establish regular meetings of second floor staff including general staff meetings and Technical Review Team meetings.
5. Retain the services of a highly-skilled Conservation Agent.
6. Secure temporary staff to get caught up on the current administrative backlog.

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BACKGROUND

The Town of Hanson retained the Collins Center to perform an assessment that includes recommendations for ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness, as well as any additional recommendations that may improve Town operations or service delivery. The overall project includes a review of the operations of two sets of departments, the “first floor” departments of the Town Hall, which refers to the administration and finance-related offices, and the “second floor” departments, which refers broadly to the land use-related, permitting, and health offices.

This report deals only with the “second floor” departments. Before going further, it may be helpful to review the “first floor” report, because it touches on many issues that are relevant for and apply to the “second floor” as well. The departments on the “second floor” include:

- Planning;
- Conservation;
- Building Inspections (along with wiring, plumbing, etc.);
- Health; and,
- Zoning.

For a description of the principles that guided the Center’s research and more general background for this work, please see the Appendix of this report or the Background section of the “first floor” report. Beyond the Center’s general principles, it is worth restating here two other general observations about municipal government in Massachusetts.

First, the responsibilities facing most municipal departments have been steadily rising over the years. At the same time, in cities and towns across the Commonwealth, there have been numerous cutbacks to staff positions and hours. At some point, the need to do more with less can lead to errors, miscommunication, and disputes, which in turn take up more time and cost. The Center study team believes that elected leaders and the public need to recognize and acknowledge that this situation is legitimately frustrating for those working on the front lines of municipal governments. In addition, those working on front lines of municipal governments must recognize and acknowledge that frustration cannot be an excuse. The work must get done. And that leads to a second general observation about municipal government in Massachusetts.

Recent and rapid changes in the demands on municipal government require jurisdictions to find new ways of operating. While many basic service demands – that is, providing police, fire, roads, inspections, parks, etc. – have not changed, the way municipalities are required to provide them has changed and will continue changing. The growth in state and federal mandates, personnel and finance laws, potential liability for mistakes, community expectations, and information technology available means that even continuing to provide the same services requires significant changes in how the Town does business. Quite simply, “that’s how we’ve always done it” is no longer an adequate explanation for how things get done. There must be change.

In the case of the “second floor” departments in Hanson, change can and must come even faster, due to the recent series of departures on the floor.

FINDINGS

If there was a common theme that emerged from the Center's interviews with staff and board members, it could be paraphrased as follows: While the first floor departments are doing the work to keep Hanson functioning today, the second floor departments are doing the work to keep Hanson strong tomorrow. In short, it is the second floor departments whose mission is to protect and grow the resources of the Town for the future. Resources should be taken in the broadest sense of the term, which would include financial resources, natural resources, environmental resources, and the health and safety of the public. All of these are "resources" that are essential for Hanson to remain a strong Town and community.

This observation about the second floor's role is in no way a slight to the first floor. Instead, it implies that their work functions are complementary, and that each is essential for its own reasons. The Center basically agrees with this characterization of the second floor's activities, although it is not a perfect fit. For example, some second floor work is critical for the Town today, and some first floor work is more about the Town's future. Moreover, the characterization does not acknowledge the natural tension that exists between the second floor departments - a tension that may occur between those functions charged with growing the Town's financial resources through economic development and those that protect the Town's natural resources (like clean water). Nevertheless, the observation is a good big-picture way of thinking about what the second floor does. No town could be successful in the long run without the second floor departments, just as they could not be successful without the first floor departments.

Fortunately for the Town, the second floor staff have a wealth of institutional knowledge and a remarkable level of commitment to the well-being of the Town. They also have shown tremendous initiative in continuing to operate their small departments with the limited resources available to them. Board members are also to be commended for their dedication and the time they take from their personal lives to contribute to Town governance. Some volunteers and members of the public have even donated money to help second floor departments acquire critical supplies and software. Without this knowledge base and dedication, the challenges described below would be even more difficult to face. It is clear that many staff and board members have risen to the occasion.

Against these strengths, the Town obviously faces significant challenges. The most obvious challenge is the vacancies in second floor positions. As of late January 2012, the following positions were vacant:

1. Town Planner;
2. Conservation Agent;
3. Administrative Assistant to the Planning Board; and,
4. Administrative Assistant to the Board of Health.

Having these positions vacant is obviously a significant challenge in the short-term. However, it is also an opportunity to rethink the staffing model of the second floor over the long-term and search for a way to provide better services more efficiently. Additionally, while the vacancies are a challenge, they are also symptomatic of larger issues. The findings below will focus on the deeper issues that may have led to some of the vacancies and to other challenges for the Town. As with the prior report, the findings in this section are broken into discrete categories for the purposes of discussion. They are obviously all interconnected.

1. Operations and Workload

Much of the work of the departments on the second floor is fundamentally interconnected. In many cases, a project that comes to one department for review will go to most if not all of the other departments on the

floor. As a result, maintaining efficiency and effectiveness in each department is important to the functioning of the all the remaining departments.

Beyond the vacancies noted, the greatest hindrance to the efficient and effective functioning of the departments on the second floor is the lack of usage of technology. With only a few exceptions, the permits, licenses, reviews, and other documents processed on the floor are done on paper. This is ineffective and inefficient for multiple reasons: (1) it slows down the process of moving information from one place to another; (2) it makes searching for information a time-consuming task; (3) it increases the chances for error and lost information; and, (4) it makes research and analysis of large amounts of data virtually impossible.

Among the challenges facing staff on the floor, several interviewees noted that they are bogged down in paper, filing has fallen behind, and there were occasions where locating paper documents proved difficult in the timeframe needed. Clearly, moving away from primarily paper-based processes would help alleviate some of these challenges.

It is also important to note that the majority of people interviewed for this part of the project either raised the issue of using more information technology themselves or were open to it when it was presented to them. Moreover, it seems that the Building Department and the Board of Health are both in the process of implementing or investigating greater usage of technology. In short, opposition to or fear of information technology does not seem to be obstacles to its greater usage in the day-to-day operations of second floor departments.

To be sure, it will never be possible to eliminate paper entirely from the work. Some documents must remain in paper form and some members of the public will always prefer to operate entirely in paper. However, even if some of the information can be moved from paper to electronic, it may be possible to consolidate some of the filing space of the various departments in such a way that it will be easier for departments to collaborate and share information more easily. Additionally, the paper forms should be standardized in appearance so that they are easier for the public to use and convey the sense of the unified permitting process.

The time savings from these changes will allow staff and Board members more time to focus on the work that is currently not being done or is being done only belatedly. This includes routine tasks such as meeting minutes for the second floor's boards and committees, as well as deeper analytical and technical research and big-picture planning. This could also include implementation of the Town's master plan, analysis of well and septic locations in Town, and taking the lead on grabbing opportunities as they arise. For example, one interviewee noted that a no-cost Brockton Area Transit study on senior transportation was missed because nobody was available to take charge of it from the Town's side.

Finally, there were examples of areas where the floor's operations could be improved by better coordination and organization. This would include ensuring that the most critical functions of all positions are backed up by other on the floor (or elsewhere in town hall) or working to coordinate the hours of department windows better.

2. Communications and Collaboration

The Center study team observed that while the departments work together in the second floor, they do so because of longstanding relationships and a commitment to get their work done, not because of any overarching structure, plan, or directive. Formal coordination and communication on the second floor is mostly absent. This point was made by several interviews who expressed a greater desire for more of a "team" attitude and less of a sense of "fiefdoms."

While most of this challenge was presented in general terms, a few examples are worth noting. First, the issue of knowing when other departments will be open or closed was raised on several occasions. Second, it was noted that years ago there were department-wide meetings to discuss common issues and permit applications, but that those had not been happening regularly (or possibly at all) for quite some time. (Several interviewees expressed an interest in seeing those meetings return.) Third, the example was given of a major property takedown that is happening without significant overarching coordination.

The second communication-related area that is in need of improvement is communication with the public. As one interviewee mentioned, quite a few people have little or no understanding of what types of property improvements require permits and what do not. Many are also uncertain regarding the differing roles and responsibilities of the second floor departments, so staff time is sometimes spent re-directing members of the public to other departments. Further, as the boards and commissions undertake new initiatives, the general public may not be aware of the services they offer (e.g., Health faces issues with hoarders, trailers, etc. that many people may not be aware of). Not only that, the Town's website may contribute to the confusion over roles and responsibilities. For example, the Conservation Commission, Board of Health, and Planning Board do not appear on the "Boards, Commissions and Committees" page of the site, but instead are on the "Departments" page. This is understandable given close working relationship between Town staff and these boards and committees, but it is likely to be confusing for the average resident, who may be unfamiliar with the workings of the Town government.

A final area of note with regard to communication and collaboration has to do with the direct supervision of personnel on the floor who work with the various boards and committees whose offices are on the floor. It has been brought to the Center team's attention that there have been differences of opinion over this issue in the past. While it is outside the scope of the project to weigh in on the legal aspects of any such disputes, from a general policy standpoint, having the staff on the floor report to a professional staff member for day-to-day oversight, and administrative and human resources matters, provides a more effective and efficient organizational structure. However, this must be done collaboratively, with due respect for the boards' and committees' responsibility for providing policy guidance and direction.

There are several issues underlying all of these communications challenges. As noted, time constraints exist, staff workloads are high, and policy direction can come from different boards, committees, and commissions. Also, as discussed in the first floor report, the spatial layout of the floor hinders easy communication. Even beyond these issues, communications may be further hindered by a lack of overarching leadership on the hall.

3. Morale:

As with the first floor report, it is the Center's general observation that morale among Town staff is low. Also as with the first floor, this has several causes. Communication is one problem. Another is the fiscal situation, which causes staff to worry that hours or jobs may be cut. Some have already seen cuts impact co-workers or have experienced reductions in hours themselves. Additionally, those staff who are truly passionate about their work see the cutbacks negatively affecting the quality of the services they are able to provide.

Beyond these issues, there was definitely a sense from both the staff and the boards and committees of the second floor that they feel undervalued. They believe, as described earlier, that their floor is essential to the future of the Town, and that they are being cut because they are an easier target than departments that have a more direct and obvious impact on the immediate operations of the Town. There is almost a sense that the present and future are being pitted against each other for the shrinking pool of resources. Whether true or not, the perception of this split presents a real problem for the general governance of the Town.

To restate a few points from the first floor report, the Center believes that morale is a critical issue to the functioning of all organizations, and that this topic (while potentially more subjective or controversial than some of the others) is important to understanding the issues facing Hanson. Getting satisfaction from work and being eager to do a good job are not simply niceties for staff. Research shows that morale can have an effect on performance. If morale is low, that will have an impact on the quality of services provided and the efficiency of operations. Clearly, this has also already had an effect on retention of staff, and potentially on recruitment as well.

4. Hidden Costs and Risks:

The final area of findings that it is important to cover briefly involves those items that do not appear as direct costs to the Town, but which should be considered in policy-making discussions, because they present potential future costs. Several of these were raised during the interviews. One example is the Factory Pond Dam that is jointly owned with Hanover and that prevents the water from a pond that is a superfund site from getting into numerous waterways and potential sources of drinking water. Another was testing of the water quality of ponds.

Given the nature of their missions, the departments of the second floor are essentially responsible for a wide array of preventative functions. The policy challenge for those in charge of preventative functions is that their importance is more difficult to measure concretely and their impacts are more difficult to demonstrate to the public than direct services. This problem grows especially acute in times when the resources are extremely strained and all budgetary decisions seem to be a zero-sum game, as is currently the case in Hanson and elsewhere. In this circumstance, those advocating for more resources for preventive functions can feel as if their concerns are being ignored, while those advocating for direct services and those making the budgetary decisions can feel as if they are being asked to cut services in favor of projects and programs that may seem more like luxuries. This can lead to a situation where different departments or boards, all of whom may have the best interests of the Town in mind, talk across each other and fall into adversarial positions. There was some evidence of this in Hanson.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For this report, the Center will present several options on how to approach improving the second floor's operations. This is due to the opportunity to restructure presented by the numerous vacancies on the floor. In addition to the principles articulated in the first floor report and in the Appendix, several additional principles apply to the models proposed. The Center recommends utilizing all the Town's current assets and resources to the maximum extent, including especially the deep pool of institutional knowledge that staff and board members have, while using the current vacancies to create a new overall structure that is more effective and efficient.

The numbers used in each of the models below are rough estimates. The actual human resource costs will depend upon the structure the Town ultimately adopts and the people hired. To ensure that any new positions are competitive, the Town may wish to undertake a limited salary survey of nearby towns and communities.

Following these models are additional recommendations that apply regardless of which the Town selects.

Organizational Recommendations

Model 1: Create a single department under a Town Planner/Assistant Town Administrator position and move administrative assistant structure from five part-time to three full-time positions.

This first model attempts to solve multiple issues via the creation of consolidated department under one senior managerial level position that contains multiple roles within it. The recommended title for the position would be Town Planner/Assistant Town Administrator. The position's job description would focus on four main tasks:

1. Planning and economic development;
2. Managing the day-to-day operations of the second floor staff;
3. Grant-seeking and grant-writing; and,
4. Improving communication among second floor staff, and between second floor and other departments (and the public).

There is no doubt that a significant amount of work will exist under this model for one position and one person. However, if the Town takes advantage of the current economic slowdown in order to put the floor's operations in order and lay the managerial groundwork for the future, when the pace of economic activity picks up again the Town will be well situated to benefit. In other words, while the role's title will be constant, the balance of its work will evolve over time. Over the next year or so, the majority of the time for this position may be focused on implementing information technology, improving second floor processes, coordinating schedules and procedures, and grant-writing. While working on these tasks, the person in the position will gain familiarity with the Town and its assets, in preparation for increased development activity. As the implementation work drops and the managerial load declines, the person can shift more focus to planning and economic development. The pace of that shift can be arranged to coincide with the next uptick in economic activity and the development needs of the Town.

Through this model, the second floor will gain an advocate who can work with the Town Administrator, the Board of Selectmen, and the Finance Committee to raise issues important to the work of the second floor.

When considering hiring, the Center study team believes this position would be attractive to someone who is currently a successful Planner, but may aspire to be a Town Administrator or Town Manager one day. Given

the budget cuts in municipalities statewide, the number of Assistant Town Administrator positions has declined, meaning that this opportunity may be looked at favorably, even if the salary is somewhat lower than Assistants may make in the area. Precedent exists for this type of position. The Center is aware of a half dozen Massachusetts towns that currently have or recently have had Assistant Town Administrator/Planner, Assistant Town Administrator/Director of Community Development, or similar positions.

The second component of this model involves shifting from five part-time administrative assistant positions to three full-time positions. This is possible due to the vacancies in two of the five positions. Two of these administrative assistants will be responsible for two departments each on the floor, while the third will be responsible primarily for one department, but will also have a “floating” role in assisting the other two, backfilling when they are absent, assisting during high-traffic times, and generally backing any administrative needs that may arise. An added benefit to this structure is that, because these positions will be full-time, the hours during which the office windows on the floor will open could be expanded significantly. (This is not to say that the offices will be able to be open for 35 hours, but the hours can be expanded beyond what they are now.) The Town has been fortunate to have high-quality administrative assistants dedicated to Town. However, now that there are openings, the goal will be to create positions that attract additional people with the skill sets and dedication to continue the work and to implement greater use of information technology.

This model makes no changes to the Building Commissioner, Conservation Agent, and Health Agent, and it should be feasible within the second floor’s current budget allocation. (See “Proposed Staffing Model #1.”) While it could produce an annual increase in expenditures of several thousand dollars, over the long-term the gains in capacity for the floor should provide for development opportunities that provide the Town with increased revenue. If successful, this model should improve services in the short-term and provide stronger management of the Town’s resources over the long-term.

Proposed Staffing Model #1			
Department	Title	Hours	Cost
Planning/ATA	Planner/Assistant Town Administrator	35	\$70,000
Board of Appeals/Planning	Administrative Assistant	35	\$40,000
Building/float	Administrative Assistant	35	\$40,000
Building	Commissioner	17	\$30,750
Conservation/Health	Administrative Assistant	35	\$40,000
Conservation	Agent	20	\$29,630
Health	Health Agent	35	\$55,185
		Total	\$305,565

Model 2: Create a single department under a Director of Planning and Land Use Permitting position and move administrative assistant structure from five part-time to three full-time positions.

This second model is very similar to the first, except that it reduces somewhat the role, title, and salary of the new position created. In this case, the position could be called “Director of Planning and Land Use Permitting,” “Director of Planning,” or “Community Development Director.” The position’s role would be very similar to the role described in Model 1. It would still have a significant planning function, and it would still be charged with coordinating the activities on the second floor, but would have less of a leadership role given that it would not be within the Town Administrator’s office.

As with the first model, this model involves shifting from five part-time administrative assistant positions to three full-time positions, and it makes no changes to the Building Commissioner, Conservation Agent, and Health Agent. (See “Proposed Staffing Model #2.) This model again would be approximately cost-neutral. The Center has identified several communities with characteristics similar to Hanson’s that have positions with titles and roles similar to this position (e.g., Director of Planning and Land Use Permitting, Planning and Land Use Administrator, etc.). See Appendix for the job description of one community’s Director of Planning and Land Use Permitting.

Proposed Staffing Model #2			
Department	Title	Hours	Cost
Planning	Director of Planning and Land Use Permitting	35	\$65,000
Board of Appeals/Planning	Administrative Assistant	35	\$40,000
Building/float	Administrative Assistant	35	\$40,000
Building	Commissioner	17	\$30,750
Conservation/Health	Administrative Assistant	35	\$40,000
Conservation	Agent	20	\$29,630
Health	Health Agent	35	\$55,185
		Total	\$300,565

Model 3: Create two departments – Planning/Zoning/Conservation and Building/Health – which report administratively to the Town Administrator. Combine the Planner and Conservation Agent positions, add a part-time junior planner position, move administrative assistant structure from five part-time to two full-time and two part-time (possibly one individual with two areas of responsibility).

A third model that moves in a different direction would be built around creating two departments, one with a combined Planner and Conservation Agent position and part-time junior planner, and the other with the Building Commissioner and Health Agent. As with the first two models, this would also provide the basis for some natural improvements in the coordination of the planning and permitting operations on the second floor. It would also allow the Town to craft a full-time Planner/Conservation Agent position that could be attractive enough to recruit strong candidates for the position.

There is precedent for the shared Planner/Conservation Agent arrangement. The Center has identified several communities with roughly similar characteristics to Hanson’s that have Planner/Conservation Agents. Center staff spoke with one of these Planner/Conservation Agents about the role. The community in which this person works is one with a smaller population (8,000) but a larger geographical size (24 square miles) than Hanson. It also has both a wetlands bylaw and a stormwater bylaw that require enforcement. The combined position was created right around the beginning of the economic downturn and shortly after the Town completed a master plan, and it has worked quite well since then, according to the person in it. With planning activity down and no heavy lifting needed for a master plan, the workload has been manageable for one person doing both positions. However, it remains to be seen whether this will be sustainable as planning activity is now beginning to recover in the community.

This model reduces the administrative assistant capacity from five part-time to two full-time and two part-time (although the two part-time could be filled by a single individual). As with the others, this model still does provide for some “floating” administrative assistant capacity. And as with both other models, this model would require increased usage of information technology and would essentially be cost-neutral. (See “Proposed Staffing Model #3.)

Proposed Staffing Model #3			
Department	Title	Hours	Cost
Planning/Zoning/Conservation	Senior Planner/Conservation Agent	35	\$65,000
Planning/Zoning	Junior Planner	TBD	\$25,000
Planning/Zoning	Administrative Assistant	35	\$40,000
Conservation	Administrative Assistant	20	\$24,000
Building/Health	Commissioner	17	\$30,750
Health	Health Agent	35	\$55,185
Building/floating	Administrative Assistant	35	\$40,000
Health	Administrative Assistant	20	\$24,000
		Total	\$303,935

The Study Team believes that Model 1 offers the greatest benefit to the Town in that it not only provides clear direction and oversight for the efforts of second floor staff, it also strengthens and supplements the staff within the Town Administrator’s Office. Importantly, it creates a career ladder within town government that can help grow a town administrator of the future and offer stability in times of change in leadership. Model 2 similarly unifies second floor staff under a single director at a slightly lower cost than Model 1. Model 3 has precedents in other communities of a similar size to Hanson wherein town planner and conservation agent responsibilities are performed by a single position. It also would provide unified leadership for the planning, zoning, and conservation functions which would increase consistency in how they approach development projects. Model 3 would further bring together all inspection staff so that they could support each other’s efforts and would allow for cross training in the future. Given the workload in Hanson, the Study Team recommends that if Model 3 is selected a junior planner position be created to take some of the workload off of the joint town planner/conservation agent position.

Operational Recommendations:

Regardless of what model the Town chooses, there are several overarching recommendations that apply to the operations of the second floor.

Increase use of Information Technology: The Town must move away from paper-based systems and toward electronic ones, as many towns are doing. In each of the organizational models described above, the number of administrative assistants will decrease, so the floor will need to operate more efficiently. In addition, as noted in the findings, the increased usage of information technology would also allow for additional high-level work (e.g., data analysis) to be undertaken by departments. There are numerous vendors that offer software packages of varying levels of comprehensiveness relative to the floor departments. The Town should investigate those, as well as the software that the Building Department is already utilizing. It is important to note that the cost of an electronic permitting system(s) can be recouped through a fee surcharge so they do not have any impact on the general fund. It would simply be up to the relevant boards and committees to determine whether their fee structures would be appropriate with the new transaction cost added.

A potential technical or financial resource in this area is the Permit Regulatory Office within the Commonwealth’s Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development. In years past, they had grant resources available to assist with technical improvements such as software or document scanning, and they also have available a free permit software system called Municipal Permit Tracking System (MPTS) that includes building, conservation, DPW road openings, septic/wells, and planning permits, among other permits.

Align the Hours of Operation for Town Hall Offices and Windows: The recommendation that the Center made about the first floor departments also applies to the second floor. In short, there are differences in schedules and gaps in the communications around schedules. (See Appendix for Chart of Town Hall hours as listed on the Town's website.) Components of the solution include improving communications, making the schedules clearer, improving communication about sudden absences, and providing better explanations of where people need to go for which tasks (see next section for details). In addition, it may be useful to look at the Town Hall hours schedule as a whole to determine where certain hours may be askew. For example, looking at the chart in the Appendix, it is clear that there are discrepancies on each day between offices closing at 2:00 pm and those closing at 2:30 pm. It is also unclear on the website when the hours were last updated. Adding that could help people determine whether the schedule is likely to be out-of-date or not.

Establish Regular Meetings of Second Floor Staff: Also the same as a first floor recommendation, the Center recommends that the second floor have regular meetings. There are two types of meetings that the Center would recommend holding regularly: (1) General meetings about departmental projects and issues; and (2) Technical Review Team meetings. The former provide an opportunity for staff to be informed about what else is happening on the floor. It may also be useful the Town Administrator and/or the Executive Assistant to the Board of Selectmen to attend some of these meetings. As for Technical Review Team meetings, these should be project-specific and should be held with the relevant players whenever there is a major project underway that touches on multiple departments.

Retain the Services of a Highly-Skilled Conservation Agent: Given the extent of water and wetlands in Town, the widespread use of septic systems, and the fact that the Town secures its drinking water from local aquifers, it is vitally important that the Town find someone with the necessary technical skills and knowledge to fill the Conservation Agent position in Town. This is necessary both to protect the natural resources of the Town, but also to protect the Town against potentially costly litigation that can arise over conservation-related issues. In each of the models described above, the Center has recommended that either a 0.50 FTE Conservation Agent or a combined Planner/Conservation Agent position be created. However, if additional resources became available, the Center would recommend they be applied to this function. Further, the Town should research whether revenues from the Water Department could be used to fund a portion of the Conservation Agent given the position's role in protecting drinking water.

Increase Utility of Town's Website for Information Sharing: The more informed applicants are before they come into Town Hall to secure a permit, the less staff time is needed to direct or re-direct them to different departments and to help them through the process. Of course, the level of sophistication of applicant will always vary from development professionals who regularly apply for permits to homeowners who are novices to the permit process. Even so, nowadays the first stop for information tends to be a city or town's website. If clear and concise information can be made available about permitting processes, even first-time applicants can start the paperwork on their own before coming to meet with staff. The level of detail currently made available on the Town website by the second floor departments varies significantly. In addition, neighbors of development projects expect to see more information on town websites, including staff reports for cases under review and decision letters and conditions of approval. Posting these online will save staff time and cost when community members request copies of documents related to development projects.

Secure the Services of Temporary Staff to Address the Current Backlog of Work: While the above recommendations all concern relatively permanent changes in the structure and operations of the second floor, there is also a short-term issue that has arisen from the current vacancies in floor staffing. Some work has fallen behind, and more may continue to fall behind as the Town works to implement change. For that reason, the Town should remain open to the possibility of temporarily bringing in extra help to get caught up on basic functions for the second floor departments.

METHODOLOGY

Research for this project falls into two general categories: (a) research on the Town of Hanson itself; and, (b) research on the experiences of other communities.

The Hanson research was primarily based on interviews with current Town department heads, staff, volunteer board members, and elected officials. The Center interviewed approximately a dozen people for this project.

In addition, Center staff reviewed numerous Town documents, including budgets, job descriptions, Annual Reports, fee schedules, Special Acts, the website, and much more. Center staff also collected data from the Commonwealth about the Town.

Externally, where the Center encountered unfamiliar topics, staff also conducted additional research on other communities, including conducting an interview with a conservation agent/planner in a community of similar population to Hanson's.

APPENDIX

Appendix I: Hanson Town Hall Office Hours as taken from Town website (in early January 2012)

	Office	Fl	8:00 AM	9:00 AM	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	2:00 PM	3:00 PM	4:00 PM	5:00 PM	6:00 PM	7:00 PM	
Monday	Town Clerk	1	8:00 am to 1:30 pm							2:30 pm to 5:00 pm					
	Board of Assessors	1	8:00 am to 5:00 pm												
	Selectmen/Administ	1	8:00 am to 5:00 pm												
	Accountant	1	8:00 am to 5:00 pm												
	Treasurer/Collector	1	8:10 am to 4:50 pm												
	Board of Health	2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
	Building Department	2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
	Building Inspector	2							1:00 pm to 3:00 pm						
	Conservation Dept	2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
	Conservation Agent	2	8:00 am to 3:00 pm												
	Planning Departmen	2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
	Planner	2	8:00 am to 3:00 pm												
	Zoning Board	2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
	Tuesday	Town Clerk	1	8:00 am to 1:30 pm							2:30 pm to 8:00 pm				
Board of Assessors		1	8:00 am to 8:00 pm												
Selectmen/Administ		1	8:00 am to 8:00 pm												
Accountant		1	8:00 am to 8:00 pm												
Treasurer/Collector		1	8:10 am to 7:50 pm												
Board of Health		2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
Building Department		2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
Building Inspector		2							1:00 pm to 3:00 pm						
Conservation Dept		2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
Conservation Agent		2	8:00 am to 3:00 pm												
Planning Departmen		2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
Planner		2	8:00 am to 3:00 pm												
Zoning Board		2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
Wednesday		Town Clerk	1	8:00 am to 1:30 pm							2:30 pm to 5:00 pm				
	Board of Assessors	1	8:00 am to 5:00 pm												
	Selectmen/Administ	1	8:00 am to 5:00 pm												
	Accountant	1	8:00 am to noon												
	Treasurer/Collector	1	8:10 am to 4:50 pm												
	Board of Health	2	8:00 am to 2:30 pm												
	Building Department	2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
	Building Inspector	2							1:00 pm to 3:00 pm						
	Conservation Dept	2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
	Conservation Agent	2	8:00 am to 3:00 pm												
	Planning Departmen	2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
	Planner	2	8:00 am to 3:00 pm												
	Zoning Board	2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
	Thursday	Town Clerk	1	8:00 am to 1:30 pm							2:30 pm to 5:00 pm				
Board of Assessors		1	8:00 am to 5:00 pm												
Selectmen/Administ		1	8:00 am to 5:00 pm												
Accountant		1	8:00 am to 5:00 pm												
Treasurer/Collector		1	8:10 am to 4:50 pm												
Board of Health		2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
Building Department		2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
Building Inspector		2							1:00 pm to 3:00 pm						
Conservation Dept		2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
Conservation Agent		2	8:00 am to 3:00 pm												
Planning Departmen		2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
Planner		2	8:00 am to 3:00 pm												
Zoning Board		2	8:00 am to 2:00 pm												
Friday		Selectmen/Administ	1	8:00 am to noon											
	Accountant	1	8:00 am to noon												
	Board of Assessors	1	8:00 am to noon												
	Treasurer/Collector	1	8:10 am to 11:50 am												

Appendix II: Position description for Director of Planning and Land-Use Permitting

Overall Responsibilities:

Works under the policy direction of the Town's land-use permitting boards and commissions, and under daily supervision of the Town Administrator. Oversees relevant Town permitting and permit enforcement. Serves as a key member of the Town's management team. Responsible for providing professional planning support, oversight and coordination of the activities of all Town land-use permitting boards and commissions, development and implementation of Town short-range and long-range planning activities, administration and enforcement of related town and state bylaws and regulations, and coordination with local, regional, state and federal groups, both public and private, on planning matters that affect the Town. Supports and enhances Lincoln's volunteer-based form of town governance.

Responsibilities and Duties:

1. Direct and support planning, zoning, and development activities within the Town working in close cooperation with the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission, Historic District Commission, Building Commissioner, Board of Health, Housing Commission, Public Safety Department, Water Commission, Town Clerk and Board of Assessors, and ensure proper communication among them.
2. Coordinate land-use permitting activities of all Town boards, commissions and departments. Oversee Town permitting and permit enforcement. Design and administer policies and procedures, working with appropriate boards and commissions, for the application and granting of permits for all types of construction and development in the Town, including permits pertaining to historic preservation. Supervise the development and administration of enhanced data management and record keeping associated with permitting.
3. Monitor activities and issues occurring at a regional and state level. Participate actively in regional planning organizations. Coordinate the Town's planning for and response to regional challenges and promote active engagement with regional, state and federal agencies.
4. Oversee and coordinate the Town's various short-range and long-range planning processes. Research means of achieving particular planning goals, make recommendations on preferred approach, and assist in drafting proposed zoning bylaw amendments. Research and help establish land use regulations.
5. Advise relevant boards and commissions regarding issues and programs with potentially significant Town, regional and State impact, and serve as the Town's representative/coordinator in the advocacy and follow-through process.
6. As necessary, attend board meetings of land-use boards and commissions and participate in site visits.
7. Convene and lead weekly meetings of the staff of the land-use permitting boards and commissions to coordinate current and upcoming project activities and discuss policy and process issues.
8. Allocate personnel to special projects or to boards and commissions with limited staff on a temporary basis, as necessary.
9. Serve as Town representative to the general public, providing guidance on questions related to land use and planning.
10. Serve as the Town's liaison to local private organizations concerned with land use and preservation, and coordinate with them on matters of mutual interest.
11. Research and assist in preparation of submissions for grant and matching fund opportunities.
12. Perform annual reviews of personnel reporting directly to this position with input from and review by the relevant boards and commissions.
13. Perform other related duties as required.

Basic Knowledge and Experience:

Master's Degree in Planning or related field preferred, and five or more years of experience in community development, town planning, and/or zoning. Experience with multiple boards and commissions, and participation in regional and State planning efforts. Ability to read, understand, and interpret technical specifications, blue prints, zoning, plot plans, and subdivision control and other land use regulations. Ability to analyze problems, prepare reports and formulate recommendations concerning planning operations. Working knowledge of the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that relate to zoning and land use. Aptitude for accuracy and attention to detail. Strong supervisory, written and oral communication, organizational, and customer service skills. Working knowledge of Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, GIS applications and Access personal computer applications.

Independent Action:

Exercises a high level of independent judgment and initiative in the execution of the position's responsibilities, in the interpretation and application of laws, regulations and procedures, and in the direction of personnel. Performs a variety of responsible functions in accordance with state statutes, local ordinances, and established policy. Employee functions independently where appropriate, referring specific problems to the Town Administrator and the relevant boards and commissions when clarification or interpretation of Town or department policy or procedures is required. Has access to position-related confidential information including bid proposals, personnel records, and personal information about citizens.

Supervisory Responsibility:

Together with the relevant boards and commissions, supervises the personnel of the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Housing Commission, Historical Commission, Historic District Commission and Board of Health; as well as the Building Commissioner and Conservation Director. Prepares and administers their annual performance evaluations. Also supervises outside consultants engaged by Town boards and commissions, as requested.

Physical Requirements:

Responsibilities involve close eye/hand coordination, finger dexterity, and manipulative ability to ensure accuracy in using computers and other office equipment, as well as physical ability to handle extensive periods of communication amongst large or small groups. Duties involve occasional light exertion of physical effort to lift or move lightweight materials or equipment. Work does not generally involve occupational risk. Work may involve standing, or being up and away from a desk setting, at least 30% of the workday in generally pleasant working conditions. Moderate physical effort is required to perform field work (e.g. traverses uneven terrain; accesses all areas of construction sites, wood, and swamps).