Designing Dedham 2030

Topic Summary
Governance

The Governance topic of the Master Plan incorporates key indicators of the Dedham's financial health, service delivery, resident and stakeholder surveys and diverse viewpoints from resident feedback. This section aims to outline the ways in which Dedham's local staff and government can be more effective, transparent, and accountable in the services they provide, and ensure that information on local issues and civic participation is accessible for all of Dedham's residents.

G1 Strong financial health

Despite the many recent stressors caused by COVID-19, Dedham is in one of the strongest financial positions in the region. With the ability to borrow money at a low interest rate, a strong financial tax base, and untapped property tax levy, Dedham does not face many of the financial stressors of neighboring municipalities. Dedham also does not rely heavily on State Aid to finance its infrastructure and services, which means Dedham is insulated from the uncertainty of State revenues and aid. Dedham has a history of fully funded pension and benefits contributions and a AAA credit rating from Standard & Poor's. Dedham's financial position is an asset that will allow it to face future economic challenges and uncertainties.

G2 Improving communication with residents

Dedham has taken creative strides to effectively communicate with residents. Town staff currently manage Facebook and Twitter accounts that focus on individual municipal functions and broadcast Board and Commission meetings on DedhamTV. Dedham has also purchased creative tech tools such as the OpenFinance budget dashboard and the CGIS Citizen Request for resident initiated public works requests. However, there is room for improvement as these tools are not widely known and are underutilized by residents. Additional resident engagement and technology tools should be explored and implemented to effectively communicate with residents in intuitive and convenient ways. By hiring a Public Information Officer in February 2021, Dedham has already taken a major step to identify the right tools and improve communication with residents.

G3 High participation rates in Town Meeting

Dedham is one of 33 Massachusetts municipalities that use the Representative Town Meeting form of government. Town meeting members are elected through local elections to represent one of seven precincts across Dedham to terms that are between 1 and 3 years. Town Meeting typically occurs in the Spring and Fall, and as needed for Special Town Meetings. In order to conduct business, Town Meeting must meet its quorum of 170 voting members. Dedham has had the luxury of very high turnout at each meeting and has never had to postpone due to the absence of a quorum. This is an indicator of a high rate of local participation and enables the government to operate as intended.

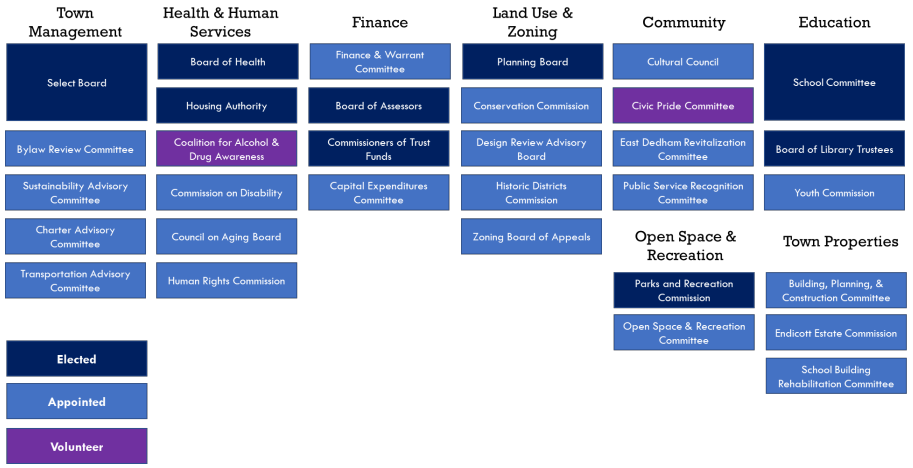
G4 Proactive charter revisitation

Dedham's Charter Advisory Committee takes a progressive look at the Town Charter every 5 years to ensure that local offices are effectively positioned to be successful and that residents are governed in their preferred system. The periodic assessment of the municipality's structure and charter is important to adapt with changing times and needs. Dedham's Charter is a foundational governing document that impacts all residents. A proactive approach to re-examine how it functions helps Dedham prepare for the future.

G5 Many layers of boards and commissions

Dedham relies heavily on the input from its elected, appointed, and volunteer Boards and Commissions, staffed by residents, for input on many municipal decisions. Currently there are 32 active Boards and Commissions. Each play a role in deciding the overall direction of Dedham. But with this many decision-making bodies, it's difficult for the typical resident to understand how to get involved, or where to direct specific issues or feedback. Additionally, many residents feel that the demographics of residents serving on Dedham's Boards and Committees do not reflect the overall population of Dedham.

Categorization of Town Boards and Committees



Draft Goals and Strategies
Governance

To improve Dedham's municipal connection with its residents and to improve the resident experience with municipal services.

G1 Goal 1: Establish a comprehensive approach to centering residents in services and communications to improve transparency and effectiveness of town government.

Strategy 1.1: Rebuild Dedham-ma.gov to be more useful for residents and become a more central resource for all Town Departments. Ensure the website has a useful search function, intuitive navigation, is maintained effective (internally), and is accessible in various languages and on multiple devices. Establish consistent standards and expectations for posting department materials and information

Strategy 1.2: Create a 'Dedham 211' phone line and email that can act as a central intake for all questions or municipal business. Create a system that prioritizes solving issues or directing residents to the right resource in the least number of steps. Appoint an ombudsman or create a mechanism for residents to give feedback when they have suggestions or receive inadequate service

Strategy 1.3: Set annual, monthly, and weekly Departmental Standards for resident outreach and contact. Ensure that each department is accessible and in touch with the public and their needs, while ensuring residents can stay informed on recent projects without barriers. Train staff on effective resident engagement

Strategy 1.4: Undergo an eternal audit of documents, communication systems, programs and policies to identify opportunities to improve communication and resident-friendly services. Revise all resident-facing municipal documents, like the annual budget, to be resident friendly and to better explain the services available to residents

Strategy 1.5: Engage staff to create an annual Citizens Academy, akin to the Dedham Police Academy, to give residents an opportunity to learn about each municipal department. Use this training program to help get more residents involved

Strategy 1.6: Use existing communication channels, such as the Town Talk newsletter, to highlight a department or Board each month to help educate the public and invite involvement

Strategy 1.7: Keep online participation options and hybrid board and committee meetings available to encourage more public participation

G2 Goal 2: Support investment in information technology to modernize the municipal workplace and resident experiences with municipal services.

Strategy 2.1: Separate the Information Technology function from the Finance Department and elevate into a separate department. Pull all IT department needs into a central IT budget. Separate IT capital investment into a separate Capital Improvement Plan that focuses on Dedham's future IT needs

Strategy 2.2: Continue to hire a full-time IT Department staff to manage all day-to day municipal IT tasks and management of long-term needs and assets. Utilize IT staff to support website management, data collection, communications, and other enhanced offerings and functions

Strategy 2.3: Focus on modernizing key municipal functions with tighter interdepartmental communication and processes, online intake and initiation, and full-service municipal software

Strategy 2.4: Adequately train Town Staff on implemented technology and offerings to ensure it is used properly. Offer training to residents on all tech tools and offerings

G3 Goal 3: Align Dedham's representation among boards, committees, and town meeting members to reflect the social and racial demographics of the town.

Strategy 3.1: Keep online participation options and hybrid board and committee meetings available to encourage more public participation. If possible (past April 2022), allow voting members of certain boards and committees to participate remotely. Ensure residents can easily access all hybrid meetings and a single protocol is followed when facilitating meetings

Strategy 3.2: Create and implement a process to gather data on the social and racial demographics of boards, committees, and town meeting representatives

Strategy 3.3: Summarize this data in an annual Town Representation Report (Boards and Committees) that compares demographics to Dedham's population. Assign this responsibility to the Town Manager's office to clearly identify areas for improvement, set goals annually, and review progress

Strategy 3.4: Establish recruitment and engagement practices to increase the diversity of Board and Committee representation (when appropriate) based on the findings of the data gathered on the social and racial demographics of the Town Representation Report

G4 Goal 4: Advance workforce planning, talent management, and align representation for town employees

Strategy 4.1: Create and implement a process to gather data on the social and racial demographics of town employees

Strategy 4.2: Summarize this data in an annual Workforce Demographic Report (Town Hall, Police, Fire) that compares demographics to Dedham's population. Assign this responsibility to the Town Manager's office to clearly identify areas for improvement, set goals annually, and review progress

Strategy 4.3: Streamline and refine hiring processes and improve outreach to find a broader audience of job seekers. Seek to diversify hires to align staff demographics with the town based on the Workforce Demographic Report. Integrate best practices such as blinded review of resumes and initial candidates. Reevaluate job requirements and create more internship opportunities at the associate, undergraduate, and graduate level

Strategy 4.4: Embrace change and foster a culture of learning and continuous improvement. Enable staff to put together service improvement recommendations and the cost/benefits for each department. Support staff training opportunities aligned with service improvement recommendations

Strategy 4.5: Create an extended leadership team that meets monthly and includes professional development opportunities for department heads and junior staff. Implement standard talent development practices including performance reviews, continuing education, etc.

G5 Goal 5: Define expectations, goals, and development opportunities for boards and committees, and encourage increased collaboration and coordination between boards

Strategy 5.1: Create a formal hierarchy for all Boards and Committees. Group each Board/Committee by function and structure them with direct oversight from other Boards/Committees, centered on the Dedham Select Board

Strategy 5.2: Require each Board/Committee to draft an annual report that outlines the previous Fiscal Year's efforts, evaluates, establishes clear goals and steps to achieve. Conduct annual reviews of each board while updating annual goals. Require each Board/Committee to have an annual reorganization of officers.

Strategy 5.3: Establish board and committee collaboration goals for those that may benefit from regularly scheduled joint meetings or other means of communication and coordination

Strategy 5.4: Establish a formal system to encourage and support training for board and committee members through resources such as the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative

Strategy 5.5: Provide annual/bi-annual training to support Board members on such topics as Roberts Rules of Order, creating efficient agendas, and meeting facilitation

G6 Goal 6: Improve monitoring of residents' economic, social, and health needs to define and respond with appropriate social services.

Strategy 6.1: Create a structure or department to oversee all Dedham Social Services. Create a relationship with existing services including the Council on Aging, Veterans' Services, Housing Authority, and Youth Commission. Add capacity for broader Community Health work

Strategy 6.2: Build a strong relationship with the Public Health Department to collaborate on intergenerational programing, address economic contributors to resident health and improve civic engagement.