



TOWN OF BOXFORD
Office of the Town Administrator
7A Spofford Road
Boxford, MA 01921

DATE: Friday, July 22, 2022
TO: Select Board
FROM: Matt Coogan, Town Administrator
RE: **Updated Proposal for Goal Setting, Strategic Planning, and Retreat**

At the last Select Board meeting the Board reviewed and provided feedback on my July 8th memo and proposal to initiate a Town-wide goal setting process over the next few months. Below is an updated process based on the feedback provided. I look forward to continuing this conversation at the July 25th meeting.

The Need to Set Town Wide Goals

The goal setting process allows the Select Board to craft a “road map” for key Town leadership to follow when executing the core functions of government and balancing competing priorities. At a time when there have been notable changes to the Town’s senior staff, particularly in the office of the Town Administrator, and coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic that had stalled action on some of the Town’s longer-term projects, creating a refreshed set of goals would enable the Town to map out the highest priority initiatives for the coming few years and would give guidance to new members of the Town’s senior staff, as well as boards and committees, in implementing town-wide goals, developed in a collaborative process, and tracked by the Select Board.

The Select Board last conducted a goal setting exercise in 2017. In the past five years there has been a lot change, as well as progress in achieving the 2017 goals, and the Town is in a good position to undertake a new goal setting process. Boxford has been emerging from direct local response to the COVID global pandemic and the Select Board has been able to refocus on town initiatives. This includes relaunching processes that were delayed during COVID, such as the Capital Improvement Program, as well as revising performance evaluation. In addition, the Town has experienced new leadership and the reorganization of roles. Since May 2021, two new Select Board members have joined the Board, and a new Town Administrator and Assistant Town Administrator were hired. Several other key staff positions have changed in the last few years, including the DPW Superintendent/ Town Engineer. Finally, this year the administration of budgeting and finance will be transitioning from a full time Finance Director position to the Town Administrator’s Office.

The timing for setting town-wide goals would coincide with upcoming town-wide initiatives. This process would be referenced as we begin developing a new 5-year CIP and FY24 operating budget later

in the fall. Last fall, the Town restarted the CIP process, and having goals will help set priorities not only for funding capital needs, but also for assigning staff to manage projects. The town-wide goals could be woven into the revised performance evaluation process for department heads and non-union, benefitted positions. Furthermore, with the transition of town finances and budgeting into the Town Administrator's Office, a document outlining the Town's goals over the next two years would inform the Select Board and Finance Committee in funding priorities with the annual operating budget.

The Process

As we begin the new fiscal year, I would like to propose a process to develop a set of town-wide goals. These goals would be developed collaboratively with active boards and commissions and department heads and the process would be facilitated by the Select Board through the Town Administrator's office. It would result in the creation of a guiding document for the Town to utilize and refer to over the next two fiscal years when prioritizing policies, projects, and initiatives and allocating resources.

The Select Board last instituted town-wide goals in 2017, resulting in the following:

- Town-wide goal #1: Build belonging, ownership, and spirit of community.
- Town-wide goal #2: Develop, support, and expand opportunities for our residents to age in community.

These two goals can be reaffirmed and combined with other priorities in a new goal setting process.

In addition to the goals, a vision statement was created in 2017: "Boxford is a welcoming, vibrant, active, beautiful community with great schools and is a safe place to raise a family and stay for life".

The following goal setting process would be an annual effort to thoughtfully coordinate all of the Town's initiatives, better integrate our collective efforts across the organization, and clearly identify consensus priority goals:

1. Solicit feedback from all active boards and committees

- Each of their respective chairs submit what they see as key areas of concern, need, and opportunity for the Board and/or other Town entities to consider over the next two years. Such input would be separated into policy and operational goals, and would be due for submission to the Town Administrator's Office.

Boards and committees' responses could be due within a month of receiving the request.

2. Solicit feedback from all Department Heads

- What do they see as key areas of concern, need, and opportunity over the next two years? Input would be primarily focused on operational goals, but could also include projects/initiatives that have policy implications.

Staff submissions could be due by the end of July.

3. Town Administrator's Office aggregates all of the submissions

- Group or consolidate similar or interrelated goals, and send those results to the Select Board for their advance consideration. That would occur, most likely, at an August meeting.

4. **Hold a Select Board annual retreat,**

- Retreat would be in a workshop-style format, to identify priority policy and operational goals for FY23 and FY24 as well as responsible parties and associated objectives (if possible). Policies and goals would be organized in broad categories (Community Character, Housing, Governance, etc.) During this process, the Select Board would also provide any additional goals.

Retreat could occur late August/ September. Could be a daytime meeting. The Board could invite department heads and chairs of boards to discuss goals.

5. **Assemble a summary document for the Board's consideration and (potential) adoption**

- Town Administrator would draft this document, which would provide more detail regarding responsible parties and associated objectives as applicable. Once formally adopted, the FY23-24 Select Board Strategic Plan would be distributed to the boards/committees and Department Heads. It could also be posted on the homepage of the Town's website. Brendan and I will provide some examples of summary documents from other communities.

6. **Integration of Goals**

- FY24 – FY28 Capital Planning process.
- FY23 Performance Evaluation process.
- FY23 Operating Budget process.

7. **Quarterly or semi-annual progress reports**

The Board would undergo this same organizational goal setting process on an annual basis, which would include a review of progress made on goals to date and continue to look out over the next two fiscal years, soliciting input from all relevant stakeholders.

Public Participation

There are over 100 residents that volunteer to serve on various town boards and committees. These are active members of the community, many of which has served on their boards or committees for many terms developing a wealth of knowledge and experience. Utilizing these boards and committees is a good first step in developing town wide goals. I would envision increasing public participation as a prioritized goal in the final summary document and going forward, we would work to develop opportunities to expand public participation from the greater community, informing the town-wide goal setting process and future iterations.

Execution

Now that my office is fully staffed, we are ready to facilitate this goal setting process. My office will manage the day-to-day tasks associated with this initiative on behalf of the Board, including correspondence, organization and presentation of information, and general coordination. I look forward to the opportunity to work with you on this undertaking and hope that it will help to clarify the areas where we all should be focusing the majority of our resources, recognizing that new issues arise all the time and that we also need to be agile enough to respond to those as needed.