



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

DATE: November 9, 2022

TO: Select Board, Town Administrator Matt Coogan, and Department Heads

FROM: Brendan Sweeney, Assistant Town Administrator

RE: **October 19, 2022 All-Staff Meeting SOAR Analysis Summary**

At a recent all-staff meeting, Town staff participated in a “SOAR Analysis”. **SOAR** stands for **S**trengths, **O**pportunities, **A**spirations, and **R**esults. The exercise consisted of asking a series of interrelated questions and soliciting anonymous responses from participants. For each component of SOAR, I’ve listed the questions and grouped the responses below by “summary phrases” used to describe the response. The actual responses themselves are listed in the appendices to this memo.

Strengths

- What is Boxford known for?
- What does the community you serve think the Town does well?
- What key resources give Boxford an advantage?

Strengths		
Natural Beauty	14	27%
Work Environment/Town Employees	13	25%
Town/Resident Character	6	12%
Town Management	6	12%
Public Safety	5	10%
Economic Factors	3	6%
Schools	3	6%
Communication	2	4%
TOTAL	52	

Opportunities

- What are key areas of untapped potential for the Town?
- What opportunities exist to make the Town a better workplace?
- How can we build on the Town’s strengths together?
- What community needs and wants could the Town address?
- What opportunities could lead to overall greater well-being of the Town residents and/or employees?

Opportunities		
Potential Management Improvements	11	26%
Pay Increases	8	19%
Improve Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	7	16%
Build/Improve Community Assets/Infrastructure	6	14%
Better Communication	4	9%
Technological Improvements	3	7%
Increased Efficiency	2	5%
Other	2	5%
TOTAL	43	

Aspirations

- What is Boxford passionate about?
- What strategies and actions support your vision for the future of the Town and the community?
- What is your vision for the Town and the community that you serve?
- How can Town government be part of the solution to the needs and wants of the community?
- How can the Town as an employer be part of the solution to the needs and wants of its employees?

Aspirations		
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	11	23%
Pay Increases	8	17%
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	6	13%
Improved Management-Employee Relations	5	11%
Better Communication	5	11%
New Community Assets/Infrastructure	4	9%
Other	4	9%
Increased Funding	1	2%
Technological Improvements	1	2%
School System Improvements	1	2%
Maintain Town Character	1	2%
TOTAL	47	

Results

- Consider the strengths, opportunities, and aspirations that you have identified; how will you measure whether or not the Town is moving in the right direction?
- What results do you want to see?
- How might the Town track the impact of changes that have taken place?

Results		
Pay Increases	12	27%
Regular Feedback/Communication	11	25%
Increased Employee Happiness	5	11%
Better Public Discourse	2	5%
School Improvements	2	5%
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	2	5%
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	2	5%
Other	2	5%
Improved Employee Retention	1	2%
Proactive Action by Town Leadership	1	2%
More Library Programming	1	2%
Employee/Department Recognition	1	2%
Increased Efficiency	1	2%
Improved Management-Employee Relations	1	2%
TOTAL	44	

Appendix 1: Strengths

Summary Phrase	Comment
Communication	Transparency
Communication	Communication
Economic Factors	Strong, consistent housing market
Economic Factors	Managable tax burden
Economic Factors	Managing money
Natural Beauty	Rural and beautiful natural wildlife
Natural Beauty	Beautiful setting
Natural Beauty	Rural roads and beautiful natural resources that the Town preserves and maintains
Natural Beauty	Land conservation
Natural Beauty	Beautiful rural setting
Natural Beauty	Beautiful open space
Natural Beauty	Mix of suburban life and open space
Natural Beauty	A lot of outdoor space for residents to enjoy
Natural Beauty	Natural beauty (land and trails)
Natural Beauty	Known for scenic environment, trails, and peaceful surroundings
Natural Beauty	Trails, open space, playing fields
Natural Beauty	Open space, large lots, trees, trails, wildlife
Natural Beauty	State parks and trails
Natural Beauty	Open space, away from stress of city. Great outdoor resources
Public Safety	Relatively safe community
Public Safety	Swift allocation of resources in emergencies
Public Safety	Privacy and security
Public Safety	Low crime
Public Safety	Safe community
Schools	Academic reputation, Boxford students very well prepared for Masco
Schools	Town is known for good schools
Schools	Good school system
Town Management	Strong collaboration amongst department heads
Town Management	Recognition of employees in public spaces by friends and family
Town Management	Good leadership
Town Management	Town government has a good balance and provides quality services
Town Management	Responsive leadership in Communications and Police Departments
Town Management	Strong leaders
Town/Resident Character	Small town
Town/Resident Character	Small town feel
Town/Resident Character	Strong sense of community
Town/Resident Character	Community events, Town/Staff meetings, Schools
Town/Resident Character	Active community
Town/Resident Character	Small town feel, pretty setting
Work Environment/Town Employees	Friendly, dedicated employees
Work Environment/Town Employees	Good community - Town employees always willing to help
Work Environment/Town Employees	Excellent resident service - Town responsiveness
Work Environment/Town Employees	Responsive, personalized service to Town residents
Work Environment/Town Employees	All colleagues work well together, especially during times of crisis
Work Environment/Town Employees	Friendliness of town workers
Work Environment/Town Employees	Impeccable customer service
Work Environment/Town Employees	Well qualified staff
Work Environment/Town Employees	Customer service is above and beyond
Work Environment/Town Employees	Customer service
Work Environment/Town Employees	Hires quality people
Work Environment/Town Employees	Teamwork
Work Environment/Town Employees	Customer service

Appendix 2: Opportunities

Summary Phrase	Comment
Better Communication	Good communication to all employees and residents
Better Communication	Better communication
Better Communication	Have a town leader panel on a monthly basis to discuss town news and developments on BCAT TV
Better Communication	Expand newsletter to take up the role of a community newspaper so that people know what's going on in town
Build/Improve Community Assets/Infrastructure	Strategic sidewalks for bike lanes to connect main roads to rail trail, east and west centers, library/town hall, and schools
Build/Improve Community Assets/Infrastructure	Create an area to be "center of town"
Build/Improve Community Assets/Infrastructure	Limited and well-planned commercial base (wedding venue, conference center, etc.)
Build/Improve Community Assets/Infrastructure	Build an outdoor skating rink
Build/Improve Community Assets/Infrastructure	More streetlights for safe driving at night
Build/Improve Community Assets/Infrastructure	Town could use more streetlights
Improve Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Town needs to new DPW building and must stay on top of equipment replacements
Improve Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Guidance for repairing building issues
Improve Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Repurposing/better usage of unused buildings
Improve Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Library has been waiting for 911 panic button for over 6 yewars
Improve Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Panic button for Library. Been waiting for years
Improve Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Card access to Town Buildings
Improve Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Town could use more salt on roads
Increased Efficiency	Automation; streamline certain processes
Increased Efficiency	Timely Masco capital plan
Other	Continue to address ways to help seniors to age in place. Try to remain fiscally conservative. Reduce impact of ""wokeness" in programming
Other	Allow more small businesses in. Make better workplace. More way to find money for employment. More places or events for seniors and people with disabilities
Pay Increases	Better pay!!!! Great place to work, but we are underpaid, big time
Pay Increases	Better pay to retain current and valued employees
Pay Increases	Pay wages to include inflation to retain good employees
Pay Increases	Fair wages throughout all departments
Pay Increases	Competitive Salaries
Pay Increases	Better pay
Pay Increases	Competitive Salaries
Pay Increases	Offer more competitive salaries
Potential Management Improvements	More inter-department collaboration
Potential Management Improvements	Empower department heads with greater autonomy
Potential Management Improvements	More employee recognition
Potential Management Improvements	Utilizing the talents of all individuals working for the Town. Expand employee roles to broaden services
Potential Management Improvements	More room for advancement
Potential Management Improvements	Leadership training for supervisors
Potential Management Improvements	Take steps to retain current employees. Town Hall currently has an amazing staff
Potential Management Improvements	Town departments need to work together - important to know we are all part of same work community

Appendix 2: Opportunities

Summary Phrase	Comment
Potential Management Improvements	Encourage more team building among town employees
Potential Management Improvements	Need to recruit more people to Town boards
Potential Management Improvements	Give departments final say on fields and buildings
Technological Improvements	Enhance website
Technological Improvements	Information technology
Technological Improvements	Enhance website

Appendix 3: Aspirations

Summary Phrase	Comment
Better Communcation	Good communication throught the employees, residents, and the Town
Better Communcation	Transparent land/building projects and preservation
Better Communcation	Better communication to all employees (although it has improved since Matt came)
Better Communcation	Better communication with town hall by having a full time person answering town hall phones. This would also minimize disruption in individual departments
Better Communcation	Town Hall can enhance sense of community by empowering distribution of information about what is happening in town
Improved Management-Employee Relations	Smoother contract negotiations
Improved Management-Employee Relations	Better contract negotiations
Improved Management-Employee Relations	Support department head capital requests and trust the judgment of those selected for the job
Improved Management-Employee Relations	Accountability for anyone not putting in the work for their department
Improved Management-Employee Relations	Open to flex on contracts
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	More parking at Boxford Commons
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Town Hall is too cramped, running out of space, employees on top of each other, no storage
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Taking care of the youth of our town. Expanding library services for children. Possibly opening West as a branch library. Current staff wiliing to staff it and offer childrens programming. Staff are limited in what they're allowed to do.
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	More natural and longer lasting mulching alternatives
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Library needs its own building
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Updated DPW building. To get Town fields and parking in better shape
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Free standing library building. This would allow both Town and Library staff to have sufficient storage and operating space
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	More room for Town Hall staff
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Community Center (in addition to Senior Center)
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	New DPW facility
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	New DPW garage
Increased Funding	Higher budget to get the nexsities done for employees and residents
Maintain Town Character	Maintain the local country feel of the town and continue to preserve this while growing
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	Coming together to help residents in need and keeping residents involved in town activities
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	More community events
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	Getting more young volunteers involved in town government
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	Town Hall has a role to play in reducing the sense of isolation that can occur when in single-family homes with large lot sizes
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	Make the best use of the new COA building/community center
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	Passionate about ways of getting together. Vision to see more involvement in projects or events in town. See more ideas to keep people and wildlife safe. Leash laws for dogs due to wildlife coming onto our yards
New Community Assets/Infrastructure	Restaurant

Appendix 3: Aspirations

Summary Phrase	Comment
New Community Assets/Infrastructure	Affordable senior housing
New Community Assets/Infrastructure	More commercial in town centers
New Community Assets/Infrastructure	Modern, safe amenities for all Boxford employees
Other	Results
Other	Passionate about sense of community
Other	Trash sticker alternative
Other	Family values. Conservative - fiscally and socially. Maintain natural beauty of town.
Pay Increases	Equitable raise structure combining COLA and Merit
Pay Increases	The Town as an employer can show how they value their employees by paying a livable wage
Pay Increases	Compensation to match quality of employees
Pay Increases	Town employees need to feel valued and appreciated - financial
Pay Increases	Better pay for hardworking, dedicated employees!
Pay Increases	Paying people more and keeping employees
Pay Increases	Competitive salaries. Perhaps change to step increases to reward years of service
Pay Increases	Retain employees by staying at or above 25% threshold for salary/pay
School System Improvements	K-12 local school system to provide more local control of education
Technological Improvements	Town Meeting that allows for remote voting/participating to better represent full community that can not always make in-person voting

Appendix 4: Results

Summary Phrase	Comment
Better Public Discourse	Fewer "roundabout" controversies
Better Public Discourse	More qualified people seeking public office
Employee/Department Recognition	Library gets more attention to its value to community
Improved Employee Retention	Keeping good employees in our town
Improved Management-Employee Relations	Negotiations with town and union will be more productive and less contentious. Union members don't feel currently valued
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Adequate equipment and tools, technology
Improved/Expanded Town Facilities/Buildings/Equipment	Adequate facilities (DPW)
Increased Efficiency	More efficient town hall operations. Departments are able to focus on their own services and goods
Increased Employee Happiness	Morale is better
Increased Employee Happiness	Less staff turnover and multiple qualified candidates when positions are advertised
Increased Employee Happiness	Positive vibes between residents and town employees (satisfaction with good/quality public service)
Increased Employee Happiness	Retain employees
Increased Employee Happiness	Employee retention
More Library Programming	An increase in library programs will result in increased circulation of library materials and involvement of residents in the town
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	Residents are engaged in town government and eager to volunteer for committees
More Resident Involvement/Inclusion	More sense of community, greater participating in community events. Possibly more community events
Other	Boxford ranking higher on "best towns to live/work/raise a family"
Other	Taxes remain reasonable
Pay Increases	Higher pay = happy employees
Pay Increases	I would like to be paid what I am worth in comparison to my supervisor
Pay Increases	I'd like to see pay adjusted to be comparable to other towns
Pay Increases	Increase in pay based on a study of other surrounding towns
Pay Increases	Analysis, plan for providing competitive salaries
Pay Increases	Better pay
Pay Increases	Salaries that reflect performance expectations
Pay Increases	Salary increases
Pay Increases	Town and contractor rates will be competitive
Pay Increases	Pay increase
Pay Increases	Town pays a greater share of insurance costs
Pay Increases	Wages are equitable and increase yearly, ideally above COLA to get closer to living wages
Proactive Action by Town Leadership	Positive action on issues, not just studies
Regular Feedback/Communication	Annual employee questionnaires regarding strengths and weaknesses
Regular Feedback/Communication	Knowledge, communication, sharing to residents with positive feedback
Regular Feedback/Communication	Resident surveys
Regular Feedback/Communication	Develop set of quantitative goals, metrics for each department to report on periodically
Regular Feedback/Communication	Quicker response to requests/ needs (e.g. safety issue of library staff not getting a panic button despite years of asking)
Regular Feedback/Communication	Positive feedback from employees and residents
Regular Feedback/Communication	Surveys
Regular Feedback/Communication	Show us improvements at staff meetings
Regular Feedback/Communication	More positive feedback and friendliness
Regular Feedback/Communication	More staff meetings
Regular Feedback/Communication	Town employees feel the performance evaluation process reflects accurately how well they are doing in their position
School Improvements	Improved school rankings
School Improvements	Better education (measured by test scores, college admissions)