



Town of Cohasset

Financial Management Review

Division of Local Services / Technical Assistance Section

February 2013



February 22, 2013

Board of Selectmen
Cohasset Town Hall
41 Highland Avenue
Cohasset, Massachusetts 02025

Dear Board Members:

It is with pleasure that I transmit to you the enclosed Financial Management Review completed by the Division of Local Services for the Town of Cohasset. It is our hope that the information presented in this report will assist the town in improving its financial management practices, addressing areas of concern and meeting its long-term planning needs.

Our technical assistance team welcomes the opportunity to present the report to the board of selectmen at a public meeting. As an added service, we are willing to meet with staff, earlier on the same day, to discuss implementation of the report recommendations.

As a routine practice, we will post the completed report on the DLS website, www.mass.gov/dls, and forward a copy of the report to the town's state senator and representative.

If you have any questions or comments regarding our findings and recommendations, please feel free to contact Rick Kingsley, Bureau Chief of the DLS Municipal Data Management and Technical Assistance Bureau at 617-626-2376 or at kingsleyf@dor.state.ma.us.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Nunes
Deputy Commissioner &
Director of Municipal Affairs

cc: Senator Robert L. Hedlund
Representative Garrett J. Bradley

Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

Overview..... 2

Overall Financial Management..... 7

 1. Adopt Town Charter 8

 2. Revisit Local Option Meals and Room Occupancy Tax 10

 3. Hold Monthly Financial Staff Meetings 10

 4. Assign Human Resource Responsibilities 10

 5. Develop Personnel Policies & Create Privacy..... 11

 6. Update Job Descriptions & Develop Employee Performance Program 12

 7. Manage Legal Services..... 12

 8. Attend Certified Public Purchasing Official Program and Seek Training Opportunities..... 13

 9. Renovate Town Hall 14

 10. Formalize Town-School Revenue Sharing Agreement 14

Finance Director/Town Accountant..... 15

 11. Retain Copies of all Contracts and Grants 16

 12. Account for Student Activity Funds 16

 13. Rollout Electronic Purchase Order Process 16

 14. Resolve Storage Issues..... 17

 15. Develop Procedures Manuals & Pursue Training Opportunities..... 18

Treasurer/Collector 19

 16. Schedule Reconciliations 20

 17. Initiate Tax Takings & Develop Plan to Resolve Aging Tax Titles 20

 18. Standardize Receipt Turnover Form..... 21

 19. Review Payroll Process..... 21

 20. Close Post Office Box..... 23

Assessors..... 24

 21. Coordinate Inspectional Department Visits 24

 22. Implement GIS..... 25

Information Technology 26

 23. Form Technology Committee..... 26

24. Adopt Town-wide Technology Plan & Policies 26

25. Consolidate Department Technology Spending 27

26. Update Town of Cohasset Website..... 27

27. Submit Helpdesk Reports to Town Manager..... 28

Appendix..... 29

Acknowledgements..... 31

Introduction

At the request of the Cohasset Board of Selectmen, the Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services (DLS) has completed this financial management review of municipal operations.

We have based our findings and recommendations on site visits and telephone conversations by staff members of the Division's Municipal Data Management & Technical Assistance Bureau. The town's DLS Bureau of Accounts field representative and its Bureau of Local Assessment community advisor were also consulted. The staff interviewed members of the board of selectmen, finance and capital program committees, as well as the acting town manager, finance director, treasurer/collector, assessor, and information technology director. A full list of names is available in the Acknowledgements section of this report.

As part of our review, DLS staff examined the town's annual budget documents, various policies, and the tax rate recapitulation and balance sheets submitted to the Department of Revenue. The town also provided us with warrants, job descriptions, revenue and expenditure reports, outside audit reports and management letters, as well as the credit rating profile by Standard and Poor's.

The purpose of this assessment is to assist Cohasset officials as they evaluate government operations and the overall efficiency and effectiveness of financial management practices and procedures. In reviewing the existing operations, we have focused on the duties and responsibilities of financial officers, the degree of coordination and communication that exists between and among local officials, and opportunities for process improvements.

Overview

The Town of Cohasset, with a population of 7,542, is a small, affluent suburb located on the South Shore of Massachusetts about 20 miles from Boston. Characteristic of an exurban locale, Cohasset exhibits higher than average income, wealth and education levels. Residents' income and the average single family home value in town rank among the highest in the state. Education is also highly valued with over 64 percent of the population over the age of 25 holding at least a bachelor's degree. The town's 4.6 percent unemployment rate is also very low when measured against state and national averages.

Due to the lack of commercial or industrial development in Cohasset, the tax burden is predominately borne by the residential class, which constitutes about 93 percent of the total tax base. At the same time, residents have approved ten operating overrides since 1989, which have collectively added almost \$5 million to the tax base. For these reasons, the average single family tax bill in Cohasset ranks 12th in the state for FY2013 at \$10,468.

Of the total operating budget of \$44,363,124, about 66 percent was funded through the tax levy, while an additional 27 percent came from local receipts, 5 percent from state aid, and 2 percent from all other sources. Among other available funds, Cohasset has a current stabilization fund balance of \$865,515, and its free cash reserves were certified at \$958,508 as of July 1, 2012. Although the town's available free cash has recovered from its dramatic decline over the last several fiscal years, its stabilization fund remains below what is normally associated with peer communities based on DOR data. Separately, retained earnings in the town's water and sewer enterprises fund are also positive, which is a shift from years past.

Characteristic of a community with high income and education levels, a significant portion of Cohasset's budget is dedicated to education with lesser amounts credited to other services and fixed costs. Reported on the year-end Schedule A submitted to DOR, 43 percent of general fund spending is on education, while another 13 percent is spent on debt service, 12 percent on public safety, 6 percent on general government services, 5 percent on public works, 2 percent on culture and recreation, and 1 percent on human services. All other unclassified spending categories, including employee health and pension benefits, account for 18 percent of the general fund operating budget. While Cohasset's debt burden remains comparatively high over the last decade, significant portions can be attributed to the town's enterprise funds and its numerous debt exclusions, which include several major renovations to its schools.

Within this context, Cohasset is governed by an open town meeting and an elected five-member board of selectmen. Under Massachusetts General Laws and the town manager special act, the board of selectmen is vested with the executive powers of the town. In this role, board members serve as the

chief goal-setting and policy making body for the town. Selectmen act through the adoption of policy directives and guidelines, which are implemented by the town manager, other officers and employees. Among its primary responsibilities, the board appoints the town manager, town counsel and members of many boards and committees. They also prepare the warrants for annual and special town meetings and comment on all the articles contained therein. Board members serve three-year, staggered terms and annually elect one of their members as chairperson.

As detailed in the town manager special act, [Chapter 34 of the Acts of 1997](#), the town manager is the chief administrative officer for the town who is generally responsible for coordinating day-to-day affairs of the community. As chief financial officer, he is also responsible for the preparation of the annual budget and a five-year capital improvement program, although some of this is being delegated to the finance director/town accountant. Additionally, the town manager supervises all town departments under the jurisdiction of the board of selectmen and appoints the police chief, fire chief, town treasurer/collector, town accountant, and superintendent of public works, among others. He also administers the personnel system and negotiates collective bargaining agreements.

Beyond the board of selectmen and town manager, there are several other committees that play important roles in directing local finances. These include the advisory committee, capital budget committee, and the budget planning group. Consisting of nine appointed members, the advisory committee is responsible for reviewing all articles for the annual and special town meetings and making recommendations that it deems in the best interest of the town. They are also responsible for the town's reserve fund, which is an appropriation made at annual town meeting to fund emergency or unforeseen expenses that occur during the course of the fiscal year. Separately, the capital budget committee, working with the board of selectmen, town manager, and department heads, provides support and planning for evaluating and financing capital expenditures.

The town manager also regularly consults with the budget planning group. Born out of the national economic crisis and in response to local financial issues, the budget planning group reviews, recommends, and comments on local fiscal policy and other finance-related matters impacting Cohasset. The group typically meets once per month and is comprised of two members each from the board of selectmen, advisory committee, school committee, and capital budget committee, as well as the town manager, finance director, superintendent, and school finance director. These meetings serve as a vehicle for sharing information and allowing local officials to coordinate financial planning in a more deliberative way.

Despite what we see as a strong organizational framework and a relatively solid economic condition, in recent years Cohasset's strengths were undermined by a lack of consistent financial management and poor internal controls. Largely due to limited staff resources, turnover in key administrative positions,

and poor communication, these issues were well-documented in a series of critical independent audit reports that identified significant deficiencies and material weaknesses hampering town operations.

Beginning in about 2010, Cohasset struggled to retain its financial management team. The town's tenured town manager had moved on, and an interim was hired to coordinate operations until a suitable replacement was found. Financial issues also began to emerge. Significant deficiencies with the town's finances that needed immediate attention went unresolved because of the lack of communication between management and the board of selectmen.

In one instance, the auditor noted that a large number of capital projects in a very short window of time overwhelmed the limited personnel resources available in the finance office to tackle the job. The finance director, beyond preparing the town's annual operating budget and overseeing financial management operations, was responsible for securing project funding, completing transactional activity, and reporting for a number of significant capital initiatives. At the same time, as town accountant, the finance director was responsible for coordinating the reconciliation of cash and receivables, reviewing invoices, maintaining the general ledger, and preparing submissions to the Department of Revenue.

It was also about this time when a significant operating deficit was uncovered in the water enterprise fund that required a transfer from the stabilization fund and delayed the setting of the tax rate. From what we understand, management and accurate recordkeeping for the water and sewer departments was a consistent problem dating back years, which hampered the ability of local officials to avoid revenue and appropriation deficits, efficiently manage and record debt, and produce accurate financial reports.

As a result, the board of selectman requested an independent audit of water operations, which noted deficiencies in operations, governance, recordkeeping, budgeting, procurement and rate setting. At the same time, a search was conducted to replace the town's aging financial management software, a reconciliation of the town's debt was completed, and a new purchase order system was implemented. A new finance director was also hired and a search for permanent replacement to the interim town manager was underway.

Unfortunately, this progress began to derail when the newly hired finance director quickly resigned after only nine months on the job citing limited resources and time constraints. As a result, the town brought in independent financial consultants Eric Kinsherf and Dan Sullivan, who worked part-time as interim town accountant and treasurer/collector, to assist the finance department in getting its house in order. A short time later, a new town manager was hired, as was an experienced finance director from the Town of Scituate. In the position today, she brings a tremendous amount of skill and know-how to the job with more than 20 years of experience.

Shortly after the appointment of the new finance director, however, the board of selectmen voted unanimously to fire the town manager, who was on the job for only about seven months. Selectmen noted a lack of cooperation with local officials, poor communication, and disagreement over the handling of town issues as their rationale. With his departure, the board of selectmen moved swiftly to appoint the chair of the government study committee to serve as acting town manager.

In the position today, the acting town manager, with only a few months under his belt, acted quickly to implement new policies and procedures and bring in an experienced treasurer/collector to support finance operations. In doing so, he hired the former colleague of the finance director in the Town of Scituate, who, like the finance director, brings a wealth of skill and experience to the job. Despite the acting town manager's efforts and improved communication across town hall, however, there continues to be public debate over whether he is eligible to hold the job for the long term. At issue is language in the town manager special act that requires a cooling off period before local officials can serve as town manager. While a recent article to eliminate this language in the special act was defeated at a special town meeting this winter, it will be resurrected as part of the government study committee's full slate of recommendations for annual town meeting.

From our vantage point, local officials in Cohasset are successfully putting past financial management issues behind them. A new group of experienced professionals are in town hall, formal policies and procedures are being adopted, and avenues for improved services are being explored. With the work of the acting town manager, new finance director and treasurer/collector, we feel Cohasset will emerge from what has evidently been an aberration in its history.

The town formed a government study committee that has made a number of recommended changes to how government operates and is set to release their suggested amendments to the town manager special act at this spring's annual town meeting. Comprised of members of the public, the group worked diligently over the last year in response to the challenges facing Cohasset. Committee members analyzed the framework of town governance and sought out areas that might be improved. Based on these meetings and the work of the budget planning group, a new budget process has been adopted, town financial policies related to revenue and expenditure forecasting, debt and reserves have been put in place, and regular budget planning group meetings are taking place.

Parallel to these actions, the acting town manager is also proposing to consolidate town hall operations. From what we understand, he will request that annual town meeting approve restructuring the town into five operating divisions of finance, public safety, permits and inspections, facilities/public works and human services/recreation. There is no doubt that this restructuring will result in a shift of responsibilities for some, but it will help relieve the town manager of coordinating activities among his 18 direct reports. In this way, he will be more responsive to the board of selectmen and better able to focus his time and energy on carrying out their goals and objectives.

In addition, the acting town manager in his recent budget presentation laid out an ambitious set of goals for FY2014. Among others, he intends to aggressively build the stabilization fund, increase the capital stabilization fund, identify solutions to fund the town's growing other post-employment benefits liability, and attain a AAA bond rating as a measure of the town's success.

Overall, Cohasset has weathered the recent economic storm and the fallout from poor financial management practices of the past. Given the past concerns about internal controls and management turnover, local leaders are focused on returning credibility and accountability to the business of government in Cohasset. While resolving legacy issues will no doubt continue to present significant headwinds, Cohasset is making positive strides towards stabilizing operations and bringing confidence back to government. Beyond this effort, Cohasset's largest hurdle remains the uncertainty over the acting town manager position. While the board of selectmen has tempered this through a series of contracts, town meeting needs to bring closure to the question of whether the acting town manager will be eligible to coordinate town operations going forward. On the pages that follow, we comment on Cohasset's overall financial management, offer a description of the town's financial offices, and outline a series of recommendations that are collectively designed to help advance operations in Cohasset.

Overall Financial Management

A review of Cohasset's overall financial management practices focuses on the policies and procedures in place that impact town government on a global basis. We look at the structure of government, the roles and responsibilities of local officials, and the level of communication and cooperation that exists among departments and personnel. We also examine long-term planning efforts involved in the budget and capital improvement processes as well as financial forecasting and monitoring. We study the cash handling practices of town offices and the procedures associated with procurement and putting together the payroll and vendor warrants. We also review personnel administration, the condition of technology, and the overall workplace environment to ensure that proper policies are in place, that technology is functioning as intended, and that resources are readily available for staff to carry out their jobs effectively. Finally, we assess local compliance with state laws and regulations relating to financial matters and review the timeliness of various reporting submissions required by the Department of Revenue.

As mentioned in the overview, local officials in Cohasset are making strides to stabilize financial operations in the wake of recent fiscal challenges and turnover in key positions. More recently, they developed a thoughtful budget process guided by revenue projections and a calendar of events. Members of the board of selectmen, advisory committee and school committee, are also meeting regularly now throughout the year to discuss the budget and to receive briefings on finance-related issues impacting the town. The development of a five-year financial plan and policies associated with free cash and the town's stabilization fund is a direct outcome of these meetings. Critical tools, such as the independent audit, are also being more widely distributed and discussed today. At the same time, the acting town manager is looking to further streamline operations by restructuring department reporting relationships. These actions, when taken collectively, aim to improve local practices and increase the town's bond rating.

With these recent achievements in mind, we feel that Cohasset would benefit from adopting a town charter. Doing so would not only help clarify the roles and responsibilities of various local officials, but it would set clear expectations going forward by documenting critical financial management procedures. While the current town manager special act goes a long way in outlining the appointment and duties of the position, it reads more like a job description that does little to formalize financial management practices or solidify the responsibilities of the finance director and budget planning group, for instance. In addition, the recently redesigned budget and capital planning processes are not codified as part of a broader effort to formalize business workflows. Establishing a town charter also gives residents and local officials alike an opportunity to evaluate how departments are organized, and whether, for example, it makes sense to move toward a more centralized government where more departments fall under the direct supervision of the town manager.

Beyond our town charter recommendation, we outline several opportunities to improve operations in Cohasset. To start, we encourage the acting town manager to hold monthly financial management team meetings as an opportunity to share information and direct operations. Additionally, Cohasset would benefit from determining how human resource responsibilities should be handled, adopting various personnel policies, and developing an employee performance program. These personnel-related matters are often one of the more neglected aspects of local government administration that should be brought into focus. Aside from these matters, we also offer guidance on managing the town's legal services and comment on the need to renovate town hall.

1. Adopt Town Charter

We recommend that local officials begin working toward the adoption of a town charter. Charters are emerging as the preferred means to solidify a town's organizational structure, define relationships among officials, boards and commissions, and clearly set out financial processes. Moreover, charters discourage frequent or frivolous amendments and ensure long-term stability.

Serving as a blueprint for local government, a charter defines the authority and responsibilities of the town manager, the duties of other town officials, like the finance director, lines of accountability, and appointments of officers and boards. The budget and capital planning processes and personnel administration are also commonly set out within various charter provisions. The choice of a charter as a vehicle for change reflects a decision to assess all of municipal government rather than address individual aspects of management through incremental adjustments.

While we are mindful of the work of the current government study committee and their efforts toward modifying the town manager special act, we feel the town would benefit from a broader look at government structure and opportunities to codify various practices and procedures going forward. Specifically, we think the town should formalize the budget planning group, form a consolidated finance department, and give consideration to placing more town operations under the oversight of the town manager.

Codify Budget Planning Group: Formed by the board of selectmen in 2009 as a result of the national financial crisis and local financial challenges, the budget planning group's primary responsibilities involve long-range planning and commenting on fiscal policy. The committee typically meets once per month, although they gather more often during the intensive work period around the budget season. In many respects, the budget planning group takes on a number of responsibilities that we would normally associate with an advisory committee or the town manager. However, we view a roundtable of senior local officials reviewing, monitoring and commenting on town finances as a collaborative effort that creates transparency and builds trust around fiscal policy matters. These meetings, therefore, not only serve as a vehicle for sharing information but allow local officials to coordinate financial planning in a more deliberative way. For these reasons, we recommend that the budget planning group be codified

in town charter. In doing so, there can be greater assurance among residents that local officials are regularly communicating about issues facing the town. This way, as financial challenges or problems arise, the town is in a better position to deal with the circumstance quickly and in a constructive manner with everyone on the same page.

Consolidate Finance Operations: In an environment where local government grows more complex and operates under considerable revenue constraints, it makes sense to coordinate management operations in a more efficient manner. To do this, we support the town manager's proposed consolidation of town hall operations and recommend establishing a consolidated finance department in town charter to validate existing reporting relationships and alleviate any confusion. Currently, Cohasset's finance director has general supervision over local finance offices and plays a significant role in managing fiscal-related matters. However, she has no formal authority other than what is delegated to her by the town manager through her job description. The town's current special act designates the town manager as the chief financial officer of the town responsible for developing the budget, estimating revenues and controlling costs.

Centralize Town Operations Under Town Manager: While the town manager special act bestows certain powers on the town manager, local operations in some regards remain decentralized. For example, the water and sewer enterprise funds are overseen by an elected commission. The board does not report to the town manager and rate-setting decisions are made independently from other town financial strategies. In recent years, an elected commission operating outside the town manager contributed to poor communication and deficits in the water enterprise, which held up the setting of the town's tax rate. As part of an overall charter review process, we recommend that the town give consideration as to whether this underlying structure should be addressed by eliminating these commissions and placing their policy and administrative functions under the oversight of the town manager and board of selectmen.

The town has two options when considering the means to adopt a charter. Frequently, towns form a government study committee to examine, through an open process, the structure and operation of government. If change is warranted and a charter is recommended, the committee drafts the proposed charter as a special act (Home Rule petition), which then requires the approvals of town meeting, town voters and the State Legislature. This process allows for the formation of a balanced, open-minded committee and a manageable time frame for completion of the committee's work.

Alternatively, town voters can elect a nine-member charter commission under M.G.L. c. 43B. This statute directs the commission to meet certain procedural requirements and to complete its final report within 18 months. Any recommendation by the commission would then be placed before the voters for final acceptance or rejection. More information on these options can be found on the DLS website via this link: <http://www.mass.gov/dor/local-officials/municipal-data-and-financial-management/financial-mgt-assistance/restructuring.html>.

2. Revisit Local Option Meals and Room Occupancy Tax

Residents at a special town meeting this past fall defeated a pair of motions aimed at enhancing overall revenues in Cohasset by adopting the local option meals and room occupancy taxes. We recommend that local officials revisit this decision to see how it might be better presented to voters. While only the immediately surrounding communities of Hingham and Norwell have adopted the provision, there is a growing trend among cities and towns across the state to access these additional revenues. If, for example, Cohasset had adopted the local option meals tax at its inception, the town would have realized almost \$500,000 in potential revenues— revenues that could have been used to support a variety of services or offset any needed capital outlays.

**Estimated Potential Revenues
from Local Option Meals Tax**

FY	Annual Revenues	Time Period
2010	76,793.76	8 months
2011	128,970.97	11 months
2012	163,144.61	12 months
2013	111,640.26	6 months
Total	480,549.60	

3. Hold Monthly Financial Staff Meetings

We recommend that the town manager meet with his finance personnel ahead of the budget planning group’s monthly meetings. Comprised of the town manager, finance director, treasurer/collector, director of assessing, and the chief technology officer, these financial team meetings would be an opportunity to solicit information, review the budget and discuss any financial management-related matters. For example, meetings would be an opportunity to review upcoming deadlines and responsibilities surrounding town meeting, financial forecasting, revenue and expenditure monitoring and adjustments, capital financing, free cash certification, yearend closing, assisting independent auditors, or any other financial matter in need of discussion.

4. Assign Human Resource Responsibilities

The acting town manager, responding to the need to streamline reporting relationships and enhance accountability, has proposed the consolidation of his 18 direct reports into a series of five divisions, including public safety, finance, inspections, facilities and human services. In doing so, we recommend that the town manager also look at how human resource responsibilities could be organized or deployed more effectively.

The management of human resources is often one of the more neglected aspects of local government administration. Citing limited resources, small communities like Cohasset are generally unable to employ a full-time human resource professional. As a result, human resource-related responsibilities are often left to staff in the finance office or with the town manager. When cobbled together this way, the town is ill-equipped to deal with ever-changing rules and regulations or other technical aspects of the job. This approach presents risks that can potentially expose the town to costly lawsuits or penalties.

Looking ahead, the town manager should strive to consolidate human resources. Although this might be difficult, given how tight budgets are, a sophisticated town like Cohasset should have a person responsible for continually reviewing, documenting and updating town personnel policies, even on a part-time schedule. Cohasset could also explore the possibility of regionalizing the service with a neighboring community or outsourcing the service to an outside vendor. Once in place, the human resource person would address matters of recruitment, selection and hiring, promotion, transfer, performance evaluation, grievance procedures, discipline, layoffs, and termination of employment.

5. Develop Personnel Policies & Create Privacy

Develop Personnel Files Policy: Officials in Cohasset should develop a set of standards for file maintenance, storage and access concerning employee personnel files. Personnel files should be consolidated into a single location and maintained in a way consistent with state and federal laws, regulations, and town policies. There are four distinct types of information that can be maintained on employees in the same location, but must be filed separately: Personnel data, including all documents kept by an employer that have been used or may affect qualifications for employment, promotion, transfer, additional compensation, or disciplinary action, as outlined under M.G.L. c. 149, §52C; Personal information, protected under M.G.L. c. 214 §1(b); Medical records including Workers' Compensation and Family and Medical Leave, protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act; and, Form I-9 required of all employers by the federal Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

Formalize Compensatory (Comp) Time Guidelines: Comp time is generally defined as paid time off granted to an employee for working beyond their regularly scheduled hours. Lacking any formal policy, Cohasset appears to largely delegate responsibility for awarding comp time to department heads who have varying methods for distributing and accounting for the benefit. As a result, questions arise on how comp time is tracked, who has authority to grant it, and what parameters exist around using it. Town officials should promulgate a policy establishing town-wide standards by which employees earn comp time. Since comp time can be a potential liability for the town in the long-term, prior approval of a supervisor, or supervising board member, should be required. In this way, department heads would be responsible to verify comp time eligibility for employees under their purview and should track time earned. Comp time should also be separately reported and tracked by the finance director. This can

simply be accomplished through the payroll process by modifying the current time sheets to record the comp time amount earned per employee during a given pay period, similar to how we encourage sick leave and vacation time be tracked.

Create Privacy: If the treasurer/collector is to continue in her current personnel-related role, we suggest the town create some privacy within her office or arrange for another location, if practical, where she can discuss issues with staff in confidence. In an open work environment, as currently exists, it is difficult to focus on assisting colleagues on sensitive personnel matters.

6. Update Job Descriptions & Develop Employee Performance Program

We recommend a systematic review of all staff responsibilities in order to develop accurate, up-to-date job descriptions for each employee. In light of the proposed restructuring of departments, this process should seek to confirm what employees will actually do and that all responsibilities are accounted for and documented. Job descriptions, when well thought out, not only define the knowledge and skill-sets required to do the job, but help articulate management's performance expectations for employees. Once job descriptions are updated, local officials should outline a program for annually reviewing employee work performance. In updating job descriptions, we recommend that employees document their responsibilities. These descriptions would then be reviewed by the department head and the town's human resource person for consistency and form, with final signoff by the town manager.

Initiating a meaningful employee performance evaluation program is often a difficult task. Managers can be reluctant to embrace the program and staff can be less than enthusiastic. However, when constructed effectively, the program can be a communication tool that supports organizational objectives by developing employee skill-sets and proactively improving their talents. Programs we find most effective focus less on rating achievements against job-specific competencies, but rather on the department head's communication with their staff. Designed this way, the program is more constructive and can help to maximize employees' capabilities.

7. Manage Legal Services

During our review there was some discussion about the need to review legal expenses in town. Because the vast majority of municipalities contract out for legal services, cost control warrants particular attention. Based on our experience, departmental access to legal services should run through the town manager's office or the chair of the board of selectmen, who would serve as the designated contact for outside counsel.

It is worth noting, however, that under M.G.L c. 41, §26A the board of assessors may employ legal counsel at the expense of the town for matters pertaining to M.G.L c. 58A. The school committee is

also permitted to retain its own legal counsel under M.G.L. c. 71, §37E and 37F. Otherwise, unless a department has a budget line item for legal services, it is precluded from engaging an attorney to represent its interest.

When determining whether to consult counsel, it is important to distinguish between matters of legal substance and matters of policy, which are not within the purview of counsel. Also, a process for annually evaluating the performance of counsel is advised. This involves assessing performance with regard to responsiveness, quality of the work and professionalism. Critical to this process is invoice detail. The municipality must insist that invoices for payment be submitted on at least a monthly basis to ensure the legal budget stays on track. Invoices must identify billable hours, the person working the hours, the date of each service, his or her hourly rate, work completed, and municipal official contacted, if applicable. Further, a municipality benefits if it maintains a number-based, legal document filling system. If all correspondence, opinions, emails and other legal materials are also listed in an electronic format, then following case threads and searches are simplified. Lastly, be aware that municipalities cannot pay in advance for legal services through a retainer. Invoices must be reviewed only after services are rendered.

8. Attend Certified Public Purchasing Official Program and Seek Training Opportunities

We recommend that the town manager, as chief procurement officer, receive training as a Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official (MCPPO) through the office of the State Inspector General. Although the acting town manager was certified in the past, his certification has since lapsed. This training promotes cost-effective, ethical and modern purchasing practices through dialogue and the exchange of ideas and best practices, stewardship of resources and compliance with Massachusetts contracting laws. Recipients of an MCPPO designation must successfully complete a series of examinations and meet experience and education requirements. This designation is also commonly written into the job qualifications for town managers.

Separately, we recommend the acting town manager encourage staff to seek outside training opportunities. Based on our observations, staff in Cohasset could benefit from attending various seminars and training sessions that are held throughout the state during the year. To begin, the acting town manager or his designee should consult with department heads to identify specific training needs in order to develop a tailored action plan for each staff member. Not only will training serve as a refresher and help provide useful information, it will also present opportunities to explore alternative ways of operating more efficiently and effectively or where additional resources and support might need to be focused.

9. Renovate Town Hall

We support the proposed renovation of town hall. With a \$75,000 appropriation from the community preservation fund approved by special town meeting this December, local officials can move forward in preparing plans and specifications for the possible renovation of town hall. Originally constructed in 1857 and substantially renovated in 1929, Cohasset's town hall is in desperate need of repair. Citing a memo from the director of project management and planning for the town, the building is not compliant with health, safety or fire regulations. On a per square foot basis, the building is also the town's highest consumer of energy because of inadequate to non-existent insulation and door and window seals. A 2008 study proposed two rehabilitation schemes for the building, but a decision is still pending.

In light of this situation, the board of selectmen recently formed a town hall restoration advisory committee that will meet periodically to discuss possible renovation scenarios. The committee, once a decision is reached on how to proceed, will present their proposal for approval of town meeting. We believe that town hall should be renovated or another alternative solution sought. An appealing work environment is critical to retaining good employees, to attracting new town workers, and reflects well on town government.

10. Formalize Town-School Revenue Sharing Agreement

We recommend that local officials formalize their town-school revenue sharing agreement in a memorandum of understanding or in an accepted policy. In 2009, Cohasset formed a budget planning group to "monitor town budgeting and revenue projections in order to develop financial policies to govern the fiscal process, and to identify issues and programs that should be studied in detail to determine if costs savings and/or improved services could be realized." The group developed a formula for the allocation of new revenue between the town and school. The formula, nets out fixed costs and then assigns a percent of available revenue to the town and school department. In this way, the community avoids some of the past struggles over how additional revenue should be allocated.

Finance Director/Town Accountant

The finance director, who also functions as town accountant, is appointed by and reports to the town manager. As finance director, she oversees financial reporting and accounting for the town and supervises the administration of the assessors' and treasurer/collector's offices. She is also generally involved in the budget process. Although the finance director is relatively new to Cohasset, having been in the position for just over a year now, she arrives with a wealth of experience from her 20 years with the Town of Scituate in a similar role. Her office is staffed by two assistant town accountants: one full-time and one new part-time position at 18 hours per week. The new staff member, who has only been on the job for about two months at the time of our review, brings a strong auditing background to the job. The other staff member has over 20 years of experience in Cohasset.

The legal obligation of the finance director as town accountant is to oversee all financial activity of the municipality. In doing so, the department plays a critical role in the system of statutory checks and balances established to safeguard local assets. Its overarching mission is to monitor the town's revenues and expenditures. This is primarily accomplished through the maintenance of independent records and adherence to well-defined procedures, such as documenting the flow of money in and out of municipal accounts. Essential duties include the verification of expense and payroll warrants, maintenance of the general ledger, and monthly reconciliations of accounting records. The finance director, as town accountant, also coordinates the preparation of the annual tax recapitulation sheet and is responsible for producing the annual Schedule A and the year-end balance sheet necessary for free cash certification.

The finance director maintains the general ledger in SoftRight, a financial management software application. SoftRight, which integrates the treasurer/collector, assessors and the school department, provides transparency and prevents the need for duplicate data entry. The application was purchased in the fall of 2011 and is still relatively new to the town. To date, the finance director is in the midst of rolling out SoftRight's electronic purchase order/accounts payable program to departments in order to further streamline data entry. Water and sewer billing and town payroll are administered through a separate program called CDS.

Based on our observations and discussions with local officials, the new finance director has brought a sense of stability and trust to the department. Her department operates on a professional level, fulfills fundamental responsibilities related to vendor and payroll warrant processing, and complies with internal and external reporting requirements. At the same time, the hiring of a new assistant town accountant should go far in alleviating some of the office's wide-ranging responsibilities.

11. Retain Copies of all Contracts and Grants

Since arriving in Cohasset, the finance director has issued a request that departments submit copies of all their contracts and grants on file. She is, with varying success, starting to receive information. We recommend that all departments, boards, and commissions comply with her request and submit copies of their grants and contracts to the finance director in accordance with M.G.L. c. 41, §57. As a rule, she must be able to verify that the terms of the contract or grant are met when reviewing payment requests. If a bill is submitted for payment and the contract or grant's payment terms are not on file, the finance director should not process the payment.

12. Account for Student Activity Funds

Under M.G.L. c. 71, §47 cities and towns are permitted to establish a special student activity revolving fund for fees and charges collected from students. Money collected is to be deposited by the treasurer into a separate account, with all interest earned credited back to that account. Funds can then be spent without appropriation for various athletic, club and extracurricular student activities, such as field trips, through the town's vendor process. Alternatively, the school committee can authorize the treasurer to establish a student activity checking account for use by the school's principals. In doing so, the committee must establish a maximum balance for each account, after which the treasurer is authorized to deposit cash advances from the student agency account for use by the principal to support student's activities.

We learned during our initial meetings with the finance director that these student activity funds were not being accounted for appropriately on the town's books. However, as of January, the finance director and treasurer/collector, after meeting with the school business manager, corrected the situation by setting up the necessary bank accounts and adding them to the town's general ledger. We view this as a positive first step.

Moving forward, we recommend that the finance director, in partnership with the treasurer and school business manager, develop a student activity procedures manual. The manual would simply document the necessary balance limits for checking accounts; describe the treatment of interest earned; establish the segregation of duties and cash handling practices relating to cash receipts and check writing; standardize forms for turnover and disbursement requests; identify procedures for donating money or gifts; and detail bank reconciliation procedures.

13. Rollout Electronic Purchase Order Process

The finance director is testing a new electronic purchase order (PO) process through the town's SoftRight financial management application. This new approach, currently implemented at the police

department, fire department and town manager's office, is designed to eliminate the shuffling of paperwork between offices and the data entry work associated with manual POs. Going forward, the finance director should roll out the new PO process to all departments. Departments that purchase large quantities of supplies, such as DPW, should be a priority in order to reduce the amount of time staff spends on data entry work in the finance director's office. Once this transition is made, the finance director's staff will be able to focus on the more important task of evaluating whether or not purchases are consistent with M.G.L. c. 41, §56.

Today, most departments in Cohasset submit a package of bills to the finance department with a coversheet that includes account and vendor information along with signatures. Staff in the finance director's office then data enter individual bills into the SoftRight application, verify invoices and produce the warrant authorizing payment.

14. Resolve Storage Issues

The administration of municipal government is largely a paper driven process. And while the finance director is moving in the direction of having departments data enter information, such as invoices, directly into the town's financial management software application, the accumulation of hardcopy records is making storage a problem. To help eliminate some of the clutter, especially in anticipation of the proposed renovations to town hall, we recommend that local officials implement a record disposal and storage campaign throughout town offices.

To start, the acting town manager or his designee should review public records laws and the municipal disposal schedules located on the Secretary of State's website, www.sec.state.ma.us, under the Records Management Unit. In coordination with the finance director, department heads can then set up a schedule to systematically go through their records to assess what needs to be retained or can be eliminated. Once a determination is made, an application for permission to destroy the documents can be submitted to the Secretary of State. Additional information is available in the Municipal Records Retention Manual: www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/MA_Municipal_Records_Retention_Manual.pdf. In the Appendix we include an example destruction permission application from the Secretary of State.

At the same time, local officials should begin disposing of any equipment or supplies with a resale or salvage value, such as surplus computer equipment, that no longer is useful to the town. We refer the town manager, as chief procurement officer, to the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General where information is available on the disposition of property. Specifically, Chapter 7 of the 30B Manual, www.mass.gov/ig/publ/30bmanl.pdf, includes an overview of the rules that apply to the disposal of surplus equipment and supplies depending on their estimated value and best practices. Items valued at under \$5,000 dollars are not subject to 30B.

15. Develop Procedures Manuals & Pursue Training Opportunities

We recommend that department managers and staff document financial procedures in an effort to develop an internal control manual. Collectively, internal controls are procedures designed to provide reasonable assurance that the assets of the town are being adequately safeguarded. Examples include the handling and turnover of cash receipts, reconciliations, purchase orders, payroll and vendor disbursements, as well as the administration of grants and month- and year-end closing procedures. Now that initial efforts have been made to standardize various policies and practices, the next step is to document a detailed list of responsibilities that each staff member completes on an on-going basis. A well-conceived procedural manual not only provides guidance on a host of financial management activities and reinforces internal controls; it serves as a valuable tool for new staff who can easily reference procedures.

Treasurer/Collector

The treasurer/collector's office in Cohasset is responsible for the issuance and collection of real and personal property taxes, water/sewer charges, and boat and motor vehicle excise. The department also handles all payroll and employee benefits administration for the town, as well as debt and cash management-related activities. The treasurer/collector is appointed by the town manager and reports to the finance director. Hired this past year, the treasurer/collector has been in office for about seven months. She arrived from the Town of Scituate where she worked as treasurer/collector for six years. She is certified by the Massachusetts Collectors and Treasurers Association. She supervises a full-time assistant treasurer/collector and an assistant to the treasurer/collector. The assistant treasurer/collector is generally responsible for handling human resource-related matters, while the assistant to the treasurer/collector deals primarily with the customer service, including tax and other payments made at the window and receipt turnovers by departments that collect money.

The treasurer/collector's office issues quarterly bills for real estate and personal property accounts. After receiving property tax commitments from the assessing department, the treasurer/collector transmits corresponding files to an outside vendor to print and mail bills. The majority of property tax payments are received from mortgage escrow services, although payments are processed by mail, over-the-counter, through MCC's ebilling payment application on the town's website, and by a new lockbox service with Century Bank. Payments are then entered into SoftRight, where they are verified and a bank deposit is prepared. Water and sewer bills, as well as boat excise bills, are handled separately through the outside billing vendor CDS. The town's deputy collector, John Y. Brody, pursues collections on accounts that remain delinquent after demand notices are sent on all accounts.

The treasurer/collector's office also regularly receives turnovers of cash and checks for deposit from different departments that collect money. Receipts, along with a report identifying a list of revenue types, corresponding account numbers and receipt amounts, are dropped off at the office by each department. While the process is somewhat complicated by the fact that not all departments use a standardized turnover report, staff in the treasurer/collector's office proof the receipt amounts against the report and sign and date copies of the turnover report. The treasurer/collector's office and the department submitting the turnover each retain a copy, with the third signed copy provided to the accountant by the department making the turnover.

At the time of our initial on-site review, the treasurer/collector had only been working in the position for about four months. By all accounts, however, she is adjusting quickly. When she took the job, she recognized there were a number of challenges facing the office that needed to be addressed. To date, she has set up a lockbox service through Century Bank and streamlined how escrow service payments are processed. She is also in the midst of closing unnecessary bank accounts and hopes to move employees to bi-weekly payroll. At the time of our visit, however, cash reconciliations were not up-to-

date, which is expected to be resolved quickly because of treasurer/collector's strong working relationship with the finance director that stems from their time together in the Town of Scituate. Overall, the treasurer/collector fulfills the core responsibilities of the office. In our recommendations, we provide guidance on some tasks that the treasurer/collector has put on her project agenda. We also advise on procedures designed to promote efficiencies, tighten financial controls, and strengthen overall practices.

16. Schedule Reconciliations

The reconciliation of cash and receivables is an essential financial control and should be a priority. The finance director, in coordinating regular monthly reconciliations, should arrange a time with the treasurer/collector at the end each month to meet and complete reconciliations, or to receive balances that she would then compare to the general ledger. It is their collective responsibility to resolve variances. To be successful, all respective records need to be up-to-date. The town manager, during financial management team meetings, should ensure that reconciliations are taking place on a regular schedule moving forward. At the time of our visits, monthly reconciliations in the treasurer/collector's office had not been completed since the close of FY2012.

17. Initiate Tax Takings & Develop Plan to Resolve Aging Tax Titles

We recommend that the treasurer/collector initiate tax takings and promptly record subsequent taxes for accounts already in tax title. At the time of our visit, real estate tax demands were being issued relatively timely, but it had been over a year since the last notice of tax taking was issued in order for receivables to be moved into tax title. Moving delinquent accounts into tax title status is an essential step towards securing the town's liens on these properties. At the same time, existing tax title accounts were not updated with subsequent years' taxes that are due.

The town has approximately 70 parcels in tax title going back to the 1970's with \$1,449,294 owed in overdue property taxes, fees, interest and other charges. To reduce tax title accounts and collect any portion of the outstanding taxes owed the town will require a commitment from the board of selectmen and town meeting. A well thought-out plan of action, supported by an infusion of resources, can help maximize collections and convince current and potential delinquent taxpayers of the town's seriousness in the collection of taxes. We suggest that the treasurer/collector formulate a plan to organize tax titles into the subgroupings listed below, and then act to move them through the appropriate process:

Land of low value: These properties, improved or vacant, can be placed on a fast track toward auction outside Land Court proceedings. To qualify, a tax title property must have a current assessed value less than \$19,970 for calendar year 2012.

Multiple parcels under single ownership: On the town's list of tax title accounts, there are a few instances where individuals own multiple properties. Greater efficiencies can be gained by dealing with these properties together either in Land Court or during a negotiation of a partial payment agreement.

Accounts with bad addresses and/or deceased properties owners: These accounts should be individually investigated to determine the likelihood of identifying legal owners, or person(s) in possession. If an owner is found, contact should be made. If after a diligent search, an owner cannot be found, alternative action should be considered. Available options include a petition to the Commissioner of Revenue under M.G.L. c. 59, §11 seeking authorization to assess taxes to the person in possession of the property (if this is the case), or to assess the taxes to persons unknown.

Existing partial payment agreements: Existing agreements should be reviewed to ensure that each is being honored and that payments are sufficient to pay down the outstanding tax balance within a reasonable time. If not, the agreement should be restructured or voided, and foreclosure proceedings should be initiated.

Remaining accounts: These accounts are the most likely candidates for outside legal assistance. We recommend the treasurer identify properties with the highest outstanding balance and solicit legal services through a request for proposals. Let respondents provide details on how many accounts, on what basis and for what fee each would contract with the town. The process can be replicated as needed to reduce the number of tax title accounts.

18. Standardize Receipt Turnover Form

We recommend that the treasurer/collector create a standardized receipt turnover sheet for departments. Most communities are moving towards turnovers sheets generated by their financial software application or one simply designed in Excel. The form, which can be emailed, placed in a shared drive or just manually distributed to each department, should include the name of the department along with appropriate locations at the top or bottom for dates, affirmations, and signatures. The form would also be preprinted with one column that lists all the revenue types by name that originate from a department and a second column with corresponding revenue account numbers. A third, blank column allows for the manual entry of turnover amounts. If entered electronically, the total can be automatically calculated at the bottom. The treasurer/collector should confirm with the finance director all revenue account numbers. If a new number is required, the finance director should create it and provide it to the treasurer. During our visit the treasurer/collector provided us with six separate examples of turnovers currently in use by departments in Cohasset. A sample turnover sheet is provided in the Appendix.

19. Review Payroll Process

Track Accrued Sick & Vacation Time: We recommend that the finance director centralize the record keeping of accrued sick and vacation time. For the purposes of GAAP accounting, the accountant must annually report this accrued time, which reflects the obligation of the town to compensate employees upon retirement for all or portions of their sick and vacation time earned, but not taken.

Departments currently submit weekly timesheets to the treasurer/collector's office for payroll processing. Although these timesheets designate the use of personal, vacation, or sick time, the department submits a separate Record of Attendance and Time Off on a monthly basis. The form, which identifies the name, department, month turned in and fiscal year for each employee, is a manual spreadsheet where the department identifies the totals for each month.

The maintenance of these records at the departmental level represents good practice only if it is uniform and if corresponding data is retained in a centralized location. Otherwise checks and balances do not exist. The absence of a systematic procedure for maintaining these records can also give rise to circumstances where an employee's claim of accrued sick and vacation time cannot be independently corroborated or challenged with credibility. To strengthen internal controls, the treasurer/collector should track running balances of all employee sick and vacation time. One possible avenue for maintaining this information could be through the CDS software application. If available, accrued time might also be made available to employees on their pay advice.

Develop Standard Payroll Timesheet & Coversheet: The treasurer/collector should develop a standard employee timesheet that records an individual's name, department, pay period, earning codes, and a signature line for the department head. Timesheets should also indicate any accrued personal, sick or vacation time used as well as any compensatory time earned and taken during the period. In addition, the treasurer/collector should develop a corresponding cover page summarizing timesheet information for each department employee. In this instance, information need only include names of employees in the department, their total hours worked or used, by type, and total pay due for the pay period. Type of hours would include regular, sick leave, vacation or compensatory time. The cover page should be submitted to the treasurer/collector's office signed by the department head, while individual employee timesheets, with daily detail on time worked or used, would remain at the department. The treasurer/collector, in distributing the newly formatted cover page and timesheet, should include a detailed memo laying out the submission procedure.

Assess Payroll Application Functionality: Hardcopy timesheets for individual employees arrive at the treasurer/collector's office where they are verified for accuracy and data entered into the CDS software application by either the amount owed or hours worked for preparation of payroll checks. This information is then data entered a second time into the SoftRight financial management software application for financial reporting purposes. This process is labor-intensive and redundant, requiring staff to data enter information multiple times in order to record payroll.

If the capacity exists, we recommend that departments be granted access to CDS so they can directly data enter their time and attendance. A hardcopy summary cover page with department head signature would still be forwarded to the treasurer/collector's office for verification, but individual timesheets

need not be forwarded. Relieved of data entry responsibilities, staff in the treasurer/collector's office can shift to a detailed auditing of payroll accounting being recorded at the department level.

Move All Employees to Bi-Weekly Payroll: Compensating employees every two weeks, or 26 times per year, reduces the shuffling of paperwork between and among offices. It saves money by cutting processing time and the cost of check stock and other materials. It also simplifies reconciliations because fewer checks are left outstanding for staff to track down and reissue. Converting to bi-weekly payroll must be negotiated with the town's labor unions.

20. Close Post Office Box

Since arriving this summer, the treasurer/collector has quickly taken steps to automate collection practices in Cohasset. Citing two recent examples, she set up an automated remittance processing service, or lockbox, through Century Bank and is enabling third-party mortgage escrow services to wire transfer payments directly to the bank. At the same time, she continues to use the e-billing services provided by MCC to streamline real estate, personal property, water/sewer, and automobile and boat excise payments.

In continuing this trend, we encourage the treasurer/collector to close out the town's old post office box. With the lockbox service, the post office box is redundant and no longer necessary. Moving forward, we also recommend that any payments sent directly to town hall be forwarded to the lockbox for processing. This would not only alleviate some of the workload associated with manually processing bills in-house, but allow staff to focus on more critical taxpayer service-related matters.

Assessors

The assessors' office is responsible for valuing all real and personal property in town and generating the commitments that authorize the treasurer/collector to collect real estate taxes, betterments, and motor vehicle and boat excises. The assessors annually review property assessments to ensure they reflect full and fair cash value. Subject to the approval of the board of assessors, the director of assessing sets the annual overlay amount and makes decisions on all abatement applications and property tax exemptions. Other duties of the assessors' office include updating tax maps and deed transfer information and responding to public inquiries.

Cohasset's three-member elected board of assessors consists of a commercial appraiser and the principle assessors for Wareham and Rockland. All three members have taken course 101 and completed a classification workshop as required by DLS. The assessing office is staffed by a full-time director of assessing who is appointed by and reports to the town manager. She has over ten years of service to the town and is an accredited assessor by the Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers.

The director receives support from a full-time assistant assessor and a 31-hour per week administrative assistant. Field work, including the inspection of sale, building permit and abatement properties, as well as the cyclical re-measure and list is handled in-house. The town contracts with Real Estate Research Consultants, Inc., (RRC) out of Andover for personal property valuation-related services. The town also contracts with Patriot Properties for its computer-assisted mass appraisal (CAMA) software application that maintains property data, values property, and ensures tax equity through uniform valuations.

We feel staff in the assessors' office are experienced and have a thorough understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Our recommendations are merely intended to improve access during routine inspections and to introduce technology that will facilitate assessment administration. While not specifically recommended here, staff training could expand the scope of work performed by the assistant assessor.

21. Coordinate Inspectional Department Visits

We recommend that the director of assessing work with the fire department and building inspector to accompany them on their respective inspections. Teaming up with the fire department when it schedules a smoke/CO2 inspection because of a pending home sale would ensure complete and timely interior information for the assessing database and for analyzing sales. Similarly, we encourage the building inspector to communicate with the assessing office on scheduled permit inspections so they can accompany him during his review. This relationship can be further cemented if the assessor was required to sign off on all occupancy and building permits. Combining visits would not only be a

courtesy to residents through the reduced number of schedule trips that local officials must make to a single property, but data collection and analysis activities would improve.

22. Implement GIS

Cohasset's Bureau of Local Assessment advisor from DOR outlined a series of recommendations last year to enhance appraisal practices as part of the FY2012 triennial certification of property values. Included was a recommendation to fully implement the new geographic information system (GIS) in order to update tax maps and facilitate assessment administration. We agree. By all accounts, Cohasset's system of tax maps is antiquated and disjointed—base maps are almost one hundred years old, are laid out poorly, must be updated by hand, and are not available electronically.

GIS is a powerful computer-based tool that can provide a convenient, informative and effective way to record and extract data relative to the town's engineering, utility, and infrastructure data. When fully integrated, GIS incorporates the assessor's maps, property records and any other useful information related to real property or the natural characteristics of the town. By implementing GIS in Cohasset, parcels can be remapped into a grid system, abutter's lists can be produced electronically, and maps can be digitized for use on the town's website.

Information Technology

The Information Technology department maintains all computer related hardware and software located in town hall and at the school department. Its wide-ranging responsibilities include the administration and service of the network, phones, peripherals such as printers, and the town's website.

Cohasset formed a position of chief technology officer (CTO) in a joint venture with the schools earlier this year. Hired in June, the new CTO is moving aggressively to address the town's aging infrastructure and other technology-related needs that have gone unmet over the years. To date, the CTO has fully integrated email between the town and schools, is moving to upgrade the phone systems, and replace outdated computer hardware. He is also in the process of drafting a five-year strategic town-wide technology plan as well as documenting a series of technology policies to standardize procedures and enhance security. The CTO reports to the town manager and is supported by a full-time network technician on the school-side. He receives no equivalent help on the town-side.

We support the work of the town's CTO. By all accounts he is moving quickly to institute much needed reforms to Cohasset's outdated IT system. The recommendations included below are designed to establish a network of likeminded individuals who can provide ongoing guidance and support on IT-related issues. We also comment on the need to adopt a town-wide technology plan and policies, merge spending line-items, update the town's website, and submit periodic reports on helpdesk activity.

23. Form Technology Committee

We recommend the formation of a technology committee. In our experience, technology committees work best when they are designed to be supportive in nature with the primary purpose of serving as a resource to the CTO. In this capacity, we view the committee functioning as a meaningful and objective contributor of information, analysis and insight for the town. They would not necessarily make decisions on what product or service to purchase, but could be tapped to complete various cost benefit analyses and other investigative-related leg work. Meetings therefore would be ad hoc and at the request of the CTO. It is our expectation that committee members would be recruited from outside town hall and possess the necessary technology knowledge, skills and experience to support the CTO. If effectively recruited, resident members can be a sounding board and a source of innovative ideas drawn from the private sector and beyond. In addition, they can communicate with the CTO in a common language with a higher level of understanding.

24. Adopt Town-wide Technology Plan & Policies

Cohasset's CTO is putting together a town-wide strategic plan and a separate series of technology policies, such as backup procedures, designed to protect the town. While both documents are currently

in draft form, they represent a positive step forward toward enhancing the overall management of information technology across town and school offices. We encourage the CTO to complete these documents, which should be tailored to the specific circumstances and needs of the community, before they are presented to the board of selectmen for formal adoption. Once adopted, the technology policies should be distributed to staff in order to secure a signature acknowledging their receipt and understanding of the document. The policies should also be incorporated into a package of information which would be provided to new employees when they are hired.

25. Consolidate Department Technology Spending

In establishing the CTO position in Cohasset, local officials merged appropriations for his salary in the town and school budgets into a single line item. Now, capital as well as maintenance expenditures, subscription and fee-related expenses that are being covered within individual department line-items should be transferred to a consolidated department of technology budget. Use of a central technology department budget line item provides greater flexibility and reduces the amount of paper between and among offices. Also, if handled in a centralized manner, it might enable the CTO to readily monitor technology spending for greater efficiency and accountability.

26. Update Town of Cohasset Website

The CTO, in his efforts to modernize technology in Cohasset, is planning to overhaul the town's website. While details of his plan are only starting to form, he intends to improve the overall character of the site and to add streaming video. His initiative began this past summer when he moved the website from its old hosting service, which no longer supported it, to a server that he manages. We support his desire to improve the website and offer the following advice.

Substandard in its current design, the town's website feels utilitarian and uninspired. Today, municipal websites are the primary vehicle for interacting with the public and are central to how towns brand and market themselves to the community at large. Websites therefore should not only be full of information relating to municipal business, such as meeting minutes, agendas and town warrants but should serve as the primary customer service portal for making online payments, filing for permits, and contacting local officials.

With this in mind, we recommend that the technology committee engage the community on how best to retool the town's aging website. While we do not encourage design by committee, we suggest an outreach campaign to better understand how the website can serve the people who use it. A simple online survey posted prominently on the existing website could be used to kick-start this effort.

27. Submit Helpdesk Reports to Town Manager

Department computer and other technology-related issues that arise during the course of business are communicated to the CTO via a dedicated email address. Through this helpdesk system, the CTO generates a monthly report on the number of tickets that are responded to and the total resolution time. Moving forward, we recommend that the CTO forward these reports to the town manager for his review. Help desk reports, when formatted in a nontechnical manner, can provide the town manager with analytics and key performance indicators that can be valuable when making decisions about potential training opportunities. They can also prove important during the capital budget season as supporting evidence in advocating for additional resources.

Appendix

Exhibit I: Example Record Disposal Application

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin
 Secretary of the Commonwealth
 Records Management Unit – Massachusetts Archives at Columbia Point
 220 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, Massachusetts 02125-3384
 Email: rmu@sec.state.ma.us
 Website: www.sec.state.ma.us
 Phone: 617-727-2816 Fax: 617-288-8429

FORM RMU-2 – APPLICATION FOR DESTRUCTION PERMISSION

IMPORTANT! Record custodians must re-submit this form each time they intend to destroy any of the records listed herein. No record can be destroyed unless it is included in an authorized disposal schedule.

Submit in duplicate:

DO NOT USE THIS SPACE

Disposal Schedule(s) #

APPROVALS:
 Pursuant to provisions of MGL ch. 66, Supervisor of Public Records hereby grants permission to destroy the records listed in this application under the Disposal Schedule(s) above.

SUPERVISOR OF PUBLIC RECORDS

Supervisor of Public Records

_____/_____/_____
Date of approval

1. Destruction Permission for: _____
Municipal Entity (city, town, school committee, etc.)

2. Total approximate volume of records proposed to be destroyed (cubic feet, file drawers, boxes, etc.)

3. Location of records: _____

4. The last audit of accounts of this office was completed on _____
Month/Day/Year

5. I certify that the last entries on the records listed in this application were made **prior** to the retention date of this agency's Disposal Schedule(s) thus satisfying the legal requirements that certain records be kept for a specified length of time and are not subject to pending audit or investigation.

Print or Type Name

Address *Phone*

Signature of Department Head or Authorized Agent *Date*

Item No.	Description of Record (Give Form # if any)	Retention Period	Inclusive Dates
<i>Example:</i> 1.104	Personnel, Leave Reports (Authorized)	20 years Retain 3 years	1960-1980

Please list additional records on a separate sheet(s).

RMU2 1/13/11

Exhibit II: Sample Department Turnover Sheet

Town of Cohasset			
SCHEDULE OF DEPARTMENTAL PAYMENTS TO TREASURER			
No.	Dept:	Date: / /	
Description	Account Code	Amount	
	TOTAL:	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 20px;"><tr><td style="text-align: center;">:</td></tr></table>	:
:			
<hr style="width: 25%; margin: 0 auto;"/> Department Head			
<hr style="width: 25%; margin: 0 auto;"/> Title	<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> Treasurer		

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by the
Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services:

Robert G. Nunes, Deputy Commissioner & Director of Municipal Affairs

Frederick E. Kingsley, Bureau Chief,
Municipal Data Management and Technical Assistance Bureau

Joe Markarian, Director, Technical Assistance Section

Zack Blake, Project Manager, Technical Assistance Section

Martin DiMunah, Field Representative, Bureau of Accounts

Grace Sandell, Community Advisor, Bureau of Local Assessment

In preparing this review,
DLS staff interviewed and/or received information from the following local officials:

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Diane Kennedy, Selectman

Frederick Koed, Selectman

Leland Jenkins, Selectman

Martha Gjestebj, Selectman

Peter Pescatore, Chairman, Advisory Committee

Michael Milanoski, Town Manager

Jennifer Oram, Assistant to the Town Manager

Tracy Connors-Kelly, Secretary to the Selectmen & Town Manager's Office

Brian Joyce, Director of Project Management and Planning

Mary Gallagher, Finance Director/Town Accountant

Jane Henderson, Assistant Town Accountant

Susan Hickey, Assistant Town Accountant

Jane Lepardo, Treasurer/Collector

Sandra Parnell, Assistant Treasurer/Collector

Linda Litchfield, Assistant to the treasurer/Collector

Mary Quill, Director of Assessing

Bruce Lane, Assistant Assessor

Ellen Warner, Administrative Assistant

Rob Bonnell, Chief Technology Officer