



Town of Holden, MA

Citizen Engagement Best Practice

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Image: Holden Town Hall¹

Introduction

Located in Worcester County, the Town of Holden, Massachusetts has a population of over 17,000 residents² and a Median Household Income of approximately \$85,000³. Holden was originally incorporated in 1741 and became one of the first communities in the state to adopt a Selectmen – Town Manager form of government. Through its rich history and active citizenry, the Town has developed a deep understanding that citizen involvement is critical for a responsive and effective local government. Today, Holden aims to use technology to foster, encourage, and focus resident input into meaningful results. In early 2016, the Town of Holden entered into a Community Compact agreement with the Baker-Polito administration to increase opportunities for citizen engagement in the community by implementing technology best practices. This report summarizes the Town’s efforts to fulfill this objective.

¹ John Phelan. “Town Hall, Holden Massachusetts.” [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Town_Hall,_Holden_MA.jpg) . *Wikimedia Commons*. Accessed on March 16, 2018.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Town_Hall,_Holden_MA.jpg

² “Community Facts”. 2010 Census. *U.S. Census Bureau. American Factfinder*. Accessed on March 23, 2018.

https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml

³ “About Holden”. Official Website for the Town of Holden, MA. Accessed on March 23, 2018.

<http://www.holdenma.gov/pages/about-holden>

Citizen Engagement Initiatives

UPDATE MUNICIPAL WEBSITE

In today's internet driven society, websites serve as the face of our organizations and a hub of information and resources for those who seek them. The Town of Holden recognizes the importance of having a modern communication strategy that incorporates digital methods, in addition to their traditional counterparts. As a technology best practice, the Town completely redesigned their municipal website. With help from Virtual Towns & Schools, Holden upgraded their outdated website to one that is more responsive, mobile-friendly, and provides a variety of useful, citizen-focused tools and information.



Screenshot of New Website:

www.holdenma.gov

(Taken on March 22, 2018)

Since their redesign, the Town has built a stronger web presence and is constantly seeking ways to communicate better with citizens. Below are examples of some useful tools being offered today through the new site.

- **Citizen Action Center.** Located prominently on the website homepage, the Town’s Citizen Action Center contains links to popular information and transactional tools such as:
 - *Online Bill Pay* – Residents can pay their real estate, personal property, motor vehicle excise, and utility bills (i.e. light, water, sewer, trash) online using the Town’s Unibank Unipay system.
 - *Municipal Light Department* – Users have access to pertinent departmental information including energy audit and rebate programs, solar / net metering details, energy conservation tips, and more.
 - *Forms & Documents* – This page serves as an online file center for the Town. Users can download important forms and documents from the Accounting, Assessing, Public Works, Police, and Health Departments, as well as the Grove Cemetery, Planning and Development Office, Board of Health, Planning Board, Senior Services/Council on Aging, Town Clerk, Town Manager, Treasurer/Tax Collector, and Water and Sewer Divisions.
 - *Online Permitting* – The Town of Holden uses PeopleGIS as their online permitting solution. Residents can initiate the permitting process by entering their address into the system. Once their address is identified, they then can apply for a new permit, check on the status of an existing permit, pay for any approved permits, and print documentation for any approved permits.
 - *GIS & Property Database* – Users can view the Town’s GIS and property data by toggling between the available Base Maps and Layers.
 - *Electronic Alerts* – Users can opt in to receive emergency notifications from the Town via email. They can subscribe to receive urgent alerts, meeting agendas, meeting minutes, news, announcements, and level 3 sex offender updates.
- **How Do I?** This portion of the website lists every resource available on the website, sorting them into alphabetical order.

- **Do Something Questionnaire.** Located in the lower left of the website homepage, under “Quick Links”, the Do Something Project is an incentive to mobilize Holden residents to contribute to their community. By filling out the questionnaire, citizens can register to serve on a board or committee, and volunteer their free time to areas of town government that require extra manpower. The table below lists the various Board & Commissions citizens can serve and volunteer with.

Volunteer Board & Commissions	
250 th Permanent Gift Committee a/k/a Bandstand Committee	Agricultural Commission
Board of Health	Cable Advisory Committee
Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)	Community Garden Committee
Conservation Commission	Council on Aging/Senior Citizens Committee
Cultural Council	Economic Development Commission
Help at H.O.M.E. Committee	Historic District Commission
Historical Commission	Medical Reserve Corp (MRC)
Municipal Electric Power Advisory Board (MRC)	Planning Board
Recreation Committee	Veterans Advisory Committee
Water/Sewer Advisory Board	Winter Festival Committee
Zoning Board of Appeals	

- **Town Calendar.** Located at the center of the website homepage, the Town Calendar informs residents about town events. Users can filter their search by event type or Department/Board/Committee. They can also view the calendar by year, month, week, and day.
- **CodeRED.** The Town of Holden leverages this tool to communicate emergency situations to residents. Types of notifications include evacuation notices, missing child reports, and more. Citizens can subscribe to the service through the municipal website to receive geo-targeted, time-sensitive information via a variety of delivery methods including voice, text, and email.

SOCIAL MEDIA

In addition to their new website, the Town of Holden has also developed a social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Holden manages a town-wide Facebook account which, as of this writing, has over 3,000 likes⁴. The Town is very engaged with their online community and uploads new posts multiple times a week. The Holden Police Department is also very active on social media, their Facebook page has over 700 likes⁵. The Holden Fire Department has over 150 likes on their Facebook page⁶ and almost 200 followers on Twitter (@HoldenMassFire). The Department of Public Works manages a Twitter page (@HoldenDPW) with almost 300 followers⁷ and an Instagram page (@holdendpw) with over 70 followers⁸.

It's evident that the Town of Holden is well-established on social media. They even have a Social Media Policy which explains the terms of use for these platforms. The complete policy can be found on the town's website at the link below.

Town of Holden, MA. Social Media Policy:

<http://www.holdenma.gov/town-manager/pages/town-of-holden-social-media-policy>

⁴ Official Town of Holden Facebook Page. Accessed on March 23, 2018.

<https://www.facebook.com/Town-of-Holden-183702448366233/>

⁵ Official Holden Police Department Facebook Page. Accessed on March 27, 2018.

<https://www.facebook.com/Holden-Police-Department-312133402216691/>

⁶ Official Holden Fire Department Facebook Page. Accessed on March 27, 2018.

<https://www.facebook.com/HoldenMassFire/>

⁷ Official Holden Public Works Twitter Page. Accessed on March 27, 2018.

<https://twitter.com/holdendpw?lang=en>

⁸ Official Holden Public Works Instagram Page. Accessed on March 27, 2018.

<https://www.instagram.com/holdendpw/>

OTHER MEDIA

Though Holden's website and social media channels are their main source of web traffic, their traditional media still offers value. For instance, the Town has created opportunities for engagement around their Electronic Sign. Town departments, community groups, and citizens can submit an application to use the sign and display a message for a limited amount of time. The details of this program can be found at the link below.

Town Electronic Sign Usage:

<http://www.holdenma.gov/sites/holden/files/file/file/electronicseignuse.holden.pdf>

Conclusion

The Town of Holden has put tremendous effort into their Citizen Engagement best practice. Though their Community Compact is coming to an end, the Town is still brainstorming ways to inform citizens. In the near future, they hope to create an electronic Newsletter to provide citizens with yet another channel of communication. With access to the new and improved website, citizens of Holden can become even more active in their community and stay informed about local news and events. They can feel assured knowing that they have the support of their town government and the tools necessary to contribute to the greater good of the Town.