



# **Town of Hudson**

## **Citizen Engagement Strategy**

Prepared by: The Office of Municipal & School Technology  
EOTSS | Executive Office of Technology Services & Security



Image: [Hudson Town Hall](#)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Incorporated in 1866, the Town of Hudson is in Middlesex County, Massachusetts. Today, the Town has a population of 19,063, a median household income of \$83,765<sup>2</sup>, and is well-known for its rich history and recreational gems. Hudson officials do their best to handle community concerns and continue to seek new ways to share pertinent information with constituents. The Town of Hudson entered into a Community Compact agreement in early 2017, pledging to implement citizen engagement best practices in their community. The Office of Municipal & School Technology (OMST) partnered with the Hudson Planning & Community Development Department to identify advanced communication platforms that would potentially enhance two-

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<sup>1</sup> John Phelan. "Town Hall, Hudson MA." [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Town_Hall,_Hudson_MA.jpg) . Accessed on October 31, 2018. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Town\\_Hall,\\_Hudson\\_MA.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Town_Hall,_Hudson_MA.jpg)

<sup>2</sup> "Community Facts." U.S. Census Bureau. American FactFinder. Accessed on October 31, 2018. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml)

way communication with citizens to keep them engaged around new developments. This report provides an overview of the Town's efforts to improve citizen engagement using technology.

## **Project Purpose**

In the summer of 2017, the Office of Municipal and School Technology (OMST) contacted the Hudson Planning Department to begin discussions around their citizen engagement goals. They had several objectives they wanted to pursue immediately. Despite a strong interest in improving citizen engagement, the Planning Department consisted of three staff members who were already at capacity, making it a challenge to increase the dissemination of information to the public.

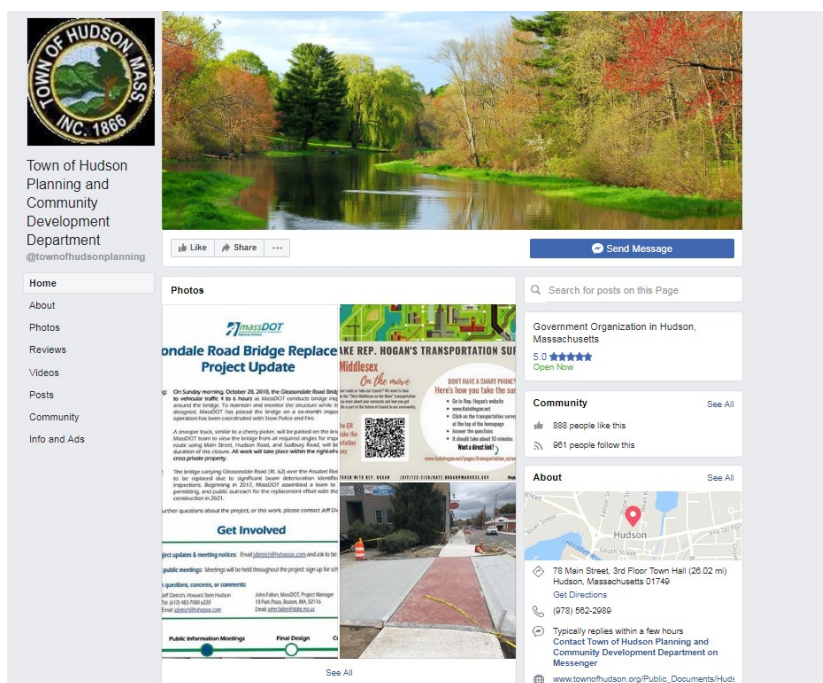
The OMST assisted the department in their search for technology solutions and organizational strategies that would facilitate the sharing of project information with residents. The Town was able to identify and address the following objectives to fulfill their Community Compact best practice, taking their current capacity into consideration.

- Identify mechanisms that would allow the Planning Department to securely share large project files with stakeholders online
- Consider staffing opportunities and alternative organizational approaches to technology implementation

# Mechanisms for Information Sharing

## SOCIAL MEDIA

The Planning Department often uses their [Facebook page](#) to post project updates, engage in dialogs with citizens and receive feedback. Currently, the page has 961 followers and 999 likes,<sup>3</sup> indicating growing engagement with constituents. Users can also message the Town directly using Facebook's Messenger app and will typically receive a response from a staff member within a few hours.



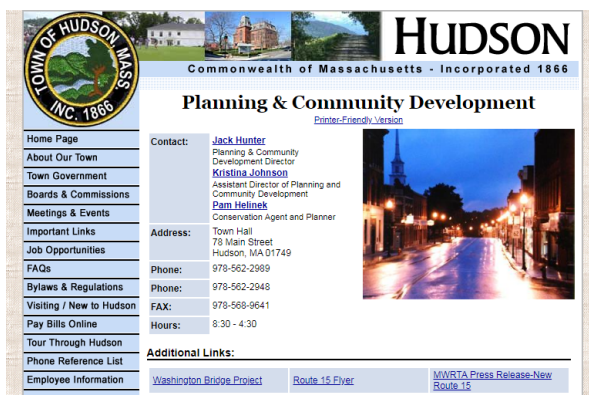
*Screenshot: Town of Hudson Planning and Community Development Department. (Taken October 31, 2018)*

<sup>3</sup> Town of Hudson Planning and Community Development Department. Official Facebook Page. Accessed on October 31, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/townofhudsonplanning/>



## WEBSITE

On February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the Town launched a new municipal website on the CivicPlus platform. The website has new features and functionality, as well as a more robust Content Management System (CMS). Images below compare before and after of the Planning & Community Development Department's [webpage<sup>4</sup>](http://www.townofhudson.org/Public_Documents/HudsonMA_ComDev/main), which contains information about the department, boards and commissions, current projects, plans and studies. Department staff received training on how to update the content on their webpage, allowing them to easily keep MassWorks, permitting, and conservation project information current.



*Before*



*After*

## BOARD DOCS

On March 13, 2019, Hudson officially adopted BoardDocs which allows Town officials to electronically distribute Meeting Agendas and other board-related information. Leveraging this cloud-based technology will help to improve the Town's governance processes by maximizing the effectiveness of their board meetings, increasing transparency and productivity and providing a clear basis for open communication with the public. These adjustments are expected to save staff time and taxpayer dollars. They are also expected to increase the time board members have to review agenda information, allowing them to better prepare for meetings. All documents associated with the meetings are automatically archived and can be accessed by date or by using the system's search feature. Users can leverage the MetaSearch feature to access best practices from other governing bodies that are using the system, allowing them to gain important knowledge about initiatives others have considered and implemented. Hudson's new Board

<sup>4</sup> Town of Hudson Official Website. Planning & Community Development. Accessed on October 31, 2018. [http://www.townofhudson.org/Public\\_Documents/HudsonMA\\_ComDev/main](http://www.townofhudson.org/Public_Documents/HudsonMA_ComDev/main)

Management tool can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.boarddocs.com/ma/hudsonma/Board.nsf/Public>

## OTHER SYSTEMS CONSIDERED

In collaboration with the OMST, Hudson's Planning Department explored a variety of technologies in use in other Massachusetts communities, including:

***CoUrbanize*** is a community engagement platform that connects residents, real estate developers, planners, and municipalities around local property developments. Users have access to a suite of tools to manage project information and receive public feedback. In July of 2017, the OMST coordinated a meeting between the Towns of Hudson and Ashland to learn more about the system first-hand. Ashland's Planning Department had been using the platform and was able to share their experiences.

***Cornerwise*** is an open source tool that was built by [Code for Boston](#)<sup>5</sup> for the City of Somerville, using data from their Planning and Capital Projects departments. Users can enter their location and discover development projects in their area. Cornerwise was built using Leaflet, Backbone, and jQuery technology. Full details can be found on [Github](#)<sup>6</sup>. The City of Somerville Cornerwise tool is available at <https://somerville.cornerwise.org/>

***ProudCity*** is an open digital government platform that provides websites and other digital government services to municipalities. The OMST and Hudson Planning Department reviewed the platform's interactive map/GIS module and how it can be leveraged for public engagement and feedback.

***Electronic Permitting*** or e-permitting, was discussed with the Planning Department and is a possibility they would like to explore at some point. The Town's current permitting system is manual and decentralized. A digital solution would require additional funding and varying levels of tech savviness to successfully deploy. Department staff communicated their interest in the Town of Watertown's e-permitting model, which can be found at the link provided: <https://www.ci.watertown.ma.us/319/Building-Permits>

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<sup>5</sup> Code for Boston: A Code for America Brigade and Grassroots Organization. Accessed on March 26, 2019. <https://www.codeforboston.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Github. Code for Boston. Cornerwise. Accessed on March 26, 2019. <https://github.com/codeforboston/cornerwise>

After learning about the various technology options available, the Town of Hudson decided to go with a combination of CivicPlus and Board Docs, while continuing their efforts on Social Media. The Board Docs tool can be accessed via the new municipal website and the Planning Department's Facebook page continues to be an effective avenue for communicating with citizens.

## **Conclusion**

The Town of Hudson has successfully completed the Citizen Engagement best practice. With support from the Community Compact program, the Hudson Planning Department was able to explore and understand available solutions to support Citizen Engagement. With a newly implemented website and BoardDocs system, the Planning Department has taken important steps that will enhance two-way communication with constituents and position the Town for successful communication in the future.