

# TOWN OF MILLIS

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## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW

OCTOBER 2023



**DLS**  
DIVISION OF LOCAL SERVICES  
MA DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

**PREPARED BY:**

**DLS | Financial Management Resource Bureau**

[www.mass.gov/dls](http://www.mass.gov/dls)

Melinda Ordway, Senior Analyst & Project Manager

Theo Kalivas, Project Manager



# DLS

DIVISION OF LOCAL SERVICES  
MA DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

Geoffrey E. Snyder  
Commissioner of Revenue

Sean R. Cronin  
Senior Deputy Commissioner

October 12, 2023

Select Board  
900 Main Street  
Millis, MA 02054

Dear Board Members:

I am pleased to present the enclosed financial management review for the Town of Millis. It is my hope that our guidance provides direction and serves as a resource for local officials as we work together to build better government for our citizens.

If you have any questions regarding the report, please contact Zack Blake, Financial Management Resource Bureau Chief, at (617) 626-2358 or [blakez@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:blakez@dor.state.ma.us).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean R. Cronin".

Sean R. Cronin  
Senior Deputy Commissioner



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>COMMUNITY PROFILE.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1. Expand Size of Select Board.....	8
2. Codify and Hold Regular Meetings of the Tri-Board .....	8
3. Conduct a Comprehensive Bylaw Review .....	8
4. Adopt Formal Financial Policies.....	9
5. Consider Consulting Services to Finalize the Munis Employee Self Service Setup .....	10
6. Strategize for Succession Planning .....	10
7. Reaccept the Other Postemployment Benefits Fund.....	11
8. Revise License Denial, Revocation and Suspension Bylaw .....	11
<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Comparable Communities .....	13
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>14</b>



## INTRODUCTION

At the request of the select board, the Division of Local Services' (DLS) Financial Management Resource Bureau (FMRB) completed this financial management review for the Town of Millis. A team from FMRB conducted the review in consultation with staff from the Bureau of Accounts (BOA) and Bureau of Local Assessment (BLA).

Millis has had two financial management reviews conducted by DLS. In 1989, the town faced serious fiscal constraints because of a culmination of sewer, water and solid waste issues and had a very decentralized governmental structure. Our review provided recommendations to cope with these challenges, including hold regular combined policy board and elected officials' meetings, upgrade the administrative assistant to a professional position, formalize the budget process, increase the accountant's hours, adopt the town collector statute, and prepare a capital plan. Over the next year and a half, elected and appointed officials improved communication with periodic meetings, and town meeting adopted a formal budget bylaw. The voters also approved charter changes: 1) establishing a town administrator's position as the chief administrative officer responsible for coordinating financial management, budget development, and personnel administration, and 2) eliminating the elected board of public works, thereby transferring operations to the select board.

Millis' second review occurred in 2000 after the voters amended the charter, making the treasurer an appointed officer. This change was prompted after a long-standing treasurer retired and, under two different elected treasurers over four years, the office's performance had deteriorated so much as to have "reportable conditions." DLS made recommendations on handling cash, maintaining a cash book, pursuing delinquent taxes, performing regular reconciliations, hiring a full-time assistant assessor, getting assistance for computer issues, and again increasing the accountant's hours. Furthermore, it was recommended that Millis appoint the collector and combine with the treasurer's position, which the voters approved by charter change in 2002.

Millis officials originally requested a focused assessment of the assessing office; however, after hiring a new principal assessor, the scope broadened to a full financial management review. The observations and recommendations made in this report are based on interviews with elected and appointed officials, department heads, and municipal office staff. We interviewed the select board, finance committee member, town administrator, assistant town administrator, finance director, accountant, treasurer/collector, principal assessor, school business manager and others. We reviewed town documents and financial data, including town charter, bylaws, special acts, annual budgets, warrant articles, tax recapitulations, balance sheets, and independent audit reports.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

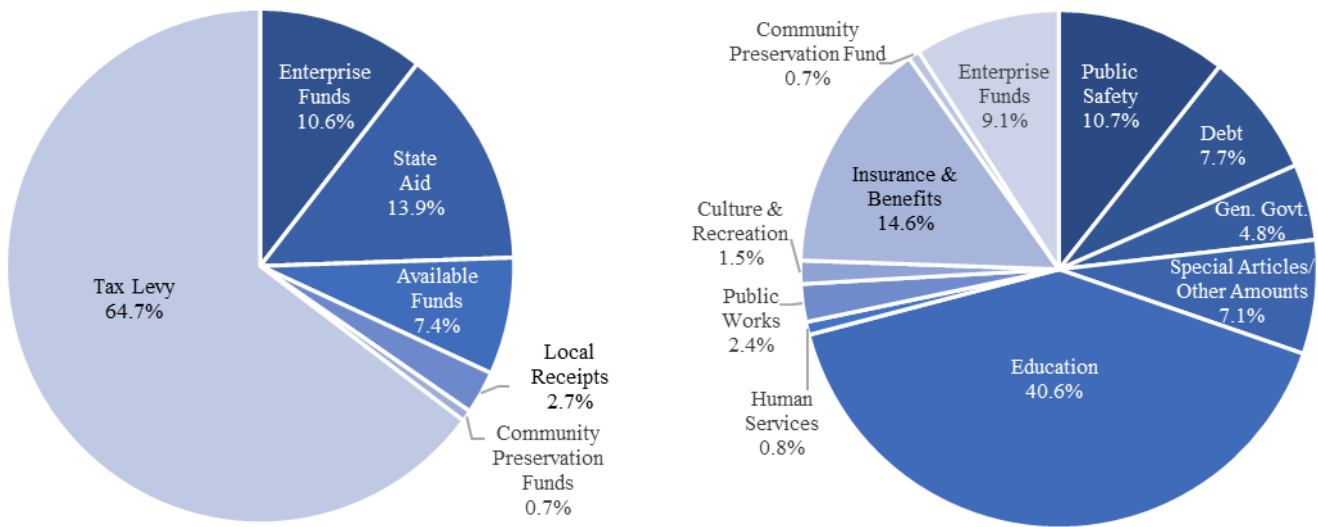
Located on the western edge of Norfolk County, Millis comprises about 12 square miles and has a population of 8,668. It is bordered by Sherborn, Medfield, Norfolk, Medway, and Holliston and accessible by state routes 109 and 115 that intersect in the center of Millis. Initially settled in 1657 as an agricultural community, the town was incorporated in 1885 and named after one of the town's founders who built a rail system that linked it to communities to the east and helped its economic growth. Millis' industrial development is long and varied, beginning with grist and sawmills and brickyards, attracting paper and textile mills, bell foundry, organ manufacturer, and canning facilities, and advancing to box factories, bottle cap and steel products company, roofing materials, the Herman Shoe Company, and Clicquot Club Ginger Ale.

While Millis continues to have a variety of commercial, retail, service industry, and manufacturing businesses, it is primarily residential with active farms and rural areas on the outskirts. As a MetroWest community, it is within commuting distance to the Boston, Worcester, and Providence metropolitan areas and has experienced residential expansion and growth over the years. One of the more recent developments is the Regency at Glen Ellen, a luxury 55-plus community with a clubhouse, walking trails and other amenities on the site of the former Glen Ellen Country Club.

Millis's \$48.15 million FY23 budget provides a wide range of municipal services and other programs. These include a police force, fire department, ambulance service, public works department, library, and council on aging. The town has its own K-12 school department, participates in the Tri-County Technical Regional School District, and some students attend Norfolk County Agricultural School. Most residents have public water service and two-thirds of the town has sewer service, both of which are self-supporting enterprise funds. Since FY19, Millis has had a stormwater management enterprise fund for the operation and maintenance to the town's drainage system, institute flood mitigation strategies, prevent pollution from construction runoff and illicit discharges into the system, and promote public education and participation. To maintain and make improvements to its assets, the town has a multi-year capital planning program overseen by a revived committee that presents spending recommendations to town meeting. Millis also established a Community Preservation Committee that makes recommendations on use of funding generated from a 1% surcharge on the real property tax levy for open space, historic resources, and community housing purposes as provided in [M.G.L. 44B](#).



## MILLIS FY2023 BUDGET



Since 1977, Millis has operated under a home-rule charter that has been amended a few times by special acts or by town meeting action with subsequent voter approval (Section V-1). An open town meeting functions as the town's legislative body that enacts bylaws, approves annual budgets and specific expenditures, and authorizes debt. The three elected select board members serve alternating three-year terms, have overall responsibility for the town's general operations, and function as its chief policymaking body.

Millis has two standing financial advisory committees. There is a nine-member finance committee that is appointed by the moderator and advises town meeting on financial and other matters. The town also has a budget bylaw that dictates key activities and responsible parties in the annual process. It includes forms and instructions distributed, initial revenue projections, meetings with departments, budget and capital requests, and the town administrator's preparation of a set of balanced budget recommendations to the Select Board and Finance Committee. The select board and finance committee hold separate hearings, which the town administrator and finance director attend to respond to inquiries and provide updated information. Prior to town meeting, a public hearing is held to present the budget and warrant article recommendations.

The second is a capital planning committee that the town revived in 2018. Appointed by the select board, it is comprised of one member from the select board, finance committee, and school committee and four registered voters. The committee reviews capital requests and projects that are

greater than \$10,000, develops a five-year capital plan, and recommends the annual capital budget based on available town funds.

By charter, the select board appoints the town administrator. He serves as the chief administrative officer and is responsible daily operations, budget development, financial management, and human resource (HR) functions. There is an assistant town administrator/HR manager who works closely with the administrator on all aspects of the office, supervises office staff, and oversees HR functions (e.g., recruitment and hiring process, onboarding new employees, benefits administration, workers' compensation, and grievance and discipline matters). Millis recently received a Community Compact Best Practice grant to retain a consultant, who will advise the town on consolidating all human resources services (including the schools) into one streamlined and professional department.

In 2018, town meeting and the school committee accepted [M.G.L. 71:37M](#), establishing a consolidated town and school finance department. Appointed by the select board, the finance director is under the supervision of the town administrator and also reports to the superintendent on school finances. Codified in a bylaw, the finance director oversees the activities of the financial offices, including town accountant, assessing, collector/treasurer, information technology (IT), and school finance office, and further advances a top-down organizational model with greater coordination and accountability. To facilitate this consolidation, Millis received a FY19 Community Compact Information Technology grant that was used to design and implement a comprehensive chart of accounts to meet both town and school operating and reporting requirements and acquired additional Munis modules to streamline financial operations and improve efficiencies.

The accountant has worked in the town for 15 years, promoted to her current position in FY20 after serving as the assistant accountant. As town accountant, she maintains the general ledger, processes vendor invoices, prepares vendor warrants and supervises training of personnel on the Munis system. She supervises the payroll administrator and reviews payroll prior to the select board's approval of the warrants. The accountant monitors budgets, coordinates monthly and year-end closing procedures, distributes monthly expenditure reports and quarterly revenue reports to all departments, and prepares schedules for the independent auditor.

A three-member board of assessors is appointed by the select board and is responsible for developing assessment policy, approves final values, assessments, and tax commitments, and acts on abatement and exemption recommendations of the principal assessor. Hired in January 2020, the principal assessor oversees assessment administration, manages day-to-day operations, and supervises the department assistant. The principal assessor also conducts field work (e.g., inspections of building permit, sale, and abatement properties), values real and personal property, calculates annual new

growth, participates in setting the annual tax rate, and generates property tax and excise commitments for the collector/treasurer. The office contracts with Real Estate Research Consultants to collect and value new and reinspection of existing personal property accounts, and it contracts with Vision Government Solutions to conduct revaluations and interim year adjustments for residential, commercial, industrial, and exempt real property. In addition, based on the Bureau of Local Assessment FY23 certification recommendations, Millis has contracted for additional consulting services to address a backlog that was inherited in the town's cyclical re-inspection program.

The collector/treasurer has worked 10 years for the town and has three staff, an assistant and two clerks. The office is responsible for all collections activities, cash management, disbursement of funds, and debt issuances. The staff issues property tax and water/sewer bills quarterly, motor vehicle excise and stormwater bills annually, and processes municipal lien certificates throughout the year. Payments are made by mail, drop box, online, over the counter, and from escrow services. The collector/treasurer issues demand notices to delinquent taxpayers, warrants outstanding motor vehicle excise to a deputy collector, transfers subsequent taxes on existing tax title accounts, and completes new tax takings. The town recently proposed a tax lien sale on three properties that triggered a couple taxpayers to pay in full the tax title balances and one was assigned to the highest bidder.

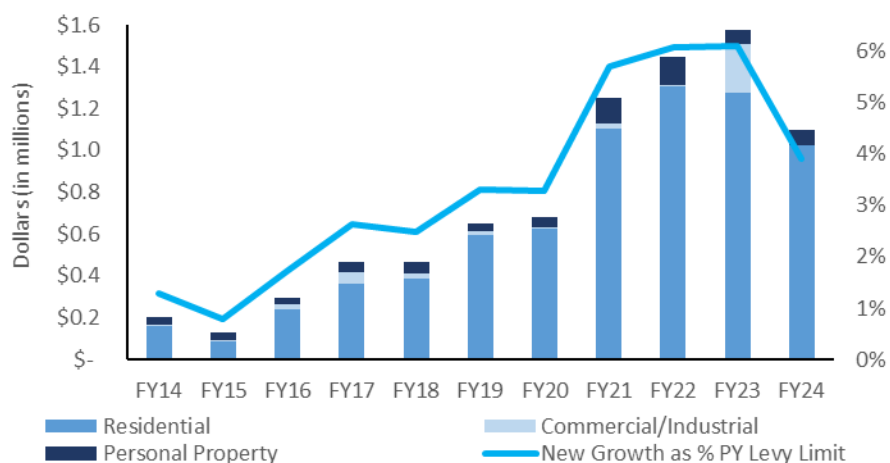
The information technology (IT) department is staffed by one IT specialist, who originally was hired in June 2021 as a shared position with the Town of Norfolk, but now works full-time for Millis supporting all non-school departments. IT manages hosted computer services and virtual servers, monitors firewalls and information security, maintains network operations, hardware, and other devices, provides user support, and makes recommendations on new acquisitions. The IT department is overseeing two Community Compact grants for an FY22 expansion of the town's fiber optic infrastructure and an FY23 purchase and implementation of an e-permitting software. The financial offices have Microsoft Office applications and Munis, a fully integrated financial management system that will be upgraded from version 11.3.25 to 2021.9 this fall. In addition, the assessors use Vision computer assisted mass appraisal (CAMA) system for real estate and personal property and CAI Technologies AxisGIS for the assessors' maps. Using Munis, many departments have access to accounts payable and purchase order modules for direct entry, can perform account inquiries, run budget reports, and enter departmental receipts.

The school business office is in the middle-high school building. The director of school finance and human resources was hired in 2018 and relies on a staff of five: two accounts payable clerks, two payroll specialists, and executive assistant, who handles contracts. The school department uses Munis to enter purchase order and accounts payable, monitor budgets, and run reports. Currently,

school employees have access to the Munis employee self-service (ESS) to view their paycheck, W-2, and personal information. However, the school business office has not setup and provided training for employees to make timesheet entries, so paysheets must be sent to the payroll administrator at town hall for entry on an exception basis.

Currently, Millis has a tri-board, consisting of the select board, school committee, and finance committee, which meets to discuss town and school matters as needed. During the FY24 budget process, the tri-board met about a culmination of factors affecting FY24 and beyond. These include new growth, cannabis impact funds, special education tuition costs, and Tri-County Technical Regional School District’s proposed building renovation.

**New Growth:** Millis has been fortunate to have experienced significant new construction and renovations recently. In just the last four years, this has translated into more than \$1 million in property tax new growth each year, which has enabled the community to support the



growing population and maintain service levels. While development and subdivision plans are still proposed, the town is not anticipating the amounts experienced in recent years to continue.

**Cannabis Impact Funds:** Millis entered into a five-year host community agreement (HCA) with CommCan, a recreational and medical cannabis dispensary. The town began receiving 3% on the gross sales after the first date of operation and an additional 3% local option cannabis excise collected by the state on behalf of the town. Per the HCA, renegotiations are to begin after the fourth year of operations in November 2023. Currently, the Massachusetts Cannabis Commission’s draft amended regulations have been released and, with “clear statutory authority and a mandate to review, regulate, enforce, and approve host community agreements,” the existing HCA will need to be renegotiated by March 2024. If CommCan agrees to impact funds, they cannot be a percentage of a licensee’s sales, but rather on a documented annual invoice of “reasonably related” costs imposed on the host municipality. While the cannabis excise would continue to be received, Millis officials are concerned and should monitor for the final regulations and the effect on its HCA and future impact funds.

**Special Education Tuition Costs:** Early in the FY24 budget process, town officials were discussing an increase in special education costs that would have a significant impact on the Millis' operating budget. The Executive Office for Administration and Finance's Operational Services Division (OSD) issued a memo to school districts that it was estimating a 14% increase in special education private schools' tuition. The reason for the big jump has to do with a labor shortage at the private schools along with inflation. Because the Circuit Breaker Program, which provides funding to offset the cost of delivering special education services to students, is distributed as quarterly reimbursements for the prior year's qualifying costs, town meeting appropriated \$400,000 from the stabilization fund and \$538,697 from free cash to fund the dramatic increase. Officials are concerned about FY24 and future years and should be aware that Circuit Breaker has an extraordinary relief claims process that the town may file for in March for current year's estimated expenses. If qualified instructional and tuition services expenses (not transportation) have increased by 25% or more over the prior fiscal year, then the district will be eligible for an additional relief payment in May.

**Tri-County Technical Regional School District's Building Renovation:** The technical school is proposing a more than \$200 million renovation for the school and placing a district wide ballot vote before the 11 member communities on October 24, 2023. While the annual assessment for the project to a community will be dependent on the debt principal and interest costs and the October 1 head count, Millis' portion based on FY23 data was estimated to be about \$481,000. Officials are concerned that the town's budget will not be able to absorb this additional debt assessment and will have a debt exclusion vote on a separate ballot the same day as the district vote.

As a team, the tri-board, administration, and department heads have worked together to provide service and seek opportunities to merge similar activities, thereby streamlining functions and eliminating needless duplication. The consolidated finance department, increased use of electronic financial management modules, and the recent grant to combine town and school human resource activities are prime examples. In the report that follows, we make housekeeping suggestions on some bylaws and financial and operational best practice recommendations that will better position the town going forward.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Expand Size of Select Board**

We recommend expanding the select board from three to five members. Historically, three-member boards have been the norm amongst smaller communities, but currently there is an equal balance between three-member boards and the larger five-member boards as towns have grown in population. In addition, looking at comparable communities to Millis (see Appendix), the vast majority have five-member boards. The larger boards offer broader representation of viewpoints, reduces risks of dominating biases and open meeting law violations, and aids a subcommittee or liaison structure. Additionally, with more than three members, there is greater availability to attend meetings of other committees to help arrive at important town decisions.

### **2. Codify and Hold Regular Meetings of the Tri-Board**

We recommend establishing the tri-board as a permanent committee through the adoption of a bylaw. Regardless of the economic climate, these meetings should be held at least quarterly. Meetings should begin with the town administrator and finance director presenting comprehensive financial information on the prior year's performance, year-to-date activities, the budget process, and concerns as they come up. As a group, it ensures all are hearing information presented at the same time, presents short and long-term planning efforts, provides ample opportunities to discuss issues and ask questions, and helps build collaboration and cohesiveness among the boards.

### **3. Conduct a Comprehensive Bylaw Review**

Millis should conduct a full review of its bylaws to ensure that they are up-to-date and include the codification of all officials, boards, committees, and departments. Reading through the current bylaws, we found they are generally organized chronologically. Many are grouped together in articles by topic, including charges, records and reports, town officers, and appropriations, while others are stand-alone articles such as select board, finance committee, accountant, and council on aging. Locally accepted optional statutes and special acts are listed at the end of the document and some are codified in sections of the bylaws.

Notably lacking throughout the bylaws is the role of the finance director in financial matters such as budgeting and capital planning. The single reference to the finance director is in Article V, Section 30, which established the town's consolidated town and school finance department after town meeting and the school committee's action in 2018.

A strong set of bylaws establishes a formal framework of codes, policies, and procedures under which town government operates. These bylaws should identify and describe the membership, terms, roles and responsibilities of appointed and elected officials, departments, and committees, which complements the charter, fills in details, and are revised as circumstances warrant. The revised bylaws should be organized by function, such as town meeting, town management, financial operations, public safety, health, utilities and public works, planning and development, recreation, and so on.

Similar to the decennial review of the town charter (Section V-1d), which the town has conducted, there is a provision for the moderator to appoint a committee every five years to review the bylaws and, if deemed necessary, to propose revision or re-codification of said bylaws (Section V-2). Accordingly, we recommend the moderator appoint a bylaw committee to conduct a comprehensive review of the existing bylaws, making sure they are all inclusive and provide clarity and transparency on governmental organization and responsibilities. Once this work is completed, the select board should put forth articles to town meeting adopt the new set of bylaws, which will require subsequent approval by the State Attorney General.

#### **4. Adopt Formal Financial Policies**

Millis does not maintain a complete set of documented policies and procedures to provide important guidance and consistency around local fiscal policy decisions and financial operations. At a minimum, we recommend the town develop and have the select board and finance committee adopt core policies on:

- Annual budget process
- Antifraud
- Capital planning
- Debt management
- Disbursements
- Financial reserves
- Forecasting
- Grants management
- Indirect cost allocation
- Investments
- Other postemployment benefits
- Procurement conflict of interest
- Reconciliations
- Revenue turnover
- Tax enforcement
- Tax Recapitulation

These policies will strengthen the town's internal controls, provide instructive guidance, and promote uniformity for all town departments. For a few years, the town administrator has provided draft policies in the annual budget document appendix that are based on DLS policy manuals developed for other communities ([mass.gov/consulting-reports](https://www.mass.gov/consulting-reports)), but no action has been taken. We recommend that the select board and finance committee review and formally adopt the financial policies.

## **5. Consider Consulting Services to Finalize the Munis Employee Self Service Setup**

Millis processes payroll in-house using the Munis Payroll for Enterprise ERP module that is part of the Human Resource Management suite. An added feature of the system is the employee self-service (ESS), which enables staff and managers to access, update, and review information such as payroll details, emergency contacts, benefit selections, time-off requests/approvals, and timesheets.

All active employees have access to ESS to view their paycheck, W-2, and personal information. Town hall and public works employees use ESS to make timesheet entries and request time-off. Millis is working on getting the library, police, fire, and school employees added to the ESS system, which requires vacation, sick, and personal time accruals be loaded for each employee and the appropriate supervisor authorized for the system approval. In addition, the timekeeping for the police and fire staff needs to be automated to upload their off-system software to Munis or discontinued with direct employee timesheet entries in ESS.

We recommend that the town consider engaging a consultant to assist the finance office to complete the entry of all time accrual data and authorizations and determine the best process for public safety timesheets to ensure the ESS system is fully functional for all employees. This may require some training for department heads and timekeepers on verifying entries for accuracy and making sure all staff are included on each payroll warrant. The town recently hired a new payroll administrator after an extended vacancy, so this assistance may be valuable. To ensure the quality and timeliness of this project, the consultant should be well-informed and experienced with the Munis payroll module and ESS features.

## **6. Strategize for Succession Planning**

Across the Commonwealth, DLS has seen the difficulties that arise when finance officers depart. Millis has experienced an extended vacancy in the payroll administrator's position and now the finance director plans on retiring next year. As such, we advise communities to take advantage of its current



leadership to prepare a succession plan and ensure a smooth transition and continuance of service in the case of unexpected or anticipated vacancies.

We recommend the town administrator meet with department heads to develop succession strategies on how to fill future vacancies due to turnover and retirements. Together, they should discuss and gather information about each role's core functions and legal responsibilities. This would include the position's job description, classification and grade, hours assigned, and any documented procedures.

In addition, we suggest they take the following steps, as appropriate to each position:

- Develop procedure manuals with step-by-step instructions starting with the most critical tasks. For propriety software systems, reach out to vendors to see what material they can supply and the training sessions they can offer at what costs.
- Identify town employees with the skills, aptitudes, and interest in being promoted, including those who might currently work in other departments. Systematically develop the person's knowledge and competencies through mentoring, funding training opportunities, setting up job shadowing practices, and delegating increasing responsibilities within their departments.
- When informed of a pending departure, ensure time overlap if possible so that the departing employee can help orient and train his or her replacement.

## **7. Reaccept the Other Postemployment Benefits Fund**

In May 2013, Millis created a trust fund for other postemployment benefits (OPEB) under [M.G.L. c. 32B, § 20](#), which allowed the town to create a reserve to finance its OPEB liability. However, the statute at that time did not meet OPEB trust fund guidelines established by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB), and it was therefore modified by the Municipal Modernization Act. To establish a GASB-compliant OPEB trust, town meeting must reaccept § 20. In addition, town meeting must also authorize the prudent investor rule as detailed in [M.G.L. c. 203C](#) to make available the options required to meet the investment goals of an OPEB trust.

## **8. Revise License Denial, Revocation and Suspension Bylaw**

In 1988, town meeting accepted [M.G.L. 40:57](#) that enables Millis the authority to deny, revoke or suspend any local license or permit to any person delinquent for more than 12 months in the payment

of taxes, fees, assessments, betterments, or other municipal charges. Per the bylaw (Article XVII), the collector distributes an annual list of delinquent taxpayers to the license- or permit-granting departments, which then carry out the denial, revocation, or suspension actions. As a part of the Municipal Modernization Act, this enabling statute was amended, allowing the collector to report outstanding charges existing for less than 12 months and to do so more often than annually, provided that the town's bylaw is updated accordingly. Therefore, we recommend the town revise its bylaw to reflect the change in the law.

## APPENDIX

### Comparable Communities

Municipality	Local School System	Population	2023 Total Revenues	Single Family Tax Bill	DOR Income/ capita	EQV/ Capita	Select Board	Administration
Millis	K-12	8,668	48,146,751	8,935	50,912	192,745	3	Administrator
Douglas	K-12	9,049	37,994,759	5,924	42,470	143,901	5	Administrator
Georgetown	K-12	8,416	41,326,784	7,747	57,825	195,828	5	Administrator
Hopedale	K-12	5,998	31,610,840	7,238	46,973	154,937	3	Administrator
Lenox	K-12	5,099	32,433,154	5,274	60,813	293,671	5	Manager
Lunenburg	K-12	11,816	50,144,852	6,874	44,044	157,029	5	Manager
Maynard	K-12	10,574	59,392,881	8,824	46,985	173,926	5	Administrator
Sutton	K-12	9,361	42,247,600	6,802	59,022	196,437	5	Administrator
Tyngsborough	K-12	12,421	53,921,527	7,092	49,058	175,293	5	Manager
Uxbridge	K-12	14,270	67,306,771	5,735	43,667	161,334	5	Manager
West Bridgewater	K-12	7,727	43,732,276	6,581	40,491	187,821	3	Administrator

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In preparing this review, DLS spoke with the following Individuals:

Ellen Rosenfeld, Select Board  
Craig Schultze, Select Board  
Erin Underhill, Select Board  
Peter Berube, Finance Committee  
Michael Guzinski, Town Administrator  
Karen Bouret DeMarzo, Assistant Town Administrator/Human Resource Manager  
Victoria Schindler, Town Administrator Operations Support  
Carol Johnston, Finance Director  
Lisa Morin, Accountant  
Jennifer Scannell, Collector/Treasurer  
Mary Frye, Assistant Collector/Treasurer  
Marsha McNamara, Collector/Treasurer Clerk  
Stacey Mill, Collector/Treasurer Clerk  
Teresa Gonsalves, Principal Assessor  
Elizabeth Rand, Assessing Department Assistant  
Terry Wiggins, Director School Finance and Human Resources  
James Donovan, Director of Information Technology  
Deidre Gilmore, DPW Operations Manager  
Jonathan Barry, Capital Planning Committee  
Christopher Soffayer, Charter Review Committee