TOWN of WESTHAMPTON

Report Prepared By: Allison Poirier, Amelia Percentie, Rodrigo Medina and Michael Hamel

Photo Credit: Flickr – Michael Femla at Downtown Westhampton

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Westhampton signed a Community Compact agreement with the Baker-Polio Administration in February of 2016. The Town committed to implementing three information technology best practices with focus on Business Continuity, System Improvements, and a Regional/Shared Services; and partnered with MassIT to develop a project scope and strategy for these initiatives. With the help of Community Compact funding, Westhampton procured the services of Northeast IT Systems, Inc. to perform a comprehensive assessment of their IT environment. Support from the Community Compact Cabinet helped position the Town to upgrade their IT infrastructure by leveraging internal staff and resources.

Community Profile

Located in Hampshire County, Westhampton is 20 miles northwest of Springfield and 100 miles west of Boston. Nearby cities and towns include Huntington, Russell, Montgomery, Southhampton, Easthampton, Northampton, Willamsburg, Worthington, and Chester. Westhampton is also notably one of the safest towns in Massachusetts, ranked 5th out of 351 communities according to onlyinyourstate.com.

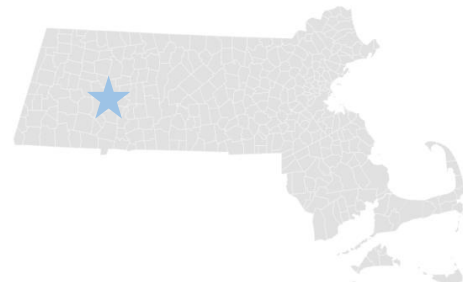**Population** is 1,607 residents (as of 2010 Census)
Annual Budget is $5.2M (FY 2017)
Median Household Income is $81,635 (as of 2010 Census)

In partnership between: Office of Municipal and School Technology   MassIT

Photo Credit: Flickr – Michael Femla at Blacksmith House Museum

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PROCESS

Prior to the Community Compact, Westhampton had taken significant steps towards improving their IT capacity. They had an IT study done to assess the state of their technology and data infrastructure. The results of the study inspired the Town to improve their business continuity practices around data security and back-up. Westhampton was also maintaining two buildings, Town Hall and the Town Annex building, each with their own network infrastructure, and internet service accounts. They hoped to provide better service and allow for more collaboration by moving the two buildings to a common network. Common server, network, and security infrastructure, can potentially minimize long-term maintenance and expense. Given that this was the first year the town had a dedicated IT budget, it was important to leveraging the funding effectively. MassIT provided consulting to Westhampton by assessing the state of connectivity between the two buildings and offering guidance around taking a sustainable approach. Concurrently, Northeast IT performed a comprehensive IT assessment of the Town's infrastructure.

Information Technology Assessment

Northeast IT Systems, Inc. provides regular IT support to Westhampton and in 2016 they conducted a comprehensive IT assessment for the Town, complete with technical solutions and cost estimates. The assessment placed specific focus on the current and proposed future network connections in Town and also touched on data security and backup infrastructure. The assessment was divided into 3 groups to address the variation of Westhampton's municipal

departments with regards to planning, budgeting, and network management. The table below describes the departmental representation within each group.

Group 1	Group 2

➢ Town Hall
    o Admin Assistant
    o Clerk
    o Assessors
    o Treasurer
    o Tax Collector
    o Accountant
    o Conservation Committee
    o Building Inspector
    o Board of Heath
➢ The Annex
➢ Highway Department
	➢ Public Safety
	    o Police Department
	    o Fire Department

	Group 3
	➢ Public Library

The goals of the assessment were to analyze and document the state of the Town's technology and provide recommendations based on findings. The following areas of Westhampton's IT environment were vetted during the assessment process:

➢ Data Cabling	➢ Communications: Wireless Access Point(s)
➢ Firewall	➢ Telecommunications
➢ Network Switches	➢ Security
➢ Hardware Assets	➢ Physical Security (data/devices)
➢ Software Assets	➢ Business Continuity Procedures

The intentions of the recommendations are to help Westhampton minimize management overhead, implement best practices where possible, and reduce the number of systems while improving functionality, reliability and scalability. Northeast IT addressed concerns for short and long-term improvements, regarding feasibility and costs around data management and security. Some of the recommendations suggested the Town transition from on premise software to cloud-based versions to reduce maintenance expense. It was also suggested that Westhampton automate their data backup processes to manage the Town's decentralized environment more efficiently and effectively. Below are some other recommendations proposed in the assessment report:

- Implementation of a terminal server in group 1. Applying this recommendation will create an environment for centralized storage of documents and data, file sharing, uniform standard computing, and automatic data backup providing ease of system management and maintenance for the departments.
    - o If Westhampton implements the server suggestion. The Highway Department (Group 1) should connect to Town Hall and Annex via a VPN to store data on the server and automatically backup their data.

- Centralize network to increase productivity and manageability of the IT resources.
- Develop an Acceptable Use of IT Policy for internal staff.
- Increase the annual IT budget and implement strategic planning efforts to address technology needs across all departments.

System Improvements

In an effort to minimize the long term maintenance of a decentralized network, the Town of Westhampton embarked on a system improvement initiative that would bridge internet and phone connectivity between the Town Hall and Town's Annex buildings. Prior to the project, computer users within these buildings could not share files directly, they had to email each other. With limited IT resources available to the Town, staff members developed a strategy that leveraged existing internal resouces to complete the connectivity project. Originally, the Town considered reaching out to the local trade school to recruit students and have them install the required ~150 feet of CAT 6 cable between the two government buildings. They eventually pursued another option; however, the creativity behind this initial idea exemplifies the level of resourcefulness and innovation municipalities display on a daily basis when faced with financial challenges.

Photo Credit: Wiki Commons - Raysonho
Category (CAT) 6 Cable

The Town chose to complete the cable installation using municipal staff. The Highway Department volunteered their services to dig the trench necessary to install conduit, the tubing needed to protect the cable(s). The department used a mini excavator machine to prepare the environment. Town staff laid the conduit and pulled the CAT 6 cable through, they left space in the conduit for future connectivity projects. Northeast IT secured independent connections on both sides of the cable. This new connection has resulted in better internet service with a $100 reduction in the montly recurring cost. Construction on this project was completed in October 2016.

Conclusion

The Town of Westhampton has clearly demonstrated its commitment to business continuity and improving the Town's information technology infrastructure in a cost-effective manner. In addition to the network improvements, the Town also replaced consumer grade firewall and access point equipment with new business-class hardware. The collaborative efforts of Westhampton's staff can serve as an inspiration to communities that are hesitant to upgrade their technology because of a lack of capital funds. Westhampton understands the significant role effective technology plays in daily business operations. The Administrative Assistant and Selectboard continue to support enhancements to the Towns IT infrastruture and are working toward plans to sustain their IT infrastructure. Ultimately, the Town's goal is to provide high quality, secure serivces that meet the expecations of their residents within their resource constraints.