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# **TOWN OF FREETOWN**

## **ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW FOR TOWN HALL, COUNCIL ON AGING AND LIBRARY**

**SEPTEMBER 2022**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Town of Freetown (the “Town”) engaged the Collins Center for Public Management to conduct an Operational Review (“Review”). The Review was commissioned to document the current state of the Town’s government structure, functions, systems, staffing, policies, and practices. The purpose of the Review was also to identify areas of deficit and provide recommendations for improvement. We have completed this overview.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For ease of reference, below is a summary of the findings and recommendations. These findings and recommendations are discussed in more detail in the report that follows.

<b>SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		
<b>Operational Audit</b>		
Page	Finding	Recommendations
	1.0 Department budgets are underfunded, and critical staffing needs hamper the Town’s ability to further professionalize services to Town residents.	1.1: Conduct a Classification and Compensation Study. 1.2: Increase department budgets to enable departments to increase staffing and resources. 1.3: Employ a floater clerical staff to assist with department coverage until staffing levels are increased. 1.4: Critically evaluate department duties. 1.5: Establish a Community Service Department and Director. 1.6 Employ a dedicated Human Resource Professional.
	2.0 Operational changes and modification will assist the Town in its current efforts to professionalize Town services.	2.1: Establish a Separate Appointed Board of Health. 2.2: Reduce time spent on administrative and operational tasks by transferring them to the Town Administrator and other officials. Use additional time to focus on long-term planning. Reassert Board of Selectmen’s role as chief executive officer of the Town. 2.3: Adopt Town-wide employment policies to govern volunteers and employees.

	<p>3.0 Critical space needs limit the Town’s ability to provide optimal and efficient services to residents and raise concerns regarding the Town’s ability to preserve and access town documents.</p>	<p>3.1: Conduct multi-building feasibility study that includes solutions for Library, Town Hall and the Senior Center.</p> <p>3.2: Source a long-term lease with sufficient space to relocate several Town Departments while building options are vetted.</p> <p>3.3: Consider short-term solutions to address document storage issues.</p> <p>3.4: Engage a service to assist with digitizing critical Town documents and forms.</p> <p>3.5: Prioritize alternative Library space to address the lack of indoor plumbing, ADA accessibility issues and lack of parking.</p>
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**OVERVIEW**

The Town of Freetown was first settled in 1659 and was incorporated in 1683. The Town is a pastoral community in Bristol County, with a history rooted in agriculture and industry. Freetown was originally a much larger town, as it once included the City of Fall River and a portion of the Town of Acushnet. Freetown is located on the southeastern edge of Bristol County in southeastern Massachusetts. The town is bordered by Berkley and Lakeville on the north, Rochester on the east, Acushnet, New Bedford, and Dartmouth on the south, and Fall River on the southwest. Freetown is approximately twelve (12) miles northeast of Fall River, thirty-seven (37) miles south of Boston, and twenty-three (23) miles east of Providence, Rhode Island. Freetown is connected to the larger southeastern Massachusetts region via two highways: Routes 24 and 140. Route 24 is located on west side of town and is the principal route between Newport, Rhode Island and Boston, whereas Route 140 is located on the east side of town and is the principal artery between New Bedford and points north.

Development within the town's 38.3 square miles is divided between Freetown’s two villages – East Freetown and Assonet, which are located on the towns’ eastern and western edges, respectively. The Town has approximately 9,200 residents and has maintained its small-town feel, with modest population growth. The planned expansion of the commuter rail raises the possibility of gentrification and a shift in Freetown’s population with an increasing demand for Town services and an expectation for resources readily available in more urban communities.

As the Town has no charter, the primary governing authority are the Town By-laws. Freetown has a Town Administrator (currently, an Interim Town Administrator), three-member Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting is the legislative branch of the local government. With few exceptions, the Board of Selectmen appoint most Town officers and Department Heads. In the past several years the Town has experienced a significant change in its leadership, including having three town administrators since 2015 and turnover on the Board of Selectmen. The current interim Town Administrator commissioned this study as part of ongoing efforts to professionalize and improve Town services.

The Town has 79 full-time and 14 part-time employees, most of which are union employees. Freetown is not a civil-service community and employment is defined primarily by union contracts or the personnel by-law. There are five unions that represent the Town's unionized employees.

Fiscally, Freetown is in a strong position and operates on a stable financial base. It has an AA+ rating from Standard and Poor, which is indicative of the financial health of the Town. The Town's primary source of revenue is its split residential and commercial tax base. Out of the 13 comparable communities surveyed, Freetown had the third lowest overall budget from FY22 and the third lowest tax bill. The FY22 tax levy was the lowest of the survey communities. While the Town's efforts at minimizing expense to taxpayers is laudable, this translates to less funding for municipal services and staff which directly impacts the Town's ability to meet the needs of its residents.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology utilized for the Operational Review included interviews with approximately 20 key personnel including the Interim Town Administrator, Executive Assistant, Selectmen, Treasurer/Tax Collector, Town Clerk, Assessor, Building Commissioner, Town Accountant, Board of Health, Planning Board, Water and Sewer Commissioner, Council on Aging Director and Library staff. Walk-throughs were done of the Town Hall, Council on Aging and Library buildings. In addition to the interviews, numerous documents, reports, studies, financial information, and policies were reviewed. Thirteen communities were identified as comparable communities and information was gathered from those communities to aid this analysis.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A, Comparable Communities  
Appendix B, Comparable Communities Salary Budgets  
Appendix C, Comparable Communities Department Budgets

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

Freetown proudly embodies the principle of do more with less. While this has served the Town well in the years past, many staff noted that resident expectations for Town services are more demanding. As is common with rural communities experiencing stages of urban sprawl, changes in demographics impact the expectation for services. What once served the Town quickly becomes antiquated and insufficient. A challenge for communities like Freetown is balancing the financial burden on long-time residents with investment in infrastructure and service improvements. As is evidenced from the Town's finances, including the Town's FY22 Audit, and a comparison with other communities, Freetown's budget and tax revenue is low. Freetown is at a "tipping point" where increased investment is required to prevent the Town from being hampered in its ability to provide effective essential services as well as services that enrich the lives of its residents, like those provided by the Council on Aging and the Library.

### Town Administration and Management

Town Administration has been in flux. Since 2015 the Town employed three different Town Administrators, not including the current interim Town Administrator Deborah Pettey. The current Town Administrator has made marked strides in professionalizing the Town's operations. Town Hall employees, as well as employees outside of Town Hall, commented on noted improvements under Ms. Pettey's tenure. For example, one employee commented that prior to Ms. Pettey's arrival departments had to "fend for themselves," but the Interim Town Administrator has been a "great resource and source of support." One important goal of Administration is not to lessen or diminish the contribution of Department Heads, but to unify Town Departments with a centralized reporting structure. It was reported that there has been significant progress made in this area of management. While efforts at workplace engagement have established a more positive relationship with administration and this is a worthy achievement, the Town Administrator is limited in how much she can provide departments without additional budgetary resources. There was a high level of frustration regarding a lack of resources for Town departments, including staff and space needs.

The role of the Board of Selectmen has also shifted. With the prior lack of consistent administrative personnel, the Board of Selectmen were necessarily more "hands-on" regarding operational functions of the Town. With the addition of the Interim Town Administrator, the Board's involvement in day-to-day operations has decreased. The Board, however, also functions as the Board of Health and the Personnel Board, which expand the Board's role into the operational side of management.

## Staffing

Much of municipal government work is based in customer service, including responding to requests, clarifying rules and regulations, and assisting residents with navigating a process. One of the unique aspects of municipal government employment is that most of these demands fluctuate, are unpredictable and have varying levels of urgency. Another characteristic of municipal job duties is that many functions are required by laws, regulations or rules. These come with deadlines and can have significant legal consequences if the proper procedures are not followed. When taken together - the unpredictable customer service responsibilities and the job duties that have legally mandated protocols and deadlines – it is easy to understand why proper staffing is essential to efficient and effective functioning of municipal government.

The staffing for the Town Hall, Council on Aging and Library is minimal. Most of most major departments are staffed by two employees.<sup>2</sup> With two employees in a busy department, coverage for vacations, lunches and illness is a hardship. It was a reoccurring theme of interviews that employees felt overwhelmed by the customer service aspects of the position and had little time to devote to other tasks. Additionally, department heads are often required to assist with customer service and clerical functions, rather than focusing on management and planning. It is not an efficient use of salary or employee skill sets to have a department head performing clerical functions.

The lack of library staff poses additional logistical challenges. There are three library employees and two library buildings that require coverage. This often results in only one employee available at each location. An additional complication is that the current library facilities are not conducive to hosting programming, as one location does not have indoor plumbing, and another does not have a dedicated space or dedicated parking. While the space issues are discussed in more detail below, the impact of the lack of space is that a third site must be utilized for programming. With only three employees covering three locations, library services are negatively impacted and the ability to run programming is diminished. This is not a reflection on the library staff – all of whom are devoted to the library’s mission and service to the residents.

When compared to 13 communities that are similar in population, location and economic factors, Freetown’s FY23 department budget and salary lines were significantly below the average for each

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix D, Staff List

department, excluding Health and Planning.<sup>3</sup> The Town’s salary lines ranged from over **\$10,000 below the departmental average** to over **\$180,000 below the departmental average**. When comparing the median departmental salary lines, Freetown was below the median departmental salary line in all departments excepting the Board of Selectmen / Town Administrator, Planning and Health. Freetown ranges from over **\$4,000 below the median** to over **\$184,00 below the median**.

## FY23 DEPARTMENT SALARIES

DEPARTMENT	Freetown	Average	Freetown Avg. Diff	Median	Freetown Med. Diff.
BOS / TA	\$264,060	\$277,338	(\$13,278)	\$260,254	\$3,806
ACCOUNTING	\$134,658	\$145,528	(\$10,870)	\$139,382	(\$4,724)
ASSESSOR	\$80,334	\$155,113	(\$74,779)	\$165,339	(\$85,005)
TREAS/COLLECTOR	\$182,953	\$228,362	(\$45,409)	\$229,886	(\$46,933)
TOWN CLERK	\$123,481	\$140,223	(\$16,742)	\$141,425	(\$17,944)
PLANNING	\$106,332	\$70,384	\$35,948	\$71,748	\$34,584
BUILDING	\$122,009	\$144,139	(\$22,130)	\$133,104	(\$11,095)
HEALTH	\$146,406	\$133,843	\$12,563	\$129,334	\$17,072
COA	\$142,400	\$174,864	(\$32,464)	\$173,191	(\$30,791)
VETERANS	\$12,240	\$45,783	(\$33,543)	\$41,782	(\$29,542)
LIBRARY	\$144,753	\$331,311	(\$186,558)	\$329,071	(\$184,318)

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the salary line items for Board of Health were difficult to isolate. Many communities have used COVID recovery funds, such as ARPA, to supplement or offset Town funded Health positions and as a result, the Town salary line may not represent the actual staffing for the office.

As is demonstrated below, the lack of funding extends to the department entire department line items. The only notable difference is that the Administration is under both the median and average.

## FY23 DEPARTMENTAL BUDGETS

DEPARTMENT	Freetown	Average	Freetown Ave Diff	Median	Freetown Med Diff
<b>BOS / TA</b>	\$317,474	\$363,291	(\$45,817)	\$346,703	(\$29,229)
<b>ACCOUNTING</b>	\$140,758	\$174,516	(\$33,758)	\$166,532	(\$25,774)
<b>ASSESSOR</b>	\$102,914	\$200,819	(\$97,905)	\$203,496	(\$100,582)
<b>TREAS/COLLECTOR</b>	\$227,461	\$292,125	(\$64,664)	\$261,979	(\$34,518)
<b>TOWN CLERK</b>	\$136,977	\$151,202	(\$14,225)	\$150,954	(\$13,977)
<b>PLANNING</b>	\$115,650	\$76,863	\$38,787	\$76,348	\$39,302
<b>BUILDING</b>	\$133,389	\$160,452	(\$27,063)	\$166,425	(\$33,036)
<b>HEALTH</b>	\$209,456	\$155,834	\$53,622	\$157,863	\$51,593
<b>COA</b>	\$159,788	\$192,073	(\$32,285)	\$179,154	(\$19,366)
<b>VETERANS</b>	\$162,240	\$210,905	(\$48,665)	\$222,249	(\$60,009)
<b>LIBRARY</b>	\$192,553	\$419,803	(\$227,250)	\$435,749	(\$243,196)
<b>TOTAL</b>	\$1,898,660	\$2,397,881	(\$499,221)	\$2,225,795	(\$327,135)

The underfunding of Town departments and salaries creates important issues for overall Town functioning as it limits resources, technology, and staff. A budgetary adjustment will need significant town investment, to align with funding that is standard in other similar communities.

## Human Resources

As communities and personnel issues have grown more complex, the responsibilities of town administration have also changed, expanded and placed more federal and state compliance demands on municipalities. As such, many municipalities have encountered difficulties in keeping up with the legal requirements of employment, benefit and labor laws which can be difficult particularly in the fast-changing human resources landscape. Employment laws, state and federal mandates and the changing workforce have necessitated municipalities to be more flexible and able to make policy changes in an efficient manner. This is especially true over the past year with adjusting the workplace in response to the Covid-19 virus. New laws regarding leave, employment obligations and working remotely raise unique challenges for public employers.

Transactional human resources are the “traditional” functions of benefits administration, policy development and administration, position descriptions, payroll, worker’s compensation, personnel file maintenance, collective bargaining agreement administration, vacancy posting and collecting applications and resumes. According to SHRM, these “transactional” functions are a way of “managing the employment relationship from recruitment and processing employees through retirement.” On the other hand, strategic human resource functions deal with the strategic direction of the organization and include long term goals. Strategic functions include long term planning, employee relations, training, succession planning, customer service and talent retention and development. The Town of Freetown needs additional staffing support in both transactional and strategic human resources.

Organizationally, the Town is very horizontal, with many of the above listed departments reporting to separately elected / appointed boards, committees, or commissions, with the Town Administrator have day-to-day management responsibility. This structure can make for a challenging HR environment with inconsistent and individual policies and practices. In addition to several union contracts, the Town utilizes a Personnel By-Law to provide a consistently applied structure to personnel actions. As noted above, the turnover in the Town Administrator position made cohesive department functioning difficult and responsibility for human resource functions rested primarily with the Board of Selectmen or the Department Heads.

Currently, within the Town, the human resource functions are spread out amongst various positions, as summarized below:

**Town Administrator** – is charged with overseeing human resource functions and day-to-day administration of personnel and union collective bargaining agreements, hiring, compliance with state and federal laws. Employee relations. Consults with department heads on employee matters.

**Town Administrator's Office** – CORI checks for Town employees, assistance with hiring and onboarding of employees and insurance case management.

**Town Treasurer / Collector** – Payroll administration, benefits, hiring, onboarding, orientation, timesheet processing and personnel record maintenance.

**Town Accountant** – processes payroll warrant.

**Board of Selectmen (BOS)** – Except where specifically delegated by by-law or other legal authority, the Board retains appointing authority for employees, Boards and Committees. The Board is also responsible for overseeing policy development and approval and is the Town's designated Personnel Board.

**All Departments** - Each department has responsibility for submitting payroll to the Town Treasurer. Departments, to varying degrees, manage their own employee issues and participate to varying degrees in the hiring process.

Because the human resource function touches every department, hiring one dedicated human resource employee can assist several departments with workload. Hiring a qualified and experienced human resource professional will provide several benefits to Town operations, including:

- centralizing and standardizing human resource functions such as the recruitment, selection, onboarding and orientation of new employees,
- assistance with employee benefit management,
- providing and/or facilitating ongoing training,
- promoting a consistent approach to employee and labor relations,
- remaining current with changes in state and federal labor and employment laws regulations and procedures,
- reviewing, interpreting and enforcing the provisions of multiple collective bargaining agreements,
- overseeing a review of personnel files to make sure they are complete, legally compliant and secure, and
- interacting with multiple Town departments, appointed and elected officials, employees, the Town's Labor Counsel, unions, outside agencies in an approachable and professional manner.

### Job Descriptions, Classification and Compensation

The Town has not undergone a systematic review and revision of current job descriptions, classification and employee compensation. Updated and accurate job descriptions are important to employers for many reasons. Job descriptions inform potential applicants of the essential functions of a position and whether they meet the minimum requirements. Having essential job functions documented in a description can help the Town determine whether an injured employee can return to work with or without restrictions. A job description also sets forth the reasonable job expectations and sets a baseline for performance expectations. In addition, the description should include any license requirements for the position, so that the hiring authority will be on notice to verify licenses / certifications prior to filling the position.

Reviewing employee classifications and compensation levels should occur, at least informally, every five years. Paying a competitive and fair wage is beneficial to the Town as it promotes a professional workforce and reduces employee turnover which is disruptive and expensive to employers.

### Space Needs

The Town Hall, Library and Council on Aging have pressing need for space. Each building has significant limitations for ADA accessibility. The Town has a Building Committee that is currently evaluating the Town's space needs.

#### *Town Hall*

The Town Hall was built in 1888. The building consists of a basement, first floor, second floor and small attic which serves as the planning office and storage. The first floor of the building is ADA accessible by use of a ramp, however access is limited to the first floor and the bathrooms are not accessible. This is problematic for Town Hall, but also for the Library as the Town Hall bathrooms are also the only facilities available for Library use. There is no public meeting space. There is no kitchen space – employees prepare food and eat in their offices. The HVAC systems are inefficient and there is no consistent temperature control. The building electrical does not support appliances, including fans, and if too many are used the circuit gets overloaded and must be reset. Office space is cramped and there is no available storage. There are no offices or storage space for the Finance Committee, Historical Commission, Veteran's Services or Animal Control. The basement of town hall has wood and stone pillars reinforced by wood bracings, and the floor is concrete and dirt. The basement is not a functional space or suitable for use by employees or

the public. Due to space limitations, an employee uses the attic as office space, which is not only unsuitable for employee use, but also should be evaluated for emergency egress. Also problematic is the lack of parking. The Town Hall parking lot has approximately 18 spaces which is not sufficient for the number of Town Hall employees, and employees are forced to park off site.

In addition to lack of space for employees, storage for documents and equipment is difficult. Every space is occupied, and organization of files is challenging, especially for large documents like site plans and maps. Many town documents and records are stored off site at a location that is not temperature controlled, has no fire suppression systems, is not treated for pests, and has minimal security measures. While the building is operational, it is not efficient, does not have adequate space for employees or storage and is not welcoming to the public.

### *Library Space*

The Library consists of two separate buildings: the Guilford H. Hathaway Library, which is owned by the Town and the James White Memorial Library, which is leased to the Town. The Hathaway Library is located across from the Town Hall and has no parking. If you wish to park a vehicle you must use the Town Hall lot or the park at a nearby business. While the building provides a ramp for ADA access, the doors are not automatic and someone with mobility limitations must signal the staff for assistance in opening the doors. Inside, the functional space is approximately 800 square feet, is one large room with no separate space for programming or reading and is inadequate for programming. Most problematic is the lack of indoor plumbing. There are no bathrooms and no running water. To use the bathroom, patrons and staff must leave the library, cross the street and enter Town Hall. Aside from the tremendous burden this places on individuals with mobility challenges, it is difficult to understand how this is an accepted practice or one that meets basic sanitary and building requirements. The increased burden this places on individuals with medical conditions and mobility challenges makes this building unwelcoming and reflects poorly on Freetown's commitment to accessibility.

The James White Memorial Library is a leased building. As the Town does not own this building, future stability for Town use is questionable and the ability of the Town to make improvements and modifications to the building is limited. The parking is located across the street, which results in patrons and staff crossing the street to access the building. At approximately 1700 square feet, the space is larger than the Hathaway Library, but consists of one room making it difficult to host programming that would

be disruptive to other library patrons. Due to space limitations, the staff attempt to schedule programming off-site at more welcoming locations, however the lack of staff makes it difficult to cover both libraries and have a presence at off-site programming.

#### *Council On Aging / Senior Center*

The Freetown Senior Center is located at 227 Chace Road. The Senior Center entrance is located in the back of the building. The functional space on the first floor approximately 1500 square feet and second floor approximately 1700 square feet. There are numerous code deficiencies, which have already been documented in a 2021 feasibility study, which is incorporated by reference in this report. These code deficiencies are grandfathered into the current building but will need to be addressed if significant modifications are made to the building. The feasibility study examined three different possibilities for Senior Center improvements, including modification of the existing building, construction of a new building and construction of a joint library and senior center facility. The feasibility study concluded that modification of the existing building to add space and make it compliant with the building code was the recommended option, however, such a solution does not address the separate cost and need for library facilities, nor did it consider the challenges of the Town Hall space. A prior Town Meeting appropriated approximately one million dollars for Senior Center improvements, so there is some funding to make improvements.

### **FINDINGS AND OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1. Department budgets are underfunded, and critical staffing needs hamper the Town's ability to further professionalize services to Town residents.**

##### **a. Recommendation 1.1: Conduct a classification and compensation study**

While this Report provides some information regarding the increases that may be necessary to bring Freetown's department budgets in line with comparable communities, a classification and compensation study will provide the Town with a recommended compensation plan and range of compensation for each position. This information will allow the Town to better assess the actual funding needs for each department and budget accordingly. Classification and compensation studies also can include a systematic review of job functions and job descriptions, which would also be of great benefit for the Town. The Town has not completed a systematic review and revision of current job descriptions. Updated and

accurate job descriptions are essential tools for personnel management. It is recommended that the Town update all position descriptions using a standardized format and procedure. It is recommended that this procedure include review of the job descriptions by the department heads and Town Administrator to ensure consistency in format and to verify that job duties align with expectations for the position.

**b. Recommendation 1.2: Increase department budgets to enable departments to increase staffing and resources**

The current Town Hall departments, the Senior Center, and Library do not have sufficient staff to address customer service needs and the demands of legally mandated department tasks. Adding additional staff to the Town's busiest departments would greatly improve service delivery and would provide department heads with much needed time to focus on management tasks, as opposed to clerical functions. The priority for staff should be determined by the Town Administrator with input from department heads, but consideration should be given to departments that are struggling to meet current workload obligations or that have high customer service demands.

As is evidence by the salary comparison information, Town departments are critically underfunded in general budget and in staff. While the Town has made admirable efforts to manage the resident tax burden, this frugality has reached the point where it is a disservice to the community and the growth and professionalism of Town operations requires a more significant investment. Examination of the data provided provides an estimate of the investment needed to bring Freetown's department and salary lines up to the average level of funding for comparable communities. Strategic planning for this investment should begin immediately and must include communication with residents regarding the need for the increase.

**c. Recommendation 1.3: Employ a floater clerical staff to assist with department coverage until staffing levels are increased.**

It is the understanding of the project team that the Town has already implemented this suggestion in a temporary form using CARES ACT funding. ARPA funding may be available to extend this solution into the upcoming years, or to expand the number of floating clerical employees pending more stable and permanent department budget increases. Cross-training will be a priority for this position to maximize effectiveness.

**d. Recommendation 1.4: Critically evaluate department duties.**

Often when department staffing is unmanageable, duties migrate to other departments based upon capacity, as opposed to function. It is recommended that a survey be conducted of departments to determine any functions that may be more appropriately serviced by another department. For example, the Town Administrator’s Office has responsibility over the boat launch, which is not a typical function of the Town Administrator. Once duties are properly assigned to the appropriate departments, workloads can be accurately assessed.

**e. Recommendation 1.5: Establish a Community Service Department and Director.**

Adding a professional manager and consolidating supervision of departments is an effective and cost-efficient method of using one professional hire to benefit and assist several departments with workload and guidance, while alleviating some of the personnel management duties of the Town Administrator.

We recommend that the Town consider restructuring Town Departments to create more vertical management rather than the flat / horizontal management that is currently in place. Advantages of creating professional management positions include better coordination of services, the ability to provide expertise in an area as opposed to general management, and the opportunity for cross-training and increased efficiency by ensuring that there are other managers available to assist with management level tasks as needed. This applies to both a human resource position and creating a Community Service Department / Director.

If moving towards consolidation of Departments, employees who once headed departments may resent a new reporting structure. In anticipation of that, management is advised to ensure that individual contributions and skill are recognized. Below is a suggested restructuring based upon Freetown’s current department structure:

<b>Department of Community Services</b>
Council on Aging
Health
Parks, Recreation and Beaches
Veteran’s Service Officer

**f. Recommendation 1.6: Hire a dedicated human resource professional.**

The opportunity to centralize the human resource functions will result in increased professional level human resource services and will standardize application of rules and policies. Having a dedicated human resource position will provide a manager - in addition to the Town Administrator – to support department heads and staff. This may also serve to reduce the level of involvement the Board of Selectmen have in the day-to-day Town Hall operations. Given the significant budget investment contemplated by this Report, consideration could be given to a part-time position.

**2. Operational changes and modification will assist the Town in its current efforts to professionalize Town services.**

While great strides have been made to increase the professionalism of Town services, implementing a few additional recommendations will further the current efforts.

**a. Recommendation 2.1: Establish a separate appointed Board of Health**

Currently the Town’s Board of Selectmen function as the Board of Health for the Town. The Collins Center recommends that the Town change this structure and move to a Board of Health that is appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The recent pandemic situation illustrates how beneficial a qualified and experienced Board of Health can be to the operations of the Town. Having a board with medical expertise or public health knowledge would serve to enrich and complement the Town’s public health services and response. When examining whether elected positions should be changed to appointed positions, the project team encourages communities to examine eight criteria. The criteria are essentially opposites of each other. Where one increases, the other decreases, and vice-versa. Note that few if any positions or boards will fall entirely in one column or another, and most will fall in the middle. The general purpose of this list is to provide a framework for discussing each position or board on its own terms and deciding what is the best fit for the particular community. Making this change will provide a more specific and tailored skill set for the Board of Health, and will also allow the Board of Selectmen to focus their effort on general municipal oversight and policy (see Recommendation 2.2 below).

Criteria supporting a position or board being ***ELECTED***	Criteria supporting a position or board being ***APPOINTED***
1. It has <b>significant</b> policy-making responsibility.	1. It has <b>minimal</b> policy-making responsibility.
2. It has <b>few</b> ministerial responsibilities and tasks whose performance is guided almost entirely by statute.	2. It has <b>many</b> ministerial responsibilities and tasks whose performance is guided almost entirely by statute.
3. Someone with little training or expertise in its area of work could <b>quickly and easily become effective</b> in the work.	3. Someone with little training or expertise in its area of work would <b>have significant difficulty in performing the work effectively, potentially creating significant risks for the community.</b>
4. Its role and tasks are <b>easily and widely understood</b> by the public.	4. Its role and tasks are <b>complicated and NOT easily and widely understood</b> by the public.
5. The nature of the position or board's role makes it <b>relatively simple</b> for the public to evaluate the performance of its non-policy-making duties (for example, efficient use of resources, etc.).	5. The nature of the position or board's role makes it <b>relatively difficult</b> for the public to evaluate the performance of its non-policy-making duties (for example, efficient use of resources, etc.).
6. The position or board is <b>helpful as a check or balance</b> against another center of power in the community.	6. The position or board is <b>not needed as a check or balance</b> against another center of power in the community.
7. It is <b>not critical</b> to the effective and efficient functioning of the government for this position or board to cooperate regularly with other officials.	7. It is <b>critical</b> to the effective and efficient functioning of the government for this position or board to cooperate regularly with other officials.
8. In the particular community in question, election for the position historically produces a <b>very competitive race between highly-qualified</b> candidates.	8. In the particular community in question, election for the position historically produces <b>little or no competition and few or no highly-qualified</b> candidates.

**b. Recommendation 2.2: Reduce time spent on administrative and operational tasks by transferring them to the Town Administrator and other officials. Use additional time to focus on long-term planning. Reassert Board of Selectmen's role as chief executive officer of the Town.**

It is common for towns without stability in administration, that the Board of Selectmen spend significant amounts of time handling smaller and more operational matters, which leaves less time for long-term planning, goal setting and forecasting. There are many places where the Board, as the head of the executive branch of the Town, can focus its attention and efforts on moving Freetown forward, including with the financial, operational and capital planning recommended by this Report. The voters of the Town elect the Board to develop vision, goals, strategies, and plans for the Town's long-term future, and then to implement the vision and plans. Operational changes that enable the Board to accomplish those objectives are recommended, including the hiring of a human resource professional and establishing a separate Board of Health.

**c. Recommendation 2.3: Adopt town-wide employment policies to govern volunteers and employees.**

It is recommended that the Town update policies. A list of recommended policies is provided in Appendix E, Policy Audit. Adopting such policies will standardize Town procedures and provide guidance for supervisors on managing their employees. The Town should be aware of bargaining obligations with Unions prior to implementation of these policies and should clearly state that the policies are not intended to supersede negotiate union contract policies / benefits. It is further recommended that policies be issued online or, if printed, that policies be issued separately, rather than codified in a handbook. This allows for ease of updating and lower costs printing costs associated with policy changes.

**3. Critical space needs limit the Town's ability to provide optimal and efficient service to residents and raise concerns regarding the Town's ability to preserve and access Town documents.**

**a. Recommendation 3.1: Conduct a multi-building feasibility study that includes assessment of and solution for the Library, Town Hall and Senior Center.**

It is recommended that the Town engage the services of an engineering / architectural firm to conduct a multi-building feasibility study. While the Town conducted a feasibility study for the Senior Center, it did not include a solution for the Library or the Town Hall, both of which need to be addressed. To maintain fiscal responsibility and respect of taxpayer investment, it is essential to have a strong and well conceptualized plan for addressing building projects and capital needs. This is especially necessary when there are several buildings that need to be addressed. It is important to consider the time frame of building projects, which can span six or more years. As all three buildings have significant needs that will need to be addressed in the near future, beginning the planning process is an immediate priority.

**b. Recommendation 3.2: Source a long-term lease with sufficient space to relocate several Town departments while building options are vetted.**

The current Town Hall space is insufficient for employee and resident needs. It is not accessible. There is insufficient space for employees and employees are assigned to work in unsuitable and potentially unsafe areas (i.e., the attic). There is insufficient parking which requires residents and employees to park offsite. There is no available space for storing and organizing Town documents. There is no space to collaborate or inter-departmental meetings or meetings with residents / outside agencies. There is no space for employee breaks, or designated place to store or prepare meals. In short, the Town hall does not have

the space needed to meet the needs of the Town and residents.

To ensure a wise investment of taxpayer dollars, building projects must be thoughtfully planned and constructed. This is time consuming and can span several years. The immediate need for space at Town Hall supports a recommendation to secure a temporary, long-term lease of space while building options are researched. The space should be large enough to relocate at least several Town departments, with priority given to those departments that have high levels of public interaction or that have space needs currently impairing the ability of the department to function at Town Hall. As noted further below, if the first floor of Town Hall can be relocated that space could be used to address the needs of the Library. While not ideal, it is a temporary solution that would be more functional than the current space at the Hathaway Library.

**c. Recommendation 3.3: Consider short-term solutions to address document storage issues.**

Reliable document storage space must be located so that important documents are not a risk. The preference would be current Town space, if there is a space that is underutilized because there is no additional cost associated with use of existing space and also because it allows greater control of, and easier access to documents. One possibility is the relatively new Police Station that may be able to temporarily consolidate space and provide room for document storage. If Town space is not available, then leasing of private space can be considered. The possibility of using ARPA funds or grant funds could also be considered.

**d. Recommendation 3.4: Engage a service to assist with digitizing critical Town documents and forms.**

Digitizing Town documents will assist with the Town's document storage issues, providing a secure digital copy of crucial records and files. Digitizing forms and documents will also allow these items to be added to the Town's webpage, providing greater capability for members of the public to self-serve and reduce the demand on employees and department operations. This is another possible use of ARPA funds, as it is a measure that allows the public to remotely access Town services, thereby reducing pandemic spread risk to both employees and members of the public.

**e. Recommendation 3.5: Prioritize alternative Library space to address the lack of indoor plumbing, ADA accessibility issues and lack of parking.**

It is recommended that the space issues, which are especially pressing for the Library, be addressed immediately, even if a temporary solution must be employed. It is clear that neither of the Library buildings are suitable for the Library needs. The lack of indoor plumbing, ADA accessibility issues and the fact that the Town does not own the White Memorial Library Building puts the future of Library services in a precarious position. Should the leased building no longer be available, or should an issue arise with the lack of plumbing at the Hathaway building, library services would be in jeopardy. Another solution for library space must be prioritized, even if that solution requires a more reliable and functional lease space.

The Library Director stated she is evaluating an application for a building grant offered through the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. The MBLC grant process is long, and currently there is a waitlist for grants, however if an interim solution can be found for more functional library space, the urgency of building construction may be alleviated. If a long-term lease space can be secured for the departments on the first floor of Town Hall, moving the library temporarily to the Town Hall is a viable temporary solution.

**CLOSING**

Thank you for inviting the Collins Center to Freetown. The Collins Center would like to thank the Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator for facilitating this project and to all Town employees and Department Heads for their assistance. A special thank you to Lu-Ann Souza who coordinated the interviews, responded to numerous information requests, and provided guided walkthrough of the Town's facilities.

**APPENDIX A: COMPARABLE COMMUNITY DATA<sup>4</sup>**

Municipality	2020 Population	2019 DOR Income Per Capita (State Average \$48,030)	FY 2022 Single Family Tax Bill (state av. 6,525)	FY 22 Total Budget (w/o CPA & Enterprise)	FY22 Tax Levy	Free Cash Amount as of FY 7/1/2021	General Government	Residential Tax Rate	Commercial Tax Rate	Total Tax Levy
Abington	17,062	\$37,848	\$6,910	\$31,004,014	\$24,540,527	\$77,363	\$2,230,627	\$15.22	\$15.22	\$39,792,894
Acushnet	10,559	\$35,648	\$4,576	\$25,857,803	\$14,454,100	\$1,361,182	\$1,690,500	\$13.27	\$17.18	\$20,464,838
Berkley	6,764	\$41,948	\$5,790	\$33,454,223	\$25,104,104	\$1,667,516	\$792,465	\$13.75	\$13.75	\$14,454,100
Carver	11,645	\$35,597	\$6,187	\$34,465,660	\$20,464,838	\$1,475,568	\$2,526,207	\$15.98	\$25.41	\$28,956,721
Dighton	8,101	\$37,359	\$5,531	\$50,828,417	\$28,956,721	\$1,800,037	\$1,531,923	\$14.29	\$26.17	\$19,634,107
East Bridgewater	14,440	\$37,748	\$6,562	\$55,509,971	\$33,106,076	\$3,438,957	\$3,665,746	\$15.60	\$15.60	\$33,106,076
Freetown	9,206	\$39,541	\$4,825	\$26,701,573	\$18,619,482	\$2,591,779	\$1,515,409	\$12.06	\$20.56	\$24,540,527
Halifax	7,749	\$43,560	\$6,589	\$50,992,037	\$37,463,205	\$1,548,977	\$1,587,830	\$16.01	\$16.01	\$18,619,482
Hanson	10,639	\$39,722	\$6,236	\$67,576,867	\$49,021,701	\$1,953,618	\$1,802,234	\$15.09	\$15.09	\$25,104,104
Kingston	13,708	\$44,706	\$7,103	\$69,207,789	\$45,899,521	\$3,246,412	\$3,379,558	\$14.58	\$14.58	\$37,463,205
Lakeville	11,523	\$43,928	\$5,422	\$33,810,214	\$27,082,452	\$1,574,563	\$1,989,513	\$12.07	\$12.07	\$27,082,452
Rehoboth	12,502	\$49,537	\$5,689	\$61,600,568	\$42,071,129	\$825,286	\$2,429,095	\$12.67	\$12.67	\$28,250,075
Somerset	18,303	\$33,507	\$4,590	\$63,816,989	\$39,792,894	\$9,379,453	\$2,019,772	\$13.29	\$25.81	\$42,071,129
West Bridgewater	7,707	\$37,722	\$6,199	\$25,592,434	\$19,634,107	\$1,014,213	\$1,488,988	\$16.22	\$29.06	\$27,552,312

<sup>4</sup> Detailed charts and statistics have been digitally produced as attachments with this report.

**APPENDIX B: COMPARABLE COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT BUDGET DATA**

DEPARTMENT	Abington	Acushnet	Berkley	Carver	Dighton	East Bridgewater	Halifax	Hanson	Kingston
BOS / TA	\$387,054	\$275,891	\$107,023	\$927,698	\$346,703	\$323,709	\$219,193	\$272,032	\$477,020
ACCOUNTING	\$238,390	\$207,567	\$119,045	\$289,179	\$166,532	\$180,881	\$129,305	\$165,365	\$176,420
ASSESSOR	\$231,929	\$180,215	\$80,875	\$213,152	\$218,662	\$270,051	\$168,330	\$203,496	\$188,440
TREAS/COLLECTOR	\$296,642	\$226,637	\$173,246	\$311,600	\$220,652	\$445,121	\$261,979	\$255,886	\$425,621
TOWN CLERK	\$147,981	\$142,777	\$60,262	\$151,635	\$150,954	\$217,309	\$102,367	\$144,634	\$196,451
PLANNING	\$76,348	\$79,300	\$938	\$196,891	\$62,049	\$47,500	\$18,718	\$112,183	\$161,544
BUILDING	\$277,769	\$163,729	\$44,836	\$92,089	\$171,234	\$166,425	\$77,776	\$138,878	\$172,491
HEALTH	\$207,904	\$200,021	\$2,292	\$128,737	\$157,863	\$191,836	\$137,207	\$141,165	\$175,345
COA	\$202,891	\$163,114	\$35,715	\$179,154	\$115,662	\$214,766	\$195,043	\$145,787	\$371,016
VETERANS	\$300,809	\$247,217	\$52,987	\$308,828	\$118,607	\$301,917	\$222,249	\$62,988	\$293,592
LIBRARY	\$574,239	\$287,779	\$153,935	\$435,749	\$299,930	\$575,995	\$340,191	\$516,341	\$708,955
TOTAL	\$2,941,956	\$2,174,247	\$831,154	\$3,234,712	\$2,028,848	\$2,935,510	\$1,872,358	\$2,158,755	\$3,346,895

DEPARTMENT	Lakeville	Rehoboth	Somerset	West Bridgewater	Freetown	Average	Freetown Ave Diff	Median	Freetown Med Diff
BOS / TA	\$407,280	\$223,932	\$375,987	\$379,257	\$317,474	\$363,291	(\$45,817)	\$346,703	(\$29,229)
ACCOUNTING	\$145,640	\$100,515	\$234,100	\$115,763	\$140,758	\$174,516	(\$33,758)	\$166,532	(\$25,774)
ASSESSOR	\$200,840	\$170,546	\$221,071	\$263,044	\$102,914	\$200,819	(\$97,905)	\$203,496	(\$100,582)
TREAS/COLLECTOR	\$242,756	\$219,052	\$392,681	\$325,750	\$227,461	\$292,125	(\$64,664)	\$261,979	(\$34,518)
TOWN CLERK	\$162,978	\$180,320	\$160,160	\$147,795	\$136,977	\$151,202	(\$14,225)	\$150,954	(\$13,977)
PLANNING	\$130,730	\$78,157	\$7,895	\$26,966	\$115,650	\$76,863	\$38,787	\$76,348	\$39,302
BUILDING	\$266,969	\$180,507	\$103,183	\$229,985	\$133,389	\$160,452	(\$27,063)	\$166,425	(\$33,036)
HEALTH	\$128,809	\$246,246	\$124,501	\$183,913	\$209,456	\$155,834	\$53,622	\$157,863	\$51,593
COA	\$245,114	\$115,123	\$155,089	\$358,481	\$159,788	\$192,073	(\$32,285)	\$179,154	(\$19,366)
VETERANS	\$178,609	\$216,135	\$371,602	\$66,220	\$162,240	\$210,905	(\$48,665)	\$222,249	(\$60,009)
LIBRARY	\$116,070	\$289,600	\$657,442	\$501,211	\$192,553	\$419,803	(\$227,250)	\$435,749	(\$243,196)
TOTAL	\$2,225,795	\$2,020,133	\$2,803,711	\$2,598,385	\$1,898,660	\$2,397,881	(\$499,221)	\$2,225,795	(\$327,135)

**APPENDIX C: COMPARABLE COMMUNITY SALARY BUDGET DATA**

DEPARTMENT	Abington	Acushnet	Berkley	Carver	Dighton	East Bridgewater	Hanson	Halifax	Kingston
BOS / TA	\$260,254	\$249,091	\$100,437	\$439,253	\$260,093	\$283,073	\$205,432	\$215,268	\$395,320
ACCOUNTING	\$222,290	\$155,417	\$89,295	\$199,679	\$139,382	\$177,681	\$123,240	\$127,680	\$172,070
ASSESSOR	\$165,339	\$118,595	\$42,160	\$139,287	\$191,112	\$231,471	\$194,386	\$153,170	\$173,662
TREAS/COLLECTOR	\$233,333	\$173,837	\$138,916	\$232,650	\$155,352	\$276,221	\$229,886	\$226,629	\$346,990
TOWN CLERK	\$136,131	\$138,225	\$52,562	\$141,425	\$141,504	\$184,109	\$140,579	\$98,332	\$182,126
PLANNING	\$71,748	\$73,300	\$938	\$164,166	\$43,545	\$44,000	\$107,278	\$16,718	\$155,344
BUILDING	\$267,141	\$134,889	\$43,086	\$88,559	\$133,104	\$149,525	\$131,478	\$70,788	\$169,186
HEALTH	\$190,114	\$170,646	\$2,292	\$112,537	\$151,463	\$159,792	\$126,040	\$129,334	\$161,245
COA	\$173,191	\$140,374	\$26,000	\$152,304	\$188,800	\$208,011	\$127,987	\$185,593	\$336,656
VETERANS	\$98,328	\$20,772	\$8,487	\$66,478	\$41,782	\$57,117	\$31,988	\$15,674	\$44,567
LIBRARY	\$403,056	\$224,542	\$116,202	\$336,104	\$227,930	\$446,052	\$361,716	\$250,756	\$555,609
TOTAL	\$1,817,869.00	\$1,375,146.00	\$504,173.00	\$1,736,338.00	\$1,446,137.00	\$1,771,000.00	\$1,418,294.00	\$1,239,186.00	\$2,137,166.00

DEPARTMENT	Lakeville	Rehoboth	Somerset	West Bridgewater	Freetown	Average	Freetown Avg. Diff	Median	Freetown Med. Diff.
BOS / TA	\$331,180	\$197,657	\$349,560	\$318,777	\$264,060	\$277,338	(\$13,278)	\$260,254	\$3,806
ACCOUNTING	\$61,685	\$98,205	\$216,026	\$109,213	\$134,658	\$145,528	(\$10,870)	\$139,382	(\$4,724)
ASSESSOR	\$91,040	\$156,281	\$167,626	\$192,344	\$80,334	\$155,113	(\$74,779)	\$165,339	(\$85,005)
TREAS/COLLECTOR	\$189,006	\$186,252	\$315,981	\$263,650	\$182,953	\$228,362	(\$45,409)	\$229,886	(\$46,933)
TOWN CLERK	\$148,978	\$169,870	\$153,510	\$135,545	\$123,481	\$140,223	(\$16,742)	\$141,425	(\$17,944)
PLANNING	\$134,230	\$75,357	\$6,550	\$21,816	\$106,332	\$70,384	\$35,948	\$71,748	\$34,584
BUILDING	\$262,969	\$116,792	\$101,298	\$204,994	\$122,009	\$144,139	(\$22,130)	\$133,104	(\$11,095)
HEALTH	\$114,809	\$217,096	\$113,401	\$91,185	\$146,406	\$133,843	\$12,563	\$129,334	\$17,072
COA	\$214,114	\$111,973	\$107,254	\$300,981	\$142,400	\$174,864	(\$32,464)	\$173,191	(\$30,791)
VETERANS	\$19,719	\$61,800	\$94,432	\$34,030	\$12,240	\$45,783	(\$33,543)	\$41,782	(\$29,542)
LIBRARY	\$284,258	\$289,600	\$482,144	\$329,071	\$144,753	\$331,311	(\$186,558)	\$329,071	(\$184,318)
TOTAL	\$1,567,730.00	\$1,391,283.00	\$1,625,638.00	\$1,672,535.00	\$1,314,873.00	\$1,515,576.54	(\$200,703.54)	\$1,567,730.00	(\$252,857.00)

**APPENDIX D: FREETOWN STAFF LIST**

<b>Staff List Town Hall, COA, and Library as of 11/10/21</b>		
<b>Department</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Part or Full Time</b>
Accounting	Town Accountant	Full Time
Accounting	Assistant Town Accountant	Full Time
Administration	Interim Town Administrator	Full Time
Administration	Administrative Assistant	Full Time
Administration	Executive Assistant	Full Time
Assessors	Assistant Assessor	Full Time
Assessors	*Part Time Senior Clerk	Part Time
Board of Health	Board of Health Agent	Full Time
Board of Health	Senior Clerk	Part Time
Board of Health	Public Health Nurse	Part Time
Building/Facilities	Principal Clerk	Full Time
Building/Facilities	Building Commissioner & Zoning Enforcement Agent	Full Time
Building/Facilities	Custodial/Maintenance	Full Time
Conservation	Senior Clerk	Part Time
Council on Aging	Director	Full Time
Council on Aging	Van Driver (part time)	Part Time
Council on Aging	Senior Clerk	Part Time
Council on Aging	Van Driver (part time)	Part Time
Council on Aging	Van Driver (part time)	Part Time
Council on Aging	Senior Clerk	Full Time
Library	Library Technician	Full Time
Library	Senior Librarian	Full Time
Library	Library Director	Full Time
Planning	Planning Technician	Full Time
Town Clerk	Town Clerk (elected)	Full Time
Town Clerk	Senior Clerk	Full Time
Treasurer/Tax Collector	Assistant Treasurer/Tax Collector	Full Time
Treasurer/Tax Collector	Treasurer/Tax Collector	Full Time

**APPENDIX E: POLICY AUDIT<sup>5</sup>**

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Access & Use of Telecommunications Systems	Yes	Update needed. Last updated 2011.
Alcohol & Drug Use	Yes	Update needed. Last updated 2011.
Anti-Fraud	No	
Attendance Policy Statement	No	
Basic Life Insurance	No	
Bereavement	No	
Computer Policy	Yes	Update needed. Last updated 2011.
Conduct (Standards)	No	
Conflict of Interest/Ethics	Yes	Update needed. Last updated 2016.
Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act	No	
Criminal Offender Registry Information	Yes	Last updated 2021.
Discipline	No	
Discrimination Prevention	Yes	Last updated 2019
Discrimination Grievance Procedure	Yes	Last updated 2019
Disability Discrimination Prevention	Pending	
Domestic Violence Act	No	

<sup>5</sup> Draft policies have been provided to assist the Town in updating any policies as needed. It is recommended that all policy updates and implementation be reviewed by the Town’s legal counsel.

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Drug Free Workplace	Yes	Update needed. Last updated 2011.
Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action	Yes	Last updated 2019
Family and Medical Leave Act	No	
Grievance Procedure	No	
Health Insurance	No	
Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act	No	
Holidays	No	
Overtime	No	
Meal & Break Period	No	
Emergency Closing	No	
Jury Duty	No	
Leave of Absence- Unpaid	No	
Life Insurance	No	
Longevity Pay	No	
Maternity & Paternity Leave	No	
Military Leave	No	
Personnel Records	No	
Political Activity	No	
Pregnant Workers Fairness Act	No	
Probationary Period	No	

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Promotion	No	
Recruitment & Selection	Yes	Last updated 2021
References	No	
Retirement	No	
Separation from Employment	No	
Sexual Harassment Prevention	Yes	Last updated 2019
Small Necessities Leave Act	No	
Sick Leave	No	
Social Networking / Media	No	
Vacation	No	
Vehicle Use and Reimbursement	No	
Weapons	No	
Whistleblower Protection	No	
Workplace Injuries Workers Compensation Police & Fire Injuries	No	
Workplace Safety	No	
Workplace Violence Prevention	No	