

COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN 2007 NORTH BROOKFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

TOWN GOVERNMENT CHAPTER



TOWN GOVERNMENT: FACILITIES & SERVICES

This chapter of the Master Plan presents a general description of North Brookfield's town government, municipal facilities and services. For this chapter, each department head was interviewed and information was collected regarding organizational structure, staffing, budget, responsibilities, equipment, facilities, programs offered and future capital needs. Before beginning an in-depth analysis of each municipal department, it is important to understand the source of the Town revenue and the tax implications for North Brookfield households (local tax rate, average single family home tax bill, average single family home assessed valuation, local tax levies and state aid).

Table TG-1
Year 2006 Local Tax Rates

North		East	New			West
<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Braintree</u>	<u>Oakham</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>
\$10.16	\$13.50	\$9.42	\$12.96	\$8.82	\$8.49	\$10.55

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Tax rate is per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

North Brookfield's 2006 tax rate fell somewhere in the middle when compared to its neighbors. While not nearly as high as Brookfield's tax rate (\$13.50 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation), it was not as low as the Spencer tax rate (\$8.49). The Town's current tax rate is at its lowest since 1990, when the tax rate was \$9.55 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Between 1990 and 2000, the Town's tax rate saw a steady rise from \$9.55 in 1990, to \$13.62 by 2000. North Brookfield's adjacent neighbors also experienced a steady rise in their tax rates over the course of the 1990s. However, 2006 saw a modest reduction from the previous year in North Brookfield's tax rate and the rates of **all** of its adjacent neighbors, the first time in decades that all of these communities experienced a simultaneous drop in their local tax rates.

Table TG-2
Average Single Family Tax Bill - Year 2006

North		East	New			West
<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Braintree</u>	<u>Oakham</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>
\$2,213	\$2,950	\$2,456	\$3,025	\$2,132	\$2,061	\$2,437

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Again, North Brookfield's 2006 average single-family home tax bill falls somewhere in the middle when compared to its neighbors: not nearly as high as the New Braintree average tax bill, but not as low as the Spencer average tax bill. Worth noting is that North Brookfield's average single-family home tax bill has increased significantly over the last five years: the year 2000 average tax bill was \$1,423, and this figure has increased to \$2,213 by 2006 (an increase of 55.5%). The increase when viewed over the last 15 years is even more dramatic, with the average tax bill **more than doubling** over this timeframe, rising from \$1,051 in 1990 to \$2,213 by 2006. Again, North Brookfield' neighbors also experienced a steady rise in their average single-family home tax bills over the last 15 years.

Table TG-3
Average Assessed Valuation Per Single Family Home - Year 2006

North		East	New			West
<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Braintree</u>	<u>Oakham</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>
\$217,856	\$218,543	\$260,749	\$233,385	\$241,777	\$242,756	\$231,021

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

North Brookfield's 2006 average assessed valuation per single family home is the lowest of its neighbors. The Central Massachusetts region and the eastern regions of the State have seen a dramatic rise in the average single family home valuation during the last five years, and North Brookfield is no exception. The Town's average assessed valuation per single family home has *more than doubled* in the last five years, rising from \$104,493 in 2000 to \$217,856 in 2006 (an increase of 108%). During the 1990s, North Brookfield's averaged assessed valuation actually decreased slightly (from \$110,044 in 1990 to \$104,493 in 2000), making the increase over the last five years all the more dramatic. Land values are high throughout the region, development is on the rise and existing homes are selling for much more than what they sold for during the 1990s. In short, the region's housing stock has never been valued higher.

The following tables identify the sources of North Brookfield's revenue from Local Tax Levies and Non-Education State Aid.

Table TG-4
Local Tax Levies - Year 2006

<u>Community</u>	<u>Taxes - Residential</u>	<u>Taxes - Commercial</u>	<u>Taxes - Industrial</u>	<u>Personal Property</u>	<u>Res. as % of Total Taxes</u>
North Brookfield	\$3,586,452	\$150,037	\$106,863	\$60,997	91.9%
Brookfield	\$3,282,585	\$136,510	\$19,938	\$63,094	93.7%
East Brookfield	\$2,096,542	\$136,492	\$20,757	\$40,007	91.4%
New Braintree	\$1,182,277	\$49,710	\$2,943	\$22,775	94.0%
Oakham	\$1,545,477	\$47,891	\$8,626	\$34,817	94.4%
Spencer	\$7,943,125	\$575,513	\$255,773	\$150,556	89.0%
West Brookfield	\$3,609,796	\$148,337	\$69,779	\$56,425	92.9%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

The general rule in municipal finance is that towns are considered to be "bedroom communities" if they derive more than 90% of their total tax revenue from residential property taxes. North Brookfield fits this profile, and so do all of its neighbors with the exception of Spencer (which is very close). In terms of actual tax dollars raised Spencer raises the most across the board, largely due to having the largest population of the compared communities.

It should be noted that residential property taxes are covering an ever-larger percentage of the North Brookfield's total tax base. In 2006, residential property taxes accounted for 91.9% of the Town's total tax base, whereas in 1990, residential property taxes accounted for roughly 82.6% of the Town's total

tax base. Thus, North Brookfield has increased its dependence on residential property taxes to fund its municipal government and this partially explains the significant rise in the average single-family home tax bill during the last five years.

Table TG-5
Non-Education State Aid - Year 2006

North Brookfield	<u>Brookfield</u>	East <u>Brookfield</u>	New <u>Braintree</u>	<u>Oakham</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	West <u>Brookfield</u>
\$859,789	\$544,846	\$294,053	\$152,042	\$224,290	\$ 2,217,245	\$498,651

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Presented figures DO NOT include State education aid.

The table above indicates that North Brookfield fares very well when compared to its neighbors in terms of Non-Education State Aid received and this is also true when the aid is analyzed on a per capita basis. North Brookfield and Spencer received the largest amount of State Aid per capita (\$183 and \$185 per capita respectively), while Oakham received the smallest amount of State aid per capita (\$118). The State distribution formula is partially based on local median household income figures and other measures of wealth. For the compared communities, North Brookfield and Spencer have lower median household income figures (thus the high amount of State aid), while Oakham has a relatively high median household income figure (thus the low amount of State aid).

SUMMARY OF THE ANALYSIS OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT AND SERVICES

The following section of this chapter is a summary of the data gathered in the interviews with the Department heads of the various entities that comprise North Brookfield's municipal government and services.

Water Department:

Organization: A three-member Board of Commissioners manages the Water Department. The Commissioners are elected to three-year terms. The Board meets on a monthly basis. The Water Superintendent is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Department and is appointed by the Board of Commissioners.

Staff: The Department consists of the Water Superintendent, one Operator and a part-time (30 hours a week) Administrative Assistant.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Department had an operating budget of \$613,104, with an offset amount of \$213,640 from the Mass. Water Pollution Abatement Trust. Water customers pay for the system's operation, however, the Water Department is not considered an "enterprise system" in the classic sense. The Department's budget is classified under Chapter 41, Section 69B of the Mass General Laws. The water users fund the entire water budget but the Department is not allowed to keep their earned interest. This interest goes back into the general fund. Any major piece of capital equipment is usually requested through an Article on the Warrant at the annual Town Meeting. Customer billing is done bi-annually.

Facilities: The Department's main facility is located on Bell Road. This facility contains the water treatment plant and a 1.5 million gallon storage tank. The pumping station is located at 74 Oakham Road.

Equipment: The Department's equipment consists of two vehicles: a 2000 F-350 pickup truck (fair condition) and a 2004 F-150 pickup truck (excellent condition).

System Description:

The water system makes use of the Horse (North) Pond reservoir as its water supply source. The water treatment plant has the capacity to treat up to two million gallons per day (gpd), but the system typically uses roughly 404,000 gpd. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has permitted a water withdrawal of up to 433,000 gpd. The reservoir can actually provide a safe yield of 500,000 gpd. Doane Pond can be used as an emergency water supply source, and there is also an interconnection with the East Brookfield water system that can be used in emergencies, but this interconnection only provides for water service to roughly 200 homes in the vicinity of Lake Lashaway. The treatment plant treats for turbidity, color, corrosion control and disinfection. The water distribution system consists of 28 miles of pipes and 228 hydrants. Many of the system's pipes are over 110 years old. A map of the water system's distribution area can be found on the following page.

Meters have been in place for just the last five years and all water customers are now metered. The most recent water audit found that the system has 29% of its water unaccounted for. While this is a very high percentage of unaccounted for water, the Department instituted an extensive leak detection program in 2005 that allowed the Department to identify and fix many of the most severe leaks. It is anticipated that the system's percentage of unaccounted for water will decrease substantially during the next water audit, as well as the amount of water the system uses on a daily basis. While the Department fixes pipes as they break, it also has an infrastructure management plan that contains a three-year pipe replacement schedule.

The Department owns a small amount of land around the reservoir and along the North Brook Canal. A portion of the land in the watershed is in the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program that allows the land to be used for farming, but much of the land around the reservoir is not restricted in any way. The Department is working with Massachusetts Rural Water Association and abutting landowners to develop a Source Water Protection Plan and a Water Protection District bylaw that will be brought before voters at a future Town Meeting. The Water Commissioners have not established a definitive service system and are not currently looking for new water supplies. They continue to entertain requests from developers for extending the system if the developers are willing to pay all associated costs. Lack of planning could result in a future water supply crisis that will affect future growth in the Town.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

The Department would like to obtain more funding for infrastructure replacement and repair, hydrant system repair and hydraulic modeling of the water system. The dam at Horse Pond has been identified as needing repair. The Department would like to replace the 2000 F-350 pickup truck at some point within the next few years. Other capital improvements identified for the future include a garage at the treatment plant and other renovations at the pump station. The Department has not yet estimated the costs of these future capital needs.

Sewer Department:

Organization: A three member Board of Sewer Commissioners manages the Sewer Department. The Sewer Superintendent oversees the day-to-day operation of the Department. The Board of Selectmen appoints the Sewer Commissioners and the Board meets on a monthly basis.

Staff: The Department's staff consists of the Superintendent, two full-time certified operators and 30 hours a week of administrative support.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Department had an operating budget of \$762,500. Unlike the Water Department, the Sewer Department operates under the Enterprise System, which means that sewer users pay for the system's operating costs and capital equipment. There is one notable exception: the Town's general fund is helping to pay off the Sewer Department's debt for a major upgrade to the sewage treatment plant that occurred in 1995. The Sewer Department earns additional income for its operating budget by receiving an average of 15,000 gallons per day of septage from other communities, trucked in by private septage haulers. The Department estimates that this practice contributes roughly \$200,000 annually to its operating budget. If the system were to free up additional capacity by addressing its inflow/infiltration problems, the Department could increase the amount of septage it takes from neighboring communities and thus increase the revenue generated by this practice. A small percentage of the Department's operating budget is earmarked for pipe replacement and preventative maintenance

The Department tries to pay for large-scale capital improvements through State and Federal grant opportunities.

System Description:

North Brookfield constructed its first wastewater treatment plant in 1895, one of the earliest treatment plants in Central Massachusetts. The plant sits on a 16-acre site located off of East Brookfield Road, south of the downtown area. As mentioned above, the treatment plant received a substantial upgrade back in 1995 at a cost of six million dollars. There are currently 870 service connections to the sewer system. The plant is designed to handle up to 757,000 gallons of wastewater per day. Last year, the plant treated an average of 649,000 gallons per day (gpd), but last year can be considered an

anomaly because of the high amount of rainfall that ended up infiltrating the system. Last year's extensive rainfall meant that 85% of the treatment plant's capacity was being used. According to the remedial action plan for the Little Canada area prepared by S.E.A. Engineers in 2005, the plant treated an average of 534,000 gallons of wastewater per day during 2003 and 2004 (70% of the treatment plant's capacity). The Department maintains three pump stations in town: at Bigelow Street, Warren Street and New Braintree Road (Route 67). A map of the Sewer Department's service area can be found on the following page.

North Brookfield's sewer system has serious problems with inflow and infiltration. Inflow is caused by direct connections to the sewer system from roof drains, sump pumps and any other water source directly discharging into a sewer line without the Department's knowledge. Infiltration is essentially groundwater infiltrating into the sewer pipes. Roughly 70% of the system's pipes are over 100 years old and are either broken, have tree roots growing through them, or have some other type of flow restriction. Excessive inflow/infiltration eats up the treatment plant's capacity and endangers the system's ability to service new connections. North Brookfield's inflow/infiltration problems are extremely serious.

According to the 2005 report from S.E.A. Engineers, roughly 57% of the wastewater treated at the plant on a daily basis comes from inflow/infiltration with the Little Canada section of Town comprising more than half of problems. The 2005 S.E.A. report concluded with an implementation plan for fixing the inflow/infiltration problems of the Little Canada area pegging the cost at \$1,089,000. The cost of this project has grown to \$1.3 million as the Department endeavors to replace roughly 15,000 linear feet of pipes in this area. The Little Canada remediation effort will be completed by the end of summer 2006. The Sewer Department has identified the Municipal Water Treatment Plant and Quaboag Rubber as the second and third largest source of inflow/infiltration.

Wastewater from the plant receives extended aeration treatment before being discharged into Dunn Brook. The Brook and the effluent discharged into it are tested for toxicity four times a year. The plant's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit expired in September 2005. The State Department of Environmental Protection and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are currently reviewing the Department's new application that was submitted in 2005. The previous NPDES permit recommended the Department undertake a phosphorous study, copper and zinc study and an inflow/infiltration study. The Department has completed all three of these studies and is currently pursuing corrective actions.

The Commissioners have not established a definitive service area and do not have a system expansion plan. They continue to entertain requests from developers for extending the system if the developers are willing to pay all associated costs. Lack of planning could result in a future water treatment crisis that will affect future growth in the Town.

Issues Facing the Department:

- Communication between the Sewer Department and other municipal entities needs improvement. Situations where road reconstruction paves over manholes, as well as newly repaired roadways needing to be dug up for sewer and water pipe replacement projects must be minimized.
- The Department needs to develop a formal policy on treating industrial wastewater. A lack of clear guidelines makes it difficult for new Industry to tie into the system. Quaboag Rubber has its own permit from DEP to treat its wastewater before it enters the sewer system.
- The Sewer Department does not have a plan for sewer line expansion, nor has it reserved any of its limited excess capacity for future economic development. What little excess capacity exists will easily be used up by future residential development. Advanced planning is needed to provide sewer service to new businesses and industries wishing to locate in North Brookfield.
- If not addressed, the inflow/infiltration problem, which seriously reduces capacity, will hamper North Brookfield's efforts to promote future economic development. New businesses and industries wishing to locate in North Brookfield will find it difficult to tie into the system due to limited capacity. The current remediation project for Little Canada will help to alleviate some of the inflow/infiltration problem, but similar efforts are needed for other areas of town on the system. The Department envisions a pipe replacement for the west side of town, currently estimated at roughly two million dollars.
- The Department has also identified lateral connections from house to sewer pipes along the street as a major contributor to the inflow/infiltration problem. The Department estimates that roughly 400 households need to have these lateral connections repaired at a cost of roughly \$3,000 per household.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

- The Department wants to initiate a pipe replacement project for the west side of Town, currently estimated at \$2,000,000. The Department is currently pursuing grant funds and/or low interest loans for this purpose.
- The cost of repair of the estimated 400 house to street lateral connections is \$1.2 million. The Department is also relying on acquisition of grant funds and/or low interest loans to cover this cost.

Highway Department:

Organization: The Board of Selectmen, acting in its capacity as Highway Commissioners, appoints the Highway Superintendent, who manages the Department on a day-to-day basis. Currently, an Acting Highway Superintendent is in charge.

Staff: The Highway Department consists of five full-time staff, including the Acting Highway Superintendent. The Department also has three part-time snow plow operators and 10 hours a week of administrative support.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Highway Department had an operating budget of \$493,515, raised locally as part of the general fund. In addition, State funds (Chapter 90) in the amount of \$392,800 were used for such purposes as road maintenance & repair, sidewalks, cleaning of storm-drains and the purchase of equipment.

Equipment:

- 2005 sander/dump truck (good condition)
- 2003 backhoe (good)
- 2001 one-ton pickup truck (good)
- 2000 sander/dump truck (good)
- 2000 mower/tractor (good)
- 1999 dump truck (good)
- 1997 street sweeper (good)
- 1995 front-end loader (good)
- 1993 ¾ pickup truck (poor)
- 1990 dump truck (fair)
- 1981 sander (poor)
- 1979 sander (out of service)
- 1976 one-ton pickup truck (poor)
- 1974 grader (poor)
- 1967 catch basin cleaner – rehabbed tanker from the Fire Department (poor)
- 1967 roller (poor – not used)
- Two very old sidewalk plows (poor)

Facilities:

The Town's Highway Barn is located on School Street. It was converted from an old school in 1957 and has not received any substantial upgrades since the conversion, with the exception of redoing the roof in 2004. There are also two steel containers on the property that are used for storage. The facility is not large enough to house all of the Department's equipment and some it resides outside by necessity. The building is not airtight and loses a lot of heat. The heating system and boiler are in poor shape. The Department also has a salt shed on Donovan Road on town-owned property.

Duties: The Department's primary responsibility is road maintenance for approximately 82 miles of roadways in town, including the State roads that pass through town (Routes 67 & 148). The Department also clears sidewalks in the downtown area, fixes road signs, mows and trims along roadsides, removes rubbish for town-owned properties and cleans catch basins. The Department oversees the construction of new roads in subdivisions to make sure they will meet the Town's roadway standards. The Department will participate in reviewing large-scale subdivision plans at the request of the Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector and other municipal department heads. The Department also issues driveway permits.

Issues Facing the Department:

- In the past, the Highway, Water & Sewer Departments have not done very well at coordinating their activities. This has led to situations where road improvements would lead to paving over manholes that would then need to be dug out, as well as newly repaired roadways being dug up for sewer and water pipe replacement projects.
- The Superintendent believes that roadside drainage is a significant problem in North Brookfield, as there are still many open ditches scattered throughout town that overflow during storm events.
- The Department believes that another Highway Barn will be needed by the end of the next decade. Such a facility would need to be constructed at a new location because the current site does not have expansion potential. The property housing the Department's salt shed has been discussed as a possible location for a new Highway Barn.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

Within the next five years, the Highway Department would like to move its facility out of the town center. If this proves unfeasible, the Department would like to give a facelift to the interior and exterior of the Highway Barn and grounds, including moving the sand and salt storage off of the property. In terms of new equipment, the Department would like to purchase three new combination sander/dump-trucks to replace the 1979 and 1981 sanders and the 1990 dump truck. The Department plans to use Chapter 90 funds from the State for these purchases and each vehicle is currently estimated to cost roughly \$110,000. Within six to ten years, the Department would like to replace the 1995 front-end loader (estimated cost: \$120,000), replace the 1976 one-ton pickup truck (estimated cost: \$50,000) and replace the 1972 sidewalk plow (estimated cost: \$85,000).

The Department will include sidewalk repaving and replacement of signage as part of its roadway repaving projects. The Department would also like to bring stormwater pipes and drains out of yards and into the main roads for better stormwater collection. The Department would also like to update the drainage systems along several local roads, including extensive work on the catch basins. Lastly, the Department would like to eliminate all open ditches and replace with underground drainage structures. It is anticipated that Chapter 90 funds will be used to pay for the majority of the work items listed previously.

Board of Health:

Organization: North Brookfield has a three-member elected Board of Health. Each member is elected to a three-year term. The Board meets on a monthly basis at the Senior Center. The Board of Health appoints the Health Agent, although this position is currently vacant.

Staff: The Board has several part-time employees including an office manager (24 hours week), a transfer station manager (20 hours a week), three transfer station monitors, a milk inspector, and an animal inspector that provides services on an as-needed basis. The Board contracts out for Title V septic system inspections, food inspections and housing inspections.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Board had an operating budget of \$205,913.

Facilities: The Board maintains a small office at the water treatment plant on Bell Road. The transfer station and recycling center is located along East Brookfield Road, south of the downtown area. This is also the site of the capped landfill.

Programs: The Board of Health's most recent initiative is serving as the host site for the Region Two Bio-Terrorism emergency medical dispensing operation for the four Brookfield communities. The Board would use the North Brookfield High School or the Elementary School as its base of operation during a bio-terrorism emergency. The regional office of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) would supply the necessary medicine and vaccines to the host site. Other programs and initiatives of the Board of Health include:

- Transfer station compliance monitoring
- Water quality testing for Lake Lashaway and Brooks Pond Beach
- Annual blood pressure, flu and pneumonia clinics
- Health regulations briefings for local restaurants
- Health inspections for restaurants, retail stores, bakeries, tanning establishments, therapy establishments (including massage), camping establishments and bathing beaches
- Semi-annual household hazardous waste disposal days (in conjunction with neighboring towns)
- Title V inspections (including performing soil percolation tests for new building lots, reviewing septic plan revisions and witnessing the installation of all on-site sewage treatment systems)
- Permits and approves all private drinking water wells
- Health code inspections for all Section 8 housing
- All housing complaints

It should be noted that the Town has an arrangement with the Spencer Savings Bank to offer low interest loans to homeowners with failed septic systems. All of the small cottages along the shorelines of Lake Lashaway and Brooks Pond are all on on-site septic systems.

Regarding Lake Lashaway, both North Brookfield and East Brookfield have a significant amount of frontage on this 274-acre waterbody. Concentrated effluent from the on-site septic systems has led to a degradation of the Lake's water quality. Town planners from both communities have recently attempted to fund a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP) at a cost of \$350,000, to be split by both communities. While North Brookfield voters approved their share of the funds for the CWMP, East Brookfield voters defeated the funding proposal. This was the third time that East Brookfield voters rejected this idea. However, the numerous small septic systems dotting Lake Lashaway's shoreline still pose a problem to the Lake's water quality and a solution still needs to be implemented.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

The Board of Health believes it needs a full-time Health Agent right now, based on its current volume of work. There has been a steady increase in the number of inspections to perform, as well as in the number of items to inspect. It is quite likely that the State's health code will continue to expand rather than contract. More items to inspect means more time needed to complete an inspection. The Board would also like to increase its office support staff to a full-time position. The transfer station will need to replace its plastic baler within the year.

Fire Department:

Organization: The Board of Selectmen appoints the Fire Chief annually. The Chief recommends all department officers to the Board of Selectmen for appointment. The Chief is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Department.

Staff: Volunteers make up the Department. There are 28 paid on-call fire fighters that serve as needed and are paid by the hour. The Department does not have any clerical support. The Department is part of the District #7 Fire/Ambulance Mutual Aid Compact, which consists of 26 Worcester County communities. The North Brookfield Rescue Squad is operated as a separate independent entity.

The Massachusetts State Police Academy in New Braintree provides dispatch services for the Department. Under a new initiative started in the summer of 2005, the fire station is fully manned (5 firefighters) for twelve weekends during the summer months. The Department plans to increase the number of weekends to sixteen during the summer of 2006, and ideally would like to slowly expand this initiative to year-round weekend coverage. According to the annual Town Reports, the Fire Department responded to 282 calls in 2005 and 202 calls in 2004.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Department had an operating budget of \$75,000, all of which came from the Town's General Fund. Grants from the federal government (Department of Homeland Security) and the State (Department of Fire Services) have funded some of the Department's recent equipment purchases.

Equipment:

- 2004 rescue boat (excellent condition)
- 2003 hovercraft (good condition)
- 2001 Humvee (excellent condition)
- 1998 cruiser (fair condition – former police cruiser)
- 1996 rescue truck (good condition)
- 1989 pumper truck with 1,500 gallons per minute pump (good condition)
- 1983 ladder truck with 1,500 gallons per minute pump (fair condition)
- 1974 tanker truck with capacity of 1,300 gallons (good condition)
- 1953 Dodge wagon (good condition)
- 1947 antique fire truck (not in service)

The Department attempts to replace a piece of equipment after 25 years of service. Large-scale equipment purchases are usually funded through Town Meeting warrant articles. The Department buys equipment outright and does not lease.

Facility:

The fire station was built in 1878 and is in poor condition. In terms of housing the Department's equipment, the station is at full capacity and has no additional room for new equipment. The Department stores the hovercraft outside and keeps its rescue boat off-site in a trailer at the elementary school. The roof is too low and leaks water. During the 1990s the Town investigated the possibility of a public safety complex that would house both the Fire and Police departments, but the plan was scrapped due to cost considerations and resistance from the departments. The Fire Department now plans to take over the adjacent Highway Barn once the Highway Department constructs a new barn on the property that currently holds its salt shed (estimated timetable: sometime within the next ten years).



The Department also has a training facility located off of East Brookfield Road. This facility was constructed in 2004 and contains a burn building, confined space and other training amenities. The facility was paid for entirely by private donations. The Department is currently working out the legal issues and protocol for allowing neighboring fire departments to use this facility.

Permits Issued:

The Department issues permits for the installation of oil burners, the removal of underground storage tanks, blasting, brush burning, as well as smoke detector certificates. The Department conducts inspections for fire alarms and sprinkler systems for businesses, industries, residences, schools, rest homes, day care facilities and medical facilities.

Programs: The Department offers fire safety programs to a variety of audiences, particularly school-age children. For these efforts, the Department makes use of the District #7 S.A.F.E. mobile education trailer.

Other Responsibilities:

The Fire Department is the first line of response for hazardous waste spills. The Department will call in the State's regional hazardous materials response team if the spill is more than it can handle. The Department also provides rescue services for auto accidents, rapid intervention teams, as well as search and rescue operations. The Department provides each fire fighter with close to 50 hours of training per member. The Department also supports a dive team.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

As mentioned previously, the current fire station is in poor condition and does not have much life left in it. The Department plans to take over the adjacent Highway Barn once the Highway Department moves to a new facility. The Fire Department has not yet prepared any cost estimates regarding renovating the Highway Barn for its use. The Department is currently working on a warrant article for the 2006 Town Meeting asking for funds to replace the 1983 ladder truck, the cost of which is currently estimated at \$880,000. By 2010, the Department would like to replace the 1990 pumper truck. The Department also plans on replacing some of its gear over the next decade, with a current cost estimate of \$35,000. As mentioned previously, the Department would eventually like to expand its fully manned weekend coverage year round at a cost of \$1,000 per weekend.

Police Department

Staff: The North Brookfield Police Department has five full-time officers (including the Chief of Police), eleven part-time officers and 10-hours a week of administrative support. The Department is currently short one full-time officer. The Board of Selectmen appoints

the Chief of Police. The entire Department is certified in First Aid and CPR. The Department also services as the Town's Animal Control Officer. There are usually two police officers on duty during the daytime, and with one officer's time often being occupied by meetings and out of town travel. The State Police Barracks in New Braintree provides dispatch service for the Department.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Department had an operating budget of \$413,800, of which \$7,200 went towards the animal control duty.

Equipment:

- 2006 cruiser (good condition)
- 2006 cruiser (good)
- 2004 cruiser (good)
- 2000 cruiser used for animal control (poor)
- 19' Starcraft rescue boat (good)

The Department tries to rotate its cruisers every two years, and the two 2006 cruisers are being leased.

Facility: The Police Station was moved out of the old Town Hall in 2002 when that building was condemned. The station currently resides in the basement of a multi-use structure located on Maple Street. There is a rental residence directly above the station, presenting a potentially dangerous situation should a firearm go off inside the station. The current location is not handicapped accessible and does not afford enough room for all of the Department's equipment and supplies, some of which are still being stored in the old Town Hall building. The station's lockup consists simply of a bench, a metal bar and a pair of handcuffs.



The Department occasionally uses the State Police Barracks in New Braintree for a lockup (no charge), or the lockup facility at the Spencer Police Station (the Department is charged for this). The Department has hired a consultant to prepare a space needs feasibility study for a new police station, which should be completed by the end of 2006. As of this date, no future location has been decided on and no cost estimates prepared. The Department also maintains a kennel at the Sewer Department property off East Brookfield Road as part of its animal control operation. The kennel is in poor shape, having limited space, heating problems in the winter, and water needs to be brought in during the winter because the water pump often freezes.

Programs:

- CPR class
- Internet safety class for school-age children
- Boating safety class during the summer months
- The Animal Control Officers works with the Wickaboag Valley Veterinary Center to place pets not claimed after pickup.

Trends and Comparisons:

According to the 2004 Annual Town Report, the New Braintree dispatch center logged a total of 4,807 service calls for North Brookfield during 2004, a modest increase from the previous year. The Department made 204 arrests in 2004, a sizeable increase from the 160 arrests made in 2003. The Massachusetts State Police keeps crime statistics that allow for comparisons with other communities. The table below takes a look at North Brookfield's crime statistics for the year 2003 as matched against its neighbors. Please note that the State Police count of total crimes represent the number of actual convictions and not simply the number of arrests.

Table TG-6
Community Crime Rate per 1,000 Residents - Year 2003

<u>Community</u>	<u>Total of Crimes</u>	<u>Rate per 1,000 Residents</u>
North Brookfield	73	15.6
East Brookfield	33	15.7
Spencer	211	18.4
West Brookfield	63	16.6

Source: Massachusetts State Police Uniform Crime Report for 2003 (the last available full year). Please note that the Towns of Brookfield, New Braintree and Oakham did not provide its local crime statistics to the State in 2003.

Issues Facing the Department:

In addition to the inadequate police facility, the Department does not have any way to track calls made directly to the police station or the number of citizens that drop by to lodge a concern.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

- The Department will need to construct a new police station within the next five years.
- The Department would like to add a full-time detective to its staff within the next decade, as well as a school resource/community police officer. Other staff additions may be needed during the next ten years as the town's population continues to grow.
- As mentioned above, the Department's practice is to rotate its cruisers every two years, meaning that this practice will occur five times during the course of the next ten years.
- The animal control shelter is in dire need of replacement and enlargement. The Animal Control Officer would also like to purchase a van that could hold a cage inside, as the current cruiser does not allow for this.

North Brookfield Emergency Management Agency:

Organization: The North Brookfield Emergency Management Agency (NBEMA) currently consists of eight members. The Board of Selectmen appoints the NBEMA Director to one-year terms.

Staff: NBEMA does not have any paid staff; rather, the appointed members handle all tasks.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, NBSEMA had an operating budget of \$1,000.

Equipment: Located in an office at the condemned Old Town Hall, NBEMA maintains an emergency operations center that consists of the following equipment: a radio dispatch system, three high-band radios, two tabletop computers, one laptop computer, one projector and two desks. NBEMA does not have a mobile command center, nor does it have any vehicles for its use. NBEMA coordinates its activities with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency through its regional office in Belchertown.

Duties: NBEMA is responsible for handling the response logistics for large-scale emergencies such as natural disasters and civil emergencies.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

NBEMA would like to purchase a vehicle for use as a mobile command center, a trailer for equipment storage and shelter supplies (cots, blankets, etc.). The NBEMA Director understands that the Town needs to substantially upgrade its emergency management capability. Towards this end, the Director will be approaching the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee to ask for their approval to bring a warrant article to the spring 2006 Town Meeting, asking North Brookfield voters to approve the appropriation of \$26,000 to cover the cost of the items listed above.

Land Use Boards:

North Brookfield has four entities that review, approve and monitor new development: the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission and the Building Inspector/Zoning Enforcement Officer. All of the entities keep their applications and forms on file with the Town Clerk's office. A general description of each entity and their major duties is presented below.

Planning Board:

The Board currently consists of five members that are elected to five-year terms and two alternates that the Board of Selectmen appoints. The Board has a part-time clerk who is paid for five hours a week but often puts in considerably more time when called upon. For the 2006 Fiscal Year the Board had a budget of \$1,544, with none of the funding earmarked for training or professional development. The Board reviews and endorses Approval Not Required (ANR) plans, which constitute the majority of newly created lots in North Brookfield. The Board also reviews and approves subdivision plans and site plan review applications. Although the Board has not yet had to handle multiple subdivision applications at once, the regional growth pressure is such that the Board will need to simultaneously manage multiple cases in the very near future. The Board's application, review and approval procedures are being reviewed and updated to anticipate increases in subdivision growth. The Board has recommended and is pursuing retaining the services of a professional engineering firm to review subdivision plan details. At present the Board does not have a revolving fund and all fees collected are placed in the Town's general fund. The Board is working with the Town accountant to establish such a fund. Early in 2006 the Board compared its expenses against the fees collected in 2005 and determined that the current fee structure does not cover its operating costs. Fees were compared to those charged by surrounding Towns and were adjusted twice in 2006. Fees will be reviewed on an annual basis for budgeting purposes and adjusted accordingly.

Zoning Board of Appeals:

The Board consists of three members and three alternates. The Board of Selectmen appoints the Zoning Board members to three-year terms. The Board has a part-time secretary to help with its paperwork. The Board has a minimal budget and has not recently utilized any of its funding for training classes. The Board meets on an as-needed basis. Its primary duties include hearing petitions for variances to the Zoning Bylaw (both use and dimensional variances), non-conforming uses, special use permits and appeals of Planning Board and Building Inspector/Zoning Enforcement Officer decisions.

Conservation Commission:

The Commission consists of six members that are appointed by the Board of Selectmen to three-year terms. The Commission has part-time clerical support. For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Commission had an operating budget of roughly \$2,327, with a portion of the

budget used to pay for training classes. The Commission's primary duty is administration of the State's wetland protection and rivers protection acts. The Commission does not have any professional staff and Commission members conduct their own inspections, essentially serving the role as town conservation agent. The Commission is having trouble keeping up with its administrative requirements and would like to have its own conservation agent, if only part-time at first. Having Commission members serve double-duty as conservation agents could potentially create a conflict for the members, as they are being asked to gather data for decisions, render decisions on behalf of property owners and enforce their decisions.

Building Inspector/Zoning Enforcement Officer: The Board of Selectmen annually appoints this position, which is budgeted for ten hours a week. The Officer issues building permits, certificates of occupancy and certificates of inspection. The Officer is also charged with enforcing the State Building Code and the provisions of North Brookfield's Zoning Bylaw. The Officer does not have any secretarial support. The Officer's limited hours has resulted in a situation where he does not have enough time available to search for code violations and can only deal with those brought to his attention. Furthermore, there are sections of the Massachusetts Building Code that are not being enforced due to time constraints. As an example, the State Building Code mandates that all multi-family units be inspected for code violations every five years and this is not being done in North Brookfield.

Town Beach Committee

Organization: The Committee consists of three members that the Board of Selectmen appoints annually. The Committee coordinates their activities with the East Brookfield Town Beach Committee, as both committees have joint jurisdiction over the beach at Lake Lashaway.

Staff: The Committee hires part-time lifeguards that work from noon until 5 PM during the summer season (essentially the last week of June through Labor Day). In the past, the Committee has made use of people serving court-ordered community service for maintenance projects at the beach.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Committee had an operating budget of \$6,000. The budget was used to pay the lifeguards for the summer beach program, as well as supplies, beach sand and equipment maintenance.

Equipment and Facilities:

The Committee has two docks that are put in/taken out every year; two lawnmowers and other assorted lawn care equipment. In terms of facilities, there is a storage shed where the equipment is stored. The Committee rents port-a-potties for the summer months. There is a gently sloping ramp that provides access for handicapped persons.

Programs:

The Committee offers swimming lessons during the summer: two weeks for North Brookfield residents and two weeks for East Brookfield residents.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

No major equipment or facility needs were identified. The Committee would like to expand the beach's lifeguard coverage for a few additional weeks during the summer, especially early June. The Committee will likely need to replace one or both of the docks over the course of the next decade. Eventually, the Committee would like to install a drinking water fountain. There are no fees charged for the use of the Town beach.

Haston Free Public Library:

Organization: The Library is a department of Town Government and is administered by an elected seven-person Board of Library Trustees that serve three-year terms. The Board's authority is derived from Chapter 78, Section 10 and 11 of the Massachusetts General Laws. The Trustees meet monthly. The Trustees have delegated the responsibility for the library personnel management, collection development and provision of library services to the Library Director. The Director is appointed and directly responsible to the Board of Trustees, and is an employee of the Town. The Library is open thirty hours a week: from 1PM to 8PM Mondays and Wednesdays, 10AM to 6PM on Tuesdays, 1PM to 6PM on Thursdays and 9AM to 12AM on Saturdays.

Staff: The Library staff consists of five part-time employees: The Library Director works 30 hours a week, a children's librarian works 26 hours a week, a technical service/assistant librarian works 15 hours a week, a custodian puts in 10 hours a week, and a library assistant puts in four hours a week. The Library makes great use of volunteers from the community with volunteers contributing over 800 hours of time to the Library last year.

Budget: The Library's funding derives principally from municipal appropriations at annual Town Meetings. For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Library has an operating budget of \$88,997.00. Municipal Appropriation consists of \$81,696.00. The State Library Incentive Grant (LIG) and the State Municipal Equalization Grant (MEG) monies make up \$7,300.00 of the FY2006 operating budget.

The Library holds several small trust funds that when combined total the principal amount of \$17,091. Only the interest is expendable and is controlled by the Board of Trustees. The Library also holds a gift fund that is deposited with the Town. The Trustees control the expenditures.

Facility: The Library building was built in 1894 and there have been no major renovations since this time. The facility currently consists of approximately 8,000 gross square feet with approximately 3,160 square feet usable for library services. The building is not fully handicapped accessible and is unheated on the third floor.



The Library has been pursuing an ambitious addition/renovation plan for the past ten years. In 1998 a long-range plan was written for the library. In 1999 a \$20,000 matching State Planning and Design Grant was applied for and awarded. In 2000 a feasibility study was completed and design schematics were prepared. In 2001 the Town voted to approve the proposed project and to apply for the Massachusetts Board of Library

Commissioners Public Library Construction Grant. The grant was approved and the library was placed on the waiting list for available state funding. The Library spent three years on the State grant waiting list until the grant money became available pending local funding in late 2004. The Town voted to approve funding for the Town's share of the Building Project at a Special Town Meeting and a Town Election in March 2005. The initial addition/renovation project was estimated at \$2,801,191. The State grant will cover \$1,257,173 of the total project cost while the Town will make up the remainder (\$1,544,018.). The Town is using a Proposition 2 ½ debt exclusion to pay for its share of the project cost.

The project has a current estimated cost overrun of approximately \$750,000. The fundraising arm of the Library, the Friends of the Hoston Free Public Library, Inc., have been very active running a Capital Campaign and associated fundraising activities. They have thus far raised roughly \$300,000 to help cover the cost overruns. The funds raised will be used to offset the Town's share of the project. Individuals, local merchants and businesses have been very generous with contributions. The fundraising will continue throughout the construction of the project and beyond. The Library asked for additional local funds at a Special Town meeting held in April 2006, and the voters approved the request.

The project will include complete renovation of the existing building, extension of the third floor and a new three-story addition. The addition will accommodate a new entrance to the building that will comply with the building standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), an elevator and interior stairway and ADA compliant rest rooms. It will also house expanded collection areas for adult fiction and non-fiction as well as a children's story/craft room and restroom. The lower level will be renovated to include a local history and special collection area, a reference area and a community meeting room. The building will be made to be accessible to all, meeting ADA codes throughout and will upgrade the electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems to code.

Circulation: The Library has an ever-increasing circulation of roughly 20,000 items. The Children's collection holds 5,766 items and the Adult/Young Adult Collection contains 14,597 items. The collection is made up of books, volumes of print periodicals and newspapers, audio books, videocassettes and discs and microfilm. The library is a circulating member of the Central-Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing service (C-W MARS), which provides an on-line catalog for all public and academic libraries in the Central and Western regions of Massachusetts. This shared on-line catalog allows patrons access to a combined collection of over 6 million items from participating libraries. Patrons can order items from home or through the library staff. Last year the library staff processed over 4,000 inter-library loan requests. There are four computers available to the public, one is a word processor and one is for Internet use.

Programs: The Library offered over 100 different programs in FY 2005, with 86 programs geared towards school-age children. The library hosts a six-week summer reading program that includes story-times, craft activities, movies and storytellers. The library hosts weekly pre-school story hours, a monthly book discussion group, occasional art classes, occasional performers, an annual book and bake sale, holiday gathering and harvest dinner. The Library provides a home delivery service for homebound citizens. The Library often receives grants from the North Brookfield Cultural Council to cover the cost of performers and the art classes. The "Friends of the Haston Free Public Library" group holds fund raising events on a regular basis.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

The library expects its maintenance costs to rise over the next decade. Additional staff may be needed, especially if key volunteers leave. The library currently has two volunteers that are essentially part of the staff. The library has to replace its computers on a regular basis. The library wants to add a few more computers once the addition/renovation project is completed. The library would also like to expand its program offerings. It is likely that additional programming will be made possible through grant funding.

Council on Aging:

Organization: The Council on Aging (COA) consists of nine members and two alternates. Each member is appointed by the Board of Selectmen and serves a three-year term.

Staff: The COA has three part-time employees. The Director works 25 hours a week, an outreach coordinator works 19 1/2 hours a week and a janitor works five hours a week. The COA makes great use of volunteers, with 60 volunteers contributing roughly 3,000 hours of service last year. The COA does not have any clerical staff.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the COA had an operating budget of \$51,710. The COA also received \$4,300 in a Formula Grant from the State, and these funds are used for equipment, supplies and mailing costs. The COA also gratefully receives donations from the general public.

Facility: The COA bought the existing Senior Center in 2002 from the Knights of Columbus. The facility is an old grocery store built in the 1950s. In 2001 the Town utilized a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to purchase and renovate the facility for use as a Senior Center. The facility contains roughly 4,500 square feet of floor space and is handicapped accessible. The facility has a large paved parking area that currently holds some mobile trailers used for Town offices due to the closing of the old Town Hall.

Programs: The COA offers Outreach, Transportation, Health, Education and Recreation programs. These programs include home visits and phone checks for seniors living on their own; transportation services to area doctor offices; a nutrition program; health clinics; an exercise program; an annual tax help seminar; assistance with Federal Program forms; and meals at the Senior Center three times a week. Program information is communicated in a monthly newsletter and over the local cable access channel. The COA is currently working on setting up a webpage. Volunteers use their own vehicles and receive a stipend from the COA to cover gas and maintenance when providing transportation services.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

Ongoing problems with leaks in the flat roof of the Senior Center will cause the need for major repairs or replacement of the roof within the next 5 years if scheduled maintenance is not performed. The COA is in the process of preparing a cost estimate for this expense. When the trailers housing some municipal offices are moved off-site, the COA wants to use a portion some of the vacant space to create a garden and outdoor recreation area. The COA is in need of a vehicle to expand transportation services to meet the needs of the increasing senior population.

Public School System:

Organization: North Brookfield has its own school system and is not part of a regional school district. This is a rare arrangement, as 36 of the 40 CMRPC communities participate in a regional school district to one degree or another. There is a five-person School Committee that sets school policies and oversees the School Department's operations. The School Committee is elected and each member serves a three-year term.

Budget: For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the School Department had an overall operating budget of \$6,222,486. This figure includes \$4,395,946 in State education aid (Chapter 70) and \$350,000 in additional State grants. It should be noted that the "Half Full Club", and an active PTA regularly donate time, money and talent for special projects.

The table on the following page presents North Brookfield's per pupil expenditure figure in comparison with North Brookfield's neighbors.

Table TG-7
Per Pupil Expenditures Year 2005

North		East	New			West
<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>	<u>Braintree</u>	<u>Oakham</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Brookfield</u>
\$8,015	\$8,233	\$7,832	\$7,559	\$7,559	\$7,832	\$7,306

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education – 2005 is the latest year for available data.

For the previous table, please note that East Brookfield and Spencer form a joint school district, Brookfield is part of the Tantasqua Regional School District, New Braintree and Oakham are part of the Quabin regional school district, and West Brookfield is part of the Quaboag regional school district.

Facilities: The North Brookfield School System currently consists of two schools: an Elementary School and a Junior-Senior High School, both located on School Drive, just off Oakham Road (Route 148) north of the downtown area. A brief description of the two school buildings is presented below.

Junior-Senior High School

Built: 2004, no additions
Size: 83,000 square feet
Capacity: 400 students
Facility is fully compliant w/Americans disabilities Act (ADA)
Students: 360, grades 7-12
Facilities: 31 classrooms, library, cafeteria gym & cafeteria

Elementary School

Built: 1972, no additions
Size: 83,000 square feet
Capacity: 500 students
Facility is not fully ADA compliant
Students: 425, grades K-6
Facilities: 31 classrooms, gym, auditorium, library, cafeteria



The Department does not have any current plans for new buildings or additions to its two existing buildings; however, there are plans to use a couple of empty classrooms at the Elementary School to add a pre-school program. It should also be noted that the Department allows community groups to use its facilities on a regular basis.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

As the Junior-Senior High School is a fairly new building, there were no upcoming capital needs identified for this facility. However, the Elementary School is over 30 years old and numerous capital improvements have been identified for the next ten years:

- The Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources completed an energy audit for the Elementary School in December of 2005. It has identified several options for replacing the existing boiler plant, with the most likely option being a commercial grade boiler having a current cost estimate of between \$65,000 and \$72,000. The Department will soon file a grant with the Division of Energy Resources that could cover up to 70% of the cost of replacing the boiler plant.
- Other identified capital improvements include a new roof, air conditioner replacements and HVAC upgrades, numerous window replacements, fire safety upgrades (currently estimated at \$25,000), ADA compliance upgrades (bathrooms and door handles), computers and associated electrical work, and some re-carpeting.

North Brookfield Housing Authority:

Organization: The North Brookfield Housing Authority's Board of Directors is composed of four elected members and one State appointee, with members serving five-year terms. The Authority's Director is responsible for the day-to-day management of the facilities.

Staff: The Housing Authority Director is a part-time position (25 hours a week). There is a full-time maintenance manager and a part-time maintenance assistant (10 hours a week). The Director handles all of the Authority's administrative paperwork.

Budget: The Town does not provide any funding to the Housing Authority; rather, the Authority obtains its revenue primarily from rents and the State makes up the remainder. The Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) pays for large-scale capital equipment through a "Condition Assessment Report

Facilities: The North Brookfield Housing Authority manages two facilities:

- Herard Lane Estates – Located off North Main Street, this elderly housing facility was built in 1978 (DHCD Project #667-1). The development consists of nine buildings containing 64 elderly/handicapped units, six of which are handicapped accessible. Each unit contains its own kitchen and bath facilities.

The facility also contains a community center with laundry facilities, plus an office for the Housing Authority Director. There is a tenants group that runs activities for the seniors on site. The facility participates in the Tri-Valley Social Service Agency's Meals-on-Wheels program, as well as the Worcester Regional Transit Authority's Elder-Bus transportation program.

- Grove Street School Apartments – Located off Grove Street, this single building facility served as the Town's former High School until it was rehabilitated for use as apartments in 1988 (DHCD Chapter 705). This facility is for low-income families and contains 14 two and three-bedroom units, one of which is designed for handicapped persons.

Waiting List: A waiting list is not uncommon for local housing authorities. North Brookfield's Housing Authority currently has a waiting list of roughly 30 households at present, and over 125 families on the family list. The non-local elderly list varies depending upon residency.

Other Group Housing Facilities: Hillside Meadows on Ward Street – This privately owned and operated facility contains 24 units of low-income family housing.

Voucher Program: The Housing Authority has one voucher for off-site housing made available from DHCD. The Housing Authority hosts one certificate from the Spencer Housing Authority's Alternative Housing Program.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

The Housing Authority has identified the following improvement projects for Herard Lane: a new roof within the next five years, upgrading some of the unit's kitchen facilities, replacing doors and railings, new boilers for the heating system and new outside wall along the rear of building #9. For the Grove Street School Apartments, the Housing Authority would like to re-point the brick facade. The Housing Authority hopes to pay for the above items through DHCD Capital Planning Grants and operating reserves.

Other Governmental Entities in North Brookfield:

Board of Selectmen and Administrative Assistant, Finance Committee, Town Clerk, Town Collector, Board of Assessors, Town Moderator, Town Accountant, Town Treasurer, Historical Commission, Cemetery Commission, Cultural Council, Veteran's Agent, Youth Council, Playground Committee, Board of Registrars, Bell Ringer, Caretaker of Town Clock, Fence Viewer, Insurance Commissioner, Historian, Tree Warden, Harbormaster, Lumber surveyors, Parking Fines Clerk, Plans & Blueprints Keeper, Public Weigher, Town Forest Committee, Town History Committee, Technology Committee, Safety Committee and Local Public Access Committee.

TOWN GOVERNMENT ISSUES IN NORTH BROOKFIELD

North Brookfield's town government has a number of issues to grapple with over the next decade, ranging from departmental needs (facilities, equipment and staff), to organizational needs (coordination and communication). Better and stronger management will be needed in order to adequately address the shortcomings identified in this chapter. The issues identified are:

- Increasing legal and regulatory demand exceeds the capability of the Selectmen to manage all departments without management assistance.
- Overall lack of management at the top administrative level (Board of Selectmen).
- Lack of communication and coordination between municipal departments.
- Each department is autonomous, with little consideration given to consolidating services or sharing staff/equipment/facilities.
- Some departments expressed staffing needs (Sewer and Highway departments).
- No long-range capital improvement plan for facilities and equipment.
- Over-reliance on dedicated volunteers and longtime public officials whose local knowledge will be hard to replace.
- Multiple municipal facilities that need improvement or replacement.
- Limited enforcement capabilities (no health inspector, limited code enforcement hours, etc.).
- Limited development review capabilities (Planning Board not utilizing the services of a professional engineering firm for review of development projects, etc.).
- Over-reliance on residential property taxes to fund Town government.
- Sewer Department's serious inflow/infiltration problems have the potential to hinder future economic development.
- High priority planning is needed to establish water and sewer service area boundaries (i.e., making a conscious choice as to what areas of town to keep rural and what areas to allow denser development).

OTHER MAJOR ISSUES FACING NORTH BROOKFIELD

- 1. Long Range Capital Planning:** North Brookfield has a long list of capital needs to address during the next decade. One facility need not mentioned previously is the old Town Hall building on North Main Street. This facility is very old and in such poor shape that it had to be condemned in late 2004. The various municipal offices once located in the old Town Hall

have been relocated elsewhere throughout town. In 2005 the Town applied for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to rehabilitate the Town Hall, but the application was not successful. The Table below represents a brief description of the Town's upcoming capital (both facilities and equipment) and staffing needs:

Table TG-8
Upcoming Capital Facility, Infrastructure, Equipment and Staffing needs

Department	Facility & Infrastructure Needs	Equipment Requests	Staff Requests
Highway Department	Construct new highway barn, bring stormwater pipes out of yards and into main roads, update drainage systems along several roadways, and catch basin repair & maintenance.	Replace the 1970 and 1981 sanders and 1990 dump-truck with three new combination sander/dump-trucks, replace the 1995 front-end loader, replace the 1976 pickup truck, & replace the 1972 sidewalk plow	None identified but additional staff may be needed to address the department's infrastructure improvement plans
Police Department	Construct a new police station and replace animal shelter facility	Rotate cruisers every two years, purchase animal control van	Add a full-time detective, and add a school resource/ community officer
Water Department	Repair dam at Horse Pond, construct a garage at the treatment plant, install a sprinkler system at pump station, additional funding for infrastructure replace & repair	Replace the 2000 F-350 pickup truck	
Sewer Department	Pipe replacement project for the west side of town, and address lateral connections.		Add new staff person
Fire Department	Construct a new fire station or renovate the Highway Barn for use as a fire station	Replace the 1983 ladder truck, replace the 1990 pumper truck, replace fire-fighter gear	Expand fully manned weekend coverage to year-round coverage
Emergency Management		Purchase mobile command vehicle, equipment trailer & shelter supplies	
Board of Health			Hire a full-time Health Agent
Council on Aging	Repair senior center roof, renovate outdoor space	Purchase new van	
Town Gov.	Rehabilitate old Town Hall		
Development Services			Hire agent for the Conservation Commission, retain engineering services for Planning Board

North Brookfield does not currently have a long-range capital improvement plan (CIP) in place at this time. A CIP is an on-going capital expenditure plan that identifies upcoming capital needs, schedules their purchase, and outlines how they will be purchased. Such plans usually look six-to-ten years down the road in terms of identifying capital needs. A capital need is a tangible item (equipment, building, etc.) that is above and beyond a municipal department's regular operating budget. A capital improvement plan (CIP) is composed of two parts: the first part is a capital budget for the upcoming year's spending plan for capital items (tangible assets that cost at least \$10,000 and have a useful life of at least five years), and the second part is a capital program for capital expenditures that extends five years beyond the capital budget.

If prepared properly, a CIP can have the following benefits:

- It will facilitate the coordination between capital needs and departmental operating budgets.
- It will enhance the community's credit rating, control its tax rate, and avoid sudden fluctuations in its debt service requirements.
- It will identify the most economical means of financing capital projects.
- It will increase opportunities for obtaining federal and state aid.
- It will focus attention on community objectives and the Town's fiscal capacity.
- It will keep the public informed about future community needs and projects.
- It will coordinate the activities of municipal departments so as to reduce duplication of services.

There are generally ten steps involved with implementing a CIP.

STEP ONE: ADOPT A CIP BYLAW AND APPOINT A CIP COMMITTEE - North Brookfield voters would approve the CIP Bylaw at a Town Meeting. The Selectmen could appoint a stand-alone CIP Committee to oversee the plan's formation, or simply charge the Finance Committee with the bylaw's implementation if the Selectmen believe this committee is up to the task.

STEP TWO: PREPARE AN INVENTORY OF EXISTING FACILITIES – This will involve preparing an inventory of all town-owned properties and assets, including all buildings and equipment. The inventory should include documentation on the need for renewal, replacement, expansion or retirement of all physical assets. The inventory should also include information on the year each facility was built or acquired, the date of last improvement, its current condition, and scheduled date for rebuilding, replacement or expansion. Often, the Town's insurance carrier has a list of insured assets that can serve as the basis for this inventory.

STEP THREE: DETERMINE THE STATUS OF PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PROJECTS – The next step is to identify projects that are underway or about to get started and determine whether additional funds are needed and the amount of unspent funds available from completed or discontinued projects.

STEP FOUR: ASSESS THE TOWN'S FINANCIAL CAPACITY – With the assistance of the Town Accountant, Treasurer, and Board of Selectmen, the CIP Committee should analyze the Town's ability to afford major expenditures. This analysis should examine recent and anticipated trends in revenues, expenditures, debt and unfunded liabilities such as pension costs.

STEP FIVE: SOLICIT, COMPILE AND EVALUATE PROJECT REQUESTS – The CIP Committee should solicit departmental recommendations for eligible projects. Each department would submit its request that would include a clear statement of need for identified projects, the project costs, their net effect on the department's operating budget, and an implementation schedule.

STEP SIX: ESTABLISH A PRIORITY LISTING OF CAPITAL PROJECTS – This step has the CIP Committee rank the priority of each proposed capital project. This is often the most difficult aspect of a CIP effort. Many communities make use of numerical scoring sheets. Whether or not a scoring sheet is used, the CIP Committee should review each project utilizing a consistent set of criteria and evaluate each project in relation to other proposed projects to determine their relative importance.

STEP SEVEN: DEVELOP A CIP FINANCING PLAN – Based on the adopted debt and CIP policies (prepared as part of Step One) and the assessment of the Town’s financial capacity (Step Four), the Committee should recommend the method of financing for each project. Such financing can be through long-term methods (bonds, grants and loans, setting money aside in a stabilization fund, debt exclusion, etc.) or short-term methods (appropriation of current revenue, capital outlay expenditure approvals, bond anticipation notes, etc.).

STEP EIGHT: ADOPT A CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM – The CIP Committee’s complete report should be presented to the Board of Selectmen annually for review and adoption. The report should include a summary of the CIP Committee’s recommendations for the upcoming year’s capital budget and the following years’ Capital Program, as well as its analysis of the Town fiscal capacity.

STEP NINE: MONITOR APPROVED PROJECTS – The CIP Committee should monitor the efforts of all departments to put in place the capital projects approved in the CIP and periodically report back to the Board of Selectmen. The monitoring reports should include changes in the targeted completion dates, identify serious problems, and document the financial status of each project.

STEP TEN: UPDATE CAPITAL PROGRAM – Every year, the CIP Committee repeats Steps #2 through #9 and revise the CIP as necessary. After the first year has been budgeted, one year is added to the Capital Program and the remainder of the plan is updated.

- 2. Municipal Staffing Needs:** Regarding the Town’s future staffing needs as outlined in Table TG-8, most of the staffing needs identified for the next ten years involve expanding the hours of existing staff (Building Inspector) or hiring of part-time staff for administrative support. The Town might consider one central full-time clerk position that would serve the needs of the Planning Board, Zoning Board and Conservation Commission. North Brookfield could also work with neighboring communities to share staff, such as the current arrangement with the Building Inspector position (the Inspector works for both North Brookfield and East Brookfield). Several of North Brookfield’s neighbors have expressed an interest in sharing the position of a Conservation Agent.
- 3. Over-Reliance on Residential Property Taxes:** As documented previously, the residential portion of the Town’s tax base has increased over the years while the commercial and industrial portions of the tax base have declined. This situation has intensified the burden of North Brookfield’s property and homeowners to pay for the Town’s municipal needs through ever-increasing property taxes. This trend will continue to worsen unless the Town creates more opportunities for economic development and undertakes efforts to retain those businesses and industries currently located in North Brookfield. These issues will be examined in more detail in the Economic Development chapter of this document.

4. **Uncontrolled Development/Outdated and Contradictory Zoning:** As part of the preparation of this document, the Master Plan Committee has identified serious flaws and deficiencies in the Town's Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Regulations. Both documents are quite old, out of date and in serious need of updating. The Zoning Bylaw in particular offers minimal design criteria and little flexibility. The Subdivision Regulations suffer from the same flaws found in the Zoning Bylaw as well as poorly written procedural provisions. The net result of the Town's minimalist regulatory structure has been that the Town has little to no control over how land gets developed in North Brookfield.



In an effort to address the issues facing North Brookfield's municipal government as identified in this chapter, the Master Plan Committee puts forth the following Town Government Goals and Objectives:

TOWN GOVERNMENT - GOAL

North Brookfield's town government must be professionally managed, emphasize customer service, provide a coordinated delivery of municipal services, be fiscally responsible, accessible to all citizens, foster citizen participation, and be proactive instead of reactive.

TOWN GOVERNMENT – OBJECTIVES

- The Town must commit itself to following through on the recommendations contained here in and strive to maintain the Master Plan as a living document.

- Municipal departments must develop annual work plans based on the needs identified in the Master Plan and establish measurable goals and objectives.
- The Town must have a long-range Capital Improvement Plan for its municipal facilities and capital equipment.
- Municipal departments must all use a single standard format for preparing their annual operating budgets, with the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee serving to coordinate and prioritize departmental budget requests within the constraints of Proposition 2 ½.
- The Town must investigate its options for professional management, whether it is through the form of a Town Administrator, Town Services Coordinator or a Town Manager.
- Increase inter-department communication and coordination by holding monthly staff meetings under the leadership of the Board of Selectmen.
- Improve public safety by enhancing the Town's inspection and enforcement capacities.
- Increase the Town's grant writing capacity and its ability to qualify for state and federal funding opportunities.
- Document community resources for the benefit of future municipal officials.

TOWN GOVERNMENT - RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Capital Improvement Plan: The Town must establish a long-range capital planning committee and charge them with the responsibility of preparing a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP should be a rolling five-year plan that identifies and prioritizes the Town's capital needs, and recommends how such needs should be paid for. As noted previously, many of North Brookfield's municipal departments have substantial capital needs coming up in the next decade. There are also a number of needed facility improvements/replacements that require immediate attention. North Brookfield must plan for its capital needs in a comprehensive manner with an eye towards the long-term, rather than the current piece-by-piece, year-to-year method of evaluating capital requests.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee.
2. Infrastructure Expansion Policy and Definitive Service Area: The presence of infrastructure such as municipal water and sewer often dictates where development takes place in a community and how intensive that development is. Water and sewer service that continues to radiate from the center of town, with no well-defined limits to the service areas, results in an inefficient land use pattern and an infrastructure system that is expensive to maintain, let alone upgrade. The current practice of extending municipal water and sewer ever further down the road as long as a developer/builder is willing to pay for them will eventually result in landowners pushing to increase the densities of these areas and reduce the minimum required lot size. Smart progressive municipalities use their infrastructure systems to encourage growth in those areas where it's suitable and discourage growth in rural areas or where

high-density development is not suitable. North Brookfield's Water and Sewer Departments are encouraged to work with the Planning Board and Conservation Commission to clearly delineate definitive service areas with the understanding that water and sewer lines will not be extended beyond the delineated service areas. North Brookfield needs to start using its infrastructure to direct growth where it wants it to happen instead of extending the water service areas based on the ability of a landowner/developer to pay for service extensions. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Planning Board, Conservation in conjunction with Water and Sewer Departments.

3. Develop the Town's Grant Writing Capacity: North Brookfield is eligible for a wide variety of Federal and State grant programs, however, applying for them can be a time consuming endeavor that requires a great deal of research and narrative writing. Many town departments would like to apply for grants but simply do not have the manpower or time to adequately deal with the application process. With numerous capital expenditures identified for the near future, it is imperative for the Town to cultivate its grant writing capacity so that it may access the significant amount of money being made available through Federal and State grants. The Town's grant writing capacity could be enhanced through contracting with a professional grant writer on an as-needed basis. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen.

4. Establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee: Town must establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee whose job it is to make sure the Plan's recommendations are implemented. North Brookfield's current Master Plan Committee will request implementation of the Chapters of the Plan, as they are finalized rather than waiting for the completed Master Plan. This will allow a bridge between the Committees that will make the implementation process more effective. The major advantages of this approach are that the data and recommendations in the Chapters will be current and the implementation process will be less overwhelming to the public and the Municipal entities. The Board of Selectmen appoint the Master Plan Implementation Committee members in consideration of the Master Plan Committee's Implementation Plan recommendations. The Implementation Committee meets with the Town's Municipal entities that have Master Plan implementation responsibilities for the various Chapters and work with them to keep the Plan on track. It is suggested that the Committee brief the Board of Selectmen on the Plan's progress, on a quarterly basis. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen in consultation with the Master Plan Committee.

5. Completely Overhaul the Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Regulations: North Brookfield's Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Regulations are in serious need of updating. Both documents offer minimal design criteria and little flexibility. These two documents serve as the Town's policy guide for the utilization of its land resources, and yet they offer very few land development options and minimal direction for people seeking to build in North Brookfield. The Town must update these two documents concurrently so that they work together and do not conflict with each other. North Brookfield needs a Zoning Bylaw and Subdivision Regulations that are clear, straightforward and legally compliant. Once in place, the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals should receive training on development review procedures and their administrative responsibilities. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Planning Board with input from the Zoning Board of Appeals and Building Inspector.

6. Improve Coordination Between Municipal Departments: North Brookfield's Board of Selectmen should arrange a meeting of all municipal department heads to be held on a quarterly basis. Such meetings will help the various departments coordinate their activities, reduce duplicative efforts, and promote a team-oriented approach to town government that does not currently exist today. Such meetings will be especially important during the annual budgeting process, and it is suggested that the Board of Selectmen involve the Finance Committee during the quarterly meeting where municipal department operating budgets are discussed. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen.

7. Promote Two-Way Communication Between Citizens and Town Government: North Brookfield must better utilize a variety of tools to promote two-way communication between citizens and town government. This initiative must involve all municipal departments in an effort to share important information with citizens such as: upcoming meetings and hearings; Town Meeting information including budget proposals and warrant articles; departmental hours of operation, staff and contact information; availability of municipal facilities for public use; tax and property information; bylaws and regulations; application forms; ongoing municipal initiatives; community events and opportunities for citizen participation (volunteer opportunities, board vacancies, etc.). The major components of this effort are the Town's website and cable channel. Educating the public on the value and use of these tools could greatly improve the perception of the citizens that they don't know what is going on. All possible existing means of communicating information to citizens should be identified and reviewed for their effectiveness. Ineffective means must be eliminated. Neglected or underutilized means must be fully utilized. As part of this effort, the Town needs to create opportunities for citizens to provide feedback to municipal officials by occasionally polling them on their preferences and opinions. This attempt to create two-way communication between citizens and their town government must include a variety of tools other than the website and cable channel. Examples are periodic newsletters, voluntary e-mail notification, announcements at public meetings and events, signage in prominent public places, an annual Town Meeting mailer, opinion surveys (both paper and digital), open houses, public forums and other opportunities for two-way communication not yet considered. The Town must commit the necessary funding to accomplish this recommendation. Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen in conjunction with all of North Brookfield's municipal departments and boards/commissions/ committees.

8. Investigate the Need for a Town Administrator: As the volume of municipal business increases in complexity, the Town must investigate its need for professional management. Options for professional management include the establishment of either a town administrator, a town services coordinator or a town manager. The first two options still vest the Board of Selectmen with ultimate management authority, while a town manager position would vest management authority with the new manager and have the Board of Selectmen serve more as policy makers. Establishing a town manager form of government requires a change to the Town's Charter, whereas the first two options do not.

The current volume of municipal business is becoming more than the Board of Selectmen can handle on its own. While Selectmen do receive a modest amount of compensation for their efforts, service on the Board is primarily voluntary and the majority of Selectmen past and present have full-time day jobs. Records of the Massachusetts Municipal Association indicate that two thirds of the Massachusetts communities with populations ranging from 2,000 to 6,000 citizens have some manner of professional administrative assistance. As North Brookfield's population continues to grow, and with it the volume of government business, the Town must investigate its options for professional municipal management. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen.

9. Specific Departmental Objectives: The analysis of Municipal Departments and Services along with the data from the Community Survey, provide information, which will be used to formulate specific departmental and interdepartmental objectives. These objectives will be developed in coordination with the implementation of this chapter and will be added as an addendum upon completion. Responsible Municipal Entities: Board of Selectmen, the Master Plan Municipal Services Implementation Team, and all of North Brookfield's municipal departments/boards/commissions and committees.