

# COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF TOWN OPERATIONS



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## 2019 UPDATE

Every Spring, the Town staff updates the Comprehensive Review of Town Operations (CRTO) as part of the Selectboard's annual goal setting process. Each annual update includes a status report on implementation (identifying items that have moved from one section to another) and notes any additions, deletions, or modifications that have been made to the list of action items.

In this update, ten (10) items have moved to "Accomplished" from "In Progress," one (1) item has moved to "Accomplished" from Short Term," four (4) items have moved to "In Progress" from "Short Term," three (3) items have moved to "In Progress" from "Medium Term," and one (1) item has moved to "In Progress" from "Long Term." Here is a quick summary of the changes, showing only the topic heading for each affected action item:

### **MOVED TO "ACCOMPLISHED" FROM "IN PROGRESS"**

Continue to Aggressively Pursue Grant Funding Assistance for Town Projects and Programs

Use Brooks Memorial Library's Foundation Center Resources to Enhance Grantseeking Efforts in All Town Departments

Continue to Pursue Opportunities to Increase Flood Resiliency Throughout the Community

Complete Succession Planning in All Departments

Transition Town Emergency Preparedness Activities (Planning Training (EOC Procedures) from Primary Emphasis on Radiological Emergencies to an All Hazards Approach

Consider Centralization of Administrative Functions (e.g. Human Resources)

Improve Payroll Procedures

Increase Training and Professional Development in All Areas of Town Government

Explore Use of Interns, AmeriCorps Volunteers, Other Volunteers, Seasonal Employees, Job Sharing, etc., to Cost Effectively Increase Staff Capacity

Consider Alternative Service Delivery Model for Town Health Officer Services

**MOVED TO “ACCOMPLISHED” FROM “SHORT TERM”**

Create an Inventory of Vehicles + Other Major Equipment w/ Estimated Replacement Schedule

**MOVED TO “IN PROGRESS” FROM “SHORT TERM”**

Increase Opportunities for Residents to Use Credit Cards in Paying for Town Services  
and to Use Online Registration Systems When Signing Up for Town Programs

Review All Existing and Potential PILOTs and Negotiate Increases Where Possible

Complete an Inventory of Accessibility at Town Facilities and an Action Plan to Correct Deficiencies

Consider Alternative Service Delivery Model for Town Services (other than Town Health Officer)

**MOVED TO “IN PROGRESS” FROM “MEDIUM TERM”**

Eliminate (or Convert to Wireless Technology) the Public Fire Alarm Box System

Consider Converting Private Fire Alarm System to a Subscription Service

Improve the Form and Content of the Town’s Budget Document

**MOVED TO “IN PROGRESS” FROM “LONG TERM”**

Create a Realistic and Sustainable Equipment Replacement Program in the General Fund

Finally, at the end of this document, the “Introduction” section from the original CRTO (in 2016) is repeated as a reminder of (1) why the Town undertook this project and (2) how the magnitude of our ongoing effort makes it a marathon, not a sprint.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

List of Action Items

Accomplished . . . . . (10 in 2016) . . . (31 in 2019) . . . . .	3
In Progress . . . . . (9 in 2016) . . . (14 in 2019) . . . . .	7
Short Term . . . . . (19 in 2016) . . . (6 in 2019) . . . . .	9
Medium Term . . . . . (10 in 2016) . . . (7 in 2019) . . . . .	10
Long Term . . . . . (2 in 2016) . . . (0 in 2019) . . . . .	10
2016 Introduction . . . . .	11

## **STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION**

### **ACCOMPLISHED (31)**

*(Note: Some "Accomplished" items involve continuing action(s). They are noted in this report as "Accomplished" rather than as "In Progress" because they have become a standard part of how the Town conducts its business and provides service to the community.)*

#### **Stabilize Police Officer Staffing Levels**

Authorized limited and strategic overfill during hiring to ensure full complement of officers. Significantly increased entry level officer pay (from bottom through middle of pay range) to attract and retain top quality officers. Adjusted step increments to reduce implementation cost and maintain stability of top steps (which were already competitive).

#### **Long Term Financial Plan (LTFP)**

This is a multi-year forecast of expenditures and revenues. It was first completed as part of the FY18 Budget process and is updated annually prior to every budget preparation cycle. The LTFP improves our understanding of the future financial implications of current budget decisions, thereby increasing our ability to maintain stable tax rates and to prepare for tax increases, when warranted.

Each forecast is prepared with as much specificity as possible (incorporating foreseeable material budget increases and decreases from year to year). Any use of assumptions or trend projections is disclosed in each LTFP so those factors can be considered when making budgetary decisions.

#### **Reduce Future Cost of Employee Health Insurance and Maintain Top Quality Coverage**

Created a health reimbursement arrangement (HRA) to save Town taxpayers over \$120,000 each year while maintaining a platinum level plan for Town employees.

#### **Reduce Future Cost of Employee Retirement Benefits and Maintain Competitive Pension Plan**

Approved Vermont Municipal Employees Retirement System (VMERS) Plan B defined benefit pension plan for civilian employees. (Police Officers and Firefighters have been enrolled in VMERS Plan D for the past decade.) Town taxpayers save over \$120,000 each year and employees receive an improved benefit.

#### **Review and Recommit to Active Strategy for Economic Development**

Identify and pursue opportunities in partnership with BDCC, State of Vermont, and others. Team approach (Selectboard and several Town staff) with no added cost to the Town.

#### **Reduce the Frequency and Cost of Solid Waste Collection**

During implementation of the Pay-as-You-Throw garbage collection system, so much of Brattleboro's waste stream was diverted to curbside compost and recycling that we were able to reduce the frequency of curbside garbage collection from every week to every-other-week. This saves the Town approximately \$100,000 per year.

### Review All Current and Potential Sources of Non-Tax Revenue + Increase Where Possible

Completed review and implemented increases in the FY17 Budget.

Due to State controls on municipal revenue sources, total impact of increases was very small. 1% Local Option Sales Tax will be implemented on July 1, 2019.

### Update Traffic Calming Plan

Completed with help from Local Motion (a bike/ped advocacy organization from Burlington) through a grant from VTrans.

The updated document is shorter, clearer, and more useful for decision making.

To reflect its improved form and updated purpose, the document is now called the Street and Sidewalk Safety Policy.

### Improve License + Permit Processes

Consolidated the application form for administratively issued permits.

Streamlined the Special Event Permit process and added a small fee for all liquor related permits.

### Improve Performance Evaluation System

Streamlined and standardized evaluation form and grading scale to increase clarity and fairness.

Changed from “all at once” to staggered evaluation schedule using employee anniversary dates to increase individual attention and improvement potential for every employee.

### Restructure Library Staff to Create an Electronic Services Support Specialist (ESSS)

This was implemented without increasing operating costs (by reallocating library clerk hours).

The ESSS has expanded services offered within the library and outreach in the community, and provides onsite tech support for staff and public computers.

### Restore Library Hours to 2011 Levels

This was accomplished with Read bequest funds to avoid having any impact on taxpayers.

### Review Non-Resident Recreation Fees

The balanced purpose of this 2016 review was to ensure that non-residents pay fees that are sufficient to offset their non-participation in Town tax funding for Recreation and Parks without making non-resident fees so high that we discourage participation and diminish the value of applicable programs for resident participants.

### Reconfigure Library Interior to Improve Service Delivery and Achieve Operational Efficiencies

This project was funded by Read bequest funds to avoid having any impact on taxpayers.

Small group and individual workspaces were added which support freelance employment and entrepreneurial endeavors.

### Create and Implement an Information Technology (IT) Plan

Plan was prepared and approved during 2016 and implemented during 2017.

This has improved IT security and functionality in a financially sustainable manner.

Among other benefits, this project is improving internal and external communications and will allow us to move toward “paperless” operations for efficiency and cost savings.

Update and Synchronize Collective Bargaining Agreements with All 4 Employee Unions

Removed obsolete language from all 4 agreements.

Updated language in all 4 agreements to ensure consistency with all applicable practices and regulations.

Synchronized all 4 agreements on a single schedule to be more efficient administratively, facilitate major changes like 2016's modifications of the health insurance and retirement programs, and make it more feasible to maintain consistency (where applicable) and equity (to the maximum extent possible) in the Town's relationship with all different classifications of employees.

Increase Funding for Improving Safety for Pedestrians and Bicyclists

Funding increased significantly for FY18 and FY19.

Increase Oversight of Large Capital Improvement Projects

Operating staff oversee most smaller capital projects and we contract for project management services on larger projects.

Increase Town of Brattleboro Communication with Vermont State Government

The Town historically has had extensive communication with certain State departments and with our local legislative delegation on matters that are of direct importance to the Town. We have extended our communications to include involvement in statewide issues both to protect the Town's broader interests and to build relationships with more State officials.

Improve Worker's Compensation Procedures and Case Management

The Town partnered with our insurance provider (the Vermont League of Cities and Towns' Property and Casualty Intermunicipal Fund or VLCT-PACIF) to establish a designated medical provider for conducting fit-for-service exams and medical case management for worker's compensation claims.

Simultaneously, Town staff and VLCT-PACIF identified opportunities for Town departments to make greater use of light-duty assignments to enable worker's compensation claimants to return to work sooner in their recovery period.

The combined impact of these two measures will be to lower costs and increased productivity. The four employee unions are collaborating with the Town's management team to implement these improvements.

Continue to Aggressively Pursue Grant Funding Assistance for Town Projects and Programs

This was already an area of strength for the Town.

We are committed to continuing to seek large and small grants to enable the Town to provide programs and complete projects that we could not afford with local funding alone.

Use Brooks Memorial Library's Foundation Center Resources  
to Enhance Grantseeking Efforts in All Town Departments

BML's Reference section is providing this service to the general public.

Interdepartmental collaboration has improved the Town's already robust grant identification and application efforts.

Continue to Pursue Opportunities to Increase Flood Resiliency Throughout the Community

Implement plans that have already been made.

Create additional plans, as needed, for sections of town that have not yet been addressed.

Be opportunistic in identifying when and where additional ad hoc improvements can be made both on Town properties and on private properties.

Continue to work in conjunction with EPA, FEMA, and the State of Vermont.

Complete Succession Planning for All Departments

Include all Department Heads and Assistant Department Heads.

Include other key positions, as appropriate.

Analysis will focus on replacement plans within current structure, but also will consider reorganization of functions, when appropriate.

Explore Use of Interns, AmeriCorps Volunteers, Other Volunteers, Seasonal Employees, Job Sharing, etc., to Cost Effectively Increase Staff Capacity

Seasonal employees are being used successfully and cost effectively in the Public Works and Recreation+Parks Departments.

Some administrative offices benefit from low cost temporary staff for special projects or to help with seasonal workload fluctuations.

Brooks Memorial Library benefits from volunteers who donate hundreds of hours each year performing regular operational tasks (e.g. shelving books) and completing special projects.

Transition Town Emergency Preparedness Activities (Planning, Training, EOC Procedures) from Primary Emphasis on Radiological Emergencies to an All Hazards Approach

The Town has a long history of extensive training and effective response to emergencies.

Much of the training from the 1970s until 2016 focused on radiological emergency scenarios related to the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant (VY).

Town procedures and training have been updated to ensure we are well prepared to respond to all types of hazards in the post-VY era.

Consider Centralization of Administrative Functions

The most obvious candidates here are Human Resources, Purchasing, and Risk Management.

Other functions should be considered, as needed.

This could include consolidation of some functions that are already centralized in part or whole.

Human Resources will be centralized in FY19 with the hiring of a Human Resources professional.

Improve Payroll Procedures

Replaced a variety of pen-and-paper systems with a Townwide automated system to increase staff efficiency and payroll accuracy.

Increase Training and Professional Development in All Areas of Town Government

Increase staff capacity.

Reduce Town liability.

Promote a culture of innovation.

Create an Inventory of Vehicles + Other Major Equipment w/ Estimated Replacement Schedule

25-year plan includes every vehicle and major pieces of equipment, including an estimated replacement year and an inflation-adjusted estimated replacement cost for each.

Replacements will still occur only when needed, but our financial planning and fleet management will be guided by the replacement schedule.

Consider Alternative Service Delivery Model for Town Health Officer Services

Would enable Assistant Fire Chief to focus on Fire Department operations.

Explore potential for contracting with a private entity, collaborating with other municipalities, or developing a regional approach to this service via the Windham Regional Commission.

*We determined that there was not a viable and cost-effective model to replace the existing system, but we have modified and improved the existing system by creating the Rental Housing Registration and Inspection Program and staffing it with existing firefighters (certified as fire inspectors) working overtime.*

**IN PROGRESS (14)**Organize a Regional Economic Hub Coalition

At Brattleboro's urging and with Town Manager Elwell acting as chair, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) convened 3 Regional Economic Hub meetings during 2018. Participants shared best practices and discussed possible legislative action. Late in the year, VLCT proposed a major legislative initiative to create a Limited Self-Governance Pilot Program for Vermont municipalities. The Brattleboro Selectboard and Representative Town Meeting formally expressed strong support for this legislation and Town Manager Elwell worked extensively with legislators and VLCT staff during the 2019 Legislative Session. For now, this Self Governance initiative has taken priority over the Regional Economic Hub work, because it would accomplish essentially the same goal of greater municipal independence, but applied to all towns instead of just to hub towns. This was a top priority for 2018. Work on it during the second half of 2019 will depend on the outcome of the Legislature's consideration of the Limited Self Governance Pilot Program.

Continue to Implement Energy Efficiency Improvements in Town Facilities

Use the results of the 2015-2016 Energy Audit project to prioritize near-term improvements.

Include approved projects in the upgraded CIP's for the Enterprise Funds and the General Fund.

Continuously seek additional opportunities to implement energy efficient projects and practices both to save money and to reduce the environmental impact of Town operations.

Create a Realistic + Financially Sustainable Capital Improvement Program for Enterprise Funds

This will require a long term plan and a commitment to consistently fund that plan.

The substantial retained earnings (fund balance) in the Utilities Fund allows us to apply these financial best practices for capital planning in this fund, both to expedite this work where we can and to set an example of how we can accomplish the same improvements over a longer period of time in the General Fund.

Complete Space Analysis + Planning for Public Works, Recreation, and Administrative Departments

This needs to be done due to the age and condition of Town facilities and to achieve our goal of continually improving both the effectiveness and the efficiency of all Town functions.

Update Employee Handbook

Ensure compliance with all applicable laws.

Eliminate obsolete provisions and align with best practices recommended by VLCT and others.

Maintain a fair and equitable work environment for all employees.

Reduce Town liability.

Create a Townwide Records Retention Policy and Records Preservation Program

Provide uniformity (or at least greater consistency) from department to department.

Increase digitization to reduce paper. This is better for the environment and will reduce long-term costs for taxpayers; but in the near term this may require additional expense.

Increase Opportunities for Residents to Use Credit Cards in Paying for Town Services and to Use Online Registration Systems When Signing Up for Town Programs

This is part of an ongoing Townwide effort to ensure that it is as easy as possible for all residents to obtain and pay for Town services.

Review All Existing and Potential PILOTs and Negotiate Increases Where Possible

A Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) is how tax exempt entities pay a fair share of support for essential public services. PILOTs are negotiated agreements and often do not offset the actual cost of providing Town services to the tax exempt entity. This is a statewide problem. We will address it both in Brattleboro and as part of the broader work of the Regional Economic Hub Coalition.

Complete an Inventory of Accessibility at Town Facilities and an Action Plan to Correct Deficiencies

Projects in the Action Plan would be included in the Capital Improvement Program.

We have not yet completed an accessibility Action Plan but we are making improvements in accessibility of Town facilities (both public infrastructure and support facilities) on an opportunistic basis as needs are identified both independently and in conjunction with larger-scale projects.

Consider Alternative Service Delivery Model for Town Services (Other than Town Health Officer)

Addressing this opportunistically as circumstances dictate and time permits.

Eliminate (or Convert to Wireless Technology) the Public Fire Alarm Box System

To reduce capital costs and operations/maintenance costs without reducing community safety.

Consider Converting Private Fire Alarm System to a Subscription Service

Could reduce cost, increase revenue, or accomplish both without reducing community safety.

Improve the Form and Content of the Town's Budget Document

Add narrative to the document (to better explain the content of the line item budget) and more graphs and tables (to make the "numbers content" more visually informative to decision-makers and observers).

### Create a Realistic and Sustainable Equipment Replacement Program in the General Fund

Full implementation of this long term goal will involve not only creating and following a planned replacement schedule (which is a prerequisite action noted in the “already accomplished” list above) but also funding the program by depreciating existing vehicles to levelize budgets (and property taxes) from year to year.

This goal will be very difficult for us to achieve, but we should not give up on it because it may be possible to obtain grants or other creative financing that will provide catch-up funding of the accumulated depreciation to expedite full implementation of the program.

## **SHORT TERM (2019-2021) (6)**

### Create a Realistic and Financially Sustainable Capital Improvement Program in the General Fund

In the short term, this will prioritize capital projects and accomplish the most urgent ones.

In the longer term, this will reduce infrastructure emergencies and allow us to complete projects more methodically and cost effectively.

Unlike many of the other CRTO action items, this one will increase the Town’s annual budget.

### Update the Town’s Website

The primary purpose of this will be to make the site more user-friendly for all users and more compatible with smartphones and tablets.

Secondary goals will be to provide a fresh appearance, expand the content, and establish procedures for efficiently maintaining up-to-date information on all sub-pages of the site.

### Update Social Media Policy and Consider Creating a Broader Internet Use Policy

The Social Media Policy update is needed to reflect technological and legal changes that have occurred since the current policy was adopted.

Many organizations also have adopted Internet Use Policies to prevent inappropriate use of that resource.

Goals are to improve communication, maintain transparency, and reduce Town liability.

### Replace Salt Shed to Allow Use of Modern Winter Maintenance Chemicals

Would improve performance and reduce operating cost.

Operating cost savings are potentially significant.

This project is included in the General Fund’s Capital Improvement Program but is highlighted here due to the severely deteriorated condition of the existing salt shed and the potentially significant operational and financial implications of not replacing it.

### Update Procurement Manual

Eliminate obsolete provisions.

Align with best practices recommended by VLCT and others.

Make purchasing processes more efficient while ensuring compliance with all legal requirements and promoting competition to obtain favorable pricing.

Establish (or Revise, as appropriate) Financial Policies

Examples include debt policy, fund balance policy, reserve policies, budget control policy, and revenue shortfall policy.

**MEDIUM TERM (2021-2024) (7)**Evaluate Current Emergency Service Collaboration and Assess Opportunity for Improvement

Review: (1) Division of labor between Rescue Inc. and Brattleboro Fire Department (BFD).

(2) Collaboration between Rescue Inc., BFD, Brattleboro Police Department, and others.

Evaluate both for operational effectiveness in serving the public and for cost effectiveness in expending public funds.

Consider Creating a Municipal Life Safety Division for Plan Review and Inspections

More convenient for local project sponsors than dealing with the State.

Source of revenue for the Town (although mostly just to cover costs).

New employee would be a firefighter, adding one more to our complement for major incidents.

Downside: During slow periods, revenue may not fully offset the cost of the new employee.

Review Fleet Maintenance Practices for Potential Consolidation and/or Other Improvements

To reduce cost and to prolong vehicle life.

Explore Establishing Brooks Memorial Library (BML) as a Regional Hub Library

Could provide services by contract to communities with no library or a small library.

Possible additional revenue source for BML.

Expand Economic Development Function and Restore Community Development Function

If funding allows, commit additional resources to these functions to promote economic growth and community capacity, with the expectation that accomplishing both of those goals will offset the cost of this investment in the long run.

Review and Update the Entire Municipal Code of Ordinances

Eliminate obsolete provisions.

Ensure internal consistency and compliance with all applicable State and Federal laws.

Consider Local Regulation of Drone Usage

Consider the existence and sufficiency of applicable State laws.

Consider known and expected impacts of drone usage in Brattleboro (re: safety, privacy, etc.)

Create a local ordinance if that is determined to be necessary and enforceable.

**LONG TERM (More Than 5 Years)**

*(None at this time.)*

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE ORIGINAL CRTO ON OCTOBER 4, 2016**

*A letter from Town Manager Peter Elwell to the Selectboard and the People of Brattleboro:*

The Town of Brattleboro has a history of active local government and high levels of service. This dates back at least to the 1950s (when, for instance, Living Memorial Park was created, the Town's administrative offices expanded to the Municipal Center, and the current West Brattleboro Fire Station was approved). It is reflected in such aspects of Town operations as our full-service professional Police and Fire Departments, our extensive Recreation programming, and our early adoption and regular upgrades of modern sanitary sewer (and sewage treatment) systems.

Brattleboro, like any town, experienced ups and downs over the years, both in local financial conditions and in relation to economic forces in our region, state, and nation. Through those cycles, the Town mostly maintained its high levels of services and adjusted funding priorities, as needed, to reflect political and economic realities of any given point in time. Put another way, there were periods of investment and periods of cost cutting, but the overall trend was upwards and the overall focus was on maintaining the generally high levels of service.

Then, during the past two decades, Brattleboro experienced a prolonged period of cost cutting and budget constraints in virtually all areas of Town government. Service levels have been reduced in some functions, while in other functions the levels of service have been maintained but funding has been reduced. Some cuts have resulted from innovations and efficiencies, while others have simply reduced resources to avoid or contain increased costs.

A couple of Public Works examples provide a good illustration of these different approaches to cost containment. The Town is maintaining more roadway miles now than ever before (an increase in level of service), but is doing so with fewer people and a much smaller budget (adjusted for inflation) than in prior years. The sidewalk plowing and sidewalk replacement budgets also have been reduced significantly, but in those cases it was through consciously reducing levels of service (fewer miles of sidewalk plowed and fewer feet of sidewalk replaced).

Despite the extended period of intense cost control work, our municipal tax rate is high compared to surrounding communities (it is about average for a regional economic hub town in Vermont and is 11% lower than in the nearby hub town of Keene, New Hampshire). Our property tax rate would be lower if the Town had more non-tax options for raising municipal revenue under Vermont law. Nevertheless, under current conditions, there is continuous pressure on staff, the Selectboard, and Representative Town Meeting to keep the property tax rate as low as possible when making decisions about Town services and projects.

When I arrived to become Brattleboro's Town Manager in January of 2015, I was aware of the financial pressures described above but not fully aware of the history. I also needed to become familiar with our organizational structure and services before I could assess the appropriateness of our current allocation of resources among the many functions of Town government. For this reason, I had advised the Selectboard during the hiring process that I believed we should undertake a Comprehensive Review of Town Operations (CRTO) and examine every aspect of Town government to identify ways in which we could achieve the following three objectives:

1. Save money without negatively affecting the community;
2. Improve our service to the community without increasing costs; and/or
3. Judiciously increase cost in specific areas where either we had cut too far previously or where new investment now would yield significant positive impacts for the community.

In February of 2015, Town staff began work on the CRTO. The department heads and their teams provided me with historical perspective on cost cutting (both through achieving efficiencies and through reducing service levels) and with ideas for future actions that would achieve one or more of the three objectives enumerated above. After my initial review of those reports and of department operations and budgets, the department heads and I worked together to expand and refine their individual “action items” lists. By then it was the early summer of 2015. Due to other more urgent matters (including, among other things, the Police-Fire Facilities Project, the NEA Our Town Public Art Project, various economic development matters, the FY17 Budget, health insurance plan modification, retirement plan modification, and collective bargaining with the Town’s four unions), my work on this project stopped almost completely until after the Representative Town Meetings in March of 2016.

In the meantime, between June of 2015 and April of 2016, we implemented several of the highest priority actions we had identified during our initial work on the CRTO. Because of the importance of those items in the overall scope of this project, there is an “Already Accomplished” section below. There also is an “In Progress” section listing actions which we have begun but not yet completed. The remainder of the action items are on “Short Term” (0-2 years), “Medium Term” (2-5 years), or “Long Term” (more than 5 years) lists of improvements we intend to make in the future.

Although the hiatus was longer than I originally intended, it provided an important advantage when I resumed work on the CRTO in April of 2016: After 15 months as Town Manager, I was much better prepared to judge our Town government’s strengths and weaknesses than I was after just the first 5 months. I prepared a draft of the action items and reviewed that with the department heads. Then I refined the action items, wrote this letter, and prepared the overall report. After a final review with the department heads, I distributed a draft CRTO to the Selectboard on July 29. Following the Selectboard’s initial consideration on August 4, we received public comments on the draft document until September 9. Staff reviewed the public’s comments, refined the CRTO document, and submitted the updated document for formal consideration by the Selectboard. At its meeting on October 4, the Selectboard discussed and approved the CRTO.

Although the creation phase of this project is now finished, the final action list in this CRTO document will not be static during the implementation phase. The list should be viewed as a living plan of action that will be updated and modified in the years ahead to reflect future changes in Town needs and circumstances.

The primary purpose of this project was to create the list of actions. However, in the course of our work some broad themes and overarching conclusions emerged. I share those here because they provide important context and background for the specific “to do list” that follows:

1. There is no more “low hanging fruit.” We can – and will – achieve additional efficiencies in Town operations, but any major budget cuts in the future will require noticeable reductions in levels of service.
2. We have cut too far in some areas, saving money but negatively impacting the community in ways that were not intended and are sometimes not very visible. Examples include infrastructure maintenance and replacement, information technology (IT) systems, and some administrative support services.
3. Some action items identify areas that just need more attention, not more money or other resources. Examples include the planned updating of the Procurement Manual and Employee Handbook.
4. Technological advances will make some of the action items easier and less expensive to implement than they would be if we were constrained by our current systems and practices. That makes our planned IT upgrades especially important and requires that we keep up-to-date best practices in mind as we develop a detailed plan for implementing each individual improvement.
5. Brattleboro is fortunate to have active citizen engagement and a great team of employees. This positions us well to implement the recommended changes and improve Town government’s service to the community.
6. During the past two decades, Town staff has developed an outstanding ability to respond to and overcome crisis situations. Implementing the action items will result in more long-term planning and fewer emergencies, but we will benefit from staff’s resilience and adaptability as we encounter unforeseen challenges and/or unintended consequences during implementation of changes in the way we do business.
7. In 2012, the Selectboard approved a fund balance guideline that established 10% of General Fund expenditures as the intended minimum amount of unassigned fund balance at any given time. The Town has adhered to that guideline through a combination of prudent budget preparation and frugal budget execution. We currently have almost 11% in unassigned fund balance with additional surplus funds accruing as we close the books for FY16. This financial security and “available fund balance” will allow the Town to approach implementation of the action items from a position of financial strength.

Finally, it should be noted that staff’s commitment to continuous improvement and cost effective local government goes far beyond the scope of this document. We are constantly on the lookout for better ways of doing what we do. While the CRTO identifies larger scale opportunities and certain specific policy changes that arose from our work on this project, we also will continue to implement (or recommend to the Selectboard on policy matters) a wide variety of smaller scale, department specific changes that are intended to meet the same three objectives described on page 2 [page 12 in this reprinted version] above.

The department heads and I look forward to working with the Selectboard to implement the recommended improvements. We also are committed to ensuring that our progress on these matters will be transparent to the public. Some items will require future Selectboard action and/or other public consideration, and staff intends to provide the Selectboard and the community with occasional updates on the entire project.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Peter B. Elwell*

Peter B. Elwell, Town Manager