

Appendix A
to Report of the
F.Y. 2019 Government Review Committee
dated September 17, 2019:

Summary of Responses
from F.Y. 2019 Board and Committee Chairs

Question 1: Is your board elected or appointed? If appointed, by whom?

Summary: Of the twenty boards interviewed ten are elected and ten are appointed. Of the ten appointed boards nine are appointed by the Board of Selectmen and one (Finance Committee) by the Moderator.

Q1: Is your board elected or appointed? If appointed, by whom?	Elected	Appointed	If Appointed by Whom
Alcohol Advisory Committee		X	Board of Selectmen
Board of Assessors	X		
Board of Health		X	Board of Selectmen
Board of Library Trustees	X		
Board of Park & Cemetery Commrs.	X		
Board of Road Commissioners	X		
Board of Water Commissioners	X		
Commissioners of Trust Funds	X		
Conservation Commission		X	Board of Selectmen
Council on Aging		X	Board of Selectmen
Cultural Council		X	Board of Selectmen
Elementary School Committee	X		
Finance Committee		X	Moderator
Historical Commission		X	Board of Selectmen
Moderator	X		
Open Space Committee		X	Board of Selectmen
Planning Board	X		
Rail Trail Committee		X	Board of Selectmen
Tri-Town School Union	X		
Zoning Board of Appeals		X	Board of Selectmen
TOTAL	10	10	

Question 2: (a) What do you view as the main mission of your board? (b) What responsibilities and duties are the priorities of your board?

Summary: The varied missions and priorities of each board are summarized below.

Question 2	Mission and Priorities
Alcohol Advisory Committee	Review, advise and check for completeness applications for alcohol licenses and event pouring licenses. The BOS issues the license.
Board of Assessors	Meet Department of Revenue guidelines in regards to property assessments.
Board of Health	Disease prevention and control, health and environmental protection and promoting a healthy community.
Board of Library Trustees	Library is the cultural and informational resource for the town. Supports the Library Director in library operations.
Board of Park & Cemetery Comm.	Run parks and cemeteries w quality and fiscal responsibility
Board of Road Commissioners	Ensure Highway Dept runs with quality of service and cost effectiveness. Maintain infrastructure and roads in winter.
Board of Water Commissioners	Ensure Water Department runs with quality of service and product and cost effectiveness. Maintain infrastructure
Commissioners of Trust Funds	Manage the trusts left to the Town in accordance with the guidelines of each trust.
Conservation Commission	Environmental protection. Administer the MA Wetlands Protection Act MCL 131 Section 40 and the Topsfield Wetlands Bylaw.
Council on Aging	Set local policy for elder programs and services. Act as elder advocates. Support and supervise the COA Director.
Cultural Council	Re-distribute Mass Cultural Council funds. Support cultural activities for the benefit of citizens of Topsfield.
Elementary School Committee	Advocate for Students. Hiring and firing of Superintendent. Fiscal responsibility.
Finance Committee	Propose annual budget to Town Meeting. Prepare budget guidelines. Approve reserve fund transfers.
Historical Commission	Protecting the historic character of town structures using the town by-laws on Historic District and Demolition Review.
Moderator	Runs/controls Town Meeting. Appoints Finance Committee.
Open Space Committee	Promote open space in town. Update state's requirements open space of the town.
Planning Board	Planning for use of land and resources in the town. Review land use applications (40B, in-law apartments, etc)
Rail Trail Committee	Construction, maintenance and funding of the rail trail without cost to the taxpayer.
Tri-Town School Union	Support student learning and success. Support central office structure. Make consistent policy for all 3 towns.
Zoning Board of Appeals	Reviews decisions made by the Building Inspector.

Question 3: (a) Which employees do you appoint? (b) Do you appoint persons to any other boards or committees, and if so, which ones?

Summary: None of the appointed boards appoint employees or persons to other boards or committees. More than half of elected boards/positions (6 out of 10) have appointing authority which is summarized below.

Q3: (a) Which employees do you appoint? (b) Do you appoint persons to any other boards or committees, and if so, which ones?	
Elected Boards/Officials with Appointing Powers	Appointments E=Employee B=Board or Committee Member
Board of Assessors	Principal Assessor (E)
Board of Parks and Cemetery Commissioners	Parks and Cemetery Superintendent (E)
Board of Road Commissioners	Highway Superintendent (E)
Board of Water Commissioners	Water Superintendent (E)
Elementary School Committee	Superintendent (E) Asst Superintendent (E) (in agreement with other two towns) Topsfield’s representatives on Tri-Town School Union
Moderator	Finance Committee (B) Memorial Day Committee (B) Shade Tree Committee (B) Topsfield’s representative on Essex Tech Regional School Board (B)

Question 4: Do the members of your board generally have experience, knowledge or skills specifically related to your board’s functions?

Summary: The overwhelming majority of boards (18 out of 20) have members with experience, knowledge or skills specifically related to the board’s functions. Of the remaining two, the Board of Library Trustees felt no specific knowledge was necessary just “a love of the library” and the Rail Trail Committee was mixed with some having skills such as grant writing and environmental regulations but all have a “passion for making the rail trail a positive experience for users.”

Question 5: How important is it for the members of your board to have experience, knowledge or skills specifically related to your board’s functions?

Summary: A majority of board chairs (12 out of 20) said it was very important for members to have experience, knowledge or skills specifically related to the board’s functions. The vast majority of chairs of appointed boards (8 out of 10) said it was very important while less than half of chairs of elected boards (4 out of 10) said so. More chairs of elected boards (6 out of 10) than chairs of appointed boards (1 out of 10) said it was moderately important or not that important but good to have. The Cultural Council said “anyone is trainable.”

Q5: How important is it for members to have experience, knowledge or skills related to your board’s function?	Elected Boards	Appointed Boards
Very important	4	8
Moderately or not that important but good to have	6	1
First year learning curve; anyone is trainable	0	1

Question 6: How much of your board’s time (estimated percentage to total 100%) is spent on:

- a. initiating, formulating or reviewing policy, including possible improvements to the effectiveness and efficiency of services to the Town?
- b. budgeting?
- c. initiating, formulating or reviewing long-term planning?
- d. performing or overseeing operational or administrative tasks?
- e. formal executive functions such as reviewing petitions or applications, conducting hearings, issuing decisions or orders, conducting enforcement actions, etc.?
- f. other?

Summary: Excluding the category “f. other,” using the average, the least amount of time was estimated to be spent on budgeting (14%) and long term planning (12%) while the most was spent in formal executive functions (32%) and operational and administrative tasks (19%).

Question 6	a. policy	b. budget	c. long-term planning	d. operational administrative tasks	e. formal executive functions	f. other	TOTAL
Alcohol	20	0	0	0	70	10	100
Assessors	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	90	0	100
Health	25	5	10	10	40	10	100
Library	55	15	15	15	0	0	100
Park	10	40	40	0	10	0	100
Road	10	20	10	10	0	50	100
Water	10	20	10	10	0	50	100
Trust Funds	5	0	0	80	15	0	100
Conservation	5	5	0	5	80	5	100
CouncilAging	25	0	25	50	0	0	100
Culture	5	25	10	40	20	0	100
El. School	20	30	30	10	10	0	100
Finance	5	90	5	0	0	0	100
Historic	10	0	10	40	40	0	100
Moderator	20	0	0	10	70	0	100
Open Space	0	0	20	80	0	0	100
Planning	10	0	0	0	90	0	100
Rail Trail	30	5	30	10	25	0	100
TriTown Elementary	50	15	10	5	0	20	100
ZBA	5	0	5	2	88	0	100
Average	16	14	12	19	32	7	100

Note: Highlighting denotes where a board/official spends a majority of its time.

Question 7: (a) How often does your board meet? (b) Is that sufficient to accomplish your main goals and long-term planning?

Summary: Boards meet as little as two times per year and up to 25 times per year, with the majority (13 out of 20) meeting once per month or more. Almost half (9 out of 20) meet more frequently when necessary. All board chairs said they met sufficiently to meet their goals.

Q 7: (a) How often does your board meet? (b) Is that sufficient to accomplish your main goals and long-term planning?	Board Elected or Appointed	2-6 times/yr	12 times/yr	13-25 times/yr	More frequently as necessary
Alcohol Advisory Committee	A	X			
Board of Assessors	E	X			X
Board of Health	A		X		
Board of Library Trustees	E		X		
Board of Park & Cemetery Commrs.	E		X		X
Board of Road Commissioners	E		X		X
Board of Water Commissioners	E		X		X
Commissioners of Trust Funds	E	X			X
Conservation Commission	A			X	
Council on Aging	A		X		
Cultural Council	A	X			
Elementary School Committee	E			X	X
Finance Committee	A			X	
Historical Commission	A		X		
Moderator	E	No meetings except Town Meeting			
Open Space Committee	A			X	X
Planning Board	E		X		X
Rail Trail Committee	A	X			X
Tri-Town School Union	E	X			
Zoning Board of Appeals	A		X		
TOTAL		6	9	4	9

Question 8: (a) Are administrative tasks (e.g. non-policy, non-strategy tasks) generally handled in a routine and timely manner? (b) Are there administrative tasks that might be characterized as unnecessarily requiring the time or oversight by your board?

Summary: All board chairs said administrative tasks are generally handled in a routine and timely manner. The vast majority of board chairs (17 out of 20) said there are no administrative tasks that might be characterized as unnecessarily requiring the time or oversight by their board. A few board chairs (3 out of 20), all of which were appointed, said that there were administrative tasks that might be characterized as unnecessary. In particular, the Chair of the Board of Health felt that the tasks assigned to its administrative assistant by the Town Administrator detracts from the primary duty of supporting the Board of Health and Conservation Commission. The Chair of the Historical Commission said that it would be more efficient if the Building Inspector had Historical Commission applications available to distribute to home owners. The Chair of the Cultural Council said that Saturday opening of Town Hall would make sign off and reimbursement easier.

Question 9: How do you generally reach decisions as a board (e.g. legal requirements, past practices, personal experience, education, etc.)?

Summary: The vast majority of boards (16 out of 20) use multiple ways to make decisions. In general, the two most frequently used are past practices (13 out of 20) and legal requirements (11 out of 20). The most frequently used by elected boards is past practices (8 out of 10) and for appointed boards it is legal requirements, past practices and other resources and methods (5 out of 10) each.

Q9: How do you generally reach decisions as a board?	Board Elected/ Appt'ed	Legal Requirements	Past Practice	Personal Experience	Educa-tion	Other
Alcohol Advisory Comm.	A					Does not make decisions
Bd. of Assessors	E	X	X	X	X	
Bd. of Health	A			X	X	
Bd. of Library Trustees	E	X	X			
Bd. of Road Commrs.	E		X	X		Consensus
Bd. of Water Commrs.	E		X	X		
Commrs. of Trust Funds	E	X		X	X	
Conservation Commn.	A	X	X			Professional assistance
Council on Aging	A	X	X	X	X	
Cultural Council	A	X				
Elementary School Comm.	E	X	X	X	X	
Finance Comm.	A		X			Reliance on dept. heads
Historical Commn.	A	X	X			
Moderator	E	X	X	X	X	
Open Space Comm.	A					Robert's Rules
Planning Board	E	X	X			
Rail Trail Comm.	A					Robert's Rules
Tri-Town School Union	E	X	X	X	X	
Zoning Bd. of Appeals	A	X	X	X	X	
Subtotal elected		7	8	7	5	1
Subtotal appointed		5	5	3	3	5
TOTAL		12	13	10	8	6

Question No. 10: How do you obtain data for your decisions?

Summary: Chairs stated that their boards obtain data for decisions in a variety of ways. Those ways generally included in order of frequency cited: (a) information and advice from staff, professionals and other experts, (b) individual knowledge through experience, education and research, (c) information from applicants, and (d) legal requirements, with most chairs citing information from staff as one of the ways data is obtained.

Question 11: Does your board have sufficient administrative assistance to help your board with fulfilling your board's mission and duties?

Summary: Every board has sufficient administrative assistance; however, a few boards (3 boards of 20) want more assistance. The Chair of the Planning Board (elected) said it "will need a Planning Professional addition to staff in near future. Possibly a part time employee shared with another town." The Elementary School Committee (elected) said they need a communication role/person and have used interns from high school to help with communication issues. The Board of Health (appointed) has an administrative assistant with many other responsibilities and thinks the Board of Health would benefit if its assistant had fewer other responsibilities.

Question 12: (a) Does your board interact with and/or receive any directives or suggestions for improvements from the Board of Selectmen or the Town Administrator? (b) If yes, please describe in general terms and state how often.

Summary: The overwhelming majority of boards (15 out of 20) do not interact with or receive directives or suggestions from the Selectmen or Town Administrator. Only five boards Alcohol Advisory, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee, Council on Aging and Moderator), all appointed, cited "occasional" or "infrequent" interaction with Selectmen (.

Question 13: Do you frequently, infrequently or never coordinate your board activities with other Town departments and administration?

Summary: The overwhelming majority of boards (16 out of 20) coordinate their activities with other Town departments. The chairs of seven boards said they do this "frequently." ("Frequently" was not defined and is subject to interpretation.) The Board of Park & Cemetery Commissioners was the only elected board that "never" coordinates its activities with other Town departments.

Question 14: What is working well?

Summary: Every chair thinks their board is working well. Two interviewees (the Moderator, and the Chair of both the Board of Road Commissioners and Board of Water Commissioners) said government overall is working well. Although this question did not ask “what could work better,” the Board of Library Trustees’ Chair sees a need for a Town custodian or facilities manager to manage the Town's public buildings. The Commissioner of Trust Funds expressed some frustration with occasional involvement by others.

Question 15: Does times spent by your board on performing or overseeing operational or administrative tasks support or hinder your board’s main mission, duties and long-term planning?

Summary: Although this question could have been phrased better, the GRC has determined that most boards are satisfied with the administrative support they receive and are not unduly burdened by administrative work. The Chair of the Cultural Council mentioned a challenge caused by its chair also acting as board treasurer. That challenge should resolve itself either with new appointments or with term extensions.

Question 16: How are possible improvements to the effectiveness and efficiency of services to the Town, including long-term planning, brought to the attention of your board?

Summary: A majority of board chairs (13 of 20 boards: 8 elected boards and 5 appointed boards) say they hear of possible improvements either from residents (via letters or informal comments) or from other boards or Town employees. Four appointed boards, and one elected board (Board of Assessors), said the question was “not applicable” to operations or responsibilities. The Chair of the Tri-Town School Union said “There is a lack of communication on long term planning for Town projects and expenses. This lack makes planning budgets and growth more difficult”.

Question 17: What are the obstructions that prevent or delay the implementation of improvements to the effectiveness and efficiency of services to the Town that are within your board’s area of responsibility?

Summary: The overwhelming majority of board chairs (15 of 20) did not identify any obstructions. Of the few that did identify obstructions, the Open Space and Rail Trail Chairs mentioned “lack of follow-through” but did not provide more specifics. The Council on Aging Chair mentioned “a need for more staff,” and the Cultural Council Chair said, “Within town government, sometimes the department or area of responsibility is difficult to determine.” The Elementary School Committee Chair expressed a desire for “more inter-departmental coordination” for more long-term planning.

Question 18: Have you encountered any specific organizational inefficiencies with how your board and department operate? What type of impact does this have on your board and department?

Summary: The majority of chairs (14 of 20 boards) have not encountered specific organizational inefficiencies. The person chairing the Elementary School Committee and the Tri-Town School Union suggested regionalization could help with inefficiencies. The Conservation Commission chair suggested "A part-time IT tech employee would help increase efficiency when troubleshooting is required." The Moderator mentioned the inefficiencies of hand-counting votes during Town Meeting.

Question No. 19: What changes in the structure of Town government would make your area of responsibility easier and more efficient?

Summary: The overwhelming majority (17 of 20) of chairs stated that there are no changes to the structure of Town government that would make their particular areas of responsibility easier or more efficient. Other chairs suggested that the Town consider regionalization and having the Council on Aging Director report directly to the Town Administrator.

Question No. 20: Are you aware of any operations or governmental structures of other communities that if adopted by Topsfield might be beneficial to Topsfield?

Summary: A majority (13 of 20) of chairs stated that there were no particular operations or governmental structures of other communities that might be beneficial to Topsfield. Some chairs (5 of 20) suggested that the Town consider changes to its operations. For example, three chairs suggested the Town consider the hiring of additional personnel that would be dedicated to specific boards for specific tasks and three chairs suggested considering specific changes to bylaws and procedures to help to streamline operations. Some chairs (3 of 20) suggested that the Town consider changes to its governmental structure, including one person who chaired two boards suggesting that the Town consider regionalization and one chair who suggested that the Town might consider a consolidated Board of Public Works.

Question No. 21: What changes in the role of the Town Administrator would make your area of responsibility easier and more efficient?

Summary: A strong majority (15 of 20) of chairs stated that there were no particular changes in the role of the Town Administrator that would make their areas of responsibility easier and more efficient. A few chairs (4 of 20) suggested specific changes in the role of Town Administrator to improve specific board operations that could all be categorized as providing the Town Administrator with more oversight power and responsibility. Those specific suggestions proposed having the Council on Aging Director report directly to the Town Administrator and empowering the Town Administrator to coordinate all board activities, to hire and oversee “many” Town employees, and to have signature authority. In addition, one chair (1 of 20) suggested that the Town Administrator no longer have primary responsibility of Personnel Director. However, in making that suggestion, it appears that the Chair was suggesting that the primary responsibility of Personnel Director remain with the Town Administrator, and that the Town consider hiring an employee or consultant to assist the Town Administrator with personnel-related duties.

Question No. 22: How do you think any organizational inefficiencies might be addressed structurally to improve your operations?

Summary: A majority (11 of 20) of chairs did not pinpoint any organizational inefficiencies that might be addressed structurally to improve operations of any particular board. Other chairs (2 of 20) made specific suggestions for the Town to consider regionalization, increasing the length of the term for the Town Moderator (1 of 20) and having the Council on Aging Director report directly to the Town Administrator (1 of 20) to improve operations. In addition, other chairs (5 of 20) suggested the Town consider hiring additional personnel to improve operations.

Question No. 23: Do you have any suggestions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of services to the Town that are within your board’s area of responsibility? If yes, what are they?

Summary: A strong majority of chairs (14 of 20) did not provide any suggestions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of services to the Town within their board’s area of responsibility. Based on the discussions with board chairs, the GRC interprets the lack of specific suggestions by such chairs as those chairs being generally satisfied with the effectiveness and efficiency of their delivery of services to the Town by their boards and departments. Other chairs made specific suggestions for the Town to consider regionalization (2 of 20), having the Council on Aging Director report directly to the Town Administrator (1 of 20), and redistributing particular existing responsibilities among Town employees (i.e., recycling and application review) and hired consultants (i.e., professional fund manager).

Question No. 24: What advantages or disadvantages do you see from having elected boards versus having appointed boards?

Summary: The responses to this question were mixed. In general, the chairs of elected boards cited advantages of elected boards while the chairs of appointed boards cited advantages of appointed boards. No one advocated for all elected or all appointed boards, while only a few board chairs (4 out of 20) explicitly said Topsfield has the right mix of elected and appointed boards.

Some of the chairs (6 of 20) generally favored having elected boards, stating that elected boards are more conducive to having a more representative diversity of participants in Town government and Town officials who are responsive to the concerns of Topsfield’s residents.

The views of many chairs were more neutral. Those chairs (10 of 20), including those favoring having elected boards, expressly recognized the value of having boards whose members are elected and appointed because elected boards are generally conducive to having a more representative diversity of participants in Town government and Town officials who are responsive to the concerns of Topsfield’s residents and because appointed boards can help ensure that a particular position is held by a person having specific or requisite skills, experience and knowledge. Some of the chairs (4 of 20) suggested that it was important to have appointed boards whose members would have specific or requisite skills, experience and knowledge.

Based upon discussions with chairs, the GRC concludes there to be general support for the current mix of elected and appointed Town boards and committees, striking a balance between elected boards responsive to all residents and appointed boards consisting of members who should have some level of specialized skill, experience or knowledge.

Elected Boards	
Advantages	Disadvantages
More democratic/representative. (5) Gives citizens a voice especially about money. (5)	Not all elected officials have the necessary knowledge or qualifications. Could elect a popular candidate without qualifications. (4)
Independent. (3)	Elections not necessary for some committees (2)
Committed to the board they wanted to be on. Engagement (3)	Could elect someone seeking personal or political gain. (1)
Yields a cross section of the community. (1)	
Efficient and effective (1)	
Appointed Boards	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Allows for selecting qualified candidates with specific skills, knowledge and experience. (5)	Lacks diversity. (2)
Ensures boards have minimum required qualified members. (1)	Appointments could go to a friend or to a friend without qualifications. (2)
More timely appointment than elections. (1)	May not have enough qualified volunteers. (1)
Note: Number in parentheses indicates number of Chairs who responded thusly.	

Question No. 25: What advantages, and what disadvantages, do you anticipate if our Town government were to be more a centralized or less centralized form of government generally?

Summary: The responses to this question were mixed.

Some of the chairs (9 of 20; 6 elected, 3 appointed) generally favored considering more centralization of Town government to increase efficiencies of the operation of Town government.

The views of other chairs (4 of 20; all appointed) were more neutral. Two of those chairs recognized the advantages and disadvantages of centralizing Town government. The two other chairs were of the opinion that a more centralized Town government would not have any positive or negative effects with respect to their boards.

Some of the chairs (7 of 20; 4 elected, 3 appointed) generally were not in favor of more centralization of Town government, citing concerns that centralization will diminish participation and vest too much authority in too few people.

Based upon discussions with chairs, the GRC construes there to be an almost even mix of support (9 of 20) and opposition (7 of 20) among board chairs for the Town to consider a more centralized form of Town government. Given the even mix of support and opposition, there appears to be at least some support from current Town board chairpersons to initiate a dialogue regarding particularized ways to centralize the Town's government.

Question No. 26: What advantages and what disadvantages do you anticipate if our Town government were to be more centrally organized such that the functions or authority of boards or departments were to be transferred to or overseen by the Board of Selectmen or Town Administrator?

Summary: The responses to this question were mixed. The mix of responses is likely attributable in part to the imperfect form of the question, which asked for both advantages and disadvantages of centralization under the Board of Selectmen or Town Administrator.

The majority of responses (11 of 20) by most board chairs to this question would best be categorized as neutral or lacking a strong viewpoint or advocacy for or against more central organization of Town government under the Board of Selectmen or Town Administrator.

Several of the board chairs (3 of 20) generally favored considering more centralization of Town government to increase the Town government's efficiency of operation. The common thread of the responses by such chairs was that some centralization – in particular giving the Town Administrator more power to manage and deal with day-to-day operation of Town government – would lead to a more efficient, coordinated, and presumably better, Town government.

The GRC deemed other board chairs (6 of 20) as more generally supportive of the current form of the Town's government, as it is currently organized and its current operations. The GRC has interpreted such general support for the Town's current form of government as general opposition to consider change to the current structure of the Town's government to centralize functions or authority of Town boards under the Board of Selectmen or Town Administrator.

Although more board chairs appear to support the current form of the Town's government (6 of 20) than appear to support further centralization under the Town Administrator (3 of 20), given that the majority of the responses (11 of 20) appear somewhat ambivalent as to whether changes to Town government should be considered and based upon GRC discussions with chairs, it appears that there would not be strong opposition, at least not from the F.Y. 2019 board chairs, for the Board of Selectmen to consider initiating a Town-wide dialogue regarding particularized ways to centralize the Town's government.