

# **Report of the Holliston Governance Committee to the Select Board**

February 23, 2023

## **INTRODUCTION**

On November 21, 2022, the Holliston Select Board approved a motion for the Governance Committee to “detail the Committee’s findings from comparative data analysis, interviews of internal and external stakeholders, and other professional sources” and provide the report to the Select Board in January 2023 and post it on the Town’s website.

The original charge of the Governance Committee is to assist in the development of town-wide policies, act as a liaison between all departments, boards, committees, and commissions as it relates to governance, and help with the development of a strategic plan.

The Select Board established the Governance Committee because the last comprehensive review of the Holliston General By-Laws occurred over thirty-five years ago and the last Government Study Committee report was issued in 1994, 28 years ago. During this time, municipal government has become more complex and demanding which has resulted in more towns upgrading their governance structure and full-time professional capacity to meet the challenges of today and the future.

The Governance Committee was established by the Select Board at its meeting on March 3, 2020 to assist in the development of town-wide policies that relate to governance and recommend changes to the form of government if needed. The Select Board invited interested residents to volunteer to serve on this five-person Committee and appointments were completed on June 17, 2020. The original Committee consisted of five residents. The Town Administrator serves as an advisor to this Committee. [Link](#)

## **Committee Membership**

The original Governance Committee consisted of five Holliston residents with diverse professional backgrounds and prior experience in Holliston government. Members were: Samuel Tyler, Chair; Scott McKechnie, Vice Chair; Paul LeBeau, Clerk; Leonard Engel and Christina Lingham. These members collectively represented over 100 years of municipal experience. [Link](#)

Since our first meeting on July 16, 2020, there have been some changes in the membership of the Governance Committee. Only two of the original members currently serve on the Committee. Family and work demands have contributed to the departure of a few members. Frustration with the lack of support from Town Meeting also was a contributing factor.

Christina (Tina) Lingham was the first member to resign in June 2021. Joan Shaughnessy, former School Committee member, was appointed by the Select Board to fill that position, although she then resigned in April 2022. Paul LeBeau resigned as of June 2022. Hayley Fetrow, Chair of the Holliston Housing Authority was appointed in July 2022 and Suzanne Nersessian, former Finance Committee member, was appointed in September 2022. Scott

McKechnie resigned in October of 2022. The current committee now consist of four members.  
[Link](#)

### **Preparatory Research**

The Governance Committee has reviewed the Holliston General By-Laws dealing with government operations with the intent of recommending greater efficiencies and more updated management practices. Charters and By-Laws of comparable towns in Massachusetts have been reviewed to identify best practices that could be applied to Holliston. This comparative data will allow the Committee to identify strengths and weaknesses in Holliston's current form of government and areas where improvements may be achieved. The Committee also reviewed the history of earlier governance change efforts in Holliston and the Town's current organizational structure. State laws enabling new approaches for improved municipal management are being studied and resources at the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, the Massachusetts Municipal Association and local university institutes or centers are being contacted for suggestions.

The Governance Committee established a web page on the Town's website which includes all its meeting agendas and minutes. Research tables and documents prepared by the Governance Committee are included in the documents section of its web page. Update Articles summarizing the Committee's work or recommendations on key initiatives are included on the web page and have been printed in full in the Holliston Reporter.

The Committee's examination of town government has been and will continue to be an open and transparent process through our public committee meetings and public meetings with town officials, boards, committees and commissions. Public hearings have been scheduled to explain our role and hear from residents regarding their views of town government and suggestions for improvement. Recommendations from the Committee will be publicized and presented at Town Meetings for discussion and action.

The first meeting, the organizational meeting, of the Governance Committee was held on July 16, 2020. The Governance Committee has met together 72 times, not including meetings by one or two members with Holliston Town officials. Initial research by the Committee involved creating a series of graphs and tables to better understand the environment of the project. Examples of this work are shown by the links listed below.

- Holliston Government Structure Charts [Link](#)
- Budget process for 15 comparable towns [Link](#)
- Years since prior Government Study Reports and reforms [Link](#)
- Finance Indicators of Holliston and 11 Peer Communities [Link](#)
- Chronology of Holliston government structural change [Link](#)

In subsequent early meetings in 2000, the Committee devoted time to meet with Town officials, review data and information it prepared and discuss governance issues and possible projects to pursue.

## STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

Based on the research undertaken by the Governance Committee regarding Holliston's governing structure, we have identified the following findings.

- The Town of Holliston has not kept pace with other Massachusetts towns which have taken steps to continually update their management capacity and reconfigure their governance structure to more effectively address the greater complexities of municipal government that have evolved over time in an environment of more limited own-source revenue growth.
- The last comprehensive assessment of governance in Holliston occurred in 1994, 28 years ago and few governance changes have occurred since then. Consequently, Holliston has no Charter, no budget development By-Law, an outdated Town Administrator special act and no periodic review of its General By-Laws.
- Past studies from state agencies and town committees have recommended change in Holliston's government structure, but most suggestions have not been implemented and none have been implemented since 1994. That trend continues today.
- Since 1994, municipal government has become more complex and demanding for Holliston and for the Town Administrator who is responsible for management of the day-to-day operations. In addition to substantially larger town budgets, federal and state regulations and enforcement changes have been enacted, adding more responsibilities for town government and creating additional administrative burdens. Some requirements have led to the creation of standalone positions in municipalities. A few examples are federal and state changes in employment regulations, pension and retiree health insurance (OPEB) actuarial changes, public information and Freedom of Information laws, additional processes for Equal Opportunity Employment laws and implementation of HR best practices like formal performance reviews, IRS payroll requirements and request for proposal and bid award changes under public procurement laws.
- Holliston's government structure is decentralized with eleven independently elected boards and offices. The 1988 and 2021 Financial Review Reports of Holliston by the state Division of Local Services noted the decentralization of Holliston government and in its 2021 report cited it as one reason for recommending the creation of a Charter. The Town's decentralized government is demonstrated in the Holliston Government Structure table available at the bottom of page 2.
- Town Government is dependent on a mix of part-time volunteer and elected residents and full-time professional staff. There are 33 committees that have been established to perform public service duties.
- Lack of transparency and clarity in many of Holliston's By-Laws exist due to limited descriptions of responsibilities for many key positions, boards or committees. This dearth of information makes it incredibly difficult for residents to understand the roles and

responsibilities of their town's officials, boards and committees and to participate in town governance.

- We do acknowledge the positive steps taken by the Town Administrator in the creation of the Assistant Town Administrator position for HR and elevating the Treasurer-Collector position to Finance Director. Also, the Facilities Manager position was established in 2020 and the Public Works Department was established in 2014.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN**

One of the charges to the Governance Committee in 2020 was to create an organizational strategic plan. Since July 2020, the Governance Committee has scheduled 72 meetings for committee business, not including meetings of one or two members with other Holliston town officials or public hearings. With that background, we have developed a short-term plan and a longer-term plan of six initiatives that constitute a strategic plan for steps the Governance Committee feels are important and recommends should be implemented soon to enable Holliston to successfully meet the current and future challenges facing the Town.

### **Longer-Term Projects**

#### **Holliston Charter**

The Governance Committee recommends that the Select Board initiate a process to establish a Town Charter for Holliston. The #1 recommendation of the state Division of Local Services (DLS) in its Financial Management Review of Holliston report in November 2021 was for the Governance Committee to undertake a process to create a Charter and submit the proposal to the Select Board for adoption.

The Governance Committee believes that engaging a public management consultant would be advisable to assist the Committee in the development of a Charter, and that the Charter should be established through the creation of a special act.

As a result of our review of By-Laws and other town documents in scores of other towns in Massachusetts, the Governance Committee is convinced that Holliston is missing an important governing opportunity by not having established a Charter of the Town. Many other Massachusetts towns with a wide range of populations have adopted Charters.

The 2021 DLS report states the following:

"Increasingly, communities have been adopting home rule charters to organize their local governments in the ways that best meet the needs of their citizens. A good charter clearly defines the structure under which a town operates, documents all its positions, boards, and committees, addresses issues of elected versus appointed officers and boards, establishes the distribution of power, and provides lines of authority. The charter should include the authority and responsibilities of a town administrator and delineate financial management procedures. Throughout Massachusetts, a charter is the preferred vehicle, over bylaws, to strengthen accountability and institute structural changes. Establishing a charter would help Holliston meet its long-term goals of better communication, improved management, and efficient operations."

## **Town Administrator**

The Governance Committee believes it is past time to upgrade the provisions of the 1994 Special Act that established the position of Town Administrator in Holliston. In 1994 when the Act was adopted, the authority provided was less than the norm for Town Administrators in neighboring and peer towns. The year 1994 was 28 years ago and little change has occurred with the legal authority of the Holliston Town Administrator. Meanwhile, municipal government has become more complex and demanding with more limited own-source revenue growth.

The limited extent of the Town Administrator's legal authority is noted in the Holliston Government Study Committee's report to the Select Board dated November 7, 1994. In comparing the new responsibilities recommended for the new Town Administrator position with responsibilities exercised by the Executive Secretary position, the report stated that "new administrative responsibilities recommended for the Town administrator actually are not extensive. The changes recommended, in large part, codify services and duties currently being performed by the Executive Secretary. The new responsibilities proposed for the Town administrator would be considered the minimum of what the Town of Holliston requires at this time to adequately provide basic services efficiently within its limited resources." Again, 28 years ago.

A stronger Town Administrator will better enable Holliston to address current and future challenges. The alignment of duties between the Select Board and Town Administrator is an important aspect of this matter as it is with the Select Board size issue. Key areas to address will be in the areas of financial planning and management and appointment authority.

The changing nature of municipal government has caused towns to upgrade their full-time professional management staff and add additional management positions.

Any assessment of the Town Administrator position should also include research on whether the increased authority necessary to bring the Town Administrator position up to the level of what is the standard authority exercised by most Town Administrators today is sufficient now, but at a later time upgrading the position to Town Manager should be in order. The other consideration would be transforming the form of government from a Select Board-Town Administrator structure to a Select Board-Town Manager form of government. A 1994 report of the Holliston Government Study Committee to the Select Board noted regarding the 15-year history of government change in Holliston that the "gradualist" approach seemed favored prior to 1994.

[Link](#)

## **Budget Development Process**

The Governance Committee recommends that Holliston establish a written budget development process. Holliston's system based on custom and past practice rather than a written structure inevitably will create uncertainty of the proper role of the various players in the budget process and unnecessary tension. A written process would be especially helpful to newly elected or appointed Town officials who would have more certainty about the

designated budget role of their office. Holliston does have an informal budget process that has been used in recent years, but it is not a written process that codifies the entire budget process.

The state Division of Local Services in its November 2021 Financial Management Review report stated in its second recommendation that Holliston should develop and adopt a Budget By-Law, in part, because “town budget practices are not completely documented in its By-Laws”. Indeed, given the absence of a town charter, the report recommended that the town “develop a bylaw that codifies the entire [budget] process into a lasting, effective model.” The recommendation further states that “the bylaw should establish a budget timeline, clearly define the responsibilities of various town officers, set out the order of tasks to be completed and continue to assign the town administrator with responsibility for managing the process as set out in the town’s special act.” The report also recommended a similar By-Law for the Town’s capital planning process. [Link](#)

In 1988, in a Financial Management Review of Holliston report, state officials stated that organizational changes are required to manage increasingly complex issues and that the town’s financial functions should be centralized. The report stated that the “current structure of the town’s financial organization is substantially decentralized” which “hinders the ability of the town to conduct comprehensive financial planning.” The report recommended that the “town should broaden the financial management responsibilities of the Executive Secretary.” [Link](#)

In a February 2, 2022 response to questions posed by the Governance Committee after the release of a second Financial Management Review of Holliston, state officials recommended a more top-down centralized budget process.

The lack of a more formal written budget development plan or By-Law was noted by Community Paradigm Associates in its work on the most recent Town Administrator search as an issue of concern in the search process.

Most towns that adopt Charters normally include in the Charters a Financial and Fiscal Procedures Article that contains provisions that outline the budget development process so each public body or official knows the proper role to exercise and what is expected. Holliston’s General By-Laws have no such Article.

### **Holliston Government Structure**

Two separate Holliston government studies raised the issue of the decentralization of town policy and supervision of town operations, excluding schools, among elected boards and offices. The Holliston Government Study Committee in its November 1994 report cited twelve (12) different elected boards and offices which were each independent of the other which it felt “created a dispersion of general government management thereby creating problems of coordination of policy and administration and impeding public accountability.” Eleven (11) boards and offices listed in the 1994 report remain unchanged in 2023. [Link](#)

The Holliston Financial Management Review by the state Division of Local Services in 2021 recommended that the Town review the numerous boards and commissions established by the

town. The report noted that the town had established 33 committees and a review should be undertaken to ensure each has “a documented purpose, an established term and oversight structure to ensure they are fulfilling their mission and complying with local bylaws.” The Governance Committee did undertake a preliminary review of the 33 committees regarding their compliance with the above factors and submitted the information to the Town Administrator. Nevertheless, the two issues raised by the two reports deserve further study.

## **Short-Term Projects**

### **By-Law Study Committee**

The Governance Committee has prepared a revised By-Law Study Committee Article intended to be submitted for the May 15, 2023 Annual Town Meeting. This By-Law is revised, taking into consideration the comments raised at the October 17, 2022 Annual Town Meeting.

Having prepared the Planning Board and Scenic Roads By-Laws with the support of the Planning Board, the Committee suggests that the Planning Board submit the two revised By-Laws to the Select Board for the May 15<sup>th</sup> or October 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Town Meeting warrant. Also, we recommend that the Select Board sponsor the revised Moderator By-law in the Spring or Fall warrant.

### **Select Board Size**

As previously noted, the Governance Committee will be prepared to make a recommendation regarding an anticipated Citizen’s Petition to increase the Select Board size from three to five members. When this issue first was proposed as a Citizen’s Petition at the May 2021 Town Meeting, the Select Board suggested not acting on the proposal at that time to give the Governance Committee an opportunity to make a recommendation on the issue.

Coming to a decision on this matter will require the following:

- Continuing discussions with Holliston and other town officials regarding the advantages and disadvantages of remaining at three members or moving to five members.
- Successfully working with the Select Board and Town Administrator to realign their responsibilities to enable the Select Board to devote more time to policy development and strategic planning and the Town Administrator to assume more responsibility on day-to-day management and operational issues.
- Analyzing the responses of the surveys received from current and prior Holliston Select Board members.
- Public hearings with Holliston residents regarding the matter.
- Publicly re-submitting the seven (7) Update Articles with any necessary additions regarding various aspects of the Select Board size issue based on the Governance Committee’s research.
- The frequency of Select Board meetings is also tied to the issues of Select Board size and alignment of duties between the Select Board and Town Administrator. A table

prepared by the Governance Committee showing the frequency of meetings of 40 towns indicated that 70% of the Select Boards meet bi-weekly. Holliston's Select Board meets practically every week. [Link](#)

The Governance Committee believes that bi-weekly meetings should be a goal the Select Board strives for to enable it to more successfully focus on policy and planning and make the position more attractive from a time-commitment perspective. Bi-weekly meetings would also benefit the Town Administrator with more time for day-to-day management.

### **Related To Above Issues**

**Alignment of Duties** - The proper alignment of duties between the Select Board and Town Administrator has been described above as being important aspects of necessary change for the Select Board size issue to be properly addressed and for the upgrading of the Town Administrator authority for the reasons explained in their relevant sections of this report. As such, alignment of duties is vital for two separate projects, and is highlighted here for emphasis.

A chart summarizing the long-term and short-term priority recommendations described above is available here. [Link](#)

## **GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK TO DATE**

### **Budget Development By-law**

At its meeting on August 19, 2020, the Committee members voted that a new Town By-Law outlining the budget development process in Holliston should be its first initiative. Holliston's current By-Laws are incomplete on this topic, which had led to tension among some boards and committees. The hiring of a new Town Administrator with direct experience in municipal finance in two other towns and the Committee's extensive review of the Charters or General By-Laws of scores of other Massachusetts towns contributed to this decision. Meetings with Holliston officials and discussion with officials in other towns were also undertaken.

From the Committee's review of town Charters and General By-Laws, the Committee developed a list of fifteen (15) towns that each adopted Charters that included Articles outlining its budget development process. The list was divided among the five Governance Committee members so that each was responsible for developing working relationships with officials in three towns to learn more about their town operations than would be possible from merely reviewing written Charters and By-Laws.

By the end of 2020, the Governance Committee had completed developing a draft Article outlining a revised budget development process for Holliston. In 2021, the Governance Committee met with several Town committees, boards and officials to receive feedback on the draft Article. Two public hearings were held for the same reason.



Work on the budget process involved reviewing dates of the May and Fall Town Meetings and trying to find more time to prepare budgets for the May Town Meeting. Awkward wording for the dates of both meetings in Holliston's By-Laws also warranted modification. Consequently, a second recommendation was prepared to make both the Spring and Fall meetings Annual Town Meetings and changing the date of the May Town Meeting to the second Monday of the month and the October Town Meeting to the third Monday of the month. Also, based on our review of town By-Laws, we came across several electronic talent bank programs to facilitate the ability of residents to learn about open town volunteer positions and how to indicate interest in serving, which we decided to recommend for Holliston.

### **Annual Town Meeting, May 10, 2021**

The Governance Committee's detailed Budget Development By-Law recommendation became Article 9 and the Town Meeting dates and Talent Bank proposal became Article 10 for the warrant of the Annual Town Meeting on May 10, 2021. Article 9 was defeated at the Town Meeting, with a majority of the residents attending voting to maintain the status quo. Article 10 was adopted by Town Meeting.

Article 9 [Link](#) Article 10 [Link](#)

### **Lessons Learned**

In retrospect, starting off with a complex and detailed budget process warrant Article was not a good strategy. Rather, the Governance Committee would have fared better by first recommending a straight forward, easy to understand issue like Town meeting dates and talent banks and gradually build up to more detailed initiatives. A more effective means of communicating with the residents of Holliston would have been beneficial along with better collaboration and socialization of the topics and more outreach to residents to be able to receive and address feedback and concerns before Town Meeting. Identifying interested residents who would be willing to speak at Town Meeting also would be helpful. Two public hearings on the budget process produced only a few residents who attended. Use of the Town's website and the Holliston Reporter enabled the Committee to publicize its reports and data, but both approaches were not enough to help with resident turnout or support.

### **Finance Officers By-Law Review**

At the end of fiscal 2021, the Governance Committee began a review of the Holliston By-Laws for the positions of Treasurer-Collector, Town Accountant and Principal Assessor, the three primary financial officers assisting the Town Administrator. The Governance Committee met with the three Town officials, inquiring about any By-Law changes that any of them would recommend. The Committee also reviewed the state laws pertaining to the three positions. Further, the Committee reviewed the By-Laws and Charters of comparable and other towns for best-practice By-Law information to assist in its overall research. From that search, the Committee considered the creation of a Finance Director position.

As a result of the breadth of this research, it became more evident that certain changes that were of interest to the Committee could not be achieved by a By-Law change, but would have to be achieved through a special act approved by the Legislature and Governor or the creation of a Town Charter. With the improved understanding of the authority of each of the three positions based on state law and with no suggestions by the financial officers for changes in the Holliston By-Laws of their respective three positions, the Committee decided against recommending any By-Law changes for Treasurer-Collector, Town Accountant or Principal Assessor at the next October Annual Town Meeting.

### **Select Board Size**

Article 37 in the warrant for the May 10, 2021 Annual Town Meeting was a Citizen's Petition to increase the size of the Select Board from three to five members. No additional changes other than the number of members were recommended in the Article. The Select Board recommended that Town Meeting hold on acting on this proposal so that the Governance Committee would be able to make a recommendation on the Article.

In February 2022, the Governance Committee began its research on this topic. The Committee reviewed the landscape by preparing several tables comparing population size to Select Board size. [Link](#) & [Link](#)

The Committee also searched for towns that had addressed this issue of Select Board size and for any printed reports regarding procedures followed and any listed advantages or disadvantages for either a three-member or five-member Board. One example of that work was a table listing the pros and cons of both three and five-member Select Boards. [Link](#)

Contact was made with the current and former Holliston Select Board members to discuss their views on the topic of Board size. A survey on this topic was prepared with Holliston Select Board members asked to complete and return the survey so their responses could be assimilated by question which would be very helpful to the Committee in forming its opinion and recommendation. [Link](#)

The Governance Committee prepared seven Update Articles on various aspects of the Select Board size issue to better inform the residents about a complex issue. Each Update Article was featured in a separate edition of the Holliston Reporter and the Articles were posted on the Governance Committee's web page to improve the exposure of the information. [Link](#)

The Warrant for the May 9, 2022 Annual Town Meeting also included a Citizen's Petition to increase the size of the Select Board from three to five members. However, a technical legal question regarding the warrant Article was raised resulting in no action being taken on the Article at the Annual Meeting. With its analysis continuing on the issue of Select Board size, the Governance Committee was prepared to speak on its work on this issue but not to make a recommendation at this Town Meeting.

The more time we devoted to the issue of Select Board size, the more we realized how complex the issue is and the importance of its connection to the role of the Town Administrator.

From our review of the written reports of other town committees established to study the Select Board size issue and our discussion with officials of other towns that have addressed this issue, we have come to realize that the alignment of duties between the Select Board and Town Administrator or Town Manager is an integral factor in determining the right decision about Select Board size and in making the decision that will lead to a successful governance change.

Consequently, the work of the Governance Committee is currently evolving around the issue of what steps are now needed to insure the Select Board is more involved with issues of policy development and strategic planning and the Town Administrator is strengthened in his day-to-day financial and operational management of Town affairs.

Our goal now is to be fully prepared to make a recommendation based on our research and work with the Select Board and Town Administrator on the issue of Select Board size assuming a citizen's petition will be submitted for the May 15, 2023 Annual Town Meeting.

We did note that in our review of reports from other town committees on this issue that the time taken to adequately review and come to a decision about Select Board size was, on average, fifteen (15) months.

### **By-Law Review**

From the Governance Committee' review of the Holliston General By-Laws, examples emerged of the lack of a comprehensive review of the By-Laws over several years. Two prime examples were the one-sentence By-law for the Moderator position and the two-sentence By-Law for the Planning Board, when excluding the Scenic Roads section. While state law provides a complete description of the full responsibilities of a Town Moderator and Planning Board, the limited Holliston By-Law descriptions of the key responsibilities of both are hardly adequate to inform the residents of the most basic responsibilities for each. This situation was particularly egregious for the Planning Board given its important role affecting current and future development in Holliston and its potential impact on residents.

In the interest of providing more information for residents in the General By-Laws about the primary responsibilities of key Town positions, boards or committees, the Governance Committee reviewed state laws and the By-Laws of other towns for Moderator and Planning Board. From that work, revised and more transparent By-Laws for Moderator and Planning Board were prepared. The Scenic Roads section in the Planning Board By-Law was restructured and expanded as a separate By-Law to give it more emphasis. These three By-Law revisions focused on the highlights of the legal responsibilities related to the Moderator, Planning Board and Scenic Roads, but did not duplicate the full extent of authority provided in state laws for those entities. State law prevails over town By-Laws so more descriptive By-Laws are intended to improve transparency by better informing the Holliston public about the key responsibilities of the office, board or committee, but do not restrict the authority provided in state laws.

The work on these three By-Laws pointed to the need for a more routine periodic review of the Holliston General By-Laws through the establishment of a By-Law Review Committee. Based on

a review of eight By-Laws for a By-Law Study or Review Committee in other towns, a By-Law Review By-Law was prepared.

Article 11 of the warrant for the October 17, 2022 Annual Town Meeting was submitted by the Governance Committee. The Article consisted of four sections. The primary section recommended a By-Law Review Committee with the other three sections for Moderator, Panning Board and Scenic Roads mainly revised examples demonstrating why periodic reviews of Holliston's General By-Laws were needed. [Link](#)

The Governance Committee prepared five separate Update Articles explaining the need and purpose of each of the four sections of Article 11 with an initial overview article. [Link](#)

Each of the five Update articles were featured in separate editions of the Holliston Reporter to help inform the residents about Article 11. In addition, the five Update articles were posted together in the Governance Committee's web page in the Holliston town website.

Despite the fact that Article 11 represented a moderate change to create a By-Law Review Committee, Town Meeting voted to indefinitely postpone the Article.

## **PRIOR GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEES**

Prior to the current Governance Committee, Holliston Select Boards had established Government Study Committees in 1987 and a second one in 1994, both with different but related objectives.

In May 1987, Town Meeting approved Article 24 which directed the Select Board to study the current government structure. Subsequently, a Holliston Government Study Committee was established and issued its report on March 14, 1988 with a recommendation to change the selection of the Treasurer-Collector and Town Auditor from elected positions to an appointed Treasurer-Collector and appointed Town Accountant. Also, the financial responsibilities of the Executive Secretary were recommended to be broadened. The Massachusetts Division of Local Services was requested to prepare a Financial Review of Holliston which was issued in February 1988. The DLS report also recommended that the Treasurer and Town Accountant become appointed positions and that the financial responsibilities of the Executive Secretary be broadened. These recommendations were supported by the Select Board and approved by Town Meeting on May 9, 1988. Next, the resulting proposed Special Act was submitted to the Massachusetts Legislature and approved as Chapter 99 of the Acts of 1998 on July 5, 1988. [Link](#)

A second Government Study Committee was established by the Select Board on October 1, 1993. The focus of this Committee was whether the Executive Secretary position should be replaced by a stronger Town Administrator position. The Committee issued its report on April 4, 1994 which recommended the language for the creation of the Town Administrator position. However, opposition to this proposal by a sitting member of the Select Board and by a vocal former Select Board member resulted in the recommended financial authority for the position being less robust than was being exercised by Town Administrators in neighboring and other

towns in 1994. The Annual Town Meeting on May 9, 1994 adopted Article 10 authorizing the establishment of the position of Town Administrator. Next, a proposal to establish a Selectmen-Administrator form of Government was submitted to the state Legislature and was approved as Chapter 94 of the Acts of 1994 on August 16, 1994. No further change has been made in this Act since 1994, 28 years ago. [Link](#)

## **CONCLUSION**

Clearly, there is much work still needed to be undertaken and this report of the Governance Committee has identified six organizational projects that the Select Board and Town Administrator should focus on accomplishing over the next few years. Of the six projects, the highest priorities should be creating the Charter for Holliston and upgrading the Town Administrator Special Act. These recommendations are endorsed by the Holliston Governance Committee and have also been recommended by the state Division of Local Services in its Financial Management Review of Holliston reports in 1988 and 2021. There should be no hesitancy in moving forward to act on these recommendations.

We all have a stake in supporting evolving governance improvements that will benefit Holliston going forward. The Governance Committee has developed a greater knowledge of Massachusetts town governance and municipal management and structure after two and one-half years of gaining experience and should continue to pursue this work. We are confident that as we continue our research on the six projects, other issues tied to the projects or the findings of this report will emerge for us to pursue as well for the long-term benefit of Holliston and its residents.

### **Governance Committee Members**

Samuel R. Tyler, Chair

Len Engel

Hayley S. Fetrow

Suzanne K. Nersessian