Chapter 12

Community Engagement

Section A: Existing Conditions

Government Leadership

Newburyport adopted its current City Charter in 2011 which took effect in 2013. Under this charter, the City has an elected Mayor, with a four-year term, and an eleven-member City Council. Prior to the adoption of the current charter, the mayoral term was two years. The School Committee has six members elected to four-year terms, which is chaired by the Mayor.

In addition to elected officials, there are over 30 boards and committees that are appointed to oversee policies and decisions regarding various responsibilities and assets within the City's jurisdiction. Most committee members are volunteers, although some receive a small stipend for their service. City officials occasionally form sub- or ad hoc committees in order to foster discussion between officials and stakeholders around specific issues. In some cases representatives of constituent groups such as the Chamber of Commerce or the Newburyport Arts Association participate in committees in order to provide stakeholder input and to facilitate coordination, and in all cases committee membership is open to all members of the Newburyport public.

All meetings of elected officials and appointed committees are open to the public under state public meeting law, M.G.L., 30 A with meeting notices posted at least 48 hours in advance of public meetings. Meetings are generally posted on the City's website, and often on a bulletin board in City Hall, as well. Public Hearings, where required by state law, are advertised in the legal notices of local newspapers. The City Clerk is responsible for posting meetings for most departments, boards, and commissions, though individual departments also post meetings for the respective boards they staff.

City Officials periodically hold or attend meetings with residents to discuss specific issues or neighborhood concerns, or to share general information and questions. The Police Department, for example, holds periodic educational talks or attends neighborhood meetings. The Police Department also recently instituted a Ward Liaison program where a Police Sergeant is assigned to each section of the City, working closely with the Ward Councilor for that area to address issues.

City Communication

The City government employs a number of tools and technologies to communicate with the public. Following is a description of some of the ways in which the City government shares or collects information.

Direct Contact

Several Departments interact directly with the Public in City Hall. For example the Building Department issues building permits, and the City Clerk issues certificates for vital records, various permits and licenses for activities such as parking and dogs, and manages elections and passport applications. During businesses hours, a greeter is often present to help direct people who enter City Hall to the find the offices or services they are looking for. Greeters are volunteers through the City's senior tax work-off program.

DRAFT

The City provides an increasing array of permit applications, registrations, payments, and other services online. User-friendly phone systems and online services enhance staff efficiency and assist in providing a more user-friendly experience for residents and businesses.

City Website

The City maintains an official website that contains information about City government, including elected officials, departments, services, news and announcements, and a public meeting calendar. Links to various regulations, policies, fee schedules, forms, and other public information are provided on the pages of relevant departments, as well as through portals for residents and businesses. The City's web page also provides a portal for visitors with links to cultural, open space, and transportation resources.

On the Mayor's Office page of the City website, there are blog posts with updates approximately once per month with news and comment about current issues. The City Council page provides live stream videos and minutes from past meetings, as well as agendas for upcoming meetings.

Several City departments and commissions maintain their own official websites:

- The School Department website provides a range of information about the school district and individual schools, staff, School Committee, policies and curriculum, and calendar of events. The School Department website also has "Let's Talk", a communication channel to facilitate ongoing dialog. This tool invites community members to submit questions and comments via forms that are then forwarded to appropriate officials and staff to respond to directly.
- The City's main website provides a link to a website for the Office of Emergency Management, however, the website is not currently functional.
- The Police Department website offers descriptions of all of the Police Department units, as well as contact information, links, and a news blog. The Police Department also facilitates communication via social media pages and an alert service through Code Red.
- The website of the Newburyport Housing Authority provides information about Housing Authority properties, various state and federal housing programs administered by the Housing Authority, instructions and forms for people interested in applying for affordable housing, and information for current tenants.
- The Newburyport Public Library website offers online access to a range of library resources and online research tools, in addition to schedules, events, and services for various types of library users. The website also provides information on library policies, contact information, volunteer opportunities, and fundraising efforts.
- The Emma L. Andrews Library & Community Center website provides information about programs and events that take place at the library, as well as news, leadership, and contact information
- The Parks Department website provides information about facilities, current projects, policies, adult recreation programs, and some community events. Forms are available for permits, program registrations, and volunteer sign-ups.

DRAFT

- Moseley Woods Park has a website with information for park visitors, a schedule of events, and fundraising support.
- Newburyport's Veterans Services are provided through a regional district which provides its own website.
- The Newburyport Waterfront Trust has a web page which describes the park under management of the Newburyport Waterfront Trust, as well as a calendar of events, meeting minutes of the Trust, park use application, photo gallery, and other information.
- The Youth Services website is currently under construction, but provides links to a current seasonal listing of programs and events and a registration portal.

Social Media

The City of Newburyport does not have an official Facebook page, however a few City departments and services use social media to share information. The Police Department has its own Twitter page with nearly 4,000 followers and a Facebook page with a following of nearly 5,000. The Police Department has also established links through the Nextdoor neighborhood social network, which is used by the Ward Liaison program that connects Police Sergeants and Ward Councilors with residents. Other City Departments with social media presence include the Newburyport Public Library, Emma Andrews Library, and Office of Culture and Tourism, which maintain Facebook pages providing news and announcements.

There are numerous unofficial social media pages dedicated to Newburyport, providing forums for sharing information among community members, advertising businesses, and discussing issues. The Chamber of Commerce is particularly active in using social media to share information about community events, as are the Daily News and PortMedia. There are also widely followed independent social media pages and groups dedicated to discussion about Newburyport, such as Newburyport Commons with over 3,000 members on Facebook, and Newburyport Forward, which has 1,600 followers.[1]

Alerts and Reporting Services

The City uses Reverse 911, which makes phone calls to all landlines in the city to inform residents and businesses of emergencies or important City announcements. In addition, Newburyport's Emergency Communication Network, Code Red, alerts residents of critical situations such as local AMBER alerts, boil water notices or shelter in place events, etc. Alerts can be sent to phones or mobile devices by text or TTY.

The City also invites residents to subscribe to e-alerts to keep them informed of events and meetings that are occurring in the City. Whenever new events or documents are posted to the City website, copies of the posting are automatically emailed to subscribers. Residents have the option to select the frequency and which types of announcements, meetings, minutes, or alerts they would like to receive.

[1] Facebook "groups" may be public (available for anyone to view) or private (available only by invitation), and allow any member to post and interact. Facebook "pages" by contrast, are intended for organizations and businesses to be able to provide updates to the public; pages are visible to everyone on Facebook by default, but only the page administrator can initiate posts.

The Police Department uses MyPD, a smartphone app which enables residents to communicate with the Police Department, as well as to receive news and alerts from the Police Department. MyPD is not intended for emergencies, but allows users to submit questions, tips, or concerns to the Police Department.

Non-City Communication

Through other media including television, radio, and newspapers, Newburyport residents can be informed about the City government and community affairs. Local media also facilitates public discussion and awareness about local issues.

Newburyport Cable Media

PortMedia is a nonprofit Public Education and Government (PEG) local cable television access center serving Newburyport. PortMedia "cablecasts" local, regional, and national programming on Newburyport's cable Channel 8 (public programming) and Channel 9 (government and education programming). Channels 8 & 9 reach almost 7,000 households, as well as nursing homes, schools, Anna Jaques Hospital, and businesses in Newburyport.[2] PortMedia provides live broadcasts of City Council, School Committee, and other government meetings, live high school sports, public affairs programs, etc. Videos of government meetings and other local events may also be viewed on the station's YouTube site. PortMedia posts public service announcements via "bulletin boards" on its cable channels.

PortMedia's mission extends beyond cable television to facilitate public discourse and meaningful engagement through a variety of media. The organization has recently established a low power FM Radio station, WJOP, which has a range of 3-10 miles. PortMedia's cable and radio broadcasts are also streaming online via the station's YouTube channel and internet radio, and the station uses social media (Facebook and Twitter) to share new content and news and announcements.

Membership to PortMedia is available to anyone who lives, works, or attends school in Newburyport. Members may take free training classes and workshops to learn how to use the station's equipment and software, borrow equipment to develop and produce programs to air on PortMedia's channels, and/or join crews to help produce live programs. The station collaborates with local public and private schools and organizations to offer training and create and distribute content. PortMedia provides summer and after-school programs, and engages high school student interns and volunteers from the community.

PortMedia currently receives the majority of its funding through cable fees, supplemented by community member fees and sponsorships. As cable television increasingly competes with other forms of media and PortMedia expands the diversity of its media offerings, the reliance on funding from cable may not continue to be sustainable in the future. The station is undertaking upgrades to its website and video streaming services. The station is also exploring options for relocating to a City building, with hopes that the move will help to reduce cost, enhance volunteer participation, and facilitate coordination with the City.

[2] http://portmedia.org/about/

DRAFT

Newspapers

There are two newspapers based in Newburyport.

- *Newburyport News*, a publication of North of Boston Media Group, provides the Daily News of Newburyport, a 6-day-per week daily newspaper that covers Newburyport and its surrounding communities of Amesbury, Salisbury, Newbury, West Newbury, Rowley, Georgetown, Groveland, Merrimac, and, in New Hampshire, Seabrook and South Hampton. Individual articles, classified listings, and other features can be accessed online on a limited basis, while subscribers receive full access to articles via e-edition or print with home delivery. Public notices are made available without subscription through mypublicnotices.com.
- *The Newburyport Current* newspaper is a weekly publication owned by New Media Investment Group. Articles are provided online through WickedLocal.com.

Radio

Two local radio stations broadcast from Newburyport:

- WNBP broadcasts on AM 1450 and FM 106.1. The format features oldies music, along with local news and commentary. Scheduled programs throughout the week provide informational discussion about a variety of topics, while City departments such as the Council on Aging, Parks Department, and the Office of Culture and Tourism provide occasional guest interviews and updates.
- WJOP broadcasts on 96.3 FM. Known as Joppa Radio, WJOP is licensed to the Newburyport Community Media Center, with studios located at PortMedia, and an antenna on top of Newburyport High School. Still in a fledgling stage (on air since April, 2016), the station aims to broadcast music and podcasts, as well as providing the City with an emergency broadcast system through which City officials can provide information to the public in case of power outage.

Civic Life

Newburyport offers a wide array of activities, events, and resident services that build a sense of community and contribute to the quality of life. In many instances the City coordinates extensively with volunteers and non-profit organizations that support these services and activities. Following is a description of some of the major programs through which the City fosters participation in community life.

Newburyport Public Library

Newburyport's Public Library envisions itself as "the centerpiece of our community, welcoming and empowering all in the pursuit of knowledge, culture and social connections." In addition to circulating books, newspapers, magazines, reference material, and other media that may be borrowed or used within the building, the Library offers access to electronic media including public computers, wireless internet, and a growing collection of e-books, music, and other online resources, as well as extensive historic archives. The Library also provides a variety of social and educational programming for children, teens, and adults, and its meeting rooms are widely used by local organizations, community groups, and boards and commissions.

The Library is in the process of preparing a four-year strategic plan. In its analysis, they have observed a change in the way the public uses the Library over recent years. While the book circulations have declined, the

DRAFT

number of people entering the Library remains much the same, as more people are coming to the Library to use computers, archives, study rooms, and meeting spaces.[3] The Library has three meeting spaces including a program room with 80 person capacity, the children's room which accommodates 20+ persons, a smaller conference room, and it also allows limited use of an additional board room. Attendance at some events has outgrown the capacity of Library meeting spaces. (The new Senior Center has a larger capacity meeting room which may accommodate larger events.)

The Library publicizes events and programs through paper calendars, a weekly handout, and a children's programming handout. They also publicize using local newspapers, a Facebook page, an Instagram account for the Children's Department, a message board located in the library, and a weekly email announcement to people who have requested it. In their strategic plan, the Library has identified the need for further improvement in communication as many residents continue to be unaware of programs and services that would be of value to them. Coordination of calendars and publicity among the Library and other cultural and community groups in Newburyport would also be beneficial.

The Emma Andrews Library and Community Center is a small independent library located in the South End neighborhood, which offers a similar range of programming to the Newburyport Public Library for children, teens, and adults, as well as book lending and community activities. The site was formerly a branch of the Newburyport Public Library, but was closed and reopened in 2010 under an independent association which has raised funds for improvement of the facilities and to support the library as a multi-purpose building.

Council on Aging

Newburyport's Council on Aging (COA) serves as a center for civic and community life for senior residents, as well as connecting elders with the range of services and resources that exist in the community to support them. A new Senior Center building opened within the past year and centralized a number of services that were previously scattered in various places throughout the City, including veterans services, housing, nutrition, legal, and tax assistance, advocacy, telephone outreach, health and wellness programs, a daily lunch program, volunteer coordination, transportation, and a variety of arts, education, and social activities. There has been a substantial uptick in participation in COA programs since the new Senior Center opened.

The COA informs the community of its programs and offerings through a monthly newsletter which is sent out to 1,000 households in paper form and 700 addresses by email, as well as extra copies which are available to be picked up in the Senior Center, City Hall, and other prominent locations around the community. The Council often utilizes media such as the newspapers, cable TV, and radio to announce upcoming events or to alert seniors about the programs available.

The Senior Center designed its programming and services through research and input from the Board of Trustees and they will offer or adjust services and programming in response to requests from the community. The COA coordinates with senior services in neighboring communities to provide complementary scheduling and to share programming ideas and opportunities. Two opportunities for improvement in services currently might include staffing to keep the Senior Center facility open seven days a week, and coordination with Emergency Services to be connected with seniors who require emergency assistance (in order to be able follow up with elder services they may need).

[3] Phone interview with Cynthia Dadd, Newburyport Public Library, 5/27/16.

DRAFT

Youth and Community Education

Newburyport Youth Services provides programming and events for the city's youth. The department also acts as an advocate for the youth, so that their ideas, concerns and needs are heard and addressed by the community. Youth Services also coordinates volunteers to provide tutoring and enrichment programs.

Newburyport Adult & Community Education (NACE) provides continuing education classes and workshops on a variety of topics such as culture, fitness, workforce skills training, and navigating life issues to adults (with some programs available to teens over age 15). NACE is an independent self-supporting program under the auspices of the Newburyport Public Schools. In addition to its course offerings, NACE also sponsors writing contests and other special events in conjunction with the Newburyport Public Library, the Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce, and the School Department. NACE recruits community members to teach courses, as well as to volunteer in other education programs in the community.

The School Department provides core services for the City's children, and coordinates with Youth Services, NACE, and other cultural and educational organizations in the community to offer programming. The School Department is a critical point of contact between the City and families with children. Effective communication is essential to supporting the educational mission of the School Department, including communication within the school community, to parents and families, and to the community at large. The School Department recently launched an online communication channel through its website, "Let's Talk", which enables community members to submit comments and questions about a wide range of topics which will be routed to the appropriate persons within the Department or the School Committee for direct response. The School Department also utilizes emails, print newsletters, and various media to share information.

The School Department provides opportunities for community involvement in decision-making through engagement with the elected School Committee (who's meetings are televised), and through School Councils, which under state law are established for each of the schools within the system. School Council membership consists of parents, students attending the school, teachers, and other members of the community who may be connected with municipal government, business, higher education, human services, child care, or other interested groups. They are tasked with identifying educational needs of students attending the schools, adopting educational goals, formulating a school improvement plan, and reviewing the annual school building budget. Finally, Newburyport School Department is in the process of preparing a five-year strategic plan, and has similarly engaged a range of community-members both within the school and beyond in their planning process.

Community Events

Newburyport is host to many community, cultural, and tourism-related events throughout the year. Taking place all over the city, venues include Downtown, various parks, museums, the Waterfront, Plum Island Point, City Hall, the High School, Senior Center, churches, arts centers, etc. Some draw visitors from the region and beyond, while others are focused in specific neighborhoods or the Newburyport community.

The City of Newburyport's website lists 22 annual events occurring in every month throughout the year. This list is not a comprehensive inventory of all the events that take place, and does not include occasional or one-time events, of which there are many. The majority of events in the City are organized by various private organizations and stakeholder groups representing a broad range of community interests, such as history, art,

DRAFT

films, music, classic cars, and seasonal shopping. The City's Office of Arts, Tourism and Cultural Affairs is the liaison for coordination with the City.

Participation, publicity, and other communication around events is primarily carried out by the organizing entity, although the Chamber of Commerce maintains a calendar with a fairly extensive listing of things going on in the City that would be of interest to visitors, businesses, arts patrons, and shoppers. The City's Office of Arts, Tourism, and Cultural Affairs maintains a Facebook page dedicated to Newburyport's Cultural District, and is in discussion about developing a central arts calendar. News about events is also shared on WNBP, the local AM radio station, PortMedia, newspapers, and by word of mouth.

A portion of downtown Newburyport was designated a Cultural District by the Massachusetts Cultural Council in 2013, which provides resources for communities with a walkable concentration of cultural facilities, activities, and assets. The City works with state and regional agencies such as the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Massachusetts Film Bureau, and the North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau, to promote visibility of Newburyport's tourism assets outside of the City. At the same time, the arts community depends on local engagement and resident participation.

Accessibility

For people with disabilities, access to civic engagement can be challenging, as architectural, communication, programmatic, and policy barriers can prevent people from being able to fully participate in community life. These barriers can prevent people with disabilities from use of common public places, such as restaurants, stores, banks, offices, or cultural venues, or attending community events. Newburyport's Commission on Disabilities is a volunteer commission that advocates for the inclusion, integration, and participation of people with disabilities in community activities and services.

As shown in **Table CE-1**, Newburyport has approximately 1,500 residents with some form of disability comprising roughly nine percent of the City's population according to latest ACS estimates. Types of disabilities reported include hearing and visual difficulties, ambulatory difficulties, cognitive difficulty, and self-care or independent living difficulties. In addition, many people may have such difficulties temporarily or permanently who do not identify as having disabilities.

Seniors experience disabilities at a significantly higher rate than the population under age 65. As seniors comprise an increasing share of the city's population, it becomes increasingly important to incorporate principles of universal access and to reduce barriers for people with difficulty seeing, hearing, or moving about in the public realm. Moreover, many people without disabilities may benefit from improvements to ease, comfort and safety.

Table CE-1: Population with Disabilities

	Total	%	65 and Older	Under age 65
Total Population	17,386		2,859	13,529
With a Disability	**1,512**	**8.7%**	**28.5%**	**5.1%**
Hearing Difficulty	490	2.8%	11.1%	1.3%
Vision Difficulty	238	1.4%	3.8%	0.9%
Ambulatory Difficulty	550	3.4%	13.6%	1.5%
Cognitive Difficulty	593	3.2%	7.5%	2.5%
Independent living difficulty	742	4.3%	16.5%	2.0%

Note: Some residents have more than one disability and are therefore counted more than once in individual disability categories.

Source: 2009-2014 ACS

While it may be particularly challenging to retrofit a historic downtown such as Newburyport to eliminate mobility barriers from public and commercial spaces, there are many ways in which people with disabilities can be included and supported in public life, and many barriers that can be addressed or avoided without significant cost.

Newburyport's historic architecture is essential to the community character and the unique appeal of its downtown cultural district; however it presents significant challenges for people with mobility impairment navigating the streets and sidewalks, as well as shops, restaurants, and cultural venues. Incremental improvements through the installation of curb cuts, ramps, and accessible pedestrian signals can help to enable more of Newburyport's residents to enjoy the downtown. Educational efforts can help to raise community awareness of business and communication practices to better include people with differing abilities, while an accessibility guide could help residents with disabilities to know what to expect when patronizing businesses and venues in the City.

Most of Newburyport's public buildings, offices, meeting spaces, parks, and other public facilities meet the requirements of Federal law, which ensure equal access for people with disabilities. Communication is typically available in a variety of formats that are compatible with various types of adaptive tools and technologies for people with visual or hearing impairments. Continual coordination, training, and examination of policies and practices can help to ensure that the City remains up to date and compliant with best practices and new guidelines from the State and Federal governments.

DRAFT

Section B: Formative Issues

Facilitating Participation

Factors such as physical barriers, competing demands for time, and lack of information about local government and community affairs, inhibit participation in civic activities. Addressing barriers and offering a wider range of opportunities to engage through a variety of locations, times, technologies, and formats, can help to build stronger connection to civic life.

Facilitating Communication

Information technology and preferences are rapidly changing so that traditional methods of communication reach only a limited segment of the population. Communication media must be flexible and current, so that members of the community continue to have access to information and opportunities for discussion and coordination.

Section C: Newburyport's Community Engagement Goals

Newburyport sustains a strong sense of community, cooperation, and trust, through engaging community members in civic life and decision-making, seeking representation and participation of residents from all neighborhoods and walks of life.

Goal 1: Effectively disseminate City information

Ensure that City information is shared in a format that is easy to access and provides a convenient feedback process with information available on-line and through more traditional means.

Goal 2: Increase public participation in civic activities.

Provide diverse opportunities for the public to engage with the City in decision-making and community service.

Goal 3: Reduce barriers to participation.

Ensure that people are not excluded from interacting with the City or participating in civic life due to physical impairments.

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