

# COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN PAXTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## Town Government Chapter



## TOWN GOVERNMENT: FACILITIES AND SERVICES

### Introduction

This chapter of the Master Plan presents a general description of Paxton's town government, municipal facilities and services. For this chapter, each department head was interviewed and information was collected regarding organizational structure, staffing, budget, responsibilities, equipment, facilities, programs offered and upcoming capital needs. Before beginning an in-depth analysis of each municipal department, it is important to understand from where the Town gets its revenue and the tax implications for Paxton households.

At the Spring 2006 Town Meeting, voters approved an operational municipal budget of \$4,146,654 for the 2007 Fiscal Year. This represents a significant reduction of 15.6% from the previous fiscal year's operational budget of \$4,792,806, although the reduction can largely be attributed to the Water Department becoming an "Enterprise System" during 2006. Non-education State Aid for the 2007 Fiscal Year amounted to \$689,468, an increase of 2.9% over the previous fiscal year and the second straight year where State Aid to Paxton was increased.

Before going further, it is important to understand from where Paxton gets its revenue in terms of both local tax levies and State assistance. The next two tables look at where Paxton gets its tax dollars from at the local level and the amount of State aid the Town receives.

The four tables that follow are intended to show how the Town's annual operating budget affects local homeowners, the taxes they pay and the value of their homes. Data is presented on the following items: average single family home assessed valuation, local tax rate, average single family home tax bill and local tax levies.

**Table TG-1**  
**Average Assessed Valuation Per Single Family Home - Year 2007**

<u>Paxton</u>	<u>Holden</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oakham</u>	<u>Princeton</u>	<u>Rutland</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Sterling</u>
\$347,213	\$311,272	\$275,471	\$276,714	\$373,441	\$286,162	\$259,847	\$337,130

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Paxton has the second highest average assessed-valuation per single-family home when compared against adjacent towns, with only Princeton having a higher assessed-valuation. The Central Massachusetts region and the eastern regions of the State have seen a dramatic rise in the average single-family home valuation during the last five years and Paxton is no exception.

The Town's average assessed valuation per single-family home has fluctuated over the years, decreasing during the 1990s from \$171,151 in 1990 to \$149,080 by 2000. However, the average assessed valuation has more than doubled in the last five years, rising from \$149,080 in 2000 to \$347,213 in 2007 (an increase of 133%). The average assessed valuations also more than doubled for Leicester, Rutland, Spencer and Sterling during this timeframe. The remaining comparative communities also experienced significant increases in their average assessed valuations, but not to the same degree.

Land values are high throughout the region, development is on the rise and existing homes are selling for much more than what they sold for during the 1990s. In short, the region's housing stock has never been valued higher.

**Table TG-2**  
**Year 2007 Local Tax Rates**

<u>Paxton</u>	<u>Holden</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oakham</u>	<u>Princeton</u>	<u>Rutland</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Sterling</u>
\$11.42	\$11.56	\$9.31	\$8.40	\$11.78	\$10.76	\$7.73	\$11.51

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

Local tax rates are determined by assessing the value of buildings and land in town and developing a tax rate that is charged per each \$1,000 of assessed valuation in such amounts as to cover all or a portion of the local municipal government's annual operating expenses. The formula for determining a property's tax bill is the tax rate per \$1,000 times the property's assessed valuation in \$1,000's.

Paxton's 2007 tax rate fell in the middle when compared to its nearby neighbors, with Holden, Princeton and Sterling having higher rates and Leicester, Oakham, Rutland and Spencer having lower rates. It should be noted that the Town's current tax rate is at its lowest rate since 1990, when the tax rate was \$10.49 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, and the tax rate has declined slightly each of the last three years. The Town's tax rate rose steadily between 1990 and 2000, hitting a high of \$17.95 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation in 1999. Paxton's neighbors also experienced a steady rise in their tax rates over the course of the 1990s.

**Table TG-3**  
**Average Single Family Tax Bill - Year 2007**

<u>Paxton</u>	<u>Holden</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oakham</u>	<u>Princeton</u>	<u>Rutland</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Sterling</u>
\$3,965	\$3,598	\$2,565	\$2,324	\$4,399	\$3,079	\$2,009	\$4,111

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Paxton's 2007 average single-family home tax bill is one of the highest when compared against adjacent neighbors; however, the average tax bill for Sterling exceeds Paxton's average tax bill by \$146. This is indicative of communities with high home and land values.

Worth noting is that Paxton's average single-family home tax bill has increased significantly over the last five years: the year 2000 average tax bill was \$2,937, and this figure has increased to \$3,965 by 2007 (an increase of 35%). The increase when viewed over the last 15 years is even more dramatic with the average tax bill more than doubling over this timeframe, rising from \$1,802 in 1990 to \$3,965 by 2007. The average tax bills also more than doubled for Leicester, Rutland, Spencer and Sterling during this timeframe. The remaining comparative communities also experienced significant increases in their average tax bills, but not to the same degree.

For the past twenty years, Paxton has ranked in the upper third when its average tax bill is compared to other Massachusetts communities. In 1990, Paxton's average tax bill ranked 88<sup>th</sup> of 323 reporting communities. By 1999, Paxton's average tax bill ranked 109<sup>th</sup> out of 340 reporting communities, and 111<sup>th</sup> out of 307 reporting communities in 2007.

The next table (TG-4) looks at how Paxton's local tax rate, average assessed value for single-family homes and average single-family home tax bills have changed during the past six years, with the last column showing the predicted average single-family home tax bill when adjusted for inflation.

**Table TG-4**  
**Historical Comparison of Changes in**  
**Paxton's Tax Data – 2000 through 2006**

<b>Year</b>	<b># of Parcels</b>	<b>Average Assessed Value</b>	<b>% Change</b>	<b>Tax Rate</b>	<b>Average Single-Family Tax Bill</b>	<b>% Change</b>	<b>Predicted Average SF Tax Bill based on Inflation</b>
2000	1,323	\$149,080		\$19.70	\$2,937		
2001	1,337	\$182,471	22.4%	\$15.18	\$2,770	-5.7%	\$3,047
2002	1,354	\$182,537	0.0%	\$16.63	\$3,036	+9.6%	\$3,082
2003	1,366	\$185,463	1.6%	\$17.89	\$3,318	+9.3%	\$3,161
2004	1,429	\$283,201	52.7%	\$12.85	\$3,639	+9.7%	\$3,222
2005	1,468	\$295,711	4.4%	\$12.85	\$3,800	+4.4%	\$3,318
2006	1,476	\$311,490	5.3%	\$12.41	\$3,866	+1.7%	\$3,450
6-Year Increase	12%	199%			32%		17%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

The large increases in assessed valuations in 2001 and 2004 were the result of a townwide reevaluation, and another is scheduled for 2007 (every three years). The data indicates that Paxton's average single-family tax bill has increased at a higher rate than inflation (32% versus 17%). It is also interesting to note that the total number of parcels has grown modestly during the past six years, indicating that Paxton has not experienced much in the way of subdivision activity. For comparison, nearby Rutland has added hundreds of new building lots to its tax rolls for each of the last seven years, with most of the lots being created through new subdivision activity.

The general rule of thumb in municipal finance is that towns are considered to be "bedroom communities" if they derive more than 90% of their total tax revenue from residential property taxes. According to the table on the following page, Paxton fits this profile, and so do all of its neighbors with the exception of Spencer and Sterling (which are very close). While Paxton has no industry per se, the radio towers on Asnebumskit Hill are considered industrial for assessing purposes. In terms of actual tax dollars raised, Holden raises the most across the board, but this is largely due to Holden having the largest population of the compared communities. The contribution of residential property taxes to the Town's overall tax base has remained steady over the years, covering between 94-96% of the total tax base with economic development making a marginal contribution.

**Table TG-5**  
**Local Tax Levies - Year 2007**

Community	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property	Res. as % of Total Taxes
<b>Paxton</b>	\$6,349,869	\$168,095	\$46,393	\$44,494	96.0%
Holden	\$22,246,269	\$757,420	\$325,113	\$278,787	94.2%
Leicester	\$9,336,075	\$412,594	\$181,766	\$115,116	92.9%
Oakham	\$1,700,051	\$51,513	\$9,463	\$31,353	94.9%
Princeton	\$5,941,231	\$77,313	\$22,603	\$56,225	97.4%
Rutland	\$8,271,704	\$168,150	\$39,090	\$102,628	96.3%
Spencer	\$7,897,588	\$543,538	\$274,148	\$133,760	89.2%
Sterling	\$11,503,224	\$526,308	\$662,113	\$307,747	88.5%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

### **Departmental Needs**

The next section of this chapter reviews the various entities that comprise Paxton's municipal government: how they are organized, staffing, budget, facilities, equipment and programs offered along with a list of anticipated capital equipment and staffing needs for the next decade.

#### Public Works Department:

*Organization:* The Board of Selectmen appoints the Superintendent of Public Works. The Department is responsible for maintaining Town roads, the public water system, the Town cemetery and the Town Common. The Department has a three-year contract with East National Water Inc. to maintain the water system on a day-to-day basis.

*Staff:* The Department consists of six full-time employees, including the Director. The Department also employs a part-time administrative assistant. Seasonal help is hired in the winter for snow plowing.

*Budget:* For the 2007 Fiscal Year, the Department had a total operating budget of \$1,146,230 (\$539,738 for highway and \$606,492 for water). The Town went to an "enterprise" system for its water service in Fiscal Year 2007. Money generated from the water system goes into an enterprise account for system upgrade and maintenance. The Department is able to keep earned interest from this account instead of returning the interest to the Town's General Fund. The Department goes through the Town's Capital Improvement Planning process to request funding for major pieces of equipment. The Department uses the bulk of its State Chapter 90 highway aid for roadway maintenance and repair. Paxton received roughly \$115,000 in Chapter 90 funds in Fiscal Year 2006 and is slated to receive a similar amount for Fiscal Year 2007.

*Facilities:* The Department has a highway barn, a storage garage and a salt shed located off Holden Road (Route 31) east of the Town Center. The main highway barn was built in the 1940s and is in fair condition. The building is not large enough to house all of the Department's equipment and several vehicles are located in the unheated secondary garage. The windows are old and need to be replaced and the building loses heat because the ceiling is not insulated.

*Equipment:*

- 2006 Sweeper Truck – good condition
- 2006 Ford 350 Pick-Up Truck with plow – good condition
- 2006 Ford 550 Dump Truck with plow and sander – good condition
- 2005 Ford 550 Dump Truck with plow – good condition
- 2002 John Deere Backhoe – good condition
- 2000 Dump Truck with combination plow and wing – fair condition
- 1997 Volvo Loader Truck – fair condition
- 1997 International Dump Truck with plow – fair condition
- 1997 International Dump Truck with combination plow and sander – fair condition
- 1995 Tiger Tractor with roadside mower – good condition
- 1995 Ford E250 Van for water department use – poor condition
- 1989 Mack Truck with sander, plow and wing – poor condition
- 1984 International with catch basin cleaner – poor condition
- Austin Western Grader – poor condition

*Departmental Duties:* The Department's primary responsibility is road maintenance for approximately 50 miles of roadways in town, including State numbered Routes 31 and 56. MassHighway, the State Department of Transportation, maintains the entirety of Route 122 through Paxton. The Department maintains the vehicles for other municipal departments. The Department also clears sidewalks in the Town Center, fixes road signs, mows and trims along roadsides, removes rubbish for town-owned properties and cleans catch basins. The Department oversees the construction of new roads in subdivisions to make sure they will meet the Town's roadway standards. The Department participates in reviewing large-scale subdivision plans in conjunction with the Building Inspector and other municipal department heads. The Department also issues driveway permits.

*Water System Description:* The Town of Paxton has a mix of town water and private wells. The Paxton Water Department supplies town water to approximately 1,200 of the 1,400 homes and businesses in Paxton. The remaining homes have private wells.

*Water Distribution System:* The Paxton Water Department currently purchases all of its water from the City of Worcester. Worcester's water system can supply as much as 103 million gallons of water per day. The system's unaccounted for water amount stands at 16 millions gallons, or 15% of the system's total capacity. While Paxton's current unaccounted for water figure of 15% represents an increase from its Year 2000 unaccounted for water figure of 10%, the 2000 figure is suspect because the water system was not fully metered at the time (as it is now). The water system's per capita water usage figure stands at 60 gallons per person per day, which is below the new State water policy that mandates water providers to get down below 65 gallons per person per day. Paxton's per capita water figure and unaccounted for water figure compare very favorably to its adjacent neighbors:

**Table TG-6**  
**Comparative Water Usage Statistics – Year 2005**

	<b>Paxton</b>	Holden	Rutland	Spencer
Gallons per person per day	60	69	88	83
Unaccounted for water	15%	8%	24%	17%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. Note: Oakham did not report for 2005 and the reports for the two water districts in Leicester are suspect.

The Town maintains a pumping station on Pleasant Street at the Worcester City line to pump water from Worcester, and two water storage tanks, one on Maple Street and one on Asnebumskit Road. Paxton's water distribution system begins with its pumping station at the Worcester City line on Pleasant Street. Water mains extend up Pleasant Street from the Worcester line to the center of Town, and branch off this main line to most parts of Town:

- Pleasant Street from the Worcester line slightly beyond Davis Hill Road.
- Grove Street from Pleasant Street to Sunset Lane.
- Holden Road (Route 31) from Grove Street to the Holden line.
- Streeter Road and Maple Street from Grove Street to Richards Avenue.
- Richards Avenue (Route 56) to Brooks Road.
- West Street (Route 31) to South Street.
- South Street and Suomi Street from West Street to Marshall Street.
- All of Marshall Street between the Spencer and Worcester lines.

Neighborhoods not served by Town water include:

- Brigham Road.
- Nanigian Road.
- Laurel Street.
- Pond Street/Grove Street beyond Sunset Lane.

Water Treatment: All of the water purchased from Worcester is treated at the City's water filtration plant in Holden. The Worcester water filtration plant combines disinfection and filtration to provide excellent water quality. Water is initially treated with Ozone for primary disinfection. The water then undergoes filtration through eight coal/sand filters, followed by final disinfection with Chlorine. The filtration plant is capable of treating 50 million gallons of water per day.



Water Supply: The City of Worcester obtains water from eleven surface water reservoirs located in Paxton and surrounding communities. These reservoirs combined hold over 7 billion gallons of water. The Worcester reservoirs include:

- Asnebumskit Pond – Paxton
- Pine Hill Reservoir – Paxton/Rutland/Holden
- Kettle Brook Reservoir #4 – Paxton
- Kettle Brook Reservoir #3 – Paxton/Leicester
- Kettle Brook Reservoir #2 – Leicester
- Kettle Brook Reservoir #1 – Leicester
- Lynde Brook Reservoir – Leicester
- Kendell Reservoir – Holden
- Holden Reservoir #1 – Holden
- Holden Reservoir #2 – Holden
- Quinapoxet Reservoir – Holden/Princeton

Of the Worcester Reservoirs, four are located in the Town of Paxton, and portions of the watersheds of all but one (Quinapoxet) are in Paxton. In addition to these reservoirs, the City of Worcester can draw water from the Quabbin Reservoir Aqueduct at shafts 3 and 4. Due to cost considerations, the Quabbin Reservoir Aqueduct is considered an emergency water supply only. However, the City has drawn water from the Quabbin Aqueduct during droughts.

Asnebumskit Pond is owned and maintained exclusively by the Town of Paxton. Asnebumskit Pond was the Town's only water supply before it connected to the Worcester system in 1998. By the terms of the water contract, the City of Worcester can draw up to 270,000 gallons per day from Asnebumskit Pond. In addition to the Worcester reservoirs, the Leicester Water District maintains 4 wells off Grove Street in Paxton. These wells supply water to a portion of the Town of Leicester. The Town of Paxton has an agreement with the Leicester Water District allowing it to obtain water from these wells in an emergency.

*Water Supply Protection Efforts:* Open Space Protection: The City of Worcester owns a significant amount of land (approximately 1,590 acres) in Paxton to protect the watersheds of the Kettle Brook and Pine Hill Reservoirs, and additional land (approximately 224 acres) in the watershed is protected through conservation restriction. The Town of Paxton owns a relatively narrow strip of land surrounding Asnebumskit Pond for watershed protection, and the Leicester Water District owns the property immediately surrounding its wells (48 acres total).

The Watershed Protection Act: The Watershed Protection Act, passed by the Massachusetts State Legislature, protects areas surrounding the Pine Hill Reservoir, Asnebumskit Pond and their tributaries. These regulated areas and tributaries eventually drain to the Wachusett Reservoir which serves as a public drinking water supply for over two million people in the Greater Boston Area.

Town Zoning Protection: In the fall of 2001, the Town of Paxton enacted a Watershed Protection District as part of its Zoning Bylaws. The Watershed Protection District restricts land use in areas of town bordering reservoirs, tributaries of reservoirs and the Leicester Water District wells. The Watershed Protection District regulations are similar to those of the Massachusetts Watershed Protection Act (the Cohen Bill).



Water Supply Constraints: The contract between the Town of Paxton and the City of Worcester specifies that the Town can purchase up to 450,000 gallons of water per day. Of this amount, the Town receives a 20% rate discount on the first 370,000 gallons/day. The Town is currently consuming about 350,000 gallons of water a day. This means that the Town is using 95% of the water it can purchase at the discount rate, and can only add about 300 homes before reaching the overall limit. If the town reaches the limit, it will be forced to either renegotiate the Worcester contract, or build municipal wells. Both of these options would represent a significant cost to water customers.

**Table TG-7**  
**Paxton Water System Statistics**

Total Available Water	450,000 gallons/day
Actual Water Usage	350,000 gallons/day
Water System Customers	1,260 connections
Usage/Day/Customers	277.7 gallons/day/customer
Gallons Per Person Per Day	60 gallons
Total Remaining Water	100,000 gallons/day

Source: Paxton Water Department

*Upcoming Capital Needs:* According to the Town's most recent Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), the Public Works Department has scheduled the following equipment purchases:

- 2008: Replace the Water Department van (estimated cost: \$32,000), replace 1987 Mack Truck with sander/wing (estimated cost: \$150,000).
- 2009: Replace the 1997 Volvo loader truck (estimated cost: \$125,000), replace one of the 1997 International dump trucks (estimated cost: \$105,000).
- 2010: Replace the other 1997 International dump truck/plow (estimated cost: \$115,000).

In addition to the above capital expenditures that have already been scheduled under the CIP, the Department has identified a series of improvements to the water system that will need to be addressed over the next decade. In February 2005, the Town retained the engineering firm of Tata & Howard Inc. to analyze the system and make recommendations for improvements. In February 2006, Tata & Howard Inc. released its Water Distribution Study for the Town of Paxton, Massachusetts, which contained the following recommendations:

- General Operation and Maintenance Practices: General maintenance and operation practices are recommended and should be completed on an as-needed basis. Regularly scheduled maintenance programs should include hydrant flushing, meter replacement and water main replacement. An estimated annual cost of \$110,000 is recommended for these maintenance programs.
- Priority One Recommended Improvements – Water Distribution: These recommendations are intended to eliminate deficiencies in storage and the main transmission grid of the system. These improvements are recommended in order to meet storage needs and to mitigate fire flow deficiencies as identified through the standards of the Insurance Services Office (ISO). The Priority One recommendations include water storage tank maintenance, a water audit, and replacement of the water mains on Grove

Street, Sunset Lane and Brooks Road. The Priority One improvements are estimated to cost approximately \$1,600,000.

- **Priority One Recommended Improvement – Water Supply:** This recommendation is intended to address potential water supply deficiencies. It is recommended that the Town conduct a study to determine the feasibility of utilizing Asnebumskit Pond as a water supply source (currently used for emergencies only). Estimated cost: approximately \$75,000.
- **Priority Two Recommended Improvements:** These suggested improvements were developed to mitigate other infrastructure deficiencies in the distribution system such as estimated fire flow requirements in residential areas and system extremities and system looping. The recommended improvements include replacement of water mains on Suomi Street, Marshall Street, Holbrook Lane, Indian Hill Road, Shanandoah Road, Arrowhead Drive, Crocker Hill Drive, Camp Street and Asnebumskit Road. The recommended improvements are estimated to cost approximately \$2,591,000.

It is expected that the Water Department will integrate the general operation and maintenance practices into its annual operating budget, while the recommended priority improvements will need to be scheduled through the CIP process.

#### Municipal Light Department

*Organization:* A three-member Board of Commissioners oversees the work of the Light Department. The Commissioners are elected to three-year terms. The Board meets on a monthly basis. The Board appoints the Department Manager who is responsible for the Department's day-to-day operations.

*Staff:* The Department consists of seven full-time positions: the Manager, four linemen, a billing technician, an accounting assistant and a part-time meter reader/system technician.

*Budget:* The Light Department is unique in that its budget cycle is by calendar year (January through December) rather than the fiscal year (July through June). The Department uses the calendar year in order to be consistent with the Department of Telecommunications and Energy Reporting period. All of the Town's other departments use the fiscal year as its budget cycle. For the 2006 calendar year, the Light Department has accrued expenses of \$2,826,277. The Department operates under the auspices of MGL Chapter 164, Sections 1 through 133 (Manufacture and Sale of Gas and Electricity). In accordance with Chapter 164, Section 56 all monies paid to the Department are deposited into an account with the Town Treasurer. The Department pays for its capital expenses on its own through earned income and depreciation. The Department's rates are based on cost of service.

*Facilities:* The Department's main facility is located off of Pleasant Street (Route 122) behind the fire station. Constructed in 1971, the building is in good shape although it does not have enough space to meet the Department's needs. The building has a new vinyl-coated covering installed in 2003 for the roof. The windows need to be replaced because they are not heat efficient. The Department also owns and maintains an electrical substation and pole-yard on Marshall Street on land they rent from the State.

*Equipment:*

- 2004 International 4400 – excellent condition
- 2004 International 4400 – excellent condition
- 1997 Chevy Fleetside – fair condition
- 1993 Vermeer Brush Trailer with Chipper – good condition
- 1987 Chevy Digger Truck – fair condition (will be replaced in 2007)
- 1971 Ford Dump Truck – good condition

*Operational Description:* ISO New England is the Independent System Operator (ISO) that controls the bidding of load, generation and pricing of electricity for all of New England. Paxton's energy generation needs are bid into and sold by transactions through the ISO, and Paxton's electrical load is bid and purchased through the ISO. The Department pays for the energy purchased for delivery to its customers based on hourly generation sold and electrical load purchased.

The Department provides electricity to all but a few Paxton households. There are two households located along the edges of Town that buy electricity from Mass Electric, and there is one household that is off the electrical grid entirely. The Department's biggest customer is Anna Maria College. The Department provides power for its customers through both fixed contracts and the open market power supply. Electrical power is sold to Paxton from a variety of sources including but not limited to: the Seabrook nuclear plant (NH), Millstone nuclear plant (CT), Stonybrook Combined Cycleplant (Ludlow, MA), the New York Power Authority (Niagara Falls, NY), various short term contracts and the spot market. The Department is currently involved in developing two energy generation projects for future power supply (Berkshire Wind and Stonybrook II), and is investigating others.

Paxton's demand for energy continues to grow unabated, both in terms of total system demand and power used per residential customer. In 1991, each of Paxton's residential energy customers used an average of 695 Kilowatt-hours per month. By 2000, this figure had increased to 738 Kilowatt-hours per customer per month. The most recent figures available are from 2005 and show that Paxton's residential energy customers now use an average of 834 Kilowatt-hours per month.

The ever-increasing energy demands requires the Department to purchase more energy from the spot energy market. Spot market prices are much more expensive than the power purchased under the Department's fixed contracts.

The table below compares Paxton's energy use with other Massachusetts communities with municipal lighting departments for the years 2004 and 2005.

**Table TG-8**  
**Energy Use Comparisons**  
**Average Annual Kilowatt Hours Per Residential Customer**

Year	<u>Paxton</u>	Ashburnham	Groton	Holden	Littleton	Princeton	Sterling	W. Boylston
2004	9,649	7,646	10,272	9,188	11,077	9,764	9,017	8,799
2005	10,012	7,893	10,811	9,645	11,261	9,777	9,702	9,182
% Increase	3.8%	3.2%	5.2%	5.0%	1.7%	0.1%	7.6%	4.4%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Energy.

The previous table indicates that increased energy usage per residential customer is a regional phenomenon and not specific to Paxton. In fact, Paxton falls somewhere in the middle when compared to other communities with municipal lighting departments, both in terms of the energy used per residential customer and the increase in energy used from 2004 to 2005.

*Programs:* The Department offers free energy audits through its Municipal HELPS Program as well as Energy Star rebates on certain appliances, and allows customers to use the Department's Watt Meter to determine the energy usage of individual appliances.

*Upcoming Capital Needs:* The Department will likely replace some of the equipment listed above during the course of the next decade including replacement of the main transformer at the Wentworth Substation. The Department will pay for these expenses on its own and will not go through the Town's capital improvement budgeting process. Should the Department require financing for the upgrades needed at the substation, such financing will require approval of town meeting, but interest and principal payments will be funded out of Light Department revenues.

*Concerns for Future Development:* The Department would like to see the Town's development regulations amended to reduce the amount of infrastructure required, as well as require the placement of utilities underground for all new construction (versus the current overhead method allowed for existing town streets).

#### Board of Health:

*Organization:* Paxton has a three-member elected Board of Health. Each member is elected to a three-year term. The Board meets on a monthly basis. The Board of Health appoints the Sanitary Inspector, Burial Agent, Animal Control Officer, Wire Inspector and Plumbing Inspector.

*Staff:* The Board employs the Town's Sanitary Inspector, who provides anywhere from five to fifteen hours a week, with the summer building season being the busiest part of the year. The Inspector conducts Title V inspections, food service establishment inspections, pool inspections, camp inspections, rental housing inspections and housing complaints. A Board member handles medical issues. The Board also employs a part-time Animal Control Officer, Burial Agent, Wire Inspector and Plumbing Inspector. The Town Services Coordinator provides administrative support to the Board as part of her full-time position with the Town.

*Budget:* For the 2007 Fiscal Year, the Board had an operating budget of \$282,197, with solid waste disposal accounting for the bulk of the budget (\$251,116).

**Table TG-9**  
**Paxton Solid Waste and Recycling Figures**

Year	Total Trash	Co-Mingled Recyclables	Recycled Paper	Remaining Trash for Landfill	% of Trash Diverted (Recycling Rate)	State Recycling Rate
2005	1,755 tons	123 tons	193 tons	1,439 tons	18.0%	28%
2004	1,814 tons	131 tons	334 tons	1,349 tons	25.6%	26%
2003	1,756 tons	117 tons	312 tons	1,329 tons	24.3%	27%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, and Central Mass Disposal Inc.

Paxton's percentage of trash diverted from the landfill (i.e., the Town's recycling rate) was slightly lower than the State average for 2003 and 2004. However, the gap widened in 2005 when Paxton's recycling rate was 18% versus the State average of 28%. Three of Paxton's neighbors also fell below the State's recycling average in 2005 (Leicester: 15%, Holden: 18% and Spencer: 23%), while three of Paxton's neighbors did not report at all (Oakham, Princeton and Rutland). Only Sterling's 2005 recycling rate (39%) exceeded the State's 2005 recycling rate (28%). It should be noted that local recycling rates vary widely, with some towns reporting recycling rates as high as 69% (Leverett), and many communities not reporting at all.

*Facilities:* The Board does not have its own office, and instead utilizes half of the limited space in the Town Services Coordinator's office at the Town Hall.

*Programs:*

- Annual blood pressure, flu and pneumonia clinics through a contract with UMass Memorial Home Health out of Worcester.
- Health regulations briefings for local restaurants.
- Health inspections for restaurants and food service establishments.
- Paxton participates in an annual Earth Day household hazardous waste disposal program with several neighboring communities including Princeton, Rutland, Holden, Sterling, Boylston and West Boylston.
- Title V inspections (including performing soil percolation tests for new building lots, reviewing septic plan revisions and witnessing the installation of all on-site sewage treatment systems).
- Permits and approves all private drinking water wells.
- Rental housing complaints.
- Low interest (5%) loans for homeowners with failed septic systems. The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) administers this program on behalf of the Town.
- Active participant in the Region III Emergency Preparedness Coalition.

*Upcoming Capital Needs:* None identified.

### Fire Department:

*Organization:* The Board of Selectmen appoints the Fire Chief. The Chief is responsible for hiring all remaining staff and the Department's day-to-day management.

*Staff:* The Department is an all-volunteer force. The Fire Chief is paid for 25 hours per week. There are 41 on-call fire fighters that serve as needed and are paid by the hour. Paxton is fortunate that many volunteers work in Town during the day. Of the 41 volunteers, 15 are certified Emergency Management Technicians (EMTs) and seven others are in EMT training. The Department shares clerical support with the Board of Assessors and receives twelve hours of assistance per month. The Department participates in the training classes offered by the District #7 Fire/Ambulance Mutual Aid Compact, which consists of 26 Worcester County communities. The Department also participates in the District #8 Fire/Ambulance Mutual Aid Compact, which consists of 31 Worcester County communities. The Department has a three-year contract with a private entity (American Medical Response Inc.) to provide ambulance service for Paxton, but has begun investigating the possibility of a shared ambulance service with Spencer.

There is a dispatch center in the existing Fire Station located on Pleasant Street (Route 122). This is a joint community dispatch center that handles police and fire calls, as well as ambulance requests and utility repair calls.

*Budget:* For the 2007 Fiscal Year, the Department had an operating budget of \$207,132, all of which came from the Town's General Fund. The Town received a 2006 FEMA Fire Act grant for the purchase of the forestry unit noted below under equipment.

#### *Equipment:*

- 2006 Ford F-550 Forestry Unit - excellent condition
- 2003 Pumper Truck (1,500 gallons per minute) - excellent condition
- 1996 Pumper Truck (1,500 gall. per minute) – recently refurbished, excellent condition
- 1996 KME Fire Truck - good condition
- 1995 Rescue Truck – recently refurbished, excellent condition
- 1987 GMC Tanker Truck (2,000 gallons, 500 gallon per minute pump) – good condition
- 1981 Pumper Truck (1,250 gall. per minute) – refurbished in 2003, fair condition
- Haz-Mat Truck with Rescue Boat – good condition



The Department attempts to refurbish its trucks every ten years and replace them after twenty years of service. Large-scale equipment purchases are funded through the Town's Capital Improvement Planning process. The Department buys equipment outright and does not lease.

*Facility:* The fire station was built in 1963 and is in poor condition. The two-story facility is at full capacity and has no additional room for new equipment. The Department has had to install a steel storage shed on the property to house excess equipment. Structurally speaking, the facility is not built to support the weight of existing equipment, has old windows in need of replacement and has no room to expand. The facility does not have space available for training or a meeting room. For training, the Department uses the City of Worcester's burn building and the Town of Spencer's training facility. The Fire and Police Departments have been investigating the option of erecting a new public safety facility on this site and have retained a contractor to perform a detailed environmental analysis. The cost of a new public safety complex is currently estimated at approximately \$8.8 million dollars and will likely come before the voters at the 2007 Spring Town Meeting if all of the necessary advanced planning is complete.

*Permits Issued:* The Department issues permits for the installation of oil burners, the removal of underground storage tanks, fireworks, CO/smoke detectors, blasting, and open burning. The Department conducts inspections for fire alarms and sprinkler systems for institutional uses.

*Programs:* The Department offers fire safety programs to a variety of audiences, particularly school-age children. The Department makes use of the District #7 S.A.F.E. mobile education trailer for Fire Prevention Week classes at the Center School. The Department also hosts an open house during Fire Prevention Week.

*Other Responsibilities:* The Fire Department has formed a regional hazardous materials response team with the Town of Leicester's Fire Department and this team is the first line of response for hazardous waste spills. The team will call in the State's regional hazardous materials response team if the spill is more than it can handle. The Department also provides rescue services for auto accidents, rapid intervention teams, as well as search and rescue operations. The Department provides each fire fighter with close to 84 hours of training per member.

*Upcoming Capital Needs:* According to the Town's most recent CIP, the Fire Department has scheduled the following equipment purchases and facility upgrades:

- 2007: Prepare plans for a new public safety complex (estimated cost: \$450,00 - cost to be divided between Fire & Police Departments), 10-year refurbishing of Engine #1 (estimated cost: \$33,000), Phase III of radio upgrade (estimated cost: \$15,000).
- 2008: New public safety building (estimated cost as of 2006 CIP: \$5.7 million – recently revised to \$8.8 million).
- 2009: Replace Engine #2 (estimated cost: \$420,000).
- 2010: 10-year refurbishing of 1996 KME Fire Truck (estimated cost: \$100,000), Replace 1987 GMC Tanker Truck (estimated cost: \$350,000).

Upgrading to an ambulance housed in Paxton, staffed by paramedics for 12 to 16 hours per day with the remaining hours covered by EMTs (Emergency Medical Technicians) is currently being evaluated, but has not been added to the CIP.

### Police Department:

*Organization:* The Board of Selectmen appoints the Police Chief. The Chief is responsible for hiring all remaining staff and the Department's day-to-day management. The Department is currently operating under a three-year contract with the Town.

*Staff:* The Police Department has nine full-time officers including the Chief of Police, two Sergeants and one Detective. The entire Department is certified in First Aid and CPR. A full-time administrative assistant provides clerical support. There are also three full-time and six part-time dispatchers working out of the community dispatch center located in the existing Fire Station. The Department usually has three officers on duty during the day and two officers on duty during the evening and overnight hours.

*Budget:* For the 2007 Fiscal Year, the Department had an operating budget of \$645,282. The current budget is supplemented by two State grants: a \$5,000 Governor's Highway Safety Grant and an \$11,000 Community Policing Grant.

### *Equipment:*

- 2006 marked cruiser - excellent condition
- 2005 marked cruiser – excellent condition
- 2004 marked cruiser – good condition
- 2004 unmarked Chevy Impala – excellent condition
- 2003 marked cruiser – good condition
- 2002 Harley Davidson marked motorcycle – excellent condition
- 2001 marked cruiser – poor condition
- 2000 marked cruiser – poor condition (used as a spare)

*Facility:* The current station was built in 1965 and is in poor condition. The building is too small



to house the officers and equipment, and the access points and bathrooms are not fully compliant with the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Department uses a bench, welded bar and handcuffs for temporary lockup until other accommodations can be made.

In January 2007, the Town contracted with RDA Architects Inc. to prepare a feasibility study to investigate the possibility of building a regional public safety center on the Anna Maria College campus that could address Paxton's need for a new police station. The January 2007 feasibility study identified too many "unknowns" for this idea that were outside of the Town's control and would remain indeterminate well into the future. These "unknowns" include:

- The college does not have a campus master plan in place and it cannot be known where a public safety facility would fit into such a plan.
- Funding mechanisms for the facility have not been identified.
- Potential partners cannot make commitments to the project given the unknowns to date.
- A regional communications consortium has not been formalized.



- Public/private joint construction issues will involve extensive legal coordination.

The feasibility study concludes by saying that “the magnitude of the timing issues involved in planning and developing a joint constituency and funding mechanism for a joint project on the Anna Maria campus leads the study team to conclude that the Town of Paxton should construct a public safety building on the Fire Department site as a prudent approach to housing the Police Department, not only from a fiscal perspective, but in order to address the potential liability issues associated with the existing station in a timely manner.”

Based on the results of the feasibility study, the Town will continue to pursue its first option: a joint Fire/Police public safety facility on the current Fire Station site. The cost of constructing this new facility is currently estimated at approximately \$8.8 million dollars. This matter is likely to appear before the voters at the 2007 Spring Town Meeting.

*Programs:*

- CPR class for new parents/grandparents
- Internet safety class for parents of school-age children
- An annual bike safety class
- Self defense class for school-age children and women
- School resource officer for the Center School

*Trends and Comparisons:* The Massachusetts State Police keeps crime statistics that allow for comparisons with other communities. Please note that the State Police count of total crimes represents the number of actual convictions and not simply the number of arrests. Table TG-10 indicates that Paxton has the lowest number of crimes and lowest percentage of crimes per 1,000 residents when compared against its neighbors.

**Table TG-10**  
**Community Crime Rate per 1,000 Residents - Year 2004**

<u>Community</u>	<u>Total of Crimes</u>	<u>Rate per 1,000 Residents</u>
<b>Paxton</b>	27	6.1
Holden	120	7.7
Leicester	153	14.6
Rutland	53	8.3
Spencer	198	16.9

Source: Massachusetts State Police Uniform Crime Report for 2004 (the last available full year). Please note that although Oakham is a neighbor of Paxton, the Town did not provide its local crime statistics to the State in 2004.

*Upcoming Capital Needs:* According to the Town’s most recent CIP, the Police Department has scheduled the following equipment purchases and facility upgrades:

- 2007: Replace police cruiser (estimated cost: \$31,500), prepare plans for a new public safety complex (estimated cost: \$450,000 – cost to be divided between Fire & Police Departments).
- 2008: Replace police cruiser (estimated cost: \$36,000), purchase new command car (estimated cost: \$35,000), new public safety building (estimated cost as of 2006 CIP: \$5.7 million – recently revised to \$8.8 million).
- 2009: Replace police cruiser (estimated cost: \$33,500).
- 2010: Replace police cruiser (estimated cost: \$34,000).

### Paxton Emergency Management Agency:

*Organization:* The Paxton Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) is currently a one-man operation, with the Director coordinating his activities with the Police and Fire Departments. The Board of Selectmen appoints the PEMA Director annually to a one-year term.

*Staff:* PEMA does not have any paid staff; rather, the appointed Director handles all tasks.

*Budget:* For the 2007 Fiscal Year, PEMA had an operating budget of \$2,036.

*Equipment:* PEMA does not have any dedicated office space at present. Files and paperwork are kept in the Director's home office. PEMA's equipment is stored at the Fire Station, which can also serve as an emergency operations center when needed, as can the Police Station. PEMA is in the process of preparing a detailed inventory of its own dedicated equipment, but the following equipment is available to PEMA through the Fire and Police Departments: radio dispatch system, high-band radios, tabletop and laptop computers, desk space, cots, blankets and emergency supplies. PEMA does not have a mobile command center at present; rather, it coordinates its activities with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) through its regional office in Belchertown.

*Duties:* PEMA is responsible for handling the response logistics for large-scale emergencies such as natural disasters and civil emergencies. PEMA's current emphasis is ensuring that Paxton's first responders (Fire and Police) receive the training necessary for federal (FEMA) and State (MEMA) certification. In 2005 the PEMA completed an update of Paxton's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, the first such update since 2000.

*Upcoming Capital Needs:* PEMA has not identified any upcoming capital equipment needs at present. It is likely that PEMA will request funds for new equipment once it completes its inventory. PEMA will go through the Town's Capital Improvement Planning process for its equipment purchases.

### Land Use Boards:

Paxton has four entities that review, approve and monitor new development: the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission and the Building Inspector/Zoning Enforcement Officer. All of the entities keep their applications and forms on file with the Town Clerk's office and/or the Town Services Coordinator's office. A general description of Paxton's land use review boards and their major duties is presented on the following page.

*Planning Board:* The Board currently consists of five members that are elected to five-year terms. The Board has a part-time clerk that works approximately 20 hours a month, and the Town Services Coordinator provides an average of eight hours per week for Planning Board duties. For the 2007 Fiscal Year, the Board's budget is \$2,200. The Board occasionally uses a portion of its funding to pay for training, workshops and classes. The Board reviews and endorses Approval Not Required (ANR) plans, which constitute the majority of newly created lots in Paxton. The Board is the Special Permit Granting Authority for senior housing and accessory apartments while the Zoning Board of Appeals handles the remainder of uses allowed by Special Permits. The Board also reviews and approves subdivision plans and site plan review applications. Although the Board does not routinely handle multiple subdivision applications at once, the regional growth pressure is such that the Board will need to simultaneously manage multiple cases in the very near future. The Board's current operating procedures appear to work well, with

the Town Services Coordinator reviewing plans for completeness before hearings are scheduled and the Board and/or its engineering consultant (Ross Engineering) reviewing plans for zoning compliance. The Board does not have a revolving fund to pay for consultant review of development plans, and all application fees collected are placed in the Town's general fund.

*Zoning Board of Appeals:* The Board consists of five regular members and four associate members. The Board of Selectmen appoints the Zoning Board members. According to the Zoning Bylaw, the length of the membership terms are "of such length and so arranged that the term of one appointee will expire each year, and thereafter appointments shall be for a term of five years". The Chairman of the Board may designate any associate member to sit on the Board in case of absence, inability to act, or conflict of interest on the part of any of the other Board members, or in the event of a vacancy on the Board until the Selectmen make a new appointment to the Board. The Town Services Coordinator provides administrative support to the ZBA as part of her regular duties. The Board has a minimal budget (\$1,770 for the 2007 Fiscal Year) and occasionally uses some of its funding for training classes. The Board meets on an as-needed basis. Its primary duties include hearing petitions for variances to the Zoning Bylaw (both use and dimensional variances), non-conforming uses, Special Permits for communications towers and appeals of Planning Board and Building Inspector/Zoning Enforcement Officer decisions. For the future, the Board would like to create a database of all Special Permit holders in town, increase the Building Inspector's enforcement capability, and post meeting minutes and hearing results on the Town website.

*Conservation Commission:* The Board of Selectmen appoints the Conservation Commission members to three-year terms. The Commission currently consists of seven voting members and two non-voting associate members. The Commission's budget for Fiscal Year 2007 was \$500. A portion of the annual budget is used to send one Commission member to one training session per year. The Commission does not have any staff and Commission members conduct their own inspections, essentially serving the role as town conservation agent. The Commission receives administrative support from the Town Services Coordinator. The Commission's primary duty is administration of the State's wetland protection and rivers protection acts. Having Commission members serve double-duty as conservation agents could potentially create a conflict for the members, as they are being asked to gather data for decisions, render decisions on behalf of property owners, and enforce their decisions. Ideally, the Commission would have an agent to gather data and conduct enforcement, freeing the Commission to serve as a permit granting authority and overall conservation policy makers. The Commission's long-term goals are to create a database of wetlands in Paxton and accompanying map, a database of active/ completed projects, and a certification/monitoring program for vernal pools.

*Building Inspector/Enforcement Officer:* The Board of Selectmen appoints the Building Inspector on an annual basis. The Inspector's budget for the 2007 Fiscal Year was approximately \$26,635, with \$400 devoted to training and official State recertification of the Building Inspector position. A portion of the budget is also used to pay for clerical support. The Inspector puts in an average of 20-to-25 hours per week depending upon the time of year. The Board of Selectmen and the Inspector jointly review the Inspector's workload for the previous year and the anticipated workload for the upcoming year and the Inspector's salary and budget are adjusted accordingly. The Inspector's primary duties include reviewing plans for compliance with the Town's Zoning Bylaw, issuing building permits, inspecting new construction for compliance with the State building code, and issuing certificates of occupancy once construction is complete. The Inspector has a modest amount of space for records and files at the Town Hall. The Inspector is available to meet with the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals to review pending development plans on an as-needed basis.

### Richards Memorial Library:

*Organization:* The Library is a department of Town Government and is administered by an elected six-person Board of Library Trustees with each member serving a three-year term. The Board's authority is derived from Chapter 78, Section 10 and 11 of the Massachusetts General Laws. The Trustees meet monthly. The Trustees have delegated the responsibility for the library's personnel management, collection development and provision of library services to the Library Director. The Director is appointed and directly responsible to the Board of Trustees, and is an employee of the Town. The Library is open thirty-four hours a week during the winter months (closed on Sunday and Monday) and twenty-eight hours a week during the summer months (closed on Saturday, Sunday and Monday).

*Staff:* The Library staff consists of two full-time employees (Director and Children's Librarian) and six part-time employees: three clerks (six to twenty hours a week), two pages from the local high school (six hours a week), and a custodian (five hours a week). The Library makes great use of volunteers from the community with volunteers contributing over 134 hours of time to the Library last year.

*Budget:* The Library's funding derives principally from municipal appropriations at annual Town Meetings. For the 2006 Fiscal Year, the Library has an operating budget of \$149,185. The Library will receive three State grants this year: a State Library Incentive Grant (\$3,061), a Non-Resident Circulation Grant (\$2,757) and a State Municipal Equalization Grant (\$2,353). The Library maintains an account for donations and also holds several small trust funds.



*Facility:* The Library building was built in 1928 and a major addition was completed in 1976. The facility currently consists of approximately 7,169 gross square feet. The building is not fully handicapped accessible; specifically the Children's Collection Room in the basement, and the bathrooms do not meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Air conditioning was recently added through a joint funding effort of the Friends of the Library and the Trustees. The Library is available for use by a variety of community groups including the Scouts, the Brownies and the Quilting-Spinning-Weaving Club.

*Circulation:* The Library has an ever-increasing circulation of roughly 63,000 items. The collection is made up of books, volumes of print periodicals and newspapers, audio books, videocassettes and DVD discs. The library is an on-line affiliate of the Central-Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing service (C-W MARS), which provides an on-line catalog for all public and academic libraries in the Central and Western regions of Massachusetts. This shared on-line catalog allows patrons access to a combined collection of over 6 million items from participating libraries. Patrons can order items from home or through the library staff. Last year the library staff processed over 2,400 inter-library loan requests (both receiving and providing). There are several computers with Internet access that are available to the public.

Recently, the Friends of the Library purchased three new computers for patron use. The Friends and the Trustees also recently joined together to purchase a new circulating computer and server.

*Programs:*

- Fundraising activities such as: an annual book sale, raffles, art shows
- Children's story hour for three age groups
- Young adult reading group
- Summer reading program
- History lessons (with assistance from the Historical Commission)
- Puppet shows, Halloween night, bike rodeo, visit with Santa (Friends of the Library)
- Passes to regional and Boston-area cultural events (with assistance from the Cultural Council)

*Upcoming Capital Needs:* The library building has a slate roof that will need an upgrade within a few years. The library will go through the Town's Capital Improvement Planning process to request funding for the roof repairs. The Library is in the formative stages of planning an expansion as well as a strategy for addressing its ADA accessibility issues.

Council on Aging:

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

*Staff:* The COA has four part-time employees. The Director works 30 hours a week, an Outreach Coordinator works 18 hours a week, and two van drivers that work two weeks on and two weeks off. The COA makes great use of volunteers, with 206 volunteers contributing roughly 5,400 hours of service in 2005 (the latest reporting year). The COA does not have any secretarial support.

*Budget:* For the 2007 Fiscal Year, the COA had an operating budget of \$58,576. The COA also received \$5,021 in a Formula Grant from the State, and these funds are used for a portion of the Director's salary and the costs associated with the newsletter. The COA also gratefully receives donations from the general public.

*Facility:* Since 1986, the COA has been using space in the White Building. Located on West Street (Route 31), the White Building is a former schoolhouse built in 1898. Although the



building was renovated for the Senior Center in 1986, the building is not fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. The Town owns the White Building and the COA and Senior Center are tenants, as is the Historical Commission. The COA uses four rooms in the White Building (totaling roughly 3,600 square feet), but they are all dual-use rooms with other municipal entities using the rooms in the COA's off hours. Recent renovations (carpeting, painting and furniture) were paid for through donations to the COA and volunteers. The COA's main concern with its existing space is that there are no confidential meeting rooms. The building is in fair shape, but the windows are not heat efficient and the roof is a patchwork of temporary repairs. The COA would eventually like to have a facility of its own.

*Equipment:* The COA owns and maintains a 2006 Dodge Grand Caravan that is in excellent shape. The COA paid for half of the van and the Town paid for the other half through a warrant article at a recent Town Meeting. The COA charges users 50 cents for in-town trips and \$4 for out of town trips. The COA also maintains eight computers (two for staff) with Internet access.

*Programs:*

- Clinics for blood pressure, influenza, podiatry and Alzheimer's awareness.
- Health-related programs sponsored by various insurance companies.
- Wellness programs.
- Dental Health programs.
- Heart medication seminar.
- Keep Moving programs and yoga classes.
- Senior Health Insurance Necessities for Elders (known as SHINE).
- Transportation for medical appointments, grocery shopping, holiday shopping, trips to the local farmers market and assorted social engagements.
- Seminars on medical equipment (including screening for the Life Line service).
- Computer training classes.
- Nutrition programs including on-site meals and Meals-on-Wheels.
- Veteran's Day program for school-age children.
- Social programs such as: Red Hat Society, Men's Club, Book Club, bowling, bingo, summer picnic, volunteer recognition day, dominos, plays, poet's corner, bus trips, dinner nights included a well-attended Italian night out.
- Education programs on such topics as retirement planning, photography, elder law seminars, financial seminars, intergenerational programs, quilting, painting and caning.
- Monthly newsletter.
- International learning breakfast program.
- Miscellaneous services such as auto license and registration renewals, fuel assistance, tax return assistance, small home repairs, spring and fall yard cleanups and outreach visits.

*Upcoming Capital Needs:* The COA will want to replace the 2006 Dodge Grand Caravan after five years of use and will go through the Town's capital improvement budgeting process to pay for it. Eventually, the COA would like to have a facility of its own, as the Town's senior population is growing and the present facility represents life back in the 1980's. The COA is making an effort to attract the new "baby boomers", thus requiring a new type of facility. The COA has not begun any advanced planning for such a facility at this time.

Public School System:

*Organization:* Paxton is part of the Wachusett Regional School District, along with the communities of Holden, Princeton, Rutland and Sterling. There is a twenty member School Committee that sets school policies and oversees the School Department's operations. The Committee's representation is based on total town population, with Paxton's representation consisting of two of the twenty Committee members. The School Committee is elected and each member serves a three-year term.

*Budget:* For the 2007 Fiscal Year, Paxton contributed a grand total of \$4,304,821 to the School District:

• Minimum Required Contribution:	\$3,687,988
• Long Term Debt:	\$67,538
• Transportation:	\$120,699
• Regional Agreement Spending Assessment:	<u>\$428,596</u>
Total:	\$4,304,821

The District as a whole received \$16,173,605 in State education aid (Chapter 70), and this aid is spread throughout the eleven schools that comprise the regional school system and not just the Center School in Paxton.

The table below presents the school district's per pupil expenditure figure in comparison with other regional school districts in Central Massachusetts.

**Table TG-11**  
**Per Pupil Expenditures Year 2005**

	<u>Wachusett</u>	<u>Dudley/ Charlton</u>	<u>Spencer/ E. Brookfield</u>	<u>Quabbin</u>	<u>Tantasqua</u>
# of students:	7,015	4,312	2,209	3,274	1,778
\$ per pupil:	\$6,980	\$6,997	\$7,921	\$7,559	\$8,899

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

The previous table indicates that the Wachusett regional school district has the largest amount of students and the lowest per pupil expenditure level of the compared regional school districts.

*Facility:* The Paxton Center School, located on West Street (Route 31) in the center of Town, is the only public school in Paxton. The current facility was built in segments with the first being the original eight-room building constructed in 1956. A four-room curbed roof addition was constructed in 1963, the gym/art and music rooms were built in 1967 and the middle school addition was completed in 1999. The building provides classes from Kindergarten through the eighth grade (K-8). The entire structure contains 91,000 square feet, has a design capacity of 675 students with a current enrollment of 503 students. The building is fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards and contains multiple classrooms, administrative offices, a gym, library and a cafetorium (combination cafeteria and auditorium).

*Enrollment Projections:* The New England School Development Council (NESDEC) prepares an annual report of enrollment trends and projects for the School District. NESDEC's most recent enrollment forecast projects an expected 6% growth rate for the Center School over the next ten years. The District does not have any current plans for new schools in Paxton. Approximately 75% of students graduating from the Center School's eighth grade class go on to attend the Wachusett Regional High School in Holden on any given year. There are 199 Paxton students attending the High School this current school year. It appears that the Center School has excess capacity for its anticipated new growth and the major expansion underway at Wachusett Regional High School means the Town will not have to consider a new school/addition for at least the next ten years.

*Upcoming Capital Needs:* The Town's CIP lists improvements to the parking lot as the School's only entry (estimated cost: \$62,100). Originally scheduled for completion in 2006, this project has been pushed back to 2007 because of budgetary constraints.

Paxton Housing Partnership:

*Organization:* Formed in 1992, the Paxton Housing Partnership currently consists of nine members. Appointed by the Board of Selectmen, the members are appointed to 2-year staggered terms. The Partnership meets at least once a month. The Partnership's guiding goals are to provide opportunities for senior housing and act as an advocate for affordable housing in general.

*Staff/Facilities/Equipment:* The Partnership does not have any paid staff, facilities or equipment. Members of the Partnership perform all tasks.

*Budget:* The Partnership had an operating budget of \$39,000 for Fiscal Year 2007.

*Current Projects:* The Partnership's primary project is overseeing the construction of twenty (20) senior rental apartments on Town-controlled land along Route 31. The land is known as the Klingele property, which is twenty-six (26) acres in size, but only ten (10) acres will be used for the senior housing project. Of the twenty units proposed, four of them (or 20%) will be affordable under the State's affordable housing law (MGL Chapter 40B). The project will be known as Asnebumskit Village once complete. The Partnership is currently working on financing the project. The Partnership hired Health Care Management Associates Inc. (HCMA) to prepare a preliminary market and feasibility review of the Asnebumskit Village project. HCMA released the results of its study in the summer of 2006 and recommended an equity-financed community rather than the rental units that Paxton's Housing Partnership prefers. The Partnership is currently evaluating the study results and will reconsider its options for financing this project.

Other Upcoming Capital Improvements Not Yet Identified:

In addition to the building and equipment needs previously identified in the departmental summaries, Paxton's current CIP lists the following capital improvements:

- 2007: Installation of lights at Grove Field (estimated cost: \$100,000).
- 2008: Resurface playing fields at the Town Center School (estimated cost: \$200,000).
- 2010: Replace Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus for Fire Department. (estimated cost: \$230,000).

Looking beyond the six-year horizon of the CIP, there are several facility needs that Paxton may need to address within the next ten years:

- Possible new Town Office Building/Community Center.
- Renovating the White Building.
- Renovate the current Town Hall to improve handicapped accessibility.
- Expansion of the Richards Memorial Library.
- New park facilities at the old Wentworth Pool site.

The previous items have yet to be integrated into the Town's CIP and cost estimates have not been prepared. As these needs become more critical, the Town will likely schedule them into the CIP once detailed cost estimates have been prepared.



Open Space and Recreation Needs: Paxton's open space and recreation needs are fully described in the Town's 2003 Open Space & Recreation Plan. As open space acquisitions are largely dependent on when individual parcels are removed from the State's Chapter 61 taxation program and the Town's ability to exercise its right-of-first-refusal, they are difficult to program into the capital budgeting process. Regarding recreation, the 2003 Plan calls for creating several new recreation facilities (skateboard park, jogging track, etc.) that may be integrated into the Wentworth Pool site listed above.

Other Governmental Entities in Paxton: Town Administrator, Town Services Coordinator, Board of Selectmen and Administrative Assistant, Finance Board, Capital Improvements Committee, Town Clerk, Town Collector, Board of Assessors, Town Moderator, Town Accountant, Town Treasurer, Historical Commission, Cemetery Commission, Burial Agent, Cultural Council, Veteran's Agent, Bylaw Revision Committee, Recreation Commission, Animal Inspector, Animal Control Officer, Tree Warden, Board of Registrars, Cable and Communication Committee, Personnel Advisory Board, Group Insurance Advisory Committee, Caretaker of Town Clock, Measurer of Wood, Bark, Field Drivers and Fence Viewers.

### **Paxton's Capital Budgeting Process**

As noted throughout this chapter, Paxton schedules its upcoming capital equipment and facility needs through a Capital Improvement Plan, better known in municipal government as a CIP. A CIP is a rolling six-year capital expenditure plan that identifies upcoming capital needs, schedules their purchase and outlines how they will be purchased. A capital need is defined as a tangible item (equipment, building, etc.) that is above and beyond a municipal department's regular operating budget. A CIP is composed of two parts: the first part is a capital budget for the upcoming year's spending plan for capital items (tangible assets that cost at least \$10,000 and have a useful life of at least five years) and the second part is a capital program for capital expenditures that extends five years beyond the capital budget. In Paxton, a Capital Planning Committee has been established to oversee the CIP process. The Committee seeks the input of the Town Administrator, Finance Committee and all department heads when preparing the annual update of the CIP.

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

- Facilitate the coordination between capital needs and departmental operating budgets.
- Enhance the community's credit rating, control of its tax rate and avoid sudden fluctuations in its debt service requirements.
- Identify the most economical means of financing capital projects.
- Increase opportunities for obtaining federal and state aid.
- Focus attention on community objectives and the Town's fiscal capacity.
- Keep the public informed about future community needs and projects.
- Coordinate the activities of municipal departments so as to reduce duplication of services.

Paxton has had a CIP in place since 2004 and the process has worked very well. Properly implemented, CIPs in small rural communities can take the politics out of the capital expenditure process and allow towns to look ahead when addressing its most costly needs instead of lurching year-to-year, crisis-to-crisis.

## **Town Government Issues in Paxton**

### **1. Recommendations from the Department of Revenue's Financial Management**

**Review:** in September 2006, the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Local Services Division completed a financial management review of Paxton. The report contained a set of recommendations dealing with the Town's overall financial management and budgeting, information technology, Accountant's Office, Assessor's Office and the Treasurer/Collector's Office. While the majority of the recommendations deal with technical aspects of the Town's accounting and bookkeeping, there are two recommendations worth highlighting for this analysis of Paxton's Town government:

-- The report recommends that Paxton adopt a Town Charter through the home-rule procedure (MGL Chapter 43B) or special act, to create a strong town administrator form of government. The report states: "With all the financial and legal complexities facing communities, many have seen the need to centralize administrative responsibilities and make a full-time professional responsible for all the day-to-day operations, staff supervision and long-term administration. Recognizing the success many communities have in providing coordinated financial management with a town administrator, we believe this type of strong centralized government is appropriate to meet the needs of Paxton." Adopting a Town Charter with a strong town administrator form of government would most likely be accomplished through a Town Meeting vote. This form of government would give the administrator the power to appoint, supervise and evaluate all department heads, as well as manage the budget process.

-- The report recommends that the Town reduce the Capital Planning Committee's membership. This would improve the likelihood of achieving Committee quorums, which has been a problem in the past. The report recommends reducing the Committee's membership from eight members to five members and having the Town staff serve in ex-officio roles. The CIP bylaw would need to be amended to reflect these changes.

**2. No Revolving Fund for Planning Board Review Fees:** Currently all of the funds collected by the Planning Board go into the Town's General Fund instead of a separate Planning Board account. Under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 46, Section 53-G, planning boards can set up a special revolving fund for the collection and expenditure of fees collected from subdivision applicants for the purpose of hiring expert consultants to assist the Board in its review of development plans. The fees paid by the applicant are deposited into a separate project account, which may be spent without appropriation by the board to cover the professional services it needs to review development plans. The account remains open until the particular project is completed. The unspent balance, including interest, is refunded to the applicant at the end of the review process. Many Massachusetts communities have implemented such revolving funds. Properly implemented, such revolving funds simplify the Planning Board's accounting procedures, ensure that review entities get paid in a timely manner and ensure that developers are treated equitably.

**3. Reliance on Residential Property Taxes:** As documented previously, residential property taxes account for roughly 96% of the Town's total tax base. Unless remedied through sound planning, this situation has the potential to increase the burden on Paxton's homeowners to pay for the Town's municipal needs through ever-increasing property taxes. Paxton could counter this possibility by exploring its options for new economic development while simultaneously

undertaking efforts to retain those businesses and industries currently located in town. These issues will be examined in more detail in the Economic Development chapter of this document.

**4. Several Facilities Not in Compliance with ADA Handicapped Accessibility Standards:** The Town has several municipal buildings that are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, specifically the Town Hall, White Building and the Richards Memorial Library. Identified deficiencies are primarily building access and restroom facilities. The ADA requires that all municipal facilities open to the public be compliant with the Act's building standards. The Town has prepared an ADA transition plan for those buildings and facilities identified as non-compliant. The Town is currently attempting to secure the funding necessary to implement the transition plan.

### **Town Government - Goals**

Paxton desires to have a forward-looking town government that is accountable, efficient, professionally managed and fiscally responsible, where citizens are encouraged to participate in town government and community life and the Town's rich cultural/historic legacy and natural environment are valued.

### **Town Government – Objectives**

- The Town should commit itself to following through on the recommendations contained herein and strive to maintain the Master Plan as a living document, including periodic reviews and updates.
- The Town should work towards full compliance with all federal, state and local laws and regulations.
- The Town should ensure that Paxton's future growth does not overburden its infrastructure and the Town's ability to provide municipal services.
- The Town should develop a municipal building and infrastructure preservation or replacement program to ensure that these resources continue to meet the needs of its citizens. The overall effort should attempt to exclude piecemeal corrections of infrastructure deficiencies and include a long-term maintenance program and the continual devotion of sufficient resources for implementation.
- The Town should provide adequate resources for technological improvements to ensure that municipal employees can perform their duties as efficiently as possible, while simultaneously providing town residents with greater access to timely information and electronic services.
- As Paxton's town government is comprised of many entities that rely on volunteers for their operation, the Town should encourage greater citizen volunteerism in town government and actively promote opportunities to serve on municipal boards, committees and commissions.
- The Town should ensure that municipal departments have the necessary staff and capital equipment to provide high quality services for its citizens.

- The Town should look upon the acquisition of open space as one approach to enhance the quality of life, provide passive recreational opportunities to local residents and enhance property values.

### **Town Government – Recommendations**

1. Implement the DOR Recommendations: The Town should follow through on the recommendations contained in the Department of Revenue’s 2006 Financial Management Review of Paxton’s town government, particularly the recommendation to adopt a Town Charter through the home-rule procedure (MGL Chapter 43B). The Town Charter recommendation to establish a Town Administrator shall be brought before the residents at a Town Meeting to seek their approval. Municipal Entity Responsible for Implementation: The Town Administrator, Town Accountant, Town Treasurer and the Board of Selectmen ~~and the Town Administrator~~Administrative Assistant.

2. Update the Town’s ADA Transition Plan and Secure Funding for Implementation: Paxton’s ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Transition Plan for its municipal buildings and facilities is out of date and should be updated. In Paxton’s case, its ADA Transition Plan was first prepared in 1985 and has never been updated. An ADA Transition Plan outlines what improvements are needed to municipal buildings and facilities in order to make them fully handicapped accessible. Communities must have such a plan in place in order to be eligible for federal funding. As mentioned previously, the Town Hall, White Building, Police Station and the Richards Memorial Library are not fully compliant with the ADA accessibility standards. It should be noted that the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program lists the removal of architectural barriers as an eligible activity. The Town should investigate the possibility of obtaining CDBG funds for this purpose. Municipal Entities Responsible for Implementation: The Town Administrator and the Board of Selectmen ~~and the Town Administrator~~Administrative Assistant.

3. Investigate CDBG Funding for a New Senior Center: Paxton’s Council on Aging (COA) has identified the development of a new senior center as one of its long-term goals. New and renovated senior centers are another eligible activity under the CDBG grant program. Although Paxton’s COA has not begun the process of planning for a new senior center, the CDBG program should be investigated for this purpose when the Council is ready to proceed. Municipal Entities Responsible for Implementation: The Town Administrator, the Board of Selectmen and the Council on Aging ~~and the Town Administrator~~Administrative Assistant.

4. Establish a Municipal Building Needs Committee: The Town has many municipal building needs to address, including the eventual replacement of the Town Hall, White Building and Highway Garage. There is also a possible Library expansion and new senior center looming on the horizon. Rather than plan for these new and/or expanded facilities on a project-by-project basis, it is recommended that the Town establish a Municipal Building Needs Committee to coordinate these efforts. This will allow for a comprehensive approach to the Town’s municipal building needs as well as for establishing a standard set of procedures and format for procuring consultant services, requests for proposals, bid submissions, bid selections, contract preparation, management and oversight. Such a committee should also be charged with investigating possible funding sources including various grant and loan programs. Municipal Entities Responsible for Implementation: The Town Administrator and the Board of Selectmen.

5. Establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee: The Town should establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee whose job it is to make sure that the Plan’s recommendations get

implemented. It may be that Paxton's current Master Plan Committee would be willing to take on this task; however, a master planning process is lengthy and demanding. Many communities have found that the members of their master plan committees are ready to close shop and move onto other ventures. Thus, most communities seriously interested in implementing their plans end up forming implementation committees for this purpose, separate and distinct from the committee that prepared the plan. The Board of Selectmen would appoint the Master Plan Implementation Committee, who in turn would meet with the Town's other municipal entities that have Master Plan implementation responsibilities and work with them to keep the Plan on track. The makeup of the Master Plan Implementation Committee should represent a broad cross-section of the entire community. It is suggested that the Committee periodically brief the Board of Selectmen on the Plan's progress, on a quarterly basis or twice a year. Municipal Entities Responsible for Implementation: The Town Administrator and the Board of Selectmen in consultation with the Master Plan Committee ~~and the Town Administrator~~ Administrative Assistant.

6. Expand the Capacity of the Town's Website: While the Town's website has come a long way since its initial inception, Paxton should continue expanding the capacity of its website in an effort to promote the sharing of municipal government information with its citizens, businesses and visitors. A partial list of benefits to be reaped by expanding the capacity of the Town website include: expanded on-line access to public records; on-line access to information regarding the Town's development review process; and on-line access to maps and other geographic information. Having such services and resources available on-line will help reduce the number of citizen visits to the municipal office building. The result will be municipal personnel spending less time on face-to-face customer service and more time on other tasks. At the next stage of upgrading the Town's website, due consideration should be given to the needs of Paxton's handicapped populations and how the site could be improved to expand the access for said populations. Municipal Entities Responsible for Implementation: The Town Administrator and the Board of Selectmen.

7. Establish a Revolving Account for Planning Board Development Reviews: It is recommended that the Planning Board work with the Town Accountant to establish a revolving account for hiring outside consultants as authorized under MGL Chapter 44, Section 53G. Establishing such an account, along with raising the fee schedule to cover all administrative costs, will enable the Board to recoup its legitimate expenses without having to periodically go before the Board of Selectmen to request additional funds, and it will also allow the Board to hire outside experts at the applicant's expense to review development plans on behalf of the Board. Municipal Entity Responsible for Implementation: The Planning Board.