STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE ANNUAL TOWN REPORT

Purpose: Present communication enhancement ideas for committee discussion and possible recommendations to the Selectboard.

Town Meeting Study Committee

Valerie Rogers July 22, 2026

WHY THE ANNUAL TOWN REPORT MATTERS

THE ANNUAL TOWN REPORT IS MORE THAN A FINANCIAL DOCUMENT

IT IS THE TOWN'S PRIMARY ANNUAL OPPORTUNITY TO:

- **Communicate**
- **Educate**
- **Inform**
- **Prepare residents for Town Meeting**

A clear, understandable report helps residents participate with confidence

Communication Model and Potential Benefits

Clear Information

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Better Understanding

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Public Confidence

↓

Trust

↓

Greater Community Engagement

Qualitative Improvement

- Better-informed residents
- Improved pre-meeting preparedness

Quantitative Improvement

- Potential for greater participation by reducing intimidation and demystifying complex local government issues

BETTER COMMUNICATION BUILDS ENGAGEMENT

VERMONT BEST PRACTICES
VLCT ANNUAL TOWN REPORT CONTEST

Award-winning reports emphasize:

- **Easy-to-read format**
- **Plain language**
- **Charts and graphics**
- **Department summaries**
- **Financial clarity**
- **Future goals**
- **Planning updates**
- **Educational information**

Examples from VLCT award-winning Town Reports (e.g., Shelburne, Stowe, Huntington)

Potential Communication Enhancements

Financial Communication

- Budget Highlights & Significant Variances *
- Clear Financial Summary *
- Local Option Tax Dashboard *
- Professional Services Summary *

Organizational Communication

- Department accomplishments
- Staffing summary
- Multi-year project updates
- Long-term planning
- School Board Summary *
- EFUD Summary*

Improving Budget Clarity

Budget Highlights & Significant Variances

Budget Highlight	What Changed?	Reason
Public Works	Road maintenance exceeded budget	Emergency storm repairs
Emergency Management	Position remained vacant	Hiring delayed; funds carried forward
Recreation Study	Project underway	Consultant selected; work continues into next fiscal year
Fire Department	Equipment purchases deferred	Delivery delayed until next fiscal year

Helps Residents understand **what** changed, **why** it changed, and **how** those decisions affected the annual budget.

Town Budget – Year to Year- at a Glance

Category	Prior Year	Current Year	Change
Operating Budget	$6.30 M	$6.57 M	4.30%
Capital Projects	$1.20 M	$1.05 M	-12.50%
Local Option Tax Revenue	$425,000	$810,000	90.60%
General Fund Tax Rate	$X.XX	$X.XX	+X.X%

Benefit

- Provides a quick overview before reviewing detailed budget pages
- Helps residents understand overall financial trends at a glance.

Local Option Tax Dashboard

Project	Year Approved	Amount Allocated	Amount Spent	Balance Remaining	Status	Community Benefit
Municipal Town Securty	FY2024	20,000.00	0.00	20,000.00	Pending	Municipal Staff Security
Woody Ave. Planning	FY2025	25,000.00	8,450.00	16,550.00	Design Underway	Supports future housing and infrastructure
SW Project	FY2025	25,000.00	0.00	25,000.00	Pending	Future Community Development
Grant Writer RM	FY2025	20,000.00	12,500.00	75,000.00	?	Assisted with Grant funding Opportunities

Benefits:

- Shows approved funding
- Tracks expenditures
- Identifies remaining balances
- Follows multi-year projects
- Improves public understanding

Making the Budget Easier to Understand

Professional Services & Operating Budget

Service	Funding	Budget	Purpose
Consultant	General Fund	5,000.00	Technical planning support
Engineering	General Fund	18,000.00	Infrastructure projects

Purpose:

- Easier to understand
- Shows funding sources
- Connects expenditures to projects
- Improves budget readability

Why Include Additional Community Summaries?

School Board

Because education is the largest component of most property tax bills, a concise summary can help residents better understand budget impacts, capital projects, and district priorities.

Edward Farrar Utility District (EFUD)

Although EFUD is a separate municipal entity, its work directly affects Waterbury through drinking water, wastewater, infrastructure, housing, and community development. A brief summary would help residents better understand projects and initiatives that shape the community.

Supporting the Committee's Goal

Potential Benefits

- Better informed residents
- Improved understanding of Town business
- Better prepared Town Meeting participants
- Increased confidence in local government
- Potential for greater community engagement

The Annual Town Report is the culmination of a year's work and the Town's opportunity to communicate clearly with every resident.

Potential Committee Recommendations

If the committee supports these concepts, it may consider recommending that the Selectboard explore opportunities to strengthen the Annual Town Report as a communication tool by:

- Building on VLCT best practices.
- Using plain language and visual summaries where practical.
- Organizing existing information into easy-to understand formats.
- Implementing enhancements incrementally as staff time and resources allow.