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Department Mission, Services, and Performance

1. Please describe your department's core mission and the essential services you provide to the community. Which services are legally mandated versus driven by community priorities?

Department Mission

The unofficial mission of the Planning and Zoning Department is to guide the orderly growth and development of the Town of New London in a way that balances community needs, protects the natural environment, and preserves the Town's distinctive rural and village character. We work to ensure that land use decisions are transparent, consistent with state law, and aligned with the Town's adopted plans, regulations, and ordinances.

Essential Services Provided

Our department provides a combination of legally mandated services and community-driven priorities:

Legally Mandated Services

- **Zoning Administration:** Enforcing the Town's Zoning Ordinance, reviewing zoning compliance for building permits, and issuing determinations on land use questions (RSA 674, 676).
- **Permit Review:** Reviewing all permit applications for compliance with the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations, and Site Plan Review Regulations before approval or referral to the appropriate board.
- **Planning Board Support:** Coordinating subdivision and site plan review applications, preparing staff reports, ensuring compliance with the Town's Subdivision and Site Plan Review Regulations, and meeting all statutory requirements for notice and decision-making. Additionally working the Planning Board to update the Master Plan which is required by RSA every 10 years if a Town has adopted Zoning.
- **Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) Support:** Providing administrative support for variance, special exception, and appeal applications, ensuring hearings are properly noticed and conducted in accordance with state law and the Zoning Ordinance.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Implementing state-required processes for notice, hearings, and decision-making; overseeing legal timelines for actions on applications. The State Building Code applies, but we do not have an adopted enforcement process for single-family residential.
- **Record-Keeping & Public Access:** Maintaining the official zoning map, the Town's land use ordinances, and development records as required by law.

Community-Driven Priorities

- **Town Plans:** Advancing community goals set forth in the Master Plan and other adopted planning documents that identify priorities for housing, economic development, transportation, natural resources, and community facilities.
- **Regulation Updates:** Regularly reviewing and proposing updates to the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations, and Site Plan Review Regulations to reflect best practices and evolving community needs.
- **Community Engagement:** Hosting forums, workshops, and surveys to ensure residents and property owners have a voice in shaping the Town's growth policies.
- **Housing & Economic Development Initiatives:** Working with local boards, regional agencies, and stakeholders to promote responsible growth and provide a range of housing opportunities.
- **Sustainability & Resilience:** Supporting initiatives for walkability, energy efficiency, stormwater management, and climate adaptation, based on community priorities expressed in Town plans.

Summary: Legally Mandated & Community Driven Services

In short, the department's function is to fill the required roll of reviewing all permits, administer zoning, subdivision, and site plan regulations, and to support the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment in carrying out their statutory responsibilities. Beyond those requirements, the Town has emphasized proactive planning through its adopted plans, regulations, and ordinances to preserve community character, expand housing choices, and maintain New London as a vibrant and welcoming place to live, work, and visit.

2. How do you measure service demand, and what are the key trends you're observing, such as seasonal changes or new and growing service needs?

Quantitative Measures:

- Tracking the number of permits and applications each year across all types (zoning, building, subdivision, site plans, variances, sign, tree cutting, driveway, etc.).
- Monitoring applications before the Planning Board and ZBA.
- Identifying and tracking seasonal spikes in activity, with heaviest volume in spring and summer.
- Reviewing year over year trends, examples: **Tree Cuttings Permits** 2024 = 24 permits; 2025 = 32 permits as of 9/15/25; **Driveway Permits** 2021 through 9/15/21 – 32, 2025 through 9/15/25 52; **Building Permits** 2024 = 96, 2025 to 9/15/25 = 102

Qualitative Measures:

- Supporting new committees created in recent years, including the Police Facility Committee, Housing Commission, and Buildings & Facilities Committee,

increased participating in Budget Committee & Selectboard, each of which requires staff time for agendas, research, and follow-up. Currently the Housing Commission and its initiatives requires approximately 30% of the Planning & Zoning Administrator's time.

- Administering new regulations, most notably the Septic Regulation, which is a significant ongoing commitment for education, compliance tracking, and enforcement.
- Complex enforcement matters and neighbor concerns have expanded substantially, requiring investigations, correspondence, and board involvement when necessary to remedy a situation.
- Providing property owner education to help residents and developers understand Town regulations.
- Managing increasingly complex projects such as larger homes, multifamily housing, and commercial developments.
- Responding to contemporary issues like the housing crisis, short-term rentals, water quality and sustainability.
- Increased complexity to enforcement matters has caused significant strain.

Key Trends

- Growing demand for diverse housing options, including ADUs and multifamily development. Increasing mandatory housing zoning provisions from the State of NH.
- Projects are larger and more complex, increasing review time.
- Expansion of enforcement responsibilities and mediating disagreements between neighbors as a significant share of staff time.
- Rising community engagement and interest in regulation updates, long-range planning, and committee work.

Summary: Performance Measurement

While permit counts provide a measurable baseline, the department's workload is more fully reflected in enforcement responsibilities, support for new committees, implementation of new regulations, and addressing complex planning issues—all of which require sustained staff involvement beyond raw application numbers.

3. What are your key performance indicators for serving the community? How does the department's performance compare to relevant goals or benchmarks?

Key Performance Indicators

Measuring performance in planning and zoning is inherently subjective, as the work is tied to the evolving needs and expectations of the community. While we track metrics such as permit volume, application timelines, and board activity, the most meaningful indicators are less quantitative:

- **Customer Service:** Whether residents and applicants feel that they received clear guidance, timely responses, and a fair process when interacting with the department.
- **Community Well-Being:** Whether the Town remains a safe, healthy, and enjoyable place to live and work, reflecting that land use decisions are supporting broader quality-of-life goals.
- **Clarity and Accessibility:** How well residents understand our regulations and processes, and whether staff provide education and support to help them navigate requirements.
- **Responsiveness to Change:** The ability of the department to adapt ordinances, regulations, and policies to address emerging challenges, such as housing needs, sustainability, and infrastructure capacity.
- **Consistency and Fairness:** Ensuring that all applications and enforcement matters are handled with professionalism, impartiality, and adherence to adopted plans and regulations.

Performance Compared to Goals

- **Regulatory Goal:** Statutory timelines for Planning Board and Zoning Board applications are consistently met, maintaining compliance with state law.
- **Community Vision Goal:** Ordinance and regulation updates in recent years—such as septic system regulations, housing-related amendments, and committee initiatives—demonstrate progress in aligning policies with evolving community priorities.

Summary re: Performance Indicators

Ultimately, our performance is best reflected in how residents experience the department—whether they feel supported through permitting or enforcement matters—and in whether New London continues to thrive as a safe, vibrant, and welcoming community. This is inherently difficult in enforcement matters. Often the subject of the enforcement is disgruntled, and others feel as if the Town should do more and generally believe we have powers that we may not – it typically feels like a no-win situation for town staff. Also, there is no mechanism to calibrate or manage service demands which generally results in higher demands within the same level of resources.

4. Looking ahead 5-10 years, what is your long-term vision for meeting the community's future needs, and what are the most significant opportunities and challenges on the horizon?

Long-Term Vision (5 - 10 Years)

In the next decade, the department must balance growth with resource protection while keeping New London a safe and welcoming community, and working on major infrastructure and utility initiatives. Advance technology use within the Department will be important including the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and electronic permitting systems.

Opportunities: Expanding housing options, protecting water resources, and advancing sustainability through updated regulations and community planning.

Challenges: The biggest challenge will be staffing—currently at 1.75 FTE staff positions, the department may not be able to fully address complex permitting, enforcement, and long-range planning if permitting levels and complexity continue to increase. Enforcement matters continue to grow, while housing and water resource issues will require more attention than current staffing allows. With permitting so closely tied to the economy, it can be difficult to predict if the increased levels will continue, or if a slowing economy would result in a slow down in permits and applications. Additionally, changes to Federal and State policies and related legislation does and will substantially impact the burden of responsibility of the town in time and resources.

Summary: Long-Term Vision

To meet future needs, New London will need clear and enforceable policies and may need additional human resources to manage increasingly complex issues to ensure high-quality service to the community.

5. How does your department partner with other community organizations, stakeholders, or external funding sources like grants and state aid to enhance services and achieve shared goals?

Our department actively collaborates with both community partners and external funding sources to strengthen services and achieve shared goals. In recent years, we have successfully leveraged state and regional funding opportunities, most notably through the **Housing Opportunity Program (HOP) Grant**, which provided over **\$100,000** in support of local housing initiatives. In addition, the **Per Unit Grant Program** has awarded **\$600,000** that will be available to Twin Pines Housing if their proposed project advances to construction. These external resources directly expand the town's capacity to support affordable and workforce housing.

Beyond grant funding, our department works closely with community organizations and stakeholder groups. This includes ongoing coordination with the local Lake Associations to align land-use planning with water quality protection efforts, as well as engagement with regional planning partners. These collaborations allow us to balance housing, environmental protection, and infrastructure needs while ensuring community voices are part of the decision-making process.

By combining outside funding with strong local partnerships, the department is able to amplify resources, enhance public services, and move forward on key initiatives that no single entity could achieve alone.

Staffing and Operations

1. Could you provide an overview of your staffing model? How do you ensure staffing levels and schedules align effectively with service demands?

The budget consists of 1.75 FTE comprised of a Town Planner/Zoning Administrator(1.0 FTE); the Land Use and Assessing Coordinator (.75 FTE) which is incorporated under the Town Administration budget. There are some monies for 'recording secretaries' within the operating budget.

2. How have your staffing needs evolved over the past five years, and what future staffing do you anticipate needing to maintain or enhance service levels?

If permit levels are sustained over the next couple of years, the Land Use and Assessing Coordinator could be needed full-time (i.e. 1.0 FTE) by the Planning & Zoning Department.

3. What are the primary drivers of overtime in your department, and what strategies help manage it effectively while ensuring service continuity?

The position of Town Planner/Zoning Administrator is salaried (exempt from overtime compensation).

4. What opportunities exist for increased collaboration or shared services with other town departments or neighboring communities to enhance efficiency and service delivery?

Given regulatory requirements unique to the town collaboration opportunities are limited.

Financial and Capital Planning

1. What are your department's highest-impact priorities that are most critical to achieving your mission in the upcoming budget?
2. To help us understand different budget approaches, could you describe how your services would be affected under a level-funded, level-service, and needs-based budget scenario?

Most of the budget consists of salary and benefits. Therefore, a level-funded budget would likely require a decrease in salary to cover the increases to lines outside of our control like health insurance.

3. What revenue streams does your department currently generate, and are there potential opportunities to enhance these or create new ones to support departmental services?

All application and permit fees. Many of the fees are collected to cover the costs for various services like mailings and advertising, but most include a base fee. To increase revenues, the fees to residents could be increased.

4. Please provide an overview of your department's key capital assets, such as vehicles and equipment, including their current condition and expected service life.

There are no capital assets in the department.

5. What is your department's long-term capital plan for the next 10 years, and what guidelines do you use to determine when to repair versus replace major assets?

N/A

6. In your capital forecast, what are the opportunities for deferring expenditures or exploring alternatives like leasing without significantly impacting core services?

N/A

7. To ensure resources align with the highest community priorities, are there services that could be modified or delivered differently to improve overall departmental focus and efficiency?

Please refer to question #4 under Technology and Innovation

Technology and Innovation

1. What key technologies does your department use, and how could their capabilities be more fully utilized to add value to your operations?

The key technology currently used consists of a work computer. I am in the process of researching the acquisition of an iPad to use on site visits to eliminate carrying paper plans and permits. I currently utilize AI through a ChatGPT account (that I pay for personally).

2. What emerging technologies, including advancements like AI, could enhance your department's efficiency or improve service quality in the future?

AI is helping tremendously, and I am encouraged by future potential uses. I am actively looking into an AI at the Local Government Conference presented by the International City Managers Association next Spring and attending in place of this year's annual New England Planners Conference. For now, I have delayed purchasing electronic permitting software because provider companies are adding AI

features and help bots. We want to make sure the software we select provides the best long-term sustainable solution and features and this market is changing rapidly.

3. Beyond staffing, what are the primary drivers of your operating budget, and are there opportunities to optimize spending through strategies like joint purchasing or inventory management?
4. What innovative ideas or strategic initiatives are you most excited about that could shape the future of your department and the services it provides?

Collaboration with the Department of Public Works (DPW) to plan and implement a variety of Planning based projects is exciting and filled with opportunities. Aside from simply working on the DPW Complex, we have spent the summer planning for and apply for permits to improve stormwater management in the waterfront at Elkins Beach and working on a potential pedestrian access opportunity from Main Street to the Elementary School in addition to collaborating on sidewalk improvements on Main Street. These real-life projects allow plans and objectives from the Master Plan to be carried out when often they 'sit on the shelf'. The ability and enthusiasm of our Director of DPW to participate in the projects has been refreshing and exciting. The co-location of departments with inter-dependent functions (such as Planning and DPW) has increased productive collaboration, performance, teamwork and morale. Modernizing office and meeting space can complement these outcomes as well.