



BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION

Report

Tuesday, March 5, 2019

Present: Co-Chair Claudia Dumond-Henderson, Co-Chair James Simons, Karen Carroll Bennett, Carolyn Gabbay, Doug Cornelius, Sue Flicop, Timothy Moran, Greg Reibman, Donald Siegel, Andrea Steenstrup, John Stewart, Kathy Sun and Committee Clerk, Danielle Delaney

Absent: Sharon Chan

The Peer Group Selection subcommittee members (Sue Flicop, Kathy Sun and Doug Cornelius; Sharon Chan was absent) explained in detail and provided a PowerPoint presentation, attached to this report. Data presented was collected from the census and various sources. Subcommittee members stated that finding comparison communities for Newton was not easy to focus on areas of research for the Mayor, City Council and School Committee compensation recommendations.

Subcommittee members found that in terms of budget figures, its peer group contains other large cities in eastern Massachusetts. However, in terms of median house price and median household income, its peer group is mostly made of towns.

Data was gathered on the categories below and evaluated different subsets to arrive at their suggested peer groups. The subcommittee began with 160 communities deleting cities and towns without any connections. The subcommittee highlighted the 15 cities and towns with values above and below Newton in each category, so that up to 30 communities were considered similar. In some cases, Newton was at the top of the range with only a few communities higher, so the subcommittee ended up with less than 30 communities in total.

- Type of government (City or Town)
- Population (2009-2013)
- Median Housing Price (2017)
- Median Household Income (2009-2013)
- % of Commercial Tax/Total Tax (2018)
- Moody's Bond Rating
- Municipal Budget (2017)
- Municipal Budget per Capita
- School Budget (Total Expenditures 2017)
- Per Pupil Expenditure (2017)
- School Enrollment (Average Pupil Membership, 2017)

Boston ended up in some of the data sets but were removed because it is so much larger than Newton. The subcommittee felt that in terms of the responsibilities of our elected officials, Boston was in a different category altogether.

City Council: The data set included all the categories except those related to the public schools (school budget, per pupil expenditure and school enrollment) since subcommittee members believed these are not generally the responsibility of a City Council. Because there is a case to be made that towns might not be relevant. There are two sets of possible peer groups, one that is just strictly cities and another that includes towns.

The city group includes all cities that were within the ± 15 community range on any combination of three variables in the data set. These were mainly within the range for population, % of commercial tax to total tax, and municipal budget. They are:

- Cambridge
- Haverhill
- Lawrence
- Lowell
- Somerville

Although these cities are similar to Newton in three areas, only Cambridge and Somerville are in the same group for median house price, and none are in the same group for municipal budget per capita. Because these communities are quite different on most of the other variables and the group is small, the subcommittee also selected a number of towns that share similar values regarding median housing prices, median household income, and municipal budget per capita. None of these are close to the size of Newton in terms of population, and only Brookline, Lexington and Plymouth are within the ± 15 group for the size of their municipal budgets. Subcommittee members felt these towns can supplement the 'city' group if they have elected officials with similar duties to City Councilors. They are:

- Acton
- Andover
- Belmont
- Brookline
- Concord
- Dover
- Hingham
- Lexington
- Lincoln
- Manchester-by-the-Sea
- Needham
- Plymouth

School Committee: The subcommittee sorted on per pupil expenditures and median housing prices. Subcommittee members felt that per pupil expenditures, or how much is spent per student, is a good sign of overall city/town investment in education. Median housing price seems a good proxy for how good the schools are and how much people will spend to live in a community with excellent public schools. Additionally, because taxes are based on real estate values, subcommittee members felt this was an appropriate variable to use.

The subcommittee did not include variables for % of commercial tax, bond rating, municipal budget and municipal budget per capita, because these are not necessarily under the purview of the School Committee.

The subcommittee ended up with the following communities that were similar on at least these two variables:

- Brookline
- Cambridge (city)
- Carlisle
- Concord
- Dover
- Framingham (city)
- Lexington
- Lincoln
- Manchester-by-the-Sea
- Needham
- Sherborn
- Somerville (city)
- Wellesley
- Weston

Mayor: The entire data set was used to evaluate cities and town for the Mayoral peer group. The subcommittee started by taking all the cities and towns chosen for the City Council peer groups and added those chosen for the School Committee peer group. With all the data available, subcommittee members found a handful of additional cities and towns that didn't work in other peer groups but have similar municipal and school budgets. Just as with the groups for the City Council, the group of cities doesn't closely match Newton beyond budget and population. Because the position of Mayor is unique to cities, the subcommittee wanted to expand that group as much as possible in a reasoned and organized way.

The city peer group is:

- Brockton
- Cambridge
- Everett
- Framingham
- Haverhill
- Lawrence

- Lowell
- Lynn
- Malden
- Quincy
- Somerville
- Taunton
- Waltham

The subcommittee also created a group of towns that could be used for a secondary comparison with communities with similar median housing prices and median family income.

- Acton
- Andover
- Belmont
- Brookline
- Carlisle
- Concord
- Dover
- Hingham
- Lexington
- Lincoln
- Manchester-by-the-Sea
- Needham
- Plymouth
- Sherborn
- Wellesley
- Weston

Commission members provided the following questions, suggestions and concerns to sub-committee members for consideration.

City Council

Suggestions:

- A suggestion was made to eliminate towns, comparing only cities.
- Another suggestion was made to delete Belmont, Hingham, Acton, Concord, Lincoln, Dover and Manchester-by-the-Sea, maintaining just five towns.

Concerns:

- It was stated that City Council responsibilities differ in towns and in cities.

School Committee

Questions:

- Is the description for School Committee members the same in towns and cities? A sub-committee member answered yes.

Suggestions:

- A suggestion was made to delete Brookline, Weston, Wellesley, Lexington, Dover, Lincoln, Concord, Manchester-by-the-Sea, Carlisle and Sherborn for simplicity purposes.
- Another suggestion was made to include the nine contiguous cities and towns to Newton.

Mayor

Questions:

- Is the data for City Council and School Committee included in the Mayor Peer Group chart? A sub-committee member answered yes.

Suggestions:

- A suggestion was made to eliminate towns who have a City Manager and not a Mayor.

The peer group subcommittee agreed to further limit the number of communities for a more relevant overall comparison. Once revised, the peer group subcommittee report will be forwarded to Blue Ribbon Commission members.

The next meeting of the Commission is scheduled for March 27, 2019 in City Hall.

The Commission adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Claudia Dumond-Henderson, Co-Chair
James Simons, Co-Chair



Peer Group Subcommittee Report

FEBRUARY 12, 2019

City Council Peer Group

Town	Type	Population (2009-2013)	Median Housing Price (2017)	Median Household Income (2009-2013)	% of Commercial Tax / Total Tax (2018)	Moody's Bond Rating	Municipal Budget (2017)	Municipal Budget Per Capita
Lowell	City	107,466	\$288,000	\$49,452	7.62%	A1	365,886,534	3,404.67
Cambridge	City	105,737	\$1,455,000	\$72,529	20.42%	Aaa	679,507,434	6,426.39
Newton	City	86,241	\$1,200,000	\$119,148	7.89%	Aaa	458,243,299	5,313.52
Somerville	City	76,945	\$733,750	\$67,118	9.79%	Aa1	265,101,333	3,445.34
Lawrence	City	76,820	\$255,450	\$32,851	8.95%	A3	309,810,756	4,032.94
Haverhill	City	61,335	\$320,000	\$60,429	7.09%	A1	200,489,019	3,268.75
Brookline	Town	58,738	\$1,912,500	\$96,488	9.01%	Aaa	288,978,682	4,919.79
Plymouth	Town	56,965	\$350,000	\$76,565	8.93%		234,949,641	4,124.46
Andover	Town	33,746	\$639,900	\$112,681	7.54%		181,737,813	5,385.46
Lexington	Town	31,886	\$1,150,000	\$139,561	6.25%	Aaa	241,416,590	7,571.24
Needham	Town	29,240	\$989,018	\$127,753	9.58%		173,154,753	5,921.85
Belmont	Town	24,943	\$1,039,000	\$110,584	4.08%		124,641,881	4,997.07
Hingham	Town	22,330	\$799,000	\$106,854	7.82%	Aaa	108,667,250	4,866.42
Acton	Town	22,291	\$617,500	\$110,592	7.33%	Aaa	98,270,842	4,408.54
Concord	Town	18,442	\$1,039,000	\$134,705	7.24%	Aaa	103,056,816	5,588.16
Lincoln	Town	6,470	\$1,072,500	\$126,395	1.74%		38,152,471	5,896.83
Dover	Town	5,677	\$1,147,500	\$187,829	0.75%	Aaa	36,282,174	6,391.08
Manchester By T	Town	5,185	\$866,500	\$115,650	4.07%		32,632,990	6,293.73

School Committee Peer Group

Town	Type	Population (2009-2013)	Median Housing Price (2017)	Median Household Income (2009-2013)	School Budget (Total Expenditures)	Per Pupil Expenditures*	School Enrollment (Average pupil membership)
Cambridge	City	105,737	\$1,455,000	\$72,529	\$212,707,498.00	\$29,206.43	7,282.90
Newton	City	86,241	\$1,200,000	\$119,148	\$246,487,344.00	\$19,081.81	12,917.40
Somerville	City	76,945	\$733,750	\$67,118	\$106,850,284.00	\$19,652.07	5,437.10
Brookline	Town	58,738	\$1,912,500	\$96,488	\$151,978,958.00	\$19,649.49	7,734.50
Weston	Town	11,538	\$1,395,000	\$192,563	\$53,095,848.00	\$24,457.99	2,170.90
Wellesley	Town	28,504	\$1,380,000	\$159,167	\$100,234,871.00	\$19,934.15	5,028.30
Lexington	Town	31,886	\$1,150,000	\$139,561	\$131,820,419.00	\$18,365.78	7,177.50
Dover	Town	5,677	\$1,147,500	\$187,829	\$11,616,354.00	\$23,335.38	497.8
Lincoln	Town	6,470	\$1,072,500	\$126,395	\$28,103,781.00	22943.74*	1,224.90
Concord	Town	18,442	\$1,039,000	\$134,705	\$41,369,542.00	\$19,324.34	2,140.80
Manchester By T	Town	5,185	\$866,500	\$115,650	\$24,916,342.00	\$17,448.42	1,428.00
Carlisle	Town	4,918	\$858,000	\$160,034	\$12,153,317.00	\$20,394.89	595.9
Sherborn	Town	4,169	\$825,000	\$223,444	\$8,113,224.00	\$18,552.99	437.3

Mayor Peer Group

Town	Type	Population (2009-2013)	Median Housing Price (2017)	Median Household Income (2009-2013)	% of Commercial Tax / Total Tax (2018)	Moody's Bond Rating	Municipal Budget (2017)	Municipal Budget Per Capita	School Budget (Total Expenditures)	Per Pupil Expenditures*	School Enrollment (Average pupil membership)
Cambridge	City	105,737	\$1,455,000	\$72,529	20.42%	Aaa	679,507,434	6,426.39	\$212,707,498.00	\$29,206.43	7,282.90
Newton	City	86,241	\$1,200,000	\$119,148	7.89%	Aaa	458,243,299	5,313.52	\$246,487,344.00	\$19,081.81	12,917.40
Brockton	City	93,911	\$271,000	\$49,025	12.71%	A1	418,464,793	4,455.97	\$263,839,103.00	\$14,783.39	17,847.00
Lowell	City	107,466	\$288,000	\$49,452	7.62%	A1	365,886,534	3,404.67	\$235,335,245.00	\$14,540.33	16,185.00
Quincy	City	92,595	\$450,000	\$61,328	12.24%	Aa3	357,311,458	3,858.86	\$159,659,540.00	\$16,976.03	9,405.00
Lynn	City	90,788	\$329,900	\$44,849	6.66%	Baa1	327,223,950	3,604.26	\$233,282,178.00	\$13,666.29	17,069.90
Framingham	City	69,288	\$425,000	\$67,915	17.27%	Aa2	320,112,289	4,620.02	\$174,238,507.00	\$18,620.00	9,357.60
Lawrence	City	76,820	\$255,450	\$32,851	8.95%	A3	309,810,756	4,032.94	\$233,294,100.00	\$14,886.90	15,671.10
Waltham	City	61,321	\$582,000	\$74,198	25.27%	Aa1	270,762,445	4,415.49	\$116,926,048.00	\$20,673.29	5,655.90
Somerville	City	76,945	\$733,750	\$67,118	9.79%	Aa1	265,101,333	3,445.34	\$106,850,284.00	\$19,652.07	5,437.10
Taunton	City	55,953	\$285,000	\$51,637	13.54%	Aa3	231,663,941	4,140.33	\$114,977,397.00	\$13,813.92	8,323.30
Everett	City	42,092	\$409,950	\$49,368	10.88%	Aa3	214,165,873	5,088.04	\$120,327,139.00	\$15,220.11	7,905.80
Malden	City	59,803	\$455,000	\$53,798	6.78%	Aa3	200,585,649	3,354.11	\$109,566,641.00	\$14,470.74	7,571.60
Haverhill	City	61,335	\$320,000	\$60,429	7.09%	A1	200,489,019	3,268.75	\$111,752,055.00	\$13,071.18	8,549.50
Brookline	Town	58,738	\$1,912,500	\$96,488	9.01%	Aaa	288,978,682	4,919.79	\$151,978,958.00	\$19,649.49	7,734.50
Lexington	Town	31,886	\$1,150,000	\$139,561	6.25%	Aaa	241,416,590	7,571.24	\$131,820,419.00	\$18,365.78	7,177.50
Plymouth	Town	56,965	\$350,000	\$76,565	8.93%		234,949,641	4,124.46	\$137,290,342.00	\$16,654.38	8,243.50
Wellesley	Town	28,504	\$1,380,000	\$159,167	11.59%	Aaa	183,176,449	6,426.34	\$100,234,871.00	\$19,934.15	5,028.30
Andover	Town	33,746	\$639,900	\$112,681	7.54%		181,737,813	5,385.46	\$105,202,975.00	\$17,042.99	6,172.80
Needham	Town	29,240	\$989,018	\$127,753	9.58%		173,154,753	5,921.85	\$98,879,657.00	\$17,390.02	5,686.00
Belmont	Town	24,943	\$1,039,000	\$110,584	4.08%		124,641,881	4,997.07	\$61,803,711.00	\$13,655.86	4,525.80
Hingham	Town	22,330	\$799,000	\$106,854	7.82%	Aaa	108,667,250	4,866.42	\$58,814,265.00	\$13,544.50	4,342.30
Concord	Town	18,442	\$1,039,000	\$134,705	7.24%	Aaa	103,056,816	5,588.16	\$41,369,542.00	\$19,324.34	2,140.80
Acton	Town	22,291	\$617,500	\$110,592	7.33%	Aaa	98,270,842	4,408.54	\$87,351,122.00	\$15,282.93	5,715.60
Weston	Town	11,538	\$1,395,000	\$192,563	3.30%	Aaa	96,556,387	8,368.55	\$53,095,848.00	\$24,457.99	2,170.90
Lincoln	Town	6,470	\$1,072,500	\$126,395	1.74%		38,152,471	5,896.83	\$28,103,781.00	22943.74*	1,224.90
Dover	Town	5,677	\$1,147,500	\$187,829	0.75%	Aaa	36,282,174	6,391.08	\$11,616,354.00	\$23,335.38	497.8
Manchester By T	Town	5,185	\$866,500	\$115,650	4.07%		32,632,990	6,293.73	\$24,916,342.00	\$17,448.42	1,428.00
Carlisle	Town	4,918	\$858,000	\$160,034	0.52%		30,463,825	6,194.35	\$12,153,317.00	\$20,394.89	595.9
Sherborn	Town	4,169	\$825,000	\$223,444	2.03%		27,594,642	6,619.01	\$8,113,224.00	\$18,552.99	437.3

Mayor Peer Group--Cities

Town	Type	Population (2009-2013)	Median Housing Price (2017)	Median Household Income (2009-2013)	% of Commercial Tax / Total Tax (2018)	Moody's Bond Rating	Municipal Budget (2017)	Municipal Budget Per Capita	School Budget (Total Expenditures)	Per Pupil Expenditures*	School Enrollment (Average pupil membership)
Cambridge	City	105,737	\$1,455,000	\$72,529	20.42%	Aaa	679,507,434	6,426.39	\$212,707,498.00	\$29,206.43	7,282.90
Newton	City	86,241	\$1,200,000	\$119,148	7.89%	Aaa	458,243,299	5,313.52	\$246,487,344.00	\$19,081.81	12,917.40
Brockton	City	93,911	\$271,000	\$49,025	12.71%	A1	418,464,793	4,455.97	\$263,839,103.00	\$14,783.39	17,847.00
Lowell	City	107,466	\$288,000	\$49,452	7.62%	A1	365,886,534	3,404.67	\$235,335,245.00	\$14,540.33	16,185.00
Quincy	City	92,595	\$450,000	\$61,328	12.24%	Aa3	357,311,458	3,858.86	\$159,659,540.00	\$16,976.03	9,405.00
Lynn	City	90,788	\$329,900	\$44,849	6.66%	Baa1	327,223,950	3,604.26	\$233,282,178.00	\$13,666.29	17,069.90
Framingham	City	69,288	\$425,000	\$67,915	17.27%	Aa2	320,112,289	4,620.02	\$174,238,507.00	\$18,620.00	9,357.60
Lawrence	City	76,820	\$255,450	\$32,851	8.95%	A3	309,810,756	4,032.94	\$233,294,100.00	\$14,886.90	15,671.10
Waltham	City	61,321	\$582,000	\$74,198	25.27%	Aa1	270,762,445	4,415.49	\$116,926,048.00	\$20,673.29	5,655.90
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Taunton	City	55,953	\$285,000	\$51,637	13.54%	Aa3	231,663,941	4,140.33	\$114,977,397.00	\$13,813.92	8,323.30
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Malden	City	59,803	\$455,000	\$53,798	6.78%	Aa3	200,585,649	3,354.11	\$109,566,641.00	\$14,470.74	7,571.60
Haverhill	City	61,335	\$320,000	\$60,429	7.09%	A1	200,489,019	3,268.75	\$111,752,055.00	\$13,071.18	8,549.50

Mayor Peer Group--Towns

Town	Type	Population (2009-2013)	Median Housing Price (2017)	Median Household Income (2009-2013)	% of Commercial Tax / Total Tax (2018)	Moody's Bond Rating	Municipal Budget (2017)	Municipal Budget Per Capita	School Budget (Total Expenditures)	Per Pupil Expenditures*	School Enrollment (Average pupil membership)
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Carlisle	Town	4,918	\$858,000	\$160,034	0.52%		30,463,825	6,194.35	\$12,153,317.00	\$20,394.89	595.9
Sherborn	Town	4,169	\$825,000	\$223,444	2.03%		27,594,642	6,619.01	\$8,113,224.00	\$18,552.99	437.3