



The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College
The Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences

Policy Research Shop

Regionalization in Vermont

Benefits and Challenges of Regionalization in Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield

Presented to the Windsor Selectboard, Windsor, Vermont

**PRS Policy Brief 1213-05
April 3, 2013**

Prepared by:

**Amy Couture '14
Brandon Debot '14
Andres Ramirez '14**

This report was written by undergraduate students at Dartmouth College under the direction of professors in the Rockefeller Center. The Policy Research Shop is supported by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). The PRS reports were developed under FIPSE grant P116B100070 from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents of the PRS reports do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



Contact

Nelson A. Rockefeller Center, 6082 Rockefeller Hall, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH 03755
<http://rockefeller.dartmouth.edu/shop/> • Email: Ronald.G.Shaiko@Dartmouth.edu



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 WHAT IS REGIONALIZATION?	1
1.2 BENEFITS OF REGIONALIZATION	3
1.3 CHALLENGES OF REGIONALIZATION	5
2. CASE STUDIES IN REGIONALIZATION	6
2.1 INTRODUCTION	6
2.2 TOWN OF ASHBY AND TOWNSEND: POLICE & COMMUNICATIONS REGIONALIZATION ANALYSIS	6
2.3 REGIONALIZATION IN BARRE, BERLIN, AND MONTPELIER	7
2.4 PUBLIC HEALTH REGIONALIZATION IN NEW HAMPSHIRE	8
2.5 REGIONALIZATION IN MASSACHUSETTS: TOWN OPINIONS	8
2.6 SOUTH SHORE SHARED FIRE SERVICES: A FAILED ATTEMPT	8
2.7 CONCLUSION	9
3. REGIONALIZATION IN WINDSOR, WEST WINDSOR, HARTLAND, AND WEATHERSFIELD	10
3.1 TOWN CHARACTERISTICS	10
3.1.1 <i>Windsor</i>	10
3.1.2 <i>West Windsor</i>	11
3.1.3 <i>Hartland</i>	12
3.1.4 <i>Weathersfield</i>	13
3.2 ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	15
3.2.1 <i>Plausible Areas for Regionalization</i>	15
3.2.2 <i>Areas to Keep the Same</i>	16
3.2.3 <i>Comparative Town Analysis</i>	17
3.2.4 <i>Cost Distribution Considerations</i>	19
3.2.5 <i>Recommendation Summary</i>	19
4. CONCLUSION	19
REFERENCES	20



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyzes regionalization in both a broad context and as it could potentially apply to specific small towns in Vermont. Regionalization is currently used to varying degrees across New England and has numerous benefits and drawbacks. If properly implemented, it has the potential to produce significant cost savings for towns while improving the quality of services provided. We analyzed the specific characteristics of four Vermont towns—Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield—that have considered regionalizing services to a small extent. We then held conversations with the town managers from the three of these towns and developed a substantive, albeit non-authoritative, analysis of how regionalization could work for these towns. We conclude with this analysis and a recommendation to form an inter-town task force to further investigate the potential gains from regionalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is Regionalization?

The tough economic times of recent years have motivated localities across the country to look for ways to lower costs while maintaining services for their citizens. One possibility for this is regionalization, which refers to the consolidation of governments and services across county or state lines.¹ Regionalization allows small towns to share services and costs with other comparably sized or larger towns, which allows additional services to be provided, often at a lower cost. However, regionalization is often a nonstarter politically, as it frequently provokes fears of job losses or loss of identity.² Shared services, a term that evokes less inherent distress, is emerging as a new way of framing the consolidation of services for small towns.³ Shared services provide an opportunity for small towns to gain additional services through economies of scale while also maintaining their local identities and administrative authority.⁴ Both regionalization and shared services have some potential benefits for towns in Vermont.



Exhibit 1: Government Shared Services Continuum

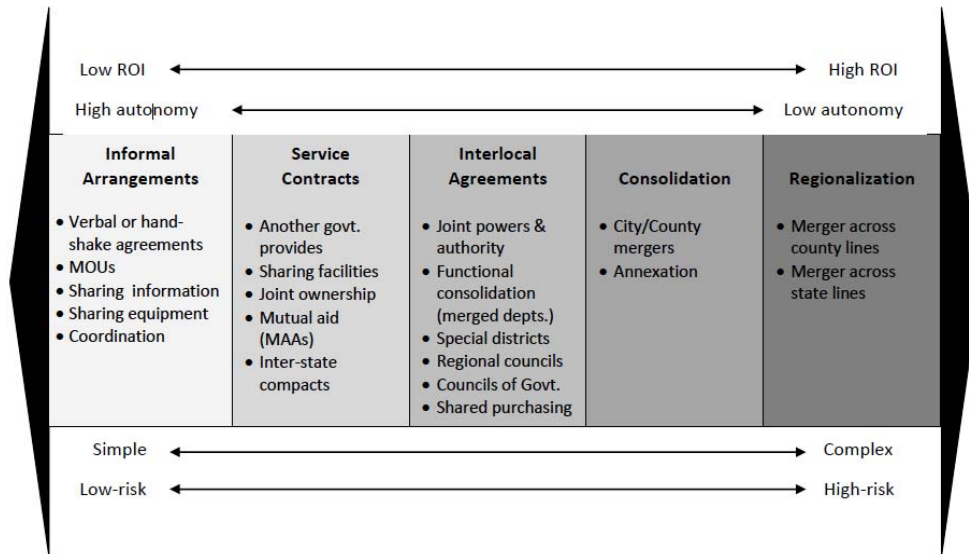


Figure 1: Government Shared Services Continuum

The above table, Figure 1, shows the various degrees of regionalization on a scale from low regionalization and high autonomy, on the left, to a high degree of regionalization and little autonomy on the right. The five different categories of regionalization vary from loose, informal arrangements and coordination, to full regionalization of services, including mergers across state and county lines. In between are service contracts, interlocal agreements, and consolidation. Service contracts include shared facilities, mutual aid, joint ownership, and allowing other governments to provide services. Interlocal agreements feature joint powers, functional consolidation, special districts, shared purchasing, and regional councils. Consolidation refers to mergers between cities and counties or annexation. Many localities without regionalization do still utilize informal agreements, service contracts, or interlocal agreements while maintaining their autonomy.

Indeed, regionalization has come up more frequently in towns across New England in recent years. For example, the annual Conference for Franklin and Hampshire County Municipal Officials discussed regionalization for the first time in 2011 as budgets tightened in Massachusetts.⁵ Speakers suggested regionalization as one potential way to overcome millions of dollars in shortfalls and cuts in state government aid.⁶ Rural towns, in particular, were cited as having the most to gain from regionalization, as it is more expensive to provide a full complement of services in small, rural towns.⁷ As noted by



numerous leaders, the economic climate will make it imperative that towns work together to provide services to their citizens at lower costs.⁸

1.2 Benefits of Regionalization

Considering regionalization is a relatively underutilized concept in Vermont counties, the towns of Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield may consider the positive effects shared services bring to their respective towns. Collaboration helps reap advantages between each party, diminishing costs of public services and maximizing efficiency of equipment and personnel. This includes regionalized police and fire dispatch services, shared contracted professional staff (encompassing assessors, engineers, and building inspectors), joint emergency medical services, and other services.⁹

When looking at regionalization, the Vermont towns may recognize that informal shared services might already exist. The towns may share the same contractor for public services, receive mutual aid, or have informal agreements following the aftermath of emergencies like Tropical Storm Irene.¹⁰ For example, Hartland receives mutual aid from surrounding towns concerning their fire department. They contract with Windsor, Woodstock, and Hartford, while using Hartford's dispatch. According to town manager Bob Stacey, the emergency dispatch works really well considering their absence of a full time staff. Similarly, the town of Windsor maintains an effective system by contracting emergency services through Hartford.

Service Delivery	Financing	Perceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customer Focus• Increase Access• Advanced Skills• Standardized processes• Higher quality• Improve employee morale	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid duplication• Bargaining power• Economies of scale• Spread risk• Capital improvements• Reduce or stabilize costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased productivity• Enhanced career opportunity – attract staff• Leveraging of tax dollars• Improved equity• Attracts businesses• Expanded sense of community

Figure 2: Advantages of Regionalization

Regionalization also opens up opportunities to restructure services in these towns, allowing for an overall better-managed community. Though each regionalized



community experiences distinct benefits from shared services, many show potential gains from service delivery, financing, and community perceptions of government.¹¹

Initially, cooperation would extend the manpower for shared services across the four towns. In effect, the efficiency in services such as EMS, administration, and public works would increase by reducing response times and effectively using the talents of each town's personnel for overall gains. Additionally, because the staffs from each of these four towns are small, regionalization would diminish the impact of shortages, vacancies, and retirement in each service. Each town could draw from each other to retain a highly qualified workforce, increasing stability within these towns and maximizing overall town management.¹² Regionalized forces may also eliminate superfluous employment training and underutilized facilities for personnel.¹³

With shared services, each town may also increase its accessibility to sophisticated equipment, expertly trained human resources, and other amenities necessary to maximize town management.¹⁴ This in turn would allow these towns to effectively carry out mandated Vermont regulations due to easier access to necessary tools without having to resort to private contractors. Furthermore, decreasing maintenance and private contracting costs for town operations allow for the utilization of savings for underfunded projects. Seeing that these towns operate with minimal budgetary assistance, increased revenue from shared services would enable increases in service projects to better maintain town provisions.

Additionally, shared services would spread fiscal burdens across Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland and Weathersfield, allowing for effective utilization of equipment and staff. For example, certain equipment, like wood chippers, is used several times a month. Each town would benefit from a full, regionalized set of standard equipment that would reduce costs for underutilized and non-essential tools. With shared equipment, costs for repair and replacements are distributed throughout the towns, while mutually benefitting from these resources. Regionalizing equipment would reduce duplication and unnecessary costs that could be easily shared with neighboring communities.¹⁵ Joint purchases may also cutback on inventory costs, storage needs, and insurance costs.¹⁶

While increasing outputs, collaborative efforts may also aid in spillover difficulties, allowing local leaders to pursue joint-goals to address externalities and other issues.¹⁷ If each town mutually cooperated on regional problems, especially during emergencies, it would foster a stronger sense of community. Each town is no more than fifteen miles apart from the others, a proximity ideal for collaboration. Local leaders would essentially minimize jurisdictional boundaries and create a more unified region. The communities could therefore leverage tax dollars and facilitate regional economic development.¹⁸



1.3 Challenges of Regionalization

With regionalization and increased interactions with other communities, tensions may arise as a result of differences in policies, codes of conduct, and necessities. Prior to considering regionalizing certain services, communities must identify the benefits and costs of regionalization and whether it will lead to an overall gain for all parties. Due to the small size of the four towns identified, certain issues will arise that are more apparent than in towns of greater populations.

Studies have shown that population size exhibits a positive correlation with successful regionalization. Since the towns of Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield each have population sizes of less than 5,000, sharing services becomes increasingly difficult. A study by Nancy Kaufman found that smaller communities experience complications in sharing services “due to their stronger ties to local identity, generations of tradition and the brand identity that inextricably links public employees to place.”¹⁹ As a consequence, local leaders may disagree on innovations necessary to move forward, as citizens may not adhere to collaborative efforts. Regionalization has a stigma of insinuating job loss, unequal distribution of services and salaries, changes in administrative leadership, and differences in workforce culture that causes skepticism in these citizens. Citizens may fear a loss of control in certain sectors, as they may relinquish control over budgets and decision-making to neighboring communities.²⁰

When considering regionalizing personnel across the four towns, communities should be cognizant of complications that may arise. Firstly, towns may see a rise in administrative costs associated with standardizing staff qualifications, training and salaries.²¹ Each town functions independently from the rest, having unique standards in wages and training. A disparity in salaries could potentially reduce wages for certain individuals while others gain mandatory wage increases, a potential burden for the towns. In addition, these towns may lower the need and value for part-time employees, as each town is showcasing its best employees that may out qualify those in other towns.²² Because staff members in Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield are comprised of a significant faction of part-time employees, job security could be threatened. Administrators may also see an increase in manageable workload, as the potential to adhere to the needs of all four towns increases.²³

Shared services also pose a threat through the communal lease and purchases of regionalized equipment. With shared equipment, communities will see an increase in resource utilization by all parties. However, due to this, shared equipment may require continual replacements and maintenance as the equipment becomes more prone to damage. Additionally, the towns will undeniably face an unequal distribution of equipment usage as one town may require its services more than the others. This in turn



will result in the potential monopolization of certain tools. Would it be fair to charge one town more for shared equipment if they use it more? How would this be measured? These obstacles may result in conflicting agreements, increasing legal fees and complicating liability.²⁴

Regionalizing services in the towns in Vermont is tricky because precedents have not been established to monitor success. Time, energy, and capital by the town managers are high in developing and implementing agreements. Each town may hold different priorities, increasing the time needed to reach finalized agreements.²⁵ Since information and resources are limited in determining the success of sharing services for these towns, experimental allocations may prove to be inefficient.²⁶ Unless the timing is correct and all town managers are on board, regionalizing services would be detrimental for the four towns.

2. CASE STUDIES IN REGIONALIZATION

2.1 Introduction

Numerous towns throughout New England have made regionalization attempts over the past two decades. Whereas some places, like Ashby and Townsend in Massachusetts and various towns in New Hampshire, had success in their regionalization efforts, others faltered. The most prominent reasons for failure were unwillingness amongst employees and the public and disparities in funding levels between towns. These case studies offer the towns of Windsor, West Windsor, Weathersfield, and Hartland a glimpse into the potential benefits and pitfalls associated with regionalization attempts.

2.2 Town of Ashby and Townsend: Police and Communications Regionalization Analysis

In 2010, the Division of Local Services within the Massachusetts Department of Revenue analyzed the potential impact of regionalizing the police and communications services in the towns of Ashby and Townsend. Ashby and Townsend are both rural towns located in north-central Massachusetts. Though Ashby has a population and land area comparable to Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield, Townsend is significantly more populated with 9,400 people.²⁷

Ashby and Townsend both have full-time police forces of five and fourteen officers respectively. Each also outfits its own dispatch center, with six and eight employees respectively. The towns have relatively low crime rates and thus see a small volume of calls compared to other Massachusetts towns.²⁸



The report found that there would be significant cost savings with regionalization. First, the report recommended that the regionalized police force maintain the same level of police officer employment. This was due to the sheer size of the land area between the two towns with limited access between them. No patrol route made economic sense, and there were limited economies of scale with staffing. Instead, Ashby would purchase patrol shifts from the regional department hosted by Townsend. Savings came from lower maintenance costs for one building instead of two, along with sharing technology and equipment.²⁹

The vast majority of savings came in closing Ashby's communications service and opening a regional dispatch center in Townsend. Because of the towns' low emergency call volume, the same level of service could be provided with eight total employees rather than fourteen. All services could also be consolidated in Townsend's facilities. The total savings from fewer employees, joined facilities, and overall economies of scale came to \$225,804 annually.³⁰

The report also analyzed methods of allocating costs. According to the report, an ideal system would lead to "relatively stable and predictable results from year to year and not increase the operational cost to either town." The report used the variables of population, equalized valuation (the estimate of the cash value for all taxable property in the town), and the 911 call volume, and calculated the ratio for each town. Savings would be allocated based on the average ratio of the three mechanisms.³¹

Before regionalizing, the report concluded that the two towns would need to consider additional challenges like operating and maintenance costs, unexpected or emergency expenses, and likely transition-related costs. A regionalization planning committee could best discuss the issues and draft an agreement. In all, a full police and communications regionalization effort would take up to a year to complete.³²

This report demonstrates the savings that can come from regionalizing very rural towns, which is comparable to the efforts found in Windsor, West Windsor, Weathersfield, and Hartland. Though limited road access can make regionalization efforts challenging, there are still ways to consolidate services and improve efficiency.

2.3 Regionalization in Barre, Berlin, and Montpelier

Regionalization has also been considered and attempted in Vermont in recent years. The towns of Barre, Berlin, and Montpelier attempted to regionalize in 2012 as a way of gaining cost savings for the small towns.³³ However, this example also highlights some of the difficulties of regionalization: start-up costs and unequal distribution. In June 2012, the towns had to seek an additional \$40,000 just to fund the analysis and start-up costs of



regionalization, which never left the development stage.³⁴ This was partially because the plan was meant to help Barre and Berlin to gain more services from Montpelier, which has a much greater population, but the smaller towns could not bear the disproportionate costs that were associated with regionalizing. Thus, while regionalization is on the table in a number of areas, effective policy design and initial funding are crucial to making full integration possible.

2.4 Public Health Regionalization in New Hampshire

New Hampshire has developed an extensive public health network through regionalization. Public health regionalization typically involves assessing capacity for providing different services, then developing public health regions that increase services across geographic areas.³⁵ The majority of these services focus on emergency preparedness and ensuring emergency medical care.³⁶ Overall, this regionalization has allowed New Hampshire to develop a coordinated health infrastructure with fifteen health regions.³⁷ This regionalization has been effective at covering the entire state with higher-quality health services.³⁸

2.5 Regionalization in Massachusetts: Town Opinions

Massachusetts, which has regionalized more extensively than Vermont, has numerous other case studies about regionalization. A Group Procurement Survey sent to municipal leaders developed numerous applicable findings for Massachusetts, which can have meaningful implications for Vermont. First, regionalization is mostly done for cost savings and most municipalities already engage in some form of joint purchasing in order to reduce costs.³⁹ Secondly, municipalities mostly wanted to share part-time employees, but would not compromise by sharing or potentially losing full-time staff.⁴⁰ Thirdly, municipalities were most receptive to sharing waste management collection systems, especially for hazardous waste, and for joint purchases of building consumables.⁴¹ Finally, very few communities were willing to share highway maintenance equipment.⁴² Because towns in Vermont face many of the same challenges as Massachusetts towns, these findings may help clarify the preferences of municipal leaders in Vermont as well.

2.6 South Shore Shared Fire Services: A Failed Attempt

A regionalization attempt in Massachusetts in the early 1990s gives an excellent glimpse into the challenges associated with implementation. Five towns in the South Shore of Boston—Cohasset, Hingham, Hull, Norwell, and Scituate—attempted to regionalize fire services in order to cut costs and relieve tight budgets. Analysts completed a 284-page feasibility study and found that regionalization could generate up to half a million dollars



each year in savings.⁴³ Initially, most town officials supported regionalization, and an attempt was made to implement the report's suggestions.

However, regionalization efforts never moved past the planning phase for numerous reasons. First, there was a significant disparity in funding levels between the five towns. Low-budget towns saw regionalization as an added expense and would give them resources they did not need, while high-budget towns believed they would be carrying much of the fiscal burden. All towns felt that they would be sacrificing their own budget autonomy.

Second, towns could not come to an agreement about where to locate new facilities. Creating regional centers meant some towns would lose their personal stations, which was rejected by employees and the public. In the words of Cohasset selectman Joseph Norton, "Everybody talks about regionalization, but when it comes down to it, no one wants to give up their dog officer, their veteran's agent... When it comes to implementation, it's a tough sell."⁴⁴

Third, the fiscal crisis that prompted the initial look at regionalization abated during the implementation process. As a result, the focus shifted from the budget shortages to the fact that towns would no longer be in control of their own fire departments. At this point, public support for the effort all but evaporated.

The South Shore regionalization efforts demonstrate the challenges that arise even with extraordinarily promising cost savings. It highlights "the disparity between broad support of the theory but utter failure on implementation."⁴⁵ In New England, where small-town independence is a point of pride, regionalization can be a particularly challenging endeavor.

2.7 Conclusion

Specific case studies of regionalization efforts demonstrate the benefits and challenges associated with consolidating resources and reducing costs. Although some towns have been cooperative and have acted on regionalization plans, others have faltered before the actual implementation stage. Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield can benefit from studying the characteristics of related regionalization attempts.



3. REGIONALIZATION IN WINDSOR, WEST WINDSOR, HARTLAND, AND WEATHERSFIELD

3.1 Town Characteristics

3.1.1 Windsor

The town of Windsor comprises approximately 19.8 square miles of land area in eastern Windsor County. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Windsor has a population of 4,858, leading to an average of 245 people per square mile. The average household income of \$42,716 is 18 percent below the state average of \$51,841.⁴⁶

Administration and Finances

Windsor is governed through its Town Offices, which is comprised of a town manager, clerk, treasurer, and lister/assessor. The offices work in conjunction with various boards and commissions, including the Selectboard, the Planning Commission, and the Development Review Board. The town of Windsor currently employs approximately 80 people, 25 of which are full time.⁴⁷

Financially, Windsor has a debt burden within an “acceptable range,” but is generally underfunded and has little money in its savings account.⁴⁸ It spends approximately \$12 million per year on town services, \$6 million of which is funded by the state and federal government and predominately goes toward education. The rest is funded primarily through town property taxes, park and recreation fees, fire and ambulance fees, and outside grants.

The municipal government operates out of a recently-build town hall. Maintenance costs for the building are approximately \$70,000 to \$80,000 per year.⁴⁹

Zoning

Zoning in Windsor is managed primarily by the Zoning Administrative Officer. For 2013, Windsor budgeted \$36,791.00 for the Zoning and Planning Office, which went primarily to wages for the Zoning Administration clerk and to legal counsel.⁵⁰

Police

The Windsor police department is comprised of a paid police chief and a number of other full time officers. Windsor currently pays approximately \$340,000 per year for full-time



police salaries and \$30,000 for part-time wages. Dispatch services are contracted out to Hartford for approximately \$100,000 per year.⁵¹ Roughly 4,000 calls go through the dispatch center each year, 600-800 of which are 911 calls.⁵² The police department operates out of the newly constructed town hall complex.

Fire

The Windsor fire department is comprised of paid and volunteer fire fighters. In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, Windsor paid \$27,170.82 and \$64,319.94 in full time and part time wages, respectively. The fire department also operates out of the newly constructed town hall complex.⁵³

EMS

Windsor's ambulance service is made up of paid full-time and part-time emergency responders. Full time and part time wages were \$154,364.60 and \$236,518.97 in FY 2011-2012.⁵⁴

3.1.2 West Windsor

The town of West Windsor covers 24.7 square miles in eastern Windsor County, bordering Windsor to the west. The population is 1,099, leading to an average of 45 people per square mile. The average household income of \$54,792 is slightly above the state average.⁵⁵

Administration and Finances

West Windsor is governed by its Selectboard, comprised of three members elected for three-year terms. Its day-to-day activities are run by the town manager, clerk, and treasurer. West Windsor pays for eight full-time employees.

West Windsor typically operates on a balanced budget. Funding comes primarily from property taxes at a rate of \$0.35 for every \$100 in assessed value. The state government pays for highways but does not offer additional assistance.⁵⁶

Zoning

Zoning is managed by West Windsor's Zoning Administrator. West Windsor requires a zoning permit for all land development, defined as "the division of a parcel into two or more parcels, the construction, reconstruction, conversion, structural alteration, relocation, or enlargement of any building or other structure, or any mining, excavation,



site preparation, or landfill, and any change in the use of any building or other structure, or land, or extension of use of land.” Certain situations require approval from the Development Review Board.⁵⁷

Police

West Windsor has contracted out to Windsor Police Department for law enforcement coverage since July 1, 2012 for an annual fee of \$75,000.00.⁵⁸ Windsor provides 15-20 hours per week for coverage and responds to 911 calls. Dispatch is routed to Hartford. For additional coverage, West Windsor employs a first and second constable.⁵⁹

Fire

Fire services are provided by a volunteer fire department. The town contributes an annual appropriation of \$44,000.00 to help pay for training and equipment.⁶⁰

EMS

Most of the EMS services are handled by the all-volunteer Fast Squad, comprised of 18 EMTs and RNs. West Windsor allocates \$1,500.00 to the Fast Squad annually. Additional emergency ambulance needs are contracted out to Golden Cross Ambulance, a private company operating out of Claremont, New Hampshire. The contract amounts to \$9,610.00 annually.⁶¹

3.1.3 Hartland

The town of Hartland comprises approximately 45.2 square miles in eastern Windsor County and borders Windsor and West Windsor to the north. The population is 3,393, leading to an average of 75 people per square mile. The median household income of \$49,388 is slightly below the state average.⁶²

Administration and Finances

Hartland is governed through its town offices, comprised primarily of the town manager, treasurer, and town clerk. Hartland employs 13 people full time and 19 people part time, which includes three part-time listers, five in the fire department, six in the recreation department, and four in the library. The unpaid Selectpersons and Planning Commission assist with town governance. Municipal employees work out of Damen Hall, built in 1915 but in good condition; the building costs \$18,400 per year to maintain and operate. Hartland also has a newly constructed library, which costs \$190,000 per year to operate and is funded through the town budget.⁶³



The town operates with a yearly budget of \$2.2 million, and runs close to its budget every year. The state contributes money only to road repairs and maintenance, which is determined by the number of total road miles in the town. Approximately \$673,000 goes to administrative costs each year.⁶⁴

Zoning

According to Town Manager Bob Stacey, Hartland has no zoning laws.⁶⁵

Police

Hartland does not have its own full-time police force, and instead pays the Vermont State Police for protection. State police expenses amounts to approximately \$50,000 per year. In 2011, there were 547 total calls for service. Dispatch services are contracted out to Hartford Dispatch. Hartland also has a part-time constable.⁶⁶

Fire

Hartland operates with a volunteer fire department. As of 2011, the department had 31 members. The fire department responded to 114 calls in 2011. The town contributes between \$50,000 and \$60,000 to the fire department each year, which pays for equipment and upkeep.⁶⁷

EMS

EMS services are provided by the volunteer Hartland Rescue Squad. The Hartland Rescue Squad responded to 150 calls in 2011. The town contributes \$16,000 each year to the squad to assist with training, equipment purchases, and general upkeep.⁶⁸

2.1.4 Weathersfield

The town of Weathersfield covers 44 square miles in eastern Windsor County and borders Windsor to the south. The population is 2,832, leading to an average of 64.4 people per square mile. The median household income of \$42,057 is approximately 20 percent below the state average.⁶⁹

Administration and Finances

The town of Weathersfield is governed by the Select Board and the Board of Listers, and day-to-day activities are managed by the Town Manager, along with the Town Clerk and



The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College
The Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences

Treasurer. The town administration budget is approximately \$340,000 annually, which pays for the manager salary, secretary, accountant, office supplies, and other miscellaneous expenditures.⁷⁰

Overall, the town operates with total General Fund expenditures of slightly over \$1 million annually. This includes administration, listers, emergency services, animal control, lands and grounds, and assorted appropriations.

Zoning

Zoning is managed by the Zoning Board of Adjustment, which is a “quasi-judicial” board which reviews applications for variances and permits in conjunction with the town’s Zoning Administrator and consistent with Weathersfield’s Zoning Regulations. Weathersfield budgets approximately \$40,000 annually for administrative wages, insurance benefits, and other expenses. Planning and Zoning generates approximately \$5,500 per year in revenue predominately from permits.⁷¹

Police

The Weathersfield Police Department is comprised of a Chief of Police and a patrolman. The town budget was \$168,342.00 in FY 2012, which primarily goes to wages, insurance, and cruiser expenses. In 2012, the police department generated \$22,991.80 in revenue from fines, the Corps of Engineers, the sale of equipment, and mileage reimbursement.⁷²

Fire

Fire services are provided through the Ascutney Volunteer Fire Department and the West Weathersfield Volunteer Fire Department. Additional services are provided by the Fire Commission and the Fire Wardens. To support volunteer efforts in FY 2012, Weathersfield budget 32,373.00 to the Fire Commission, \$32,900 to Ascutney Fire, and \$52,270.00 to West Weathersfield Fire.⁷³

EMS

For ambulance services, Weathersfield contracts out to a private company, Golden Cross Ambulance. Golden Cross operates primarily out of Claremont, NH but opened a second office in Vermont to serve communities there. Weathersfield pays \$22,304.00 annually for this service.⁷⁴



3.2 Analysis and Recommendations

Throughout August 2012 we held conversations with the town managers of Windsor, West Windsor, and Hartland about the services offered by their town as well as budget information. We were unable to hold a conversation with Weathersfield town manager Jim Mullen before the time of this report. However, from these discussions, we were able to identify several areas with a significant overlap of services or where the town managers mentioned may be easy to share services, and we note these below as places where regionalizing could help these towns. We also note places where the towns appear to be operating extremely well independently and it would not make sense to regionalize services. We also include a recommendation about opening a regional task force to discuss the idea of sharing services in these towns. It is important to note that we are not experts in regionalization, and that this analysis is formed from broad discussions of town management in these towns.

3.2.1 Plausible Areas for Regionalization

Equipment

All the town managers noted the expense and difficulty with making new capital purchases. While most equipment was in workable condition, the managers commented that new purchases would be difficult with current funding, and that they did not plan on increasing equipment in the near future. In addition, as noted by Bob Stacey of Hartland, there is often a significant duplication of equipment among small towns, especially for certain equipment like grates and plows that are used very infrequently, easily sharable, and are usually purchased by individual towns.⁷⁵ As noted by Tom Marsh, town manager for Windsor, woodchippers and mowers are only used a few times a month and could be regionalized with relative ease.⁷⁶ Regionalizing equipment between these towns, either in the form of sharing existing equipment or forming capital funds for towns, has the potential to prevent overlapping purchases and allow towns to expand their services at diminished costs.

Some Administrative Services

All the towns mentioned have significant administrative infrastructures. Between the costs of employing staff and maintaining property, these administrative costs absorb a large percentage of each town's budget. While the town managers commented that they were satisfied with the quality of administration, there was also significant overlap between the services provided, and there may be potential to consolidate or increase responsibility for positions to improve efficiency and productivity. Each town will



certainly seek to maintain its staff and services, but this may be one area where cost savings can be found.

Zoning for Rural Areas

Unifying and updating zoning rules has the potential to make property assessment and tax collection easier. While it would not make sense to develop unified zoning rules across all four towns, it could make sense to unify the rules in particular for more homogenous areas, such as the rural areas in Hartland and West Windsor.⁷⁷

Continue Regionalizing Dispatch

Hartland, Windsor, and Weathersfield currently contract with Hartford for emergency dispatch services. Each of the managers also displayed satisfaction with this arrangement. This form of service contracting appears mutually beneficial and should be continued unless problems arise.

3.2.2 Areas to Keep the Same

Though the previous methods of regionalization will benefit the four towns, certain services should remain unaltered as they demonstrate positive track records. After speaking with town managers, partial regionalization found in EMS, regional school systems, and police force are said to aid the towns in successfully meeting community needs. They seem to have sufficient budgets for these services and do not foresee many necessary changes in the near future.

EMS

The Emergency Medical Services in these towns seem to be running efficiently through dedicated volunteers and small factions of paid staff. Windsor, West Windsor, and Hartland each have money budgeted by the towns as donations to offset service costs. Additionally, Hartford receives auxiliary aid from surrounding towns. In both West Windsor and Hartland, the EMS is completely volunteer run, with approximately 30 dedicated firemen. Each EMS station dispatches through Hartford, a system that has been working well for years as stated by all three town managers.

School Systems

The towns of Windsor, West Windsor, and Hartland are joined in a supervisory union in which West Windsor and Hartland students have the choice of attending middle and high



school in surrounding regions, including the towns of Woodstock, Hartford, Windsor or Hanover. However, because Windsor is the host community of Kindergarten through 12th grade, Windsor residents are required to attend Windsor High School. This system is working well as more affluent towns are levied in education taxes, redistributed funds to towns with lower funding. For towns like West Windsor and Hartland whose schools only go up through middle school, costs are paid by the state of Vermont. Additionally, Hartland residents have the opportunity of sending their kids to a private school in Meridan, partially funded through local and state funds.

Police Force

As for law enforcement services, Windsor and West Windsor have merged their police forces. They provide 15-20 hours a week of police and 911 coverage. Though the regionalized police force has only been merged for over a month, the town manager of West Windsor is pleased with the work that has been produced. 911 and emergency calls are also routed through Hartford.

Overall, these regionalized services have provided the towns with cooperative efforts to maximize efficiency. EMS and educational shared services have been in place for years and are deemed successful by the town managers. As for law enforcement, the system between Windsor and West Windsor is relatively new but working well nonetheless.

3.2.3 Comparative Town Analysis

A second method of analysis we considered was to compare the collective expenses of a regionalized Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield to larger towns in Vermont that shared similar populations and characteristics. However, because the majority of Vermont towns are smaller than the collective 12,182-person population of the regionalized towns, there were limited points of comparison. Most towns with greater populations were significantly more urbanized and were thus highly dissimilar from Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield.

As a result, the comparison was limited to the two towns of Hartford and Brattleboro. Both Hartford and Brattleboro are comparably rural to Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield, with Hartford also in Windsor County, and Brattleboro significantly more south in Windham County, but still relatively rural.⁷⁸ The two towns have populations of 10,200 and 12,241 respectively, according to the 2010 census.⁷⁹



The table below compares spending levels of each town in the areas of zoning, police, fire, and EMS. An attempt was made to also compare administrative spending, but each town characterized “administration” in differing ways, thus making it too complex to accurately depict their relative levels. The budget data is from the most recent budget reports available, typically from the 2012-2013 fiscal year. The Weathersfield data numbers are from the 2010-2011 fiscal year, as this was the most recent report available.

Town	Population	Land Mass	Population Density	Zoning	Police	Fire	EMS
Windsor	4,858	19.8	245	36,791	835,240	196,600	657,010
West Windsor	1,099	24.7	45	6,140	91,200	44,000	11,110
Hartland	3,393	45.2	75	0	66,381	59,000	57,418
Weathersfield	2,832	44	64.4	40,605	168,342	117,544	22,304
Total:	12,182	133.7	91.1	83,536	1,161,163	417,144	747,842
Hartford ⁸⁰	10,200	45.9	222.2	109,122	2,152,128	2,161,162	359,233
Brattleboro ⁸¹	12,393	32	382.5	194,835	1,876,825	1,657,358	193,840

Figure 3: Comparative Town Analysis Budget Data

This table suggests that even collectively, Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield spend less than Hartford and Brattleboro in essentially every major area. The only area that implies room for cost savings is in EMS, although Winsor spends nearly ten-fold more than the other three towns, and thus cost savings would disproportionately benefit them. The reason for these generally low spending levels is likely Hartland, West Windsor, and Weathersfield’s reliance on volunteer fire and EMS services, which cost the town little money. These three towns also have very small police departments or contract out for coverage. In contrast, Hartford and Brattleboro have professional fire and EMS organizations and a significantly larger police force.

Further analysis on administrative spending may reveal greater cost savings. In general, however, it appears that Windsor, West Windsor, Hartland, and Weathersfield are already saving significant amounts of money by contracting out for services and by utilizing skilled volunteer organizations.



3.2.4 Cost Distribution Considerations

An important point of discussion for any regionalization attempt is how the four towns would most equitably share associated costs. As evidenced in the regionalization effort by Ashby and Townsend, the most efficient and fair method of cost-sharing often involves the development of a formula that takes into account population, usage, and real estate valuation. For example, if a town has a greater 911-call volume, or if it has higher real estate values, it would pay more under this system. Although this system could generate complexity, it would appropriately apply cost burdens to each town. A more simple mechanism is to share all costs equally. This would likely disproportionately hurt the smaller towns of West Windsor and Weathersfield and benefit Windsor.⁸²

3.2.5 Recommendation Summary

We recommend that Windsor, West Windsor, Weathersfield, and Hartland create some form of an inter-town task force to discuss their respective management and services. The task force would allow leaders of each town to discuss ways to improve efficiency and quality of services in this region, which may evolve into discussions of regionalizing specific services. Although the town managers already have very full agendas, we feel that the discussions would be fruitful because of the overlaps between towns and the current tough economic times.

4. CONCLUSION

With tough economic times and tight municipal budgets, regionalization is an appealing alternative that saves money and improves efficiency. Analyzing the theory behind regionalization and studying specific regionalization attempts across New England reveals the significant benefits and challenges of consolidating resources. Whereas some towns have had great success regionalizing various government services, others have faced substantial challenges and have often faltered despite great potential. Because of public disagreement, funding discrepancies, and a general desire for autonomy, numerous efforts have failed to get off the ground.

A focused look at Windsor, West Windsor, Weathersfield, and Hartland suggests that there is certainly promise for cost savings from regionalization. As revealed through discussions with town managers and from a comparative town analysis, savings from police, fire, and EMS seem unlikely. At the same time, consolidating administrative services, zoning, and equipment purchases could reap sizable benefits. By improving efficiency and reducing redundancy, all four towns can improve their government operations.



REFERENCES

¹Nancy J. Kaufman. *Regionalization of Government Services: Lessons Learned & Application for Public Health Service Delivery*. The Strategic Vision Group. 2011. p. 6.

²*Ibid.*, 2.

³*Ibid.*, 2.

⁴*Ibid.*, 2.

⁵Rebecca Everett. Daily Hampshire Gazette. "With budgets tight, regionalized services suggested at municipal conference." April 11, 2011.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Faust, Wayne H. "Sharing Government Services: A Practical Guide." N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Aug. 2012. <<http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/G3677.pdf>>.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 1.

¹¹Kaufman, Nancy J. "Regionalization of Government Services: Lessons Learned & Application for Public Health Service Delivery." N.p., July 2010. Web. 28 Aug. 2012.

<<http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/rwjfphrregionalizationofgovernmentsservices.pdf>>.

¹²Holdsworth, Art, "Justifying Interlocal Cooperation: Feasibility Studies, Financing and Cost Allocation" (2006). Working Group on Interlocal Services Cooperation. Paper 25.

http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/interlocal_coop/25

¹³*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷Feiock, Richard C. "Rational Choice and Regional Governance." Florida State University, n.d. Web. 28 Aug. 2012. <http://localgov.fsu.edu/publication_files/Rational_Choice_and_Regional_Governance.pdf>.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*, 1.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷"Towns of Ashby and Townsend: Police & Communications Regionalization Analysis," *Massachusetts Department of Revenue: Division of Local Services*, March 2012, p. 3.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, 25.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*

³³Patty Minichiello. *Regionalization seeks \$40,000 to continue work*. Vermont Today. June 28, 2012. <<http://www.vttoday.com/regionalization-seeks-40000-to-continue-work/>>

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Jose T. Montero. *Regionalization Update and Assessment Findings*. New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services. September 1, 2011. p. 8.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 8.



³⁷Ibid., 10.

³⁸Ibid., 5.

³⁹Montachusett Regional Planning Commission. *Group Procurement Survey: Results*. June 30, 2009. p.4.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³“Regionalization: Case Studies of Success and Failure in Massachusetts,” *Pioneer Institute*, October 2008, p. 4.

⁴⁴Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵Ibid., 7.

⁴⁶“Windsor, Vermont,” <http://www.city-data.com/zip/05089.html#b>.

⁴⁷Tom Marsh. Town Manager of Windsor, VT. August 8, 2012. Phone Conversation.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰“Town of Windsor General Fund Budget,” *Windsor, Vermont*,
<http://www.windsorvt.org/documents/budgets/proposed%20line%20item%20budget%20FY%202013.pdf>.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Tom Marsh. Town Manager of Windsor, VT. August 8, 2012. Phone Conversation.

⁵³“Town of Windsor General Fund Budget.”

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵“West Windsor, Vermont,” <http://www.westwindsorvt.govoffice2.com/>.

⁵⁶Glen Seward. Town Manager of West Windsor, VT. July 31, 2012. Phone Conversation.

⁵⁷“Zoning and Planning Information,” *West Windsor, Vermont*.

http://www.westwindsorvt.govoffice2.com/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={02F64152-0BAA-4E70-ACAF-DB9E94FEA233}.

⁵⁸“2011 Annual Reports,” *Town of West Windsor, Vermont*. 2011, p. 23.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 26.

⁶¹Ibid., 26.

⁶²Hartland 2010 Census.

⁶³Bob Stacy. Town Manager of Hartland, VT. August 8, 2012. Phone Conversation.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶“Fiscal Year July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011,” *Town of Hartland, Vermont*. 2011.

http://www.hartland.govoffice.com/vertical/sites/%7B47DC8B4F-778B-408C-BB00-EA7AC4E090E5%7D/uploads/2012_Town_Report.pdf, p. 7-17.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Weathersfield 2010 Census.

⁷⁰“Annual Town and School Report,” *Weathersfield, Vermont*, 2010-2011.

http://www.weathersfieldvt.org/documents-online/func-download/159/chk,ff083c651d9fd181a4598deeca130e82/no_html,1/.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Bob Stacy. Town Manager of Hartland, VT. August 8, 2012. Phone Conversation.

⁷⁶Tom Marsh. Town Manager of Windsor, VT. August 8, 2012. Phone Conversation.



The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College

The Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences

⁷⁷Tom Marsh. Town Manager of Windsor, VT. August 8, 2012. Phone Conversation.

⁷⁸"Town of Hartford Official Website." <http://www.hartford-vt.org/>.

⁷⁹"Demographics," *Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce*,
<http://www.brattleborochamber.org/business/demographics.html>.

⁸⁰"Town of Hartford Master Budget," 2012.

⁸¹"2011 Annual Report," *Brattleboro, Vermont Town and Town School District*. 2011.

http://www.brattleboro.org/vertical/sites/%7BFABA8FB3-EBD9-4E2C-91F9-C74DE6CECDFD%7D/uploads/Town_Report_2011_FINAL1%281%29.pdf.

⁸²"Regionalization Recommendations and Implementation," L.R. Kimball, March 2012, p. 66.
<http://www.townofmaynard-ma.gov/documents/final-regional-report-PSAP911.pdf>.