

Town of Litchfield
Borough/HDC Consolidation Study Committee
Recommendations to Litchfield's Board of Selectmen

Background & Context

The Borough/HDC Consolidation Study Committee (the “Committee”) was formed by the Board of Selectmen of the Town of Litchfield (the “Board of Selectmen”) in mid-2022 to consider ways in which the relationships and functions of the Borough and the Town could be improved for the benefit of the residents of both the Town and the Borough.

From the outset of Committee deliberations, it was agreed that we began with no predetermined objectives or preferences but would explore, with advice of counsel, the full range of options regarding possible relationships between the Town and the Borough, taking into full consideration the wide range of public opinions expressed by residents of the Town and the Borough.

Among the principal suggestions received by the Committee were the following:

- A **full consolidation of the Borough** into Town Governance, with governance duties, liabilities and obligations of Borough absorbed by the Board of Selectmen, but **with the authority and functions of the Historic District Commission (“HDC”) continuing without change**. There was unanimous agreement from the outset that HDC is of vital importance to maintaining the character of Historic Litchfield which must be preserved.
- The **establishment of a contract services agreement (an “Interlocal Agreement”)** between the Borough and the Town whereby an agreed list of functions presently performed by or contracted by the Borough would be provided by the Town to reduce duplication of effort, obtain the advantages of existing Town resources, and reduce costs.
- A **transfer of authority for the management of the Litchfield Green and/or Community Field** from the Warden and Burgesses of the Borough to the Board of Selectmen.

Recommendations

- A. The Committee, after thoughtful consideration, has determined that an attempt to alter the governance of the Borough would be controversial, divisive, and subject to legal challenge. The Borough has a proud, 200+ year history, is nationally recognized as important historically and represents an attraction of economic value to the whole of the Litchfield community that is worthy of continuance.

The Committee has reached consensus to recommend that no effort or initiative should be undertaken to abolish, consolidate or otherwise diminish the governance authority of the Warden and Burgesses of the Borough.

- B. The Committee, after thoughtful consideration, is of the strong opinion that considerable savings could be achieved if the Borough were to contract with the Town for the provision of several of the functions now performed by or contracted to others by the Borough. This agreement might be for an initial five-year period, after which the Borough would have the right to seek other suppliers if appropriate.

A less comprehensive Interlocal Agreement was in place in the past but was terminated by the Borough some years ago.

The Committee's review of services that could likely be efficiently performed by the Town suggests that Borough Taxes could be reduced by as much as 30-50% while requiring no increase in Town Taxes. Attached as Exhibit A is a list of such services worthy of such consideration.

The Committee recommends that the Selectmen:

- 1. Review the functions presently performed or contracted by the Borough,**
- 2. Develop a list of those services that the Town would be prepared to perform under a five-year contract with the Borough as its client,**
- 3. Specify that the price charged to the Borough would represent the actual marginal cost to the Town of providing such services.**

- C. The Committee, after thoughtful consideration, remains divided on the question of which governing body should control the use and management of the Green and/or Community Field.

Strong feelings have been expressed by residents and committee members favoring control be transferred to the Selectman so that all residents of Litchfield have an equal voice on this matter, while other residents and committee members feel equally strongly that, at a minimum, the governance of the Green should remain with the Borough.

All committee members agree that the protocols could be improved for coordinating the provision of events in Litchfield and have obtained conditional agreement from the First Selectwoman that the Town would be prepared to assign this role to the Park & Recreation Department. Attached as Exhibit B is a preliminary list of venues in Litchfield that would be appropriate for venues of various types.

The Committee offers two recommendations for consideration by the Selectmen:

- 1. Undertake to provide a coordinating service to aid all groups in the Town and Borough in scheduling events in appropriate venues, while continuing the Borough's decision-authority regarding the use of the Green and Community Field, and**
- 2. Schedule a referendum of the voters of the Town and separately of the voters of the Borough regarding the appropriate control of the governance of the use of the Green &/or Community Field.**

Next Steps

The Committee recommends that the Selectmen undertake the following next steps:

- 1. Step 1: Offer to engage with the Warden and Burgesses of the Borough in a full and collaborative effort to agree and implement a refreshed Interlocal Agreement for the benefit of all residents of the Town and Borough, and**
- 2. Step 2: If Step 1 is unsuccessful,**
 - a. Expand the referendum described in C.2. above such that the desirability of agreeing and implementing a refreshed Interlocal Agreement is offered to voters of the Town and separately of the Borough as "Proposition #1",**
 - b. The referendum regarding the appropriate control of the governance of the use of the Green &/or Community Field would be offered as Proposition #2.**

Exhibit B

Venue

The Litchfield Green
Community Field
The Church Parking Lots
Town Hall Parcel (Skating Rink Area)
Tapping Reeve Meadow
Center School Parking Lot
West Street Yard Pond Site
Plumb Hill Playing Fields
The Field behind Bohemian Pizza
South Plains Athletic Fields
Graham Thompson Reserve
Ripley "Horse Show Meadow"
WMF Locations
Lourdes of Litchfield
Bantam Community Field

Governance

The Borough
The Borough
The Town
The Town
The Historical Society
The Town – Region 20?
West Street Yard
Plumb Hill Playing Fields
Bohemian Pizza
?????
Litchfield Land Trust
Ripley
WMF
Montfort Fathers
Bantam Civic Association?

Northfield Community Field

The Town

Other???

Exhibit A

Areas of Potentially Duplicative Capabilities for Consideration

Streets & Parks (2023-24 Budget)

Street Lights	\$27,000
Park Maintenance	\$28,378
Snow & Sanding	\$12,000
Walks/Repairs	\$225,000 (normally much less)
Trash Removal	\$4,860
Trees & Green Improvement	<u>\$14,000</u>
Total Streets & Parks	\$311,238 (~\$200,000? Normally)

Other Areas for Discussion

Legal, Code & Consulting	\$36,000
Tax Collection	\$18,817.
Fire Hydrants	\$94,000
Insurance	<u>\$16,000</u>
Sub-total	\$164,817

TOTAL WORTHY OF CONSIDERATION	\$476,055
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NOTE: 2023-24 Total Borough Budget	\$655,951
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