

6. Government Services and Facilities

Introduction

This chapter discusses the town of Brookfield's government services and facilities and its goal is threefold: to develop—using information gathered from surveys, public forums, and interviews with town employees, Selectboard, and department heads—a vision of the ideal functioning and condition of the town's government services and facilities; to examine the town's current government services; and to make recommendations on how to move from the current condition to the vision.

Vision

Public Forum

The public forum was conducted on February 4th, 2010 at the Brookfield Elementary School library to create a vision for the town services and facilities, to describe the current condition, and finally to make suggestions on transitioning from the reality to the vision.

In the vision portion of the exercise, the participants in the forum were asked, "What is your ideal vision for Brookfield's town government?" The statement below combines the answers from this exercise into one statement.

A Vision of Brookfield's Services and Facilities

Brookfield's government is housed in beautiful and exceptionally functional town buildings that are excellently maintained, accessible, and use minimal energy. Within the walls of these buildings one will find courteous and efficient town employees who can clearly guide a local citizen, business owner, or visitor through any task they need accomplished. All permitting, licensing, and oversight procedures are quickly completed with logical and easily understood procedures. Aside from the paid employees, the town buildings bustle with capable, coordinated, and well-trained volunteers who work seamlessly with the paid employees and elected officials. Outside of the immediate town government the expanded library and intergenerational community spaces act as vibrant gathering places for all members of the community. The town's transfer station is efficient and environmentally sustainable, and the town grounds, especially the common, Lewis field, and the cemetery are exceptionally well kept. The education of the students of all ages in town is second to none, and the recreation opportunities reflect the tremendous natural and developed resources in the town. Roads are well maintained and safely navigated, and the water infrastructure is in top condition. The public well protected and served by a professional police, fire and emergency staff. The burden on the taxpayers is reasonable, and the money is wisely allocated for the best present and future use. All of these aspects of the town government are accessible and linked through the very functional and easily found and searched website, which holds and shares critical resources for all members of the community.

Current Condition of Government Services

In this section this paper will show the results of the public forum S.W.O.T (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) analysis, the master plan survey from winter of 2008, survey’s given to department heads regarding the current issues they face, and a brief overview of the towns current financial resources and expenditures.

Public Forum S.W.O.T Analysis

The public forum, which took place on February 4th, 2010, surveyed the attending citizens regarding the four categories listed below. The results below were recorded at the public meeting. They are in no particular order other than the order that they were spoken of at the forum.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Strengths</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Fire Department and EMS Library and staff Open space Common Natural recreational opportunities Hard-working town employees Schools Police Mutual aid Community pride Community activities Number of churches Water Assistance to needy </p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Opportunities</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Online communication Commercial development Possible Railroad access Volunteerism Town Hall renovation Ecotourism Green Energy Regionalization Artisans </p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Website Too few people doing too many things Negative vibes Police/Community Patronage Short-term planning Lack of volunteers Town Hall and other buildings Deferred maintenance of facilities Lack of adequate paid staff Enforcement of by-laws Outdated zoning by-laws Computer network in Town Hall Poor accessibility to town committees and boards Over extended boards and committees </p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Threats</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Budget cuts Community discord Apathy Bedroom community Negative development Distressed property Rt. 9 blight Small size of town Lack of affordability Solid waste costs Increasing energy costs Rising health costs Litigation costs Tax delinquency Falling property value </p>

Intern discussions with Town Staff and Elected Officials

As part of the research for this chapter, the Master Planning Committee was able to recruit the services of an intern from Tantasqua Senior High School. Alison Kane, a senior in the “Dynamics and Democracy” class, interviewed the majority of the town employees in hopes of developing a broad view of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that the government was facing. Ms. Kane’s interviews and report were completed during the spring semester of 2009. See Appendix A for her full report.

To summarize her research, Ms. Kane determined that Brookfield’s strengths according to the town employees were primarily its employees and volunteers. The weaknesses she uncovered were the accessibility of the Selectboard and the functionality of the Town Hall building. Each of these weaknesses contributes to problems with communication, efficiency, and morale. As far as opportunities for the town, Ms. Kane revealed that the majority of town employees thought that state grants were crucial. The two most present threats observed were the risk of unchecked residential development, and the limited number of volunteers.

Public Survey

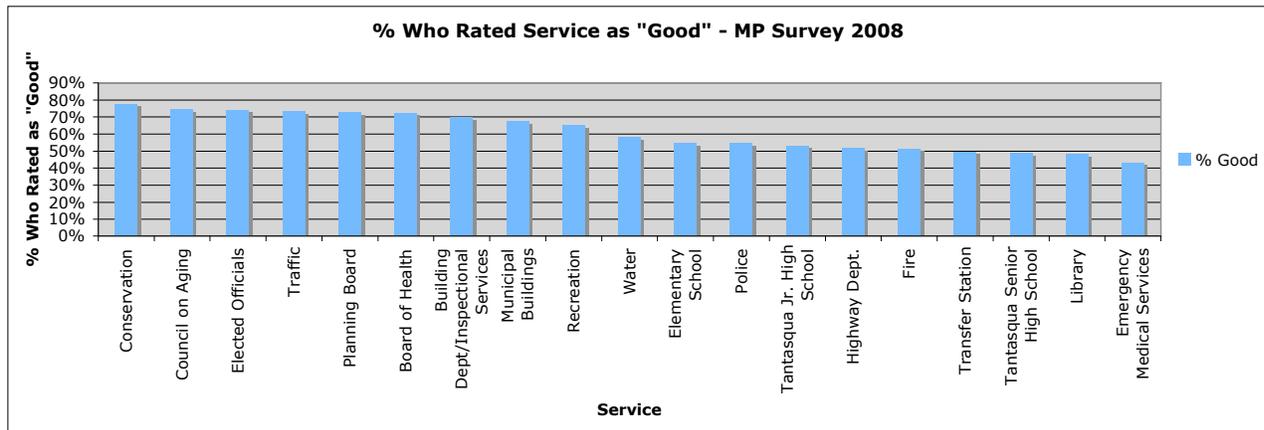
Below is a ranking of public opinion on 19 of the town departments/services. This information was collected from the master plan survey taken during the winter of 2008, with approximately 250 residents responding. The survey participants were asked to rate the town services listed below as poor, good, or excellent. A point system was built for each response and the results were tallied up to build the table below. The highest-ranking services received the most positive responses.

Rank	Department
1	Emergency Medical Services
2	Fire
3	Tantasqua Senior High School
4	Transfer Station
5	Library
6	Tantasqua Jr. High School
7	Elementary School
8	Water
9	Highway Dept.
10	Board of Health
11	Recreation
12	Police
13	Conservation
14	Traffic
15	Council on Aging
16	Building Dept/Inspectional Services
17	Planning Board
18	Municipal Buildings
19	Elected Officials

From this ranking it is clear that the Emergency Service (Fire and EMS) are the most highly regarded services in town. The schools, library, and transfer station are also strongly appreciated.

The most poorly regarded departments in town are those staffed with elected officials, and the Planning Board and the Inspectional Services are also poorly viewed. The municipal buildings also ranked poorly relative to the other government services.

At first this ranking may lead one to believe that the elected officials, Planning, Inspectional Services and municipal buildings are in poor condition. However, with a closer look at the data we can see that even the elected officials (who ranked last) were generally regarded as “good” on a scale of “poor,” “good,” or “excellent.”



The chart above lists the percentage of survey takers who chose “good” for the services listed along the bottom of the chart. We can see that elected officials were generally considered “good” by more than 70% of the respondents. Therefore, we can conclude that even though the elected officials and municipal buildings ranked as the worst amongst the town departments, the majority of the survey takers considered even the “worst” parts of town to be “good.” In short, there is room for improvement, especially in the lower-ranked departments in town, but the improvements will be designed to make something “good” even better.

Brookfield’s Services and Facilities

During the spring of 2010 a questionnaire was given to the major departments and committees in the town’s government. The most important information gathered from these surveys was the issues that each department or committee is either currently facing or will be facing in the future. Below are the issues facing each department gathered from these questionnaires. Not every committee and department is included in this section due to the abundance of departments and committees.

Public Safety: Police

The lack of a permanent and adequate police station. The second major issue is the lack of a police chief. There is currently a search committee in place to find the next police chief, but no solution has been determined after several studies on where to house the department. Currently, the department is renting a facility from a neighbor to the town hall.

Public Safety: Fire

The department always is faced with upcoming capital needs. In the relatively near future these needs will include ongoing vehicle replacement, air bottle replacements, protective clothing, heating systems (for fire station), and roof (for fire station). Additionally, due to the nature of an almost all-volunteer fire department, member acquisition and retention is an ongoing challenge.

Public Safety: EMS

Similar to the fire department, the EMS is on a cycle of ongoing capital needs. However, the recent purchase of a 2009 Horton ambulance on a GMC chassis puts the department in a presently good condition for capital needs. The department also maintains a cardiac monitor and a stretcher. Operating costs are currently offset by revenue from billing for ambulance transports. However, the future of such an operation is uncertain. Factors such as lowered insurance reimbursements, increased costs, and services that cannot be billed may eventually lead to a change in this situation.

Highway Department

There is a shortage of staff - A second licensed operator would make it possible to maintain the roads in a more timely fashion and would help to eliminate the safety hazards now experienced. Many jobs are not safe to do when there is only one person present (maintaining equipment, working in a trench).

Upcoming capital needs include the replacement of the sidewalk plow and the 1980 & 1981 Mack trucks need to be replaced in the next 2-3 years.

Community Services: Recreation Committee

Residents have expressed a desire for improved maintenance and water quality testing at the town beach. The Recreation Committee is constantly cleaning and repairing playground equipment from being vandalized and defaced and on several occasions there have been break-ins. Also, the committee is looking to install underground drainage where there is currently an open, and therefore dangerous, trench.

Community Services: Conservation Commission

Continuing education for the members of the Conservation Commission is needed concerning the complex Massachusetts wetlands regulations. The commission needs to attract and develop members with a diverse set of life experiences and qualifications to adequately staff the commission. The commission would like a small office for wetlands materials display and storage. Currently, the Conservation Commission is staffed only by volunteers and receives enough money from permit fees to fund its activities.

Community Services: Tourism Commission

The commission is inactive.

Community Services: Local Access Department

The department is in the process of updating the website, upgrading the video recording and transfer system, and increasing the content on the public access channel.

Community Services: Cultural Council

The committee has been frustrated by the lack of access to the Town Hall ballroom for indoor cultural and community events. The committee is looking for new volunteers to help run the Memorial Day Parade, the

Concerts on the Common, the awarding of Massachusetts Cultural Council grants, and other activities promoted by the council.

Library

Merrick Public Library, Banister Memorial Hall was opened in 1884. In order to maintain the historic integrity of this National Historic Register building we need to address major physical building repairs on an annual and priority based assessment. Technology upgrades and electrical improvements; including wireless conversions also need to be addressed over the next ten years. The stand-alone library circulating system is currently outdated with an immediate need for upgrade to regional system.

Elementary School

Student and teachers are being trained in methods and strategies to promote a positive social climate. The school has adopted a new bullying policy, and has worked with the towns in the Tantasqua/Union 61 School District to develop a Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. The plan has been submitted to the state of Massachusetts for approval, and the curriculum selected is in direct support of that plan. The school has been provided with a MSBA Green Repair Program grant that, in collaboration with school choice funds, will replace all of the windows throughout the entire facility. The hope is that we will be able to further increase our building's efficiency, while reducing the cost for heating the building both day and night. This is especially important now that the school is used for town and community meetings after school hours.

Facilities: Town Hall

The Town Hall is currently in poor condition. Most of the building is unusable due to ADA compliance concerns or, in the case of the basement, because it needs a remodeling. The current office set-up lacks privacy and the meeting space is limited. Also, the Town Hall is very inefficient in its energy use.

Facilities: High School & Jr. High

The high school is also housed in a new building. It is in very good condition. The Jr. high School is an older building that may need upcoming repairs.

Facilities: Highway Barn

The highway barn is new and in excellent condition.

Facilities: Fire Dept/EMS buildings

The Fire Department is housed in an older building that will need a new heating system and roof in the next 5 years.

Facilities: Police Station

Currently, the police station, as mentioned above, is housed in a rental property near the Town Hall. The town has expressed a desire for a town-owned, permanent facility.

Facilities: Lewis Field Recreation Area

Lewis Field is steadily improving under the watch of the Recreation Committee. The committee is pursuing drainage improvements and possibly an adult-size baseball diamond.

Facilities: South Pond Recreation Area

This area has not been maintained for the last several years, but the recreation committee is pursuing the reopening of the swimming area.

Facilities: Town Common

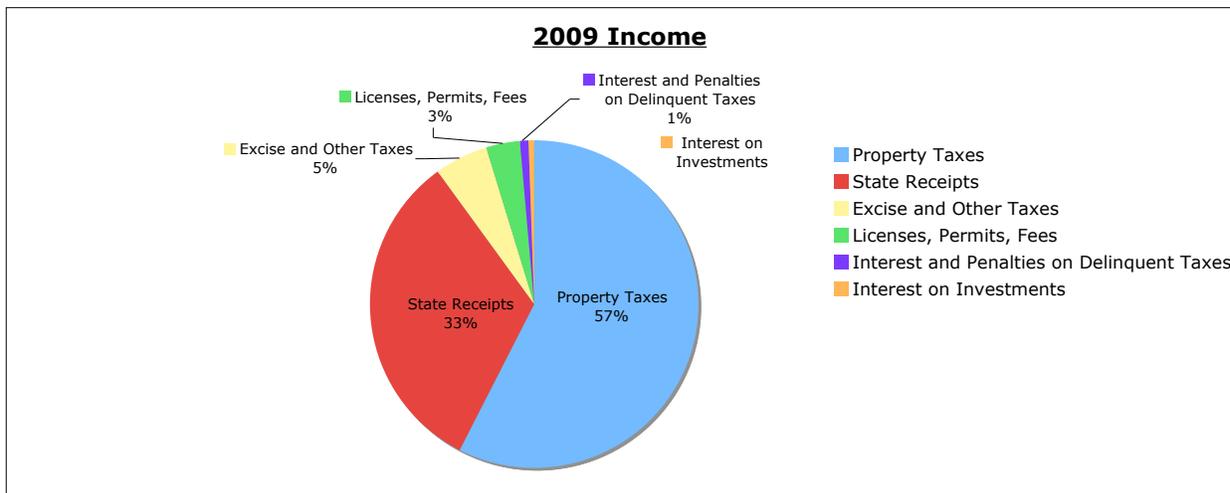
There is currently a town common committee that is building a plan for the future of the town common.

Town Financial Overview

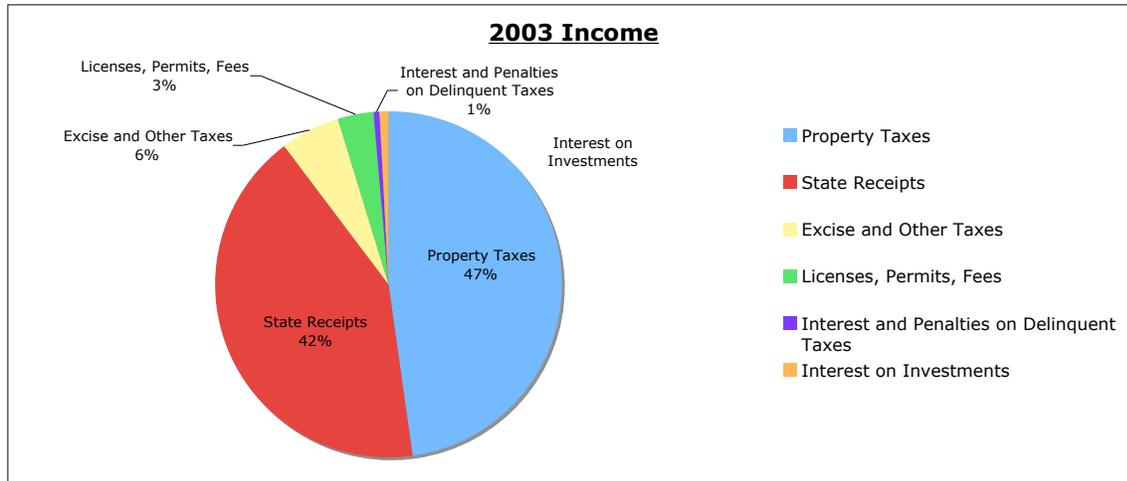
This section will briefly illustrate the income and expenditures for the town of Brookfield to give perspective on how the town collects and distributes its financial resources.

Income

Below is a pie chart of the income sources for the Brookfield town budget in 2009. The majority of the town’s income comes from property taxes, and the second largest portion is from state receipts.



Below is a similar pie chart for the year 2003 for comparison. Please note the dramatic difference between state receipts and property taxes in 2003 versus 2009 (shown above). In 2003 the state receipts made up 42% of the towns income whereas in 2009 the state receipts represent only 33% of the towns income.



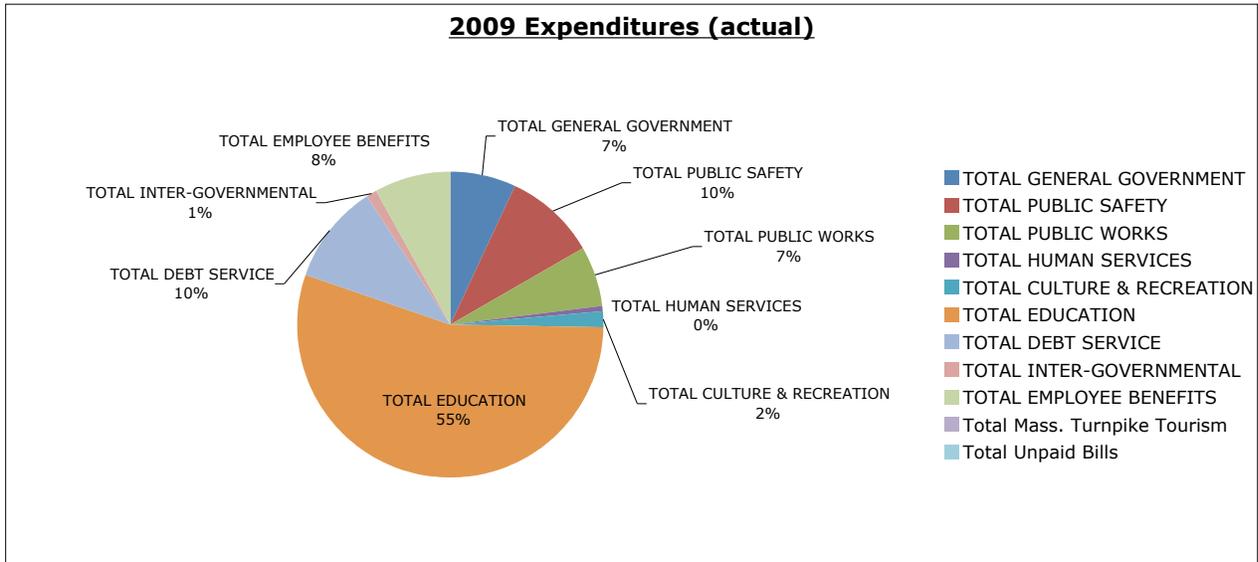
Below is a table showing the actual income from 2003 to 2009. The property taxes during this period increased 31.43%. This increase is partially due to the level or negative funding from the state receipts, which make up the second largest portion of Brookfield’s income. The increase in income from property taxes is also due to the growth that Brookfield experienced across this period.

Actual Town Income from 2003 - 2009

	2003(Actual)	2004(Actual)	2005(Actual)	2006(Actual)	2007(Actual)	2008(Actual)	2009(Actual)	% Change Since 2003	% Change since 2004
Revenues:									
Property Taxes	\$ 3,007,034	\$ 3,027,163	\$ 3,227,726	\$ 3,406,423	\$ 3,501,795	\$ 3,874,288	\$ 3,952,271	31.43%	30.56%
State Receipts	\$ 2,654,676	\$ 2,225,287	\$ 2,149,876	\$ 2,180,221	\$ 2,376,796	\$ 2,417,686	\$ 2,231,797	-15.93%	0.29%
Excise and Other Taxes	\$ 351,318	\$ 373,031	\$ 384,509	\$ 436,910	\$ 365,797	\$ 416,100	\$ 350,991	-0.09%	-5.91%
Licenses, Permits, Fees	\$ 210,216	\$ 299,358	\$ 346,071	\$ 279,914	\$ 216,634	\$ 237,955	\$ 233,899	11.27%	-21.87%
Interest and Penalties on Delinquent Taxes	\$ 36,976	\$ 70,104	\$ 38,150	\$ 55,285	\$ 41,080	\$ 63,687	\$ 47,986	29.78%	-31.55%
Interest on Investments	\$ 43,900	\$ 20,094	\$ 44,714	\$ 83,479	\$ 101,614	\$ 97,018	\$ 47,334	7.82%	135.56%
Total Revenues	\$ 6,304,120	\$ 6,015,037	\$ 6,191,046	\$ 6,442,232	\$ 6,603,716	\$ 7,106,734	\$ 6,864,278	8.89%	14.12%
Total Expenditures	\$ 6,554,949	\$ 6,391,365	\$ 6,355,543	\$ 6,357,662	\$ 6,792,040	\$ 7,173,471	\$ 7,228,943		13.10%
Sum of Taxes + State Receipts	\$ 5,661,710	\$ 5,252,450	\$ 5,377,602	\$ 5,586,644	\$ 5,878,591	\$ 6,291,974	\$ 6,184,068	9.23%	17.74%

Expenditures

This section examines the expenditures that the town has made during the period from 2003 to 2009. The following pie chart shows how the expenditures are allocated. The majority of the town’s budget goes to education (55%), followed by Public Safety (10%), Debt Service (10%), Employee Benefits (8%), Public Works (7%), and General Government (7%).



The table below was created to answer the question of how these expenses have changed over time. This shows that since 2003 the expenses that have increased the most rapidly are the general government expenses and the public safety expenses.

Actual Expenditures from 2003 - 2009

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	% Change from 2003	% Change from 2006
TOTAL GENERAL GOVERNMENT	\$ 375,113.73	\$ 373,254.91	\$ 443,841.04	\$ 426,175.09	\$ 489,948.74	\$ 500,628.79	\$ 505,685.40	34.81%	18.66%
TOTAL PUBLIC SAFETY	\$ 506,968.08	\$ 459,792.96	\$ 482,619.16	\$ 495,698.47	\$ 594,028.84	\$ 579,236.14	\$ 692,668.24	36.63%	39.74%
TOTAL PUBLIC WORKS	\$ 376,783.57	\$ 422,823.18	\$ 411,614.72	\$ 450,597.82	\$ 423,584.60	\$ 528,809.58	\$ 477,555.72	26.75%	5.98%
TOTAL HUMAN SERVICES	\$ 25,468.04	\$ 34,647.95	\$ 42,820.56	\$ 27,873.05	\$ 27,757.40	\$ 32,151.28	\$ 29,472.75	15.72%	5.74%
TOTAL CULTURE & RECREATION	\$ 150,544.97	\$ 95,712.93	\$ 112,892.15	\$ 104,282.92	\$ 109,191.89	\$ 126,372.07	\$ 127,361.92	-15.40%	22.13%
TOTAL EDUCATION	\$ 4,269,218.13	\$ 3,616,156.00	\$ 3,445,364.00	\$ 3,417,124.23	\$ 3,876,545.10	\$ 3,983,411.68	\$ 3,968,992.64	-7.03%	16.15%
TOTAL DEBT SERVICE	\$ 473,281.26	\$ 924,038.26	\$ 877,172.76	\$ 811,015.26	\$ 600,381.76	\$ 761,866.29	\$ 754,521.55	59.42%	-6.97%
TOTAL INTER-GOVERNMENTAL	\$ 34,308.00	\$ 64,534.00	\$ 92,257.00	\$ 103,250.00	\$ 148,520.00	\$ 119,404.00	\$ 99,824.00	190.96%	-3.32%
TOTAL EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	\$ 341,691.44	\$ 389,773.93	\$ 446,145.95	\$ 521,645.12	\$ 522,082.04	\$ 541,591.12	\$ 572,860.60	67.65%	9.82%
Total Mass. Turnpike Tourism	\$ 1,200.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -		
Total Unpaid Bills	\$ 371.33	\$ 10,630.55	\$ 815.18	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -		
Total Expenditures	\$ 6,554,948.55	\$ 6,391,364.67	\$ 6,355,542.52	\$ 6,357,661.96	\$ 6,792,040.37	\$ 7,173,470.95	\$ 7,228,942.82	10.28%	13.70%

Conclusions from Financial Overview

Brookfield's income has been consistently rising over the past seven years due to growth and inflation. This increase overall has been less than the inflation (approximately 3% per year) for this period. The reduction or flat funding of state receipts is the major factor in explaining the disproportionate increase in property taxes relative to other sources of income. The increase in expenses has been driven by inflation and growth, which resulted in increases in the general government, public works, public safety, and employee benefits.

How to Move Toward the Vision

Public Forum Suggestions

The solutions offered at the public forum to move Brookfield from the SWOT to the vision statement are broadly described as creating a "structure for the future". Considerations for the future include the possibility of a town administrator, a framework for increased volunteerism, and the possibility of hiring grant writers, community planners, and volunteer coordinators. An upgrade of the website is crucial, as well as a thorough review and updating of the general and zoning by-laws. Regional cooperation, coordinating information systems, and an economic development committee are all parts of improving the system. Following are the objectives and strategies that the Master Planning Committee recommends to create the "structure for the future" that was discussed at the Public Forum.

Objectives and Strategies

These objectives are not in order of preference or importance.

1. Upgrade website and integrate use into Town Hall processes. Build an integrated electronic communication system for Town employees and for the public to access public information.
 - 1.1. This project could be funded and facilitated by the Public Access Committee.
 - 1.2. This will require the town, preferably in conjunction with the elementary school, to hire a technology/network coordinator and to make a significant initial capital investment, perhaps as part of a Town Hall renovation, and to budget for ongoing system maintenance and equipment replacement.
 - 1.3. Gather quotes and information about the possibility of creating a secure online bill payment system for the Town Hall so residents can pay their bills to the town online.
2. Create a regulations manual for obtaining permits.
 - 2.1. Create a Permit Process committee to spearhead the creation of a manual empowered to propose and implement changes to the process itself.
3. Review the possibility of regionalizing overlapping town services. This will be an ongoing process spearheaded by the Selectboard.
4. Establish a Community Development Advisory Committee supported by a grant-funded, part-time community development planner/grant writer, either as a staff member or as consultant on retainer.
 - 4.1. This committee will seek out and pursue grant opportunities.
5. Review town by-laws for consistency, overlapping duties, and currentness.
 - 5.1. Create a by-law review committee.
6. Consider the possibility of hiring a town manager.

7. Improve the condition of municipal buildings.
 - 7.1. A solution needs to be adopted to repair and improve the Town Hall and police station. This committee recommends revisiting the proposal put forth by the Town Hall Barrier Removal Committee.
 - 7.2. The Library is also in need of several repairs and upgrades to its facility.
8. Improve energy efficiency of government facilities in Brookfield.
 - 8.1. The Selectboard should create an energy committee to develop and implement recommendations to this effect.
9. Compare the financial ratios of Brookfield with the ratios for similar towns and towns Brookfield would wish to emulate. Develop recommendations accordingly.
 - 9.1. The Selectboard should establish a committee to study this subject and report back with recommendations.
10. Update the Capital Improvements Plan for the town.
 - 10.1. The three largest capital projects for the near future include the Town Hall, the police station, and possibly a library expansion. Smaller projects include the roof and heating system for the fire station, replacement vehicles for the Highway Department, and drainage improvements for Lewis Field. The full list of projects would need to be gathered by a committee dedicated to that purpose.
11. Develop a workgroup to work with the town employees to update the human resources protocol with a goal of creating the Town Hall environment described in the vision statement of this chapter.
12. Develop a volunteer training and support program.
 - 12.1. Write a short manual for volunteers covering the basics of the open meeting law, the town organizational chart, a list of important contacts with phone numbers and email addresses (such as committee and department chairs).
 - 12.2. Develop a mentoring program. Have a paid employee be the prime contact for each new volunteer. This would be a person who is familiar with town processes who can be easily reached for questions.
 - 12.3. Hire one or multiple committee clerks to act as a clerk for several of the town's volunteer boards. This person would be knowledgeable in the proper procedures and would ensure that the meetings are run properly, minutes are kept, meetings are posted, and minutes are passed along to the town clerk and Select board.
13. Pursue the free state financial audit.
 - 13.1 The free state financial audit will give a more comprehensive review of the town's financial situation along with recommendations for improvements.
14. Build a comprehensive model of the current organizational chart with responsibilities of each position clearly delineated.

See Appendix IV for the Report on Town Governance done by a Tantasqua Intern.