**Town of Norwich, Vermont**
**Finance Committee**

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# Comparable Peer Town Budget and Service Review

## Context for Municipal Budget Considerations

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Prepared for the
**Norwich Selectboard**

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# Contents

# Introduction and Scope

The Norwich Finance Committee was tasked by the Norwich Selectboard with identifying a set of comparable peer Vermont towns to provide context for Norwich's short- and long-term budget considerations. To date, the Committee's analysis has focused on overall municipal budgets, the use of supplemental warrant articles, police services, administration, and solid waste disposal, as these areas represent significant and recurring cost drivers across towns. This framework is intended to support informed discussion rather than prescribe outcomes, and the analysis may be extended in the future to additional service areas or financial topics as requested by the Selectboard.

The towns selected for comparison were Chester, Hartland, Manchester, Thetford, Waterbury, and Woodstock. These towns were selected based on population size, governance structure, service mix, and relevance to Norwich's fiscal and regional context.

# Comparative Service and Budget Analysis

## General Town Budgets

| Town | FY22/23 Budget | FY25/26 Budget | FY26/27 Proposed Budget | % change 26 to 27 | % change 22 to 27 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chester | $3.4m | $4.2m | $4.5m | 7% | 32% |
| Hartland | $3.2m | $3.8m | $4.3m | 13% | 34% |
| Manchester | $6.3m | $6.9m | $8.2m | 18% | 30% |
| Norwich | $5m | $6.7m | $6.9m | 2% | 38% |
| Thetford | $3.5m | $4m | $4.4m | 10% | 26% |
| Waterbury | | $7m | $7.5m | 7% | n/a |
| Woodstock | $8.2m | $10.6m | $10.5m | -1% | 28% |

General fund budgets among the peer towns vary widely, with larger year-over-year increases often driven by specific structural changes rather than across-the-board growth. For example, Manchester's increase this year reflects the addition of the town library to the general fund, significantly raising the reported budget without a comparable expansion of core municipal services. Other towns' increases may be influenced by staffing changes, capital funding, or catch-up on deferred costs. Compared to these peers, Norwich's general fund budget is relatively large in absolute terms for a town of its population size, but its year-over-year increase from FY26 to FY27 is modest. However, when viewed over the longer period from FY22/23 to the proposed FY26/27 budget, Norwich shows one of the larger cumulative increases among the peer towns at approximately 38 percent. This suggests that while recent annual growth has moderated, a significant portion of Norwich's budget expansion occurred between FY22/23 and FY25/26 relative to several comparable communities.

## Other Town Warrant Articles for Funding

| Town | FY25/26 Budget | FY26/27 Budget |
|---|---|---|
| Chester | $37k | $42k |
| Hartland | $219k | |
| Manchester | $423k | $117k |
| Norwich | $508k | $590k |
| Thetford | $555k | |
| Waterbury | $31k | $51k |
| Woodstock | | $212k |

Other town warrant articles for funding vary significantly across the peer towns and are often used to address discrete or episodic needs such as capital projects, special programs, or one-time expenditures. The scale of these articles reflects different budgeting philosophies, with some towns funding a larger share of costs outside the general fund through targeted votes, while others incorporate more expenditures directly into their base budgets. Norwich's use of separate warrant articles is toward the higher end of the peer group in both absolute dollars and relative reliance on voter-approved supplemental funding, indicating a greater reliance on voter-approved, purpose-specific funding rather than embedding all costs within the general fund, which can increase transparency but also contribute to year-to-year variability.

## Police Departments

| Town | Services/Staffing |
|---|---|
| Chester | Town Municipal Police Department – 5 full-time, 1 part-time, 1 secretary |
| Hartland | Town Constable, plus 40 hours contracted with Sheriff's Department & State Police |
| Manchester | Town Municipal Police Department – 8 full-time, 4 full-time dispatch, plus part time officers and dispatch |
| Norwich | Town Municipal Police Department - 4 full-time budgeted position plus 1 administrative assistant, with a stated goal of expanding to 5 full-time and 2 part-time positions plus 1 administrative assistant |
| Thetford | Town Municipal Police Department – 3 full time |
| Waterbury | 2 full-time state troopers |
| Woodstock | Town Municipal Police Department – 8 full-time, 1 part-time, 6 full-time dispatch, 1 full-time admin |

Police services across the peer towns are delivered through a range of models, from contracted or State-provided coverage to fully staffed municipal departments. Some towns such as Hartland and Waterbury rely primarily on Sheriff or State Police services, while Manchester and Woodstock maintain larger municipal departments with dedicated dispatch functions. Norwich currently budgets for four full-time officers, with an expressed goal of moving toward five full-time officers supplemented by two part-time positions. This places Norwich in the middle of the peer group and reflects a policy choice to maintain local control over policing while incrementally expanding capacity in response to service demands, recognizing the higher fixed costs associated with operating and growing an independent municipal police department.

## Solid Waste Disposal

| Town | Services/Staffing |
|---|---|
| Chester | • Chester-Springfield Recycling Center and Transfer Station open 2.5 days |
| Hartland | • A.B.L.E. Waste Fast Trash Program – Saturday morning pickup<br>• Hartford Recycling & Waste Management Center open 5 days |
| Manchester | • Casella Transfer Stations in Dorset and Sunderland open up to 6.5 days (2pm close) |
| Norwich | • Town Transfer Station open 2 days<br>• Hartford Recycling & Waste Management Center open 5 days |
| Thetford | • Town Transfer Station open 0.5 days<br>• Hartford Recycling & Waste Management Center open 5 days |
| Waterbury | • Private Transfer Station open 4 days |
| Woodstock | • A.B.L.E. Waste Fast Trash Program – 2 half days<br>• Hartford Recycling & Waste Management Center open 5 days |

Solid waste services vary widely across the peer towns, reflecting different approaches to access, convenience, and cost control. Some towns rely primarily on regional or private facilities with broader hours, while others maintain limited-hour town transfer stations supplemented by access to regional centers. Norwich's model - operating a town transfer station with limited hours while providing access to the Hartford Recycling & Waste Management Center - is shared by several peers and represents a hybrid approach that balances local service with regional infrastructure. Compared to towns with very limited local access or those relying entirely on private providers, Norwich's system offers moderate convenience while keeping operating costs constrained through shared regional services.

## Administration

| Town | Services/Staffing |
|---|---|
| Chester | • Town Manager<br>• Finance Director |
| Hartland | • Town Manager<br>• Finance Administrator<br>• Finance Assistant |
| Manchester | • Town Manager<br>• Director of Accounting & Finance<br>• Finance Administrator<br>• Human Resources & Operations Administrator |
| Norwich | • Town Manager<br>• Assistant Town Manager<br>• Administrative Assistant<br>• Finance Director<br>• Finance Assistant |
| Thetford | • Town Manager<br>• Town Accountant |
| Waterbury | • Town Manager<br>• Administrative Coordinator (Part time, role also encompasses Assistant Town Clerk/Treasurer) |
| Woodstock | • Town Manager<br>• Chief of Staff<br>• Finance Director<br>• Accounts Receivable, Taxes, Billing Assistant<br>• Accounts Payable, Payroll Assistant<br>• Administrative Coordinator<br>• Economic Development Manager |

Administrative structures across the peer towns vary in size and complexity, reflecting differences in service scope, organizational maturity, and operational demands. Some towns such as Chester, Hartland, and Thetford maintain relatively lean administrative teams centered on a town or municipal manager and limited finance staff, while larger or more complex municipalities such as Manchester and Woodstock support broader administrative functions, including dedicated human resources, finance, and economic development roles. Relative to several peer towns of similar size, Norwich maintains a comparatively robust administrative structure, with both a town manager and assistant town manager, along with dedicated administrative and finance staff. This reflects a policy choice to emphasize professional management and internal capacity, supporting financial

oversight and operational continuity, while also representing a higher fixed cost within the municipal budget.

## Limitations and Data Constraints

This analysis is subject to several limitations that affect both the depth and precision of the comparisons. The Committee has not been able to engage directly with Norwich department heads, limiting the ability to validate assumptions or clarify service-level differences. In some cases, publicly available information is not fully up to date - for example, descriptions of police department staffing on the Norwich town website do not reflect current budgeted positions or planned changes. In addition, previously requested financial and staffing information specific to Norwich has not yet been provided, constraining the ability to normalize comparisons.

Finally, peer towns employ different budgeting practices and reporting structures, and the availability and level of detail of public information varies considerably across municipalities, making direct comparisons at times approximate rather than exact.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

Overall, this peer town comparison provides useful contextual insight into how Norwich's municipal budget and service levels align with similarly situated Vermont communities. While differences in tax base, service delivery models, and budgeting practices limit the ability to draw direct one-to-one comparisons, the analysis highlights where Norwich is broadly consistent with peers and where policy choices - such as maintaining local policing and using warrant articles for specific funding needs - carry distinct fiscal implications. This work is intended to inform discussion and support transparent decision-making by the Selectboard, and it can serve as a foundation for deeper or more targeted analysis as future budget questions arise.

# Appendix I: Peer Town Profiles

## Chester

Chester is a small Vermont town with a traditional town meeting form of government and population size within the same general range as Norwich. It has a defined village center, a largely residential tax base, and a mix of local services typical of a rural Vermont municipality. Like Norwich, Chester must balance municipal services, infrastructure maintenance, and school-related costs with limited commercial development.

## Hartland

Hartland is comparable to Norwich in population, rural character, and governance structure. Both towns are primarily residential, have limited commercial and industrial tax base, and rely heavily on property taxes to fund municipal services. Hartland's proximity to Interstate 91 and reliance on neighboring towns for employment and services mirrors Norwich's relationship with the Upper Valley and Dartmouth-Hanover area.

## Manchester

Manchester is larger than Norwich and has a substantially stronger commercial and retail tax base. Manchester's tourism-driven economy offer a useful reference point for understanding how differences in tax base composition affect municipal spending capacity, staffing levels, and capital investment.

## Thetford

Thetford is one of the most directly comparable towns to Norwich in terms of population size, rural-residential character, and limited commercial development. Both towns serve as bedroom communities within the Upper Valley and face similar cost drivers related to schools, roads, and municipal services. Thetford's budget structure and service profile closely resemble Norwich's, making it a particularly relevant comparator.

## Waterbury

Waterbury differs from Norwich in that it hosts significant State of Vermont facilities and regional infrastructure, but it remains a useful peer. Like Norwich, Waterbury provides a full range of municipal services and must plan for long-term capital needs and infrastructure maintenance. Its inclusion helps illustrate how the presence of major non-residential property affects municipal finances within the same statewide policy environment.

## Woodstock

Woodstock is comparable to Norwich as a small Vermont town with a well-defined village center and a strong residential character, though it has a larger tourism sector. Woodstock operates under similar municipal funding structures and provides a comparable range of town services.