



*Community  
Facilities and  
Services*

# 9

## *Community Facilities and Services*

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## **9.0 Community Facilities and Services**

### **9.1 OVERVIEW**

***Priority Action Program:  
Community Facilities and Services***

- Establish an objective system of planning for community facility and service needs. Link this system to a long-range capital programming process to reconcile needs with the Town’s fiscal capacity

Amherst has excellent community facilities and services that are consistently rated by residents as major contributors to the Town’s high quality of life. The Comprehensive Plan addresses the following facilities and services provided by Amherst or other public agencies for the benefit of Town residents:

Town Owned or Provided

- Parks and Open Space
- Recreation
- Police Protection
- Libraries
- Senior Services
- Youth Services
- Other Municipal Facilities

Owned and Provided by Other Entities

- Public Schools
- Fire Protection
- Health Care Facilities

While the quality of the Town’s community facilities and services is generally excellent and is expected to remain so in the foreseeable future, some significant issues will need to be addressed if this quality is to be maintained. Key issues include:

- ***Effects of population growth:*** The population growth projected for the Town will create increased demand for community facilities and services. The moderate rate of increase (9% to 19% projected over a 20-year timeframe) will result in this effect being felt gradually over time. Nevertheless, the need for new or expanded facilities and services to serve a larger population distributed over a larger geographic area is likely.
- ***Shift in geographic focus:*** As a byproduct of the projected population growth, there will likely be growing emphasis on locating facilities and providing services in the central and northern parts of the Town.

- **Cost implications:** As Amherst grows and matures, the costs of constructing and operating high-quality community facilities to serve the larger population will affect the Town’s fiscal situation. This issue applies both to town facilities and services, such as parks and recreation and police protection, and to facilities and services provided by others but supported by taxpayers, such as public schools.

## 9.2 GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

### GOAL

*Community facilities and services that meet residents’ needs and contribute to the Town’s high quality of life*

### OBJECTIVES

- Establish standards or performance criteria to determine community facility and service needs
- Enhance the role of public facilities as centers of neighborhood and community activity
- Provide quality facilities and services cost effectively by managing expenses and diversifying revenue sources

### POLICIES

#### A. Community Facility and Service Needs

Figure 12 identifies existing community facilities and new facilities proposed in the Town of Amherst Capital Improvement Program. (See Figure 4 for existing parks and open spaces. Park and recreational facility needs are being addressed in the Recreation & Parks Master Plan Update.)

#### 9-1 Establish an ongoing system to identify and prioritize community facility and service needs.

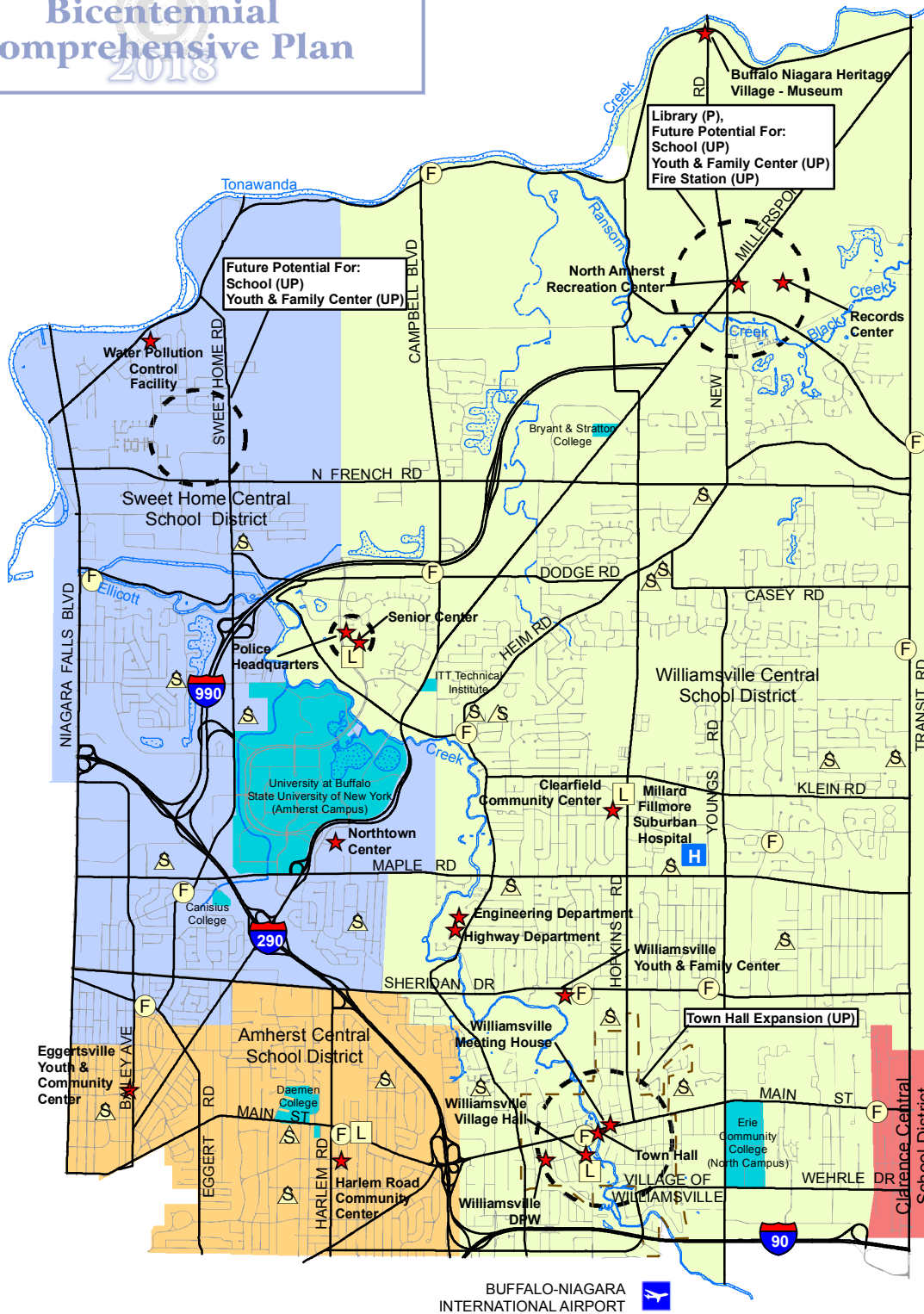
A proactive approach is required if Amherst is to maintain the high quality community facilities and services expected by residents at affordable costs. Planning for future community facility and service needs should to the maximum extent possible be based upon objective level of service standards or performance criteria for each type of facility. Taking into account existing and projected population characteristics, the current and future provision of community facilities can then be compared to the standards or criteria, providing the basis for short- and long-range planning for capital improvements or other ways of meeting identified needs. This systematic approach should be part of the on-going planning and programming activities of town departments that provide facilities and services through the capital improvements budgeting process (see Policy 9-8).

***Vision Statement Directions:  
Community Facilities and  
Services***

Community facilities and services are integral to the Town’s exceptional quality of life:

- Accessible parks and recreation
- Outstanding public schools
- Public safety

# Town of Amherst Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan



**FIGURE 12**

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES PLAN

LEGEND		SCHOOL DISTRICTS	
<b>Existing Facilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Town/Village Facilities</li> <li>L Library</li> <li>F Fire Station</li> <li>△ Public School</li> <li>■ Educational Campus</li> </ul>	<b>New Facilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Type of Facility</li> <li>○ General Location</li> <li>(P) Programmed</li> <li>(UP) Unprogrammed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Amherst Central</li> <li>■ Sweet Home Central</li> <li>■ Williamsville Central</li> <li>■ Clarence Central</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- - - Municipal Boundary</li> <li>- - - Village of Williamsville Boundary</li> <li>■ Surface Water Body</li> </ul>

**SOURCE NOTES:**

Original Source Data Provided by the Town of Amherst Information Technology Department, URS Corporation and Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC

Map Compiled by the Town of Amherst Planning Department

Date: September 2015

0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 1.25  
Miles

The Town's Planning Department can play an important role in this process by helping to define the basic structure of the community facility planning system, sharing information on population and growth trends, and coordinating among the different providers. Coordination should extend to providers outside of town government, such as the public school districts.

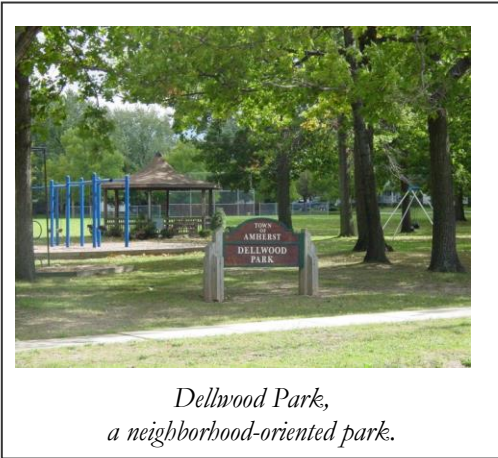
The following text provides an overview of strategies for the future related to the different types of community facilities and services.

Parks and Recreation

In 1992, the Town completed a *Recreation & Parks Master Plan* that established standards for the provision of recreational facilities (ballfields, courts, playgrounds, etc.) and parkland acreage per 1,000 residents. The Master Plan was updated in 2003 with new standards and requirements to meet parks and recreation needs. The Town should perform a routine monitoring protocol to determine its performance in accomplishing plan objectives. As conditions warrant, the plan should be periodically updated. (*Amended 09-08-15; BCPA-2014-01*)

Future planning for parks and recreational facilities should strive to achieve the following:

- ***Integrate parks and recreational facilities into an interconnected open space system of parklands greenways and trails.*** Although the Town has made considerable progress in developing a system of off-road recreational trails, most existing parks are isolated from each other. The predominantly developed nature of most of Amherst makes it more difficult to establish a truly connected system. Nevertheless, opportunities should be actively sought to connect public parks and open spaces through pedestrian and bicycle trails, sidewalks, and lanes along streets (see Land Use and Development Policy 3-13 and the accompanying Parks, Open Space and Trail map).
- ***Provide a more even distribution of parks and recreational facilities throughout the community.*** While the existing supply of neighborhood and community parkland (3.83<sup>12</sup> acres/1,000 residents) is slightly lower than the standard established by the 2003 *Recreation & Parks Master Plan* (4.25 acres/1,000 residents), parkland is not evenly distributed throughout the Town. In order to correct the parkland deficit between the existing and proposed standards, future planning



*Dellwood Park,  
a neighborhood-oriented park.*

<sup>12</sup> Ratio based on 2012 inventory of parkland and 2008-2012 American Community Survey estimate of total population.

activities should seek to establish more neighborhood level park and recreational facilities in under-served areas. Creative approaches will be necessary in the southern and central parts of the Town where the availability of land is limited. Possibilities include use of other publicly owned land that may be suitable for development of neighborhood-oriented park and recreational facilities, joint use agreements (see below), and evaluation of infill/redevelopment sites for potential acquisition and park development. (*Amended 09-08-15; BCPA-2014-01*)

Where vacant land is available for development, conservation development can be used to encourage dedication of parkland and open space in new subdivisions (see Chapters 1.0 and 2.0). The Town currently requires new developments to contribute fees to a recreation and open space trust fund, with the proceeds used for open space acquisitions or recreational facility development. As part of this regulation, the Town may accept land within the development instead of fees. In certain situations, this provision could be used to meet needs for neighborhood-level parkland.

- ***Pursue joint-use agreements with other providers.*** Joint-use agreements with entities such as the public school districts and non-profit organizations can be a cost-effective way of providing recreational opportunities for residents in areas where acquisition and development of new parkland by the Town is not feasible (see Policy 9-7). The Town should explore such arrangements with other educational/civic organizations that maintain recreational facilities. (*Amended 09-08-15; BCPA-2014-01*)

#### Police Protection

Amherst is known for its low crime rate and is rated the “Safest City in America” by researcher Scott Morgan of *America’s Safest Cities*. The Town’s police force of 151 sworn officers is substantially lower than the number in many communities of the same size. Constructed in 1979, the Town’s police station is considered generally adequate for current space needs. (*Amended 09-08-15; BCPA-2014-01*)

Amherst has an exceptionally low crime rate and has been rated as the <b>“Safest City in America.”</b>
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Future planning for police protection should monitor the adequacy of the size of the present police force and station. More officers, a larger police station, and/or new substations may be needed in the future to serve a larger residential population and more employment and retail development distributed over a larger area.

#### Libraries

The Amherst Main Library and three branch libraries are owned and maintained by the Town and operated by the Erie County library system. The Town’s Capital Improvement

Program previously included construction of a fourth branch library in Northeast Amherst to serve residents of this growing area. This project is consistent with projections that indicate significant future population growth in this area, which contains a large proportion of the Town's remaining vacant land available for development. The new facility should be located to support establishment of a mixed-use activity center (see Policy 9-4) in the area.

Senior Services

Opened in August 2000, the Town's Center for Senior Services is expected to accommodate the facility needs of seniors for the foreseeable future. The Center replaced and consolidated the functions of multiple sites previously located throughout the Town. The consolidation of services at one location was in response to national trends toward: providing facilities capable of accommodating the programming needs of two generations of seniors; the need to eliminate administrative costs associated with multiple sites; preferences of seniors; and the increased revenue generating potential of single site service delivery. Van service is available to seniors who are unable to drive to the Center. Senior services planning and programming should continue to address the need for outreach services and accessibility for all seniors.



*Amherst Center for Senior Services.*

Youth Services

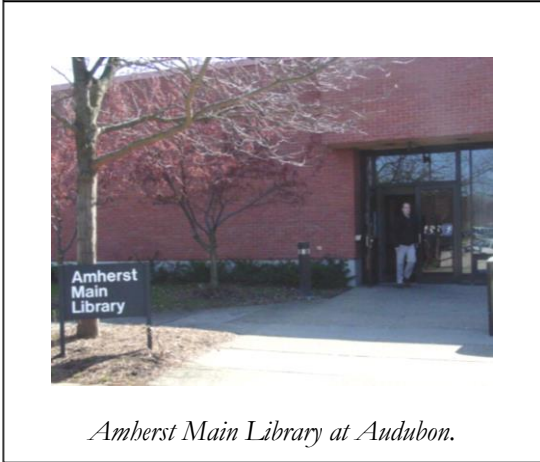
The Amherst Youth Board offers varied services in support of the Town's children, youth, and families, including after-school child care and after-school, evening, and weekend programs. Over the long term, a potential need has been identified by the Youth Services Department for new facilities in Northeast and Northwest Amherst to serve the increasing number of families in the northern part of Town. If it is determined to be needed in the future, these could be developed as part of joint use facilities in accordance with Policy 9-6 (e.g., in conjunction with construction of new schools).

Other Municipal Facilities

Other Town of Amherst facilities include the Town Hall in Williamsville and the Engineering/Highway Department administrative and operational facilities on North Forest Road. The Amherst Town Hall Expansion Study completed in 2000 identified the need for an additional 20,000 square feet of space because of overcrowding of the administrative functions that occupy the building. No project to comprehensively address space shortages in Town is included in the Capital Improvement Program; such a project will be needed in the future.

Public Schools

The great majority of the Town of Amherst is served by three public school districts: Amherst Central School District, Sweet



*Amherst Main Library at Audubon.*



Home Central School District, and Williamsville Central School District. These districts consistently rank above average in New York State in student performance, make an important contribution to the Town's quality of life, and are potentially key players in the Comprehensive Plan initiative to establish Amherst as a leading national "knowledge-based" community.

Projected population increases are likely to ultimately result in demand for expanded or new school facilities, particularly in the Williamsville School District, which includes Northeast Amherst and portions of the Town of Clarence.<sup>13</sup> The Town has no direct involvement in providing public education, but can assist the school districts in planning to accommodate long-range facility needs based upon projected population growth. If a new school(s) is required, it should be located to provide a "neighborhood anchor" and/or support establishment of a mixed-use activity center (see Policies 9-3 and 9-4). The Town should also encourage and support school district efforts to maintain academic excellence and provide public outreach and lifelong learning programs, thus enhancing Amherst's reputation as a "knowledge-based" community.

Amherst's *public schools* are highly rated and have an important role to play in the Education Key Initiative.

#### Fire Protection

The Town of Amherst has no direct role in fire protection services, which are provided by 10 volunteer fire departments that operate a total of 13 fire stations in the Town. The fire stations are generally well distributed within the Town, and no need for new facilities has been identified. Given that only two stations are located north of North French Road, the potential need for an additional fire station to serve growth in Northeast Amherst should be monitored in the future.

The key performance standard for fire protection planning, emergency response time, is generally good throughout the Town. Response times are influenced by fire station locations and by road network conditions. From the latter standpoint, traffic congestion should be monitored for its potential effects on future response times.

#### Health Care Facilities

The Millard Fillmore Suburban Hospital is a privately operated health care facility of regional significance located in Amherst. While not analogous to the publicly provided facilities and services previously discussed, this highly rated facility makes important contributions to the Town's quality of life and

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<sup>13</sup> Population in the Amherst Central School District is expected to remain flat or slightly decline by 2020. Much of the projected population increase in the Sweet Home District is attributable to projected growth in the UB student population, and an overall trend towards an older population is expected to reduce the number of school age children as a proportion of the total.

economy. The hospital was expanded in 1995 and due to growing demand for health care services from a surrounding suburban population that is increasing in both numbers and age, the hospital was again expanded in 2008. The Hospital is the central feature of the mixed-use activity center located at Maple and Youngs Roads (see Section 3.3). Designation of this center supports the Hospital and ancillary uses.

The Town should continue to support the Hospital in providing quality health care for residents of Amherst and surrounding communities. In addition, research and development programs, particularly those that link to other area institutions and reinforce Amherst’s status as a “knowledge-based” community, should be encouraged.

**9-2 Encourage transportation and outreach programs for persons who find it difficult to get to particular facilities.**

Amherst’s size and population make it impractical to provide community facilities in close proximity to all those who use them, a situation that will be compounded as growth continues towards the north. Providers should address the needs of users who need assistance in getting to their facilities (e.g., elderly or children). The Senior Services Department, for example, offers van service for users. To maximize their accessibility, community facilities should be provided with transit, sidewalk, and bicycle connections as part of the integrated transportation system described in Chapter 6.0.

**B. Community Facilities as Activity Centers**

In addition to meeting community needs for specific facilities and programs, community facilities provide centers of neighborhood and community activity. In this capacity community facilities can play an important role in promoting other Comprehensive Plan policies, such as neighborhood revitalization and establishment of mixed-use activity centers.

**9-3 Identify opportunities to strategically locate certain facilities to strengthen neighborhoods and serve local needs.**

Public facilities such as parks, schools, and libraries are centers of community activity that contribute to the vitality of surrounding neighborhoods. Opportunities should be pursued to increase the contributions of existing facilities to neighborhoods (e.g., by providing sidewalk connections, hosting community meetings and events, etc.). In addition, certain new facilities, such as neighborhood parks and youth/family centers, could be located to both meet identified needs and serve as “anchors” that enhance neighborhood life. In the event that a public facility is closed or relocated, redevelopment of the facility and surrounding lands should be pursued pursuant to Policy 3-9.

Contribution to neighborhood vitality should be taken into consideration as a factor in planning for community facility and service needs by the Town and other providers (Policy 9-1). (*Amended 2-28-11; BCPA-10-1*)

**9-4 Integrate community facilities within mixed-use activity centers.**

A key concept of the Comprehensive Plan is establishment of mixed-use centers that integrate different types of land uses (see Land Use and Development Policy 3-1). Mixed-use centers are intended to provide focuses of community activity, convenient access to services and facilities, and encourage walking, biking, and use of public transportation as alternatives to automobile trips. As destinations and places for communal activities, community facilities are a potentially vital ingredient in the mix of uses that can be included in these centers. Where possible, mixed-use centers should include or provide connections to existing community facilities. In addition, mixed-use centers should be the preferred location for new community facilities. (Northeast Amherst in the vicinity of the Millersport Highway/New Road/Smith Road intersection is a logical location given the programmed or potential needs identified for facilities such as a library, youth and family center, and school.) The Town should coordinate internally and with other providers in planning for future community facilities to encourage their inclusion in designated mixed-use centers.

***Mixed-use activity centers*** should wherever possible include existing or new community facilities.

**C. Community Facility and Service Costs**

Continuing to provide high-quality community facilities and services to a growing population will have significant implications for the Town's fiscal situation. A variety of strategies are proposed to manage the future provision of community facilities and services in a cost-effective manner that allows the Town to maintain the high levels of service that residents expect.

**9-5 Allow continued growth of the nonresidential tax base consistent with the Comprehensive (Land Use) Plan.**

Amherst's nonresidential (commercial retail, office and industrial) development partially subsidizes the costs of providing community facilities and services to residents. National studies have shown that commercial development derives excess revenues as compared to residential development. Results from a similar local study by the AIDA confirm these findings for Amherst. Thus growth in the nonresidential tax base is needed if the Town of Amherst (and other providers such as the public school districts) is to continue to provide quality facilities and services at rates affordable to taxpayers. Nonresidential development and redevelopment should be managed to be consistent with Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives, and policies for Land Use and Development and other elements, and with the

concept of balance between economic development, livability, and community character expressed in the Vision Statement.

**9-6 Pursue cost efficiencies in the provision of public facilities and services through the sharing of resources and the elimination of service duplications.**

As is typical of the Buffalo-Niagara region, Amherst's public infrastructure and services are provided by multiple entities in stand-alone, single-use facilities. While this pattern is likely to persist in the foreseeable future, opportunities should be sought to realize cost savings where possible by sharing resources and eliminating service duplications between different providers. Multi-use facilities (e.g., public schools with community recreation facilities) are one way to achieve this objective. Northeast Amherst is a logical location to apply this concept, given the programmed or potential needs identified for facilities such as a library, youth and family center, and school. Cost-saving opportunities should be pursued at the regional as well as the local level.

**9-7 Expand partnerships with other service providers, private organizations, and businesses to provide community facilities and services.**

A strategy related to Policy 9-6, partnerships with other public and private service providers to provide community facilities and services can meet a portion of identified needs, thus relieving some of the fiscal burden on town government. For example, joint-use agreements can be executed with public schools or other educational institutions for use of recreational or other school facilities during off-hours. Potential partners include public school districts and other educational institutions; non-profits such as churches, scout and "Y" organizations, and athletic leagues; and private businesses.

**9-8 Reconcile needs for community facilities and services with the fiscal capacity of the Town through the capital programming process.**

The community facility planning system described in Policy 9-1 is designed to objectively identify the needs of Amherst's current and future population for the various types of public facilities and services provided by the Town and others. By comparing the current and programmed provision of community facilities to levels of service or other identified performance standards, capital improvements or other means of meeting future needs can be planned for.

The Town's present capital programming process is characterized by short-term decision-making and would benefit from a longer-term perspective based upon realistic evaluation of the Town's fiscal capability to fund major projects. Currently, the Capital Improvement Program offers little guidance on how to fund worthwhile projects that are

programmed to occur in the next several years but which are competing for limited dollars. The proposed new approach would include:

- Staging of projects to occur in the short, mid, and long-term (e.g., 0-2 years, 2-5 years, 5-10 years, 10+ years)
- Reconciliation of project costs with the Town's projected fiscal and bonding capacities over the specified timeframes

Cost-benefit analyses must be conducted for each project as part of this process, taking into account construction, operating costs, and debt service; any offsetting revenues to be generated by the facility; and outside sources of funding (e.g., grants or corporate sponsorships).

**9-9 Re-evaluate funding of special purpose or “high level of service” programs or facilities.**

Many community facilities, programs, and services are generally available to residents as a public service, with no expectation of recovering their costs. Conversely, certain facilities (e.g., golf courses) are more specialized in nature and/or require more intensive investment by the Town to meet the needs of specific user groups. Where possible, funding of such special purpose or “high level of service” facilities and programs should be reevaluated to shift the burden away from the general fund to greater reliance on user fees and partnerships with non-profit organizations. Exceptions to this policy should be allowed where necessary to make facilities and programs available to low to moderate income families or other special needs groups.

