

**Bethlehem 2020 Implementation Committee**  
**21st Century Town Governance & Management Structure Options**  
**Executive Summary**

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**Purpose**

This report evaluates opportunities for modernizing Town government, including consolidation of some Town departments, encouraging shared services, and changing some of the Town's elected offices to professional appointments. The options are presented with the goal of engaging the public in a dialogue on the right governance model or structure for our Town government.

**What Options Are Being Proposed?**

- Lengthen the term for Town Supervisor from two to four years.
- Move away from elective department heads, placing accountability for all Town operations with the elected Town Board and Supervisor and allowing consolidation of positions and departments. This would make the management and functions of Highway Superintendent, Tax Receiver and Town Clerk consistent with the majority of Town operations (such as Police, Public Works and Parks & Rec, which do not have elective heads).
  - ✚ These recommendations would require passage of a local law by the Town Board to authorize a public referendum by the voters in November
  - ✚ Neither the current elected four office holders, nor those to be elected this fall would have their terms affected by passage by the voters of these referenda, which would not take effect until 2014.
- Comprehensively review the current arrangements for department heads, including considering giving the Town Supervisor power to directly appoint or nominate some department heads and align appointive terms with that of the Supervisor where appropriate. Currently department heads reflect a mix of elected, appointed and civil service positions, and there appears to be little rationale for the differentiation (see chart below).

**Why Support These Options?**

- Overall, as a major and complex municipality, with a population of 33,000 (larger than most small cities), our Town would benefit from a governance system with stronger executive control and more streamlined and accountable management, without independently managed "silos." These changes can help Town leaders respond to today's fiscal challenges, rapidly changing environment and economic development opportunities.
- Previous Bethlehem Supervisors (from different political parties) have all agreed that a two-year electoral cycle simply isn't enough time for a leader to propose, develop consensus and implement solutions to difficult and complex issues. A longer term of office would also provide a more stable timeframe within which to develop partnerships with other taxing jurisdictions and be in a position to act more effectively on priorities like economic development.

- Elected Tax Receivers, Clerks and Highway Superintendents are a vestige of history when towns in New York were almost exclusively rural, generally without a municipal workforce, a full-time supervisor, independent audits, or any of the other modern management tools of which Bethlehem already has the benefit.
- Voter approval of these options, which reflect the findings of the Lundine Commission on Local Government Efficiency, would create the opportunity for cost savings that could be achieved through consolidating the operations of currently separate though similar departments including Highway, Public Works, and the Offices of the Clerk, Tax Receiver and possibly others.
- Bethlehem has eliminated an elective office previously with good results, and now has an appointed assessor providing excellent service.
- By establishing Bethlehem as a leader in local government efficiency and restructuring, we could position our Town to capitalize on state government interest and grant opportunities.

**The Governance Report and Options are not.....**

Meant as criticism of *any* elected or appointed official or their staff, or meant to suggest that these departments are functioning poorly. We believe however that more efficient and effective organizational structures are available to address the significant challenges that Bethlehem faces.

