



Community Expenditure Comparison Report

Fiscal Year 2015

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Town Administrator

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This is the second annual Community Comparison report for the Town of Easton. Developed to provide useful information to decision makers during the budget process, this report compares Town of Easton expenditures by category with the same categories in a selected group of towns. The categories compared are Education, Fire, General Government, Police, and Public Works. All expenditure data were obtained from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) using the most recent year (FY2013) available¹.

The list of comparable towns was selected based on four metrics that are commonly used and readily available from the DOR:

1. Population
2. Average Single Family Tax Bill
3. Income per-capita
4. Equalized Valuation per-capita

As a starting point, we looked at municipalities that were between 90 and 110% of Easton's value for each economic metric. Any municipalities with two or more metrics falling within that range were included in the first screen. To account for differences in community character any municipalities with a population greater than 40,000 or less than 15,000 or a population density greater than twice that of Easton were eliminated. This produced a core-group of six towns:

1. Ashland
2. Chelmsford
3. Foxboro

¹ See Appendix – Table 1 pg. 7

4. Mansfield
5. Marshfield
6. Walpole

In addition to the core-group, we added the remaining towns which directly border Easton to see how we compare with our neighbors:

1. Norton
2. Raynham
3. Sharon
4. Stoughton
5. W. Bridgewater

This list of proximate towns may not have much more in common with Easton than a border, but could provide valid comparison data for some public services. Our analysis shows:

- **Easton spends fewer dollars per-capita than its neighbors and core group.**
- **Easton's Education funding is middle of the pack.**
- **General Government spending in Easton is significantly below average.**
- **Police Department funding is stable, but slightly below average.**
- **Easton's Fire Department per-capita expenditures rank 11th of 12, but total spending is slightly above average².**
- **Public Works spending has improved in comparison to our peers since last year.**

² It is worth note that the Fire Union did not have a contract with the Town during the fiscal year from which this data is based.

Overall Spending. In all of the expenditure areas compared, Easton ranked in the lower half of all communities in per-capita expenditures. When compared to the core-group of similar communities, Easton's absolute spending levels are typically in the lower half as well. Lower spending does not necessarily equate to reduced service delivery, and in some cases may reflect above average departmental efficiency. In fact, Easton spends less, on a per-capita basis, than all of the core-group communities. At \$3,261.48 of per-capita total budget spending we rank 5th of the seven bordering towns and approximately \$1,000 per person less than Sharon or West Bridgewater³.

Education⁴. Easton's total and per-capita spending for Education ranks 5th of the seven core-group communities (Easton plus six). Easton fares better when compared to bordering towns ranking 4th out of seven and when compared with the larger group ranking 7th out of twelve. It is worth noting that, while still below the 50th percentile of per-capita spending, our 7th place ranking in this category is the highest of all spending categories compared.

General Government⁵. Easton's General Government spending is the lowest among comparable communities. Easton also ranks last in per-capita spending at \$81.49, with the core-group average per-capita spending being \$119.22. When including neighboring towns, Easton still ranks last in per-capita spending in this area. In order to equal the core-group per-capita average in this category, Easton would need to increase our General Government spending by \$881,120 (46%).

³ See Appendix – Table 2 pg. 8

⁴ See Appendix – Table 3 pg. 9

⁵ See Appendix – Table 4 pg. 10

Police⁶. Total spending and per-capita spending for Easton's Police ranks 4th and 5th, respectively, of the seven core-group communities. When compared with the larger group, Easton's per-capita spending ranks 9th out of twelve and is 5th of the seven border communities.

Fire⁷. Placing second from last, Easton's per-capita Fire expenditures rank 11th of all twelve communities. Our total Fire expenditures are just above the 50th percentile, placing 6th out of twelve communities. This figure reflects the lack of a contract between the Fire Union and the Town in FY2013, the year from which the DOR expenditure data is drawn.

Public Works⁸. Easton ranks 7th of all twelve communities in its total spending on Public Works and 8th of twelve in per-capita spending. Easton ranks 5th of seven among the core-group communities in per-capita spending and 5th out of seven compared to its neighbors.

Other Considerations. There are two other categories that haven't been mentioned that are worth noting. First is Debt Service. The DOR spreadsheets do not separate exempt from non-exempt debt and without untangling them it is difficult to make valid comparisons. But given the fact that our total budget on a per-capita basis also ranks last in the peer group it is unlikely that our debt service is significantly different. The second area is reserves⁹. When the combined free cash and stabilization fund balances are measured on a per-capita basis (unfortunately the latest year available is FY2014 for Free Cash and FY2012 for Stabilization Funds) we

⁶ See Appendix – Table 5 pg. 11

⁷ See Appendix – Table 6 pg. 12

⁸ See Appendix – Table 7 pg. 13

⁹ See Appendix – Table 8 pg. 14

are second from last among the core-group. Easton fares better when compared to bordering towns, sitting above the 50th percentile at 3rd out of 7 communities.

Although these kind of comparisons are worthwhile, they are not perfect. Different metrics will produce different comparisons. Other categories such as school age population for education and road miles for public works may also prove useful for future analysis.

As this is the second year in which we have conducted this analysis, it is worth comparing this report to FY2014's. Doing so reveals that, with few exceptions, Easton's per-capita expenses remained in the bottom half of both core-group and bordering town comparisons. Our per-capita reserves and Public Works expenditures improved their ranking compared to other communities. General government per-capita expenditures remain far below all comparative communities. A more detailed analysis of our peer's general government budgets may reveal useful information to explain this disparity.

Conclusion. This report is reflective of Easton's continuing efforts in achieving and maintaining responsible spending levels and achieving quality service delivery at an effective cost. Since The Great Recession, evermore care has been taken to insure responsible budgeting of our resources while still providing the vital services our residents need. Over the past five years, reorganization efforts in the Town Offices and throughout Easton have contributed to this responsible and sustainable budgeting.

It is my hope that this information will be helpful during the upcoming budget process. Based on this data there are a few very broad conclusions that are worth articulating.

- It is clear that our budgets are very lean, such that adding programs or services will require additional revenue and not simply re-ordering priorities.
- Relatively speaking, Education, Police, and Public Works are the best funded on a per-capita basis compared to our core-group, however, even these departments are below the 50th percentile.
- General Government remains our leanest budget. Our department heads and their staff are highly efficient and remain committed to their professions through ongoing education and professional advancement.
- Our reserve position improved amongst our peers in this report, however, we must remain committed to sustaining a healthy reserve level to prepare for the next recession.

I look forward to continuing this discussion throughout the winter and early spring. Please let me know whether you have any questions or would like further information.

David A. Colton

Town Administrator

Appendix

Table 1 – Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) Categorical Expenses Comparative Report

Core-Communities are listed in green font.

Municipality	2010 Population	2014 Average Single Family Tax Bill	2011 DOR Income Per Capita	2012 EQV Per Capita
Ashland	16,993	\$6,351	\$42,176	\$132,409
Chelmsford	34,545	\$6,119	\$41,984	\$144,389
Easton	23,352	\$6,040	\$40,568	\$134,038
Foxboro	17,087	\$5,583	\$40,568	\$163,230
Mansfield	23,414	\$5,628	\$39,976	\$142,867
Marshfield	25,436	\$5,002	\$40,413	\$177,977
Norton	19,310	\$4,341	\$30,110	\$114,180
Raynham	13,504	\$4,534	\$32,555	\$141,596
Sharon	17,826	\$8,914	\$56,677	\$162,378
Stoughton	27,849	\$4,321	\$28,058	\$118,390
Walpole	24,562	\$6,405	\$42,409	\$161,667
West Bridgewater	6,941	\$4,618	\$30,095	\$143,369

The data provided by the DOR includes the average 2014 single family tax bill as well as governmental expenditures from FY2013.

Obtained from:

https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/DLSReports/DLSReportViewer.aspx?ReportName=Comparative_Report&ReportTitle=Community%20Comparison%20Report

Table 2 – Total Spending Per Capita

Seven Core-Group Communities

<u><i>Town</i></u>	<u><i>Total Per capita expenditure</i></u>	<u><i>Compared to FY14</i></u>
Mansfield	\$4,020.75	
Foxboro	\$3,940.80	
Marshfield	\$3,708.19	
Ashland	\$3,663.41	
Walpole	\$3,606.81	
Chelmsford	\$3,420.21	
Easton	\$3,261.48	(same)

Bordering Towns

Sharon	\$4,352.71	
W. Bridgewater	\$4,086.46	
Mansfield	\$4,020.75	
Stoughton	\$3,555.20	
Easton	\$3,261.48	(same)
Norton	\$2,957.31	
Raynham	\$2,946.51	

Table 3 – Education Expenditures

Seven Core-Group Communities

<u>Town</u>	<u>Per capita expenditure</u>	<u>Compared to FY14</u>
Foxboro	\$1,767.44	
Mansfield	\$1,758.74	
Marshfield	\$1,630.83	
Walpole	\$1,522.95	
Easton	\$1,472.81	(improved from 6/6)
Chelmsford	\$1,449.07	
Ashland	\$1,382.93	

Bordering Towns

Sharon	\$2,063.72	
Mansfield	\$1,758.74	
W. Bridgewater	\$1,497.47	
Easton	\$1,472.81	(fell from 3/7)
Stoughton	\$1,356.07	
Norton	\$1,262.36	
Raynham	\$1,188.87	

Table 4 – General Government Expenditures

Seven Core-Group Communities

<u>Town</u>	<u>Per capita expenditure</u>	<u>Compared to FY14</u>
Walpole	\$177.01	
Ashland	\$131.36	
Foxboro	\$125.45	
Chelmsford	\$115.45	
Marshfield	\$102.56	
Mansfield	\$101.24	
Easton	\$81.49	(same)

Bordering Towns

W. Bridgewater	\$176.81	
Stoughton	\$110.28	
Sharon	\$110.24	
Raynham	\$107.99	
Mansfield	\$101.24	
Norton	\$90.58	
Easton	\$81.49	(same)

Table 5 – Police Expenditures

Seven Core-Group Communities

<u>Town</u>	<u>Per capita expenditure</u>	<u>Compared to FY14</u>
Walpole	\$176.54	
Foxboro	\$175.34	
Chelmsford	\$166.25	
Marshfield	\$164.65	
Easton	\$157.20	(previously 4/6)
Ashland	\$152.48	
Mansfield	\$148.46	

Bordering Towns

W. Bridgewater	\$301.17	
Raynham	\$284.24	
Sharon	\$186.16	
Stoughton	\$179.71	
Easton	\$157.20	(same)
Mansfield	\$148.46	
Norton	\$127.00	

Table 6 – Fire Department Expenditures

Seven Core-Group Communities

<u>Town</u>	<u>Per capita expenditure</u>	<u>Compared to FY14</u>
Marshfield	\$174.18	
Foxboro	\$163.88	
Chelmsford	\$137.46	
Walpole	\$131.63	
Mansfield	\$130.84	
Easton	\$127.76	(previously 5/6)
Ashland	\$125.24	

Bordering Towns

W. Bridgewater	\$272.18	
Raynham	\$170.33	
Sharon	\$149.96	
Norton	\$143.63	
Mansfield	\$130.84	
Stoughton	\$130.26	
Easton	\$127.76	(fell from 6/7)

Table 7 – Public Works Expenditures

Seven Core-Group Communities

<u>Town</u>	<u>Per capita expenditure</u>	<u>Compared to FY14</u>
Mansfield	\$182.34	
Walpole	\$174.14	
Chelmsford	\$169.64	
Foxboro	\$126.63	
Easton	\$125.51	(improved from 6/6)
Marshfield	\$123.89	
Ashland	\$78.29	

Bordering Towns

Sharon	\$186.96	
Mansfield	\$182.34	
W. Bridgewater	\$176.22	
Raynham	\$132.11	
Easton	\$125.51	(same)
Stoughton	\$120.82	
Norton	\$49.16	

Table 8 – Reserves Per Capita

Seven Core-Group Communities

<u>Town</u>	<u>Per capita reserves</u>	<u>Compared to FY14</u>
Foxboro	\$357.27	
Walpole	\$277.29	
Chelmsford	\$275.02	
Mansfield	\$207.78	
Ashland	\$190.31	
Easton	\$160.45	(improved from 6/6)
Marshfield	\$117.10	

Bordering Towns

Mansfield	\$207.78	
Stoughton	\$195.21	
Easton	\$160.45	(improved from 5/7)
Norton	\$156.82	
Raynham	\$156.36	
W. Bridgewater	\$125.78	
Sharon	\$-13.18	