



TOWN OF FAIRHAVEN WORKPLACE CLIMATE ASSESSMENT

DECEMBER 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The Town of Fairhaven town governance structure was changed from an Executive Secretary to a Town Administrator form of Government. AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE POSITION OF TOWN ADMINISTRATOR IN THE TOWN OF FAIRHAVEN. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same as follows:

SECTION 1. The executive powers of the town of Fairhaven shall be vested in the board of selectmen, who shall have all the powers given to boards of selectmen by the General Laws, except for those executive powers granted to the town administrator.

The board of selectmen shall serve as the chief goal-setting and policy-making agency of the town of Fairhaven. The duties and responsibilities for day-to-day management of the town shall be delegated to the town administrator. The board shall act through the adoption of policy directives and guidelines which shall be implemented by the town administrator and the officers and employees appointed by, or under the authority of, the board. Individual selectmen shall not purport to represent the board or exercise the authority of the board except when specifically authorized by the board. This was approved, November 25, 2014.

In July 2020 The Fairhaven Board of Selectmen voted to issue an RFP for a consultant to perform an employee engagement and work culture survey to assess the work environment and management of Fairhaven workers and staff. have climate assessment done in the Summer of 2020.

The study incorporated the analysis of web information, Town records, interviews, policy reviews and analysis of metrics. In addition:

- Review of Town documents, General Code and web information.
- Discussion with Town Administrator, Human Resources Director and Board of Selectmen.
- Focus Group Exercise with 5 employees
- Compiling of Questionnaire based on the above interviews.
- Interviews with Department Heads and Town Staff – in person, by phone and via Zoom.
- Research on Town operations including annual Town Report and Town Charter.
- Analysis of employee turnover over the past five years.

INTERVIEW NOTES

Although metrics and data are important it is only through conversation that the true culture of this organization could be ascertained. Interviews were conducted in person and by phone over three weeks. Thirty-two full time employees were invited to participate, 27 responded and participated.

The survey document consisted of open-ended questions as well as survey questions with a rating scale. A sample survey instrument is included in the report. Recommendations are outlined at the end of this document.



TOWN OF FAIRHAVEN – DEFINITIONS (ABRIDGED VERSION)

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

The board of selectmen shall:

- (a) enact rules and regulations to implement policies and to issue interpretations;
- (b) exercise, through the town administrator, general supervision over all matters affecting the interests or welfare of the town;
- (h) appoint, and may re-appoint, and enter into a contract for the employment of a town administrator for a term of not more than 3 years, who shall be a person with executive and administrative qualifications and especially fitted by education, training and experience to perform the duties of the office; provided, that the town may from time to time, by by-law, establish such additional qualifications as it deems necessary and appropriate;
- (i) remove the town administrator at any time, for just cause following a formal procedure including a written intent to dismiss, a written response and a public hearing, to be completed within 30 days after the issuance of a written intent to dismiss, in accordance with the terms of the town administrator's contract;
- (j) set the compensation for the town administrator, not to exceed an amount appropriated by the town meeting; and
- (k) designate a qualified person as acting town administrator to perform the duties of the office during any vacancy exceeding 30 days, caused by the town administrator's absence, illness, suspension, removal or resignation; provided, that the appointment of an acting town administrator shall be for a period not to exceed 180 days.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

SECTION 2. The town administrator shall be the chief administrative officer of the town of Fairhaven and shall act as the agent for the board of selectmen. The town administrator shall be responsible to the board of selectmen for coordinating and administering all town affairs under the jurisdiction of the board of selectmen.

The town administrator's powers and duties shall include those outlined in subsections (a) to (aa), inclusive.

- (a) Consult and advise the board of selectmen regarding its policies and implement those policies.
- (b) Attend all meetings of the board of selectmen, except when excused, and consult with and advise the board of selectmen on all matters that come before the board.
- (c) Attend all town meetings and advise the town meeting on all warrant articles within the jurisdiction of the board of selectmen.
- (d) Attend all finance committee meetings, except when excused by the board of selectmen, and keep the finance committee informed on all matters under the jurisdiction of the town administrator that come before the committee.
- (e) Manage and direct the daily reporting and supervision of all town departments under the jurisdiction of the board of selectmen including: assessors, building commission, council on aging, police, civil defense, animal control officer, gas inspector, plumbing inspector, wiring inspector and weights and measures inspector, recreation, highway, water, sewer, tree and park, planning, finance, finance director, collector, treasurer, accounting, veterans, town counsel, other committees appointed by and under the jurisdiction of the board of selectmen and the fire department, subject to section 42 of chapter 48 of the General Laws.
- (g) Except with respect to the school department, the town administrator shall have sole authority over the administration of personnel policies for all town employees. With respect to the fire department, such authority shall be subject to section 42 of chapter 48 of the General Laws. The town administrator shall act as the personnel board under all applicable laws and by-laws, except as otherwise set forth in this act. The personnel board as presently constituted shall be eliminated upon the appointment of the town administrator. The town may enact by-laws establishing the



TOWN ADMINISTRATOR – CONTINUED

wages, salaries and other benefits of employees, which shall be consistent with the authority granted to the town administrator in this act. Notwithstanding the elimination of the personnel board, all actions taken prior to the appointment of the town administrator by the personnel board within its authority, and by any other town official or board, with respect to personnel, including the appointment of all officers and employees, shall continue in full force and effect subject to future action by the town administrator within the town administrator's authority.

(h) Administer the town's insurance policies, including the ability to settle claims; provided, however, that all insurance contracts and claims settlements shall receive the approval of the board of selectmen.

(i) With the approval of the board of selectmen, appoint and remove all Department Heads under the direct control of the town administrator. Each Department Head, with the approval of the town administrator, shall appoint and remove all department staff within their respective departments. All appointments shall be based entirely on merit and fitness. All appointments and terminations shall be conducted in accordance with the General Laws, personnel policies, by-laws of the town of Fairhaven and any applicable employment contracts; provided, that fire department appointments shall also be subject to section 42 of chapter 48 of the General Laws.

(j) With the approval of the board of selectmen, reorganize any departmental structures under the jurisdiction of the town administrator.

(k) With the approval of the board of selectmen, negotiate all collective bargaining agreements on behalf of the town, except for the school department. The town administrator may seek the assistance of labor counsel if the town administrator deems it necessary to effect successful negotiations. All final agreements must be approved and executed by the board of selectmen.

(l) With the approval of the board of selectmen, establish compensation packages for all town employees under the jurisdiction of the town administrator, not subject to a collective bargaining agreement. Such compensation shall not exceed the amount appropriated therefor by town meeting and shall be subject to all applicable laws and by-laws.

.....

(t) Be responsible for coordination of operational and strategic planning for the town.

(y) Delegate and direct any qualified town official or employee to carry out any duty that is within the authority of the town administrator.

(z) During a temporary absence, with the approval of the board of selectmen, the town administrator may designate a qualified administrative employee or officer to exercise the powers and perform the duties of the town administrator.

(aa) Perform any other duties or tasks assigned by the board of selectmen, assigned by the town meeting or mandated by applicable state law.

SECTION 3. The town administrator of the town of Fairhaven shall have access to all municipal books, papers and documents or information necessary for the proper performance of the duties of the town administrator. The town administrator may, without notice, cause the affairs of any division or department under the town administrator's supervision, or the conduct of any officer or employee thereof, to be examined.



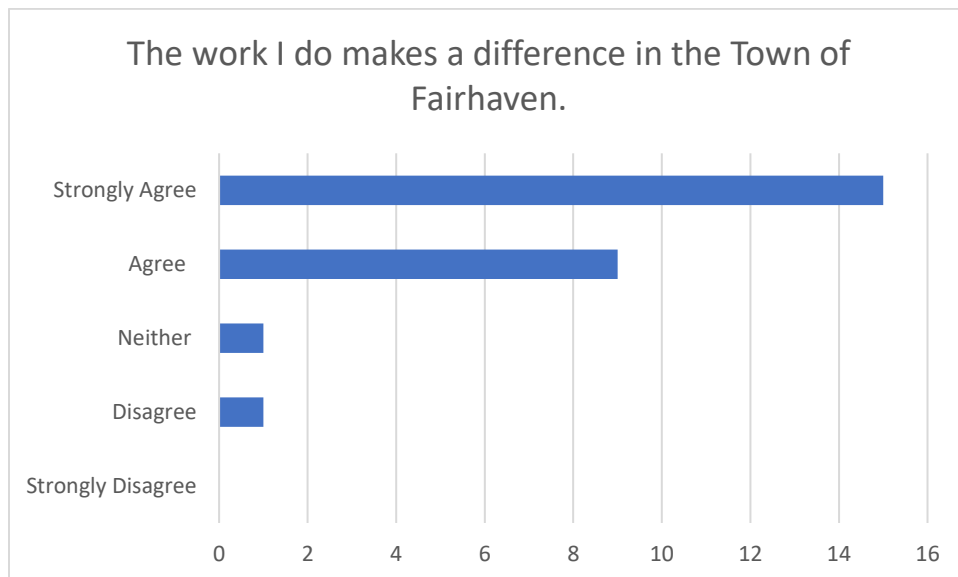
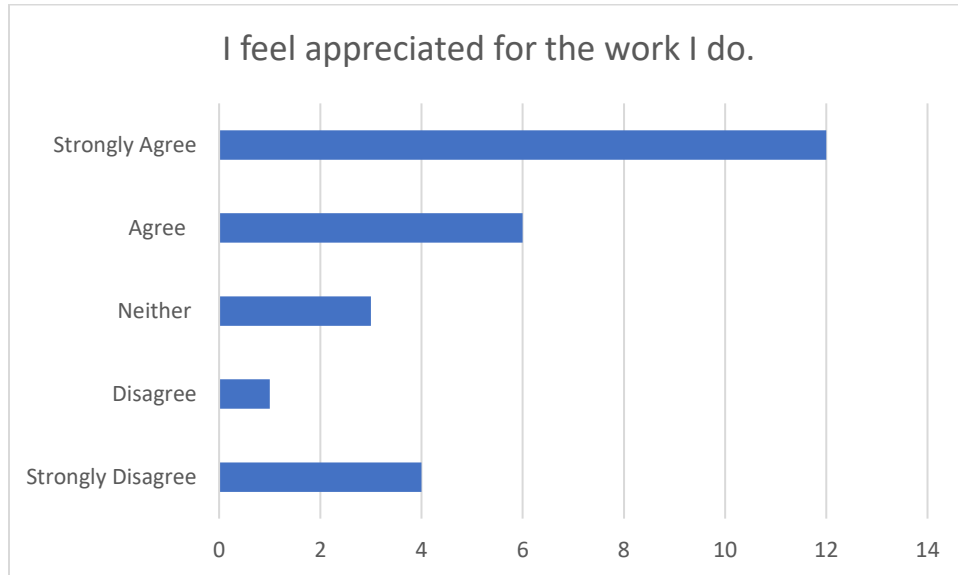
EMPLOYEE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Name	Title	Years in position
Reports to	Supervises	Hours
Job Satisfaction		
What attracted you to this job?		
How long is your commute?		
Do any of your family members work for the town?		
Do you socialize with coworkers?		
What motivates you to keep coming back?		
Teamwork		
Which coworkers do you regularly work with?		
What other departments do you regularly work with?		
What Boards and Committees do you usually work with?		
Personal Productivity		
Have you ever been recognized for your work?		
How has COVID-19 impacted your job?		
Communication		
How do you find out about workplace news and information such as new employees, new policies?		
How can communication be improved?		
Climate		
How would you define a positive workplace culture/climate?		
How would you describe the current workplace culture/climate in the Town of Fairhaven?		
What advice would you give Town Leaders for improving the climate?		
Climate Rating Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Neither Disagree or Agree 4= Agree 5 = Strongly Agree		
Climate Assessment		
Does your current work environment allow you to express your opinions?	1 2 3 4 5	
Do you feel appreciated for the work you do?	1 2 3 4 5	
Do you feel that the work you do makes a difference in Fairhaven?	1 2 3 4 5	
How would you rate the culture of your department?	1 2 3 4 5	
How would you rate the culture of this organization?	1 2 3 4 5	
Do you like working here?	1 2 3 4 5	
Do you trust your coworkers?	1 2 3 4 5	
Do you feel that favoritism exists in the workplace in Fairhaven?	1 2 3 4 5	
Have you been properly trained to do your job?	1 2 3 4 5	
Are you given opportunity for training professional development?	1 2 3 4 5	
Do you feel other people get more opportunities than you do?	1 2 3 4 5	
Do you feel that the level of involvement by elected officials is appropriate?	1 2 3 4 5	
Do you have work life balance?	1 2 3 4 5	
The Town of Fairhaven is a great place to work	1 2 3 4 5	
Do you feel this study will actually be used to make improvements?	1 2 3 4 5	

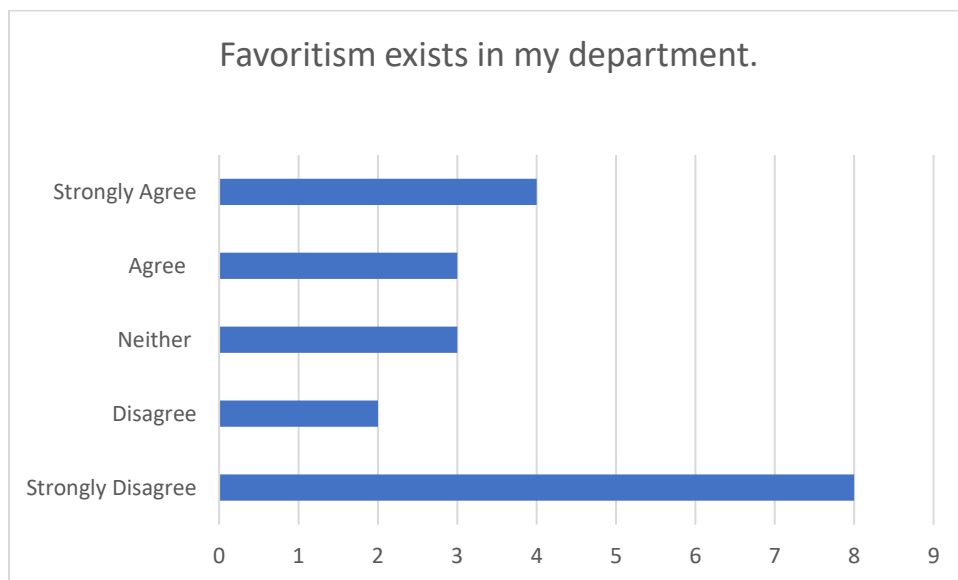
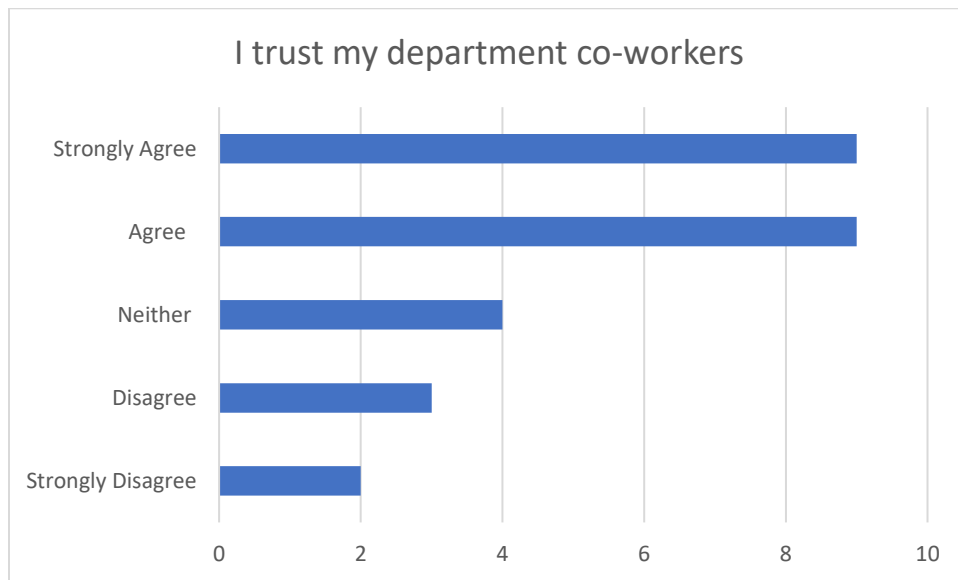
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

SURVEY RESULTS BY CATEGORY

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT



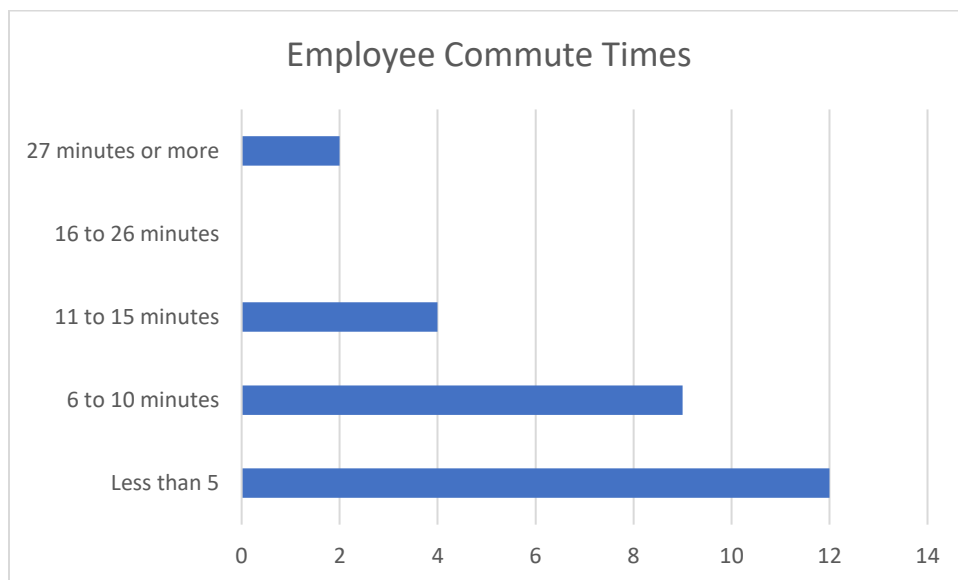
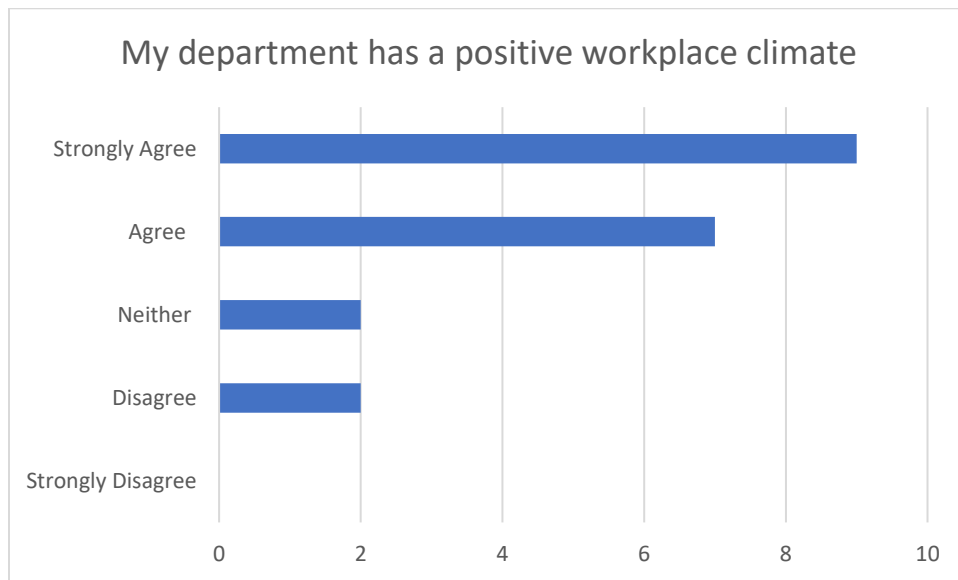
TEAMWORK



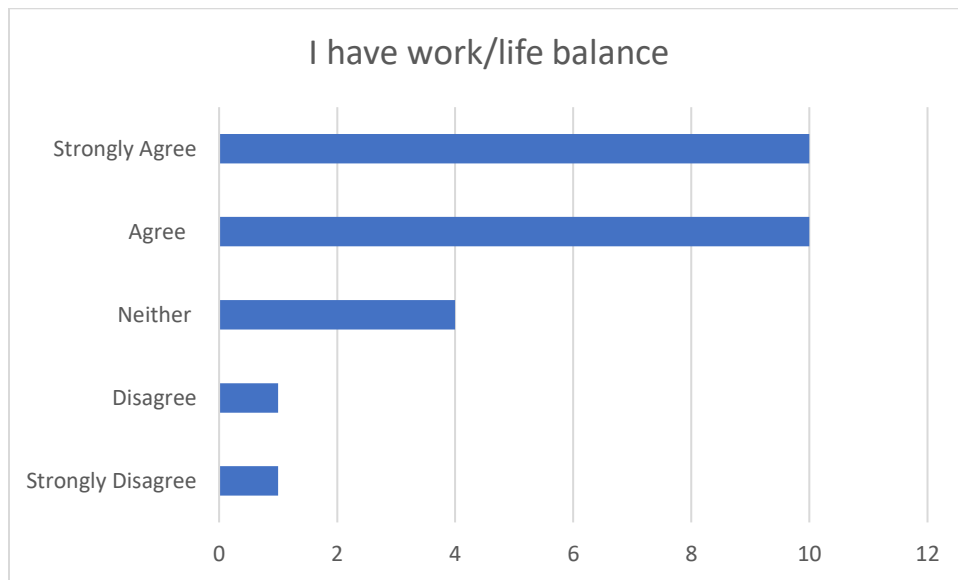
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT



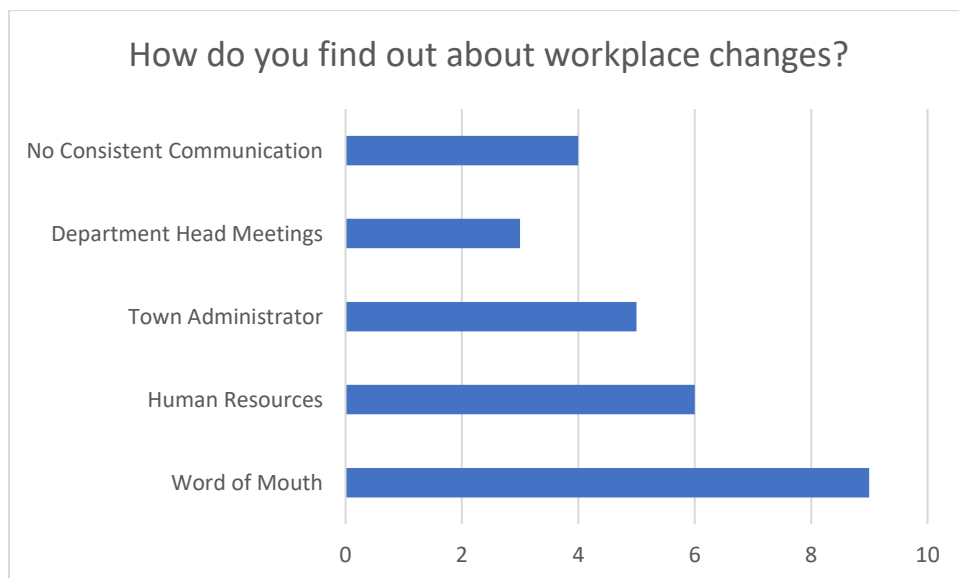
JOB SATISFACTION



JOB SATISFACTION - CONTINUED



COMMUNICATION





WORKPLACE CULTURE

The words and phrases reflected in the charts below are the most frequent responses received when asked how employees would define workplace culture/climate. The terms represented below were responses from two or more employees.

HOW THE TOWN OF FAIRHAVEN EMPLOYEES DEFINE A POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE:

APPRECIATION	COLLABORATION	COMMUNICATION	DEDICATION
DEPTS WORK TOGETHER	FAIRNESS	FOCUS ON WORK	LIKE A FAMILY
NO RUMORS	OPEN DOORS	PROFESSIONALISM	RESPECT
SMILING	SUPPORT EACH OTHER	WELCOMING	WORK AS A TEAM

HOW THE TOWN OF FAIRHAVEN EMPLOYEES DEFINE THE CURRENT WORKPLACE CULTURE:

CLIQUES	CLOSED DOORS	DIVIDED	DYSFUNCTIONAL
GOSSIPY	LOSING GOOD PEOPLE	NEGATIVE	POLITICAL
RUMORS	SOUR	TOXIC	TURMOIL
UNFAIR SOCIAL MEDIA	UNSUPPORTIVE	UNWELCOMING	WORK ALONE

Based on interviews with the Department Heads and Staff, the negative connotations of workplace culture were not geared around job satisfaction, engagement, or departmental issues. Rather, the negative workplace culture responses reflect their descriptions and reactions of external factors. Some of these include the impact of newspaper articles, social media, Board and Committee comments and behaviors. The comments also reflect the employees' perception of favoritism/fairness across the organization.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TOWN LEADERS ON HOW TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE IN FAIRHAVEN?

STOP MISREPRESENTING EMPLOYEES IN THE MEDIA	UNITE PEOPLE INSTEAD OF DIVIDING THEM.	DON'T LISTEN TO GOSSIP. GET THE WHOLE STORY.
DON'T IGNORE ISSUES — SOLVE THEM.	SET A GOOD EXAMPLE ESPECIALLY AT PUBLIC MEETINGS.	GET OFF FACEBOOK.
COMMUNICATE WITH EMPLOYEES AT ALL LEVELS.	BE COMMUNICATIVE, APPRECIATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE.	STOP TARGETING GOOD EMPLOYEES.
ESTABLISH A CULTURE OF FAIRNESS.	COMMUNICATION IS KEY.	FOSTER TEAMWORK.



RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – WORKPLACE CULTURE

THE OVERALL RATING OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE WAS 49%

“Culture can affect leadership just as much as leadership affects culture. Leaders are responsible for creating systems that develop organizational culture and reinforce workplace norms. Cultural norms in the workplace are adopted from the actions of the leader: where their attention is focused, how they react to crises and the behaviors they model”¹. Based on interviews with the Board of Selectman Members Town Administrator, Human Resources Director, the Focus Group and the employees, they all demonstrated a clear understanding of a desirable workplace culture. From relatively new employees to long-time seasoned employees they all shared similar descriptions of an ideal work culture. The breakdown in culture was characterized in four key areas;

1. “ELECTED OFFICIALS ARE HAMPERING OUR ABILITY TO DELIVER CUSTOMER SERVICE TO THE RESIDENTS”

Due to misrepresentation of employee morale in the media. 80% of employees reported that they are embarrassed and disappointed that the public has a negative view. Although survey results show high levels of job satisfaction, trust and enthusiasm for their job, the public perception does not match the reality. They feel that leaders should pay closer attention to and not make generalizations about the day to day work of the employees. Increased recognition of departments at televised Board Meetings and on social media would highlight the 89% satisfaction rating of employees who responded to the statement “I like working here”.

2. “WORKPLACE CLIQUES AND GOSSIP ARE DESTROYING THE ‘FAMILY ATMOSPHERE’

Although this is a common occurrence in workplaces, Fairhaven’s divisiveness seems to be getting worse. Employees pointed to high levels of terminations and resignations this year fueled by the divisions in the workplace. However, survey results show that Department Heads enjoy working with one another, and teams trust one another. 85% of employee felt that political interference, workplace gossip and favoritism were factors in these divides. Many stated that “it used to feel like a family at work” or “now ‘the rules don’t apply to everyone” and some people are ‘protected’. It would go a long way to create some cross functional teams so that the employees can work together on common goals to break down the barriers. IT will be important for the next Town Administrator and Human Resource Director to create opportunities for team building, wellness activities and cross functional project teams. The adoption of the new Personnel Policies would be a great opportunity to bring people together for training and discussion in a non-controversial setting. In the current pandemic it may be challenging but still possible.

3. “COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN IN THE ORGANIZATION”

Communication issues were mentioned in every conversation. Fueled not only by the pandemic and changing work conditions but also by the ‘cliques’ and ‘gossip’ in the work environment. Most employees had clear ideas on how communication, trust and respect should work together. Although positive communication exists within departments and among the Department Head group, there are breakdowns along the way. This is addressed in detail on page 16.

4. “FAIRNESS, FLEXIBILITY, FAVORITISM”

The comments were geared toward perceived favoritism around workplace flexibility. Several examples were given of certain departments and employees who adhere to predictable, established work schedules. Alternatively, others mentioned management’s openness to allow for flexible work schedules to help employees balance their work and family responsibilities. Unfortunately, the Town’s management has made an attempt to create a more flexible workplace but it was not embraced by all departments and caused resentment among those who did not adopt this philosophy.

¹.BASS, B., & AVOLIO, B. (1993). TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE. Public Administration Quarterly, 17(1), 112-121. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40862298>



RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

THE OVERALL EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT RATING WAS 89%

“Employee Engagement is measured by the ability and willingness of individuals to exert extra effort for the benefit of the company, their tendency to speak highly of the organization and their intent to stay”, according to Greg Harris present, Quantum Workplace, a market research company that surveys employee engagement.

Eighty nine percent of the employees (89%) felt that their work makes a difference to the Town of Fairhaven. There was much town pride and sense of accomplishment from these respondents.

The employees of Fairhaven’s response to “I like working here” was a 4.44 out of 5 rating or 89%. In addition, the respondents trusted their coworkers 75% of the time. This rating was attributed to some of the workplace ‘gossip’ and ‘cliques’.

When asked if they felt appreciated for the work they do, 79% responded favorably. Although most felt appreciated by their immediate supervisor, only 10% had received a formal recognition for their work. Some recalled a ‘years of service pin’ distributed by Human Resources, others had received awards from local groups or organizations. It would go a long way if the Town made a practice of ‘highlighting’ departments and recognizing them publicly for the work they perform. It would also serve to negate some of the negative social media perceptions.

Eight percent (80%) of Town employees who were surveyed stated they felt that they had work/life balance. Of those respondents 20% felt that they worked 24/7 and the other 80% credited their work/life balance to the Town’s wellness initiatives.

The average commute time for employees surveyed is 5.4 minutes, with only two employees having a commute of 30 minutes or more. Most categorized themselves as “Townies” and a few employees lived close enough to walk to work.

The above Engagement ratings are very encouraging, as employee engagement is the key to rebuilding the workplace climate and culture in the Town of Fairhaven. The Town can capitalize on these engaged and committed employees by providing opportunity for recognition, positive depiction in the media and positive feedback to continue to motivate them. This will have a direct impact on customer service and employee morale.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – TEAMWORK

83% PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES FELT THAT THEIR DEPARTMENT CULTURE WAS FAVORABLE

Department culture ratings were high with most people feeling that within their department “people supported one another” were “collaborative” and “worked as a team” most of the time.

Employees responded with (75%) Seventy five percent favorability to the question “do you trust your coworkers”?

A vast majority of Department Heads commented that they work well with other departments and the regular Department Head Meetings are a valuable teamwork component with opportunities for collaboration.



RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

76% OF EMPLOYEES FELT THAT THEY RECEIVED THE PROPER TRAINING TO DO THEIR JOB

Long-term employees of 20 years or more responded most favorably to this question. Employees with 10 years or less have had to “find their way” and “learn on the job”. It is typical in municipal settings that an overlap in incoming and outgoing positions rarely exists. Budgets are not built to afford salary overlap for training purposes so this is not an unusual result.

Eighty four percent of employees stated that they were provided with ongoing opportunities for professional development and training. They felt supported by the Town to seek professional training. This is a positive engagement tool for recruitment and retention of employees.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – COMMUNICATION

Conversations about communication and culture went hand in hand throughout this study. Interviews demonstrated that communication among the Department Head group is excellent, with regularly scheduled Department Head Meetings in which “everyone is given a chance to speak” and “opportunities for collaboration arise that you would never have thought of”. Respect and camaraderie exist among the Department Head group.

Many Department Heads are good at communicating relevant information from the Department Head meeting to their employees. There was a distinct dissatisfaction with employees as to how they learn about workplace changes such as staffing changes “sometimes the Department Head or HR will walk a new employee around and introduce them”. Regarding notification about policy changes “We usually get an email from HR with no explanation about the policy”.

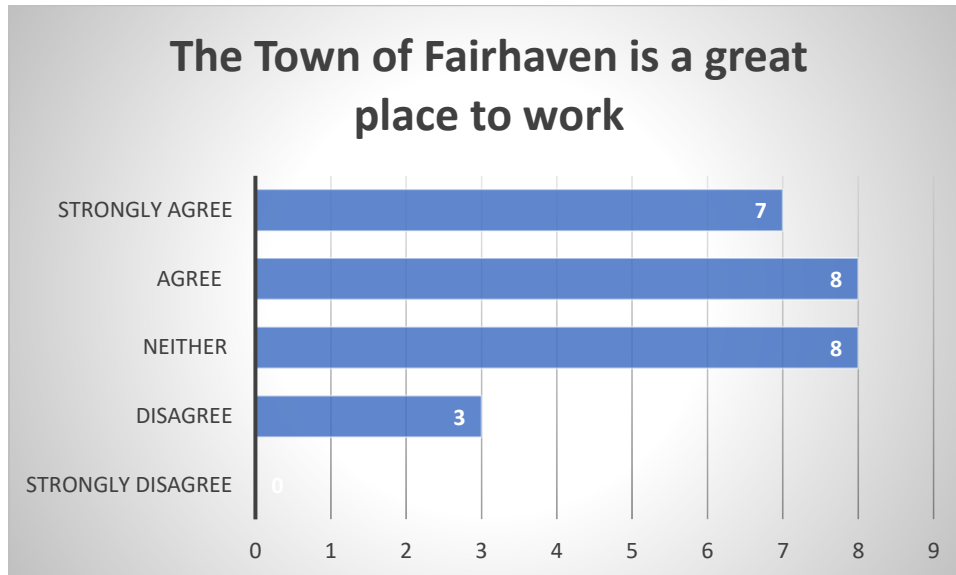
It is recommended that the Town take the time to communicate with all employees and take the time to make sure that policies are clearly explained. The adoption of the new Personnel Policies is a great opportunity to have an “all hands on deck” meeting to disseminate the policy and answer questions. This could also be used as an opportunity to take a stand on ‘flexible schedules’; the Town’s management should commit to it, communicate it and ensure that it is understood and adopted across the board to eliminate feelings of favoritism.

Additionally, Anti-Harassment policy is required by law to be distributed annually. The Town should endeavor to conduct training every other year. It is understood that these meetings are challenging in current pandemic times., but it should be a goal for HR.

Most importantly it is recommended that Elected Officials, Future Town Administrator and Human Resources Director please consider seeking opportunities for positive interactions with employees: recognition of employees for years of service or accomplishments at BOS meetings, community events that foster a cross functional team of Board members and employees and workshops. These actions will foster positive interactions and make employees feel valued. Refrain from negative comments about employees or groups. Be role models for the behavior you would like to see.

FINAL THOUGHTS

75% OF EMPLOYEES FELT THAT “THE TOWN OF FAIRHAVEN IS A GREAT PLACE TO WORK”



The results were consistent among long term and short-term employees, Department Heads and staff. Responses to this question included the following statements: “You should have asked me two years ago”, “It makes me sad, it used to be a 5.0”, “it has the potential to be”.

Some key opportunities exist for Town Leaders, future Town Administrator, and future Human Resources Director. Improve employee morale through increased communication, fostering co-worker relationships through better communication, motivating through recognition and encouraging employee wellbeing.

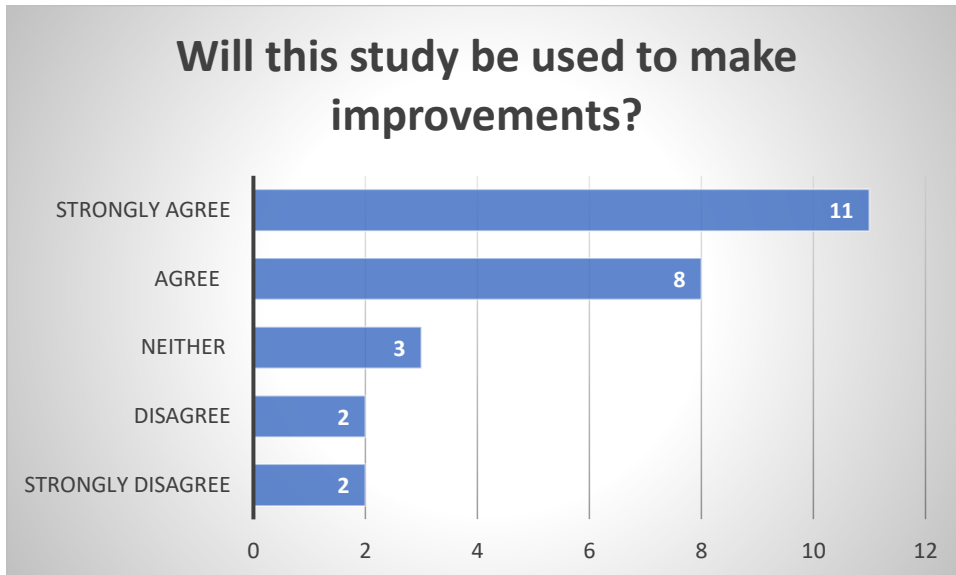
Dig deeper into termination/resignation and retirement data to find correlation between length of service, department, and any other possible problem areas. Review current exit interview practices with the intent to improve and provide a comprehensive exit interview with Human Resources or a neutral third party.

Think about the cost of turnover for the Town before fostering a negative culture and feeding into ‘gossip’ allowing productive employees to be isolated in a manner that is detrimental to a health workplace climate. Although employees perceived turnover to be an issue, an analysis of the numbers do not signify an unhealthy turnover ratio.

For future recruitment continue to maintain professional recruitment standards to attract qualified, engaged candidates. The current employees exhibit a love for the Town and love the work that they perform. This is the foundation needed to restore the culture of this work environment.

FINAL THOUGHTS - CONTINUED

80 % OF EMPLOYEES FELT THAT THIS STUDY WOULD BE USED TO IMPROVE WORKPLACE CULTURE



It is important to note that not only did 80% respond positively to this question they also expressed extremely optimistic comments. Nearly 90% of the respondents used the word “hope” in some form in their response: “I’m hopeful”, “hopefully”, “I really hope so”, “I’m hoping”. One respondent replied “I have faith in Fairhaven to do the right thing.”

For the employees who did not feel optimistic they stated that it depended upon whether or not the Board of Selectmen liked the results: “it depends on the outcome”, “not if it’s not what they don’t want to hear”, “they will refute it if they don’t like the findings”, and “it depends on the Selectmen”.

In conclusion, It was a pleasure to conduct this study and to have the opportunity to meet the employees in person, on the phone and via Zoom. I would like to express my sincere thanks to all who participated for their honesty and hospitality.

Fairhaven’s widely publicized ‘morale problem’ is actually a ‘perception issue’. The employees have spoken. Fairhaven’s leaders are encouraged to take the following into consideration when deciding to implement this study:

“THERE IS NO BETTER WAY TO CAUSE RESENTMENT AMONG EMPLOYEES THEN TO ASK THEM TO GIVE THEIR FEEDBACK AND THEN FAIL TO ACT IN RESPONSE TO THEIR CONCERNS. HONEST, CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES START WITH TRUST AND THE UNDERSTANDING THAT EMPLOYEES CAN VOICE THEIR CONCERNS WITHOUT FEAR OF RETALIATION.”²

² (2009). MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION. Society for Human Resource Management. from <https://www.Shrm.org/resourcesandtools/managingorganizationalcommunication.aspx>