

Town Council Goals 2026-2027  
Adopted 6/1/26

**Mission**

To provide ongoing stewardship for the Durham community including effective and efficient municipal services.

**Core Values**

Excellence, Integrity, Justice, Resilience, Respect, Transparency

**Purpose and Use of Council Goals**

Town Council Goals are intended to reflect the consensus of the Council regarding what it should strive to accomplish over the course of its one-year session. Some goals are continuous from year to year and provide ongoing general direction, while others are more specific and respond to evolving or emerging needs of the community and its residents.

Although the goals are adopted by the Council, responsibility for achieving them is, by the nature of the Town Charter and organizational structure, shared with the Administrator, departments, and committees. The goals also provide a framework for the Council to review its progress over the year and to hold itself accountable to the public, and, insofar as certain objectives are a shared responsibility with the Administration, they may also serve as one measure of assessing the Administration's effectiveness.

**Goal 1 - Facilitate optimal functioning of Town government through continuous improvement, new efficiencies, and waste reductions.**

- A. Assess and mitigate both cybersecurity and fraud risks using technology and robust internal procedures.
- B. Identify educational opportunities for the Council, such as presentations from the fire, police, and public works departments concerning their operations and programs, the working of the NH Municipal Bond Bank, fire/EMS response protocols and mutual aid coverage, etc., that will help it more effectively carry out its responsibilities.
- C. Encourage all Town boards, committees, commissions, and Durham's legislative delegation to become familiar with and align their efforts with the Council goals, actively collaborate and communicate with each other, and communicate with the community at large.

**Goal 2 - Pursue long-term economic strength and resiliency, anticipating the community's, the region's, and the nation's economic characteristics, challenges, and opportunities.**

- A. The Council, Administrator, local Boards, and Departments will work collaboratively to broaden and diversify Durham's tax base over the long-term in order to maintain a stable municipal tax rate. This includes promoting taxable business development in the commercial core and in other commercial zones, guided by smart growth principles consistent with the Master Plan.
- B. The FY2027 budget goal is to both hold the municipal tax rate at the FY2026 rate of \$5.89 and to keep total expenses excluding principal payments, interest payments, overlays and exemptions at \$20.2M or less. The \$20.2M expense goal may be exceeded if there is unexpected offsetting revenue for the matching expense as occurs, for example, when the town is awarded a state or federal grant for a project.
- C. Partner and support UNH on development projects at The Edge at West End and potentially within the Commercial Core.
- D. Manage spending and reserve levels prudently, increase non-tax revenues and external grant funding where possible, and make the strategic personnel and capital decisions necessary to provide for the ongoing cost-effective delivery of high-quality services within the available budget appropriation.
- E. Expand the Administrator's budget message, which is currently comprised of personnel, budget, and vehicle comparisons, the fiscal forecast, and the expense summary, to include easily understood graphics that assist residents in better understanding the high level budget data, tax rate, and fiscal outlook.
- F. Increase connection and collaboration between the Town and local businesses to help foster a supportive and beneficial atmosphere to increase the desirability of downtown Durham.
- G. Continue to improve Durham's commercial core and adjacent zones in ways that promote a vibrant New England small college town character, enhance the sense of community, better provide for the needs of residents and businesses, strengthen the fiscal health of the Town and UNH, and align with the Master Plan.

**Goal 3- Pursue long-term environmental sustainability and resiliency, considering existing and predicted impacts of climate change on drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, agriculture, food, society, transportation, ecology, solid waste, and economy.**

- A. Work toward continued Town-wide reductions in solid waste generation.
- B. Support pedestrian, public, and transportation alternatives to the automobile, and continue taking steps to address downtown multi-modal transportation options.

- C. Encourage and enable local and residential food production, preservation, and storage, while protecting existing farming businesses and infrastructure, through policies that reduce or remove barriers to local food production, consumption, and promote the expansion of community gardens.
- D. Encourage Town committees, departments, and especially the broader community to pursue strategies that support the Town's 2025–2030 Climate Action Plan, and, in collaboration with the Town Clerk, Assessing, and Building Department offices, systematically track local trends in electric vehicle registrations, heat pump installations, and similar measures within the built environment.

**Goal 4 - Pursue long-term social resiliency and quality of life in Durham intended to strengthen the community in a welcoming and inclusive manner.**

- A. Continue to develop and adopt ordinance and policy changes that increase the availability of a full range of appropriately located housing options, recognizing that housing type, density, and location directly affect the municipal tax base, demands on water and wastewater infrastructure, and ultimately what residents pay in property taxes. Prioritize housing that fits within existing neighborhoods served by Town water and wastewater, preferably in or near the commercial core, in ways that are consistent with the Master Plan and that protect the integrity and character of Durham's traditional neighborhoods.
- B. Support the recreational, educational, and social needs of residents through Parks and Recreation, Durham Public Library, and related programming including the celebration of Durham's rich history through the work of Durham's Historic District Commission and Heritage Commission.
- C. Strive for residents, board members, and staff to feel heard and respected and for healthy debate at public meetings.
- D. Enhance residents' understanding of Town government through active communication, outreach, and education about Town operations, so that community members are informed and prepared to engage in public decision-making.

**Goal 5 - Continue cooperative and collaborative efforts with UNH to enhance mutual intellectual, cultural, environmental, social, and economic benefits associated with hosting New Hampshire's flagship state university.**

- A. Encourage collaboration between the UNH administration and Durham's Administrator on decisions and planning that affect the university, the town, local businesses, and residents.

- B. Encourage collaboration with UNH to actively promote the university's athletic, cultural, social, health and fitness, recreational, and educational programs to Durham residents.
- C. Endeavor to establish Durham as an epicenter of off-campus volunteerism and research by UNH students, faculty, and staff.
- D. Collaborate with UNH and businesses in support of a vibrant downtown given changing university demographics.

**Goal 6- Lead efforts to promote inter-governmental awareness and collaboration on issues of mutual interest and concern.**

- A. Establish regular, meaningful communication between the Town of Durham, the Oyster River Cooperative School District, and Strafford County to discuss future strategic plans, objectives of common interest, the scope and timing of major capital projects, and their combined impact on taxpayers' total tax bill. At a minimum, invite the ORCSD Superintendent and School Board Chair to attend two Council meetings per year and the County Administrator and County Commission Chair to attend once per year, with at least one meeting in each case specifically focused on budget preparation and projections.
- B. Proactively prepare for an active and coordinated response to both potential and approved federal and state legal, policy, or economic actions that materially impact the Town, particularly those affecting human rights or the well-being of community members and employees. Work swiftly, in collaboration with the Town's legislative delegation, UNH, and other relevant partners, to protect essential operations, community services, and the safety and rights of the Durham community, and to oppose efforts that undermine local authority and control. When appropriate, issue clear and timely statements or resolutions to articulate the Town's position and concerns.

Note: The numerical order of the goals does not imply priority.