

ANNUAL TOWN REPORT

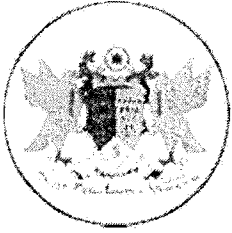
2021

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Section One

Letter from Town Manager



Town of *Dracut*
MASSACHUSETTS

To: Residents and Business Owners of the Town Dracut

It is with great pleasure that I transmit the Town Manager's Town Report of Department activities and operations for the year 2021, this document, along with others such as the Annual Town Budget Book, 5-year Capital Plan, and the Town's website, are produced to provide information regarding the activities of Town Government.

It seems just when we see the end in sight we have to prepare for another wave of COVID19 but with the patience of our residents and businesses, we see the light at the end of the tunnel. Departments such as the Library and Council on Aging continue to adhere to CDC guidelines and social distancing by providing our services remotely, when applicable. Some of our core services to our residents were interrupted resulting in many becoming essentially shut-in. Many have converted their home into their offices, gym and day care center. Boards and Commissions continued to conduct important town business virtually, we have begun to see in-person or hybrid meetings.

At the forefront of this pandemic is our Board of Health and Emergency Management Departments. As the pandemic took hold of the country and we grappled with how to manage the Town and provide services to our residents and businesses, the Board of Health marched forward and managed the disease in a professional and systematic way. Our Board of Health staff continue to work diligently and sometimes 7 days a week to keep things in check. The rules, regulations, policies, and procedures of the CDC, Federal Government, and the State of Massachusetts Department of Public Health were followed throughout this pandemic. We have moved on to the next phase of the pandemic; providing testing options and improving access to vaccines including boosters. We have partnered with Tyngsboro and Methuen to obtain a bulk order of home testing kits to make available to all.

Some of the forced changes with remote options, some of our programming and services will continue to be remote. Thanks to the town's investment in technology and personnel to manage the daily operation of Town business, we are grateful for the foresight the Town had with respect to automation and operating remotely. Clearly, Town business requires a lot of interaction in-person; working remotely is not sustainable for all services but can certainly continue for many, resulting in convenience to residents and businesses. All departments stepped up and made working remotely a group effort with a goal to continue to provide important town services throughout the pandemic. Town buildings were re-opened in June 2020 and have remained open throughout the pandemic. We continue to experience absenteeism due to the lingering virus but we have been successful with having little to no interruptions to our operations with the exception of departments and contractors being impacted by supply chain issues all are facing. It has slowed the progress of some capital projects and other projects such as engineering services, equipment, vehicles, etc..

Our School Superintendent, Teachers and other staff at the School Department continue to work throughout this incredibly difficult time. They transformed classroom instruction to remote instruction and/or both, referred to as a hybrid model for education. Kids are amazingly resilient and have fared well throughout but we still need to keep any eye on them. The Town and School worked collaboratively to provide a safe place for all. The State and Federal Government recognized the stress (physically, mentally and emotionally) has had on all by providing the resources needed to address the need to provide some normalcy to the students, teachers and Town as a whole. As we move forward through this period, we have to be cognizant of the long-term impacts this disease will have on all. Our most vulnerable residents (aging and school-aged residents) have been impacted the most; we must continue to provide them the services needed.

The year 2021, which overlapped fiscal years 2021 and 2022 continued to see improvements in the growth of our town, both commercially and residentially. The year saw results of continued strong economic conditions. A strategy of conservative revenue projections, coupled with disciplined expenditure control has resulted in improved, structurally balanced operations and an improved Free Cash status.

During 2021, the town achieved quite a few exciting initiatives throughout the year. The following are just a few of the areas we have progressed in order to be more efficient in delivering municipal services to the residents and businesses of this community.

Economic Development:

Our Economic Development Director has been very successful with assisting current businesses with marketing by hitting the streets and interacting with the businesses to determine if there are needs that we can address to keep them successful. As you will see in the Director’s report, he has and continues to welcome more and more businesses to town. Some are large, some are small, but all are enjoying the benefits of a single tax rate. We have seen new restaurants, lots of home businesses thanks to the amending to the Zoning Bylaw at November’s Town Meeting and lots of mom and pop shops that filled the little amount of vacancies that became available.

- The Genesis Healthcare project scheduled for 55 Loon Hill Road to accommodate a proposed 82,000 square foot, \$26,000,000 short-term rehab facility has been put on hold due to the pandemic and other extenuating circumstances. We are hopeful that this project will break ground in FY23.
- Progress continues with the infusion of cannabis facilities in Dracut. The residents at the June 2018 Town Meeting approved the necessary by-laws for the establishment of marijuana retail locations in industrially zoned areas. Town residents voted to support legal marijuana and we are required, through Special Permit of the Board of Selectmen to issue at a minimum four marijuana licenses. The bylaw also sets the maximum at four retail establishments. The town will receive 6% revenue of their gross annual sales, 3% being subject to a 5-year sunset clause. To date five facilities (Greenstar Herbals (retail), Lazy River (retail/cultivation), Treehouse (retail), Bailey’s Buds (cultivation) and Mass Biolytics (testing) have opened their doors, the Town has received no complaints and continues to work cooperatively with other proponents. All of these facilities have been outstanding neighbors. If there is an issue, they are more than cooperative.
- Continued working with the Chamber of Commerce and other agencies to implement tools to attract businesses to Dracut.
- The Town has been very successful with the application and receipt of many grants. The application and implementation timeline for most of these grants can be daunting but our Department Heads and Boards and Commissions persist on applying to improve our economy and address some projects that need attention and would not be possible without outside funding. Some examples are:

<u>Grant Name</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Actual Amount Expended</u>	<u>Fiscal Year</u>
Municipal Vulnerability	Storm water Mgmt.	\$ 41,375	2021
Cares Act Fund	COVID-19 Expenses	\$2,152,747	2021
American Rescue Plan (Federal)	Infrastructure	\$1,655,542	2021
LED Green Communities	LED Street Lights	\$ 168,685	2021
Extra Polling Hours	Elections	\$ 5,312	2021
American Disabilities Grand (ADA)	Study Buildings	\$ 18,500	2021
Housing Choice	Dracut Centre School	\$ 107,153	2021
911 Grant	Regional Dispatch	\$ 67,894	2021
Fire SAFE	Fire Personnel	\$ 6,065	2021
Firefighter’s COVID-19 Assistance	Fire Personnel	\$ 2,043	2021
Firefighter Safety Equipment	Fire Dept.	\$ 14,980	2021
Emergency Operations	Fire Dept.	\$ 8,500	2021
Shared Streets/Spaces	Hypine/Lakeview	\$ 400,000	2021
MAPC Covid-19	Board of Health	\$ 19,078	2021

Elder Affairs Grant	Council on Aging	\$ 58,209	2021
Dracut Arts Council	Art Council	\$ 5,832	2021
Economic Dev. Initiatives	Economic Development	\$ 1,975	2021
Trail Blazing Signs	Economic Development	\$ 4,750	2021
Council on Aging	COA Roof/HVAC Earmark	\$ 59,410	2021
Greater Lowell Sr. Trust	Council on Aging	\$ 2,048	2021
COA Cultural Council	Council on Aging	\$ 2,996	2021

The Town does not have a Grant Writer, we rely on Department Heads and Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) to apply and administer. Given the resources and staffing levels, available personnel have done an incredible job. Many of these grants are the result of the hard work of our Community Development Director and other Planning Departments. This list does not include those grants that the School applies/receives; please reach out to the Superintendent's Office for particulars. The School department recognizes approximately \$3.5M in grants not including COVID-19 grants.

Some of the grants above can be carried into next Fiscal Year but most of them have to be spent within a much tighter time frame, requiring the Town to shift workloads from other areas to focus on the grant to be sure we have met all the requirements. Cares Act funding has been depleted, the Town used approximately 20% and the School used approximately 80%, without this funding we would have not been able to manage the pandemic in the manner we did. The American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds have specific uses and expenditure timelines. The Town is fortunate to have been awarded just under \$10M in ARPA funds that will be used as directed, focusing on roadway maintenance and infrastructure replacement (culverts, etc). We will also focus on unaccepted roadways and equipment such as a vacuum and camera truck to be used to clear manholes, cameral water and sewer lines to determine if attention needs to be directed to these areas. The ARPA funds will be used over FY22, 23 and 24, we will use about 50% of it in FY23. These funds will be used to repair/replace culverts, mill and resurface roadways and other infrastructure on Saw Mill Drive, Tally Hoe, Kelly Road and the purchase of the equipment noted above.

Energy/Environmental Related:

- Continue to recognize savings (Approx. \$70K) with the retrofit of all streetlights. With the completion of this project we are now focusing on charging stations and electric vehicles. We need to understand the benefits and also the pit falls prior to committing to these items.
- The Municipal Aggregation Agreement was renewed the program will run for three more years until 2024; we continue to see savings for all.
- The Stormwater Department has made significant strides with obtaining grants and will benefit from the ARPA funds to address lingering issues on the streets noted above. It will also benefit from the purchase of the vehicles; there will be little need to contract these services out. Because of ARPA, the Stormwater Department has been fortunate to improve its retained earnings resulting in less stress on the General Fund budget.

Financial:

- Maintained a bond rating AA with a stable outlook from Standard & Poor's Rating Agency. Dracut is considered to have a strong economy; strong budget; liquidity and strong management policies. We continue to analyze debt and refinance when deemed appropriate.
- Increased Free Cash by approximately 4.1%, from \$9,898,201 in 2020 to \$10,317,955 in 2021. A policy of conservative revenue projections, coupled with disciplined expenditure control has resulted in improved structurally balanced operations.
- The Town maintains our aggressive collection of delinquent real estate taxes through D'Ambrosio Brown, LLP, to recover delinquent taxes, at no expense to the town.

- The town continues to address neglected, ignored, abandoned and dilapidated commercial and residential properties in the community through the town's C.O.D.E. Team. The program levied approximately \$60,000 in fines and the improvements to the properties have had a significant impact on addressing the quality of life in neighborhoods.
- We continue to take the conservative approach with cannabis-projected revenues; however, there is an opportunity to include in the budget 3% of the expected 6% in revenues. We are also preparing to address some lingering capital projects, equipment replacement, liability funding, and increasing Net School Spending levels. The Town has refrained from including one-time expenditures in the budget, the purpose of free cash is to fund those expenses that are not considered recurring, provide liquidity, improve our bond rating, all of which we have been persistent with.

Public Safety:

- The Town has passed a debt exclusion for \$4 million, with additional general fund investment of \$2.5M for the construction of a new fire station at 539 Nashua Rd.
 - The parcel was purchased for \$225,000 and approved at the June 2018 Town Meeting.
 - The house on the property was razed and the Permanent Building Committee selected an Architect and Owners Project Manager. Bids were solicited and the contract was awarded to L.D. Russo, construction is just about completed, occupancy will be on or before March 1st.
 - The parcel where the existing Collinsville Fire Station @ 1990 Lakeview Avenue was declared surplus at the June 2018 Town Meeting, following transfer to the new station the Town will consider various options for this parcel. The parcel will most likely serve as additional parking for that plaza, with a goal of improving the traffic flow and public safety.
 - The Regional Emergency Communication Center for Police and Fire dispatch for Dracut and Tewksbury is complete. We have successfully transferred all dispatch operations to Tewksbury. Regionalizing our emergency dispatch will provide staff with continuous training and state-of-the-art technology, resulting in improved services. For the next three fiscal years, 2021 being the first, the State will be funding the operation, thereafter it will be an additional obligation of approximately \$500,000 per year.

Housing:

- The Coalition for a Better Acre of Lowell was selected to develop the Dracut Centre School/Town Hall Annex at 11 Spring Park Avenue into eight affordable rental units, with all of the affordable housing units directed to those earning at or below 70% of area median income (AMI) but affordability to those earning below this level is preferred. All affordable housing units will remain affordable in perpetuity. The town's preference is to provide these affordable units to veterans, with priority being given to area residents. This project also represents one of the town's first projects using a portion of CPA funds for the rehabilitation of the exterior of the structure to historic standards. The Town received a grant from the Department of Housing and Community Development in the amount of \$1.8M toward the renovation/rehabilitation of this much-needed housing. This project is making positive progress and has gotten through multiple agencies to receive grants and funding, construction is expected to begin over the next six months.
- At the November 5, 2018, Town Meeting, the land located at 144 Greenmont Avenue was conveyed back to the town by the Dracut Housing Authority for the sole purpose of developing up to 60 units of senior affordable housing. The site is a 17-acre parcel of land, of which 11 acres of the land is buildable and 6 acres consists of wetlands. At the June 2015 Town Meeting, the Town of Dracut through the Community Preservation Committee appropriated an additional \$3,000,000 to assist in funding the construction of the project. Request for Qualifications was issued and awarded to Common Ground, a subsidiary of Community Teamwork in 2019. The Town continues to work diligently to assist with the commencement of the project. As with many of these types of projects Commonground is working its way through the maze of tax credits, grants and other funding to support the project.
- There have been ongoing discussions with developers who are considering constructing significant housing which will include affordable attributes. More to come on this later this year.

Community:

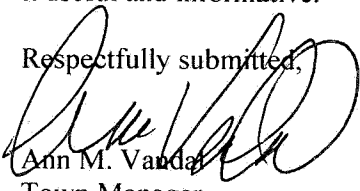
- The renovation of Veteran's Park and the installation of two Turf Fields at the School Complex has been completed. These projects are a joint venture between the Town and School leaders and the Community Preservation Committee. The park looks fantastic and will be available for use in the spring of 2021. One of the positives of the pandemic is with the lack of traffic on the fields; many of them experienced a rejuvenation of the grass, etc.
- Continue to build on social media platforms with Town Departments to assist in communicating with the residents and business owners.

Throughout this report, readers will learn and be able to be updated on a number of undertakings in the Town during the year 2020 including:

- Financial data and reporting;
- Summaries of Town Meeting actions;
- Comparative budget information including that proposed for Town Meeting action (a detailed budget is available in the Treasurer's Office); and
- Reports of various Departments, Boards and Commissions of their previous year's activities highlighting such wide-ranging areas as the on-going sewer program, permitting activities, emergency response data, school enrollment data, vaccination and health screening data, mosquito control activities and voting reports. This is a non-inclusive list and readers are referred to the individual department reports.

Through this document, Town staff strives to inform the residents concerning their Town Government. We hope you find it useful and informative.

Respectfully submitted,



Ann M. Vanda
Town Manager

IN MEMORY OF

Peder Pedersen
(School Department Retiree)

Walter Bogochow
(Town Retiree)

James Wagner
(Town Retiree)

Leona Doyle
(Town Retiree)

Judith E. Enis
(Town Retiree)

Patricia Carrigg
(School Department Retiree)

Robert Kohanski
(Town Retiree)

Joseph Shurtleff
(Town Retiree)

Doris Gariepy
(Town Retiree)

Richard Pimentel
(School Department Retiree)

Karla Azonabor
(School Department Retiree)

Joan Vinal
(School Department Retiree)

Olga Davis
(School Department Retiree)

Rita Jensen
(School Department Retiree)

This page is dedicated to those persons who have served the community of Dracut. The Town gratefully acknowledges their years of dedication to the people and Town of Dracut.

Section Two

Budget

Town of Dracut
Fiscal Year 2022 & Fiscal Year 2023 Budget
Expenditures

Department/Description	FY2022 Budget	FY2023 Request	% Change PY
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<i>Town Moderator (114)</i>			
Part Time Salaries	\$ 550	\$ 550	0.0%
Total Moderator	\$ 550	\$ 550	0.0%

<i>Selectmen (122)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 63,500	\$ 74,622	17.5%
Expenses	23,997	29,777	24.1%
Total Selectmen	\$ 87,497	\$ 104,399	19.3%

<i>Town Manager (123)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 247,575	\$ 268,411	8.4%
Expenses	30,400	35,400	16.4%
Total Town Manager	\$ 277,975	\$ 303,811	9.3%

<i>Finance Committee (131)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 1,350	\$ 1,350	0.0%
Expenses	675	450	-33.3%
Total Finance Committee	\$ 2,025	\$ 1,800	-11.1%

<i>Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director/Accountant (135)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 266,885	\$ 285,094	6.8%
Expenses	107,785	147,700	37.0%
Total Asst. Town Manager/Finance Dir.	\$ 374,670	\$ 432,794	15.5%

<i>Assessors (141)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 170,334	\$ 176,506	3.6%
Expenses	115,889	59,800	-48.4%
Total Assessors	\$ 286,223	\$ 236,306	-17.4%

Town of Dracut
Fiscal Year 2022 & Fiscal Year 2023 Budget
Expenditures

Department/Description	FY2022 Budget	FY2023 Request	% Change PY
<i>Treasurer (145)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 174,028	\$ 172,816	-0.7%
Expenses	12,850	32,850	155.6%
Total Treasurer	\$ 186,878	\$ 205,666	10.1%
<i>Tax Collector (146)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 159,050	\$ 152,713	-4.0%
Expenses	59,400	59,300	-0.2%
Total Tax Collector	\$ 218,450	\$ 212,013	-2.9%
<i>Legal Department (151)</i>			
Law Dept. Legal Fees	\$ 200,000	\$ 220,000	10.0%
Total Legal Fees	\$ 200,000	\$ 220,000	10.0%
<i>Human Resources (152)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 100,701	\$ 62,465	-38.0%
Expenses	8,450	26,400	212.4%
Total Human Resources	\$ 109,151	\$ 88,865	-18.6%
<i>Informational Technology (155)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 107,744	\$ 171,634	59.3%
Expenses	190,886	233,300	22.2%
Total Informational Technology	\$ 298,630	\$ 404,934	35.6%
<i>Town Clerk (161)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 240,200	\$ 197,765	-17.7%
Expenses	27,250	27,550	1.1%
Total Town Clerk	\$ 267,450	\$ 225,315	-15.8%

Town of Dracut
Fiscal Year 2022 & Fiscal Year 2023 Budget
Expenditures

Department/Description	FY2022 Budget	FY2023 Request	% Change PY
<i>Elections & Registrations (162)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 21,000	\$ 21,858	4.1%
Expenses	47,650	69,650	46.2%
Total Elections & Registrations	\$ 68,650	\$ 91,508	33.3%
<i>Conservation Commission (171)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 66,690	\$ 68,067	2.1%
Expenses	2,300	2,725	18.5%
Total Conservation Commission	\$ 68,990	\$ 70,792	2.6%
<i>Planning Board (175)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 107,409	\$ 166,408	54.9%
Expenses	6,200	7,950	28.2%
Total Planning Board	\$ 113,609	\$ 174,358	53.5%
<i>Zoning Board of Appeals (176)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 4,500	\$ 4,500	0.0%
Expenses	4,000	4,000	0.0%
Total Zoning Board of Appeals	\$ 8,500	\$ 8,500	0.0%
<i>Building Maintenance (196)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 175,500	\$ 26,651	-84.8%
Expenses	213,100	370,275	73.8%
Total Building Maintenance	\$ 388,600	\$ 396,926	2.1%
<i>Town/School Insurance Premiums (197)</i>			
Liability Insurance Premiums	\$ 570,000	\$ 640,000	12.3%
Total Town/School Insurance Premiums	\$ 570,000	\$ 640,000	12.3%

Town of Dracut
Fiscal Year 2022 & Fiscal Year 2023 Budget
Expenditures

Department/Description	FY2022 Budget	FY2023 Request	% Change PY
<i>Permanent Building Committee (198)</i>			
Expenses	\$ 200	\$ 200	0.0%
Total Permanent Building Committee	\$ 200	\$ 200	0.0%

Total General Government	\$ 3,528,048	\$ 3,818,737	8.2%
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<i>Police Department (210)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 4,419,327	\$ 4,966,623	12.4%
Expenses	434,880	457,900	5.3%
Total Police	\$ 4,854,207	\$ 5,424,523	11.7%

<i>Fire Department (220)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 4,422,000	\$ 4,508,681	2.0%
Expenses	367,734	\$ 382,459	4.0%
Total Fire Department	\$ 4,789,734	\$ 4,891,140	2.1%

<i>Building (241)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 206,095	\$ 220,642	7.1%
Expenses	7,600	7,600	0.0%
Total Building	\$ 213,695	\$ 228,242	6.8%

<i>Plumbing & Gas (242)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 30,977	\$ 30,314	-2.1%
Expenses	5,000	5,000	0.0%
Total Plumbing & Gas	\$ 35,977	\$ 35,314	-1.8%

<i>Sealer of Weights (244)</i>			
Service Contracts	\$ 8,500	\$ 8,500	0.0%
Total Sealer of Weights	\$ 8,500	\$ 8,500	0.0%

Town of Dracut
Fiscal Year 2022 & Fiscal Year 2023 Budget
Expenditures

Department/Description	FY2022 Budget	FY2023 Request	% Change PY
<i>Wiring (245)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 32,430	\$ 33,075	2.0%
Expenses	4,600	4,600	0.0%
Total Wiring	\$ 37,030	\$ 37,675	1.7%

<i>Emergency Management (291)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 2,700	\$ 2,800	3.7%
Expenses	23,510	17,310	-26.4%
Total Emergency Management	\$ 26,210	\$ 20,110	-23.3%

<i>Animal Control (292)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 58,952	\$ 68,501	16.2%
Expenses	21,800	21,300	-2.3%
Total Animal Control	\$ 80,752	\$ 89,801	11.2%

Total Public Safety	\$ 10,046,105	\$ 10,735,305	6.9%
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<i>Schools/Education (300)</i>			
Net School Spending Appropriation	\$ 32,850,000	\$ 36,200,000	10.2%
Excludable Appropriation	2,765,000	2,900,000	4.9%
GLTHS - Assessment	4,615,297	4,750,000	2.9%
GLTHS - Non-Net Assessment	185,000	200,000	8.1%
Essex Aggie - Assessment	20,000	20,000	0.0%
Essex Aggie Non-Net Assessment	15,000	15,000	0.0%
Total Schools/Education	\$ 40,450,297	\$ 44,085,000	9.0%

<i>Engineering (410)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 245,864	\$ 241,888	-1.6%
Expenses	26,250	44,250	68.6%
Total Engineering	\$ 272,114	\$ 286,138	5.2%

Town of Dracut
Fiscal Year 2022 & Fiscal Year 2023 Budget
Expenditures

Department/Description	FY2022 Budget	FY2023 Request	% Change PY
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<i>Public Works (420)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 196,984	\$ 212,525	7.9%
Expenses	55,075	55,075	0.0%
Total Public Works	\$ 252,059	\$ 267,600	6.2%

<i>Highway Maintenance (421)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 984,876	\$ 961,728	-2.4%
Expenses	315,400	324,400	2.9%
Total Highway Maintenance	\$ 1,300,276	\$ 1,286,128	-1.1%

<i>Snow & Ice (423)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 125,000	\$ 125,000	0.0%
Expenses	438,000	438,000	0.0%
Total Snow & Ice	\$ 563,000	\$ 563,000	0.0%

<i>Street Lighting (424)</i>			
Electricity	\$ 110,000	\$ 110,000	0.0%
R & M Equipment	10,000	10,000	0.0%
Total Street Lighting	\$ 120,000	\$ 120,000	0.0%

<i>Tree Department (428)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 226,141	\$ 223,247	-1.3%
Expenses	41,245	46,145	11.9%
Total Tree Department	\$ 267,386	\$ 269,392	0.8%

<i>Vehicle Maintenance (429)</i>			
Salaries	\$ 186,789	\$ 185,825	-0.5%
Expenses	223,750	248,850	11.2%
Total Vehicle Maintenance	\$ 410,539	\$ 434,675	5.9%