

## NEW MILFORD, CONNECTICUT

**Population: 28,276**

**Form of Government: Town Council/Mayor**

**Legislative Body: Town Council**

**Operational Leader: Mayor**

**Link to Town Charter:**

**[https://www.newmilford.org/filestorage/3088/3122/Charter-Final\\_Effective\\_12-6-18.pdf](https://www.newmilford.org/filestorage/3088/3122/Charter-Final_Effective_12-6-18.pdf)**

### **Interview with Pete Bass, Mayor of New Milford, CT**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2025**

#### **Government Structure:**

- New Milford has a **Mayor-Town Council** form of government since **1978**.
- The **Mayor** acts as the executive, overseeing day-to-day operations.
- The **Town Council** is the **legislative body**, made up of **9 at-large members** (not district-based), elected every two years along with the mayor.
- There is **minimal turnover**, with officials often serving long terms, which Mayor Bass sees as a strength for consistency and experience.

#### **Budget & Financial Processes:**

- For major expenditures (e.g., **\$6.5M library renovation** in 2019), the process involves:
  1. Proposal to the **Board of Finance**
  2. Approval by the **Town Meeting**, typically through **voice vote**
  3. Rarely, a **paper ballot vote** is used (only 3 times in 25 years) for contentious issues
  4. Final bonding or funding decision
- **Town meetings** draw low participation—typically **100–150 residents**—unless the topic is high-interest.
- Routine **road projects** and other non-standard expenses are also brought to town meetings when needed.

#### **Board of Education (BoE):**

- Operates **independently** of the town council and mayor.
- The **BoE budget** is separate from the town budget and is voted on via **town-wide referendum**.

- Budget review process:
  1. Superintendent submits to BoE
  2. BoE submits to Town Council
  3. Town Council suggests line-item changes
  4. Sent to **Board of Finance**, which can recommend category-level changes
  5. Final review by BoE before going to public vote

### **Operational Oversight & Departments:**

- The **Mayor** does **not report** to the Town Council and operates independently.
- **Town employees**, including the **Police Chief**, report to the Mayor.
- No Police Commission exists.
- **Independent commissions** (e.g., **Planning & Zoning, Sewer Commission, Library**) manage their own operations, but their staff are town employees.

### **Civic Engagement:**

- **Low civic engagement** overall, except for high-interest topics (e.g., library renovation, turf field).
- All **town meetings are recorded** and made available to the public.
- Issues like the **turf field project** have sparked increased interest and brought new community members into local governance discussions, but interest wanes over time.

### **Mayor Pete Bass:**

- Serving as mayor for **25 years**
- Open and approachable; willing to engage in further discussions if needed

### **Summary of Key Findings**

- **Promoting Efficiency**
  - Town Council with periodic Town Meeting/Referendum questions is generally efficient.
  - Entire Town Council subject to 2-year terms appears to work for New Milford, despite very little turnover and many running unopposed.
  - Referendum for Annual BOE budget has pros and cons worthy of further investigation.
  - Mayor as COO appears to be operationally efficient. Mayor is not distracted by other legislative matters.
  - Limited number of Town Meetings for questions that meet very specific scope and scale.
- **Accountability**
  - 2-year terms for Town Council and Mayor allow for Accountability.

- **Citizen Participation**
  - Engagement Low with higher levels of interest for specific questions/topics. However, once question has been voted on, participation again wanes.
  - Many Town Council positions are not opposed despite 2 year terms.
- **Responsiveness to Local Needs**
  - 2 year terms of Town Council and. Ayor allow for citizens to challenge local government if they feel local needs are not being met.
  - Special Town Meetings and Referendums for high profile expenditures reflects further responsiveness.
  - Presentation of BOE Annual Budget as separate question form Town Budget also reflects responsiveness to local needs.