

Town of Dracut, Massachusetts

Town Manager

Profile



EDWARD J. COLLINS JR. CENTER FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT
JOHN W. McCORMACK GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
GLOBAL AND POLICY STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

Introduction

The Town of Dracut has retained the services of the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts Boston to assist in the Town's recruitment of a new Town Manager. This Profile draws upon our discussions with selectmen, department heads, elected officials, and staff. It describes our understanding of the organization, the challenges that lie ahead for the successful candidate, and the professional and personal characteristics an ideal candidate will possess.

The Town of Dracut

Dracut is located approximately 30 miles north of the center of Boston. It lies close to the intersection of Route 93 and Route 495. The Town's location adjacent to these highways, constructed in the 1950s and 1960s, fostered very rapid residential growth in this once semi-rural community. Today the Town has a population of approximately thirty thousand compared to its 1960 population of approximately fourteen thousand. Commercial development has been modest and is concentrated mostly along the arterial roads.

Dracut, which has 20 square miles of land area, lies between the City of Lowell and the New Hampshire border. The portions of the Town bordering Lowell, served for many years as residential neighborhoods for residents who worked in Lowell while the balance of the Town's 20 square miles retained its rural character until the 1950s and 1960s.

The Town has had a single Town Manager since shortly after the position was established in 1987. The position of Town Manager will be vacant as a result of a decision by the current Town Manager to retire. Dracut's charter, which comprehensively restructured town governance in the mid 1980s as well as the Town by-laws are available on its web site. (www.dracut-ma.us). The revised charter maintained the open Town Meeting as the legislative body. Construction on a new Town Hall will commence in summer 2013 with occupancy anticipated in Fall 2014. This project is financed on a cash basis.

According to the 2010 census the median income for a family was \$74,000, significantly higher than the statewide average. Data on the Town's demographic trends can be obtained from the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (www.nmcog.org). In addition the Town's 1999 Master Plan is available on the Town's web site.

Organizational Design and Governance

The Town governance structure consists of a five member Board of Selectmen elected for three year staggered terms and an open Town Meeting. The five-member School Committee is elected, as are the Library Trustees. The

Town Meeting is the legislative body and exercises the functions of appropriating money and making local laws. The position of Town Manager is well established and well respected.

Public Finance

In financial terms, Dracut is managed very conservatively. Dracut had total General Fund revenues for FY2011 of approximately \$64 million. \$39 million of this amount was from locally levied taxes. The Town does not have a split property tax rate. Residential property generates over ninety percent of property tax revenue. Since FY 2000 Dracut has not sought an operating override. Detailed financial information, including the date and purpose of debt exclusions, may be obtained at the web site of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Department of Local Services. Many of the Town's capital projects over the last decade have been funded with cash.

Challenges for the Town Manager

- **Building on the Foundation.** Boards of Selectmen, Town Meeting and the retiring Town Manager have built a solid public administration foundation for the Town that emphasizes professionalism among the Town's staff and administrators. Dracut has well trained professional department administrators and key staff. While Dracut is perceived in the region as a highly political town, the administration of the Town is professional, a value the current Board of Selectmen wants to maintain. The new Town Manager needs to sustain and build on this foundation.
- **Maintaining a Positive Labor-Management Climate.** Dracut has sustained a positive labor relations climate by utilizing careful budgeting and good management practices at the department level. Most of the Town's employees are members of the five collective bargaining units. Collective bargaining activities are the responsibility of the Town Manager. Maintaining a positive climate will require careful attention in the coming years as the Town navigates through an environment characterized by fiscal stress and shifting public expectations.
- **Medium Term Budget Planning and Service Delivery.** Like all Massachusetts municipalities, Dracut is facing revenue constraints and growing cost pressures. A significant amount of the Town Manager's time will be required to forge town-wide strategies to bring these into balance. This task must be addressed in the context of multi-year plans that consider *the new normal*: constrained revenue. Service expectations are high but resources in real dollar terms will be limited for the foreseeable future. Conservative budgeting and strict expenditure control have been the hallmarks of the tenure of the retiring Town Manager and these values are strongly held by the Town.

- **Communication.** Well-developed communication skills are essential. Open, accurate and timely communication by the Town Manager with Town government entities, department heads, the public, the many volunteers and the employees needs to be integrated into the normal operational practices of the Town. The next Town Manager must be skilled and comfortable serving as a major public spokesperson for the Town and actively participate in shaping a strategic message to citizens, stakeholders and the business and development communities. The Town Manager presents most articles at Town Meeting. In addition, the Town Manager must be able to engage the members of the Board of Selectmen in an on-going dialog about the critical issues that face the Town. *The public communication role of the Town Manager will be critical to sustaining the high level of confidence and trust that residents have in the Town.*
- **Information Technology.** The Town needs to develop and implement a comprehensive IT plan to bring current technology to town operations. Because Dracut has not been an early adopter of information technology, it is feasible to put in place the most advanced systems currently available.
- **Building a Management Team, Staff Development & Morale.** Dracut has a well-regarded group of department heads. Departmental operations are generally working well, however, departments tend to operate in silos. Effort will be required to foster a more interdepartmental approach to problem solving and governance. Maintaining staff morale, fully utilizing the considerable talents of staff and maintaining high performance standards will be critical to the success of the new Town Manager.
- **Public Role.** The next Town Manager is expected to play a public role in the community. Participation in civic functions and representation of the Town with other governmental entities, and serving as a public voice for the Town will be important. The Town Manager must play an active role in managing the Town's relationship with the key state government actors that drive regional economic and transportation policy decisions.

The Ideal Candidate

The Dracut Board of Selectmen seeks a Town Manager who is a seasoned manager in an environment of similar complexity who possesses strong organizational, communication and community leadership skills. This is not a learning position.

Dracut seeks a Town Manager with the skill, energy, creativity and experience to achieve the Town's goals including: preserving public service levels, fostering development in the few locations where this is feasible, and maintaining the Town's positive civic attitude toward the future.

Dracut seeks a Town Manager willing to commit to a tenure long enough to build a multi-year approach to ensuring the sustainability of the Town's service levels. The new Town Manager must support regional solutions when that is in the Town's interest, as well as foster volunteerism and private contributions as a partial solution to service delivery. Dracut needs a Town Manager who can help set the stage for community-wide approaches to addressing the Town's needs, approaches that produce sound outcomes and avoid polarization.

The following attributes have been determined important in Dracut's next Town Manager.

Personal

The next Town Manager needs to be:

- Able to demonstrate unquestioned integrity in interactions with officials and citizens.
- Able to communicate effectively with all elements of the community.
- Able to work cooperatively with the Board of Selectmen on the establishment of annual goals and objectives for the Town and its departments, update the BOS and staff on progress and actively participate in the annual review of results and operations.
- Able and willing to play a highly visible role in the community. The ideal candidate must participate broadly across the leadership structure of the community and region and be a champion of the community. However, the long-standing practice of non-participation in political activities of any kind must be continued.
- Comfortable engaging directly with citizens. The Town Manager must have sufficient direct engagement with the civic community so that he/she can gain thorough understanding of the Town's culture. Through formal and informal interaction the Town Manager's concern for the Town's citizens needs to become evident.
- Able and willing to work openly with community groups and employees. A direct, collegial, facilitative style that fosters joint problem solving is needed. The Town Manager can have no agenda beyond being professional and ensuring that service delivery meets the community's standard for customer service.
- Able to be a vocal and positive spokesperson for the Town's agenda at Town Meetings, public forums, state agencies and with the media. The successful candidate must be able to use the status inherent in the Town Manager's position to advance the Town's agenda.
- Able to assume a strong organizational management role. The Town Manager cannot be a micromanager. He/she needs to delegate, while maintaining strict accountability. The successful candidate must be direct, facilitative, and clear.

- Able to create and sustain a goal-oriented environment by establishing, maintaining and promoting effective policies and initiatives. The Town Manager will be a genuinely inclusive leader who is capable of exerting influence and direction in a manner that shares successes with elected officials, professionals and volunteers.

Professional

The Town Manager must be:

- An experienced leader of a comparable organization with extensive personal experience in finance, capital and operational planning, expenditure management, labor relations, public facilitation, and staff development. Excellent public and interpersonal communication skills are essential, as is skill in forging a management team.
- A professionally stable person with a record of tenure and consistent career growth. The Town seeks a committed management professional willing to stay for a significant period but who is also willing to take risks to improve the organization.
- Able to demonstrate a background in guiding the development of a shared strategic vision for the community. The ideal candidate must be a coalition builder, equally at home with private sector and community leaders. The ideal candidate must be able to exercise leadership within the organization and within the community.
- In possession of the skills and interest to identify and promote opportunities for commercial/industrial growth. Although the opportunities for this kind of growth are limited, targets of opportunity need to be identified and nurtured.
- Able to delegate to a highly competent cadre of Department Heads while maintaining strict accountability.
- Both strategic and tactical. He/she must be experienced in working effectively in a political environment providing seasoned and impartial guidance to elected officials to identify and address the long-term strategic needs of the community and the short-term tactical steps necessary to sustain service delivery.
- Capable of keeping elected officials comprehensively informed, while staying detached from the political process and ensuring that staff maintains a similar detachment.
- Familiar with highly participative local government environments with dynamics similar to Dracut's, as well as being familiar with the Massachusetts municipal context, particularly Town government.
- Comfortable working with and managing an organization in a political context often characterized

by vigorous debate among well-informed citizens who are active in local decision-making processes. Key decisions made by the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting are sometimes closely decided.

- In possession of a Bachelor's Degree and at least seven to ten years of experience as a Town or City Manager or other position that oversees the operations of a public entity governed by an elected policy body that makes decisions in public. A person who has served as an Assistant Town or City Manager in a complex environment will be considered.
- Membership in the International City/County Management Association is desirable. Membership in the Association and adherence to ICMA tenets will be a job requirement.
- Familiarity with municipal governance in a New England Town Meeting environment will be helpful, as will general familiarity with governmental context in Massachusetts and New England.

The Hiring Process

The Town will utilize a Screening Committee to conduct preliminary interviews. The Screening Committee is expected to review the applications of candidates recommended by the Collins Center in May and complete preliminary interviews in June. Interviews of finalists by the Board and a decision are expected in early summer. A mid fall start for the new Manager is contemplated.

Salary and Schedule

The search begins in April 2013 and is expected to end in July 2013. Applications should be received by May 15, 2013. Direct compensation of the retiring Town Manager, a twenty-six year incumbent, is in the 140's. The Town is willing to negotiate a competitive compensation and an employment contract DOQ with the selected candidate.

How to Apply

Applications are preferred electronically. Please send your resume with a cover letter addressing the job requirements to this email address: recruitment.umb@gmail.com *Please combine all of your documents in a single file and include **Dracut TM** in the subject line.* Kindly use PDF format, if possible.

Should you have any questions regarding this opportunity, or a recommendation of a colleague, please contact: Dick Kobayashi, Senior Consultant 617-489-8812, or Mary Flanders Aicardi, Consultant 508-215-8992.

To learn more about the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management at UMASS Boston, please visit: www.umb.edu/cpm