

Norwell, MA

Town Administrator

Profile



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

Introduction

The Town of Norwell has retained the services of the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management at UMASS Boston to assist in the Town's recruitment of a new Town Administrator. This Profile draws upon our discussions with Selectmen, department heads, elected officials, stakeholders and the public. 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 Norwell

Norwell is located approximately twenty miles south of the center of Boston. The Town has a population of approximately 11,000. Commercial development is limited, with residential property comprising 84% of the Town's tax base. The Town has a single tax rate. Norwell is a well-regarded picturesque suburban community. The previous Town Administrator served in the position for 16 years. Additional information about the Town is available on its web site. (www.townofnorwell.net)

The median household income is approximately \$115,000, almost double the state median of \$65,000. Data on the key socioeconomic, financial and property tax data can be obtained from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services website (www.mass.gov/DOR/local).

Traditionally, Norwell has been viewed as a modest sized middle class New England town. Its very high level of public services, amenities and geographical location have made it an attractive place to live for professional families. Its highly ranked schools are a reason many move to Norwell. Houses are in high demand and there is upward pressure on housing prices. Tension exists between residents who desire high levels of service and are willing to pay for them and residents who prefer more modest service levels and more modest tax bills.

Organizational Design and Governance

The Town governance structure consists of a five member Board of Selectmen, elected for three year staggered terms, and Open Town Meeting. Elected Boards include the School Committee, Library Trustees, Planning Board, Board of Health, Board of Assessors, Housing Authority and Water Commissioners. The Town Moderator, the Town Clerk and the Highway Surveyor are also elected.

The Town Administrator's powers are established in the Town's Special Act Charter, enacted in 2012 and available on the town's website. Town Meeting is the legislative body and exercises the functions of appropriating money and making local laws. The position of Town Administrator is well established and the Town is committed to professional management.

While the position of Town Administrator has relatively strong powers, as an old New England town, Norwell retains a strong tradition of making decisions through consensus. The new Town Administrator must be attuned to this tradition and be comfortable working in an environment where political power is diffuse and citizens expect broad consultation on significant decisions.

Public Finance

The Town is financially conservative and holds significant reserves in its Stabilization Fund and in "free cash". The Town has a bond rating of AAA. Information about the Town's finances may be obtained on the Norwell website (www.townofnorwell.net). A recent bond offering statement is available on the Collins Center web site (www.umb.edu/cpm).

Challenges for the Town Administrator

- **Building on the Foundation.** Boards of Selectmen, Town Meeting and the former Town Administrator have built an enhanced public administration foundation for the Town that emphasizes professionalism among the Town's staff and administrators. Norwell has well-trained professional department administrators and key staff, a value the current Board of Selectmen wants to maintain. The Board is looking for a new Town Administrator to lead the continuing transition of Town government.
- **Ensuring full confidence in the management of the Town.** The tenure of the previous Town Administrator places a premium on making the right appointment. The new Town Administrator needs to be able to foster a sense of stability while evaluating the current condition in a forthright and professional way. The process of selecting a new Town Administrator, the first impression set by the new Town Administrator, and the perception of the new Administrator's initial decisions need to engender confidence in the Town's decision-making processes and enhance the public perception of the quality of town governance.

- **Medium and Long-Term Budget Planning and Service Delivery.** Like many Massachusetts municipalities, Norwell is facing revenue constraints and growing cost pressures. A significant amount of the Town Administrator's time will be required to forge town-wide strategies to manage within these constraints. A multi-year approach is essential to deal with the new normal of constrained revenue combined with explicit recognition of pension and OPEB liabilities. Service expectations are high, but resources in real dollar terms will be limited.

Conservative budgeting and strict expenditure control will be required. Norwell is a high service town with own-source general fund revenue coming largely from the residential property tax base. Despite the median family income in Norwell, there is significant resistance to property tax increases. While overrides and debt exclusions have been successful in the past, passage of referenda is not assured in future years.

Maintaining the Town's pastoral landscape is a core value of the Town and land available for new commercial/industrial development is limited to existing zoned commercial districts. Residential property owners will bear the principal burden of the Town's tax levy for the foreseeable future which increases the pressure to generate new growth through economic development.

Housing is an important issue for Norwell. Debate is vigorous over the subjects of residents' ability to stay in the community, affordability of long term residents' homes and taxes and resistance to inappropriate 40B housing.

Developing a comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan will be critical to future budget development.

- **Communication.** Well-developed communication skills are essential. Open, accurate and timely communication by the Town Administrator with the Selectmen, other Town government entities, department heads, the public, the many volunteers and employees, need to be integrated into the normal operational practices of the Town. The next Town Administrator 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 community.

The Town Administrator must be able to engage the members of the Board of Selectmen and committees/boards/commissions in an on-going dialogue about the critical issues that face the Town. The public communication role of the Town Administrator will

be critical to sustaining a high level of confidence and trust by residents in Town government. The Town Administrator will need to provide leadership to enhance the use of technology and social media in town government.

- **Building a Management Team, Staff Development and Employee Relations.** Norwell has a well-regarded group of department heads. Efforts by the Town Administrator will be required to foster comprehensive interdepartmental approaches to problem solving and governance. While respecting the autonomy of the School Department, efforts must be continued to engage the School Department's leadership about the issues facing the Town as a whole.

Maintaining staff morale, fully utilizing the talents of staff, and establishing and maintaining high performance standards and measures will be critical to the success of the new Town Administrator.

Most of the Town's employees are members of collective bargaining units. Collective bargaining activities are the responsibility of the Town Administrator and Selectmen. The labor relations climate is generally considered favorable. The Town recently hired a human resource professional, but the human resources systems, such as the Personnel Plan, require further attention and evaluation.

- **Managing relationships with Boards and Commissions.** Norwell has a large number of elected and appointed boards, commissions and committees that are integral to the governance of the Town. Many of the boards, commissions and committees possess defined statutory powers. All need support and collaboration from the Town Administrator.
- **Strategic Planning.** Given the Town's limited revenue options, thoughtful strategic planning to maximize of the town's revenue potential, service delivery system and land use regulatory system will be a priority. The Town will need to bring stakeholders together to plan and prioritize for the future.
- **Community & Economic Development.** The Town Administrator will need to facilitate discussion and actively participate in efforts to pursue economic development and new growth while balancing the interests of all residents.

The Ideal Candidate

The Norwell Board of Selectmen seeks a Town Administrator who is a seasoned manager in an environment of similar or greater complexity who possesses strong organizational, communication and

community leadership skills. Norwell seeks a Town Administrator willing to commit to a tenure long enough to build a multi-year approach to ensure the sustainability of the Town's service levels.

The following attributes are important in Norwell's next Town Administrator.

Personal/Professional

- An experienced leader of a comparable organization with professional experience in finance, capital and operational planning, community and economic development, expenditure management, labor relations, public facilitation, and staff development. Excellent public and interpersonal communication and writing skills are essential.
- A committed and creative management professional with a record of tenure and consistent career growth.
- Financially strategic, not only with the Budget, but with approaches to the Town's financial future.
- Demonstrates 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.
- Possesses the skills and interest to identify and promote opportunities for the expansion of the commercial tax base.
- Experienced in managing a unionized environment, respecting employees, and approaching collective bargaining and employee relations with fairness.
- Able to enhance a management team, provide support, set goals for and delegate to Department Heads while maintaining strict accountability.
- Both strategic and tactical. He/she must be experienced in working effectively in a political environment, providing professional 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.
- Able to be proactive and evaluate opportunities for innovation, creativity and enhanced uses of technology, including integrated software and GIS.
- Capable of keeping elected officials comprehensively informed, while staying detached from the political process and ensuring that staff maintains a similar detachment.

- 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.
- Holds a Bachelor's Degree and at least five years of experience as a Town or City Manager/Administrator. A person who has served as an Assistant Town Administrator/Manager in a complex environment will be considered. Candidates with experience in other municipal, state, federal, not-for-profit, higher education and business roles with the required leadership skills will also be considered. A relevant Master's Degree is preferred.
- Possesses a track record of professional behavior consistent with the ethical tenets of the International City Management Association.

The Hiring Process

The Town has appointed a Screening Committee to conduct preliminary interviews in confidence. The Screening Committee is expected to review the applications of candidates presented by the Collins Center in March and make a recommendation of three to five finalists to the BOS in April. The Board of Selectmen will interview finalists in April.

Salary

The salary range is in the low to mid one hundred thousand dollar range. The Board of Selectmen is willing to negotiate a competitive compensation package and contract with the selected candidate.

How to Apply

Applications are preferred electronically. Please send a resume with a cover letter addressing the job requirements to the following email address: recruitment.umb@gmail.com. Please combine all documents in a single pdf file, if possible. **Norwell TA** and the applicant's **Last Name** must be included in the subject line. The deadline to apply is March 12, 2015.

Should you have any questions regarding this opportunity, or a recommendation of a colleague, please contact Mary Flanders Aicardi, Associate 508-215-8992.

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