

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

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 Princeton has retained the services of the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts Boston to assist in its recruitment of a new Town Administrator. The Collins Center, established in July 2008, focuses on helping governments work better. This Profile draws upon our discussions with Selectmen, citizens, department heads, 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 would possess. For more information about the Town of Princeton, please consult its web site: <http://town.princeton.ma.us>.

Background on the Town of Princeton

Princeton is located approximately twelve miles north of Worcester and just south of the Fitchburg-Leominster region. It is a small central Massachusetts town relatively high in elevation as it encompasses much of Mt. Wachusett, the highest point in the eastern part of the state. Princeton has long had a dual identity. One identity is as a typical small upland town with a significant portion of its population engaged in agricultural or skilled trades. Another identity is as home for working and semi-retired professionals working in the Worcester or Boston regions who are attracted by the semi-rural lifestyle and the extraordinary vistas that characterize the town. Over recent decades an increasing portion of the town's population is composed of recent arrivals and this trend has been fostered by improvements in the highway system as well as the relatively low cost of land compared to similar areas closer to Boston.

The current population is estimated at approximately 3500. The median family income is \$104,871 compared to the state average of \$62,365. The number of children attending the regional public school has decreased since 2000.

The position of Town Administrator is open due to the appointment of the Town Administrator as the Commissioner of Agriculture for the new Massachusetts Governor's administration.

Princeton is thinly staffed, employing approximately 85 people and of these only 38 are fulltime employees. Town Hall is closed on Fridays and a significant portion of the Town Hall staff work less than full-time.

Organizational Design and Governance

The Town governance structure consists of a three member Board of Selectmen elected for three year staggered terms and a traditional open Town Meeting. The Board of Assessors, Moderator, and Planning Board are elected, but all other town officials are appointed. In addition, the Princeton Municipal Electric Light Department, overseen by three elected Commissioners, serves Princeton. While a department of the Town, the Light Department operates quite autonomously under the relevant state statutes. The relationship between the Light Department and the Town is positive. Princeton

was one of the first towns of its size to create and develop the position of Town Administrator. While not a charter position virtually all town departments and most official town committees report to or through the Town Administrator. One characteristic of the Town is the use of official committees staffed by volunteers who carry out their duties with a high and consistent level of professionalism.

Princeton does not have a school department; rather all of its public education needs are met through its membership in the Wachusett Regional School District, which serves Holden, Paxton, Rutland and Sterling as well as Princeton. (www.wrsd.net). It is the largest regional school district in the state serving approximately 7200 pupils. The town's proportion of the overall pupil population is approximately 8 percent. Princeton participates in the governance of the district by electing two members of the 21-member district school board. The regional technical school is Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School. Princeton is a member of a regional dispatch and animal control.

Public Finance

Princeton has a budget of approximately \$10 million of which approximately 60% is expended on schools through its assessment by the District. Most of Princeton's revenue is obtained through the property tax. Eighty-seven (87%) percent of the Town's revenue is from property taxes. The Town has not had an operating override referendum since 1990. Princeton currently has \$835,175 in Stabilization resources and excess levy capacity of \$453,000. Princeton established an account and has funded 40% of its OPEB liability. Detailed financial information for the Town may be obtained at the website of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Department of Local Services.

Challenges for the Town Administrator

- **Building on the Foundation.** Recent Boards of Selectmen and the previous Town Administrator have built a solid public administration foundation for the Town that emphasizes professionalism both among town staff and among the members of volunteer committees. A principle task for the new Town Administrator will be to sustain and build on these efforts. The Board of Selectmen is accustomed to functioning as a Board of Directors focusing on policy issues and leaving day-to-day management decisions to the Town Administrator. Current Board members have expressed a strong desire to maintain this operating paradigm. Similarly town employees are accustomed to taking direction and garnering support from the Town Administrator, as are the volunteer committees.
- **Being both a manager and a front line worker.** The Town Administrator must be a manager, a manager of people and equally important a manager of the critical processes in the life of the Town. Examples include the budgetary process, the planning process, the Town Meeting warrant process and similar processes. The Board of Selectmen and the town generally have strong expectations that the Town Administrator will take primary responsibility for

management of key processes. Because of its small size all employees and officials are *de facto* front line workers interfacing with the public and in the habit of rolling up their sleeves to accomplish tasks at hand. The Town Administrator must be prepared to be willing to act as a front line worker from time to time both to accomplish tasks and as an example for other employees and officials.

- **Communication.** In the current context there is a premium on communication skills. Open, accurate and timely communication with and among the organs of Town government and with the public and employees needs to be continually fostered and integrated into the normal operational practices of the Town. The Town Administrator must be an exemplar of these values. Sustaining and enhancing trust and confidence between and among the Town's leadership cadre and the public will be important tasks for the new Town Administrator.
- **Resource Planning.** Like all Massachusetts municipalities Princeton faces revenue constraints and growing cost pressures. A significant amount of the Town Administrator's time will be required to forge town strategies to continue balancing these issues. This task will be challenging due to the narrow revenue base and large portion of the budget claimed by schools. In addition this task must be addressed in the context of a multi-year plan that considers the unknown duration of the current period of financial exigency.
- **Infrastructure Managing, Repair, Renovation.** Bagg Hall, an historic building, which is the Town Hall is in need of repair and renovation as is the Old Center School, now a community center. The Town Administrator will need to work with stakeholders to develop a strategic plan to address these critical needs.
- **Roads Program.** The Town has a comprehensive roads program which uses tax revenue and Chapter 90 funds to improve its roads. The new Town Administrator will need to continue the program.
- **Forging Strong Links with the Commonwealth and Neighboring Municipalities.** Princeton despite its off the beaten path location and small size has played a prominent role in regional decision making particularly concerning the Route 2 and Route 140 corridors and in the development of state municipal policy. This is due, in large part, to the diligent and sustained efforts of the previous Town Administrator. The Town believes that it has reaped significant benefits from playing a prominent regional role and expects the Town Administrator to continue in this vein.
- **Developing and Sustaining Institutional Capacity and Staff.** Town Hall operations including staffing, hours of operation and the mix of full and part time staffing warrant comprehensive assessment to determine the optimum mix for efficiency and effective service delivery, with a view toward strengthening this valuable component of the Town's civic fabric. The Town Administrator will need to continue to develop the comprehensive training strategy and cross training staff to secure efficiencies and provide career ladders for staff.

- **Princeton Broadband Municipal Light Plant (MLP) and Broadband initiatives.** Town Meeting approved and the residents voted to move forward with the initiative of creating a telecommunications MLP to bring fiber optic internet technology to the town and its residents. The Town Administrator is the designated Manager of the Princeton Broadband MLP and will need to assist the MLP Directors and be an advocate for the initiative.

The Ideal Candidate

The BOS seeks a Town Administrator willing to commit to a tenure long enough to build a multi-year approach to the dilemma of providing an adequate level of services in the current revenue context and also to foster implementation of the recently completed Master Plan. The new Town Administrator must be availing of regional solutions where that is in the Town's interest, fostering volunteerism and private contributions as a partial solution to service delivery, and to educating the public when necessary of the needs for service reduction. Princeton needs a leader and problem solver who can help set the stage for a communitywide approach to addressing the Town's needs that produces a reasonable consensus on an appropriate approach, an approach that avoids factionalism and polarization within the town. The following attributes have been determined important in Princeton's next Town Administrator.

Personal

The next Town Administrator needs to be:

- Able to demonstrate unquestioned integrity in interactions with officials and citizens.
- Able to find ways to foster support for a traditional governance system for a small sparsely settled community that has served it well but is likely to come under increasing. The ideal candidate must lead and facilitate the improvement of government practices and assist in building consensus on critical issues in an environment characterized by limitations on revenue.
- 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. The Town Administrator must be comfortable, engaging directly with citizens. While the Town does not have a residency requirement the Administrator must have sufficient direct engagement with the civic community so that he/she can gain understanding of the Town's culture and that through formal and informal interaction the Administrator's concern for the Town becomes evident to citizens.
- Able and willing to work openly with community groups and employees but not in a confrontational manner. A direct, collegial, facilitative style that fosters joint problem solving is needed. The Town Administrator can have no agenda beyond being a professional.
- Able to be a vocal and positive spokesperson and representative 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 Administrator's position to advance the Town's agenda.

- Able to assume the strong managerial role exercised by the previous Town Administrator. While some micro management is necessary given the Town's size, the Town Administrator should develop and implement delegation strategies to the extent possible. Capacity building and staff development should foster possibilities for delegation. The Town Administrator must be able to engage the organization on a personal as well as professional level. The successful candidate will be direct, facilitative, and clear.
- Able to establish a goal-oriented environment by establishing, maintaining and promoting policies and initiatives. But do so by being a genuinely inclusive leader who is capable of exerting influence and direction in a manner that shares successes with the elected officials, professionals and volunteers. The successful candidate must lead by example and commitment.

Professional

The next Town Administrator should be:

- A mature leader of a comparable organization with extensive personal experience in finance, management, and staff development. Excellent communication skills are essential.
- A professionally stable person with a record of tenure and consistent career growth. The Town does not seek a resume builder. It does seek a committed management professional willing to stay for a significant period but who is also willing to take risks to improve the organization. Skill in forging a management team will be important.
- A demonstrated background in guiding the development of a shared vision for communities. The ideal candidate must be a coalition builder, equally at home with private sector and community leaders.
- A demonstrated track record of positioning communities to engage in successful and sustained implementation of comprehensive Master Plans. In Princeton's case this involves managing the complex and on-going relationships with state executive agencies and regional planning entities as well as neighboring municipalities.
- A person fully capable of functioning as Princeton's Finance and Budget Director as these function are fully incorporated into the Town Administrator position.
- An administrator who is familiar with the issues of Municipal Light Plants and Broadband initiatives.
- A manager familiar with major renovations to infrastructure, including historic buildings, schools and roadways and systems.
- The successful candidate must be a well-rounded manager with a track record of managing complex customer service organizations within constrained financial resources. The ability to foster a shared vision is essential. Municipal planning and grant writing and administration skills are important to this position, as is the ability to develop and maintain professional relations with key state and regional agencies.
- A balanced communicator with a proven track record of informing the elected leadership of critical policy and

service initiatives. The new Town Administrator must be capable of keeping all officials comprehensively informed, while staying detached from the political process and ensuring that staff maintains a similar detachment.

- A mature, experienced manager with an understanding of how to lead a small, complex community. Experience hiring, motivating and disciplining employees and assuring accountability is essential. The successful candidate but must have a well-honed understanding of local political processes and experience presenting articles at Town Meeting.
- He or she must be experienced in working effectively in a political environment providing 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 deliver services.
- A practical consensus builder, but willing to make decisions.
- Someone who is creative and willing to advocate for issues that improve the community. This is not a caretaker position.
- Able to demonstrate sustained leadership in a comparable organization, preferably in a municipality or similar governmental direct service organization. The ideal candidate will have a bachelor's degree and five years of experience in local government administration. A Master's degree is desired. Experience as a seasoned Assistant Manager, Finance Director or similar position in a complex environment will be considered, as will experience as an organizational leader in a municipal/public context if combined with a detailed knowledge of municipal finance. A record of professional development and training is important.

Salary

Direct compensation is anticipated to be in the \$80,000 to \$100,000 range, DOQ, plus benefits. Residency is not required.

How to Apply

Deadline is April 27, 2015. 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. Kindly use PDF format. The subject line of the email **must contain** the candidate's LAST NAME and the words Princeton TA.

Should you have any questions regarding this opportunity, or a recommendation of a colleague, please contact: Dick Kobayashi, Senior Associate 617-489-8812, or Mary Aicardi 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