

Town of North Brookfield



REPORT BY
THE TOWN GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEE

Presented to

The North Brookfield Board of Selectmen

Prepared by

Chair Michael Cloutier
David Brown
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April 1, 2008



MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 1, 2008
TO: The North Brookfield Board of Selectmen
FROM: The Town Government Study Committee
SUBJECT: Recommendations

The following report is respectfully submitted by the Town Government Study Committee consisting of the following members: Chair Michael Cloutier, David Brown, and Raeann Caron. Within the report contains the recommendations you have requested we provide your board by April 1, 2008.

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The North Brookfield Town Government Study Committee was asked to research and make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen, concerning the applicability of changing the local government structure.

The committee was established at the request of the Board of Selectmen, pursuant to recommendations received in two previous reports submitted to the town; the 2007 Community Master Plan and the Financial Management Review, (which was completed in October 2007 by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue).

The primary focus of this committee was to determine if the Town of North Brookfield would benefit from employing a Town Administrator/Manager. In addition, the committee was asked to research the following questions:

- How would the town implement such a change in town government?
- Identify the qualifications, duties, and responsibilities of Town Administrator/Manager.
- Complete a salary comparison with comparable communities in Massachusetts.



...government of the people, by the people, for the people...

BACKGROUND

The current form of town governance, which includes open town meetings and selectmen, was implemented in the colonial days throughout New England. This form of government involves the popular election of a set number of community volunteers to a select board depending upon the town's charter of incorporation or bylaws. In colonial days, these volunteers were men who were typically self-employed and whose work was done within the borders of the township. Their responsibilities included the day-to-day management of all aspects of *colonial* town governance. The townships of those days were close-knit communities of people who were truly neighbors. It was not uncommon for whole townships to attend Sunday worship service together and socialize on many occasions. Those were the "good ole days" where everyone knew your name and neighbor cared about neighbor.

There was less interference of state or federal government. Local town government was simpler then too. The outhouse served for the sewer department, a well for the water department. When a house caught fire, the local neighbors would band together to fight it with buckets of water from the well and if it burned to the ground, the

neighbors worked together to rebuild it. There was little need for a police department as lawlessness was typically unheard of. The school system was typically a single room building with a single teacher for all the children. In those days, governance by selectmen and open-town meeting was appropriate with everyone living and working so closely. Everyone worked together for the common good of the town and its people.

Today, the concerns of town governance are much larger and more complicated. The demands on the selectmen are no longer narrowly focused on the colonial concerns within the village, but now involve both state and federal accountability. There are numerous departments, committees and personnel to oversee (see appendix A). The local taxes collected from the citizenry are insufficient to cover the costs of running the town and state and federal financial aid is shrinking while state and federal mandates are increasing. There are mounting pressures to provide services to the senior population due to an aging demographic, while support for the education of our young is becoming more demanding with changing state formulas to calculate minimum net school spending.

With all of these changes and complications in town governance, we find a changed community in a modern day that is trying to maintain a colonial style of government that is no longer able to meet the needs of the community. The people of North Brookfield are predominately employed outside of the town limits with their own increasing demands of career and family. Many people wish for the good ole days, but they are long gone. There is little free time left to devote to aiding or serving your neighbors, even for the selectmen and other municipal volunteers, time is a shrinking commodity.

It is because of these changed times and the continuously increasing demands on local town government that a change in the form of government in North Brookfield is needed. A full-time professional employed in a central management position to run the day-to-day business of the town as directed by the selectmen would be most appropriate.

The proud town of North Brookfield has found it difficult, since its early successes, to evolve with the ever-increasing demands placed upon it. Currently, North Brookfield is battling a state of decline that is most visually apparent with a historic town house laying vacant on Main Street having been condemned in 2002. Many of the town offices are housed in rented storefronts or in trailers situated in the parking lot of the senior center. The police station was moved to a non-ADA compliant building across the street from the town house that formerly housed the local pub. A grant sought two years ago to restore the townhouse was declined because of improper planning on the town's part to provide a blueprint as part of the application requirement.

All of the towns and cities across Massachusetts have been suffering increased costs that cannot be covered by their current revenues. However, the budgeting issues facing North Brookfield do not just include a lack of funds; they also involve a lack of time and knowledge required for proper budget planning. There is a lack of inside knowledge by any one individual or board of each department's workings. In addition, there is a lack of communication amongst and between the various departments which makes it nearly impossible to properly plan the needs of the town overall.

**“DATA SHOW[S] STRONG GROWTH OF MANAGEMENT
AND ADMINSTRATIVE POSITIONS” (Morse)**

In a report published in the Municipal Advocate last year, data has shown that all across Massachusetts there is “strong growth of management and administrative positions” (Morse). The trend, as outlined in the report, is happening all across the commonwealth because of changing times. The first “professional manager” or town administrator was employed in Massachusetts in 1915 in Norwood. By 1965, fifteen towns employed either a town manager or a town administrator. By 2005, out of 300 towns, 54 employed town managers and another 138 employed town administrators. In total, more than half of the towns in Massachusetts or 64% of towns now employ a professional in town administration. Please see Figure 1, which shows this trend in more detail.

Figure 1

Professional Administrators in Massachusetts, 1965 to 2005						
	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005	Percent Change
Town Manager	14	23	24	44	54	
Town Administrator	1		24	78	138	
Executive Secretary	17		67	61	22	
Other titles	2	70	35	7	45	
	34	93	150	190	259	662%
Number of towns	312	309	307	304	300	-3.8%

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Master Plan 2007 - North Brookfield, Massachusetts

Prepared by the North Brookfield Master Plan Committee - October 2007

Town Government – Goal

North Brookfield’s town government must be professionally managed, emphasize customer service, provide a coordinated delivery of municipal services, be fiscally responsible, accessible to all citizens, foster citizen participation, and be proactive instead of reactive.

“The Town must investigate its options for professional management, whether it is through the form of a Town Administrator, Town Services Coordinator, or a Town Manager.”

Massachusetts Department of Revenue – Division of Local Services

Town of North Brookfield Financial Management Review – October 2007

Recommendation 1: Create Town Administrator Position

We recommend hiring a town administrator to coordinate financial management and long-term planning efforts. We envision the town administrator taking an immediate and lead role in providing the type of financial coordination and analysis needed by town policy-makers to make informed decisions. In the context of the town’s limited revenues and ongoing cost pressures, there is a heightened need to operate in a forward looking and cost-effective manner.

Among assigned responsibilities, the town administrator should:

- Coordinate day-to-day financial operations, such as setting the tax rate, preparation and submission of periodic state reports, and other responsibilities that cut across more than one department. The administrator will also ensure that the town addresses the findings contained in its annual audit.
- Prepare the initial draft of the annual budget by working with department heads to insure that budget priorities are met and that the budget is balanced. He will also review monthly financial reports and monitor the status of the budget throughout the year.
- Develop a multi-year revenue and expenditure forecast to assist the town in analyzing the affordability of the numerous proposed capital projects, to assess the impact of additional debt service, and evaluate other long-term obligations.
- Prepare financial and cost/benefit analyses to examine potential cost saving measures such as providing health insurance through the state's Group Insurance Commission and consolidating school and municipal financial and IT functions.
- Develop formal financial policies on target levels and allowable uses of reserves, parameters for the issuance of debt and funding guidelines for capital needs.

Additional responsibilities for the town administrator will include an assessment of the town's technology status and the development of uniform personnel policies. An evaluation of IT will involve an inventory of hardware and software and a survey of department staff in order to develop a prioritized list of necessary improvements. The development of uniform personnel policies will ensure that rules governing employee conduct are adequate and that policies relating to vacation and sick accrual are equitable.

The administrator will further ensure that the town maintains its personal employee information in a secure, central location.

To assist the town administrator in these responsibilities, we recommend that the town form a financial management team. The town administrator, serving as chairperson, will convene meetings on a monthly basis that will include the accountant, treasurer, collector, chief assessor, and superintendent of schools.

The meetings will serve as a forum to coordinate critical financial functions and discuss progress on other finance-related deadlines. The team will identify critical junctures and offer strategies to deal with anticipated areas of concern to the town's policymaking bodies. This will include proposals on debt limits, reserve fund levels, revenue and expense estimates, and annual budget guidelines. The team will also aid in the town administrator's review of the functionality of the town's IT systems, and in the creation of uniform personnel policies.

Once the town administrator has served in the new role for a period of three to five years, officials may want to reevaluate the position to determine the appropriateness of transferring additional authority to it. Such responsibilities may include the power to appoint, supervise, and evaluate various employees.

North Brookfield Town Government Study Committee

We recommend that the town codify the responsibilities of the town administrator, and the role of the financial management team, in town bylaws. The adoption of a bylaw outlining the role of town administrator and the financial management team indicates a firm commitment to centralized management. Codifying

the town administrator's responsibilities ensures that these changes become a more lasting improvement to the town's governance, one that is likely to endure as elected and appointed officials change. At some future date, it may be practical to evaluate the appropriateness of adopting a town charter. Additional guidance on adopting a town charter is at: [City and Town Charters - Adoption, Revision, and Amendments](#).

The North Brookfield Town Government Study Committee recommends the following Bylaw change to add a section titled "North Brookfield Town Administrator"

Bylaw Recommendation

NORTH BROOKFIELD TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

Appointment, Qualifications, Term of Office.

The town administrator shall be appointed by the Board of Selectmen for a term of three years. A committee consisting of the Town Moderator, one finance committee member, selected by the finance committee, the Superintendent of Schools, one selectmen, and one citizen appointed by the Board of selectmen, shall select and present no less than three qualified applicants to the Board of Selectmen.

Qualifications should include a minimum of a bachelor's degree in public administration, business administration, five years of full time, compensated service in a managerial capacity in a public or private business administration position, have successful experience writing grants and must be capable of performing all duties as prescribed by the Board of Selectmen. The Town Administrator need not be a resident of the town of North Brookfield or of the commonwealth but must be a United States citizen. The Town Administrator must not have held any elected position within the town government for at least twelve months prior to appointment.

The Town Administrator shall not hold any public office nor engage in any other business or occupation during his/her tenure except for part-time consultative or teaching duties, directly related to the profession of municipal management and with the specific consent of the Board of Selectmen.

The Town administrator may be appointed to successive terms of office.

Powers and Duties.

The powers and duties of the town administrator shall include but are not limited to the following:

Attendance at all meetings of the board of selectmen, unless excused by the administrator's request and Selectmen's approval, having a voice at the meetings but no vote.

Keep the Board of Selectmen fully informed of the needs of the town and to recommend to the Board of Selectmen measures for adoption or items requiring expedient action taken.

To be responsible for coordination of operational and strategic plans for the town set forth by the Board of Selectmen, or as a result of a vote at annual or special town meetings.

The town Administrator shall have access to all town books, papers and records for information necessary for the proper performance of his/her duties, and shall have the authority to require personnel responsible for said records to meet with the town administrator as needed.

The town administrator shall be responsible for coordinating all employees, activities and departments placed under the control of the Board of Selectmen by general law or by-laws.

Shall keep the Board of Selectmen informed of the availability of outside funding, both public, private and inter-governmental, in the form of grants, gifts, contributions and otherwise and advising the Board of Selectmen how said funds may affect short and long term needs of the town. In this process shall seek out, prepare, coordinate and file applications for state, federal or private grants.

Shall be responsible for procurement of goods and services for all town departments and activities of the town, except food for the schools, school books and other instructional material and equipment, unless specifically requested by the School Committee.

Shall coordinate all activities, communication and cooperation between all town departments under the authority of the Board of Selectmen and town administrator.

Will assure the complete and full records of the financial and administrative activity of the town are maintained and to supply reports to the Board of Selectmen as may be required. A full report shall be made no less than annually and made available to the public.

Shall assure that a full and complete inventory of all town property both real and personal, is kept, including all property under the jurisdiction of the School Committee

Shall be responsible for all rental, use, maintenance and repair of all town facilities except those under the authority of the School Committee, Sewer Commission or Water Commission, unless requested by those agencies.

Shall create/administer the town's personnel system, personnel evaluation policies and practices, enforcement of labor contracts, labor relations, collective bargaining and state and federal equal employment opportunities law compliance, except for school department agreements, entered into by the town.

Shall be the Right To Know officer, keeping and maintaining all material safety data sheets for materials and products used by any town employee, by any town department, including the school department, being kept in a location having full and immediate access by any and all employees.

The town administrator shall have the authority to sign payroll and accounts payable warrants concerning the everyday operation of the town.

The town administrator shall prepare and present to the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee a written proposed town budget, including that of the school department, for the ensuing fiscal year by a date mutually agreed upon. The proposed budget shall detail all expenditures and revenue of all agencies, departments, and committees, including all free cash and special account balances. The town administrator shall also advise the Board of Selectmen the estimated amount required to be levied and raised by taxation to defray all expenses and liabilities of the town together with an estimate of the tax rate necessary to raise said amount.

All boards, departments, committees, commissions and officers of the town shall annually, at the request of the town administrator submit to him/her in writing and/or in electronic format, a detailed estimate of expenditures for the ensuing fiscal year, along with details of any existing free cash or special use accounts.

The town administrator shall execute any and all special orders given to him/her by the Board of Selectmen.

Removal.

The Board of Selectmen, by an affirmative vote of at least two-thirds majority, may initiate the removal of the town administrator by adopting a resolution to that effect. The resolution shall state the reason for removal and may not be adopted within 90 days following any town election. Said resolution may only be adopted at a regularly scheduled public meeting and in open session.

The adoption of this resolution shall serve to suspend the town administrator for 45 days during which time his/her salary shall be paid. A copy of the resolution shall be forthwith delivered in hand or by registered mail, to the administrator's last known address.

Upon receipt of the resolution and within 5 days the administrator may request a public hearing with the Board of Selectmen, who shall schedule a public hearing within 15 days and at a time and place announced and advertised no less than 7 days prior.

The town moderator shall preside at any such hearing, where the reason(s) for removal shall be read aloud.

The administrator shall have the right to address the meeting personally or through counsel.

The town administrator and the selectmen shall have the authority to compel testimony and subpoena town records for purposes of said hearing.

Final removal shall become effective by an affirmative two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Selectmen, at a public meeting held in open session at a time and place announced and advertised no less than 7 days prior to the meeting and held no sooner than 15 days after the adoption of the resolution.

The salary of the town administrator shall be paid for a period of 45 days after the vote effecting removal.

The town administrator shall provide the Board of Selectmen at least 90 days notice of intent to resign. The Board of Selectmen may shorten or waive this requirement.

ALL OPTIONS FOR CHANGING GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

In Massachusetts, there are three methods or routes to change government structure as dictated by state law. Each of these methods can be employed to change the structure of government to one that includes a town administrator position.

The first route that may be taken is known as using “Bylaws and Permissive Legislation.” This is the simplest method of affecting change to create the position of town administrator and is recommended by the North Brookfield Town Government Study Committee. In order to change the bylaws, a simple town vote at town meeting is required.

The second route that may be taken is known as “Home Rule Charter.” This method is often used when the town’s charter needs to be reviewed in greater detail in how it defines town governance. Appointed positions can be changed to elected positions and vice versa using a home rule charter. In order to affect this method, a charter commission needs to be created. A charter commission can review budget preparation responsibilities and the organization of departments. The procedures for creating the charter commission include a “petition of fifteen percent of the registered voters, [who] may vote to elect a nine-member charter commission to prepare a charter” (Contreas). The "home rule charter" method allows the charter commission between ten and eighteen months to construct a new charter and deliver a final report to the townspeople. The proposed charter then requires a majority vote in a municipal election to pass.

The third and last method that can be taken to create the position of a town administrator is through a petition for special legislation. The procedure requires a

majority vote at town meeting to propose the special municipal legislation. A petition is created, and if passed, is sent to the legislature where it is addressed in a hearing. Once it passes a hearing, it is then sent to the house and senate for approval and then signed by the governor of Massachusetts. This process typically takes about one year.

BUDGET

A budget to hire a new town administrator is straightforward. It requires the hiring of an additional employee who would receive an annual salary and benefits awarded a full-time employee of the town of North Brookfield.

Salaries for town administrators were researched through use of The Massachusetts Municipal Personnel Association’s Fiscal 2008 Benchmark Titles Salary Survey.

Figure 2

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER SALARY COMPARISON
Massachusetts Communities with a population between 2,501 – 5,150

Town	Operating Budget	Population	Chief Administrative Officer*
Ashby	\$4,834,001	3,265	\$52,195
Boylston	\$11,596,156	4,200	\$68,923
Hadley	\$13,496,892	5,059	\$64,647
Hubbardston*	\$6,471,235	4,598	\$52,733
Millville*	\$4,833,969	3,200	\$44,000
North Brookfield	\$4,815,102	4,892	0
Paxton*	\$9,419,852	4,740	\$65,280
Wenham	\$13,383,242	5,129	\$90,820
West Brookfield	\$7,568,495	3,631	\$50,184
Average:	\$8,490,993.78	4,301	\$50,192

Source: Massachusetts Municipal Personnel Association, Benchmark Titles Salary Survey, Fiscal 2008 Edition, Published January 2008

* Calculated at the median reported annual pay.

FINAL CONCLUSION

North Brookfield is at a crossroad. Funding is an ever-increasing issue and what is being recommended carries a cost in a new salary and benefits for another employee. However, what this new cost will purchase will go far beyond just one department. This new employee will bring to North Brookfield an education in public administration; an education of study in the fields of politics and policy, strategic planning and goal setting, management, budgeting, negotiating, and administrative law. This town administrator would be employed full-time and be ever accessible to the selectmen, town employees, and the citizens of North Brookfield. This central management position would be the hub that ties all of the spokes together in the wheel of North Brookfield. Through proper municipal management, the town administrator will see that the town rolls smoothly into the future.

APPENDIX A –
List Of Town Departments, Employees and Positions both Elected and Appointed

Administrative Assistant	Outreach Coordinator
Animal Control Officer	Parking Fines Clerk
Animal Inspector	Planning Board Alternate
Assistant Animal Control Officer	Plumbing Inspector
Bell Ringer	Assistant Plumbing Inspector
Assistant Bell Ringer	Police Chief
Ballot Clerks and Inspectors	Police Facility Committee
Board of Assessors	Police Sergeants
Board of Health	Police Patrolmen
Board of Registrars	Part-time Police Officers
Board of Selectmen	Plumbing and Gas Inspector
Building Inspector	Public Weigher
Local Inspector	Quaboag Valley Economic Development
Caretaker of Town Clock	Right To Know Coordinator
Cemetery Commission	Safety Committee
Constable	Safety Inspector
Conservation Commission	School Building Committee
Council on Aging	School Committee
E911 Coordinator	SCM Elderbus Board of Directors
Election Workers	Sewer Commissioners
Emergency Management Agency	Sewer Department
Emergency Management Director	Superintendent Of Streets & Highways, Sidewalks, Bridges
Fence Viewers	Tally Clerks and Inspectors
Finance Committee	Technology Committee
Fire Department	Town Accountant
Gas Inspector	Town Beach Committee
Assistant Gas Inspector	Town Clerk
Gypsy Moth & Elm Tree Superintendent	Town Collector

APPENDIX A – continued...

List Of Town Departments, Employees and Positions both Elected and Appointed

Hazardous Waste Coordinator	Town Counsel
Harbormaster	Town Forest Committee
Haston Free Public Library	Town Hall Agent
Historian	Town History Committee
Historical Commission	Town House Building Committee
Insurance Advisory Committee	Town Treasurer
Insurance Commissioner	Veterans' Agent
Janitor of Town Hall	Water Department
Library Building Committee	Wiring Inspector
Local Cultural Council	Assistant Wire Inspector
Local Emergency Planning	Zoning Board of Appeals
Local Public Access Committee	Zoning Enforcement Officer
Lumber Surveyors	
Milk Inspector	

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