

NORTHFIELD TOWN GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

October 2013



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Executive Summary

Northfield is at a crossroads. Residents can feel the winds of change coming from within and from the outside. Northfield has decisions to make as a community. Will the 200-year-old structure of the Town government be able to cope effectively with the challenges? Will we be able to maintain our infrastructure, educate our children, develop economic opportunities, **and** keep our small town character and modest tax rates?

Those paying even cursory attention have seen symptoms of the structural problems the most recent challenges have exposed: six town administrators in four years, four police chiefs in five years, public disappointment with Selectboard dysfunction, lack of communication with NMH and potential campus occupants, and the citizen petition that created this committee. Northfield has been in the media for the wrong reasons. At the same time, we heard continually in our research that municipal management has become so complex that leaving the job to amateurs is both an enormous burden on those people and ineffective for the community.

We are recommending a reorganization of Northfield's town government around the principle of placing a trained, experienced professional at the center of Town business. That position is the **Town Administrator**. In addition, we are recommending that the **Town Clerk, Tax Collector, Treasurer, and Assessor's Clerk** be appointed by the Selectboard. We have developed an organizational chart for Town government and a job description for the Town Administrator position that details the specifics of this reorganization.

We recommend that the **Selectboard** remain a 3-member body, but that this topic be considered again in 2016, three years from now.

Massachusetts law ensures that the Selectboard remains the ultimate executive overseeing Town government. Our recommendations simply put a professional in place to carry out the day-to-day tasks of implementing the policies set forth by the Selectboard. Many have made the analogy that this arrangement is similar to a business with a board of directors dictating strategy and a CEO implementing the board's directives. We agree.

Now is the time for these changes precisely because of the challenges and opportunities in front of us. We are currently in the midst of developing a Master Plan for the next 20 years. We have the opportunity to foster a mutually beneficial relationship with the next tenants of the former NMH campus. We can position ourselves for increased economic development. Town government will need to address all of these things with a long-term view.

The charge of this committee was to examine the foundational questions of governing ourselves at the local level. We were to make recommendations on the mechanics of **how** we manage operations and make decisions in our Town. That is one of the most important decisions we can make for our collective future. We want to see the Town, and its citizens, succeed in every way possible.

Respectfully submitted,



Barry Bordner, *Chair*



David Chula



Sam Richardson



Christian Guertin, *Clerk*



Nathaniel Hussey



Homer Stavely



Steve Stoia

1. Background

A year ago, on October 4th, Barbara and Sam Richardson convened a public meeting to discuss Northfield's Town government structure. At that time, it was expected that Grand Canyon University would soon be moving to the Northfield Campus, and they had announced that they would begin to prepare for a student body of 5000. They were surprised and pleased to have a turnout of 35 interested residents who were also concerned about the ability of our town government to respond to the change and possible upheaval that could result as new campus occupants became an integral part of Northfield. The unofficial group – the Town Government Working Group – did research and met every other week throughout the fall and into the winter.

Earlier, in 2010, the Campus Collaborative Committee, which had been appointed by the Selectboard to welcome C.S. Lewis College, sent three of its members to visit Williamstown, MA, the home of Williams College, and Henniker, NH, the home of New England College. They were studying the critical relationship between town and the college. Both towns have a Town Manager form of local government. In each case the Town Manager works directly with the college to coordinate interactions between the town and the college. The Henniker Town Manager came to Northfield and described his experiences working with New England College at an evening public meeting in the Town Hall. His talk was well received and some people began to consider the idea of Northfield having a Town Manager.

During late 2012 and the first weeks of 2013 the unofficial Working Group studied other towns similar to Northfield to see how they differ from Northfield in the way they manage their town. The results indicated four areas that suggested further study:

1. In many towns there are five members of the Selectboard instead of three.
2. In most towns the Executive Secretary, Town Administrator, or Town Manager is empowered to implement policies set by the Selectboard – to a far greater extent than what is the case in Northfield.
3. Most towns have collected their by-laws, procedures, and policies into a set of documents which define how the town conducts its business. Aside from the Zoning By-laws, Northfield does not have an approved set of by-laws. Although a Massachusetts Department of Revenue audit recommended in 2011 that the town begin a By-Law Study Group, no progress had yet been made.
4. Financial management of a town's budgetary affairs requires professional attention, not only to achieve fiscal efficiency, but also to avoid expensive litigation.

It seemed clear that Northfield was at an important crossroads. Any day now, it could wake up and read that it had a new neighbor on the Northfield Campus. For the town it is a time of great opportunity and great challenge.

With this in mind, the Working Group sought a response from their fellow citizens. A Special Town Meeting on February 25th voted to form an official Town Governance Study Committee to address two questions,

- What is the optimal size for the Northfield Selectboard?
- What level of professional support will best allow the Selectboard to carry out its duties?

The Committee would then report back to the town with any recommendations it thought appropriate.

In the report that follows the Town Governance Study Committee submits its recommendations and urges the people of Northfield to implement them expeditiously.

2. Research

The topic of Town governance is a large field of information. This Governance Committee was able to narrow its sights by using an array of sources available. With aid the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA), officials of the Town of Northfield as well as those of other towns, knowledgeable people in the field of town governance and the people of Northfield. Our committee was able to compile a wealth of information from which it has been able to make informed decisions regarding potential steps to be taken by the Town of Northfield in improving its Government.

Information provided on the MMA website (mma.org) gave the committee a solid base from which to start researching. The committee first familiarized itself with Massachusetts laws regarding town governance. As set out by the MMA, the town governance organizational chart was reviewed by the committee and compared with that of Northfield. Compliance issues were thoroughly analyzed regarding open meeting and public record laws. The resources of the MMA allowed the committee to better understand the larger framework in which Northfield is part.

As individuals, Northfield town officials shed much light on the professional interaction taking place in the town. Officials were interviewed and posed with questions regarding job descriptions, collaboration/communication among town staff, departments and committees/boards, and the level of support given among them.

The committee's visits to eight other towns invited additional perspectives to the issues surrounding Northfield governance. The issues prevalent in these towns were much the same as those in Northfield. The major difference is that these other towns have taken action to improve their situations. The committee's selection of towns was based on similarities to Northfield regarding size, population, fiscal budget, local economy, ratio of residential to commercial property etc. Interview questions posed to town officials focused on empowerment of the Town Administrator, interaction with the Selectboard, personnel policy, and communication among offices, departments, and committees/boards.

In presenting two forums the committee was able to engage knowledgeable people in the field of town governance while simultaneously allowing the general public the opportunity to actively be involved in the researching process. The forums were organized with panel discussions focusing on small town government. Taking part in the discussion were political science professors, consultants, other Towns' Governance Study Committee members, and a Town Administrator. These panelists shared their experiences working in town governments, punctuating their realities, challenges, and possibilities in the present and future.

This committee's research began with an inward look at the structure and organization of Northfield's town government to ensure a complete understanding of Northfield's current situation. The scope was broadened through interaction with parties involved with other town governments. From there, we were able to put Northfield into a comparative context. The committee evaluated the two perspectives accompanied by the overall framework of Massachusetts General Law and produced a clear, concise proposal for the improvement of Northfield town government.

3. Discussion & Debate

Based on the vote of a Town Meeting, the Town Governance Study Committee was appointed in the following manner:

- Two members by the Northfield Selectboard
- Two members by the unofficial Working Group
- One member by the Town Moderator
- Two additional members selected by the above group.

The resulting committee of seven was diverse in profession, age, and experience. There were several teachers, two entrepreneurs, some who worked in Northfield and some who worked in other towns, states, and nations. One is the parent of young children, some have not-so-young grandchildren. From their background and work experience, members of the committee were familiar with the conduct of research and the analysis of research results.

Balancing this diversity was a commitment to the committee's task. From the start we agreed to keep an open mind about the current state of Northfield's government and about the alternative shapes it could take in the future. We have held 25 public meetings and presented two open forums in six months. In the early meetings, committee members took turns presenting the findings from their independent investigations. Some searched the Internet for information while others interviewed town officials where they worked and with whom they were familiar. One member systematically interviewed Northfield's Town Hall workers and town officials. One member set up an Internet document storage facility that could be shared by all members. The Chair also assigned responsibilities when appropriate to increase our effectiveness. We learned to appreciate strengths and compensate for weaknesses. We learned how a well-timed joke could advance a meeting's agenda. We worked together.

After an alert citizen brought to our attention during our first scheduled meeting that it had not been properly posted under the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law (OML), we learned to follow and respect the OML rules. We came to appreciate how official bodies are bound by these rules and thus made appropriately responsive to the public.

As the weeks and months of committee work proceeded, we fell into a pattern of unanimous decisions after active discussion of pros and cons. Additionally, we followed a share-and-share-alike policy with regard to tasks. We are cheerful collaborators who have not dropped our personal independence nor our commitment to the Town.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

4.1. Town Administrator

All of our research overwhelmingly indicates that an empowered Town Administrator should be put in place in the town of Northfield, Massachusetts. This has been the recommendation received by all outside parties consulted. Through interviews with other town's personnel, government officials and the knowledgeable panelists of our two forums, the opinion is conclusive and unanimous.

One word of caution that does occasionally pop up is the potential for culture shock as a town transitions into this empowered Town Administrator model. This is our one concern due to our long history of decentralized governmental structure in Northfield. For this transition to be successful, all parties need to approach the change with a positive, professional attitude. However, this is a change our town government needs to make to function in a compliant manner and to properly serve the people of Northfield.

There are many reasons for changing to an empowered Town Administrator:

- Under the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Ch. 39, Sect. 23B (OML), a selectboard can only conduct town business during a properly posted public meeting. This requires that a selectboard must publicly post an announcement of the meeting 48 hours in advance and be able to establish a quorum. In many cases, selectboard members work during the day and/or have limited numbers of nights of the week during which they can attend meetings. The OML, compounded with various personal conflicts, makes it virtually impossible for a selectboard to ever run the day-to-day business of a town. An empowered Town Administrator is the eyes and ears of a selectboard and is on the scene to manage overall operations and the day-to-day business of a town.
- Members of a selectboard are elected by popular vote by the people of a town. This process does not necessarily mean that an elected official has the knowledge to keep a town in compliance nor the necessary professional skills to manage a town. Empowered, highly skilled Town Administrators have the knowledge to keep a town in compliance with local, state, and federal regulations. Town Administrators also have the knowledge and skills to work under the direction of a selectboard to manage any of the operations of the town for best efficiency in all areas.
- One of our key principles is that any employee who receives a salary from the Town should be under the supervision of a professional Town Administrator. This shall not include members of elected or appointed boards who may receive a stipend for their service. Please see recommended organizational chart in 4.2 for more information.
- Through our research we have determined that a professional Town Administrator makes the job of a volunteer/elected member of a selectboard less complicated. A Town Administrator will provide the members of a selectboard with a constant flow of information required to make final decisions on policy and general operations. This will attract more people to run for the selectboard, giving the townspeople a more diverse pool of candidates to choose from.
- Professional management of administrative and departmental staff will greatly improve the operating efficiency of a town. An empowered Town Administrator would provide this help and management. Our research indicates that our town's staff is too decentralized and in most cases unsupervised and "lost" on a daily basis. A member of the Northfield

administrative staff stated, without malice, “I report to no one,” during one of our interviews. In addition to conducting regular staff meetings to manage and coordinate all of a town’s departments, a Town Administrator will assist the professional staff in many ways. Gone are the days when an administrative official in a town can simply be put in place by popular vote and be effective. There is a formidable number of professional development certifications that a town’s staff needs to have to be in compliance. An experienced Town Administrator will have the knowledge and skills to work with the staff in this area.

- An empowered Town Administrator will also work with all boards, committees, and commissions of a town on a variety of tasks. A Town Administrator will assist any group in the town with compliance, researching, and organization of grants and general help as the need requires.
- As the representative of a selectboard, a Town Administrator serves as the point of contact for a town. Local, state, and federal agencies, and others that operate during the daytime hours, need someone to conduct business with on behalf of a town. In addition, a Town Administrator is the person responsible for working with potential economic development opportunities that may want to locate in a town.
- Our committee feels strongly that transitioning to a qualified, empowered Town Administrator will benefit a town currently run on a decentralized basis. The savings achieved by a skilled individual managing purchasing, contract negotiation and monitoring, grant research and procurement under the direction of a selectboard will be significant. The increase in savings will more than compensate for the somewhat higher salary difference for an empowered Town Administrator.
- Finally, a Town Administrator serves as the “go-to person” for any of the town’s citizens to turn to for help with any government-related matters. This is one of the most important things a general citizen of a town gains from having an empowered Town Administrator.

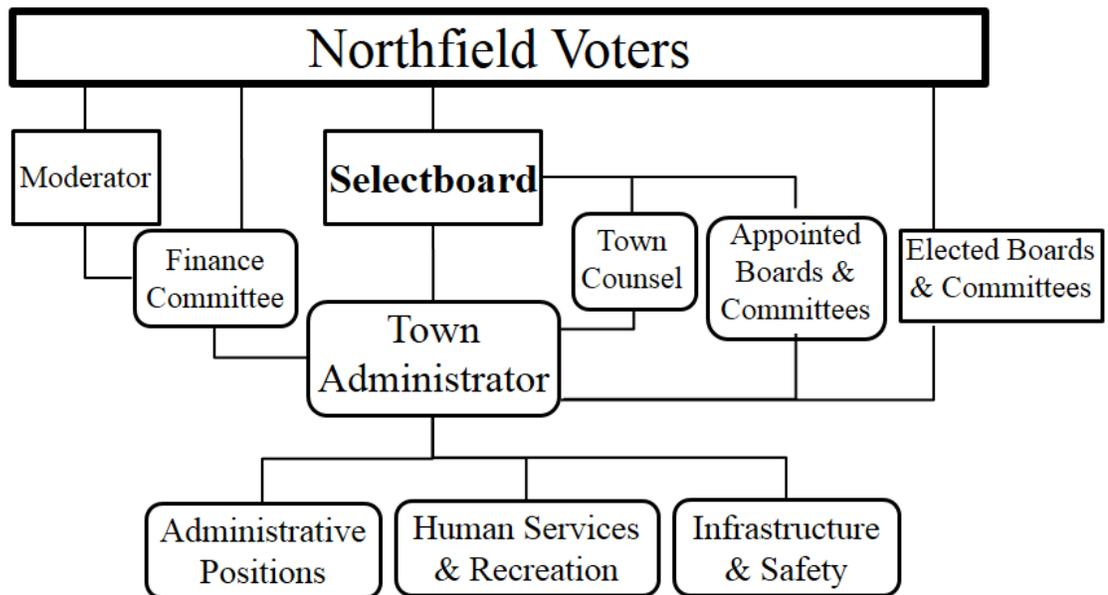
For more complete information please see Appendix A: Town Administrator Job Description.

4.2. Northfield Government Organizational Chart

Our recommended organizational chart is the result of an in-depth analysis of the way a town and its boards, committees, commissions, officials, and employees need to communicate. In addition to communications, the management and assistance provided to town employees by an empowered Town Administrator was a strong consideration. Below is our recommendation of how our town can be structured to best serve citizens in an organized and efficient manner.

As a transitional activity, our committee recommends that the Selectboard, department heads, and staff meet with the new Town Administrator to be oriented to the implications of the new organizational chart.

Please see Appendix A: Town Administrator Job Description for a better understanding of this chart.



4.3. Appointed Positions

This committee is recommending to convert by Special Act three positions that are currently elected by the voters of Northfield to positions that are appointed by the Selectboard. They are the **Town Clerk, Treasurer, and Tax Collector**. We also recommend that the **Assessor's Clerk** be converted by Special Act from a position that is appointed by the Board of Assessors to a position that is appointed by the Selectboard.

With the overarching principle of placing the Town Administrator at the center of town activity (communication, budgeting, etc.), it was clear to us that some positions needed to be moved under the oversight of the Selectboard via the Town Administrator. We felt that the people in these positions should have their performance reviewed by a professional with expertise in their work area. Anyone receiving a regular salary from the Town should be under the management of the Town Administrator.

We compiled annual election results in Northfield for the past 10 years for insight into how competitive the elections for these positions have been (see Appendix B: Northfield Annual Election History). They show that there has been no competition at all for Town Clerk, Treasurer, and Tax Collector. Northfield voters have had no choice for these positions in the last 10 years. These positions have been effectively self-appointed. In principle, anyone who was unhappy with the performance of these officials could have run for the office themselves, but none did. As a panelist said in our May 23 forum, "*There are only two ways to run for public office: scared or unopposed.*" We agree. Those seeking our votes should be out asking for them. Absent the competitive impetus of contested elections for these four positions, we believe Northfield residents will be best served by having these positions accountable to the representatives of the people: the Selectboard.

A panelist in our September 13th forum found that the total labor force in Northfield is around 1,700 people. Removing the residency requirement vastly expands the pool of potential candidates for these positions to anyone within driving distance, perhaps 100,000 people, thus increasing the likelihood of filling them with qualified individuals in the future. We do, however, enthusiastically encourage qualified Northfield residents among those 1,700 to seek these positions. A qualified resident is a win-win situation.

The Assessor's Clerk is appointed by the Board of Assessors. We recommend that the position become appointed by the principal representatives of the people, the Selectboard, to serve the Board of Assessors because the position is paid a salary and should be within the structure of communication and oversight that the Town Administrator position will have.

Each of these positions requires a special skill set and state certifications. The mere fact of the existence of specific software (accounting, GIS, etc.) and outside training seminars for these positions attests to the need for qualified people to be in the positions. The Town Clerk is the principal custodian of the integrity of our local elections and vital records, the Tax Collector and Treasurer are the stewards of our tax dollars, and the Assessor's Clerk is the public interface of the body responsible for our property taxes. If any of these municipal functions were to break down or have a period of ineffectiveness, residents would face inconvenience at best and legal or financial consequences at worst. As municipal management becomes more complex, we expect this will only become more acute in the future.

We also note that many towns have converted the two positions of Tax Collector and Treasurer to a single position. Northfield currently has these as two half-time elected positions and both have been held by a single person for more than the ten years shown in Appendix B: Northfield Annual Election History. We decided not to recommend combining these two positions at this

time in the interest of implementing change slowly and because, as a practical matter, they already are combined.

On the topic of the Tax Collector and Treasurer, we also want to highlight one finding of the *Financial Management Review* completed in 2011 by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue. It reads, in part, “*The fact that the town has not, in 18 years, had an outside audit of its year-end financial statements is astonishing.*” Soon after this DOR report was issued the town did have an outside audit, and our tax dollars were found to be well taken care of. We interpret this as a positive confirmation that Northfield has well-meaning **and** competent people in these positions today.

We believe our recommendations will help to ensure that that remains true for all of these positions in the future.

4.4. By-laws

Our research indicated that Northfield's lack of general government by-laws puts the town at a huge disadvantage. Most towns of Northfield's size or larger have a set of by-laws that are part of a policy handbook. In larger towns, protocols for handling problem situations which arise are compiled into a substantial handbook of approved standard operating procedures. Aside from the Zoning By-laws (approved by the Attorney General in 2008), Northfield has almost nothing written in the way of legal rules and processes. More than two and a half years ago, in February 2011, the Division of Local Services of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue submitted their *Financial Management Review* to the Selectboard. In the 30+ page document they note that, "*With the exception of a reference to a two-thirds town meeting vote, lacking are by-laws relative to general government. Nor is there in the town hall of Northfield a compilation of Special Acts, or local acceptance statutes voted by town meeting... we recommend that the town start a process to formulate general government by-laws.*" As of October 2013, no progress has yet been made in this critical area.

Without a handbook, policies for dealing with problem situations are often re-invented, hurriedly on the spot and usually with no knowledge of past practices. A guidebook of approved policies and past practices would be invaluable for newly-elected members of the Selectboard. Without a policy handbook, the perception is that those in the dark are being led by the partially blind.

In Appendix C: Example By-laws, there is a listing of the by-law titles for the towns of Deerfield and Dalton, which could provide a roadmap for the path Northfield should begin to follow.

4.5. Size of Selectboard

As part of its overall mandate to explore new forms of governance for the Town, the Town Governance Study Committee was charged with researching the arguments, pro and con of increasing the number of Selectboard members.

The Town Governance Study Committee is not including increasing the number of Selectboard members from 3 to 5 in this year's recommendations to the Town Meeting. However, we will offer some of our findings here that convinced our committee members that this topic should definitely be addressed by the next Town Governance Study Committee - findings that in some cases supported the appointment of a strong Town Administrator as well. The current Town Governance Study Committee recommends that a reconstituted Governance Study Committee convene in three years to examine the benefits and concerns of the Town Administrator model, and to revisit the exploration of other innovative ideas such as the increase in Selectboard members. We reiterate however that while the size of our Selectboard is too important to ignore, the appointment of an empowered, experienced and skilled Town Administrator is the committee's primary goal at this time.

What the Town Governance Study Committee learned from its months of research was that the issue of selectboard workload was the driving force behind the decisions of many towns to move from a three member selectboard to five. Towns including Dalton, Lee, Holden, Winchester, Sturbridge, Great Barrington, Littleton, Dartmouth, Rutland, Plymouth, and Southampton have gone to a five-member selectboard and a Town Administrator. These towns have explained that the move was spurred by the increasingly sophisticated and complex work of selectboard members. To our knowledge, no Town has returned to a three-member selectboard after changing to five. This fact piqued the committee's curiosity even more. A number of towns are working successfully with a three-member selectboard after hiring an empowered Town Administrator to be in charge of the day-to-day operations of their municipalities (e.g., Sheffield and Lanesboro). Workload and the skills and knowledge needed to tackle that workload were the critical issues for these towns.

Several issues have influenced the decisions of towns on the number of selectboard members: 1) the concept of division of labor, where five members as opposed to three dividing the myriad of complex problems of governing will allow the development of more skills and knowledge in particular areas; 2) the idea that five members allows for better representation of town neighborhoods by employing the model of each member being elected to represent the concerns of a particular area of town; and 3) the premise that while winning alignments around a particular issue may have been built on like personalities in the past, more substantive deliberation will be required to gain a majority with five members.

Critics of the idea of a five-member selectboard point to the fact that it is difficult enough to get citizens involved on committees, never mind recruiting citizens to run for such an all-consuming role as a member of a selectboard. History proves those critics wrong about Northfield Selectboard races in a number of instances (see Appendix B: Northfield Annual Election History). Our hope is that after the installation of an empowered Town Administrator, serving on the Selectboard will be less time consuming, and therefore more attractive to candidates.

While we hope that the citizens of Northfield find our research into Selectboard numbers valuable, the Town Governance Study Committee believes that the next Town Governance Study Committee that convenes needs to review the above arguments for increasing the Selectboard to five members.

Currently in Massachusetts, there are 154 towns with a three-member selectboard, 141 with a five-member selectboard, and one with a seven-member selectboard.

4.6. Form Study Committee Again

A final recommendation, unanimously reached by this committee, is that a new Governance Committee be formed three years from now to evaluate the effects of the above recommendations and to explore any new ideas to help in the smooth management of the Town of Northfield. We also suggest that the new committee should not contain any present members, but consist of two appointees from the **Selectboard**, one from the **Finance Committee**, one from the **Town Moderator**, one from the **Planning Board**, and two volunteers chosen by the five appointed members. Once again, all findings should be reported to the Selectboard and the citizens of Northfield at a Town Meeting.

See Appendix D: 2016 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Article.

Acknowledgements

This committee would like to thank the citizens of Northfield for giving us the opportunity to serve our town.

We must gratefully acknowledge the many thoughtful conversations and emails, helpful suggestions for good resources, and other contributions that enhanced our results. Officials and staff from Northfield and other towns that took time to answer our questions and offer their thoughts on our task are numerous; we've done our best to list them all below.

We also thank those that helped us successfully present our public forums on May 23rd and September 13th. The six panelists that travelled to Northfield from as far away as Swampscott and Watertown provided valuable insight and perspective on our task. Many of their thoughts are highlighted in the text of this report. Northfield residents deserve a nod as well. Both of the forums were well attended and there were many direct and insightful questions. As one of our panelists said during our second forum, *"It's heartening to see this many people here. I've been in much larger towns with many fewer people at a public forum... It shows you recognize the importance of getting the organizational structure of the town right...that's the machinery of government."*

Finally, we thank the crew of BNCTV for their work recording the discussions for posterity.

Denise Baker, *Massachusetts Municipal Management Association*

Rhonda Bombard, *Town Administrator, Sheffield, MA*

Tyler Bourbeau, *Associate Producer, BNCTV*

Barbara Brassor, *Tax Collector / Treasurer, Northfield*

Kris Burns, *Chair, Town Governance Study Committee, Orange, MA*

Jill Collins, *Town Administrator, Hinsdale, NH*

Marilyn Contreas, *Department of Housing and Community Development, MA*

Mary Fitz-Gibbon, *Executive Administrator, Ashfield, MA*

John Gorlech, *Chair, Selectboard, Lanesboro, MA*

Dan Gray, *Selectboard, Northfield*

Jennifer Grybowski, *Administrative Assistant, Brookfield, MA*

Julie Hannum, *Chair, Selectboard, Sheffield, MA*

Tom Howlett, *Charter Committee, Hubbardston, MA*

Thomas Hutcheson, *Town Administrator, Northfield*

Joseph Knox, *Chair, Town Governance Study Committee, Littleton, MA*

Bernard Kubiak, *Town Administrator, Deerfield, MA*

Joseph Markarian, *Director, Technical Assistance Section, Department of Revenue, MA*

Deb Mero, *Town Accountant, Northfield*

Terry Mosher, *Town Coordinator, Shelburne, MA*

Kevin Paicos, *Interim Town Administrator, Northfield*

Tammy Pelletier, *Town Hall Custodian, Northfield*

Jamie Pitney, *Chair, Charter Committee, Hubbardston, MA*

Jed Proujansky, *Selectboard, Northfield*

Donald Robinson, *Professor Emeritus of Government, Smith College*

Tracy Rogers, *Former Administrative Assistant, Northfield*

Anita Shapiro, *Town Administrator, Hubbardston, MA*

Paul Sieloff, *Town Administrator, Lanesboro, MA*

Jack Spanbauer, *Chair, Selectboard, Northfield*

Lois Stearns & Members of the Finance Committee, *Northfield*

Melissa Stevens, *Green Trees Gallery, Northfield*

Bethany Walker, *Assessor's Clerk, Northfield*

Kenneth Walto, *Town Administrator, Dalton, MA*

Michael Ward, *Director of Municipal Services, Collins Center for Public Management, UMass Boston*

Otis Wheeler, *Operations Manager, BNCTV*

Sandra Wood, *Town Secretary, Northfield*

Kathleen Wright, *Chair, Selectboard, Northfield*

Gail Zukowski, *Town Clerk, Northfield*

Appendix A: Town Administrator Job Description

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR
JOB DESCRIPTION**

**SUBMITTED BY:
THE TOWN GOVERNANCE STUDY
COMMITTEE
NORTHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS**

AUGUST 2013

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4.18	Additional Duties	Rev. _____	Date: _____
5.0	Interaction with Selectboard	Rev. _____	Date: _____
6.0	Knowledge, Skills and Abilities required	Rev. _____	Date: _____
7.0	Minimum Qualifications Required	Rev. _____	Date: _____
8.0	Physical Exertion/Environmental Conditions	Rev. _____	Date: _____

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR JOB DESCRIPTION

1.0 JOB SUMMARY

- 1.1** The Town Administrator shall act as the chief administrative officer for the Selectboard under the guidelines of Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 41, Section 23a.
- 1.2** The Town Administrator coordinates and is responsible for the daily administration of the town including supervising daily town office operations, administering the personnel, financial, and purchasing policy, and preparing and implementing operating and capital budgets of the town. This person is expected to serve in a full time capacity, including nights and weekends as necessary.

2.0 SUPERVISION RECEIVED

- 2.1** In carrying out the duties listed below, the Town Administrator shall work under the direction of, and is responsible to, the Selectboard exercising administrative and management responsibilities over town operations and departments under the jurisdiction of the Selectboard. Work is evaluated through an annual review by the Selectboard, as well as periodic conferences, reports, and communications.

3.0 SUPERVISION EXERCISED

- 3.1** The Town Administrator shall coordinate activities of all town department heads and supervise town employees. As the Selectboard's representative, this person has supervisory oversight responsibility of various department heads and staff and must exercise a considerable degree of professional judgment. This person will assist the Selectboard in hiring, evaluating, disciplining, promoting, and dismissing town employees.
- 3.2** The Town Administrator acts as the communications hub for the town making frequent contacts with local, state, and federal officials, Town Counsel when appropriate, local business and community leaders, town employees and

department heads, committees and boards, and with the general public on behalf of the town.

- 3.3** This person shall have access to town-wide confidential information including personnel records, negotiating positions, and bid proposals.

4.0 ESSENTIAL DUTIES

Essential duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

The Town Administrator shall:

4.1 Personnel Management

- 4.1.1** Assist with employee hiring, evaluation, discipline, promotion, and dismissal.
- 4.1.2** Attend to training needs of employees.
- 4.1.3** Motivate and coach staff.
- 4.1.4** Advise the Selectboard on personnel matters.
- 4.1.5** Enforce the personnel policies of the town.
- 4.1.6** Manage town insurance and employee benefit programs.

4.2 Communication

- 4.2.1** Coordinate the daily administrative functions of the office of the Selectboard.
- 4.2.2** Foster communication and serve as liaison between the Selectboard and town department heads, boards, committees, commissions, and town officials.
- 4.2.3** Conduct monthly staff meetings with all department heads and town officials and provide the Selectboard with a summary report of all staff meetings.

4.3 Budget and Finance

- 4.3.1** Assist in preparing the annual town budget in coordination with the Finance Committee and oversee its daily administration.
- 4.3.2** Analyze expenditure trends and report potential problems to the Selectboard.
- 4.3.3** Monitor department budgets to avoid over spending.
- 4.3.4** Complete and submit budget forms and reports as required by local, state, and federal agencies.

4.4 Grants

- 4.4.1** Assure that the town effectively pursues state and federal grants and other sources of non-tax revenue and be responsible for writing and

applying for grants and/or assisting department heads in grant preparation.

- 4.4.2** Monitor current state and federal funding sources for future municipal programs and make recommendations to the Selectboard, town department heads, boards, committees, commissions, and town officials.

4.5 Economic Development

- 4.5.1** Coordinate an economic development strategy in consultation with local, regional, state, and national public and private entities.
- 4.5.2** Negotiate payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs) at the discretion of the Selectboard.
- 4.5.3** Introduce new businesses and economic ventures to appropriate town department heads, boards, committees, commissions, and town officials.

4.6 Purchasing

- 4.6.1** Under the oversight of the Selectboard, establish purchasing policies.
- 4.6.2** Coordinate all department purchases and facilitate sharing of resources for efficiencies of all departments, including reviewing purchase requisitions, drafting specifications, preparing bid documents, and evaluating competitive bids received.
- 4.6.3** Supervise competitive bidding process for contractual services and the purchasing of supplies, materials and equipment. This person may meet and negotiate with potential vendors and contractors, as allowed by law.
- 4.6.4** Monitor the progress of consultants and contractors retained by the town.
- 4.6.5** Monitor all purchasing activity to ensure compliance with annual budgets.

4.7 Scheduling

- 4.7.1** Maintain a detailed annual calendar (electronic format) of the major recurring tasks and deadlines for every department.
- 4.7.2** Monitor and share this calendar regularly with staff and report to the Selectboard on any issues and necessary corrective steps.

4.8 Technology

- 4.8.1** Supervise computer technology, secure document management and backup, and facilitate the continuing development of a coordinated, up to date, technology system for all town departments including ensuring that the town website is up to date and accurate.

4.9 Policy Compliance

4.9.1 Communicate with town staff concerning policies and procedures.

4.9.2 Ensure that all boards, commissions, and committees are aware of policies and procedures.

4.9.3 Assist with training town department heads, boards, committees, commissions, and town officials when necessary.

4.10 Public Relations

4.10.1 Serve as the towns' public relations officer and be responsible for maintenance of the towns' website and other communications in order to maintain a high standard of service to citizens.

4.11 Public Liaison

4.11.1 Review and resolve complaints from the public, either through direct response or by delegating to the appropriate department head, and advise the Selectboard of these matters as necessary.

4.11.2 Coordinate schedules to assure that the office of the Selectboard is accessible to the public during normal hours of operation.

4.12 Selectboard Meetings

4.12.1 Attend all meetings of the Selectboard, providing background information and recommendations.

4.12.2 Assist in establishing the agenda for all Selectboard meeting.

4.13 Selectboard Liaison

4.13.1 Attend meetings as required by the Selectboard.

4.13.2 Represent the Selectboard upon their request.

4.13.3 Prepare press releases and reports.

4.13.4 Handle Selectboard's correspondence.

4.13.5 Coordinate appointments for Selectboard.

4.14 By-laws and Town Policies

4.14.1 Supervise the compilation and updating of the town's By-laws and Policies Handbook, as appropriate.

4.15 Town Counsel Liaison

4.15.1 Work with Town Counsel on matters affecting town government and matters involving litigation.

4.15.2 Coordinate with Town Counsel in the preparation of the warrant for all special and annual town meetings.

4.15.3 Coordinate with Town Counsel in the preparation of agreements, easements, and right-of-ways concerning land for town use.

4.15.4 Manage legal advertising and posting requirements for all departments.

4.16 Long-Range Planning

4.16.1 Facilitate and coordinate long range planning with all town department heads, boards, committees, commissions, and town officials.

4.17 Volunteer Support

4.17.1 Coordinate volunteer efforts in various town programs, boards, committees and projects.

4.18 Additional Duties

4.18.1 Perform all other related duties and functions as may be required or directed by the Selectboard.

5.0 INTERACTION WITH SELECTBOARD

5.1 The Town Administrator's position derives its authority from the Selectboard who remain ultimately responsible for all operations of the town. The Town Administrator shall ensure that members of the Selectboard are kept well informed as to all ongoing operations.

5.2 It shall be the obligation of the Selectboard to ensure that the Town Administrator properly implements his/her responsibilities by conducting annual job performance reviews of the Town Administrator prior to contract and compensation negotiations.

6.0 KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES REQUIRED

6.1 Thorough knowledge of public administration, including personnel management, financial management, and general management principles, policies, and practices; thorough knowledge and understanding of town policies and procedures, town ordinances and state and federal statutes.

- 6.2** Ability to develop, implement, and evaluate administrative policies and procedures.
- 6.3** Considerable knowledge of office management.
- 6.4** Basic knowledge of governmental accounting, statistics, and bookkeeping methods.
- 6.5** Skill in personnel administration functions such as hiring, firing, promoting, training, etc.
- 6.6** Skill in the use of desktop computers, standard office software packages, and the Internet.
- 6.7** Ability to plan, organize, assign, supervise, inspect, and coordinate the work of professional, technical, and support personnel.
- 6.8** Ability to delegate responsibility.
- 6.9** Ability to prepare comprehensive studies, analyze problems, prepare and present technical and statistical reports, and formulate recommendations.
- 6.10** Ability to negotiate and resolve disputes effectively.
- 6.11** Ability to exercise creativity and initiative in resolving town problems and issues in carrying out administrative responsibilities.
- 6.12** Ability to exercise professional judgment and discretion in applying and interpreting the policies of the Selectboard.
- 6.13** Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
- 6.14** Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with employees, town officials, the business community, state, regional and federal officials, and the general public.

7.0 MIMINUM QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED

- 7.1** Master's degree in Public Administration, Public Policy, Business Administration, or related field plus a minimum of five years administrative experience with financial and project management, preferably in a municipal setting; **OR** equivalent combination of experience and education which demonstrates possession of the required knowledge, skills, and abilities.

7.2 Must have and maintain a valid driver's license.

7.3 Bend and lift and/or move 25 pounds or less.

8.0 PHYSICAL EXERTION/ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

8.1 The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an employee to successfully perform the essential functions of the job of Town Administrator. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

8.2 A pre-employment physical shall be required as stipulated in the Town of Northfield Personnel Policy (dated September 25, 2007) Section 2.8.1.

Appendix B: Northfield Annual Election History

Shown below is the competitiveness of Northfield annual elections 2003 - 2012. A "Yes" highlighted green indicates that there were more candidates on the ballot than there were positions to fill, i.e. a contested election. Also shown is the voter turnout for the annual elections and the state elections for the same time period highlighted on a color scale from green (low turnout) to red (high turnout). Northfield annual election turnout averaged 21%, while state election turnout averaged 72% during this time period. Write-in candidates (Selectboard 2008, Selectboard & Town Clerk 2009, Selectboard 2012) are not included in this analysis.

	Candidates	Positions	Comp?	Candidates	Positions	Comp?	Candidates	Positions	Comp?	Candidates	Positions	Comp?	Candidates	Positions	Comp?
	Selectboard			Board of Assessors			Recreation Comm			Board of Health			Library Trustees		
2003	1	1	No	2	2	No	1	1	No	4	3	Yes	2	2	No
2004	2	1	Yes	1	1	No	5	4	Yes	3	2	Yes	3	3	No
2005	2	1	Yes	1	1	No	0	1	No	1	1	No	2	2	No
2006	2	1	Yes	2	1	Yes	2	3	No	3	3	No	2	2	No
2007	2	1	Yes	2	1	Yes	2	3	No	4	3	Yes	2	2	No
2008	1	1	No	2	2	No	2	2	No	1	2	No	4	3	Yes
2009	1	1	No	0	1	No	2	2	No	2	2	No	3	2	Yes
2010	2	1	Yes	3	2	Yes	3	2	Yes	2	2	No	2	2	No
2011	2	1	Yes	2	1	Yes	3	2	Yes	1	1	No	2	2	No
2012	2	1	Yes	1	1	No	1	2	No	2	2	No	3	3	No
	Sewer Comm			Planning Board			Trust. of Vets Mem			Constable			Farms Constable		
2003	1	1	No	2	3	No	6	5	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2004	1	2	No	1	2	No	3	3	No	3	3	No	1	1	No
2005	3	2	Yes	3	3	No	2	2	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2006	1	1	No	2	2	No	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2007	2	1	Yes	3	3	No	2	2	No	3	3	No	1	1	No
2008	1	1	No	2	1	Yes	2	2	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2009	0	1	No	1	1	No	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2010	2	1	Yes	0	1	No	1	2	No	3	3	No	1	1	No
2011	1	1	No	2	2	No	3	3	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2012	1	1	No	1	1	No	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Town Clerk			Treasurer			Tax Collector			Moderator			Voter Turnout		
													Annual	State	
2003	1	1	No	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1	No	10%	N/A	
2004	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	34%	80%	
2005	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	10%	N/A	
2006	1	1	No	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1	No	20%	62%	
2007	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	25%	N/A	
2008	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	23%	83%	
2009	1	1	No	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1	No	43%	N/A	
2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	13%	59%	
2011	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	18%	N/A	
2012	1	1	No	1	1	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1	No	20%	76%	

Appendix C: Example By-laws

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Appendix D: 2016 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Article

Article ##.

Move that the Town establish an ad hoc Town Governance Study Committee to examine the government structure of the Town of Northfield for possible improvement. Members of this committee shall serve a term of one year ending on the date of the 2017 Annual Town Meeting and be appointed in the following manner: two members by the Selectboard, one member by the Finance Committee, one member by the Town Moderator, and one member by the Planning Board. Once their first meeting is convened, this committee shall have the option, within thirty days from that meeting date, to appoint two additional members.

This committee shall issue a written report, with recommendations, to the 2017 Annual Town Meeting.

This committee shall be terminated on the day following the 2017 Annual Town Meeting after the final report is presented.

Appendix E: Other Important Ideas

This committee conducted interviews with Northfield officials and officials from other towns, presented two public forums, and spoke with many individuals involved with these topics across the Commonwealth. Below are some additional important ideas or quotes that emerged during our research.

Video of the May 23rd forum is posted here: <http://vimeo.com/67147256#at=0>

Video of the September 13th forum is posted here: <http://vimeo.com/74681613>

It would be better for town government and for those who work in it to see themselves as a team trying to accomplish common goals rather than as adversaries who constantly need to watch their backs. – interview.

There's a certain culture that does not treat the professional help properly, and that is killing Northfield. – September 13th forum.

I am often reminded of the saying, "Why are academic politics so vicious? Because the stakes are so low." – interview.

Culture eats strategy for breakfast. – September 13th forum

If you're looking for someone who is a professional to come and be the Town Administrator, to ask somebody to come into that role without the authority to manage those folks is a prescription for disaster. – September 13th forum

There are opportunity costs. If you don't have someone in a position where they can look for opportunities for the town, whether that is grants or economic development activities, those are costs that you incur...There is also avoided costs. If you have the town operating more efficiently, you're not making mistakes...you're avoiding some costs that you might incur in the future...The fact that you avoid a lawsuit by good process...you shouldn't look at the Town Administrator as an expense. You should look at the Town Administrator as an asset. – May 23rd forum

Nothing kills a committee faster than five people in a room with no support...With a capable, professional administrator, it does encourage citizen involvement. – May 23rd forum

Every panelist in the September 13th forum were in agreement that an increased Town Administrator salary would be justified by the extra experience and expertise. *"Think about the number of potential \$100,000 or \$200,000 problems that that extra bit of money could avoid."*

If there is a Town Administrator, then Selectmen have no involvement in day-to-day activities of departments, that's why you have a Town Administrator. – May 23rd forum

The Town Administrator is not an independent player, position is a hammer in the hand of the Selectboard. – May 23rd forum

Part of the problem was a tendency for the Selectboard to meddle in what the Town Administrator was doing or was assigned to be doing. So, it requires both a Town Administrator who has this passion for anonymity and Selectboard members who will turn it over to the Town Administrator and not meddle in it all the time. Not because they don't have authority to do that, but it's a mistake. You've got to have this mutual respect back and forth. – May 23rd forum

The only democracies in human history...were ancient Athens...and New England town meeting, where the people themselves make laws and pass budgets in an open forum like this.
– May 23rd forum

You can view the Finance Committee as a standing representative of Open Town Meeting because Town Meeting only exists at a specific point in time. – September 13th forum

I would say in defense of people who make decisions, I've often been in positions of making decisions, and no decisions are arbitrary. I have never found a person or committee in government who has ever made an arbitrary decision, there's always good reason. Virtually always, the person making the decisions have more information than the people criticizing the decisions. – May 23rd forum