

# THE TOWN OF SOMERSET, MA

## TOWN ADMINISTRATOR RECRUITMENT

### *Invitation to Qualified Candidates*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Somerset, MA (18,300 pop.), seeks a creative, proactive, community leader, committed to excellence in public service, to serve as its next Town Administrator. This fiscally stable community with a rich nautical and manufacturing history has a strong hometown feel, is located in Bristol County and was first settled in 1677 before being formally incorporated in 1790. Historically, the community has had a connectivity to its neighbor, the City of Fall River. Originally connected to its neighbors in Fall River via a ferry service that crossed the Taunton River, Somerset has transitioned over the years to a highly sought after and desirable, family oriented, suburban community. Although the ferry service is no longer in operation, the two communities are still connected by bridge structures to handle growing vehicular traffic which includes an off/on ramp into Somerset from the major Interstate 195. The town borders on Mount Hope Bay, the Taunton and Lee Rivers with proximity to Narragansett Bay and has direct access to deep water ports for a variety of uses. The town is 20 miles southeast of Providence RI and 45 miles south of Boston and residents as well as businesses have easy access to both national and international airports in the Providence and Boston area. The community is recognized for its excellent local K-8 schools as well as highly rated regional high schools and for providing exemplary services to all its residents and business community.



Led by a three-member Board of Selectmen and Open Town Meeting form of government, the Administrator is the chief administrative and operating officer of the town and oversees a municipal operating budget of approximately \$58 million (including \$ 33.6 million for educational expenses) and 143 FTE's on the town side and 268 FTE's in the School Dept. The ideal candidate will have a Bachelor's degree and/or a Master's degree in municipal management or related field and a minimum of 3 to 5 years of experience as a municipal administrator, assistant administrator or other relevant experience. The Town Administrator acts as the Town's HR/Personnel Manager as well as the Chief Procurement Officer. Salary range of \$160,000 to \$180,000 will be commensurate with qualifications and professional experience. Somerset is an equal opportunity employer. For additional information related to the search, or town and candidate profiles, contact Alan Gould, President, Municipal Resources, Inc. at 603-279-0352, x320.

**DEADLINE: 4 PM EST; Monday, March 28, 2022**

**Resume and cover letter, in confidence as PDF attachment to: [recruitment@mrigov.com](mailto:recruitment@mrigov.com)**

## TOWN ADMINISTRATOR – TOWN OF SOMERSET, MA

The ***Ideal*** Candidate for the position of Somerset, MA Town Administrator will have the following characteristics and skill sets:

A career commitment to the highest personal and professional ethical standards and integrity.

The next Administrator must have the ability to listen and be respectful of diverse viewpoints in order to determine an appropriate course of action after engaging in an analysis of all relevant information that will be in the best interest of the Town of Somerset.

An individual who embraces and promotes the utilization of electronic media platforms and will lead the innovation and implementation of software tools to promote internal efficiencies and customer friendly processes.

A leader with a proven track record of thoughtful, creative and innovative “Best Practice” municipal management initiatives as well as demonstrated successful strategic planning for both short and long-term goals. A true visionary.

A leader with a willingness to manage Town affairs in an open and transparent manner including an expanded utilization of varied social media platforms to inform the citizenry of pending issues in a timely manner and promote communicating efficiently with all citizens

The next Administrator must be open minded, sincere, creative and not be afraid to try new approaches to solve complex municipal issues. An innovator with strong convictions.

Demonstrated skills in working collaboratively with many boards and committees to facilitate discussion and build consensus to solve an issue.

An individual who will commit to be engaged in the community at every level. Someone who will be seen and participate in the community at large.

The ability to lead, organize, inspire and manage people; a generalist who understands operational department functions while allowing professional Department Heads to operate their departments effectively and efficiently and holding them accountable for their responsibilities.

Must have demonstrated in their career effective public speaking, oral and written presentation skills in front of large disparate groups, business representatives, state and local elected officials, and major media outlets.

A proven record of nurturing and building upon the existing positive culture and organizational strengths of the community while encouraging diversity of opinion on issues to help engage a wide spectrum of citizens in the public discourse. A demonstrated ability to provide unbiased guidance to elected officials while maintaining a professional manner.

## **THE TOWN OF SOMERSET**

Somerset is located in Bristol County and shares a border with the neighboring state of Rhode Island and is abutting the Massachusetts communities of Swansea, Dighton, Bristol, Rhode Island and Fall River. Interstate 195 is the major highway which traverses through Somerset albeit State Routes 138, 103 and 6 are additional major arteries through the community. The town is served via regional bus transit out of Fall River through the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority. The town has a total area of approximately 12 square miles of which 4 square miles is water, which includes a town reservoir. The town maintains 90+ miles of local roads within the community and has a staff headed by a Superintendent within its Highway Dept to deal with issues related to roadwork, drainage, storm-water management, operation of a transfer station as well as snow and ice removal. The town also operates a Water and Sewer Dept. with significant treatment facilities under the guidance of elected Commissioners separate from the Highway Dept. Somerset provides its residents and the business community with full time Police and Fire Depts. and also operates its own paramedic ambulance service within the community. The two public safety agencies share a combined facility within the town and the Fire Dept also has a sub-station located in the Brayton Point area.



The community prides itself on its many varied outdoor parks and conservation areas including 5 recreational active parks, which include a waterfront park and a public beach. The town has a proud and dedicated Historic Commission and the town was recently honored when a portion of old Somerset Village was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2020. Additionally, the community supports an active senior center with town supported transportation and a popular library. The Housing Authority maintains two major complexes of over 130 units to serve the senior population.

Somerset is known as an ideal place to live and raise a family and unlike many communities in Southeastern Mass., its population has remained very stable for the last two decades. The public education is provided by the School Department with a Superintendent who oversee three elementary schools, a middle school and also is the host community for a new combined Somerset Berkley Regional High School, which opened in 2014 and cost \$80M dollars. The school system is mid-sized with a stable population of approximately 2,600 students in grades K-12. The community also participates in two regional vocational schools in neighboring communities.



# TOWN ADMINISTRATOR – TOWN OF SOMERSET, MA



Today, Somerset's population is approximately 18,300 residents and as previously mentioned very static due to a lack of developable space in the town. Many residents continue to value the small-town character and culture of the community as well as its natural assets and home town New England charm. This adds to the community's outstanding quality of life, is what keeps families in town and has created a true spirit in the community as evidenced by numerous community day celebrations, music festivals, art and craft exhibitions all culminating in the "Spirit of Somerset" family

fun day that until the COVID pause were a constant in the fabric of the town.

The next Town Administrator will be facing a number of challenges over the next few years. The current challenge is dealing with the lingering impact of COVID and managing the community through this difficult time as some relief appears to be on the horizon. The new Administrator must be a leader and have the ability and skills to effectively work with the elected and appointed leaders to help navigate Somerset through the challenges ahead.

## FINANCE/BUDGET

The biggest challenge for the new Town Administrator will be to balance the cost of providing the high level of municipal and educational services and programs the residents have come to expect at a sustainable tax rate during this time of fiscal uncertainty. Somerset has a long tradition of strong financial planning and fiscally conservative budgeting of both revenues and expenditures. The FY '22 budget is \$58.2M, of which \$33.6M is for School Department and \$24.6 is for Town Departments. Approximately 72% of the tax base comes from the residential sector and the remaining 28% from excise taxes and commercial/personal property taxes. The next Town Administrator will have to recognize the importance of and be active in commercial and industrial economic development in order to keep the average residential taxpayer from absorbing more of the overall tax burden.

The Water and Sewer Enterprise budget is \$8M. The town's reserves are very healthy: stabilization account is \$10.1M, Certified Free Cash totals \$8.7M, ARPA funds are \$948K. There are retained earnings for both the water/sewer and solid waste funds of \$2.7M and \$1M respectively.



# TOWN ADMINISTRATOR – TOWN OF SOMERSET, MA

Moody's Investors Services assigned Somerset with its Aa2 bond rating last year and stated that the town's credit position is very strong. This is a noteworthy achievement for a municipality of 18,300 residents in the midst of a global pandemic. Moody's also recognized the town has a history of robust financial positions, conservative management, low debt burden, manageable pension and OPEB obligations, and a sizable tax base. In fact, the town's available fund balance is routinely between 30 and 36% of the operating expenses. All these factors supports the Aa2 bond rating.



The next Town Administrator will need to be skilled in collective bargaining and labor relations. Somerset has four labor unions and the Administrator plays a key role in contract negotiations and contract administration. This position is also in charge of the town's human resources and therefore experience in municipal labor relations and personnel policies and practices is important to have.

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Town has not had a formal 5 or 10 year Capital Improvement Program over the years but has successfully improved or replaced a number of public facilities/capital equipment needs in a systematic way by establishing priorities in a collaborative manner between the affected Depts. on an annual basis. However, the current Interim Town Administrator has developed a model CIP for the community to adopt going forward to allow for a better forecasting tool in anticipation of future needs, to help develop buy-in on timelines to complete the task identified, and show possible funding mechanisms to pay for the requests. The new Administrator should have the ability to follow through on this process and help the community adopt a formal fiscal policy regarding the Capital Improvement Plan as an



integral part of the overall annual budget process. This is especially true as the community will be dealing with some significant capital/infrastructure improvements in the next few years. Two projects that will need the new Town Administrators attention will be construction of the new Somerset Middle School, which was approved by the voters at Town Meeting and at an election as a debt exclusion. In addition, the water and sewer commissioners are working on plans for a new wastewater treatment facility and other infrastructure upgrades to be paid by the enterprise fund. Both the DOR/DLS and the

various bond rating agencies see a formal, comprehensive CIP as an essential part of a strong fiscal management tool for all communities.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Somerset has great access to Interstate 195 and three other State roads which makes it ideal for the commercial and industrial development that would be appropriate for the semi-rural and small town character of the community. As has been noted, approximately 72% of the annual tax levy is derived from the residential base. This is beginning to have a serious impact on people with low to moderate incomes and seniors on a fixed income and their ability to maintain home ownership. Somerset has recognized that in order to maintain sustainability of services within the community, it must promote smart growth that will be acceptable to the community in defined areas without negatively impacting well established residential neighborhoods. The most prominent sites for potential development have been looked into and analyzed through multiple studies. Specifically, the two former power plant sites at Brayton Point that closed in 2017 and was once the largest coal fired energy plant in New England, and the now abandoned Montaup Power facility. Brayton Point occupies 243 acres with deep water access and Montaup is 43+/- acres also with deep water access adjacent to Main Street in Somerset. Another intriguing site is the proposed Slades Ferry Mixed Use proposal. The community is also very interested in improving its downtown main street image through improved streetscapes, façade improvements, pedestrian access and investments in roads as well as continued overall infrastructure improvements along these significant routes.



Many of these and other areas of interest for potential are currently included in the 2019 [“Economic Development Plan for Somerset”](#). The challenge for the new Town Administrator will be to determine the “correct” balance of economic development and to lead the discussion, in consultation with the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board, actively engage the residents, elected boards and all interested parties on the value this activity will have for adding tax dollars from the Commercial/Industrial/Personnel Property sector to offset the burden on residential property owners. The challenge for the Town Administrator will be to help preserve and sustain the unique character and charm of Somerset while promoting responsible, smart growth.

# TOWN ADMINISTRATOR – TOWN OF SOMERSET, MA

Finally, Somerset is a wonderful community that exhibits all the characteristics of a traditional New England town. The next Administrator must bring passion, energy, and commitment, as well as excellence, integrity and the confidence to guide the community in the years ahead. The ideal candidate must possess outstanding verbal and written communication skills. It is imperative that she or he is able to communicate effectively with town leaders, staff, and the public. In order to do this, the Administrator will need to have a high level of community engagement. It is the Administrator's responsibility to keep the public informed, so he or she must be committed to operational transparency and possess the ability to synthesize and communicate clear program/project level progress on initiatives and activities. The Administrator must leverage emerging technologies and other creative ways to promote community involvement. "Customer service" is a high priority for this community, which means the successful candidate must place great value on listening and providing accurate information to all.

## LINKS OF INTEREST

- [Town of Somerset](#)
- [Somerset Economic Development Committee](#)
- [Somerset Video Tour](#)

