

Middleton, MA Town Administrator Recruitment Essay Responses: Andrew Shapiro

1. I commend the Town of Middleton for embarking upon an ambitious, but clearly necessary, plan to update its public facilities. I am also impressed with the level of analysis and planning that went into this project during the runup to Annual Town Meeting in 2021, and by the support shown by residents who voted overwhelmingly to authorize borrowing for the project and approve a proposition 2 ½ debt exclusion. I have significant firsthand experience facilitating public construction projects and procurement, including during these challenging times, which I strongly believe would serve me well in helping the Town of Middleton see its Public Facilities project come to fruition.

When I arrived in November 2019 to serve as its Director of Community and Economic Development, the Town of North Andover had fully designed a new two-story, 13,500 square foot Senior Center. In February of 2020, I worked cooperatively with the Town's Director of Public Works and contracted architect to issue an invitation for bids (IFB), which resulted in selecting Castagna Construction of Danvers, MA as general contractor for the project. We were not able to immediately award the contract because Castagna's bid price exceeded what the Town had previously appropriated for the project. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic then descended upon us, forcing shutdowns of businesses and construction operations.

At Annual Town Meeting in June of 2020, the Town voted to approve an additional \$2.5 million for the project, adding to an originally appropriated \$6.25 million. That year, Annual Town Meeting also voted to authorize the Town to acquire a property necessary for completion of the project for \$550,000. Over an approximately six-month period, I worked with our project team, the Town Manager, and the Town Counsel to both secure the property needed for the Senior Center, and negotiate and approve about \$600,000 in additional cost escalation brought on by COVID related inflation/supply chain issues.

I meet weekly with our project team, including the architect and owner's project manager (OPM), to exchange construction updates, discuss potential change orders, and to facilitate general coordination of the project. I am proud to say that despite being bid and constructed during one of the most tumultuous times in recent memory, while encountering numerous financial and logistical challenges, the project will be complete in April of this year.

Additional experience that I have related to public construction/facilities and procurement (not exhaustive):

1. With the assistance of a contracted architecture firm, I am currently leading an effort to study the reuse of the Town's existing Senior Center, located at the rear of Town Hall.

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2. Utilizing funding obtained through a Massachusetts Office on Disability's (MOD) Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Grant, I led an effort to procure the services of the Northeast Independent Living Program (NILP) to update the [Town's ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan, as well as its ADA policies and procedures](#) – something that had not been done since 1994. For these efforts, in October of 2022 I earned NILP's "ADA Champion Award." Over the next two years, the Town will complete upgrades identified in the Transition Plan, pending approval of appropriations by Town Meeting, which will ensure that all Town facilities are 100% ADA compliant.
3. In 2016/2017, while an Economic Development Planner for the City of Salem, MA, I successfully applied for a \$3.5 million MassWorks Infrastructure Program Grant, which I then utilized to procure the services of a qualified civil engineering firm to design [Complete Streets enhancements for a major entrance corridor into the city](#). This project required coordination with other staff members overseeing design/construction of a new senior center that was going to be built along the roadway.

To address challenges related to completion of Middleton's new Municipal Complex, I would consistently attend and participate in Building Committee meetings, maintain a clear line of communication with the Town's contracted OPM and architect, and keep the Select Board well apprised of all project matters. Despite having a fair bit of experience as described herein, I am by no means a construction or design expert. I rely heavily on the advice and counsel of those who are; in this case the architect and OPM. I would work diligently with them, in concert with the Building Committee and Select Board, to if necessary, value engineer the project while not compromising the integrity of what was promised to residents and Town officials. Any changes that could affect the space, layout, or functionality of operations for certain departments would be discussed openly with and agreed upon by those department heads. I would ensure that any issues requiring legal oversight are reviewed thoroughly by the Town's contracted legal counsel and that any resulting recommendations are communicated to the Select Board and project team. The project would continue to be carried out with maximum transparency and in full view of the public, allowing for public participation and inquiry as necessary.

I have a strong track record of executing highly visible and challenging projects in municipal settings. I strive to collaborate across various departments and stakeholder groups to drive consensus and arrive at solutions for challenges. I allow subject matter experts and department heads to do their work while not micro-managing, but allowing for enough oversight as is appropriate. In my view, this approach tends to result in a high-quality outcome.

*2. a) Engage with the Select Board to determine and clarify goals and objectives and what their expectations would be for your role as Town Administrator?* At a high level, I already know that my role is to carry forward the policy initiatives of the Select Board, and do in a way that is collaborative, competent, and ethical. But at a finer grained level, clear, consistent, and open communication is both a principle that guides me as a municipal management professional and a hallmark of how I would approach my relationship with the Select Board. Interaction and productive conversations during public meetings, one-on-one and group conversations outside of regular Select Board meetings, and interaction at local events are all opportunities that I would utilize to keep this line of communication open. And of course, my door and phone line would always remain open when and if a Member of the Select Board needs to talk to me. Many select boards and city councils across the Commonwealth participate in retreats to discuss priorities and objectives for the coming year with their respective chief executive or administrative officers. I would be happy to facilitate such a process. The budget process is also a time at which the Select Board and Town Administration come together to formulate a cooperative approach to developing policies that will guide the Town for the coming year and further into the future. We can work together to define specific goals that we collectively want to achieve as a Town and ensure that they are funded appropriately through the annual operating or capital budgets. And of course, these goals/objectives should also align with Middleton's new Master Plan.

*b) Establish your own leadership style and management presence while building trust and confidence between your administration, staff and community?* Once again, open communication is a key element to establishing trust between myself, staff, and the community. I believe I am quite approachable. I enjoy talking to department heads and their respective staffs, to understand what programs and policies are working well, and which ones may need to be examined or adjusted. I always encourage honest and constructive feedback and I tend to gain trust by taking swift and decisive action, when feasible, to address changes that need to be made. While I establish myself as a leader, I also do my best to present a flat/team oriented approach to accomplishing projects, which empowers department heads to do their best work and take credit for accomplishments. I find this to be good for morale and a healthy working environment, which ultimately translates to successful outcomes for projects.

I believe my approachable, easy going and communicative nature also translates well to with working with the public. I project empathy when challenges or hardships are presented and I do not shy away from difficult questions. I do not hesitate to say that I need to gather more information on a topic or issue, if that is the case, and I always follow up in a timely manner. I do not have a problem taking

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meetings with community members at a moment's notice, if feasible, and I look forward, with the Select Board's input and permission, to continue, augment, or and/or create a variety of informative communication channels to keep the public apprised of all major happenings in Middleton: newsletter, emails/social media, open office hours, and local closed circuit cable video messages.

*c) Establish your relationship with numerous independently elected or appointed boards and committees, where you have no direct authority or responsibility for the outcome of their work?* I would make a significant effort to attend or watch key meetings to get a sense for how these bodies operate, better understand the types of issues and projects confronting them, and to see how they are being led. I would also make it a point of arranging meetings with the chairs of these bodies (if they are willing to meet), in order to establish a baseline relationship and to open lines of communications. Most critically, I would forge positive working relationships with Town staff/department heads responsible for staffing these boards and committees to get their perspectives on how they operate, what their challenges and opportunities are, and if there is anything we can collectively work on, if necessary, to improve their functioning.

*d) Measure your success in your first year as the new Town Administrator?*

If the Select Board agrees, I think it could be beneficial over the first month in the position, to work with them on defined, measurable goals on which we mutually agree. This could be one set of benchmarks to measure success. If I am fortunate enough to advance in the interview process for the position, I would like to find out from the Select Board, what attributes and qualities it values the most in a new Town Administrator (i.e. excellent cross-collaborative skillset; strong ability to communicate; excellent command of municipal finance). From there, I think it would be helpful to craft evaluation criteria around these and other key areas, for use during an annual evaluation. But overall, my view is that if the Town's operations remain stable and strong; if I can improve certain municipal operations with the cooperation of the Select Board and department heads; if the Town's financial position remains strong and/or improves, and if we complete major projects on time and on (or under) budget, I would hope that the Select Board can judge me favorably on any number of measurable outcomes stemming from these overarching areas, or likewise, find areas in which I can improve.

3. As a planner certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) that holds a Master's of Urban and Regional Planning, I have significant experience and appreciate for implementing comprehensive master plans. As the Town of North Andover's Director of Community and Economic Development, I oversee broad implementation of the Town's Master Plan, which was developed in 2018. I work directly with the Town's Master Plan Implementation Committee to track progress on implementation of strategies outlined in the Plan and to assist in prioritizing advancement of strategies that may have not yet have been fully pushed forward.

a) *How would you coordinate and work with all stakeholders to attain success in an implementation schedule?* I would break out all objectives by responsible party and have focused discussions with them about how we could work toward implementation. Shorter term priorities would take precedent, while medium and longer or ongoing items could require additional planning/strategizing. I would dedicate time at staff meetings to discuss Master Plan progress and priorities in a group/collaborative setting. I would work collaboratively with responsible parties, the Finance Director/Finance Committee, and the Select Board to budget for and program in elements of the Master Plan requiring funding. A portion of each Select Board agenda could be dedicated to updating the Board on implementation progress (it could be done less frequently if the Select Board so decided).

b) *How would you allocate resources to volunteer boards and committees who have been assigned to accomplish task defined in the plan?* As noted in the response provided in the prior section, there would need to be dedicated conversations with department heads, as well as with board/commission chairs and members to clearly understand the types of resources necessary to carry out Master Plan objectives. If there is a financial component, it would need to be well understood and articulated so that I could work with the Finance Director/Finance Committee and Select Board to bring those budgetary enhancements forward during the process of developing the Town's operating and capital budget for discussion and consideration. Many of the objectives in the Plan outline specific funding sources. Others do not require a funding source per se, but may require that a department or board/commission dedicate time and human capital to a particular effort. Grant funding will also be a vital resource for implementation of Master Plan objectives – whether for capital projects, technical assistance, or planning. I would ensure that any/all grants pursued by the Town responded specifically to meeting one or more of the objectives outlined in the Plan.

c) *Please explain how you would advise the Select Board, the Planning Board, the Middleton 300 Committee as well as all other interested parties including residents about implementation progress,*

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*impediments to progress and how you would suggest moving forward when financial support may not be available to accomplish certain goals.* I mentioned in the introduction to this overall response that my work with the Town of North Andover involves staffing its Master Plan Implementation Committee. We are required to report out progress to both the Select Board and Planning Board on a bi-annual basis, or as needed. The Committee suggests certain strategies to prioritize and also evaluates larger projects being pursued in town against how they align or deviate from Master Plan strategies and goals. I have also been working diligently with the Committee to provide regular updates to a [comprehensive webpage](#) that compiles updates on how Master Plan Strategies are being addressed. This site is always viewable to the general public.

If it does not already, perhaps converting the Master Plan Committee to focus on implementation efforts could be a good way to highlight progress on the Plan and keep Town stakeholders accountable to its implementation. Or a new committee could be formed to take on this mandate. Production of a public facing website that acts as a clearinghouse and compendium of information for Master Plan progress is a good way to keep residents informed on how it is being implemented. Likewise, it is a good tool for Town boards and department heads to track progress. Social media is also a good way to highlight when and how Master Plan objectives are being met. For instance, if the Town of Middleton is successful in applying for and receiving Complete Streets funding to improve pedestrian and bike safety and community character in the Middleton Square area, the Town can advertise this success and point to it having originated from a Master Plan objective/action.

If financial resources are not available to accomplish certain goals, I think it is important not to let those goals die on the vine as a result. I would encourage creativity, patience, and adaptability. If it is a matter of not having funds available through the Town's operating or capital budget, perhaps a grant from the state or other alternative resources could be sought to fund a project. Working closely with the Town's state delegation, perhaps an earmark can be sought. The Town can work with its regional planning agency, the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC) to utilize district local technical assistance (DLTA) funding to support projects requiring technical assistance or human capital that the Town does not currently possess. I consider myself as someone who gets things done. I do not let obstacles stop me in my tracks. Projects may take longer, or require more strategy and collaboration, but in the end I find ways to get them done with a high quality outcome.