

Question 1 – Municipal Complex Center

It is not every day that the right circumstances align for a nearly three century old town to develop an entirely new Town Center. Middleton finds itself at the crossroads of a unique opportunity. While many municipalities hit a stage where they have outgrown their existing facilities, few municipalities find themselves with the opportunity to purchase 52 acres of open space nestled within a 10 minute walk of their existing town offices. This sealed what is often times an early stumbling block – site location. This \$61.7 million dollar project would incorporate a Town Hall, Public Safety Facility, Senior Center, Community Space and Town Green. It can take a decade or more to build public support for one of these components, let alone all of them. It is a testament to Middleton's citizens that consensus was found.

While 2/3rds support is a significant accomplishment that should be celebrated, it is important to be mindful that 1/3rd of voters did not support this project as presented. In order to realize a successful outcome, it would be beneficial to continue efforts to bring this group into the fold. This takes discipline and commitment. Working alongside opposing views will help the building committee better understand and avoid potential problems, resulting in a stronger end result for the community and ensuring everybody gets a seat at the table.

Beyond consensus, one of the larger obstacles for this project is cost. Historically this will always prove to be a hurdle for any large municipal project. In discussing a project with the community, we must always do our best to provide realistic figures. This helps our residents make informed decisions when voting. It is a best practice to build inflation into the cost estimation process – typically 4% (meaning that the \$100,000 appropriation you made last year may very well cost you \$104,000 the next). In the COVID-era, I have seen project material and labor costs balloon as high as 15% or more on a project. Beyond this, as projects scale-up in size this inflationary impact can compound rapidly. For an almost \$62 million dollar project, that 4% figure is almost \$2.5 million additional taxpayer dollars to deliver the same project.

One of my first tasks when appointed as the Town Manager in Winchendon was to find a way to build consensus for a recently failed \$12,000,000 Fire Station proposal. I worked with

our Fire Chief and architects to reduce the scope of the project and look for opportunities to value engineer the new building in a way that worked for both our first responders and our taxpayers. I also carved out time to sit down with some of the largest opponents of the building project to better understand their concerns. Working together we managed to reduce the project by nearly 30% (even after taking inflation into account). We held a host of public forums to discuss the new plans, including joint meetings with the Capital Planning Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Board of Selectmen. We brought the design phase costs of a new project coupled with a new funding plan (debt exclusion) to our October 2022 Special Town Meeting where we earned 88% support. The project just went before our residents at the November 2022 elections where it also secured nearly 2/3rds support at the ballot.

I would use a similar approach in Middleton. This work would center around communication with the Building Committee, the Select Board, Department Heads, and most importantly Middleton residents. I have recently renewed my MCPPO designation ensuring my accreditation stays active and my knowledge remains up to date. This is focused on public contracting, the purchasing of supplies and services and most critically for this discussion, construction projects. To date I have worked on over a dozen large scale public facility projects. This included the multi-million dollar redevelopment of the Tyngsborough Town Center and leading the way through the MSBA process for the development phase of an \$82 million Middle School addition several years ago as the Assistant Town Administrator. More recently as the Town Manager of Winchendon I have revived our Fire Station project, executed Phase 1 of a 3 phase \$5 million restoration of our Old Murdock Senior Center, and guided a \$4 million new Performing Arts Center Amphitheater through the design, bid, and build phases. I am proud to highlight that I have led my team to complete these projects on time and on budget.

I have compiled the skill and experience needed to guide Middleton through this significant time in its history. This would include conversations surrounding the fate of your existing facilities as well (whether it be leasing them or selling them, both areas in which I have experience). I would be proud to work alongside your boards, committees, and residents to make this bold vision for Middleton a reality.

Justin Sultzbach – Town Administrator Candidate

Question 2 – On Boarding Plan

The transition period for a new Town Administrator is a crucial make or break moment. There are several high profile calendar-driven “balls” to keep an eye on, including most importantly the development of your departmental budgets in relation to your upcoming Annual Town Meeting in May followed immediately by year-end procedures in June. Given the timing of the annual cycle relative to your candidate search, I believe a majority of budgetary decisions would already be set going into the next fiscal year. Town Meeting preparation would command a fair amount of attention right out of the gate and would largely dictate the chosen candidates schedule for the first 30 days. Beyond this, initial preparation would include considerable acclimation efforts to the Town of Middleton including an extensive review of critical Town documents including the Charter and Bylaws, recent audit reports, budgetary documents from the last 5-10 years, as well as your recently developed Master Plan 300 (more on this later). These documents would be reviewed before walking in the door on day one.

Beyond Town Meeting and crucial documents, I would work immediately to form a strong understanding of the Select Board’s collective goals and individual motivators. It has been my practice to do a full public review of Town Administrator/Select Board Goals for the fiscal year before digging into the work to ensure that the entire team is on the same page. I would also immediately work through the chair to schedule one on one meetings with each member of the Select Board to listen to their individual vision for Middleton, discuss how and why they chose to participate in local government, and provide members with an uninterrupted opportunity to better understand my leadership style and professional preferences. Communication is key, and it has been one of my primary focuses throughout my career.

I would also start out by forming clear lines of communication with my immediate staff in the Town Administrators office. This would include carving out regular time to listen to their views on Town operations. I would also focus on identifying professional development opportunities to ensure they are empowered to reach their own professional goals. A stronger staff results in a stronger Middleton. I am also a firm believer that many instances of success in

a community can be directly attributed to communication among its personnel. As such, I would immediately schedule one on one meetings with every Department Head in town starting with the Chief of Police, Fire Chief, and DPW Superintendent. I would also take the time to hold several broader staff meetings in the first few weeks, with a reoccurring Department Head meeting to occur monthly. I have always found that the best leaders take the first several months to listen and observe. I choose to lead from the front, but I also make a point of treating my staff as the experts they are in their given fields. The relationships I've formed with employees throughout my career have been built on earned trust and mutual respect, and I would commit the same focus and energy to such an approach in Middleton.

It would be a priority to schedule introductory meetings with other major players in our operations and community including our Statehouse Delegation and other state-level figures, Legal Counsel, our partners at the Middleton Public Schools, Regional Planning Commission and local Chamber of Commerce to name a few. I would also make a point to reach out to the Chair of every elected or appointed board or committee in town to offer my availability for an in-person introduction at their next scheduled meeting should their agenda allow. I have always worked to maintain strong, respectful relationships with boards and committees in town. This includes making it clear that I am available as a resource should they ever need my assistance.

Last but not least, I would schedule multiple introductory open forums in the first few months of coming to town for residents to meet with me. This would be followed by quarterly after hour's forums to give citizens an opportunity to sit down and talk with me informally in person. I am a big believer in access. I have hosted such events in Winchendon (Town Manager Talks) with great success, and I would be committed to ensuring such accessibility was available for the people of Middleton. That is the part of the job that I find to be most meaningful.

Everybody measures success differently. I believe taking the SMART approach to goal setting (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) always provides a clear path to success both for me as a professional as well as success for the communities I serve. As such, as part of the goal setting process for the year I would follow through on a yearly review to measure progress and identify shortcomings on these pre-established goals.

Justin Sultzbach – Town Administrator Candidate

Question 3 – Middleton 300

Now more than ever towns across the Commonwealth are struggling with complex issues involving housing, economic development, open space, and many other topics that shape the local character and growth of our smaller communities. While most components of this change is outside of your control (state, national, and global trends), your community is fully in control of how you react to these changes. The smartest and most impactful way a municipality can control the outcome of these factors is through a well-developed and up to date Master Plan. It seems that Middleton is actively taking this proactive approach.

In my own experience I had the pleasure of working alongside our departments, boards and committees, and of course our residents to lay the groundwork for the development of an updated Master Plan for the Town of Tyngsborough. Where funds weren't budgeted for this purpose I set to work to identify funding sources outside of our annual operating budget. This has always been my approach when funding runs tight, and I would work hard to bring grant funding to Middleton that would help you achieve your Master Plan goals should traditional funding fall short. It is crucial to coordinate these funding efforts with Master Plan initiatives.

As the Assistant Town Administrator I led our team to secure a DLTA Grant in conjunction with the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments to update our nearly fifteen year old Master plan. This multiyear process involved countless hours of public meetings and forums and resulted in a 450 page governing document that highlights a clear direction for the Town of Tyngsborough well into the future. I always work to be mindful, grateful, and appreciative of the impact my professional life can have on the community in which I work. While there are many projects and initiatives I have been proud of as a municipal leader, being able to help facilitate these important conversations for our residents is one of my brightest highlights to date. It was truly an honor to be a part of that process.

I was pleased to see that the Town of Middleton made the updating of this essential document a priority starting in 2019. As a Town Administrator, a recent master plan is essentially a play book for community priorities. It determines your direction as a town and

helps Town Government prioritize the use of its resources in a way that is reflective of your citizen's needs and wishes. As I am sure you have seen over the past four years or so, the development of this plan is a significant undertaking. Your Executive Summary sums this up well: "Developing a master plan is more than just researching and writing a report. It is an open, public process". Beyond the earnest work that comes with soliciting broad public input, the other most crucial work comes after the Master Plan is completed – implementation.

Some communities have a habit of allocating resources for studies that never see the light of day. The worst thing a town can do is complete a Master Plan only to put it on a shelf. This is a working document that means nothing without follow through. When I was appointed as the Town Manager in Winchendon in 2021, one of my main priorities was Master Plan implementation. Using my experience in Tyngsborough, I was able to pick up the town's master planning process and move it forward. I set straight to work laying the groundwork for the development of a Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC). I have been assisting this group in securing buy in throughout our organization to follow through on our short, mid, and long term goals. This comes with directly assigning tasks to different factions of your organization, a need highlighted in Middleton's implementation plan. Beyond my support, I always stress that this needs to be a citizen-led process. That means ensuring we provide the tools and resources necessary to get the job done. This has included leadership from my office to allocate the resources needed (including financial, but most importantly and frequently overlooked –time and bandwidth-) to assign the appropriate groups and individuals to specific tasks that will help us reach our community goals in the immediate and long term.

I was impressed to see that the Middleton Master Plan 300 came with a highly detailed implementation plan to be led by your Planning Board. I would look forward to supporting their efforts. Your upcoming 2028 tri-centennial organically provides an established and achievable deadline to implement many of your strategies. With that said, 5 years is right around the corner. I believe that my up-to-date experience developing and launching Master Plans in two other communities would help me to empower (not direct) boards and committees in Middleton to meet your strategic goals over the next half-decade and well into the future. I look forward to an opportunity to discussing this potential partnership further.