



*"I am convinced that nothing we do is more important than hiring and developing people. At the end of the day you bet on people, not on strategies."*

— Lawrence Bossidy,  
Former COO of GE

# RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

Newport, NH  
Town Manager Visioning Session  
January 17, 2015

**Primex**<sup>3</sup>  
NH Public Risk Management Exchange

Center for  
**Public Sector**  
Advancement

Promoting Excellence in the Public Sector



## Introduction

Primex<sup>3</sup> was invited to assist the Town of Newport in its search for its next Town Manager by facilitating a visioning session with members of the Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager Search Committee, and members of the community. In this role, Primex<sup>3</sup> aims to support the Town in its efforts to make a soundly informed hiring decision that maximizes the potential of the hiring process while minimizing the risks the process brings. The following report provides a summary of the items covered during this visioning session.

## Participants

**Todd Fratzel**, Vice-Chair, Board of Selectmen and Town Manager Search Committee Member

**Bill Wilmot**, Selectman and Town Manager Search Committee Member

**David Hoyt**, Selectman

**Jeff Kessler**, Selectman

**Biddy Irwin**, Town Manager Search Committee Member

**Bruce Jasper**, Community Member

**Bert Spaulding, Sr.**, Town Manager Search Committee Member

**Larry Flint**, Recreation Advisory Committee and Town Manager Search Committee Member

**Ernest G. Rowe**, Newport Police Department and Town Manager Search Committee Member

**Chris Marcotte**, Deputy Chief, Newport Fire Department and Business Owner

**Cory Patten**, Community Member

**Cindy Gallagher**, Town Manager Search Committee Member

**Ella M. Casey**, Exec. Director, Newport Area Chamber of Commerce and Town Manager Search Committee Member

**Wayne Conroy**, Chief, Newport Fire Department

**Dick Wentzell**, Conservation Commission

**Archie Mountain**, Reporter, *Argus-Champion*

**Paul Brown**, Finance Director and outgoing Town Manager

**Barry M. Brenner**, Consultant

**Ken Merrow**, Planning Board Member and Business Owner

**Becky Merrow**, Supervisor, Newport Recreation Department

**Joan Strully**, Community Member

**Ken Dennis**, Manager, Buildings, Grounds & Cemeteries

### *The exercise was facilitated by:*

**Jennifer Brennan**, Assistant to the CEO, Primex<sup>3</sup>

**Carl Weber**, Director of Member Services, Primex<sup>3</sup>

## Discussion Format

The visioning session followed a six-point agenda that covered the following items:

- Welcome, Overview and Ground Rules
- Critical Issues for the Town of Newport and the new Town Manager
- Potential Road Blocks for a Smooth Transition
- Essential Skills Necessary for Town Manager Position
- Behaviors Sought for Town Manager Position
- The Ideal Candidate

*The report that follows is not a verbatim recreation of the discussion, but rather a summary of the discussion's major themes as they relate to the agenda items above.*

## Welcome, Overview, and Ground Rules

After a brief welcome and introduction by the outgoing Town Manager and the facilitators, the group identified several ground rules to help guide the day's discussion. The following rules were agreed upon:

1. No fighting
2. Participation is encouraged
3. All voices should be heard
4. Brainstorming is encouraged
5. All participants are equal
6. Focus on the objectives
7. Respect each other
8. The "Vegas" rule – what happens here stays here

## Critical Issues

The following topics were identified as critical issues that the Town of Newport and the new Town Manager will be facing:

- Status of Ruger Firearms (especially as the Town's largest employer)
- Potential loss of **any** business in Town
- Lack of youth engagement in Town affairs
- Attracting young people and families
- Recruiting volunteers
- Preserving the elements of the community and local government that are working
- Establishing long-term vision (10+ years – "Where is Newport headed?")
- Uniting and creating a partnership between the Town and the school district
- The Town's aging infrastructure (roads, water, sewer and buildings)
- Current Town procedures that may be hindering and/or limiting economic growth as well as private redevelopment
- Limited financial resources
- Increasing economic development in the Town and building the tax base
- Being able to demonstrate the value of the tax rate
- Ensuring stability, for both the Town and for the Town Manager position
- Being responsible with the Town's budget, and looking at the Town's functions from an operational perspective
- Considering the impact of any potential State or Federal legislation, changes in fiscal priorities (down-shifting costs) on Newport
- The health and wellness of the community (and an aging population)
- Local poverty and mental health issues
- Creating incentives for and making the Town more attractive to industry
- Promoting the Town of Newport
- Addressing perceived "low morale" of the Town's workforce
- Collaborating with Sullivan County
- Various housing issues
  - ✓ Redevelopment
  - ✓ Establishing senior communities
  - ✓ Evaluating renting and Section 8 housing

- Launch and promotion of the Town's new community center
- Fostering better relationships and creating goodwill with the Town's local businesses

The following items were identified as critical *specifically to the Town Manager*:

- Big shoes to fill
- Addressing the proposal of creating a combined School and Town Finance Department
- Potential role confusion that may arise with the incumbent manager still working in Town government
- Establishing one-on-one relationships with local business owners (making the connections in person)
- Becoming the "heart and soul" of the community and also the public face of the Town, with a focus on keeping small-town values
- Establishing strong relationships with other local communities and expressing willingness to learn from them

## Potential Road Blocks

The following items were identified as potential road blocks facing the incoming Town Manager:

- High expectations for the role
- Navigating the various community voices and personal/political agendas, both internal and external
- Resistance to change, both internal and external
- Role confusion, and the conflict between "old vs. new" dynamics
- Acknowledging the value that staff bring (and not overlooking institutional knowledge) while also being a change agent for the Town
- Bringing a new and different level of accountability to the Town, its operation and employees
- Learning the ins-and-outs of the Town of Newport
  - ✓ All of the players and the stakeholders
  - ✓ The "passionate ones"
- Lack of technological resources to communicate with community members
- Salary (identified as a *potential* road block)

## Essential Skills and Experience

The following characteristics were identified as essential skills and experience needed in the next Town Manager:

- Thick-skinned and doesn't personalize issues
- Personnel management skills
  - ✓ Ability to measure and develop workforce
- Strong listening skills
- Ability to think "outside the box"
- Ability to say "no" when necessary (and to do so in a professional way), explaining why when appropriate
- Ability to sell ideas and to get things done
- Promote open communication
- Open-minded
- Be a "working manager," but also have the ability to be a professional and articulate figurehead for the Town when needed
- Technological skills
- Forward thinker and a practical solver
- Not a politician
- Prior municipal experience and understanding of Town government
- Financial savvy
- Sense of humor
- Possess an understanding of the (often complex) rules/laws/regulations under which he or she will operate
- Educated in negotiation, having good boundaries, and ownership in issues or failures (both in general terms, and regarding collective bargaining agreements)
- Ability to build relationships with others
- Ability to put personal politics aside when dealing with Town matters
- Willingness to learn and grow

## Essential Behaviors

The following behaviors and characteristics were identified as being desirable in the next Town Manager:

- Organized
- Accessible
- Able to communicate at all levels
- Able to delegate responsibilities
- Strong time-management abilities
- Extroverted (as required in professional role)
- Team player
- Puts the Town's goals first, above personal goals
- Does **not** see Newport as just another "stepping stone"
- Decision maker with a balanced ego
- Forward-thinking/visionary
- Open to learning from the success of other communities and evaluating other ideas besides his/her own

## The Ideal Candidate

The group determined that the ideal candidate for Town Manager would meet the following qualifications:

- Demonstrated prior success
- Formal education (minimum of a bachelor's degree, with a master's degree preferred)
- 3-5 years (minimum) prior experience with management of personnel and operations
- Solid understanding of legal complexities associated with Town Manager role
- Other potential credentials suggested (ICMA Credentialed Manager or Certified Public Manager CPM)
- Financial management experience/expertise
- The desire and ability to stay in Newport



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