

Recommended Selectboard's Office Budget Priority for FY23

Increase Selectboard Office Capacity to Enhance Government Performance

A Proposal from the Town Administrator

November 13, 2021

Summary

Goal: To enhance Montague Town Government's ability to work in a strategic and proactive fashion, to better respond to the challenges and seize the opportunities of our current and future context.

Proposal: To increase the capacity of the Selectboard's office to a level more appropriate to the needs of the community through an expansion of executive and clerical staffing. Enhancing our ability to plan and execute work efficiently, attract and retain new revenue and investment, better understand and respond to community needs, and continue to realize the promise of our community.

Current Capacity

What's Working: Montague benefits from managers and staff who are talented and deeply committed to our community. Many have enjoyed a long tenure with the Town and bring an exceptional level of skill and experience to the job. Our present governmental capacity was developed over time and in response to community needs, with a pragmatic focus on the capacity to execute of department level responsibilities. Department staffing is lean and often has little or no depth in leadership, which presents a level of risk, operationally.

The Selectboard's Office is staffed in this same fashion, but is responsible for a uniquely broad scope of responsibilities, including direct management, oversight, or support for: human resource and personnel management, recruitment and hiring, department support, financial management and capital planning, capital project management and implementation, contract and vendor management, facilities & lease management, procurement, grant writing and management, intergovernmental relations, media and community relations, licensing, ADA coordination, information technology, emergency management, and management of special projects and challenges as they emerge.

The prominent roles of other departments in the above tasks should be noted, as should the limits of their capacity to fully attend to elements of these functions. Nonetheless the Selectboard Office must be substantially engaged with and show competency in all areas. To do it all well requires considerable and ongoing focus, learning, and work effort. While our team embraces this challenge, we are also very aware of the limits of our ability to dedicate sufficient time to meet the needs of this very broad and constantly evolving agenda.

Limitations: As Town Administrator and a Town resident, I am very proud of what this Town has accomplished in recent years and I am excited by our very promising future. We can continue to achieve progress as presently staffed, but through five years on the job, I've become acutely aware of the limitations of the capacity of our office. The chronic inability to devote what I believe is sufficient

time to the planning and execution of work diminishes our effectiveness and limits our ability to respond to community needs, sometimes resulting in missed opportunity or less than ideal outcomes.

Two recent grant-supported projects focused on enhancing Montague's human resource and financial management functions served to underscore my understanding of our limitations. In both instances, consultants from the Collins Center for Public Management noted what they consider to be insufficient capacity in the Selectboard Office to meet the demands of those functions, particularly in light of other areas of responsibility. That lack of capacity tends to result in a prioritization of immediate workflow over more systematic planning and management.

We've functioned this way for years, but the demands of municipal government in 2021 do not favor the approach. For example, human resources strategy will be increasingly important in the coming years. A long-anticipated wave of retirements has begun and the need for succession planning – including the hiring, mentoring, and support of new leaders – will become a central concern in the years ahead. With a very flat organizational structure, Montague could be particularly vulnerable to turnover, and would benefit from better defined processes and systems than we presently possess, as well as added executive leadership capacity to support staff and operations.

Proposal and Budget Recommendation

The FY22 Selectboard budget includes \$170,334 in wages relative to an operating budget of roughly \$13.5M and total Town budget of \$26M. This provides a full time Town Administrator and Executive Assistant; a level of staffing that is not sufficient to support development and maintenance of an effective administrative infrastructure, and to execute other required work to expected standards. The goal is not for anyone to do less work, but to accomplish more work, more efficiently.

It is proposed that the Selectboard add new executive and clerical capacity beginning in FY23 and that this should be considered the office's long-term staffing plan. The proposed positions include a:

- Assistant Town Administrator for Development, Facilities & Infrastructure (Grade I, 37.5 hr/wk)
- Selectboard Clerk and HR Assistant (Grade B, 20 hr/wk)

This change would necessitate an increase of roughly \$117,000 (60%) in the Selectboard budget, as well as expected increases in benefit costs that could range from \$11,904 to \$37,512, assuming participation in a health insurance plan. Pension costs would be in the vicinity of \$10,000/year. There could be some cost relative to office relocation to accommodate new staff,

Costs would be offset to an extent by elimination of the MEDIC stipend (\$4,000), as well as increased ability to attract grant funding, and more efficient planning and implementation of capital projects. Further, this may facilitate some consolidation of human resource responsibility in the Selectboard Office, shifting some tasks currently located in the Treasurer/Collector's Office, in particular.

Role of the Assistant Town Administrator

The Assistant Town Administrator for Development, Facilities, and Infrastructure (ATA) would bear primary responsibility for—and manage or support the implementation of—the Town’s community and economic development strategy; and infrastructure and facilities planning, management and grant-making. The ATA would work on special projects consistent with the above roles at the discretion of the Town Administrator, subject to agreement of the Selectboard.

Hierarchically, the position rests under the supervision of the Town Administrator and works at the direction of the Selectboard. The ATA would assume day to day management of Town operations in the absence of the Town Administrator. The ATA would provide supervision to the Town Planner and Building Inspector, and their staff; and would collaborate closely with other department heads, most notably with those managing Town facilities or infrastructure, including the DPW and WPCF.

Although some responsibilities will naturally be shared across positions, a proposed preliminary division of work between the Town Administrator and ATA is presented below.

Town Administrator	Assistant Town Administrator
Financial Management and Planning	Community & Economic Development
Human Resources/Professional Development	Capital Planning
Personnel (Bargaining, Discipline)	Infrastructure Planning
Governance and Policy	Facilities Planning and Management
Information Technology	ADA Coordinator
Supplies and Services Procurement	Construction Procurement
Grant and Contract Management	Grant and Contract Management
Intergovernmental Relations	Business Marketing and Outreach
Board and committee Development	Committee Support
Board and Constituent Engagement and Support	

Benefits Include...

- Greater ability to organize and perform work efficiently, whether planned or unexpected
- Better integrated decision making due to increased opportunity for leader engagement
- Enhanced financial management, human resource, and information technology strategy
- More comprehensive and better coordinated infrastructure and facilities investments
- Improved succession planning and greater resilience in response to key staff turnover
- Better managed and more efficient administrative systems and related planning
- Greater support for Departments dealing with financial, management, personnel, procurement, facilities and other challenges
- Increased emphasis on board recruitment and development, governance planning
- Staffing approach allows development of complementary skill sets, with ability to shift specific work tasks in response to emergent needs