

Topsfield, MA Town Administrator



Community & Position Profile



COMMUNITY PARADIGM ASSOCIATES, LLC

The Community of Topsfield, Massachusetts

Nestled in the heart of the North Shore, the Town of Topsfield is a small rural-suburban town, with approximately 6,500 residents and a strong sense of community. Topsfield is known for its open spaces, pristine rivers and rolling hills. The Town is seeking an experienced municipal management professional with exceptional leadership, financial management, communications, and team-building skills to serve as Topsfield's next Town Administrator.

HISTORY: [Topsfield](#) was incorporated in 1650 and is located in Essex County in northeastern Massachusetts. Topsfield was an agrarian community throughout the 17th-19th centuries. In the 19th century, railroad companies built a rail line through Topsfield, connecting the community to Boston and Newburyport. The manufacturing of shoes flourished for a time during the 19th century, but the last shoe manufacturer in Town ceased operations in the early 20th century. The invention of automobiles and construction of Route 128 soon allowed people to work in the city and commute home for the evening, helping to spur growth in many smaller communities located near Boston. The high-technology industry boom along Route 128 in the 20th century resulted in numerous high-tech workers making Topsfield their home.

Topsfield is a fairly compact community that includes rolling hills and winding streams, large areas of open space, hiking trails, and bike paths. In addition to the local shopping center, there are various small businesses located principally along Route 1. The Town remains primarily a residential community that retains a rural character and has a charming New England Town Common.



Topsfield is a prime location for residents and visitors who appreciate being able to quickly travel to the city of Boston, Plum Island, and the ocean shore as well as those who enjoy hiking in state forests, kayaking in scenic rivers, and exploring the rural countryside. Topsfield is also home to the Topsfield Fair, which began in 1818 as a way to promote agricultural interest and today is the nation's oldest continuing fair, drawing more than 400,000 visitors during the 11-day annual event.

GEOGRAPHY: Topsfield is 12.8 square miles in size, including 11.9 square miles of land and 0.9 square miles of water. The Town lies in the geographic center of Essex County. Topsfield is bordered by Ipswich to the north, Hamilton and Wenham to the east, Middleton and Danvers to the south, and Boxford to the west. Topsfield is about 22 miles north of Boston and has approximately 60 road miles and 25 miles of sidewalks and bike paths.

Topsfield is linked to neighboring towns by a network of old county roads, including Route 97, and to the Boston area and the Route 128 corridor by Route 1 and I-95, allowing commuters direct access to the city. I-95, Route 1 and Route 97, which runs north from Beverly, are the main north-south connectors for the Town. Topsfield's Washington Street, High Street, and Ipswich Road provide the main east-west connectors through town. A commuter rail station is conveniently located in the adjacent town of Hamilton.

ECONOMY: The community consists primarily of residential properties with a small business district located along Route 1 and a downtown that has good bones but is in need of attention. Topsfield has several automobile businesses and industrial structures on a portion of Route 1 between the Topsfield Fairgrounds and Route 97 as well as three business parks farther north on Route 1. The Town does not have large strip malls or chain stores as are abundant in the abutting towns of Danvers and Middleton. Topsfield supports economic development that is appropriate for the community and does not detract from its rural character.

The largest employers in Topsfield include Masconomet Health Care, Fairview Machine Co., and Harmony Health. The largest seasonal employer is the Essex Agricultural Society, which manages the Topsfield Fair. Unemployment rates have traditionally been lower than state and national trends.

ASSESSED VALUES: Topsfield's total assessed value in FY19 was approximately \$1.4 billion, according to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services. Residential properties account for approximately 92.4% of the Town's total assessed value, while commercial properties account for about 4.8%, industrial for about 1.3%, and personal property for approximately 1.5%. The average FY19 residential property assessment was \$599,950.

CENSUS DATA: According to the U.S. Census estimates for 2018, the Town of Topsfield's racial composition is 96.1% white, 2.6% Asian, and 1.3% Hispanic or Latino. The median household annual income is approximately \$152,083, which is more than double the state median household annual income of \$70,954. The Town is demographically similar to the state in one resident age cohort while varying in another. For example, in the under-5 years cohort, Topsfield has 4.1% of its population according to the 2018 U.S. Census estimates, which is only slightly lower than the state's 5.3% and in the under-18 years cohort is Topsfield at 24.6% versus 20.0% for the state. The most significant difference is found in the 65 years and over cohort estimate, which in Topsfield is 23.1%, while the Commonwealth's is 16.5%. The median age of Topsfield's residents is estimated to be 46 years while the median age for the state is 39 years.



Government and Finance

BOARD OF SELECTMEN: Topsfield's executive branch of government is a five-member [Board of Selectmen](#) that serves as the governing body of the Town. Board of Selectmen members are elected to staggered three-year terms to oversee all matters impacting the interest and welfare of the community and are responsible for ensuring that Town government is responsive to and reflective of community needs and values. In addition to its general executive authority, the Board appoints the Town Administrator/Personnel Director; calls for Annual and Special Town Meetings; oversees the preparation of the Town Meeting warrants; coordinates and submits the Annual Report; signs all bonds and notes for borrowing, purchasing, leasing or disposing of Town property; and settles claims against the Town or employs counsel in suits against the Town. The Board's FY19 [Goals & Objectives](#) can be reviewed on the Town's website.

COMMITTEES: An elected five-member Elementary [School Committee](#) oversees the policies and budget of the Town's public elementary schools. There is also the [Tri-Town Union School Committee](#), which includes two Topsfield members, and the [Masconomet Regional School District School Committee](#), which includes three Topsfield members. The three member communities in the regional school committees are Topsfield, Middleton, and Boxford. Other elected positions in Town include: Planning Board, Housing Authority, Constable, Moderator, Board of Library Trustees, Board of Assessors, Board of Road Commissioners, Board of Water Commissioners, Commissioners of Trust Funds, and Park and Cemetery Commissioners. In addition, the Town appoints citizens to numerous boards and commissions to conduct municipal operations, including the Finance Committee. A listing of the various committees and the respective appointing authorities is contained within Topsfield's [Annual Report](#).



TOWN MEETING: In accordance with its [Town Bylaws](#), Topsfield has an Open Town Meeting form of government. The Town Bylaws state that Annual Town Meeting shall be held on the first Tuesday in May each year, which must be opened with a quorum of at least 100 registered voters. Special Town Meetings may be convened as deemed necessary by the Board of Selectmen or petition of voters. There are approximately 4,844 registered voters in Topsfield.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR: The title of [Town Administrator](#) was established by a 2005 Town Meeting vote which authorized the position in January 2007. The Board of Selectmen appoints the Town Administrator to implement the broad policy directives of the Board, to supervise staff and oversee the daily operations and delivery of municipal services performed by departments under the jurisdiction of the Board of Selectmen.

The Town Administrator is responsible for the following tasks and responsibilities: serve as Chief Administrative Officer and Agent of the Board of Selectmen; serve as the Personnel Director; serve as Chief Procurement Officer; serve as Chief Financial Officer and Director of Financial Management team; oversee and report on claims against the Town; prepare and coordinate Annual and Special Town Meeting warrants; compile the Town's Annual Report; and oversee and manage operations/services under the Selectmen's authority.



FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT: Topsfield is in a strong financial position. The Town has a [\\$28.9 million](#) operating budget for FY20. Included in the annual operating budget is \$7.8 million as Topsfield's contribution to the [Masconomet Regional School District](#) and \$302,800 for the [Essex North Shore Agricultural & Technical School](#).

According to the Division of Local Services, Topsfield had a stabilization balance of \$1,555,703 for FY18 and a free cash balance of \$2,564,754 for FY19. The FY19 Overlay Reserve balance was \$141,258. The FY18 [Financial Statements](#) can be reviewed on the Town's website. The FY19 tax levy was \$23.94 million. In FY19, local receipts were nearly \$3.38 million, state aid was \$1.97 million, and other available revenue was \$1.73 million. The FY19 tax rate for all properties is \$17.00 per thousand of the property's assessed value.

Topsfield holds a Standard & Poor's rating of [AAA](#) with a stable outlook, as of February 2019. The Standard & Poor's rating upgrade noted the Town's consistent operating surpluses supporting continued reserve growth amid a rising debt burden, underpinned by a formalization of its management practices and policies on debt management and reserves, which provide a strategy for maintaining the Town's financial health. Local property taxes generate about 77.16% of revenue, with local receipts accounting for 10.89%, state aid for 6.35%, and other available revenue for 5.60%.



Challenges and Opportunities

- **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Topsfield would like to attract new businesses to the community and is particularly interested in revitalizing its downtown. The Town is seeking to maintain the character of the downtown and the community by attracting new businesses that would align with the Town's vision. Topsfield's Downtown Revitalization Strategic Planning Working Group is striving to develop a strategic plan for the [revitalization](#) of the downtown which will include a market assessment. It expects to present a completed plan in February 2020. Topsfield's main shopping area is ¼ mile village downtown and there are additional small businesses in Town, which are located primarily along Route 1.

Topsfield is interested in attracting new enterprises that correspond with the Town's character, will provide services to residents and visitors, and will ease the budgetary dependence on residential property taxes. The next Town Administrator will have to balance Topsfield's desire to maintain open space with the need to bring in appropriate commercial development.

- **EDUCATION**

Topsfield highly values education and its public-school system. Topsfield's highly rated school system is one of the reasons many families choose to live here. An elected five-member Elementary [School Committee](#) oversees the policies and budget of the Town's two elementary public schools: [Steward](#), serving Preschool-grade 3, and [Proctor](#), serving grades 4-6. The [Tri-Town Union School Committee](#) is made up of members from each of the three member towns (Topsfield, Middleton, and Boxford, known informally as the Tri-Town area) elementary school committees. The [Masconomet Regional School District](#) also serves students in grades 7-12 in the Town of Topsfield as well as Boxford and Middleton. [Masconomet Regional Middle School](#) and [Masconomet Regional High School](#) are located in the same complex in Boxford. The FY20 budget for the regional school district is approximately \$37 million, with Topsfield contributing about \$7.8 million. Topsfield high-school-aged students may opt to attend the [Essex North Shore Agricultural & Technical School](#). Topsfield's FY20 assessment for the school is approximately \$302,800. There are approximately 1,800 elementary school students in the Tri-Town district, including approximately 500 Topsfield students.

Representative of Topsfield's dedication to education is the fact that 97.3% of the Town's residents age 25 years and older have a high school diploma and about 60% of the Town's population age 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher advanced degree.



- **CAPITAL NEEDS**

Like most communities, Topsfield has periodic capital needs that must be addressed. For example, the fire station will need a new roof and sealed containment under each bay in the near future. A



number of capital needs have been addressed including: Town Hall underwent an extensive, nearly \$10 million renovation in 2018, which incorporated dedicated space for the Council on Aging; a \$10 million water treatment plant was completed less than a year ago; the two elementary schools recently received about \$7 million in renovations including new roofs; and a \$1.1 million ladder truck for the Fire Department was recently purchased. The Town recently received a \$15,000

Massachusetts Downtown Initiative grant to implement a parking management strategy and, in August 2019, Topsfield was awarded a \$400,000 Complete Streets grant. In 2015, the Town received a state grant of approximately \$1 million to repave Route 97 from the Boxford town line to the Wenham town line. Topsfield's [Capital Improvement Plan](#) for FY18-FY22 can be reviewed on the Town's website.

- **OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION**

Topsfield's [Open Space & Recreation Plan](#) was completed in August 2018. The Plan includes an inventory of open space and recreation lands, a statement of Topsfield's open space and recreation goals, an analysis of needs, goals and objectives, and a seven-year action plan. Approximately one-third, or 2,850 acres of the total area of Topsfield, is owned by such entities as: Massachusetts Audubon, Essex County Greenbelt, a portion of Bradley Palmer State Park, a portion of Willowdale State Forest, the Beverly-Salem Water Board, the Essex County Agricultural Society (Topsfield Fairgrounds), the Town of Topsfield, and land that individual residents have placed under conservation restrictions. The Ipswich River is one of the most important natural features in Town. Audubon's [Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary](#) has a popular Nature Center and hiking trails. Hood Pond, a 68-acre pond, is located off Route 97 and has a private beach operated by the [Topsfield Beach Association](#) where both residents and non-residents can seek membership. The [Topsfield Rail Trail](#), which runs four miles from the Wenham to the Boxford town line, is popular for walking, hiking, and biking. There are numerous locations in Town for kayaking, swimming, birdwatching, and wildlife viewing. Topsfield has two major recreational parks: Klock and Pye Brook. Additionally, the Town's [Park and Cemetery Department](#) also offers a variety of active and leisure activities, including soccer, baseball, lacrosse, football, nature observation, and picnicking.

- **HOUSING**

There are approximately 1,877 single-family parcels in Topsfield. Approximately 95% of housing units are owner occupied. The average FY19 residential property assessment was \$599,950 and the average single-family tax bill was \$10,199. The [Housing Authority](#) offers affordable housing to about 60 senior and disabled people living at Little Brook Village, a 55-unit housing complex.



- **PUBLIC SAFETY**

The Topsfield [Police Department](#) has 13 full-time and 10 reserve officers as well as two civilian administrators. The Town approved two additional officer positions at Annual Town Meeting which is designed to help reduce overtime costs. The department became fully accredited by the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission last year and its FY20 budget is about \$1.58 million. The police station is a former State Police barracks, built in 1935. The current Police Chief is scheduled to retire in April 2020. The Topsfield [Fire Department](#) has five full-time and 21 on-call firefighters; all but one are also EMTs. It has an FY20 budget of approximately \$733,000 and one fire station, which was built in 1960. The department runs the Town's ambulance service and five firefighters are also paramedics. Topsfield contracts with an outside ambulance service to provide backup and transport services. The [24/7 Fire Study Committee Report](#), which was updated in 2016, can be reviewed on the Town's website.

- **GREEN COMMUNITY**

Topsfield is a designated Green Community. It has received state grants to fund: a high-efficiency steam boiler at the library, energy conservation measures, weatherization, exterior and interior lighting, energy audits, Energy Management Systems improvements, and Variable Frequency Drives in municipal buildings. Topsfield has a [Renewable Energy/Green Communities Committee](#) that investigates the application of the provisions of the Green Communities Act.

- **WATER**

The Topsfield [Water Department](#) was created in 1949 and provides drinking water and fire protection to approximately 80% of the Town of Topsfield as well as the Masconomet Regional School District. The Department reports directly to the Board of Water Commissioners and is funded by revenues generated from user fees. Topsfield's water comes from two well fields that draw water from the Ipswich River basin.

- **CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION**

Topsfield embraces civic engagement and appreciates the levels of participation and discourse residents provide. Citizens serve on numerous elected and appointed boards and committees as well as in other volunteer capacities. Maintaining a strong and collaborative relationship among residents, employees, and volunteers is vital to the success of the community. Residents have also expressed a strong desire for



increased transparency and communication from the Town Administrator and various local boards regarding Town business, including the budget. Ideas and recommendations regarding improved methods of communicating with, informing and engaging citizens, including new technologies and social media, would be welcome. It is important that the next Town Administrator be a skilled and effective communicator.



Candidate Qualifications

COMPETENCIES: The Topsfield Board of Selectmen is seeking a Town Administrator with excellent leadership, financial management, communications, and team-building skills. The successful candidate:

- should demonstrate prior success in leading a complex municipal organization or department(s).
- should be competent in all areas of municipal management and operations, but especially in finance, human resources administration, personnel management, economic and community development, project management, and communications.
- must be proactive and able to assess and improve a municipal organization.
- must be analytical, data-driven, and focus on results.
- must understand the importance of implementing up-to-date processes and protocols.
- must be adept at multi-tasking, know how to prioritize, and be skilled at long-term planning in relation to municipal operations, services, and needs.
- should appreciate the importance of utilizing technology and maintaining IT security.
- should be knowledgeable about municipal management best practices.
- is expected to be adept at locating grant opportunities and be able to write and administer grants.
- should be inclusive, collaborative, ethical, and committed to transparency in government.
- must treat all staff, residents, and board and committee members fairly and equally.
- should be an innovative and decisive leader who can work well with various Town stakeholders.
- is expected to work cooperatively and collaboratively with staff, citizens, the business community, area municipalities, and state and federal officials.
- must be a strategic and dynamic leader; should be highly approachable and accessible.
- should be an experienced facilitator who can help eliminate silos and encourage teamwork between various Town departments, boards, and committees.
- must be a skilled and effective communicator, who can speak concisely and clearly.
- must have an open-door management style.
- should be enthusiastic and strive to build morale.
- must be skilled in developing relationships and team building.
- must be able to delegate effectively, mentor department heads, and provide support and motivation to ensure continued high performance and professional growth for employees.
- must be dedicated, organized, patient; have a strong work ethic; and inspire trust and confidence.
- should be imaginative and willing to ask both the obvious and the more thoughtful questions; be willing to question the status quo.
- must have the ability to effectively explain complex issues to individuals, committees, and citizens.
- should have strong management skills and be a strategic thinker.
- must be a creative problem-solver and active listener who is accessible, open to new ideas, and a consensus-builder.
- must lead by example, have effective conflict resolution skills, and be motivated and respectful.
- is expected to be a community unifier who manages projects in a participatory manner.
- should enjoy engaging with community members, including working with volunteer boards and committees, and be willing to attend important community events.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE:

- The successful candidate will possess a bachelor's degree, and preferably a master's degree, in public administration, political science, business management, or a similar field.
- A minimum of five years of experience, with three years in Massachusetts preferred, in managing a business with greater than 100 employees or a Town of 5,000 or more inhabitants.



Compensation Package

The Town of Topsfield will offer an employment agreement and compensation package that is competitive with comparable area communities, with a salary of \$140,000+/-, commensurate with qualifications. An attractive benefits package, including health and retirement plans, is part of the Town Administrator's total compensation. Residency is not required.



How To Apply

Interested applicants should submit a cover letter and résumé, in confidence, by September 18, 2019, 5:00 p.m., via email to:

Apply@communityparadigm.com

Subject: Topsfield Town Administrator Search

Please submit a single PDF containing both cover letter and résumé.

Following the closing date, résumés will be reviewed according to the outlined qualifications. The Topsfield Town Administrator Screening Committee will interview the most qualified candidates in confidence. Based upon these interviews, finalists will be chosen for further evaluation and reference checks and will then be forwarded to the Board of Selectmen. Finalists will be contacted for references and approval of background reviews before their selection is advanced to the Board of Selectmen. The Topsfield Board of Selectmen will select the Town Administrator.

Questions regarding the position should be directed to:

Bernard Lynch, Principal
Community Paradigm Associates
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The Town of Topsfield, Mass., is an EOE/AA employer.