

The Landmark

Rutland town administrator sworn in

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New Town Administrator Michael Nicholson had his first day on the job on Monday, getting sworn in twice by Town Clerk Anita Carlson – at the start of the workday and again at the board of selectmen’s meeting.

Nicholson was one of several candidates brought forward to the board by Bernard Lynch of Community Paradigm Associates LLC, a group that consults on personnel matters for communities. The interviews were held in December and selectmen agreed unanimously on offering Nicholson the town administrator position.

The position has been open since the town’s first town administrator, Margaret Nartowicz, left last summer to become Town Clerk of Amherst. The town has been served in the meantime by Interim Town Administrator Robert Reed.

Nicholson comes to Rutland after serving as the executive aide to Gardner Mayor Mark P. Hawk for the past two years. He is a graduate of The University of Massachusetts Amherst with a dual degree in History and Political Science as well as a certificate in Public Policy and Administration. He also has earned multidisciplinary honors with a concentration in State and Local Electoral Politics and Policy from the school’s Commonwealth Honors College. In addition, Nicholson holds a Masters of Public Policy from UMass Amherst and is currently working on a law degree at Suffolk Law School.

At his interview, Nicholson said he thought he had a good foundation of knowledge for the town administrator’s position and has established a network at municipal, state and federal levels

“Rutland seems very unique and interesting to me, with the amount of growth that has happened here in the past couple of years,” he said at his earlier interview.

In his role as executive aide, Nicholson said he was part of Gardner's budget process from start to finish.

As well as creating a conservative template to build the city's budget, Nicholson said he met regularly with department heads to discuss priorities and their impact on the city budget. They also discussed revenue and expense trends.

Although Nicholson worked with a city council form of government, he is familiar with the open town meeting form that Rutland uses. He was in charge of formalizing Gardner's financial policies and shoring up the city's stabilization fund. He was also involved in capital improvement planning.

Five years ago, when Nicholson first went to work for the Gardner mayor, the city had a Baa bond rating with a negative outlook. Today, with its emphasis on stabilization fund building it has moved up to AA- with a positive outlook.

Nicholson said he was responsible for getting a grant to use fiber optic cable to connect Gardner police, City Hall and the Senior Center, leading to an \$8000 savings in phone bills. He has successfully written about \$200,000 in grant applications in the past year, he said.

Speaking to the projected residential development in Rutland, Nicholson said he thought it was important to retain a community identity and to make sure established and new residents feel like they're members of the same town.

You want to make sure that the new developments "don't take away from who Rutland thinks Rutland is," he told the board at the interview.

Nicholson noted that several towns including Marlborough, Amherst and Petersham have limited the number of building permits they hand out each year as a way to slow development and minimize impacts on schools and services.

Nicholson also said he was familiar with PILOT agreements for solar projects since the city has sited one on land it owned that was once planned for residential development. He has worked with National Grid to figure out the city's capacity to host solar energy projects. Gardner now includes solar projects in the city's zoning code, he said in December.