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Residents to weigh in on town administrator search

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NORTHFIELD — Residents will be asked to contribute to the town administrator search in a community forum Monday, Aug. 27, 6 p.m. at Dickinson Memorial Library.

The forum will be “very free form,” said Bernard Lynch, principal of Community Paradigm Associates, the Plymouth-based company conducting the search.

“It gives townspeople a say and a way to participate in the process, and it gives candidates a sense of the community,” Lynch said. The information gathered from the community forum tells the search team about the “issues, challenges and opportunities that the town has,” he said, and gives a “good sense of the type of person we should be looking for as we do the search.”

“We find it’s also a great process for a community to go through,” Lynch said.

“Leaving everything aside, stepping back and trying to identify what the issues are and what the assets of the individual who will be hired should be, is a worthwhile use of time.”

Since May, Northfield’s town administrator position has been held by Bernie Kubiak, who has maintained since he was hired that he does not plan to stay for more than a few months. The previous town administrator, Willie Morales, was hired in June 2017, then put on administrative leave in March, following a disciplinary hearing in which the Selectboard aired a list of complaints about his work performance. Morales’ attorney subsequently negotiated a separation agreement with the town.

One of the Selectboard’s priorities in this search for a new town administrator, said Selectboard Chairwoman Tracy Rogers, will be to find someone who can fill the role of a “strong town administrator.” In 2013, the Town Governance Study Committee recommended that the town transition to a “strong town administrator” model, in which the town administrator would oversee the day-to-day operation of

the town government's various departments. Rogers noted that Northfield is still working through that transition.

"I don't know if we necessarily want a strong personality, but someone who is good with people," she said.

"A lot of our departments are very used to independence," said Selectwoman Julia Blyth. "We have to find a balance between giving them the independence that they're used to ... but also making sure everybody is accountable to somebody."

The information from the community forum will be used to advertise the position, Lynch said. A search committee, which has not been formed yet but will likely comprise residents, will then review the pool of applicants and ultimately narrow it down to three viable candidates, whom the Selectboard will interview.

The whole process will likely take until October, Lynch said.

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