

Coventry, R.I. Town Manager



Photo Credit: Trails and Walks in Rhode Island

Community & Position Profile

The Community

The [Town of Coventry](#), R.I. is a vibrant and active community of approximately 35,000 residents in Kent County, Rhode Island. It is known for its areas of rural neighborhoods and strong citizen participation. The Town is seeking a dynamic, visionary, and community-focused leader to serve as its next Town Manager.

Coventry was first [settled](#) by English colonists in the early 18th century when the Town was part of Warwick. In 1741, residents of the area petitioned the General Assembly of Rhode Island to create their own town and the petition was granted that year. Coventry is 64.8 square miles in size, including 2.6 square miles of inland waterways and ponds. Coventry is bordered by West Warwick and Warwick to the east; Foster, Scituate and Cranston to the north; East Greenwich and West Greenwich to the south; and Sterling, Connecticut to the west. Coventry is the largest town in land area in Rhode Island and is surpassed in total area only by South Kingstown, Rhode Island.

Coventry is centrally located in the Pawtuxet River watershed approximately 16 miles southwest of the state capital of Providence. The Town is located along Interstate highway 95 and is within a short drive from the scenic coastal communities of Newport and Narragansett, R.I., and a 90- minute drive from Cape Cod.

While the western and central portions of Coventry remain rural in nature, the eastern section is one of the most rapidly growing residential communities in Rhode Island. Coventry changed dramatically during the 19th century. In 1800, it was primarily an agricultural town with a population of 2,423, but the expansion of the textile industry sparked dramatic growth in Coventry.

A number of historic buildings are located in Coventry, including the Nathanael Greene Homestead, the Paine Homestead, and the Waterman Tavern. Farmhouses from the 18th century can be found scattered around Coventry, and many continue to be used as private residences today. On the east side of Coventry, many homes from the 19th century remain, ranging from two-family former mill workers' houses to large mansions.

The Town is interested in continued appropriate economic development to provide additional employment opportunities and tax revenue, and to increase retail, professional services, and commercial options for residents and visitors. Coventry's total assessed value was approximately \$3.62 billion in fiscal 2020.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the Town of Coventry's racial makeup is 94.8% white, 1.8% Hispanic or Latino, 1.5% two or more races, 1.1% Black or African American, and 0.5% Asian. The median family income in Coventry is about \$88,556 annually, which is higher than the state median family annual income of \$74,045 by approximately 19.6%. The Town is demographically similar to the state regarding resident age cohorts. Particular differences are in the under-5 years cohort with Coventry at 4.0% in the 2010 U.S. Census versus 5.2% for the state and in the 65 years and over cohort where Coventry has 16.1% of its population which is slightly lower than the state's 16.8%.



Government and Finance

Coventry is governed largely under the 1973 [Coventry Home Rule Charter](#). Its government contains a Council-Manager form of government that includes a five-member Town Council, each elected by one of the Town's five districts to a term of four years. The Town Council exercises overall control of the local government. The Town Manager, appointed by and responsible to the Council, is responsible for the administration of policies and for the performance of virtually all administrative functions.



There is also an elected five-member School Committee that oversees the policies and budget of the Town's public school system. In addition, Coventry utilizes a number of appointed boards and commissions, with various modes of appointment, to conduct the Town's municipal operations.

Coventry holds an annual Financial Town Meeting, which is an open Town Meeting with jurisdiction to vote only on financial matters, including the expenditure of funds and approval of the annual budget.

The Town Manager is responsible for executing the policy directives of the Town Council and for leading and managing the operations and activities of the Town. The Town Manager is

specifically responsible for fiscal planning and development of the Town's operating budget, capital planning, implementing Town policies, economic development, oversight of personnel functions including collective bargaining, coordinating intra- and intergovernmental affairs, grant procurement and administration, long- and short-term planning, and procurement of goods and services. The Town Manager appoints the Town Solicitor, all department directors, and Town employees, with the exception of the Probate Judge, School Superintendent, and Library Director. Coventry has many talented department heads who look forward to assisting the next Town Manager in continuing to move the Town in the right direction.

The Town is currently utilizing its FY21 budget for FY21 due to COVID. The Town Manager's [FY20 budget book](#) can be located on the Town's website. In FY20, Coventry had an overall spending plan of approximately \$108,150,086, with \$76,192,204, or 70.45%, allocated for education, \$28,317,184, or 29.55%, for municipal government, of which 5.8% for debt service, capital improvements, and library resource sharing.

The total grossed valuation of the Town for FY19, prior to a statistical revaluation during FY20, was \$3,600,706,919 and for FY20 the total valuation increased to \$3,619,962,306; the growth attributed to new construction and general economic activity. Coventry continues to exclude a growing proportion motor vehicle taxes, which are being phased out over a five-year period and no longer count toward the levy, per RIGL §44-34-11, § 44-34.1-1(c)(1)(i) and §44-34.1-1(c)(5). Coventry's tax rate for FY20 was \$22.24 for residential, \$26.81 for commercial, \$22.24 for tangible, and \$18.75 for motor vehicle.

For FY20, Coventry received state motor vehicle phase out reimbursement of nearly \$1.6 million, motor vehicle base reimbursement of \$251,244, and library aid of \$226,403. For FY20, Coventry expected to bring in \$481,581 in meals and beverages taxes, \$441,150 in public service corporation tax, and \$112,054 in hotel tax, according to the state Department of Revenue's Division of Municipal Finance.

As of June 30, 2018, Coventry reported combined ending fund balances of \$20,535,998, including: nearly \$2.65 million for sewer fund; funds restricted for educational programs of nearly \$668 million, public safety programs of \$374,158, health and human services programs of \$184,185, and culture and recreation



programs of \$42,892; funds committed for public works programs of \$6.3 million, culture and recreation programs of \$2.8 million, and public safety programs of \$52,391; and unassigned funds of \$6.7 million. As of June 30, 2018, the unrestricted net position of the Sewer Fund was (\$42,697).

According to the Town's Annual Financial Report, as of June 30, 2018, the Town of Coventry had a total bonded debt of approximately \$46.45 million, an OPEB liability of approximately \$17.1 million, and a net pension liability of about \$161.6 million.

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Finances**

Coventry holds a Moody's rating of A1 (negative outlook), as stated in ratings reports of February 2019. Moody's highlighted the Town's above average socioeconomic profile, average debt levels, and satisfactory reserve position in its rating action. Coventry's goal is to manage its finances in a manner that will maintain or improve this rating. Coventry's FY20 budget was approximately \$108 million. State Senate Bill 3050 caps municipal property tax levy increases to 4%. The Town's [sewer program](#) was running a structural deficit of approximately \$1 million annually that has recently been resolved and is now self-sustaining. A review of the sewer use fees is now being conducted and will be completed shortly allowing for the Sewer Enterprise Fund to meet regulatory compliance requirements. Citrin Cooperman, an accounting and advising firm, was contracted to review the project and provide information to the Town. A copy of their [presentation](#) can be found on the Town's website.

- **Economic Development**

Coventry has a [Comprehensive Community Plan](#) that was first developed in 1992 and updated in 2000. The Town is currently in the process of again updating this plan and the next Town Manager will be expected to participate in this important activity. Additional commercial/industrial businesses that fit the character of the Town would be welcome in order to expand the tax base and lessen the burden on residential property owners. Attracting a diverse core of businesses is important to the future of the Town and considered a primary goal. The Center of New England mixed-use development, near Interstate 95, is a major business area in Coventry.

- **Capital Needs**

As with most communities, Coventry has ongoing infrastructure issues as programmatic needs have changed and facilities have aged. Maintaining Coventry's existing infrastructure and enhancing programmatic offerings is important to the Town. Construction on a \$12 million Police and Human Services complex, which was formerly the senior center, will be completed in December 2019.

- **Education**

Coventry highly values education. The [Coventry Public Schools](#) system helps to attract families to the



community. The total student population is approximately 4,700 and has been declining over the past several years at the Town's five elementary, one middle, and one high school. The annual school budget for FY20 is approximately [\\$76.1 million](#), which represents a 4.17% increase over the FY19's budget. Illustrative of the community's commitment to education, a total 92% of its residents age 25 years and older have a high school diploma and about 26.3% of the population age 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or higher.

- **Housing**

Approximately 81.4% of the housing units in town are owner occupied, according to U.S. Census data. Homes in Coventry have a median value of approximately \$300,000 and homes on the market are currently selling well. The median monthly rental unit is \$934. There are approximately 14,671 housing units in Coventry, according to the U.S. Census.

- **Department of Public Works**

The Coventry [Department of Public Works](#) has 52 employees and an annual operating budget of about \$5.7 million. It is responsible for taking care of the Town's 225 miles of roads, bridges, engineering, cemeteries, building maintenance, trash collection, recycling and snow plowing, and has oversight of sewer construction.

- **Public Safety**

The Coventry [Police Department](#) has 57 full-time officers, including patrol officers, detectives, sergeants, lieutenants, captains, a major, and colonel. The department expects to complete the accreditation process within two months. The department's FY20 budget is nearly \$12.3 million. Fire service is provided via four separate fire districts. They operate independently and are not part of Town governance.



- **Recreation**

Coventry provides many [recreational opportunities](#) for children and adults. It has several ponds and a lake for fishing and water sports, beach areas, playgrounds, and an 860-acre natural park area that has forestlands, brooks, hiking trails, and several old farm sites. The 9.2 mile Coventry Greenway, which is part of the East Coast National Greenway system, is a biking and walking path that uses abandoned railroad right of ways. The Town also has popular youth leagues for numerous sports, playing fields, and a skate park.

- **Citizen Engagement**

The Town embraces civic engagement and would seek to encourage even higher levels of participation and discourse. Citizens are involved in a large number of appointed positions as well as in numerous volunteer capacities. Ideas and recommendations regarding additional methods of communicating with and engaging citizens would be welcome.

Candidate Qualifications

The Town Council seeks a Town Manager with strong leadership abilities and municipal management experience. Candidates should be competent in all areas of municipal management and operations, but should have particularly strong financial management and interpersonal skills. They should also have strong skills in economic and community development, project management, and personnel administration. The candidate should be knowledgeable of best practices in municipal management and experienced in using technology and innovative methods to achieve cost-savings while providing effective and efficient municipal services.

The Town Manager must be a visionary, decisive, and diplomatic leader who can work collaboratively with the various interests of the Town. The Town Manager is expected to work cooperatively with citizens, volunteers, and the business community. The Town Manager should have a visible public presence and be highly approachable. He or she should become deeply involved in the community. Candidates should have the ability to highlight the many positive aspects of Coventry and be willing to share that information with staff and the public via traditional and modern communications tools.

The Town Manager must be able to delegate effectively, mentor department heads, and provide support and motivation to ensure high performance and professional growth for Coventry employees. He or she must be a strategic and dynamic leader who can build a strong team and employ a teamwork approach. He or she should strive to encourage collaboration between all departments, including schools, and to build morale. The Town Manager must be innovative, organized, have a strong work ethic, and inspire trust and confidence. He or she must have active listening skills and be a powerful communicator with the ability to accurately and effectively explain complex issues to individuals, committees, and the citizenry.

The Town Manager should have strong finance skills and be a long-term strategic thinker, particularly in regard to finances, and economic and community development. The Town Manager must also demonstrate successful experience in project management and personnel management, including experience in meaningful economic development. He or she must be able to develop and sustain credible relations with employees and multiple union representatives. The Town Manager must be skilled in developing and maintaining relationships within Town government and throughout the community. He or she should exude a positive attitude, have a strong character, and be willing and able to take ownership of issues. The next Town Manager must be politically astute and have a passion for municipal management.

The Town Manager must have critical thinking skills and be a creative problem-solver who is accessible, transparent, trustworthy, collaborative, and a consensus-builder. He or she must lead by example, and be motivated, innovative, ethical, and respectful of others.

The successful candidate should possess demonstrated skills, abilities and knowledge in municipal finance, economic development, project management, government law, personnel administration, and intergovernmental relations. Candidates should show evidence of continued professional development and an ICMA Credentialed Manager is preferred.

Compensation Package

The Town of Coventry will offer an employment agreement and compensation package that includes an annual salary of \$150,000+/-, is competitive with comparable area communities and commensurate upon qualifications. An attractive benefits package, including health and retirement plans, is part of the Town Manager's total compensation. Coventry's residency requirement can be waived by the Town Council.

How To Apply

Interested applicants should provide cover letters and résumés, in confidence, **in a single PDF** to:

Apply@communityparadigm.com

Coventry Town Manager Search

Résumés will be reviewed according to the outlined qualifications. The Town Council will interview the most qualified candidates in confidence. Finalists will be contacted for references and approval of background reviews. The position is Open Until Filled with a first review of applications on **December 7, 2020**.

Questions regarding the position should be directed to:

Bernard Lynch, Principal
Community Paradigm Associates
Blynch@communityparadigm.com
978-621-6733

The Town of Coventry, R.I., is an Equal Opportunity Employer.