

Report to the North Castle Town Board

The Administrator Review Task Force is unanimous in its recommendation that the Town of North Castle should hire a Town Administrator as soon as possible. In making this recommendation, members of the Task Force, who have lived in North Castle for a total of more than 150 years, are all grateful for the fact that the town has been so well governed in the past, and that our Town Supervisor had the vision to raise this important issue just at the time she did.

The Case for Hiring a Town Administrator

Our recommendation is supported by the fact that all members of the current Town Board are either strongly in favor of hiring a Town Administrator, or are at least willing to consider doing so. The question of cost was a common concern voiced by virtually everyone we talked to, but viable approaches to this key question also emerged during our meetings.

Our Task Force was brought into being by a letter from the Town Clerk issued on 11 September 2008. The economic debacle that has descended on our country since that date has imposed upon our deliberations a deep layer of concern that none of us might have imagined when we were first convened.

Every level of government in the United States, national, state, county and town is being forced to deal with new exigencies of deep complexity, and long duration. All of us on the Task Force believe that it was fortunate that we were convened when we were, so that we can present to the Town Board our recommendation in the early stage of what is certain to be a long and difficult period for town governance.

In making the recommendation that a Town Administrator be hired, we are buttressed by our recognition of the fact that today we are dealing with a situation that not only calls for change in town governance, but also presents us with the opportunity to bring change into being.

The need for change comes from the growing financial and regulatory complexities of town governance, the added problems of having to deal with exogenous factors brought on by the economic emergency, and the requirement to maximize efficiency and uncover new funding sources.

The opportunity for change comes from the willingness of the Town Supervisor and the Town Board to consider directly contributing to the inevitable costs that will be involved in acquiring the services of a talented Town Administrator. This willingness is a

key factor in our ability to recommend seriously that the town take on additional expense at a time when the town budget is already under heavy pressure.

The Task Force met with the Town Administrators from both Mamaroneck and New Castle. We were well impressed with both men, and with what their positions have done to benefit their towns. Both administrators spoke of a growing-in period that followed their hiring. Working relationships had to be established and parochial suspicions overcome. Neither man had, nor wanted the authority to “hire and fire.” Both felt that they had increased the efficiency of their towns’ governing processes, and that their Town Supervisors were well pleased with their performances.

The New Castle Town Supervisor, Barbara Gerrard, had this to say about her Town Administrator, who has been in place for 15 years. “It’s worked out very well....He has all the information on county law and state law. He keeps us from making big mistakes.” This quote is from a 5-11 August 2008 issue of *The Examiner*, entitled “The Best of Both Worlds” that details the many benefits that have come to New Castle since it hired a Town Administrator. The article also quoted Alfred Gatta, Town Administrator of Scarsdale who said that having a long term administrator in place “removes a large chunk of the intense politics that often poisons honest debate on local issues.”

On 26 February 2009, a member of this Task Force talked directly with Town Supervisor Valerie O’Keeffe, to see if she felt equally enthusiastic about Mamaroneck. O’Keeffe spoke with forceful enthusiasm about the benefits of having a Town Administrator. She put it bluntly, “Town governance has become so complex that trained experts are required, volunteers can no longer do it.” O’Keeffe cited a cascade of state and county regulations, auditing requirements, fairness in dealing with personnel issues in a variety of departments, the ability to deal with the issuance of bonds and the seeking of grants as all requiring the expertise and continuity of a Town Administrator.

Many of these issues had also been cited by North Castle Town Board members during their meetings with the Task Force, as they cited their support for bringing a Town Administrator on board.

The Role of Town Administrator

In general terms, the Town Administrator would be the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Town of North Castle, reporting to the Town Board. The Supervisor would continue to be the Town’s chief executive and, with the Town Board, would continue to have ultimate responsibility for all local laws and regulations, budget approval, contract approval and the hiring and firing of Town employees.

Although Town Board members could still have a liaison relationship with Town departments and committees, it is the Town Administrator that would organize, direct and coordinate with all departments on a day-to-day basis. He or she would report to the Town Board on all town operations on a regular basis. This would enable the Town

Board to focus more of its attention on policy matters and on the long-term vision of the Town and its government.

The Town Administrator would be responsible for the entire process of preparing and recommending the Town's annual budget to the Town Board. He or she would also be responsible for a standardized process of periodic performance review and evaluation of all town departments and personnel.

The Town Administrator would be responsible for coordination with county, state and federal governmental agencies, although the Supervisor could still participate in inter-governmental meetings.

The Town Administrator would be responsible for all vendor solicitation, evaluation and negotiation, as well as personnel contract negotiation, although the Town Board would continue to have all final approval power.

The Town Administrator would be responsible for all studies related to alternate funding sources, project feasibility and alternate methods of providing town services.

The Town Administrator would be expected to keep abreast of innovations being pursued by comparable localities throughout the U.S. and to assess their applicability to the Town of North Castle.

The Cost of Hiring a Town Administrator

We were told by the Mamaroneck Town Administrator that salaries for people in his position range from \$115K to \$185K. The Mamaroneck Supervisor was asked if there is a pool of talented Town Administrators who might be interested in working in North Castle. She replied that talented candidates are available.

Our Town Supervisor has stated her willingness to reduce her salary by \$70k, which would cover roughly half the cost of a Town Administrator's salary. Additional funds might come from the salaries of the Deputy Town Supervisor and members of the Town Board, as many of the duties they now perform would be taken on by the administrator.

We were told that a law firm now conducts labor negotiations for North Castle at an annual cost of approximately \$100k. Both Town Administrators we talked to said that they had taken on these duties, and that significant savings to their towns had resulted, perhaps as much as \$50k in the case of Mamaroneck. A portion of additional costs for special studies, such as those associated with the building moratorium or proposed capital projects, could be avoided in the future by having a Town Administrator's perspective earlier in these processes.

The Town of North Castle now has an annual budget of \$30M. One Town Board member said he felt that budget is higher than it should be, and that the more efficient management that would result from the hiring of a Town Administrator would bring overall costs down.

The Task Force feels strongly that only one additional person be hired in the near future, that person being the Town Administrator. He or she should be able to draw on existing administrative support during at least the first two years in office. Although some towns have added the position of deputy town administrator, we recommend that, if necessary, the Town of North Castle do so by adding this responsibility to that of an existing town official.

The hiring of a Town Administrator has become a longstanding, contentious political issue in a nearby town (Yorktown). We are fortunate to be able to avoid this difficulty, since the need to hire a Town Administrator has become so clear, and our Town Supervisor and Town Board are in favor of doing so.

North Castle has a long-standing tradition of strong local government. The hiring of a Town Administrator now would be very much in keeping with this proud tradition.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Shapiro, Chairman
Jack Boyce
Douglas Cassetta
Donald Gregg
Jacqueline Macken
John Reese
Earle Yaffa

7 March 2009