

Matthew Coogan  
Boxford Town Administrator Screening Committee Candidate Essay Questions  
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#### Question #1

Building personal relationships with the Select Board, department heads, and staff, as well as other elected boards is critical. For my onboarding in Newburyport, I reached out to the 11 City Councillors and set up meetings individually to learn more about them personally, but also on their vision for Newburyport, their goals as Councillors, and to get an understanding of the current relationship between the executive branch and the legislative branch. I also did the same for department heads, and I made sure to meet at their offices and get introduced to their staff and better understand the working environment and structure of the department. For some departments, such as water, sewer, police, and fire, I set up tours of their facilities in addition to one on one meetings to learn more about critical equipment, operations, and facility protocols. It's important to get to know people as early on as possible and make personal connections to build trust and confidence on my leadership capabilities. My onboarding process in Newburyport was successful, and Department Heads and the City Council soon understood that I was a reliable, trustworthy resource.

Within the first 60 days my priority is to build further on these relationships. To get us acquainted and to help me quickly be an effective Town Administrator, I would engage the Select Board in various ways to determine their vision, to clarify goals and objectives, and to help us strategize and best prepare our journey together. I always make sure I am accessible to the Select Board, and my door will be open always to additional discussions and any informal conversations in between; there will always be things forgotten or unsaid during more formal sessions, for various reasons. A series of of different types of meeting with Select Board members, as individuals and as a body, in a formal public meeting or in a workshop retreat, or even informally, will help me engage with the Select Board, get us all working in the same direction, and develop strategies to achieve their goals and allow me to manage the day-to-day effectively.

Throughout these engagements I would be compiling a priority action plan for the biggest issues facing the Select Board. It would be an iterative process, and throughout the suggested series of meetings I would present drafts for the Board to discuss and react. The process would be to distill the plan down to the most important issues that we tackle together.

#### Question #2

a. I would envision a similar process to my experience in Newburyport. I have experience creating GFOA annual operating budgets. The Finance Director and I prepare a presentation on the City's finances as a starting point to building the budget. In the past few years we have been working to expand our financial indicators to create a more accurate and detailed financial ten year revenue forecast, as well as a general economic forecast for the City. In addition, we also identify trends in expenditures, specifically targeting expenditure items that trend beyond typically year-over-year increase to find ways to better understand or reduce increases. The revenue and expenditure forecasts are helpful to understand what the City can afford within the levy limit. Newburyport has a performance based budget, and department heads submit narratives that include their previous fiscal year accomplishments, trends for their field, and goals with objectives for the next fiscal year. I work with the Council, specifically the Budget and Finance Subcommittee, on a public budget workshop schedule for the Councillors and general public to review each department budget. The annual operating budget and CIP is approved by the City Council in June and is a robust document assembled in a way for the taxpayer to understand how the budget correlates to municipal operations and the delivery of services for their community.

strong fiscal policies in Newburyport have helped make the Capital Improvement Plan a useful tool to fund capital improvements. Each year we make adjustments to improve on the utility and detail of the plan. This year, we are implementing new fiscal policies to dedicate more funding for capital improvements in our expenditure forecasting. We are setting a dedicated ratio of funding for capital improvements based on annual revenue. This percentage ratio of capital expenditures to annual revenue would gradually increase in order to help the City tackle more projects and lingering maintenance issues, which is especially important in an old community like Newburyport. A long-term strategic CIP also allows municipalities to be proactive in obtaining other revenue sources to fund capital projects. Last year, our part-time grant writer was successful in bringing in \$3 million of grant funds for capital projects. The CIP is a critical piece of our grant applications as grantors favor funding municipalities that are proactively planning infrastructure improvements in a public process.

c. The pandemic will continue to affect municipal budgets differently for each community. Like Boxford, Newburyport's revenue source is predominantly from property tax, and that revenue source has not appeared to have been affected by the pandemic, at least in Essex County. There are some predictions that commercial and personal property tax will decrease as office space remains vacant and businesses and industries are leasing less space. But again, Newburyport, and especially Boxford, would be relatively isolated from this potential since both communities have very small commercial tax bases. Furthermore for Boxford, the Town does not have a strong reliance on other revenue sources that have been affected by the pandemic, specifically meals and room taxes. It also appears that state revenues are performing better than expected. The level state aid allocated to communities for FY21 was a pleasant surprise, and there doesn't appear to be reductions in state aid to municipalities in the future.

Schools will be a focus of funding in the next few years. The abrupt transition to remote learning followed by a gradual return to in person will no doubt take a toll on the social emotional skills of our children, and it will be important to focus funds on helping students re-adjust to in person learning. I foresee increases in school budgets for these adjustments. Federal stimulus will help cover many of these costs, but the effect the pandemic on our public schools is still unknown and may last several years. Resources will be needed.

Although it appears the economy is in a much better state than what was expected early in the pandemic, and financial forecasts have improved dramatically for 2021 as compared to 2020, it's important to keep financial forecasts conservative for the coming years. My advice is to remain cautious in budgeting, be conservative in forecasting, be prepared for another downslide, and utilize federal stimulus dollars for one-time expenditures.

#### Question #3

a. As a leader, I would guide the Board of Selectmen to make sound decisions and develop strong policies to achieve goals. I would work together as a group to understand their vision.. I consider the process as a journey where we would all learn and make adjustments along the way. We would commit to forming a strong relationship, both personally and professionally, with mutual trust and honest communication. I would want the Board to recognize that I have a breadth of knowledge of municipal operations and can draw on that knowledge to advise the Board. In the case I don't have the experience to draw from, I would want the board to trust me to find the information or make connections to the right stakeholders, agencies or other entities so that they can do their jobs effectively.

b. As a manager, I expect a high level of professionalism and accountability for myself as well as all department heads and staff. I work hard to develop that relationship by instilling trust and an open line of communication. My office door remains open for anyone to approach me with issues and problems, and they trust that I'll be honest and earnest in helping them work through these issues. I have been fortunate to work with dedicated, hardworking staff that deeply care about public service and doing right by the taxpayer. There are times when mistakes are made or deadlines are missed, or even the occasional personnel issues when disciplinary action is necessary. In those occasions, it's important to quickly, but deliberately work through these issues, learn from them, and move on. It's important to be hard on issues and soft on people. Giving staff the opportunity to be accountable and the opportunity to learn and grow helps make a great employee and a great employee culture for a municipality.

C. The Masconomet School District is renowned for high-quality education, and education is highly valued in Boxford. It's important as a municipal leader to constantly work with the school committee to provide them with financial forecasting and guidance to build budgets that promote efforts at academic excellence. It's important to provide context for school funding needs as well as the other needs of the community and represent the interests of the Town of Boxford while working collaboratively with the School Committee.

d. At the heart of the TA position, is the responsibility to provide the best municipal services possible the residents of Boxford. It's important to forge strong relationships with the public to ensure participation and an eagerness to volunteer and serve on the board and committees that provide so many services for a community. The public needs to be informed and engaged throughout the year to ensure a productive Town Meeting. It's important to actively engage with the community to recruit fresh perspectives and diverse input for community discourse.