

DATA SHOW STRONG GROWTH OF MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS

By MARK MORSE



Massachusetts local government, while having strong historical roots, is continuously evolving. Two of the most significant changes include the employment of more professional and technical personnel, and the reorganization of local government agencies.

Organizational changes within a local government reflect the philosophical views of local voters. Some towns have many elected officials, while others have few. Some communities have many boards and commissions, with large memberships; others have a smaller number of boards and commissions, with smaller memberships.

While cities and towns have organized their internal operations in many different ways, a common approach in all municipal government has been the creation of more central management positions and the employment of more professional and technical employees. Thirty years ago, municipalities employed few managers or administrators, human resource directors, and finance directors. Today there are hundreds of such positions.

The number of professional, technical and administrative positions in municipal government has expanded rapidly and continues to expand. Many new types of positions have been created relating to general management, finance, human resources, purchasing, information technology, environmental management, inspection services, social services, emergency medical services, community and economic development, and others. This trend is not unique to Massachusetts cities and towns; it parallels changes across the United States.

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Historical References

The concept of employing a professional manager in towns actually has a long history. On October 16, 1815, a committee in the then-town of Boston recommended that an “intendant” be employed by the town to “attend daily in some central and public office,” according to an article in *The Massachusetts Selectman* published in October 1966. This nineteenth century reference appears to be the first instance of a town addressing a need for administrative and technical support on a day-to-day basis.

Following this, one of the most significant changes in local government occurred in 1914 when the town of Norwood accepted a statute providing for the first professional administrator in Massachusetts. Soon thereafter, Mansfield (1921), Middleborough (1921), and Stoughton (1922) began operating with town manager structures (see chart below). While a number of towns adopted town manager special laws in the late 1940s and 1950s, other towns began to employ executive secretaries. In 1942, Brookline became the first town to establish the position of executive secretary.

While towns began employing town managers and executive secretaries, a number of cities were experimenting with the adoption of a council-manager form of government (plans D and E). Twelve

cities adopted one of the two forms of council-manager government between 1918 and 1959 (see chart, next page). For several cities, the experiment was relatively brief; Brockton, Fall River, North Adams, and Waltham operated with a council-manager structure for five years or less. Gloucester abandoned the council-manager structure after almost twenty years when the voters adopted a home rule charter establishing a strong mayor form of administration. The Gloucester Home Rule Charter, however, provides for the position of administrative assistant to the mayor, who is assigned a large number of administrative and management duties. Cambridge, Lowell and Worcester continue to have a council-manager structure, but have modified the original Plan E form, either by special legislative act or home rule charter adoption.

A review of the directories prepared by the Massachusetts Municipal Association over the last forty years provides some insight into the magnitude of the change in local government. (The directories may have some inaccuracies, since information is self-reported, but they are regarded as the most reliable source of this data.) The charts included here (see pages 13 and 14), with data drawn from MMA directories, illustrate some of the changes in local government over the past four decades.

Early Town Manager Plans, 1915 to 1959

Norwood 1915	Danvers 1950	Randolph 1955 (abandoned plan in 1961)
Mansfield 1921	Wilmington 1951	Ipswich 1955 (abandoned plan in 1962, re-adopted plan in 1966)
Middleborough 1921	Holden 1952	Concord 1956
Stoughton 1922	Arlington 1953	Williamstown 1957
Orange 1929	Amherst 1954	Andover 1959
Saugus 1948	Provincetown 1954	
	Shrewsbury 1954	

In 1965, thirty-nine Massachusetts communities had a city form of government, representing eleven percent of the 351 communities in the state. Forty years later, the number of cities is fifty-one, representing 14.5 percent of communities. This change reduced the number of communities with a town form of government by twelve in the same period, decreasing from eight-nine percent of the state's communities to eighty-five.

The number of mayors who serve as the chief executive of their city has increased since 1965 from thirty-two to

forty-one. The number of communities with council-manager forms of government has increased from seven to ten.

The most significant change of the past forty years has been the enormous growth of professional administrative positions in towns. [For purposes of calculating these figures, we have tried to identify any position that supported the administrative work of the board of selectmen.] In 1965, only about eleven percent of all towns employed a professional administrator, while by 2005, 259 towns (eighty-six percent) employed a professional

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Council-Manager Forms of Government, 1918 to 1959

City	Plan Adopted *	Year Effective	Abandoned
Waltham	D	1918	1922
Fall River	D	1929	1933
Cambridge	E	1942	continues to have a council-manager structure
Lowell	E	1944	continues to have a council-manager structure
Medford	E	1950	1986
Quincy	E	1950	1955
Revere	E	1950	1964
Worcester	E	1950	continues to have a council-manager structure
Haverhill	E	1952	1967
North Adams	E	1952	1957
Gloucester	E	1954	1975
Brockton	E	1958	1959

* Plan D called for a city council, a city manager, and a school committee elected for four-year terms. Plan E called for a city council, city manager and a school committee elected for two-year terms. Plan E utilized a proportional election system. The standard plans of city government could only be adopted by communities that were already cities. With the adoption the Home Rule Amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution in 1966 and the Home Rule Procedures Act (Chapter 43B), these forms could no longer be adopted.

Cities and Towns in Massachusetts, 1965 to 2005

	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005	Percent Change
Communities with a city form of government *	39	42	44	47	51	31%
Communities with a town form of government	312	309	307	304	300	-4%

* Some communities with a city form of government continue to call themselves towns, such as Barnstable, Franklin, Southbridge and Watertown.

The term “administrator” is used here to refer to all types of administrators, including town manager, town administrator, executive secretary, executive assistant, town coordinator, administrative assistant, and other positions.

administrator. From 1965 to 1975, the number of towns employing professional administrators nearly tripled, so that by 1975 thirty percent of all towns employed a town manager, a town administrator, an executive secretary or a management position with another title. By 1985, the number of towns employing administrators increased to 150 (forty-nine percent). By 1995, almost sixty-three percent of towns were employing administrators. Over the forty years, the number of professional administrative positions in towns grew by 662 percent.

The term “administrator” is used here to refer to all types of administrators, including town manager, town administrator, executive secretary, executive assistant, town coordinator, administrative assistant, and other positions. It is interesting to note that there have been many

titles used, including some rare titles such as town agent or municipal assistant, to identify management positions responsible for supporting a board of selectmen. Over the last fifteen years, as the city and town management profession has evolved and matured, the title of town administrator has become the most common. “Town administrator” encompasses positions with a wide range of authority. In some communities, a town administrator has broad appointing and administrative authority, and in others the position may have only those duties and responsibilities assigned by the board of selectmen. A review of municipal directories indicates that in 1985, sixty-seven towns used the title executive secretary and only twenty-four used the title town administrator; in 2005, only twenty-two towns used the title executive secretary and 138 used the title town administrator.

Mayors Serving as Chief Executive Officer, 1965 to 2005						
	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005	Percent Change
Mayor as chief executive	32	34	35	37	41	28%
Council-manager form of government	7	8	9	10	10	43%
Communities with a city form of government	39	42	44	47	51	

Professional Administrators in Massachusetts, 1965 to 2005						
	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005	Percent Change
Town Manager	14	23	24	44	54	
Town Administrator	1		24	78	138	
Executive Secretary	17		67	61	22	
Other titles	2	70	35	7	45	
	34	93	150	190	259	662%
Number of towns	312	309	307	304	300	-3.8%

* The 1975 Municipal Directory consolidated many titles under one category (executive secretary, administrative assistant, town administrator with less than town manager authority, or other executive assistant with administrative powers who is named by the board of selectmen to assist them in the administration and oversight of town activities under their control).

'Professionalization' Continues

The evolutionary process has also created a number of fascinating local government management arrangements. Some towns have operated under a system in which the board of selectmen hold several offices, including serving as the board of health and the board of assessors. As the need for more administrative support developed, a number of towns, especially on Cape Cod, operated with three-member boards of selectmen, often with the selectmen considered "full-time." Bourne, the last town in Massachusetts to have full-time board of selectmen, expanded its three-member board to five and established a town manager structure in 2000.

It is worth noting that the growth of other municipal disciplines parallels the increase in the number of administrative and management positions. For example, the

number of assistant town and city managers and administrators has increased sharply in the last twenty years. Often these positions have responsibilities encompassing human resource management, procurement, fiscal analysis and special projects. The number of finance and human resource professionals has also increased dramatically.

The growth of the town and city management profession in many ways parallels the demographics of Massachusetts and the United States. The number of professional local government positions grew along with the baby boomer generation. The combination of rapid growth of local government professions and an aging population has, and will continue to have, a major effect on the number of local government professionals available. This is expected to result in salaries growing at a rate faster than the labor market in general as well as strong competition for the limited pool of qualified applicants. ❁

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STATE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

During the late 1970s the commonwealth of Massachusetts undertook a number of initiatives to promote professional management in cities and towns, including the funding of several "circuit riders." A circuit rider was a management professional who worked for two, three or even four towns. A number of towns participated in the circuit rider program, including Ashfield, Brimfield, Deerfield, Holland, Northfield, Shutesbury, Sunderland, Warwick, and Wendell. The circuit riders who participated included Wendy Foxmyn (now assistant town administrator in Wilbraham), James "Jay" Moynihan (now executive director of the North Attleborough Electric Department), Charles Seelig (now town administrator in Halifax), and Jim Purcell, (now town manager in Norton).

From 1984 to 1989, the Executive Office of Communities and Development (now the Department of Housing and Community Development) operated the Incentive Aid Program, which was designed to provide financial support for local government management improvements. In part, the program grew out of pressure from Proposition 2½ to improve local government management. Among other initiatives, the program sought to fund the creation of a number of local government management positions over a three-year period; the local government would pay an increasing share of the cost of the management professional.

– Mark Morse