

THE ITEM

Lancaster signs up with Community Paradigm for town administrator search

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LANCASTER - Now that Community Paradigm Associates LLC was chosen as the search firm for a new permanent town administrator, John Petrin discussed the process with the Selectboard on Monday, Jan. 3.

Petrin, the liaison with Lancaster on the project, is a Bolton resident who was the town administrator in Burlington for seven years before retiring; previously he was the town administrator in Harvard from 1988-2001. He was also past president of two municipal associations.

He said it was an 11-step process of meetings with selectmen, research, putting together a position statement, advertising and actively recruiting, resume review, selection and interviews of semi-finalists, finalist background check, and helping select the new hire.

The Selectboard had to decide if Community Paradigm Associates would be reviewing the resumes and interviewing semi-finalists alone or with a screening committee. Petrin said just the firm would be faster, and that it was very important for this part to be confidential with no names released until the public interviews were scheduled for the finalists.

Petrin explained that if semifinalist names were disclosed, it would be very bad for the town's reputation.

The screening committee would have to maintain confidentiality, refrain from background checks or call people from other communities who know candidates for an opinion, even after the process is concluded.

Selectman Jay Moody said it was safer to not have a search committee because it only takes one person making a mistake to cause a problem. His motion to not have one passed unanimously.

Petrin said the process would take a little under 14 weeks.

Selectman Alix Turner said the Selectboard understands the formal job description for the town administrator, but every town is unique and they need to figure out what kind of "characteristics and priorities" are desired.

Petrin said the next step is to meet with the selectmen individually and capture three opinions, then bring those together in one document to guide the search. He said they also "need to know the flavor of the community" to help discuss with candidates during recruitment.

The market for town administrators right now should bring about 30 total applicants for a town like Lancaster, Petrin said, with seven or eight "serious" people making it to the semifinal before three finalists are selected.

Community Paradigm was recently hired by Sterling to conduct its town administrator search, also.