



Massachusetts Municipal Association

MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES

Recommendations for Effective Local Government Administration and Management from MMA Policy Committees

January 2020 • Volume 5 • Number 1

MMA Policy Committee on Public Works, Transportation and Public Utilities **Best Practice Recommendation: Promote the Public Works Profession**

BEST PRACTICE: Work with municipal public works-related departments to promote the public works profession, invest in professional development for department staff, and attract qualified candidates to available positions.

Municipal public works professionals provide critical services to residents, businesses and visitors and improve the quality of life within our communities. They pave and plow roadways, oversee water and sewer plants, are facilities managers, and act as first responders, among many other responsibilities. But municipalities compete with private sector engineering and consulting firms to attract public works professionals to join their ranks, often for lower pay and with fewer upfront professional benefits. Municipal officials can take several proactive steps alongside their public works-related departments to better promote the public works profession, invest in professional development for current department staff, and attract qualified candidates to join the municipal workforce.

The following are recommended practices for promotion of the public works profession:

- As professional associations facilitate leadership development, continuing education and training, and networking, encourage public works, highway, water and sewer, and other relevant departments and staff to become involved with professional associations such as the American Public Works Association, the New England chapter of the APWA, the Massachusetts Water Works Association and the Massachusetts Coalition for Water Resources Stewardship.
- Where relevant, encourage municipal public works staff to participate in activities of the Massachusetts Highway Association and regional/county highway associations. Encourage municipal public works staff to attend the annual New England Public Works Expo, sponsored by the Massachusetts Highway Association, for professional development and networking purposes.
- Publicize a promotional campaign – or create a new one – that showcases the services that municipal public works professionals provide for their communities. Promotional campaigns can be shared through municipal websites, social media and other digital and print materials. (For example, see the New England APWA's "Public Works Makes It Happen" video.)

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- Seek opportunities to educate and promote the public works profession among younger generations by speaking to students at elementary, middle and high schools, vocational schools and area colleges. Children often know more about the police and fire professions than they do about public works. Speak with children about road maintenance, drinking water and sewer infrastructure, and other age-appropriate concepts. With older students, there is an opportunity to connect classroom learning to career applications by offering hands-on projects, job shadowing or internships with municipal departments.

Resources:

- American Public Works Association: www.apwa.net
- American Public Works Association New England Chapter: newengland.apwa.net
- Massachusetts Water Works Association: mwwa.memberclicks.net
- Massachusetts Coalition for Water Resources Stewardship: mcwrs.org
- Massachusetts Highway Association: <http://masshwy.org>



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MMA Policy Committee on Energy and the Environment Best Practice Recommendation: Municipal Exterior Lighting Conversions

BEST PRACTICE: Municipalities can promote energy-efficient lighting practices, decrease environmental impacts, and reduce costs in their communities by adopting the International Dark-Sky Association's recommendations related to municipal streetlight and area-lighting conversions.

Municipalities are converting exterior lighting to LEDs at increasing rates, whether by first purchasing their streetlights from investor-owned utilities and then converting to LEDs, by working with utilities to convert to LEDs while the utility maintains ownership of the infrastructure, or as a municipal light plant. During the conversion process, municipalities can make choices that further promote energy efficiency and reduce costs, decrease negative environmental impacts, and benefit public health.

The following best practices associated with LED conversion are recommended by the International Dark-Sky Association:

- Use fully shielded exterior lighting in new or replacement installations. Fully shielded light fixtures emit all of their light downward. This helps protect drivers and cyclists from potentially-dangerous glare, directs light to where it is needed most, and reduces the impact of light pollution on the natural environment.
- Use lighting with a correlated color temperature (CCT) of no greater than 3,000 kelvins. LEDs contain high levels of blue light in their spectrum, which can have negative impacts on environmental and public health, particularly circadian rhythms in human and animal populations. Municipalities converting external lighting to LEDs are advised to select a color temperature no greater than 3,000 kelvins to lessen the negative impacts of harsh blue light.
- When possible, install dimming features that allow municipalities to better control the brightness of external lighting during different times and in different locations. Dimming enables municipalities to be more energy-efficient with external lighting while reducing costs and protecting environmental and public health.

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Dozens of Massachusetts municipalities have taken steps to convert their street- and area lights to LEDs and have made choices that align with these recommendations. For example, the city of Pittsfield last year completed an LED conversion process on 5,372 streetlights. The city selected fully shielded fixtures approved by the International Dark-Sky Association and bulbs with a color temperature of 2,700 kelvins. The city shared the costs of the conversion process between its own capital budget and incentives from its electric utility and a regional planning agency. The city estimates that its annual streetlight operating costs will be cut in half.

Municipalities and other government entities in Massachusetts have access to the MMA's MunEnergy program. Through Constellation, the MMA-endorsed supplier for the MunEnergy program, cities and towns can manage their energy costs and spread out the cost of energy-saving programs, such as LED conversions. Through Efficiency Made Easy, communities can work with approved suppliers to fund the cost of LED conversion across the life of their MunEnergy contract. This option allows communities to avoid the bid process and go directly through a trusted partner, avoiding upfront capital costs and quickly recognizing energy savings.

Resources:

- International Dark-Sky Association: www.darksky.org
- Constellation's Efficiency Made Easy program through MunEnergy helps Essex: tinyurl.com/ConstellationEssex
- City of Pittsfield Streetlight LED Conversion Project: tinyurl.com/PittsfieldLED
- MMA's MunEnergy Program: www.mma.org/munenergy
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council LED Streetlight Retrofit Program: www.mapc.org/our-work/expertise/clean-energy/led-streetlight-retrofits



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MMA Policy Committee on Personnel and Labor Relations **Best Practice Recommendation: Conduct and Civility of Public Officials**

BEST PRACTICE: Adopt a code of conduct for appointed and elected officials serving on boards, commissions, committees and councils in order to maintain civility, decorum and professionalism in public positions at all times.

Local leaders remain at the forefront of democratic governance, addressing the public's concerns, developing and implementing policies, and setting the tone for civic engagement. Whereas the concerns of constituents are often diverse and divided, maintaining a public forum where people can disagree through civil debate remains at the core of a healthy democratic process. By listening, respecting people's opinions, remaining open to new ideas and points of view, and disagreeing constructively, local leaders can refine ideas and reach common ground to create meaningful policy. This means preserving civility in all discussions and debates, and not tolerating speech or behavior that is belligerent, disrespectful, threatening, abusive or disparaging. Poor behavior impedes the democratic process, encourages hard feelings and divisiveness, contributes to voter alienation and aversion to government, and creates a liability for cities and towns. Fostering a climate of respect among public officials is at the heart of work performed in the public interest.

Elected and appointed officials must understand that, regardless of their intentions and whether they are an appointing authority, their interactions with municipal staff can expose the city or town to liability and lead to serious legal consequences for the city or town. Even good-faith actions by elected or appointed officials could violate collective bargaining agreements or other policies or laws. Respect and professionalism in all public and private dealings with municipal staff and other elected and appointed officials is essential.

The following are recommended items to include in a code of conduct:

- Conduct at public meetings
- Use of parliamentary procedure
- Responsibility and behavior toward fellow members of a public body
- Responsibility and behavior toward town or city administration

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- Responsibility and behavior toward employees and volunteers of the city or town
- Responsibility and behavior toward members of the public
- Communication expectations
- Conflict of interest of members of a public body
- Adherence to the city or town's social media policy
- Statement of commitment to and understanding of the code of conduct and an acknowledgment of receipt
- Reporting mechanism (e.g., report to chair of selectboard), including the procedure for filing a complaint, and a process for resolving conflicts, which could be a city or town's harassment policy
- System of communication among members of governing body regarding incidents of misbehavior and complaints, and communication to chief executive officer
- Enforcement of the code of conduct (which could include a decision by the governing body to publicly reprimand or not to indemnify an individual who acts inappropriately)

A code of conduct should remain easily accessible to everyone, including municipal officials, employees and the public. Following every election, or at least once a year for appointed positions, municipal officials should review the code of conduct and sign an acknowledgement of review, which should be kept on file.

The following are examples of codes of conduct:

Town of Littleton Board of Selectmen: tinyurl.com/LittletonConduct

Town of Carver Select Board: tinyurl.com/CarverConduct

Town of Holden Selectboard: tinyurl.com/HoldenConduct

Resources:

- Robert's Rules of Order: www.robertsrules.com
- "Beyond Civility: From Public Engagement to Problem Solving, An Action Guide for City Leaders," National League of Cities, 2011: tinyurl.com/NLCBeyondCivility
- The Institute for Civility in Government: www.instituteforcivility.org
- The Civility Center: civilitycenter.org



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MMA Policy Committee on Personnel and Labor Relations Best Practice Recommendation: Pathways to Municipal Government

BEST PRACTICE: Develop a plan for recruiting, hiring and retaining employees in the municipal workplace.

Local governments are refreshing hiring practices to attract the next generation of public employees. In order to attract diverse and talented candidates, it is important for communities to shift from traditional advertising and hiring practices to modern methods of recruitment. All employees desire job security and good pay and benefits, but work-life balance, a desire for mission-driven work, and the ability to have a positive impact in people's lives and society at large are emerging as priorities among younger workers. These pair well with jobs that serve the public.

Adjusting expectations around retaining employees is equally important. Today's shorter-job-tenure trend among younger employees can be reframed as an opportunity to build employee skills and introduce more workers to local government. Today's employees want to learn new skills through continuous education that allows them to progress at their own pace. By implementing cross-training, mentorship programs, and flexible work policies, municipal employers can offset the knowledge gaps and high overtime costs vacancies can create.

The following are some ways that local governments can modernize their recruitment, hiring and retention workforce plans:

- Make projections on future employment needs, including a data analysis of retirements, and plan for future workload distribution and staffing levels.
- Improve your city or town's "brand" to attract employees, including those without public sector experience. This may include updating and standardizing recruitment materials, updating job titles and descriptions on the municipal website, reexamining minimum qualifications to make sure they are not out of date, providing recruiters with new toolkits, using advertising campaigns to improve messaging, and updating employer pages on social media sites such as LinkedIn.
- Integrate the municipal website and social media with the recruitment and hiring process, and consider posting short videos that showcase municipal employees talking about why they enjoy their positions and what they like about public service. (See information about the MMA's MassTown Careers initiative in Resources below.)

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- Prioritize employee development and engage in succession planning. Opportunities for advancement can help with retention.
- Enhance benefits, particularly "soft benefits" such as flexible hours, job sharing, cross-training, summer hours, working from home, educational opportunities, performance rewards, paid time off to volunteer, and other non-monetary rewards.
- Consider student loan reimbursement programs, which may involve negotiating with employee organizations for unionized employees or implementing a personnel policy for non-union employees.
- Consider offering a sign-on bonus, a referral bonus or relocation expenses.
- Provide mentoring opportunities and consider programming that allows senior employees to transfer knowledge to others over a pre-retirement period.
- Consider loosening civil service requirements.
- Encourage employee health through wellness programs and robust employee assistance programs that include benefits like free counseling, health advice, legal advice and other services.
- Conduct employee surveys to update and improve retention strategies.
- Improve and update technology.

In addition to modernizing recruitment, hiring and retention programs, municipal employers can increase public engagement to attract employees. Citizen academies, youth councils and volunteer positions in local government departments are all excellent ways to increase public awareness about the rewards of a career in local government. Municipal employers can also use high school and college internship programs as training grounds for new employees as a way to attract and introduce individuals to local government. Assigning employee mentors to interns and providing interns with meaningful work may lead to future hires.

Support for high school civics education, college programming, and management fellowship programs may also benefit local government recruitment and hiring. Municipal employers can use high school classes and higher education to educate the next working generation about the impact, value and satisfaction that comes with working in the public sector. Partnering with entities outside government can be a good way to remain visible in the community, share resources and engage potential employees.

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Resources:

- MassTown Careers (masstowncareers.org): A special MMA initiative (going live in January 2020) was created as a recruitment tool to help cities and towns showcase the varied and exciting roles available in Massachusetts communities. Videos feature interviews with municipal officials at various stages of their careers and in different municipal roles around the Commonwealth.
- MMA-Suffolk University Certificate in Local Government Leadership and Management (www.mma.org/certificate): This graduate-level program, taught on Fridays during the academic year, is the equivalent of five MPA-level courses covering a range of municipal topics, including strategic leadership, human resources, civic engagement and financial management. Participants earn a certificate and graduate credits.
- Municipal Finance Management Seminar (www.mma.org/about-mma/services): The MMA and Suffolk University created this program in response to feedback from local officials about the challenges in hiring finance professionals. Held over the course of five Fridays, the seminar covers budgeting, financial reporting, treasury functions, "costing out" contracts and more.
- Supervisory Leadership Development Program (www.mma.org/mmhr/sldp): The Massachusetts Municipal Human Resources association, a member group of the MMA, offers a three-day program designed for municipal employees interested in developing or enhancing their supervisory and management skills. The program includes content on communication, team building, performance management, delegation, and supervision in the unionized, public sector workplace.
- "New Rules for Attracting and Retaining Government Talent," e.Republic, 2019: tinyurl.com/RetainGovTalent
- "'Choose Purpose': Cities Launch Ad Campaigns to Attract More Job Applicants," Governing.com, February 2019: www.governing.com/topics/workforce/gov-state-local-government-cities-recruitment-hiring-employees.html
- "What Government Can Learn From 'Best Places' Employers," Governing.com, September 2017: www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/col-what-government-can-learn-best-places-employers.html
- "Can New Perks Make Up for Smaller Pensions?," Governing.com, September 2017: www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/gov-public-sector-benefits-pension.htm
- "Can Government Hiring Get Out of the Stone Age?," Governing.com, February 2016: www.governing.com/topics/mgmt/gov-government-hiring-best-practices.html
- City of Newton, High School Summer Internship Program: www.newtonma.gov/gov/health/youth/summer_youth_internships.asp
- City of Somerville, Mayor's Summer Jobs Program: www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/mayors-summer-jobs-program



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MMA Policy Committee on Municipal and Regional Administration Best Practice Recommendation: Local Process Changes to Ensure Sustainable Housing Production

BEST PRACTICE: Proactive local strategies to ensure sustainable housing production that matches your community's goals.

Community-driven housing production requires proactive approaches on behalf of municipal officials. By strategically updating zoning bylaws and ordinances, communities can encourage housing development that is consistent with the municipality's goals. The following are some recommendations:

1. Begin with a housing needs assessment, community master plan or housing production plan for your community. This can provide a roadmap for developers interested in building in your community. Build a local public awareness campaign around these housing initiatives to help inform the community.
2. Ensure that the renter population is aware of developments in their community. In many communities, notices of developments are mailed only to property-owning abutters. In order to encourage the participation of renters at development meetings, notice should be distributed to abutting tenants as well as property owners.
3. Planning and zoning board officials can consider having a "cooling off" period between community meetings and decision-making to ensure that decisions are not made in the heat of the moment. A sufficient amount of time could be one week, for example.
4. Permitting processes should be streamlined and transparent and available to developers. Processes should be standardized so that developers can understand when additional studies may be necessary ahead of time in order to avoid delays and extra money.
5. Planning and zoning board officials should understand how to frame the proposed development to community members and how best to give feedback on issues raised by community members. This should include considering the balance between the issues raised by community members and what is best for the city or town to meet development goals.

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Resources:

- "Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes," by Boston University professors Katherine Levine Einstein, Maxwell Palmer and David Glick: tinyurl.com/EinsteinPalmerGlick
- Massachusetts Housing Partnership Housing Toolbox: www.housingtoolbox.org/local-support/organize



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MMA Policy Committee on Municipal and Regional Administration Best Practice Recommendation: Economic Development Factors Within Municipal Control

BEST PRACTICE: Municipalities should act on factors that are within their immediate control to boost economic development in their communities.

The Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University created an Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool to help cities and towns better understand the factors that contribute to healthy economic and employment growth. This tool collects information from cities and towns on: Access to Customers/Markets; Concentration of Business and Services (Agglomeration); Lease/Rental Rates; Labor Quality and Cost; Municipal Process; Quality of Life (Community); Quality of Life (Site Amenities); Business Incentives; Tax Rates; and Economic Development Marketing. Boiling down the trends, the study ranks the factors that were most highly correlated with percentage change in employment and establishments in cities and towns.

The factors that were most highly correlated with percentage change in employment were:

1. available development sites
2. site amenities
3. economic development marketing
4. timeliness of approvals
5. parking
6. school "success"

The factors that were most highly correlated with an increase in establishments were:

1. economic development marketing
2. timeliness of approvals
3. parking
4. public transit
5. cross marketing
6. low traffic congestion
7. fast-track permitting
8. site availability

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To facilitate desired economic development, a best practice for municipal leaders is to act on measures that are within their immediate control and that are shown to result in employment growth and attractiveness to business and industry.

The following are some recommendations:

- Improve the city or town website to boost economic development marketing and draw in developers.
- Identify sites for economic development and make that information available to developers.
- Make sure identified sites are zoned to encourage development.
- Look into ways to highlight site amenities such as on-site parking, public transportation, nearby educational facilities, etc.
- Make sure application and permitting processes are available to developers ahead of time and are as transparent as possible, with predictable timelines. Develop flow charts to identify the different pathways to approval.
- Provide an online application process and allow for online permitting, if possible.

Resources:

- "What Makes Working Cities Work," presentation by Northeastern University professor Barry Bluestone: www.mma.org/resource/what-makes-working-cities-work-2
- Town of Easton's Commercial and Industrial Property Site Finder: tinyurl.com/EastonSiteFind
- City of Somerville's SiteFinder tool: tinyurl.com/SomervilleSiteFind
- Town of Ashland's Downtown Planning Initiative: courbanize.com/projects/ashlanddowntown/comaps/48



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MMA Policy Committee on Municipal and Regional Administration Best Practice Recommendation: Strategies for Boosting Community Engagement

BEST PRACTICE: Implement key public engagement strategies to facilitate and expand citizen participation and increase the viewpoints contributed in the local dialogue and decision-making process.

There is no one-size fits all approach when it comes to community engagement. In order to maintain a healthy governance structure, residents must be aware of quality-of-life decisions in their communities and feel empowered to participate in the deliberative process. Empowerment comes through information sharing and access to decision makers. A range of activities are necessary to reach, engage and motivate diverse stakeholders to participate. "Diverse" should mean all demographics, including age, race, ethnicity, religion, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, property ownership (or not), language, income and educational attainment.

The following are considered best practices in this area:

- Make a stakeholder list for your community.
- Create user personas to define the different stakeholders in your community, and use these user personas to help predict and prepare for attendance and participation in meetings.
- Identify and consult with community-based and intermediary organizations, including neighborhood and grassroots leadership groups, local clergy and faith-based organizations, community and ethnic media, and others that can provide conduits for two-way communication between local officials and community residents on specific issues and policies.
- Provide early notice for public hearings and meetings, with details explaining the purposes and objectives and the subjects to be covered. Provide time and location details, as well as guidelines for participation.

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- Use multiple methods for community engagement and keeping the public informed. These can include face-to-face forums, focus groups or community-wide meetings, farmer's markets or community festivals, as well as social media and online surveys or third-party engagement platforms that allow real-time answers and resources such as maps. [Consult your municipal counsel on the open meeting and public records laws before you start to engage on social media platforms.]
- Hold "office hours," when community members can come in and speak with municipal officials and build relationships.
- Use local realtor listings to reach out to new homeowners. Hold new homeowner meetings with key local officials to help build new relationships.
- Understand the barriers that could prevent some residents from attending meetings, such as location, child care needs, language and holiday observances. Are meetings held in locations that are difficult to reach using public transportation? Is the setting one that people do not often go to or might not be comfortable going to, such as city hall or municipal offices? Try changing the location to a school, public hall, restaurant, or a space where people naturally congregate. Make certain these alternative locations are fully accessible. If meetings are held in a restaurant or other location that serves food or drink, make sure there is an understanding that they do not need to purchase anything to participate. Choose times that are convenient for all who may participate. Consider multiple meetings at different sites, times of day, and days of the week, perhaps co-sponsored by community groups as a way to increase attendance.
- Set and enforce ground rules for a civil, reasoned discussion focused on legitimate, substantive concerns and solutions to community problems.
- Create participant worksheets that allow meeting attendees to offer more detailed, individual comments and ideas.
- Make sure that appointments to local boards represent the demographics of the community, including a representative percentage of the rental community.

Resources:

- Metropolitan Area Planning Council Community Engagement Guide: tinyurl.com/MAPEngage
- "Running Effective Public Meetings," from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership: tinyurl.com/RunMeetings
- "Improve Public Engagement in Municipal Government," by Sustainable Jersey: tinyurl.com/SustainableJersey
- "Beyond the Usuals: Ideas to Encourage Broader Public Engagement in Community Decision Making," by the Institute for Local Government: tinyurl.com/InstituteLocal