

31 Bartha

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Assistant Town Manager
Town of Avon, CT**

2010-Present

- Senior manager in a council-manager municipality with a population of 18,000, an \$81.8 million combined budget, 107 full-time / 194 part-time municipal employees, and three bargaining units
- Manage all aspects of the operating and capital budget processes
 - Work closely with departments to develop requests and identify reductions/efficiencies
 - Develop and maintain performance measures in conjunction with department heads
 - Actively manage CIP projects for both the town and board of education
 - Prepare budget presentations for town manager and council chair at public hearings
- Serve as purchasing agent for Avon
 - Prepare contract, bid and RFP documents and manage procurement activities
 - Work with department heads to ensure compliance with purchasing policy
 - Negotiate scope, schedule and compensation with vendors
- Manage state and federal grants: application, oversight, compliance, and audit
 - State Library Grant - \$1.0 million (one award)
 - Small Town Economic Assistance Program - \$1.16 million (four awards)
 - American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Energy) - \$161,000 (three awards)
 - Department of Justice - \$90,000 (two awards)
- Oversee building projects, including \$8.61 million library renovation (completed spring 2012)
 - Coordinated bidding process and negotiated construction contracts
 - Worked with construction manager, architect, building committee, staff, and contractors
 - Managed \$1.0 million construction grant
 - Project completed for \$890,000 less than \$9.5 million budget approved at referendum
- Manage clean energy efforts in Avon
 - Managed commission, consultant, and staff to develop a comprehensive energy plan
 - Secured grant funding for various efficiency projects in municipal and school buildings
 - Facilitated solar RFP for town and school buildings resulting in three viable projects
- Emergency Management: Winter Storm Alfred (2011) and Hurricane Sandy (2012)
 - Liaison with utilities, state agencies, FEMA, and staff regarding restoration and recovery
 - Manage emergency procurement activities totaling +\$2.5 million (Winter Storm Alfred)
 - Serve as Public Information Officer during and after emergencies
- Negotiate municipal union contracts as member of management team
 - Work in partnership with the director of human resources to represent Avon
 - Cost out various proposals and analyze policy implications
 - Served as town's chief negotiator during DPW contract negotiations (2014)

Budget Analyst

2009-2010

State Office of Policy and Management, Hartford, CT

- Developed caseload and expenditure projections for Connecticut's public assistance programs
- Authored major policy and budget recommendations impacting social service programs
- Acted as liaison between the state budget office and social services program and fiscal staff
- Represented the state budget office at various legislative hearings and committee meetings

**Management Assistant & City FOIA Coordinator
Community Services Area, Ann Arbor, MI**

2008-2009

- Provided staff support to city planning commission
- Served as the city FOIA coordinator
- Managed grievances filed against the city by local Teamsters and AFSCME unions

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (Continued)

- Special Projects Manager** **2007-2008**
Town Manager's Office, Farmington, CT
- Performed duties of economic development coordinator
 - Established business retention and expansion program
 - Wrote economic impact analyses, tax abatement recommendations, and policy papers
 - Assisted with quarterly and annual strategic-plan goal reporting to town council
 - Revised sewer benefit assessment policy based on best practices, tax theory literature, and present-value analysis of historic town projects
- Teach For America (Secondary English)** **2004-2006**
Capitol High School, Baton Rouge, LA
- Cultural Affairs Intern, American Embassy** **Spring 2003**
US State Department, London, England

EDUCATION

- Master of Public Administration** **May 2008**
University of Connecticut, West Hartford, CT
- Concentration: Local Government and Public Financial Management
 - Overall GPA: 3.85 / 4.0 scale
- Bachelor of Arts** **May 2004**
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI
- Major: Political Theory and Constitutional Democracy
 - Minor: Journalism

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

- International City/County Management Association (ICMA), 2007-Present
- Connecticut Town and City Managers Association (CTCMA), 2010-Present
- Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), 2012-Present
- American Society of Public Administrators (ASPA), 2007-2012

PUBLIC SERVICE & VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

- President, CTCMA, Effective July 2014
- Executive Board Member, CTCMA, 2012-Present
- Member, Shared Services Committee, Capitol Region Council of Governments, 2010-Present
- Executive Council Member, ASPA Charter Oak Chapter, 2007-2008 and 2011-2012
- Vice President, Graduate Association of Public Policy Students, 2006-2007
- International volunteer work in Haiti (1998 and 1999) and Mexico (2002)

ACADEMIC HONORS

- Karl A. Bosworth Award for Academic Excellence, University of Connecticut, 2008
- Pi Alpha Alpha, National Honor Society for Public Affairs and Administration, 2008

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- United States Wayfarer Association (sailing), 2012-Present
- Newington Main Stage Community Theatre Group, 2011-Present
- ING Hartford Marathon finisher, 2011
- Eagle Scout (1999) & Merit Badge Counselor (2012), Boy Scouts of America

DANVERS, MA – TOWN MANAGER RECRUITMENT – ESSAY QUESTIONS – BARTHA

Response #1

Collective bargaining – Philosophy: Collective bargaining is about managing relationships to establish trust and achieve common goals. Negotiators must (1) show genuine interest in the personal / professional wellbeing of union members, (2) understand issues that are important to them, and (3) be fair and consistent. Work to achieve economic and administrative outcomes that are in the best interest of the municipality. Approach: Know the short and long-term cost impact of economic issues, membership demographic trends, and recent settlement outcomes. Identify issues with department heads to be addressed. Develop strategy and set cost parameters with elected officials in advance. Include department head, human resources, legal, and benefits/actuarial consultants on the team. Start off the record to see if agreement can be reached without the potential pitfalls of formal negotiation. Background: Served on management team in Avon with HR director and department heads to negotiate successor agreements with police (2012), dispatch (2013), and DPW (2014).

Employee discipline – Philosophy: People want to feel pride in their work. Discipline is less necessary in an organization with a healthy culture and work ethic. Managers who work hard, lead by example, and show interest in the lives of staff ensure this. Be firm but fair. Give praise when employees “do right,” because this makes employees more receptive to critical feedback. Approach: Stay informed, let supervisors handle most discipline, but intervene as necessary. Gather facts, but also act quickly – don’t let issues linger. Discipline should (1) be done privately, (2) balance positives / negatives, (3) focus on issues (not the person), and (4) be designed to improve performance / correct wrongdoing. Background: Grievance management experience in Ann Arbor, MI and Avon, CT. Graduate level coursework in labor relations.

Budget development and administration – Philosophy: Managers need to be very involved in budget development; provides an opportunity to know and direct, in detail, the workings of each department without micromanaging. Budget messages are an opportunity to provide a “state of the town” and to report where we are, where we are going, and how we’ll get there. Consult with budget director and department heads at regular intervals to track budget performance / manage variances. Approach: Take a long-term view. Use conservatism when projecting both revenue and expenditures. Pay attention to external trend data and internal

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financial information. Partner with appropriate consultants to negotiate favorable renewals with insurance carriers. Use recent and anticipated experience to project revenues and expenses; change assumptions incrementally to avoid budget volatility. Formal policies (debt, fund balance, investment, capital, etc.) ensure consistency and discipline and help moderate reactions to positive or negative budget information. Utilize guidance from auditors/ratings agencies and pursue GFOA budget/CAFR awards. Background: Deeply involved in all aspects of the budget process in Avon. Prepare presentations and talking points for the manager's office and council chair. Manage performance measures in department budgets. Worked as a budget analyst in the CT State Budget Office. Earned public finance certificate with my MPA.

Performance evaluation – Philosophy: Goal setting, recognition for achievement, and corrective action for falling short are the linchpins to effective operations. Absence of a performance evaluation systems result in ambiguity, inefficiency, and frustration – for both employee and employer. Focus should be threefold: projects, professional development (for self and department), and personal. Approach: Having clear goals and expectations and checking in at regular intervals is key; this way, priorities can be shifted and resources brought to bear to adjust to changing circumstances. Provide constructive criticism and praise as warranted. Background: Worked closely with the Farmington Town Manager to develop and report out her annual goals and objectives. Assist Avon Town Manager with oversight of department and division head project monthly project updates.

Strategic planning – Philosophy: Visioning and goal setting are critical to achieving sustained success. The process engages community members in the governing process, helps elected officials to articulate goals, evaluate priorities, and identify long-term objectives, and provides management with clear direction, actionable goals, and measurable performance metrics. Approach: The process must be accessible to all community stakeholders. Engaging outside assistance ensures objectivity. Utilizing surveys, focus groups, and joint planning sessions of elected/appointed boards develops support. Making each component of the draft available for public review and response results in a final product that represents the community's will. Background: Worked closely with the Farmington Town Manager and Town Council during implementation of their 2007 Strategic Plan.

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Response #2

When the Avon Town Manager and I were hired within six months of each other in 2010, the person we were replacing had been on the job since 1978 and was recognized beyond state borders as a star in his field. His were big shoes to fill. Given Wayne Marquis's tenure and popularity, the shoes he is leaving behind may be even bigger. It will be important for the next Danvers Town Manager to understand that Mr. Marquis cannot be replaced in the sense that he cannot be replicated and, as such, not to try to be someone he or she isn't. Danvers is a wonderful community that has benefitted from solid management for decades. I have no doubt that residents and staff are keenly aware of this. The next Danvers Town Manager needs to honor this legacy and build upon the foundation that is in place.

To be effective in these circumstances, a new manager must earn the trust and loyalty of staff, department heads, elected officials, volunteers, and residents through hard work, fairness, and authenticity. Successful managers, under any circumstances, establish themselves by getting involved. They meet with employees on their turf, show interest in their careers and their families, call them by name, hold them to high expectations, and give praise and criticism in equal parts. They earn the respect and trust of residents engaging in community life and being seen – jogging in the park, attending community events, shopping at the market, volunteering. They make time for people, even when they don't have it. They are accessible. They get to know elected officials by scheduling regular meetings with them in the office and in the field, touring Town facilities with them, meeting their families, and investing the time necessary to understand what issues and projects are important to them, how they prefer to communicate with the Town Manager's Office, who they are, and how they operate.

In a community like Danvers (or Avon), stakeholders usually want to be assured that new managers aren't bent on distinguishing themselves from their predecessors by instituting changes for change's sake. I would address this concern by familiarizing myself with the organizational and community cultures by listening to staff, officials, and residents, getting to know services and programs, and reading Danvers's governing documents. When the time comes to make change, you must be prepared to explain it – over and over again – because

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people are skeptical of change in general and especially with new leadership. You must involve others in the process of change so that they feel a sense of shared ownership of it.

Most importantly, the new manager must work hard and invest whatever time is necessary during the first few months (and beyond) to show stakeholders that he or she is serious about their work and committed to the community. The first few months should be spent absorbing, learning, listening, and developing a feel for what the community values and expects from its municipal organization. The new manager must be decisive when the situation requires a decision, but it is important that the people around you – especially in the shadow of a legend – recognize that you respect the work of those who came before you and share the community's hopes and aspirations for itself.

Response #3

I have experience working in three council-manager communities and understand that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to organizational structure or service delivery. Every town is different and job descriptions / organizational charts rarely tell the whole story in terms of how work gets done and where responsibility lies. My current position is a good example of this. In some towns, like Avon, the assistant town manager focuses on the budget, procurement, general administrative duties, labor relations, and public construction projects. In other towns, the position functions as a personnel director, economic development director, or finance director. The key is learning how work is distributed within an organization.

In order to make informed decisions about service delivery or departmental roles and structure, an exhaustive analysis of organizational strengths and weaknesses must occur during the first few months on the job. I would ask department heads to prepare orientation packages for me that focus on their operations, goals and objectives, responsibilities, key policy documents, departmental strengths and weaknesses, and suggestions about community leaders to meet (from the departmental perspective). I would sit down with the Board of Selectmen and chairs from other boards for their perspective on operations. I would want to review school operations with the superintendent to look for opportunities to collaborate and avoid overlapping service delivery. I would look to Mr. Marquis for his perspective on the opportunities and challenges facing the organization. I would want to sit down with chief administrative officers from neighboring communities to get up to speed on projects, programs and services where our efforts overlap and complement each other. I would also want to get out into the field or administrative offices to see service delivery firsthand. I would merge what I learn from these activities with my own vision and professional experience, before recommending changes.

Several tools that can aid new (or long-tenured) managers in evaluating their operations include citizen surveys, performance measurement systems, or formal administrative services studies. All three have been used effectively in Avon, but not to the extent that they could be. The last time that Avon undertook a community-wide survey was 2004. From the survey, the Town learned that brush pick-up was not a highly valued service. Collection data supported this

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finding and the service was discontinued in 2008. The same survey indicated that transitioning the senior center coordinator position from part-time to full-time would eventually be necessary; in the current budget, the position was expanded. Citizen surveys are an effective way to track satisfaction (i.e. effectiveness) over time and should be utilized at regular intervals to evaluate satisfaction with current services and to learn what else might be highly valued, if offered.

In the FY 2011/12 budget, I worked with departments to develop performance measures related to their operations. These measures focus on outcomes (how did we do?) as well as output (what did we do?) and were developed in response to GFOA comments as part of the annual budget award process. Performance measurement offers much more in terms of program evaluation and service delivery if the measures can be applied against benchmarks adopted by other, similar communities. ICMA has developed customizable, "off the shelf" performance measurement tools that are relatively inexpensive and easy to implement.

In 2008, Avon undertook an administrative services study to review and make recommendations on the financial operations, human resources, and facilities maintenance functions provided by both entities. The study generated a long-list of recommendations, from consolidating staff / service functions to sharing equipment to utilizing common software. Many of the recommendations were accepted and have resulted in operational efficiencies. Some have been explored, but ultimately rejected. Others are still under consideration or on hold until staffing changes occur.

Once opportunities are identified, it is important for the manager to build support among key stakeholders, including elected officials, departments, and the community. Some efficiency gains or service improvements are frictionless, but others may require changes to contract language, cause service disruption, or diminish the span of control or prestige enjoyed by individuals, departments, or outside organizations. The best ideas are doomed to failure without support from the right stakeholders. The key is gaining access to the right information, sharing it in the right forum with the appropriate stakeholders, and presenting it clearly and without bias to the broader audience.

Response #4

I once read that a manager's fundamental role is to (1) identify stakeholders, (2) assess their conflicting values on issues, and (3) develop an environment in which to create the strategies, structures and systems to address conflicts and build consensus. This view of the profession resonates with my personal belief that being an effective manager requires the skill, demeanor, and ability to forge, nurture, and maintain relationships with all community stakeholders. My professional experience combined with my personal qualities – excellent written and verbal communication skills, the ability to develop and maintain positive working relationships, a track record of respect and loyalty from prior and current peers and employees, and personal and professional integrity and accountability – will enable me to help advance the goals and objectives of the Board of Selectmen, to work effectively with staff, citizens and volunteers, and to foster a spirit of teamwork and a commitment to excellence among my management team and employees.

Throughout my career, I have earned the respect and loyalty of peers, staff, and elected officials by working hard, modeling the behavior I expect, being honest and fair, articulating my thoughts clearly and concisely, possessing the humility to admit mistakes, and maintaining a sense of humor in trying situations. I lead by example, with integrity, authenticity, and persistence in the pursuit of excellence. These skills and attributes translate into a work style that is both communicative and collaborative. I view the manager's role with a board of selectmen as that of a partner. The manager must rely on the selectmen to communicate their vision, articulate policy, and to formulate goals. The selectmen must rely on the manager to professionally manage departments, to provide cogent arguments for and against various policy alternatives, to implement municipal best practices, and to make difficult administrative decisions for the betterment of the organization and community. In order for this balance to work properly, trust and open communication must be established. This requires effort and commitment to relationship building on both sides.

My approach to working with representatives of various town boards and committees, as well as community stakeholders, starts with a commitment to learn who they are, what key issues they face, and how they view their role in the pursuit of organization-wide, long-term

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goals and objectives. I will schedule meet-and-greets not only with elected and appointed officials, including all major committee chairs, but also the superintendent, media, chamber officials, major employers, our state delegation, key state agency contacts, neighboring chief administrators, and community members. I will work diligently to get to know the community, its leaders, its employees, the documents that govern and guide it, and its ambitions for the future.

My relationship with staff is articulated, in part, in my response to Essay Question #2; in short, a manager must lead by example and show interest in the lives and well-being of all employees. My car is usually the first in the lot and the last to leave town hall. I know Avon employees by name and ask about their families. I don't ask anyone to do anything I am not willing to do myself, such as helping to copy and collate budget books on the Friday afternoon they are distributed. I share homemade baked goods (and home brew) with staff. I play softball with staff and make a point of spending time with department heads outside of the workday. Most important, I communicate my expectations clearly and make a point of delivering whatever I have promised on time. I give credit and take blame.

A wise manager once told me that there is no substitute for being liked – not being a “yes” manager or a pushover, but simply being a likeable person and treating others with respect and dignity. In my career, this concept has proven invaluable. If you are genuine with stakeholders, work hard, listen to them and support them, they will, in turn, do the same. In sum, my philosophy regarding leadership, with elected officials, staff, and volunteers, centers on investing the time and effort necessary, which is significant, to develop and grow trust and understanding, so that positive change can be achieved.

Effective and transparent communication with the community is built on, above all, accessibility – both of time and of information. Technology has leveled the information-access playing field, so managers must embrace transparency to be effective. It is important to consider that information and communication takes many more forms today than even five years ago. Some stakeholders still get their information by attending public hearings, other from the municipal website, others still from social media sites. The effective communicator today knows that an effort must be made to engage stakeholders on their terms.

Response #5

I currently serve as President of the Connecticut Town and City Management Association, which is a local chapter of the International City/County Management Association. One of the tenets in our professional Code of Ethics is: "Submit policy proposals to elected officials; provide them with facts and advice on matters of policy as a basis for making decisions and setting community goals; and uphold and implement local government policies adopted by elected officials." As a professional manager, I take seriously my responsibility to operate outside of the sphere of politics, to focus on facts and best practices, and to check my ego at the door. One of the first questions I was asked while interviewing for a job out of graduate school was, What do you do if you are asked to prepare background materials that will support a policy you disagree with personally or politically? I do go home after some meetings and complain to my wife (she is a saint) about certain decisions – we are human after all. But, I have learned in my career not to take things personally. You can't. The role of the manager, as noted in Response #4, is to develop an environment in which decisions can be made. This is accomplished by preparing materials, options, information, and alternatives for consideration by the officials chosen by the community to represent their interests. The manager may have a personal opinion – and, if asked, is obligated to provide this opinion – but the manager's role is to educate and support stakeholders, not manipulate or coerce them.

What follows are two examples from my current and previous positions in which my advice did not align with popular opinion or special interests. In 2007, I authored a revised sewer benefit assessment policy for the Town of Farmington, CT in response to a contentious project being proposed in neighborhood of 40 homes. Due to high-failure rates of septic systems, the local health district was pushing the Town to install sewers. Twice in the preceding 20 years, the neighborhood had been offered, and rejected, free sewers by developers working on projects in the area (both of which the neighborhood opposed). In 2007, based on an untested sewer benefit assessment formula, the homeowners faced connection charges of more than \$40,000. Many in the community felt the neighborhood should pay this amount, based on their stubbornness and missed opportunities. I was asked by the Town Manager to take an objective look at the issue and provide a recommendation. My

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approach included: (1) an historical analysis of all sewer project financing in Farmington dating back to the 1950s, including total project costs, intergovernmental revenues, unique features (e.g. pump stations or significant ledge), assessment methodologies, and costs per connection, all of which was then adjusted to net present value using the Construction Cost Index; (2) a survey of similar Connecticut municipalities' assessment methods and recent projects; (3) extensive discussions with DEP staff on sewer financing; and (4) a review of tax theory literature. As a result of my findings, a new benefit assessment method was adopted by the Town Council in July 2010. The cost to the homeowners in the affected neighborhood was \$10,000, which was consistent with Farmington's past practice and best practices in the state.

The second was a controversial decision in the days following Winter Storm Alfred (2011) to collect debris on some, but not all, private roadways within Avon. This decision stemmed from the historic service relationship (i.e. plowing, street sweeping, etc.) between the Town and residents on certain roadways. Our office discussed the decision, rationale, and likely outcomes with the Town Council prior to announcing it, so that there were no surprises. Given the lack of financial resources in this area and its unique relationship with the Town, we were comfortable with this approach, even though many other private associations were demanding the same treatment and many residents living on public roads were opposed to tax dollars being spent to support private associations. At that time, emotions ran high and patience short. Many Avon residents were without power for close to two weeks, which made communicating with the public difficult. As Avon's Public Information Officer, my role during these events is to manage communications to and from residents. Working closely with local media via press releases and interviews, posting flyers at grocery stores, gas stations, and the emergency shelter, and utilizing the state's emergency notification system, residents were provided multiple updates per day. The debris collection decision resulted (as expected) in myriad phone calls, visits, and letters to my office. Because we had done our due diligence in determining which roadways would be collected, both the Town Council and I were able to respond to every upset resident and association president with a consistent message and rationale, even if many remained dissatisfied with the decision.

Response #6

Losing “baby boomer” institutional and community knowledge is a challenge facing many communities – especially as the national economy continues to recover and some of the retirements that would otherwise have been spread over the past five years soon may be coming in twos and threes. Avon, like Danvers, has benefitted from organizational stability. In 2010, the Town Manager of 32 years stepped down. In the past three years, two department heads and one division head retired with more than 80 years of experience between them; several more department heads with 30+ years on the job are set to retire in the next two years. Similarly, the past three elections in Avon have seen a number of long-tenured elected officials step down and the upcoming election promises more of the same. There is no magic bullet to prevent the loss of institutional knowledge or stability that departs with retirements. There are, however, effective strategies that can be implemented to minimize the loss and ensure continuity during and after the transition.

It is important that we utilize technology, to the extent we can, to capture, store, and retrieve as much of a departing individual’s data and information as possible – this involves strategic planning as the retirement approaches to organize documents, emails, notes, etc., by topical area and communicating with staff about how to access this information. This approach tends to emphasize quantity over quality, but it is not uncommon for seemingly mundane information to prove valuable years later.

It is also important to communicate early and clearly with departing officials or staff to understand their timelines. This allows for a thoughtful transfer of physical (or digital) information, as described above, but it also allows the organization to attempt to hire a replacement early to provide an overlapping transition period. In the case of volunteers or elected officials, the same holds true. To the extent that circumstances (and personalities) allow, it is important for the departing and incoming officials to be able to exchange ideas and information. Additionally, developing a “welcome packet” for newly elected or appointed officials (perhaps a joint effort of legal counsel, the manager, and senior officials/department heads) that provides new officials with the information they need to be successful is an effective approach. Working to maintain positive relationships and open lines of

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communication underpins these concepts. And, keeping the retiree's phone number and email address at hand is never a bad idea!

Succession planning must be intentional and ongoing to be effective. In stable organizations, it is often possible to develop internal candidates by identifying them early, providing them with opportunities to expand their responsibilities, and allowing them to mentor (formally or otherwise) under the senior employee. The goal in these cases is not to circumvent transparent hiring practices; rather, it is to ensure that the best candidates compete for jobs, whether internal or external.

To the extent that qualified internal candidates do not emerge, the key to succession planning with external candidates is bringing individuals on board who fit the culture of the management team and the community. Above all, hiring integrity is the most important factor in building an effective team. Once you get to a certain point in any hiring process, all candidates tend to possess the technical skills and experience to do a job. If you hire integrity, the experience or education differences become less important. Integrity, however, does not show up on a resume. Beyond checking references, utilizing Google, talking to your peers in the municipal manager's association, and probing the candidate in the one-on-one interview with experiential questions are all critical activities. This concept of hiring integrity was captured perfectly in a short but powerful 2013 article in Public Management Magazine by a New Hampshire Town Administrator. He argued that the three C's of hiring (in order of importance) are as follows: character, chemistry, and competence. I totally agree with this idea.

In summary, and consistent with the themes explored in some of the other Essay Questions, the challenge for the next Danvers Town Manager (and roadmap for success) will lie in relationship building. The not-so-secret recipe for this is to commit yourself 100% to the community and the many stakeholders who care about it. As a husband and father (of a ten-month-old), I am looking for a community in which to put down roots and to which to commit my time, my passion, and my personal and professional resources. Danvers is the kind of community we see ourselves becoming a part of and, for this reason, I am confident that I will be able to build and maintain the kinds of relationships necessary to continue the excellent stewardship that the community has come to expect from its municipal organization.