



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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Municipal Sustainability Survey Results

Introduction

In September 2022, BRPC's Regional Issues Committee began a discussion centered on the future sustainability of municipal government given concerns related to the recruitment, retention, and training of both paid and volunteer positions in Berkshire County. As a result of multiple meetings with stakeholders, BRPC staff developed a survey to supplement the discussion and contacted the 30 towns in Berkshire County to request a response. Of the 30 towns, 23 responded to the survey. Six of the seven communities that did not respond have less than 1,000 persons, and all seven are below 2,000. For perspective, 20 of the 30 towns have under 2,000 persons, so despite not having results from every community, the survey is well represented by communities of all sizes.

Results

1) Paid Positions

The below is not a complete list of results by position surveyed, but represents mostly common positions or any other results standing out as surprising. The numerical representation next to the position title represents number of communities stating they have trouble filling the position/number of communities reporting they have the position. Overall, the results by community were spread across municipalities large or small, which is reflected similarly in all of the positions after Town Administrator/Manager.

- Town Administrator/Manager: 11/20 communities stated they had difficulty filling the position. Communities large (Williamstown/Great Barrington) and small (Washington/Windsor) responded that they had difficulty filling this position.
- Town Accountant 16/22
- Town Assessor 14/23
- Building Inspector 13/23
- DPW Director/Superintendent 9/21
- DPW Staff 12/20
- Fire Department Staff 11/17
- Police Chief 3/23
- Police Officers 15/22
- Seasonal Staff 5/9
- Sewer Operator 5/6
- Tax Collector 10/22
- Treasurer 12/23
- Water Operator 8/8

Overall vacancies of paid staff

- 10/23 communities have 3-4 current vacancies, while 9/23 had 1-2 current vacancies

- 14/23 responded vacancies were greater than 60 days
- In the past 3 years, 2 communities had 5 or more vacancies lasting 60+ days, 7 had 3-4 vacancies lasting 60+ days, 10 had 1-2 vacancies lasting 60+ days
- In the past 3 years: 3 communities had 3-4 vacancies lasting 120+ days, 12 had 1-2 vacancies lasting 120+ days
- In the past 3 years: 13 communities have had 5+ positions turn over, 6 communities have had 3-4 positions turn over, 3 had 1-2 positions turn over
- Regarding retirement, 4 communities expect >50% retirement in next 5 years, 18 expect retirement of at least 5% of workforce

General Comments

The comments provided by communities can be aggregated to highlighted opinions of there are not enough persons in the labor force, low wages make recruitment difficult, training is expensive and time consuming, and an overall lack of succession planning.

2) Volunteer Positions

The below is not a complete list of results by positions surveyed, but represents traditionally common bodies and bodies with high rates of difficulty in attracting volunteers. The numerical representation next to the position title represents number of communities stating they have trouble filling the position/number of communities reporting they have the position. Overall, the results by community were spread across municipalities large or small.

- Board of Assessors 11/21
- Board of Selectmen/Select Board 6/22
- Conservation Commission 10/23
- Finance Committee 10/22
- Planning Board 8/22
- School Committee 7/19
- Zoning Board of Appeals 10/22

Overall volunteer vacancies

- 18/23 have current vacancies
 - 16/23 have vacancies open greater than 60 days
- In the past 3 years, 6 communities have had 5 or more volunteer positions open for 60+ days, 4 have had 3-4 volunteer positions, and 9 have had 1-2 volunteer positions.
- In the past 3 years, 3 communities have had 5 or more volunteer positions open for 120+ days, 6 have had 3-4 positions open for 120+ days, and 7 have had 1-2 volunteer positions.

General Comments

The responses include general overall commentary that includes: volunteer bodies lack diversity, difficulty getting younger persons involved, difficulty recruiting new people, many of the same people filling multiple positions, communities lacking staff support to ease the responsibilities of the bodies, and community pressure on some of the positions.