

Why a Town Administrator?

Some concerned citizens have talked to town trustees about our decision to give the position of town administrator a three-month trial starting in December. They point out that the town has a lot of needs—sewer work, streets, law enforcement—so why look at adding a position?

There are several answers to that question, and the first has to do with all those needs the town has and finding the money to pay for them:

1. Yes, Saguache needs to upgrade its sewer system, streets and public services, and there's no way the town budget can stretch to pay for these improvements. (The over-layment of two blocks on Christy and new pavement on part of a block of 8th alone cost \$26,000.) That means someone has to look for grant money.

So why not just hire a grant writer? Well, grants have to be administered once the town gets them. Rese Garcia, our town clerk, has a more than full-time job already and cannot take on grant administration. So it makes sense to hire someone who can both write and administer grants—and perform a lot of other duties as well. If we decide to make the position permanent, we expect the town administrator to raise way more than the cost of his or her salary in grant money each year.

2. The town staff is currently “supervised” by the town board as a whole—a volunteer group with more than its fair share of turnover. That means that the guidance and oversight the staff gets changes every time the board changes. That is not good for the staff, or for the town. It looks like it makes much more sense to have an administrator who handles day-to-day personnel and management issues and reports to the board.

3. The trustees want to start a long-range planning process that can involve all citizens: *What should we be doing to make our town a better place to live, what should we focus on first—and how do we pay for it?*

A town administrator can run this process, and then be responsible for making sure that the plan is followed. Just one example: Infiltration problems from sub-irrigation water getting into sewer lines caused a lot of problems last summer. This issue has to be addressed before the state forces us to build a multi-million dollar treatment plant. The town administrator would get and administer the grants to fund the work, issue bids and make sure that the work we pay for solves the problem it's meant to.

The trustees are now applying for a grant from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. If we get it and the board decides to move forward with hiring an administrator, that grant would pay for 75% of the salary for the first year, 50% the second year and 25% the third year. That would give everyone in town a real chance to see if the idea of an administrator is a good one.

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