

Local Government **REIMAGINED CONFERENCE**

FEBRUARY 26-28, 2025 DENVER, COLORADO

Onboarding and orientation for new elected officials

Alex Torpey | alex@rethinklocal.us

Municipal Manager, Consultant, Educator, Podcaster
Interim Town Administrator Swanzey, NH; Founder, Rethink Local

ICMA | conference



Grand Hyatt Denver
Colorado Ballroom AB 2nd Floor
Wednesday at 2:15pm



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Why are we talking about onboarding and orientation for elected officials?

Could Ben Wyatt have succeeded?

How the Town Costs Ice Clown His Town Crown

By JONATHAN CARLOS
Minneapolis Enterprise Reporter

At fall, Benjamin Wyatt, 18, became the nation's youngest mayor OK, and he also graduated from high school. Wyatt was elected mayor of Partridge, Minnesota, on a platform of fiscal responsibility, social reform and "being fly."

Wyatt was elected in a two-year term on November 7, 1994, receiving 80 percent of the vote in a three-person race. He ran a well-furnished campaign knocking on his neighbors' doors out of necessity; he was broke after spending his graduation money on an Atari video game.

Wyatt received a total of 309 votes, which topped the votes received by outgoing City Council member Jeff Smith, 48. A former city supervisor, Ian Phillips, 64, had with 201 votes.

"How is the boy mayor doing?"

Smith is refreshing," says Graham Raible, 55, a Partridge resident who has served on the City Council for over 10 years. "I'm impressed with the way he likes to try new things. We had one of our quarterly budget meetings at a reading of *Jurassic Park*."

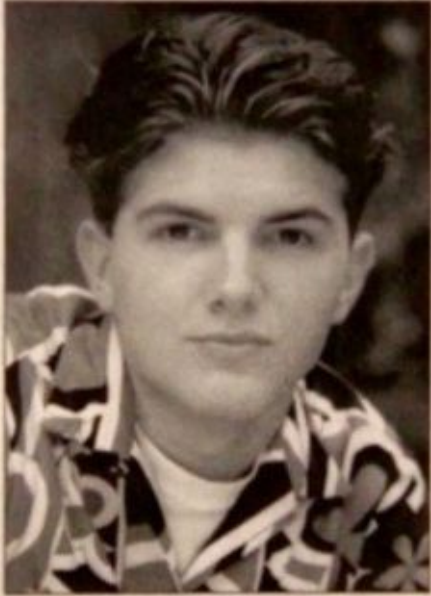
Why would the town of Partridge elect a kid as mayor?

Well, things in Partridge couldn't have gotten much worse. As Partridge residents have long been aware, it is a king when it comes to city government.

Wyatt is no ordinary 18-year-old. Witty and glib, he has great appeal among the young; he keeps a life-sized dummy in his baronial office to entertain visiting schoolchildren. Wyatt has a large collection of comic books and has seen *Near Wars* six times.

After becoming mayor, Wyatt changed about the city, firing orders and firing anyone who thought was not doing his job correctly. When Mayor Smith used Partridge's art, Wyatt sacked the airport director and supervised the removal himself.

Wyatt soon appeared in high city offices a handful of



Benjamin Wyatt's high school yearbook photo doubled as his official Mayoral portrait.

When it comes to economic issues, Wyatt is a real talker himself. He cut the city's budget by \$25,000, to a

By FLORENCIA MARTI
Minneapolis Enterprise Reporter

Partridge firefighters Wednesday battled a fire that started in a concrete silo at the Pawnee Agri-Service Co-op after smoldering for days.

Firefighters were called at before 10:40 a.m. Wednesday to the at the Penny Newman Grain & Seed bulk cargo terminal at 1805 Indian

Smoke could be seen for distance.

Partridge Fire Deputy Chief Bishop said the concrete silo, about 100 feet tall, was used to store grain—an oily, flaky substance—that had started to smolder some Sunday.

"It is not unusual for corn grain to smolder in storage," Bishop said.

"It's just in their industrial process," Bishop said. "It's not at all unusual."

The silo's capacity is about 1,000 tons, and there were only 75 tons of corn grain in it when the fire started.

Pawnee Grain & Seed had been monitoring the silo for days and the Fire Department on Wednesday morning when flames came through access door.

The Fire Department treated it as a single-alarm blaze but deployed additional engine because of possibility that firefighters might have to fight a confined-space fire, Bishop said.

A Pawnee Fire Department firefighter suffered minor injuries battling the fire, Bishop said.

Pawnee Grain & Seed has a

We may never know

Small group discussion

What are the benefits of effective onboarding?

What are the benefits of effective onboarding?

1 Reduce legal and financial liability or claims

2 Improve quality of decisions and outcomes

3 Increase staff (especially CEO) retention

4 Improve succession planning and knowledge transfer

5 Support pathways for better civic leadership development

6 Valuable skills officials will retain/take to other arenas

A few onboarding examples and ideas

1 Existing state association, resources, and legal advice

2 Atkinson, NH from Town Administrator John Apple

3 Jaffrey, NH from Town Manager Jon Frederick

4 Lisbon, ME from Town Manager Glenn Michalowski

5 New trust-building with VT League of Cities and Towns

6 A few other examples and resources from New England

1. Existing resources

Often detailed/valuable resources

Usually ‘necessary’ but may not be ‘sufficient’

Can be too long or technical

May need to be adapted

Don’t usually focus on “soft skills”

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Consider looking at:

- **ICMA**
- **Your state association**
- **Other local boards/committees**
- **Employee onboarding**
- **Your attorney/firm**

2. Atkinson, NH from Town Administrator John Apple

Documents provided and four-hour workshop after swearing in

Involves input, presentations from all departments

Provides excellent meet/greet

Similar content to budget presentations

Communicates existence of existing plans and goals

Helps create understanding of organizational structure



Population: 7,000

Area: 11 sq mi

Budget: \$7m

Government: SB2 Town Meeting

Governing Body: 5 member Board

Atkinson, NH from Town Administrator John Apple

LAND USE

	Population	Δ
2022	7,087	5.0%
2010	6,751	8.4%
2000	6,230	21.2%
1990	5,141	16.9%
1980	4,397	91.9%
1970	2,291	125.3%
1960	1,017	106.7%
1950	492	12.8%
1940	436	7.1%
1930	407	-1.5%
1920	413	-6.1%
1910	440	-0.5%
1900	442	

- All Land Use controlled by Town Ordinances & NH RSAs
- Changes to Zoning Ordinances can only be made by the voters
- Current 7 Zoning Districts – 93% Residential (TR2, RR2, RR3), 5% C, CI, or CP and 2% Town Center (*based on acreage*)
- 18% of Atkinson acres are permanently Conserved Lands of which 9% is Cluster Development Open Space
- History* 1940 - Atkinson's first Building Code adopted
1950 - Zoning Commission established
1955 - 1st Building Inspector, Planning Board, Board of Adjustment
1956 - Atkinson Zoning Ordinances & Building Codes approved
1980 - 1st Master Plan adopted

* Source "Atkinson Then & Now"

The Library is a Busy Community Hub!

- 4,500 residents are Kimball Library card holders
- In 2022, the Library had 33,000 visits
- We provided more than 700 programs for 8,600 attendees!
- Our meeting rooms were used more than 600 times.
- 50,000 items were borrowed
 - We lend both physical and digital books, magazines, films and audio titles.
 - Snowshoes, launch pads, croquet, a telescope and much more are available.
 - Databases make it possible to read local and national newspapers, learn a new language and research your ancestry.
 - Hotspots provide portable internet access.
 - We belong to a cooperative increasing our offerings to more than 130,000 titles!

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE

• Short-Term Goals

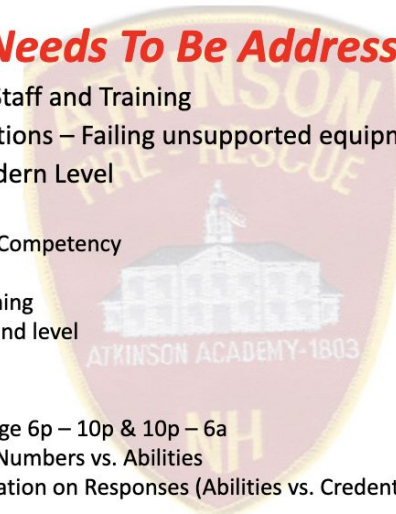
- Review and update Town policies.
- Consolidate filing systems electronically and paper document cleanup.
- Recreate Organizational Chart.
- Update Board Operational Guidelines and Handbook.
- Develop and implement new Town website.

• Long-Term Goals

- Streamline operations and communications for effectiveness/efficiency.
- Develop Human Resources program/department.
- Create a safe and secure workplace for all departments.
- Develop a wage scale.

Needs To Be Addressed

- Fire Prevention – Staff and Training
- Radio Communications – Failing unsupported equipment
- Technology to Modern Level
- Training
 - Certification and Competency
 - Officer Training
 - Task Specific Training
 - Increased hours and level
- Staffing
 - Officer Coverage
 - Overnight Coverage 6p – 10p & 10p – 6a
 - Call Department Numbers vs. Abilities
 - Member Classification on Responses (Abilities vs. Credentials)



3. Jaffrey, NH from Town Manager Jon Frederick

Checklist to go through with each new member ensures consistency

Summarizes governance, authority, roles/responsibilities, etc

Details list of all ongoing major projects

Sets up for tours of each facility/department

Includes logistics such as emails, documents, hours, keys, contact information, SOPs, etc



Population: 5,300

Area: 40 sq mi

Budget: \$15m

Government: Town Meeting

Governing Body: 3 member Board

Jaffrey, NH from Town Manager Jon Frederick

New Select Board Member Checklist

1. Town Manager

- o RSA 37 – Form of Government
- o Contact
- o Weekly Report
- o Contract
- o Boards/Associations/Credentials
 - ICMA; Pittsburgh, Veterans Committee
 - MMANH
 - Southwest Administrators
 - NH Retirement System Board of Trustees

2. BOS Meetings

- o Agenda preparation and format
 - Consent Agenda
 - Selectmen Reports
- o PDF Files sent on Friday
- o Binders or Electronic?
- o 91-A
- o Town Hall Streams
- o Schedules (Select Board; Holidays)

3. Other Duties

- o Bi-Weekly Payroll – Select Board meetings
- o A/P – Ready the Friday before SB meetings
- o Read File
- o Select Board Appointments to other Boards

4. Policies

- o Finance
- o Employee Handbook/Personnel Policy

5. Collective Bargaining Agreements – DPW, Police

6. Town Email:

- o For Town use only
- o Do not change the password
- o Primarily to communicate between TM and SB
- o **NEVER Reply to All!** That creates an illegal meeting.

7. Contact Information

8. Keys

9. Payroll Forms

10. Staff Introductions

11. Schedule Local Officials Workshop – April 3, 2024

12. Report to NHMA Directory

13. Facilities Tours

- o WWTP
- o Water Works
- o Cold Stone Springs
- o Public Works
- o Transfer Station
- o Fire Station
- o Recreation
- o Town Office

14. Projects

- o Route 202
- o WW Cross
- o Cold Stone Springs
- o Letourneau Drive Bridge
- o Transfer Station Reconfiguration
- o Community Solar at Landfill
- o Town Office Exterior
- o Recreation Building Ceiling
- o Humiston Field Fence, Retaining Wall
- o Squantum Road Water Main
- o Wheeler Street Neighborhood Water

15. Water & Sewer Rates

16. Capital Reserve Funds

17. Layman's Warrant

18. Town Code www.townofjaffrey.com – Town Manager – Code of the Town of Jaffrey

19. Website review

4. Lisbon, ME from Town Manager Glenn Michalowski

In an easy to read narrative format

Provides context and statutory reference for authority, roles of Council & all boards

Includes various SOPs and expectations for agendas, emails, resident complaints, etc

Introduces organizational structure and provides full org chart

Provides timeline for major processes such as budget development

Links to state association resources/trainings



Population: 9,700

Area: 24 sq mi

Budget: \$13m

Government: Town Council/Manager

Governing Body: 7 member Board

Lisbon, ME from Town Manager Glenn Michalowski

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Communication through Staff: In some cases, councilors may communicate with each other indirectly, such as through the town manager or other staff. This can be appropriate in some circumstances, however councilors should not use staff to circumvent open meetings laws or to create a "back channel" for discussion of council business.

Effective communication among councilors is crucial for a well-functioning council. It helps in making informed decisions, maintaining unity, and fostering a cooperative working environment. However, it's also important that councilors, like all public stewards, communicate in a manner that is respectful, transparent, and in accordance with any relevant laws and regulations.

Councilor to Manager Communications

Communication between councilors and the town manager is an integral component of effective local governance. The town manager, serving as the chief administrative officer, is responsible for implementing council decisions and managing day-to-day operations, and therefore needs to maintain a clear, open, and consistent line of communication with council members.

Here's a brief explanation of how councilors typically communicate with the town manager:

Open Access: As a councilor, you should have access to the town manager to discuss concerns, ask questions, or request information at any time. The town manager should be available for any councilor who needs to communicate about town business.

Respectful and Professional: All communications with the town manager should be respectful and professional. This includes respecting the manager's time and roles, providing clear and concise information, and maintaining a cordial tone.

One-on-One Meetings: Councilors may schedule one-on-one meetings with the town manager to discuss issues in detail, present new ideas, or seek advice.

Group Meetings: In group meetings or council sessions, councilors will communicate with the town manager about agenda items, policy decisions, and operational matters.

Written Communication: Councilors may communicate with the town manager through emails, letters, or memos, especially when it's necessary to provide detailed information or to have a record of the communication.

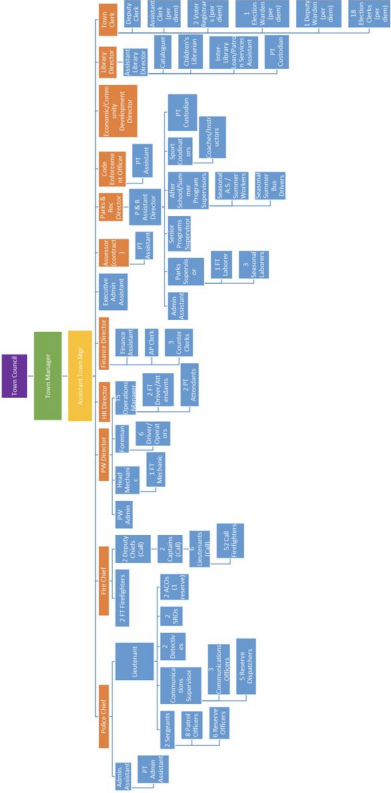
Concerns and Issues: If councilors have concerns about town operations or issues that need to be addressed, they should communicate these to the town manager directly. The town manager's role is to handle these matters in order to facilitate their resolution.

Chain of Communication: Despite having direct access to the town manager, councilors should remember that communication about specific departmental matters should generally follow the chain of communication. In other words, councilors should avoid bypassing the town manager to directly communicate with department heads or staff about operational issues, unless otherwise agreed upon. *However, there's a notable exception to this guideline. The Town Clerk, who serves as the secretary to the council, can be directly contacted by councilors regarding procedural matters and items for the council meeting agenda. Typically, these types of communications will come from the council chair. This exception ensures the efficient organization of council meetings while still maintaining the overall structure of the chain of communication within the town's governance.*

It is important to emphasize that optimal lines of communication between councilors and the town manager is critical to the efficient functioning of the town government. It ensures that both are aligned and working together to serve the interests of the town and its residents.

Press Inquiries
Coordination with Town Manager

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



5. Going beyond transparency to build trust

In development and piloting this spring in Vermont!

Helping *individuals* be effective as a *group*

Providing stability during turnovers

**The value of trust building in governance,
within boards and between boards & staff**

**Creating more leadership/volunteer
pipelines**

**Underlining the importance of proactive
public outreach and engagement**

**Pushing back on NIMBYism and SWS
(Squeaky Wheel Syndrome)**



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Going beyond transparency to build trust with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns

1 The importance of trust enabling good decisions

2 Detailed gov & community stakeholder mapping

3 Effective and authentic public engagement

4 Strategic planning, goal setting, and prioritizing

5 Creating robust volunteer and leadership pipelines

6 Applying new ideas to existing personal goals

6. More resources

We've made all of these documents, plus packets from:

- Town Administrator Mike Branley, Swanzey, NH
- Town Manager John Haverstock, Harford, VT
- And more

Freely available online to anyone (QR Code/link on last slide).

Do you have ideas or documents? Please share and we'll include in the next session, which is at ICMA National in Tampa.

Small group discussion

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Visit rethinklocal.us or
Scan for a folder of resources!

