



Policy Brief 2021:01

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Managing Tuckahoe: Transitioning to a Village Administrator

The Case Study Series

This review of change in governance and administration in the Village of Tuckahoe, New York is one in a series of communities in New York that took initiative to change the administration of their local government. These local initiatives were reviewed and summarized in 2020 by the Public Management Program (PMP), Department of Public Administration, SUNY Brockport. The cases were examined to provide insights for other local leaders and citizens in New York about options for change in local administration and governance. They examine (1) how initiatives for administrative change got started, (2) how local leaders and citizens responded to the initiative and moved forward, (3) the barriers and useful resources that were identified in the process, and (4) the experience since a change has been adopted - or not.

Tuckahoe Community and Region

Tuckahoe is a village in Westchester County and the Town of Eastchester in the Metropolitan New York Region north of New York City. The village has a population of roughly 6,500 and is less than one square mile in size. Tuckahoe is in the top 15% of villages in the state by population size. Westchester is the third largest county in the state with a total population of nearly 950,000. The county contains a large number of local governments with six cities, nineteen towns, and twenty three villages. Tuckahoe has two train stations located at

opposite ends of the Village to serve commuters.

Village Service and Financial Profile

Tuckahoe provides a relatively full complement of municipal services to village residents. The village has approximately 59 full time equivalent employees including administrative personnel to support service delivery. Village provided services include:

- A police department with 24-hour coverage;
- Residential and commercial refuse and recycling collection, large item pickup, and food waste drop off;
- Public works services including street and sidewalks, a sewer collection system (served by a regional treatment facility);
- Village parks and recreation services;
- Planning and code enforcement services; and
- A municipal library and a community center.

Village water supply is provided by a private company servicing municipalities in the region. Fire service is provided by the Eastchester Fire District, an independent fire district serving the entire town of Eastchester. Similarly, Eastchester EMS, a non-profit volunteer 911 EMS agency, serves the ambulance and emergency services need of the Villages of

Tuckahoe, Bronxville and the balance of the Town of Eastchester.

The village had a total General Fund budgeted expenditures of \$13 million for fiscal year 2019-2020. Spending was supported by \$8 million in property taxes with the balance coming from other sources. Police and Public Works spending accounted for about two-thirds of operating budget spending.¹ Debt service has been relatively stable in the last five years and is about 6% of the 2019-20 budget.

Initiative for Change

Former Mayor Steven Ecklund developed a concern about the village's long term central administrative capacity in 2013-14. He had been serving as Mayor since 2011 and previously as a board member since 2004. As a long term business owner/manager Ecklund sensed the need for someone in charge, like a CEO, to whom people in the organization - department heads in particular - are accountable to on a day-to-day basis. Similarly he observed that local organizations that serve the public need administrative leadership that can help choose a course, implement board policy, and resolve conflict. Tuckahoe had been graced with previous mayors - retirees with managerial experience – that filled this role, in part, but the continuity of this volunteer management capacity cannot be assured in the Mayor's position.

The mayor and other Tuckahoe leaders were influenced by communication with neighboring local leaders whose governments had manager/administrator personnel serving their communities. The observation of this model and its demonstrated value were also important factors to local leaders. Some of this exposure was facilitated by participation in the

Westchester Municipal Officials Association which includes involvement by both elected leaders and appointed local government administrators. At the time Tuckahoe leaders began to consider local change, the village was one of only two out of twenty three villages in Westchester County without a central manager or administrator.

The need for strengthened central administrative presence was highlighted when the village treasurer was ill and village annual financial reports were filed late with the state comptroller. This in turn triggered a down grading of the Villages bond rating by Moody's Investors Service. The Mayor and village attorney stepped in to address the situation and followed with a rapid engagement with the rating agency for a full review. While the outcome of this effort led to a "better than before" bond rating, the need for administrative change was reinforced to village elected leaders. The village board's discussion and intent to create a village administrator position influenced the decision to upgrade the bond rating.

Moving Toward a Decision

This situation led the Mayor with board member support to take steps to address the administrative need in early 2014. The village began to look at options and settled on the creation of an administrator position in 2014. Board support for creating the administrator option was not unanimous at the outset, but full board agreement emerged during the board's consideration of the change. Village officials initially planned to offer the position to the current village attorney who assisted in developing needed local law changes to create the village administrator position². The village

¹ Total operating budget spending is adjusted for fringe benefits, debt service and transfers to capital funds.

² [Chapter 22A of the Laws of the Village of Tuckahoe NY](#) contains provisions regarding the position of

Village Administrator – is appended to this case profile. It is important to note that the 2014 adoption of Chapter 22A left unchanged section [§ 2-7 Conduct of Village business, affairs.](#) Of Chapter 2 Administration. Which states: The conduct of

attorney, however declined to accept a position with a law firm and the village then began an external search to fill the new position. The search led to selection and hiring of the current Village Administrator, David Burke, in late 2014.

During the village board's deliberations over change to adopt a village administrator there was no apparent significant community engagement – either in support or opposition. The community has a previous history of engaging on local government change. In the 1970s the village had a central administrator. At one point a vacancy in the position was filled by a former village trustee. The appointment was viewed as “cronyism” by the public and the board members who approved the appointment were voted out of office and the position of village administrator was eliminated. Some seasoned local officials believe that this event has had staying power in community memory and had often served a source of concern or resistance to creating the position again.

Expectations and Experience

Tuckahoe leaders created the new chief administrative officer, CAO, position to improve day to day management and to increase the efficiency of local service delivery and administrative operations. The position of village administrator was viewed as a means of providing stable, effective administrative guidance and leadership for the village government in serving community needs. Tuckahoe's local law changes indicate the intention of giving oversight authority to the new position and minimizing the administrative role of the Mayor and Board of Trustees. Interviews indicated that local leaders viewed this position as a means to continuously review and assess municipal operations for cost saving

business and affairs of the Village shall be through departments established and organized for the purpose by resolution of the Village Board of Trustees. Each such department shall be under the

improvements and opportunities. In addition, the new law provided the mayoral option of designating the Administrator the village budget officer with leadership in developing the tentative budget with departmental managers and providing financial oversight and planning.

The experience of a new village CAO has been consistent with the expectations of local leaders in Tuckahoe. Village elected leaders have been encouraged and satisfied by the change to a full time administrator. There has been no systematic monitoring of administrative and management improvements or savings in the years since the change was made. A number of specific developments support the general satisfaction with change expressed by local leaders. These include:

- A revised administrator led annual budget process welcomed by department heads, providing clearer process, better budget product, and improved narrative content on budget changes for governing board members;
- Budget implementation changes that have eliminated previous problems with departmental cost overruns;
- Formation and implementation of a multi-year capital plan and planning process linked to a village wide financial plan and the annual budget process;
- Evidence of increased administrative consistency and fairness in addressing both departmental and citizen concerns; and
- Examples of changes in village purchasing and contract activity that led to reduced or limited increases in operating costs.

supervision of a member of the Village Board of Trustees appointed for the purpose.

There was a sentiment expressed by elected leaders that they would not run for the office of mayor without the presence of a village administrator, one went on to say that they would not want to live in the village if there was not an administrator present to oversee and ensure the effectiveness of village government and the health and safety of the community. In a similar vein, one village staff person present before and after the transition, expressed the belief that all local governments should adopt a manager or administrator form of organization.

A common concern for local governments considering the creation of a CAO is the increase in overall administrative costs. In some cases local governments reconfigure other administrative positions to minimize the salary impact. In Tuckahoe the CAO position with its salary and benefits were simply added to the existing administrative team which included treasurer's staff and clerk staffing along with costs for specialized auditing and fiscal agent fees. Over the six year period since the increase from CAO salary startup in the 2014-15 fiscal year, the combined overall administrative costs have decreased by 9% in budget year 2019-20. This represents about a third of the initial CAO salary increase. This decline reflects several personnel adjustments in the administrative team with new CAO leadership.

During the six years since creation of the CAO position in Tuckahoe spending for capital has increased and stabilized annually. At the same time, the percent increase in overall village spending declined by a third in comparison with spending growth in the six year prior the creation of a CAO position.

Another common concern is the change in the Mayor's and governing board's role with the creation of a CAO position. A lack of clarity or agreement in this area can frustrate efforts to move forward and meet important community

goals. In Tuckahoe this potential problem was faced directly with early discussion about roles, communication and authority in relationship to the supervision of department leaders, citizens, and intergovernmental partners. While there will always remain some areas of needed flexibility in addressing this area of inevitable change – finding common ground directly and early appears to have been an important element of Tuckahoe's early success in adopting a CAO.

Resources

The Tuckahoe mayor and board members drew upon two valuable resources in their work to create a CAO position for the village. The village attorney provided needed guidance in helping craft the local law within state requirements and the balance desired by local elected leaders. Second, local leaders benefitted from the nearby examples of other local governments with CAOs and communication with local mayors, governing board members and administrators/managers.

Summary Insights

1. **Concern and Change.** Financial staffing and reporting problems precipitated administrative concerns and a drop in bond ratings leading to the examination of a need for broader organizational change.
2. **Value of Peer Examples.** The example of nearby local governments with managers and administrators provided valuable insights of the functioning and benefits of a CAO.
3. **Finding a New Balance.** In implementing change, early communication about the role of the CAO and adjustments in pre-CAO role of the Mayor and governing board members has proven to be important in

Tuckahoe’s ability to adapt and thrive under these new arrangements.

4. **Expectations and Outcomes.** The expected outcomes of Tuckahoe’s leadership team for improved village administration, financial and capital planning, and the ability of the governing board to focus on important community and policy concerns –have been realized.
5. **A Simpler Alternative.** New York State law provides two broad organization options to establish a central village administrative position. Tuckahoe chose the simpler alternative which requires the village board to draft and

adopt a local law outlining the creation of the position of village administrator. This new law delegates a portion of Mayoral and governing board authority to the administrator and is subject to the same adoption procedures of other local laws. A different option is to revise village organization through the creation of council-manager form. This option can require more community engagement and the resulting structure is different. These differences are discussed in another policy brief in this series.

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Laws of Village of Tuckahoe, New York: Chapter 22A Village Administrator

[§ 22A-1 Office created.](#) In order to provide the most economical and efficient overall direction, coordination and control of the day-to-day activities and operations of the Village of Tuckahoe, to minimize the administrative details now handled by the Mayor and Board of Trustees, to provide centralized direction and control of Village employees and to formalize the staff and advisory functions necessary to the foregoing, the office of Village Administrator is hereby established.

[§ 22A-2 Powers and duties.](#) Subject to the approval, direction and control of the Board of Trustees or the Mayor, as the case may be, the Village Administrator shall:

[A.](#) See that the laws of the state and the local laws, resolutions and rules of the Village are faithfully executed.

[B.](#) Exercise supervision over the conduct of all functions and activities of the Village and of its officers and employees, except the Village Justice, Village Clerk, Village Treasurer and Village Counsel.

[C.](#) From time to time make reports to the Mayor and Board of Trustees upon the affairs of the Village, and recommend to the Mayor and Board of Trustees such measures as he or she may think necessary or appropriate.

[D.](#) Keep the Mayor and Board of Trustees fully advised of the financial condition of the Village and its future financial needs.

[E.](#) Conduct a continuing study of all functions and activities of the Village for the purpose of devising ways and means of obtaining greater efficiency and economy.

[F.](#) Have such powers and duties, not inconsistent with law, as from time to time may be provided by resolution of the Board of Trustees.

[§ 22A-3 Designation as Budget Officer.](#) In addition to the powers and duties set forth in [§ 22A-2](#) hereof, the Village Administrator shall serve as Budget Officer when so designated by the Mayor in accordance with § 5-500, Subdivision 2, of the Village Law.

[§ 22A-4 Reservation of power.](#) Nothing herein contained shall be deemed or construed as abolishing, transferring or curtailing any powers or duties of the Board of Trustees or of the Mayor, the Treasurer or the Clerk, as prescribed by the Village Law or other applicable laws of the state.

[§ 22A-5 Residency requirements.](#) The provisions of L.L. No. 2-2014, entitled "A Local Law Repealing Section [2-12](#) of the Village Code of the Village of Tuckahoe, Entitled 'Residency of Officers, Employees,' and Restating and Reenacting Residency Requirements Applicable to Certain Positions Within the Village of Tuckahoe," shall be applicable to the position of Village Administrator.

[§ 2-7 Conduct of Village business, affairs.](#) The conduct of business and affairs of the Village shall be through departments established and organized for the purpose by resolution of the Village Board of Trustees. Each such department shall be under the supervision of a member of the Village Board of Trustees appointed for the purpose.