

# TOWN MANAGER

**ABINGDON, VIRGINIA**





**The Town of Abingdon** is seeking an experienced professional to serve as Town Manager, the chief administrative officer responsible for directing programs and operations of the Town government.

This recruitment profile provides background information on the community, its government operations and its aspirations. It also outlines the qualifications, experience and characteristics determined to be necessary and desirable for the position of Town Manager.

Qualified candidates are encouraged to submit a cover letter and resume, with salary history and professional references, to The Berkley Group via email at [kimball.payne@bgllc.net](mailto:kimball.payne@bgllc.net). While the position is open until filled, review of candidates will begin April 8, 2022. Inquiries relating to the Town Manager position may be directed to:

**Kimball Payne**

The Berkley Group

P.O. Box 181

Bridgewater, Virginia 22812

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# TOWN OF ABINGDON

## COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

The Town of Abingdon is in Washington County in the scenic Blue Ridge Highlands region of Virginia. Established by an act of the Assembly of Virginia in 1778, the town was named after the ancestral home of Martha Washington. The town's location on Interstate 81, approximately fifteen (15) miles above the Virginia-Tennessee border, makes it easily accessible from much of the eastern United States. Abingdon is the county seat of Washington County and is part of the Kingsport-Bristol (TN)-Bristol (VA) Metropolitan Statistical Area, which is a component of the Johnson City-Kingsport-Bristol, TN-VA Combined Statistical Area, commonly known as the "Tri-Cities" region.

Abingdon enjoys an exemplary quality of life with both natural recreation and major metropolitan areas nearby. Five other state capitals are closer to the town than the Commonwealth's capital of Richmond.

Jefferson National Forest, the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, Grayson Highlands State Park, and the Appalachian Trail, as well as numerous streams, rivers, and lakes, are easily accessible from the town. The western terminus of the Virginia Creeper Trail, a popular rails-to-trails project is in downtown Abingdon. Bikers come from all over to get a shuttle to White Top mountain, thirty-five miles away, and ride the mostly downhill trail back to Abingdon.



The Town of Abingdon is characterized by its charm, historic buildings, unique businesses, and arts and cultural activities. Downtown is a Virginia Historic Landmark and its 20-square block Historic District includes many restored and preserved buildings such as the Fields-Penn 1860 House Museum, which shows how a typical family lived in the pre-Civil War period and The Arts Depot, a restored 1870 railroad station. A Four-Star, Historic Hotel of America, the Martha Washington Inn & Spa, built in 1832, sits across the street from the Barter Theatre. Considered the "State Theatre of Virginia," the Barter Theatre is one of the longest running professional regional theatres in the nation, hosting such Hollywood luminaries as Gregory Peck, Patricia Neal, and Ernest Borgnine.



Abingdon is one of the towns along "The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail" and is home of the annual Virginia Highlands Festival, one of the most popular events in Virginia. Agriculture has historically played an important role in the life of the region, although production has shifted away from tobacco to more varied crops, beef cattle, dairy, and eggs. The Abingdon Farmers' Market and farm-to-table restaurants are popular attractions.

All of this, a thriving arts scene, foodie culture, vibrant history, and great outdoor recreation are just a few of the reasons that USA Today named Abingdon the #2 Southern Small Town in 2015 and, as one of the 10 Best Small Town Food Scenes in the Country three years in a row (2019-2021). Additionally, Abingdon was named the Top Small Adventure Town for 2021 by Blue Ridge Outdoors. For more information about what Abingdon has to offer, visit the Abingdon Convention and Visitors Bureau at: <https://visitabingdonvirginia.com/>.

Abingdon students attend Washington County public schools. Virginia Highlands Community College, offering 2-year degrees, is in the town. The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, on the campus of VHCC, provides the region with access to undergraduate and graduate degree programs and courses from participating institutions Emory & Henry College, Old Dominion University, Radford University, University of Virginia, University of Virginia's College at Wise, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Highlands Community College, Virginia Intermont College, and Virginia Tech. Emory & Henry College is located seven miles north of the town.

Abingdon's population of 8,376 is approximately 94% white, 2% African American, 1% Hispanic and 1% Asian. The Median Household Income is \$45,848 (2019) and the poverty rate is 16.2%. Washington County has a population, including town residents, of approximately 54,400. Regional employment is focused on transportation equipment, specialty chemicals and metal manufacturing, distribution, health care, professional, scientific, and technical services, lodging, and food and retail services. K-VA-T Food Stores, Inc., the owner of the Food City grocery chain, has its corporate headquarters and a distribution center in Abingdon. Johnston Memorial Hospital, a 116 bed, not-for-profit facility located just north of town, provides healthcare to residents of the region.

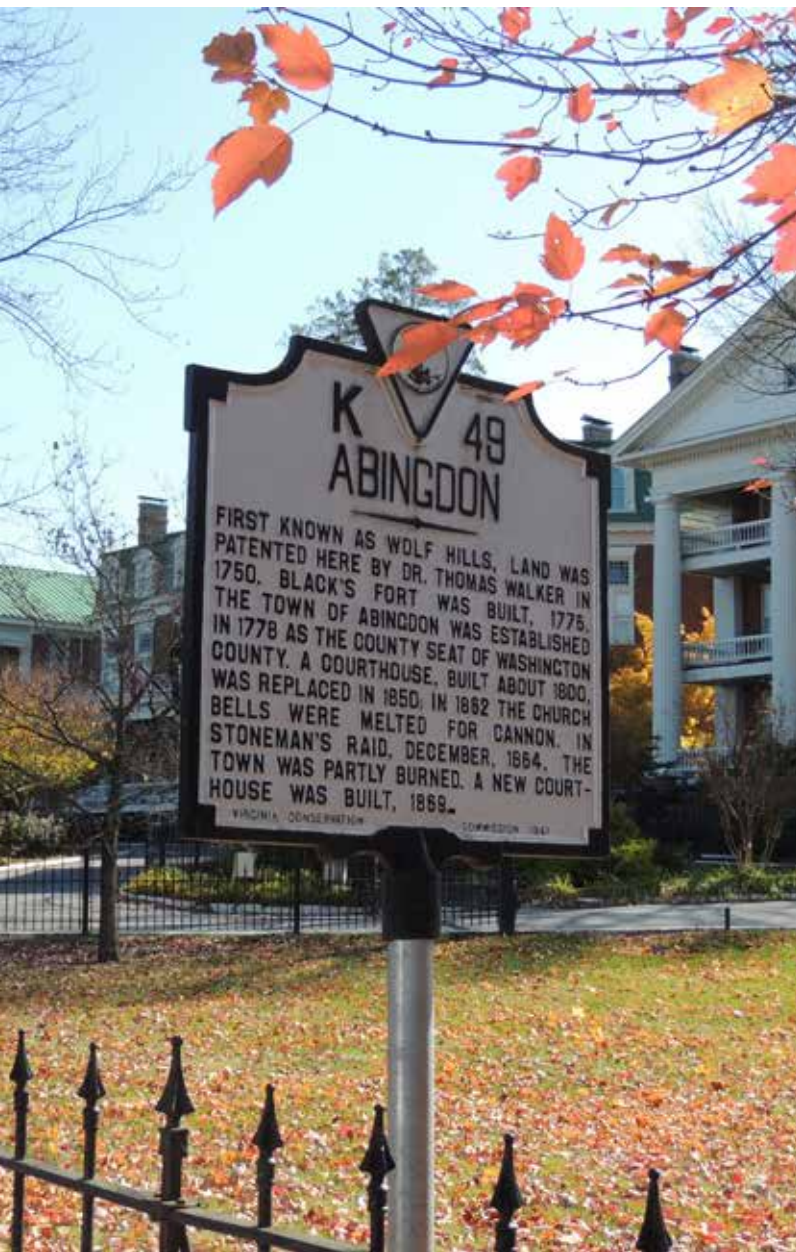


Photo Credit: Jason Barnette



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## TOWN GOVERNMENT

The Town of Abingdon provides an array of municipal services complementing the more broadly delivered services, such as public education and social services, provided by Washington County. Services include planning and zoning, building inspection, stormwater management and erosion control, streets maintenance, wastewater collection and treatment, and solid waste collection. A third-party contractor manages wastewater operations. The Abingdon Police Department is responsible for law enforcement and emergency response is provided by the Abingdon Fire Department and Abingdon Volunteer Fire and Rescue, Inc. Washington County provides centralized E911 call answering and dispatch services.

Cultural and recreational activities are provided by a robust Parks and Recreation Department. The main branch of the Washington County Public Library is in Abingdon. The town also has active economic development and tourism programs.

Abingdon has approximately 200 employees, with an annual budget of approximately \$24 million, including a General Fund of \$13.2 million and approximately \$7.5 million in capital expenditures. The Sewer Fund, an enterprise fund, has an annual budget of \$4.8 million and the Street Maintenance Fund totals \$3.2 million. In Fiscal Year 2021-22, the real estate tax rate is \$0.28 per \$100 of assessed value and the personal property tax rate is \$0.76 per \$100 of assessed value. Other major revenues sources are the 7% meals tax, the 7% transient occupancy tax, and the Town's share of local sales tax.

The Town of Abingdon is governed by a five-member Town Council, elected at-large to four-year, staggered terms. The Council is the legislative policy making body for the town government. The Council elects a Mayor from its members, who presides at meetings of the Council and is recognized as the head of the town government for ceremonial and certain statutory purposes.

The Town Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the town government, appoints and supervises employees, serves as the town purchasing agent, implements policies and addresses priorities adopted by the Council. The manager is also responsible for ensuring that all laws, ordinances, resolutions, and bylaws of the Council are faithfully enforced. In addition, the Town Manager represents Abingdon to federal and state agencies and serves on various local and regional boards representing the town.



## CHALLENGES, ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

During the three-year tenure of the previous Town Manager a strong management team was put in place as retirements and other transitions occurred and new department heads were brought on board to complement those who remained. The new Town Manager will have the opportunity to engage staff and work with them to build a stronger team, one that focuses on coordination and collaboration. He or she will also be responsible for hiring an Assistant Town Manager, a position that has been vacant for almost four years.

The Town Council also has a relatively short tenure; three council members are in the last year of their first term and the other two council members are in the third year of their first term. Nevertheless, council members have attended training offered by the Virginia Municipal League and the entire council held a strategic planning retreat in July 2021. The new Town Manager will have the opportunity to further implement and build on decisions reached at the retreat. The Town Council is particularly interested in maintaining excellent town operations and building on the progress that has been made during its tenure as the community comes out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the Town Manager will be able to lead the organization in the implementation of the recently completed update of the town's Comprehensive Plan. The plan includes a 2040 Vision of Abingdon as "a community where residents want to stay and visitors want to return," with the following characteristics:

- A Small Town with a Big Quality of Life
- Southwest Virginia's Intersection of Arts and Nature
- A Town that Helps Businesses Start Up and Soar
- A Place that Embraces Preservation and Progress
- A Connected, Walkable and Bikeable Small Town
- Providing Housing for Every Stage of Life
- A Town of Complete Neighborhoods
- A Place where Everyone Feels Welcome and Included

A significant new community asset will be dedicated in April 2022. The Meadows, a seventy-acre site, rezoned from agriculture to business in 2015, has brought new commercial development to the town. The property includes the 34-acre Meadows Sports Complex offering state-of-the-art facilities for local and travelling youth and adult sports teams. Other amenities include an ADA accessible playground, a perimeter walking track with access to the Virginia Creeper Trail, picnic areas and ornamental landscaping throughout the park. The Town will be implementing an operations plan for the complex and will need to be flexible and adaptable as experience dictates. There is also a former residence on the property that the Town would like to offer to the private sector for repurposing.

Capital projects will require the attention of the new Town Manager. The new Capital Improvements Plan for FY 2023 and beyond will address street improvements, stormwater management, culvert replacement, and trestle repairs on the Virginia Creeper Trail. In the longer term, interest has been expressed in a new or renovated municipal building and town shop with the possibility of bringing more town operations into a single location.



Photo Credit: Jason Barnette





# Position Profile

*Town Manager, Abingdon*

## **QUALIFICATIONS, EDUCATION & EXPERIENCE**

The following education and experience factors are the expected qualifications for successful performance:

- A Master's degree in Public Administration, Business Management, Planning, or a related field; experience equivalent to a master's degree may be considered.
- Three to five years of successful leadership at a senior executive/administrator level in an organization with comparable responsibilities; possessing a broad skill set appropriate to the breadth of town government operations. Local government experience in Virginia as a manager, deputy or assistant is desirable.
- A record of being an active community member, through participation in local service organizations and volunteer activities.
- A demonstrated commitment to ongoing professional development through participation in organizations such as the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the Virginia Local Government Management Association (VLGMA); designation or progress toward designation as ICMA Credentialed Manager would be a plus.
- Any combination of education and experience that qualifies an applicant may be considered in lieu of the more specific criteria listed above.

## **PERSONAL TRAITS & DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS**

- Absolute integrity, ensuring ethical, equitable, honest, fair, open, and personable interactions with all town employees and community members.
- Professionally competent, with confidence tempered by humility.
- A sound decision maker, open to input from stakeholders, exhibiting sound judgment, and decisive when appropriate.
- Excellent communications and interpersonal skills, including the ability to listen effectively and understand differing views.
- Strong participative leadership skills within the government organization, the community, and the region; visionary, proactive, and decisive; able to integrate new ideas and facilitate the blending of differing points of view into a reasonable approach for community betterment.
- Not easily intimidated; able to diffuse tense situations and seek common ground when different perspectives create friction.
- Approachable and empathetic, with a customer service mindset.
- Knowledgeable and supportive of the principles of the council-manager form of government and respectful of the different and complementary roles of the Town Council and the Town Manager.
- A role model, coach, and mentor for town employees; dedicated to the professional development of staff; able to empower employees with a focus on performance, collaboration, and accountability.
- A promoter of teamwork and collaboration among town departments, with Washington County, and across the region.

## PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

- Short-term, immediate actions will be to engage with staff and council, review town policies and procedures, master the budget process, and get up to speed on active capital projects.
- Responsive to citizen concerns and issues; listening, understanding, and providing timely follow-up.
- A commitment to open and transparent government; promoting a positive and interactive relationship with town citizens and stakeholders; encouraging inclusive citizen engagement.
- Effective communications with all stakeholders; presenting information in a form understandable to various audiences; strong, consistent, and equal communications with the Town Council.
- A focus on promoting interdepartmental communication, cooperation, and collaboration in the town organization.
- Fair and equitable investment in and support of town employees and departments with a priority of enhancing competency and accountability through individual development and improved business processes. Not a micromanager; able to empower and entrust employees in fulfilling their responsibilities.
- An active and visible resident of the Town, participating in community activities and building relationships with citizens, business owners, and other stakeholders.

## COMPENSATION & BENEFITS

Compensation for the Town Manager will be competitive, depending on qualifications and experience. The successful candidate will be offered a generous benefits package including participation in the Virginia Retirement System (VRS), health/dental/vision insurance, paid time off, professional development support and other benefits as provided for all Town employees or identified in a negotiated employment contract.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

**Initial review of candidates will begin on April 8, 2022.** Applications received after that date may be considered until the position is filled. Timely submittal will ensure the most advantageous review. To be considered, please submit a cover letter, resume, salary expectations, and professional references to The Berkley Group, via email at [kimball.payne@bgllc.net](mailto:kimball.payne@bgllc.net). Questions may be directed to:

### Kimball Payne

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## FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Visit <https://abingdon-va.gov/>

The Town of Abingdon is an Equal Opportunity Employer

