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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Nicely done, Rob. Beautifully reported, written, and organized, and you end the landing satisfyingly and with grace. Sounds like they let a good one get away. Maybe Deb Wright will take the job.

—Note that Kristi Morris is counterintuitively but decidedly a dude:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/people/single/2024/33012>

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Rockingham municipalities will miss Pickup, colleagues

2 say

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 The municipal manager will become Springfield's town

4 manager, after five years of advancing multiple projects and

5 reversing a pattern of tumult in the Town Hall

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7           Municipal Manger Scott Pickup is leaving Rockingham  
8 and Bellows Falls at the beginning of the new year to take a  
9 similar position with the nearby town of Springfield.

10           Pickup came to the municipalities in October 2020,  
11 making his five years in the position one of the longest tenures in  
12 recent history. After several turbulent years, town leaders say  
13 Pickup brought a much-needed calm and stability to the position.

14           That was also noticed by the Springfield Selectboard,  
15 which voted unanimously at its Nov. 24 meeting to hire Pickup to  
16 replace Jeff Mobus, who is completing a five-year term.

17           “Scott really distinguished himself out of over 30  
18 applicants because of his previous experience as a town  
19 manager, his knowledge of Vermont local and state government  
20 process, and his collegial personality,” Springfield Selectboard  
21 Chair Kristi Morris said in a news release announcing the hire.

22           Morris added that Pickup was selected because the  
23 board was “impressed with his work in Bellows Falls and  
24 Rockingham. He was recognized for bringing stability and has a  
25 strong professional management style.”

26           Pickup’s annual salary in Springfield will be around  
27 \$155,000, compared to the \$120,000 that he was making in  
28 Rockingham. The population of Rockingham is around 4,800,  
29 while Springfield is nearly twice as large, with over 9,000  
30 residents.

31           Morris said that the Selectboard “thought he would be a  
32 great fit for Springfield. Scott checked all the boxes for what the  
33 town is looking for to implement our strategic plan, town plan  
34 and for updating our land use ordinances. All these are focused  
35 on growing our economy and increasing the grand list.”

36           Pickup’s last day in Rockingham is Jan. 2, and his first  
37 day in Springfield will be Jan. 6. But Pickup, who lives in Bellows  
38 Falls, said he won’t be far away and will be glad to help the town  
39 through the transition to a new manager.

40           Originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, Pickup, 63, has  
41 Bachelor of Arts and Master of Public Administration degrees

42 from the University of Cincinnati. He has served as town  
43 manager in other Northeast towns and says he really prefers  
44 working with smaller communities.

45 “It’s one place where government still works. You can do  
46 things with an immediate impact,” he said, while acknowledging  
47 that not all decisions that small town leaders make are popular  
48 with everyone. “Sometimes they don’t like the answers they get.  
49 Hopefully, we can all get past that.”

50 Pickup said that the particular challenge of his current  
51 position is that “the municipal manager has a responsibility to the  
52 town of Rockingham [and] the village of Bellows Falls, and I  
53 work with the village of Saxtons River.”

54 That means working with a town Selectboard and two  
55 village boards of trustees.

56 Pickup said he is most pleased that during his tenure “the  
57 boards have worked very hard to work together,” he said,  
58 providing the community with strong leadership.

59 That cooperation was really put to the test during the  
60 past year when the boards faced the challenge of consolidating  
61 three fire departments — the Bellows Falls Fire Department  
62 (BFFD), the Rockingham Volunteer Fire Department (RVFD), and  
63 the Saxtons River Volunteer Fire Department (SRVFD).

64 In 2023, a study by AP Triton, a Wyoming firm,  
65 concluded that the town would be better served by the three  
66 departments sharing personnel, equipment, and fire stations.  
67 Consolidating fire departments was not a new issue — it had  
68 been discussed by the town for decades, with strong resistance  
69 and no action.

70 But following the study, town leaders agreed to pursue  
71 consolidation. After several occasionally contentious public  
72 discussions on the issue, the topic was brought to a vote at Town  
73 Meeting on March 1.

74 Despite strong pockets of opposition, the majority of  
75 voters agreed that the time for consolidation had arrived. By a  
76 vote of 191–103 — a nearly 2-to-1 margin — voters decided to

77 consolidate the three departments into a single municipal  
78 division under one chief.  
79 "It took two years of work" by the town, villages and the  
80 departments, Pickup said, "but it passed by a significant majority.  
81 The community spoke, and it is better served. It makes things  
82 more efficient."  
83 Pickup also said that he understood that "people feel  
84 strongly about it, and I get it. It's hard to make changes."

## 85 **Confidence in local leadership**

86 Pickup said that one of the things that makes moving on  
87 to Springfield easier is that he is confident that Rockingham has  
88 strong community leadership.

89 "It takes a lot of work" to effectively lead the community,  
90 "and I give the elected officials a lot of credit," he said. "When  
91 there isn't clear direction from the top, then there are problems,"  
92 and things don't get done, he said.

93 Pickup has tried to make that point by his own example.

94 "Thanks to his quietly transformational leadership," said  
95 Selectboard Member Rick Cowan, who has worked with Pickup  
96 his entire tenure in the town, "Rockingham and Bellows Falls  
97 have made remarkable progress in the past five years."

98 Cowan noted that Pickup's management style "deftly  
99 balances the reactive and proactive. When responding to an  
100 emergency, he always seeks a longer-term fix or whole new  
101 approach" while never losing sight of the bigger picture.

102 This long-term view of problems has served Pickup well  
103 in leading the town in making difficult decisions about parts of  
104 the community that were polluted during its industrial past, he  
105 said.

106 "Progress is measured in decades," Cowan said. "It's  
107 expensive to clean up legacy pollution. But at some point, the  
108 financial implications have to be addressed."

109 The town has taken on significant brownfields cleanup  
110 projects in recent years, particularly on the Island and the Under

111 the Hill areas next to downtown Bellows Falls. Railyards, paper  
112 and pulp mills, and other factories, once brought prosperity to  
113 the region but have left decades of polluted soils to be cleaned  
114 up.

115 "I give [Development Director] Gary Fox and the boards  
116 credit that they've taken the years-long process to get the  
117 brownfields cleanup done," Pickup said. "It has to be done.  
118 Decay just attracts more decay and decline."

119 Pickup said that some have been critical of the cleanup  
120 efforts and noted that "criticism is uncomfortable, and we've had  
121 to make decisions that are difficult."

122 Several community leaders praised Pickup for his calm  
123 and farsighted approach to these issues in the face of critics.

124 Former Village Trustee Jeff Dunbar said that "Rockingham  
125 has been extraordinarily fortunate to have Scott serve as its  
126 municipal manager." He noted that Pickup's style of management  
127 "quickly earned the trust and confidence of his staff, governing  
128 boards, and community at large."

129 Dunbar added that "during his tenure we have seen  
130 considerable improvement in infrastructure repair and  
131 maintenance." He noted in particular Pickup's work in the  
132 "coordination of local, state, and federal agencies as we prepare  
133 for bridge reconstructions and development on the Island. We  
134 have seen an effort to stabilize, restore, and celebrate the  
135 architectural and cultural fabric of our villages."

136 Those efforts to move the community ahead have not  
137 been appreciated by everyone.

138 Pickup said that when anyone is critical of initiatives to  
139 improve the town, "I ask them, 'So, what's your vision?'

140 "In most cases they don't have one," he said. "They just  
141 want to criticize. So we move on."

142 He said that one of the strengths of Rockingham is that  
143 the people are hard working and committed to their community  
144 and its future.

145 "Those people want to be here in 20 years," Pickup said.

146 He added that not addressing the pollution issues would  
147 be shortsighted.

148 “What does it mean if we don’t clean up the legacy  
149 pollution?” Pickup asked. “Then we don’t expand the tax base,  
150 and we still have a polluted site. People or businesses thinking of  
151 moving here see that, and they say, ‘You’ve given up.’”

## 152 **‘A town governance ninja’**

153 “Scott Pickup is an extraordinarily good town manager,”  
154 said artist and town activist Charlie Hunter, who has worked with  
155 the municipal manager on several projects. “He knows how to  
156 listen, and make people feel heard; sculpting others’ rough  
157 proposals into viable concepts.”

158 Hunter said Pickup is “calm, organized, and able to  
159 move projects forward without getting mired in controversy. The  
160 unwieldy two-headed beast that is Rockingham/Bellows Falls  
161 town/village government with its myriad fiefdoms didn’t seem to  
162 intimidate him. He was able to walk between the raindrops —  
163 he’s sort of a town-governance ninja.”

164 Hunter said he especially loved working with Pickup on  
165 matters concerning the Bellows Falls Opera House.

166 “Meetings are to the point; he understands the big  
167 picture and has zero interest in micromanagement,” he said,.

168 Hunter said that under Pickup’s tenure, the Opera House  
169 deficit has shrunk by two-thirds while offerings have expanded  
170 greatly.

171 Pickup, he said, “understands what an economic driver  
172 that place can be for the whole downtown. To quote Kenny  
173 Rogers, he ‘know[s] when to hold ‘em, [knows] when to fold ‘em,  
174 knows when to walk away, knows when to run.’

175 “Our loss is definitely Springfield’s gain,” Hunter said.

176 That sentiment was expressed by many who worked with  
177 Pickup.

178 “Losing Scott Pickup as our town manager is certainly a  
179 loss for our town,” expressed Selectboard Vice-Chair John Dunbar

180 (Jeff Dunbar's brother). "Scott has been a solid leader for  
181 Rockingham, taking on the position at a time when the town had  
182 experienced a lot of turnover in that position and with the  
183 complexities of having separate town and village governments."

184 Dunbar said that during Scott's tenure the town had seen  
185 many projects — many of large scale — take shape, "including  
186 overseeing the scheduled replacement of bridges, supporting the  
187 Windham & Windsor Housing Trust in the rebuilding of the  
188 [Bellows Falls] Garage project, bringing much-needed housing to  
189 our downtown, as well as managing the effects from flooding  
190 events and storm damage."

191 John Dunbar said he appreciated Pickup's leadership  
192 during the consolidating of the fire departments and his work  
193 with the Development Department and Fox to save the train  
194 station "from becoming another historic building in our town lost  
195 due to neglect."

196 Dunbar noted that Rockingham and Bellows Falls "have  
197 been gaining attention statewide as an example of a town  
198 rebuilding its vibrancy," which he said "is in large part due to  
199 Scott's leadership and his ability to work with the various  
200 departments, boards, commissions, and committees that are  
201 tasked with implementing the necessary work. I have appreciated  
202 working with and learning from Scott."

## 203 Winding down

204 In his final weeks, Pickup said he hopes to wrap up a few  
205 loose ends.

206 Even as he was being interviewed for this article in his  
207 third-floor office in the 100-year-old Town Hall, work crews  
208 could be heard finishing up replacing the historic building's roof.  
209 With water damage to ceilings and plaster walls clearly visible  
210 throughout the building, preventing further damage by replacing  
211 the roof has ranked high on Pickup's priority list.

212 "It'll be nice to have it fixed," he said.

213 He also hopes to announce the new fire chief hire for the  
214 consolidated departments by the end of the month at a tri-board  
215 meeting.

216 As far as his replacement, he said he was confident the  
217 town's leaders would find a good candidate, likely with the help  
218 of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns.

219 "It'll probably take three to six months," he said. "I'll be  
220 available during the transition. I'm not going away, and I'm more  
221 than happy to help in any way I can."

222 He said that he had a lot to thank his staff for.

223 "A lot of the work is done behind the scenes by the staff,  
224 and it's not easy," he observed.

225 Pickup had high praise for the community he's served for  
226 the past five years.

227 "As you well know, this community is fiercely loyal — to  
228 their schools, to their alumni, to their history," he said. "Because  
229 of that, we have a future. You need people with that kind of  
230 dedication. You don't find those kinds of people everywhere.

231 "People here are doers," Pickup said. "They make things  
232 happen. That's a wonderful resource."

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