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Updated

Scarborough hires Rockland's city manager

By **Leanne M. Robicheau**
The Courier-Gazette Editor

ROCKLAND (Sep 4): Rockland's city manager for the past nine years has accepted the position of town manager of Scarborough, the fastest growing municipality in Maine.

Advertisement

Scarborough has a town manager - town council form of government.



Tom Hall

Hall said it's a career move he couldn't pass up.

Hall begins working in Scarborough Nov. 3. He was appointed town manager Wednesday night at the Scarborough Town Council meeting. Hall replaces Town Manager Ron Owens, who is retiring.

Hall wasn't really looking for a job, he said, but he knew about the Scarborough opening and "appreciates that good jobs don't happen often" and "owed it to himself professionally to try for it."

"It's a good move for my family," he said, "which is the ultimate decision."

Hall came to Rockland Sept. 20, 1999, as the new city manager, taking the helm from former City Manager Richard Michaud, who left to become city administrator in Saco.

Hall, an Aroostook County native, had previously served as manager of Bethlehem Township, Pa., a suburb of Bethlehem.

At that time he was looking to expand his horizons when he returned to his home state to become Rockland's leader.

Now the Presque Isle native is again seeking bigger challenges.

Hall said Scarborough offers "lots of challenges and lots of opportunities."

In comparison to Rockland's \$18.7 million overall budget, which includes municipal, school and county costs, Scarborough's total budget is \$84.2 million. Rockland has 105 full-time employees; Scarborough has 150.

Rockland is a city of nearly 8,000 residents and is 12.5 square miles in size. Scarborough is estimated to have a population of about 20,000, Hall said, noting that number is rising and it comprises 54 square miles of land.

"What I've grown to love, personally, [about Rockland], is it's size and scale," Hall said. "Scarborough doesn't have that at all."

Hall will miss the "edgy-ness" of Rockland.

Scarborough is a suburban community, "with beautiful sandy beaches," he said, noting two beaches are town-owned. The southern Maine community also has "intense commercial development," he said.

A challenge in Scarborough will be controlling that growth around Interstate-95 and U.S. Route 1, which cut through the middle of the town, and "connecting villages and neighborhoods."

Rockland has a city manager and five city councilors, while Scarborough operates with a town manager and a seven-member town council.

As Rockland city manager, Hall earns \$83,787. Scarborough will pay him \$104,000 to start.

Hall is proud of his accomplishments during his tenure in Rockland, which have included improvements to the downtown infrastructure and the establishment of a downtown Tax Increment Financing District, he said. The TIF District is designed to help improve the infrastructure of the Tillson Avenue and downtown areas at a savings to taxpayers. He was also instrumental in getting funding for streetscape improvements downtown.

Hall also played a role in helping to attract Boston Financial Data Services to the former MBNA waterfront complex, which is the type of economic and community development work that excites him.

Scarborough offers many more opportunities in the way of business development, he said.

"The [Maine Lighthouse Museum] is really a crowning achievement," he said of his part in bringing the museum to the city's waterfront. "I'll always look back at that fondly."

Hall also was a major force behind converting the former Courier Publications building at One Park Drive into condominium units that are now separately owned by the city, museum and Rockland Festival Corp.

"It was very comforting to see those pieces fall in place," he said of the museum and condo deal.

Hall is comfortable, he said, in leaving Rockland now.

"The timing is right," he said, noting that he would like to work with city officials to help select his successor.

Although this is the right move for him professionally and for his wife, Kerry, son Brendan, 13, and daughter Emma, 10, it is difficult to leave friends here and a staff with whom he has formed a "great personal connection," he said.

"I couldn't be prouder," he said of his key employees.

Hall praised the creativity of the staff, which has worked well with limited resources, he said, such as public works crews doing jobs that would typically be hired out to construction firms.

"Rodney Lynch ... he's done a masterful job," said Hall of the city's community development director, who has gotten the city "through these lean years" by securing numerous grants. Solid Waste Director David St. Laurent has helped the city turn a corner with problems at the landfill, and it is now headed in a positive direction, said Hall.

One of Hall's biggest regrets is having to defer maintenance due to a lack of capital funds.

"My number one focus was stabilizing or reducing the tax rate," he said. Hall has controlled spending, he said, and attempted to spread the tax burden by attracting businesses, but there has not been adequate funding to afford capital improvements.

In comparing the total assessments of Scarborough and Rockland, Hall said that the year to year gain in Scarborough's total valuation last year climbed \$60 million and Rockland's increased about \$4 million. That higher assessment allows a community to reinvest, he said.

In describing another contrast in the two communities, Hall said that Rockland opens itself up in the summer months with many community events, from Summer Solstice to the Maine Lobster Festival.

"I know I'm going to miss that when I'm gone," he said. "This place is really going to blossom into something great."
