

Stephen O'Neil named new WRTA Administrator

WORCESTER, MA. Friday, March 2nd, 2007 — The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) Advisory Board is pleased to announce it has chosen Stephen O'Neil for the position of administrator of the WRTA.

O'Neil, who is currently working for the city of Worcester, was the front-runner in a three candidate race. Along with O'Neil, the other candidates included Carla Lakatos, of Ohio and Michael Abegg, of Minnesota. The board met with each candidate on March 1 for a lengthy one-hour public interview, then convened for a vote.

"In the end it came down to a two horse race. There was one candidate with transit experience, but did not have the local connections or knowledge and the other was strong on the regulatory side," said Dennis Lipka, WRTA chairman of the Personnel Committee.

In an unprecedented move by Chairman of the Advisory Board Michael O'Brien, a non-weighted vote was taken. Massachusetts State law allows each member town a certain weighted vote, with the city of Worcester's vote carrying the most weight. O'Brien is the Worcester city manager.

"I'm not looking at the weighted vote, there is no need for that," O'Brien said. "We all share the same goals for the system."

After deliberating for an hour and a half, the committee unanimously chose O'Neil. A total of 14 out of 37 members attended the meeting and voted.

"We need someone who has a good working history and Steve brings that track record to the table," Lipka said. "He is a proven commodity and has working relationships in our state and local government that goes back 20 years."

In the final interview with the board, O'Neil cited his credentials and noted, "I don't need this job, I want this job. I know what needs to be done and I know I can do the job well."

Lipka said it is O'Neil's enthusiasm and his desire to "hit the ground running" that was also a factor in the committee's decision.

O'Neil said his first task would be to change a deficit run agency by making progress on both the state and federal levels to gain additional funding.

"I'm going to look for ways to increase revenue," O'Neil said. "It will be very important to reach out to various communities and listen to their needs."

O'Neil said he hopes to be fully onboard as administrator by the end of the month.

"I'm grateful for the Advisory Board for selecting me as the new administrator; only the third administrator in the history of the WRTA. I'm looking forward to the challenges ahead and look forward to working with all the WRTA staff and Professional Transit Management (PTM), the management company."

The Contract Negotiation team will meet with O'Neil next week to finalize negotiations. The team is made up of Shrewsbury Town Manager Daniel Morgado, Dennis Lipka, director of Growth Management for Holden and Douglas Belanger, a selectman for the town of Leicester.