

June 2015

The City of Amesbury has retained the services of the Edward J. Collins Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts Boston to assist it in its search for a Chief Financial Officer (CFO). The Center is a part of the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies. Founded by the Commonwealth in 2008 the Center has a focus on assisting Massachusetts municipalities and state agencies.

Background on the City of Amesbury

Amesbury is a city in Essex County, Massachusetts, located on the left bank of the Merrimack River near its mouth, upstream from Salisbury and across the river from Newburyport and West Newbury. The population is approximately sixteen thousand. A former farming and mill town, Amesbury is today largely residential. It is one of the two northernmost towns in Massachusetts (the other being neighboring Salisbury)

In 1996, the town changed its status to a city, and adopted the mayor/council form of government. Voters approved a charter amendment in November 2011 changing the city's official name to the "City of Amesbury" and removing references to the old "Town of Amesbury" name.

The City consists of approximately 13 square miles of lying along the left bank of the Merrimack River estuary. The median family income in the City is approximately \$94,946 compared to a statewide average of approximately \$83,371. The school system serves more than 2,339 in four schools.

In Amesbury, the school district is a part of the municipality, although the elected School Committee (Board) has autonomy in educational policy and hiring and related matters. The Mayor serves *ex officio* as Chair of the School Committee.

Organizational Design and Governance

The City is governed by a directly elected Mayor with strong executive powers and a nine-member City Council. The Mayor and Council serve concurrent two-year terms. The Council consists of six district councilors and three at-large councilors. The City's Home Rule Charter established the position of Chief Financial Officer in 1996. The charter is available on the Collins Center web site. The current Mayor, Ken Gray, was elected for his first term in November 2013.

Public Finance

General Fund Expenditures for FY2015 totaled \$53.9 million of which \$28.1 million or 52% were for education. The property tax levy for FY2015 was \$37.9 million and for the same year \$11.8 million of revenue was from state aid. In FY 2015 \$6.2 million (16%) of the property tax levy was from commercial and industrial classes of property and \$31.7 million (84%) was from the residential class of property. Amesbury has a uniform

property tax rate for all classes of property. Amesbury has an AA bond rating from Standard and Poors. A recent bond offering statement is available on the Collins Center web site.

The Chief Financial Officer.

The Chief Financial Officer position was established in 1996. The position was included in the 1996 charter that abolished the Town Meeting/Selectman/Town Manager form of government and replaced it with a Mayor/Council form of government. The inclusion of the CFO position was intended to continue the tradition of strong professional management of Town affairs while creating more responsive executive and legislative bodies. Accordingly the Charter description of the powers and duties of the CFO plus subsequent ordinances and designations have effectively made the CFO position the *de facto* Chief Administrative Officer of the City.

The CFO holds the statutory powers of City Auditor and is designated as Chief Procurement Officer and Human Resource Director. Treasury and Collection functions, Assessing and benefits and IT are all subordinate to the CFO position. The CFO plays a significant role in collective bargaining.

The CFO is appointed by the Mayor for a three-year term and has an employment contract.

The CFO serves as the City's senior advisor on budgetary and financial matters. Preparing the annual budget with the Mayor, shepherding its passage through the Council, and monitoring its execution is a core function of the position. Managing the financial relationships with the City's development and enterprise entities is in the CFO's purview, as will management of relationships with the City's auditors, rating agencies and state oversight bodies.

The CFO functions in the context of a skilled and experienced managerial team that includes the Assistant School Superintendent for Administration. Both the Schools and the Town utilize the MUNIS based municipal accounting and reporting system.

Challenges for the CFO

Gaining and maintaining the full confidence of the Mayor and Council. Amesbury is a strong-mayor city. While the CFO has specific powers and duties defined by statute the CFO will draw much of his/her authority from the development of an effective working relationship with the Mayor and Council. The new CFO is expected to bring a fresh look at city operations and also quickly attain the credibility needed to serve as the steward of the City's finances and principal financial strategist.

Earning the respect and support of subordinates, peers and key opinion leaders. The CFO will have extensive interaction with key players in the municipal organization. The

CFO will need to quickly demonstrate a high level of competence and professionalism to earn the respect and confidence of the City's leadership and staff. This is not a learning position.

Forging a relationship with the top management of the School Department. State law places much budgetary and financial control of the school department budget within the school system, but these functions need to be closely linked to city financial operations.

Establishing a working relationship with the City Council. The CFO must be able to develop a positive relationship with the Council. Meeting this challenge effectively is necessary to set the stage for the CFO's long-term relationship with the Council.

Articulate the City's financial situation. The CFO must have the confidence, communication skill and credibility to represent the City to key opinion leaders including those from the media, state agencies, the business community and bond rating agencies.

The Ideal Candidate

The ideal candidate will be a professionally seasoned manager with well-developed financial skills who has a demonstrated record of effectiveness in public organizations and who has worked directly with political leaders. The ideal candidate could come from the City Management profession, the Government Finance profession or a similar environment.

The Ideal Candidate needs to be

- Able to demonstrate unquestioned integrity in interactions with political leaders and staff at all levels and the public.
- Able to firmly exercise the control of city finances envisioned in the Charter that established the CFO position, but do so in a way that engenders understanding of the City's limitations and encourages participation by staff at all levels in meeting the City's cost containment and revenue maximizing goals.
- Able to help the Mayor and Council understand the short and long term financial implications of their policy decisions and the constraints the City faces.
- Able to carry out the duties of the CFO while functioning as an *inside actor* who develops strong formal and informal linkages within the municipal and school structures,
- Able to utilize the powers inherent in the position to help represent the City's agenda in discussions with senior state and federal leaders and with the private sector.

- Able to establish *a culture of continuous improvement* in financial management and budget analysis at all levels in the organization.
- Able to function as an accessible and effective organizational leader in a modest sized municipal environment characterized by limited resources, high service demand.

The Ideal Candidate

The ideal candidate will have a Bachelor's degree and the experience typically gained through a Master's degree program in a relevant field and ten to fifteen years of public management experience working directly with elected officials. The successful candidate must be a well-rounded manager with a track record of managing complex customer service organizations in an environment of constrained financial resources. Municipal service planning, financial and human resource management and the ability to build and foster a cohesive management team are strengths vital to this position, as is the ability to develop and maintain positive professional relationships with senior officials of the Commonwealth.

The Selection Process

The Collins Center staff will assess applications and recommend candidates for interview by the Mayor.

Salary and Compensation

The current salary range for this position is \$110,000, plus a \$3000 stipend for service on the Town's Retirement Board. The City is willing to negotiate an employment contract DOQ with the selected candidate.

How to Apply

Applications are preferred electronically by June 26 , 2015. Please send your resume with a cover letter addressing the job requirements to this email address: umbrecruitment@gmail.com. The words **Amesbury CFO** must appear in the subject line. Please combine all of your documents in a single file and kindly use PDF format if possible. Should you have any questions regarding this opportunity, or a recommendation of a colleague, please contact: Richard Kobayashi, Senior Consultant (617 489-8812), or Mary Aicardi, Consultant (508 215-8992).