

# THE CITY OF AMESBURY, MA

## CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

### IDEAL CANDIDATE PROFILE & CHALLENGE STATEMENT

The Ideal Candidate for the position of Amesbury **Chief Financial Officer** will have the following qualifications:



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.

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 the position, as is the ability to develop and maintain positive professional relationships with senior officials of the Commonwealth.

Ability to demonstrate unquestioned integrity in interactions with political leaders and staff at all levels and the public.

Ability 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.

Ability to help the Mayor and Council understand the short and long term financial implications of their policy decisions and the constraints the City faces.

Ability 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.

Ability to utilize the powers inherent in the position to help represent the City's agenda in discussions with senior state and federal leaders with the private sector.

Ability to establish a culture of continuous improvement in financial management and budget analysis at all levels in the organization.

Ability to function as an accessible and effective organizational leader in a modest sized municipal environment characterized by limited resources, high service demand.

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## 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's seal still bears the name "Town of Amesbury", although the City has put forth a bill to correct the seal with the new name.



Photo Credit: Fletcher6

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 \$78,638 compared to a statewide average of approximately \$77,385. The school system serves more than 2,058 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 current Mayor, Ken Gray, was elected for his first term in November 2013.

## Public Finance

General Fund Expenditures for FY2018 totaled \$59.1 million of which \$31.8 million or 53.7% were for education. The property tax levy for FY2019 was \$41.99 million and for the same year approximately \$11.6 million of revenue will be from state aid. In FY 2019 \$4.84 million (11.5%) of the property tax levy was from commercial and industrial classes of property and \$35.87 million (85.4%) 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.

## 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.

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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.

Since the establishment of the position in 1996 the position has been held by only four individuals. The current CFO will leave in July 2019.



Photo Credit: J Phelan



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The CFO serves as the City's senior advisor on budgetary and financial matters. Preparing the annual budget with the Mayor, guiding 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 Chief Financial Officer**

***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.



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**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.



Photo Credit: L Stalteri



Photo Credit: J Phelan

## Additional Information

For additional information related to the search, contact Alan Gould, President, Municipal Resources Inc. at 603-279-0352, x320 or visit [www.mrigov.com/career](http://www.mrigov.com/career)

**Cover letter and resume in confidence as PDF attachment to:** [recruitment@mrigov.com](mailto:recruitment@mrigov.com)

**DEADLINE: Thursday, July 18<sup>th</sup> at 8 AM.** Resumes will be reviewed as they are received, and preliminary screening interviews will be scheduled as quality candidates are identified. The position may be filled prior to the deadline.