INTRODUCTION

The City of Chelsea has retained the services of the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts Boston to assist the City Council in the recruitment a new City Manager. This Profile draws upon our discussions with all eleven councilors and community stakeholders. It describes our understanding of the organization, the challenges that lie ahead for the successful candidate, and the professional and personal characteristics an ideal candidate will possess.

THE CITY OF CHELSEA

Chelsea is a 2.2 square mile city located across the Mystic River from downtown Boston. A 19th century industrial city, Chelsea developed around maritime activities and associated industry. Today the City has a population of approximately 40,000. Commercial and residential development in the last 20 years has been significant. From 2010 to 2019, more than 1200 housing units were added. Chelsea is the smallest city in Massachusetts in land area but the second most densely populated. Chelsea also has the second highest percentage of Latino residents.

The City has had three city managers since the position was established in the mid 1990s. The position of city manager is vacant as a result of a decision by the most recent incumbent to take the senior administrative position with the Massachusetts Trial Court system. The outgoing City Manager had a strong rapport with the City Council and residents of Chelsea. Chelsea’s charter, which comprehensively restructured city governance in the mid 1990s as well as the City’s ordinances are available on its web site. www.chelseama.gov.

The Charter provides the City Manager strong administrative responsibility and oversite of the city’s operations. According to the 2020 census the median household income was $64,872, approximately $25,000 lower than the statewide average. Data on the City’s demographic trends can be obtained from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council www.mapc.org.

In the 1990s Chelsea was in a difficult financial situation and its schools were placed in receivership. However, since then, Chelsea has earned a reputation as a well-governed city with a balanced budget, healthy reserves, and significant economic development accomplishments.

ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN AND GOVERNANCE

The charter created an eleven member City Council, eight members are elected by district and three members elected at-large. The school committee consists of nine members; 8 elected by district and one elected at-large. The terms of councilors and school committee members are two years. The city manager has strong executive and appointment powers.
CHELSEA BY THE NUMBERS – FINANCIAL DATA

In financial terms, Chelsea is managed very conservatively and maintains strong operating reserves. The city has a split property tax rate. Residential property generates over 53% of property tax revenue. State Aid provided nearly 56% of the FY 2023 budget. The Standard and Poor’s Rating is AA. Detailed financial information is available from the Department of Revenue/Division of Local Service web site and from several financial documents posted on the City’s web site.

FISCAL YEAR 2023 BUDGET:

City $92,802,343
Schools $119,542,287
(Capital) $24,436,414

FISCAL YEAR 2023 REVENUE BY SOURCE:

Tax Levy $83,381,454 39.27%
State Aid $118,326,209 55.72%
Local Receipts $6,503,750 3.06%
Other $4,133,217 1.95%

BOND RATING:

Standard and Poor’s AA

FISCAL YEAR 2023 TAX RATES:

Residential $12.38
Commercial $24.88
Industrial $24.88
Personal Property $24.88

Residential $40,324,999 53.65%
Commercial $22,022,371 29.30%
Industrial $6,354,566 8.45%
Personal Property $6,466,570 8.60%

RESERVES ON 7/1/23:

Free Cash $17,095,263
Water Retained Earnings $2,123,423
Sewer Retained Earnings $4,077,367
All Stabilization Funds $17,153,270
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Building on the Foundation. The City Council, stakeholders and the first three City Managers have built a solid public administration foundation for the City that emphasizes professionalism among the city’s staff and administrators. The new City Manager needs to sustain and build on this foundation. The City Manager will need to continue prudent financial management and fiscal oversight of departments and will be charged with the development of a formal performance review system.

Maintaining a Positive Labor-Management Climate. Chelsea has sustained a positive labor relations climate by utilizing careful budgeting and good management practices at the department level. Most of the city’s employees are members of collective bargaining units. Collective bargaining activities are the responsibility of the City Manager. Maintaining a positive climate will require careful attention as the City Council desires to maintain positive relations between the administration and its workforce.

Schools. The new City Manager will need to forge a strong relationship with the School Superintendent to work on education and advocacy for youth.

ARPA. The City received $40 million in ARPA funds. Approximately 20 community meetings and/or focus group sessions were held and a committee was established to recommend how to allocate the funds. Approximately $25 million was allocated towards capital needs. The City Council has voted to authorize that the funds be used for the recommended capital needs identified. The remaining $15 million has been set aside in a Community Fund for the City Manager and Senior Staff to determine how best to use. The City Manager chosen will have significant input in how the funds are used. Some funds have been allocated and RFPs are being prepared. The City Manager will need to establish a set of standards to measure the effectiveness of the various uses for the funds. It is envisioned that the measurements will avail the City to seek additional money to supplement the ARPA funds. A copy of the ARPA report may be found on the City’s website: www.chelseama.gov

Addressing Housing Concerns. As part of the greater Boston community, Chelsea is not immune from the housing affordability and availability crisis of the past 5-10 years. Many who are priced out of the Boston proper market have looked to Chelsea to provide some type of affordability. Some community leaders express concern that gentrification is occurring as a result. The Metropolitan Area Planning Commission reported that more than 80% of the resident who rent housing units contribute more than 50% of their income toward the cost.
Economic Development. Development and Redevelopment opportunities are plentiful. The City Manager will play the leadership role in “reimagining” parcels for redevelopment and marshalling new development initiatives. The City Manager is a major leader, not just a facilitator of development. When considering economic development opportunities, the City Manager must remain focused on certain core values that the Chelsea community represents. Projects will need to be vetted in a process that includes community input. Development should focus on opportunities and jobs for the local area population. At present there are many development projects in various stages of the process. A few examples include:

- The Everett Avenue Renewal Area, an approximately 20 acre parcel in which the City Manager will lead a reimagining effort to redevelop the area in collaboration with private property owners.
- Downtown - $15 million has been appropriated for utility and street scape improvements. New traffic patterns focused on moving people efficiently via bus, bicycle, or sidewalk will be established. Construction expected in 2024.
- Harbor Plan – the City recently completed a regulatory process which will allow greater flexibility in redevelopment initiatives in the port area

Communication Skills. Well-developed communication skills are essential. Open, accurate and timely communication by the City Manager with city, state and federal government entities, department heads, the public, and the many stakeholders needs to be integrated into the normal operational practices of the City.

The next City Manager must be skilled and comfortable serving as a public figure and advocate for the city. Equally important the City Manager must actively engage the many diverse constituencies within the city. Chelsea is a “gateway city” with a high proportion of the city’s population been born abroad. The City Manager must be able to engage a multiplicity of groups, gain understanding of their needs and ensure that the city’s direct services effectively respond to those need.

The City Manager must be able to engage the members of the City Council in an on-going dialog about the critical issues that face the city. The public communication role of the City Manager will be critical to sustaining the high level of confidence and trust that residents have in the city.

Public Safety. The past two City Managers have worked closely with public safety chiefs to improve the level of service and reduce criminal activity in the city. The City Manager will need to work closely with citizens, community groups, the council and the Police Chief to continuously address to provide a safe haven for all who reside and or work in Chelsea.

Building a Management Team, Staff Development and Morale. Chelsea has a well-regarded group of department heads. Departmental operations are working well. A continuous effort will be required to foster a more interdepartmental approach to problem solving and governance. Maintaining staff morale, fully utilizing the considerable talents of staff and maintaining high performance standards will be critical to the success of the new City Manager.

Public Role. The next City Manager is expected to play a public role in the community. Participation in civic functions and representation of the city with other governmental entities and serving as a public voice for the City will be critical. The City Manager must play an active role in managing the City’s relationship with the key state government officials that drive regional economic and transportation policy decisions.
THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

Authenticity and Trust are highly valued by the Chelsea community. The individual selected for this position must exemplify the highest standard in meeting these key important community values.

The City Council seeks a City Manager who is a seasoned public administrator in an environment of similar complexity who possesses strong organizational, communication and community leadership skills. This is not a learning position.

Chelsea seeks a City Manager with the skill, energy, creativity, vision and experience to achieve the city’s goals including: preserving public service levels, fostering development, and maintaining the city’s positive civic attitude toward the future. The new City Manager will need to harness Chelsea’s diverse cultures as an asset in shaping the City’s future.

Chelsea seeks a City Manager willing to commit to a tenure long enough to build a multi-year approach to ensuring the sustainability of the city’s service levels. The new City Manager must support regional solutions when that is in the city’s best interest, as well as foster volunteerism and private contributions as a partial solution to maintaining and augmenting service delivery. Chelsea needs a City Manager who can help set the stage for community-wide approaches to addressing the city’s needs; approaches that produce sound outcomes and avoid polarization.

The following attributes are important in Chelsea’s next City Manager:

PERSONAL

The next City Manager needs to be:

- Able to demonstrate unquestioned integrity in interactions with officials and citizens.
- A visionary who sets the tone and develops a roadmap in moving the City forward regarding a host of modern days issues including but not limited to climate change, coastal resiliency, mental health awareness, affordable housing, and sustainability.
- Able to sustain the outstanding communication relationships established by the previous City Manager with various stakeholders and residents, speaking multiple languages with a predominance of Spanish.
- Able to work cooperatively with the City Council on the establishment of annual goals and objectives for the city and its departments update the City Council and staff on progress and actively participate in the annual review of accomplishments and areas in need of improvement.
**CHELSEA – CITY MANAGER**

- Able and willing to play a highly visible role in the community. The ideal candidate must participate broadly across the leadership spectrum of the community and region and be a champion of the community. However, the long-standing practice of non-participation in electoral political activities of any kind must be continued.

- Comfortable engaging directly with citizens. The City Manager must have direct engagement with the civic community in order to gain thorough understanding of the fabric of the community. Through formal and informal interaction the City Manager’s concern for residents, businesses and the community-based organizations must be evident.

- Able and willing to work openly with employees. A direct, collegial, facilitative style that fosters joint problem solving is needed. The City Manager can have no agenda beyond being professional and ensuring that service delivery meets the community’s standard for customer service.

- Able to be a vocal and positive spokesperson for the city’s agenda at City Council meetings, public forums, state and federal agencies and with the media. The successful candidate must be able to use the status inherent in the City Manager’s position to advance the city’s agenda.

- Able to assume a strong organizational management role. The City Manager cannot be a micromanager but must be able to delegate and maintain strict accountability. The successful candidate must be direct, facilitative, and clear.

- Able to create and sustain a goal-oriented environment by establishing, maintaining and promoting effective policies and initiatives. The City Manager will be a genuinely inclusive leader who is capable of exerting influence and direction in a manner that shares successes with elected officials, employees and other stakeholders.

**PROFESSIONAL**

The City Manager needs to be:

- An experienced leader of a comparable organization with extensive experience in financial management, capital and operational planning, labor relations, public facilitation, and staff development. Excellent public and interpersonal communication skills are essential, as is skill in forging and supporting a management team.

- A professionally stable person with a record of tenure and consistent career growth. The city seeks a committed management professional willing to stay for a significant period of time but who is also willing to take risks to improve the organization.

- Able to demonstrate a background in guiding the development of a shared strategic vision for the community. The ideal candidate must be a coalition builder, equally at home with private sector and community leaders. The ideal candidate must be able to exercise leadership within the organization and within the community.

- In possession of the skills and interest to identify and promote opportunities for commercial and industrial growth. Targets of opportunity need to be identified and nurtured.
CHELSEA – CITY MANAGER

- Both strategic and tactical and must be experienced in working effectively in a political environment providing seasoned and impartial guidance to elected officials to identify and address the long-term strategic needs of the community and the short-term tactical steps necessary to sustain service delivery.
- Capable of keeping elected officials comprehensively informed, while staying detached from the political process and ensuring that staff maintains a similar detachment.
- Familiar with urban environments with dynamics similar to Chelsea’s.
- Familiar with and embrace the principles of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs
- Comfortable working with and managing an organization in a political context often characterized by vigorous debate.
- In accordance with the City Charter “The City Manager shall be a person of proven administrative ability, especially qualified by education and training with at least five years prior experience as a City or Town Manager, or an assistant City or Town Manager or the equivalent public or private sector level experience and shall hold a bachelor’s degree or similar or higher level degree from a recognized, accredited college or university.”
- Able to adhere to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) tenets as a job requirement. Membership in the ICMA is desirable and will be a requirement if selected.

Salary and Residency

The City is willing to negotiate a competitive compensation and an employment contract with the selected candidate. The anticipated salary is $200,000 +/- depending on qualifications. The City Charter indicates “the City Manager need not be a resident of the City or of the Commonwealth at the time of appointment but shall establish residence within the City within 12 months following appointment unless the City Council shall waive such requirement,” as was done for the most recent City Manager.

How to Apply

Please submit and resume and cover letter expressing your interest and detailing your qualifications to: recruitment.umb@gmail.com. Please confirm all documents in a single PDF file and include your LAST NAME and CHELSEA in the subject line and submit no later than May 25, 2023.

The Hiring Process

The City Council has appointed a Screening Committee to conduct preliminary interviews. The Screening Committee is expected to review the applications of candidates provided by the Collins Center and conduct preliminary interviews in June. Interviews of finalists by the City Council and an appointment decision are expected in July.

Should you have any questions regarding this opportunity, please contact Mary Flanders Aicardi, Human Resources Practice Leader at 508-215-8992.

To learn more about the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management at UMASS Boston, please visit: www.umb.edu/cpm