



— POSITION AVAILABLE —

CITY MANAGER

Apply ASAP but no later than February 28, 2025

Nestled on Florida's glittering Emerald Coast, on Choctawhatchee Bay, Fort Walton Beach is a destination perfect for anglers, families, and saltwater enthusiasts alike. Here, you can spend time on the cool, quartz-sand beaches and swim, snorkel, and dive the clear, emerald-green waters. Water sports and fishing for sought-after saltwater species are a way of life for locals that live on the Gulf Coast. Flourishing as a coastal city, Fort Walton Beach is a quality residential community that thrives on visitors, friends, and family.

Residents here are very patriotic. In fact, many have served in the military at either nearby Hurlburt Field (a United States Air Force Installation and home to the Air Force Special Operations Command with over 8,000 military personnel) or Eglin Air Force Base (home to the test and evaluation center for Air Force air-delivered weapons, navigation, and guidance systems with over 12,000 military and civilian personnel) and chose to call Fort Walton Beach home.

Historic Downtown Fort Walton Beach is charming and filled with lively restaurants, pubs, and locally owned shops. At its heart is the beautiful Fort Walton Beach Landing Park. Often referred to as "The Landing", this park sits along the scenic Santa Rosa Sound



with 700 feet of waterfront boardwalks, boat ramps, fishing piers, gazebos, playground equipment, restrooms, and a stage. Another popular downtown location is the Heritage Park & Cultural Center, which includes the Camp Walton Schoolhouse Museum, Garnier Post Office Museum, Fort Walton Temple Mound, and the Civil War Exhibit Building. A highlight is the Indian Temple Mound Museum, which houses one of the finest collections of prehistoric ceramics in the Southeastern United States and many interpretative exhibits depicting 12,000 years of Native American life.

One of Fort Walton Beach's attributes is its proximity to nature and water activities. On its southern border is an intracoastal waterway and Okaloosa Island, which provides for quiet hikes, paddle boarding, fishing, kayaking, and simply relaxing at the beach. Choctawhatchee Bay, Cinco Bayou, and associated waterways, lie to the city's east, and provide plenty of opportunities to spend time on the water.

Fort Walton Beach operates two notable parks on the water. Garnier's Beach Park sits along Choctawhatchee Bay and provides a boat ramp, playground and picnic area, and a small beach for sunbathing. Liza Jackson Park is found on Miracle Strip Parkway, spanning over 1,000 feet of waterfront area, offering visitors pavilions, playgrounds, boat ramps, a fishing pier, and restrooms onsite. Liza Jackson Park is also home to a charming dog park where visitors can take their dogs to play and swim.

The area is known for its fishing. Alternatively, bring your camera and capture spectacular images of magnificent views and diverse marine life! Dolphins, sea turtles, herons, and pelicans inhabit the sea and sky here. And, of course, don't forget to watch the Island Anglers reel in their catch of the day.

For those who prefer land-based, recreational activities, the Fort Walton Beach Recreation Center offers basketball, volleyball, pickleball and racquetball facilities as well as a fitness room, game room, a dance/exercise studio, a senior center, and the Preston Hood Athletic Complex. Private leagues are also available.

If you enjoy golf, take advantage of the Fort Walton Beach Golf Club, which has 36 holes of championship golf located in Fort Walton Beach's northern section of town. The Club holds

community-oriented charity golf tournaments and promotes a Junior Golf Program every summer with free clinics. In addition, twenty public courses and three private courses can be found within 20 miles of Fort Walton Beach.

Nearby tourist attractions include the must see Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park where guests can watch exuberant bottlenose dolphins leap out of the water, laugh along with the comedic antics of sweet, puppy-eyed sea lions, or grab a seat in the Otter Den. At the nearby Gulf Breeze Zoo, you can get up close with your favorite members of the animal kingdom including gorilla, hippopotamus, and rhinoceros. Another favorite is the Emerald Coast Science Center, which hosts many entertaining programs like Planetarium Nights, Discover Science Saturdays, and Creature Features.

If you enjoy the performing arts, Fort Walton Beach contains the Stage Crafters Community Theater. A short drive away is the Mattie Kelly Arts Center in Niceville, a premiere arts and entertainment center offering Broadway shows, art exhibitions, dances, and concerts.

The median home price in Fort Walton Beach is \$333,683, which is lower than the state average of \$408,400, and the national average of \$429,943. The community is primarily composed of single-family homes but also offers condos, townhomes, and multifamily housing units. A three-bedroom, two-bathroom 1,800-square foot single-family home in a nice neighborhood can be had for \$400,000. Residents overall view the community as a safe place.

Schools are excellent in Fort Walton Beach. Its students are served by the Okaloosa County School District which has achieved a larger share of "A" rated schools than any of the other 67 Florida Counties. The system serves approximately 30,000 students, and is a designated purple star school system for military families. Private school and higher education opportunities are also easily available. Okaloosa Technical College, Northwest Florida State College, and the University of West Florida are minutes away.

Traveling to and from Fort Walton Beach is convenient. Travelers can hop on a flight at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport,

which is served by major airlines like Delta, American, Southwest, and Allegiant. Pensacola International Airport and the Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport are less than 90 minutes away.

Fort Walton Beach is the kind of place that feels like you are on vacation 24/7. What could be better than living in a prime coastal community on Florida's gorgeous Emerald Coast? It's also a great city to raise a family, keep your toes wet (literally and figuratively), and put down roots. If you are an experienced Manager, please dust off your resume and apply today!

HISTORY

With settlements dating back 14,000 years, the area now known as Fort Walton Beach has been home to Native Americans, explorers, settlers, and even local pirates. In the late 1860s John Thomas Brooks moved to the area and established a home on 111 acres with his family. The area was called Brooksville or Brooks Landing. The town's name was officially changed to Camp Walton with the establishment of the community's first post office in 1911. This was done by John Brooks to honor the Walton Guard, a volunteer home guard unit mustered at the start of the American Civil War. The Walton Guard was founded in and named after Walton County, Florida which was named to honor Colonel George Walton who was Secretary of the Territory of West Florida from 1821 to 1826. He later became acting Governor of West Florida. Colonel Walton's father, George Walton, Sr., was a former Governor of Georgia and signer of the Declaration of Independence.

The City of Fort Walton was created as a municipality by special act of the Florida Legislature in 1937. A second charter was issued to the City in 1941 that created the Mayor-Council government. The City's present charter was issued in 1953, and a final change was made to the name making it the City of Fort Walton Beach. The most significant factor in the history of the City's growth was the creation (in 1935) and expansion, of what is now Eglin Air Force Base (the largest military installation in the world).

The City enjoyed a substantial population and economic boom from the 1950's through the end of the 1970's. Subsequently,

things started to slow down. The military base became less important to the City's economy than the growing tourism industry. In the late 1960's and early 1970's Fort Walton Beach began to experience a decline in economic prosperity. New development began to take place in the surrounding communities. The City started to focus attention on finding ways to induce private enterprise investment in the City and thus capturing a greater share of the local and regional market. The City's premier gathering place along the Santa Rosa Sound has been the Fort Walton Landing Park, since its purchase in 1986. The City's downtown waterfront was opened to an extent never before realized and spurred economic growth downtown.

These City additions along with new stores, hotels, businesses, and community subdivisions have brought locals and guests to this thriving community. Future growth will be guided by the Downtown Master Plan. Improvements will focus on the redevelopment of the Downtown District once U.S. Highway 98 is rerouted to the north of the Downtown core. The building of the new Brooks Bridge will offer this City a unique opportunity to create a vibrant downtown linked together by pedestrian friendly streetscapes and high-quality open spaces, parks and plazas which will enliven and transport Fort Walton Beach to be the progressive little city it has been since John Thomas Brooks saw its potential in 1868.

Today, Fort Walton Beach is an active residential city with stores, school, parks, and other amenities. The City has a "small town" feel with many of the benefits of an urban community. The area includes eleven traditional neighborhoods (seven of which are located along the shoreline), each with its own distinct personality and charm. All told, the City has more than 30 parks ranging in size from mini parks to a large waterfront community parks, making Fort Walton Beach a great place to live or visit.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The permanent population numbers and related demographic information are displayed in Table I on page 4. The numbers are somewhat misleading, however, as approximately 7.8 million visitors travel to Okaloosa County every year.

Table 1: Fort Walton Beach Demographics

Distribution by Race		Distribution by Age	
White	71.8%	0 to 19	24.2%
Black	10.2%	20 to 39	28.9%
Hispanic	10.0%	40 to 59	23.0%
Asian	3.2%	60 and over	23.9%
Native American	0.2%		
Some Other / Two or More Races	4.6%		
Total	100.0%	20,925	

Educational Achievements (25 & Over) and Other Statistics	
High School or Higher	46.7%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	53.3%
Median Age—Fort Walton Beach	36.9
Median Age—U.S.	39.2
Median Household Income—Fort Walton Beach	\$71,362
Median Household Income—U.S.	\$80,610
Poverty Rate	13.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

CLIMATE

Fort Walton Beach's climate is more seasonal than most of Florida. Summers tend to be hot (highs average around 90°F) and humid, lasting from late May to mid-September. Spring (late February to late May) and fall (mid-September to early December) are generally warm. Winters (mid-December to late February) are short and mild with highs averaging in the mid-60°F. The result is tourism tending to peak in the summer months.

Fort Walton Beach averages 55 inches of rain annually and is fairly evenly spread throughout the year. Snow and/or freezing rain are rare, occurring about once every ten to fifteen years.

GEOGRAPHY

Located in Florida's Panhandle in Okaloosa County, it is in the western end of Choctawhatchee Bay (an arm of the Gulf of Mexico/America) and on Santa Rosa Sound (separated from the Gulf by Okaloosa Island). The City covers 8.2 square miles, of which 7.5 is land and 0.77 is water. The City, on average, is 10 feet above sea level. The nearest cities of any size are Mobile, AL, (population 185,000, two hours west) and Tallahassee (population 197,000, three hours east). New Orleans is four hours to the west and Atlanta is five hours to the northeast.

COMMERCE

The primary driver of Fort Walton Beach's economy is the military. As noted, the City is bracketed by two major Air Force bases, Eglin AFB and Hurlburt Field. Thus defense contracts have been and are the foundation for much of the region's growth— particularly the high technology sector. Over 350 local technology companies contract with the local military bases. See Table 2 for a list of the area's principal employers.

THE GOVERNMENT

Fort Walton Beach utilizes the Council-Manager form of government with eight elected officials: the Mayor and seven Council members. The Mayor presides over meetings but only votes in the event of a tie. The elected officials serve staggered four-year terms and are elected at-large. The next election will be in March of 2025.

The current Mayor has the longest tenure of the elected officials, eight years as a Council Member and another eight years as Mayor. Three Council members have served almost eight years, one Council members has served four years, and three Council Members have served three years. The Council appoints the City Manager, City Clerk, and the City Attorney. Councilmembers are passionate about their City, and hold the staff in high regard.

Fort Walton Beach's total budget is \$60,558,326 and its general fund budget is \$32,063,508. The City is a full-service

Table 2: Principal Employers, Fort Walton Beach, FL

Employer	Industry	Employees
Okaloosa County School District	Education	8,581
Walmart Super Center (Combined)	Retail	3,702
HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital	Healthcare	2,236
Publix (Combined)	Retail	1,982
Okaloosa County Government	Government	1,888

Source: Okaloosa County Economic Development Council 2025

government organization. Services include finance, human resources, police, fire protection, cultural and recreational activities (parks, library, museum, cemetery and two golf courses), planning and zoning, public works (streets, sidewalks, and rights-of-way), and utility services (water, sewer, stormwater, garbage, and recycling). A Fire Union represents Fire Fighters, Driver Engineers, Fire Captains, and Battalion Chiefs. Out of 320 employees, nine report directly to the City Manager. Employees are excellent overall, and work together well.

THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A significant opportunity in Fort Walton Beach will be managing growth and redevelopment. The City is essentially built out, and numerous redevelopment projects are under consideration. Capital projects will be a factor, and some current projects need to be pushed forward. Examples include the new City Hall, Brooks Bridge replacement (connecting downtown Fort Walton Beach to Okaloosa Island), Around-the-Mound Highway (rerouting downtown traffic), Recreation Complex Expansion (additional fields), and Waterfront Park improvements (new boardwalk, pocket beach area, circular amphitheater, restrooms, parking lots & sidewalks, lighting, and an entrance way canopy).

The relationship between City Hall/City Hall Annex and Citizen Groups is important to the community and will need to be improved. The citizens need to feel welcome and comfortable coming to City Hall to express any concerns or to request help. The staff needs to listen to the citizens and try to find a solution to any concern. It is understood that sometimes it is not possible, so a reasonable response explaining the situation is essential. Part of

the solution will be improving the messaging to the citizens to showcase the work the staff is doing for the betterment of the community.

The next manager will be expected to review all City operations, communicate with City Council members, and make sure the City is functioning optimally. This effort will include reviewing operations from top to bottom including staffing, standard operating procedures, policies, and procedures. Needless to say, policies and procedures need to be implemented fairly and consistently across the board. Improving morale of the City staff will be critical.

Finally, relationships must be created and maintained with stakeholders in the community. This includes, but is not limited to, the military.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

The City is looking for a highly motivated individual who is both a great manager and an outstanding leader. It wants someone who is friendly, outgoing, and collaborative. Indeed, they will build teams, strive to be part of the solution, and work well with the community and outside agencies. They will be visionary while also practical and very down-to-earth. He/she will work hard to find and implement new ideas to move the City forward while also protecting the small-town character of the community. The ideal candidate will be an outstanding communicator and keep the elected officials, as well as the community, well informed. The individual will be a trusted advisor to the Council and someone who is comfortable telling people what they need to hear instead of what they want to hear. She/he will be comfortable speaking to individuals from all walks of life and be able to explain complex concepts in layman's terms. The individual will continue the already strong relationships with other public entities and work well with the community's partners. Much of what needs to be accomplished will require their participation and funding.

The best candidate will be customer service focused and lead by example. He/she will expect that every resident and business owner is to be treated with dignity and respect and an honest effort made to solve their problems.

The elected officials want someone who is passionate about the job and will immerse themselves in the community. The individual will participate not because it is part of the job, but because she/he enjoys it and truly wants to help make Fort Walton Beach their home and a better community!

The next Manager should unify the staff, lead the organization, and maintain Fort Walton Beach's status as the Treasure of the Gulf Coast. The staff is very capable, so the ideal candidate will not be a micromanager. Instead, he/she will give assignments, set the goals, and provide the resources needed to accomplish the task. The individual will then get out of the way and let the staff make it happen. Accountability will be important; the next manager will expect tasks to be completed properly and on time. While not being deeply involved, she/he will expect to be kept informed.

Strong moral and ethical values are a must, as well as a strong work ethic. The individual will show a high level of commitment to the City and job. The ideal candidate will be someone who exhibits good common sense and thinks strategically. They will work creatively to get things accomplished. The individual will always seek ways to make City operations more efficient and effective.

The ideal candidate will have a demonstrated track record of achievement and success. The individual will have at least five years of increasingly responsible experience in local government with four years' experience as a city manager, assistant, or comparable position. A bachelor's degree in public administration or a related field and a master's degree are preferred, though experience may be substituted for educational requirements if appropriate. The candidate must be aware of the military presence and their relationship with the City. Experience in a Florida local government is desirable but not mandatory.

The next City Manager should have a vision for the community and make a commitment to it, rather than viewing Fort Walton

Beach as a steppingstone. The City hopes the next manager will stay at least five years and hopefully longer.

COMPENSATION

The salary range is \$150,000 to \$225,000. The salary will depend on qualifications and experience. Benefits are excellent. In terms of retirement, the City plans to match the City Manager's contribution to a 401(a) plan, up to 7.5%. That said, salary and retirement are negotiable.

THE MOST RECENT CITY MANAGER

The previous City Manager accepted a job offer with Okaloosa County.

RESIDENCY

Fort Walton Beach prefers the City Manager live within city limits, but residency is not required. That said, the manager needs to live within a 15-to-20-minute drive so he/she can respond to any emergencies that occur.

HOW TO APPLY

E-mail your cover letter and resume to Recruit42@cb-asso.com by February 28, 2025. Questions should be directed to Stephen Sorrell at (513) 317-0678 or Colin Baenziger at (561) 707-3537.

INTERNAL CANDIDATES

We are not aware of any internal candidates.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In Florida, an application is a public record and is subject to disclosure once a candidate has forwarded a resume. As a practical matter, the media rarely covers positions of this nature until the finalists are named.

THE PROCESS

Applications will be screened between February 28 and April 1. Finalists will be selected on April 8. A reception and interviews will be held on April 17. A selection will be made shortly thereafter.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The City of Fort Walton Beach is an Equal Opportunity Employer and strongly encourages women, minorities, and veterans to apply. A veteran's preference will be awarded per Florida law.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For additional information about the City, visit:

www.fwb.org

www.fwbchamber.org

www.destinfbw.com

City Budget

www.fwb.org/166/Budget

Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports

www.fwb.org/Archive.aspx?AMID=38

Strategic Priorities

www.fwb.org/509/Strategic-Priorities-Major-Projects

Comprehensive Plan

www.fwb.org/243/Comprehensive-Plan

