

City Manager

North Port, FL

(Population 55,800)

Located in Sarasota County on Florida's Gulf Coast, North Port is approximately halfway between Tampa and Naples and served by US 41 and I-75, southwest Florida's two primary thoroughfares. Covering over 103 square miles, it is Florida's fourth largest city in terms of land mass. Over the past ten years, its population has more than doubled and it is not done yet. The City is only 25% built out and over the next 20 years, its population is expected to grow to 94,000 to 132,000. It is a community with incredible potential and, with building at a virtual standstill, now is the time to chart its course into the future.

In terms of amenities, North Port certainly has them. With its temperate climate, recreational activities abound. The City has three major golf courses and several significant sports parks. Some outstanding Gulf Coast beaches are within a 30 minute drive. With many canals, lakes and access to the Gulf of Mexico, boating and fishing are popular pastimes. Culture? The City boasts a state-of-the-art Performing Arts Center (home to the North Port Orchestra, North Port Chorale, and North Port Concert Band) and a community-supported North Port Area Art Guild. If that is not enough, the nearby City of Sarasota (less than an hour away) offers a host of other cultural experiences. And if you like the big city, Tampa is only 90 minutes away. If cruises are something you enjoy, many depart for the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America from the Port of Tampa. Air Travel? Five airports (including two offering international destinations) are readily accessible.

The City is different from most Florida cities in that it has a number of natural attractions. For example, the majority of Myakka State Forest lies within the City so if you like camping, hiking, off-road bicycling, horseback riding and wildlife viewing, we offer it. North Port is also the home to Warm Mineral Springs which is the largest warm spring in Florida and the most mineral rich spring in the world. As such, it is a major health and tourist attraction. Another significant attraction is Little Salt Springs, a prehistoric archeological site dating back at least 12,000 years.

The City offers a wide variety of housing and, with the current economic downturn, it is very reasonably priced. Sarasota County Public Schools (one high school, two middle schools and five elementary schools) serves the City and the schools are top notch. The Imagine Charter School now offers an alternative program for K-8 and will soon open a high school. When students are ready for higher education, the University of South Florida and the State College of Florida both have campuses in or near North Port.

But what makes North Port truly special are two things. First, despite its size, it retains a small town's sense of community. Neighbors know their neighbors and when they need help, they

pitch in. Second, the City's undeveloped property provides a feeling of open space – and opportunity.

HISTORY AND COMMERCE

In the 1950s, the now defunct General Development Corporation (GDC) developed land on both of Florida's coastlines. Among these areas were Port Charlotte / North Port Charlotte. After purchasing the land, the corporation subdivided the land into lots (primarily residential) and sold them. In 1959 North Port Charlotte was incorporated and in 1974, the name was changed to North Port as residents sought to establish a separate identity. Interestingly, the City does not have a port within its boundaries.

When GDC subdivided the land, its target market was people who would retire to Florida and only a minimal amount of land was set aside for commerce and industry. As a result, the City is presently primarily a bedroom community and most of its labor force commutes an average of 30 minutes to jobs in another community (Port Charlotte, Sarasota and Tampa) to earn a living. During the earlier part of this decade, residential construction was a very significant industry in the City. But not unlike other parts of the country, the collapse of the housing market has taken its toll here. In recent years, a new Economic Development Division was established and recruiting new businesses and industries has become a City Commission directed priority.

The five largest employers in the County are: School Board of Sarasota County (5,548 employees), Sarasota County (3,335 employees), Sarasota Memorial Hospital (3,092), Publix Supermarkets (1,692) and PGT Industries which manufactures windows and doors (913).

GEOGRAPHY, CLIMATE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

North Port lies approximately 70 miles south of Tampa. It is flat, approximately 11 feet above sea level and just inland from the Gulf Coast.

North Port's climate is classified as subtropical and has short, mild to warm winters and long, hot, humid summers with most of the year's rainfall from June to September. Monthly average temperatures range from 65 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 83 degrees in August, with the annual average being 76 degrees.

Although GDC originally targeted retirees, North Port is now a relatively young community with a median resident age of 38.7. In fact, the community has approximately 10,000 children in the public schools and retirees compose only 17% of the population. Almost 90% of the community is non-Hispanic Caucasian with African Americans and other groups composing the remainder. The estimate median annual household income in 2008 was a little over \$50,000. Approximately 88% of the residents are high school graduates, 16% have graduated from

college and 6% have graduate or professional degrees. On average, 2.5 people occupy a household.

THE GOVERNMENT

The City's mission statement is to "to provide the health, safety and welfare services to our residents which would not be provided or could not be provided efficiently or equally without the intervention of government at the local level. The City will provide said services in a professional and cost effective manner, and only by listening to those who have put us in the position to serve them, our residents."

The City is governed by a five member Commission whose members are elected at large and serve staggered four year terms (limited to two consecutive terms). The Commission Chair is not selected by the members but rather rotated as designated by the City Charter. The next election is in November 2012. Overall, the members of the Commission tend to be friendly and collegial. A new member was elected last November and the personality of the newly constituted Commission is still developing.

The Commission appoints a City Manager to oversee the City's day-to-day operations which include: planning, building and zoning, code enforcement, engineering, fire/rescue, parks and recreation, police, public works (including sanitation), utilities (water and wastewater) and a small social services office. Overall, the City has 569 full time and part time positions. The largest group is police employees which make up approximately 28% of the workforce followed by public works (roads and drainage, solid waste and facilities and fleet maintenance) at 22.5% and fire/rescue at 16%. The staff is dedicated and serious about providing high quality services and customer service to the community's residents and businesses.

The City has a millage rate for 2010/2011 of 3.3400. Its total funds budget is \$117.3 million. The general fund budget is \$31.6 million, special revenue funds of \$17.3 million, \$14.8 million for roads and drainage, \$8.2 for solid waste, \$6.9 million for fire rescue, \$14 million capital and utilities \$24.4 million.

THE ISSUES

The first and foremost challenge is financial. With the growth in housing as well as their prices, North Port's appraised value rose from \$921 million in 2000 to \$5.96 billion in 2007. Then, as a result of actions taken in the state legislature, Amendment One to the Florida Constitution and the housing bust, the total appraised property value declined to \$2.49 billion in 2010. As a result, property taxes receipts have decreased from a high of approximately \$16 million in 2007 and 2008 to a projected \$8.1 million in 2009. That decline has placed a great deal of stress on the City's budget. Cuts have been made but it appears more actions will be needed as it is not

believed that the housing market will rebound in the near future. The next manager and staff will need to review the operations again to find more ways to streamline and improve efficiency and effectiveness. Second, in the longer run, the City wants to focus on creating more jobs within its boundaries. At build out, the City could easily have a population of over 200,000, and it would be best if the majority of its residents did not need to commute elsewhere. The City does not have a downtown and creating one might help in this area. Third, when GDC planned the community, it anticipated the homes would use well water and septic systems. That is no longer an acceptable long term solution. Further, while the City has a utility, most areas of the City do not have water mains and sewer lines running into their neighborhoods. The cure is a very costly retrofit and one many citizens do not want to pay for. Fourth, much of the other existing road and stormwater infrastructure is aged and in need of repair. A bond that would have repaved 350 miles of roadway was recently defeated. While residents recognize the need, they want the City to find some other way to pay for it.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

North Port's next manager will be an outstanding leader; someone who will serve as an effective ambassador in promoting the City; and someone who is outgoing, confident, positive, proactive, responsive and involved. The individual will be a consensus builder, approachable and easy to talk to – not just someone who works for the City Commission but someone who will partner with the Commissioners and serve as a trusted advisor. They recognize they do not know everything and that staff, by virtue of their training, knowledge and experience, can provide valuable input. And they want to hear it. The individual will be a straight shooter and not afraid to diplomatically (and privately to the degree possible) tell the elected officials that something is not a good idea and why. They do not want a “yes” person. They also expect the manager to make recommendations and decisions. Of course, the manager needs to remember that those decisions often reflect on the elected officials so they need to be kept well informed. He/she will provide the same information to all parties. Integrity and honesty are critical. Being humble and willing to admit a mistake will be important to establishing that credibility.

The next manager will understand the role of transparency in government and have outstanding communication skills. The individual will listen carefully and be as comfortable talking to a company president as to a laborer in the field. The selected candidate will be friendly – North Port is a small town at heart, after all – and very customer service oriented. He/she will not spend a great deal of time behind a desk but will be out in the field, the departments and the community.

The next manager will understand the importance of the day-to-day but will not let it consume his/her attention and preclude preparation for the future and the City's long term success. He/she will take the Commission's priorities, whatever his/her own feelings, and implement them. The next manager will also have high expectations for the staff and set high standards.

The individual will realize one person cannot do it all and will utilize subordinate staff. He/she will mentor and delegate appropriately. The next manager will demand accountability. The individual will also recognize the importance of being a buffer between the elected officials and the staff.

With so much going on in the City – particularly with the revenue decline – the honeymoon period may be short. The individual will need to have strong shoulders and a thick skin – the press can be tough in North Port.

Skill in economic development, finance and building public and private partnerships will be important. North Port needs to create an economic base, a job base, and encouraging business will be important. But intergovernmental relations cannot be ignored.

The ideal candidate will have a minimum of ten years of progressively responsible experience in public or private sector management and at least two years as manager overseeing the efforts of at least 200 employees. A Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, with a major in administration, management or a related field, is required. A Master's degree is preferred.

Finally, the next manager will realize that North Port is a hidden jewel, one that will be rediscovered when growth resumes. As such, he/she will understand the importance of growth management and planning in preparing the City to go forward without losing what makes it unique.

COMPENSATION

The salary range is from \$140,000 to \$190,000. Benefits are very good.

RESIDENCY

The City Manager is required by City Charter to establish residency within the City's boundaries within one year.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Under Florida's public records act, once an application is submitted, it is deemed a public record. As a practical matter, we generally do not divulge applicant names until after the closing date. We do expect media coverage of this search as it progresses.

HOW TO APPLY

E-mail your resume to RecruitThree@cb-asso.com by January 14, 2011. Faxed and mailed resumes will not be considered. Questions should be directed to Colin Baenziger at (561) 707-3537.

THE PROCESS

Applications will be screened between January 15th and February 21st. Finalists will be selected in late February and interviews held on March 4th and 5th with a selection shortly thereafter.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

North Port is an Equal Opportunity Employer and encourages minorities to apply. North Port values its small town/neighborhood feel and is committed to serving its residents and businesses.