



## Apply by September 13, 2013

# Utilities Director

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 finished yet. The City is only 25% built out and over the next 20 years, its population is expected to grow to 132,000. It is a community with incredible potential and, with building beginning to resume, it is poised for an exciting future.

In terms of amenities, North Port certainly has many. 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 recent economic downturn, it is very reasonably priced. The Sarasota County Public School System (with one high school, two middle schools and five elementary schools) serves the City and the schools are top notch. The City is also served by the Imagine Charter School (which is now part of the County School District) offering an alternative program for K-11 and will offer the senior year of high school beginning in August 2014. 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 state and the country, the collapse of the housing market has taken its toll here. In recent years, an Economic Development Division was established and it is working hard at recruiting new businesses and industries.

Six employers in the County have work forces exceeding 1,000 employees. They are: School Board of Sarasota County (5,549 employees), Sarasota County (3,241 employees), Sarasota Memorial Hospital (3,024), Publix Supermarkets (1,474), Venice Regional Medical Center (1,400) and PGT Industries which manufactures windows and doors (1,118).

## Geography, Climate and Demographics

North Port lies approximately 70 miles south of Tampa. The City is flat, approximately 11 feet above sea level and just inland from the Gulf Coast. Overall it covers 104 square miles. Of that, 34.34 square miles is developed. Most of the remainder is undeveloped with 15.75 square miles being state forest and 5.35 square miles recreational/open space.

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. Just under 90% of the community is Caucasian. African Americans (7%) and other groups composing the remainder. Hispanics (of all races) compose 8.7% of the population. The estimated median annual household income was right around \$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, 2.6 people occupy a household.

## The Government

The City's mission statement is "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 next election is in November 2014. The Mayor and Vice Mayor are selected by and from the Commission Members in November of each year and cannot serve consecutive one year terms in either position. Overall, the members of the Commission tend to be friendly and collegial. Two new members were elected in November 2012 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%, fire/rescue at 16% and utilities at 10%. 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 2012/2013 of 3.6167.

Its total funds budget is \$113.0 million. The largest components for the total budget are: the General Fund (\$29.2 million), Utilities (\$25.9 million), Roads and Drainage (\$13.9 million), Solid Waste (\$8.8 million) and Fire Rescue (\$7.7 million).

## The Utilities Department

North Port's Utilities serves approximately 18,000 water customers and 13,500 wastewater customers. Approximately 3,000 of the water connections are outside the City. 90% of the accounts are residential and 10% commercial. Approximately 65% of the meters utilize AMR technology. Overall, the Utility has 58 employees. Administration includes the following functions: Utility Administration, Engineering Public Relations, Billing and Customer Service. All told it has 17 employees.

In terms of water treatment, the City has an authorized treatment capacity of 6.4 mgd. This capacity is provided by a 4.4 mgd surface water treatment plant and a 2 mgd reverse osmosis plant (more capacity can easily be added as the design capacity is 4 mgd). Typically the plants provide an average daily flow of 3.0 mgd. Overall Water Treatment has 8 employees.

On the wastewater side, the City operates an advanced secondary treatment plant with a capacity of 7 mgd with average daily flows of approximately 3 mgd. Overall, Wastewater Treatment has 6 employees.

The fourth division is Field Operations. It takes care of the water distribution system (five wells, 300 miles of water transmission lines, 1,632 fire hydrants, 3,000 valves and five storage tanks) and the wastewater collection system (130 miles of gravity lines, 70 miles of force mains, 99 lift stations and 3,000 manholes). Overall it has 27 employees maintaining the system including the instrumentation and GIS, reading the meters that are not automated and inspecting construction.

The Utility also has interconnects with the Peace River Manasota Water Supply Authority, Sarasota County and Charlotte County.

The average monthly water bill (based on 4,000 gallons) is \$42.27 and the average wastewater bill is \$32.43 (again 4,000 gallons). Rates are anticipated to increase 2% per year for each service through 2017. Over the same period, the customer base is expected to grow less than 1% per year. That said, the Utility is very well prepared should the growth come sooner or be of great magnitude than is anticipated.

The employees are dedicated, high performers who are accustomed to a department with a consistent, family style culture. At the same time they are accustomed to operating in an often rapidly changing environment. For example, in 2002, the Utility had approximately 600 new water connections. That number increased to 900 in 2004 and 1,500 in 2006 before dropping to less than 100 in 2009 as the housing market crashed. The staff is very friendly and very customer service oriented. They also take a great deal of pride in their operation and





that can be seen with a quick glance. The vehicles and facilities are spotless and well maintained. The Utility has also won a number of awards. Only the plant operators are unionized.

## The Issues

Overall, the Utility is in good condition. It is well run with a strong staff and financially sound. It is also well prepared for the future. When growth returns, it has ample capacity for the foreseeable future. Its challenges relate more to history and geography than anything else. As noted, the City covers over 100 square miles. While much is undeveloped, the land area presents challenges in terms of extending coverage and tying it all together. Utility service is needed, for example, at the I-75 interchange in order to promote commercial development there. The second challenge is historic and that is that as the individual lots developed, many used well and septic for their water and wastewater. The Utility in a sense is playing catch up. The third and most significant challenge will be replacing a very highly regarded and capable department director. The City and staff realize that the new director will be different. They do want to insure, however, that the change is not drastic. Accordingly, they plan to bring the new person in as the Assistant Director to work alongside the current director for a period of time and then assume the Director's duties. That period will likely end prior to April 1st but cannot extend beyond September 14, 2014. The current Director is in the DROP program and must retire then.

## The Ideal Candidate

North Port's next Utility Director will be an outstanding leader who can grow with the organization. The individual will be outgoing, confident, positive, proactive, responsive and involved. It will also be important for the person to be easy going, approachable and easy to talk to. The staff is accustomed to participatory management where everyone's opinion is respected family style environment and the organization is working well. No one in the City expects a major shift in that approach. On the other hand, everyone knows

things will be different under a new manager – just hopefully not significantly different.

The City Manager is innovative and forward thinking. He is open and believes in transparency. He also wants to hear what he needs to hear, not what he otherwise might want to hear. Consequently, the next Utility Director needs to be a straight shooter, not a “yes” man or woman, but also someone who will rally enthusiastically behind the program after all the options are presented and the Manager has determined the course of action. The individual will be comfortable making decisions. Integrity and honesty are critical. Being humble and willing to admit a mistake will be important to establishing that credibility.

The next Utility Director will have outstanding communication skills, listen carefully and be as comfortable talking to a company president as the fellow mowing lawns. North Port is a small town at heart so being friendly and very customer service oriented will be very important. He/she will not spend a great deal of time behind a desk but will be out in the field, the department and the community.

The next Director 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 Utility’s long term success. The individual will have high expectations for the staff and set high standards. On the other hand, he/she will realize one person cannot do it all and will utilize subordinate staff. He/she will mentor and delegate appropriately while also demanding accountability.

Knowledge of utilities is essential. Skilled in management, budget preparation and management and customer service. Experience in intergovernmental relations will be a plus. The ideal candidate will have a minimum of five years of progressively responsible experience in utilities and at least two years as manager. A Bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university, in engineering, management or a related field, is required. Experience in Florida and in a community with an expanding utility is a plus.

## Compensation

The salary range is from \$87,597 to \$128,986. As noted, it is anticipated the selected candidate will serve a short

apprenticeship as the Assistant and be promoted to Director upon the current Director’s retirement. As a practical matter, the City plans to hire near the bottom of the range and have the individual grow with the Utility. Benefits are excellent. The Utility Director is in Florida Retirement System’s Senior Management Class and the City pays 100% of the employee’s health insurance and approximately 60% of the spouse and dependent coverage.

## Residency

The Utility Director is expected to establish residency within the City’s boundaries. Housing options are plentiful and the prices are relatively low.

## 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. Further, we do not expect any media coverage of this search as it progresses.

## How to Apply

E-mail your resume to [Recruit25@cb-asso.com](mailto:Recruit25@cb-asso.com) by September 13, 2013. Faxed and mailed resumes will not be considered. Direct your questions to Colin Baenziger at (561) 707-3537.

## The Process

Once applications, CB&A will perform an initial screening. It will then recommend candidates to the City by September 24th and the City will oversee the project from that point.

## 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. A veteran’s preference will be awarded per Florida law.