

Mary Esther, Florida City Manager Profile October 2019

The Mayor and City Council seek to recruit a new City Manager due to the resignation of the City Manager who served since 2017, and three previous City Managers, who collectively served for 30 years.



Description of Mary Esther

Mary Esther is a small, quiet coastal community nestled on the northwest coast of Florida between Pensacola and Panama City. Mary Esther has a comfortable, casual and laid-back atmosphere that invites people of all ages to enjoy the beach and other areas of natural beauty. The mix of small shops and restaurants provide the opportunity to shop and dine during both the day and evening. There is also fishing, golfing, tennis, and boating. The community is resident focused and boasts one of the largest military installations in the country, Eglin Air Force Base including Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) at Hurlburt Field.

According to the US Census Bureau, Mary Esther had an estimated population of 3,951 as of July 1, 2018. Of those, 19% were over 65, approximately 78% of the population is White, 12% Black or African American, and 9% are Hispanic or of Latino origin. The neighboring city of Fort Walton Beach, population 22,284, is home to 3,032 veterans.

Almost 56% of housing is owner-occupied and the median value of those housing units is \$166,800. Over 76% of the households have a broadband Internet subscription and 90% of residents are over 25 years old with a high school diploma or higher; and over 25% have a bachelor's degree or higher.

History of Mary Esther

Because of its easy access to local waterways, the City of Mary Esther is noted as one of the first areas established in this part of Northwest Florida. The first pioneer of Mary Esther arrived in 1842, when Jesse Rogers and his family drove a large cattle herd from Louisiana to the shores of the Santa Rosa Sound to settle here. During the mid-1850s, John Newton, a minister and a teacher, settled in the area west of Fort Walton Beach known as the Narrows, today known as Mary Esther. Reverend Newton founded the first school, which also doubled as a church during the Civil War. Additionally, he established the first post office in the community on October 10, 1871 and became its first postmaster. The post office location probably doubled as the Newton's home.

There are three versions of the story about how the City of Mary Esther got its name. Because the community needed a mailing name, old-timers say that through naming the community, Reverend Newton honored his daughters and wife. One version says it was the name of Newton's wife, the second says it was a combination of his two daughters' names and the third says it was a combination of his wife's and daughters' names. In 2014, a resident came forward with pictures from the local cemetery, of the engraved tombstones for Mary Christine Newton (9/12/1863 - 7/22/1937) and Esther Newton (7/12/1861 - 11/11/1931). This lends credence to the possibility the City of Mary Esther was eventually named after Reverend Newton's daughters.

Description of City Government

Mary Esther operates under a Council/Manager form of government. The City Council is vested by Charter with policy-making and legislative authority. The elected body is comprised of a Mayor and five Council members. The councilmembers are elected on a non-partisan basis with staggered 4-year terms, while the Mayor, who has no voting or veto authority, is elected every two years. The City Manager serves at the pleasure of the Council and is the Chief Administrative Officer. The Manager has oversight of city departments including Police (Sheriff's Office Contract), Utilities (consisting of Water & Waste Water, collection, conveyance, and treatment plant operations - under Contract with Jacobs Engineering, Inc.) Finance, Library, Planning/Zoning/Permitting/Code Enforcement Services, Parks & Facilities Maintenance, and Fire/Rescue services which are provided by a Special District (under contract for services; but housed in city owned/maintained fire station). The City has 19 full time employees and another 22 part-time or contractual support staff who maintain operations.

Qualifications of City Manager

According to the Charter, the city manager shall be appointed by the city council solely on the basis of executive and administrative qualifications with special emphasis on actual experience, education in, or knowledge of, administration and operation of local government management. The city manager shall be appointed without regard to political beliefs and need not be a resident of the city or state at the time of appointment, but during the term of office the city manager shall be a resident of the city. The city council may, upon request of the city manager, by majority vote, authorize the city manager to reside outside the City.

Expectations, Work Experiences and Personal Characteristics of the City Manager

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities for the City Manager

The ideal candidate will have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with a major in administration, management or related field and relevant experience as a city manager or assistant manager. A Master's Degree is preferred but not required. The successful candidate must be able to foster effective council relations, have strong administrative skills, maintain positive community and intergovernmental relations, support economic development and revitalization and understand the Florida open meetings and public records laws. Traits sought by the Council are good judgment, effective decision-making skills, and integrity. Keeping current on City projects and updating the Council is essential. Treating others with respect and dignity, embracing cultural diversity and the ability to recruit and retain competent, professional and responsive staff will be important. A working knowledge of municipal finance, human resources, public works, public safety, and community development are highly desired.

Major challenges the new city manager is expected to address include implementation of a major capital improvement project; consisting of a complete citywide over-haul of the water and wastewater infrastructure systems, estimated to require \$30 million in debt service during construction, economic development that is compatible with the small-town character of the community, stormwater and roads, and community planning in relation to updating the City Charter and comprehensive plan.

Expectations, Work Experiences and Personal Characteristics of the City Manager

Performance Expectations

Performance expectations are specific results the City Manager is expected to achieve. What will filling this position accomplish for Mary Esther? What are the needs to be fulfilled and the desired results? Results are accomplishments to be achieved.

- Keep the City Council informed on current projects and update the Council on current events
- Ensure the city provides great services, that citizens are treated with respect, and citizen concerns are tracked and responded to promptly.

- Handle difficult public events or meetings without taking negative feedback personally and always with the objective of achieving what is in the best interests of the city. Work positively and thrive in a small-town atmosphere.
- Provide leadership by supervising city employees in a positive manner and earning their respect while achieving the missions of the city.
- Create and maintain positive public relations through working with the press and social media.
- Keep the public informed on emergency management such as hurricanes. Successfully pre-plan and restore services after an emergency event.
- Keep the City financially sound by managing municipal finances and the budget.
- Ensure that the water and sewer plants meet all applicable state and federal permit requirements and have adequate capacity to serve our community.
- Ensure our city roads are well maintained with long-term funding in place.
- Ensure that our employees are fairly compensated, personnel policies are followed, employees are valued as individuals, and are properly trained.
- Work closely with the Sherriff's Office to assure policies and procedures are adequate to ensure our citizens feel safe.
- Update development codes and the comprehensive plan.
- Encourage economic development that is compatible with the small-town character of our community.

Success Patterns

A person's success patterns consist of experiences, accomplishments and skills. These patterns indicate whether an individual will be able to meet the performance expectations identified above.

- Experience as a City Manager or Assistant City Manager in a small town that operated under the Council-Manager form of government
- A track record in working with City Councils or other public bodies, making presentations and achieving positive results
- Extensive experience in working in a City or County government
- Successful experience in supervising all aspects of HR operations, to include labor negotiations
- Demonstrated understanding of planning, zoning, permitting and Code Enforcement
- Has experience managing tropical storms or similar emergencies
- Successful experience in solving citizen concerns and establishing positive customer relations
- Experience in making decisions regarding water, wastewater, solid waste and road maintenance operations
- Extensive experience in city wide budgeting and financial management

- Has worked with Police Departments on programs that improved public safety
- Has a college degree with major course work in public administration or a related field
- Experience in working with regulatory agencies, state legislatures, and county government
- Experience in working with the press and social media

Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics are the foundation of assessing the right fit for the city. What values do we want for our organization?

- A positive chemistry with the City Council and city employees
- A person who appreciates working and living in a small town
- A leader who can motivate others and takes pride in mentoring and helping others achieve success
- Highly values honesty and is trustworthy in terms of character and competence
- Committed to citizen service and can define what that means. Ability to meet with citizens and solve problems regularly
- A good communicator who can actively listen and understand other points of view and explain complex issues
- Intellectual curiosity and the ability to come up with creative solutions to complex problems
- Future oriented

Compensation

The City Council will provide a competitive salary and benefits. Starting salary will be \$105,000-\$125,000, depending on qualifications. The City Manager is required to live in or, with Council approval adjacent to the City. All candidates are subject to a full background check to include a credit report. No internal candidates for the job are anticipated.

Application and Selection Process

To apply, submit a cover letter and resume with salary history by Friday, November 22, 2019, to:

Dana Williams, City Clerk
195 Christobal Rd., N
Mary Esther, FL 32569
OR

cclk@cityofmaryesther.com

This search is being assisted by the Florida Senior Advisor Program, a voluntary effort affiliated with the Florida City and County Management Association.

Following the close of the application period, the Florida Senior Advisor Program will review the applications and recommend semi-finalists to the City Council, who will choose who the finalists will be. Finalists will be invited to Mary Esther for an interview process which is expected to take place at the end of December.

NOTE: Under Florida Law, all information and document submitted are public records and will be provided to the press and/or others upon request.



Mary Esther Florida

