

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

CITY OF LOWELL

In City Council

VOTE

To Appoint Kelly Oakes to the position of City Auditor for the City of Lowell and establish a salary for the position.

It is voted by the City Council of the City of Lowell to appoint Kelly Oakes to the position of City Auditor, said appointment to be effective on _____, at which time she will be sworn into office. The Auditor's salary shall be established at \$_____ (Step __ of Schedule A Salary Tier System Ordinance for Department Heads and Confidential Employees.). _____ appointment shall be for a _____ year term.



Conor Baldwin
Chief Financial Officer

MEMORANDUM

TO: Eileen M. Donoghue, City Manager

FROM: Conor Baldwin, Chief Financial Officer

CC: Sheryl Wright, Interim City Auditor

DATE: September 20, 2021

RE: Update and Recommendation – City Auditor Search

This memorandum is intended to provide an update on the search for a new City Auditor and share the recommendation of the screening committee. On May 25, 2021, the City Council voted to appoint Sheryl Wright as interim City Auditor, who has been an invaluable addition to the financial team during this transition and her assistance in the search for a permanent replacement cannot go unnoted. On June 8th, 2021, the City Council voted unanimously to engage a third-party recruiter to assist in the hiring process for the City Auditor.

Immediately following the vote, the finance department contracted with the Collins Center at UMass Boston to engage their professional services to aid in the search. Over the course of the summer, a job profile was developed and advertised on all professional association websites (e.g. MMA, GFOA, MMAA, MGFOA, etc.). Additionally, the Collins Center engaged in direct recruiting through their professional networks locally and throughout Massachusetts and greater New England. Overall, and despite the efforts of the Collins Center, the response to the solicitation was relatively low, but still yielded two (2) viable candidates.

At the recommendation of the Collins Center, both candidates were interviewed on September 16th by an internal panel consisting of myself, Mary Callery, HR Director, and Allison Chambers, Deputy CFO. It was the unanimous consent of the panel, as well as the Collins Center, that Kelly Oakes was the most qualified and best candidate to bring forward to the City Council. While Ms. Wright was unable to join the interviews, she was later apprised of the matter and is in full agreement with the group as to the most qualified candidate.

Enclosed with this memorandum is the resume of Ms. Kelly Oakes for consideration by the City Council. She is a Lowell resident who has been employed by the City since early 2019 in the role as City Treasurer/ Collector. In her time in that role she has made significant improvements in the office, including the full reconciliation of cash, which has long beleaguered her predecessors in the role. Her experience, education, and skills make her uniquely qualified to serve in this role

As a matter of law (G.L. c. 41 s. 61A), if a city treasurer's office becomes vacant, or if the treasurer, due to disability or absence, is unable to perform the duties of the office, the City Manager, without confirmation by the city council, must appoint a temporary treasurer to



Conor Baldwin
Chief Financial Officer

perform those duties thereof until another is duly appointed. I have conferred with the current Interim City Auditor and it is our recommendation that Allison Chambers, the city's current Deputy CFO, be appointed as Acting City Treasurer/ Collector until such a time that a permanent successor is qualified and appointed. The Collins Center has agreed to include the search for a new Treasurer/ Collector as part of the scope of their current contract and without additional cost to the city. Their experience has also been that it has been easier to find qualified candidates to fill the role of Treasurer, as opposed to Auditors/ Accountants. Ms. Chambers currently oversees certain Treasury functions in her role as Deputy CFO and is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). Additionally, both Ms. Oakes and I will be available to assist if necessary while Ms. Chambers manages the day-to-day operations of the Office of the City Treasurer/ Collector.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if there are any questions.

Skills

- MUNIS
- Financial Analysis & Reporting
- Internal Controls
- Strong Attention to Detail
- Cash Management
- Revenue Cycle Management
- Solid Analytical and Research Skills

Employment History

City of Lowell, Lowell, Massachusetts – February 2019 – present

Treasurer/Collector

- Collect, maintain and reconcile accounts receivable balances of real estate tax, personal property tax, excise tax, and water/sewer charges
- Full and complete reconciliation of all City bank accounts to the general ledger which resulted in the resolution of a long standing management comment from outside auditors on an internal control weakness
- Assist CFO with issuance of debt, maintain and reconcile debt service records and ensure timely payment of debt service
- Tax title processing
- Design and implement strong internal controls over treasury functions and recording of receipts
- Management of a very busy treasurer/collector office with a staff of 8
- Preparation of year end reports to the Department of Revenue

City of Lawrence, Lawrence, Massachusetts - December 2016 – February 2019

Treasurer/Collector

- Collect, maintain and reconcile accounts receivable balances of real estate tax, personal property tax, excise tax, and water/sewer charges
- Implemented investment policy of City funds that resulted in 200% increase of interest income
- Reconcile all City bank accounts
- Responsible for issuance of debt, maintaining debt service records and annual budgeting of principal and interest payments
- Tax title processing and foreclosures
- Implemented a system to manage City owned properties taken through foreclosure process
- Member of the Mayor's distressed property task force
- Management of a very busy treasurer/collector office with a staff of 8
- Implemented internal controls in the office to help mitigate the risk of theft

Abel, Rogers & Sullivan, Andover, Massachusetts – November 2007 – December 2016

Senior Accountant

- Prepare corporate, individual and trust tax returns
- Plan and conduct review and compilation engagements to assure financial statements are fairly presented in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles
- Advised clients on improving their systems and internal controls
- Projections of annual taxable income and prepare quarterly estimates for federal and state taxes
- Research complex tax issues
- Maintain and review fixed asset schedules
- Demonstrated experience in identifying tax savings and performing tax adjustments

Universal Software Corporation, Chelmsford, Massachusetts – May 2000 – May 2003

Controller

- Reported to the CEO and held full accounting and financial reporting responsibility
- Areas of responsibility included general accounting, financial statements, cost reports, banking relationships, payroll processing, administration of employee health benefits and 401(k) plan
- Managed the company's cash flow and line of credit
- Instrumental in creating and maintaining effective cost management practices that resulted in the company being profitable throughout a period of revenue declines of approximately 50%

Sullivan Bille PC, Tewksbury, Massachusetts – January 1997 – April 2000

Staff Accountant

- Responsible for leading the audit of non-public companies
- Specific duties included planning the engagement, conducting the audit according to accepted auditing standards, preparing the audit report, writing management commentary letters and reviewing with company officers and directors
- Municipal audit team member for two years
- Advised clients on improving their systems and internal controls
- Prepared corporate and individual tax returns

Education

Bachelor of Science: Business Administration, Major in Accounting, 1996

University of Massachusetts, Lowell MA

Certified Collector through Massachusetts Collector Treasurer Association, 2020



Eileen M. Donoghue
City Manager

September 20, 2021

Mayor John J. Leahy
And
Members of the Lowell City Council

Dear Mayor Leahy and Members of the Lowell City Council,

I am pleased to inform the City Council that, after an extensive search in collaboration with the Collins Center at UMass Boston, the search committee is hereby recommending that the City Council appoint Kelly Oakes as the new City Auditor. Ms. Oakes, a Lowell resident, is the current City Treasurer/ Collector in Lowell. Prior to her appointment as Treasurer, Ms. Oakes had 15 years of private sector experience in accounting and financial services. Immediately prior to coming to Lowell, she served as the City Treasurer and Collector for the City of Lawrence. Ms. Oakes, in her current tenure with Lowell has made significant improvements in the Office of the City Treasurer/ Collector. Most notable is the full reconciliation of cash, which had been a management comment on the annual audit by Powers & Sullivan, dating back to at least 2009. Her experience with internal controls, cash management, financial analysis, and familiarity with the MUNIS financial system will provide for a seamless transition.

Ms. Oakes graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of Massachusetts Lowell with a BS in Business Administration and Accounting. During her tenure in Lawrence, she implemented investment policies of City funds that resulted in a 200% increase in interest income and implemented internal controls in the office that have mitigated risk. I am confident Ms. Oakes' experience in accounting and administration will ensure that the responsibilities and functions of the Treasurer's Office are in good hands. Her dedication to customer service excellence and extensive understanding of municipal finance renders Ms. Oakes the ideal candidate for the position.

I look forward to having Ms. Oakes transition her role amongst, what I consider to be a very strong financial team. I would like to thank the members of the search committee for the efforts in bringing forward this candidate. Enclosed is a memorandum which more fully describes the process to date.

Sincerely,

Eileen M. Donoghue
City Manager

Cc: Conor Baldwin, Chief Financial Officer
Sheryl Wright, Interim City Auditor