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Ott FW articles

1 message

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Fort Worth Star-Telegram (TX)

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Section: Metro**Edition:** NortheastE**Page:** B9**Fort Worth assistant hired as Austin city manager***MIKE LEE**Star-Telegram Staff Writer*

FORT WORTH — **Marc Ott**, an assistant **city manager**, was hired as Austin's **city manager** on Thursday, leaving Fort Worth with four high-ranking administrative positions to fill.

That's the biggest turnover at the top at **City Hall** in recent memory, and the results will have a big effect on Fort Worth's progress over the next years.

The **city manager** is the head of government in most big Texas **cities**, reporting directly to the elected **City Council**. In Fort Worth, there are five assistant **city managers**. Charles Boswell, who has been **city manager** since 2004, is retiring at the end of the month. He'll be replaced by Dale Fisseler, who has been an assistant **city manager** for three years. Fisseler has launched a search to fill his old position, along with those left by **Ott** and Libby Watson, who is retiring. To top it off, Police Chief Ralph Mendoza is retiring in February.

"It's a rare opportunity for a **city manager** to be able to have that much influence over what his executive team is going to look like," **City Councilman Danny Scarth** said.

Ott's tentative start date is Feb. 14, according to an Austin **City Council** resolution. He will earn about \$257,000 a year in salary and allowances.

On paper, Fisseler is responsible for hiring his assistants, but in reality, the process will include input from council members, employee groups and the public.

Mayor **Mike Moncrief** ticked off a list of issues that the candidates will have to handle — Fort Worth's explosive growth, natural gas drilling and labor issues involving the newly-empowered police, fire and general employees associations.

"We need people who understand a **city** that is growing and who understand teamwork," he said.

Councilman **Chuck Silcox** said the **city** needs straight shooters, citing numerous occasions when high-ranking **city** staffers hid problems from the council and the public. Most recently, for instance, the Star-Telegram reported that 16 percent of 911 calls were being placed on hold during the summer. The **city** is still dealing with fallout from 2004 and 2005, when the annual audit was delayed by a series of financial problems. It was months before council members found out about it.

"Taxpayers need to be able to see what we're doing," Silcox said. "It's their money, and we work for them."

Silcox and other council members said they have a good idea of what kind of candidates are available because they spent much of December interviewing candidates for **citymanager**.

"I'm fully confident in our **city manager** being able to find some good folks," Councilman Sal Espino said. "Obviously we want to assemble a good, diverse team. By that I mean a team that can assist in some of the central issues – roads, central **city** revitalization."

Councilwoman Kathleen Hicks said she's looking for candidates who care about inner-**city** neighborhoods, poverty and related issues.

"I'm looking for an assistant **city manager** who'll stay the course, who'll be engaging in the other Fort Worth," she said.

Marsha Anderson, vice president of the General Employees Association, said she wanted "a blend of old and new."

"You don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater and overlook those who are Fort Worth," she said.

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Assistant **manager** hired to oversee infrastructure

GINGER D. RICHARDSON

Star-Telegram Staff Writer

April 23, 2002

After conducting a nationwide search, **city** officials have hired **Marc Ott**, a **city manager** with about 20 years of experience in municipal government, to oversee Fort Worth's streets, water lines and sewers.

Ott, 46, who has been **city** administrator in Rochester Hills, Mich., since 1998, will start his new post in Fort Worth on May 20. He will earn about \$132,000 a year, officials said.

"We are excited that **Marc** is joining the team because he brings excellent knowledge and experience in leading and managing **city** departments," **City Manager** Gary Jackson said. "**Marc** ... brings the right blend of hands-on field experience with management vision."

Ott, whose official title is assistant **city manager** for infrastructure services, will be charged with overseeing the **city's** water, aviation, engineering and transportation and public works departments.

Much of **Ott's** focus will be on transportation and promoting orderly growth, **city** officials said. The **city's** growth has been a hot issue at **City Hall** in recent months with the proposed annexation of 36 square miles.

"Fort Worth is ... similar to many of the communities up here, in that it must balance the urban core with growth through annexation," said **Ott**, who was also one of two finalists for a **city** administrator position in Ann Arbor, Mich., last December.

"It's a difficult issue - determining how you do what you need to do in the central area with limited resources, and then still find intelligent ways to manage the newer areas of the **city**," he said.

Ott will also be expected to work with regional transportation agencies such as Texas Department of Transportation, Fort Worth Transportation Authority, Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, North Central Texas Council of Governments and North Texas Tollway Authority.

He becomes the second of two men hired to replace former Assistant **City Manager** Mike Groomer, who left the **city** in February after spending more than a decade working on some of Fort Worth's highest-profile economic development projects.

The **city** has also hired Reid Rector, former executive vice president at the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, to head the **city's** economic and community development operations.

In his Michigan job, **Ott** has overseen all municipal operations for the **city** of Rochester Hills, which is located about 25 miles north of Detroit and has a population of about 69,000.

Before that, he served as **city manager** of Kalamazoo, Mich., and was that **city's** deputy **city manager** and assistant **city manager**.

Ott graduated from Oakland University in Michigan in April 1979. Two years later, he received his master's degree in public administration from the same school.

Monday, he said he was excited about his new job.

"I like the **city** very much," **Ott** said. "Fort Worth is a very aggressive municipal operation.

"I've been very impressed by what I've read, heard and seen. I am eager to start."

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City manager candidate field narrowed to 8

ANTHONY SPANGLER

Star-Telegram staff writer

Fort Worth officials will begin interviewing a group of eight candidates next week to replace **City Manager** Charles Boswell.

A nationwide search for Boswell's replacement yielded eight finalists, including three Fort Worth assistant **city managers**: Dale Fisseler, who oversees economic and community development; **Marc Ott**, who oversees infrastructure issues; and Joe Paniagua, who oversees public safety and public events.

The other candidates:

Jelynn Burley, deputy **city manager** in San Antonio.

David Leininger, a development and managing director for Irving.

C. Scott Johnson, a government and economic development consultant in Romania.

Joseph Lessard, a consultant and former assistant **city manager** for Austin.

Theodore Voorhees, a deputy **city manager** for Durham, N.C.

Mayor Mike Moncrief said he would like to include the **city's** newest **City Council** member in the decision. Voters will decide who will fill Wendy Davis' unexpired term in District 9 in a runoff election Dec. 18.

Moncrief said he and other council members would like a candidate with strong big-city experience, particularly in cities that have experienced rapid growth.

"I feel very comfortable that we will have a very strong slate from which to choose," he said. "It's going to be difficult as we come down to a short list. I certainly think the quality of the candidates is a reflection of the quality of this city."

Waters Consulting Group prepared the list of finalists. Boswell, who earns about \$219,000 a year, is stepping down in January after 30 years with the city.

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City faces competition in hiring manager

ANNA M. TINSLEY
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

WANTED: Someone to guide one of the 20 largest cities in the country, oversee a multimillion-dollar annual budget and manage a strong-minded City Council.

Applicants must have strong leadership skills, resolve and be team players. Note: Any takers will replace a city manager essentially forced out this year.

This ad could hang at city halls in three of Texas' biggest cities: Fort Worth, Dallas and San Antonio.

And that means headhunters conducting Fort Worth's nationwide search to replace former City Manager Gary Jackson — who resigned in August — may face stiff competition.

Dallas is looking to replace Ted Benavides, who resigned in May, and San Antonio is searching for a replacement for Terry Brechtel, who resigned in August.

"It will be harder for us to find someone because there's more competition, more big cities looking for managers," Fort Worth Councilwoman Becky Haskin said.

The competition could make Texas a key market for city manager hopefuls who will consider salary, housing, cost of living and more.

Mayor Mike Moncrief said that Fort Worth has a clear advantage.

"We're a better place to live, better place to work, better place to raise and educate our children," Moncrief said, "and we offer the challenge of being the fastest-growing city in the country."

On Tuesday, the Fort Worth City Council will consider hiring California-based CPS Executive Search — the same company that Dallas is using — at its meeting beginning at 7 p.m. at City Hall, 1000 Throckmorton St.

In the end, each city's search for a city manager will boil down to one component: the right fit, said Jim Riddlesperger, a political science professor at Texas Christian University.

"While it is unusual for three big cities in Texas to look for city managers at the same time, it's not totally

unexpected because of the pressures of the job," he said.

"The question is who best fits the needs of the cities at this time."

Special qualities

The Fort Worth council was clear in its vision for a **city manager** in 2000, when it sought a replacement for Bob Terrell, who retired after a near-record eight years in the job.

Council members said they wanted a visionary, a strong planner and a leader who could focus on promoting economic growth and revitalizing the central **city**.

Now, three and a half years later – amid criticism that Jackson lacked vision, leadership and the trust of the council – **city** leaders are struggling with what they want.

Ask each of the nine council members about their wishes, and you'll get nine different answers.

A leader with a calm voice, a firm hand, who is not afraid to say what direction the **city** should take on nearly any issue. A person of resolve.

"Someone who is breathing," Councilman Chuck Silcox said jokingly.

Haskin's hopes are a little higher.

"We've got to have someone bulletproof, who is not scared to stand out front and get hit," Haskin said. "I'm looking for a cross between Superman and Houdini, preferably a female."

Councilwoman Wendy Davis said political savvy is as important as a strong vision for the **city**.

"The council has put enough vision on the table to keep any **city manager** busy for a long time," Davis said. "We have very strong people who all care very much about the future of this **city** but have different ideas on what's best."

"I caution us in a desire to get a **city manager** who is too strong. We need one who understands his bosses are the nine people at the table."

Moncrief said he wants someone who can balance residents' demands for quality of life with economic development.

"We need someone who will do the job according to the charter – leave the policy issues up to this council and manage the **city** of Fort Worth without micromanagement," Moncrief said.

Councilman Jim Lane said the council needs to move slowly and should talk to previous **city managers** for advice.

"We need someone who will sit down, analyze what our past is about and see where the future belongs," Lane said.

Councilman Clyde Picht said the **city's** needs are simple.

"A good **manager**, that's all," Picht said. "Really, someone who can manage the day-to-day operations of the **city**, provide accurate budget projections and manage the staff."

The first step in launching the search could be unifying council members' demands, said Michele Frisby, a spokesman for the Washington-based International **City/County** Management Association.

"If they can't all agree on their top priorities, it will raise red flags with candidates," he said.

The average **city manager** serves seven years, and the average search for a new **city manager** lasts about six months, according to the association.

The abrupt departure of the Fort Worth, Dallas and San Antonio **city managers** probably won't deter applicants.

"**Managers**' jobs are only as secure as the next council meeting," Frisby said. "They are used to the uncertainty that this profession involves."

In retrospect

Fort Worth leaders hope a new **manager** will be in office by April.

After the council approves the hiring of a search firm, headhunters will meet with the council and other **city** leaders to determine requirements and qualifications for the job. The firm will recruit, screen and evaluate candidates.

Fort Worth trails its Texas competitors in **manager** compensation. Jackson earned about \$189,000, while Benavides took home \$263,000 and Brechtel \$206,000.

But Fort Worth may have an edge in livability, officials said.

The cost of living, for example, is 9.4 percent lower in Fort Worth than in Dallas, and it is about the same as in San Antonio. Average home values in Dallas, however, exceed \$150,000; in Fort Worth and San Antonio they are just under \$100,000.

Dallas' search has been under way since July, and early reports show that search firm officials hope to hold interviews between candidates and council members in November, said Margaret Wright, Dallas' interim director of human resources.

The council, which is spending as much as \$80,000 on the search, hopes to name a new **city manager** by January, Wright said.

In San Antonio, council members began discussing how to handle the search to replace Brechtel just days ago.

In Fort Worth, where officials are expected to spend up to \$33,000, candidates are already beginning to line up.

Interim **City Manager** Charles Boswell, a longtime budget authority, is eligible for retirement and has said he will not seek the permanent position. But Assistant **CityManagers** Joe Paniagua and **Marc Ott** are possible contenders.

"We're expecting top-notch work and sound policy suggestions." Councilman Donavan Wheatfall said. "If we're going to pay a **city manager** \$180,000, they ought to be worth their weight in gold."

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BLACK HISTORY MONTH PROFILE

Marc Ott

Throughout Black History Month, the Star-Telegram will spotlight people or places having an impact on the Tarrant County area.

Age: 50

Occupation: Fort Worth assistant **city manager**

Education: Master's in public administration from Oakland University

What to look for: As assistant **city manager** for infrastructure services for nearly four years, **Ott** oversees millions of dollars in road and bridge repairs and other improvements. That includes the eight-mile Southwest Parkway toll road, from Interstate 30 near downtown to Altamesa Boulevard, which he said may be built starting late next year. **Ott** has also had a lifelong passion for drawing and painting. Three of his sketches, including a portrait of Fort Worth Fire Chief Charles Gaines and an unfinished self-portrait, are on display through Feb. 22 at the Fort Worth Central Library gallery, 500 W. Third St., in the exhibit "The Art of Man: Paintings and Sculpture."

— Compiled by Scott Streater

"Obviously, I have a great fascination with portraits and people's faces. I find that because I have that kind of fascination with what I see in people's faces, it's almost like you can find a universe in somebody's face. At least that's how I perceive it. And I get pretty fascinated by that. It's like another way of getting to know someone, aside from how you might otherwise get to know people."