https://wcfcourier.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/waterloos-new-chief-of-staff-role-commonplace-in-other-iowa-cities/article_91fa8bc1-fdd4-595e-9ae5-fcf2758e5f01.html

ALERT TOP STORY

Waterloo's new chief of staff role commonplace in other Iowa cities

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WATERLOO — The more than $176,000 earmarked for a new Waterloo chief of staff position would be less than salary and benefits for similar posts in Iowa's most populous cities, according to information obtained by The Courier.

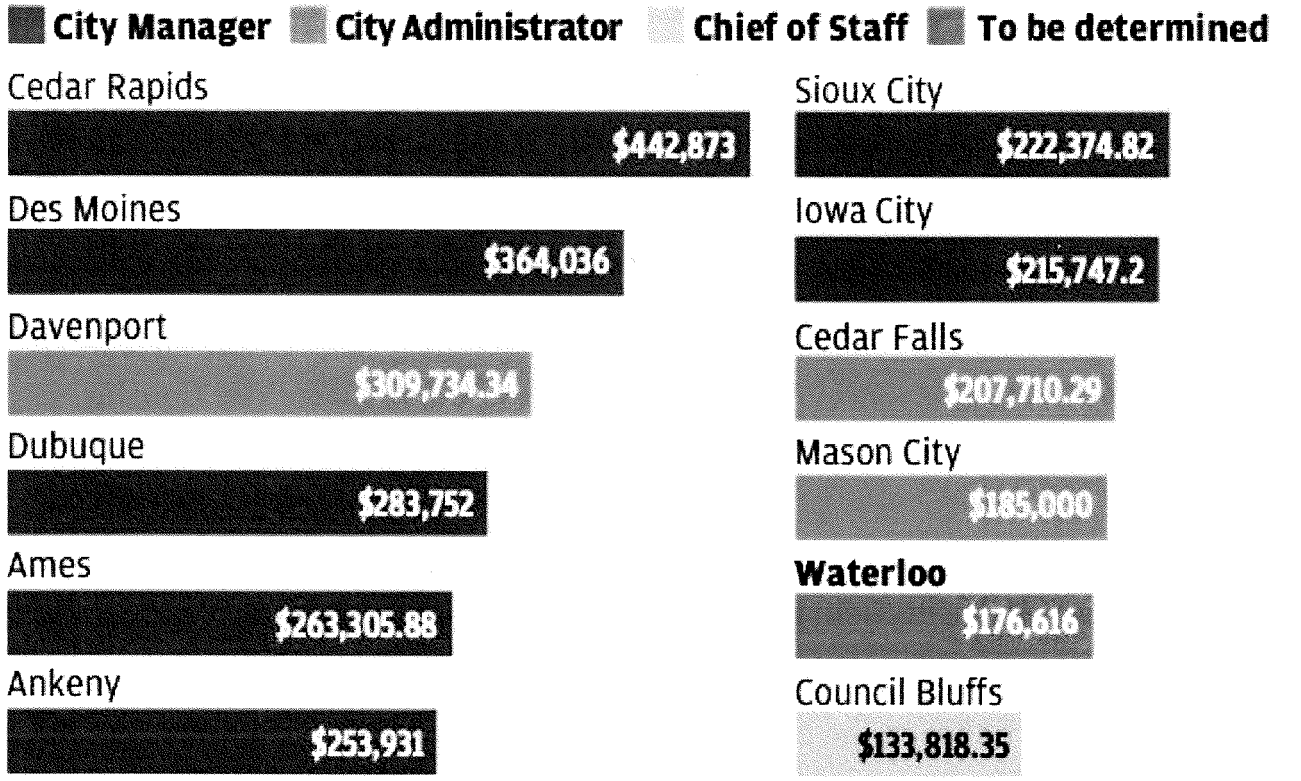
The Waterloo City Council approved the funds at a **March 25 special budget meeting**. The position's creation was met with criticism from several residents and council members Margaret Klein and Pat Morrissey, who ultimately voted against the entire budget. Mayor Quentin Hart and council member Sharon Juon defended the position as a way to improve the city's efficiency.

Positions like city manager, city administrator and chief of staff exist in other Iowa metro areas, cities like Iowa City, West Des Moines, Ankeny, Ames, Council Bluffs and Dubuque, all of which have populations similar to Waterloo.

The $176,000 salary and benefits in Waterloo fall below compensation for similar positions in nine of Iowa's other most populous cities. Only the chief of staff in Council Bluffs makes less.

Iowa cities: How much do they pay their chiefs of staff?

Waterloo's approved compensation for its chief of staff position falls lower than the compensation amounts for similar roles across the state.



Note: The Mason City and Cedar Falls compensation amounts represent only base salary, not total compensation with benefits. The other compensation amounts represent salary and benefits that were provided to The Courier, many of which include car expenses and deferred compensation amounts. This may cause the rankings to vary.

Source: Local government offices

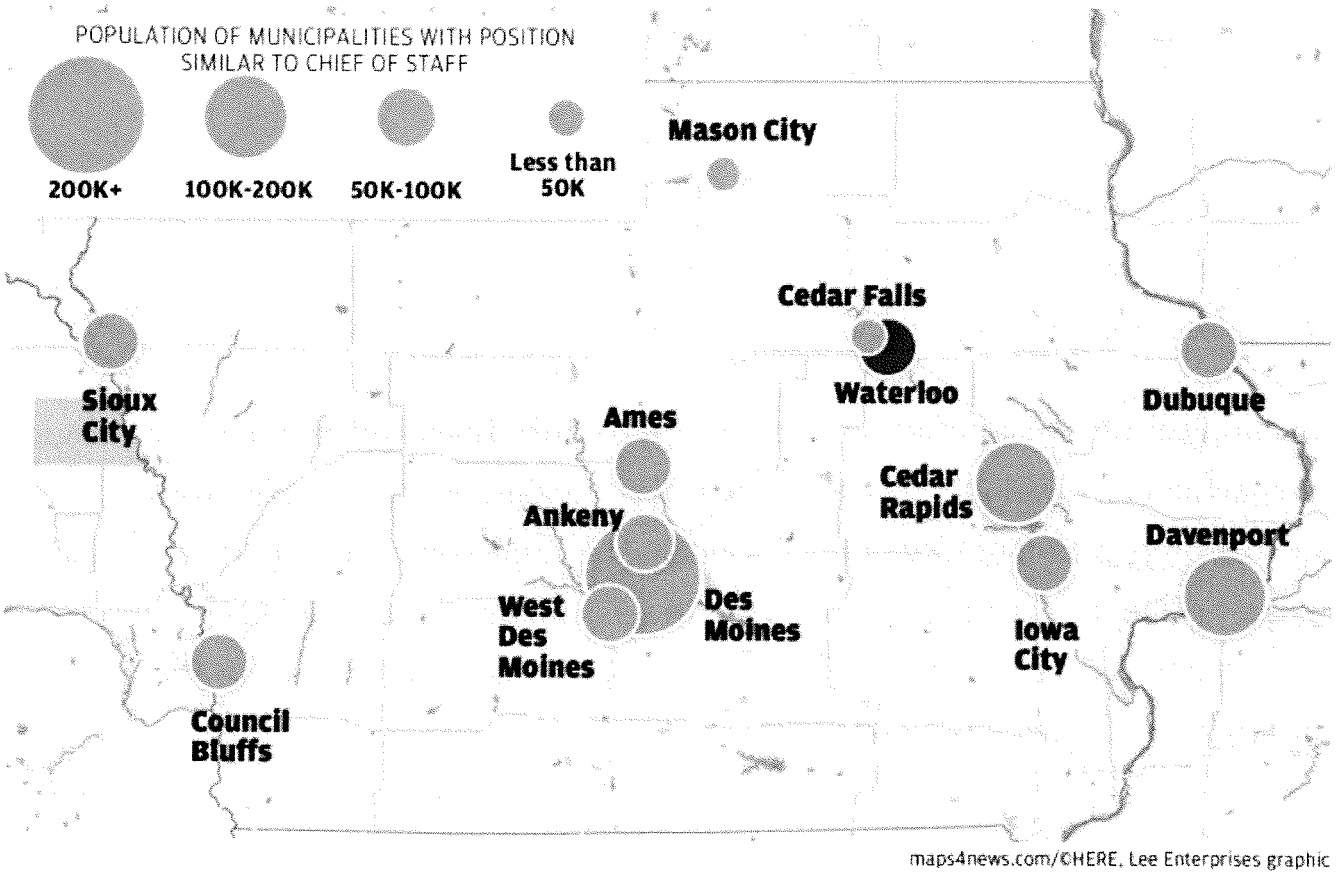
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Ankeny, with about 67,000 residents recorded in U.S. Census data, pays its city manager nearly $254,000 in compensation. Ames, which has about 66,000 residents, pays about $263,000. Waterloo has a population of nearly 67,000.

Some cities, like Council Bluffs, Dubuque and Iowa City, have support staff that assist the chief of staff. Waterloo did not approve funds for any additional staff.

Iowa cities: Do they have a chief of staff?

Iowa's most populous cities have a position similar to the one approved in Waterloo, with titles like City Manager, City Administrator and Chief of Staff.



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A title and job description have not yet been approved in Waterloo. Hart said the position could end up being a manger for business services and handle the overall flow of city operations.

Geoff Fruin, city manager in Iowa City, said the "chief of staff" title is typically "seen in a strong mayor form of government." There is "generally little difference" in responsibilities of city managers and administrators.

Mason City City Administrator Aaron Burnett said he helps carry out policy objectives of the City Council. He leads city staff and serves as a single point of communication for them. Business and development opportunities also fall under his purview, he said.

Burnett said his role is "to provide that support and expertise in the execution of the goals of that elected body." He mentioned an issue like broadband as an area he would handle. Waterloo is **exploring a city-owned broadband** utility for high-speed

internet, phone and TV services.

"Local government becomes more complex every day," Burnett said. "The reality is that we're dealing with a myriad of issues — most of those didn't even exist 50 years ago."

He balances the opinions of elected officials to represent their goals in a unified manner. He can then interact with private businesses or nonprofits to generate partnerships that promote city objectives.

City manager responsibilities outlined in Fruin's **job description** include managing all departments, developing long-term fiscal strategies, overseeing big projects, directing preparation of City Council agendas, building community partnerships, making presentations and negotiating contracts, among other duties. He is appointed by a majority vote of the City Council, but cities can also have the mayor fill the job — a decision yet to be made in Waterloo.

The Council Bluffs Chief of Staff Matthew Mardesen is appointed by the mayor. He assists with human resources, supports public safety departments, looks into issues brought to the mayor's office and more. His day-to-day tasks vary and are typically unknown until he walks into the office, he said.

"To really rely on one person to have a full complete understanding of everything is very difficult," Mardesen said. "If (the Council Bluffs mayor) didn't have a second person or a chief of staff position, I think it would be a lot more overwhelming."

Due to hiring delays that go into effect July 1 — expected to save the city more than $586,000 next fiscal year — officials likely will wait until fall to discuss a formal title and description for the Waterloo job.

Hart said the person who fills the role could help Waterloo with its **2030 Community Vision**, financial needs and administrative services to increase the city's efficiency. That falls in line with Hart's ongoing evaluation of departmental structures in the city, he said.

Some people criticized the position for taking on the mayor's responsibilities. Hart said at the March 25 meeting that the position is "absolutely not" replacing the mayor. Mardesen in Council Bluffs said his role is complementary to that of the mayor.

"I work side by side with the mayor on all our initiatives as to what we want to see happen in the city and what direction we want to take our city," Mardesen said. "I don't know that I'm much of just an assistant to him. I think we take up and divide and conquer different roles that we're going to do."

Michael Van Milligen, Dubuque city manager, said the council-manager form of city government was first developed in the early 1920s as a way to fend off corruption. He said it mimics a board of directors that sets policies working with a company's president or CEO, the person who operates the business. He said his role consists of carrying out city initiatives.

"I think any community would benefit from professional management," Van Milligen said. "I have the greatest respect for elected officials, but city managers are trained to do this job."

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