

Holyoke advances accounting hires to address financial challenges

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HOLYOKE — City leaders report momentum in fixing long-standing financial problems facing Holyoke.

In an update from Holyoke Mayor Joshua Garcia's office, Human Resources Director Kelly Curran said the city has made progress filling key leadership jobs under Municipal Finance Modernization Act.

The positions were [created](#) to improve oversight, coordination and long-term financial stability, city leaders say.

Sharon Bittner-Willis was appointed city comptroller and now serves as interim auditor. Laura Wilson Shaw was appointed treasurer-collector and will assume the combined role after a permanent auditor is named.

The city is interviewing candidates for chief administrative and financial officer, with two finalists selected from 16 applicants for interviews with Garcia.

One auditor candidate advanced from a pool of 13 to an interview with the City Council, while three candidates for director of technical assistance advanced to a screening committee.

“For far too long, we have faced the same challenges and only provided Band-Aid solutions. I’m confident that the work being done now will set Holyoke up for financial success in the decades to come,” Garcia said.

The city says it has completed its Fiscal Year 2023 budget reconciliation, an overdue accounting task, and has submitted records to an outside auditor, CBIZ.

Officials said work is now focused on closing fiscal years 2024 and 2025 and certifying free cash before the end of the fiscal year. Work ahead includes addressing systemic accounting issues — all aimed at improving internal controls, audit timeliness and long-term financial stability.

Finance Committee Chair Patti Devine said the city's accounting firm, CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, reported that the [reconciliation](#) work has been complex and time-consuming because it involves multiple financial systems and more than 60 bank accounts, some dating back several years.

The accounting firm also cited progress. The ongoing work will spell out best practices to help the city manage its finances more efficiently in the future.

City officials said staff members are reviewing Fiscal Year 2026 finances and taking on work that the city previously outsourced. Garcia said the shift is expected to improve efficiency and keep audits on schedule.

Interim Treasurer Rory Casey said the city is fixing persistent data errors and weaknesses in past financial practices, leading to clearer and more accurate records.