

# Clearlake city manager offered job with Suisun City



**Greg Folsom, city manager for Clearlake, Calif., has been selected as the city city manager for Suisun City, Calif. Photo by John Jensen/Lake County News.**

CLEARLAKE, Calif. – Clearlake’s city manager of the past four years, credited with helping turn the city around and put it onto a better path, is leaving for a new job.

On Wednesday morning, the Suisun City Council began its meeting with the announcement from closed session that it had voted unanimously to hire Greg Folsom as its next city manager.

Suisun City, located in Solano County, has an estimated population of more than 28,000, nearly twice the Clearlake population. It’s where Clearlake Police Chief Andrew White came from last year, as Lake County News has reported.

Folsom told Lake County News he was pleased to hear of the unanimous vote.

“It is just a career opportunity,” he said of his decision to pursue the job. “Suisun is similar but in a more organized area with similar issues and I think my background here will be beneficial to helping with their issues.”

“I wish him well and hate to see him go,” said Clearlake Mayor Nick Bennett. “He’s done so much for this community it’s unbelievable. He’s brought our City Hall staff together as a working team. He’s brought on a new finance director who is now assistant city manager, He was a major component of passing the Measure V road tax and initiated the state of the city events.”

District 2 Lake County Supervisor Bruno Sabatier, who until December worked with Folsom while he was on the Clearlake City Council, said Folsom will be remembered for his great service to the city, and he wishes him the best of luck as he starts a new adventure in Suisun City. “They are lucky to have him.”

Suisun City has been looking for a new city manager for over a year. It was explained at Wednesday’s meeting that Folsom’s hiring will be finalized at the next Suisun City Council meeting on March 5.

Folsom said he believes he'll be starting with Suisun City on April 2. He doesn't plan to take a break between jobs; his last council meeting in Clearlake will be March 14 and his final day with the city will be March 30.

Between now and then he said he will be focusing on getting some things onto the agenda and to the council "as well as organizing files and data for my successor."

Folsom currently makes \$151,000 a year for Clearlake, which in Suisun City will rise to \$205,000 a year, he said.

Asked if Assistant City Manager Alan Flora will be tapped to succeed him or if an open recruitment will be pursued, Folsom said, "That is going to be up to the City Council."

The Clearlake City Council appears headed to take up the matter immediately.

The council has a special 5 p.m. meeting on Thursday during which it will consider awarding a contract to demolish several old structures in the city – one of Folsom's successful efforts to clean up and abate dilapidated structures – and hold a closed session discussion regarding the city manager's job.

### **An accomplished career**

Folsom began his career in government in 1992, working as a Small Business Administration loan officer, before moving on to work for 20 years for the city of Stockton city manager's office, specializing in economic development and redevelopment.

In 2014, he went to work as deputy director of economic development for the county of Riverside, and was appointed the following year to the Menifee Planning Commission.

In early 2015, the city of Clearlake began its recruitment after City Manager Joan Phillippe submitted a letter to the council announcing her plans to retire.

Following a lengthy search, the Clearlake City Council voted in May 2015 to hire Folsom, who started with the city the following month.

With his ascent to a city manager's post, Folsom became one of the few city managers in California who is a tribal member. He belongs to the Choctaw Nation, a federally recognized tribe based in Oklahoma.

At the time of his hire, city leaders said that Folsom's economic development and business recruitment experience had been of particular interest to them, and they hoped he would help them keep their forward momentum.

More than just maintaining momentum, Folsom gave the city a shot of rocket fuel.

He set about getting grants for city cleanup and a variety of projects, worked on marketing – including new logos and motto for the city – and bringing in new business, assisting with the process that led to the Ray's Food Place building now houses Tractor Supply and Big 5.

Folsom partnered with community groups such as Citizens Caring for Clearlake to address illegal dumping and abatements.

Folsom earned the respect and affection of longtime staff and brought in new administrators as well. He has been lauded for his leadership and team building, and the ability to bring the best out of Clearlake's employees.

He and his staff crafted rules to give commercial opportunities to cannabis businesses, placing the city well ahead of the rest of the county in that regard.

When the county pursued the creation of a tourism improvement district, Folsom advocated for it and after its creation was finalized earlier this year, he was named as a member of its board.

He's also a member of the Clear Lake Chamber of Commerce board, and his efforts helped complete the long-running project to renovate the chamber's lakeside headquarters.

Folsom also has instituted "State of the City" events, which are annual celebrations of the city in which goals and accomplishments are highlighted and community members are invited to take part.

"Bringing in the 'State of the City' events, one of the strategies was changing the image of Clearlake," Folsom explained. "You have to talk about what you're doing in order to change the image. The strategy was to talk about our successes. It's turned out to be a successful effort."

While racking up these accomplishments, Folsom had to face unique challenges for the city.

Within months of Folsom arriving, he would be among the local leaders responding to that summer's furious wildland fire season, which endangered the city and ended up leaving a trail of devastation in the south county.

Fires hit close to home again in 2016, when the Clayton fire burned Lower Lake, and then in October 2017, when the North Bay Fire Storm – which included Clearlake's Sulphur fire – struck.

The Sulphur fire burned 2,207 acres and destroyed 162 structures – most of them in Clearlake – and led to the evacuation of thousands of people, Folsom and his wife included. The city has since joined litigation against Pacific Gas and Electric over the fire.

With its lakeside location, the city of Clearlake also suffered some damage from the 2017 atmospheric river storm that caused Clear Lake to top 10 feet Rumsey and led to a temporary closure of the lake.

### **'A game changer'**

It was Folsom's work to get Measure V passed – the 1-cent sales tax dedicated to repairing and rebuilding Clearlake's system of roads – that may be one of his most enduring accomplishments.

It wasn't an easy task. By the time Measure V passed in November 2016, the city had attempted several sales tax measures for various uses, all of them failing to get the necessary supermajority.

But with Measure V, the city listened to what voters wanted and crafted it to be a dedicated funding source specific to roads, which can't be used for anything else. "What we did different was we asked what people would support. They said they'd support dedicated funds and sunset and they did," he said.

"Measure V is an absolute game changer," said Folsom, noting he's very proud that the city managed to get it passed. He personally donated his time and expertise – not working on city hours – to ensure the effort was successful.

Prior to its passage, the city had about \$50,000 to \$100,000 each year for road work. Now, Measure V brings in more than \$2 million annually, according to Folsom. "That's how we're able to do a lot of the projects we have planned. The city didn't generate enough to repair the roads in the past."

He said Measure V is helping pull Clearlake up by its bootstraps. "If you can fix and maintain roads, home values and property tax revenues go up."

Folsom said that, over the long run, Measure V will improve properties and revenues. "It's going to take a few years to see big impact but it's happening."

Last year, the city spent about \$1 million on new road repair equipment to replace the 20-year-old equipment it had. Now, they're looking at road patching equipment. Folsom said they've been using short-lived cold patch equipment and are looking at switching to hot asphalt equipment for much more permanent fixes. "I hope to have that on the agenda prior to leaving."

Having the money to purchase equipment such as an asphalt recycler and a hot box "was way beyond our ability to purchase in past."

As to what he's most proud of, Folsom explained that one notable thing is that the comments he's hearing about the city are completely different than when he first started.

He said when he and his wife, Georgianna, were looking for housing, they asked around and were told to choose a place "anywhere but Clearlake."

Folsom added, "Now the comments are that Clearlake has turned around." He's also proud of the changes and progress that have been made "and that Clearlake is now the example of how to do better."

He noted that the city just won a special award at the Stars of Lake County Community Awards ceremony. "For Clearlake to be first municipality to win that award says a huge amount."

While he has accomplished a lot, he said he didn't quite complete everything he'd hoped to do, such as the Austin and Highlands Park projects. "But they are in process and I hope to be back for the grand openings."

"Greg is one of my heroes," said Bennett. "I've been in the political business a couple of years but around municipalities since 1964 through my work in law enforcement and he's the best city manager I've had the pleasure of working with."

"Greg Folsom was the leader that Clearlake needed for its revival," said Sabatier, who served as Clearlake's mayor and worked closely with Folsom. He was elected to the Board of Supervisors last year and took his seat in January.

Folsom and his wife plan to maintain a presence in Lake County. He said they own property here and are planning to keep their house in Clearlake.

He said they've come to love Lake County. "It's actually very difficult for us to make this decision because we love it here so much."

Folsom said their eventual plan, barring life changes, is to return to Lake County and retire.

"I appreciate the opportunity that the City Council gave me," he said. "It's been an honor working with the council and I had a tremendous staff. Between all of us, we've made a difference."

John Jensen contributed to this report.

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