

City of Miami Beach

City Manager

Summary of Articles

John Woodruff

(Note: Articles Follow In Reverse Chronicle Order)

Articles

- *While Miami Beach Hunts for New City Manager, Five City Employees Want Interim Role*, Miami Herald, December 8, 2020.
- *Miami Beach Ended FY 2020 Budget Year in Better Shape Than Projected, Out Years Less Certain*, Re: Miami Beach, November 18, 2020.
- *To Fill COVID-19 Gaps, Miami Beach Dips into Reserves and Plans Reduced Trolley Service*, Miami Herald, September 29, 2020.
- *Miami Beach Faces Another Tough Budget Year*, Re: Miami Beach, June 4, 2019.
- *Miami Beach Has Recovered Half of Its Stolen \$3.6 Million, But Made No Arrests*, Miami Herald, April 6, 2017.
- *Miami Beach Hires Former Budget Director as New CFO in Wake of Bank Fraud Scandal*, Miami Herald, January 17, 2017.
- *Miami Beach Launches Online Tool for Exploring City Finances*, Miami Herald, June 4, 2015.

Websites

- LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/in/john-woodruff-a38b346/>

WHILE MIAMI BEACH HUNTS FOR NEW CITY MANAGER, FIVE CITY EMPLOYEES WANT INTERIM ROLE

MIAMI HERALD

Martin Vassolo
December 8, 2020

Until the city of Miami Beach finds a replacement for outgoing City Manager Jimmy Morales, a commission-appointed interim manager will serve as the city's top administrator.

Five senior-level city employees have expressed interest in the temporary position. They are City Attorney Raul Aguila, Code Compliance Director Hernan Cardeno, Public Works Director Roy Coley, Fire Chief Virgilio Fernandez and Assistant City Manager Mark Taxis. The City Commission will make its selection during a meeting Wednesday.

Morales, who is leaving the city after more than seven years, will join the administration of Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava as the county's chief operations officer.

Friday will be his last day at work. When he submitted his resignation in October, Morales told the City Commission that he would stay on board until February to ensure a "smooth transition."

His accelerated exit surprised some commissioners, who must now select an interim manager as the city negotiates a contract with a search firm to find a permanent successor. The firm, Ralph Andersen & Associates, requested \$48,500 to conduct the search.

"We had a great schedule but our city manager was apparently too desirable to the new county mayor," Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber said during Friday's commission before congratulating him.

"Obviously we didn't plan for any of this. Names [of candidates] are coming out now and not earlier because we didn't really know we had this problem until earlier in the week," Gelber later said.

The interim city manager will assume the emergency powers granted to Morales by the commission during the state of emergency he declared amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Since March 12, Morales has used his unilateral decision-making authority to impose curfews, business closures and alcohol-sale restrictions. City code authorizes the manager to wield his emergency authority for a 72-hour period, but the commission has regularly extended Morales' powers.

Miami Beach's form of government gives commissioners the authority to vote on policy decisions, but the city manager is responsible for carrying the laws out and running the city. Morales has endorsed Fernandez and Taxis, both of whom report directly to him.

"Obviously in an interim type of situation you want the smoothest transition," he said Friday. "I think either one of those would be a solid appointment."

Most commissioners agree that the interim city manager should not be considered for the permanent position. Assistant city managers Eric Carpenter and Alina Tejada Hudak, and Chief Financial Officer John Woodruff, have said they will apply to replace Morales. Morales' current base salary is \$305,736.

The city expects to finalize a contract with the search firm this week, a spokeswoman said. City leaders expect the process to last about six months. Before Morales became city manager in 2013, interim City Manager Kathie Brooks served for about eight months.

"This could last many, many months to select the permanent person, so I'd like to have an interim person promise not to be considered for the permanent role," Commissioner Ricky Arriola said at Friday's meeting.

MIAMI BEACH ENDED FY 2020 BUDGET YEAR IN BETTER SHAPE THAN PROJECTED, OUT YEARS LESS CERTAIN

RE: MIAMI BEACH

Susan Askew
November 18, 2020

While the coronavirus pandemic continues to take its toll on Miami Beach's tourism industry, CARES Act reimbursements of COVID-related expenses may buffer greater than anticipated losses in the City's resort tax revenue. Miami Beach CFO John Woodruff told City Commissioners at their meeting Wednesday that early cost cutting efforts resulted in a lower than projected use of General Fund reserves for the FY 2020 budget year which ended September 30. In mid-April, Woodruff told Commissioners the use of reserves could have been \$8.6 million but spending and hiring freezes whittled away at that number over the next six months resulting in a need of just \$272,000 of reserve funds. The use of Resort Tax Reserve Fund dollars remained steady at \$5 million since the April projection.

The picture for FY 2021 is a little worse. Initial projections were for the City to use \$9.6 million of General Fund reserves but to need no additional dollars from the Resort Tax Fund. In September, however, City Manager Jimmy Morales warned resort taxes were "not coming back as quickly" as anticipated following COVID shutdowns. Art Basel's cancellation of its annual event here and the scaling back of the college National Championship game were big blows.

Though the City only has 1.5 months of data points in the current fiscal year, Woodruff said, "We're already behind" with regard to the resort tax estimates. "That doesn't bode well for this year." Resort tax revenues come from a 4% tax on hotel rooms and 2% on sales of food and beverages sold in restaurants, bars, or nightclubs.

The original FY 2021 assumption of a 25% decrease in resort taxes was too optimistic, Woodruff said. The number is likely to be closer to 42%.

With a 25% decrease, the resort tax revenue loss was projected to be \$22.0 million. The "likely scenario" now, according to Woodruff is \$37.5 million. "It looks like we're now going to have a gap of about \$15.5 million."

Woodruff noted the City has had \$7.5 million in CARES Act reimbursements approved to date with another \$25 million to \$35 million in potential reimbursement. While he's conservative in not counting funds before they're paid, he said CARES Act reimbursements could provide an "opportunity to help make ourselves whole whatever we're short in 2021."

Woodruff said he would have more details in the January-February timeframe when there is a better picture of resort tax collections, CARES Act reimbursements, and cost savings. At that point, he told Commissioners, he would present, "if necessary, whatever additional measures we need to take to balance the budget for 2021."

Woodruff indicated, "We're still seeing a lot of impacts from COVID. I wouldn't be surprised if a portion of 2022 wouldn't be affected as well at this point." Both he and City Manager Jimmy Morales indicated events are expected to be impacted for many months to come. During his COVID update earlier in the meeting, Morales noted, "The Convention Center is now empty probably until April or May," while Woodruff indicated the City will probably "not see a lot of special events until at least the third quarter" which would be the April-June timeframe.

Commissioner Ricky Arriola, Chair of the Commission's Finance Committee, said he's concerned about commercial property valuations and the impact of lower tax assessments. Woodruff said it's too early to determine how many commercial properties will be assessed at lower valuations but he's watching the appeals of current assessed values.

Arriola said the hotels that "have sat vacant for months" and the buildings with vacant stores "are going to get reset at current economic realities... I'm not sure how much we'll see in 2021, but in 2022-23, we'll definitely see that."

"That's the big ticket in our budget," Woodruff said of the City's property taxes which make up about 50% of the General Fund revenues. Lower resort tax revenues are "somewhat more temporary but the hits to our property taxes, that's where we have to face cuts, potentially, going forward."

"We've figured out how to save money temporarily to get through COVID," Woodruff said. With the help of the CARES Act, the concern now shifts to be "more about the actual property values and what that's going to do to the more permanent side of our budget."

"I don't think our revenues are going to rebound very quickly," Arriola said. "We're going to have to be vigilant about keeping our costs flat and even down in the next couple of years."

With the FY 2020 and projected FY 2021 General Fund reserve use, the total fund would be reduced from \$80.6 million to \$70.7 million, about 2.5 months of expenses. The goal set by the City Commission is to maintain 3 months of expenses in reserve.

The current Resort Tax reserve is \$15.2 million. The use of \$5 million to cover the FY 2020 gap results in a \$10.2 million balance, equal to 2 months.

Woodruff recommended the City consider placing any additional CARES Act reimbursements after what is needed to balance the budget into the General Fund and Resort Tax Reserve Funds to meet the City's three-month expense reserve target.

“We’re still in really good shape,” to deal with additional budget gaps and another hurricane season, Woodruff told Commissioners.

TO FILL COVID-19 GAPS, MIAMI BEACH DIPS INTO RESERVES AND PLANS REDUCED TROLLEY SERVICE

MIAMI HERALD

Martin Vassolo
September 29, 2020

In order to balance its budget for the upcoming fiscal year, the city of Miami Beach will use about \$8.5 million in reserve funds and continue cost-cutting measures it began at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

The City Commission passed the operating budget Tuesday evening after facing a \$32 million budget gap caused by COVID-19 losses and an additional \$6 million gap due to projected decreases in property values.

On top of hiring restrictions and expenditure freezes enacted months ago, the City Commission voted to renegotiate contracts to save about \$5 million, reduce public trolley service to the tune of \$5 million in savings and trim about \$800,000 in police overtime costs. To address immediate pandemic-related impacts, the city used \$2.8 million in reserves during the current fiscal year.

The city suspended its free trolley program in March and has not announced when service will resume. Under the new budget, its fleet will be reduced to 15 from 25 vehicles and the frequency of its stops will increase to 30 minutes from 20 minutes. The new hours of service will be 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., and the city will eliminate the 11th Street Loop and modify the Belle Isle Loop.

"It is important to note that trolley vehicle assignment, service frequency, and service hours will be subject to change based on demand, and the service levels could be increased incrementally, depending on budget availability," City Manager Jimmy Morales wrote in a memo to the commission. "The Administration is currently pursuing dedicated Freebee service for seniors."

The \$328 million operating budget also includes the elimination of 45 full-time positions, including 40 in the parking department. All employees affected by the layoff were offered new jobs with the city, but 17 parking employees either declined or did not respond to the city's offer, according to a city presentation. The city administration withdrew its proposal to privatize some of its enforcement resources and instead the City Commission voted to earmark \$1.2 million in reserve funds to keep on the 17 employees for one year.

Several parking employees, including some who remain on furlough, called into Tuesday's meeting to tell the commission they can make the department financially viable.

"I do appreciate the help and the thought given," said longtime parking officer Manuel Lago. "All I'm asking is for us to have a chance to get on track."

Citywide, as many as 49 full-time workers and 192 part-time employees remained on furlough as of July, Chief Financial Officer **John Woodruff** said.

While the city's operating millage rate will remain flat, the average homesteaded property owner will see a \$286 annual tax increase associated with the voter-approved general obligation bond program that passed in 2018.

Next year, without the benefit of an unusually high \$1.3 billion in new construction projects, Woodruff said the city could see a \$10 million gap due to worsening property value trends.

"It saved our behinds this year that we had so many projects come online," said Commissioner Ricky Arriola at a June meeting of the Finance and Economic Resiliency Committee, which he chairs. "But to the extent that we delay or don't approve new economic development, future years are going to be that much more difficult."

MIAMI BEACH FACES ANOTHER TOUGH BUDGET YEAR

RE: MIAMI BEACH

Susan Askew
June 4, 2019

It will be another difficult budget process in the City of Miami Beach as Commissioners reconcile a smaller than needed increase in property values with maintaining current levels of City services. At the FY 2020 budget retreat, Miami Beach CFO John Woodruff told Mayor Dan Gelber and City Commissioners that, in order to maintain current service levels, a 5.6% increase in property values would be needed, 6.3% if the City were to meet its goal of not using any money from the Parking Fund for general operating expenses. The preliminary numbers released by the Miami-Dade County property appraiser this weekend show a 3% increase.

The 2018 Preliminary Taxable Value of approximately \$38.9 billion increased to approximately \$40.0 billion in 2019 Estimated Taxable Value. Existing property values showed a 2.8% increase while new construction values increased 26.3% for an overall 3% increase.

Prior to the release of the numbers, Woodruff told Commissioners, "I think it's a safe bet that it's going to be a fairly tight year." His assessment of the real estate market: "I think we're in a little bit of a trough of a cycle." After double digit increases in values in FY 2016 and 2017, values began trending down in FY 2018. The City faced a similar budget gap last year. By law, the budget must be balanced when it takes effect October 1.

Commissioner Ricky Arriola, Chair of the Commission's Finance and Citywide Projects Committee, told RE: Miami Beach he hasn't seen all the numbers yet but "One of the things that is abundantly clear to me is we cannot have a City budget that is based on a premise that property values have to increase 7% to handle city service levels. We have to grow government at a much slower rate than 7% because that's unsustainable. It puts too much pressure on the City Commission to embrace new development just to meet its annual funding needs. We have to slow down the rapid pace of government growth of the last few years.

With the preliminary property appraisal numbers – the final numbers come out July 1 – the gap between revenues and expenses in the General Fund is estimated to be \$4.9 million. (Each percentage increase in property value equals \$1.7 million according to Woodruff's presentation at the budget retreat.) That is the gap if the City continues to use \$1.2 million in money from the Parking Fund which it has tried to ween itself off of in recent years.

The Parking Fund is one of the enterprise funds in which revenue is used to cover the costs of a system (e.g. Parking, Sanitation, Stormwater, Water and Sewer). In the case of the Parking Fund, the City has, in

the past, used revenue over and above its costs for the General Fund. The amount has been reduced from a high of \$8.4 million in FY 2014, 2015, and 2016 to \$1.2 million in FY 2019.

“Over the last few years, the Parking Fund has seen substantial decreases in parking utilization due to the popularity of ride share services,” Woodruff told RE:MiamiBeach in an email. “As a result, our goal is to reduce the contribution to the General Fund to zero in the near future.”

If the City does not continue with the \$1.2 million supplement from the parking fund this year, the budget gap would be \$6.1 million. The City’s total budget in FY 2019 was \$680.1 million which breaks down as a \$631.4 million operating budget and a capital budget of \$48.7 million.

The final property tax numbers are due on July 1. Woodruff told RE:MiamiBeach, “Last year the numbers increased from 3.4% to 4.0%. We hope the July 1st number increases from 3.0% to closer to 3.5%.”

While Miami Beach is less reliant on property taxes than other municipalities due to its resort tax, Woodruff told Commissioners at their retreat that the City’s reliance on the resort tax to fund general operating expenses has gone up over time which “means we are taking on more risk.” In FY 2019, the resort tax transfer to the general fund was 11%. In 2007, it was 8%.

As to resort tax collections this year, he said he’s waiting one more month to get a better idea of the trends. “Since beginning of the fiscal year we haven’t seen the kind of growth I thought would happen. We’re barely making budget,” he said.

In the meantime, he said, costs have gone up, “but our revenues haven’t really increased, so something has to give.”

“There’s a lot of pressure on new programs and enhancements at a time when property values are not growing a whole lot,” Woodruff told Commissioners.

As to where the City’s money goes, 74% of general fund expenditures go to personnel and salaries. Woodruff noted that public safety as a percentage of the general fund budget has increased from 50% to 58% since 2007. When trimming the budget, Woodruff told Commissioners, “You tend to not cut in public safety.” He noted some of the increased costs were due to the Emergency Management Department being moved into the Fire Department.

Miami Beach Police Chief Dan Oates reminded Commissioners they added “25 police officer positions alone in the last five years” which “explains that number.” Fire Chief Virgil Fernandez noted that the addition of the North Beach fire station and lifeguard towers are also reflected.

The preliminary budget does not include an additional \$2.6 million Oates said would be necessary to fund additional Spring Break police costs at a level equal to emergency measures taken this year to enhance police presence in the Entertainment District. Any allocation for Spring Break would come from the Resort Tax Fund, Woodruff said. Currently budgeted, \$1.1 million. Added to the \$2.6 million

enhancement request during March, the total request is \$3.7 million.

“It’s clearly unworkable to have a \$4 million enhancement for police presence during Spring Break,” Arriola told RE:MiamiBeach. “So, we’re going to have to find another path. And that path will include things such as alternative programming which has been shown to work during other busy periods.” When asked about Oates’ comments at the budget retreat that there will be a transition period during the initial years of alternative programming as Spring Breakers will expect the same type of atmosphere as previous years, Arriola said, “I disagree.”

Woodruff told Commissioners the average expenditure growth since FY 2007 is 3.2%. In an email, Woodruff acknowledged the growth since FY 2014 has averaged 5.5% though he noted “the average of the previous seven years is 1.6%.” The Consumer Price Index (CPI) averaged 2.2% during the same 12 year period.

The City’s average daily resident population is 92,000 but, according to Woodruff, the average daily population is “probably over 200,000” when you add visitors into the equation. “That average daily population has grown a lot,” he told Commissioners. That average daily population needs to be taken into account when considering how the budget has increased. If not, “you’re going to get skewed” data, he said.

“The budget per Average Daily Population has increased by less than 1% since FY 2007,” Woodruff said. With the increase in visitors, “services can feel degraded” and the City feels “not as clean. The budget really hasn’t kept up with that.”

The number of City jobs has increased by 30 since FY 2007, Woodruff told Commissioners. “And I’m pretty sure we’re providing a helluva lot of service more than once upon a time.” The preliminary FY 2020 budget includes \$6 million in “inflationary” costs, pensions, pay increases, cost of living adjustments, and an 8% increase in health insurance, along with some annualized expenditures such as the new STEAM Plus educational program and the overnight police captain for the Entertainment District.

Arriola told RE:MiamiBeach, “Clearly, we have to be more aggressive in trimming government payroll. Frankly there are departments and people working at City Hall and I don’t have a clue as to what they do.” He’s advocating for a zero based budgeting approach “where you start your year from zero and rebuild your budget so that you’re justifying every person in your department at their salary level and every expense because that imposes discipline on the organization versus what we do which is carry over things from the previous year and adding 7 percent... that is not sustainable.”

The millage rate, or property tax, is at the “lowest in the history of Miami Beach and is 34% less than in FY 1999 and 23% less than in FY2007,” Woodruff said at the budget retreat. The preliminary FY 2020 budget assumes no change in the operating millage rate of 5.7288. [To calculate property taxes, you multiply the mill rate by the property value and divide by 1,000.]

With debt service on the GO Bonds approved by voters, taxes will “start to inch up” he said to cover the debt service. Because the bonds are being issued in tranches, the increases will be spread out over 10-12 years but, he noted, “We’re not going to have the lowest millage rate anymore in the City of Miami Beach.” The new millage rate will be adopted on July 31.

Woodruff presented Commissioners with ideas for potential new revenue sources including indexing some fees to CPI, advertising opportunities on the exterior of the trolleys which is being piloted now, as well as naming rights for the new Convention Center.

In an email exchange asking about the potential value of a Convention Center sponsorship, Woodruff said, “Based on the comparative information, a range of \$1 million to \$5 million annually seems reasonable.” He expects Commissioners to consider a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for firms that have experience in advertising and sponsorship opportunities at their July meeting.

In the meantime, he said, “We are researching the [Convention Center] naming rights with our Legal Department.” Naming rights would require a referendum but questions remain as to if a specific name would require approval and, if so, would a new referendum be needed whenever there was a sponsor / name change.

Commissioners will get their next budget update on June 14.

MIAMI BEACH HAS RECOVERED HALF OF ITS STOLEN \$3.6 MILLION, BUT MADE NO ARRESTS

MIAMI HERALD

Joey Flechas
April 6, 2017

About four months have passed since the revelation that \$3.6 million had been siphoned from a city bank account, a theft that went unnoticed by the City Hall's finance department during the six months that it was going on, and now city officials say about half of the money has been recovered.

City Manager Jimmy Morales reported this week that \$1.8 million has been recovered so far -- \$726,435 in the last month. In a memo to commissioners, he said law enforcement has helped the city recover the money.

"The administration continues to work with with the U.S. Attorney's office, the FBI and **Miami Beach** police to aggressively recapture all the funds," he wrote. Morales declined to answer more specific questions by the Miami Herald, including how and where the last \$726,435 increment was recovered, citing the open criminal investigation.

Miami Beach police would only confirm that no arrests have been made and that the investigation is still active.

The money was stolen from the city's SunTrust Bank account through fraudulent automatic payments over the course of six months last year. Someone used the city's bank account information to set up transfers the same way one would arrange automatic payments from a checking account to pay regular bills.

After the theft was uncovered in December, two employees in the finance department resigned. Morales has said they are not suspected of theft, but they should have noticed the fraudulent transfers earlier. The city's chief financial officer Allison Williams demoted herself. The city named former budget director **John Woodruff** the new CFO in February. Woodruff recently filled two new financial analyst positions created this year.

Two financial consulting firms are studying the finance department's internal controls and procedures.

The account that was plundered holds dollars collected from resorts taxes, parking fees, red light camera fines and liens. Its daily balance ranged from \$46 million to \$144 million. The city immediately closed the account when the theft was detected in December and opened a new one with fraud control.

MIAMI BEACH HIRES FORMER BUDGET DIRECTOR AS NEW CFO IN WAKE OF BANK FRAUD SCANDAL

MIAMI HERALD

Joey Flechas
January 17, 2017

A day after Miami Beach's chief financial officer got a demotion following the theft of \$3.6 million from a city bank account that went undetected for six months, City Manager Jimmy Morales announced he is bringing a former budget director back to lead the city's struggling finance department.

John Woodruff, who left his position in the Beach in the spring of 2016 to become management and budget director in his hometown of San Antonio, will return at the end of January. City commissioners approved the appointment Wednesday.

He will replace Allison Williams, who was promoted from chief accountant to CFO in the fall of 2015. Her promotion came after the previous CFO and assistant finance director were forced to resign when they were found to have manipulated leave time to benefit future payouts upon leaving the city.

Morales publicly addressed the commission for the first time since it was revealed that \$3.6 million was siphoned out of a bank account through unauthorized automatic payments.

"There is no denying we should have caught this earlier," he said. "There was clearly human error and non-action that contributed to this."

Morales, a former politician and first-time administrator who has run the city's day-to-day operations since the spring of 2013, apologized for his administration's failure to catch the problem earlier — an oversight that will blemish his record.

"Although I personally believe I did nothing to contribute to this event, the buck clearly stops at my desk," he said. "It's my job to take responsibility."

Woodruff worked for the city for three years before leaving last year. In November 2014, he was suspended for three days without pay after he made a mistake on the public notice advertising the amount of taxes that would be collected for the Center City Redevelopment Area. He briefly served as interim CFO before Williams was named to the position. During that period, he oversaw a large bond issuance to pay for the \$600 million renovation of the Miami Beach Convention Center.

Commissioners did not comment on the issues, citing an open criminal investigation of the bank theft being pursued by the FBI and the police department.

"While it's difficult to be patient, I don't think it's appropriate for us to comment on it until the investigation is complete," Commissioner John Elizabeth Alemán said.

MIAMI BEACH LAUNCHES ONLINE TOOL FOR EXPLORING CITY FINANCES

MIAMI HERALD

Joey Flechas
June 4, 2015

Miami Beach has launched a new online tool residents to explore the city's finances on the web.

Through a platform called OpenGov, anyone can dive into the city's revenues and expenditures from 2009 through the current fiscal year. The website, [opengov.com](#), will cost the city \$24,975 annually.

It features several visualizations of how the city budgets its money, with graphs and percentages. While it doesn't break down the expenses to the nitty-gritty specifics -- you can see how much money it set aside for the Normandy Shores Golf Course, but not exactly what was purchased -- the platform offers a wealth of information to query, comparison from year to year and links to the city's full budget books.

John Woodruff, director of the Beach's Office of Budget and Performance Improvement, said in a statement that the site is a good resource to track changes to the city's finances over time.

"Maintaining budget data on OpenGov's platform answers frequently asked questions, such as what has the city spent on police over the past five years or how have tax revenues changed over the past five years," he said.

The city of Miami . Miami and the Beach are among two of 16 governments in Florida that use OpenGov.

Contact

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Top Skills

Performance Management
Program Budgeting
Strategic Planning

Languages

Spanish

John Woodruff

CFO at City of Miami Beach
Miami-Fort Lauderdale Area

Experience

City of Miami Beach
CFO
January 2017 - Present (4 years 3 months)

City of San Antonio
Budget Director
March 2016 - October 2016 (8 months)

City of Miami Beach
Budget Director
June 2013 - March 2016 (2 years 10 months)
Miami/Fort Lauderdale Area

Panama Realtor Property Management Services
Co-Owner
August 2012 - June 2013 (11 months)
Panama City, Panama

Pinellas County Government
10 years 4 months
Budget Director
April 2007 - July 2012 (5 years 4 months)

Management & Budget Manager
April 2002 - April 2007 (5 years 1 month)

City of San Antonio
4 years 4 months
Senior Budget & Management Analyst
February 2000 - April 2002 (2 years 3 months)

Budget & Management Analyst
January 1998 - February 2000 (2 years 2 months)

Education

The University of Texas at Austin
BA History, Geography · (1989 - 1993)

The University of Texas at San Antonio
MBA, International Business · (1995 - 1997)