CITY OF LAKELAND

Finance Director

The Position

The City of Lakeland, Florida, is seeking an experienced, strategic, and service-oriented municipal finance leader to serve as its next Finance Director. This is a high-impact executive role in a growing full-service city with complex operations that include general government, major utilities, and other enterprise activities. The next Finance Director will join a well-managed organization and serve as a key strategic partner to the City Manager, elected officials, and department leadership on the decisions that shape the City's long-term financial position, capital capacity, and public service delivery.

Reporting to the City Manager, the Finance Director serves as the senior executive responsible for the administration and management of the Finance Department. The Director leads the City's financial functions across central accounting, treasury, payroll, accounts payable, customer billing, retirement services, records, and City Clerk operations, oversees the preparation of financial and statistical reports, the annual budget process, preparation of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, revenue and expenditure forecasting, debt issuance support, investment oversight, and compliance with bond and loan covenants. This role works closely with the City Commission, City leadership, pension boards, collective bargaining groups, financial advisors, investment bankers, legal counsel, auditors, rating agencies, and other stakeholders, and is expected to provide candid, well-grounded advice on matters that affect the City's financial strategy, bargaining posture, capital planning, and long-range decision-making.

The Finance Director supervises the Assistant Finance Director, City Clerk, Retirement Services Manager, Human Resource Management Systems Manager, City Treasurer, and one support position across a department budgeted for 47 positions. The Director is expected to bring clear judgment, technical depth, political awareness without politics, and strong leadership to a function that supports citywide decision-making, helps maintain internal controls, and advances efficient, accurate, and transparent financial operations. This is a visible role for a leader who can move confidently between executive-level strategy, public discussions, and the practical realities of a working department.

Priorities

- Serve as a credible, forward-looking financial strategist to the City Manager, City Commission, and department directors on budgeting, forecasting, debt, investments, labor impacts, and major policy decisions.
- Strengthen cross-department partnerships so departments receive timely, practical financial guidance, sound internal controls, and clear support on operating decisions, capital planning, and budget development.
- Lead a broad Finance portfolio that includes accounting, treasury, payroll, accounts payable, customer billing, retirement services, records management, and City Clerk functions while maintaining accuracy, responsiveness, and accountability across core operations.
- Develop staff, build bench strength, and help position the department for continuity in a period of leadership transition within Finance and longer-term succession needs.
- Provide disciplined financial analysis in collective bargaining and other sensitive decision settings and help the City prepare for emerging issues including changes in state law, tax policy, and other external factors that may affect revenues, service levels, reporting requirements, or workforce planning.

The Successful Candidate

The successful candidate will be a steady, trusted public sector leader who combines strong technical finance skills with sound judgment, strategic perspective, and clear communication. They will demonstrate the ability to advise elected and appointed officials on sensitive financial matters with accuracy, sound judgment, candor, and professionalism. They will have the confidence and integrity to provide organizational leaders with the information and recommendations they need to make informed decisions, even when those perspectives may differ from what they want to hear. The next Finance Director will be able to move easily between long-range planning and day-to-day operational oversight, bringing discipline to processes while keeping service to internal and external customers in view.

The ideal candidate will bring strong knowledge of municipal accounting, budgeting, financial reporting, debt administration, investments, financial forecasting, pensions, and risk assessment. They will be able to explain complex issues in plain language, anticipate questions, build credibility over time, and maintain productive relationships with auditors, advisors, regulators, department leaders, and bargaining stakeholders. The City will benefit from a leader who understands how to finance major needs from multiple sources, appreciates the operating realities of public safety and enterprise functions, is comfortable learning new technologies and systems, and promotes a culture of accountability, continuous improvement, and high-quality public service.

Qualifications

Minimum qualifications include a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in accounting and eight years of progressively responsible accounting experience, including four years of experience in finance, debt issuance, investment activities, and management. Candidates should offer significant experience in complex local government finance and the judgment to operate effectively in a highly visible executive role.

Preferred qualifications include an active Certified Public Accountant credential or a master's degree in accounting. Experience in Florida local government finance is strongly preferred, including familiarity with state laws, financial disclosure requirements, debt management, and the fiscal context for collective bargaining and millage-related decision-making. Candidates from outside Florida should be prepared to describe how they would quickly get up to speed on the state's legal and operating environments. The selected candidate will be required to file financial disclosure in accordance with Florida law.

The Community

Located along the Interstate 4 corridor between Tampa and Orlando, Lakeland is the largest city between two major metropolitan areas and a community with a distinctive identity of its own. With approximately 124,725 residents and a growth rate more than four times the recent national average, Lakeland is experiencing the opportunities and challenges that come with being one of Florida's fastest-growing communities.

Founded in 1885, Lakeland takes its name from the 38 named lakes that shape its landscape and contribute to the city's unique sense of place. Today, Lakeland blends historic character with a dynamic economy, thriving cultural amenities, and an exceptional quality of life. Its strategic location provides convenient access to the resources and opportunities of both Tampa and Orlando while maintaining the advantages of a connected, community-oriented city.

Lakeland's diverse population reflects the broader growth and vitality of Central Florida.

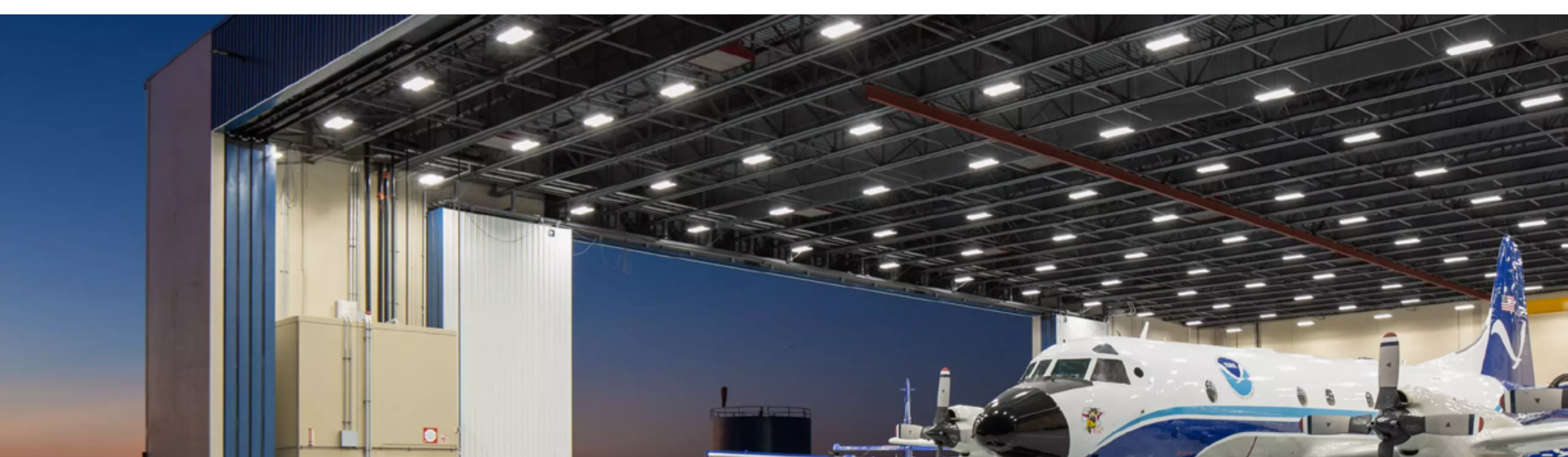
A Distinctive Quality of Life

Lakeland offers an impressive combination of natural beauty, culture, recreation, and community amenities. Downtown Lakeland, often described as "Lakeland's living room", features historic architecture, local restaurants, craft breweries, shops, and a vibrant arts scene.

The city's architectural and educational heritage is nationally recognized. Florida Southern College is home to the world's largest single-site collection of Frank Lloyd Wright architecture created for a single client, and its campus is designated a National Historic Landmark. Lakeland is also home to Southeastern University and Florida Polytechnic University, helping develop a highly educated workforce and contributing thousands of graduates to the region each year.

Baseball has been part of Lakeland's identity for generations. The 2026 season marks the Detroit Tigers' 90th spring training season in Lakeland, representing the longest-standing relationship between a Major League Baseball team and a current spring training city. Beyond baseball, residents enjoy a broad range of cultural experiences, including the annual Mayfaire by the Lake art festival, performances and events at the historic Polk Theatre, and public art throughout the community. More than 60 sculptures and murals are permanently displayed in parks and City facilities.

Lakeland's parks and natural spaces further distinguish the community. The City's Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Arts Department maintains more than 70 parks and recreation venues. The 168-acre Bonnet Springs Park, a signature community destination, has received national recognition, while Circle B Bar Reserve, Fort Fraser Trail, Lake Mirror Park, Hollis Garden, and Lakeland's extensive network of lakes provide year-round opportunities for recreation and outdoor enjoyment.



A Strong and Diversifying Economy

Lakeland's central location and transportation infrastructure have established the city as a major regional center for manufacturing, distribution, logistics, health care, education, and tourism.

The community is home to more than 28 million square feet of industrial and warehouse space, supporting more than 12,500 jobs in supply chain and logistics. Lakeland Linder International Airport is the third largest in cargo handling in Florida and is a significant economic driver for the region. Its business park supports more than 3,000 jobs, with Amazon Air playing a major role in the airport's continued growth.

Lakeland is also home to Publix Super Markets, one of the nation's largest employee-owned companies and one of the region's major employers. The local economy continues to diversify through growth in medical device manufacturing, packaging and sterilization services, health care, financial services, higher education, technology, and businesses connected to Central Florida's longstanding citrus and agricultural industries.

This economic diversity, combined with continued population growth and significant investment, positions Lakeland as an increasingly important regional center within Central Florida.

Growth, Opportunity and Affordability

Lakeland's growth and quality of life have attracted increasing national recognition. The Lakeland-Winter Haven metropolitan area ranked No. 31 on the Milken Institute's 2025 Best-Performing Cities list, recognized for job and wage growth and high-tech economic performance. Lakeland also ranked No. 92 on U.S. News & World Report's 2026 Best Places to Retire list and No. 10 in This Old House's ranking of the best cities for snowbirds. WalletHub ranked Lakeland among the nation's most affordable small cities for homebuyers.

For professionals considering a move to Lakeland, the community offers a compelling balance of economic opportunity, affordability, exceptional amenities, and accessibility. Residents can enjoy the resources of two major metropolitan areas within easy reach while benefiting from a community that retains its own character, relationships, and sense of place.

The Organization

Lakeland operates under a commission-manager form of government. The public elects a Mayor and six City Commissioners, and the City Commission appoints the City Manager to oversee day-to-day operations and appoint department directors. According to the City's adopted FY2026 budget, the City employs 2,719 people and operates with a total FY2026 budget of $815 million, including approximately $190 million in General Fund expenses.

Lakeland is a full-service city with a broad operating profile that includes traditional local government functions as well as major enterprise-type activities such as Lakeland Electric, water and wastewater utilities, an international airport, a 27-hole golf course, and the RP Funding Center, a multi-purpose arena, performing arts theater, and convention and meeting facility. This operating environment requires a Finance Director who can support both public-sector accountability and the business realities of large-scale service delivery.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Vision

Lakeland - a vibrant, innovative, culturally inclusive world-class community.

Mission

A community working together to achieve an exceptional quality of life.

Values

- **Social Responsibility** - Enhance the quality of life for all citizens through partnerships and programs that embrace cultural diversity, safety, and community involvement.
- **Leadership** - Lead by example, learn from the past, provide direction for the present, and plan for the future.
- **Integrity** - Conduct ourselves in an honest and ethical manner to earn the trust of employees and citizens.
- **Commitment to Excellence** - Achieve measurable success and continuous improvement through investment of resources, focus on efficiency and accountability, and high expectations for quality.
- **Empowered Workforce** - Cultivate a work environment with supportive leadership, mutual respect, trust, personal responsibility, and open communications.
- **Diversity** - Utilize ethnic, cultural, gender, and experiential differences to encourage participation, opportunity, equality, respect, and responsiveness to the community.

These guiding principles shape Lakeland's goals, such as fostering economic opportunity, improving communication, managing finances effectively, ensuring quality growth, enhancing quality of life, and providing responsive governance.

Inside the Finance Department

The Finance Department manages, controls, and reports on the financial affairs of the City and partners closely with departments across the organization to develop budgets, implement internal controls, and establish policies and procedures that safeguard City assets. Based on the City's FY2026 adopted budget, the department's approved FY2026 budget is $2.74 million. The department is budgeted for 47 positions, including 46 full-time employees and 1 part-time employee.

The department's functions include central accounting, accounts payable, payroll, HRMS support, customer billing, treasury, retirement services, records management, and City Clerk operations. The Finance Director leads a management structure that includes the Assistant Finance Director, City Treasurer, City Clerk, Retirement Services Manager, and other division leaders across these functions. The role is expected to be hands-on and engaged, with the judgment to stay at the right level while understanding the operational details that drive sound financial management across the organization.

Collective bargaining is an important part of the City's operating environment. For this search, the City has identified the following bargaining units and covered employee groups: the Utility Workers Union of America for Lakeland Electric employees, the Fraternal Order of Police for Police Officer, Police Sergeant, and Police Lieutenant positions, and the International Association of Fire Fighters for Firefighter, Driver Engineer, and Lieutenant positions. The Finance Director supports the City Manager in collective bargaining and must be prepared to provide disciplined financial analysis, long-term perspective, and sound advice in that setting.

Lakeland's leadership culture is described as stable, collegial, and highly professional. Senior leaders are expected to work collaboratively, communicate directly, and support one another while keeping the City Manager and elected officials well informed. The organization values trusted advisors who can carry forward decisions once made, contribute constructively in public settings, and help improve systems, processes, and service over time.

Compensation and Benefits

The pay range is $167,611 - $284,940, depending on qualifications.

The City of Lakeland is committed to attracting and retaining talented professionals by offering a comprehensive benefits package designed to support employees throughout their careers. Employees have access to a comprehensive benefits package that includes medical, dental, and vision insurance, with employee and employer contributions toward coverage. Employees enrolled in a City medical plan also have access to an onsite wellness clinic. The City offers an exceptional retirement and financial benefits package, including membership in the City's retirement system and optional deferred compensation plans with opportunities for both employee and employer contributions, supporting employees in planning for their long-term financial security.

The City also supports work-life balance and personal well-being through 11 paid holidays, one personal day, vacation leave, and sick leave, giving employees time to recharge and attend to the things that matter most. Professional growth is encouraged through tuition reimbursement, while military leave supports employees who serve our nation and state.

The City of Lakeland invests in its people, supporting their health, financial security, professional growth, and future, while providing opportunities to make a meaningful and lasting impact on the community.

How to Apply

Applications will be accepted electronically by Raftelis at raftelis.com. Candidates should submit a cover letter and resume. **The position is open until filled.**

Questions

Please direct questions to Anne Lewis at alewis@raftelis.com or Kelsey Batt at kbatt@raftelis.com.