

Should Holyoke elect its city treasurer?

Voters will decide this month

- Jan. 09, 2025, 9:01 p.m. [Story source: MassLive.com](#)

- [Aprell May Munford | AMunford@repub.com](#)

HOLYOKE — In just three weeks, Holyoke residents will head to the polls to decide if the city treasurer should continue to be an elected position or transition to an appointment by the City Council.

City Hall supports the move to an appointed position, citing improvement to the city's financial and administrative operations, and because it's recommended by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue and the IRS.

Because the outcome of this special election will shape Holyoke's financial future, Mayor Joshua Garcia, council members and Rory Casey, the current city treasurer, held a press conference Thursday to discuss the vote's specifics.

Garcia said previous annual audits indicate that the treasurer's office has been responsible for many of the city's material weaknesses.

"The heart of the work is protecting public funds, safeguarding local assets and adhering to financial standards and regulations," Garcia said.

Asking voters to decide if the position is elected or appointed is a part of broader plan to modernize Holyoke's financial practices, Garcia said.

Other federal and state recommendations include improving financial reporting, streamlining operations, and adopting advanced financial management systems.

City Council President Tessa Murphy Romboletti emphasized that the press conference aimed to inform, not sway, voters, ensuring they had enough information to decide.

"This is about good governance, plain and simple," she said. "It is something we believe is very important for the public to consider."

The effort also has unanimous support from the City Council, she said.

Casey also is an advocate for the move. With over a decade of annual [audits](#), three different financial analyses and two scathing reports about the treasurer's office, Casey said, the city needs to have systems in place, or at some point in the future, the city will have a financial disaster.

He noted that the treasurer manages a lot of money, and by law has sole access to these funds and can spend them without oversight.

"I'm the fourth elected treasurer over the past 10 years, and I hope I'm the last," Casey said in a statement Wednesday. "Most politicians run campaigns asking voters to be hired."

Instead, I'm asking the voters to fire me. The reason is simple: Our city deserves a better system."

He said the position of treasurer elect allows for public participation in the choosing of who holds the post, but candidates are not required to have specific expertise, which can limit the city's ability to address complex financial challenges.

The appointment would reduce the risk of frequent turnover because of elections, which also can disrupt long-term financial planning and stability.

The appointee would be accountable to the mayor and City Council, ensuring clear oversight and performance expectations, similar to the auditor, tax collector and city adviser.

If the vote passes, Casey will stay in the job until the first Monday of February 2026, unless he leaves earlier. Then, the council will appoint a new treasurer.

If voters keep the position elected, Casey will continue until the next municipal elections. However, Garcia warns that the city might face challenges in implementing IRS recommendations to improve financial operations.

Casey, appointed in September 2022 after the former treasurer left, hoped to resolve this issue within 18 months. However, since it's a charter change, Casey had to petition the court and legislators to get the question signed by governor and on the ballot.

Casey said, because there's an election this fall, the city needs to decide now if the position will be elected or appointed.

Of all 351 municipalities in the state, Holyoke is the only one that has a stand-alone elected treasure, Casey said, and the job has changed a lot since the city charter was written.

The responsibility today is to make sure millions of taxpayer dollars and funds are secure on a weekly basis. The office is under attack with phishing, scams and by other nefarious actors trying to get their hands on taxpayer money, he said.

"This (vote for appointed position) is the first domino to help achieve the goals we want to achieve to have the foundation we need, and all work day in and day out to have," Casey said.

Personnel Director Kelly A. Curran said elected officials are not vetted, but an appointed official is.

The professional qualifications of an appointed treasurer include financial knowledge, academic background and professional experience.

The current treasurer gets \$85,000 a year, but the city has not yet determined the salary schedule for an appointed position but said it's in the works.

Brenna Murphy Leary, city clerk and registrar of voters, said she anticipates voter turnout will be on the lower side, similar to other preliminary and municipal elections.

Residents can cast their ballot in person or by mail. The last day to register for the election is Jan. 18.