

## DID YOU KNOW?

The last time the City of Virginia Beach did a Market Rate study for it's wage structure was in 2011?

## HOW LOW ARE YOUR WAGES?

Find out inside this detailed report.

This report is compiled by:  
**the UE Research Department**



# WAGE MARKET STUDY

A report comparing City of Virginia Beach wages to other peer cities

March 2022





**ABOUT THIS REPORT**

This report was compiled by the UE Research Department through Public Records requests and by reviewing Collective Bargaining Agreements between city worker unions and the various municipalities.

We selected the cities in this report because they had a comparable population size and cost of living to City of Virginia Beach. Any true market rate study will consider these factors objectively, and not just review nearby cities and counties that are much smaller, where the cost of rent and all living expenses is significantly lower, and where the work load is also lower. We did not chose cities outside the general geographic region, given the political and cultural differences with the north east and west coast. The City of Cincinnati was the only city chosen outside of the southeast, because this is where City Manager Patrick Duhaney was most recently employed.

| City           | Population | Cost of Living |            |            |         |
|----------------|------------|----------------|------------|------------|---------|
|                |            | Nerdwallet     | SmartAsset | BestPlaces | Average |
| Virginia Beach | 459,470    | 100%           | 100%       | 100.0%     | 100%    |
| Baltimore      | 585,708    | 119%           | 108%       | 88.4%      | 105%    |
| Cincinnati     | 309,317    | 99%            | 80%        | 84.0%      | 88%     |
| Alexandria     | 159,467    | 174%           | 110%       | 135.8%     | 140%    |
| Raleigh        | 467,665    | 101%           | 88%        | 99.10%     | 96%     |
| Miami          | 442,241    | 121%           | 88%        | 118.5%     | 109%    |
| Louisville     | 782,969    | 99%            | 86%        | 86.8%      | 91%     |
| Durham         | 283,506    | 101%           | 86%        | 94.4%      | 94%     |
| Charlotte      | 874,579    | 104%           | 88%        | 96.5%      | 96%     |

In looking at this information, we realized that other than Alexandria, all the cities chosen are unionized. The two comparable cities in neighboring North Carolina, Raleigh and Charlotte, have also been bound by the same Jim Crow-era ban on public sector collective bargaining. However, our union, UE has had members in Raleigh since the 2006 sanitation workers strike, and in Charlotte since the 2013 union payroll deduction vote by City Council. Over this 15 or so years, UE members in those cities, through their constant collective action, have had a profound impact on raising the wages.

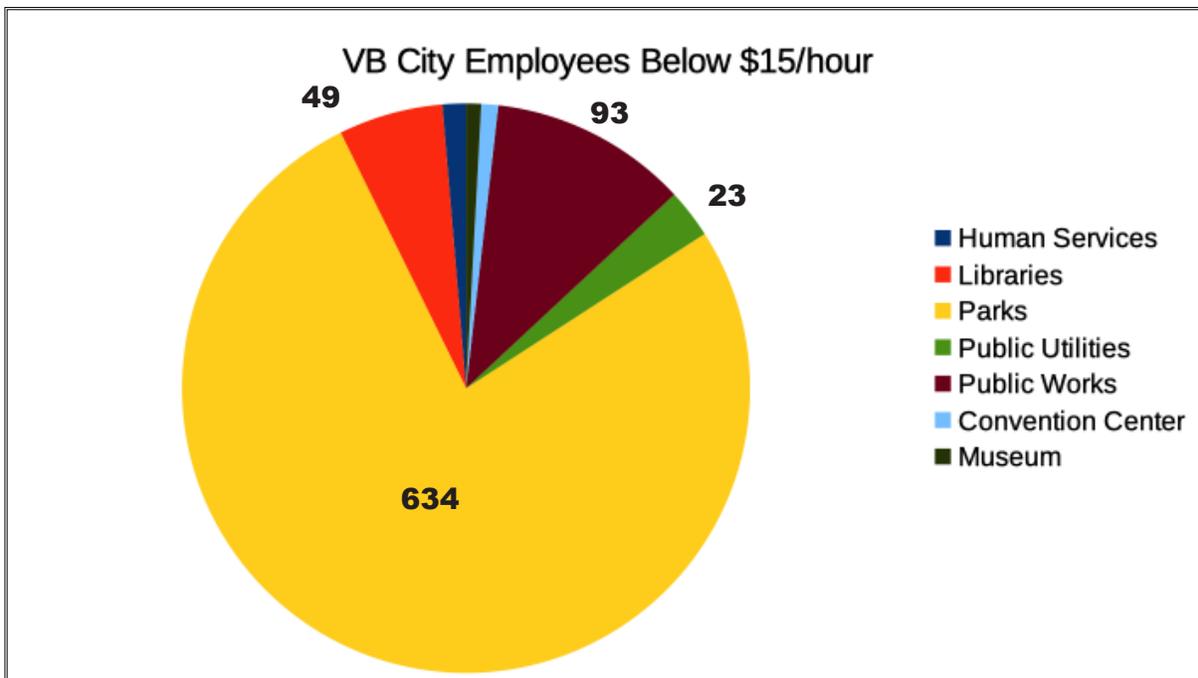
**UE Secures Minimum of \$15 per hour wages for all city employees**

It is to be noted, that all the cities where UE organizes in North Carolina, even where collective bargaining is illegal, the minimum wage for city employees was raised up to \$15 per hour two years ago including in Raleigh, Charlotte, Durham, Greensboro and Winston Salem. By now, most have minimum wage above \$16 per hour. Most also have a Step Pay Plan of annual wage increases on top of the base wage, allowing for more fair movement of workers up the wage scale. As of March 2022, City of Charlotte has a minimum wage of **\$18.50**, Raleigh’s minimum is **\$17.33**.

**Wage Scale Hides the Truth of Low Wages**

Looking at the wage scale alone, like in the City of Virginia Beach, hides the true inequality. Most workers without a union get stuck at the bottom of their wage scale, and never even reach the mid-point of their salary range. Without being organized in a union to demand fairness and annual across-the-board raises, in addition to merit, there are no checks and balances. For instance, the Virginia Beach wage scale claims that the maximum salary for a Waste Management Operator IV is \$61, 235. However, prior to the recent Waste Management work stoppage in August 25, 2020, the highest that any current employee earned was \$52,790, even those that started employment as far back as 1974, over 46 years ago!

# “A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats” Virginia Beach Remains One of Few Not to Have \$15/hr Minimum



Out of the 9 cities considered in our study, Virginia Beach is one of only 2 others that do not pay a minimum wage of \$15 per hour, which is increasingly becoming a national standard.

Reviewing the city’s wage data, we discovered that 825 city employees make less than \$15 per hour, with a particular high concentration in **Landscaping** and **Custodial** services, which are both overwhelmingly African American workforces.

Many local public employees in Virginia Beach cannot afford to live in the city they serve. Currently, a single person would need to make approximately **\$43,451** to afford a quality standard of living. Add one child into the mix, and the minimum salary needed raises to more than **\$65,000**. An employee raising two kids will need to make a minimum of **\$82,361**, according to a recent report by the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis.

**825**  
City employees make less than \$15/hr

**9 in 10**  
City employees could not attain an adequate standard of living on what they are paid if they have a single child.



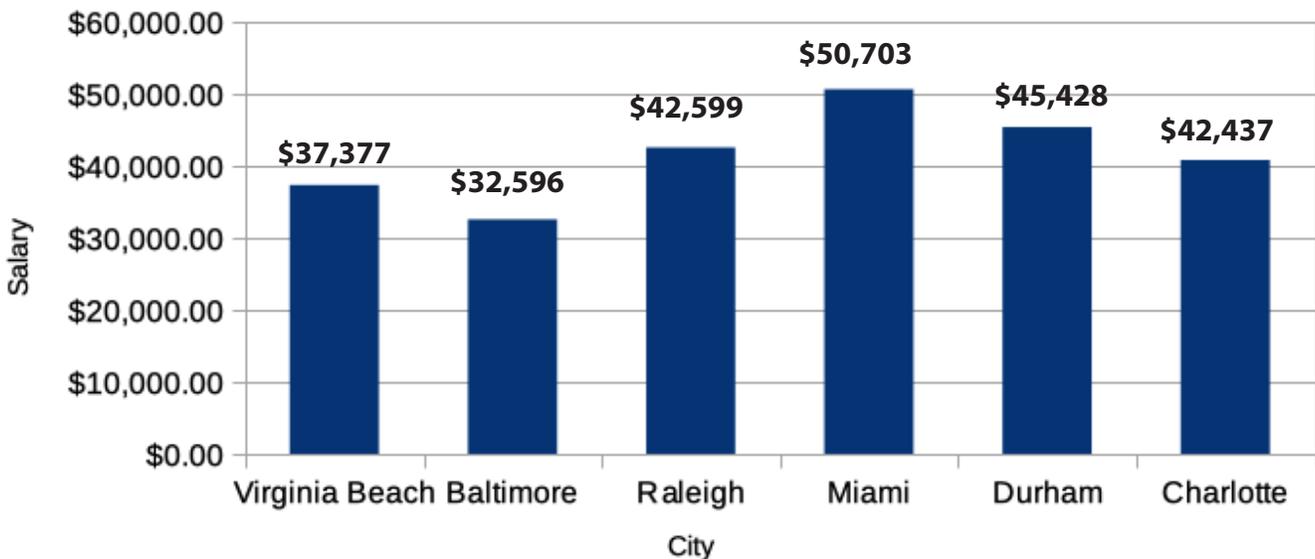
**JOKTAN "JOCK" HILL**  
*UTILITY MECHANIC AID*

*"WORKING AND LIVING IN VIRGINIA BEACH IS A MISMATCH. WITH OUR SALARIES STARTING OFF SO LOW, YOU CAN'T AFFORD A SINGLE FAMILY HOUSE. EVEN US, WITH A CDL-A LICENSE STARTING AT BASE SALARY JUST OVER \$11 AND SOME CHANGE IS ATROCIOUS. I HAVE A FAMILY OF 5. MY BIGGEST CONCERN WITH MY FAMILY IS BUYING A HOUSE. I WOULD LIKE TO PUT MY FAMILY INTO A HOUSE, BUT I CANNOT AFFORD ONE ON THE WAGES I EARN WITH THE CITY."*

# UTILITY MECHANIC AID

Utility Mechanic Aide, Mid Range

VB is \$5,060 Below Market





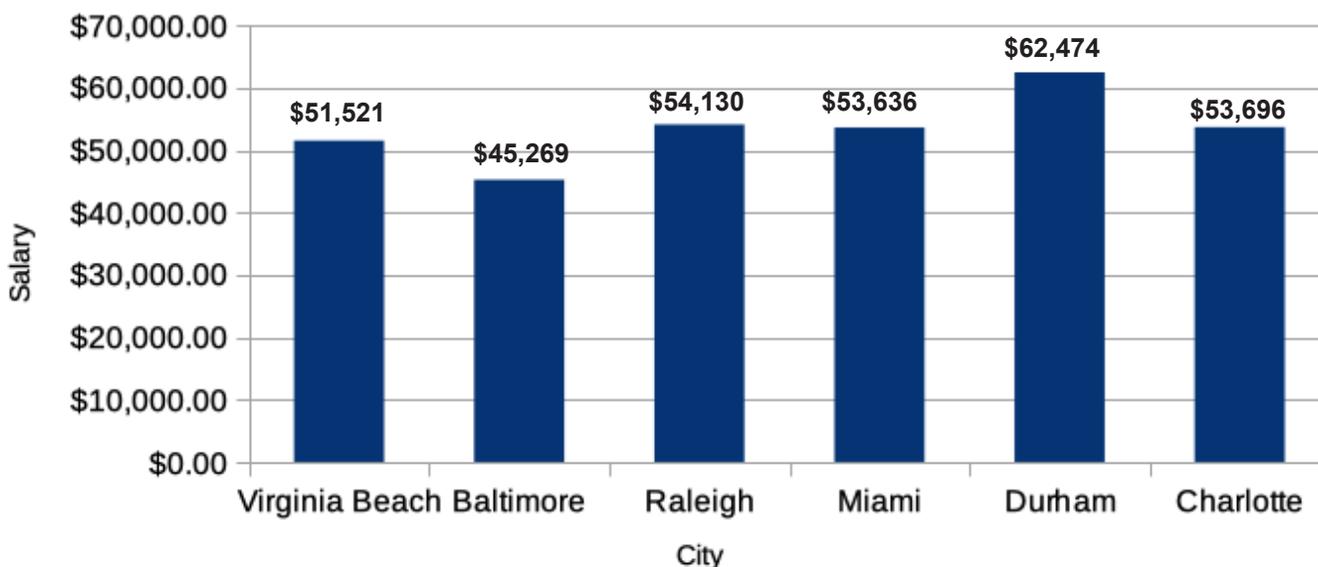
**STANLEY "BUTCH" NICHOLSON**  
*UTILITY MECHANIC 1*

*"LIFE IS HARD BUT FAIR. BUT IN THIS CASE IT IS HARD AND UNFAIR. EVERYTHING IS AFFECTED BY SEWER. WE ARE JUST AS ESSENTIAL AS FIRE AND POLICE BUT DON'T GET PAID LIKE THEY DO. IT'S DETRIMENTAL BECAUSE WITHOUT SEWER, THE CITY WON'T FUNCTION EITHER. WE ARE ESSENTIAL FOR THE CITY TO RUN, BUT WE DON'T GET COMPENSATED FOR WHAT WE DO. THIS IS WHY WE NEED AN ENTIRELY NEW SCALE."*

## UTILITY MECHANIC 1

### Utility Mechanic, Max Salary

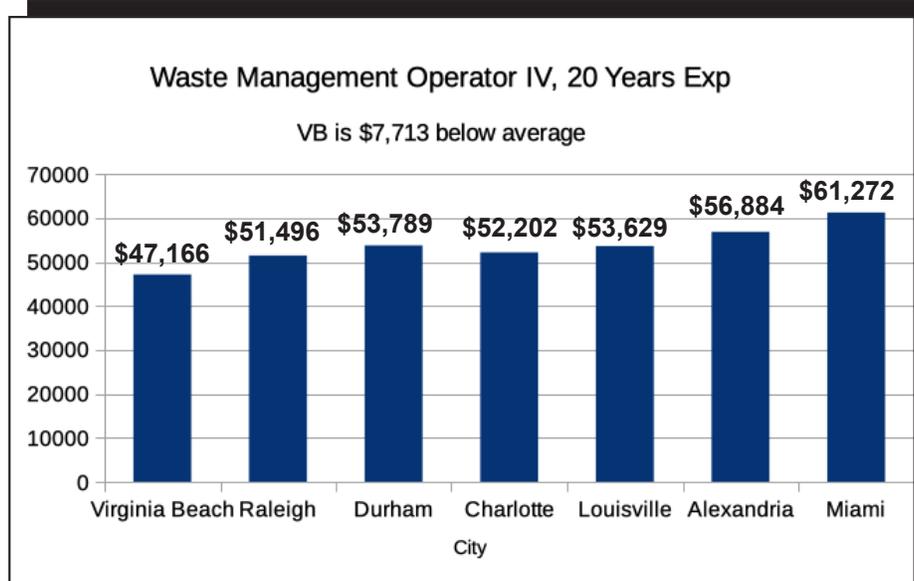
VB is \$2,319 Below Average





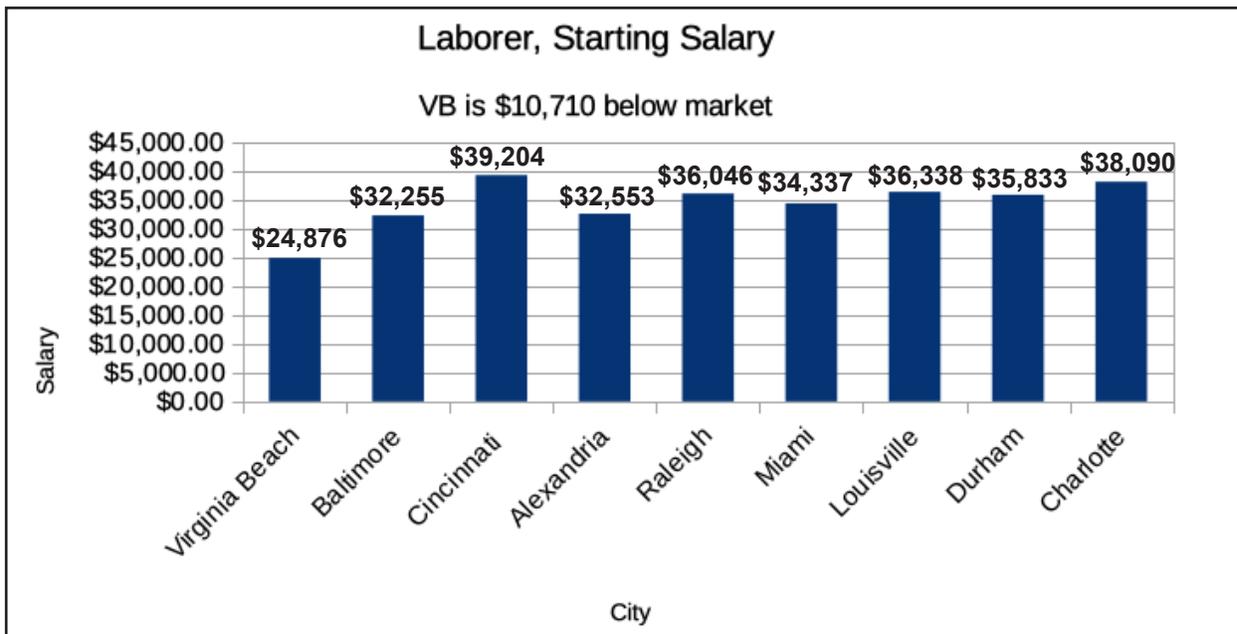
**Alfred "Red" McClenny,**  
Waste Management,  
Operator IV

# WASTE MANAGEMENT OPERATOR IV



*“Why are we overlooked? Why are we underpaid? We have to confront this systematic racism and racial disparity that manipulates the city’s decision making when it comes to social and economic equality. I feel collective bargaining is a step to help us bridge that racial divide.” - Red McClenny*

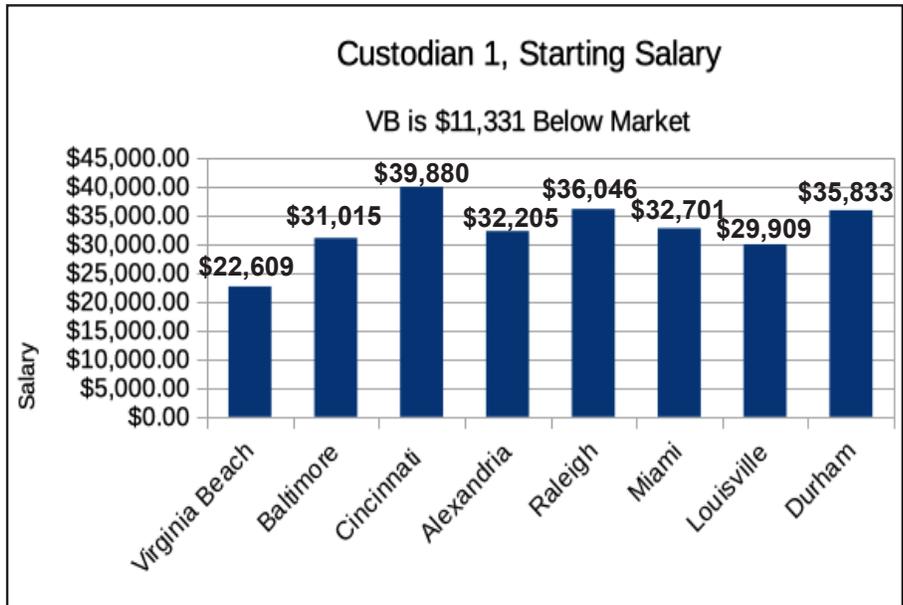
# LABORER





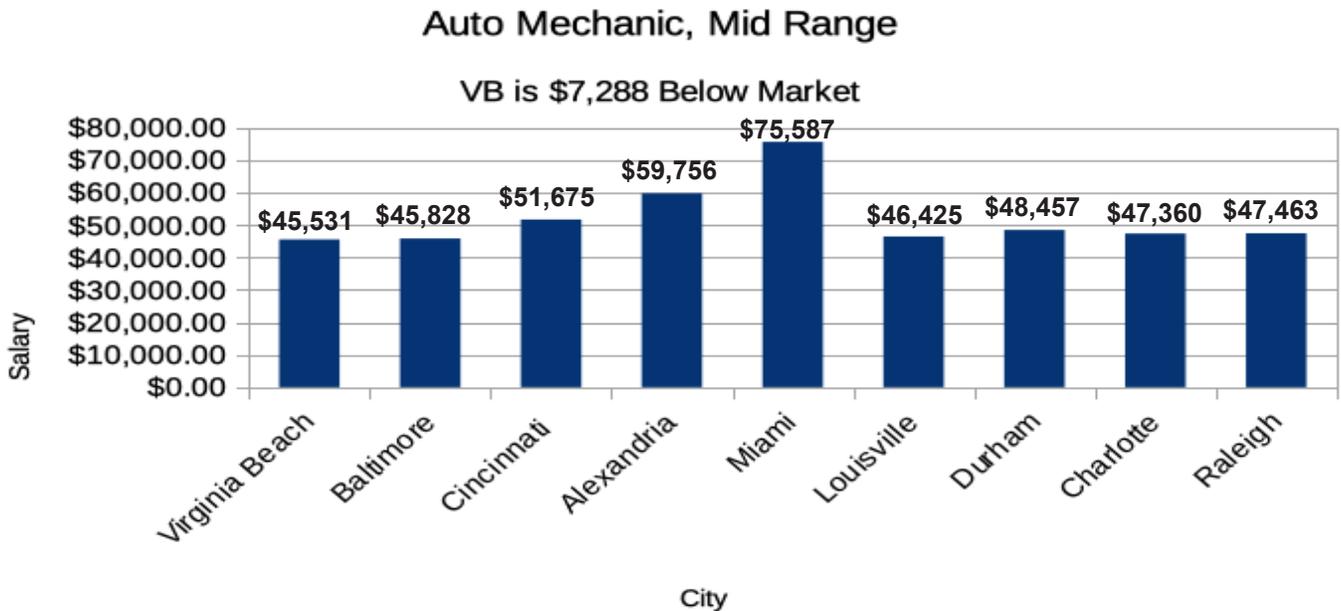
**George Stinson,**  
Utility Mechanic II,  
Sewer Collection and  
**Devon Conley,** Motor  
Equipment Operator II,  
Stormwater wear UE  
union masks.

# CUSTODIAN 1



A Custodian 1's Starting Salary is Below Market Average by **\$11,331**.

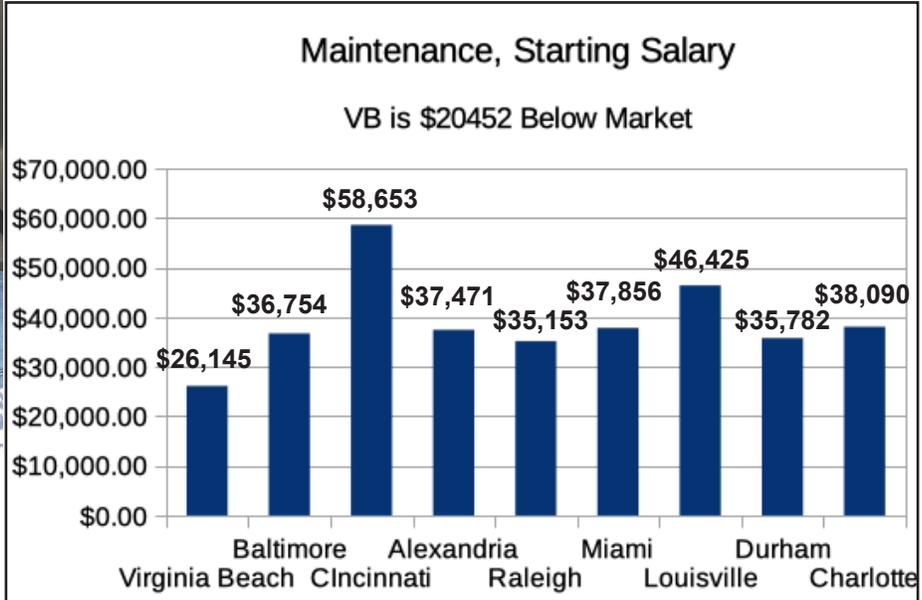
# AUTO MECHANIC 1, FLEET MANAGEMENT



# MAINTENANCE WORKER

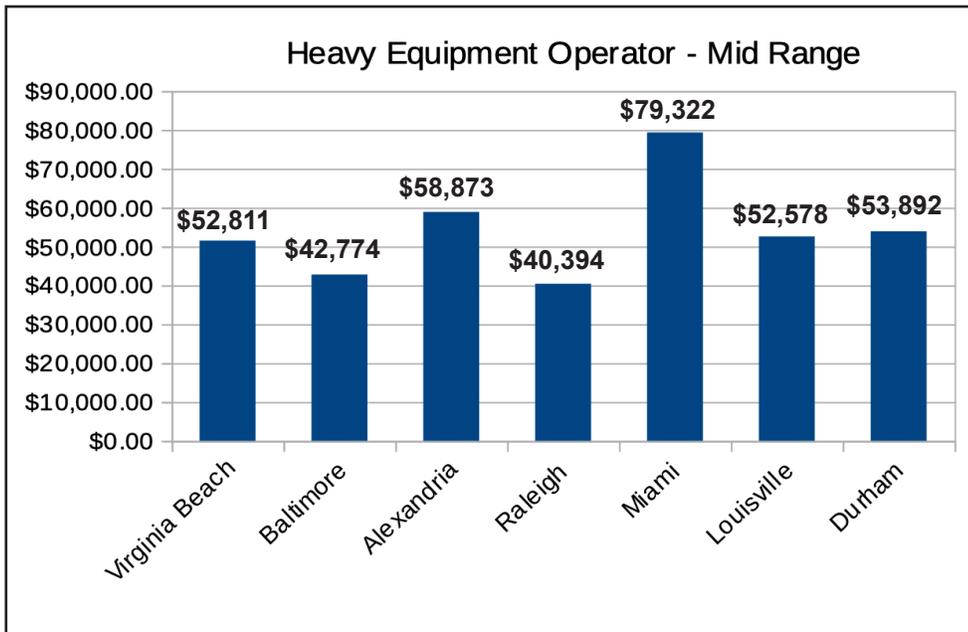


**Eric Ellerbe**  
Maintenance Worker  
Street Maintenance



A Maintenance Worker’s Starting Salary is Below Market Average by **\$20,452**.

# HEAVY EQUIPMENT OPERATOR



**HIGHLIGHTS:**  
Heavy Equipment Operator

VB = **\$52,811**

Avg. outside of VB = **\$54,638**

Amount VB is Below Average = **\$1,827**

Amount VB is Below Alexandria, VA = **\$6,061**

# HUMAN SERVICES, REGISTERED NURSE

Registered Nurse, Starting Salary

VB is \$3,778 Below Market

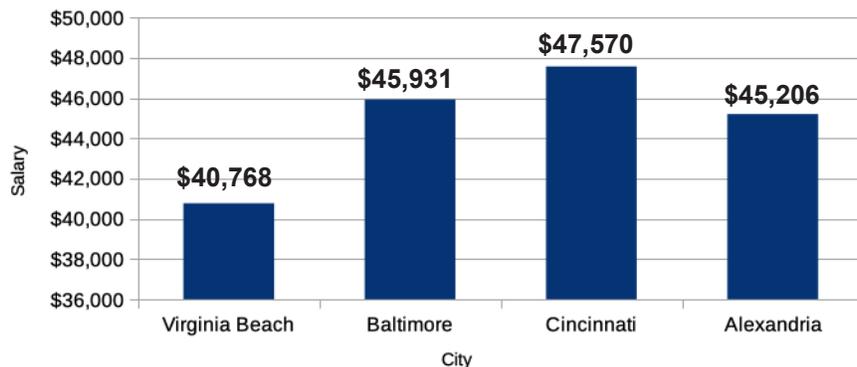


Tyra Jackson and Trina Love, BH/DS Assistants

# BEHAVIORAL SPECIALIST

Behavioral Specialist, Starting Salary

VB is \$5,467 Below Market

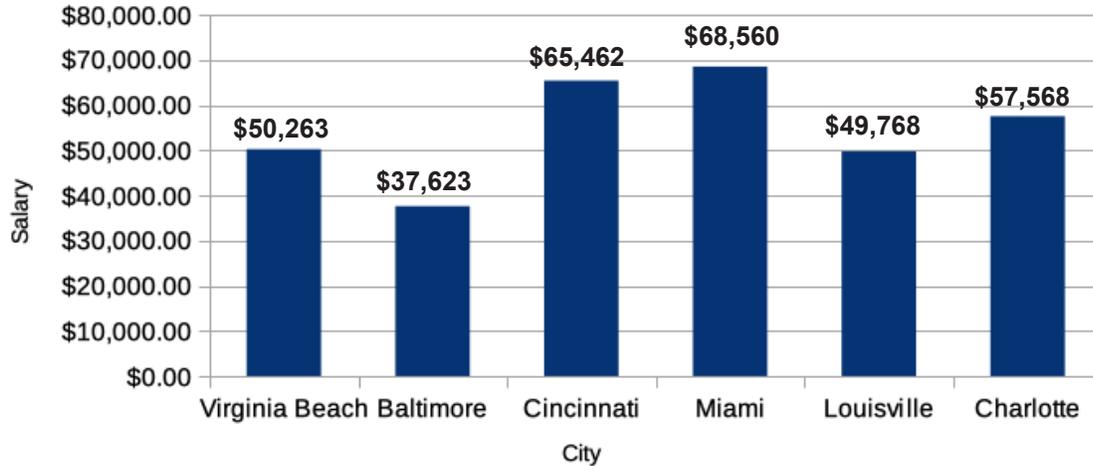


“We cannot hire or retain staff on these very low salaries. Workers can literally get a job at Walmart or Dunkin Donuts or Target, for more money with no necessary training, CDL, Healthcare Certifications or the risks we bear. Of course, we cannot retain good staff. Human Services has a major understaffing crisis right now. Many of us are being forced to stay overtime and pressured to work on weekends to cover.” **Patricia Thebert**, Behavior Specialist I, West Neck Intermediate Care Facility

# GENERAL MAINTENANCE, CARPENTER II

## Carpenter II, Mid Point

VB is \$5,533 Below Market



# HVAC TECHNICIAN II

## HVAC Technician II, Starting Salary

VB is \$6,571 Below Market



*“Every time we say the City can’t, they say they can. They took away our ability to earn comp time. Before that they took away our paid lunch breaks. They took away our ability to drive city vehicles home during standby. They cut our standby rate by more than half. They take little bits here and little bits there and it adds up. With a union contract they can’t take anything away from us without bargaining with us first. It’s a binding agreement.”* - **Matt Friesz**,  
Maintenance Engineer 1, Public Works, Resort Maintenance/Electrical



*“Working in the water department is becoming completely impossible due to so many staff leaving. The city used to have eight water crews, now we are down to less than three crews to cover the whole city. We are working lots of overtime to cover all the water main breaks and keep the water running for the residents. We need a real voice and a union to help retain staff and dignified working conditions.”*

- **Terry Green**, Utility Mechanic II,  
Water Distribution, Public Utilities, City of VA Beach



*“One of the major reasons we are losing so many staff and cannot hire new ones is because the wages are so low. Our union looked at all the major cities of similar size and cost of living in the mid-Atlantic region including Charlotte, Raleigh, Alexandria, and others and found that, for instance, for Maintenance Worker’s starting salary is below market average by \$20,452.”*

- **Devon Conley**, Motor Equipment  
Operator 3, Highways/Stormwater,  
City of Virginia Beach



*“I speak in support of unionizing our city workers. The City beach ocean front will not be inviting to our tourists if the water and beaches are not clean. These workers need action now. As a minister, we look at them, their families and children and we know how they suffer. They need someone on this council to put forward a resolution to allow them to collective bargaining.”*

- **Rev. Dr. James Allen**, President,  
Interdenominational Minister’s Conference



## SUMMARY

City workers in Virginia Beach, based on the job titles in this study, are **currently between \$1,827 - \$20,452 behind** the Market Rate average wage compared to other comparable cities across the southeast.

### Collective bargaining promotes pay equity

For public employees, one of the benefits of unions with collective bargaining rights is increasing pay to levels that are closer to that which could be obtained in the private sector. Overall, public-sector collective bargaining tends to boost pay by 5% to 8%, and the fair and clear standards provided by unionization particularly help Black and Latinx workers, according to a recent report by the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis.



### Virginia Beach City Workers Union, UE Local 111

VBCITYWORKERS@UEUNION.ORG WEBSITE: [locals.ueunion.org/111](http://locals.ueunion.org/111)

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