Public Works Department
Organizational Analysis

Final Report

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**Introduction**

On May 19, 2015, the Northfield City Council approved a contract with David Drown Associates to conduct a comprehensive analysis of their Public Works Department structure. The Department has diverse responsibilities including engineering, facilities, streets, parks, water, wastewater, GIS, recreation and others.

The objective of this analysis is to help the City of Northfield determine the most cost effective and highest quality utilization of staff in the Public Works Department. This included analysis of the current service delivery system, examination of other city models, interviews with all department employees, a review of financial information and the development of recommendations and implementation strategies to assure a cost effective, customer oriented service delivery system.

**Current Situation**

The current structure of the Department is a convoluted hybrid structure that evolved over the course of many years. The present table of organization is attached as Addendum A. In the last several years, as departmental needs evolved, and with leadership changes, the Department has been through a host of organizational changes. This methodology gave rise to many issues within the Department that caused employee confusion and undoubtedly impacted the quality of service delivered to the citizens of Northfield.

Another important variable is that the Department has experienced regular staff turnover due to retirements and employee resignations. Because of the multitude of changes, service quality and consistency has likely been impacted. This organizational trend will likely continue because nearly 20% of Department employees are nearing retirement.

Given these important realities and with the arrival of the new City Engineer, it was determined that this was the opportune time to examine the structure in detail, with an eye toward organizational efficiency and service quality for the long term.

**Employee Interviews**

All 27 current employees of the Public Works Department were interviewed for this study. The list of these employees is attached as Addendum B and the questions asked of each person are attached as Addendum C.

The following lists are representative summaries of comments received from employees and not a full accounting of information that was shared. The comments are arranged by areas of strength and areas of concern.
**Strengths**

- People have the necessary tools to do their job
- Employees understand what is expected of them
- It is felt that the mission of Northfield helps employees do their job
- Communication from supervisors is generally good in most divisions
- Staff generally cooperate within the Department
- Staff cooperate with other City Departments as needed
- Employees are efficient
- New ideas are welcomed in most areas
- Education and training is encouraged
  - There is a culture of learning
- There is a good overall organizational culture in the City
- People are happy with the new departmental and City leadership and with the Human Resources Department
- Staff are committed to providing good customer service
  - Staff bend over backwards to resolve citizen concerns
- Equipment is shared across departments when needed
- The recently established quarterly department meetings are a good idea
- It is a friendly work environment
- Many staff love working for the City of Northfield
- Want to retire here
- The organization is family friendly
- Office space is good
- Morale is improving

**Concerns**

- There are not enough staff to get the job done effectively
- Opinions don’t seem to matter
  - Somewhat dependent on who the supervisor is
- There is a “we have always done it this way” mentality
  - Also some “that’s not my job”
- Management staff do not cooperate as much as the front line staff do
- Specialization in Water and Wastewater should be maintained
  - Too much expertise needed for one person to be competent in both areas
- On call is not effective because the on call person only understands one half of the needed business
- The duties of the Plant Technician position are not fully understood
- There are significant retirements on the horizon and there does not appear to be a good plan in place to deal with these upcoming changes
- Certain system maintenance is being ignored
  - Exercising valves is an example
- A reorganization is needed
  - Do not be afraid to move ahead
- There are too many supervisors in the Department
- Some staff do not know how to effectively communicate with the public
- There are insufficient compliments received for doing good work
- Some employees are held to different performance standards
- Having to carry two cell phones is burdensome
• The City lacks a true Parks and Recreation structure
• GIS is falling behind and not being fully utilized
• Storm water is not being dealt with appropriately
• Technology is not being utilized as effectively as it could be
• There is too much red tape to solve problems
  o Too many layers to go through to get something done
• There is a lack of planning in the Street Department
  o Seems like everything is day to day and “flying by the seat of our pants”
• Communication is poor when projects are happening that might affect other divisions
• Unnecessary work gets done because of a lack of information
• Too much work is contracted out
• Quality of work is impacted by bad management planning and decision making
• Too many silos in the organization
• There is a lack of consistency on policy enforcement between divisions
• There is a lack of continuity created by the significant turnover of Public Works Directors and Administrators

Conclusions

The commitment to customer service and to the City’s mission, along with plentiful educational opportunities, has helped build a strong organizational foundation in the Department. This, coupled with dedicated and experienced staff, has insured that quality services are provided by the Department. The employee foundation is strong and improving because of recent changes in the organization.

Overall, the Department is functioning at a good level; however, improvements can and should be made to the organizational structure to increase efficiency. The Department clearly is in need of restructuring. Some organizational changes that have occurred in the past few months have positively impacted morale and there is genuine excitement for moving forward. However, there are concerns that this process will simply be another in a long list of studies that will sit on the shelf or only be partially implemented. Implementation of the following plan will need to be attended to with great care and commitment. If the plan, ultimately approved by the Council, is simply admired, the future situation will be the same or even worse than the current situation.
Recommendations

1. Reconfigure the organizational structure as per attached Addendum D. There are several significant changes to the structure including:
   a. The creation of four new Manager positions
      i. This more closely mirrors other similarly sized organizational structures
   b. The Foremen positions become “working foremen” and are not office based positions, but working side by side with staff
      i. This more closely mirrors other similarly sized organizational structures
   c. The elimination of the Assistant Engineer position
      i. This position is not needed in the new Department structure
2. Provide opportunities for education, growth and advancement for staff to achieve needed licensure
   a. Certain positions require a level of licensure that only a few present staff hold. When these persons retire or depart, there will be difficulties in replacing them from within the organization
3. Develop a succession plan for some of the key departmental positions where knowledgeable staff are nearing retirement
   a. Identify the critical positions
   b. Determine the core skills needed for the position
   c. Find potential successors
      i. Develop internal talent wherever possible
   d. Document the plan
   e. Implement the strategies
      i. Implement APWA public works management practices
         1. Start with the divisions that will be impacted most by retirements
         ii. Ride alongs
         iii. Education
         iv. Training
         v. Certification
      f. Evaluate effectiveness
4. Review on-call process for Water and Wastewater
   a. The current system is not as effective as it could be because the on-call person only knows one part of the business. More cross training of on-call staff is needed to increase competency
   b. It does not make financial sense to return to the previous system where two people were on call at the same time
5. If feasible, create access to the SCADA software on home computers or mobile devices so employees can monitor certain functions remotely, as needed
6. Develop and implement comprehensive infrastructure maintenance plans for all departments
   a. The current plans are haphazard and do not represent a long term view. The creation of the Manager positions identified in recommendation 1 will help alleviate planning related concerns throughout the division
7. Provide customer service training to all staff having public contact. This is an area where some have great skill, and others require additional training and a greater understanding of organizational expectations.

8. Good work by employees should be recognized both formally and informally. A simple “thank you” and a “job well done” go a long way to improving employee morale.

9. Along with recognition of good work, successes should be celebrated so that the entire Department can rally around accomplishments. This helps build teamwork and camaraderie amongst employees.

10. Give consideration to a cell phone allowance policy in addition to issuing City cell phones to employees. Many organizations do this as an option and it mostly likely will not result in increased costs to the City.

11. Enhance safety training strategies
   a. This is being addressed better now, but still not at the level it should be in all divisions within the Department. A more comprehensive and systematic approach is recommended.

12. Consider capital planning and operations costs for Parks and Recreation
   a. The City is dedicated to parks and trails but have not always committed to a long term plan for moving the Council’s vision forward.
   b. There is presently a disconnect between City facilities and the recreation program that is not administered by the City. Additional planning for recreation is suggested.

13. Upon initial review, it appears that contracting out services is a cost effective option for many services. However, these contracted services should be reassessed each time a contract renewal is suggested. Costs and service quality should be the guiding principles for determining what services are contracted and what services are better provided in house.

14. Develop a comprehensive storm water management plan that meets all the requirements of the MS4 permit.

15. Hold weekly team meetings within each division.

16. Eliminate the differentiation between Public Works Operators 1 & 2 by combining these positions into a single job classification.

17. Develop a winter project plan that identifies projects to be completed between snow events.

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**Organizational Structure Detail**

Implementing the changes identified in this report involves modifying several current positions and creating a couple new positions. The net impact to the staff complement is an increase of two full time equivalents (FTE). The recommended changes are explained in greater detail in the following pages, along with a financial impact analysis.
Manager Level
Four new Manager Level positions are created with this proposed structure.

1. Engineering Manager
   a. This position is created by modifying the Engineering Technician Coordinator position to include additional duties
   b. The position would be filled by Sean Simonson
2. Streets and Parks Manager
   a. This is an entirely new position charged with parks planning, streets and maintenance planning, budgeting and division management
   b. It is recommended this position be posted internally as there is likely more than one qualified candidate in the Department
3. Facilities Manager
   a. This position is created by modifying the Facilities Supervisor position to include facility planning, maintenance planning and overall division management
   b. This position would be filled by a new employee currently being interviewed
4. Utilities Manager
   a. This position is created by eliminating the Utilities Supervisor position and creating working foreman positions in Water Services and the Wastewater Plant
   b. This would be filled by Doug Lien as he is the most experienced manager on staff

Foreman Level
Hands on foreman positions are created in the Streets and Parks, and the Utilities Divisions. These positions are not office based, but involve working side by side with and supervising departmental staff. Specific supervisory responsibilities will be defined when the job descriptions are developed.

1. Public Works Foreman
   a. This position is created by modifying the Streets and Parks Supervisor position
   b. The person who will serve in this capacity will be determined after the Streets and Parks Manager position is filled
2. Utilities Services Foreman
   a. This position is created by modifying the Water Superintendent position to become a working foreman
   b. This position would be filled by Justin Wagner
3. Wastewater Plant Foreman
   a. This position is created by modifying the Wastewater Manager position to become a working foreman
   b. This position would be filled by Gerald Ness

Other Changes
There are a few other suggested changes with this newly proposed structure.

1. GIS Technician
   a. This position has evolved by adapting to organizational needs in and out of Public Works. The envisioned position goes back to a more GIS focused role with less work on other organizational tasks
i. This change will impact how certain other City services are provided and will necessitate further planning
   b. The person who will serve in this capacity will be determined after the Streets and Parks Manager position is filled

2. Water Quality Technician
   a. The need for this position has been identified as a result of a recent audit indicating the City is lagging in carrying out the tasks associated with current legislation and rules related to storm water
   b. This is a new position in the organization

3. Utilities Operator
   a. There is a significant need for an increase in the staff complement in this service area
   b. This is a new position in the organization

**Financial Impact**

Several positions will change if this plan is implemented. As per City policy, any persons who are promoted receive a 10% increase in their pay. Below is a summary of the financial impact of the plan put forth in this report:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Annual Cost</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Manager</td>
<td>$5,017</td>
<td>As per City policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets and Parks Manager</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>As per City policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities Manager</td>
<td>$5,200</td>
<td>As per City policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities Manager</td>
<td>$7,800</td>
<td>As per City policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Works Foreman</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Services Foreman</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wastewater Plant Foreman</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIS Technician</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Quality Technician</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
<td>This is an FTE add</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities Operator</td>
<td>$68,918</td>
<td>This is an FTE add</td>
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**Total Cost to Implement**  $234,435

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Annual Savings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager/GIS Technician</td>
<td>$83,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Engineer/PW Director</td>
<td>$115,199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Savings**  $198,610

**Total Financial Impact:**

Including Wages and Benefits  $35,825
Office Logistics/Office Space

Implementing the changes identified in this report has an impact on physical locations of staff and the need for two additional office spaces. The suggested changes to physical locations include the following:

1. Facilities Manager
   a. This position would be located in one of the vacant offices on the second floor of City Hall

2. Facilities Assistant
   a. This position would be located in one of the vacant offices on the second floor of City Hall

3. Streets and Parks Manager
   a. This position would be located at the Public Works facility in the office presently occupied by the Streets and Parks Supervisor

4. Public Works Foreman
   a. This position would have a cubicle in the current Facility Supervisor’s office

5. Public Works Operators
   a. Operators would share a cubicle in the current Facility Supervisor’s office

6. GIS Technician
   a. This position would be located in the current Project Manager/GIS Technician office

7. Water Quality Technician
   a. This position would be located in the vacant Assistant Engineers office
List of Persons Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steve Malecha</td>
<td>Operator/Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Petricka</td>
<td>Operator/Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cris VanZuilen</td>
<td>Operator/Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan Kiefer</td>
<td>Mechanic/Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate Becker</td>
<td>Eng. Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marty Gallagher</td>
<td>Operator/Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason Schultz</td>
<td>Operator/Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.J. Heinricy</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda Playter</td>
<td>Admin Assist/Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annalise Haan</td>
<td>Facilities Asst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernie Shakal</td>
<td>Facilities Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb Neitzel</td>
<td>Admin. Assist./Eng.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasper Kruggel</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerald Ness</td>
<td>Wastewater Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Tussing</td>
<td>Operator/Utilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Wagner</td>
<td>Utilities Supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doug Lien</td>
<td>Water Sup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Murphy</td>
<td>Operator/Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenny Moore</td>
<td>Operator/Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Malecha</td>
<td>Operator/Wastewater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Spooner</td>
<td>Recreation Operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison Watkins</td>
<td>Recreation Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Murphy</td>
<td>Operator/Wastewater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug Grandahl</td>
<td>Operator/Wastewater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Valley</td>
<td>Utilities Tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean Simonson</td>
<td>Engineer Tech. Coord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Bennet</td>
<td>Engineer PW Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Northfield
Public Works Organizational Study Questions

The questions below will be covered during your meeting with consultant Gary Weiers. Please review these in advance, as the meeting time is limited to 30 minutes for each person. Thank you.

1. Do you know what is expected of you in your job?
2. Do you have the materials and equipment you need to do your job right?
3. When was the last time you received recognition for doing good work?
4. Please describe how your opinions seem to matter at work.
5. Please describe how your supervisor communicates with you.
6. Describe staff work together in the department.
7. Describe how staff work together with other departments.
8. Do you feel the mission or purpose of Northfield helps you do your job well?
9. Describe the effectiveness of the current Public Works Department structure.
10. Describe how it could be improved.
11. Please describe the growth and learning possibilities you have at work.
12. Where do you want to go with your career?
13. Talk to me a bit about your long term plans for your position.
14. What are the obstacles to making changes in the department and City?
15. Do you have any suggestions for improving the delivery of services in your area, in the department or the city as a whole?
16. Do you have anything else you would like to add?