

Operational Performance Assessment –

Phase I Report



Prepared for:

**Columbus Consolidated
Government, Georgia**

July 15, 2026



CONTENTS

1. Overview and Background	2
2. Scope and Approach	5
3. Departments.....	7
3.A Columbus Civic Center	8
3.B Community Reinvestment.....	42
3.C Engineering	62
3.D Facilities Maintenance.....	104
3.E Finance	125
3.F Human Resources	166
3.G Information Technology	192
3.H Inspections & Code	193
3.I Job Training Division/Workforce Investment.....	219
3.J METRA Transit	244
3.K Parks & Recreation	284
3.L Planning	313
3.M Public Works.....	337
Enterprise-wide Observations and Recommendations.....	375
4. Conclusion	383

1. Overview and Background

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“Government”, “CCG”, or “City”) serves residents of Muscogee County located in the west-central part of Georgia, on the state line with Alabama. The City of Columbus, Georgia resides within Muscogee County and lies on the Chattahoochee River, approximately 100 miles southwest of Atlanta. The Columbus Consolidated Government’s service area contains an estimated population of 206,922 based on the 2020 U.S. Census.

The Columbus Consolidated Government serves as both a city and county government, carrying out duties for both entities. CCG was Georgia’s first consolidated city-county government. As such, the Government holds the governmental and corporate powers, duties and functions formerly vested in the City of Columbus and Muscogee County.

The Government operates under a mayor-council-city manager form of government. The mayor is elected for four-year terms by popular vote. The City Manager is appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the Council and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of CCG. The Council of Columbus (“Council”) consists of 10 members, eight district councilors and two councilors-at-large. The Council operates as a legislative body and interacts with the executive branch of Columbus, including all appointed officers, directors of departments, and employees by way of ordinances or resolutions formally adopted at Council meetings.

In May 2025, Mauldin & Jenkins (“M&J”) was engaged to perform a governmentwide Operational Performance Assessment of the Government’s core operating departments. The scope of the assessment includes assessing Government operations and performance and creating realistic and implementable recommendations for the Government to achieve enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and transparency. The Assessment identifies numerous recommendations that may not be possible to implement at the present or near future due to budget constraints, but should the Government accept and agree with the recommendations, the Government will have the ability to plan and budget for future implementation.

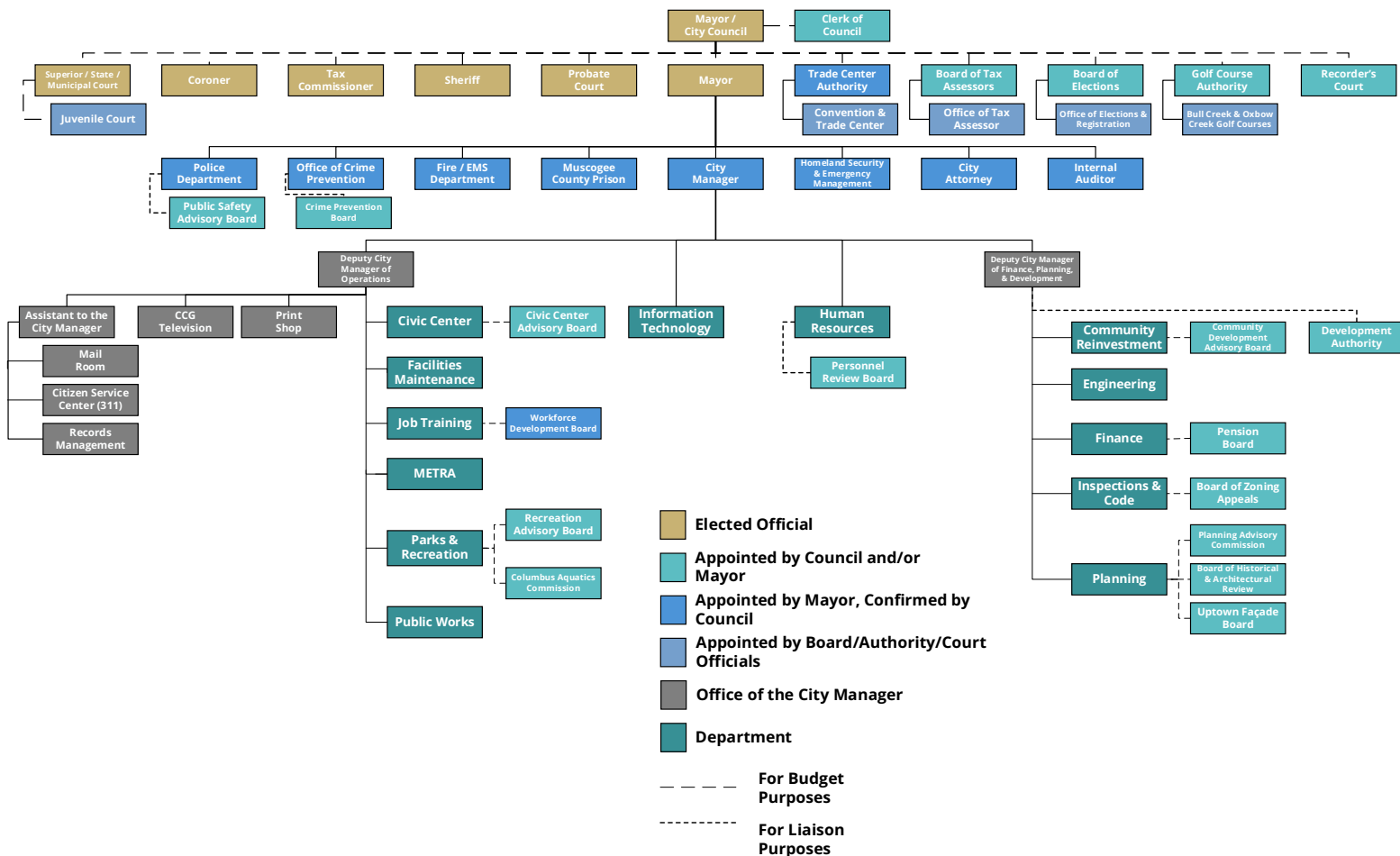
The Assessment is divided into the following three phases:

- Phase 1 – operating departments reporting to the City Manager
- Phase 2 – public safety departments
- Phase 3 – departments governed by elected officials (optional opt in)

The Phase 1 Assessment consisted of the following departments:

• Columbus Civic Center	• Inspections & Code
• Community Reinvestment	• Job Training/Workforce Investment
• Engineering	• METRA Transit
• Facilities Maintenance	• Parks & Recreation
• Finance	• Planning
• Human Resources	• Public Works
• Information Technology	

The following citywide organizational chart depicts the City structure. Departments within Phase I are indicated in dark teal boxes.



We commend City leadership for undertaking this valuable work, and commend City leadership for ensuring opportunities for staff at all levels of the organization to be engaged and encouraged to share their perspectives, insights, and feedback throughout the Assessment process.

We also would like to recognize the numerous City employees throughout multiple departments and position levels who gave their time coordinating logistics, conducting interviews, providing requested information, providing tours, and allowing Mauldin & Jenkins to observe and “job shadow” certain functions.

This Assessment report identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement. This report also identifies numerous recommendations and provides enterprise-wide recommendations that should be leveraged to help the City enhance operations. Implementing positive change is never easy, but by leveraging the City's greatest asset – its employees, and by clearly articulating and communicating the rationale and benefits of the desired change, we are confident that the City can successfully continue to enhance its operations and continue to provide quality, efficient, and effective services to the residents and stakeholders of Columbus. City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the included recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

2. Scope and Approach

This section details the scope and approach utilized by M&J to conduct Phase I of the Assessment.

Scope and Objectives

Assessment scope and objectives included the following:

- Reviewing the functional taxonomy, organizational makeup, staffing, and roles and responsibilities
- Reviewing governing requirements (statutes, regulations, policies and procedures, etc.)
- Reviewing business processes, workflows, inputs/outputs, and dependencies for both controls and risk mitigation, as well as efficiency and effectiveness
- Reviewing the current use of technology and identify opportunities for automation/enhancement
- Reviewing communications and reporting
- Identifying operational leading practices
- Comparing the Government's current environment to leading practices and departmental/Government-specific goals
- Developing meaningful recommendations to improve/enhance operations and create a roadmap for a desired future state

Approach

We developed a workplan for the Assessment which consisted of the following four phases:

1. Initiation and Planning
2. Information Gathering
3. Fieldwork and Data Analysis
4. Validation and Reporting

As part of the Assessment, we performed the following key tasks to aid us in formulating our observations and recommendations:

- Requested and reviewed significant amounts of data and information, such as:
 - Organization charts
 - Job descriptions including roles, responsibilities, and competencies
 - Policies and procedures
 - Technology/systems inventory
 - Workflow diagrams or mapping
 - Fiscal and budgetary data/reports

- Volume/Customer information
- Strategic plans and/or prior similar assessments
- Conducted 193 interviews with the in-scope department heads, key management, and front-line delivery personnel
- Conducted “walk-throughs” of multiple facilities and properties
- Performed “job shadowing” observations of various functions and tasks
- Delivered periodic status updates throughout the engagement

We commend CCG leadership for undertaking this valuable work, and commend them for ensuring opportunities for staff at all levels of the organization to be engaged and encouraged to share their perspectives throughout the Assessment process. Employees at all levels were open, honest, and cooperative throughout the process.

Our Phase 1 analysis and fieldwork were completed between August 2025 and January 2026. CCG management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the recommendations included are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

3. Departments

This section presents the current state, observations, and recommendations for all in-scope Phase I City departments. The Phase 1 Assessment consisted of the following departments:

3.A Columbus Civic Center	3.H Inspections & Code
3.B Community Reinvestment	3.I Job Training/Workforce Investment
3.C Engineering	3.J METRA Transit
3.D Facilities Maintenance	3.K Parks & Recreation
3.E Finance	3.L Planning
3.F Human Resources	3.M Public Works
3.G Information Technology	

Within each departmental section, the following are described where applicable:

- Introduction
- Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition
- Organization and Staffing
- Key Duties and Responsibilities
- Customer Service
- Use of Technology
- Assessment of Guiding Documentation
- Strategic Priorities
- Performance Metrics/Outputs
- Culture, Engagement, and Buy-In
- Department-wide Observations and Recommendations
- Maturity Model
- Conclusion

3.A Columbus Civic Center

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“CCG” or “City”) Columbus Civic Center (“Civic Center” or “Center”) is an entertainment venue located in Uptown Columbus that hosts a variety of live music performances, conferences, sporting events, festivals, and more. The Center is home to the Columbus River Dragons professional hockey club and the Columbus Lions, a professional indoor football team. Performing artists and events have included Disney on Ice, the Columbus Rodeo, PBR Professional Bull Riding, comedian Jeff Dunham, singer Taylor Swift, rapper T.I., and the Greater Columbus Fair. In addition to the 10,000-seat arena, the Center features a 360 concourse with concessions and merchandise, hospitality suites, a courtyard available for gatherings, an open-air amphitheater, and a four-lot parking setup that doubles as an outdoor event space.

In addition to managing the Civic Center, the Center staff also manage the Columbus Ice Rink (“Ice Rink”) and the Liberty Theatre & Cultural Arts Center (“Liberty Theatre”). The Columbus Ice Rink hosts public skating for the community (including ice skate rental), as well as introductory hockey and figure skating lessons, youth hockey leagues, and various practices (such as those for away teams competing against the Columbus River Dragons). The Ice Rink also serves as the home rink for several men’s and women’s collegiate hockey teams and Fort Benning’s hockey team. A third-party vendor maintains a pro shop in the Columbus Ice Rink facility.

The Liberty Theatre is a historic performance venue that opened as Columbus’ first Black theater in 1925. Over the course of its first 100 years in existence, the Liberty Theatre hosted legendary artists ranging from Ma Rainey and Ella Fitzgerald to Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong, and in 1925 was the largest movie house in the City. The Government took ownership of the Liberty Theatre in 2023, with the intention to renovate the building and transfer management to the Civic Center staff. The Liberty Theatre was closed as of M&J’s fieldwork in order to install a new roof; a new heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (“HVAC”) system; remediate largescale mold issues; and replace the vandalized electrical system. As of M&J’s fieldwork, the Civic Center staff did not have a timeline for the completion of all renovations due to unexpected costs (e.g., the vandalized electrical system) and limited funding.

The Ice Rink is available for events booking; the Liberty Theatre may become available for event bookings after renovations are complete.

In addition to the venues entirely managed by the Civic Center staff, the Civic Center hosts occasional events at the A. J. McClung Memorial Stadium (“Memorial Stadium”) – the City’s historic 15,000-seat sports stadium. While Memorial Stadium is primarily managed by the Parks and Recreation Department, the Civic Center provides staffing, including box office management, for the Center-hosted events.

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

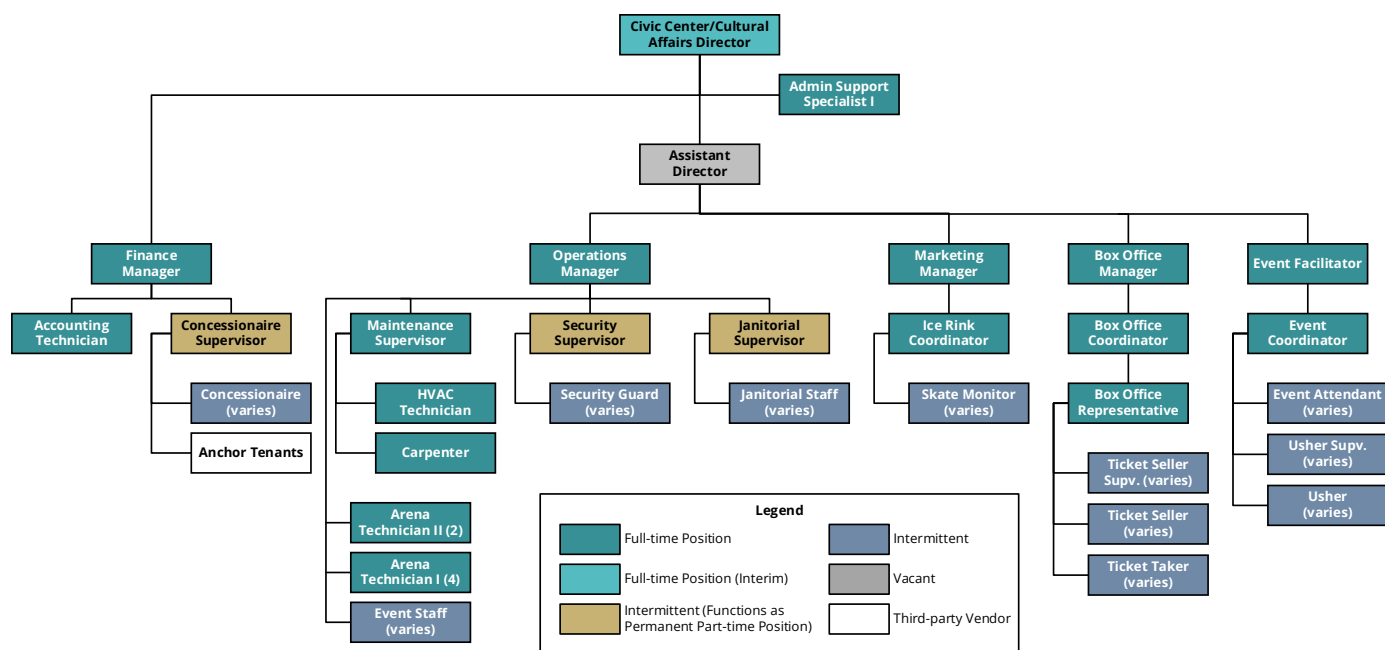
The Civic Center is operated by a skilled staff of dedicated professionals who combine various fields of expertise in event and venue management. The in-house maintenance staff largely handles repairs, upgrades, and routine preventative maintenance for the facility, which helps avoid overextending the Facility Maintenance Department's workload.¹ The staff hold a variety of certifications and credentials. For example, a member of the Center's Operations Division is credentialed as a Certified Ice Technician by the U.S. Ice Rink Association – one of only four Certified Ice Technicians in the State of Georgia and one of approximately 300 Certified Ice Technicians in the county during the review period (FY21-FY25).

Civic Center staff noted in interviews with M&J that retention is relatively high, even among intermittent staff in certain functional areas, at the Center and indicated job growth opportunities and job satisfaction serving the community within the Civic Center organizational structure and programming. Several full-time employees at the time of M&J's fieldwork had previously been employed by the Center as part-time staff, intermittent staff, or interns, and stated in interviews that they had been eager to return to the Center in full-time positions.

Organization and Staffing

According to the Columbus Consolidated Government Adopted Operating Budget, the Civic Center was allocated 22 full-time positions each year of the review period (FY21-FY25). The Center's FY26 position allocation remained consistent with the FY25 allocation. In addition to the full-time positions, the Center allocates budget for a variable number of intermittent employees, based on events and needs. The Government uses the term "intermittent" to describe non-permanent employees who are not employed for a discrete timeframe, but instead are scheduled on an as-needed basis for as long as the Government and the individual are willing in maintaining the employer-employee relationship. As noted throughout the report, the term "intermittent" does not always align with the roles and responsibilities of some of the Center's intermittent positions. The following organizational chart illustrates the Center's structure and FY25 allocated positions.

¹ Largescale repairs, such as roof replacements, are still coordinated in conjunction with the Facility Maintenance Department.



A Civic Center/Cultural Affairs Director (“Director”) position manages the Center, Ice Rink, and Liberty Theatre, as well as the staff for the three facilities. The Director is responsible for overseeing the different functional areas, identifying means to improve logistics and reduce costs, and providing strategic guidance for the Center’s activities. For the second half of the review period, the Director position was staffed on an interim basis as the most recent permanent Director resigned in January 2023. According to staff interviews, two Government employees have served in an interim capacity since January 2023, including the Government’s Deputy City Manager for Operations.

The interim Director during M&J’s fieldwork was elevated on an acting basis from the Civic Center/Cultural Arts Assistant Director (“Assistant Director”) position, which was reclassified from an Event Services Manager position in FY24. In addition to an Assistant Director position (when fully staffed), the Director position is supported by an Administrative Support Specialist I position.

The Center staff are divided among five divisions: Finance, Operations, Marketing, Box Office/Ticketing, and Events.² Apart from the Events Division, each division is led by a manager-level position; the Events Division is managed instead by an Event Facilitator position. The Director directly manages the Finance Manager, while the Assistant Director manages the Operations Manager, Marketing Manager, Box Office Manager, and Event Facilitator positions.

² Internally, the Center uses the term “department” to delineate between the various functions headed by manager-level positions. In order to avoid confusion with the other uses of “department” in this report, M&J used the term “division” instead.

Finance Division

The Center's Finance Division is responsible for the oversight and conduct of financial functions for the Civic Center and the Ice Rink. The Finance Manager is responsible for creating and monitoring the Civic Center's annual budget, reviewing and approving expenditures and revenues, and performing accounts payable and accounts receivable duties. Center-wide financial duties performed on a monthly basis include balancing petty cash, paying sales, updating building utilization reports, reviewing and approving credit card statements, monitoring and restocking concession inventories, invoicing anchor tenants, and invoicing Ice Rink tenants. Center-wide financial duties performed on an as-needed basis include processing and coding bank deposits, submitting miscellaneous AR receipts to the CCG Finance Department's Revenue Division for posting to the general ledger, reviewing and approving accounts payable entries, monitoring outstanding invoices for timely payments, and approving office supply orders.

The Finance Manager provides regular reporting and support to the other divisions on financial matters, as well as performs human resources ("HR") and administrative duties for the Center, including reviewing employee time off requests, reviewing the input of labor hours worked, posting weekly journal entries for labor hours to the correct event, monitoring the accuracy of and approving payroll, monitoring the Center's customer service performance, and submitting workers' comp claims in the event of accidents.

For events, the Finance Manager maintains responsibilities before, during, and after events. Prior to events, the Finance Manager reviews required documentation, including contracts, insurance certificates, lists of expenses, and cash advances. Settlement sheets are set up prior to events so that expenses and revenues can be recorded accurately throughout the process. As needed, the Finance Manager contacts promoters to confirm details and conduct a pre-settlement during the week of the event to help ensure both parties are aligned on financial understandings. Leading up to and during the event, the Finance Manager oversees concessions and catering – booking concessions and catering to the relevant events, whether in the hospitality suites or to dressing rooms backstage; scheduling intermittent Concessionaire staff; and overseeing the cleaning and maintenance of the facility's kitchen and concessions stands. After the event, the Finance Manager handles the event settlement with the event organizer. Throughout the process, the Finance Manager regularly reviews Center's point of sale and event management system for incoming wires, which the Finance Manager assigns to the correct event, codes, and coordinates posting the wire to the general ledger with the CCG Finance Department's Revenue Division.

A full-time Accounting Technician position supports the Finance Manager, processing weekly payroll and coordinating personnel actions with the City’s HR and Finance Departments. As the Center hires new staff, the Accounting Technician processes the hires and follows up with the HR Department as needed to help ensure information is input into the Government’s enterprise resource planning system, Advantage, correctly and employee statuses are correct and up to date. The Accounting Technician also enters invoices, requisitions, purchase orders, supply orders, and other financial actions into Advantage; processes credit card statements in Advantage, matching receipts to the appropriate statement; and assists the Finance Manager and other manager-level positions with processing final settlements after events. In addition to inputting hours worked on events’ labor sheets based on employees’ timecards, the position monitors overtime worked and reports overtime figures to the Finance Manager for approval. The Accounting Technician position performs some administrative duties, such as delivering mail and assisting guests who are meeting with Center management, in the absence of the Director’s Administrative Support Specialist. The Finance Manager performs the duties of the Accounting Technician during leave or a vacancy in the position.

Concessions

The Finance Manager also oversees a Concessionaire Supervisor position, an intermittent part-time position. The Civic Center contains two types of concession stands – Center-managed stands and anchor tenants. The Concessions Supervisor oversees scheduling and staffing of intermittent Concessionaire positions to the Center-managed stands, with oversight and approval of the Finance Manager, and coordinates with the Center’s anchor tenants – local restaurants with permanent presences at the Civic Center during events. While the Center includes a kitchen facility, during a walkthrough M&J noted that the facility looked unused, suggesting the Center does not offer regular on-site food preparation.

As of January 1, 2026, the Center transitioned to a “cashless” model, meaning both Center-managed stands and anchor tenants only accept digital payments.

Prior to the review period (FY21-FY25), the Center contracted Centerplate, a subsidiary of Sodexo, to manage concessions during events.³ According to staff interviews, the decision to bring concessions in-house was made to provide opportunities for local restaurants to enter into contracts with the Center to become anchor tenants. Local partnerships, such as the Center’s anchor tenants, has been a growing trend in the entertainment venue-management industry.

Most entertainment venues manage concessions through one of three primary models:

- **In-house Management** – The venue directly manages concessions functions, including staffing, menu development, inventory and ordering, preparation, and financial operations. The model allows the venue to maintain maximum control over concessions quality and branding, as well as retaining all concessions revenue. However, in-house management requires a larger staffing model and increases the workload of the venue’s finance team.

³ Centerplate still manages the alcohol license for the Civic Center.

- **Third-party Contractor** – The venue contracts with an external food service management company specializing in concessions to handle some or all food and beverage operations for a specified period. The model minimizes the venue’s direct involvement in concessions and allows for a more limited staffing model. However, using a third-party contractor requires a revenue structure (either a fixed amount, a percentage of sales, or a combination) that shares concessions revenue between the venue and the vendor.
- **Public-Private Partnership** – The venue contracts with a private entity to finance, design, build, and operate the entire venue, including concessions (a primary revenue stream for the private partner to recoup investments). The model generally removes most operational responsibilities and authority from the public partner.

No one model for concessions management dominates the industry. Instead, many Georgia-based events venues (such as Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Athens Classic Center, and Savannah Civic Center) have developed a modified management model that either delineates duties and events between the venue and the vendor, or includes certain stipulations in the contract for third-party management (such as a requirement to designate a certain percentage of concessions space to local restaurants and small businesses). Venues see advantages in a modified management model including a higher degree of flexibility and increased opportunities to embrace emerging trends that may not be available through in-house or third-party management without modifications, such as interchangeable menu concepts at certain concessions stands, grab-and-go service, cashless payments, and more centralization of catering management.

Operations Division

The Operations Division, led by the Operations Manager position, covers four primary functions for the Civic Center: maintenance, security, janitorial services, and event logistics support. Two operations supervisory positions (the Security Supervisor and Janitorial Supervisor positions) are intermittent part-time positions, meaning the Center is not guaranteed to have security and/or janitorial coverage on a regular basis. In total, the Operations Manager position directly supervises seven full-time positions and two intermittent part-time positions that function more like permanent part-time positions, as well as bearing responsibility for two additional full-time positions and numerous intermittent employees. The Operations Manager position’s span of control (the number of direct reports a supervisor is responsible for) is average for an executive-level position or median for a middle-management position when only considering full-time employees.⁴ When the total number of employees the Operations Manager position is responsible for, as well as the number of disparate functions, the position’s span of control potentially exceeds HR standards.

⁴ Average and median span of control data for executive-level and middle-management level positions uses benchmarks from the Society for Human Resource Management’s Human Capital Report.

The Operations Division is responsible for general maintenance of both the Civic Center and the Ice Rink, and will be responsible for general maintenance of the Liberty Theatre after the completion of renovations. As is discussed in the *Key Duties and Responsibilities* section, many of the Operations Division's less-routine maintenance responsibilities are a result of the age of the Center, as the building was constructed between 1994 and 1996, coupled with the lack of a preventative maintenance and capital improvement plan developed at the time of the building's construction.

Maintenance

The Operations Division's nine full-time positions (apart from the Operations Manager position) comprise the maintenance function, responsible for maintenance of the Center's non-structural features (e.g., ice plant, cooling towers, carpeting, painting, carpentry, etc.). A Maintenance Supervisor position oversees an HVAC Technician position and a Carpenter position. Both the HVAC Technician and Carpenter are responsible for general maintenance in addition to the specific function implied by the job titles. Six Arena Technician positions, along with the Maintenance Supervisor position, report directly to the Operations Manager. The Arena Technician positions work closely with the other maintenance positions to provide general maintenance and upkeep outside of the Facilities Maintenance Department's responsibilities.

Security

The Operations Manager coordinates security details with the Security Supervisor position – an intermittent part-time position that functions more like a permanent part-time position. The Security Supervisor position coordinates schedules for intermittent part-time Security Guard positions to maintain security details whenever the Civic Center is open – during events and during daily Box Office operations (generally Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.). The Operations Manager and Security Supervisor maintain security staffing levels based on event type and size and try to maintain desired staffing levels during events as frequently as possible depending on intermittent employees' availability.

The Muscogee County Sheriff's Office supplements the Civic Center Security personnel with Sheriff's Deputies during ticketed events, as well as larger non-ticketed events.

Janitorial Services

The Operations Manager coordinates janitorial services with the Janitorial Supervisor position – an intermittent part-time position that functions more like a permanent part-time position. The Janitorial Supervisor position coordinates schedules for intermittent part-time Janitorial positions to maintain the cleanliness and visual appeal of the building. Because the Janitorial positions are all intermittent part-time positions, janitorial services are not consistently conducted in the building on non-event days. The Operations Manager and Janitorial Supervisor maintain janitorial staffing levels during and after events based on event type and size and try to maintain desired staffing levels as frequently as possible depending on intermittent employees' availability. In interviews with M&J, Center staff indicated that the inconsistent work schedule for janitorial staff, including the Janitorial Supervisor, has resulted in high turnover in janitorial services roles.⁵

Event Logistics Support

The entire Operations Division, including both permanent full-time and intermittent part-time positions assist with event logistics support. While not all employees may be present for every event, each employee of the Operations Division works a combination of pre, during, and post-event shifts, and most (other than Janitorial positions) work on non-event days, as well. The Operations Manager schedules a variety of intermittent event staff to assist with a range of responsibilities, in addition to full-time staff, Security personnel, and Janitorial personnel. Specific intermittent positions include Audio Visual Technician, Change-over Crew, and Electrician.

Inmate Labor

The Center frequently uses inmate labor from the Muscogee County Prison to supplement full-time and intermittent Operations Division staff. A variety of Operations Division staff have received Correctional Officer certification or attended Correctional Supervisor classes to oversee inmate details. Correctional Officers are qualified to oversee up to eight inmates at a time, while Correctional Supervisors are qualified to oversee up to two inmates at a time. According to Civic Center staff, the Operations Division has overseen shifts of up to 16 inmates at a time, oftentimes rotating shifts partway through an event prep or breakdown day. During busier shifts, Muscogee County Prison employees, including the Warden and Deputy Wardens, have provided oversight for inmate details at the Civic Center, with the Center funding the Muscogee County Prison employees' overtime hours.

⁵ After the completion of M&J's fieldwork and the initial drafting of this report, Center leadership indicated that the FY27 budget request included a permanent, full-time Janitorial Supervisor position. As the scope of this Assessment did not include a review of FY27 budget requests, M&J cannot independently verify this inclusion.

Marketing Division

The Marketing Manager position is the primary employee promoting the Civic Center and Ice Rink as venues for hosting and attending events.⁶ The Marketing Manager handles external communication for the Center, including email, social media, and direct contact with event promoters; develops branded marketing materials ranging from flyers and digital signage to social media graphics and video content; maintains the website in conjunction with the Department of Information Technology; and arranges partnerships, sponsorships, and trade agreements with community businesses. Most of the Center's marketing efforts are Business-to-Consumer ("B2C") marketing with limited Business-to-Business ("B2B") marketing, including sponsorship identification. Leading entertainment venues frequently bifurcate B2C and B2B marketing/communications between different positions or different teams, with additional (sometimes part-time) positions specifically focusing on social media or sponsorships. Larger entertainment venues infrequently rely on one marketing/communications position, with smaller staffing models coordinating efforts with a government-wide marketing and/or communications function.

Ice Rink

A full-time Ice Rink Coordinator position formally reports to the Marketing Manager. However, in practice, the Ice Rink Coordinator position generally operates independent of the Civic Center's management structure – arranging for maintenance support from the Operations Manager or marketing/communications support from the Marketing Manager as needed. The Ice Rink Coordinator position oversees public skate sessions and both sporting and special events at the facility, ensuring the facility meets the needs of users, especially regarding quality of the ice. The Ice Rink Coordinator schedules and manages intermittent part-time Skate Monitor positions to support operations during public skate sessions and events, with responsibilities ranging from on-ice safety oversight and management of ice skate rentals. The Ice Rink Coordinator additionally schedules Concessionaire positions, as needed, when the Ice Rink's snack bar is open.

Box Office/Ticketing Division

The Box Office/Ticketing Division ("Box Office Division") is managed by three full-time positions: a Box Office Manager position, a Box Office Coordinator position, and a Box Office Representative position (collectively "Box Office leadership"). The Box Office Manager position (also referred to as a Ticketing Operations Manager position in some documentation) supervises the staff and provides direction for the Box Office Division's activities and operations. The Box Office Coordinator position supports the Box Office Manager in supervising staff and executing on the direction provided for the Box Office Division. The Box Office Representative position supports the Box Office Manager and the Box Office Coordinator positions and works with intermittent staff to conduct the day-to-day activities of the Box Office Division.

⁶ The Marketing Manager position will additionally be responsible for promoting the Liberty Theatre after the completion of renovations.

The Box Office leadership are jointly responsible for creating the event listing in the Center's point of sale and event management system, Ticketmaster's TM1, and keeping the event listings updated until the event has occurred. During the ticket sales process, the day-of activities for the event, and post-event close out, Box Office leadership record and report on each event's finances and ticket sales, including performing an audit after each event. The Box Office leadership work with both outside promoters, as well as Center staff who are internally managing events (e.g., food truck festivals), to ensure ticket prices include necessary fees or rebates before the sale of tickets begins.

In addition to the three full-time positions, the Box Office Division employs a variable number of intermittent part-time positions responsible for the day-to-day sale of tickets and taking of tickets during events. The Box Office Representative schedules the intermittent staff to cover both regular daily shifts (the Box Office is open from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday) and event-specific shifts (the Box Office opens at 1:00 p.m. for weekend events). The Box Office leadership rotate shifts as supervisor of the Box Office from event to event.

Events Division

The Events Division is led by an Event Facilitator position responsible for oversight of the Events Division's pre-show, intra-show, and post-show activities, with support from an Event Coordinator position. The Event Facilitator and Event Coordinator positions liaise with the Center's client (e.g., event promoters) to determine space use, set up, staffing needs, etc. and communicate the client's needs to the relevant Civic Center staff prior to the occurrence of the event. The Event Facilitator and Event Coordinator positions serve as clients' primary point of contact and frequently serve as Manager on Duty or Supervisor on Duty for ticketed events, assuming responsibility for the facility, staff, and back-of-house operations. The Events Division also helps develop and organize Civic Center-generated events, such as food truck festivals, drive-in movie nights, etc.

Event Attendants and Ushers

The Event Facilitator and Event Coordinator hire, supervise, and schedule intermittent Event Attendant positions, Usher Supervisor positions, and Usher positions. Event Attendant positions serve as clients' liaisons during largescale ticketed events if the Event Facilitator and Event Coordinator are not available, and are the primary liaisons and on-the-ground supervisors for ticketed events with fewer than 400 attendees. The Event Attendant positions are responsible for helping ensure event logistics requirements are met while the client is on-site for the event and helping ensure that the event occurs without issues. Event Attendant's specific responsibilities frequently include assisting with crowd control and movement, assisting with Americans with Disabilities Act guest entries and exits, and monitoring for incidents and inappropriate behavior among guests. The Event Facilitator and Event Coordinator schedule Event Attendants for most events held at the Civic Center and the Ice Rink, both ticketed and non-ticketed (e.g., facility rentals). The Usher positions are responsible for directing event attendees to the appropriate seats, as well as to concessions, amenities, and the correct exits. Usher Supervisors are identified as needed to help oversee staff for larger events. The Event Facilitator and Event Coordinator schedule Usher and Usher Supervisor positions only for ticketed events.

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

The following table lists the Center’s turnover rate for each of the five full fiscal years in the review period (FY21-FY25). The turnover rates only include the Center’s permanent full-time positions.

Table 1: Annual Turnover Rate

Fiscal Year	Turnover Rate
2021	0.0%
2022	18.2%
2023	18.2%
2024	27.3%
2025	18.2%

Source: CCG Budget Books FY21-FY25, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The typical turnover rate for a municipal department is approximately 15%. During the review period, Center’s turnover rate was regularly 18.2% (*i.e.*, four employees), with two exceptions – in FY21 the Civic Center did not experience any turnover and in FY24 the Civic Center experienced a turnover rate of 27.3% (*i.e.*, six employees).

The following table represents an estimate of annual intermittent staffing during the review period, including the positions previously described as “function more like permanent part-time positions.” The numbers do not necessarily represent the total number employed at any one time, but instead represent the total number of individuals who were employed by the Center in an intermittent position for at least part of the fiscal year. On average, the Civic Center employed 244 intermittent employees annually.

Table 2: Annual Intermittent Staff

Fiscal Year	No. of Intermittent Staff
2021	206
2022	265
2023	259
2024	231
2025	257

Source: CCG Human Resources Department Reports

Advisory Boards and Sports & Entertainment Authority

The Civic Center staff interact with three advisory and regulatory bodies appointed by the Columbus Council and community partners.

The Civic Center Advisory Board provides staff with advice on the Center's operations based on regular meetings and reports provided by Center staff. The Civic Center Advisory Board consists of 13 members representing the City districts and the Columbus Hockey Association. Members of the Civic Center Advisory Board are appointed to three-year terms, with a maximum of two consecutive terms. While the Civic Center Advisory Board has historically provided oversight of the Civic Center and Ice Rink, the body's oversight comes with limited governance authority.

The Liberty Theatre & Cultural Arts Center Advisory Board ("Liberty Theatre Advisory Board") was established as part of the Government's assumption of responsibility for the Liberty Theatre. The Liberty Theatre Advisory Board consists of 11 members appointed by the Columbus Council, including two nominated by recommendation of the Civic Center's Director, who provide advice and programming support for the Liberty Theatre's operations and strategic direction. Additionally, the Deputy City Manager for Operations serves as an ex-officio, non-voting member. The members of the Liberty Theatre Advisory Board serve for a maximum of three four-year terms and meet on a bimonthly basis at the Civic Center.

The Columbus Council established the Columbus Sports & Entertainment Authority ("Authority") on July 1, 2025, as a supervisory body providing oversight of the Civic Center, Ice Rink, Memorial Stadium, and the South Commons Softball Complex, as well as the employees responsible for each facility. The Authority consists of nine voting members and seven ex-officio members. The Columbus Council appoints the voting members based on specific criteria (e.g., corporate/employment attorney, marketing background, Trade Center representative, etc.). The ex-officio members include members of Government leadership, the heads of several Government departments or their designee (e.g., Parks and Recreation, Information Technology, Police etc.), a designee appointed by the Fort Benning Garrison Command, and a professional hockey promotional entity.

At the beginning of M&J's on-site fieldwork in September 2025, Civic Center staff had limited information regarding the role and responsibilities of the Authority. As fieldwork progressed, communication about the Authority increased, and on October 20, 2025, the Authority conducted its first meeting. During the meeting, Civic Center staff presented draft bylaws for the Authority, based on the bylaws of similar authorities in Columbus. The draft bylaws identified the Authority's responsibilities as oversight of the operations of the Civic Center and Ice Rink, including appointment of an Executive Director for the Civic Center and approval of contracts equal to or greater than \$10,000. As of the Authority's second meeting on November 10, 2025, the Authority had not approved the bylaws with members requesting clarity regarding the Executive Director's responsibilities for each facility, the relationship between the Authority and the CCG Parks and Recreation Department, and the relationship between the Authority and the Columbus Sports Council. During the November meeting, the members indicated an intention to develop short- and long-term goals for the Authority.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The Civic Center staff identify, contract, support, and host a variety of events annually in the Civic Center's various event spaces (the arena, courtyard, hospitality suites, amphitheater, and parking lot), as well as the Ice Rink. The Center manages events through three primary functions:

- Marketing and Event Identification
- Event Support
- General Management

Marketing and Event Identification

The Center employs a variety of marketing activities to help promote the venue to event promoters and organizers. The Marketing Manager uses connections with local media, advertisements, and relationships with community partners (such as Columbus State University and Visit Columbus, GA – the community's convention and visitors bureau) to connect with event promoters and introduce event organizers to the venue. During M&J's fieldwork, Center staff asserted in interviews that then-current advertisements promoting the Center's hospitality suites had garnered interest, with multiple event organizers reaching out to the Center claiming to have seen the advertisement.

As previously mentioned, the Center does not have a position dedicated to business-to-business marketing with responsibilities for approaching event promoters and identifying events. Information gained through interviews indicated that staff are inconsistent in efforts to proactively identify events. Some staff asserted that employees actively identify and contact promoters developing routing for events, such as the Interim Director who maintains a personal goal of proactively reaching out to one or two promoters each week. Other staff asserted that the Center waits for promoters to approach staff through the Center's inquiry webpage or direct communication, resulting in a more reactive approach for identifying events. The staff do not regularly, if ever, respond to requests for proposals issued by event organizers.

Much of the promotional material provided to M&J, as well as the Center's website, indicated that interested event organizers should contact the Center's Assistant Director position or interim Director position for pricing and availability, and staff indicated that contracts are signed and distributed by the Assistant Director position or interim Director position, suggesting that management positions have to largely focus on the day-to-day responsibilities of identifying and contracting individual events, rather than having capacity to serve in more supervisory and strategic roles, such as goal setting, performance monitoring, and establishing an overall vision for the types of events sought to fill the Center's annual schedule (as opposed to selecting events independent of an overall plan).

The Ice Rink Coordinator position is the role predominantly responsible for using industry connections and local partnerships to identify events.

Event Support

Staff support for events begins as soon as the contract has been executed and extends through post-show breakdown, reporting, and settlement. Support can be grouped in three time-based categories:

- Pre-Event Support
- Support During Event
- Post-Event Support

Pre-Event Support

Once a contract has been signed, the signature authority (generally the Director, interim Director, or Assistant Director position) transmits the contract to the Events Division to begin coordination with the event organizer. The Events Division works with the organizer to identify the event's needs, including timetable, personnel, space configuration, audio/visual support, catering, and directional signage. The Events Division transcribes the event needs on a fact sheet which is distributed among the divisions to help divisions identify scheduling and preparation plans. The Events Division additionally communicates needs to external partners, such as the Muscogee County Sheriff's Office. The Events Division hosts meetings, both with the event organizer and internal to Center staff, as necessary during the preparation stage.

The Events Division or Ice Rink Coordinator completes a scaled-back version of the fact sheet used for Civic Center events for events held at the Ice Rink.

For ticketed events, upon receiving the contract and/or fact sheet, the Box Office leadership creates the event in TM1 in preparation of beginning ticket sales. The Box Office Division frequently communicates directly with event promoters to identify ticket levels, prices, discounts or additional fees, and rules for special ticketing options (e.g., complementary tickets, platinum/very important people ["VIP"] tickets, group tickets, etc.). At the time agreed upon between the Center and the event organizer, the Box Office publicly publishes the event and begins selling individual tickets, both online and in-person. While the Box Office historically used paper tickets, or a combination of paper and digital tickets, the venue transitioned to "ticketless" (*i.e.*, digital tickets only) on January 1, 2026, with approval from the Columbus Sports & Entertainment Authority.

As necessary, the Box Office leadership or the Finance Manager will export pre-event reports from TM1 to conduct forecasting on expected sales figures, calculate the amount of money the Box Office and concessions stands will need to have on hand during the event, and provide sales information to event promoters. The Finance Division coordinates with the Government's central Finance Department to arrange for more petty cash to be on hand at the Center, as necessary.

Once events are publicized, the Marketing Manager begins promoting the event to the local community (if the event is open to the general public) through email newsletters, media promotions, radio partnerships, social media, video content, flyers, participation in community events, and partnered marketing with event promoters.

Either in the days prior to the event, or on the day of the event, the Operations Division arranges the space to meet the staging needs of the event. The Operations Division schedules change-over crews of intermittent employees and inmate details to build stages, arrange extra seating, hang signage, re-arrange hospitality suites and locker rooms/dressing rooms, prepare audio/visual equipment, and clean the facility. If necessary, the Operations Division assists clients with the load-in of client-owned equipment, promotional items, branding/signage, etc. While event organizers may attend set up to provide guidance, the Operations Division primarily relies on the fact sheets developed and transmitted by the Events Division to meet clients' needs and expectations.

If an event is cancelled, the Civic Center staff coordinate communication with attendees about rescheduled dates, as appropriate, and opportunities to receive refunds. Occasionally, events are cancelled after attendees have begun arriving, in which case the Security team and Manager on Duty coordinate in-person communication and Center staff assist with egress from both the venue and the parking lot.

Support During Event

During the event, a member of the Center management team serves as Manager on Duty or Supervisor on Duty. The Manager on Duty or Supervisor on Duty is responsible for the facility; back-of-house operations; and enforcing proper behavior of staff, talent, and attendees. For larger ticketed events, one of the Center's division managers or the Event Facilitator serves as the Manager on Duty on a rotating basis.⁷ For ticketed events with fewer than 400 attendees, Event Attendants manage the facility and operations and liaise with event organizers to limit the frequency at which the Center management team is required to be onsite for event oversight. For facility rentals, more junior staff or the Security Supervisor can serve as the Supervisor on Duty on a rotating basis, with the Operations Manager (or another Manager on Duty as assigned) available on call.

Prior to entering the facility, attendees interact with a variety of intermittent staff, including Event Attendants responsible for directing traffic in the parking lot, Security Guards enforcing rules about items not permitted in the venue, and Ticket Takers scanning digital tickets. Prior to the transition to ticketless on January 1, 2026, Ticket Takers also scanned printed tickets. The Box Office continues selling individual tickets as available, and also functions as a will-call location, where attendees with reserved tickets are able to check in and/or pick up tickets.

⁷ For standalone ticketed events (e.g., concerts, rodeos, etc.), the Finance Manager is not included in the rotation of Manager on Duty because the Finance Manager is responsible for the final settlement with the event promoter and the final payment to or from the event promoter.

Throughout the venue, Security Guards and Event Attendants manage the flow of crowds, limiting bottlenecks and barring unauthorized entry to back-of-house spaces (e.g., management offices; operations bays, storage, and equipment; locker rooms and dressing rooms, etc.). Ushers assist attendees with finding seat locations and manage entry to VIP seating. The Concessionaire Supervisor, or a designee, oversees the Center-managed concessions and souvenir stands, as well as the stands operated by the Center's anchor tenants – helping to ensure stocks are replenished, financial transactions occur without issue, and staff maintain an expected level of professionalism.

Both permanent full-time staff and intermittent staff assist organizers as needed during the event, including managing audio/visual elements; the scoreboard, which operates through sports-technology industry-leader Nevco's scoreboard controller system; operating the Zamboni; and providing troubleshooting support for any issues that arise.

Post-Event

When an event ends, Event Attendants, Ushers, Security Guards, and other intermittent staff conduct crowd control measures to ensure efficient and safe egress from the venue and the parking lot. After attendees have exited, the Janitorial team begins conducting post-event cleanup and other Operations Division staff assist the event organizer with the load-out of client-owned equipment. If necessary, the Operations Division schedules a change-over crew to rearrange the venue immediately after an event in order to meet limited timelines between the concluded event and the next ticketed event or facility rental. If immediate break down of the setup is not required, the Operations Division schedules the change-over crew for the most advantageous time to break down the setup or rearrange for the subsequent event.

The Box Office leadership closes out the event in TM1 and begins reconciling cash received and credit card receipts with sales reports generated by the system. The Box Office Manager conducts an audit of sales data, body scanner reports (*i.e.*, the number of people who passed through security screening devices), complimentary ticket figures, and other data as required by the Finance Division and as requested by event organizers.

For ticketed events, the Finance Division determines the final settlement with the event promoter, calculating the ticket sales and fee figures owed to the client, labor costs, production and promotion costs, catering, and incidental costs. The Finance Division, in conjunction with the Events and Box Office Divisions, uses the settlement to determine how much is owed to or from the client.

General Management

Outside of event-specific duties, the full-time staff have a range of responsibilities related to general management of the Civic Center, Ice Rink, and Liberty Theatre. Center leadership, the Finance and Events Divisions, and the Marketing Manager maintain offices along a back-of-house hallway (herein “Management Hallway”) that also includes a conference room and is accessible only to Government employees with access badges, as set up through the security vendor’s (Verkada) security system. Center leadership and division heads use the proximity of much of the management team along the Management Hallway to collaboratively coordinate activities and regularly hold meetings regarding overall management of the Civic Center, as well as specific events. The staff along the Management Hallway also use the proximity to strategically plan the Civic Center’s direction on an informal, *ad hoc* basis. While the Box Office and Operations Divisions are not located along the Management Hallway, division heads and staff attend meetings as necessary and frequently interact with day-to-day intermittent staff, especially Ticket Sellers and Security Guards. The Operations Manager maintains access to a series of security cameras throughout the venue to monitor the facility through Verkada’s interface and assist the Security staff in maintaining a safe environment for Center staff and patrons.

The Operations Division maintains a series of offices and workspaces in a back-of-house area at the Civic Center (herein “Operations Hallway”) that include storage space, load-in bays, and equipment-specific spaces for the maintenance of the ice used during the Columbus River Dragons season (e.g., chillers, ice plant, etc.). When operating at the Ice Rink, the Operations Division has a similar, but smaller back-of-house area for storage of equipment.

As needed, the Operations Division conducts routine and emergency maintenance on equipment and other elements of the venue that are not specific to the Center’s structure. When structural needs are identified (e.g., roof leaks), the Operations Division coordinates with the Facilities Maintenance Department to provide fixes and/or coordinate contracting a third-party vendor to provide fixes. Operations Division staff stated in interviews with M&J that the Civic Center maintenance staff understand the Facilities Maintenance Department has a large scope of work and try to perform as much maintenance as possible and allowable to limit the Facilities Maintenance Department’s need to assign staff to the Civic Center to address minor need (e.g., lightbulb replacements).

The Operations Division additionally ensures routine upkeep of the Civic Center and Ice Rink aesthetics. Janitorial staff perform custodial duties on non-event days as necessary to maintain a clean environment for members of the public visiting the Box Office or event promoters touring the facility. Maintenance staff perform general upkeep in order to provide an attractive facility for clients, attendees, and staff, such as replacing carpeting and repainting offices, hallways, the concourse, and other amenities.

While the Operations Division tries to provide a high level of maintenance services for the Civic Center, the Government has lacked a preventative maintenance schedule for the overall structure of the building since its construction between 1994 and 1996, resulting in an aging structure and equipment and limiting the Operations Division's ability to fully address maintenance issues. Major structural issues, such as a leaking roof, are primarily addressed in a reactive manner. Civic Center leadership worked with Government leadership to fund a series of equipment (ranging from seating and industrial vacuums to chillers and compressors) purchases and improvements during the review period (FY21-FY25) through the Friends of Columbus Trust. However, due to the lack of a Government-wide long-term preventative maintenance and capital improvement schedule, many of the equipment purchases came at or after the end of the equipment's useful life. Without Government-planned capital improvements, the venue does not provide some of the same resources more modern or more frequently updated events venues in other municipalities provide, such as multiple accessible elevators for staff, clients, and patrons unable to use the stairs between the venue's two levels. Additional limitations include minimal storage for equipment and supplies in back-of-house spaces and a Box Office setup that creates difficulty for Center staff and patrons to communicate clearly.

Customer Service

As the vast majority of the Center's staff interact with clients (*i.e.*, event promoters) and patrons on a regular basis, Civic Center leadership indicated to M&J that staff are expected to demonstrate a high level of professionalism and customer service. Supervisory positions, including intermittent positions, noted that management supports decisions related to disciplinary actions due to poor staff conduct, with disciplinary actions ranging from additional training to termination of employment. Supervisory positions indicated to M&J that interviews frequently include questions related to customer service expectations and experience.

While the Center management have a high degree of influence over staff's behavior interacting with clients and patrons, control over third-party personnel (such as those employed by the Center's anchor tenants) is limited and can inadvertently reflect on the Civic Center and its staff.

Use of Technology

The Civic Center uses a variety of technologies, including both enterprise-wide systems and department-specific solutions. For most financial and HR purposes, the Civic Center uses the Government-wide enterprise resource management system, Advantage. The Operations Division uses the Government's work order system, Q-Alert, for the submission and management of both internal work order requests and requests for the Facilities Maintenance Department.

Department-specific technologies include Nevco's scoreboard solutions, Verkada's system of security cameras and badge access, and American Refrigeration's services related to maintaining the Civic Center and Ice Rink's ice production and maintenance systems. The Center maintains a partnership with Ticketmaster for the sale of tickets, granting the Box Office Division access to TM1 – Ticketmaster's solution for managing events through the event-ticketing lifecycle.

The Civic Center does not use a lead generation system to track and manage leads identified through advertisements, proactive communication with promoters, or the Center's booking inquiry webpage, which limits the Center's ability to better ensure leads are converted into bookings. The lack of a lead generation system also limits the Center's ability to analyze lead sources (e.g., Center website, advertisements in industry publications, email newsletters, etc.), which would allow the Center to identify the most effective sources, both in general and for different types of events. While the Center worked with the Department of Information Technology to develop the online booking system (*i.e.*, booking inquiry webpage) between 2024 and 2025, the resource is minimal with limited information requested and/or required.

Similarly, the Center does not use a comprehensive event management or project management system to help ensure events are managed from lead generation through settlement. While TM1 provides event management resources, the system is focused primarily on the event-ticketing lifecycle which results in manual management of non-ticketed events (e.g., facility rentals). During the review period (FY21-FY25) Center staff manually routed information through individual forms and printed documents without an automated workflow. Manual routing of information, rather than automatic workflows that include relevant parties, can lead to delayed communication of events and needs. As a result, staff presented inconsistent perceptions of communications among the divisions. Some staff suggested to M&J that communications and coordination are better than in the past, and regularly recurring meetings among several divisions helps ensure staff are aware of events. Other staff indicated that communication of event needs (or the existence of events themselves) does not regularly occur proactively, resulting in staff reportedly finding out about events and needs at the last minute or after the events are published on Ticketmaster and posted on the website.

M&J's fieldwork did not indicate that the lack of a project management system led to significant issues managing events and meeting clients' expectations during the review period, however, the Center is potentially missing opportunities to follow up on leads and has developed communication and workflow concerns that impact event preparation and internal culture.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

The Center's guiding documentation does not form a comprehensive, enterprise-wide document, but rather is scattered among divisions and standalone documents. According to information gained in interviews with Center staff, policies are generally issued on an *ad hoc* basis. M&J received several standalone policies, some of which were outdated in terms of staffing structures, resources, and key community partners (e.g., the community's previous ice hockey team, the Cottonmouths, which ceased operations in 2017). Policies are not collected in a single policies and procedures manual, or similar document, which could result in staff not being aware of certain policies or adhering to outdated versions of policies.

While several of the divisions maintain division-specific standard operating procedures (“SOPs”), the Center does not have enterprise-wide SOPs beyond recommended staffing models for different types of events. Additionally, the division-specific SOPs are laid out in a variety of documents – sometimes with multiple documents for different functions within the same division – which are frequently structured differently. The SOPs do not exist in a comprehensive, collected form with consistent formatting and content (e.g., purpose, scope, responsible party identification, tasks, chain of command, etc.). In interviews with M&J, Center staff indicated that few positions previously maintained job aides or internal process descriptions beyond externally developed guides related to systems and equipment. As a result, Center staff further stated that multiple divisions have developed division-specific guides on an *ad hoc* basis. The lack of a comprehensive policies and procedures manual, SOPs, or similar resources contributes to communication issues and lack of formal consistent workflows among divisions.

For 2025-2026, the Center has operated with the guidance of a strategic plan developed by the interim Director. For each division and leadership position, the plan lists an overall goal, along with one or more categorized discrete tasks and strategies related to achieving the goal. The strategic plan concludes that the “strategic plan strengthens operations, reduces costs, enhances engagement, and grows the Civic Center’s revenue and reputation.” The document provides a starting point for Center leadership and the Columbus Sports & Entertainment Authority (“Authority”) to begin developing a multi-year, comprehensive strategic plan with both division-specific goals and objectives, as well as overarching goals and objectives for the Center as a whole. The goals, which are presented in the following report section, do not contemplate measurable progress that can capture the results of the Center’s efforts toward achieving the stated goals.

As part of the Government’s budget development process, the Center’s divisions complete Strategic Planning Forms that define the division’s activities, goals, objectives, and performance indicators, as well as how the division’s activities align with the City’s Vision Columbus strategic priorities. Whereas other departments assessed by M&J incorporated the Strategic Planning Forms provided by divisions and functional units into the goals, objectives, and performance indicators listed for the respective department in the annual Government budget book, the Civic Center did not convert its divisions’ Strategic Planning Forms into goals and objectives listed in the budget book (as evidenced by the goals, objectives, and performance indicators tables in the following two report sections). Similarly, the goals and objectives in the strategic plan do not align with the divisions’ Strategic Planning Forms and only align for two objectives/tasks/strategies in the budget book (LED light conversion and increase venue revenue through sponsorships), suggesting disconnected efforts among Center leadership, and potentially between the Center and the CCG Finance Department, in the strategic planning process.

Prior to the first meeting of the Columbus Sports & Entertainment Authority (“Authority”) on October 20, 2025, Civic Center staff prepared an informational manual for the Authority, including the following sections:

- About the Facility
- Booking and Staffing (Civic Center and Ice Rink)

- Department Approved FY26 Budget
- FY25 Friends of Columbus Purchases
- Employee Listing⁸
- Civic Center/Cultural Affairs Director Job Description
- Civic Center Tenant Agreements
- Ice Rink User Agreements
- Sample Concert Contract and Settlement
- Liberty Theatre Upgrades
- Sports & Entertainment Authority Roster
- Civic Center Advisory Board
- Liberty Theatre Advisory Board
- Venue Booking Organizations
- Venue Membership
- Preferred Caterer's List
- Civic Center and Ice Rink Rental Rates
- Draft Sports & Entertainment Authority Bylaws
- Trade Center Authority Bylaws
- Golf Authority Bylaws
- Upcoming Events

The manual provided foundational information about the managed venues, but did not present information about the Center's then-current or prior strategic priorities or master planning documentation with recommendations related to capital improvements for the venues.

Strategic Priorities

Civic Center leadership suggested that the Director, interim Director, and Assistant Director positions maintain responsibility for developing strategic direction for the venues. However, M&J's fieldwork indicated that leadership positions are heavily involved in the day-to-day activities of identifying and contracting individual events, which potentially limit the positions' capacities to perform in more supervisory and strategic roles, such as goal setting, performance monitoring, and establishing an overall vision for the types of events sought to fill the Center's annual schedule.

⁸ The event listing section only includes the employees occupying permanent full-time positions, the two intermittent positions that are treated more like permanent part-time positions (Security Supervisor and Janitorial Supervisor), and the intermittent Concessionaire Supervisor position.

M&J acknowledges that the lack of consistent and permanent leadership for the Civic Center during the review period (FY21-FY25) and that the establishment of the Columbus Sports & Entertainment Authority (“Authority”) impacted the development of strategic priorities and strategic planning documentation, especially later in the review period, while staff waited for input from Government leadership, new Center leadership, and the Authority. While M&J acknowledges the perception of limited authority to conduct comprehensive strategic planning impacted parts of the review period, neither staff nor provided documentation indicated that there existed previous strategic plans and/or master plans that guided the direction of the Civic Center, Ice Rink, and Liberty Theatre.

The following table lists the goals, discrete tasks and strategies, and task categorizations (herein referred to as “components”) identified in the Center’s 2025-2026 strategic plan.

Table 3: Columbus Civic Center Strategic Plan 2025-2026

Division	Goal	Components	Tasks/Strategies
Finance	Reduce overall operating costs while maintaining service quality.	Vendor & Contract Cost Reduction	• Re-evaluate long-term vendor contracts for concessions, janitorial, and equipment rentals. • Explore bundled purchasing with other City departments to reduce costs.
		Smarter Event Budgeting	• Require standardized event cost sheets for every event prior to approval. • Track profit/loss on each event to adjust pricing, labor, and rider requirements.
		Operational Cost Controls	• Implement spending thresholds and approval workflows for [divisions]. • Conduct quarterly financial performance reviews against budget targets.
Operations	Improve efficiency, streamline labor, and reduce scheduling conflicts.	Scheduling Optimization	• Implement a digital crew-scheduling platform. • Set a 14-day forecast schedule and a 72-hour final schedule rule.
		Utilization of City Inmate Labor Program	• Assign inmates to cleaning, grounds, trash runs, walkway clearing, set-up assistance, and staging.

Division	Goal	Components	Tasks/Strategies
		Conversion Excellence Program	- Standardize checklists for all conversions. - Cross-train arena technicians.
Marketing	Strengthen brand presence, build partnerships, and grow community engagement.	Community Partnership Development	Build collaborations with VisitColumbusGA, Chamber of Commerce, CSU, Fort Moore, influencers, and schools.
		Social Media & Engagement Growth	Monthly content calendars, behind-the-scenes content, giveaways, user-general campaigns.
		Brand Visibility	- High-quality photo/video event coverage. - Strengthened signage.
Interim Director	Lead organizational growth, diversify programming, and strengthen long-term sustainability.	Diversify Shows & Events	Expand promoter outreach across multiple genres.
		Increase Venue Revenue	Dynamic pricing, VIP packages, vendor programs, sponsorship booths.
		Energy Efficiency & Power Expense Reduction	LED transitions, HVAC audits, smart scheduling, sustainability grants.
		Naming Rights & Sponsorship Expansion	Naming rights catalog, short-term and long-term packages.
Box Office	Improve clarity and customer satisfaction.	Ticket Selling Enhancements	Simplify event pages, improve ADA clarity, upsell VIP, expand kiosks.
		Customer Service Improvements	2-minute wait time standard, bilingual signage, clear FAQs.
Events	Improve guest flow, safety awareness, and event experience.	Enhanced Ingress & Egress	Directional signage, ambassador staff, digital crowd updates.
		Emergency Exit Education	Exit diagrams, pre-show safety videos, staff communication.
		Crowd Safety Training	Quarterly crowd management workshops, wristbands, barriers.

While many of the goals provide realistic direction for enhancing the Center’s performance, the tasks and strategies identified are largely one-time accomplishments or are too vague to provide measurable progress toward successfully meeting the goal.

The following table lists the goals, objectives, and performance indicators identified by the Box Office in its Strategic Planning Form. The rows of the table do not indicate a relationship among the goal, objective, and performance indicators listed.⁹

Table 4: Box Office Goals

Goals	Objectives	Performance Indicators
Convert to digital ticket delivery only by the end of 2025 for all tickets purchased at the Columbus Civic Center and the Columbus Ice Rink.	Provide a modern, up-to-date ticket busying experience for Civic Center customers and Columbus Ice Rink customers.	• Shorter wait times between ticket sales. • Elimination of ticket purchase limits for outside events. • Reduction of paper usage with the elimination of paper tickets. • Ease of payment processing with the reduction of cash acceptance. • Increased customer satisfaction ratings involving ticketing operations procedures.
Upgrade Box Office microphones in the Civic Center Box Office by the end of 2025.	Provide an aesthetically pleasing and functioning work environment for Box Office Staff at the Civic Center and the Columbus Ice Rink.	
Repair or replace outdated furnishing, flooring, cabinetry in the Box Office by the end of 2026.	Improve the ticketing experience for patrons.	
Update the ticketing delivery experience for outdoor events (fairs, football classics, etc.) to digital ticket delivery only by 2026.		
End cash sales at the Civic Center and Ice Rink and be card only by the end of 2027.		

The Government's FY25 Adopted Operating Budget identifies a series of goals, objectives, and performance indicators for the Civic Center and the Ice Rink, along with prior-year actual and current-year projected metrics. The table below lists each goal, along with associated objectives and performance indicators.

Table 5: Civic Center and Ice Rink Goals

Goal	Objective	Performance Indicator
Civic Center		
Develop annualized events to support the programming of the Civic Center.	Increase the number of annual events such as Christmas parties, summer programs, etc. to help fill the slower periods in the calendar.	Number of annual events FY23 Actual: 3 FY24 Actual: 3 FY25 Projected: 3

⁹ M&J uses the Box Office Division's Strategic Planning Form, as it was the sample provided during fieldwork. After the completion of fieldwork and the initial drafting of this report, M&J received other divisions' forms and confirmed that the same conclusions could be drawn from each division's form.

Goal	Objective	Performance Indicator
Increase ancillary revenues.	Increase sponsorships and event related revenues.	Percentage of increase in sponsorships FY23 Actual: 5% FY24 Actual: 5% FY25 Projected: 5%
	Increase ticket, food, and beverage sales from increased event bookings. Recognize total increase of 15% from previous year.	Percentage increase in sales FY23 Actual: 5% FY24 Actual: 5% FY25 Projected: 5%
Support the Civic Center with an increase in revenue through concessions at events and sponsorships from ventured services.	Increase revenues per person at all events in food and beverage purchases, and alcohol and soda contracts.	Percentage of increase in concessions FY23 Actual: 10% FY24 Actual: 5% FY25 Projected: 5%
		Percentage of increase in vendor sponsorships FY23 Actual: 10% FY24 Actual: 5% FY25 Projected: 5%
Continue to increase staff training.	Employees earn NARCE (ice maintenance/building) certification. Send minimum of one (1) employee for training until all full-time staff have been certified. ¹⁰	Number of employees certified FY23 Actual: 4 FY24 Actual: 1 FY25 Projected: 1
Continue energy conservation initiatives.	Complete LED light conversion and increase energy savings by 20%.	Percentage of energy savings FY23 Actual: 10% FY24 Actual: 10% FY25 Projected: 10%
Ice Rink		
Increase revenue during the months of June, July, and August each year.	Utilize facility to increase revenues from non-traditional rentals by removing the ice during these months.	Percentage of increase in revenues FY23 Actual: 5% FY24 Actual: 5% FY25 Projected: 10%
Increase in private ice rentals for groups.	Increase revenue at the Ice Rink by 10% to 20%.	Percentage of increase in revenues over prior year FY23 Actual: 5% FY24 Actual: 10% FY25 Projected: 10%

¹⁰ NARCE stands for the North American Rink Conference & Expo, which is a major annual conference hosted by the United States Ice Rink Association for ice rink owners, operators, and associated personnel.

Goal	Objective	Performance Indicator
Increase public skating numbers.	Advertise and attract more patrons for public skating to increase 10% to 20% growth in patrons over prior year.	Percentage growth in patrons over prior year. FY23 Actual: 10% FY24 Actual: 10% FY25 Projected: 10%

Performance Metrics/Outputs

Division-specific performance metrics identified through documentation or interviews with Center staff were predominantly input and output data (which can only provide limited indications of successful performance) or were challenging to quantify with heavy reliance on anecdotal observations. In general, performance metrics were not clearly aligned with goals and objectives, and did not identify standards by which the respective division could measure its successful progress toward achieving goals and objectives.

For the Civic Center as a whole, the performance indicators listed in the annual budget are aligned with goals and objectives, however, few goals and objectives identify associated performance standards. The few performance standards identified were not consistently adjusted based on year-over-year performance, nor were projections. Most of the performance indicators provided limited context by which to understand whether the actual and projected numbers present positive progress toward achievement of goals, fall short of where the Center needs to be in order to achieve goals, or how the actual and projected numbers were calculated. The budget book does not present explanations as to changes or lack of changes in performance indicators, such as year-over-year changes in operations or staffing.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

As previously discussed, the Civic Center displayed a lack of formal communication workflows and has a perception by staff of limited communication. Some staff indicated to M&J in interviews that breaks in communications have resulted in excessive last-minute requests and negative relations among staff. Staff indicated that inefficiencies in communications result in a lack of proactivity, which impacts employees' abilities to complete their duties and meet clients' expectations in a timely manner. While some staff suggested to M&J that the opposite is true – that communications and relationships were more positive than in the past – M&J noted staff frequently contradicted each other and presented misunderstandings of other divisions' responsibilities. While few organizations maintain a full level of understanding of job duties and responsibilities among functional units, the Center's perceptions exceed basic misunderstandings, resulting in frustration and personal judgements on others' work ethics and output. Conflicting statements indicated that interdivisional workflows are not universally understood by all employees, which can further impact relationships among staff.

Perceptions of internal culture and job performance were most notable between staff who work in the Management Hallway and staff who are located elsewhere. While not universal, the majority of concerns expressed about other divisions were between two divisions located in different workspaces within the Center.

The lack of a permanent Director has also impacted the internal culture among the Civic Center staff. Regardless of the individuals who held the Director position on an interim basis at any point during the review period (FY21-FY25), the lack of a permanent Director resulted in perceived and actual limits on authority, which further impacted interpersonal relationships. While some divisions and functional areas may operate in a unified manner, the lack of regular leadership has affected the Center staff's ability to develop a comprehensive strategic direction that helps ensure all divisions are fully coordinating efforts.

Center staff have attempted to develop a sense of unity through initiatives such as Employee of the Month and Employee of the Year awards, but the Center has not focused enough attention on addressing the root of the problem, which stems from a lack of clear enterprise-wide procedures, interdivisional workflows, and inconsistent communications.

Additionally, some of the staff asserted that event identification is driven largely by personal interests and not enough effort has been made to diversify the types of events hosted at the Civic Center. While M&J's review of past and upcoming events did not indicate a clear pattern in programming, perceptions among staff may be shared by members of the public, which could impact overall perceptions of the Center and willingness to attend or host events at the venue. Differences in understanding of how events are identified and contracted can play a major role in developing perceptions of a programming schedule lacking in diversity of events.

Even with personal differences among employees and among divisions, staff predominantly agreed in interviews with M&J that the Center's employees were consistent in their dedication to the Civic Center and the community, and expressed a desire to maintain employment with the Civic Center due to job satisfaction and pride in the Center's impact on the community.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: The Columbus Civic Center ("Civic Center" or "Center") lacked consistent leadership, with the only permanent Director serving for 2.5 years, followed by two interim Directors. The absence of a sustained permanent Director has impacted staff culture due to perceived and actual lack of authority, as well as a limited ability for the Center to develop a strategic direction.

Recommendation 1: Columbus Consolidated Government ("Government") leadership and the Columbus Sports & Entertainment Authority ("Authority") should prioritize searching for and hiring an employee to fill the Civic Center's vacant Director position (or Executive Director position, per the naming scheme introduced in the Authority's draft bylaws).

Observation 2: The Civic Center staff directly manage concessions in house, which may decrease the Center's concessionaire and catering efficiency, require a higher need for intermittent staff, and impact the Center's ability to implement emerging trends, such as interchangeable menu concepts, grab-and-go services, cashless payments, and centralization of catering services. Many Georgia-based event venues have developed a modified management model that either delineates duties and events between the venue and a third-party concessions management vendor, or includes certain stipulations in the contract for third-party concessions management (such as a requirement to designate a certain percentage of concessions space to local restaurants and small businesses).

Recommendation 2: Civic Center leadership, Government leadership, and the Authority should review the Center's current concessions management model to determine whether the model meets the needs of the Center's clients and patrons from the community. In order to achieve a desirable balance between the Center's profit and its supply and labor costs, Leadership could consider alternative models for concessions management, including full management by a third-party vendor, delineated management by both Center staff and a third-party vendor, or updated contracts for the local restaurants that serve as the Center's anchor tenants.

Observation 3: The Operations Division consists of three functional areas that conduct a vast variety of duties for the Civic Center's general management and maintenance, as well as pre-, intra-, and post-show responsibilities. The Operations Manager position, the head of the Operations Division, directly oversees seven full-time positions and two intermittent positions that function more as permanent part-time positions, as well as maintains responsibility for two additional full-time positions and numerous intermittent employees and inmate labor. When considering the number of functional areas and full-time and intermittent positions for which the Operations Manager is responsible, the Operations Manager's span of control may exceed human resources recommended standards.

Recommendation 3: The Civic Center should consider coordinating with the Human Resources Department to determine if a need exists for an Assistant Operations Manager position and, if so, develop a job description and business case for the allocation of a new full-time position.

Observation 4: Two intermittent positions employed by the Civic Center function more as permanent part-time positions with regular near-full-time schedules and supervisory responsibilities over functional areas: a Security Supervisor position and a Janitorial Supervisor position. The Civic Center includes the supervisory roles on its organizational chart, with the current employees identified, further indicating that the positions are viewed as permanent positions. Due to the intermittent nature of the positions, however, the services provided and overseen by the quasi-permanent positions are not guaranteed and consistently performed. While concessions management may not require more regular conduct, the absence of permanent supervisory positions over security and janitorial services may limit the consistent presence of security at the venue and decrease the frequency of custodial duties intended to maintain the cleanliness and visual appeal of the venue. The inconsistent work schedule has led to frequent turnover in janitorial positions, including the Janitorial Supervisor position.¹¹

Recommendation 4: The Civic Center should consider coordinating with the Human Resources Department to determine if a need exists for permanent part-time or permanent full-time supervisory positions for the Center’s security and/or janitorial functions and, if so, develop the necessary job description(s) and business case for the allocation of one or more new permanent positions.

Observation 5: The Marketing Manager position is the primary employee promoting the Civic Center and Ice Rink as venues for hosting and attending events. As a result, the Marketing Manager position is responsible for both business-to-consumer (“B2C”) and business-to-business (“B2B”) marketing, which can decrease the position’s ability to provide adequate attention to either. Similar events venues frequently employ both a marketing position focused on B2C promotions, and a marketing and/or sales position focused on B2B promotions. Similar events venues can also assign responsibility for developing community partnerships and sponsorships to the B2B-focused position, hire a full-time or part-time employee to exclusively manage partnerships and sponsorships, or contract a consultant who specializes in partnership and sponsorship development on an as-needed basis.

Recommendation 5A: The Civic Center should consider coordinating with the Human Resources Department to determine if a need exists for a marketing and/or sales position focused on B2B marketing to event promoters and organizers and, if so, develop a job description and business case for the allocation of a new full-time position.

Recommendation 5B: The Civic Center and Authority should determine the desired direction for developing partnerships and sponsorships and consider assigning the responsibility to a B2B-marketing-focused position, developing a business case for a separate full-time or part-time role solely responsible for partnerships and sponsorships, or contracting a consultant who specializes in partnership and sponsorship development to support the Center on an as-needed basis.

¹¹ After the completion of M&J’s fieldwork and the initial drafting of this report, Center leadership indicated that the FY27 budget request included a permanent, full-time Janitorial Supervisor position. As the scope of this Assessment did not include a review of FY27 budget requests, M&J cannot independently verify this inclusion.

Observation 6A: The Civic Center and Columbus Ice Rink (“Ice Rink”) were constructed between 1994 and 1996. At that time, the Government did not develop a preventative maintenance and capital improvement schedule for the venues, resulting in aging structures and equipment, including equipment that has exceeded its useful life.

Observation 6B: The Government assumed ownership for the Liberty Theatre & Cultural Arts Center (“Liberty Theatre”) in 2023, with the intention to renovate the building and transfer management to the Civic Center staff. As of M&J’s fieldwork, the Liberty Theatre was closed for renovations, including mold remediation and replacement of the electrical system.

Recommendation 6: The Government should conduct or contract a formal facility assessment of the Civic Center, Ice Rink, and Liberty Theatre to identify immediate and upcoming maintenance and replacement needs, as well as identify opportunities for modernization of the venues. The Government should develop ongoing, regular preventative maintenance, equipment replacement, and capital improvement schedules for each venue.

Observation 7: The Center does not use a lead generation system or a comprehensive event management/project management system, resulting in the possibility of missed opportunities to convert leads into contracts and impacting internal communications. The Center lacks formal workflows that help ensure information related to events is communicated to all relevant divisions and personnel.

Recommendation 7: The Civic Center should consider coordinating with the CCG Department of Information Technology to identify potential lead generation and/or event management/project management solutions. The Center should develop formal interdivisional workflows detailing the transmission of information related to events to all relevant divisions and personnel, potentially creating automated versions of workflows in identified lead generation and/or event management/project management solutions.

Observation 8A: The Civic Center does not maintain a comprehensive policies and procedures manual, standard operating procedures (“SOPs”) document, or formal job aides. While individual divisions have used external vendors’ manuals or have developed internal guides and SOPs, the lack of comprehensive, enterprise-wide documentation with consistent formatting and content can result in inconsistent understanding of divisions’ responsibilities and interdivisional workflows.¹²

Observation 8B: The Civic Center has historically issued new and updated policies as standalone documents, without a common repository or document collecting active policies. As a result, staff may have inconsistent understandings of policies. Certain policies have not been reviewed or updated recently, and include outdated information and procedures.

¹² After the completion of M&J’s fieldwork and the initial drafting of this report, Center leadership asserted to M&J that the Center maintains a book of facility-wide SOPs. M&J was not provided with this resource, so could not independently verify its existence.

Recommendation 8: The Civic Center should review active policies and available procedures manuals and job aides to identify outdated guiding documentation. The Civic Center should update any information included in policies and guides that is no longer applicable, and should collect policies and SOPs in a singular policies and procedures manual, or similar document. The Civic Center should also document formalized interdivisional workflows in the policies and procedures manual, or similar document.

Observation 9: The Civic Center operated under a single-year strategic plan practice during the review period (FY21-FY25), as well as division-developed Strategic Planning Forms. The various strategic guidance documents were primarily focused on divisions as individual units, with limited overarching goals and objectives and without a unified vision or purpose statement. The strategic guidance documents did not include overlapping goals and had limited overlap with the goals listed for the Center in the City's annual budget books. While the strategic documents used by the Center can provide short-term strategies, the Center did not operate using a multi-year strategic plan, master plan, or similar guiding document with both short-term and long-term priorities, limiting the Center's ability to operate in a proactive, strategic, and uniform manner.

Recommendation 9: The Civic Center should coordinate with the Authority to internally develop or contract a third party for the development of a multi-year strategic plan and/or master plan that will provide the Center with short-term and long-term direction for operations, strategic initiatives, and venue capital improvements. The Center could use the currently existing single-year strategic plan and division-developed Strategic Planning Forms as a starting point for the development of a multi-year strategic plan and/or master plan.

Observation 10: The Civic Center maintained limited enterprise-wide goals, objectives, and performance measures and standards during the review period that could measure the progress made toward achieving the Center's goals and mission, as well as could provide intentional, actionable tasks and initiatives to provide desired levels of service delivery to the community.

Recommendation 10: The Civic Center should coordinate with the Authority to internally develop or contract a third party for the development of goals and objectives that contemplate measurable progress, capturing the results of the Center's efforts and ensuring a consistent direction forward for the Center's future prioritization of programs and activities. The Civic Center should further coordinate with the Authority to internally develop or contract a third party for the development of performance measures and standards that can enable the Center to better monitor performance, evaluate progress toward goals and objectives, and support future improvements to the Center's service delivery methods through data-driven decision-making.

Observation 11: Fieldwork indicated inconsistent communications and perceptions of communication among staff, especially among staff in different divisions and different workspaces. Inconsistent communications and inconsistent understanding of other divisions' duties and responsibilities has impacted interpersonal relationships among staff. A lack of formal, documented workflows and consistent permanent leadership have further impacted interpersonal relationships.

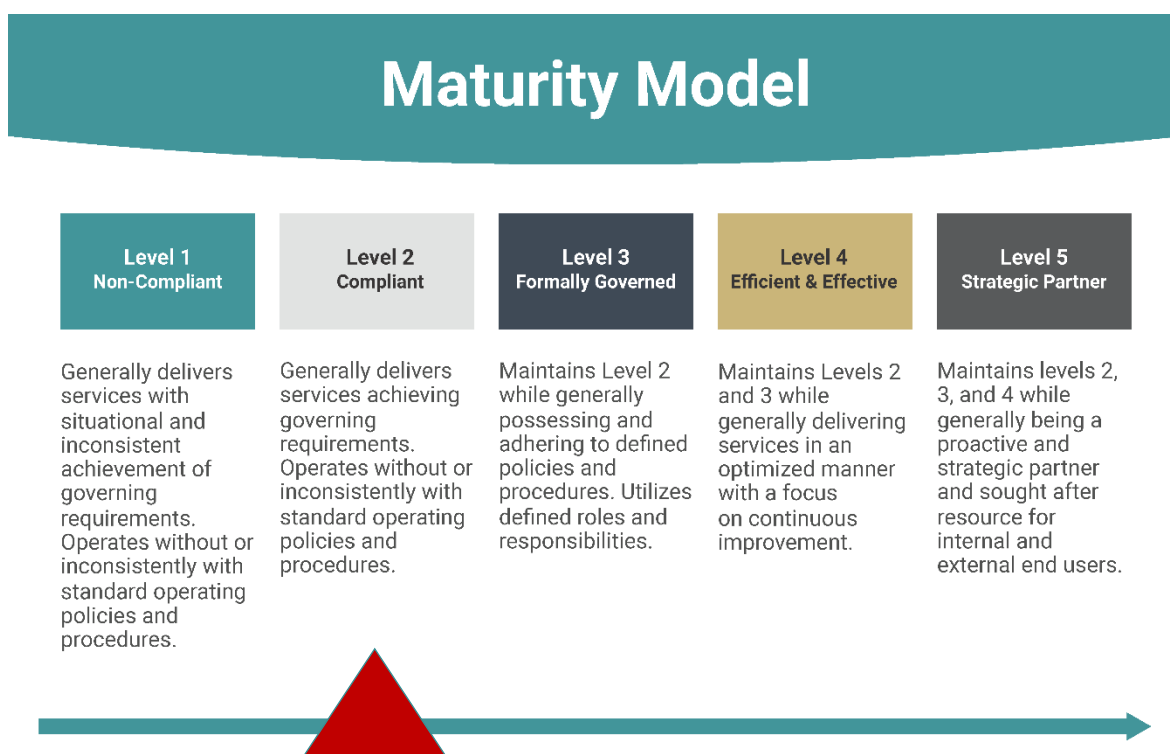
Recommendation 11: Civic Center and Governmental leadership should make more efforts to regularly engage with staff across all levels and functional areas, ensuring more intentional engagement across all divisions. Communication should include both formal announcements and meetings, as well as informal discussions among coworkers in different workspaces and non-work-oriented team-building efforts. Leadership should seek to understand the duties and responsibilities of all functional areas within the Center and develop methods, such as documented job descriptions and workflows, to provide Center staff with increased visibility into the duties performed by coworkers.

Observation 12: Some of the Civic Center’s staff asserted in interviews with M&J that event identification and selection is driven largely by personal interests and not enough effort has been made to diversify the types of events hosted at the venue. While M&J’s review of past and upcoming events did not indicate a clear pattern in programming, perceptions among staff may be shared by members of the public, which could impact overall perceptions of the Center and willingness to attend or host events at the venue. Differences in understanding of how events are identified and contracted can play a major role in developing perceptions of a programming schedule lacking in diversity of events.

Recommendation 12: The Civic Center should formalize and document the event identification, selection, and contracting process to allow staff more insight into the process and mitigate misconceptions. The Center could use resources in aforementioned recommendations, such as a lead generation system and/or a B2B-focused marketing/sales position, to proactively reach a more diverse range of event promoters and identify the most effective methods for generating leads for different types of events.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department's maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Civic Center as **Level 2: Compliant**. The Center hosts and generates a variety of ticketed events and non-ticketed facility rentals for the community with a strong emphasis on customer service. The absence of formal workflows and holistic documentation of policies and procedures has resulted in inconsistent communications and misconceptions related to processes. The Center's lack of strategic direction and planning has impacted perceptions of event selection and resulted in limited proactivity, instead relying on reactive and last-minute conduct of business.

Conclusion

The management of the Columbus Civic Center and Columbus Ice Rink has resulted in an elevated level of pride from employees for the programming and services that the venues provide to the community – ranging from ticketed touring shows to facility rentals and public skate sessions. The Center’s ability to meet external expectations has been impacted by a lack of consistent leadership and inconsistent understanding of job duties and processes resulting from inconsistent communication and limited formal workflows and documentation. As the newly established Columbus Sports & Entertainment Authority finalizes its bylaws and establishes short-term and long-term goals, the Authority will likely provide the Center with the strategic direction that the Center lacked during the review period (FY21-FY25). M&J would like to thank Civic Center leadership, as well as the 14 individuals across all levels of the organizational structure, for allowing us to conduct numerous interviews, tour the Civic Center and Ice Rink facilities, and for providing us with numerous documents and pieces of information used in our analysis.

3.B Community Reinvestment

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“CCG” or “City”) Community Reinvestment Department (“Department”) works to improve the quality of life, especially for low- to moderate-income residents by administering projects funded through federal grant programs related to affordable housing, neighborhood revitalization, and expanding economic opportunities.

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

In 2022, the Department spearheaded a project related to investing in more community streetlights in response to complaints from residents regarding poorly lit areas of the City. The Department partnered with the Columbus Consolidated Government’s (“CCG”) Engineering Department in addition to Georgia Power to improve street lighting. The Department utilized Community Development Block Grant (“CDBG”) funds totaling \$611,000 to upgrade lighting, thereby increasing road visibility and pedestrian safety. Over 1,200 existing pole-mounted street light fixtures were replaced in 17 neighborhoods throughout the City, and the project was completed in February 2024.

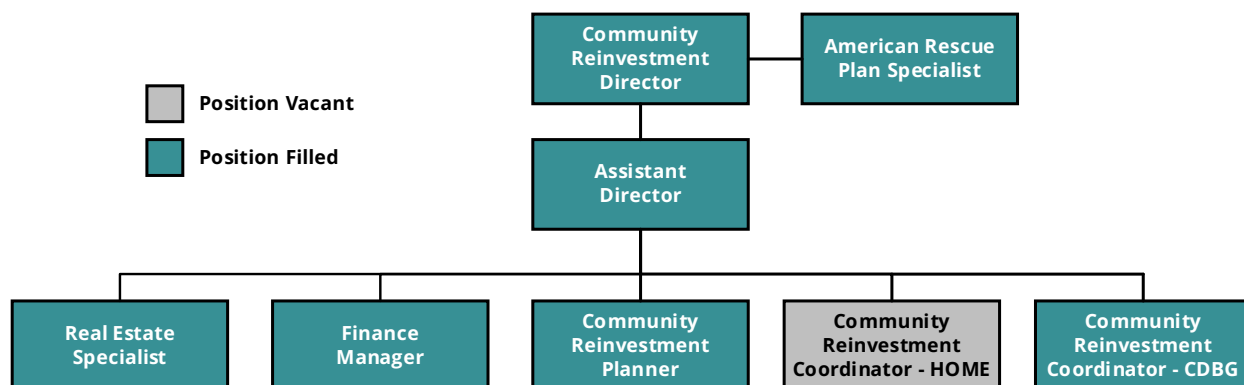
In 2022, the Department piloted a Small Business Economic Relief Program to assist small businesses. The program was implemented to support the recovery of small businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program targeted women- and minority-owned enterprises and businesses in underserved communities, providing financial relief and capacity-building resources to help stabilize operations and sustain growth. The Department partnered with the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce and StartUP Columbus (non-profit organization dedicated to fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Chattahoochee Valley Region) to help expand outreach and technical support. The program initially started on a smaller scale as a pilot program to help 27 small businesses using \$120,000 of CDBG funding for COVID-19. After the success of the initial program, the City offered approximately \$5 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding for the Department to replicate the first program, and the Department requested and was awarded an additional \$4 million in State Fiscal Recovery Funds to continue to serve local businesses. In total, the program supported 243 entities including small businesses, nonprofits, and hospitality/tourism organizations. In 2023, the program won the Audrey Nelson Community Development Award from the National Community Development Association and was recognized as best practice and inspired similar programs nationwide.

In January 2025, the City received the 2025 Audrey Nelson Community Development Award from the National Community Development Association which highlights innovative, collaborative, and impactful community development projects. The award acknowledged the exceptional collaboration between the Department and Food Mill Inc. – a nonprofit dedicated to reducing food insecurity and promoting community health. The 2025 award represents the City’s second national award in three years.

Organization and Staffing

The Department is led by a Director who receives assistance from an Assistant Director. The Department includes a Real Estate Specialist, Finance Manager, Community Reinvestment Planner, a Community Reinvestment Coordinator – HOME (vacant at the time of M&J’s fieldwork), a Community Reinvestment Coordinator -CDBG, and an American Rescue Plan Specialist.

In FY23, the previously part-time Real Estate Specialist position was created into a full-time role. Also, in FY25, the Community Reinvestment Coordinator – HOME position was added to the Department, bringing the Department’s head count to eight positions. The Department’s structure is depicted in the following organizational chart:



Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

The following table shows the Department’s turnover rate over the last five fiscal years:

Table 6: Annual Turnover Rate

Fiscal Year	Allocated Positions FT/PT	Turnover Rate
2021	5/1	50%
2022	6/1	42.9%
2023	7/0	0%
2024	7/0	0%
2025	8/0	25%

Source: CCG Budget Books FY21-FY25, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The typical turnover rate for a municipal Community Reinvestment Department is approximately 15%. The Department’s turnover rate in FY21 peaked at 50%. The high turnover rate was due to two separations and one retirement. The turnover rate in FY22 was 42.9% due to three separations. The Department did not experience any turnover in FY23 or FY24. In FY25, the turnover rate was 25% due to one separation and one transfer to a different CCG department. For the years in which the Department experienced turnover, the turnover rate was higher than average.

Based on interviews, staff cited lack of opportunities for advancement and uncompetitive compensation for high turnover and difficulty recruiting qualified candidates. Based on M&J's review of job descriptions and titling, the Department does not offer advancement opportunities within positions such as with secondary titles to indicate experience (i.e. I, II, or Senior). Furthermore, due to the technical nature of the roles in the Department responsible for managing federal grant programs and compliance, positions require a specific knowledge and skillset which is difficult to attract with the current compensation offered. In 2023, the Department was internally audited by the CCG Department of Internal Auditing, and a resulting recommendation noted that "compensation rates for several positions are below market for the respective roles."

Key Duties and Responsibilities

While the Department's structure does not reflect separate divisions, employees are responsible for different programs that the Department administers.

The Community Development Advisory Council ("CDAC") oversees the Department's initiatives to ensure that community needs are addressed through Departmental programs. As such, the CDAC is involved in much of the Department's programming and planning activities.

The following sections describe the Department's main functions:

- United States Department of Housing and Urban Development Programs
 - Home Investment Partnership ("HOME") Program
 - Community Development Block Grant ("CDBG") Program
 - Emergency Solutions Grant ("ESG") Program
 - Reporting
 - Program Administration
- United States Environmental Protection Agency Programs
 - Brownfields Program
 - OneGeorgia Authority Grant
- American Rescue Plan ("ARP") Programs
 - Homeowner Accessibility Rehabilitation Program ("HARP")
 - Small Business Economic Relief Program
- Real Estate
- Land Bank Authority
- Project/Grants Management and Administration
- Strategy and Community Engagement

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development Programs

The Department receives federal funding through the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) to administer three of the Department’s main programs: HOME, CDBG, and ESG.

HOME Program

The Community Reinvestment Coordinator - HOME Program (“Coordinator”) is the position primarily responsible for administering the HOME Program. Due to the current vacancy in the Coordinator position, the Community Reinvestment Planner is currently performing these duties with assistance from the Director and Assistant Director. The HOME Program is an annual grant provided to CCG to implement local housing strategies designed to increase homeownership and affordable housing opportunities for low and very low-income Americans.

CDBG Program

The Community Reinvestment Coordinator - CDBG Program is the position primarily responsible for administering the CDBG Program. The CDBG Program is the primary source of funding utilized to provide “decent housing” and a suitable living environment in addition to expanding economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income populations. CDBG funds can be used for activities such as acquisition of real property, relocation and demolition, rehabilitation of residential and non-residential structures, and construction of public facilities and improvements such as water and sewer facilities, streets, neighborhood centers, and the conversion of school buildings for eligible purposes.

ESG Program

The Director is the primary position responsible for administering the ESG Program. The ESG Program is designed to assist people with quickly regaining stability in permanent housing after experiencing a housing crisis and/or homelessness. The Department determines how ESG funds are spent between areas of street outreach, emergency shelter, homelessness prevention, and rapid re-housing.

Reporting

As mandated by HUD, the Department must produce three types of plans to remain eligible for funding: the Consolidated Plan, the Annual Action Plan, and the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report. The Community Reinvestment Planner is the primary position responsible for facilitating the creation of the three plans and for project management responsibilities. The Director and Assistant Director are responsible for setting strategy and the vision for the plans to ensure the plans accurately reflect and capture the Department’s mission and goals and community priorities. As such, the process of developing the three types of plans is a collaborative effort between the Director, Assistant Director, and Community Reinvestment Planner.

Consolidated Plan

A major responsibility of remaining in compliance with HUD and eligible for funding is to create a Consolidated Plan (“Plan”) approved by HUD that provides specific information about how the Department plans to use their CDBG, HOME, and ESG allocations and a foundation on which the community’s affordable housing efforts are built. The Department prepares the Consolidated Plan every five years which involves collaboration with internal and external organizations within the City. Some of the CCG entities which the Department collaborates with to ensure that the Plan aligns with the City’s short- and long-term goals include Planning, Homeland Security, Engineering, Inspections & Code, Parks and Recreation, and Public Works. The planning process includes focus groups and interviews of City department experts in addition to external experts in specialties such as homelessness and economic development. Furthermore, the process is collaborative with citizens to ensure the Department is responsive to community needs and wants. As such, the Department conducts public meetings and a community survey to gauge needs and solicit feedback from the community.

In October 2025, the Department started planning for the next five-year cycle of the new Consolidated Plan. The Department contracted Mosaic Community Planning to assist with the Plan. Department staff work very closely with any contracted consultants the Department may hire to assist with Consolidated Plan development. Although consultants provide guidance and framework material, Department staff are actively involved and are leading the development of the Consolidated Plan in addition to creating the framework and vision for the Consolidated Plan.

Annual Action Plans

The City must also submit individual Annual Action Plans for each of the five years within the Consolidated Plan period. The action planning process starts each year in January. Annual Action Plans (“Action Plans”) serve as the City’s yearly applications to HUD which are required for the City to receive annual allocations for the HOME, CDBG, and ESG programs. Action Plans summarize the actions, activities, and specific federal and non-federal resources that will be used each year to address the needs and specific goals defined in the Consolidated Plan. The Action Plan planning process also involves community engagement and community feedback and input through public meetings. The Action Plan identifies specific projects to be funded during the respective program year.

Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report

The Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (“CAPER”) serves as an assessment of annual accomplishments and progress towards goals outlined in the Consolidated Plan. The Department prepares the CAPER each year, which involves a community engagement process in which the Department presents the CAPER to the public. The Department is mandated to submit the CAPER to HUD. The CAPER includes various performance metrics such as number of people served through the CDBG, HOME, and ESG programs, spending data, and demographic information.

Application Process

In January of each year, the Department issues a request for proposals (“RFP”) for organizations or nonprofits with public services programs that serve low to moderate income households to apply for CDBG, HOME, and ESG funding. The Department also hosts a workshop for interested organizations to review eligibility criteria and application details. Department staff and members of the CDAC review applications and select qualified programs for funding. Upon the Action Plan being approved by City Council and submitted to HUD, the Department issues formal award letters to selected subrecipients informing them of their award.

The application process is consistent and occurs alongside the development of the overall Consolidated Plan and Action Plan. The application process begins in January when the City issues the RFP and begins accepting applications from organizations for federal grant funds for the CDBG, HOME, and ESG programs. Applicants are approved on a rolling basis depending upon available funds and eligibility.

Program Administration

The Community Reinvestment Coordinators assigned to CDBG and HOME are responsible for administering their respective programs. The Director is responsible for administering the ESG program. The Coordinator positions and Director are responsible for facilitating the application process including selecting subrecipients for their respective programs. Department staff are also responsible for project management functions, such as:

- **Assisting subrecipients with compliance through all HUD regulations:** Department staff are responsible for conducting formal monitoring of subrecipients and to ensure that subrecipients are complying with HUD requirements and general program requirements. Also, the Department distributes a policies and procedures manual for each program which defines best practices and guidelines for subrecipients. Examples of monitoring techniques in use include desk monitoring which allows Department staff to monitor remotely by reviewing documentation and issuing a letter to communicate any findings or concerns. Department staff may also perform site visits to review documents and processes (specific to the CDBG program).
- **Monitoring funds and budgets and ensuring complete expenditure of federal awards:** Department staff are responsible for managing financial components related to grants and subrecipients. Department staff are responsible for managing program budgets. Furthermore, Department staff receive reimbursement requests from subrecipients and ensure that supporting documentation is provided and expenses are eligible for reimbursement. Department staff communicate with the Department Finance Manager to ensure grants and related expenditures are properly accounted for.
- **Reporting on projects through HUD databases:** Department staff are responsible for obtaining and compiling activity data and performance metrics from subrecipients to submit to a HUD database to capture program performance.
- **Managing project progress:** Department staff are the primary contacts for subrecipients and are responsible for staying updated on projects that are in progress. As such, Department staff attend meetings with project stakeholders, conduct site walkthroughs, and attend ribbon-cuttings and events related to ongoing projects.

United States Environmental Protection Agency Programs

Brownfields Program

The Assistant Director is the primary position responsible for administering the Department's Brownfields Program and serves as the project point of contact. The Brownfields Program is funded through a United States Environmental Protection Agency Multipurpose Brownfields Grant. The Brownfields Program focuses on identifying, assessing, and cleaning up properties where redevelopment is hindered by potential environmental contamination (such as lead, asbestos, or petroleum).

OneGeorgia Authority Grant

The Assistant Director is the primary position responsible for managing grant funds received from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The Department serves as a conduit for Environmental Protection Agency funds which are provided to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The Department serves as the legal applicant and fiscal agent on behalf of the local subrecipient of the funds. OneGeorgia Authority Grant funds may be utilized for land acquisition, infrastructure development, business relocation assistance, and entrepreneur support to support economic development.

ARP Programs

Homeowner Accessibility Rehabilitation Program ("HARP")

The objective of the American Rescue Plan Homeowner Accessibility Rehabilitation Program ("HARP") is to support vulnerable low-income households by addressing the need to preserve affordable housing. HARP is available to eligible homeowners who live in their homes and meet low-income and ownership requirements. The ARP Specialist ("Specialist") is the primary position responsible for administering HARP. The Department has a rolling application process and maintains a waitlist of pre-screened applicants. The Specialist is responsible for screening applicants, managing the waitlist, and coordinating with applicants. The Specialist also is responsible for managing the RFP process, which the Department may initiate as necessary when certain vendors or subrecipients are needed to provide services to approved applicants. The Specialist coordinates with subrecipients which are nonprofits or organizations to deliver services to approved applicants. The Specialist is the point of contact for subrecipients and is responsible for monitoring compliance and managing reimbursement requests and the program budget. It should be noted that due to the absence of a grants management software, the Specialist is tracking the program budget using Excel.

Small Business Economic Relief Program

The ARP Specialist is also responsible for administering the Small Business Economic Relief Program ("Program"). The Program is designed to assist small businesses impacted by COVID-19. The Specialist is responsible for managing the application process for small business funding, selecting subrecipients, managing compliance, the Program budget and reimbursements.

Real Estate

The Real Estate Specialist (“Specialist”) is the position primarily responsible for the real estate function. As such, the Specialist is responsible for property transactions from start to finish, including whether the City is interested in purchasing a property, or if citizens are interested in purchasing a city-owned property. Furthermore, the Specialist serves as the point of contact for City properties that are leased or rented. As such, the Specialist collects payments for leases and rentals and manages terms of lease contracts. The Specialist also maintains a comprehensive listing of properties owned and leased or rented by the City. Based on interviews, the Real Estate Specialist keeps data and information for all the City-owned properties totaling approximately 650 properties. The Real Estate Specialist is currently manually tracking all the information associated with each of the 650 properties using a comprehensive Excel spreadsheet.

Land Bank Authority

The Land Bank Authority manages properties that are vacant and abandoned, tax delinquent, government surplus, tangled in heirs’ property, or are no longer wanted by private individuals, estates, or financial institutions. The Department works in partnership with the Land Bank Authority to provide comprehensive real property management for the City. Functions of the Department in cooperation with the Land Bank Authority include acquiring property to serve the public interest, disposing of public property, working with nonprofit organizations to prioritize affordable housing and community improvement projects, supporting public-private efforts for community revitalization and economic development, and ensuring the use of publicly transferred property meets performance criteria.

The Director and Assistant Director oversee the Land Bank Authority, while the Specialist serves as a liaison between the Department and the Land Bank Authority. The Assistant Director serves as the secretary for the Land Bank Authority Board, and both the Assistant Director and Specialist attend and facilitate Land Bank Authority Board meetings.

Project/Grants Management and Administration

Due to the absence of a position dedicated to general project management, grants or programs that are not assigned to a specific position (i.e. CDBG, HOME, or ARP) are typically managed by leadership staff within the Department such as the Director and Assistant Director, shifting the Director and Assistant Director’s focus away from more strategic functions.

The Finance Manager is the primary position responsible for grant-based accounting for the grants administered by the Department. The Finance Manager processes invoices and monthly reimbursement requests submitted by subrecipients. The Finance Manager serves as a liaison between the Department and the CCG Finance Department to ensure grant expenses and reimbursement requests are accurately reported and recorded in the City's financial management software, CGI Advantage. Furthermore, the Finance Manager also ensures reimbursement requests are submitted and reported accurately in HUD databases. The Finance Manager performs monthly reconciliations which involve receiving monthly expense reports from the CCG Finance Department generated within CGI Advantage, creating drawdowns within the HUD database, and issuing receipts once drawdown funds are received to ensure records within CGI Advantage match the HUD database. The Finance Manager is then responsible for logging all transactions within internal financial status reports, which are updated frequently. The Finance Manager also is responsible for quarterly finance reporting in the HUD database to record eligible expenses for the Department's various programs.

It should be noted that the grant reconciliation process requires the use of both CGI Advantage and the HUD database and is a manual, time-consuming process. Based on interviews, the Department has researched solutions to allow for the grant reconciliation process to be automated. Furthermore, based on interviews, the Department has been in contact with the CCG Information Technology Department to schedule a software demonstration from CGI related to the CGI Advantage Grant Lifecycle Management add-on software. The Department is awaiting approval from the CCG Finance Department to schedule the demonstration.

The Assistant Director and Finance Manager are responsible for creating annual budgets for the Department's grant programs and presenting budgets to the Director. Midway through the fiscal year, the Assistant Director and Finance Manager make any necessary adjustments to program budgets. The Assistant Director and Finance Manager also serve as liaisons between the Department and the Financial Reporting Division within the CCG Finance Department. For example, the Assistant Director and Finance Manager are responsible for reporting programmatic outcomes such as beneficiaries to the CCG Finance Department on a yearly basis. The Department is tracking grant budgets using Excel, as the Department does not utilize a grants management software.

The Assistant Director is primarily responsible for establishing policies and procedures within the Department to document and standardize internal processes. The Department is in the process of creating standard operating procedures to guide daily processes.

Strategy and Community Engagement

The Director is responsible for identifying the Department's priorities and strategy to achieve its objectives and goals. To inform the Department's priorities and strategy, the Director participates in community engagement and maintains a strong community network. Through community engagement and networking, the Director can gauge community needs and stay informed regarding service gaps that the Department may be able to serve. Examples of community engagement and networking include attending national conferences, sharing the Department's programs and impact with the public, and attending events throughout the community to represent the Department and connect with residents. Through the Director's efforts to stay connected to the community, the Director can identify innovative ways to leverage relationships and use the Department's programs to address specific, unique community needs.

Customer Service

The Department generally does not provide direct services or customer service to the public, rather the Department serves the public through its programs which are managed by subrecipients, who are generally nonprofit community-based organizations. Furthermore, the Department supports subrecipients who deliver services to the public. As such, Department staff are in frequent communication with subrecipient organizations to answer questions and monitor project progress and compliance. The Department's Real Estate Specialist serves internal customers such as the Land Bank Authority ("LBA") and City officials involved in initiating a real estate transaction. The Real Estate Specialist also serves members of the public interested in purchasing a City-owned property or renting or leasing City-owned properties. Based on information available and insights from interviews, M&J did not identify any barriers to providing efficient customer service within the Department.

Use of Technology

The Department uses the following software and applications:

Neighborly

The Department utilizes Neighborly which is a cloud-based technology platform to administer and manage grant funding. The Department's subrecipients utilize Neighborly to submit monthly Reimbursement Request Packets containing cover letters, invoice summary list, and additional supporting documentation for grant-related expenses. Subrecipients must upload monthly accomplishments and activities related to programs funded through grants such as demographic information and total number of beneficiaries served. Department staff utilize Neighborly to access and review Reimbursement Request Packets and to access and report subrecipient performance information as part of the CAPER.

Integrated Disbursement and Information System

The Integrated Disbursement and Information System (“IDIS”) is a nationwide database which provides HUD with current information pertaining to program activities. IDIS is the draw down and reporting system that the Department uses for CDBG and HOME grants and for consolidated planning. Community Reinvestment Coordinators utilize IDIS to set up activities and accomplishments for each grant-funded program and report on accomplishments and activities achieved by subrecipients. Information contained in IDIS can assist Coordinators with completing the CAPER. The Finance Manager utilizes IDIS to submit draw down requests and to ensure disbursements within IDIS reconcile with expenses recorded in CGI Advantage.

CGI Advantage

The Director, Assistant Director, and Finance Manager are the positions within the Department that utilize CGI Advantage, the City’s enterprise resource planning system. The Finance Manager utilizes CGI Advantage for budget management, submitting invoices, and grant reconciliation to ensure total expenses recorded in CGI Advantage match total funds drawn down in IDIS. The Director and Assistant Director primarily utilize CGI Advantage to approve invoices.

ArcGIS

The Department has access to the City’s Geospatial Information System, ArcGIS to access maps of the City that contain data points relevant to the Department’s mission such as low to moderate income areas, property records, and city-owned properties and lots.

Other Software

The Department also uses additional federal and state reporting applications such as:

- Disaster Recovery Grant Reporting System (“DRGR”) – HUD
- HUD Environmental Review Online System (“HEROS”) – HUD
- HUD Income Calculator – HUD
- Assessment, Cleanup and Redevelopment Exchange System (“ACRES”) – Environmental Protection Agency
- Automated Standard Application for Payments (“ASAP”) – Bureau of the Fiscal Service
- Euna Grants Subrecipient Portal (Georgia Department of Community Affairs)

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

The Department maintains the following policies and procedures related to programs and operations:

- Sweet Home Columbus Down-Payment Assistance – September 2024
- HOME – No Date
- HOME Investment Partnerships Program Resale/Recapture Policy for Homeownership Activities – No Date
- CDBG Public Service – No Date

- CDBG Public Facilities – No Date
- Violence Against Women Act Policy – August 2023
- Personally Identifiable Information Policy – No Date

As demonstrated by the list above, many of the Department’s policies and procedures do not include a date of creation or update. Based on M&J’s analysis of Department-provided information, all the policies listed above were created between 2022 and 2023 in response to remote monitoring of the CDBG Program, CDBG-Corona-Virus Program, HOME Investment Partnerships Program, and Neighborhood Stabilization Programs conducted in late 2022. The purpose of the remote monitoring, conducted by the Atlanta Office of Community Planning Development (HUD), was to assess the Department’s performance and compliance with applicable Federal requirements. The monitoring contained findings regarding lack of policies and procedures related to the CDBG, HOME, Down-Payment Assistance programs and personal identifiable information and the Violence Against Women Act.

As part of the Department’s corrective actions, the Department created policies and procedures. Program-specific policies and procedures contain information related to eligibility criteria, application process, financial management and reimbursement process, subrecipient monitoring, and performance reporting.

The Department maintains the following standard operating procedures (“SOPs”) and manuals pertaining to internal operations:

- Procurement Procedures – January 2023
- Real Estate Procedures – June 2025
- Planner SOP – No Date
- Financial Management Policy and Procedure Guide – September 2025 (in progress)

It should be noted that the Department also created some of the SOPs identified above in response to remote monitoring conducted by HUD in late 2022. One of the findings related to lack of detail within policies and procedures of highly critical tasks central to grants and fiscal management of funds.

Based on interviews and information provided, the Department is in process of updating existing documentation and creating additional SOPs related to financial management policies and procedures and SOPs for the CDBG Public Services program. The Department is in process of creating position-specific SOPs which detail processes performed by staff.

Strategic Priorities

Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plans

The Department's goals for its HUD programs are defined in the five-year Consolidated Plan and Annual Action Plans. Examples of goals contained within the Consolidated Plan include:

- Expansion of affordable housing supply: Development of new single-family and multifamily affordable housing units for both homeownership and rental, to include elderly housing units and units produced by qualifying Community Housing Development Organizations.
- Housing rehabilitation: Rehabilitation of homeowner housing to benefit extremely low-, low-, and moderate-income households. Supportive programs and services to increase housing access and safety, including accessibility modifications to existing homes, down-payment assistance, tenant-based rental assistance, and lead-based paint testing.
- Blight removal: Blight removal in older neighborhoods to remove uninhabitable structures, improve community aesthetics and reduce crime.
- Infrastructure and public facility improvements: Promote quality of life and neighborhood revitalization through improvements to current public infrastructure and facilities.

Information contained in the Consolidated Plan include goals, the citizen/stakeholder participation process, demographic data on populations served, ranking of the most pressing community needs, and project summaries.

The Department's Annual Action Plans include information such as the citizen/stakeholder participation process, expected resources, annual goals and objectives, and specific projects to be funded.

According to the FY26 Annual Action Plan, the Department's goals and initiatives include funding the following causes:

- Affordable housing creation
- Public services and public facility and infrastructure improvements
- Fair housing
- Homelessness services and housing
- Program administration

A new program addition to the Department to help achieve goals is an Emergency Solutions Grants ("ESG") program, which the Department received funding for in May 2024. Based on the FY26 Annual Action Plan, funds from the ESG program will be used to support ESG eligible services in emergency shelter, homelessness prevention, rapid rehousing, and administration of the Homeless Management Information System.

Additional Strategic Priorities

Based on interviews and information provided, M&J identified the following additional strategic priorities.

Compliance

In 2020, the Department's current Director at the time of this report was hired. Historically, the Department lacked documentation to standardize and formalize programs and internal operations. As a result, the Department did not have current, comprehensive policies and procedures internally to guide operations or externally to provide to subrecipients. Furthermore, within the first two years of the current Director's tenure, the Department experienced high turnover including the retirement of a long-tenured employee. To fill vacancies, the Department hired new staff members with little to no prior federal grant management or administration experience.

During the remote monitoring conducted in late 2022, HUD noted a total of 14 findings which have since been closed. Some of the findings centered around documentation and formal policies and procedures to ensure compliance. An additional finding related to the need to increase training for staff. Since the remote monitoring, the Department has worked to correct the findings and has looked more strategically to document internal processes and broaden the Department's impact. It should be noted that because of a finding related to failure of the CCG general ledger to reconcile to HUD system reports, the City has engaged an external consultant to fully reconcile reports from CGI Advantage system to IDIS. The focus of the engagement will be to identify the source of an unaccounted balance of more than \$1 million dating prior to 2005.

External Monitoring

During interviews, staff shared that the Department has prioritized formalizing external policies and procedures to provide subrecipients with guidance to comply with program stipulations. Furthermore, the Department has implemented additional resources such as workshop meetings and holding training on an as-needed basis for subrecipients to address any concerns or questions regarding best practices. Historically, the Department has experienced issues with subrecipients not being in compliance. As a result of implemented procedures and training, compliance has improved.

Land Bank Authority

Prior to 2021, the LBA was underutilized and primarily functioned as a passive holding entity. Based on insights obtained, the LBA accumulated distressed parcels, but did not implement a disposition strategy to put distressed properties back to productive use. As a result, the LBA was not able to maximize its impact in the community or generate sufficient revenue to cover costs. In 2021, the Department shifted the model of the Land Bank Authority by creating an online presence and brand to advertise LBA properties and designating the Real Estate Specialist to lead the Land Bank Authority. Furthermore, the Department implemented a strategy to align LBA property acquisition efforts with community-driven redevelopment. Examples of operational changes made include no longer petitioning for properties unless a citizen or developer demonstrates interest and submits a workable redevelopment proposal which includes proof of financing. Also, the LBA updated pricing practices to help ensure sales cover foreclosure costs and build the fiscal capacity of the LBA. As such, the Department has ensured that each property acquired has a path to successful redevelopment leading to community benefits.

Since the LBA has been revitalized, the LBA has successfully acquired properties through in rem tax sales. Based on information provided and interviews, historically, the relationship between the CCG Tax Commissioner's Office and the LBA was not a positive working relationship. As a result, poor relations between the two entities have affected the ability of the LBA to achieve its goals since its revitalization. In January 2025, the public appointed a new CCG Tax Commissioner, whom the Director has since met with to discuss the strategy and vision for the collaborative relationship between both entities moving forward. The Department hopes to work more collaboratively with the Tax Commissioner's Office in the future to further increase the LBA's impact. Based on LBA meeting minutes from September 2025, members of the LBA plan to meet with the new CCG Tax Commissioner to present their vision for the LBA moving forward.

Training

In response to recommendations from HUD's remote monitoring, the Department has implemented formal training for staff to attend to increase their knowledge and skillsets. The Department is continuing to identify external training opportunities such as conferences for staff to attend. Based on interviews, Department staff have not formally been cross trained to perform the roles of other positions if a staff member is out of office.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

The Department is required to track and report performance data related to programs funded through federal and state grants. The Department submits the CAPER annually which includes the following data points:

- Dollar amount of resources available
- Dollar amount of dispersed grant funds
- Dollar amount of categorized expenditures by program
- Program highlights/accomplishments
- Comparison of proposed versus actual outcomes for each outcome measure submitted with the Consolidated Plan (e.g., performance indicator, unit of measure, expected, actual, percent complete, expected program year, actual program year, percent complete)
- Information on demographics of beneficiaries served

As the Department's activities and programs are compliance-driven, the Department collects data from subrecipients and reports on performance metrics which speak to the progress and achievement of the Department's goals and objectives outlined in the Consolidated and Annual Action Plans.

The Department has participated in annual performance reviews of staff including a 360-review process where subordinate staff members can provide feedback to supervisory staff. Based on interviews, the Department last participated in annual performance reviews in 2023.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

Based on interviews with staff, the culture and work environment within the Department is very positive. Staff feel supported and are satisfied with training opportunities. Department leadership have meetings twice a month with individual staff to check in on their workload and address any concerns. Department staff appreciate leadership's open-door policy and feel that leadership is always accessible and willing to assist. Due to the Department's small size, staff interact frequently to ask questions and assist each other.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: Based on interviews, staff cited lack of opportunities for advancement and insufficient compensation for high turnover and difficulty recruiting qualified candidates. Based on M&J's review of job descriptions and titling, the Department does not offer advancement opportunities within positions such as with secondary titles to indicate experience (i.e. I, II, or Senior). Furthermore, due to the technical nature of the roles in the Department responsible for managing federal grant programs and compliance, positions require a specific knowledge and skillset which can be difficult to attract with the current compensation offered. In 2023, the Department was internally audited by the CCG Department of Internal Auditing, and a resulting recommendation noted that "compensation rates for several positions are below market for the respective roles."

Recommendation 1: The Department should continue to collaborate with the CCG Human Resources Department to explore the possibility of implementing career ladders within the Department for positions that identify a path to promotion or advancement potentially by implementing secondary titles to indicate experience (i.e. I, II, or Senior). Furthermore, the CCG Human Resources Department should assess compensation rates for positions within the Department and compare compensation to market rates for similar roles to ensure the City is competitive with other municipalities.

Observation 2: Based on interviews, the Real Estate Specialist keeps data and information for all of the City-owned properties totaling approximately 650 properties. The Real Estate Specialist is currently manually tracking all of the information associated with each of the 650 properties using a comprehensive Excel spreadsheet.

Recommendation 2: The Department should collaborate with the CCG Information Technology Department to assess the possibility of building an internal database tool (potentially with GIS capabilities) to allow for information to be stored on each City-owned property centralized within one database for ease of use and consolidation of information (i.e., location, property picture, acreage, leases, documentation, notes, etc.).

Observation 3: Due to the absence of a position dedicated to general project management, grants or programs that are not assigned to a specific position (i.e. CDBG, HOME, or ARP) are typically managed by leadership staff within the Department such as the Director and Assistant Director, shifting the Director and Assistant Director's focus away from more strategic functions.

Recommendation 3: The City should assess the Department’s staffing levels compared to departmental workload and consider adding an additional position(s) responsible for general project management/program management to relieve the Director and Assistant Director of day-to-day project management duties to allow the Director and Assistant Director to focus on more strategic responsibilities.

Observation 4A: Due to the absence of a grants management software, the Specialist is tracking the program budget using Excel.

Observation 4B: The Department is tracking grant budgets using Excel, as the Department does not utilize a grants management software.

Observation 4C: The grant reconciliation process requires the use of both CGI Advantage and the HUD database and is a manual, time-consuming process. The Department has researched solutions to allow for the grant reconciliation process and grant lifecycle to be automated. Furthermore, the Department has been in contact with the CCG Information Technology Department to identify a solution.

Recommendation 4: The Department should continue to work with the CCG Information Technology Department and CCG Finance Department to explore options for an internal or external solution that integrates with CGI Advantage and IDIS to streamline the grant reconciliation process.

Observation 5: Many of the Department’s policies and SOPs do not include a date of creation or update published within the document. The Department is in the process of updating its policies and SOPs to ensure content is up to date.

Recommendation 5: The Department should continue to update its documentation and review sections of policies and manuals last created/updated before 2022 and prioritize updating the most outdated content first. As part of the review, a “last reviewed” date should be added to specific sections or content within the documents to record the fact that the content was reviewed, even if updates or changes were not needed. Ensuring documentation is up to date will help to promote consistency in policy, understanding, and practices.

Observation 6: Based on interviews and information provided, the Department is in process of updating existing documentation and creating additional SOPs related to financial management policies and procedures and SOPs for the CDBG Public Services program. The Department is in process of creating position-specific SOPs which detail processes performed by staff.

Recommendation 6: The Department should prioritize the creation of position-specific SOPs that provide step-by-step instructions of how to perform primary duties. Furthermore, the Department should continue to build on progress made so far to create SOPs.

Observation 7: The Department has made significant progress to revitalize the LBA within the last few years. However, due to the poor working relationship between the LBA and CCG Tax Commissioner’s office historically, the LBA has not been able to be as effective. Now that a new Tax Commissioner has been appointed, the Director and LBA are taking strides to improve the working relationship with the CCG Tax Commissioner’s Office.

Recommendation 7: The Department should continue its efforts to expand the impact of the LBA through partnering with the CCG Tax Commissioner’s Office and developing a positive working relationship to achieve the LBA’s goals and maximize impact.

Observation 8: Based on interviews, Department staff have not formally been cross trained to perform the roles of other positions if a staff member is out of office.

Recommendation 8: The Department should prioritize cross-training staff to perform roles of other staff members to ensure continuity of operations if a staff member is out of office for an extended period or leaves the Department.

Observation 9: Based on interviews, the Department last participated in annual performance reviews in 2023.

Recommendation 9: The Department should begin conducting performance appraisals of staff on an annual basis to help ensure accountability and provide a formal mechanism for staff evaluation and feedback.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department’s maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.

Maturity Model



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Department as between **Level 2: Compliant** and **Level 3: Formally Governed**. The Department has made several changes and has made substantial progress including implementing formal documented policies and procedures to guide external compliance and monitoring since receiving findings from HUD’s remote monitoring in 2022. As such, the Department’s compliance function has greatly improved. The Department is in the process of formalizing and documenting internal policies and procedures to guide operations and ensure consistency which will assist in moving the Department towards Level 3. As the policies and procedures become more formalized and standardized, the Department will be able to move towards Levels 4 and 5. With documentation of internal policies and procedures, the Department will be formally governed.

Conclusion

The Community Reinvestment Department has a vital impact on the CCG community by administering federally funded programs that benefit low-income residents and promote community development and growth. After implementation of external compliance policies and procedures, the Department is meeting governing requirements and delivering services but staffing constraints and turnover have affected the Department’s efficiency and effectiveness.

Department leadership is involved in day-to-day responsibilities of managing various projects, thereby reducing capacity for more strategic initiatives and improvements. The Department struggles with recruitment of candidates with relevant backgrounds and experience due to uncompetitive compensation. Furthermore, the Department struggles with recruitment and retention due to lack of growth opportunities for staff. Improving the Department's maturity will require implementation of incentives to improve recruitment and retention, in addition to considering adding additional staff to shift from a reactive model to a proactive model. Examples of initiatives which the Department could focus on with additional staffing include the development of internal policies and procedures and cross training. M&J would like to thank Departmental leadership, in addition to the five individuals within the Department, for allowing the team to conduct interviews and follow-ups to complete this assessment.

3.C Engineering

Introduction

The Engineering Department (“Department”) contains divisions that provide a variety of engineering or engineering-related services for the City, including installation and maintenance of traffic signals and roadway signs throughout the City, delivery of roadway infrastructure capital construction projects, stormwater permitting and inspecting, site development reviews, surveying, inspection of utility work on public rights of way, inspection of worksites for compliance with erosion control requirements, and management of relevant portions of the City’s geographic information systems (“GIS”) database. The Department’s mission is “to provide an enhanced quality of life for all citizens who live and work in the region by the delivery of an effective safe transportation system to move people and goods throughout the community; and provide management that is environmentally sensitive to our natural resources through the oversight of storm water and drainage infrastructure; and provide data, construction, and communication support to other [City] departments by the effective and efficient delivery of geographical information and construction management.”¹³

The Department is funded through three different City funds. Activities and positions related to the Department’s general operations, GIS management, surveying, utility inspection, and worksite inspection services are funded through the City’s Paving Fund. Activities and positions related to The Department’s stormwater inspection and management services are funded through the City’s Stormwater (Sewer) fund. Activities and positions related to the Department sign and signal maintenance and roadway construction management positions are funded through the City’s General Fund.

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

The City, through the Engineering Department’s stormwater management work and reporting, has qualified as a Class 9 community in the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (“FEMA”) Community Rating System (“CRS”), which is a voluntary program that recognizes and incentivizes communities to adopt stormwater best management practices. As a Class 9 community, property owners are eligible to receive a 5% discount on flood insurance purchased through the National Flood Insurance Program.

Organization and Staffing

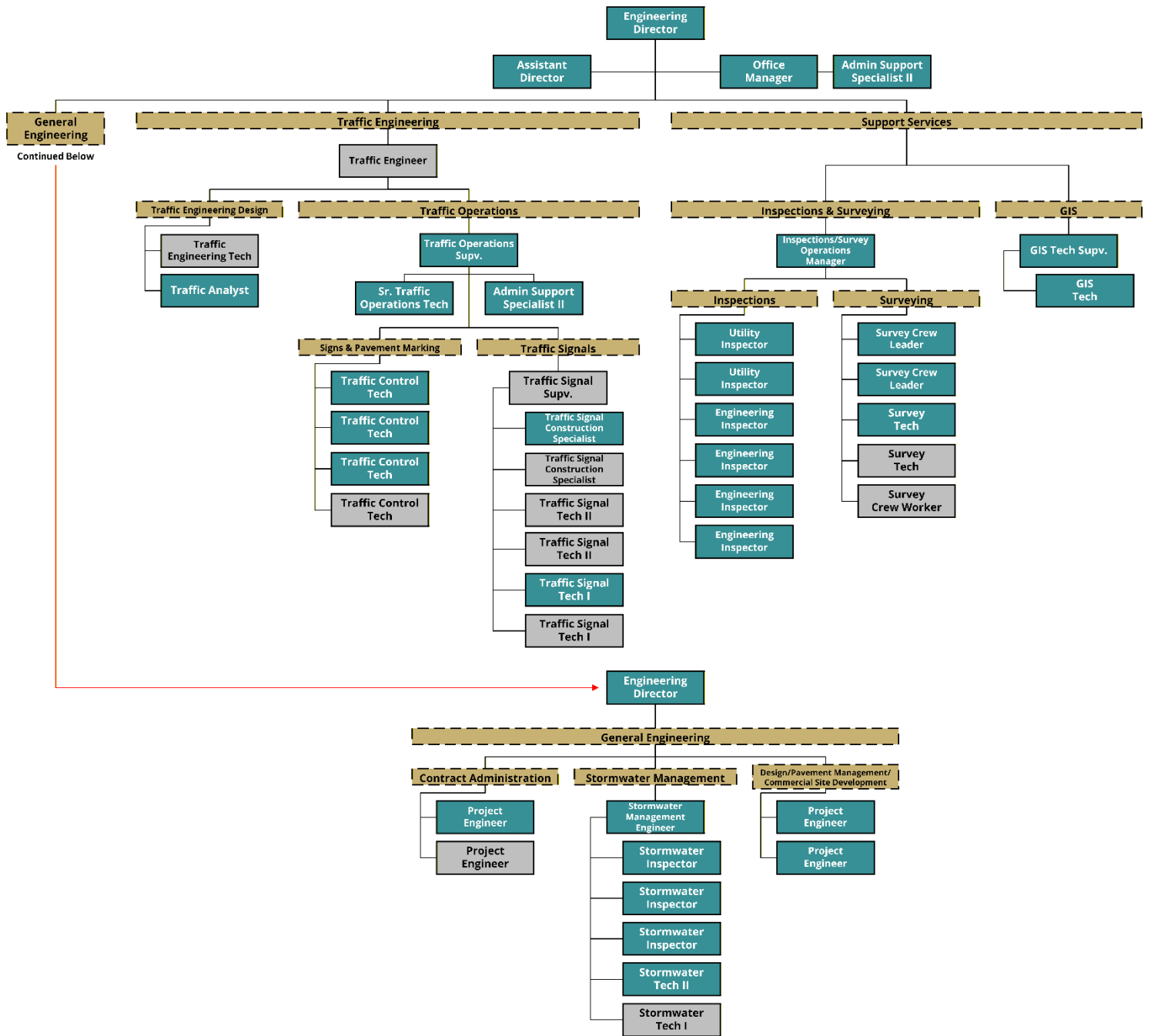
The Department is led by the Engineering Director, who is supported by the Assistant Director. The Office Manager, who reports to the Engineering Director, oversees general Department administration and is supported in their role by an Administrative Support Specialist II.

¹³ <https://www.columbusga.gov/engineering/>

The Department is organized into three Divisions, which are further divided into several sections and sub-sections, as follows:

- General Engineering Division
 - Contract Administration Section
 - Stormwater Management Section
 - Design/Pavement Management/Commercial Site Development Section
- Traffic Engineering Division
 - Traffic Engineering Design Section
 - Traffic Operations Section
 - Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection
 - Traffic Signals Subsection
- Support Services Division
 - Inspections & Surveying Section
 - Inspections Subsection
 - Surveying Subsection
 - GIS Section

The following organizational chart details the Department's organizational structure at the time of M&J's fieldwork, with filled positions at the time of M&J's fieldwork shown in teal and vacant positions shown in grey.



General Engineering

The General Engineering Division includes the Contract Administration, Stormwater Management, and Design/Pavement Management/Commercial Site Management (“D/PM/CSD”) Sections. The General Engineering Division consists of three sections, with each section reporting directly to the Engineering Director. In interviews, staff indicated that they expected the Division’s reporting structure to change in the near future following the hiring of the Assistant Director, although the exact nature or timing of these anticipated changes was not yet clear at the time of M&J’s fieldwork.

The Contract Administration Section includes two Project Engineers, only one of which was filled at the time of M&J’s fieldwork. The Stormwater Management Section is led by a Stormwater Management Engineer, who leads a team of three Stormwater Inspectors, one Stormwater Technician II, and one Stormwater Technician I. At the time of M&J’s fieldwork, the Stormwater Technician I position was vacant. The D/PM/CSD Section includes two Project Engineer Positions, both of which was filled at the time of M&J’s fieldwork. One of the Department’s former Project Engineers currently works with the Department on a part-time, as-needed basis to supplement the D/PM/CSD Section’s operations during a recent period while one of the Project Engineer positions was vacant and while the newly hired Project Engineer is trained on their position, although this former employee is not reflected on the Department’s organizational chart.

Traffic Engineering

The Traffic Engineering Division is led by the Traffic Engineer, who oversees both the Traffic Engineering Design and Traffic Operations Section. The Traffic Engineer position was vacant at the time of M&J’s fieldwork, although staff reported in interviews that the newly hired Assistant Director was serving as acting Traffic Engineer and that the Department was not actively looking to fill the vacant Traffic Engineer position. The Traffic Engineering Design Section includes one Traffic Engineering Technician position and one Traffic Analyst position. The Traffic Engineering Technician position was vacant at the time of M&J’s fieldwork.

The Traffic Operations Section is led by the Traffic Operations Supervisor, who is supported by a Senior Traffic Operations Technician and an Administrative Support Specialist II, and includes two Subsections. The Signs & Pavement Parking Subsection includes four Traffic Control Technician positions. In interviews, staff indicated that two of the Traffic Control Technician positions are designated as “Sign Technicians,” with the other two Traffic Control Technician positions designated as “Paint Technicians.” The Traffic Signals Subsection is led by the Traffic Signal Supervisor, who heads a team made up of two Traffic Signal Construction Specialists, three Traffic Signal Technician IIs, and a Traffic Signal Technician I. Vacant Traffic Operations Section positions at the time of M&J’s fieldwork include two of the four Traffic Control Technician positions (both of the positions designated as paint technicians) within the Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection and the Traffic Signal Supervisor position, one of the two Traffic Signal Construction Specialist positions, two of the three Traffic Signal Technician II positions, and the Traffic Signal Technician I position in the Traffic Signals Subsection.

In interviews, staff reported that the Senior Traffic Operations Technician is functionally serving as the Traffic Signal Supervisor due to the position's vacancy. The Traffic Operations Section, including both of its subdivisions, does not operate out of the Department's main office and instead works out of a facility at 601 11th Avenue.

Support Services

The Support Services Division includes the Inspections & Surveying and GIS Sections. The Support Services Division does not itself have a single manager and instead each section reports directly to the Engineering Director. The Inspections & Surveying Section is led by the Inspections/Survey Operations Manager and includes the Inspections Subsection and Surveying Subsection. The Inspections/Survey Operations Manager also serves one week per month as the on-call Risk Management Investigator for the City Human Resources Department's Risk Management Division. The Inspections Subsection contains two Utility Inspector positions and four Engineering Inspector positions; all six Inspections Subsection positions were filled at the time of M&J's fieldwork. The Surveying Subsection includes two Survey Crew Leader positions, two Survey Technician positions, and one Survey Crew Worker position. At the time of M&J's fieldwork, the Survey Crew Worker and one of the Survey Technician positions were vacant. The GIS Section is led by the GIS Technician Supervisor, who is supported by a GIS Technician. Both GIS Section positions were filled at the time of M&J's fieldwork.

Span of Control

The Engineering Department's organizational structure in place at the time of M&J's fieldwork placed the Engineering Director as the immediate supervisor of 10 positions across a wide range of service areas, while the Assistant Director at that time did not formally serve as the supervisor of any Department staff. Many of the Engineering Director's immediate reports, including the Contract Administration Section and D/PM/CSD Section's Project Engineers, the Stormwater Management Engineer, and the GIS Technician Supervisor, function primarily as direct service-delivery staff, not the managerial or administrative staff that department directors typically oversee.

Engineering Department leadership reported that in time since M&J's fieldwork, the Assistant Director position has officially assumed the Traffic Engineer position, including that position's location on the Engineering Department's organizational chart. As a result of this organizational shift, the Assistant Director oversees the Traffic Engineering Division, while the Engineering Director directly oversees the operations of the General Engineering and Support Services Divisions. This leaves the Engineering Director nine direct reports, who are:

- General Engineering Division
 - Project Engineer (x4)
 - Stormwater Management Engineer
- Traffic Engineering Division
 - Assistant Director
- Support Services Division

- Inspections/Survey Operations Manager
- GIS Technician Supervisor
- Departmental Administration
 - Office Manager

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

The Department has experienced the departure of 44 employees since the start of Fiscal Year 2021 (“FY21”), or an average of slightly fewer than 9 departures per fiscal year. The following table shows the Department’s turnover rate for the last five fiscal years, compared to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (“BLS”) estimated nation-wide turnover rate among non-educational state and local government organizations during the same periods:

Table 7: Annual Turnover Analysis

Fiscal Year	Department Turnover Rate	BLS Turnover Rate Estimate
2021	17.0% (2 Retirements, 6 Separations)	19.6%
2022	8.5% (1 Retirement, 3 Separations)	21.6%
2023	23.4% (1 Retirement, 10 Separations)	20.5%
2024	28.3% (4 Retirements, 9 Separations)	18.0%
2025	17.4% (8 Separations)	17.8%

Source: CCG Human Resources Department Reports, BLS Job Openings and Labor Turnover Study

The Department’s turnover rate has varied significantly over the past five fiscal years, ranging from a low of 8.5% in FY22 to a high of 28.3% in FY24. The Department’s turnover rate compares favorably with the BLS’s estimated sector-wide figures, with the Department averaging roughly 18.9% annual turnover and the BLS reporting an average of nearly 19.5% annual turnover. The Department’s turnover rates did spike significantly above the estimated national average in FY24, however, with the Department exceeding the national average by a margin of over 10%. In interviews, Engineering Department leadership reported that disciplinary issues have contributed to the Department’s periodic difficulties in retaining staff.

14 of the Department’s 45 positions (31.1%) were vacant at the time of M&J’s fieldwork. While this figure does represent a somewhat elevated vacancy rate by itself, the fact that the Department’s vacancies are largely concentrated in the Traffic Engineering Division (52.9% vacancy rate) is concerning. The Department’s FY27 budget request reportedly contains a number of adjustments to the staffing structure in the Traffic Operations Section intended to increase the Department’s ability to hire competent staff.

Training

Across the Department, staff generally learn how to carry out the duties of their new position through some form of “on the job” training, which primarily consists of unstructured one-on-one training (*i.e.*, an existing employee giving the new employee a “walkthrough” of the process in question), observation of existing staff in their work, and, as applicable, employees performing their work under the supervision of experienced staff. The Department does not have an established plan for cross-training staff or otherwise developing staff to be able to “back up” other critical staff in the event of unavailability. The following subsections discuss particular training matters within each of the Department’s divisions.

General Engineering Division

The General Engineering Division’s Project Engineers, across both the Contract Administration and D/PM/CSD Sections, must possess engineering degrees, although they are not required to be licensed Professional Engineers (“PE”) at the time of hiring. In interviews, some staff reported that their lack of PE licensure has become an impediment to future promotions, although this was reportedly not the case when they were originally hired, and that the City would not fund any expenses towards the staff receiving their PE licenses. Other staff reported that they currently lacked PE licensure but were expected to receive their PE license within an unspecified “near future,” timeframe even though licensure is not an established job requirement. The Project Engineers in the D/PM/CSD Section must obtain and maintain Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (“GSWCC”) Level II Erosion & Sediment Control certification, which requires attending a four-hour course every three years. The City does fund the initial certification course and required recertification courses for the General Engineering division’s Project Engineers, but does not require Project Engineers to fulfill any other continuing professional education requirements or regularly offer supplementary training courses on other relevant subjects.

The General Engineering Division’s Stormwater Management Section staff are required to obtain and maintain their Georgia Environmental Protection Division (“EPD”) Level 1B Advanced Fundamentals Stormwater Inspector certification, which requires staff to attend a multi-day training course offered by the National Pollutant discharge Elimination System’s (“NPDES”) training institute in Atlanta every three years. The City pays for staff to obtain and maintain their Level 1B certifications, including the cost of the training course, travel, and lodgings. The Stormwater Management Section also has identified several preferred certifications for its staff, although staff do not receive any particular incentives, such as compensation adjustments, for receiving and maintaining these certifications.

In interviews, Engineering Department leadership reported that the City generally does not award pay enhancements for preferred certifications but does occasionally use “career ladder” positions to incentivize certain training and certifications. The Stormwater Technician (I/II) positions may function as “career ladder” positions, although the Department does not have a set of documented criteria by which Stormwater Technician Is may be “upgraded” to Stormwater Technician IIs upon the achievement of specified qualifications. The Stormwater Management Section’s preferred certifications include NPDES MS4 Green Infrastructure Technician certification and EPD Level 2 Design Professional certification. Since the time of M&J’s fieldwork, the Engineering Department has reportedly hired a new Stormwater Management Engineer who is certified to offer training courses on stormwater-related subjects and is in the process of planning an internal training curriculum.

Traffic Engineering Division

The Engineering Department does not require any particular qualifications or certifications for the Traffic Analyst. The Traffic Analyst periodically attends online Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System (“GEARS”) training sessions and update classes offered by the Georgia Department of Transportation (“GDOT”).

The Engineering Department does not require any particular qualifications or certifications for applicants to Traffic Operations Section positions. The Engineering Department reportedly does send Traffic Operations Section staff to courses on traffic signal operations in Atlanta, although these classes are not consistently offered and most training is conducted on-the-job. The Engineering Department does not require Traffic Signals Subsection staff to obtain and maintain relevant industry certifications, such as International Municipal Signal Association (“IMSA”) Traffic Signal Technician or IMSA Traffic Signal Inspector certifications. However, the Department funds IMSA training courses for Traffic Signals Subsection staff. The Traffic Engineering Division is also reportedly planning a training event which will include several courses on traffic operations-related subjects, drawing instructors and students from both within the Engineering Department and from throughout the Columbus area.

Support Services Division

The Engineering Division has different training and certification practices for the two different types of Inspections Subsection staff. The Inspections Subsection’s utility inspectors have no particular qualifications required and are not provided with any specialized training. The Inspections Subsection’s Engineering Inspectors are required to obtain GSWCC Level 1B certification, with the Engineering Department funding the initial training course and periodic recertification courses. The Engineering Department also periodically sends the Inspections Subdivision’s Engineering Inspectors on other relevant training courses, such as the “Field Days” jointly hosted by Auburn University and the International Erosion Control Association, and arranges for in-house demonstrations of erosion control techniques from product vendors.

The Engineering Department does not require any particular qualifications or certifications for Survey Subsection staff or provide Survey Subsection staff with specialized training on land surveying methods. The City's current compensation for Survey Subsection positions is not competitive with private sector compensation for Georgia-licensed Land Surveyors, which is the primary qualification for land surveyors in Georgia, although specialized surveying education is available from Georgia educational institutions or the Surveying and Mapping Society of Georgia.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The following list defines the primary functions of the Engineering Department's organizational units:

- General Engineering Division — Contract Administration Section
 - Capital Project Management
- General Engineering Division — Stormwater Management Section
 - Stormwater Plan Review
 - Stormwater Reporting
 - Stormwater Inspection
- General Engineering Division — D/PM/CSD Section
 - Plan Review
- Traffic Engineering Division — Traffic Engineering Design Section
 - Traffic Data Reporting
- Traffic Engineering Division — Traffic Operations Section — Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection
 - Signs & Markings Installation and Maintenance
- Traffic Engineering Division — Traffic Operations Section — Traffic Signals Subsection
 - Traffic Signal Installation and Maintenance
- Support Services Division — Inspections & Surveying Section — Inspections Subsection
 - Utility Inspection
 - Worksite Runoff Mitigation Inspection
- Support Services Division — Inspections & Surveying Section — Surveying Subsection
 - Surveying
- Support Services Division — GIS Section
 - GIS Database Maintenance

Capital Project Management

The Project Engineers in the Contract Administration Section manage the Department's roads and drainage-related capital construction projects, including the procurement of construction services and oversight of projects as they are in progress. The City's Planning Department manages the design and planning portion of the capital projects administered by the Contract Administration Section in coordination with contracted planners and engineers, and provide finalized designs to the Engineering Department for execution. Project Engineers do not play an official role in the Planning Department's project development work, but often attend monthly status meetings between Planning Department staff and the contracted planning firm to keep track of project development and offer feedback from the perspective of someone that will be tasked with executing the project.

The Project Engineers work with the Engineering Director to select projects for execution, based on the City's needs and priorities as well as funding availability. The Project Engineer then works with the CCG Finance Department's Purchasing Division to develop bid documents based off of a template built from previously developed solicitations and issue the solicitation for construction services. For projects which involve federal funding, the Project Engineer modifies the bid document to include additional required language, based on guidance issued by GDOT, and obtains GDOT approval of the bid document before issuance.

The Purchasing Division manages solicitation advertisements and vendor communications, forwarding questions to the Project Engineer as needed. Purchasing Division staff also receive and open all responses, which they use to prepare a bid tabulation sheet based on the price quotes provided. The Project Engineer and Engineering Director review the responses and bid tabulations to confirm the qualifications of the lowest bidder before the Project Engineer recommends awarding the project to the lowest priced qualified bidder, using an award recommendation form that identifies the funding sources for the project. The Project Engineer then prepares a City Council resolution, using a template, to approve the award of the bid, attaching procurement records as supporting documentation; the Engineering Director presents the resolution to the City Council for approval.

Once the City Council has approved the award, the Project Engineer sends the winning bidder an award letter and works with the vendor to prepare a contract for the construction project, based off of a City contract template, which they submit to the Purchasing Division via the City's inter-office mail system for approval. The Purchasing Division forwards the contract for further approval by the City Attorney and Mayor's office, before finalizing the contract.

Once the contract has been finalized, the Project Engineer oversees the construction process, including participating in pre-construction planning meetings, regularly visiting construction sites to inspect progress, working with contracted designers and engineers to modify construction plans as needed in response to challenges that may arise during construction, and performing the final review of the completed project before closing it out. The Project Engineer serves as the point of contact between the construction team and any other City departments which the project may impact. METRA, the City's public transportation system, is the department which the Project Engineer most commonly discusses construction project impacts, although construction projects do occasionally impact the services provided by other City departments, such as Public Works or Parks & Recreation.

The Project Engineer also receives and processes invoices from Department contractors. When an invoice is received, the Project Engineer confirms that the requested payment matches the prices listed in the project contract and verifies that retainage has been calculated properly before approving the invoice and submitting it to the Office Manager for further processing. The Office Manager confirms the funding source of the payment and prepares the payment request in Advantage, before submitting the payment request to the Finance Department for processing and payment. The Office Manager informs the Project Manager once the payment has been issued. The Contract Administration does not perform any vendor performance tracking or prepare vendor performance reports in order to document vendor performance for potential consideration in future bid evaluations.

Additionally, the Project Engineers in the Contract Administration Section manage the Department's on-call contracts with construction firms to carry out the Department's ongoing roadway repaving work. The Department maintains a database in the Citylogix asset management software system that tracks the condition of City-maintained roadways, based on a pavement condition survey performed by a third-party firm. The Project Engineers prioritize street segments for repaving based on the assigned pavement condition and time since last repaving, and assign repaving projects to the City's on-call paving contractors, as allowed by the Department's repaving budget. The Project Engineers then visit the paving site to confirm that the repaving job was performed to appropriate standards and inform the GIS Section, who updates the Citylogix roadway condition database to reflect the completed repaving work.

General Engineering Division — Stormwater Management Section

Collaboration with Public Works

The Stormwater Management Section collaborates with the CCG Public Works Department's Rainwater Maintenance Division which shares the same domain as the Stormwater Management Section. The Stormwater Management Section is responsible for the regulatory compliance, engineering and planning related to City-owned stormwater systems, whereas the Rainwater Maintenance Division maintains existing stormwater systems and maintains the systems' property.

The Rainwater Maintenance Division and Stormwater Management Section serve different roles related to stormwater management, but overlap in domain and resources as they share a funding source (Stormwater (Sewer) Fund). The entities are also required to collaborate when a project is too large or time-consuming to be completed by the Rainwater Maintenance Division and must be completed by a third-party.

Stormwater Plan Review

The Stormwater Management Engineer reviews construction plans submitted to the Engineering Department to verify that the plans meet all relevant requirements related to stormwater management best management practices, as established by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (“EPD”) such as the construction of appropriate stormwater retention structures. Applicants submit paper copies of their construction plan documents to the Administrative Support Specialist II working at the Department’s front desk, who creates an application in Tyler Technologies’ Enterprise Permitting and Licensing software system (“EPL”)¹⁴ and places one set of paper plans in a mailbox designated for stormwater plan review. The Stormwater Management Engineer retrieves the set of paper plans from the mailbox in the Engineering Department office and performs the review based on EPD standards. The Stormwater Management Engineer then enters the results of their review into EPL, either approving the plans or denying the plans and leaving comments identifying any applicable deficiencies.

A Project Engineer in the D/PM/CSD Section communicates the results of the plan review back to the applicant, including any comments on deficiencies noted by the Stormwater Management Engineer. If deficiencies are noted, the applicant typically resubmits a new set of plans, which the Stormwater Management Engineer re-reviews in a similar manner, recording the results of the review in EPL.

Stormwater Reporting

The Stormwater Management Section prepares quarterly and annual reports for EPD to show the City’s compliance with various EPD stormwater management regulations and to document the City’s implementation of floodplain management practices, in accordance with the FEMA CRS standards. CRS is a voluntary program established by FEMA that encourages localities to implement floodplain management practices above and beyond minimum required standards, which allows for discounted flood insurance rates in the applicable areas. The Stormwater Management Engineer serves as the City’s CRS Coordinator and prepares the City’s quarterly and annual reports.

¹⁴ EPL was previously named “EnerGov” and is frequently still referred to as such in conversation.

The City prepares its quarterly and annual reports using data that the City creates throughout the year, including data generated by the Stormwater Management Section during its regular operations (e.g., creek walk reports, facility inspection reports, water quality sample test results) and data generated by the Public Works Department. The Public Works Department performs a variety of services in support of the City's water quality and floodplain management efforts, including street sweeping to remove potential pollutants from roadways and maintaining the City's own stormwater mitigation infrastructure. The Stormwater Management Engineer compiles the data generated by the Stormwater Management Section throughout the year on a network drive and meets with a peer in the Public Works Department in advance of reporting deadlines to request data on Public Works Department activities. The Stormwater Management Engineer compiles the collected data into the required reports using a template provided by EPD, before submitting the report to the Engineering Director for their review. Once the Engineering Director approves the relevant report, the Stormwater Management Engineer submits the report to EPD.

Stormwater Inspection

Stormwater Management Section staff perform EPD-mandated monitoring and inspection of stormwater-related facilities and features throughout the City, including waterways, identified highly visible pollutant sources ("HVPS")¹⁵, industrial sites, and private stormwater detention/retention structures, as well as water quality inspections at designated sampling locations. Staff in the City's Public Works Department monitor and inspect City-owned stormwater detention/retention structures. EPD requires the City to inspect all City waterways for signs of dumping, impermissible runoff, or improper stormwater management practices at least once every five years. The Stormwater Management Section organizes its waterway monitoring through a five-year cycle, with each waterway being inspected during its assigned year of the cycle. Per its waterway inspection cycle, Stormwater Management Section staff inspect approximately 60 miles of waterways per year.

All Stormwater Management Section staff, including the Stormwater Management Engineer, Stormwater Inspectors, and Stormwater Technicians (I and II), participate in the Section's waterway monitoring by conducting "creek walks" along assigned waterways. For safety, Stormwater Management Section staff perform creek walks in pairs, as creek walks frequently require staff to enter private property¹⁶, traverse hazardous terrain, and encounter potentially dangerous wildlife. To perform creek walks, the assigned Stormwater Management Section staff access the waterway in question and travel up and down the waterway by foot, observing the waterway and surrounding area for signs of improper practices.

¹⁵ Per the Engineering Department's website, "HVPS are facilities that have high traffic and the potential to be a source of pollution for our waterways. Several businesses fall in this category, including gas stations, auto repair shops, car washes, and other similar facilities and practices."

¹⁶ In Georgia, navigable waterways are publicly owned, while non-navigable waterways typically may be privately owned. All Stormwater Management Section staff performing fieldwork are sworn officers authorized to enter private property for the purpose of performing their inspection and enforcement duties, including accessing publicly owned waterways through privately owned land and accessing waterways on privately owned land.

If Stormwater Management Section staff do note potential violations, such as dumping, improper waterway modifications (e.g., unauthorized dams), or excessive runoff, they document the violation by taking geotagged photos using the Solocator app on their City-issued tablets and pursue enforcement as appropriate, as discussed later in this section of the report. Stormwater Management Section staff additionally document their observations during creek walks using fillable PDF-based forms on their tablets, which are stored on a shared network drive.

Stormwater Inspectors perform regular inspections of highly visible pollutant sources (“HVPS”), industrial sites, and privately owned stormwater detention/retention facilities. The Stormwater Management Section maintains an inventory of HVPS, industrial sites, and privately owned stormwater detention/retention facilities, based on stormwater permitting data and facility industry code data maintained by the Tax Assessor’s Office, and has five-year inspection cycles for each facility type. The Stormwater Management Section’s five-year inspection cycle for stormwater-related facilities exceeds EPD’s requirement to inspect at least 10% of all sites each year. Stormwater Inspectors also inspect sites based on complaints received from the public or other City employees, either submitted through the City’s Q-Alert citizen submission system or through phone calls to the Engineering Department’s front desk.

One Stormwater Inspector (typically the most experienced inspector) inspects HVPS and industrial sites, while the remaining Stormwater Inspectors inspect privately owned stormwater detention/retention facilities. Stormwater Inspectors schedule inspections with facility owners several days in advance. While performing inspections, Stormwater Inspectors evaluate the business or site in question to confirm that pollutants are being properly contained (e.g., that an auto repair shop is properly collecting and disposing of motor oil, that an industrial site is not improperly discharging wastewater, that a gas station’s underground fuel storage tanks do not show signs of leakage), review the property to confirm that all required best management practices have been implemented, and review the condition of any stormwater management structures present to confirm that they are still in good working order.

Stormwater Inspectors record the results of their inspections on PDF-based forms on their tablets, stored on a shared network drive. Stormwater Inspectors issue a letter on City letterhead to the facility owner shortly following the inspection, either stating that no deficiencies were observed or identifying the deficiency or deficiencies that were noted and giving the facility owner 30 days to correct the issue or issues identified (“Notice to Comply”). If the deficiency cannot feasibly be addressed within the 30-day period provided, facility owners may request extensions, typically of no more than 90 days, which Stormwater Management Section staff can issue at their discretion. Following the end of the 30-day mitigation period and any granted extensions, the Stormwater Inspector again inspects the facility to confirm that the issues have been fully addressed. If the identified issues have not been fully addressed, the Stormwater Inspector writes a citation and submits the citation to EPD and a copy of the citation to the City’s Environmental Court for adjudication. For egregious violations, Stormwater Inspectors may bypass the Notice to Comply stage of the enforcement process and instead immediately issue a citation. Stormwater Inspectors attend Environmental Court sessions, which are held twice per month, as needed to testify to citations that they have issued.

The Stormwater Technicians (I and II) perform water sample quality testing. The Stormwater Management Section samples water quality at 14 sites on 11 different waterways around the City. Stormwater Technicians travel to the inspection sites on a regular basis to collect water quality samples, which they bring back to the Stormwater Management Section's offices to test for a variety of chemical and biological markers. The Stormwater Technicians also provide samples to the Columbus Water Works' Water Quality Monitoring Department for testing for fecal coliform bacteria, which shows contamination by mammalian fecal waste and may indicate improper sanitary sewer discharge into the waterway. The Stormwater Technicians record the results of their water quality sample testing on a shared network drive.

Due to the fact that runoff from rainfall can decrease the validity of certain water quality tests, the Stormwater Technicians cannot perform those water quality tests in the two days following rainfall events. During periods with frequent precipitation, the Stormwater Technicians are assigned to digitize building plan documents received as part of the Engineering Department's plan review function, storing the digital copies of the documents on a shared network drive.

General Engineering Division — Design/Pavement Management/Commercial Site Development Section

Plan Review

The D/PM/CSD Section administers and performs plan review for engineering site plans submitted to the Engineering Department as part of the City's overall building permitting and construction approval process, including plans for single-family residential, multi-family residential, commercial, and industrial developments. The D/PM/CSD Section's Project Engineers work with the Administrative Support Specialist II working at the Department's front desk (*i.e.*, the Administrative Support Specialist II that reports to the Office Manager) to receive plan submissions and administer the plan review process. Plans reviewed by the D/PM/CSD Section include standard site plan reviews, for most construction projects, and "minor land disturbance" reviews ("MLD"), for construction projects which involve disturbing fewer than 5,000 square feet of land (*e.g.* construction of moderately sized driveways). MLD reviews require a lower level of review than standard site plan reviews, do not require plans to be approved by a licensed PE, and charge lower fees than standard site plan reviews.

The Administrative Support Specialist II at the Department's front desk receives building plan submissions in-person from applicants, performs an initial check to confirm that all required files are included in the submission (including multiple paper copies of the plan documents), confirms that the provided parcel number(s) are correct, and enters the plan submission into EPL, either creating a new application or updating an existing application, as appropriate. The Administrative Support Specialist II then verifies that EPL is charging the correct fees and receives payment on the submission, either through cash, check, or card payments.

The Engineering Department does not provide the option to submit plans online or make online payments of application fees. The Administrative Support Specialist II processes card payments through the City's nCourt payment processing system, although the Administrative Support Specialist II does not process card payments at the time of plan submission. Instead, the Administrative Support Specialist II records the applicant's credit card information and signature on a card payment form and manually keys the payment information into the card reader to make the charge once a Project Engineer has confirmed that the application contains all required information. The Administrative Support Specialist II stores the collected card payment form paperclipped to the application paperwork.

For check and cash payments for standard plan review submissions, the Administrative Support Specialist II records the payment in EPL and stores the received payment in the Department's front office. At the end of each day, the Administrative Support Specialist II collects all cash and check payments received for the day, prepares a deposit slip for the collected payments, and places the received payments and deposit slip in an envelope that they provide to the Office Manager. The Office Manager stores received deposit envelopes in a locked safe in their office until the Department brings the collected funds to the bank for deposit. The Department does not have a standardized timeline for processing deposits; per interviews, the Engineering Department typically brings deposits to the bank once per week, although the Department may go two to three weeks between deposit runs during slow periods. The Administrative Support Specialist II, Office Manager, and GIS Technician are authorized to perform deposits on the Department's behalf. For MLD submissions, the Administrative Support Specialist II does not process payments for deposit (*i.e.*, prepare deposit slips and place the payments in a deposit envelope) until after a Project Engineer has performed an initial review of the submission to confirm that it contains all required elements. If a Project Engineer has not completed their initial review of a MLD application by the end of the day on which the application was received, the Administrative Support Specialist II paperclips the checks to the application paperwork, stored in the Engineering Department's locked front office, and stores any cash in a locked cash drawer in the Office Manager's safe.

Once the Administrative Support Specialist II has received the application, they place stickers on the copies of the engineering plans to indicate whether the application is a new application or a resubmission and place the copies of the plans in designated inboxes in the Engineering Department's offices, with copies of the plans designated for arborist review, planning review, stormwater review, and engineering review. The City Arborist, in the CCG Public Works Department, and staff from the CCG Planning Department perform the arborist and planning review, respectively. The Stormwater Management Section's Stormwater Management Engineer performs the stormwater review, as discussed earlier in this report. The D/PM/CSD Section's Project Engineers perform the engineering review, confirming that the application meets a variety of standards related to hydrology, erosion control, grading, and similar requirements, as well as various traffic-related features (in coordination with the Traffic Engineering Division). All plan reviews are performed using paper copies of the plans, with the D/PM/CSD Section's Project Engineers a single physical copy of the plans that they use to perform reviews.

The Department's traffic-related reviews are currently performed by the part-time former Project Engineer, due to the fact that the Traffic Engineer position is currently vacant. The Assistant Director, as acting Traffic Engineer, may reportedly assume responsibility for performing traffic-related plan reviews at some point in the future, although no timeline had been established for this transition at the time of M&J's fieldwork.

One of the Project Engineers within the D/PM/CSD Section administers the plan review process, including tracking the status of all applications and their associated reviews on a D/PM/CSD Section-created Word document as well as communicating the results of all reviews with the applicants. The various plan reviewers from across the CCG Public Works Department, Planning Department, and Engineering Department all record the results of their review in EPL, either marking the stages of review as approved or leaving comments specifying the nature of any deficiencies. Once all reviewers have completed the necessary reviews and entered any comments, the Project Engineer compiles the comments into a single Word document and sends the document to the submitter. As applicants review the received comments, they may reach out to the Project Engineer to discuss the comments in greater depth. For comments on reviews performed by other individuals (e.g., Stormwater or Arborist reviews), the Project Engineer directs the applicant to the appropriate individual. The Project Engineer also answers questions from both applicants and other plan review-related staff about review status.

Once all reviewers have approved all required items and no further review or revision is required, a Project Engineer informs the Administrative Support Specialist II that the project has been finalized and marks the plans as approved. The applicant either picks up physical copies of the approved plans from the Engineering Department's front desk or provides the Engineering Department with a prepaid shipping label that the Department uses to ship the approved plans to the applicant.

Signs & Markings Installation and Maintenance

The Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection installs and maintains roadway signage and pavement markings along City-maintained roadways (other than overhead/highway signs) and in City-owned parking lots and decks. The Traffic Operations Supervisor oversees the Signs & Pavement marking Subsection's Traffic Control Technicians and assigns projects to them based on needs identified by the Traffic Analyst, issues reported via Q-Alert, issues reported by citizen calls (either directly by the Traffic Operations Section's Administrative Support Specialist II or via 911), and issues observed by Engineering Department staff during their fieldwork. When the Traffic Operations Supervisor identifies a sign that needs installation, maintenance, or replacement, the Traffic Operations Supervisor notifies the Traffic Control Technicians (designated as Sign Technicians), who determine what equipment is needed to install, replace, or maintain the sign. If a new sign is needed, the Sign Technicians determine whether the sign is a standard stocked sign (and confirm that the Traffic Operations Section has a copy of the appropriate sign in stock) or a custom sign. If the required sign is a custom sign (e.g., a sign referencing a specific street sign), a Sign Technician uses a computer-controlled decal cutter to design the appropriate decal, which they affix to the appropriately colored sign blank. In the field, the Sign Technicians remove any equipment being replaced and install the new equipment, based on the instructions from the manufacturer of the equipment.

When the Traffic Operations Supervisor identifies pavement marking work that needs completion, including new marking or the replacement of existing markings, the Traffic Operations Supervisor determines whether the job can feasibly be performed by the Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection's current staff or if the job would be better carried out by the City's pavement marking contractor. While both of the Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection's Traffic Control Technician positions designated as Paint Technicians are currently vacant, one of the Sign Technicians is trained on the Subsection's painting equipment and this Sign Technician can work alongside the Traffic Operations Supervisor to perform small pavement marking jobs, such as repainting individual parking spaces or small City parking lots. The Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection uses push-powered painting machines, including a thermopainting machine and a "standard" painting machine. The Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection currently contracts out any larger jobs, such as roadway markings or larger parking lots, due to staffing shortages.

The Traffic Operations Section's Administrative Support Specialist II submits orders to the Department's sign and marking equipment and supply vendors to maintain appropriate stock of printed signs, sign blanks, signposts, pavement marking supplies, and other required supplies based on requests from the Traffic Operations Supervisor. The Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection does not use a structured inventory management system, and instead, the Traffic Operations Supervisor periodically reviews the Section's inventory and orders replenishments as they feel is needed. Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection also does not maintain an inventory of all signs installed along roadways, although it does maintain an inventory of the signs and equipment installed at each of the City's signaled intersections. Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection staff complete work orders after performing work at a signaled intersection documenting the equipment at the intersection installed, replaced, or removed. The Traffic Operations Section's Administrative Support Specialist II provides the work orders to the GIS Section, who use the included data to update the GIS database inventorying the City's traffic signage.

Traffic Engineering Division — Traffic Operations Section — Traffic Signals Subsection

Traffic Signal Installation and Maintenance

The Traffic Operations Section's Traffic Signals Subsection maintains traffic signals on City-managed roadways, including installing new equipment, replacing equipment, and reprogramming signals. While the Senior Traffic Operations Technician is not organizationally placed within the Traffic Signals Subsection, this position reportedly fills the place of the vacant Traffic Signals Supervisor position and supervises the work of the remainder of the Traffic Signals Subsection's staff. The Senior Traffic Operations Technician manages the day-to-day work of the Traffic Signals Subsection, including working with the Traffic Operations Supervisor to identify work projects (based on similar factors as those used to identify work for the Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection), assign work to staff, and ensure that work is being performed to applicable standards.

The Traffic Signals Technicians perform all of the Traffic Signals Subsection's complex electrical and programming work, including wiring traffic signals, configuring signal control cabinets, programming signals, and responding to intersections with malfunctioning signals. Traffic Signals Technicians periodically work on-call to respond to after-hour incidents, with the four Traffic Signals Technician positions intended to maintain a "one week on/three weeks off" on-call rotation. Due to the Department's current staffing vacancies, with only one of the four Traffic Signals Technicians positions filled at the time of M&J's fieldwork, the Senior Traffic Operations Technician is supporting the lone Traffic Signals Technician in their on-call work, with each working a "two weeks on/two weeks off" on-call rotation. Traffic Signals Subsection staff (including the Senior Traffic Operations Technicians) receive time-and-a-half overtime for any time worked on-call, plus four hours of pay (at time-and-a-half pay, equivalent to six hours of standard pay) as a stipend for each week worked on-call.

Traffic Signal Construction Specialists perform construction work related to the installation, maintenance, and replacement of traffic signals, including installing pole boxes, laying conduit to protect wires, hanging signals, replacing lights, and installing signal control boxes. The Traffic Signals Subsection uses City contractors to provide supplemental traffic signal construction work as needed. Due to current vacancies in the Traffic Signal Construction Specialist position, with one of the two positions vacant at the time of M&J's fieldwork, the Traffic Signals Subsection relies on contractors to perform all "new installations" of traffic signals at intersections, reserving the Traffic Signal Construction Specialist for repairs and maintenance of existing equipment.

The Traffic Signals Subsection maintains a stock of wires, control boards and boxes, signals, light modules, and other equipment at the Traffic Operations Section's facility. When the Senior Traffic Operations Technician identifies work for the Traffic Signals Subsection, they work with the Traffic Signals Technicians and Traffic Signal Construction Specialists to identify the parts needed, confirm that all programming is correct (using traffic signal programming simulators at the Traffic Operations Section's facility), and that staff have the necessary equipment. Staff then travel to the worksite, and perform the work as per the manufacturer's specifications. Staff always work in pairs for safety, particularly when working at heights in the Department's cherry picker trucks, with one employee working at heights in the bucket and the other employee maintaining a safe working environment on the ground. Due to staffing shortages, with only one Traffic Signals Technician and one Traffic Signal Construction Specialist at the time of M&J's fieldwork, the Traffic Signals Subsection currently must pair the two different positions into a single working team, preventing the Subsection from simultaneously performing construction and programming/electrical work.

The Traffic Operations Section's Administrative Support Specialist II submits orders to the Department's signaling equipment supply vendors to maintain appropriate stock of signals, wires, lighting modules, control boards, signposts, and other supplies as needed based on requests from the a Traffic Signal Technician II. The Traffic Signals Subsection does not use a structured inventory management system, and instead, a Traffic Signal Technician II periodically reviews the Section's inventory and orders replenishments as they deem appropriate. The Traffic Signals Subsection maintains an inventory of the signs and equipment installed at each of the City's signaled intersections. Traffic Signals Subsection staff complete work orders after performing work at a signaled intersection documenting the equipment at the intersection installed, replaced, or removed. The Traffic Operations Section's Administrative Support Specialist II provides the work orders to the GIS Section, who use the included data to update the GIS database inventorying the City's traffic signals.

Utility Inspection

The Inspections & Surveying Section's Inspections Subsection inspects work performed by utilities impacting public rights-of-way, such as roadways and sidewalks, to confirm that this work and any repairs required after the completion of the work meets City standards and does not present ongoing hazards. Additionally, Inspections Subsection staff respond to emergency alerts that may be related to utilities, such as downed power lines and sinkholes under roadways. The Inspections Subsection's utility work inspection duties are performed by its two Utility Inspectors, with one Utility Inspector designated as responsible for inspecting work by the City's electrical and telecommunications utilities, with the other Utility Inspector designated as responsible for inspecting work by the City's water,¹⁷ sewer, and natural gas utilities.

The Utility Inspectors base much of their inspection work on permit applications for utility work and maintain a database of open utility inspection permits. The Utility Inspectors visit the sites of the utility work after the utility reports that the work has been completed through the City's purpose-built online utility permitting system and confirm that the work has been performed adequately and that the utility has adequately repaired any damage to the public right of way, such as repaving sidewalks, replacing sod, and patching holes in roadways. If the work has been completed to the City's standards, the Utility Inspector approves the work in the utility permitting system. If the work has not been completed to the City's standards, the Utility Inspector reaches out to their contact with the relevant utility and informs them of the issue(s), with the Utility Inspector later reinspecting the work to confirm that the utility addressed any deficiencies. If the utility does not adequately address any concerns, the Utility Inspector is authorized to write tickets to the utility for failing to conduct their work in the proper manner.

Utility Inspectors periodically observe utility work crews performing work without first applying for the proper permits, at which point they stop and inform the utility work crew that a work permit is needed. If the utility still does not obtain a proper utility work permit, the Utility Inspector is authorized to issue a stop-work order, forbidding the work crew from performing any additional work until the utility has obtained the proper work permit.

¹⁷ The Columbus Waterworks is a governmental organization but is treated the same as privately-owned utilities by the Engineering Department for the purposes of its utility inspection function.

Utility Inspectors also respond to public reports of utility-related issues to City right of ways, including emergency reports (e.g., sinkhole impacting roadway, downed power lines) and non-emergency reports (e.g., leaking water causing minor flooding, telecom lines hanging too low over a roadway). Utility Inspectors receive these reports through the Q-Alert system, referred by 911 or 311 operators, or through Engineering Department staff observing issues while working in the field. When Utility Inspectors arrive at the site of a reported incident, they first determine whether the issue poses a safety threat and take steps to mitigate the threat (e.g., placing flags/cones to warn about downed power lines). Next, the Utility Inspectors determine which utility is responsible for the concern and either contact the utility owner to confirm that they are aware of the issue or forward the Q-Alert entry to the proper City department.¹⁸ If the Utility Inspector is able to remove the hazard immediately (e.g., if a downed wire is a low-voltage telecom wire, which the Utility Inspector can safely clear from the scene, not a power line), they do so before leaving the site. The Utility Inspector revisits the incident site after several days to confirm that the incident has been addressed.

Worksite Runoff Mitigation Inspection

The Inspections Subsection's Engineering Inspectors perform required inspections of construction worksites throughout the City to confirm that the worksites are in compliance with applicable City, State, and Federal runoff and erosion mitigation requirements. The Engineering inspectors are required to visit and inspect each active construction worksite, including single-family residential, multi-family residential, commercial, industrial, and public construction worksites, on a regular basis, with inspections being performed at least once per week for worksites of at least one acre in size and every other week for worksites less than one acre in size. For runoff and erosion inspections, the City divides inspection responsibilities into four districts, with each Engineering Inspector responsible for performing all required inspections in their assigned district. Inspections Subsection staff maintain a database of all active construction sites in both EPL and an Excel spreadsheet stored on the Engineering Department's shared network drive, breaking the sites out by assigned district.

¹⁸ In some instances, issues that may initial appear to be due to utilities may be the responsibility of a different City department, such as sinkholes that are produced by failures of the Public Works Department's storm drain/sewer system instead of the Columbus Waterworks' drinking water or sanitary sewer systems.

When Engineering Inspectors visit a worksite, they inspect for drainage and runoff issues by walking the perimeter of the jobsite to look for any locations where runoff is not adequately mitigated and is traveling into neighboring properties or waterways. If no such runoff is present, the Engineering Inspector writes their report noting no issues, and saves the PDF report on the Engineering Department's shared network drive. If the Engineering Inspector does observe unmitigated runoff, they inform the worksite foreman of the issue, write a report noting the issue, and send a copy of the report to the construction project manager (e.g., developer, contractor, property owner, as appropriate). If the runoff issue has not been mitigated by the Engineering Inspector's following inspections of the worksite, they may issue a stop-work order, halting construction work at the site until the issue is resolved. If an Engineering Inspector notes work being performed in violation of the stop-work order, they are authorized to issue tickets to the builder.

When reviewing public construction projects, including roadway construction projects, Engineering Inspectors also review to confirm that the drainage and runoff mitigation features being built into the project are being properly constructed, as specified in the original construction plans. Engineering Inspectors travel to public construction worksites and review copies of the approved construction plans against the work being actually performed, paying particular attention to the location of features like culverts and stormwater drains. Engineering Inspectors are not issued tablets or electronic copies of the work plans and instead work from paper copies of the workplans.

Support Services Division — Inspections & Surveying Section — Surveying Subsection

Surveying

The Inspections & Surveying Section's Surveying Subsection conducts surveys on behalf of the Engineering Department and any other City departments that require surveying services. City departments that frequently make use of the Engineering Department's Surveying Subsection and the type of work performed include:

- Engineering Department
 - Mapping stormwater inlets and control features
- CCG Public Works Department
 - Locating trees for City Arborist
 - Confirming grade of slopes for stormwater control structures
 - Marking street features (bus stops, gutters, curb cuts, sidewalks)
 - Confirming fill areas for landfills
 - Confirming gravesite locations in public cemeteries

The Inspections & Surveying Section's Inspections/Survey Operations Manager receives communications from users requesting survey work from the Surveying Subsection's and assigns work to the survey teams during daily morning meetings. As designed, the Surveying Subsection has two survey teams, with one team of two (Survey Crew Leader, Survey Technician) and one team of three (Survey Crew Leader, Survey Technician, Survey Crew Worker), although the Department's current staffing levels only allow for a single survey team of three.

When the Inspections/Survey Operations Manager assigns a survey project to a survey team, that team gathers their equipment and travels to the survey location to perform the work. When they reach the survey location, the survey team's work varies significantly based on the assignment. For certain projects, such as mapping the location of stormwater inlets and control features, the survey team uses their survey equipment to record the location of existing features (as well as feature qualities, like the type of stormwater feature) into a digital file, which the Inspections/Survey Operations Manager provides to the GIS Technician Supervisor for incorporation in the relevant City GIS database. For other projects, like confirming gravesite locations in public cemeteries, the survey team uses their survey equipment and existing location markers to locate requested positions, marking those positions with stakes or flags for later use by the requestor.

The Department typically does not allocate the costs for routine services, such as tree locating, landfill fill evaluations, and gravesite locating, provided by the Surveying Subsection to the City department that requested the services. As a result, the Engineering Department ultimately does pay for services performed for the benefit of other departments. The Department maintains on-call contracts with two private surveying firms for use on major, non-standard projects, and the costs for these contracted surveying services are allocated to the requestor department.

Support Services Division — GIS Section

GIS Database Maintenance

The GIS Section maintains the Engineering Department's GIS databases. The City maintains a decentralized GIS governance model, by which different City departments with GIS-related functions maintain their own lightly-interconnected GIS databases. The Engineering Department maintains a variety of City GIS databases, including the City's roadways (alignment and naming), addresses, stormwater features, bicycle and pedestrian trails/routes, designated truck routes, and traffic signal inventories. The GIS Technician Supervisor and GIS Technician work with staff from across the Engineering Department and a variety of other City departments to obtain the information that they use to maintain these various databases, including the Planning Department, Public Works Department, and Tax Assessor's Office. GIS Section staff also work closely with the IT Department's GIS staff, who perform the technical administration of the City's GIS systems. The GIS Technician performs the Engineering department's addressing duties, updating addresses as needed based on parcel splits or other items and notifying other bodies (e.g., utilities, Inspections & Code, Tax Assessor's Office) as necessary. The GIS Technician Supervisor manages the remainder of the GIS Section's databases, including notifying outside bodies, such as GDOT, about changes to the City's street alignments, naming, and status (e.g., notifying about roads undergoing significant construction work).

The GIS section also prepares data products as needed, including maps for internal use, maps for public use, and ad-hoc reports produced as needed. The GIS Section maintains an internal “Engineering Reporter” map, which serves as a “catch-all” map for the Engineering Department, allowing staff to access data on stormwater features, signal inventories, and other relevant subjects. The GIS Section maintains two maps for public access on the City’s website: a map showing truck routes through the City and a map showing bicycle and pedestrian routes/trails.

Customer Service

The Department serves a wide variety of customers, including people requesting inspections, permitting applicants, City contractors, local citizens and visitors, and other City departments. The Department’s enforcement-related functions, including both in-office and field-based functions, have priorities that are inherently at odds with those of many of their customers. Additionally, many functions performed by the Stormwater Management Section and Inspections Subsection, such as conducting creek walks and conducting stormwater inspections, place staff in vulnerable positions, such as walking through backyards, entering unfamiliar business service areas, and visiting construction sites. In interviews, multiple staff across the Department’s enforcement-related functions reported that they had experienced being threatened by members of the public in the course of performing their standard job duties, including multiple instances of being threatened with firearms and/or having the police called on them. Per interviews, staff state that they try to notify property owners or occupants before traversing private property, although this may not be feasible in certain instances, such as creek walks that may potentially involve traversing dozens of properties in a single day. The City does not require conflict avoidance or de-escalation training to all relevant staff across its various departments or provide additional support to staff that do encounter hostile members of the public, either as the result of perceived intrusions of private space or resistance to being the subject of enforcement proceedings.

The Department’s permitting functions, which are largely centralized in the D/PM/CSD Section but also feature within the Stormwater Management Section and Traffic Engineering Division, are a relatively “traditional” customer service relationship. The Administrative Support Specialist II serves customers from a work counter, while one of the D/PM/CSD Section’s Project Engineers manages further communications on the details of plan reviews via phone calls or email. As needed, the Project Engineer directs the customer to contact other reviewers directly, typically also by phone or email. The Department requires applicants to submit applications in person but does allow applicants to receive approved plan documents via mail by providing a prepaid shipping label.

The Department’s management of City contractors is contained largely within the Contract Administration Section, who performs this task in coordination with the Finance Department’s Purchasing Division. The Purchasing Division manages communications with potential contractors during the bidding process, while the Contract Administration Section’s Project Engineers maintain communications after the contract has been awarded. The Project Engineers maintain regular communications with the City’s contractors through periodic meetings, regular phone calls and emails, and (typically) updates through contractor-provided project management software platforms.

The Department serves citizens and visitors through the Traffic Operations Section's functions as well as through its responses to citizen-submitted requests and reports. The Traffic Operations Section has minimal direct interactions with citizens but does provide a valuable service through maintaining the City's road signs, markings, and symbols. The Traffic Operations Section interfaces directly with the public primarily through citizen-submitted requests and reports, in a similar manner to how the Stormwater Management Section and Inspections Subsection interact with citizen requests and reports. The Department primarily receives reports through the Q-Alert software system, but does also receive reports referred from the City's 311 helpline or 911 operators or reports made directly to the Department's administrative staff (at either the main office or the Traffic Operations facility). Department staff use Q-Alert's built-in ticketing system to track their progress responding to submissions in this system and, if the citizen entered their contact information, may reach out to citizens to obtain additional information or update them on the report status. The Department encourages staff to funnel requests received from external sources through the Q-Alert system, although it does not have a system for tracking and/or communicating progress in responding to reports or requests where requestors are not willing, or did not use the system.

The Department's Surveying Subsection and GIS Section are largely internal service organizations whose customers are other Department staff or other City departments. The Inspections/Survey Operations Manager manages communications with other City departments on behalf of the Surveying Subsection, while the GIS Technician Supervisor manages the GIS Section's interdepartmental communications. Most interdepartmental communications take place through either email or phone calls. The Department does not have a ticketing system or other established method for tracking and communicating status on surveying or GIS maintenance work.

Use of Technology

General Engineering Division

The General Engineering Division's Contract Administration Section operates in a largely computerized manner, using Word document templates to prepare solicitation documents and contracts, and engaging with contractors through contractor-provided project management software platforms (the exact platforms used vary by contractor). The Contract Administration Section's Project Engineers do perform paper-based work when processing invoices for payment, however, as the Office Manager receives payment requests and supporting document as printed documents.

While working in the field, Stormwater Management Section staff use tablets to fill PDF forms documenting their inspections and creek walks, which they store on a shared network drive. Staff also use the Solocator app on their tablets to capture time-stamped and location-stamped photographs of items of interest while performing inspections in order to document potential violations in the manner required by EPD. Stormwater Management Section staff also use remote cameras to view the status of stormwater management structures, often lowering the cameras down manholes into storm drains; Stormwater Management Section staff do not use automated winches or reels to lower/raise their remote cameras and raise/lower the cameras by hand.

The Stormwater Management Engineer uses EPD-developed templates to prepare the reports that they regularly submit to EPD. The Stormwater Management Engineer reviews plans using paper copies of the plans, submitting the results of their review through EPL. Per interviews, a Stormwater Technician is currently tasked with using a Department scanner to scan plans submitted for plan review, storing the scanned plans on a shared network drive. Department Staff reportedly do not use these scanned plans for plan review. In interviews, staff stated that the scanned plans do not support easy plan review, both due to the fact that Department staff are not issued with large enough monitors for the plans to be viewable at the scale of paper plan printouts and due to the fact that the plan scans are low-quality scans that lack features, such as layers and searchability, that digitally-submitted plans may have.

The D/PM/CSD Department's Project Engineers use EPL and a series of Word templates to administer the plan review process, entering and receiving comments through EPL and compiling the received comments in a purpose-built Word template. The Project Engineer that handles communications with applicants primarily communicates through email and/or phone, referring applicants to other plan reviewers as applicable.

The Department receives plan submissions exclusively in physical formats and does not offer applicants the opportunity to submit plans or make payments online. As discussed earlier in this report, plan reviews are conducted using paper copies of the plans. In interviews, Department leadership indicated an intent to transition to digital plan acceptance and review at a future date, including introducing the use of iPlan Tables, a digital drafting table already used by certain other City departments. The Department reportedly has received delivery of its iPlan Tables and is in the process of developing its digital plan review workflows. The Department is working with several local engineering firms to test its system for receiving digital plan submissions before eventually rolling the system out for all submitters.

Traffic Engineering Division

The Traffic Engineering Design Section's Traffic Analyst uses GDOT's GEARS system to access accident reports, which they compile into a purpose-built Excel workbook, creating a new workbook each year. When reviewing accident reports, the Traffic Analyst often uses AutoCAD to view accident diagrams.

The Traffic Operations Section does not use an inventory management system to track sign, pavement marking, or signaling equipment inventories, instead having the Traffic Operations Supervisor and a Traffic Signal Technician II periodically review the Section's storage areas and submit reorder requests to the Administrative Support Specialist II as they deem necessary. The Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection's Signs Technicians use a computer-controlled decal cutter to prepare decals for purpose-created road signs, which they apply onto sign blanks. The Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection's Paint Technicians use push-powered painting equipment, including a thermopainting machine and "standard" paint machine. Traffic Signals Subsection staff use computers in the Traffic Operations Section's facility to program control boards in the office in advance of installing the programming in the field, using programming tester setups installed in the facility to verify that the programmed signals behave as intended.

Support Services Division

The Utility Inspectors and Engineering Inspectors within the Support Services Division's Inspections Subsection prepare reports using City-issued laptops, which they bring with them into the field to prepare inspection reports. When Engineering Inspectors are required to review construction plans in the field, they exclusively work off of paper copies of plans and are not provided with equipment, such as tablets, for easily working with digital plans. The Department does plan to issue tablets to its field inspectors as part of its transition to a digital plan review process and intends to purchase and issue the tablets by the summer of 2026.

The Surveying Subsection uses Carlton digital survey equipment, including a tablet "base station" and a GPS-connected "robo" surveying station. The surveying station records point measurements in a format that is read by companion software installed on the Inspections/Survey Operations Manager's laptop computer, which they forward on to the GIS Section or other appropriate recipients. The Survey Crew Leaders have view-only access to the Engineering Department's GIS databases to review information and confirm locations. In interviews, Support Services Section staff indicated that the Department intends to purchase updated surveying equipment in the next fiscal year, pending budgetary approval, in order to improve the integration between the surveying equipment and the City's GIS platform, which currently often requires some manual data cleaning prior to import.

The GIS Section uses the City GIS system, ESRI's ArcGIS platform, including ArcGIS Pro for database creation and maintenance and ArcGIS Online for presenting information to internal and external users. The City has a highly decentralized model of GIS governance, though the IT Department serves as the administrator of the City's GIS platform. The GIS Section regularly works with the IT Department's GIS team to confirm that data are being updated properly City-wide and that all necessary users have access to updated GIS data.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

The Department maintains a Department-wide "Rules and Regulations" document that details the Department's general rules and regulations for all Department employees. The Rules and Regulations documents covers topics including the maintenance of personnel records, the Department's hours and attendance policy, restrictions on outside employment, conduct expectations, a uniform policy, safety regulations and a disciplinary schedule for safety violations, vehicle usage policies, inmate labor policies,¹⁹ and the procedure for employees to file a grievance. The Rules and Regulations document is labeled as "VERSION 2012." The Rules and Regulations document does not contain any information on specific processes, procedures, workflows, or other details of the work performed by Department staff.

¹⁹ The Department does not currently use inmate labor.

On the whole, the Department does not currently possess completed reference materials for use by Department staff that detail processes and procedures that staff are regularly asked to perform, such as standard operating procedures or process and procedure manuals. Department leadership has tasked staff throughout the Department with developing these Department-specific reference materials and staff are currently in various stages of progress in compiling these materials. Several organizational units within the Department, including the Stormwater Management Section and Traffic Operations Section, maintain libraries of third-party materials that may serve at least partially as guides for how to perform portions of certain key functions. The Traffic Operations Section, for example, maintains documentation from equipment manufacturers detailing the proper use, installation, and maintenance of tools and equipment regularly used by its staff. The Stormwater Management Section, on the other hand, maintains guides provided by EPD and other conservation-related organizations detailing stormwater best management practices and other similar materials for reference on proper operations.

The Stormwater Management Section also maintains its EPD-approved Stormwater Management Program document, with the most recent document covering the 2022-2027 period. The most recent Stormwater management Program document states that the document was last revised in February 2024. The Stormwater Management Program document contains detailed information on the City's implementation of its stormwater management program, including specifics on inspection content and frequency, plans for responding to issues that do occur (e.g., a detailed spill response procedure), and systems in place for ensuring compliance with relevant City, State, and Federal environmental regulations.

While the Stormwater Program Management document does not itself contain details on the execution of a number of portions of the plan (e.g., the Stormwater Plan Management document details how often HVPS facility inspections are to occur, but not how to conduct a HVPS facility inspection), the document does incorporate by reference supplemental documents and forms that describe how to actualize the plan described in the Stormwater Management Program document. One key Stormwater Management Section function not described in detail in the Stormwater Management Program document and its various supporting documents is the Stormwater Management Engineer's reporting function, including detail on how the Stormwater Management Engineer gathers the required data from the variety of data sources that support the Stormwater Management Section's reporting and how the Stormwater Management Engineer compiles the data into the required report formats.

The GIS Section also maintains a detailed guiding document for their own processes and procedures, referred to as the "Handbook for Engineering GIS." The Handbook for Engineering GIS contains a basic data inventory of GIS features maintained by the GIS Section as well as detailed workflows of many key GIS Section procedures, including address assignment, road centerline/naming maintenance and associated GDOT notifications, updating point features (e.g., stormwater inlets). The Handbook for Engineering GIS is not a complete document, however, with several sections not yet completed. The Handbook for Engineering GIS is undated.

Strategic Priorities

M&J reviewed a “Strategic Planning Form” prepared by the Department as part of the FY25 budget development process. The Strategic Planning Form contains a set of goals²⁰ along with associated objectives²¹ and performance indicators.²² The following table details the goals, objectives, and performance indicators listed in the Department’s FY25 Strategic Planning Form:

Table 8: FY25 Strategic Planning Form Goals

Goal	Objective	Performance Indicator
Install, operate, and maintain traffic signals to safely and efficiently move people and goods through street intersections.	Establish preventative maintenance schedule and procedures for each of the 276 traffic signals in order to reduce service calls during normal working hours and after-hours emergencies.	Preventative Maintenance of Signalized Intersections
Install, replace, repair, and relocate traffic signs as necessary to provide proper traffic and speed control on all streets and intersections, alert drivers of potential hazards, and provide directional and street identification information to drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians.	Inspect and replace damaged and deteriorated signs.	Upgrade Traffic Signs To Meet New Retro-Reflective Standards
Maintain pavement markings (centerline, lane lines, and edge lines) and legends on all local streets to provide adequate daytime and nighttime visibility for motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians.	Re-stripe and re-mark all in-place striping and marking that has faded or been disturbed. Re-stripe and re-mark all streets that have been resurfaced. Add pavement striping and marking on streets and at intersections as necessary to improve safety. Add bicycle lanes/markings as necessary to comply with the City’s Complete Streets objectives.	Inventory miles of striping
To increase the citizen satisfaction of the City’s roadways.	To reduce the number of calls for unsatisfactory repairs through permit management.	Number of permits

²⁰ Defined in the Strategic Planning Form as “ideas and direction that implements and accomplish the mission of the organization and the intent to achieve a desired result or outcome.”

²¹ Defined in the Strategic Planning Form as “General intent or purpose of the program broken down into measurable components.”

²² Defined in the Strategic Planning Form as “An indicator needs to be measurable. An amount or a percentage increase from year to year.”

Goal	Objective	Performance Indicator
To increase the life of existing streets by continual implementation of the Pavement Management System and maximize the benefit of the funds spent.	Improve the overall condition of streets.	Number of miles resurfaced
To review plans within a timely manner and provide onsite inspections.	To ensure compliance with Federal, State, and Local laws.	Number of plans reviewed.
To review plans within a timely manner and provide onsite inspection. ²³	To ensure compliance with Federal, State, and Local laws.	Number of plans reviewed.
To document in-stream water quality trends as described in CCG's [EPD]-approved Stormwater Management Program to include ambient creek monitoring programs.	Perform water quality monitoring as required by the [EPD] MS4 Permit.	Number of samples collected.
To conduct inspections of Construction Sites in accordance with performance measures identified in CCG's [EPD]-approved Stormwater Management Plan.	The [EPD] requires that construction sites with coverage under the State's Construction Activities Stormwater Discharge permit be inspected per a schedule that the regulated community (CCG) identifies in its Stormwater Management Plan.	Number of inspections performed.
To educate our citizens and promote environmental stewardship through our Public Information & Education Program and perform required inlet marking as part of the Community Rating System (Floodplain Management Program).	Storm Sewer inlets marked (minimum 250/yr).	Number of inlets marked
To meet the [EPD] inlet inspection requirement which mandates that all Municipal separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) inlets be inspected at least once every five years (20% annually). Based on the determination by the Engineering Department's Stormwater Manager, there are 17,712 (MS4) inlets within [CCG] that meet the annual inspection requirement.	To inspect on average 3,600 inlets annually.	Number of inlets inspected

²³ This Goal/Objective/Performance Indicator appears to have been duplicated across different portions of the Strategic Planning Form

Many of the goals listed in the Strategic Planning Form consist of maintenance of the Department's current operations, with no indication that the Department's strategic plan includes the delivery of new or improved services, increased efficiency, additional strategic alignment with City-wide initiatives, or other sources of departmental growth. Certain goals, such as the goal to "increase the Citizen satisfaction of City roadways" do indicate that the Engineering Department aims to improve the level of its services, although the strategic planning form contains limited information on how these goals are to be achieved. The Department does not maintain any other Department-wide strategic planning documents and Department leadership did not express an organized strategic vision for the Department in interviews. Department leadership did identify some individual strategic items in interviews, such as an intent to eventually transition to electronic plan review and to fill vacancies in the Traffic Operations Section.

The Department performs a wide range of relatively dissimilar functions, including permitting, capital project management, traffic operations, environmental management, enforcement, and internal services. The Department's organizational chart is complex and fragmented, with some apparently-related services located in entirely separate organizational units, such as the fact that the Department's stormwater and drainage-related services are spread across the General Engineering Division's Stormwater Management Section and the Support Services Division's Inspections Subsection. The diversity of the Department's duties makes it difficult for the Department to create a cohesive strategic plan, as each organizational unit within the Division has widely varying needs and priorities.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

The Department does not have a written plan for reviewing performance metrics and outputs, with each organizational unit within the Department largely responsible for evaluating their own performance data. Within the General Engineering Section, no performance metrics are tracked in the Contract Administration Section. In the D/PM/CSD Section, the Project Engineers aim to complete all reviews within 15 business days of submission, although total processing time is contingent upon staff in a number of other organizational units and departments. The D/PM/CSD Section does maintain a project status log, although the format of this log (a set of plaintext lists in Word documents, with new versions published daily) is not conducive to performing quantitative evaluations of performance over a period of time. The Stormwater Management Section makes more frequent use of performance metrics, with the Stormwater Management Engineer regularly reviewing the inspection and sample testing records of the Section's other staff to verify that staff are meeting their performance targets, set based on the City's EPD-set inspection/sample testing quotas.

The performance or productivity of the Traffic Analyst, located in the Traffic Engineering Division's Traffic Engineering Design Section, is not currently being tracked by any collected performance metrics. Within the Traffic Operations Section, management tracks the productivity of the Signs & Pavement Marking Subsection through tracking the number of signs installed and length of roadways marked (including by contractors), although these data are not used to evaluate individual performance. Similarly, management tracks the overall production of the Traffic Signals Subsection in the number of intersections serviced, but does not use these data to evaluate individual performance.

Within the Inspections Subsection, Utility Inspectors provide a single performance measure at the end of each year in the total number of permits approved during the prior year, which is not evaluated against a specific target or quota. The Inspections Subsection's Engineering Inspectors similarly track their number of inspections conducted on a Department-created tally sheet, with a goal to conduct inspections in line with the City's EPD-approved inspection timelines (either weekly or biweekly, depending on construction site size). Per interviews, Engineering Inspectors do not have their individual performance evaluated based on whether they meet their inspection frequency targets. Within the GIS Section, the GIS Technician Supervisor evaluates the GIS Technician's performance based on the number of address points that they add to the addressing database each year, but does not include turnaround time or other non-volume metrics in their performance evaluation. The Department does not specify how the GIS Technician Supervisor's performance is evaluated or if any metrics are tracked regarding their performance.

The Department's Strategic Planning Form submission, as discussed in the prior report section, includes a number of listed performance indicators, largely aligning with the indicators already discussed in this section. In a number of cases, the stated "performance indicator" does not actually indicate any particular performance measurement, although it does imply what is actually being measured. For example, the performance measure listed as "Preventative Maintenance of Signalized Intersections" likely actually reflects the number of intersections for which preventative maintenance has been performed during the subject year. In other instances, the performance metrics provided in the Strategic Planning Form are of limited use in evaluating performance towards the relevant goal and/or objective. The performance indicators listed on the Strategic Planning Form do sometimes serve as effective measurements of the listed goals and objectives, however, such as the "number of inlets inspected" indicator, which does effectively evaluate the goal and objective.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

Department leadership primarily communicates with Department staff through regularly scheduled (typically weekly, though less frequent if not needed) meetings with the Department's managers. In these management meetings, Department leadership communicates messages to the managers, who are tasked with further communicating these messages to their staff. Individual organizational units then convey these messages down to their staff during team meetings; some teams, such as the Surveying Subsection, hold team meetings at the start of each day, while others hold meetings less frequently or only as needed. Following management meetings, the Office Manager also sends out an email to all Departmental staff summarizing what was discussed in the meeting, which serves to communicate the intended messages to staff that are not represented by a manager at the meetings, such as the Contract Administration and D/PM/CSD Sections.

During M&J's interviews, multiple staff reported that the work environment within the Department is not favorable, although multiple staff also reported no issues. It is not possible to make any conclusions based on M&J's scope of work whether the feedback regarding a negative work environment is based on reality or perception. Regardless, there is perceived conflict that should be addressed to help create a more unified sense of a positive working environment.

Safety

The Department's key functions include a number of responsibilities necessarily expose staff to serious risks of physical harm, including working at heights, working near traffic, working near high-voltage electrical equipment, working in treacherous terrain, encountering dangerous wildlife, and exposure to hazardous substances such as raw sewage or environmental toxins. While the Department's Engineering Rules and Regulations document states that the Department is "serious about safety" and contains policies requiring staff to adhere to unspecified safety rules, the Department has not introduced comprehensive, industry-standard safety practices and has not taken formal actions to enforce compliance with safety policies that do currently exist.

Finally, the Department's lack of documented processes and procedures and established training protocols means that the Department has limited formal safety policies. Instead, the Department relies on staff to "pass down" proper safety procedures, without regularly receiving retraining based on updated industry standards. The Department's policies requiring staff to adhere to established safety rules are not effective in promoting employee safety if Department staff have been trained on safety policies that are below industry standards. Due to the lack of third-party safety training or references to third-party safety standards, the safety procedures currently followed in the Department likely fall short of industry standards in a number of areas, both because the Department has not updated its own safety practices in response to new industry guidance and/or because practices have evolved to become less stringent after being verbally passed down through "generations" of staff. The Department also does not have an established, publicized method of reporting unsafe working conditions or operations contrary to established safety practices.

In the time since M&J's fieldwork, Department leadership have stated that they plan to hold monthly departmental safety meetings to discuss safety-related issues with relevant Departmental staff.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: At the time of M&J fieldwork, the Department's organizational structure places the Engineering Director as the immediate supervisor of nine staff across a wide variety of service areas. The Engineering Director's direct reports include staff from a variety of levels, including managerial staff, as well as direct service-delivery staff and lower-level managerial staff, often without an intermediate managerial level. As a result, the Engineering Director is tasked with performing a mix of Department-wide management and strategic direction as well as management of individual staff tasked with performing highly-specialized functions with which the Engineering Director may lack in-depth expertise.

Recommendation 1: The Department should review its organizational structure and revise its reporting relationships to limit the number of service-delivery staff reporting directly to the Engineering Director. As necessary, the Department should develop intermediate-level managerial positions overseeing the Engineering Director's current direct reports in order to consolidate management into fewer individuals that can have more relevant knowledge of individual responsibilities. As necessary, the Department should consider reorganizing its current Divisions, Sections, and Subsections, to produce more cohesive staff groupings.

Observation 2: While the Department had a slightly elevated overall vacancy rate of 31% at the time of M&J's fieldwork, most of the Department's vacancies were concentrated within the Traffic Engineering Division, where over half of all positions were vacant at the time of M&J's fieldwork. In interviews, Engineering Department leadership reported that disciplinary issues have contributed to the Department's periodic difficulties in retaining staff. The Traffic Engineering Division's high rate of vacancies limits the Division's ability to maintain the City's signs, pavement markings, and traffic signaling infrastructure on its own, causing the Department to rely on extensive use of expensive subcontractors. The Department's FY27 budget request reportedly contains a number of adjustments to the staffing structure in the Traffic Operations Section intended to increase the Department's ability to hire competent staff.

Recommendation 2: The Department should evaluate the effectiveness of the Traffic Engineering Reorganization included in its FY27 budget request. If necessary, the Department should conduct further review of its hiring and staff retention efforts in the Traffic Engineering Division, including job conditions, industry trends, and comparable salaries, to identify the reason(s) behind the Department's difficulty hiring and/or retaining staff in the Division. Once the Department has identified the reasons behind the Traffic Engineering Division's persistently high vacancy rate, it should develop realistic strategies for filling positions and retaining staff, and work with City leadership to implement the required changes.

Observation 3A: The Department does not have established training plans or regular curricula for most of its positions. As a result, most new hires into the Department receive “ad hoc” training, primarily consisting of non-standardized “on the job” training. Some organizational units within the Department, such as the Stormwater Management Section and portions of the Inspections Subsection, do receive standardized training as part of required certification processes funded by the Department. For Department staff that are not required to hold specific certifications as part of their job duties, the Department does not have a standard, written training plan detailing the courses available to the staff, even for relevant or preferred qualifications. The Department reportedly has begun planning additional training programs for certain Department staff in the time since M&J’s fieldwork, although these programs are one-off programs and the Department has not yet developed standardized training curricula for long-term use by Departmental staff.

Observation 3B: The Department does not provide direct salary incentives for obtaining preferred certifications, although it does occasionally use “career ladder” positions (e.g., level I/II/III positions) to award certain certifications. The Department currently has two “career ladder” positions in the Stormwater Technician (I/II) and Traffic Signal Technician (I/II) positions, although it does not have documented policies for how staff may be upgraded from the level I position to the level II position by obtaining specified qualifications.

Recommendation 3A: The Department should develop standardized training programs for its positions, including a mix internal classroom training using standardized curricula, Department-funded third-party training courses (as applicable), and “on the job” training under the guidance of other experienced staff. The Department should also develop standard methods of delivering refresher and/or update training to existing staff on a regular basis, through either in-house or third-party training providers. Additionally, the Department should establish written cross-training guidelines that specify which positions are to be cross-trained on which processes so that the Division can ensure that appropriate levels of qualified backups exist for critical Division processes.

Recommendation 3B: The Department should work with the City’s Human Resources Department to clarify the criteria used to progress through its existing “career ladder” positions and explore the possibility of offering additional incentives, such new “career ladder positions” or direct salary incentives, to staff that obtain specified preferred qualifications above and beyond the minimum requirements of their position.

Observation 4A: The Stormwater Management Section collaborates with the CCG Public Works Department’s Rainwater Maintenance Division which shares the same domain as the Stormwater Management Section. The Stormwater Management Section is responsible for the regulatory compliance, engineering and planning related to City-owned stormwater systems, whereas the Rainwater Maintenance Division maintains existing stormwater systems and maintains the systems’ property.

Observation 4B: The Rainwater Maintenance Division and Stormwater Management Section serve different roles related to stormwater management, but overlap in domain and resources as they share a funding source (Stormwater (Sewer) Fund). The entities are also required to collaborate when a project is too large or time-consuming to be completed by the Rainwater Maintenance Division and must be completed by a third-party.

Recommendation 4: The City should consider consolidating the CCG Public Works Department's Rainwater Maintenance Division and the Engineering Department's Stormwater Management Section. Through consolidation, the City will maintain a centralized stormwater function which allows for better communication and coordination and will ensure funds are optimized.

Observation 5: The Traffic Operations Section maintains an inventory of signs, sign production supplies, signposts, paints and roadway marking supplies, traffic signals, traffic signal controllers, electronic equipment, and other miscellaneous sign and signal related supplies in its facility. The Traffic Operations Section does not use an inventory management system to track its inventory, however, and instead asks the Traffic Operations Supervisor and a Traffic Signal Technician to periodically review storerooms to assess the state of the Section's inventory and compile order lists. The Traffic Operations Section's unstructured inventory management system creates risks of the Section not maintaining an effective stock, over-ordering some products and under-ordering other goods.

Recommendation 5: The Department should work with the City to procure and implement a computerized inventory management system for use by the Traffic Operations Section in maintaining its inventory of signs, pavement marking, and signaling equipment and supplies.

Observation 6: The Surveying Subsection performs surveying work for a variety of City departments other than the Engineering Department, primarily including various aspects of the Public Works Department. The Engineering Department does not allocate the costs of the standard survey work that the Surveying Subsection performs directly for other City departments to those departments, however, resulting in the Engineering Department effectively subsidizing the operations of other City departments that use the Surveying Subsection's surveying services. The Department does allocate the costs for major, non-standard surveying projects performed by its private surveying contractors.

Recommendation 6: The Engineering Department should work with the Finance Department to begin allocating costs for Surveying Subsection services performed for the benefit of other City departments to the appropriate department, effectively reimbursing the Engineering Department for services performed for other City departments.

Observation 7: The GIS Manager housed within the IT Department maintains communication with the GIS Section's staff to manage workload and ensure coordination of projects between GIS divisions and employees decentralized within other City departments. The GIS Section's GIS Technician Supervisor, however, reports to the Engineering Director. Therefore, the Engineering Director is responsible for evaluating the GIS Technician Supervisor's performance and is involved in hiring decisions for GIS Section positions. As there is not a requirement for the IT Department's GIS Manager to be involved in hiring decisions, performance appraisals, and training opportunities, it is up to the discretion of the Engineering Director to involve the GIS Manager in such decisions. As such, the GIS Section is not formally accountable to the IT Department's GIS Manager, which creates governance issues when assigning workloads. Also, training opportunities received by GIS positions are inconsistent between departments, affecting the retention and talent of employees.

Recommendation 7: The City should consider implementing a different staffing/reporting model for current shadow IT roles that exist external to the IT Department. The City could consider the following alternative approaches:

- The City could house shadow IT roles within the IT Department and therefore, current shadow IT roles would be centralized within the IT Department, based out of the IT Department office, and report directly and solely to the IT Director or designee.
- The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments but instead of reporting to individual department directors, the shadow IT roles would solely report to and be held accountable by the IT Director or designee. As a result, shadow IT roles would exist under the IT Department but would be located within the respective departments they support.

The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments and implement a dual-reporting relationship for shadow IT positions which establishes a reporting relationship with the external positions and the IT Director (or designee) to promote accountability and collaboration with the IT Department.

Observation 8: The Engineering Department has not consistently standardized and documented its processes and procedures, with various organizational units having different levels of standardization and documentation. For example, the Stormwater Management Section has documented its key functions in the current Stormwater Management Program document (including materials incorporated by reference), while the Surveying Subsection does not have any written documentation of its processes and procedures. Engineering Department leadership has tasked its various sections and subsections to develop process reference materials, although it has not developed standards for how these references are to be created and does not have a standardized process for periodically reviewing and updating the documentation to ensure that it continually reflects actual Department operations.

Recommendation 8: The Engineering Department should develop a uniform process for standardizing and documenting its processes and procedures. This process should include a regular format for recording processes and procedures that includes fields to track relevant dates (including date created, date last updated, and date last reviewed), should require organizational units to perform reviews and updates of policy and procedure documents on a regular basis, and should detail how the process and procedure documents are to be stored and distributed. Standardized process and procedure documentation should also clearly state safety policies and regulations related to each process, based on up-to-date industry standard safety practices.

Observation 9: The Department’s key functions include a number of responsibilities necessarily expose staff to serious risks of physical harm, including working at heights, working near traffic, working near high-voltage electrical equipment, working in treacherous terrain, encountering dangerous wildlife, and exposure to hazardous substances such as raw sewage or environmental toxins. While the Department’s Engineering Rules and Regulations document states that the Department is “serious about safety” and contains policies requiring staff to adhere to unspecified safety rules, the Department has not introduced comprehensive, industry-standard safety practices and has not taken formal actions to enforce compliance with safety policies that do currently exist. In the time since M&J’s fieldwork, Engineering Department leadership stated an intent to begin holding monthly safety meetings for relevant Departmental staff.

Recommendation 9A: The Department should develop a plan for building a “culture of safety” in its workforce, beginning with ensuring that the updated, standardized process and procedure documents contain up-to-date, industry leading safety policies. The Department should provide staff with thorough training on critical safety practices and, once staff have been adequately trained, begin enforcing its existing disciplinary policies related to non-compliance with established safety practices.

Recommendation 9B: As part of developing its “culture of safety,” the Department should create designated channels for reporting unsafe working conditions or practices. When designing these reporting channels, the City and the Department should focus on creating channels that will allow staff to credibly believe that violations will be thoroughly investigated and acted on and that employees will not be threatened with retaliation as a result of reporting safety concerns, in accordance with Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines. In accordance with workplace safety best practices, the Department’s safety practices should prioritize root cause analysis and prevention of future incidents.

Observation 10: Department staff across a variety of organizational units, including both in-office and field-based functions, have enforcement functions where their priorities are inherently at odds with many of their customers. These enforcement functions may also require entering potentially risky, such as traveling through private property. In interviews, multiple staff reported numerous instances of feeling threatened by citizens, including multiple instances where staff were threatened with firearms and instances where police officers have been called on Engineering Department staff for performing their basic job duties. The City does not currently offer conflict avoidance and/or conflict de-escalation training to staff that regularly deal with members of the public.

Recommendation 10: The City and Department should begin to require conflict avoidance and/or de-escalation training to staff that regularly engage with the public, particularly including staff in positions whose duties are more likely to produce conflict. The Department should require new staff to receive this training as part of their standard training regimen and also require existing staff to receive periodic “refresher” trainings.

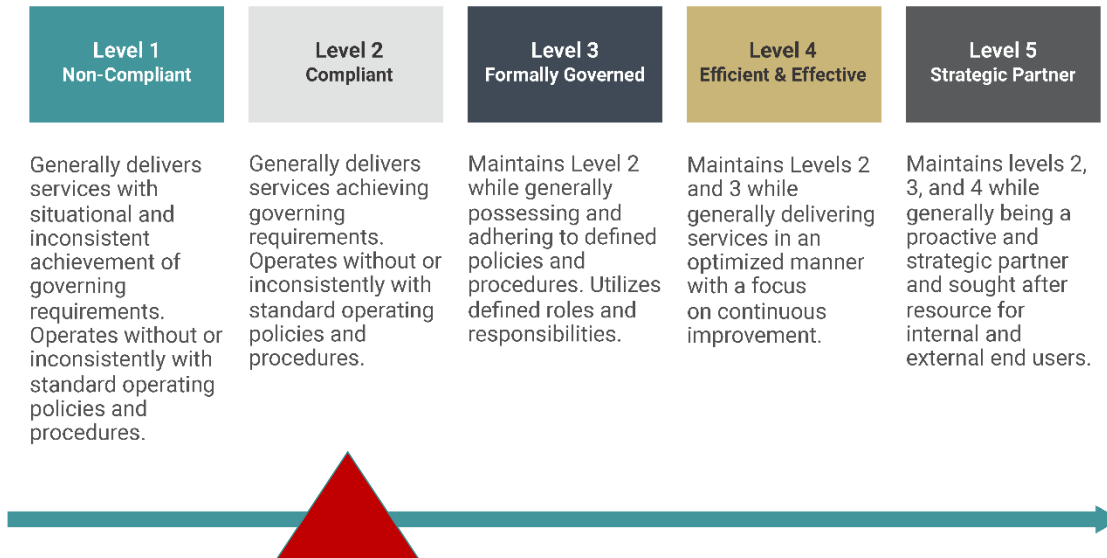
Observation 11: During M&J’s interviews, multiple staff reported that the work environment within the Department is not favorable, although multiple staff also reported no issues. It is not possible to make any conclusions based on M&J’s scope of work whether the feedback regarding a negative work environment is based on reality or perception. Regardless, there is perceived conflict that should be addressed to help create a more unified sense of a positive working environment.

Recommendation 11: The City should commission an independent third-party to conduct a review/investigation of the health of the Department’s work environment and culture and identify potential methods to enhance trust between staff and departmental leadership.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department’s maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.

Maturity Model



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Department as **Level 2: Compliant**. The Engineering Department complies with all governing standards and adequately performs the functions that it is assigned to perform, but it inconsistently performs these functions in accordance with standard operating policies and procedures. The Engineering Department would benefit from standardizing additional policies and procedures, documenting these standardized policies and procedures, and conducting training to help ensure that staff operate in accordance with these defined policies and procedures, with a particular emphasis on critical safety policies.

Conclusion

The Engineering Department performs a highly varied collection of functions related to permitting, traffic and roadway management, and stormwater and drainage management, as well as several key internal services. The services performed by the Engineering Department provide extensive benefits to City residents, businesses, and visitors by keeping roadways safe, ensuring that traffic remains flowing, maintaining the health and vibrancy of the City's waterways, providing flood insurance discounts, permitting new development, and supporting functions throughout the rest of the City's government.

Given the variety of the Engineering Department's workload, the Department's operational emphasis is primarily on completing day-to-day tasks and completing assigned tasks, with limited thought for how the Department can be most effectively organized, managed, staffed, or led. Processes are often undocumented, relying on knowledge "inherited" from prior employees and producing a culture with limited emphasis on safety and employee protection, both from physical threats and harassment. The Department has the opportunity to become an effective strategic partner for other City departments through adopting a more balanced organizational structure, implementing and documenting standardized processes, and making a conscious effort to build a "culture of safety."

The Department's work environment and culture are not perceived as positive based on feedback from numerous interviews. City leadership should review/investigate the Department's culture and develop concrete strategies for improving the work environment. .

3.D Facilities Maintenance

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“CCG” or “City”) Facilities Maintenance Department (“Department”) is responsible for the maintenance of 524 City facilities. Department duties are organized by services: electrical; plumbing; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (“HVAC”); carpentry/general maintenance; irrigation; and custodial work.

The Department’s mission is to deliver efficient, high-quality maintenance services that ensure the safety, functionality, and longevity of all city-owned infrastructures. To do so, the Department’s goal is to achieve operational self-reliance by reducing dependency on subcontractors, empowering in-house teams, and strengthening internal capabilities.

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

Effective July 1, 2025, the Department became a standalone Department reporting to the Deputy City Manager of Operations. Historically, Facilities Maintenance was a Division of the CCG Public Works Department. At the time of M&J’s fieldwork, the Department was in the process of hiring a Director, which was a newly created position for FY26. As such, during M&J’s fieldwork, the Department was in the early stages of transitioning to operate independently from Public Works. Upon the hiring of a Director, Departmental processes and procedures are planned to be formalized and the structure of the Department will be adjusted as necessary to optimize efficiency and resources.

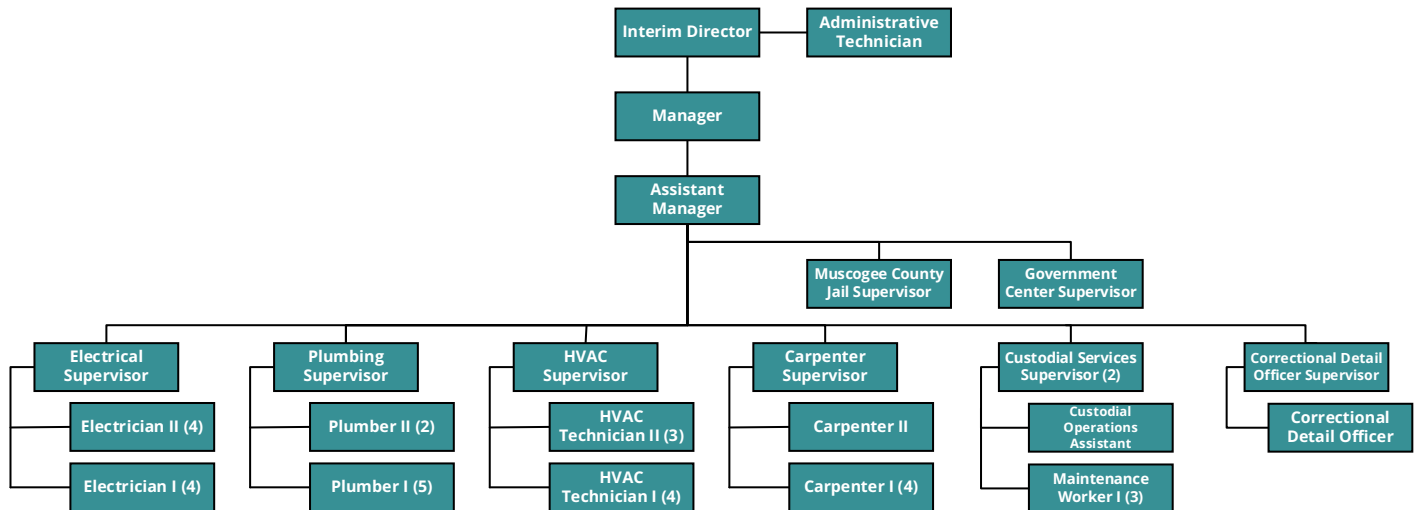
The Department is reviewing its position titles, job descriptions, and staffing model to attract the best possible talent and ensure positions align with workload needs. For example, the Department is currently working with the CCG Human Resources Department to reclassify its “Carpenter Technician” role to “General Maintenance Technician,” and to add Technician III roles to complement existing Technician I and II roles. Furthermore, the Department plans to reclassify Maintenance Worker I positions to Custodial Worker I positions to better reflect actual job responsibilities. The Department hopes that updates to the staffing model will attract more applicants and increase hiring rates, since the updated titles and job descriptions will more accurately represent a position’s actual responsibilities.

The Department oversees long-term projects, such as the 2025-2026 revitalization of the City’s historic Liberty Theater. The Department was involved in its mold remediation, HVAC system installation, roofing, and painting. The Department anticipates continuing to perform vital renovation functions for the property through 2026.

Organization and Staffing

The Facilities Maintenance Department is led by the Facilities Maintenance Director, which was a vacant position at the time of M&J’s fieldwork. The former Facilities Maintenance Division Manager is serving as the Interim Director. As of the FY26 approved budget, the Department was allocated 45 full-time positions. The full-time positions are supported by approximately 16 inmates who supplement staffing levels through a work release program with the Muscogee County Prison. At the time of M&J’s fieldwork, 32 positions were filled.

The following organizational chart depicts the structure of the Department:



The Department includes five services which make up individual shops: Electrical, Plumbing, HVAC, Carpentry, and Custodial. The Department also includes an administrative team consisting of an Administrative Technician and a part-time Administrative Assistant. Each shop is allocated one Supervisor and varying numbers of Technician I and II roles as pictured in the organizational chart. It should be noted that some of the roles within the five shops have a dual-reporting relationship to their immediate shop Supervisor and the Muscogee County Jail Supervisor or Government Center Supervisor. As such, positions assigned to the Muscogee County Jail or Government Center also report to the Supervisors specifically assigned to the buildings.

The following table lists position titles by shop and number of positions located within each shop.

Table 9: Positions by Shop

Shop	Position Title	Number of Full-time Positions
Electrical	Electrical Supervisor	1
	Electrician I	4
	Electrician II	4
Plumbing	Plumbing Supervisor	1
	Plumber I	5
	Plumber II	2
HVAC	HVAC Supervisor	1
	HVAC Technician I	4
	HVAC Technician II	3
Carpentry	Carpenter Supervisor	1
	Carpenter I	4
	Carpenter II	1
Custodial	Custodial Services Supervisor	2
	Custodial Operations Assistant	1
	Maintenance Worker I	3

Source: CCG FY26 Budget Book

Shop staff are divided into floating staff and fixed staff. Floating staff are based in the Facilities Maintenance office and respond to work orders at various CCG properties via a CCG vehicle, whereas fixed staff are assigned to a specific building and respond to most of its work orders. The Department's dual staffing model gives large CCG facilities that receive a high volume of work orders (e.g., Muscogee County Jail, Government Center, etc.) their own staff who are familiar with the building's blueprint and prior issues, thereby enabling them to respond more effectively to work orders.

The Department maintains 12 fixed staff and the number of fixed staff by building is displayed in the following table:

Table 10: Fixed Staff by Building

Building	Fixed Staff Count	Supervisor Specifically Assigned to the Building?
Muscogee County Jail	4	Yes
Government Center	4	Yes
Muscogee County Prison	2	No; staff assigned to building are located within a specific shop
Annex Building	1	No; staff assigned to building are located within a specific shop
City Services Building	1	No; staff assigned to building are located within a specific shop

Source: Interviews with Staff

Based on interviews, the Interim Director plans to assign fixed staff members at the City Hall, CCG Fire & EMS Department headquarters, and the Muscogee County Sheriff's Office building as well.

The Department supplements much of its staff with contracted service providers. Contractors are used when a project is overly technical for Department staff or time-consuming. While the CCG Civic Center and Parks & Recreation Department maintain their own in-house maintenance personnel, the Department is responsible for maintenance of their facilities and performs any facilities maintenance in which the CCG Civic Center and Parks & Recreation maintenance staff do not have the expertise or capacity to complete. The Department does not maintain certain City properties operated by independent authorities, such as the Columbus Ironworks Convention & Trade Center or the Columbus Airport.

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

26 Employees have joined the Department, and 20 employees have departed the Department since FY20. Vacancies are common as the Department has increased in size consistently each year following FY22.

The following table shows the turnover rate for the last five fiscal years:

Table 11: Annual Turnover Rates

Fiscal Year	Allotted Full-time Staff	Turnover Rate
2021	30	10%
2022	30	16.7%
2023	38	21.1%
2024	38	5.3%
2025	44	11.4%

Source: CCG Budget Books FY21-FY25, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The Department has experienced expected turnover, with two spikes, over the last five fiscal years. The average turnover rate for a municipal Facilities Maintenance department is approximately 15%. The Department's average turnover rate was 12.9% over the last five fiscal years. Turnover peaked in 2022 and 2023 but returned to normal levels in 2024 and 2025.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The following list outlines each of the Department's functions:

- Work Order Maintenance
- Electrical Shop
- Plumbing Shop
- HVAC Shop
- Carpentry Shop
- Custodial Shop

In addition to operating five shops, the Department has begun conducting its own administrative duties, such as financial reporting and human resource functions, since becoming a standalone Department. All five shops utilize an identical work order system. The Department's five shops generally complete unique work orders from each other but collaborate on projects when multiple disciplines/specialties are required, such as the ongoing revitalization of the City's historic Liberty Theater.

Work Order Maintenance

All five Shops receive work orders (“tickets”) from Q-Alert, CCG’s work order management system. In the Department’s case, most Q-Alert work orders come from CCG employees who work in the buildings where maintenance is needed, although the public can submit work orders as well. Work orders from the public are typically submitted by CCG 311 Citizen Service Center staff after citizens contact the CCG 311 Citizen Service Center with an issue (e.g., “The fountain on 1st Street is broken”), although citizens can submit Q-Alert work orders directly on the City’s website or app. When work orders from CCG employees are assigned to a Department staff member, the staff member will contact the party who entered the work order to confirm receipt.

Facilities Maintenance staff receive Q-Alert work orders in their email inbox, regardless of which shop the Q-Alert is assigned to. Interviews with staff revealed mixed feelings on this strategy, since some staff considered the work orders not assigned to their shop or building as irrelevant to their operations, while other staff appreciated the ability to use other shops’ work orders to anticipate future work orders (e.g., An electrical work order may require the reinstallation of drywall).

Work orders are often assigned to the incorrect shop, in which case the staff member that finds the erroneously assigned work order will reassign the work order to the correct shop. It is also common for the Department to receive work orders that are not the Department’s responsibility, such as work orders requesting the Department fix broken streetlights, which are maintained by the City’s electrical provider. As such, staff members devote substantial time sorting through their email inbox reassigning non-relevant work orders.

Interviews with staff indicate that Q-Alert only functions adequately as a work order intake tool and does not contain the following general and project management-related functionalities:

- Q-Alert is not currently implemented to provide Supervisors the ability to assign work orders to specific staff. Therefore, Supervisors assign work orders to staff over the phone, in-person, or staff select the work orders from Q-Alert themselves. Supervisors thus are not able to easily keep track of which Technicians are working on specific work orders.
- Based on interviews and CCG’s current configuration of Q-Alert, Q-Alert is not perceived as user-friendly. Staff have difficulties generating reports of past work orders to analyze metrics like volume, and time to close workorders. Furthermore, it is difficult to search for a specific work order, as staff must manually filter through a list of closed work orders to find a specific work order. Lastly, due to CCG’s current configuration of Q-Alert, customers often communicate with staff outside of Q-Alert to check on the status of their work order, which reduces staff capacity. Staff must therefore inform CCG work order requesters that their request has been received, and when it is completed outside of Q-Alert by phone or email.
- Q-Alert, as it is implemented, lacks the ability to assign costs to work orders and therefore track costs associated with work orders. As a result, the Interim Facilities Maintenance Director manually tracks costs spent on repairs to identify total costs associated with upkeep and repairs of different buildings, which is a time-consuming process.

- Q-Alert, as it is currently implemented, does not offer customers the ability to provide feedback within the system. Therefore, Department staff obtain customer feedback informally, whether on the job site or when customers contact the Interim Director to express a complaint.
- Q-Alert requires a Wi-Fi or mobile data connection; therefore, staff cannot access or update Q-Alert in the field without a Wi-Fi or mobile data connection.

Many staff members are using personal cell phones to communicate with Supervisors and to access Q-Alert. Q-Alert access requires a Wi-Fi or mobile data connection, without which staff cannot receive or close out work orders. When staff complete a work order, they are instructed to close the work order within Q-Alert. Due to not being able to close Q-Alert work orders without Wi-Fi connection, and a lack of portable devices, most Q-Alerts are not closed in real-time and are instead closed hours or up to one day after work is completed. Furthermore, many staff members do not have access to Q-Alert and as such, must receive work orders from their Supervisors daily.

Shops

The Department maintains five shops – Electrical, Plumbing, HVAC, Carpentry/General Maintenance, and Custodial. Alongside overseeing Technicians and responding to work orders themselves, Shop Supervisors are responsible for overseeing the work quality of contractor jobs. If a contractors' product does not meet the Department's expectations, Supervisors are expected to be familiar with warranty details in each contractor agreement and hold contractors accountable if warranty conditions are triggered. Shop Supervisors are also on call after hours if an urgent repair or installation is needed. Descriptions of the Department's five shops are as follows:

Electrical

The Electrical Shop installs and maintains electrical equipment for CCG facilities such as ball fields, tennis courts, recreation centers, swimming pools, civil defense sirens, fountains, and security systems. In addition to the Electrical Shop's aforementioned core duties, the Electrical Shop installs annual holiday light displays, collaborates with Georgia Power to repair broken streetlights, and coordinates and installs special event lighting as needed.

Plumbing

The Plumbing Shop installs and maintains plumbing equipment for CCG facilities such as the City Hall, Government Center, ball field bathrooms, fountains, etc. In addition to the Plumbing Shop's aforementioned core duties, the Plumbing Shop installs gate valves for watershed lakes and coordinates plumbing projects for special events as needed.

HVAC

The HVAC Shop installs and maintains heating and air conditioning system equipment for CCG facilities that have an HVAC system. In addition to the HVAC Shop's aforementioned core duties, the HVAC Shop installs and maintains refrigerators and ice machines, as well as drinking fountains.

Carpentry/General Maintenance

The Carpentry/General Maintenance Shop performs all miscellaneous general maintenance roles for CCG facilities, such as drywall installation, heavy picture hanging, painting, etc. In addition to the Carpentry/General Maintenance Shop's aforementioned core duties, the Carpentry/General Maintenance Shop oversees the City's physical security of locks and locking devices.

Custodial

The Custodial Shop is responsible for janitorial services at City Hall, Government Center, The Annex, Citizen Service Center, and Public Works facility. The Custodial Shop also sets up and breaks down events at the Civic Center. Based on interviews, the Department has historically utilized inmates via the inmate work release program through Muscogee County Prison to supplement custodial duties throughout the City. The Department plans to shift custodial responsibilities away from inmate utilization in the future.

Administrative Duties

The Department's Administrative Technician conducts certain purchasing duties for the Department. Purchase cards are issued to Department leadership, Supervisors, and Technicians, which are used at stores like Home Depot, John Stone Supply, and Amazon. The purchase card ("P-card") user will save the receipt, deposit receipts in a folder in front of the Administrative Technician's office, and the Administration Technician inputs and uploads P-card statement information into the City's in-house P-card reconciliation system.

The Administrative Technician also performs accounts payable duties for the Department. Common purchase examples are invoice payments to vendors, supplies like uniforms, and payments to the CCG Public Works Department's Fleet Maintenance Division for when a Facilities Maintenance truck requires repair or maintenance. Invoices are printed and provided to the CCG Finance Department and uploaded into CGI Advantage ("Advantage"), the City's financial management system. Purchase orders and supporting documentation are provided to the Administrative Technician for submission to Advantage. Depending on the dollar amount of the purchase, invoices and purchase orders are routed to the Department Director and the CCG Finance Department for final approval and payment.

The Administrative Technician has also assumed a liaison role with the CCG Human Resources Department and oversees payroll and personnel actions. Employee timesheets are processed and maintained using manual paper timecards, which are completed by staff and approved by Supervisors prior to providing to the Administrative Technician. The Administrative Technician is responsible for gathering and inputting each employee's time within CGI Advantage. The Administrative Technician manually enters in hours worked for each Department employee. As part of the Human Resources Liaison role, personnel actions (new hires, terminations, leave, etc.) are also entered into CGI Advantage by the Administrative Technician, and Family Medical Leave Act ("FMLA") notices are entered into CCG's FMLA tracker that was developed in-house by the CCG Information Technology Department.

Customer Service

The Department serves both internal and external customers to the City. Internal customers include CCG employees who work in offices that reside in CCG buildings and who submit Q-Alerts to request maintenance. External customers include the public that utilize CCG facilities and structures and submit Q-Alerts through the CCG website or through the 311 Citizen Service Center. The Department serves customers through performing preventative maintenance and through responding to Q-Alert work orders.

Use of Technology

Q-Alert

Q-Alert by QScend Technologies Inc. is CCG's citizen response management system. Q-Alert is used internally by CCG staff to create work order tickets and by CCG's 311 Citizen Service Center, which intakes citizens' non-emergent phone calls, submits a Q-Alert work order, and assigns it to an appropriate Department and Division. Citizens may also submit Q-Alerts themselves through the City's website or app.

Advantage

The Department uses CGI Advantage, the City's enterprise resource planning/financial management system for finance-related functions such as inputting invoices, budget monitoring, and payroll.

Phones & Laptops

Department staff mainly access Q-Alert work orders on their personal phones, due to the fact that not all staff receive work phones. While all staff are issued work laptops, staff often leverage phones in the field due their portability as compared to laptops. Supervisors use laptops for Supervisor duties like reviewing more complex work order requests and emailing staff. In addition, some Supervisor laptops have software that allows them to control select CCG facilities' systems (e.g., air conditioning, lighting, etc.). Supervisors are also provided work phones, while Technicians are not.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

The Department maintains the following three strategic planning documents:

- Public Works Policy Book
- 2025 Strategic Plan
- FY26 Strategic Planning Form

Public Works Policy Book

The Department continues to use the CCG Public Works Department Policy Book as its policy document despite the Department's recent reorganization from the CCG Public Works Department. Interviews indicate that the Department is in the process of formalizing its own policy, operations and structure as a standalone Department, which will be the priority and responsibility of the new Director once hired.

2025 Strategic Plan

Department strategic plans are contained in its most recent strategic planning document, which outlines five priorities. The Department accompanies each priority with an objective and actions for accomplishment.

Table 12: 2025 Strategic Plan Goals

Category	Objective	Actions
Preventative Maintenance Program	Reduce operational costs and extend the life of critical assets by implementing a robust preventive maintenance program.	• Conduct a full audit of all facilities and equipment to assess current maintenance needs. • Develop and implement a Quarterly Preventive Maintenance Schedule covering HVAC systems, electrical systems, plumbing, roofing and structural elements, ADA compliance components • Utilize a Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) to track work orders, asset histories, and generate maintenance reminders. • Set KPIs such as equipment downtime reduction, service request response time, and preventive vs. reactive maintenance ratio.
Skilled Labor Recruitment & Retention	Build a stable, qualified in-house maintenance workforce to reduce outsourcing and ensure long-term continuity.	• Launch an aggressive skilled labor recruitment campaign by partnering with local trade schools, technical colleges, and workforce development programs, offering internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities, and attending job fairs and community outreach events to raise awareness of career opportunities. • Enhance employee retention strategies by providing competitive wages and benefits, creating professional development paths with certifications, cross-training, and leadership development, implementing a recognition and reward system for exceptional performance, and promoting a positive workplace culture that values safety, teamwork, and growth.

Category	Objective	Actions
Self Sufficiency and Cost Reduction Strategy	Reduce reliance on subcontractors by developing internal capabilities, cutting costs while maintaining quality.	- Invest in training programs and tools that enable staff to perform specialized tasks (e.g., HVAC certification, electrical licenses). - Identify high-frequency outsourced tasks and phase them in-house through hiring and upskilling. - Create specialty response teams (e.g., plumbing, electrical, general repair) to handle projects that were previously contracted out. - Implement a cost tracking system to compare in-house vs subcontracted work and monitor cost savings.
Safety & Compliance Focus	Maintain a safe and compliant working environment for employees and building occupants.	- Establish a comprehensive Workplace Safety Program that includes regular training, incident tracking, and safety audits. - Conduct monthly safety briefings and emergency response drills. - Ensure compliance with OSHA regulations and ADA standards. - Provide PPE and safety equipment as standard operating tools.
Performance Monitoring and Reporting	Ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.	- Develop a monthly performance dashboard tracking maintenance cost savings, work order completion rates, safety incident reports, and staff turnover and hiring metrics - Conduct quarterly reviews with department leadership to assess progress and realign goals as needed.

FY2026 Strategic Planning Form

CCG requires that CCG Department leaders complete a “Strategic Planning Form” each budget cycle, which details the Division’s goals, objectives, and performance indicators for the upcoming fiscal year. Performance indicators are accompanied by the actual performance indicator from FY24 and FY25, as well the projected performance indicator for FY26. The Department’s strategic indicators are outlined below:

- **Goal:** Perform maintenance and preventive maintenance on a timely schedule for each building.
- **Objective:** Perform inspections of all facilities annually.
- **Performance Indicators:** Total percentage of inspections annually

Strategic Priorities

Based on the Department's strategic documents and conversations with staff, M&J identified the following strategic priorities.

Facility Condition

The City last underwent a Facilities Condition Assessment in 2018 which reviewed each CCG department's facilities and assigned a grade to each facility based on current conditions. The Department is in the process of updating the Facilities Condition Assessment from 2018 to create a Facilities Condition Assessment plan which prioritizes facility updates based on current conditions.

Department leadership is prioritizing the creation of a preventative maintenance plan, which has not been adopted historically by the Department. Interviews with Department staff specified that this is in part due to the current design of the Q-Alert system in facilitating proactive maintenance, as it is difficult to set work order schedules in the software. Additionally, staff indicated that in the past, staffing shortages prevented the Department from pursuing proactive maintenance and led to a culture of temporary fixes. Fixed staff are more likely to conduct proactive maintenance than floating staff, since fixed staff typically have more availability and are more familiar with their facilities' issues. Based on interviews, the Interim Director plans to assign fixed staff members at the City Hall, the CCG Fire & EMS Department headquarters, and the Muscogee County Sheriff's Office building, which should help to increase proactive maintenance within the City's larger buildings. Furthermore, the Interim Director is in the process of researching alternative software such as a CMMS to meet the Department's needs and assist in operating more strategically.

Staffing and Efficiency

The Department does not formally train staff, instead opting for new Technicians to participate in hands-on shadowing with a more senior Technician or Supervisor. In Interviews, staff expressed a desire to partake in more formal training, however, with one staff member citing training courses like those offered by external vendors at the HVAC Training Center in Alabama as an example, which offers four-day classes like "Foundations for Troubleshooting HVAC Refrigerant Systems." Department leadership hope such specialized training would decrease staff turnover by incentivizing skill development within the Department as outlined in their strategic goals.

In addition to offering specialized training, Department leadership identified a need to implement a career ladder program that rewards Department staff for obtaining degrees, licenses, and certifications. Currently, most staff are not licensed by the State of Georgia in their respective fields to perform large projects or overly technical work. Current policy does not provide financial incentives or career advancement for attaining professional licensure, such as a Journeyman Plumber certification. This may disincentivize professional development and increase the risk of turnover as staff seek competitive opportunities that reward advanced skillsets.

The Interim Director intends to optimize the Department's organizational structure by reassessing the ratio of fixed versus floating positions. The Interim Director also hopes to encourage the cross-training of staff to expose staff to different trades to develop more diverse skillsets and be able to address a wider variety of work orders. Additionally, the Interim Director is assessing the possibility of obtaining a different work order system to provide more project management abilities such as tracking maintenance schedules and costs, which would allow the Department to track key performance indicators and other metrics to make data-driven decisions related to staffing and operations.

Self-Sufficiency

To address staffing shortages, the Department has relied on a primary master contractor since 2023. The arrangement provided an immediate solution via the State of Georgia's statewide contract. The downside, as the Department asserted, may have resulted in project costs exceeding direct-to-vendor rates. The Department further noted that the approved contractor list is difficult to navigate. Consequently, Department leadership plans to collaborate with the Finance Department to identify more cost-effective alternatives while simultaneously expanding internal staffing.

Safety & Compliance

Department staff undergo driver safety training facilitated by the CCG Public Works Department's Safety Coordinator before operating a CCG vehicle. One of the Department's staff also serves as a part-time Risk Investigator for the CCG Human Resources Department's Risk Management Division. At the time of this report, the Department lacks a formalized workplace safety program. In the absence of documented policies, a staff member, who concurrently serves as a part-time Risk Investigator for the CCG Risk Management Division, provides on-the-job safety guidance and facilitates knowledge sharing on CCG-wide incident-prevention methods.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

The Interim Director utilizes a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to assess Department productivity. Primary quantitative metrics include annual facility inspection counts and the volume of closed work orders within the Q-Alert system. While Q-Alert effectively tracks project volume, Q-Alert as implemented, lacks the granularity to assess individual employee performance such as through feedback surveys. Consequently, leadership relies heavily on direct communication with Supervisors and staff to gauge individual contributions and operational efficiency.

Shop Supervisors define efficiency as the successful resolution of assigned work orders. To maintain service quality, the Department adheres to a two-week service guarantee. If a work order remains unresolved beyond this 14-day threshold, the Interim Director intervenes to expedite the project, including escalating the task to an external contractor to ensure timely completion.

The Department currently lacks a formal mechanism for measuring customer satisfaction, as the Q-Alert system does not support automated surveys. In the absence of structured data, staff utilize informal interactions with internal CCG customers as a primary performance indicator. While personnel report that customer complaints are rare, there is no documented evidence to verify satisfaction levels or service quality.

As the CCG Human Resources Department within the last year mandated annual performance evaluations, the Department participates in this process to provide employees with feedback.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

Department staff perceive Department culture as generally positive. Staff are pleased with Department leadership, and Technicians typically feel that they have the support of their respective Supervisors, although support is not needed often, and interaction is limited. Staff spoke positively of the Department becoming independent from the CCG Public Works Department and look forward to the hiring of a permanent Director.

The Department Interim Director hosts Supervisor meetings monthly and has an open-door policy for staff to ask questions or express concerns. Floating Technicians receive daily workloads from both their Supervisor and Q-Alert, and fixed Technicians in buildings other than the Muscogee County Jail or Government Center (which have building-specific Supervisors), receive daily workloads from Q-Alert since they rarely interact with their shop Supervisor. Supervisors do not hold routine meetings with their Technicians and therefore policies may not be communicated downward in a consistent and timely manner.

Overall perception of the culture of CCG is not as favorable as within the Department. According to feedback gathered during staff interviews, there is a consensus that the Department's compensation and benefits packages are not aligned with those of similarly sized municipalities or the private sector. Respondents identified the lack of competitive compensation as a primary driver of staff turnover. Department staff also expressed concern related to a CCG requirement that select managerial positions must possess a four-year bachelor's degree. Shop staff find CCG's degree requirement especially demoralizing since leadership qualifications in the trades' industries are generally measured by tenure, state licenses (e.g., Master Plumber), and general competencies, not a four-year degree. Based on interviews, the requirement contributes to turnover, as Supervisors without degrees are unable to be promoted and, therefore, their opportunity for wage growth stops at the top of the Supervisor pay range. As such, less opportunities for growth reduces the incentive for front-line staff to stay in the Department.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: Facilities Maintenance staff receive all the Department's Q-Alert work orders via email, regardless of which Shop the Q-Alert is assigned to. The Department's work orders are also often assigned to the incorrect shop, in which case the staff member that finds the erroneously assigned work order will reassign the work order to the correct shop. It is also common for the Department to receive work orders that are not the Department's responsibility, such as work orders requesting the Department repair broken streetlights, which are maintained by the City's electrical provider. As such, staff members devote substantial time sorting through their email inbox reassigning non-relevant work orders.

Recommendation 1: The Department should collaborate with the CCG Information Technology Department to create a work order triage system that accurately filters work orders by shop and prevents non-relevant work orders from entering the email inbox of Department staff. The Department should consider tasking one of its administrative personnel with overseeing the triage system, or reorganizing one of the Department’s Technician roles as an administrative position devoted to the work order triage system. Alternatively, the Department should consider procuring a new work order solution or configuration that meets its triage needs.

Observation 2A: Interviews with staff indicate that based on CCG’s current configuration of Q-Alert, Q-Alert does not contain the following general and project management-related desired functionalities:

- Q-Alert is not currently implemented to provide Supervisors the ability to assign work orders to specific staff. Therefore, Supervisors assign work orders to staff over the phone, in-person, or staff select the work orders from Q-Alert themselves. Supervisors thus are not able to easily keep track of which Technicians are working on specific work orders.
- Based on interviews and CCG’s current configuration of Q-Alert, Q-Alert is not perceived as user-friendly. Staff have difficulties generating reports of past work orders to analyze metrics like volume, and time to close workorders. Furthermore, it is difficult to search for a specific work order, as staff must manually filter through a list of closed work orders to find a specific work order. Lastly, due to CCG’s current configuration of Q-Alert, customers often communicate with staff outside of Q-Alert to check on the status of their work order, which reduces staff capacity. Staff must therefore inform CCG work order requesters that their request has been received, and when it is completed outside of Q-Alert by phone or email.
- Q-Alert as it is implemented lacks the ability to assign costs to work orders and therefore track costs associated with work orders. As a result, the Interim Facilities Maintenance Director must manually track costs spent on repairs to identify total costs associated with upkeep and repairs of different buildings, which is a time-consuming process.
- Q-Alert as it is currently implemented does not offer customers the ability to provide feedback within the system. Therefore, Department staff obtain customer feedback informally, whether on the job site or when customers contact the Interim Director to express a complaint.
- Q-Alert requires a Wi-Fi or mobile data connection; therefore, staff cannot access or update Q-Alert in the field without a Wi-Fi or mobile data connection.

Observation 2B: As part of the Department’s strategic priorities, the Department has identified the need for a Computerized Maintenance Management System (“CMMS”) to track work orders, asset histories, costs, and to generate maintenance reminders.

Recommendation 2A: The Department should collaborate with the CCG Information Technology Department to determine whether Q-Alert contains project management capabilities that increase user-friendliness and allow work order status updates, end-user notifications, project assignments, report generation, search features, and customer feedback. If such capabilities do exist, the Department should evaluate the cost benefit of implementation.

If Q-Alert does not provide needed features, the Department should continue to assess options available to invest in a Computerized Maintenance Management System (“CMMS”)/enterprise asset management system to fulfill the Department’s project management needs and that will exist alongside (for external citizen requests) or potentially replace Q-Alert.

Recommendation 2B: If the Department considers switching work order systems, the Department should implement a CMMS/enterprise asset management system that centralizes maintenance expenses (labor, parts, inventory, contracts) in one system allowing real-time visibility, budget control, key performance indicator analysis and better, more informed decision-making to optimize asset lifecycles. Furthermore, the Department should utilize workload and performance data captured by the system to assess their current staffing model and determine whether additional positions are justified.

Observation 3A: Technicians are not provided with work phones or tablets while in the field, causing many staff to use their personal phones to access Q-Alerts and participate in work calls daily, thus spending personal money on data and minutes for work-related matters. Although staff are issued laptops to access Q-Alert, due to laptops not being as portable as phones, staff often opt to use their personal phones.

Observation 3B: Department staff are unable to access Q-Alert without a Wi-Fi connection, therefore, due to the absence of city-provided tablets or phones, staff cannot close work orders in real time without a Wi-Fi connection.

Recommendation 3: The Department should consider implementing a method to reimburse Technicians’ costs for work-related phone data and minutes, possibly through a pay increase that is specified for data and minutes, or by providing Technicians with a work phone or tablet to use in the field. Providing staff with a work phone or tablet for use in the field would allow staff to be able to always access Q-Alert and close work orders in real-time. Furthermore, employees using personal phones for work-related matters could subject employees’ personal phones to public disclosure including personal emails and text messages.

Observation 4: Employees’ hours worked are kept using paper timecards, which are completed by staff and approved by Supervisors prior to providing to the Administrative Technician. The Administrative Technician is responsible for inputting employees’ hours worked within CGI Advantage, the City’s financial management system. The Administrative Technician manually enters each employee’s hours worked into CGI for each pay period.

Recommendation 4: The Department should consider implementing biometric time clocks (TimeClock Plus) to automate timekeeping. Biometric time clocks are utilized by the CCG Public Works Department and are considered beneficial by both front-line staff and supervisory personnel. The Department should collaborate with the CCG Information Technology Department to integrate TimeClock Plus with CGI Advantage to eliminate redundant, manual data entry and to automate the time reporting process.

Observation 5: The Department continues to use the CCG Public Works Department Policy Book as its policy document despite the Department's recent reorganization from the CCG Public Works Department. The Department is in the process of formalizing its policy, operations and structure as a standalone Department, which will be the priority and responsibility of the new Director once hired.

Recommendation 5: The Department should create a policy document separate from the CCG Public Works Department that relates to the unique needs of the Department. In addition to the creation of a unique policy document, the Department should create a workplace safety plan with the collaboration of the CCG Public Works Safety Coordinator, as well as an accountability plan for Department leadership to hold direct reports accountable.

Observation 6: The City last underwent a Facilities Condition Assessment in 2018 which reviewed each CCG department's facilities and assigned a grade to each facility based on current conditions. The Department is in the process of updating the Facilities Condition Assessment from 2018 to create a Facilities Condition Assessment plan which prioritizes facility updates based on current conditions.

Recommendation 6: The Facilities Maintenance Department should continue its plan to update the 2018 Facilities Condition Assessment and establish a current, formal, and comprehensive Facilities Condition Assessment plan which includes a comprehensive asset inventory and audit, identifies necessary repair or replacement tasks for each asset with anticipated costs, includes an investment plan that prioritizes and sequences capital and operational expenditures for the time period covered by the plan, includes preventative maintenance schedules, and defines the facility condition index for the City's buildings to assess building health.

Observation 7: Historically, the Department has operated in a reactive manner as the Department did not previously maintain a formal plan for preventative maintenance. Historically, work order volume was high relative to staff count due to vacant positions, and proactive maintenance was not prioritized, thus leading to a culture of temporary fixes.

Recommendation 7A: The Department should prioritize recruitment efforts to fill vacant positions since a full or near-full staff count is necessary to conduct preventative maintenance.

Recommendation 7B: The Department should create a preventative maintenance schedule that considers the following components:

- Comprehensive asset inventory
- Standardized maintenance schedules for all shops
- Integrated work order system that includes automated preventative maintenance triggers)
- Financial and performance tracking (return on investment monitoring, vendor versus in-house cost tracking, energy efficiency data)
- Training and quality assurance (regularly training Technicians on new equipment, implementing spot checks by Supervisors for quality assurance to ensure standards are met)

Implementing a preventative maintenance schedule should result in long-term cost and time efficiencies. This proactive approach prioritizes minor, low-cost interventions—such as scheduled component replacements—to mitigate the risk of catastrophic equipment failure and the high capital expenditures associated with reactive repairs. Department leadership has acknowledged the necessity of this transition and intends to formalize a maintenance plan following the appointment of a permanent Department Director.

Observation 8: The Department does not provide Technicians with formal continuing professional development or technical training. Staff indicate a desire to partake in short-term trainings like those offered by external vendors at the HVAC Training Center in Alabama, which offers four-day classes like “Foundations for Troubleshooting HVAC Refrigerant Systems.” Current training is exclusive to a few weeks of formally shadowing a more senior Technician or Supervisor and hands-on learning and troubleshooting by completing different jobs.

Recommendation 8: The Department should establish a dedicated annual budget for professional development, collaborating with Shop Supervisors to identify high-impact training opportunities. By strategically diversifying certifications in specialized areas such as HVAC refrigerant systems, the Department can cultivate a multi-faceted workforce where individual staff members serve as subject matter experts. This targeted specialization would ensure a broader internal capacity to manage complex, trade-specific work orders while reducing reliance on external specialists.

Observation 9: The Department’s current compensation structure lacks formal mechanisms to recognize or reward the attainment of advanced degrees, professional licenses, and certifications. This absence of professional incentives may stagnate internal skill development and increases the risk of turnover, as personnel may seek opportunities with organizations that offer competitive rewards for technical advancement.

Recommendation 9: The Department should develop a “career architecture” program that incentivizes employees to pursue degrees, licenses, and/or certifications that are relevant to job duties via monetary incentives like bonuses or pay raises to boost morale and increase retention. The Department should also consider covering training/certification costs for employees.

Observation 10A: The Department supplements its staff with the use of external contractors. To manage workload demands, the Department utilizes a third-party contractor for facilities maintenance. This primary contractor subcontracts projects to local businesses; leading to higher project costs than would be incurred through direct engagement with local trades.

Observation 10B: Department staff asserted that the CCG-approved contractor list is outdated and contains a high volume of non-relevant vendors. The current format is difficult to navigate, presenting a significant administrative barrier for leadership when attempting to identify viable alternatives to the primary master contractor.

Recommendation 10: The Department should identify contractors to conduct business with and work with the CCG Finance Department to pre-qualify selected local vendors to contract with directly for small repairs. Having multiple outsourcing options would allow the Department to negotiate quotes and receive services at more favorable rates. Furthermore, the Department should collaborate with the CCG Finance Department to assess the quality and relevance of the approved contractors listed by the CCG Finance Department to create an updated list that is more succinct and navigable.

Observation 11: Supervisors do not hold routine meetings with their Technicians. Therefore, policy additions or amendments may not be communicated consistently or timely. Additionally, the lack of regular team meetings prevents Supervisors from providing front-line staff with general, routine, and timely feedback.

Recommendation 11: The Department should create a policy mandating regular meetings between all staff members within a shop at least twice per month. Regular meetings would allow shop-wide issues or common themes to be identified, feedback to be provided, and promotes collaboration and communication between Shop staff.

Observation 12: Based on feedback gathered during staff interviews, there is a common perception that the Department's compensation and benefits packages are not aligned with those of similarly sized municipalities or the private sector. Respondents identified the lack of competitive compensation as a primary driver of staff turnover.

Recommendation 12: The Department should collaborate with the CCG Human Resources Department to further assess specific roles within the Department to compare current compensation offered with other municipalities and the private sector. Depending on the results, the City may need to consider raising salaries for Departmental staff to be more competitive.

Observation 13: Department leadership and Shop staff expressed that the CCG requirement that Managers must possess a four-year bachelor's degree contributes to turnover, since Supervisors without degrees are unable to get a promotion and, therefore, their opportunity for wage growth stops at the top of the Supervisor pay range. As such, less opportunities for growth reduces the incentive for front-line staff to stay in the Department.

Recommendation 13: City leadership, in collaboration with the CCG Human Resources Department, should research the benefits and drawbacks of the four-year bachelor's degree requirement and consider the possibility of allowing experience to substitute for education for certain job classifications.

Observation 14: The Department was effectively separate from the CCG Public Works Department as of FY26 but, as of the writing of this report, does not have a permanent Director. The lack of a Director hinders the Department in achieving the goals outlined in its strategic documentation.

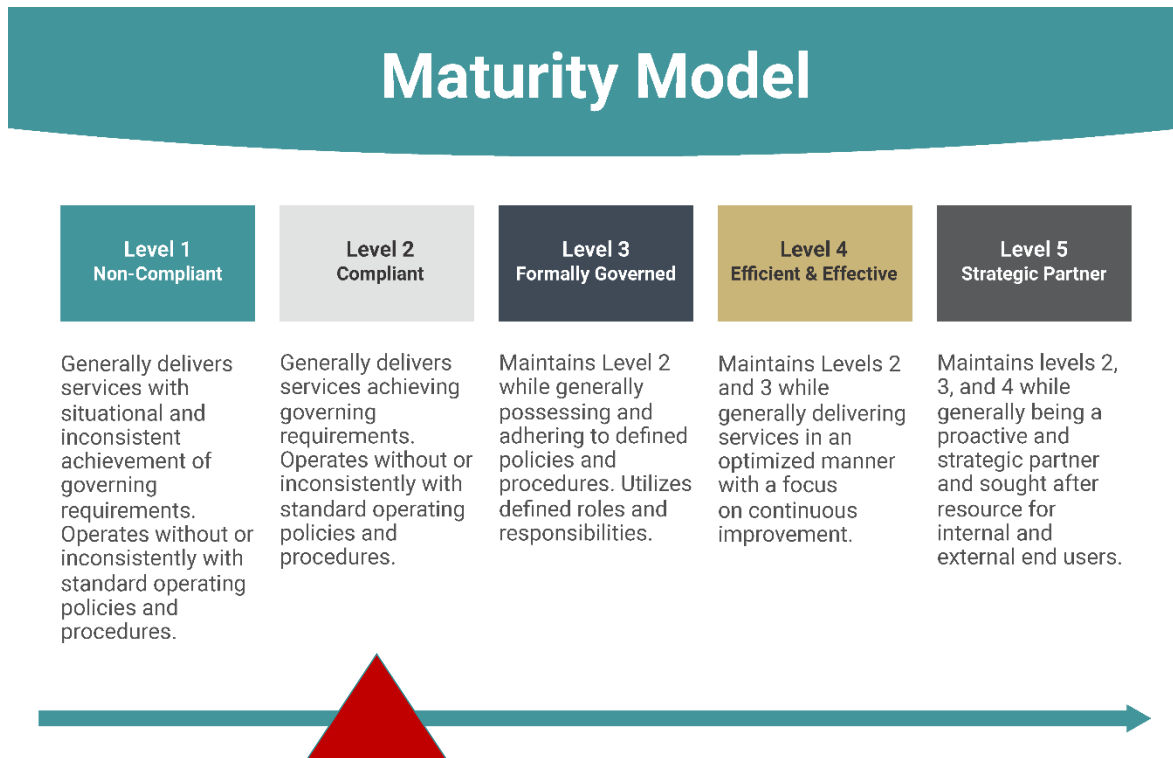
Recommendation 14A: The City should prioritize filling the Director vacancy as soon as possible.

Recommendation 14B: Upon the hiring of a Director, the Director should consider focusing on the following to ensure forward progress for the Department:

- Assess the benefits of implementing a maintenance management system/enterprise asset management system.
- Establish a preventative maintenance plan/schedule.
- Establish policies and procedures unique to the Department.
- Implement performance metrics and key performance indicators to track Departmental workload and use insights gleaned from such data to make decisions related to the Department's staffing model and staffing levels.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department's maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Department as **Level 2: Compliant**. While the Department is operating efficiently in some ways, due to the Department's recent formation, the Department lacks formal policies and procedures to guide operations and possesses an outdated staffing models from prior to its reorganization. Furthermore, the Department has many opportunities to operate more efficiently such as through setting preventative maintenance schedules and ensuring the Department's staffing model and structure is optimized for operations. The Department is in the process of moving to a more proactive service model and could be more strategic related to investing in staff and collecting performance metrics and data to inform strategic decisions.

Conclusion

The Facilities Maintenance Department ("Department") provides essential maintenance services to 524 City facilities. The Department recently reorganized into an independent Department from previously being a Division of the CCG Public Works Department. The Department does not have a permanent Director but an active search for the position is underway.

The Department is aware of most of its growth opportunities and plans to more actively pursue its goals outlined in its 2025 Strategic Plan after a permanent Director is hired. Currently, the Department lacks formal policies and procedures, is understaffed, does not possess a proactive maintenance plan, and is still updating its staffing model to accommodate its new standalone Department status.

Transitioning from Level 2: Compliant to a Level 3: Formally Governed and above maturity rating will require a dedicated effort to alleviate the Department's remaining inefficiencies by the new Director. As the Department has recently become independent, now is an opportune time to implement measures to increase its maturity and efficiency.

M&J would like to thank Department leadership, as well as the 12 individuals interviewed across the Department, for allowing us to conduct numerous interviews, follow-up interviews, and job shadowing that were required to complete this Assessment.

3.E Finance

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“CCG,” “City,” or “Columbus”) Finance Department (“Department”) serves as an internal service department for the City, processing financial transactions, managing budgets and financial planning, conducting governmental purchasing, and conducting financial reporting. The Department also serves citizens directly by billing and collecting certain CCG revenues and administering Columbus’s business licensing function. The Department’s mission is “to maintain [CCG’s] financial stability through sound financial and management practices. [The Department is] committed to the highest standards of accountability, accuracy, timeliness, professionalism, and innovation in providing financial services to our internal and external customers.”²⁴

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

The Finance Department’s Budget Books and Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports (“ACFR”) consistently receive the Government Finance Officers Association’s (“GFOA”) Distinguished Budget Presentation Award and Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, respectively. The Department’s receipt of these GFOA awards indicates that the Finance Department meets GFOA standards for budget presentation and financial reporting. GFOA has awarded the City’s Budget Books and ACFRs the relevant awards for the past 35 years.

Organization and Staffing

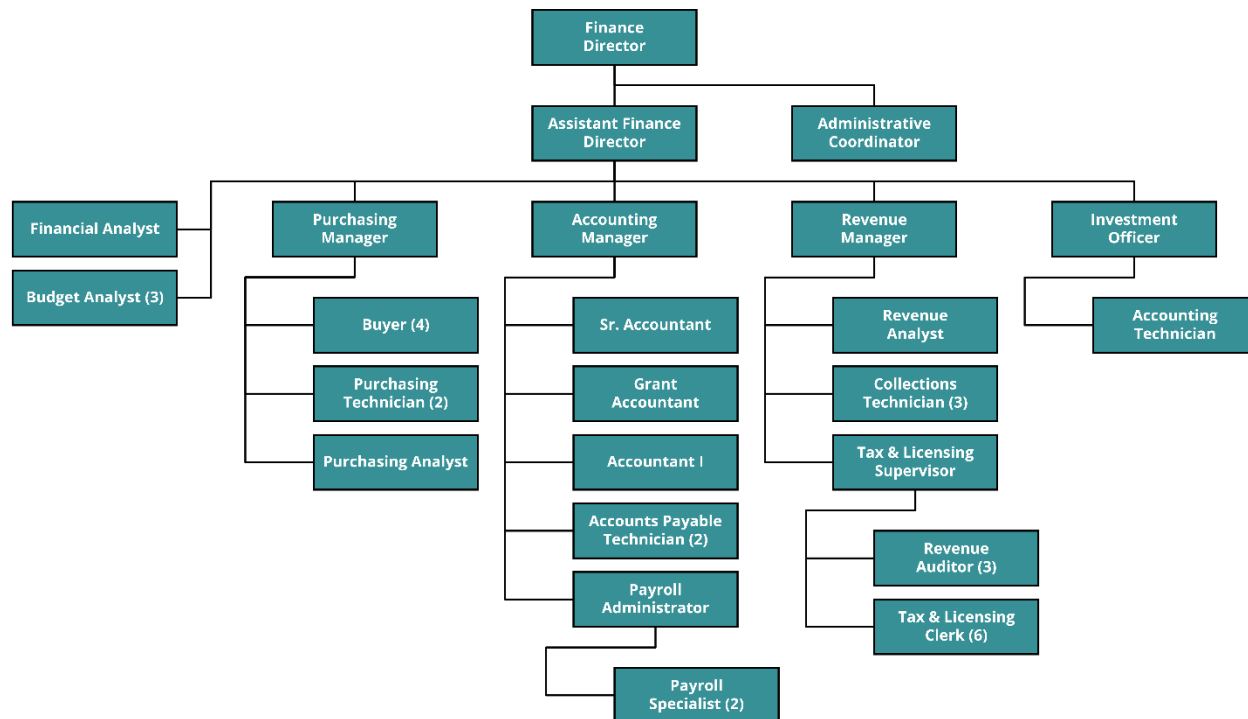
The Department is led by the Finance Director, who is supported by an Administrative Coordinator and an Assistant Finance Director. The Department is organized into the following five Divisions²⁵:

- Financial Planning/Budget Management
- Purchasing
- Accounting
- Revenue
- Cash Management

²⁴ <https://www.columbusga.gov/finance/home>

²⁵ Sections [2-215](#) and [2-216](#), *City of Columbus, GA, Code of Ordinances*, specify a different Finance Department organizational structure, with only four Divisions: Accounting, Revenue, Financial Planning, and Purchasing. These sections of the *City of Columbus, GA, Code of Ordinances* have not been updated since 1995.

The following table details the Department's organizational structure:



Formally, the Financial Analyst and three Budget Analysts within the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division as well as the leaders of the Purchasing, Accounting, Revenue, and Cash Management Divisions each report directly to the Assistant Finance Director, who oversees the day-to-day operations all five Divisions. In practice, the Assistant Finance Director spends significant time acting as the manager of the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division and supporting that Division's responsibilities, rather than serving as a Department-wide manager.

Financial Planning/Budget Management Division

The Financial Planning/Budget Management Division includes a Financial Analyst and three Budget Analysts. The Financial Analyst and three Budget Analysts all report directly to the Assistant Finance Director. In interviews, Department staff stated that the Financial Analyst and one of the three Budget Analyst positions was filled at the time of M&J's fieldwork.

Purchasing Division

The Purchasing Division is led by the Purchasing Manager and also includes four Buyers, two Purchasing Technicians, and one Purchasing Analyst. All Purchasing Division staff report directly to the Purchasing Manager, who reports to the Assistant Finance Director. In interviews, Department staff stated that all Purchasing Division positions were filled at the time of M&J's fieldwork other than one of the two Purchasing Technician positions (which they anticipated being filled shortly) and the Purchasing Analyst position (which was newly created).

Accounting Division

The Accounting Division is led by the Accounting Manager and also includes one Senior Accountant, one Grants Accountant, one Accountant I, two Accounts Payable Technicians, one Payroll Administrator, and two Payroll Specialists. The Payroll Specialists report to the Payroll Administrator, while the rest of the Accounting Division's staff report directly to the Accounting Manager. The Accounting Manager reports to the Assistant Finance Director. In interviews, Department staff stated the Senior Accountant position was vacant at the time of M&J's fieldwork, but that the Department was planning to fill the Senior Accountant vacancy by promoting the Payroll Administrator.

Revenue Division

The Revenue Division is led by the Revenue Manager and also includes one Revenue Analyst, three Collections Technicians, one Tax & Licensing Supervisor, three Revenue Auditors, and six Tax & Licensing Clerks. The Revenue Auditors and Tax & Licensing Clerks all report to the Tax & Licensing Supervisor, while the rest of the Revenue Division's staff report directly to the Revenue Manager. The Revenue Manager reports to the Assistant Finance Director. In interviews, Department staff indicated that there were several vacancies within the Revenue Division at the time of M&J's fieldwork, including one of the three Collections Technician positions, the Revenue Analyst position (which was newly created), one of the six Tax & Licensing Clerk positions, and one of the three Revenue Auditor positions. All Revenue Division positions work out of offices in the City Services Center, with most Revenue Division positions working out of the primary Revenue Division office and the three Collections Technician positions operating out of a separate office within the City Services Center.

Cash Management Division

The Cash Management Division is led by the Investment Officer and also includes one Accounting Technician. The Accounting Technician reports to the Investment Officer, who reports to the Assistant Finance Director. In interviews, Department staff stated that the Accounting Technician position within the Cash Management Division was vacant as of M&J's fieldwork.

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

The Department has experienced the departure of 33 employees since the start of FY21. Various official CCG records reviewed by M&J show conflicting Finance Department employee counts for multiple years during the review period, which prevents M&J from performing firm turnover rate calculations for the review period.

The following table shows the number of employees who left the Department during the last five fiscal years:

Table 13: Annual Employee Departures

Fiscal Year	Employees Leaving ²⁶
2021	3 (3 Resignations)
2022	2 (1 Dismissal/Termination, 1 Resignation)
2023	5 (4 Resignations, 1 Retirement)
2024	14 (3 Dismissals/Terminations, 7 Resignations, 4 Retirements)
2025	9 (2 Dismissals/Terminations, 6 Resignations, 1 Retirement)

Source: Finance Department Employment Reports

The Department saw moderate to slightly elevated turnover during the review period. Over the entirety of the review period, turnover rates were highest within the Revenue Division, with 48% of all turnover among positions within that Division. Turnover in FY24 was significantly above the prior trend, with significantly more employees leaving the Department than in either the prior or the following year. FY24 turnover, however, was not significantly concentrated within any one Division, with multiple employees leaving from all three of the Department's largest Divisions (Purchasing, Accounting, and Revenue). Additionally, FY24 turnover was not concentrated within any particular levels of positions, with turnover taking place in both entry-level positions and managerial roles.

Per interviews with Department staff, nine of the Department's 41 positions (22.0%) were vacant at the time of M&J's fieldwork, although staff reported that there were firm plans to fill at least two of these vacant positions within the following several weeks. Additionally, several of the vacant positions at the time of M&J's fieldwork were reportedly vacated by staff who transitioned to other positions within the Finance Department. Some staff expressed a perception that Department leadership often promoted employees into new positions as a way to ensure that critical duties continued to be performed despite the Department's high vacancy rate, with an understanding that the promoted employee would continue performing their former responsibilities while they learned the duties of their new role. In interviews, staff indicated that some Department employees were currently performing at least some responsibilities of positions that they had previously held in the Department alongside the duties of their current positions. Should these additional duties be temporary assignments with a formal transition plan, then there is no issue. A practice of expecting employees to indefinitely continue performing their prior duties when moved to new assignments may lead to certain employees taking on a much higher workload than intended for their position.

²⁶ This table does not include transfers out from the Finance Department to employment elsewhere in CCG as a departure. This table also does not include employees that were hired and provided a start date but did not report to work with the Finance Department.

Staffing Levels

To evaluate the City’s financial staffing levels, M&J collected financial staffing levels²⁷ reported by five comparable municipal governments in Georgia and neighboring states. While M&J did endeavor to select municipalities similar to the City when developing its benchmarking list, the selected governments do vary somewhat in size. In order to adjust for differences in government size across M&J’s sampled governments and allow for more effective comparison, M&J recorded the United States Census Bureau’s population estimate for each selected municipality as well as the general revenues reported on the municipality’s ACFR. M&J sampled all data from each government’s FY24 ACFR and collected the Census Bureau’s 2024 American Community Survey population estimates for each municipality. The following table shows the collected staffing benchmarking data and M&J’s calculated staffing figures that normalize for differences in population and revenues:

Table 14: Staffing Benchmark Analysis

Municipality	Finance FTE	Population	Finance FTE per 10,000 Residents	General Revenues	Finance FTE per \$10 Million in General Revenues
Columbus Consolidated Government	41	201,830	2.03	\$365,742,252	1.12
City of Savannah, GA	100	148,808	6.72	\$316,599,205	3.16
City of Montgomery, AL	47	144,788	3.25	\$128,660,838	3.65
City of Mobile, AL	35	198,722	1.76	\$378,594,876	0.92
City of Columbia, SC	44	195,818	2.25	\$282,079,065	1.56
City of Knoxville, TN	66	201,367	3.28	\$385,312,500	1.71
AVERAGE	55.5	181,889	3.05	\$309,498,123	1.79

²⁷ The number of full-time equivalent (“FTE”) staff reported working in the government’s financial function in the City’s ACFR

As shown by the data in the staffing benchmarking table, the City's Finance Department operates with staffing levels that are fairly "lean" (*i.e.*, with fewer financial staff per 10,000 residents or per \$10 Million in general revenues) relative to the selected benchmark municipalities. Based on the population and revenue staffing ratios, the City's Finance Department has a significantly "leaner" staffing model than the financial functions within several of the selected benchmarks, including the City of Savannah, GA, the City of Montgomery, AL, and the City of Knoxville, TN. The City's financial staffing is, on the whole, moderately "leaner" than that of the City of Columbia, SC. Only one selected benchmark municipality, the City of Mobile, AL, operates with financial functions that are materially "leaner" than the City's.

M&J's financial staffing level benchmarking is based on the City's budgeted staffing levels and the current high vacancy rates within the Finance Department, with over 20% of budgeted positions vacant at the time of M&J's fieldwork, means that the Department's staffing model, which is already fairly "lean" relative to its peers as designed, operates with an even larger gap in staffing between the City and many of its peer organizations.

Training

When new staff enter the Department or enter new roles in the Department, they generally learn how to carry out the duties of their new position through some form of "on the job" training. Depending on the position that the employee has filled, the employee may be provided with training or reference materials prepared and maintained by the Department (see the *Assessment of Guiding Documentation* section of this chapter of the report), but Finance Department training is generally relatively self-guided. Staff mostly learn by doing, referring to any reference materials provided and asking questions of more experienced staff as needed. The Finance Department does periodically send staff to applicable training courses held by third-party organizations, such as the Georgia Municipal Association, but it does not have a standard training curriculum for staff that lays out the training that they are to receive as a new hire and on an ongoing basis as continuing education.

The Department has required qualifications for certain positions, including a college degree requirement for many technical and/or managerial positions, a requirement that all revenue Division staff are registered as notaries public, and federally mandated certification requirements for positions involved in grants management. The Department also occasionally uses "career ladder" advancements to incentivize staff to achieve professional certifications. While the Department does encourage staff to obtain additional relevant professional certifications, it does not require staff to hold any additional third-party professional certifications or use pay to incentivize staff to obtain and maintain these additional third-party professional certifications.

Unlike the rest of the Department, the Revenue Division does have a structured training plan for new hires, including specified time for instruction, observation, and supervised working, and periodically holds formal Division-wide training sessions during the Division's weekly "all hands" meetings to address topics of interest identified by Division management, such as areas where staff have expressed confusion or have handled applications in an inconsistent manner.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The following list defines the primary functions of the Finance Department's divisions:

- Financial Planning/Budget Management
 - Budget Development
 - Budget Administration and Processing
- Purchasing
 - Purchasing
 - Contract and Vendor Management
 - Payment Processing
 - Purchasing Card ("P-Card") Management
- Accounting
 - Accounts Payable ("AP")
 - Grants Management
 - Accounts Receivable ("AR")
 - Payroll Processing
 - Financial Reporting
- Revenue
 - Business License Processing
 - Alcohol License Processing
 - Collections Management/AR
- Cash Management
 - Cash and Investment Management
 - AR

Financial Planning/Budget Management

Budget Development

The budget development process begins following the completion of the financial audit for the prior fiscal year (e.g., the development of the FY2027 budget began following the completion of the FY25 financial audit), once actual revenues and expenditures from the audited year are uploaded into Advantage, the City's Enterprise Resource Planning software system. The Assistant Finance Director then carries forward the current fiscal year's finances into the upcoming fiscal year to create a baseline budget. In January, the Assistant Finance Director sends initial budgetary information, including an instructional handout detailing the stages of the budget development process and a variety of budget worksheets, to relevant staff in each CCG department. The Assistant Finance Director, Finance Director, and Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff then conduct a City-wide kickoff meeting to provide a walkthrough of the budget development process to relevant staff in each City department and answer any questions that may arise.

Following the kickoff meeting, departments have two weeks to prepare their budget requests, using paper forms prepared and sent by the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division. The budget request forms prepared by the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division use the department's prior budget as the "baseline" from which the department is to prepare the new request. For the FY26 budgeting process, the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division updated the "baselines" from the prior year's budget to incorporate anticipated changes in costs and only asked departments to provide requests beyond those included in the adjusted baselines. When Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff receive completed departmental budget request forms, they manually key the budget requests into Advantage. Some larger departments may request extensions beyond the allotted two weeks to prepare budget requests, which the Department typically grants. Once all budget requests have been received, staff manually compile the requested amounts into a single document, which is distributed to key City leaders.

The Department's typical practice is for individual Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff to be assigned specific departments to be responsible for, although the Division's staffing situation at the time of M&J's fieldwork (including two of the three Budget Analyst positions being vacant and the one filled position being filled by a relatively inexperienced employee) led Department staff to indicate that they would likely need to operate in an alternate manner in the upcoming FY27 budget cycle, relying on additional staff outside of the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division (potentially including the Finance Director and/or Assistant Finance Director) to complete much of the budget analysis and evaluation.

Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff work with the Finance Director and Assistant Finance Director to review the departmental budget requests, holding meetings with leadership within requesting departments as needed to further discuss requested amounts. For certain sensitive or critical issues, key City leadership (e.g., City Manager, Deputy City Managers, leadership from other relevant City departments such as Human Resources and Information Technology) may join in those individual departmental meetings. The Finance Director is responsible for developing the budget request presented to the City Manager, with the support of the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division and the Assistant Finance Director. The City Manager then may further revise the budget request before submitting their recommended budget to the Mayor, who ultimately presents their budget recommendation to the City Council.

As part of the presentation of the Mayor's budget request to the City Council, leadership from various City departments may prepare individual departmental presentations to support departmental requests included within the Mayor's budget request. City departments may use their budget presentations as an opportunity to request new items in their budgets that were not included in the budget requests initially submitted to the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division; any additional budget requests first introduced in departmental budget presentations to the City Council are placed on an "add/delete list," which the City Council evaluates following the completion of the remainder of the budget process. In interviews, staff indicated that departments often use this later opportunity to introduce budget requests as a way to request funds to address needs that were not anticipated at the time that the departments created their initial budget requests. Staff also indicated, however, that some departments may use this later opportunity to introduce new budget requests that may have been known at the time initial budget requests were prepared, but which department management may have felt would be more favorably received if presented directly to the City Council, rather than to the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division.

Following the adoption of the final budget and any modifications from the "add/delete list" by the City Council, Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff prepare the budget book for the fiscal year, based on GFOA's budget book standards. Staff prepare the budget book utilizing a template, although the process of updating charts and tables is a highly manual process.

Budget Administration and Processing

The Financial Planning/Budget Management Division performs a number of regular budget administration and processing tasks, including preparing monthly budget reports, managing the mid-year budget review and adjustment process, and processing certain requests for payment that require budgetary approval. The Financial Planning/Budget Management Division prepares monthly budget variance reports for each department, comparing actual revenues/expenditures as recorded in Advantage against projected revenues/expenditures through this point in the fiscal year (*i.e.*, $1/12$ of total budgeted revenues/expenditures $\times$ number of months into fiscal year). The Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff responsible for each department prepare that department's report using data from Advantage and note any areas of concern, including areas where expenditures are ahead of schedule (*e.g.*, areas where a department has spent 75% of budgeted funds only halfway through the year) or areas where expenditures are in excess of the budgeted amount. For areas where expenditures are in excess of the budgeted amount, the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff will work with departmental management to determine how they would like to address the overage, including potentially transferring funds from other budget items, as allowed.

The City allows Departments to freely transfer available funds between capital and operating accounts, with Financial Planning/Budget Management Division approval; departments cannot request adjustments to personnel budgets (other than the elimination of currently vacant positions) without City Council approval. Departments can either prepare the Transfer of Budget requests directly within Advantage, where they can submit them for Financial Planning/Budget Management Division approval, or they can request that Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff prepare the entry in Advantage themselves. Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff request written (typically emailed) approval from the relevant department head before directly entering Transfer of Budget requests into Advantage.

The Finance Director provides a financial update at the mid-year City Council meeting, detailing the City's financial performance against its budget. At this time, departments may request midyear budget adjustments, including transfers and/or modifications, which the Finance Director and relevant departmental leadership present to the City Council for approval. The Financial Planning/Budget Management Division and the Assistant Finance Director enter any approved midyear budget adjustments into Advantage.

Financial Analysts and Budget Analysts within the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division also process requests for payment, including some requests for payment using Advantage's General Accounting Expenditure ("GAX") process and requests for petty cash payments. The role of the Financial Analyst or Budget Analyst in the payment approval process is to verify that sufficient budgeted funds exist in the designated account to pay for the requested purchase. The Financial Analysts and Budget Analysts receive payment requests through interoffice mail, which they check at least daily. Requests for payment include a coversheet, prepared in Advantage and printed by administrative staff in the requesting department, and any relevant supporting documents, such as receipts or invoices.

The Financial Analyst or Budget Analyst reviews the provided documentation to ensure that all necessary information is present and correct, including a signature from the relevant department head indicating their approval, and uses the account information provided on the coversheet to look up the indicated source account and confirm that sufficient budget exists to fund the requested payment. The Financial Analyst or Budget Analyst then approves the payment (including physically stamping/signing all requests and approving certain requests, such as travel reimbursement requests, in Advantage) and forwards it on to the appropriate recipient elsewhere within the Department. Payment requests related to the purchase of goods or services are forwarded to the Purchasing Division, petty cash requests are forwarded to the Cash Management Division, and GAX requests under \$5,000 not related to the purchase of goods or services (e.g., utility payments, travel reimbursement requests) are forwarded to AP staff within the Accounting Division.

Purchasing

Purchasing

The Purchasing Division is responsible for processing City purchases other than Small Purchases (*i.e.*, purchases of \$5,000 and less). The City requires the use of the Competitive Quotation purchase method for purchases of at least \$5,000 but no more than \$25,000, which requires purchases to be supported by at least three written quotations from reputable vendors.

Purchasing-related staff within departments collect the quotes supporting Competitive Quotation purchases and submit the quotes as an attachment to a requisition in Advantage to the Purchasing Division. Purchasing Division staff (typically Buyers) then review the requisition and supporting quotes to confirm that the quotes are valid and approve the purchase in Advantage.

For purchases of at least \$25,000 but less than \$50,000, the City requires the use of the Sealed Quotation purchase method, by which the City solicits sealed bids from vendors and awards the purchase to the lowest responsible bidder. Departments initiate the Sealed Quotation purchase process by submitting a requisition form to the Purchasing Division in Advantage detailing the desired purchase. Purchasing Division staff (typically Buyers) work with the requesting department to prepare a bid package detailing the specifications required by the department and publish the solicitation on a variety of digital platforms, including the City's website and the State of Georgia Procurement Registry. Purchasing Division staff may also send the solicitation directly to relevant vendors, including past City vendors, vendors recommended by staff in the requesting departments, or other vendors of which the staff have knowledge. Once the solicitation has closed, Purchasing Division staff open the responses and forward the quotations to the requesting department, who determines which vendors qualify as "responsible" (providing a written determination for any vendors found to not be responsible). The Purchasing Division then awards the purchase to the lowest responsible response.

For purchases of \$50,000 and greater, the City may use either the Competitive Sealed Bid or the Competitive Sealed Proposal purchase process. The Competitive Sealed Bid purchase process operates identically to the Sealed Quotation purchase process, with the modification that solicitations must also be advertised in the local newspaper.

The Competitive Sealed Proposal purchase process begins similarly to the Competitive Sealed Bid purchase process, with the requesting department submitting a requisition and the assigned Purchasing Division employee (typically a Buyer) working with the requesting department to develop a solicitation document detailing the needed good or service. For Competitive Sealed Bids, the solicitation also defines the criteria by which the bid will be evaluated, which may include cost. Solicitations prepared using the Competitive Sealed Proposal purchase process are advertised similarly to Competitive Sealed Bid solicitations.

Unlike Competitive Sealed Bid purchases, which are only evaluated for “responsibility,” and are awarded to the lowest responsible bidder, Competitive Sealed Proposal purchases are evaluated by an evaluation committee based on the criteria established in the solicitation document and awarded to the highest scoring proposer. The Purchasing Division employee assigned to a Competitive Sealed Bid purchase selects the composition for the evaluation committee. Evaluation committees must include five voting members, must include the director (or equivalent) of the requesting department (at least in an advisory capacity), and may include alternate voters in addition to the five primary voters. The assigned Purchasing Division employee develops a scoring form based on the criteria included in the solicitation document, which the committee members use to score the proposals. The evaluation committee may decide to shortlist certain proposers and conduct interviews with the shortlisted vendors; the assigned Purchasing Division employee helps to facilitate these interviews. The evaluation committee may conduct negotiations with shortlisted proposers, provided that the evaluation committee does not disclose any information about competing proposers, and vendors may modify their proposal submissions to better meet the City’s needs. Once scoring is complete, the assigned Purchasing Division employee collects the evaluation sheets and compiles them into a final score, which determines the awarded vendor.

All contract purchases and non-contract purchases of \$50,000 and greater must receive City Council approval before the award can be finalized. The assigned Purchasing Division employee prepares the City Council agenda item for the purchase and submits it to the Purchasing Manager for review and approval. The Purchasing Manager then submits the agenda items to the Finance Director for final review and approval before submission to the City Council.

The Purchasing Manager and one of the Purchasing Technicians conduct a purchasing training course for relevant administrative staff in end-user departments every other month.

Contract and Vendor Management

For purchases requiring a contract, Purchasing Division staff prepare the contract based off a boilerplate template after the purchase receives City Council approval. Contracts must be reviewed and approved by the City Attorney before being finalized. The assigned Purchasing Division staff then uploads a copy of the contract to a folder on the Department’s share drive and enters the contract into the Annual Contract Database developed by the CCG Information Technology Department (“IT”). The Annual Contract Database automatically notifies the Purchasing Division and staff in the relevant end-user department about upcoming contract renewals and expirations as well as upcoming document expirations (e.g., business licenses, certificates of insurance). Assigned Purchasing Division staff work with the relevant end-user department to collect updated documents and determine how to respond to upcoming contract renewal options and expirations.

The City does not require end-user departments to conduct periodic vendor performance evaluations or contract compliance evaluations, although the Purchasing Division does use an IT-developed tool to receive and record vendor complaints from end-user departments.

The City is still in the process of developing a Vendor Self-Service system; an early version of the system is live for the select City vendors that receive payments via electronic funds transfer (“EFT”). Currently, most vendor profile creation and maintenance is performed by Buyers and/or staff in end-user departments, who prepare vendor profile update requests as needed in Advantage and attach all relevant supporting documentation (e.g., IRS Form W-9, certificate of insurance, business license). One of the Purchasing Technicians reviews the vendor profile update requests and, if all required information and documents are included, approves the request.

Payment Processing

All payments of at least \$5,000 and all contract purchases of less than \$5,000 must be approved by the Purchasing Division prior to issuing payment. For non-GAX payments of at least \$5,000, the process begins when a Purchasing Technician receives a payment request via interoffice mail. Payment requests are prepared in Advantage by administrative staff in the department making the purchase; staff print a coversheet out from Advantage, attach the coversheet to the supporting documentation (e.g., invoice), and send the payment request to the Finance Department. The Purchasing Technician reviews the payment request to confirm that the vendor information (e.g., address), type/quantity of goods, and price provided in the payment request in Advantage agree with the invoice before approving the request in Advantage and forwarding the payment request paperwork to AP staff in the Accounting Division for payment processing.

For GAX payments of at least \$5,000 (e.g., utility bills, travel reimbursement requests), the Purchasing Technician reviews to confirm that the payment is not required to follow the formal purchasing process before approving in Advantage. For contract purchases of less than \$5,000, the Purchasing Technician reviews to confirm that the invoice number provided on the payment request matches the invoice number printed on the invoice before approving it in Advantage.

P-Card Management

The Purchasing Division administers the City’s P-Card system. The City issues two types of P-Cards (both types through Synovus bank): individual P-Cards and departmental P-Cards. The Purchasing Division issues P-Cards based on requests submitted by department heads through the City’s P-Card management software system, which was developed in-house by IT. The department head enters information about the intended P-Card holder (individual or departmental) and the desired purchasing limits for the card (within the allowed range). A Purchasing Technician reviews the request, confirms that the provided information is complete and accurate, updates the status in the P-Card system to “request pending” and submits the P-Card request to Synovus. Once Synovus issues the P-Card to the City, the Purchasing Division requires the cardholder (or assigned individual, in the case of departmental cards) to review and sign a cardholder agreement and attend P-Card training, offered as part of the purchasing training that the Purchasing Manager and Purchasing Technician provide every other month.

Cardholders are required to reconcile their P-Card purchases monthly. Staff within the Accounting Division download the City's P-Card statements each month when issued and upload the transactions into the IT-built P-Card management software system. Cardholders must complete their reconciliation by the 15th of each month; the P-Card management software system automatically notifies cardholders if they have not completed the reconciliation on time. To reconcile transactions, the cardholder must list the account to be used to fund the purchase, provide a brief justification for the purchase, and attach a scanned receipt evidencing the purchase for each purchase. The City does not have a standardized disciplinary system for addressing instances of P-Card misuse. Per interviews, the Purchasing Manager has the authority to suspend individual P-Cards to address disciplinary concerns, such as tardiness in reconciliation or use of a card for inappropriate purchases, but this authority has not been used in recent years. Staff reported that enforcement of discipline for misuse of a City-issued P-Card, including ensuring the City is reimbursed for any improper purchases, is typically delegated to the relevant cardholder's department.

Accounting

Accounts Payable

The Accounting Division's accounts payable ("AP") responsibilities are primarily performed by the two Accounts Payable Technicians ("AP Technician"). The AP process begins when Division staff receive a payment request through interoffice mail. Payment requests can take a variety of forms, including GAX payments, commodity payment request ("PRC") payments (for contracted payments), and purchase order payments (for large single-project purchases). Payment requests have already received any required prior approval from the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division prior to their receipt by the Accounting Division. PRC and purchase order payment requests have already received prior approval from the Purchasing Division before their receipt by the Accounting Division, while the AP Technicians must forward GAX payment requests over \$5,000, which also require Purchasing Division approval before payment, to the Purchasing Division before they can be processed for final payment by the AP Technician.

When an AP Technician receives a payment request ready for processing, the AP Technician begins processing the payment as part of a batch. The Finance Department performs check runs to process payments daily, with checks printed and payments issued the following business day. All payments are processed the day that the fully approved payment requests are received by the Accounts Payable Technician.

In order to process payment requests, the AP Technician reviews the information on the printed payment request to confirm that the payment has received all required approvals (including the inclusion of a receiving record for purchase order requests), that all required supporting documentation is attached to the payment request, and that the supporting documentation matches the information included on the payment request. The AP Technician then approves the request for payment in Advantage. At the end of each day, the AP Technician releases the batch of payments for printing and payment issuance.

Each morning, the CCG Information Technology (“IT”) Department prints the checks from the prior day’s check run. Most City vendors receive payment through physical checks, although some select vendors are configured to receive payments through electronic funds transfer (“EFT”). The check printout includes check stubs for payments issued through EFT. An Accounts Payable Technician retrieves the printed check run at the start of each day and scans the checks (or check stubs) along with any supporting documentation into a secured folder on the Finance Department’s sharedrive. The AP Technician then files a copy of the check and the supporting documentation into the Finance Department’s records and prepares the checks for mailing.

The two AP Technicians do not have a set process for distributing the processing of received payment requests, although they do alternate daily portions of their regular workload (*i.e.*, reviewing the check register from the prior day and scanning checks and supporting documentation).

For utilities payments, the AP Technician receives the bill and enters information from the bill into a spreadsheet template to allocate charges to the appropriate accounts. The AP Technician then uploads the completed template into Advantage and processes the payment as a GAX payment, receiving approval from the Accounting Manager before finalizing the payment. For P-Card payments, the Purchasing Division submits the bill to the Accounting Division once all allocations have been submitted and finalized, with the allocation automatically being applied in Advantage through the IT-built P-Card management system. An AP Technician then creates a PRC for the payment, which must be approved by both the Accounting Manager and Purchasing Division before payment can be issued.

Grants Management

The Grant Accountant performs most of the Accounting Division’s grants management responsibilities, although they may be supported by the Accountant I in some limited number of processes. The Accounting Division does all applications, management, and reporting for a small number of the City’s grants, including certain grants issued by the Department of Justice to support law enforcement and court operations. For most grants, the Accounting Division acts in a support role, with the primary grant management responsibilities being carried out by staff within the recipient department.

The City requires prospective grant applicants to notify the Finance Department and receive City Council approval before applying for any grants, although staff reported in interviews that some City departments do not consistently comply with all parts of this requirement. When the Grant Accountant learns that a City organization intends to apply for grant funds, they ask the applicant to complete a checklist “e-form” in the City’s intranet to record the grant’s purpose and how the grant is being monitored. The “e-form” is then signed by both the Grant Accountant and Finance Director, before the Grant Accountant uses the collected information to draft a City Council resolution to approve the grant application.

For the grants managed directly by the Accounting Division, the grants accountant works with the organizations that use the relevant grant funds to prepare annual grant requests, performs the relevant journal entries to account for grant funds, and prepares periodic drawdown requests and financial reports as required. The Finance Director serves as the approver for most grant-related items.

For grants primarily managed by other City departments, the Grant Accountant provides support as needed. Typically, the Grant Accountant's support consists of providing information and exports from Advantage to support drawdown requests and reporting, answering questions on grants accounting, reviewing drawdown requests and reporting prior to submission, and tracking compliance. The Grant Accountant uses an internally developed Excel spreadsheet to track the City's grants and compliance with reporting requirements. The City does not use any automated system to assist in grants management, such as automated reminder emails in advance of reporting deadlines or expiration dates. City departments are asked to provide the Grant Accountant copies of grant reporting for their review and approval prior to submission to the grant provider, although the introduction of online-only reporting systems that do not allow for the export of reports prior to final submission has created situations where the Grant Accountant cannot perform a final review of reporting before submission.

Accounts Receivable

The Accountant I performs the Accounting Division's accounts receivable ("AR") responsibilities. All cash receipts are formally received by staff in the Cash Management Division, while the Accounting Division is responsible for transferring records from the receiving software system used by the Cash Management Division into Advantage in order to record the receipts onto the City's general ledger. In order to transfer receipts into Advantage, the Accountant I receives a printout prepared by the Cash Management Division each day detailing the City's receipts, prepared by the IT-developed software system that the Cash Management Division uses to track receipts, and uses the printout to prepare journal entries recognizing the receipts. The Accountant I then submits the journal entries for approval and posting to the general ledger, attaching the relevant supporting documentation.

Payroll Processing

The Payroll Administrator and two Payroll Specialists (collectively, "Payroll Section") perform the Accounting Division's payroll processing duties. The City has two pay periods, including a biweekly pay period for active employees and a monthly payroll for certain retirement-related payments and death benefits.

For the biweekly payroll, pay is issued every other Friday. The Payroll Section requires departments to submit and approve time reports by the end of the Friday prior to payday, although many departments regularly do not provide the final approval of their time reports until the following Tuesday morning (*i.e.*, the Tuesday morning prior to payday). The Payroll Section prepares a preliminary payroll report at the end of the Monday prior to payday, which they use to validate payroll by reviewing the "high/low" report (*i.e.*, identifying any payments materially higher or lower than in the prior period and confirming that those adjustments are legitimate). The final payroll run is completed on the Tuesday prior to payday.

On the Wednesday prior to payday, the Payroll section again reviews the payroll reports to confirm that the payroll run is valid and then work with IT to prepare the bank file and upload the file to the bank to prepare the payroll check run, with all payments dated for payday (Friday). IT then prints paystubs and, for the very few employees not paid via automated clearing house (“ACH”) payments, paychecks. On Wednesday, the Payroll Section also submits information on benefit withholdings to the City’s benefit providers and prepares payments to those vendors. Finally, the Payroll Section prepares the payroll memo, documenting all payroll charges; the Payroll Specialists prepare the payroll memo, with the Payroll Administrator performing the final approval.

On Thursday prior to payday, the Payroll Specialists prepare journal entries in Advantage to record payroll charges, manually keying information from Advantage’s Human Resources module into Advantage’s Finance module with limited automation, before attaching supporting documentation and submitting the journal entry for further approval and posting to the general ledger.

Throughout the pay period, Payroll Specialists are processing a variety of payroll adjustments and updates, including salary updates, new hires and resignations/terminations/retirements, wage garnishments, vacation payouts, and time adjustments. Any documents submitted prior to the end of the Tuesday prior to payday are included within a given pay period. For City-submitted pay adjustments (e.g., time adjustments, vacation payouts), the adjustment is submitted on a physical form through interoffice mail or by email and must include approval from the relevant department head. The Payroll Specialist then notifies the employee of the update and enters the update into Advantage’s Human Resources module for inclusion within the next available pay period.

For wage garnishments, Payroll Specialists are notified when the Finance Department receives a garnishment notice from the relevant court, either via email or mail. The Payroll Specialist enters the garnishment into Advantage’s Human Resources module once it is received; the Payroll Section relies on the court to notify the relevant employee of the garnishment. The Accounting Division does not have a system to track garnishments, meaning that the Payroll Section has no process for tracking the expiration of garnishments and instead typically only removes garnishments upon a notification from a court that the garnishment has been terminated. Per interviews, the Payroll Section has occasionally performed haphazard reviews of garnishments in the past and, while most garnishments were still valid at the time of review, has identified a small number of garnishments still in effect that likely had expired.

Financial Reporting

Staff within the Accounting Division assist in the annual financial audit process and prepare a variety of regular and one-off financial reports throughout the fiscal year. The financial reports prepared by the Accounting Division include a number of reports performed as part of the Division’s AP, Grants Management, AR, and Payroll Processing functions. Many of the Accounting Division’s reports are prepared as part of the year-end close and annual financial audit processes, such as reports tracking capital assets, depreciation, construction-in-progress, and retainage. The Accounting Manager typically oversees the preparation of the Accounting Division’s year-end/audit-related financial reports, using prior reports as templates.

Revenue

Business License Processing

The Revenue Division's Tax & Licensing Clerks receive and process business license applications and renewals, although the Revenue Manager, Tax & Licensing Supervisor, and Revenue Auditors can support business license operations when needed. The Tax & Licensing Clerks work at customer service windows in the Revenue Office and receive walk-in applicants at the windows. When walk-in applicants arrive, the Tax & Licensing Clerk receives the application, verifies that the application is complete, and calculates the proper license charge based on the reported information. The Tax & Licensing Clerk then enters the information from the application into Enterprise Permitting and Licensing ("EPL")²⁸, which calculates the proper charge based on the provided information and validates the Tax & Licensing Clerk's calculation. For applications for which late fees are to be applied, however, the formula used by EPL to calculate the late charge at the time of M&J's fieldwork was not correct and the Tax & Licensing Clerk had to override the automatically calculated value and manually insert the appropriate late fee amount. The late fee formula has reportedly been corrected in the time since M&J's fieldwork. The Tax & Licensing Clerk then receives payment, either through cash, personal check, cashier's check, money order, or credit card (using a credit card reader that interfaces with EPL), records the payment in EPL, and provides the applicant with a receipt.

For certain types of applications, including pawn shops and jewelry stores, applicants are required to receive background checks for all employees. Applicants provide the Tax & Licensing Clerks with a form containing a section completed by each employee. The Tax & Licensing Clerk manually adds a \$20 fee per background check to the payment in EPL. After receiving the payment, the Tax & Licensing Clerk provides the background check form to either a Revenue Auditor or the Tax & Licensing Supervisor, who sends the information to the Police Department for a background check. The Police Department provides the background check results to the Revenue Auditor or Tax & Licensing Supervisor who submitted the initial request, who reaches back out to the original applicant to notify them about any negative background check results.

Each Tax & Licensing Clerk maintains a change drawer for receiving cash payments. The Tax & Licensing Clerks balance their cash drawer at the start and close of each shift, ensuring that the drawer starts and ends the day with a balance of \$300. The Revenue Manager, Tax & Licensing Supervisor, and/or Revenue Auditors verify the count of each Tax & Licensing Clerk's cash drawer and deposits at the end of each day.

²⁸ The EPL system was previously named EnerGov and is frequently still referred to as such in documentation and conversation.

The Revenue Division prepares business license renewal notices at the start of each calendar year, working with the City's print shop to print pre-filled renewal forms for all active business license holders and the Tax & Licensing Clerks (and other Revenue Division staff, as available) to mail all renewal notices by the end of January. Businesses can submit renewals by mail or in person, but all renewals must be received by the end of March. The Revenue Division aims to finish processing all mail-in business license renewals by the end of May, although it sometimes takes through June to finish the processing. The Revenue Division does not offer an online business license application or renewal option or the option for online payment of business license renewal fees.

As part of the business licensure process, the Revenue Division also accepts payments for various excise taxes imposed by the City, such as taxes on hotel and motel stays and rental cars. Excise tax reporting is available online. The process for collecting in-person excise tax payments is largely similar to the process for collecting business license application fees.

Alcohol License Processing

The Revenue Division's Revenue Auditors receive and process alcohol license applications and renewals, although the Revenue Manager and Tax & Licensing Supervisor also support alcohol license operations when needed. Businesses selling alcohol for on-premises or off-premises consumption must have both a State alcohol license and a City alcohol license. Applicants prepare and submit their alcohol license applications for State licenses through the Georgia Department of Revenue's State-wide Alcohol Licensing Portal ("ALP"), and City applications for alcohol licenses are received in person. Revenue Auditors arrange meetings with businesses that intend to apply to alcohol licenses before those businesses submit their applications in order to discuss the licensing process and compliance requirements for alcohol licensing. Applicants must complete all stages of the application process, including sign erection and completion of a favorable survey, before paying their application fees and submitting their application. The Revenue Division does not accept incomplete applications. The Department issues laptops to Revenue Auditors, allowing them to operate from the field, but Revenue Auditors are required to use their personal vehicles for field work and submit reimbursement requests for miles driven on City business.

Revenue Auditors work with the Police Department to conduct background checks on covered individuals related to the application, in a similar manner to the background checks performed as part of pawn shop and jeweler business licensing. Revenue Auditors collect alcohol license fees through EPL in a similar manner to business license application payments. Revenue Auditors send out alcohol license renewal notices in September and process alcohol license renewal applications through the end of the calendar year. Alcohol and business license renewals are distinct processes and businesses must submit separate renewal applications for business license renewals and alcohol license renewals.

Revenue Auditors do not regularly perform auditing of business licenses, either in-office audits to verify that revenue information included in business license applications are valid or field audits to verify that businesses are not operating without the presence of a valid business license. Staff within the Inspections & Code Department do conduct field audits to verify compliance with business licensing requirements. In discussions with Finance Department leadership, it was explained that Revenue Auditors are generally expected to perform field audits once they gain sufficient experience in their position, although no Revenue Auditors currently possess that experience.

Collections Management/AR

The Revenue Division's Collections Technicians work out of a separate office within the City Services Center to perform their collections function. The Collections Technicians perform collections services for the Revenue Division as well as any other City departments which interact directly with individuals and business with outstanding payments, such as court-imposed payments, bounced checks, or unpaid service charges, other than property tax assessments, which are handled by the Tax Collector's office. The Collections Technicians collect payments on outstanding charges on behalf of the department that originally imposed the charge and remit the payment to the original department. Collections Department staff are typically notified of outstanding charges via emails from the various City departments with which they work.

For a period of time, the Collections Technicians had not been taking steps to escalate cases for individuals with long-term outstanding charges by filing warrants in the court to compel payment. The Collections Technicians have recently resumed working with the City courts to file warrants for certain individuals with long-term outstanding obligations.

Cash Management

Cash and Investment Management

The Investment Officer manages the City's cash holdings and investment portfolio, other than the City's pension funds, which are managed by a third-party investment manager overseen by the Pension Board. The Investment Officer works with First Horizon Financial ("FHN"), the City's investment broker, to manage the City's invested assets in accordance with the City's investment policy, making transactions as needed to maintain a responsible level of liquid assets and ensuring that the City maintains a safe balance of assets across a variety of allowable investment classes. The Investment Officer prepares a monthly report detailing the City's investments and the performance of the City's portfolio, which they deliver to the Finance Director, the Deputy City Manager over the Finance Department, and the City Manager. FHN serves the City solely as a broker and not in an advisory capacity. The City does not employ the services of an investment advisor or other informational resources and tasks the Investment Officer with all management of the City's financial assets.

Accounts Receivable

The Investment Officer and Accounting Technician manage the Cash Management Division's portion of the AR process, in coordination with the Accounting Division's AR function. Staff in a variety of City departments receive cash payments for services and deposit those payments in a specified City bank account. When these staff make deposits into the City's deposit account, they use an IT-developed tool to report these "miscellaneous receipts" to the Cash Management Division, attaching any relevant backup documentation (e.g., deposit slip) and noting the proper account to which the revenues are to be received. The Investment Officer and Accounting Technician review the receipts reported through the IT-developed "miscellaneous receipts" tool to verify that the reported receipts are allocated to the appropriate general ledger accounts and agree with the relevant bank records. At the end of each day, the Investment Officer prepares a printout of the "miscellaneous receipts" received in the IT-developed software tool during the day and provides the printout to staff in the Accounting Division for further recording.

While the Finance Department has created a City-wide cash handling policy, the Cash Management Division does not play a role in overseeing the handling of cash received by various City departments prior to its deposit in the bank and reporting through the IT-developed "miscellaneous receipts" tool.

Customer Service

Other than the Revenue Division, the Department largely serves as an internal service department, with its customers being other City departments. The Department generally has productive relationships with its internal service customers and Department staff reported that they are generally able to work well with staff from other Departments through in-person interactions, email, and phone calls. The Department makes extensive use of interoffice mail to receive and send hard copies of documentation, even though many of the documents that the Department receives include coversheets that are created in Advantage before being printed out.

The Financial Planning/Budget Management Division conducts a City-wide budget kickoff meeting at the start of each year's budgeting process to introduce leadership and budget-related personnel in the City's various departments to each year's budgeting process. The annual budget kickoff meeting does provide individuals throughout the City with the opportunity to ask questions that they may have about the City's budgeting process, but does not allow for detailed discussion about particular issues that individual City departments may be facing with their own financial planning, such as how to address specific projects or challenges that only impact a single department's budgeting. The Financial Planning/Budget Management Division currently does not regularly conduct any "one-on-one" department-level budget discussions until after Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff have evaluated the initial budget requests developed by the departments following the annual kickoff meeting. In interviews, Department leadership indicated that it is a Departmental goal to have Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff conduct these "one-on-one" department-level budget discussions on a more regular basis, although staff turnover and inexperience have prevented them from achieving this goal in recent years.

The Revenue Division works extensively with members of the public from its office within the City Services Center. Citizens and business owners regularly enter the Revenue Division's office to obtain new business/alcohol licenses, renew their business/alcohol license, and pay other amounts owed to the City that have been sent to collections. The Revenue Division has received publicity and criticism in recent years for persistent backlogs in business license and alcohol license renewals, which resulted in the City commissioning Troutman Pepper to conduct an independent review of the Revenue Division's operations. Troutman Pepper's presentation of its findings, presented in January 2024, concluded that the Revenue Division's backlog was due to a number of factors, including staffing shortages, weaknesses in training, and inefficient processes. A new Revenue Manager was hired midway through calendar year 2025 and is still in the process of evaluating the Revenue Division's current state, including staffing and processes, and developing ways to improve its operations going forward. The recently created Revenue Analyst position is intended to benefit operations both by assuming various reporting and compliance duties currently performed by customer-serving staff, allowing them to dedicate more of their time to serving the public, and by allowing for more in-depth evaluation of Revenue Division performance in order to support strategic operations.

Use of Technology

CGI Advantage

The Department uses CGI Advantage ("Advantage") to perform most of its financial management and administrative duties, including Advantage's Finance, Human Resources, and Budgeting modules. In practice, the Department performs parallel processing in both Advantage and on paper for a number of financial processes, such as payment processing. Additionally, the Department often uses a mix of both paper approvals (*i.e.*, stamps and/or signatures) and digital approvals for these processes, including some approvals that are recorded in both media and other approvals that are only recorded in one medium or the other. The Department extensively uses the City's interoffice mail system to both receive and distribute physical paperwork used in its financial processes.

In interviews, Department staff reported that the various Advantage modules used in the Department's processes, as currently configured, do not possess the capability to automatically export/import data from one module to another. As a result, staff are generally required to use manual exports/imports of data to transfer records between systems, with staff occasionally being required to manually key data that may not transfer properly in the manual import/export process.

Internally Developed Software and Tools

The Department makes use of IT-developed software systems for certain processes, including maintenance of annual contracts, receiving and responding to contract performance complaints, and managing the P-Card process. Staff reported that the City's IT-developed software systems generally function well.

For certain functions, such as grants management, budget development, and certain reporting, the Department relies on internally developed tools developed as Excel workbooks. These internally developed Excel workbooks are not consistently documented and do not consistently contain controls, such as the use of protected cells, to decrease the risk of employees inadvertently breaking formulas.

Procurement

The Department does not currently have a unified digital procurement system, although staff reported in interviews that the Department has received funding approval to purchase and implement a digital procurement management solution. The Department reportedly plans on implementing this system within the near future.

Enterprise Permitting and Licensing

The Revenue Division primarily operates using Tyler Technology's Enterprise Permitting and Licensing ("EPL") software suite to perform its licensing operations; the Revenue Division's Collections Technicians perform their collections duties using a mix of EPL and Advantage. Staff reported in interviews that EPL generally functions well. The current Revenue Manager has started a practice of regularly meeting with IT staff to explore options to improve the Revenue Division's use of technology, including improving the Revenue Division page on the City's website to provide more useful and up-to-date information to taxpayers, improving the integration between EPL and other City software systems, and modifying the Revenue Division's implementation of EPL to streamline and/or automate processes. The Revenue Division currently offers online excise tax services, but does not offer online services for some other City taxes and fees. The Revenue Division's lack of online services covers both initial applications and renewals of City business and alcohol licenses.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

M&J evaluated the Department's written documentation at the Division level. In addition to the Department's official documentation, staff in a variety of positions throughout the Department stated in interviews that they maintain their own personal reference materials, including notes that they have created, "unofficial" references handed down by prior staff, or handouts retained from past trainings. Staff may make their personal reference materials available to other staff, but there are not processes in place to review these personal reference materials for accuracy or to ensure that they reflect the most current version of the Department's operations.

Financial Planning/Budget Management

The Department maintains guiding documents related to the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division's positions. One of the primary guiding documents developed for the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division is a training guide for the Financial and Budget Analyst positions. The Financial and Budget Analyst training guide details how staff are to process the various payment requests which pass through the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division, including travel documents, purchasing documents, and petty cash requests. The Financial and Budget Analyst training guide also contains some instructions related to specific aspects of the budget development and administration processes, including how to add lines to budgets and pull certain budget reports, but contains highly limited information on the overall budgeting process and does not detail how these specific procedures tie into the larger processes. The Financial and Budget Analyst training guide is undated.

The Department also maintains a “Budget Policy” at the Finance Department level that provides a high-level overview of the budget development process. The Finance Department’s “Budget Policy” is a two-page document that provides a general overview of the various stages of the budget development process, laying out the rough timeline for the process and the general roles and responsibilities for the various actors in the budget development process. The “Budget Policy” does not contain any templates or detail on how the budget process is to be documented or provide any details on the administration and management of budgets once they are adopted by the City Council. The “Budget Policy” is dated to January 1, 2012.

The Assistant Finance Director and Financial and Budget Analysts prepare a Budget Manual and Budget Manual Instructions document at the start of each year’s budgeting process to guide budget-related staff in each City department through that year’s budgeting process. The annual Budget Manual and Budget Manual Instructions document are generally based on the prior year’s Budget Manual and Budget Manual Instructions document, incorporating any relevant updates since that prior year. The Budget Manual Instructions document includes instructions for completing all required forms included in the Budget Manual, a checklist of all of the steps in preparing each department’s initial budget submission, and reference materials for use while completing the Budget Manual (e.g., updated standardized costs for mileage or vehicle purchases). The Budget Manual and Budget Manual Instructions document contain limited information regarding the further processing of submitted Budget Manuals by Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff.

Purchasing

The Purchasing Division maintains thorough, up-to-date documents detailing many of their key processes and procedures. One of the Purchasing Division’s primary guiding documents is its extensive Purchasing Training Manual, which the Division primarily uses to train purchasing-related staff in other City departments on how to conduct purchasing within Advantage. The Purchasing Training Manual is a thorough document that walks the reader through the various types of purchases authorized by the City and provides details on how to complete required forms and submissions. While the Purchasing Training Manual is primarily designed for staff in end-user departments, the document also does a good job detailing the Purchasing Division’s general role in the City’s procurement process. The Purchasing Division regularly updates the Purchasing Training Manual to adjust for software updates or other changes to the procurement process, with the most recent version reviewed by M&J showing a revision date of 09/18/2025. The framework of the City’s purchasing process, as described in the Purchasing Training Manual, is established by the City’s Purchasing Ordinance, which was last updated by the City Council in November of 2020. The Purchasing Division also maintains a library of forms, templates, and boilerplate documents for use in processing requisitions and preparing solicitations.

Accounting

The Accounting Division maintains several position-specific procedure manuals, including procedure manuals for the Accounting Manager, Senior Accountant, and Grant Accountant positions. The Accounting Division's position-specific procedure manuals are not generally dated although they frequently include a selection of example or reference materials that are dated. The example/reference materials included in the Accounting Division's position-specific procedure manuals suggest that the documents cover a wide range of ages and are not consistently updated. For example, the Accounting Manager's procedure manual primarily references materials dated to 2023 or 2024, while the Senior Accountant's procedure manual primarily references materials dated to 2012 or 2013. In interviews, Accounting Division staff stated that the position-based procedure manuals are updated "as needed" and that there is not an established process for how to determine when manuals need to be updated or how updates are conducted.

Additionally, the Accounting Division's position-specific procedure manuals generally are not maintained in a "native" digital file and they are instead largely maintained as paper-first documents, so any revisions must be completed by modifying the paper documents, including potentially recreating procedure guides or examples where the digital originals cannot be located and modified.

The Department also maintains a selection of policies at the Finance Department level that relate to Accounting Division functions, including a "general accounting policy" (which describes the City's system of fund accounting, the City's basis of accounting, "milestones" in the accounting process [e.g., monthly and annual closes], and AP and payroll processing timelines and procedures) and a fixed/capital assets policy (which details how the City accounts for fixed assets, including capitalization method and thresholds, depreciation schedules, and how assets are to be disposed).

Revenue

The Revenue Division maintains a general office policy that details general Division-wide policies, such as communications expectations, office etiquette, performance evaluations, and proper use and care of shared resources and information (e.g., office supplies, sharedrive). The Revenue Division's general office policy was originally created in 2011 and last updated in 2024.

The Revenue Division also has a structured training policy, detailing the stages of training for new hires to the Division, including general City-wide onboarding and orientation, specified City-wide training courses offered through NEOGOV (a human resources software suite used by the City) that the Division requires staff to complete, and job-specific training. The job-specific training includes periods for the assigned trainer to walk the trainee through the task, periods for the trainee to observe the trainer as they complete the task, and periods for the trainee to complete the task under the trainer's supervision.

The Revenue Division is in the process of creating policy and procedure documents for the Division's processes and has finished creating policy and procedure documents for a number of processes, including handling return mail, logging and assigning work received in the mail, processing business license applications, managing business license accounts, issuing receipts and cashiering, and processing refund requests, although the Division has not yet completed policy and procedure documents for all Division processes. While the Division has used a variety of formats to record its policy and procedure documents, the formats used by the Division generally do include locations to record a "last updated" date and the completed documents are generally relatively current, dated within the last two years.

The Division also maintains retains and uses materials provided by Tyler Technologies, makers of the EPL software suite, on how to use EPL to carry out Revenue Division functions.

Cash Management

The Cash Management Division has limited written documentation governing its functions. The City maintains an investment policy, dated to 2011, which details the governing provisions (including both statutory requirements and GFOA recommended practices) for the City's investments as well as a high-level description of the City's investment objectives, safekeeping policies, suitable investment types and investment parameters, collateralization requirements, and internal reporting requirements. The investment policy document states that the policy is to be reviewed on an annual basis, with any changes approved by both the City Manager and Finance Director, although the policy does not contain any evidence showing that this annual review has regularly taken place.

The Finance Department also maintains a cash handling policy to govern cash management across all City organizations that receive payments on the government's behalf. The Finance Department's cash handling policy details how City organs are to receive and record cash payments, store cash payments prior to deposit or delivery to the Cash Management Division for deposit, and deposit cash or deliver cash to the Cash Management Division for deposit. Additionally, the cash handling policy details certain cash handling requirements of the Cash Management Division, including how certain receipts are to be recorded and reconciled. The cash handling policy was created in 2012 and last updated in 2023. Per interviews with Finance Department staff, the Finance Department has little authority in practice to enforce the cash handling requirements set out in the cash handling policy within other City departments.

Strategic Priorities

M&J identified two documents detailing the Department's current strategic priorities: the Finance Department's 2025 Strategic Action Plan Summary and the Department's submission for the FY25 annual report.

2025 Finance Department Strategic Action Plan

The Department developed a Strategic Action Plan for 2025 which outlines three key strategic goals. Each of the three strategic goals is accompanied by additional information, including action plans and measures of success.

The following table details the Department’s strategic goals reported in the 2025 Strategic Action Plan, along with the accompanying action plans and measures of success:

Table 15: 2025 Strategic Action Plan Goals

Strategic Goal	Action Plans	Measures of Success
1) To improve and maintain accountability, financial reporting, innovations, and professionalism	• Improve public access to electronic payments and reporting • Annual completion of employee performance evaluations • Key statistical and economic measurements posted regularly	• Increase in electronic payment processing • Gain service efficiencies with automation and self-service options • To obtain positive feedback from citizens through various mediums
2) Maintain Good Financial Condition	• Meet all deadlines for reporting • Investigate feasibility of additional revenue • Investigate removing challenges • Increase fees for services	• Number of days in unreserved in the fund balance [sic] • Bond Ratings • GFOA Excellence in Financial Reporting Award • Investment yield compared to market benchmark • GFOA Distinguished Budget Award
3) Consistency of Finance professionals and document processing within the Columbus Consolidated Government	• Set minimum and enforceable requirements • Participate in selection process and evaluation process • Establish minimum professional requirements	• Decrease in document processing errors and/or problems • Reduction of one-on-one troubleshooting • Reduction in audit findings

While the Department’s long-term vision is valuable, the 2025 Strategic Action Plan requires better documentation and organization to serve as an effective guide for the Department’s implementation of its long-term strategy. Strategic goals #1 and #3 show overlap, with both addressing similar elements related to both staff quality and the execution of financial processes. Additionally, all three strategic goals stated in the 2025 Strategic Action Plan are very high-level goals, increasing the importance of the accompanying information (e.g., action plans and measures of success) for determining how to actually carry out the goals and measure success in accomplishing them. Despite the wide variations in operational profiles across the Department’s various Divisions, the 2025 Strategic Action Plan does not contemplate different goals for different Divisions, instead treating all three goals as equally applicable across all parts of the Department.

The action plans provided with the strategic goals do not serve as effective guides to reaching the strategic goals. For strategic goal #1, the provided “action plans” contain a mix of materials related to measuring staff quality and modifications to specific processes, with no unifying theme or clear explanation of how these action plans would accomplish the stated goal. The modifications to Departmental operations stated in the action plans for strategic goal #1 may be useful, but each item is itself a significant undertaking and additional detail is necessary to adequately describe how these items would figure into the Department’s long-term operations.

The action plans for strategic goals #2 and #3 are similarly non-specific. For example, the action items for strategic goal #2 raise a number of questions: “meet all deadlines for reporting” (which deadlines?), “investigate the feasibility of additional revenue” (from which sources?), “investigate removing challenges” (which challenges?), and “increase fees for services” (which fees would be increased, and by how much?). Based on context, the action plans provided for strategic goal #3 all appear to relate to employee hiring, although this connection is never stated outright, leaving the goals unclear as written.

The adequacy of the measures of success given in the 2025 Strategic Action Plan is discussed in the “Performance Metrics/Outputs” subsection within the Finance Department section of this report.

Finance Department FY25 Annual Report Submission

The Department additionally prepared a submission for compilation into the City’s FY25 annual report. This submission details goals, objectives, and performance indicators for each of the Department’s Divisions. Many of the Goals included within the Department’s FY25 annual report submission are descriptors of the Department’s duties and its current state, not aspirational visions of improvements to Departmental operations that Department leadership hopes to realize in the coming years (e.g., goals to prepare financial statements and annual reports in a compliant and timely manner). Additionally, there are a number of instances where one or more of the Objectives accompanying a goal do not effectively serve as steps towards reaching the goal, instead either restating the goal with minor additional detail included or explaining the benefit that reaching the goal is hoped to bring.

The adequacy of the Performance Indicators given in the Department’s FY25 annual report submission is discussed in the “Performance Metrics/Outputs” subsection within the Finance Department section of this report.

Evaluation of Strategic Priorities

Goals, Objectives, and Performance Indicators are frequently the three primary components of effective planning documents. Goals are generally high-level targets that encompass the organization’s major strategic priorities. Each Goal is typically accompanied by one or more Objectives, which are “waypoints” along the path towards achieving the relevant goal. Objectives should be designed so that progress towards achieving the objective can be readily evaluated. Each Objective is accompanied by one or more Performance Indicators, which are often used in evaluating progress towards achieving their related objective. Good Performance Indicators are able to be collected with minimal disruption to organizational operations and are relevant to the objective in question. When developing Goals, Objectives, and Performance Indicators, organizations should set an aspirational target that is still reasonably achievable within the specified time period, reducing the risk of losing employee buy-in due to setting either unrealistic expectations or showing a lack of ambition.

In its interviews with Departmental staff and reviews of relevant records, M&J observed that the Department largely does not operate in a cohesive, strategic manner. Instead, most Departmental operations can be described as “reactive,” characterized by an emphasis on reacting to challenges as they occur. Strategic operations generally focus on identifying and addressing problems before they arise, when possible, and relying on inherent redundancies and advanced preparation to more easily and calmly respond to unexpected challenges. For departments operating in a strategic manner, the question posed by events that disrupt operations is typically “how can we continue to maximize efficiency despite this challenge?” rather than “how can we continue to operate despite this challenge?”.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

Both of the documents detailing the Department’s strategic priorities, discussed in the prior subsection, reference specific performance metrics. Department leadership also periodically reference a variety of performance metrics exported from the Department’s various software platforms, such as the number of checks processed, number of Form 1099s handled, number of license applications processed, number of delinquent accounts, etc. but the Department does not use a standardized method to evaluate the exported performance data.

2025 Finance Department Strategic Action Plan

The Department’s 2025 Strategic Action Plan lists several measures of success attached to each of the plan’s three strategic goals, as shown in the 2025 Finance Department Strategic Action Plan table earlier in this report. Generally, the measures of success presented do not serve as effective tools to evaluate the Department’s progress towards reaching the targets established in the 2025 Strategic Action Plan. Some of the measures of success do not directly address measurable phenomena, such as the measure of success “gain service efficiencies with automation and self-service options.” Many of the measures of success do discuss measurable phenomena, but do not provide sufficient detail to specify how the measurements are to be made. For instance, the measures “increase in electronic payment processing” and “decrease in document processing errors and/or problems” do not specify how levels of electronic payment processing and levels of processing errors/problems are to be measured. A number of the listed measures of success also reference improvements against an existing standard without specifying what standard the improvements are to be measured against or what constitutes an acceptable improvement. As an example, the measure of success “reduction of one-on-one troubleshooting” does not specify what the desired reduction is measured against or whether the desired reduction is a reduction in the absolute number of one-on-one troubleshooting incidents or a reduction in the share of all items processed requiring one-on-one troubleshooting.

Additionally, some specific measures of success either cannot be achieved or do not serve their intended goals due to the details of the measure. The “reduction in audit findings” measure proposed for strategic goal #3 cannot be achieved, due to the fact that the FY24 audit report showed zero findings; the Department cannot work to receive fewer than zero audit findings in future periods. The 2025 Strategic Action Plan lists a single measure of success for evaluating the management of the City’s financial reserves “investment yield compared to market benchmark;” investment performance should not be evaluated solely on returns, as outcome-based performance measurement can incentivize overly risky investing. Instead, it is best practice to evaluate the management of a government’s financial reserves on several factors, balancing raw returns against maintaining an acceptable risk profile.

The listed measures of success do include several usable measures, such as the two related to receiving the GFOA’s Excellence in Financial Reporting and Distinguished Budget Presentation awards (both related to strategic goal #2). While these measures are clearly defined and easily measurable, they are only of limited relevance to their strategic goal, as both awards are related to reporting and presentation, not the actual management of the City’s financial position.

Finance Department FY25 Annual Report Submission

The Performance Indicators included in the Department’s FY25 Annual Report submission are generally somewhat more detailed than the measures of success included within the Strategic Action Plan but occasionally display similar deficiencies. A number of the listed Performance Indicators are worded in an ambiguous manner, making it difficult for readers to clearly understand what the measure is reflecting. For example, the measure “increased rates of return” shows results as percentages (FY24 Actual: 3%, FY25 Actual: 2%, FY26 Projected: 5%) without specifying what they are percentages of. Similarly, it is unclear what is reflected by the percentages reported for the Performance Indicator “reduce the licensing delinquency report.”

Several of the listed Goals and Objectives only reference performance indicators that are not immediately relevant to evaluating performance towards the applicable Goals and Objectives, even if the indicators may refer to related concepts. For example, the goal and objective related to providing proper oversight of AP practices and processing payments in a timely manner only utilizes the Performance Indicator “number of checks processed,” which does not convey any information about the oversight of the AP process that led to the check being created or whether the payment request was processed on the desired timeline. Likewise, the goal and objective related to encouraging the use of P-Cards to reduce the need to manually process payments under \$5,000 references the “number of cardholders” Performance Indicator, despite the fact that the number of cardholders does not speak to how widespread use of P-Cards is or how many P-Card-eligible payments are still being processed manually.

The Department’s FY25 Annual Report submission does report not include any performance targets, benchmarks, or long-term trends against which the Department’s current year performance and coming year performance projections are to be evaluated, instead only providing information on actual performance from the current year and immediately prior year. As a result, all performance data provided are shown with minimal context, without the ability for the reader to easily understand what constitutes a “good” result.

Evaluation of Performance Metrics/Outputs

The performance metrics/outputs documented in the Department's various strategic documents are of limited use for evaluating the Department's performance and/or progress towards reaching its stated goals and objectives. Based on reviews of the Department's existing process documentation and interviews with Departmental staff, Department management and leadership make limited use of performance metrics/outputs (including the measures referenced in the Department's strategic documents and other performance data that are available within the Department's technology systems) when evaluating employee performance and managing Department operations.

In interviews, some Departmental staff expressed that the Department has taken steps to make greater use of available performance metrics and outputs in Departmental management in the near future. In particular, the recent creation of the Purchasing Analyst and Revenue Analyst positions was done with the intent that the new positions will enable the Department to operate in a more data-driven manner. At the time of M&J's fieldwork, neither of the newly-created positions had been filled.

Additionally, Departmental staff indicated in interviews that it intended to begin conducting annual employee performance reviews, with the first reviews scheduled to be conducted shortly after the completion of M&J's fieldwork. This new endeavor to evaluate employee performance aligns with the first strategic goal in the Department's 2025 Strategic Action Plan, including the action plan item "annual completion of employee performance evaluations." In interviews, neither Department management (who would be tasked with performing the performance reviews) nor staff were clear on what criteria would be used to evaluate performance in these annual performance reviews. Similarly, neither management nor staff indicated any knowledge of how performance review results would impact employee management and progression (e.g., if bonuses or raises would be tied to positive results, if poorly evaluated employees would be placed on performance improvement plans), if at all.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

The Department's culture is generally positive, with staff dedicated to performing their assigned tasks and open channels of communication within and across most of the Finance Department's various Divisions. Due to the fact that the Revenue Division operates out of the City Services Center, not the Finance Department's main offices in City Hall, the Revenue Division does not regularly interface with the other Divisions. The Finance Director does visit the Revenue Division's offices in the City Services Center on a regular basis to review Revenue Division operations and maintain communications with Revenue Division leadership. The Department has plans for the Revenue Division to move into City Hall at some point in the future, but the timeline of this move has not yet been finalized. While the move will place the Revenue Division within the same building as the rest of the Finance Department, the Revenue Division's office space must include significant customer-serving areas and therefore will still be a separate office space from the main Finance department office.

In interviews, Revenue Division staff stated that the Revenue Division's morale and culture was generally poor over at least the past few years, but has improved significantly in recent months, following the hiring of the current Revenue Manager. Staff reported that the Revenue Manager has improved the Revenue Division's culture by communicating more clearly and more thoroughly with all staff, setting clear expectations for employee performance, and emphasizing filling vacant positions to better balance the Division's workload.

In interviews, Finance Department staff reported that, despite the generally positive culture within the Department, relationships with other City departments are occasionally strained; staff reported that negative news reporting and the associated poor public perception of the Finance Department are largely responsible for these difficulties in working with other City departments. In particular, staff stated that individuals in other City departments may view Finance Department staff as being less qualified or worse at their jobs, without an understanding of the challenges that Finance Department staff may face in carrying out their assigned tasks.

The Finance Department holds periodic meetings of Division management, often weekly, and Division leaders are expected to communicate items discussed in these meetings to the staff that they manage as appropriate. The Revenue Division does conduct weekly "all hands" meetings to provide relevant updates and/or conduct minor training. Other Finance Department communications are generally conducted as needed through a combination of email, phone/video calls, and in-person meetings. Finance Department managers, up to and including the Finance Director, have an "open door" policy and staff are generally comfortable approaching their managers directly with any questions, comments, or concerns that they may have.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: The Assistant Finance Director currently serves as both the supervisor of the managers (or equivalent) of four of the Finance Department's divisions (Purchasing, Accounting, Revenue, and Cash Management) and serves directly as the de facto manager of the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division, due to the fact that the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division does not contain a manager-level position. As a result, the Assistant Finance Director reportedly spends the plurality of their time functioning as a manager of individual staff, working to support the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division, instead of supporting the Finance Director's leadership of the whole of the Finance Department. This "split-level" management structure limits the Assistant Finance Director's ability to operate strategically on two levels, with their Division-level management responsibilities limiting their ability to support strategic efforts at a Departmental level and their Department-level management responsibilities limiting their ability to support the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division's efforts to produce more strategic financial and budgetary reporting.

Recommendation 1: The Finance Department should explore options for reorganizing the management of the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division so that the Assistant Finance Director is no longer required to split their time serving as both a Department-wide supervisor and a manager of an individual Division. This reorganization may involve creating a Financial Planning/Budget Management Manager position (or a similar role) to manage the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division's staff, who reports to the Assistant Finance Director. This Financial Planning/Budget Management Manager (or similar) would assume the responsibilities currently held by the Assistant Finance Director related to the administration of the annual budget development process and lead the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division's efforts to begin performing more strategic financial and budgetary analyses. The Assistant Finance Director's role, as it relates to the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division, would instead be limited to overseeing the Division's general operations, in a similar manner to how they oversee operations in the other four divisions, supporting the Finance Director in their role in the annual budgeting process, and using reports produced by the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division to support data-based management of Departmental operations.

Observation 2A: In M&J's fieldwork, M&J observed instances where Finance Department staff retained prior duties and responsibilities as they moved from position to position within the Department, including retaining responsibilities as they moved across divisions. Should these additional duties be temporary assignments with a formal transition plan, then there is no issue. If these assignments associated with former roles and titles do not correspond with the actual titles held by individuals, then there would be a disconnect between titles and roles and responsibilities based on job descriptions.

Observation 2B: The Department performs a number of time-sensitive processes that are critical to the City's overall functioning, including procurement, payroll processing, accounts payable ("AP") and accounts receivable ("AR") administration, and cash management, but the Department does not consistently perform thorough cross-training of many of those responsibilities to train Departmental staff on how to perform other duties in the event that the employee that normally performs a critical function is unavailable to work in a specific instance. In some instances, segregation of duty requirements also limit the availability of staff who can be cross-trained to serve in "backup" roles. As a result, the Department must operate in a reactive manner when critical staff depart or are unavailable, typically relying on either asking former occupants of positions to continue performing their former job duties or reassigning staff and asking them to learn how to perform those critical duties on restricted timelines in order to ensure that the Department continues meeting its operational requirements.

Recommendation 2: The Department should conduct a thorough evaluation of the alignment between its organizational structure and the permanent actual assignment of duties and responsibilities to departmental staff and use the results of this evaluation to better align job duties and position titles. The Department should additionally implement formal cross training succession planning, and transition planning processes to help ensure that relevant staff are qualified to back up critical Departmental processes and procedures and that temporary transitions do not result in long-term shifts in job duties away from those described in job descriptions. Going forward, the Department should manage vacancies and unavailability in a way to maximize alignment between job title and responsibilities, aiming for duties and responsibilities to follow position titles, not individuals. If there are instances where the Department must rely on individuals backing up duties outside of their position's job description, the Department should clearly establish that this instance of operating outside of position is a temporary circumstance and make every reasonable effort to realign duties and titles at the next practical opportunity.

Observation 3: When compared to other comparable municipal financial agencies, the Finance Department's structure is significantly "leaner" than average, meaning that it operates with fewer staff than expected based on the City's general characteristics, including population and overall revenues. For example, when evaluated alongside five other comparable governments in the region, the City's Finance Department operates with fewer than average full-time employees per 10,000 residents (2.03 vs an average of 3.05) and fewer than average full-time employees per \$10 Million in general revenues (1.12 vs an average of 1.79). As a result, the Finance Department's staff face greater demands than similar staff in other comparable governments in order to achieve the same level of performance. The Finance Department generally has not implemented automated electronic processes or other labor saving technologies that could mitigate this relatively "lean" staffing situation.

Recommendation 3: The City should review overall Finance Department staffing levels in comparison to industry standards and work to develop a staffing plan that balances prudent use of public resources against providing appropriate staffing levels. Having a chronically understaffed Finance Department can lead to lapses in internal controls and reductions in vigilance, as a result of staff endeavoring to complete larger-than-standard workloads.

Observation 4: The Finance Department has not consistently standardized and documented its policies and procedures, with the various divisions each having different levels of standardization and documentation. For example, the Purchasing Division has documented most of its key policies and procedures, the Revenue Division has documented many of its key policies and procedures but has not yet completed its documentation efforts, and the Cash Management Division has only documented a limited number of policies and procedures. Additionally, the Finance Department does not have a unified process for documenting its policies and procedures, resulting in documentation existing in a variety of disparate formats and inconsistent practices regarding the regular review and updating of guiding documentation. As a result, much of the Finance Department's guiding documentation is out-of-date, with many guiding documents not showing evidence of being updated within at least the last decade, and/or stored in a format that does not facilitate straightforward updates (such as documents that are stored in a paper-first format, with the only digital copies held being scans of printed documents).

Recommendation 4: The Finance Department should develop a uniform process for standardizing and documenting its policies and procedures. This process should include a standardized format for recording policies and procedures that includes fields to track relevant dates (including date created, date last updated, and date last reviewed), should require Divisions to perform reviews and updates of policy and procedure documents on a regular basis, and should detail how the policy and procedure documents are to be stored and distributed, ensuring that they are readily accessible by all relevant staff. Finance Department leadership should work with Division management to develop a plan for implementing this policy and procedure standardization and documentation effort and monitor progress towards this goal.

Observation 5: The City currently uses a “traditional” or “incremental” budgeting mechanism, where departments are asked to prepare budget requests based on a baseline set based on the prior year’s approved budget, potentially including incremental adjustments to account for factors such as revenue growth and/or inflation. As a result, the City’s budgeting process is minimally reactive to changes in economic conditions or operating circumstances, such as cost increases concentrated in certain sectors (e.g., COVID-19 era cost increases in building supplies and materials).

Recommendation 5: The Finance Department should explore implementing a modern strategic budgeting methodology, such as zero-based budgeting or performance-based budgeting, to reduce the City’s path dependence as it comes to budgeting and help ensure that the City’s spending patterns better align with its strategic needs and priorities. By adopting a more modern, strategic budgeting methodology, the City can better align its allocation of resources with the City’s evolving priorities.

Observation 6: The Finance Department’s budget development process begins with a set of City-wide kickoff meetings and the Finance Department does not regularly conduct one-on-one meetings with budget staff in the various departments until after the departments have submitted their initial budget requests. The Finance Department does often hold meetings with individual departments after reviewing the department’s initial budget request, with these meetings typically including high-level staff within the Finance Department (e.g., Finance Director, Assistant Finance Director) and potentially City leadership as well (e.g., City Manager, Deputy City Manager, leadership from other relevant City departments). Departmental budget staff are welcome to reach out to the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division to ask budget-related questions between the time of the initial kickoff call and the submission of the department’s initial budget request, but currently Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff do not regularly, schedule proactive meetings with individual departments outside of the City-wide kickoff meetings. Department leadership have stated that it is a Departmental goal to have Financial Planning/Budget Management Division staff conduct these proactive department-level budget discussions on a more regular basis, although staff turnover and inexperience have prevented them from achieving this goal in recent years.

Recommendation 6: To streamline the annual budget cycle, the Financial Planning/Budget Management Division should continue developing Division staff so that they can achieve their goal of having staff regularly initiate one-on-one meetings with departmental staff prior to initial submission deadlines. These sessions will serve to clarify process questions following the city-wide kickoff and align departmental goals with City-wide priorities. By developing staff that can foster this early exchange of information, the City can improve submission quality and reduce the need for corrective, high-level meetings involving senior leadership later in the process.

Observation 7A: The Finance Department maintains two sets of current strategic guiding documents, which are the goals and objectives included within the Department's FY25 annual strategic report submission and the 2025 Finance Department Strategic Action Plan. Neither of the Department's strategic guiding documents consistently contain detailed, actionable items to guide the Department's operations over future periods, with the listed items (including goals, objectives, strategic goals, and action items) primarily consisting of either general performance of current duties or broad, statements about desired future states that do not serve to guide future operations with a meaningful level of detail.

Observation 7B: Both of the Finance Department's strategic planning documents also contain sets of associated performance measures, although the performance measures listed within the strategic planning documents are often not specifically identified, may not be readily collectable without significant additional work, or may only provide an incomplete or skewed picture of Departmental operations. Additionally, many of the performance measures listed within the Department's strategic planning documents are only loosely tied to the goals, objectives, strategic goals, and action items included within those documents, serving of only a limited use when evaluating progress towards the associated item.

Recommendation 7A: The Finance Department should develop a detailed strategic planning document that not only describes the Department's current activity or lists the Department's statutorily mandated duties, but instead reflects the Department's long-term and short-term priorities for change and improvement. The Department's strategic plan should include sets of goals and objectives that align with the Department's strategic vision. The Department's goals and objectives should contemplate measurable progress, capturing the results of the Department's change efforts and helping to ensure a consistent direction forward for the Department. The Department should also implement procedures for re-evaluating the Department's strategic priorities and updating its strategic plan accordingly on a regular basis.

Recommendation 7B: The Department should identify specified performance measures and standards and develop processes for collecting, storing, and evaluating the specified performance data on a routine basis. The Department should develop its list of performance measures alongside its new strategic planning document in order to help ensure alignment between the selected performance measures and the goals and objectives included within the strategic planning document. The Department should use the identified performance measures as one part of a comprehensive performance management system.

Observation 8: Most of the Department’s major functions are currently performed using highly manual processes, with limited automation or technological support. Many Departmental processes, such as payment processing, are performed primarily using physical files, facilitated via interoffice mail, while some other processes, such as grants management, are performed using Excel spreadsheets made by Departmental staff, with limited automation or documentation. Many of the Department’s paper processes may be accompanied by a “parallel” process in Advantage, but the physical process generally functions as the “primary” form of the process, with the additional processing in Advantage simply duplicating the work already done on paper. Rolling out additional digital and automated systems would likely enhance employee productivity by reducing time spent on clerical duties (e.g., filing papers, moving papers from office to office), improve the quality of processing (e.g., automating calculations and linking databases to allow direct imports from one system to another reduces the risk of human mathematical or input mistakes), and provide a more resilient overall system (e.g., a digital-first process experiences lower risk due to papers being misplaced).

Recommendation 8: The Department should continue existing efforts to digitize and automate the City’s financial processes, such as the digital procurement management system for which the Department has recently received budget approval. Further, the Department should work with its software vendors and the City’s Information Technology Department to develop and implement a plan to transition away from paper-based financial processes and implement new automation tools for non-automated processes, such as the Department’s grants management function. The City should evaluate all options, including making greater use of features included in the City’s existing software platforms, working with the Information Technology Department to develop additional in-house solutions, and procuring software from qualified vendors, to carry out its digitization and automation efforts.

Observation 9: Most Divisions within the Department do not have a standardized training plan for their staff, including staff newly hired into the Department, staff transferring into a new position within the Department, or continuing education for existing staff. As a result, most Departmental staff receive “ad hoc” training, primarily consisting of non-standardized “on the job” training (*i.e.*, learning by doing).

Recommendation 9: The Department should develop standardized training programs for its positions, including a mix of both classroom training using standard curricula and “on the job” training under the guidance of other experienced staff. The Department should also develop standard methods of delivering refresher and/or update training to existing staff on a regular basis. As appropriate, the Department should also continue offering relevant third-party training courses and certifications to staff, including programs like the Georgia Municipal Association’s Municipal Revenue Administration Certificate certification program and courses from the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

Observation 10A: The Department relies on work produced within the various end-user departments for a variety of its key processes. In certain instances, delays in receiving work from end-user departments do not have an impact on overall Departmental functioning, such as processing vendor payments, where the primary impact of a department's failure to provide all necessary information in a timely fashion is limited to the relevant payment being delayed. A number of Departmental processes cannot be completed until all City departments complete their role in the process, including processing payroll (timesheets), the budget development process (departmental budget requests), and P-Card administration (P-Card reconciliations). While the Department does set deadlines for end-user departments to complete their portion of these City-wide financial processes, the Department does not currently have the authority to enforce compliance with these deadlines beyond sending reminder emails.

Observation 10B: The Department has worked with City leadership to develop official policies for several City-wide financial matters, including cash collections and handling, P-Card usage and administration, and grants management. For example, the City's cash handling policy specifies how departments are to store cash prior to deposit and how frequently departments are to deposit collected funds, and the City's grants management policy requires departmental staff to receive Finance Department approval prior to applying for new grants or submitting grant reporting documents. While most City departments are reportedly compliant with City-wide financial policies, the Department does not have the authority to enforce compliance with or impose discipline for violating the City's financial policies. In some instances, disciplinary enforcement is left up to the individual departments (e.g., discipline for P-Card misuse, including the collection of any funds required to reimburse the City for improper purchases), while in other instances a well-articulated disciplinary mechanism does not exist.

Recommendation 10: The Department should work with City leadership to develop more robust mechanisms for enforcing compliance with Finance Department deadlines and policies, such as the creation of disciplinary schedules detailing how Finance Department staff are to respond to rules violations (e.g., suspending P-Card access, requiring retraining). The Department may wish to publish service-level agreements, or similar, for the services that it provides to various City departments to more clearly lay out the services that the Department will provide (including processing/turnaround guarantees) and what the Department expects from the other departments (e.g., deadlines).

Observation 11: The IT Department performs certain finance related responsibilities to support the Department such as printing paystubs as part of the payroll process and printing and delivering accounts payable checks as part of the check run process.

Recommendation 11A: Due to CCG employees having the ability to access pay stubs through Advantage self-service, the City should continue eliminating the printing of paper payroll advices in an effort to encourage and direct end-users to existing self-service capabilities, and to reduce workload, redundancy, and promote sustainability.

Recommendation 11B: The City should consider leveraging existing resources such as the City Print Shop, or the Finance Department to print accounts payable checks to allow IT staff to focus on daily IT-related responsibilities. The City should consider redistributing all other vendor payment responsibilities to the Finance Department while still maintaining a system of internal control.

Observation 12A: The Revenue Division currently contains several Revenue Auditor positions, but these employees are currently used primarily to process alcohol license applications and renewals and to support general business license operations. The Revenue Division does not currently perform any proactive auditing, including “desk audits” to validate the business-reported financial information used to calculate business license fees and field audits, to verify that businesses are not operating without valid business licenses. In interviews, Finance Department leadership indicated that Revenue Auditors are generally expected to perform proactive auditing but that current inexperience among Revenue Auditors is keeping them from performing these proactive audits. Staff within the Inspections & Code Department perform checks to verify compliance with business licensing requirements as part of their inspections duties.

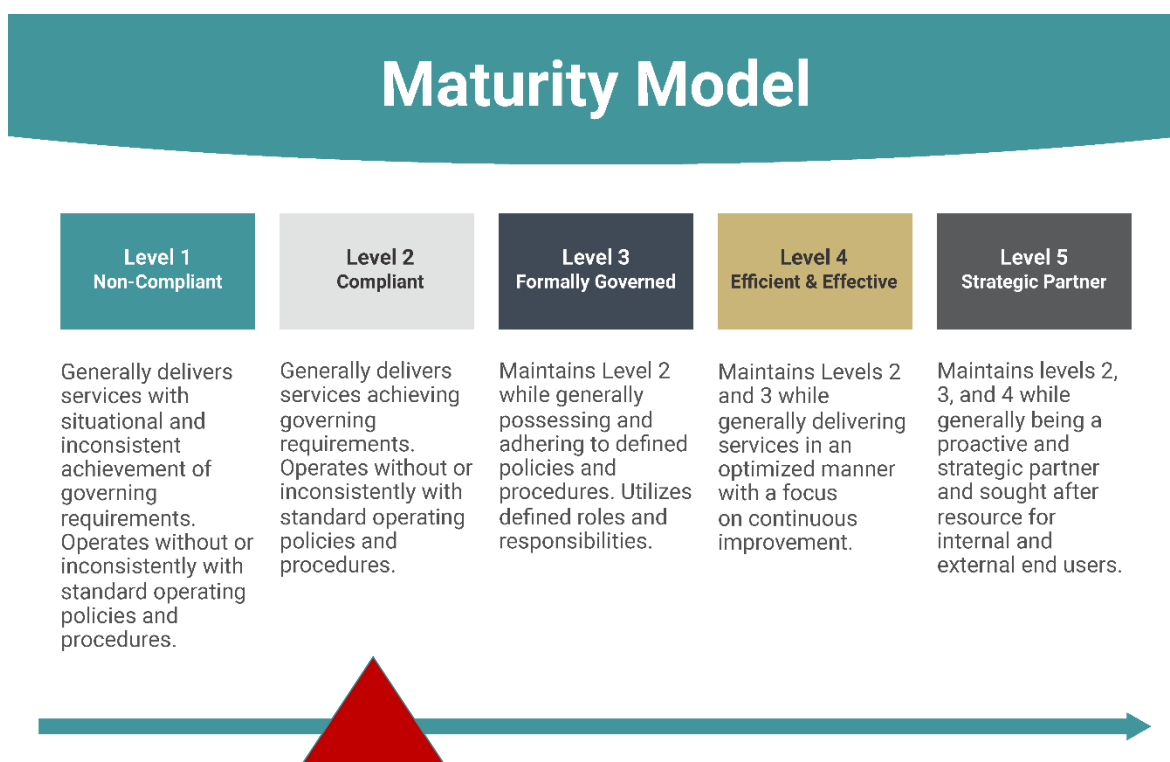
Observation 12B: The Revenue Division’s Revenue Auditors currently are required to use their personal vehicles to perform their alcohol license-related fieldwork duties and are not provided with any equipment identifying them as City employees other than their City-issued uniform shirts.

Recommendation 12A: The Revenue Division should begin conducting periodic audits of alcohol and business license holders to verify compliance with licensing requirements, primarily focusing on “desk audits” to validate business-reported financial information used in calculating alcohol and business license fees. As the Revenue Division’s auditing function becomes more robust and staff gain additional experience, the Revenue Division should work with the Inspections & Code Department to determine whether the Revenue Division should assume at least a portion of the field licensing enforcement duties currently performed by Inspections & Code Department staff. As the Revenue Division expands its audit function, it should monitor the proceeds generated by its audit function and potentially work with Department and City leadership to expand the audit function to collect additional available revenues.

Recommendation 12B: As the Revenue Division’s Revenue Auditors begin performing additional field audits, which can be high-stress situations and involve non-cooperative audit subjects, the Revenue Division should consider working with the City’s fleet management function to provide the Revenue Auditors with fleet vehicles for use when performing official City business. Using decalated City fleet vehicles would allow audit subjects to clearly identify Revenue Auditors as City officials and underscores the Revenue Auditors’ authority to enforce the City’s business and alcohol licensing requirements.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department's maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.



M&J evaluates the Finance Department's current organizational maturity as **Level 2: Compliant**. The Finance Department does meet all governing requirements but only possesses and operates in accordance with standard operating policies and procedures for certain functions. Additionally, the Finance Department does not consistently use defined roles and responsibilities, and M&J has observed instances in which roles and responsibilities follow individuals from position to position. The Finance Department's operations would benefit from further developing and implementing standardized policies and procedures for all Divisions and from reviewing its organizational practices to re-emphasize the connection between positions and responsibilities.

Conclusion

The Finance Department performs key processes in support of all parts of Columbus Consolidated Government and its functioning is critical to the City's ability to continue to serve its citizens and businesses. The Department currently meets its governing requirements and fulfills its critical tasks, but it does so using processes that are largely manual and paper based. The Department's continued use of paper-based processing means that the Department's staff are overwhelmingly focused on fulfilling the Department's required tasks and managing their day-to-day workload, which results in the Department having limited capacity for strategic growth, either internally or as a partner to other parts of the City.

The Department's prioritization of fulfilling its processing obligations over any strategic vision has also produced a staffing structure where the Department is highly reliant on certain key staff, with limited capability to continue providing key services in their absence. Moving beyond merely acting as "processors" to serving as a true strategic partner throughout the Columbus Consolidated Government would require the Department to implement modern, automated processes and adopt an organizational structure that firmly ties roles to specific positions and includes inherent redundancies, like cross training. Addressing the Department's lean staffing is a major contributor to some of the issues noted above, and rightsizing the Department with the needed positions will help the Department move further along the Organizational Maturity Scale.

M&J would like to thank Department leadership and staff, particularly the 15 employees from across the Department who sat for interviews, for the time and effort that they provided while sitting for interviews and responding to information requests.

3.F Human Resources

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“CCG” or “City”) Human Resources Department (“Department”) provides benefits, compensation, wellness programs, and additional employee support services. The Department’s mission is to improve employment opportunity, advancement opportunity, employee relations and employee performance through better communications, cultivation of a diverse workforce, and through the development and implementation of pro-active policies, procedures, programs, and training.

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

The Department offers a robust benefits program and health-related initiatives to promote well-being. The Department offers the following:

- Coordinates an annual health and benefits fair in which various health vendors attend and provide a wide range of healthcare services to employees.
- Hosts quarterly wellness events through a Passport to Wellness program which employees can participate in to receive gift cards. Examples of events include walking events and tracking daily steps to earn gift cards.
- Maintains a fitness center which employees can access for free located in City Hall.
- Partners with CareATC (health management company) to offer a Health & Wellness Center located in downtown Columbus in which employees (and dependents) can receive free, streamlined health services. Benefits of using the Health & Wellness Center include:
 - Free prescriptions
 - Stable premiums
 - Quick and easy appointments
 - No sick leave charge for appointments
 - Short waiting times
 - Discounted services

The City is a designated alcohol and drug free workplace, which helps to eliminate threats to health and safety of CCG employees and to the security of the organization’s equipment and facilities.

The City also maintains an Employee Assistance Program for employees to obtain short-term counseling, referrals, and resources for issues such as stress, mental health, substance abuse, legal concerns, and financial, child, or elder care.

The Department administers a robust Automatic External Defibrillator (“AED”) and Narcan initiative which are both mandated by the State of Georgia to be placed in qualified government buildings. In addition to placing AEDs and Narcan within the City’s buildings, the Department is working on an outdoor AED project which will supply 30 AEDs, Narcan, stop-the-bleed, and first aid kits inside weatherproof boxes to outdoor City facilities such as parks. Boxes will come with codes which users can call 911 to access, which allows the dispatch of an ambulance to the exact location. Furthermore, AEDs are compatible with AEDs currently in use by the CCG Fire & EMS Department. AEDs will be constantly monitored, which will notify staff by email when batteries are dying and when equipment within the AED is set to expire or is not functioning properly.

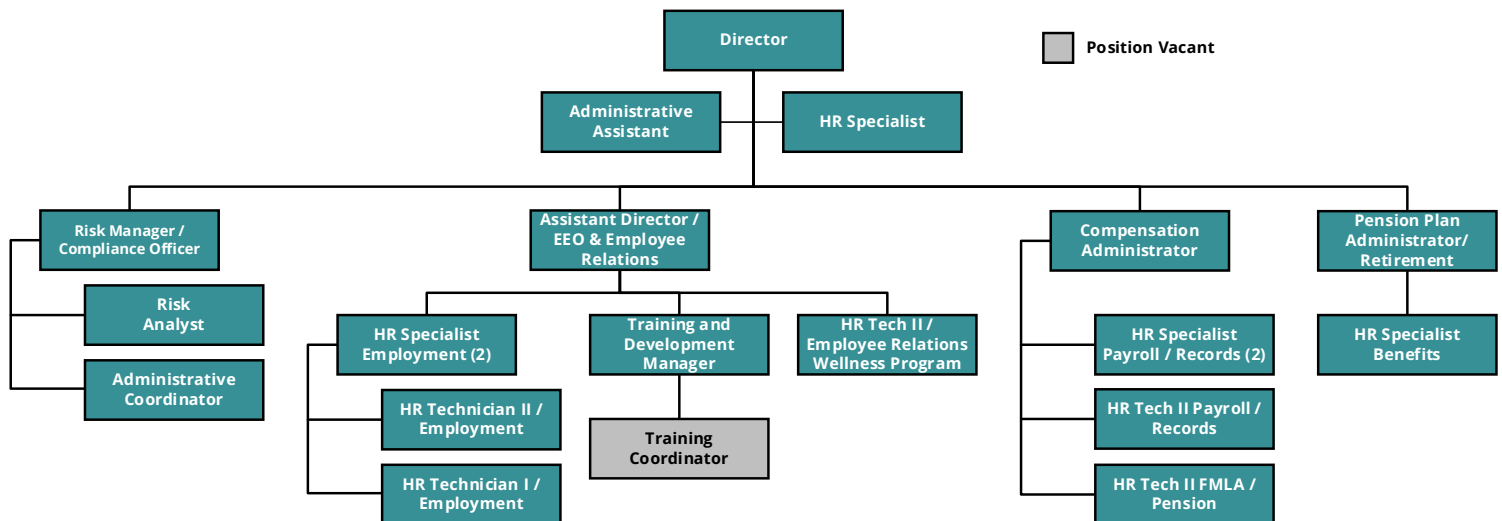
The Department coordinates a Leadership Development Program (“LDP”) which City employees can apply to participate in. The LDP consists of 12 monthly 3-hour long courses spanning one year on various managerial and leadership topics. LDP courses are taught by external contractors such as third-party consultants and professors at Columbus Technical College and Columbus State University. Cohort sizes are typically limited to 25 people; however, the most recent cohort consists of 33 members who will graduate from the program.

The City engaged Evergreen Solutions to conduct a Classification and Compensation Study and Analysis (“Pay Study”) for all CCG positions that was finalized in 2022. The 2022 Pay Study replaced a pay plan that had not been systematically updated since 2006. As a result of the Pay Study, the Department implemented changes to the Citywide pay structure to make salaries more competitive with market rates.

Organization and Staffing

The Department is led by the Human Resources (“HR”) Director with the assistance of an Assistant Director. In December 2025, the long-tenured Director retired. In February 2026, a new permanent Director was hired.

At the time of this report, the Department includes 21 full-time positions. The following organizational chart depicts the Department's structure:



The Department includes the following Divisions and functions:

- Administration
- Risk Management
- Equal Employment Opportunity
- Employment
- Training and Development
- Employee Relations
- Compensation
- Pension Plan /Retirement & Benefits Administration

Administration

The Administration Team consists of an Administrative Assistant and an HR Specialist.

Risk Management

The Risk Management Division is led by the Risk Manager/Compliance Officer and consists of a Risk Analyst and Administrative Coordinator.

Equal Employment Opportunity

The Equal Employment Opportunity function is performed by the Assistant Director.

Employment

The Employment Division is led by two HR Specialists and consists of an HR Technician II and an HR Technician I. The Employment Division reports directly to the Assistant Director.

Training and Development

The Training and Development Division is led by the Training and Development Manager and consists of a Training Coordinator position which is vacant at the time of this report. The Training and Development Division reports directly to the Assistant Director.

Employee Relations

The Employee Relations Division consists of an HR Technician II who reports directly to the Assistant Director.

Compensation

The Compensation Division is led by the Compensation Administrator. The Compensation Division includes two HR Specialists both responsible for payroll and records functions, and two HR Technician II positions responsible for records and pension functions.

Pension Plan/Retirement & Benefits Administration

The Benefits & Retirement Administration Division is led by the Pension Plan Administrator and includes an HR Specialist responsible for benefits.

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

The following chart depicts the turnover rate for the Department between FY2021 and FY2025:

Table 16: Annual Turnover Rate

Fiscal Year	Allocated Full-time/Part-time Positions	Turnover Rate
2021	16/1	17.6%
2022	17/1	27.8%
2023	19/0	26.3%
2024	19/0	21.1%
2025	21/0	19%

Source: CCG FY21-FY25 Budget Books and CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The average turnover for a municipal Human Resources department is between 15% and 20%. The Department has experienced higher than average turnover for certain years over the last five fiscal years. The average turnover between FY21 and FY25 was 22.4%. The Department's turnover rate peaked in FY22 with five separations. Excluding FY22, the Department has remained within or slightly above the average turnover range.

It should be noted that the Department-provided staffing data conflicts with part-time approved staff as indicated in CCG Budget Books. As a result, M&J included part-time staffing data which best aligns with available CCG Budget Books to calculate turnover.

In addition to the part-time allocated positions listed in the table, the Department was also allocated six part-time Risk Coordinator positions which are performed by positions within external departments with full-time roles. M&J did not include Risk Coordinator turnover data within the Department's turnover analysis as the Risk Coordinator positions' primary full-time roles are serving within other departments.

It should be noted that in addition to full-time allocated positions, the Department receives assistance from additional positions housed in external departments whose responsibilities are HR-related. HR Liaison/Coordinator positions assist with HR-related functions within other departments such as hiring, timekeeping/payroll, and entering personnel actions into the City's Enterprise Resource Planning system, CGI Advantage. As such, some of the Department's duties are decentralized through the responsibilities of HR Liaisons.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The Department includes the following Divisions and functions:

- Administration
- Risk Management
- Equal Employment Opportunity
- Employment
- Training and Development
- Employee Relations
- Compensation
- Pension Plan/Retirement & Benefits Administration

Administration

The Administration Team ("Team") is responsible for administrative duties to support the Director and the Department as a whole. The Team takes and routes phone calls received by the Department, supports external boards and committees, maintain employee records, and prepares documentation for HR policies and procedures.

Risk Management

The Risk Management Division ("Division") oversees the City's Workers' Compensation Program, manages liability claims filed against the City, conducts internal investigations of incidents involving City vehicles or equipment, manages insurance coverages and claims, and develops and implements loss control measures that benefit City employees and save taxpayer dollars.

The Division receives assistance from six allocated part-time Risk Coordinator ("Coordinator") positions that are housed within external CCG Departments such as: Engineering, Public Works, Office of Crime Prevention, and Facilities Maintenance. Coordinator responsibilities are part-time and are in addition to the full-time jobs of the Coordinators who serve in other capacities within their respective departments. Coordinators rotate being on-call and are each on call for one week of each month and have a City-provided phone and vehicle to perform on call duties. Calls related to incidents and accidents are routed to the Coordinator on call and the Coordinator must prioritize responding to the scene, documenting the situation, and investigating the scene over their regular responsibilities. At times, Coordinators on call may not always be available to take such calls, as Coordinators have other roles and responsibilities, resulting in finding another Coordinator to be present at the scene.

The Division previously housed an Accident Review Board (“Board”), responsible for reviewing employee at-fault accident investigations and determining disciplinary implications. The Board is responsible for deciding outcomes of accidents using a points system to determine disciplinary actions such as suspensions, mandatory driver’s training, and termination. Currently, the function of the Board is decentralized across various CCG departments which hear accident cases pertaining to their own department and make determinations. The current decentralization of the Board function within individual departments does not appear as efficient as the previous centralized model due to understaffing and high workloads in departments which house Boards, causing issues with timely hearings. The Division is in the process of centralizing the Board function within Risk Management.

The Division utilizes a contracted nurse case manager and an adjuster through USIS Inc. (a workers’ compensation/liability third-party administrator) that manages claims for the City. The nurse serves as an advocate for the employee and conducts follow ups with employees after incidents to assess their wellbeing. The adjuster is responsible for the insurance processing.

It should be noted the Division facilitates post-accident drug screenings for at-fault CCG employees. Based on interviews, the Division does not conduct drug screenings for workers’ compensation injuries and the Division is in process of creating policy to include drug screenings if there is reasonable suspicion.

Equal Employment Opportunity

The Equal Employment Opportunity (“EEO”) administration function includes receiving employee grievances and complaints. When experiencing issues in the workplace, employees are encouraged to resolve grievances with direct supervisors, if possible, prior to escalating issues to the Department. The Department is responsible for investigating any claims that are related to unequal treatment which may involve EEO Councilors that interview employees/supervisors related to the investigation and try to resolve the issue. The Assistant Director assists with investigating any claims and will complete reports identifying findings and submits the reports to the department Director to determine their agreement or disagreement with the outcomes determined by the Assistant Director. If any party wishes to appeal the decision they may file an appeal with the Personnel Review Board.

Employment

The Employment Division (“Division”) is responsible for recruitment, hiring, and onboarding functions for City employees and departments.

The Division maintains various recruitment plans which departments can choose from to determine the Division's level of involvement in recruiting candidates. The Division's standard recruiting plan is a "Light Plan" which involves posting and advertising jobs on various platforms, creating flyers to advertise open positions in specific departments, and referring applicants during hiring events and general interviewing. The Light Recruiting Plan (minimal influence by HR) is mandatory for departments to use; however, departments may opt in to plans in which the Division is more involved such as the "Moderate" and "Heavy Recruiting Plans". The Moderate Recruiting Plan ("Moderate Plan") entails the Division thoroughly screening and preliminarily interviewing applicants before they are hired. The Moderate Plan also includes Division staff conducting calls with candidates' references, referring three to five candidates for a final interview with the department, or instead of departments conducting a final interview, the department hiring manager may allow HR to hire the best of the top candidates. The Division will continue sending three to five top candidates until the position is filled. The Heavy Recruiting Plan ("Heavy Plan") includes all components of the Light and Moderate Plans and includes heavier advertising of positions, hiring events which could result in the Department hiring candidates on the spot, and vetting/clearing employees quicker for departments with severe vacancies.

The Division's process pertaining to recruitment, hiring, and onboarding are all routed through NEOGOV (a human resources management platform). As such, end-user departments and decentralized HR Liaison positions have access to NEOGOV to submit requisitions for vacancies, post positions (Division only), and update the status of each candidate whether they are chosen for an interview, are extended an offer letter, or are in the pre-hire process. As such, both the Division and department have visibility into NEOGOV to track where different candidates stand in relation to job postings.

Once the best candidate is selected, the hiring manager extends an e-offer letter through NEOGOV to the candidate. Upon acceptance of the offer letter, the Division conducts appropriate screenings such as background checks, physicals, drug tests, and credit checks. If the candidate has a criminal history or their drug test results are positive, Division staff communicate such results with the hiring manager. Upon the screening process being completed, the Division creates a job offer letter to send through NEOGOV and extends the offer to the candidate.

Upon offer letter acceptance, the candidates' status in NEOGOV is changed to "onboarding". The HR Technician I is then responsible for scheduling the employee's orientation date and shares orientation dates with HR Liaisons within end-user departments. Orientation is conducted virtually on a weekly basis (Monday's). Based on interviews, end-user departments typically do not receive notification of new hires attending orientation typically until the Friday prior to orientation. The Department is in the process of collaborating with end-user departments to provide hiring managers with advance notice of new hire orientation dates.

New hires can complete new hire paperwork and documentation electronically through NEOGOV. The Department also allows new hires the option to come in-person to complete paperwork using a computer in the Department's office. During orientation, Division staff walk new hires through bswift, the Department's benefits software, and answer any questions regarding open enrollment.

Training and Development

The Training and Development Division (“Division”) is responsible for promoting and developing employee talent, knowledge and skillsets. The Division offers many training courses available to City employees within NEOGOV, which serves as the Department’s Learning Management System and hiring and onboarding system. NEOGOV offers on-demand training courses on various topics such as Microsoft Suite products, customer service, communication, and conflict management. The Division coordinates an annual Leadership Development Program (“LDP”) that City employees can apply to be part of featuring courses on topics such as people management, Equal Employment Opportunity, and networking. LDP courses are taught by external consultants and professors from Columbus Technical College and Columbus State University. The Division also offers general leadership and development courses and is in the process of building a learning plan dedicated to supervisory staff.

The Division partners with CareATC, the Department’s employee wellness provider, to offer monthly courses related to health and nutrition. The Division also partners with Corebridge Financial to offer quarterly courses related to personal finance and Pastoral Institute to offer courses related to mental health and wellness.

Employee Relations

The Employee Relations function includes building and maintaining position relationships between the City/Department and its employees. Employee Relations functions include coordinating employee team-building and social events and quarterly wellness events. Furthermore, the Department organizes employee appreciation events.

Compensation

The Compensation Division (“Division”) is responsible for payroll data entry, Family Medical Leave Act (“FMLA”) compliance, personnel action approvals, salary surveys, and other compensation-related duties.

Related to payroll, the Division enters payroll and banking information in NEOGOV and CGI Advantage (“Advantage”), the City’s Enterprise Resource Planning system, for new hires. The Division also assists employees with making any necessary changes to their direct deposit or tax information. The Division provides support and timekeeping training to HR Liaisons to teach timekeeping best practices. HR Liaisons are responsible for timekeeping within respective departments. Many end-user departments are using paper timesheets which are then manually entered into Advantage by HR Liaisons. As the Division is responsible for entering payroll information, the Division creates employee personnel files and ensures that proper documentation is transferred to the employee’s personnel file, which are stored electronically through onPhase, the Department’s records management system.

The Division is responsible for FMLA administration and compliance. FMLA is primarily managed by HR Liaisons, however, Division staff provide assistance and customer service to HR Liaisons. To initiate the process of being placed on FMLA, employees contact the Division to apply and provide necessary documentation and information. Division staff review eligibility and approve FMLA if the requesting employee is eligible. Upon approval, HR Liaisons enter a personnel action within Advantage, which is routed to Division staff for final review and approval. HR Liaisons are then responsible for tracking leave hours used by employees on FMLA using a system designed in-house for tracking. Furthermore, the Division hosts training for HR Liaisons related to FMLA tracking.

The Division maintains contact with HR Liaisons on an as-needed basis with and provides guidance and assistance. Employee Status Maintenance requests (“ESMTs”) are submitted in Advantage by HR Liaisons and may pertain to various personnel actions and statuses such as hiring, transfer, demotion, and FMLA. When an HR Liaison enters an ESMT, the ESMT is routed through the respective departments’ director, the Employment Division (depending on type of ESMT), the Compensation Division, the Finance Department, and the HR Assistant Director for final approval.

As ESMTs are routed to Division staff, staff review ESMTs to ensure accuracy. If Division staff note any inaccurate coding or information, staff reject the ESMT and leave comments for the HR Liaison to understand why the ESMT was rejected. Typically, Division staff will also send a follow-up email explaining the reason for the rejection. HR Liaisons can then make corrections and resubmit ESMTs for approval. Based on interviews, a large portion of the Division’s workload involves reviewing ESMTs, as the Division receives approximately 20 to 40 on average per day. Based on interviews within the Department and with HR Liaisons, ESMTs are rejected often, with Division staff rejecting approximately half of ESMTs received. Furthermore, ESMTs are not always submitted in a timely manner. For instance, ESMTs may be submitted the day before payroll is processed, or separations are not entered until after the employee has been terminated, leading to overpayment.

The Division also conducts internal salary surveys and assists with updating job descriptions and adjusting pay scales and employee compensation. As a result of the City’s most recent Pay Study completed in 2022, the Division is responsible for implementing associated recommendations.

Pension Plan/Retirement & Benefits Administration

The Benefits & Retirement Administration Division is responsible for administering general employee benefits to active employees and retirement benefits to retired employees.

Related to benefits administration, the Benefits Specialist (“Specialist”) conducts open enrollment and manages the City’s vendors for benefits. The Specialist is also responsible for ensuring employee’s benefit elections are accurately reflected in Advantage. To do so, the Specialist collaborates with the CCG Information Technology Department to ensure that open enrollment data from National Financial Partners (“NFP”) (benefits provider) and bswift (NFP’s technology partner for benefits administration), the City’s employee benefits solution, is accurately uploaded into Advantage to reflect new employee elections. Furthermore, the Specialist manually enters data into Advantage to reflect any changes in bswift.

The Specialist also conducts audits periodically throughout the year to ensure the Department's data matches vendor data for benefit providers. The Specialist collaborates with the CCG Information Technology Department to run reports within Advantage to compare with vendor information to ensure vendors are adjusting benefit plans regarding separated employees.

The Pension Plan Administrator ("Administrator") manages the retirement lifecycle for both active employees and retirees across the City and several partner entities. The Administrator serves as the primary point of contact for employees planning to retire and assists employees with processing mandatory forms, calculating benefits, and setting up records in PensionGold (the line-of-business application used to administer plans), to ensure retirees receive benefits on time. Beyond the City's primary pension, the Administrator manages pension plans for external entities such as the Columbus Water Works, the Hospital Authority of Columbus, and the Columbus Airport Commission. The Administrator maintains the Pension Gold system and ensures information is reflected accurately in Advantage for transmittals and retiree records. The Administrator also receives and processes employee and employer contribution checks. The Administrator manually creates conversion records for employees whose payroll is not managed internally and manually determines entity contribution amounts based on annual pension valuations.

Due to the Administrator being the only position responsible for retirement benefit administration, the Administrator often does not have the capacity to cross-train staff or comprehensively document procedures. The Administrator is in the process of working on documentation for continuity of operations.

Customer Service

Based on M&J's fieldwork and analysis, the Department's ability to provide timely and optimal customer service to end-user departments is impacted by its staffing model. As a result, the Department operates in a more reactive manner, responding to immediate customer needs as opposed to strategically gauging and responding to customer needs. M&J discusses the Department's staffing model in the *Strategic Priorities* section.

Use of Technology

CGI Advantage

CGI Advantage ("Advantage") is the City's Enterprise Resource Planning system. The Department utilizes Advantage to manage payroll and benefits for employees.

NEOGOV

The Department utilizes NEOGOV, a human resource management solution, for its hiring and onboarding functions.

Spark Hire

The Department utilizes Spark Hire, a video-based hiring platform and applicant tracking system designed to streamline recruitment.

onPhase (formerly DocuPhase)

The Department uses onPhase (formerly DocuPhase), as its document and records management solution.

bswift

The Department utilizes the bswift platform for benefits administration. Bswift offers a range of services such as employee enrollment, compliance, reporting, and analytics on a secure platform.

PensionGold

The Department uses PensionGold which is a comprehensive, line-of-business application used by retirement systems to fully administer plans and provide service to members.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

Related to guiding documentation, the Department maintains a CCG Employee Handbook (“Handbook”) which is designed to communicate important citywide policies and procedures to CCG employees and is distributed to all CCG employees. The Handbook includes the following sections:

- Getting Started
- Attendance and Leave
- Compensation
- Employee Benefits
- Employee Relations
- Separation
- Appendix

The Handbook appears to be consistent with current policies and procedures, as the Handbook was last revised in December 2024.

The Department utilizes many standard operating procedures (“SOPs”) created by NEOGOV to complete functions associated with recruitment, hiring, and onboarding. The Department also utilizes many SOPs created by CGI on various CGI Advantage process to train staff and HR Liaisons.

M&J received over 50 SOP documents in the areas of risk management, compensation and payroll, and various CGI Advantage and NEOGOV processes which were created internally to serve as user guides. Based on M&J’s analysis, most of the SOPs did not include creation dates or date of last update. As such, M&J is unable to determine whether the provided SOPs are in alignment with actual practices.

The Department also maintains a Recruiting Plan which outlines its Standard Light, Moderate, and Heavy recruiting plans available to end-user departments. Lastly, the Department maintains a Training & Development Catalog that identifies all the training resources available to employees, instructions on how to enroll in the LDP, and an annual calendar for 2026 indicating the training seminars and courses offered throughout the year.

Strategic Priorities

The Department does not maintain a current strategic plan but completes Strategic Planning Forms in alignment with each annual budget. For FY25, the Department's goal was to reduce the time it takes to hire and onboard new employees by 20%. Also, the Department's objective was to utilize predictive hiring tools and one-way interviews for better hires and fit for the organization and to enhance the recruitment, selection, and retention process to provide a better experience for new hires and hiring managers.

Based on M&J's fieldwork and analysis, the following sections represent strategic priorities of the Department and opportunities for strategic improvement in different areas of operation:

Recruitment

The Employment Division ("Division") is in the process of revising its strategy to be more proactive to customer needs and prioritize customer service. Historically, the Department has offered different levels of recruitment involvement for end-user departments to choose based on their desired level of HR involvement in the recruiting and hiring process. The Division's recruitment strategy has not historically been informed by City departments' feedback and has generally served as a reactive function. The Division has future plans to cater more to City departments' specific needs and preferences, and hopes to collaborate and meet with hiring managers within departments proactively to understand and assess their needs and preferences to ensure their recruitment strategy is in alignment with customer needs.

The Division is also in the process of changing hiring procedures. For example, historically certain job postings would be posted on a rolling basis, without time limits. A recent change included the default job posting timeline to be two weeks for non-hard-to-fill positions. By closing the job posting quicker, the Division and hiring manager are assessing quality of candidates timelier, leading to filling vacancies quicker. Based on interviews, the Department has struggled with taking an extended period to fill positions, therefore the Division is assessing strategies to help improve performance and outcomes.

Furthermore, the Department has implemented technological solutions to allow for more efficient recruitment. The Department implemented Spark Hire, a video-based hiring system, to allow for one-way interviewing of candidates to help make the vetting process quicker and more effective. The Department also implemented a module within NEOGOV called Attract which functions as a candidate relationship management software to source more candidates through access to a talent pool, notify qualified candidates of positions that fit their qualifications, and better market job postings.

Risk Management

The Department has implemented several projects and initiatives related to risk management, reducing risks, and recovering costs. The Department contracted with Peachtree Recovery in 2017 to recover costs from damaged property, and has recovered approximately \$700,000 since 2017. Within the last two years, the Department implemented Alternative Claims Management to recover lost funds for not at-fault accidents which includes diminished value, loss of time, and vehicle damage. Based on interviews, through its contract with Alternative Claims Management, the City has been able to recover approximately \$400,000 at the time of this report. Furthermore, the Risk Management Division partners with the Training Coordinator within the CCG Public Works Department to provide CPR, Narcan, and AED training to employees.

Automation

The Department recently collaborated with the CCG Information Technology Department to automate FMLA leave tracking through an in-house application. Based on interviews, the Department is in the process of searching for a system to assist with employee grievance tracking to streamline the grievance process.

Based on M&J's fieldwork, the Department experiences inefficiencies within certain processes and procedures due to the lack of automation and integration of specific systems as described in the following sections.

NEOGOV, Advantage, and onPhase

Currently, there is a lack of integration between NEOGOV and CGI Advantage. NEOGOV contains information related to an employee's initial application, hiring, and onboarding. CGI Advantage contains information related to employee payroll and benefits. Due to the two systems not communicating with each other, information which is contained within NEOGOV must be duplicated within CGI Advantage and manually entered by HR staff and HR Liaisons. As a result, processes to enter ESMTs and set up payroll for employees are time-consuming, require using both systems, and rely on manual data entry which is subject to human error resulting in potential discrepancies between the systems. Furthermore, if an employee wishes to update or make changes to their payroll/direct deposit information or tax forms, employees complete forms within NEOGOV. Department staff must then manually enter such changes to be reflected in Advantage. Also, NEOGOV and Advantage do not communicate with onPhase, which the Department uses to maintain employee personnel files. As such, staff must manually transfer documentation from NEOGOV and Advantage to onPhase to ensure employee files include all necessary documentation.

Pension Gold and Advantage

The Pension Plan Administrator's ("Administrator") processes are heavily manual and administratively burdensome. Prospective retirees complete and bring paper forms to the Administrator, and death benefit claims involve mailing documents to beneficiaries and waiting for their return in the mail. Furthermore, the Administrator processes over \$1M in physical checks for employee and employer contributions each year, as contributions are submitted via physical checks by external entities rather than electronic fund transfers ("EFTs"). Pension Gold does not appear to be used to its full potential for automation or member transparency. While the Administrator collaborates with the CCG Information Technology Department to load payroll information from CGI Advantage to Pension Gold through monthly transmittals, the Administrator still performs many manual calculations and benefit setups manually within CGI Advantage.

CGI Advantage and Pension Gold are not fully integrated, as retirees are paid through CGI Advantage. Retirees lack direct access to their full pay statements or gross-to-net details through Pension Gold, and can only access such information through CGI Advantage's self-service portal which must be setup by the CCG Information Technology Department. Also, CGI Advantage is not as user-friendly for retirees as Pension Gold, making it difficult for customers to find the information they are looking for. Furthermore, retirement income letters are sent by mail and require manual labor on behalf of the Administrator to produce as they are not currently automated.

Staffing Levels

Based on M&J's analysis of benchmark HR staff member to employee ratios, a common ratio is one HR staff member per every 100 employees.^{29,30} The Department supports approximately 3,000 employees across CCG (not including retirees) while maintaining 21 full-time positions (according to the FY26 budget). As such, the Department's current ratio is approximately one HR staff member for approximately every 142 City employees. Based on benchmark data, the Department is slightly understaffed, which could have a negative impact on the Department's ability to operate efficiently and effectively and provide enhanced customer service.

Customer Service

The Department serves approximately 3,000 customers or end-users (not including retirees) which are CCG employees and HR Liaison positions decentralized throughout departments to assist with HR-related functions and processes. The Department could improve its customer service through greater solicitation of feedback, greater inclusivity and communication, additional staff, and through implementation of a fully functioning self-service portal.

²⁹Erik van Vulpen and Neelie Verlinden, "The Ideal HR to Employee Staffing Ratio: What It Is and How to Calculate It," *Academy to Innovate HR*, Accessed January 14, 2026. <https://www.aihr.com/blog/hr-to-employee-ratio/>.

³⁰ "HR to Employee Ratio: Benchmarking Guide," *CompanySights*, Last modified August 17, 2025. <https://www.companysights.com/resources/hr-to-employee-ratio-benchmarking-guide>.

Based on interviews, the Department's recruitment strategies and hiring processes specific to departments have historically not considered end-users' needs and preferences. Furthermore, end-users perceive that their needs are not considered when revising HR-related processes that impact departments. Furthermore, while the Department conducts exit interviews for all exiting employees and administers surveys related to training opportunities, the Department does not conduct employee engagement surveys to all City employees to measure employee motivation, commitment, satisfaction, and provide insights to improve the City work environment and boost productivity and retention.

Based on interviews, HR Liaisons do not feel like they are extensions of the Department due to lack of consistent formal communication. HR Liaisons shared that information is communicated on a need-to-know basis instead of proactively. HR Liaisons also expressed concerns with the ESMT entry process being largely complex and the hiring process requiring use of Advantage and NEOGOV which results in duplication of information entered into both systems, sometimes resulting in inaccuracies in both systems. HR Liaisons expressed ESMTs being frequently rejected by the Department without proper explanation, causing bottlenecks. HR Liaisons cited that processes such as ESMT rejection are inconsistent and depend upon which HR staff member reviews the ESMT, which causes confusion. Furthermore, end-users expressed frustration with not receiving automatic notifications from Advantage when HR staff reviews (and either approves or rejects) ESMTs. As a result, end-users are manually checking Advantage periodically to check ESMT status.

Also, HR Liaisons expressed concerns with response times and time to hire stating that due to perceived low staffing and high workload of HR staff, end-users experience delays with ESMT reviews and the hiring process. Relatedly, end-users feel that timely communication of orientation dates for new hires and other information is not prioritized, leading to miscommunication and end-users not receiving information in a timely manner.

Based on M&J's interviews with HR staff and HR Liaisons, HR staff (particularly within the Compensation Division) maintain frequent contact with HR Liaisons daily from answering questions and providing daily assistance. It should be noted that new HR Liaisons receive training from the Compensation Division, however the Department historically has not offered formal opportunities for additional training or learning outside of training materials which are available for HR Liaisons to reference. At the time of M&J's fieldwork, the Department did not host regular, formal meetings with HR Liaisons on a regular basis. As of this report, the Department is in the process of revising training opportunities available to HR Liaisons and implementing biweekly meetings with HR Liaisons to answer questions and provide information.

While Advantage has the capability to provide an Employee Self-Service Portal (“ESS”) the Department has historically limited features which are available to end-users. The Department has historically not allowed employees to update certain information such as their address, direct deposit, and tax form information. As a result, the Compensation Division is responsible for making appropriate changes to employees’ direct deposit, tax, and address information. Employees must complete forms within NEOGOV pertaining to which information they would like to change or update, and then the Compensation Division staff enter appropriate changes within Advantage manually. Employees do not have full access to an ESS portal through Advantage, which also requires more manual effort on behalf of Compensation Division staff to make necessary changes and updates.

Generally, a common concern M&J noted throughout CCG interviews was job descriptions that do not adequately reflect actual responsibilities and are not modern. For example, end-users noted that job descriptions include physical demands that are not appropriate or relevant to the position. Also, related to Information Technology roles, some positions responsible for different functions share job titles and job descriptions, which negatively impacts the Department’s recruiting for such roles.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

The Department tracks performance metrics such as: turnover rate, time to hire, tenure, vacancy rate, and trainings offered. Through the implementation of NEOGOV, the Department can track metrics related to recruitment and hiring such as:

- Number of types of job postings (full-time, hard-to-fill, continuous)
- Number of hires
- Number of recruitment events
- Number of new hires completing Onboarding Process
- Percentage of departments utilizing basic, moderate, and heavy recruitment plans
- Number of hires by departments

While the Department’s performance metrics align with the Department’s goals to increase recruitment and retention and reduce time-to-hire, due to the lack of a formal and comprehensive strategic plan outlining goals and objectives, the Department’s ability to use insights gleaned from performance data to assess performance and progress towards goals is limited.

The Department requires end-user departments to conduct annual performance appraisals of staff. Based on interviews, participation within performance appraisals has not been consistently enforced to ensure all departments are complying with the requirement and all CCG employees receive an annual evaluation. As a result, the Department recently implemented incentives and a new process involving NEOGOV to streamline the performance appraisals process. With the implementation of the new process, the Department is tracking compliance to ensure performance appraisals are completed.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

Generally, the Department's work environment is positive, and staff feel supported by management. Staff feel that they work well together, and coworkers provide assistance when needed. Regarding internal communications, the Department meets twice a month for a staff meeting. Furthermore, individual divisions meet with immediate supervisors (Director or Assistant Director) twice a month. Overall, staff are satisfied regarding frequency of communications.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: The City engaged Evergreen Solutions to conduct a Classification and Compensation Study and Analysis ("Pay Study") for all CCG positions that was finalized in 2022. The 2022 Pay Study replaced a pay plan that had not been systematically updated since 2006. As a result of the Pay Study, the Department implemented changes to the Citywide pay structure to make salaries more competitive with market rates. Also, as a result of the Pay Study, Evergreen Solutions recommended the City conduct a comprehensive classification and compensation study every three to five years.

Recommendation 1: The City should conduct a comprehensive classification and compensation study every three to five years.

Observation 2: The Risk Management Division receives assistance from six allocated part-time Risk Coordinator ("Coordinator") positions that are housed within external CCG Departments such as: Engineering, Public Works, Office of Crime Prevention, and Facilities Maintenance. Coordinator roles are part-time and are in addition to the full-time jobs of the respective Coordinator positions who serve in other capacities within respective departments. At times, Coordinators on call may not always be available to take such calls, as Coordinators have other roles and responsibilities, resulting in finding another Coordinator to be present at the scene.

Recommendation 2: The Department should consider revising its Risk Coordinator staffing model and instead hire a full-time position(s) to absorb Risk Coordinator duties. The Department could consider maintaining one to two part-time Risk Coordinator positions to support the full-time Risk Coordinator and complete Risk Coordinator duties when the full-time Risk Coordinator is out of office or responding to a different scene.

Observation 3: The Risk Management Division previously housed an Accident Review Board ("Board"), responsible for reviewing employee at-fault accident investigations and determining disciplinary implications. The Board is responsible for deciding outcomes of accidents using a points system to determine disciplinary actions such as suspensions, mandatory driver's training, and termination. Currently, the function of the Board is decentralized across various CCG departments which hear accident cases pertaining to their own department and make determinations. Decentralizing the Board function within individual departments does not appear to be as efficient as the previous model due to understaffing and high workloads in departments which house Boards, causing issues with timely hearings. The Division is in the process of centralizing the Board function within Risk Management.

Recommendation 3: The Department should continue efforts to centralize the Accident Review Board to reside within the Department to review and decide all accident cases related to City employees within various departments. Through centralization, the Accident Review Board will be more efficient and help ensure the points system and disciplinary actions are administered and applied uniformly across City departments.

Observation 4: The Division does not conduct drug screenings for workers' compensation injuries and the Division is in process of creating policy to include drug screenings if there is reasonable suspicion.

Recommendation 4: The City should continue its progress towards adopting a policy to conduct drug screenings following workers' compensation injuries if there is reasonable suspicion.

Observation 5: Orientation is conducted virtually on a weekly basis (Monday's). Based on interviews, end-user departments do not receive notification of new hires attending orientation typically until the Friday prior to orientation. The Department is in the process of collaborating with end-user departments to provide hiring managers with advance notice of new hire orientation dates.

Recommendation 5: The Department should continue collaborating with end-user departments to implement a system in which Department staff provide advance notice to hiring managers related to assigned orientation dates for new hires.

Observation 6: The Training and Development Division offers general leadership and development courses, and is in the process of building a learning plan dedicated to supervisory staff.

Recommendation 6: The Training and Development Division should continue its efforts to outline and identify learning paths and plans to allow supervisory staff to develop soft and managerial skills.

Observation 7: Many end-user departments are using paper timesheets which are then manually entered into CGI Advantage by HR Liaisons. Certain departments use biometric time clocks (TimeClock Plus) for recording time. Furthermore, the payroll process is time-consuming and relies on manual data entry due to the need to transfer data on paper timecards to Advantage, or from the biometric timeclocks to Advantage as the two systems are not integrated. Additionally, the implementation of timeclocks has not eliminated manual data entry.

Recommendation 7: The City/Department should consider implementing biometric time clocks (TimeClock Plus) throughout all departments as appropriate. The Department should collaborate with the CCG Information Technology Department to integrate TimeClock Plus with Advantage to eliminate redundant, manual data entry and to automate the time reporting process.

Observation 8: Due to the Administrator being the only position responsible for retirement benefit administration, the Administrator often does not have the capacity to cross-train staff or comprehensively document procedures. The Administrator is in the process of working on documentation for continuity of operations.

Recommendation 8A: The Department should consider adding additional staff to assist with administrative duties and to step in for the Administrator if the Administrator is out of office. Upon the potential addition of additional staff, the Department should ensure staff are cross-trained as part of succession planning and continuity of operations.

Recommendation 8B: The Pension Plan/Retirement & Benefits Administration Division should continue creating documentation in the form of SOPs and process guides to document operations and ensure consistency and continuity.

Observation 9: M&J received over 50 SOP documents in the areas of risk management, compensation and payroll, and various CGI Advantage and NEOGOV processes which were created internally to serve as user guides. Based on M&J's analysis, most of the SOPs did not include creation dates or date of last update. As such, M&J is unable to determine whether the provided SOPs are in alignment with actual practices.

Recommendation 9: The Department should review SOPs and prioritize updating the most outdated SOPs first to ensure material is aligned with current practices. As part of the review, a "last reviewed" date should be added to specific sections or content within the documents to record the fact that the content was reviewed, even if updated or changes were not needed. Ensuring documentation is up to date will help to promote consistency in policy and practices.

Observation 10: The Department does not maintain a current strategic plan but completes Strategic Planning Forms in alignment with each annual budget.

Recommendation 10: The Department should create a short-term strategic plan which spans approximately three years and includes high-level strategic direction and vision for the Department in addition to defining specific goals and objectives to guide operations and define strategic priorities. The strategic plan should also include applicable performance measures/metrics/and KPIs that align with goals and objectives and measure progress and performance.

Observation 11A: The Division's recruitment strategy has not historically been informed by City departments' feedback and has generally served as a reactive function. The Division has future plans to cater more to City departments' specific needs and preferences, and hopes to collaborate and meet with hiring managers within departments proactively to understand and assess their needs and preferences to ensure their recruitment strategy is in alignment with customer needs.

Observation 11B: The Division is also in the process of changing hiring procedures. For example, historically, certain job postings would be posted on a rolling basis, without time limits. A recent change included the default job posting timeline to be two weeks for non-hard-to-fill positions. By closing the job posting quicker, the Division and hiring manager are assessing quality of candidates timelier, leading to filling vacancies quicker. Based on interviews, the Department has struggled with taking an extended period to fill positions, therefore the Division is assessing strategies to help improve performance and outcomes.

Recommendation 11: The Department should continue to assess recruitment and hiring approaches and tailor approaches to end-user departments to ensure feedback from end-user departments is used to inform hiring strategies. The Department should strive to be more proactive and involved in recruitment and hiring through proactive strategies such as regular meetings with hiring managers.

Observation 12: Based on interviews, the Department is in the process of searching for a system to assist with employee grievance tracking to streamline the grievance process.

Recommendation 12: The Department should continue its efforts to find a system for employee grievance tracking to streamline the grievance process.

Observation 13A: Currently, there is a lack of integration between NEOGOV and CGI Advantage. NEOGOV contains information related to an employee's initial application, hiring, and onboarding. CGI Advantage contains information related to employee payroll and benefits. Due to the two systems not communicating with each other, information which is contained within NEOGOV must be duplicated within CGI Advantage and manually entered by HR staff and HR Liaisons. As a result, processes to enter Employee Status Maintenance requests ("ESMTs") and set up payroll for employees are time-consuming, require using both systems, and rely on manual data entry which is subject to human error resulting in potential discrepancies between the systems. Furthermore, if an employee wishes to update or make changes to their payroll/direct deposit information or tax forms, employees complete forms within NEOGOV. Department staff must then manually enter such changes to be reflected in Advantage.

Observation 13B: NEOGOV and Advantage do not communicate with onPhase, which the Department uses to maintain employee personnel files. As such, staff must manually transfer documentation from NEOGOV and Advantage to onPhase to ensure employee files include all necessary documentation.

Recommendation 13: The Department should collaborate with the CCG Information Technology Department to explore solutions to integrate certain processes within Advantage (or a future ERP) and NEOGOV which require manual data entry and duplication between systems. Furthermore, the Department should collaborate with the CCG Information Technology Department to explore solutions to integrate certain processes within NEOGOV, Advantage, and onPhase, to allow reduce manual effort required to store documentation within onPhase.

Observation 14: Prospective retirees complete and bring paper forms to the Administrator, and death benefit claims involve mailing documents to beneficiaries and waiting for their return in the mail.

Recommendation 14: The Department should consider implementing DocuSign, or a platform for electronic signatures, to allow for prospective retirees to complete retirement paperwork and forms and for beneficiaries to complete death benefit claims electronically to replace the delay and inefficiencies associated with manual processes and mailing documents.

Observation 15: The Administrator processes over \$1M in physical checks for employee and employer contributions each year, as contributions are submitted via physical checks by external entities (Columbus Water Works, Hospital Authority of Columbus, etc.) rather than electronic fund transfers (“EFTs”).

Recommendation 15: The Department should consider partnering with external entities (Columbus Water Works, Hospital Authority of Columbus, etc.) and the CCG Finance Department to replace physical monthly checks with EFTs to eliminate administrative burden and reduce the security risk associated with sending checks through mail.

Observation 16A: Based on interviews, Pension Gold does not appear to be used to its full potential for automation or member transparency. While the Administrator collaborates with the CCG Information Technology Department to load payroll information from CGI Advantage to Pension Gold through monthly transmittals, the Administrator still performs many manual calculations and benefit setups manually within CGI Advantage. CGI Advantage and Pension Gold are not fully integrated, as retirees are paid through CGI Advantage.

Observation 16B: Retirees lack direct access to their full pay statements or gross-to-net details through Pension Gold, and can only access such information through CGI Advantage’s self-service portal which must be set up by the CCG Information Technology Department. Also, CGI Advantage is not as user-friendly for retirees as Pension Gold, making it difficult for customers to find the information they are looking for.

Recommendation 16A: The Department should consider collaborating with the CCG Information Technology Department to conduct a cost-benefit analysis related to running payroll through Pension Gold to eliminate the need for transmittals between CGI Advantage and Pension Gold (or if the City selects and implements a new Enterprise Resource Planning solution), reduce the need for data entry between the two systems, and modernize processes to be more efficient. By running payroll through Pension Gold, the Department would greatly reduce administrative burden and the potential for human error.

Recommendation 16B: The Department should consider collaborating with the CCG Information Technology Department to consider implementing the MemberDirect portal within Pension Gold that would allow retirees to log in and view pay stubs and tax forms on demand and determine whether implementation of MemberDirect would improve service provided to retirees.

Observation 17: Retirement income letters are sent by mail and require manual labor on behalf of the Administrator to produce as they are not currently automated.

Recommendation 17: The Department should collaborate with the CCG Information Technology Department to explore the possibility of automating retirement income letters through Pension Gold to eliminate the need for their manual creation and mailing.

Observation 18: Based on M&J’s analysis of benchmark HR staff member to employee ratios, a common ratio is one HR staff member per every 100 employees. The Department supports approximately 3,000 employees (not including retirees) across CCG while maintaining 21 full-time positions (according to the FY26 budget). As such, the Department’s current ratio is approximately one HR staff member for approximately every 142 City employees. Based on benchmark data, the Department is slightly understaffed, which could have a negative impact on the Department’s ability to operate efficiently and effectively and provide optimal customer service.

Recommendation 18: The City should consider increasing staffing levels within the Department to decrease the ratio of HR staff to end-user employees. Increasing staffing levels would allow for the Department to provide enhanced customer service and to operate more strategically and proactively.

Observation 19: Based on interviews, the Department’s recruitment strategies and hiring processes specific to departments have historically not considered end-users’ needs and preferences . Furthermore, end-users perceive that their needs are not considered when revising HR-related processes that impact departments.

Recommendation 19: The Department should seek out more opportunities to solicit end-user feedback, especially prior to making changes to processes which affect end-users. Examples of mechanisms to solicit feedback could be through town hall meetings, or employee surveys.

Observation 20: While the Department conducts exit interviews for all exiting employees and administers surveys related to training opportunities, the Department does not conduct employee engagement surveys to all City employees to measure employee motivation, commitment, satisfaction, and provide insights to improve the City work environment and boost productivity and retention.

Recommendation 20: To solicit feedback related to overall employee satisfaction and engagement, the Department should consider administering employee engagement surveys to all employees to measure employee motivation, commitment, satisfaction, and to provide insights to improve the City work environment and boost productivity.

Observation 21A: Based on interviews, a large portion of the Compensation Division’s workload involves reviewing Employee Status Maintenance requests (“ESMTs”), as the Division receives approximately 20 to 40 on average per day. Based on interviews within the Department and with HR Liaisons, ESMTs are rejected often, with Division staff rejecting approximately half of ESMTs received. Furthermore, ESMTs are not always submitted in a timely manner – ESMTs may be submitted the day before payroll is processed, or separations are not entered until after the employee has been terminated, leading to overpayment.

Observation 21B: Based on interviews, HR Liaisons do not feel like they are extensions of the Department due to lack of consistent formal communication. HR Liaisons shared that information is communicated on a need-to-know basis instead of proactively. HR Liaisons also expressed concerns with the ESMT entry process being largely complex and the hiring process requiring use of Advantage and NEOGOV which results in duplication of information entered into both systems, sometimes resulting in inaccuracies in both systems. HR Liaisons expressed ESMTs being frequently rejected by the Department without proper explanation, causing bottlenecks. HR Liaisons cited that processes such as ESMT rejection are inconsistent and depend upon which HR staff member reviews the ESMT, which causes confusion. Furthermore, end-users expressed frustration with not receiving automatic notifications from Advantage when HR staff reviews (and either approves or rejects) ESMTs. As a result, end-users are manually checking Advantage periodically to check ESMT status.

Observation 21C: Also, HR Liaisons expressed concerns with response times and time to hire stating that due to perceived low staffing and high workload of HR staff, end-users experience delays with ESMT reviews and the hiring process. Relatedly, end-users feel that timely communication of orientation dates for new hires and other information is not prioritized, leading to miscommunication and end-users not receiving information in a timely manner.

Observation 21D: Based on M&J's interviews with HR staff and HR Liaisons, HR staff (particularly within the Compensation Division) maintain frequent contact with HR Liaisons daily from answering questions and providing daily assistance. It should be noted that new HR Liaisons receive training from the Compensation Division, however the Department historically not offered formal opportunities for additional training or learning outside of training materials which are available for HR Liaisons to reference. At the time of M&J's fieldwork, the Department did not host regular, formal meetings with HR Liaisons on a regular basis. As of this report, the Department is in the process of revising training opportunities available to HR Liaisons and implementing biweekly meetings with HR Liaisons to answer questions and provide information.

Recommendation 21A: The Department should analyze common questions and issues raised by HR Liaisons to proactively continue to increase and revise training offered and to provide more learning opportunities for HR Liaisons. The Department should continue its plan to host regular biweekly sessions for HR Liaisons to ask questions and share knowledge. The Department should also utilize feedback from HR Liaisons to inform internal training efforts and SOPs to ensure consistency in processes and procedures especially related to approval/rejection of ESMTs.

Recommendation 21B: The Department should continue its plan to host biweekly regular meetings with HR Liaisons to communicate updates to policies and procedures which may affect end-user departments to increase and standardize communication and information sharing.

Observation 22: While Advantage has the capability to provide an Employee Self-Service Portal (“ESS”) the Department has historically limited features which are available to end-users. The Department has historically not allowed employees to update certain information such as their address, direct deposit, and tax form information. As a result, the Compensation Division is responsible for making appropriate changes to employees’ direct deposit, tax, and address information. Employees must complete forms within NEOGOV pertaining to which information they would like to change or update, and then the Compensation Division staff enter appropriate changes within Advantage manually. Employees do not have full access to an ESS portal through Advantage, which also requires more manual effort on behalf of Compensation Division staff to make necessary changes and updates.

Recommendation 22: The Department should consider implementing more features within the Advantage ESS to allow employees to make changes to their information without involving manual data entry by staff within the Department’s two primary systems NEOGOV and Advantage.

Observation 23: While the Department’s performance metrics align with the Department’s goals to increase recruitment and retention and reduce time-to-hire, due to the lack of a formal and comprehensive strategic plan outlining objectives, the Department’s ability to use insights gleaned from performance data to assess performance and progress towards goals is limited.

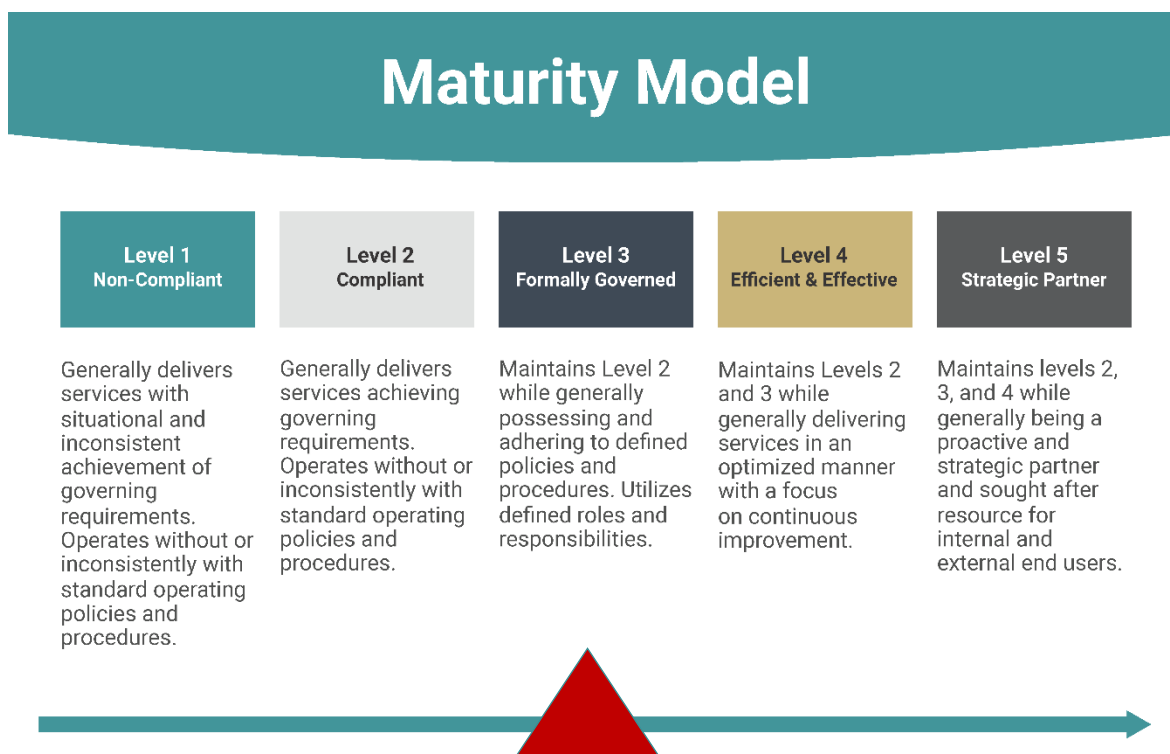
Recommendation 23: The Department should establish a process by which leadership analyzes performance data captured and utilizes performance data to help identify proactive, strategic efforts and track progress towards formal goals and objectives. As such, performance data tracked by the Department should align with defined strategic goals and objectives.

Observation 24: Based on interviews, participation within performance appraisals has not been consistently enforced to ensure all departments are complying with the requirement and all CCG employees receive an annual evaluation. As a result, the Department recently implemented incentives and a new process involving NEOGOV to streamline the performance appraisals process. With the implementation of the new process, the Department is tracking compliance to ensure performance appraisals are completed.

Recommendation 24: The Department should continue tracking compliance to enforce the annual performance evaluation requirement and should ensure all departments comply with the requirement.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department's maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Department as **Level 3: Formally Governed**. While the Department maintains documentation and SOPs, the Department is not able to operate as efficiently as possible due to highly manual processes, staffing constraints, and lack of formal strategic direction.

Conclusion

The Human Resources Department provides services such as recruitment, hiring, to approximately 3,000 departments and supports HR Liaisons which serve as an extension of the Department. The Department has implemented initiatives to better support recruitment efforts and has been tasked with implementing recommendations from the 2022 Pay Study, which helped to increase compensation for CCG employees. The Department maintains adequate documentation to guide operations. However, due to staffing constraints, manual process, and lack of a strategic plan, the Department is not able to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. With the addition of more staff to support operations, automation of manual processes, and the implementation of strategic goals, the Department will have the ability to greatly improve its customer service and its maturity. M&J would like to thank Departmental leadership, in addition to Department staff for allowing the team to conduct interviews and follow-ups to complete this assessment.

3.G Information Technology

Please see the confidential report on the Information Technology Department presented separately from this comprehensive Phase I Assessment Report.

3.H Inspections & Code

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“CCG” or “City” or “Government”) Inspections and Code Department (“Department”) serves the City of Columbus by helping to ensure the safety of the built environment for residents and visitors.³¹ The Department enforces the Georgia State Minimum Standard Codes, consisting of the State-adopted and amended editions of the International Building, Plumbing, Electrical, Mechanical, and Property Maintenance Codes, along with local codes and ordinances specific to the Columbus Consolidated Government. The Department additionally enforces the Unified Development Ordinance, which is the compilation of regulations that govern land use, including the Zoning Ordinance, the Environmental Ordinance, and the SubDivision Ordinance/Regulations for the City of Columbus.

Department operations are divided between construction and development compliance and existing property maintenance and compliance, overseen by the Inspections Division and Code Enforcement Division respectively. The Inspections Division processes building applications, issues construction permits, collects building permit and inspection fees, and examines building plans for new structures and additions to existing structure. The Department issues Certificates of Occupancy after confirming adherence to state and local standards. Code Enforcement enforces relevant laws, ordinances, and codes regarding property maintenance by investigating and resolving complaints and noncompliance in existing structures and lots, including unsafe buildings, environmental nuisances, and overgrown vegetation.

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

The Department prioritizes accessibility and customer service, and has developed professional relationships throughout the community to provide a high level of service delivery. Inspections Division staff have established working relationships within the local construction industry, allowing for informal dialogue to proactively correct recurrent issues. The Department conducts quarterly meetings with contractors to discuss items such as construction industry trends, site access challenges, and to provide updates on relevant process or technical changes.

Department staff are active in State and local industry associations, such as the West Georgia Inspectors Association (“WGIA”) and the Georgia Association of Code Enforcement (“GACE”). During fieldwork, Inspections Division staff served as WGIA’s current President and Secretary. The Department strongly encourages continuing professional education (such post-tension foundation training to align with market trends) and supports staff development by reimbursing costs for certification tests upon successful completion.

³¹ The Department was previously titled the Community Development Department. A variety of documents and webpages still use the Community Development Department designation.

Staff maintain professional certifications including, but not limited to:

- Certified Building Official³²
- Building Inspector (including both Residential and Commercial certifications)³²
- Electrical Inspector (including both Residential and Commercial certifications)³³
- Mechanical Inspector (including both Residential and Commercial certifications)³²
- Plumbing Inspector (including both Residential and Commercial certifications)³²
- Combination Inspector (including both Residential and Commercial certifications for the Building, Electrical, Mechanical, and Plumbing trades)³²
- Combination Plans Examiner (including certifications for Building, Electrical, Mechanical, and Plumbing trades)³²
- Property Maintenance Inspector³²
- Code Enforcement Certificate Level I³⁴
- Code Enforcement Certificate Level II³⁴
- Code Enforcement Certificate Level III (Leadership and Management)³⁴

The Department partners with industry associations, such as WGIA and GACE, as well as local businesses and industry experts, to ensure staff receive the continuing education credits required to maintain certifications. In addition to the certifications staff attain after joining the Department, the Department has also recruited employees with other relevant certifications, such as contractor certifications, trades professional certifications, and peace officer certification. Staff study for continuing education courses, including those needed for certification sustainment and additional certifications, when not actively working on cases.

During the review period, the Code Enforcement Division was allocated two Sign and License Inspector positions – a new role created to enforce City Sign Ordinance on City rights-of-way and alcohol and business license compliance. Creating positions dedicated to enforcement of sign and business licensure ordinances allows Code Enforcement Officers to focus on property maintenance and environmental code enforcement.

Both Inspections Division and Code Enforcement Division staff patrol assigned zones/districts when in the field and not actively working on cases. Staff look for possible violations of City ordinances, such as construction without a permit or inoperable cars, and either create a case (if within the employee's jurisdiction) or notify staff in the other division (when a potential violation is within the other division's jurisdiction).

³² Certified by the International Code Council

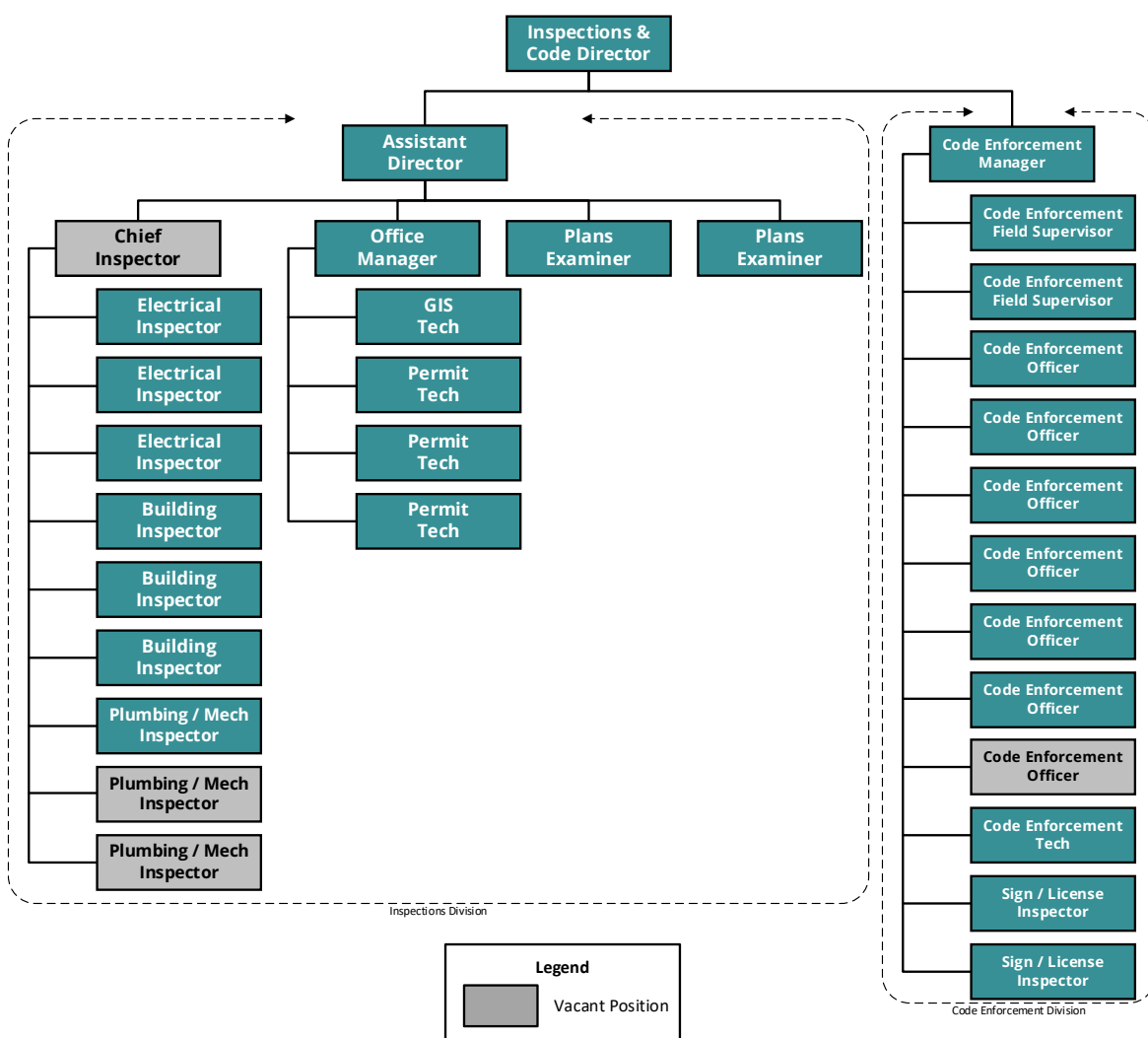
³³ Jointly certified by the International Code Council and Independent Alliance of the Electrical Industry

³⁴ Certified by the Georgia Association of Code Enforcement in partnership with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government

Organization and Staffing

The Department had 32 allocated full-time positions through the end of FY25 divided between two divisions: Inspections and Code Enforcement.³⁵ At the start of M&J's fieldwork, four positions were vacant: the Chief Inspector position, one Code Enforcement Officer position, and two Plumbing/Mechanical Inspector positions. For FY26, a new Project Analyst position was created to support the Engineering, Finance, Inspections and Code, and Planning Departments. The position will assist the Inspections and Code Department with budget management for capital projects. The position will not be funded through the Department's budget.

The following organizational chart illustrates the organization of the Department into the Inspections and Code Enforcement Divisions. The organizational chart only includes the 32 positions allocated to the Department through the end of FY25



³⁵ The Code Enforcement Division is also referred to as the Special Enforcement Division.

Department Leadership

The Department Director position leads the administration and strategic direction of the Department and serves as the Chief Building Official (“CBO”) for the City of Columbus. The Director serves as the final authority on code interpretation, mediating technical disputes with contractors and advising the City Council on necessary code revisions to ensure adherence to construction safety standards. The Director also functions as the project manager for the Columbus Consolidated Government’s building-related capital improvement projects. The additional responsibility of capital project management leverages the specific professional background and competencies of the individual in the Director position during the review period rather than assigning project management responsibilities to a specific position.

Supporting the Director is an Assistant Director position, who helps oversee Department operations. While the organizational structure, according to the position’s job description (as provided by the Human Resources [“HR”] Department) and some of the organizational charts available to M&J, aligns both divisions under the Assistant Director position’s supervision, Department staff asserted that the Assistant Director position has historically focused primarily on the Inspections Division, while the Code Enforcement Manager functions as the *de facto* authority for the Code Enforcement Division.

Department leadership positions additionally have liaison responsibilities to other Government organizations. The Director serves as staff liaison to the Historic Façade Board for technical matters related to local codes. The Assistant Director functions as the Secretary for the Board of Zoning Appeals, which reviews appeal applications and maintains files on conditional rezoning and special exception uses.

Inspections Division

The Inspections Division focuses on construction trade code compliance. A Chief Inspector position reports to the Assistant Director and is responsible for the direct supervision of nine Inspector positions. The Inspector positions specialize by trade as Building, Electrical, and Plumbing/Mechanical Inspectors – three Inspectors per trade. Inspectors are responsible for verifying compliance with the relevant construction codes at various stages of new structure construction and structural modification to existing buildings, via onsite inspections.

The Plans Examiner positions report to the Assistant Director. Plans Examiners review construction plans and specifications for code compliance prior to the issuance of building permits. The Plans Examiners communicate with the architects, engineers, contractors, and property owners applying for building permits to explain zoning and code regulations, request updated plans based on the Plans Examiners’ feedback, and maintain records of approved projects. At the completion of the plan review, permitting, and inspections processes, the Plans Examiner positions are responsible for issuing Certificates of Occupancy.

The Office Manager position reports to the Assistant Director and supervises three Permit Technician positions and one Geographic Information System (“GIS”) Technician position. The Office Manager performs administrative functions, such as budget form inputting and submission and payroll, as well as administrative support duties for the office as a whole (ordering supplies, assigning workspaces, etc.). Permit Technicians are the primary customer service representatives for the Department, serving as the first point of contact for customers, primarily related to the Inspections Division’s functions. The Permit Technicians process building permit applications, intake construction plans, issue required permits, and provide guidance for customers throughout the plan review, permitting, and inspections processes. Based on permit applications received, the Permit Technicians schedule inspections to determine compliance with building, plumbing, electrical, and mechanical code compliance and relevant local laws and ordinances. Two of the Permit Technician positions are located at the Department’s public-facing front counter, while the third Permit Technician position is located in the back office and functions as the primary customer service representative for telephoned inquiries and as a dispatcher, relaying information and cases to Inspectors in the field.

The GIS Technician manages the Department’s zoning, mapping, and spatial data needs, developing and producing reports as necessary and updating the Government’s GIS database when Departmental cases result in geographical data changes. The GIS Technician serves as a backup for the telephone customer service representative and dispatcher roles, when required. The GIS Manager housed within the CCG Information Technology Department maintains communication with the GIS Technician to assign workload and ensure coordination of projects between GIS divisions/employees decentralized within other City departments. However, the GIS Technician reports to the Department Director. Therefore, the Director completes the GIS Technician’s performance appraisals, and is primarily involved in hiring decisions for GIS positions assigned to the Department, in addition to approving the types of training that can be obtained. As there is not a requirement for the GIS Manager to be involved in hiring decisions, performance appraisals, and training opportunities, it is up to the discretion of the Director to involve the GIS Manager in such decisions. As such, GIS positions within the Department are not formally accountable to the GIS Manager, which creates governance issues when assigning workloads. Also, training opportunities received by GIS positions are inconsistent between departments, affecting the retention and talent of employees.

Code Enforcement Division

The Code Enforcement Division is responsible for enforcing compliance with property maintenance, environmental, and zoning codes and ordinances. The Code Enforcement Manager position serves as the direct supervisor for the Code Enforcement Division’s staff and activities. According to the Assistant Director job description provided by the HR Department, the Assistant Director position supervises both the Inspections and Code Enforcement Divisions. However, during fieldwork, the Code Enforcement Manager position appeared to report directly to the Department Director position, with the Assistant Director position solely responsible for the Inspections Division.

The Code Enforcement Manager oversees 12 positions – two Code Enforcement Field Supervisor positions, seven Code Enforcement Officer positions, two Sign and License Inspector positions, and one Code Enforcement Technician position.^{36,37} The Code Enforcement Officer positions are responsible for investigating complaints and enforcing ordinances related to property maintenance and nuisances. The Sign and License Inspector positions are responsible for enforcing the Sign Ordinance and business license regulations by patrolling for non-compliant signage, visiting local businesses to confirm valid business and alcohol licenses, and verifying payment of excise taxes. The Code Enforcement Field Supervisor positions provide guidance and support for field personnel, as well as performing the duties of the Code Enforcement Officer position. The Code Enforcement Technician position serves as a dispatcher for field personnel and administrative support for the Division, as well as provides support and guidance for the public.

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

At the start of M&J’s fieldwork, the Department had four vacancies: the Chief Inspector position, two Plumbing/Mechanical Inspector positions, and one Code Enforcement Officer position. Due to the vacancies, Department staff took on additional duties and responsibilities in order to avoid a decline in services. For example, the Code Enforcement Division temporarily expanded the district assignments for Code Enforcement Officers to ensure coverage across the Government’s jurisdiction. The individual in the Assistant Director position temporarily performed the duties of the Chief Inspector position and conducted plumbing and mechanical inspections, which limited full attention on the strategic duties of the Assistant Director position. The Department prioritized avoiding any disruptions in service provision, while actively seeking qualified candidates for the vacant positions. During interviews with M&J, senior leadership indicated that Department staff were interviewing candidates and had extended an offer to a candidate for the Chief Inspector position.

The following table lists the Department’s turnover rate for each of the five full fiscal years in the review period (FY21-25).

Table 17: Annual Turnover Rate

Fiscal Year	Turnover Rate
2021	16.7%
2022	26.7%
2023	33.3%
2024	30%
2025	15.6%

Source: CCG Budget Books FY20-FY25, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

³⁶ M&J refers to the Code Enforcement Field Supervisor, Code Enforcement Officer, and Sign and License Inspector positions collectively as “field personnel.”

³⁷ The Code Enforcement Technician position is designated as an Inspection Services Technician in Human Resources Department documentation. M&J uses the term “Code Enforcement Technician” to avoid confusion between the technician positions who support the Inspections Division and the technician position who supports the Code Enforcement Division.

The typical turnover rate for a municipal Inspections & Code Department is approximately 15%. During the review period, the Department’s turnover rate ranged from 15.6% to 33.3%. Turnover rates were at the highest end of the range during FY23 and FY24. The review did not identify a systemic cause for separations during these two fiscal years.

The Department faces recruitment challenges due to wage competition with the private sector. As a result, the Department often hires retirees from the private sector or less experienced employees. Departmental training protocols and lack of documentation impede the ability to train replacements for departing staff or move current staff into new roles.

Career Paths and Training

Reports provided by the CCG Human Resources Department indicated that eight of the 16 (50%) position titles allocated to the Inspections and Code Department have job tiers within the respective position allowing for an increase in pay grade for employees without waiting for another position to become vacant. The number of job tiers and the positions assigned tiers is inconsistent, however, as demonstrated in the following table.

Table 18: Job Tier Data

Job Tiers Available	Applicable Positions (Pay Grade)
No Tiers	Director (134) Assistant Director (131) Chief Inspector (128) Office Manager (118) Code Enforcement Field Supervisor (122) Sign and License Inspector (116) Code Enforcement Technician (115) Project Analyst (123)
I, II	Permit Technician (115, 116) GIS Technician (118, 119) Plans Examiner (123, 124) Code Enforcement Manager (126, 127)
I, II, III	Building Inspector (120, 121, 122) Electrical Inspector (120, 121, 122) Plumbing/Mechanical Inspector (120, 121, 122) Code Enforcement Officer (120, 121, 122)

Source: CCG Human Resources Position Allocation Report

As the preceding table illustrates, the availability of career paths is inconsistent. In some scenarios, positions at the same initial pay grade have inconsistent access to job tiers (e.g., Permit Technician and Code Enforcement Technician). In other scenarios, positions start at the same pay grade as the relevant supervisory position but can exceed the supervisory position’s pay grade through job tier advancement (e.g., GIS Technician and Office Manager). And in a further set of scenarios, supervisory positions have access to job tier advancement while the positions that report to the supervisory position do not have job tiers (e.g., Code Enforcement Manager and Code Enforcement Field Supervisor).

In interviews with M&J, Department staff indicated that job tier advancement, as well as promotion into vacant supervisory positions, requires the attainment of additional or advanced certifications. However, M&J did not receive documentation of these requirements. The only training listed in the Department's 2025 Rules and Regulations manual is Drivers Training (an enterprise-wide training program required before employees may operate Government vehicles). A separate document provided to M&J that appeared to be a possible standalone training policy detailed the number of training hours employees must obtain based on the number of ICC certifications held by the employee. Furthermore, job descriptions provided by the HR Department did not indicate the opportunity for job tier advancement or the certification levels required to advance job tiers.

Many staff in interviews agreed that the Department emphasizes training and certification as a means to develop staff and maintain familiarity with the most-current versions of codes and industry leading practices. The Department's training structure primarily relies on external training, however, with limited formal internal training. New hires rely primarily on job shadowing and on-the-job instruction, which can lead to inconsistencies in practices and knowledge. The Department does not maintain a policy detailing a required training program for positions.

Leading practices suggest that organizations such as the Columbus Inspections and Code Department develop formal training policies that detail the various stages in new-hire training, as well as timelines and expectations for continued education and additional certifications required for job tier advancement. Leading training programs commonly include opportunities for various types of training, including job-specific technical skills (e.g., trades inspector certifications, understanding of legal documents, etc.), technology (e.g., the systems used by the organization, equipment use, etc.), soft skills (e.g., people management, de-escalation, etc.), and safety and security (e.g., peace officer certification, safety equipment use, etc.).

M&J's fieldwork indicated that staff had inconsistent understanding of the systems and platforms used by the Department and made available to the public, as well as relevant job-specific technical and soft skills. While some functional areas had access to subject matter experts who could provide in-depth initial training to new employees, not all functions had the same access to staff willing and able to dedicate time to training, resulting in certain functional areas displaying more comfort with tools and processes than other functional areas.

Staffing Analysis

The Department does not engage in succession planning to formally train and advance current staff into leadership roles or technical positions. Cross-training opportunities are limited due to the manner of execution of job duties, creating a reliance on specific individuals for institutional knowledge rather than preparing staff across the Department. Promotion to and within leadership positions often results from individuals' proactive career development efforts or prior experience external to the Department, rather than through intentional succession planning and leadership development.

During interviews, M&J identified several instances of the Department (and the Government as a whole) assigning responsibilities based on the competencies of current and former holders of each position. As previously discussed, the individual in the Department Director position during the review period functions as the building-related capital project manager for the Government – a role that transferred with the individual from another Government department, rather than assigned specifically to the Department Director position.

Within the Department, certain duties are divided among people due to competencies, oftentimes resulting in similar functions operating differently in each division. For example, payroll is bifurcated between the Office Manager position and the Code Enforcement Manager position. While the Office Manager position manages the payroll process for the Inspections Division, the Code Enforcement Manager position manages the payroll process for the Code Enforcement Division. The bifurcation of payroll and other functions can result in inconsistent processes and policies between the two divisions, which can impact communications and culture in the Department. Assignment of duties and responsibilities due to jobholders' competencies instead of position can further impact communications and culture as processes and policies start to change due to personal preference and can cause confusion due to unclear delineation of responsibilities – both among Department staff and among departments.

The lack of clear leadership of the Code Enforcement Division could similarly impact communications, culture, and create an unclear delineation of duties and chain of command. The organizational structure was not a notable issue during the review period, as staff indicated in interviews that the holders of the Assistant Director position have historically only focused on the Inspections Division, and staff throughout the Department noted regular lines of communication among the Department's senior leadership. However, the situation could result in tension and impacted service delivery in the future.

Board of Zoning

The Department provides administrative and technical support to the Government's Board of Zoning Appeals ("Board"). The Department receives and processes applications and fees for appeals to the Board, as well as providing technical assistance and staff recommendations to the Board. The Department maintains records for conditional rezonings and special exceptions, and updates the official copy of the zoning map as changes are approved. Plans Examiners also review appeal applications for projects noncompliant with established zoning requirements or seeking a special exception.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The Department's mission is the development and maintenance of a safe and environmentally sound community, which is enacted in different phases of the property lifecycle by the two divisions. The Inspections Division maintains the safety of the built environment via construction code compliance, and Code Enforcement enforces property maintenance and environmental codes for existing structures.

The Department's primary functions within its mission are:

- Construction Inspections
 - Plans Examination and Permitting
 - Site Inspections
 - Issuance of Certificates of Occupancy
- Code Enforcement
 - Abatement
 - Demolition
 - Signage and Licensing Enforcement

Construction Inspections

The Inspections Division helps ensure safety and environmental soundness of the built environment by verifying that all permitted work complies with the appropriate regulations, including the Georgia State Minimum Standard Codes and City ordinances.

Plans Examination and Permitting

The plans examination and permitting functions help ensure safety and environmental soundness of the built environment by approving permits for construction work and ensuring that permitted work complies with the Georgia State Minimum Standard Codes. The functions relate to new construction, as well as enlargements, alterations, repairs, or other changes that affect the structure or occupancy of an existing building. The Department receives and processes construction permit applications submitted in person at the Department office or through the online portal hosted through the Government-wide community development management software, Tyler Technologies' Enterprise Permitting and Licensing ("EPL").³⁸ The Civic Access Self Service ("CASS") online portal provides the public an opportunity to digitally submit applications, payments, and plans, as well as check the status on the permitting, inspection, and licensure processes.

When members of the public – most commonly property owners or contractors representing property owners – intend to initiate new construction or structural modifications to existing buildings, the individual is required to apply for the applicable permit(s) prior to beginning construction. The Department offers a variety of permits based on the type of work intended, including building, sign, gas, plumbing, electrical, and mechanical permits. Required permits may also depend upon the type of structure, such as different building permits for residential, educational, or mercantile occupancies. As part of the permitting process, applicants submit construction plans for review by the Department to ensure the intended construction is designed to meet the relevant construction codes, life safety codes, and adhere to zoning restrictions.

³⁸ The EPL system was previously named EnerGov and is frequently still referred to as such in documentation and conversation. Documents and staff may also refer to the system by the software provider ("the Tyler system").

The Plans Examiners coordinate with architects, engineers, and contractors regarding code requirements prior to the drafting of final plans, requiring revisions when plans do not meet the relevant standards. The Plans Examiners also process packets for short-term vacation rentals, issue zoning letters for personal care homes, and verify zoning compliance for alcohol license applications.

Once the Plans Examiners approve the construction plans, the Permit Technicians issue the relevant permit(s) to the applicant and input the inspections required by the construction type into the permit file in the EPL system. When issuing the permit(s), the Permit Technicians collect permitting and plan review fees paid via cash, check, or credit card (if the applicant did not already pay in the CASS portal). The Permit Technicians balance the cash, checks, and credit card payments received daily and conduct a weekly deposit to the bank. If daily balances don't match the Finance Department's reports, the Permit Technicians work with the Finance Department to reconcile reports and documentation.

After approving and issuing a permit, the Department requires the applicant to post the permit at the site of the construction. Inspectors rely on issued permits during the inspections process. When the Department identifies unpermitted work, the Department can issue a stop-work order and/or assess fines until the required permits are acquired.

The Permit Technicians serve as customers' primary point of contact for this process, collecting plans and accompanying documentation, answering inquiries regarding fee submission, and assisting end-users with necessary paperwork.

Site Inspections

After receiving required permits, property owners or contractors request inspections via the CASS online portal, phone call, or at the Department office at specific required construction milestones. The Department's trade-specialized Building, Electrical, and Plumbing/Mechanical Inspectors visit the construction site to validate dimensions and setbacks, review third-party reports (such as soil tests), and check the work against permitted plans. Inspectors fill out a hardcopy permit card upon completion of the inspection, signing off for a passed inspection or noting any failures. The order of inspections generally follows the sequence outlined in the relevant codes: foundation, electrical, mechanical, plumbing rough-in, framing, and final inspection, as required by the scope of the construction. Additionally, Inspectors verify compliance with soil erosion and sedimentation control requirements during site visits. Inspectors collaborate with the Fire Marshal's Office to verify adherence to the Life Safety Code and Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

Inspectors rely on individual experience, memory, and direct reference to code books to verify compliance during site visits, not operating with a checklist in paper or digital form. While the Building, Electrical, and Plumbing/Mechanical Inspectors can begin the role with knowledge and expertise from prior employment and acquisition of certifications, the lack of use of a checklist creates potential risks for inconsistency in enforcement. The lack of documentation also complicates the training process. As discussed in the *Organization and Staffing* section, new Inspectors are trained through observation and shadowing rather than following a standardized procedure, introducing personal variance and preference into the training process.

Inspections are organized geographically. The Inspectors in each trade divide Columbus into three zones with one Inspector from each trade (building, plumbing/mechanical, and electrical) assigned to each zone, allowing the Inspectors to build rapport with customers across the City. The Department targets next-day service for inspections, providing requestors a date and either a morning or afternoon inspection period. Inspectors cover areas outside their assigned zones when there are absences or vacancies to maintain next-day service targets.

While onsite, Inspectors document the results in the EPL system. If the inspection result is a pass, the Inspector signs the hardcopy permit card. In interviews with M&J, staff noted inconsistencies in the practice of signing the permit card upon a passed inspection, which can lead to ambiguity for contractors regarding the result of the inspection, delaying further construction or an application for a Certificate of Occupancy.

If the Inspector identifies code violations, the Inspector issues a hardcopy correction notice to the contractor detailing the specific deficiencies that must be addressed. The Inspector also records the deficiencies into the EPL system as a case record. For complex issues, Inspectors may walk through the remediation steps onsite with the contractor. The Department's fee schedule indicates the assessment of fees for re-inspections. The re-inspection fees, however, are inconsistently assessed (oftentimes not assessed until a permitholder demonstrates repeated non-compliance) and the Department does not assess fees when Inspectors are unable to access a property (e.g., locked gates, no one present to allow access to the interior of a structure). The lack of assessment of no-show fees results in unrecovered operational costs for fuel and staff time.

Inspectors also enforce regulations such as the Columbus Historic Preservation Ordinance and the Uptown Façade Ordinance, which evaluate historic, scenic, and architectural significance of sites, as the regulations relate to construction codes.

When not actively conducting inspections, Inspectors monitor their assigned zones for indications of unpermitted construction and issue violations as necessary.

Issuance of Certificates of Occupancy

Plans Examiners and Inspectors coordinate to ensure the final structure matches the plans approved during the permitting process. The Department, through the authority of the Chief Building Official, approves the Certificate of Occupancy for commercial buildings as it relates to zoning and use after required inspections are complete and Plans Examiners confirm that no unannounced alterations were made to plans during the process. The Fire Marshal's Office determines and approves the occupancy load for buildings. Both approvals are required before the Government will issue a Certificate of Occupancy for a commercial building. The Certificate of Occupancy states the permissible use, the number of persons for each floor when limited by law, and the allowable load per square foot for each floor in accordance with the provisions of the applicable code. The Government requires a valid Certificate of Occupancy to issue a business license. The Department is not involved with the approval and issuance of Certificates of Occupancy for residential buildings.

Code Enforcement

The Code Enforcement Division enforces adherence to the codes and ordinances that establish minimum housing standards to maintain health and cleanliness in the City and ensure safe and sanitary conditions for the community. Code Enforcement Officers (“Officers”) enforce local ordinances and State codes that detail property maintenance and environmental standards pertaining to issues such as lawn height, blighted structures, noise nuisances, scrap tires, biomedical waste, open burning, hazardous waste, and mobile home registration.

Officers and Code Enforcement Field Supervisors divide the Government’s jurisdiction into nine districts and respond to complaints within each field personnel’s assigned district. Potential violations are identified through public complaints to the Government’s 311 system, calls from the public directly to the Department, or proactive observation by Code Enforcement Officers patrolling assigned districts. Case assignments are distributed daily via the EPL system. When addressing a complaint, Officers verify the relevant ordinance for potential violations and visit the identified site. If the Officer identifies one or more violations, the Officer issues a notice of violation with a specified timeframe for rectification. Officers monitor violation sites for compliance and conduct a re-inspection at the completion of the allotted timeframe. If the responsible party (e.g., property owner, landlord, business owner, etc.) does not come into compliance by the time of the re-inspection, the Code Enforcement Officer has the discretion to allow additional time for the responsible party to address the violation or to take more formal steps to encourage (or compel) compliance. If the Officer decides to take more formal steps, the Code Enforcement Technician sends a certified letter to the responsible party identifying the violation(s) and the timeframe for rectification. After waiting for the legal remediation period to elapse between letter receipt and the ensuing re-inspection, the Officer can issue a citation if the property is still noncompliant and the responsible party is available. Citations issued for property maintenance and environmental code violations require the responsible party to appear in an Environmental Court session of the Recorder’s Court of Columbus. The Environmental Court can choose to impose fines on the responsible party according to the Government’s set fine schedule.

Abatement

In rem abatement (“abatement”) is the process of the Department taking action against the property itself, either in the absence of the property owner or continued failure of the responsible party to rectify violations. The Department will proceed with the abatement process with permission from a judge if the Department is unable to contact property owners or if imposed fines fail to comply rectification. The Department uses the abatement process for a variety of violation resolutions, such as mowing the lawn of a property, towing cars, or clearing debris from a property, as well as more extreme resolutions, such as the demolition of blighted structures. The Department contracts third parties to assist with the resolutions in addition to Officers’ efforts. The Division emphasizes safety, monitoring third-party crews and ensuring at least two Officers are onsite when property owners or residents are likely to protest the resolution. The relevant property is subject to a potential lien after abatement to cover the cost of abatement.

Demolition

For blighted structures the Officer has the prerogative to initiate a legal process for demolition of the structure. Demolitions require an abatement order from the City Manager or a designated representative requiring the responsible party to come into compliance or demolish the building or structure within a specified time no more than 60 days and remove the debris from the site within 30 days. The City Manager or a designated representative presents the case to the Columbus Council, who must pass an ordinance approving the demolition before the Department can move forward with the abatement order.

If the responsible party does not heed the abatement order, the Officer will placard the site with condemnation notices and take pictures of the site for record-keeping purposes. Due to the number of properties requiring demolition during the review period and the Department's annual allotted budget, the Division frequently waited two or more years after an abatement order to finalize the demolition of a blighted structure.

During the pending period, Officers routinely check on the site every 30-45 days to ensure the site has neither deteriorated further nor is posing any new or additional health and safety issues. Officers document the site via pictures at each blighted structure visit. The Code Enforcement Field Supervisors audit the visits to properties awaiting demolition to ensure compliance with legal and Departmental procedures. Officers frequently review for a change in ownership of properties awaiting demolition. If ownership of properties change, the Department is required to restart the abatement and demolition processes.

When the Division is ready to demolish the structure and has adequate funding to do so, the Department schedules the demolition in coordination with a third-party vendor and sends a letter to the property owner with a notification of a demolition hearing before the Columbus Council. If the Columbus Council does not reject or delay the demolition, the Department moves forward with the process as scheduled. On the scheduled demolition day, the on-duty Code Enforcement Field Supervisors and Officers, as well as the Code Enforcement Manager if available, arrive at the site in the morning and begin procedures for demolitions, including preparing the site for the vendor and preventing the public from accessing the site. Field personnel swap duties throughout the day to better ensure a strong presence onsite throughout the demolition.

Signage and Licensing Enforcement

The Sign and License Inspectors enforce the City's Sign Ordinance and business license regulations by patrolling for posted and compliant business licenses, alcohol licenses, and signage. The Sign and License Inspectors perform investigations of suspected non-compliant business and conduct site visits as necessary to enforce the relevant regulations. The Sign and License Inspectors remove illegally placed signs from City rights-of-way and address violations on private commercial properties, such as unpermitted banners or flag signs.

In the position's licensing capacity, the Sign and License Inspectors verify that establishments operate with valid business and alcohol licenses, coordinating with the Finance Department to confirm the payment of excise taxes. Additionally, the Sign and License Inspectors utilize a non-renewal list, typically provided by the Finance Department in August, to identify and investigate businesses operating with expired credentials.

The Sign and License Inspectors issue notices of violation, after which the Code Enforcement Technician sends a certified letter to the responsible party. If noncompliance continues, the Sign and License Inspectors issue citations to the noncompliant businesses.

Customer Service

The Department emphasizes responsive customer service across both divisions. The Permit Technicians and the Code Enforcement Technician are the first point of contact for customers on the phone and in person at the Department offices. The Permit Technicians and Code Enforcement Technician have extended interactions with users, verifying provided documentation for Department functions such as permit applications, plan approval, and inspections, and answering user questions on processes and requirements. As detailed in the *Organization and Staffing* section, the Permit Technicians and Code Enforcement Technician, like the majority of the Department, rely on knowledge transfer of common situations and customer questions rather than a defined training plan to learn the job duties. There is no specific formal training regimen in the Department for any role to practice customer service interactions or learn skills for customer-relationship management.

The Inspections Division maintains professional working relationships with the local construction industry, especially with general contractors. The Inspectors in each trade rotate assigned zones, allowing the Inspectors to build rapport with users across the City. The Division ensures coverage of zones even when Inspectors are absent, positions are vacant, or workloads for specific zones are higher than usual in an attempt to maintain the goal next-day inspection service. Inspectors also rotate trade inspections on large projects, such as construction of the new Columbus City Hall, ensuring critical projects always have inspection coverage and that contractors have relationships with all Inspectors.

The Code Enforcement Division operates in environments and situations that require balancing safety and customer service. The Code Enforcement Division's field personnel incorporate customer service into interactions by explaining the noncompliance to available parties and providing printouts of relevant ordinances. Both Code Enforcement Officers and Sign and License Inspectors try to provide leeway to responsible parties for violations, issuing multiple warnings in an attempt to encourage compliance rather than force action. Field personnel operate collectively on cases where there may be a heightened customer service or safety need, such as towing cars or demolishing structures. Teamwork allows for field personnel to maintain situational awareness and safety measures while still interacting with and explaining issues clearly to members of the public.

Both divisions emphasize proactive identification of Inspectors and Code Enforcement Officers as representatives of the Department to members of the public. This emphasis includes verbal identification, wearing badges and Department-issued uniforms, and parking Department vehicles visibly to allow identification when interacting with the public in the field.

Use of Technology

The Department uses the EPL system to record and manage cases for both the Inspections and Code Enforcement Divisions. The Department issues laptops to Inspectors and Code Enforcement field personnel to document case details directly into the EPL system. While staff generally report that the laptops are sufficient, some suggested that use of a mobile application version of the EPL system for work phones could streamline case documentation in the field. The Inspections Division was field testing tablets during M&J's fieldwork to evaluate viability as replacements or supplements to the current laptop setup.

Inspectors and Code Enforcement Officers work in the field using Department vehicles. Safety when driving is part of their overall job safety, as stressed by the Government's Drivers Training. When performing job shadowing, M&J observed inconsistency in the availability and use of safety and navigation equipment, such as hands-free connectivity and communication, phone mounts, and mapping tools. M&J further observed that some employees appear to be paying for use of a route optimization tool, Spoke Route Planner (previously Circuit Route Planner), out of pocket. Additionally, Code Enforcement Officers noted a desire for additional vehicular safety equipment in interviews with M&J, such as rooftop emergency light bars for adverse weather conditions or when pulled over to the side of the road for enforcement duties.

Code Enforcement Division vehicles are equipped with printers, which are only for printing ordinances rather than for issuing notices and citations. Inspection Division vehicles are not equipped with printers of any kind. Staff handwrite violation warnings and citations onsite, then enter it in the EPL system either while still in the field or upon returning to the Department office. The duplication of data entry introduces opportunities for error and takes time, especially with extensive lists of violations. Many similar municipal inspections and code enforcement organizations use mobile printer solutions for that print directly from the community development management system, streamlining operations by eliminating redundant data entry and handwriting time.

The Department implemented the EPL-hosted CASS online portal in FY25 to streamline permit processing and payments. However, post-implementation challenges persisted during M&J's fieldwork regarding system customization and workflow flexibility. Department staff identified instances where hard-coded system parameters prevent necessary corrections to active cases and permits, requiring the deletion and resubmission of applications and complaints to fix minor errors.

Additionally, the portal's standard processing timelines do not always align with immediate user needs, such as emergency power reconnections or same-day inspection requests. The system accepts and receives payment, which processes overnight, before the system assigns the inspection. As a result, Inspections Division staff use offline workarounds to address emergency situations.

Department staff appear to have not been involved in the development of the EPL-hosted tools, including the CASS portal. Additionally, Department staff appear to have inconsistently received training on the EPL-hosted tools, resulting in users performing the same task in different manners or struggling to explain to members of the public how to use the Department’s public-facing resources.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

The Department does not have a formal strategic plan. The Department maintains a Rules and Regulations document, most recently updated in 2025. The Rules and Regulations provide general guidelines regarding professional conduct, safety regulations, vehicle and equipment usage, cash register policies, and human resources guidelines. The Rules and Regulations do not address specific operational workflows or subject-matter procedures. The Department also does not have Standard Operating Procedures (“SOPs”), policies specific to job duties, or process manuals. The Department relies on codebooks and ordinances for job instruction across both divisions, with Department leadership providing interpretation in the case of dispute or lack of clarity. Lack of documentation for job-specific policies procedures creates the risk of inconsistent treatment of cases and members of the public during service delivery. Comparable organizations use SOPs to help ensure consistency and standardization of service delivery.

As previously noted in the *Organization and Staffing* section, the Department lacks documented policies and procedures governing training for field personnel in both divisions, including new employee training requirements, certification schedules and criteria necessary for job promotion, and calendars of continuing education opportunities needed to maintain certifications.

Training for administrative positions and non-field technical positions is conducted after beginning the job. The Department currently lacks documented policies, SOPs, or job aids for administrative and non-field technical positions, and administrative and non-field technical positions do not receive any structured training. Training for these roles relies on institutional knowledge and overlap in employment between staff members holding the same position.

Strategic Priorities

The Department’s primary mission is ensuring a safe and environmentally sound community for residents and visitors. The Department maintains internal emphasis and cultural priorities to deliver an elevated level of customer service and build relationships within the community. The Department aims to function as a partner to community members and prioritizes education of customers to encourage compliance with regulations rather than issuing citations and penalties.

The Code Enforcement Division views employee safety as a critical priority to balance with customer service obligations, especially given the potentially difficult nature of enforcement interactions. While Code Enforcement Officers wear bulletproof vests, this tool can be insufficient when personnel are threatened, including confrontation with firearms. The Department requests assistance from the Muscogee County Sheriff's Office or the Columbus Police Department on cases where there is a possible threat of violence. Relying on these agencies for routine enforcement support can stretch law enforcement resources and often results in delayed response times for Code Enforcement Officer case visits. To address safety concerns for Code Enforcement personnel, comparable municipalities often consider the certification of a limited number of code enforcement personnel as peace officers authorized to carry weapons in limited contexts by the Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council ("POST certification").

Three Code Enforcement Division personnel with criminal justice or related backgrounds possess Correctional Officer certification, a type of POST certification, which they received prior to employment with the Department. Correctional Officer certification does not allow personnel to carry weapons and only permits oversight of incarcerated individuals, not enforcement of laws to the general public. During the review period, the Department did not require, or state a preference for, employment candidates to hold Correctional Officer or full POST certification, and did not promote or provide additional compensation based on Correctional Officer or full POST certification.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

The Department tracks high-level outputs for both divisions. Metrics related to inspections include the total number of completed inspections and plan review times. Metrics related to code enforcement include the number of citations issued, abatements executed, vehicles towed, field inspections performed to verify business and alcohol licenses, number of excise tax payments confirmed during site visits, and number of short-term vacation rental packets processed.

Data from FY25 indicates that the Department met its goal of providing next-day service for construction inspections. An analysis of the time elapsed between an inspection request being entered into the EPL system and the inspection occurring indicates turnaround times within the Department's goal range. During FY25, electrical, mechanical, and plumbing inspections consistently averaged between 1.0 and 1.4 business days from request to initial inspection.

Inspections Division metrics show that the Department completed a total of 25,659 construction inspections during FY25. Building inspections account for the highest volume (38%), followed by electrical (28%), plumbing (18%), and mechanical (16%).

Daily workload averages for FY25 varied significantly by Inspector availability and trade. Building Inspectors averaged approximately 12.6 inspections per day per Inspector, Electrical Inspectors averaged 11.4 inspections per day, and Plumbing/Mechanical Inspectors averaged 8.5 plumbing inspections and 8.0 mechanical inspections per day. The overall inspection pass rate was 81%, with re-inspections constituting 18% of site visits.

As the Department does not have any outlined goals or strategic priorities other than inspection times from request to completion, the numbers are not correlated to any strategic priorities or goals for the Department. The Department's lack of connection between data and goals limits the ability to make strategic, data-driven decisions. Leading practices encourage community development-focused organizations to look beyond volume counts and focus on data points that offer insight into operational efficiency and community impact. Similar development departments track metrics such as:

- **Permit Rejection Rates:** Tracking the percentage of rejected permits and categorizing the reasons for rejection can help identify common knowledge gaps and target educational resources effectively.
- **Inspection Goal Adherence:** Tracking the percentage of inspections completed within the stated goal timeframe, rather than simply measuring the time elapsed between an inspection request and its completion, can help provide a clearer measure of service reliability.
- **Violation Analysis:** Analyzing the types of violations for which notifications were issued and the percentage each category represents can help focus enforcement efforts and public education on the most prevalent issues.
- **Inaccessible Site Visits:** Tracking the number of visits where personnel are unable to access properties to review for potential violations or conduct construction inspections as a percentage of the total number of site visits can help quantify lost efficiency and support potential policy changes regarding trip fees.
- **Compliance Timelines:** Measuring the average time elapsed from initial code enforcement encounters to final compliance (or abatement) can help measure the effectiveness of the enforcement process rather than just the volume of activity.
- **Total Abatement Costs:** Tracking the total annual cost of upkeep for properties between demolition approval and actual demolition can help provide a financial aggregate that clearly demonstrates the fiscal impact of blight in the community.

While the Department emphasizes customer service as a key cultural value, it currently lacks specific key performance indicators or mechanisms to measure public satisfaction. Unlike the quantitative data collected for permitting or inspections, service quality is currently anecdotal. To address similar gaps, peer organizations often integrate feedback mechanisms directly into existing customer interactions. For example, industry practices include adding QR codes to the physical inspection cards left at job sites, linking directly to a brief satisfaction survey. This approach allows contractors and residents to provide immediate, specific feedback on their interactions with staff, providing governments with actionable data on service performance.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

The overall Departmental culture is rooted in a strong sense of community and service. Department employees expressed in interviews with M&J that while sometimes challenging, interacting with the public is a high-reward component of the job. Staff noted that serving the community by providing safety services and helping improve quality of life through both construction inspections and code enforcement is rewarding. Staff with military, civil, and correctional services backgrounds stated that the job is an extension of previous service to the community.

According to interviews with M&J, employees generally feel supported by Department management and teammates. Though the Inspections and Code Enforcement Divisions appear to be somewhat siloed, there is communication between divisions and the provision of cross-divisional support when necessary. During the Assessment, M&J observed a need for clearer protocols on how to coordinate between the two divisions to resolve cross-functional issues effectively. Staff also raised concerns that the office relocation planned for shortly after the review period, which will physically separate different functions of the Department, may further strain lines of communication.

Employees also reported that management is generally approachable and open to hearing concerns or equipment requests. Employees perceive that they have the tools they need for their job and that management is willing and able to acquire additional equipment as employees identify needs.

Communication within individual functional areas is frequent and functional but differs in formality between the two divisions. The Code Enforcement Division conducts a roll call meeting each morning to discuss assignments and trends, and Code Enforcement Field Supervisors hold meetings twice a week (once per team) with their assigned Officers to review active case statuses. The Code Enforcement Division emphasizes formal lines of communication and regular meetings.

Conversely, the Inspections Division does not meet as a whole, resulting in most communication occurring informally, which can result in inconsistent understanding of and access to information. While the Inspectors meet each morning to review total inspection volume and manually redistribute assignments across the three geographic zones to ensure balanced workloads, the meetings are the result of the employees in the Inspector positions during the review period and could cease in the event of turnover in the Inspections Division. Additionally, communication among the different Inspections Division functional areas generally relies on continuous, *ad hoc* collaboration.

Policy changes are communicated through email and acknowledged through signed forms often with little to no explanation for employees. Department management (the Director, Assistant Director, Code Enforcement Manager, and Office Manager positions) meet once a month to discuss notable issues or policy changes. Information flows down from these leadership positions differently and sometimes ineffectively. Employees suggested in interview with M&J that staff occasionally feels uninformed about changes or important information affecting the Department and its personnel. Some employees expressed that while communication with upper-level management is positive when it occurs, it can be rare depending on responsibilities held by each member of leadership. The Department does not hold regular staff meetings to policy changes or other relevant matters, potentially impeding the spread of information and perception of management availability.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: The Code Enforcement Manager positions functions as the *de facto* authority for the Code Enforcement Division (“Division”), despite a formal organizational structure that potentially places both divisions under the Assistant Director position. While this leadership structure operated without conflict during the review period, the discrepancy between certain versions of the Department’s organizational chart, the Assistant Director position’s job description, and daily operations could potentially result in a lack of clarity in the chain of command that could lead to confusion, operational inefficiencies, or tension in the future, particularly if turnover occurs in key leadership positions.

Recommendation 1: The Department should coordinate with the Human Resources Department to review job descriptions, organizational charts, policies, and workflows in order to provide clarity as to the formal and actual leadership structure for the Code Enforcement Division. The Department could consider options for organizational clarity such as more active involvement from the Assistant Director position in management of the Division, clear identification of the Code Enforcement Manager position as the Divisional head who reports directly to the Department Director, or elevation of the Code Enforcement Manager position to a second Assistant Director position with each Assistant Director position responsible for a division.

Observation 2: The GIS Manager housed within the CCG Information Technology Department maintains communication with the GIS Technician to assign workload and ensure coordination of projects between GIS divisions/employees decentralized within other City departments. However, the GIS Technician reports to the Department Director. Therefore, the Director completes the GIS Technician’s performance appraisals, and is primarily involved in hiring decisions for GIS positions assigned to the Department, in addition to approving the types of training that can be obtained. As there is not a requirement for the GIS Manager to be involved in hiring decisions, performance appraisals, and training opportunities, it is up to the discretion of the Director to involve the GIS Manager in such decisions. As such, GIS positions within the Department are not formally accountable to the GIS Manager, which creates governance issues when assigning workloads. Also, training opportunities received by GIS positions are inconsistent between departments, affecting the retention and talent of employees.

Recommendation 2A: The City should consider implementing dual-reporting relationships for all GIS-related positions decentralized external to the Department. As such, GIS positions should directly report to both the Directors in their respective departments, in addition to the GIS Manager within the IT Department.

Recommendation 2B: As a result of implementing a dual-reporting relationship, the City should ensure the GIS Manager is also responsible for completing performance evaluations for GIS positions. Also, the GIS Manager should be involved in the hiring process for all GIS positions to ensure top quality candidates with GIS knowledge and expertise are hired.

Recommendation 2C: Also, as a result of a dual-reporting relationship, the City should allow the GIS Manager to set standard training for GIS positions to attend to ensure all GIS positions receive the same training opportunities.

Observation 3: Departmental job descriptions and assigned duties do not consistently align with responsibilities often tied to specific individuals' competencies rather than to positions. For example, administrative tasks such as payroll and contract review are assigned and shared by different positions based on historical precedent rather than job function.

Recommendation 3: The Department should coordinate with the Human Resources Department to conduct a comprehensive review and realignment of job functions to ensure duties are best aligned with positions. The Department should further coordinate with the Human Resources Department to update job descriptions to match responsibility realignments

Observation 4: The Department does not maintain formal Standard Operating Procedures ("SOPs"), process manuals, or documented training protocols for many core functions. Training relies heavily on job shadowing, leading to inconsistencies in how duties are performed and how knowledge is transferred to new hires. Specific gaps exist in training for the Tyler Technologies Enterprise Permitting and Licensing ("EPL") system, as well as essential soft skills (customer service, de-escalation, etc.) and basic legal principles required for administrative duties. The lack of documentation extends to field operations, where Inspector positions are expected to rely on memory rather than standardized checklists, further contributing to potential variations in enforcement.

Recommendation 4A: The Department should prioritize the development of formal SOPs and job aids for all key functions. These documents should be centrally accessible and regularly updated to serve as a reliable reference for all staff.

Recommendation 4B: The Department should formalize its training program by developing a standardized curriculum that includes specific modules for the EPL system, soft skills (conflict de-escalation and customer service), and relevant legal requirements. This training should be mandatory for new hires and available as continuing education for current staff.

Recommendation 4C: The Department should develop and implement standardized inspection checklists for each trade. The Department could consider using checklists developed in the EPL system or provided as physical documents to ensure that all inspections are conducted against a consistent set of criteria.

Recommendation 4D: The Department should formalize the protocol for documenting passed inspections in the field, specifically regarding the signing of permit cards. The Department should communicate this standard clearly to both inspectors and the construction community to eliminate ambiguity regarding inspection results.

Recommendation 4E: The Department should ensure that all major policy updates are accompanied by a formal briefing or training session to ensure staff comprehension. The Department should require staff to sign an acknowledgement of understanding for new policies, but only after providing the necessary context and instruction.

Observation 5: Code Enforcement Officers operate in potentially adversarial environments without the full authority or equipment necessary to maximize their safety and effectiveness. While the Department has taken steps to provide protective vests, Officers rely on law enforcement agencies for support in dangerous situations. This reliance stretches law enforcement resources and can delay necessary enforcement actions.

Recommendation 5: The Government should consider reviewing the policy regarding POST-certified Code Enforcement Officers to determine the feasibility of allowing them to carry defensive weapons while on duty. This change would increase officer safety and reduce the Department's reliance on the Sheriff's Office and Police Department for routine enforcement support.

Observation 6: The Department tracks high-level output metrics such as total inspections and citation counts but lacks Key Performance Indicators ("KPIs") that measure service quality, efficiency, or outcomes. The current data focuses on volume rather than the effectiveness of operations or the satisfaction of the community. Furthermore, while the Department emphasizes customer service as a core value, there is no formal mechanism to collect direct feedback from the public regarding their interactions with field staff.

Recommendation 6A: The Department should expand its performance measurement framework to include more outcome-based KPIs, such as the average time elapsed from initial violation to compliance, the first-time pass rate for inspections, and the number of inaccessible visits.

Recommendation 6B: The Department should implement a customer service feedback mechanism, such as adding a QR code link to a customer satisfaction survey to the yellow inspection cards left at job sites or adding a customer satisfaction survey link to the Civic Access Self Service ("CASS") portal. A feedback mechanism would allow contractors and residents to provide feedback about their experience, providing the Department with actionable data to measure and improve service quality.

Observation 7: Communication practices within the Department vary significantly by division and are often reactive rather than proactive. While individual teams communicate frequently, there are no regular all-staff meetings to ensure alignment on departmental goals or changes. Policy updates are typically disseminated via email with a requirement for signature acknowledgement but without accompanying context or explanation, leaving staff ill-equipped to consistently explain changes to the public.

Recommendation 7: The Department should institute a regular schedule of all-staff meetings to discuss departmental updates, celebrate successes, and clarify strategic goals. Leadership should accompany major policy changes with a briefing or training session to ensure staff fully understand the logic and procedure behind new policies and technologies before policies are implemented.

Observation 8: The Department's utilization of technology is inconsistent and, in some areas, inefficient. While the implementation of the Tyler Technologies EPL portal represents a significant modernization effort, post-implementation customization gaps force staff to use offline workarounds for immediate-need situations. In the field, vehicle equipment use varies significantly, with inconsistent use of hands-free capability and mapping tools, posing potential safety and efficiency risks. Furthermore, the current process for issuing citations involves data double-entry, as officers handwrite tickets and enter data into a separate court system. While Code Enforcement vehicles have printers, the printers are underutilized, and Inspection vehicles lack printers entirely, missing an opportunity to streamline the issuance of violation lists.

Recommendation 8A: The Department should prioritize the customization of the EPL CASS portal to accommodate immediate need workflows, such as emergency power reconnections, or document offline procedures to handle portal exceptions.

Recommendation 8B: The Department should standardize the equipment in vehicles to ensure Inspectors and Officers have access to necessary safety and navigation tools, including Bluetooth connectivity and phone mounts. The Department should establish clear expectations and training for the use of this equipment to ensure driver safety.

Recommendation 8C: The Department should equip Inspection vehicles with mobile printers and upgrade Code Enforcement printers to support citation issuance. This investment would eliminate the need for handwritten violation cards, reduce data double-entry, and allow for more professional and legible communication with property owners and contractors.

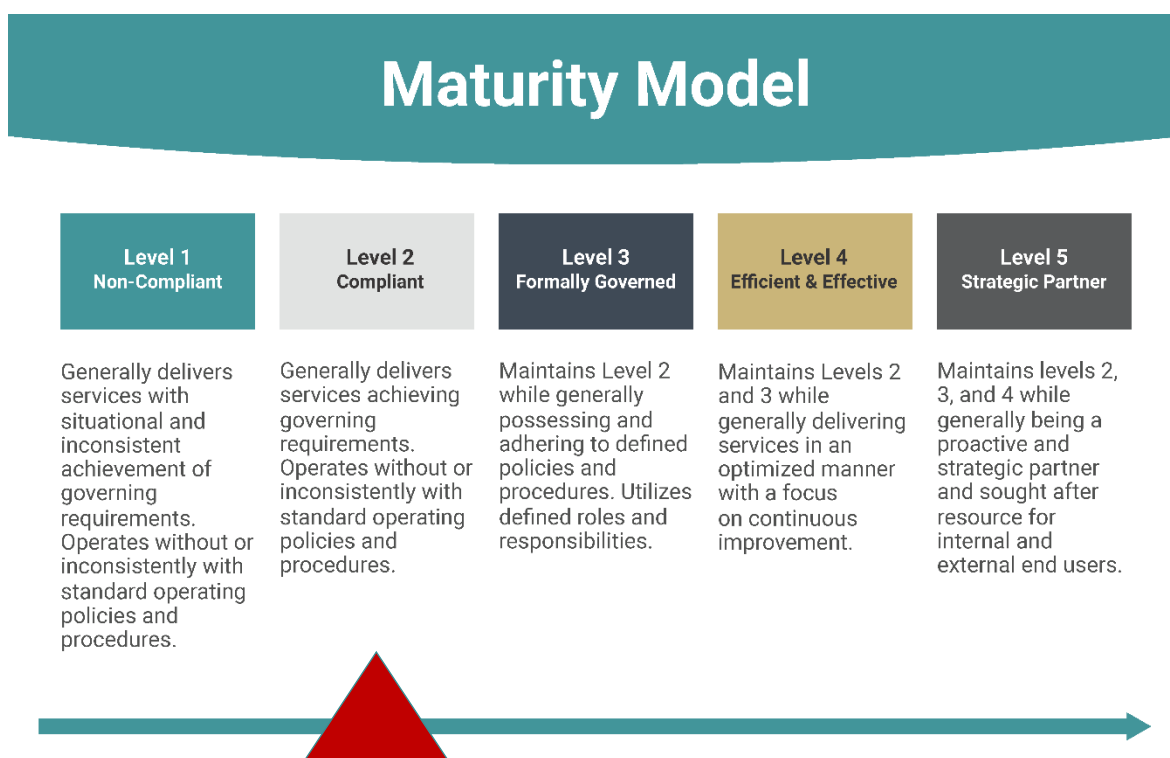
Observation 9: The Department lacks a consistent and standardized approach to assessing fees for re-inspections and fees for inaccessible properties. Staff interviews indicate that while a policy exists for charging fees after multiple failed inspections, its application varies by inspector and by case. Additionally, the Department does not currently assess fees when inspectors travel to a site but cannot access the property (e.g., locked gates), resulting in unrecovered costs for fuel and staff time.

Recommendation 9A: The Department should standardize the assessment and enforcement of reinspection fees across all trades and inspectors. This policy should include specific criteria for when a fee is mandatory versus discretionary to ensure equitable treatment of all contractors and property owners.

Recommendation 9B: The Department should consider implementing a fee when an inspector arrives at a scheduled appointment but cannot access the property. This fee would help recoup costs associated and cut down on wasted time and trips by incentivizing site readiness.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department's maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Department as **Level 2: Compliant**. The Department delivers services with a strong emphasis on customer service and safety. The absence of formal documentation, policies, and procedures has resulted in inconsistent treatment of cases across the Department. While training is thorough, lack of documentation of training can result in inconsistent procedures and results. The Department's lack of strategic direction and planning has resulted in haphazard optimization of services; while delivering good services and building relationships, there is no cohesive communicated vision of departmental end state.

Conclusion

The Inspections and Code Department is a strong component of customer relationships with the Columbus Consolidated Government, and is mission driven throughout all levels to provide high quality customer service within the service area. The Department is adequately delivering services and providing high quality governmental interactions. The Department's lack of formal strategic direction, documentation, and process formalization are preventing it from reaching another tier of service provision. The Department is already positively impacting the public in current state; striving towards a cohesive future state would provide further depth of impact in the community. M&J would like to thank Department leadership, as well as the 29 individuals across all levels of the Department, for allowing us to conduct numerous interviews, group interviews, and job shadowing.

3.I Job Training Division/Workforce Investment

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“CCG,” “City,” or “Columbus”) Job Training Division (“Division”) administers the workforce development services of the Lower Chattahoochee Workforce Development Area (“LCWDA”), which is designated as Area 14 of WorkSource Georgia’s 19 areas. The LCWDA includes Muscogee County as well as the entirety of Chattahoochee, Clay, Harris, Quitman, Randolph, Stewart, and Talbot Counties. In its administration of LCWDA, the Division works with community partners to provide a variety of career guidance, education, and training services to eligible members or potential members of the region’s workforce to develop marketable skills among the region’s population and to help ensure that businesses operating in the region have access to a qualified labor pool.

The Division’s operations are largely funded through multiple grants from the federal Department of Labor (“USDOL”) under the terms of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (“WIOA”). The State of Georgia Department of Labor (“GADOL”) serves as the primary recipient of USDOL WIOA funding, while the Technical College System of Georgia (“TCSG”) manages the State’s federally-funded workforce development programs through its WorkSource Georgia program, with local operations broken out into individual regions, such as LCWDA. CCG is designated as the subrecipient of WIOA funds for the LCWDA, with the CCG Mayor designated as the primary Chief Local Elected Official for the region. The Division’s mission is “to provide quality training and employment opportunities for eligible citizens of our workforce community through a myriad of programs and activities funded or provided through a network of internal and external training providers.”

Due to the fact that its programs are largely funded by federal grants, the Division’s operations are primarily organized around the “Program Year”, which lines up with the July 1-June 30 schedule used in the federal grant awards. For example, Program Year 2025 (“PY25”) runs from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026.

Organization and Staffing

Due to its role as part of the State's WorkSource Georgia program, the Division maintains a somewhat complex organizational and reporting structure. The Division's operations are ultimately overseen by the Lower Chattahoochee Workforce Development Board ("Board"), which must include at least 21 members and must meet the following requirements:

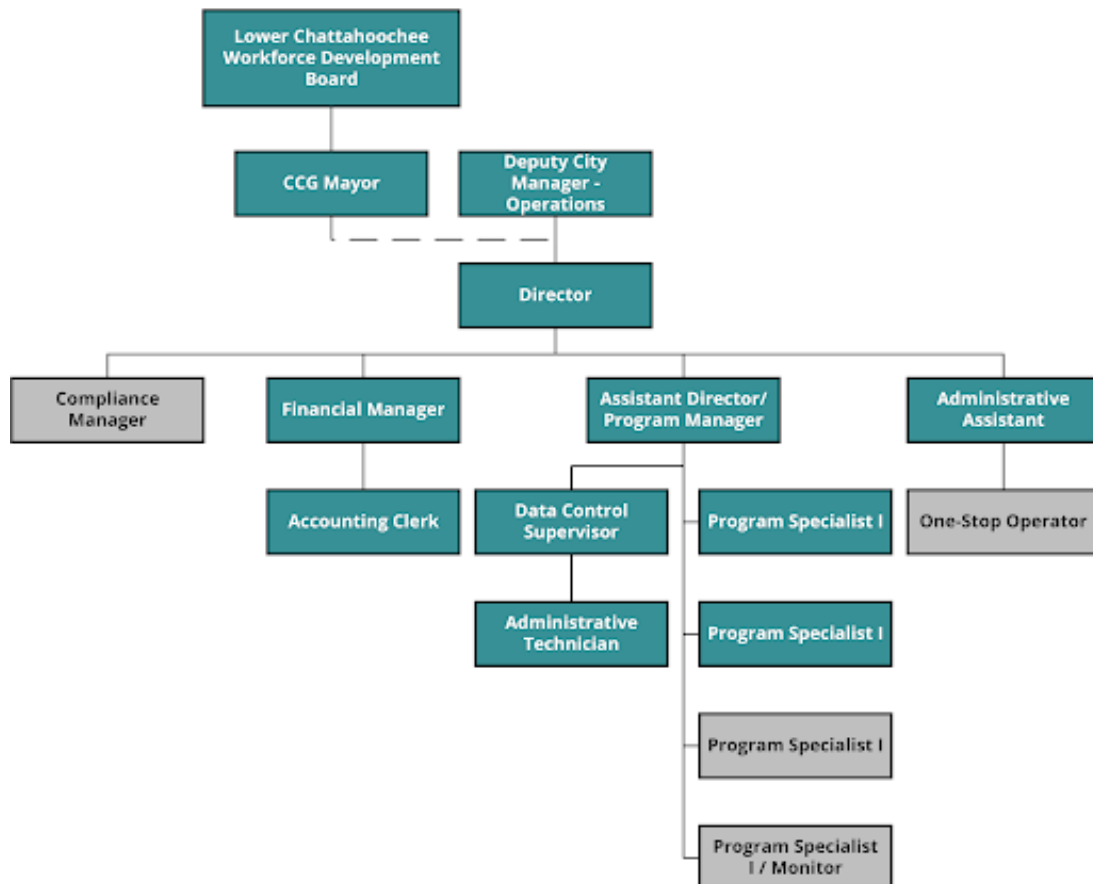
- More than half of the Board's members must represent private sector employers
- At least two Board members must represent local labor organizations
- At least one Board member must represent a local joint labor management organization or apprenticeship program (if available)
- At least one Board member must represent an organization working towards youth workforce development
- At least one Board member must represent an organization providing adult education and literacy activities
- At least one Board member must represent a local institution of higher education (including community colleges)
- At least three members must represent specified governmental and economic development agencies

Board members serve two-year terms, with the opportunity to be reappointed for at least two subsequent terms. Board members are appointed by the CCG Mayor, based on nominations from throughout the LCWDA's service area. The Board currently includes 29 members. The Board and CCG Mayor guide the Division's strategy and planning efforts, oversee Division operations, and finalize certain periodic reporting required as part of the WorkSource Georgia program.

The Division's day-to-day operations are led by its Director, whose activities are overseen by the CCG Mayor and Board but organizationally reports to the Deputy City Manager for Operations. The Division is organized into the following four Sections:

- Policy and Compliance
- Finance
- Data Control
- Programs

The Division's organizational chart as well as the filled (green)/vacant (grey) status of the Division's positions as of M&J's fieldwork are shown as follows:



The Policy and Compliance Section consists solely of a single Compliance Manager, who reports to the Director. At the conclusion of M&J's fieldwork, this Compliance Manager position was vacant.

The Finance Section is overseen by the Financial Manager, who reports to the Director. The Financial Manager oversees an Accounting Clerk. Both Finance Section positions were filled at the conclusion of M&J's fieldwork.

The Assistant Director/Program Manager, who reports to the Director, oversees both the Data Control and Programs Sections. The Data Control Section is led by the Data Control Supervisor, who manages an Administrative Technician. Both Data Control Section positions were filled at the conclusion of M&J’s fieldwork. The Programs Section consists of three Program Specialist I’s and one Program Specialist I/Monitor positions, all of whom report directly to the Assistant Director/Program Manager. One of the Program Specialist I positions and the Program Specialist I/Monitor position were both vacant at the conclusion of M&J’s fieldwork. While most of the Division operates out of the Division’s main office in the 1111 1st Avenue building, the three of the four Program Specialists within the Programs Section are based out of the One Stop Center, a public-facing space that the Division shares with GADOL that is located approximately one mile southeast of the 1111 1st Avenue building.

In addition to the staff within each of the four named Sections, the Division includes Administrative Assistant and One Stop Operator positions. The Administrative Assistant performs general administrative tasks on the Division’s behalf, such as scheduling, records management, and personnel administration, and also serves as the liaison between the Division and the Board, including supporting the preparation and distribution of agendas in advance of Board meetings and serving as secretary at Board meetings. The One Stop Operator position was vacant at the time of M&J’s fieldwork, although its job description indicates that the position serves as a “greeter” at the One Stop Center, answering questions and directing citizens to the appropriate service.

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

The Division has seen nine employees leave since the start of fiscal year 2020-2021 (“FY21”). Various official CCG records reviewed by M&J show conflicting Job Training Division employee counts for multiple years during the review period, which prevents M&J from performing turnover rate calculations for the review period.

The following table shows the number of employees that left the Division during the last five fiscal years.

Table 19: Annual Turnover Data

Fiscal Year	Employees Leaving
2021	2 (1 Resignation, 1 Retirement)
2022	1 (1 Resignation)
2023	2 (2 Resignations)
2024	2 (2 Resignations)
2025	2 (1 Resignation, 1 Retirement)

Source: CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The Division saw moderate levels of turnover during the review period, with turnover levels quite steady from year to year. Resignations were concentrated within the Division’s Program Specialist positions, with six of the departures consisting of resignations by Program Specialists.

Four of the Division's 13 positions (30.8%) were vacant at the time of M&J's fieldwork. Additionally, two Division employees were out on long-term leave for at least a portion of M&J's fieldwork, resulting in periods of time where only seven positions (53.8%) were filled. In interviews, staff indicated that the Division was making efforts to fill at least some of the vacant positions, both through hiring and through internal transfers/promotions, although it was not clear at the time of M&J's fieldwork when exactly any positions would be filled.

Training

When new staff enter the Division or enter new roles within the Division, they generally learn how to carry out the duties of their new position through some form of "on the job" training, which primarily consists of unstructured one-on-one training (*i.e.*, an existing employee giving the new employee a "walkthrough" of the process in question), observation of existing staff in their work, and, as applicable, employees performing their work under the supervision of experienced staff. The Division does not have an established plan for cross training staff or otherwise developing staff to be able to "back up" other critical staff in the event of unavailability, although some staff reported in interviews that, due to their own self-reported curiosity and needs created by vacancies, they trained themselves on some key functions typically performed by other Division staff.

The Division's current Director, who entered their role roughly one year before the start of M&J's fieldwork, has started to provide periodic ongoing training to Division staff, with employees reporting emphases on promoting consistency and competency in Division operations as well as increased cross training. The Director is also working with the Board to develop standardized training programs for each position, although these programs have not yet been finalized.

The Division does not have any specific qualification or certification requirements for Division positions other than a college degree requirement for applicants to certain managerial and/or technical positions. The Division does encourage staff to attend TCSG, WorkSource Georgia, and GADOL training events, as relevant to their positions, including both virtual trainings and in-person trainings and updates. The Division typically does not send multiple employees to multi-day in-person training and development courses, instead sending a small number of employees (rotating), who are tasked with reporting back any updates or insights. Division staff also reportedly have access to and make periodic use of "on demand" training and reference materials provided by TCSG. The Division does not have any official continuing education or professional development requirements for its staff.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The following list defines the primary functions of the Job Training Division's sections:

- Policy and Compliance
 - Compliance Monitoring
- Finance
 - Financial Administration
- Data Control/Programs³⁹
 - Program Administration

Policy and Compliance

Compliance Monitoring

The Compliance Manager position, which is the only position within the Policy and Compliance Section, was vacant for the entirety of M&J's fieldwork. As a result, M&J was not able to observe the Division's compliance operations as designed.

The Policy and Compliance Section's compliance monitoring duties consist of both monitoring the Division's own compliance with TCSG's WorkSource Georgia regulations and monitoring the Division's various partner employers for compliance with the terms of their service agreements.

Based on interviews with Division staff and the Division's process and procedure documentation, the Compliance Manager position performs much of the Policy and Compliance Division's monitoring of the Division's own compliance with TCSG regulations, primarily by observing the Division's operations and performing periodic reviews of applications processed by the Division and other similar outputs. The Compliance Manager position also serves as a resource for Division staff, who are encouraged to ask the Compliance Manager any questions that arose during their work surrounding applicant eligibility, TCSG requirements, or other process/procedure questions. In the Compliance Manager's absence, no specific individual has been designated to fulfill these internal compliance duties; the Division's existing processes generally include multiple stages of review and approval by staff other than the Compliance Manager before most Division work can be finalized, as discussed elsewhere in this report. Without the Compliance Manager to serve as a primary resource for the Division's staff with policy/process questions, Division staff instead ask other Division staff with relevant experience and, if those staff are unable to satisfactorily resolve the question, reach out directly to staff at TCSG for support.

³⁹ The key duties and responsibilities of the Data Control and Programs Sections overlap significantly. Accordingly, this report presents their key duties and responsibilities in a single subsection.

The Policy and Compliance Section's partner employer compliance monitoring duties have been historically performed by both the Compliance Manager and the Program Specialist with the position title "Program Specialist I/Monitor." The Program Specialist I/Monitor also performs typical Program Specialist duties (discussed elsewhere in this report) alongside their compliance work and the Program Specialist I/Monitor position is organizationally located within the Programs Section alongside the other Program Specialists. In the absence of both the Compliance Manager and the Program Specialist I/Monitor, the Division's Accounting Clerk has performed compliance monitoring for partner employers.

The Division requires that employers fulfill a variety of requirements before participants are placed with the employer, including workplace safety, facility accessibility, business licensing, and insurance. Partner employers must have their compliance with all requirements verified prior to the start of their first placement each Program Year. When the Division places an employee at a partner employer for the first time in a Program Year, an employee of the partner employer will reach out to the Division to arrange for a site visit to verify compliance with program terms ahead of the anticipated placement start date. The Division employee performing the compliance check will visit the worksite to confirm that it meets all relevant worksite safety and accessibility requirements; while at the client site, they will also review documentation to verify that the employer's business licenses are current and that the employer has obtained at least the minimum required insurance coverage. As the final part of the compliance check, the Division employee performing the check collects various information about the partner employer and their partnership with the Division, including the partner employer's satisfaction with the staff that the Division has placed with them in the past.

The Division employee performing the compliance check records the results of their review on a designated checklist and form, which they submit to the Administrative Assistant after completion for filing. In the event that the partner employer does not meet all program requirements (e.g., the facility lacks a wheelchair ramp that meets Americans with Disabilities Act standards, the employer's business license has expired), the Division employee performing the compliance check informs the partner employer of the deficiency; the employer has the opportunity to take corrective actions and request a new compliance check once all identified deficiencies have been addressed.

Finance

Financial Administration and Reporting

The Division's Finance Section manages the Division's finances and performs required financial reporting. The Division's primary financial administration duties include expense tracking, Division payroll processing, participant payroll processing and personnel management, and partner invoice processing. The Division tracks all program expenses, including both participant payroll expenses and payments to Division partners for services, on an Excel spreadsheet. The Accounting Clerk reviews intake documentation prepared by Program Specialists after the intake of new participants to note the financial obligations that the Division is taking on related to the new participants, including future wage payments to the participant or charges from partners for any training courses in which the participant is enrolling, to confirm that the Division's various grants are sufficient to cover the costs and to track remaining available funds from each funding source. The Accounting Clerk prepares an expenditure report for the Financial Manager at the middle and end of each month that details the Division's expenditures and budget status.

The Division's contracts with its partner training providers are governed by two-year contracts for the actual costs of the goods and services provided, up to a "not to exceed" amount. The Accounting Clerk tracks the amounts paid on each of the Division's contracts with its training providers to monitor their expenditures against their contract's "not to exceed" values. The Accounting Clerk provides partner training providers with a monthly report showing payments to date against their contracted budget; in the event that a contractor starts to approach their "not to exceed" budgeted amount, the Accounting Clerk reaches out to appropriate staff at the training provider to notify them of their budget situation.

The Finance Section performs most payroll processing and personnel administration duties for both the Division's own staff and for participants of the Division's services, as well as personnel administration for participants. For Division staff, each employee fills out timesheets for each two-week pay period, breaking out the time that they worked across the various funding sources that support the Division's different programs. The Director reviews and approves Division employee timesheets. Participants also prepare their own timesheets, which are first reviewed by Program Specialists before being submitted to their supervisor at their partner program for final approval. After receiving final approval, the Accounting Clerk or Financial Manager enter the timesheets into the City's payroll system and releases them for further processing and payment by the Finance Department.

Adult Division payees (including employees and participants) receive payments via direct deposit, although many youth participants receive paper checks. The Accounting Clerk picks up the printed checks from the Finance Department and prepares a form for each paper check for the youth participant to sign, acknowledging their receipt of the check. The Accounting Clerk then works with the Program Specialists to distribute the checks to the youth participants, retaining copies of the signed check acknowledgement forms in the Division's records.

The Financial Manager prepares most of the initial submissions in CGI Advantage (“Advantage”), the City’s financial system, for new personnel profiles (including both employees and participants), with the Accounting Clerk serving as their backup. Finance Section staff create new personnel profiles as needed, either following the hire of a new employee or the intake of a new participant. The Director and Financial Manager are authorized to perform Division-level review and approval of new personnel profiles, although the Financial Manager cannot review/approve personnel profiles that they entered themselves. After receiving Division-level approval, the Human Resources Department performs all further review, approval, and processing of new personnel profiles. Human Resources Department staff also perform all personnel profile updates, working directly with the relevant employee or participant.

Both the Financial Manager and Accounting Clerk process invoices received by the Division, which primarily consist of payments for services from the Division’s service provider partners. The Division’s service provider partners are paid on a reimbursement basis – the service provide partners submit invoices monthly that include supporting documentation justifying the claimed costs. The Finance Section staff that process the invoices begin by reviewing the supporting documentation against the invoiced costs, confirming that the claimed items are valid expenses based on the Division’s contract with the service provider and that the provided supporting documentation is sufficient to justify the charge. Once all invoiced charges have been validated, the Division employee then prepares a coversheet using a Division-created template, breaking down the expenses against the budget categories included in the contract. Partners may transfer funds between different contract budget categories with Director approval, as noted on a Division form, but partners may not exceed their total expense budget. The Division does not pay any overages over the total expense budget included in a partner’s contract. The Finance Section employee signs the coversheet confirming their review and submits the invoice to the Director for their approval.

After the contract budget coversheet is approved by the Director, the Finance Section employee enters the invoice into Advantage, attaches the supporting documentation, and submits the requisition in Advantage to the Director for their review and approval. After receiving Director approval, the requisition moves on to the Finance Department for further processing and payment.

The Division’s Finance Section performs financial reporting required of the Division by the City and State. The Division’s reporting is performed on a monthly basis. The Division’s reporting for both the City and the State utilizes the “Admin Spread” figure, which the Financial Manager calculates each month using a State-developed Excel spreadsheet template. “Admin Spread” represents how the Division’s administrative costs are spread across the Division’s various funding sources. The Division’s report for the City is based on an Excel report prepared by the Finance Department’s Grant Accountant that details the Division’s expenditures against its funding sources, exported from Advantage. The Financial Manager updates the report with the Division’s “Admin Spread,” which the Grant Accountant uses to transfer funds to reimburse the City for the Division’s administrative costs.

The Division's State-level reporting consists of its monthly cash request, which the Financial Manager prepares using a State-developed Excel template. The Financial Manager enters the Division's expenditures by source into the template, adjusted for administrative costs in line with the calculated admin spread. The Financial Manager then submits the cash request to the State. The State does not require any supporting documentation to be submitted alongside the monthly cash request and instead validates all requests during their annual audit of the Division's operations. The State prepares a monthly Financial Status Report for the Division as well, which details the Division's various grants and its progress against each grant (total amount, amount claimed, amount available, etc.). The Financial Manager reviews the Financial Status Report each month to verify that the figures provided agree with the Division's own figures.

The Finance Section is not required to apply for State grants each year, as the State allocates WIOA-based funds to the various areas using a formula based on the area's unemployment rate. TCSG notifies the Division of each year's award, with different notification dates for each of the Division's various grants. The Division does not currently receive any grants other than its WIOA-based grants that come through the State, although, per interviews with Division staff, it may consider applying for additional grants in the future.

Data Control/Programs

Program Administration

The Division manages four program categories, tied to the various grants that fund the Division's operations:

- Adult
- Dislocated Worker
- Rapid Response⁴⁰
- Youth (in-school and out-of-school)

The Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Rapid Response programs all serve adult participants, with the Dislocated Worker and Rapid Response programs serving specific populations and the general Adult program serving the general adult population. The Dislocated Worker program serves workers that have a significant attachment to the workforce but have lost their employment or income through certain enumerated circumstances, including not-for-cause termination, honorable military discharge, or loss of self-employment. The Rapid Response program provides a dedicated response to workers impacted by plant closures or other mass layoffs. Services provided to adult participants include Division-funded career training, career counseling, and/or job placement support. Career training is provided through the Division's training partners.

⁴⁰ The Division's offering of rapid response services is contingent on the Division receiving a rapid response grant from the State for the current program year; the Division does not consistently receive rapid response grant funding.

The Division's training partners and the subjects that they offer include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Georgia Driver Academy
 - Commercial Driver's License
- Columbus Technical College
 - Nursing
 - Dental Hygienist
 - Cybersecurity
 - Phlebotomy
 - Medical Billing/Coding
- Columbus State University
 - Nursing⁴¹

The Division partners with a local community-based job placement organization to place adult participants with local employers to help participants develop job skills, gain work experience, and potentially obtain long-term employment. As part of the Division's job placement activities, the Division funds the placed employees' wages for up to 180 hours of work, with the City paying the placed employee directly. If the local employer wishes to retain the placed employee, the employer can employ the participant directly after the conclusion of the 180 Division-supported placement period.

Adult participants enter the program through directly interacting with the Division, through the Division's partner providers, or through the Division's rapid response program. General Adult program participants typically directly interact with the Division through the One Stop Center's Program Specialists, while Displaced Workers typically interact with the Program Specialist stationed within the Division's main office in the 1111 1st Avenue building.

Participants work with the Program Specialist to discuss career options and determine how they would like to proceed in the program, deciding on a training program or job placement to pursue. Participants are then referred to the training provider or job placement organization to proceed with the application process, in the same manner as participants that enter the program directly through the partner providers. The Data Control Supervisor serves as the Division's Rapid Response coordinator, reaching out to companies after receiving notification of upcoming plant closures or mass layoffs to determine if the company is willing to work with the Division to promote the Division's services to impacted employees.

⁴¹ Due to the cost and length of Columbus State University's nursing program, the Division typically is only authorized to pay a portion of the training program's cost

Adult participants begin their work with the partner providers by applying for admittance into the training program of interest or placement with the job of interest. After being accepted into their training program or job placement, adult participants work with WIOA-related staff in the partner organization to prepare an application for Division support, which the partner organization's staff submits to the Division.

Program Specialists within the Division review received applications to confirm that the applications are complete and that the applicant meets the relevant eligibility criteria before forwarding the applications to the Data Control Supervisor for a second level of review. For certain applicants, additional testing may be necessary to verify program eligibility; the Division funds any required testing, which is conducted in GADOL's portion of the One Stop Center. The Data Control Supervisor further reviews the application to verify that the application is complete and valid. For applications for certain non-standard Individual Training programs, additional approval from the Director is required before final approval can be issued. Once final approval has been issued, the Program Specialist informs their contact at the partner provider, who schedules the participant's start in the program. The Division tracks all approvals during the application review process as signatures on physical copies of the application.

Once the partner provider confirms that the participant has begun their program (*i.e.*, that they have attended their first day of training or worked their first day in their placement), the Program Specialist assigned to the participant enters the details from the participant's application and information on their training/placement into the WorkSource Georgia online platform, attached to the participant profile that the participant created during the application process.

Throughout the participant's time in the program, the partner provider prepares monthly check-in reports discussing the participant's time in the program. Partner provider monthly check-ins discuss the participant's engagement with the program, identifies any additional resources that the participant may benefit from, and notes any other items of interest related to the participant's time with the program. The partner provider submits their monthly check-in reports to the assigned Program Specialist, who enters the details from the check-in report into the WorkSource Georgia online platform. Similarly, the participant's assigned Program Supervisor conducts follow-up meetings with the participant for one year following the end of their participation in the program (*i.e.*, completion of training program or end of Division-supported job placement) to monitor the participant's progress in the job search, track whether participants that were hired have retained their employment, and collect other feedback as relevant. The Program Supervisor enters the information from the quarterly post-program follow-up meetings into the WorkSource Georgia online platform.

Youth participants may participate in in-school or out-of-school programs. The Division offers in-school programs to youth throughout LCWDA's service area but currently only offers out-of-school programs to youth within the City. The in-school program is for youth that are currently enrolled in school and involves placing students with an employer for up to 120 hours of Division-supported work, intended to help the participant gain exposure to a workplace and earn work experience. The out-of-school program is for youth that are not currently enrolled in school and involves placing students with an employer for up to 320 hours of Division-supported work, with an aim of having the youth learn how to perform the job and be hired on by the employer at the end of the Division-supported period. The Division works with a local job placement organization to place in-school and out-of-school youth.

Program Specialists at the One Stop Center may refer youth that visit the facility to the job placement provider, who works with the youth to prepare and submit applications for placements. Once youth have been accepted into the program, they work with staff in the partner provider to prepare applications, which they submit to the Division. The Administrative Technician reviews youth applications, verifying that they contain all required information and that the applicant meets all eligibility criteria, before forwarding the application to the Data Control Supervisor and then Director for their review and approval. After receiving final approval from the Director, the Administrative Technician informs the partner provider that the application has been approved and that the applicant can begin work at their placement.

Similarly to adult applications, the Administrative Technician enters data from the application and data on the placement to the WorkSource Georgia online platform after they are informed that the applicant has begun their placement. The Administrative Technician receives quarterly reports from the partner provider discussing the youth participant's progress, which they upload to the WorkSource Georgia online platform. After the conclusion of the program, the Administrative Technician continues to receive quarterly follow-up reports on the applicants until the later of one year after program completion or one year after high school graduation, uploading the content of the reports into the WorkSource Georgia online platform.

The Administrative Technician also acts as the coordinator for the Mayor's Summer Youth Program, which is a program run by the Mayor's Office in the City that helps place youth into jobs in City government, with local utilities, or with local community organizations. The Administrative Technician works with the Human Resources Department, who receives program applications, to select applicants for acceptance into the program, to assign accepted youth to employers based on each youth's interests, and to onboard youth as they start in the program.

Customer Service

The Division's primary customers are the Division's adult and youth participants from throughout LCWDA's service area. Adult participants typically conduct most of their interactions with the Division through the Program Specialists, three of whom are located within the One Stop Center. The Division's organizational chart includes a One Stop Operator position, although this position was not filled throughout M&J's fieldwork. Per the position's job description, the One Stop Operator is intended to serve as the first line of customer service at the One Stop Center, greeting members of the public as they arrive at the One Stop Center, answering questions about the services that the One Stop Center provides, and helping to direct citizens to the applicable services. During the One Stop Operator position's vacancy, the One Stop Center has not had an assigned "greeter" to meet citizens as they enter the facility and help direct them to the appropriate service.

While three of the Division's four Program Specialist positions are assigned to the One Stop Center, one Program Specialist and the Administrative Technician position both regularly deal directly with participants at the Division's main offices in the 1111 1st Avenue building.

The Division also owns the Mobile Unit, which is a large van wrapped in Division advertisements and outfitted with computer workstations. The Mobile Unit was reportedly developed to serve as the base for Division operations at job fairs and similar events, enabling the Division to enroll participants from these remote locations. The Accounting Clerk possesses a Commercial Driving License and serves as the designated driver of the Mobile Unit, although the Accounting Clerk reportedly has not been trained in how to use the Mobile Unit's computers to receive applications from prospective participants. The Division has made limited use of the Mobile Unit in the Post-COVID period, with the Division only traveling to a small number of job fairs hosted at the Civic Center. In most of the Division's recent appearances at the Civic Center, the mobile unit has served entirely as advertising, not using the Division's computer stations. The Mobile Unit's computers have been used at one event within the past two years, although the computers were not used for Division purposes and were instead used by the City's Human Resources Department to receive job applications for CCG-posted positions.

The Division performs limited direct outreach to residents of LCWDA's service area outside of its rapid response programming and occasional presence at job fairs and similar events hosted at the Civic Center. In interviews, Division staff indicated that the Program Specialist I/Monitor position may have been dedicated to outreach to the non-City portions of LCWDA's service area in the past, but this position was vacant for the duration of M&J's fieldwork and no staff were assigned to perform these outreach duties in the Program Specialist I/Monitor's absence.

The Division has begun to establish a social media presence within the past year in an effort to inform potential participants about LCWDA's services, although its reach is still fairly limited with fewer than 100 followers on both its Facebook and Instagram profiles at the time of M&J's report. The Division also advertises on its webpage on the City's website, which includes links to submit applications and required documents online. Online application and/or document submissions are received by the Administrative Technician, who forwards them on to the applicable recipient.

Use of Technology

The Division uses a mix of paper-based and digital processes, with processes handled within the Division being performed primarily on paper and processes where the Division interacts with other bodies (e.g., WorkSource Georgia or other City organizational units) handled mostly through digital means. The Division performs internal application processing on paper, although the Division can receive submissions of applications and supporting documentation electronically via an email address posted on its page on the City website.

The Division uses Advantage to process invoices and create employee profiles. The Division uses custom-built Microsoft Excel templates and reports throughout its various reporting processes, including receiving and re-submitting an Excel report from/to the Finance Department's Grant Accountant and using a TCSG-developed Excel template to perform the "Admin Spread" calculations and submit its monthly cash request. Division staff also use Excel, including a mix of Division-developed report templates and "ad-hoc" reports developed as needed, to prepare individual performance and workload reports.

The Division uses TCSG's WorkSource Georgia online platform to submit participant information to TCSG and receive monthly production reports. Each participant must create their own profiles on the WorkSource Georgia platform at the start of their time working with the Division, after which the Division can submit information on the participant's work with the Division, including application information, periodic status reports, and follow-up information after the participant's completion of the program.

As discussed in the "Customer Service" subsection of this report, the Division has begun to maintain a social media presence within the past year. The Administrative Technician manages the Division's social media presence.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

The Division has one primary guiding document, a comprehensive Policies & Procedures Manual. The Division's Policies & Procedures Manual document provided to M&J contains a date on the cover (June 2022), although it is not clear whether this date reflects the date when the document was initially published, the date of the document's last revision, or the date upon which the document was most recently reviewed. In interviews, Division staff reported that they are in the process of updating the Division's Policies & Procedures Manual but were not able to provide a firm estimate of when they expect these revisions to be completed.

The Policies & Procedures Manual is a significant document, containing 13 chapters or parts detailing the performance of LCWDA activities. In total, the document spans over 500 pages. The version of the Policies & Procedures Manual provided to M&J is a native Microsoft Word file but does not consistently use Word's built-in organizational tools, such as headers and internal links, to facilitate easy use of the document, making it difficult to navigate through the document and locate relevant portions on demand.

The Word file provided to M&J does contain a table of contents near the beginning of the document, but this is a hand-built table of contents, not a table of contents automatically generated and updated by Word; the table of contents in the Policies & Procedures Manual contains inconsistent levels of detail (e.g., detailed page numbers are given for sections and subsections throughout the first half of the document, but limited or no page numbers are given for materials in the second half of the document) and the page numbers given in the table of contents are frequently incorrect.

The Policies & Procedures Manual includes a number of references to other materials, such as forms, templates, and subsidiary guides/manuals. In certain instances, the referenced materials are included within the Policies & Procedures Manual Word document provided to M&J, but a number of other instances feature the provided Word document referencing outside materials through pages marked solely with “(Insert XXX Form),” or similar, likely indicating that a copy of the form would be inserted into a printed version of the manual at the specified point. M&J was not provided with copies of the materials referenced by the Policies & Procedures Manual that are not incorporated into the Division’s primary Word document. The table of contents included near the beginning of the Policies & Procedures Manual also references six appendices, which appear to reference specific City policies or guidance, such as the City’s fleet management policy and P-Card regulations, which are not included in the provided Word document and are presumably appended after printing in physical versions of the document.

The material included within the Policies & Procedures Manual is thorough and well produced and, assuming that the fully compiled version of the document includes all referenced material and that the referenced material is of a similar quality to the provided material, contains sufficient information to guide staff as they carry out various Division functions, once the staff are able to locate the materials within the document.

In addition to the Division’s Policies & Procedures Manual, staff in a variety of positions throughout the Division stated in interviews that they maintain their own personal reference materials, including notes that they have created, “unofficial” references handed down by prior staff, or handouts retained from past trainings. Staff may make their personal reference materials available to other staff, but there are established processes to review these personal reference materials for accuracy or to ensure that they reflect the most current version of the Division’s operations.

Strategic Priorities

The Job Training Division itself does not independently prepare any strategic plans or other guiding documents that identify strategic priorities for the Division. The Board and CCG Mayor, however, do work with the Division to periodically prepare a “Local Area Plan,” as required by WIOA, USDOL, TCSG, and GADOL. The LCWDA Local Area Plans serve to guide the organization’s activities over the specified four-year period, which means that these plans serve as de facto strategic plans for the Division’s operations. LCWDA publishes its Local Area Plans either as part of a “WIOA Regional Plan,” which also includes the Local Area Plan from the neighboring Middle Flint Workforce Development Area (Area 15), or independently. The most current LCWDA Local Area Plan identified by M&J is its 2024-2027 Local Area Plan, published on the Division’s website. The 2024-2027 Local Area Plan does not include a publication date or other indicator of currency outside of its title.

The 2024-2027 Local Area Plan was developed based on a standardized template provided by TCSG that begins with a thorough discussion of past trends and the current state of workforce-related items within LCWDA's service area, including broad demographic information and detailed insights into particular industry needs and highly local labor market indicators. The discussion contained within the Local Area Plan is supported by a variety of cited sources, including statistical information and references to qualitative reports published by various governmental, not-for-profit, educational, or private organizations, such as GADOL, the TCSG, regional economic development organizations, and regional industry organizations.

The 2024-2027 Local Area Plan provides an overview of LCWDA's current operations, including a detailed review of its service providers and the types of trainings that it offers, and then goes on to discuss the Division's goals for the covered period, including any specific initiatives with which LCWDA is currently engaged or plans to become engaged during the period as well as general goals for the system's performance. The "System Building Goals" listed in the 2024-2027 Local Area Plan consist of the following objectives:

- Meet or exceed the performance goals established by the [Board] and the State Workforce Development Office
- Promote continual development and improvement of a workforce system with multiple access points and services tailored to meet the needs of the community and workforce area
- Increase ongoing training opportunities for WIOA partners and staff; and promote continual cross-training of local programs and services
- Promote information and data sharing among partnering agencies that will seek to eliminate duplication of services and enhance the quality of training programs and service that are available to our citizens and that are conducive to the demands of local employers
- Broaden the pool of skilled, job ready workers needed by local businesses
- Increase collaboration with local businesses to address the growing skill gap between education and training outcomes that meet business and industry needs; and encourage employer participation that promotes program services and employment opportunities
- Identify required skill sets needed to assist jobseekers of our local workforce community enhance their quality of life and to become more competitive and marketable in the local labor market
- Identify the needs of our employers through continuous partnership and collaboration to ensure appropriate services are being identified and delivered
- Operate as a talent development system that meet local industry needs and foster a collaborative partnership with economic development to enhance economic prosperity of the local workforce area
- Increase the partnership of private sector businesses in training and employment opportunities for individuals participating in WIOA programs
- Enhance customer satisfaction. Assist workers who face unprecedented challenges to retool their skills and re-establish themselves in viable career paths

- Continuously develop and refine the local workforce development system with innovative service delivery strategies

The “System Building Goals” listed in the 2024-2027 Local Area Plan are all valuable goals that are highly relevant to the Division’s mission of enhancing LCWDA’s workforce, providing effective support to the region’s workers, and helping to promote relevant skills among the workforce for local employers. The “System Building Goals” do not contain significant associated discussion detailing how the Division is to bring about these goals, however, such as any discussion of new services that the Division could offer or modifications to the Division’s existing service offerings, or of how any service expansions or enhancements could be funded.

The 2024-2027 Local Area Plan also details a number of objectives and sub-objectives for LCWDA in the covered period, which include:

- **Objective 1.1:** Align our education and workforce systems
 - **1.1.1:** Create a comprehensive cradle-to-career (C2C) partnership to align education, training, business, and social services around increasing talent levels in Greater Columbus.
- **Objective 1.2:** Develop homegrown talent
 - **1.2.1:** Ensure that three- and four-year-olds have access to high quality early childhood education.
 - **1.2.2:** Ensure that infants, toddlers, and expecting parents have access to comprehensive child development and family support services.
 - **1.2.3:** Expand efforts to introduce students to education and career possibilities from a young age.
 - **1.2.4:** Leverage existing programs to coordinate a community-wide mentoring program for at-risk K-12 students.
 - **1.2.5:** Launch a broad-based adult education campaign to connect individuals who did not complete high school or college coursework with opportunities for advancement and employment.
- **Objective 1.3:** Retain our best and brightest workers
 - **1.3.1:** Connect business and education providers to develop post-secondary programs and high school curricula that support target business growth and introduce young people to job opportunities.
 - **1.3.2:** Challenge the region’s business community to leverage, expand, and develop internship and apprenticeship opportunities for high school and college students.
 - **1.3.3:** Develop a formal retention program for individuals retiring from or exiting the military.
 - **1.3.4:** Welcome and engage new residents who move to the area with a relocating family member.

- **Objective 1.4:** Attract talented individuals to Greater Columbus
 - **1.4.1:** Attract educated expatriates back to Greater Columbus through a “boomerang” marketing program.
 - **1.4.2:** Support the promotion of Columbus State and Troy University’s Phenix City campus as schools of choice for students from outside the region.

Each of the sub-objectives listed in the 2024-2027 Local Area Plan also includes one or more Potential Actions. The Potential Actions listed along with the sub-objectives are largely specific actions that would meaningfully work towards achieving the relevant sub-objective. The listed objectives and sub-objectives are highly ambitious, however, with many of these aims going far beyond the Division’s current service offerings of facilitating individual access to specific job training programs for certain qualified members of the local workforce. As a result, most of the Potential Actions listed alongside the sub-objectives are either actions of a limited impact, which would certainly help towards achieving the objective but would not on their own be sufficient (e.g., encouraging companies and local organizations to take new actions, making connections between local organizations, promoting services offered by other organizations), or are dissimilar from services currently provided by the Division without an identified funding source to support the Division’s expansion into those services (e.g., introducing new programs within local school systems, developing intensive marketing programs, developing new hiring systems for use within the region).

The Job Training Division finalized a Strategic Planning Instrument for PY27 after M&J completed its fieldwork. The PY27 Strategic Planning Instrument is a document listing goals, along with associated objectives and performance indicators, that the Division hopes to accomplish during PY27. The PY27 Strategic Planning Instrument is a relatively brief document, only listing three goals, and aims to serve as a high-level guide for programming over the coming year, although not in nearly as much detail as the 2024-2027 Local Area Plan. The goals, objectives, and performance indicators in the PY27 Strategic Planning Instrument are generally quite broad and do not contain sufficient detail to serve as an effective guide to future action.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

The 2024-2027 Local Area Plan includes a section discussing the Division’s performance measurement – LCWDA states that it is still in the process of developing a new methodology to collect feedback directly from customers and that it uses State-provided data, generated from information submitted by the Division to the State (primarily through the WorkSource Georgia online platform). In interviews, Division leadership and staff stated that they primarily use State-provided data to evaluate performance, including the performance of the Division as a whole and of individual employees, focusing primarily on production data (e.g., number of individuals enrolled and “graduated” from training programs). Reportedly, Division leadership reviews reports detailing these production data on a regular basis.

The 2024-2027 Local Area Plan includes a section reviewing LCWDA's performance targets from the two periods prior to the covered period (PY22, PY23). The provided targets include five metrics ("Employment Rate 2nd Quarter After Exit," "Employment Rate 4th Quarter After Exit," "Median Earnings 2nd Quarter After Exit," "Credential Attainment Within 4 Quarters After Exit," and "Measurable Skills Gains"), with different target levels for participants in the Division's different training programs (*i.e.*, adult trainees, dislocated workers, and youth trainees). The 2024-2027 Local Area Plan does not report on the Division's performance against the given PY22 and PY23 performance targets or provide performance targets for periods after PY23.

The Data Control Supervisor prepares monthly reports for the Director detailing the Division's activity during the prior month, including information on the number of participants enrolled, the number of participants that exited into employment, participant demographics, and the breakdown of participants by the Division's partner organizations. The Director reviews the Data Control Supervisor's monthly production reports, alongside the monthly budget coversheets prepared by the Finance Section, primarily to evaluate the performance of the Division's partner organizations and confirm that they are on track to meet the goals established in their contracts with the District. If the Division's production reports indicate that a partner organization is not on track to meet its contractual production goals, Division staff arrange a meeting with partner organization representatives to discuss the deficiency and develop strategies for correcting the gap.

Division staff are required to prepare a monthly individual report, detailing the work that they performed during the prior month. The Division does not provide staff with a standardized template for preparing their monthly individual report, but the Director does provide examples of the types of information to be included in the monthly reports that staff use to develop reports appropriate for their individual workloads. Information included in individual reports may include information such as the number of invoices processed or invoice turnaround time (for Finance Section staff), number of applications processed or cases managed (for Data Control or Programs Section staff), or number of inspections conducted (for Policy and Compliance Section staff). Staff that work with individual applicants (*i.e.*, Program Specialists and the Administrative Technician) also maintain an Excel spreadsheet tracking the number of participants with whom they are currently working. The Director reviews the monthly individual reports and tracking spreadsheets to evaluate employee performance. In interviews, Division staff reported that the Division endeavors to meet certain performance standards, including processing applications in no more than one week from submission, although M&J did not identify documents listing any such performance standards.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

In interviews, the Division's staff consistently reported a healthy working culture, stating that they feel supported by leadership and that communications are generally open and productive. The Division holds "all hands" meetings on a regular basis to provide updates on Division operations and help to maintain inter-Division culture and consistency.

The Division does face one potential challenge due to the location of the Program Specialists in the One-Stop Center, approximately one mile southeast of the Division's main office in the 1111 1st Avenue building, which could contribute to a disunity in the Division's culture and impediment to consistent, open communications. Despite this physical separation of working spaces, staff reported in interviews that there is not a significant cultural gap between staff working in the Division's two worksites and that the distance does not hinder effective communications. Staff attributed the continuity of operations despite the separation to the fact that staff based out of the One Stop Center regularly (typically several times per week, reportedly) travel to the Division's main office to deliver or pick up paperwork, as required by the Division's primarily paper-based processes, as well as regular use of "less formal" communications technologies, such as Microsoft Teams.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: The Division does not have an established training plan or curriculum for its staff, including new hires into the Division as well as transfers/promotions within the Division. As a result, most Division personnel receive "ad hoc" training, primarily consisting of non-standardized "on the job" training (*i.e.*, learning by doing). The Division does encourage its staff to participate in virtual or "on demand" TCSG, WorkSource Georgia, and GADOL training events, although it does not have any continuing education or professional development requirements for its staff. The Division does not have a written cross training strategy, although some staff have reportedly taught themselves on their own to perform certain functions performed by other staff, either out of curiosity or necessity; in interviews, Division staff reported that the current Director has recently promoted cross training of critical positions.

Recommendation 1: The Division should develop standardized training programs for its positions, including a mix of both classroom training using standard curricula and "on the job" training under the guidance of other experienced staff. The Division should also develop standard methods of delivering refresher and/or update training to existing staff on a regular basis. Additionally, the Division should consider establishing written continuing education/professional development requirements for staff as relevant in order to ensure that staff stay up to date with trainings offered by TCSG, WorkSource Georgia, and GADOL. Finally, the Division should develop written cross training guidelines that specify which positions are to be cross trained on which processes so that the Division can ensure that appropriate levels of qualified backups exist for critical Division processes.

Observation 2A: The Division performs limited direct outreach to residents of LCWDA's service area outside of the City, with the City's relatively limited participation in in-person outreach events largely contained to job fairs (and similar events) at the City's Civic Center and the Division's limited social media presence not yet having significant reach. Per interviews, the Program Specialist I/Monitor position was previously tasked with performing outreach to the non-City portions of LCWDA's service area, although this position was vacant during M&J's fieldwork and no other staff were assigned to perform these outreach duties in their stead.

Observation 2B: The Division owns and maintains the Mobile Unit, which can both serve as a “moving billboard” to advertise the Division’s services as well as a location where interested individuals can apply for Division services on the installed computer stations. At the moment, the Division’s use of the Mobile Unit is limited to occasional appearances at job fairs (and similar events), where it typically serves either solely as a visual advertisement or as a technology resource for other City departments.

Recommendation 2: The Division should design an advertising and outreach program to help ensure that a greater number of potentially eligible individuals throughout the entirety of LCWDA’s service area are aware of the Division’s service offerings and have the opportunity to apply for Division assistance. The Division should work with its community partners to facilitate outreach through Mobile Unit appearances at both job fairs (and similar events) throughout the entirety of LCWDA’s service area as well as standalone appearances at high-impact locations, such as libraries and other public buildings, in communities across LCWDA’s service area. As part of this advertising and outreach program, the Division should provide adequate training to staff assigned to work the Mobile Unit so that these staff can use the full capabilities of the Mobile Unit at its various appearances.

Observation 3: The Division’s guiding documentation is largely contained in a single, comprehensive Policies & Procedures Manual, which has no indications of being updated or reviewed since June 2022, although staff indicate that a revision is currently in progress. The Policies & Procedures Manual is a 500+ page Word document that does not make use of Word’s built-in hierarchical organizational and tagging features, making it difficult to locate specific areas of interest and use the document as an effective reference manual. Additionally, the Policies & Procedures Manual includes a number of areas where it seems to include documents by reference, although the referenced documents are not present in the digital version of the document and instead are likely only present in printed versions of the manual. As a result, the Division does not have a single, comprehensive, easily usable digital version of its primary reference manual.

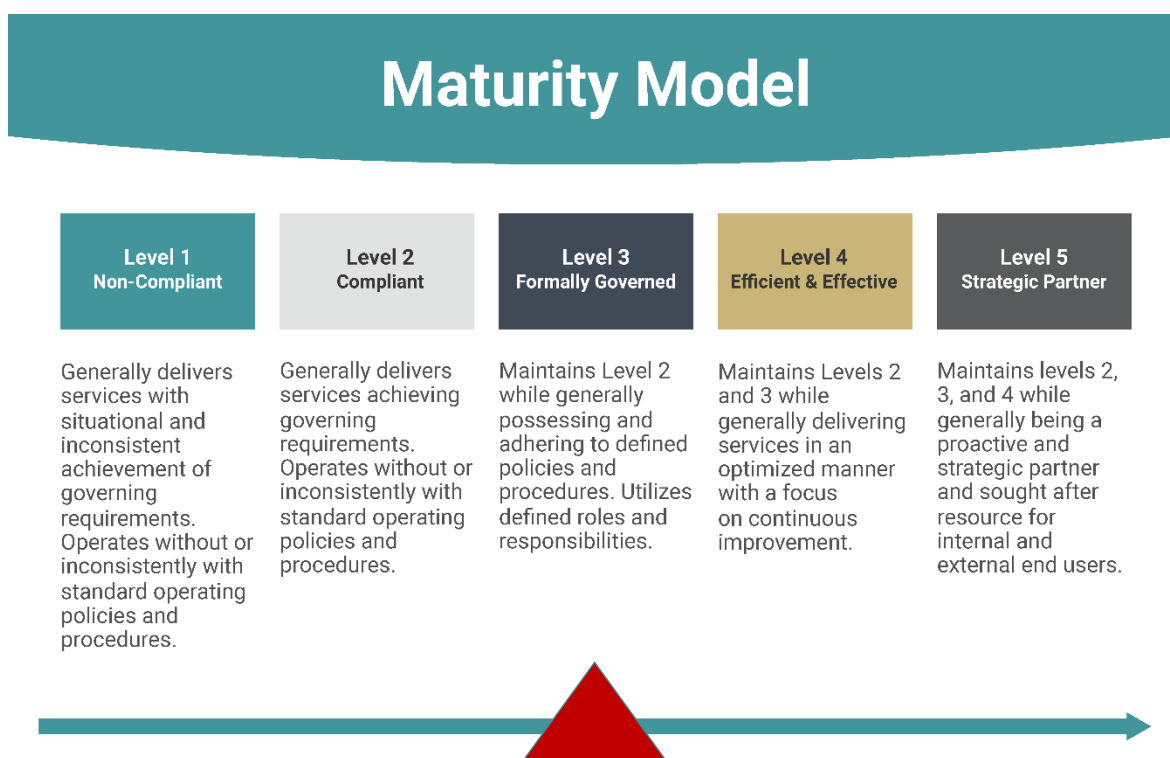
Recommendation 3: The Division should recompile its Policies & Procedures Manual into a single, comprehensive, organized, digital source that readily allows for navigation and locating topics of interest as well as facilitates future updates without requiring further extensive recompilation. Once this recompilation is complete, the Division should review the Policies & Procedures Manual and, as needed, revise as necessary so that the document accurately reflects the Division’s current processes workflows. The Division should provide space in the revised Policies & Procedures Manual to track the date of the document’s first publication in its recompiled state, the date on which the document was last revised, and the date on which the document was last reviewed, and adopt processes to review the document on a periodic basis to help ensure that it remains up-to-date as Division processes change over time.

Observation 4: The Division’s current primary strategic planning document is its 2024-2027 Local Area Plan, which contains a number of “System Building Goals,” objectives, and sub-objectives. The System Building Goals, objectives, and sub-objectives included in the 2024-2027 Local Area Plan generally represent worthwhile aims, but the document does not contain clear pathways towards achieving them. In many instances, the goals or objectives are not feasible with the Division’s current resources and do not contain pathways to obtaining the significant additional resources that the Division would need in order to effect the desired change. In other cases, the Division’s role in any potential change is minimal (often limited to encouraging actions by other organizations), meaning that the completion of the goal or objective is largely out of the Division’s hands. The Division also has prepared a Strategic Planning Instrument for PY27, although this document contains goals, objectives, and performance measures that are, on the whole, too broad to serve as effective guides to future Division operations.

Recommendation 4: The Division should work with the Mayor and Board to revise LCWDA’s Local Area Plan during TCSG’s next planning phase so that the goals and objectives included in the Division’s strategic roadmap are either reasonably achievable with the Division’s current resources or achievable with resources that the Division reasonably foresees obtaining during the period covered by the plan. Additionally, the Division’s revised strategic plan should focus on changes on issues where the Division has material influence on the outcome in question.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department's maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Division as **Level 3: Formally Governed**. Most of the Division's major processes and procedures must, at least in part, meet TCSG standards, which requires the Division to generally operate using defined policies and procedures. The Division's policies and procedures are contained within its Policies & Procedures Manual which, although there is room for improvement, is on the whole a thorough and highly specific reference for the Division's operations. The Division does generally operate using defined roles and responsibilities.

Recent vacancies have resulted in some staff in the Division taking over duties designed to be performed by other positions, but M&J did not observe any indications that these “out of role” assignments are persistent or are likely to continue once the relevant vacancies are filled. The Division shows minimal strategic vision or efforts towards a culture of continuous improvement, however, its primary strategic document (its Local Area Plan) outlines limited actionable, feasible pathways to growth and future improvement. A number of individual staff working in the Division, however, did express ambition for the Division to expand and improve its service offerings and expressed more clear visions for success; these plans for growth are not conveyed in Division strategic guiding documents or other official planning records.

Conclusion

The Job Training Division is an effective administrator of LCWDA’s workforce development services, providing youth and adults in need of job market assistance with access to valuable training programs and employer connections. While the Division maintains comprehensive documentation of its internal processes, it lacks a robust training policy and relies on “on-the-job” training to prepare staff for performing Division processes. Additionally, the Division is not guided by an actionable, realistic strategic plan; developing and adopting such a strategic plan would provide the Division with a pathway towards expanding and/or enhancing its service offerings beyond the “standard” WIA-funded programs that it currently offers and truly serving as a Strategic Partner of local employers and jobseekers. M&J would like to thank Division leadership and staff, particularly the seven employees who sat for interviews, for the time and effort that they provided while sitting for interviews and responding to information requests.

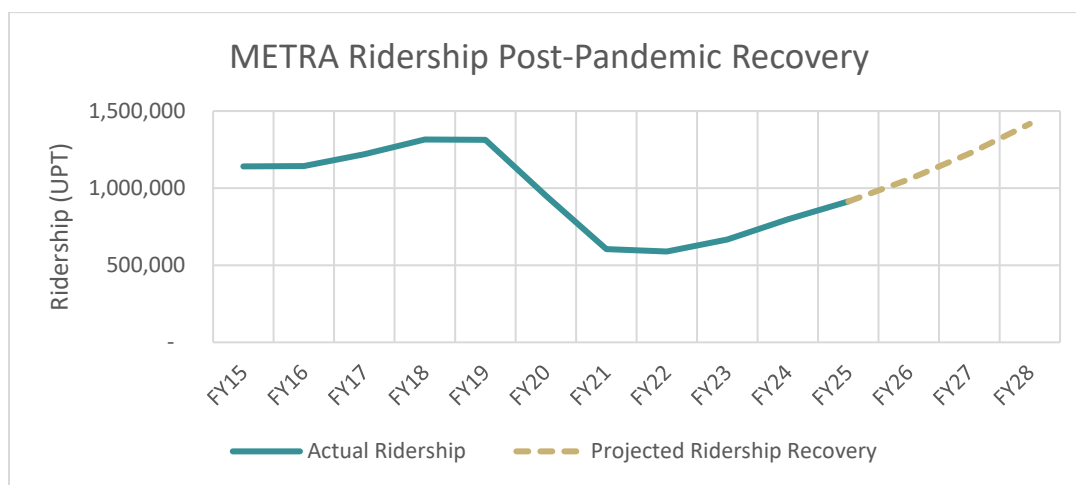
3.J METRA Transit

Introduction

METRA⁴² Transit (“METRA”) serves as Columbus Consolidated Government’s (“CCG” or “City”) public transit agency, providing public bus service to City residents and visitors as well as providing paratransit service to citizens with qualifying disabilities, in accordance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”). METRA also operates the City’s parking services and a shuttle service in the Uptown central business district. METRA staff manage the planning, training, and maintenance operations necessary to support the City’s 10 fixed-route bus service routes, paratransit service, Uptown Shuttle service, and Uptown parking enforcement. METRA’s mission is “to provide safe, reliable, dependable, and cost-effective transit service with a team of professional employees, dedicated to our customers needs and committed to excellence.”⁴³

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

Like most American transit agencies, METRA’s ridership fell significantly during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In METRA’s case, ridership fell from pre-Pandemic levels of over 1.3 million annual rides in Fiscal Year 2018-2019 (“FY19”) to a Pandemic era low of under 600,000 annual rides in FY22, a decrease of 55.2%. METRA’s ridership is recovering steadily in the post-Pandemic era, with increases of 13.3% in FY23, 19.6% in FY24, and 14.5% in FY25.⁴⁴ METRA has made up much of its Pandemic era ridership losses, with FY25 ridership sitting at 69.5% of FY19 levels. Assuming that METRA’s post-pandemic ridership growth trends continue, METRA is projected to reach or exceed pre-Pandemic ridership levels by FY28. The following chart shows METRA’s ridership over the pre-pandemic era, pandemic era, and post-pandemic era, along with ridership recovery projections (assuming that METRA maintains existing post-pandemic ridership recovery trends):



⁴² The City styles “METRA” in all-caps; the name is not an acronym.

⁴³ <https://www.columbusga.gov/metra/Home>

⁴⁴ Final FY25 ridership figures have not yet been published by the Federal Transit Administration’s National Transit Database and this analysis is based on METRA’s initial data submission

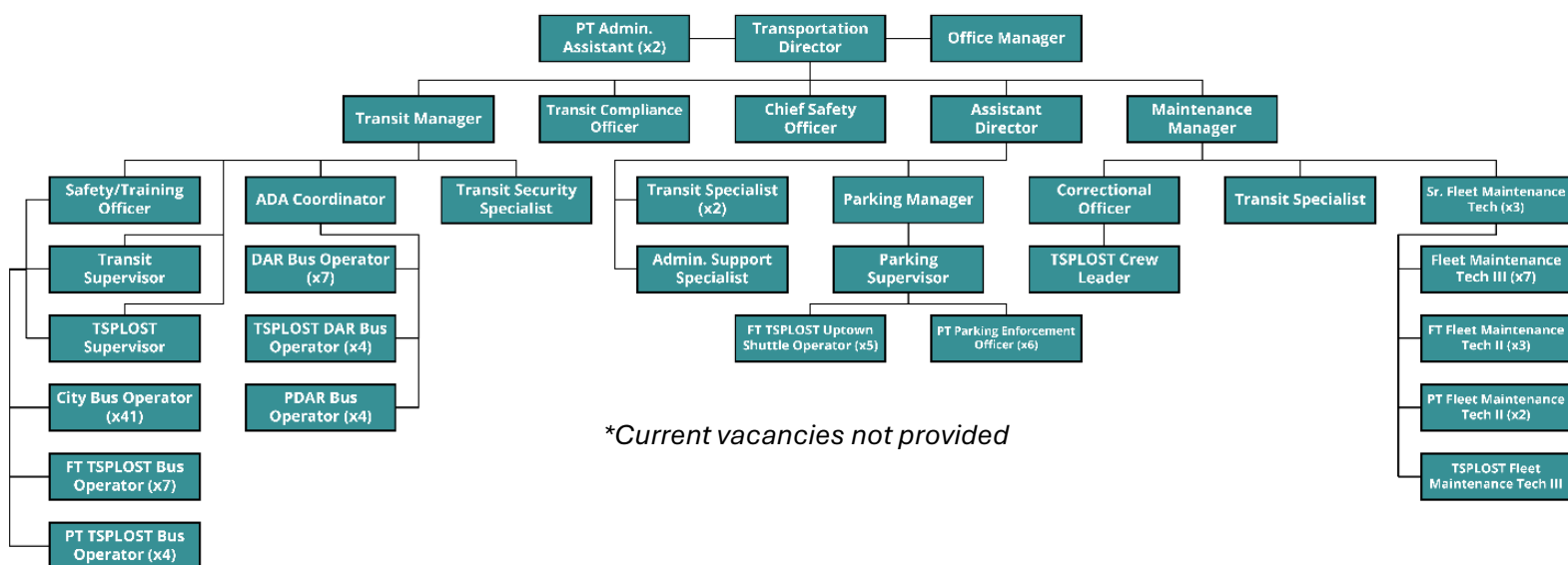
METRA suffered significantly deeper Pandemic-era ridership losses than American public transportation organizations on the whole, with total American transit ridership falling by only 40% from its pre-Pandemic levels during the Pandemic era. Like METRA, overall American public transit had recovered roughly nearly half of its Pandemic-era ridership losses as of late 2024, with nationwide transit ridership recovering to 79% of pre-Pandemic levels by the end of 2024. Total American ridership recovery has slowed in recent years, however, with ridership levels only increasing from 76% to 79% of pre-Pandemic levels from 2023 to 2024, METRA’s ridership has continued its steady recovery across the post-Pandemic period.

Organization and Staffing

METRA is led by the Transportation Director. At the time of M&J’s fieldwork, the Transportation Director position was vacant following the retirement of the prior Transportation Director midway through Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (“FY25”). The Deputy City Manager for Operations, to whom the Transportation Director reports, is currently serving as the interim Transportation Director until the position can be filled on a full-time basis. The Transportation Director receives administrative support from the Office Manager and two part-time Administrative Assistants. The Assistant Director supports the Transportation Director’s management of overall departmental operations. METRA is organized into four Divisions:

- Transit Operations
- Transit Planning
- Parking Operations
- Maintenance

The following organizational chart details METRA’s organizational structure:



M&J was not provided with administrative records detailing METRA's current vacant/filled position status.

The Transit Operations Division is led by the Transit Manager. Three positions report to the Transit Manager and supervise the Transit Operations Division's transit bus operations, which are the Security/Training Officer, Transit Supervisor, and the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax ("TSPLOST") Supervisor. METRA designates certain positions as being funded through the TSPLOST through the position title, although the duties of these positions are generally similar to the duties of the equivalent non-TSPLOST positions. The TSPLOST Supervisor position, for instance, is functionally identical to the Transit Supervisor position other than the position's funding source. The Transit Operations Division's three bus operations supervisors oversee the Division's 52 Bus Operator positions, including 41 full-time City Bus Operator positions, seven full-time TSPLOST Bus Operator positions, and four part-time TSPLOST Bus Operator positions. Per interviews with METRA staff, 12 of the Transit Operations Division's Bus Operator positions (across all types) were vacant at the time of M&J's fieldwork. METRA's current Bus Operator vacancy rate is reportedly significantly lower than the vacancy rate during and shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, although M&J did not receive the personnel records necessary to confirm these reports.

The Transit Operations Division also includes METRA's paratransit services, which are overseen by the ADA Coordinator. The ADA Coordinator oversees the work of the Division's 15 Paratransit Operators, including seven Dial-a-ride ("DAR") Bus Operators, four TSPLOST DAR Bus Operators, and four Premium Dial-a-ride ("PDAR") Bus Operators. The Transit Operations Division also includes METRA's lone Transit Security Specialist position.

The Transit Compliance Officer and Chief Safety Officer report to the Director. The Transit Planning Division, which manages METRA's transit service planning and reporting functions, includes certain staff that report to the Assistant Director, including two Transit Specialists and an Administrative Support Specialist. The remaining staff that report to the Assistant Director make up the Parking Operations Division. The Parking Manager leads the Parking Operations Division, supported by the Parking Supervisor. Five Full-time TSPLOST Uptown Shuttle Operators and six Part-time Parking Enforcement Officers perform the Parking Operations Division's Uptown parking enforcement function and operate METRA's Uptown Shuttle. Per interviews, only three of the Parking Division's five TSPLOST Uptown Shuttle Operator positions and two of the Parking Division's six Part-time Parking Enforcement Officer positions were filled at the time of M&J's fieldwork.

The Maintenance Manager oversees the Maintenance Division. The Correctional Officer, supported by the TSPLOST Crew Leader, manages METRA's use of inmate labor for maintenance of facilities throughout the City. The Maintenance Division's one Transit Specialist position performs administrative and clerical tasks particular to the Maintenance Division's operations. The three Senior Fleet Maintenance Technicians perform day-to-day management of the Maintenance Division's bus repair and maintenance shop and lead its 13 technicians. All three Senior Fleet Maintenance Technician positions were filled at the time of M&J's fieldwork. The 13 technicians overseen by the Senior Fleet Maintenance Technicians include seven full-time Fleet Maintenance Technician IIIs, three Full-Time Fleet Maintenance Technician IIs, two Part-time Fleet Maintenance Technician IIs, and a TSPLOST Fleet Maintenance Technician III. Eight of the Maintenance Division's 13 combined Maintenance Technician positions were filled at the time of M&J's fieldwork.

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

138 employees left METRA employment from FY21 through FY25, or an average of 27.6 departures per fiscal year. The following table shows METRA's overall turnover rate for the last five fiscal years:

Table 20: Annual Turnover Rate

Fiscal Year	Turnover Rate
2021	32.0% (4 Retirements, 26 Separations, 1 Deceased)
2022	33.0% (1 Retirement, 30 Separations, 1 Deceased)
2023	33.3% (2 Retirements, 32 Separations)
2024	21.0% (22 Separations)
2025	17.3% (1 Retirement, 18 Separations)

Source: CCG Human Resources Department Reports

METRA had notably high turnover rates, over 30% from FY21 through FY23, although its turnover rates have declined to somewhat more reasonable levels during FY24 and FY25. Notably, the overwhelming majority of METRA's turnover has occurred within Bus Operator positions.

The following table breaks down METRA’s turnover for each of the past five fiscal years by position type (*i.e.*, Bus Operator⁴⁵ vs non-Bus Operator positions).

Table 21: Turnover by Position Type

Fiscal Year	Bus Operator	Non-Bus Operator	Total Turnover
2021	16	15	31
2022	26	6	32
2023	26	8	34
2024	16	6	22
2025	9	10	19
TOTAL	93	45	138

Source: CCG Human Resources Department Reports

As shown in the prior table, 93 of METRA’s 138 employee departures (67.4%) during the sampled fiscal years were employees in Bus Operator positions. As only 52 of the 116 full-time and part-time positions (44.8%) currently shown on METRA’s organizational chart are Bus Operator positions, METRA’s turnover in recent years has been disproportionately concentrated in its Bus Operator positions. In interviews, METRA employees stated that METRA has struggled to fill Bus Operator positions and retain Bus Operator talent in the post-COVID period, citing higher wages offered by private sector employers and greater scheduling flexibility offered by other City departments as the primary challenges faced by METRA’s Bus Operator hiring efforts.

⁴⁵ Includes all Bus Operator-related positions, regardless of funding source (*e.g.*, TSPLOST-funded positions) or full-time/part-time status. Includes Bus Operators that depart METRA employment while in trainee status. Does not include DAR Operators or Uptown Shuttle operators.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The following list defines the primary functions of METRA's divisions:

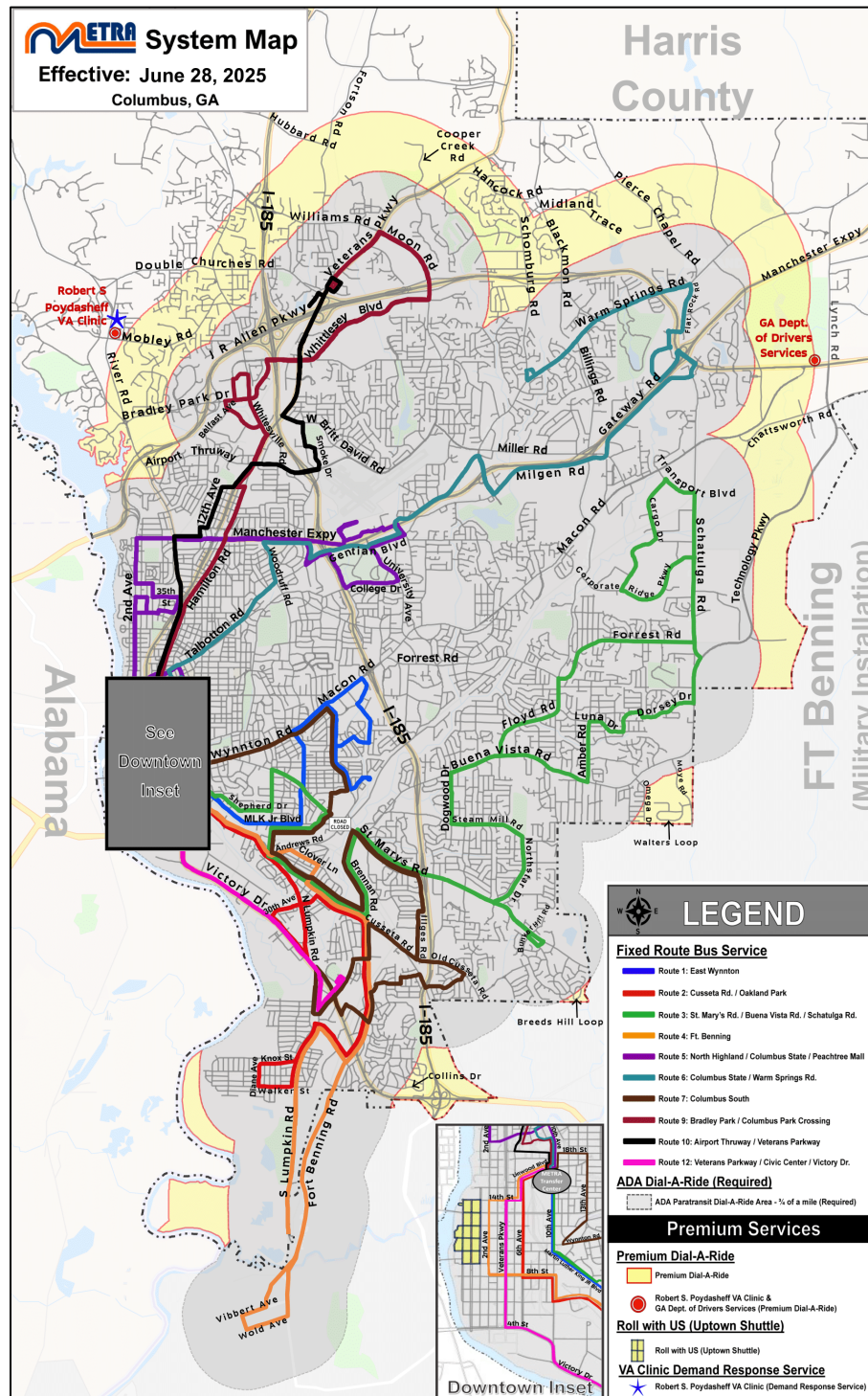
- Transit Operations Division
 - Bus Operations
 - Paratransit Operations
 - Training
- Transit Planning Division
 - Transit Planning and Procurement
 - Transit Reporting and Compliance
- Parking Division
 - Uptown Parking Enforcement
 - Uptown Shuttle Operations
- Maintenance Division
 - Transit Fleet Maintenance
 - Transit Facility Maintenance

Transit Operations Division

Bus Operations

Staff employed in the Transit Operations Division's Bus Operator positions (including the City Bus Operator position, Full-time TSPLOST Bus Operator position, and Part-time TSPLOST Bus Operator Position) operate METRA's 10 fixed-route transit bus routes.

The following image details METRA's service offerings, including all 10 fixed-route transit bus routes:



Due to reported shortages of bus operators, METRA currently operates all transit bus routes using Saturday schedules, with designated service hours running from 4:30 AM through 8:30 PM. METRA offers transit bus services from Monday through Saturday, with no Sunday services. All METRA transit bus routes originate and terminate from the METRA Transfer Center, located on the same campus as METRA’s main offices, maintenance facility, and bus yard. The following table details each of METRA’s 10 fixed-route transit bus routes, listing the current scheduled time at which the route begins (*i.e.*, the first scheduled departure from the METRA Transfer Center) and ends (*i.e.*, the last scheduled arrival to the METRA Transfer Center). The table also lists the headway for each route, or the time between buses on the route, and the minimum number of buses needed to serve each route schedule.

Table 22: Fixed-route Transit Bus Routes

No. ⁴⁶	Route Name	Route Start	Route End	Headway	Maximum Buses in Service
1	East Wynnnton	6:00 AM	6:50 PM	1 Hour	1
2	Cusseta Rd. / Oakland Park	5:30 AM	7:50 PM	1 Hour	2
3	St. Mary’s Rd. / Buena Vista Rd. / Schatulga Rd. ⁴⁷	4:30 AM	8:25 PM	1 Hour	2
4	Ft. Benning	5:00 AM	7:20 PM	1 Hour	2
5	North Highland / Columbus State / Peachtree Mall	5:00 AM	7:45 PM	1 Hour	2
6	Columbus State / Milgen Rd. ⁴⁸	5:30 AM	8:20 PM	1 Hour	2
7	Columbus South ⁴⁹	5:30 AM	8:30 PM	1 Hour	2
9	Bradley Park / Columbus Park Crossing	5:00 AM	7:20 PM	1 Hour	2
10	Airport Thruway / Veterans Parkway	5:30 AM	7:50 PM	1 Hour	2
12	Veterans Parkway / Civic Center / Victory Dr.	6:00 AM	6:50 PM	1 Hour	1

Source: Departmental Information

⁴⁶ Route numbers 8 and 11 are not currently used by METRA.

⁴⁷ At the time of M&J’s fieldwork, Route 3 (St. Mary’s Rd / Buena Vista Rd. / Schatulga Rd.) was operating using a “detour” route due to roadway construction, which may impact the listed Route Start/End times.

⁴⁸ Route 5 is also referred to as “Columbus State / Warm Springs Rd.”

⁴⁹ At the time of M&J’s fieldwork, Route 7 (Columbus South) was operating using a “detour” route due to roadway construction, which may impact the listed Route Start/End times.

METRA primarily operates using two daily Bus Operator shifts, with the first shift running from before the start of each operator's assigned route to around midday, and the second shift running from midday through the end of the Operator's assigned shift. Most Bus Operators are scheduled for specific routes, with the Transit Operations Division reassigning routes and shifts every six months, based on seniority. Part-time staff generally work equivalent shifts to Full-time operators but are scheduled for fewer days of work per week. METRA typically schedules a small number (1-3) of Bus Operators as "spares" each shift, as well, with the Transit Operations Division using these "spares" to serve in place of employees that are not working (e.g., on vacation/sick leave or taking their allowed lunch break), deliver replacement buses in the event that a vehicle breaks down while in service, and provide other "fill-in" services as needed.

METRA staff reported in interviews that, due to staffing shortages in Bus Operator positions, METRA makes extensive use of overtime to staff all Bus Operator shifts needed to provide all scheduled service. Staff stated that METRA requires all Bus Operators to work some amount of overtime, with most full-time staff working six-day weeks, although many Bus Operators volunteer for some amount of overtime, as well, reducing the amount of mandatory overtime that METRA is required to use. METRA pays staff time-and-a-half wages for all overtime hours.

METRA also schedules a Bus Operator as "Dispatcher" during each shift. The Bus Operator serving as Dispatcher works out of the Transfer Center and regularly uses a radio communications system to communicate with in-service Bus Operators to help ensure on-time performance, organize shift changes, and respond to any situations that may arise while on route (e.g., advising on how to adjust for unplanned construction or lane closures, beginning the incident response process if buses are involved in an incident, responding to reports of unruly passengers). Dispatchers also perform the duties of "spares" in the event that all scheduled spares are busy, with a Bus Operations Supervisor taking over bus operations dispatch responsibilities in their absence. Bus Operators volunteer to serve as Dispatchers and receive specialized dispatching training before receiving their first Dispatcher assignments. Bus Operators do not receive any salary adjustments or incentives for taking on these additional Dispatcher responsibilities.

The Transit Operations Division's Supervisors (including the Transit Supervisor and TSPLOST Supervisor as well as the Safety/Training Officer) oversee the Transit Operations Division's Bus Operations. Supervisors often work in the field, visiting incidents or other impediments to on-time operations to develop and plans for getting the Division's bus services back on schedule. As mentioned in the prior paragraph, Supervisors also serve as backup Dispatchers in the event that the scheduled Dispatcher is called away from their dispatch responsibilities. In a similar manner, Dispatchers (*i.e.*, Bus Operators that have been trained to perform Dispatcher duties) function as backup Supervisors on weekends, when Supervisors are taking vacation or sick leave, and when Supervisors are busy in the field. Dispatchers/Bus Operators do not receive any salary adjustments or incentives for taking on these additional Supervisor responsibilities. The Transit/Safety Officer performs their training responsibilities in addition to their Supervisor responsibilities, often taking trainees into the field with them as they respond to incidents. The Transit/Safety Officer position is compensated equivalently to the other Supervisor positions, with no adjustments or incentives for taking on its training responsibilities.

Before beginning service each day, Bus Operators perform a pre-check inspection of their vehicle to confirm that the vehicle is in good condition and is safe to operate, recording the results of the inspection as well as the vehicle's starting mileage on a paper inspection checklist. The Bus Operator then brings their bus into service and travels along their designated route, picking up and dropping off passengers as needed.

METRA riders can pay their fare directly on the bus or pre-purchase one-day or multi-day bus passes from a vending machine at the Transfer Center or from a service window at the Transfer Center. Eligible riders, including children, seniors, and individuals with qualifying disabilities, can also purchase reduced fare passes from the Transfer Center service window, providing documentation confirming their eligibility for the City's reduced fare program. Dispatchers, including Bus Operations Dispatchers and/or Paratransit Dispatchers, typically staff the Transfer Center's service window and receive payments as cash, check, or credit. Service window workers record cash payments using the City's internally-developed "miscellaneous receipts" software tool, making change and storing proceeds prior to deposit using a locking cash drawer. The Transfer Center's service window is not equipped with a dedicated credit card reader for processing credit card transactions and staff instead use an online credit card payment processing tool, manually keying the customer's credit card information into the tool.

Riders pay fares as they enter the bus using an electronic farebox, either swiping their pass for single/multi-day passes or reduced fare passes or inserting exact change into the machine's cash/change handler. Bus Operators do not collect cash payments themselves or regularly handle cash. Fleet Maintenance Technicians periodically collect accumulated cash receipts from fareboxes. METRA recently installed new fareboxes in its buses which have the capability to receive card and mobile payments using "touch to pay" technology, but METRA has not yet enabled this feature.

At the end of each day, Bus Operators park their bus in METRA's bus yard and clean the inside of their vehicle, leaving their inspection checklist form on the vehicle. After the Bus Operators have finished cleaning their vehicles, Fleet Maintenance Technicians collect the completed inspection checklist forms, refuel the vehicles, and run the vehicles through METRA's bus wash station before parking the vehicles for the night.

Paratransit Operations

METRA's paratransit operation, which it brands as "Dial-A-Ride" consists of on-demand shuttle services in all parts of the City within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of METRA's fixed-route bus routes, as required by the ADA, plus additional "premium" paratransit service areas extending for an additional $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from METRA's fixed-route bus routes. METRA's paratransit services also conduct pickups and drop-offs at the local Georgia Department of Driver Services office and the Robert S. Poydasheff United States Department of Veteran's Affairs Clinic, even though both locations sit barely outside of METRA's premium paratransit service area. The METRA service map included earlier in this report depicts METRA's paratransit service zones. METRA charges the same fare for rides to/from locations in the premium paratransit service area as rides to/from locations in the standard, ADA-required paratransit service area.

The Transit Operations Division's ADA Coordinator oversees METRA's paratransit operations, with service delivery performed by the Division's Paratransit Operators (including DAR Bus Operators, TSPLOST DAR Bus Operators, and PDAR Bus Operators). METRA's paratransit services operate the same hours as METRA's transit bus operations, from 4:30 AM to 8:30 PM (last pickup at 7:30 PM), Monday through Saturday. Paratransit Operators work shifts based on demands; Paratransit Operators may have a "usual" shift start/end time, but their actual start/end time on any given day may vary based on the rides scheduled for that day. One Paratransit Operator each day is assigned to serve as a "Paratransit Dispatcher," while the remaining Paratransit Operators work in the field conducting paratransit operations; unlike METRA's bus operations, METRA does not schedule Paratransit Operators as "spares."

The Paratransit Dispatcher schedules all paratransit pickups and drop-offs. Paratransit riders must schedule their rides in advance by calling the METRA office and providing their pickup location, their drop-off location, and their requested pickup or drop-off time. Paratransit riders can request rides between locations within METRA's ADA-required paratransit service area no earlier than 14 days before the ride and no later than the day before the ride. For paratransit rides with an origin or destination in METRA's premium paratransit service area, the rider must schedule the ride on the day prior to the ride.

METRA answers paratransit ride request calls from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Saturday. Outside of these hours, paratransit riders may leave a voicemail to request service that the Paratransit Dispatcher will respond to at the start of the following workday. The Paratransit Dispatcher answers most paratransit ride request calls, although one of METRA's Part-time Administrative Assistants also is trained to answer paratransit ride request calls and does so as needed, forwarding the request information to the Paratransit Dispatcher.

Per interviews, only one Paratransit Operator is currently trained to serve as Paratransit Dispatcher. At the time of M&J fieldwork, METRA was in the process of hiring a new Paratransit Operator with the intention of training this new Paratransit Operator to perform the Paratransit Dispatcher function to serve as a backup. Certain Transit Operations Division staff other than the current Paratransit Dispatcher are familiar individual processes performed by the Paratransit Dispatcher position, but no backups are trained for certain functions. According to interviews, the current Paratransit Dispatcher is required to work long hours six days per week, without taking vacations or sick days, in order for METRA to provide its required paratransit services. The Paratransit Dispatcher also serves as a backup driver, entering service if needed. When the Paratransit Dispatcher is working as a driver, they continue to perform their dispatch duties from the road, reviewing and (as needed) updating schedules when stopped at pickups/drop-offs.

The Paratransit Dispatcher receives ride requests and enters the ride requests into a ride scheduling software system to determine how to best provide the requested ride. METRA transitioned from using the RouteMatch paratransit scheduling system to the Spare paratransit scheduling system during M&J's fieldwork. In the Spare system, the Paratransit Dispatcher configures the software to operate under METRA's paratransit service scheduling (*i.e.*, configuration of Paratransit Operator shifts, service hours) and enters information on ride requests into the system as they are received. Spare automatically uses the ride request information to generate a service schedule, assigning pickups and drop-offs to Paratransit Operators in a way that minimizes travel, maximizes utilization, and ensures on time performance. METRA does not conduct paratransit operations as point-to-point shuttles, picking up riders and immediately driving to their destination, but works to optimize overall system performance. A Paratransit Operator may conduct additional pickups or drop-offs along the way in between picking a given rider up and dropping them off. The Paratransit Dispatcher reviews the route scheduling created by Spare and adjusts it as necessary, accounting for local features (*e.g.*, road closures or traffic) or other information not accounted for in Spare's scheduling logic. All of METRA's paratransit vehicles are equipped with at least three wheelchair tiedown points, although the Paratransit Dispatcher avoids scheduling more than two riders with wheelchairs for a single vehicle at any given time if at all possible.

The ADA Coordinator oversees METRA's overall paratransit operations and also reviews applications for paratransit eligibility. Prospective paratransit riders complete and submit applications to METRA that include their contact information, details of their disability, and a note from a qualified, licensed healthcare professional confirming the applicant's disability. Applicants can receive application forms from the METRA office or through a download from METRA's website and return their paper application materials to the METRA office by mail or by hand. Applicants can also prepare their applications electronically, using a portal on METRA's website. METRA does not charge an application fee for applying for paratransit service.

After receiving an application, the ADA Coordinator reviews the provided information to confirm that the application contains all required information and reviews the information to determine the applicant's eligibility for paratransit service. The ADA Coordinator may ask the applicant to visit the METRA office for an in-person interview to obtain additional information about the applicant's disability, if needed. The ADA Coordinator completes all eligibility determinations within 21 days of receiving a completed application. If the ADA Coordinator determines that the applicant is eligible for paratransit service, they inform the applicant of the decision by mail and instruct the applicant to visit METRA's office to have a paratransit ID card made, which the rider will use to verify their eligibility for paratransit service. Paratransit ID cards are valid for three years for riders with permanent or long-term disabilities, while paratransit ID cards expire after six months for riders whose disability is determined to be temporary. If the ADA Coordinator determines that the applicant is not eligible for ADA service, they inform the applicant of this finding in writing, after which the applicant has 60 days to prepare and submit a written appeal of this finding of ineligibility. The Transit Director reviews all written appeals and has 30 days from receipt to issue their final eligibility determination.

Paratransit Operators begin service by performing a pre-trip inspection of their vehicle; unlike Bus Operators, Paratransit Operators do not record the results of their pre-trip inspection on a checklist or other form. The Paratransit Operators then begin service, following the itinerary created by the Dispatcher. Paratransit vehicles are equipped with tablets that inform the Paratransit Operators of their next destination, either to pick a passenger up or drop a passenger off, and provide turn-by-turn directions. Paratransit Operators assist passengers in entering and exiting vehicles and, as needed, ensuring that wheelchairs are properly secured. METRA's paratransit vehicles run on gasoline, not diesel fuel, and Paratransit Operators refuel their vehicles as needed at the City's fueling center, managed by the Public Works Department. Paratransit vehicles are equipped with fuel chips that allocate fuel costs to METRA as appropriate.

Paratransit Operators also collect fares from riders using their vehicle-mounted fareboxes, either as cash payments or via METRA-issued cards. Paratransit riders can purchase fare cards in a similar manner to how bus riders purchase single/multi-day passes or reduced fare cards. Paratransit riders can be accompanied by one caregiver or guest without charge, although these guests must be identified at the time the reservation is made.

Training

METRA's training curricula for new hires vary significantly by position, although all METRA hires receive similar initial training and onboarding, conducted by the Safety/Training Officer. METRA's initial training and onboarding process is a several day process in which the Safety/Training Officer familiarizes the new hire(s) with METRA's general operations and culture, instructs the new hire(s) on METRA's organization-wide policies and procedures, and supports the new hire(s) as they complete any administrative paperwork required by the City's Human Resources Department or METRA's administrative staff.

All Bus Operators and Supervisors must hold active Georgia Class B commercial driving licenses ("CDL") with the "P" (Passenger Vehicles) endorsement to drive buses in revenue service. At times in the past when there have been particularly severe Bus Operator shortages, METRA has loosened Bus Operator job requirements by not requiring applicants to hold a full CDL at the time of their application, but instead requiring applicants to obtain at least their Class BP CDL learner's permit prior to starting work with METRA. METRA then provided CDL training to the new permit-holding hires and supported the trainee Bus Operators as they worked to acquire their full-status Class B CDL. METRA does not require Bus Operators or Supervisors to hold any qualifications other than the appropriate CDL.

The Safety/Training Officer trains newly hired Bus Operators on METRA's bus operations procedures, including providing CDL training to new hires that only hold Class BP CDL learner's permits. The Safety/Training Officer structures their bus operations procedure training, including CDL training, on curricula provided by the United States Department of Transportation's ("USDOT") Transportation Safety Institute ("TSI"), collected in TSI "train the trainer" courses that the Safety/Training Officer periodically attends. METRA's bus operations procedure training includes a mix of classroom-based training, "hands on" training in METRA's bus yard, field observational training (*i.e.*, observing the Safety/Training Officer or an experienced Bus Operator as they operate a transit bus in the field, potentially while in revenue service), and field operational training (*i.e.*, operating a transit bus in the field under the supervision of the Safety/Training Officer or an experienced Bus Operator).

The Safety/Training Officer's CDL training for Bus Operators that are hired with a Class BP CDL learner's permit typically lasts several weeks, at which point the trainee takes their road test and, if they pass, obtain their full Class B CDL. METRA's bus operations procedure training typically lasts four to six weeks (in addition to any CDL training). The Safety/Training Officer releases newly hired Bus Operators for solo revenue operations once they are comfortable that the trainee can operate vehicles in accordance with METRA's safety standards, based on their own observations of the trainee's driving and reports from the experienced Bus Operators with whom the trainee has worked.

The Safety/Training Officer, other Supervisors, and the Transit Manager periodically perform "ride checks", trailing in-service buses to confirm that the buses are being operated in a safe manner and adhering to METRA policies, documenting the results of their ride checks in a printed memo. The Safety/Training Officer provides one-on-one training to Bus Operators after incidents where the Bus Operator was determined to be at fault or after negative ride check findings. The Safety/Training Officer develops a personalized curriculum for any such individualized training to address the fault(s) that led to the incident or that were observed in the ride check. METRA also holds an annual "all hands" meeting, during which the Safety/Training Officer delivers a training session addressing any recurring faults that Transit Operations Division leadership has observed across METRA's operators during the prior year.

After receiving their initial training and onboarding from the Safety/Training Officer, the Safety/Training Officer instructs Paratransit Operators using an adapted version of the in-classroom curriculum used to train new Bus Operator hires. METRA's paratransit minibuses do not require CDLs to operate, so METRA only requires Paratransit Operators to maintain a standard Class C Georgia driver's license and a clean driving record. The ADA Coordinator arranges the field-based portion of the Paratransit Operator training process, which consists of field observational training and field operational training. While in the field, the experienced Paratransit Operators supervising the trainee instructing them not only on safe driving practices, but also on specific customer service techniques for serving METRA's primary customer base of individuals with physical and mental disabilities. METRA offers CPR training courses to Paratransit Officers and encourages them to maintain an up-to-date CPR certification.

METRA does not have a structured training program for its bus operations and paratransit operations Dispatcher positions or its or Supervisor positions. Staff learn how to serve as Dispatchers and/or Supervisors by observing experienced staff serve in these positions and reviewing the appropriate policy and procedures handbooks.

METRA staff across the Transit Planning and Parking Divisions receive METRA's initial training and onboarding from the Safety/Training Officer, but most remaining training is largely unstructured and consists of learning how to perform the required duties by observing experienced staff as they perform their work and reviewing reference materials or procedure guides. Transit Planning Division employees periodically attend virtual and in-person seminars and conferences covering transit planning and compliance topics offered by USDOT's Federal Transit Administration ("FTA") and the Georgia Department of Transportation ("GDOT"). METRA does not require Transit Planning Division and Parking Division staff to maintain any particular certifications beyond standard Class C driver's licenses and METRA does not have policies specifying any particular continuing education requirements for Transit Planning Division and Parking Division staff, although staff may periodically be instructed to attend specific courses or events.

METRA staff in the Maintenance Division receive METRA's initial training and onboarding from the Safety/Training Officer, but the Maintenance Division provides limited amounts of organized training for new staff beyond this onboarding. Maintenance Division staff learn most of their job tasks through "on the job" training, including observing experienced staff as they perform their work, asking questions, and reviewing reference materials and guides. The Maintenance Division's Correctional Officer and TSPLOST Crew Leader must maintain Georgia Department of Corrections certification to oversee inmate labor teams.

The Maintenance Division's Maintenance Technicians and Senior Maintenance Technicians must maintain a Georgia Class B CDL with the proper endorsements to be qualified to drive transit buses for maintenance purposes. METRA does not require Maintenance Technician and Senior Maintenance Technician applicants to hold full CDLs when hired, but applicants must obtain a Georgia Class BP CDL learner's permit before starting work with METRA. The Safety/Training Officer trains Maintenance Division hires to receive their full CDLs, as needed, using the same CDL training curriculum used for bus operators.

Maintenance Technicians and Senior Maintenance Technicians must have experience with automotive repair work prior to being hired, but METRA does not require these staff to have prior experience working with heavy diesel vehicles or to obtain and maintain relevant industry certifications. Similarly, METRA does not provide any incentives, such as bonuses, promotions, or tuition reimbursement to Maintenance Division staff that obtain relevant specialized maintenance certifications. As a result, METRA's repair shop cannot perform specialized or highly technical repairs in-house and must send vehicles to third-party repair shops to have these types of services performed. The Maintenance Division does periodically arrange for vendors to visit METRA's repair shop and hold training sessions educating the Maintenance Technicians and Senior Maintenance Technicians on maintenance of that vendor's equipment, but METRA does not have any policies requiring or encouraging these staff to meet annual continuing education goals.

Transit Planning Division

Transit Planning and Procurement

Much of METRA's large-scale transit planning function, including planning related to METRA's use of FTA grant funds, is conducted through its involvement with the Columbus – Phenix City – Metropolitan Planning Organization ("MPO"). The MPO is an intergovernmental organization that organizes transportation policy and planning throughout the Columbus-Phenix City region, including localities in Georgia (the City, Chattahoochee County, and portions of Harris County) and Alabama (the City of Phenix City, City of Smiths Station, and portions of Lee and Russell Counties). The MPO is the lead agency responsible for administering and coordinating the transportation-related activities of its participants, although the MPO does not itself implement the planned transportation projects, with the implementation left to the MPO's member organizations. The Planning Department is the City's primary representative to the MPO, representing the City's interests related to highways and streets. METRA engages with the MPO to advocate for its own transit-related interests.

The MPO's primary output is its Transportation Improvement Program ("TIP") document, which details the federally-supported projects that the MPO plans to support through its member agencies during the planning period. The MPO develops the TIP to plan the region's transportation activities for a four-year period, with the current TIP covering the FY24-FY27 period. The Transportation Director sits on the MPO's primary governance body, the Policy Coordinating Committee, which is responsible for developing and adopting the TIP, while the ADA Coordinator and Deputy City Manager for Operations (currently serving as the interim Transportation Director) both serve on the MPO's Technical Coordinating Committee, which provides technical advice and guidance to the Policy Coordinating Committee.

Within METRA, the Transportation Director, Assistant Director, Transit Manager, Transit Compliance Officer, and Maintenance Manager jointly work to develop METRA's own internal planning priorities and needs. METRA's internal planning process primarily consists of tracking the state of METRA's capital assets, including vehicles and facilities, managing their maintenance, and planning to replace those assets as they reach the end of their scheduled service lifespans. To this end, the Maintenance Manager maintains a vehicle inventory and replacement timetable, listing the number of vehicles that METRA plans on procuring each year to replace aging vehicles reaching the end of their service lives.

METRA's Transit Planning Division works with the Finance Department's Purchasing Division to procure capital items, including purchasing vehicles and conducting facility repairs and construction. METRA maintains an extensive procurement process above and beyond the Purchasing Division's own procurement process to help ensure that federally funded METRA purchases adhere to relevant FTA guidelines.

The Transit Planning Division's Transit Specialists coordinate between METRA and the Purchasing Division, working with the Maintenance Manager and Transit Manager to develop specifications and working with the Purchasing Division to develop solicitations based on those specifications and conduct the bidding process. The Assistant Director and Transportation Director review and approve Transit Specialist procurement work as needed. The Purchasing Division advises METRA about the low bidder on capital projects, providing METRA leadership with the opportunity to disqualify non-qualified bids before award.

The Transit Planning Division's Transit Specialists also serve as METRA's project managers for capital projects, including vehicle procurement and construction/facility maintenance, managing METRA's communications with the vendor and processing vendor invoices. The Transit Specialists hold regular meetings with the Assistant Director and Transit Compliance Officer to discuss project capital status and next steps. The Transit Planners also work closely with the Transit Manager on vehicle purchases and Maintenance Manager on construction/facility maintenance projects to ensure that the work adequately serves METRA's needs. The Transit Specialists do not directly oversee facility design or construction work; staff within the Inspections & Code Enforcement Department and Public Works Department directly oversee the design and construction of facility projects.

Transit Reporting and Compliance

The Transit Planning Section's Transit Compliance Officer performs much of METRA's federal compliance, reporting, and grants management duties. The Transit Compliance Officer prepares METRA's annual National Transit Database ("NTD") report submission that compiles various financial and operational data to give an overview of METRA's service during the year. The Transit Compliance Officer accesses financial data through Advantage, the City's enterprise resource planning ("ERP") software suite, and works with the Transit Manager and Maintenance Manager to collect the necessary service data, such as vehicle production data (e.g., miles travels, hours in service) and system usage data (e.g., ridership). The Transit Compliance Officer compiles the required information into FTA-provided forms and submits the forms annually through the FTA's online NTD reporting portal. If needed, the Transit Compliance Officer works with the FTA to validate the information provided and revise data submissions based on FTA guidance.

The Transit Compliance Officer also manages METRA's engagement with FTA's triennial review process. Federal law requires all recipients of certain federal transit funding to undergo a review every three years to assess various aspects of the recipient's operations in order to promote effective use of federal funds.

The FTA triennial review may include reviews of as many as eight subject areas:

- Technical Capacity
- Financial Capacity
- Financial Management
- Procurement
- Disadvantaged Business Enterprise
- ADA
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act
- Maintenance

The Transit Compliance Officer works with the FTA to prepare the triennial review in accordance with FTA guidance, based on information collected from Advantage, the Maintenance Manager, and the Transit Manager. At the time of M&J's fieldwork, the Transit Compliance Officer was in the process of revising its 2025 triennial review submission in response to FTA comments.

The Transit Compliance Officer also administers METRA's federal grants. FTA's grant strategy is primarily organized through the MPO's TIP development process. The Transit Compliance Officer uses the plan laid out in the TIP document to develop grant applications for discretionary and formula-based grants, which they submit through FTA's Transit Award Management System ("TrAMS"), a web-based grant management tool. The Transit Planning Section's Transit Specialists perform monthly grant reporting and drawdowns. The Transit Specialists prepare monthly financial reports detailing METRA's use of federal grant funds, based off of monthly reports prepared by the Finance Department's Grant Accountant, and submits the reports through TrAMS.

The Chief Safety Officer oversees the safety of METRA operations, including transit services and maintenance, and monitors compliance with various federal, state, and local safety regulations. The Chief Safety Officer responds to all vehicle incidents to ensure that staff adhere to FTA post-incident guidelines and to collect incident information for entry in the City's SafetyPoint safety tracking database. After the incident, the Chief Safety Officer enters the collected information, including the date of the incident, a description of the incident, the incident classification (e.g., vehicle-vehicle, vehicle-object), and operator name, into the SafetyPoint database. The Chief Safety Officer then convenes an Accident Review Board meeting, including relevant METRA leadership and management, to discuss any lessons learned from the incident or changes to implement for the future and to assign "points" to the operator involved in the incident based on the severity of the incident and the operator's culpability for the incident. Bus or Paratransit Operators may face discipline after accumulating more than six "points" in a calendar year.

The Office Manager performs METRA's FTA-required drug testing and drug test reporting duties. The City Human Resources Department selects a random population of METRA employees for testing each month and emails the list to the Office Manager. When they receive the list, the Office Manager informs the sampled staff of their drug test selection and instructs the staff to visit the City's third-party drug testing provider that day for testing. The Office Manager also arranges for operators to undergo drug testing following any incidents. The Office Manager receives the drug testing results from the third-party drug testing provider and informs the Transportation Director of any positive test results, which result in immediate termination. Annually, the Office Manager provides a report summarizing the results of METRA's drug testing throughout the prior year to FTA.

Parking Division

Uptown Parking Enforcement

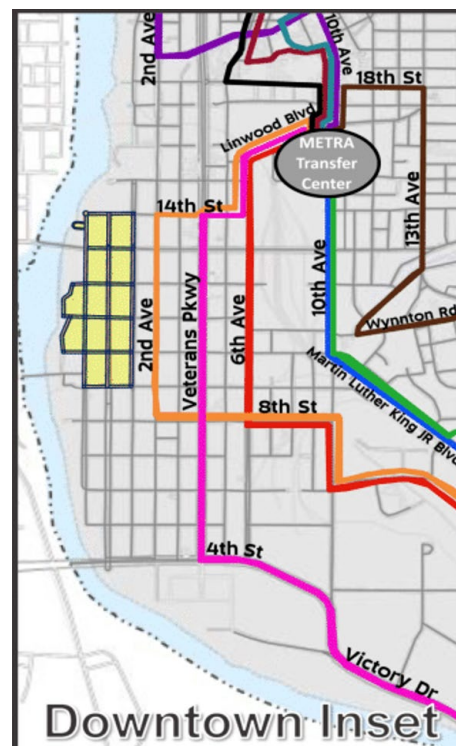
The Parking Division's Part-time Parking Enforcement Officers and Full-time TSPLOST Uptown Shuttle Operators both enforce the City's parking regulations in the Uptown parking enforcement area. The City does not require drivers to pay for parking in the Uptown parking enforcement area but instead restricts the time that a vehicle can be parked in a given parking region (*i.e.*, block or parking deck). The Parking Division's staff perform "rounds" throughout the City's service area, logging all parked vehicles in a handheld parking enforcement device by scanning the vehicle's license plate number, which tags the vehicle to the appropriate parking region. On following rounds, the Parking Division used the handheld parking enforcement devices to recognize vehicles that have remained parked in a region past the allowed time. Parking Division staff then use the handheld parking enforcement device to create a citation for the vehicle. Parking Division staff leave a printout of the citation on the offending vehicle's dashboard. In the event that Parking Division staff notice a vehicle that has remained in a parking spot for a particularly lengthy time (typically over a day), they refer the vehicle to the Parking Manager and/or Parking Supervisor, who may contact the City's contracted towing service to have the vehicle towed.

Drivers that have been issued citations can pay the assessed fine through an online portal or in-person at the Parking Division's office in the 919 Broadway parking deck. The Parking Manager and Parking Supervisor work out of the 919 Broadway facility and receive payments. Part-time Parking Enforcement Officers may collect payments if the Parking Manager and Parking Supervisor are not available. Other enforcement organizations, including the Columbus Police Department, Muscogee County Sheriff's Department, Columbus Fire Department, enforcement staff at the medical center, and enforcement staff at the Columbus Airport, perform parking enforcement duties outside of the Uptown parking enforcement area, recording violations on paper citation forms. Each morning, the Parking Division's Part-time Parking Enforcement Officers visit the City Courthouse to collect copies of parking citations issued by other enforcement organizations and manually enter the citations into the City's parking enforcement computer system.

Part-time Parking Enforcement Officers are primarily dedicated to parking enforcement in the Uptown parking enforcement area and aim to conduct rounds at least every two to four hours, performing administrative tasks such as uploading tickets written by other enforcement organizations, between rounds. Part-time Parking Enforcement Officers also perform minor maintenance and custodial functions for the Parking Division, such as making sure that parking deck elevators remain clean and emptying parking deck trash cans. Parking enforcement is a secondary responsibility for the Full-time Uptown Shuttle Operators, however, who conduct parking enforcement tasks as able in time between providing and soliciting Uptown Shuttle rides.

Uptown Shuttle Operations

The Parking Division manages the Uptown Shuttle, a free shuttle service that provides point-to-point transportation between points in the roughly 12 blocks that make up Uptown Shuttle service area. The Uptown Shuttle's service area is highlighted in yellow on the following image from METRA's service map.



As shown in the service diagram, the Uptown Shuttle's service area does not intersect with METRA's fixed-route bus services. At its closest, the Uptown Shuttle is still one block removed from Route 4 (Ft. Benning), the closest bus route (shown in orange in the diagram). Routes 2 (Cusseta Rd. / Oakland Park — shown in red) and 12 (Veterans Parkway / Civic Center / Victory Dr. — shown in pink) also pass within five blocks of the Uptown Shuttle's service area. In interviews, METRA staff state that Uptown Shuttle's service area is primarily determined by speed limits, with METRA limiting the Uptown Shuttle's service to streets with speed limits at or below the Uptown Shuttle vehicle's maximum speed of approximately 30 miles per hour.

The Parking Division's Full-time Uptown Shuttle Operators operate the Uptown Shuttle service using enclosed golf cart-style vehicles. The Uptown Shuttle's vehicles run off of batteries and seat five passengers plus the operator. Uptown Shuttle vehicles are equipped with solar panels on their roofs to recharge batteries while in service, but also recharge through a plug at the 919 Broadway deck. One Uptown Shuttle vehicle is configured for handicapped service, containing a wheelchair tiedown space, which reduces the vehicle's capacity from five passengers to four (three standard passenger seats plus a wheelchair). The Uptown Shuttle runs from 11:00 AM to 8:00 PM Monday through Thursday and 10:00 AM to 12:00 AM (Midnight) Friday and Saturday.

The Uptown Shuttle Operators begin their shifts by inspecting their shuttle vehicles to confirm that they are in good operating condition and safe to drive, before filling out a paper inspection sheet that records the results of the inspection as well as the vehicle's starting mileage. The Uptown Shuttle Operators then go into service. The Uptown Shuttle provides both scheduled and on-demand service. Riders can schedule service through a form on METRA's website; METRA has posted promotional signs throughout the Uptown Shuttle service area with QR codes linking to the form. Uptown Shuttle Operators prioritize scheduled rides, taking on-demand rides during unscheduled periods. Riders can also request rides by calling the Parking Division's office.

Uptown Shuttle Operators use a tablet mounted in the vehicle to keep track of rides scheduled through the online portal. The ZenduIT fleet management software running on the app receives data from the online ride scheduling portal and displays details on upcoming scheduled rides on the tablet – including the name and contact information of the requestor, the requested pickup time and location, and the destination. The Parking Manager and Parking Supervisor notify Uptown Shuttle Operators of rides requested by phone through the Parking Division's radio communications system. The Uptown Shuttle Operators also use the radio communications system to coordinate service, including determining who is serving each scheduled ride or letting other operators know about potential customers.

At the end of each ride, the Uptown Shuttle Operator notes the ride details on a ride log sheet, tracking the pickup location, pickup time, number of passengers, drop-off location, and drop-off time. At the end of each shift, the Uptown Shuttle Operator records the end mileage of their vehicle on the vehicle inspection sheet and submits the vehicle inspection sheet and ride log sheet to the Parking Supervisor and Parking Manager. The Parking Supervisor and Parking Manager compile each day's inspection and ride log sheets into a daily report summarizing the day's Uptown Shuttle productivity, which they send to the Assistant Director.

In time between scheduled rides, the Uptown Shuttle Operators provide on-demand service to residents and visitors within the Uptown Shuttle's service area, often directly reaching out to individuals or small groups that they see walking the streets to offer assistance. Uptown Shuttle Operators often serve as de facto "ambassadors" for the Uptown community, giving directions, providing recommendations on food and entertainment, and answering various other questions as needed. Uptown Shuttle Operators also perform their parking enforcement duties between their scheduled and unscheduled rides. Per interviews, the batteries installed in the Uptown Shuttle vehicles do not have sufficient capacity for operators to actively drive for an entire shift. Uptown Shuttle Operators use the time between rides to let their vehicles sit still, minimizing battery draw, or even return to 919 Broadway to recharge.

Maintenance Division

Transit Fleet Maintenance

The Maintenance Division manages the maintenance of METRA's fleet of transit vehicles, including its transit buses, paratransit minibuses, and the Uptown Shuttle vehicles. While the Maintenance Division manages the maintenance of METRA's transit vehicles, it does not perform all repair work in-house, but instead uses a combination of in-house service, service provided under warranty by vehicle manufacturers, and service provided by third-party repair shops. The Maintenance Division makes use of warranty repairs whenever possible and attempts to perform as much of its remaining repair and maintenance work in-house as is reasonably possible, but regularly uses third-party repair shops for work that requires specialized skillsets or equipment to which the Maintenance Division does not have access or for work that the Maintenance Division does not have the availability to perform.

In interviews, staff stated that the Maintenance Division's Fleet Maintenance Technicians possess few specialized skillsets, such as automotive air conditioning repair, automotive high-voltage electronics repair, and heavy vehicle suspension repair, requiring the Maintenance Division to send vehicles to third-party repair shops for nearly all work other than standard preventative maintenance ("PM") and basic repairs. In addition to generally being more expensive than in-house services, staff reported in interviews that third-party repair shops often take significantly longer to perform repairs than the repairs would take to perform in-house. Staff gave examples, stating that certain types of work that would take no more than several days to perform in-house (if the Maintenance Division possessed the required skills and equipment) often have multi-week turnaround times from third-party repair shops.

The Maintenance Manager oversees the Maintenance Division's overall fleet maintenance operations, including determining general fleet maintenance strategy, including scheduling and prioritizing PM work and repair work. The Maintenance Division operates nearly around the clock, with most Fleet Maintenance Technicians working one of three shifts:

- 1st Shift: 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
- 2nd Shift: 1:00 PM to 9:30 PM
- 3rd Shift: 10:30 PM to 7:00 AM

One Fleet Maintenance Technician works a "swing" shift, starting their shift midway through the 3rd shift and ending their shift midway through the 1st shift. Maintenance Division staff other than the Fleet Maintenance Technicians all work standard working hours.

In the time since M&J's on-site work, the Maintenance Division has adopted a new work schedule for its Fleet Maintenance Technicians, as follows:

- 1st Shift: 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
- 2nd Shift: 3:00 PM to 12:00 AM
- 3rd Shift: 12:00 AM to 8:30 AM

The Maintenance Division's recent changes to its shift structure are based on employee feedback.

The Maintenance Division performs its fleet maintenance work out of METRA’s repair facilities, located adjacent to METRA’s main office. Per interviews with METRA staff, certain repair equipment is often out of service, limiting the services that the Maintenance Division can perform in-house. All four of the repair shop’s bus lift systems were out of service at the time of M&J’s fieldwork, with one bus lift system reportedly having been out of service for well over five years. As a result, METRA cannot perform any tire changes or rotations in-house and must instead outsource these services, which are typically straightforward and basic, to a third-party repair shop.

The Maintenance Division has two primary fleet maintenance responsibilities: PM and repairs. PM is work that should be performed on vehicles periodically to prevent future mechanical breakdowns and keep the vehicles in good working order, such as tire changes and fluid replacements. Repairs, on the other hand, are as-needed fixes to specific mechanical or technological faults that prevent METRA from using the vehicle in revenue service. To help ensure that METRA is able to place enough vehicles in service to fully serve all routes, the Maintenance Division generally prioritizes repair work over PM. As designed, the Maintenance Division aims to perform the bulk of its repair work during METRA’s service hours and perform the bulk of its PM work outside of METRA’s service hours, leaving functional vehicles available for service instead of pulling them from the field for maintenance work that is not time-critical.

As of M&J’s fieldwork, METRA maintains a fleet of 32 transit buses, 16 paratransit mini-buses, and five Uptown Shuttle golf carts. All METRA vehicles can be classified as “active” or “inactive.” All 16 paratransit mini-buses and all 5 Uptown Shuttle golf carts were active at the time of M&J’s fieldwork. The following table breaks down the service status at the time of M&J’s fieldwork of METRA’s 32 transit buses, broken down by whether the vehicles were or were not still within their useful lifespans⁵⁰ at the time:

Table 23: Useful Lifespans of Transit Buses

Lifespan Status	Active	Inactive
Within Useful Lifespan	20	4 (major repair/refurbishment)
Past Useful Lifespan	1	7 (contingency fleet)
TOTAL	21	11

Source: Departmental Information

⁵⁰ A vehicle is determined to be past its useful lifespan when either its age or mileage exceeds FTA guidance for vehicles of that type. The FTA has determined that the useful lifespan of small (<35’) transit buses is 10 years/350,000 miles and that the useful lifespan of heavy (≥35’) transit buses is 12 years/500,000 miles.

21 of METRA's 32 transit buses were active at the time of M&J's fieldwork, meaning these vehicles are readily available to operate in revenue service. The four transit buses within their useful life that were inactive during M&J's fieldwork are diesel-electric hybrid buses that METRA is having a third-party mechanic convert to conventional diesel powertrains. METRA decided to convert these vehicles from diesel-electric hybrid powertrains to conventional diesel powertrains because the Maintenance Department does not have any mechanics qualified to work on the electric portion of the hybrid powertrain, making METRA reliant on third-party mechanics for most repairs on these buses. The seven vehicles past their useful lifespans that are inactive are part of METRA's contingency fleet, meaning these vehicles maintain a minimum level of function but are only fit for use in emergency situations.

METRA's current fixed-route transit bus service schedules require at least 18 vehicles in active service, which leaves METRA with three active vehicles to serve as spares. FTA defines the "spare ratio" as the ratio of spare vehicles to total active vehicles; METRA had a spare ratio of 14.3% (3/21) during M&J's fieldwork. FTA policy generally requires transit agencies with fleets of at least 50 transit buses to maintain a spare ratio of at least 20%. FTA does not have a similar guideline for transit agencies with fleets smaller than 50 transit buses (which is the case for METRA), but does require agencies to maintain "reasonable" spare ratios. METRA's 14.3% transit bus spare ratio during M&J's fieldwork is significantly lower than the 20% spare ratio that FTA recommends for larger agencies, leaving METRA with a limited "buffer" to account for repairs and allow for transit buses to be taken out of service for necessary PMs without impacting service delivery.

METRA does not use fixed-schedules for its Paratransit Operators, so M&J cannot determine the peak number of paratransit vehicles scheduled to be in service at any single point in time. The bulk of METRA's paratransit operations take place during normal business hours, which means that it is not unreasonable to expect a significant majority of METRA's 14 non-Dispatcher Paratransit Operators to be in service simultaneously during peak times. With only 16 active paratransit vehicles, METRA's current paratransit service levels could plausibly produce scenarios where it has as few as two spare vehicles available for paratransit operations.

The Maintenance Division uses the ShopFax fleet management software system to document and administer its fleet maintenance activities. Staff use ShopFax's Repair Order ("RO") workflow to document repair work. When a vehicle enters the shop for repair, a Fleet Maintenance Technician creates a RO for the vehicle in ShopFax, notes what the complaint is, and troubleshoots to determine the fault. Once the Fleet Maintenance Technician has identified the fault and settled on a repair method, the Fleet Maintenance Technician pulls the necessary parts from the Maintenance Division's inventory, using a handheld tool to "check out" the parts and attach them to the RO. If specialized parts or supplies are needed, the Fleet Maintenance Technician works with their shift's Senior Fleet Maintenance Technician to prepare a paper parts order form, specifying the part(s) needed, and submits the form to the Maintenance Division's Transit Specialist, who orders the part(s) from METRA's parts and supply vendors. Once the ordered part(s) arrive, the Transit Specialist logs the parts into the Maintenance Division's inventory, after which the Fleet Maintenance Technician attaches the part to the RO. After the repair has been finished and the vehicle is confirmed to be in good working order, the Fleet Maintenance Technician finalizes the RO in Shopfax, allocating the costs of the repair to the vehicle.

The Maintenance Division uses ShopFax's vehicle status tracking system to follow PM needs. At the end of the service day, Maintenance Division staff enter each vehicle's final mileage into ShopFax; if the vehicle's mileage triggers a PM threshold (e.g., service performed every x miles), ShopFax notifies the user and flags the vehicle in the system as being due for PM. The Maintenance Division reportedly maintains an "unofficial goal" of performing all PMs within 3 days of the PM flag being triggered. Fleet Maintenance Division staff use a process similar to the RO workflow to document PMs, assigning all parts and supplies used in performing the PM on the vehicle.

When the Maintenance Division receives a vehicle back after work has been performed by a third-party repair shop, Maintenance Division staff enter the repair work into ShopFax in a similar manner to how they enter in-house repair work in order to track the repairs performed and repair costs in the vehicle's ShopFax profile.

The Maintenance Division's Transit Specialist maintains the Division's parts and supplies inventory, tracking the storeroom's stock of frequently used parts and equipment in ShopFax and ordering replacements from METRA's parts and supply vendors as needed. METRA maintains several supply contracts with vendors for certain types of parts and supplies, which the Transit Specialist uses for parts/supplies purchases whenever possible.

Transit Facility Maintenance

The Maintenance Division's Correctional Officer and TSPLOST Crew Leader oversee the inmate labor that METRA uses to perform much of its basic transit facility maintenance duties. At the start of each day, the Correctional Officer travels to the Muscogee County Prison to collect the inmates that the prison has assigned to work with METRA that day. Once the Correctional Officer has collected the assigned inmates and returned to the METRA facility, the Correctional Officer assigns inmates to tasks for the day. Inmates working at the METRA facility are tasked with cleaning facilities, taking out trash, performing landscape maintenance, and performing other miscellaneous tasks as assigned. Various METRA staff, including at least the Transit Manager and Maintenance Manager, reportedly have completed Georgia Department of Corrections training courses required to supervise inmate laborers and oversee these three inmates as they perform their assigned tasks.

The Correctional Officer and TSPLOST Crew Leader each take a small team of inmates and drive down METRA's bus routes to perform maintenance of METRA bus stops and their immediate surroundings. The Maintenance Division/Inmate teams replace broken signs and signposts, replace lighting fixtures at bus shelters, empty trash bags, perform basic landscaping, and carry out other minor maintenance tasks. If the Correctional Officer or TSPLOST Crew Leader identify any damage that they and the inmate laborer that they are supervising are not equipped to repair, they note the item and report it to the Maintenance Manager at the end of the day, so that the Maintenance Manager can submit a repair request to the Public Works Department's Facilities Maintenance Division in Q-Alert. The Correctional Officer may also periodically be asked to use METRA's inmate labor to perform tasks significantly different than their typical day-to-day work, such as having inmates help set up/take down tables, chairs, and decorations before/after events that METRA is holding. At the end of the day, the TSPLOST Crew Leader drives the inmates back to the Muscogee County Prison.

The Maintenance Director advises the Transit Planning Division on the state of METRA's facilities and any maintenance or replacement needs. As discussed earlier in this report, the City's Inspections & Code and Public Works Departments oversee the planning and execution of major facility construction and maintenance projects, with the Transit Planning Division's Transit Specialists serving as METRA's internal project managers.

Customer Service

METRA's primary customers are its riders, including transit bus riders and paratransit riders. Bus Operators and Paratransit Operators receive customer service training as part of their initial training curriculum, including classroom training delivered by the Safety/Training Officer and field training provided by experienced Bus and Paratransit Operators. Paratransit Operator training focuses specifically on the customer service challenges that METRA's paratransit rider population may present. Transit Operations Division staff also directly serve customers when selling fare passes (including standard transit passes and paratransit fare passes) at the Transfer Center's service window. The fareboxes that METRA uses to collect fares on its vehicles are currently configured to only accept cash (exact change only) and pre-purchased fare passes. The only way for METRA riders to pay for rides with credit cards or mobile wallets is to purchase fare passes at the Transfer Center.

The Paratransit Dispatcher receives ride requests exclusively through phone calls to a dedicated METRA phone line. The Paratransit Dispatcher confirms scheduled rides with the requestor and provides any schedule updates or modifications. METRA's dedicated paratransit phone line is configured to receive voicemails for reservations made overnight. METRA receives paratransit eligibility applications through an online portal, through the mail, or from in-person drop-offs. The ADA Coordinator reviews these applications, conducts in-person follow up meetings (if needed), and communicates the results of the review to the applicant via mail.

METRA's Parking Division also serves customers, both in the form of Uptown Shuttle riders and individuals with parking ticket citations. The Parking Division's Uptown Shuttle Operators have customer service as one of their main priorities, with the position serving as somewhat of an "ambassador" for the Uptown neighborhood. Uptown Shuttle Operators frequently interact with members of the public in their work, not only when they offer rides to people along the street, but also when they answer questions and provide local advice to riders and passers-by. Uptown Shuttle riders can book rides either through a portal on METRA's website or by calling the Parking Division's office in the 919 Broadway parking deck. Vehicle owners that receive parking tickets can pay their ticket online, using a portal on METRA's website, or in-person at the Parking Division's office.

Each October, METRA hosts a "Communities in Motion Day" event at METRA's campus in an effort to involve riders more in METRA's planning processes and develop stronger bonds between METRA and the communities that it serves. At the Communities in Motion Day event, METRA connects with riders, hosts various community partners, and actively solicits feedback from riders through surveys. Additionally, Supervisors periodically conduct informal surveys of riders at the Transfer Center to collect information on rider needs and perceptions of METRA's services.

Use of Technology

METRA transit buses are equipped with a variety of technology systems to support transit operations. The core technology system that supports METRA's bus operations is GMV's Intelligent Transit System ("ITS") software and hardware ecosystem. The ITS system uses Global Positioning System ("GPS") trackers in all buses to track real-time bus location data, which Dispatchers and Supervisors can view in ITS's desktop software platform in order to monitor each bus's on-time performance. Each bus is also equipped with a tablet near the driver's seat that the driver can use to track their performance against their schedule and send messages to Dispatchers and Supervisors. Most communications between Bus Operators and Dispatchers/Supervisors are conducted through METRA's two-way radio telecommunications system. ITS also enables METRA to provide riders with live bus location tracking data – riders can track METRA buses on a map on METRA's website, through the "METRAMobile" smartphone app, and through an integration with Google Maps.

All METRA buses are also equipped with surveillance cameras, although these surveillance cameras are only configured to provide live streaming video feeds to Dispatchers and Supervisors on certain buses. On vehicles where the surveillance cameras have not been configured to stream live video feeds, staff can only review captured surveillance footage by physically retrieving the surveillance footage storage device from the vehicle once it has returned to the bus yard. Bus Operators use a paper checklist/form to record the results of their pre-trip inspection and track mileage. In the time since M&J's fieldwork, METRA has also issued body-worn cameras ("bodycams") for use by staff responding to incidents. METRA staff responding to incidents, typically including both the Chief Safety Officer and a Supervisor now wear these bodycams when they are performing incident response duties, in order to capture relevant details from the incident and produce a record for later use if needed.

METRA switched its paratransit scheduling software from RouteMatch to Spare partway through M&J's fieldwork. In interviews, staff reported that the transition was smooth and that the Spare service was functioning well. The Paratransit Dispatcher receives ride requests on a dedicated phone line and enters the ride request information into Spare, which automatically updates the pickup/drop-off schedule for that day. The Paratransit Dispatcher periodically reviews Spare's auto-generated schedule and modifies it as needed. METRA's paratransit minibuses are equipped with tablets in the driver's area running Spare software, which displays turn-by-turn directions to the next scheduled pickup/drop-off location. Paratransit Operators primarily communicate with the Paratransit Dispatcher through a dedicated channel on METRA's radio network. METRA's paratransit minibuses are equipped with GPS trackers and surveillance cameras, similarly to METRA's transit buses.

METRA recently updated the fareboxes in use on its vehicles. METRA's new fareboxes allow for "tap to pay" payments, which would enable riders to pay fares using electronic methods such as specialized passes as well as credit cards and mobile wallets. METRA currently uses the "tap to pay" function to receive payments using METRA-specific fare cards, sold at the Transfer Center's service window as well as through a vending machine kiosk at the Transfer Center. METRA has not yet enabled the "tap to pay" functionality allowing for payments with credit cards and mobile wallets.

Riders can book rides on the Uptown Shuttle through a portal on METRA’s website or by calling the Parking Division’s office. Rides booked through the online portal automatically appear on vehicle-mounted tablets running ZenduIT’s fleet management software. Staff at the 919 Broadway office communicate ride requests to Uptown Shuttle Operators using a dedicated channel on METRA’s radio system. Uptown Shuttle Operators record the results of their pre-trip inspection and vehicle mileage on a printed vehicle inspection checklist and record information on each of their trips on a printed trip log. The Parking Division’s Parking Manager and Parking Supervisor compile track and vehicle usage information in a purpose-built Excel worksheet. Parking Division staff use a handheld system to track vehicles for parking enforcement purposes and write parking citations.

The Transit Planning Division performs much of its work using standard computer productivity software, such as the Microsoft Office suite and Adobe Acrobat. METRA manages its finances using the City’s Advantage ERP system. METRA carries out its FTA-required reporting using FTA-developed templates and administers its FTA grant funds through FTA’s TrAMS web-based grants management platform. The Chief Safety Officer submits incident reports using the City’s SafetyPoint database system.

The Maintenance Division uses ShopFax to manage its inventory and track the condition and repair history of METRA’s vehicle fleet. The Transit Specialist performs ShopFax-related financial administration, while the Maintenance Technicians and Senior Maintenance Technicians use the system to record maintenance that they perform and allocate part/supply usage to individual maintenance projects.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

METRA maintains extensive guiding documentation for many of its major functions. The following table shows an a representative selection of the METRA guiding documentation M&J reviewed, including the title of the document, the division that the document primarily applies to (or METRA-wide), the function(s) most directly addressed by the document, and the date that the document was last revised (if available), and a brief description of the document’s contents:

Table 24: Guiding Documentation

Document Title	Division	Function	Date	Description
METRA Rules & Regulations Manual	METRA-wide	METRA-wide	01/2022	Comprehensive guide to METRA’s rules and policies, covering topics including customer service, discipline, accident procedures, bus operations
Driver’s Training Handbook	Transit Operations	Training	Undated	TSI-produced guide for an intensive driver training course, covering topics including bus inspections, driving maneuvers, special conditions, customer service, and emergency conditions

Document Title	Division	Function	Date	Description
Fixed-route Rider's Guide	Transit Operations	Bus Operations	12/01/2024	Customer-facing pamphlet providing basic information on how to use METRA's fixed-route bus service, including operating hours, fares, and service rules
Dial-A-Ride Paratransit Service Rider's Guide	Transit Operations	Paratransit Operations	05/05/2025	Customer-facing pamphlet providing basic information on how to use METRA's paratransit service, including eligibility requirements, instructions on how to schedule rides, and service rules
Reasonable Modification Policy	Transit Operations	Paratransit Operations	Undated	Policy detailing the procedure for requesting service modifications under ADA, plus a form used to submit requests
Governing Principles Regarding the Allowability of Costs, the Timely Distribution of Funds, and Approval of Reimbursements	Transit Planning Division	Transit Planning and Procurement, Transit Reporting and Compliance	07/28/2025	Detailed document establishing a number of METRA accounting policies and procedures in accordance with FTA grant management requirements
METRA Procurement Policies & Procedures	Transit Planning Division	Transit Planning and Procurement	2025	Exhaustive reference document detailing FTA procurement regulations and METRA's role in helping the City adhere to them
METRA Procurement Standard Operating Procedures	Transit Planning Division	Transit Planning and Procurement	07/01/2022	Document containing a number of checklists and guides detailing METRA's role in the City procurement process and steps METRA can take to promote compliance with FTA procurement regulations
METRA Contingency Fleet Plan	Maintenance Division	Transit Fleet Maintenance	01/2025	Document establishing policies for maintaining METRA's contingency fleet and laying out scenarios where METRA would be permitted to use the contingency fleet
METRA Vehicle, Equipment, and Facilities Maintenance Plan	Maintenance Division	Transit Fleet Maintenance, Transit Facility Maintenance	05/15/2025	Document laying out METRA's high-level fleet and facility maintenance management strategies, detailing METRA's standard operating procedures for performing PM, and providing checklists for use in evaluating capital maintenance

Document Title	Division	Function	Date	Description
METRA Parts Room Standard Operating Procedures	Maintenance Division	Transit Fleet Maintenance	Undated	Standard operating procedure showing how to properly track the receipt of parts from vendors, enter parts receipts into Shopfax, and properly track part usage in ShopFax

The METRA guiding documents reviewed by M&J are all highly detailed documents that effectively document METRA’s policies, procedures, and processes and serve as useful reference and/or training materials for staff. METRA typically tracks “last updated” dates of its guiding documents, and appears to be relatively diligent about reviewing and updating materials as needed. Many of the documents reviewed by M&J were last updated within one year of M&J’s fieldwork, and no documents were last updated more than four years before the start of M&J’s fieldwork.

Some key METRA functions were not addressed in the guiding documentation that M&J reviewed, with the entirety of the Parking Division’s operations being the most prominent example. Additionally, certain critical processes are not documented in METRA’s existing guiding documents, such as paratransit dispatching and the preparation of the FTA triennial review. Without documentation for these key processes and/or thorough cross-training, METRA is highly reliant on the experience of individual employees and may struggle to carry out these vital operational and compliance tasks if those staff were absent.

Strategic Priorities

As discussed earlier in this report, much of METRA’s regional strategic planning is addressed through its involvement in the MPO, which allocates federal transit funding across much of the Columbus-Phenix City metropolitan area. The MPO’s core planning document is laid out in the TIP document – MPO’s current TIP runs from 2024 through 2027. The original publication of the MPO’s final 2024-2027 TIP document only discusses METRA’s use of federal funds in FY24. The MPO’s planning for use of federal transit funds in the following fiscal years is to be incorporated into the TIP document through amendments, although M&J has not identified any such amendments. The MPO’s TIP document contains limited discussion of how the identified METRA federal allocations support either MPO’s regional planning or METRA’s own strategic plans. Instead, the TIP primarily serves as a list of anticipated purchases without further elaboration. In reviewing the FY24 TIP allocations, M&J noted that METRA had executed most, but not all, of the identified purchases.

METRA maintains two primary internal strategic guides: the Transit Development Plan (“TDP”) and the 10-year Comprehensive Infrastructure & Transit Services Plan (“CITSP”). The TDP is a high-level planning document that provides an overview of METRA’s history and services, identifies challenges that METRA faces, and discusses how the City’s development patterns and City-wide priorities impact METRA’s own planning. The TDP provides a list of major activities that METRA plans to undertake during the covered period, including facilities construction and maintenance, vehicle replacements, and adjustments to METRA’s service delivery. The TDP does not provide specific goals, objectives, or metrics for evaluating METRA’s success at achieving its strategic aims. Additionally, the TDP does not provide any details on how METRA is to implement the identified projects.

METRA’s current TDP runs from 2022 through 2026. After M&J’s review of the projects listed in the 2022-2026 TDP, it appears that the document was not thoroughly updated for this revision cycle, and may not have been thoroughly updated for several revision cycles. For example, discussions of identified projects include language like “next replacement planned for 2021” and “will be voted on in 2013,” indicating that portions of the list of identified projects have not been updated since 2020, with certain items potentially unchanged since at least 2012.

The CITSP serves as a more in-depth planning document than the TDP, although it still is a project-based document rather than a goal-oriented strategic plan. The CITSP divides METRA’s planned projects into two categories: METRA Campus Infrastructure Projects and New Services & City-wide Projects. The following table details the projects listed in the CITSP:

Table 25: CITSP Projects

Project	Description
METRA Campus Infrastructure Projects	
Asphalt & Concrete Campus Resurfacing Project	Resurface or replace all pre-existing asphalt and concrete on the METRA campus. This project has been completed.
Linwood Park & Ride (Park & Ride Phase 1)	Construction of a 29-space park & ride facility adjacent to the METRA campus. This project has been completed.
Columbus Multimodal Center (Park & Ride Phase 2)	Construction of a multimodal facility, parking lot, and bus bays adjacent to the METRA campus. This facility is intended to interconnect METRA with other transportation services, including intercity buses, biking, taxis, and rideshare, and may support future METRA transit modes. This project was under construction at the time of M&J’s fieldwork.
Lower Shop Renovations	A complete renovation and expansion of the lower portion of METRA’s repair shop, including building infrastructure to support the maintenance of electric buses. This project was still in an early planning phase at the time of M&J’s fieldwork.
Upper Shop Renovations	A complete renovation and expansion of the upper portion of METRA’s repair shop, including building infrastructure to support the maintenance of electric buses. This project was still in an early planning phase at the time of M&J’s fieldwork.
Transfer Center Renovation & Expansion	A complete renovation and expansion of the Transfer Center located on METRA’s campus. This project was still in an early planning phase at the time of M&J’s fieldwork.
METRA Administration Building Renovation & Expansion	Complete renovation and expansion of METRA’s main office building. This project was still in an early planning phase at the time of M&J’s fieldwork.
Expanding Campus for Electric Buses	Acquisition of property adjacent to METRA’s campus, demolition of existing structures, and construction of electric bus infrastructure. This project was still in an early planning phase at the time of M&J’s fieldwork.
New Services & City-wide Projects	
Roll With US (Uptown Shuttle)	Introduction of an on-demand microtransit service in the Uptown neighborhood. This project has been completed.

Project	Description
Columbus On-Demand	Implementation of an on-demand City-wide transportation service, with riders pre-scheduling rides through an app or phone call. This project was still in the early planning phase at the time of M&J's fieldwork.
City-Wide: Electric Vehicle Charging Stations	Installation of up to 17 electric vehicle charging stations across the City. This project was partially completed at the time of M&J's fieldwork.
City-Wide: Solar-Powered Bus Stop Lighting	Installation of up to 500 solar-powered lights at METRA bus stops throughout the City. This project was ongoing at the time of M&J's fieldwork.
City-Wide: Electric Buses	The procurement of battery-electric buses to replace diesel buses and associated infrastructure projects to support electrification. This project was ongoing at the time of M&J's fieldwork.

As of M&J's fieldwork, METRA has completed several of the listed projects and was performing active construction or implementation work on others. As noted previously, the CITSP is an entirely project-based document that does not contain any holistic discussion of METRA's overall vision or goals, other than the execution of the listed projects. As a result, METRA's delivery of these specified projects is often misaligned with METRA's operational growth and development. The construction of the Multimodal Center and adoption of electric buses were the two most prominent METRA strategic projects during M&J's interviews of METRA staff and serve as good examples of the disconnect between METRA's project planning and operational development.

The CITSP describes the purpose of the Multimodal Center as being a facility where METRA's transit services can interconnect with other transportation modes, expanding the access of METRA's transit network and providing citizens with greater mobility across the Columbus area. In interviews METRA staff indicated that the Multimodal Center may also serve as a sort of regional transit hub, allowing METRA transit services to interconnect with other nearby transit services, such as Phenix City's Phenix City Express service. In interviews, METRA staff stated that METRA had not yet secured any partnerships with other transit agencies or transportation service providers. METRA began construction on the Multimodal Center without any confirmation of which transportation modes would serve the facility upon its opening, which prevented METRA from having the opportunity to adjust the design of the facility to best support its actual eventual services.

METRA's adoption of electric buses is a significant undertaking, requiring major infrastructure investments as well as modifications to METRA's operations. METRA cannot rely on third-party repair shops to perform routine repairs and PM of electric buses if it hopes to operate an electrifying fleet in an efficient manner. Performing routine electric bus repairs and PM in-house requires both an upgraded repair shop with specialized tools and a fleet maintenance team qualified to work on electric buses. The CITSP includes plans to renovate METRA's repair shops so that they are equipped to repair electric buses, but METRA has not developed firm plans for developing and retaining a fleet maintenance team with necessary electrical qualifications. Four of METRA's transit buses were in inactive service during M&J's fieldwork because METRA had sent these diesel-electric hybrid buses to a third-party repair facility to have them converted into conventional diesel powertrains, with staff stating that this was done because the Maintenance Division cannot effectively service the electric part of the hybrid powertrain. In interviews, METRA staff stated that they are working with vendors to develop plans to train staff on electric maintenance, but these staff did not indicate that these plans would include any changes to compensation or hiring practices that would likely be necessary to attract additional qualified staff and retain staff as they gain marketable experience working on heavy electric vehicles.

METRA has contracted with a third-party transportation planning and consulting firm to conduct an evaluation of METRA's services to offer recommendations to increase the efficiency of METRA's operations and adjust its service offerings (potentially including service expansions) to better serve the City's residents and visitors. The third-party transportation planning and consulting firm was partway through their evaluation at the time of M&J's fieldwork.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

METRA collects a variety of performance measurements as required by FTA's NTD reporting requirements, including transit service delivery metrics, paratransit service delivery metrics, fleet maintenance data, and financial data. While METRA leadership does use these performance measurements to inform their planning and decision-making, METRA does not have a written or standardized process for using its collected performance data to evaluate overall system performance. None of METRA's planning documents identify any metrics or targets for use evaluating the success of METRA's various planned projects or service offerings.

METRA does not have documented processes for using captured performance data to evaluate individual employee performance by evaluating performance against established production targets. In interviews, staff reported that METRA does have some unwritten productivity benchmarks that its employees strive to attain. For example, the Parking Division's Parking Enforcement Officers reportedly aim to average issuing at least 10 parking citations per shift and the Maintenance Division's Fleet Maintenance Technicians and Senior Fleet Maintenance Technicians strive to perform PMs on vehicles within three days of ShopFax triggering the PM notification. These are unofficial targets, and managers do not grant them particular importance when evaluating employee performance.

Some employees within METRA's Transit Planning Division, including the Division's two Transit Specialists, prepare production reports and send them to the Assistant Director monthly. In these production reports, staff list all of the items that they have processed during the prior month, such as a list of invoices processed, meetings attended, reports prepared, and similar. Transit Planning Division staff only include information on outputs in their production reports and do not report any information on time usage or the timeliness of processing (e.g., invoice time-to-process data).

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

In interviews, staff consistently reported a healthy and "family-like" culture within most parts of METRA. Lines of communication appear to be open, staff feel comfortable expressing concerns to their superiors or asking for help, and employees appear to care deeply about providing effective service for METRA's customers. METRA holds an "all-hands" meeting once per year, typically shortly after the start of the new fiscal year, where METRA leadership update staff on METRA and the City's priorities for the next year and provide staff the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback. The Safety/Training Officer uses this meeting to deliver "refresher" training to staff as needed, addressing any particular areas of concern from the prior year. METRA's management staff reportedly holds frequent meetings to guide METRA operations, although there is no set schedule for these meetings. Most other intra-METRA communications occur via email, through "team meetings" within each Division, and through direct conversations between staff.

Unlike the rest of METRA, interviews consistently indicated that there were unproductive working relationships within the Maintenance Division and a contentious relationship between portions of the Maintenance Division and the remainder of METRA. Factors contributing to these conflicts reportedly include incompatible management styles and a lack of trust and understanding between various levels of management.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: Most Bus Operators are assigned to drive buses during their shifts, either as assigned to a specific route or by serving as "spares." One or two Bus Operators per shift are assigned to work from the METRA office as a Dispatcher. In a similar manner, one of the Paratransit Operators works primarily to answer service request calls and schedule paratransit rides as a Paratransit Dispatcher, not driving a paratransit minibus. Bus Operators and Paratransit Operators must learn a separate set of skills to serve as Dispatchers and Paratransit Dispatchers and perform work that is materially different from the work performed by other Bus Operators and Paratransit Operators. The Bus Operators serving as Dispatchers and Paratransit Operators serving as Paratransit Dispatchers hold the same position title as staff performing standard Bus/Paratransit Operator work and receive comparable wages.

Recommendation 1: METRA should consider recognizing that the Dispatcher and Paratransit Dispatcher positions are materially different from standard Bus Operator and Paratransit Operator positions, including a requirement to undergo additional training and take on heightened responsibilities, by establishing distinct Dispatcher/Paratransit Dispatcher job titles. METRA should work with the Human Resources Department to review industry trends and place the Dispatcher/Paratransit Dispatcher positions on appropriate salary steps.

Observation 2: Bus Operators trained to serve in the Dispatcher role are often also trained to serve as substitute Supervisors and periodically take on “acting Supervisor” duties, either for portions of a shift in order to replace a Supervisor that is busy with other tasks or for entire shifts if none of the “normal” Supervisors are available. When serving as “acting Supervisor,” these specially trained Bus Operators take on the additional duties and responsibilities of Supervisors but do not receive any corresponding adjustments to their compensation.

Recommendation 2: METRA should work with the Human Resources Department to explore methods to adjust the pay of Bus Operators serving as “acting Supervisors” to account for the additional demands of filling the Supervisor role. This pay adjustment could include an hourly wage adjustment for each hour that the employee reports as “acting Supervisor” or a shift adjustment for all whole shifts worked as “acting Supervisor.”

Observation 3A: METRA has installed a number of technology systems in its vehicles but these systems occasionally are not implemented consistently across the entire active fleet. For example, the surveillance video systems installed across METRA’s fleet are not configured consistently, with some surveillance systems allowing METRA staff to view footage remotely in real-time, while other surveillance systems require staff to physically retrieve copies of the surveillance footage from vehicles once they return to the bus yard.

Observation 3B: METRA does not use all features of the technology systems that it has installed on its vehicles and may be missing out on opportunities to improve efficiency and/or provide a higher level of service to riders. For example, METRA has not activated the “tap-to-pay” functionality for credit cards and mobile wallets on the new fareboxes that has installed across its fleet, limiting the payment options available to riders.

Recommendation 3: METRA should review the implementation of its in-vehicle technology systems to identify instances where technological features are implemented inconsistently across METRA’s fleet and to identify unused functionality that may enhance METRA operations. When METRA identifies instances of inconsistent technology implementation, including, but not limited to, the inconsistent ability to remotely access in-vehicle surveillance systems, it should standardize the technology implementation. When METRA identifies instances of unused features that may be beneficial, including, but not limited to, the use of credit card and mobile wallet “tap-to-pay” functionality on the new fareboxes, METRA should review the features and implement them as appropriate.

Observation 4: METRA has a number of critical tasks for which only a single employee is trained to carry out the task, such as paratransit dispatching and FTA report preparation. Having only a single employee trained to perform these key operational and compliance tasks creates a significant risk that METRA's operations would be interrupted or that METRA would fall out of compliance with federal regulations if that lone trained individual ever is unavailable to perform their critical task.

Recommendation 4: METRA should review its processes to identify tasks critical to operations and compliance and develop a cross-training plan to help ensure that at least one backup employee is trained to perform all tasks identified as critical.

Observation 5: METRA only accepts requests for paratransit service over the phone. If an individual calls to request paratransit service outside of METRA's business hours, they must leave a voicemail on the paratransit dispatch phone line; the Paratransit Dispatcher processes voicemails shortly after the start of each workday.

Recommendation 5: METRA should work with the provider of Spare, its paratransit scheduling software system, to develop and introduce a web-based portal that approved paratransit riders can use to request paratransit rides.

Observation 6: As currently configured, METRA does not require its Fleet Maintenance Technicians and Senior Fleet Maintenance Technicians to hold any particular certifications or offer its Fleet Maintenance Technicians and Senior Fleet Maintenance Technicians any incentives for obtaining and maintaining specialized maintenance certifications relevant to METRA's maintenance needs. As a result, METRA's Fleet Maintenance Division contains few staff with specialized skillsets and can only perform basic preventative maintenance and repair work in-house. The Fleet Maintenance Division must instead send vehicles to third-party repair shops for nearly all specialized repairs, which increases repair costs and significantly lengthens the amount of time that vehicles stay out of service.

Recommendation 6A: METRA should identify a list of specialized maintenance and repair subjects for which METRA would materially benefit from having access to in-house talent and work with the Human Resources Department to develop incentives, such as bonuses, tuition reimbursement programs, wage adjustments, or "career ladder" advancements, for Fleet Maintenance Technicians and Senior Fleet Maintenance Technicians that obtain industry certifications in the identified subject areas. When developing determining incentive levels, METRA should consider both METRA's own needs and industry demand for each identified certification.

Recommendation 6B: As METRA identifies specialized maintenance and repair subjects that it wishes to bring in-house, METRA should develop plans for obtaining the tools, infrastructure, and materials necessary to conduct the service in-house. When METRA hires new staff with certifications in the identified subject areas and/or as existing METRA staff obtain certifications in the identified subject areas, METRA should execute the relevant plan so that the skilled staff have the resources needed to carry out their specialized maintenance and repair work in-house.

Observation 7: The Uptown Shuttle’s service area does not intersect with any of METRA’s fixed-route bus routes, although Route 4 (Ft. Benning) travels within one block of the Uptown Shuttle’s service area. Routes 2 (Cusseta Rd. / Oakland Park) and 12 (Veterans Parkway / Civic Center / Victory Dr.) also pass within five blocks of the Uptown Shuttle’s service area. Creating an intersection between the Uptown Shuttle and METRA’s fixed-route bus services would increase connectivity between the Uptown neighborhood, one of the City’s key tourism and entertainment districts, and the wider City. This interconnection may become increasingly valuable once the Multimodal Center is completed and riders could interconnect with other regional or long-distance transit services.

Recommendation 7: METRA should review the boundaries of the Uptown Shuttle’s service area and the alignment of its fixed-route bus routes and explore modifying the service area boundaries and/or route alignments such that the Uptown Shuttle’s Service Area intersects with one or more of METRA’s fixed-route bus routes.

Observation 8: METRA’s long-term planning processes, including its regional planning through the MPO and its internal planning, are largely focused on the delivery of specific capital projects and rollout of specific service modifications. METRA does not maintain a true strategic plan, and this lack of a strategic plan results in METRA operating in a “project oriented” manner that may limit METRA’s focus on how those proposed projects fit into METRA’s existing operations. Developing and adopting a strategic plan, which would define a vision of METRA’s desired future state, identify goals and accompanying objectives that METRA could use as a “roadmap” towards achieving that future state, and specify performance metrics for use evaluating METRA’s progress towards accomplishing its stated goals and objectives, would help ensure that METRA’s capital projects and service modifications are aligned with METRA’s overall operations.

Recommendation 8: METRA should develop a strategic plan that incorporates its existing capital project and service modification plans, including the MPO’s TIP as well as METRA’s own TDP and CITSP, into a comprehensive, METRA-wide plan. This strategic plan should lay out METRA’s vision of its desired future state and establish a framework for realizing that vision. The strategic plan should include specific goals, which are individual major elements of the envisioned future state, and associated objectives, which are distinct, attainable steps towards achieving the associated goal. METRA’s goals and objectives may include the delivery of capital projects and introduction of new transit services, but should also contemplate the integration of these projects/services with METRA’s existing transit services and their relationship with METRA’s current administrative and support processes. The strategic plan should also identify specific performance metrics that METRA can use to evaluate its progress towards achieving the stated goals and objectives, which should be easily measurable and relevant to the goal/objective being reviewed. Finally, METRA should develop and implement a process for reviewing its strategic plan on a regular basis and revising it as needed to account for changes to METRA’s vision or means of achieving that vision.

Observation 9A: The Safety/Training Officer currently either delivers or oversees all of METRA’s driver training programs while also serving as one of METRA’s acting Supervisors. As a result, the Safety/Training Officer must occasionally interrupt training classes or sessions to travel to incident sites in the field. When not actively instructing drivers, the Safety/Training Officer’s Supervisor responsibilities limit the time that they are able to spend developing or updating training curricula or performing ride checks.

Observation 9B: While the Safety/Training Officer and Chief Safety Officer both perform functions related to maintaining the safety of METRA’s operations and compliance with applicable safety regulations, the two positions do not have any direct reporting ties and are administratively placed in different parts of METRA’s organizational structure. This separation of the Chief Safety Officer’s process review, safety data tracking, and policy compliance duties from the Safety/Training Officer’s training and safety inspection training duties limits opportunities to coordinate safety activities.

Recommendation 9: METRA should consider splitting the Safety/Training Officer and Chief Safety Officer positions out into a new “Safety & Training Division,” enhancing the ability of the occupants of these positions to collaborate and more clearly defining and empowering the staff responsible for ensuring that METRA operates safely and in compliance with all applicable regulations. At the same time, METRA should consider creating a new, dedicated Supervisor position within the Transit Operations Division to assume the Supervisor duties currently performed by the Safety/Training Officer.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department’s maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.

Maturity Model



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of METRA as **Level 3: Formally Governed**. METRA possesses and operates in accordance with detailed, up-to-date documentation for most of its key policies and procedures, although it does lack sufficient documentation for certain processes. METRA staff consistently operate with defined roles and responsibilities, although some positions, such as the Bus Operator and Paratransit Operator positions, cover a very broad set of functions. METRA does not have a comprehensive strategic plan, and its future planning is primarily focused on delivering capital projects and implementing specific service enhancements, rather than optimizing existing processes and procedures. In order to grow towards serving as a true Strategic Partner within the City, METRA must focus on its broad vision for future growth, laid out in measurable goals and objectives, rather than on specific projects to deliver or service modifications to implement.

Conclusion

METRA serves the City's residents and visitors through providing accessible public transit and paratransit services. METRA's services are generally efficient, safe, and effective, and METRA performs extensive reporting to remain in compliance with applicable FTA standards. The COVID-19 Pandemic posed a challenge to METRA's operations, both through a significant reduction in ridership and difficulties hiring and retaining staff, but METRA has generally made significant progress in recovering from these setbacks, although some challenges still remain.

METRA maintains thorough capital project and service enhancement plans and is generally successful at actualizing these plans, but this is the extent of METRA's long-term planning. As a result, METRA's completed capital projects and realized service modifications often do not integrate cleanly into existing METRA services. Similarly, METRA may occasionally neglect addressing administrative or organizational inefficiencies that are not directly related to the identified capital projects and service enhancements. By adopting a more comprehensive strategic vision, METRA can help ensure that the capital projects and service enhancements that it provides are part of a complementary, interconnected transportation system. M&J would like to thank METRA leadership and staff, particularly the 18 employees who participated in interviews, for the time and effort that they provided while sitting for interviews and responding to information requests.

3.K Parks & Recreation

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government's ("CCG" or "City" or "Government") Parks and Recreation Department ("Department") administers and maintains the community's parks and recreational facilities. The Department administers recreational, educational, and cultural programming for the public at properties throughout the City.

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

The Department has received frequent recognition from both State and national professional associations. The Department's sustainment of Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies accreditation underscores its commitment to best management practices, a distinction complemented by its designation as "Agency of the Year" for various population categories at least nine times by the Georgia Recreation and Park Association ("GRPA") since 2007. The Department and its staff have also received numerous agency and individual role-based awards from the National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials ("NACPRO"), the National Recreation and Park Association ("NRPA"), and GRPA, such as the Mary Roth Award for Outstanding Programmers and District Administrative Support Award. Various projects, initiatives, and properties have also received NACPRO, NRPA, and GRPA awards, such as the Trails and Corridors Class I award, the Removing Barriers Initiative award, and the Athletic/Aquatic Network Outstanding Special Event Award.

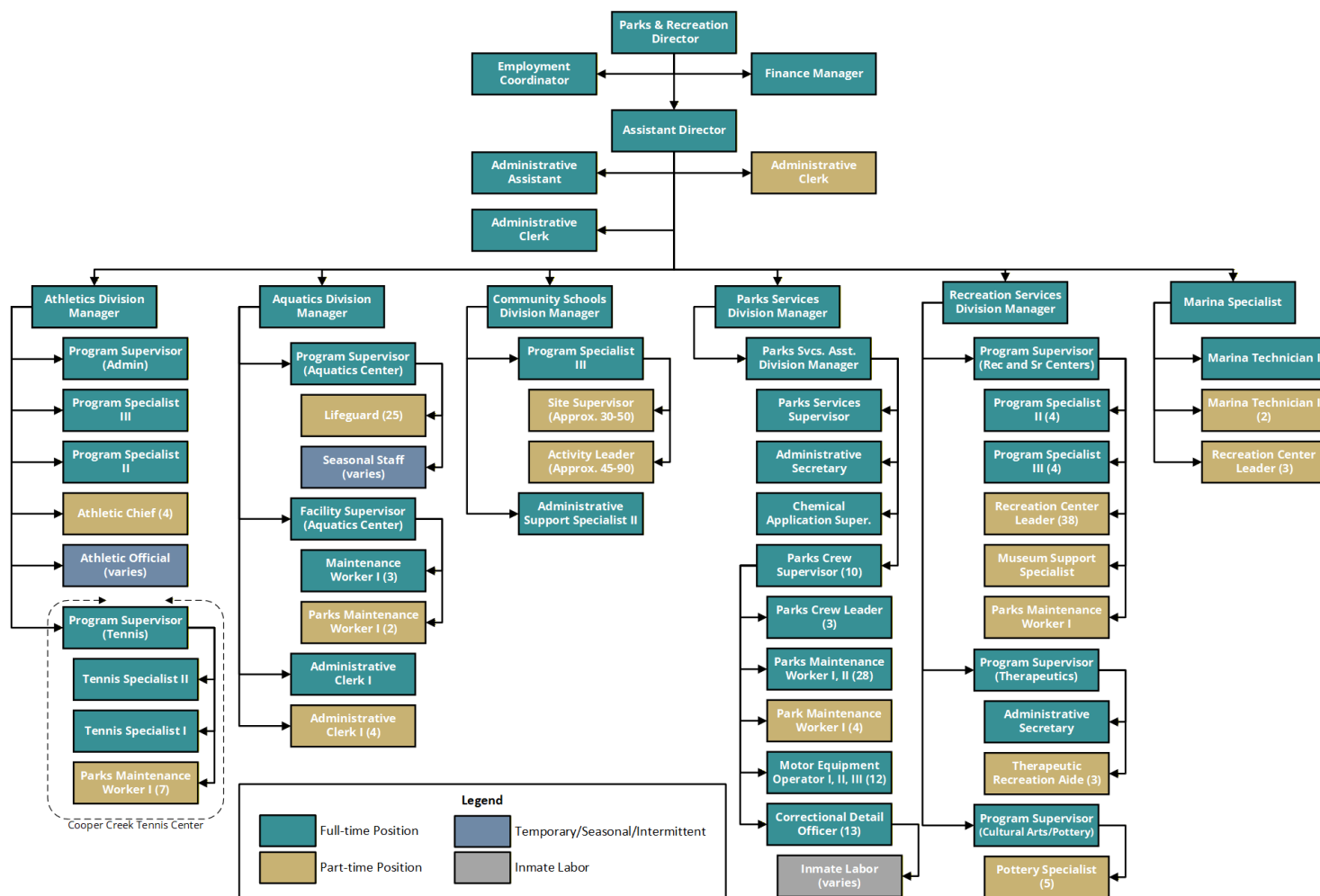
The Department maintains an active presence within the broader parks and recreation industry. Department leadership and staff actively participate in State and national organizations, such as GRPA, NACPRO, and NRPA, and regularly attend State and national conferences. This engagement allows the Department to identify and implement leading practices from across the industry and share leading practices developed in Columbus. The Department aims to keep its operations aligned with industry standards by engaging in these organizations at an executive level, including serving in leadership roles in GRPA and NRPA.

The Department emphasizes the importance of individual technical competency and professional development within its workforce. The Department prioritizes the recruitment, training, and retention of staff possessing advanced certifications and licenses, such as the NRPA Certified Parks and Recreation Professional, NRPA Aquatic Facility Operator, the National Alliance for Youth Sports' Certified Youth Sports Administrator, and the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance's Certified Pool Operator certifications. The attainment and maintenance of credentials that exceed the qualifications listed in job descriptions is a leading practice that aims to ensure that programs and facility operations consistently exceed standard regulatory expectations.

Organization and Staffing

According to the FY25 Columbus Consolidated Government Adopted Operating Budget, the Department was allocated 117 full-time positions; 60 part-time positions; approximately 75 to 140 part-time staff specific to the Community Schools Division; and a variable number of seasonal, temporary, and intermittent staff, as needed. The Department additionally used inmate labor to support staff's efforts. Based on M&J's fieldwork, including interviews with Department staff and reviews of Human Resources ("HR") Department reports, the number of allocated positions does not appear to match actual headcounts, both for the Department overall and within specific functional areas. During some years of the review period (FY20-22, FY24), actual headcounts derived from HR Department data were higher than allocated positions. Similarly, the allocated position counts published in the annual budget book did not consistently match headcounts in HR Department reports or the Parks and Recreation Department's knowledge of allocated positions. The Department's structure and FY25 allocated positions are organized as seen in the following organizational chart.

City of Columbus Parks and Recreation



The Department has a centralized Administration office which performs HR and finance functions, as well as provides oversight of and strategic direction for the Department's activities. The Department's operational structure includes five divisions: Athletics, Aquatics, Community Schools, Parks Services, and Recreation. In addition to the five divisions, the operational structure also includes the Lake Oliver Marina as a standalone functional area.

Leadership

The Department is led by a Department Director position, who provides oversight of Departmental operations, strategic planning, and fiscal management. An Assistant Director position supports the Director and assists in the day-to-day management of the Department's primary operational areas – the five divisions and the Lake Oliver Marina. During fieldwork, M&J observed the Director and Assistant Director performing numerous day-to-day activities, such as staffing sports tournaments and filling shifts at Department facilities, in order to maintain regular operations and programming while positions were vacant, or staff were on sick or personal leave.

Administration

The Department's Administration houses the Department's central support functions, including finance, HR, and contract management functions. A Finance Manager position is responsible for all Department-level financial processes, such as invoice receipting, processing, and coding; payment and donation receipting; purchasing; refunds; and revenue and expense tracking and reporting. An Employment Coordinator position is the Department's HR functionary, responsible for reviewing job applications; assisting hiring managers in selecting candidates; creating profiles for new employees in the Government's Enterprise Resource Planning system, Advantage; scheduling new employees for onboarding; and receiving/answering employee HR-related questions. An Administrative Assistant position, one full-time Administrative Clerk position, and a part-time Administrative Clerk position provide administrative support to Department leadership and the Department as a whole. The administrative positions are responsible for due and fee collection, contract drafting and maintenance, supply ordering, overall office management, and public interaction at the Department office and over the phone. The Department's allocated leadership and administrative positions are identified in the following table.

Table 26: Department Leadership and Administrative Allocated Positions

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Full-time	6	6
Department Director	1	1
Assistant Director	1	1
Finance Manager	1	1
Employment Coordinator	1	1
Administrative Assistant	1	1
Administrative Clerk	1	1
Part-time	1	1
Administrative Clerk	1	1
Total Positions (FT+PT)	7	7

Source: CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY25, CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY26

Athletics Division

The Athletics Division provides resources and support to leagues and tournaments playing organized sports at Department facilities (such as the South Commons Complex and Midland Football Field), including softball, baseball, soccer, flag and tackle football, pickleball, and basketball, at both the youth and adult levels. The Athletics Division is led by an Athletics Division Manager position who reports to the Assistant Director. The Athletics Division Manager oversees the coordination of organized sports leagues and events at Department-owned parks and facilities. In addition to the Athletics Division Manager position, the Athletics Division was allocated three full-time and four part-time positions in FY25. The Athletics Division's allocated positions are identified in the following table.

Table 27: Athletics Division Allocated Positions

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Full-time	4	4
Division Manager	1	1
Program Supervisor	1	1
Program Specialist III	1	1
Program Specialist II	1	1
Part-time	4	4
Athletic Chief	4	4
Seasonal/Intermittent		
Athletic Official (part-time)	<i>varies</i>	<i>varies</i>
Total Positions (FT+PT)	8	8

Source: CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY25, CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY26, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

One Program Supervisor position manages the Athletics Division's administration, including managing field rentals for approximately 20 facilities, facilitating the drafting and execution of special event contracts, ensuring annual renewal of memoranda of understanding with community partners, managing the Athletics Division's calendar of events, coordinating support from the Parks Services Division for events held at City parks, and managing the Athletics Division's financial transactions. The administrative Program Supervisor position coordinates with the Athletics Division Manager and the Program Specialist positions to organize sporting events and tournaments, with the positions each rotating coverage at sporting events and tournaments to assist with score keeping, records management, and general oversight. While some sporting events and tournaments are hosted with a partner organization, other leagues are managed entirely by the Athletics Division staff.

To support league and tournament play, the Athletics Division relies on part-time, seasonal, and temporary labor. The part-time Athletic Chief positions (of which there are either two, three, or four; counts differ among CCG Human Resources position data and organizational documents) manage onsite setup for and administration of games and tournaments, supported as needed by intermittent Athletic Official positions. During busier seasons, the Athletic Chief positions frequently manage tournaments and all-day league play for numerous consecutive weekends, often working extended hours. During M&J's fieldwork, the roster of Athletic Chiefs consisted entirely of individuals retired from full-time employment who were willing to work extensive hours and consecutive weekends, which could present a future challenge filling vacant Athletic Chief positions if the Department struggles to identify individuals willing to maintain the same limited work-life balance as previous Athletic Chiefs.

Cooper Creek Tennis Center

The Athletics Division Manager also supervises a second Program Supervisor position, responsible for managing the Cooper Creek Tennis Center ("Cooper Creek"). While Cooper Creek is supervised by the Athletics Division Manager, the budget for Cooper Creek and the facility itself are considered a separate organizational unit.

The Program Supervisor is assisted by two full-time Tennis Specialist positions and seven part-time Parks Maintenance Worker positions – the latter of whom are responsible for the upkeep of the Cooper Creek's courts and Department-owned facilities.⁵¹ The tennis program includes tennis lessons with licensed and insured professionals; league practices, matches, and tournaments coordinated in partnership with the Columbus Regional Tennis Association; Columbus State University's tennis team practices and matches; and informal practice and play opportunities for the public. The Athletics Division collects fees for court reservations and offers monthly, three-month, and annual memberships for frequent users of the courts.

For FY26, Cooper Creek was allocated an additional Program Supervisor position, which will manage the Department's growing pickleball lessons and leagues, with the support of a Pickleball Specialist. Cooper Creek was additionally allocated two new part-time Parks Maintenance Worker positions to maintain the increasing number of pickleball-specific courts and facilities that can be converted into temporary pickleball courts (such as recreation center gyms).

Cooper Creek's allocated positions are identified in the following table.

Table 28: Cooper Creek Tennis Center Allocated Positions

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Full-time	3	5
Program Supervisor	1	2
Tennis Specialist I/II	2	2
Pickleball Specialist III	0	1

⁵¹ The Columbus Regional Tennis Association and Columbus State University both own facilities at the Cooper Creek Tennis Center, which are maintained by the organization that owns each facility, not by the Athletics Division.

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Part-time	7	9
Parks Maintenance Worker I	7	9
Total Positions (FT+PT)	10	14

Source: CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY25, CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY26, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

Aquatics Division

The Aquatics Division administers the Columbus Aquatic Center, five seasonal (outdoor) pools and associated facilities, two seasonal splash pads, and aquatics-related programming and rentals. The Aquatics Division is managed by an Aquatics Division Manager position (also referred to as an Aquatics Center Manager position in some CCG position count reports and organizational documents) who reports to the Assistant Director. In addition to the Aquatics Division Manager position, the Aquatics Division was allocated seven full-time and 31 part-time positions in both FY25 and FY26 to manage the Columbus Aquatic Center. The Aquatics Division's positions allocated to operate the Aquatic Center are identified in the following table.

Table 29: Aquatic Center Allocated Positions

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Full-time	7	7
Division Manager	1	1
Program Supervisor	1	1
Facility Supervisor	1	1
Parks Maintenance Worker I	3	3
Administrative Clerk I	1	1
Part-time	31	31
Parks Maintenance Worker I	2	2
Administrative Clerk I ⁵²	4	4
Lifeguard	25	25
Seasonal/Intermittent		
Lifeguard (part-time)	<i>varies</i>	<i>varies</i>
Total Positions (FT+PT)	13	13

Source: CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY25, CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY26, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

⁵² While HR and Finance Department records indicate four part-time Administrative Clerk I allocations, the Department has not received permission to hire more than three.

One Program Supervisor position (also referred to as an Aquatic Center Program Supervisor position or an Aquatics Supervisor position in some documentation) reports to the Aquatics Division Manager and is responsible for oversight of programming at the Columbus Aquatic Center, including swim meets, swimming and water safety lessons, special events, and public swim. Twenty-five part-time Lifeguard positions support Aquatic Center programming and activities. Head Lifeguards (who are included in the 25 Lifeguard positions) supervise and work lifeguarding shifts and Water Safety Instructors (who are also included in the 25 Lifeguard positions) provide swimming and water safety classes in addition to working lifeguarding shifts.

The Aquatic Center Program Supervisor and Lifeguards provide support to the Aquatics Division Manager, when possible, to oversee and operate the outdoor pools, splash pads, and associated outdoor programming. Additionally, the Aquatics Division employs a fluctuating number of seasonal and intermittent Lifeguards to staff and support operations at the Aquatics Division's outdoor facilities. To hire as many Lifeguards as possible with available funding, the Aquatics Division does not hire Head Lifeguards to supervise staff at the outdoor pools. Seasonal Lifeguards also manage concessions offerings at the outdoor facilities. The Aquatic Division's positions allocated to operate outdoor facilities are identified in the following table.

Table 30: Outdoor Aquatic Facilities Allocated Positions

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Seasonal/Intermittent		
Lifeguard (part-time)	<i>varies</i>	<i>varies</i>
Total Positions (FT+PT)	0	0

Source: CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY25, CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY26, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The Aquatics Division requires both permanent and intermittent Lifeguards to possess Lifeguard Certification, a training and certification program that includes water safety, basic life support, first aid, and oxygen equipment instruction offered by organizations such as the American Red Cross and American Lifeguard Association. The Aquatics Division requires Water Safety Instructors to attain the more advanced Lifeguard Instructor certification before leading swimming and water safety classes. During both swim meets and public swim the Aquatics Division ensures enough certified Lifeguards and/or Lifeguard Instructors are present to maintain an industry standard of one Lifeguard/Lifeguard Instructor per every 25 attendees.

The Facility Supervisor position (also referred to as an Aquatic Center Facility Supervisor position or an Aquatics Supervisor position in some documentation) reports to the Aquatics Division Manager and is responsible for the maintenance of the Columbus Aquatic Center, outdoor pools and attached facilities, and splash pads. The Facility Supervisor manages three full-time Parks Maintenance Worker positions and two part-time Parks Maintenance Worker positions responsible for upkeep of the Aquatics Division’s facilities. The Aquatics Division Manager and several maintenance personnel hold the NRPA Aquatic Facility Operator and/or the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance’s Certified Pool Operator certification recommended for the continual operations of an aquatics-related facility.⁵³ Maintenance staff are trained and certified to manage chemical and filtration systems, and frequently attain additional certifications such those required to handle and fill oxygen bottles, which are generally not required by job descriptions.

Four Administrative Clerk positions (one full-time and three part-time) support the Aquatic Center, serving as front desk and administrative staff, greeting guests, helping manage memberships, and performing other administrative tasks as required. During swim meets and other events, the Administrative Clerk positions provide coverage for both the Aquatic Center’s front desk and concessions stand.

Community Schools Division

The Community Schools Division administers the Community Schools Program, which provides after-school science, technology, engineering, and mathematics-focused programming to children at Department-managed recreation centers and at Muscogee County School District sites. During the review period, the Community Schools Division provided programming at 14 sites.⁵⁴ The Community Schools Division is headed by a Community Schools Division Manager position who reports to the Assistant Director. The Community Schools Division Manager oversees a Program Specialist III position and an Administrative Support Specialist II position. The Community Schools Division Manager and Program Specialist perform administrative work required to offer regular programming and maintain participation in childcare programs for low-income families, such as the Georgia Childcare and Parent Services (“CAPS”) Program. The Department further supports low-income families through sliding-scale pricing and scholarships for programs. The Community Schools Division Manager and Program Specialist additionally provide direct oversight of the afterschool programs through site visits to observe programming and evaluate staff.

⁵³ Industry standards recommend that at least one Aquatic Facility Operator be present at an aquatics-related facility, such as a public swimming pool or aquatics center, whenever the facility is open to the public.

⁵⁴ Department leadership expressed a desire to expand Community Schools Division programming to housing authorities and additional recreation centers, if funding for programming and staff is available.

The Community Schools Division employs part-time Site Supervisors and Activity Leaders to provide day-to-day management of program sites and instruction as part of programming curricula. The Community Schools Division employed between approximately 30 and 50 Site Supervisors and between approximately 45 and 90 Activity Leaders each fiscal year of the review period. Annual employment counts of Site Supervisors and Activity Leaders fluctuated based on number of sites, turnover, and seasonal employment for specially offered camps on non-school days (e.g., teacher workdays, school calendar breaks, etc.). The Community Schools Division ensures the correct number of Site Supervisors and Activity Leaders are present at each site to maintain Georgia Department of Education-mandated student to staff ratios, averaging approximately 80 site-based staff employed during standard afterschool programming. If the requisite number of staff is not available (either due to hiring or funding), the Department places students on a waitlist.

The Administrative Support Specialist position is located at the front desk in the Department office and serves as the public's first touchpoint with the Community Schools Division. The Administrative Support Specialist assists parents register students for programs, takes payments, collects parent-completed handbooks (which are required before students can participate in programming), and manages the Community Schools Division's overall community relations.

The Community Schools Division's allocated positions are identified in the following table.

Table 31: Community Schools Division Allocated Positions

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Full-time	3	3
Division Manager	1	1
Program Specialist III	1	1
Administrative Support Specialist II	1	1
Part-time	Approx. 75-140	Approx. 75-140
Site Supervisor	Approx. 30-50	Approx. 30-50
Activity Leader	Approx. 45-90	Approx. 45-90
Total Positions (FT+PT)	Approx. 75-145	Approx. 75-145

Source: CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY25, CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY26, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

Parks Services Division

The Parks Services Division is responsible for property maintenance and upkeep at the Department's 52 parks, 42 baseball and softball fields, and seven football fields. A Parks Services Division Manager position, who reports to the Assistant Director position, leads the Parks Services Division, with operational support from a Parks Services Assistant Division Manager position and administrative support from an Administrative Secretary position. The Parks Services Division was allocated 71 full-time employees and four part-time employees for FY25, with the number of part-time employees increased to six in FY26. The Parks Services Division's allocated positions are identified in the following table.

Table 32: Parks Services Division Allocated Positions

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Full-time	71	71
Division Manager	1	1
Assistant Division Manager	1	1
Parks Services Supervisor	1	1
Administrative Secretary	1	1
Chemical Application Supervisor	1	1
Parks Crew Supervisor	10	10
Parks Crew Leader	3	3
Parks Maintenance Worker II	1	1
Parks Maintenance Worker II	27	27
Motor Equipment Operator III	2	2
Motor Equipment Operator II	4	4
Motor Equipment Operator I	6	6
Correctional Detail Officer	13	13
Part-time	4	6
Parks Maintenance Worker I	4	6
Total Positions (FT+PT)	75	77

Source: CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY25, CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY26, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The Parks Services Division Manager and Parks Services Assistant Division Manager oversee parks maintenance crews comprised of a combination of full-time and part-time positions, three of which are located at specific parks (e.g., the South Commons Complex), one of which operates the Department's heavy equipment (e.g., dump trucks, excavators), and one of which maintains the paint on athletic fields. The remaining parks maintenance crews maintain the remaining 48 parks, approximately 40 miles of trails, and support maintenance at the 12 recreation centers. A Chemical Application Supervisor position manages application of chemicals, such as chemicals designed to eliminate pests like fire ants. Among the full-time positions managed by the Park Services Division leadership, various positions hold specific functions not always reflected in job titles, such as supply/inventory management, carpentry, and janitorial duties. Thirteen Correctional Detail Officer positions manage inmate labor details that support the Parks Services Division's work crews. The Parks Services Division's staffing model is heavily reliant on inmate labor, which is available in varying capacities and requires high levels of supervision. When access to inmate labor decreases, the Parks Services Division is required to stretch resources to maintain basic service levels, such as grass cutting cycles.

Recreation Services Division

The Recreation Services Division manages 10 recreation centers, three senior centers, a pottery and cultural arts studio, and the Paul B. ("Pop") Austin Recreation Center, which houses the Department's therapeutics program. The Recreation Services Division additionally manages the intermittently staffed Ma Rainey House and Blues Museum, which was closed for renovations during M&J's fieldwork.

The Recreation Services Division is led by a Recreation Services Division Manager position who reports to the Assistant Director. The Recreation Services Division was allocated 21 full-time employees and 10 part-time employees for both FY25 and FY26. The Recreation Services Division's allocated positions are identified in the following table.

Table 33: Recreation Services Division Allocated Positions

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Full-time	13	13
Division Manager	1	1
Program Supervisor	3	3
Program Specialist III	4	4
Program Specialist II	4	4
Administrative Secretary	1	1
Part-time	48	48
Museum Support Specialist	1	1
Recreation Center Leader	38	38
Therapeutic Recreation Aide	3	3
Pottery Specialist	5	5
Parks Maintenance Worker I	1	1
Total Positions (FT+PT)	61	61

Source: CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY25, CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY26, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The Recreation Services Division Manager position is supported in managing the Recreation Services Division's various programming areas – general recreation, senior centers, therapeutics, and cultural arts and pottery – by three Program Supervisor positions.

One Program Supervisor position assists the Recreation Services Division Manager with management of the recreation centers and senior centers. Eight full-time Program Specialist positions manage the day-to-day operations of the 10 recreation centers and three senior centers, supported by a varying number of temporary part-time Recreation Center Leader positions (ranging between approximately 25 and 50 each fiscal year of the review period [FY21-25]). Staffing per facility is generally limited and staff do not frequently provide coverage for different facilities, resulting in staff feeling unable to take time off, as was shared in interviews with M&J. Recreation and senior centers are open between 45 and 50 hours each week, Monday through Friday or Saturday depending on the center. Recreation centers operate from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, with certain recreation centers operate from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday. The senior centers operate from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, with two of the centers additionally operating from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturday. Haygood Gym (a recreation center specifically operated for boxing) operates for limited hours from 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, without a dedicated staff. The Comer Recreation Center (an administrative location for the Department) operates from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The Program Supervisor position responsible for the recreation and senior centers also oversees the Recreation Services Division's part-time Parks Maintenance Worker position responsible for general facility upkeep and the part-time Museum Support Specialist position responsible for the Ma Rainey House and Blues Museum.

A second Program Supervisor position oversees the Department's therapeutics program at the Pop Austin Recreation Center. A full-time Administrative Secretary position and three part-time Therapeutic Recreation Aide positions support the therapeutics program, with responsibilities ranging from weekly meal preparation for attendees to activity leadership and special event coordination.

A third Program Supervisor position (also referred to as a Cultural Arts/Pottery Program Supervisor in some documentation) manages the Recreation Services Division's cultural arts and pottery programming. Five part-time Pottery Specialist positions are allocated to support cultural arts and pottery programming, staffing the Britt David Studio, as well as satellite studios located at the Northside and Psalmond Road Recreation Centers. Due to difficulty retaining Pottery Specialists, the Department only operated the Britt David Studio during the review period.

Lake Oliver Marina

A Marina Specialist position, who reports to the Assistant Director, manages the Lake Oliver Marina. The Lake Oliver Marina is managed and operated seven days a week by the Marina Specialist position, with the support of one full-time Marina Technician I position, one part-time Marina Technician II position, and two part-time Marina Technician I positions. Work schedules for the Marina Technician positions are arranged to ensure that staffing is fullest from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. every day while the concession stand is open to maintain food safety standards, which require a minimum of two employees. Lake Oliver Marina's allocated positions are identified in the following table.

Table 34: Lake Oliver Marina Allocated Positions

Position Title	No. of Positions Allocated (FY25)	No. of Positions Allocated (FY26)
Full-time	2	2
Marina Specialist	1	1
Marina Technician I	1	1
Part-time	3	3
Marina Technician II	1	1
Marina Technician I	2	2
Total Positions (FT+PT)	5	5

Source: CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY25, CCG Adopted Operating Budget FY26, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

The following table lists the Department's turnover rate for each of the five full fiscal years in the review period, including both permanent full-time and permanent part-time positions.

Table 35: Annual Turnover Rate

Fiscal Year	Turnover Rate
2021	16.8%
2022	33.6%
2023	26.2%
2024	26.4%
2025	22.6%

Source: CCG Budget Books FY20-FY25, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The typical turnover rate for a municipal Parks and Recreation Department is approximately 15%. During the review period (FY21-FY25), Department turnover ranged from 16% to 34%. During M&J's fieldwork, interviews with the Department's staff indicated burnout and perceptions related to staffing levels resulted in turnover. Staff suggested the number of allocated positions (especially permanent positions) limits employees' ability to take sick or personal leave, resulting in burnout and requiring Department leadership to cover shifts in order to maintain necessary staffing levels and keep facilities open.

The following table represents an estimate of annual seasonal, intermittent, or temporary staffing during the review period. The numbers do not necessarily represent the total number employed at any one time, but instead represent the total number of individuals who were employed by the Department in a seasonal, intermittent, or temporary position for at least part of the fiscal year. On average, the Department employed 280 seasonal, intermittent, or temporary employees annually.

Table 36: Parks and Recreation Seasonal, Intermittent, and Temporary Employees, FY21-25

Fiscal Year	Number of Seasonal, Intermittent, or Temporary Staff
2021	266
2022	284
2023	275
2024	232
2025	344

Source: CCG Budget Books FY20-FY25, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The Department administers and maintains the community's recreational properties and facilities through four primary functions:

- Park, Facility, and Asset Management
- Programming and Community Engagement
- Event Management and Tourism
- Administrative and Operations Support

Park, Facility, and Asset Management

The Department maintains a diverse portfolio of physical assets, ranging from aquatic facilities to open parkland. The Parks Services Division ("Parks Services") holds primary responsibility for external maintenance across 52 public parks, seven football fields, 42 baseball and softball fields, and the 11-field Woodruff Farm Soccer Complex. Parks Services crews perform comprehensive groundskeeping, including mowing, edging, fertilization, and specialized chemical applications for weed and pest control. Crews also maintain 20.5 miles of trail and manage daily trash and restroom cleaning routes from March through October. To perform these duties, the Department uses a fleet of heavy equipment, including dump trucks, excavators, and skid steers. Inconsistent capital funding for these assets has resulted in an aging fleet requiring frequent repairs.

Operational ambiguity regarding maintenance responsibilities affects efficiency across the Department. While Parks Services is officially responsible for grounds and amenities, staff frequently perform structural repairs, plumbing fixes, and graffiti removal on buildings to avoid service delays. Administrative inefficiencies in the Government-wide work order system, Q-Alert, contribute to operational ambiguity as the platform allows the public and 311 operators to categorize service requests improperly, resulting in Parks Services receiving a high volume of work orders falling under the jurisdiction of other departments.

In addition to general park maintenance, specific facilities face distinct challenges. Many recreation centers were constructed over 20 years ago and suffer from structural deficiencies, including persistent roof leaks, mold in ventilation systems, and moisture damage to gymnasium floors. Similarly, the Aquatic Center faces equipment challenges, where items such as diving boards and lane lines are nearing the end of their useful life, and areas such as the chemical testing room suffer from inadequate ventilation. The process to request equipment and facilities repairs is inconsistent from facility to facility, with management level staff at some facilities using email to request repairs and facilities services repairs rather than inputting requests into Q-Alert. At Lake Oliver Marina, the dual role as a public recreational site and a gathering site for Government employees creates significant facility wear, particularly within the restrooms serving the general public, Government employees, and concession patrons. Marina staff divert time from revenue-generating activities and safety oversight to perform frequent custodial duties. The Ma Rainey House and Blues Museum was closed during the review period for renovations.

Programming and Community Engagement

The Department delivers recreational, educational, and cultural programming designed to engage users across demographic spectrums. The Community Schools Division provides after-school programs emphasizing holistic child development with a specific focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (“STEM”) enrichment. To help ensure high-quality water safety instruction, the Aquatics Division offers learn-to-swim programs. The Athletics Division administers local athletic programming on Government property, ranging from traditional leagues to sports increasing in local popularity such as pickleball, cricket, and rugby. The Recreation Services Division delivers community programming tailored to specific sites, ranging from youth sports to senior-specific activities. This Division also oversees the Paul B. (“Pop”) Austin Recreation Center, which provides specialized therapeutic recreation for adults with disabilities.

Current internal program evaluation methodologies limit the Department’s ability to assess program effectiveness accurately. While external program evaluations allow for the public to submit feedback through a digital form accessed via a QR code, internal evaluations primarily rely on simple paper forms (with different facilities using different versions of the forms) or informal verbal feedback rather than consistent digital data collection methods. These tools often use binary “yes/no” feedback options, which lack the qualitative data necessary to measure participant satisfaction and engagement beyond the bare minimum. Additionally, these tools do not collect feedback in spreadsheets or similar documents that can be used for systematic review, comparison, and analysis of program data.

Event Management and Tourism

The Department’s programs, facilities, and activities draw significant participation, making Columbus a regional hub for sports tourism and large-scale community events. The Columbus Aquatics Center hosts swimming and diving meets of various sizes, including State high school age group championships. The facility features one of the few Olympic-size swimming pools in the State, required to hold any meets accredited under USA Swimming as Long Course meets.⁵⁵ Division staff provide operational support for these meets, managing logistics, sanitation, and lifeguard coverage. However, fee structures for third-party rentals and competitive meets during the review period did not fully recover operational costs.

⁵⁵ An Olympic-sized swimming pool conforms to standards developed by World Aquatics, the governing body for international water sport competitions, for use at the Olympic Games.

The Athletics Division hosts large-scale events at A.J. McClung Memorial Stadium (“Memorial Stadium”), a 15,000-seat sports stadium owned by the Government. Athletics Division events at Memorial Stadium include the Heritage Bowl, an annual high school football rivalry game, and the Fountain City Classic, an annual college football rivalry game, which draw attendances of approximately 10,000 spectators. The Athletics Division processes athletic tournament special event contracts and field rentals to facilitate activities such as baseball, softball, and soccer tournaments. Parks Services provides critical logistical support for athletic tournaments, handling equipment transport, setup, and teardown.

The Lake Oliver Marina (“Marina”) presents further opportunities for event-based revenue. The Marina’s concessions operations have evolved beyond the original scope, currently serving as a popular daily lunch destination for the area. Department discussions have identified the potential to expand revenue through amenity rentals and by positioning the Marina as a host site for collaborative events such as fishing tournaments.

Administrative and Operations Support

The Administration Division provides the central leadership, fiscal oversight, and personnel management required to sustain the Department’s operations. The Finance Manager performs Departmental accounting duties, including managing cash receipts, coding invoices, and ensuring sales tax compliance. Departmental financial workflows rely on manual spreadsheets due to limitations within the Government’s Enterprise Resource Planning system, Advantage.

Department and division leadership manages external funding sources to supplement the budget. The Community Schools Division secures State-funded Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time grants, Child and Parent Services (“CAPS”) subsidies, and Child and Adult Care Food Program (“CACFP”) support. The Division maintains rigorous quality control standards, evidenced by consistently high evaluations on external CAPS and CACFP compliance audits. Similarly, the Athletics Division manages a public-private partnership with the Columbus Regional Tennis Association, where donations fund court upgrades and maintenance which the operating budget cannot support. Additionally, the Athletics Division manages memoranda of understanding with external entities, such as the Muscogee County School District, to facilitate shared facility usage. Resource constraints limit the Department’s capacity for long-term strategic planning. Despite population growth and an expanding portfolio of SPLOST-funded facilities, the Department operates at the lowest staffing level for its service scope. This imbalance forces leadership to focus on immediate service continuity rather than proactive strategy. Consequently, the Department handles initiatives such as an update to the Master Plan internally due to a lack of resources for external consulting, which is commonly used in the industry to gain an independent perspective.

Parks and recreation departments frequently function as government enterprise funds or internal service funds, with fees, rentals, and permits allowing departments to become more self-sufficient and/or supplement budget allocated from the government's general fund. M&J's fieldwork indicated that the Department may not be consistently reviewing and collecting fees agreed upon in contracts and memoranda of understanding with external parties and may not be charging adequate membership and activity fees to help cover ongoing facility and equipment maintenance.

Customer Service

Much of the Department is external facing, with the of staff interacting with the public regularly on Department-managed sites. The Department's workforce aims to demonstrate a strong commitment to public service. However, while individual staff dedication is high, existing workflows and resource constraints create friction in the customer experience.

Customer interaction regarding facility access and programming remains heavily reliant on manual, paper-based processes at some facilities, creating unnecessary barriers to entry. At facilities like the Cooper Creek Tennis Center, membership tracking and court reservations are managed via physical index cards and manual Excel entry, while boat launch fees at the Lake Oliver Marina involve handwritten receipts. These outdated workflows slow down service delivery and increase the risk of administrative error. Department leadership stated during interviews with M&J that the Vermont Systems RecTrac platform being implemented is intended to standardize and digitize registration, point-of-sale transactions, and other Departmental processes.

Resource constraints directly impact the consistency of the customer experience. The staffing model in Recreation Services means that the absence of a single Supervisor can disrupt facility operations, potentially leading to unannounced closures or reduced service hours. Similarly, Lake Oliver Marina's concession operation frequently becomes overwhelmed during peak hours due to insufficient staffing, leading to long wait times.

Use of Technology

CGI Advantage and NEOGOV

The Department uses a combination of enterprise-wide municipal systems, *ad hoc* digital solutions, and paper-based workflows. The Department utilizes the Government's central Enterprise Resource Planning system ("Advantage") for employee management and financial processes, and the Government's recruitment system ("NEOGOV") for applicant tracking. Due to the lack of integration between these two platforms, personnel data for new hires must be manually keyed into NEOGOV, re-entered into Advantage, and often entered a third time into internal onboarding forms. This redundancy results in workflows that increase the risk of data errors and delay the deployment of seasonal staff. Furthermore, Department users feel that Advantage's financial management capacity has limited reporting flexibility, restricting the ability to generate custom financial reports without external assistance from the Finance Department.

Program Registration and Facility Management

The Department lacks a unified database for program registration and facility management. The Department relies on manual methods, including index cards and disparate Excel spreadsheets, to track memberships and reservations. This is evident in the Athletics Division, where tennis center staff record memberships, court reservations, and fee collections using physical index cards and disparate Excel spreadsheets due to the absence of a functional Point of Sale (“POS”) system and membership database, in addition to staff manually recording field bookings. To advance from manual processes, the Department is in the process of implementing Vermont Systems’ RecTrac in 2026. The RecTrac integrated platform is designed to centralize facility booking, activity registration, and point-of-sale transactions. The Department plans to have ample training to help ensure a smooth transition from legacy manual processes to this digital solution.

Additionally, several divisions use standalone applications for division-specific functions. The Aquatics Division uses Sling to manage shift scheduling and communication for lifeguards and staff, and uses a Daktronics timing system for swim competitions, which will be obsolete by the end of 2026 as Daktronics will exit the aquatic sports timing market. There is no replacement plan for the Daktronics timing system as of the review period.⁵⁶ Athletics uses Quick Score for tournament record-keeping. Community Schools staff use State portals, including those used to track information for CACFP and CAPS, to manage grant reporting and food service compliance.

RecTrac

During M&J’s fieldwork, the Department began implementing Vermont Systems’ RecTrac (“RecTrac”), a comprehensive recreation management platform designed to enhance overall service provision. By centralizing core functions such as activity registration, facility booking, and point-of-sale transactions, RecTrac is intended to replace decentralized and fragmented paper processes and create more accessible, consistent, and efficient interactions with customers. The use of RecTrac also creates opportunities to enhance performance evaluation and data tracking. During implementation, Department leadership solicited design and customization input from staff representing a variety of Departmental functions and duties, ensuring the software configuration aligns with required business processes. The Department built a regular training schedule for Department staff to familiarize themselves with RecTrac prior to the go-live date and will continue training when implemented. The Department’s emphasis on user experience and training can help mitigate transition risks and can increase staff operational readiness when RecTrac goes live.

⁵⁶ After the completion of M&J’s fieldwork and the initial drafting of this report, Department leadership indicated that the FY27 budget request included a replacement for the Daktronics timing system. As the scope of this Assessment did not include a review of FY27 budget requests, M&J cannot independently verify this inclusion.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

In March 2025, the Columbus Council adopted Ordinance No. 25-013, establishing a Recreation Advisory Board (“Board”) as a seven-member body, comprising appointees from State Senate Districts 15 and 29, appointees from at-large Councilors, and the Muscogee County School District Athletic Director. The Board serves in an advisory capacity to the Department Director to consider policies and recommend operational improvements. Ordinance No. 25-013 mandates specific duties for the Board, including conducting facility inspections at least once per year, reviewing Department financial statements annually, and reviewing policies and procedures annually.

The Department developed a 2023-2031 Strategic Action Plan (“Action Plan”) and 2014-2034 Master Plan (“Master Plan”) that envision the future state of operations and establishes Departmental priorities. The Action Plan outlines seven strategic goals: Facility Maintenance and Improvement, Department Image, Leisure Programs, Professional Growth, Community Involvement, Management and Administration, and Resource Stewardship. For each goal, the Action Plan lists specific challenges, opportunities, and action plans, such as creating routine preventative maintenance schedules and tracking customer loyalty. The Action Plan also inventories capital needs across the Department’s assets, identifying specific renovation projects for facilities like Alexander Park, Benning Park, and Cooper Creek Tennis Center, and assigning estimated costs to these projects.

The Action Plan includes a directive to “define and maintain quality maintenance, programming, and project plans.” The Department has not generated the detailed standard operating procedures for these action items. The Action Plan notes challenges regarding staffing and training. Some divisions of the Department rely on on-the-job instruction, and the Department has not developed the proposed written training schedules and Leadership Academy. The Action Plan also identifies the need for routine and preventative maintenance schedules to address the challenge of shortened life expectancy of materials. Consistently used documented schedules for facility management do not exist. The Action Plan was published in 2023, with a time horizon ending in 2031. The Department has remaining time to implement the action items, though with leadership required to perform day-to-day tasks, such as working shifts at facilities to maintain operations, leadership has limited availability to devote to developing detailed procedures, training schedules, and other resources to achieve strategic priorities.

The Master Plan, developed in 2014, presents an analysis of community data and the then-current state of the Department’s parks and facilities for use as a guiding document for future development and strategy. The Master Plan identified factors impacting the use and future development of the Department’s properties, such as the form of government in Columbus, the City’s regional role, transportation projects and challenges, community demographics, and trends in the parks and recreation industry.

The Department maintains an Employee Handbook (“Handbook”), revised in April 2023, as its primary source of operational guidance. The Handbook establishes standards for professional conduct, leave policies, and safety regulations, including protocols for areas such as inmate labor supervision and vehicle accident reporting.

Strategic Priorities

The Department's strategic priorities as outlined in the FY25 Adopted Operating Budget, emphasize a commitment to comprehensive service delivery and proactive management oversight.

Administration goals focus on ensuring leadership familiarity with program operations through regular facility spot checks, alongside a mandate to develop new, innovative programming that addresses the needs of a growing regional community. Similarly, specific functional areas like Senior Services prioritize increasing participation through inter-generational mentorships and external partnerships to foster a positive image of aging. The Department intends to leverage SPLOST funding to deliver tangible amenity upgrades, such as new playgrounds and pool renovations, reflecting a desire to modernize the asset portfolio.

In contrast to the strategic goals presented in the Department's Action Plan and the Government's Adopted Operating Budget, daily operations are driven primarily by reactivity rather than strategic intent. In interviews with M&J, Department staff suggested the limited staffing model and large Departmental footprint has led to a reactive culture where crisis management has to take precedence over long-term planning. Operational activity is frequently dictated by urgent issues such as roof leaks and staffing coverage, rather than by a comprehensive Master Plan with a routine maintenance schedule. Furthermore, accreditation requirements for State and national parks and recreation associations and grant requirements often require time intensive administrative work at an executive level. The data collection requirements for these accreditations drive decision-making, instead of data informing strategic priorities and decisions. To align operational reality with strategic ambitions, the Department must transition from reactive decision making to data-driven strategic planning, developing a desired future state and deciding on a course of action to achieve it.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

The Department currently tracks several types of operational data to satisfy external compliance requirements and accreditation standards. The data collected is not used to drive internal strategy. The Community Schools Division maintains attendance and meal distributions documentation to meet State grant requirements and Child and Adult Care Food Program ("CACFP") standards. Similarly, the Department tracks adherence to Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies ("CAPRA") standards and National Recreation and Park Association ("NRPA") benchmarks to maintain its professional standing. Recreation Services staff record daily facility headcounts and program participation numbers, which are used for reporting and verification, not as a tool for strategic planning or evaluation.

The Department's current performance management indicators as detailed in the FY25 Adopted Operating Budget rely predominantly on output-based indicators that prioritize activity volume over strategic impact or quality. For the Department's Administration, goals regarding management oversight are measured by the number of events, facilities, and programs spot-checked by leadership, a metric that does not assess the effectiveness of the oversight. Similarly, tracking the number of new programs introduced ignores the current Recreation Services tracking of number of visitors to centers and program participation, and ignores the staffing reality of Parks and Recreation facilities.

The Department currently lacks Key Performance Indicators (“KPIs”) related to financial efficiency. There is no formalized tracking of cost recovery ratios or subsidy per participant for fee-based divisions like Aquatics, Athletics, the Marina, leaving leadership without the necessary data to evaluate the financial sustainability of its operations. Operational expenses for personnel, equipment, and chemicals have risen, but fee structures have not kept pace. Without tracking financial metrics, the Department is operating with a revenue gap that cannot be accurately quantified. The Department is unable to determine the true cost of service delivery, which could result in reliance on the General Fund to fund Divisional functions that may self-fund to breakeven or above.

The implementation of the Vermont Systems RecTrac platform could provide an opportunity to transition from manual headcounts to digital tracking of facility use and program engagement, allowing the Department to track better and more targeted metrics.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

The Department’s operational culture is defined by reactive service delivery. The Department’s management structure relies heavily on the tenure and institutional knowledge of longtime staff. Staffing levels combined with an expanding portfolio of facilities and SPLOST-funded projects limit capacity for the Department to operate strategically. Leadership is frequently required to focus on immediate operational needs, frequently stepping in to cover staffing shortages at Departmental facilities and address urgent facility issues to maintain service delivery. While this demonstrates leadership’s commitment to the Department, it prevents the development of long-term strategic planning, succession management, and proactive operations. The Department focuses on surviving day to day rather than planning out a desired future state.

While the Department shares centralized maintenance and administrative support functions, the divisions largely operate as semi-siloed, external-facing divisions rather than a cohesive unit. Divisions such as Community Schools, Aquatics, and Recreation Services function largely as independent entities with limited cross-functional collaboration. Consequently, the Department misses significant opportunities for cross-promotion. For example, the audience at after-school programs is not introduced to Departmental swim lessons, athletics leagues, or cultural arts programming. Geographic separation exacerbates this isolation, as field staff rarely interact with colleagues outside their specific division, leading to a fragmented organizational identity. M&J received employee feedback during 2025 fieldwork detailing this lack of Departmental identity, with mentions of perceptions of inconsistent treatment among divisions and within divisional staff. Staffing models with limited coverage or redundancy in multiple divisions contribute to the perception of inconsistent treatment, with staff feeling specific individuals and divisions receive inequitable resources.

Staff perceive capital expenditures and resource allocation as inconsistent and unpredictable. In interviews with M&J, frontline staff expressed a disparity in facility upkeep. While facilities with strong public-private partnerships (like Cooper Creek Tennis Center) receive supplemental funding for improvements, older neighborhood recreation centers have time-sensitive deferred maintenance issues like mold and roof leaks. These issues create a perception that resources are not distributed based on an objective needs-based assessment.

Communication remains fragmented, which reinforces the culture of silos. Most divisions hold regular staff meetings, but the dissemination of information to part-time and seasonal staff is inconsistent. Operations rely heavily on *ad hoc* text message groups, email chains, and division-specific tools like Sling in the Aquatics Division.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: A common challenge facing parks and recreation departments across the country is an increase in properties managed and community expectations without an increase in resources. During M&J’s review period (FY21-FY25), the expectations for programming and management of open properties by the CCG Parks and Recreation Department grew, with inconsistent growth in resources. Responding to the growth in pickleball in the City and across the country, the Government allocated two new full-time and two new part-time positions to the Department specifically focused on implementing pickleball programming at the Cooper Creek Tennis Facility. But resource allocation didn’t consistently match growth in other areas: reopening Tillis Recreation Center after 20 years; reopening three outdoor pools and introducing new splash pads; renovations of playgrounds and full parks, such as Lakebottom Park; and increases in regional, statewide, and national athletic tournaments. Throughout the review period, the Department maintained inexpensive and free programming, ranging from swimming lessons to afterschool programs managed by the Community Schools Division – the latter of which Department staff indicated has a waitlist. The review period also included planned renovations, reopenings, and new properties, such as the current development of the Mellon Street Pocket Park. Strategic resource growth to meet growing expectations, programming, and properties could have included a Program Manager position to oversee the outdoor aquatics properties; additional full-time positions at Lake Oliver Marina; or an increased number of park maintenance crews, either for the City’s parks as a whole or assigned to specific properties.

Staffing limitations hinder the Department’s ability to retain employees and transition from a reactive to proactive and strategic organization. When M&J conducted a site visit of the Gallops Senior Center less than an hour after opening, the parking lot was full and numerous members of the community were already engaged in various programs and activities. Gallops Senior Center only employs one full-time position, meaning that if any of the three part-time positions are vacant or unavailable to be scheduled, the ability of the full-time position to take leave is limited, unless the center is temporarily closed or Department leadership fill in to supervise the center. Various programs have been limited or temporarily ceased due to a lack of dedicated staff, such as the hours for Haygood Gym and the operation of satellite pottery studios. Consistent athletic programming, including both internally and externally hosted tournaments, results in many Department staff (both full-time and part-time positions) working extended hours without the availability of overtime compensation and/or working a high number of consecutive weekends during busier seasons (such as summer and fall), limiting employees’ ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Numerous employees shared with M&J in interviews a perception of not having the ability to take leave due to staffing limitations, which has led to burnout and turnover.

Recommendation 1: CCG leadership should seek to quantify the magnitude of impact current resource levels have on the Department’s ability to meet community expectations and manage the number of properties (parks, trails, recreation centers, etc.) and programs (athletic tournaments, afterschool programs, therapeutic activities, etc.) currently managed by the Department. Based on the magnitude of impact, CCG leadership could address the perceived or real lack of resources through one or more strategic solution, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Maintain Current Levels – CCG leadership could decide to maintain current resource levels and continue to operate the current number of properties and programs with current resources.
- Limit Services – CCG and Department leadership could decide to limit current service offerings, such as decreasing the hours of recreation centers and/or limiting the frequency of competitions, classes, and Department-developed programs.
- Consider Outsourcing – CCG leadership could decide to contract for or internally conduct a feasibility study for outsourcing certain operations (e.g., maintenance of a specific park or facility, coordination of athletic leagues, management of outdoor pools, etc.).
- Develop Immediate Increase Plan – CCG and Department leadership could decide to develop a plan to immediately increase resources, either to meet the Department’s needs for resources to meet all expectations or to meet the Department’s most pressing needs, as based on community and City leadership’s expectations.
- Develop Periodic Increase Plan – CCG and Department leadership could decide to develop a plan to periodically and continually increase resources, on an annual, biannual, or other agreed-upon frequency, in order to address the areas of most need and increase resources to meet the expectations for the Department without requiring immediate sizeable growth.

Observation 2: The Aquatics Division is responsible for the operation and maintenance of multiple pools, splash pads, and associated facilities, which require ongoing upkeep to ensure safety and functionality. Current issues with deteriorating equipment, such as aging diving boards and lane lines, and concerns about inadequate ventilation in spaces like the chemical testing room, point to the need for a formal thorough facility assessment. Additionally, the lack of signage around the facility creates challenges for patrons trying to locate the center, which reduces public awareness and potential visitation. The building’s ventilation system and overall infrastructure, including HVAC and pool equipment, are showing signs of wear, and as such, may require further investment to maintain operational standards.

Recommendation 2: The Department should contract for or internally conduct a formal facility assessment to evaluate the end-of-life status of key equipment, ventilation systems, and overall infrastructure of the Columbus Aquatic Center and other aquatic facilities.

Observation 3: The Department hosts numerous events and programs at a variety of facilities, which, while beneficial to the community, often result in operational costs that exceed revenue. Currently, rental fees and membership prices are not sufficient to cover the full costs of facility maintenance, staffing, and event hosting. With rising costs associated with equipment and personnel, the Department is unable to operate more like a government enterprise fund. Moreover, the increasing demand for events like swim meets, sports tournaments, and community programs has led to higher operational expenses. While parks and recreation departments rarely generate enough funding to be entirely self-sustainable, many departments across the country have implemented and raised fees, as necessary, to help recoup some costs.

Recommendation 3: The Department should consider contracting out or internally conducting a review of rental fees and membership pricing to align more closely with the Department's operational costs.

Observation 4: The Athletics Division relies heavily on four part-time Athletic Chiefs to manage facility logistics and safety during major tournaments and weekend events. The current roster for these positions consists entirely of retired individuals, creating a significant succession risk. There is no pipeline of younger professionals willing to work the requisite long hours and weekends for part-time wages, posing a threat to operational continuity should these current employees leave.

Recommendation 4: The Department should develop a formal succession plan and recruitment strategy for the Athletic Chief positions, potentially evaluating the feasibility of converting these roles into full-time positions or restructuring the hours to attract a broader pool of candidates.

Observation 5: Administrative workflows at the Cooper Creek Tennis Center rely on inefficient manual processes, including the use of physical index cards and disparate Excel spreadsheets to record memberships, court reservations, and fee collections. This lack of a functional Point-of-Sale system and membership database slows service delivery and increases the risk of administrative errors.

Recommendation 5: The Department should ensure the implementation of the Vermont Systems RecTrac platform at the Cooper Creek Tennis Center assists with the digitization of registration, membership tracking, and point-of-sale transactions, in order to replace legacy manual systems.

Observation 6: The Recreation Services Division's physical assets, particularly the "super centers" constructed over 20 years ago, face significant deferred maintenance challenges, including roof leaks, mold, and moisture damage to gym floors. Some facilities in the Division currently utilize a manual, email-based work order process rather than a centralized digital asset management system or CCG's Q-Alert system, resulting in tracking inefficiencies and unresolved facility issues.

Recommendation 6: The Department should contract out or internally conduct formal facility assessments for the recreation and senior centers to document structural integrity and safety concerns. These assessments should form the basis of a comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan and a formalized preventative maintenance program.

Observation 7: The Recreation Services Division’s staffing model does not allow for coverage when an employee is absent, meaning staff are working when ill and have no opportunities for personal time off. Staff indicated that the staffing model results in staff burnout and result in Department leadership covering day-to-day operations at facilities away from the Department’s central office.

Recommendation 7: The Recreation Services Division should establish a coverage model or non-operational time periods to allow staff to take earned time off.

Observation 8: The Ma Rainey House and Blues Museum is currently closed to the public and, when not undergoing renovations, is only open intermittently depending on the schedule of a single part-time employee. The Department lacks a definitive long-term plan for the property resulted in a potentially underutilized asset.

Recommendation 8: The Department should recommend to the Columbus Council strategic direction options for the Ma Rainey House and Blues Museum, exploring options such as fully funding restoration and regular operations, seeking grants and/or endowments to supplement funding, engaging in public-private partnerships, or transitioning management and/or ownership to a separate entity.

Observation 9: The Recreation Services Division does not have a consistent manner of internal program evaluation. Forms of input and evaluation differ from site to site and are not collected in a central location, such as a spreadsheet, that allows for systematic review of information and data.

Recommendation 9: The Recreation Services Division should standardize internal program evaluation forms using digital resources, such as SurveyMonkey or Google Forms, that allow for the collection and systematic analysis of response data. The Recreation Services Division could consider adding questions and criteria that use a Likert Scale or similar model to quantify and standardize evaluations.

Observation 10: The Parks Services Division is understaffed and overwhelmed, relying heavily on both mandatory overtime and inmate labor to supplement its field workforce. Inmate labor presents significant operational risks due to inconsistent availability and high supervision requirements. When inmate counts drop or supervising correctional officers required to deploy inmate labor are unavailable, the Division struggles to maintain basic service levels, such as grass cutting cycles, and technical staff are diverted from their duties to supervise crews. Coverage is not available for crews who work overtime regularly or have heavier workloads. Workloads are significantly impacted by covering duties of other Government departments.

Recommendation 10A: The Department should consider conducting a workforce analysis of its staffing model to reduce dependency on inmate labor, potentially converting resources into dedicated full-time or seasonal maintenance positions to ensure consistent service delivery.

Recommendation 10B: Parks Services should implement a coverage model to distribute mandatory overtime among staff or provide assistance to crews that regularly require overtime.

Recommendation 10C: CCG should provide clear guidance and delineation on Parks Services duties to the Department, other CCG departments with possible overlap, and 311 employees who input Q-Alert tickets.

Observation 11: The Parks Services Division operates an aging fleet of heavy equipment and vehicles due to inconsistent capital funding. Frequent repairs and downtime hinder operational efficiency, and there is no formalized preventative maintenance program or structured replacement schedule.

Recommendation 11: The Department should perform a formal comprehensive inventory review to determine the remaining useful life of machinery and implement a structured capital replacement schedule to mitigate equipment failure.

Observation 12: The Lake Oliver Marina operates seven days a week with insufficient staffing, relying on limited staffing who frequently work without regular days off (such as weekends or equivalent days off elsewhere in the week). The concession operation has grown beyond its original scope, often overwhelming the limited staff and compromising facility management and safety duties during peak hours.

Recommendation 12A: The Department should consider engaging a third party or internally conducting a feasibility study of the Lake Oliver Marina to determine the future scale of the concession operations. Concurrently, staffing levels should be increased, ideally converting part-time positions to full-time roles, to ensure adequate coverage, allow for a sustainable work schedule, and meet food safety standards.

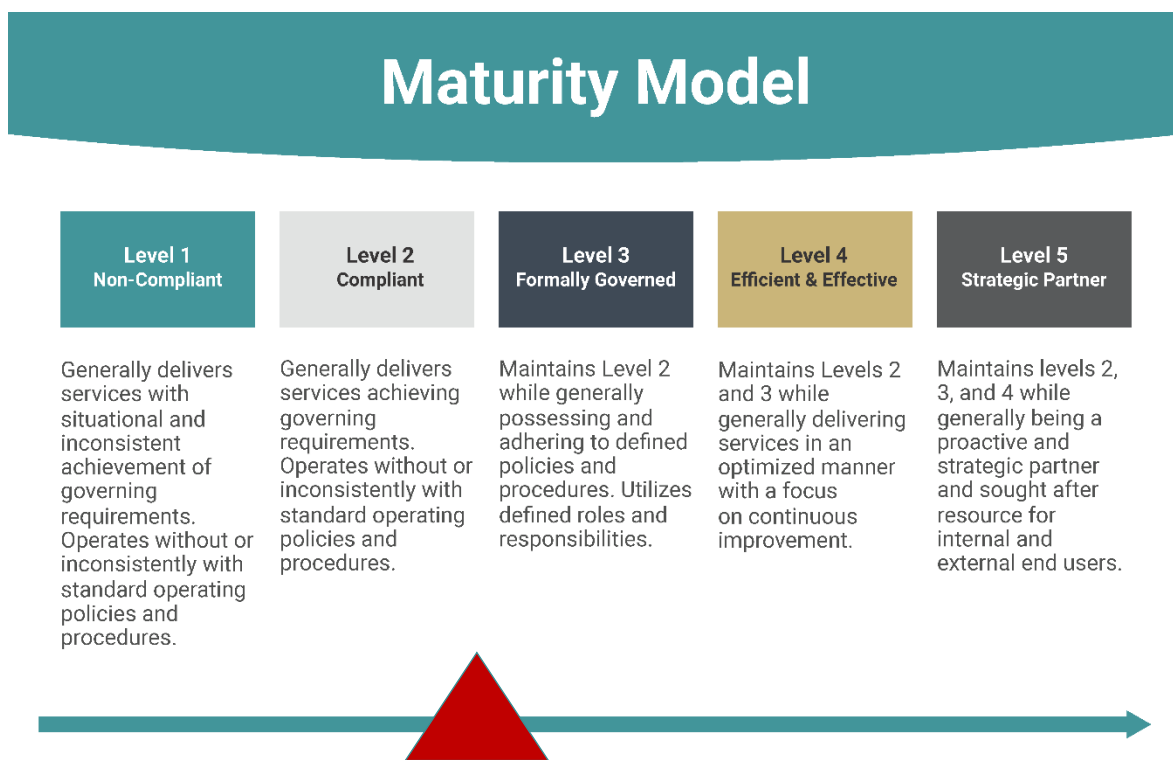
Recommendation 12B: The Department should consider engaging a third party or internally conducting a feasibility study of the Lake Oliver Marina to determine the desired future state of the facility, identifying revenue producing opportunities, needs, and revenue recovery metrics. The Department could consider opportunities such as, but not limited to, expanded concession operations using a third-party food service, kayak rentals managed by Department staff or a third-party partner, and/or regular events and tournaments hosted at the facility.

Observation 13: The Department currently lacks key performance indicators related to financial efficiency, such as cost recovery ratios or subsidy per participant. Without this data, leadership cannot effectively evaluate the financial sustainability of operations or make informed decisions regarding fee structures, leaving the Department entirely reliant on the General Fund.

Recommendation 13: The Department should establish key financial performance indicators and conduct a comprehensive fee assessment to identify opportunities for cost recovery and ensure that rental and program fees align with actual operational costs.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department's maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Department as between **Level 2: Compliant** and **Level 3: Formally Governed**. The Department delivers services within current resource and staffing levels but can easily fail to deliver services through small operations disruptions. The Department continues to achieve endorsement and certification through State and national governing and affiliate bodies, which means it maintains leading practices. The focus on achieving day-to-day service takes focus from strategic planning and results in reactive decision-making and inconsistent approaches and treatment between divisions. While policies and procedures are generally uniform throughout the Department and roles are clearly defined in terms of actual responsibilities, limited resources oftentimes affect the Department's ability to maintain consistent practices and require staff to exceed the expectations of their roles.

Conclusion

The Parks and Recreation Department serves to increase community engagement and well-being within the Columbus Consolidated Government service area, operating an expansive number and range of facilities and programs to serve all users. The Department is currently meeting governing requirements and delivering services but operates in a state where resource limitations and staffing constraints force a focus on daily survival rather than long-term strategy. The Department's reliance on reactive decision-making, manual workflows, and an unsustainable maintenance model prevents it from maximizing its potential and preserving its valuable assets. Transitioning from a "compliant" maturity level towards a Strategic Partner requires a dedicated shift toward data-driven planning, comprehensive feasibility and needs assessments, and a reevaluation of resource allocation. M&J would like to thank Department leadership, as well as the 27 individuals across the Department, for allowing us to conduct numerous interviews, facility walkthroughs, and job shadowing sessions to complete this assessment.

3.L Planning

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“CCG” or “City”) Planning Department (“Department”) guides the City’s physical, social, and economic development. The Department oversees land use development, cultural and historic preservation, and planning for long-term development.

The mission of the Department is to provide continuous, comprehensive, and coordinated planning efforts that promote regional growth and regional mobility, while fostering sustainable development sensitive to community and natural resources.

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

The Department prioritizes continuing professional education and certifications to develop staff skillsets and implement best practices. At the time of this report, the Assistant Director is a registered landscape architect in Georgia and International Society of Arboriculture certified Arborist. Both the Assistant Director and one of the Senior Transportation Planners have attained Local Administered Project (“LAP”) certifications from the Georgia Department of Transportation (“GDOT”) and are working towards obtaining American Institute of Certified Planners (“AICP”) certifications. The Department’s remaining Senior Transportation Planner is working to obtain the LAP certification and both Senior Transportation Planners possess Title VI certificates from the Georgia Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations. The Department’s Principal Planner is AICP certified, and the Geographic Information Systems (“GIS”) Coordinator is certified by the GIS Institute as a GIS Professional.

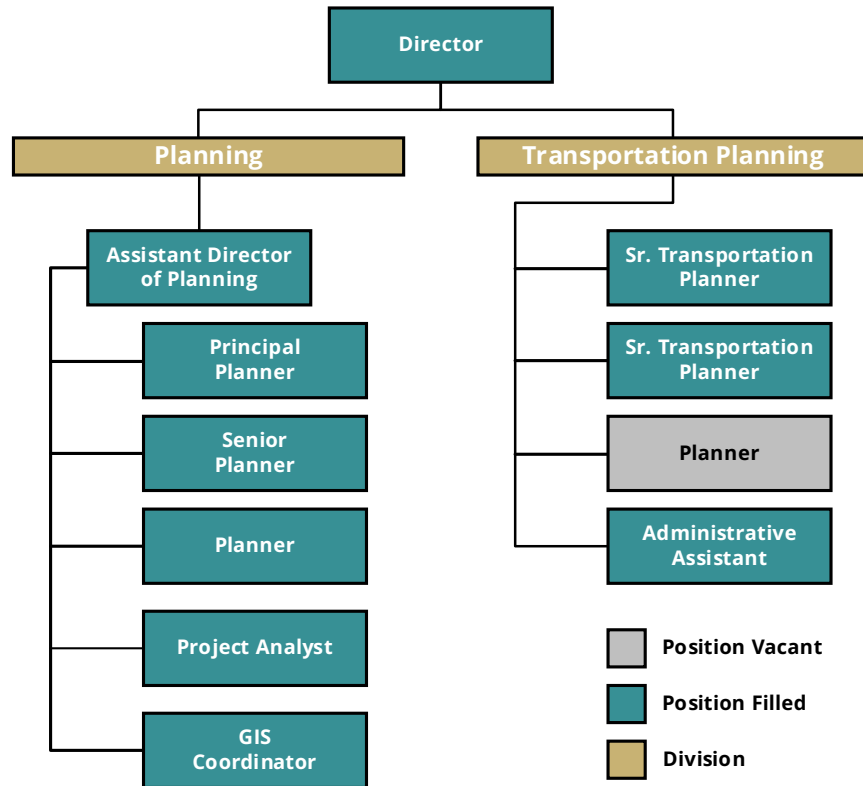
The Department’s Planner, who oversees historical preservation applications, is the first Planning staff member to become certified as a Code Enforcement Officer. With this certification, the Planner can accompany a CCG Inspections & Code Officer during inspections of properties within the City’s historic districts, allowing the Department to maintain stricter oversight and enforcement relating to noncompliant historic properties.

In January 2026, the Department, along with the CCG Engineering and Inspections & Code Departments, moved offices from the Annex Building to City Hall. City Hall also houses the CCG Finance Department, resulting in all Departments involved in the City’s business license and permitting process (i.e., Finance, Engineering, Planning, and Inspections & Code) being located within one building. City Hall therefore acts as a one-stop-shop for citizens to interact with all departments involved in the business license and permitting process, creating a more streamlined and efficient customer experience.

Organization and Staffing

The Department is divided into two Divisions – the Planning Division and the Transportation Planning Division. The Planning Division manages City planning duties related to land use, while the Transportation Planning Division manages transportation-related capital projects and facilitates the Columbus portion of the Columbus-Phenix City-Metropolitan Planning Organization (“C-PC-MPO” or “MPO”).

The Department is led by a Director, who oversees the Department and serves as Chair of the C-PC-MPO Technical Coordinating Committee (“TCC”), which oversees the MPO. The Department’s Assistant Director of Planning oversees land use planning duties. The following organizational chart depicts the Department’s structure:



The Planning Division includes one Principal Planner, one Senior Planner, one Planner, one Project Analyst, and a GIS Coordinator position. The Transportation Planning Division includes two Senior Transportation Planners, one vacant Planner position, and an Administrative Assistant position. Effective FY26, the Department added the Project Analyst position which was vacant during M&J’s fieldwork.

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

Six employees have joined the Department, and six employees have departed the Department since the beginning of FY21.

The following table shows the turnover rate for the last five fiscal years:

Table 37: Annual Turnover Rate

Fiscal Year	Turnover Rate
2021	8.3% (1 Separation)
2022	20% (1 Retirement, 1 Separation)
2023	10% (1 Separation)
2024	0%
2025	18.2% (1 Retirement, 1 Separation)

Source: CCG Budget Books FY21-FY25, Department Information, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

The Department has experienced expected turnover, with two spikes, over the last five fiscal years. The average turnover rate for a municipal Planning department is approximately 15%. The Department's average rate was 11.3% over the last five fiscal years. Turnover peaked in 2022 and 2025, both with one retirement and one separation each. As of November 2025, the Department has two vacant positions.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The following list defines the primary functions of each division:

- Planning
 - Development Services
 - Rezoning and Special Exceptions
 - Subdivision Plat Review
 - Land Disturbance Plan Review
 - Historical Preservation
 - Board of Historical & Architectural Review and Uptown Façade Board
 - Geographic Information System Maintenance
 - Long-term Planning
- Transportation Planning
 - Columbus - Phenix City Metropolitan Planning Organization
 - Federally Required Plans
 - Quarterly Compliance Reporting
 - Capital Projects
 - Transportation Investment Act Program/Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax
 - Right-of-way Coordination

- Public Participation Plan
- Multi-Modal Plan

The following sections detail each of the primary functions.

Planning

The Planning Division (“Division”) consists of the Assistant Director of Planning, a Principal Planner, a part-time Senior Planner, a Planner, and a GIS Coordinator. The Division is responsible for processing applications for rezoning, special exceptions, and zoning verification letters. The Division is also responsible for historical preservation, geographic information system maintenance, and long-term planning.

Development Services

Rezoning and Special Exceptions

The Principal Planner (“Planner”) is responsible for processing rezoning and special exception applications. Applications are available as paper copies in the Department’s office and are also offered as a PDF on the Department’s website, which applicants may print to fill out. After the applicant fills out the paper application, they can scan the application and email it to the Department, mail it to the Department, or deliver it to the Department by hand. The Planner then conducts an initial review of the application to ensure inclusion of all required information (e.g., site plan map, legal details, fees, contact information, payment details, etc.), and calls or emails the applicant to recommend changes if requirements are not met. The Planner and the applicant conduct ongoing communications until the application is compliant, or the applicant stops communicating. One application requirement is the installation of a sign on the applicant’s property stating the details of their application. Following the submission of the application, the Planner adds the application to the agenda of the upcoming Planning Advisory Commission (“PAC”) meeting. The Planner then issues notices to property owners that live within 300 feet of the application’s property to notify them of the application’s upcoming PAC hearing. The Planner issues the notices by mailed letter. The Planner first obtains the relevant property list from the Columbus Tax Assessor’s Office, then addresses envelopes with each property, then prints the notices using the Department printer, then inserts notices into each envelope, then delivers the letters to the City’s in-house mail room in the Government Center building, which then sends out the letters containing the notices to the specified property owners.

The Planner then creates a case file for the application in Tyler Technologies' Enterprise Permitting and Licensing ("EPL")⁵⁷, a software application that manages land use and permitting applications. Upon creation of the case file, EPL assigns the application a payment receipt which the Planner brings to the Department's Administrative Assistant with the applicant's payment method – either card, cash, or check. If the applicant wishes to pay by card, the applicant must complete a credit card authorization form to record the applicant's card information to be charged. The Planner ensures credit card information is included with the application. Upon receipt of the application, the Administrative Assistant submits the card information into a Catalis Payments (formerly known as nCourt) credit card machine and processes the credit card payment using Catalis Payments, a comprehensive payment processing solution. Applicants paying by cash or check may submit their payment by mail or in-person. At the time of M&J fieldwork, upon receipt, the Administrative Assistant stores cash and checks in an office lockbox until making a deposit at Synovus Bank at the end of the week. For cash and check payments, the Administrative Assistant records the receipt in the "Engineering / Planning Receipt System" – an in-house receipt recording system created by the CCG Information Technology Department.

Applications may require additional reviews by positions within and outside the Department based on the desired application actions. Additional reviews may be conducted, but not limited to the following:

- CCG Planning, *GIS Coordinator*: Responsible for providing an updated map for the rezoning case.
- CCG Inspections & Code, *Code Enforcement Officer*: Responsible for ensuring compliance with existing certificates of occupancy.
- CCG Engineering, *Traffic Engineer*: Responsible for conducting a traffic congestion study.
- CCG Fire & EMS Department, *Fire Marshal*: Responsible for ensuring safety compliance.
- Muscogee County School System, *Superintendent*: Responsible for commenting if rezoning occurs near a school that may have an impact on safety, traffic, etc.

To initiate the review and approval process from external entities required for the application, the Planner emails the application PDF to reviewing entities and requests they leave comments within seven days. Comments from additional reviewers are often not received within seven days, in which case the Planner follows-up with the reviewing entity by email, phone, or in-person. When all comments are received, the Planner compiles comments and application information into a staff report and disseminates the staff report to PAC members, so they have the data necessary to make an informed recommendation. After each month's applications are submitted to the PAC agenda, the Planner uploads the applications and the upcoming PAC agenda to Trello, a workflow software where the public and stakeholders can view ongoing and past applications.

⁵⁷ The EPL system was previously named EnerGov and is frequently still referred to as such in conversation.

The PAC meeting consists of the PAC voting to recommend either an approval or denial for each application. After the PAC's vote, the Planning Department shares their own recommendation, which typically aligns with the PAC. If the PAC recommends approval, the application is automatically added to the City Council agenda by the Clerk of Council. If the Planning Department recommends denial, the applicant must send a letter to the Clerk of Council requesting to continue forward with the City Council public hearing. The City Council reviews both the Department's and the PAC's recommendation before voting on the application. The City Council's decision typically aligns with the recommendation issued by those bodies.

If the application is added to the City Council agenda, the applicant must run an advertisement for at least 15 days prior to the meeting in the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer notifying the public of the potential rezoning and the upcoming public hearing. The Department also repeats the process of sending notices to property owners that live within 300 feet of the application's property, although the additional notice pertains to the City Council meeting rather than the PAC meeting.

The first City Council meeting consists of a first reading followed by a public hearing where the public can speak to the application, and two weeks later a second meeting follows where Council members vote on the application. If the City Council approves the application resolution, the Principal Planner updates the Trello dashboard to reflect the application's approval and notifies the City's GIS offices to update all relevant maps and plats. If the City Council denies the application resolution, the applicant has the option to refile the application following a six-month waiting period (if the zoning designation remains the same) that begins the day following the date-of-denial. The applicant has the option to refile the application following a one-year waiting period if the zoning designation has changed. The applicant may also appeal the City Council's decision to the Muscogee County Superior Court, which may review the City Council's decision.

Subdivision Plat Review

The Senior Planner ("Planner") is responsible for the intake and processing of subdivision plat applications. Subdivision plat applications typically require less back-and-forth communication with the applicant compared to rezoning and historical preservation since applications are submitted by knowledgeable private surveyors on behalf of the property owner. The Planner reviews the application details and ensures the plat complies with the Unified Development Ordinance and will communicate with applicants to make any needed changes until the plat is in compliance. Upon approval, the Planner sends the application to the CCG Engineering Department and Tax Assessor's Office. After the application leaves the Department, the Senior Planner may also provide status updates as requested to the Surveyor, as the Planner is privy to the application's status as it processes through the multi-Department workflow.

Land Disturbance Plan Review

The Director and Assistant Director are primarily responsible for reviewing land disturbance permits submitted to the CCG Engineering Department (“Engineering Department”) for zoning reviews. The Administrative Support Specialist II within the Engineering Department receives paper applications in-person along with required physical copies of plans and creates a case file in EPL which contains application information, PDF copies of the plans, and payment information. A workflow is then assigned to the application in which external reviewing entities (such as the Planning Department) are asked to review, comment, and approve or deny the application based on their zoning review to ensure the land use is permitted. External reviewing entities also receive physical copies of the plans.

Historical Preservation

Board of Historical & Architectural Review and Uptown Façade Board

The City of Columbus maintains 11 historic districts that consist mainly of residential properties. The City also maintains two historic districts in their Uptown neighborhood that consist mainly of commercial properties – the Central Riverfront District and the Uptown District. For all historic districts, property owners must submit a Certificate of Appropriateness application to the City if they wish to majorly modify the exterior or of their property or modify the façade of the building.

The Planner is responsible for processing Certificate of Appropriateness applications in these 13 districts, which are then reviewed by the Board of Historical & Architectural Review (“BHAR”) or the Uptown Façade Board (“UFB”), for historic districts and Uptown districts, respectively. The Planner serves as Secretary of both Boards. The Certificate of Appropriateness application process and intake follows that of rezoning, except Certificate of Appropriateness applications do not require public notices and external reviewing entities are limited to just the Inspections & Code Department. The Planner receives applications and reviews to ensure completeness before providing the application to the Administrative Assistant for payment information processing. The Planner then posts the application and upcoming BHAR and UFB hearing details to Trello. At the upcoming Board of Historical & Architectural Review or Uptown Façade Board meeting, the body then recommends an approval or rejection. Subsequent processes are identical to the rezoning application processes.

The Planner also participates in enforcement activities alongside the CCG Inspections & Code Department to identify properties that are out of compliance. Based on M&J interviews, many businesses owners are unaware of signage permits needed if their businesses reside within historical districts. As a result, it is a common occurrence for businessowners to install signage or make material changes to the property that have not been approved. New business owners were previously made aware of signage and façade requirements by the staff of Uptown Columbus Inc. – an Uptown revitalization non-profit. However, due to leadership changes, Uptown Columbus Inc. staff have stopped providing such information to new business owners for the past two years.

Geographic Information System Maintenance

The Geographic Information System (“GIS”) Coordinator prepares maps for proposed rezoning cases, updates existing maps to reflect rezoning and special exceptions, and works with the Transportation Division to provide geospatial data of high-volume traffic corridors. The GIS Manager housed within the CCG Information Technology Department maintains communication with the GIS Coordinator to assign workload and ensure coordination of projects between GIS divisions/employees decentralized within other City departments. However, the GIS Coordinator reports to the Department Director. Therefore, the Director completes the GIS Coordinator’s performance appraisals, and is primarily involved in hiring decisions for the GIS Coordinator position assigned to the Department, in addition to approving the types of training that can be obtained. As there is not a requirement for the GIS Manager to be involved in hiring decisions, performance appraisals, and training opportunities, it is up to the discretion of the Director to involve the GIS Manager in such decisions. As such, the GIS Coordinator position within the Department is not formally accountable to the GIS Manager, which creates governance issues when assigning workloads. Also, training opportunities received by GIS positions are inconsistent between departments, affecting the retention and talent of employees.

The Senior Planner also performs GIS functions, specifically pertaining to gathering spatial data that the Department uses to inform decisions, such as the number of a specific type of business within the City.

Both staff members make extensive use of the ArcGIS platform to perform their role, which facilitates the collection, storage, analysis, and mapping of spatial data.

Long-term Planning

The Department conducts long-term planning for the City in part through its creation of a 20-year comprehensive plan. In 2018, the Department created the “2038 Comprehensive Plan,” which outlines a 20-year road map for the City’s future in categories ranging from Land Use to Urban Services. The comprehensive planning process includes public meetings and other outreach methods to gauge community feedback.

The comprehensive planning process is a collaborative effort across City departments, elected officials, regional and local leaders, residents, and other stakeholders. The Department publishes updates to the 2038 Comprehensive Plan on an as-needed basis, with the most recent update occurring in 2023.

Transportation Planning

The Transportation Planning Division consists of two Senior Transportation Planners, an Administrative Assistant, and a Planner position that was vacant at the time of M&J fieldwork). The Division supports the regional C-PC-MPO and performs various planning duties for CCG capital projects.

Columbus - Phenix City Metropolitan Planning Organization (C-PC-MPO)

The C-PC-MPO is one of 16 MPOs in Georgia and serves as the transportation planning body for all or part of the Georgia counties of Muscogee, Chattahoochee, and Harris; and the Alabama counties of Russell and Lee.

Staff produce C-PC-MPO quarterly budget reports, update federally required C-PC-MPO's strategy documents, and liaise between C-PC-MPO components, which include the aforementioned counties plus the Federal Highway Administration ("FHWA"), Federal Transit Administration ("FTA"), Georgia Department of Transportation ("GDOT"), Alabama Department of Transportation ("ALDOT"), Georgia Department of Revenue ("GDOR"), and the Transportation Investment Act ("TIA") Division of the Georgia State Financing and Investment Commission ("GSFIC").

Federally Required Plans

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan ("MTP") is a 20-year guiding document for the C-PC-MPO that is edited every five years, most recently in 2024. While the MTP is typically written by Department staff, a lack of tenured staff led the Director to contract out the creation of the 2024 MTP to Pond & Company, an engineering and planning firm that offers comprehensive planning services. A required subsection of the MTP is the Congestion Management Process ("CMP"), which Pond & Company sub-contracted out to engineering and planning firm Benesch.

The Transportation Improvement Plan ("TIP") is a 4-year guiding document for the C-PC-MPO that budgets upcoming projects and is created by a Senior Transportation Planner. All projects in the TIP are selected from the MTP.

The Unified Planning Work Plan ("UPWP") is a 1-year guiding document for the C-PC-MPO that details specific projects for the upcoming fiscal year and associated budgets. It is written by the same Senior Transportation Planner that writes the TIP. All projects listed in the UPWP are pulled from the TIP, and the projects listed in the TIP are in turn pulled from the MTP. Thus, UPWP acts as the day-to-day transportation project guide for C-PC-MPO entities.

The MTP, CMP, TIP, and UPWP are each sent to GDOT and ALDOT upon completion, who review the document and make comments. Since these are all federally required documents, GDOT and ALDOT send the final version to the FHWA.

The Senior Transportation Planners are responsible for drafting amendments to the MTP, CMP, TIP, and UPWP as needed. Upon drafting any amendments, the Senior Transportation Planners submit the draft amendments as a resolution to the agendas of the C-PC-MPO Technical Coordinating Committee ("TCC") and Policy Coordinating Committee ("PCC"), which meet monthly to approve the MTP, CMP, TIP, and UPWP final documents and future amendments. The TCC consists of C-PC-MPO technical leadership (e.g., Phenix City Director of Engineering), while the PCC consists of C-PC-MPO political leadership (e.g., Lee County Commission Chair). Amendment resolutions pass through the TCC first, who use their technical expertise to modify as needed, before then being voted on by the PCC. The Department's Administrative Assistant serves as Secretary of both Committees, which entails preparing TCC/PCC agendas and minutes, and posting to Trello to be accessible to the public.

Quarterly Compliance Reporting

One of the two Senior Transportation Planners completes C-PC-MPO budget reports at the end of each quarter which are submitted to GDOT and ALDOT, who sends them to FHWA, who reimburses the C-PC-MPO through GDOT and ALDOT. 80% of C-PC-MPO funds come from the FHWA.

Capital Projects

The other Senior Transportation Planner, who is not responsible for creating federally required plans, assumes transportation capital project responsibilities such as conducting plan reviews for transportation capital projects and coordinating with developers to amend plans. Other duties of the Senior Transportation Planner include conducting project site visits and attending meetings related to projects.

Transportation Investment Act Program/Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax

The Georgia Transportation Investment Act Program (“TIA”) provides a way for congressional regions within Georgia to fund necessary transportation infrastructure projects through a voter-approved one-cent Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (“TSPLOST”). CCG is part of the River Valley region which includes 16 Georgia counties. The Department utilizes TSPLOST funding to fund its capital projects. The Department coordinates with other counties within the River Valley region to identify proposed TIA-funded capital projects within an Approved Investment List which is included within ballots to present capital projects to voters when voting to authorize the TSPLOST every 10 years.

Right-of-way Coordination

The Senior Transportation Planner is responsible for coordinating right-of-way acquisition for City capital projects, which are required 40-50% of the time. This entails sending out letters informing the property owner(s), coordinating with third party appraisers to appraise the property before and after the property is impacted, and coordinating with attorneys to protect the interests of the City and the property owner.

Public Participation Plan

The Senior Transportation Planner also writes Public Participation Plans (“PPP”) for transportation related capital projects. Such plans are required by the FHWA/FTA if the project uses state funds (i.e. T-SPLOST), and each PPP contains capital project details and timelines along with methods for the public to engage with the project.

Multi-Modal Plan

The Planner position, which was vacant during M&J fieldwork, is intended to create a CCG multi-modal plan that outlines bicycle and pedestrian goals for the City. Execution of the plan entails working with non-profit groups and CCG METRA, who are heavily involved in existing pedestrian and bicycle trails. Examples of projects included in the multi-model plan include expansion of the City’s “dragonfly trails,” Columbus’s urban hiking trails. Until the Planner position is filled, A Department Senior Transportation Planners is overseeing bicycle and pedestrian related planning responsibilities to cover the anticipated vacant Planner position.

Customer Service

The Department engages with customers when conducting minor land disturbance plan reviews and processing applications for rezoning, special exceptions, zoning verification letters, BHAR, UFB, and subdivision plat permits. Since no online application portal exists, customers must receive and submit applications in-person or print a PDF version of the application, fill it out by hand, then scan the application and send it to the Department over email. In addition, no online payment portal exists to pay application fees, thus requiring customers to mail or hand deliver cash and checks, or provide card details to a Department staff member over the phone. In summary, the Department's application and payment process is entirely manual and lacks digital functionalities like an online application or payment portal that'd reduce customer confusion and accelerate application speed.

Use of Technology

The Department relies on four technologies: Trello, EPL, Catalis Payments, and ArcGIS.

Trello

Trello is the public-facing software that Department staff use to upload applications for rezoning, special exceptions, zoning verification letters, BHAR, and UFB. Staff also post resources for the PAC, BHAR, and UFB, such as, agendas, and minutes. As such, Trello serves as a repository for planning documents that applicants and the general public may wish to view.

Enterprise Permitting and Licensing

EPL by Tyler Technologies is the software the Department uses to create and track case files for rezoning, special exception, BHAR, UFB, and subdivision plat applications. Case files include details like plat maps, property owner information, and property attributes, however Planning staff typically just enter a summary of application details and payment information into EPL as the software's current use in the Department to create a case file with a corresponding invoice for internal tracking purposes.

Catalis Payments (formerly known as nCourt)

Following the intake of the application, the respective Planner brings the Administrative Assistant the EPL case file and invoice, and the Administrative Assistant processes the payment. If the payment type is a credit card, the customer must complete a credit card authorization form (either submitted with online application or provided over the phone) containing their credit card information. Upon receiving the case file and invoice from EPL, the Administrative Assistant utilizes a Catalis Payments (formerly known as nCourt) credit card machine stored in their office and a Catalis Payments payment portal to charge the card. It should be noted not every staff member has a credit card machine to process payments during application intake.

For cash and check payment types (either provided in-person or by mail), the Administrative Assistant records the receipt in the in-house “Engineering / Planning Receipt System”. The Administrative Assistant stores the cash or check in a lock box in their office and deposits the payment at Synovus Bank at the end of day or end of week, depending on the amount. The Administrative Assistant sends the CCG Finance Department a balance sheet report, showing the amount of cash and check payments processed for each type of application, at the end of each day. The Administrative Assistant also receives daily reconciliation reports from Catalis Payments that show credit card transactions processed and deposited, which the Administrative Assistant provides to the CCG Finance Department.

It should be noted that credit card payments for applications are not charged until documentation is brought to the Administrative Assistant. As a result, there have been instances of zoning verification letters being issued to customers prior to their cards being charged. In some instances, if the card is declined, Department staff must reach out to the customer to provide an alternate payment method after the application has been processed, and the letter has been issued.

Catalis Payments does not communicate with EPL, requiring payment information to be recorded and processed within systems that are not associated with tracking applications. During interviews, M&J learned that Tyler Payments is used in the CCG Inspections & Code Department which integrates with EPL and eliminates the need for a third-party payment processor. Although staff have access to a Tyler Payments credit card machine, it has not yet been installed or implemented.

ArcGIS

The Department’s GIS Coordinator and Senior Planner use ArcGIS by ESRI in their roles. ArcGIS is a cloud-based GIS platform that facilitates the creation, visualization, and sharing of spatial information through web maps and applications. The GIS Coordinator uses the software to map updates to the City’s zoning boundaries, historic districts, and plat ownership, and the Senior Planner will use the GIS database to provide spatial data as needed, as well as perform plat mergers or divisions.

Digitization and Equipment

Plan reviews are currently done primarily using a physical set of plans. While EPL may contain a PDF version of site plans, due to it not being a plan review software, reviewers cannot mark up the plans or interact with the plans. This contrasts with the CCG Inspections & Code Department, which uses touchscreen iPlanTables that present plans digitally and allows for comments and mark-ups. The Department has already purchased their own iPlanTables and plans to install the technology and integrate them into day-to-day processes in the months following the Department’s move into City Hall.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

Guiding documentation of the Department's operations include the CCG Unified Development Ordinance ("UDO"), and Department 2025 Policies & Procedures and 2025 Standard Operating Procedure ("SOP") documents. Within the Transportation Planning division specifically, the day-to-day guiding document is the 2025 Unified Planning Work Program ("UPWP"), while the longer-term strategic document is the 2024-2027 Transportation Improvement Program ("TIP"). New staff are introduced to the Department's guiding documentation during onboarding, and existing staff are familiarized with amendments and additions to guiding documentation via an email and during periodic Department-wide team meetings.

Unified Development Ordinance

The UDO is a collection of all CCG zoning, special exception, overlay, etc., ordinances. While the City Council is responsible for amending the UDO, the Department reviews the UDO to ensure compliance when processing applications, crafting quarterly reports, and creating policy recommendations to Council.

2025 Policies & Procedures

The Department recently updated their policies and procedures document in February 2025 after the document had not been updated in approximately ten years. The document details the following policies and procedures:

- Code of Ethics & Prohibited Practices
 - Conflict of Interests
 - Disclosure
 - Use of public property
 - Testimony of public officials relating to public affairs
 - Contracts voidable and rescindable
 - Ineligibility of elected officials
 - Political activities of certain officers and employees
 - Penalties for violation
- Work Hours / Attendance
- Calling in Sick / Late
- Compensatory Time
- Time Sheets
- Lunch
- Staff Meetings
- Office Supplies
- Telephone / Voice Mail
- Out of Office

- Reports / Presentations to Council / Boards / Citizens
- Citywide Policies & Procedures
- Responsibility for Petty Cash / Balancing Money from Cash Register
- Communications with City Executives, Media, and General Public

2025 Standard Operating Procedures

The Department recently updated their SOP document in February 2025. Prior to the document's update it had not been updated for ten years. As such, the SOP is up-to-date and accurately reflects the Department's current processes and procedures. The document details SOPs for the following workflows:

- Rezoning Applications
- Special Exceptions Applications
- Zoning Verification Letter Applications
- Subdivision Review Applications
- Board of Historic and Architectural Review Applications
- Uptown Façade Board Applications

FY25 Unified Planning Work Program

The UPWP is an annual transportation planning process document required by laws most recently amended in the "Infrastructure, Investment & Jobs" Act (2021). Submission of the Program to the federal government is required of all MPOs by the Federal Highway Administration ("FHWA") and Federal Transit Authority ("FTA") in exchange for funding.

The UPWP is created by one of the Department's Senior Transportation Planners and identifies the budget for the upcoming fiscal year and the projects the C-PC-MPO will take on in the upcoming year. M&J's interviews with staff indicated that they frequently reference the document and adhere to the document when making budgetary or strategic decisions.

2024-2027 Transportation Improvement Program

The TIP is an implementation plan created by one of the Department's Senior Transportation Planners that outlines four-year scope C-PC-MPO projects, their budgets, and short-term goals. The TIP offers defined projects such as "*Resurfacing on Opelika Road from SR-38 to the City Limits,*" and goals such as, "*Locate the top five most dangerous intersections.*"

Based on M&J's interviews, Transportation Division staff utilize the TIP when creating the UPWP, quarterly budgets, and assigning workload and making day-to-day decisions.

Strategic Priorities

Departmental strategic priorities are outlined in the CCG 2038 Comprehensive Plan and the 2025 Strategic Action Plan. C-PC-MPO strategic priorities are outlined in the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan ("MTP").

2038 Comprehensive Plan

The 2038 Comprehensive Plan was created by the Department in 2018 and outlines the City’s 20-year goals in categories like finance, land use, transportation, service quality, etc. The Department updated the 2038 Comprehensive Plan in 2023.

Chapter four of the plan, “Land Use,” pertains to Planning-specific topics and outlines the following goals:

- Provide for more mixed-use development opportunities to create more density, reduce impacts on city services, and provide retail, jobs, and other amenities for residents.
- Study modern zoning regulations, techniques, and concepts to incorporate into the UDO. Examples include form-based codes; accessory dwelling units; pocket neighborhoods; incremental development; and/or transit-oriented design.
- Incentivize development within walking/bicycling distance of existing and future transit and trail corridors to improve location efficiency for housing, employment, recreation, and civic spaces.
- Incentivize adaptive reuse such as density bonuses, fire code modification, administrative variances, and discounted city fees.
- Incentivize private parties repurposing grayfields.
- Barriers to redevelopment should be identified and potentially amended or removed, to Infill development back into the urban core.
- Conduct a land needs assessment to identify buildable land and lands available for redevelopment.

M&J’s interviews with Department staff indicated that the Department is working towards the goals outlined in the 2038 Comprehensive Plan.

Since 2018 (when the 2038 Comprehensive Plan was created) the majority of zoning activity has occurred incrementally through the adoption by Council of dozens of site-specific rezoning applications annually. This is in contrast to the creation of “overlay districts,” which Department staff expressed enthusiasm for as these districts would lessen application load and allow CCG to respond proactively to their 2038 Comprehensive Plan goals.

The rezoning resolutions passed since 2018, however, favor mixed use developments in the urban core, indicating success by Council in re-densifying Uptown Columbus and repurposing grayfield lots. According to M&J’s interviews with staff, City Council accepts the Department’s opinion on most applications. Although the Department may not be driving its long-term rezoning goals; its goals and Council’s resolutions are typically in alignment.

2025 Strategic Action Plan

The 2025 Strategic Action Plan (“SAP”) is more Department-specific and short-term than the 2038 Comprehensive Plan.

The five strategic goals that the SAP outlines are:

- Increase citizen involvement and communication
- Manage planning and growth activities through a strong and meaningful vision for Columbus (Comprehensive Plan)
- Maintain a professional and versatile Planning staff
- Become a nationally recognized Planning Department
- Protect and preserve the environment

Each of the goals is separated into five subsections that analyze:

- Impact for Citizens
- Challenges
- Opportunities
- Action Plans
- Measures of Success

An example and analysis of one goal and its subsections is outlined in the *Performance Metrics/Outputs* section of this report.

2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Congestion Management Process

The MTP and CMP are performance management documents required by all MPOs and submitted to the FHWA every five years. Like TIPs, MTPs and CMPs are a condition of the “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century” (2012) Act and “Fixing America’s Surface Transportation” (2015) Act. The 2050 MTP and CMP were created in 2024. The purpose of a MTP and CMP are to set a 20-year vision for the MPO; funding does not have to be secured for proposed projects.

Although the 2024 MTP and CMP were created by contractors and not in-house, staff reference the document when creating the TIP, which in turn informs the UPWP on which projects will be undertaken that specific year and corresponding budgets.

Additional Strategic Priorities

Based on Department information and conversations with staff, M&J identified the following areas in which proposed changes may create more strategic opportunities for the Department:

- **Digitization:** The Department has already purchased iPlanTables and plans to install them in their new City Hall office in the months following their January 2026 move. Also, staff are seeking out methods to move the application details online. The Department has many opportunities to increase digitization such as by transferring the credit card processing platform from Catalis Payments to EPL’s platform (Tyler Payments), thereby eliminating the use of a payment processor which does not communicate with EPL. Furthermore, the Department could allow customers to make payments online instead of having staff take payments manually. The Department has also been in contact with the CCG Information Technology Department to move applications online.

Based on M&J's interviews and fieldwork, the CCG Inspections & Code Department has recently succeeded in digitizing online applications and payments via EPL (and Tyler Payments), publicly displaying applications via EPL's Civic Access Self Service Portal, and utilizing iPlanTables. The Inspections & Code Department was the pilot department for implementation of new electronic features and platforms before migrating other departments with interrelated processes (i.e. Planning and Engineering), to the platform fully.

- **Customer Service:** Digitizing the application process and its accompanying payment would save the customer time and streamline their application process. The Department's recently updated SOPs also set a performance measure that customer emails should be replied to within 48 hours and calls returned within 24 hours.
- **Fee Schedule Update:** Based on information received and interviews, the Department has not updated its fee schedule at least within the last five years. As such, the Department's current fees may not be capturing actual costs of providing services.
- **Documentation and Cross-Training:** A 20-year tenured employee who carried a host of knowledge specific to the Department's operations recently retired. The experience has pushed the Department Director and Assistant Director to prioritize multiple employees receive the same trainings and certifications from GDOT, AICP, etc. as well as encouraging cross-training between employees. Furthermore, the Department updated both its SOP and Policies and Procedures document in 2025, which were last updated ten years ago.
- **Traffic Reduction:** The C-PC-MPO has contracted with GDOT to conduct a traffic reduction study surrounding the City's numerous schools during school drop off and pick up times. Additionally, multiple goals outlined in the C-PC-MPO TIP address the MPO's desire to decrease future congestion.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

The Department's Planning Division tracks submitted application volume via Trello, although application-related metrics like application review turnaround time or a customer journey of where applications stopped are not formally measured. The Department is collaborating with the CCG Information Technology Department to integrate EPL's online Civic Access Self Service Portal into the application process, after which the Department will be able to run reports to better measure application metrics like turnaround time.

The Director conducts annual performance evaluations mandated by the CCG Human Resources Department, though the results of the evaluations are not tied to monetary incentives.

Based on M&J's analysis, the objectives outlined in the 2025 Strategic Action Plan ("SAP") are vague and lack the details necessary to qualify success versus failure. "Vague" goals are defined as lacking specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound language.

The breakdown of strategic goal, “Become a nationally recognized planning department,” is as follows, with vague descriptors italicized and underlined.

- Impact for Citizens
 - Better understanding of how planning works in our community
 - Community ownership of planning operations by our citizens
 - Increase in trust and credibility as a planning organization
- Challenges
 - Financial constraints and staffing
 - Finding new ways to be innovative with our planning programs
- Opportunities:
 - National recognition for ourselves and our community
 - Self-promotion of our planning programs
 - Design ways to reach a broader audience
 - Increase efficiency and effectiveness
- Action Plans:
 - Establish and maintain innovative planning programs that increase citizen involvement and communication
 - Manage planning and growth activities through a strong and meaningful vision for Columbus (comprehensive plan)
 - Maintain a professional staff
- Measures of Success:
 - Recognition by national, state and local professional organizations for our planning efforts and programs

As an example, “vague” descriptors are underlined in the following statement - “Design ways to reach a broader audience.” The term “ways” is not defined and lacks specificity; and the term “broader audience” does not have an accompanying numeric value, and is not time-bound since no timeline of when the goal needs to be achieved. It will be very difficult for the Department to maintain clear action items and measure success without further specificity and clarity.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

The Department’s work environment and culture is positive. During M&J interviews, staff consistently praised Department leadership and expressed satisfaction in their positions.

The Department is a close-knit team, which aids in communication. Formal all-team meetings are rarely scheduled, as management maintains an open-door policy according to staff and encourages information to disseminate organically between Department staff. M&J interviews suggest that staff are satisfied with communications.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: Applicants paying by cash or check may submit their payment by mail or in-person. Mailed check payments are more subject to fraud risk as they are more likely to be lost, stolen, or altered.

Recommendation 1: To mitigate risks associated with mailed checks as a form of payment, the Department should phase out the acceptance of mailed checks.

Observation 2: Rezoning and special exception applications often require additional review and commentary from external (CCG departments and City offices outside the Planning Department) review entities. Review requests are sent by Planners over email with the request to review and comment within seven days. However, it is common for external review entities to not reply within seven days, forcing Planners to follow-up with the individual by email, phone, or in-person. The manual follow-up creates extra work for Planning staff and delays application processing speed.

Recommendation 2: The Department should collaborate with external departments' (CCG departments and City offices outside the Planning Department) leadership to define realistic, yet customer friendly, service level agreements ("SLA"s) for response times. Upon functional implementation, and when applications are processed through EPL instead of email, the Departments should utilize the EPL case file sharing functionality to enable Department staff and external reviewers to create relevant comments, attachments, etc., in a common electronic shared file, which would also enable CCG department and City office leadership the ability to hold lower level staff more accountable.

Observation 3A: There is no method to apply for zoning, special exception, BHAR, UFB, and subdivision plat applications online. All applications are available online as PDFs, but applicants must print the PDF, fill it out, scan it, and then submit the scanned PDF via email if the applicant does not wish to submit the application in-person. As a result, Planners report experiencing issues with incomplete applications that require them to go back-and-forth with the applicant to obtain relevant information. Furthermore, Planners must manually enter application and payment details into EPL. Although EPL has the capability to allow the public to submit applications themselves, the Department has not yet implemented this function.

Observation 3B: The CCG Inspections & Code Department has implemented an online customer Civic Access Self Service portal which integrates with EPL which allows customers to complete applications, pay fees/charges, and view application status online. Based on discussions with staff, the City plans to implement the customer portal in other departments with interrelated processes.

Recommendation 3A: The City should continue its plan to utilize EPL’s Civic Access Self Service as an online application portal for the Department where customers can use to submit for rezoning, special exception, BHAR, and UFB applications. Implementing the Civic Access Self Service public-facing application portal capability would eliminate the need for manual application review and entry by Planners, could allow for an automated workflow and checklist of requirements, and could improve customer service and timeliness.

Recommendation 3B: The CCG Information Technology Department and the Planning Department should ensure that workflows and functionality is customized to the Department and its specific processes upon implementation and design of the EPL Civic Access Self Service portal for the Department. The Department should be involved in the design and rollout of the portal and should include other departments involved in Planning Department workflows to help ensure buy-in. Upon implementation, the CCG Information Technology Department should ensure that Department staff (and other involved parties) receive adequate training to utilize the new features implemented.

Observation 4: Trello is currently used as the repository for applicants and the public to view ongoing and past applications. However, EPL has an in-house application called Civic Access Self Service online portal which integrates with EPL’s application intake software, therefore no extra effort is required to keep the platform updated on the Planning staff member’s end. The portal is currently in use within the Inspections & Code Department.

Recommendation 4: The Planning Department should consider replacing Trello with the Civic Access Self Service Portal, which not only would reduce Planning staff member workload and let applicants more easily view their application status but also synchronize mediums with the Inspections & Code Department, so customer experience is consistent across CCG Departments.

Observation 5: Based on interviews, many business owners are unaware of signage permits needed if their business resides within historical districts. As a result, it is a common occurrence for businessowners to install signage or make material changes to the property that have not been approved. The Uptown revitalization non-profit, “Uptown Columbus Inc.,” previously made business owners aware of UFB requirements upon them moving into a property, although in the past two years changes in leadership have led the organization to stop fulfilling this role.

Recommendation 5: The Department should collaborate with the Inspections & Code and Finance Departments to create educational materials to distribute to businessowners upon receiving business licenses to decrease and prevent instances of noncompliance with historical district requirements. The Department should also explore the possibility of revitalizing the role of Uptown Columbus Inc. in increasing compliance awareness for new Uptown businesses.

Observation 6: The GIS Manager housed within the CCG Information Technology Department maintains communication with the GIS Coordinator to assign workload and ensure coordination of projects between GIS divisions/employees decentralized within other City departments. However, the GIS Coordinator reports to the Department Director. Therefore, the Director completes the GIS Coordinator's performance appraisals, and is primarily involved in hiring decisions for the GIS Coordinator position assigned to the Department, in addition to approving the types of training that can be obtained. As there is not a requirement for the GIS Manager to be involved in hiring decisions, performance appraisals, and training opportunities, it is up to the discretion of the Director to involve the GIS Manager in such decisions. As such, the GIS Coordinator position within the Department is not formally accountable to the GIS Manager, which creates governance issues when assigning workloads. Also, training opportunities received by GIS positions are inconsistent between departments, affecting the retention and talent of employees.

Recommendation 6: The City should consider implementing a different staffing/reporting model for current shadow IT roles that exist external to the IT Department. The City could consider the following alternative approaches:

- The City could house shadow IT roles within the IT Department and therefore, current shadow IT roles would be centralized within the IT Department, based out of the IT Department office, and report directly and solely to the IT Director or designee.
- The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments but instead of reporting to individual department directors, the shadow IT roles would solely report to and be held accountable by the IT Director or designee. As a result, shadow IT roles would exist under the IT Department but would be located within the respective departments they support.

The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments and implement a dual-reporting relationship for shadow IT positions \which establishes a reporting relationship with the external positions and the IT Director (or designee) to promote accountability and collaboration with the IT Department.

Observation 7A: Applicants paying with cash or check may submit their payment by mail. Mailed payments increase the Department's risk of not receiving the payment, as mail is more susceptible to theft, fraud, or getting lost than digital payments.

Observation 7B: Credit card payments are not charged until documentation is brought to the Administrative Assistant to swipe cards and process transactions. As a result, there have been instances of zoning verification letters being issued to customers prior to their cards being charged. In some instances, if the card is declined, Department staff must reach out to the customer to provide an alternate payment method after the application has been processed, and the letter has been issued.

Observation 7C: The Department is using Catalis Payments to process credit card payments in addition to an in-house “Engineering / Receipt System” to record check and cash payments, which do not communicate with EPL where applications are tracked. During interviews, M&J learned that Tyler Payments is used in the Inspections & Code Department which communicates with EPL and eliminates the need for a third-party payment processor or receipt system. Although Planning staff have access to a Tyler Payments credit card machine, it has not yet been installed or implemented.

Recommendation 7: The City should continue its plan to utilize EPL’s Civic Access Self Service as an online application portal for the Department where customers submit and pay for applications online and payments are processed through Tyler Payments, which integrates with EPL. A less cumbersome payment processing system that accepts cards online would lead to quicker, more secure citizen payments and eliminate the use of additional portals/systems which do not record payments with applications in one portal. Implementing online payments would also improve the customer experience and ensure that payment is processed prior to issuance of zoning verification letters.

Observation 8: Plans are reviewed manually using physical copies of plans. Staff do not have the ability to annotate plans and do not have a software specifically dedicated to plan reviews. As such, the Department does not possess efficiency-increasing technology like touchscreens, mark-up functionalities, automated permit issuing, etc. During interviews, M&J learned that iPlanTables, which the Department has already purchased and which serve as a plan review software, will be installed and integrated into Department processes in the months following the Department’s move to City Hall.

Recommendation 8: In the months following the Department’s move to City Hall, the Department should continue the process of digitizing their plan review process by implementing iPlanTables.

Observation 9: Efforts to digitize applications and payments via EPL are ongoing and being worked on by the Information Technology Department.

Recommendation 9: The Department should continue working with the Information Technology Department to establish timelines and expectations surrounding implementation of new digital features and platforms. Furthermore, the Department should consider building internal technical capacity by training departmental “super users” to handle routine support and configuration.

Observation 10: The Department’s fee schedule has not been updated for at least five years to reflect current actual costs of service provision. The Department’s costs of providing services may not be fully captured and recouped by the current fee schedule.

Recommendation 10: The Department should consider conducting a fee study to determine the Department’s cost to provide its services and ensure that the Department’s fee schedule accurately captures costs of providing services.

Observation 11: Application-related metrics like application review turnaround time or a customer journey of where applications stopped are not formally measured. With the full implementation of EPL, the Department plans to run reports to better measure customer service.

Recommendation 11: Upon the full implementation of EPL and the Civic Access Self Service online portal, the Department should consider tracking performance metrics that measure various levels of efficiency and customer service such as application turnaround time.

Observation 12: The objectives outlined in the 2025 Strategic Action Plan (“SAP”) are vague and lack the details necessary to objectively qualify success versus failure. Without specific goals, it will be difficult for the Department to maintain clear action items and measure success.

Recommendation 12: The Department’s progress/achievement of annual goals could be more easily quantified if they were benchmarked to certain performance measurements. For example, instead of the goal’s language being “promote our *planning programs*,” the language could be updated to “promote *new rezoning ordinances*.” Additionally, methods could be provided, such as, “promote new rezoning ordinance *by posting one Facebook post for each ordinance*.” Clear measurable goals will better allow the Department to more effectively measure its performance year to year.

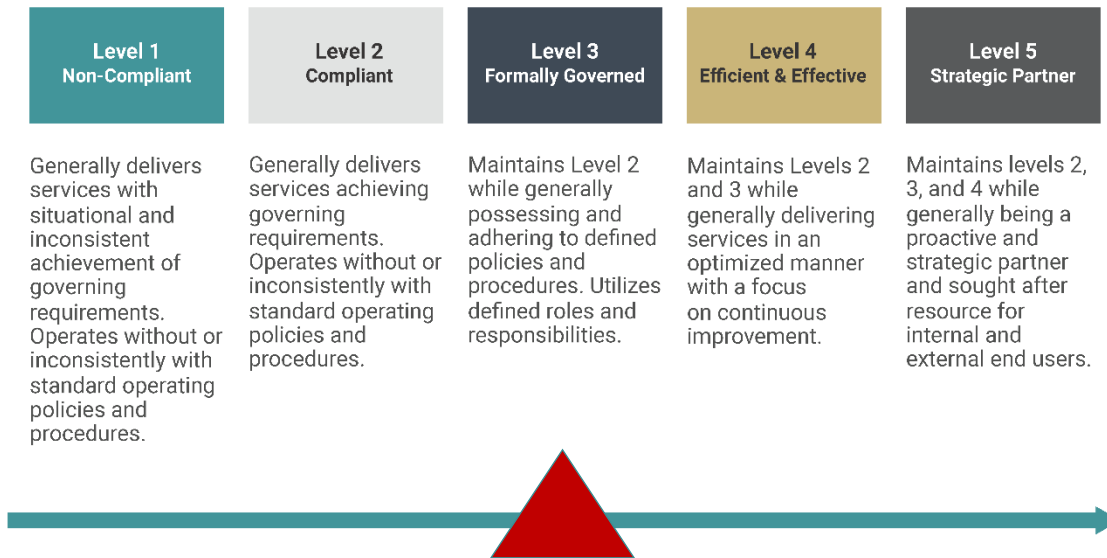
Observation 13: Formal Department-wide meetings are not scheduled regularly. Instead, Department leadership have an “open-door” approach and encourage information to disseminate organically throughout Department staff.

Recommendation 13: The Department should implement formal regular Department-wide meetings biweekly, monthly, or another frequent period. Regardless of whether the Department’s existing communication model, which relies on an “open-door” approach and organic information dissemination, is effective, the Department should standardize communications to prevent accidental communication lapses and increase transparency between leadership and lower-level staff.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department’s maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.

Maturity Model



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Department as **Level 3: Formally Governed**. While the Department is operating efficiently in many ways and is investing in training staff to implement best practices, the Department could be more efficient with the implementation of digitization to improve customer experience and allow for more streamlined application and payment processes.

Conclusion

The Planning Department guides the City's physical, social, and economic development. The Department oversees land use development, cultural and historic preservation, and planning for long-term development. At the time of this report, the Department is meeting governing requirements and working to adhere to goals set in its 2025 Strategic Action Plan, 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, and the City's 2038 Comprehensive Plan.

The Department's application and payment process is outdated and cumbersome for citizens seeking rezoning special exception permits, certificate of appropriateness, and zoning verification letters. Although the Department's application and payment process runs smoothly, the lack of digital technologies and inter-Department SLAs prevents the Department from achieving its full potential efficiency. Modernization is required for the Department to advance from level 3: Formally Governed, to level 4: Efficient and Effective, and eventually to level 5: Strategic Partner.

M&J would like to thank Department leadership, as well as the eight individuals across the Department, for allowing us to conduct the numerous interviews and follow-up interviews that were required to complete this assessment.

3.M Public Works

Introduction

The Columbus Consolidated Government (“CCG” or “City”) Public Works Department (“Department”) is responsible for maintaining and enhancing the City’s essential infrastructure and providing citizen and internal government services, encompassing functions related to street maintenance, beautification, solid waste management, fleet operations, stormwater management, cemetery management, community service, and drivers training/safety coordination. The mission of the Department is to efficiently, effectively, and equitably provide services to CCG citizens.

The vision of the Department is to proactively provide outstanding services to the City in a safe, efficient, and equitable manner while promoting environmental stewardship.

Commendations, Implementation of Leading Practices, Accreditation, and other Recognition

The Department received American Public Works Association (“APWA”) accreditation in 2018, reaccreditation in 2022, and is seeking to be reaccredited for a third time in 2026. At the time of this report, the Department is working towards reaccreditation. The Department was the fourth government in Georgia to receive APWA accreditation in 2018, and, as of the time of this report, is still one of only six Georgia cities and counties to hold APWA accreditation. Initial accreditation requires a government to be in full compliance with 95%+ of APWA recommended practices, and reaccreditation requires 97%+ compliance. A collection of APWA evaluators assesses compliance via document review, site visits, and interviews with staff.

A core element of APWA is a focus on safety, which is a leading priority of the Department. The Department’s Safety Coordinator prepares safety briefings on various topics, which are delivered by supervisory staff within the Department’s divisions daily before shifts begin. Also, safety skills and best practices are demonstrated annually via an “equipment rodeo,” in which different teams are scored on their handling of equipment. Prior to the equipment rodeo, an employee athlete event was sponsored annually where staff were scored on how well they performed safety-critical functions such as shoveling rocks into a wheelbarrow or riding on a moving refuse truck. In 2024, the Fleet Management Division Manager further enhanced employee safety by erecting a gate around the fleet yard and facility in addition to speed bumps to control traffic flow. Prior to the gate, it was common for vehicles to enter and exit the fleet yard at high speeds and in quick succession, posing a safety risk to on-duty staff.

The Department’s Fleet Management Division is working to enhance customer service for CCG internal customers. The Fleet Management Division Manager recently created two Service Writer roles to reduce administrative burden for the shops’ supervisory staff and give them more capacity to oversee Shop operations. Previously, supervisory staff were responsible for providing weekly reports to end-user departments, informing them of the status of vehicles in the Department’s various fleet shops. Service Writers have since taken on status report responsibilities, thereby improving customer service and allowing supervisory staff to focus on overseeing the Department’s various fleet shops.

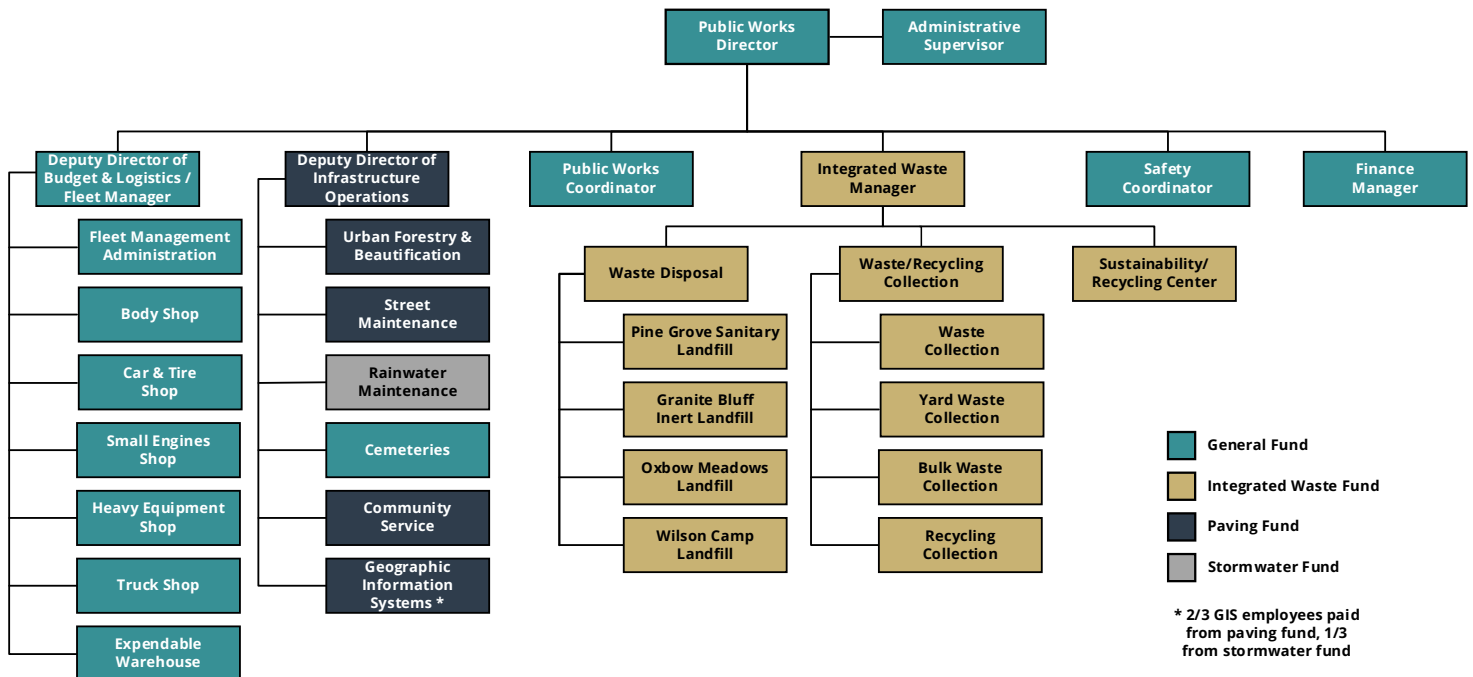
The Department is placing an emphasis on technological innovation. The Integrated Waste Division recently purchased Routeware, a waste collection routing software, to optimize waste collection routes and evolve away from paper maps. The Integrated Waste Division is also installing Samsara cameras in refuse trucks to monitor driver safety practices. The Rainwater Maintenance Division has provided Maintenance Workers with tablets so they can take before and after pictures of projects to be logged and provided to customers. The Community Service Section is collaborating with the CCG Police Department to install cameras at common illegal dumping sites to make the practice less prevalent and to increase enforcement. The Fleet Management Division is searching for an upgraded asset management software that will offer customers live status updates throughout the repair process as well as other functionalities that will enhance efficiency.

The Department is working with the Landfill Group LLC to develop and construct a renewable natural gas (“RNG”) facility at Pine Grove Sanitary Landfill. The Landfill Group LLC’s subsidiary, Enerdyn Power Systems Inc, is responsible for processing the landfill’s methane gas emissions into pipeline quality RNG that can be used in homes, industry and transportation. Based on interviews, the project is underway, and the methane gas will be cleaned to pipeline standard and injected into the Liberty Utilities (Peach State Natural Gas) Corporation’s distribution system. Once completed, the initiative will be a profit-generating and environmentally sustainable addition to the City.

Organization and Staffing

The Public Works Department is led by the Public Works Director (“Director”) with the assistance of a Deputy Director of Infrastructure Operations and a Deputy Director of Budget & Logistics. At the time of this report, in FY26, the Department was allotted 391 full-time positions, 13 part-time positions, 40 temporary positions, and, based on interviews, utilizes approximately 236 inmates through the work release program with the Muscogee County Prison.

The following organizational chart depicts the Department's structure:



Historically, the Department included an Animal Control Division and a Facilities Maintenance Division. On February 1, 2025, the Animal Control Division was eliminated, and CCG contracted with PAWS Humane Society to manage CCG's animal care and control functions. As such, positions within the previous Animal Control Division were eliminated from the Department effective July 1, 2025. Also, effective July 1, 2025, the Facilities Maintenance Division transitioned to become its own Department, resulting in the elimination of its positions from the Department.

The Department includes the following divisions/sections/teams:

- Fleet Management Division
- Urban Forestry & Beautification Division
- Street Maintenance Division
- Rainwater Maintenance Division
- Cemeteries Division
- Community Service Section
- Geographic Information Systems Section
- Integrated Waste Division
- Safety Training Division
- Administration Team

The staffing and organizational structure of each division/section/team is expanded on below excluding the Safety Training Division, which only contains a single staff member (Safety Coordinator). Each of the following staff headcounts are based upon the FY26 budget.

Fleet Management

The Fleet Management Division (“Division”) is led by the Fleet Manager, who also serves as the Department’s Deputy Director of Budget & Logistics. The Division includes 35 full-time staff, and four inmates separated across five Fleet Shops and an Administration team. Inmates are split into two two-inmate details, which are each overseen by a Shop Supervisor. The Division also utilizes temporary staff, whose numbers vary from year to year.

Each Shop is led by a Supervisor, who oversees a team of Technicians. Technicians may be a Technician I, II, or III, depending on experience. Shops include the Car Shop, Truck Shop, Small Engine Shop, Heavy Equipment Shop, and Body Shop. The Tire Shop reports to the Car Shop. Due to the volume of the Car Shop’s tire-related workload, the Fleet Management Manager permanently assigned a Technician III to tire-related work, as well as two of the Division’s four inmates. The Division also includes an Expendable Warehouse which houses a stock of supplies for CCG departments for daily needs such as cleaning supplies. The Expendable Warehouse includes an Inventory Control Technician.

The Division maintains its own Administrative team that includes the following roles:

- Administrative Technician,
- Finance Operations Administrator,
- Senior Buyer,
- Contract Warranty Specialist, and
- Inventory Control Technician

The Fleet Management facility also hosts an on-site NAPA Auto Shop staffed by NAPA Auto Shop personnel.

Urban Forestry & Beautification

The Urban Forestry & Beautification Division (“Division”) is led by the Urban Forestry & Beautification Manager, who reports to the Deputy Director of Infrastructure Operations. The Urban Forestry & Beautification Manager role is currently vacant and is being performed by an Interim Manager. The Division is allotted 87 full-time staff, two temporary staff, and 80 inmates.

The Division is split into two subdivisions: Urban Forestry and Beautification. Urban Forestry is allotted 19 full-time staff, Beautification is allotted 64 full-time staff and two temporary staff, and the Division’s administrative team is allotted four full-time staff. The Division’s staffing model consists of Supervisors, who oversee Crew Leaders, who oversee teams of Maintenance Worker I’s, Equipment Operators I, II, and III’s, and Tree Trimmers I’s and II’s. Inmates are divided into 10 eight-inmate details which are each overseen by a Correctional Detail Officer.

Street Maintenance

The Street Maintenance Division (“Division”) is led by the Street Maintenance Manager, who reports to the Deputy Director of Infrastructure Operations. The Street Maintenance Manager role is vacant as of the writing of this report, following the previous Manager's promotion to the Deputy Director of Infrastructure Operations. The Division is allotted 77 full-time staff members, 15 temporary staff members, and 32 inmates.

The Division utilizes a tiered operational hierarchy in which Supervisors provide oversight to Crew Leaders, who manage multi-disciplinary teams of Maintenance Workers and Equipment Operators (Levels I–III). This internal workforce is supplemented by a custodial labor program consisting of four eight-person inmate details, each managed by a dedicated Correctional Detail Officer.

Rainwater Maintenance

The Rainwater Maintenance Division (“Division”) is led by the Rainwater Manager, who reports to the Deputy Director of Infrastructure Operations. The Division is allotted 53 full-time staff and 80 inmates, though the number of inmates utilized daily varies.

Led by a Rainwater Manager and an Assistant Rainwater Manager, the Division utilizes a hierarchical staffing model to manage specialized technical trades and maintenance personnel. Field operations are scaled via nine supervised inmate details, ensuring a consistent ratio of one Correctional Detail Officer per eight-person crew for labor-intensive projects.

Cemeteries

The Cemetery Division (“Division”) is led by the Cemetery Manager, who reports to the Deputy Director of Infrastructure Operations. The Division is allotted five full-time staff and one eight-inmate work detail.

In addition to the Manager, the Division staff contains one Crew Leader, one Maintenance Worker, one Equipment Operator, and one Correctional Officer who oversees the eight-inmate work detail.

Community Service

The Community Service Section (“Section”) is led by the Community Service Coordinator, who reports to the Deputy Director of Infrastructure Operations. The Section is allotted 20 staff, seven of whom are full-time and 13 of whom are part-time Saturday workers who lead details of probationers conducting community service.

Alongside the Community Service Coordinator, the Section’s staff contains one Supervisor, one Waste Equipment Operator, two Crew Leaders, and two Maintenance Workers. Prior to 2020, the Section also utilized inmate details for labor, which has since been discontinued.

Geographic Information Systems

The Geographic Information Systems (“GIS”) Section (“Section”) is led by the GIS Supervisor, who reports to the Deputy Director of Infrastructure Operations. The Section also includes a GIS Technician II and a GIS Technician I. The City’s FY26 budget allots each of the Section’s three staff to different Public Works Divisions, therefore the three personnel do not comprise a unique section according to the FY26 budget. However, for the purpose of clarity this report will refer to the team as a unique section.

Integrated Waste

The Integrated Waste Division (“Division”) is led by the Integrated Waste Manager. The Division has three sections, Waste Collection, Waste Disposal, and Sustainability/Recycling Center each led by a Manager. It should be noted that the four roles (Manager and three Section Managers) have identical titles despite the Integrated Waste Manager overseeing the Section Managers. The Division’s FY26 staff is allotted as follows:

Table 38: Integrated Waste Division Staffing Levels

Staff	Waste Disposal	Waste Collection	Sustainability/ Recycling Center	Total
Full-time	18	90	11	119
Temporary	0	19	4	23
Inmates	18	12	0	30
Total	36	121	15	172

Source: CCG FY26 Budget Book

The Waste Collection Section is led by the Waste Collection Manager. Section duties are divided between six Supervisors. Two Supervisors oversee eight household garbage routes each, two Supervisors oversee six yard waste routes each, one Supervisor oversees 12 recycling routes, and one Supervisor oversees 10 bulk waste routes. Each route has one Waste Equipment Operator, and some also have Waste Collection Workers. The Waste Collection Section also uses two-inmate details in some of its yard waste routes and recycling routes. The collection of waste on CCG Parks & Recreation Department properties is conducted by the Refuse Collection Division of the CCG Parks & Recreation Department, which is allotted three full-time staff and funded through the CCG Parks & Recreation Department budget. The Waste Collection Section also utilizes inmates to perform routine landfill duties. The inmates are organized into six two-inmate details, each overseen by a Section Supervisor.

The Waste Disposal Section is led by the Waste Disposal & Recycling Manager, who oversees the Pine Grove Sanitary Landfill, Oxbow Meadows Landfill, Wilson Camp Landfill, Granite Bluff Inert Landfill, and the Recycling Center. The Waste Disposal Section also contains a Compost Manager who oversees the Inert Landfill. The Waste Disposal & Recycling Manager role is vacant as of the writing of this report, but its duties are being performed by an Interim Manager. Additional staff include two Supervisors who oversee two Heavy Equipment Operators, a Landfill Operator, a Maintenance Technician, a Maintenance Worker, and a Scalehouse Operator. The Waste Disposal Section also utilizes inmates to perform routine landfill duties. Inmates within the Waste Disposal Section are staffed into two eight-inmate details and one two-inmate detail, which are overseen by Correctional Detail Officers and a Section Supervisor, respectively.

The Division previously included a Recycling Section that operated a Department-owned Materials Recovery Facility (“MRF”) with the assistance of Pratt Industries, that supplied recycling equipment to the MRF. The Recycling Section’s duties ceased in 2023 when Pratt Industries removed their equipment from the MRF over profitability concerns. Recycling waste is currently sold to Federal Waste & Recycling, which delivers the recyclables to a privately-owned MRF in Illinois. The 11 full-time and four temporary staff members that were allotted to the Recycling Center are utilized within other areas within the Department at the time of this report.

The Division is one of the only such organizations in the region within the State of Georgia to be referred to as Integrated Waste. Peer providers such as the City of Atlanta, Gwinnett County, Cobb County, Macon-Bibb County, and the City of Albany refer to their equivalent function as solid waste. Other governments such as DeKalb County, the City of Marietta, and the City of Decatur refer to their equivalent function as sanitation. Interviews with Division staff suggested that “Integrated Waste” makes it difficult to attract talent, as the title of the Division is not as common as solid waste or sanitation designations. At the time of this report, the Department is in the process of changing the Integrated Waste Division’s name.

Administration Team

The Administration Team (“Team”) reports directly to the Department Director. The Team includes four full-time staff, including a Public Works Coordinator, who also serves as the Department’s liaison to the CCG Human Resources Department, an Administrative Supervisor who serves as the Director’s assistant, and a Safety Coordinator, who also serves as a part-time Risk Coordinator for the CCG Human Resources Department. The Team also includes a Finance Manager position.

Staffing and Turnover Vacancies

The following table identifies the number of allotted full-time and permanent part-time staff in addition to turnover rates from FY21 to FY25. The Department’s Animal Control and Facilities Maintenance Divisions were present until the FY26 budget, and therefore are reflected in the following metrics.

Table 39: Annual Turnover Rate

Fiscal Year	Allotted Staff (Full and Permanent Part-time)	Turnover Rate
2021	432	24.5%
2022	434	25.8%
2023	441	22%
2024	445	21.1%
2025	462	19.5%

Source: CCG Budget Books FY21-FY25 and Human Resources Department Reports

The Department has experienced above average turnover rates over the last five fiscal years. The average turnover rate for a municipal Public Works Department is approximately 15%, and the Department's average rate was 22.6% over the last five fiscal years. Turnover rates peaked in FY21 and FY22. Turnover steadily declined from FY23 to FY25.

The following table represents an estimate of the annual seasonal, intermittent, or temporary staffing from FY21 to FY25 based on approved seasonal, intermittent, and temporary positions for each fiscal year.

Table 40: Public Works Seasonal, Temporary, and Intermittent Employees, FY21-25

Fiscal Year	Number of Seasonal, Temporary, or Intermittent Staff
2021	17
2022	17
2023	17
2024	40
2025	40

Source: CCG Budget Books FY21-25

Inmates on work release from the Muscogee County Prison are also used as supplemental labor by the Fleet Management, Urban Forestry & Beautification, Street Maintenance, Rainwater Maintenance, Cemeteries, and Integrated Waste Divisions. Inmate details are divided into two categories: eight-inmate work details that require armed supervision by a licensed Correctional Detail Officer (“red card” inmates), and two-inmate work details that require supervision by a CCG Supervisor who has passed an inmate supervision course administered by the Georgia Department of Corrections (“blue card” inmates). Whether inmates require supervision by a Correction Detail Officer depends on whether they are classified as red card or blue card, indicating the severity of their criminal history. The Urban Forestry & Beautification, Street Maintenance, Rainwater Maintenance, Cemeteries, and the Integrated Waste Division’s Waste Disposal Section utilize red card inmates, whereas Fleet Management and the Integrated Waste Division’s Waste Collection Section utilize blue card inmates. Divisions that utilize red card inmates face significant Correctional Detail Officer (“CDO”) vacancies.

The FY26 approved CDO (CDO and CDO Supervisor) positions versus filled CDO (CDO and CDO Supervisor) positions count (as of September 2025) is outlined below:

Table 41: Approved CDO Positions versus Filled CDO Positions Summary

FY26 Approved CDO Positions	Actual CDOs	Vacancy Rate
31	15	51.6%

Source: CCG FY26 Budget Book, CCG Human Resources Department Reports

In total, the Department is allotted 31 CDO positions, but just 15 are actively filled. Interviews with Department staff suggest that hiring and retaining CDOs is difficult in part because CDOs receive the same benefits as other Department staff, whereas Correctional Officer positions at the Muscogee County Prison and the Muscogee County Jail receive the enhanced benefits of Public Safety staff but require the same qualifications as CDOs. CDOs are a required element of red card inmate details, meaning Departments can only utilize as many inmate details as they have CDOs.

Notwithstanding CDO hiring difficulties, interviews with Department staff indicate that inmate labor has limited benefits for the Department, citing the liabilities involved with inmate supervision and the unpredictability of inmate availability and performance. Furthermore, the Supervisors responsible for blue card inmate details are often diverted from their day-to-day responsibilities to manage inmates. The enlistment of inmate labor also requires a working relationship between the Department and the Muscogee County Prison, to coordinate logistics for inmate transportation and working schedules and availability. Department staff noted inconsistencies with inmate availability, which varies daily, and inmate working hours. If availability of inmates is limited, the Department’s operations are affected due to lack of manpower to complete routine responsibilities. Based on interviews, historically the inmate work release program was successful and beneficial to the Department, however over time the quality of work provided by the inmates and success of the program have declined.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

The Department's core functions align with the roles of each one of its divisions and teams. Each division and team function are expanded on below.

Fleet Management

The Fleet Management Division ("Division") is tasked with repairing CCG vehicles in all CCG Departments excluding the Metropolitan Transit Authority ("METRA") which manages and oversees its own Fleet Management Division.

The Division receives work orders from CCG employees with assigned vehicles ("customers") within ShopFax – a work order intake and asset management system ("System"). Customers submit work orders by inputting their vehicle information and issue description into the System. Furthermore, the Division Manager often receives phone calls or requests outside of the System detailing vehicle issues and opts to personally submit the work order on the customer's behalf. In addition to work orders created for live issues, the Division has preventive work orders in ShopFax that are automatically submitted at timed intervals (e.g., oil changes every 90 days, etc.). However, automatic work orders are imperfect for preventative maintenance as they only account for time passed and not vehicle metrics like miles driven.

Notifications of ShopFax work order submissions are sent to Division Supervisors via email, who assign the work order to a Technician, who then updates the work order status to "In Progress" in the system and begin the repair process. The Division aims to resolve work orders within 48 hours unless specialty parts are required, in which case the repair time depends on the shipping time for parts. Customers are unable to track their vehicle's repair progress within ShopFax, requiring individual Shops to send out weekly reports to end-user Departments detailing work order status, anticipated timeline, parts required, and quotes. The Car Shop and Truck Shop have designated Service Writer positions that conduct such duties, while the Heavy Equipment Shop, Small Engine Shop, and Body Shop rely on the Supervisor to create such reports. When the repair is complete, the Service Writer/Supervisor will alert the customer by email or phone that their vehicle is ready to be collected, and the Division's Finance Operations Administrator will then invoice the Department that submitted the work order.

The Division also oversees the functioning of CCG's two non-METRA fuel points, one located on Schatulga Road and the other located on the Fleet Management Division's Facility. The Division includes an Expendable Warehouse staffed by an Inventory Control Technician who is responsible for managing inventory and ordering supplies requested from departments and Department divisions/sections/teams. The Division's facility also hosts a NAPA Auto Parts store, where staff procure parts for repairs.

Urban Forestry & Beautification

The Urban Forestry & Beautification Division (“Division”) has two functions:

- **Tree management (“Urban Forestry”):** Urban Forestry entails pruning trees, cutting trees, and removing tree debris on CCG property, while beautification entails grass cutting, landscaping, and litter collection on the City’s rights-of-way and the Georgia Department of Transportation (“GDOT”) rights-of-way, which the City is responsible for maintaining per a long-standing inter-governmental agreement between the City and the State of Georgia.
- **Right-of-way beautification (“Beautification”):** Beautification of developed CCG properties like City Hall or the Government Center is contracted out, and beautification for the City’s right of ways (e.g., creek beds, land bank properties) is the responsibility of the Department’s Community Service Section.

Part of the Division’s duties are performed by contractors. Part of the Division Manager’s responsibilities is managing contracted entities to ensure work quality. Contract labor is used to supplement staff vacancies and the Division’s workload during heavy workload periods.

Most of the Division’s workload is determined by fixed-service routes (e.g., cut grass on Macon Rd. median every six weeks, prune trees on J. R. Allan Pkwy once a year, etc.). However, the Division also receives work orders from Q-Alert, CCG’s citizen response management system. Work orders are submitted by CCG employees or citizens. While employee work orders are submitted directly through Q-Alert, citizen work order requests typically go through CCG’s 311 Citizen Service Center, which employs staff to intake non-emergency calls from citizens and submit work orders. Division Supervisors are notified of work orders by email, which will contain the work order’s description (e.g., “Tree needs pruning on Cusseta Rd.”), location, and requester contact information. A Division Supervisor adds the work order into the work queue, and the Division’s objective is to fulfill the work order in 6-8 weeks. Based on interviews, the Division’s former goal was 4-6 weeks, but the rapid increase in new subdivision rights-of-way has increased the volume of grass-cutting work orders.

As equipment is in short supply across the Department, the Division is often called upon to lend equipment to other divisions. Based on M&J fieldwork, the Division maintains older equipment that should be planned for future replacement such as:

- inmate detail vehicles,
- bucket trucks,
- grab-all trucks,
- flatbed crew trucks,
- pick-up trucks,
- zero-turn mowers, and
- 4 x 4 tractors with flex wing mowers.

Existing equipment is deteriorating or is past/approaching the end of its useful life.

The Division is on-call for after-hour emergencies, which usually entails clearing tree debris from roads. On-call employees are on rotation, and since no employees have take-home vehicles, if a call is placed the employee will first go to the Fleet Yard facility, where Division equipment is stored, to collect a vehicle before going to the incident site.

Street Maintenance

The Street Maintenance Division (“Division”) facilitates street repair, asphalt maintenance, sidewalk repair, curb/gutter repair, and fence repair for all CCG properties. Additionally, the Division conducts CCG property graffiti removal and, recently, assisting the Community Service Section with homeless encampment removal. Based on interviews, the Division is assigned many ad-hoc responsibilities, as the Division also offers assistance as needed to the Community Service Section to collect illegal dump waste, the Rainwater Maintenance Division with the creation of ditches, and Urban Forestry & Beautification when tree debris needs hauling to landfills.

Rainwater Maintenance

The Rainwater Maintenance Division (“Division”) is responsible for all City-owned stormwater systems, including stormwater pipes, inlets and open ditches. The Division’s goal is to flow rainwater to the Chattahoochee River over all 640 square miles of the City via 64,000 water catch basins, 11 watershed lakes, and 82 detention ponds.

Maintaining a stormwater system entails routinely cleaning drain inlets and connecting pipes using eductor trucks, which use a high-pressure water hose to blowout blockages in pipes. Ditches are also cleaned to keep water flowing and are checked for blockages during and after each major rain event. Detention ponds are cleaned twice a year as well. Watershed dams are mowed once a year, usually in late Fall.. Inmate details are tasked exclusively with ditch and retention pond maintenance.

The Division also responds to 311 Citizen Service Center Q-Alert work orders, which are submitted when citizens report issues such as sink holes or water blockages that lead to flooding. The most common work order request is ditch cutting. As ditch cutting requests are non-urgent, the Division keeps those on the backlog until more time sensitive work is complete. Division staff were recently outfitted with tablets that they bring to job sites, therefore upon completion of Q-Alert work orders, customers receive pictures of the completed project.

The Division collaborates with the CCG Engineering Department’s Stormwater Management Section (“Stormwater Section”), which shares the same domain as the Division. The Stormwater Section is responsible for the regulatory compliance, engineering and planning related to City-owned stormwater systems, whereas the Rainwater Maintenance Division maintains existing stormwater systems and maintains the systems’ property.

Cemeteries

The Cemeteries Division (“Division”) maintains five city-owned cemeteries: Linwood Cemetery, Riverdale Cemetery, Porterdale Cemetery, East Porterdale Cemetery, and Resting Gardens (located along the Black Heritage Trail). Linwood, Riverdale, and Porterdale cemeteries are at capacity and cemetery maintenance is exclusive to grounds maintenance. East Porterdale cemetery is the only cemetery with vacant lots, although they are reserved for City-conducted pauper burials, which Cemetery Division staff oversee. The Resting Gardens are a memorial site dedicated to honoring enslaved people buried without markers.

The City also maintains memorandums of understanding between their Cemetery Division and the Riverdale-Porterdale Foundation and Historic Linwood Foundation non-profit organizations, which fundraise for and develop comprehensive preservation and beautification plans for the City’s cemeteries.

Community Service

The Community Service Section (“Section”) is responsible for picking up litter on CCG properties that are not overseen by the Rainwater or Cemeteries Divisions. The Section is also responsible for mowing 64 city-owned lots. Such lots include undeveloped rights-of-way and other land that the City inherited.

The Section’s labor force is divided between full-time staff, part-time staff who work Saturdays, and citizens who received a court order requiring them to complete a certain number of community service hours as a probation condition. The Section averages 3-8 probationers on weekdays and 20-30 on Saturdays. The Muscogee County Probation Office has a list of approved community service options outside of the Public Works Community Service Section, such as local non-profits and City authorities like the Columbus Airport. The list has grown in recent years, thus giving probationers more community service options and making it more difficult for the Section to secure adequate levels of probationers for assistance. Due to the availability of more community service options and probationers opting for other community service assignments, the Section utilizes less probationers today than prior to 2020.

The Section’s daily workload is determined by Section staff depending on the quantity of probationers that are available. The Section conducts both proactive jobs, such as the Section’s daily Uptown sidewalk cleaning, as well as responding to Q-Alert work orders, which are assigned to the Department when the work order relates to litter clean-up. The Section is also responsible for coordinating with the Street Maintenance Division related to homeless encampment removal.

In addition to managing probationers and conducting litter clean-up, the Section cleans illegal dumping waste. Illegal dumping clean-up begins in Q-Alert after a CCG employee or citizen submits a work order notifying the Department of the waste. The most common illegal dumping waste is tires, which the Section retrieves and disposes of approximately 50 to 100 each month. Based on interviews, illegal tire dumping is a frequent occurrence. Also, based on interviews, the CCG Inspections & Code Department historically assisted in ensuring tire businesses complied with ordinances related to lawful tire disposal.

After notification, Section staff will arrive to clean up the waste with the Section's grab-all truck. The CCG Police Department has begun installing cameras near common illegal dumping sites, which capture license plate information on vehicles transporting the waste. The Community Service Coordinator is tasked with documenting the illegal dumping incident, going to the property tied to the licensed plate, and serving the citation which is adjudicated in Environmental Court to the vehicle owner. In the event the illegal dumping charge is brought to the Columbus Municipal Court, the Community Service Coordinator must also be ready to testify in court.

Litter waste is stored in trash bags in the back of the four-door flatbed truck, and illegal dumping bulk waste is stored in the grab-all truck, which functions as a short-term makeshift dumpster. Trips to the Pine Grove Sanitary Landfill are not made each day as the Section's trucks are not equipped to navigate the steep dirt roads of the landfill, therefore the Section reduces vehicle wear-and-tear by going to the landfill every two to three days.

Geographic Information Systems

The Geographic Information Systems ("GIS") Section ("Section") fulfills the Department's internal mapping and spatial data needs. The Section utilizes ArcGIS, the City's GIS platform to perform duties. Annual projects taken on by the Section are collaborating with the Urban Forestry & Beautification Division and the CCG Tree Board to map out a tree planting proposal, as well as updating the waste collection route maps as new properties are developed and rights-of-way are adjusted.

Examples of other GIS projects are the Department's current initiative to map out cemetery plots and headstone data for the Cemeteries Division's cemeteries, which requires on-site work. The Section shares a vehicle to travel to and from job sites. Alongside GIS mapping roles, the Section also conducts other data-related duties, such as developing and showcasing Q-Alert work order dashboards on the Department's website.

The GIS Manager housed within the CCG Information Technology Department maintains communication with the GIS Section positions to assign workload and ensure coordination of projects between GIS divisions/employees decentralized within other City departments. However, the Department's GIS positions report to the Department Director. Therefore, the Director completes GIS positions' performance appraisals, and is primarily involved in hiring decisions for GIS positions assigned to the Department, in addition to approving the types of training that can be obtained. As there is not a requirement for the GIS Manager to be involved in hiring decisions, performance appraisals, and training opportunities, it is up to the discretion of the Director to involve the GIS Manager in such decisions. As such, GIS positions within the Department are not formally accountable to the GIS Manager, which creates governance issues when assigning workloads. Also, training opportunities received by GIS positions are inconsistent between departments, affecting the retention and talent of employees.

Integrated Waste

The Integrated Waste Division (“Division”) facilitates the collection and disposal of waste for Columbus residents and select businesses. The Department primarily provides residential waste collection, however, the Department collects waste for select small businesses located within the Columbus Uptown District.

Waste is collected by Waste Equipment Operators (“Operators”) in refuse trucks. Operators begin their shifts in the morning with a safety briefing from a Supervisor, and then, per Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration guidelines, must fill out a Driver Vehicle Inspection Report, which logs the status of their truck’s brakes, tires, signals, and fluids. Inspection reports are also required to be completed after every shift. Based on interviews, it is common for Operators to confirm that all safety vehicle elements have been inspected despite never having inspected their trucks.

Operators will often spend the morning conducting routine refuse truck maintenance duties as well, however, they are instructed to conduct maintenance duties in the afternoon following their shifts. Based on interviews, it is common for a backlog to develop in the morning as refuse trucks queue for fuel or cleaning materials. Routine maintenance has not historically been prioritized according to interviews with Division staff, who report that it is common for refuse truck cylinders to need expensive replacements due to them breaking as a result of trash and dirt buildup.

Routes are run by Operators on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Wednesday routes are run if there’s a holiday on one of the other days or in select cases. The Department runs 16 garbage routes, 12 recycling routes, 12 yard waste routes, and 10 bulk waste routes. Routes are currently outlined on paper maps that Operators bring with them, which has historically led to unequal route volume, with some routes servicing over 1,300 residents and others less than 600 on any given day. Furthermore, routes are not currently optimized for fuel efficiency or time-savings. The Department recently purchased Routeware, a waste management solutions software that optimizes routes and provides Operators with expected route completion times. Staff are hopeful that Routeware will reduce the common practice of “stalling,” when Operators deliberately slow down a route to increase their hours and boost overtime pay. According to staff interviews, stalling is common practice amongst the Section’s Operators and has resulted from a previous culture within the Division in which Operators were not held accountable. The Division is in the process of reforming its culture to increase accountability and disciplinary measures for noncompliance.

Many routes include Uptown Columbus businesses, who demonstrate their enrollment in the City’s waste collection services via “bag stickers” that they purchase from the City and attach to their trash bag before putting waste on the right-of-way to be collected. Based on interviews, the Department has not historically checked to ensure all businesses whose waste is collected are enrolled and paying for service. As such, enrollment in Uptown waste collection service is based on an honor system and many Operators collect waste from Uptown businesses who are not paying for the City’s waste collection services.

After finishing routes, Operators on recycling routes drop off their waste at the Federal Waste & Recycling facility, those on garbage and bulk waste routes dump their waste at the Pine Grove Sanitary Landfill, and those on yard-waste routes should dump their waste at the Granite Bluff Inert Landfill. The City does not own or utilize any transfer stations; therefore, Operators always deposit waste at one of the three aforementioned locations.

The Pine Grove Sanitary Landfill accepts resident waste, although residents must pay a fee based on their waste's weight which is determined at the landfill scale house. After the last Operator deposits the waste from that day's route, the landfills cover all exposed trash with a tarp and closes operations until the next day. The landfill is also watered intermittently to promote grass growth and keep the dust from blowing into the City.

Safety Training

The Department's Safety Coordinator fulfills a variety of safety training duties for CCG employees. The Safety Coordinator conducts drivers training for all CCG employees who drive a City-owned vehicle as part of their responsibilities, which helps protect the City from liability when incidents occur. Driver training is an eight-hour course hosted monthly in the Public Works main building. Vehicle key fobs are only awarded to employees following the completion of Operators training. Two-hour remedial drivers training is also administered each Wednesday for employees that have experienced a driving incident, and annual four-hour refresher courses are mandated for all employees with key fobs.

CCG employees that are driving commercial vehicles, like refuse trucks, must undergo 20 hours of "in-vehicle" hours before they're allowed to conduct routes individually. They must also obtain a Commercial Driver's License ("CDL"), which the Safety Coordinator facilitates training for using external instructors. The Safety Coordinator also conducts CDL testing for various divisions within the Department and for external departments such as METRA.

The Safety Coordinator also oversees proactive safety measures, which includes facilitating random drug testing within the Department, monitoring the Integrated Waste Division's Samsara camera live feeds to review the safety practices of refuse truck Operators, and checking Department staff's driver's license statuses to ensure there are no employees driving with a suspended or expired license. The Safety Coordinator also writes the daily safety briefings that Supervisors deliver to front-line staff, which mostly come from National Safety Council reports.

The Safety Coordinator also administers cardiopulmonary resuscitation and automatic external defibrillator training to CCG Police Department and Fire Department staff every two years. The Safety Coordinator is certified to conduct these trainings through the American Heart Association.

The Safety Coordinator also serves as a part-time Risk Coordinator and is on-call once a week each month to respond and perform risk management duties on behalf of the CCG Human Resources Department. Duties include responding to incident sites and submitting incident reports and data to track and report safety incidents. The Safety Coordinator is one of five other part-time Risk Coordinator positions designated within the CCG Engineering, Facilities Maintenance, Office of Crime Prevention, and METRA Departments.

In interviews with Department staff, various employees expressed concern that the Safety Coordinator role, which is currently occupied by a long-tenured individual nearing retirement, without a designated transition/succession plan. This is partly because the Safety Coordinator is a one-person team. The Department does include two other employees who are certified testers for CDL licenses, however no other individuals are familiar with the Safety Coordinator's unique, comprehensive responsibilities. Furthermore, due to being a one-person team and workload, the Safety Coordinator is not able to proactively conduct regular route checks or safety audits to monitor employee's driving or safety practices in the field. The Safety Coordinator function as staffed by a single employee, is not as proactive or strategic as possible. As part of the upcoming FY27 budget cycle, the Department is requesting an additional position to assist the Safety Coordinator and facilitate succession planning.

Administration Team

Finance-related functions are performed by an Administrative Technician, Finance Operations Administrator, and Senior Buyer who assist the Deputy Director of Budget & Logistics with procurement-related processes for the Department such as managing the bidding process, invoice entry, and purchase-card reconciliation. The Finance Manager also performs finance-related functions such as budget creation and tracking.

Furthermore, the Public Works Coordinator ("Coordinator") is responsible for processing payroll on behalf of the Department. Most of the Department's divisions utilize paper timecards for tracking daily time for employees. Timecards are then approved by the appropriate supervisor and time reported is manually entered into Advantage by administrative staff within divisions designated as timekeepers. The Waste Collection Section is the only organizational entity within the Department in which employees use a biometric timeclock (TimeClock Plus) to track when they clock in and clock out during shifts. Administrative staff still must manually enter time reported in the time clock to Advantage, as the two systems are not integrated. Therefore, time reporting is a time-consuming, manual process for administrative staff. Once time has been entered into Advantage, the Coordinator reviews each employee's reported time to ensure accuracy and check for errors. The Coordinator then corrects any errors and approves timesheets to be routed to the CCG Finance Department for final approval and processing.

Customer Service

Overview

The Fleet Management Division's customers include other CCG Departments and Public Works Divisions. Customer service is facilitated via weekly reports sent to customers detailing work order status, anticipated timeline, parts required, and quotes. Reports are written by full-time Service Writers in the Car and Truck Shop, and the Supervisors of the other shops. In addition, the Division reaches out to customers by email or phone when their work order is concluded.

The Integrated Waste Division is the only Public Works Division that has City citizens as direct customers, as the Division accepts payment from the public when citizens use the Pine Grove Sanitary Landfill. Payments are processed at the scale house, and receipts are transferred to the Finance Manager to log and eventually send to the CCG Finance Department.

Other Department Divisions serve the public through responding to Q-Alert work orders. Although CCG employee Q-Alert submitters are typically notified by phone or email when their work order is completed, citizen Q-Alert submitters are typically not notified of work order status completion.

Quality Control Program

Alongside work orders from CCG staff and the public, Many work orders are submitted in Q-Alert by staff from the CCG Quality Control Program (“Program”). The Program reports directly to the City’s Deputy City Manager of Operations and consists of 10 CCG staff who work part-time for the program in six-hour shifts on Saturday and Sunday. Staff are divided into two-person teams, and one team works each weekend. Thus, each staff member works once every five weekends. Each team navigates the City in City-owned vehicles to identify potential work orders and submit them in Q-Alert via a City-owned device.

Based on M&J’s discussions with staff, the Program includes a quota of work orders that Quality Control Program staff are encouraged to meet. The Program results in the submission of irrelevant work orders that increases workload for Department staff and reduces their capacity to conduct essential job duties. For example, Program staff often submit work orders to the Community Service Section to pick up waste left outside houses on Sundays despite waste collection being the responsibility of the Integrated Waste Division when the Division runs their Monday morning trash route. Program staff also reportedly submit duplicate work orders (e.g., median grass is overgrown at 133 Macon Rd., 134 Macon Rd., 135 Macon Rd., etc.) and work orders for issues which have already been reported. In addition to irrelevant and duplicated work orders, program staff often assign work orders to the incorrect Division and submit work orders that are not the City’s responsibility to address such as commercial waste pickup. Improper submission of work orders requires Department staff to vet work orders to manually select applicable work orders and reassign or delete non-applicable work orders. At times, staff will travel to work order sites only to find that a work order should not have been submitted, or the issue has already been solved. The work order vetting process and attempted resolution of non-applicable work orders reduces staff members’ capacity to conduct essential job duties.

Use of Technology

ShopFax

The Fleet Management Division receives work orders through ShopFax, a work order intake and asset management system (“System”). The System was created by World Information Systems and is today a product of IBM. Council meeting minutes demonstrate that ShopFax has been used by the Division since at least 1997.

The software does not contain the functionalities of many modern fleet management software, including the ability to live track key vehicle metrics like miles, the ability to alert customers to progress updates to their work order, and the inability to generate past work order reports in a non-manual way. As such, customers must call the Division to check their work order status, and the inability of the system to generate reports efficiently hinders the Department in their efforts to develop preventative maintenance schedules and use past work orders to inform future decisions.

Q-Alert

Q-Alert is CCG's citizen response management system and a product of QScend Technologies, Inc. Q-Alert is used internally by CCG staff to create work order work orders, as well as being the technology used by CCG's public facing 311 Citizen Service Center, which intakes non-emergent public calls and creates a work order work order on their behalf. The Urban Forestry & Beautification, Street Maintenance, Rainwater, and Community Service Divisions/Sections receive much of their workload through Q-Alert.

Samsara

Samsara cameras have been installed in many of the Integrated Waste Division's refuse trucks, including in recycling trucks and rear loader trucks. The cameras are intended to monitor the Operators' performance and ensure safety standards are being followed. Supervisory staff can monitor cameras live on tablets or retroactively in the Samsara system.

Routeware

The Department recently purchased Routeware, a waste management route optimization technology solution. The software will recommend new, optimized versions of the City's existing waste collection routes, and offers dynamic solutions in the event of road blockages. Routeware offers tracking services so Supervisors can track routes simultaneously on tablets.

ArcGIS

The Department's GIS Section ("Section") uses ArcGIS, a product of ESRI, in their roles. ArcGIS is a cloud-based GIS platform that facilitates the creation, visualization, and sharing of spatial information through web maps and applications. The Section uses the software to map the City's tree plan, map routes for the Waste Collection Section, update the Cemeteries Division's cemetery plot maps, and conduct a variety of other mapping duties as assigned.

Assessment of Guiding Documentation

The Department's daily operations are guided primarily by three documents: the Department's policy book, the APWA-required Strategic Plan, and CCG Strategic Planning Forms that are published in the annual budget.

Document amendments are communicated to Department leadership in biweekly leadership meetings held in the main Public Works building, and with front-line staff in biweekly calls. Staff are also introduced to these documents during Public Works Department orientation training that all new employees are required to attend. Orientation "refreshers" are conducted annually as well.

In addition to Department-specific documentation, the CCG Human Resources Department familiarizes staff with general CCG documentation like the CCG employee handbook during citywide orientation.

Policies, Procedures, and Standards of Professional Conduct

The Department maintains 119 policies and procedures contained in a “Policy Book” that is reviewed with employees at Department orientation.

Although policies and procedures are defined as being Department-specific and Division-specific, respectively, the Policy Book groups them together. The most comprehensive policy is titled “Rules and Regulations” and contains all Department rules on a wide range of topics like dress code and time-off. Other policies range from “Road Restriction Policy,” detailing how to close off a road, to “Media Policy,” detailing how to interact with media sources. Many procedures, such as “Inmate Escape Procedure” that details proper response protocol to an escaped inmate, apply across multiple Departments. Departmental policies and procedures are reviewed every three years.

The Department also has a Standards of Professional Conduct document containing seven ethics requirements that employees are expected to uphold.

Amendments and additions to the Policy Book and Standards of Professional Conduct documents are approved by the Department Director.

2022 Strategic Plan

The Department updated their Strategic Plan in 2022 as a requirement for APWA reaccreditation. The strategic plan includes the Department’s vision, mission, and values, which were each voted on by Public Works Department staff, and strategic goals divided between five-year goals and ten-year goals. Responsibility for the creation of the strategic plan is assigned to the Rainwater Maintenance Division Manager, who also functions as the Accreditation Manager.

Five-year goals include adhering to the recently conducted pay compensation study, increasing staffing numbers and reducing turnover rate, reducing the number of contracted services utilized by the Department, discontinuing commercial waste collection, and moving away from utilizing inmate labor.

Ten-year goals include purchasing an asset management system that will allow the Department to account for all its inventory more effectively and increasing recyclable literacy amongst City citizens to make landfill and recycling facility operations more efficient.

FY2026 Strategic Planning Forms

CCG requires that all CCG Division leaders complete Strategic Planning Forms each budget cycle, which details the division’s goals, objectives, and performance indicators for the upcoming fiscal year. Performance indicators are accompanied by the actual performance indicator from FY24 and FY25, as well as the projected performance indicator for FY26. The FY26-specific (i.e., non-routine) goals for some of the Public Works Department’s 12 budgetary divisions are outlined below:

Fleet Maintenance

- **Goal:** Establish parameters for accomplishing routine maintenance.
- **Objective:** Perform all routine preventive maintenance on fleet vehicles and equipment within 200 miles, 20 hours, or 10 days of scheduled service.
- **Performance Indicators:** Percentage of vehicles and equipment that meet scheduled maintenance criteria.

Cemeteries

- **Goal 1:** Have all lots in Riverdale, Porterdale, East Porterdale and Linwood in the GIS database.
- **Objective 1:** To improve the condition of the roads in all four City owned cemeteries. This will allow all visitors to have a hazard free passage.
- **Performance Indicator 1:** List and track number of Riverdale lots put back in database.

Rainwater Maintenance

- **Goal 1:** To prevent or reduce flooding during heavy rain events due to stormwater pipe obstructions.
- **Objective 1:** Pressure clean three (3) miles of stormwater pipes annually to help prevent blockage.
- **Performance Indicators 1:** Miles of stormwater pipes pressured cleaned
- **Goal 2:** To meet the Georgia EPD ditch inspection requirement, which mandates that all City maintained drainage ditches be inspected at least once every five (5) years (20% annually). Based on determination by the Engineering Department's Stormwater Manager and surveyors, there are 222 miles of ditches within Muscogee County that meet the five-year inspection requirement.
- **Objective 2:** Inspect an average total of 44.4 miles of ditches annually.
- **Performance Indicators 2:** Miles of ditches inspected annually.

Street Maintenance

- **Goal 1:** To improve asphalt maintenance by repairing potholes, asphalt deficiencies, driveway aprons and shoulders through generating in-house work orders, addressing computer generated work orders and addressing those highlighted on the Department of Transportation's Report (DOT) as well as other reporting agencies.
- **Objective 1:** To increase asphalt maintenance and repair by tonnage used.
- **Performance Indicators 1:** Tonnage of asphalt used
- **Goal 2:** To address all curb, gutter, sidewalk, inlet and various other concrete maintenance work generated by in house or computer generated work orders, or the DOT monthly report.

- **Objective 2:** To keep sidewalks, curbs and gutters in a safe and serviceable condition, including examining all concrete work called in to 311.
- **Performance Indicators 2:** Yards of concrete poured
- **Goal 3:** To provide fill material to perform maintenance to bring shoulders levels even with pavement levels.
- **Objective 3:** Fill and compact 30 miles of unpaved state and city shoulders annually.
- **Performance Indicators 3:** Miles of road shoulders repaired

Urban Forestry & Beautification

- **Goal 1:** To maintain a neat appearance within the city's small median type parks.
- **Objective 1:** Service an average of 62 parks once every two weeks during peak growth months.
- **Performance Indicators 1:** Average number of parks maintained every two weeks during peak growth months.
- **Goal 4:** Reduce the frequency of needed cutting on rights-of-way and other property.
- **Objective 4:** Treat 5,000 acres of land annually with herbicides.
- **Performance Indicators 4:** Annual acreage treated.

Household Garbage & Yard Waste Collection

- **Goal 1:** To lower the number of collection stops missed.
- **Objective 1:** To reduce the number of missed pick-ups (Code 2) by 2% annually.
- **Performance Indicators 1:** Annual number of stops.

Recycling Collection

- **Goal 1:** To promote the concept of recycling to the general public.
- **Objective 1:** Increase the tonnage of recyclables collected at the curbside.
- **Performance Indicators 1:** Tons of Recyclables collected.
- **Goal 3:** To keep more municipal solid waste out of the city owned landfill.
- **Objective 3:** Increase the percentage of municipal solid waste recycled.
- **Performance Indicators 3:** Percentage of recycled solid waste to waste

Granite Bluff Inert Landfill

- **Goal 2:** To recycle as much material as possible for use as "fill material" in the landfill.
- **Objective 2:** Increase the percentage of inert waste recycled for landfill use.
- **Performance Indicators 2:** Percentage of recycled solid waste to waste

Pine Grove Sanitary Landfill

- **Goal 1:** Increasing diversion will extend the life of the landfill by decreasing the material tonnage which would otherwise be placed in the landfill.
- **Objective 1:** To increase diversion rate by 1% each year.
- **Performance Indicators 1:** Percentage of annual diversion and recycling rates
- **Goal 2:** Increasing compaction will extend the life of the landfill by decreasing the material size to be placed in the landfill.
- **Objective 2:** To increase annual compaction rate by 50lbs/current year over previous year.
- **Performance Indicators 2:** Compaction rate lbs/cubic yards and years of remaining capacity.
- **Goal 3:** Create a new source of revenue to support the integrated waste fund and its efforts to become the self-sustaining enterprise fund that it is designed to be.
- **Objective 3:** Identify waste materials that have the potential to be reused, recycled, or processed and sold. Develop programs and identify markets for such materials. Diverting materials will increase the life expectancy of our landfills and generate revenue to support its efforts.
- **Performance Indicators 3:** Tons of scrap metal sold.

Strategic Priorities

Department objectives and priorities are focused on reducing employee turnover, increasing digitization, improving the Department's equipment and facility quality, reforming the culture of the Integrated Waste Division, placing a greater focus on revenue generation, and achieving APWA reaccreditation in 2026.

Reducing Turnover

The Department is currently suffering from above average turnover. Based on interviews, staff are aware of high turnover and expressed plans to help increase retention and boost morale. Staff noted the implementation of a "career ladder" to identify paths for staff growth as an initiative to help increase retention, as the Department does not offer incentives (i.e., bonuses, pay raises, or promotions) for obtaining licenses or certifications. Obtaining licenses and certifications is especially beneficial in the Fleet Management Division where technical skills are highly valued. The Fleet Maintenance Division Manager has taken the initiative of creating a career ladder proposal for the Division, which if enacted would promote Technician II's to Technician III after either three years on the job or their obtaining of an Automotive Service Excellence ("ASE") certification.

Additionally, staff expressed concerns that managerial positions require a four-year bachelor's degree, thus precluding most front-line staff from promotion opportunities and eliminating their possibilities of becoming a manager or above within the Department. M&J validated that some managerial positions within the Department do require a four-year bachelor's degree. Also, based on interviews, the requirement has contributed to vacancy rates within managerial positions as qualified candidates with extensive work experience cannot be considered. Staff expressed support for either easing the degree requirement or adding an "or x years of experience" clause to the managerial job descriptions/qualifications to incentivize front-line staff to continue their employment within the Department and CCG.

The Department experiences frequent turnover once an employee receives their CDL license. The Department pays for employees' CDL training and licensing; therefore, it is common for employees to receive their CDL from the Department before departing for a higher paying private sector job. There is not currently a requirement for employees to stay with the Department after a certain number of years to recoup the Department's cost of training/investment and increase retention rates.

Improving Equipment & Facility Quality

Interviews with staff from all divisions cited that their work quality was inhibited by poor equipment quality and equipment shortages and expressed needs to purchase new equipment.

M&J identified the following equipment types as almost all being past or soon-to-be-past their useful life:

- Grab-all trucks
- Bucket trucks
- Boom mowers
- Shredders
- Compacters
- Water trucks
- Grinders

Additionally, M&J identified the following themes during Departmental interviews regarding equipment:

- Snow equipment is incompatible with existing vehicles. The Department's original fleet inventory when snow equipment was purchased has since been upgraded and is therefore now incompatible with new equipment but is able to be used with the original equipment. The Department has requested new snow equipment to be used with updated fleet equipment within the upcoming FY27 budget.
- The Community Service Section's flatbed trucks are not well suited for daily trips to the landfill.
- The Community Service Section lacks a refuse truck to collect litter and waste as it is being collected by probationers.

- The Waste Collection Section makes extensive use of rear-loader refuse trucks, which are considered more dangerous for front-line workers than front-load refuse trucks as workers are highly exposed to traffic, lifting injuries, and biohazards.

Equipment shortages in one Division often lead to the borrowing of equipment from other Divisions, which exasperates shortages and accelerates the decline of equipment quality. The equipment issues and shortages promote a negative feedback loop as significant portions of the Department's budget are spent repairing outdated equipment, thereby preventing the Department from investing in new, enhanced equipment. The Department's purchasing model appears to be reactive, and the Department faces a backlog of equipment to be replaced due to falling behind on equipment purchases.

The Department is in the process of prioritizing replacing its aged-out equipment and maintains a vehicle replacement and equipment maintenance schedule. However, the Department's replacement and maintenance schedule is not comprehensive and does not include a financial strategy to fund replacements, an asset inventory, or a defined system or method for tracking useful life of equipment, or a policy for disposal of assets.

In addition to equipment quality, Department staff also expressed concerns about the state of their facilities. Within Fleet Management, the facility is lacking some crucial safety and habitable elements, including a frequently broken heating, ventilation, and air conditioning ("HVAC") system, a lack of a facility-wide intercom, a lack of slip-resistant flooring in the Shops, and a small Shop size, which leads to proximity between staff and hazardous heavy equipment. Fleet Management staff also expressed concern over the lack of space in the fleet yard. Currently, the fleet yard stores both CCG vehicles undergoing or awaiting repairs, as well as acting as a parking lot for many of the City-owned vehicles.

The Public Works Department's main building is also past its useful life, having been built in 1939 and lacking the infrastructure of modern facilities. The City plans to demolish the Public Works Department's main building complex within the next two years as the City has allotted the property as the site of the upgraded Muscogee County Jail. CCG leadership has not determined where the Department's new facility will be, but the move will be a good opportunity for the Department to receive an upgraded facility.

Implementing Digitization

The Department is also prioritizing the improvement of its current digital systems and the digitization of paper processes. The Fleet Maintenance Division Manager is exploring alternatives to ShopFax (the Division's work order intake system) since ShopFax, as implemented, is unable to intake data from customer vehicles, communicate with customers, and perform project management duties, all of which are built-in features of more modern fleet maintenance systems.

The Department is overseeing the implantation of its Routeware and Samsara systems in the Integrated Waste Division. Department leadership hopes Routeware will reduce the time the GIS Team spends creating route maps, reduce refuse truck accidents via safer routes, increase routes' completion speed, and equalize Operators' route lengths. Department leadership hopes the cameras provided by Samsara will incentivize safe driving habits by Operators and reduce Department liability when incidents occur. Department leadership hopes that the two systems will be almost fully implemented by the start of FY27.

Enhancing Waste Collection Culture and Performance

Based on interviews, historically, there has been a lack of oversight and policy enforcement among front-line Waste Collection staff. Operators reportedly violate state and federal safety regulations frequently, such as not filling out their Driver Vehicle Inspection Report correctly, not wearing seat belts, texting and driving, and not stopping fully at stop signs. Additionally, Operators are prone to “stalling,” the practice of intentionally slowing down a route to increase hours and thus overtime pay, as well as not conducting proper refuse truck maintenance, reducing the useful life of their vehicles and increasing maintenance costs.

The Integrated Waste Division has experienced a change in leadership and as such, Division leadership is prioritizing reforming the culture of the Division to prioritize accountability for both Operators and their Supervisors. The Division's integration of Routeware and Samsara will facilitate accountability, as Routeware includes refuse truck location tracking and Samsara shows Waste Equipment Operator behavior while on routes.

Revenue-Producing Initiatives

Leadership staff expressed plans to revitalize the City's recycling center, which was built as a state-of-the-art facility in 2013 but was abandoned in 2023 due to the removal of equipment by Pratt Industries. Although the Department is currently generating revenue from recyclable waste by selling collected recycling to Federal Waste & Recycling, which then transports the recyclables to a MRF in Illinois, revenue could potentially increase if the Department possessed its own MRF.

Based on interviews, the Department has not historically checked to ensure all businesses whose waste is collected are enrolled and paying for service. Many businesses in Uptown are thus getting their trash picked up for free at the expense of the City. Based on interviews, the Department intends to begin monitoring compliance for Uptown businesses to ensure solid waste collection services are paid for.

The City does not offer commercial waste collection (excluding select small Uptown businesses). As such, the Department is not currently generating revenue through providing commercial service. Based on interviews, staff have a desire to offer commercial waste services and cited the potential to generate additional revenue.

The Department is working with the Landfill Group LLC to construct a renewable natural gas (“RNG”) facility at Pine Grove Sanitary Landfill. The Landfill Group LLC is paying the Department to allow it to construct and operate the RNG facility, giving the CCG integrated waste fund a new, easy, and environmentally sustainable revenue stream.

The Cemeteries Division is aiming to add a fifth cemetery to their portfolio since only one cemetery, East Porterdale, still has vacancies, which number just 50 and are exclusive to pauper burials. CCG leadership is assessing various properties in the eastern, less developed part of the City as potential sites for a fifth cemetery. An additional cemetery would not only provide a valuable service to City residents, who currently have no public cemetery options within city limits, but would also be a source of revenue for the Department, which could charge plot and burial fees.

An additional opportunity for the Department to generate revenue is the implementation of a stormwater management/utility fee. The City does maintain a dedicated millage for stormwater, but the millage has not been increased in over 10 years. The City does not collect maintain a standalone, dedicated stormwater management/utility fee to fund stormwater operations. Based on M&J's interviews, financial constraints cause funds to be used for new builds rather than proactively rehabbing older systems. Consolidated governments of comparable size and demographics such as Macon-Bibb County and Athens-Clarke County have successfully implemented a standalone stormwater management/utility fee. Implementation of a standalone stormwater management/utility fee would create a revenue stream dedicated to stormwater management and allow for more proactive projects to be undertaken.

Performance Metrics/Outputs

Performance Metrics

The Department tracked 36 performance metrics across divisions in the FY26 budget. Of the 36 performance metrics, the divisions/sections report nine metrics quarterly and annually to the Department Director. The nine metrics are as follows:

- Q-Alert work orders closed by division
- Landfill tonnage per month
- Recycling tonnage per month
- Pounds of litter collected
- Feet of pipes cleared, and ditches cut
- Number of potholes repaired
- Number of pauper burials
- Trees planted
- Completed Fleet Management work orders

The Waste Collection Section does not track performance metrics aside from those included in the quarterly/annual reports. Upon the full implementation of Routeware and Samsara, the Section plans to begin tracking route completion and Waste Equipment Operator safety metrics.

The Department's Safety Coordinator in addition to the CCG Human Resources Department is responsible for tracking accidents and safety incidents that occur as part of the City's Risk Management function. The Safety Coordinator is also the administrator of the City's remedial training programs, which CCG staff are required to attend when cause an accident with their City vehicle. Safety incident count and type is considered by the Safety Coordinator and Department leadership as they create safety training programs for the subsequent year.

According to interviews, some Department leaders supplement quantifiable performance metrics with informal feedback sources like social media to gauge public opinion and to be notified of complaints. Although Q-Alert has a “describe” section where citizens can detail opinions, the platform is mainly used to alert the City of issues, not to provide feedback.

As the CCG Human Resources Department has mandated performance evaluations within the last year, Department staff also partake in annual performance evaluations, though the results of the evaluations are not tied to monetary incentives.

Service Levels

The Fleet Management Division maintains a 48-hour service guarantee where vehicles will be turned around in 48 hours notwithstanding new parts are needed which are not available in the NAPA store and therefore must be ordered. ShopFax tracks work order completion time, therefore the Fleet Management Division’s primary performance metric is average completion time for each work order type. Furthermore, the Division tracks number of completed work orders.

The Urban Forestry and Beautification Division has historically aimed to complete non-urgent Q-Alert requests in four to six weeks but has recently updated their goal to six to eight weeks to accommodate the City’s increase in rights-of-way.

Culture, Engagement, Buy-in

Interviews with Department staff revealed that perception of Department culture is generally positive. Staff are pleased with Department leadership and front-line staff typically feel that they have the support of Division Management. Negative perceptions of Department culture that were reported were related to the Department’s high staff turnover and equipment quality/shortage issues, which appeared to lower the morale of some Department staff interviewed by M&J.

Communication appears to be disseminated efficiently within the Department. The Department oversees Departmentwide staff calls every two weeks, and Department leadership (i.e., Managers and above) meet separately every two weeks. All policy changes, strategic initiatives, and leadership updates are formally communicated during these meetings.

Almost all Division/Section Managers assign instructions to Supervisors and front-line staff in the morning before their shift, with additional instructions disseminated throughout the day as needed. All work details include at least a Supervisor, and often a Manager as well, therefore front-line staff are constantly in communication with supervisory staff and are receiving tasks effectively.

Overall perception of the culture of CCG is not as favorable when compared to the Department. According to interviews with Department staff, the disbandment of the Animal Control Division in 2024 and the associated publicity left many Department staff feeling uncertain as to the degree that CCG leadership valued and understood their roles. Additionally, many Department staff cited high turnover rates and equipment quality/shortage issues as stemming from an underfunded budget resulting from leadership underestimating the needs of their Department. Staff interviews indicated that informal service requests frequently bypass the Q-Alert system in favor of direct communication. This practice creates a deviation from standard operating procedures and may lead to a perceived imbalance in service prioritization. Furthermore, bypassing established protocols prevents the Department from accurately capturing resource allocation and response times in its official metrics.

Observations and Recommendations

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation.

Observation 1: In the Fleet Management Division, all tire work is currently conducted under the Car Shop by staff assigned to the Car Shop. However, there exists a high volume of tire-related workload thus necessitating the Fleet Management Manager to permanently assign a Technician III to tire-related work, as well as two of the Division’s four inmates.

Recommendation 1: The Fleet Management Division Manager should continue their efforts to create a unique Tire Shop separate from the Car Shop, with its own Supervisor role. Assigning staff solely to the Tire Shop will streamline repair workflows, incentivize retention, increase tire-specific skill development, and reduce the dependency on two inmates currently working on tires.

Observation 2: The Integrated Waste Division (“Division”) is led by the Integrated Waste Manager. The Division has three sections, Waste Collection, Waste Disposal, and Sustainability/Recycling Center each led by a Manager. It should be noted that the four roles (Manager and three Section Managers) have identical titles despite the Integrated Waste Manager overseeing the Section Managers.

Recommendation 2: The City should consider differentiating the primary Integrated Waste Manager title from the Division’s three Section Managers. Options could include the Integrated Waste Manager role/title being shifted to a Deputy Director role/title, or the creation of a Senior Manager role/title.

Observation 3: The Integrated Waste Division is one of the only such organizations in the region to be referred to as Integrated Waste. The City of Atlanta, Gwinnett County, Cobb County, Macon-Bibb County, and the City of Albany refer to equivalent functions as solid waste. Other local governments such as and DeKalb County, City of Marietta, and the City of Decatur refer to their equivalent function as sanitation. Interviews with Division staff suggested that “Integrated Waste” makes it difficult to attract talent as the title of the Division is not as common as solid waste/sanitation. At the time of this report, the Department is in the process of changing the Integrated Waste Division’s name.

Recommendation 3: CCG should continue its plan to rename the Division from “Integrated Waste” to either “Solid Waste” or “Sanitation” to more accurately represent the Division and potentially increase the applicant pool.

Observation 4: Notwithstanding CDO hiring difficulties, interviews with Department staff indicate that inmate labor has limited benefits for the Department, citing the liabilities involved with inmate supervision and the unpredictability of inmate availability and performance. Furthermore, the Supervisors responsible for blue card inmate details are often diverted from their day-to-day responsibilities to manage inmates. The enlistment of inmate labor also requires a working relationship between the Department and the Muscogee County Prison, to coordinate logistics for inmate transportation and working schedules and availability. Department staff noted inconsistencies with inmate availability, which varies daily, and inmate working hours. If availability of inmates is limited, the Department’s operations are affected due to lack of manpower to complete routine responsibilities. Based on interviews, historically the inmate work release program was successful and beneficial to the Department, however over time the quality of work provided by the inmates and success of the program have declined.

Recommendation 4: The Department should consider conducting a workforce analysis of its staffing model to reduce dependency on inmate labor, potentially converting resources into dedicated full-time or temporary/seasonal maintenance positions to ensure consistent service delivery.

Observation 5A: The Fleet Management Division’s asset management software, ShopFax, as implemented, lacks crucial functionalities desired by staff based on M&J’s conversations with staff. ShopFax is unable to live track key vehicle metrics like miles, alert customers on their work orders’ status updates, nor generate reports of past work orders. As such, work order requesters commonly call the Division to check their work order status, thus reducing staff capacity for other tasks, and ShopFax’s lack of reporting abilities hinder the Department from developing a preventative maintenance schedule.

Observation 5B: The Buyers within the Division’s in-house NAPA Auto Parts are also unable to access ShopFax, and therefore buy parts based on verbal needs instead of work order data, which would enable more accurate and proactive purchasing habits.

Recommendation 5: The Department should consider evaluating upgrading to a more effective asset management software solution, along with exploring the variety of solutions on the market to gauge whether a ShopFax alternative aligns with the Division’s budget.

Observation 6: The Muscogee County Probation Office has a wide variety of approved community service options, including local religious non-profits and revenue-producing City entities like the Columbus Airport. The Public Works Department’s Community Service Section is one of the approved options, and one of the most physically taxing for probationers, given the manual labor required. As more options are added to the approved community service list, less probationers opt to volunteer for the Community Service Section.

Recommendation 6: The Department should coordinate with the Muscogee County Probation Office and express their recent volunteer shortages, assess the Muscogee County Probation Office's intent and needs, and reach an agreement on the community service entities on the approved list of volunteer hours.

Observation 7: Illegal dumping of tires is a frequent occurrence with businesses being a frequent offender. The CCG Inspections & Code Department historically assisted with helping to ensure tire businesses followed ordinances related to lawful tire disposal, but no longer are as proactive in monitoring businesses due to workload and staffing constraints.

Recommendation 7: The Department should collaborate with the Inspections & Code Department to implement proactive monitoring and enforcement of tire-disposal ordinances for businesses.

Observation 8: The GIS Manager housed within the CCG Information Technology Department maintains communication with the GIS Section positions to assign workload and ensure coordination of projects between GIS divisions/employees decentralized within other City departments. However, the Department's GIS positions report to the Department Director. Therefore, the Director completes GIS positions' performance appraisals, and is primarily involved in hiring decisions for GIS positions assigned to the Department, in addition to approving the types of training that can be obtained. As there is not a requirement for the GIS Manager to be involved in hiring decisions, performance appraisals, and training opportunities, it is up to the discretion of the Director to involve the GIS Manager in such decisions. As such, GIS positions within the Department are not formally accountable to the GIS Manager, which creates governance issues when assigning workloads. Also, training opportunities received by GIS positions are inconsistent between departments, affecting the retention and talent of employees.

Recommendation 8: The City should consider implementing a different staffing/reporting model for current shadow IT roles that exist external to the IT Department. The City could consider the following alternative approaches:

- The City could house shadow IT roles within the IT Department and therefore, current shadow IT roles would be centralized within the IT Department, based out of the IT Department office, and report directly and solely to the IT Director or designee.
- The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments but instead of reporting to individual department directors, the shadow IT roles would solely report to and be held accountable by the IT Director or designee. As a result, shadow IT roles would exist under the IT Department but would be located within the respective departments they support.
- The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments and implement a dual-reporting relationship for shadow IT positions \which establishes a reporting relationship with the external positions and the IT Director (or designee) to promote accountability and collaboration with the IT Department.

Observation 9: The City does not own any transfer stations, therefore Operators deposit waste at its final destination, at either the Pine Grove Sanitary Landfill, the Granite Bluff Inert Landfill, or the Federal Waste & Recycling building. The two landfills are at the very edge of the City, so it is common for Operators to drive upwards of 30 minutes from their route's end to the landfill, therefore causing inefficiencies.

Recommendation 9: The City should consider conducting a feasibility assessment that evaluates the costs and benefits of investing in building a transfer station(s) closer to the City's geographic center. Although transfer stations help streamline the waste disposal process and are often more cost effective, the potential of negative impact on the surrounding community may reduce the value of transfer stations.

Observation 10A: In interviews with Department staff, employees expressed concern that the Safety Coordinator role, which is currently occupied by a long-tenured individual nearing retirement, has no viable successors. This is in large part because the Safety Coordinator is a one-person team. The Department does include two other employees who are certified testers for CDL licenses, however no other individuals are familiar with the Safety Coordinator's unique, comprehensive responsibilities. As part of the upcoming FY27 budget cycle, the Department is requesting an additional position to assist the Safety Coordinator and facilitate succession planning.

Observation 10B: Furthermore, due to being a one-person team, the Safety Coordinator is not able to consistently and proactively conduct regular route checks or safety audits to monitor employee's driving or safety practices in the field. Therefore, the Safety Coordinator function is not as proactive/strategic as possible.

Recommendation 10: Due to the Safety Coordinator's essential role across all CCG Departments, the City should continue with its request to assign an additional staff member to safety functions that can learn the details of the role and be prepared to assume the role in the event of the existing Safety Coordinator's retirement or separation, or if the Safety Coordinator is out of the office for an extended period. The additional position would also allow for the safety function to provide more driver monitoring and routine safety checks.

Observation 11A: The Department primarily uses paper timecards for employees to report time.

Observation 11B: The only Department division which uses a biometric time clock, TimeClock Plus is the Solid Waste Section.

Observation 11C: The payroll process is time-consuming and relies on manual data entry due to the need to transfer data on paper timecards to Advantage, or from the biometric timeclocks to Advantage as the two systems are not integrated. Additionally, the implementation of timeclocks have not eliminated manual data entry.

Recommendation 11: The Department should consider implementing time clocks (TimeClock Plus) throughout all divisions that do not currently leverage TimeClock Plus. If the implementation moves forward, the Department should collaborate with the CCG Information Technology Department to integrate TimeClock Plus with Advantage to eliminate redundant, manual data entry and to automate the time reporting process.

Observation 12: Based on M&J’s discussions with staff, the Program includes a quota of work orders that Quality Control Program staff are encouraged to meet. The Program results in the submission of irrelevant work orders that increases workload for Department staff and reduces their capacity to conduct essential job duties. For example, program staff often submit work orders to the Community Service Section to pick up waste left outside houses on Sundays despite waste collection being the responsibility of the Integrated Waste Division when the Division runs their Monday morning trash route. Program staff also reportedly submit duplicate work orders (e.g., median grass is overgrown at 133 Macon Rd., 134 Macon Rd., 135 Macon Rd., etc.) and work orders for issues which have already been reported. In addition to irrelevant and duplicated work orders, program staff often assign work orders to the incorrect Division and submit work orders that are not the City’s responsibility to address such as commercial waste pickup. Improper submission of work orders requires Department staff to vet work orders to manually select applicable work orders and reassign or delete non-applicable work orders. At times, staff will travel to work order sites only to find that a work order should not have been submitted, or the issue has already been solved. The work order vetting process and attempted resolution of non-applicable work orders reduces staff members’ capacity to conduct essential job duties.

Recommendation 12: The City should consider providing Quality Control Program staff with more comprehensive training to help ensure the correct routing of work orders to departments/divisions and educate staff on the scope of work orders can be addressed by the Public Works Department. The City should also consider whether assigning a quota to staff drives the submission of irrelevant or inaccurate work orders.

Observation 13: Staff expressed concerns that managerial positions require a four-year bachelor’s degree, thus precluding most front-line staff from promotion opportunities and eliminating their possibilities of becoming a manager or above within the Department. M&J validated that some managerial positions within the Department do require a four-year bachelor’s degree. Also, based on interviews, the requirement has contributed to vacancy rates within managerial positions as qualified candidates with extensive work experience cannot be considered. Staff expressed support for either easing the degree requirement or adding an “or x years of experience” clause to the managerial job descriptions/qualifications to incentivize front-line staff to continue their employment within the Department and CCG. The holistic degree requirement can hinder proactive succession planning, as most Managers’ subordinates do not have a degree.

Recommendation 13: City leadership, in collaboration with the CCG Human Resources Department, should research the benefits and drawbacks of the four-year bachelor’s degree requirement and consider the possibility of allowing experience to substitute for education for certain job classifications.

Observation 14: Based on interviews, the Department experiences turnover once an employee receives their CDL license. The Department pays for employees’ CDL training and licensing; therefore, it is common for employees to receive their CDL from the Department before departing for a higher paying private sector job. There is not currently a requirement for employees to stay with the Department after a certain number of years to recoup the Department’s cost of training and increase retention rates.

Recommendation 14: The Department should collaborate with the CCG Human Resources Department to adjust employment contract language to increase retention for positions where CDL training is offered. This may entail including a “Minimum Term of Employment” section with an accompanying clawback provision that lets the City request a certain amount of money from the employee to recuperate training costs if the employee leaves before a certain date.

Observation 15: The equipment quality issues and shortages promote a negative feedback loop as significant portions of the Department’s budget are spent repairing the outdated equipment, thereby preventing the Department from investing in new equipment. Based on information provided and interviews, the Department’s purchasing model is generally reactive, and the Department faces a backlog of equipment to be replaced due to falling behind on equipment purchases.

Recommendation 15: The Department should consider different equipment purchasing tools and models to be more strategic rather than reactive.

Examples of options to consider include:

- **Implementation of a replacement matrix:** The Department should implement a point-based replacement score for every asset including condition, maintenance cost, downtime (out of service for repair), and mission criticality to prioritize the replacement of aging equipment currently in use.
- **Shift to a Vehicle and Equipment Replacement Fund or an Equipment Replacement Fund (Internal Service Fund) Purchasing Model:** The Department could charge itself an annual “rental fee” or depreciation fee for every piece of equipment. Funds collected by the fee go into a dedicated, protected reserve fund to fund replacements.

Observation 16: The Department is in the process of prioritizing replacing its aged-out equipment and maintain a vehicle replacement and equipment maintenance schedule. However, the Department’s replacement and maintenance schedule is not comprehensive and does not include a financial strategy to fund replacements, an asset inventory, or a defined system or method for tracking useful life of equipment, or a policy for disposal of assets.

Recommendation 16: The Department should create a robust, comprehensive capital equipment and maintenance plan which establishes replacement thresholds, a defined system or method for tracking useful life of equipment, maintenance intervals, includes an asset inventory, defines a financial strategy to fund replacements, and includes a disposal policy.

Observation 17: The Department is utilizing rear-loader refuse trucks within the Integrated Waste Division. Based on M&J’s research, rear-loader refuse trucks are considered more dangerous than front-loaders for Waste Equipment Operators as workers are highly exposed to traffic, lifting injuries, and biohazards.

Recommendation 17: The Department should consider phasing out rear-loader refuse trucks in an effort to reduce safety hazards and increase efficiency. Switching to front-load refuse trucks would improve safety and increase capacity.

Observation 18: The Fleet Management facility is lacking some crucial safety and habitable elements, including a frequently broken HVAC system, a lack of a facility-wide intercom, a lack of slip-resistant flooring in the Shops, and a small shop size, which leads to proximity between staff and hazardous heavy equipment. Fleet Management staff also expressed concern over the lack of space in the fleet yard. Currently the yard stores both CCG vehicles undergoing or awaiting repairs, as well as acting as a parking lot for many of the City-owned vehicles.

Recommendation 18: Given that CCG is moving the main Public Works facility to a new location soon, the City should consider renovating or moving the Fleet Management facility as part of the process.

Observation 19A: Operators are required to complete the Driver Vehicle Inspection Report, which logs the status of their truck's brakes, tires, signals, fluids, etc., before and after their shift. Based on interviews, it is common for Operators to check off that all safety vehicle elements have been inspected despite never having inspected their trucks.

Observation 19B: Operators are frequently captured by Samsara cameras engaging in unsafe driving practices like not putting seat belts on, texting while driving, and conducting rolling stops at stop signs.

Observation 19C: Operators historically have not prioritized refuse truck maintenance according to interviews, which suggest that it is common for cylinders on trucks to need expensive replacements due to them breaking as a result of trash and dirt buildup.

Observation 19D: At times, operators deliberately slow down a route to increase their hours and boost overtime pay. Not only does "stalling" cost the Department via increased payroll, fuel, and maintenance expenditures, but it reduces customer service quality due to slower trash collection.

Recommendation 19: The Department has policies prohibiting the observations noted above, although staff have not historically been held accountable to the policies. Now that the Integrated Waste Division has brought in new leadership, it is an opportune time to develop an updated accountability plan to ensure Supervisors are enforcing Department policies and staff follow federal, state, and local safety standards. Holding Supervisors, and in turn Operators, accountable will be made easier as Routeware location tracking and Samsara cameras are more fully implemented across the fleet. The Department should continue its implementation and utilization of features offered within Routeware and Samsara to increase accountability.

Observation 20: Based on interviews, the Department has not historically checked to ensure all Uptown Columbus businesses whose waste is collected are enrolled and paying for service. Many businesses in Uptown are thus getting their trash picked up for free at the expense of the City. Based on interviews, the Department intends to begin monitoring compliance for Uptown businesses to ensure solid waste collection services are paid for.

Recommendation 20: The Department should implement enforcement mechanisms to ensure all Uptown businesses whose waste is collected are enrolled in services and in compliance. Options for enforcement could include utilizing Routeware’s digital route maps and/or the GIS Division to highlight only the addresses of paying customers for waste pickup. An additional option could be to instruct Operators not to collect bags without stickers and placing “notice of non-compliance” stickers on untagged bags. The Division could then collaborate with CCG Code Enforcement to send logs of unpaid businesses to Code Enforcement and the businesses could be fined for illegal dumping or obstruction of the right-of-way. We understand that the Department is working with Uptown businesses to address the issue and collect relevant fees as appropriate.

Observation 21: The City does not offer commercial waste collection (excluding select small Uptown businesses). As such, the Department is not currently generating revenue through providing commercial service. Based on interviews, staff have a desire to offer commercial waste services and cited the potential to generate additional revenue and expand service offerings.

Recommendation 21: The Department should consider and conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine the feasibility and outcomes of offering commercial waste collection services. The Department should consider factors like costs to provide the service, equipment needs, and staffing model to determine whether providing such services in-house would be beneficial to the Department and the public.

Observation 22: The City does maintain a dedicated millage for stormwater, but the millage has not been increased in over 10 years. The City does not collect maintain a standalone, dedicated stormwater management/utility fee to fund stormwater operations. Based on M&J’s interviews, financial constraints cause funds to be used for new builds rather than proactively rehabbing older systems. Consolidated governments of comparable size and demographics such as Macon-Bibb County and Athens-Clarke County have successfully implemented a standalone stormwater management/utility fee. Implementation of a standalone stormwater management/utility fee would create a revenue stream dedicated to stormwater management and allow for more proactive projects to be undertaken.

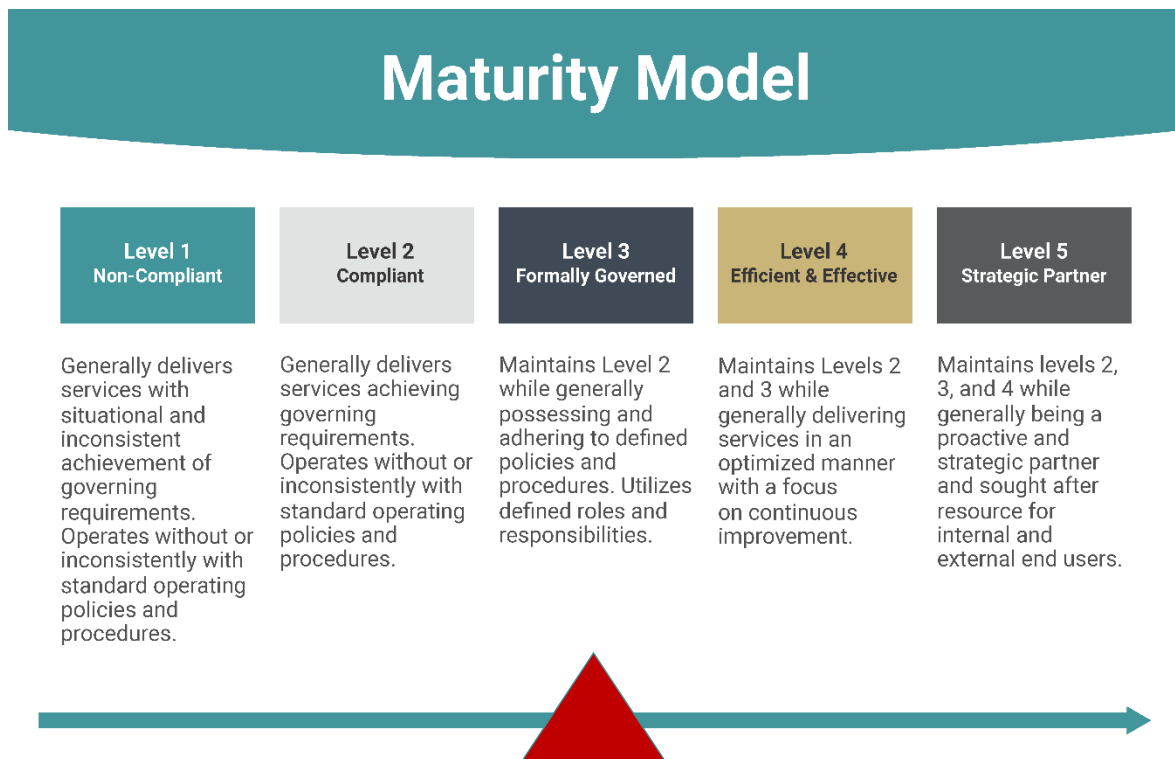
Recommendation 22: The City should consider conducting a formal feasibility study to potentially adopt and implement a dedicated stormwater management/utility fee to provide the City’s stormwater operations with a guaranteed, sustainable revenue stream.

Observation 23: The Waste Collection Section does not track performance metrics aside from those included in the annual/quarterly reports. Upon the full implementation of Routeware and Samsara, the Section plans to begin tracking route completion and Waste Equipment Operator safety metrics.

Recommendation 23: Upon the implementation of Routeware and Samsara, the Division should begin tracking performance metrics and key performance indicators such as route completion time to better gauge performance and assess driver safety.

Maturity Model

M&J has developed a Maturity Model to help governments visualize a department's maturity and opportunities for growth and development. A department is graded into one of five levels, with each level indicating maturity and effective operations. While units at higher levels of the Maturity Model often perform more efficiently than units at lower Maturity Model levels, the Maturity Model is an evaluation of organizational maturity and does not directly measure unit performance. While the Maturity Model does not directly measure unit performance, organizational maturity has a strong impact on performance. Furthermore, organizational maturity tends to be a robust, long-lasting determinant of performance, allowing units with higher levels of organizational maturity to continue to function effectively through staff turnover, reorganization, major process changes, or other circumstances that may seriously disrupt the operations of units with lower levels of organizational maturity.



M&J evaluates the current organizational maturity of the Department as **Level 3: Formally Governed**. While the Department is operating efficiently in many ways, the Department could implement a number of initiatives to be more strategic related to following through on strategic goals, increasing retention and reducing turnover, enhancing equipment quality, prioritizing digitization, and optimizing revenue generation.

Conclusion

The Public Works Department provides a range of essential internal and external services to the City. The Department's duties encompass functions related to street maintenance, beautification, waste management, and fleet operations.

The Department is aware of most of its growth opportunities and plans to more actively pursue its goals outlined in its 2022 Strategic Plan. Currently, the Department lacks turnover reducing mechanisms such as the creation of career ladders, is utilizing equipment past or soon-to-be past its useful life, continues to rely on many paper functions, and is not optimizing revenue generation. Transitioning from a Level 3: Formally Governed towards a Level 5: Strategic Partner maturity model will require a dedicated effort to alleviate the Department's remaining inefficiencies and strategic planning by the Department's leadership team.

M&J would like to thank Department leadership, as well as the 13 individuals interviewed across the Department, for allowing us to conduct the numerous interviews, follow-up interviews, and job shadowing that were required to complete this assessment.

Enterprise-wide Observations and Recommendations

During M&J's fieldwork, we identified multiple observations that either have enterprise-wide impact throughout the City government or will require policy or guidance from City leadership. Below are the noted enterprise-wide observations and recommendations.

City management has the ultimate responsibility to determine which, if any, of the following recommendations are to be implemented and the timing of such implementation. The Assessment identifies numerous recommendations that may not be possible to implement at the present or near future due to budget constraints, but should the Government accept and agree with the recommendations, the Government will have the ability to plan and budget for future implementation.

Observation 1: Many staff members were optimistic and pleased to participate in M&J's Assessment and expressed support for this Citywide initiative to enhance operations. While City staff are proud of the work they do to serve the City's common mission, employee morale is low due to public perception/opinions of the City, lack of opportunities for advancement, heavy workload, and deteriorating facilities and equipment. Staff expressed dissatisfaction with compensation and feelings of underappreciation due to a perceived lack of City leadership understanding departmental challenges and responsibilities. Certain staff have the perception that City leadership is disconnected with daily departmental operations and cited a lack of visibility and facetime with City leaders. Staff also expressed desires for more team-building events, as the City's current culture feels siloed among departments.

Recommendation 1: City leadership should assess meaningful ways to demonstrate to staff that individuals at all levels are seen and appreciated. Where applicable, individual departmental recommendations about restructuring job titles or classifications, defining career ladders, adding staff, incentivizing continuing education, and assessing condition of equipment and facilities should be considered. City leadership should conduct visits to departments to interact with frontline staff and increase visibility into departmental operations. City leadership should increase efforts to cultivate cohesiveness among all CCG departments through Citywide gatherings and events to boost morale and enhance the City's culture.

Observation 2A: Job descriptions for certain positions do not align with actual position responsibilities and in some cases include physical demands that are not appropriate/relevant to the positions. Also, some positions within the same department share job titles and descriptions but perform different roles and responsibilities which are not reflected in job descriptions.

Observation 2B: For certain roles, responsibilities and duties move with employees in positions, therefore as employees move positions, they retain responsibilities from previous roles. As a result, roles and responsibilities do not always align with actual job descriptions.

Recommendation 2: The Human Resources Department should collaborate with departments to ensure job descriptions are updated and reflect actual roles and responsibilities.

Observation 3: M&J observed inconsistencies and a general lack of career paths in certain departments. Certain positions (noted within individual departmental reports) at the same initial pay grade have inconsistent access to job tiers (i.e. Junior, Senior, I, II, III). In other scenarios, many positions lack defined career paths/job tiers, which can limit staff growth and restrict promotion opportunities to only when higher tier positions are vacated.

Recommendation 3: The Human Resources Department should collaborate with departments which maintain inconsistent job tiers or lack job tiers in general to define career ladders for staff to identify opportunities for growth and promotion.

Observation 4A: Certain roles which require operational/trades expertise require four-year bachelor's degrees for managerial and supervisory roles. In departments which rely on operational/trades expertise (Public Works, Facilities Maintenance) entry-level positions often do not require four-year bachelor's degrees and as a result, there is a barrier to growth for non-supervisory staff. Without opportunities for promotion into managerial and supervisory roles, staff's morale is negatively impacted. Degree requirements in certain roles can also discourage qualified applicants with relevant experience from applying to jobs, negatively impacting recruitment.

Observation 4B: Certain roles which require technical expertise (Information Technology) require four-year bachelor's degrees for most positions within the Information Technology Department. As a result, many qualified candidates cannot apply for positions, thereby negatively impacting recruitment. Furthermore, the requirement of degrees is generally becoming less common in the Information Technology profession.

Recommendation 4: City leadership, in collaboration with the Human Resources Department, should research the benefits and drawbacks of the four-year bachelor's degree requirement for certain job classifications/roles and consider the possibility of allowing experience to substitute for education for job classifications/roles that are less prevalent/commonplace to require four-year degrees.

Observation 5A: Many departments do not maintain standardized, consistent training programs/paths for positions to encourage or incentivize staff to receive training or obtain certifications above and beyond minimum requirements which exist for positions.

Observation 5B: Within departments that heavily rely on technical experience and operational/trades experience, staff expressed a lack of incentive to pursue additional certification and licenses which would increase their skillset, aid in professional growth, and be beneficial to their daily responsibilities.

Recommendation 5: The Human Resources Department should collaborate with departments to create career ladders that define training/certification pathways and compensatory incentives to encourage staff to pursue additional training, certifications, and licenses to promote development and benefit the City by expanding staff skillsets. Furthermore, the City should consider reimbursing employees for the cost of applicable training programs, certifications, and licenses that are applicable to their position.

Observation 6: The City engaged Evergreen Solutions to conduct a Classification and Compensation Study and Analysis (“Pay Study”) for all CCG positions that was finalized in 2022. The 2022 Pay Study replaced a pay plan that had not been systematically updated since 2006. As a result of the Pay Study, the Department implemented changes to the Citywide pay structure to make salaries more competitive with market rates. Also, as a result of the Pay Study, Evergreen Solutions recommended the City conduct a comprehensive classification and compensation study every three to five years.

Recommendation 6: The City should conduct a comprehensive classification and compensation study every three to five years to help ensure the City’s pay structure maintains market competitiveness and internal equity.

Observation 7: Interviews and walkthroughs of facilities with staff revealed deteriorating facilities which negatively impact operations and employee morale.

Recommendation 7: The Facilities Maintenance Department should establish a formal and comprehensive Facilities Condition Assessment plan which includes a comprehensive asset inventory and audit, identifies necessary repair or replacement tasks for each asset with anticipated costs, includes an investment plan that prioritizes and sequences capital and operational expenditures for the time period covered by the plan, includes preventative maintenance schedules, and defines the facility condition index for the City’s buildings to assess building health.

Observation 8: Departments which utilize heavy equipment are using equipment which is beyond its useful life due to inconsistent capital funding for assets, which has pushed departments behind on their equipment purchases. Due to an aging fleet of heavy equipment, certain pieces of equipment are unreliable and require frequent repairs, which limits the availability of equipment and increases maintenance costs.

Recommendation 8: The City could consider implementing an Internal Service Fund model for vehicle and equipment replacement. Departments would be charged an annual “rental” or “depreciation” fee for every asset, with the revenue protected in a dedicated reserve for future replacements and upgrades.

Observation 9: Many business processes throughout City departments are manual and burdensome due to reliance on paper and lack of integration of systems. Examples of manual processes identified within individual departmental reports include:

- Timekeeping processes are inconsistent within departments. Certain divisions within departments utilize biometric time clocks (TimeClock Plus) to automate timekeeping, while many divisions and departments track hours worked using paper timesheets. Staff must manually enter time from paper timesheets to CGI Advantage (the City’s enterprise resource planning system). Due to lack of integration of TimeClock Plus and CGI Advantage, staff must also manually enter hours worked into CGI Advantage.
- NEOGOV (the City’s onboarding and learning management system), CGI Advantage, and onPhase (the City’s records management system) are not integrated. Therefore, Human Resources staff and HR Liaisons must manually transfer data and documents stored on these systems, resulting in duplicative data entry which is time-consuming.

- The Engineering and Planning Departments accept credit card payments using paper credit card forms, as there is not currently a method for customers to make online payments.
- The Engineering and Planning Departments are conducting plan reviews primarily using paper copies of plans which are shared between appropriate reviewers.
- Customers cannot complete and submit Planning and Engineering Department applications using an online portal which streamlines the application and payment process. Based on M&J's fieldwork within the Inspections & Code Department, departments involved in the permitting and licensing process (Planning, Engineering, and Inspections & Code) are in the process of implementing Tyler Technologies' Enterprise Permitting and Licensing software which provides a Civic Access Self Service online portal allowing customers to submit digital applications, payments, and plans and to have visibility into their application status.
- The Finance Department's grants management function is primarily performed using Excel spreadsheets, thereby including limited automation and documentation.

Recommendation 9: The City should consider implementing technological solutions proposed throughout individual departmental reports to automate and streamline business processes to increase efficiency.

Observation 10: The County Prison provides an inmate work release program that provides approximately 400 inmate laborers to perform sanitation, landfill, public works, and maintenance roles. The inmate work labor program is reported to provide more than \$10million in savings to the City. Many departments are heavily reliant on inmate labor to supplement their workforce. Based on interviews across departments, the benefits of the inmate labor program have decreased in recent years due to the following:

- Limited daily availability of inmates, making supplemental staffing levels unpredictable at times and therefore reducing capacity if less inmates are available
- High turnover within Correctional Detail Officer positions which are required to supervise inmates which causes supervisory staff to assume oversight responsibilities of inmates, diverting them from their normal duties to supervise crews
- Unpredictability of quality of work from inmates

Recommendation 10: The City should further assess the inmate work release program to ensure that the program is still meeting the needs of the City and is operating as effectively as possible for both the City and the Prison.

Observation 11A: Many of the in-scope departments lack formal, documented, and updated standard operating procedures ("SOPs") to guide operations, and help ensure consistency and continuity.

Observation 11B: In the event of retirement or departure of a long-tenured employee, departments lose institutional knowledge due to lack of documented procedures and process guides and cross-training.

Recommendation 11A: City leadership should encourage the development of SOPs within all departments and should encourage departments to review SOPs at least every 2 years to ensure SOPs are updated and reflect actual practices.

Recommendation 11B: City leadership should encourage departments to participate in cross-training staff to increase knowledge sharing and succession planning.

Observation 12: Generally, many departments are operating in a reactive manner and lack strategic planning documents to guide long-term operations and define goals and objectives and measure department performance.

Recommendation 12: City leadership should encourage the development of strategic planning documents for all departments to define short- and long-term goals and align with collected performance data to track progress and performance.

Observation 13: Many departments lack formal, defined performance metrics and key performance indicators (“KPIs”) which are tracked to gauge departmental performance and align with strategic goals and objectives. For Departments which do track performance metrics, metrics are more focused on outputs (e.g. number of applications processed) rather than level of service provided, efficiency, or outcomes (e.g. time to process applications).

Recommendation 13: City leadership should encourage the development of KPIs that align with departmental strategic goals and objectives. City leadership should require the reporting of KPIs on a regular (monthly, quarterly, annually) basis to increase accountability, assess level of service provided, and gauge department performance.

Observation 14: Citywide annual performance appraisals were discontinued during the COVID-19 Pandemic due to the elimination of in-person meetings. Within the last year, the Human Resources Department reinstated annual performance appraisals as a requirement for departments, updated the process, and began tracking compliance. Historically, departments have not been held accountable to conduct performance evaluations, resulting in inconsistent departmental participation in the evaluation process.

Recommendation 14: The Human Resources Department should continue mandating annual performance appraisals and tracking compliance to ensure all departments participate and all staff receive a yearly evaluation.

Observation 15: The City does maintain a dedicated millage for stormwater, but the millage has not been increased in over 10 years. The City does not collect maintain a standalone, dedicated stormwater management/utility fee to fund stormwater operations. Based on M&J’s interviews, financial constraints cause funds to be used for new builds rather than proactively rehabbing older systems. Consolidated governments of comparable size and demographics such as Macon-Bibb County and Athens-Clarke County have successfully implemented a standalone stormwater management/utility fee. Implementation of a standalone stormwater management/utility fee would create a revenue stream dedicated to stormwater management and allow for more proactive projects to be undertaken.

Recommendation 15: The City should consider conducting a formal feasibility study to potentially adopt and implement a dedicated stormwater management/utility fee to provide the City's stormwater operations with a guaranteed, sustainable revenue stream.

Observation 16: The GIS Manager housed within the IT Department maintains communication with the GIS Section's staff to manage workload and ensure coordination of projects between GIS divisions and employees decentralized within other City departments. The GIS Section's GIS Technician Supervisor, however, reports to the Engineering Director. Therefore, the Engineering Director is responsible for evaluating the GIS Technician Supervisor's performance and is involved in hiring decisions for GIS Section positions. As there is not a requirement for the IT Department's GIS Manager to be involved in hiring decisions, performance appraisals, and training opportunities, it is up to the discretion of the Engineering Director to involve the GIS Manager in such decisions. As such, the GIS Section is not formally accountable to the IT Department's GIS Manager, which creates governance issues when assigning workloads. Also, training opportunities received by GIS positions are inconsistent between departments, affecting the retention and talent of employees.

Recommendation 16: The City should consider implementing a different staffing/reporting model for current shadow IT roles that exist external to the IT Department. The City could consider the following alternative approaches:

- The City could house shadow IT roles within the IT Department and therefore, current shadow IT roles would be centralized within the IT Department, based out of the IT Department office, and report directly and solely to the IT Director or designee.
- The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments but instead of reporting to individual department directors, the shadow IT roles would solely report to and be held accountable by the IT Director or designee. As a result, shadow IT roles would exist under the IT Department but would be located within the respective departments they support.

The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments and implement a dual-reporting relationship for shadow IT positions \which establishes a reporting relationship with the external positions and the IT Director (or designee) to promote accountability and collaboration with the IT Department.

Observation 17: Job descriptions for GIS positions are not updated to reflect job responsibilities and skillsets accurately, therefore affecting the quality of candidates that can be hired.

Recommendation 17: The GIS Division and Department should collaborate with the CCG Human Resources Department to update GIS job descriptions throughout the City to ensure job descriptions are accurate and modernized, and contain the appropriate qualifications and skills necessary to attract quality candidates.

Observation 18: In recent years select CCG departments (including select Public Safety departments) have created Business Analyst positions (“shadow IT positions”) with job descriptions that are very similar to the IT Department’s roles within the Enterprise Applications Division (“Division”). Due to the IT Department managing most of the City’s enterprise applications, the Division must assist shadow IT positions with certain functions, therefore some of their responsibilities require collaboration with the IT Department. However, based on interviews, there are concerns that shadow IT positions are managing applications/systems that the IT Department is unaware of.

Furthermore, compensation for certain shadow IT roles is significantly higher than comparable positions within the IT Department. As such, shadow IT roles have led to external competition for the Department, as an incumbent staff member transferred to another department to fill a Business Analyst role due to higher compensation and comparable job duties. Other issues resulting from shadow IT roles relate to accountability and authority, as the roles report to respective directors, not the IT Director. As such, there is limited collaboration between the IT Department and IT shadow roles which conflict with goals the Department wants to accomplish, create potential duplicative efforts, and encourage other departments to rely less upon the IT Department and create similar roles within other departments.

Recommendation 18: The City should consider implementing a different staffing/reporting model for current shadow IT roles that exist external to the IT Department. The City could consider the following alternative approaches:

- The City could house shadow IT roles within the IT Department and therefore, current shadow IT roles would be centralized within the IT Department, based out of the IT Department office, and report directly and solely to the IT Director or designee.
- The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments but instead of reporting to individual department directors, the shadow IT roles would solely report to and be held accountable by the IT Director or designee. As a result, shadow IT roles would exist under the IT Department but would be located within the respective departments they support.

The City could continue to house shadow IT roles within respective departments and implement a dual-reporting relationship for shadow IT positions which establishes a reporting relationship with the external positions and the IT Director (or designee) to promote accountability and collaboration with the IT Department.

Observation 19: Many of the departments utilize Q-Alert to receive work orders which are submitted by internal employees, the public, and 311 Citizen Services Center staff. Due to administrative inefficiencies within Q-Alert, departments receive many work orders which are not applicable to their department/division which require time to manually sort through work orders which can be addressed by the department/division. Furthermore, duplicative work orders are commonly entered, resulting in a high volume of work orders which have already been received or closed.

Recommendation 19: The City should provide clear guidance and delineation on CCG department duties and responsibilities to stakeholders which submit work orders using Q-Alert.

4. Conclusion

The in-scope departments are operating efficiently in many ways, but also have many opportunities to improve. Across all in-scope departments, there are some common threads in the observations and recommendations. There are several departments that need to more formally document policies and procedures, both to lessen ambiguity for current employees and to aid the learning of new hires. Multiple departments demonstrate the need for formal, documented, comprehensive strategic planning documents which align with identified key performance indicators and performance metrics to gauge progress towards goals and Departmental performance and customer service. The City should also identify ways to improve employee morale through eliminating barriers to advancement and identifying additional opportunities for growth through additional job tiers and available training pathways. Some departments are in need of updated equipment, especially equipment used when operating in the field.

The City now has a more thorough understanding of the operations of the in-scope departments, and recommendations on how to enhance City services and operations within those departments.

We commend the City for commencing this Operational Performance Assessment as this process has been in-depth and brought to light the positive accomplishments of the in-scope departments, and the opportunities for enhancement needed to achieve operational excellence.