



Columbus Consolidated Government

Georgia's First Consolidated Government

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**Internal Audit of
Public Works Department
January 24, 2023**

AUDIT AUTHORIZATION

This departmental audit was authorized by City Council on February 8, 2022, in response to a request for audit by former Forensic Auditor Donna McGinnis. The audit began on March 30, 2022, with the audit completed by Internal Auditor/Compliance Officer Donna McGinnis.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Public Works strives to serve the community by providing street and road maintenance, storm drainage, environmental enforcement, urban forest maintenance, waste disposal and maintenance of city owned properties in a safe and efficient manner, which is sensitive to the environment. The department is committed to doing its part to enhance the high quality of life for the current and future generations. The department consists of 458 full & part-time employees, and also relies upon the availability of inmate labor.

LEADERSHIP

Public Works Director Drale Short leads the department, accompanied by Deputy Director Michelle L. Brown-Mang. They are augmented by divisional leadership in various functional areas. Interim Division Manager Contreana Pearson heads Animal Control, Division Manager Marc C. Holmes heads Cemeteries, Division Manager Ralph Blakely heads Community Service, Safety Coordinator Johnny Floyd heads Driver Training, Division Manager Johnny Harp heads Facilities Maintenance, Deputy Director/Fleet Manager Andrea Owens heads Fleet Maintenance, Integrated Waste Manager Matt Dolan and Division Manager Carl Nunley and Assistant Division Managers James Mang and Aaron Thomas head the Integrated Waste Division, Supervisor Brandon Hatcher heads the Internal Services-GIS Team, Division Manager Tommy Beauchamp heads Rainwater Management, Acting Manager David Pate heads Street Maintenance and Acting Manager Darrell Meadows heads the Urban Forestry & Beautification Division. The Department Director reports to the Deputy City Manager of Operations.

AUDIT SCOPE

The audit scope is intended to address all material aspects of the Public Works Department. Material aspects included, but were not limited to: organizational structure, policies and procedures, internal controls, cash handling process, strategic planning, payroll, equipment, inventories, budgetary control, management continuity plan, training and participation in regional, statewide and national professional organizations.

AUDIT PROCESS

The Audit Process began with the authorization of the audit. An audit program was developed to address the material aspects of the departmental audit, followed by the entrance conference with the department head and leaders of the functional divisions. The audit techniques included reviews of documents and manuals, physical verification of employees and capital assets, tests of internal controls, examination of reports prepared by the department and others from independent sources, tests of transactions, reviews of policies, procedures and controls to determine if they were achieving desired results, reviews of strategic planning and capital replacement listing, interviews, meeting observations, independent verifications, and other techniques as appropriate. During the audit, management was briefed on findings and potential recommendations. Following the audit, a draft report is presented to department management for review and response. A final report including the departmental response is then prepared and distributed to department management, the Mayor and Council, concurrently. A presentation to Council is scheduled to address any questions or concerns they may have and to avail it to the public. The auditor provides follow-up later to insure that agreed-to recommendations have been implemented and are properly functioning.

FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES

Fieldwork began with payroll testing in which payroll distribution of the period ended March 25, 2022 was tested against time records and payroll system reporting and no discrepancies were noted. Activities then proceeded to each of the functional areas as noted below:

Within Rainwater Management, it was noted that Rainwater's share of Stormwater Funding is spent on repairs and remediation, as Engineering generally has spent their share of the funding source on new infrastructure. It was noted that the Division Manager had participated in available Advantage courses and was carefully managing the budget performance of his division. It was also noted that recently ambitious, re-classified employees had felt penalized in our recent Pay Study.

Within Integrated Waste, it was noted that there have been rate studies conducted noting that our current monthly rate of \$18 doesn't cover the cost of service provision, and that monthly rate should be adjusted to better reflect true costs. Also, discussed the intent to move beyond reliance on our current Amwaste agreement, with Public Works directly providing the service.

It was also noted that when making any decisions re: rate changes, it would be important to identify the rate to be charged for the issuance of a 2nd bin or cart for service addresses, as well as a rate for handicapped services. It was noted that the four-year degree requirement had led to quite a few long-empty positions in this division and across the department. It was also noted that we are in compliance with the State of Georgia re: landfill management, inclusive of the Landfill Reserve for the perpetual care of closed landfills. Reserve funds were initially used to fund the Amwaste agreement, and those funds should be replenished in the future.

It was additionally noted that if the intent is to directly provide waste collection services, without purchasing automated services under the Amwaste agreement, it would be necessary to hire the employees that are necessary to provide service to the growing number of service routes. At the present time, we ideally need 104 inmates to help with service delivery, and as recently as December 2022, were often only receiving about 50 inmates for scheduling. The COVID pandemic has disrupted inmate availability. Also, in previous years, the inmates were generally older adults who had previous work history, and they could earn parole credit for doing a quality job. The current inmate is often 18 or 19 years old with little work experience, and is no longer afforded the opportunity for parole credit. Inmate labor is, as a result, increasingly coming with liability attached, and there has been legal action associated with employing inmate labor on our service routes. It would be desirable to replace inmate labor with employees on service routes.

Within Community Service, it was noted that the workforce business model relies upon the availability of inmates & probationers to address an average of 2,000 work orders per year. The COVID pandemic has had an impact upon the availability of both inmates and probationers. At the height of the pandemic, local area non-profits had largely discontinued their use of inmates and probationers in their activities which resulted in less competition for these workers, and as a result, it was then easier for our Community Service division to get them scheduled. As much of the crisis has eased, the competition is back, and we sometimes have difficulty scheduling needed probationers. Generally, they are available on Saturdays as some have other employment Monday-Friday. Most of the Community Service work effort involves the completion of work orders generated through the 3-1-1 Office, but they additionally are responsible for addressing a litter hotspot list monthly, covering the patrol of 96 main roads. Due to lack of staffing available, and the growth of Columbus, only about half of the hotspot list gets completely addressed for litter each month. Most work assignments involve litter or trash pick-up or the cutting of city lots.

In Street Maintenance, it's noted that they have had key vacancies over lengthy periods of time associated with the 4-year degree requirement. Seasoned employees with credentials in the technical trades don't qualify for leadership opportunities due to the 4-year degree requirement. There were noted examples of previous hiring in which a degreed division leader was recruited from outside of CCG-Public Works and had not proven to be a successful hiring or organizational fit. It was noted that we do maximize the state and federal funding support for our roadways, but we also are required to maintain our match for those funds. Replacement of aged capital equipment has become a budgetary stress point- they have generally sought to make a request for only one specific piece of aged equipment one year, following in the next year with a replacement request list of several less expensive purchases the following year. It was also noted that the winter months pose additional challenges for the Streets Maintenance Division.

The potential for a light dusting of snow or "black ice" event further wears on the condition of our roadways, and as a result, following a tough winter, there's often more street repair, resurfacing and pothole repair. Additionally, it was noted that in some treacherous situations, the Street Maintenance Division is notified that they need to address highway conditions before CCG Public Safety employees can safely return to the streets in service to the community.

In Urban Forestry & Beautification, it was noted that the division hasn't been able to fill its leadership role as we're seeking both a 4-year degree and Urban Forestry certification. We have some employees who are degreed, and some who have completed the rigorous Urban Forestry certification, but we don't currently have a seasoned employee in the division with both the degree & certification. Pay study inequities & compensation rates and "burnout" were cited as the causes of a number of recent employee departures. This division is responsible for the care of right of way and common areas, and an increasing number of community roundabouts.

Within Animal Control, staffing shortages are so significant that hours of operation have been adjusted, opening at noon daily. It was noted that 5 employees had left Animal Control in the past, at a point when it was feared that Animal Control employees would no longer be considered CCG employees but would be joining the Paws payroll. The potentially impacted employees didn't want to jeopardize CCG benefits, or service time in the pension system.

It was found that the relatively new leadership at Paws Humane Society is working very effectively and efficiently, supporting Animal Control activities. This collaboration hadn't been as effective under previous Paws leadership. Inflationary times have added to not only diminished donor support at Paws, but there has been an increase in the number of abandoned pets, as a result of rising family evictions from rental properties in Columbus.

Animal Control obtains financial sponsors for kennel crates when possible, works collaboratively with Paws on fostering and adoption events, and also schedules "Meet & Greet" events to further encourage adoptions involving families who already have a pet in their home. There are some owner recoveries when a pet has been picked up by Animal Control, and there are grace periods in which owner recovery fees are waived. It was noted that possibly through ARP funding or other grant sources, there might be an opportunity to expand our runs, possibly eliminating or minimizing euthanasia. The vast majority of dogs at Animal Control are Pit Bull mixed breeds, with a few identified as aggressive. There is a bit of a stigma re: "aggression" associated with the Pit Bull breed and as a result, these dogs tend to have more of an adoption struggle than other breeds. During field visits, several of the Pitties were found to have very sweet dispositions.

Within Fleet Maintenance, in working with the business office, 3 years of departmental budgetary performance was reviewed, and a significant number of fixed assets were confirmed across the department. We had one drive-by asset confirmation day followed by a make-up day, along with additional confirmations of scrapped & auctioned items. With the development & implementation of recently established Standard Operating Procedures, there has been a significant reduction in the amount of fleet service activity that has been contracted with outside vendors. Nearly all budgeted positions are currently filled, and the team is now certified to handle most work on site.

Fleet records on vehicles were found to be in good order, and departments are now being notified when their vehicles are due for preventive maintenance. This notification program was recently launched. Outside fleet service providers are now only used following an evaluation and referral from Fleet Maintenance which will result in budgetary savings. This division is also home to a well-stocked NAPA store, and is also responsible for a \$2 million inventory of products that are requested and used city-wide such as COVID masks, Lysol products, paper products, cleaning products, etc. Records in the inventory area were found to be in good condition as well.

In the Cemeteries division, it was learned that we are running out of capacity for the traditional burial of indigent persons. There is currently a recommendation to acquire additional land for a future cemetery through the use of ARP funding, however, we may still run out of available plots before land is acquired. It will likely be necessary to change or enhance the criteria for those seeking indigent status, and we will likely need to develop a policy that addresses the use of cremation services, or mausoleum accommodation options. It was additionally learned that the acquisition of upgraded cemetery management software would be helpful in the management of the dwindling number of available plots available.

Within Facilities Maintenance, the tasks are perpetual and there's a deliberate effort to provide effective and legitimate repair as opposed to applying band-aids to situations. Sometimes accepting the lowest bid has resulted in unacceptable delays in CCG operations, and new contractors are ultimately sought out. FY23 capital funding of approximately \$1 million was nearly completely exhausted by the close of Period 4 with \$51,000 remaining at that point in time. In many cases, it's been necessary to rely upon outside vendors or contractors as staff has been insufficient.

Staffing shortages and staff departures have been problematic in Facilities Maintenance as the Pay Study disparities have highlighted differing valuations for CDL employees and Public Safety employees without similar consideration in the skilled technical trades. There were employees in this division who resigned their positions rather than file an appeal under the Pay Study. As a result of a number of vacant positions, Facilities Maintenance is currently unable to provide staff support to the Muscogee County Jail and to the City Service Center. Deferred maintenance is certainly a recognized issue at the Jail, and the situation is further stressed when Facilities Maintenance staffing is unavailable.

Within Administration, Driver's Training and Risk Management provides services city-wide. There is a concerning lack of succession planning in the area. Our Safety Coordinator shoulders all the responsibility for this area. In CDL training, the instruction and certification testing can't be provided by the same individual. The volume of Initial Driver's Training and Refresher Training (for those having an accident event) has also increased. Looking forward, it would be advantageous to return to the allowance for third-party testing, which would support the addition of two positions to the Driver's Training team. Additional costs for testing in Albany, or other Georgia cities would be minimized, and a minimal revenue stream would be generated because of provision of training & testing to others from adjacent counties.

Additionally, within Administration, the Internal Services-GIS Team is developing unique expertise in Public Works-GIS. Their information is critical to capturing information associated with emergency events. Their reporting considers the impact of weather events upon Public Works infrastructure and as a result, they are capable of providing critical information to our leaders and risk managers, and the data can also become important in substantiating claim activity with GEMA or FEMA. This functional area is expected to employ three by the close of FY23, but is utilizing budgetary funding pulled from several Public Works divisions. There are some identified needs for additional Public Works-GIS specific training, and for software application upgrades. In future budget years, it would be advantageous to establish a separate divisional budget for this unit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Would recommend “degree and/or experience” latitude in hiring decisions for those Public Works divisions that rely heavily upon skills in the technical trades.
2. Would recommend the acquisition of Cemetery management software considering the scarcity of available plots on our current properties.
3. Would recommend the development of a cemetery policy that revises the criteria for indigent services, and further provides policy guidance re: cremation options and mausoleum accommodations.
4. Would recommend the approval of a Rate Study that would address the true cost of Waste Collection services, with a review of the monthly rate, and a recommended cost for handicapped services, or a second cart or bin at a service address. This action should also involve the development of a process for the ordering of supplemental bins at an address.
5. Would recommend the development of a replacement equipment plan as most heavy equipment has a 5 year life, with a request reflected in the FY24 budget submission.
6. Would recommend including 2 FTEs in the FY24 budget submission for the Driver’s Training/Risk Management Office in order to begin the development of a succession plan for the area. Along with this action, it would be important to return to the provision of third party driver’s testing.
7. Would recommend addressing the pay grade disparities between CDL employees and our experienced technical trade personnel to stabilize employee retention.
8. Would recommend establishing the Public Works-GIS Team as it’s own budgetary division within the FY24 budget, and further providing for additional training opportunities & software upgrades.

9. Would recommend the staffing of waste collection service with employees, rather than continuing to rely upon dwindling quality inmate labor. The liability and resulting legal action associated with the use of prison labor is a growing concern, and by staffing our own CCG team, we can more effectively implement automated services without relying on the Amwaste contract.

Director's Response

Page 1 – Background

The Department of Public Works strives to serve the community by providing street and road maintenance, storm drainage, environmental enforcement, urban forest maintenance, waste disposal and maintenance of city owned properties in a safe and efficient manner, which is sensitive to the environment. The department is committed to doing its part to enhance the high quality of life for the current and future generations. The department consists of 458 full & part-time employees, and also relies upon the availability of inmate labor.

Dir. Response: All Departments within Public Works are as follows: Waste Collection (household, recycling, bulk and yard waste) Recycling Center, Pinegrove MSW Landfill, Granite Bluff Inert Landfills, Satilla/Wilson Camp Landfills; Urban Forestry & Beautification; Community Service; Fleet Management; Facilities Management; Cemetery Management (Riverdale, Porterdale, Eate Porterdale, Linwood); Stormwater Management; Animal Care and Control; Paving & Repairs; Drivers Training/Safety Program.

Page 1 – Leadership

Public Works Director Drale Short leads the department, accompanied by Deputy Director Michelle L. Brown-Mang. They are augmented by divisional leadership in various functional areas. Interim Division Manager Contreana Pearson heads Animal Control, Division Manager Marc C. Holmes heads Cemeteries, Division Manager Ralph Blakely heads Community Service, Safety Coordinator Johnny Floyd heads Driver Training, Division Manager Johnny Harp heads Facilities Maintenance, Deputy Director/Fleet Manager Andrea Owens heads Fleet Maintenance, Integrated Waste Manager Matt Dolan and Division Manager Carl Nunley and Assistant Division Managers James Mang and Aaron Thomas head the Integrated Waste Division, Supervisor Brandon Hatcher heads the Internal Services-GIS Team, Division Manager Tommy Beauchamp heads Rainwater Management, Acting Manager David Pate heads Street Maintenance and Acting Manager Darrell Meadows heads the Urban Forestry & Beautification Division. The Department Director reports to the Deputy City Manager of Operations.

Dir. Response: Community Service head is classified as the "Community Service Coordinator" and is not graded the same as Division Managers.

Page 4 – Field Work Activities

Within Fleet Maintenance, in working with the business office, 3 years of departmental budgetary performance was reviewed, and a significant number of fixed assets were confirmed across the department. We had one drive-by asset confirmation day followed by a make-up day, along with additional confirmations of scrapped & auctioned items. With the development & implementation of recently established Standard Operating Procedures, there has been a significant reduction in the amount of fleet service activity that has been contracted with outside vendors. Nearly all budgeted positions are currently filled, and the team is now certified to handle most work on site. Fleet records on vehicles were found to be in good order, and departments are now being notified when their vehicles are due for preventive maintenance. This notification program was recently launched. Outside fleet service providers are now only used following an evaluation and referral from Fleet Maintenance which will result in budgetary savings. This division is also home to a well-stocked NAPA store, and is also responsible for a \$2 million inventory of products that are requested and used city-wide such as COVID masks, Lysol products, paper products, cleaning products, etc. Records in the inventory area were found to be in good condition as well.

Dir. Response: Standard Operating Procedures have been in place for the procurement portions of Fleet Management; however, agree that established SOP's have been done for Fleet Technicians.

Page 5 – Field Work Activities (Cont)

Within Administration, Driver's Training and Risk Management provides services city-wide. There is a concerning lack of succession planning in the area. Our Safety Coordinator shoulders all the responsibility for this area. In CDL training, the instruction and certification testing can't be provided by the same individual. The volume of Initial Driver's Training and Refresher Training (for those having an accident event) has also increased. Looking forward, it would be advantageous to return to the allowance for third-party testing, which would support the addition of two positions to the Driver's Training team. Additional costs for testing in Albany, or other Georgia cities would be minimized, and a minimal revenue stream would be generated as a result of provision of training & testing to others from adjacent counties.

Dir. Response: Succession Planning and assistance for the Driver's Training Instructor is on-going, finding individuals interested in venturing into this arena is the challenge. Two individuals have been identified and are currently in training to become a trainer/tester, but the age of these individuals is not significantly lower than the current Drivers Training Instructor, therefore, the need to identify much younger candidates is ongoing.

I agree that "Our Safety Coordinator shoulders all the responsibility for this area and that Third Party Testing is needed throughout the state, but until we obtain additional certified trainers/testers within the CCG, it would be an additional area that he would have to shoulder the burden of ensuring testing and training is done according to state requirements. You cannot train and test. Third Party Testing should be a shared adventure throughout the State.

Page 6 - RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Would recommend including 2 FTEs in the FY24 budget submission for the Driver's Training/Risk Management Office in order to begin the development of a succession plan for the area. Along with this action, it would be important to return to the provision of third party driver's testing.

Dir. Response: Agree to the need for 2 FTE's and will submit in FY24 Budget