



Office of the City Manager
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MEMORANDUM

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Telephone: (262) 473-0104
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To: Common Council
From: John Weidl, City Manager
Date: 9/13/2023
Re: September Update

City of Whitewater 2023 City Manager Plan

Vision Statement: Building upon our rich history, the City of Whitewater will continue to be a welcoming, safe, and dynamic community. We will embrace the cultural and educational opportunities that the presence of a thriving University and an increasingly diverse population offers.

We will seek to continually improve and make Whitewater strong by fostering public trust and confidence in our government. We will encourage a community characterized by a spirit of openness and fairness that encourages individuals to participate publicly and prosper personally. We will maintain a high quality of life through careful stewardship of all our many resources.

Mission statement: The City of Whitewater provides efficient and high-quality services which support, living, learning, playing, and working in an exceptional community.

Focus areas:

- 1) Meet Various Staff, Departments, and Committees
 - a. Schedule tours with each department and leadership team

Update Successfully Finished. Moreover, following the HR overhaul, every newly recruited individual now receives an onboarding schedule. This includes guided tours of pertinent departments and introductions to key personnel like those in HR, Finance, and so on.

- b. Attend at least once annually committee meetings for each City-led committee/board

Update - Currently Underway. Progress is on track. Now that we have appointed a Finance Director, it's imperative for the Finance Committee to convene. The Community Involvement and Cable TV commission has not met since the TV station was reinitiated. We've merged the Pedestrian and Bicycle advisory committee, and we'll be proposing further efficiency measures in 2024.

- c. Meet semi-annually with departments/staff to facilitate dialogue and share organizational information

Update - Accomplished and Ongoing. Moreover, we've initiated a quarterly luncheon dedicated to rising leaders. Human Resources is rolling out Stay Interviews, and we're planning cross-departmental open houses throughout the upcoming year. These are timed with holidays to promote interaction among city-wide employees.

2) Increased Communication and Teamwork – Strategic Planning

a. Facilitated Strategic Planning Workshops

Update – Finalized and endorsed by the Common Council with five primary objectives: increased single-family housing, enhanced relations with the business community, superior public communication, optimized recruitment and retention, and strategies for levy caps and fiscal limitations. The draft for the 2024 Strategic Planning materials is expected in October, detailing our achievements in 2023 and objectives for 2024. Numerous ongoing projects and programs resonate with these strategic aims, including a rejuvenated social media and TV footprint, pay-scale adjustments and benchmark research, the establishment of a ratified Affordable Housing Policy, among others.

b. Biennial Plan linked to Budget Document

Update - Underway and set to finalize during the annual budget procedure. It's imperative to note that the budget requires annual approval. Adopting a biennial perspective coincides with the State's budgetary approach, our strategic objectives, and grants department heads the flexibility for multi-year planning and implementation.

3) Implement Referendum Strategy – Fire/EMS staffing

a. Management and staffing structure for 27/7 coverage

Update – Finalized. I'm both honored and delighted to report that our response times have been reduced by 50%, and we still see potential for further enhancement. In 90% of instances, we are responding in under 3 minutes. Our Fire and EMS teams have managed demanding workloads, handling as many as 22 calls within a 24-hour span. We have earned our Paramedic Certification. I'm confident in stating that our Fire and EMS department stands out as the most improved in the Tri-County region, if not the entire State.

b. Onboarding, training, and management program for first 3-5 years

Update - The preliminary plan has been finalized, but continuous progress remains a priority. We've secured our Paramedic Certification. The training and onboarding framework has undergone significant enhancement and has been digitalized. Our team consistently meets training milestones promptly. By 2024, the management structure will be in full swing as Fire/EMS is set to appoint a full-time Assistant Chief or EMS Chief, positions which are currently part-time. The Chief has a clear roadmap, and it will be addressed within the budget. Everything is progressing according to his timeline.

c. Hire FT Chief within 120 days

Update – Finalized. Kelly is an exceptional Chief. Even a national search couldn't have yielded a better candidate. Jason, Ryan, Joe, and the entire leadership team have our full trust to oversee their respective operations. They deserve high praise.

4) Re-Establish Economic Development Platform

a. Establish reporting and financial relationships between Economic Development Director, CDA, and Manager/City Council

Update - Largely accomplished. We recommend further training for management personnel and elected representatives. The CDA is in the process of assessing its loan programs for compliance and making necessary updates in response to market conditions. The Common Council has greenlighted a revised City Manager evaluation policy. Currently, competencies and various other aspects are being addressed through Human Resources.

b. Facilitate creation of Housing Policy and guidance for TIF Extension monies

Update - Finalized and endorsed by the Common Council. I've gone through an initial subdivision plan for the East side. The City is collaborating with a developer concerning Meadowview Court. We're in the early planning phases for a subdivision on the City's West side. Our progress is commendable.

c. Hire CDA Director by July, 2023

Update - Not yet finished. The CDA Interview team is relisting for the 3rd time, now with the aid of GovHR. From my discussions with Human Resources, the CDA's choice to repost seems well-advised.

5) Develop Annual Training milestones for City Manager, staff, boards, and committees

- a. All Staff: Sexual harassment, workplace misconduct, retaliation and active shooter, and others as determined by City Manager, HR Manager, Police Chief, and CVMIC

Update - Complete and always ongoing for staff. Boards and committees onboarding is now a digital video so the content is always available to current and prospective members.

- b. Boards and Committees: Robert's Rules of Order, Open Meetings Law, Open Records Law, conflicts of interest as determined by City Clerk and Attorney

Update - Finalized and ongoing. Five Common Council members underwent training regarding the responsibilities of elected officials. The Common Council opted not to set a training policy for the elected officials. Committees now have digital resources and training at their disposal. A Common Council member has requested that training for the Common Council be included in the April 2024 agenda.

- c. City Manager: 9-Course Leadership Training Module and additional training as determined by HR Manager and City Manager
 - i. Policy Development, Succession Planning, Retaining and Training, Leadership Challenge, Project Management, Negotiations for Leaders, Recruiting, Interviewing and Hiring, Performance Evaluations, Strategic Planning and Visioning

Update- In progress. All classes are scheduled. 8 of 11 classes complete.

- ii. Additional Training: Coaching and Feedback, Leadership: technical skills, soft skills, and people view, and Mentoring for Leaders

Update – Complete

6) Establish a City-wide compensation and staffing structure that brings the City into alignment with its comparable Wisconsin communities and ability to pay

Update - Underway. The Common Council has directed staff to prioritize non-department head roles. The approach is to handle this internally by reaching out to other municipalities and collaborating with the Cities and Villages Mutual Insurance Company (CVMIC).

- a. Evaluate areas for consolidation through attrition, outsourcing, and other measures to reduce costs, where applicable

Update - Finalized and ongoing. We've restructured Media Services, integrating it with the City Manager's Chief of Staff role, downsized the GIS staff, and are considering the outsourcing of code enforcement.

- b. Study and initiate multi-year plan to align staffing and compensation with comparable communities.

Update - In progress. See above.

- c. Establish written succession planning in applicable departments

Update - Underway. We initiated with the Chief of Staff/Executive Assistant role. Efforts for Media services and the Clerk's office are currently in motion. The City Manager's office and Human Resources are set to begin gathering pertinent data via stay interviews. Additionally, they aim to cultivate upcoming leaders through initiatives like leadership luncheons, continuous training, development programs, and exploring other best-practice methods.

Strategic objectives:

- 1) Increased productivity through clear, direct, and consistent communication.

Update - Examples underway include our new social media guide, WAFC Business Plan, Action Plan and Marketing Plan, and the City's recently approved Strategic Plan.

- 2) Establish programs that create growth in the tax and employment base.

Update - Current initiatives in progress encompass the implementation of the Affordable Housing Policy, the CDA's overhaul of its loan programs to introduce matching grants and competitive interest rates, and the collaborative effort between the City and CDA in selling two land parcels for industrial development this year. These parcels are projected to add 30,000 and 100,000 square feet of taxable industrial growth, respectively. Furthermore, the City is collaborating with a developer to position the Whitewater Grocery Co-op in the Downtown area, and we've greenlit developments for both Aldi – a significant milestone - and Starbucks.

- 3) Ensure appropriate training and accountability for performance improvement.

Update – In progress. The Clerk's office has now embraced a culture of continuous learning and actively participates in relevant training sessions. The introduction of Badger books aims to streamline the election process and reduce reconciliation time. There's an ongoing initiative in the Clerk's office to digitize all forms. For operational efficiency during high-demand periods, one of our finance team members has undergone training and certification by the Municipal Clerk's Institute. Human Resources has diligently updated and maintains comprehensive files for all employees. Cross-training has been implemented for the online HR platforms, ensuring all staff utilize a standardized software for HR-related materials. To further enhance employee performance, training requirements have been integrated into the improvement and discipline processes. Our collaboration with CVMIC is resulting in an updated employee handbook/policies, and an in-depth study on employee compensation is underway. The digitization movement continues with Neighborhood Services now accepting online permit applications and payments. All staff undergo essential training sessions, including those on sexual harassment, active shooter scenarios, and other department-specific topics.

- 4) Safeguard the taxpayer's investment in City services through transparent and forthright management practices.

Update - Under the current City Manager's leadership, the City has witnessed significant enhancements in its operations, achieving levels of efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency that stand out in recent history. The establishment of a 24/7 Fire and EMS service, which is fully funded without the necessity for equipment loans, is a notable accomplishment. Staff-formulated policies undergo a meticulous review using transparent and accountable measures, such as open houses, public readings, and community interactions as deemed necessary.

Now, more than ever, and certainly surpassing pre-pandemic times, the City is accessible across diverse platforms: online, TV, and in-person. A prime example of their unwavering commitment to transparency and accountability towards taxpayers is evident in the exhaustive reporting and strategic planning for the Whitewater Aquatic and Fitness Center (WAFC). Faced with constructive yet sharp feedback, the staff exhibited tenacity and dedication. Positive outcomes abound: memberships have increased, budgetary alignments are underway, lifeguard staffing has seen a significant uplift, and the staff's capacity to address criticism constructively, without taking it personally, has been commendable. Their enduring dedication was transparent during the six rigorous months of consistent public scrutiny.

Additionally, the success of the referendum is worthy of mention. The team aimed for excellence, and the results surpassed those aims. An overwhelming 65% of voters endorsed the City's Fire and EMS referendum. What did the staff accomplish post this approval? A remarkable reduction in response times by half and earning the City Manager's unwavering faith in the staff's capabilities to enact transformative changes.

Projects: Strategic Planning, Biennial Budget, Capital Improvement Plan, annual performance evaluations, WUSD and City of Whitewater WAFC agreement, recruitment of CDA Director.

Update – Based on extensive employee feedback indicating that the performance evaluations are not serving as constructive tools for improvement or as effective mechanisms within the compensation framework, comprehensive reviews will be postponed until 2024, giving Human Resources time to work with the leadership staff and CVMIC to craft something that will be useful. All other tasks are either completed or progressing as planned.

Current situation: Recently approved referendum for Fire and EMS. Slow economic growth. Recruitment challenges. No current strategic/operational plan. Many projects, policies, and planning documents left unfinished by former City Manager. Solid development assets (land, CDA, etc.). Many above averages and several exceptional performers in various departments. Operating budgets are tight. Documentation and accountability suboptimal in previous years.

Update – We are on the upswing and by this point we would need to be. Affordable Housing Policy Approved. Strategic Plan Approved. Code Enforcement Rewrite – In progress. Badger Books – in progress.

Future perspective: Immediate concerns are the projected decrease in MPS payments, projected to result in a loss of \$250,000+/- annually to the general fund and the negative impact of higher interest rates on the City's ability to borrow (e.g. if we borrow \$1M per year and \$250K is interest payments, we spend \$750K on capital. Now interest is more like \$350K, which results in \$650K to spend, or less effective purchasing power. Numbers are illustrative).

Medium term, the City and WUSD need to come to an agreement regarding the WAFC and its operations and funding. Also, the City needs a strategy and direction for creating sustainable increases in tax base and employment using existing resources, namely affordable housing monies and City-owned parcels that are backed by live tax increment financing districts.

Long-term, staff and I need clear direction from the City Council regarding how to manage constrained budgets and inflating costs. There is a high likelihood that the organization will need to reduce its total number of employees within the next 24 to 48 months if serious steps are not taken to shore up declining revenues and/or consider other revenue generating options. Also long term, the City has large capital needs for DPW, and large repairs for buildings at City Hall, WAFC, and other City-owned buildings across the City.

We have plenty of time. We need to be proactive and collaborative. By the end of year one, we will have a strategic plan, an economic development platform, and a biennial budget that ensures we have a financial plan moving forward.

Update – In 2024, the City is expected not to receive the Expenditure Restraint Payment, primarily due to the budget augmentation resulting from the referendum, though this is projected to resume in 2025. Additionally, reimbursements from the University for dispatch services will be discontinued. These changes are anticipated to lead to a revenue shortfall of approximately \$510,000 for the City in 2024. Conversely, state shared revenue is projected to see an upsurge of \$690,000. This results in a net revenue increase of roughly \$180,000 against an \$18,000,000 budget, signifying a 1% revenue augmentation. The City's growth stands at a modest 0.08%. Nevertheless, the primary takeaways of this section remain valid.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John S. Weidl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and last name "Weidl" clearly distinguishable.

John S. Weidl, City Manager