

City Services Study – City Council

A comprehensive review of staffing for city services in the City of Providence, RI, containing recommendations to streamline departments and reduce costs.

D'Amico Consulting

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D'Amico Consulting was retained by the Providence City Council for a two part human resources project. Project # 1 was to update the job descriptions throughout the city. Project # 2 was to prepare a report with recommendations to "streamline the class structure to reflect today's work environment and suggest the combination of duplicative job descriptions" as well as " identify areas of redundancy and potential consolidation of similar or identical functions within and throughout city departments". What follows in this report is a set of twenty (20) recommendations which meets the goals of project #2. As part of its work, D'Amico Consulting held more than thirty information gathering meetings with department directors and managers. The recommendations that follow are a combination of suggestions by department heads as well as our own observations based on these extensive discussions.

It is important to note that some of the recommendations may require negotiated changes within the city's collective bargaining agreements with its unions. Also, while in many cases we are proposing consolidations that would lead to the elimination of positions, we are not advocating that the city should immediately displace these employees through some sort of lay-off. Any lay-off is likely to lead to a drawn out bumping procedure resulting in multiple workers in new jobs at its conclusion. In order to avoid the additional employee training this would require and the temporary upheaval in departments as they go through this process, it may be preferable in most cases to accomplish the proposed consolidations either through natural attrition or by transferring the affected employee into an unfilled position of need elsewhere in the city.

Below each recommendation is an estimate of the annual savings the city is likely to achieve from implementing the recommendation. It should be noted that the savings estimates listed here are meant to be extremely conservative. We are confident that the true savings in each case will meet or exceed the estimate that we have provided.

Recommendation 1

The Department of Public Works (DPW) consists of seven divisions responsible for the construction, reconstruction and maintenance of highways and bridges; snow removal; sidewalks and curbing; street cleaning; garbage and refuse collection and disposal; traffic engineering duties include providing guidance related to parking, traffic movements, studies, and traffic growth projections; construction, inspection, and maintenance of traffic control devices including signs and traffic control signals, and parking meters; and street lighting. The Parks Department is responsible for all green spaces of the city, all parks including Roger Williams Park Zoo and Roger Williams Park Museum, the North Burial Ground and other city-owned or controlled cemeteries, public recreational areas of all types including those on or adjacent to school property and all forestry functions including the setting out, care and removal of trees, shrubs and other plants on the streets of the city as well as on the properties for which it is responsible. The Fire Department is responsible for firefighting, rescue, and other types of emergency response within the city. Each of these three departments has a fleet of trucks and other vehicles at their disposal. The city currently manages three separate garages for vehicle maintenance. DPW has a garage to maintain its trucks; the Parks Department has a garage to maintain its trucks; and the Fire Department has a garage to maintain its fire trucks and other vehicles as well as all of the police cars in the city's fleet. Spread among these three departments there are seventeen senior mechanics, one

mechanic, three shop supervisors, one assistant shop supervisor, one auto equipment supervisor, and one equipment maintenance supervisor.

It is our recommendation that the city look to consolidate all of these functions under one garage. There would be several benefits to this new structure. First, there would be a need for fewer supervisors. As it stands today, each garage needs its own supervisory staff. Eliminating two garages would allow the city to reduce that staffing by at least two supervisors if not more.

The second benefit would be in the assigning of mechanics. Having all of the mechanics under one garage would give management the maximum flexibility based on the daily vehicle maintenance needs. For example, the DPW garage has two senior mechanics. If one of them is not at work for any reason, the garage is likely to fall behind in its assignments until that mechanic returns to work. Given that many city employees have several weeks of vacation, there are likely many weeks during the year when the staffing in the DPW garage is only half of its required needs. If the city had all of the mechanics in one garage, the supervisor could assign any of the remaining fifteen senior mechanics to assist with the DPW workload during this time period. Having more mechanics at their disposal under one roof will allow management to better assign their workforce based on the varying needs on a daily basis, thereby improving city maintenance services. Furthermore, once this consolidation is complete, the city may find that seventeen senior mechanics are not necessary. The city may be able to take advantage of certain economies of scale to reduce the number of positions over time.

It should be noted that the senior mechanics in the fire department garage work on much more complex engines and therefore have more stringent job qualifications. Nothing in this recommendation would preclude the city from maintaining two levels of mechanics. One job classification would meet the requirements to work on DPW trucks, Parks trucks, and police cars. The higher level job classification would meet the necessary requirements to work on both the aforementioned vehicles as well as the larger fire trucks.

Estimated savings: At least \$120,000 annually. This assumes the elimination of two supervisory positions. It is likely the city will see additional savings from reduced overtime but that is not factored into this calculation.

Recommendation 2

There are currently approximately 30 laborers split between the Parks Department and DPW. Approximately two thirds are assigned to DPW and one third to the Parks department. Laborers perform manual work doing a variety of semi-skilled tasks. The skills required and the tasks performed are similar in both departments. Under the current structure, laborers in Parks are not permitted to work in DPW and vice versa. This creates inefficiencies as this does not allow management to assign laborers to meet the needs of the city as a whole on a given day. Management is restricted to keeping a laborer within his or her assigned department. Instead of the current arrangement, there should be one pool of laborers who are assigned to either Parks or DPW each day in the appropriate numbers to meet the needs of the day. For example, in the summer seasons Parks would likely need more laborers as they maintain the city parks and baseball fields. In the winter months, DPW would need more laborers as they have more work to do to maintain roads and fill potholes. This alignment would also make it

easier for managers to cover for employees who are out due to illness or vacation. Today, if Parks has one or two laborers on vacation, they would likely need to cover the absences with overtime to get the necessary work completed, as they have a relatively small number of laborers in total. If laborers were allowed to move freely between departments, the city could transfer one or two laborers from DPW to assist Parks and thereby limit overtime. Certainly there would be times when DPW needed its full complement of laborers and therefore Parks would still need to use overtime. However, it is also a certainty that there would be occasions when DPW could spare one or two of its laborers and allow Parks to avoid the overtime. It is difficult to put a hard dollar amount on the potential cost savings, but the benefit to the city of the flexibility in this arrangement is apparent.

If the city is able to successfully implement this recommendation, we would advise expanding this philosophy to other positions that are shared between these two departments. The Parks Department and DPW both have Equipment Operators, Heavy Equipment Operators, and Forepersons. The job descriptions in the two departments for each of these jobs are essentially the same. If they are able to successfully share laborers, there is no reason they would not ultimately be able to successfully share these joint positions as well greatly enhancing management flexibility in the city.

Estimated savings: It is difficult to quantify the overtime savings but the enhanced flexibility to the city would be substantial.

Recommendation 3

The city has numerous clerical positions spread out among its more than thirty different departments. In the current structure, clerks are assigned to a department and work only in that department. This forces small departments to essentially overstaff. Consider a department that needs three clerks on a daily basis to complete its work. If each of these clerks has been with the city for ten years, they would each be entitled to four weeks of vacation as well as fifteen sick days per year in addition to any unused sick days they may have accrued from prior years. The manager of the department knows at the start of the year that he/she will be short one clerk for at minimum twelve weeks and potentially twenty-one or more weeks during the year. This problem becomes particularly acute if a clerk is on vacation when a second clerk becomes ill. If the department needs three clerks on a given day to complete all its work, the manager has no choice but to either maintain a staff of four clerks or allow frequent overtime to cover employee vacation and sick time. The result is that several of the smaller departments in the city are more than likely staffed by one more clerk than is truly necessary when at full staffing.

In discussions with department managers, it became clear that they would all benefit greatly if they were allowed to transfer clerks to meet the needs of each department on a daily basis similar to the laborers recommendation above. However, unlike the laborer example, the clerical work in one department can be substantially different than that in another department. Employees that "float" between departments would need to be trained in each department individually. In order to accomplish this, we recommend the following. Certain departments with somewhat similar work should be grouped. For example, the Retirement Office, Accounts Payable, and Payroll could be one grouping. The Tax Assessor's office and the Tax Collector's could be another grouping and so forth. Each department within a group would maintain a base number of clerks albeit some number fewer than they have today. In addition to the clerks in each department, there would be a small group of what we

will call Special Clerks who would be trained on all the clerical work for all departments in a group. These Special Clerks would be rotated based on need. If someone is on vacation, a Special Clerk covers for that person for the week. If a department has a particularly busy period, such as the week tax payments are due in the Tax Collector's office, one or more Special Clerks is assigned to that department for the week to alleviate the backlog. Given that these Special Clerks would be trained in multiple tasks and would be more skilled than a clerk who only works in one department, a new higher level job classification will need to be created and compensated accordingly. However, we feel that the increased salary would be more than offset by the increased flexibility, efficiency, and reduction in overtime. Furthermore, it is likely that the total number of clerks across all departments can be reduced somewhat when departments are able to share clerks in this manner. Another potential benefit is that it provides the city's clerical employees with a natural career progression and an additional opportunity for promotion. The exact structure of the department groupings and the implementation of the mechanism for assigning clerks will have to be discussed at length among managers. There will also need to be a lengthy training period for the Special Clerks to become proficient in multiple departments.

Estimated savings: It is not possible to quantify savings at this time as it would depend on the exact department groupings and the agreed compensation for the Special Clerks.

Recommendation 4

The city's Geographic Information System (GIS) is a computer program that contains a map of the city and important details for all city locations. This information is used by several departments throughout the city such as the Planning Department for city planning issues, the Tax Assessor's office to record details of the properties needed for valuations, and public safety to respond to emergencies. The GIS Manager is responsible for maintaining this computer application. This position currently reports to the Planning Director and is considered part of the Planning Department. It is our recommendation that this position be transferred to the Information Technology (IT) department. In the current structure, it is difficult for the GIS manager to be fully aware of the issues other departments are facing and the needs they may have related to the GIS. As a result, the GIS manager unintentionally, but quite naturally, focuses his/her efforts on supporting the specific needs of the Planning Department. The Planning Department may need a separate person dedicated to the GIS applications that they use. However, the GIS infrastructure and its integration among all city departments should be managed out of IT in order to better meet the needs of the city as a whole.

Estimated savings: None. The benefits are in improved GIS integration throughout the city.

Recommendation 5

The Police department currently employs three uniformed officers to manage its information technology (IT) requirements. The department would be better served to have trained police officers doing police work and civilians trained in IT managing its IT needs. After discussions with both the Police department and the Information Technology department, it is our recommendation that this work be transferred to the IT department. They would likely need to add two additional IT technicians to replace

the three in the police department. However, this would allow the police department to backfill three open and budgeted positions for police officers from within rather than adding three officers from outside the department resulting in a net decrease of one position in the city's total employee base.

Estimated savings: \$50,000

Recommendation 6

The Law Department has employed a Clerk/Courier for a number of years. This position is responsible for transporting documents between various city departments – in particular between City Hall and the Law Department. The Law Department has always been located in a satellite office outside of City Hall. For many years, several city departments were scattered in rented office space throughout the city of Providence. The courier was responsible for driving to the various satellite offices and City Hall picking up and dropping off documents throughout the day. He was also at times responsible for bringing documents to the various courts for filing in legal proceedings. Having a courier on staff allowed the departments to operate much more efficiently than they otherwise would have if the only means to transport documents were the standard US Postal Service. However, in 2011, the city decided to consolidate all of these satellite offices into one building known as the Doorley Building several blocks from City Hall. As a result, there is no longer a need to drive around the city to collect and drop off mail and other documents. Employees now need only walk up or down a flight of stairs to transfer items between departments. Furthermore, most courts are moving to a system of electronic filing and there is much less need for transfer of hard copy documents. The only route that remains for the courier is between the Doorley Building and City Hall. As there is constant employee traffic back and forth between these buildings, there is no need for a dedicated courier. Anyone going to City Hall for a meeting could bring whatever outgoing mail may be destined for City Hall and vice versa. It is our recommendation that the city look to eliminate this position.

Estimated savings: \$30,000

Recommendation 7

The Board of Licenses office is responsible for processing a broad range of license applications for the City of Providence as well as regulating licenses in over thirty different categories, including hackney food dispensing, peddlers motor vehicle repair, nightlife operations and liquor licenses. The Office of Vital Statistics maintains records on births, deaths, and marriages within the City of Providence, provides certified copies of these records, and is responsible for the issuance of marriage licenses. The two departments are headed by a single department director. Both departments have multiple levels of clerk positions with titles ranging from Clerk to Senior Clerk to Chief Clerk. In all there are seven distinct classes of Clerk positions in these two departments although not all of these classifications are in use at the moment. In our review it became clear that the differences in these job levels were so minor as to be almost non-existent. We would recommend only two levels of Clerk positions in these departments. The work for the Board of Licenses is more complex than the work in Vital Statistics. As such, the city could create one Clerk job classification for Vital Statistics and then a second higher level classification

for Licenses. This would eliminate the confusing and overly cumbersome structure in use today that forces the department manager to make very minor task distinctions among the various employees to satisfy the stratified nature of the job classes. The manager would be able to assign any work to any clerk to suit the needs of the department rather than limiting certain work to certain positions which creates unnecessary delays and backlogs when an employee is out of work. This new structure would also provide a natural promotional progression for employees. New employees would start out as clerks in Vital Statistics and then could be promoted to higher level positions in Licenses.

Estimated savings: Any savings resulting from this recommendation are likely to be very minor. The primary benefit will be the improved efficiency and flexibility within the departments.

Recommendation 8

The Communications Department is a sub-department within Public Safety. The department is responsible for operations in the areas of police and fire dispatch, emergency call processing, cable maintenance, radio repair and installation, and telephone and computer services. The department has a distinct separation between police emergency call taking and dispatching and fire emergency call taking and dispatching. The police telecommunications division works a different weekly work schedule than the fire telecommunications division and management is prohibited from moving dispatchers between the two groups to align resources with needs in an emergency situation. Based on discussions with the management of this department, it is our recommendation that these two separate groups be merged into one Public Safety dispatch center. By having full cross training of communications personnel, the Department would realize savings, efficiency and improved public safety. Having the ability to shift resources in the event of an emergency would improve the department's capacity for responding to an emergency event. As in the examples of the laborers and clerks in recommendations two and three above, it will also make it easier for the department to cover for employees out sick, on vacation, personal leave or injured and ensure adequate staffing with less overtime.

Estimated savings: The department has historically spent several hundred thousand dollars annually in overtime so the savings from this reconfiguration could be substantial. The city experimented with a combined dispatch department for several weeks two years ago. The savings at that time were estimated to be 50% of the expected overtime. In order to specifically calculate the savings, we would need to know the exact shift configuration the department would elect. However, given the department's past experience, we expect the savings to exceed \$100,000 annually.

Recommendation 9

The Communications Department has both a Foreperson Cable Crew and a Foreperson Line Crew job classification. The jobs are both the same grade and the duties are very similar. They should be combined into one new title – Fire Alarm Foreperson. This would not result in a financial savings as two employees would still be required. However, converting to one job title would simplify the classifications and avoid any potential problems over division of duties in the future.

Recommendation 10

The Fire Department has a position titled Coordinator. In our discussions with the management of the Fire Department, it became clear that the duties assigned to this position are very limited and do not seem to constitute a full time job. These duties could easily be redistributed and the position eliminated. The incumbent could then be reassigned to an open position of need elsewhere in city government.

Estimated savings: \$50,000

Recommendation 11

The Fire Chief currently has both an Administrative Assistant and a Secretary. These titles are usually used interchangeably and it is unusual for a manager to have one of each. In our discussions with the department, it became clear that the Secretary is performing the functions normally associated with these job titles. The Administrative Assistant is performing more general clerical duties. It would not be possible to eliminate the position, but it should be changed to a Clerk III as this more accurately reflects the current duties.

Estimated savings: \$8,000

Recommendation 12

Within the past two years, the Park Rangers have been transferred from the Parks Department to the Police Department and the title of the position has been changed to Security Officer. As recently as 2012, there were ten Park Rangers. Given the size of the group, it was necessary to have more senior officers supervise the junior officers. This was particularly necessary in the Parks department as none of the other Parks Department managers had any law enforcement experience and as a result this group of employees needed to be in essence self-managing. To accomplish this, the city created a separate job title of Senior Security Officer. With their transfer to police, the number of employees has been reduced from ten to only six, two of which are still titled Senior Security Officers. Furthermore, they are now supervised by managers with an extensive background in law enforcement. As such, it is no longer necessary to have the more senior officers supervise such a small group of junior officers. The entire complement of six could report to one manager within the police department. We would recommend eliminating the Senior Security Officer position and converting the Senior Security Officers to Security Officers.

Estimated savings: \$12,000

Recommendation 13

The Commissioner of Public Safety's office has two employees with the job title Senior Fiscal Officer. There are many people throughout the city with variations of the title Fiscal Officer. Typically these

positions are responsible for the accounting work in the department in which they reside. They will work with the controller's office to coordinate vendor payments, track department expenditures against budgeted amounts, prepare financial forecasts for department managers, and assist the department managers in preparing the annual budget. The Senior Fiscal Officers in public safety do not perform any of these tasks. Their jobs are much more akin to high level clerical duties. They process payroll forms, separation papers, and other documents; they keep track of employee usage of sick and vacation time in the department; they process documents related to employee health benefit choices, etc. It is our recommendation that these jobs be changed to clerk positions to more accurately align the title and pay grade with the work being performed.

Estimated savings: \$36,000

Recommendation 14

The Mounted Command is a unit within the Police Department. This unit has a position titled secretary. Following our discussions with the management of the Police department, we would recommend converting this position to a Clerk II in line with other positions of a similar nature within the department. The job description for this position does not contain any of the duties or responsibilities normally associated with a secretary. The duties are of a lower level and match with those of a Clerk II. The city would realize a small financial benefit from lowering the grade of this position accordingly.

Estimated savings: \$10,000

Recommendation 15

The City Clerk's office is the official repository for all ordinances, resolutions and official documents related to the government of the City of Providence. The department has three separate positions titled Administrative Assistant, Secretary, and Clerk I. All three of these positions perform varying levels of clerical work. Because there are three discrete job titles and job descriptions, the duties of each of these employees are divided very precisely. This makes it difficult for the manager to efficiently assign work among the three positions. If one employee starts to experience a backlog, it is difficult to reallocate some of the work to the other two employees to address this. Given the overall similarity in the type of work performed, all three of these positions should be grouped under one title and all three employees should be cross-trained on each other's duties. This would provide the manager the maximum flexibility to assign work and increase the efficiency of the department. The exact classification and grade of the resulting position would need to be worked out between management and the union. Given that each employee will now be cross-trained on multiple tasks, the new position is likely to be at the upper level of the current three positions. As such, there are unlikely to be financial savings to the city but the city will benefit from the increased efficiency.

Recommendation 16

The Office of Parking Administration is responsible for maintaining parking meters in the city. There are two job classes within the department – Parking Meter Maintenance Person I and Parking Meter Maintenance Person II. The job descriptions are the same with the exception that the description for the higher level position references certain supervisory responsibilities. In practice, the Maintenance Person II does not perform any supervisory work. Both employees report directly to the Parking Administrator. The Parking Meter Maintenance Person II classification is unnecessary and it is our recommendation that it be eliminated and both positions be classified as Parking Meter Maintenance Person I.

Estimated savings: \$5,000

Recommendation 17

The Department of Planning and Economic Development is responsible for guiding physical, social, and economic change in Providence's neighborhoods and its downtown through a wide range of programs and services that support job creation and economic development in accordance with Providence's Comprehensive Plan, zoning regulations, and other policies. Within the department, there are three separate employees with the term Administrative Assistant within their full job title. One of these employees is the Administrative Assistant to the Department Director. The other two employees are engaged in clerical functions. Administrative Assistants are typically a higher job class than clerks and are paid as such throughout the city. It is our recommendation that the two additional Administrative Assistants be reclassified as clerks and their job grades adjusted as such.

Estimated savings: \$17,000

Recommendation 18

The Board of Canvassers has a Teller among its list of positions. The Board of Canvassers is responsible for registering voters in the city of Providence and conducting elections. The department does not regularly handle cash for any reason and has no need for a teller. The person in this position currently performs clerical work that is essentially the same as the Clerk IV position in the department. It is our recommendation that this position be converted to a Clerk IV and the pay grade adjusted accordingly.

Estimated savings: \$6,000

Recommendation 19

The city has three switchboard operators. Two of them have the title Switchboard Operator and one has the title Senior Switchboard Operator. From our discussions with management, it appears as if the duties for the two job titles are identical in every way. We recommend eliminating the Senior Switchboard Operator classification as it is unnecessary. The savings from this would be minimal as the

pay differential between the jobs is very small. However, this would eliminate potential complications from having multiple job titles for the same position.

Estimated savings: None

Recommendation 20

The Department of Public Property manages the physical assets of Providence's City government, including public school buildings. The Department is also responsible for managing the City's purchasing of goods and services. The Purchasing Office is responsible for acquiring all goods and services for the city of Providence typically through a competitive bid process. There are currently three different levels of Purchasing Agents in the Public Property department – Purchasing Agent II, III, and IV. The three job descriptions are almost identical. Purchasing Agent II excludes certain duties related to the Board of Contract and Supply but otherwise all three positions perform the same function. There is no need for three levels of positions. It is our recommendation that there should be one job classification at the Purchasing Agent III level. The other classifications are redundant.

Estimated savings: None. This will streamline and simplify the department structure but the employee costs should not change.