

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Review of Alternatives to PW
Operations Manager Discussion
January 22, 2013 – 5:30 p.m.

Members Present: Mayor Sturdevant, Aldermen Bohn, DeVries, Dale, Hansey, Bajumpaa, Mitskog, Bertsch, and Schmidt (via skype).

Staff Present: Development Director Priebe, Auditor/Finance Director Huwe, Attorney Lies, Public Works Director Nelson, and Police Chief Thorsteinson.

Others Present: Matthew Liedke of the Daily News

Finance Committee Chair Bohn called the meeting to order at 5:45 p.m.

Public Works Operation Manager Position Alternatives – Bohn reminded those present that in the past there had been a proposal for a potential Operations Manager Position that could perhaps interface with the operation day-to-day to facilitate some of the changeover that would happen in the event Nelson should leave the organization and give some secondary coverage. She said as part of that proposal Nelson had some objectives that he will share with the group as far as what he would have liked to have seen or still would like to see get done with that position. Bohn said since the first couple of meetings about that position a general consensus has been heard that not all are in agreement about adding a new position to the organization, so will now try to approach it in a different way.

Objectives – Nelson said the proposal for PW Operations Manager had several objectives. He said he split it into two with the second being to establish a transition plan for team management staff, primarily himself (Public Works Director), but also to provide some coverage for the managers at the time those positions transition will have another way of covering their duties in their absence. Nelson said the primary goals for the Public Works Department, in no particular order/priority, was to build and maintain momentum in the Capital Improvement Program so that critical infrastructure needs are addressed more timely and cost effectively; improve customer service in the core functions; improve budgeting and purchasing of materials, equipment, supplies and services in public works operation areas; to finish flood protection system and implement a system management sooner and more cost effectively; and increase and improve capacity for emergency planning, preparedness and response to address a broad range of emergencies and natural disasters and maintain full capacity for emergency response at all times.

Succession Planning for PW Director – In addition to the core objectives for the normal day-to-day functions, Nelson said associated with that was to establish a transition plan. He said the proposal for the Operations Manager has been eliminated however these objectives remain to be addressed. Nelson said a topic for this meeting's discussion was a transition plan for his position – which is inevitable. Nelson talked about his personal situation regarding future retirement, and said part of his management duties is to have succession plans for peak staff and some positions may have multiple positions with the same descriptions which is a matter of spreading the work for while, where his is not – there is not a logical promotional tract through the organization/structure, there is not a group of management that can be moved into his position as PW Director and City Engineer. Nelson said as currently described, a registered engineer is required for the position, but that could change. At any rate given where we are, Nelson said it was not an option to look at additional staff for these various purposes so do have to deal with where at today and succession planning for Nelson's position. Nelson said it was not something that moves quickly and when the time comes for the hand-off there may be a little overlap, but how much could be a point of discussion. He talked about having some sort of plan in mind to lessen the transition time as well as not dropping the ball. Regarding his personal situation/retirement, Nelson commented that work is still satisfying to the extent that he can see progress made in some fashion with problems being solved, community improvements made, working as a member of a team with elected officials and community leaders making improvements in some fashion, so he said he is not ready to retire quite yet but would like to taper towards retirement with the level of intensity/hours with his job.

Bohn said one of the things Nelson has mapped out is if it is agreed to proceed with advertising for a new PW Director, there would be some transition planning – whether its 6-9 months, or 12-15 months depending on the length of time needed to find a successful candidate. With the new hire, Bohn said the job description would be updated for the current PW Director's position and advertise it as a position that would be succeeding the current PW Director with a gradual phase-in process, so they would be hired, brought into the organization and given a chance to interface with water plant, street department, police department, and other office personnel to understand what our organization is, and depending on their skill set they may tackle some of the objectives Nelson mapped out when the Operations position was being considered. Bohn felt this may help the new hire get integrated into the organization rather quickly, and with Nelson willing to stay and mentor the new employee and as their level of comfort gets stronger in the organization more of that workload can be delegated to that person through the transitioning and Nelson can taper his workload as he had mentioned while still adding value to this organization. With that, Bohn said there is always the concern of how it is budgeted, when doubling up on the engineering post in the City. She said there is also the question of how it will fit into the organizational chart, so that there is clear communication within the organization. Bohn noted that it is not known how long it will take to get a qualified applicant.

Bohn then asked for any input. Hansey said he was inclined to suggest, subject to available funding, to advertise for this position as soon as possible to hopefully have someone hired by July 1st, so this person could work together with Nelson for a 6 month period and give the opportunity to extend that if necessary into the 2014 budget. Bohn said she would like to see someone identified that early but did not think it was realistic. She said if Nelson is so inclined and the person who comes into the organization gets trained in quickly that perhaps Nelson could help with some of the additional projects as more of a contract engineer, because whoever is hired is going to want to customize the way they do things. Bajumpaa said he was excited to hear that are moving in this direction but felt need to be mindful of whenever it starts to go into this open-minded and be willing to listen and hear feedback as to how things are going and react according to what's best for the City and its citizens. Mitskog said she did not want to go back to the point where the City was when the past PW Director retired, and felt the City has made great progress and had very successful projects that have been completed with things moving in the right direction so wanted to keep moving forward, but questioned the qualifications if it would be a requirement that they get a PE or not. Bohn said that was a question being considered as to whether they need the PE seal to apply or if they could get their PE certification upon employment offer. Mitskog then asked if would advertise in ND as it was a challenge in the past, and talked about giving consideration to expanding the search area. Bohn agreed that will need to be aggressive in the markets being considered for this job position. When asked, Bohn said at this time it is the intention to advertise the position as a PW Director with the byline that the current Director is still in the position and would be a successor. Discussion held. Hansey wondered what part of the PW Director's work required a Professional Engineer. Nelson guessed an estimated 50% and explained. Further discussion held.

Next Steps – Going forward, Bohn said Nelson has been asked to refine the job description for the PW Director and once he has that documented the Council will review it then a motion will be made at either Council or Committee that we recommend advertising that position and get started as soon as possible and get the applicant pool filled. Nelson then followed up in terms of timing from beginning to end in recruiting the position and that 6 months can go by fast by the time the description is done. He said starting today to be realistic to set a goal, if this is direction chosen, there will be 2 people in this position for a while with the duration of overlap still to be decided and need to work out funding, and if not very aggressive may be looking at August and with 6 months would put back at this time of year and Nelson felt it was important for him to introduce the new person to spring breakup so the successor is able to learn how to deal with situations that can arise during that time. This would put us in spring 2014. It was felt some time would be needed to figure out the salary also. **Motion by Bertsch, seconded by Hansey, to update the Public Works Director/Engineer job description.** Discussion held. **Motion Carried with all voting 'aye'.** How this new employee will be integrated into Nelson's position was then discussed.

Meeting adjourned at 6:25p.m.

Submitted by lma