

February 28, 2001

Ms. Kay Palmer
Director of Human Resources
One Executive Park Drive
Hendersonville, TN 37075

Dear Ms. Palmer:

Recently you asked MTAS to provide information on the organizational structure of municipal public works departments. I understand that the city's public works director has resigned, and that it's an opportune time to consider changes in the department's organizational structure. First, I'll provide a brief overview of the functions of municipal public works.

Public Works is a big part of the overall city operation in terms of budget, customer service, employees, projects, and essential functions. Donald C. Stone, the founder of the American Public Works Association (APWA) defined public works this way:

“Public works are the physical structures and facilities that are developed or acquired by public agencies to house governmental functions and provide water, power, waste disposal, transportation, and similar services.”

The APWA has identified 145 different functions that are related to public works. They can be classified into 8 broad categories:

1. Transportation - This includes streets, bridges, sidewalks, bike paths, airports, seaports, traffic control and storm water management. Public works is responsible for the design, construction and maintenance of these facilities.
2. Sanitation - Traditionally cities collect solid waste within the corporate limits and counties dispose of solid waste. However, some cities do operate solid waste landfills, compost facilities and incinerators. Increasingly, cities are becoming involved in recycling operations.
3. Utilities - This includes water, wastewater, gas and electric. It may also include storm water and flood control. Utility operations may be a function of public works or utilities may be handled by other city departments or other governmental entities.

4. Buildings and Grounds - This includes the design, construction, maintenance and management of public buildings and facilities including urban forestry.
5. Municipal Engineering - This includes civil and environmental engineering functions such as new facilities design, technical studies, construction inspection and surveying. The size of your city's public works department, as well as the expertise of personnel, will determine how many of these functions it performs. Larger departments tend to perform some of their own engineering services; small departments will contract these services. Major and complex projects are almost always contracted.
6. Fleet management - This function involves the procurement and maintenance of city owned equipment and vehicles. Some public works departments only manage their own equipment; some provide this service for all city departments. Many contract maintenance services.
7. Management and Administration - This includes operations management and supervision, financial management and reporting, public relations, procurement of professional services, requesting and evaluating proposals, awarding bids and contract management
8. Other - Various other functions such as parks maintenance, cemetery operation, airport services, dead animal pickup, etc. may be included under public works.

Next, let's look at how public works departments are organized and the advantages and disadvantages of various organizational schemes.

There isn't a standard organizational structure for fulfilling local government public works functions. Some cities include utilities under public works, others use a free standing department or board for utilities; some place code enforcement, even parks and recreation under public works; sanitation services may be under public works or they may be under a separate department. Various organizational structures can work well. The type of structure best for your community depends on community size, range of public works functions, complexity of operations and other local factors.

Under the Traditional Organizational Structure, the Public Works Director is responsible for streets, sanitation, fleet management, engineering, and storm water management. Utilities, code enforcement and building inspection are under other departments. This structure provides a fair division of work, a clear chain of command, and the structure facilitates good communication between division managers. A disadvantage is that public works and utilities may work at counter-purposes (i.e. street paving and utility street cuts). In Hendersonville's case, water and wastewater utilities are under a separate utility district.

Under a Comprehensive Organizational Structure, the Public Works Director is assisted by a Deputy Director who is responsible for budget, personnel, public works finance and public relations and information. Then two main branches, Development (including engineering,

buildings and grounds and transportation) and Operations (including street maintenance, fleet management and utilities) are headed by Assistant Directors. The comprehensive type organizational chart is more appropriate for a large city. One would expect each division to be professionally managed and a high degree of co-ordination between the director, deputy director and assistant directors.

Other organizational schemes include special departments to handle specific functions. For instance, a department of community development may include public works planning, engineering, land use planning, zoning, economic development, transportation issues and so forth. This approach combines public and private initiatives to benefit the community.

Currently, the City of Hendersonville's public works department is organized along the traditional organizational structure. In Hendersonville, the public works director is responsible for:

- engineering – technical review of site plans and plats, engineering inspection of subdivisions, land surveys, design and construction of roads and drainage, the geographical information system (GIS), internal information technology support, traffic signalization, working with developers, etc.;
- repair and maintenance of city buildings and grounds (including parks), garbage collection/disposal, sidewalk construction projects, etc.; and
- road construction and maintenance, stormwater drainage and fleet maintenance.

MTAS examined organizational structures (functions) for selected Tennessee municipal public works departments from 22,000 to 53,000 population range. Organizational charts and/or descriptive information about public works functions for Brentwood, Columbia, Franklin, Germantown, Johnson City and Oak Ridge are attached. These public works operations are organized along the traditional organizational structure or variations of the traditional structure. Johnson City (the largest city included here) uses some elements of the comprehensive organizational structure and divides responsibility between two division heads within the department of public works. A brief description of each city's public works operations follows:

- Brentwood – The public works functions are organized similar to Hendersonville's; water and wastewater utilities are under a separate department; solid waste services are contracted. This department reports to a city manager.
- Columbia – This city uses separate departments for engineering, streets and sanitation services. All departments report to the city administrator.
- Franklin – This city uses separate departments for engineering, solid waste, streets and water/wastewater. All departments report to the city administrator.
- Germantown – The director's title is Environmental Services Director, and this position is responsible for solid waste (by contract), animal control, streets and utilities. The

director reports to a city manager.

- Johnson City – the Department of Public Works has a director then division heads. The two divisions are: (1) building development and engineering and (2) solid waste, streets and traffic. Utilities are in a separate department. All departments report to a city manager.
- Oak Ridge – the Public Works Director is responsible for water and wastewater, fleet management, buildings, streets and engineering. The director reports to a city manager.

Any organizational structure can work well for Hendersonville. I think the way the city's department of public works is now organized is effective. As you noted when we spoke last week, the minimum qualifications for the director's position do not include registration as a professional engineer. But, the city engineer, whom the director supervises, must possess a professional engineer's license. This requirement may make recruitment and pay classifications (for both positions) more difficult. However, most of the cities listed above do not require their public works directors to be licensed professional engineers.

After a new department head has been appointed, there may be room for some fine-tuning of assignments/responsibilities within the three areas of responsibility in this department (outlined above). For instance, it appears from the job descriptions that both the public works superintendent and the roads superintendent are responsible for aspects of construction and maintenance of roads, sidewalks, and drainage structures. These responsibilities may need clarification. I will be available to work with the new director on this matter if requested.

I hope this information is helpful. Please let me know if you need anything further on this matter.

Sincerely,

Sharon Rollins, P.E.
Manager of Technical Consulting

attachments