



City of West Allis

7525 W. Greenfield Ave.
West Allis, WI 53214

Meeting Minutes Public Works Committee

Aldersperson Gary T. Barczak, Chair

Aldersperson Martin J. Weigel, Vice-Chair

Alderspersons: Michael J. Czaplewski, Daniel J. Roadt, James W. Sengstock

Monday, October 19, 2009

6:00 PM

West Allis City Hall Room 128

SPECIAL MEETING

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Barczak called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Present: 5 - Ald. Barczak, Ald. Weigel, Ald. Czaplewski, Ald. Roadt and Ald. Sengstock

Excused: 0

Others Attending

Mayor Devine; Alderspersons Kopplin, Lajsic, Narlock, Reinke, Vitale; Paul M. Ziehler, City Administrative Officer; Mike Lewis, City Engineer; Tom Harmatys, Acting Director of Public Works; Audrey Key, HR Manager; Gary Schmid, Manager of Finance; Brenda Schmid, Principal Secretary; Jeanette Wardinski, Administrative Assistant.

C. NOTICE OF JOINT MEETING WITH THE BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS AND THE ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS:

1. [2009-0647](#)

Report from City Administrative Officer regarding organizational structure of the City with respect to the Public Works Department and the Engineering Department.

Mr. Ziehler began by reviewing the report regarding the organizational structure of the City with respect to the Public Works Dept. and the Engineering Dept. He summarized the structure of the report and briefly reviewed each of the main sections, including Background, Discussion of Issues, Conclusion, and Recommendation/Timing and Other Related Discussion. The first decision to be made is how to handle the structure and then to address the secondary issues, which include job descriptions, salary levels, residency vs. perimeter requirements, and recruitment policies and procedures. The report's recommendation is to maintain the current structure of a separate Public Works (PW) Dept. and a separate Engineering (Eng.) Dept. There is no compelling reason to change when the benefit is minimal. Mr. Ziehler discussed eight key points on why the current, separate structure works well. He also noted that under either scenario (status quo or a combined department), the PW Administrative Office Supervisor position will be eliminated upon retirement of the current employee at the end of the year, resulting in an \$85,000 gross savings (salary/fringe benefits).

A good part of the meeting was spent discussing the organizational structure of the City with respect to the two departments, and three options were mentioned as the main possibilities. These include (a) maintaining the status quo, (b) a combined PW/Eng. Dept. without a PW Assistant Director, and (c) a combined PW/Eng. Dept. with a PW Assistant Director. Ald. Sengstock stated, and it was agreed by all, that we want to maintain the good operations we have no matter what structure is in place, but that additional savings are desired. Specific comments by Alderspersons are noted:

Ald. Narlock - Wanted to be sure everyone understands that he is talking about positions and not individual people during this meeting. If he mentions a name, it's by virtue of the person

being in a specific position.

Ald. Vitale - He pointed out that there are other communities that have the combined department, and he thinks we should try it out for a year. Mr. Lewis has the background to run both departments, and hiring from the outside presents other difficulties (relocation, etc.). He thinks Mr. Lewis could split his time between the two locations (City Hall and Yard), or if he's located at the Yard, then his Eng. Assistant handles the Eng. Office at City Hall. He also expressed his concerns about the layers of management at the Yard, from Superintendents, to Supervisors and Lead Persons. Mr. Ziehler clarified that only the Sanitation & Streets Division has these two levels due to the size of the Division and nature of the work. All other Divisions have a Superintendent and Lead Person, which is a union position.

Ald. Weigel - Asked for input from Ms. Key, HR Manager, on what the job market is like right now if we would hire from the outside; would it be difficult/easy to fill the position or what about waiting a year. Mr. Ziehler said it will be a challenge. Ms. Key reminded the Alderpersons about the succession planning issues we face, including residency and recruitment, and with this being a high level position to fill, the housing market and our residency requirements for Department Heads are factors. She also noted that our PW Director position is the lowest paid compared to other cities our size, and there are other communities currently looking to hire for this type of position, which are concerns for us. On the positive side, West Allis is a good location being close to a major metropolitan area and the amenities that attract candidates, and West Allis has a good reputation due to the respect Mr. Pertmer garnered throughout the State.

Ald. Lajsic - Commented that when we first discussed this matter, he didn't feel combining the positions was a good idea. However, after reading the report, he can see that there may be some advantages to combining the Depts., although there may not be monetary savings in the short term, but perhaps in the long term with other changes at the Yard over time and through attrition. His view of the combined position is that the PW/Eng. Director provides the administration and oversight of the departments, focusing on budgeting, meetings, public appearances, etc. with both an Engineering Manager and Public Works Yard Manager. He feels someone needs to be at the Yard overseeing operations at least 75% of the time, and one person assuming all the Public Works operations in addition to Engineering is just too much; he does not see how it could be done effectively and efficiently. Additionally, he does not think we need as many highly paid supervisors we have at the Yard now, and he talked about Divisions with lead people and new operations/technologies to streamline this work.

Ald. Sengstock said he agrees with comments about instituting changes within the PW Dept., and his simple suggestion is to put Eng. under the Public Works Director, give Mike Lewis a raise and we would not have to train anyone, there's little disturbance with implementation, and monetary savings. When asked if he felt this was a manageable option, Mr. Lewis said he has the ability to do the job, based on his past work experience, but he agrees with Mr. Pertmer's opinion that to take on this type of position, there would have to be an Assistant at the Yard. Ald. Lajsic commented that we have to remember this is just not moving 17 Engineering positions under the PW umbrella, but it's the responsibility for engineering, such as planning, design, etc. that is an issue of how much someone can manage in a 40 hour work week. Mr. Ziehler mentioned that in discussions with other staff and their feelings in this regard, all agree that a Manager/Assistant at the Yard would be necessary. Ald. Narlock asked if the other cities that have the combined departments, whether they have an Assistant? Ms. Key said out of the 8 surveyed, 5 have a DPW Director and Assistant and the other 3 have varied structures. When asked for his perspective, Mr. Harmatys said one person cannot do it all. He also asked the Committees to keep in mind that most likely in the next 6 years there will be a complete turnover of PW Division Heads; this makes a Yard Manager/Assistant critical.

Ald. Reinke - Before reading the report, she wondered why are we thinking about making changes when both departments work so well together? However, after reading the report and seeing how many communities have the combined department, she thinks this can be a possibility, resulting in savings to the City. She thinks there could be greater continuity with the departments combined, and she does agree that there is the need for a Manager/Assistant in both departments under the Director position. She would be willing to try this on a one-year trial basis as suggested by Ald. Vitale. Mr. Ziehler said this may not be a bad idea, but for it to be a fair trial period, there would need to be an Assistant/Manager at the Yard. Speaking from his work experience, Ald. Roadt agrees that a Manager/Assistant would be needed at the Yard if the departments are combined.

Ald. Czaplewski - Noted that Mr. Ziehler manages multiple divisions and wonders how this PW/Eng. scenario is different if he is able to do it. Mr. Ziehler said that all the Division Managers he supervises are in the office and not out in the field like the PW Superintendents. Also, they are all in one location, which would not be the case with the PW/Eng. combined department. Size is also a factor in some instances. Ald. Czaplewski said his concern is saving money without blowing everything up. He talked about salary costs of the various positions discussed this evening and what kind of savings there would be. If we are not saving any money, why make the change.

Discussion continued about salaries and savings. Mr. Ziehler pointed out that we will continue to get efficiencies because of the budget constraints we face every year. This makes us come up with new efficiencies and ways for saving. He further explained his evaluation of position salaries based on the historical structure of the Public Works Department during Mr. Krafcheck's tenure as PW Director with Eng. as a Division of PW. Basically, instituting similar changes now results in a "wash," or in other words, little if any savings at all.

Ald. Barczak - Summarized what has been discussed this evening, noting that there are basically three different options: (1) status quo, (2) combined PW/Eng. Dept. with no Yard Assistant, and (3) combined PW/Eng. Dept. with Yard Assistant and Engineering Assistant. He also commented that the report mentions that several of the communities with a combined dept., the depts. actually function independently. This leads him to state his opinion that he prefers the status quo, because our two departments run well individually now and why fix it if it's not broken. However, if we do vote on a combined department, he believes we will need an Assistant level position in both departments. He feels our first step is to decide on what organizational structure we want and then work on the details. With the understanding that we have these three options and it is basically a wash money-wise on the combined department options, he would like to take a hand vote to see where we are at and if we can eliminate any of the options in order to focus in on the one we want. A hand vote was taken resulting in the following:

- 1.) Status quo - 5 in favor (1-A&F, 4-PW)*
- 2.) Combined w/Assistant - 3 in favor (2-A&F, 1-PW)*
- 3.) Combined w/o Assistant - 2 in favor (2-A&F, 0-PW)*

Ald. Barczak said it is apparent that at this time the Council is split 5-5 between status quo and some sort of a combined department. If it came to a vote today, the Mayor would have to break the tie. Ald. Narlock suggested we take some time to think everything over that has been discussed this evening and come back at another time for a formal vote. He also asked if this can be discussed in closed session. Mr. Ziehler said only the performance evaluation of individuals as they may be qualified to take on these jobs can be discussed in closed session; the organizational structure discussions have to be done in open session. Ald. Lajsic pointed out that we agreed early on that we are not looking at people; we are looking at the structure and what is best for the City. A structure has to be decided on first before we can even vote on salaries, etc.

It was the consensus of both Committees that a Joint Meeting be scheduled for November 2, 2009, at 6:00 p.m. to finalize discussions and vote on this matter. Ald. Barczak asked Mr. Ziehler to have ready for that meeting the structures of the two options that received the most hand votes this evening (status quo and combined dept. w/Assistant). Staff concurred.

Held

D. NEW AND PREVIOUS MATTERS

- 1. [2009-0509](#) Communication from Mike Pertmer, Director of Public Works, announcing his retirement in October.

No Action

E. OTHER MATTERS TO COME BEFORE THE COMMITTEE FOR DISCUSSION/ACTION

None.

F. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 p.m. The motion carried.