

MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
JANUARY 8, 2009 – 7:00 P.M.
LINCOLN CENTER HEARING ROOM

PRESENT: Mayor Spadaccini, Deputy Mayor Peak, Directors Tweedie, Beckman, Zingler, O'Neill, Kissmann and Farina

ALSO: General Manager Shanley

ABSENT: Secretary Pelletier

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:

Mayor Spadaccini called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. All in attendance participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, led by Mayor Spadaccini.

PUBLIC WORKS:

Engineering Division

Mark Carlino, Director of Public Works, reminded the Board that the Engineering Division was consolidated two years ago with Water and Sewer. Quite a bit of work took place in 2007, including consolidating functions, work processes, and beginning work on the backlog of design efforts. In fiscal year 2007-2008, \$9.6 million of construction activity was administered by the Engineering Division. There are a number of projects currently in the design process. In this week's mail log the Board will receive a Public Works Status Report, containing all projects completed over the past year. The Engineering Division has been collecting data to look at service and performance measures, including looking at the value of having an in-house Engineering Department. Using some standard industry numbers, based upon percentage of construction value, the use of in-house staff has saved the Town of Manchester approximately \$270,000 in each of the last two years.

General Manager Shanley explained that this data serves as a performance measure benchmark. He congratulated Mark Carlino, Jeff LaMalva, and Rich Staye for their efforts in this employee initiated effort.

Jeff LaMalva, Assistant Town Engineer, explained that the spreadsheet was put together using time sheet data over the last two years.

General Manager Shanley said the spreadsheet contains a good representation of the diversity of the projects. The GIS system was originally an attempt at mapping and is now a very impressive relational database used by practically every operational department. It has become an internal service of the Engineering Department.

Deputy Mayor Peak noted the amount of time spent on public infrastructure (34%) and asked what that number should be.

General Manager Shanley explained that the information about the time spent on certain tasks is most importantly a benchmark. The engineering industry standards give an idea of what the Town could expect to pay if it did not use in-house engineering services. The next step is to try to find ways we can be more productive. During the initial discussions about consolidating the Engineering functions, there was a lot of consternation and concern. Jeff LaMalva and Rich Staye did a terrific job of melding the two departments and, working with Ed Soper, have completed many projects. The consolidation worked well and Jeff and Rich continue to make the Department as highly productive as it can be.

Mr. Carlino said that Manchester has been very successful in achieving competitive grants thanks to the Engineering Division. He noted that the Town has received a variety of grants over the years, totaling almost \$700,000 in the past four years. Mr. Carlino explained that the upcoming project on North Main Street is an 80-10-10 split, with funding coming from the Federal Government and the State of Connecticut. Manchester must pay 10% of the cost of the construction project. The Town is reimbursed for engineering costs at the industry standard rates, thereby offsetting construction costs further.

General Manager Shanley said that this happens often and one of the things being looked into is using this as a revenue source. The redesign of the elementary school parking lots used in-house design and saved money. If design costs had been outsourced, the project would have to have been paid by bonding rather than through the General Fund.

Mr. Carlino explained that the Engineering Division is responsible for inspections of all public improvements. Without oversight, there is a risk that substandard work may occur. All private work done within the public right of way is inspected. The Town's inspectors are trained through the State of Connecticut. Inspection is another revenue stream.

Rich Staye, Utility Engineer, explained that any time a water main is installed, testing needs to be done as this is closely related to public health issues. Every opportunity to be on site is a benefit to the public. Inspectors are careful not to make a pattern of their travels/inspections so contractors do not know when to expect them.

Mr. Carlino spoke about a requirement of GASB 34 which requires tracking of all capital improvements within a fiscal year. This is an unfunded mandate that takes significant effort.

General Manager Shanley further explained that GASB 34 requires a municipality to document all assets and assign a value. GASB has not yet moved to funding for liability, but that is probably coming.

In response to a question from Deputy Mayor Peak, Mr. Carlino explained that each component of the North Main Street project has an 80-10-10 split. On average, 8% of a project consists of design efforts. For the North Main Street project, \$200,000 has been allocated for the design effort and 90% of that is reimbursed, which in turn offsets construction costs.

Deputy Mayor Peak asked if the Town ever becomes so involved in private projects that it could provide services to developers and charge them.

Mr. Carlino said that some municipalities contract for other municipalities. There is currently quite a backlog of projects, but the possibility exists for the future.

Director O'Neill noted that when her employer outsources engineering services, things take longer. She asked if there is enough staff to handle the work in Engineering.

Mr. Carlino said the Department is adequately staffed now for the work it is doing. The blending of the two offices has allowed for cross training and there is a good mix of talent.

Director O'Neill asked if the backlog is getting larger and was answered in the negative.

Building Department

Mr. Carlino explained that most of the activities of the Building Department are mandated by State Statute. Comparing the six month period from July 2008 to December 2008 to the same six month period in 2007, building permit applications have increased 14% and revenue has increased 20%. There are a few significant projects on the horizon.

Dan Loos, Chief Building Official, listed several upcoming projects including the Dye House, the Main Street Cancer Center, new condominiums on Tolland Turnpike, Highland School renovations, the Eighth Utilities District Maintenance Garage, the Marlow Apartments and several others.

General Manager Shanley explained that the Building Inspector has to manage the school projects as much or more than any private construction project. Mr. Loos added that he is at the Head Start project at least every other day. Mr. Shanley said the school projects don't bring in revenue, but take a significant amount of staff time.

Mr. Carlino said the Department has been making a more intensive effort on property maintenance issues. Inspectors are out there regularly contacting chronic offenders. The Zoning Enforcement Officer works out of the Building Department and is responsible for sign issues, tool shed permits, vendor licenses, fences, etc. He also helps Engineering with bond releases and attends preconstruction meetings. Mr. Carlino explained that the Building Inspectors work closely with the Fire Marshal's Office to take a unified approach. They are still trying to find ways to streamline the application and permitting process.

Director Zingler asked the status of a mobile interface that would allow inspectors more time in the field. Mr. Carlino explained that all data for inspections and property maintenance rests in a program called Govern. It does not have a mobile component but has recently changed hands and Mr. Carlino expects that to happen in the future. The Neighborhood Inspectors have a fully field driven component developed by the Town's Information Systems staff.

Director Kissmann said that Public Works work very hard. He has worked most closely with the Building and Engineering Divisions and they do an outstanding job with a limited number of people. Mr. Loos goes above and beyond his duties and manages the Department the most effectively that Mr. Kissmann has seen in the last 30 or 40 years.

Mayor Spadaccini asked how the economic downturn has affected the level of property maintenance code issues.

Mr. Loos has noticed that the most problems are with bank owned properties and people on the brink of foreclosure. The Building Department wants to encourage people to stay in their homes, so it doesn't push too hard. He does expect activity to increase in the future.

Mr. Carlino added that there are problems with absentee landlords and bank owned properties, especially with sidewalk maintenance. In the last year, there has been active property maintenance enforcement and chronic offenders are contacted.

General Manager Shanley said that the Building Department has added a part-time position for property maintenance compliance at a cost of \$27,000 per year. It has been effective, but it is a new position.

Director Tweedie said that East Hartford is taking on maintenance of bank owned properties that do not respond to requests to correct problems and then putting a lien on the property to cover the costs. Mr. Loos said that had been discussed but there are some issues that need to be worked out.

Facilities Management Division

Mr. Carlino introduced Chris Till, who recently started working as the Assistant Facilities Project Manager. Mr. Carlino explained that Facilities Management is a relatively new function, created in 2000 with the onset of the school construction. This Division also maintains all Town facilities, repairs all Town facilities, and oversees contracted services. In 1999, nine Building Maintainers were employed; currently there are five funded positions. Since 1999 a number of facilities have been added, including the Public Works Facility and the new Youth Service Bureau building. This Division has also become responsible for the Police Department, which was previously responsible for itself, as well as the Cheney Building.

Facilities Management has done a number of things to reduce energy costs, including installing fluorescent lighting and participating in the CL&P Program. The budget this year will reflect repairs needed to a number of renovation projects done in the past.

General Manager Shanley added that this Division provides maintenance and repairs for every building in addition to managing projects. It provides an internal and external service. Employees depend on this Division for their working environment.

Mr. Carlino said that this Division has a small, but very talented staff; all Maintainers have plumbing and electrical licenses. The amount and age of the infrastructure never gets smaller.

This Division is constantly challenged with maintaining older infrastructure. Mr. Carlino said that quite a bit of the Assistant Facilities Project Manager's time is dedicated to school renovations; he would like to see more time dedicated to the Town side.

Field Services Division

Mr. Carlino explained that the Field Services Division includes Highway, Park, Fleet, and Cemetery and is responsible for a variety of activities.

The Highway Division is responsible for timely snow removal, which includes the cemeteries. The Park Division is responsible for snow removal for Town buildings and public sidewalks that abut Town property. There are 25 plow routes, clearing a total of 550 miles of road. Currently there are 17 Maintainers, which is down from 24 in the 1980s. To cover the number of plow routes, employees from other divisions are used. Mr. Shanley added that some of the plowing is also privatized.

Ken Longo, Field Services Superintendent, said that the Town contracts with two plowing contractors, which provide up to six vehicles, depending on the need. A recent bid revealed a cost increase of 17% with the same contractors responding as previous years.

General Manager Shanley explained that plowing is not a service contractors will drive a long way to provide. The Town is using the private sector to the extent it can and has optimized internal staff.

Mayor Spadaccini asked what the cause of the 17% increase is.

Mr. Longo speculated that it is the cost of fuel, as diesel is still high, the timing of the bid, and the fact that plowing is tough on equipment.

Mr. Carlino observed that the expectation level has changed over the years. He can remember when people put chains on their cars and expected snow on the roads. Now the expectation is black pavement. With these expectation changes over the years, the Highway Division has had to adjust, which in turn costs more.

General Manager Shanley added that people wonder why things begin to cost more and often times it is because of expectation levels. There are opportunities to ratchet back the level of services to save money. If one looks at the overtime expense in Public Works, it mostly consists of snowstorm time.

Mr. Longo said there has been a great effort in the education process of putting out salt. Drivers are given a ballpark number per lane mile, but each storm is different. There is now a weighing system in place, so data can be collected as to how much salt is used for each route. He has found that it is best to apply the treatment before any snow pack or accumulation. One of the most stressful times is when he knows a storm is coming and wants to get his drivers in, but does not want to make the call too early so as not to increase overtime costs.

Mr. Carlino explained that the Highway Division has inherited the plowing of the Lutz Museum. The Board of Education previously provided this service and could not continue. Rebuilding America takes a significant amount of employee time for approximately two weeks leading up to the event. It has become somewhat of a year-round program and Facilities Management provides a number of services for it. The Park Division will assist with brush, cutting trees, or picking items up.

Mr. Carlino stated that Public Works is a service organization; it doesn't set programs or parameters, but it does need to provide services.

There was some discussion about Rebuilding America and the value of services provided. It was mentioned that volunteers may not be as likely to serve without the guidance of the Public Works staff. There are a core number of employees that volunteer their time on that day.

General Manager Shanley explained that there are many functions that require Public Works' support, such as Rebuilding America, Fourth of July, Cruisin' on Main, and Heritage Day. It is important to recognize that costs are incurred for these events.

Director Kissmann believes it is the consensus of the Board that these are all good programs, but in hard times we have to make cuts. We live with high expectations. Maybe that is part of the message we are not getting out. He questioned whether we cut services or add taxes to finance the current level of expectations.

General Manager Shanley brought up the collection of leaves. The reason it is important to discuss it is because all of the services within Public Works are very integrated; leaf collection is one of the few services that can be easily lifted out.

Mr. Carlino said that in the last five years, there has been only one collection each year. In years like this year, collection worked great. Last year, snow removal equipment and leaf collection equipment needed to be exchanged several times. Payloaders were removing leaves because of the snow.

General Manager Shanley explained that the same equipment is used for both snow removal and leaf collection. When Public Works is vacuuming leaves and the weather begins to turn, all equipment goes back to the garage to flip to snow equipment, whether the snow event happens or not. Then equipment must be switched back to leaf vacuuming equipment. This is a very labor intensive process. Approximately 500 miles of leaves are vacuumed in five weeks. When the weather cooperates, it can be done very efficiently. But when the weather does not cooperate, it becomes a financial disaster.

General Manager Shanley asked if there would be savings if the Town did not do leaf collection but also did not eliminate any positions. Mr. Carlino answered that \$200,000 would easily be saved. Mr. Longo added that including other costs such as parts, we could approach a \$400,000 savings. Mr. Shanley said he recognizes leaf vacuuming is a service that Manchester citizens hold very dear.

Mayor Spadaccini wondered about encouraging bagging of leaves, possibly by offering free bags. Mr. Carlino explained that he ran the calculations in 2003 and it doesn't save enough money to make stopping leaf vacuuming worthwhile.

Director Beckman asked about contracting this service. Mr. Carlino said that West Hartford completely contracts this service and was paying approximately \$600,000 several years ago. Mr. Shanley said the Town could put leaf collection out to bid, but would have to lay people off for it to be cost effective.

Mr. Carlino spoke about the paving responsibilities of Field Services. The Highway Division does much of the work and project management itself. A number of communities contract the entire operation out. The focus in Manchester is to maximize funding set aside for paving. Mr. Longo uses different subcontractors to manage costs. This year, the Highway Division replaced 190 catch basins. Milling was done by contractors, hauling was done by Town staff, and paving and curbing were done by separate contractors to save money. Support services were provided by Town staff. Traffic signs, street signs, and tree trimming were also done by Town staff.

Mr. Carlino suggested the Main Street banner as a possible revenue opportunity. Two people, a lift truck, and traffic control are required to change the banner.

Mr. Longo explained that the whole process takes a couple of hours minimum. There are approximately 20 requests per year and the Division puts up 12 to 15 banners per year. Summers are very busy with two or three changes per month.

General Manager Shanley wondered if people would value the use of the banner enough to cover the cost of three employees for three hours, plus the use of the truck.

Mayor Spadaccini said if there is a cost associated with putting the banner up and it is for a non-Town event, it would not be unreasonable to ask for a fee.

Mr. Carlino next discussed street sweeping, which is required as part of the EPA permitting process. Sweeping has been reduced significantly with the elimination of sand, but it is still part of the operation. The Town has been using an in-house sweeper and generally supplementing the contractor. Currently, he is looking into eliminating the contracted sweeping.

Mr. Longo added that sweeping takes place in the early morning hours in the Buckland area on an overtime basis.

General Manager Shanley mentioned that Public Works crews respond to car accidents.

Mr. Longo added that it also responds to oil spills and disabled vehicles.

General Manager Shanley explained that these are necessary services but also add overtime costs. Having fields available for sporting events on the weekends adds significantly to overtime costs. All are small examples, but taken together they add up.

Mr. Longo said that in May of 2008 there were 408 field uses, which is over 100 uses per week. There are 29 ball fields, 10 soccer fields, and the football fields. Field preparation is the crux of what the Park Division does. It feels strongly about providing a quality product. Field maintenance consists of fertilizing, irrigating, and mowing, sometimes two or three times a week. Again, this becomes a level of expectation. Cutting back on some of these items may not be recoverable. For instance, if fields aren't fertilized and irrigated, they could end up as dry, dusty, hard-packed fields.

Deputy Mayor Peak suggested maintaining fewer fields or making sure the fees paid are commensurate with the level of services received.

General Manager Shanley explained that it has been the tradition that the base line responsibility of government is to provide the infrastructure. It is not an inappropriate expectation, but also not an inexpensive one. He has had conversations about ways to work with the bargaining units to adjust the work week schedule.

Deputy Mayor Peak is interested in knowing a deliverable figure. For instance, service level A would cost "X" amount of money, while service level B would cost "Y."

Director Tweedie said he has benefited from the use of the fields for years and knows, for instance, that the Silkworms will not stand for not having the grass cut. Manchester Little League, during playoffs, asked and paid for someone to come in and take care of the fields. Manchester does have the best fields around. All programs that are not Town run have a fee. We will have to work with organizations on expectations and figure out ways to be compensated for the service provided.

Director Farina commented that he is trying to get someone to move a business from Stamford to Manchester and that person has been amazed at the quality of Manchester's roads, fields, and sidewalks. Mr. Farina asked if there is any way to recoup costs associated with accidents.

General Manager Shanley has thought about charging the insurance companies. It can be done with the Fire Department, but he is unsure if it can be done with a Public Works response. The challenge is the level of service expectation.

Mr. Carlino brought the discussion back to field maintenance and explained that Manchester's fields are used a tremendous amount, sometimes two or three times per night. That level of play is difficult to manage. Another difficulty is the maintenance of fields with the ban of pesticides.

Director Zingler left the meeting at this time (9:13 p.m.).

Mr. Longo explained that beginning in July of this year, pesticides will be banned from school grounds. Normally, as the outfield encroaches, weed killer would be used to redefine the field. The Park Division tried rototilling to achieve the same result. There is a tremendous amount of work involved now, a two or threefold increase, in the time it takes to care for fields on school properties.

General Manager Shanley informed the Board that Manchester participated in a pilot program for organic lawn care with limited success. People are expecting green grass, which is a result of fertilizers.

Mr. Carlino said salvaging fields after a rain event is also involved in field preparation. Crews try hard to keep the fields playable so games do not have to be postponed. This involves baling the fields with the use of pumps, hand pumps, and rakes to get the water off the field. This process also removes some of the clay, adding the cost of clay replacement. Some overtime is involved to make fields playable after rain.

General Manager Shanley said that becomes important because it is a decision of canceling the games so as not to incur overtime. The mission has always been to get the game on, but that does incur an overtime expense.

Mr. Carlino next spoke about trash receptacles, which are located at the fields and some satellite locations. There are costs associated with providing this service. There has been some thought about implementing a carry in/carry out program. Mr. Carlino will be providing a graffiti removal program report in next week's mail log. Locations have been tracked and the report highlights each road with more than one occurrence. Mr. Carlino wondered if there is still a need for a formal program. A part-time employee is employed for the graffiti removal program.

Mr. Longo explained that Facilities Maintenance maintains all cemeteries in Town using Town staff. In the summer, we bring on additional temporary staff to assist with mowing. Cemetery staff is responsible for burials, lawn care, tree care, repair of stones, road maintenance, and plowing of the cemeteries. Public Works receives many compliments on the Cemetery operations and the quality of care; there are seldom issues with the Cemetery Division.

Mr. Carlino said there are four cemeteries in Manchester, with a total of 127 acres of manicured property.

Mr. Longo reported that the in-house expansion of East Cemetery is close to completion. Last year there were 268 burials, averaging about 5 burials per week.

General Manager Shanley thinks many people are unaware that if they are a Manchester resident, they can be buried in a Manchester cemetery and receive perpetual care for \$650 for a plot and \$600 for the burial. Fees for private cemeteries are significantly more expensive. Manchester provides a wonderful service and the cemeteries are beautiful places to walk through. The fees in no way cover the costs associated with the cemeteries. Mr. Shanley suggested forming a committee consisting of funeral directors, finance people, and members of the community to remedy this situation.

Mayor Spadaccini asked the last time the cemetery charges were looked at. Mr. Carlino answered that the latest price increase was implemented in March 2007. Mr. Spadaccini remembers that at that time Manchester was on the lower end of the cost spectrum.

General Manager Shanley said that even with the fee increase, the Cemetery Division is a heavily subsidized operation.

Mayor Spadaccini asked to what degree the cemetery is cost effective. Mr. Carlino said that in 2005 revenues offset about 40% of the costs. The General fund subsidized approximately 60% of the Cemetery operation at that time.

Mr. Longo said it is fair to say that Field Services exists to service the Town. He wanted the Board to be aware that costs have gone up: snow by 17%, salt by 21% and diesel fuel by 18%.

Mayor Spadaccini thanked the Public Works staff for its thorough presentation.

Director Tweedie moved to go into Executive Session for the purpose of Labor Negotiations at 9:31 p.m. Mr. Farina seconded the motion and seven members voted in favor.

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APPROVED:

ATTEST:

Secretary, Manchester Board of Directors