SAINT PAUL CITY COUNCIL AUDIT COMMITTEE STUDY

2021

CUSTOMER & CONSTITUENT SERVICES

WITH CULTIVATE STRATEGY, LLC

CONTENTS

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

Cultivate Strategy was asked by the Audit Committee of the Saint Paul City Council to research, analyze, and make recommendations focused on improving equitable access to the City's constituent and customer services. This Executive Summary outlines the process followed, implications of information learned, and recommendations for moving forward. Readers are strongly encouraged to review the full report to gain deeper insights into the realities of system users and staff.

This study focused on departments separate from emergency services. The project team uncovered pain points along the customer-service journey, both from the perspective of service providers within the City, as well as from users of the system. Of special importance was evaluating access, service delivery, and follow-up across demographics of those served.

THE CITY

In this section of the report, we review information learned from each of the departments, offices, and people listed in the table below.

Departments And Offices Studied	City Staff Consulted
• Offices of The Mayor and Financial Empowerment • Offices of The City Council and City Clerk • Financial Services • Parks & Recreation • Planning & Economic Development • Public Library • Public Works • Regional Water Services • Safety & Inspections • Technology & Communications	• 88 contacts with 54 City staff members • 9 Departments • 4 Administrative focus areas (Mayor's Office, Financial Empowerment, Innovation Team, City Council) • 18 one-on-one interviews • 7 group conversations (Lunch & Learns) involving 36 staff members • 13 additional exchanges with staff members on specific topics

Points Of Service For All Offices Within The Study

Highlights of an inventory of customer and constituent-service access points—as searchable on stpaul.gov—within the offices studied are shared below. Additional Department-level information is included in the full report. Citywide Access Points analysis revealed:

- 514 points of access within three clicks on stpaul.gov
- 315 emails
- 139 phone numbers
- 21 online forms
- 14 socials
- 8 portals/applets
- 4 print/mail forms
- 2 walkups
- 6 broken or unresponsive access points

Departmental Themes

Here we share more detail about each Department or office we studied. We highlight our perception of the primary question each area asks about its work, and the repeated narratives we heard from them, and about them.

Example: Implicit Question about Customer Service within Public Works
How do we provide faster, more efficient customer service?"

Key Narratives within Public Works
- *We want to provide faster, more efficient customer service.*
- *We are about the infrastructure of Saint Paul.*
- *There are right and wrong ways to do customer service, and we do it right.*
- *We are "customer advocates" who are getting better and better at engaging the community.*
- *We struggle with mediation between residents and their garbage haulers.*

Key Narratives about Public Works
- *Public Works is responsive overall.*
- *Public Works passes customers around.*
- *It's hard to find the right person with the full answer, particularly with matters that cross divisions, departments, or levels of government.*

Themes Across Departments

We consider common patterns within five themes citywide—System Access & Handling, Tracking Issues, Service Technology, System Sustainability—and discuss tensions in how staff view service provision. For example, are staff supposed to act as concierges or should they be building civic empowerment with those who call the City?

Dominant Narratives Citywide

- We've Got Some Serious Problems with Customer Service
- We Wish People Knew How Hard This Is
- Our Systems Do Work…Just Not Always Efficiently or Fairly
- We're the One Office That Does Service the Right Way
- There Are Strengths to Our System—Especially When We Work Together

THE COMMUNITY

In this section, we describe community outreach efforts, characteristics of respondents, and which neighborhoods were represented.

Initial Outreach	Secondary Outreach	Interviews & Feedback Sessions
• People with Disabilities • Seniors • Residents from Highly Resourced Neighborhoods • Residents from Less Resourced Neighborhoods • Non-Native English Speakers • BIPOC Residents • People Who Do Business in the City • People Who Work in the City	• Disability Advocacy Organizations & Activists • District Council Staff • Residents Referred by District Council Staff • Residents Invited through Community Shares of Minnesota • Non-Native English Speaker Advocacy Organizations & Activists • Business Associations, Focusing on Those Serving Cultural Communities • Randomized Outreach to Businesses from Recent Liquor On-Sale and Automotive Licensure Lists from ECLIPS	• 3 Interviews with Disability Advocates • 2 Feedback Sessions with 13 District Council Staff • 1 Feedback Session/Interviews with 3 Residents, Referred by District Council Staff • 2 Feedback Sessions/Interviews with 21 Residents, Promoted through Community Shares of Minnesota and Social Media • 3 Interviews Drawn from Non-Native English Speaker Advocacy Organizations • 1 Feedback Session/Interviews with 6 Business Representatives /Advocates, Referred from District Councils, Business Associations, and/or ECLIPS outreach

Community Themes

In this section we share themes distilled from conversations with residents, businesses, BIPOC communities, and Disability communities, and include more detail about what each user group said. The categories of information included focus on:

- Good Experiences
- Submission of Complaints
- Tracking & Follow-up
- Silos & In-Between Spaces
- Informal Connections
- The Role of City Officials
- Systemic Inequity

  For example, regarding Systemic Inequity: Customers and constituents with a problem-solving stance are not served as well as those with a punishment stance. The former grow disenchanted with the Main Line and city staff for stressing penalties, fines, and even condemnation over assisting those with lesser means to mitigate issues. This citywide culture creates a system ripe for the latter to use the complaint system for harassment.

District Council staff and a few community members shared a sense--with some evidence--that BIPOC residents, renters, and lower-income residents are given poorer service and experience more punitive impacts than white, homeowning, higher-income residents. With studies in other cities revealing racial inequities, a well-funded, transparent study of the City's property enforcement mechanisms is needed. Furthermore, the City needs to shift its image: from "we do what government does" to "we build government to help residents thrive."

We move deeper into commonly held beliefs, or narratives, that the public hold about the City and its service provision, sharing their voices to illustrate each.

Dominant Narratives Community-Wide

- Fast to Punish, Slow to Fix
- You Have to Leverage Relationships with the Right People to Get Attention
- The City Makes Things Hard for Us and Easy for Them
- Complaints Must Fit Neatly into Departments During Business Hours
- City Staff Can Be Corrupt, Abusive, or Ambivalent
- DSI Inspections Standards Are Unclear
- Engagement Is Needed but Not Followed Through On

IMPLICATIONS

We begin this section by describing archetypes – repeated stories people tell themselves about who they are within the system. Behavior change theory posits that the way people think about themselves influences their behavior. To change people's behavior, they must be aware of how they see themselves. By seeing themselves, it may be possible to shape interactions more constructively. For example, City staff may be better able to calibrate their responses based on their self-understanding and their understanding of how users approach the system. This section also includes User and Provider Narratives about what it's like to interact with the system to better illustrate each Archetype.

User Archetypes	Staff Archetypes
• A Customer	• A Concierge
• A Constituent	• An Educator
• A Taxpayer	• A Reformer
• A Reporter	• A Realist
• A Violator	• And Advocate

Here is one example of a User Archetype and a corresponding narrative:

Taxpayers: *Those wanting accountability that local government is functioning efficiently. This group somewhat related to the design of the study, though these respondents needed reminders to share their specific experiences without extrapolating on perceptions of government.*

Here's the thing. Those 8989 people are very polite when you call, but they can't do anything for you. Plus, you have to call them only during their hours, so good luck if it's an evening or a weekend, and you need a quick answer. Well...really...there are no quick answers anyway. They'll make you slog through city workers, through mistakes, failures, voicemails...and they never call you. You have to keep calling. Well, they do call sometimes, but they don't respond as quickly as they should. Those employees are great but none of them have any power to do anything. But at least you get to talk to somebody pleasant. Unionized civil servants get super-duper powerful over the years, and there's no oversight 'cause the City Council comes and goes, the Mayor comes and goes, but the civil servants stay. You wonder where all that property tax money is going. I tried getting the Mayor involved once, but he doesn't put his number on the website. You have to really look to find it. And I never got a call back. They just took the complaint, and I have no idea what happened. Maybe if I was rich or something, somebody would pay attention to me.

Here is one example of a Staff Archetype and a corresponding narrative:

Realists: *Those most fulfilled by telling the people the truth as they see it. This group sees the City as largely a static bureaucracy that takes a long time to deliver on some of its promises, which they feel are sometimes overpromised and underdelivered. This group "level" with people who are struggling to navigate the City. They pragmatically assist customers and constituents, but they're careful to be honest and methodical. If processes aren't working as designed, they may share helpful "tricks" with the public or connect them with Advocates or Concierges.*

The Main Line works well if people use it, but people won't always use it, or won't use only it. And if they do use it but won't leave their contact information, City staff can't get back to them with answers. It sets up a long cycle for residents of calling, leaving a request, then calling back to get an answer. If there were enough staff available to answer calls, and if they were knowledgeable enough to respond, that would make things run more smoothly. I've been around a long time and know people in every department, so I can help callers find the right person or place, but that's not true for everyone. I think staff need ongoing customer service training, including supervisors, so they how best to support their forward-facing staff.

Systemic Factors

Each team member addresses factors we see at play across the city from our professional and experiential expertise. Factors include:

- Equity & Justice
- Governance & Change
- Process Improvement
- Technology
- Internal Networks

RECOMMENDATIONS

After considering the quantitative data, the stories and experiences of City staff alongside customers and constituents, and considering archetypal experiences and systemic factors, we make 10 recommendations for City officials, leaders, and staff. Each recommendation includes Quick Wins, or ideas for action that will prompt further momentum; Things to Try that may be catalytic in causing additional changes; and Power Plays that will require collaborative leadership and sustained coordination. We also characterize some actions as Crisis Interventions – actions needed now to address pressing challenges in the system.

While it is tempting for our firm or City leaders to define sweeping, centralized solutions, they would be disastrous. With such divergent practices across departments, divisions, and offices—compounded by complicated legal and privacy issues—we advocate for more relational, complexity-informed, emergent strategies—strengthened by skilled leadership from the top and the bottom of the City's hierarchy.

Detailed analysis is provided for the following recommendations:
1. Prioritize the health, hearts, and minds of frontline staff.
2. Shift the City's identify narratives.
3. Establish universal access to service while building political efficacy.
4. Create conditions to share tracking between departments and with the public.
5. Empower Main Line staff to close requests.
6. Relocate citywide customer service.
7. Continue to diversify approaches to customer service.
8. Deemphasize anonymity; emphasize accountability.
9. Reward connectivity and curiosity
10. Watch for opportunities to align business practices with high-quality customer service technology.

Ideas for Further Study
Here we explore four additional ideas for further study to strengthen City services overall.
- Strengthen and diversify the District Council system to improve service and build justice.
- Build internal capacity to engage the community.
- Reassess ethical and legal considerations surrounding community engagement.
- Leverage study recommendations to cut down on waste.

STRAIGHT TALK FROM THE STUDY TEAM

Our team brings multiple perspectives to this project. In this section, we share a few, informal words of reflection.

Introduction

PROJECT PURPOSE & AIMS

The Audit Committee was formed by the Saint Paul City Council in February 2019 to audit the work of City departments, with occasional assistance from independent consultants. For 2021, the focus of the Committee was on access, service delivery, and follow-up in response to non-emergency-related services for City residents, business representatives, and workers.

Cultivate Strategy was asked to research, analyze, and make recommendations focused on improving equitable access to the City of Saint Paul's constituent and customer services. This study focused on departments separate from emergency services (i.e., Emergency Management, Fire Department and Police Department). The project team uncovered current pain points in the customer and constituent services from the perspective of users of the system as well as service providers within the City.

Of special importance to the process was evaluating access, service delivery, and follow-up across demographics of those served. Improving and enhancing current research efforts by Office of Technology and other City Departments in their own, internal work was to take place in parallel with outreach to diverse users of the City's multifaceted information and complaint system. Data collected from service providers and recipients is synthesized herein, including recommendations for improvements that provide constituent and customer services that are equitable, caring, and honor the humanity of residents, customers, and City staff.

PROJECT TEAM

Cultivate Strategy is a small LLC based in St. Paul. It works with nonprofits, small businesses, and government entities who share a commitment to helping organizations build caring, responsive, and sustainable processes that include all kinds of human difference. Cultivate Strategy's team for this Customer & Constituent Service Study included:

Sherry P. Johnson (she/her/hers)
Project Coordinator and Complex-Systems Consultant, Facilitator, & Accessibility Pathfinder
Cultivate Strategy Founder

Sherry advises nonprofits, public sector leaders, and small businesses in strategy, engagement, working in complexity, and disability inclusion. She is a Certified Technology of Participation® (ToP®) facilitator and trainer, coach, and curriculum designer. Sherry holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a Master of Education from the University of St. Catherine.

Brigid Riley (she/her/hers)
Senior Project Advisor; Facilitator, & Organizational Development Pathfinder
Cultivate Strategy Senior Associate

Brigid specializes in organization and Board development, strategic planning, small and large group facilitation, and project management. She is a Certified Technology of Participation® (ToP®) facilitator and trainer, Brigid holds an undergraduate degree from the University of St. Catherine, Saint Paul, MN, and a Master of Public Health from the University of Minnesota.

Johnese M. Bostic (she/her/hers)
Data Manager, Facilitator, & Quality Improvement Pathfinder
Cultivate Strategy Associate

Johnese is a facilitator and assessment professional skilled in fostering partnerships on public health policies, programs, and initiatives. She is a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt and earned her B.A. in Behavioral Science from Columbia College, an Associate Public Manager Certificate through the SC Department of Administration's Human Resources Division, and a Project Management Certificate from the University of South Carolina.

Vera F. Allen (she/her/hers)
User Stories Coordinator, Facilitator, & Diversity / Equity / Inclusion Pathfinder (September 6-Present)
Cultivate Strategy Associate

Vera F. Allen is a Black Navajo mother, partner, organizer, and farmer who moonlights as a media and food system activist. She is a multi-media cultural communications specialist, researcher, and a problem-solver who works to attain more equitable and sustainable systems for communities. Vera researched Women's/African American/Native American Studies at the University of Minnesota and holds a Mini-MBA in Nonprofit Management from the University of St. Thomas.

Kia Moua (she/her/hers)
User Stories Coordinator, Facilitator, & Diversity / Equity / Inclusion Pathfinder (June 16–August 17)
Former Cultivate Strategy Associate

Kia Moua consults and trains on racial equity and intercultural collaboration. She is a co-developer of the Diamond Inclusiveness Assessment™ (DIA) and a qualified administrator of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). She is a Child Welfare Foundations Supervisor and Trainer for the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Kia holds a Master of Human Development degree with an emphasis on Antiracism Studies from Saint Mary's University.

Lisa Meredith (she/her/hers)
Technical Rollout and Human-Systems Advisor, (September 21–Present)
Cultivate Strategy Associate

Lisa has been the Executive Director of a joint power organization for 20 years working with counties and other local government entities to provide software solutions. She is a Certified Technology of Participation® (ToP®) facilitator. Lisa holds an undergraduate degree in Business and Marketing from the University of Minnesota-Duluth; an MBA with a concentration in nonprofit management and public policy; and a Master in Leadership with a concentration in facilitation, both from the University of Saint Thomas.

PROJECT NARRATIVE

After an unexpectedly long procurement period, we launched our efforts in late June and worked into December 2021. The graphic below provides an overview of the timing of separate phases of the project. A brief review of each phase follows.
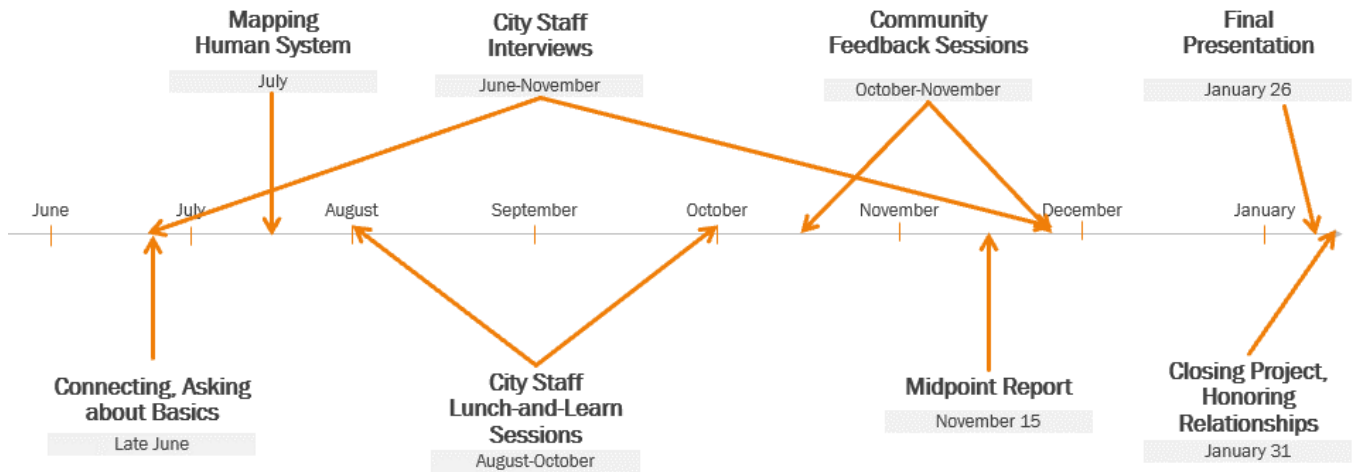
Connecting, Asking About the Basics
Initial conversations with Audit Committee members and the Committee's staff liaison led to email introductions to key staff members. We followed up with initial phone conversations to start connecting with real people to deepen our understanding of the City's constituent and customer services. Finding and connecting with the right people in each department was not always easy, as no staff directory nor organizational chart was provided. And while we were able to rule out emergency services, the priority of offices for our focus began as an open question.

Human System Mapping
To enrich our understanding of services, we created a visualization of city departments and filled it in with key staff and services as we uncovered them. A thorough website review added an additional layer of information.

City Staff Interviews
Once we learned the basics about how services are offered, we scheduled additional one-on-one phone calls with appropriate staff and to learn more about how they handle services in their departments. Almost everyone we reached out to inside City government was eager to describe their role and practices, share relevant materials, and identify others to contact for more information. Unfortunately, the study's scope and budget did not allow for us to talk with all referrals.

City Staff Lunch and Learn Sessions
To budget our time effectively, we also offered departments the opportunity to host Lunch and Learns—one-hour conversations that included several staff members—that gave us a better feel for how services worked in their office, and their respective roles. These proved immensely popular, and we eventually hosted 7 of them. Talking with small groups of people from the same department was especially energizing, as they built off one another's responses and shed light on more specific, day-to-day aspects of their work.

Community Feedback Sessions
While part of the team worked to map the City side of services, another part was conducting community outreach through multiple channels to learn about users' experiences. We ran into challenges contacting community members right away and learned that many of those we reached out to—individually and inside organizations—were experiencing such elevated levels of overwhelm that they were unable or uninterested in participating in the study. Our community-based efforts

were also paused for a month by the unexpected departure of one of our team members, but we eventually rebounded and reached our target number of connections after a new team member joined us.

The remainder of this report presents summary information from more than six months of study. We address both City services and the customer and constituent experience. We highlight information we gleaned from each department studied, themes about service provision, and staff and resident stories. We discuss the implications of what we found from both human-systems and business-process perspectives. We conclude with a set of 10 recommendations and ideas for further study.

PROJECT VALUES

The engagement and data-collection methods we have adopted for complex contexts are rooted in the team's values: These values not only shaped our approach to the work, but also this report, as described below.

Inclusive Participation
We ensure everyone in every room, real or virtual, has an opportunity to contribute. Special focus on creating and maintaining space for historically underrepresented voices is vital to equitable inclusion.

In this report, we are intentional about highlighting quotes and narratives from those we perceive are least likely to be heard and emphasized—particularly BIPOC and disabled residents and staff, frontline staff, and women and nonbinary leaders.

Profound Respect
We create an environment where all participants feel welcomed and heard. In this project, we strived to make evident our respect for residents and their stories, alongside respect for city workers and their commitment to public service.

In this report and supporting documentation, we have promised anonymity to all respondents. Names have been removed and identifying information obscured to protect their livelihoods. We highlight respondents' actual words to honor their voices and perspectives, sometimes combining City staff's phrasing with others' in their focus areas. We identify only germane details in attribution.

Honoring Narratives
We create opportunities to safely share and examine both traditional and narrative data as valid artifacts of an organization's context. Resident stories and those of City staff weave themselves into a complex picture of a constantly evolving system. Where quantitative data helps us better understand problems and monitor improvement, qualitative data is the primary driver of systemic change.

Narratives: Simple stories that govern individual and group behavior. In individuals, these stories may be internal and unconsciously held; in groups, these stories may be shared or in conflict, but often go unacknowledged.

This report highlights summary and archetypal narratives from staff, customers, and constituents throughout. In our construction of these narratives, we employ the words and phrases of single or multiple respondents whenever possible, reordering them for coherence and linking them with denotative transitions.

PROJECT SCOPE

The most challenging aspect of this study was its massive scope to be studied within a short duration. Revisiting and checking in on that scope rose in importance as the project progressed, to keep the project team and Audit Committee focused on identifying the most relevant

recommendations within the study's budget. Communicating these boundaries also became vital to reaching diverse groups of community respondents, who often needed clarification about scope.

Items within the scope of this study:
- In-reach: Ways customers and constituents access city services and information
- Assessing the quality of service and response across departments not specifically excluded from the study
- Describing and assessing internal processes related to customer and constituent service and response-- within and across city departments, Council Offices, and the Mayor's Office
- Describing and analyzing customer and constituent experiences of the City's service and response
- Making recommendations to improve service and response, particularly related to equity across demographic groups

Items outside the scope of this study:
- Emergency response of all kinds
  - Police
  - Fire & Paramedics
  - Emergency Management
- Human resources, including procurement processes, hiring/firing/promotion, and equity-related hiring targets
  - City Attorney
  - Human Resources
  - Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity (excepting ADA and Language Line Coordination)
- Outreach & engagement: Ways that the City initiates contact with constituents for feedback on specific programs, policies, or plans
- Political advocacy: Describing or assessing policy or decision-making processes and response from elected officials on issues up for Council votes or Executive action that will have a citywide impact

PROJECT CONTEXT

Herein is described quantitative aspects of departments, divisions, and offices studied, citywide access points, the phases of the study's community engagement, rough demographics of community respondents, and constraints on quantitative data collection.

Departments And Offices Studied
Below we list departments and offices the team studied, along with common abbreviations used throughout the report:
- Offices of The Mayor and Financial Empowerment ("OFE")
- Offices of The City Council and City Clerk ("Council")
- Financial Services
- Parks & Recreation ("Parks")
- Planning & Economic Development ("PED")
- Public Library ("Library" or "SPPL")
- Public Works
- Regional Water Services ("SPRWS")
- Safety & Inspections ("DSI")
- Technology & Communications ("OTC")

City Staff Consulted
Our team spoke with City contacts in multiple formats: formal and informal, individual and group, in real-time and asynchronously. Our contacts included:
- 88 contacts with 54 City staff members
- 9 Departments
- 4 Administrative focus areas (Mayor's Office, Financial Empowerment, Innovation Team, City Council)
- 18 one-on-one interviews
- 7 group conversations (Lunch & Learns) involving 36 staff members
- 13 additional exchanges with staff members on specific topics

Points Of Service For All Offices Within The Study

As the team spoke with City staff, we took an inventory of all customer and constituent-service access points—as searchable on stpaul.gov—within the offices studied and share highlights below. (See Appendix for detailed data.)

- Citywide Access Points
    - 514 points of access within three clicks on stpaul.gov
    - 315 emails
    - 139 phone numbers
    - 21 online forms
    - 14 socials
    - 8 portals/applets
    - 4 print/mail forms
    - 2 walkups
    - 6 broken or unresponsive access points
- Parks & Recreation
    - 3-person Call Center
    - Parks and Rec receives at least 200 calls/day
- Public Works
    - 26 phone-number service directory
    - Solid Waste answered 12,815 calls last year; 940 were complaints to haulers
    - Public Works "touches" residents at least 15x/day
- Regional Water Services
    - 10-person Call Center
    - 650 calls/day; 281 answered by staff; 369 by self-serve Interactive Voice Response unit (IVR).
    - 94,000 accounts, of which 72,000 are in St. Paul
- Safety & Inspections
    - 5-person Call Center
    - 500-600 calls/day
    - About 80,000 anonymized calls (2019)
    - Since the pandemic, expecting that number to rise to 100,000/year
    - AMANDA records 35-40,000 calls/year
    - "Top 10" complaints tracked by month

Communities Approached

The team approached the community side of the study through experiment. With the pandemic's effects rising and falling—and a great racial reckoning and vocational upheavals alongside them--we knew that traditional "best practices" in community engagement would likely be ineffective in reaching communities most impacted by inequitable service provision. Below are summarized the team's process of trial-and-error:

Phase I: Initial Outreach to Broad User Groups:

Community outreach to the following groups was arduous at best as we navigated Covid protocols and safety measures. The response was tepid as people spent months in front of screens, felt a sense of complacency regarding the City and real time survival was happening through a global pandemic.

- People with Disabilities
- Seniors
- Residents from Highly Resourced Neighborhoods
- Residents from Less Resourced Neighborhoods
- Non-Native English Speakers
- BIPOC Residents
- People Who Do Business in the City
- People Who Work in the City

Phase II: Secondary Outreach to More Focused User Groups

The Study continued with second and third phone calls, emails, and personal outreach to a more focused set of community members, paying particular attention to referrals from Phase I Community contacts and City staff contacts.

- Disability Advocacy Organizations & Activists
- District Council Staff
- Residents Referred by District Council Staff
- Residents Invited through Community Shares of Minnesota
- Non-Native English Speaker Advocacy Organizations & Activists
- Business Associations, Focusing on Those Serving Cultural Communities
- Randomized Outreach to Businesses from Recent Liquor On-Sale and Automotive Licensure Lists from ECLIPS

Phase III: Interviews (In-Person or via Form) & Feedback Sessions

The study concluded with intensive outreach to those most responsive and interested in the Study and included:

- 3 Interviews with Disability Advocates
- 2 Feedback Sessions with 13 District Council Staff
- 1 Feedback Session/Interviews with 3 Residents, Referred by District Council Staff
- 2 Feedback Sessions/Interviews with 21 Residents, Promoted through Community Shares of Minnesota and Social Media
- 3 Interviews Drawn from Non-Native English Speaker Advocacy Organizations
- 1 Feedback Session/Interviews with 6 Business Representatives /Advocates, Referred from District Councils, Business Associations, and/or ECLIPS outreach

Rough Profile Of Respondents

- 50 Total Respondents
- 16 BIPOC Respondents
- 4 Self-Identified As Having A Disability

Constraints On Quantitative Data Collection

While the study design was not focused on quantitative data collection, the project team made every effort to find and analyze available data for customer and constituent service within the City. Unfortunately, the City's data collection was largely limited to topical, rather than customer-experience and report-tracking information. The latter types of data are kept in personal or team documents within Divisions. The team was not confident that any attempt we might have made to work with such data would have generated useful comparisons for this report (see Tracking Issues).

We generated our own quantitative data with respect to customer and constituent access points, which we have shared in the Appendix.

Community Respondents by Neighborhood
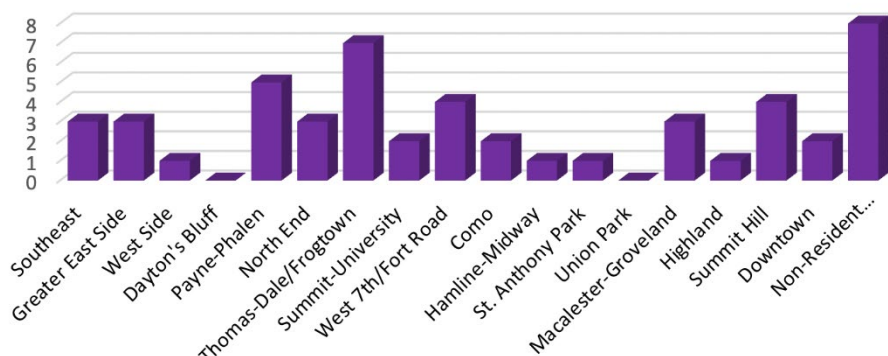
Regarding community outreach, we collected data about respondents only based on user groups and neighborhoods. While we were able to represent our respondents by neighborhood, we chose to favor holistic over granular data wherever anonymity might be compromised, given 50 total respondents.

The City of Saint Paul

ONE SYSTEM, MANY PARTS

When analyzing human systems, it can be helpful to draw on biological sciences for inspiration. If Saint Paul's government is a living, complex-adaptive ecosystem, its departments are akin to ecological niches. Where a natural system may contain river, prairie, bluff woods, bottomlands, urban forest, and edge habitats, city departments each have staff and business processes that adapt to the conditions of that niche.

Niche-dwellers are good at doing some things and poor at doing others. We found successful projects and great customer service within each department, but each department struggles to adapt and to recognize their interdependence, instead seeking control and predictability—attempting to set up hard boundaries around their niche to protect themselves or "their way of doing things." While these boundaries may preserve their strengths, it tends to magnify their weaknesses. Sharing resources like human wisdom, technology tools, or good processes becomes increasingly difficult.

Biology tells us that niches may seem to exist independently, but what happens in one niche impacts the others, in sometimes profound and surprising ways. For example, we know from nature that connections between niches are where ecosystems often build adaptive capacity.

In this sense, the City of Saint Paul is not resilient.

Too few staff are comfortable in the space between departments—in "edge habitats"—to be able to foster adaptation to change, from social changes like higher standards for inclusion & equity, to catastrophic events like the pandemic. Further, departments struggle to coordinate across culture and function. Too few staff have strong connections between departments to share information, to ensure cross-pollination of ideas, to build a consistent culture and experience of customer service, or to foster innovation.

There is no typical customer service experience in the City of Saint Paul. Each department interacts with constituents in their own unique way, with several staff suggesting or insisting they have a different standard for "good customer service" than the others. But without a consistent workflow across departments, with each having their own way of tracking complaints or requests, customers and constituents with complicated requests are left confused and sometimes abandoned, trekking from one ecological niche to another without a guide, unequipped to handle the differences in communication and practices.

Nevertheless, our team heard from many City staff who yearn for something better, more coordinated, with the ability to better refer and follow-up with customers, to track successes and challenges, and to celebrate closure. While we refrain from advocating top-down, systemwide "enforced connectivity," we hope to reveal places where this is emerging so that these efforts can be observed and dialed up where they're working.

THEMES BY DEPARTMENT

This section of the report will examine each office studied, before looking again at the City system. The offices of City Clerk and Financial Empowerment will be discussed alongside the City Council and Mayor's Offices, respectively. For each office, we identify key narratives—the beliefs that consciously and unconsciously drive actions and decision-making.

Internal narratives are drawn from the respondents we spoke with, as well as our review of the department's website, communications, budget presentations, and overall approaches. *External narratives* are drawn from community comments and staff in other departments. We neither research nor confirm their accuracy; however, we include them in the report when they have been repeated by multiple sources, to provide departments with useful feedback on how they are perceived.

Offices of the Mayor and Financial Empowerment

Mayor's Office and OFE: How do we provide radical hospitality to customers and constituents citywide?

The Mayor's Office has its own form to contact the Mayor, including two other forms for inviting the Mayor to a meeting and to events. It hosts a phone line, but that line is difficult to find. It's listed 3 clicks in, and a customer would need to know that a) the underlined heading on the top of the "Contact the Mayor" form is a hyperlink, and b) the website template contains phone numbers on page footers. Despite that, many constituents still begin by contacting the Mayor, rather than using the DSI Call Center, known as the "Main Line." The Office of Financial Empowerment has its own line.

The Mayor's Office triages all requests from the Mayor, the City Council, and the Main Line. They "flag these internally for response, but there isn't a way to do that formally," according to one staff member. Like many other staff in the City, they can and do track customer concerns internally, using spreadsheets. They try to keep up on "who to send people to in City departments, but that gets disrupted with staff changes. There's no flow chart. There's no systematic way to manage queries."

The Mayor's Office concerns itself not only with effective service; they use the word *hospitality*. But one Administration staff shared, "The City's customer service system being so diffuse, with many entry points, some things get handled quickly while other things do not." The ideal model cited by staff was the now-dispersed Pandemic Language Line. Mirroring and borrowing staff from the Public Library's successful Community Helpdesk, this line was made up of City employees who spoke languages other than English and were familiar enough with the system that they could navigate City services for callers.

Mayoral staff we spoke with shared a desire for efficient government; moreover, they stressed the role of innovating and improving government's approach to customer and constituent services: "The City is too big not to have a centralized system because people have a hard time connecting for answers," shared one staff member. Another said, "There's a lack of consistency and follow-up with regards to handling constituents requests." A staff member from Financial Empowerment also shared, "The current system is not financially sustainable: there are too many repeated processes, access points, and double-coverage across departments."

Key Narratives within the Offices of The Mayor and Financial Empowerment
- It's our job to move City government forward; The Mayor's Office has a unique and more forward-thinking perspective than elsewhere in the City.
- We're going to move the bureaucracy into the future.

Key Narratives about the Offices of The Mayor and Financial Empowerment
- It's hard to get ahold of the Mayor.
- This administration does not prioritize customer service.
- College Bound program services are thoughtful and effective.

Council and City Clerk's Offices

City Council staff frequently interact with customers and constituents wanting assistance for a wide variety of requests. Some want to express policy and oversight concerns and opinions; others want

assistance navigating City services or holding City staff and its business processes accountable. Many constituents begin their service journey here, rather than using the Main Line. Veteran aides and administrative staff are deeply versed in City processes and personnel, but newer staff struggle to learn quickly enough to keep up. Each Ward office keeps its own records in separate ways, often with spreadsheets. Staff expressed frustration with the many different knowledge and customer support systems each department needs them to learn. Navigating Legistar and AMANDA when dealing with vacant or "problem-properties" and neighbor conflicts are distinct challenges.

Regular customer and constituent service processes include the City Clerk pulling City data upon request, in compliance with the Minnesota Data Practices Act. The City Clerk is currently a highly connected, longtime staff member who helps Council staff navigate department systems.

Central Council Office and Ward Office contacts are prominent on the website for email and phone. Some Ward pages even have helpful videos for customers who may have cognitive disabilities or struggle with reading proficiency. The video for Ward 6 is a prime example of an effective social story for neurodivergent customers and constituents to understand the layout and implicit rules for visiting Council offices.

Council staff we spoke with cared deeply about supporting effective government and providing for customer and constituent needs. But a few expressed concerns about balancing these values. One Council staff shared, "Five people from any Ward can take up all of your time at the ward level; the more we deal with everyday, small-scale problems, the fewer long-term, bigger ideas we will have room for. We're drowning in day-to-day stuff." The more that Council involves itself in small-scale customer service concerns, the less time it has for effective policymaking and oversight.

Key Narratives within the Council and City Clerk's Offices
- Clerk: We strive to be open and transparent.
- Council: Two contrasting narratives:
    - The job of Council is to teach people about government and how to navigate it: "We empower you."
    - The job of Council to advocate for constituents and push for follow-through: "We take care of you."

Key Narratives about the Council and City Clerk's Offices
- Council offices are best as secondary helpers to intervene when other systems don't work, or people need an ear.
- Council offices can make situations worse when involving themselves in constituent calls, because they don't know enough about department-level processes and sometimes overpromise.

Financial Services

The Office of Financial Services' concerns span all departments, as they oversee the financial operations of the City. They serve customers and constituents through paper bills and assessments and an online pay site, backed up by phone and email assistance. Though paper bills make them easy to find, website wayfinding is a bit tricker, with assistance 3 clicks in. They do offer written instructions in multiple languages.

The staff we spoke with conveyed this department's desire for clear, efficient customer service citywide and a general helpfulness for customers with financial questions or complaints. They shared that their customer and constituent interactions most often take place after an initial call to their City Councilmember or the Mayor's office.

Key Narratives within Financial Services
- We educate the public about financial matters—from the Mayor's budget down to their park shelter or assessment bill.

Key Narratives about Financial Services
- None thus far

Parks & Recreation

The Parks & Recreation customer service staff is an efficient, tightly connected primary network with strong relationships within DSI. Their relationships and work style are vital to favorable attitudes the department enjoys within the community. Call Center staff have enjoyed the adoption of Microsoft Teams, "just to chat with each other and bounce off questions that pop up during the day." Active software "is a great tool," as is the Tree Keeper software they use to manage Forestry calls.

However, the department's secondary networks—vital connections to program and recreation center staff—are damaged or missing. Many customer calls are related to recreation centers' programming, events, and maintenance. But Call Center staff struggle to discern who manages what, particularly with park maintenance. "Cheat sheets" exist, but they are not always accurate, so reaching the proper person for a customer request is awkward and time-consuming.

The Parks Call Center staff desire an efficient asset management system that would enable at least their own department to better share information, but a citywide system would be preferred. One Call Center staff shared: "In a perfect world I would love to just say there's an issue for our maintenance or operations-related, I can just type in the address, type in the issue, and boom! It gets sent through that software and then sent to the right people. That would be the magic ticket."

Parks: How do we translate our customer service team's efficiency and connectedness to our operations?

Key Narratives within Parks & Recreation
- We yearn to translate our customer service team's efficiency and connectedness to Parks operations.
- Our knowledge is specialized, and we really know our stuff.
- We struggle to close loops with staff vacations, time off, and turnover. There's no backup, so we do the best we can.

Key Narratives about Parks & Recreation
- They have a lot of staff turnover.
- Communication isn't always timely, especially about events.
- Parks has good programs and good customer service.

Planning & Economic Development

PED consists of three divisions: Planning, Economic Development, and Housing. Due to the wide scope of our study, we were only able to engage directly with Planning staff; however, we did hear from the community about the other two divisions. Happily, since the study began, the department's homepage has grown in its usability and wayfinding capacity for customers and constituents. Division phone numbers are now on division-page footers,

PED: How do we better coordinate with DSI to provide excellent customer service?

with clearer explanations of the function of each. From a customer and constituent perspective, however, it is not intuitive for Housing to reside within the department, as it is not explicitly mentioned in its department's title.

District Council staff reported several "go-to" contacts within the department. The department also hosts a Business Resource Center, as 80% of its customer service contacts are with businesses and business associations, according to staff we spoke with. Project Managers within Economic Development work with businesses on location services, coordination with other departments, and more. However, the purpose and pathway to this resource is somewhat ambiguous, as there are multiple access points and crossovers with other departments, DSI in particular. The most confusing aspect of this relationship is that PED staff answer its email, while Main Line staff answer its phone number. When our team tested this phone number, we were transferred to the licensing desk, had to ask again for a more direct contact to the Resource Center, and were told to email PED. It is still unclear to us—and certainly the business representatives we spoke with—which aspects of this service aid beyond licensing.

The pandemic has honed its overall customer service practices. One staff shared that he and his colleagues had to learn "how to do our existing work in new ways, PLUS communicating about programs the City and county and state and feds all created to help businesses."

Planning staff shared that "our culture in our division is customer-service oriented. All of my colleagues put a high value on responding quickly…in less than an hour, someone will say 'I'll follow up' when front-line staff sends something." He also shared that PED and DSI coordination has declined in recent years but that the department is currently working on rebuilding those lines of communication.

Key Narratives within Planning & Economic Development
- Our customer service is more responsive than the rest of the City; our standard is to return calls personally, within 24 hours.
- …Unless it's a Federal project; those get bogged down in timing and process, with a lot of "dotting I's and crossing T's."

Key Narratives about Planning & Economic Development
- PED is helpful and responsive
- "New blood" in PED is shaking things up
- DSI and Housing need to coordinate more to serve people's needs
- It's unclear how to utilize any business services they may offer beyond licensing referrals

The Public Library

No department in the City is more beloved than the Saint Paul Public Library. Staff and community outreach revealed almost universal gratefulness for its staff and operations. During the pandemic, libraries were a familiar place to turn when the community was struggling with disconnection and an unpredictable future.

One Library staff shared that the Public Library began "trying to find ways to replicate as much as we can (the in-person) experience in the online environment… trying to answer questions the same way we would if someone came to us or called us." Libraries' customer service surged during the pandemic, centered on its multi-lingual Community Helpdesk, which broadened its service to outstate and beyond.

SPPL: How do we maintain and build upon the deep relationships we've built in the community?

In addition to the Community Helpdesk, Libraries have a vibrant array of customer and constituent-focused services, including onsite librarians, the Central Library phone helpdesk, the Homework

Line, and an onsite social worker at Rondo Library. Her job is "Giving people the time that they need" to process stress and trauma and connecting them with supportive services in the community. She also has assisted librarians and customer service staff in the Mayor's Office with self-care tools as they respond to community needs with callers in similar situations.

Despite the added pressure of all this demanding work, the Library staff we spoke with are set on growing their capacity to offer both technical and social services. "We want easier connections to us. We want one number without touchtone options." (Even since our interviews, our team has noticed the website increasingly set up for more direct access to this kind of personal triage.) In fact, Library staff shared that the whole City could benefit from an expanded social worker program that staff across the City could draw on.

Key Narratives within the Public Library
- Our customer service is a model; it's responsive and caring.
- The physical presence and familiarity of neighborhood library sites is key to building trust
- Libraries are uniquely positioned—a more trusted and known source of reliable info and help—than other City services.

Key Narratives about the Public Library
- Libraries are amazing—A+
- Consistently excellent reputation, internally and externally

Public Works

Though Public Works' website presence features a hotline, it has multiple names. Its service directory and website buttons present an overwhelming number of access points via phone, online forms, mail, and in-person options for contacting its many divisions. In addition, the department is particularly active on Twitter, where it refers resident concerns to these access points—risking outsized attention of city leaders and officials on low-priority concerns (see Recommendation 3 for more on this dynamic).

Key Public Works frontline staff and division leaders were often mentioned in City and resident outreach as being especially helpful with referrals. Many have a "good relationship" with DSI staff, in addition to an enthusiastic software pilot partnership with OTC.

In October, Public Works staff in Street Services, Recycling/Garbage, and Sidewalks divisions began a pilot project with Zendesk. This customer service software tracks inbound and outbound communications via phone, email, and an online form. The two-year Zendesk pilot also records calls and tracks each exchange as a service ticket, enabling staff to assess resource usage and service approaches in real time. This potential innovation is significant, as staff had expressed frustration about their inability to track customer service when approached before the study; one staff shared, "We're excited about what Zendesk can do. We're going to have better accountability and tracking."

Staff expressed concern here because Zendesk is only a pilot program whose success will be limited by the divisions and departments who adopt it. Another staff shared, "(We) hope that other depts and divisions examine how they communicate and offer a variety of ways to reach (the City)." Future budgeting is also of concern. Currently, OTC sponsors the pilot, but Public Works will need to take on the costs of the software if they want to keep it.

After the garbage system overhaul in 2018, Public Works increased community engagement capacity, focusing on recycling. This new emphasis on engagement is influencing the way that other divisions within Public Works are approaching customer service—providing community outreach and education lessens pressure on frontline staff by

PW: How do we provide faster, more efficient customer service?

increasing the likelihood that customers and constituents who contact the department will have the language and systemic knowledge to more effectively report their concerns.

Overall, Public Works staff expressed a desire for clear communication within and between departments, noting that "rumors are the absolute enemy of good public service." They are "not sure messages are communicated well to constituents" in citywide communications, citing low turnouts for community recycling events in a multi-unit area as an example.

Key Narratives within Public Works
- We want to provide faster, more efficient customer service.
- We are about the infrastructure of Saint Paul.
- There are right and wrong ways to do customer service, and we do it right.
- We are "customer advocates" who are getting better and better at engaging the community.
- We struggle with mediation between residents and their garbage haulers.

Key Narratives about Public Works
- Public Works is responsive overall.
- Public Works passes customers around.
- It's hard to find the right person with the full answer, particularly with matters that cross divisions, departments, or levels of government.

Safety & Inspections

Despite the DSI Call Center's title as "The Main Line," the first stop for many constituents is often the Mayor or City Council Ward office. In addition to the "8989" phone service, their customer support tools include a dedicated email inbox and online forms for complaints and compliments. Complaint types vary by season:

DSI: How do we get support from the rest of the City of Saint Paul to best serve and inform customers?

For non-English-speaking customers, DSI relies on the Language Line, managed through the Department of Human Rights and Equal Employment Opportunity. A few staff shared that it is an "amazing" service, particularly for those languages most common to St. Paul. However, we did hear some reports of long waiting times and mixed quality of translators for this service.

When speaking with DSI's customer service staff, our team was impressed with their resourcefulness and connectedness across the City. They rely on an internal FAQ document, the City website, Google, and various Departments' printed policies and procedures to respond to a wide variety of customer needs. They asserted that while public officials are allowed to track names and contact information, the Call Center promises that all calls in DSI are anonymous. Though they answer emails and online forms, they cannot return phone calls.

DSI customer service staff we spoke with shared a desire for an informal, personable approach to service. We discovered that Saint Paul has developed its own brand of responsiveness that is more personal and unscripted than others, particularly Minneapolis' 311 system (see more in Recommendation 5 about this dynamic).

Overall, DSI has limited tools to respond to ever-expanding needs. It takes two years for a staff person to get fully up to speed to know what to draw on to respond to callers. When policy or procedural shifts occur, information isn't shared soon enough for Call Center staff to know, understand, and use in responding to calls. Staff expressed a desire for more up-to-date information from colleagues around the City. They stressed, however, that documenting and sharing information—particularly centralizing information—would be difficult and time-consuming for staff. DSI and OTC staff hope for streamlined communications as OpenGov replaces AMANDA, the complicated legacy software used to document address-based complaints and inspections.

Regarding racial equity efforts, DSI created an Equity Analysis Framework that is used whenever considering a policy or program change. In addition, they completed 3 equity assessments to improve customer service in Code Enforcement, Fire Certificate of Occupancy, and Licensing processes before the pandemic, including modest community engagement outreach. While they have dedicated time and talent toward identifying equity imbalances, our team was not able to discern any momentum for implementing their assessment recommendations.

In-process or on the horizon are other service improvements: a new Concierge Service Position for directing customers at the walk-up licensing and permitting location; increased staffing overall using American Rescue Plan funds; and an online permitting system via OpenGov. Given the response of business representatives in the community engagement phase, these will help the permits desk recover from staffing shortages experienced during the summer of 2021.

Complaint Types by Season

JANUARY 2021	JULY 2021
1 - Snow Walk (sic)	1 - Garbage Rubbish
2 - Garbage Rubbish	2 - Exterior
3 - Certificate of Occupancy	3 - Tall Grass
4 - Parking	4 - Dumping
	5 - Parking
	6 - Certificate of Occupancy
	7 - Graffiti

Key Narratives within Safety & Inspections
- We are about the safety of the City.
- We generate revenue for the City; we aim to be self-sustaining.
- Our Call Center workers care deeply about customer concerns and do the best they can within the constraints of safety and staff time.
- Our Call Center workers are subject to the elevated levels of what my team would describe as "secondary trauma."

Key Narratives about Safety & Inspections
- DSI are busy and stressed out.
- DSI is all about punishment, not helping people. They even ignored their own equity study.
- Some DSI inspectors are especially helpful; others are contradictory or rude.
- DSI should dig deeper on their own website for their own answers—and update their information; there's a lot of dated information, particularly about licensing on there.
- DSI doesn't coordinate with or understand enough about county and state licensing.
- DSI cares about slowness and safety at the expense of customer service.

Technology & Communications

The Department of Technology & Communications directly handles customer service for cable provider complaints, providing a hotline and an online feedback form. Moreover, it enables customer service technology improvements citywide. OTC has traditionally served in a support role for department-specific software, but it recently spearheaded a website redesign, coordinating departments' Public Information Officers (PIOs) and other staff for content updates and creation.

OTC: How do we make citywide customer service system more user-friendly and equitable?

OTC is currently sponsoring pilots to explore possibilities for more centralized software deployment and support, including a two-year Zendesk pilot with Public Works and City Council. Customers are using the Zendesk complaint form on the Public Works website right now, with rave reviews in the department. Council has been slower to adopt the software (see Service Technology). Publishing the "Plan an Event" content page on StPaul.gov is its next milestone for its Service Hubs website program.

The department is trying to enable—not dictate—centralization efforts by finding champions in each department who want join forces with technology solutions to improve outcomes. OTC also created the position of Digital Communications Manager to bring some continuity, governance, and sharing of good practices across departments. Staff want to see all residents well-served, but closing out customer service requests isn't built into the processes of any department. Nor is it a universal expectation for departmental PIOs to follow up with customer complaints. Data on quality and process improvement is another aspect of their work across departments: "We don't have the data to prove that government is really not a black hole," one staff shared.

OTC staff our team spoke with all shared a desire for data aggregation & service equity. There are so many ways in which people contact the City—depending on knowledge, preferences and comfort with government—that the customer and constituent service system may be enabling separate and unequal tracks of service for different populations. One staff member summed up this concern: "The customer service system typically favors people who are older, whiter, and have more political agency to engage those methods because it's an active process... If you need a website or a desktop to interact with something, you're going to lose immediately 20% of possible audience right there, just by not meeting them on the field that they can engage (with smartphones)."

Key Narratives within Technology & Communications
- We test new things. We are iterative. We try not to break things, to do no harm.
- We know all the departments are different and have experts in them; we shouldn't harm their ability to establish systems that work for them.

Key Narratives about Technology & Communications
- OTC tries to work like this is a private enterprise, but they don't realize we have legal obligations that private industry does not...But they're learning.

Water Services

Saint Paul Regional Water Services is not a typical department, in that its services span a wider audience than Saint Paul residents, and it does not rely on City tax dollars. Its award-winning customer services and supervision of water quality is at times taken for granted by the community, who remember its reliability with enthusiasm, but only when asked directly. Department staff we spoke with were quite

SWRWS: How do we make our services easy for all our customers?

proud of the array of services they provide, including online and paper billing that include graphically satisfying information sheets. They offer a 24-7 customer hotline with a clear, accessible, automated touchtone service backed up by highly trained Call Center staff.

Staff we spoke with shared a desire for continuous improvement. Proud of their *2017 J. D. Power Best in Water Utility Residential Customer Satisfaction*, SPRWS added to their laurels this year, winning the "Best in Glass" drinking water taste test at the Annual Conference for the Minnesota Section of the American Water Works Association. SPRWS performs a yearly survey to assess customer satisfaction, a practice we did not notice in other departments.

Staff shared these surveys have inspired them to consider adding a "Press 1 for Spanish" option to assist their Spanish-speaking customers. They are working on other issues, as well. Some customers—particularly elders—have a tough time setting up an account or paying bills online, and the phone system does not always recognize words of callers with heavily accented English.

Key Narratives within Water Services
- We are unique as a department. We are bigger than St. Paul—historically and importantly separate.
- We are known for our customer education and communication.

- SPRWS is reliable.
- They care about educating the public about water quality and billing

CITYWIDE THEMES

In this section, we consider common patterns within five themes around customer and constituent service citywide: System Access & Handling, Issue Tracking, Service Technologies, and System Sustainability.

System Access & Handling

Customers & constituents access the system through many trailheads. There are many ways for constituents to contact or engage with City government—phone calls, email, forms, walk in. Customers often contact multiple departments simultaneously to escalate their issue or ensure it's not lost. One City staff member shared, "The City looks like a fortress, but we offer hundreds of ways in. You'll find the right person to show you around and get you to your destination, regardless of where you entered… If you're lucky."

If a customer does find and talk with that right person, they may never find them again. Our attempts to search for staff names using the website's search function was rarely successful, with these searches only uncovering staff names when they were included in public meeting minutes or city news releases. One staff member complained, "The old website had more contact info for specific city functions; city staff had directories. The new website obfuscates all but Directors." Indeed, any directories that do exist are 2-3 clicks in, with few instances of names attached. City staff also struggle to coordinate without staff directories. One staff member shared that it's impossible to coordinate without "digging through outdated Outlook descriptions."

Overwhelmed by choice—with the "Main Line" featured only in the footer of each webpage—customers with non-emergency concerns or questions choose comfort. They connect in ways in which they are most familiar and feel safest: a cousin or neighbor who works in the City…a City Councilmember…the Mayor…the first phone number labeled, "hotline"…emailing the most fitting address they can find…searching for a web form so they don't have to talk with anyone…or, worse, 911… An exasperated City veteran staff shared, "The Main Line works if people use it. You can tell people all day where to call and email, but if they know somebody or have an 'in,' they're not going to use it."

All these pathways in create an immeasurable amount of waste, particularly when it comes to heavy and repeated users of customer service—often the most privileged—who can take up a disproportionate amount of staff time. When considering this dynamic, a staff member shared, "For random people throughout every other department in the City… (their) capacity is taken up by the basic questions." Another shared his office "could spend as much as a third or half of its time on the six or seven most complaint-heavy people… I'm not talking about even 20% of constituents; I mean the 1% of constituents who take up the most amount of time. It actually hurts the rest of the residents… the more you're sucked into those people who …just frankly cannot be helped."

By offering all these inroads within a complex system like the City, **a paradox of service is born: City staff share a pervasive desire for "one way in," with complaints or requests routed to the correct department. Yet public officials, City staff, and even District Council staff seem to enjoy taking a heroic stance if they know the system enough to offer guidance or direct access.** Though many staff shared that the Main Line is "clunky" but "largely works," we talked with few staff who would actually recommend it.

Concierge Service ← → Civic Empowerment

Tree maintenance is an illustrative example of the dynamic for customers and constituents attempting to access service. We describe the typical customer experience in the sidebar feature.

Trees: An Illustration of the Troubled Pathway into Saint Paul's Customer Service System

Residents often call in with questions about who is responsible for maintaining a tree. Some may assume the City is responsible when it is not; others may have a neighbor dispute over a tree that may be neither neighbor's responsibility. The most direct tree-maintenance explainer links are here, here, and here, and none of it is light reading. Just to find that information on the website, a customer would need to know:

1. The Forestry division exists.
2. The Forestry webpage is 5 clicks in, classified under "Natural Resources" within the Parks & Recreation Department.
3. The 3 buttons among 17 options that are most germane to their issue.

Typing "trees" into the search bar strands customers within unhelpful subpages. Most customers will call the Main Line exasperated, looking for clarity, only to be transferred to Parks.

Parks then walks callers through a series of questions to determine proper routing—which depends largely on the words a potentially frustrated, exhausted customer uses, and how they've framed the issue in their minds. Under many circumstances, the answer to who is responsible for a tree is an unpleasant and expensive answer. If the resident is responsible, they often want assistance finding licensed tree care companies. This gets them transferred back to the Main Line, where only DSI staff have access to the updated list.

Back at DSI, callers must explain their issue again and are often rerouted back to Parks by accident if they don't use the magic words: "I need the list of licensed tree care companies in Saint Paul for a tree that Forestry has told me I'm responsible for."

There is no visual aid here, no infographic to assist customers who have difficulty processing complex written information in English—particularly information that runs counter to their sense of logic. Customers must unlearn what they think they know, and getting passed between departments makes them less cognitively and emotionally ready to process that information.

Tracking Issues

Customer & constituent concerns move through the City's business processes and are resolved in myriad ways. Each department, and sometime each division, uses a different business process and hosts an array of specialized expertise. The words they use to describe knowledge and process don't always translate well across departments and between the City and its officials. One City staff member shared, "We don't have a tracking system. We don't know how many calls we take. We don't know what kind of calls they are, or how many are complaints or how many are (other) things. It's difficult for me to be responsive to customers and City Council when they ask, 'What are your customer responses and how do you handle these?' I don't have data."

In similar fashion, staff care for multiple software and documentation systems, including spreadsheets of frontline workers, who create them for personal use or share them only with a trusted cohort. When it comes to customers and constituents, legal and financial datasets are formalized and shared, but quality-of-life ones seem to be informal and not shared widely. There is no reliable customer service data collection citywide.

With spotty tracking, the system struggles to hold people accountable. Staff sometimes triangulate around issues that are tricky or cross divisions or departments, to cope with high workloads. A few

staff suspected particular colleagues may do it to evade accountability, but they were careful to characterize the overall culture as one of helpfulness and taking responsibility. Both characterizations were in-line with our overall interactions with staff and with community engagement findings.

Another issue that spotty tracking encourages: Triangulation by the public. City staff shared that some "high demand" customers and constituents can manipulate the system to get the answers they want, since no one in the City has a way to track complaints as they move around the City. One staff member compared the dynamic to family-systems: "If you get an answer you don't like from Mom, go ask Dad."

Finally, process improvement efforts are doomed to fail in a system without consistent, shared tracking. Needed changes within the system lack data to inform good process. **Without data management automation, staff time spend a lot of time gathering data to use at a small scale; sharing and using that data for process or quality improvement would demand another level of staff time and resources they simply do not have.**
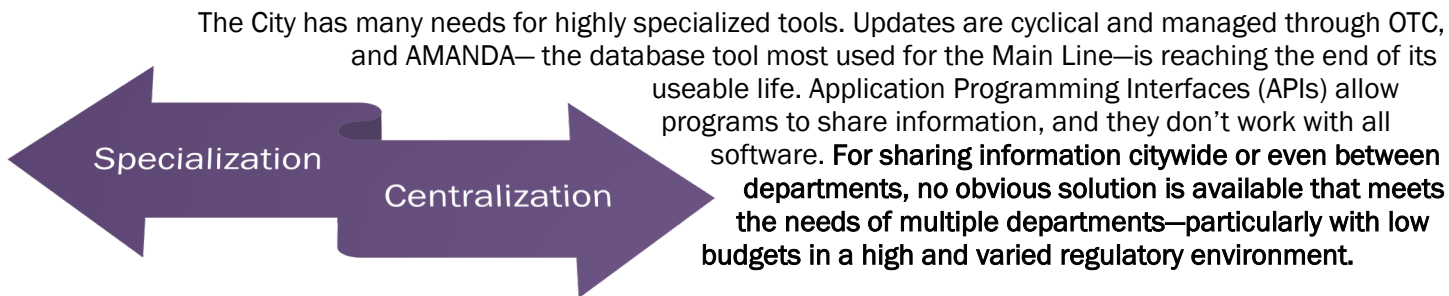

Collecting Data → Sharing Data

Service Technology

The City's technology tools for handling customers & constituent concerns meet basic needs within divisions, though they vary in age, usability, and compatibility. Below is a partial list of customer & constituent technologies, as mentioned by staff we spoke with in each department:

Department	Primary Customer Service Tool(S)	Secondary Tool(S)
Offices Of The Mayor And Financial Empowerment	Excel MS Forms	Engage Saint Paul Social Media
Offices Of The City Council And Clerk	Council Desk Phone And Email Ward Office Phones And Email Excel Open information/Open data Central Library Research Services Legistar	PDF forms
Public Works	Hotline And Phone Tree Online Service Directory MS Forms Zendesk Pilot	Excel Engage Saint Paul ArcGIS Social Media PDF forms
Parks & Recreation	Call Center Hotline Active Event Registration Software Online Service Directory FAQ Documents	Tree Keeper Forestry Software Engage Saint Paul Social Media MS Forms
Public Library	Central Phone Line Library Map-Based Directory Community Helpdesk Line Homework Line Online Catalog	Annual Reference Survey Social Media MS Forms
Planning & Economic Development	Phone Email ArcGIS	Social Media PDF forms
Regional Water Services	Call Center Customer Service Line Voice Response System Emergency Line Online Billing System	MS Forms

Financial Services	Phone Email Online Billing System	Open budget
Safety & Inspections	Call Center Main Line MS Forms AMANDA OpenGov (To Replace AMANDA)	ECLIPS Licensing Software Project Dox
Technology & Communications	Engage Saint Paul Zendesk Pilot MS Forms Hotline	

The City has many needs for highly specialized tools. Updates are cyclical and managed through OTC, and AMANDA— the database tool most used for the Main Line—is reaching the end of its useable life. Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) allow programs to share information, and they don't work with all software. **For sharing information citywide or even between departments, no obvious solution is available that meets the needs of multiple departments—particularly with low budgets in a high and varied regulatory environment.**


Specialization ← → Centralization

Moreover, budgeting can be a problem. Though departments have "billback" and other methods to enable shared ownership of software, it requires negotiations between human beings, who have complex narratives shaping the choices they make. Our team can confirm that most City workers are loyal to their departments' needs and methods before that of the City as a whole.

Rollouts of new software are always challenging, with staff training, service gaps, and potential noncompliance of staff who miss their old systems. City Departments have a culture of defining their own systems; people have invested their careers in the choice, setup, and daily use of those systems, which have long shaped their business processes. Centralized software can be perceived as a threat to veteran staff's daily workplace experience and identity of expertise. There's also the added tension of defining who should have different permissions across departments, which affects who can see what information and who can add or delete data.

Another key factor here is website searchability and Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Different offices may adopt software on a managed timeframe, but a more centralized and immediate effort is crucial when developing web content. In upgrading to the new stpaul.gov redesign, the biggest lag in customer and constituent service provision has been its extremely poor searchability, due to out-of-date content and forgetting to use content tags when creating webpages. One City staff member shared:

> *One of the biggest barriers we have for (website search) is that we have a very deep historic document library that has a lot of content that is not applicable to the City anymore. That's just for our search within stpaul.gov. With actual SEO, like Google level searches, that's where coordinating—with our PIOs and content managers—we're attempting to help improve that experience...tagging that would associate with content. With federated communications, we have different approaches to using some of those methods by our different PIOs.*

When it comes to the experience of users—on the City and the public-facing sides of software, there are two tensions. **The more efficient the system becomes, the less flexible it might be perceived in the eyes of customers who want flexible approaches to their interactions with the City.** Data privacy is another issue. Multiple departments would need to negotiate data permissions, which could make software-sharing negotiations even more complex. And data privacy impact the quality and style of customer service: **The more privacy a customer has, the less personalized that service becomes.**

Efficiency

Flexibility

Personalization

Privacy
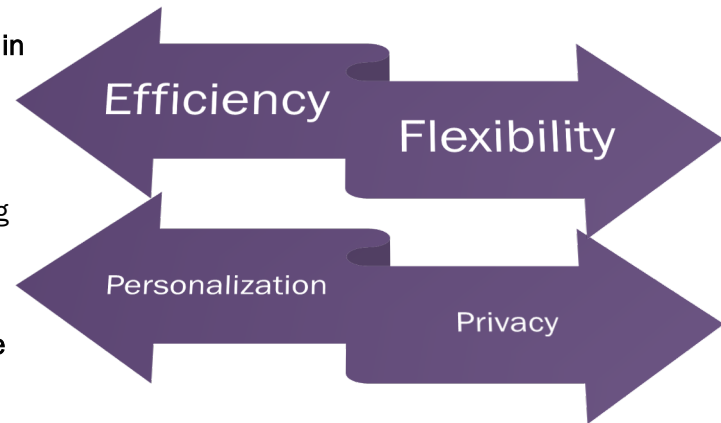
System Sustainability

The City as a living system is now in hibernation, to recover from years of resource cuts… pandemic-era demands, coupled with staff retirements and resignations… a cultural and technological reckoning in which many question the purpose of work and the demands of "the professional self" that can obscure human needs… racial uprisings that remind us just how much the normal way of doing business was never built to serve everyone… Many of the City system's long-held policies, procedures, processes, and tools are now being questioned. How should the City change to serve a greater purpose? How can it attract and hold onto high-quality staff? And how can it creatively adapt its processes to succeed with the resources it has?

Working with the City is stressful, and staff need help. They work within tight budgets amid complicated processes, rules, and regulations. They try to assist customers and constituents with a wide range of backgrounds and needs. Customers' problems are complex and sometimes traumatic—"more so than anyone in City government is often equipped to deal with," according to one staff member. Frontline staff—particularly Call Center staff—experience outsized secondary trauma, with little to no mental health support.

Staff training for onboarding and professional development is also demanding. Training staff for good citywide service is challenging, with such deep expertise needed to navigate the system. Many staff shared that it can take two years or more to understand most City processes enough to explain them to a range of customers with complex needs. It can take longer than that to develop the skills necessary to ask the right questions and the right time, and to stay calm when customers are upset. Many staff never receive the resources to develop the kind of self-care required in situations of staff abuse or racial animus expressed by customers.

Then there's the financial burden of wasted staff time. Customers and constituents are now playing an exhausting game, triangulating to maneuver around a system with too few clear answers and processes. Multiple contacts in multiple formats to solve even one issue adds up to hours of frustration and waste. Add the time entering data into multiple systems with counterintuitive interfaces. Add the time of translating business processes and jargon across departments and levels of government. Triangulation, inefficiencies, and old tech are financially unsustainable.

Finally, the current customer and constituent service system creates an unsustainable burden on the City's governance. Multiple Council and Mayoral staff shared that they're "drowning" in day-to-day complaints that City staff are equipped to handle, and that it pulls their time away from policymaking and planning for the future. **Vision and "big ideas" get lost in the churn of heroic efforts to serve constituents, some of whom overuse their access to City officials.** The City's visionaries must somehow find balance.

Future-Orientation

Present-Orientation
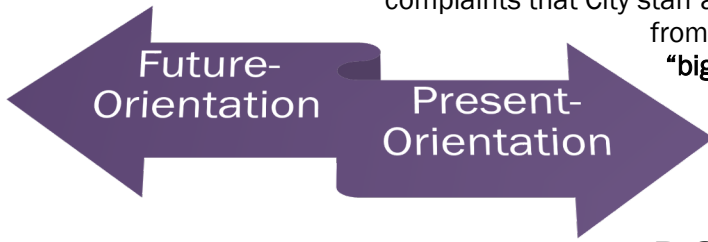
DOMINANT NARRATIVES WITHIN THE CITY

In this section, we move deeper into commonly held beliefs, or narratives, that City staff hold about the City and its service provision. We attempt to name these overarching narratives and provide a brief rationale for each before sharing the stories of City staff. Most narratives are told by one person; a few are merged voices with fellow staff in the same department. *We neither research nor confirm the accuracy of narratives; we merely share the pattern we have noticed; the preservation of anonymity limits full statements and some details.*

We've Got Some Serious Problems with Customer Service

Even those who are well-versed in how to get things done inside City government experience significant challenges because every part of the City uses a different approach to constituent and customer service, and there are no functions everyone agrees to maintain or follow.

What I find most frustrating from our end is when I'm transferring somebody to a department, and nobody answers on that end. I get that people need to learn to leave a voicemail, but when it becomes a consistent problem with a department... When I transfer people to get a permit, and all they get is voicemail. It's very frustrating that we can't complete the task on our end. Even if we give them the phone number, they still call us back and say, "At least when we call you, we get a person. When we call over there, we don't get a person, and it's frustrating. They don't get back to us." So that's the teaching piece that I would like for the whole city: You know we can't afford to staff everything but somehow, we need to connect with these people, especially when it comes involves a permit, because it might be time sensitive.

--Call Center Staff in DSI

The City website is horrible when you're trying to find phone numbers or emails. The external part of it is bad, and to me there's no internal information unless you put something together yourself. None of it is updated. None of us are taking care of it. It's still outdated, and they don't have all the departments or all the people that I would need to contact. It would save so much time if I didn't have to research through the contacts every time.

--City Council Staff

There are so many people who call us who are like 'I don't have access to email' or 'I'm calling you because I don't want to spend time on the website; I just want you to tell me.' The website is not the end-all-be-all for City information. The City has moved so much customer service online. This doesn't work well for elders, or folks without internet, or those with language barriers, or those experiencing challenges or relocation, or those without strong technical skills. These folks need a person to talk to.

-- Public Works

We Wish People Knew How Hard This Is

People everywhere are hurting, and staff are often asked to triage the challenges in people's lives while also withstanding the worst of people's frustrations. They often find themselves overwhelmed, without sufficient systems in place to support their work, or manage the impact of interactions with the public.

We as the Call Center are not trained to be Emergency Service Operators—to handle some of the other issues that we have to deal with. I personally feel we need some type of resource or outlet for the difficult things we have to handle in the position. This position can take a mental, psychological, and sometimes physical toll on you. I know the City offers a 4-session therapy program, but that is not very helpful when some of us get verbally abused every day. Having something for the Call Center, and not just, "I need a minute to step away." Sometimes a minute is not going to do it.

When I have a lady telling me that her brother just jumped off a bridge, or a lady telling me her cousin is overdosing on the floor in front of her, that's not what this position is for. I ask them, "Why aren't you calling the police?" And then you get that mom who has four kids, and she is trying the best she can. She literally has thousands of mice running around her apartment and her child has cerebral palsy and doesn't use their walker around the house ...And then I think about these incredibly rude, entitled people that call and complain about this car that's parked "too close to their driveway" on Summit Avenue, and I think, "Is that really what I need to worry about?" Yes. I have to take that in; it's a legitimate complaint I have to deal with.

<div align="right">

--Call Center Staff in DSI
</div>

What's challenging is the amount of stressful interactions that staff have. When you don't have enough staff, you can't take longer breaks or move to a different place within the building or go to a different building. We feel it more and more now. It's a grind every day and especially now when we're looking at how do we decide what our priorities are in our services to the community. We've had to reduce hours because we don't have the staff, and for the hours that we have, it's not just one building. And it's not just one service. Everything is affected by that. That is where it's hard because when you can't give that care, or you don't have enough. You don't have it in you to give it anymore. Then you're not giving your best customer service to the people who you are supposed to be serving.

<div align="right">

-- Libraries
</div>

It's never just one call, and it's never just one issue to resolve; when people come to see me, they're dumping emotionally, saying all the things that are wrong and everything that they need help with. And I'm like, "Okay, how about we start with this one particular thing, and then we will work on the rest." It becomes hours of dealing with stuff on the backend.

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-- Libraries
</div>

Our Systems Do Work...Just Not Always Efficiently or Fairly.

While each individual department's response system produces sometimes remarkable results, every system works best for people who know how to navigate it. Equitable access and action remain elusive.

There are about 20 different types of complaints that could get into different kinds of categories to get classified into AMANDA. How our job is hard: even knowing how to enter complaints for our department is hard...But knowing that for other departments in the City? It's a work order system. But when we run things to the other departments, nobody checks the folder. With one department, turns out we were sending it off to nowhere land.

<div align="right">

--Call Center Staff in DSI
</div>

The follow-up by the Inspectors is rather suspect sometimes. Complaints are entered into AMANDA for garbage or debris on properties, the Inspector goes out to the property, sends a

letter, and "does a follow-up" inspection and marks the complaint as In-Compliance. However, I have received calls for the same address with the same complaint, stating, "What do you mean it's in compliance? That couch, that problem, is still there." This type of issue has happened several times, with different inspectors, for different matters. I'd like a little bit more accountability for some of the inspectors, mostly on the code enforcement side. It'd be nice to have sort of physical evidence for that follow-up.

--Call Center Staff in DSI

Because residents can call in through all these different channels, they do, so things kind of are moving in multiple places at once. Sometimes they coalesce into one person or we kind of realize we're all talking to the same person but not always. We also get the issue of people calling who get one answer from one person and then call another place to get a different answer, or hope they get a different answer. Sometimes they call six places within 20 minutes, so we're all spending time on the same issue. I know that's frustrating from a resident perspective because they're just trying to get an answer, and they don't know who to call. And they don't always know that you know they called their City Council person, and their City Council person reached out to us, and then they call us, so it's a lot of "How do we keep track of those pieces well?"

-- Public Works

While there are many options open for people to contact the City – virtual, phone, in person – there is a whole swath of people who don't have digital access. This is a point to consider through an equity lens – who has digital access? Who doesn't? The City could be more intentional about making sure there are non-digital ways to make contact.

--Libraries

We're the One Office That Does Service the Right Way

Each part of the City was eager to describe how they managed constituent and customer services, and how assiduously they worked to stay on top of a relentless river of requests. They spoke with pride of their systems and workarounds while acknowledging how challenging the lack of a coherent system was to their success. The City's fragmented approach to constituent and customer services pushes departments, and individuals in departments, to define their role, absent a unified approach. It also leads to confusion about to what customer service means in the City (See Provider Archetypes).

Some of us have been involved in this work a long time and can address most questions people have. We've had to create systems for ourselves. We've updated our website with accessible and fillable forms that can be filled out after hours, so people don't have to come to City Hall. We have our own call system and answered 12,815 calls last year. Our tracking is done internally. We use our communication tools to keep the public informed about what's going on and are proactive in educating residents about changes.

--Public Works

We used to have three separate numbers to call for different questions, but now it's one number. We used to be separated physically, but now are together in one space (pre-COVID and hopefully again soon). Our Call Center staff manage phones, emails and people stopping by in person, and we manage social media, which is often about answering questions, too. The numbers ebb and flow, but we easily answer 200 calls a day when it's flowing. We have our own call log. We're answering questions from residents and people who work inside the City. I talk to every City department every day.

--Parks and Recreation

We are forward-facing and all about patron services. The work that we do with the Community Service Specialists at the Library is pretty unique. Questions come from texts, phone, 1-1 conversations, and we answer them in many languages. For the people who know us, we have a trusted presence. Our physical presence is one of our big strengths.

There Are Strengths to Our System—Especially When We Work Together

There are strengths to lean into regarding the City's more flexible approach to constituent and customer service, and in the specialized knowledge departments have developed. Staff members appreciate being one part of a bigger response system.

Minneapolis does sound like they have a fantastic system on how they do their complaints, but I don't want ours to be a scripted thing. A friend who works there says she has to "mind her Ps and Qs," 'cause she's being listened to. She says one wrong thing and she's getting called in, she's getting scored, she did this wrong, said this wrong, and it's really rigid. Here we can actually have some open dialogue with our residents that call in. We can explain to them why this is happening instead of "This is the policy." We can be a little bit more friendly. Sometimes we have people that call in that are older residents that just need somebody to listen to them. Over there, nobody in 311 lives in Minneapolis. We live in this community, we work in this community, so we have the same common goal.

--Call Center Staff in DSI

I talk to somebody in a different department every day. Working together as one city is easier than the silos that we've historically been in. I've built friendships. This job is much easier when you have relationships with other people in different departments. We're a team, and I'm just one small portion of the entire City team. People on the same level all get lifted together as they've been around the same time, so people work together to deal with escalated calls. It's rare that I need to reach out to the Director. If there's a policy or process change that's coming down the line that I'm questioning, I work with my boss, and she will reach out to one of the Deputy Directors or the Directors if need be. It's very clear where the boundaries are. Directors are dealing with higher level strategic views. The day-to-day work is going to be on us.

--Call Center Staff in DSI

Just knowing what processes and who to contact within each department and how we can work together and share info...kind of assist each other...I think if we see what's working within departments and use what we already have and kind of expand from that and share that with each other it would...help a lot. Maybe save us some coins and get a significant effect.
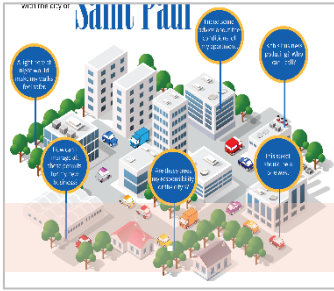
--City Council Staff

Overall, we're not Council versus DSI versus Street Maintenance versus Parks. This is one big City ... The body cannot function without the other parts. It doesn't matter what department, division, or position you're in; we all depend on each other to be sure that we're providing and striving for the same goal. If we really want this city to be a city that works for us all, then all of us need to work together.

--Call Center Staff in DSI

The Community

USER GROUPS

In this section, we examine results from 50 community respondents. We highlight overall patterns of the customer & constituent service journey, while emphasizing the experiences of four user groups: District Councils, Business Representatives, BIPOC Communities, and Disability Communities.

District Councils

With outreach assistance from the District Councils Coordinator, our team met twice virtually with District Council staff in October. First, we reached out to a handful of Executive Directors for ideas and checking on our process plan. Then, we hosted a feedback session, where we asked our community-phase questions, transcribed responses, and anonymized them. District Council staff welcomed the promise of anonymity and our practice of keeping this session private and without City staff present. Next, we prepared a report summarizing findings and noting key narratives repeated in the session. Then, we shared our report with the Executive Directors & Community Organizers (EDCO) group, where we checked our interpretations and gathered more data. Finally, we asked District Council staff to connect us with residents and business representatives who had important stories for our study. After receiving input from 13 District Council staff, 3 more respondents were referred to us and attended feedback sessions, sat for an interview, or requested an interview form.

Business Representatives

The team concentrated our initial outreach to the African Economic Development Center, Asian Economic Development Association, Latino Economic Development Center, and WomenVenture, though connecting substantively with these groups proved difficult in the summer and under pandemic conditions, even with repeated phone calls and emails. With guidance from WomenVenture, we scheduled a virtual feedback session for business representatives in November and promoted it through email and social media to the aforementioned associations, in addition to Main Street Alliance, Metro IBA, Highland Business Association, Grand Avenue Business Association, Hamline Midway Coalition, and Support Saint Paul Neighborhood Small Business. We reached out personally to businesses listed in the City's ECLIPS listings who had recently worked with licensing—20 randomized businesses for Recent Liquor On-Sale, and 10 randomized businesses for Automotive Licensure. We received input from 7 representatives from businesses.
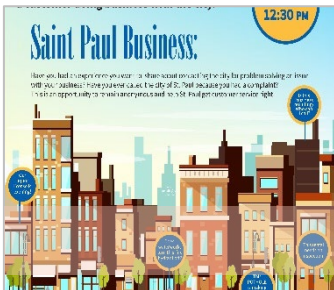
BIPOC Communities

With study emphasis on equitable service, the team was careful to target our outreach to organizations and social media feeds that were most likely to connect with BIPOC communities. Before having to leave the project, the team's first User Stories Coordinator reached out to personal contacts within nonprofit and neighborhood organizations. A month of outreach resulted in 2 responses. The team's second User Stories Coordinator observed that traditional methods of gathering data are at their greatest test without the opportunity to connect with people in person. The first strategy of looking for people of specific backgrounds was based less on finding fixable problems in the system and more about imploring a cast of characters to satiate an imaginary list of equity. We decided that gathering people should be about the merit of the questions we wanted to answer. We adopted the strategy of using images depicting a diverse and welcoming community, in empowered dialogue about the City, to invite folks to

have virtual conversations (see sidebar, previous page). We used the premise that customer service is innate in St. Paul's city government aesthetic and that anonymity is the sanctity of the data itself. People were receptive to our messaging which encouraged feedback from invested citizens by demonstrating actual situations people could relate to having experienced with the City. Using positive messaging around problems and inclusive images appealed to community-active residents—and ultimately, real users of the system in place—who happened to fulfill important demographic perspectives that the study aimed to survey. We received input from 16 BIPOC respondents for this study.

Disability Communities

Again, seeking input regarding equitable service, the team focused on organizational contacts who worked within disability communities. We reached out to the Neighborhood Network for Seniors, The Arc Minnesota, The Minnesota Council on Disability, and the Institute on Community Integration, following up with contacts to disability activists and other people with disabilities. We received input from 4 respondents who self-identified as having a disability for this study, in addition to 2 disability advocates.

FINDINGS BY THEME

Each of our themes is highlighted in a table on the following pages, with context and links to each embedded below.

Good Experiences

Our team asked for appreciations in all feedback sessions and interviews. Responses celebrating a particular City office are summarized here.

Submission of Complaints

Complaint submission requires three key things: 1) clear reporting of complex issues; 2) faith in proper categorization—even with issues that defy categories; 3) patience with ambiguous follow-up protocols across departments. Faced with these realities, those with knowledge of the City's system often opt out of official submission and turn to trusted relationships with subject-matter and system-navigation experts in the City.

Tracking & Follow-up

The City's existing systems put the burden of tracking on the submitter, which feels anachronistic to residents used to modern, automated customer-service systems. Calling back or looking up by address for status is clunky. The system prevents a sense of closure for customers and constituents and creates a perception of evaded accountability.

Unpredictable resolution timelines build distrust and disorient customers and constituents. Customer frustrations increase with having to employ tactics like timed, repeated submissions and calling officials, which often succeed in getting attention, but may contribute to systemic inequity in having to get special attention. Other customers simply give up when issues "fall into the abyss" or City staff adopt the attitude of "it's not my job/problem." No one wants to own difficult things unless a city official speaks up.

Silos & In-Between Spaces

The current reporting system is designed to assign accountability to a specific address, which prevents issues from being resolved quickly in "liminal spaces" like roadsides, skyways, or public land. Reliance on an ownership model for accountability mirrors single-department approaches that limit problem-solving across departments and levels of government

Informal Connections

The City has a few "go-to people" who help District Council staff think through complex issues and go beyond with customer service. While there are "good and bad" employees in each department, their customer service quality often depends upon good leadership.

The Role of City Officials

Constituents report having to compete for officials' attention, and sometimes feel placated over having their issues truly resolved. While the City Council has a reputation for being responsive, the Mayor's Office is more mixed, with constituents wanting more timely, streamlined communication, and some District Councils feeling confused by and disconnected from a growing Mayoral staff.

Systemic Inequity

Customers and constituents with a problem-solving stance are not served as well as those with a punishment stance. The former grow disenchanted with the Main Line and city staff for stressing penalties, fines, and even condemnation over assisting those with lesser means to mitigate issues. This citywide culture creates a system ripe for the latter to use the complaint system for harassment.

District Council staff and a few community members shared a sense--with some evidence--that BIPOC residents, renters, and lower-income residents are given poorer service and experience more punitive impacts than white, homeowning, higher-income residents. With studies in other cities revealing racial inequities, a well-funded, transparent study of the City's property enforcement mechanisms is needed. Furthermore, the City needs to shift its image: from "we do what government does" to "we build government to help residents thrive."

Table Of Findings: Good Experiences   *"I appreciate many city staffers for their prompt, courteous and helpful responses."*

Overall Responses, Including Highlighted Communities	
Libraries	• Many respondents shared enthusiasm for libraries. They are celebrated and appreciated for their helpful staff and excellent service. • Rondo Library was specifically named for the caring ways it interacts with the local community.
Public Works	• Multiple respondents shared that Public Works does a "really fast" job of clearing roads of refuse or blockages when they report. • One respondent shared that Public Works "gives you a little bit of knowledge to work with so that the next time you will know what you need to do a little bit better." • A Hmong respondent shared that a Hmong Public Works construction site crew member was particularly helpful in helping her understand the City.
Safety & Inspections	• Many respondents shared stories about individual DSI inspectors that were helpful. • A respondent shared that "hero stories" happen in DSI around liquor licensing and homeless issues. • An immigrant respondent shared that DSI Inspectors sometimes understand the need to accommodate growing families and co-sleeping arrangements in small apartments. • A BIPOC respondent expressed hope that an Animal Control worker was willing to text with her about resolving an issue, sharing that texting is often a more accessible mode for more people. • An immigrant landlord shared the Fire Certificate of Occupancy program was thorough and clear; the inspector took time to answer questions. • An immigrant respondent reported using the Main Line and shared it has been more helpful since Somali was added during the pandemic.
Parks & Recreation	• A few shared positive experiences with customer service at Parks & Recreation.
Regional Water Services	• Many reported positive interactions with SPRWS: "They're friendly, and it's fast."
Planning & Economic Development	• A business association cited PED's Economic Development Project Managers were helpful.
City Council	• Many shared that their Ward office was responsive, particularly when they had a relationship with their City Councilmember. • Business Representatives reported relying on their City Councilmember to assist them most often, and that they got prompt, empathetic responses, even when issues weren't resolved in their favor. Recent work by Councilmembers on streamlining business licensing was also appreciated.
Mayor's Office & Initiatives	• Two BIPOC respondents were quite pleased with the Office of Financial Empowerment's responsiveness and engagement in the community.
Overall	• Many respondents shared that many of the City's customer service staff were good at their jobs. One shared, "I appreciate many city staffers for their prompt, courteous and helpful responses." • Several respondents appreciated the summary email news bulletin created by the City during the pandemic. • District Council staff appreciated the helpful relationships they have in the City, stressing the importance of relationship building to solve problems. • District Council staff appreciated that City staff sometimes refers complaints back to District Councils so that people who violate a rule they didn't know about can be informed and assisted without being penalized. • Business Representatives appreciated the honesty of City staff, even if they were unable to meet their needs. • An autistic respondent shared that she had found police officers to be helpful in building her understanding of the City as a whole and decreasing her anxiety about contacting the City.

Table of Findings: Submission of Complaints *"Find The Right Number to Call, Report, and Hope You're Not Boxed In"*

Overall Responses

- Multiple respondents reported not knowing about the Main Line and wanted to know more about it.
- Many knew about the Main Line but felt it would fail to put them in touch with decision-makers and those with the power to solve problems.
- Many attempt to navigate the website to find the best places to call. The same group reported not always noticing the Main Line number in the footer before finding a different number—most often the Public Works hotline.
- Some preferred using the online form to report an incident or email the contact email in the website footer.
- A few respondents suspected the City was moving away from phone service to be more focused on online reporting, but "not sure it is working well."
- One respondent speculated that the City was taking the lead of other organizations and deliberately obscuring contact information to save City staff time.
- Many call their Councilmember first.
- A few reported trying the Mayor's line, but without much success, and that it is hard to find on the website.

District Council Responses

- Phone calls are tricky; respondents are not always sure what words to use or what to identify as the problem, even those with a lot of experience navigating the City.
- Many residents have been complaining via Facebook groups about city staff not answering phones.
- Some wondered if the recent emphasis on form submittal to DSI was due to short staffing.
- One respondent shared the DSI Main Line and form "would be nice if it worked better."
- Another shared customer service staff are sometimes immensely helpful and connective and other times feel "boxed in" or "boxed out" of solutions by staff.

Business Representative Responses

- Phone calls during limited time frames are hard on business owners, as is having to pick up return calls.
- Generally, business owners shared that out of necessity, they "start to develop a list of the people--and it's generally a fairly short list-- that you can count on to actually be helpful" in each department and reach out to those contacts when they need assistance, instead of using the Main Line or phone trees.
- One respondent shared that with the time-sensitive and costly projects he works with, he cannot afford to waste time using general-purpose connections.
- For time-sensitive issues, none would hesitate to call their Councilmember over using regular channels.

Responses from BIPOC Communities

- Multiple respondents shared frustration about lack of direct service connection to those who have the power to improve their quality-of-life.
- People search the website exhaustively, and often unsuccessfully, for staff directories for the quickest contact to decision-makers and not be "redirected all over the place."
- Some call their Councilmember first, particularly if they have an existing relationship.
- Some immigrant respondents reported they do not reach out to the City. "Our go-to is reaching out to the places of worship and within our own communities" and call 911 if needed.
- One respondent reported problems with using the Snowplow Line.
- Another shared that she doesn't call for personal issues. She only calls "when it affects the community around us."

Responses from Disability Communities

- The online form is easier for people with some disabilities to use than the phone.
- Snow removal complaints received both poor and particularly good reports.
- One respondent shared that accessibility violation reports "never go anywhere" with the City; he and other respondents report to state agencies and nonprofits instead.
- One respondent with a cognitive disability shared how difficult it was to be referred to phone numbers without context while using the Main Line, as well as having to explain a complicated situation multiple times to different staff.

Table of Findings: Tracking & Follow-up

"Is it up? Is it still there? Is it not still there? … What is happening?"

Overall Responses	• Most respondents shared immense frustration that the burden of tracking a complaint's status is on the submitter. "Calling back for status is clunky." • Many respondents want a system with modernized customer support features they experience in the private sector, where complaints receive ticket numbers, and updates are automated via email or text; "Sitting in limbo forever is not okay." • Some respondents reflected on the amount of time it takes to follow up regularly on a complaint that can take weeks to resolve, and a few reflected on the equity implications of such a system. • One respondent shared, "People who answer that (Main Line) phone there are very courteous, but they pass on concerns to other people, and that doesn't work out." • Many were frustrated with the timing and content of DSI letters—sometimes a day to mitigate concerns, often without any guidance.

District Council Responses	Business Representative Responses	Responses from BIPOC Communities	Responses from Disability Communities
• Many have developed systems for checking on complaints. "Task flow: Main Line or form is the first step; check on it every couple of weeks; then call a specific staff person and/or Councilmember." • Many shared that responsiveness is inconsistent; sometimes resolved the next day, sometimes months. • Many felt that complaints "fall into the abyss" if submitters don't' follow up. • Many were frustrated about DSI's resolution, "I don't hear back from them." "It takes several weeks to get to the site, often too late." • Some shared that residents sometimes "give up." • One respondent shared that residents often need to "work together to resubmit every 3 weeks, 3-5 times before anything happens." • One respondent was frustrated having to decode Legistar without help.	• One respondent shared, "As a business owner, email is a much easier form of communication than calling because it allows the communication to be asynchronous and when I have a moment or they have a moment to respond, it doesn't have to happen at a specific time." • A common workaround to using the Main Line and phone trees: Trying to look for an email of the right person to contact to enable asynchronous replies.	• One respondent was frustrated that he did not know what happened to his complaint he filed with the Main Line. • Another respondent shared, "People don't get back to you. The times and responsibilities are unclear. Leadership is passive, and there is no accountability." • One respondent shared doubts that ticketing and towing was ensuring sufficient plowing in Frogtown, and that complaints don't make a difference. • Another respondent shared, "I'm very privileged in terms of time; I can't imagine someone working full time, or with children; no way they'd have time" for the number of follow-up calls she typically needs to make to resolve an issue.	• One respondent uses the online complaint form for access barrier violations and snow clearance issues, "It's fairly nonresponsive."

Table of Findings: Silos & In-Between Spaces

"No connections to solve problems."

Overall Responses	
	• Having to know which department does what is intimidating. • Having to work across departments is quite challenging for people without knowledge of the City. • Many respondents wanted a visual aid, decision tree, chat box, or concierge for better wayfinding on the website. • Many use the website to find the right contact, but "in-between" issues require more than one contact. • Many expressed frustration that there is no intermediary for departments without having to use the power and take up the time of a City official.

District Council Responses	Business Representative Responses	Responses from BIPOC Communities	Responses from Disability Communities

• Some shared that having to attach an address for complaints—even if it's on the boulevard or alley—requires discomfort around blaming and punishment.
• Departments don't connect to solve problems.
• One respondent was particularly frustrated that the City's Housing division and DSI don't coordinate to save people's homes; there's a massive disconnect with the housing shortage.
• Respondents shared that sometimes there's difficult to no resolution on "in-between" spaces. They shared many examples:
  • Open spaces and wild areas
  • Skyways
  • Alleys
  • Boulevards
  • Easements
  • Medians
  • Off-ramps
  • Dead-end streets
  • Tree maintenance
	• Business respondents all shared at least one example of departments failing to coordinate efficiently on small and large matters.
	• While a business association representative expressed gratefulness for PED's assistance, other respondents wished a project manager could handle their concerns—seemingly unfamiliar with the City's existing services.
	• The Business Resource Center email inbox is monitored by the Economic Development team, but its 651-266-6600 calls are—confusingly—forwarded to the Main Line Call Center.
	• One respondent shared that his project was put on hold because of a stark disagreement between two departments who kept refusing to compromise.
		• One respondent captured their experience of multi-department issues: "Most of the time they'll send me to a new number when I leave a voicemail because no one ever actually answers the phone. Or I fill out a form online and nobody ever calls me back, or if they do call me back it's to tell me they are not the right person and to send me to another place."
		• Another respondent shared frustration about the issue of abandoned cars being left in her area. With multiple departments involved and impacted, she must deal with exceedingly long resolution times and a feeling that no one is taking her seriously.
			• One respondent shared that it's exceedingly difficult for him and others in the disability community to understand jurisdictions for those issues that most impact mobility—sidewalks, curb cuts, parking lots, painted slash-lines for disabled parking—and little trust that City staff would take the time to do so.

Overall Responses

- Many respondents shared that the Main Line was a place only for people who didn't have a better option.
- Many respondents suggested or expressed that having friends or family who know the system or work in it helps relieve the overwhelming sense of the City. One shared, "I go where I might have a point of personal connection...not through any kind of structured online system or phone call or anything." Another shared, "I'll just get reviews from friends who have tried them first."
- Several respondents named people who were particularly helpful at helping them navigate the City.
- A few respondents shared that even knowing people might not be enough: "Unfortunately, my internal rubric is guided by my belief that my voice would reach a person or process that would not likely be responsive or empowered to make change."
- One neighborhood activist shared that their area's DSI inspector is quite helpful in coming to their meetings to explain code compliance and City processes.

District Council Responses

- Many suspected that there "Definitely isn't someone helpful in every department."
- A few respondents held experienced Legislative Aides as precious resources; "We try not to overuse them..."
- One respondent shared they can "count on one hand" the "go to people" who go "above and beyond" in the City.

Business Representative Responses

- Overall, respondents try to find and develop relationships that grow over time.
- One respondent shared, "For city-related things, I establish a point person. I have no interest in an email inbox or general call line. I like to have a go-to person. The City has been good about having those people. They don't try to hide them. They connect you to them. It starts with a call to a department. Once you're connected, and if they're the right person, you just keep calling them directly for everything."

Responses from BIPOC Communities

- One immigrant respondent shared, "We do not reach out to the City. Our go-to is reaching out to the places of worship and within our own communities."
- Many BIPOC respondents prefer to work with someone from their community to help them navigate the City.
- Some shared there aren't enough people from their culture, race, or language community who work at the City.
- A few respondents shared that they do not like using the Language Line and instead go to other family members for interpretation services.

Responses from Disability Communities

- An advocate shared that when people in the disability community have complaints, they prefer to go to an entity they're most familiar with to report accessibility issues, such as the Minnesota Council on Disability.
- One respondent shared, "I don't go through the Main Line; I always go through people I know to get the answers I need. I'm just not confident I'd get the answers I'd need based on colleagues, peers, friends' reports."
- Autistic respondents shared they typically must depend on someone else to direct them around the City and share implicit rules and understandings about how things connect:

Table of Findings: The Role of City Officials

"We're competing for attention."

Overall Responses	

- Most respondents shared that their City Councilmember was more accessible than the Mayor; some shared that this was fine; others found it frustrating.
- Some shared that they try to call the Main Line first, and only rely on their Councilmember for policy issues or escalation of service issues.
- A few shared that contacting their Councilmember was the first and most important way to resolve all but the smallest issues. City services are "more complicated than shipping a product to people; it's difficult to pull apart policy from customer service concerns. Why is the City not plowed right now? That's a policy, not a customer-service issue."
- Those with concerns about code enforcement also shared that policy and oversight was intertwined with service delivery, particularly when City fines and fees were so important to maintaining City budgets.
- One respondent shared his concern that homeless issues wouldn't be handled fairly without first contacting his City Councilmember.

District Council Responses

- Respondents shared their City Councilmember was responsive.
- Most shared that the Mayor is sometimes responsive, though the timing is longer, and invitations to events are often denied.
- Many shared that communications from the Mayor's office are "pretty weak" and that navigating between social media and official communications complicated matters.
- A few shared that residents must adapt strategies, like making videos on social media, to "compete for electeds' attention."
- A few shared that officials placate the community more than they seek to improve the system.
- One respondent suspected that departments doing community engagement was merely for placating the City Council.

Business Representative Responses

- One respondent shared, "I would tell any businessperson: Know your Councilmember … what their proclivities are, and don't get on the wrong side, because that's the way St Paul operates at the end of the day. The power resides with the Council, and you don't want to make enemies at the Council level."
- Another shared, "I would never call the Mayor's office. The Mayor doesn't have a lot of a lot of control over the issues that that are important to us…The detail is left with the Council and the agencies and departments."

Responses from BIPOC Communities

- BIPOC Councilmembers were particularly prized as a first contact by respondents of color.
- One respondent shared, "I called the Mayor's office, and one of his people took two weeks to get back to me. I'd need to be rich or a campaign donor to get a call."
- Another respondent who was frustrated with a sidewalk repair shared, "I'm not gonna let the Mayor worry about that 'cause he has citywide issues to worry about …If it's just directly impacting me in my house I reach out to a specific department, but if it's an issue that's impacting the whole city, I'll bring it up to the Mayor or the Council number."

Responses from Disability Communities

- One advocate shared their belief that the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Disabilities is "toothless" and ineffective.

Overall Responses	
	• Some respondents also shared a concern that a system that favors personal connections and "insider" knowledge to get the best customer service might be exacerbating inequities: "If you're a savvy system person, you can decipher which area you might want to call out, whereas another person might just be like, 'I'm not sure.' …That's just another example of privilege."
• Some respondents pointed out that Saint Paul's complaint-based system is ripe for inequities: "The City overall runs on complaints; most things happen due to somebody complaining. It means complainers have a lot of power in that they're anonymous."
• A few respondents shared pointed concerns about racially based harassment with the complaint system: "In an American city where there's a history of institutional racism, that the ability of one or two anonymous neighbors to really make life miserable for some other neighbor…It's a thing."
• A few respondents were passionate that administrative penalties and fines resulting from customer complaints is an example of systemic racism, particularly when little help is provided to fix the issue, nor to defend themselves with knowledgeable, third-party assistance.
• Business representatives did not share concerns in this area for this study, so that column has been removed below.

District Council Responses		Responses from BIPOC Communities	Responses from Disability Communities
• Many respondents shared that city culture centered on a penalizing mindset over solving problems, particularly within DSI, and that other tools were necessary to develop regarding problem properties: "Sometimes I'm looking for help with an issue and the response is not, 'Let's help resolve it,' but 'That's against code; they're going to be penalized.'
• Some shared this mindset makes people less likely to report issues in the future.
• A few desired a customer service system that serves people who are coming in not as complainers, but as people who are trying to address the City's unfair enforcement.
• A few respondents from districts with both low- and high-income residents notice discrepancies between enforcement fairness and speed.
• A few want a secure system to track who's placing complaints to prevent racial harassment.	• A few respondents want a well-funded, transparent, independent study of racial inequities and code enforcement in the City.
• One respondent pointed out the need to acknowledge the economics of Saint Paul neighborhoods and DSI's stance on fines.
• One respondent shared that DSI "uses demolition threats liberally," against those with the least means to navigate complicated processes and the Legistar system.
• One respondent pointed out that the complaint system's poor follow-up---necessitating multiple reports—exacerbate inequities by putting more complaints on specific addresses.	• Several respondents questioned the justice of timing on different matters: "They don't respond to our problem about the sidewalk, but when they notice that our grass isn't cut properly, they are quick to send us a notice."
• Several Hmong respondents shared this frustration: "The City writes stuff in Hmong? A lot of people don't read in Hmong! They can't communicate with the City at all without knowing about that Language Line."
• A few respondents expressed fear of backlash if they report.
• One respondent shared that an inspector didn't take off his shoes during an inspection and questioned how a City employee whose job was visiting homes would not know how disrespectful this is in her culture.
• Another respondent shared about DSI: "I have been treated with sexism and discrimination."	• Many shared that people with disabilities are not taken seriously by the City.
• Some shared frustration with federal compliance, particularly around curb cuts. One activist complained, "The City was sued when doing curbs downtown without updating curb cuts…It's going to happen again…It doesn't work when I reach out to individuals I know in the City."
• A few respondents shared that the City's ADA Coordinator is "overwhelmed and has very little power."
• One respondent shared that visiting City offices isn't very accessible.
• An autistic respondent shared that the City's inability to communicate its structure and functions in a comprehensive, visual way inhibited her access to services.

DOMINANT NARRATIVES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

In this section, we move deeper into commonly held beliefs, or narratives, that the public hold about the City and its service provision. As with the City, we attempt to name these overarching narratives and provide a brief rationale for each before sharing the stories of residents, business representatives. *We neither research nor confirm the accuracy of narratives; we merely share the pattern we have noticed; the preservation of anonymity limits full statements and some details.*

Fast to Punish, Slow to Fix

Many customers and constituents—from businesses, to landlords, to residents, to District Council staff—echoed that the City seemed in thrall to a punitive mentality. Attempts to problem-solve or work through unique situations was met with an authoritarian or dismissive tone.

> *...I was like, "I bet the person who deals with vacant houses at the City would know a board-up place to help with this unique situation," and when I called, they weren't like, "Wow here are all the problems with this person's situation and the ways that we can be helpful!" Instead, it was, "We'll penalize them for all this stuff." I was like, "Well I'm glad I didn't tell you the address!" I didn't say that out loud, but it was it was the most frustrating situation. I helped the guy out somehow, but that type of attitude just makes it so that in the future I am way less likely to call someone at the City to get help in preventing an issue. I'm going to be very hesitant about mentioning a name or an address or a phone number unless my goal was punishment—which it usually isn't.*
>
> --District Council staff, attempting to assist a homeowner in crisis

> *We have seen (the system) being misused. we have had neighbors attempt to make their case—as they're dragged in front of a legislative hearing officer again and again and again, paying hundreds and hundreds every time—and say, "I think I'm being targeted." ...And they're like, "Well, we don't track that information ...There's absolutely nothing to stop the system from being used against people.*
>
> --District Council staff

> *I contacted the City about dangerous pedestrian crossings... They were like, "We're gonna put up signs there, but it won't happen until like a year from now," and I was like, "Well, what are you doing now to ensure that pedestrians in this neighborhood are safe, especially at night? People don't stop at the crosswalks. They don't care. They're just zooming by... I feel like they weren't working with me to find the solution... They were just "responding to my request." ...It didn't feel like they were being proactive. It's like they're waiting until someone gets hit by a car. Why wait till it gets that extreme?"*
>
> --BIPOC resident

You Have to Leverage Relationships with the Right People to Get Attention

Many respondents were not aware of options other than the Main Line unless they had a personal connection within the City. Other respondents spoke often of special connections and relationships within the City; however, they needed to spend time learning the system, investigating the website, and keeping track of those connections to avoid bureaucratic and procedural burdens.

> *I've reached out to our City Planner about random things that the City doesn't even do, and he'll provide information from the county or whatever... I can count on one hand those folks that are kind of go-to people....*
>
> --District Council staff

> *My Councilmember wants you to go through the proper channels, and although she hasn't stated this bluntly to me, I'm quite certain that she has a lot more important things on her to-*

do list than (my business), so I am very conscious about not bothering her unless the wheels have totally come off...

<div align="right">--Business representative</div>

For city-related things, I establish a point person. I have zero interest in an email inbox or general call line. I like to have a go-to person. The City has been good about having those people identified. They don't try to hide them. They connect you to them. It starts with a call to a dept; once you're connected, and if they're the right person, you just keep calling them directly. I don't have time to do bureaucratic call tree stuff...

<div align="right">--Business representative</div>

The City Makes Things Hard for Us and Easy for Them

Many respondents noted frustrations that they had needed to spend more time than City staff to learn about situations that mattered to their livelihoods. Some also questioned who was being served by reporting processes, and who was being hurt.

The City is not very well coordinated with state agencies in licensure proceedings... In fact, the state or the City got it wrong and initially in their attempt to steer me along this complicated pathway sent me in the wrong direction with the state. When I spoke with the individuals at the state agency, they told me that they had numerous experiences with the City of Saint Paul misunderstanding their laws and their forms and they were very apologetic that I went through the ordeal.

<div align="right">--Business representative</div>

I had a complaint against me about snow before, even when there wasn't really any snow needing to be shoveled. I still received that complaint letter. It's faceless, and you get it, and then it's like, "Okay, well, you have to do this within a certain time span," and it was very short. That whole process there can be a little bit tricky, timing-wise. I understand why it's like that. It gets people's attention to resolve issues.

<div align="right">--BIPOC resident</div>

If it's winter and it's 20 below and (something) is clearly not being heated, we can make a complaint. I was just looking at the website, it's hard to find that number... I think I remember at one point that they were saying that they prefer to email, instead of just calling. it's a little bit clunky ...I need to fumble around with my phone. I'm sending email, which I can do, but I don't think very many people really do that...I don't know if that's why they switched to email because it's maybe a little bit easier instead of having somebody answer the phone.

<div align="right">--District Council staff</div>

Complaints Must Fit Neatly into Departments During Business Hours

Respondents were often frustrated by issues that didn't seem to fit neatly within one department. They also were unsure what the City expects about reporting non-emergency matters after-hours.

It's hard to figure out who to call, for starters... Is it housing, is it public safety? When they were shooting fireworks in the middle of the night at 2:00 AM a couple weeks ago, I went online and was like, "Okay, who do I call," you know? I don't really want to call the police, but I don't want to confront three men in the backyard of my neighbor's house that are drinking. So, I called the management company in the middle of the night because I did have a number but it's just a voicemail, so there's no obligation to some of these landlords to be responsive to the neighbors. That's frustrating, so I don't even know where this kind of issue lands in terms of the City and who would deal with these things.

<div align="right">--White resident</div>

They wanted us to take the blame for (a controversial decision). They didn't want to take a position on the issue. It's excruciating how long it took. I had to force it. Coordination between Planning and Public Works need specific, unambiguous direction. They need to work together. Don't worry about being the bad guy; you're salaried. Do what you think is right. The City should appoint a quarterback for any project. We have to have contacts in a lot of departments. You should not put a private party in the middle of two departments who have different views on something. It's awkward, uncomfortable, and unnecessary.

--Business representative

…people have come up along our alley and dumped things… And the report that I got from the City was that it's our responsibility because technically it's on our 3 feet of land between the building and the alley. And then another time we had to call our garbage company to come and pick it up… So our association picks it up. Another time this happened, even more stuff… So, another person in the condominium tried to get some more information, and we thought, "We lucked out—we at least got an inspector to come out and take a look to see if indeed the City had any responsibility!" And he said we'd get a citation that said if we didn't have that stuff out of there within 5 days, we would receive a fine…. We're in the process of getting some signs to put up… What responsibility can the City take to pick up things that have been just dumped?

--White resident

City Staff Can Be Corrupt, Abusive, or Ambivalent

A few residents questioned the ethics of City staff. Some shared firsthand accounts; others shared what might be rumor or innuendo. We include them here in the interest of departments interested in the state of their reputation in the community.

(A local landlord's property had) ongoing issues, and I called… At the time, the person who was one of the owners worked in the Housing Department, so it was a very unfruitful conversation! She proceeded to tell me when I talked to them directly that she and her husband had bought this property for a retirement investment! So that was my last call to the City.

--White resident

…DSI operates within a good-old-boys' network; we have the employees at DSI, their buddies are the big contracting companies… I am starting to wonder about the how close their ties are with the contractors 'cause it seems to me that the contractors know the magic words to say to get out of accountability. I don't know what those magic words are but one of the things I've noticed is that DSI employees write letters on their behalf …Out and out lie and write a letter and say I inspected this and everything's fine… So nobody's got your back, and the contractors know it. I've had an awful lot of these kinds of experiences.

--White resident

The City does not respond in many instances or is dismissive. As a female who identifies as a marginalized population, I have been treated with sexism and discrimination (from DSI inspectors). They do not follow through.

--BIPOC resident

DSI Inspections Standards Are Unclear

While Inspection standards and code enforcement are outside the scope of this study, the way landlords must navigate services is within scope. We offer these narratives as examples for further study and quality-improvement efforts for DSI.

With our rental property, we ended up getting two reports that were really different. Between inspectors, one was tough, but the other said, "Technically it's two people per bedroom, but if

a family member is under 2 it's okay..." He's trying to work with our tenants and our culture around family, where parents often co-sleep with new babies. When I asked about a City Ordinance to change things for everyone, he said, "We just enforce it, we don't do policy." But they did greenlight the exception. What about families who only get that strict inspector? They may have ended up moving.

--BIPOC landlord in Payne-Phalen

I am a landlord of the house in Dayton's Bluff. We have had two housing inspections, and it seems that the standard was different for the initial inspection and the second inspection. In the initial Section 8 inspection, I was given a clear understanding of each of the violations that I had had and how they were to be corrected and how much they cost me on the rating system. But for the second inspection, I didn't have that understanding from the regional inspector. I got a list of things that I had to fix, and I had a month to fix them. I'm like, "I don't think I can get a contractor in that fast," and the inspector said I could appeal to ask for more time. I knew that the best thing for me to do in a situation where it's all quasi-judicial was to put on my best "educated middle class white guy," persona, and it turned out to just be a phone call. I got the extension for some of the things, so I showed up for the reinspection date and the inspector wasn't there. I called him, and he said, "I thought you had gotten an extension," and he rushed over to inspect the things that weren't extended. But then he ended up finding new things that weren't on the list at all! I felt like once again there was a standard that I was unaware of. I just wanted clarity.

--White landlord in Southeast

Engagement Is Needed but Not Followed Through On

Multiple respondents wanted the City to be more involved in community outreach and engagement about City services. (At the time of this writing, the team applauds impending programs designed for immigrant and refugee outreach, which were often mentioned.) Many were concerned, however, that previous engagement efforts were employed merely for image reasons, not to effect meaningful change.

Purportedly we were being asked to join that group so that we could give some feedback from the neighborhood perspective and give some advice. And I think we had 4-5 meetings— each of which were two or two and a half hours—and from my perspective, it added up to a lot of nothing. I feel like we weren't listened to. It seemed like DSI was just holding the meeting so that they could go tell the City Council that they held the meetings. There was no follow up with any of us who were on the group or anybody from any of the other organizations that were on the group. and they felt like they really weren't interested in solving the problem as much as saying that the community had been placated.

--District Council staff

What type of outreach is being done, especially with newer refugees? They turned the stove on for heat... You cannot do that! The only person who speaks English is the 7-year-old.

--BIPOC resident

Somebody did a lot of illegal dumping, so we called the company to come and get it, and I get a letter—It was not a nice letter—and by the time I got the letter, I had like a day to get rid of the stuff. So I'm calling and talking with the person at DSI about this, but I just really wanna know why the letters weren't changed? They were supposed to give people where they could take their stuff...like even 1-800 Got Junk, or help people find something at a low cost or the Neighbors Helping Neighbors and COVID (program). It just went nowhere, and this was supposed to be part of DSI's equitable plans!

--District Council staff

Assessing Implications

We engaged with more than 100 people during this study and began to glimpse patterns in how they see themselves in relation to the City and the system. For its users, answering the question "Who am I to the City?" led to distinct types of engagement with the City's constituent and customer service system. For providers, defining their role within the system influenced how they responded to user concerns. In this section, we share syntheses of both user and provider experiences to further illuminate how the system is functioning for those who need it and those who host it. We also offer insights into additional, implicit factors that we see at play within the system. Finally, we name some of the challenges we experienced along the way.

USER ARCHETYPES

In the community phase of the study, the team discovered that the course of each journey through the customer-service system was heavily influenced by the initiator's self-concept—for both residents and business representatives. As we've approached the community, we've had to adjust our messaging and deeply consider the ways that residents and business representatives perceive their relationship with their city's government. Residents and business representatives may ask themselves—consciously or unconsciously—*Who are we to the City of Saint Paul?*

In observing customer and constituent behavior in sessions and via social media streams, we identified five patterns of self-concept:

Customers: Those seeking goods and services. This group related at once to the design of the study, seeing themselves as entitled to effective assistance from the City, which is their provider of services.

A Customer

A Constituent

A Taxpayer

A Reporter

A Violator

Constituents: Those wanting assistance with navigating government. This group also related to the design of the study, though these respondents needed reminders to stick with service-related matters and set aside policy-related issues; some argued that there is no real distinction.

Taxpayers: Those wanting accountability that local government is functioning efficiently. This group somewhat related to the design of the study, though these respondents needed reminders to share their specific experiences without extrapolating on perceptions of government.

Reporter: Those looking to report safety-related matters or frustrating issues regarding quality-of-life in the City. This group related somewhat to the design of the study, though these respondents needed reminders about our role as consultants—not informants.

Violators: Those who worry about whether they may have violated codes or laws that the City wants to penalize. This group did not relate to the design of the study, avoiding engagement with it out of caution; cautiously approaching through third parties; or finding it a waste of their time. Their stories are extrapolated from or told through third parties.

In this sense, the self-concept of community members can determine whether they approach or avoid the City entirely. It also determines whether they use City services only in a crisis...which may lead to an overuse of elected officials or add to the 78,000+ emergency calls for service that the City's 911 system handles[1], for example.

This conundrum likely affected outreach for the study. When the team shared that data would be anonymized, residents, business representatives, and District Council staff—even those most likely to see themselves as customers and constituents—expressed gratitude, and at times, visible relief.

The following are amalgamated narratives that try to capture and summarize the experiences of those with these five self-concepts, using respondents' phrasing and tone when possible. In the Frustrating Narratives column, we have included key pain points found across 50 customer and constituent journeys within these stories, highlighting them for reference. In the Productive Narratives column, we have highlighted factors that enabled good customer and constituent service we named through engagement work.

User Narratives: Frustrating Journeys

A CUSTOMER

There is a sidewalk near my home that is hard for me. I use a walker. I use the other side of the street. One day it was blocked for repair, so I had to use the hard side. It was very hard. I wanted to call the City to fix it when they fixed the other side. On the website, I noticed a number on the bottom of the page and checked with my daughter to see if it was the right number. She said the website can change to Hmong, but a lot of us don't read in Hmong. I called the number because my daughter is busy. They got a person to translate, but I had to wait. They spoke Hmong okay. But when they explained about the City, it didn't make sense to me. They said I had to call another number if I couldn't do the form or email. They did not transfer my call. A few days later, one side of the street was fixed, but the bad side was not. I called the new number, and they didn't answer. The next day I called again and had to wait again for a translator. The person said they needed an address. I needed to walk over and see, but it takes me a long time with my walker. So I called back a few days later with the address. They said they would fix it. I asked why it did not get fixed when the other side was fixed. They said if it is not on their list, the City can only fix things when people complain. It's still broken. I can see from the good side of the street. I don't know when it will be fixed, but I will wait until my daughter has some time to call them back.

[1] Gleicher, Lily and Ruhland, Ebony. *An Analysis of 911-Initiatied Calls for Service in Saint Paul, Minnesota.* Robina Institute of Criminal Law and Criminal Justice, 2021.

Pain Points:
- Language access isn't strong enough to be welcoming nor accessible to non-English speakers
- Intercultural communication challenges--particularly ESL speakers and oral-language communicators
- Disempowered frontline staff
- Little trust the staff person will have power to change the customer's situation
- Experience of runaround--getting passed around
- ADA/access complaints handled very poorly or not at all; a sense of futility for physically disabled customers
- Emphasis on complaints in providing basic services

A CONSTITUENT

As a restaurant owner, I'm always surprised at how little the City tells people about what it does. I remember when I first applied for a liquor license, I had no idea what I was doing or which department to use. I spent hours and hours reading and taking notes on the website. I'd get lost in there reading so much. And then I noticed that the information didn't always match up with the state licensing people I also had to work with. Some of it seemed outdated. So I call the number, and they direct me to the Business Resource Center. I leave a voicemail and spend the next couple days checking my phone during the City's business hours, while I'm trying to serve customers at the restaurant. Why on earth don't they text or email—some kind of asynchronous way of communicating, especially with busy people like us? ...So I finally get my instructions. I spend weeks and weeks filling out all these forms and doing everything they tell me to, and then I don't get any updates. No one answers my calls. Then it's phone tag with no information on voicemails. Meanwhile I push back the launch date for liquor sales. And I call my Councilmember again for help. Thank God he has the right temperament to help fight this system. I know other businesses don't have that, and it shouldn't have to come to this—me getting my Councilmember to cut through red tape. It makes me feel like a bad guy.

Pain Points:
- Insufficient education & outreach about City government structure and processes
- Synchronous communication difficulty for busy people and shift workers
- Inconsistent response rate on phones
- Inconsistent processes for complicated matters
- Customers spend effort to understand policies, but they can be unpredictably enforced
- Perception that a Councilmember's temperament and integrity can make or break business processes
- Misleading or outdated information on the website about licensing

A TAXPAYER

Here's the thing. Those 8989 people are very polite when you call, but they can't do anything for you. Plus, you have to call them only during their hours, so good luck if it's an evening or a weekend, and you need a quick answer. Well...really...there are no quick answers anyway. They'll make you slog through city workers, through mistakes, failures, voicemails...and they never call you. You have to keep calling. Well, they do call sometimes, but they don't respond as quickly as they should. Those employees are great but none of them have any power to do anything. But at least you get to talk to somebody pleasant. Unionized civil servants get super-duper powerful over the years, and there's no oversight 'cause the City Council comes and goes, the Mayor comes and goes, but the civil servants stay. You wonder where all that property tax money is going. I tried getting the Mayor involved once, but he doesn't put his number on the website. You have to really look to find it. And I never got a call back. They just took the complaint, and I have no idea what happened. Maybe if I was rich or something, somebody would pay attention to me.

Pain Points:
- Having to go through a mediator, organization, or officials to receive service
- Constraining service to business hours in a 24-7 connected world
- Kind service by disempowered person; no locus of accountability
- Inconsistent response time
- Number of touchpoints increases likelihood of mistakes and misperceptions by staff
- Mistrust in frontline staff motivations when the system moves more slowly than expected
- Perception that privileged, connected people get better service

A REPORTER

Yeah, so in my neighborhood of Frogtown, streets get almost impassible in the winter because the City does not tow cars—and we're one of the favorite neighborhoods for people to abandon them. It gets pretty dangerous for school buses and stuff, and we get stuck when we try to park because the plows in no way can do the curb-to-curb thing. It's not like Summit Hill or Highland here! Me and other neighbors get together and call, call, call, but especially with abandoned cars, nothing happens. Why can't the City do anything without us complaining? I've gone down rabbit holes on the website for the right place to report, and I've tried everything—phone, email, forms... The page on abandoned vehicles has information, but it doesn't tell you how to report or who is ultimately responsible. Is it inspectors? Cops? Plowing people? Me and my neighbors are like—is all this work worth it? Do they even listen to people who look like us? I heard that one of the phone helpers told one of my neighbors that the stuff they send on never gets answered. I feel bad for those Call Center workers, you know?

Pain Points:
- Inter-department complaints often resolve slowly or not at all
- Website subpage searches and links to main pages are poor to nonexistent
- Perception that the City relies on complaints to prioritize basic services
- Low clarity about responsibility for "in-between" issues—on the side of the road, easements, medians, or county/state/federally controlled land
- Existential sadness, disappointment, cynicism felt by some reporters
- Repeat calling needed with a system that does not follow up with reporters
- Perception that privileged, connected people get better service
- AMANDA software incompatible with other department systems and/or difficult to navigate outside DSI
- Disempowered Call Center staff

A VIOLATOR

My neighbor is South Asian like me, and I help him out sometimes with different things. His lawnmower broke down a few months ago, and he's been unable to keep his lawn mown. My landlord takes care of ours, so it's the one thing I haven't been able to help with. Anyway, he started getting these letters from the City, and he's really scared. He goes out there with a hedge trimmer to try and make everybody happy, but someone in the neighborhood has started reporting him for every little thing now...sidewalks, grass and weeds, even leaving his trash cans out when everyone else might be doing the same things! I can't help but wonder if this is racially based harassment, because there's this guy in the neighborhood that says borderline mean things whenever he's outside. I told him to call the City, but he's too scared. He won't even call his City Councilmember. I called and asked what people do when they think they might be getting harassed or racially targeted, and they said everything is anonymous, so there's nothing to be done. So I asked my District Council for help: Was there any way to get someone on his side? She called and asked the City whether my neighbor could get some help with mowing and shoveling, and I'm so glad she didn't give his address! Apparently, the person at the City assumed she wanted them to fine my neighbor right away!

Pain Points:
- Perception the system is not safe for everyone to access
- Talking to an official is uncomfortable for some
- Perception that you must have "someone on your side" at the City
- Racial and other targeted harassment is enabled by anonymous reporting
- Sense of hopelessness: the one place that can help you might not help you
- City staff predisposed to punish, not solve problems, given the tools and processes available to them

User Narratives: Productive Journeys

A CUSTOMER

I've had great interactions with the Parks and Rec; it's the staff people that makes it a good experience. I've had good experiences with the Public Works apartment when things have been in the road--they've been really fast to respond. They give you a little bit of knowledge to work with so that the next time you will know what you need to do a little bit better. I called the Water Department before; they're friendly and it's fast. In different city departments the people that I end up interacting with are always pretty knowledgeable and willing to share. Libraries are absolutely great, and the staff at the libraries are so helpful...particularly the Rondo Library. The past couple winters have been really chilly, and they always keep their doors open longer for the young people and for the elders in our community. When we call the Main Line, it is helpful; the Language Line does work, but it's not as good as having someone who speaks our language—like at the Library Community Helpdesk. They even have someone on there who speaks Spanish and directs us to resources in Spanish. They help people from all over the state, I hear. Especially new immigrants.

Enabling Factors:
- Language Line
- Individual staff who are willing to educate the public
- Public Works' sense of urgency with traffic impediments
- SPPL staff that embody a culture of helpfulness and care
- Parks Call Center staff often helpful
- SPRWS' efficient phone system and clarity of customer communications
- SPPL's Community Helpdesk program and staff

A CONSTITUENT

At least weekly there's this bulletin that comes from the City that's very useful. It has a lot of information in it. I love our Water people; I have organized for us getting municipal broadband and use it as an example. I love the libraries, I love the Library staff, and I love the services that the libraries were able to provide during COVID. If I had an issue or question, I would not hesitate to call a City department directly or to call the main number. I get a really good response from my City Councilmember, but I'm pretty active politically. Another thing I'm really happy about is the Mayor's work on library fines. The College Savings Account people been really responsive, too, 'cause there's these incentives you can get. You have to submit proof that you did these activities, and I hear they're pretty flexible about it. Moms in my community were like, "Oh can I just send you a screenshot," instead of like having to download something to prove that you did something to get the incentive. They also did a community baby shower type thing. They got little cupcakes, and you could get things you need for babies—wipes and info for WIC. They partnered with a bunch of other people. I don't know if they organized it, but mainly they were there to check up: "Do you have what you need, 'cause online is not that easy to understand if you're not used to doing logins," or whatever. None of that is easy to do when you have a newborn, I'll bet!

Enabling Factors:
- OFE's administration of The CollegeBound Program
- Individual staff who are especially knowledgeable and helpful
- The Mayor's policy on library fines
- Councilmembers' and staff responsiveness
- SPPL staff that embody a culture of helpfulness and care
- SPPL's COVID response
- The City of Saint Paul email bulletins
- SPRWS' administration and service

A TAXPAYER

I'm on our local District Council, so I use the services a lot. I appreciate that the phone gets answered pretty quickly; mostly people have been responsive within 48 hours. The online form does notify people sometimes... Hero stories do happen with DSI—largely around liquor licensing and homeless issues... Parks and the Library have both been underutilized or underfunded, but they are still doing a pretty good job. I interact a lot with Conway Rec, which is contracted by the Sanneh foundation, and it's kind of a public/private park. It does a pretty good job there. They've done a bunch of free programming, so I think that they are a pretty good partner... The last couple of years when I've contacted my City Councilmember's office, I get prompt response at least, whether they do what I want them to do or not. They respond and answer and that's good... The Mayor's Office and the Council's intentions are good, and the policy directives are good. I think where things fall apart is the mid- and lower levels of the agencies where there's lack of funding, lack of staffing. Sometimes that policy is just not being implemented. I think people's intent is good; I'm not saying there's any corruption, or ill intent. When I fail to get service, I have no sense that anyone is acting out of malice. I do appreciate the City's honesty when you get to an individual level.

Enabling Factors:
- General responsiveness with answering phones and following up with the online complaint submission form
- DSI staff "heroism" with time-sensitive matters
- Councilmembers' and staff responsiveness
- Parks' programming partnerships with nonprofit organizations
- Perception of honesty and integrity among City staff

A REPORTER

Having someone follow up is so important... I was able to text with a worker from Animal Control recently. I appreciate that some city workers are open to texting. It's so much more accessible than just phone or email, and more of them should do it. I really like our area's inspector; they come to the local District Council to answer questions regularly... Overall, if I make a direct contact in the City with people I know, it's usually satisfactory. Once you find those right people in each department, you get a task flow: Main Line or online form is the first step; check on it every couple of weeks; then call a specific staff person and/or Councilmember.

Enabling Factors:
- Individual staff who are willing to try new modes to reach the public
- Individual staff who are especially knowledgeable and helpful in each department
- Individual DSI inspectors who are willing to educate the public
- District Council outreach and education

A VIOLATOR

I'm a newer landlord, and I was really scared to get my Fire Certificate of Occupancy. They can shut down your building and condemn you. I've heard different inspectors can have really different standards, too. But we got lucky. The program so far handles issues very fast and just and fair. They were very thorough. Questions about requirements are answered really well. They try to define their terms—but only when I ask. I have to do a lot of work to have a good working relationship with them. I have to ask, nicely.

Enabling Factors:
- DSI's Fire Certificate of Occupancy Program---particularly for new participants
- Individual DSI inspectors who are willing to educate the public

PROVIDER ARCHETYPES

In the City phase of the study, the team discovered that service providers' guidance of user journeys through the customer-service system depended on their perception of the City and their role within it. As we approached City staff, we have needed to adjust to each office's culture and assumptions—deeply considering the ways that staff perceive their role in customer and constituent service. We noticed an underlying current of staff wondering, consciously or unconsciously, *What is our role here?*

After listening to City staff in sessions—not merely to their words, but also what they chose to talk about and its subtext—we identified five patterns of self-concept. The following are amalgamated narratives that attempt to capture and summarize the experiences of those with these five self-concepts, using respondents' phrasing and tone wherever possible.

Concierges: Those most fulfilled by serving the public in a way in the most efficient, polite manner possible. This group sees the City as three, parallel entities: a provider of services; a creator of policies; and an enforcer of policies. They adapt their style to the needs of the person they're serving, and they try not to burden them with details while getting them where they need to go in the City.

Their ideal service encounter: The Customer.

Educators: Those most fulfilled by educating the public about what the City does and how its processes work. This group sees the City as a partner in the lives of customers and constituents. They take every opportunity to build government expertise and political efficacy in members of the public, to empower them and their communities with more knowledge to partake in government processes.

Their ideal service encounter: The Constituent.

Reformers: Those most fulfilled by critiquing the City and empathizing with frustrated members of the public. This group sees the City as a system in need of fixing. They like change, and they often look for opportunities to improve processes and results to be more just and efficient. They find

A Concierge

An Educator

A Reformer

A Realist

An Advocate

themselves apologizing when the City isn't set up to meet someone's particular needs, and they make note of it to fix from their position—or even take it to the next level, if a problem happens often enough.

Their ideal service encounter: The Taxpayer

Realists: Those most fulfilled by telling the people the truth as they see it. This group sees the City as largely a static bureaucracy that takes a long time to deliver on some of its promises, which they feel are sometimes overpromised and underdelivered. This group "level" with people who are struggling to navigate the City. They pragmatically assist customers and constituents, but they're careful to be honest and methodical. If processes aren't working as designed, they may share helpful "tricks" with the public or connect them with Advocates or Concierges.

Their ideal service encounter: The Reporter

Advocates: Those most fulfilled by advocating for members of the public who struggle to understand and navigate the City. This group sees the City as a powerful and important force in people's lives, and that it must wield that power very carefully. They listen deeply to people and try to connect them to decision-makers who can make a difference in their lives. They struggle to maintain their mental health and personal boundaries at times, though they celebrate whenever anyone gets what they need.

Their ideal service encounter: The Violator

The following are amalgamated narratives that attempt to capture and summarize the experiences of those with these five self-concepts, using respondents' phrasing and tone when possible. We have included key factors in service delivery identified across 54 provider journeys within these stories, highlighting them for reference.

PROVIDER NARRATIVES

A CONCIERGE

My role is to listen and be sure callers know I'm listening. I take pride in getting them to the department that can do something about their issue. For example, if there's a dangerous situation on a street, I'm going to call Public Works street maintenance and let them know so they can send a crew out right away. Council staff send us most everything and then we send it to whoever needs to handle it because we know where to forward things. My team and I share a reference document and add to it all the time. I take responsibility for my calls. I always take the name and number of the person calling, and then I transfer them. I tell people that if they don't get an answer, call back in 24 hours, because then I feel like if I transferred them to the wrong person, they can re-contact me and I can rethink where to send them.

Factors Impacting Service:
• Outdated or insufficient information to share with callers
• Quality of support to continue interfacing with an unhappy public
• Repeated internal requests for information in addition to public requests

AN EDUCATOR

My job is to educate callers instead of doing everything for them. I tell them about which departments do what, and I get them the number they need so that they can call the division that can answer their question. This way, they call or email the office themselves, so they know what to do next time and can share that knowledge with their community. Internally, I wish we got regular training to make us aware of everything the City does and all of the places in City government that residents can contact. I recommend creating a monthly info session where City staff can share resources with one another. We don't know what we don't know. I would like to be able to answer questions more holistically.

Factors Impacting Service:
- Inadequate updates to stay on top of changes within the City
- System gaps preventing status tracking

A REFORMER

St. Paul is too big a city to <u>not</u> have a centralized way for people to ask questions. Right now, the City is replicating resources all over, and we simply can't afford to do that anymore. We could be using analytics to help us figure out what's working and what's not, or look to other studies, like the Fleet Services study, as examples of how to build operations that don't duplicate efforts. There are important lessons we can learn from the COVID-19 Language Line, where City staff who know City services and who speak languages besides English acted as navigators for callers. There are answers at our fingertips, but we have to find the fortitude to use them.

- Factors Impacting Service:
- Balkanization of constituent and customer service nodes
- Inaction at a systems level despite clear need for change
- Increased demands from an exasperated public

A REALIST

The Main Line works well if people use it, but people won't always use it, or won't use only it. And if they do use it but won't leave their contact information, City staff can't get back to them with answers. It sets up a long cycle for residents of calling, leaving a request, then calling back to get an answer. If there were enough staff available to answer calls, and if they were knowledgeable enough to respond, that would make things run more smoothly. I've been around a long time and know people in every department, so I can help callers find the right person or place, but that's not true for everyone. I think staff need ongoing customer service training, including supervisors, so they how best to support their forward-facing staff.

Factors Impacting Service:
- Myriad access points
- Practice of maintaining caller anonymity on Main Line
- Under-resourced staffing levels

AN ADVOCATE

Working the Call Center, we are advocates too. I don't like the fact that my neighbor could call because I have tall grass and that the letter goes out before the inspector looks at it. For tall grass, snowy walks, graffiti, those letters get sent out the same day because we want them to have a chance to correct it before the inspector goes out. But you receive that letter and think, "I don't have tall grass; this is ridiculous!" or "My grandpa died, and I haven't been paying attention to the grass"; that's going to really sting. You'd think, "Well darn, the City doesn't care about me."

Then I had somebody call yesterday that their neighbor is filing a harassment order because their neighbor's just been evil to them, and they're using the City as a tool. I see that a lot: People use the City because they're having neighbor disputes. I can tell by how they speak about certain people, a lot of times it's racially motivated. I hear evil things, especially right now. I did go look at Minneapolis' 311 system, and it was really cool 'cause they could see if there was a complaint that they entered on the same block. If we had a good management system, we could at least all see the complaints across the City, look at the work orders…then the public could look up the status, and we could take more action against harassment.

Factors Impacting Service:
- Systemic racism
- Anonymized complaint system's role in racially based harassment

- Secondary trauma experienced daily by Call Center staff, with insufficient mental health support

SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Our team brought varied expertise to bear in carrying out this project, viewing the people, practices and paradigms through different lenses. In reviewing the study's findings, we each have our own take on what we've uncovered. We share our perspectives below.

Equity & Justice
With Vera Faith Allen

The City of Saint Paul will soon have more residents of color than white residents. Having a Black mayor—which even in 2022 is not a large group—gives evidence of a demographic in support of ideas of diversity. Mayor Carter being elected a second term at the peak of a global pandemic gives stronger credence that there is room for learning and growth among City residents and policy makers.

The State of Minnesota hosts philosophies, cultures, and people from around the world. The majority of the global descendants who make their lives in Minnesota reside in the City of Saint Paul.[2] These new inhabitants will share their stories, which will reverberate back into the countries of their origins and reflect an American experience as no other. Here is where Saint Paul has the opportunity to fortify a more positive story than one of failures and misgivings. Saint Paul can model service-as-equity and allow the clarity of its system to shape and form around progress and balance for long-term sustainability.

As the city only grows into a more diverse community, strongholds of policies that can continue to be used one citizen against another, will predispose unnecessary confusion and expand the marks that new residents can be targeted with, leaving them on the wayside of a city on the move toward justice. Residents of color; descendants of slaves, Indigenous lineages, and multi-generational immigrant families have and do suffer in the eyesight of a city government that extracts their experiences within city living and planning as a separate mission of the serving body.

If nothing else was learned from this study, our team found over and again that every person—no matter their racial, cultural or financial background—wanted the same things from their City: acknowledgement of their issues, follow through on responses, a tracking system for their concerns, and policies in search of *solutions*, not punishment.

Simple acts of equity do not begin with statutory legislation. They start with creating seamless systems that afford all users, from any walk of life, the equal application of their purpose. For instance, all intake calls must be treated with the same privacy and importance. All documents must be processed with the same results in pursuit of service, regardless of the customer. Everyone should be greeted, either on the phone or walking into a government office.

Saint Paul has the predisposition of being a beacon for other cities across the country in transitions of power from a white majority to a brown majority. Providing a study in what it means to serve all of the public, across any identifying marker, demonstrates for the country at large that white supremacy and patriarchy are not good for anyone, not even white people. Treating a community as a cohesive unit and customer service as a *means* of equity provides a definitive game plan, starting with the

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2 "QuickFacts Chicago city, Illinois; Moorhead city, Minnesota; Duluth city, Minnesota; St. Cloud city, Minnesota; Minneapolis city, Minnesota; Saint Paul city, Minnesota." U.S. Census Bureau, United States Department of Commerce, 2020, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/chicagocityillinois,moorheadcityminnesota,duluthcityminnesota,stcloudcityminnesota,minneapoliscityminnesota,stpaulcityminnesota/AGE135219.

basics and reinforcing a foundation for larger, more encompassing changes in policies that support community equity issues that are older than Saint Paul.

Potential is abounding in this city; it is up to her stewards to strengthen her assets and push through what is holding her back.

Governance & Change
With Brigid Riley

We have identified many potentials for change in this study. In a complex government organization like the City of Saint Paul, there are many possible paths forward. Some are technical in nature and require technical solutions. Others focus on shifts in processes informed by cross-division and cross-department connections. Still others recommend extending the current ethic of care exhibited toward constituents and customers *to staff themselves*. In the ever-present battle between implementing change and maintaining the status quo, the status quo always wins in the absence of leadership.

As you make decisions about how best to use this study, there are at least two layers of leadership to bring into focus. The first is defining precisely what you want to achieve through changes, and why. You are at a pivotal point right now: you've looked at the big picture, you've engaged staff and you've reached constituents and customers. What questions come next? How will you define your overall objectives and strategies? How will you align those with what is already happening so all Departments resonate with them? How will you balance the needs of the system overall with the need for flexibility and autonomy within each department? By using this organizational governance lens, you will provide clarity about your intentions and ensure participation of those who know how to get things done within the City. Implementation efforts will need attention, too; knowing who will be affected by changes, and how; communicating changes; offering time and training to adapt; designing ongoing check-ins, etc.

The second layer to consider is how you will accomplish what you set out to do. Will you convene a multi-department council? A task force of subject matter experts? A group of project managers? Or might departments be asked to implement changes independently? We've talked elsewhere in this report about recognizing the decentralized, autonomous nature of City departments, but want here to encourage you to tune into the "We Are One City" message we heard from some staff ([see Dominant Narratives within the City](#)). Constituent and customer services happen in every department which means there's opportunity to generate buy-in to change efforts in every department, enhancing the likelihood of uptake.

Tapping the right person – or people – to shepherd any change process will be one key to its success. Obviously changes to customer and constituent services will affect various parts of the City, and there will be many voices and interests to balance. The 'change shepherd' will need to be a collaborative leader, defined as someone who "accepts responsibility for building - or helping to ensure the success of – a heterogeneous team to accomplish a shared purpose."[3] They also need to have the gift of influence and the ability gain others' respect. In a government organization, referent power[4] is more likely to be found in a trusted staff member than a political appointee. It isn't necessarily tied to someone's title or position, but to the authenticity and quality of their interactions with others.

Any of these efforts are going to take human, technical and financial resources. Be careful to scope the different costs before committing to action. We heard more than one story of the City adopting a technical or process change without committing concomitant resources, leading to eventual failure.

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[3] Rubin, Hank. *Collaborative Leadership: Developing Effective Partnerships for Communities and Schools*. Corwin Press, 2009.

[4] French, J. R. P. and Raven. 'The Bases of Social Power', in D. Cartwright (ed.), *Studies in Social Power*. University of Michigan, 1959.

While it is always politically challenging for government entities to spend taxpayer money on internal improvements, these services are important to residents and businesses. They could become part of making Saint Paul an even *more* livable city.

Process Improvement
With Johnese Bostic

Waste is any step or action in a process that is not required to complete a process successfully. Looking through the lens of process improvement, The City of Saint Paul's process by which to receive and respond to inquiries, complaints, or even compliments is filled with waste. After taking a deeper dive into the project, the process includes four types of waste. First, I'd like to point out Motion: People, information or machines making unnecessary movements. If the tools needed to perform one's job is not at arm's length, there tends to be motion. One example of this type of waste is the City's website. There are more than five hundred (500) access points into the City. Each time customers—which includes residents and non-residents—click more than three times to retrieve the information they are seeking, there is unnecessary movement of information. Customers who visit the website have a maze of information to filter through.

Secondly, I'd like to point out is Inventory: Information or people that are sitting idle. One example of this is the number of access points that are available for customers to contact the City. There are 514 access points, 316 emails, 140 phone numbers, 21 online forms and more. While these numbers look impressive—and yes there is a lot of variety—think of the number of access points that were created, but never receive a hit or were created and have not been updated in the last three or more months. What would be some of the immediate benefits of keeping less "inventory" and creating what is needed based on analyzing trends, data, and customer needs?

Next, I'd like to point out Human Potential: underutilizing people's talents, skills, and knowledge. This form of waste is seen when employees do not have the adequate tools needed to perform their jobs. Turnover is an issue, and new employees are not trained or cross-trained well. Many customers trust the Library system and would benefit from the Library being better equipped as conduit of timely and relevant information. You also see this type of waste when people are ignored when making suggestions around improvement.

The last form of waste I'd like to point out is Waiting: Wasted time for the next step in the process to occur. Waiting equals wasted time, and wasted time equals wasted taxpayer dollars and more unsatisfied customers. This is largely seen in the amount of time it takes to respond to a customer's inquiry. There are other factors that are in place, such as contacting the wrong department or a customer using an unmanaged access point, however, when work must sit until the city takes any next steps, it puts the service levels under pressure. Streamlining the workflow to include the task of responding to the customer, would close the loop and decrease wait time. But, remember the longer the wait time, the more waste in the process.

Eliminating waste across all resources—time, effort, people, processes, and inventory—will result in a smooth, efficient experience.

Implementing Technology
With Lisa Meredith

As the City contemplates adopting software solutions, it must recognize that implementing new software programs can be a challenge from several aspects. Determining the new program has the features and functions that you need is only the first step. I look at the implementation as a three-prong approach.

The first is usability, which also includes accessibility, both for your end users and staff. What will your user experience be with the new system? How far will it be rolled out? What are the user and licensing implications?

You will need to involve staff in the process. You will need their input and testing. And you will likely have staff that is particularly good with the existing software program; they are valued because of their "power user" expertise. Involving these individuals provides several benefits to the implementation project. They are knowledgeable in the current usage and can provide valuable input. They can be some of your best testers and trainers, or project champions while continuing to be valued for their input. Often, if your current power users are not involved in the process, they may push back on the change.

The ultimate goal is to provide a pleasant experience to your end users, citizens, constituents, visitors, etc.: Being able to provide them with a positive customer service experience or easy access to information on the website. User experience testing and feedback is important. Reach out not only to your high-volume existing end users, but also identify end users that are currently not using the systems and find out why.

The second is reviewing your business processes. As you look at software systems, what do they do well, and can they offer some efficiencies to your current business processes? Working with the software versus highly customizing the software can often provide insights as to how else can you do you process. The priority is providing a high-quality customer experience. How can your selected software *help* you to do that?

Finally, how does your new software interact with other existing software and systems? Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) allow programs to share information. This may be done with a very integrated option, such as a pop-up window that pre-populates information from one program to another or a regularly scheduled file update. The benefit of sharing information between programs is that data is cleaner, more accurate, provides better metrics, and most importantly reduces the time staff is required to do duplicate data entry. There are also challenges with interfacing between programs—whether it is a file update or API. You are typically working with at least two different software vendors. When one or both make a software update, the API and software might struggle with compatibility.

OTC teams and interdepartmental leaders who are working on Zendesk and Service Hubs have thus far done a wonderful job addressing the first item—working with staff. They have also worked on business processes—most successfully so far in the Public Works Zendesk project. The work on interfacing with other programs is just starting.

Zendesk Project
The Zendesk project seems to have been well thought through and implemented in the Public Works Department. The team has used smart implementation strategies to improve their chance of success. These strategies include:
- Identifying some of the staff that might be resistant to the change and including them in the process to identify likely hurdles to be addressed. The team has identified both power users and project champions to help implement this project.
- Leadership-level champions have also been important to help support the project.
- Change management has been incorporated, including engaging leadership and project champions, celebrating accomplishments, and recognizing the efforts of the testers, trainers, and staff that are making extra efforts to implement Zendesk, through small gifts and staff recognition for their work, at leadership levels and with their peers.
- The team has gone into this project with the goal of leveraging technology to help identify best practices with a focus of improving the experience for constituents and site users.
- Strategic thinking includes, *What will the residential experience look like in three years?*
- Planning will need to include technology testing with both onsite and remote users, including variables such as internet speed and the changing landscape.

The implementation of Zendesk for Council is going much slower, with a different focus. Public Works tracks all communication, service tickets and issues through Zendesk. This will provide a complete "picture" of the customers contacting public works with metrics to help track. The Council, on the other hand, is going with a much slower and more limited implementation, using Zendesk only to

track service tickets. The discussion of anonymity – the definition, implementation, and process – is still in process.

Next steps will be identifying who and what people and departments are interested; addressing budget and licensing issues; and creating an implementation/rollout process template for other departments. As the Council continues its process and other departments look at Zendesk, creating an implementation process that includes the steps outlined above would help improve the success for other departments.

Service Hubs Project

The Service Hubs project has rolled out a limited project with the goal of focusing on user experience, making it public-focused versus department-focused. As part of the user experience, the team has also contracted with SiteImprove to recommend improvements regarding accessibility of the site. In our discussion, we also recommended working with the State of Minnesota Office of Accessibility for resources. The first departments involved in this process are DSI, followed by Parks, SPPD, and Public Works. The team is currently working on finding end users to help provide input from a user perspective. It is important to not only identify current users for their input, but all those not using the site to find out what and what might be done to increase their chance of using the site. The good news is that the staff has been very engaged and generous with their time to help make this a successful project. Again, the team should continue making an effort to recognize the efforts of the staff!

Next steps will include improved searching through Search Engine Optimization (SEO), both internal to the site and external search engines. This will require using analytics to identify most-accessed documents and pages and archiving or removing old and outdated information. Then work with department Public Information Officers (PIOs) to provide governance over content. Work through the feedback from SiteImprove to improve accessibility on the site. Also, identify and plan for a positive user experience for different communities and users – helping them easily find the information or help they need in a way that is accessible to them through information, language, learning style, and ease of use. One OTC staff shared that this work is to "make sure that the structure of the information is going to support the users' needs and their goals." The next step is to utilize this process to create a repeatable process ("playbook") that can be adopted by departments to help them become of part of the Service Hub project.

Internal Networks
With Sherry P. Johnson

Western organizations are in a silent struggle of their own making, and they're losing. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 4.5 million Americans quit their jobs in November 2021.[5] Limeade, a human resources and technology firm, recently released their report on this "Great Resignation," showing some evidence that employee burnout was highly correlated to the amount of care and connection employees felt in their jobs: "On average, respondents reported a 22% boost in feeling cared for as an individual by their new employer and a 22% improvement in comfort regarding disclosing a mental health condition compared with how they felt at their previous employer."[6]

In the Industrial Age, organizations structured themselves hierarchically, around experts, specialization, and efficiency. The message had been *talent* and *compliance* fuel organizations. But this worldview ceases to function when organizations face increasingly complex, unpredictable

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[5] "Economic News Release: Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary." *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, United States Department of Labor,
4 Jan. 2022, www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.nr0.htm.

[6] "The Great Resignation Update: Limeade Employee Care Report." Limeade. www.limeade.com/resources/resource-center/limeade-employee-care-report-the-great-resignation-update/?utm_source=newswire&utm_medium=press_release.

situations. Right now, organizations are finding they need to structure aspects of their work more organically, around relationships, emergence, and pragmatism. The message now is that *relationships* fuel organizations. And workers are following that message, opting for more relational workplaces where their ideas are listened to, no matter their job title.

The City of Saint Paul still needs the authority of static experts—veteran staff who oversee more ordered aspects of City government like policy research, legal advice, road resurfacing, safety advice, etc.; here, the City needs to apply what Johnese shared in *Process Improvement*. But when facing tremendous changes or multiple, human inputs, it's the number and quality of human relationships that will determine whether information will flow quickly enough to enable effective and creative decision-making—applying what Brigid shared in *Governance and Change*. These two systems—linear and complex—exist in parallel and are interdependent upon one another. We must see and recognize the importance of both ways of doing business.

In static, ordered, linear systems, experts can fly solo and get things done. They may defend the organization's processes in one breath and act heroically in the next by cutting "red tape." While they know the rules, policies, and procedures, they may be intermittently surprised to hear about a bit of hard-won systemic wisdom that is no longer current. In network theory, these folks tend to be "power nodes" who have a large number of weak, task-specific connections to other humans. This can mean that they are constantly being contacted or contacting others who need answers to "quick questions." Unfortunately, it also means they can be bottlenecks, preventing the free flow of information, either inadvertently—they're busy or on a leave of absence—or on-purpose, when they don't trust a piece of information, or worse, they want to quash it for their own reasons.

These "solo flyers" are the backbone of some of the City's key processes. But they also don't adapt as well to change and may even block necessary reforms. Those who want to improve anything in the City of Saint Paul must become aware of these staff—making every effort to include and connect them to deeper, more trusting relationships outside of their offices...To engage them in deeper conversations, thereby strengthening their connections...To learn from them, thereby releasing the pressure on them as the bottlenecks of information. Moreover, these folks can become the champions of new processes or technologies if they're brought along early.

Our team heard about and experienced many instances of "solo flyer" City staff hoarding information or expertise. Yet customers and constituents shared that they appreciate City staff who are honest with them, say the hard things, and explain the City's processes honestly and fully.

Apart from these "solo flyers" exist the "collective players." In dynamic, emergent, complex systems, these staff rely upon one another to meet collective aims. They tend to act cooperatively, finding creative ways to "work around" or "dance with" the system—to bend it without breaking it. They tend to share their feelings about work—what's working and what's not; what's in-line with their personal values and what's not. They leverage relationships to try things that could make one another's lives easier. In network theory, these folks tend to be highly interwoven nodes who have a moderate number of robust, broad-based connections to other humans. They can move systems in crisis faster than other kinds of nodes. If one person is busy or on leave, it's no problem; others are empowered to step in. Their dynamic can devolve into "cliquish" behavior, so these folks need to be on their guard about staying curious and inclusive. But there's little doubt that many staff will turn to these folks for in-depth, highly contextual, up-to-date information: After all, if they don't know, they'll know someone who will.

These "collective players" often need help staying connected and curious. They need technical solutions to store and share their wide breadth of knowledge in ways they can all access it equally— applying Lisa's wisdom in *Implementing Technology*. They need employee rewards for team effort, rather than personal heroism. And above all, the system needs to provide regular opportunities for office-level and inter-office teams to connect informally and maintain those connections—particularly in an age of virtual work.

Our team also heard about and experienced many instances of City staff acting collectively, particularly in the City's Call Centers and those taking part in OTC's Service Hubs event-planning project.

Finally, there's a third group in network theory: Call these "outliers." Most innovation comes from this group. These are folks whose "positive deviance" makes them special. They tend to do things a little differently, seeing patterns and finding new pathways where others do not. Their inclinations can get them in trouble for noncompliance if they're managed by "solo fliers," and get them excluded if managed by "collective players." But these are the folks who are best equipped to help systems adapt for the long haul, through their fearlessness and curiosity. They tend to be less connected nodes, though, with one or two strong relationships, sometimes with powerful nodes in the organization: they're often informal "right-hand humans" of organizational leaders.

These "outliers" need help forming multiple, loose connections across the system. They also need access to knowledge systems and increased care and connection that will keep them from burning out. They need to be invited into conversations about change and be empowered to experiment in safe-to-fail ways to improve things they see as problematic.

Our team met a handful of outliers. Their suggestions are some of the most valuable we received and are woven into our recommendations. How much good might they do, long after this report is forgotten, if they're brought into the right relationships?

One more important thread: In human systems where "whiteness" or "Minnesota Nice" is the dominant culture, "outliers" are often BIPOC, LGBTQI+, and disabled people. Equity and inclusion efforts must keep network theory in mind if they are to enact real, lasting change—by connecting important, non-dominant perspectives to nodes of influence of the kind Vera writes about in *Equity & Justice*.

By thinking in these terms, changemakers in the City can begin to improve their system in small ways, just by shaping their networks and building caring connections. The City must shift its worldview away from merely "how things get done," to "how everyone gets what they need." And the only way that happens is by prioritizing caring, empathetic relationships within and between the offices of government. If the City wants to care for its customers, it must itself embody that same care. Meanwhile, it can win the struggle for employee retention, too.

PROJECT CONSTRAINTS

Any study, whether quantitative or qualitative, takes place within a particular time and place. A study is a snapshot, described through the experiential lens of its researcher and analyzed within a particular philosophical framework. The team employed best practices where possible, including diversifying the study team and seeking the most diverse set of respondents we could. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some previously held best practices were no longer available to us in the field of community and employee engagement, including in-person meetings, sitting in on processes, and informal office visits. With this in mind, we humbly submit our recommendations.

Recommendations

After considering the quantitative data, the stories and experiences of City staff alongside customers and constituents, and considering archetypal experiences and systemic factors, we developed recommendations for City officials, leaders, and staff. In every case, we revisited improvements suggested by all respondents, paying particular attention to customers, constituents, and Call Center staff—as this relational interface is key to systemic change. We make the following recommendations:

DETAILED ANALYSIS

1. PRIORITIZE THE HEALTH, HEARTS, AND MINDS OF FRONTLINE STAFF

Ideally, the best service is accomplished by open, curious, and empathetic staff who are empowered regularly to address unfair situations and systemic inequities. Right now, Call Center and Help Desk staff throughout the City field a massive number of calls, emails, and forms—never knowing what kinds of concerns they'll hear on a minute-by-minute basis. Combined with business processes neither designed for equity nor the kinds of trauma that can come through these channels, staff experience secondary trauma without many opportunities for processing and releasing it. **While the City allows for limited mental health support, it does not match the level of need.** (See Equity & Justice.)

Several times in this study, frontline staff shared the elevated levels of stress they experience, with many asking for support for themselves or their colleagues. Library staff shared that they were incredibly lucky to have a social worker on staff, with whom they could process emotions and receive instruction on healthy boundary-setting and recovery. The social worker shared that she provided some training for some of the Mayor's staff, as well. Without increasing the burden on her, these efforts need to be scaled up—perhaps with a mechanism created by Council or the Mayor for shared funding of citywide social workers to provide support and training wherever needed. Alternatively, a new Office of Neighborhood Safety may be the right home for such support, as long as the funding structure enables inter-departmental utilization, eliminating the need for tricky, negotiated billbacks.

In addition to mental-health support and training, **supervisors and city leaders should focus professional development funds in customer-service training** for every City staff member who answers public-facing phone, email, texts, or social media. In particular, new and existing Council and Mayoral staff need training and resources on City structures and processes, so they can improve and stay up to date on their capability to refer customers and constituents to the proper divisions and roles. Creative solutions might include inviting high-performing customer-service staff to provide detailed input on training modules created by consultants. Any such trainings must include skill-building in greeting, active listening, and asking questions in a structured way to get the proper level of detail for response. In no way should scripts or recordings of customer service calls be used to overly constrain, disempower, or limit the creativity of frontline staff, as these approaches would not be coherent with the culture and values of the City of Saint Paul.

Multiple staff shared their frustration that recent turnover, staff cuts, and the website overhaul have left them disconnected and uninformed on role and staff changes across the City. City leaders and Human Resources must provide support to update internal staff directories and make them easily accessible to all customer-facing staff. The Office of Technology must be empowered and resourced to create or update secure and appropriate data-sharing and search protocols for this effort — perhaps through Outlook or password-protected webpages via stpaul.gov. An updated system could be useful in improving phone trees and public-facing directories as the website and its subpages continue to be improved. Most importantly, Public Information Officers, their corollaries, and key staff must be identified as primary contacts for customer and constituent service within each division. Divisions should also provide secondary contacts for filling in during staff vacations, leave, turnover,

or illnesses, so that customer questions and complaints are saved from the "abyss" that study respondents so often mentioned.

Finally, while the City may not be able to add additional frontline staff, **Human Resources should consider increasing its emphasis on customer service and second-language skills for** *anyone* **applying to the City.** Many respondents—particularly those from immigrant communities--shared that their best contacts were often staff who did not have a formal front-line position, like a street crew member from Public Works or a neighbor who works on a program within PED. Generally increasing this skill base across the City could make a surprising difference to improve service in the years ahead (see Recommendation 7).

PRIORITIZE THE HEALTH, HEARTS, AND MINDS OF FRONTLINE STAFF:
- Crisis Interventions
  - Provide short, on-demand mental health support for individuals and teams.
  - Provide yearly training on self-care and boundary setting.
- Quick wins
  - Create a comprehensive staff directory for internal use, noting primary and secondary contacts
- Things to Try
  - Provide regular training on customer service: greeting, active listening, structured questions
  - Consider peer training and support for customer service
- Power Plays
  - Consider hiring more social workers for staff and community needs.
  - Increase individual allowance for continued mental health support.
  - As systems build their tracking capabilities:
    - Encourage qualitative targets for service resolution.
    - Discourage quantitative targets for service resolution.
  - Emphasize customer-service experience and language skills for new hires

2. SHIFT THE CITY'S IDENTITY NARRATIVES

A great many respondents within the City referred to systemic issues with exasperated sighs or stalwart insistence: "That's the way the system works." Community respondents heard this loud and clear from City staff, sharing that they were glad when they could just get someone to level with them when "the system" just wasn't built for solving their problem. This self-image must shift from the embedded narrative—that City staff are always pushing, prodding, or gaming "the system"—to "We ARE the system." City officials, Department Directors, division and program leaders must all confront this narrative wherever it arises, seeking opportunities to shift language, business practices, and relationships away from a learned helplessness to a collective sense of empowerment. **Look for opportunities to deemphasize the culture of heroism and "go-to people" and emphasize teamwork and small efforts that add up to collective impact.** Not only will these shifts be effective in improving service; it's also interculturally competent (see Recommendation 6).

Nowhere is shifting the narrative toward empowerment more important than in exploring ways to connect staff across departments in empathetic, mission-driven relationships. Aligning business processes and values around customer and constituent service can emerge when staff can try out attractive possibilities that fit their contexts (see Recommendation 5 and Recommendation 9). Safe-to-fail experiments, small and large, don't always work, but trial-and-error can build a sense that "We are one City" in which everyone has the power and connections to change things for the better.

Another narrative in need of a citywide conversation: The role of customer and constituent service. Is it education, concierge service, advocacy, justification, enforcement, or something else? Different departments, divisions, or city officials might see their role differently, but **self- awareness and communication about their assumption—to the public and City staff—are vital to the image and integrity of the City as a whole.** Furthermore, what is the City's service role overall? Is it constant, or

does it change with administrations? Whatever the answer, the City's Call Center staff must buy into that assumption (see Recommendation 2).

SHIFT THE CITY'S INDENTITY NARRATIVES:
- Quick wins
  - Repeat and lead others in repeating:
    - "We are subject to the system." → "We ARE the system."
    - Learned Helplessness → Collective Empowerment.
    - Individual Heroism → Teamwork.
    - Big Changes → Small Efforts.
- Things to Try
  - Encourage inter-departmental relationships.
  - Identify and make explicit existing customer-service archetypes among staff.
  - Start conversations about these archetypes.
  - Study and discuss user archetypes at all levels of staff.
- Power Plays
  - Incorporate user archetypes into peer coaching and training for customer-facing staff.
  - Come to consensus about the preferred customer-service archetype within each Division or Department.
  - Encourage safe-to-fail experiments.
  - Realign business processes around emerging behaviors.

3. ESTABLISH UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SERVICE WHILE BUILDING POLITICAL EFFICACY

Universal access isn't merely about making services multilingual and accessible to hearing-, sight-, and physically impaired individuals. It's about making sure that the "implicit rules" of a system are made explicit, and that they are communicated clearly and thoughtfully. **The best customer and constituent service also strives not merely for access, but for hospitality and empowerment.** The message is, "Welcome to our home. I'm so glad you're here. Did you have any trouble getting here? …Please take your shoes off. Glasses are in the cupboard over there. Beverages are in the refrigerator. Make yourself comfortable and let me know if I can help you with anything."

City departments, like the many rooms of a house, might need different directions or have different rules. But the more they can echo one another in acknowledging and communicating those differences, the more accessible they are enabled to become. Strengthening accessibility to the public has the added benefit of enabling inter-department coordination, where City staff can get the answers they need when finding their own way around the City and building relationships across departments. Not only must departments explicitly and clearly explain not only their business processes, but also their essential customer-service tasks. Basic questions need clear answers. A prime example, what is the difference between a license, a permit, and a certificate? Do different departments offer a mix of those three things? Customers and constituents often use those terms interchangeably, where City staff understand them to be quite different.

One, counter-intuitive example: Public Works. On the website, no department is more up-front about how to approach their different divisions. They provide a detailed service directory with both a multi-use hotline that has a phone tree; and they provide direct access numbers to specific tasks within the department. Yet they were the primary department named by City staff and our community respondents as "passing people around." In many ways, our team wondered if this kind of broad openness was creating more problems than it solves.

Access to effective service in the City of Saint Paul is inequitable. Across the board, respondents in the community and among City staff emphasized that the chances of getting to a person who can solve a customer's issue in a timely fashion massively increase when the customer has an existing relationship in the departments who can address the issue. It's a game of connections. While Main Line staff are knowledgeable and provide helpful referrals, they admitted that customers and

constituents do get passed around, and our findings revealed that the public isn't always able to clarify their issue to get them the most appropriate referral the first time. They need a great deal of help, plus trial-and-error. Even issues that may seem simple to the public are complicated to explain to Main Line staff for proper routing. We shared tree maintenance as a prime example of this dynamic in Citywide Themes.

City leaders should therefore invest time, energy, and budgets into **defining their business processes and finding clear ways to communicate service access points**. Such work would enable possibilities like:

- a well-publicized hotline with a phone tree for every department—DSI in particular
- system- and service-specific infographics, translatable into multiple languages
- informal explainer videos featuring City staff who speak languages other than English— particularly helpful for oral-language cultures and building hospitality to recent immigrants and refugees
- formal, animated explainer videos, translatable into multiple languages
- external marketing campaigns that champion City services and service staff
- community engagement events that feature tips for engaging and influencing City services
- facilitating multi-department service requests for customers, constituents, and the City staff who refer them
- supporting OTC's service hubs strategy, which seeks to make the website easier to navigate
- easier employee onboarding with updated training materials
- easier onboarding for political appointees
- department- and city-wide processes that envision even greater access for ALL
- smartphone applications and social media connectivity

The City wastes an untold amount of staff and community members' time going about its business without defining and communicating its processes clearly. All that guessing, second-guessing, repeated questions, and drama over misunderstandings adds up (see Process Improvement). The investment will pay for itself in catalytic fashion. Of all the possible approaches, we now detail the cornerstone approaches to increasing customer and constituent access to equitable service.

Service Workflows
Each department within the City must begin creating customer service workflows for their top 10 service issues, from intake to closure. Start with issues that tend to be passed between departments or levels of government. Then, create integrated customer-service references for each, aiming for visual aids and a Flesch-Kinkaid score of 8 or lower[7] to improve access for all and be more easily translated into other languages. Just as importantly, in cases where difficult issues may need to be elevated, include these second-level responses in the reference document. Finally, these references must be easy to find on the website—through both the "I Want To" menu and the search bar, at a minimum.

Knowledge Management
These efforts can evolve into an easily translated, citywide FAQ for the public and internal staff, with some ability for the City to move the most-asked questions to the top on a regular basis. In alignment with OTC's Service Hubs Strategy this responsibility could fall under their governance, under the Mayor's Office, or under the hub-and-spoke office proposed in Recommendation 6. In all cases, guidance from PIOs in each department would be vital. Creating these plain-language resources could be a cheap, effective, and emergent way to build a knowledge-management system that is compatible across departments.

Social Media
Another layer to clarifying access: City staff—particularly officials and PIOs—need to be cautious about equitable use of social media channels: Right now, only the most privileged users are likely to

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[7] This "grade 8" level of reading ease greatly increases understanding by those unfamiliar with government and sets up materials for easier translation by online services such as Google Translate.

get the quickest response on social media. One example is Twitter, which largely serves in-the-know individuals who tag "just the right people" in departments, presenting followers with compelling photos designed to apply public-relations pressure to resolve issues quickly. On the other hand, customer and constituent messaging via Facebook—a far more accessible platform for mass use-- tends to overwhelm City staff with vague requests that are more difficult to resolve and multiple comment topics that disperse any public-relations pressure to resolve any of them. It is vital for City staff to use care in selecting the channels they use, how they use them, and how to promote equity when it comes to accessing City services via social media.

The Role of Officials
City officials should consider leveling with the public: *Councilmembers and the Mayor should be the second point of contact for most customer-service issues.* While it is attractive to City officials to be accessible to constituents on all things, it squanders leaders' time on day-to-day issues. Moreover, it creates an unhealthy, sometimes inequitable dependency dynamic: Customers and constituents fail to internalize and take ownership of their own government's processes; and the City's customer service staff fail to rise to the challenge of building internal motivation and accountability systems without being praised or "called out" by officials.

Many times in our study, respondents spoke about a family-systems dynamic in the City—whereby officials were "Mom and Dad," customers were the City's favored children, and City staff were less-favored children who weren't pulling their weight. Accordingly, Departments spoke about one another in such a way that echoed a dynamic of sibling rivalry. Successful organizations do not work this way. It is past time to change this story. City officials and staff need to re-frame how they think about and talk about one another's role in the system, and City officials are poised to lead this shift.

Additionally, the City's website includes information about the Deputy Mayor who "manages the daily operations of Saint Paul's government, including its fourteen departments, and more than 3,000 employees." Yet no one with whom we engaged across the system referenced this position, this person, or her work. From an organizational development perspective, this position could be instrumental in efforts to improve constituent and customer services.

ESTABLISH UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SERVICE WHILE BUILDING POLITICAL EFFICACY
- Crisis Interventions
  - Consider equity in social media practices.
- Quick wins
  - Budget for staff time to define business processes.
    - Begin with "Top 10" service workflows.
  - Budget for staff time to share business processes with other divisions and departments.
  - Empower staff to be the first layer of customer service; not officials.
- Things to Try
  - Establish a citywide FAQ as a first step in increased knowledge management.
    - This can start as an internal document.
    - This could grow into an external document.
- Power Plays
  - Strive for hospitality, not merely access.
  - Make business processes explicit.
  - Budget for staff time to share business processes with the public.
    - Choose compelling and diverse methods for sharing business processes.
  - Watch for opportunities to participate in the ongoing Service Hubs project hosted by OTC.
  - Reorganize staff in the Mayor's Office to lead improvements in service.

4. CREATE CONDITIONS TO SHARE TRACKING BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS AND WITH THE PUBLIC

While it is tempting for our firm or City leaders to define sweeping, centralized solutions to tracking service requests, they would be disastrous. With such divergent practices across departments, divisions, and offices—compounded by complicated legal and privacy issues—we advocate for more relational, complexity-informed, emergent strategies—strengthened by leadership and creativity—from every level of the City's hierarchy.

Right now, each department owns their customer and constituent service data. Sometimes it exists on staff spreadsheets—either used for personal reference or shared with trusted team members. Other times, data exists within complicated databases like AMANDA in DSI or ACTIVE Net in Parks. In some cases, the data is shared in a complicated relationship between public and private entities, like Public Works' Garbage Line forms and spreadsheets, in parallel with haulers' service systems.

Making any move on tracking service in such a complex system citywide is risky. At worst, historic data could be lost, corrupted, or leaked, violating confidentiality or legal requirements. More likely, that data would be misunderstood across divisions unless staff invested considerable time translating and aligning it.

However, the value of tracking customer service requests—particularly in a way that customers can access in a public portal—is an industry-wide best practice in the private sector. Public frustration with government can only grow if the City continues to avoid customer-support features they enjoy everywhere else. City staff could also benefit from tracking features by saving them time with follow-up calls and being able to track, celebrate, and improve their closures of service requests.

As a conservative approach, we recommend the City begin to explore blocks to consistent upkeep and sharing of customer-service tracking data within divisions first. Building on defined workflows as described in Recommendation 3, divisions could begin small changes over a year or two, to align their tracking data and terminology with other divisions within their departments. Within the next 3-5 years, greater alignment could be explored between departments.

As a bolder approach, we recommend division leaders explore the current Zendesk software pilot in Public Works and investigate whether this tool, or something like it, would align with their needs. Just as importantly, division leaders should consider whether this is the time to make any long-awaited business-process improvements to align with customer-service tracking software like Zendesk. No software is poised to fit precisely into an organization's workflow; however, most commercially available software can meet organizations halfway. Leaders keeping an open mind about what must be static and can be changed is key; often, as the pandemic has shown us, much of what we assume is static turns out to have been changeable under the right conditions.

Much of the City's most specialized software can and should never be centralized or phased out—particularly those that track quasi-judicial, legal, or compliance matters. But basic customer service software can align with much of these tools. **The goal is not centralization for efficiency's sake. It is centralization, where appropriate, and over time, as systems prove themselves** (see Recommendation 10).

CREATE CONDITIONS TO SHARE TRACKING BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS AND WITH THE PUBLIC
- Quick wins
  - Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, **within divisions**.
  - Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, **within departments**.
- Things to Try
  - Remove one block and see what happens.
  - Dial up the experiment if it's working, dial it down if it's not.
  - Pilot customer-service tracking software within divisions; then departments.
- Power Plays
  - Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, **between departments**.

- o Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, **between departments and officials.**
- o Identify blocks to sharing service requests **externally**, between the City and the public.
- o For any block, start frank conversations about the ways staff *participate in keeping the block in place.*
- o Leaders explore alignment of business processes with tracking software.
- o Leaders watch for alignment around software solutions that could work across departments (see Recommendation 10).

5. EMPOWER MAIN-LINE STAFF TO CLOSE REQUESTS

According to recent numbers, a Call Center staff member for Saint Paul's Main Line handles roughly 100+ calls per day. That's about 12.5 calls per hour, or a call for every five minutes. In the Parks Call Center, staff can expect to handle about 2/3 of that; if SPRWS, 1/3 of that. Of course, Parks and SPRWS have many other duties around billing, messaging, planning, etc. But Main Line staff also handle emails and website forms, and staff must use multiple systems for data entry and research, including a highly technical legacy database system—which they'll soon have to migrate to a new one.

Study respondents shared an awareness that the City attempts to do a lot of work with fewer and fewer resources. But to do that in any kind of sustainable way, **Call Center staff, their supervisors, and their directors all need the freedom to experiment—even to the point of influencing standards and metrics of customer service within their context—then influence customer expectations to fit with those standards.** The private-industry standard of 6 minutes per call[8] is not appropriate for navigating government and its complexities, particularly for a City whose culture prides itself on personal, informal service. Giving staff the time to process particularly difficult calls needs to factor in as well (see Recommendation 1).

But it's about balance. Staff need time to answer and respond with care. They also need time to enter data, resolve issues, and follow up with customers and constituents. Right now, staffing and intake is so onerous that following up with customers seems impossible. Our team grew to suspect that the logic of automatic anonymity of callers to the Main Line might be serving a triple purpose: 1) helping potential "violators" feel safe asking questions; 2) helping "reporters" feel safe from retribution, and 3) creating an effective workaround for having to follow up with callers. The first two are often proper; the third is not. (See Recommendation 8.) Furthermore, at the risk of adding more demand to an already stressed resource, multiple City staff and community respondents made their desire clear: The City **must** look for ways to take the responsibility for resolving issues off the backs of submitters.

The City's Main Line staff should gather alongside other frontline staff—such as Library Helpdesk, Parks Call Center, Public Works hotlines, and Mayor's Office and Council administrative staff—to **host a visioning process that includes a more equitable mission and plan to better serve everyone.** Those used to strategy and leadership should lead by stepping back, paying special attention to the words of frontline staff. Ask staff what *they* see as solutions before adding to the conversation.

We identified numerous possibilities for seeding this brainstorming. **Any of the following actions could be a catalyst for increasing service equity and closing requests.** Many of these ideas come directly from Main Line Call Center staff, and some are further detailed in Recommendation 7. Possibilities include:
- Clarify job descriptions and expectations around customer service, not only for frontline staff, but for their supervisors, division managers, inspectors, and department leaders.
- Prioritize solving customer problems over imposing penalties—both for submitters of complaints and for those who need to come into compliance.

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[8] According to Zendesk.com and Call Centre Magazine, the industry standard for average handling time (AHT) is 6 minutes and 10 seconds. This includes total talk time, total hold time, and follow up. Number of calls handled is also considered.

- Cut intake hours to follow up on and close requests.
- Experiment with dividing intake employees in half and have one team receive calls and the other answer the calls. Match each with a person from the opposite team and have them accountable to one another for achieving some sort of reward. This approach is being informally applied now; more formal experiments might yield more substantive, actionable data to change approaches to service.
- Provide 360° reviews for inspectors that include input from Call Center staff, to increase accountability.
- Consider a customer complaints-intake system that allows for photo submission via online form or software application.
- Greenlight and budget for a customer- and/or knowledge-management system for Call Center workers. Take another look at OpenGov before it fully replaces AMANDA to make sure it has features that staff need to be successful.
- Create and maintain a user-friendly, interactive online public portal for customers to follow up on complaints. Make it compatible with smart phones and use clear, jargon-free language to describe outcomes. Consider adding image-upload capability for field staff to document closure.
- Give Call Center staff time to funnel their knowledge into an online FAQ for the public and other City staff to reference, with the most-asked questions continuously bumped to the top. Make this easy to update. Contract with a professional writer and/or graphic designer who specializes in accessibility for the best result. These materials already exist; give staff time to share this material, even if it means outsourcing Main Line calls for a time—perhaps to Council administration staff during a low-demand period.
- Involve high-performing Main Line staff in training other City departments' customer service staff and compensate them accordingly.
- Invest in internal and external messaging that the Main Line is "not a dumping ground, but a referral service," as one Call Center staff shared.
- Have Council and other departments' staff sit in on the Main Line Call Centers as part of their training, in order to provide secure backup "go-to" people for customers across the City.
- Consider creating a phone tree for DSI, akin to Public Works, to streamline Main Line intake.
- Budget for additional Main Line staff.

EMPOWER MAIN-LINE STAFF TO CLOSE REQUESTS
- Quick wins
  - Keep Saint Paul's informal tone.
- Things to Try
  - Initiate follow-up on customer-service requests; keep track of what happens.
  - Envision and experiment with actions that establish practices for closing service requests.
  - Envision and experiment with actions that lower the daily burden of service-request intake.
  -
- Power Plays
  - Authorize staff to define and apply standards for excellent service.
  - Build in frontline staff time for data entry, follow-up, fostering relationships, and improving the system.
    - Decrease intake hours
    - Increase staffing

6. RELOCATE CITYWIDE CUSTOMER SERVICE

The City's Main Line is housed within the Department of Safety & Inspections, a department well known in the community for being able to inspect homes and properties, fine people, and condemn homes. Of course, it does so much more: Ensuring solid structures, sanitary plumbing, dependable electrical systems, fire safety, elevators that don't have people opting for stairs instead... But many,

many residents fear the inspector. 2020 and 2021 budget presentations by the DSI Director stress a worldview in which many DSI services must attempt to make the department's programs "100% cost recovery" mechanisms. A few constituents we spoke with cited that language and—right or wrong—assumed that when DSI greenlights its Administrative Citation Program, this "self-sustaining" model would apply there, and inequitably fund the department on the backs of low-income, disabled, and BIPOC residents.

As we shared in Recommendation 5, the City's Main Line staff must buy into the City's service role overall, as redefined on occasion by its Mayor. With everyday immersion in the specific context, needs, and rules of DSI, the current Main Line staff are left trying to balance the roles of education, concierge service, advocacy, and justification—while a hand rests comfortably on the enforcement side of the scale. **From an equity perspective, this is a customer service system bound to fail in serving all.**

According to a November 3, 2021, report from the City of Portland, Oregon,

> *The City of Portland enforces an extensive set of rules for how residents should maintain their homes, from overgrown lawns to a pile of pallets in the driveway. It is almost exclusively a complaint-driven system, with neighbors and passersby filing confidential reports that are investigated by City inspectors.*
>
> *The system consistently generates more complaints to the Ombudsman's Office than any other City program. Community members, advisory groups, and City inspectors have all raised concerns about the fairness of a system that can result in heavy fines and burdensome liens on some of Portland's most economically vulnerable property owners. Analysis of the Bureau of Development Services' data confirms there is reason for concern: Complaint-based enforcement disproportionately affects communities of color and neighborhoods vulnerable to gentrification.[9]*

If one replaces the word "Portland" with "Saint Paul," one notices that Saint Paul has neither an Ombudsman nor a comprehensive equity study of enforcement data to ensure that Portland's systemic racism does not apply in Saint Paul. While DSI performed several recent Equity Impact Assessments, few of its own short-term strategies have been implemented in any meaningful way. Not surprisingly, this report's equity-related recommendations mirror the findings of DSI's Code Enforcement Racial Equity Impact Assessment in 2019 (*see sidebar, next page*).

Given the mission of the Department of Inspections and the work it needs to do regarding equity, if the City's goal is to provide equitable service to all, housing the Main Line within this department is inappropriate. **Our team recommends the Main Line for the City's customer service be moved to a more neutral department or office**, such as Public Works, OTC, Libraries, etc.

As a stretch goal, such a system might also be housed in an interdepartmental office with a hub-and-spoke model of governance, in which rotating staff from each department serve alongside seasoned

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[9] "City's Reliance On Complaints for Property Maintenance Enforcement Disproportionately Affects Diverse and Gentrifying Neighborhoods." Nov. 2021, City of Portland, Oregon website, www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/report-and-.pdf.

Call Center staff—inspired by models like the Library's Community Helpdesk and the pandemic Language Line. In this way, department-specific knowledge is more readily available for referral, interdepartmental relationships could form and strengthen, common customer-service culture and logic could take root, and shared funding models could be tested. Many efficiencies and possibilities enabled by Recommendation 3 could also flourish in this environment. Furthermore, such an office could host an ombudsman or mediation program for people who feel they've received poor service or are being targeted by non-emergency enforcement mechanisms. The team suspects such an interdepartmental initiative could empower the Mayor's Office in their administration of the Mayor's vision.

Findings from DSI's 2019 Code Enforcement Racial Equity Impact Assessment

1. *Improve the quality and tone of communications*
   a. *Photos in Correction Orders and all Summary Abatement documents*
   b. *Complete plain language (sic) assessment and implement changes on following documents:*
      i. *Summary Abatement letter*
      ii. *Correction Orders*
      iii. *Tall Grass and Weeds*
      iv. *Snow Walk (sic)*
   c. *Provide informative, non-threatening door hangers educating owners/occupants on conditions that may lead to a violation*
2. *Focus on solutions, not penalties*
   a. *Add 'resources' document to all CE mailings*
   b. *Collaborate with Mayor's Office VISTA program*
      i. *Provide real-time notification to program participates on open CE orders (sic)*
      ii. *Collaborate with Hearts and Hammers and Habitat for Humanity existing assistance programs*
3. *Ensure system is not abused to foster discrimination*
   a. *Develop a system to prevent anonymous complaints from generating excessive and inappropriate notices sent to building owners and occupants*
      i. *AMANDA 'quick hit' will flag third unfounded complaint in a rolling 12 month (sic) period*
      ii. *Complaints generated in the following 24 months would notify Code Enforcement supervisors*
      iii. *Supervisory staff will investigate each complaint before issuing an (sic) notice to correct*

To be clear, **we recommend current Main Line Call Center staff be retained in any case.** It takes two years or more to fully train a citywide Call Center staff member. Their knowledge, passion, and skills are vital to the City. Though one or two current Call Center staff might remain in DSI to coordinate calls for licensing, permitting, and inspections, other Call Center workers might enjoy being part of an interdepartmental model—connected and empowered to broker solutions outside the bounds of a single department's business practices. In addition, most Call Center staff gave high marks to their supervisor, who should also be considered to lead this transition.

RELOCATE CITYWIDE CUSTOMER SERVICE
- Quick wins
  - Invest in a DSI electronic phone directory.
  - Retain and empower current Main Line staff, exploring cross-training possibilities.
  - Retain SPPL's Community Helpdesk staff, exploring cross-training possibilities.
- Things to Try
  - Explore peer coaching and training possibilities hosted by Main Line staff.
  - Explore peer coaching and training possibilities hosted by SPPL's Community Helpdesk staff.
  - Explore an inter-departmental hub-and-spoke Call Center model for the Main Line.
- Power Plays
  - Move the Main Line out of DSI.
  - Study the equity of the City's property enforcement mechanisms.

7. CONTINUE TO DIVERSIFY APPROACHES TO CUSTOMER SERVICE

Interviews with City staff uncovered deep entrenchment within departments around business processes, culture, and assumptions about customer service and engagement. Contrary to widespread belief, silos can be quite effective at managing ordered processes—particularly ones requiring specialization and repeatable processes, such as building a sound roadway or filing and resourcing legal materials. But complex processes—those involving human psychology and social structures, characterized by unpredictability—require a different kind of response, in which silos are detrimental to problem-solving.

Particularly with legal and other constraints, Saint Paul, like any government entity, **must balance both modes of doing business, more than other sectors.** On the one hand, each City department has aspects of its work that must cater to ordered, predictable modes of management and decision-making. On the other hand, anything involving human beings, complexity, unpredictability—or even wicked problems brought on by seismic shifts in culture or technology—calls for some aspects of each department's work to build adaptive capacity.

City staff and officials must invite innovation, experimentation, inter-departmental, and inter-disciplinary insights in ways that are "safe-to-fail." In other words, adaptive capacity should not be about massive, thoughtless, unplanned, or top-town change. Everyday choices that work often find a way to spread through networks of human beings, particularly if they are enabled to communicate openly and take small risks that don't break things while making their lives easier.

City officials, leaders, and frontline staff must imagine and experiment with ways to promote inter-departmental sharing of knowledge and business processes. City leaders can promote this mindset by creating opportunities—in City communications or during special occasions—to share department success stories with other departments. They can look for ways to tap effective people and projects and attempt to echo what works in their own contexts, as well.

Another, equally important way for the City to grow in its adaptive capacity is to **continue seeking out and hiring more staff who are better equipped to represent and understand all of Saint Paul's communities:** particularly those who speak Hmong, Karen, Somali, or Oromo, as well as those from other BIPOC and disability communities. Many study respondents shared that their greatest access to high-quality customer and constituent services is the "go-to person" they know who works in the City. Providing more opportunities for diverse communities to connect with people who may be better equipped to understand their situation, to explain how the City works in their own language, is priceless.

CONTINUE TO DIVERSIFY APPROACHES TO CUSTOMER SERVICE
- Crisis Interventions
  - Ensure the City's customer support system includes front-line staff who speak Hmong.
    - Consider adding staff.
    - Consider special assignments.
- Quick wins
  - Ensure the City's customer support system includes front-line staff who speak other languages in high use in Saint Paul—Spanish, Karen, Somali, Oromo.
    - Focus first on oral-language cultures, and/or those with less written-language proficiency.
    - Consider adding staff.
    - Consider special assignments.
  - Seek out new hires who will improve linguistic and cultural representation of Saint Paul's diverse population.
- Things to Try
  - Emphasize emergent solutions over top-down strategy.
  - Supervisors, Division leaders, PIOs, Department Directors: Share approaches that work to improve customer service.

- Power Plays
  - Leaders: promote different approaches to ordered and complex problems; study Cynefin.
  - Build adaptive capacity throughout the City, at every level, counting the cost of understaffing and overwork.

8. DEEMPHASIZE ANONYMITY; EMPHASIZE ACCOUNTABILITY

Anonymity can be a comforting façade. The City of Saint Paul has shown that it can be highly effective at honoring anonymity when it is legally or ethically necessary. But as we shared in Recommendation 5, the team recommends that the concept and practice of customer and constituent anonymity should be reexamined considering equity concerns, customer needs, and the need for accountability around closure of service requests.

When it comes to equity, anonymous reporting creates a system ripe for racially based harassment. In DSI's own study, they recommended an approach to monitoring for and responding to patterns of harassment. These are a good start. But there are ways to anonymize reporters on the back end of service tracking systems while allowing that data to remain accessible only to users with special permissions—from a division or department, to a few system administrators. In the same way that telecommunications companies are legally bound to provide data when people are harassed or otherwise targeted, the City's legal minds should seriously consider whether anonymizing customer reporting data violates this responsibility.

At the very least, residents should be able to flag their address as a potential target for harassment if they have received multiple complaints. Flagging should entitle a resident to the services of ombudsman or dispute resolution process that is independent of DSI scrutiny. Moreover, anonymous reporting against flagged properties must pause until the resident's harassment report is fully mediated.

As discussed elsewhere, customers increasingly expect a modern service system to track and respond to their reports without their having to follow up. An anonymous reporting system precludes that possibility and undermines the potential for embracing updated business practices and software.

Finally, a great many respondents within the community and the City shared that **anonymous reporting, coupled with no need for follow-up to a customer, decreases accountability for City staff in completing their tasks**. While City workers we talked to came across as highly competent, honest, and caring, the fact remains that humans do better when they experience accountability. Being able to better track and report closure helps divisions and Call Centers be able to evaluate and improve individual and team performance on customer and constituent service.

DEEMPHASIZE ANONYMITY; EMPHASIZE ACCOUNTABILITY
- Crisis Interventions
  - Create a way for residents to flag their own property for harassment watch.
  - Require self-identification when reporting on flagged properties while securing that data.
- Quick wins
  - When referring customers and constituents to other divisions, provide the following:
    - The phone number
    - An email address
    - The name of the person
    - The role of the person
    - A backup contact if the customer or constituent doesn't hear back within 2-3 business days
  - Record assigned persons to referrals in notes area of tracking software or spreadsheet.

- Things to Try
  - Aim to close 10% of customer requests via MS Forms, where customers and constituents have already disclosed their identities, keeping track of results. Dial up the experiment if it's working; dial it down if it's not.
  - Explore ways to anonymize at customer request only.
- Power Plays
  - Reevaluate the rewards of accountability against the risks of anonymity.
  - Explore ways to record customer data and keep it private.
  - Perform a legal risk assessment to the City for allowing anonymous reporting.

9. REWARD CONNECTIVITY AND CURIOSITY

As City staff build care, unity, connection, clarity, and accountability, they should be rewarded for those efforts. This study did not engage with the Human Resources Department. At the risk of displaying our ignorance about efforts already underway there, we humbly suggest Human Resources consider including employee rewards and basing promotions on connectivity and curiosity.

Connectivity
Every recommendation in this report depends on staff being able to move away from a heroic, individualistic, and self-protective mindset into a more cooperative, connected one. Is there a way for Human Resources and division leaders to evaluate staff based a little less on individual performance and a little more on team performance? Is there a way to evaluate leadership potential based upon the number of people who mention a connection to that staff member as a valuable one? Network mapping software is an emerging tool that might be a valuable enabler for Human Resource professionals—or any City leader—who are looking for new ways to build connections within and between departments.

Curiosity
Every recommendation in this report also depends on staff being able to move away from a stoic, static, certainty-based mindset into a more open, exploratory one. Is there a way for Human Resources and division leaders to evaluate staff based a little less on repeatable skills and a little more on solution-seeking? Is there a way to evaluate leadership potential based upon the questions a staff member has spurred their division or department to answer together?

21st Century government leaders are emerging now, and making sure that Saint Paul is set to capitalize on the talents and worldview of a new generation depends on responding to trends in what makes a good employee. Our best hopes are with the City as it moves forward.

REWARD CONNECTIVITY AND CURIOSITY
- Quick wins
  - Add performance indicators that reward practical problem-solving.
  - Add performance indicators that reward experimenting with process improvement.
- Things to Try
  - Add performance indicators that reward inter-departmental influence and connectedness.
  - Evaluate team performance alongside individual performance.
- Power Plays
  - Work with mapping software to identify "solo fliers," "collective players," and outliers.
  - Use formal or informal network mapping to introduce or strengthen strategic connections between staff.

10. WATCH FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO ALIGN BUSINESS PRACTICES WITH HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER-SERVICE TECHNOLOGY

City leaders must stay current on available customer-service technologies for cities and municipalities. For officials, Department Directors, Division Managers, and PIOs, it is not enough to rely on the current Innovation Officer or Director of OTC; they must keep one other informed and in conversation about tech. Leaders can take advantage of their increased contact through cooperative efforts currently underway—like website optimization, Zendesk pilots, the event planning Service Hub—to visit and revisit industry trends and software possibilities.

First, two things that cannot wait: **The City cannot work quickly enough to improve its stpaul.gov search engine—as well as its Search Engine Optimization practices—to help customers and constituents navigate City services.** Division leaders must lead the charge in hunting down dated web content and dead links to update and remove them. PIOs and web content creators across the City must double their efforts to properly tag existing and updated content so that search engines can more easily find pages.

Next, some things that can wait...but only a while: In the same way yesterday's leaders celebrated automated phone systems, the fax machine, or computer networking, **today's leaders need to engage the newest software and platforms for improving the lives of staff and the public.** Too often, leaders assume they cannot understand applications and capabilities without a specialized degree; this is misguided and threatens to keep government stuck in the pre-Internet age. Though staff must always be wary of over-selling by software companies, plenty of third-party explainers exist.

The two biggest traps for leaders: 1) Maverick behavior that fizzles, wasting time and taxpayer dollars, and 2) Demanding that software platforms conform perfectly to existing business processes, rather than leveraging software to improve them. As one staff shared, "It's really about finding engaged leadership, even if they have concerns: Engaged to solve problems (and not assume) technology is going to be able to be overly customized in order to support their exact process and not change."

A prime example: An elected official or new hire steps into an office and demands everyone switch to a new, shiny platform, or one that they loved in their last position—without regard to existing business processes and the historic and present contexts holding them in place. Otherwise, staff will not feel respected for their wisdom. Instead, they may resist adopting the technology in a meaningful way—using only a tiny fraction of its capabilities—while relying secretly on that Excel spreadsheet in their desktop folder. Unused software that other offices don't want to adopt is an expensive mistake.

Instead, leaders must stay in conversation and work together to try new things. They must have already assisted their staff to define and unpack their business practices, getting their input on process improvement tweaks and overhauls (see Recommendation 5). They will have sought out their Division Managers, supervisors, and highly influential staff who can champion those changes. **Leaders must patiently observe, assess, and form the relationships necessary to champion innovative ideas for process improvement first.** Only then should leaders use tech wisdom to assess a move in the next wise direction. Within these enabling constraints, a software pilot can be an effective gauge of whether to adopt a system—and all the tweaks and overhauls in business processes that may need to occur. Adopting software only to expect fancy backend programming (APIs) that cater to the status quo is another expensive mistake.

WATCH FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO ALIGN BUSINESS PRACTICES WITH HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER-SERVICE TECHNOLOGY
- Quick wins
    - Hunt down and remove dated web content and subpages.
    - Update subpages
    - Explore buttons and links that connect users back to primary and secondary content on subpages.

- Things to Try
    - Tag all updated content for optimal searchability.
    - Investigate and work with OTC to pilot customer-service software like Zendesk.
    - Talk to colleagues in other Departments or Divisions about their software.
    - Create a learning community around technologies that cater to the City's context.
- Power Plays
    - Work with other Departments or Sections to align customer service tracking and terminology
    - Work with other Departments or Sections to align customer service technologies— either through the same software or APIs
    - Pay attention to trends and features in customer-service technology.
    - Shape conditions that enable successful innovation.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Accounting for the scope of this study and other constraints the team encountered and shared, we recommend further study of the following—either by department teams, City officials, or their consultants.

STRENGTHEN AND DIVERSIFY THE DISTRICT COUNCIL SYSTEM TO IMPROVE SERVICE AND BUILD JUSTICE

The number and variety of formats for city information across departments puts an undue burden on customers and constituents to keep up with city news on programs, projects, and engagement opportunities. The complexity can make residents feel like the City is trying to "get away with things" or bypass engagement steps. District Councils can be the only way that people hear about things that go on, and some feel their importance is being neglected.

From our community outreach, District Councils came up a few times:
- District Councils staff shared that they play a significant role in helping people find the right person in the City; that they make the "customer service connection."
- District Councils staff build relationships with highly effective "go-to people" in the City, making sure that their district doesn't go unheard or forgotten when changes take place.
- District Councils staff feel underutilized by the City on their capacity for working relationally with households.
- Some District Councils staff shared frustration that the protracted process they participated in with DSI on building equity was ignored, and that this kind of service to the City needs to be properly utilized.
- District Councils staff shared that they were rarely thanked for raising visibility on critical issues.
- A few community respondents shared that they reach out to their District Council if they "don't have luck with a call."
- One community respondent found her District Council particularly unhelpful: "Our district council is not a good option for resolving routine issues with the City," concerned that the Council was too involved in advocating for highly political ends.
- One business representative shared that they would approach their District Council first for an issue they were having.
- No BIPOC respondents shared anything about their District Council.

Our team is aware that the District Council system has its challenges, particularly when it comes to representation of renter, BIPOC, immigrant, refugee, and low-income households. In Recommendation 7, we shared the need for City staff to diversify its methods and staff. Here, we also recommend more study be done to these ends with the District Council system, asking the questions:

- What is the purpose of District Councils, particularly regarding their role in customer and constituent service?
- How might District Councils be held to higher accountability for the customer and constituent service aspects of their mission?
- What is the role of community advocacy in the District Council system, and what is its relationship to its customer and constituent service role?
- What customer and constituent services might the City be able to outsource to District Councils, and what financial and human resources would be required for such an effort?
- How might District Councils be more functionally representative of the communities they are tasked to represent, without tokenizing nor micro-aggressing new Board members and staff from historically marginalized communities?
- Might a citywide BIPOC and Disabled Council—with the powers, privileges, and funding mechanisms of place-based Councils—be an effective way to create a more representative system? Might a new Rondo Council serve such a function? How might this align with or replace City Commissions?

BUILD INTERNAL CAPACITY TO ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

In our community engagement, several respondents were over- or under-whelmed by outreach from the City. We heard that the City is "all over the place with communications." With stpaul.gov, Legistar, Open Information, Open Budget, Engage Saint Paul, social media, news releases, copious newsletters, etc., no one could keep up—particularly when it comes to getting City events on their calendars. The pandemic launch of the City's amalgamated newsletter and Engage Saint Paul's recent campaign about the Summit Avenue redesign are welcome resources for constituents, but our sense was that technological and engagement expertise are sorely needed in many departments. One PIO we spoke with shared, "My concern is, are we getting that message out there well?"

Engagestpaul.org needs more support citywide. The public portal shows a lot of promise, but without a coordinated public information campaign about how to use it, the platform invites cynicism. As part of our study, we joined the Online Community and Share Your Idea spaces, but we received only an automated message and experienced no engagement with fellow users. Successful administration of the City's Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design campaign was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, yet its page still seems to invite ideas, without clarity about what happened. The site needs some sort of coordinated governance over content if it is to be perceived as legitimate.

Effective community engagement is a process of constant experimentation; sometimes efforts fail to reach people; other times, they're wildly successful. In the spirit of Recommendation 7, we suggest the City study ways to internally communicate successes and challenges for community outreach and engagement, so that staff who try new things receive recognition for their bravery, and they can share their enthusiasm, skills, and hard-won learnings with others. Moreover, the City needs to create dialogue among PIOs and other leaders about circling back with communities to update them and making sure tools like engagestpaul.org reflect that. In this way, effective approaches for engaging Saint Paul residents can spread with less fear and more empowerment and confidence that the City is indeed listening.

REASSESS ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS SURROUNDING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our team was privileged and honored to perform this study for the City of Saint Paul. We struggled, however, to maintain our integrity around community engagement with some of the legal strictures within the City's policies and procedures.

Currently, contractors looking to provide translators must also work through third parties approved by the CERT system, rather than use City staff or hire their own subcontractors to do that work. In

addition, the City does not allow its funds to be directed toward provision of food, beverages—or in the case of COVID—gift cards for community participants in outreach. It also does not allow stipends or lump-sums to be provided to organizations for their assistance in connecting the City with community participants; instead, it only allows for reimbursement of staff hours, which must be documented in detail. Such arrangements are confusing and bothersome for most small nonprofits, whose relationships in communities are the result of deep investments of time and money over the long haul, and whose staff already work within and often beyond their capacity. Lump-sum payments and stipends—including ones to community nonprofits and District Councils—would allow for more creative approaches that require less paperwork and bureaucracy, and we believe they could be successfully documented and structured to provide the level of accountability the City needs.

These constraints impacted our ability to engage communities within the study's brief time period. Our initial proposal costs included many of these elements, and we were informed only after the contract was rewarded that these items needed to come out of our company coffers and would not be reimbursed. For small firms like Cultivate Strategy, this breaks the bank.

We're in a period of racial reckoning, when BIPOC, low-income, and non-English-speaking respondents are heavily sought after in engagement campaigns. Demands on their time and expertise are increasing, and they often perform the kind of care work in their communities that goes unpaid and unseen. The City should no longer consider their participation a free resource in the way that white, upper-income community members' has historically been. With the City's recent decision to cancel District Council Innovation Grants, the City of Saint Paul has lost a key pathway for experimentation in this direction. The City should study how to renew its leadership role in finding ethical, transparent, and legally appropriate ways to shift City engagement away from favoring the participation of those most able to give their free time.

LEVERAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS TO CUT DOWN ON WASTE

Future contractors with the City of Saint Paul could use the same access improvements and accommodations called for in this study to come up to speed faster on projects requiring their services. Our team struggled to find our footing with City processes overall and within each department studied. Merely finding the proper contacts and understanding their roles and relationships was a challenge that took many, many more hours than is typical in our work with other clients.

Every document, every piece of information we received, were things our team needed to discretely ask for. We were never quite sure we were working with information in the proper context. In this way, our experience of studying service likely mirrored that of customers and constituents. If we—as professionals with a personal City liaison, who spent hours per week speaking with city staff—were still struggling to understand basic City processes after months of work, how much more would an average resident or businessperson? Our recommendations that the City should prioritize documenting their structures, processes, and procedures in plain language will not only serve current and new staff, but also new appointees, contractors, and the public.

Appendix I

Acknowledgements

Cultivate Strategy would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance in this project:

Community respondents
Whether they sat for a 20-minute phone or Zoom interview, participated in a one-hour feedback session, or helped us recruit respondents, their assistance was essential to these findings. We thank them.

City staff respondents
We are grateful to City staff who spent their precious time in a stressful era, investing in improving the system for customers and constituents.

Audit Committee
Thanks go to committee members and community representatives for their thoughtfulness, candor, and warmth throughout the study.

Nhia Vang
City Project Manager for this study
We appreciated Ms. Vang for her vital, detail-oriented stewardship of this project, through timely communications, weekly check-ins, and so much more.

Councilmember Rebecca Noecker and Councilmember Jane Prince
Audit Committee Co-Chairs
Their bravery in rebirthing the work of this important function of City government deserves all our thanks. We wish them and their Council colleagues the best in communicating and using these findings to improve City service.

Appendix II

With a background in youth arts education, community engagement, and volunteer coordination, **Sherry Johnson** (she/her/hers) understands the power of a clear, compelling purpose to lead community and organizational development.

As founder of Cultivate Strategy, Sherry advises nonprofits, public sector leaders, and small businesses in strategy, engagement, and working in complexity. Drawing from her personal experience with a midlife autism diagnosis, she helps clients transform by engaging their intuition, embracing mindfulness, and releasing long-held narratives that have stifled innovation, inclusion, and accessibility.

Sherry is a skilled facilitator, coach, and curriculum designer who currently serves as a Board member of the Summit Hill Association after Co-Chairing the Grand Avenue Neighborhood Task Force. Sherry is a Certified ToP Facilitator, a Qualified ToP Trainer, and a certified facilitator of the Diamond Inclusiveness Assessment™ (DIA) ™. She holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a Master of Education from the University of St. Catherine.
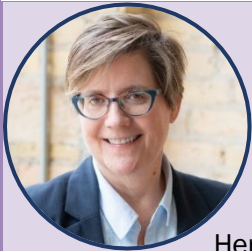
Brigid Riley (she/her/hers) specializes in organization and Board development, strategic planning, small and large group facilitation, and project management. She is a certified Technology of Participation® (ToP®) facilitator and trainer, emphasizing authentic participation by all. Brigid has honed her facilitation practice through extensive work with local, state, and national groups.

Her background includes executive leadership in the nonprofit sector and community-focused public health programs, with special emphasis on reframing how we think and talk about youth, young parents, adolescent sexual health and the concerns of LGBTQ populations.

Ms. Riley Brigid holds an undergraduate degree from the University of St. Catherine, Saint Paul, MN, and a Master of Public Health from the University of Minnesota. She is an alumna of the Policy Fellows program at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs, and the Emerging Leaders Network, a leadership development program of Minnesota public health associations. She received the Betty Hubbard Maternal and Child Health Leadership Award from the Minnesota Department of Health for her work to promote adolescent sexual health for Minnesota youth.

Johnese M. Bostic proudly works to assess the effectiveness of efforts to improve health outcomes and eliminate health disparities, while fostering partnerships on policies, programs, and initiatives to address dimensions of wellness.

As a native of South Carolina, Johnese enjoys volunteering at her church, spending time with family and traveling. She earned her B.A. in Behavioral Science from Columbia College, an Associate Public Manager Certificate through the SC Department of Administration's Human Resources Division, and a Project Management Certificate from the University of South Carolina.

She has over twelve years of experience working with diverse populations, faith-based organizations, non-profits, and other community groups. As a trained Lean Six Sigma Green Belt and Technology of Participation (ToP) Facilitator, Johnese uses design thinking to foster innovative approaches and sustainable change.

She serves as Governing Councilor of Public Health Education and Health Promotion for the American Public Health Association; Past President of the South Carolina Public Health Association; member of the Board of Directors of the Action Council for Cross Cultural Mental Health; and Human Services Ambassador for the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Vera F. Allen is a Black Navajo mother, partner, organizer, and farmer, who moonlights as a media and food system activist. She works as a multimedia designer and strategist for v.Faith Projects Consulting where she creates websites, cultivates marketing strategy, leads brand development and effectively conducts research engagement for data analysis.

Vera is dedicated to problem solving and the importance of research to attain more equitable and sustainable systems for communities at large. She has conducted research projects to do everything from influence movie trailers to collect narratives for the remodeling of public access television for the city of Minneapolis. She enjoys the challenges of designing CRM databases and has done so for companies operating locally and nationally.

Vera spends all winter waiting for the fishing opener and will not turn down peanut butter or watermelon, ever.

Lisa Meredith has been the executive director of a joint power organization for 20 years working with counties and other local government entities to provide software solutions. In her role as Executive Director, she helps members update and implement software solutions, working with vendors, users, department heads, and boards. Lisa also enjoys volunteering as a SCORE mentor.

Lisa has an undergraduate degree in Business and Marketing from the University of Minnesota-Duluth. She also has an MBA with a concentration in nonprofit management and public policy, and a Master's in Leadership with a concentration in facilitation, both from University of Saint Thomas. Lisa is a certified ToP Facilitator (CTF), utilizing the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) Technology of Participation (ToP) methods of facilitation and various other facilitation methods to help individuals and organizations solve problems, plan events, create strategic plans, and find better ways to work together and accomplish goals.

Lisa's message to her clients and members is to *"be audacious";* embrace the audacious acts that incite positive change.

Appendix III

City Approach

Questions asked of all interviewees and Lunch and Learn participants:

1.   Briefly describe the process of how residents share complaints with the city.
2.   What is your role in the process and how do you impact the way situations are handled?
3.   What is working well about the way customer concerns are handled by the city?
4.   What or where are the inefficiencies you feel rest within this process?
5.   What are the reasons for this?
6.   What are the main issues that are of concern to residents?
7.   Who sends you requests from inside city government?
8.   Who do you connect callers to inside city government?
9.   Who or what do you rely on to address the concerns that come into the city?
10.   How are the residents informed that their needs have been met?
11.   How does the city/ your department keep track of the complaints they've addressed?
12.   Given all of this, what suggestions do you have for improving future experiences?
13.   Who else do we need to talk to/hear from?
14.   Anything else?

Appendix IV

Access Points within 3 Clicks Via stpaul.gov:

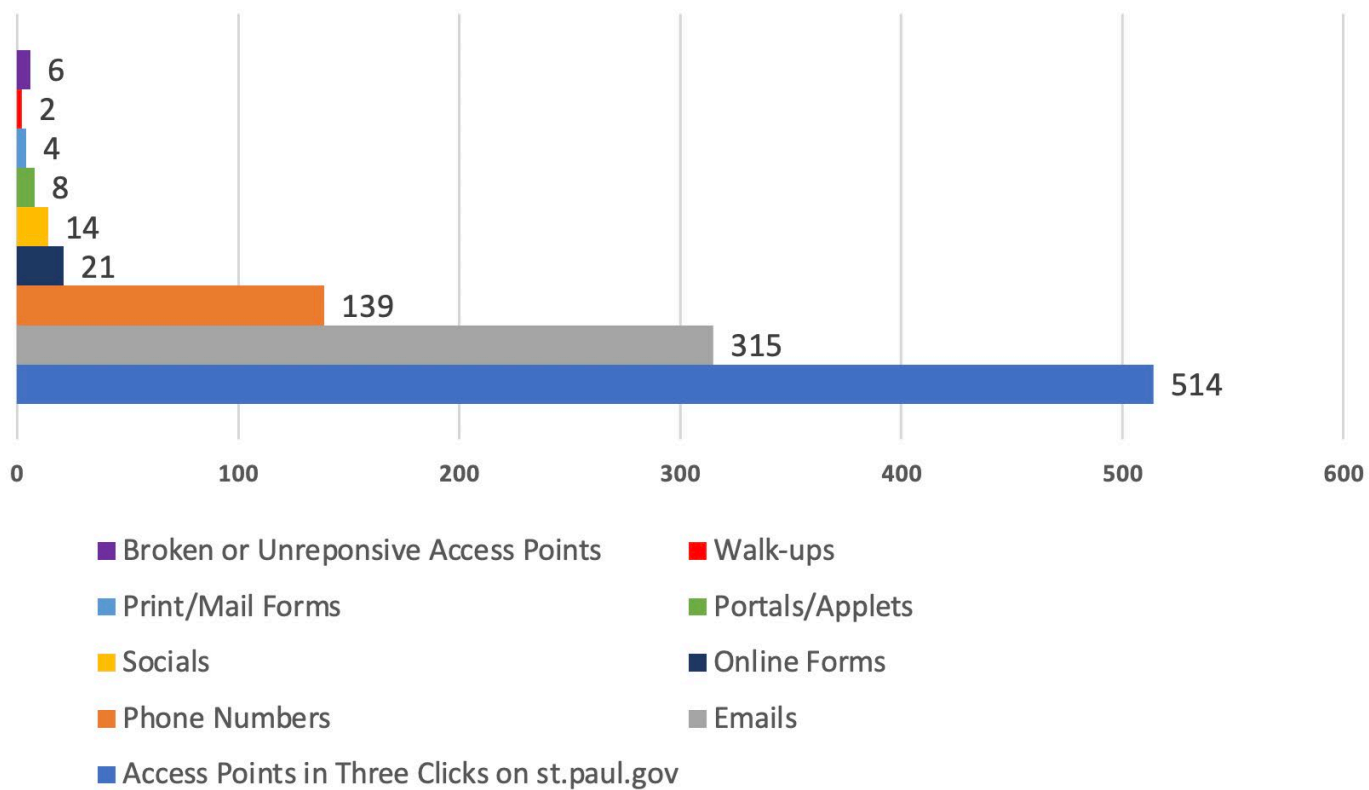| Access Point	Totals
Mayor Admin Contact the Mayor Event Request Form	1
Mayor Admin Contact the Mayor General Contact Form	1
Mayor Admin Contact the Mayor Meeting Request Form	1
Mayor Socials: FB, Insta (Twitter dead)	3
Mayor Office Phone Number On Bottom Of Webpage	1
City Clerk Appeals for Damage PDF	1
City Clerk File for Damage PDF	1
City Clerk Footer	2
City Connect Email List Signup	257
City Directory Phone Numbers	43
CMs Full-Council Email	1
CMs Individual Emails	7
CMs Individual Phone Numbers	7
DSI Business Project Facilitator Service	2
DSI Call Center Email	1
DSI Call Center Line	1
DSI Contractor Portal for Permitting	1
DSI Contractor Portal for Siteplan Review	1
DSI Portal for Paying Fees & Fines	1
DSI/SP Connect Give a Compliment Form	1
DSI/SP Connect Report Incident Form	1
Engage St Paul Digital Services Idea Submission NO RESPONSE	1
Engage St Paul Digital Services Question Submission NO RESPONSE	1
Engage St Paul Our Online Community Poll Submission NO RESPONSE	1
Engage St Paul Overall Idea Submission NOT UPDATED	1
OFS Assessments Payments	1
Open Budget Email	1
Open Budget Feedback Page DEAD	1
Open Budget Web Portal DEAD	1
Open Information Site Feedback Page DEAD	1
Open Information Suggest-a-Dataset Form	1
Open Information/City Clerk Data Practices Requests	1
OTC Nonresponsive Cable Provider Form	1
OTC Open Data Questions Page DEAD	1
OTC Open Information Surveys	1
OTC Site Feedback Form	1
Parks & Rec Active.com Portal	1
Parks & Rec Active.com Volunteer Registration	1
Parks & Rec Call Center	1

Parks & Rec Design & Construction Proposal Form	1
Parks & Rec Natural Resources Boulevard Tree Form	1
Parks & Rec Natural Resources Geocache Form DEAD	1
Parks & Rec Volunteer Interest Form	1
Parks & Rec Socials: Facebook, Twitter, Insta	3
Parks & Rec Staff Directory	68
PED Maps & Data Request Form (PDF/Word)	1
PED Open St Paul Subscription Message Board DEAD	1
PED Socials: FB, Twitter, YouTube	3
PED Division Footers	10
PED Business Resource Center	2
PW City of Saint Paul Right of Way and Permitting Office 899 Dale Street North	1
PW 24-hour service desk 651-266-9700	1
PW All-Divisions phone number directory with phone tree	1
PW Come Clean Program Application	1
PW Downtown Transportation Planner email	1
PW Email PW-trafficgeometrics@ci.stpaul.mn.us	1
PW Garbage Information Email garbage@ci.stpaul.mn.us	1
PW Garbage Program Complaint Form	1
PW Legislative Hearing Request Form	1
PW Paint the Pavement form	1
PW publicworksinfo@ci.stpaul.mn.us Email	1
PW ROW Email PW-ROWpermits@ci.stpaul.mn.us and Walkup	2
PW ROW Permit PDF Forms	1
PW service directory phone list	26
PW Sidewalk Concern Form	1
PW TC Safety Pledge	1
PW Socials: Twitter	1
SPPL Book Requests	1
SPPL Website Feedback Form	1
SPPL FB, Twitter, Insta, YouTube, Tumblr	5
SPPL Directory	15
SPRWS Billpay Site	1
SPRWS Customer Service Line	1
SPRWS Emergency Line	1
SPRWS PDF Form for Waterworks Contributions	1
SPRWS Walk-up	1

Access Points data continued the following page.

How Many Entry Points Are There to the City of St. Paul?

Legend:
- ■ Broken or Unreponsive Access Points
- ■ Walk-ups
- ■ Print/Mail Forms
- ■ Portals/Applets
- ■ Socials
- ■ Online Forms
- ■ Phone Numbers
- ■ Emails
- ■ Access Points in Three Clicks on st.paul.gov

Appendix V

Flowchart of de-facto service system map created for community respondents who requested it:

Need help with a question or concern?

...About City services like code enforcement, roads & sidewalks, trash, water, and more?
- Phone City Call Center staff between 7:30am and 4:30pm: 651-266-8989
- Submit your concern online: www.stpaul.gov/report-incident

...About information resources or technology?
- Call a librarian: 651-266-7000
- Visit: sppl.org/ask-a-librarian

...About community education, sports, rec centers, or events?
- Phone Parks & Rec staff between 7:30am and 4:30pm: 651-266-6400
- Email: ParksCustomerService@ci.stpaul.mn.us

You can contact your District Council.
- Find your Council info: www.stpaul.gov/residents/live-saint-paul/neighborhoods

You can contact your City Councilmember.
- Find your City Councilmember's info: www.stpaul.gov/department/city-council
- Call the City Council's Main Line: 651-266-8670

You can contact the Mayor.
- Submit your concern online: www.stpaul.gov/contact-mayor
- Call the Mayor's Main Line: 651-266-8510

## Questions asked of all interviewees and feedback-session participants:

1. What do you know about the current process for sharing complaints or concerns with the City of St. Paul? What have you heard about it?
2. What do you find frustrating about how well the city responds? How has this impacted you and your community?
3. What do you appreciate about the way the city currently handles issues from residents?
4. How would you determine whether to call the mayor, a council member or the City's Main Line for an issue you might have? Is there another way you might reach out for services?
5. How can the city be more accountable to its residents who are trying to access them for services and/or complaints?
6. Given all of this, what suggestions do you have for improving people's future experiences?
7. Anything else you'd like to share?

Thumbnails of community outreach materials used via email and social media channels:
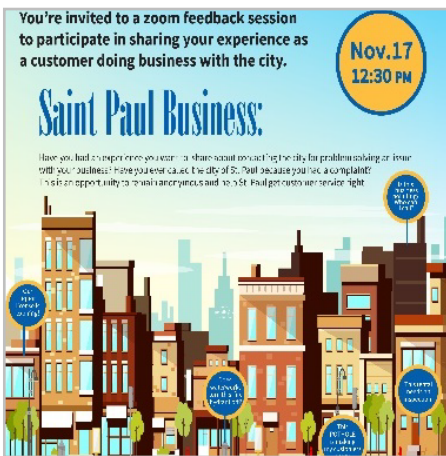
Report to EDCO Reflecting District Council Staff Feedback
October 2021 Findings on Key Observations from District Council Staff

Submission
Complaint submission requires: 1) clear reporting of complex issues; 2) faith in proper categorization—even with issues that defy categories; 3) patience with ambiguous follow-up protocols across departments. Faced with these realities, DC staff often opt out of official submission and turn to trusted relationships with subject-matter and system-navigation experts in the city.
- Typical flow: find the right number to call, report, and hope
- DSI main line and form "would be nice if it worked better"
- DSI prefers email, but email hard on a phone; are they short-staffed?
- Calling is hard; not always sure what to ask or report as the problem
- Sometimes very helpful and connective; sometimes "boxed in" or "boxed out" of solution. "I'm not going to take care of your problem for you"
- Lots of FB reports about city staff not answering phones

Tracking & Follow-up
The City's existing systems put the burden of tracking on the submitter, which feels anachronistic to residents used to modern, automated customer-service systems. Calling back or looking up by address for status is clunky. The system prevents a sense of closure for customers and constituents and creates a perception of evaded accountability.
- With DSI, I don't hear back from them; it's frustrating
- With DSI, it takes several weeks to get to site and resolve, often too late to matter
- Burden of tracking is on the submitter
- Calling back for status is clunky
- "Is it up? Is it still there? Is it not still there? Like, what is happening with it?"
- Legistar difficult to navigate and DSI staff won't research for you
- Not like tech support with tickets to track and update
- Ticket numbers needed; sitting in limbo forever is not okay

Timing & Case Elevation
Unpredictable resolution timelines build distrust and disorient customers and constituents. Customer frustrations increase with having to employ tactics like timed, repeated submissions and calling officials, which often succeed in getting attention, but may contribute to systemic inequity in having to get special attention. Other customers simply give up when issues "fall into the abyss" or City staff adopt the attitude of "it's not my job/problem." No one wants to own difficult things unless a city official speaks up.
- Task flow: main line or form is the first step; check on it every couple of weeks; then call a specific staff person and/or council member
- Online form and phone similar in responsiveness
- Trash on side of road is like graffiti in responsiveness; sometimes gone the next day, sometimes complaining every 3 weeks for months
- Residents work together to submit multiple requests for things like graffiti
- Residents will resubmit every 3 weeks, 3-5 times before anything happens
- Many tickets to get attention creates inequitable marks on addresses
- Residents sometimes give up resubmitting complaints
- Complaints often "fall into the abyss"
- DSI letters not being sent in a timely fashion--a day to mitigate sometimes, without guidance

"Go-to People"
The city has a few "go-to people" who help District Council staff think through complex issues and go above and beyond with customer service. While there are "good and bad" employees in each department, their customer service quality often depends upon good leadership.
- Can "count on one hand" the "go to people" who go above and beyond in the city
- Definitely not someone helpful in every department

- Libraries are "killing it"; doing amazing
- Lot of people frustrated with PW and Parks; can be hard to get a response
- Story: car speeds and PW explanation
- Story: forestry callback
- Experienced Legislative Aides are precious resources; "We try not to overuse them...Probably do that more than they should have to."

Role of Officials

Constituents report having to compete for officials' attention, and sometimes feel placated over having their issues truly resolved. While the City Council has a reputation for being responsive, the Mayor's Office is more mixed, with constituents wanting more timely, streamlined communication, and some District Councils feeling confused by and disconnected from a growing Mayoral staff.

- City Council responsive
- Mayor sometimes responsive; can't get him to come to events and often don't get an answer in a timely manner
- Communications from mayor's office "pretty weak"; hear about it posted on social media and not official communications
- Residents must adapt strategies, like making videos on social media, to compete for officials' attention
- Community placation is more emphasized than system improvement
- "DSI was just holding the meetings with District Councils so that they could go until the City Council that they held the meetings"

Role Of District Councils

With a history of aforementioned frustrations and a failed engagement process with DSI, some District Council staff prefer skipping the Main Line and navigating certain matters for constituents, connecting them with city staff members with whom they have trusted relationships. Some still follow a protocol of starting with the Main Line and its complaint submission system, but they tend to prepare auxiliary plans, with bypass tactics at the ready.

- I never call the city's main line. I would rather dig in and see if I could find an immediate contact first.
- Don't direct people to Main Line; direct to a contact in a department.
- District Councils play a role helping people find the right person in the city; make the "customer service connection"
- District Councils build relationships with "go-to people"; highly effective nodes in city
- Long process with DSI ad hoc work with District Councils, especially with improving enforcement letters, was ignored
- No thank-you for District Councils raising visibility on important issues

Silos & Liminal Space

The current reporting system is designed to assign accountability to a specific address, which prevents issues from being resolved quickly in "liminal spaces" like roadsides, skyways, or public land. Reliance on an ownership model for accountability mirrors single-department approaches that limit problem-solving across departments and levels of government.

- Attaching an address for DSI even if it's on the boulevard requires discomfort around blaming and punishment
- Sometimes no resolution, particularly on liminal land
- Departments don't connect to solve problems
- City housing dept and DSI don't coordinate to save people's homes; massive disconnect with housing shortage
- District Councils underutilized by city on working relationally with households
- Story: rusted items piled next to nature preserve
- Story: skyways and DSI main line

City Culture

Customers and constituents with a problem-solving stance are not served as well as those with a punishment stance. The former grow disenchanted with the Main Line and city staff for stressing penalties, fines, and even condemnation over assisting those with lesser means to mitigate issues. This citywide culture creates a system ripe for the latter to use the complaint system for harassment.

- Penalties > solving problems with DSI department culture
- Sometimes I'm looking for help with an issue and the response is not, "Let's help resolve it," but "That's against code; they're going to be penalized"
- Punishment should not be the only tool with respect to problem properties
- DSI uses demolition threat liberally
- DSI penalizing stance makes it less likely people will report with an address in the future
- DSI penalties = financial risk of losing one's house. Condemnation threat is real.
- Story: DSI demolition order and using Legistar
- Story: brother of a homeowner with mental health issues story about boarding up
- Story: legislative hearing: "I think I'm being targeted"

Systemic Inequity

When it comes to property enforcement, District Council staff shared a sense--with some evidence--that BIPOC residents, renters, and lower-income residents are given poorer service and experience more punitive impacts than white, homeowning, higher-income residents. With studies in other cities revealing racial inequities, a well-funded, transparent study of the city's property enforcement mechanisms is needed. Furthermore, the City needs to shift its image: from "we do what government does" to "we build government to help residents thrive."

- Huge disconnect between the economics of our neighborhoods and DSI stance on punishment and fines
- More secure system needed to track who's placing complaints; it's misused to target people
- Racial impacts of DSI system are inequitable; needs well-funded, transparent study
- Possibly more consideration is given to homeowners versus rental properties
- District Councils with low and high-income sections notice discrepancy between enforcement fairness and speed
- Customer service side of the city also needs to serve people who are coming in not as complainers but as people who are trying to address the city's holding them accountable

Communications

The number and variety of formats for city information across departments puts an undue burden on customers and constituents to keep up with city news on programs, projects, and engagement opportunities. The complexity can make residents feel like city is trying to "get away with things" or bypass engagement steps. DCs can be the only way that people hear about things that go on, and some feel their importance is being neglected.

- No centralized communication from city
- Number of newsletters are overwhelming; impossible to stay connected in time to communicate events
- City "all over the place with communications"; website, Legistar, calling around, social media, website news, newsletters...

Appendix VII   RECOMMENDATIONS

Menu Of Options For Implementation

1. PRIORITIZE THE HEALTH, HEARTS, AND MINDS OF FRONTLINE STAFF:

- Crisis Interventions
  - Provide short, on-demand mental health support for individuals and teams.
  - Provide yearly training on self-care and boundary setting.
- Quick wins
  - Create a comprehensive staff directory for internal use, noting primary and secondary contacts
- Things to Try
  - Provide regular training on customer service: greeting, active listening, structured questions
  - Consider peer training and support for customer service
  -
- Power Plays
  - Consider hiring more social workers for staff and community needs.
  - Increase individual allowance for continued mental health support.
  - As systems build their tracking capabilities:
    - Encourage qualitative targets for service resolution.
    - Discourage quantitative targets for service resolution.
  - Emphasize customer-service experience and language skills for new hires

2. SHIFT THE CITY'S INDENTITY NARRATIVES:

- Quick wins
  - Repeat and lead others in repeating:
    - "We are subject to the system." → "We ARE the system."
    - Learned Helplessness → Collective Empowerment.
    - Individual Heroism → Teamwork.
    - Big Changes → Small Efforts.
- Things to Try
  - Encourage inter-departmental relationships.
  - Identify and make explicit existing customer-service archetypes among staff.
  - Start conversations about these archetypes.
  - Study and discuss user archetypes at all levels of staff.
- Power Plays
  - Incorporate user archetypes into peer coaching and training for customer-facing staff.
  - Come to consensus about the preferred customer-service archetype within each Division or Department.
  - Encourage safe-to-fail experiments.
  - Realign business processes around emerging behaviors.

3. ESTABLISH UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SERVICE WHILE BUILDING POLITICAL EFFICACY

- Crisis Interventions
  - Consider equity in social media practices.
- Quick wins
  - Budget for staff time to define business processes.
    - Begin with "Top 10" service workflows.
  - Budget for staff time to share business processes with other divisions and departments.
  - Empower staff to be the first layer of customer service; not officials.

- Things to Try
    - Establish a citywide FAQ as a first step in increased knowledge management.
        - This can start as an internal document.
        - This could grow into an external document.
- Power Plays
    - Strive for hospitality, not merely access.
    - Make business processes explicit.
    - Budget for staff time to share business processes with the public.
        - Choose compelling and diverse methods for sharing business processes.
    - Watch for opportunities to participate in the ongoing Service Hubs project hosted by OTC.
    - Reorganize staff in the Mayor's Office to lead improvements in service.

4. CREATE CONDITIONS TO SHARE TRACKING BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS AND WITH THE PUBLIC
- Quick wins
    - Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, **within divisions**.
    - Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, **within departments**.
- Things to Try
    - Remove one block and see what happens.
    - Dial up the experiment if it's working, dial it down if it's not.
    - Pilot customer-service tracking software within divisions; then departments.
- Power Plays
    - Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, **between departments**.
    - Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, **between departments and officials**.
    - Identify blocks to sharing service requests **externally**, between the City and the public.
    - For any block, start frank conversations about the ways staff *participate in keeping the block in place.*
    - Leaders explore alignment of business processes with tracking software.
    - Leaders watch for alignment around software solutions that could work across departments (see Recommendation 10).

5. EMPOWER MAIN LINE STAFF TO CLOSE REQUESTS
- Quick wins
    - Keep Saint Paul's informal tone.
- Things to Try
    - Initiate follow-up on customer-service requests; keep track of what happens.
    - Envision and experiment with actions that establish practices for closing service requests.
    - Envision and experiment with actions that lower the daily burden of service-request intake.
    -
- Power Plays
    - Authorize staff to define and apply standards for excellent service.
    - Build in frontline staff time for data entry, follow-up, fostering relationships, and improving the system.
        - Decrease intake hours
        - Increase staffing

6. RELOCATE CITYWIDE CUSTOMER SERVICE
- Quick wins
    - Invest in a DSI electronic phone directory.
    - Retain and empower current Main Line staff, exploring cross-training possibilities.
    - Retain SPPL's Community Helpdesk staff, exploring cross-training possibilities.

- Things to Try
  - Explore peer coaching and training possibilities hosted by Main Line staff.
  - Explore peer coaching and training possibilities hosted by SPPL's Community Helpdesk staff,
  - Explore an inter-departmental hub-and-spoke Call Center model for the Main Line.
- Power Plays
  - Move the Main Line out of DSI.
  - Study the equity of the City's property enforcement mechanisms.

7. CONTINUE TO DIVERSIFY APPROACHES TO CUSTOMER SERVICE
- Crisis Interventions
  - Ensure the City's customer support system includes front-line staff who speak Hmong.
    - Consider adding staff.
    - Consider special assignments.
- Quick wins
  - Ensure the City's customer support system includes front-line staff who speak other languages in high use in Saint Paul—Spanish, Karen, Somali, Oromo.
    - Focus first on oral-language cultures, and/or those with less written-language proficiency.
    - Consider adding staff.
    - Consider special assignments.
  - Seek out new hires who will improve linguistic and cultural representation of Saint Paul's diverse population.
- Things to Try
  - Emphasize emergent solutions over top-down strategy.
  - Supervisors, Division leaders, PIOs, Department Directors: Share approaches that work to improve customer service.
- Power Plays
  - Leaders: promote different approaches to ordered and complex problems; study Cynefin.
  - Build adaptive capacity throughout the City, at every level, counting the cost of understaffing and overwork.

8. DEEMPHASIZE ANONYMITY; EMPHASIZE ACCOUNTABILITY
- Crisis Interventions
  - Create a way for residents to flag their own property for harassment watch.
  - Require self-identification when reporting on flagged properties while securing that data.
- Quick wins
  - When referring customers and constituents to other divisions, provide the following:
    - The phone number
    - An email address
    - The name of the person
    - The role of the person
    - A backup contact if the customer or constituent doesn't hear back within 2-3 business days
  - Record assigned persons to referrals in notes area of tracking software or spreadsheet.
- Things to Try
  - Aim to close 10% of customer requests via MS Forms, where customers and constituents have already disclosed their identities, keeping track of results. Dial up the experiment if it's working; dial it down if it's not.
  - Explore ways to anonymize at customer request only.
- Power Plays
  - Reevaluate the rewards of accountability against the risks of anonymity.

- o Explore ways to record customer data and keep it private.
- o Perform a legal risk assessment to the City for allowing anonymous reporting.

9. REWARD CONNECTIVITY AND CURIOSITY
- Quick wins
  - o Add performance indicators that reward practical problem-solving.
  - o Add performance indicators that reward experimenting with process improvement.
- Things to Try
  - o Add performance indicators that reward inter-departmental influence and connectedness.
  - o Evaluate team performance alongside individual performance.
- Power Plays
  - o Work with mapping software to identify "solo fliers," "collective players," and outliers.
  - o Use formal or informal network mapping to introduce or strengthen strategic connections between staff.

## 10. WATCH FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO ALIGN BUSINESS PRACTICES WITH HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER-SERVICE TECHNOLOGY
- Quick wins
  - o Hunt down and remove dated web content and subpages.
  - o Update subpages
  - o Explore buttons and links that connect users back to primary and secondary content on subpages.
- Things to Try
  - o Tag all updated content for optimal searchability.
  - o Investigate and work with OTC to pilot customer-service software like Zendesk.
  - o Talk to colleagues in other Departments or Divisions about their software.
  - o Create a learning community around technologies that cater to the City's context.
- Power Plays
  - o Work with other Departments or Sections to align customer service tracking and terminology
  - o Work with other Departments or Sections to align customer service technologies— either through the same software or APIs
  - o Pay attention to trends and features in customer-service technology.
  - o Shape conditions that enable successful innovation.

Appendix VIII
GRAPHIC SUMMARIES

Midpoint Graphic: The City
A graphic summary of the City's studied departments, access points, and central themes for sharing with City staff.
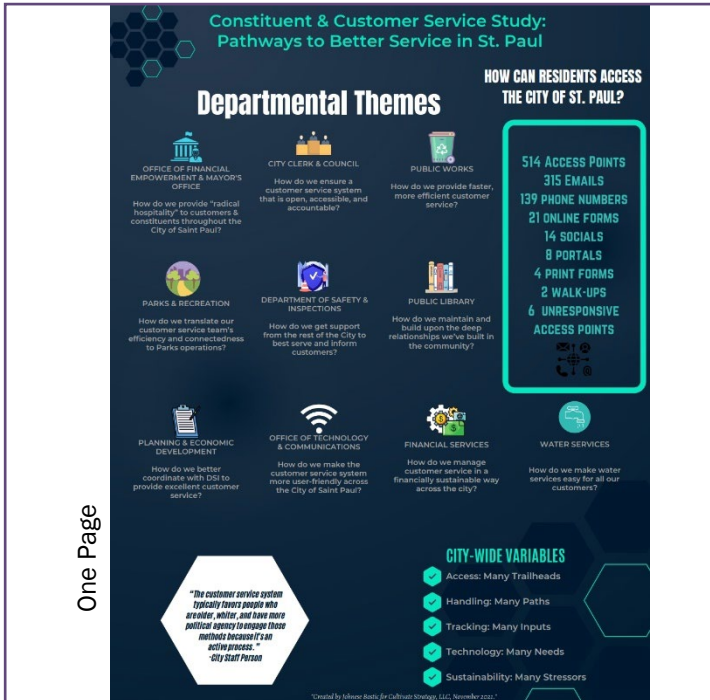
One Page

Final Graphic: Menu of Options
A graphic summary of the study recommendations overall, with menus for crisis intervention, quick wins, things to try, and power plays for sharing with City staff.

Front Side

Back Side

Appendix IX:

From The Study Team

Our team brings multiple lenses to this project. Here are a few, informal words of reflection from each of us.

Brigid Riley

Looking through the lens of change management, the City of Saint Paul can depend on the talents of its people. You have a deep well of human resources to pull from to create a stronger constituent and customer service system. We spoke with seasoned leaders with profound expertise, adept rapid responders, caring resource providers and innovation fans. Each person was honest about what was working and what was not and shared a desire for a better overall system. Tap that energy. Direct it to collaborative decision-making for next steps. Staff were also forthright about how relentlessly they work to just stay afloat. Pay attention to their needs. Everything is balanced on their capacity for action.

In addition to the strengths of the people, many areas have developed creative practices and embraced replicable tools that could be models for others. Provide opportunities for cross-fertilization and reward adaptation. Foster the idea of being a learning organization and follow through on its promise. Each person, division and department has developed practices and procedures that allow them to meet demand, even while being under-resourced and stretched too thin. They are justifiably proud of their work. Carefully consider how to center these people in making choices about technical changes while also igniting a collaborative leadership model that pays just as much attention to the change process.

Johnese M. Bostic

Looking through the lens of process improvement, The City of Saint Paul has *Muda*, the Japanese term for waste, across all its resources. Waste are inefficiencies that cost tremendous amounts of money and time and often lead to overburdened employees and unsatisfied customers, who depend on the resources you have to offer. Like many city governments across the nation, the City of Saint Paul's organization is filled with several departments, many of which are mandated, to satisfy the law and more importantly the needs of the residents of Saint Paul. The concern, however, is not the number of departments that exists, but the number of access points and the number of different workflows and processes that exist regarding receiving and handling customer inquiries.

The City would benefit from a robust quality assurance department—one who took the Lean Six Sigma approach to improve the capability of their business processes. While seen first in manufacturing, more governments are now seeing the benefit in the methodology to increase performance and decrease process variation. The City of Saint Paul has many valuable resources, especially its human talent, and many people depend on the services. A process that promotes the use of work standardization and flow while being driven by customer satisfaction, will increase employee morale and productivity, efficiency, and allow for the City of Saint Paul to operate at its maximum capability.

Vera F. Allen

The opportunity to study what residents think about their City government and practices is a true exercise in democracy, and this initiative should be acknowledged and commended. That being said, the opportunity to gain more specific and transformational data and solutions was limited by budgetary constraints, as are many feats of equity. If you will take this chance to listen to the willing guides herein, this study and break past an unnecessarily complex system of communication gaps and power trips, a larger momentum toward prosperity can be harnessed, and all residents can enjoy better lives because of it.

The City of Saint Paul needs to expand the research of customer service in order to find the systemic incidentals that stem from rapid changes and the difficulty of transcending policies through departments. Although advancements seem welcomed, unclear guidance for implementation creates chaos, and this is where equity begins to break down.

Sherry P. Johnson

The City of Saint Paul is a complex-adaptive system. The more it tries to behave like an entirely ordered system, the more it will leave its people behind. While the City is certainly subject to legal constraints, these can overly constrain innovation and provide excuses for people who are comfortable with the status quo. Similarly, deferring to "the way things have to happen," can be a coping mechanism for those who fear that change will make their jobs harder—or worse, isolate them or make their wisdom irrelevant.

The City must experiment with human and technical solutions, but it cannot leave anyone behind. Therefore, the City must care for staff mental health, enable stronger relational networks within and between departments, and hire leaders who inspire trust and empower staff. Meanwhile, City officials should establish and fund inter-department efforts like technology and engagement programs that attract—rather than compel—departments to try things that align business processes and make the everyday lives of staff more productive and connected to all the communities they serve.
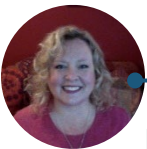
Lisa Meredith

Your teams have done some great work! Recognize their successes and use their experience to create a playbook that can be used to help other departments become involve in these projects. Developing power users and project champions from individuals resistant to change can be key in engaging staff to embrace change. Support and involvement from leadership is so important. Celebrate successes! And, finally, these are major projects in never ending improvements to the constituent experience.

Being aware that for software programs to run well, it is imperative to look at where you can modify your business processes. Building customizations into programs can often lead to issues with updates and changes down the road, and they can be costly. Make sure the customizations are really what you need.