

A Department Efficiency and Collaboration Study for the Saint Paul City Council Audit Committee

Saint Paul Parks and Recreation and Saint Paul Public Library

Background

Wilder Research prepared the following mid-term report for the Saint Paul City Council Audit Committee. This report updates the Audit Committee on the activities outlined in our proposal, our mid-term progress, and our timeline moving forward.

The study goals are to identify efficiencies and opportunities for collaboration, cost sharing, and process improvement within Saint Paul Public Library (SPPL) and Saint Paul Parks and Recreation (Parks and Recreation). The focus for this study is the operations in four functions of both departments:

1. Human resources and staffing
2. Financial management and procurement
3. Technology management and equipment
4. Buildings and maintenance

Wilder's guiding questions for the project include:

- Where are the current effective practices and opportunities for improvement in each of the four functions across SPPL and Parks and Recreation?
- What are the actionable ways to reduce redundancy and create efficiencies in each of the four functions between SPPL and Parks and Recreation?

SPPL manages 13 library branch locations, and Parks and Recreation manages 165 buildings. Both departments share three co-located library and park buildings: Arlington Hills, Highland Park, and West 7th.

Human resources and staffing

Through our document review and key informant interviews Wilder is examining current staffing approaches and processes such as recruitment, onboarding, performance management, and pipeline management. We are looking for opportunities to cross-train staff to cover multiple functions and opportunities for staff training and development to build capacity. We are also looking for opportunities for pipeline management of staff talent.

Financial management and procurement

Wilder is collecting data on budget allocation in each department to learn about opportunities to streamline financial practices. In the procurement processes, we are examining common vendors in both departments and potential cost savings measures in the four function areas.

Technology management and equipment

Wilder is gathering information on current technology systems and software in use in both departments and their effectiveness in supporting daily operations. We are examining opportunities for procurement and maintenance of equipment and for integrating technology and equipment across both departments.

Facilities and maintenance

Questions under examination from documents and key informants will provide us with information on how facility maintenance is currently managed, how preventive maintenance and repairs are handled, how processes could be streamlined and/or improved, and how facilities and maintenance resources can be shared between the two departments; for example, equipment used for snow removal and lawn maintenance.

Activity update

At project mid-term, we continue to gather and analyze data. Findings and recommendations will be detailed in our final report to the Audit Committee.

Project management

We conduct regular meetings with the SPPL and Parks and Recreation Assistant Directors Joshua Schaffer and Tom Russell, with Parks and Recreation, Operations Manager, Tom Hagel, and Nhia Vang, Senior Policy Analyst. The purpose of these meetings is to continually review the work plan, organize key tasks, and discuss updates on work progress. Through these meetings, we finalized a list of key informants for data collection.

Primary data collection

Document and literature review

In cooperation with the Audit Committee, Wilder conducted a broad document review to gather information in the four function areas of SPPL and Parks and Recreation. Our purpose in requesting and analyzing the documents is to gain a more complete understanding of operations in each department. As we review the documents, we can identify areas where more information is needed. In addition, we are in the process of a literature review of shared services in other municipalities, counties, and states.

Develop interview protocols

To assure a level of consistency in data analysis and reporting, Wilder developed a list of common questions that can be tailored for key informants working in specific functions at different levels within the departments. Our questions examine current operations and opportunities for efficiencies and collaboration with operational functions.

Conduct key informant interviews

We have conducted in-depth interviews with Joshua Schaffer, Tom Russel, and Tom Hagel at sites of their choosing to allow for a tour of the facilities.

We have a list of 13 key informants with expertise in at least one of the four functions representing both departments. We developed text to introduce ourselves as we request interviews with each of the 13 individuals. We began reaching out to this second round of key informants to schedule interviews in early July 2024.

Timeline for future activities

Data analysis and reporting

By early to mid-August, Wilder expects to have completed the second round of interviews, conducted a thorough analysis of interview data, combined the interview data with our document review, developed a list of recommendations, and sent a draft of our final report to Joshua Schaffer, Tom Russell, and Tom Hagel for their comment. We will then send the draft with their comments included to the Audit Committee for comment prior to formatting and submitting the final report to the Audit Committee.

In addition to recommendations, we will include the following in our final report:

- Key informant interview questions
- Annotated bibliography of key literature