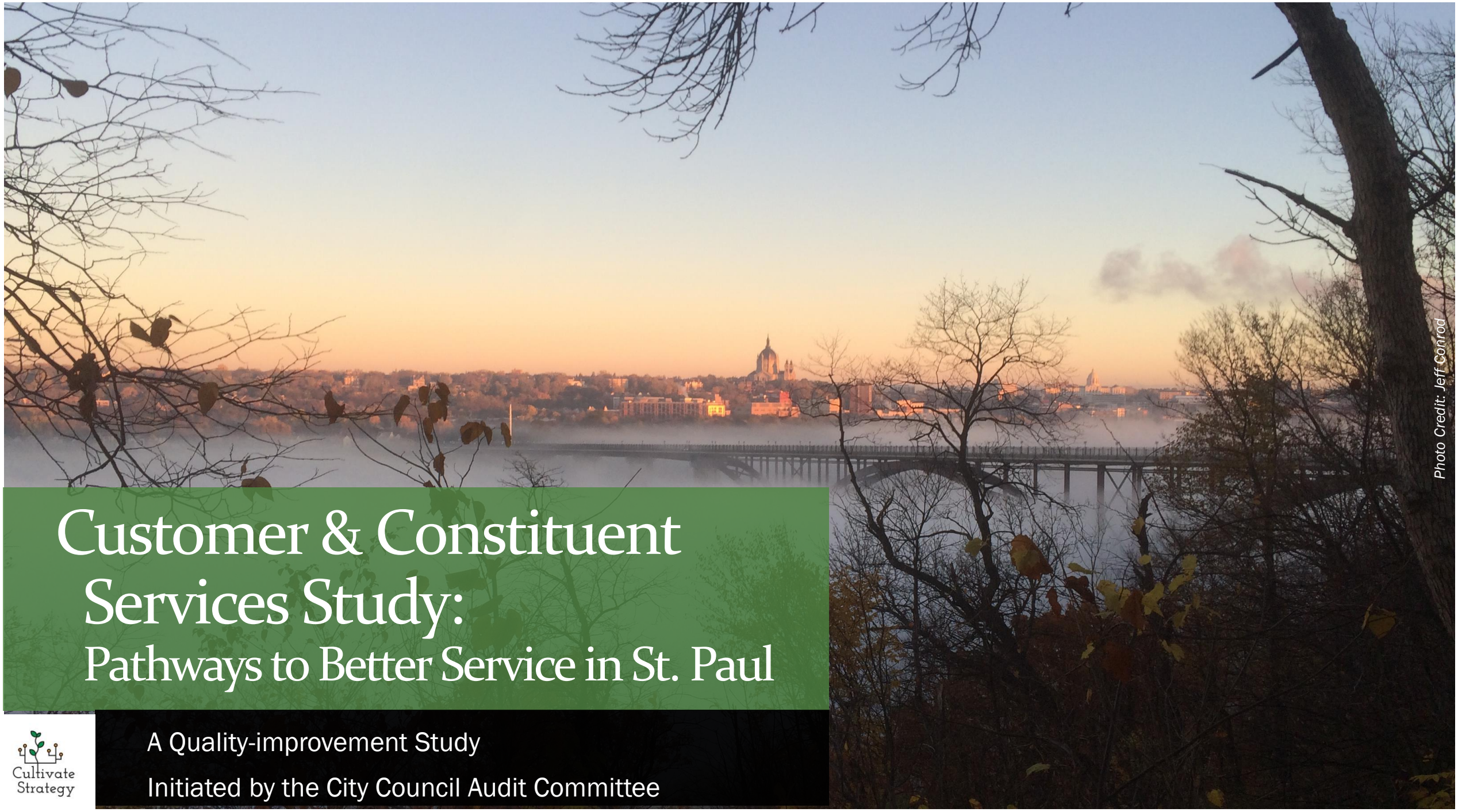

Customer & Constituent Services Study:
Pathways to Better Service in St. Paul

A Quality-improvement Study

Initiated by the City Council Audit Committee

Cultivate Strategy

Photo Credit: Jeff Conrod

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About Us

Our team of pathfinders are dedicated to finding multiple ways forward

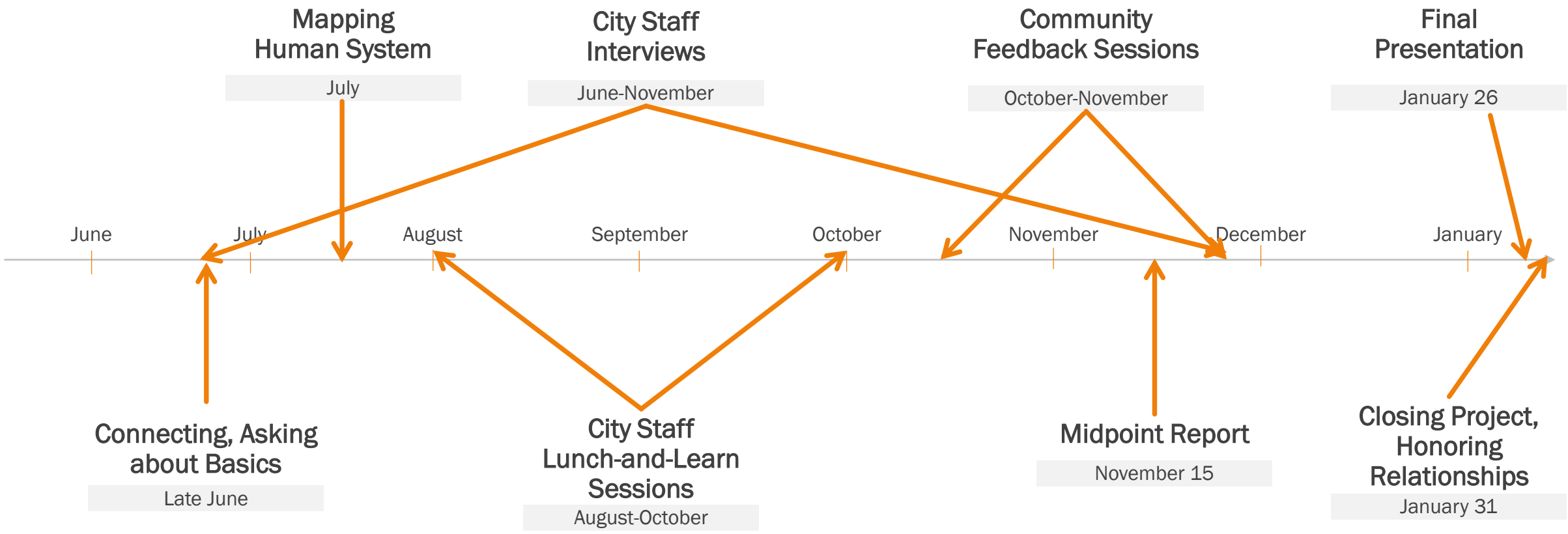
Multiple Perspectives

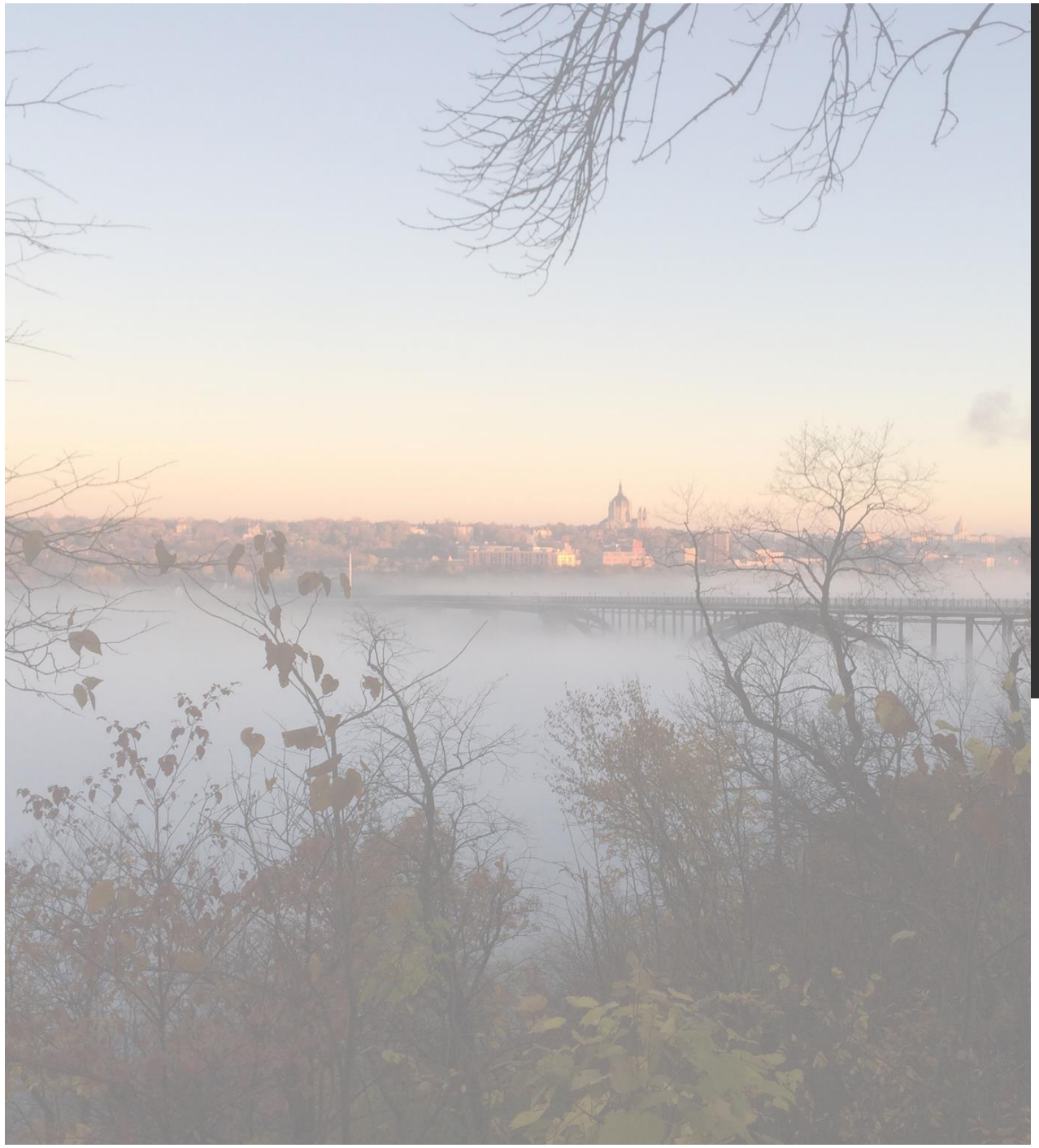
Our team draws on experience in the nonprofit and government sectors, drawing on hard-won knowledge from complementary fields:

- Organizational Strategy & Development
- Quality Improvement
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
- Education & Accessibility
- Community Engagement
- *Software Rollouts in Government

In addition, we bring our personal, intersectional wisdom as members of cultural- and neurodiversity communities,

Process Timeline





Quantitative Data

By the Numbers… Points of Service

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

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

Public Works

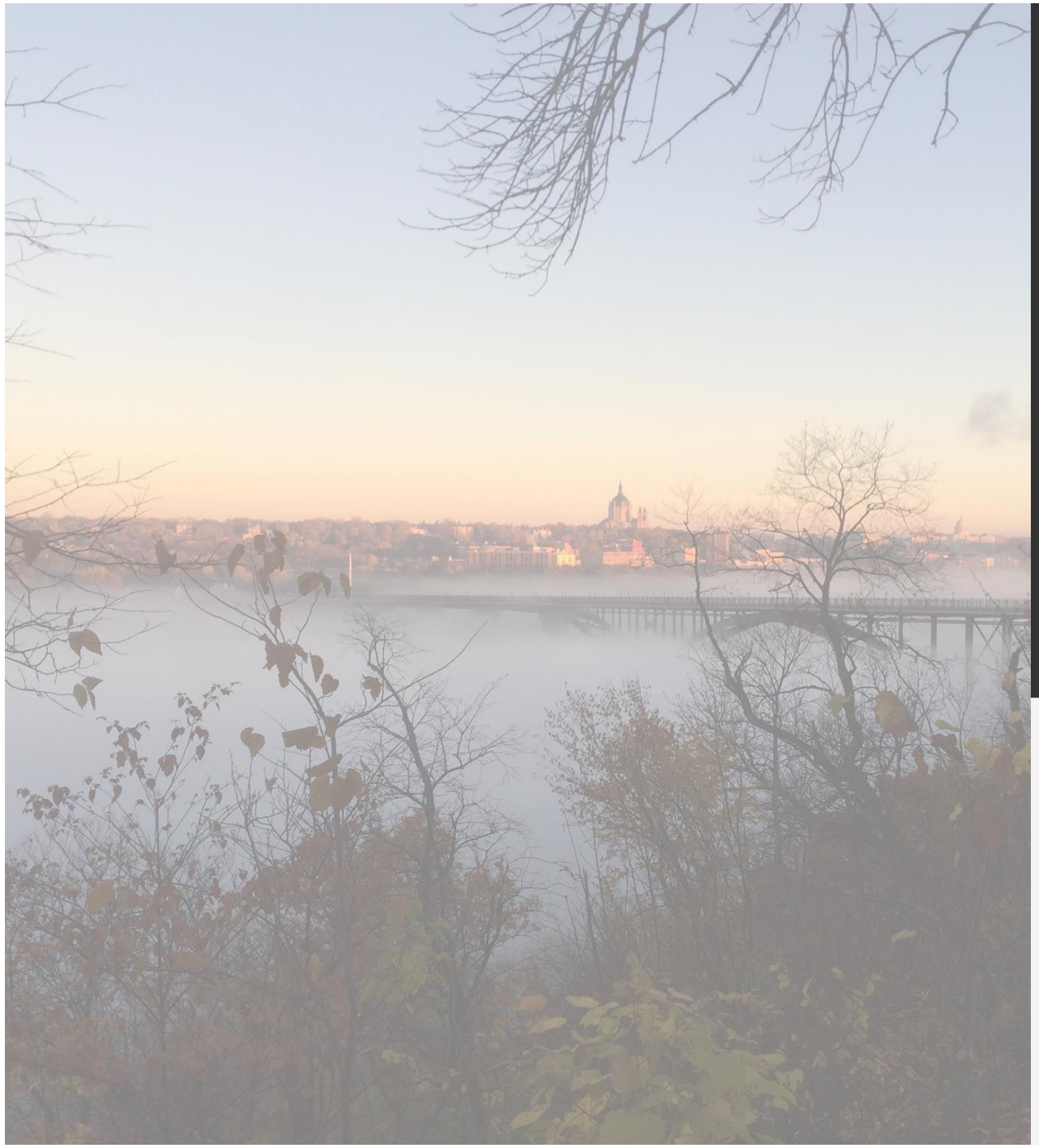
- 26 phone-number service directory
- Solid Waste answered 12,815 calls last year; 940 were complaints to haulers
- Public Works "touches" residents at least 15x/day

Parks & Recreation

- 3-person call center
- Parks and Rec receives at least 200 calls/day

Citywide

- 514 points of access across departments studied, via 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



Qualitative Data

***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.*

Dominant City Narratives

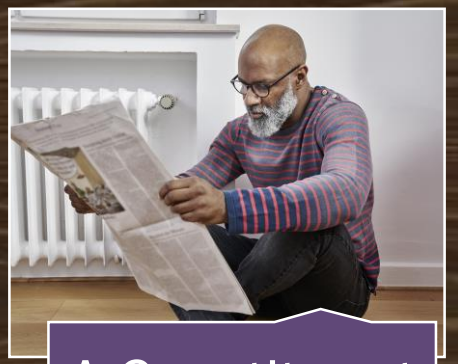
- There Are Strengths to Our System—Especially When We Work Together
- We've Got Some Serious Problems with Customer Service
- Our Systems Do Work…Just Not Always Efficiently or Fairly
- We're the One Office That Does Service the Right Way
- We Wish People Knew How Hard This Is

Dominant Community Narratives

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

The Community: *Who Are We to the City?*

A Customer



A Constituent

A Taxpayer

A Reporter

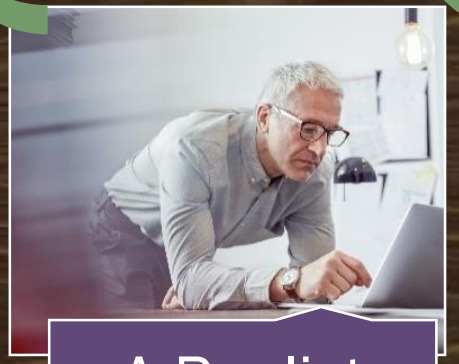
A Violator

City Staff: *What is Our Role within the City?*

A Concierge

An Educator

A Reformer

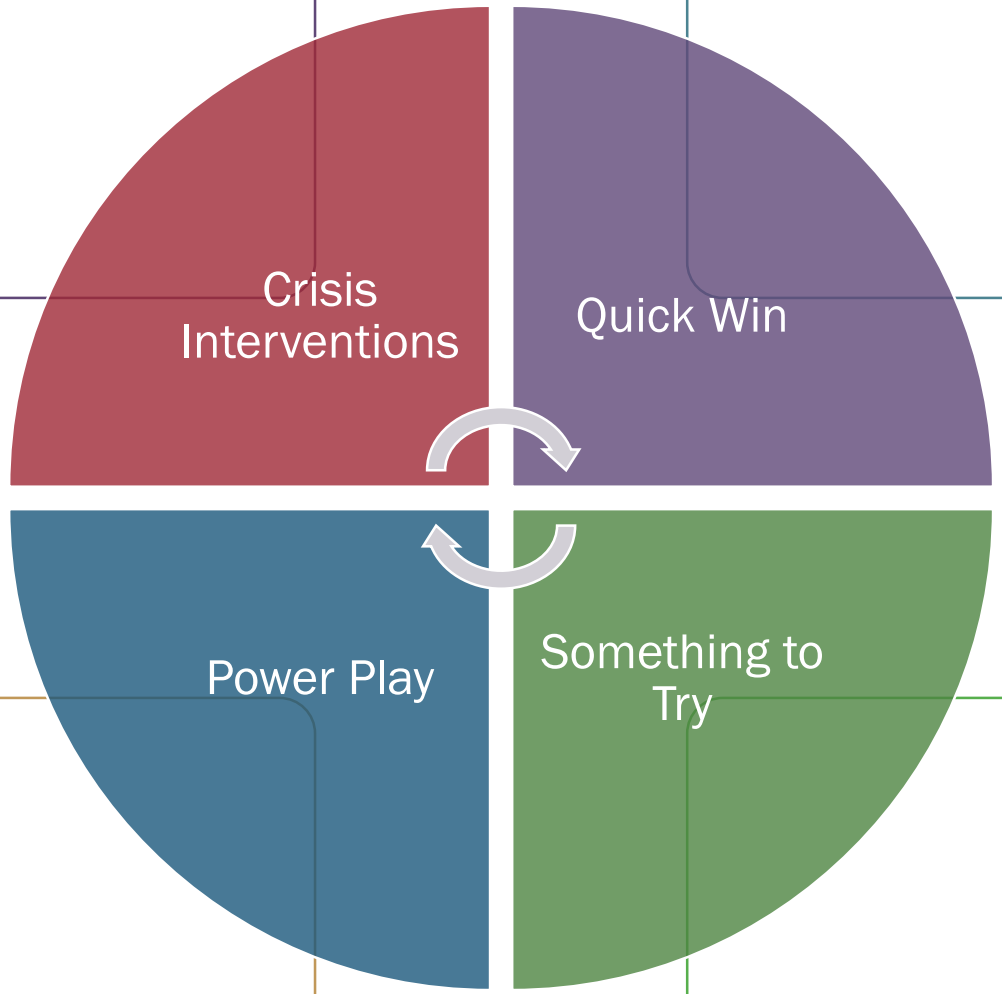


A Realist

An Advocate

A Leader's Framework for Decision-Making: *Cynefin*

- **In High-Risk, Unpredictable Situations**
- Do these things NOW.



- **In Clear Situations**
- Get it done ASAP to get everyone moving and motivated.

- **In Complicated Situations**
- Respond strategically, in collaboration with experts.

- **In Complex Situations**
- Experiment from all points in the hierarchy.

Prioritize The Health, Hearts, And Minds Of Frontline Staff

- Provide on-demand mental-health support.
- Provide training on boundaries.

- Create a staff directory for internal use.

- Consider hiring more social workers.
- Increase mental health allowance.

- Provide customer service training and peer support.

Shift The City's Identity Narratives

- "We are SUBJECT to the system." → "We ARE the system."

- Incorporate user archetypes into training.
- Realign business processes around emerging behaviors.

- Encourage inter-department connections.
- Talk about self-concept.

Establish Universal Access To Service While Building Political Efficacy

- Consider equity in social media practices.

- Budget for staff time to define business processes, starting with “Top 10” service workflows.

- Strive for hospitality, not merely access; make business processes explicit.

- Establish a citywide FAQ as a first step in knowledge management.

Create Conditions To Share Tracking Between Departments and With The Public

- Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, within divisions and departments.

- Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally.
- Watch for alignment around software solutions that could work across departments.

- Remove one block to sharing and see what happens.
- Pilot customer-service tracking software within divisions, then departments.

Watch For Opportunities To Align Business Practices With High-Quality Customer-Service Technology

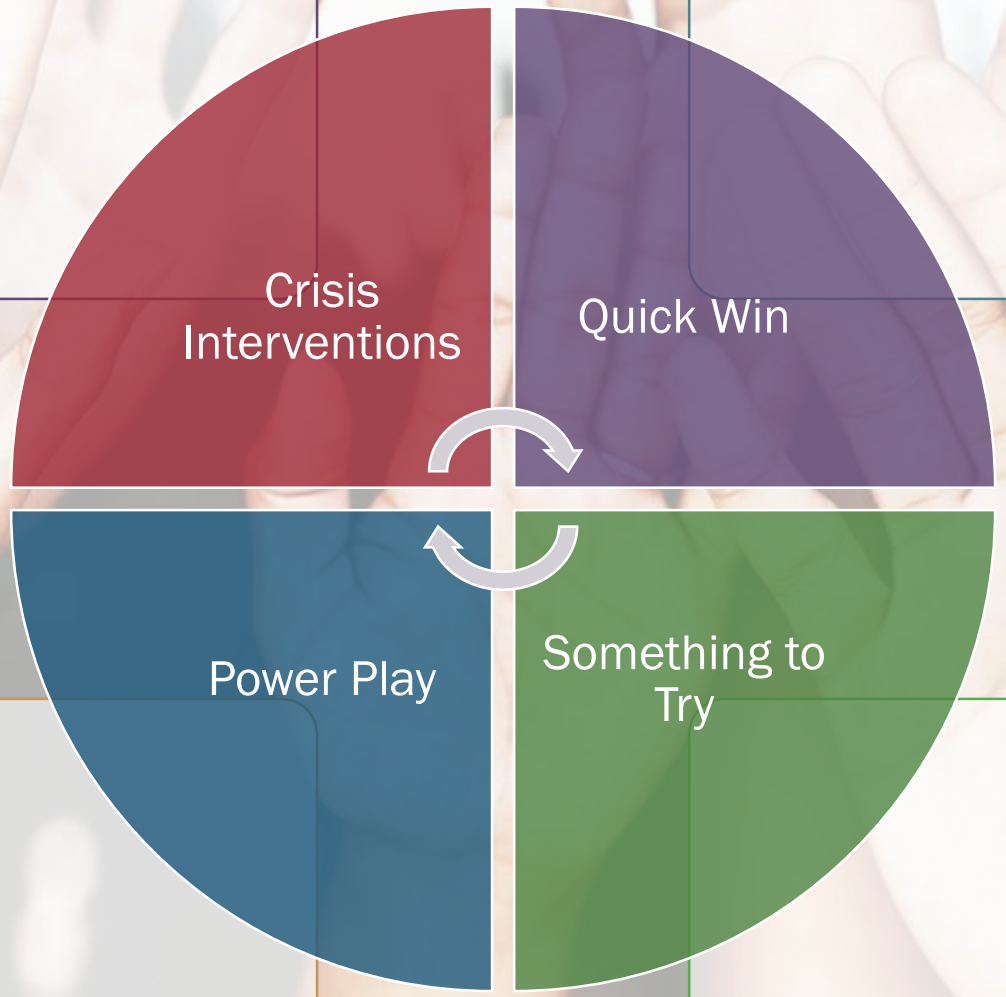
- Hunt down and remove dated web content.
- Update subpages.

- Work across the City to align customer service tracking and terminology.

- Tag all updated content for optimal searchability.
- Create a learning community around technologies that cater to context.

Deemphasize Anonymity; Emphasize Accountability

- Create a way for residents to flag their own property for harassment watch.



- Create a way for residents to flag their own property for harassment watch.

- Reevaluate the rewards of accountability against the risks of anonymity.
- Perform a legal risk assessment to the City re: anonymous reporting.

- Start closing customer requests via MS Forms, keeping track of results.

Empower Main Line Staff To Close Requests

- Keep Saint Paul's informal tone.

- Authorize staff to define and apply standards.
- Decrease intake hours or increase staffing.

- Initiate follow-up on customer-service requests.
- Experiment to lower the daily burden of intake.

Relocate Citywide Customer Service

- Invest in a DSI electronic phone directory.
- Empower Main Line and Community Helpdesk staff to cross-train.

- Move the Main Line out of DSI.
- Study the equity of the City's property enforcement mechanisms.

- Explore an inter-departmental hub-and-spoke model for the Main Line.

Continue To Diversify Approaches To Customer Service

- Ensure the City's customer support system includes front-line staff who speak Hmong.

- Ensure the City's customer support system includes front-line staff who speak other high-demand languages.

- Promote different approaches to ordered and complex problems.
- Build adaptive capacity, counting the cost of understaffing, overwork.

- Emphasize emergent solutions over top-down strategy.
- Share approaches that improve customer service.

Reward Connectivity And Curiosity

- Add performance indicators that reward practical problem-solving and experimentation.

- Work with relational-network mapping software.
- Strengthen strategic connections.

- Add performance indicators that reward connectedness.
- Evaluate team alongside individual performance.

Thank You

Cultivate Strategy

Q&A

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