

Department Efficiency and Collaboration: Saint Paul Parks and Recreation and Saint Paul Public Library

*Presentation to the Saint Paul City Council
Audit Committee*

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Appreciation

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Goals & Research Questions

- **Goal:** To identify **efficiencies and opportunities for collaboration, cost sharing, and process improvement** within **SPPL and Parks and Recreation**
 - **Focus Areas:** Human resources and staffing, financial management and procurement, technology management and equipment, facilities and maintenance
- **Questions:** 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?

Methods

- **Document review:** Collection and review of relevant documents provided by SPPL and Parks and Recreation across the four functional areas (summary in Appendix A)
- **Literature summary:** Broad literature review to examine shared services and interdepartmental collaboration in governmental entities (summary in Appendix B, links to articles included)
- **Key informant interviews:** 15 interviews including 2 deputy directors, 1 operations manager, 12 mid-level managers and supervisors with expertise in one or more of the four functional areas

Key Findings: Opportunities

- There is a **shared vision to find efficiencies** across the two departments among high-level managers.
- **Staff at all levels shared ideas and suggestions** for creating efficiencies and cost sharing indicating a breadth of experience and knowledge.
- **Collaboration and trust currently exist.** Enhancing and building on the relationships as the work continues will be important.
- **Security and safety** are areas ripe for collaboration.
- **Co-located sites present unique opportunities** to establish collaboration and pilot efficiency measures.
- Defining **clear roles and responsibilities** is critical as greater collaboration occurs across departments.

Key Findings: Challenges

- Staff who work in a functional area in one department are **not aware of the work processes used by their counterparts in the other department**. For example, staff who work with vendors are not aware of which vendors are being used by their counterparts. This inhibits the process of creating efficiencies between SPPL and Parks and Recreation.
- **Aging buildings** in both departments, but especially in SPPL, present substantial budget challenges.
- Both departments experience **staffing challenges** due, in part, to fixed budgets established through the City budgeting process.
- **Labor contract language** can prevent accomplishing tasks in the most efficient manner.

Key Findings: Human Resources and Staffing

- The centralized human resource approach **may not fully accommodate the specific needs** of different departments.
- **Hiring needed staff, especially seasonal staff, can be cumbersome**, slowing down the hiring process. There is a need for an efficient hiring and on-boarding process to enable departments to fill positions quickly, particularly during the summer season.
- **Cross training staff** can reduce costs and create a pipeline for staff movement and promotion

Experiences: Human Resources and Staffing

Currently the [other department] human resources liaison and I are collaborating on a resource for individuals who want to take a parental leave, we have about an eight page draft document that we're working on and getting feedback from a variety of different people.— Key informant

I think there continues to be more of a need for training opportunities for the Community Recreation Leader to ensure that they are prepared and successful at that next level, whether it be as an Office Assistant, whether it be as a Community Recreation Specialist or whether they go on to a different job someplace within the City of Saint Paul. — Key informant

- Maybe there's an opportunity for collaborating with the supervisor academy as well as an opportunity to collaborate on hiring processes and maybe even onboarding on a regular basis. — Key informant*

...but if there was a way to streamline the actual hiring process, so that there was even just one or two types of processes, but there are many different types of processes at this play at this time... So my hope is that we can streamline hiring process. To be simplified to just maybe two or three different ways that we're doing hiring versus the probably ten different ways at this point. — Key informant



Key Findings: Financial Management and Procurement

- **More coordination** is needed between departments to avoid redundancy and inefficiencies in resource management to better navigate procurement processes, for example, utilizing common vendors and master contracts.

Experiences: Financial Management and Procurement

I don't really know a lot about how [the other department] operates. I work with that accountant occasionally on some interdepartmental billing. A lot of this stuff is centralized, so there's a budget team over in the Office of Financial Services like our central finance and they assist each department. I know that we share some capital budgets with [the other department] and I work with them on monitoring and reporting on those budgets, but... I don't work with them on a regular basis. So, I'm not really sure what potential efficiencies there are. – Key informant

I'm not really aware of what [the other department] does operationally, I'm not really aware of what vendors they use, so that might be a better question for our central purchasing office maybe, just to see—they might be more familiar with common vendors I think, but I'm sure there are some. – Key informant



Key Findings: Technology Management and Equipment

- **Managing budget constraints while keeping up with technological advances** is a constant struggle especially given the rapid pace of change in the technology landscape.
- Greater **collaboration on technology investments** could prevent duplication of efforts and ensure that both departments benefit from technology advancements.

Experiences: Technology Management and Equipment

I can see two groups meeting and talking about “what kind of equipment/software are you using” and learning about new things like scheduling software. I learned that [the other department] is also doing something similar, so what we did was reach out to someone, and have a semi-formal meeting about it and how they went through the process...If there was more cross-over, where people can check in regarding technology, some way to share intel and needs. Share successes. – Key informant

[We are] definitely talking about ways to collaborate more closely on security camera systems. Parks and Recreations and Libraries maintain their own buildings, but there are a couple of cases where parks and libraries are in the same building. Mix bag—but in one location, each has its own security system, which is a duplicate in the building. [In] another building, Parks control the whole thing, and that can be a challenge for the library staff in that building as they do not have access to the camera footage/have to go through a process of requesting. – Key informant



Key Findings: Facilities and Maintenance

- Staff express **uncertainty on how best to optimize** the use of physical spaces to reduce costs.
- There are current **strategies in place to manage physical assets between departments** designed to produce efficiencies and cost sharing, however, those strategies might not be used across all working sections in both departments.

Experiences: Facilities and Maintenance

We lean on facility partners at [the other department] if we need help, or when our vendors have troubles. I see some collaboration with staff but as of right now, not a lot of cost sharing, but can see the collaboration starting with each other. – Key informant

There's a lot of separation of staff ... what I'm actually working on right now is redoing our grass cutting and plow routes to create efficiencies in that in itself, because we have a lot of people driving right past each other every day to go to something that they could actually already cut rather than driving by each other. So just based on the group that you work in, we're doing a lot of this. – Key Informant

The city should have one centrally located supply warehouse for all agencies. We could use an existing building and all supplies can be ordered and delivered through the warehouse. I know we can't do all the supplies but supplies like toilet paper, soap, disinfectant wipes, copying paper, pencils, pans, etc. This could be a big cost savings for all departments [because] we would be ordering in large quantities and if something like Covid ever happened again, this would put the city in a better position. – Key informant



Experiences: Facilities and Maintenance

Even shared knowledge would be super helpful like a plumber and electrician that can tell us what to do rather than guessing. Assisting each other to get things back running. Maybe that's an opportunity that can help us both? But again, [other department] is playing as much catch up to modernize their facilities just like us. – Key informant

As long as proper training occurs and, you know, they're just taking care of the equipment is the biggest thing when some of the stuff is used by others that we typically would use on our own. We have issues with, it not coming back in the same shape as it when they used it. Damages that have sometimes occurred. That'd be my concern. – Key informant

Getting a better contracts with vendors—both SPPL and Parks and Recreation—with preventative maintenance and others can have cost savings from one standpoint. I know things can get a little murky with workload and you know, who's calling who, and levels of understanding job responsibilities. – Key informant



Recommendations

- Build **awareness among staff** of the work being done in the other department. The **culture of collaboration** among departments, in this case SPPL and Parks and Recreation, **needs to be constantly reinforced and modeled through all staff levels—from directors to front line staff**. The overarching message needs to highlight the “one city approach” in all function areas.

Recommendations

- Organize **workgroups within each function area consisting of staff members who do similar jobs from both departments**. Require each workgroup to set regular ongoing meetings using a virtual platform such as Microsoft Teams. The purpose of the workgroups is to:
 - Share information about processes in each department.
 - Build relationships and trust between staff and their counterparts across departments.
 - Explore services within each department that can be shared or centralized.
 - Establish priorities for shared service implementation.

Recommendations: Human Resources

- Continue having **human resources liaisons** assigned to each department and to **collaborate** on developing materials for staff across the two departments.
- Consider greater **centralization of departments for more efficient hiring, cross training, on-boarding, and career development processes** and to **negotiate with unions on expanding job roles**, for example, engineering and maintenance roles.

Recommendations: Financial Management and Procurement

- Consider more **centralized, integrated services**, for example, developing a mechanism **to share vendor and contract lists**.
- Develop **policy guidance** for sharing vendors.
- Examine the benefits of **eProcurement systems** that exist in other municipalities.
- Examine asset management and set **standards, life cycles, and requirements for equipment**, including furniture.

Recommendations: Technology Management and Equipment

- Examine opportunities for **purchasing technology equipment**, for example, computers, **in greater quantities to access better pricing**.
- Continue progress on establishing **one video management system** for all departments.
- Prioritize **safety and security processes** as a starting point for collaboration.
- Prioritize exploring **efficiencies and cost-savings at co-located sites**, for example, sharing physical spaces such as conference space and classrooms and enabling cross-departmental access for maintenance support.

Recommendations: Facilities and Maintenance

- Examine possibilities for a more **standardized maintenance process** to create efficiencies among maintenance staff and prevent the frequency of repairs.
- Develop **policies for equipment sharing** that address the care and maintenance of the equipment.



Thank you!