CITY OF

Lake Elmo, MN

Public Works Organizational Assessment

Report / May 9, 2025

RAFTELIS

This page intentionally left blank to facilitate two-sided printing.

RAFTELIS

May 9, 2025

Nicole Miller
City Administrator
City of Lake Elmo

Subject: Public Works Organizational Assessment Project Report

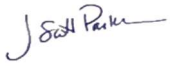
Dear Ms. Miller,

We are pleased to present this project report for the City of Lake Elmo Public Works Organizational Assessment. The report includes observations and recommendations for incorporating best management practices into Public Works operations and creating staff capacity in several key areas.

The Public Works staff who engaged in this process take pride in their work and strive to offer exceptional service to the community. The operational improvements and staffing adjustments that are recommended here are intended to make the Public Works staff more efficient and effective. Addressing these areas will ensure that the Department of Public Works continues to be an asset to the Lake Elmo community.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with the City of Lake Elmo.

Sincerely,



J. Scott Parker
Vice President – Organizational Assessment

This page intentionally left blank to facilitate two-sided printing.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Executive Summary

The City of Lake Elmo (City) contracted Raftelis to complete an operational, organizational, and management analysis of its Department of Public Works (Department). This assessment aimed to identify opportunities for improving operational efficiency and effectiveness and review organizational structure, technology, processes, and policies to provide efficient and effective service to the fast-growing community of Lake Elmo.

To complete this assessment, the project team engaged with nine operators, three members of the leadership team, three members of the billing, finance, and HR departments, and three (contracted) engineering team members to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Public Works Department operations. The perspectives from staff and leadership were combined with an analysis of available data and information related to current workloads and staff performance, including data related to capital and operating statistics, service level targets, budgets, capital improvement plans, and annual financial reports. Information gained from interviews and documentary research was compared with industry best practices and helped shape a series of recommendations with the intent of improved efficiency and effectiveness of Department operations, while working to ensure the ability of the Department to handle continued growth in the future.

The City of Lake Elmo has several unique challenges associated with its Public Works operations. For example, the City has experienced rapid population growth over the last 10 years. By 2050, Lake Elmo is expected to be the fastest-growing community in Washington County, with a population projected to increase 67% to 19,000 residents by mid-century[1]. More recently, the City's growth rate has ranked as the fastest growing in the entire state[2]. In some important ways, the growth in workload demands that Public Works has experienced has far outpaced the rate of population growth. In 2013, the City had only several dozen sewer customers and now has over 2,600. In the same time span, the City's water customers have grown from just over 1,000 to approximately 3,500. The City and its residents also have had concerns over PFAS contamination in the water supply, to which the City settled a $2.7M drinking water lawsuit with 3M[3].

Despite these challenges, in many respects the Department is providing a high level of service, given its size and challenges. For example, it has developed and tracks service level targets, such as valve exercising, hydrant flushing, and sewer jetting. The service level targets qualify as industry best practices, and the Department, to this point, has been able to meet its targets. These types of preventative maintenance activities are needed if the Department is to maximize the value it receives from its assets. In addition, the Department has implemented asset management software (Beehive) that allows the Department to track maintenance activities and the condition of its assets. Finally, the Department has a pay grade structure (Operator III, II, I) that rewards employee motivation, and is at least partly responsible for the superior employee retention observed.

Ultimately, the primary difficulties faced by the Department are growth-related. While it has been able to meet its service level targets, the effort has clearly strained the Department and its resources, and the current pace is unlikely to be sustainable. The Department last created additional Operator positions in 2019. In just the four years from 2019 to 2023, the growth in the Department's major service areas has been rapid, with cumulative growth of:

- 74% increase in sewer customers

[1] Population growth in Lake Elmo: https://bringmethenews.com/minnesota-news/lake-elmo-rosemount-and-carver-among-cities-set-for-population-boom
[2] https://www.startribune.com/lake-elmo-growth-rate-surges/600179062
[3] PFAS Lawsuit: 3M, Lake Elmo settle for $2.7M, land transfer in drinking water lawsuit | MPR News

- 39% increase in sewer pipe length
- 43% increase in water customers
- 55% increase in water pipe length
- 23% increase in park acreage

The Department has taken steps to gain efficiency (e.g., improved water meter technology, screening of utility locates requests) and should be applauded for those efforts. Nevertheless, there are limits as to what can be gained via efficiency measures without adding staffing capacity. The recommendations contained within this report are intended to help the Department adapt to the growth it has seen as well as prepare it to meet workload demands in the future. Overall, fully implementing our recommendations will require dedicated effort over the next one to three years. The table below summarizes the recommendations included in this assessment by topic area.

Table 1: List of Report Recommendations

Number	Recommendations
Yearly Planning and Prioritization	
1	Create an annual work plan to determine when significant work initiatives are scheduled or expected.
Organizational Structure and Staffing	
2	Use the annual work plan to revisit policies restricting Operator PTO.
3	Modify the Department's summer hours to increase efficiency.
4	Increase staffing by two Operators and one Lead Operator.
5	Designate about six Operators as Utility Specialists and limit on-call rotations to the Utility Specialists.
6	Edit the Director's job description to remove responsibilities for heavy equipment operation and add focus on public outreach and achieving strategic goals.
7	Hire an administrative assistant to help with administrative needs.
8	Either hire a certified mechanic or sign a service contract with a local vendor.
9	Stakeholders within the City should collaborate on potential Parks staffing.
Work Processes	
10	Implement the Beehive CMMS to fully utilize its capabilities.
Leadership	
11	Obtain leadership training for those in supervisory roles.
Safety	
12	Work to instill and sustain a culture of safety.

Introduction

Background and Methodology

The City of Lake Elmo engaged Raftelis to assist with a comprehensive operational, organizational, and management analysis of the Department of Public Works. This assessment aims to analyze operations, service levels, infrastructure management, organizational structure, and staffing levels and to provide recommendations for improving efficiency and effectiveness.

After the project kickoff, Raftelis spent two days on-site interviewing key staff and discussing the Department's practices. The consulting team held small group interviews with representatives at all levels to gather insights into daily operations and staff perceptions regarding staffing levels, workloads, intergroup relationships, and potential efficiency improvements. Remote interviews were conducted with the Engineering team to accommodate staff schedules and ensure the project timeline was managed effectively.

Information gained from the interviews was then supplemented and verified by a review of documents and data provided by the Department. Sources include:

- Annual budgets
- Annual financial reports
- Capital Improvement Plans (CIPs)
- Historical staffing levels
- Growth projections
- Water and sewer flow rates
- Operating and capital statistics
- Public Works metrics
- Job descriptions

Raftelis then combined information from document reviews with themes identified in the interviews to evaluate the desired level of service compared with staffing levels. This information, where appropriate, was also compared to best practices guidelines from industry organizations such as the American Water Works Association (AWWA). This comparative analysis allowed the project team to clearly define recommendations to increase staff capacity in several key areas and provide a framework for future staffing and service level decisions.

About The City of Lake Elmo

The City of Lake Elmo spans 24.2 square miles in Washington County, Minnesota. It is located along U.S. Interstate 694, U.S. Route 36, and U.S. Interstate 94, approximately 18 miles northeast of St. Paul, the state capital. The City sits on Lake Elmo, a 256.8acre lake that contains several fish species, making it a destination for boating, shopping, dining, fishing, and other recreational activities.

According to the latest American Community Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the City's permanent resident population is 13,756.[4] The permanent population has grown by nearly 21.5% over the last 10 years. Most Lake Elmo community members reside in owner-occupied housing.

[4] U.S. Census: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Lake Elmo city, Minnesota

About the Public Works Department

The City of Lake Elmo's Public Works Department manages the City's water and sewer systems, maintains roadways and sidewalks, performs street sweeping, and oversees the City's infrastructure planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance. This includes streets, drinking water, sanitary sewer, and stormwater systems. Additionally, the Public Works staff is responsible for maintaining parks, sidewalks, trails, and all City buildings and vehicles.

A Public Works Director leads the Department, and the current Director undertook this role in 2019. The Assistant Director oversees the Department's operations and maintains utility maintenance records and planning. According to the City of Lake Elmo's 2023 budget, the total staffing complement for the Department includes 11.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and operators who oversee parks, water, and sewer. The organizational structure of the Department and other relevant portions of the City's organizational structure are shown in the figure below.

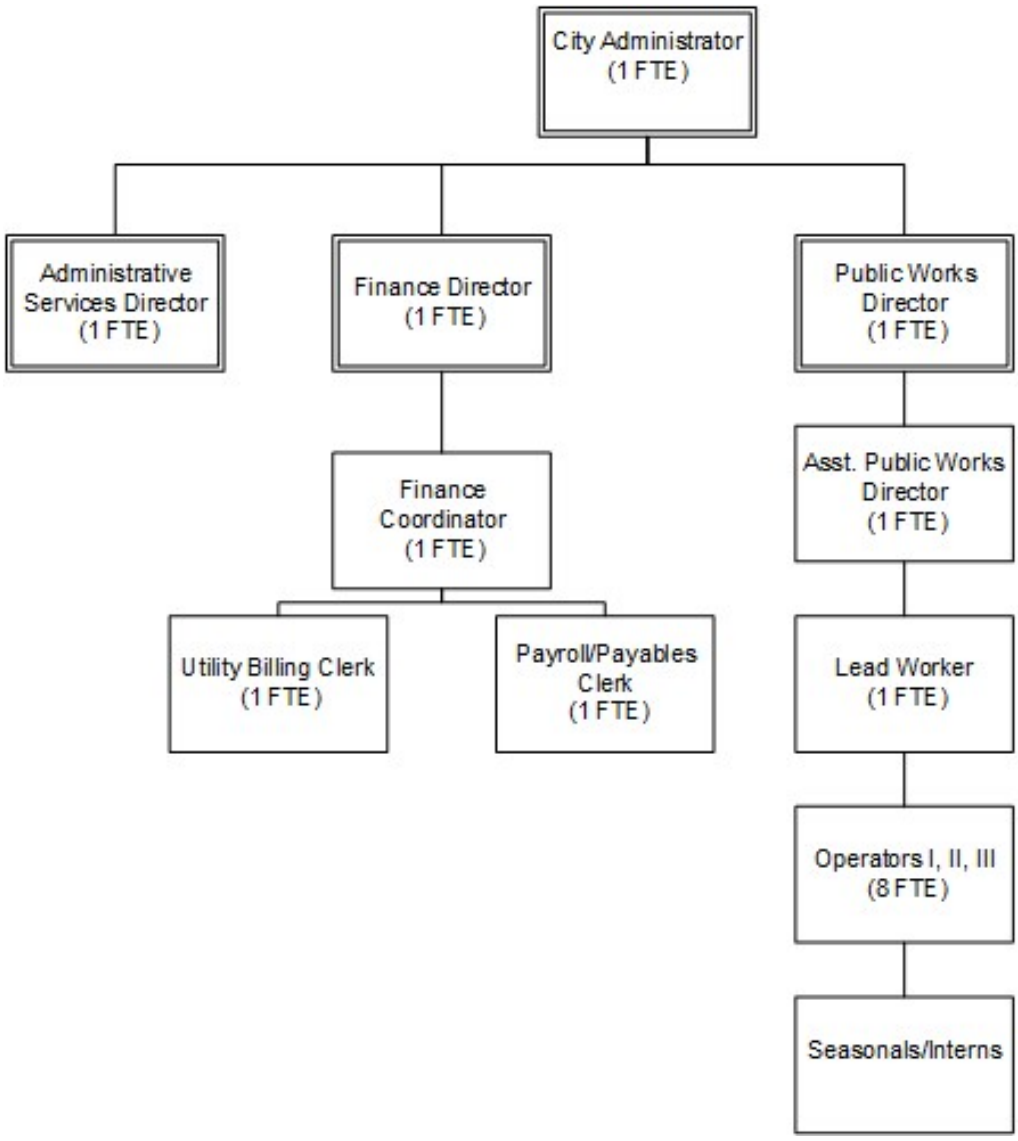


Figure 1: Public Works and Relevant Departments' Organizational Structure, FY2024

CORE SERVICES MATRIX

The following table provides an overview of core services. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive but illustrates staff responsibilities throughout Public Works.

Table 2: Public Works Department Core Services

Function	Summary
Public Parks	• Maintenance of public works • Street and sidewalk sweeping • Maintenance of parks and trails • Tree trimming • Snow plowing and salting roads
Utilities	• Infrastructure planning, design, and maintenance • Drinking water • Sanitary sewer • Stormwater systems • Utility locates • Hydrant/valve flushing and turning
Sewer	• Lift station and grinder pump maintenance and repair • Line maintenance and repair • Sewer inspections • Sewer line locates

STAFFING

Authorized staffing in the Public Works Department grew from five to 11 FTEs between 2012 and 2023. In that same time period, water customer accounts grew by 229%, and sewer accounts grew by 8,534%. The staffing levels for the Department have remained at 11 FTEs since 2019, which was the most recent year a new Operator position was added. The only other full-time addition since 2019 was that of the Assistant Director.

Analysis and Recommendations

Population growth in a city inevitably increases demand for services. Often, those demands for services grow in rough proportion to the growth in population, and this approximates what is seen with the Department of Public Works regarding its service areas of roads and parks. The rapid population growth Lake Elmo has experienced, growing from 8,069 residents in 2012 to 13,514 in 2023, would strain most municipal departments. Importantly, though, the Department also provides water and sewer services, which have grown at much faster rates than would be suggested by population growth. Prior to 2012, there were no more than 30 sewer customers in the City. The water system, while not as nascent as the sewer system, served only a fraction of the City residents. In other words, the water and sewer systems' growth are not due just to new residents but primarily to rising participation rates in the utilities from existing City residents. This, combined with simple overall growth, places its own workload demands on services.

As mentioned previously in this report, the Department has not added a Public Works Operator since 2019. Nevertheless, it has clearly defined Levels of Service (i.e., target rates for various preventative maintenance activities such as valve turning, hydrant flushing, sewer jetting, etc.). The maintenance activities adhere to industry standards, and the Department successfully implements those plans. It has comprehensive Capital Improvement Plans (CIPs) for each of its service areas, and it has implemented Asset Management software (Beehive). Some of the maintenance service level targets that the Department has set and strives to meet include:

- Sewers jetted every three years
- Valves are exercised every three years
- Unidirectional hydrant flushing performed every summer; dead-end valves flushed in autumn
- Ditches mowed twice per year
- Biannual facility inspections

Additionally, the Department has established service level targets related to customer service, including examples such as:

- Water or sewer leaks investigated within 30 minutes
- Water or sewer quality complaints responded to within 24 hours
- Tree complaints or concerns are investigated within three days
- Park complaints investigated within one to two days based on safety concerns

The Department is also advantaged in a key respect in that its utility infrastructure is almost entirely new. Most cities grapple with the repair and replacement of aging infrastructure while needing to contend with growth. Typically, their ability to perform preventative maintenance can be overwhelmed with the need to conduct reactive maintenance, leading to a downward spiral of asset conditions. For example, the Department's water and sewer utilities have few assets more than 20 years old, with many being substantially younger. What results is a lower than normal demand for reactive maintenance. This will change as the utility systems age; the need to conduct reactive maintenance will rise, even with appropriate preventative maintenance programs.

Another advantage held by the Department is its people. The Public Works Operators, in particular, are experienced and have had little turnover. Across the nation, many public works departments and utilities struggle to attract and

retain quality operators. Not only does the Department lack this problem, but its rules regarding position grades (Operator III, II, I) allow operators to "self-promote" if they serve appropriate time-in-service and earn additional licensure levels. Almost every operator in the Department has pursued this strategy, leading to most operators being licensed and classed at the highest grade (Operator I).

Despite the strengths of the Department, there are challenges as well. Most notable among them is the heavy workload in the Department and the pressures to meet service-level targets. For various groups within the Department, there are concerns regarding work-life balance and morale. In short, while the Department has identified appropriate service level targets and is able to meet them, the pressure and strain required to achieve them has created a somewhat unsustainable environment. If left unaddressed, this level of unsustainability will likely increase as the City continues to grow and assets age.

For example, one major issue for the operators is the ability to take paid time off (PTO). Additionally, there is a noticeable lack of effective communication between operators and management regarding the overall goals and vision.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WORKLOADS OVER TIME

Benchmarking is typically used to compare the quantitative and/or qualitative metrics of an organization against those of peer organizations or an industry as a whole. Public works departments often struggle to benchmark against one another due to the numerous unique factors that set them apart, such as the differing relative sizes of the services they provide (e.g., utilities, streets, parks), relative to the number of staff dedicated to that service. Some agencies devote full crews to any one or all of these service offerings. Others, like Lake Elmo, expect their staff to perform ALL of these services. In other words, little or dubious insight might be gained by comparing the City's Department of Public Works to those of other cities. Instead, what can provide meaningful insight is an examination of metrics that quantify relative workloads and how they have changed over time. Unfortunately, there is no way to examine the cumulative workload of the Department across all its services over time. Instead, the following graphs will look at the Department's component services individually: water, sewer, streets and roadways, and parks.

The graphs in this section present workloads normalized by total FTEs in the Department. The City's Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) contains tables of statistical information, including the number of FTEs allocated to each activity by year. These allocated FTEs can help indicate the amount of labor expended on an activity in a year, but these allocations may be inexact. The allocation method may have changed over time, and some allocated labor may not be directly related to the operation and maintenance of assets (e.g., allocated time of the Administrator or Director, utility billing). For this reason, the workload metrics are normalized by the total staff within the Department, as these ratios represent the total demand to do work per employee.

Table 3: Selected Department Statistics and Authorized FTEs, 2013 – 2023

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sewer Pipe (mi.)	4	4	4	8	8	29	29	32	33	36	40
Sewer Customers	29	45	96	321	712	1,253	1,436	1,612	1,937	2,206	2,504
Water Pipe (mi.)	39	40	43	50	50	58	58	73	75	82	90
Water Customers	1,051	1,073	1,234	1,538	1,727	2,317	2,423	2,522	2,863	3,196	3,466
Acres of Parks	420	420	420	420	420	427	427	427	517	517	526
Paved Road (mi.)	63	65	65	103	103	112	112	92	95	97	97
Population	8,069	8,069	8,069	8,069	9,625	10,521	11,105	11,105	12,655	13,514	13,514
Total PW Employees	5	6	5	6	9	10	11	10	10	11	11

Figure 2 shows the water customer accounts served per Department employee. In other words, the denominator is the total number of FTEs within the Department, which are predominantly Operators and is a good proxy for the capacity to operate and maintain infrastructure. In Figure 2 the number of accounts per FTE has consistently grown after 2019, reflecting that no new operator positions had been added since 2019. The general trend across the timespan in the figure is for increasing numbers of accounts served per employee over time. Between 2017 and 2023, the number of accounts served per employee has grown by 64%.

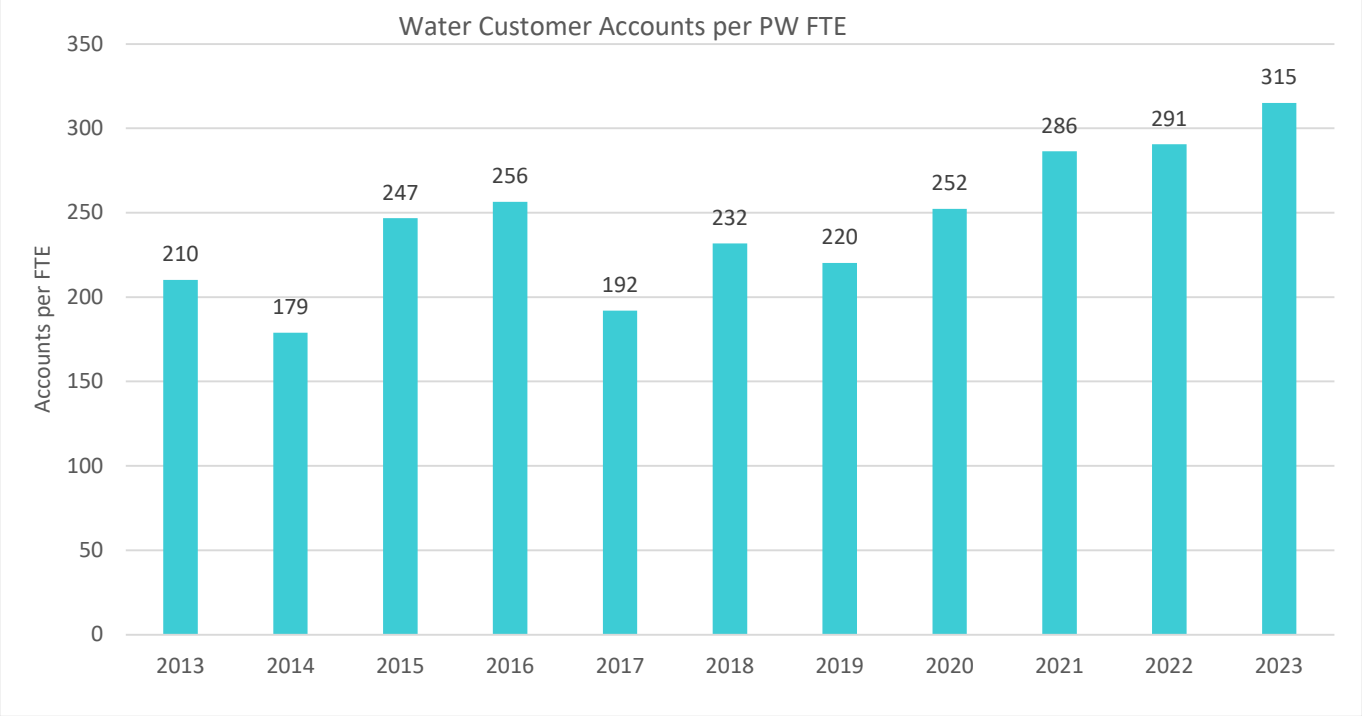


Figure 2: Water Customer Accounts per PW FTE

Figure 3 presents the number of sewer customer accounts per total Public Works FTEs. Again, the sewer utility had very few customers in the initial years of the graph and has seen rapid growth, so the years of 2012 to 2016 should be evaluated in context. Notably, no other service area has grown faster than the sewer utility for the Department.

Since 2018, the ratio of sewer customers to Public Works FTEs has nearly doubled. This figure is a strong indication that the Department's labor resources may be strained by the growth in the sewer utility.

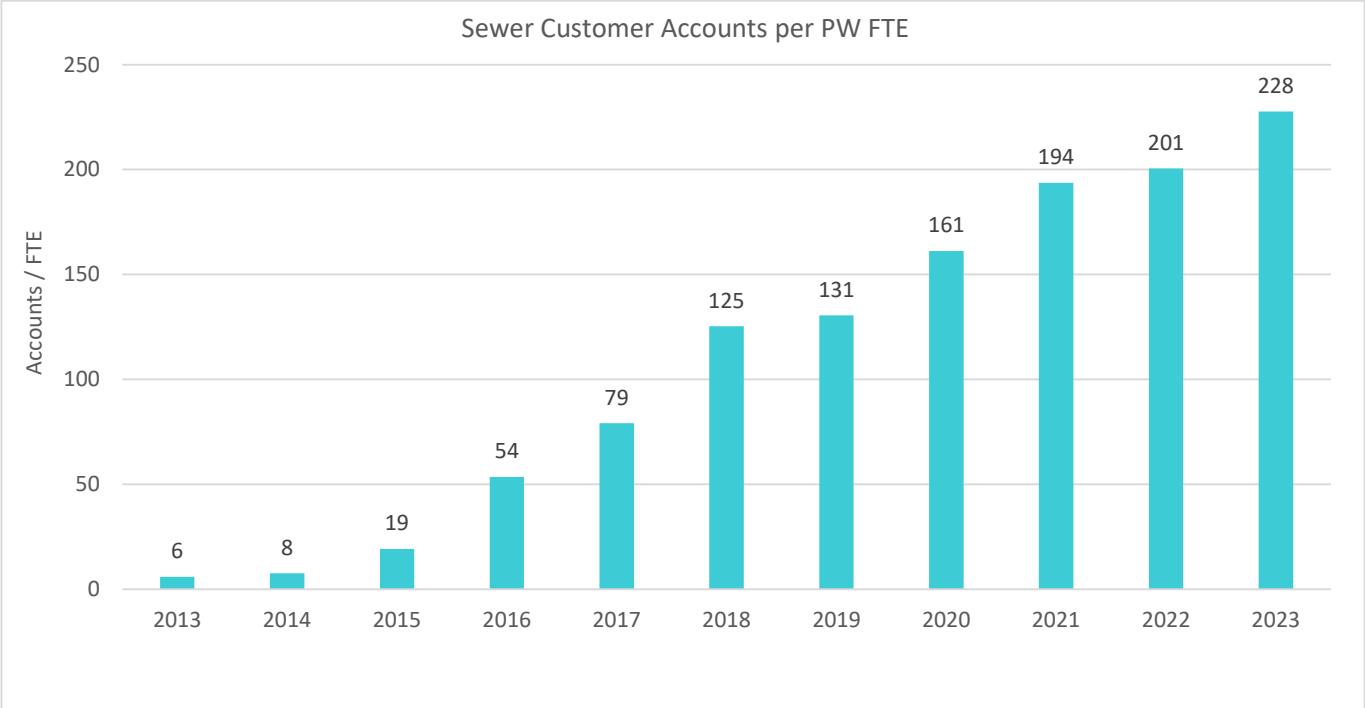


Figure 3: Sewer Customer Accounts per PW FTE

Figure 4 presents water production (MGD) per total Public Works FTEs. Notably, this rate has been basically constant from 2020 to 2023, despite a growth in water accounts and only one additional FTE during that time. This supports the notion that per account water usage has fallen during this timeframe.

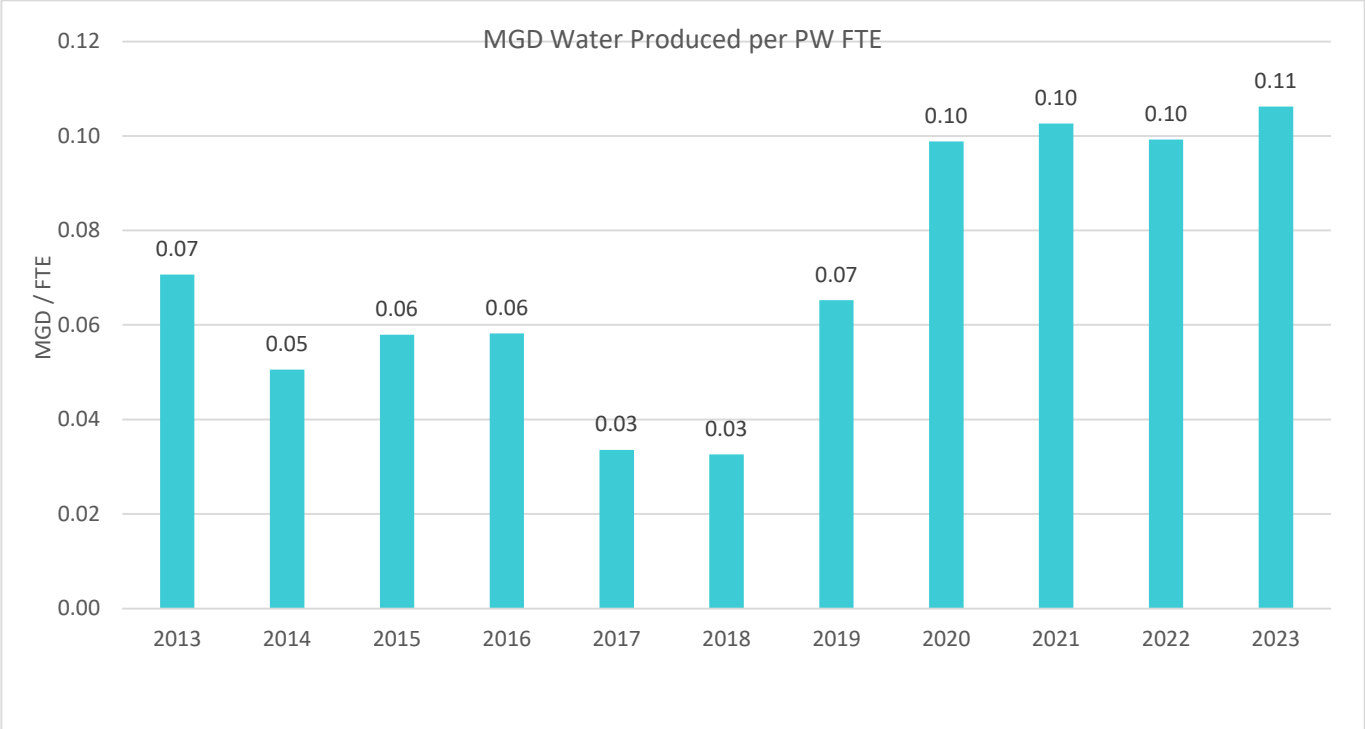


Figure 4: MGD Water Produced per PW FTE

Figure 5 presents the wastewater flow per Public Works FTE. Again, the general trend is one of increasing flow rates per FTE over time. Notably, this trend has also been evident from 2018 onward. Again, the reason this trend is notable is that the last time the Department hired an additional Public Works Operator was in 2019, and this graph is suggestive of increasing labor demands per employee.

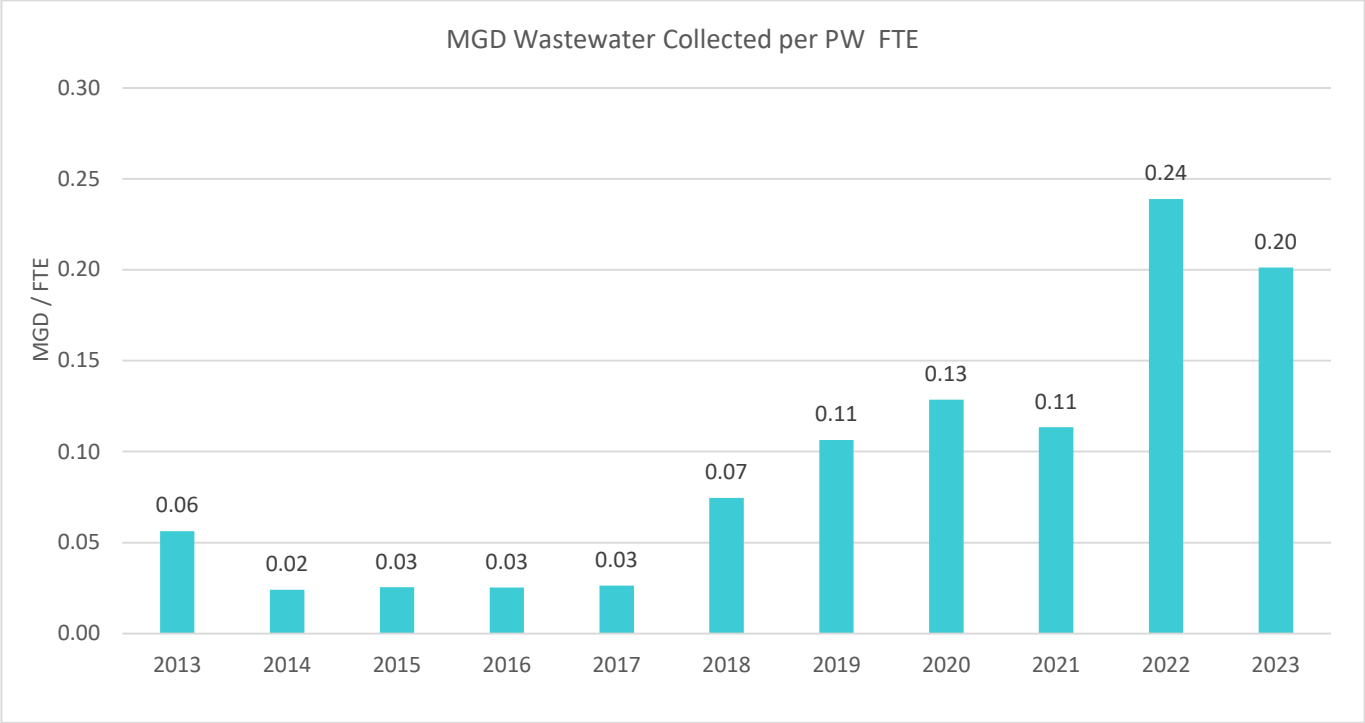


Figure 5: MGD Wastewater Collected per PW FTE

The number of acres of parkland has grown over time, though the rate of growth has been much more modest than the rate of growth in the number of water and wastewater customer accounts. Figure 6 presents the acres of parkland per total Public Works FTE. Here, the number of acres per Public Works employee is highest in the early years of the figure, which is unusual compared to the other major services that have been examined thus far. However, it is again notable that since 2019, the latest year in which an additional Public Works Operator was added, the ratio of parkland to employees has again been rising, as parkland has been added to the City while the number of Operators has not grown.

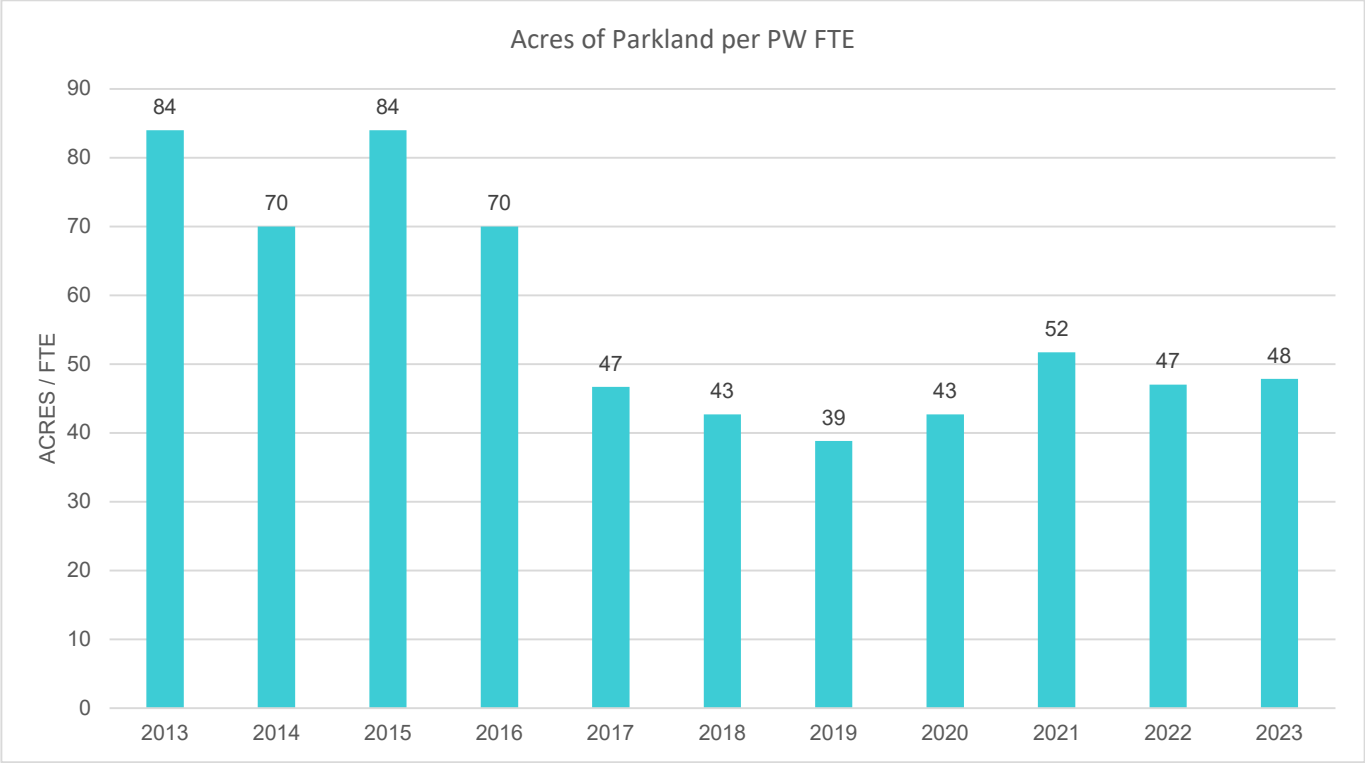


Figure 6: Acres of Parkland per PW FTE

Figure 7 presents the miles of paved road per Public Works employee. This metric is unusual in that it is the only major infrastructure metric that has fluctuated up and down over time. The length varied from 63 miles in 2023 to 112 miles in 2018 and 2019 before dropping to 97 miles in 2023. This is the only potential workload measure shown in this report that has declined over time.

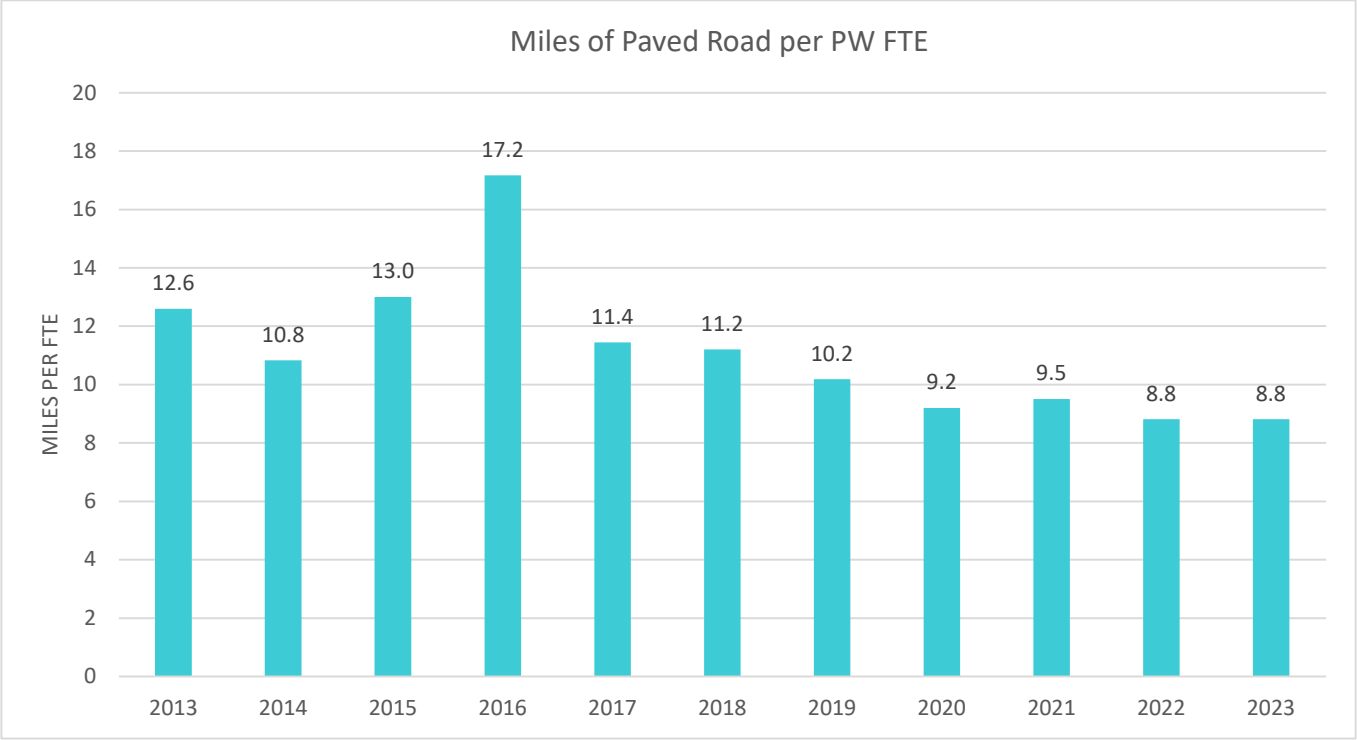


Figure 7: Miles of Paved Road per PW FTE

Examined individually, the figures presented in this section do not often tell a clear story or identify the cause of observed trends. However, when these figures are considered as a whole, there is a compelling narrative that the rapid growth within the City has not been met with proportional growth in the Public Works workforce in recent years. Perhaps the strongest evidence of this is seen in reviewing each of the graphs, focusing on 2019 onward. In each case (with the one exception of miles of paved road per FTE), the general trend indicates leaner staffing in 2023 than in 2019. This metric is significant in that 2019 was the most recent year an additional Public Works Operator FTE was added. These individuals are the ones who actually perform the labor required of the Department's assets. Since 2019, the only other FTE added to the Department was an Assistant Director in 2022.

YEARLY PLANNING AND PRIORITIZATION

Recommendation 1: Create an annual work plan to determine when significant work initiatives are scheduled or expected

Work scheduling for the Department consists of balancing and prioritizing different kinds of work. There are day-to-day activities (e.g., daily utility rounds), one-off projects (e.g., waterline leak repair), and seasonal projects and activities (e.g., snow removal). The seasonal projects and activities represent a majority of preventative maintenance-related Level of Service targets and can be high-visibility projects for residents. (Residents will be aware if streets are plowed in a timely manner or if potholes are neglected.) Examples of such activities include:

- Sewer line jetting
- Valve turning
- Hydrant flushing
- Street paving/pothole repair
- Snow plowing
- Ice rink maintenance/trail grooming

Despite the regularity of these activities, the Department lacks a documented annual work plan. While these activities and projects are still being completed, the lack of a work plan leads to deficiencies in resource planning, reactive work taking priority over planned work, and intradepartmental communications. The Department should create an annual work plan that identifies the date windows in which projects are likely to occur and estimates the labor requirements within that time window. For example, pothole repair might be anticipated in June and July. Estimates of the total number of days within that timeframe that crews will be engaged in the activity and the crew size should be made. Weather events, high-priority or emergency projects, and other conditions will inevitably cause some days within this time window to be devoted to non-pothole activities Nevertheless, the annual work plan is intended to be an informed estimate that can be used to coordinate various seasonal project activities in a way that is most efficient for staff. For instance, while pothole repair can be accomplished whenever conditions allow it, valve turning is conducted for three weeks each summer using rental equipment. An annual work plan can prioritize the time-sensitive nature of valve turning and allow the Department to plan around the activity.

This plan can also assist the Department in assessing and communicating its labor needs. The activities included in the list above and other relevant activities represent some of the Department's baseline labor requirements. An accounting of these needs can help express the amount of labor required to conduct its basic seasonal project activities and allow for accurate "comparables" with the time available.

Finally, in Raftelis' interviews with Department staff, a consistent observation was the lack of communication of the "big picture" of projects, their timing, and assignments. Implementing an annual work plan that outlines significant scheduled projects can enhance communication between management and staff, ultimately leading to increased transparency and efficiency. It can also assist with morale by communicating the expected baseline work needs.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STAFFING

Recommendation 2: Use the annual work plan to revisit policies restricting Operator PTO

Recent, temporary, guidelines established within the Department allowed for a maximum of two Public Works Operators approved for PTO per day, a reduction from previous limits of four Operators approved for PTO on a given day. The reduction in this limit, while temporary, is indicative of the strain the Department is experiencing to meet workload demands with available staffing. (This limit has since been lifted.)

The reduced PTO limit negatively affected morale within the Department. Operators have had numerous PTO requests denied, despite some requests being made months in advance, to the point that Operators do not feel that they are likely to be able to take the vacation that they have earned on the dates they would prefer to take it. Given a two-person PTO limit, however, denial of PTO requests is a likely outcome. Given the number of Operator positions (including the Lead Operator), and assuming an average accrual of 7.5 hours of PTO per pay period, plus an additional six days of sick leave per year, the Operators collectively earn almost 2,200 hours of time off each year. In other words, if time off were evenly distributed throughout the year, at least one Operator would be out every working day of the year. Time off requests are not distributed evenly, however. They naturally cluster around holidays and school breaks, which then leads to denials of PTO requests.

While the perception of the need for aggressive PTO limits is understandable (i.e., the sense that Level of Service targets can only be met with a full complement of staff), a change in approach is warranted. First, there is some flexibility as to when some of the Department's project work must be completed. Of all the work the Department completes in a year, the Department has significant flexibility as to when certain activities are conducted. Secondly, as noted earlier, on average, at least one Operator will be off every workday (assuming all PTO and sick leave is taken). Every day, then, that two or more Operators are on PTO mathematically results in one or more days that the Operators are fully staffed.

Denial of PTO requests has had negative consequences on the Operators' morale. Raftelis recommends that the Department revisit this limit with the goal of increasing it by using the annual work plan (Recommendation 1) to inform what this limit should be. This recommendation should be considered strategically as the annual work plan is being crafted. When planning certain seasonal projects, consideration should be given to grant PTO requests as part of the planning process. The potential to grant PTO may also be able to fluctuate seasonally based on work needs. Certain weeks of the year might intentionally be identified as "low power" weeks in which no major projects are planned. For example, aligning such a week with the local school district's schedule for spring break may be advantageous. There is likely to be higher demand for PTO on that week, and as long as the Department is able to meet day-to-day operational needs, the time off that is taken that week will ensure more days of fully staffed operation the remainder of the year.

Expounding on the notion of fluctuating PTO limits, the Department may wish to give special consideration to the snow plowing season (generally considered to be November 1 to March 31). Within the snow plowing season, the Department may not wish to approve so much PTO on any given day that it cannot staff the seven plowing routes in the City should there be a snowstorm. However, given the quality of modern weather forecasting, the Department may wish to grant additional PTO requests with a week's notice should the forecast be sufficiently clear of potential snow risks. Reportedly, at least a form of this conditional granting of PTO ("approved off pending a snow event") has been in place for several years.

Ultimately, working to make the PTO that Operators have accrued more easily accessible to them is likely to improve morale within the Department at no fiscal cost and should be considered as the annual work plan is developed.

Recommendation 3: Modify the Department's summer hours to increase efficiency

During the winter months, the Department's Operators work a standard eight-hour day (Monday to Friday). In the non-winter months, Operators work four nine-hour days (Monday to Thursday) and a four-hour day on Friday morning. This "summer schedule" is considered a win-win proposition. The Operators appreciate the early start to the weekend, and management believes that they are significantly more productive under this scheme, thanks to the longer uninterrupted hours of work in the afternoons of the nine-hour days. This alternative summer schedule improves productivity by minimizing the inevitable inefficiency that occurs during the startup and cleanups as crews transition from lunches and breaks. It extends the time spent working uninterrupted in the afternoons.

A side effect of the summer hours is the desire among Operators to take Fridays off. Currently, by using just four hours of their accrued PTO, Operators can get a full three-day weekend. Given the low PTO cost to Operators, Fridays are always minimally staffed.

Management has noted increased productivity that comes from workdays that are longer than eight hours and has been considering extending the current summer hours of "four nines and a four" to the winter months in addition to adopting the "four 10s" schedule in the summer. This report remains neutral as to whether "four nines and a four" is appropriate during the winter. The increased productivity gained by "four nines and a four" is not questioned. The issue is that the reduced hours scheduled for Fridays may require some amount of overtime if roads must be plowed on a Friday. Other potential downsides include spending longer hours outside in the Minnesota winter and the lack of available daylight, which can pose a safety hazard. Nonetheless, the benefits of longer hours, even in the winter, may be worth the cost, but this should be evaluated by the Department. There may also be compromise strategies in which "summer hours" are extended longer than they have been historically (e.g., summer hours could be in place from March 15 to December 1). We believe these sorts of details are best sorted out by the Department.

Raftelis does propose dividing the Operators into two groups to address these staffing challenges during the summer months. Crew A would work Monday through Thursday, while Crew B would work Tuesday through Friday. This arrangement ensures that each crew has three consecutive days off while maintaining a four-day work schedule of 10-hour shifts. The summer schedule theoretically allows every Operator to enjoy a three-day weekend.

We recommend this change based on the fact that under the current summer schedule, Mondays to Thursdays are considered productive field workdays, while Fridays address more housekeeping-type activities. Changing the schedule to ensure everyone gets a three-day weekend (except for the individual on-call) may improve productivity, reduce the total demand for PTO during the summer and help spread PTO requests throughout the rest of the year. The longer 10-hour days should lead both to greater efficiency and to improved workplace morale. See Figure 12 for a depiction of the structure of Crew A and Crew B.

Recommendation 4: Increase staffing by two Operators and one Lead Operator

Over the past six years, workloads have increased significantly, but no additional Operators have been hired since 2019. The number of sewer customer accounts has grown from fewer than 30 in 2013 to over 2,500 by 2023. The number of water customer accounts has grown by over 330% between 2013 and 2023. In contrast, the number of Operators has grown from four to nine. Given the growing workload demands, the Department has adopted efficiency strategies to free up the workforce. One example is replacing water meters that use Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) technology with those that use Automatic Meter Infrastructure (AMI) technology, which no longer requires Operators to drive around the City to obtain meter reads. A second example is more intense screening of utility locate requests, in which a desktop determination is now made as to whether the proposed activity actually

requires an Operator to respond in person to mark City assets. Despite these strategies, the growing workload demands are straining the Department. Target service levels continue to be met, but in a manner that is unlikely to be sustainable. Two areas in which the strain is evident are in recent strategies to limit PTO usage (see Recommendation 2) and the manner in which tasks are staffed and performed. Specifically, there is a perception of excessive pressure to complete tasks more quickly while staffing tasks with fewer Operators than may be recommended for safe operation.

The current complement of Operators has a single Lead Operator overseeing eight Operators. Although this role is not officially a supervisory position, it does have some supervisory characteristics. Normal recommendations would be for no position to oversee more than five to eight people. Usually, a front-line supervisor, for example, a Lead Operator, is more of a Team Lead-type role with a smaller span of control of four to six individuals and is not monitoring teams on multiple worksites.

Given the demonstrated need, Raftelis recommends that the Department hire additional Operators. Additional Operators, in turn, suggest the need for an additional Lead Operator. Specifically, Raftelis recommends in the short term that the Department hires one Operator and one Lead Operator. The project team believes that in the longer term (as soon as the following year), a second new Operator is likely warranted. However, the Department is currently recruiting to fill an open Operator position, a vacancy created due to retirement. Filling this vacant position and those of the two new recommended positions would represent a significant undertaking for the Department in the short term. Assuming these positions are filled this year, the Department may assess in the next year or two whether creating and filling the second new position for Operator is warranted.

The hiring of additional Operators and a Lead Operator will also require investment in tools and equipment for these individuals. One or more trucks may be required for the new staff members. Additionally, the Department's workspace is nearly at capacity now, with little space to park additional vehicles indoors. If the community continues to grow as it has in the recent past, it is likely that additional building and/or garage space will be needed in the coming years.

As noted earlier in the report, the Department has identified appropriate service level targets and is meeting those targets. However, the effort required to meet them has been growing for years. Additional staff resources will allow the Department to meet those targets more effectively today in a manner that is safe and sustainable for the workforce and prepare the Department for a future where workload demands continue to grow.

Recommendation 5: Designate up to six Operators as Utility Specialists and limit on-call rotations to the Utility Specialists

Currently, Public Works Operators are not differentiated by the types of work that they do. There are not "water operators" or "sewer operators" or "streets operators". Each week, however, one Operator is designated to be on call. This on-call Operator is responsible for checking and resolving any alarms within the water and sewer systems, particularly after-hours and weekends. The on-call Operator is also responsible for performing daily rounds on the utility systems. The on-call responsibility rotates weekly amongst all Operators. With a complement of eight Operators and a Lead Operator (currently seven Operators due to the vacancy), each Operator is on call once approximately every two months.

Some Operators expressed a lack of comfort with working on the utility system, noting that they rarely work with it outside of their call weeks. The Department has the advantage of being, in relative terms, a simple utility system with few mechanical components and operations that do not require constant monitoring. Yet, it is still complex enough that infrequent exposure fails to produce the familiarity that one would expect in Operators. The issue expressed by

the Operators is likely to be compounded in the short and medium term. In the short term, the addition of new Operators will reduce the frequency of the on-call rotation for each Operator if the current scheme of rotation amongst all Operators continues. If the Department hires an additional three Operators, which it may do over the next year or so, each Operator will be on call once every 12 weeks, or roughly once every three months. It will be even harder to gain familiarity with the system with reduced exposure. In the medium term, the addition of new PFAS treatment plants will further complicate the water system's operation. Reportedly, these treatment plants should not have a large impact on labor needs but will be a complicating factor in gaining mastery of the water system operations for the Operators. Additionally, as existing equipment ages, it will require more know-how to keep it running properly, further emphasizing the need for expertise in the system.

To address the issues noted above, Raftelis recommends that the Department designate approximately six Operators as Utility Specialists. The primary differentiation of Utility Specialists from other Operators is that the on-call rotation would be staffed only by the Utility Specialists. The on-call Operator would continue to have primary responsibility for the daily rounds, as well. Specifically, Raftelis recommends that both Lead Operators be designated as Utility Specialists. As to the other four positions, it would be preferable that they be staffed with four of the most senior operators (e.g., Public Works Operator I's).

There is a question as to the desirability of this role. Historically, in the water and wastewater industry, the opportunity to earn compensation and overtime from being on call was considered a perk among Operators. However, in recent years, Raftelis' experience shows that overtime work is increasingly difficult to recruit for. It appears that younger employees increasingly value their time. The Department has evidence of this trend as well. Recent retirements/vacancies have opened two weekly on-call "slots," and these slots have remained open for a considerable time. (The on-call work is still being covered, but out of requirement rather than opportunity.) Further, when given the choice of receiving overtime pay or comp time, the Operators have exhibited a strong preference for comp time, indicating that their time is worth more than their wages.

It may be that the role of Utility Specialist requires incentives beyond the compensation received for being on-call. There are several potential mechanisms that could be explored and could include things such as:

- A uniform increase in base wages for Operators designated as Utility Specialists
- An increase in step on the pay scale
- More generous terms of on-call compensation (e.g., instead of one hour of automatic pay when on call, an increase to one and a half hours)
- Preferential scheduling for overtime requests when not on call (e.g., if desired, they could be last to be called out for weekend plowing work if not on-call)

Should there be significant interest in the Utility Specialist role, preferential selection should be made of the most experienced Operators (i.e., Operator I's) before opening the role to less experienced positions. It should be noted that any of the approaches mentioned above will likely require negotiation with the Operators' union.

It should also be noted that the intention of this recommendation is not to segregate the Operators into utility and non-utility skillsets. Currently, there is no need to divide the Operators such that one Lead Operator leads the Utility Specialists and the other leads the non-Utility Specialists. All Operators should continue to be required to earn the licenses appropriate for their level (III, II, or I) and encouraged to advance their licensure. Rather, the intention is to ensure that those who respond to after-hours call outs are experienced, comfortable, and competent in working independently to solve whatever issues have arisen with utility infrastructure.

Figure 8 below shows the proposed organizational structure of the Department and related functions with the addition of a Lead Operator and two new Operators, who are included as part of the Operators / Utility Specialists. (The Administrative Assistant position is discussed in Recommendation 7.)

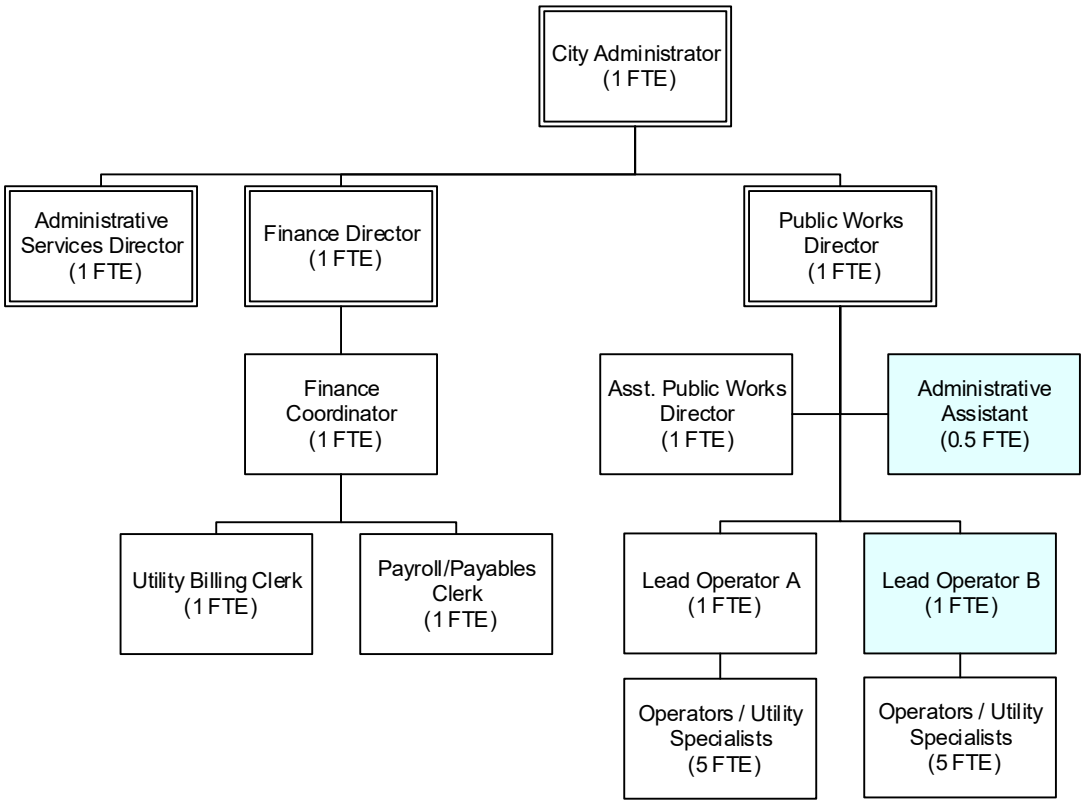


Figure 8: Proposed Organizational Structure with Addition of Lead Operator and Operators

Recommendation 6: Edit the Director's job description to remove responsibilities for heavy equipment operation and add focus on public outreach and achieving strategic goals

As cities grow, their organizations inevitably exhibit more specialization. In smaller Public Works departments or utilities, staff tend to "wear a lot of hats." As they grow, however, this becomes less and less possible. This is largely a matter of scale; the more infrastructure in service, the more it needs care and attention, and this is beyond what any one person or group can do. Moreover, as organizations grow and specialize, staff aim to work at their highest levels, where they can provide the highest value for the organization. In response, more specialized job titles begin to appear in the organization: engineer, public information officer, GIS analyst, safety and training manager, etc.

In Lake Elmo, the demands of the Director's time have increased alongside the City's development. The growth within the City has led to ongoing change that requires coordination within other city departments, with developers and residents, who now expect a higher level of service, particularly concerning communications about Department operations. The Director has also identified numerous service-level targets, coordinates efforts to meet those targets, and tracks progress to ensure the targets are achieved. Yet within the Director's job description, it is a requirement that the Director have "extensive operator skills" related to heavy equipment, and the Director is sometimes behind

the controls of heavy equipment. This is likely not the highest and best use of the already busy Director's time. (To be sure, the fact that the Director feels the need to work in the field indicates that the Operators are understaffed.)

The "Position Details" section of the Director's job description does not address the role of public communication. Raftelis recommends that the Director's job description be reviewed and edited to reflect the need for executive-level work within the Department. This review should de-emphasize duties and skills more in-line with Operators. Rather, it should stress expectations related to leading the strategic direction of the Department and specifically add language regarding coordinating communications with the public.

In the project team's interviews, there was a consistent theme about a lack of communication that exists within the Department relative to the strategy and relevance of work staff is expected to do. There is also a significant need for effective communication and customer service between the Department and the community, notably in response to public inquiries about water quality. When combined with the addition of staff noted in Recommendation 4, the organization should rework the Director's job description to identify the executive components of the position to emphasize the importance of communication and providing strategic direction to the Department and the public. This can help advance the professionalization of the Department as well as its standing with the public and other stakeholders.

Recommendation 7: Hire an Administrative Assistant to help with administrative needs

The City previously had an Administrative Assistant who was allocated 0.4 FTE to the Department and recently left their position. This had an impact on Department operations, which require administrative and clerical support, especially from someone knowledgeable about public works operations. Efficient organizations thrive when employees can perform at their highest levels. In the absence of administrative support, these more clerical tasks must be taken on by either the Director or the Assistant Director. Raftelis recommends that this position be filled with at least 0.5 FTE allocated to the Department. Over time, and with the right candidate, this individual could be provided with sufficient duties to warrant a full 1.0 FTE allocation to the Department. Ideally, the new hire should have experience in public works or utility operations. Additionally, this individual must be capable of learning and operating new software applications and be able to read maps using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which, with the work plan and growth of the City, will be increasingly critical to efficient Department operations. As such, the more proficient the candidate is in computer usage, the greater the role they will be able to take on within the Department.

The potential duties the Administrative Assistant could help with is listed below:

- Customer Service: Responding to phone and email inquiries
- Park Reservations: Managing reservations
- Data Entry: Updating spreadsheets (e.g., backflow preventer tests, well logs, fluoride reports)
- Permit Processing: Handling road right-of-way and temporary parking permit applications
- Communication Management: Taking calls/emails, resolving routine queries, and forwarding them to appropriate departments
- Minutes and Agendas: Creating and distributing minutes for park commissions and safety committees, updating agendas and meeting reminders
- Website and Document Updates: Updating public works web pages, printing records/maps, and editing forms/documents
- Complaint Resolution: Handling minor complaints (e.g., garbage, tree issues, mailbox damage) and directing them appropriately
- Fuel and Equipment Records: Entering maintenance data into software and generating fuel reports

- Calendar and Scheduling: Managing staff schedules and on-call responsibilities, tracking staff vacations and callouts, and setting up appointments
- File Management: Organizing, scanning, and disposing of outdated documents

The more tasks this individual can take on, the greater the value this role will be to the Department, largely by removing these tasks from those that must otherwise be completed by the Director or Assistant Director. The list of tasks above is varied and will require significant training. An initial investment of time by the Assistant Director or Director in creating a binder of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for this individual to reference will pay dividends in helping them learn their role. Some of the tasks listed above will only be done periodically, and a book of SOPs laying out where to find reports, when they must be completed, how they are to be completed, etc. will reduce the oversight necessary from the Assistant Director and Director, as well as help ensure a more consistent and efficient work product. The SOPs should document critical operations and duties to provide reference materials for the new Administrative Assistant, as well as any potential future employees. The SOPs should include guides to common tasks the Administrative Assistant may conduct using various software platforms, and the SOPs should be reviewed periodically so any revisions in processes or major software updates are accounted for. Initially, this position is envisioned being allocated roughly 0.5 FTE to the Department and the rest to general administration. This allocation may change over time, particularly if the individual can take on more duties within the Department.

Recommendation 8: Either hire a certified mechanic or sign a service contract with a local vendor

The Department operates a fleet including plow, salting, light-duty, and heavy equipment. Many larger cities or public works departments include a Fleet component that provides, at a minimum, basic maintenance of light-duty vehicles. Currently, the City does not employ a mechanic. However, there is at least one Operator who performs some of this work, though this person is not an ASCE certified mechanic. Naturally, there is a desire by the City to obtain auto repair work at as low a cost as possible, but having non-certified mechanics work on vehicles is not an appropriate strategy and may open the City up to significant liability risk.

To address its needs, the City should either hire an ASCE-certified mechanic, issue a Request for Proposals (RFP), or approach local auto repair facilities to obtain a service contract. A service contract will likely be most cost-effective if it includes all City light-duty vehicles, rather than just those within the Department. There are numerous advantages to a vehicle maintenance service contract. The first advantage is freeing Department staff time by eliminating a non-core service performed by Department staff. The second is that the specialists can maintain all the necessary parts and tools to conduct all repairs, rather than the City maintaining only those for basic work, only to have to send the car to a vendor for more complex work. There are potential cost savings as well. Many service contracts include basic maintenance, such as oil changes and tire rotations, within the cost of the contract. The automotive work currently done by the City is also likely being done on a more informal basis, without the work being recorded as part of a larger asset management program. The service vendor would have a computerized documentation system that would record all work done on vehicles, and while this system would not be owned by the City, the City could request this information when needed.

Alternatively, the City could hire a certified mechanic, though unless it felt that it could keep the mechanic busy performing vehicle maintenance full-time, it is unlikely to be cost-effective compared to a service contract. Employing a mechanic may provide other, non-financial benefits to the City, such as the convenience of having an in-house mechanic. There may also be non-financial downsides, though, such as what happens to vehicle maintenance if the mechanic position is vacant for an extended period of time. Ultimately, the choice between a certified mechanic or a service contract will be determined by local market conditions and the City's preferences.

Recommendation 9: Stakeholders within the City should collaborate on potential Parks staffing

The City recently produced a Parks Master Plan containing recommendations regarding the future of the City's parks, involving identified capital projects, improvements, and staffing. The recommendations were labeled as 'High', 'Medium', and 'Low' priority. A recommendation to hire a Parks Director was specially singled out as 'First Priority', with highlighted text stating, "Adding this position is the most critical action the city can take toward improving their park and trail system as the future unfolds."

The recommendation for a Parks Director may be sound, but the recommendation omits discussion of this role's scope and function, how it might fit either within or alongside the Public Works Department, or how it might fit within the larger City organization. Specifically, Parks Director positions rarely exist outside of Parks Departments that contain other parks staff to oversee. Based on our analysis, the workload for a separate Parks department does not exist at this time.

Recent developments within the City, however, call for an intentional process to plan for staffing some form of parks leadership position in the coming years. In general, the growth that has matured the parks system sufficiently to warrant a master plan will soon warrant a staff member to implement the master plan. One specific development that may justify planning for a staff position is the recent acquisition of a 77-acre tract of land, currently intended as a park containing a multisport complex. Development of this multisport complex may, depending on the amenities provided, mark a significant turn in the level of service that the City's parks offer its residents.

The City should conduct a workshop (or convene a workgroup) of relevant stakeholders, including the City Administrator, Director and/or Assistant Director of Public Works, the Parks Advisory Board, and City Council members to work through how a parks leadership position might best serve the needs of the City. The group should answer such questions as:

- **What is the scope of this position?** Is this role intended to obtain grant funding and deliver capital projects from the master plan? Is this role intended to plan and coordinate programming within the parks?
- **Where in the City's organizational structure should this role reside?** If this role is in the Public Works Department, what would be an appropriate title (e.g., Assistant Director, Manager)?
- **When should this hiring occur?** The multisport complex represents a large opportunity for the City but lacks definitive plans. Should this position be filled to help the community plan its design, or be hired once the park has been built?

Being intentional in answering questions of the "what" and "why" of this park leadership position will help create agreement within the City as to the purpose of this role and help identify the ideal candidate for this envisioned role.

WORK PROCESSES

Recommendation 10: Implement the Beehive CMMS to fully utilize its capabilities

Industry standard software for public works departments includes asset management software that combines GIS mapping with asset inventories to help track the location, condition, and maintenance performed on assets. When asset management capabilities are combined with the capacity to issue, track, and complete work orders, these software packages are known as Computerized Maintenance Management Systems (CMMS). The industry standard practice is for work orders to be developed within the CMMS and assigned to operators. The operators perform the

work and record their work in the CMMS, and that work order is attached to the asset's record within the CMMS. Moreover, operators are commonly issued mobile devices so that they can access the CMMS in the field, allowing them to use the GIS capabilities, receive work orders, and fill out the work orders without having to return to the office.

A properly designed and implemented CMMS provides numerous advantages to organizations. It improves workflows, communications, and analysis of asset conditions. It also allows reporting not just of the work that is being done, but the backlog of work that is not being accomplished and may require more resources. It can be an invaluable tool not just for tracking asset conditions but also for tracking workforce conditions. By showing the amount of work that is being accomplished, the ratio of corrective to preventative maintenance that is occurring, and the backlog of work orders, a CMMS can quantitatively make the case as to whether more staff are required. The reports produced by a CMMS can aid leadership in making more informed decisions and be an effective tool to communicate with parties outside the Department.

The City utilizes an asset management software program known as Beehive. Beehive has been in use for several years within the Department and has been utilized to develop the Department's asset inventory. Unfortunately, Beehive does not include any Parks assets, as the Department has not purchased a Parks module. Additionally, it is not used to its full capability work order system. Operators in the field primarily rely on Beehive for utility locates and GIS mapping, using a mobile app version. In its role as an asset management program, work that is done on the utility system is recorded within Beehive by the Assistant Director following the completion of the work. Work orders are not issued prior to work, negating the ability to plan work or track work backlogs, and the sort of data that would allow for the tracking of level of effort (e.g., labor hours, equipment, and supplies used) is not collected. Rather than the Operators entering all of this data in the field and the Assistant Director performing quality control checks on completed work orders, the Assistant Director enters data on asset status and the type of work performed.

To fully realize the value of Beehive, the Department should implement all of its functionality. This would involve developing the work order capabilities of Beehive to include the most efficient recording of the data for that work. Once a work order is created, it can be assigned to specific Operators, who upon completion of the work, will fill out the necessary information in the work order. It can then be reviewed for detail and accuracy before approval. Currently, when work is completed, information about the work is relayed to the Assistant Director, who enters the data into Beehive. To enhance functionality, the Parks module should be acquired and mobile devices provided for Operators working in the field.

The proper use and maintenance of this tool will be imperative to the success of the proposed work plan noted in Recommendation 1. The work recorded in the CMMS should be reviewed and referenced when the work plan is reviewed and decisions on operational initiatives or capital improvements are made. Most CMMS packages come with their own standard set of reports, allowing custom reports to be created. It is important, then, that the Department select or develop the necessary reporting tools to make the best use of their data.

It is also necessary to invest in sufficient staff training to ensure all staff can use Beehive proficiently. Failure to obtain adequate training is a common cause of poor adoption of software in organizations and can jeopardize the substantial investment made in the software. The Department should evaluate training courses offered on the program and take advantage of as many of them as it deems necessary to properly utilize the tool toward its strategic objectives.

LEADERSHIP

Recommendation 11: Obtain leadership training for those in supervisory roles

Within the public works industry, people all too often are trained in the technical skills required of their roles as they promote through their careers but receive little to no leadership or supervisory training as they promote into positions of authority. This is an area in which many organizations struggle to provide appropriate resources. Larger cities and organizations are more likely to have formalized development programs for their leaders and supervisors. In contrast, smaller organizations are more likely to seek ad hoc or external training programs. As a city grows, one unexpected side effect is the strain on supervisory roles as the need for supervision becomes more prominent. More staff means more supervision, and there is a different level of skill required to supervise two staff members compared to 10.

The Operators' Union has filed several grievances regarding the workplace environment and management's behavior. Morale is low among operators, some of whom report high levels of work-related anxiety. This observation is included not to validate those complaints or assign blame, but to illustrate what sorts of things that may be alleviated with improved supervisory skills.

Raftelis recommends that workers in supervisory roles, including Lead Operators, as a matter of policy, be provided with periodic leadership or supervisory training. The soft skills developed through these training courses can help to improve workforce morale. Just as importantly, this sort of training is a vital component of succession planning. Given the City's size, it is likely that most training will need to be sourced externally. There may be some areas where internal training would be indicated, such as if the City wishes to have a consistent application of employee appraisal metrics. The elements of the training should include:

- **Effective Leadership** – Training on effective supervisor leadership to include topics like situational leadership, work planning, communication, building and motivating strong teams, coaching, and conflict resolution.
- **Efficient Work Execution** – Training Lead Operators and others on best practices and efficiency standards for the use of equipment, coordination of resources, and assignment of the number of workers who should respond to different types of jobs.
- **Focus on Safety** – Setting clear expectations regarding a culture of safety and performance of work according to established and required safety practices.
- **Performance Expectations** – Communicate how to consistently apply performance appraisal metrics tied to expectations for specific job categories.

SAFETY

Recommendation 12: Work to instill and sustain a culture of safety

During the interview process, there were consistent concerns raised regarding safety issues, in a manner indicating a culture that prioritizes efficiency and productivity over safety. In part, Operators are concerned that job tasks are assigned with fewer staff than recommended by knowledgeable third parties. Furthermore, if staff are routinely placed in unsafe situations due to low staffing, it becomes difficult to hold them accountable for their unsafe actions, which can place the organization at unacceptable exposure to risks that could impact it in a number of ways, up to and including significant financial risk. This is why organizations speak of cultivating a "culture" of safety. It is a recognition that if one aspect of safety is ignored, other aspects of safety are more difficult to maintain.

The Department should work to develop a culture of safety and instill that culture into all elements of its work. This requires several steps based around communication, collaboration, and coordination of safety activities. Currently, the Department provides safety training courses from external providers to its staff, and this should continue. Safety training courses are a necessary component of a culture of safety, but they alone are not sufficient. Another component of a safety culture involves an ongoing discussion regarding the tasks and work environments that Operators experience. Given that a primary concern regards staffing levels, representatives of the Operators and management should work together to agree to staffing guidelines for common tasks. For instance, if a crew is performing tree trimming and operating a woodchipper, safe operating guidelines would direct that one Operator should always be located near the emergency shut-off switch, and the task should be staffed accordingly. Other activities that should have staffing guidelines agreed to include any work that occurs in the street, such as tree trimming, and confined space entries. These standards should be agreed to, codified, and monitored and tracked as part of compliance with SOPs.

The final element to building a culture of safety is to ensure that a safe harbor that employees can turn to outside of the Department exists. In the City, this resource would most naturally reside with Human Resources, though in larger organizations it might be the Safety Officer. The intent of the notion of a safe harbor is to have an independent resource that employees can turn to for questions of unsafe behavior outside of their line of supervision.

Each of these steps should help address the perception that minimal staffing levels on job tasks are a product of the strain produced by the need to meet service level targets with the available staffing. Implementing our staffing recommendations, as well as implementing the work order system in Beehive, flips the staffing formulation. The question among leadership should no longer be, "How can we meet our service level targets with our total number of Operators?" Now, the question becomes, "Given the safe staffing requirements and the work orders that we must complete to meet our service level targets, how many total Operators does the Department need?"

Implementation Plan

Table 4 contains a proposed implementation plan for the recommendations contained within this report. The recommendations are assigned a prioritization level (1 = highest; 4 = lowest), as well as an estimate of the expected time to complete or implement each recommendation. Some of the recommendations may be subject to external factors, however, such as the available job market, which may delay the time to full implementation. Other recommendations, such as Recommendation 3, are likely dependent upon the Department being able to hire additional Operators prior to their own implementation.

Table 4: Proposed Implementation Plan for Recommendations

Rec #	Recommendations	Implementation Steps	Priority	Time to Accomplish	Person(s) Responsible
1	Create an annual work plan to determine when significant work initiatives are scheduled or expected	• Identify major annual work initiatives • Assess timeframe of each initiative and estimate total work effort required • Optimize schedule to ensure that the Department is not overscheduled at any one time • Publish schedule and share with Operators	1	2-4 months	Director, Assistant Director of Public Works
2	Use the annual work plan to revisit policies restricting Operator PTO	• Review annual work plan and daily activities to determine minimum staffing needs each day • Recognize that some unscheduled sick leave should be expected • Set max pre-approved PTO limits based on minimum staffing needs	1	3-5 months	Director, Assistant Director of Public Works
3	Modify the Department's summer hours to increase efficiency	• Set summer hours with two crews, each working four 10-hr days • Transition to this schedule may be delayed until one or more Operator positions are filled	2	1-12 months	Director of Public Works

4	Increase staffing by two Operators and one Lead Operator	• Work with the Human Resources Department to fill the existing Operator vacancy plus two additional Operator positions, and one Lead Operator position • One of the new Operator positions should be held until next year to minimize disruption • Obtain the tools/vehicles necessary to equip new staff	1	1-18 months	Director of Public Works
5	Designate about six Operators as Utility Specialists and limit on-call rotations to the Utility Specialists	• The Lead Operators should automatically be designated Utility Specialists • The remaining Specialists should be Operator I's • The idea should be discussed with the Operators to assess interest • There may need to be adjustments to pay or other incentives to build sufficient buy-in	2	3-12 months	Director, Assistant Director, City Administrator, Operators
6	Edit the Director's job description to remove responsibilities for heavy equipment operations and add a focus on public outreach and achieving strategic goals	• Review Director's job description with the intent of removing lower value functions and focusing on strategic success and outreach to community	1	1-2 months	Director of Public Works, City Administrator, Administrative Services Director
7	Hire an Administrative Assistant to help with administrative needs	• Produce SOP manuals for activities intended for the Administrative Assistant • Recruit an Administrative Assistant with computer literacy and the ability to read GIS maps	2	6-12 months	Assistant Director and Director of Public Works, Administrative Services Director
8	Stakeholders within the City should collaborate on potential Parks staffing	• Stakeholders should form a workgroup to envision what Parks leadership staffing is appropriate • Identify the scope, role, and intention of Parks staffing	2	12-24 months	Parks Advisory Board, City Council, City Administrator, Public Works leadership

9	Either hire a certified mechanic or sign a service contract with a local vendor	• Obtain bids from local vendors for automotive repair work for all City-owned light-duty vehicles • Determine relative cost of bid versus paying a full-time ASCE-mechanic in-house plus tools and supplies	2	6-12 months	Director and Assistant Director of Public Works, other department heads
10	Implement Beehive CMMS to fully utilize its capabilities	• Obtain Parks module for Beehive and input assets • Develop work order capability within Beehive and work order process within Department • Issue tablets to Operators and provide training	1	12-24 months	Director and Assistant Director of Public Works
11	Obtain leadership training for those in supervisory roles	• Identify potential supervisory / leadership training programs • Obtain appropriate training Note, different trainings may be suitable for Lead Operators versus Director	4	12-24 months	Public Works Director
12	Work to instill and sustain a culture of safety	• Create a working group of Department leadership and staff to agree to minimum staffing levels for common tasks • Create a reporting structure outside of the Department for near misses / unsafe behavior	1	ongoing	Director and Assistant Director of Public Works, Operators, Administrative Services Director

Conclusion

Over the last decade, the City of Lake Elmo Department of Public Works staff has faced high rates of growth in the infrastructure that must be maintained that has far outpaced the rate of population growth within the City. Despite that, the Department has worked to identify service level targets that align with industry standards, track their efforts, and meet the identified service level targets despite not adding additional Operator positions since 2019. The strain of meeting those work demands is becoming evident. Staff concerns with work/life balance, the ability to take time off, and workplace safety indicate that conditions are not sustainable.

The recommendations offered by this report are intended to aid the City in ensuring the staff capacity needed to balance reactive work with preventative maintenance activities to prolong the useful life of the City's critical assets. They are designed to create the staffing capacity to attract and retain employees. They also offer the City a pathway to develop a data-driven approach to work planning and assessing future staffing needs. Successfully implemented, these recommendations should provide the Department with adequate resources to be efficient and effective now as well as provide a methodology whereby the Department can support future requests for additional resources necessary to provide high quality service to the community.