

TO: City Employees
FROM: David Dillner, City Manager
SUBJ: 2012 Accomplishments and 2013 Goals
DATE: December 18, 2012

At the end of each year, it is important to reflect upon what we have accomplished as an organization and to contemplate what needs our focus and attention during the upcoming year. By communicating these items, hopefully it provides each of you with a better understanding of the challenges facing the organization and community. Each person within our organization has a unique role in fulfilling our public mission to provide public services to the citizens of Abilene. This memorandum attempts to articulate in summary form some of the ways that the public mission is being carried out with respect to the priorities established by the City Commission.

Water. The on-going drought continues to present challenges for our community. The City is still not out of the clear even though cooler temperatures have brought relief from the harsh summer weather. Our water supply stands perilously close to a potential water emergency. Consumption may have decreased during the summer due to voluntary conservation measures implemented by citizens, but an equipment malfunction or water main break could have placed our water supply in a precarious situation.

The City has been exploring for new water sources since 1996, but these explorations have yet to yield an operational water source. Since 2004, the City has spent \$238,000 exploring for new water sources. The City has identified at least one source that promises to add capacity to the utility's production limits. City staff is in the process of negotiating the acquisition of this new water source, which would further expand our existing supply and provide additional redundancy during major droughts. The new source will also more easily accommodate population growth if development gains momentum.

In addition to acquiring and developing new water sources, the City has made some operational changes and modified the production process to produce a "harder" water. This means the water being produced contains more minerals than in the past. The change in production is safe for public consumption and still meets all water quality regulations. This change has allowed the City to utilize our two water sources in a way that best maximizes their usage. Ultimately, it allows the City's Water Division to better respond to situations when water is not as abundant.

Action Items:

- Complete the acquisition of new water source and integrate it into public water supply.
- Develop an evidence-based methodology for locating new water sources.
- Conduct an assessment of large user accounts to determine changes that may be made to reduce consumption.
- Develop and communicate to the public an understandable benchmark to assess status of water sources.
- Meet with other area water utility providers to determine where possible system connections may exist.
- Conduct an assessment of the City's non-essential water use and develop criteria for reducing such water usage.

Infrastructure. Providing adequate and well-maintained infrastructure is one of the core functions of local government. Infrastructure is often the “taken-for-granted” service that most people do not consider unless it is not functioning properly. Streets have been a major priority in the last few years as evidenced by the E. First Street Project, KLINK Resurfacing Projects on Buckeye Avenue, and the NE 14th Street Mill and Overlay Project.

The City’s public infrastructure is constantly deteriorating. Many of our streets have reached, or are nearing, the point where a resurfacing project will no longer suffice. Instead a full-depth repair will be required to rebuild the subgrade and provide a new layer of pavement. Unfortunately, the City lacks sufficient resources to do the street work that is necessary; this means that we must complete temporary projects until a longer term solution may be financed.

The NE 14th Street Mill and Overlay Project is an example of a short-term solution. The project will provide about seven to ten years of life to the existing street. At that time, the City will proceed with a full-depth reconstruction similar to the scope of the E. First Street Project. The City plans to issue G.O. Bonds to finance the reconstruction project in 2021.

Taxpayers recently approved a 0.25% retailers’ sales tax initiative to fund a ten-year, \$2.9 million Local Street Improvement Program. The sales tax will become effective on April 1, 2013. The State of Kansas has a plan to reduce its portion of the sales tax, so on July 1, 2013, the sales tax in the City of Abilene is anticipated to be less than the sales tax being currently being paid (7.8% compared to 8.15%). This funding source will allow the City to fund improvements on about 14% of the local street network over the ten-year period of the program.

When it comes to infrastructure, streets receive the most attention because they are visible from the surface. The City, however, maintains several other types of infrastructure not visible to the public (i.e., water, sewer, and stormwater, etc.). These systems also deteriorate over many years of use, and many sections of these systems are nearing the end of their expected life. The City annually repairs or replaces portions of the water and sewer conveyance systems, but more could always be done especially as these systems continue to age.

The City plans to commence design on the SE Drainage Project soon. This project is necessary to upgrade the stormwater conveyance system serving E. First Street and a large percentage of the community located north of E. First Street. The project is anticipated to cost several million dollars, but lacks an adequate funding source without a stormwater utility rate increase. Delaying the project only adds to the probability that future storm events may deteriorate the soon-to-be-completed, \$3.3 million investment on E. First Street.

Action Items:

- Develop and implement a formal Street Maintenance Program that includes the ten-year Local Street Improvement Program.
- Improve public access to infrastructure information (i.e., capital projects, plans, etc.).
- Review the Safe Routes to School Plan and other available resources to develop a strategic plan to provide safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle traffic in the community.
- Commence preliminary engineering on the SE Drainage Project with the expectation of commencing construction in the near future.
- Review existing studies and integrate recommendations into an overall infrastructure strategy.
- Proactively leverage local infrastructure programs to provide a “complete” project approach.

Economic Development. The City of Abilene, in partnership with Dickinson County, has been developing a new framework to guide our community's economic development. The framework attempts to connect entrepreneurs and business owners with the resources needed to make their business successful. A strong business community is an important piece of any vibrant community. The City has a vested stake in the success of the business community as it receives most of its revenue from business investments (in the form of property taxes) or sales receipts (in the form of sales tax). Local economic development has two key components: 1) organic growth of existing businesses; and 2) recruitment of new businesses to continue to diversify our local economy and provide opportunities for synergy and growth.

The City is in the process of facilitating the development of a community-wide Economic Development Plan that will address both of these economic priorities. This effort has truly been a community effort with participation from major business stakeholders including the Abilene Area Chamber of Commerce, the Abilene Downtown Association, and major employers. The City will host its inaugural business summit early next year to provide the general public and the business community an opportunity to review the plan and provide feedback. I am hopeful that this will yield a product that will transform the way economic development is undertaken in the community.

In addition to the plan, the City has been discussing a proposed hotel incentive policy with the goal of recruiting a new hotel to locate in Abilene. The incentive will also be structured to encourage investment in and expansion of our existing hotels. The Economic Development Council has recommended the City Commission approve the policy and the Convention and Visitors Bureau will review it at its upcoming meeting. The City is also discussing a possible project to enhance visitor attractions in the community with wayfinding signage and modernized information outlets.

Action Items:

- Complete the development of and facilitate implementation of a community-wide Economic Development Plan.
- Facilitate a proactive, engaging, and on-going dialogue with business-related partners, including the Abilene Area Chamber of Commerce, the Abilene Downtown Association, and the North Central Regional Planning Commission.
- Review the current roles and responsibilities of the Economic Development Council to determine if the organization may be modified to produce better results amid a changing business environment.
- Develop and maintain the City of Abilene website as a clearinghouse for information related to the local economy.
- Develop a proactive strategy to promote residential development to meet local and regional housing needs to include affordable housing.

Organizational Development. The City of Abilene has undertaken several initiatives to engage and develop staff. Human resources are the most important asset when it comes to providing public services. Without highly trained and competent staff, the organization will not be equipped to meet the on-going and constantly changing demands of the public. Thankfully, the City of Abilene has a very balanced and prepared staff. Constant improvement, however, should be an ever-important goal of the City.

In the pursuit of improvement, the City of Abilene recently became members in the Alliance for Innovation. This national coalition of local governments seeks to pursue knowledge sharing and innovation in local government services. As a member, all City employees have access to cutting edge training and research that provide insight into how other communities have sought to address problems. Many issues that local government

manages are similar no matter where you live in the country. As such, the City can take an idea or program that was implemented in Florida or Wisconsin and apply it to a local issue. This keeps our organization constantly thinking about innovation and what we can do differently to provide high-quality public services.

Another initiative that the City has recently implemented helps individuals from various departments throughout the organization learn more about the other departments that are providing public services. The Emerging Leaders program seeks to provide employees that are not yet supervisors with an opportunity to learn about the wide variety of public services the organization provides. Employees are involved in their jobs and do not always get a chance to see how the larger organization operates outside of their area of expertise. This program provides employees with an introduction to the various departments, but perhaps more importantly, it provides employees with an opportunity to interact with peers that they often do not get the opportunity to work with. This past year, the City had eight participants in the Emerging Leaders program with a representative from each department.

The City of Abilene also commenced a new Supervisory Skills course. The internal course mirrors the “cross-pollination” element of the Emerging Leaders program by bringing individuals from various departments together to develop their supervisory skills. The class has a diverse group of individuals with varying supervisory experience. Some participants are seasoned supervisors seeking new “tricks-of-the-trade,” while others are not yet supervisors, but are seeking to develop their skills in preparation of an opportunity to supervise within the organization. Fourteen participants have engaged in the introductory session with sessions planned each month for the next year.

Action Items:

- Conduct the annual organizational survey and benchmark the results with the previous year; determine actions that may be done to continue to improve.
- Designate ambassadors for the City’s participation in the Alliance for Innovation to promote the use of the membership throughout the organization.
- Improve the existing Employee Orientation program to better integrate new employees into the organization.
- Implement an annual Ethics training throughout the organization.
- Complete the inaugural Supervisory Skills course for supervisors and aspiring supervisors.
- Begin a quarterly Leadership Luncheon program for employees to learn about leadership and share experiences.
- Assess the feasibility of an inter-departmental exchange program and a interorganizational exchange program.
- Conduct a bi-annual senior management retreat to provide an opportunity to build the team.
- Implement an annual employee recognition program that recognizes exemplary leadership and work ethic from employees.

While there are challenges that still need to be addressed, I remain confident with our organization and its ability to meet the ever-changing expectations placed on it. Our success cannot only be attributed to senior management; indeed, it is our frontline workers who do the heavy lifting that ensures our organization performs at a level that allows it to exceed expectations. While I cannot speak on behalf of the City Commission, I know that they value and appreciate the work performed by the City of Abilene. I know that I am proud of our organization and its ability to provide public services in a fair and equitable manner. The City of Abilene would not be successful without your firm commitment to public service and the ideals that our organization and community stand for. Together, we will continue to meet the challenges put before us head on with confidence.