

## *Memorandum*

**Date:** May 5, 2023  
**To:** Mayor and Council Members  
**From:** Lisa Taylor, City Manager  
**RE:** Report

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Greetings, Mayor and Council Members

By now, you have been introduced to various city properties, the budget, City needs, etc. I hope you are not feeling too overwhelmed, as there is still a ton of information we have to share with you. In this memo, I will inform you about various activities that I have been working on and I encourage you to reach out to me for further discussion or clarification.

I want to start by letting you know about some of my core responsibilities. I manage overall daily operations of the City of Durant, including but not limited to the direct supervision of 16 employees, 27 departments, more than two dozen buildings, five lease agreements and more than 1,000 acres of greenspace/ parks. The City Manager is required to approve every travel request, change of duty status form (hiring, transfer, termination, etc.), meeting agendas, and major expenditures.

At this time, I want to share information about the following ongoing projects and activities:

- Budget – As you know, our team is working to finalize the 2023-24 Annual Budget. By the time you receive this memo, you should have received your draft of the proposed budget, and I hope you will take time to send comments and questions before the scheduled workshop. During this time, we are also winding down to the end of the current fiscal year, making sure we are diligent to finalize purchases and close out purchase orders as quickly as possible. Of note, there are still many capital improvement items that were ordered either last fiscal year or at the beginning of FY 2021-22 but we have yet received delivery due to supply chain shortages. One such example is the transfer trucks that were ordered last year, with an expected delivery date well into next fiscal year. This is a problem currently being experienced by both government and other organizations across the globe.
- Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA) – The City of Durant has Collective Bargaining Agreements with the Fraternal Order of Police Union Lodge 113, as well as with the International Association of Firefighters, Union 3061. These contracts are negotiated on a yearly basis. However, in years past, there have been times when multiyear agreements have been reached. You will hear details about each during executive session at the June council meeting. I expect to be close to agreement, with council approval, by that time. Negotiations are handled by a consultant, which is someone new this year. Collective Bargaining Agreements bring with them separate and extensive rules for each set of employees, as these are separate from non-union personnel policies. In the event that a union employee feels they have been treated in a manner that is in violation of the contract, they have the right to file a grievance. At this time, the

City of Durant is working through two grievances from the FOP and none from the IAFF. An arbitration hearing is scheduled for later this month, which will hopefully bring us closer to an end to that grievance, originally dated September 2022. Hearing preparation for this arbitration has taken a considerable amount of my time over the last couple of weeks. The other grievance was received in April 2023, and I will host the hearing for that later in May.

- Open Records Requests – Over the last year, the City of Durant has received an unprecedented number of Open Records Requests. Many of these requests are blanket email requests, and equal to tens of thousands of pages each. The requests come in to the City Clerk via a webform, and she works with the IT Department and the City Attorney to fulfill the requests. Our IT department was very short-handed for several months, and no one in the department knew how to retrieve the requested information. Over the last month or so, our new IT Director has worked to retrieve all information, which has been shared with our City Attorney for redaction. Of note, our City Attorney currently must review and redact every document before it is shared with the requestor. On another note, the significant amount of data in the requests make it impossible to share via email. As a solution, which was implemented by our former city manager a few years ago, the requestor has been notified of the number of pages, and told that they will need to pay for copies of the information before we pay to have the city attorney conduct the review. We are currently working toward a better solution.
- Organizational Review – Despite growing in population and land area, the number of employees in the public works division has either reduced or remained the same. Meanwhile, it seems that the number of employees in the admin division has increased. This review is important to our organization for numerous reasons, but most importantly it will help us identify and address two main issues: compliance and overtime. Last year, our organization accrued nearly 18,000 hours of overtime, and we are on track to achieve the same result for the current year. This calculates to more than \$500,000 per year. We have got to make changes fast. The HR Solid Foundation was on-site this week conducting interviews with department heads to get a better idea about areas of concern, job functions, staffing, etc. Although operations related, I have attached a copy of the report to this memo in order to make you aware of issues we will be working through over the next several months. Please keep in mind that a majority of the findings are a result of many years of lack of planning, inexperience, and poor management. The next step in the process will be a job duties/ salary plan review.
- University Project – The project appears to be on track. Weekly written reports have been coming in as required. The first milestone was met, and the intersection of University and University Place is open to traffic. Of note, as you may know, we have had the regular incident of people driving around barricades and into the newly poured pavement. Each time this occurs, it sets us back at least three days. We have tried posting additional signage and barricades. The police department has started monitoring the area regularly. Last week, I was contacted by a business owner along University Blvd. who would like Council consideration to reconsider the addition of sidewalks in front of his business. I believe this is about an 85-foot stretch. This change would require approval by Council. Please let me know if you would like to have this item appear on a future agenda for consideration.

- Airport – In collaboration with Southeastern Oklahoma State University, I have been meeting with various legislators to discuss the need of air traffic control at the Durant Regional Airport. We have made a lot of progress over the last few months, and hope to have some good news to share soon. Air traffic control is a necessity in order for the University to grow, as well as for our region to grow. You will see an item on the Airport Authority Agenda next week that will authorize KSA to conduct a Benefits Cost Analysis, as well as to submit our application for a Federally Controlled Tower.
- Waterline Upgrade – We have been working with Senator Bullard to provide information to the State Appropriations Committee about our need to replace waterlines to the South side of Durant. This project is estimated to cost approximately \$20 million, and will be required before we can continue to grow on that side of town.
- Employee Management – As noted last time we met, there has been little to no effort over the years to develop or implement an onboard process, regular training, succession planning, etc. This has resulted in chaos and increased liability to the City of Durant. While I cannot share details of employee actions or ongoing investigations, I will say that we do have various activities going on now. I know that each time an employee separates from our organization, regardless of reason, members of the public may reach out to council members in protest. I would ask that you refer any comments or complaints to me, as interference into employee matters could become a liability for us.
- Department Reports – Department reports are now available, and for the first time, they have been published on the City of Durant website for public review. In the following months, I will continue to work with department heads to help fine-tune reports in order to provide even greater transparency to the public.
- Fee Schedule – Staff has been working toward a fee schedule update for several months. Former council members were provided data, along with the request to hear the item on council agenda. Unfortunately for current council members, you will be faced with this decision soon. We plan to put this item back on the agenda in June, and I hope you understand the gravity of our financial situation well enough to consider approval.
- Payroll – I have a request out among cities in Oklahoma for a sample RPF for payroll services. Outsourcing this function may lead to a more reliable and cost-effective system.
- Community Planning – As a result of the Community Perception Survey, six areas for improvement were identified by the public. We have conducted individual community meetings for each of these issues. Next, I will engage department heads in planning action steps for our organization to work toward goals within each issue area. This will eventually become an action plan for the City of Durant.

In addition to regular management duties and ongoing project activities, I respond to phone calls, concerns and visits with the general public daily. Most often concerns come to me because a citizen was unable to achieve their expected outcome by going through the appropriate channels. I expect and welcome this type of opportunity to engage with our citizens. As council members, I know you receive calls, as well. I will always encourage each of you to engage with citizens in order to identify areas of concern. Please remind citizens that they can always reach out to me if they need immediate assistance. My cell phone number is included on every email, and at the bottom of this memo. Please share freely.

While we are on the topic of concerns, I want to take a moment to make a request. I appreciate the communication from Council members. It shows that you are inquisitive and that you care. On the other hand, it can be a bit disruptive at times when I receive several texts and emails throughout the day. I will do my best to catch every request, but it is easy to miss one here and there. As you think of a question for me, please make a list and send multiple requests in an email or text message. If it is a concern or something of an urgent nature, please feel free to contact me immediately. This will help me remain efficient in my daily activities by allowing me to stay focused on the task at hand.

On a final note, our team needs a boost of moral. It has been a year of chaos, and team members have not received a pay increase to keep up with inflation. We do not have any type of employee retention program, and I am worried about attrition. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, we will host a Family Fun Day for City of Durant employees and their families. There will be a cookout at noon and we will open the city pool to employees and their families from 2 to 5 p.m. Please feel free to stop by and show your appreciation if you are available.

Please let me know if there is anything I can do to make your role easier. Serving as a member of the city council is not an easy task, and I have great respect for each of you for your willingness to serve.

Thank you

LT

Lisa Taylor  
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## HR Audit, City of Durant

The following questions were asked of all department heads. The following pages are responses for each question. Recommendations are listed after responses.

### What is your experience with the following: Recruiting, Orientation & Onboarding

#### Unanimous response:

Posting by HR, resumes sent to mgmt (5 of group stated- applicants were not qualified)

Interview set up with mgmt selection. Given JD, and told to use generic, and just add what you need.

HR and mgr interviewed. No set questions for positions.

If HR Manager, she asked questions. If HR Specialist, she did not, but gave out benefit info if they asked.

HR made offer, and informed us of pay.

Background and drug test set up, then hired in.

½: HR would give packet to candidate prior to hiring and they brought in first day filled out- mgmt turned in to HR

½: HR would give mgmt packet for new hire to fill in on first day- then return to HR.

HR instructions- sit down and fill this out.

3 Mgrs hired in the last 2 years stated they did not know about benefits, because it was not explained as to what they had, other than, look at the employee handbook. None of them were aware that benefits did not kick in until 90 days after.

1 Mgr stated the following process:

Once applications were forwarded to me, I emailed asking what HR's thoughts were as to who met requirements for best fit for position- I did not receive a response. I would start with personal & work references checks. HR would then set up an interview, if they passed the background check.

Orientation- 1<sup>st</sup> day was spent ½ with HR, then came to me- the mgr.

1 Mgr simply stated: I was told not to let people know about a posting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recruiting & Orientation aligned process

HR & Mgmt trained on process

Structured Interview questions

Benefits Sheet for all interviewees

State & Federal guidelines met regarding new hire paperwork

Most Mgr believe they are short staffed. OT review of departments

Intern program initiative with Southeastern College.



What does your “Wish list” for you and your department look like?

- Mgr & Employee(s) next door, too loud cannot concentrate
- Certain employee(s) need to retire- it is time for them to go, slowing down progress
- Partnership with other departments
- Need a backup
- In house attorney, as answers are not prompt
- Wellness program
- Understand personnel policies- sick leave used, medical leave (FMLA). HR does not respond.
- Staff at another location needed
- Updated/new equipment
- Getting burned out. Pulled in multiple directions- wondering: who is really my boss?
- Incentive to stay, succession planning in place, cross training
- Software, IT needed
- Encode instructions, how to use all functions.

Most answered as top wish:

Better pay for employees, they are going to leave if they do not get a raise soon

Depending upon the department, they need a private place to meet; while others stated they wanted their staff to be near- 1 large office or attached office space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mgmt communication as to reporting structure; and status updates to implementation of items which have been approved.

Mgmt training on policies & procedures

Conduct wage analysis

Cross & succession training/planning

Wellness program & incentives



What are the challenges you and your department currently have which were not included above in wish list?

- Need training for employees
- Receive training for Mgmt, as we did not receive training to manage, nor know employee policies we are responsible for enforcing
- When receiving funds for a project, the money- per the grant is to be maintained separately from City funds
- Staying ahead when waiting on IT needs to be addressed
- Need qualified people coming in- no time to train
- Homeless & customers, who are upset by things out of our control
- No onboarding, do not know how to record my time if I want to request 1/2 day off
- Professional training & develop
- Stressed as to what new Leadership (& Council) will expect from us (listed several times)

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Employee training: Conflict resolution

Management training: from how to deal with direct reports to info as to recipients of grants

Timely communication from City Manager, Mayor, and Council





Do you receive annual training from the City, HR? Or Departmental requirements?

All stated NO, but 4 departments.

They listed specific departmental requirements: Grants, GIS Mapping, Parks, Fire and Police training.

When asked about the mandatory training: harassment, discrimination, etc.; a resounding no, but many had in prior jobs.

#### RECOMMENDATION

ALL employees receive mandatory annual training



Do you have emergency contacts for your employees?

ALL said no, until the meeting with Phillip Hightower.

Phillip agreed it was a good idea, and sent out an email after our conversation, stating all employees should not have to wait until HR was available, or in the office, if an emergency took place with an employee.



Are you aware of a Compliance Hotline? If not, would you use it?

Everyone answered one of the following:

No, do we have one?

What is a compliance hotline?

No, but we could really use one!

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Put a compliance hotline in place for employee complaints and concerns without their fear of retaliation.



Have you received a performance evaluation? Have you had a performance evaluation with your direct reports?

- No, I haven't seen anything about doing one- nor do I know how.
- Yes, the last one I had was a few years ago, and the City Mgr told me I clearly didn't know how to do my job. I have not had one for my staff. I didn't know I was supposed to...am I?
- Last City Mgr, made me cry! I haven't done one for my staff- I don't have time anyway!
- Last City Mgr handed me a folder piece of paper and told me to review. I read it, and told him I did not agree. He told me to think about it. I walked out of the office and didn't return it & he didn't ask for it.

#### RECOMMENDATION

Educate Mgmt the proper way to issue a performance evaluation, as well as to use it for any type of incentive, pay raise, etc., to ensure fair and consistent in equitable practice.



Were you given instructions as to how to issue disciplinary action? Have you issued to direct reports?

- I was told to use the template.
- I followed the disciplinary action listed in the employee handbook.
- I was “talked” through as to how to do it.
- I had HR come to do it.
- I try to give my staff chances to improve. I can't afford for them to get mad and leave!
- I called HR, they sent me a form, and I just filled it out. No training, but I was told to keep it.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Proper disciplinary action training, as this is the main reason there are lawsuits with management- did not follow protocol.



Have you had a workers compensation situation? If so, how did you address?

For those that said yes, almost verbatim in experience:

- I called HR, they sent me the form and I filled it out and entered into the WC system
- I had to keep track of Dr. notes, and speak with WC people, and get medical release back to work
- An employee cannot come back until full release.

For those who said no:

- I would call HR and ask what to do.
- That isn't my job, is it?
- I do not know how workers compensation works.

#### RECOMMENDATION

All Mgmt should receive proper instructions as to how to handle Workers Compensation.

NOTE: No one should have medical information outside of HR, nor should they keep in contact with an injured employee.

HIPAA & ADA violation at minimum



Do you have a backup?

½ said Yes

½ said No

All who agreed but 4 stated: back up could not successfully do the job but either tenured or work alongside in another capacity they could manage (by calling or advising, but not acting upon until they received guidance).

#### RECOMMENDATION

Cross training department heads- either with another, or employees who could work together as two sharing responsibilities.



Where do you see yourself and your department in the next 2-5 years?

- Most stated they either would have or working toward their “wish list,” and employees being paid adequately
- *Several planning to retire during that timeline.*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Cross training and succession plan in place as soon as possible.





### **AUDIT & LIABILITY CONCERN**

- HR Department- lack of guidance in critical areas
- Wage analysis- equitable
- Finance- Separation of duties
- Management training- vicarious liability
- Equipment needed from IT to ensure Emergency Mgmt (EM) meets Community's needs ensuring safety.

Each management member sharing incidents that have yet to be resolved or addressed that could lead to further liability. Department Head came in with a folder of items HR has not responded to. Felt it necessary to share to ensure it was addressed ASAP. Guided through process to correct immediately.

### **FINAL RECOMMENDATION**

Immediate training needed for Human Resources

Immediate training for Management

Financial reconciliation due to lack of Separation of duties as well as Payroll/OT audit

Items needed for EMS, to update system for timely assistance to ensure safety.

**HR Solid Foundation** offers HR and management training.

Partners include:

Bill Giles, independent Financial Auditor to offer explanation of separation of duties & reconciliation.

Texas Data & VoIP for information regarding EMS needs that basic IT cannot offer.

Both are free consultations.



Lisa Taylor <ltaylor@durant.org>

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## CM Memo

1 message

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**Lisa Taylor** <ltaylor@durant.org>

Fri, May 5, 2023 at 5:58 PM

Cc: Martin Tucker <mtucker@durant.org>, Lauran Fuller <lfuller@durant.org>, Humphrey Miller <hmiller@durant.org>, Danny Sherrer <dsherrer@durant.org>, Mike Simulescu <msimulescu@durant.org>

Good evening, Mayor and Council Members

Attached you will find an introductory report. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Have a wonderful weekend.

LT  
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