October 2022

Strategic Plan Introduction

The development of the Public Works Department’s first Strategic Plan in 2015 was driven by several factors: 1) desire of the newly appointed Public Works Director to take a fresh look at department goals and organizational structure; 2) during the APWA 2010, 2014 and 2018 reaccreditation processes, was a best practice found to be only substantially compliant; and 3) response to City Manager’s vision for greater collaboration, efficiency and succession planning across the organization.

Since the completion of the Strategic Plan in July 2015, much has been accomplished in the department towards meeting the key goals of the plan: infrastructure focus, collaboration, staff development, public outreach, technology and strategic re-structuring. This update is intended to report on our success, present new ideas on continued organizational realignment, and reaffirm our department mission, vision and goals.

1. Background

The Public Works Department is one of 10 departments in the City of Thousand Oaks, a community of about 130,000 in eastern Ventura County, California. With 185 staff and an annual operating and capital budget of over $100 million, Public Works is the largest department, led by a management team of Director, two Deputy Directors, and five Division Managers. The range of services provided by the department is diverse, including water, wastewater, streets, drainage, transit, landscaping, traffic, sustainability, and engineering. The department is responsible for operating and maintaining infrastructure with a replacement value of $2.5 billion. The Public Works Department’s first strategic plan was prepared in 2015.

The greater City organization is at a transition point unlike any other in its history. Established as a municipal corporation on October 7, 1964, the City celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014. The City is now essentially at buildout, and its future will be characterized by in-fill development, redevelopment, and maintenance of aging infrastructure. To address the challenge of shrinking revenues no longer able to meet the rising costs of City services, a Financial Strategic Plan was first prepared in 2005, and has been periodically updated to assist the City Council and executive staff in the effective management of City resources. The plan, retitled the Fiscal Sustainability Study, provides a detailed analysis for each separate financial fund with projections into the future. See Attachment #1 for the January 2016 Fiscal Sustainability Study.

The City Manager’s Citywide strategic planning initiative, “Thousand Oaks in 2014…An Organization in Transition, preparing for the Future,” has been embraced by every City
department, with individual strategic plans in various stages of development. A 2022 PW Department Overview Report has also been prepared.

2. **Department Profile**

As the City transitions from a developing community to buildout, the department’s emphasis has shifted from expansion through major capital projects to maintenance of aging infrastructure. This is reflected in the current capital budget wherein most projects are related to asset management.

Since 2015, many department staff have retired, including in key leadership positions, providing opportunity for changes in the department structure and promotion of existing staff into higher positions.

Public Works staffing levels have declined over the past decade from a high of 210 to the current budgeted level of 185 positions. This reduction reflects the City’s response to the economic downturn beginning in 2007 as well as movement of some positions into other departments to centralize finance, technology and public outreach resources.

The department’s stakeholders are widely varied, including residents and businesses, elected officials, other City departments, governmental agencies, utility companies, non-governmental organizations, Conejo Recreation & Park District, Conejo Valley Unified School District, California Lutheran University, contractors, consultants, and customers. The culture within the Public Works Department has shifted over the past few years towards greater collaboration, technology, communication, and customer-centric focus. Continued emphasis on engaging all stakeholders will be essential to meeting our mission.

3. **Mission, Values, and Vision**

The Public Works Department mission is to provide essential life services, including water, sanitation, transportation, public safety, and environmental protection, to maintain Thousand Oaks as a premier community for residents and businesses, through innovative, sustainable and cost effective practices.

Department values include the kind of culture we want to create, and how we want to be perceived by the public and by other agencies. Our values are professionalism, customer service, efficiency, teamwork, and ownership of all things public works.

The Public Works Department’s vision is to maintain a world-class department that everybody wants to work for, that sets the standard in the region, that other agencies want to emulate, and that is proud to share our successes and support our profession.
4. **Department Strengths, Areas of Improvement, and Work Plans**

During the July 2014 strategic planning workshop, the department management team developed a list of strengths (and ways to sustain those strengths), areas of improvement to focus on, and work plans.

5. **Strategic Organization Goals**

The future of the Public Works Department will be characterized by a focus on operation and maintenance of aging infrastructure and succession planning. The department organization structure has over the past three years included several shifts in division and other assignments to better align with strategic goals of the organization. Staff workplans have been developed with specific reference to Department, City Manager, and City Council goals and priorities.

The Public Works Department goals are as follows:

1. Focus on infrastructure operations and maintenance;
2. Collaboration, innovation, and sustainability;
3. Develop staff for the future;
4. Communication and public outreach emphasis;
5. Expand the use of technology; and
6. Create a strategic organization structure to utilize limited staff and fiscal resources more efficiently.

6. **Organizational Structure Change**

The previous organizational structure of the department evolved from merging the Public Works and Utilities Departments in 1995. Some realignment had occurred over the years, adding a Deputy Director/City Engineer position in 2001, eliminating the Utilities Engineering Division in 2003, and reorganizing the remaining four engineering divisions in 2005. Retirements and vacancies in key management positions up to 2015 provided the opportunity for strategic realignment of the department organization to meet department and citywide goals as part of the 2015 strategic plan.

7. **Revised Organizational Structure**

The current department organizational structure represents fewer total department positions than in the past, reduced the number of positions at the division manager level from eight to five, and added a second Deputy Director position. Divisions were combined and rearranged. By aligning, consolidating, and redistributing resources among divisions with related functions, the new structure has been successful in reducing silos, improving collaboration, focusing on operations and maintenance, expanding public outreach, and rolling out new environmental sustainability programs.
Several specific organizational position changes were called for in the 2015 Strategic Plan. The following is a status update on these changes.

   a. New Deputy Director overseeing Public Works Operations

   b. Realign existing wastewater treatment superintendent to new Utilities Superintendent position

   c. Reassign water quality section to Utilities Superintendent

   d. Merge existing development and traffic divisions into new Engineering Services Division

   e. Merge existing design and construction divisions into new Capital Engineering Division

   f. Realign the existing resources division into new Environmental Division

   g. New Financial Analyst position *(not implemented -*

   h. Transfer business management Accounting Specialists to Finance Department *(completed)*

   i. Reassign transit program oversight to City Engineer

   j. Transfer vacant public works analyst to new Public Outreach Analyst position in the City Manager's Office

   k. Other position transfers – Crossing Guard Crew leader to HRD, analyst position to Finance

During the last several years, additional opportunities for strategic reorganization and succession planning have arisen from retirements and staff analysis. These opportunities are presented and discussed below, with status noted.

   • Numerous in-house staff have been promoted into positions vacated through retirements following open competitive recruitments

The success of existing staff in these promotional opportunities is evidence of meeting Department Goal #3 – development of staff for the future. Continued focus in this area will provide a talented pool of in-house candidates for the expected additional retirements in the coming years.

   • Reclassification of Senior IT Technician to Public Works Systems Analyst
Department Goal #5 – expand use of technology, has been embraced by staff throughout the department, but especially so in operational areas at the Municipal Service Center and Hill Canyon Treatment Plant. The sophistication of various technology systems that support day-to-day maintenance and operations, along with on-site file servers, security cameras, and others necessitates a greater level of staff knowledge and capabilities. A Public Works Systems Analyst position to plan, manage and oversee field technology systems and initiatives is justified.

- Senior Engineer internal promotion

The breadth of projects and responsibilities within the two engineering divisions requires competent, experienced and senior level managers. Three Senior Engineers support the Division Manager in the Capital Projects Division, while only two Senior Engineer incumbents were in the Engineering Services Division. An in-house promotional recruitment was conducted to provide a third Senior Engineer position in the Engineering Services Division.

- Reclassification of Administrative Clerk to Engineering Technician and internal promotion

The way the department serves customers from the public counter has evolved. The goal now is for front counter staff to be able to complete all the common service requests through a higher level of training and experience. Previously administrative staff (customer service reps, clerks, etc.) would be the first encounter with the public, generally requiring calling other technical staff to complete the requested service request. A more effective and efficient service model is for Engineering Technician staff to be that first encounter, able to complete the major requests. The existing front counter Administrative Clerk position was reclassified to an Engineering Technician, and an internal promotional recruitment was completed with the incumbent being promoted.

- Reassignment of Public Works Inspectors to each of the two engineering divisions; Reclassification of Construction Inspection Supervisor to Engineering Assistant

The realignment of the four engineering divisions that previously existed into the current Capital Projects Division and Engineering Services Division has been successfully implemented. Previously, all inspector positions, one Construction Inspection Supervisor and four Public Works Inspectors, were assigned to the Engineering Services Division. To better allocate resources to work teams and programs, two inspectors needed to be reassigned to the Capital Projects Division. The Construction Inspection Supervisor position was vacated through a retirement, and was reclassified into an entry level engineering position. The new Engineering Assistant position was filled through an open recruitment.
• Reassignment of Engineer Associate to Capital Projects Division *(completed)*

The incumbent staff in this position was transferred from the Engineering Services Division to the Capital Projects Division to provide additional resources needed to deliver projects that focus on Department Goal #1 – focus on infrastructure maintenance.

• Reclassification of Land Survey Assistant position to Associate Land Surveyor

The incumbent in the Land Surveyor Assistant position, who holds a Professional Land Surveyor registration from the State of California, has gained considerable experience and technical competency over the past five years in this field. As such, she is performing at a professional level commensurate with licensed civil engineer counterparts at the Associate Engineer level. Continuing to retain a licensed land surveyor on staff is important to provide excellent customer service in the context of the Engineering Services Division core functions.

• Reclassification of Engineering Associate to Associate Planner

One of the Engineering Associate positions in the Engineering Services Division primarily focuses on transportation planning, a critical element for new, infill or redevelopment which will characterize the City’s growth in the future. The incumbent, who holds a master’s degree in transportation planning, has gained considerable experience and technical competency over the past five years in this field. As such, she is performing at a professional level commensurate with planning counterparts at the Associate Planner level. Continuing to retain an experienced transportation planner on staff is important to provide excellent customer service in the context of the Engineering Services Division core functions.

• Reclassification of Engineering Assistant positions to Engineering Associate and internal promotional opportunity

Retirements of the department’s seasoned Senior Engineer staff in the coming five to 10 years is anticipated. Preparing younger staff for future succession into these more senior level positions involves training, experience, mentoring and providing work assignments at progressively higher levels of responsibility. There are six staff in the Capital Projects Division currently holding Engineering Assistant positions (this is the entry level engineering position). Several incumbents hold a professional engineering license, an engineer-in-training certificate, have several years of experience to their credit, and/or have demonstrated competency beyond the entry level expectation. A promotional recruitment opportunity for these staff will allow for successful applicants to advance into the next level in the engineering series.
• New Transit Analyst position and promotional opportunity

The City’s transit program has grown to a $10 million annual enterprise serving several neighboring cities and communities through a contract service approach. Previously the program was managed by two full-time staff and one or two hourly staff. The complexity of regulatory reporting, management of the numerous service contracts, innovation of service models, and day-to-day response to customer inquiries and concerns requires an additional professional analyst level staff position. A new Transit Analyst position was included in the FY 2017-19 budget utilizing one of the department’s “bench” positions. An internal promotional recruitment will be conducted and the vacated Transit Assistant position will be filled through an open recruitment.

• New Water Quality Supervisor position

The department has seen ever-increasing water quality regulations in water, wastewater and stormwater programs for many years. These regulations are complex and interrelated to the point that coordination of water quality sampling, testing, best management practices, operations and capital projects is essential to ensure permit compliance. Accordingly, the 2015 strategic plan called for moving the environment programs staff into the Utilities Division. A new Water Quality Supervisor position will provide the needed leadership success. An open competitive recruitment is warranted for this essential position.

8. Organization Structure Implementation

The 2015 Public Works Department Strategic Plan included several changes that have been implemented over the last three years as discussed in Section 7 above. The implementation process has provided a smooth transition of resources and responsibilities with a minimum of disruption to customers and staff. New opportunities for strategic reorganization have already been completed or will be implemented over the remainder of each FY.

9. Closing Message from the Director

The Public Works Department’s first strategic plan completed in 2015 provided a framework for preparing the department to meet the challenges of the future. Implementation of the 2015 plan has been a great success because of the commitment, engagement and tenacity of staff throughout the department. As I predicted in my closing message in 2015, additional needed changes to our organization structure have come to light over the last couple years. This Strategic Plan remains a living document.
The influx of energy, perspective and talent that our newly hired and recently promoted staff bring to the department is exciting. The ongoing dedication and professionalism of all staff is inspiring. I remain honored and humbled to be your Director as the department takes such confident steps into the future. I continue to value the thoughts, comments and suggestions of every staff member. And I am so thankful for all the outstanding work the department accomplishes each day.