

# Town of Windham



## Recommendations Report

By



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## I. Executive Summary

The Windham, ME Town Council retained Opus Consulting Group LLC (Opus) to perform an organizational assessment to improve working conditions in the Public Works Department (PWD) following a letter of no confidence issued by the Teamsters Union on behalf of Public Works crew members on May 21, 2018. Additionally, Opus was to assess the events following the Windham High School (WHS) incident which occurred on March 15, 2018. Our recommendations report explored the following:

- Management's effectiveness, in the Public Works Department, to establish a culturally productive work environment.
- Develop recommendations for the Town Council to ensure productive oversight of the Public Works Department to carry out the Council's strategic direction for the benefit of the Town of Windham.
- Assess the organizational alignment between departments core values and management styles to ensure the successful implementation of a corrective action plan.

The primary findings indicate that a strong cultural change initiative is necessary to refocus the PWD to meet its mission. Currently, PWD employees focus on relationship issues and daily tasks which result in low morale and a lack of focus. The PWD needs to be refocused on a unifying mission and goals. The PWD mission is a subset of the Town of Windham's Mission Statement: To provide services and to improve the quality of life of Windham residents.

There is not a single root cause to problems in the PWD but rather a systematic breakdown in the effective chain of command resulting from a lack of open communication and trust. Key relationships are broken preventing conflict resolution and change management from occurring.

Recommendations explore the following themes:

1. **Cultural Change Action Plan in PWD**
2. **Structure: Functional Chain of Command**
3. **Strategic Focus**
4. **Systems**

## II. Background

The beginning of disfunction in the PWD is most commonly cited as an incident complaint made by an employee against his supervisor in 2016. The supervisor was terminated and after arbitration, was reinstated to his former position.

The incidents following the termination and reinstatement have fostered hostility between select individuals in the PWD and the leadership team consisting of the Publics Work Director, the HR Director, and Town Manager.

In February 2018, the leadership team hired Bill O'Brien, an independent consultant to assess matters in the Public Works department. In March 2018, Bill O'Brien issued a report highlighting opportunities to improve, leadership, communication, accountability and trust in the PWD. A corrective action plan was initiated following the report.

On May 2018, the Teamsters Union wrote a letter asking Town Council to intervene stating that improvements were not being made in the PWD.

A separate incident occurred on March 15, 2018 at the Windham High School where an unintentional escalation of a safety drill occurred. Subsequently, the Town Manager and Police Chief engaged the Lewiston Police Department to conduct an outside investigation. Our report explored the events surrounding the incident and subsequent steps taken by management.

Opus Consulting Group was retained in July 2018.

### III. Methodology

Opus Consulting Group performed in person employee interviews with the Town Manager, Director of Human Resources, Public Works Director, 3 Town Councilors, 3 additional management personnel in other departments and 21 of the PWD staff.

Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and allowed individuals to highlight areas for improvement and successes, critique their immediate managers and upper management personnel.

Opus further reviewed documents related to human resource management, filed complaints and corrective action plans related to the PWD and the WHS incident.

Our report is structured to elevate common themes of the employee interviews and highlight both positive and counterproductive efforts across all levels of the organization.

## IV. Primary Findings

Our analysis indicates that three broad themes underlie the PWD's issues. These themes are root causes of the disfunction and must be addressed strategically before exploring more granular opportunities. Strategic Goals for the PWD organization and its management must include:

- **Improve Customer Focus**
- **Restore Chain of Command**
- **Repair Key Relationships**

### Missing Customer Focus

The majority of PWD interviews revealed a lack of customer focus towards Windham residents. The customer focus would be driven by top leadership, exemplified by management, and prescribed through standards, goals and performance targets.

Our interviews indicated a lot of energy being expended upon interpersonal relationships and employees expressed frustration over the "drama" within the department. Most staff concurred the constant negativity and focus on non-work-related matters.

Our review did not indicate the presence of clearly communicated performance goals or targets for individuals or the PWD as a whole. Quality standards appear to be loosely defined, and many employees expressed concerns over how quality concerns by employees were handled.

PWD staff members expressed concern over the inconsistent manner of handling resident complaints. We observed in another department that strong policies existed to record all complaints regardless by which medium the complaints were received. The other department recorded complaints in the appropriate system which were tracked for follow up and clear expectations existed for treating customers.

There is a lack of training standards to interact with residents when stopped in the community. One PWD crew member stated his general response to any resident is, "call the director."

**Key Finding:** The lack of a unifying mission creates an unhealthy and unproductive work environment. There are no guiding principles which are enforced when conducting work and interacting with other team members.

**Key Finding:** Without setting clear expectations for behavior and actions which align the organizational mission, no corrective action plan will succeed. An underlying cultural shift is necessary to induce change and improve working conditions.

## **Leadership Team – Teamsters Union Agent**

We identified multiple instances of an adversarial relationship between the Union Agent and the Leadership Team. The Leadership Team stated that continued attempts to bring negotiations forward have been met with the lack of response and ended negatively.

The leadership team stated that the recent fair share ruling is a driving factor in the PWD problems. The Union is cited as “bullying and intimidating PWD employees,” and “making false complaints without supporting facts.”

The leadership team expressed the lack of support from the Town Council in Union relationships. It was stated that the: “Council is willing to believe the union without facts.”

**Key Finding:** Problems in the PWD are believed to be primarily related to Union involvement and less on management practices.

It should be noted that the Union, although an external entity to the organization, can have an impact on productivity. Our viewpoint is that an adversarial relationship with the Union is simply not productive. The leadership team needs to find common ground with the Union to pave a path forward and feel supported by the Town Council.

## WHS Incident Findings

The WHS incident refers to an unintentional escalation of a safety drill conducted at the Windham High School.

Sequence of Events:

### **3/15/2018** – Windham High School Incident – Officer Issues Request for Investigation

After the incident, one of the involved officers issues a formal complaint to the ATM/HR Director. During our interviews, it was stated that the ATM/HR Director was asked to stand down on the investigation by the Town Manager and to allow an outside entity to facilitate the investigation. The Lewiston Police Department conducted a follow up investigation.

### **3/15/2018** – School Superintendent Issues Notice to School Community

Public notice by the School Superintendent states: “One of the Officers took it upon himself to enter the cafeteria, telling the students this was a drill and that they should get down.” This appears to have been the only formal written notice to the Public on the Highschool incident. The statement that the Officer took it upon himself fails to address the issue of communication and other participants.

Review of public news records indicated the issue was due to communication breakdown.

**5/11/2018** – Estimated Date of the Lewiston Police Report being issued to Windham Chief of Police. The document was not dated.

### **5/15/2018** – Officer Issues 2<sup>nd</sup> HR Complaint

Formal complaint by the Officer to the HR Director in which they describe an interaction on 5/11/2018 between them self and the Chief of Police. In the interaction, the Officer was told they would not face disciplinary action but that the incident was still the Officer’s fault.

**May/2018** – In May, the report was scheduled to be reviewed in closed session by the Town Council and Town Manager. Due to time constraint the matter was not discussed.

### **7/17/2018** - Town Council receives Lewiston Police Report

The report was not sent to the Town Council until approximately July 17<sup>th</sup>. Our review of the report indicates areas for improvement in the Police Department, particularly improving communication and setting policies and procedures to prevent future instances of communication breakdown.

**Key Finding:** Approximately two months passed between the Lewiston PD report being issued and being presented to the Town Council. There is no indication of an attempt to implement a corrective action plan following the WHS incident or inform the public of details of the incident.



## V. Recommendations

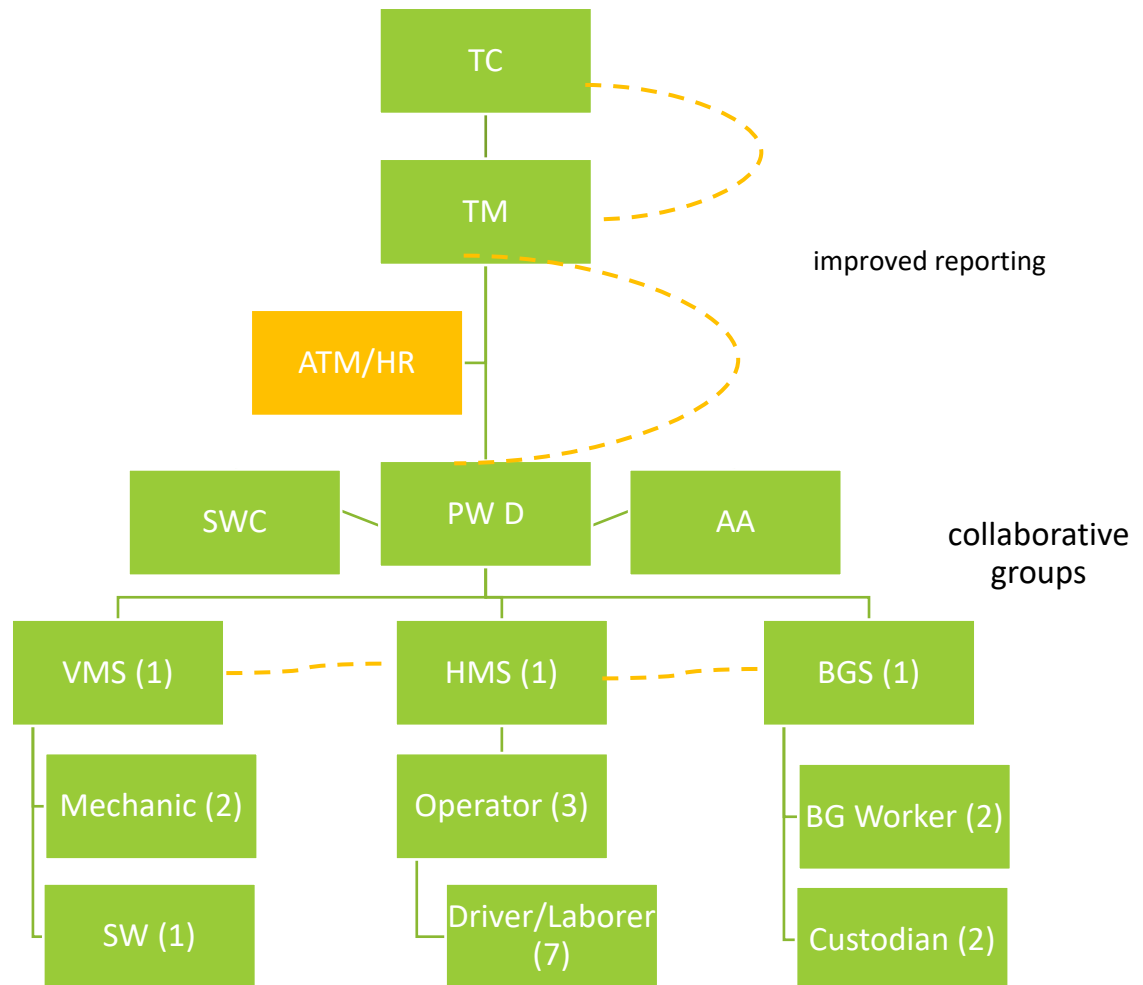
### Organizational Change Action Plan

Launch Organizational Culture Change Action Plan to shift focusing on town residents as customers. It is imperative that all levels in management exemplify the customer focus as a leadership style and guiding philosophy.

- 1.1 Leadership training for the managers (workshop: Leadership and its effect on organizational culture and job satisfaction)
- 1.2 Conduct a PWD-wide meeting to revisit the mission of the PWD with its employees and Manager.
  - Allow crew members to share their expectations of management and list the appropriate expectations of themselves.
  - The outcome of the meeting is that the PWD crew creates a department specific mission statement, reinvigorates the sense of purpose and creates goals to aspire to.
  - Lastly, develop an appreciation that PWD is a public facing role in the Town of Windham.
- 1.3 Create specific responsibilities, job descriptions and measurable goals. Re-establish appropriate chain of command policies and procedures.
- 1.4 Adhere to consistent hiring practices related to job posting times and interview process and foster an environment of promoting from within.
- 1.5 Implement cross training initiatives in the PWD to foster talent development and departmental cohesion. Break down barriers between crews and foster collaboration.
- 1.6 Foster supervisor meetings in PWD to meet long term objectives and scheduling and cross training matters.
- 1.7 Continue weekly huddles with employees and managers to share updates and allow employees to elevate concerns. Improve upon this meeting by making it highly structured and setting ground rules.
- 1.8 Quarterly meetings between Supervisor and employee to review goals and employee satisfaction.
- 1.9 Establish employee awards to reward positive influencers and appropriate behavior.
- 1.10 On-going communication to staff to remind them of goals, mission and roles.
- 1.11 On-going monitoring of results, facilitate follow up meetings, etc. Changing an organizational culture is not a one-off effort, it requires continuous effort until behavior becomes business as usual.

## Structure:

### Improved Structure



- 2.1 Clarifying the role of Director of Human Resources which acts as Assistant Town Manager, Safety & Compliance Officer and handles human resource matters. Needs more time to execute HR roles and delegate Safety Compliance.
- 2.2 The escalation chain should be enforced, if items are improperly escalated they should be pushed to the proper level of the chain. A level of the chain should be skipped if that level is where the issue is occurring.
- 2.3 Foster cross departmental working groups to improve internal customer focus.
- 2.4 Allocate time for progress reporting at the Director level for Town Council consumption.
- 2.5 Develop standard reporting for Town Council consumption for operational oversight and assurance that small matters do not outweigh the important.

## Strategic Focus

Currently, there are too many smaller issues that are being addressed through the Council that should be handled by managers throughout the organization. Focusing the Council's attention on strategic matters will allow for quicker reaction times by management on daily items.

The Council should have two primary objectives, to oversee the strategic activities and operational activities of the Town. Operational oversight should be achieved through standard management reporting. Standard management reporting should be succinct and align to strategic goals.

Problems should be addressed with an action plan in a timely fashion with measurable goals and outcomes. The role of the council should be to support the management when faced with operational barriers.

### Balance Town Council Activities



3.1 Rebalance Town Council activities.

3.2 Implement training and transition plans for onboarding new council members to ensure continuity of strategic plans and operations.

3.3 Refocus efforts on developing long term improvement plans and communicate the shared vision.

3.4 Implement a succession planning process for key personnel.

## Systems

- 4.1 The Town of Windham should invest in increased training of MyGov for customer complaint tracking, turnaround times and progress tracking. Currently only select individuals are trained in the software. Phone and email complaints often are often not tracked in the system.
- 4.2 Invest in an Information Technology audit to ensure best practices are adhered to.
- 4.3 Invest in the Town website as it is dated and not mobile friendly. Finding public information is difficult and outdated.

## VI. Closing Remarks

Improving management's effectiveness in the Public Works Department will be established by implementing a Cultural Change Initiative with the primary goal to refocus efforts towards serving Windham residents.

The success of a corrective action plan hinges on ongoing support from the Town Council and Town Manager to set the tone and exhibit leadership. Managers will require ongoing mentoring and coaching to change mindsets and require dedicated resources to be successful.

To improve organizational alignment and communication, management must address broken relationships and reestablish standards of conduct. Positive conduct is reinforced by recognizing and elevating actions which contribute to the organization's mission. A functioning chain of command will address negative conduct.

The Town of Windham has grown significantly in recent years and to further poise the Town for growth, continued focus should be placed on implementing long term strategic plans supported by improved systems and stronger organizational alignment.