

City of Rochester Hills Department of Public Services: Shared Services Initiative

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In today's economy, government leaders, like those in the private sector, are faced with the challenge of doing more with less. Striving to keep the same level of service with fewer personnel is a struggle that many agencies face. In addition, diminishing revenues have made the challenge that much greater.

While it is clear that the ability and fortitude to adapt to the situation is necessary to problem solving, having vision, boldness, and the tenacity to not only survive, but thrive, are key components to effective leadership. The City of Rochester Hills Department of Public Services (DPS) Shared Services Initiative is an example of cooperative vision that has addressed these needs in proactive and very effective ways.

The leadership team of the Rochester Hills DPS took the economic downturn as an opportunity to evaluate their operations, resources, and personnel to formulate a plan to not only optimize their internal efficiencies and effectiveness, but to assess opportunities to enhance services on a regional basis. The evaluation resulted in the Shared Services Initiative. During the planning stage of the initiative, two key questions were asked:

- How can we deliver the same high quality service at a reduced cost?
- Are we maximizing our efforts and resources?

To address these questions, the Rochester Hills DPS leadership team took the proactive approach of embracing positive change by revisiting how work is completed and reviewing the processes within their own department. Areas they evaluated included:

- Hours of Operation
- Equipment Inventory
- Facility Utilization
- Fleet Utilization
- Solicitation of Bids
- Procurement
- Technology Used
- Work Processes
- Essential Services Checklist
- Personnel Shortfalls or Lack of Expertise
- Succession
- Training
- Budget
- Funding Opportunities

The next step in considering shared services on a regional basis was to understand that while there is uniqueness to how each agency delivers services, there are commonalities we focused on:

- Facility Utilization
- Personnel Utilization
- Solicitation of Bids
- Procurement

In reviewing Rochester Hills' operations, including the Water and Sewer, Roads, Pathways, Fleet, Sign Shop and Water Meter areas, it became clear that our ability to assist others in a meaningful way would be in the Fleet, Sign Shop, and Water Meter areas. The completion of this evaluation stage positioned us to initiate talks with other local government agencies on their operations, including any challenges they have experienced, and what needs they may have. The primary recurring concern was having vehicles, equipment, and needed service provided in a timely manner. The second concern was having vehicles, equipment, and needed service performed correctly the first time.

As the City of Rochester Hills is in the same industry, and servicing the same audience, we clearly understood these legitimate concerns. We understood the importance of having vehicles and equipment ready for service. We understood the potential urgency of needing a water meter tested or having a sign fabricated for installation. We also understood that providing effective and efficient internal services would help deliver high quality service with a dedicated support team.

To demonstrate our ability to help alleviate problems these agencies were experiencing, we invited them to tour our DPS facility. The tours were successful as we were able to convey



Fleet Services Technician, Tom Joss, performing repairs

not only the service opportunities our state-of-the-art facility would allow, but the professional interaction with

Rochester Hills staff members elevated the confidence of our potential partners. The tours resulted in our

Shared Services Initiative which started slowly with agreements with a neighboring Fire Department and the City's Public Library.

These two agreements were monumental to the Shared Services Initiative as they broke down a number of preconceived barriers. It became clear that the program was intended to assist where we could and the collaboration was never intended to take over another's operation. In essence, the collaborations are clearly win-win because we maximize the utilization of our facility and personnel while our partners receive services that are timely and accurate.

The success of these two agreements really set the stage for future partners. In April 2013, the State of Michigan recognized our efforts in collaboration

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with a Competitive Grant Assistance Program award in the amount of \$51,625. This award was directly related to a partnership established between the City of Rochester Hills and the Road Commission for Oakland County. The following is an excerpt from the application and brief explanation of the agreement:

The Rochester Hills Department of Public Services (DPS) has a fleet services division and repair facility that manages the City's fleet of vehicles and equipment by performing a variety of services, including preventive maintenance, major and minor repair as well as diagnostics.

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) currently maintains over 2,700 miles of county roads and more than 230 miles of State highways. On-call 24/7, RCOC must have safe and operational equipment at all times which has not been the case. The Rochester Hills DPS has the necessary facility space, tools and equipment to maintain many of the RCOC vehicles including loaders, bulldozers, cars and trucks, and offers licensed and certified mechanics that have the expertise in repairing and maintaining municipal vehicles. Additionally, RCOC would like to take advantage of the Best Management Practices already in place at the Rochester Hills DPS facility including: electronic asset management documentation for repairs; predictive and preventive maintenance; and just-in-time inventory management and collaborative purchasing benefits which will reduce fleet expenses to the RCOC and provide more timely repairs. This project will directly benefit not only Rochester Hills and the RCOC, it will also impact most if not all communities throughout the county, creating an efficiency that gets vehicles back on the road quickly without experiencing service backups that can occur, especially during the winter months.

With shrinking budgets and the tough decisions that accompany them, many communities are taking the necessary steps to be good stewards and identifying cost savings strategies while focusing on maintaining the same high level of service. And, unlike other city/county services, roads departments are in a position to do more regionalized work since most already work together directly and indirectly. Early discussions have been well received by the Rochester Hills Mayor and City Council, the RCOC Managing Director and the Board of Road Commissioners for Oakland County.

While funding for a study is not required for this collaborative effort, the Rochester Hills DPS is requesting funding for a software upgrade to its fleet management information system allowing 500 assets to be stored and tracked versus the current 325-unit capacity. This upgrade will position this collaborative effort for success by providing the ability for the RCOC vehicles and equipment to be inputted into the RTA Fleet Management system. Additionally, funding is being requested for one portable/wireless truck lift and four jack stands so that multiple vehicles can be serviced at once. This equipment will be positioned in space that is currently open and available.

To date, we still retain our early partners but now have a full complement of agreements with agencies that perform work in Rochester Hills, along with neighboring agencies that perform work for their respective communities.

Our partners:

- City of Rochester Fire Department
- City of Rochester Hills Public Library
- City of Rochester DPW
- City of Auburn Hills DPW
- Road Commission for Oakland County
- Oakland Co. Water Resource Commission
- City of Pontiac
- Orion Township
- North Oakland Transportation Authority
- Oakland Co. Fire Mutual Aid Association
- Rochester Community School District
- Traffic Improvement Assoc. of Michigan



One of our many Shared Services partners

Other facets of our operations that are involved with shared services are the DPS sign shop and water meter shop. When a sign needs to be fabricated in compliance with the Michigan *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, our personnel have the knowledge and expertise to do so. With respect to efficiency and compliance, the sign shop personnel utilize an industry-leading software package for design and an equally impressive plotter/cutting device to prepare the sheeting material for placement on the aluminum substrate.

The water meter shop is outfitted with equally knowledgeable and experienced personnel. Their services are typically sought out when a water customer contests the accuracy of the water meter on their property.



Water Meter Shop test benches along with service area

Our water meter test bench that can test any water meter in the industry has allowed other agencies to test the

accuracy of their meters at our facility. This service has been invaluable because the DPS is in close proximity

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to our collaborative partners and we have the ability to prioritize the testing schedule. The test bench has also been an asset to agencies that have taken random meters out of their system to test for potential meter replacement programs and complement non-revenue water assessments.

In addition to the partnerships for service, the concept of cooperative purchasing is very successful. The City of Rochester Hills has taken the lead in many cooperative purchases and while the benefits are numerous, the economies of purchasing in bulk and combining the expense of solicitation and advertising are most beneficial.

One successful example of this strategy is the 2014 solicitation for

large municipal dump trucks. The Request for Proposal was structured as a cafeteria-style proposal whereby the participants could essentially build and order a truck to best service their particular needs. In addition, the language in the RFP allowed additional agencies to take advantage of the favorable pricing. The initial stakeholder group was eight agencies for the purchase of 25 trucks. This RFP process has been an overwhelming success and we now have 21 participating agencies with over 60 trucks ordered.

By working outside of our individual silos, the dump truck RFP strategy has garnered more attractive pricing for agencies that otherwise could not attract on their own and saved 21

agencies the time, effort and expense of preparing individual solicitations.

The Shared Services Initiative has proven to be a true win for all involved. These accomplishments do not happen by accident—they happen because of the vision, fortitude, boldness, and the tenacity to persevere of the individuals who collectively work together to achieve them. They succeed by working through, over, and around the paralysis that would otherwise prevent these innovative successes.

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Rochester Hills Department of Public Services team