

April 5, 2024
Dear Assembly,

Thank you for your hard work and dedication to making Haines the best it can be. As a past Borough Contractor and Executive assistant to two Borough Managers I wanted to share a few thoughts on Borough structure.

I believe that many of our current challenges are structural (not specific issues or political) and stem from a lack of staff in the Administration. The staff are the ones who spend 40 hours (or more) each week helping to achieve the Assembly/Public vision and there are simply too few to get all the projects accomplished.

The biggest gap I see is in the Managers office. Without more help, our manager cannot possibly handle all the current projects, manage over 50 staff, deal with emergencies, engage with the public, attend all the meetings, etc. I know we are advertising for an assistant, but it looks like this is an entry level position, I would advocate for higher pay and increased education/ experience requirements. The right person will more than pay for themselves.

Here are a few examples of projects that have I believe have stalled out due to lack of staff.

The Housing study: Affordable housing was identified as a serious issue by the Assembly, who asked HEDC to conduct a housing study. HEDC presented their results and suggestions to the Planning Commission. There has been nobody available to implement the recommendations.

The Comprehensive Plan: The Borough has spent over \$150,000 on the new comprehensive plan. How are we going to prioritize and realize any of the objectives of this plan? I would suggest that shepherding the comp plan is close to a full-time job and requires an experienced multi discipline staffer.

The Junk Car Program: Ten years ago, we purchased a tow truck, passed legislation to set aside \$11 from every vehicle registration. I believe that we collect almost \$30K annually, and still have no functional way to dispose of junk or abandoned vehicles.

Upcoming Challenges

Haines has a long history of Manager transitions, and we should be planning for the next one. These transitions can be incredibly disruptive to Borough operations; projects fall through the cracks, day to day operations are impacted, and morale suffers. The departure of the Public Facilities Director is a recent example. Imagine how many projects Ed Coffland was working on. Hiring a new manager also creates a huge workload for existing staff to advertise, vet, interview, onboard and train a new manager.

Solutions:

- The Assembly could allocate funds immediately for the use of local independent contractors, as we did in the early 2010's. These contractors can be tasked with specific projects. (Implement the Housing Study recommendations, Comp Plan objectives, completing the Junk Car program, etc.) Hiring contractors also allows the manager to vet possible candidates for full time positions.
- Hire a full time Special Projects Coordinator to ensure that the Borough has someone who can go where needed, write grants, manage projects, shepherd the comp plan, and help with the inevitable Manager transition. Another value of this position is their ability to be deeply knowledgeable about various Borough projects and to help inform Assembly members before and during meetings, which leads to a more effective Assembly.
- Planner and Manager Assistant. It appears we are advertising for entry level staff for these positions and I would advocate for competitive pay and higher experience requirements for these jobs.

Financial

Some will argue that we can't afford more staff or to pay competitive wages, but I would suggest that lack of experienced staff is costing us every day.

If we had enough staff, perhaps we could have taken the time to contact FEMA for authorization before allowing a third party to do work on the Porcupine Road and risking \$1.4 M. Could we have avoided spending the thousands of dollars and staff/assembly/community time spent on appealing the decision?

Imagine if we had been able to offer Dave Long a competitive wage. We would still have an experienced, dedicated planner on the team. Instead, we hired someone at tremendous onboarding cost who is already leaving. What is the opportunity cost of not having an experienced planner right now?

There are millions of dollars in grant funds available through the Infrastructure and Inflation Reduction acts. Do we have the staff to bring some of this money to Haines?

In closing, I believe that the Borough Administration staff is the foundation of our government, and building up this team should be a top priority of the Assembly.

Sincerely
Darsie Culbeck