

April 2008

Public Works Audit Impact

Inquiry reveals broader management needs citywide

“Currently, the fire department’s officers receive no formal training in management, leadership, and supervision.” This finding from the Mayor’s Boston Fire Department Independent Review Panel’s report of November 30, 2007 could just as easily apply to the Public Works Department and other city line departments.

Beyond the recently revealed findings of inadequate supervision and lax work practices and record keeping in the Highway Division of the Public Works Department (PWD) are broader personnel issues of recruitment, training, supervision, evaluation promotion, and accountability that should be addressed citywide. Indeed, the 2007 KPMG audit of the work order management of the Highway Division raises questions of whether or not similar work practices and management issues would be identified in other line departments providing direct public services with a dispersed workforce.

Today, Civil Service applies to police officers and firefighters and is basically non-existent for other services. However, the City has not been willing to enter this void and establish a comprehensive human resource operation with formal recruitment, training, evaluation and accountability systems. The financial commitment required has influenced this situation. Through seniority, employees rise in rank to supervisor or manager but usually do not receive formal training in how to exercise their new responsibilities. Promotion

is generally from within with few managers coming from the private sector bringing new experiences and practices with them.

The City’s Office of Human Resources has a central responsibility for efficient personnel management but for many years its role had been limited to processing due to past practice and restricted resources. Programs to provide training classes have been offered but they are not mandatory and utilization differs among departments. With tight budgets, the City has not been willing to devote the resources needed to provide a more formal structured and mandatory training program.

The Administration has come to realize the importance of a stronger and more comprehensive role for Human Resources. With this new emphasis and the utilization of upgraded technology, improved services to city departments should be expected. The tougher issues of changing an imbedded culture and raising supervisory and workforce standards in some departments will take time.

The results of the PWD review reinforce a recommendation made over the years by the Bureau that the Menino Administration contract with an appropriate firm to undertake a complete evaluation of the management and operations of one city department each year with no prior notification.