

CITY OF

# Watertown

## Personnel Department Study

Final Report / July 2023



July 13, 2023

George Proakis  
City Manager  
149 Main Street  
Watertown, MA 02474

Dear Mr. Proakis:

We are pleased to provide the City of Watertown (City) with this report detailing our organizational assessment of the Personnel Department (Department). This assessment includes analysis and recommendations based upon information provided by City staff, industry research, and best practices in human resources (HR) management.

We believe that the analysis and recommendations included in this report will support the City's efforts to modernize the HR function and achieve the leadership vision that you have outlined for the organization. These recommendations create the building blocks of an HR Department so it can meet the current and emerging needs of the organization. It outlines an approach to strengthen the Department's leadership and departmental operations, provides a path to enhanced recruitment and retention for the organization, identifies opportunities to promote organizational development and culture in the City, and details specific improvements needed to promote effective and efficient workflows.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with the City of Watertown.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Michelle Ferguson'.

**Michelle Ferguson**  
*Vice President - Organizational Assessment*



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# Executive Summary

Through a 2021 Charter amendment, Watertown officially changed its name from being known as a Town to a City, capping over 40 years of growth and changes to the identity of the community. Watertown emerged from the Global Pandemic in a strong financial position and, along with local governments across the country, has begun to reflect and act upon lessons learned about modernizing operations and the organization’s ability to adapt to external factors impacting service delivery. In the summer of 2022, a new City Manager was hired following the retirement of a Manager who had served nearly three decades in the role.

These changes have ushered in a new vision and strategies for the City. In an October 2022 presentation to the City Council, the City Manager detailed a five-part leadership formula for City staff that outlines how the administration will operationalize a new vision:

1. Maintaining the highest ethical standards
2. Ensuring collaborative departments
3. Providing ACE (accurate, courteous, and easy) customer service
4. Transparency in process and outcomes
5. “Be abnormal” – finding new and unique solutions to the challenges of leading in local government

Many areas within the City have been or are beginning to operate in alignment with these leadership concepts. For example, the City’s proactive efforts related to climate mitigation and resiliency and fiscal and environmental sustainability highlight the City’s commitment to innovation, collaboration, transparency, and high standards.

As the City organization grows to meet the evolving needs of its residents, City leadership has recognized the need to ensure that its internal service departments are appropriately structured and resourced to support the organization. The organization recently completed a study and restructuring of the Information Technology (IT) function that created a contemporary IT Department focused on developing collaborative, customer-focused technology solutions. The City Manager’s 2024 budget proposal further supports these leadership principles through the creation of a Chief Financial Officer position to oversee and coordinate the activities of several other internal service functions, including Procurement, Assessor, and Treasurer/Collector.

To build on this progress of promoting collaborative and customer-focused internal services for the organization, the City engaged Raftelis to conduct a Personnel Department Study with the goal of implementing improved HR services to the organization. The analysis and recommendations contained in this report have been developed to strengthen the Department’s ability to perform its core services effectively, meet the organization’s HR needs now and into the future, and align with the City Manager’s five-part leadership formula.

The following table illustrates the recommendations detailed in this report. These recommendations are not listed by priority; priority should be assigned by City leadership during the implementation process.

**Table 1: List of Report Recommendations**

Number	Recommendation
<b>Leadership and Departmental Operations</b>	
1	Rename the Department to Human Resources.
2	Hire a professional HR Director that is committed to building an HR Department that meets the City’s needs.

Number	Recommendation
3	Restructure the Department to support the delivery of contemporary core HR services in Watertown.
4	Create an Assistant Human Resources Director position.
5	Create two HR Generalist positions by reclassifying existing staff positions.
6	Create an HR Systems Analyst position.
7	Assign leave and absence management to the Auditor's Office.
8	Develop a prioritized annual work plan for the Department to effectively deliver core HR services.
9	Collect and monitor performance data for each core HR service.
10	Review and update City Personnel Regulations.
11	Create an Employee Handbook that is easily accessible and updated regularly.
12	Document HR Standard Operating Procedures.
13	Develop HR communication and outreach strategies.
<b>Recruitment and Retention</b>	
14	Streamline the application process for non-sworn positions.
15	Automate the recruitment process using web-based technology.
16	Expand recruitment outreach and develop proactive recruitment strategies.
17	Develop strategies and workplace policies that will position the City as an employer of choice.
<b>Organizational Development and Culture</b>	
18	Conduct an organizational training and development needs assessment.
19	Develop a leadership development and supervisory training program.
20	Promote activities that support employee engagement.
<b>Effective and Efficient Workflows</b>	
21	Streamline the Personnel Action Form (PAF) process.
22	Negotiate union provisions that promote effective and efficient workflows.
23	Leverage human capital management capabilities available in the City's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.



# Introduction

## Background and Methodology

In February 2023, the City of Watertown engaged Raftelis to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the Personnel Department focused on the organizational structure, operations, and internal customer-service experience. To accomplish this, the project team held a project kickoff meeting with the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, and Personnel Director to discuss this engagement. The project team then conducted individual interviews with both Personnel Department staff members and 20 stakeholders, including City and Department leadership, union representatives, and Councilors.

The project team reviewed and analyzed data provided by the City and other publicly available data related to Department operations, including budgets, personnel regulations, labor agreements, position descriptions, and technology systems. Insights and feedback from this process directly informed the research and analysis phase of this project.

## About the City

The City of Watertown is located in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, just west of Boston. The City covers approximately four square miles and has a population of 35,329 people as of the 2020 decennial census. The City's population is growing, with estimated growth of over 10% between the 2010 and 2020 decennial censuses. Watertown was founded in 1630 and incorporated as the Town of Watertown in 1632. In 1980, Watertown changed its form of government to become a city through a municipal charter change. A second charter amendment in 2021 renamed it the City of Watertown.

The City's administrative departments are overseen by a City Manager appointed by the City Council. The City Council also appoints a City Auditor and Council Clerk. A separately elected Library Board appoints the Library Director. Combined, the City's FY2023 authorized staffing level is 366 full-time, 31 part-time, and over 100 seasonal employees.

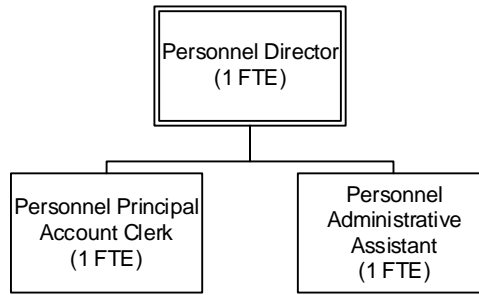
## About the Personnel Department

Watertown's Personnel Department provides a basic level of traditional HR support for the employees of the City of Watertown. It is responsible for recruitment and selection, classification and pay, personnel policy development and administration, employee relations, and collective bargaining activities related to City staff. HR matters related to the schools are managed by the school's own personnel staff. The Department currently has an authorized staffing level of three full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, including a Personnel Director, and two confidential staff positions, a Personnel Administrative Assistant, and a Personnel Principal Account Clerk.<sup>1</sup> The Clerk position was initially a part-time position, with shared clerical responsibilities between the Personnel Department and the Department of Community Development and Planning. In the FY2022 Budget, the position was converted to full-time within the Personnel Department.

The following organizational chart depicts the current authorized staffing for the Department.

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<sup>1</sup> The specific titles of the two staff positions within the Personnel Department are reported inconsistently by City staff and on City documents. Throughout this report, they will be referred to as the Personnel Principal Account Clerk and Personnel Administrative Assistant.



**Figure 1: Personnel Department Organizational Structure, FY2023**

The Personnel Director leads the Department and directly supervises all Personnel employees. Prior to their retirement, the Personnel Director was a working Director, spending the majority of their time on recruitment activities, labor and employee relations, and oversight of the Department. The Personnel Administrative Assistant position is responsible for coordinating recruitments and promotions for the Fire and Police Departments with the Massachusetts Civil Service program; reviewing and keying Personnel Action Forms (PAFs) to record changes to employment status such as retirements, resignations, or promotions, as well as changes in position, compensation, or contact information; and manually calculating and maintaining leave balances for all City employees. The Personnel Principal Account Clerk position is newly filled after being converted from part-time in 2022. This position is responsible for keying PAFs, providing clerical support for recruitment, providing information and assistance to applicants, managing clerical tasks, and providing back up support to the Personnel Administrative Assistant.

## CORE SERVICES MATRIX

The following table depicts an overview of the core services and activities currently performed by the Department. This table is for illustrative purposes; it is not meant to be all-inclusive.

**Table 2: Personnel Department Core Services**

Department Function	Program Area	Activities
<b>HR Leadership and Administration</b>	HR Strategy and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advise the City Manager, City Council, and other City leadership on HR matters.</li> </ul>
	Department Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop annual Department budget.</li> <li>Monitor budget expenditures and adjust as needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Labor and Employee Relations</b>	Labor Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Represent management during collective bargaining negotiations.</li> <li>Provide support to management on personnel matters.</li> <li>Provide escalating support for discipline and union grievance hearings.</li> </ul>
	Employee Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide policy and procedural guidance to departments for workplace conflicts and disciplinary matters.</li> </ul>
<b>Recruitment and Onboarding</b>	Active Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage the recruitment process for vacant and new positions.</li> <li>Share responsibility for Civil Service recruitments and promotions with the Police and Fire Departments.</li> <li>Participate in selected recruitment interviews.</li> <li>Coordinate background checks for selected candidates.</li> </ul>

Department Function	Program Area	Activities
	Onboarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate new employee onboarding activities and programming with IT, as well as the Retirements and Benefits Offices.</li> </ul>
<b>Compensation and Classification</b>	Position Classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop job descriptions and classifications for new positions.</li> </ul>
	Employee Compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain the City's compensation plan.</li> <li>Participate in surveys market comparability surveys.</li> </ul>
<b>HR Customer Service and Workflows</b>	HR Customer Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide front-line customer service to walk-in staff, attend to visitors, and answer incoming calls.</li> <li>Provide employee salary and employment verifications.</li> </ul>
	Personnel Records Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Process Personnel Action Forms and input personnel data for new employees and changes for existing employees into the City's Human Resources information system.</li> <li>Maintain official physical personnel files.</li> <li>Maintain employee leave balances.</li> </ul>
	Unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to unemployment claims.</li> </ul>
	Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate FMLA requests with employees.</li> <li>Monitor FMLA claims.</li> </ul>
<b>Risk Management</b>	Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate insurance policies and risk management strategies with representatives from Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA).</li> <li>Share risk and safety related MIIA training opportunities with City staff.</li> </ul>
	Employee Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Process public safety injury-on-duty claims in coordination with Police and Fire Departments.</li> <li>Coordinate drug and alcohol testing programs.</li> </ul>
	Workers' Compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Process workers' compensation claims for employee-sustained injuries and illnesses.</li> </ul>

## STAFFING

Prior to 2019, the Department operated with authorized staffing of 2.0 FTE, which included the Personnel Director and the Personnel Administrative Assistant. In FY2019, a Principal Account Clerk position was created and was split between the Personnel and Building Departments at 0.5 FTE each. In FY2022 the Principal Account Clerk position was converted to full-time, but the Department was unable to fill the role despite multiple rounds of recruitment. This position remained vacant until early 2023 when it was finally filled. In the spring of 2023, the long-tenured Personnel Director retired, leaving the Director position vacant at the time this report was written.

**Table 3: Personnel Department Staffing, FY2019 through FY2023**

Staffing (FTE)	FY2019 Budget	FY2020 Budget	FY2021 Budget	FY2022 Budget	FY2023 Budget	Percent Change FY2019 to FY2023
<b>Authorized</b>	2.5	2.5	2.5	3.0	3.0	20%

## BUDGET

Operating expenditures for the Department have increased steadily over the past several years, chiefly due to increased salary expenses related to routine salary increases and the conversion of the part-time Principal Account Clerk position to full-time.

**Table 4: Personnel Department Expenses – All Funds, FY2019 through FY2023**

Expense Category	FY2019 Actual	FY2020 Actual	FY2021 Actual	FY2022 Actual	FY2023 Budget	Percent Change FY2019 to FY2023
Salaries	166,348	186,917	197,849	205,896	245,360	48%
Expenses	75,989	56,155	61,574	65,673	76,300	0%
Grand Total	242,337	243,072	259,423	271,569	321,660	33%

## PAYROLL AND BENEFITS

Personnel Department staff collaborate closely with staff throughout the City to accomplish their work, but their ongoing collaboration with the Auditor’s Office is worth noting. The Auditor’s Office is responsible for administering the payroll and benefits functions for both the Watertown City and School organizations.

The Auditor’s approach to payroll processing for the City is exception based, which means that each pay period, employees are paid based upon the assumption that they have worked their normally scheduled hours unless an exception or deviation is recorded. This approach relies on timely updates to the City’s Human Resources Information System (HRIS) by the Personnel Administrative Assistant in order to process the biweekly payroll. Payroll is administered by a single Payroll Specialist within the Auditor’s Office. In addition, the Personnel Administrative Assistant manually maintains the discretionary leave balances for City staff using information shared by Auditor’s Office staff.

The City provides a limited set of health insurance and ancillary benefits, including a traditional health insurance program, dental, vision insurance, and life insurance. The City is a member of the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) for its health insurance coverage, a quasi-independent state agency that provides insurance coverage to state employees and participating municipalities. While the City has the ability to set or bargain health premium contribution ratios, the GIC maintains exclusive authority to determine all other matters relating to municipal subscribers’ GIC health insurance rights, responsibilities, cost, and payment obligations, including the manner and method of payment, eligibility requirements, choice of benefits, and health carriers.

Consequently, the Auditor’s Office role in benefits is largely administrative, with a single Principal Account Clerk for Benefits performing the administrative, financial, clerical, and customer service related duties for Watertown City and School employees and retirees. This includes responding to questions from employees and retirees pertaining to City benefits, maintaining records of employee benefit elections and deductions, managing open enrollment, and processing invoices for insurance vendors.

# Analysis and Recommendations

## Core Services Review

Watertown’s approach to personnel management and human resources functions has historically been largely transactional. The resources and capacity of the Personnel Department supported procedural tasks to meet the daily operational demands of the City. As Watertown’s City organization grows and evolves to meet the community’s needs, so too must its personnel function. However, the current ability of the Personnel Department to do this effectively is limited.

An initial review of the City’s core HR service levels inventoried the City’s current levels of service against a set of fundamental HR services needed to meet the basic needs of an organization like the City of Watertown. Those basic services are listed in the table below. The degree to which Watertown currently provides each service is noted by color. For reference, those services highlighted in green with a checkmark are currently performed by the City sufficiently. Those services highlighted in yellow are performed on a limited basis, and those highlighted red with an x are not reported to be performed.

**Table 5: Service Level Evaluation**

Human Resource Function	Program Area
<b>HR Leadership and Administration</b>	• HR Strategy and Leadership
	× Policy Development and Administration
	✓ Department Administration
<b>Labor and Employee Relations</b>	• Labor Relations
	• Employee Relations
<b>Recruitment and Retention</b>	• Active Recruitment
	× Proactive Recruitment
	• Onboarding
	× Retention Analysis
<b>Compensation and Classification</b>	• Position Classification
	• Employee Compensation
<b>HR Customer Service and Workflows</b>	• HR Customer Service
	• Personnel Records Administration
	✓ Unemployment
<b>Risk and Benefits</b>	× Benefits Strategy
	× Employee Wellness
	• Risk Management
	• Employee Safety
	✓ Workers’ Compensation
	✓ Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Administration
✓ Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Administration	
<b>Organizational Development and Culture</b>	× Learning Management
	× Employee Training
	× Succession Planning and Leadership Development
	× Employee Engagement and Recognition
<b>HR Information Systems (HRIS)</b>	× HRIS Administration
	× Process and Workflow Improvement

### **HR Leadership and Administration**

While the Department meets basic administrative obligations, most staff time is spent on recruiting and onboarding new employees. The Personnel Director position has historically been largely focused on recruitment-related activities and routine transactional matters such as approving personnel transactions. This has limited the Director's capacity for taking on more strategic leadership activities such as policy development and updates, or working with City leadership and departments to proactively understand their personnel-related needs.

### **Labor and Employee Relations**

While the Personnel Director has historically been an active participant in labor negotiations, most matters related to interpretation of labor agreements are referred to the City's labor attorney. Staff and stakeholders report that the Department's approach to employee relations, including investigations and discipline, has been limited and inconsistent.

### **Recruitment and Retention**

Personnel Department staff report that a significant portion of their time and attention is focused on filling vacant positions. The complex dynamics of civil service recruitment for public safety, and broader labor market challenges for public sector employment have left this service limited despite their best efforts to meet customer demand. Efforts to develop more proactive recruitment strategies or promote retention have not been pursued.

### **Compensation and Classification**

The City is currently undertaking a compensation and classification study. Outside of this study, the Department does not have a consistent practice or policy for reviewing and updating compensation and classification. Prior to the study, its involvement in compensation and classification largely consisted of responding to peer community's market surveys and updating compensation as part of labor negotiations. This has led to challenges with maintaining competitive pay and up-to-date job descriptions and classifications for positions.

### **HR Customer Service and Workflows**

Department staff have focused on manually processing personnel actions and other transactional customer service activities, such as responding to unemployment claims, and maintaining official personnel records. A common theme in stakeholder interviews was the Department's limited capacity to provide customer service for employees. Many reported that because of how apparent it is that Personnel is overtaxed, staff have simply stopped going to them for HR-related matters.

### **Risk and Benefits**

The Department currently focuses on the transactional types of risk and benefits activities such as FMLA, ADA, and Workers' Compensation. It has a limited scope of activities related to risk management and employee safety, namely related to interfacing with the City's insurance provider and forwarding safety-related training links to City employees. It does not coordinate any City-wide safety training or risk mitigation programming. Additionally, the current responsibility for managing and administering employee benefits currently resides with the City Auditor. While the transactional side of this function is appropriate to remain with the Auditor, strategic decision-making about benefits offerings and wellness programming are a common element of modern HR leadership because they are part of an employee's holistic employment experience. These are currently absent in the Personnel Department.

### **Organizational Development and Culture**

With its limited capacity and focus, the Personnel Department has not provided centralized organizational development or training. The only reported training-related activities that Personnel has engaged in has been forwarding training opportunities offered by the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association to City staff. The

Department does not engage in proactive succession planning support for City departments. These are critical areas of investment for recruiting, developing, and retaining a talented workforce.

### HR Information Systems

The Department utilizes limited technology resources to accomplish its core tasks. Resource constraints have crowded out the ability to implement automation, process improvement, and leverage technology in ways that generate capacity for the Department.

## Building Blocks of Modern HR

Modern local government human resources management has been driven by technological advancements, changing workplace dynamics, and global workplace trends. Today’s approach to human resources is built upon the idea that HR must be a strategic organizational function, and the actions and focus of HR should be based on meeting the needs of the organization and the people within it. In other words, HR does not exist solely to process transactions; HR exists to ensure that the organization has the workforce it requires to accomplish its objectives.

Shifting the Department’s approach from transactional toward modern HR management that can provide these fundamental HR services will require that the Department have the right leadership focus, structure, policies, and core processes in place to be successful. Strengthening the core services provided by the Department to the organization will help ensure that the City is able to adapt and meet community service-level expectations.

To provide the core services outlined previously, the City needs to have the right building blocks in place. This report focuses on the four most important building blocks of modern HR to facilitate this change. Each building block serves as a starting point for Department leadership as they develop their plans to move the Department forward. The recommendations contained throughout this report are organized thematically in sections dedicated to each of these building blocks.

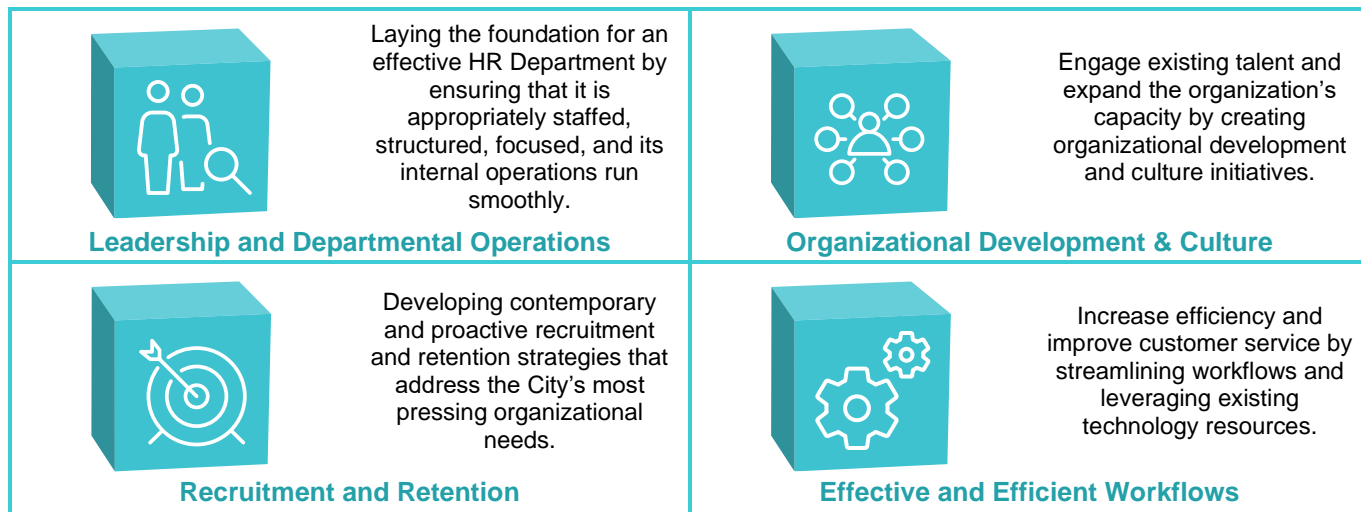


Figure 2: Building Blocks of HR Change for Watertown



## Leadership and Departmental Operations

In order to ensure that it is appropriately equipped to meet the City's overarching organizational needs, the leadership strategy, staffing, structure, and operations of the Personnel Department itself need to be thoroughly evaluated.

This section includes recommendations that address the following essential components of leadership and departmental operations:

- HR Strategy and Leadership
- Department Structure and Staffing
- Work Planning and Data Collection
- HR Policy and Procedures

### HR STRATEGY AND LEADERSHIP

Shifting to an HR management approach, capable of providing fundamental HR services to the organization, will necessitate the creation of a new way of doing business for the Department. City and Department leadership will need to be clear and intentional about the mission and functions of the Department. This includes thoughtful practices that focus on people and relationships.

#### **Recommendation 1: Rename the Department to Human Resources.**

The City's Personnel Department has historically been staffed to meet the immediate transactional demands of the organization, namely recruiting for vacant positions and administering personnel records management tasks. Legal compliance responsibilities are shared with outside legal counsel and the Department handles basic compliance-oriented tasks like Family Medical Leave and Workers Compensation. A common theme identified in stakeholder interviews was the frequency with which routine personnel matters, including labor contract interpretation, employee discipline, and grievances, were referred to outside counsel rather than handled by the Personnel Department itself.

Taken together, these characteristics reflect a personnel management department that fundamentally operates as a transactional service provider for the City. Workload volume, staffing levels, and outdated processes have all contributed to an environment where there was little time for anything beyond transactional work. This departmental focus no longer serves the needs of the organization, as the City has grown in size and complexity, and the needs of its workforce and the community continue to evolve. To better meet these needs, and to align with the City Manager's leadership formula for the City, the Department needs to shift their focus toward HR management.

To signal a shift in focus, the Personnel Department should first be renamed the Human Resources Department. This title reflects the desired progression from historical transactional services to a contemporary HR management approach, meeting the organization's workforce needs. HR is a professional, proactive approach to managing human capital within an organization that includes an intentional focus on the growth and development of the workforce. Effective HR management requires active communication and collaboration across the organization to identify and address recruiting and retention challenges, become the "keeper of the culture," and position Watertown as an employer of choice, committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Collective bargaining in the state of Massachusetts can, at times, complicate this contemporary approach; however, working toward a shared vision among labor groups and leadership will foster progress.

City leadership is commended for their FY2024 re-organization proposal that includes changing the name of the Personnel Department to the Human Resources Department. This is an important first step. The change, if approved



by Council, will require updates to the City code where the Department is referenced, as well as policy documents, job title and descriptions, annual filings, and public information resources like the City website.

The remainder of this report will reflect this recommended change and refer to the Department as HR or the HR Department.

## **Recommendation 2: Hire a professional HR Director that is committed to building an HR Department that meets the City's needs.**

Promptly filling the HR Department's vacant Director position will be foundational in transitioning the Department beyond transaction-oriented services to one that focuses on people and relationships while collaboratively working to build out the Department's ability to provide core services. The new Director will be responsible for communicating a clear vision to the organization, building a framework and prioritized work plan that addresses the core services outlined in this report, and appropriately allocating resources to achieve the vision. Policy development, whether revised or new, should first consider the customer (people) impact. Changes should improve the communication, experience, and relationship employees and department leadership have with the Department.

City leadership continues to face headwinds with recruiting and retention that are felt across the country for local governments. They need a partner within the City that understands their human capital needs in order to meet resident service level expectations. The City Manager's proposed re-organization structure, submitted to Council for the FY2024 budget, reduces the number of direct reports from 15 department directors to 11, and adds leadership support for departments through the newly hired Deputy City Manager, newly created Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and Assistant City Manager for Community Development and Planning. Under the proposed structure, the Director of Human Resources reports directly to the City Manager with the Deputy City Manager as an assigned liaison. This signals an important partnership as the new Director begins to build relationships with each of the department directors to understand their staffing challenges and needs. In addition, the City Manager conducts regular leadership meetings, which present an opportunity for the new Director to engage their peers on workforce development policy and strategy discussions that will help identify ways for HR to support the needs of the organization.

As City leadership plans to recruit for this position, they should carefully develop the position description and recruitment strategy to ensure that they are best representing the role and the opportunity for this position in Watertown. It will be important for candidates to fully understand leadership's vision for the Department and the steps that will be required to achieve that vision. Likewise, it will be important for the chosen candidate to demonstrate not just their professional HR expertise, but also their ability to embrace and enact organizational change.

## **DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE AND STAFFING**

With a history of limited staffing, the Department has been challenged to handle all but the most basic of personnel functions, primarily employee recruitment and processing personnel actions. Of the current complement of positions, a Personnel Director, Personnel Administrative Assistant, and Principal Account Clerk, only the Director position can be considered a professional HR position based on the recommended minimum qualifications included in their associated job descriptions.

The concept of professionalization involves the application of a theoretical body of knowledge that takes extensive training and knowledge to acquire. Most professions involve a degree-level college education or certificate programs focused on developing knowledge and aptitude in this body of knowledge and are supported by professional associations that provide current research and resources on best practices and emerging trends. In the world of HR,

there are multiple professional organizations that provide credentialing and certifications for HR professionals, including the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) and Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI).

In its Best Practice Recommendation on Human Resources Professionals, the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) Policy Committee on Personnel and Labor Relations recommends that municipalities should try to align with the best practice of maintaining one HR professional for every 100 total employees.<sup>2</sup> At its authorized level of three HR FTE, and the City’s FY2023 authorized 366 FTE, 31 part-time positions, and over 100 seasonal staff hired by the City’s Recreation Department, Watertown’s current ratio of total organizational positions to HR positions is 165.7. This means that there are 165.7 positions for every one HR position, far exceeding the MMA recommendation.

The HR Department needs to be structured, staffed, and managed in a way that supports the effective and professional delivery of core HR services, creates leadership depth, and supports long-term succession planning in the Department. The following recommendations create a departmental structure and staffing arrangement that provides capacity for HR Department leadership to effectively develop the HR building blocks and core functions that will meet the current and emerging needs of the City.

The following table lists staffing-related recommendations discussed in this section and their estimated total cost impact. These figures include full-time salaries based upon the City’s FY2023 non-union classification system and salary tables and benefits estimates of \$20,000 per position, an amount commonly used by the City for budgetary purposes.

**Table 6: Recommended Staffing Additions with Estimated Cost Impacts**

Recommendation	Total Estimated Cost Impact
Create an Assistant Human Resources Director position	\$98,000 to \$126,000
Create two HR Generalist positions by reclassifying existing staff positions	\$12,000 to \$30,000
Create an HR Systems Analyst position	\$98,000 to \$126,000
<b>Total Estimated Costs</b>	<b>\$208,000 to \$282,000</b>

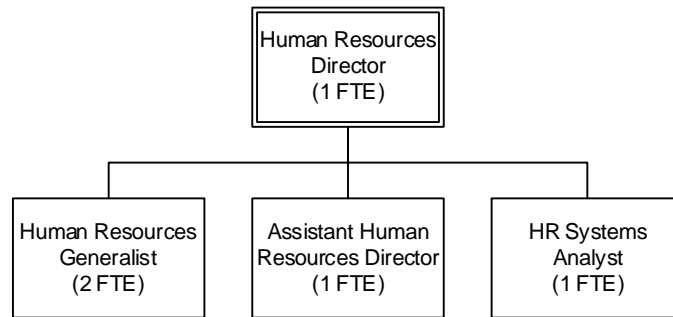
If all of the staffing recommendations contained in this report were implemented, the overall change in FTE for the HR Department would be a net increase of two FTE; changing authorized FTEs to five. The result would result in a ratio of total organizational positions to HR positions of 99.4, bringing it into alignment with the MMA recommended best practice.

**Recommendation 3: Restructure the Department to support the delivery of contemporary core HR services in Watertown.**

Effectively providing core HR services for the staff and departments of Watertown will require an HR Department that has the appropriate experience, capacity, and approach to providing professional, people-focused services. The recommended organizational structure creates additional leadership depth and supports long-term succession planning by adding an Assistant HR Director position. It promotes the professionalization of the Department and creates pathways for staff development by reclassifying two HR support positions as HR Generalists. The recommended structure creates capacity for technology enhancements, process improvements, and data analysis by creating an HR Systems Analyst position.

<sup>2</sup> MMA Policy Committee on Personnel and Labor Relations. Best Practice Recommendation: Human Resources Professionals. [https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/mma\\_best\\_practices\\_vol4no7\\_jan2019.pdf](https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/mma_best_practices_vol4no7_jan2019.pdf)

The following figure demonstrates the recommended organizational structure for the Human Resources Department.



**Figure 3: Recommended HR Organizational Structure**

The recommended structure retains a flat reporting structure, with all Departmental positions reporting to the HR Director at this time. This reporting structure is recommended for the short-term as a valuable way for the new HR Director to stay tightly connected to each member of the team while they focus on developing and refining the core services, policies, and procedural building blocks for the Department. The table that follows summarizes the recommended core functions and program areas of HR that the Department, when appropriately staffed and structured, should be capable of performing. This listing is intended for illustrative purposes, and is not a complete accounting of every activity and function that will take place in the HR Department.

**Table 7: Recommended HR Functions and Program Areas by Position**

Department Function	Program Area	Primary Position(s) Responsible
<b>HR Leadership and Administration</b>	HR Strategy and Leadership	Director
	Policy Development and Administration	Director
	Department Administration	Director Assistant Director
<b>Labor and Employee Relations</b>	Labor Relations	Director
	Employee Relations	Assistant Director
<b>Recruitment and Retention</b>	Active Recruitment	HR Generalists
	Proactive Recruitment	HR Generalists
	Onboarding	HR Generalists
	Retention Analysis	HR Generalists
<b>Compensation and Classification</b>	Position Classification	Assistant Director
	Employee Compensation	Assistant Director HR Systems Analyst
<b>HR Customer Service and Workflows</b>	HR Customer Service	HR Generalists
	Personnel Records Administration	HR Generalists
	Unemployment	HR Generalists
<b>Risk and Benefits<sup>3</sup></b>	Benefits Strategy	Director
	Employee Wellness	Assistant Director
	Risk Management	Assistant Director
	Employee Safety	Assistant Director HR Generalists
	Workers' Compensation	Assistant Director HR Generalists
	Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Administration	Assistant Director HR Generalists

<sup>3</sup> Responsibility for benefits administration (i.e., processing benefits-related transactions) is recommended to continue being part of the Auditor's office in order to maintain separation of duties and continuity in that department.

Department Function	Program Area	Primary Position(s) Responsible
	Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Administration	Assistant Director HR Generalists
<b>Organizational Development and Culture</b>	Learning Management	Assistant Director HR Generalists
	Employee Training	Assistant Director HR Generalists
	Succession Planning and Leadership Development	Assistant Director
	Employee Engagement and Recognition	Assistant Director HR Generalists
<b>HR Information Systems (HRIS)</b>	HRIS Administration	HR Systems Analyst
	Process and Workflow Improvement	HR Systems Analyst

#### **Recommendation 4: Create an Assistant Human Resources Director position.**

The historical structure and staffing level of the Department necessitated the Personnel Director to play a large role in daily transactional activities of the Department, with little capacity for proactive management or policy-oriented initiatives. In order to position the new HR Director to be successful developing and refining the core services, policies, and procedural building blocks for the Department, the creation of an Assistant HR Director position is recommended. This position should be filled with an experienced HR professional with the skills and abilities necessary to help create an HR Department that can meet the needs of Watertown staff and departments.

In addition to supporting the HR Director with overall Department administration activities, the Assistant Director should be the Department’s primary point of contact for employee relations matters. A common theme in stakeholder interviews was the organization’s historic lack of consistency in how workplace policies have been enforced and employee relations matters have been handled. Assigning this responsibility to a senior-level HR professional will provide consistency in how employee relations matters are handled and reduce the overall risk to the City.

The Assistant HR Director should also lead the Department’s compensation and classification activities, which will become a more robust function for the Department with completion of the compensation and classification study currently underway. This position should coordinate the Department’s risk and benefits activities as well. Finally, the Assistant Director position should lead the Department’s efforts to build out its organizational development and culture related programs.

In addition, this position would provide leadership depth for the Department and support succession planning by providing support to the Director on the Director’s key projects and initiatives. This position would also be able to take on temporary workload when vacancies within the Department occur, in order to limit the burden that vacancies create on other HR staff.

Based on the current classification of other assistant director level positions in the City, this position is estimated to be classified in the M2 classification range. Based upon this classification, the estimated financial impact of this new position would be \$98,000 to \$126,000 inclusive of salary and benefits.

#### **Recommendation 5: Create two HR Generalist positions by reclassifying existing staff positions.**

The staff positions that are currently part of the Department, the Personnel Administrative Assistant and the Principal Account Clerk-Personnel, have job descriptions and qualifications that primarily reflect the clerical and transactional nature of the Department’s historic approach to administering HR. As part of the professionalization of HR within the organization, transitioning these clerical positions into professional HR Generalist positions is recommended.

An HR Generalist is an HR professional that is responsible for performing a broad range of HR-related duties based on the needs of the organization. This role is most often described in the context of what it is not – a specialist in a particular area of HR. Given the recommended size and structure of the HR Department for Watertown, the HR Generalist model is recommended, in order to balance Departmental workloads and to provide depth of coverage for the core HR functions that these positions will administer.

The primary responsibilities that are recommended to be assigned to the HR Generalists include recruitment and retention, HR customer service and workflows, as well as coordination of activities related to both risk and benefits and organizational development and culture in conjunction with the Assistant Director. While the ultimate distribution of workload between the Generalists should be determined based upon the skills and experience of the individuals filling those roles and the organization’s evolving needs, the following figure outlines a potential division of responsibility between the two Generalist positions. Under this approach, the two positions are expected to be cross trained in each other’s primary areas of responsibilities in order to provide long-term continuity and short-term back-up support for the Department.

Generalist A	Generalist B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Service and Workflows</li> <li>• Recruitment and Retention               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Civil Service Departments (Lead)</li> <li>○ All Other Departments (Backup)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Risk and Benefits (Lead)</li> <li>• Organizational Development and Culture (Backup)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Service and Workflows</li> <li>• Recruitment and Retention               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ All Other Departments (Lead)</li> <li>○ Civil Service Departments (Backup)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Organizational Development and Culture (Lead)</li> <li>• Risk and Benefits (Backup)</li> </ul>

**Figure 4: Recommended Distribution of Duties for HR Generalists**

Based on the current classification of non-union level positions in the City, these positions are estimated to be classified in the M1 classification range. The financial impact is estimated based upon reclassifying the current staff positions that are classified at the THA4 (Principal Account Clerk-Personnel) and THA6 levels (Personnel Administrative Assistant). Based upon this classification, the estimated financial impact of these two new positions would range from \$12,000 to \$30,000 inclusive of salary and benefits.

**Recommendation 6: Create an HR Systems Analyst position.**

Providing core HR services through effective and efficient workflows will require significant changes to the way that the Department currently does business, moving away from manual and paper based processes to maximizing the use of technology tools (Recommendation 23). The City’s IT Department has already begun investing in the appropriate technology to make this happen, by upgrading the City’s Enterprise Resource System (ERP), Munis®, and fully investing in the system’s Human Capital Management module, which is capable of creating automated and efficient digital workflows and records for most core HR and payroll related functions.

Implementing these new capabilities will be a significant undertaking for HR. It will require substantial effort and specialized expertise to ensure that the systems are configured appropriately, tested thoroughly, and that staff, both within HR and throughout the City, are fully trained on how to utilize the new system tools and functions. To accomplish this work effectively, a dedicated HR Systems Analyst position is recommended to be created and assigned to HR.

Systems Analysts serve unique roles in organizations, bridging the gap between traditional IT functions and their assigned department. Their role is to focus on designing and mapping their department’s business processes and

technical requirements so that the organization's technology systems are designed appropriately and function to best support them.

This position is recommended to be a part of the HR Department, not IT. It should be filled by an individual with significant HR experience, who understands the organizational and policy requirements of HR business processes. While this position's primary duties are recommended to be associated with the project and organizational change management associated with widescale technology upgrades, it should also be utilized to support additional process and workflow improvements as needed. This position can enhance capacity in the Department for data analytics, which will support ongoing work related to employee compensation, and collecting and monitoring Departmental performance data.

Based on the current classification of other Systems Analyst positions in the City, this position is estimated to be classified in the M2 classification range. Based upon this classification, the estimated financial impact of this new position would be \$98,000 to \$126,000 inclusive of salary and benefits. This position could be developed as a temporary, project-based position focused on the rollout and upgrade of the Human Capital Management modules. This process is likely to span two to three years. Once this process is nearing completion, the ongoing need for this position within HR should be evaluated.

### **Recommendation 7: Assign leave and absence management to the Auditor's Office.**

Currently the Personnel Administrative Assistant is responsible for tracking the discretionary leave balances for every City employee in conjunction with the City's payroll process. This is accomplished manually, through a system of paper files for each employee that detail their leave accruals and leave taken. A running balance for each employee is not currently maintained; staff report that most employee leave balance information is at least two years out-of-date. In lieu of continuously recording and tracking these balances, staff report that individual employee balances are updated only when an employee enquires about their balance or requires a leave payout upon separation.

The current process is time consuming for existing staff in HR, and is not specifically related to the core functions of the Department. Additionally, the lack of real-time leave balance information creates risk for the organization and has led to a system in which individual departments have had to devise their own methods for tracking this information.

In most organizations, the task of tracking leave balances is a payroll function. Indeed, this activity is a core function of most automated time and attendance and payroll systems. As the City begins to embrace the capabilities of its existing HRIS (see Recommendation 23) more fully, the responsibility for leave and absence management should be transitioned to the payroll staff in the Auditor's office. Migrating this information from paper files to an electronic database will require significant staff resources and capacity upfront, and may require the use of temporary or contract support. Once complete, however, leave requests, approvals, and balances can be processed and maintained electronically.

## **WORK PLANNING AND DATA COLLECTION**

The recommended changes to Department structure and staffing described in the previous section will increase the size of the Department and provide it with the capacity to expand core HR services to the organization. At the same time, the recommendations contained within this report will create a need for clear and consistent communication about priorities, expectations, and performance. To ensure the success of these endeavors, the following recommendations outline the steps the Department should take to plan and prioritize the work of the Department successfully.

**Recommendation 8: Develop a prioritized annual work plan for the Department to effectively deliver core HR services.**

As the Department’s capacity to provide core HR services increases, it will be important to develop systems that enable the Department to successfully plan and perform those services. An annual work plan is a tool that organizations use to guide their work and focus their efforts to achieve their broader goals. Developing a detailed annual work plan in HR will help the Department focus and guide its efforts as it works to transform its role in the organization and implement the recommendations in this report.

HR’s annual work plans should be developed to accomplish the following best practices of work planning:

- Identify key goals within each of the core service areas
- Outline specific projects that contribute to the achievement of each goal
- Develop an estimated timeframe for completion, detailed tasks, and deadlines for each project
- Assign staff to projects or a goal that aligns with their job responsibilities, technical expertise, and capacity
- Prioritize the work plan and expectations for balancing progress with day-to-day activities

Prioritization and timing are critical. For example, simplifying the application process or PAF workflow first may improve daily operational efficiency, generating additional capacity for other projects that begin to address core services that have gone unmet. Conversely, some goals or project tasks may require changes to union contracts, budget actions, or City Council approval. These items should be carefully planned with an understanding of the required timelines. In the meantime, other initiatives that can be accomplished within the scope of the City Manager’s or Department’s administrative authority should be prioritized.

To illustrate the potential format and level of detail recommended for a Departmental work plan, the following table shows an example project with all five elements of a true work plan. This example is based on the recommendation to streamline the PAF process (Recommendation 21). By defining a detailed work plan, the implementation of this objective becomes clearer and accountability for completion is created.

**Table 8: Sample Work Plan Language**

Goal: Streamline the PAF process	Deadline	Duration	Person Responsible
<b>Project: Review PAF initiation requirements</b>			
Collect a representative sample of PAF data	8/20/2023	4 hours	HR Generalist
Analyze PAF sample data	9/10/2023	4 hours	HR Generalist
Create a matrix that identifies personnel actions by type, recommended initiation (employee, department, or HR), and required approvals	9/20/2023	8 hours	Assistant HR Director
Identify actions that would no longer require a PAF employee self-service is implemented	9/20/2023	1 hour	HR Generalist
Propose changes to City leadership	10/15/2024	4 hours	Assistant HR Director
Develop methods to identify and initiate personnel actions in HR to reduce department initiation requirements	10/30/2023	4 hours	HR Generalist
Determine what regulatory or contract languages may be needed to streamline	11/1/2023	6 hours	Assistant HR Director
Implement approved changes	1/1/2024	24 hours	HR Systems Analyst

Developing the annual work plan is ultimately the responsibility of the HR Director, but the plan should be developed in conjunction with Department staff. Working collaboratively to create and carry out an annual HR Department

work plan will support HR staff’s ability to understand their individual contributions and the interdependence of their work. It will also promote accountability by clearly communicating expectations and requiring regular updates on progress and performance.

The work plan, and updates on the Department’s progress, should be shared regularly with City leadership and department directors. This will help to support ongoing communication and collaboration between HR and the organization it serves, and provide City leadership with the opportunity to provide stakeholder input on the priorities identified in the plan.

**Recommendation 9: Collect and monitor performance data for each core HR service.**

As the Department expands its core services to the organization, the next step will be to track the Department’s activity levels and begin to assess whether the performance expectations identified by City and Department leadership and operationalized in the annual work plan are being met. Performance measurement is a tool that can be used to quantitatively evaluate progress, make ongoing assessments, and create a department culture that values continuous improvement and responsiveness to organizational needs.

Currently the Department tracks limited data about recruitment activities and personnel actions. Moving forward, the Department should develop a system for regularly collecting and evaluating performance measurement data about each of its core services. In some cases, data may already be readily available or able to be extracted from existing systems. In other cases, it may be necessary for Department staff to develop data tracking systems in order to collect the necessary information.

The limited amount of data currently collected by the Department are considered output or workload measures; they help to develop an understanding of the Department’s current workload. While these measures capture current activity levels, such as the number of PAFs processed or the number of vacant positions, they do not measure the efficiency or effectiveness of the Department at achieving those tasks.

To understand the full picture of a program’s performance, it is a best practice to develop a “family of measures” that assesses the workload, efficiency, and effectiveness of a program. Identifying measures in each of these three areas helps an organization understand the amount of work completed, the cost-effectiveness of that work, and the impact that work has on operations and the organization. The table below summarizes the measure types included in the family of measures and provides HR related examples of each.

**Table 9: Family of Measures**

Measure Type	Definition	Example(s)
Inputs	Indicate the amount of resources used performing program or service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dollars spent on HR services</li> <li>• Number of Department staff</li> </ul>
Outputs (Workload)	Indicate the amount of output produced by a program or service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of positions filled</li> <li>• Number of job descriptions updated</li> <li>• Number of seasonal employees hired</li> </ul>
Efficiency Measure	Indicate how well an organization is using its resources, typically expressed as a ratio between the amount of input and output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of employees supported per HR professional</li> <li>• HR labor cost per vacancy filled</li> </ul>



Measure Type	Definition	Example(s)
Effectiveness (Outcome) Measure	Indicate how well the program or service accomplishes the intended purpose and is of direct importance to customers, often related to quality, cycle time, and customer satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average number of days to create a candidate pool</li> <li>• Percentage of customers “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with recruiting process</li> </ul>

Over time, as the Department’s data collection and reporting abilities improve, it should work toward developing and tracking effectiveness measures for its core services. The table below provides examples of recommended performance indicators for each of the core service functions outlined in the report.

**Table 10: Workload and Effectiveness Measure Examples**

Core Service	Workload Measures	Effectiveness Measures
<b>HR Leadership and Administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of HR policies and regulations created or updated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of HR policies and regulations reviewed and updated within the last three years</li> <li>• Annual turnover rate</li> <li>• Percent of employees who would recommend Watertown as an employer of choice</li> </ul>
<b>Labor and Employee Relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of grievances filed</li> <li>• Number of workplace investigations completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of grievances resolved before passing from management control</li> </ul>
<b>Recruitment and Retention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of recruitments performed</li> <li>• Number of proactive recruiting events and activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average number of workdays to fill a vacant position</li> <li>• Percent of new hires who are still working with the City after one year</li> </ul>
<b>Compensation and Classification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of reclassifications completed</li> <li>• Number of market compensation analyses completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of positions with market compensation completed within the last three years</li> </ul>
<b>HR Customer Service and Workflows</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of PAFs processed</li> <li>• Number of salary and employment verifications processed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of personnel records changes made within one business day</li> <li>• Percent of survey respondents that are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the customer service provided by the HR Department</li> </ul>
<b>Risk and Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of workers’ compensation claims processed</li> <li>• Number of employee drug and alcohol tests coordinated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent change in the average cost per workers’ compensation claim</li> <li>• Percent change in the number of workdays lost due to workplace injuries</li> <li>• Percent change in the number of safety incidents reported</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational Development and Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of training and development programs offered</li> <li>• Number of employee recognition activities coordinated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of City workforce participating in training and development programs</li> <li>• Participant satisfaction ratings with trainings offered</li> </ul>
<b>HR Information Systems (HRIS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of HR business processes automated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User satisfaction with HR technology systems</li> </ul>

## HR POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Documented personnel regulations, policies, and procedures are important tools for promoting clarity around expectations for behavior, consistency in the treatment of personnel matters, and compliance with applicable state and federal laws. They also serve as important reference material for employees learning new processes or navigating unfamiliar situations.

For these documented standards to be as effective as possible, they should be up-to-date, comprehensive, supportive of the organization's current operating environment, and readily accessible for staff. Historically, Watertown has created limited documentation of its personnel regulations, policies, and procedures, and what it does have is generally outdated and not centrally accessible. In both departmental and stakeholder interviews, staff report that the City's limited personnel documentation is outdated and has negative impacts on operations.

The following recommendations outline a series of activities that would create a foundation of up-to-date, accessible, and relevant personnel regulations, and departmental operating procedures that would create clear expectations for employee and organizational behavior, support consistent treatment of personnel matters, and protect against the loss of institutional memory that takes place when employees leave the organization.

### **Recommendation 10: Review and update City Personnel Regulations.**

The City's Personnel Regulations are contained within Chapter 30 Subchapter II of the City code. They were initially adopted in 1964 and were most recently amended and updated in 1980. These regulations provide a detailed set of policies and processes that were intended to guide how personnel matters were administered in Watertown at the time they were adopted. Included in these Personnel Regulations are sections governing:

- Participation in Massachusetts Civil Service (§30.17, §30.18, §30.30)
- The composition and official functions of a Personnel Board (§30.17)
- The creation and administration of a Classification Plan (§30.18, §30.20, §30.21, §30.22)
- The creation and administration of a Compensation Plan (§30.19, §30.20, §30.21, §30.23, §30.24, §30.25, §30.26, §30.32)
- Establishment of paid holidays (§30.26)
- Establishment of vacation and sick leave (§30.27, §30.28)
- Residency requirements for Police Officers and Fire Fighters (§30.31)

It has been over 40 years since the last time the Personnel Regulations were updated, and they are widely recognized throughout the organization as not reflecting current practices. These Personnel Regulations are referenced throughout the organization as well, most commonly in the City's six union agreements and Memoranda of Agreement (MOA). This puts the City at risk should a complaint arise involving the City's approach to any of the areas outlined in Chapter 30 that do not reflect current practices.

In addition, there are many sections in which the level of specificity contained within the code is overly detailed because they describe administrative practice, not legislative policy. The content of these sections would be better suited as administrative and employee policies, not the municipal code of ordinances, which should be viewed as containing laws of a permanent nature.

It is a best practice for municipalities to review and update their code of ordinances on a regular basis, at least every 10 years. Such review provides an opportunity to identify conflicts with new state or federal law, inconsistencies, and obsolete provisions, and reconcile provisions with any newer sections of code that have been added subsequently.

The City should prioritize a comprehensive review and update of its Personnel Regulations to ensure that they are outlining only those items that are critical to maintain in the code of ordinances and that these sections reflect the current policy and practice of the organization. The importance of this review and update will be further reinforced by the upcoming results of the City's ongoing compensation and classification study, and changes to personnel policies and processes that occur as a result of this assessment. Given the legal complexity and magnitude of this task, the City may consider engaging the services of a qualified HR consultant or employment lawyer to assist in the research and drafting of revised regulations.

Following this review and update, as well as the development of an employee handbook (Recommendation 11), it will be important to identify those areas in union agreements and MOAs that will need to be updated in future negotiations, as well as any other administrative policies that will require updating.

### **Recommendation 11: Create an Employee Handbook that is easily accessible and updated regularly.**

Beyond the Personnel Regulations included in Chapter 30 of the municipal code and the City's six union agreements and MOAs, City of Watertown employees are not provided unified guidance regarding the City's policies, procedures, or expectations. A frequent theme shared during interviews with Watertown employees was a lack of consistency in how key personnel matters were applied across and within City departments. All of these factors point to the need for an Employee Handbook that is easily accessible for all City employees.

Employee Handbooks are frequently viewed as being little more than a listing of all an organization's personnel-related policies and procedures. While the core purpose of employee handbooks is to lay out how an organization treats its employees and how it expects them to behave, they can also serve as a tool to communicate an organization's brand identity and desired culture.

Creating an Employee Handbook that includes all of the City's desired policies, rules, and procedures will feel like a daunting task for a small department that has historically had little in the way of documented policies and procedures. Department leadership should develop a prioritized plan and timeline for developing the handbook, starting with documenting the most important policies and rules, and adding sections over time.

In addition to including these policies and procedures, the Employee Handbook could be used to help promote organizational culture visually by incorporating branding elements specific to the City and pictures of employees, City landmarks, and events. The City Manager could also use the welcome message in the Employee Handbook as an opportunity to reinforce his leadership formula and expectations for how all City staff play a part in the organization's success.

For reference, the following figure includes SHRM's recommendations for elements that Employee Handbooks should contain, and additional elements identified over the course of this assessment<sup>4</sup>. Depending on the labor agreement an employee is subject to, the content of these sections may vary for Watertown employees. Consequently, it would be appropriate to have a version of the Employee Handbook for each bargaining unit as well as one for non-union employees.

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<sup>4</sup> Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM). How to Develop an Employee Handbook. <https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/tools-and-samples/how-to-guides/Pages/developemployeehandbook.aspx>

Introduction and Compliance Provisions	Policies and Procedures	Benefits and Leave	Safety	Behavioral Expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome Message</li> <li>• The Importance of Policies and Procedures</li> <li>• Equal Opportunity Statement</li> <li>• Contractual Disclaimers/At-Will Statements</li> <li>• Anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies</li> <li>• Family and Medical Leave Act/medical leaves of absence policy</li> <li>• Americans with Disabilities Act policy</li> <li>• Religious accommodation policy</li> <li>• Background-check policy</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of Receipt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Safety</li> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Hours of Work</li> <li>• Meal and Rest Periods</li> <li>• Overtime</li> <li>• Timekeeping</li> <li>• Personnel Records</li> <li>• Paydays</li> <li>• Payroll Deductions</li> <li>• Garnishments</li> <li>• Performance Reviews</li> <li>• Promotions</li> <li>• Transfers</li> <li>• Termination: Reduction in Force, Layoff/Recall</li> <li>• Acceptable Use Policy</li> <li>• Social Media</li> <li>• Work From Home Policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holidays</li> <li>• Vacation</li> <li>• Sick Leave</li> <li>• Disability Leave</li> <li>• Personal Leave</li> <li>• Bereavement Leave</li> <li>• Family and Medical Leave</li> <li>• Jury Duty</li> <li>• Military Leave</li> <li>• Paid Time Off</li> <li>• Health Insurance</li> <li>• Life Insurance</li> <li>• Retirement and Pension Plans</li> <li>• Call-In/Report-In Pay</li> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Employee Assistance Program</li> <li>• Service Awards</li> <li>• Workers' Compensation</li> <li>• Unemployment Insurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to Safety</li> <li>• Emergency Procedures</li> <li>• Medical Services</li> <li>• Personal Protective Equipment</li> <li>• OSHA Requirement and Safety Rules,</li> <li>• Reporting Accidents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards of Conduct</li> <li>• Sexual Harassment</li> <li>• Drug and Alcohol</li> <li>• Violence and Weapons</li> <li>• Workplace Investigations</li> <li>• Progressive Discipline</li> <li>• Exit Process</li> </ul>

Figure 5: Recommended Elements of Employee Handbooks

### Recommendation 12: Document HR Standard Operating Procedures.

An essential element of creating and supporting an organization that can effectively and consistently perform core HR functions is formalizing and documenting Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for its work processes. SOPs are written and formally adopted policy documents that describe how to accomplish core functions and respond to common service delivery issues.

Currently, the Department maintains limited documentation for a portion of its work processes, including checklists for how to complete different recruitment types, and the workers' compensation claims process. However, these documents do not follow a standard format and the specificity of the information included varies widely. As currently written, they would not provide adequate context about when, why, and how to perform these core functions for them to serve as a training or continuity tool. Further, they do not cover the full range of core functions performed by the Department.

To better support its ability to perform its core HR functions effectively and consistently, document existing procedures, and preserve institutional memory, the Department should develop a comprehensive set of formal SOPs. To accomplish this, HR leadership can begin by developing a standardized template and a list of all the SOPs that need to be developed. Standardized templates for SOPs make it easier for readers to locate and understand relevant information, as well as promote comprehensive and appropriately detailed job aids for employees. HR should adopt an SOP template that includes the following specific features:

- Procedure name and purpose
- Date SOP was last reviewed and updated

- Scope identifying when the procedure should be used
- Definitions for any unique words, phrases, or acronyms
- Procedure summary
- Responsibility assignment for each activity described
- Step-by-step activities required in the procedure
- Criteria, checklists, or references used to complete the procedure
- Control steps such as testing, verification, or oversight to ensure the quality of the process

Once the template is created and the list of needed SOPs is complete, staff can begin by filling in the key identifiers for each procedure, such as procedure name and purpose, and the scope identifying when the procedure should be used. Existing informal documentation used by Department staff could be used to develop the initial phase of SOP procedures, activities, criteria, and checklists. Other information, such as references to other SOPs, may be added later after all key SOPs are initially drafted. SOPs for those processes where informal documentation does not exist, or a new process needs to be established, can be tabled for subsequent phases of development. Additionally, the Department should review and update each SOP on a regular schedule, such as once every two years, to ensure it reflects contemporary practices and procedures.

### **Recommendation 13: Develop HR communication and outreach strategies.**

One common theme that arose in staff and stakeholder interviews was communication. With limited staff capacity in the Department and a historical culture of siloed communications and functions, City staff received limited information about personnel policies and benefit programs. This has historically led to issues with employees not being aware of benefits and service offerings available to them, and a sense that the Department was solely focused on processing paperwork, instead of connecting with the people of the organization.

To support its shift toward being a people-focused Department that provides effective and responsive customer service, the Department should develop communication strategies for keeping City departments and employees apprised of policy updates and changes to HR operations, as well as benefits and services available to them as City employees. The approach to developing these communication and outreach strategies should include multiple modes and levels of communication, matched to the characteristics of the message being communicated. For example, time-sensitive updates that affect all City staff, like open enrollment announcements would require different communication frequencies, vehicles, and approaches than changes with a more limited scope.

To support more effective communication about policy updates and HR operational changes, as well as to support efforts to promote a more cohesive organizational culture, the City should consider a communications approach that includes a mix of the following:

- **Employee Newsletter:** A regularly produced (e.g., weekly or monthly) employee newsletter that is distributed electronically and on paper for field-based employees can be used to communicate non-urgent new information about the organization and its employees.
- **All Hands Meetings:** All hands meetings are an effective way to gather employees to celebrate successes, share news, and communicate organization-wide news that affects all employees.
- **Email:** Email works well for urgent messages – where emergency action is required. It should be used sparingly because of the difficulty discerning tone in email messages, the challenges with emails getting lost or going unread for some recipients, and other recipients who lack consistent access to email.
- **Face-to-Face Meetings:** Face-to-face meetings are best for relaying sensitive information to a limited audience. The more limited audience allows for better conversation and processing of information. When a larger audience needs to be informed of an important matter, participating in a series of face-to-face meetings,

such as having HR leadership attend or facilitate meetings with each City department can be particularly effective.

- **Intranet:** An employee intranet is a powerful tool for information sharing, providing centralized access to important documents, such as employee handbooks, union agreements, and benefits information, as well as important announcement, events, and links to relevant websites and systems.

While the entire Department should be responsible for consistent and effective communication with City departments and staff, responsibility for developing these enhanced communication strategies should be assigned to the Assistant Director in consultation with the Director.



## Recruitment and Retention

Recruiting and retaining a high quality workforce is an acute issue for local governments across the country. The market for qualified talent has become more competitive with the “great resignation” and a wave of generational retirements that have created high vacancy rates regionally and nationally and highlighted the need for proactive succession planning in organizations. Changing workforce expectations about work-life balance, flexible work arrangements, career development, and longevity have shifted candidates’ expectations for employers, and organizations are being challenged to adjust their workplace policies and compensation practices to remain competitive.

In Watertown, recruiting and hiring was reported to be the primary service and interaction between City departments and the Personnel staff. Many stakeholders expressed frustration with the length of time it takes to hire new employees and the limited candidate pools resulting from recent recruitment efforts. Many identified procedural and policy-related causes for these issues, and the Department’s limited staff capacity was widely acknowledged as being a contributor to the City’s recruitment-related challenges.

Inefficiencies in the recruiting and hiring process increase workload and customer demand for staff. Process improvement and innovation are key to overcoming the challenges associated with recruiting for the City. Recruitment is a core service for the Department that requires ongoing communication and responsiveness with each of the City departments and prospective candidates. The recruiting process for Watertown looks distinctly different for sworn public safety positions than for civilian positions in City departments outside Police and Fire.

### Recruitment Process

A detailed process map for regular (non-sworn public safety) recruitment is provided in Appendix A of this report. The process involves the hiring department, HR, and prospective candidates. Department heads begin the process by filling out a requisition form, formally requesting a recruitment for a vacant position. The form is submitted to HR, who determines whether a job description update is needed. If so, description updates are written and a copy is provided to the appropriate union representative. The majority of Watertown employees are members of one of six unions. Those that are not include members of the City Manager’s leadership team, department heads and managers, professional and engineering positions, and some confidential administrative roles like the Personnel Clerk and Administrative Assistant.

Past practice, as outlined in the Department’s recruitment policy, included meeting with the hiring department to discuss expectations for the position and the recruitment. Stakeholder interviews indicated that these formal meetings are not currently taking place. Staffing constraints and the desire to expedite the process has transitioned the formal meeting to more informal communication between HR and the hiring department, including use of the requisition form to identify advertising preference for the vacancy.

After receiving the requisition form, HR creates the job advertisement, which is posted on the City’s website and MMA website. It may also be advertised on other outlets like LinkedIn, depending on the hiring department’s request. A candidate who is interested in the job must complete a form available on the City’s website. This form can be filled out electronically, but cannot be automatically submitted. The form can be emailed, mailed, or hand-delivered to the HR Department.

The Department collects applications and sends them to the hiring department for review. Historically, HR would evaluate applicants using a grid system, based on minimum qualifications for the job; however, they do not have sufficient capacity to grid all applicants while also managing other recruitments across the City at this time. The hiring department reviews applications and selects applicants for interview. Typically, a prospective applicant is

interviewed twice. HR has historically participated in the interview process for most recruitments with some exception for part-time seasonal employees. After the interview process, the hiring department notifies HR of the preferred candidate for hire.

### **Civil Service Recruitment (sworn Police and Fire)**

The City of Watertown participates as a member of Civil Service with the State of Massachusetts for sworn Police and Fire employment. A detailed process map for Civil Service recruiting is provided in Appendix B of this report. As a member of the Civil Service, recruiting responsibilities are shared among the Civil Service division of the State Human Resources Department and the City.

The state agency uses an online portal (NEOGOV<sup>®</sup>) to facilitate recruitment and promotion of public safety employees in Watertown. Watertown has access to this system as most of the recruitment process is delegated to the City. Prospective Police and Fire candidates work directly with the state Civil Service to schedule and sit for an examination. They indicate municipality preference, beginning with their place of residence. The City currently hires with residency preference, which means the first list of potential candidates they receive for hire only includes Watertown residents. If the list is insufficient for the number of vacancies or other reasons, a second request must be submitted that includes a justification for why non-resident candidates are being requested.

The recruiting process begins with the Chief of Police or Fire formally requesting a recruitment for a vacant position with a requisition form submitted to the HR Department. HR then requests a list of eligible candidates from Civil Service via the online portal. The list is sent to the appropriate Chief for review while HR sends the application packet for the City to the prospective candidates. If there is a sufficient number of residency-preference candidates, then applicants are screened for interviews. Staff report that residency-preference candidates are frequently insufficient, and the department requests that HR go back to Civil Service for a second list that includes non-residents.

The top candidates that opt to be considered for employment in Watertown are interviewed. All interviews involve a prescriptive scoring process. If the top score from the interview is not the top-ranked candidate from the Civil Service list, an exception must be submitted to Civil Service. Once approved by Civil Service, a candidate for hire is determined and communicated to HR.

### **Hiring Process**

The hiring process for the City is detailed in Appendix C of this report. The process begins once a candidate for hire is determined and ends with delivery of an appointment letter signed by the City Manager. As part of collective bargaining agreements, the City Manager is the signing authority for all union-related hires. Union employees participate in a step compensation system. Once Personnel is notified of the candidate for hire, they will begin any required background checks. Requirements are based on job description and responsibilities, such as whether the job requires the use of a City vehicle. Personnel will also complete the reference checks provided on the application. This duty has been shared with hiring departments on an as needed basis.

The hiring department will include with their candidate selection the recommended compensation step or salary. If the recommendation is higher than step one, which is frequently the case within the current labor market, HR will notify the union and submit a request to the City Manager to approve an entry salary above step one. Once approved, HR will email the candidate with total compensation details, including salary, benefits, leave, etc. At this point the candidate can either accept the proposed total compensation or negotiate. If negotiated with an increase, the union notification and City Manager approval is requested again.

Once compensation terms are agreed upon with the candidate, a formal conditional offer letter is prepared by the Department and sent to the candidate. The offer letter explains the conditions for employment, including a physical



and drug screening for all new employees, along with any other job-specific requirements. Once HR receives the results from the physical and drug screening, they prepare an appointment letter for the City Manager's signature. The appointment letter is sent to the candidate, which includes details for their start date, where to report, their direct supervisor, etc. Once the appointment letter is sent, HR creates a new PAF to establish the employee's personnel record and provide required information for the HRIS, as well as develop an orientation packet for the new hire. The packet is shared with IT, the Auditor's benefits and payroll teams, and the Retirement office.

#### **Recommendation 14: Streamline the application process for non-sworn positions.**

In a competitive labor market, the prospective candidate experience when applying for a job with the City is key. It provides the first impression of how the City conducts business. Efficient processes and prompt communication with candidates are also important, as candidates are often applying for and considering multiple positions with different employers. In today's recruiting environment, an inefficient and slow process can mean losing otherwise excellent candidates to other opportunities.

While the City does not currently collect data on recruitment cycle times or how many candidates move on before an offer can be extended, HR staff and stakeholders agree that the City's current application process for non-sworn positions has been outdated and inefficient. A primary issue with the application process has been the application form itself. The City has recently improved the application form from a nine-page non-fillable PDF to a five-page fillable PDF. This updated form has removed numerous outdated requirements, such as typing and shorthand speed and has improved the overall formatting and appearance in a way that creates a more positive impression for candidates.

However, there are still opportunities to streamline the application process for non-sworn positions that could improve both the candidate and hiring department experience. The first is to further refine the application form. There are several fields that are commonly included in traditional application forms, but that do not collect information that is used by the organization, or collect data that is only required from finalists for a position. HR leadership should evaluate the current application form to identify whether there are any fields that are collecting such data, and streamline the form further by eliminating them.

Second, HR should permit candidates to submit a single application for more than one position. The current practice requires applicants to submit a separate application for each position in which they are interested. This practice is a holdover from the days of paper-based applications and should be updated. Often applicants are considering more than one potential opening, and requiring separate applications is onerous for the candidate and creates an impression that the City's recruitment process, and the City by extension, is inefficient.

Third, now that the City has moved to a fillable online form for its applications, it should investigate tools that will permit applicants to electronically sign the form and submit it online without having to rely on email, printing, and scanning or mailing. Several digital tools can automate this process, such as DocuSign and Adobe that the City's IT team could help HR to implement.

#### **Recommendation 15: Automate the recruitment process using web-based technology.**

In addition to the short-term process improvements that can be made to the non-sworn application process, there is an opportunity for the City to further improve its recruitment efforts, and bring them in line with the recruiting practices of neighboring communities.

Investing in a web-based recruitment and applicant tracking software (ATS) solution is essential for supporting the Department's long-term ability to serve the needs of the City organization. ATS systems are often a foundational building block of modern HR departments because they automate otherwise manual and time consuming processes,

reduce errors, create opportunities to collect rich data on recruitment and candidate trends, and communicate to candidates that an employer operates like a contemporary, tech-savvy organization. There are numerous ATS products available that could meet the City's needs, including NEOGOV, CivicHR®, and a module within Munis Human Capital Management that the City could access.

These ATS solutions allow organizations to post open positions online in a variety of formats for easy distribution on the City's website, to professional associations, and to job-related search engines. Applicants can complete the entire application process electronically and digitally submit all required materials to the City. The ATS can then be used to screen applicants for minimum qualifications, and applicant information is automatically stored in the system and can be imported directly to the City's HRIS. These systems can be designed with customizable workflows for review and tracking, and some can be used even after selection to continue an employee's onboarding and orientation process.

There are several benefits to ATS solutions beyond the immediate gains to efficiency and outreach. Some ATS solutions can help public sector employers promote diversity, equity, and inclusion by allowing for blind resume review. Similarly, ATS solutions can help organizations avoid claims of discrimination by developing pre-screening criteria before applications are received and removing opportunities for intentional or implicit bias by automating the screening process for minimum qualifications. They can also automate time consuming data collection and reporting processes, such as periodic Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reporting and provide access to an array of performance data related to the recruitment cycle. Most ATS solutions currently available can be used to readily calculate the time involved in filling a recruitment, the percentage of recruitments completed within pre-defined timeframes, employee turnover, and vacancy rates. This data can also be used to identify trends that can influence how the Department approaches recruitment, such as which online advertising sites are most successful and which positions are the hardest to fill.

To identify an appropriate ATS solution, HR leadership and the HR Systems Analyst should work together to develop an understanding of their overarching requirements for the software. They should then engage in an evaluation of the best ATS tool to meet the City's needs. While the City currently has access to the integrated Munis solution, it may not be the ATS that best addresses the requirements identified by HR and department leadership. Once the appropriate solution is identified and resourced, the HR Systems Analyst should be responsible for working with City IT staff to support its implementation.

### **Recommendation 16: Expand recruitment outreach and develop proactive recruitment strategies.**

The City's current approach to recruitment is entirely reactive. In other words, current capacity and practices dictate that the City only engages in the job market when there are specific vacancies that need to be filled. To improve the overall size and quality of candidate pools for open positions, the City should begin to expand its recruitment strategies to include expanded outreach and proactive recruitment.

#### **Recruitment Outreach**

In order to cast a wider net, and identify more and more diverse candidates, the City should expand its outreach efforts when it is actively recruiting for open positions. The standard today for non-sworn positions is for open positions to be posted on the City's website and the MMA job site. There are numerous additional online networks HR should consider to create broader awareness of open positions. Some of these are position or department specific. For example, there are numerous professional and trade associations that have job boards tailored to the specific backgrounds of their members.

To begin reaching a more diverse pool of potential applicants, the City should investigate opportunities to partner with professional organizations that focus on diverse populations. These efforts will build awareness about Watertown and publicize open positions when they arise. Advertising through these and other professional associations will also communicate to the applicant pool the City of Watertown is actively interested in increasing diversity through employment. Examples of such organizations include the following:

- The National Association of Black Accountants (NABA)
- The National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA)
- The League of Women in Government (LWG)
- The Local Government Hispanic Network (LGHN)
- The Minority Professional Network (MPN)
- Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL)
- And other job posting sites including diversity.com and inclusv.com

### **Sworn Officer Recruitment**

While the Civil Service recruitment process for sworn police and fire positions is largely determined by the state, there are ways for the City to expand its reach in recruiting for these positions as well. In addition to some of the proactive recruitment strategies outlined below, the City could eliminate the current residency requirement for Civil Service applicants. When the residency requirement was first enacted, it was the norm in Massachusetts to require residency for public safety officers. However, the pool of qualified Watertown residents that are interested in a public safety career is no longer sufficient to meet the City's needs, particularly given the high cost of living and housing in the City. The residency requirement is set forth in the City's personnel regulations, and could be amended during the review process outlined previously.

### **Proactive Recruitment**

In addition to casting a wider overall net in its recruitment efforts, the City should begin to consider opportunities for proactive recruitment, particularly for difficult-to-fill positions. Such strategies include maintaining an active presence at local and regional job fairs and partnering with local colleges and universities to develop internship and mentorship opportunities. The City is in a unique position to partner with the Watertown schools to develop early awareness of the opportunities and benefits associated with working for the City.

## **Recommendation 17: Develop strategies and workplace policies that will position the City as an employer of choice.**

The increased competition and demands of attracting and retaining a qualified workforce require that the City begin to consider how to position itself as an employer of choice that is responsive to the changing times and employee expectations.

In a recent study of over 1,000 local and state government employees, MissionSquare Research Institute identified meaningful differences in what attracted respondents to their current government position based upon their age. As the City is working to develop recruitment and retention strategies that attract and support younger generations of workers, this data, summarized in the table below, is particularly relevant.

**Table 11: Major Factors Attracting Workers to Public Service<sup>5</sup>**

Factor	Under 40	Ages 40-59	Age 60+
Work/life balance	56%	47%	43%
Quality of boss/supervisor	43%	27%	20%
Potential for career advancement	42%	28%	17%
Quality of colleagues/coworkers	36%	24%	17%
Paid family leave	35%	35%	13%
Flexible scheduling or remote work policies	31%	22%	11%
Non-traditional benefits	20%	12%	6%

In light of these shifting priorities in the workforce, the City should pursue strategies and workplace policies that better position the City to match the expectations of potential candidates and current staff. In addition to continuing its ongoing work of evaluating compensation and classification for City employees to ensure competitive compensation, the City should also consider the following:

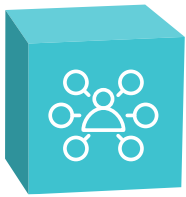
- Developing or formalizing policies that promote flexibility and work/life balance such as scheduling flexibility and remote work.
- Investigating opportunities to offer expanded benefits for employees, such as employee wellness programs, discounted rates for child or elder care, and pet insurance.
- Investing in employee learning and development, creating pathways for personal and professional development.
- Creating meaningful opportunities for employee engagement and feedback.

In addition, HR leadership should begin a practice of conducting exit interviews for departing City staff. The insights collected from these exit interviews can be used to identify issue areas that need to be addressed and to inform additional solutions that support enhanced retention.

As the City makes the types of changes that will better position it as an employer of choice, communicating them internally and externally will be critical. City and HR leadership should work together to develop communication strategies that promote the Watertown “brand” as an employer of choice through social media, the City budget, and other communication streams.

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<sup>5</sup> MissionSquare Research Institute. State and Local Government Employees: Morale, Public Service Motivation, Financial Concerns, and Retention – 2022 Survey Results. [https://slge.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/59976-slg-worker-report\\_final.pdf](https://slge.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/59976-slg-worker-report_final.pdf)



## Organizational Development and Culture

With limited staff capacity, a comprehensive organizational development program has gone largely unaddressed. The Department's training focus has been compliance or risk-based, leveraging the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) Risk Management representative, the City's Employee Assistance Plan (EAP), or MMA.

A well-rounded skills training and career development program will reduce the risks associated with the loss of institutional memory from employee actions that are not in line with regulatory requirements. Investing time and resources in employee development improves workforce retention, and helps to promote a positive and engaged workplace culture. These are especially important in the public sector, where single employer, long-tenured careers are no longer the status quo.

Currently, the responsibility for identifying training and development needs and opportunities is decentralized across the departments. While this may be appropriate for skill-specific training unique to the department or job classification, it is important to know where gaps may exist across the City. Citywide training should be multi-faceted, focusing on key development areas that benefit all employees. For example, digital skills, technology-led process improvement and collaboration, time management, mental health, and employee wellness are the types of programs that should be centrally offered. In addition, Citywide training can assist with communication and reinforcement of HR policies. Beginning to track training centrally may also surface a department-provided training that could be beneficial Citywide.

The recommendations that follow outline an approach to developing centralized organizational development and culture programs for the City that focus on the needs of individual employees and departments.

### **Recommendation 18: Conduct an organizational training and development needs assessment.**

The first step to develop an effective learning and development program is to identify the current and emerging training and professional development needs of City departments and staff. This can be accomplished by conducting an organizational training and development needs assessment. The assessment will help inform priorities as well as assess existing and needed resources and staff capacity. A needs assessment includes:

- **Training Records** – Identify and collect information related to training offered by departments across the City.
- **Job Descriptions and Requirements** – Evaluate existing job descriptions for common skill sets as well as job classifications with specific certification requirements to begin tracking centrally.
- **Leadership Interviews** – Discuss training and development needs with department leadership throughout the City.
- **Focus Groups** – Convene employees who have similar roles and training needs to discuss training and skill gaps.

After completion of the needs assessment, the Department will have a better understanding of the current skills and training requirements of City staff. As it prioritizes what content should be developed and delivered, consideration should be given to the training delivery methods (e.g., on-demand, in-person, self-paced) and models (e.g., in-house, outsourced). The capacity for direct instruction by HR staff is limited, so the Department should investigate opportunities for partnerships with outside organizations, including nearby colleges and nonprofit organizations, who may be able to provide high-quality training and development opportunities. This will allow HR staff to focus their efforts on program administration and coordination.

## Recommendation 19: Develop a leadership development and supervisory training program.

One area of learning and training development that should be prioritized is supervisory and leadership development training. City leadership and HR stakeholders shared a common concern that supervisory staff in the City lack awareness and skill in employment law, effective supervisory practices, documentation, discipline, and grievance policies.

According to SHRM, effective supervisory training programs incorporate a mix of both knowledge-based and skills-based learning.<sup>6</sup> Knowledge-based learning provides supervisors with necessary information about the structure and functions of the organization they serve, important organizational policies and procedures, and key elements of employment law that supervisors are responsible for upholding. Skills-based learning provides supervisors with an understanding of managerial competencies that help supervisors be more effective at motivating and managing their staff.

The Assistant HR Director should lead Departmental efforts to develop a supervisor training program that focuses on both knowledge-based and skills-based training for aspiring, newly appointed, and long-term supervisors looking to enhance their skills. The following table provides a summary of topics that should be included in the City’s supervisory training program.

**Table 12: Supervisor and Leadership Development Topics**

Knowledge-Based Training Topics	Skills-Based Training Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Watertown governmental and organizational structure</li> <li>• The City’s legislative process</li> <li>• City budget and financial management policies and procedures</li> <li>• City personnel regulations</li> <li>• Leave and attendance policies</li> <li>• Employment laws including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fair hiring standards</li> <li>○ Wage and hour laws</li> <li>○ Equal employment opportunity (EEO) laws</li> <li>○ Workplace safety laws</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Workplace safety policies</li> <li>• Workers’ compensation policies and procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal, effective interviews</li> <li>• Setting performance expectations</li> <li>• Developing mentoring and coaching plans</li> <li>• Creating employee development and performance improvement plans</li> <li>• Motivating employees</li> <li>• Managing conflict</li> <li>• Providing constructive feedback</li> <li>• Workplace investigations and documentation</li> <li>• Progressive discipline</li> </ul>

## Recommendation 20: Promote activities that support employee engagement.

Employee engagement is defined as the level of an employee’s commitment and connection to an organization. Effective employee engagement supports higher retention, attendance, and performance, and engaged employees are more supportive of organizational change and resilient in challenging times. Employee engagement is influenced by more than employees’ job satisfaction. Engagement includes a commitment to advancing the City’s public service mission, feeling connected to the work and invested in the organization and its outcomes.

HR staff and stakeholders in Watertown describe a workforce that is largely siloed, with employees identifying deeply with their departments and work teams, yet largely disengaged from the City organization at-large. As the central hub for the people of an organization, HR can play an important role in boosting employee engagement and promoting a positive and supportive workplace culture.

<sup>6</sup> Society for Human Resources Management. Development Management.

HR's role in employee engagement includes both formal and informal opportunities to promote engagement. An example of their formal role is in designing and evaluating policies that attract and retain talent with the skills necessary to advance organization goals. The recommendations for each of the core HR services in this report will create formal opportunities for HR to increase employee engagement.

It is also important that new policies and procedures are complemented with informal opportunities to enhance employee engagement. Examples of informal employee engagement opportunities to consider include:

- Supporting coaching and mentoring among staff
- Developing staff recognition programs
- Planning social events for staff
- Communicating about the value and contribution of City employees
- Inviting staff to participate in Citywide events
- Conducting employee focus groups and surveys
- Organizing and supporting employee resource groups

Determining the value and success of engagement-focused activities can be possible through the use of employee surveys. There are multiple engagement-oriented survey tools available, such as those provided by Qualtrics and Gallup, or the City could work on its own or with a consulting partner to develop its own data gathering tools. By monitoring engagement data over time, City leadership will be able to spot trends, identify issues, and better develop targeted solutions to improve the employee experience.



## Effective and Efficient Workflows

The HR Department has historically relied on manual, paper-based processes to accomplish many of its core functions. This approach requires a significant commitment of staff time and resources, promotes inefficiency, and boosts the risks associated with human error. In addition, two core processes meeting this characterization, personnel action changes and the City’s recruitment application process, require extensive time and resources from external departments (customers). By dedicating so much time to processing paper transactions, staff have limited opportunities to focus on improving and expanding core HR services.

The following recommendations, along with prior recommendations in the recruitment and retention section, focus on shoring up the Department’s core services by maximizing the use of existing tools and technology to promote effective and efficient workflows.

### Recommendation 21: Streamline the Personnel Action Form (PAF) process.

A significant amount of staff time is spent processing personnel-related changes. The existing workflow for personnel actions is paper-based with some systematic data entry at the end of the process for payroll related changes. Biweekly payroll processing is a time sensitive activity that requires efficient transmission of information across multiple departments in order to ensure employee paychecks and benefit enrollment is accurate and timely. Certain periods during the year experience a high volume of PAF processing, such as benefits open enrollment and seasonal hiring.

The table below provides a summary of the PAF transactional volume over five prior calendar years for the City based on data provided in the City’s Annual Reports and PAF logs provided by the Department.

**Table 13: Number of PAFs Processed 2018 to 2022**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of Transactions	515	695	536	585	573

The City’s current PAF lists 15 action types, such as new hire, termination, step increase, and address change. For every action, the form must be signed by a minimum of three people, including the Department Head, Personnel Director, and City Manager. The party initiating the PAF also varies depending on the type of action, with responsibility for initiating some core HR transactions, like anniversary-based pay increases, decentralized to the departments. The City’s Personnel Action Form policy was last updated in 2014 and the existing workflow occurs via email for signatory approval.

Moving forward, for each action type, the Department should evaluate both the appropriate level of signatory approval as well as the appropriate party to initiate the PAF. For example, authority to approve PAFs related to address changes could be granted by the HR Generalist assigned to that department and not require the HR Director or City Manager to sign off on these routine transactions.

Similarly, the City Manager could consider designee authority for certain actions that align with the proposed new organizational structure where some departments report through the CFO, Deputy City Manager, or Assistant City Manager positions.

For some actions, modification to the signatory approval process will require union contract modifications achieved through the negotiations process. The Department can directly initiate other actions such as centralizing the responsibility for initiating PAFs for step increases. Streamlining the policies and approval requirements around these



personnel actions will support future organizational efforts to further automate personnel action workflows within the City's ERP system.

### **Recommendation 22: Negotiate union provisions that promote effective and efficient workflows.**

The City has six collective bargaining agreements that represent most of its workforce. The agreements serve as governing doctrine for managing personnel policies such as compensation and classification, disciplinary action, grievance procedures, and promotional opportunities. The contract negotiation team for the City has historically been comprised of the Personnel Director, City Auditor/Assistant City Manager, relevant department heads, and legal counsel. Currently, the Deputy City Manager leads negotiations for the City, along with the relevant department heads and the City's legal counsel. Once the new HR Director and Chief Financial Officer positions are filled, however, they are expected take the lead on negotiations moving forward.

In many cases, the original contract dates back several years, with subsequent addenda outlining changes from the original contract. For example, the City's current agreement with the Watertown Firefighters Association initially spanned the time period from July 1, 2005 to June 30, 2008. Several successive rounds of bargaining have led to memoranda of agreement since that time. These memoranda have provided updated wage and benefit provisions as well as policy and procedural updates such as revisions to drug testing and training repayment policies. Layering of addenda over multiple bargaining cycles rather than revising the contracts to reflect the changes creates multiple challenges for the City. First, it is an inefficient use of staff and management time to have to hunt through multiple addenda to find the appropriate and most up-to-date reference. Identifying what actual policy is in place can require the reader to dig through multiple MOAs and the original agreement. Additionally, this approach creates risk for the City by increasing the likelihood of inconsistent policy application for similar scenarios.

As part of the negotiation process, City leadership can present opportunities to streamline the labor agreements to include all currently active and applicable contract language so that that contract can become a streamlined resource for labor and employee relations matters for both staff and management. Negotiating for these changes will require that the City bargaining team develop sufficient rapport and trust with the bargaining teams from each of the six bargaining units. This activity should be prioritized in the next round of bargaining, only after the new Director has an opportunity to develop a full picture of the City and overarching operating environment.

In conjunction with these changes, the HR Department should also identify additional contract changes that could further contribute to efficient and effective operations while minimizing any perceived negative outcomes for bargaining unit members. For example, during their review of PAF workflows and personnel regulations, HR may identify areas where adjustments to the contract language could improve existing workflows or better reflect existing HR policy.

### **Recommendation 23: Leverage human capital management capabilities available in the City's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.**

The City conducted an Information Technology Assessment in 2019 that led to the creation of a Chief Information Officer position and several operational recommendations. Subsequently, the City's IT infrastructure and professional capacity has been expanded and is well positioned to promote process automation, electronic workflows, and the ability to manage technology implementation projects across the City. The recommended addition of an HR Systems Analyst position for the Department will also increase capacity to advance process improvements that leverage technology within HR.

There are several technology-based improvements that are possible for the HR Department to implement using technology investments that the City has already made. As part of recent upgrades to the City's Munis ERP system,

IT staff worked to ensure that the City would have full access to the Munis Human Capital Management (HCM) system. HR is currently using a fraction of the available capabilities within HCM, which were designed to streamline employee information management and provide centralized and integrated processing capabilities. The HCM system includes integrated modules that automate many common HR core services including:

- Recruiting
- Personnel Records Management
- Training and Development Records Management
- Employee Self Service
- Risk Management

While not all of the capabilities available within HCM may be appropriate for Watertown based on the City's policies and workforce, there are several opportunities within this system to improve HR processes and promote efficient and effective workflows.

The most impactful of these to enact will be transitioning the PAF process into an electronic workflow within the system. Once personnel action policies and approval requirements are reviewed and revised to improve efficiency, the new process should transition from paper-based to electronic. The transition will improve access and visibility of the workflow across multiple departments in the City and will lead to more effective follow-up and completion of a time-sensitive process.

While the Department may ultimately select an alternative applicant tracking system, integrating web-based applicant tracking with HCM will further streamline the Department's recruitment and records management processes. In addition, fully utilizing the HCM capabilities will improve the Department's ability to collect and monitor performance data, and produce routine compliance-related reporting quickly and without the risk of human error.

In order to fully implement the HCM system, the HR Systems Analyst will need to work closely with City IT and the vendor to understand the system's capabilities and requirements, and work with HR Department staff to understand current and desired future policies and processes. As new functions are implemented within HCM, it will be important for the HR Systems Analyst to appropriately configure, test, and document them before they are widely adopted. This individual should also take the lead at training HR Department staff and stakeholders on these new systems and their appropriate use.

# Conclusion

The recommendations in this report are designed to support the City's efforts to deliver contemporary HR core services that support the employees and departments of Watertown City government. This can be accomplished by identifying and investing in the building blocks of core HR services: Leadership and Departmental Operations, Recruitment and Retention, Organizational Development and Culture, and Effective and Efficient Workflows.

With these building blocks in place, the City will have an HR Department that is appropriately resourced and focused on meeting the needs of the organization's people and departments. This will enable the City to recruit, retain, develop, and engage top talent who are invested in serving the community.

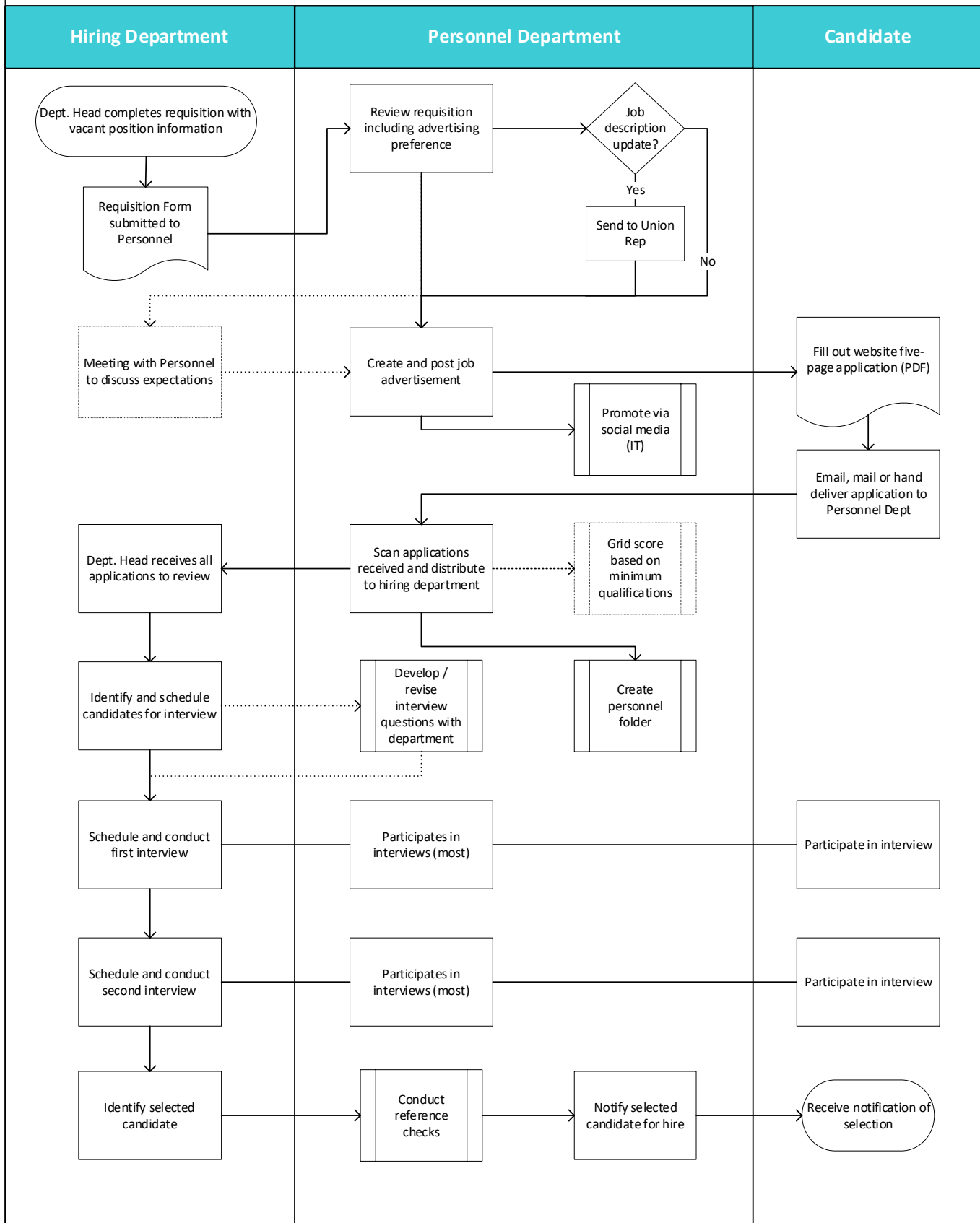
Achieving the changes recommended in this report will require the support of City Council, diligent leadership, and ongoing management oversight. It will be essential to appropriately plan, prioritize, phase, and resource the recommended initiatives in order to maintain staff capacity for ongoing operations while engaging in these new activities. Ongoing and data-informed communication between HR leadership and City management will be critical to affect these changes at a reasonable cadence for the organization.



APPENDIX A:

# Recruitment Process Map: Non-Civil Service Positions

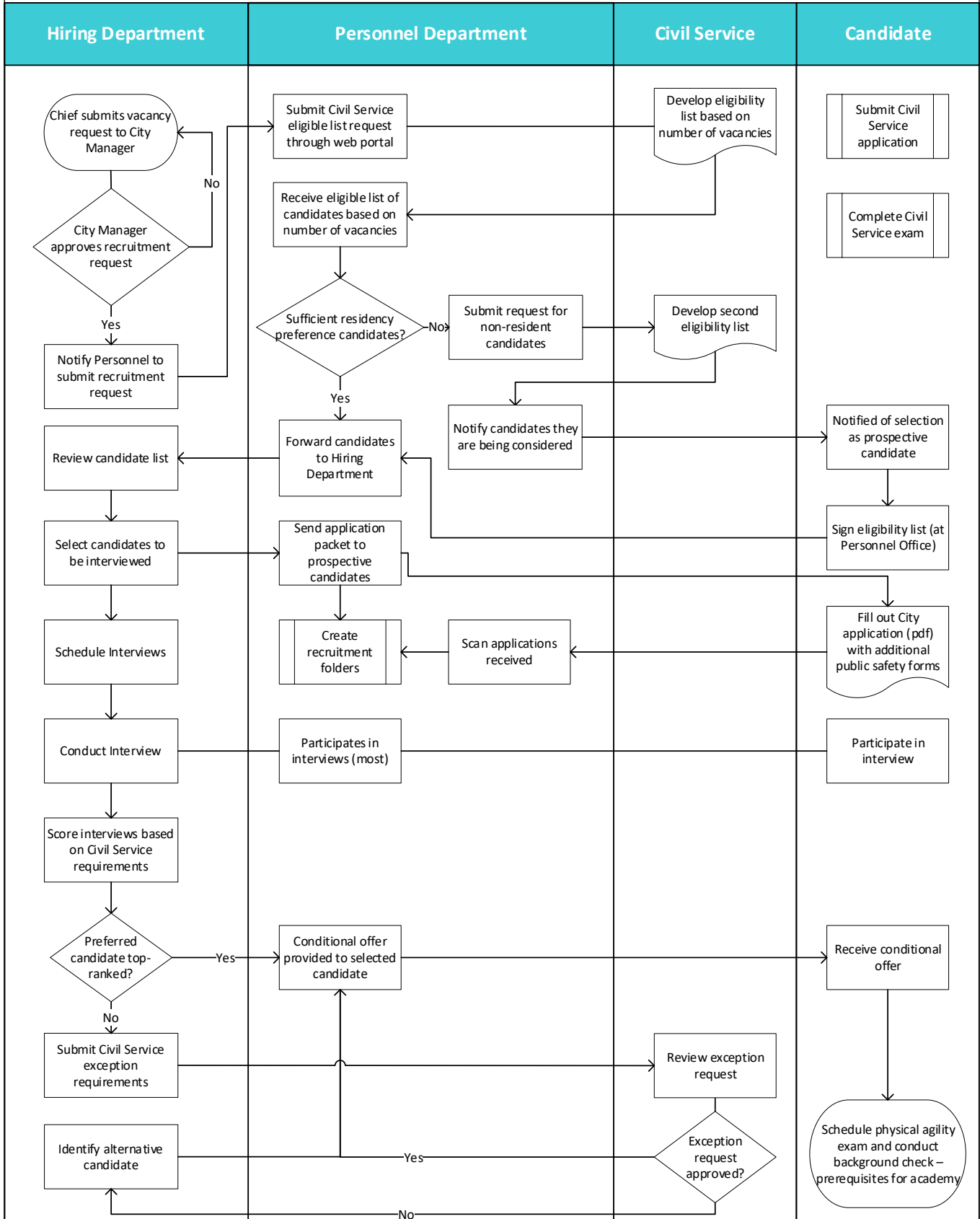
# Recruitment Process – Non-Civil Service Positions



APPENDIX B:

# **Recruitment Process Map: Civil Service Positions**

# Recruitment Process – Civil Service (Sworn Police and Fire)





APPENDIX C:  
**Hiring Process Map**

# Hiring Process

