

Alma City Commission
Investigation Sub-Committee Report



Sub-Committee Members:

Mr. Greg Mapes, Mayor
Mr. Larry Mott, Commissioner
Mr. Nick Piccolo, Commissioner

July 5, 2017

Investigation Sub-Committee Information

At the May 9, 2017 Alma City Commission meeting, as per the city charter, the commission empaneled a sub-committee. The sub-committee members are Mayor Mapes, Commissioner Mott and Commissioner Piccolo.

The following observations are based on interviews and quantitative data. They are not speculative or intended to be directive.

The sub-committee:

1. Conducted personal interviews (21) with citizens, city employees, and service providers
2. Reviewed relevant sections of the Alma City policy and procedures manual
3. Reviewed relevant statutory issues that may arise
4. Examined past and current city practices for reducing staff
5. Examined budgetary considerations and practices to maximize financial and human resources
6. Examined internal and external communication practices and procedures
7. Reviewed relevant statistics

Review

Past and current city practices for reducing staff

- Review of the data indicates that for fifteen years, the City of Alma has primarily relied on natural attrition such as resignations, retirements, etc. to reduce the work force. On occasion, the city also would implement lay-offs.
- Over that time, virtually all departments, with the exception of APD and Fire Department, have seen a reduction in their staffing levels.
- At current staffing levels, APD has an officer ratio of sworn officer to resident of 1:711, St. Louis is 1: 1,083 and the Sherriff's Office is 1: 1,163. (See Appendix 1)

Budgetary considerations and practices to maximize financial and human resources

- The city's budget challenges are due, in large measure, to the processes imposed by the Michigan legislature. For several years, the city has adopted a strategy of financially "outlasting" other cities in hopes that more general fund dollars may become available through revenue sharing or other sources.
- The state of Michigan's revenue sharing with cities has decreased over the last decade.
- Over that time, the city of Alma has experienced a loss of industry.
- There was a corresponding decline in the tax base; the recession intensified the problem.
- In light of the reductions noted above, the city engaged in a process of cross training and re-distribution of work to cover reductions in force (RIF).
- The "wear points" of doing with less have become increasingly evident to citizens in services such as snow removal, upkeep of parks, etc.
- The city has a number of specific purpose funds that cannot legally be applied to anything but their intended purpose. The city has managed these funds well, but because of restrictions on their expenditure, those funds cannot be applied to areas of urgent or even greatest need. Consequently, some Alma City accounts are relatively healthy, but not the General Fund.
- APD accounts for approximately 40% of the city's general fund budget.
- At this time, it is unlikely that the positions of the officers who were laid off will be re-filled.

The lay-off implementation process

- The City Manager has the authority to reduce the Alma City work force; this includes not filling vacancies and implementing lay-offs.
- The lay-off process followed was consistent with past practice in other departments.
- The policy manual is silent on a recommended lay-off process, and it appears that no other lay-off processes were considered.
- The impact of the lay-off process and its timing was highly disruptive for the APD and citizens, raising numerous operational concerns.

The search process for the Director of Public Safety

- Alma City engaged the Michigan Municipal League (MML) as the search firm to conduct the Director of Public Safety Candidate Search.
- MML identified finalists for interviews.
- Lt. Kendra Overla was in that group and her interview invitation was withdrawn.
- The withdrawal of her candidacy cast suspicion on the process and eroded confidence in the outcome.

Operational Concerns Arising

Communication:

- As an organization, the city is not engaging in “best practices” for intra-organization communication.
- Expectations or standards about how to treat colleagues in the work place are either absent or unclear.
- On all levels of the organization, there are significant gaps in communication.
- Regardless of the reason, the parties involved interpret these gaps in communication as intentional and negative in purpose.

Climate

- Virtually all employees care deeply about their responsibilities. They expressed pride in the City of Alma and their work here.
- Almost to a person, interviewees expressed a fear of retaliation from one source or another. There was no single source for employee anxiety about retaliation.
- Many employees described friction within and between departments. This seemed to be consistent with almost all departments.
- Many employees expressed a sense of low morale.

Management

- By charter, the Alma City Commission concerns itself with policy, not the day-to-day management of the city. Consequently, the Commission has followed a passive role about human resource matters and, as a result, may not have engaged in management oversight at an optimal level. For example, the commission did not cut last year’s budget and used approximately \$300,000 of the fund balance to balance the budget.
- As noted earlier, expectations about how to treat colleagues in the work place are either absent or unclear. Employees interpret this condition as evidence that there was no accountability for destructive or negative work-place behavior.
- Some employees expressed concern that the leadership team does not value the Alma City workforce.

Issues for the consideration by the Alma City Commissioners

This section reflects some specific and general questions raised in the investigative process. The following questions offer some (not all) possible discussion points. They intend to begin a wide-ranging discussion, not restrict or guide considerations that may arise.

APD

- What is an acceptable to optimum range of sworn officer to citizen ratio?
- What do the citizens of Alma want in regards to APD staffing? How do the citizens wishes interact with budgetary constraints, and other city priorities?
- How does the city of Alma pay for it?

The lay-off process

- Should the policy manual provide or recommend guidelines for the lay-off process such as seeking input and assuring a fair process?

The Director of Public Safety Search

- Going forward, what should be the status of the Director of Public Safety Candidate Search?
- Should the policy manual provide or recommend guidelines for the executive staff hiring process?

Communication:

- What are “best practices” for intra-organization communication and how will the city engage them?

Climate

- The fear of retaliation from one source or another seems pervasive. What are the city’s expectations and standards regarding the treatment of colleagues in the work place? How will they be developed and communicated? If so, by whom?
- Should the city routinely assess employee satisfaction?

Management

- As noted above, employee anxiety about retribution seems pervasive and needs addressing. That said commissioners are not management. What are the commissioners’ expectations for executive leadership? How will the effectiveness of any changes be measured?
- Does the city have an effective structure in place for dealing with HR matters?
- What does the city do to prepare new managers for their duties?
- What is an appropriate level of transparency in human resource processes?
- Has the investigation yielded any additional human resource issues that need addressing?

APPENDICES

Appendix 1
Staffing Patterns for Local Law Enforcement

	<u>Alma</u>	<u>St. Louis</u>	<u>Gratiot Co.</u> <u>Sherriff</u>
Population	9,237	6,497	22,097
Sworn Officer Count	13	6	19
Square Miles Covered	6	3.5	568
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Squares Miles per Officer	0.46	0.58	29.89
Residents per Officer	711	1,083	1,163

<http://www.micrstats.state.mi.us/MICR/Home.aspx>

Appendix 2 Comparative Crime Statistics 2011-2015

MICHIGAN CRIME STATISTICS

Crime Type	Number of Arrests					Average
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Alma						
Total For Crimes Against Persons	3	42	58	54	61	43.6
Total For Crimes Against Property	3	43	36	39	49	34
Total For Crimes Against Society	67	138	186	231	148	154
Total For Crimes Against All Other	15	89	55	89	73	64.2
Grand Total of All Crime Types:	88	312	335	413	331	295.8
St Louis						
Total For Crimes Against Persons	22	13	11	14	21	16.2
Total For Crimes Against Property	7	6	2	3	5	4.6
Total For Crimes Against Society	43	36	40	49	48	43.2
Total For Crimes Against All Other	44	24	24	34	53	35.8
Grand Total of All Crime Types:	116	79	77	100	127	99.8
Ithaca						
Total For Crimes Against Persons	1	0	3	5	8	3.4
Total For Crimes Against Property	0	0	1	5	6	2.4
Total For Crimes Against Society	9	10	19	27	27	18.4
Total For Crimes Against All Other	20	5	7	31	41	20.8
Grand Total of All Crime Types:	30	15	30	68	82	45
Gratiot County						
Total For Crimes Against Persons	102	93	107	125	131	111.6
Total For Crimes Against Property	102	103	67	104	117	98.6
Total For Crimes Against Society	562	474	558	646	491	546.2
Total For Crimes Against All Other	236	170	117	291	291	221
Grand Total of All Crime Types:	1,002	840	849	1,166	1,030	977.4

<http://www.micrstats.state.mi.us/MICR/Home.aspx>

