



*Courtesy Bob Watts*

# NEWBURYPORT PARKS REORGANIZATION PLAN

January 24, 2023

Full Plan to the City Council Accompanying  
Administrative Order

**Mayor Sean R. Reardon**  
City of Newburyport



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January 24, 2023

President Shand and Members of the Newburyport City Council,

It has been five months since I first introduced my reorganizational plan for Newburyport's parks and playgrounds. I continue to be excited about this plan, and believe it is the best move for our City.

Our parks represent some of our most valuable public assets, and we owe it to them, and to our residents, to protect and enhance them for future generations to enjoy. Our parks provide a necessary connection to nature, history, community and recreation, and support our economic and environmental sustainability. I remain steadfast in my belief that this plan will provide our parks with the highest level of care in the most efficient and effective manner.

Since this plan was first introduced in August, we heard from each member of the City Council, we have held two public forums, and we have adopted many good suggestions for adjustments to the plan. In September, we elected to withdraw the plan to hold focused public discussions with the Parks Commission, which, subject to appropriation, lays out, regulates, and hires officers to manage our parks.

The Parks Commission has discussed, and is currently drafting, a 10-year vision for our parks. In parallel, a passionate group of residents has also stepped up to create a new 501(c)(3), the Port Parks Alliance, to be the fundraising and volunteer support arm for our parks. Based upon the good work of the Commission and Alliance over the past three months, we have made additional adjustments to the plan to reflect and support the priorities and desires of each group.

It is through open dialogue and collaboration that successful outcomes occur. The adjustments to the reorganization plan that you will find in the following pages represent just such an effort over the past five months. Those efforts have made this plan stronger.

The plan touches many city departments, not just the Parks Department, all of which have been involved in crafting the revisions. The result weaves together existing strengths to address the City's needs, culminating in what I know will be a stronger organizational plan to support our parks, and our City, moving forward. I look forward to discussing this with you and the public in the coming weeks.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean R. Reardon".

Mayor Sean R. Reardon

## Executive Summary

In August of 2022, this Administration brought forth a plan to reorganize Newburyport's Parks Department into the Department of Public Services. The goal of the reorganization was, and continues to be, to strengthen Newburyport's Parks, improve efficiencies, and eliminate redundancies. While many members of the City Council and the public approved of this plan in concept, there were questions that arose around the elimination of the Parks Director position, and how to support the number of perceived roles that position filled. Instead of thinking about the Parks Director's role as being split across multiple departments, the following pages show how the Reorganization Plan is instead better aligning the skill sets that currently exist within the City in order to support the needs of our parks, in a way that will continue to make our parks better.

Below is a list of changes that the Reorganization Plan proposes:

1. Move the operations of the current Parks Department under the Department of Public Services and remove the Parks Director position to **improve maintenance and better allocate resources**:
  - Maintain all other people and positions previously in the Parks Department, including the Parks Manager, full-time and part-time employees, who have specific skills and experience related to our Parks, as a fully intact Division under DPS. They will continue to execute operations, inspections and maintenance as they have in the past, but will report to DPS leadership rather than to a Parks Director.
  - Utilize the Business Manager role within DPS to provide procurement, contract management and budgeting assistance, which are skills this role is expert in.
  - Employ DPS Admin to execute work orders, write agendas and minutes for the Parks Commission, and manage pro forma permits and reservations for the parks.
2. Bring Adult Recreation under supervision of NYS to **improve allocation of resources**:
  - Continue to offer adult recreation opportunities under the purview of NYS, which has both capacity and platforms in place to support such activities.
3. Advance advocacy and fundraising for our parks to **improve governance and better allocate resources**:
  - Work with the new 501(c)(3) Port Parks Alliance, whose mission is to support advocacy, fundraising and volunteerism in our parks.

- Coordinate communication between the Port Parks Alliance, the Parks Commission and Parks Manager to support initiatives and priorities as identified by the Commission, and to comply with all Charter, Newburyport Code, and state laws on accepting gifts.
4. Provide additional support for parks and open space within the Planning Office by having the Department's Planner assist the Parks Commission with specific tasks to **support visioning and implementing of parks specific plans**:
- Support some project management, and staffing of the Parks Commission to help coordinate the implementation of the City's Master Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan, and the Parks Commission's 10-year Strategic Plan.
5. Provide the Parks Commission with additional support from the Mayor's Office and Planning Office to **improve governance**:
- Assist the Commission in setting and adopting policies that reduce their time reviewing issues and permits ad hoc.
  - Increase the Commission's ability to spend time focusing on their goals, core values and opportunities including annual, scheduled reviews of the Parks Master Plan of priority projects, grant and fundraising requests, policy reviews, review of the City's 'Orphaned Properties', and improved communication with the public about park assets.

Newburyport's 2020 Open Space and Recreational plan included a community survey in which residents and stakeholders were very clear about why they choose to live in Newburyport: because of its natural beauty, historic and cultural assets, and open space and recreation opportunities. That strong sense of civic pride rang true last fall as we discussed the first version of this parks reorganization plan, and that pride of place and importance of our open spaces carry through every line of this reorganization plan. This plan makes our parks stronger and provides the support needed to maintain and improve them for years to come.

## **Goal of Restructuring**

One of the main objectives in the Mayor's Strategic Plan is to provide high-quality public services in order to strengthen our city's position as a desirable place to live, work, and visit. A subset of this goal is a commitment to maintain the City's excellent financial position and to look for new ways to maximize efficiencies in its administration. The City administration constantly looks for ways to improve municipal administration and provide the high level of services our residents expect, by efficiently using existing City resources. The City Council is particularly interested in reducing unnecessary spending so that residents can be spared from high tax increases.

In August 2022, Mayor Reardon proposed a plan to consolidate the Parks Department within the Department of Public Services, which originated as a recommendation from municipal management consultant Community Paradigm in their June 2022 report on operational improvements. The report reads in pertinent part as follows:

*"Issue: The Parks Department maintenance crew consists of two (2) full-time individuals and seasonal staffing, when available. The crew is responsible for maintaining a number of park areas throughout the City. With very limited staff, accomplishing all its workload proves problematic at times. The Department of Public Services (DPS) has a much larger staff that performs many of the same tasks also throughout the City. As an example, in certain areas park maintenance staff is responsible for one side of the street while DPS is responsible for the opposite side.*

*Recommendation: Establish a Parks Division within DPS with responsibilities related to public parks and grounds. The two full-time park maintenance staff would be merged into existing DPS structure and utilized as other department personnel. This will eliminate duplication of tasks and responsibilities, as well as the purchase and maintenance of capital equipment. The larger DPS staff would be able to accomplish all necessary park maintenance tasks with the ability to provide coverage during vacations, sick leave, etc. Assign the current Parks Manager as a General Foreman or a Division Head in DPS reporting to the DPS Assistant Director (similar to the already current General Foreman). This individual could be responsible for several DPS responsibilities that perform like services that he currently oversees."*

This recommendation remains timely and relevant, because the opportunities for efficiencies presented by consolidating the Parks Department remain. In later sections of the plan, we will detail how consolidation is also consistent with the City’s Master Plan, Open Space Plan, and the goals of the Parks Commission, the body actually responsible for our system of parks and playgrounds.

### **Reorganization Plan: Process**

This plan accompanies an administrative order submitted to the City Council to move the responsibilities of the Parks Department primarily to the Department of Public Services. Article 5, Section 5-1 of the Newburyport City Charter, titled “Organization of city agencies,” requires that the Mayor file such an administrative order with the City Council to organize the City’s operating agencies:

*“The mayor may, subject only to express prohibitions in a general law or this charter, propose to reorganize, consolidate or abolish any city agency, in whole or in part, or to establish such new city agencies as is deemed necessary, but no function assigned by this charter to a particular city agency may be discontinued or assigned to any other city agency unless this charter specifically so provides. The mayor may from time to time prepare and submit to the city council administrative orders that establish operating divisions for the orderly, efficient or convenient conduct of the business of the city. These administrative orders shall be accompanied by a message of the mayor which explains the benefits expected to ensue and advises the city council if any provision of an administrative order shall require amendments, insertions, revisions, repeal or otherwise of existing ordinances.”*

This plan expands upon the earlier effort begun in August 2022. The plan presents a comprehensive approach to realizing a long-term vision for Newburyport’s parks. It describes the benefits expected from the new operations plan (including additional supports for parks management), officers and groups proposed to be responsible for fundraising and events for our parks, and how municipal recreational activities will be structured.

It also includes information about how to support the Parks Commission in that body’s role in overseeing our parks. This information includes an overview of those provisions of the Newburyport Code that may need to be updated to accompany the reorganization. Please refer to the matrix of responsibilities (Exhibit A) and the revised organization chart (Exhibit B).

## **History of Parks Commission and Department**

The Parks Commission was established in 1996 under then-Mayor Lisa Mead. The exact responsibilities of the Commission have evolved over the last 25 years, but its mission to oversee the operation of the City's parks and recreational facilities has remained the same. Today, the Commission has jurisdiction over laying out parks, park improvements, and setting the rules of how parks are to be used, including the issuance of permits (Newburyport Code of Ordinances, Chapter 11). The five volunteer commissioners help to set the City's vision of how our parks will continue to meet the needs of our residents, including how they can be maintained for generations to come.

The Parks Department grew organically out of the Commission's work, and the need to have staff maintain and program our parks.

- The FY2015 Budget was the first to refer not merely to the Parks Commission, but to a "Parks Department," as well. However, no administrative order was submitted or considered, although Newburyport's Home Rule Charter had taken effect.
- Under the FY2015 Budget, both the Parks Commission and Parks Department were grouped under the broad category of "planning and development". This was the same year that the "Parks Coordinator" position was budgeted as a full-time position. Under the FY2016 Budget, the coordinator position was denoted as a "Director-" level job. The City Council appropriated the necessary funds, but did not approve an administrative order at that time.
- The FY2017 Budget classified the "Parks Department" as falling under the broad category of "public services", with the Parks Director being appointed by and reporting directly to the Mayor.
- The FY2018 Budget again placed the Parks Department within the broad planning and development category, which is how it has been listed since.
- The Department continued to grow after FY2016, with the addition of a "Parks Manager" in FY2018, an additional full-time laborer in FY2019 and another in FY2020.

Today, the Parks Department is budgeted for 7.5 FTE positions between the Parks Director, Parks Manager, two full time groundskeepers, 1 FTE in part-time groundskeepers, and 2.5 FTEs worth of seasonal groundskeepers. In contrast, under the FY2014 Budget, the sole employee was a Parks Coordinator, at 0.57-time, and no employee benefits. To that date, groundskeeping, for example, was handled by Department of Public Services staff.

Neither the Parks Department nor the Parks Commission is mentioned under the Newburyport Home Rule Charter. While the Parks Department appears to have evolved over time into a full “department”, with a director reporting to the Mayor, there is no record of any plan for the Department’s organization having been submitted to the City Council, at any point.

**Review of Other Municipalities**

With their June 2018 report, Community Paradigm submitted a review of other municipalities of similar sizes, identifying the structures of their parks, recreation, and public works agencies. Their findings confirmed research by the Mayor’s Office, that it is common in municipalities at Newburyport’s size and scale to manage its parks through their departments of public works. Community Paradigm has worked with municipalities of all sizes in Massachusetts and their recommendation carries considerable weight based on their experience in local government.

The following chart describes how comparable municipalities handle their parks.

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>City/ Town</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Parks acres per 1000 people</b>	<b>Parks Maintenance</b>	<b>Recreation Programming</b>	<b>Commissions</b>
Concord	Town	18,950	38	Public Works	Recreation Department	Recreation Commission
Scituate	Town	18,839	53.1	Public Works	Recreation Department	Recreation Commission
Sharon	Town	18,666	76.1	Public Works	Recreation Department	Recreation Advisory Committee
Winthrop	Town	18,558	1.7	Public Works	Parks and Recreation	Parks Committee
Pembroke	Town	18,455	40	Public Works	Recreation Department	Recreation Commission
Newburyport	City	18,197	11.8	Parks Department	Parks Department	Parks Commission
Rockland	Town	18,010	4.2	Park Department	Recreation Commission	Park Department
Foxborough	Town	17,917	41	Highway Division	Recreation Department	Recreation Board



Ashland	Town	17,787	51.6	Public Works	Recreation Department	Open Space and Recreation Committee
South Hadley	Town	17,715	19.8	Public Works	Recreation Department	Recreation Commission
Amesbury	City	17,474	44.4	Public Works	Recreation Department	Parks and Recreation Commission
Greenfield	City	17,353	12.4	Public Works	Parks and Recreation	Recreation Commission
Gardner	City	20,607	99.4	Public Works	Parks and Recreation	Public Service Committee
North Adams	City	12,897	8.6	Public Services	Parks and Recreation	Parks and Recreation Commission

There are certainly some municipalities with standalone parks departments, but this appears to be more common only in larger and more populous places than Newburyport. The proposed structure here is consistent with that of other similarly situated municipalities and will best serve the City of Newburyport given our size, scale, and structure.

### **Proposed Structure**

#### ***Operations***

Under this reorganizational plan, operational and maintenance duties will be placed under the supervision of the Department of Public Services. The Parks Manager will report directly to the DPS leadership, with daily supervision from both the Director and Assistant Director of Public Services, based on their priorities and availability.

The duties of the Parks Manager will largely stay the same. They will oversee all parks operations and maintenance on a day-to-day basis, and the Administration will have this position moved into the appropriate union. The two full-time groundskeepers will continue to report to this employee, as will the part-time and seasonal workers. As a unit—the Parks Manager, groundskeepers, and part-time and seasonal workers—will be responsible for all physical work, maintenance and inspections at our parks. The difference is that the unit’s budget and supervision will fall under DPS.

Moving into the Department of Public Services means the parks unit will have access to all of DPS’s support staff, none of which are available to them today. This DPS Business Manager will assist with

procurement, budgeting, and contract management so that Parks staff will not be solely responsible for writing their own RFPs or managing contracts in addition to their field duties.

Currently, the parks unit has no administrative staff, while folding them under DPS will allow them to draw upon the three full-time administrative staff members at DPS. DPS administrative staff will be able to file work orders for the Parks unit and answer questions from the public. Perhaps most importantly, there will now be multiple administrative staff able to handle permit applications for Parks use. They will be trained on the parks permitting system and the protocol for referring permit applications to the Parks Commission as necessary. By statute the Parks Commission is the permitting authority for our parks and playgrounds, and the commission may delegate permitting to City officers or other staff as defined by them. (Munic. Code s. 11-5(t).)

### ***Fulfilling the Previous Responsibilities of the Parks Director***

A significant change within this structure is the elimination of the Parks Director position. A full accounting of the reassignment of the Department's responsibilities, including those of the Director, can be found in Exhibit A, the Responsibility Matrix. All responsibilities around day-to-day operations will be moved to the Department of Public Services as described in the section above. The August 2022 process included numerous discussions on the other responsibilities of the Parks Director, including advocacy and vision for the parks, supervision of programming and events, and supporting the Parks Commission. This section will describe the Administration's plan for transferring these responsibilities to individuals, departments, and organizations that are well equipped to fulfill them.

### **Strategic Planning and Vision**

By statute, responsibility for the improvement and use of Newburyport's parks and playgrounds rests with our Parks Commission, with input from residents, and subject to appropriation. The City has a dedicated, thoughtful, and talented group of residents who serve on our Parks Commission. This reorganization plan is an opportunity to better align operational practice with the Commission's role as the vision definers and policy makers of our parks.

Over the last three months, the Parks Commission has undertaken a strategic planning process to identify their goals and core values, and opportunities for improving their policies and procedures as a Commission.

The Commission is proposing to undertake annual, scheduled reviews of its policies and to adopt rules for handling grant and fundraising requests. It also plans to adopt a capital plan for priority projects proposes the performance of an annual review, in collaboration with the Planning Department, Mayor's Office, and other pertinent Boards, Commissions and Departments, of the City's 'orphaned properties' to determine their suitability as parks or playgrounds. All of this policy work will focus Commission meeting time on its larger vision, rather than reviewing and voting on projects and permit applications ad hoc.

In the coming months, the Mayor's Office will help the Parks Commission to overhaul its website, to improve public communication around its adopted policies, regulations, and fee schedule, and to provide a map and inventory of assets at each of our City parks and playgrounds.

#### *Project Management and Supporting the Parks Commission*

Through the earlier rounds of feedback from the City Council and the public, concern was raised about whether the City has the capacity to support the planning and coordination needed to implement the vision for Newburyport's parks. There was also a preference expressed to employ a City staffer who has "subject matter" experience that is not strictly administrative. Accordingly, under this plan we propose having the Planning Department's Staff Planner add specific, parks related responsibilities to their portfolio. This position already staffs relevant committees, including the Community Preservation Committee, and would be comfortable playing a planning specific supporting role for the Commission. The Planner would be responsible for staffing the Parks Commission and coordinating the implementation of the City's Master Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan, and Parks Commission Strategic Plan.

The Parks Commission has significant responsibilities, and this position will add staff support for implementing the plans they create. They will also help to staff planning processes, like the Open Space Plan. This position is already charged with assisting in land use decisions and coordinating the improvement of public and private lands, so this will be a natural fit.

#### *Administration and Customer Service*

To reiterate, the Administration intends for administrative staff already employed at the Department of Public Services to assist in the day-to-day use of our parks and playgrounds, mostly by handling permit applications and creating work orders for maintenance requests. One of these DPS administrative

staffers will be made available for clerical support of the Parks Commission, including preparing agendas and writing minutes. This is, in fact, how clerical tasks are handled for our Water and Sewer Commission. Clerical support for Water and Sewer is, of course, far more intense than what the Parks Commission will need.

### Adult Recreation

The Administration is committed to continuing to offer recreational programs for residents of all ages, and recommends bringing adult recreation under the direction of Newburyport Youth Services. Given its core competencies, NYS was mentioned in the Community Paradigm report as a logical home for some of the programmatic functions in our parks.

This plan proposes to move adult recreation programs under the purview of the NYS Associate Director of Recreation and we will have all recreation activities listed on the City's online activity registration portal. We anticipate providing the same level of service for recreation by assigning it to the purview of a position already working on recreation and using existing platforms for marketing and facilitating registration for these programs.

### Advocacy, Fundraising, and Volunteering

In the past, the person serving as Parks Director has committed significant time to securing revenues for the preservation and expansion of our parks and playgrounds, through a non-City entity called the Parks Conservancy, that is controlled by the Mayor Gayden W. Morrill Foundation. The City is committed to maintaining its strong relationship with the Morrill Foundation, which historically has gifted approximately \$110,000 per year to advance priority capital projects in the City. Naturally, the City is very grateful to the Morrill family for its continued support of the City and its parks, in the tradition of Mayor Morrill himself, during the Great Depression.

While the Conservancy for many years handled donations paid to our parks and playgrounds, it had been managed by the former Parks Director, a City employee, on behalf of the Morrill Foundation. Late last year, the Foundation indicated a preference to dissolve the Conservancy in order to allow a new, independent, non-profit "Friends-type" group to emerge and help our parks and playgrounds, rather than handle monies directly. This transition presents an opportunity to ensure that all fundraising procedures avoid any legal or accounting issues that arise from mixing public and private functions, duties, and funds.

To continue a tradition as old as our city government, the Administration would like to encourage private fundraising for and volunteer work at our parks and playgrounds. We are excited to announce the formation of a new 501(c)(3), called the Port Parks Alliance, whose charge is to advocate for our parks system, raise capital funding for the system, and organize volunteer labor. This group is purely volunteer and will have a close relationship with the Parks Commission.

When the Alliance raises money, it will be for those initiatives that the Commission has identified as its priorities, and all gifts above \$500 will be brought before the City Council for acceptance. By operating as a fully independent non-profit organization, we will be assured that the Alliance will comply with all local and state laws on accepting gifts, and will provide transparency in the handling of public funds.

The Alliance can be a vehicle for some donor-directed spending, but by working through the Parks Commission, the City can be sure that these opportunities are consistent with the City's own goals, as well as the capacity of staff to implement. Going forward, donors to the Alliance will be able to see in public filings, accessible through the City website, how funds are actually spent on parks projects.

The Port Parks Alliance will also be responsible for organizing volunteer workers at our parks and playgrounds. The Alliance will work with the Parks Commission and City staff as directed by that commission, to organize annual clean-up and advocacy events. Further events could also be authorized by the Parks Commission, depending on their match with that commission's strategic plans and priorities. The City is grateful to its residents who care deeply about the City's parks, and the Alliance will be able to organize volunteers systematically and transparently.

#### Grant Writing

The City employs a part-time grant writer, who will remain the point person for writing grants to support the City's parks.

#### Summary

Further details on the proposed reorganization can be found in Exhibit A, the proposed responsibilities matrix. Between the administrative, management, and business offices at DPS, the policy and planning assistance from the Planning Department and Parks Commission, and recreation services through NYS, most non-maintenance functions will be covered by departments already engaged in similar work.

## **Anticipated Benefits**

*Operational Efficiencies:* The greatest benefits of this reorganization plan include a new ability to achieve greater outputs with fewer or similar resources, and the improvement of processes that will lead to high quality parks maintenance, efficient delivery of capital projects, and an improved resident experience with their city parks and playgrounds.

DPS and Parks Department staff have been performing similar functions without coordination, often entering into multiple contracts to buy the same supplies, or purchasing the same equipment, which may not receive full use in either department. The two departments have identified specific areas of efficiencies, as follows:

- Administrative Staff: As described earlier, shared administrative staff will allow for more efficient communication with the public and the immediate creation of work orders to address resident issues. Parks maintenance staff will be able to focus on improving the condition of the parks and playgrounds.
- Snowplowing: Currently, Parks staff snowplow parks and playgrounds only, and they begin that work while DPS staff are still plowing city streets and sidewalks, without any coordination. Merging with DPS will allow staff in the Parks unit to plow alongside DPS staff, as needed given actual conditions. For example, new cooperation will mean that heavily used parks and playgrounds like the Clipper City Rail Trail can be cleared as quickly as possible by parks unit and DPS staff, together. The Department of Public Services files an annual snow removal plan with the City Council, as required under the Newburyport Code, and these changes will be addressed through that document.

Further, pooling equipment creates redundancies so that if one piece becomes inoperable, there are backups. For example, this past winter the Parks Kubota tractor used by parks staff became disabled six hours before a major snow storm, and needed attention and resources under intense time constraints to fix. DPS equipment could not be used to help. In practical terms, merging with DPS means that parks staff will be able to mount plows on two additional trucks. Also, parks staff will gain new access to DPS trucks or staff to plow parks parking lots to that serve our parks and playgrounds, which is not true today.

- Other Equipment: This advantage is also felt through saved capital and maintenance costs, but streamlining even just the logistics of purchase and use of equipment shared by both parks staff and DPS will help both. Examples include landscape equipment (mowers, trimmers, etc.) as well as attachments or modifications to existing equipment. These changes will be reflected in future Capital Improvement Plans, showing both potential reductions in overlapping equipment and more targeted requests that will better our parks and playgrounds.
- Operational Systems: The Department of Public Services utilizes a number of systems and apps that allow for faster assignment and tracking of work. They also have the full support of their business office which handles payroll, accounts payable, purchasing, vendor selection, and ordering of supplies. Meanwhile, today's Parks Department does not have any work order system for assigning tasks. Giving parks staff access to DPS's systems and apps will allow a level of management and tracking that does not and cannot otherwise exist. To better communicate with residents and Ward Councillors, requests related to parks and playgrounds will be able to be indexed, prioritized, and tracked.
- Physical Condition of Parks and Playgrounds: The merger will lead to a higher level of physical care at our parks and playgrounds. Specifically, we will see higher frequency mowing, faster service on irrigation systems (which requires coordination with the Water Department, also part of DPS), more frequent repainting of benches, and faster repair of water fountains and play equipment.

Cost Savings: While Operational Improvements are the focus of this plan, cost savings are anticipated because of the elimination of the Director's position, which will put total cost savings at around \$105,000 per year. We have also addressed how revenue creation activities regarding the parks, including grant writing and fundraising, will be covered by volunteer organizations or current employees.

DPS and Parks have identified several areas for cost savings derived from operational efficiencies, which are detailed below.

- Equipment Rental: Currently, parks staff must rent equipment for annual maintenance and to complete larger capital projects. For example, Parks often subcontracts to use trucks at a cost of over \$361.00 per day, and usually for a period of two weeks, even though DPS may have trucks available. Parks also currently contracts with private companies to clear out rock, aggregate, or debris from assorted landscape projects, but will no longer have to do so when given access to DPS's Fulton Pit, as well as DPS vehicles for hauling. Other common rentals by Parks include skid steers, loaders, and mini excavators, all of which will now be able from DPS's pool of equipment. Savings on annual maintenance is estimated at least \$800 a year, and can bring down costs of individual projects by 5-10% depending on the project. Between maintenance and projects, savings are anticipated at approximately \$3,000 a year, which may seem modest but is significant over the lifetime of our parks system.
- Purchasing of Materials: The City will see savings with Parks purchases now being integrated into bulk orders through DPS for items such as salt, ice melt, fertilizer, seed, and mulch. Savings are estimated at up to 10%, which on today's approximate \$41,000 budget, will save approximately \$4,000 every year.
- Contracted Services: Parks has two vehicles that are currently serviced by the dealer. Once the reorganization within DPS is complete, in-house DPS mechanics will be able to service these vehicles instead, saving approximately \$250 an hour for any work done. Vehicles typically receive an average of four hours of service per year. Having service in-house also means they can be fixed and placed back into service faster, and it will be less expensive to provide routine service more often, which can help extend the life of the vehicles. Cash savings for such vehicle maintenance is estimated at approximately \$2,000 per year.
- Bookkeeping Services: Today's Parks Department pays a part-time bookkeeper \$3,000 every year, and this work will instead be completed by the in-house DPS business office staff.
- Operational Cost Savings: Costs are expected to decrease and staff time is expected to be used more efficiently because of the operational improvements described in this and the previous section. The Parks Manager will not need to spend time on renting equipment or checking in on task completion because of the improvements in staffing, operations, and equipment sharing.



Costs could decrease by as much as 20% thanks to these improvements, and would make certain projects more feasible and efficient.

- Existing DPS Contracts: Leveraging existing DPS contracts for certain capital and maintenance tasks, including paving, sidewalks/walkways, tree removal and more will also create substantial savings. These may be expected on a per-project basis. For example, completion of the Joppa Park walkway project cost approximately \$30,000 less than budgeted by utilizing DPS’s sidewalk contractor, and leveraging their economies of scale.

**Needed Changes in the Code of Ordinances**

The Charter at Section 5-1 states that the Mayor’s message should advise the City Council if there will be a need to update or amend the City’s Code of Ordinances. Potential updated Ordinances may include, but not be limited to, the sections found below.

Chapter 2, Article VI, Section 2-394 – Departmental Revolving Funds

This section gives the Parks Director the authority to spend from the Parks Maintenance Revolving Fund. We will recommend that this responsibility instead be given to the Director of Public Services. The funds will still be used for the same purpose, which is maintaining the parks and investing in repairs, renovations, upkeep and security. The source of the funds are fees and charges received from renting the parks. The funds would with approval by the DPS Director (with reporting to the Commission and City Council), allowing for more immediate spending with appropriate oversight, and can serve the immediate needs of the City’s parks. The original language is found below.

A Revolving fund	B Department, Board, Committee, Agency or Officer  Authorized to Spend from Fund	C Fees, Charges or Other Receipts Credited to Fund	D Program or Activity  Expenses Payable from Fund	E Fiscal Years
Parks maintenance	Parks Director	Fees and charges paid to the city for the use	Expenses associated with parks	Fiscal year 2019 and

		and rental of parks by outside groups, organizations and individuals	maintenance, repairs, renovations, upkeep and security	subsequent years
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Chapter 11, Article I, Section 11-5(t, v, and y) – Rules and Regulations for All Public Playgrounds:

Chapter 11 will need to be edited in a few places. Currently, Chapter 11 allows the Parks Commission to delegate authority in approving routine, non-recurring park permits to the Parks Director. We will recommend that these provisions be changed to instead allow for the Parks Commission to use different designees to process such applications. As addressed above, our recommendation is for the DPS Administrative Assistant, who will staff the Parks Commission, to approve routine applications, and to bring complicated applications to the Commission for further consideration. We also recommend removing the phrase “non-recurring” from the section, to more adequately reflect how applications were being processed by the Parks Director. It is our recommendation that the Parks Commission set a formal policy for which applications are considered routine and non-recurring, and so can be handled by administrative staff, with all the rest handled by the Commission.

The specific provisions of Chapter 11 to consider are found below.

- *“The parks commission shall be the permitting authority for all of the city's public parks and playgrounds, and applications for activities therein shall be made to such commission. Solely for routine, non-recurring applications, the parks commission may delegate its authority to process such applications to the parks director, by promulgating a rule pursuant to section 11-6.”*
- *“Permit applications for activities at parks and playgrounds, made pursuant to the rules and regulations of this chapter 11, shall be processed in the order of their receipt. The parks commission, or the parks director as its designee pursuant to subsection (t), shall determine whether to grant or deny an application within thirty (30) days of receipt of determining that such application is complete, in all respects, unless the applicant provides written consent to extend such period for a set period.”*
- *“Denial of an application for authorization shall be in writing, and shall set forth clearly the grounds upon which the permit was denied. Where feasible, the parks commission, or the parks*

*director as its designee pursuant to subsection (u), shall suggest in such written denial those measures by which the applicant may cure any defects in its permit application, or otherwise procure a permit in a subsequent application.”*

**Additional Changes**

Creating an additional division within the Department of Public Services will also require reevaluating the Department’s allocation of overhead costs to its divisions, which has implications for the budgets of the General Fund, Water Enterprise Fund, and Sewer Enterprise Fund. The Finance Department and Business Manager of the DPS will work together on allocating these in the 2024 Budget Cycle based on preliminary time estimates after the plan is approved. The DPS Director and Finance Director currently recommend adopting the following splits between divisions:

Staff Position	Highway Division (GF)	Parks Division (GF)	Water Division (Water Enterprise Fund)	Sewer Division (Sewer Enterprise Fund)
Management Positions (Director, Deputy Director, Business Manager)	30%	10%	30%	30%
Engineering	33%	1%	33%	33%
Administrative Staff (Overall Split)	25%	10%	35%	30%
Facilities	97%	1%	1%	1%
Electrician	64%	4%	16%	16%

This will continue to be revised in a way that accurately estimates the time spent by relevant staff on division related activities.

## **Fit with Other City Plans**

At the outset of this plan, we addressed how it serves the goals of the City's Master Plan, which was adopted in 2017 after a large-scale, community-led processes. The plan is also consistent with the City's Open Space and Recreation Plan, adopted in 2020. Finally, we have mentioned that the commission in recent months began a 10-year strategic visioning process, which the reorganization plan also services. Below are more details.

### **Support for the City's Master Plan (2017):**

Newburyport is fortunate to have 26 city parks and playgrounds. Together, they comprise over 200 acres, or roughly 3% of the City's total land, including parks of historical significance, woodlands, water features, over three miles of rail trails, playing fields, courts, and play areas. There is no question that these resources are a source of great community pride, as they help make the City an extremely desirable place to live, work and visit.

Within Chapter 9 of the City's Master Plan (Cultural, Historical & Heritage Resources), is an overall theme of strengthening, enhancing, and promoting the City's many cultural, historical and natural heritage resources for residents and visitors to enjoy. By utilizing the existing strengths and resources that already exist throughout the City in a more effective and organized way, the Parks Reorganization Plan will provide the appropriate supports to execute on the goals as detailed below.

*Goal CR-3: Support a rich variety of cultural opportunities and activities for all groups and individuals in the City.*

Detail: Over the past few months, a committed group of residents has formed a new non-profit Port Parks Alliance, whose purpose is to advocate for our parks and provide support in terms of fundraising and volunteerism. Early discussions with this group have included the potential for one or more annual landmark events to raise awareness and money to support capital improvements in our parks, as identified by the Parks Commission, and regular coordination with parks volunteers who desire to connect with our parks in a purposeful way. They also aim to promote education and advocacy for our City's open spaces in terms of their history, ecological vibrancy and overall maintenance.

*Goal CR-4: Promote the preservation, appreciation, and sustainable use of Newburyport's natural resources for residents and visitors.*

Detail: Over the past few months, the Parks Commission has embarked on a 10-year Strategic Visioning Plan to identify the core values of the Commission, and drive their priorities over the next decade. Among the 6 core values the Commission has identified is ‘Environmental Conservation’, which includes a desire to coordinate with City agencies to improve climate resiliency at our most vulnerable parks, identifying plant species that are well-suited to climate change, reducing water needs, and considering renewable energy sources within our parks. The Parks Commission will be working with the Parks Manager and Mayor’s office to set policies around these critical issues, and schedule regular coordination meetings with appropriate City agencies in order to move some of these key priorities.

*Goal CR-5: Promote and support an increased level of preservation to protect Newburyport’s historic built environment for future generations.*

Detail: Included in the Parks Commission’s core value ‘Historic Preservation’, is the aim to document the historical aspects of our parks through a program called ‘Know Your Parks’. This program would list all the interesting aspects of each park, including its history, and would be listed on the City’s Parks Commission webpage. The information could also be located on designated markers at each park. This program would support additional economic development initiatives, as identified by the City’s economic consultant, including strengthening Newburyport’s branding and identifying an on-line presence for visitors seeking a full package of destinations to enjoy within the City.

*Support for the Open Space and Recreation Plan (2020):*

Newburyport’s Open Space and Recreational plan, adopted in 2020, was informed by a community survey, in which residents and stakeholders gave reasons for their decisions to live in Newburyport. Chief among these were the City’s natural beauty, it’s historic and cultural assets, and its open space and recreational opportunities. Newburyport has a strong sense of place and civic pride that is inherently tied to its heritage landscapes, open spaces, and recreational opportunities.

Included in the recommended action items of the OSRD goals is an overall theme of protecting open space, supporting recreation, and conducting a high level of parks maintenance. This Parks Reorganizational Plan aims to execute on these critical goals by reducing redundancies and streamlining effective action and communication as detailed below:

*Objective 1C: Plan for unmet recreation needs.*

Detail: Included in the Parks Commission's core value 'Health & Wellness', is the goal to further support the recreational needs of the City's residents and visitors. One suggestion that was brought up during the Commission's recent Visioning Sessions was a desire for an annual review of both the Parks Commission's Master Plan, as well as the City's list orphaned properties (properties that are owned by the City but are not designated to any particular department) in order to determine if our City's open spaces are being utilized in the most effective manner. This annual review would take place between the Parks Commission, Mayor's office, Planning Department and any other pertinent Boards, Commissions and/or Departments that may have a stake in the conversation. This exercise would be a useful and broad-reaching review of City priorities for its open spaces, ensuring the best and highest use is being implemented to support the critical needs of its residents.

*Objective 1C: Maintain and conduct renovations, as needed, of existing parks and recreational facilities.*

Detail: There are many pertinent action items in this section of the City's OSRP that will be supported by the Parks Reorganization Plan. Item #1, 'to fund a fully-staffed Parks [Division]', will be fulfilled by allowing for the sharing of resources and labor that currently exist within the Department of Public Services, to supplement the existing skilled labor of the Parks Department staff, which will move under the DPS umbrella as a standalone Division. Similarly, item #6, 'to establish a new parks [division] office' will be accomplished by sharing space on Perry Way for the Parks staff that will merge into DPS. Both are examples of how collapsing the two departments will save money and improve efficiencies.

Item #2, 'annually update and implement CIP plans for parks and recreation' will continue to be supported by utilizing the existing structures within DPS, specifically the Business Manager, Parks Manager and DPS Director's roles, with support from the Mayor's and Planning office, who will be able to effectively budget, procure, and project manage these priority projects. By sharing resources and supporting efficiencies, item #7 'continue to advocate for increases in the operating budget' will likely be less onerous as projects, as demonstrated at the Joppa Park and Atwood Lighting projects this past fall, were completed on time and under budget in both instances due to the streamlining of process and elimination of redundancies.

Item #3, 'explore neighborhood-based approaches for oversight and maintenance of Newburyport parks', is one of the key priorities of the new Port Parks Alliance, who will be the new support arm of Newburyport's parks in terms of volunteerism and fundraising.

*Objective 2B: Provide recreation opportunities for people with varying interests and abilities.*

Detail: Action items #1, 'work with COA to identify types of active recreation trending with seniors and identify opportunities to meet those needs' and #9 'identify the need for expanded Youth Services staff to serve youth recreational needs', are important reasons why this Parks Reorganization Plan references Newburyport Youth Services as the appropriate department to shepherd the recreational offerings in our parks, and we believe we will be able to work with the Council on Aging as well in the implementation of recreational programs. Other priority action items listed in this section include exploring opportunities to expand fee-based adult recreation programs, which are currently comprised of 4-5 programs that rely on volunteer instructors.

*Support for the Parks Commission's 10-year Strategic Visioning Plan:*

Over the past three months, the Parks Commission has embarked upon a 10-year Strategic Visioning Plan to identify and prioritize core values and action items for our parks system over the next decade. The Commission continues to refine this Plan, and the core values are listed below, along with details on how the Parks Reorganization Plan provides appropriate supports to the 10-year Strategic Visioning Plan.

*Core Value: Environmental Conservation*

Detail: The Parks Commission will be working with the Parks Manager and Mayor's Office to set policies around critical climate issues, and schedule regular coordination meetings with appropriate City agencies in order to move some of the key priorities around climate change and resiliency forward, including reducing water needs, improving habitat, utilizing renewable energy sources, implementing green infrastructure, removing invasive plant materials, and protecting our waterfront parks from sea level rise.

*Core Value: Health & Wellness*

Detail: The Parks Commission aims to further support the recreational needs of the City's residents and visitors. The Parks Reorganization Plan includes expanding recreation offerings in our parks.

*Core Value: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion*

Detail: The Parks Commission will work to set policies around program offerings in our parks that support DEI initiatives. Also, the Commission will continue to work with the Parks Manager and Parks Division to ensure that any improvements to our parks and playgrounds continue to implement universal accessibility standards.

*Core Value: Community Engagement & Communication*

Detail: The Parks Commission will work with the Mayor's Office in order to revamp the Parks Commission's website with content related to historical and cultural information about our parks, a calendar of community events, and to support a stronger social media presence. The Port Parks Alliance will also work with the Parks Commission to support volunteerism in our parks, advocate for and educate about our parks, and help organize and manage volunteer opportunities, with assistance from the Parks Manager. All other public communications, meetings and minutes postings, and website updates will be managed by a DPS admin.

*Core Value: Economic Vitality, Planning & Stability*

Detail: Since the inception of the Parks Reorganization plan, a group of residents, the Port Parks Alliance, has organized with the mission to support advocacy, fundraising and volunteerism for our parks. Their intent is to meet annually with the Parks Commission in order to review the Commission's priority projects for that year, and to then provide the fundraising needed to fill any gaps in the budget for the projects. The Parks Commission will only accept monetary or in-kind donations if they are aligned with the Commission's priority projects as specified for that year, and all donations above \$500 will also be approved by the Mayor and City Council in compliance with City Policy and State Law.

The Commission also desires to execute an annual review of the City's orphaned properties (properties that are owned by the City but are not designated to any particular department) in order to determine if our City's open spaces are being utilized in the most effective manner. This annual review would take place between the Parks Commission, Mayor's office, Planning Department and any other pertinent Boards, Commissions, Departments and/or stakeholders. This exercise will be a useful and broad-reaching review of City priorities for its open spaces,



ensuring the best and highest use is being implemented to support the most critical needs of the community.

*Core Value: Historic Preservation*

Detail: The Parks Commission will work with the Mayor's Office to create an easily accessible database of archived documents related to our park's history, and to develop a self-guided historical walking tour through Newburyport's parks. The Commission will continue to champion projects that aim to preserve historical assets in our parks.

**Next Steps**

Article 5, Section 5-1 of the Charter lays out the process for the consideration of the Reorganization plan. It states in pertinent part:

*"Whenever the mayor proposes an administrative order, the city council shall hold one or more public hearings on the proposal giving notice by publication in a local newspaper, which notice shall describe the scope of the proposal and the time and place at which the public hearing will be held, not less than seven nor more than fourteen days following said publication. An organization or reorganization plan shall become effective at the expiration of sixty days following the date the proposal is submitted to the city council unless the city council shall, by a majority vote, within such period vote to disapprove the plan. The city council may vote only to approve or to disapprove the plan and may not vote to amend or to alter it."*

The Mayor anticipates this plan will be considered by either the Public Works & Safety Committee or the Community Services Committee, given their oversight of the Department of Public Services, the Parks Department, and the Parks Commission. The Mayor's Office looks forward to answering questions about this plan from the public at the necessary hearings, and will work to communicate how the proposed changes will affect residents. The plan will become official 60 days after its presentation to the Council, which will be March 31, 2023, unless the Council decides to disapprove of the plan. The City will submit all needed budget transfers to carry out this plan in the coming weeks and use the FY24 budget process to complete the transition.

## **Conclusion**

From its inception, the goal of this plan has been to make our Parks stronger by improving efficiencies and eliminating redundancies. This Parks Reorganization plan identifies and aligns the unique skill sets that currently exist within our City to support the needs of our parks in a way that will sustain them well into the future.

Throughout this process, it has been clear that Newburyport residents feel a strong connection to our City's parks and open spaces. They are what help give Newburyport its strong sense of place and civic pride. We look forward to advancing this plan in order to ensure that our parks receive the attention that residents expect, whether that be in daily operations and maintenance, in completing a capital project, or in assisting a resident in reserving a park for their next event. The City's parks require excellence in management, planning, and maintenance, and this reorganization plan is designed to keep a strong focus on our parks for years to come.

**Exhibit A: Reassignment of Parks Department Responsibilities**

Function	Task	Department Assigned	Position Assigned	Notes
<b>OPERATIONS</b>				
	Coordinating purchase and installation of new materials and equipment	DPS	Parks Manager	Manager already does much of this supervision
	Quarterly inspection of existing facilities and equipment	DPS	Parks Manager	Parks Manager received Playground Inspection Certification 10/2022
	Coordinating with Newburyport Public Schools and other parks related organizations	DPS	Parks Manager	
	Coordination with Youth Leagues on athletic field licensing agreements	DPS	Parks Manager	Mayor’s Office will also be involved as appropriate
	Coordination of Memorial bench program	DPS	Business Manager & Parks Manager	Program will be run by Port Parks Alliance, following the Parks Commission’s 2022 policy, with coordination by the Business Manager and Parks Manager

Function	Task	Department Assigned	Position Assigned	Notes
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**ADMIN**

	Answering questions from and interfacing with public	DPS	Administrative Assistant	Admin will forward messages to the appropriate parties based on issue: maintenance to Parks Manager, policy and capital requests to Commission, project management to MSP or Planning Dept, etc. DPS already handles communications regarding projects, and will be able to use its existing notification and work order systems to provide more targeted notice to abutters and other affected residents.
	Creating agendas, minutes and postings for Parks Commission meetings	DPS	Administrative Assistant (stipend position)	All assistance with Parks Commission will be subject to stipend, similar to that of Water and Sewer Commission
	Bring permits to Parks Commission in need of approval	DPS	Administrative Assistant (stipend position)	
	Approve pro-forma permits that do not need Commission approval and coordinate master calendar of parks reservations	DPS	Administrative Assistant	When only issue is scheduling, DPS can approve permits if given authority by Parks Commission

Function	Task	Department Assigned	Position Assigned	Notes
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**PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

	Managing Capital project development, budgeting and approval from Mayor and City Council	DPS & Mayor's Office	Business Manager/Manager of Special Projects	
	Carry out procurement process for contracted items	DPS	Business Manager	DPS Business Manager is City's procurement point person
	Coordination with contractors to implement improvements	DPS	Parks Manager	
	All other project management of park improvements	DPS & Mayor's Office	Parks Manager/Manager of Special Projects	
	Update Department website with project updates & notifications	DPS	Administrative Assistant	

Function	Task	Department Assigned	Position Assigned	Notes
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**BUDGET**

	Prepare annual budget requests	DPS	Business Manager	
	Manage Capital Improvement Plan requests	DPS & Planning Office	Business Manager/Planner	Planner tracks which projects from Parks Master Plan can be added to CIP
	Establish and manage user fees	DPS	Business Manager/Parks Commission	With approval by the City Council
	Pursue grant funding for parks improvements	Mayor's Office	Grants Developer	Port Parks Alliance, Planning Department and Mayor's Office can also assist
	Manage donations and gift approval by City Council	DPS	Business Manager	All gifts above \$500 require City Council approval; Business Manager will work with Port Parks Alliance to manage

Function	Task	Department Assigned	Position Assigned	Notes
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**COMMISSION SUPPORT**

	Coordinating the Parks Commission's 10-year Strategic Vision Plan	Mayor's Office & Planning Department	Manager of Special Projects/Planner	Manager of Special Projects assists with capital projects. Planner assists with long-term vision, and drives economic vitality initiatives related to arts, culture and open space, alongside Parks Commission.
	Coordinating parks component of Open Space and Recreation Plan	Mayor's Office & Planning Department	Manager of Special Projects/Planner	Manager of Special Projects assists with capital projects. Planner assists with long-term vision, and drives economic vitality initiatives related to arts, culture and open space, alongside Parks Commission.

Function	Task	Department Assigned	Position Assigned	Notes
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**ADULT REC**

	Contracting with instructors/organizers for adult recreation classes and activities	NYS	Associate Director of Recreation	
	Managing registration and other logistics for classes and activities	NYS	Associate Director of Recreation	Already have registration systems for classes and activities

Function	Task	Department Assigned	Position Assigned	Notes
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**COMMUNICATION, EVENTS,  
OUTREACH & VOLUNTEERING**

	Update Parks Commission website	Mayor's Office	Manager of Special Projects with maintenance by DPS Admin	Update Parks Commission website with list and maps of parks, rules & regulations, fee schedule, permit process, policies & calendar of annual reviews and tasks such as Master Plan review, grant requests, policy reviews, etc.
	Issue press releases and communicate with media on Parks	Mayor's Office	Mayor/Chief of Staff/PR Consultant	Will utilize existing PR contract and communications assistance from Mayor's Office
	Organize volunteers for parks maintenance and special events	DPS & Port Parks Alliance	Port Parks Alliance with assistance from Parks Manager	With assistance from DPS and Mayor's Office as needed
	Posting information to social media regarding events, announcements, etc.	Parks Commission & Port Parks Alliance	Parks Commission & Port Parks Alliance	With support from DPS, who as active channels and can migrate info as needed

Function	Task	Department Assigned	Position Assigned	Notes
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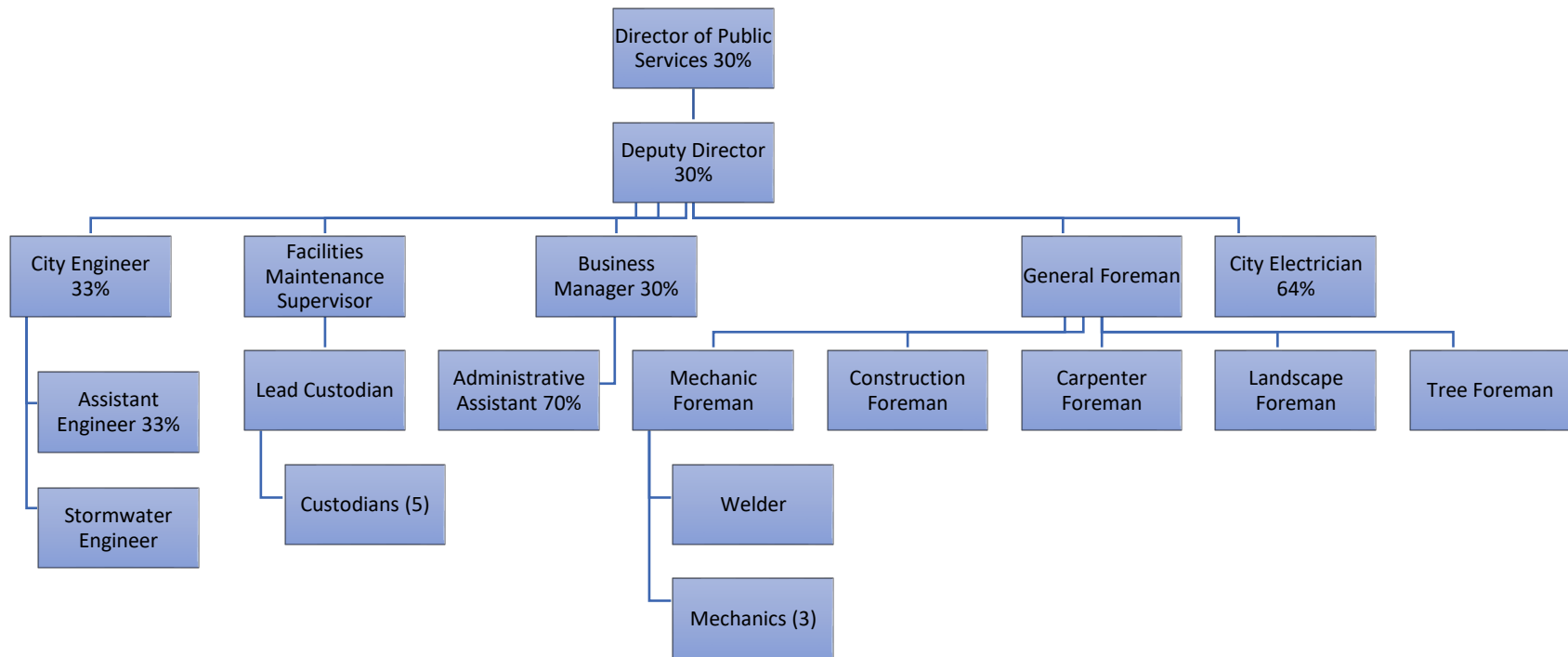
**MORRILL FOUNDATION**

	Coordinate annual requests for Morrill Foundation	Parks Commission & Mayor's Office	Commissioners/Manager of Special Projects	List will be finalized by Parks Commission
	Liaison to Morrill Foundation	Mayor's Office	Manager of Special Projects	



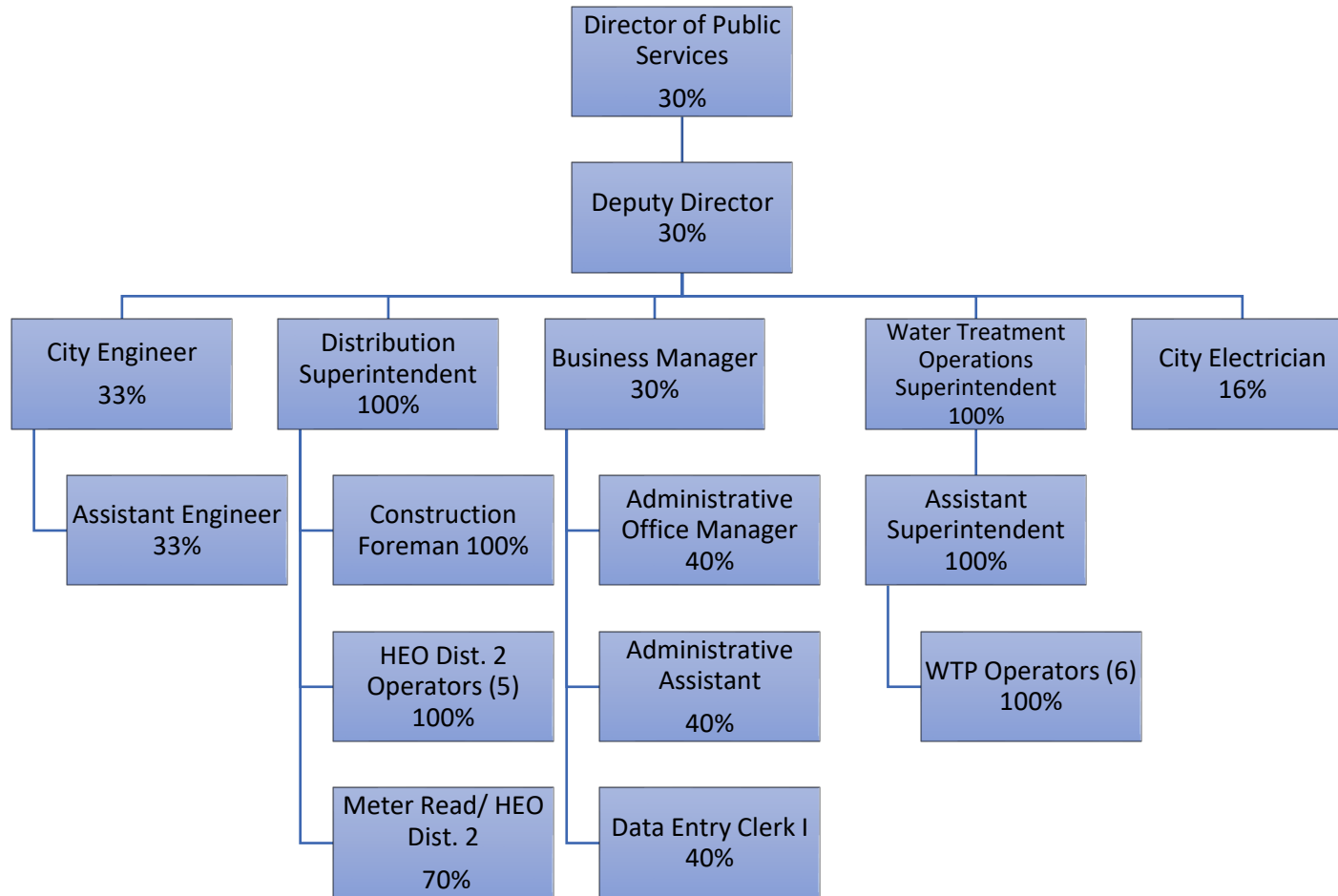
**Exhibit B: Relevant Organizational Charts**

DPS-Highway



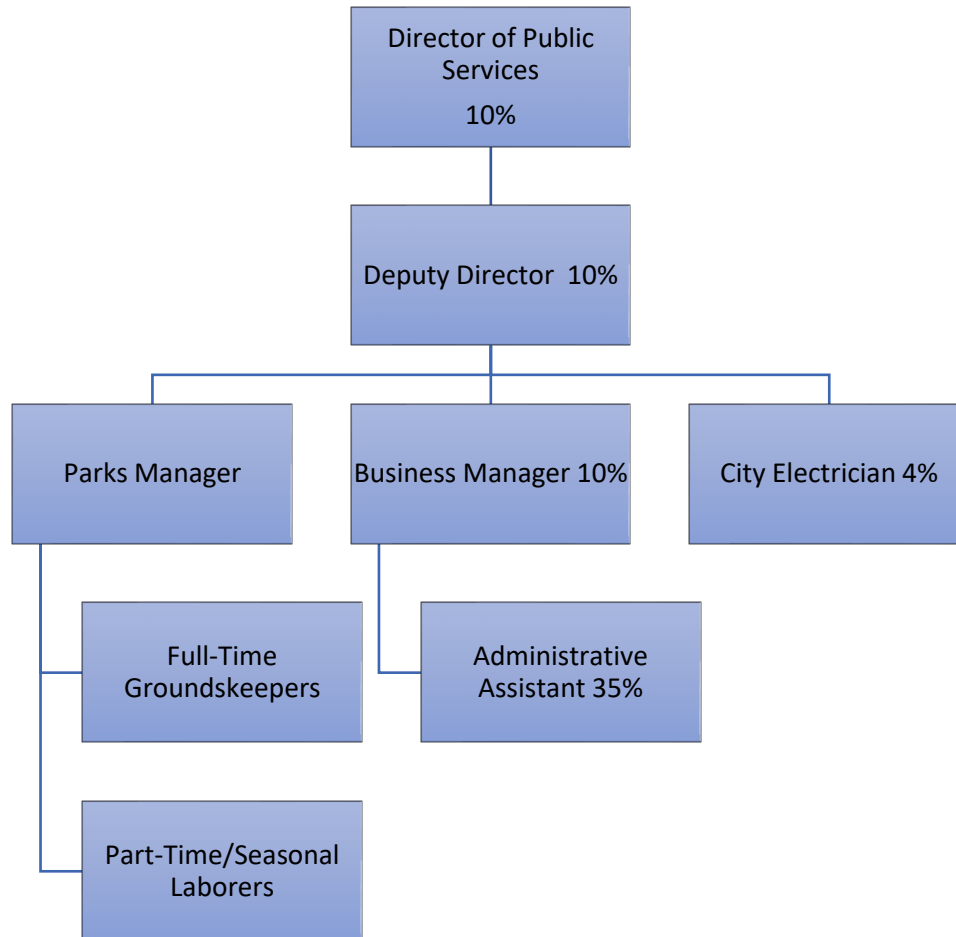
**Exhibit B: Relevant Organizational Charts**

DPS-Water



**Exhibit B: Relevant Organizational Charts**

DPS – Parks



**Exhibit B: Relevant Organizational Charts**

DPS-Sewer

