

## **MUNICIPALITIES AND CONSULTANTS**

### **WORKING AS PARTNERS**

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Is your town overwhelmed or overburdened with day to day activities? Do your staff members need a 48-hour day, seven-day workweek to accomplish the tasks at hand? Is planning for tomorrow, never mind next week, month, year, out of the question? Are you experiencing infrastructure problems such as failing sewer systems, water mains, and storm drainage? Is your town growing at a faster pace than you can upgrade infrastructure? Engaging a municipal engineering consultant can help alleviate some of these burdens.

Many municipalities currently have professionals such as legal counsel and accountants on staff, or on standby, to provide advice or representation when needed. Having a municipal engineering consultant on board works in much the same way. Building a relationship with a municipal engineering consultant will pay off. Whether your town has a need for long-term service or an occasional project, a relationship with an engineering consultant is important.

Why not just identify needs and issue Requests for Proposals, as necessary? If you select this course of action, you must carefully identify and define the need each time. Someone then has to write the RFP, establish the invitee list, establish the criteria for selection, and establish the meeting dates, site visits, and deadlines. Pre-proposal/site meetings may also be required. Responses must be evaluated; often interviews/presentations are scheduled and conducted. All of this will cost the municipality time and money and the process may take weeks or months.

A municipal engineering consultant can help identify and assess your pending issues, investigate potential solutions and their benefits/impacts to the community, along with potential costs. Consultants are usually aware of available funding sources such as grants, low interest loans and other types of state and federal aid. A consultant with experience in this field can also assist the community in obtaining funds needed to rebuild or correct failing systems.

### **SELECTING A CONSULTANT TO WORK WITH YOUR TOWN**

#### **The Process:**

The operative word here is “with.” For the partnership to be successful, the consultant must become an extension of the town. The process is much the same as acquiring a new employee. Always consider selecting your partner based on qualifications, reputation and rapport.

Some believe that fee should be the determining factor. Remember you are buying a service as well as specialized technical solutions to your problems. Fee-based only decisions may compromise the integrity of the service and information you require. In the long run, the benefit of using a consultant who is fairly compensated will out-weigh the savings from a “fee-based” selection.

Select the consultant that you believe will best assist you in accomplishing your goals. Once on board, work with the consultant to prioritize your needs, set the short- and long-term goals within applicable budgets and use the consultant’s expertise to accomplish them.

Establishing a relationship with your consultant...one based on trust, communication, dedication, and comfort may take time. Once established however, you are “partners.” Your partner will learn your

processes and become familiar with your town, its staff, its infrastructure, its concerns, and its governing members, along with its rules and regulations. Your partner will then recommend solutions that best suit your needs and your budget on an as needed basis.

**The Benefits:**

- Experience: Your consultant will provide you with time- and cost-saving tools to effectively manage the operations of the town.
- Availability: Your consultant is often “just a telephone call away.”
- Familiarity: Your consultant knows your needs, concerns, budget, regulations and process.
- Cost: Your consultant is able to recommend and organize both his and contractor services to avoid duplication of services.
- Economic Development: By shepherding the review process, your consultant aids both the town and applicants, while attracting development.

