



FINAL REPORT INTERVENTION 2015

MUNICIPALITY OF WENTWORTH



REPORT PREPARED BY



CLAUDE GRENIER RESSOURCES HUMAINES INC.

October 2015

Time to Decide

Elected Officials Version

Aknowledgements

Special thanks to Mr. Marcel Harvey, Mayor,
Mrs. Natalie Black, Director General and Secretary-Treasurer,
and the whole team

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Table of Contents

1. Preamble	4
2. Mandate	4
3. Conditions of a successful intervention	4
4. Methodology	4
a) Meetings with the municipal council.....	4
b) Preparation of an interview questionnaire.....	4
c) Meetings with the Director General	5
d) Meeting with all employees (group meeting).....	5
e) Meetings with employees (individual meetings).....	5
f) Meetings with the Mayor	6
5. Problems identified and recommendations	6
a) History of events.....	6
b) Role of the municipal council: a line between the council and the municipal team.....	6
c) Cycle of municipal activities.....	7
d) HR tools to be improved	7
e) Succession plan and forward-looking strategy	9
f) Underutilization of computer equipment.....	10
g) Layout of municipal offices, which could be redesigned for more efficiency	10
h) Mrs. Martine Renaud’s case	11
6. Conclusion	11
7. List of documents provided by the Firm	12
a) Comparative study of salaries paid in the municipal sector.....	12
b) Performance review form templates.....	12
c) Procedure guide to write an Employee Handbook.....	12
d) Employee Handbook model.....	12
e) Confidentiality clause model	12
f) Settlement Agreement and Release model.....	12
g) About overtime	12
h) Design of organization charts	12
i) Interview guide model: Director of Public Works.....	12
j) Recognition program	12
8. ANNEXES	12
a) Municipality of Wentworth’s organization chart.....	12
b) Municipal documents: What is the role of elected officials?	12

1. Preamble

The municipality of Wentworth, formed of several lakes and located in the Argenteuil RCM, has a population of 520 inhabitants during the winter and 2400 during the summer. A large segment of its population is made up of retirees, many of whom head south for the winter. When summer comes, the township municipality welcomes many vacationers from large urban centers of the Gatineau and Montréal regions, some of them with high requirements.

2. Mandate

The municipal council has mandated our Firm to carry out a study of its current workforce (human resources) in order to justify the positions currently held. Moreover, this study will lead to various recommendations aimed at improving productivity and identifying low value-added activities. It should take into consideration that the needs of the population may change in the course of the year, depending on the period.

The report to be produced should be presented in both languages (French and English). A global report in French, including all annexes, will be presented to the Mayor of the municipality, whereas a copy (without its annexes) will be given to each municipal councillor, in French or English, according to their preference. An electronic copy of the report, in both languages, will be available on the municipality's intranet.

3. Conditions of a successful intervention

- All meetings shall be held at various periods during the year in order to understand the cycle of activities;
- The consultant shall deal with one respondent only, i.e. the Director General and Secretary-Treasurer.

4. Methodology

a) Meetings with the municipal council

- The consultant, Mr. Claude Grenier, has met with the municipal council on **January 28, 2015**, to clarify the mandate to be given to his firm. That meeting revealed that some council members felt dissatisfaction and frustration about a few employees;
- The report should be tabled before the municipal council on **Wednesday, September 30, 2015**,

b) Preparation of an interview questionnaire

- Prior to the meeting with employees, a questionnaire has been prepared to record all relevant information during individual meetings.

c) Meetings with the Director General

- The initial meeting with Mrs. Black took place on **February 19, 2015**, to explain to her every stage of the intervention process and discuss sensitive matters, understand her points of view and prepare interview scenarios for group and individual meetings with employees;
- Additional meetings with the Director General were held on **February 20, March 2 and 3, May 28 and 29, as well as on September 10 and 11, 2015**, to analyze data, identify problems, assess various scenarios, develop recommendations, and gradually draw up the final report;
- It was decided to provide Mrs. Black with some HR guidance documents, free of charge. A list of these documents is provided in Annex b);
- Mrs. Black is a new Director General who has the ability and talent to succeed in this position. However, she deserves the opportunity to improve her skills and knowledge. The ADMQ (Association des directeurs généraux municipaux du Québec) offers various training courses that would be very useful to her;

d) Meeting with all employees (group meeting)

- On **February 9, 2015**, a meeting with all the employees of the municipality was held in order to explain the objectives of the intervention and the consultant's expectations;
- Employees expressed their feelings of insecurity, fear and loss of motivation;

e) Meetings with employees (individual meetings)

- Individual meetings took place on **February 19 and 20, 2015**. The consultant had the opportunity to meet face-to-face with each employee to discuss their job description, which will allow him to summarize and map their key tasks. These meetings also helped to understand workplace irritants that have an impact on employees' productivity. Mrs. Christine Bennett was absent during those two days, but we met with her on our next visit, on **March 2, 2015**;
- A second meeting with people still employed was held on **September 10, 2015**, to complete the collection of data;
- The main points observed include the following:
 - Each employee has the appropriate competency to carry out the requested tasks. However, job descriptions are not up-to-date and seem to change on a regular basis;
 - All employees have expressed their feelings of unease and insecurity, and stated that their level of motivation is decreasing due to the poor relations with the municipal council. They regret the lack of recognition from the council with regards to their implication and the usefulness and quality of their work;
 - Salary inequity has been mentioned, as well as the lack of a succession plan, especially for positions related to administration and municipal inspection (value-added positions);
 - The lack of a formal integration guide for new employees was also mentioned;
 - Employees deplored the lack of structured strategies for staff training and development;

f) Meetings with the Mayor

- We have met with Mayor Marcel Harvey on **May 28 and September 10, 2015**, to discuss the progress of the intervention. He was presented with a list of the main points that had emerged so far. These meetings have provided an opportunity to validate and confirm information.

5. Problems identified and recommendations

a) History of events

During individual and group meetings, employees have talked about a period extremely striding for them. At the last municipal elections, the comments of some elected officials have created a great deal of insecurity and loss of motivation among team members, which has led to strained relationships.

More specifically, some comments about potential lay-offs were heard by employees, thus arousing a keen interest in joining a union. Only the amount of the union dues made them change their minds. However, nothing must be taken for granted, and the desire to unionize could come back pretty fast. If the council articulates a growth or service improvement vision, its objectives could be achieved only through the active participation of a dedicated team.

Moreover, the turnover rate has been very significant these past few months, which has resulted in high staff replacement costs. If the municipal council does not change its stance, more staff departures should be anticipated.

Recommendations

- 1. In the short term, organize a connection activity such as a happy hour gathering for municipal officials and employees in order to close ranks, develop a better understanding and get to know each other outside of work.*
- 2. Subsequently, organize a connection activity for municipal council members and employees (“Lac à L’Épaulé”). There is a lot of misunderstanding about employees’ work on the part of municipal council members. Their level of trust in their employees is rather low, which is strongly felt by employees.*

b) Role of the municipal council: a line between the council and the municipal team

It is important to recall the role of elected officials, especially with regards to personnel management. Elected officials play an important role in municipal meetings and assemblies, and may be assigned specific mandates by the council. But, at all times, they must respect hierarchy, in particular the role of the Director General and Secretary-Treasurer, who should be the only person to give instructions to employees. Failure to respect this principal weakens the Director General and Secretary-Treasurer’s authority and creates confusion in employees’ minds. To each his own role. The way things are now, when elected officials come to the municipal office, insecurity and fear are omnipresent among employees, which is not normal.

Recommendations

- 3. Design a recognition policy aimed at developing a sense of belonging among employees within the municipality and stopping employees' departures. Last year, there were five (5) departures: Mrs. Knudson, Mr. Boucher, Mrs. Bennett, Mrs. Gravel and Mr. Kasprzyk. This is not normal, and it proves extremely costly for the municipality.**
- 4. Make sure that each council member better understands the role of officials. Relevant training is strongly recommended.**

c) Cycle of municipal activities

The municipality's activities are carried out in an inconsistent manner, going from calm periods to very intense ones. The fact that the population quadruples during most of the year has a significant impact on the workload of the municipal team. Lower-intensity periods then become chosen moments to develop succession plans, provide training, draft procedures and get back on one's feet.

In addition, it is difficult to estimate the extent of the impact of the new fiscal agreement on the workload, knowing full well that accountability will become more important and that municipalities might soon be in charge of school tax management.

The consultant asked the Director General to collect statistics on data entry (phone calls, emails, visitors, correspondence, travelling) and identify associated types of services. The global report contains a summary of these data.

Recommendation

- 5. For the upcoming year, I recommend that data entry stressing the importance of citizens' requests should be pursued.**

d) HR tools to be improved

- **The municipality's organization chart** needs to be more accurate since it relates to the intentions of the municipal council and the challenges facing the municipality.

Recommendation

- 6. I would recommend that the position that will be occupied by Mrs. Martine Renaud be called "Senior Municipal Inspector" and that the position formerly occupied by Mrs. Renaud be called "Municipal Inspector".**

The recent announcement of Mrs. Christine Bennett's retirement should accelerate the decision-making process by the municipal council regarding the re-engineering of the organizational structure of the municipality.

- **Jobs descriptions** do not always reflect the reality.

Recommendation

- 7. They deserve to be updated and maintained afterwards. Moreover, the council's stance regarding the position of Communications and Administrative Assistant should be clarified since some officials do not believe in its relevance.***

In addition, the role of the ***municipal inspector*** needs to be understood by all. He or she has to act as a police officer – a community police officer, not a riot police officer. It's all about approach.

- ***Salary policy and scale:*** There are flaws in the HR tools currently used in this regard. Among other things, when a person is filling in for an employee, the salary paid to the replacement should be reviewed since there is an apparent injustice in this matter. A policy is applied in one case while a completely different policy is applied in another case.

A recent compensation study for all positions in the municipal sector has been presented to Mrs. Black. Changes should be made to the salary policy to include new data on pay scales, and to the staff replacement policy with regards to officers' replacements.

Recommendation

- 8. I recommend that work be done to design this up-to-date tool as soon as possible in order to ensure pay equity and maximize retention of value-added candidates.***

- ***Employee Handbook:*** In some respects, the absence of guidelines, policies or rules may lead to conflicts. For instance, the municipality's vacation policy should be more accurate and better understood. There is a need to determine whether or not the municipal team should be present, on a rotational basis, on Friday afternoons, and to rule on the interdiction to take vacations during the summer for urban planning, environment and municipal inspection employees.

No one took vacations in July 2015 as it was necessary to ensure a rotation to keep on providing appropriate services. The key is to make sure that taxpayers get the answers they are entitled to and that a fair rotation is conducted among employees. The comparative study of similar municipalities could guide the council's decision-making process.

Recommendation

- 9. See to the preparation (conception and drafting) of an Employee Handbook including the municipality's annual vacation policy.***

- *Performance appraisal*

Recommendation

- 10. It is recommended that the employee's annual performance review be pursued and that this exercise be coupled with piecemeal internal audits in order to check compliance with the various work procedures.*

- *Training and integration*

Recommendation

- 11. It would be important to develop an annual training plan to promote succession and a forward-looking strategy. At the same time, the development of training plans would accelerate knowledge acquisition for new employees and those who have to replace other employees.*

e) Succession plan and forward-looking strategy

As mentioned before in the report, this topic is certainly the most at risk as to municipal administrative activities. Here are the main concerns:

- The Director General has recently taken up her duties. Therefore, despite her great skills, she cannot fill in for others in positions considered as “value-added positions” (occupied by Mrs. Lois Armitage and Mrs. Christine Bennett). She needs training, especially through the ADMQ (Association des directeurs municipaux du Québec);
- The Director of the Urban Planning department has recently retired, and there was no prepared succession for this position. Mrs. Bennett could act as a consultant; she informed us that she could ask \$75 per hour for her services. A RCM shared resource or a consultant from St-Jérôme could fulfill short-term needs. Fees might be high;
- The position of Assistant Secretary-Treasurer is the most at risk. Nobody can fill this position, even in the short term. A replacement could be provided by PG Govern (accounting software) or by our accounting office. Fees might be quite high (more or less \$120 per hour);
- Considering the shortage of replacement staff and the lack of time to prevent it, the hiring of an employee acting as administrative technician would provide support for the Director General in most of her tasks, help preparing succession with Mrs. Armitage, assist the team in facing peaks in workload and updating the filing in the vault, and develop work procedures supporting the forward-looking strategy. We invite you to consult the job description in the global report (annex).

Recommendation

- 12. The possibility of hiring an Administrative Technician should be explored (see annex for proposed job description). This would allow team members to develop procedures aimed at preparing the succession, who could translate the documents from English to French (bilingualism with writing and translation skills required).***

f) Underutilization of computer equipment

Underutilization of computer and technological equipment was observed at the municipality. Improving this aspect would significantly enhance productivity.

Recommendations

- 13. Take more advantage of technology: paperless council and Municipal Inspector (tablet), set up of an intranet.***
- 14. In each department, write procedures that could be available on the intranet.***
- 15. Prepare letter templates with editable elements and develop standard forms that could be available on the intranet. Explore the possibility of hiring trainees.***

g) Layout of municipal offices, which could be redesigned for more efficiency

Generally speaking, the current office layout does not respect the objectives of full efficiency and productivity of the municipal team. Employees are easily distracted, and there is an obvious lack of secrecy and confidentiality due to office configuration.

Recommendations

- 16. The Director General should be assigned a closed office that could be located in the back, where the copier is currently installed. It is extremely difficult to maintain the confidentiality of the discussions and interviews, especially those requiring the greatest discretion.***
- 17. Mrs. Lois Armitage's office should not be facing the visitors' entrance for confidentiality purposes when telephone interviews are conducted (e.g. collection of outstanding accounts).***

h) Mrs. Martine Renaud's case

- The municipal council expressed its dissatisfaction with Mrs. Renaud's work; overzealousness and difficult communications are only a few examples of the recriminations against her. Mrs. Renaud has several years of experience, and according to some elected officials, citizens and Mrs. Black, she has improved lately.
- Concerning Mrs. Renaud's remuneration in the position of Municipal Inspector, it is important to mention the following point:

Mrs. Renaud replaced Mrs. Christine Bennett in her position of Director of Urban Planning, Environment and Public Works. The council must address the application of its salary policy with regards to officers' replacements. Should compensation be paid to Mrs. Renaud for filling in for Mrs. Bennett? Based on a recent situation where someone had to fill in for the Director General (Mrs. Knudson and Mrs. Armitage), a lump sum has been paid to the replacement.

Recommendation

- 18. In Mrs. Renaud's case, an adjustment needs to be made; double standards should not be applied with regards to wage policy. We must remember that it is not the person who is remunerated, but the position.***

6. Conclusion

Time to Decide. The title of the report is, in my opinion, very representative of the challenges facing both the municipal council and permanent team.

Team performance revolves around three basic elements: harmony, fun at work, and competency. Unfortunately, the first two elements are absent from the equation. It is up to people in charge to restore the situation. The whole team has suffered a lot from lack of recognition, support and appreciation.

"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."

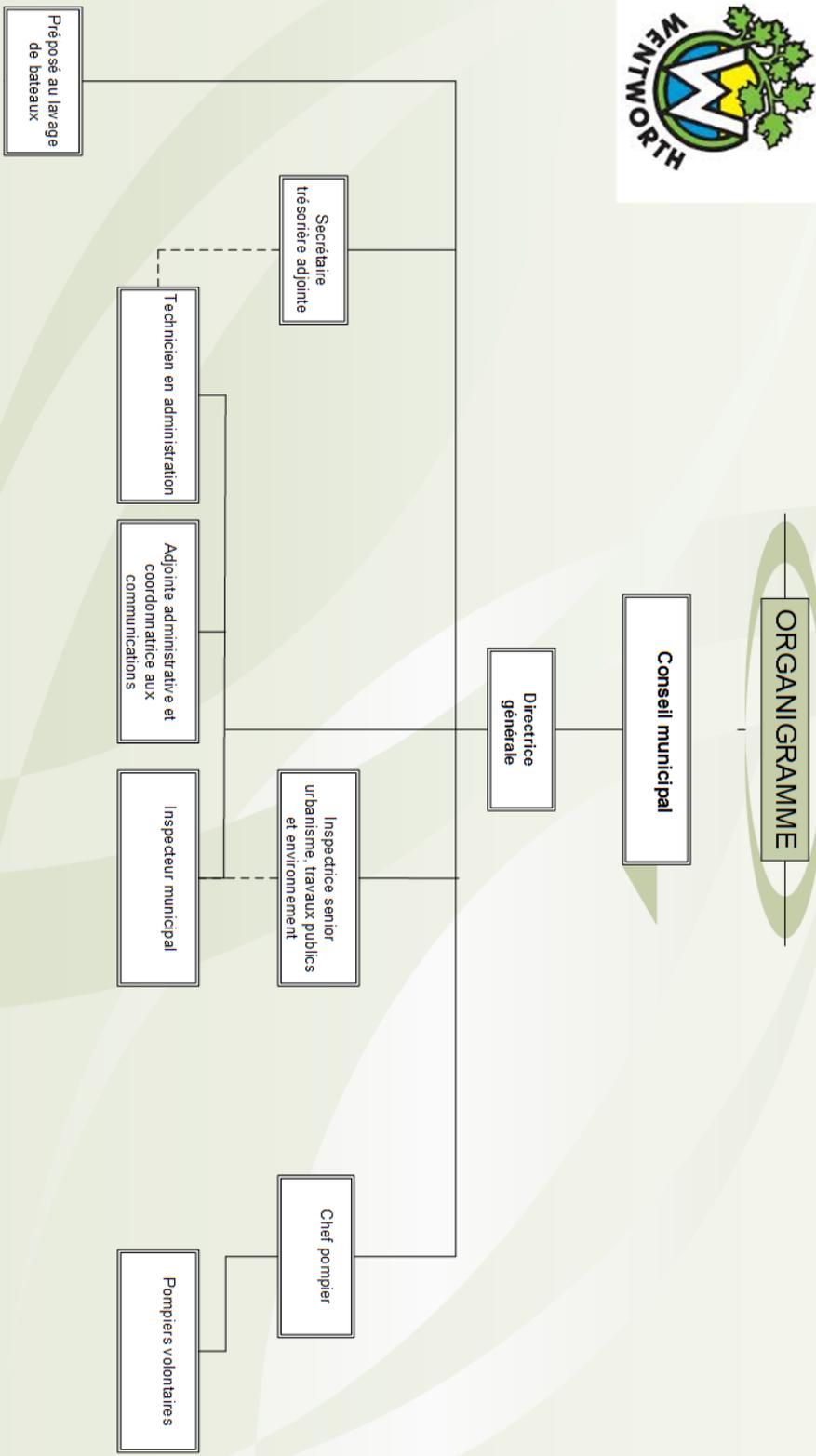
I invite you to build on existing strengths so to avoid weak links.

7. List of documents provided by the Firm

- a) Comparative study of salaries paid in the municipal sector
- b) Performance review form templates
- c) Procedure guide to write an Employee Handbook
- d) Employee Handbook model
- e) Confidentiality clause model
- f) Settlement Agreement and Release model
- g) About overtime
- h) Design of organization charts
- i) Interview guide model: Director of Public Works
- j) Recognition program

8. ANNEXES

- a) Municipality of Wentworth's organization chart
- b) Municipal documents: What is the role of elected officials?



Légende: Un pointillé représente une supervision indirecte (seulement reliée aux tâches).

14-09-2015

What is the role of elected officials?

Elected officials meet as a council representing the population; they make decisions on directions and priorities of the municipality, while managing its affairs.

Mayor

The elected Mayor represents the whole population of the municipality. He or she presides over meetings of the council and works collegially with the other members of the council. He or she exercises the right of superintendence, investigation and control over the functioning of the municipal services, thus ensuring the transparency of the municipal council in the community's interest. He or she forwards the mandates entrusted to the municipal administration by the council, oversees the application of by-laws and resolutions, and communicates any information deemed in the public interest.

The Mayor especially sees that the revenue of the municipality is collected and expended according to law. He or she can also sit on other government bodies or committees, for example the council of the Regional County Municipality (RCM) or the board of directors of a regional conference of elected officials.

Let us mention that the Mayor can have a right of veto on the decisions made by the council by refusing to approve them, and consequently sign documents regarding these decisions. This right of veto is suspensive, meaning it can be reversed if the absolute majority of council members re-adopt the decision.

At all times, the Mayor can participate in the decision-making process during a council meeting, but has no obligation to vote. In an emergency situation threatening the life and health of the population or the integrity of municipal equipment, the Mayor can, on his or her own initiative, authorise expenses and grant the contracts deemed necessary to remedy the situation.

The Mayor can be called upon to occupy the position of warden of a Regional County Municipality (RCM) as the warden is generally appointed by RMC council members among those of them who serve as mayors.

Note, however, that all RMCs may decide that wardens will be elected by universal suffrage, except for the ten (10) RMCs located on the Montréal Metropolitan Community's territory.

Councillors

Councillors can influence the decision-making process in the interest of your community. Besides being present at council meetings and promoting the interests of the community, councillors can provide input to the council on specific issues. They can be appointed to sit on boards and committees, or be given cases or files they will need to investigate to support various council decisions.

Unless they are in conflict of interest, councillors have the obligation to vote on each proposal debated during council meetings. They can also be called upon to act as deputy mayor. So if the Mayor is absent or if the position is vacant, the councillor appointed by the council fills in for the Mayor and carries out his or her duties.

What is the role of the municipal council?

The role of the municipal council is to ensure that services meet the needs of the community; its members perform essential duties.

Composition

The municipal council is comprised, in most cases, of the Mayor and six councillors.

In a municipality having a population of 20,000 or over whose territory is divided in electoral districts, the council is comprised of the Mayor and one councillor for each electoral district. The number of councillors varies according to the size of the municipality.

Functioning

The council sees to the quality of life of the community. Elected officials must always make decisions in the best interest of the citizens they represent, and only during council meetings through by-laws and resolutions. On an individual basis, elected officials cannot make decisions in the name of the municipality outside assemblies, except the mayor, who can exercise his power in emergency situations.

Council decisions are generally made by the majority of members present. Usually, the council meets once a month, but can meet more often. It can also call special meetings.

Responsibilities

The main role of the council is to ensure that services offered meet the needs of the community.

The nature of the matters submitted to the council may vary according to the municipality, but the council must adopt a budget and must ensure the financial equilibrium of the municipality. The council accepts the rights and obligations vested in it by the Cities and Towns Act or the Municipal Code of Quebec and certain related acts such as An Act Respecting Municipality Taxation and An Act Respecting Land Use Planning and Development.

Hence, the council can make decisions regarding various aspects affecting the quality of life of the community, including economic development, urban planning, drinking-water supply, wastewater treatment, community development, recreation and culture, etc.

“Aside from their administrative and legal responsibilities, the councillors and the Mayor alike must play a political role which is not described in the Municipal Code. This role involves listening to the citizens and being available to hear their inquiries, grievances and suggestions.”