

Public Works (PW) - Street Maintenance & Pothole Repair Operations

Purpose: Evaluate whether Public Works manages street maintenance efficiently and effectively to prevent and repair potholes, extend pavement life, reduce maintenance backlogs, and optimize limited staffing and financial resources.

Background: Public Works is reevaluating its operations under new leadership and has raised concerns about staff capacity and competing operational priorities. Despite these timing considerations, both department leadership and audit staff agree that an evaluation of street maintenance would provide value. The audit could also examine operational impacts associated with the winter parking pilot program. Sufficient historical data exist to establish performance trends and provide a reliable baseline, while benchmarking against pavement-management practices and performance audit models used by peer U.S. cities.

Proposed Audit Focus

The audit would examine:

- Pavement management planning and whether maintenance priorities are based on objective data, including Pavement Condition Index (PCI) scores.
- The existence and effectiveness of a multi-year pavement management and asset preservation plan.
- Pothole prevention and repair practices, response times, backlog management, and crew deployment.
- Cost-effectiveness of preventive maintenance compared with reactive repairs.
- Internal versus contracted maintenance costs, including labor, materials, and equipment.
- Accuracy and usefulness of pavement-management and work-order data.
- Staffing levels, workflow bottlenecks, and opportunities to optimize crews and resources.
- Coordination and data sharing among Public Works divisions, including street sweeping, parking, utilities, and ADA-related work.
- Effects of alternate-street parking policies on maintenance operations.
- Operational and financial performance, utilization, and costs of the municipal asphalt plant.
- Climate resilience and the impact of severe freeze-thaw cycles and aging street foundations.
- Alignment with industry best practices and evidence-based pavement management strategies.

Key Challenges

- Severe freeze-thaw cycles and aging street foundations.
 - Nearly \$1 billion in deferred street maintenance and a significant pothole repair backlog.
 - Funding limitations, including legal restrictions affecting certain funding mechanisms.
 - Competition for resources among pothole repair, snow removal, street sweeping, ADA improvements, and routine pavement maintenance.
 - Staffing and operational capacity constraints.
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- Coordination challenges involving street sweeping, parking, utilities, and other street activities.

Performance Audit Approach: A mixed-method approach would include:

- Evaluation of pavement management systems, PCI data, and prioritization criteria.
- Verification of work-order and maintenance data accuracy.
- Mapping of end-to-end street maintenance and pothole repair workflows.
- Analysis of budgets, labor, materials, contracted services, and resource allocation.
- Comparison of response times and service levels against established targets.
- Analysis of pavement conditions, backlog trends, and maintenance outcomes.
- Comparison of preventive maintenance and reactive repair costs and outcomes.
- Evaluation of asphalt plant production costs, utilization, and operational performance.
- Interviews with Public Works staff and relevant stakeholders.
- Benchmarking against peer cities and identification of root causes of performance gaps.

Timing Considerations: Although Public Works is undergoing organizational changes and facing competing operational demands, sufficient historical data exist to conduct a reliable performance audit. The audit can account for changing operational targets while establishing a baseline for evaluating long-term pavement management, resource allocation, and maintenance outcomes.

Estimated Scope

Duration: 8 months

Estimated Cost: \$20,000–\$25,000

Audit Committee Recommendation: Proceed with a performance audit of Public Works' street maintenance and pothole repair operations, emphasizing data-driven pavement management, preventive maintenance, backlog reduction, resource optimization, cost-effectiveness, and operational efficiency. The audit should identify opportunities to improve the City's ability to maintain streets proactively, extend pavement life, and optimize limited staffing and financial resources.