



**CITY OF KIRKLAND**  
**Department of Public Works**  
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**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Kurt Triplett, City Manager

**From:** Julie Underwood, Director of Public Works  
John Starbard, Deputy Director of Public Works

**Date:** May 6, 2021

**Subject:** PUBLIC WORKS STAFFING MODIFICATION

**RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council approve a motion to convert certain staff positions in the Department of Public Works from temporary to ongoing in order to improve employee recruitment, retention, and division operations. These conversions have no financial impact but do modify the number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions authorized by the Council.

If the Council supports this proposal, the Department of Finance and Administration will return to the City Council on June 15, 2021 to recommend this and other mid-year adjustments to the adopted 2021-2022 budget.

**BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:**

Starting in 2020, the Public Works Director and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Manager initiated an ongoing effort to evaluate and improve the performance of the CIP division. Given the growth and expansion of the CIP over the last several years, the goal is to assess the division's ability to effectively deliver the scale, magnitude, and complexity of the Capital Improvement Program and maintain a high performing organization. This effort has included a range of actions including, but not limited to, the following:

- Contracting with outside consultants to evaluate the CIP structure and processes against industry best practices and comparing Kirkland to peer organizations;
- Providing additional training in project management, use of MUNIS and related skills to all CIP staff;
- Increasing coordination between the CIP division and the Finance Department to better track budgeting and accounting;
- Augmenting staff with additional outside project management support due to staff vacations, FMLA, turnover, etc.; and
- Implementing additional best practices (e.g., conducting a risk workshop for the fire stations projects).

A comprehensive presentation on the results of the CIP division evaluation and recommended actions will be brought to a future Council meeting later in 2021. Overall, while there are specific recommendations for improvement, the consultant evaluation concluded that Kirkland's CIP division is within industry norms and already follows many best practices. However, the best practices and training are hampered by a lean structure, continuing staff turnover, and the difficulty in filling vacancies. These problems are industry-wide for public works engineering staff as all cities and organizations such as Sound Transit and WSDOT are competing for the same scarce resource. The result of the vacancies is often multiple projects for existing staff to oversee that limits time for training and best practice implementation. Without time for training, mistakes on scope, schedule and budget can occur.

Therefore, one top priority for the Public Works Director to creating and sustaining a high performing group is to address staff vacancies and attrition. It is imperative that Kirkland retain talent and strengthen the city's ability to attract the best talent, especially with highly skilled professional classifications (e.g., licensed engineers). Additionally, there are significant turnover costs associated with recruiting, interviewing, hiring, orientation and training, lost productivity, potential customer dissatisfaction, administrative costs, and lost expertise. Moreover, frequent voluntary turnover has a negative impact on employee morale and engagement.

As a first step to address this, Public Works is seeking to strengthen the operations of both the Capital Improvement Program division and the Transportation division. With this agenda item, staff proposes to convert 6.5 limited term employees to ongoing employees. These are existing positions with full salaries and benefits, so there is no budgetary impact to this proposal. However, this conversion would mean adding 6.5 FTEs to the statutorily required itemization of Council-authorized positions ("Position Summary"). Approval is being sought now so that the change could be implemented in conjunction with the mid-year budget adjustments in June.

### **RECLASSIFY LIMITED TERM EMPLOYEE POSITIONS**

For several years, Public Works has recruited for and hired certain positions as limited term employees. The reasons for doing so stem largely from financial prudence and uncertainty about workload. For example, after the Juanita-Finn Hill-Kingsgate annexation a decade ago, the City knew that it would have an increased workload but didn't yet have experience about actual revenues from and expenses in the annexation area. However, it was certain that after ten years from the date of annexation the State-provided annexation financial incentive—about \$4 million per year—would end. Combined with that was the recognition that the City would have increased capital improvement project demands, but only a reasoned projection about when, where, of what type, and whether the workload would be relatively constant or fluctuating. For those reasons, the Department tended to create limited term employee positions to meet the new levels of service.

While the Department enjoyed many successful recruitments to fill those temporary positions, and those employees worked diligently for the City, it has experienced some changes that require the reevaluation of this practice. Even though all Kirkland employment positions may be eliminated by the Council in the budget process, many employees feel uncomfortable about the perceived transience and uncertainty about being in a "temporary" position rather than an "ongoing" position. The division has lost employees to other organizations because they were offered a regular or "permanent" position there, sometimes of equal responsibilities, which made those employees feel better about their employment situation. This should be addressed as the current recruitment climate is challenging. Current and upcoming private construction and regional public works projects are rife in the Puget Sound area, and certain professions—such as civil engineering and project management—are at a premium.

All other factors being equal, if a candidate has the option to apply for or accept a job that is regular/ongoing versus temporary, the temporary position likely will be the least attractive. Additionally, the employment market today so favors employees that it is not uncommon for candidates who have been chosen as finalists to withdraw at the last minute with negotiated job offers in hand from other employers, or to have current employers counter with a better arrangement. The department's perspective is that the temporary classification is now a barrier to recruitment and retention that should be removed with reasonable justification.

*CIP Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator and Office Specialist*

The CIP division includes a Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator position that is .5 ongoing and .5 temporary. The temporary .5 has been funded each year for the past 8 years. The need for communication and outreach around CIP projects has only grown over time and so converting this .5 to make a full ongoing position is consistent with the engineer conversions. Finally, the temporary Office Specialist position has been in place for several years and has proven critical to accomplish the many administrative tasks that would otherwise fall to the engineers and project managers. Converting this position to ongoing will also help recruit and retain strong candidates to provide this important support.

*Transportation Engineer*

The Transportation division also has a 1.0 FTE limited term Transportation Engineer who is part of a three-person team that performs transportation analysis, supports the Intelligent Transportation System, and performs plan review and develops traffic control plans for CIP projects. For similar reasons to those mentioned above, the Department would like to bring greater stability to this position and make it ongoing.

**PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO 2021-2022 POSITION SUMMARY**

To make these changes, the Council would need to authorize the addition of 6.5 ongoing FTE positions, as identified in Table 1, below. The incumbents in those positions then could be reclassified from limited term to ongoing positions. While the goal is to create a workplace where employees have a sense of greater stability, technically it is possible that an employee prefers not to take an ongoing position or assignment, which could lead to bumping and/or seniority situations.

The positions staff ask the Council to add to the authorized position count are:

**Table 1: Limited Term Positions in Public Works Proposed to be Regular Employees**

Position Title	Position Number	FTE	Division
Senior Project Engineer*	705	1.0	CIP
Surface Water Planner	658	1.0	CIP
Project Engineer*	706	1.0	CIP
Associate Project Engineer*	707	1.0	CIP
Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator	617	0.5	CIP
Office Specialist	810	1.0	CIP
Transportation Engineer	662	1.0	Transportation
<b>Total FTEs:</b>		6.5	

(\* ) *The duration of the limited terms of these three positions is coincident with the 2019-2024 Capital Improvement Plan, so they expire December 31, 2024. All other limited term positions identified in Table 1 expire December 31, 2022.*

All of these positions are fully funded in the current budget and all are occupied. The addition of these 6.5 positions is financially neutral.

**NEXT STEPS:**

If the Council supports these proposals, then the following steps would need to be taken:

- The Council would move to have staff prepare materials for the June 15 mid-year budget adjustment to increase the Department's total authorized FTEs by 6.5 FTEs.
- Administratively, staff would prepare materials to reclassify positions.

No recruitment or reclassification would occur until after the ordinance presented on June 15 were acted upon and took effect.

Further recommendations from the CIP evaluation will be brought to future Council meetings. These include consideration of potential wage increases (which must be bargained) and adding a second CIP Supervisor to reduce the span of control of the current CIP Manager and CIP Supervisor.

Attachment A: 2021-2022 Position Summary—Public Works<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Does not include Maintenance Center or Utility staff

## 2021 - 2022 POSITION SUMMARY

***PUBLIC WORKS*****POSITION SUMMARY BY CLASSIFICATION**

<b>Classification</b>	<b>2019-2020 Positions</b>	<b>Additions/ Reductions</b>	<b>2021-2022 Positions</b>	<b>Budgeted 2021 Salary Range</b>
Director	1.00		1.00	11,382 - 14,688
Deputy Director	0.05		0.05	10,014 - 12,920
Development Engineering Manager	0.65		0.65	9,416 - 12,150
Capital Projects Manager	1.00		1.00	9,385 - 12,110
Transportation Engineering Manager	1.00		1.00	8,689 - 11,213
Development Engineer Supervisor	1.00		1.00	8,226 - 10,613
Capital Projects Supervisor	1.00		1.00	8,147 - 10,512
Senior Project Engineer	4.00		4.00	8,576 - 10,089
Senior Development Engineer	1.00		1.00	8,373 - 9,850
Transportation Engineer	3.00		3.00	7,892 - 9,285
Senior Capital Project Coordinator	1.00		1.00	7,881 - 9,271
Project Engineer	6.00		6.00	7,665 - 9,016
Sr. Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator	1.00	(1.00)	0.00	7,570 - 8,905
Development Engineer	2.00		2.00	7,342 - 8,637
Capital Project Coordinator	1.00		1.00	7,216 - 8,489
Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator	0.50	1.00	1.50	7,210 - 8,482
Senior Construction Inspector	1.00		1.00	7,161 - 8,425
Senior Financial Analyst	1.00		1.00	6,418 - 8,281
Senior Development Engineering Analyst	1.00		1.00	7,001 - 8,236
Associate Development Engineer	1.00		1.00	6,883 - 8,098
Associate Project Engineer	2.00		2.00	6,557 - 7,713
Construction Inspector	7.00		7.00	6,822 - 8,025
Engineering Technician	1.30		1.30	5,554 - 6,534
Senior Accounting Associate	0.05		0.05	5,462 - 6,426
Administrative Assistant	1.00		1.00	5,390 - 6,340
Public Works Office Specialist	1.00		1.00	4,386 - 5,160
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41.55</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>41.55</b>	

**POSITION SUMMARY BY DIVISION**

	<b>2019-2020 Positions</b>	<b>Additions/ Reductions</b>	<b>2021-2022 Positions</b>
Administration	3.10		3.10
Capital Project Engineering	21.50		21.50
Development Environmental Services	13.50		13.50
Transportation Engineering	3.45		3.45
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41.55</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>41.55</b>