

Community Development Director

Late this summer, the City Council began discussing the opportunity to create a new Community Development Director position while reorganizing the city's administrative and finance functions.

The Community Development Director would provide a "point person" for economic development inquiries. Proactive economic development efforts are also emphasized in the position description. When networking with other cities (larger cities of 10,000 to 15,000 in population) at conferences, they repeatedly tell us how they feel fortunate when they've been able to create an in-house position for economic development.

Currently, our City Planner is in the office one afternoon per week. A new Community Development Director position would allow these services on a daily basis. Additionally, an in-house position would likely provide a more customized approach to updating our Smart Growth Plan and to reviewing other zoning and development documents.

In the reorganization, we had a rare opportunity to greatly upgrade our services. The City Council made the decision to proceed. A position description was drafted. And it was funded with the approval of the 2013 budget.

Selection Panel

This fall, we targeted our advertising for the new Community Development Director position. We used websites such as League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Wisconsin Chapter of American Planning Association, and Wisconsin Economic Development Association to attract experienced candidates.

We had 21 applicants. And they all had very strong credentials. Our selection panel narrowed the list to three to invite for interviews, with another half-dozen on the bubble.

Our selection panel consisted of Mayor Sandy Decker who is chair of the Plan Commission, Council President Mason Braunschweig who is on the Plan Commission, Alderperson Jim Brooks who is chair of the Economic Development Committee and also on the Plan Commission, Dave Olsen of Baker Manufacturing who brought a business perspective and has been a member of both the Plan Commission and Economic Development Committee in the past, Paul Benjamin who is the Director of the Rock County Planning and Development Department, and myself.

In naming the selection panel, we emphasized the Plan Commission and Economic Development Committee as the city committees the Community Development Director would work most closely. We also sought outside perspective and professional expertise and placed great weight on the insights of our local business community.

Following the interviews, the selection panel discussed the finalists at length. Our three finalists quickly narrowed to two. I am a strong believer in reference checks. Their current and prior supervisors spoke extremely highly of both of them. They were respected and admired by their colleagues. They were both very qualified.

We had two excellent candidates, and it would be a tough decision. In the final discussion, two from the selection panel actually said they were splitting their “votes” fifty-fifty.

Good To Great

There was not really a vote; it would be my decision. I carefully considered the comments and insights of our selection panel. I reviewed my notes from the interviews and reference checks. I re-read their resumes. I even followed up with phone calls to clarify a couple points with each of the candidates.

At lunch I took the book *Good To Great* by Jim Collins from my shelf. I re-read the chapter about hiring the right person. Collins advises first getting the right people “on the bus” then figuring out where to drive it. Whether someone is the right person has more to do with character traits and innate capabilities than with specific knowledge, background, or skills.

I had hoped the book would help me crystallize my thoughts, but it did not help the way I wanted. Both of our finalists were stars. I would be happy with each of them on the bus. I wanted to hire both of them.

And that thought – hiring both of them – became the core of my decision. I thought about hiring both of them and how I would organize a larger office with multiple employees. I figured I would hire Nicole into the supervisor position and our other candidate into the support position.

Then I thought very deliberately about why I would put Nicole in the supervisor position. More than her practical skills, I was impressed with her attitude toward finding ways to improve and provide better service. She has championed new and evolving ideas. And she greatly embraces broad public involvement and input in planning.

This was all very close and consistent with the drive for excellence which we have been discussing at Committee of the Whole and other strategic meetings over the past year. My decision became obvious.

Nicole Sidoff

I hired our Community Development Director.

Nicole Sidoff has been the Community Resource Development Educator at the University of Wisconsin-Extension in Ozaukee County for the last four and a half years. She also has experience working for the Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Department and with a Business Improvement District in Milwaukee. She earned her masters degree in urban planning (with honors) from the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

Nicole brings professional experience both in planning and in economic development. In planning, she has worked with comprehensive/smart growth plans, park and open space planning, extensive public outreach efforts, and strategic planning.

In development, she has collaborated with the Small Business Development Center and Ozaukee Economic Development for business education, facilitated webinars on revitalizing downtowns, assisted several chambers of commerce (a constituency which the Ozaukee Extension had not previously reached), done goal setting and benchmarking with economic indicators, and conducted economic and demographic research.

She was also the driving force in starting a leadership program in Ozaukee County to enhance the capacity of the local business, non-profit, and government sectors.

And, in addition to being a focused hard-worker, she has a dynamic and winning personality.

We are fortunate to have her joining our staff. I am confident you will find Nicole a fantastic addition to our community.