

Mayor's Column for January 11, 2012 Review

At this week's Common Council meeting there will be an agenda item for Council confirmation of my appointment of Town and Country Engineering, located on Verona Road in Madison, as the City Engineer. It has been an extensive review and selection process, begun last fall, to reach this appointment decision.

In April 1997 the Madison firm of Foth and Van Dyke was appointed City Engineer. There was a subsequent firm name change to Foth Infrastructure and Engineering. In January 2011, due to a business alliance forged between Foth and Cedar Corporation, located in Menomonie, Wisconsin, municipalities contracting for general engineering services with Foth were assigned to Cedar. Cedar Corporation became our engineer. Our engineering contract with Foth did allow for this assignment.

In late 2004 the Common Council reviewed all professional service contracts, with the exception of engineering services because of impending major improvements to Highway 14. Proposals for the other consultants were sought and a new City Attorney, City Planner, City Assessor, and City Auditor were hired.

Additional infrastructure projects, Main Street, Madison Street, County Road M, and the Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade further pushed off the ability of the City to review engineering services. During late 2010 City budget discussions, it was decided that review of engineering services would again be put off to allow for completion of the Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade, stormwater drainage improvements on South Sixth Street, and the oft-postponed East Main Street bridge replacement. However, in anticipation of a lull in capital improvement projects beginning the end of 2011 that would finally allow for an in-depth review of our community's engineering needs going forward, and a decision to fully research Cedar Corporation, an engineering firm assigned to us but not selected by us, we shortened the usual two-year appointment of City Engineer to a one-year term ending December 31, 2011. The City temporarily extended this appointment to complete the review process.

Last September the City Council approved conducting a request for proposals (RFP) for municipal engineering services. The RFP was mailed to 15 area engineering firms and was also advertised on-line and in the newspaper. Fourteen firms met with the City Administrator prior to submitting proposals to learn more about Evansville and to discuss the RFP. We received 13 proposals. A review/selection committee, composed of the Chairs of the Public Works and Water & Light Committees, the City Administrator, and me, culled the proposals to 5 firms that were invited for interviews. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 2 firms and then several reference calls were made for each of them.

The RFP listed several criteria that would be used in evaluating proposals:

1. Municipal engineering experience and qualifications generally, in similarly sized communities to Evansville, and specifically in relation to Evansville.
2. Firm client service philosophy and ability to meet City goals and policies.

3. Qualifications of the key personnel assigned to Evansville to provide engineering services.
4. The ability of the assigned staff to manage and complete projects timely and within budget.
5. Estimated fees associated with the engineering service.

Among additional criteria that were considered and discussed by the review committee during the evaluation process:

1. The firm's ability and experience to best meet Evansville's long-term needs. In 1997, our population was 3,562; in 2011, it was 5,033, a 41 percent increase in 14 years. The projected population in 2025 is just over 6,800. Our city is projected to nearly double in population from 1997-2025. Demographic changes have increased our ties to Dane County—many of our new residents come from Dane County and half of our working population drives to Madison for work.
2. The firm's "fit" in the City's efforts to improve professionalism and excellence in service delivery. The Police Department accreditation process, the RP3 program certification efforts of the Water & Light Utility, Department Head and staff training toward certifications, and installation of a consolidated City accounting system are current City service improvement activities.
3. The Common Council's commitment to top-notch service as discussed at the July 2011 Committee of the Whole meeting. Our selection committee discussed which firm would best deliver service excellence if incumbency was a not a factor in consideration.
4. Incumbency. The value of institutional knowledge and built relationships that Foth/Cedar brings from more than 14 years of service.
5. Input from our Public Works and Water & Light department heads.
6. Expertise in operation of wastewater treatment facilities using a mechanical treatment process.
7. The firm's ability to address our staffing needs adequately and provide back-up staffing.
8. The firm's policy and experience with conflicts of interest, doing work for both a private developer and the municipality.
9. Comments and opinions of reference checks.
10. Upcoming changes in Council and City staff, with three new Council members, new City Engineer and new City Administrator.

While taking into account all of the above factors, I gave specific in-depth consideration to a number of these criteria in my own decision making. First, our City Engineer needs to provide the necessary expertise required for our new wastewater treatment plant. Our current upgrade occurred with Foth/Cedar as our engineer. Town and Country has strong background with wastewater treatment facilities, including the mechanical treatment process of our new plant.

Town and Country is located in Madison. Cedar Corporation is located in Menomonie, more than 225 miles from Evansville. As the result of their alliance with Foth, Cedar has

four employees in Madison. Cedar has indicated their intention to grow the Madison office.

Town and Country has no private engineering clients. They handle only municipal work. In late 2006, an engineering conflict of interest issue arose in the biodiesel plant project. Foth was doing work for North Prairie Production and the City. The City had to contract for certain engineering services by another firm. It was a bumpy experience. Cedar Corporation has stated they will not undertake private engineering work in Evansville while serving as City Engineer. It is a moot point if a firm does only municipal engineering.

Town and Country is cost efficient, operating with low overhead. The firm does no marketing. The firm has an extensive mapping service, an area of past difficulty for us. The company's many other regional clients offer possible opportunities for cooperation.

Since its formation in 1981, Town and Country Engineering has never lost a client. The reference section of their proposal included a list of their clients, with key contact information. Our reference calls for Town and Country indicated highly satisfied clients. Conversations with communities that recently switched engineering services to Town and Country reported smooth transitions. Cedar reported an annual retention rate of 92 percent, a respectable number, and references were mostly favorable.

A particularly difficult issue for me when looking at the importance of incumbency was our relationship with Dave Sauer. Dave has been the Foth/Cedar engineer designated to work in Evansville since 1997. When the alliance between Foth and Cedar occurred a year ago, Dave became an employee of Cedar. Dave is a very nice person. He cares about Evansville. I am respectful of the nearly fifteen years of service he has provided to Evansville and the relationships and friendships he has built here. Following much thought, the resolution to the conflict I was feeling was provided by remembering the Common Council discussion at the Committee of the Whole meeting last summer. The Council was strong in its commitment to provide the highest quality, timely, efficient, and economical service to our residents. It re-focused my attention to the best overall decision going forward for Evansville, taking into account all of the factors of excellent service. Our city received a not-so-subtle reminder, with our change in engineers because of the Foth/Cedar alliance, that our engineering services contract is with a firm, not an individual.

I also spent much time thinking about the coming changes to our Council and City Staff. Reflection on my years of serving as mayor made me realize that we will be able to handle the coming changes. In summer 2006, shortly after I first became mayor, there were three new aldermen, a new mayor, a brand new financial director, we were without a City Administrator, the City Clerk had been on the job for a year, and the City Planner, City Attorney, City Auditor, and City Assessor were all eighteen months into their positions. The economy was still humming and the City was in the beginning of the extensive, detailed work on the biodiesel project. We handled all of it. The City is very capable of handling this current transition.

The selection committee did not reach consensus. However, we did reach a majority decision that Town and Country Engineering is the best fit for Evansville and will provide excellent service to our community. The divergent issue was concern about the loss of experience with imminent Council and City Staff changes. As I have stated, I have no doubt that the City is capable of handling this transition.

Community Announcements

The third and final airing of the Evansville episode of Discover Wisconsin will be on January 14. Discover Wisconsin typically airs at 6:30 p.m. on WKOW-TV. Check your television guide for the actual air time.

Christmas trees can be placed on your terrace for pick-up. The tree should be free of ornaments and tinsel and should not be bagged.

Community Congratulations/Thanks

Evansville thanks Scott George for thirty-three years of dedicated service to our community as he retires as Evansville Water and Light Superintendent. Through the years, Scott has worked for the Public Works Department, the Evansville Fire Department, including as Chief, and the Evansville Water and Light Utility.