

**Public Works and Utilities Division
UTILITIES BILLINGS OFFICE**

STRATEGIC PLAN

June 15, 2007

Mission Statement: The Utilities Billings Office will provide to the City of Spokane's utilities customers superior customer service in the areas of refuse, sewer and water billing while providing sound billing and collection systems to support the City's utilities and the Regional Solid Waste Disposal System.

Abbreviated List of Key Customers:

- The rate payers of the City's utilities departments
- The City utilities departments:
 - Solid Waste
 - Regional Solid Waste
 - Wastewater
 - Water
- City General Fund

Abbreviated List of Office Products and Services:

- Customer service for 160,000 City utilities customers contacts per year, 10,000 per representative
- 900,000 bills yearly for the City utilities
- Account maintenance of over 72,000 utilities accounts
- Credit and Collection services for the City utilities departments, 12,000 property contacts (3,000 per collector) per year

Strategic Analysis – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT):

Strengths:

1. Excellent customer service.
2. The office has well established policies and procedures.
3. The computer system is very good for the uses to which it is currently put.

Weaknesses:

1. High turn over caused by a lack of employee opportunity. It takes two years in the office to reach a level of competence, up to five years to become expert. Half of the office has less than five years in the office, one fourth have less than two years. By the time employees are trained, they are eligible to promote out.

2. Too much reliance on manual operations. This leads to too many opportunities for the making of errors.

Opportunities:

1. A proper reorganization of the office can both save money and improve efficiency by fostering the retention of good employees.
2. Enhance automated systems to limit the number and severity of errors and improve efficiency. Implementation of the new Permits System is an example.
3. Enhance programs to find and correct existing service errors

Threats:

1. A catastrophic computer and/or phone system failure.
2. Costly errors caused by miscommunications.
3. The loss of key personnel.

Key Success Factors (KSF):

1. Percent of lost phone calls. These should be kept to less than 5%.
2. Percent of revenue collected to revenue billed. This is currently over 99%.
3. Amount of account receivables over 90 days old. Reduce to an amount less than the equivalent of 1% of the yearly billed amount. (Full implementation by 9/4/07)

Goals and Strategies:

GOAL #1 Implement Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system as recommended in the Matrix Report (Mayor's Priority for Customer Service) (Utilities Billing, pg. 19-4, Buckets #2,5.) (SWOT – Opportunities)

Strategy

Coordinate with the MIS Department to create and implement an IVR system. Also work with Parking Violations and Permits as necessary to allow them to create their own systems.

GOAL #2 Implement reorganization plans that will enhance the efficiency of the office by both saving cost and improving customer service. The plan is based on a recommendation in the Matrix Report (Mayor's Priority for Financial Stability) (Utilities Billing, pg. 19-3, Bucket #2.) (SWOT – Opportunities)

Strategy

The Accounting Clerk currently assigned to Utilities Billings will be eliminated from the office's budget by moving it to Public Works & Utilities where a vacant position will be eliminated. This will save \$56,225 per year.

Excessive employee turnover adversely affects the office mission. The turnover requires remaining personnel to spend too much time training new

hires and filling in for vacated positions. This leads to increased risks of billing errors and reduced customer service,

A vacated Clerk II position will be eliminated and two other Clerk II positions will upgrade to Clerk III. This will have a positive effect on the office mission, including customer service, as efficiency improves due to retention rates increases. A financial analysis shows this will also have a 2007 cost savings of \$37,296 and a future yearly savings of \$48,793. (By 7/1/07)

GOAL #3 Develop performance measures for the office as suggested in the Matrix report that will enhance the delivery of excellent customer service to the rate payers of the City's enterprise funds operations (Mayor's Priority for Customer Services) (Utilities Billing Section, pg. 19-5, Bucket #2.) (SWOT – KSF)

Strategy

Create an employee committee to assist the supervisors in creating reasonable standards for each position and developing reports that will help the managers and supervisor ensure that the goal of excellent customer service continues to be accomplished. (Full implementation by 7/1/07)

GOAL #4 Enhance customer service by improving and properly maintaining the office web site. (Mayor's Priority for Customer Service) (SWOT – Opportunity) (Not a Matrix suggestion.)

Strategy

Work with Public Works and Utilities and MIS personnel to upgrade the existing site and develop new sections that will provide needed, accurate and updated information to citizens. (Phase 1 is complete. This is an ongoing process as needs and changes are determined.)