

Member Article:

Strategic Master Planning Produces Major Results

David Jacobs, City of Garland Project Manager

The City of Garland Texas Water Utilities Department implemented a strategic technologies planning process in its organization in 2003 that has resulted in creating forward thinking that is in tune with the City's management agenda. The management agenda is an agreement between the Council and City Manager that addresses five (5) priorities for implementing positive change and improvements city-wide.

The strategic technologies planning concept was created in 2003 to outline a methodology to position the department in a more aggressive role so that it could take advantage of a wide variety of available technologies. The following obvious questions followed: How does such an undertaking begin? What are the needs? What types of technologies fit the department? How are these technologies funded?

To answer these basic questions and others a series of meetings were held at all levels of the organization to begin the planning process and from the meeting came an outlined approach for the plan. A technologies committee was developed at staff level to become a method to transmit and receive information and needs from the field into the planning process. Higher-level meetings were held between Managers and the department Managing Director Jack May to develop a vision as well as deciding upon a planning time period and to formulate a structure of how to successfully implement the plan for maximum reward. By June 2003, a three (3) year cycle was agreed upon

and the strategic master plan began to evolve.

Master Plan Components

The first three (3) year cycle was seen as a period in time to create a solid base for future endeavors. To that end, the 2003-2006 Strategic Master Plan covered the following key areas, namely:

- 1) Field Enhancements
(How Water Utility completes work orders in field)
- 2) Office and Internal Communication Enhancements
(How Water Utility communicates internally)
- 3) Outward Communication Enhancements
(How Water Utility communicates outwardly to citizens, customers)

The Master Plan was divided into a series of one-year annual plans for implementation purposes. "We found that one year at a time gives us the maximum opportunity for successful implementation" noted May. Annual action plans contained elements of all key areas and implementation occurred throughout the 3-year period systematically with the plan facilitator selecting areas from each key area and Managers and Managing Director approving the annual action plan prior to its implementation.

Field Enhancements

The primary enhancements that were noted and have been implemented include: the development of

a new work management system (front and back end) that would accept wireless work order data transmissions; automated dispatch operation; and devices to provide wireless communication.

Mobile Digital Terminal (MDT) were funded through the City's 2004 Capital Improvements program (CIP) for implementation into over forty (40) vehicles so that as work orders are created in the office they can be electronically sent to the vehicles equipped with MDT's and wirelessly transmitted back and forth. A field crew is now able to access the information then drive to the location, complete the work, and clear the work order directly from the field. Work order information then is sent wirelessly back through the city network to the new work management system.

To keep up with the whereabouts of city assets (vehicles) an integrated work order and automated vehicle location (AVL) system has been implemented that records the movement in GPS waypoints and posts directional movement on the City's GIS map system. "A work order with AVL integration tied to GIS is where folks doing innovative work will want to be" added May.

Office and Internal Communication

This key area of the plan involved improved ways in which the department could provide better internal management of its systems like CIP planning, management reporting,

for Water Utility

budget preparation, benchmarking and forecasting, and systems maintenance.

About twelve (12) components were selected as necessary enhancements, improvements and stability of its internal communication areas. Examples of components are a GIS based Customer Information System, development of a web based SQL backend database, new intranet web based front end, GIS infrastructure routing, voice digital phone recording, asset documentation, water/sewer modeling, skill training module for crews, line segment infrastructure documentation, radio read meter replacement program (ERT meters) and an automated information and resolution system for capturing work order completion information for callbacks to customers notifying of work completion. Most of the funding for this key area is from operating funds with supplemental funding coming from ongoing CIP funding.

Outward Communication Enhancements

Customer service is the focus of this key area of the plan. A stated goal was to "close the loop" on communication to the utility's customers. Prior to the development of the automated information and resolution (AIRS) system, the customer had to reinitiate contact with the water utility to find out the resolution to previously requested work like repairs to main breaks, sewer overflows and

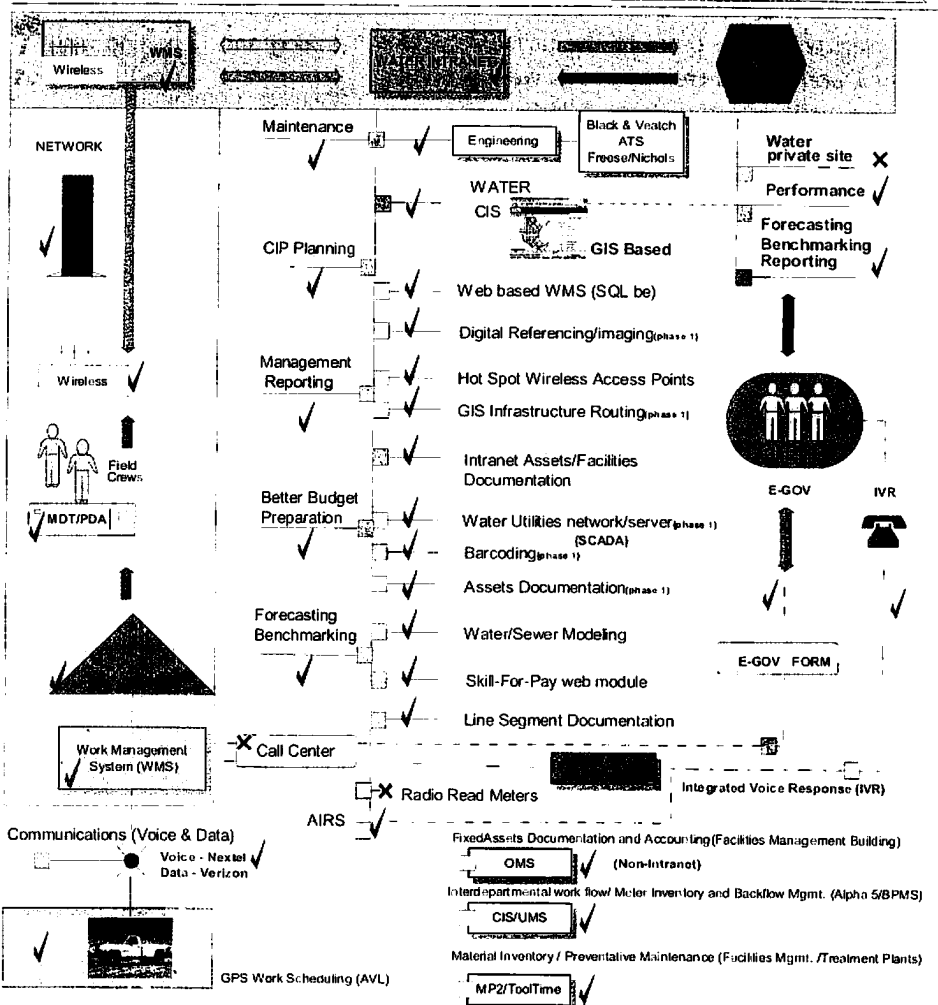
Garland Water Utilities Strategic Master Plan



Water Utilities 3 Year Plan 2003-2006

City Manager Management Agenda

- Maximize Employee Resources
- Enhance Financial Accountability
- Responsiveness Council/Citizens
- Management Focus on Results
- Keep Pace with Citizen Expectations



Where does Water Utilities want to be in 3 years?

- Mobile Integrated Workforce Management
- Fixed Assets /Infrastructure Tracking and Reporting
- Enhanced Communication capabilities to improve response to Citizens/Council

<div style="background-color: black; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	03/04 04/05 05/06	Revised: 07/17/06 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In Process <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Completed
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Continued on next page →

water meter leaks. With the implementation of AIRS, the utility has been able to call back its customers with information regarding the date and time the work has been done along with a reference number that is used for obtaining additional information about the work. Then if the customer is unsatisfied with results they may send the utility an email from the water website that reinitiates action or they may contact the utility by phone using the reference number to reengage work activity. Additionally, Internet based customers may choose from a category of ten (10) basic work area issues and then forward their request for service through the Internet in the form of an e-government type electronic work order to the utility. All work orders created in this way are sent wirelessly to the field for work activity. These work orders are specially marked so as they are closed in the field an email is automatically

sent back to the customer via email advising that work has been successfully completed. If follow-up work is required the customer sends the utility a return email and the work order is reopened until such time that a satisfactory final resolution occurs.

What stated advancements did the Water Utility strive to have completed upon the conclusion of the three (3) year strategic master plan?

The Water Utility had three primary objectives they sought upon completion of implementation efforts. They were as follow:

- Mobile Integrated Work Management (field mobility)
- Fixed Assets/Infrastructure Tracking and Reporting
- Enhanced Communication Capabilities to Improve and Enhance Response to Citizens and the Council

The utility has been successful in obtainment of stated objectives. What has made the plan even more successful was the desire of the Utility to integrate the City's management agenda into the master planning process. As a result, the five priorities established between city management and the Council is directly woven into each of the key areas chosen by the utility and forms the foundation of the master plan. According to May, "We are doing what we have been asked to do by our city leaders, in innovative ways."

What's Next?

The Utility is actively engaged in its next three (3) year Strategic Master planning process covering 2007-2010.

For more information please contact David Jacobs, Project Manager at (972) 205-3204 or email address djacobs@ci.garland.tx.us ♦

Your Town - Your Schedule

National Waterworks leads the industry in material management services and on the spot delivery of the products, technology and services that municipalities and contractors need day-in and day-out. With over 130 branches in 36 states, and a fleet of over 400 delivery vehicles, our customers are assured fast service and delivery. Plus, National Waterworks delivers with specialized on-line inventory control and billing software that lets you do more with less!

For more information on how you can put **National Waterworks** to work for **YOU**, just visit www.nationalwaterworks.com or call your area Texas representative. We will respond right away.



TEXAS:

Austin 800-995-9344 Belton 800-851-8998 Brownsville 800-635-2408
Corpus Christi 800-548-8258 Dallas 800-252-1557
Houston (North) 281-890-3036 Houston (Central) 800-633-0348
Kyle 512-268-3000 McAllen 800-333-5838
San Antonio (East) 800-544-4901 San Antonio (West) 800-444-2573
Tyler 800-444-2381 Waco 800-876-7910

**National
Waterworks**

Ask us about

CAP

Local Service, Nationwide