

Date: January 18, 2024

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager



From: Joe Ambrosini, Director of Human Resources



For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Proposed City of Long Beach Charter Amendment-Civil Service Reform**

The City of Long Beach (City) is grappling with a major organizational challenge with an inefficient and outdated recruitment and hiring process that dramatically impacts our existing workforce and the community we serve. On a national level, 2021 saw an astonishing 47 million Americans resign from their positions, and this trend continues into 2023, with an additional 4 million resignations reported in February. The widespread phenomenon known as the “Great Resignation” has left profound impact on our City, resulting in a significant rise in employee turnover and job vacancies. Long Beach is not exempt from this labor market turbulence, leading to a concerning 22 percent citywide vacancy rate, with specific departments experiencing even higher vacancy rates. These staffing challenges place an unwarranted strain on our City’s operations and capacity to meet the needs of our community.

The overall time that it takes to recruit and hire vacant positions in the City has not significantly improved, despite several years of increased funding and attempting to seek improvements and efficiencies. The City currently operates a hiring system that includes two distinct categories. The Civil Service Department manages the hiring of classified positions, while the Human Resources Department is responsible for the oversight and recruitment of unclassified positions. The current system is not meeting the needs of the organization as evidenced by recent data from 2021 and 2022 that reflect an average of over seven months to fill a classified vacancy through the current system. The actual timing was much longer when an existing eligible list of candidates was not immediately available. According to NEOGOV (a widely used public sector applicant tracking platform), the average time to fill a vacancy in a local government agency such as Long Beach is less than four months, however, Long Beach’s processes currently take over 42 percent longer than the nationwide average.

Background

This proposal stems from a significant evaluation of how the City’s current recruitment and selection processes compare to other agencies in terms of best practices and meeting the needs of the organization. The concept of better aligning the Human Resources and Civil Service departments has been a topic of discussion for many years. It was extensively reviewed in 2007 by Management Partners, now known as Baker-Tilly, as part of an independent assessment of the City’s recruitment, hiring, and retention practices. This review recommended an amendment to the City Charter to establish a single, centralized personnel department that would encompass the functions of both the existing Civil Service and Human Resources Departments.

The Management Partners' report uncovered several shortcomings in our existing system, including the lack of a clear mission, vision, values, or standardized practices related to recruitment, selection, and hiring. Discrepancies between the technologies used by the two departments were noted, resulting in confusion among employees and applicants regarding the responsibilities of each entity.

The cities of Long Beach and San Diego are the only two large cities in California that have both a Human Resources Department and a Civil Service Department that function and operate independently from one another.

Proposed Model

The powers and duties of the Long Beach Civil Service Commission are like other jurisdictions, with the exception that, in Long Beach, the Civil Service Commission is burdened with administrative tasks that are handled by human resources staff in other jurisdictions. Other cities in California, both large and small, have one central department (e.g., Human Resources) that handles all the personnel-related functions to avoid duplication and inefficiencies. Given the City's unique structure, there is an opportunity to align these two functions to provide a better way to serve employees and the City's recruitment and hiring needs while still maintaining a merit-based recruitment system and allowing for an independent disciplinary appeal process for classified employees. The Commission will continue to carry out the City Charter mandate to hear and review disciplinary appeals filed by City employees in a classified position. The Commission will continue to receive and resolve complaints relative to the hiring process of the classified service and rule on appeals of industrial retirement determinations.

The proposed amendment to the City Charter aims to modernize our recruitment and hiring processes to effectively address these challenges. They involve renaming the Civil Service Commission to the Civil Service Employee Rights and Appeals Commission and transferring administrative responsibilities to the Human Resources Department. The Commission would remain independent as it is today, and its decisions on Employee Appeals would remain independent from management, providing employees with a fully-independent appeals body. Responsibility for the examination and certification of the classified service, creation of classifications, maintenance of eligibility lists and other hiring functions will be handled by the Human Resources Department following Civil Service rules and regulations. Merit-based hiring standards would remain, with employees hired based on qualifications, skills, and abilities. The City would continue to use a system of classified and unclassified service, and those definitions would remain unchanged. The Civil Service Rules and Regulations in effect would remain in place unless and until amendments thereto are adopted by the City Council. The existing staff in the Civil Service Department would transition to the Human Resources Department, ensuring that there is no loss of employment for current City employees. This change mirrors the structure of other commissions, such as the Planning, Parks and Recreation, Marine Advisory, or Cultural Heritage Commissions.

Goals and Benefits

The proposed HR/Civil Service Charter Amendment is driven by a set of comprehensive goals, aimed at enhancing the overall effectiveness of our city's administrative functions and meeting the evolving needs of Long Beach:

1. Streamlined Recruitment and Hiring: The primary objective is to align Long Beach's recruitment and selection processes within a single department, the Human Resources Department, encompassing both classified and unclassified service. This strategic consolidation will pave the way for greater operational efficiency, the reduction of superfluous bureaucracy, and notably, a considerable improvement in the city's timeline for hiring vacant positions.
2. Upholding the Civil Service and Merit System: The proposed amendment places a strong emphasis on preserving and nurturing Long Beach's Civil Service and Merit system, which stands as a cornerstone of our commitment to merit-based hiring practices. This commitment ensures the continued employment of qualified individuals within the classified service.
3. Expedited Disciplinary Appeals: The proposal seeks to empower the Civil Service Employee Rights and Appeals Commission ("Commission") to focus exclusively on the adjudication of disciplinary appeals related to classified employees. This specialization is expected to lead to more expedient and efficient resolution of these cases.
4. Localized Preferences: The proposal introduces preferences within the classified recruitment process to create a more localized and community-centered approach. This includes increased opportunities for candidates residing within the city limits of Long Beach, thus bolstering the connection between the workforce and the community we serve.
5. Educational Institutions Proximity: Preferences are extended to candidates who have graduated from specific educational institutions situated within a ten-mile radius of Long Beach. This aims to strengthen ties between our city and local academic institutions while fostering the recruitment of talent nurtured within our community.
6. Supporting Current "Non-Career" Employees: Recognizing the value of our existing workforce, the proposal establishes preferences for current "Non-Career" employees, ensuring that their dedication and service to the City are duly recognized and rewarded.
7. Empowering Internship and Apprenticeship Participants: Acknowledging the importance of cultivating talent from within, preferences in the classified recruitment process are provided to current participants of City-sponsored internship or local/ regional apprenticeship programs that align with the job requirements. This encouragement of professional development aligns with our commitment to nurturing homegrown talent and support of internship and apprentice programs.

8. Maintaining an Independent Commission: This proposal would maintain an independent Commission who would hear employee appeals and serve as the body to independently determine whether to uphold management's disciplinary decision or determine another course of action. The Commission would deliberate on facts provided by management and the employee, and render their independent decision. The Commission will continue to receive and resolve complaints relative to the hiring process of the classified service and rule on appeals of industrial retirement determinations. The Commission would also receive an annual report on hiring in the City to measure progress in meeting the goals of the reform effort.

These goals collectively contribute to a vision of a more efficient, community-centered, and responsive city government, committed to merit-based hiring practices and the continuous improvement of our service delivery to the residents of Long Beach.

The consolidation of these two departments brings about the following potential benefits:

- Reduction in the time required to recruit and hire staff, setting a goal of hiring most positions within 90 business days on average.
- The creation of a unified mission, vision, values, and standardized processes for guiding all personnel practices.
- Integrated practices would cover the entire spectrum of employee-related issues, from hiring, compensation, orientation, and ongoing development.
- Consolidation of technology systems would reduce duplication and enhance efficiency.
- Delegation of Administrative matters to City staff, streamlining the process.
- Expediting the timeline for hearing classified employee disciplinary appeals, as the Commission would have additional capacity to hear cases.
- The elimination of redundant processes between the two departments.

Furthermore, the experiences of other cities in California including Fresno, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Jose, and Santa Ana, served as an inspiration for this proposal. These cities have effectively centralized their Human Resources functions while maintaining a Civil Service Commission dedicated to merit-based hiring and handling of disciplinary appeals. By adopting a similar model, Long Beach aims to address current inefficiencies, offer a streamlined and efficient hiring process, and, most importantly, enhance its ability to serve the needs of the community effectively.

The next step for City staff is to initiate the meet and confer process with our labor partners regarding the proposed charter amendment. This amendment is a critical step toward a more efficient, responsive, and modern city government. It will lead to faster hiring, quicker resolution of appeals, and an enhanced capacity to serve the needs of our community. After meet and

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confer, the proposal will be heard three times by the City Council prior to a decision to place an amendment before voters for the November 2024 election.

If you have any questions, please contact Joe Ambrosini, Director of Human Resources, at Joe.Ambrosini@longbeach.gov or at 562- 570-6140.

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