

APPLICATION TEMPLATE FOR CITY COUNCIL PROGRAMS FUNDED BY AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN
2021 – 2024

COUNCILMEMBER: _____JC Harris_____

NAME OF PROJECT/EXPENDITURE: Director Of Environmental Strategy

OUTCOME INTENDED: Create an FTE and support staff to manage the environmental assets of Des Moines to optimize long term public health, economic development and tourism

This person's initial tasks to include:

- a) Create a Strategic Climate Action Plan which will be integrated into all planning decision
- b) Develop a strategic approach towards quantifying, reducing and mitigating the negative impacts from Sea-Tac Airport--including issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those impacts should be explored across all domains including economic development, tourism, real estate values, educational outcomes, health risks, etc.
- c) Develop a strategic approach towards water quality issues across all three shorelines and water systems in order to enhanced the tourism value of Des Moines
- d) Develop a strategic approach towards tree management, including residential, commercial and forest with a particular emphasis on enhancing the value of tourism
- e) Educate the public and improve awareness to build support
- f) Act as legislative advocate on all related legislation
- g) Identify and develop grant funding to support all these goals
- h) Organize other governments and organizations towards coordinated and strategic responses

Background

Above all, the position of Environmental Strategist is pro-active. The successful candidate will be a person with legal, technical, lobbying and organizational skills who can, above all else *lead* rather than respond. Finding that person is, in itself no small undertaking.

Once on board, the Environmental Strategist's first task will be to create to develop a plan to manage the critical environmental issues of Des Moines, primarily, but not limited to the airport, shoreline and trees. Their job will be to establish clear goals to reduce our climate footprint and to reduce the impacts from external sources such as Sea-Tac Airport.

This person's sole interest will be in protecting the environment and public health of Des Moines.

They will have no other agendas. It has been common practice for cities to assign elected and staff to work on various environmental issues. However, to one extent or another, these individuals always have to take into account competing concerns such as economic development. In order to be successful, the Environmental Strategist *must* have no real or perceived conflicts with their essential mission. It is to be *expected* that they may occasionally be in tension with other City staff over various goals—just as there will always be a healthy tension between development and environmental stewardship.

AIRPORT

The fundamental flaw in all community responses to airport growth over the decades has been that they tend to be reactive. Communities *respond* to events and actions initiated by the Operator and the FAA and almost immediately dissolve once any particular event has been resolved—usually poorly.

The Environmental Strategist's primary task is to re-think that entire premise. Her job will be to plan, manage and act, *not* react.

To illustrate why this position is needed, and why this is a different approach, consider something quite different from an airport: a coastal town in South Carolina.

A coastal town will have ongoing shoreline management issues (eg. zoning, erosion, water quality, etc.) But they will also have to prepare for major events every few years such as storms. Unfortunately, in the past very few cities did any of that on their own—mainly because they lacked the political will. Ultimately the results were devastating for both residents and taxpayers.

To address this, many years ago the Federal government put into place a set of rules *requiring* such towns to create a management plan. Now, every such town has a professional manager—a trained multi-disciplinary expert whose job it is not only to deal with day to day issues, but also who knows what to do to plan for and respond to those big storms. They have multiple ongoing systems in place to prevent damage and respond effectively; and these are worked out years in advance. They also continuously strategise and lobby for better practices and better funding options at all levels of government. In general, storm damage is now prevented and mitigated many orders of magnitude better now than in prior decades.

From a community viewpoint, an airport is much the same as that coastal town. There should be day to day management—sound and air quality mitigation packages, negotiating flight paths, noise and air quality monitoring etc. But beyond that you also need a strategy in place to prepare for 'storms'—the expansions that occur every 10 years or so.

Unlike hurricanes, airport expansions are predictable. (eg. The SAMP was first discussed in 2012.) So one can develop responses *years* in advance, with legislation, investigation and negotiation. To do that we need to identify and cultivate both talent and funding sources. We need to recognize that Sea-Tac Airport is at bottom, a very complex set of ongoing factory processes. We should be constantly monitoring not only its emissions, but also its procedures and processes.

We also need a continuity of knowledge—the ability to pass on information and insight from administration to administration so that the City learns as it goes and never has to 'reinvent the wheel'.

Instead, what all airport communities have traditionally done is to *react* to events. They wait until the Operator unveils *their* process (usually environmental review) and they follow *their* playbook (even though that playbook can be predicted to a high degree of certainty.) Cities *outsource* their responses by hiring from a small group of industry insiders who all tend to deploy the same conventional tactics. After the event is resolved, everyone goes home. So at the next event cities have to reinvent the same wheel.

Also: outsourced parties can never develop any true knowledge of the community or its politics. Their entire strategy is based on FAA and NEPA regulations and their generalized experience of working with

other airports. In reality, it is local and regional political factors that determine the major outcomes as much as the formal process. And those factors *cannot* be managed without ‘on the ground’ expertise. In short, **airport management is as much about understanding the politics as it is any legal or technical expertise.**

Beyond that, with each expansion, it is usually *not* electeds who are the first to engage. Various community groups arise and *then* electeds try their best to respond. But each stakeholder has different needs, wants and desires and almost none are true experts. Aside from that, these groups tend to also have the problem of a lack of continuity. They too usually have to re-learn and reinvent the wheel. Worse, they have no statutory authority or access to the politics. All these factors lead them to also end up employing similar conventional tactics.

Lastly, there is the fact that each city also has very different expressed interests and any mutually agreed upon strategy tends to be less than optimal for the City Of Des Moines.

The end results of all these factors are usually years of endless meetings, committees, studies and other very noble efforts that make the public feel like *something* is happening, but which ultimately provide at best only modest benefit.

No City can hope to compete successfully with organizations like the Port Of Seattle or the FAA working this way. The Port has a team of experts in each department and all of them have decades of experience. (Note that many of the same people working on the SAMP were also working on the Third Runway—*that* is institutional knowledge at work.) Communities have no similar expertise, no ongoing strategy, no long term plan and *no continuity*. The Port Of Seattle and the FAA have all those things.

The Environmental Strategist will provide the expertise and leadership necessary to successfully take on the ambitious goals of managing noise and pollution and fairly compensating the residents of Des Moines for the negative impacts from Sea-Tac Airport.

WATER

When it comes to shore and creeks, the City Of Des Moines has an embarrassment of riches. Unfortunately, the management of these resources is governed by many agencies, often with unclear jurisdictions and competing priorities. This makes it difficult to develop a strategy that safeguards public health, protects the environment and optimizes our tourism experience. The Environmental Strategist will create a cohesive strategy to do that. She will also develop a legislative agenda promoting funding for upgrades to infrastructure and smarter shoreline and habitat restoration policies. **This work is essential in order for the City to develop a successful eco-tourism industry.**

TREES

Like the entire region, the City is experiencing an ongoing decline in tree cover and difficulties in maintaining its forested areas. There are many interested parties including residents and business. And again there are many agencies that strive to improve tree cover but no strategic policy for Des Moines or for the region. The Environmental Strategist will establish specific goals to increase tree cover throughout Des Moines and suggest policies to make it happen. She will promote tree planting in residential and business zones. She will develop a legislative agenda promoting funding for parks and

forest management. **This work is essential in order for the City to promote tourism and combat climate change.**

LIMITED TERM OR STRUCTURAL (ONGOING)

If Structural, How Will Project/Expenditure Be Funded After 2024

Limited. The initial funding would cover departmental setup and salaries through 2024 as a proof of concept. In 2024, the department will undergo a performance review at which time a decision will be made to continue funding within the regular budgeting process.

COST TO IMPLEMENT/ANNUALLY

\$1,000,000 allocated as \$200,000 from 2022-2026 (salary for 1 FTE, ½ FTE administrative, setup expenses including travel, research and IT.)

JUSTIFICATION UNDER FEDERAL GUIDELINES *(attached to this sheet)*

COVID Response/Economic Development/Tourism/Public Health