

OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS



A Report by Parish President Michael B. Cooper's 200-Day Committee

2020

A message from President Michael B. Cooper

When I began to set priorities that would guide my new administration, I did so not only with the best interests of St. Tammany Parish in mind but also with the input of members of our community.

What none of us could have possibly known at the time is that we would be faced with a global pandemic that would threaten our families, jobs, and community. Today, as we move through the difficulties presented by the pandemic and look forward to future recovery and resiliency, I am releasing a citizen-centered 200-Day Committee report focused on our collective vision for St. Tammany Parish.

The report includes a series of recommendations to guide us in the short-term, throughout my first years, and beyond my tenure as Parish President. It is important to note that the content of the report was generated by a broad-based citizen-led committee. I believe it is important to share this report with our citizens who worked to create this report and took the time to share their ideas based on the information they collected.

The report-based recommendations include: citizens' needs, future vision, and a community that offers affordable housing for all, gainful employment close to home, and the preservation of our natural resources — especially clean air and clean water. The committee's recommendations for action present solutions to meld the protection of our environment with sustainable development. They offer strong suggestions on how to create a Parish Government that is responsive to our citizenry as a whole — where all voices are heard.

I am deeply grateful for the hard work of the community members that created the 200 Day Committee report.

Today, I find many of their recommendations even more important because we will need bold and urgent solutions. Many of these issues were discussed during the election campaign, and I look forward to working with the Council on the following: increased economic opportunity; housing policy to meet the needs of our residents; efficient transportation; sustainable development; and coastal protection and restoration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'm3 Cooper', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael B. Cooper
St. Tammany Parish President

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Introduction



As a candidate, President Mike Cooper pledged to be engaged in the community, receiving input from citizens to continue to make St. Tammany parish one of best places to live. He immediately made good on that pledge in forming a 200-Day Committee to help ensure that St. Tammany Parish government would continue to look beyond its walls to formulate solutions to difficult problems.

This ad-hoc body, made up of a broad and diverse cross-section of community stakeholders, was charged with helping to identify critical issues and strategies for the incoming administration. Since team members were neither employed by the parish nor otherwise compensated by the parish, their recommendations are independent. This report does not intend to be the blueprint for every decision to be made by parish president Cooper over the next four years. Rather, it is our hope that it serves as a compass.

All citizens expect a government that is open, accessible and responsive to their needs amid an unfolding disaster. The new administration has the opportunity and has shown the will to make changes to best address the varying needs of the people who call this parish home. This report provides the parish president and his team with a long list of actionable recommendations aimed at making St. Tammany parish “the best place to call home.”

One of the most glaring and concerning findings is that a healthy environment is not only important for the well-being of our residents, but also an economic driver that makes our parish more viable. A healthier parish dramatically improves the quality of life for residents, saves the parish money and increases our competitiveness and ability to attract new residents, businesses and tourism.

Introduction

As we prepare for new residents and preserve our quality of life for long-term residents, we must encourage thoughtful land use and infrastructure planning, ensuring that we can get where we need to go with the least negative impact on our environment. We need a strategy for drainage improvements and efficient delivery of water and sewer services.

While it is impossible for a team of community volunteers to do a full in-depth operational audit, we do recommend and encourage the parish to consider a more extensive analysis into the financial and technical aspects of parish operations, to include outside professional financial review and participation.

The findings and recommendations in this report include ideas that are specific and actionable items. The report seeks to strike a practical balance between investing in St. Tammany Parish's long-term and short-term needs. Some are small and presumably easy to accomplish, while others are complex and will require significant time, resources and stakeholder involvement to implement. Some recommendations require little if any funding; some would mean a large investment; while still others could require legislative action.

While we provide recommendations that we believe are achievable, we also recognize that unexpected barriers may arise and it may not be possible to implement every recommendation. Whether the recommendations were small or large, global or specific, similar themes emerged from the committee.



Cross-Cutting Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerged repeatedly, in various forms, across the 200-Day Committee's areas of concentration. They apply overall as the administration moves forward with plans and ideas.



1. Facilitate ongoing input

Establish avenues for community input in planning, policy recommendations and assessments of needs. This begins by ensuring diverse community representation on all parish boards, commissions, task forces, working groups and other bodies.

2. Enable two-way communication

Create a culture of transparency and collaboration within parish government, as well as between the parish and the community to foster a culture in which ideas, suggestions and concerns are welcome and valued, and information generated by parish government is made broadly available.

3. Assess and restructure

Think creatively about the structure and staffing of parish government, with strategic restructuring over time.

4. Maximize shared spaces

Assess parish buildings—occupied and unoccupied—for efficiency and community benefit. Develop a plan for achieving the highest and best community use for each parish-owned property.

5. Improve access

Minimize red tape and improve the accessibility of parish services and spaces. Digitize parish services and forms and continue to utilize social media to share information, while ensuring access to paper and other traditional media for those without internet.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

6. Work in partnership

Expand and deepen collaboration among residents, community organizations, neighborhood groups, local governmental agencies and St. Tammany Public Schools.

7. Recognize that everything is connected

Fundamental needs such as healthcare, affordable housing, economic security and environmental sustainability are closely intertwined, yet they are often tackled separately. Seek holistic solutions that address multiple challenges concurrently.

8. Secure new revenue

The parish is underfunded. Increased public and private dollars are needed to provide sufficient basic services, as well as to improve and expand programs.

9. Learn from other parishes

There is much to learn from the successes and failures of parishes/counties of similar size and demographics while recognizing St. Tammany's distinctiveness.

10. Plan first

Many of the recommendations in this report will not be accomplished in the short term. The parish should operate based on a comprehensive long-term plan that is under continuous review. It should consider not only these recommendations but those to come.



Cross-Cutting Recommendations



The parish government officials and staff we met with have been forthcoming and comprehensive when asked probing, detailed and complicated questions. The 200-Day Committee found parish government staff very knowledgeable in their understanding of the operations and functions of this government in service to our community. They have been completely open and transparent providing the requested figures and facts needed to produce the recommendations made in this report.

Members of the committee would like to thank President Cooper for his leadership. Inviting others to come in and offer a fresh perspective, as well as taking in suggestions from residents, is a credit to him and his administration. The first recommendation is to continue to replicate this exercise where government and citizens come together to solve community issues and participate in the restructuring and reprioritizing of government operations.

It has been our honor to take part in this process. Over the past six months, we have witnessed our community come together in the spirit of collaboration and public service during unprecedented times, helping cement our identity.

Committee Leadership

Chair: Nick Richard, Non-profit Director

Co-Chair: Rachel Brumfield, Paralegal

Committee Members

Adam Acquistapace, Entrepreneur

Carrie Calvin, CPA

Ed Dillard, CPA

Brian Glorioso, Attorney

Melissa Hodgson, Communications

Sean Morrison, Attorney

Dr. Raphael Tillman, Education

Organizational Structure

The transition of St. Tammany Parish government offers a unique opportunity to redefine and innovate the effectiveness of various internal departments in order to expand both productivity and performance. Improving the efficiency and workflow within the structure of the departments will result in a coherent system, improving the quality within each department.

Recommendation 1. Reorganization of Parish Departments.

The Committee supports the current proposed Ordinance 6405 entitled, "ORDINANCE TO AMEND SECTION 2-182 AND SECTION 2-183 OF THE ST. TAMMANY PARISH CODE OF ORDINANCES FOR THE REORGANIZATION OF PARISH DEPARTMENTS."

The Ordinance calls for the following items which relate directly to the Department of Permits and Inspections:

1. Returning the duty of issuing permits to the Department of Permits and Inspections;
2. Removing the issuance of permits from the Department of Planning and Development; and
3. Restoring Code Enforcement to this department.

The Ordinance calls for the following items which relate directly to the Department of Planning and Development:

1. Separating the Department of Engineering from the Department of Public Works and creating a new independent Department of Engineering;
2. Returning the duty of issuing permits to the Department of Permits and Inspections; and
3. Removing the issuance of permits from the Department of Planning and Development.

The Ordinance calls for the following items which relate directly to the Department of Public Works:

1. Separating the Department of Engineering from the Department of Public Works and creating a new independent Department of Engineering; and
2. Removing responsibility for administration of district capital projects and lighting districts from Public Works and moving those duties to the proposed new Department of Engineering.



Organizational Structure

Recommendation 2. Research opportunities to make Tammany Utilities a separate entity.

The parish should create a task force to research restructuring Tammany Utilities to improve its ability to provide services for the public. The parish created Tammany Utilities by purchasing two companies and merging the management under the control of the parish government. The goal was to help manage development throughout the parish and provide a uniform standard of services for everyone. Since its creation, it has remained a subdivision within the Department of Environmental Services (DES).

Its position under the DES causes two problems. First, despite its size, it has significant structural barriers to efficient operation by having the utility report to a department director, parish government and the council. This slows its ability to act on behalf of customers. Second, the Department of Environmental Services is tasked with inspections of the very utilities that it is managing. While DES is very careful about separating these responsibilities, it does present a potential conflict.

Other models exist, including oversight by board or committee, or operating as its own department. Reorganizing Tammany Utilities within parish government to address these conflicts can accomplish the original goal of improved customer service.

Recommendation 3. Restructure the current organizational model so that the Grants department is accountable to the Chief Financial Officer.

Grants are an integral element in the revenue stream of the parish and rely on financial data from the Finance department for compliance. Currently, the Grants department operates under the Chief Administrative Officer. To increase collaboration and efficiency between the Grants department and the Finance department, it is our recommendation that the Grants department be restructured to fall within the supervision of the Chief Financial Officer.

Recommendation 4. Review the funding sources and organizational structure of the St. Tammany Commission on Cultural Affairs

The Commission on Cultural Affairs appears to be the only council in the state that is solely operated under parish government. Our unique structure may be the best way to serve our area, however it is our recommendation that there be a review of the funding source and organizational structure to better meet the needs of the parish.



Parish Operations and Administration

St. Tammany Parish government continues its commitment to provide impactful leadership and accountability. The administration seeks to maintain the highest performance in parish and executive operations by providing excellent communication, management, policy implementation, adherence to governmental regulations, financial transparency and strategies for future improvements.

Recommendation 1. Systematize Plan for Department Review.

The administration should consider a review of all department staffing requirements based on the needs of the parish. A training assessment or survey must be completed following each annual training, to allow the department head to determine whether the training was beneficial and improved staff performance. An ongoing review of the budget will provide proper fiscal accountability, allowing each department to complete its responsibilities effectively. The appropriate budget projections are determined and shared with all departments to forecast the hardware, software and any other technology needs to ensure the proper function of each department.

Recommendation 2. Institutionalize Risk Management.

Liability is inherent in any organization the size of St. Tammany Parish government. The best way to manage liability is through risk management and adequate safety training in the field with various departments. The parish recently created the position of Assistant Risk Manager within the CAO. Ideally, there should be a minimum of three people handling risk management for the parish – one to provide training and two clerical staff to manage the paperwork. The parish should explore hiring additional staff for risk management and determine whether the cost of new staff will be offset by the decreased liability for the parish.

Recommendation 3. Purchasing Efficiency.

Supplies should be purchased and allocated in the most efficient manner possible. Par levels and determination of departmental use of supplies should be utilized. A warehouse should be used for basic supplies. Underutilized space should be identified and utilized for the storage of supplies that are of common nature. These supplies should be dispersed according to their most effective utilization and allocated to each department effectively. Each department should catalog and log their usage and collaboration within the Department of Procurement to determine the par and utilization levels. Departments should be graded on their efficiency of use of supplies and assets. Inventory excesses should be inventoried and reallocated to the area with the greatest need.



Parish Operations and Administration



Recommendation 4. Review Parish Government's Insurance Policies.

The parish holds numerous insurance policies to help limit liabilities. However, the new administration has an opportunity to review these policies, including but not limited to policy limits, coverage and applicable deductibles and determine whether they still fit the current needs.

Recommendation 5. Inventory of all Assets and Supplies.

The parish needs to have a current and accurate inventory of all assets and supplies for all departments. All items must be coded correctly and allocated to the proper department. Moving to a perpetual inventory system of all supplies should be the goal. The inventory should be digitized and a physical inventory should be conducted yearly of all supplies and assets.

Recommendation 6. Negotiation and Estimation.

Director of Procurement should have input on necessary changes needed to create a more effective and efficient procurement process. There is a need to hire or assign resources to the process of negotiation of terms and price of supplies and assets. Professional estimation services should also be utilized. The Request for Proposals (RFP) threshold should be evaluated and lowered if there can be savings generated.

Recommendation 7. Reinstate the Communication Department.

The current arrangement to have only a Public Information Officer, a public access television station and exceedingly tight staffing to complete the tasks assigned to the Public Information Office. This arrangement is insufficient for a parish as populated, diverse and large as St. Tammany. We recommend the new administration support the scope of the Public Information Office with appropriate personnel and status as a full-fledged Communication department with a director and staff. This includes adding staff in the TV station to enable appropriate content generation, archive curation and future growth, not least of which will need to address the federal closed-captioning requirement for broadcast TV.

Recommendation 8. Improve the parish's Community Rating System for Floodplain Management

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) has a Community Rating System (CRS) to determine flood rates. The lower the number, the better the flood protections and the lower the community's flood insurance rates. St. Tammany's CRS is 7, which may be at risk if we do not keep up the criteria. Jefferson parish, with its miles of wetlands, ocean coasts and bayous, is at a 5. St. Tammany has four certified floodplain managers, but none are currently designated to be a program coordinator. The parish should identify a coordinator with the goal of bringing the parish's CRS down to 5. This will provide significant reductions in flood insurance costs for residents and the government.

Budget and Finance

As St. Tammany parish continues to grow there will be a corresponding increase in the demand for services. This need for increased services, combined with the loss of sales tax revenue and now the COVID-19 pandemic, is projected to bring about budget shortfalls beginning with the 2022 budget. The parish government is tasked with providing a high level of services to the citizens of St. Tammany, while faced with the prospect of reduced revenue. This is not considered to be a financial crisis; however, it is a problem that needs to be resolved. Recognizing the scope of this problem, the administration is currently reviewing alternatives and formulating a plan to overcome this future budget shortfall.

Recommendation 1. Budget Shortfall 2022.

The parish administration anticipates a budget shortfall in 2022 due to the loss of funding for the maintenance of the St. Tammany Parish Justice Center and Parish Jail. Parish voters, on three different occasions, turned down the renewal of the sales tax dedicated to funding the Justice Center.

Various avenues should be explored in order to provide the necessary funding. Whether it is a combination of reducing, reallocating the overall budget or seeking a source of additional funding, the Department of Finance would be able to provide the analysis needed to facilitate the decision.

Recommendation 2. Strengthen grant-seeking capacity.

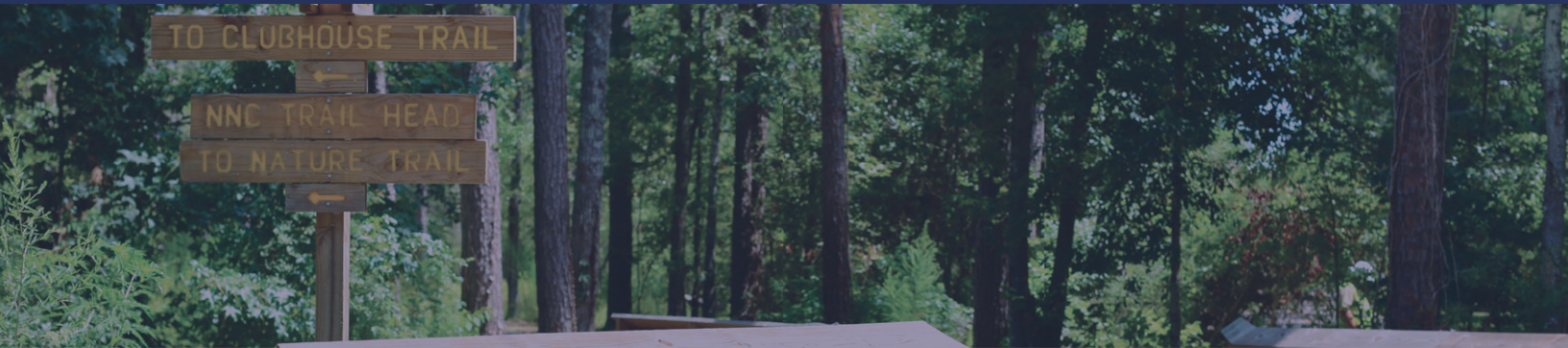
The parish competes for grants from the state and federal governments and from nonprofits and philanthropy. Over the last several years they have been active in applying for renewal grants but are showing a lack of new grant awards. The parish should assess and grow its current capacity to identify, apply for, manage and comply with grants. It should also ensure full utilization of all existing grant funding. Explore opportunities for negotiating indirect rates with granting agencies to improve administrative funding.

Recommendation 3. Allocation of Utility usage.

Departments that utilize resources of utilities should be allocating the cost into the department based on an equitable metric. Utility expense should be allocated to the departments to encourage efficient usage. Moreover, the cost allocation plan should be reviewed and analyzed to ensure equitable and understandable allocation of expenses that are attributable to the operation and use of each department. This should be reviewed and done in a manner that holds each department responsible for efficient usage of resources and ensures that they can respond to allocation and have an actionable influence over usage.



Budget and Finance



Recommendation 4. Promote the online checkbook.

Parish government is committed to transparency and the ability to provide easy access to parish financial information. These documents are readily accessible on the parish website. As many residents are not aware that the online checkbook exists, parish government should increase promotion of access to online financials.

Recommendation 5. Review multi-use facility grant.

St. Tammany Parish government should review the status of the grant funding the multi-use facility or “Safe Room,” considering current conditions to determine if the needs meet the original scope. The pandemic is requiring a shift in the physical structure of the workspace and scope of the project, resulting in a shift of costs and expenses.

Recommendation 6. Long-Term Financial Plan – Animal Services.

Based on the passing of the previous millage, the Department of Animal Services should consider the possibility of expanding the existing facility space needed to house and care for additional animals.

Recommendation 7. Utilize the state’s revolving loan fund.

The state of Louisiana provides a number of revolving loan funds designed to promote clean water, proper sewage treatment and other infrastructure priorities. These loans come with very low interest rates and it is common for all or part of the loan to be forgiven. For years, St. Tammany did not participate in these programs.

The parish should take advantage of these loan programs to improve its infrastructure, especially as it relates to Tammany Utilities. There are many deferred upgrades that could benefit from such an investment. It is noted that the Department of Environmental Services has already begun the applications of these loans. The parish should continue to pursue this course of action.

Recommendation 8. Streamline Court Fees Process.

The District Attorney’s Office and the Finance Office must find a solution to appropriately reconcile court fees and expenses. Currently, the timelines of the courts do not match the financial processing times of the Finance Office. This committee is not making a specific recommendation on how to fix the problem but recommends that the problem is addressed, creating a process which satisfies the parish’s legal, ethical and financial responsibilities, while meeting the strict filing fee requirements of the courts.

Budget and Finance

Recommendation 9. Updating Technological Devices.

Technological devices become obsolete within a short amount of time. Therefore, the administration and Department of Technology should formulate a financial plan to provide up-to-date technology, mainly computers and servers, to ensure continued reliable service to the parish. The department is currently reviewing alternatives, to properly satisfy the technological needs of the parish, as well as each department.

Recommendation 10. Additional controls to be put in place to mitigate the manual adjustments posted to the General Ledger to true-up Grants revenue.

Currently the Grants department utilizes Excel spreadsheets to record grant transactions. If the general ledger does not agree with the spreadsheets prepared by the Grants department then an adjusting journal entry is posted to bring the two into agreement. Adjustments utilized to alter source documents is a serious concern. Additional training and controls need to be put into place to mitigate the need for these adjusting entries.

Recommendation 11. User Service Fee.

Several departments charge fees for various services available to the public. Some of the fees have not been updated even though the costs to render the service has increased. It is recommended that a review of the fee structures be to determine if adjustments are necessary. The review should include a comparison of fees charged by surrounding parishes to determine if St. Tammany parish fees are competitive.



Personnel and Training

Every successful business can tell you that its workforce is the secret to its success. The St. Tammany Parish government workforce is highly specialized, with considerable experience, training and expertise. Retaining the institutional knowledge contained in the collective brain trust of our parish workforce is crucial to keeping our community safe, well-maintained and expertly run.

Recommendation 1. Create workgroup for policy and procedure review.

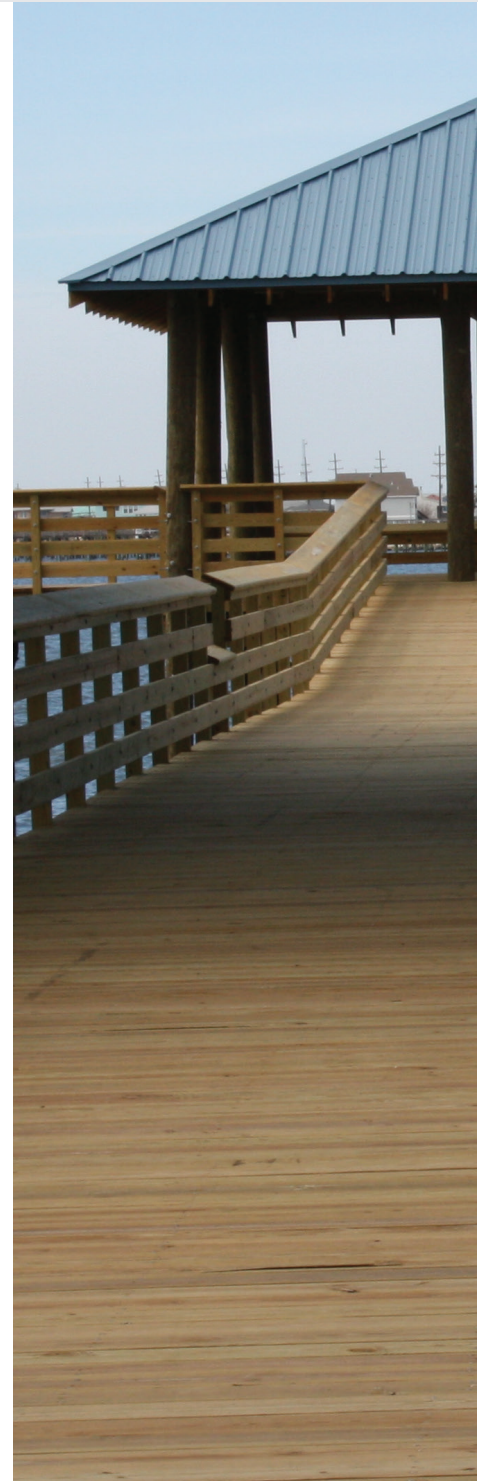
Policies and procedures are living documents that should grow and adapt with government. While the core elements of policy may stay the same, the details should change with the organization. Policy review and revision is a crucial part of an effective policy and procedure management plan. Because of many factors, including department changes, pandemic, etc. it is imperative to update policies and procedures that reflect the changes in landscape. Parish government should form a workgroup, led by Human Resources, made up of parish employees to review and make recommended policy and procedure changes to parish administration.

Recommendation 2. Ordinance Training.

The parish uses an ordinance system to manage the government's proposals for ordinances before they go to the parish Council. There is a standard operating procedure for working ordinances, including step-by-step guides. Additional training should be provided to current staff to reduce problems with version control, agenda management and public transparency. Additionally, a standardized ordinance training program should be created for all parish employees who are involved with ordinance management and it should be part of the regular ongoing training requirements for certain positions that work more extensively with the ordinance system, potentially on an annual basis.

Recommendation 3. Staffing & Annual Training Plan – Animal Services.

The administration needs to hire a Director and additional staff members to ensure that the workload does not overwhelm the Animal Services department. The department suffers from negative publicity within the community; therefore, the department will need a qualified director to provide a positive culture and communicate his or her vision to the public. A prepared annual training plan should determine the proper animal service training needed to allow staff members to complete their assigned job responsibilities. The yearly training should cover, but not be limited to, advanced animal behavior modification, animal care, euthanizing certification, animal safety and animal temperament training.



Personnel and Training



Recommendation 4. Consider hiring a grants person to find and write grants to improve certain departments and expand their services.

Some parish government departments may benefit from grant funding that would cover the cost of personnel responsible for grant proposal writing. The committee recommends the Department of Environmental Services and the Coastal Management Program follow this model for staffing a grant writer. Planning and Development should consider hiring a dedicated grants manager, who can identify, write and manage grants for coastal management in conjunction with the Grants department.

Recommendation 5. Retention and Cross-training of Staff in Facilities Management.

The office of Facilities Management requires a staff that is trained in many disciplines of maintenance, repair, replacement and installation. The department should implement a comprehensive training and cross-training program for all staff and all positions within the Department of Facilities Management.

Recommendation 6. Recruitment and Training of Technical Professionals – Facilities Management.

There are many jobs in the new economy that require professionals with digital infrastructure and technical knowledge that is necessary in managing the parish facilities. Network professionals with IT experience are critically needed in this department. The technology employed by the parish, including security and surveillance systems, require this technical expertise. Recruitment of personnel or the cross-training of existing personnel should be explored.

Recommendation 7. Procurement and Installation of IT hardware.

The Department of Technology should assign a specific staff member or identify a solution for timely installation of IT hardware. If there is a backlog of installations, a solution should be found to rectify the backlog and put in place an actionable and realistic schedule of completion for hardware installations. If personnel shortage exists to complete these installations, possible solutions could be grading the installation in complexity and assigning someone within the receiving department with replacing the most elementary installs. This could allow the Department of Technology to prioritize the most complex installations.

Personnel and Training

Recommendation 8. Upgrade the current PIO equipment resources.

Support the current scope of the department through upgrading equipment and applications. Explore how upgrades can affect the image of the parish which is communicated to the public.

Recommendation 9. Develop Job Classifications and Pay Scales designed to retain employees within the Department of Public Works.

The Department of Public Works has developed a strong employee training program providing employees the opportunity to be trained on the job and obtain state licenses and certifications, particularly, but not limited to, the area of commercial vehicle licensing. However, due to low pay for many of these employees, the department has had difficulty retaining employees for which there is a high demand in the private sector.

The department should create pay schedules for employees that have obtained state licenses or certifications and adjust their pay scales to increase the retention of those skilled employees.

Recommendation 10. Staffing Plan – Technology.

Serious consideration should be given to expanding the Technology department's staff. The department is currently hiring a person to fill the role of security analyst and another to help with the large load of public records requests. If staffing security analyst becomes an issue after reviewing the budget, hiring a contracted company should be considered.

However, considering the pace of technological adoption, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, further investments need to be made in IT staff and infrastructure. At least two new people should be added to the staff. One for the help desk so that an increasing need for inter-governmental IT help can be managed. Another to work on networks as they continue to expand. Consideration should be given to a third new staff member to help manage hardware procurement matters to expedite delivery and installation.



Personnel and Training

Recommendation 11. Staff Training Plan – Technology.

The administration and Department of Technology must formulate an annual training plan that determines the proper technical training needed to allow staff members to complete their assigned job responsibilities. With the ongoing implementation of MUNIS, it is vital that all departments' staff are full trained and ready to use the new system. The yearly training should cover, but not be limited to, GIS, MUNIS and other specific training relevant to their positions.

Recommendation 12. Continue and invest in Employee Excellence Days.

The Department of Human Resources created Employee Excellence Days in which parish employees not only had the opportunity to attend required training and continuing education, but also to interact with other parish employees. When running a parish government this size, department silos can quickly create barriers. Each department has different key-performance metrics and perceptions of a successful day. By bringing employees together they work more efficiently and with greater overall success.

Recommendation 13. Credentialing Staff in Supply Chain and Procurement.

The Department of Procurement should incentivize and allocate resources to persons in the department that would like to further their knowledge and credentials in supply chain and purchasing. Best practice and certification pursuit should be very important to the parish in this function. SPSM, CPSM, CSCP are a few that the parish should investigate.



Planning and Economic Advancement

St. Tammany parish has experienced significant growth over the last 20 years; planning has not kept pace with growth. Transportation accessibility, low business costs, availability of labor, outstanding school system, low crime rate and first-rate medical facilities encourage continued growth for businesses and residents. This expansion has escalated the need to survey land usage to ensure the future developments of residential, commercial, industrial and recreational development. Utilizing appropriate funding while opening projects to local vendors will return money to our community, stimulating our economy and supporting community members.

Recommendation 1. Complete drafting of the updated unified development code.

This process was begun under the prior administration(s) but not completed and has been in a dormant state for a significant period of time. The current administration has been working to review the data from the 2016 Diagnostic report and is determining how to move forward with the completion of this project.

A plan should be put in place to complete Phase 2 "Drafting Development Code," and Phase 4 "Code Refinement and Adoption" within the next 18 months.

Recommendation 2. New Vendor and Local Procurement.

Local Procurement within the parish should be sought whenever possible. An intentional directive should be made by the parish to actively seek out local sources for supplies and assets to provide to the parish a list of approved vendors. Many local suppliers may not know that they could supply the parish with services. This could create a more competitive environment and divert more resources back into the parish economy.

Recommendation 3. Complete the parish master streets plan.

The Department of Public Works maintains its own data regarding parish right-of-ways and servitudes as well as a master Road Base file. The department should coordinate with the other relevant departments to ensure that the data and knowledge of the Department of Public Works relating to the parish roadways and rights-of-way are properly intergraded into the MUNIS system and also utilized in the preparation of the master street plan (Phase 3) of the revision of the development code.



Planning and Economic Advancement



Recommendation 4. Work with Planning and Development for focus on facilities that could enhance Economic Development.

The parish should re-evaluate future facility needs and work with Economic Development to construct a long-range plan for facilities that can enhance commerce and growth within the parish, i.e. the airport.

Recommendation 5. Develop a comprehensive zoning and development plan for St. Tammany parish.

The parish should develop a comprehensive zoning and development plan for St. Tammany parish with the following goals in mind:

1. Review current zoning to determine areas that are appropriate for future development as residential, commercial, industrial and recreation uses;
2. The parish and the business community should seek opportunities for development of economic districts consistent with the Master Zoning Plan to encourage economic investment in St. Tammany parish;
3. Limit large-scale high-density track housing developments and encourage residential development that is consistent with the current mix of residential and light commercial density in St. Tammany parish; and
4. Ensure that future development will not adversely affect the quality of life of our citizens by ensuring that proper drainage and infrastructure including, but not limited to, traffic density considerations, are in place before large new developments are approved.

Communications and Information Technology

St. Tammany Parish government intends to implement practical solutions for optimizing workflow by utilizing technological advancements. This will streamline procedures, improve results and have a budgetary impact. This administration plans to complete the parish-wide implementation of the MUNIS system. Accomplishing this goal offers a central source for all departments, allowing them to produce to their full capacity. MUNIS is a cloud-based system, ensuring file security and ease of access to the entire cache of information.

Recommendation 1. Continued Implementation of MUNIS System.

The Department of Finance is required to provide monthly and annual financial statements and reports on a timely basis. To complete the statements and reports the department relies on information provided by other departments. The parish is in the process of installing the MUNIS ERP System which will provide necessary financial information to the Department of Finance on a timely basis. Not all departments have fully implemented the system and some lack the knowledge to operate the system efficiently. While much has been done to bring MUNIS to all departments, the parish should consider fast-tracking the implementation and include formal training of department personnel.

Recommendation 2. MUNIS for Staffing and Scheduling – Facilities Management.

Staffing for projects and scheduling for workflows and work orders has been conducted through spreadsheets. MUNIS should be fully utilize in the department to maintain, track and schedule all functions of Facilities Management.

Recommendation 3. Improve Public Records Requests Process.

Public records requests are an important part of the government's commitment to transparency. They are managed by state statute, including deadlines for compliance and penalties for failure to comply. On average, St. Tammany parish receives more than 600 requests per year, totaling hundreds of thousands of pages of documents.

A public records task force should be implemented to create a streamlined process that meets the law's strict timelines, while improving document management throughout the parish. The task force should prepare a report for the parish president on a proposed multi-departmental process for managing public records requests. Proper document management will also help departments with their records, lower litigation costs due to discovery requests and significantly improve transparency to the public.



Communications and Information Technology



Recommendation 4. Develop an access point to obtain all building permits.

The Department of Permits and Inspections should develop a simplified process for citizens to obtain building permits. Coordination between departments outside of Permits and Inspections should be addressed internally and relayed back to the citizen by the Department of Permits and Inspections representative that is assisting them in the permit process.

The department should develop and encourage a citizen-friendly approach that is designed, whenever possible, to allow the citizen to utilize their property in a manner consistent with its zoning designation. Additionally, any issues that arise prohibiting the approval of an application should be addressed with the citizen by this department in a manner designed to assist the citizen in accomplishing his/her goals within the structure of the existing zoning regulations. A citizen should never be sent to another department to resolve an issue. Instead, the Department of Permits and Inspections should shepherd the citizen through the process and, when necessary, coordinate with any other departments as required. The proposed reorganization will support this process.

Recommendation 5. Communication for individuals with disabilities.

Address the pressing need for communication for the disabled to comply with federal law. Engage an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter for all live-feed broadcasts and invest in appropriate technology for closed-captioning all content aired on parish government access channel, STPGTV.

Recommendation 6. Develop partnerships with local authorities including but not limited to constables for the enforcement of code violations.

The parish should develop partnerships with local constables to enforce code violations and nuisance complaints relating to property use. This will allow parish government to be more responsive to citizen complaints and to ensure both safety and compliance.

Recommendation 7. Build a public information strategy.

Build a coalition of public information officers from civic organizations, economic development, tourism and other public service entities throughout the parish to study the need for a parish brand identity. Establish that identity and build collaborative relationships among the agencies, to join behind a unified identity that speaks from the St. Tammany Parish government office.

Maintenance and Utilities

Cultivating a safe, adaptable and accessible community is fundamental to residents, business owners and St. Tammany Parish government. Maintenance and utility operations affects our economic development, quality of life and public health. As our parish continues its momentous growth, it has become necessary to review use, upgrading or expanding sidewalks, roadways and public facilities.

Recommendation 1. Confront the use of office space and devise a plan for underutilized facilities either through repurpose or divestiture.

Since the pandemic began, office infrastructure, maintenance and use has changed rapidly. Evaluate the most efficient way to utilize the currently occupied space and advise the parish leadership in new utilization. There are assets that should be evaluated for highest and best use or divestiture, specifically the former EOC building in Covington. All parish properties should be evaluated for their necessity and cost-benefit analyzed.

Recommendation 2. Review Tammany Utilities Service and Pricing.

One result of purchasing two separate utilities, which were themselves conglomerations of smaller utilities, is that the pricing, infrastructure and service are not consistent throughout the parish. Tammany Utilities (TU) is working on the necessary infrastructure, but a pricing study should be done to determine correct rates and make a standard rate structure for all TU customers.

Recommendation 3. Deferred Maintenance.

Parish facilities have experienced deferred maintenance in recent years due to the budget cutbacks. Identification of critical maintenance should be scheduled immediately and carried out to inhibit the deterioration of facilities. Some of these include exterior physical plant upkeep as well as floor maintenance.

Recommendation 4. Research grant opportunities for investing in a wastewater treatment system.

If the parish were to purchase a unique biological wastewater treatment system, it could make improvements and expansions, including consolidating treatment capacity, rather than having scattered treatment sites. The process of wetland assimilation involves discharging nitrogen enriched treated sewer effluent into marshland, while also impeding saltwater intrusion and inhibiting coastal erosion. The beneficial result is increased growth of grass, plants and trees providing refuge to waterfowl and animals.



“I want to thank every member of this committee for graciously volunteering their time to serve our community.”

- Michael B. Cooper
Parish President