

City works yard hiring, contracting process flawed

Stanley Tromp, Vancouver Courier, 31 July, 2013

One of Vancouver city hall's work yards, the Evans Yard, needed to clean up its financial act, and the city says that's being done.

"There is potential for improved internal control and additional risk mitigation in project management, work orders and time entry, purchase and vendor management and hiring practices."

Those are the findings of a January 2013 report from the city's internal audit branch, which the Courier obtained through the freedom of information law. The City's Consolidated Facilities Service Project (CFS) had asked the city's internal audit branch to review the Evans Yard operation, which is housed at 955 Evans Avenue, near Terminal Avenue and Glen Drive.

Evans Yard was funded mainly by the Vancouver Park Board, but is now under the city's Real Estate and Facilities Management (REFM). It supports shop and warehousing duties, with some Parks work such as landscaping and arboriculture.

Management says it is in the process of fixing all the problems noted. The auditors found that "there were projects where no overall project plan was provided to enable effective management oversight of resources, budget, and schedule."

Sandy Swanton, city hall's communications manager, told the Courier that better processes were implemented in January to ensure all projects have a proper plan, budget and schedule before work is started.

"Work orders do not reflect the true cost of time spent on jobs," auditors wrote. As well, "without having gone through the bidding process ... there is a lack of transparency, inability for strategic purchasing decisions, and a potential for overpayment for goods and services."

Swanton said that work orders are now being reviewed upon closure, and variances reported to the manager for further investigation if needed.

There was a lack of justification for premium pay for Operations Worker II positions (mainly unskilled labour). "Under the current practice, there is a risk of incurring unnecessary labour costs if the pay premiums are not justified ... the lack of criteria for applying premium pay may lead to a perception of unfairness amongst staff." Swanton said job descriptions are all under review and standard selection criteria for premium pay at Evans yard are being developed.

Moreover, the report called for "increased transparency of the hiring process." Under the Collective Agreement for CUPE 1004 in place during the audit, Operations Worker II positions did not have to be publicly posted. Workers with enough hours were put on a recall list, from which they could be interviewed for new positions that came up. The review found a lack of documentation to support hiring decisions, and grievances have been filed on whether the seniority order was followed. "The current process may lead to a perception of subjectivity or favouritism in the hiring process, and ultimately, dissatisfaction among staff," it said.

Swanton said that hiring and selections processed at Evans Yard are under review and "are being aligned with standard corporate practice." These are governed by the new CUPE agreement and a union representative can observe the interviews.

Last May, after months of infighting, the local leaders of CUPE 1004 were fired by the union's national administrators. Despite repeated phone calls and emails from the Courier over the past two weeks, CUPE 1004's nationally assigned administrator Justin Schmid refused to discuss the audit, as did Vancouver business agents Karen Kindrid, Glenn Jones and Steve Varty.