

City of Dallas Civilian Employee Flight

Apparently the fact that a staggering number of City employees are eligible to retire in the next five years is not sinking in with management. Of the 7000 civilian employees at the city, over 1000 can go in FY2005 if they choose. Over the next five years upwards of 40% of our workforce can leave if they wish. This puts services severely at risk.

While we can possibly hire more laborers, or at least we can until the job climate improves, the city will be hard pressed to maintain enough skilled workers to run necessary services. We could lose many skilled workers like our water treatment operators, budget analysts, engineers, flood control operators and surveyors if nothing is done to stop their flight.

Many city employees can retire, if not now, then soon. Why should they not retire and take their years of experience to some other company or municipality where the pay is better, the workload is less and they are not blamed for every woe that occurs. After all as things stand now, the city has clearly shown they do not value their civilian employees, so those eligible to retire see no benefit in remaining.

Who is important to the happiness of the Citizens? At first glance, you might be tempted to say 'not civilian employees' but would that really be true? Think about all the times you come in contact with the civilian employees.

The first line of defense against crime is NOT the police officer. With the exception of crimes witnessed by officers, the first line is the CIVILIAN employee who answers the 911 emergency phones. In fact those operators are the first and second line, since a CIVILIAN employee is also responsible for dispatching the call to the police officers. The same is true for Fire and Emergency Medical crews. In fact during many accidents, the first responders are often emergency street crews who block the road to make it safe for the Fire, Police and EMS employees to work.

During winter storms it is CIVILIAN employees who are up all night long sanding the streets for morning traffic. During hard cold spells when pipes freeze and break, it is the CIVILIAN employees who are down in the water and mud in the freezing weather to restore water to the neighborhoods. During the spring storms our CIVILIAN crews go out in the driving rain to check the banks of the levees and make sure clogged drains don't flood our neighborhoods. And during the tornado and high winds, Streets, Park and Sanitation CIVILIAN employees are the ones who go out to cut away the downed trees and clear the streets so that needed equipment can get through.

And those are just some of their emergency functions. This is why it is always so strange when the city tries to privatize a function like mowing, or street repair. You can hire a service to cut grass, but the CIVILIAN crews that do those day to day jobs also have other duties during emergencies. It is very doubtful that the company that provides contract street sweeping has employees who are trained and willing to come out during a tornado watch. Many CIVILIAN employees also function as emergency response personnel and therefore are very important to the safe running of our city.

Of course they have other, more routine jobs that they do to make the citizens lives easier. CIVILIAN employees operate the purification and pumping plants. When citizens turn on their water it was a CIVILIAN employee who purified and tested the water to ensure quality before it arrived at the tap. When you see a city vehicle, Police, Fire, Code Enforcement, Sanitation and all the rest, it is a CIVILIAN employee who maintains those city vehicles so they can respond to the needs of the citizens. When there is a stray animal starving, or endangering people, a CIVILIAN employee is sent to collect the animal and make the neighborhood safer and more livable.

What are we going to do when all the EXPERIENCED CIVILIAN employees retire or quit?

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