

COMPLIANCE REPORT

Efficiency Commission Recommendations

February 2024





February 15, 2024

TO: Polk County Board of County Commissioners
Polk County School Board

City of Auburndale

City of Bartow

City of Davenport

Town of Dundee

City of Eagle Lake

City of Fort Meade

City of Frostproof

City of Haines City

Village of Highland Park

Town of Hillcrest Heights

City of Lake Alfred

Town of Lake Hamilton

City of Lakeland

City of Lake Wales

City of Mulberry

City of Polk City

City of Winter Haven

FROM: William Beasley, County Manager

SUBJECT: 2023 Polk County Efficiency Commission (PCEC) Recommendations -
County Manager Compliance Report

The Polk County Charter, as approved by voters, requires a Polk County Efficiency Commission to convene, "Not later than January 31 of 2005 and every eighth year thereafter." The timing of this would have meant an Efficiency Commission appointed in January 2021, however, due to the pandemic, the Board approved postponing it until January 2022.

The Efficiency Commission was appointed in January 2022, held their first meeting on February 23, 2022, and their last meeting on February 15, 2023, where they adopted their final report. Once the Efficiency Commission delivers their final report, the County Manager has twelve months to deliver a compliance report to "each designated recipient" of the final report.

Attached is a copy of the compliance report mandated by the Charter.

I would like to thank those 22 citizen members of the Efficiency Commission, who volunteered their time and completed their service on the Efficiency Commission.

xc: Richard E. Straughn, Efficiency Commission Chair

Randy Mink, County Attorney

Summary of Efficiency Commission Recommendations and Responses

The Polk County Efficiency Commission (PCEC) split their work into two phases. The first phase focused on current and on-going activities by County Government that had significant efficiency and effectiveness impacts on County operations. With this first phase, the PCEC found several significant efforts already in place or underway and wanted to acknowledge those ongoing efforts and show support towards those initiatives:

Item	Subject	County
<u>Number</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Response</u>

1	Behavioral Health Services	Already under way
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The PCEC voted unanimously to endorse actions being taken by the Polk BoCC and partner agencies, including the Sheriff's Office. The PCEC felt that implementation of the Polk Vision strategic plan for behavioral health and corresponding initiatives would lead to improvements in service delivery and community outcomes.

2	RFID Tagging of Property	Already under way
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Polk County maintains standard equipment and an inventory control processes as a function of day-to-day division operations. Expansion of the RFID efforts on sensitive or high-dollar items will reduce losses and improve public confidence in county stewardship of taxpayer funded assets.

3	Developer/County Roadway Infrastructure	Already under way
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Agreements

The PCEC agrees that working with developers on agreements to construct transportation improvements will benefit the traveling public by potentially reducing project costs and expediting project completion schedules.

4	North Central Landfill (NCLF) –	Already under way
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Methane Gas Beneficial Reuse

The counties efforts to develop opportunities to market methane gas through connection to the natural gas distribution pipeline network offers significant financial benefits and should be continued.

5	NCLF - Leachate Management	Already under way
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Polk County has already incorporated projects to implement newer leachate treatment methods that will reduce disposal costs and are more environmentally feasible.

6	Improved ambulance bill collection rates	Already under way
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Even though the county collects a proficient 68 percent of EMS ambulance billings, Polk's goal of 70% is achievable thru improved technology with handheld tablets in the units. This will allow the rescue crews to capture health insurance information in the field for more efficient bill processing.

7 Energy efficiencies through cool roofing systems Already under way

Polk Facilities Management should continue to utilize cool roofing technology to reduce facility energy consumption and related operational costs.

8 Safety coordinator position transition Already under way

The Risk Management Division has 2 Safety Coordinator positions that are responsible for safety practices, and related training/communication. Both individuals in these positions are retirement age and have spoken about retirement, which causes concern for the loss of institutional knowledge. The County has added a Safety Coordinator position that should allow some overlap training and transfer of knowledge. The PCEC agrees with the counties action and that the County has a Succession Plan Program to ensure foresight and planning for staffing issues in all areas of service.

Since the County was already working on the above items, the PCEC was only acknowledging that they believed Polk County was taking the appropriate actions and should continue. The County will continue working on these items, but I will not address them any further in this compliance report.

The second phase of the PCEC work was to analyze current and emerging external trends that could be of significance to future County operations. Several topics were raised and most of these were addressed by staff as part of PCEC meetings or via written submittals. I will not focus on these items as they are addressed as part of the PCEC Final Report. The single most significant issue identified was the employment competition for qualified and competent staff. The PCEC provided several recommendations to address challenges specific to recruitment and on-boarding of new county staff, as well as recommendations to improve the overall capacity and capabilities of the Equity and Human Resources (EHR) Division, as follows:

<u>Number</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Response</u>
1	Proposed standard recruitment process	Agree
2	Designate a scheduler to track the proposed recruitment process timeframe	Agree
3	Deputy County Managers and Director of Planning and Development will ensure Divisions stay in proposed process timeframes	Agree
4	Polk County will continue to periodically review fringe benefits, specifically leave allotments, to compete with other entities	Partially agree/ ongoing
5	County should review an alternative software system for benefits management	Complete
6	County Manager's Office should monitor the work demands on the HR Director and ensure that position focuses on strategic and policy	Agree

	topics as opposed to routine or administrative	
	daily tasks	
7	HR should develop decision authority charts that clarify decisions specific positions can make and decisions that should be elevated to the	Agree
	Division Director	
8	Effectiveness of various recruitment mechanisms should be evaluated	Agree/ongoing
9	Evaluate which positions should be continuously advertised to reduce posting time requirements	Agree/ongoing
10	Review alternative advertising strategies that could increase the attractiveness of Polk County	Agree/ongoing
	positions	
11	Examine options to expand financial incentives for current employees who recommend	Agree/ongoing
	potential employees	
12	Examine options to expand recruitment at local or regional educational and training institutions	Agree/ongoing
13	Increase budget resources dedicated to recruitment to at least .5 percent of the	Partially agree
	County's Budget	
14	Establish a specified training budget for the HR Director to ensure latest professional knowledge and skills	Partially agree
15	Consider engaging an HR consultant to review current divisional practices as compared to national best practices	Agree

Finally, the PCEC examined the future of the PCEC as a stand-alone entity and has recommended the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) select between three options:

16 Recommend the BoCC select one of three path for the PCEC: Received February 2, 2024

BoCC Guidance options as a future

Abolish the stand-alone PCEC and transfer these responsibilities to the Charter Review Commission

Reduce the recurring costs of the PCEC by extending its terms from every eight (8) years to every twelve (12) years

Abolish the PCEC; the BoCC and independently elected constitutional officers will continue to seek efficiencies in local government operations as part of their ordinary course of duties.

The following pages of this Compliance Report will go into more detail on each of these 16 recommendations.

PCEC – Recommendation # 1: Adopt a proposed standard recruitment process.

The PCEC worked with the County Manager’s Office and the Human Resources Division to develop a revised recruitment and on-boarding process that could reduce the number of days to a target of 32 but no more than 56 working days from position advertising to the actual employee physically participating in an on-boarding process.

This improved process would establish a number of days for each step involved in the hiring process. The initial step begins with the hiring division requesting HR to advertise the position and ends with HR making the conditional offer and finalizing the candidates criminal background reviews.

County Response:

Hiring is a very important part of what we do, and timing can become critical to getting the best people hired. With the current tight labor market and approximately 20% of BoCC positions eligible for retirement and/or Florida DROP in the next 5 years, it is extremely important to get people hired as quickly and efficiently as possible. We can’t afford to lose prospective employees because Polk was too slow in finalizing the deal.

Polk County has always been focused on a timely hiring process and we would support any process to improve upon the outcome. Following are some exceptions to the hiring timelines that can take longer than a normal position:

Professional positions typically take longer than other positions. This includes advertising taking 30 days compared to the two weeks for other positions.

Variances within the process, could extend a timeline. This could include time needed to modify job descriptions and/or pay classifications.

County management would expect that HR and hiring divisions will do everything they can to meet the timelines in the proposed process.

Responsibility: HR Division Director and Hiring Division Directors will be responsible for their staff meeting the timelines.

PCEC – Recommendation # 2: A designated “Scheduler” will be identified whose function is to track and manage the overall hiring schedule to include regular reports on timeline performance.

There needs to be an HR employee designated as a “Scheduler” who can monitor the hiring timeline and push the process as needed. In addition, reports should be created to show performance achievements and failures. These reports will be tracked by the “Scheduler” and routinely submitted to the Deputy County Managers for review and coordination with respective divisions.

County Response:

The county is supportive for the need to have an individual (or individuals) that are tracking the hiring timelines, as well as the need for uniform reports that can be used to track/monitor those timelines. HR has identified the Employment and Benefits Services Manager as the “scheduler” who will work with the HR staff and vendor staff to monitor and push the process to stay on target.

There are current internal reports that track this process and HR will review and amend those reports as necessary to ensure a productive/informative management report is available. The “scheduler” will review these reports and go over them with the Deputy County Manager (CM) (over HR) monthly, with an emphasis on the recruitment processes that are taking longer than anticipated/projected.

Responsibility: Employment and Benefits Services Manager will be responsible for ensuring applicable reports are updated as needed and to conduct a regular review with the Deputy CM (over HR). Division Directors will be responsible for their staff working with the “Scheduler” to meet established timelines specific to divisional vacancies.

PCEC – Recommendation # 3: It will be the responsibility of the Deputy County Managers and designated senior staff to ensure their respective divisions (including HR) participation in the hiring process stay within the specific parameters noted as part of a master schedule. This hiring schedule coordination should be easily achievable by way of tracking each divisions participation along the established timeline.

The County Managers Office must help ensure that all divisions are performing within the timelines established for the proposed hiring process.

County Response:

We agree with this recruitment concept and will strive to ensure that each division meets established timelines. Ultimately, the Deputy County Managers (3) and the Director of Planning and Development will be responsible for the divisions that report to them.

Responsibility: The Deputy County Manager over HR will meet with the “scheduler”, noted in Recommendation #2, regarding the process and will then meet with the rest of the County Manager’s Office regarding any issues where we are over the timeline. Then the Deputy County Managers and Director of Planning and Development will be able to ensure performance of their divisions using the reports.

PCEC – Recommendation # 4: As a function of an improved recruitment initiative, Polk County should continue to periodically review employment fringe benefits – specifically leave allotments. The issue of leave allotments is particularly relevant as county employees retire or otherwise separate from service and Polk County competes with private sector employers and other public entities for new employees.

County Response:

The County Managers Office regularly reviews and discusses our benefits to ensure that we are providing a reasonable and sustainable benefits package to our employees. We believe this portion of our benefits package is attractive to perspective employees, with starting full-time employees receiving 12 days of annual leave and 12 days of sick leave accrued each year. In addition, employees can use 3 days of their sick leave as a PTO leave day, meaning that employees can utilize 15 days (3 work weeks) of leave each year for whatever they need it for, plus 9 days for sick leave. The annual leave accruals increase every 5 years as follows:

40 - Hour Employees		
From the first pay period through the 5th year anniversary	3.70 hours	12 days
From 6th - 10th year	4.62 hours	15 days
From 11th - 15th year	5.54 hours	18 days
From 16th - 20th year	6.46 hours	21 days
After 20th anniversary	7.71 hours	25 days
56 - hour Employees		
From the first pay period through the 5th year anniversary	5.17 hours	134.42 hours
From 6th - 10th year	6.47 hours	168.22 hours
From 11th - 15th year	7.76 hours	201.76 hours
From 16th - 20th year	9.06 hours	235.56 hours
After 20th anniversary	10.78 hours	280.28 hours

As the business climate warrants, Polk County will continue to review and improve our benefits in order to attract and retain the best workforce available.

Responsibility: The County Manager, Deputy County Managers, and Director of Planning and Development will continue to review and discuss, with input from our HR team.

PCEC – Recommendation # 5: Due to software compatibility issues between the County’s Oracle system and the Florida Retirement System, as well as other software issues, the Oracle module for benefits management is problematic. It was recommended that the County Manager review an alternative software system for benefits management.

County Response:

This recommendation has been completed and an agreement with Bentek, a software vendor, has been acquired to facilitate better communications with retirees regarding benefits management. As Bentek is a system that is utilized by other Florida jurisdictions, we have a high degree of confidence that it will interface with the Florida Retirement System. The system will enhance the retirees’ experience by providing 24-hour online access to verify benefit selections and payment history. The Bentek software open enrollment module will also allow retirees to electronically enroll for insurance benefits. County staff worked with Bentek to implement this software and have completed this recommendation.

Responsibility: HR Director and HR Benefits team will continue to operate and maintain this system.

PCEC – Recommendation # 6: The Director of Human Resources, due to mid-management staffing shortages, has had to be more directly involved in operational issues than is optimal for that position. This position, along with the three other key Director positions with a county-wide focus (Budget – financial resources, IT – technology and Procurement – tools and supplies) should be focused on the continuing capacity of the county to deliver services in an ever-changing environment. The County Manager’s office should monitor the work performance of this position; the HR Manager’s role should focus upon everyday operational matters that will allow the HR Director to focus more on strategic and policy topics.

County Response:

As was stated by the PCEC, there were several vacancies and projects going on that made it very difficult for the EHR Director to step out of some of the Day-to-Day operations. Now that the EHR Manager and OTC Manager positions have been filled, the HR Director should focus on handing off all those operational duties and step back to focus on more of the strategy and policy issues. The EHR Director will need to make the effort to train the new managers on what decisions they can make and then allow them to make those decisions. Once those managers are trained, they will be able to manage and train their staff, reducing the amount of work that the EHR Director must be involved in.

Responsibility: EHR Director and Deputy County Manager over HR

PCEC – Recommendation # 7: To support the success of mid-managers within the EHR Division, it is recommended that decision authority charts and related protocols be developed that specify the decisions a given position can make independently, decisions for which the Division Head should be consulted, and decisions that are the sole prerogative of the Division Head. Clarity on this topic will lead to more efficient operations.

County Response:

This suggestion from the Efficiency Commission may have been more of a timing issue, due to the vacancies in EHR at the time and some of this concern may get solved with new management and staff. However, there have been concerns voiced from divisions about it taking too long for EHR to process things and some of that time has been communicated by divisions as linked to EHR staff not being allowed to make decisions.

Decision authority charts should help clarify EHR staff decision authority and better delegate each responsibility. These decision authority charts will be put into place by June 1, 2024.

Responsibility: EHR Director, HR Manager, and Deputy CM

PCEC – Recommendation # 8: The effectiveness of various recruitment mechanisms should be evaluated using various media metrics appropriate to the recruitment mechanism being evaluated.

County Response:

The EHR Division, along with our recruiting vendor, currently review and evaluate how advertisements are performed and which advertisements are the most successful. EHR also communicates with hiring divisions on new recruitment sources and ways to advertise that will get employment opportunities posted to the appropriate audience. As an example, the County recently ceased newspaper advertisements as they have not been successful since most job seekers no longer read newspapers but rather, utilize social media and organization job sites. The EHR Division will continue these processes and continue to adjust and improve how and where we advertise for vacant positions.

Responsibility: EHR Director and HR Manager

PCEC – Recommendation # 9: Evaluate additional positions that could be continuously advertised to reduce posting time requirements.

County Response:

EHR is already doing this by continuously advertising “evergreen” positions like Family Support Workers and Service Workers. Given the current market for select positions, the continuous advertisement of such positions is a worthwhile consideration.

Responsibility: EHR Director and HR Manager

PCEC – Recommendation # 10: Review alternative advertising strategies that could increase the attractiveness of Polk County government to potential employees such as “persona” advertising. “Persona” advertising is the use of lifestyle cues to connect potential qualified applicants to open positions. A very basic example might be: Do you like fishing and spending time in the great outdoors? Check out this vacancy with Polk County Parks and Natural Resources!

County Response:

The EHR Division continuously works with Divisions to develop and implement the best practices in attracting the most qualified, interested, and motivated applicants. As part of this effort EHR is now creating Tik Tok videos and social media posts to find potential talent interested in Polk County. EHR will continue to explore innovative ways to advertise and find the caliber of employees that will work best, consistent with our Mission, Vision, and Values.

Responsibility: EHR Director and HR Manager

PCEC – Recommendation # 11: Examine options to expand incentives for current employees to recommend potential employees.

County Response:

The county has several such incentive programs including one where current employees can recommend a friend or family member to apply for a qualifying county position. That employee would receive a \$200 incentive once the friend or family member completes 200 hours (5 weeks) of employment. In addition, Polk has a \$1,000 sign-on bonus program aimed at specific blue-collar trade and skilled positions. We continue to reevaluate that program to consider increasing the incentive amount(s) as needed based on market competitiveness. EHR Division will continue to review these incentives and bonuses.

Responsibility: HR Director and County Managers Office

PCEC – Recommendation # 12: Examine options to expand recruitment at educational and training institutions.

County Response:

The county currently partners with Polk County Schools and Polk Vision to recruit and train high school students on required job skills for entry level jobs. In addition, Polk continues to recruit at trade schools, fire colleges, and major in-state colleges/universities.

Responsibility: HR Director and County Managers Office

PCEC – Recommendation # 13: Increase the resources dedicated to recruitment to at least .5 percent (one-half of one percent) of the County’s budget for personnel. Current funding appears to be in the range of approximately .35 percent (thirty-five one-hundredths of one percent) of personnel budget. This would equate to roughly a \$300,000 additional investment in HR functions. This recommendation is based not only upon current vacancy trends, but also upon projected retirement trends in the next five years as Baby Boomer/older Gen X employees retire (or become eligible for DROP) in significant numbers. Polk County should also conduct a best practices study reviewing comparable recruitment and on-boarding budgets and develop a staged plan to achieve best practice status.

County Response:

The County Manager’s Office and the EHR Director meet every year regarding the budget and have discussions regarding what the EHR Division needs to operate. We will continue these discussions as part of the budget process and will also wrap this into what we do for PCEC – Recommendation 15. The EHR funding needs discussion will be weighed against other needs and available budget and the County Manager will ultimately decide on what to include in the proposed budget.

Responsibility: EHR Director and County Managers Office

PCEC – Recommendation # 14: Establish a specified training budget for the HR Director to ensure latest professional knowledge and skills for this key role.

County Response:

The EHR division has a training budget, but there is no specific training budget for the director. This will continue to be part of the discussion during the budget process each year with the County Manager ultimately deciding what to include in the proposed budget.

Responsibility: EHR Director and County Managers Office

PCEC – Recommendation # 15: Consider engaging an HR Organizational Consultant to review business practices as recruitment/retention trends and workplace needs evolve.

County Response:

The County worked with Matrix Consulting Group in 2016/2017 on an HR Operational and Staffing Assessment. This assessment was done over 5 years ago and found numerous improvements that could be made. Since the Efficiency Commission did not do a full assessment, it would be beneficial to have a vendor do a similar review to see what improvements have been made and what items are still outstanding.

The County will move forward to hire a skilled consultant to conduct a more comprehensive assessment of the EHR Division to include organizational structure, staffing, and related service efficiencies. This work will be initiated no later than July 2024.

Responsibility: EHR Director and County Managers Office

PCEC – Recommendation # 16: Select one of these three alternatives considered by the PCEC as it assesses and determines the future path for the Efficiency Commission.

Abolish the stand-alone Polk County Efficiency Commission and transfer its responsibilities to the Charter Review Commission

Reduce the costs of the Polk County Efficiency Commission by changing its terms from every eight (8) years to twelve (12) years

Abolish the Polk County Efficiency Commission; the Board of County Commissioners and independently elected constitutional officers will continue to seek efficiencies in local government as part of their ordinary course of duties.

County Response:

Although the PCEC Final Report only gave 3 alternatives, there was actually a 4th that the BoCC could have decided on, which was to make no change. On February 2, 2024, we met with the BoCC publicly to discuss the various options noted above, and the consensus decision of the BoCC was to move forward with option 1 above. At this time, the County Attorney's Office is working on language to include in referendum in November 2024.

Responsibility: County Managers Office