



City of Yakima

News Release

Subject: Update Regarding Potential Utilities & Engineering Reorganization
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Utilities & Engineering Director Departs Ahead of Potential Reorganization

Interim Yakima City Manager Jeff Cutter has accepted the resignation of Utilities & Engineering Director Debbie Cook as the City considers potentially restructuring its senior management team assignments. Cook's resignation will become effective on Monday, March 21st at 5:00 pm.

Cook was hired by the City in December 2012 to head the newly-created Utilities & Engineering Department, which includes the Water/Irrigation Division, the Wastewater Division, and the Engineering Division. Prior to that, the Assistant City Manager position was assigned oversight responsibility for the City's two largest utilities - Water/Irrigation and Wastewater. The Assistant City Manager position has not been funded since 2011, in part due to budget constraints. Cutter said the City is weighing options related to how certain senior management team responsibilities might be reassigned.

Debbie has managed challenging circumstances that resulted from forming a new department, said Cutter. The City is constantly evaluating how to best utilize limited resources and how to design its administrative structure to manage its programs and services in the most efficient and effective way possible. With Debbie resigning, we have a unique opportunity to do that, said Cutter.

Cutter emphasized that Cook's resignation is not related to information recently provided by some employees Cook oversees that were critical of her leadership. Cutter said he and Cook had been considering the terms of her resignation for several weeks before he was notified of the employee concerns.

We certainly appreciate the fact that the City leadership gave no consideration to the uninformed comments, said Bill Pickett, Cook's private attorney. Debbie's departure is a positive step for her as she will now be able to fully invest in other interests while the City contemplates the direction of potential reorganization efforts.

During her nearly 30-year career Cook has worked as an Associate Engineer for the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle, as a Project Engineer for the Port of Port Townsend, as a Senior Project Engineer for Zambrana Engineering, Inc., in a variety of roles for URS Corporation, and as a Construction Manager for the City of Rio Rancho, New Mexico. Immediately prior to being hired by the City, Cook served as the City of Rio Rancho's Development Services Engineering Manager.

I have enjoyed my time in Yakima, but I'm also anxious to take advantage of new opportunities to apply my skills and be part of another organization, said Cook. I'm proud of the progress that has been made during my tenure to better coordinate the services provided by the Utilities & Engineering Department to the Yakima community.

As part of the separation agreement between Cook and the City, she will receive four months' severance, which amounts to about \$40,000.