

“Ask the Auditor”

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Efficiencies in Berkeley? Yes, We Can!

There are no easy answers to the budget problems facing our cities and counties. There are strong disagreements about which services to reduce, which programs to eliminate and which fees to increase. Even the search for the elusive “unnecessary administrative costs” is contentious. Raising taxes, cutting services, and cutting administrative oversight can all result in unintended consequences and increased risk.

One thing we should all agree on is improving the efficiency of our public services. The hard part is making the decision to invest in the improvements. What should be tackled, and by whom? How much will it cost?

Many people feel that the public sector is particularly “efficiency-challenged” because of the lack of a profit motive (though some corporate workers – and customers – will tell you that the fictional world of Dilbert is more realistic than you’d like to think – and not very efficient).

Berkeley’s City Auditor’s office is working hard to increase efficiency in City service delivery, as part of our basic mission: to be a catalyst for improving City government. On Tuesday, October 13, we bring to the City Council two reports with recommendations for improved efficiency: “Investing in Long Term Cost Savings: Workers’ Compensation and Wellness” and “Audit: Utilization of Public Works Sewer Staff Can Be Improved.”

Our long term savings suggestions, presented as part of the Council’s 5 p.m. budget work session, include investments to:

- Improve tools and training, especially software, performance measures, and written procedures,
- Further reduce workplace injuries, and
- Evaluate the establishment of an employee wellness program.

Our report on Public Works staffing efficiencies, on the 7 p.m. consent calendar, includes 35 recommendations for improvement, aimed at reducing costs, improving worker safety, and protecting public and private property from damage. We developed the objectives for this report with the assistance of Public Works staff, and the department is in full agreement. They report having made significant progress in implementing our recommendations.

To make these improvements in Public Works and to tackle inefficiencies Citywide, the City will need to make the kinds of investments discussed in our 5 p.m. presentation.

To read these reports and others please visit the [City Auditor Home Page](http://www.cityofberkeley.info/auditor) at www.cityofberkeley.info/auditor.

Contact me with your ideas for future performance audits, requests for information, and to continue to weigh in on the merits of establishing a whistleblower hot line for City employees.

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