

CITY OF NANAIMO

BUSINESS CASE – Human Resources (HR) Department: HR Associate: Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) Support

CURRENT OVERVIEW

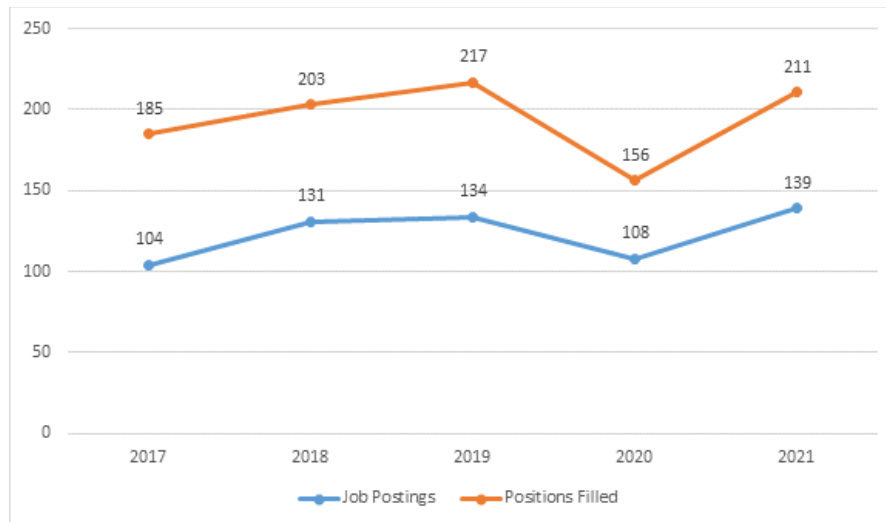
Human Resources is responsible for managing the employee life cycle for approximately 1,000 employees (regular and contract), beginning with recruiting and onboarding and ending with retirement, resignation or termination. In between these events are multiple other transactions such as leaves, position changes, and accommodations that can occur, which vary by employee. HR staff develop specializations in processing these transactions and we try to maintain a positive experience for City employees by providing timely and efficient service. HR's annual training program, wellness events and Health & Safety initiatives reflect the investments made by the City in improving the employee experience.

HR currently consists of 12 FTEs:

- Director
- 3 Managers (2 in HR, 1 OHS)
- 3 Advisors
- 2 Associates
- 2 Assistants
- OHS Coordinator

The HR department has remained at 12 FTEs since 2007. In order to maintain or improve service delivery, where staffing changes (e.g. retirements, resignations) have occurred within the department, HR has re-assessed its staffing needs at the time and has adapted roles and responsibilities in order to balance workloads. However, this has not served to add capacity to the department while the organization has expanded.

The three Advisor positions directly support three Managers and one Director. All Advisors are trained to provide some degree of overlap for the others for periods of peak workloads or short term absences. When the recruitment workload is heavy, a disproportionate amount of HR Advisor time is spent on recruiting in order to help the departments fill their vacancies quickly, addressing a broader corporate need. The chart below shows the recruitment load over the past five years. (Note that the number of positions filled is greater than the number of postings because some postings have multiple vacancies for the same role).



The HR department posted its 100th job of 2022 in mid-June, indicating another record year ahead.

As a consequence, staffing resources get diverted from supporting OHS disability management and return-to-work tasks. OHS is already more specialized and less interchangeable than the other roles within HR, which often results in the OHS Manager being required to perform more time-sensitive but largely administrative tasks related to disability management and being forced to put down other important tasks. The timelines for following up with injured employees to try to get them back to work can be longer, and the claims costs higher as a result. Complex employee cases take a disproportionate amount of time to manage, and diligent case management improves the chances of a successful return and reintegration to work.

BUSINESS ISSUE

The OHS section of the HR Department has a lead role in ensuring worker safety and OHS risk management for the City’s employees. The OHS portfolio includes heading up numerous Joint OHS committees and supporting dozens of managers and supervisors in meeting their WorkSafeBC-mandated safety responsibilities and the City’s Certificate of Recognition from WorkSafeBC. Key OHS responsibilities include:

- Injury prevention, including hazard and risk assessments, worksite inspections and incident investigations;
- Development of safe work procedures;
- Safety-related training;
- WorkSafeBC claims management;
- Long Term Disability (LTD) claims management; and
- Return-to-work planning.

While the work in injury prevention, training and developing procedures is forward-focused, a considerable amount of the work of the OHS section is more reactive, such as claims management and establishing return-to-work plans. LTD case management and accommodation case management are very time consuming activities that directly impact the overall employee experience.

WorkSafeBC and LTD are insurance systems where the City's premiums are driven by employee usage of these benefits. Reducing the length of an absence by even a couple of weeks can save the City thousands of dollars. Active case management for injured employees is time consuming, requiring numerous phone calls, emails, meetings, letters, etc. Getting people back doing meaningful work not only provides the City some measurable work product for the money it expends, but it also is good for the employee's own mental wellbeing as work can fill a social need for many people.

Beyond case management of injured employees, there is an increasing focus on mental health and wellbeing in the modern workplace. Workplaces can have an essential role in maintaining positive mental health, as they can give people the opportunity to feel productive and contribute to the betterment of their organization or community. Workplaces can also be stressful environments that contribute to the rise of mental health challenges and illnesses. No workplace is immune from these risks and the City cannot afford to limit its definition of occupational health and safety to only the physical aspect of employment.

With most adults spending more of their waking hours at work than anywhere else, addressing issues of mental health at work is vitally important. The BC Municipal Safety Association is in the process of developing a workplace mental health program to assist municipalities. The City is directly participating in this development, and plans to implement the program when it is complete. The HR Department has already augmented its annual training program with some offerings to support good mental health, and OHS introduced programs like Mental Health First Aid and the Workplace Mental Health Leadership Certificate program.

OHS was at the front line of the City's Covid response, reviewing Provincial Health announcements, guidelines and orders and ensuring the City remained compliant. OHS developed safe work procedures, cleaning protocols and return-to-the-office guidelines to help the rest of the organization navigate through the pandemic, so the City could maintain its services to the public. Now, staff are dealing with their own post-Covid circumstances which may include separation from (or the loss of) loved ones, the complexities of a hybrid work arrangement and concerns over future waves of restrictions or new variants. We can expect OHS to be looked to for support and resources to help guide the City through its response to these new workplace challenges.

To afford OHS the time to be forward-focused, the OHS Manager needs to be able to shift away from urgent tasks that could be performed by other staff and concentrate on program and procedure development, dealing with the most complex disability management claims, and further developing the City's supports for mental health in the workplace. For the reasons noted, the HR Department is seeking to add an HR Associate position. This position will primarily be responsible for providing support in the OHS section, dealing with more administrative functions and freeing up the OHS Manager for these more strategic health, safety and wellbeing initiatives.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Adding an HR Associate whose primary role will be to assist the OHS section will enable the City to:

- Better manage the existing disability management workload;
- Take a more proactive approach to managing mental health and wellbeing issues in the workplace;
- Provide additional support to the department in LTD case management, sick leave tracking and accommodation case management;

- Collect, analyze and compare statistics (e.g. WorkSafeBC claims data, aggregated and anonymized EFAP usage) to identify emerging health and safety priorities;
- Actively follow-up with workers, managers and WorkSafeBC (i.e. WorkSafeBC documentation, stay-at work-duties and return-to-work duties) to effectively manage WorkSafeBC claims by ensuring claims documents are processed quickly, and stay-at-work or return-to-work duties are identified for the OHS Manager to act upon;
- Provide much-needed capacity throughout the HR department, as other tasks will supplement the OHS workload;
- Support recurring cross-training that helps address workload shifts and vacation/sick/parental leaves to ensure our responsiveness to organizational needs; and
- Maintain a positive experience for all employees as they go through the employee life cycle.

OPTIONS

Option #1 – Add an HR Associate, effective April 1, 2023

Add an HR Associate, whose primary role will be to assist the OHS section, with supplemental duties elsewhere in HR.

Benefits:

- Provides much needed capacity within the OHS section, and the HR department in general.
- Enables the OHS Manager to have more dedicated support on significant initiatives within the organization, such as disability management and mental health.
- Enables the OHS Manager to be more focused on managerial rather than administrative tasks.

Weaknesses:

- Permanent increase to HR operating budget.

Financial Analysis:

- Position will be set at excluded pay band 3.
- Estimated budget impact for 2023 for wages and benefits is \$81,700 based on an April 1st start date.
- Additional annual costs are estimated at \$2,300 in 2023 for training and network charges.
- One-time costs upon the creation of the position are projected at \$4,900 in 2023 for purchase of computer and furniture.

Option #2 - Add an HR Associate, effective July 1, 2023

This a slower implementation of Option 1.

Benefits:

- Provides much needed capacity within the OHS section, and the HR department in general.
- Enables the OHS Manager to spend more time focusing on significant initiatives within the organization, such as disability management and mental health.
- LTD case management, sick leave tracking and accommodation case management.
- Compared to option 1, impact on budget is approximately \$27,000 less in 2023.

Weaknesses:

- Permanent increase to operating budget of section; and
- Slower implantation of Option 1 will delay benefits to HR OHS section.

Financial Analysis:

- Position will be set at excluded pay band 3.
- Estimated budget impact for 2023 for wages and benefits is \$54,500 based on a July 1st start date.
- Additional annual costs are estimated at \$2,300 in 2023 for training and network charges.
- One-time costs upon the creation of the position are projected at \$4,900 in 2023 for purchase of computer and furniture.

Option #3 – Status Quo

Make no change to staffing in the HR department; organization continues to be serviced with existing resources.

Benefits:

- No impact to the operating budget for the department.

Weaknesses:

- Some key tasks will be delayed due to re-prioritizing.
- Leaves the department lean in covering planned and unplanned leaves.
- Increasing risk of burnout as workloads remain high.

RECOMMENDATION

Option #1: Add an HR Associate, effective April 1, 2023.