

# Team

# WORKERS



Sequim City Manager  
Charlie Bush outside  
city hall

Four municipal leaders talk about challenges they've faced, and strategies they've put in place, as champions of public service.



**“ WE HAVE A LOT OF FUN** here at the City of Sequim. It's something that was in place to some extent before I got here, and we tried to really open it up even more. We have done all kinds of things: we've been out camping; we've done pot-lucks, happy hours, hikes, bike rides; we've done a Wii bowling tournament in our exercise room—just a variety of things to get everybody together outside of their normal work environments and have fun together and enjoy their time together here working for the city. It's also accomplishing a goal for the city, which is bringing our organization closer together. You don't want people in a stressful, time-sensitive situation to realize they don't know each other. And so the plan is that by having people do some engaging, fun things that that actually starts to change their work performance as well.

We measure employee engagement here. Gallup does employee engagement surveys through something called the Q12, a survey they've been doing for something like 40 years. They've been asking the same questions for a

long, long time, and they've got all this longitudinal data. The first time we did it in 2017, our score was 3.5 on a 5-point scale, which equates to 63 percent out of 100 percent.

In the private sector, nationwide, employee engagement averages 28 percent. That basically means that less than a third of employees bring their best selves to work. And then you've got another 60 percent or so who are essentially just punching the clock; there are opportunities for them to step it up, but they don't feel a need to or desire to. And then you've got some people at the end of the spectrum who are actively disengaged,

who are really there to undermine what's going on. For us to poll at over 60 percent, that was really good.

There were some insights from the first survey that we acted on. One of the things we weren't very good at that we thought we'd be really good at was our connection to our mission and vision; we just thought intuitively, "Hey we're local government, we know what we're about: public service." But people did not feel like they had a real clear, razor-sharp understanding of that. So we partnered up with the Drucker Institute in Claremont, California, where Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, was a professor; we used their methods to develop a vision, mission, and core values for each department, and even drive that down to the division level. If you're in public works you actually have more detail about your mission for the water division or the sewer division.

The analogy that I love is that a city's staff is like a rowboat. If you're on a rowing team and you've got somebody who's out of sync with the rest of the team or is rowing in the wrong direction or is only rowing with one arm, it can really mess things up for the whole crew. But if you've got everyone working together in this thing going in the same direction, imagine what you can accomplish together. So you want to have a very fluid, very efficient, very trusting team operating with a knowledge of where you're going together.

Along those lines, we spend a lot of money on employee development here at Sequim. We have a full tuition reimbursement program: we've paid for entire degrees for employees. The reason we do that and make it a priority is because we're a rural community, and we can't compete with the I-5 corridor. We rarely attract talent from that area, because we're nowhere in that pay range. We're a smaller community, but we can grow our own people, and doing that serves multiple purposes: One, it's really motivating and inspiring to see our coworkers getting another degree and moving up in the organization. Two, it's a great retention tool when you're able to continue to develop and challenge yourself. And three, we're developing our own talent internally so we don't have to be as reliant on bringing talent in from the outside.

## SEQUIM

### CHARLIE BUSH

**Current position** City manager

**Years at that job** 4

**Years of public service** 21

**Education** MPA, Syracuse University  
Maxwell School of Citizenship &  
Public Affairs; BA (political science),  
Wittenberg University

**Best advice from another city manager** "You can always be an economic developer if you've been a city manager for a long time, but if you've done economic development for a long time, it's harder to move into city management."

# Kennewick

## MARIE MOSLEY

**Current position** City manager

**Years at that job** 9

**Years of public service** 36

**Education** BA (accounting), Gonzaga University

**Pet civic project** Kennewick's Gesa Carousel of Dreams, a vintage 1912 carousel restored, to the tune of \$1.9 million, via a partnership between the city and a group of local community leaders who volunteered their resources, time, and talents

“ **IN 2010, OUR CITY** manager decided to pursue a different career path, which left the position vacant. So the mayor and city council asked me to step in as interim city manager, and I agreed to do that, even though I was definitely stepping outside my comfort zone because I had not been in a city manager or deputy city manager position—I had been in finance my entire career. I was the interim city manager for about four months when the council offered me the full-time city manager position. Given my lack of experience, I was appreciative that the council was willing to take a risk.

During the recession, as support services director, I had worked with the city manager and the city council. What got us through that difficult time is our “budgeting by priorities” model. There were some positions, like government affairs, that we had to eliminate and realign our resources to implement higher-priority programs for the organization. We looked at some of the programs we were providing and asked if there were other ways we could deliver those services. We worked with organizations like the YMCA to take over programs like a summer day camp we had been providing so that we weren't competing or duplicating services with the limited resources that we had. Those types of challenges really did prepare me for taking over as city manager.

As soon as I took on the city manager role, we established our core values of integrity, inclusiveness, stewardship, and communication. As an organization we embrace and live by these core values. We have made a commitment to hiring and promoting the best and the brightest. We are also focusing on the importance of succession planning, as we have many members of our organization who are within five or so years of retirement. It's important that we're working to make sure that the next generation is prepared



Kennewick City  
Manager Marie  
Mosley at the Gesa  
Carousel of Dreams

to take over when those of us who have been in these jobs for many years are ready to retire.

I do think there's an advantage to having somebody who's being groomed for a position, who understands the culture of the organization, and who knows the council's goals and priorities. The City of Kennewick utilizes our strategic plan to stay aligned as an organization with the council's goals and priorities. Not only do we tie our strategic planning process into the biennial budget, but we tie it into our performance reviews. It is my responsibility to keep the organization focused on our strategic plan, which will help even when we may have changes in council leadership.

Since I've been in this profession, it certainly seems that the norm is to work in our department silos. I don't think that's as effective as coming together as a team and looking for creative and flexible solutions that could be missed if we are just focused on a single department or a linear approach. We definitely can't be as successful if we're not working on a cross-functional basis that encompasses multiple areas of expertise within our organization.

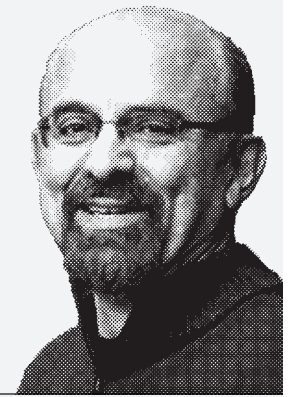
We also can't be successful if we're not building and leveraging partnerships with other cities and jurisdictions. A river separates Pasco from Kennewick. Kennewick and Richland are separated by a road; half of the road is owned by Kennewick, and half is owned by Richland. The three cities are also within two counties, so we do a lot of partnering, with [city manager] Dave Zabell over in Pasco and Cindy Reents [city manager of Richland] and our county administrators.

I consider Cindy to be a friend and a mentor. We regularly have lunch and collaboratively work together because we both attend many partnership meetings. For instance, Cindy is the chair of our bicounty dispatch center, SECOMM. Prior to the consolidation last year, we had a dispatch center in Franklin County and one in Benton County. There were instances where if you were on the border of Franklin County, you could be standing in Pasco and make a phone call to 911 and end up getting Benton County dispatch. We recognized it was very important to have just one dispatch center, and Cindy did an amazing job of implementing the consolidation.

We also have a great partnership with the Port of Kennewick and have been recognized by the governor's office the past two years for the ways we have been able to capitalize on the strengths and resources of each of our organizations to further multiple economic development projects. We can provide much more efficient and effective services when we're partnering versus when we're doing things by ourselves.

## Hire Calling Q&A DENNIS KARRAS

*Local government executive recruiter Dennis Karras talks about the public-sector job market and how municipalities can optimize their search for the right candidate.*



**Your firm, Karras Consulting, specializes in recruitment for municipal positions in the Pacific Northwest. What led you to focus on local government?**

I was on a couple of governors' cabinets heading a state agency called State Department Personnel, and when I was the director, we had a department that conducted searches for state government. It was so popular and successful that a lot of local governments also used our services.... My daughter [Marissa Karras, who had been working in the high-tech sector as a public relations and marketing director] and I had decided that when I left state government we would start a company to provide the sort of expertise and customer service that we felt was really wanting in organizations we'd worked with previously.

**And part of that expertise is dipping into the private sector to find candidates who might also flourish in municipal roles.**

Oftentimes municipal clients want someone who has had municipal experience, and I think

that's important, but there are a lot of private-sector clients that we've introduced to local government. Maybe we find someone working for an organization where their values are not aligning, or they're working in the private sector and they want an opportunity to give back and be a contributor to their community.

**Are there jobs or skills in the private sector that you think transfer well to employment in local government?**

Information technology tends to be a great area, as well as human resources.

**You tell your clients that background checks are the most important part of the hiring process.**

**What do you look for in a candidate, beyond glowing references?**

We go out to a wide group of individuals—people who've worked for the candidate, peers, stakeholders, people they've worked for in the past—and we get a really broad view of their past work successes and failures. The thing that's most important to us, and the thing that clients

CONTINUED ON P.19 ►

**“ I HAVE A SAYING ON THE** wall in my office—I’ve had it since before I became Richland’s city manager in 2007: “Some leaders are born women.” I just really appreciate that, because there are very few female city managers, especially in the state of Washington. As the very first city manager in the Tri-Cities area, I think the biggest issue was proving to council that a woman could do this job. I looked at it as, “No problem!”

We budget extremely conservatively here. When the downturn hit after I became city manager, we buckled down; I talked to all of the department heads and said, “We’re going to scrub our budget”—that’s what we called it—“and we’re going to get down to what it is that we need to function and provide the services that our citizens have asked us to do.” And that’s been my mantra here to our employees: It doesn’t matter if there’s a downturn. Let’s do what business would do.

It really was a relief to have another female city manager in the Tri-Cities area, and I felt Marie [Mosley, Kennewick’s city manager] was leaning on me because I had been a city manager before her. But she had no idea how much I leaned on her, and we’ve just developed a relationship that has transcended city work: it has created such a bond between the two cities. It doesn’t really matter which city you’re in, whether you’re big or small; we all have the same issues. We can speak as one voice, especially when we’re lobbying in Olympia, and we’ve been able to do that as well with Pasco and West Richland—we’re a very, very good team. But I think Marie and I, as female city managers, have a little bit of a better bond. We meet regularly, we talk on the phone, we partner, we share things—we have even shared employees. She loaned me an executive one time, and I’ve provided services to her. We have a master local agreement, so when we need those kinds of services, we call each other up and see if we can help each other out.

If you asked any of my employees, they’d probably tell you that I wear my heart on my sleeve. When I’m giving them an award, I’ve usually got tears in my eyes because I’m really proud of them. But I also hold them accountable, because we still have a business to run, and we are going to run this business the best that we possibly can with the best employees that we can. I do a brown-bag lunch once a quarter, and there’s no agenda; any employ-

ee can come and have lunch and talk about anything they want, and I will try to answer the best I can. Once a month, I also take four random employees out to lunch and tell them, “We don’t have to talk about work. I just want to get to know you.” And then a year ago, we started implementing a monthly city manager’s orientation for new employees. Again, there’s no agenda; it’s my way of thanking them for choosing Richland.

If my employees know me, they’re going to trust me more. If I get to know them, I’m going to trust them more, and I want to work in a place where people help me do what I need to do, and I want them to know I’m here to help them do what they need to do. It’s kind of cheesy, but we’re here together: we’ve got to be a family.

When I took over as city manager, the first thing I did was work with council and build a strategic plan. One of the pieces of that plan was to make our downtown into this beautiful, walkable waterfront area along the river, to create something better for our community where people would really just have a sense of place. Part of that involved replacing our original city hall, which was falling apart. We took down three buildings and consolidated them into one building, which is going to save a lot of money; the efficiencies that it has created for our staff have been already staggering. It took 10 years and \$18 million, but on Monday, June 10, we had our city hall grand opening.

It was probably more surreal for me than anybody. When I look out my window like I’m doing right now, I see a changing landscape, and I know I had a hand in that. My granddaughter was looking at the plaque on the wall in city hall that had my name on it, and I said, “Grammy did that!” What we’re doing is not for today, it’s for tomorrow, for generations to come. I truly believe that this is what I was born to do; I mean, what other profession gets to do that?

## RICHLAND

### CINDY REENTS

**Current position** City manager

**Years at that job** 12

**Years of public service** 26

**Education** MBA, California Coast University

**Best advice from another city manager** “If you want to be a good city manager, you need to know finance and people. If you want to be a great city manager, you need to know people and finance.”

# RICHLAND CITY HALL



Richland City Manager  
Cindy Reents with her  
granddaughters

should first and foremost look at and pay attention to, is the candidate's ethics and integrity. That's what really forms the foundation of any good leader.

### **What's one effective recruitment strategy for a small city in a rural area drawing from a limited local talent pool?**

Looking at "boomerangs": candidates who've grown up near the location where you're doing the recruitment, or maybe they attended college there or have family in the area. Those are all draws that are really important.

### **How else can small cities attract talent?**

Cultural fit is really important for any candidate: What's going to draw them to the area? Is it because of the recreational opportunities there, or that they like the wide-open spaces? I think you always need to be looking at those types of things, and if you can offer any type of unique benefits, that's very lucrative, too.

### **What's an example of that?**

We did a recruitment for a public organization recently that offered free, on-site physical therapy. That was a real benefit to us in the recruitment process—that they were willing to put resources like that into their budget for employees.

### **How do you make sure you're reaching out to a diverse talent pool?**

We reach out to a lot

of professional alumni associations and community groups, and then we really leverage associations that cater to diverse candidates. The most important piece of that is to let candidates know that your city really values diversity, equity, and inclusion. If you want diversity, you have to create a culture that supports it.

### **What specific qualities do you look for in city manager or administrator candidates?**

It's important to remember that most of these jobs are not tactical in nature—they're not doing the work, they're overseeing and directing the work. So, strategy and creativity are really important. But I think one of the most important things in any leadership role is relationship building.

### **Is there such a thing as too broad of a search when it comes to finding the right candidate?**

The wider the search, the better. In fact, we tend to go with very broad general qualifications because we don't really want people to be fearful of applying for a position because they don't think they meet some specific criteria. Every once in a while, we find someone who may not meet the traditional qualifications that the clients are looking for but offers another skill set that's important that had not been thought of previously—we're looking for that diamond in the rough.

Pullman

## ADAM LINCOLN

**Current position** City administrator

**Years at that job** 3

**Years of public service** 13

**Education** MPA, University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy & Governance; BA (political science), Western Washington University

**Best advice from another city manager** “You really have to spend time getting to know your team—you have to be open to being vulnerable with the people that work around you.”

Pullman City  
Administrator  
Adam Lincoln



“ **I AM A BIG PROPONENT** of the Lean model of government and process improvement, and looking at what other cities are doing that’s cutting-edge and how we might replicate that here. That needs to come not just from the top down, but from all directions of the city. One of the things that we’ve been looking at and taking a cue from Charlie Bush in Sequim is how can we create a team that is multilevel, is diverse, and focuses on identifying innovations we should be looking at. We’re a couple of weeks away from starting our own internal innovation team, which is a big deal for us because we are encouraging people to not just lead down but lead up.

We don’t have the money to have a trainer go through every single department to do this work, so this group will help facilitate conversations and lead trainings to be that group that wants to go above and beyond, that is interested in doing things a little differently. They’ll be the ones to lead those efforts, and I’m pretty excited for that. That kind of work on process improvement is important, but so is improving the culture of the workplace.

One of the better pieces of advice that I got—and this is something that’s

probably contrary to how a lot of longer-standing city managers operate—is that you really have to spend time getting to know your team, and you have to be open to being vulnerable with the people that work around you. A lot of city managers want to keep an arm’s distance from their employees, and they get in the habit of just being in their office with the door closed. When you deal with human resources issues and things like that, I understand that need to keep that arm’s distance. But it makes for a much happier work relationship when you actually get to know the people you’re working with, and they understand that you truly care about what their interests are and what they’re doing.

When I became manager, the city had gotten away from doing citywide picnics. Every year since I’ve been here, we’ve done an all-staff barbecue picnic. The other thing we stole from Charlie was what’s called our Fun Committee. One of the employees who runs our social media operation has also been really great about reaching out to local restaurants and bars and setting up happy hours for anyone on staff who’s interested in going out after work and just spending an hour or two talking about whatever comes up. It’s a way to invest in the community

and also get to spend time talking to one another.

People respect leadership where it’s approachable and open-minded. If you have someone who’s just sort of the figurehead at the top who isn’t approachable, you might go along with what they do, but you’re not going to have much satisfaction in what you do. And to me it’s really important that if you’re going to dedicate your career to working for the city, you’re also going to get satisfaction out of doing that. If there’s something I can do to make that job better for you, then I want to know about it. I want you to feel comfortable talking to me.

We may be a staff of 300, but we’re not a big enough organization where I can’t get out and meet with all of the employees at some point in a relatively short amount of time. Maybe you’re someone in the city who doesn’t have an e-mail address, and you work out in the field all day; if it means that I should come to you, then I’ll come to you to find out what it is that we should do differently or better, or how I can assist you in some way. It gets back to that genuine relationship, that viewpoint of servant leadership being a critical aspect of being a good leader. **C**