HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEGAL COMPLIANCE

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ANNUAL REPORT
FISCAL YEAR 2016-2017

The Town of Rocky Hill re-established its personnel department in January of 2015, infusing into the unit responsibility for human resources best practices and related legal compliance matters. The Department of Human Resources and Legal Compliance (HRLC) partners with all other municipal departments to align the municipal organization’s most valuable resources—its employees—with organizational values and goals, while fostering an environment where employees are provided with training and professional development opportunities and prepared for career advancement. In its legal compliance role, HRLC ensures compliance with employment and labor laws, as well as workplace health and safety regulations, by working across departments to develop practical approaches to personnel systems, including but not limited to recruitment and selection, performance and training, compensation and classification, and labor relations.

HRLC maintains an open door policy across all levels and work groups. Through formal training—but most often through daily interactions with Town employees, HRLC staff apprise employees and supervisors alike of their rights, responsibilities and trends relative to a host of issues affecting the workplace, including performance management; promotion and career advancement; review of job descriptions in terms of the classification system; and continuing education and tuition reimbursement programs.

HRLC works with vendors to facilitate training on team-building, leadership skills, and health and safety matters. Many of these training sessions are sponsored free of charge by the Town’s insurance providers (Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Association (CIRMA) and Anthem Blue-Cross Blue-Shield. HRLC staff provide training and guidelines to search committees on conducting and documenting objective recruitment and hiring activities, and addressing unconscious bias in applicant review and selection decisions. As an internal resource, the HRLC Director began developing training on topics including sexual harassment prevention, harassment/hostile work environment, retaliation, and discrimination, which will be rolled out to both supervisory and non-supervisory employees.

HRLC facilitates safety and OSHA-related training programs for employees across departments. HRLC partners with department Directors relative to OSHA mandated compliance plans, which are posted for public reference. Additionally, HRLC coordinates the activities of the Town’s Safety Committee, which is comprised of employee representatives across departments and titles, and includes Board of Education representatives.
The following statistics reference some of HRLC’s key functions which were active in fiscal year 2016-2017:

- 43 Employee Relations and Administrative Review Cases
- 26 Family Medical Leave Act and Americans with Disability Act Cases
- 19 Freedom of Information Act Requests
- 24 Searches to Fill Vacancies

1. PERSONNEL TRANSACTIONS, RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PROCESS

HRLC ensures that personnel transactions such as hires, promotions, transfers, terminations, compensation decisions and other employment actions are aligned with the classification system and current union contracts, Municipal Employees Relations Act (MERA), Connecticut Fair Employment Practices Act (CFEPA), and other applicable state and federal laws. HRLC works closely with the Finance department to update and standardize procedures and documentation associated with the employment process, including but not limited to offer letters, background checks, payroll authorizations and related documents, as well as contractually-obligated tuition reimbursements. The HRLC Director conducts exit interviews, participates in hearings regarding unemployment benefits before the Connecticut Department of Labor and proceedings before the Workers’ Compensation Commission.

The HRLC facilitates training and procedures designed to address job vacancies through an objective evaluation and hiring process. Guidance materials developed by HRLC are utilized across departments. As a testament to its partnership with departments, HRLC staff are invited by department heads and search committee chairs to monitor and assist with applicant interviews and evaluations. HRLC helps departments balance interests in hiring the best qualified candidate with concern for speedy outcomes—while ensuring compliance with applicable laws and best practices. HRLC has been partnering with Finance department staff to roll out an online search process system, which is tied to best practices for position control numbers for budget purposes—using existing technological platforms.
2. EMPLOYEE RELATIONS AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW CASES

HRLC investigates internal complaints of discrimination, sexual harassment, hostile work environment, and retaliation, amongst other matters, as directed by the Town Manager. Investigation protocols and standards of review are directly aligned with state and federal oversight authorities’ requirements and guidelines (i.e., Connecticut Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities (CHRO), and the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC)). Administrative review/investigatory reports are submitted to the Town Manager for final decisions regarding disciplinary and other employment actions. Whenever possible, and if appropriate, HRLC mediates employee conflicts through informal means with union representatives and supervisors. The HRLC Director represents the Town’s interests and participates pre-litigation proceedings, and attends hearings before the CHRO and the Department of Labor.

3. LABOR RELATIONS, CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS AND GRIEVANCES

HRLC values its relationships with union leaders and employee representatives. The department strives to cultivate collegial, joint problem-solving efforts which lead to improvements in personnel systems and increased morale and productivity across departments. HRLC’s labor relations work includes preparing successor contract proposals for negotiations, updating job descriptions, and fielding questions from supervisors and union representatives regarding compensation and the classification system.

When informal conflict resolution cannot be achieved and grievances are filed, as directed by the Town Manager, the HRLC Director crafts response briefs and participates in arbitrations before Connecticut’s State Labor Board of Mediation and Arbitration.

4. COMPLIANCE WITH AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT & FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

The Town is committed to providing access to its programs and facilities, and is dedicated to assisting employees who are unable to work because of their own serious health condition or the serious health condition of a family member. HRLC works across departments and consults weekly with supervisory and non-supervisory employees to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as amended by the ADA Amendment Act (2008), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as well as the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996.

Through training and facilitating interactive process discussions, HRLC assists Directors, supervisors and employees in developing reasonable accommodations that balance the needs
and rights of employees with the business interests of the municipal organization, thereby ensuring compliance with the ADA. With regard to FMLA, beyond minimal compliance, HRLC has adopted best practices in communicating with employees and health care providers. For each employee request, HRLC staff ensures the use of updated forms and standardized correspondence readily accepted by oversight authorities like the federal Department of Labor—which serves to mitigate potential liability for the Town. HRLC also administers the Town’s Zero Tolerance Drug and Alcohol Policy and related random testing system, and is the Town’s liaison with Employee Assistance Program (EAP) vendors.

5. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

The goal of the Town of Rocky Hill is to courteously and promptly provide requested information in compliance with the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which guarantees public access to all public records maintained or kept on file by the municipality. Most public records are readily available for inspection upon request during regular business hours, such as those maintained by the office of the Town Clerk and other municipal offices. Otherwise, records must be provided within statutory timelines of four (4) days (to provide written acknowledgement of requests) and 20 business days (to provide responsive records). HRLC is often called upon when requests relate to records that contain information deemed to be confidential or private. HRLC reviews such requests through the lens of statutory exceptions and exemptions to balance public disclosure and individual privacy interests. HRLC communicates frequently with FOIA Commission representatives to ensure compliance in this area and participates in hearings before the FOIA Commission.