



Above: Frederick City Hall. Credit: CC-BY-2.0 by Bob Carney on Flickr.



EMPLOYER PROFILE

PROVIDING FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS AND UNINTERRUPTED SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC: THE CITY OF FREDERICK

The City of Frederick, Maryland, which also serves as the county seat of Frederick County, employs approximately 881 people. The public employer developed and implemented several policies to provide staff with a flexible working environment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Karen Paulson, the City's Director of Human Resources, described some of the City's Transportation Demand Management (TDM) efforts. Employers may wish to consider similar initiatives as they develop return to office plans and welcome back employees.

The City already had a few employees who worked compressed schedules prior to the pandemic, but the pandemic compelled the City to "formalize these working options and introduce telework more broadly," according to Paulson. At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, the City closed all facilities to the public and only permitted essential staff whose duties required them to be on site to physically report to work. The remainder of staff were encouraged to telework and were provided with laptops to facilitate the temporary shift to home-based work, ultimately teleworking full-time for more than a year. In the recovery period, staff are now able to telework up to 60 percent of their time, maintaining flexible work hours that fit with varying schedules, and taking advantage of compressed schedules to allow for more days off, subject to approval.

Teleworking has proven to be mutually beneficial for employees and the City. Employees reacted positively to the formalized alternative working arrangements, which was adopted by the Board of Aldermen and has now become a permanent benefit to eligible employees pending continued six-month reviews and approval. The additional flexibility of telework has also increased morale. "For the City, the teleworking, compressed work schedules, and flexible work hours programs have enabled staff to continue working in ways that fit within their schedules, allowing more freedom to balance work and home demands while providing a high level of service to our constituents," according to Paulson. This flexibility also helps keep the City running and ensures services continue during a public health crisis or even when there is inclement weather. Today, 154 employees have been approved for the teleworking program, which employees can also use for other emergencies, such as weather, caregiving responsibilities, and temporary building closures. "The initiative's success has been measured by maintaining a high level of service throughout the pandemic with services our community relies upon," Paulson explained.

Paulson has advice for organizations that want to implement or expand similar programs. She recommends that "it may be helpful to start with a trial period to measure the success of the plan. Managers and employees should be provided with ample training, and performance expectations should be made clear. Having defined objectives and core work hours helps employees and managers stay in communication." Once the City has more experience with the program past the pandemic response, they plan to reevaluate it in more "normal" times.

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Karen Paulson

Director of Human Resources,
City of Frederick