



Wisconsin Society of Professional Engineers

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A state society of the National Society of Professional Engineers

June 8, 2004

City Council
City of Milwaukee
200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Attn: Ronald D. Leonhardt, City Clerk

Re: CC# 040131
P.E. Registration – CPW Position

Ladies/Gentlemen:

The Wisconsin Society of Professional Engineers (WSPE) is an individual membership organization representing approximately 1,000 licensed professional engineers and other engineers in the state of Wisconsin working in industry, government, education, construction and private practice.

WSPE strongly opposes efforts by the city of Milwaukee to repeal a requirement that the Commissioner of Public Works (CPW) be a professional engineer (PE) registered under the laws of Wisconsin. WSPE understands that City of Milwaukee Common Council File 040131 has been introduced by Ald. Michael Murphy, Chair of Finance and Personnel Committee which proposes to repeal the PE requirement.

As background, the PE requirement was added by the Common Council in February, 1966, at the original request of the engineering community in Milwaukee. In a letter from the Department of Public Works, signed by Herbert A. Goetsch, then Commissioner, it was pointed out that this had been the practice for the past 30 years prior to the adoption of a Charter Ordinance. It has been the practice now for at least 68 years.

There are several reasons why this should be a charter requirement. The CPW is responsible for the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operation of street and highway facilities, including bridges, all storm and sanitary sewers, all water treatment and distribution facilities, all electrical facilities and a system of wired and fiber-optic communications facilities for fire, police and emergency service facilities, all street trees, city playgrounds, on and off street parking facilities, and the municipal equipment and vehicular fleet

and over 200 city buildings and their structural, electrical and mechanical facilities. The CPW appoints division heads (with the exception of the City Engineer) who carry out these many activities. The CPW is also responsible for garbage collection, recycling and garbage disposal. These facilities have a replacement cost of over \$8 billion in today's dollars.

In addition, the CPW is also the chief contracting officer for the department. As such they also hire engineering consultants and the registration of all parties under such circumstances serves to enhance the mutual confidence and respect. The code of ethics to which the registered engineer adheres gives assurance to the public of the technical competence of the office.


Many of the duties of subordinates in the department require the application of engineering principles wherein the safeguarding of life, health or property is concerned, or service of the type for which registration is required in private practice.

The registration of a CPW offers legal protection to the City in the event of possible lawsuits involving public works. It also lends general assurance that the public is securing competent technical service for the leader providing public works services. The public is entitled to such assurance of technical qualifications in its area of services.

Looking ahead to the major public works challenges facing the city, such as the issue of separation of the combined sewers within the city, the quality of river and lake water and the fiscal issue of preservation of infrastructure under declining tax revenues, it seems ill advised to remove the technical qualifications of the Commissioner of Public Works in these trying times. There are many competent PEs who can meet these qualifications. For most of the last 70 year history of this position, when the Mayor appointed an individual from within the department, that person served with distinction. Three of the last five Commissioners won the American Public Works Association's "Top 10 Public Works Administrators of the Year" award in the last 40 years.

Therefore, WSPE urges the city of Milwaukee to reject efforts to modify its requirements for the Milwaukee Director of Public Works.

Sincerely,



Mark S. Davy, P.E.
President, WSPE (2003-04)