Town Government Participates in Local “Day of Quality”
Week of October 22, 2018

Every local government in New York State is confronted with the same problem: how to maintain and, ideally, expand output with finite, often stagnant resources. The need to hold the line on already-high property taxes weighs heavy on government leaders as we work to ensure that infrastructure is maintained, the community is kept safe and quality of life is enhanced.

Earlier this year, the Greater Rochester Quality Council expressed their interest to me in working with the Town of Irondequoit to assess and improve quality and performance at Town Hall. The GRQC, an affiliate of the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce, works to foster excellence in the products, services, and processes of all organizations and businesses in the community.

Every year, through its Day of Quality, the GRQC dispatches experts in Lean Six Sigma organizational performance to address a potential improvement area. Historically, local governments have not participated, so I am proud that the Town of Irondequoit was willing to acknowledge our need to always be improving. The first challenge in this effort: choosing an area to target.

It is no secret that over the past few years, the many trees in Irondequoit have received a great deal of attention. The long-anticipated, much maligned arrival of the Emerald Ash Borer has forced us to preemptively remove hundreds of ash trees from our right-of-way. The many sugar maples that were planted two generations ago are now at the end of their life span. And, yes, last year’s devastating wind storm reminded us that our best assets - in this case, our urban tree canopy- can also bring great challenges.

On the October 4th Day of Quality, our DPW leadership and I spent an entire day working with a volunteer quality team of experts to review and enhance our internal processes for responding to the many hundred requests we get annually to remove town trees from the public right-of-way. We tackled this problem knowing that many things are outside of the Town’s control, and mindful that some trees might take an entire week to take down.

Ultimately, our charge was to help streamline our internal processes to afford better communication with constituents and provide a reasonable timeline. This is based on the overall condition of the tree. I can say that an overwhelming majority of requests we get are not imminent, and as such, we are bound to address first those trees that pose a potential public safety hazard. That said, our goal is to get to more trees and to better communicate with our residents in that regard.

I am very much satisfied with the plan of action that emerged from this Day of Quality session and hope to duplicate it with other processes of Town Government. Upon reflecting on this effort, I was reminded of our State’s motto: “Excelsior”. Latin for “Ever Upward”. Indeed, there is no reason why we should not strive to perform better.