

GOVERNMENT GLOOM

Working within the framework of a bureaucracy can give government workers the blues. Here are what some must cope with en route to doing their jobs as effectively as possible.

by Jeff Sobul, assistant editor

It's not just having limited funds that makes it frustrating. It's that, when working in a bureaucracy, managers have to go through so much trouble to get their money.

While bureaucracies exist in the private sector as well, the vast majority occur in the public sector. From the tiniest municipality to the largest state, government landscape managers often must deal with miles of red tape to get funds. Getting additional funds above and beyond the budget is even more difficult.

Buddy, can you spare a dime?

For some, like Kenneth Grothous, superintendent of parks in tiny Delphos, Ohio (pop. 7300), getting the same budget allocation as in 1986 would be nice. Unfortunately for Grothous, \$40,000 of his \$140,000 1986 budget came from federal revenue sharing, all of which he has lost this year. In addition, his \$100,000 operating budget has been cut another \$10,000. With most of the operating budget paying six to eight maintenance workers on staff from April through November, little is left to get necessary work done.

Grothous divides the rest among maintenance of the city football stadium

in which two high school teams play, baseball diamonds, and the town swimming pool. The pool is the city's main source of income, and thus the high-

quate to maintain the city's 128 acres. The land includes a sports complex, a

BMX racing track and five neighborhood parks (mostly picnic areas) for the town of about 15,000.

However, his small budget limits plantings. Given more funding, he adds, "I'd do a lot more landscaping."

For purchases between \$500 and \$1,500, Arledge must get three estimates before one is approved by the city. For projects above \$1,500, he is required by law to advertise for two weeks to get bids. Though Arledge wishes the process were faster, he believes that it's still good policy because it makes spending more accountable.

Arledge's biggest problem, however, may come from the possible loss of diazinon. It has been his most cost-effective way of dealing with armyworms and fire ants, a common and dangerous problem in the South. If the situation continues, he will have to find an alternative—which will in all likelihood be more expensive.

Similar problems exist on a larger scale in other cities. Mark Gillespie, who manages public land in one of Charlotte, N.C.'s four park districts, would love to add more people to his staff, "but it's difficult to make a case for additional personnel when facilities are added," he says. "You have to make a well-documented case in order to get more people."

His district is staffed by 25 full-timers, with 10 people added during the busy season, although there's no real slow-down of work during the year because of back-up. Gillespie would like to add one more five-person crew and three temporary people. Without this help, he says, during the summer his district just tries to stay even with the work. "Wintertime is the time to make advancements. In winter, my priorities shift to improv-

est priority.

Grothous plans to add a water slide to the pool in hopes of boosting revenues.

"(The town) needs to take more steps to increase revenues, such as a special operating fund for projects on existing facilities," he observes. However, he expects revenue sharing to return—in some form—after 1987 because of pressure from municipalities.

Carrol Arledge of the Clinton, Miss. parks and recreation division has the help of a two-mill tax levy. He feels his seven-person staff is ade-



ing."

As with Grothous, Gillespie makes a priority list for his two-year budget (which comes in one-year increments). "You have to concentrate on areas in the public eye," he says. His main priority is Memorial Stadium, which hosts the Shrine Bowl college football all-star game each December. Other priorities include preparing for various festivals and maintenance of the grounds of Discovery Place, a nature and science museum.

"It's a constant juggling of resources," Gillespie says. "You let areas go that don't get as much attention. But that catches up with you." To help with the juggling, the parks department recently hired a budget analyst.

He has had to stretch out his mowing schedule in order to cut costs some. His department is also using plant growth regulators on rights-of-way.

Most of the work his department does is horticulture-related, including landscaping and tree work (take-downs, pruning, planting, etc.). As a result, Gillespie spends a lot of money on pesticides, but he again runs into red tape because of hiring constraints.

"We need people with pesticide

applicator certification," he says. "The personnel department doesn't realize this." Despite this, he adds, "We're really conscious of pesticide safety." His people always have up-to-date safety information.

Slip slidin' away

Transportation department personnel nationwide, struggling with nature to

Research shows that growth regulators can save states between 30 and 50 percent on mowing costs.

keep rights-of-way clean and safe for motorists, railroads and public utility companies, also operate within bureaucracies.

And with budget limitations imposed by state legislators, transportation department employees must make due with what they have, also establishing a priority list to allocate money where it is most beneficial and necessary.

Though priorities often differ from region to region across the country, some seem to be cropping up as often as weeds along a highway. A major concern for most transportation departments is erosion control, both during and after rights-of-way construction.

Boyd Cassell of the Virginia Highway Department says every construction project undertaken in the state includes erosion control measures. Considerations for control during and after a job are worked into the project budget, he adds.

Cassell's control methods during construction include silt barriers, geotextile use and fences for slope protection. The key to post-construction control, he says, is re-establishing vegetation as quickly as possible. This includes sodding and planting shrubs and trees.

Bill Johnson of the North Carolina Department of Landscape Engineering uses similar methods. "We are required by law to re-establish vegetation, using grass, seed, shrubs and the like," he says. In addition to geotextiles, he also incorporates fiberglass drainage ditches into the construction project. His office is involved throughout the life of each project.

Limiting growth

Once vegetation has been re-established, controlling its growth becomes a major concern. States in the temperate Southeast, where a full growing season translates into frequent mowing, have been using growth regulators with increasing frequency.

Jeff Doan of Technomic, a market research company, has done \$750,000 in research on the rights-of-way pesticide market. He says that nearly all of the states from North Carolina and Tennessee south, and from Louisiana east, are using PGRs.

"PGRs are economical if they work," Doan comments. His research shows that growth regulators can save states between 30 and 50 percent on mowing costs.

Virginia's Cassell has also used PGRs successfully on a limited basis. "We use it around guardrails and other narrow areas," he says.

Whatever the extent of use PGRs are getting in the Southeast, their economic benefits suggest that while they may keep grass from growing, their use in vegetation control will continue to grow. And in a situation where every penny counts, and is accounted for, a cost-reducing agent is always welcome.

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