

# City of Madison: City engineer Robert Phillips announces retirement after 33 years of city service

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MADISON, WI – The City of Madison Engineering Division City Engineer Robert “Rob” Phillips will retire at the end of April after over three decades of service to the City.

“It has been an honor to be a part of the Engineering Division over the last 33 years. The Engineering Division touches many people. The Engineering Division has helped a lot of people through the years. We have solved problems for alders, neighborhoods, businesses and developers,” Phillips said. “I have worked with so many amazing people. Our staff is smart, innovative, helpful, ready and willing to adapt to change.”

## **Three Decades of Change**

Change has been an evolving theme throughout Phillips’ career. When he started in 1988, the Division was still designing on paper; The Division was on the verge of transitioning to computerized drafting, surveying and designing. Phillips said the Division now designs on top-notch technology, a technology overhaul he is proud of. Phillips said other major changes that affect the Engineering Division include increased public involvement, addressing climate change, the evolving mission of the stormwater section and the addition of on-the-job training for underrepresented individuals.

“I could not have done my job effectively without the quality of people we have. I truly am grateful for the staff we have here. It is us collectively that are the Engineering Division,” Phillips said. “I have never lost sight of that, of what makes us successful, which is the people here who make us successful.”

## **Career Climb**

Phillips graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Civil and Environmental Engineering in 1987. Phillips started his career at the City of Madison in 1988 as an entry-level engineer, specifically designing street reconstruction projects. Once at the City, his career continued with promotions to more advanced engineer positions leading Public Works projects, managing federally-funded projects and leading the City's Bridge Inspection and Construction Program.

"I am very proud of our work making bridges more attractive," Phillips said. "No one was really asking us to do it back then, we just did it. Generally, it was not a big extra cost, but it made them look nice. I came up with a lot of the architectural treatments and provided them to the designers."

In 1992, Phillips earned a promotion to Principal Engineer of the Engineering Division's Transportation Design Section, where he would lead the section of Engineering tasked with overall management of the City's streets, bridges and paths projects.

In 1999, Phillips earned a promotion to Assistant City Engineer, where he assisted in overall management of the Engineering Division. Phillips negotiated contracts for the City, directed staff in public works contracting, acted as City Engineer while the current City Engineer was temporary assigned to the Water Utility for one year and directed staff involved in the design of transportation facilities, storm sewers, storm water facilities and sanitary sewers.

In 2010, Phillips earned a promotion to City Engineer, where he led general administration of the City of Madison Engineering Division following the retirement of Larry Nelson.

As City Engineer, he served on the mayor's management team, served as the executive secretary of the Board of Public Works, Madison Metropolitan Planning Organizations Technical Coordinating Committee, Employee Relations Committee, and served as the Public Works Team Leader, in addition to his current role as City Engineer, for the City of Madison.

"Rob's work leaves an incredible legacy in the infrastructure of our city," said Mayor Rhodes-Conway. "He has provided steady and conscientious guidance to the Engineering Division over the years, and has been instrumental in many City-wide projects. His experience and expertise will be missed."

Phillips was also involved in significant projects like the construction of John Nolen Drive in conjunction with the construction of Monona Terrace, the reconstruction of East Washington Avenue, the construction of County Highway M and rebuilding of most of the major streets that serve downtown.

"I am proud that we were able to continue to grow the bike network, an effort my predecessors got well started," Phillips said. "I am very proud of our efforts on the days and weeks following the unprecedented rains that came on August 20, 2018. I lead that effort, but it really was an all-city effort. Maybe even more significant, is the watershed studies that grew out of the 2018 floods, led by Janet Schmidt in our Stormwater Design Section."

### **Future of Infrastructure in the City of Madison**

Flooding and the growing need to use renewable energy will challenge City Engineering and City staff even more, as the City of Madison remains focused on improving both areas of infrastructure.

"We need to show other cities it is possible to become sustainable and to dramatically reduce or eliminate our reliance on fossil fuels," Phillips said.

Working toward solutions to handle evolving climate change remains a growing focus for the Engineering Division and for the next leader of the Engineering Division.

"Climate change is going to be difficult to address," Phillips said. "A big burden will fall on the Storm Utility, which will have to find other funding to supplement local funding for the projects needed to address flooding as the price tag is so high. I hope over the next couple of decades we can significantly reduce the probability of damaging floods."

Overall, Phillips said he is thankful for the honor and privilege of serving his community for 33 years, with challenges, changes and improvements for the community, it has been an honor to serve on a team like the City of Madison.

"I am proud of what we as a City have been able to accomplish over my time with the City," Phillips said. "We have been named best place to live, we've achieved platinum bike rating, we're among one of the safest cities of our size for pedestrians, and so much more. These are not my personal accomplishments. It is an effort that involves every department. We collectively provide quality service to our residents and visitors and it shows. It makes a difference."

*The City will conduct a nationwide search for Phillips' successor. Engineering Division Deputy Division Manager Kathy Cryan will serve as interim manager of the Engineering Division.*