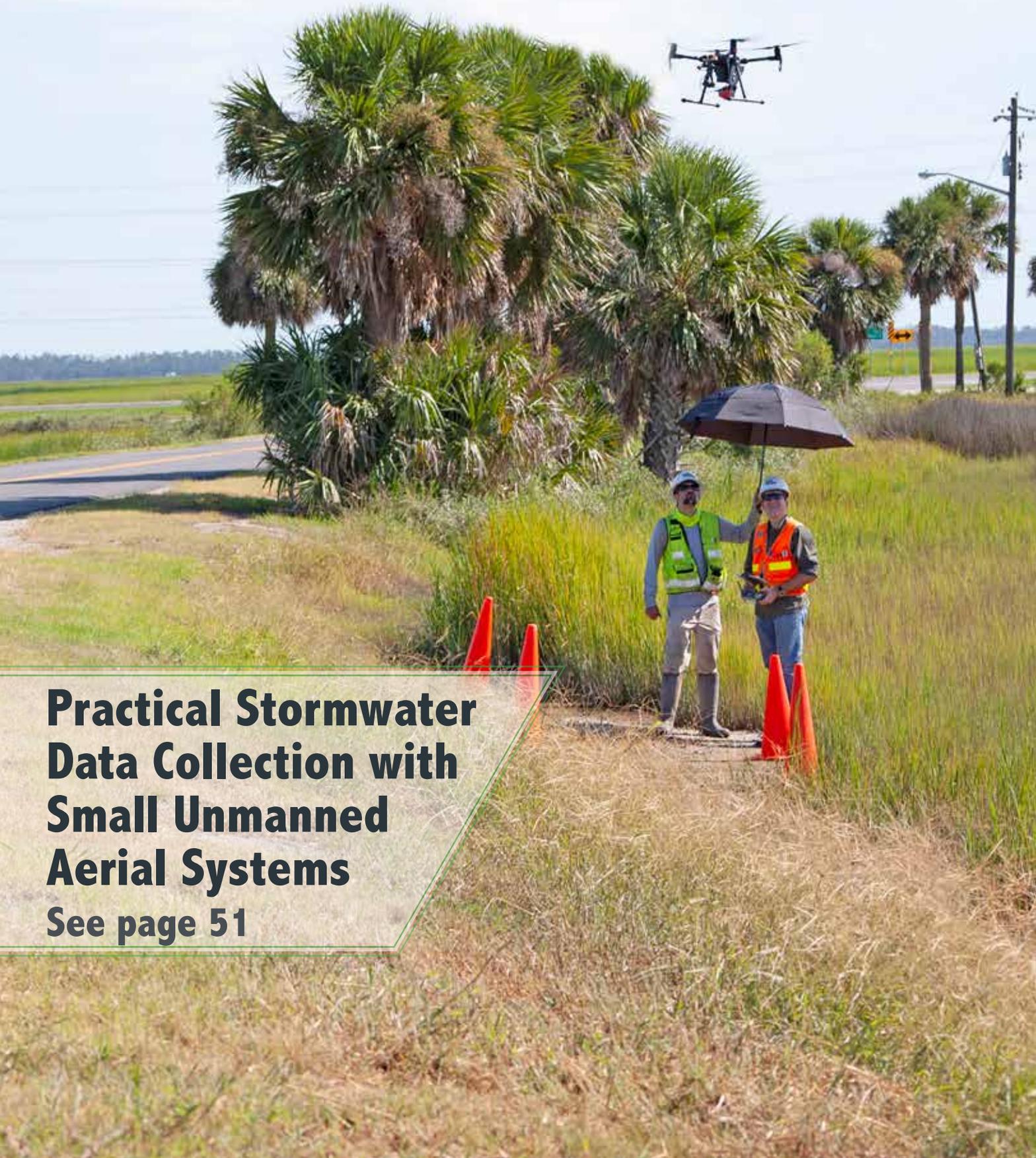


APWA REPORTER



Practical Stormwater Data Collection with Small Unmanned Aerial Systems

See page 51



The APWA Reporter, the official magazine of the American Public Works Association, covers all facets of public works for APWA members including industry news, legislative actions, management issues and emerging technologies.

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City of Fairway Accreditation



Bill Stogsdill, PWM, PWLF, Director of Public Works, City of Fairway, Kansas; member, APWA Leadership & Management Committee

Have you ever thought about trying to get your agency accredited? Do you think it would take too much time? Do you think that your staff was too small? Are you worried that it will be too daunting? The City of Fairway, Kansas, had the same questions.

With a landmass of just over one square mile and a Public Works staff of five, we didn't know if it was possible. We are here to share our lessons learned as well as the good, the bad, and the ugly. Lots of people ask, "Is accreditation for us?" Accreditation is for every agency that wants to confirm that they are using the best practices in the most efficient way.

The City of Fairway, incorporated in 1949, is a beautiful residential community in northeast Johnson County. The city was named "Fairway" as it is bordered by two private golf courses. With nearly 4,000 residents and nearly 1,800 homes and 100 businesses, Fairway is a small but significant city. Located within minutes of the Country Club Plaza and downtown Kansas City, Fairway is a very popular residential area known as "the City of Trees."

Achieving accreditation was important to us so we could confirm that even though we are a small department and community, we still follow the best practices available.

One of our biggest challenges was just getting started in earnest. The seed of accreditation was planted at PWX (Congress) in 2013 while attending a session on accreditation for small communities sponsored by the SC/RC (Small Cities/Rural Communities) Committee. We attended a Self-Assessment Workshop the following February and decided shortly after that this was something that we wanted to pursue. At our May 2014 City Council meeting we signed our accreditation contract and the clock started.

Things went quickly to begin with by focusing on the "Not Applicable" sections of the handbook. Once that was completed, we hit a stretch of inactivity. As a small agency it is easy to put a project like this on the back burner. We were inundated with other assignments and projects that required immediate attention. A few of the larger ones:

- We demolished and rebuilt our pool/park complex in the off season of 2015.
- A space-needs assessment for our Public Works facility was conducted and a new facility master plan was developed to rebuild on the current site. The new facility master plan was scrapped after finding an existing facility, rehabbing it to suit our needs, and ultimately moving into our new location in 2015.
- Google and AT&T built out the backbone of their infrastructure throughout the city in 2016.
- A new location for City Hall was identified, remodeled to suit our needs, and moved into in 2017.
- We transitioned through three different City Administrators and two Mayors.

Projects of this size and a change in leadership in a small city with a small staff made putting accreditation on the back burner very easy. Six months would come, six months would pass, and we would request another extension. In January of 2018 that came to a halt. Tracy Quintana (APWA Accreditation Manager) e-mailed us to check in and see how our progress was going and if we would be ready for a site visit in 2018. We were not ready and requested another extension, but we were out of extensions.

Tracy informed us we could get a final six-month extension for free or a one-year extension that would cost 25% of our original accreditation fee. The options were presented to our City Administrator and he encouraged us to find a way to get it completed within the six-month window. Now that we had a hard deadline, we quickly organized to divide the work up amongst the team of three public works staff and one borrowed (our Accreditation Manager was from the City's Administration Department).

Our Accreditation Manager assigned the chapters to the team factoring in each of our current job duties and familiarity with the requested information from each chapter. With a small accreditation team, each member was responsible for multiple chapters. The team continued to meet monthly and the Director and the Accreditation Manager met bi-weekly. As each chapter was completed and uploaded to the website, our Accreditation Manager reviewed it for content and thoroughness and checked it off the list. This project was at the forefront and took considerable time, and finally after months of going through chapters and practices we were ready for our peer review and we felt confident about it.

Our confidence was shattered in the first 20 minutes of the peer review. While we did have most of our information uploaded, we did not have all of it dated. It is very important that all your supporting documentation is relevant (which is to say three years or newer) or have a memo from the department head stating that it is the most current document or policy that your department follows. I can't stress this enough—our peer review team helped us tremendously. They gave us detailed information on what we needed to have cleaned up and modified for our site visit. Luckily, we gave ourselves about five weeks in between the peer review and the site visit just in case, and we needed it.

Thanks to our hard-working staff and our diligent peer review team, the site visit went better than expected. We finished earlier than anticipated and were able to get the site visit team home a little early (after enjoying some great Kansas City BBQ). We achieved full compliance on 346 practices, substantial compliance on two practices, and had one model practice.

Conclusion and Do's and Don'ts

Do's: Do go through the process to learn about your city, your department, and your staff. Do assign team members multiple chapters. We found that the more chapters you went through, the easier it became to complete. Do recruit the best peer review team possible. They will help make the site review process go that much more smoothly. Do schedule plenty of time in between the peer review and the site review to allow time for corrections and polish. Do empower your Accreditation Manager to be the one person with oversight and whose job is to review and make sure content



Bottom row, left to right: Bill Stogsdill, Fairway Public Works Director; Abbie Aldridge, Fairway Deputy City Clerk & Accreditation Manager; Chris Mann, Fairway Public Works Asst. Director. Top row, left to right: John Lawlor, Public Works Director, City of Bloomfield, CT (APWA Evaluator); Rick Allen, Fairway Right-of-Way Specialist; Emily Black, Parks & Recreation Coordinator, Cherry Hills Village, CO (APWA Evaluator)

matches and is similar across all the chapters as well. Do treat the site review team as guests; they are there to help. Do celebrate the accomplishment and invite the governing body to the plaque presentation.

Don'ts: Don't put the process off and run out of extensions; come up with a plan and a timeline and stick to it. Don't get defensive toward the site review team. They are there to try to understand your city, policies, and operations. Don't be afraid to reach out to other accredited cities to see what they used in a particular practice; it is okay to borrow ideas and policies.

Conclusion: I would recommend accreditation for any agency large or small. I have worked for the City of Fairway since 2001 and been Director since 2006 and I learned several things about my city that I didn't know or had put aside. It is also a good internal look at your department's policies, procedures, operations and efficiency. I know it's easy as a Department Head to say that there isn't time to dedicate to accreditation, but I promise you will find ways during the process to optimize or improve your department's operations.

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