

Profile in Public Service: Prosper Finance Director Matthew B. Garrett

By Rachael Pitts

TML Director of Member Services

Prosper Finance Director Matthew B. Garrett is an example of the hundreds of hard-working, dedicated city officials serving small cities in Texas. We think it is important to profile these public servants from time to time.



Matthew B. Garrett has been serving as the Town of Prosper's finance director for three and a half years. Before coming to Prosper, which is home to more than 10,500 residents and located in Collin and Denton counties, he worked five and a half years for Collin County, holding the positions of human resources analyst, human resources supervisor, and senior financial analyst.

Matthew earned a B.B.A. in management from Texas A&M University, and an M.B.A. in organizational strategy from The University of Texas at Dallas. He is a Certified Government Finance Officer, as well as a graduate of the Northern Collin County Leadership Program and the Collin County District Attorney's Office Citizen Prosecutor Academy. A big believer in continuing education, Matthew is midway through the Certified Public Manager Program at Texas State University and in the MS-Accounting Program at The University of Texas at Dallas.

Matthew is a member of the Government Finance Officers Association of Texas (GFOAT) and serves as the chair of the Newsletter/Web Site Committee. He is also a member of the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), the Government Treasurers' Organization of Texas (GTOT), the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), and the Texas Association of Governmental IT Managers (TAGITM).

Matthew recently celebrated his eleventh wedding anniversary. He and his wife Kristie have two children, a beautiful eight-year old daughter named Rebekah and Samuel, a rowdy two-year old son. Completing the family are two dogs, a Golden Retriever/Husky rescue and a German Shepherd puppy. In his downtime, Matthew enjoys home improvement projects, coaching youth softball and basketball, training dogs, and date nights with his wife.

What are your core responsibilities as finance director?

My responsibilities include oversight of finance, budget, and utility billing activities. I help direct the town's information technology functions and manage our contract with an outsourced IT service provider. With no stand-alone human resources function, I often assist with human

resources policy review and compensation analysis.

As an investment officer, I'm responsible for ensuring the town is prudently managing its portfolio. As a department head, I help define the organization's strategic direction and lead others through any changes required to get closer to the council/town manager's objectives.

What is a typical week like for you?

A typical week would include 60 percent scheduled and 40 percent unscheduled activities.

The scheduled activities include a department head meeting with our town manager, agenda item research/preparation, meeting with department or division leaders, evaluating new initiatives, reading up on economic trends, coding various invoices, committee meetings, and making time to think. The reactive portion is spent on ad hoc reporting for the town manager and departments, escalated utility customer or taxpayer concerns, encouraging vendors to meet town expectations, ensuring IT commitments are met, and finding coachable moments.

What makes Prosper unique?

"Prosper is a place where everyone matters." This is our purpose statement, and a lot of time and energy goes into living up to this standard.

Prosper has an excellent reputation as a place to live and work and was Dallas-Fort Worth's fifth ranked suburb to live in by *D Magazine*. The town has excellent schools, low crime, and affordable housing, providing a wonderful environment to live in and raise a family.

What major projects are currently underway in Prosper?

The town is updating its comprehensive plan this year, entering year two of a compensation study implementation, and has established a customer care team to keep our focus on service. The town just opened the first phase of Frontier Park, which improved 40 acres of recreational space, including five ball fields, twelve soccer fields, playgrounds, and a water feature.

Finance is tackling improved reporting of monthly financials, a transparency initiative, and a mandatory rotation in auditing firms. Our voters recently authorized bonds on a

number of projects and designs. Staff and the town council are working through scenarios concerning when that debt should be issued, given project timelines and I&S (interest and sinking) rate consequences.

What pressing issues does the town face?

The Town of Prosper is fortunate in that one of the pressing issues is still how to properly manage growth without over-extending resources too far ahead.

As a finance department of two and a half people, staffing is a pressing issue. We have a long-term comptroller who is retiring next May, and we will be looking for a good replacement to come in, learn the ropes, and take Prosper's accounting function into the high growth era we are expecting by 2013.

What are Prosper's short-term goals?

The town is seeking high quality commercial developments to take their place along key corridors. The town is launching into more thorough performance benchmarking and is gathering relevant statistics for each department and program. The town is also hoping to receive a TML Award of Excellence for both our implementation of dispatch and also organizational development initiatives.

In our department, we're refining processes to make interdepartmental transactions and communications efficient. We're hoping to receive the town's first certificate of excellence for the FY 2010 CAFR (Comprehensive Annual Financial Report) and plan to submit the FY 2011-2012 budget document for additional recognition by GFOA. We're also planning to revamp the general ledger and build a contract repository database for all town functions.

What are the town's long-term goals?

The Town of Prosper is guided by the Town Council's Vision and Strategic Workplan. The broadest goals as stated are:

- Secure the Town's Financial Future
- Actively Engage Citizens
- Make Prosper a Jewel
- Enhance Public Safety

In finance, one long-term goal is earning/maintaining the respect of each department and being regarded as a business partner rather than an obstacle to new ideas. Like most others, we're striving for an AAA bond rating.

What are the town's greatest opportunities?

The greatest opportunity for Prosper lies in determining our own future state. Prosper has historically maintained large lots, an open feel, and clearly defined commercial use areas. Development agreements can be reviewed with

greater scrutiny and higher expectations in locations where growth is almost inevitable. With a little patience and knowing what our residents hold dear, Prosper can ensure and incentivize quality.

What are the town's greatest challenges?

A major challenge for Prosper is a relatively large physical divide between most of our residents on the east and our rapidly growing subdivisions on our western boundary. The town is approximately nine miles wide, and the area in between is sparsely populated. The town currently does not provide water or sewer services to many in that area, and emergency response times are beyond targeted limits. Certain measures have already been put into motion to address the needs, but additional fire facilities and services from a second water district make westward expansion complicated.

Do you monitor state and federal legislation?

Now that the Texas legislative sessions have adjourned, our town faces some implementation challenges—none more than S.B. 100 and its impact on election dates or council terms. As always, I'm on the lookout for other federal "guidance," GASB standards, or IRS regulations that impact the town.

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Small Cities' Corner

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Why do you attend the TML Annual Conference and Exhibition or other TML training events?

The TML Annual Conference and Exhibition gives me an opportunity to interact with professionals from an array of cities, many of which experience the same issues we have or will soon be facing. I like the range of specializations that attend, and it is always good to glean a new perspective from other leaders and elected officials. The conference and training events contain important information city leaders need to understand; the most helpful for me is the legal briefings.

The exhibitors and their solutions allow you to see what is on the cutting edge, as well as time-tested methods. I think of each trip into the exhibition hall as vendor speed-dating.

Any advice you can offer those new to city government?

Know yourself first. Then find an organization that fits you and supports your career aspirations. Establish candor with your boss, if possible. Discover how your job affects the lives of others. Be Proud of Your Service to the Community.

Other insights I've borrowed from driver's education...

"Buckle up."

The road ahead has more than a few potholes. Get tough.

"Objects in the rearview mirror may be larger than they appear."

Seemingly small actions today may catch up with you in a big way later.

"Pedestrians have the right of way."

Any position can be filled if vacant, but people are irreplaceable.

"Always use your turn signals, and use hazard signals only as needed."

Maintain integrity between your words and actions.

"Listen to your driving instructors."

Serve your organization diligently, and seek out career/life mentors.

(I didn't invent any wisdom that may be found in my advice above, so I'd like to personally say thanks to my parents, Cynthia Jacobson, Rodney Rhoades, Monika Arris, and Mike Land for being my driving instructors.) ★