TO: Mayor and Council
FROM: Howard S. Lazarus, City Administrator
RE: A2 Fix It Changes
DATE: February 1, 2019

This memo details changes being made to the A2 Fix It system to improve data reporting and responsiveness to resident requests for service.

Opportunities

The A2 Fix It platform has become a ubiquitous part of the city's customer service operations. In 2018, the city received an average of 1,800 A2 Fix It requests monthly. Additionally A2 Fix It is the source for nearly 100% of service requests for reported abandoned bicycles, grass or vegetation issues on private property, pothole repairs, sidewalk issues, snow and ice removal, and trash on lawns, making it an indispensable tool for the city. Use of the A2 Fix It platform has also increased every year since the software was originally launched in 2014. Usage data is provided in the figures below:

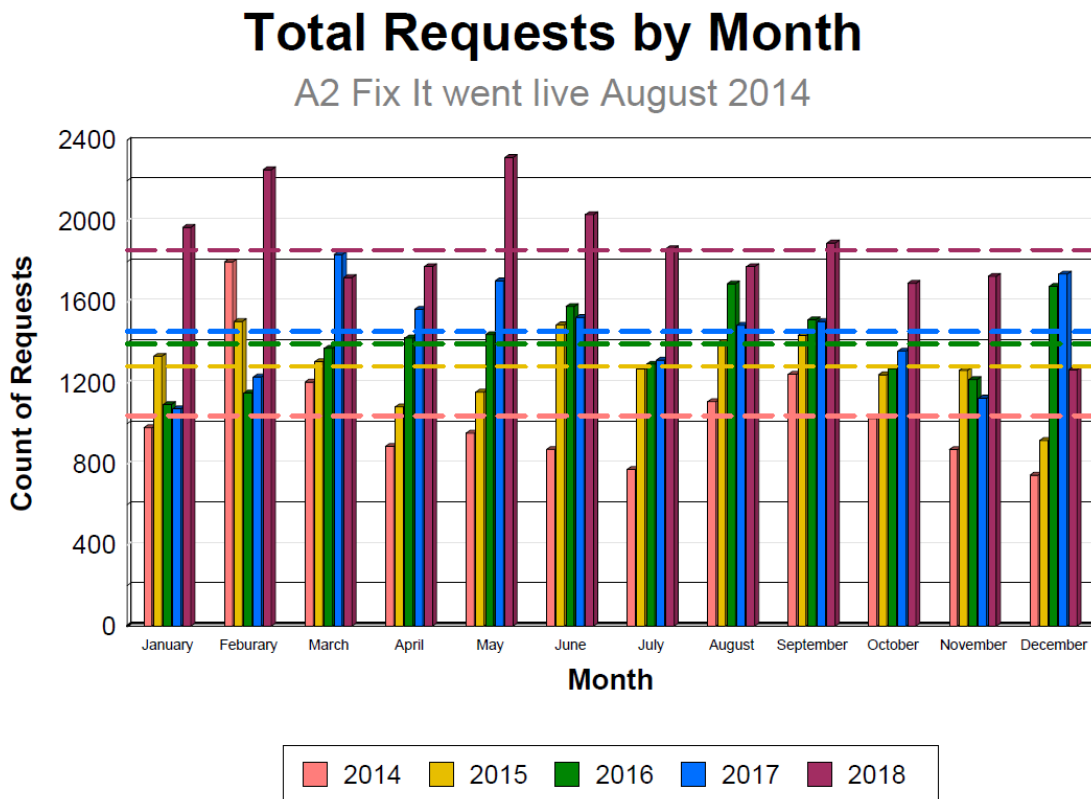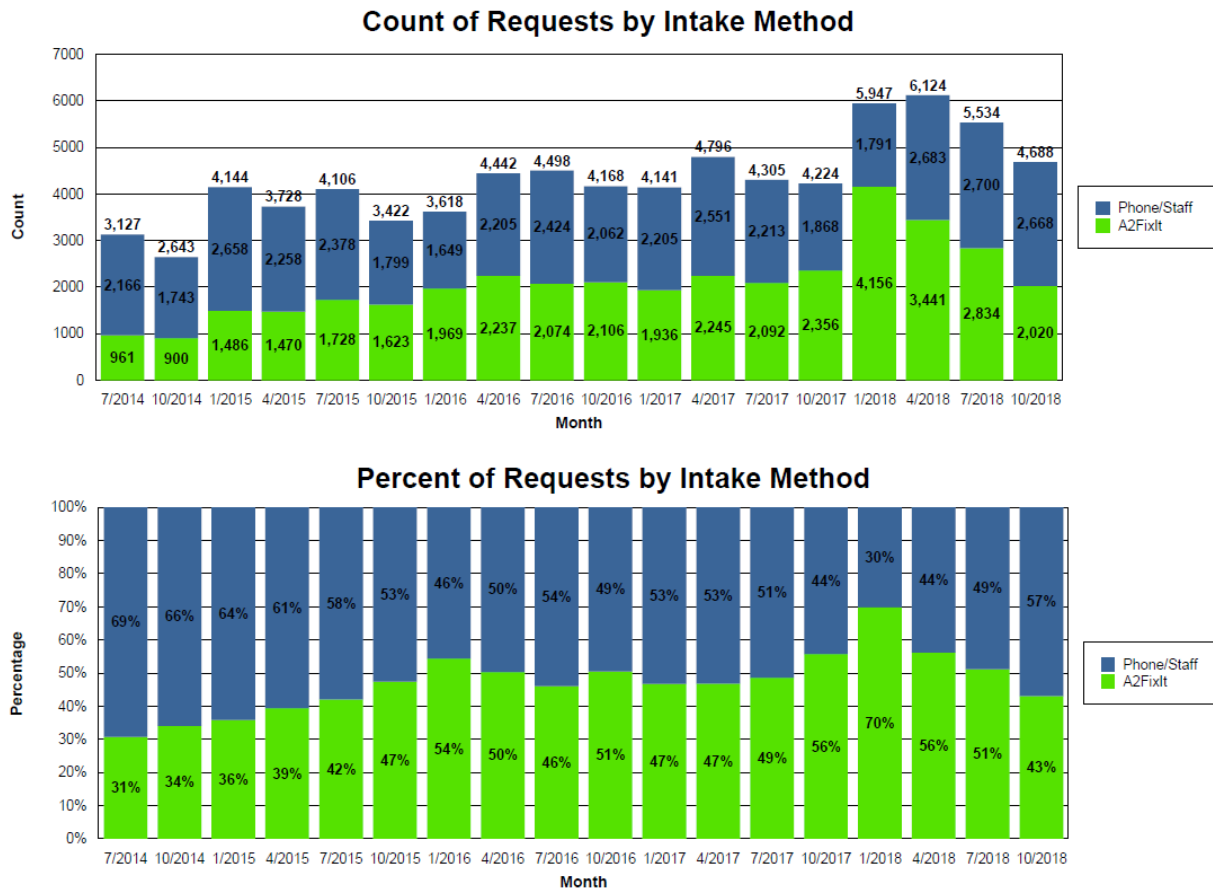Figure 1. Total A2 Fix It Requests by Month and Average Requests by Year

Figure 2. Count of Requests by Intake Method

The A2 Fix It application provides a portal for residents to request services from the city directly through our Cityworks work order system, and is therefore a communication tool between the public and city staff. Ideally, the application should provide insight for staff on what the highest priority issues are for residents and should also provide feedback to residents on what staff are doing to address their concerns. While staff do an excellent job on a day-to-day basis meeting the many challenges that are inherent to running a city, there can also be improvement on how this tool is used to meet our objectives.

It bears repeating, however, that the A2 Fix It tool is directly integrated into Ann Arbor's Cityworks work order system, so that when a request is made through A2 Fix It a work order is generated for staff to review in their normal course of business. This is a tremendous strength of this system and it has allowed city staff to incorporate citizen requests into their day-to-day work flow.

Issues

While the strength of the A2 Fix It system lies in its integration into the city's work order system and in the increasing adoption and popularity of the system, a weakness is in the data reporting that is achieved from the system. Since A2 Fix It operates as a work order management tool, the data is

managed purely for work order processing and not for public reporting. This may not seem like an important distinction, but it has a significant impact on the quality of the data.

For instance, a person might be interested to know how long it takes the city on average to close a work order for pot holes. In the A2 Fix It system a pothole request is marked as closed only after a public works employee files the work order report stating that the ticket has been closed, and that often happens several days after the job is actually completed because public works employees tend to take a group of work orders, work on them all at once while they are in the field, and then at the end of the week or after a few days fill out the work order report to close them out. So the existing data does not reflect actual time stamped completion of the work.

Similarly, when someone files a complaint for illegal dumping the city's response is not a simple work order for service as this is a criminal act and the police have to open an investigation and pursue a criminal enforcement proceeding. This process can take some time and the data cannot reflect the level of attention or effort that the city is expending to remediate the dumping.

There are also A2 Fix It issues where some city residents may simply disagree with the decisions of professional staff, and they will keep submitting the same A2 Fix It request over and over despite it being closed. An example of this are requests for tree pruning. The forestry team at the city may get an A2 Fix It request for a tree to be pruned, but upon inspection the city staff may decide that the tree is not a good candidate for pruning. They will mark the inquiry as closed, but if the resident disagrees the request will keep coming back time and again. This interferes with the integrity of the data that is reported out of the system in that it doesn't reflect efficiency of city operations so much as it reflects the desire of residents to have city-owned trees aggressively pruned.

Finally, there are some residents who use the system to editorialize about the city rather than to request services. Short statements such as "Great work on paving X street!" or a pithy comment expressing displeasure are not uncommon. Some people request services that the city cannot render, such as capturing skunks that live under a person's deck or requesting that the city collect unopened newspapers from the neighbor's porch. Many requests are the spur for a capital improvement project, which may also be marked as completed even though the actual work requested may be deferred and incorporated into a large effort at a later date. Because the system is managed as a work order system, we simply mark these A2 Fix It requests as complete so they are removed from the open work order queue. However, doing so skews the data and makes it unreliable.

These are only a sampling of the issues that cause the A2 Fix It data to be poor in terms of its suitability for public reporting, even though it works very well as a work order system.

Solutions

Since the public and City Council have showed more interest in receiving data reporting from the A2 Fix It system, we have convened a working group in city hall led by the Assistant City Administrator and composed of employees from IT, Communications, and from the managers who use the A2 Fix It system on a daily basis to draft recommendations for improving the data reporting abilities from the system. This group will draft new data handling procedures for A2 Fix It, develop a training for city staff so they can re-learn how to use the system with an eye toward protecting data integrity, and

develop management tools to ensure that the data being entered is accurate and useful. In addition, the IT team will develop a standardized reporting tool so A2 Fix It data can be visualized and communicated effectively across the organization.

Some preliminary recommendations include:

1. Creating additional request categories, such as "Crosswalks," and "Abandoned Scooters" so resident can more easily file high-demand requests.

2. Adding a check-box to each work order so it can be marked as "complete" for data tracking purposes before the official work order report is filed, thereby creating a time stamp for when the work is actually done in the field.

3. Creating subcategories that can be used internally to track requests so citizen comments, unachievable requests, repeat requests, and other similar requests can be filtered out of our data reporting.

4. Auditing the reporting structure for A2 Fix It requests so we can ensure that they are being reported to the proper city staff.

5. Creating an online data dashboard so that when the data reporting achieves a level of reliable quality we can share it with the public on a regular basis.

Work on this process will be ongoing indefinitely, however we intend to achieve a second quarter of 2019 initial completion date with continuous management from that point forward.