

MINUTES

Approved 5/11/07

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

APRIL 13, 2007 2:00 P.M. SCOTT HEYMAN CONFERENCE ROOM

Present: G. Stevenson, Chair; M. Sigler; M. Hattery; D. Kiefer

Excused: P. Mackesey

Staff: C. Covert, Clerk of the Legislature; P. Younger, Deputy County Administrator; S. Whicher, County Administrator; V. Coggin, Assessment Director; J. Franklin, Deputy Assessment Director; M. Lynch, Public Information Officer; G. Potter, Information Technology Services Director; D. Squires, Finance Director

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

Changes to the Agenda

There were no changes made to the agenda. Ms. Kiefer spoke about an email she received describing NYSAC's request for suggestions about "there ought to be a law" and asked committee members to keep this in mind and consider bringing issues forward.

Chair's Report

Mr. Stevenson said he did not have a report.

Report from the County Administrator

Mr. Whicher announced the New York State Association of Counties State budget analysis is available and will provide copies to Legislators. He also asked County Department Heads to provide him with their analysis and the impacts on the department's budgets and hopes to have this information prepared and available prior to the Legislature's retreat on April 26th.

Mr. Whicher brought to the Committee's attention a request from the County Historian as presented in the letter distributed to the Committee asking for the policy to be reinstated that provides a stipend for that position. The letter outlines and explains the reasons for the request. *Mr. Whicher asked the Committee to place this item on the next agenda for consideration.*

County Attorney's Report

The County Attorney was not present.

Report from the Finance Director

Mr. Squires was not present at this time.

Report from the Public Information Officer

Ms. Lynch said she is in the process of preparing a report on the budget forums held recently and hopes the information will be available prior to the Legislature's retreat as well.

Assessment Department

Resolution – Refund of Taxes

Ms. Coggin provided a brief overview of the resolution and said government agencies cannot be charged for any special districts.

It was MOVED by Ms. Kiefer, seconded by Mr. Hattery, and unanimously adopted by voice vote by members present, to approve and submit the following resolution to the full Legislature for approval:

RESOLUTION NO. CORRECTION OF ERROR AND REFUND OF TAXES – TOWN OF LANSING (45.1-1-52.5)

WHEREAS, this Legislature is informed that an error has been made in the 2007 tax roll of the Town of Lansing, namely parcel 45.1-1-52.5, assessed to United States Postal Service, was erroneously charged for the Lansing Fire District tax (a United States government agency is not to be liable for any special district charges, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, on recommendation of the Government Operations Committee, That the Town of Lansing Tax Collector is directed to correct the 2007 Town and County Tax Roll,

RESOLVED, further, That the amount of \$8,612.31 be charged back to the Town of Lansing.

SEQR ACTION: TYPE II – 20

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Flood Assessment Relief Act of 2007

Mr. Franklin explained this law was passed by the State and signed by the Governor last week. The law allows Assessment Departments to make any corrections to the 2006 tax roll and refund taxes that a property owner would have paid if their property was damaged by the flood in June 2006. A provision of the law adopted is that at least ten properties must be damaged by at least 50 percent or greater of their market value. Following discussions with appropriate officials and County staff, the number of properties in Tompkins County do not meet the minimum requirements and Mr. Franklin, therefore, does not believe this law is applicable in Tompkins County.

Assessment Data on the Internet

Mr. Franklin said this issue is being brought back for the Committee's consideration. He provided an overview of the Department's policies and programs and said there are two levels of assessment information available on the Internet. The basic (restricted) level is open to the public and is searchable by the tax map number or address. The tax map, deed book/page, and assessment information is available at this level. The advanced level is available to professionals such as the real estate community on a pay per view basis. The information at the advanced level is also available in the office if members of the public choose to come in and access it. He also noted the information at the advanced level is also available on other Internet sites but is not up to date. Members of the public have asked that the information in the advanced level be made available to them. He believes the advance level data should be accessible to the public for the 2008 revaluation to allow the ability for members of the public to research comparables. The cost to provide the advanced level data to the public is very little as the tools and equipment are in place now.

Ms. Kiefer said she does not find the argument for making the advanced level data available to the public on the Internet persuasive. She does not approve of the County contributing to the privacy concerns and details of properties being available to the public on the Internet.

Mr. Whicher spoke in support of the proposal for allowing public access to the advanced level of information. He believes the information currently offered is too restrictive and the public deserves and

desires to have more information. He hopes the Committee will reconsider the policy and allow this information to be accessed on the Internet.

Mr. Hattery suggested making the advanced level data available in the Town Clerk's offices. He also asked what other counties have experienced and if there would be an increase in the number of people challenging their assessment. Mr. Franklin commented that Tompkins County is unique as it offers county-wide assessing and does not know if there would be an increase in the number of challenges. It would make the assessment tax roll more equitable and become a better product. He also noted that local government offices already have access to the advanced information.

Ms. Coggin spoke about the grievance process and said that most people want to see comparables and see pictures of the properties.

Mr. Stevenson expressed his opinion and said he supports making the advanced level data available on the Internet as he hears from constituents that they would like access to it.

Discussion continued concerning the information available at the advanced level. Ms. Kiefer reiterated her concerns and strongly opposes having property exemptions made available. Mr. Franklin said the exemption code could be deleted.

Mr. Whicher suggested and the Committee agreed to have Mr. Franklin and Ms. Coggin come back to the next meeting with a proposal for the Committee to consider.

2008 Countywide Revaluation – Staffing Issues

Ms. Coggin reviewed the information distributed with the agenda concerning the staffing issues with the 2008 Countywide Revaluation. The department is in need of more staff or it will likely be in a crisis situation. As assessment professionals, the main concern is to put out an equitable assessment roll every year. An equitable assessment roll means a uniform percentage of fair market value. There are two options for the Committee to consider: (1) increase staffing levels for the revaluation (2007-85% value to 100% value in 2008); or (2) continue with an equitable assessment roll at the fractional value (less than 100%).

Mr. Whicher said this needs to be tied with the budget and would like to meet with staff before going any further with this and request that the Department come back with a proposal for the Committee to consider at a future meeting.

Ms. Kiefer recalls that when the Legislature approved the three-year cycle it was with the expectation that by the third year the assessment roll would be at 100 percent value. She also recalls it being explained that once the County reached the third year that there would be staffing needs.

Mr. Stevenson said the staff from Assessment and the County Administrator need to get together and discuss this and bring back a proposal next month for the Committee to consider. Mr. Whicher said one issue that will need to be resolved is whether the Legislature wants the assessment roll at 100 percent value.

A brief discussion followed and Ms. Kiefer MOVED, seconded by Mr. Hattery, to approve and submit to the full Legislature a resolution that directs the Assessment Department to update the 2008 assessment roll at 100 percent fair market value rate. Mr. Stevenson said he does not necessarily believe the assessment roll needs to be at 100 percent value. A voice vote resulted as follows: Ayes – 2 (Kiefer and Hattery); Noes – 2 (Sigler and Stevenson). MOTION LOST.

Resolution – Volunteer Fireman/Ambulance Worker Exemption

Mr. Stevenson briefly reported that there has been some interest in examining the possibility of providing a tax exemption on real property owned by volunteer fire or ambulance workers residing in Tompkins County. A resolution has been prepared but does not expect the Committee to take any action today; however, he would like the Committee to discuss it briefly.

Mr. Franklin researched this and has learned that the State Legislature recently passed an Income Tax Credit for qualifying Fireman/Ambulance workers that they can take on their State income tax return. This Income Tax Credit is only available to those qualifying individuals who have not applied for and received an exemption off of their real property tax. In Tompkins County there are approximately 800 people who would be eligible for this property tax credit in Tompkins County prior to this recently passed legislation.

No further discussion was held.

Finance/Assessment Departments

The Corrections to Tax Roll dated 2007 was presented as information only and no discussion took place.

Report from the Finance Director

Mr. Squires said he did not have a report, but announced that the Auditors are finishing up their work.

Finance Department

Resolution – Cash Management and Investment Policy

Mr. Squires briefly explained the resolution and policy and said there was no change from last year. It was MOVED by Ms. Kiefer, seconded by Mr. Hattery, and unanimously adopted by voice vote by members present, to approve and submit the following resolution to the full Legislature for approval:

RESOLUTION NO. - ADOPTION OF CASH MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT POLICY

WHEREAS, Article 2 -Section 10 of the General Municipal Law requires each local government to authorize depositories for public funds, and

WHEREAS, Article 2 -Section 11 of the General Municipal Law requires each local government to authorize Permitted Investments for public funds not required for immediate expenditure, and

WHEREAS, Article 3 -Section 39 of the General Municipal Law requires each local government to adopt a comprehensive investment policy which details the local government's operative policy and instructions to officers and staff regarding the investment of public funds, and that the Investment Policy shall be annually reviewed by the local government, and

WHEREAS, the cash management policy of 2006 has been reviewed by the Finance Director and found to be appropriate to continue, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, on recommendation of the Government Operations Committee, That the Cash Management and Investment Policy dated January 2007, is hereby adopted.

SEQR ACTION: TYPE II-20

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Mr. Squires briefly reported the only change in cash handling is with the Solid Waste Division. The Division is using digital imaging of checks through the Citizens bank. He also reported that the

County annual auction on foreclosed properties is scheduled for June 12th. There are only 16 parcels; however, he is hoping that the City of Ithaca will be participating.

Legislature

Resolution – 2007 Succession of Members

It was MOVED by Mr. Sigler, seconded by Mr. Hattery, to approve and submit the following resolution to the full Legislature for approval. Ms. Kiefer believes the list should not be done by committees, but based on experience and length of service and availability and suggested the following order: Mr. Proto, Ms. Kiefer, Mr. Koplinka-Loehr, and Ms. Robertson. A brief discussion followed and a voice vote resulted as follows: Ayes – 3 (Hattery, Sigler, and Stevenson); Noes – 1 (Kiefer), Excused – 1 (P. Mackesey). RESOLUTION CARRIED.

**RESOLUTION NO. - APPROVAL OF 2007 SUCCESSION OF MEMBERS OF THE
COUNTY LEGISLATURE TO SERVE IN THE ABSENCE OF THE
CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**

WHEREAS, Section 2.05 of the County Charter, specifies the succession of members of the Legislature be designated annually by resolution to serve in the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair, and

WHEREAS, the Government Operations Committee recommends the chairs of standing committees be designated, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, on recommendation of the Government Operations Committee, That the following order of succession of County Legislators for the year 2007 be approved to serve in the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair:

- Chair, Budget and Capital Committee
- Chair, Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee
- Chair, Health and Human Services Committee
- Chair, Government Operations Committee
- Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee

SEQR ACTION: TYPE II-20

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Committee Goals

Ms. Younger briefly reviewed the proposed three goals presented to the Committee based on discussions she had with Mr. Stevenson. Mr. Stevenson said it has been challenging for him to adequately take the Committee discussions and present them to Ms. Younger. He encouraged Committee members to raise any questions or concerns they have and make recommendations.

Ms. Kiefer commented that she agrees with goal numbers one and two and recommended adding some language to goal one that the Committee agreed with and is incorporated in the goal below.

Following further discussion, Ms. Younger distributed information from a website concerning plain language in government and said that it could be applied to both goals one and two. She said looking at language and layout standards on how to approach updating the Administrative Manual and putting conventions in place should be taken into consideration.

As referenced in the last set of Committee minutes, Ms. Kiefer questioned why there were only three goals rather than four and that program evaluation, staffing levels, and structure were not mentioned as goals. Mr. Sigler thought goal three hinted towards them and believes it is an important area to address especially following the discussion with the Assessment Department. Ms. Younger said many of these

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topics relate to the strategic objectives outlined in one of the Budget and Capital Committee's goals. She said she is pushing the Core Performance Framework approach to assist with putting an infrastructure in place to begin discussing program evaluation.

Mr. Hattery thought the Committee had discussed goal number three as identifying the role of central administration to departments versus Legislators.

Ms. Kiefer also noted that the appointment policy is not mentioned as goal.

Mr. Sigler believes staffing and structure should be discussed in this Committee. Ms. Younger commented that it is also important to look at all dimensions of a department not just the personnel.

Discussion followed concerning the advisory board appointment policy and that it should be listed as goal four with the understanding that it would likely not be done this year and recommend it continue as a goal in 2008. Ms. Kiefer identified some of the issues raised in the past including filling vacancies openly and bylaws being uniform.

Mr. Sigler requested the assessment of the number of departments be added to goal number three.

Ms. Younger agreed to revise goal three and add goal four for the Committee to review and approve at the next meeting.

It was MOVED by Ms. Kiefer, seconded by Mr. Hattery, and unanimously adopted by voice vote by members present, to approve goal number one and two as follows:

Goal 1: Develop a plan, including guidelines and process, for routine review and/or updates to the County Administrative Policy Manual including consideration of maximizing its utility. The plan should be in place by the end of the 2007 calendar year and should provide a suggested timeline for improving Manual currency by 50% by the end of 2009.

Need Statement: Currently, there is no coordinated approach to updating sections of the Administrative Policy Manual or stated guidelines on how this should be done. The need for a coordinated approach is critical because the information contained in the Manual is used to support all departments and administrative units of the County. The Manual consists of six core sections and 94 subsections. The majority of the recorded policies (63%) originated in 1981, indicating that most of the information is approximately 26 years old. Roughly 75% of the policies have been revised at least once; however, revision dates range from 1984 to 2006, which is a significant span of 22 years. Policy that is inaccurate or outdated jeopardizes the overall quality of our operations. Inconsistencies need to be identified. Because we rely on our policies for guiding our management, financial, and administrative decisions and actions, it is important that we have a plan and a process in place for routinely ensuring the accuracy and currency of the County's Policy Manual.

Goal 2: Work to develop and implement updates to the County's Communication policy that is specific to usage of the County's electronic mail (e-mail) system, i.e., Section 01-18 of the County Administrative Policy Manual. The updates and implementation steps should be completed by October 1, 2007.

Need Statement: Recently, the County began the first steps in upgrading its email system. Once the technical changes are in place, there will be a need for training and technical assistance not only on how to use the system, but also on the appropriate use of the system. Section 01-18 of the County Administrative Policy Manual is intended to address the latter; however, current

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information is sparse in content and has not been reviewed or revised since February 2, 2001. E-mail is a very important and powerful tool that is used daily by County staff and officials to conduct business. To minimize potential risk in areas such as confidentiality breaches, legal liabilities, e-mail retrievals to support FOIL requests and other matters of law, and waste of valuable bandwidth resources due unnecessary network congestion, there is need for a policy, based on industry standards, that:

- Provides current guidelines on the appropriate uses of the County e-mail system.
- Helps increase awareness of the potential risks to the County organization if the guidelines are not followed.

At a minimum, the revised policy should address the following:

- Email risks
- Best practices (email etiquette, writing rules, etc.)
- Personal usage
- Prohibited content
- Document retention
- Treatment of confidential data
- Email monitoring

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of March 9, 2007 were deferred to the next meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:13 p.m.