

**Government Operations Committee
August 3, 2007
Courthouse Conference Room
2 p.m.**

Present: M. Sigler, P. Mackesey, D. Kiefer

Excused: M. Hattery, G. Stevenson

Staff: S. Whicher, M. Lynch, County Administration; J. Wood, County Attorney, D. Squires, Finance;
M. Pottorff, Legislature Office; E. Cree, S. DeWitt, Board of Elections

Guests: J. Steiner, Public Library Director, N. Fawcett, H. Dullea, Library Board of Trustees

Call to Order

Mr. Sigler called the meeting to order at 2:07 p.m.

Finance Director's Report

Mr. Squires distributed information on the annual tax enforcement cycle and a list of properties that are subject to foreclosure. He said the list contains less than 150 properties and that owners will receive a notice on October 1st to inform them of potential foreclosure. The total amount in unpaid taxes \$189,522. The list contains one trailer park in the Town of Dryden. The only property listed that is an environmental concern is the Dobson property located in the Town of Danby.

Mr. Squires said the inventory of unpaid tax items has been constant and at any one time there are approximately 3,000 unpaid tax liens. Approximately 500 notices are sent out each year to property owners. Once notices are sent and properties are advertised the list lessens to approximately 150 properties on average.

County Administrator's Report

Mr. Whicher reported the County Administration Department is working on an arrangement to share a staff person with the County Attorney's Office. He said current Administration staff is unable to complete work, which has generated additional staff position needs in the Office and there is a need for a secretarial-type position. He will be trying to make arrangements for additional office staffing without requesting funds for additional staff.

Mr. Whicher also reported the State has taken over court security; however, the State has left the responsibility for paying State Court Attendants. He said he has asked Mr. Wood to look into the County being released from this contract because the County does not have the right to supervise, hire, or review any of the time worked by these employees but has to pay them through the County's payroll system.

Mr. Whicher spoke of the parking lot located directly across the street from the Shortstop that is used by DSS employees during the week. He said on the weekends is often used by the Immaculate Conception Church. There are occasionally other requests for use of the lot on weekends by various entities. Mr. Whicher said unless he is advised otherwise by the Legislature, County Administration's policy on this space will be that entities will be permitted to use the lot as long as they have provided the County with a waiver of liability, have insurance, and have a signed contract on file with the Contracts Coordinator.

Ms. Kiefer requested copies of minutes of this Committee from the earlier date when the use of this parking lot was discussed.

County Attorney's Report

Mr. Wood reported his longest-running case has concluded – Tracy vs. Freshwater, The case involved a fugitive from justice on a federal drug warrant who was injured in an altercation with a Sheriff's Deputy and then sued the County. Mr. Wood said the 47-page opinion concluded the officer did nothing wrong. Mr. Wood said this case involved 196 documents and 66 motions filed by the plaintiff and he is pleased to have it finally resolved.

Mr. Wood reported on the County Attorney's budget and said he does not foresee any over-target requests coming forward in the Department's 2008 proposed budget. He briefly spoke of discussions taking place with County Administration with regard to sharing a staff position.

Report from the Public Information Officer

Ms. Lynch reported a Cornell University student has accepted an internship position with the Diversity Communications Program. This intern has been meeting with departments to talk with senior staff about communications needs. To date, meetings have taken place with DSS, Office for the Aging, and the Assessment Department.

Tompkins County Public Library - Report on Budget

Ms. Steiner, Director of the Tompkins County Public Library, provided the Committee with an overview of the Powerpoint presentation on the budget presentation that was given to the full Legislature on June 7th. Highlights from Ms. Steiner include the following information:

2007 Appropriations

- Increase in target, permanent increase in hours for volunteer collection
- Updated textbook collection
- Business Process Analyst – report is almost complete and will include recommendation for reorganization at the upper level as well as addition of staff
- Upgrade of technology and equipment

Current Library Initiatives

- Strategic Plan – should be available in the Fall
- Library Community Advisory Council – Members include community leaders, past presidents, persons interested in the Library; approximately 43 members
- Public Programming and Community Outreach Coordinator position is now full-time
- Marketing Initiative
- Community Library Initiative – community libraries supported by TCPL in Danby, Caroline, and Lansing are all moving towards self-sufficiency
- Facilities Changes – front doors are being realigned through a grant from the NYS Education Dept.
- Staffing – 75% or professional staff will be eligible for retirement in the next ten years. The Library is trying to prepare for this because a decrease in the market for librarians is expected

The Library will be presenting a budget request that is not founded on settled collective bargaining agreements; therefore, it will contain estimates of what those figures might look like and is comparable with County employees in terms of health insurance and compensation.

Ms. Steiner said because the Library's collective bargaining is not resolved, the Library has to make the best projection it can for budgeting purposes.

It is projected that the 2008 Library budget will show a deficit in the amount of \$166,500, which is made up of two components that will be presented to the Legislature as over-target requests. Without this funding a reduction in the workforce will be required. The over-target requests that will be presented to address that deficit are:

- Convert one-time operational aid in the amount of \$88,000 back to permanent aid, and
- Meet contractual salary and benefit obligations and vendor increase in the amount of \$78,500

Workforce Changes – actual and projected. The present Library is now twice the size of the Old Library, meeting the increased expectations of Library users with two fewer employees than there were at the Old Library. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reduce the 2007 workforce without significant and damaging changes to services. At this time Ms. Steiner said the Library does not have personnel to carry out all of its basic functions and there is not a security guard on duty. This budget request is for basic and core personnel.

A historical look at the number of employees:

2000 – 50 FTE employees
2001 – 56 FTE employees
2006 – 46.5 FTE employees
2007 – 48 FTE employees
2008 projected – 50.5 FTE employees

Mr. Whicher noted that County departments are guaranteed pay increases and agencies will have to make requests for that funding; therefore, it will always appear as if the Library is asking for more than departments.

Ms. Mackesey asked how the rural libraries depend on the Public Library. Ms. Steiner said there is a group of public libraries that are chartered in New York State and are funded by their towns and their own taxpayers (Newfield, Trumansburg, Dryden, Groton). These libraries are also part of the Finger Lakes Library System, and share with the Tompkins County Public Library. She said the other three libraries are offered collections of books, which rotate every three months with books being transported by a van services. The Library also pays for a contract with a company that assures them they will receive best sellers. In addition, the Library provides consulting services and attends their advisory committee meetings and assists them in providing good services to their communities. Ms. Steiner said the libraries have been informed that if they wish to continue the book rotation, there may be a fee in the future for that service. Ms. Steiner said the goal is to have these libraries go to their municipality and request funding, which would then make them supported by their own community.

Ms. Kiefer asked if there has been any continued talk about a single-use card system. Ms. Steiner said library directors will be meeting next month and this will be one of the items discussed.

It was clarified by Ms. Steiner that if the \$88,000 is not restored it will mean a cut to the Library's base budget and will result in a loss of services and staff.

Board of Elections – Report on Budget

Ms. Cree reported on funding requests that will be included in the Department's 2008 budget submission.

She spoke of the following factors that will result in over-target requests:

A four-year election cycle and 2008 will be a presidential election year, the busiest year in the four-year cycle;

The primary date has been changed from March to February.

Finding election workers will be difficult because the usual workers will still be residing in the South during the winter months

The Statewide voter database is up and running. Although the State paid for this in 2007, the ongoing maintenance costs will be reflected in a \$7,000 target increase, which is a vendor cost. Mr. Potter has been consulted with; however, he said the County could not take over this kind of work at a cost less than is being charged.

Ms. Kiefer said she would like additional information about what is included in this \$7,000 charge. Ms. Cree said she is working on obtaining this information.

The following are funding requests will be submitted as OTRS in the Department's 2008 budget:

\$24,000 will be a request for one FTE to assist the Department to get through the general election;

\$14,000 to transport voting machines and equipment; this is still at one-time until a decision is made on what machines will be used; and

\$7,000 for Statewide voter database maintenance;

A funding request to offset additional expenses related to the 2008 Presidential election

HAVA

Ms. Kiefer reported Nassau County has filed a suit in the State Supreme Court against the State with regard to the HAVA requirements and is asking for relief. She said they are also asking for the State Board of Elections to certify voting machines no later than December 1, 2007, which she thinks is virtually impossible. A problem that exists is that while the New York State Legislature passed legislation in July of 2007, that allows municipalities in New York State to use lever voting machines until at least one HAVA-compliant electronic voting machine is certified for use in New York State, the current language of the Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act of 2007 (H.R. 811) would prevent any municipality in New York State from using lever machines for any Federal election beginning in February 2008. Ms. Kiefer asked that while she does not agree with some items contained in the lawsuit, would it be prudent for Tompkins County to adopt a resolution to address the use of lever voting machines. Mr. DeWitt said if Tompkins County was unable to use the lever machines a paper ballot election would have to be conducted.

The Committee agreed to schedule a special meeting prior to the August 21 Legislature meeting to act on a resolution that will be produced by Mr. DeWitt to address this concern.

Legislature – Report on Budget

Ms. Pottorff reported on the Clerk of the Legislature's 2008 Budget submission and stated there will be one OTR in the amount of \$1,700 to be used to purchase computer software and replace one computer. On the Legislature side of the budget, the County Administrator's reduction in the amount of \$11,200 will be reflected in two over-target requests: \$5,000 in local mileage and \$6,200 for Legislator salaries. There will be a fourth over-target request in the amount of \$5,000 for Professional Services, which was approved last year as one-time.

There was discussion about a possible transfer of responsibilities for advisory boards and the Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee from the Planning Department to the Legislature Office. Ms. Pottorff said that while there are other County departments that provide staff support to advisory boards, the Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee is the only standing committee that receives minute-taking support from staff outside the Legislature Office. She said it is likely the Legislature Office will be able to take over responsibility for the Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee in 2008, however, at the current staff level it is not possible to assume work related to advisory boards.

Approval of Minutes

It was MOVED by Ms. Kiefer, seconded by Ms. Mackesey, and unanimously adopted by vice vote by members present, to approve the minutes of the June 8, June 19, and July 13, 2007 meetings as corrected. MINUTES APPROVED.

Mr. Whicher asked if any request had been made to review the triennial assessment process before the three-year period ends. While no request had specifically been made, the Committee was interested in hearing from the Assessment Department on how this process is going and what they have found out since it was adopted. This item will be added to an upcoming agenda.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.