

# BUDGET FISCAL ANALYSIS TASK FORCE

## Meeting Notes

### November 23, 2009

The meeting was opened at 5:21 PM. All four task force members were present, Yvon Alexandre, Joseph Kask, Timothy Sullivan, and Lyle Wray, along with members of the public and the staff to the task force, Linda Bayer.

**I. Review of Previous Meetings' Notes:** The notes of the October 13<sup>th</sup> and November 2<sup>nd</sup> meetings were reviewed and accepted as presented.

**II. Selection of Chair:** Tim Sullivan volunteered to chair the meeting. No permanent chair was selected.

**III. Focus Areas:** Tim reviewed the four focus areas identified at the last meeting. He emphasized that the purview of the task force is to study the City Budget and find ways to reduce expenses or increase revenues. It is not the task force's role to look at revaluation or address the small business taxation issue. Tim also noted that the members intend to think outside of the box and make recommendations. City political leaders will decide what can be done with those recommendations. He also indicated that members of the public could make comments and ask questions as the meeting progressed, rather than wait until the end of the meeting.

**Internal and External Service Sharing:** Lyle Wray volunteered to take the lead on this area. He noted that there is a huge potential for savings in this area, but such savings can only be generated over the medium to long term. He suggested that, if we only deal with 90-day "fixes", we will never get to the long-term fixes which can result in bigger savings.

Lyle suggested that the task force look at what the City can sell to others, either directly to other towns or through CROG. Where is there excess capacity? In response to a question, Lyle explained that "excess capacity" usually refers to infrastructure, such as equipment, not people. People can be hired with the money received for providing the service. For example, Hartford's MetroHartford Information Services (MHIS) provides excellent IT services and might sell this service to smaller towns. 911 Dispatch is another area where towns can share services. In Houston, for example, there is one dispatch center. In a similar size area in Connecticut, there are 109 dispatch centers. Other examples of shared services are the Metropolitan District Commission and the Capital Region Education Council (CREC). Region-wide property assessment could probably save 50% of the current costs of assessment. The Capitol Region Council of Governments is currently engaged in ten shared service projects, including an on-line permitting program which is being rolled out now. Lyle urged the task force to consider all services. For example, don't dismiss the idea of other towns doing snow plowing in Hartford without examining it.

It was also suggested that the task force look within the City government to see if similar services are being performed in various departments. Such areas might be personnel and buildings and grounds maintenance, especially between the Board of Education and the City.

It was noted by some in attendance that when resources from outside sources (such as the State) to the Board of Education decrease, the rest of City Government must pick up the slack. The task force should consider benchmarking information for the Board of Ed, such as number of students. The task force asked for specific requirements of the State Law that requires minimum contribution to the Board by the City and agreed to look at the Board of Ed budget.

There was also discussion that City staff has been reduced dramatically and further reductions may not be feasible. Task force members suggested that other communities have reduced the layers of bureaucracy, but retained the staff that provide service directly to the customers.

**Employee Benefits:** Tim Sullivan volunteered to take the lead in this area. The task force members will need information on various insurances and post-employment benefits such as pensions. They need to know what the City is doing to evaluate the current system of self-insurance. Perhaps we can look at health savings accounts and defined contribution pension plans for new employees. The task force wants to meet with the COO, Human Resources Director, and the City Treasurer to review the current situation. It was noted that teachers are in the State pension plan. The task force also wants to know who in City government monitors the cost of benefits and what reports are generated. The task force wants to have a similar conversation with staff of the Board of Education, but needs to know who the appropriate staff would be. Members of the public suggested that the task force look closely at administrative salaries.

**Maximizing Available Resources:** The task force reviewed the information provided on the stimulus dollars coming into Hartford (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 – ARRA). They asked for information on whether ARRA funds replaced City dollars. For instance, did the ARRA dollars received by the Board of Ed reduce the City contribution? Will ARRA funds be calculated into the per pupil cost? Councilmen Pedro Segarra and Jim Boucher, who were in attendance, will arrange a presentation by the Board on this topic. The task force also wants additional information on how the ARRA funds are being spent and a comparison with other cities. Also, have we done all that we can do to get stimulus dollars into the City budget? It was noted that COPS funds did go into the City budget to pay for more police officers. The question was posed as to what happens when the ARRA funds go away?

The task force asked for information on tax collection rates as well as comparison with other towns. Members of the public emphasized that taxes cannot be raised any more and that property tax reform is needed at the state level.

The task force wants information on the management of grants within City Government. Is there a centralized or de-centralized management system? Also, how much (if any) funds have to be returned to the grantors when projects are complete? Perhaps the task force will look at outsourcing the function of grants management.

**Department-Specific Issues:** The task force will want to meet with department heads and will ask them 1) how can revenues be increased, and 2) what services might your department sell to others?

**IV. Meetings:** The task force discussed whether to have separate meetings to take public comment. Members of the public suggested that public meetings be held in the neighborhoods or with other groups. No decisions were reached, but the task force agreed to continue with the practice of inviting public participation during their regular meetings. The task force agreed that they wanted information prior to their next meeting, which they would have during the week of December 14<sup>th</sup>. They asked their staff person to email the task force members to select a date.

**V. Public Comment:** Because the public had commented throughout the meeting, there was no further comment at the end of the meeting.

**VI. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda A, Bayer  
Staff