

Task Force Report for City Clerk Miguel del Valle

May 2007

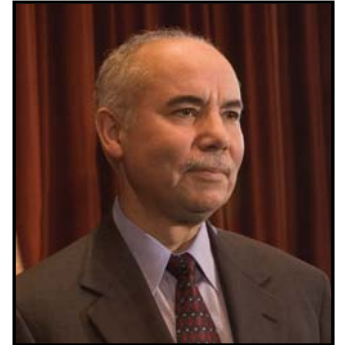


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Introduction

City Clerk Miguel del Valle convened a volunteer task force of civic, business and government representatives to bring a fresh perspective to the functions of the City Clerk and make recommendations on improvements.

Members of the Task Force interviewed senior-level staff, researched analogous functions in other municipalities and discussed potential improvements together before making these recommendations. Some recommendations are short-term in nature while others will take years to fully implement.

This document should be construed as an initial planning document to assist City Clerk del Valle in his efforts to improve the most visited office in City Hall. These recommendations are not the official position of the Office of the City Clerk and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual member of the Task Force.

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Improvements to the Office of the City Clerk

City Clerk del Valle is committed to bringing more efficiency, visibility and access to City Clerk services for Chicagoans throughout the city. Furthering the public's access to City Council legislation, increasing the number of distribution sites for vehicle stickers and expanding the outreach of the City Clerk's programs and services are just a few examples of the numerous improvements that could be made to the Office of the City Clerk's operations.

With a staff of 120, the City Clerk is the second highest-ranking official and his office is the most visited office in City Hall. The City Clerk's Office is responsible for maintaining official records of city government, issuing all business, liquor, and other city licenses, and distributing more than 1.1 million vehicle stickers. The City Clerk has the opportunity to provide residents of Chicago the opportunity to see how their government works. In addition to enhancing the City Clerk's website so that it will be more user-friendly and provide greater access to city government, the following initiatives will enhance the services that the City Clerk's office provides to the residents of Chicago.

VEHICLE STICKERS

All city residents who own a motor vehicle must purchase an annual vehicle sticker. However, there are a limited number of facilities at which to purchase these stickers, and they often are overwhelmed during the six-week annual renewal period. In addition, with over twenty types of vehicle stickers consumers and currency exchange employees often do not know what type of sticker is required for each vehicle.

Findings:

- The City Clerk's office needs to provide easier neighborhood access to vehicle stickers.
- Technology should be used to enhance the availability of vehicle stickers at off-site locations.
- The City Clerk's office should greatly expand the number of sites where vehicle stickers can be purchased.
- Additional interest should be generated for the vehicle sticker design contest.
- The number of vehicle stickers must be reduced to eliminate confusion and the potential for fraud.

Specific Recommendations:

- Kiosks that are linked to the City Clerk's computer system should be located in banks, grocery stores, and other convenient locations. The kiosks should accept credit card payments and disburse receipts. The

service desk at the facility should then be able to accept the receipt and issue a vehicle sticker.

- Banks and other financial institutions should be authorized to issue vehicle stickers.
- A panel of celebrity judges should be convened to promote the vehicle sticker design contest and to choose the nominees. A CAN-TV show with an American Idol format could then be broadcasted to announce the nominees.
- The ability to purchase vehicle stickers online needs to be promoted.

RESIDENTIAL PERMIT PARKING

Chicago's Residential Permit Parking program is designed to restrict parking on designated residential streets during specified hours, except for the residents of that street, guests of the residents or those who provide a service to the residents. This program aims to provide residents of densely populated areas with reasonable access to parking near their homes. The program has grown to include over 1,100 different residential permit parking zones. Residential parking permits can be obtained by either mailing in an application, or at the City Clerk's office.

Finding:

- The City Clerk's office should research and implement improved technology to process residential parking permits so that they are faster to issue, more secure, and more durable.
- Permit parking zones should be consolidated to increase enforcement and to reduce consumer confusion.

Specific Recommendation:

- Change guest parking permits from perforated paper to security encoded paper.
- Sell residential parking permits online.
- Combine the residential parking permit and vehicle sticker into one sticker.

PASSPORTS

The Office of the City Clerk can accept and process applications for U.S. passports. However, the program is currently not as accessible or convenient as it should be. The City Clerk's Office needs to enhance access to this service for the residents of Chicago.

Findings:

- The City Clerk's office should expand passport services to all working hours at all three offices.
- A marketing strategy should be developed that encourages city residents to use the City Clerk's office to process passport applications.
- Passport services should be offered at mobile locations throughout the city.
- The City Clerk's office should increase services in immigrant and ethnic communities, which have the largest potential user of passport services in the city.

Specific Recommendations:

- A mobile passport application unit should be developed. It should have photographic ability, and be able to participate in neighborhood festivals, city events, and other city programs.
- Satellite passport offices to serve immigrant and ethnic communities should be opened in different neighborhoods in the city.
- The City Clerk's office should expand the marketing campaign that targets areas where an interest in and a use of passport services has been exhibited.

DOG LICENSES

The City Clerk's office oversees the licensing of dogs in Chicago. It is estimated that there are 700,000 dogs in Chicago and the City Clerk's office currently licenses just 17,000 dogs a year.

Findings:

- Compliance with licensing requirement needs to be greatly increased.
- The City Clerk's Office needs to initiate a computerized database tracking dog licenses rather than the paper files currently maintained.
- The public should be informed of the many amenities available for properly licensed dogs, specifically the dog parks and beaches located throughout the city.

Specific Recommendations:

- A computerized application should be implemented for all dog licenses, resulting in the issuance of a plastic dog tag or weatherproof sticker rather than a metal tag.
- The City Clerk's Office should design a dog park and beach map, and distribute to interested city residents.
- Allow for online dog licensing.

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

One of the chief responsibilities of the City Clerk's office is to maintain official records of city government, including publishing the *Journal of Proceedings* of the Chicago City Council. To ensure that city government is open and responsive in order to best serve the residents of Chicago, the City Clerk should implement the following reforms to increase the transparency of City Council legislation and actions.

Findings:

- Council Committee reports/agendas are not readily available to the public.
- City Council rules are also not easily accessible to the public, limiting the public's understanding of how the City Council functions.
- Records of City Council action can be difficult to find.
- The Municipal code is difficult to access.
- The public cannot easily track ordinances pending before the council.
- Although the City Clerk accepts citizen ordinances for introduction to the Council, it is not an easily accessible process.
- Residents of Chicago do not have easy access to live recordings of City Council meetings.
- It is difficult to search the archives of the *Journal of Proceedings*.

Specific Recommendations:

- All Council Committee reports should be published on the City Clerk's website, so that the public has easy access to the work of the committees on a quarterly basis.

- The City Council Rules, in a printable format, should be posted on the City Clerk's website.
- The City Clerk's website should contain a link to the Legislative Reference Bureau, and explain that this is the source for all roll call vote information.
- The entire Municipal Code should be posted on the City Clerk's website, or there should be a link to the Code from the Law Department's site.
- The City Clerk should post on his website a spreadsheet detailing the status of all pending ordinances, which includes their committee assignments, status, and summary.
- The City Clerk should provide an online process for accepting citizen ordinances.
- Podcasts of current and past City Council meetings should be available for the public to download.
- All ordinances should be required to keep the same number throughout the legislative process.
- Each Council item should be given a name and a title so that they can be easily searched for and tracked.
- The City Clerk should contract with a search engine so that online users can search the full archives of the *Journal of Proceedings*.

COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION WITH OTHER CITY SERVICES

The City Clerk's Office should continue working with other city services to improve the efficiency and accessibility of its programs. Specific improvements include:

- Putting the City Clerk's Office icon and a link to the website on the City of Chicago homepage. This will make it easier to find the Clerk's Office online. Directly below the icon, there should be a brief list of the types of services offered at the City Clerk's Office, so that viewers are informed of what is available via the link.
- Working with the Community Policing / District Advisory Councils to offer Medical and Child IDs at local police stations. This will improve local access to these cards, and improve relations with all local police organizations.
- Developing a stronger relationship with the Department of Business Affairs and Licensing to create a metric for business licensing to maintain a high level of efficiency with processing licenses.

LOOKING FORWARD

With the implementation of the proposal contained within this report, we are confident that the City Clerk's office will become a model for how government can work. The City Clerk's office can serve as the focal point of open and accountable government. In addition, by modernizing licensing operations residents can enjoy the quick, efficient service they deserve. Each of us looks forward to participating in this transformation.

-The Taskforce