



September 4, 2007

City of Hot Springs
City Manager's Office

P. O. Box 700
Hot Springs National Park,
Arkansas 71902

Mr. Blake Robertson, Secretary
Garland Good Government Group
POB 21324
Hot Springs, AR 71903

Dear Mr. Robertson:

Recently you requested information on city employees and/or officers who are promoting the passage of the upcoming bond issue. To my knowledge, we have had no city employee or officers engaged in any such promotional campaign.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K.A. Myers", is written over the typed name and title.

Kent A. Myers
City Manager

cc: *Board of Directors*



September 11, 2007

Blake Robertson, Secretary
Garland Good Government Group
POB 21324
Hot Springs, AR 71903

City of Hot Springs
City Manager's Office

P. O. Box 700
Hot Springs National Park,
Arkansas 71902

Dear Mr. Robertson:

This serves to respond to your recent request for information on the City's public education efforts related to the October 9 bond election.

Last June, I appointed a staff committee to assist in informing the community about the bond election scheduled on October 9. I requested that Lance Hudnell, Terry Payne and Minnie Lenox serve with me on this committee. We began meeting in July to discuss ways we could present factual information to local voters on the election. Since this effort is part of the City's ongoing public information program, most of the efforts have been coordinated by Terry Payne, Public Information Officer for the City of Hot Springs. Attached is her response to your questions. My response to your questions includes the following:

1. *In July 2007, there was an educational meeting regarding the new city hall. Who lead the meeting and who attended? Was there city supplies used in the production and execution of this meeting?*

I am not sure which educational meeting this question refers to. We had several meetings in July involving the public education committee to update the Power Point presentation. A draft presentation was made to the Board following one of their meetings. Finally, on July 31, we gave the Power Point presentation in our Board Chambers to a group of about 25 City employees. The only supplies used were a laptop computer, projector and several computer discs.

2. *What were the time and expenses related to some sort of strategy session with the Mayor regarding the use of city staff to continue presentations of an educational manner?*

There was no strategy session with the Mayor regarding the use of City staff to continue educational presentations on the bond election. Several weeks ago, I called Mayor Bush and told him that we had received requests from 4-5 local organizations to provide a presentation on the election and needed some direction. He suggested that we continue with these presentations so that local voters could be informed about the election. The conversation lasted 5-10 minutes, and no expenses were involved.

3. Who created the city's slide show presentation and were city supplies used in this creation. Where was this slide show viewed?

As stated in the attached response from the Public Information Officer, she drafted the initial educational slide show presentation. This presentation has been revised by the staff education committee several times over the past 2 months. For example, the latest revised presentation eliminates reference to the DHS property since this is no longer being considered as a site for the new City Hall. Kitti Richard, Lance Hudnell's secretary, made most of these revisions, as recommended by the committee. The only City supplies used for these presentations were a laptop computer, projector and screen and several computer discs.

4. Did any local group or organization take the city up on its offer to make a presentation?

To date, we have been requested to make presentations to the Sunrise Rotary Club, Oaklawn Rotary Club, National Park Rotary Club, 50 for the Future Board, Chamber Government Task Force, Chamber Board and GCEDC Board.

5. Who created the August 2007 city newsletter and what did it cost to sent to all residents?

As stated in the attached, this newsletter is prepared by the Public Information Department on a quarterly basis at a cost of \$2,562.84 per issue.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,




Kent A. Myers
City Manager

KAM/mp

Enclosures

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kent Myers, City Manager

FROM: Terry Payne, Public Information Officer 

DATE: September 11, 2007

RE: **Response to request for information from GGGG**

This serves as my response to the September 10, 2007 letter from Blake Robertson of the Garland Good Government Group that requests information related to the new city hall proposal. The responses refer to numbered paragraphs in the letter.

Paragraph 2: In July, there were various "educational meetings" regarding the new city hall. These included meetings of the Staff Education Committee and educational slideshow presentations to members of the Board of Directors, city department heads, and city employees. The meetings were led by the city manager with support from the Staff Education Committee. City supplies were used in the production and execution of this meeting; please refer to the role of public information in local government, below.

Paragraph 3: I was not involved in any strategy session with the mayor. However, the mayor is always involved in the planning stages of city referendums, as is our department. This is not unique to the new city hall proposal.

Paragraph 4: I drafted the initial educational slideshow presentation on city hall, using city data and city photos. This presentation has been shown to all city employees who wished to attend voluntary educational meetings. Our duty to inform citizens includes our own employees, who deserve to hear the facts from their supervisors rather than learning about it through the news media, and many of whose work circumstances will be directly affected by this proposal. The presentation has also been made to the groups already referenced in paragraph 2. Finally, the presentation has also been made to Fifty for the Future and the Sunrise Rotary.

The slideshow presentation is part of an overall public education plan regarding the proposed new city hall. It provides details about the need for a new facility (which has been stated in published studies as early as 1991); the opportunity that has arisen at this time in city history; the proposed financing package for construction; and the purpose of the special election.

Paragraph 5: I believe at least two groups have responded to the speakers' bureau mailing. The mailing did not refer to the members of the Staff Education Committee, as Mr. Robertson alleges in his letter.

Paragraph 6: The quarterly citywide newsletter which was inserted into the August 2007 city utility billing cycle was produced by the Public Information Department. Aside from the mayor's column, the articles were written by the city manager and me. The cost of the printing and folding of this issue to 40,000 addresses was \$2562.84. I have not yet received an invoice for the insertion fee, which was \$153 for the previous issue of the newsletter. As a cost comparison, the total cost of printing, folding and mailing to 34,000 addresses the August 2006 citywide newsletter, before we began inserting the newsletter into the city utility bill envelope, was \$13,509.40.

The main article in the citywide newsletter, written before the Board of Directors relinquished the city's option on the DHS property, only contained one paragraph specific to the DHS site. The rest of the article contained many pertinent details that could enable citizens to make an informed decision at the polls. Therefore, the decision was made to continue distribution of the newsletter throughout the remainder of August.

City materials and personnel time have been expended in this public education effort, just as they have been in responding to FOIA requests like this one. I have not kept a time log on this or any other public information activity in which I engage. It is impractical to provide a time or materials estimate, as this issue overlaps many of our department's other activities, such as answering citizen and news media inquiries.

It is important to note that Mr. Robertson's reference in Paragraph 2 to "the City's efforts to pass this measure" is incorrect. The city has not expended any efforts to "pass" this measure. The city has expended efforts to *inform* the electorate regarding this issue.

It is the duty and responsibility of the Public Information Department of any municipality to inform citizens regarding issues that affect them. As Thomas Jefferson said, "... *Information to the people... is the most certain and most legitimate engine of government.*" (Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1787) In fact, the definition of an informed electorate is: Citizens who, when they exercise their right to vote, have the necessary information to protect their own interests.

Finally, to quote the ICMA publication Public Relations in Local Government, "*The highest conception of providing information to the public is that it enables the citizen to render intelligent judgments regarding the policies and activities of democratic government.*" As Hot Springs' Public Information Officer, I am charged with the duty and privilege of empowering local citizens with the most accurate, complete and timely information possible, in order to enable their fullest participation in local government.

The stated mission of the Garland Good Government Group is actually quite similar: "*To promote transparent, ethical, and representative government for the betterment of our thriving community. To demand openness and accountability in all governmental activities. To foster civic involvement, community improvement, and participate in good government. To acquire and provide access to information so the public can make informed choices.*" With such similar stated objectives, it certainly would be great if we could all work together for the benefit of the Hot Springs community.