## Taxation, Revenue, and Utilization

**of Expenditures (TRUE) Commission**

### Marc Hassan, Chair

### Ralph Hodges, Vice Chair

**TRUE Commission**

**Internal Operations Committee Meeting Minutes**

**February 15, 2017**

**4:00 p.m.**

**Attendance:** Commissioners Barbara Finke (Chair), John Pittman, Niki Brunson and Ralph Hodges

**Excused:** Commissioner Greg Rachal

**Also**: Jeff Clements and Colleen Hampsey – City Council Research; Mike Anania – Greater Arlington/Beaches CPAC TRUE nominee

Chairwoman Barbara Finke called the meeting to order at 4:01p.m.

The minutes of the meeting of January 25, 2017 were **approved as distributed**.

Discussion of purposes, policies and procedures

The group discussed answers to several questions posed at the last meeting for which responses were subsequently received from Jeff Clements, the commission’s staff person from the Council Research Division.

What is the relation of the TRUE Commission to the Inspector General and Ethics Commission – what is its role?

The TRUE Commission is an appointed, citizen advisory body to the Council and the Mayor, commenting and making recommendations on matters with fiscal implications for the City, so your review would be looking for financial implications, efficiency and effectiveness in service provision, threats to City revenues, etc. It was anticipated that the TRUE Commission would offer a private-sector perspective on operations and expenditures that might be different from the perspective of government employees. The Inspector General’s Office has 4 charges: 1) Provide independent oversight of government operations;

 2) Detect and prevent fraud, waste, mismanagement, misconduct, and other abuses by elected and appointed officials and employees, contractors, their subcontractors and lower tier subcontractors, and other parties doing business with the city and/or receiving county or City funds; 3) Promote economy, efficiency and effectiveness in government; and 4) Conduct audits, investigations and contract oversight, require production of documents, and receive full and unrestricted access to records.

The Ethics Commission shall be empowered to review, interpret, render advisory opinions and enforce Chapter 602, Ordinance Code (Ethics Code), which governs conflicts of interest, reporting of gifts and honoraria pursuant to local ordinance and state law, regulation of lobbying, abuse of position, and the like.

There does appear to be some overlap between the functions and authority of the TRUE Commission and the Inspector General’s Office; not so much overlap with the Ethics Commission.

Is it within the authority of the TRUE Commission to audit the Council Auditor? Who reviews the Auditor’s processes?

The TRUE Commission has very broad authority under Chapter 57 to review and comment on fiscal aspects of City government operations, including conducting studies, informing the general public, commenting on efficiency and effectiveness, and reviewing the Auditor’s Office’s audits and reports and other City and independent agency audits and financial reports. The Council Auditor’s Office is a member of the Association of Local Government Auditors, the national accrediting body for city and county government auditors, which provides peer reviews every 2 years of the office’s operations. The Auditor’s Office reports to the Finance Committee’s Audit Committee and to the Council’s Executive Committee (President, Vice President, Finance Committee Chair, Rules Committee Chair and one other appointed council member).

The Policies and Procedures Manual says that the TRUE should be doing an annual report; what is the time frame - fiscal year or calendar year? Can the committee review samples from previous years?

The commission has been remiss in making annual reports; the last available reports are from 2007 and 2008.

Chapter 57 Sec 105 (d) makes reference that the commission will be reviewing “external audits and reports of the City and interdependent Agencies”. What is the current process for how we receive these external audits?

Although it is in the Powers and Duties listing, Mr. Clements did not recall that the commission has ever reviewed the external audits and reports of the independent authorities.

What would be the protocol to ask for dedicated staff assistance?

If TRUE wants a staff person, a good start would be to meet or correspond with the Council President and explain the need for more help and how that staff assistance would be used and would make the commission more effective. The President can explain the Council’s priorities and budget outlook and could offer the council’s perspective on adding additional staffing. Commissioner Pittman felt that a dedicated staff person would make the commission more effective by attending City Council standing and special committee meetings and relaying the committees’ discussions and actions to the TRUE Commission, giving the commission better context for its own deliberations. The committee noted that with the council president’s term expiring at the end of June, it may be best to have discussions with Vice President Crescimbeni who is the most likely candidate to be Council President next year.

**Motion** (Brunson): recommend that the TRUE Commission begin exploring with the Council President and/or Vice President the Commission’s need for more staff assistance – **approved 5-0**

Would it be possible to incorporate into the New Commission Orientation a way to reach out to people who are considering applying or are working their way through the nomination process and help them orient to the Commission?

Mr. Clements explained that he sends copies of the commission’s fundamental documents (Ordinance Code Chapter 57, Policies and Procedures Manual, By-Laws) when the appointment resolutions for new members are filed so they can begin familiarizing themselves with the work of the commission. Commissioner Hodges felt that the committee structure should be more formalized with fixed memberships and an expectation for everyone to join one or more committees. Commissioner Ferreira felt it would be helpful for TRUE members to attend the City Council’s committee meetings to become informed on pending issues and bring that information back to the full commission, which would help the commission be more effective in advising the City Council. Mr. Pittman recommended including the timing of bill filing, release of bill summaries, committee and council timeframes, etc. in the policies and procedures for the members’ information.

Legislative Tracking Committee

The group discussed the timing of new legislation introductions and the production of bill summaries. The commission tends to be out of synch with City Council’s legislative process half the time because the council meets twice a month and the TRUE Commission only once. It was suggested that the commission could call special meetings as needed to respond to hot topics in a timely manner. Commissioner Brunson said that CPACs vary in their handling of legislative issues, and perhaps the TRUE Commission could be helpful by referring items to the CPACs that affect their district in case they haven’t seen them. The group discussed how best to refer items to the CPACs, whether through each CPAC’s TRUE Commission appointee to pass on or to the CPAC Chair directly. Commissioner Finke felt it was probably best to refer items to the CPAC chair and let them handle it their own way with their group. Mike Anania, the Greater Arlington/Beaches CPAC nominee to the TRUE Commission, said that in his experience the CPACs tend to be handicapped by a lack of knowledge about pending legislation and tend to be led by whoever makes the presentation at a meeting to take knee-jerk positions, which they sometimes later regret. Ms. Finke noted Council Member Anna Brosche’s suggestion that the commission avoid opining directly for and against bills and instead present factual analysis and identify issues and trends and let the Council and its committees make of it what they will.

Ms. Finke said that she would revise and refine Commissioner Brunson’s Legislative Bill Tracking Procedures handout for the next meeting.

After some discussion of potential dates and times, Commissioner Brunson requested staff to notice a meeting of the Legislative Tracking Committee for Friday, March 3rd at 12 noon.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

Posted 2.17.2017 5:30 p.m.