



Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

Let your voice be heard in rebuilding the Greater New Orleans Area


[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[Our Reform Initiatives](#)
[Resources & Collaborations](#)
[Archives](#)
[Contact Us](#)

Media

[Ethics Home](#)
[Highlights](#)
[Resources](#)
[Archives](#)
[History & Status Reports](#)

N.O. Council miserly in funding IG

Monday, September 3, 2007

N.O. CityBusiness

By Jaime Guillet

When Inspector General Robert Cerasoli begins his first day of work Wednesday, his duty to New Orleans citizens is certain but his operating budget to fulfill his responsibility is much less so.

The New Orleans City Council established the Office of the Inspector General Nov. 2, more than a decade after Orleans Parish voters approved it in 1995.

The Council allocated \$250,000 for the new IG office from the city's 2007 budget, with about \$158,000 covering Cerasoli's salary. Council President Arnie Fielkow said the funding represents half of a full year's budget because Cerasoli is assuming responsibilities late in the year.

Although a 2008 operating budget has not been submitted, Cerasoli said he is concerned after meeting with city officials about his budget.

"I didn't get the feeling there was a big commitment on funding of the job," Cerasoli said. "This job is about systemic change. It's about changing how the government does business ... and eventually eliminating ineffectiveness, waste, abuse and corruption that exists."

It will take more than \$500,000 a year to hire an experienced, qualified staff to do the job, Cerasoli said. Cerasoli wants a minimum staff of 10 auditors and investigators. He also needs an office and equipment.

"When I start on Sept. 5, I have no office, no computer -- all I have is a cell phone," Cerasoli said. "As it appears now I'm not going to have a staff. I'm not going to hire people who've never done this before."

Fielkow said research is needed to determine how much the IG's office should receive.

"I'm very supportive of giving him the resources that are necessary for him to successfully do his job," Fielkow said. "At the same time, due diligence requires that in a limited city budget, we need to ask the right questions and to make sure we're allocating dollars that provide the best return on investment."

Fielkow asked Cerasoli for a budget proposal, including how many staffers are needed, specific duties and salaries. The budget request will be taken up by the Council's Budget Committee and later the full City Council in November.

Fielkow also suggests "creative" funding opportunities such as putting a percentage on future city contracts earmarked for the IG office or assistance from the private sector. Cerasoli said he has an open mind to creative funding. He said 0.5 percent of city operating revenue dedicated to the IG office would also be enough.

"Using the current budget of \$773.3 million, that one-half of 1 percent would be \$3.8 million," he said.

Cerasoli plans to provide the Council with a budget proposal by Sept. 19.

District B Councilwoman Stacy Head said \$500,000 annually should suffice during the initial IG setup.

"It allows him to have, at a minimum, four staff members," Head said. "You can get good accountants in the New Orleans area for \$60,000. He doesn't have an office to pay for. If he needs a budget increase of \$150,000, I would be open to it (but) \$3 million is more than I'm willing to be supportive of in the initial setup of the office."

"He could also consider hiring only two assistants and using the \$115,000 for contract work for specialists such as forensic accountants," she said.

"It's not just any auditor or accountant (that's needed)," said Fred Palm, executive director of the Philadelphia-based Association of Inspectors General. "It's a specialized understanding and skill. People have to be trained. It's a big task to undertake and it should be pursued that way. You don't want to disable (the office) from the get-go with a skinny budget."

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans: N.O. Council miserly in funding IG

District D Councilwoman Cynthia Hedge-Morrell said she expects Cerasoli will need about \$3 million for his office, and she said it shouldn't be a problem for the Council.

"I would think we'll be very lenient in looking at what he needs," Hedge-Morrell said. "I don't think there's going to be any problem getting him funding."
District A Councilwoman Shelley Midura agrees.

"I'm fully supportive of funding him at the level he needs to be successful," Midura said. "I intend to support him and get (him) as much money as he needs to root out corruption."-

Copyright 2007 Dolan Media Newswires
Provided by ProQuest Information and Learning Company. All rights Reserved.

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans © 2005 - 2013