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Times-Picayune

Inspector general's staff gets Civil Service OK

Monday, January 14, 2008

By David Hammer, *Staff writer*

New Orleans' new inspector general can begin recruiting specialized investigators and legal staff with Monday's approval of more than 20 jobs by the Civil Service Commission.

Inspector General Robert Cerasoli, who was hired by the Ethics Review Board to give the city a viable independent watchdog, said the approval defied the naysayers who said New Orleans would never give him the resources to stamp out a culture of corruption.

"When I first came, I heard, 'You'll never be able to get this done with Civil Service,' and I said, 'I don't see why not,'" Cerasoli said before the commission. "I think we did it well and did it right and showed people in the city it could be done if you put a little elbow grease into it."

In fact, commission Chairman William R. Forrester Jr. said he didn't want to stand in the way of positions Cerasoli and Civil Service staff had negotiated and agreed upon. He also thanked Loyola University President the Rev. Kevin Wildes for providing Cerasoli with temporary office space last year.

City staff agreed to create three new job classifications for auditing, criminal investigations and so-called "forensic engineering," specialists who evaluate the quality of public construction projects.

The commission approved 19 positions in those three main groups Monday. Also, it allowed the Ethics Review Board to hire three management level positions -- an executive director, legal counsel and a first assistant inspector general for legal affairs.

The ethics board's executive director will make \$71,000 and the board's other two management positions will be paid \$131,000. Cerasoli earlier won City Council approval for paying \$131,000 each to first assistant inspectors general for criminal investigations and auditing, positions he had discretion to fill without Civil Service Commission approval.

The positions, job descriptions and salaries taken up Monday by the commission still need to be approved by the City Council.

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