

INT. NO. 952: ONLINE PUBLICATION OF *THE CITY RECORD*



NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

TESTIMONY BY JENNIFER BLUM  
DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROJECTS  
DEPARTMENT OF CITYWIDE ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES  
APRIL 28, 2009

Good afternoon Chair Sears and members of the Governmental Operations Committee. I am Jennifer Blum, Director of Special Projects for the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services ("DCAS"). I am joined by my colleagues Mark Daly, Director of Communications, and Kevin DePodwin, who is part of our Office of Operations and Strategic Planning. On behalf of Commissioner Martha K. Hirst, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss Int. No. 952, in relation to requiring *The City Record* to be published online and made available to the public at no charge, and our efforts to publish *The City Record* electronically.

**BACKGROUND ON *THE CITY RECORD***

The New York City Charter ("Charter") requires DCAS to publish *The City Record*, the official journal of the City of New York. *The City Record* must be published each weekday except legal holidays. It includes notices from New York City agencies regarding public hearings and meetings, court notices, property dispositions, procurement solicitations, contract awards, agency rules, and special materials such as changes in personnel. Currently, the daily circulation of *The City Record* is approximately 1,400 copies per day. According to the Charter, it is the responsibility of DCAS to provide Borough Presidents, Council Members, Community Boards, library branches, and certain media outlets with free subscriptions to *The City Record*. Over 300 copies are delivered to private subscribers. Contractual costs for printing, mailing, and delivery of the paper totaled around \$1.2 million in Fiscal Year 2008.

**CITY RECORD ON-LINE**

DCAS maintains City Record On-Line ("CROL"), which features the electronic version of the procurement notices that appear in the Solicitations and Awards section of the printed version of *The City Record*. In June 2002, CROL was established to allow City agencies to submit procurement notices electronically and in June 2004, vendors had the capability to register and search advertisements on CROL. CROL offers current and archived solicitations and awards, and gives vendors the opportunity to register to receive bid notifications by

e-mail. The site includes a fully searchable database of current awards and solicitations using various criteria, such as due date, publication date, agency, procurement category, commodity codes, and keywords. In addition, solicitations can be downloaded directly from the site. DCAS also directs agencies to submit procurement notices using the online application for posting on CROL and printing in *The City Record*.

Procurement notices printed in *The City Record* are electronically available for the convenience of readers and vendors; however, the print edition of the paper is the official publication of these and other advertisements. While the printed publication continues to be the authoritative source for solicitations and other notices, CROL affords vendors and interested parties the opportunity to review and access full procurement notices at home or at work and at anytime day or night. Furthermore, CROL facilitates the dissemination of procurement notices by City agencies.

#### **ELECTRONIC PUBLICATION OF THE CITY RECORD**

Publishing *The City Record* electronically offers a number of advantages to both the City and the public. In the absence of the requirement to print *The City Record*, DCAS will be able to significantly decrease costs associated with the production of the paper. At the same time, providing *The City Record* as an electronic newspaper will increase the ease of circulation and thus should expand readership. Evolving to an electronic format of *The City Record* also supports Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC carbon emission reduction goals. The printing, processing, and delivery of newsprint are energy and resource-intensive processes. Allowing for the electronic publication of *The City Record* would be a considerable energy conservation and waste reduction measure. By eliminating the ongoing need to publish printed editions of the paper, the City will continue to set an example for other municipalities.

The Administration supports the objective of Int. No. 952, which seeks to amend the Charter to permit the City Record to be published online. However, we have concerns about whether a local law would be sufficient to ensure that electronic publication of *The City Record* would satisfy State laws requiring publication of notices. We are currently working with the Law Department and the Mayor's Office on a State legislative proposal that would authorize electronic publication of *The City Record* and we look forward to collaborating with this Committee on this effort.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify about Int. No. 952. We appreciate your support of our endeavors to electronically publish *The City Record*. We are pleased to answer any questions you may have.



**CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**  
**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Governmental**  
**Operations on Int. No. 952 – requires City Record to be**  
**published online and free of charge**  
**April 28, 2009**

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Good afternoon, Chair Sears, and other members of the Committee on Governmental Operations. My name is DeNora Getachew, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Legislative Counsel of Citizens Union of the City of New York, an independent, nonpartisan civic organization of New Yorkers that promotes good government and advances political reform in our city and state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee in support of Int. No. 952, sponsored by Chair Sears and, among others, Councilmember Brewer who has been a leader on increasing government transparency and access to government information.

Citizens Union believes it is not only timely but critically important that government take steps to make government more transparent, because doing so directly correlates to expanding the public's access to information about government performance and decision-making and ensures that citizens can hold their government accountable. We believe that efforts to provide more government documents online not only serves to increase transparency, but can also save government resources and time, because it would eliminate many of the formal and informal requests to agency personnel for basic information already provided in existing government reports and other documents.

Citizens Union supports Int. No. 952, which would require the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), or a successor agency, to publish the City Record online, available free of charge and be updated at least daily. We applaud efforts to make the City Record – which importantly provides a single source for government notices and actions, such as public hearings, proposed agency rule changes, court notices, procurement actions and contract awards, similar to the other government publications, such as the New York State Register – available online and free of charge because it would move the City inline with other government publications and take a significant step towards producing greater transparency in government operations. This change would also make the publication better serve the public and, hopefully, encourage more citizens to provide input or comment on proposed government changes by allowing citizens to more easily access pertinent public notices.

The bill also mandates that hard copies of the City Record would continue to be provided to each borough president, council member, community board, branch of a public library, the municipal reference and research center and the news media on a periodic basis to be determined by the Commissioner of DCAS. These hard copies would also continue to be available for public inspection without charge. Our recommendation is that at the outset – at least until elected officials become used to accessing information through DCAS' website – that DCAS should print hard copies of the City Record on a weekly or even better bi-weekly basis, which we hope will ultimately become a monthly print publication. We are mindful, however, that our long term goal of printing hard copies of the City Record on a monthly basis may be impractical given that notice for many government actions requires

comments within a thirty day window. For now we believe that printing and distributing hard copies on a weekly basis would ensure that elected officials, the public and the media remain informed about important government actions in a timely manner to allow opportunity for comment, while also reducing DCAS' printing and distribution costs.

Citizens Union previously testified before the City Council's Committee on Technology in Government on this issue, recommending that the City Record be published online and that the Department of Records and Information Services (Records) become a "one-stop shop" of City government publications and information. We therefore recommend that the Records website ultimately host the online version of the City Record or at least provide a direct link for this service on its website. Records currently publishes government reports in the publications section of its website, and ideally should be a single source for those looking for a variety of information about City government, including public hearings, agency reports, rules changes, and other important news.

Additionally, we would like the City Record online proposed by this bill to be fully searchable and archived, and encourage the City to look at ways to make the service more automated and interactive by making available items such as e-mail alerts or RSS feeds for new postings and creating calendar subscriptions for public hearings or meetings. Citizens Union also recommends that DCAS work with Records and the City's Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications to ensure that the website is as user-friendly as possible, especially with respect to the layout and availability of past editions of the City Record.

Finally, the bill proposes that the City Records website be implemented in ninety days after enactment of the law. While Citizens Union is unprepared to speak definitively regarding whether this is a realistic timeline for the City to develop and implement this new website, we suggest that all relevant agencies will work with DCAS to satisfy the law's requirements, continue to work with DCAS or Records to update the site after its initial launch, and solicit user feedback on how to improve the site.

We urge the Council to promptly pass this legislation and consider further efforts to improve its implementation. Citizens Union appreciates the opportunity to share its views and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Council on ways to continue to improve public access to important government information.



**Testimony of Chris Keeley, Associate Director of Common Cause/New York before the Council of the City of New York**

**Intro 952-2009**

***A Local Law to amend the New York City Charter, in relation to requiring the City Record to be published online and available to the public at no charge***

April 28, 2009

Good afternoon. Thank you Chair Sears and members of the Government Operations Committee for this opportunity to speak before you here today. My name is Chris Keeley and I am the Associate Director of Common Cause/New York. Common Cause/New York is a non-partisan, non-profit citizens' lobby and a leading force in the battle for honest and accountable government. Common Cause supports the proposal to amend the New York City Charter, in relation to requiring the City Record to be published online and available to the public at no charge. This is a common sense measure which would serve to more effectively open up government activities and opportunities to the public.

As stated on its website, the City Record is an electronic version of the Procurement Notices appearing in the City Record printed version. The City Record online is posted by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). It includes information from one section of the printed publication – the Solicitations and Awards. The City Record newspaper is currently published each business day and it is a primary source for many New Yorkers seeking information about public hearings, agency rule changes, court notices, procurement actions, contract awards, and other information.

**Common Cause supports efforts to bring valuable information that is currently available in the published version of the City Record to the City Record online, free of charge and on a daily basis.**

We believe that making city information available online in a timely manner, particularly public hearings and agency rule changes, will serve to increase public participation by making information more conveniently available to a wide number of New Yorkers. In some respects, Intro 952 would effectively further the goals of Local Law 11 of 2003. The stated aim of Local Law 11 is to position New York City as, "leading the nation in using information technologies to improve the efficiency and accessibility of municipal government," and using the Internet as, "a powerful means of accomplishing these twin goals." It is incumbent upon the City to make government information available in a timely and accurate fashion and Intro 952 would take an invaluable leap in that direction. That said, we must remember that not all New Yorkers have adequate access to the internet and efforts to expand broadband access to all communities and all New Yorkers must remain a priority for the city. We again commend the City's Broadband Advisory Group for continuing its efforts in this regard.

**There should be an overlap between the creation of the online version of the City Record and the existing printed version in order to ensure a smooth transition. In addition, the printed version should continue to be printed on a bi-monthly basis.**

When the City Record online first begins to be updated daily with additional information, there should be an overlap period of three to six months to ensure a smooth transition. In the longer-term, Intro 952 states the City Record should be printed, “on a periodic basis to be defined by the commissioner.” We agree that the printed version of the City Record can be scaled back, but a timeframe for continued publication should be clearly defined. Printing the City Record on a bi-monthly basis would be a reasonable way to ensure that New Yorkers accessing the printed version of the City Record do not miss opportunities for public involvement.

**The City Record website should be developed in a strategic way to ensure ease of update, ease of use, and ADA compliance. Email alerts and RSS feeds should be offered.**

Common Cause applauds the City Record online for its existing strengths, including the variety of search criteria and sophisticated search engine. For archived and current awards, as well as solicitations, users can search using a variety of criteria including due date, publish date, agency, procurement category, commodity codes, and keywords. For certain bids there are links to other agency websites which are also posting details of the bid opportunity. The City Record’s existing use of email alerts is also valuable, providing vendors an opportunity to receive notification of particular opportunities. This capability to segment email addresses by type of information the user wishes to receive is invaluable and should be rolled out for future email lists covering public rulemakings, agency hearings, and other information that should be available on this re-crafted City Record website. Real Simple Syndication feeds, or RSS feeds, would also provide a convenient way for New Yorkers to remain informed about City activities in a timely manner in a way that is cost-effective for the City.

**All information made available on the City Record website should be made readily available to all interested parties. Compulsory registration should be eliminated.**

It is currently possible to search archived bids and award notices without login and to request email alerts by completing an initial registration with an email address. To search for current bids and awards and download bid documents, however, a user must complete a further registration and create a user name and password. To access this information the user must create a ‘vendor account’ detailing what commodities or service they wish provide to the City of New York. All information in this re-crafted City Records website should be readily accessible to all New Yorkers.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify here today in support of Intro 952. We look forward to working with you in the future and welcome any questions you may have.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/28/09

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jennifer Blum

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I represent: DCAS

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Name: Mark Daly

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I represent: DCAS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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I represent: DCAS

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: DENORA GETACHEW  
Address: 299 Broadway, Suite 700  
I represent: CITIZENS UNION OF CITY OF NY  
Address: SAME AS ABOVE

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CHRIS KEELEY  
Address: 354 COURT ST, #1 BKLYN  
I represent: COMMON CAUSE NY  
Address: 155 ONE OF AMERICA

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