Customer Service Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: **March 10, 2008**

CSAC members present: Art Alexander, Alisa Cour, John Dutt, Michael Kaplan, Sue Klobertanz, Michael Mills, Michael Mock, Vincent Woods

Others present: Gary Blackmer, City Auditor; Drummond Kahn, Director – Audit Services Division; Jennifer Scott, Management Auditor; Shea Marshman, Management Auditor – CSAC Clerical Staff

Notes prepared by: Shea Marshman   **Date:** March 12, 2008

Topic	Discussion	Action/ Decision
BIP #7 Recommendation 2.2	At the request of the members of CSAC, Gary Blackmer and Drummond Kahn attended the meeting to discuss the inclusion of a customer service question in the SEA Citizen Survey, which would support BIP #7 Recommendation 2.2 An extensive summary of the discussion is recorded below. In summary: • CSAC members said that they are interested in asking a general survey question intended to produce the customer survey "temperature" across all City functions by asking how residents perceive customer service in general. This would be in addition to the specific surveys that bureaus are expected to conduct to inform direct customer interaction. • Gary and Drummond said that the SEA Citizen Survey is not an appropriate vehicle for addressing the question because it is intended to gather information to inform management about specific bureau functions. • CSAC members raised questions about whether Customer Service should be defined as customer service, writ large, received from the City (e.g. When a resident receives water from the City, they are a customer receiving service, which can be evaluated.) or as the direct interactions between City employees and citizens. • Gary and Drummond said that, if CSAC defines Customer Service from the larger perspective the survey already collects this information. (Question 28: Overall, how good a job do you think local government is doing at providing services?) If Customer Service is defined more	CSAC members agreed to revisit the definition of Customer Service. Due to limited time, no specific actions were identified.

specifically, the survey is not the right vehicle for collecting the data.

Next meeting The next meeting is April 14. Follow-up on the topics addressed during the February 11th meeting will be continued. These include: 1) Review follow-up with bureau representatives and report on progress issues and 2) Review of bureau customer service reports. In addition, the CSAC may seek to officially define Customer Service.

Summary of Discussion between CSAC members, Gary Blackmer, and Drummond Kahn
Note: The following is not intended to be verbatim. Rather, it is a summary of concepts presented by individuals

John Dutt: Provided a review of the history of BIP #7 and the development of CSAC along with a summary of Recommendation 2.2 (The Auditor's Office will evaluate the possibility of adding question to the Annual SEA Citizen Survey to help measure customer satisfaction across the City). In February, John met with Drummond Kahn, Scott Stewart, Kari Guy, and Shea Marshman from Audit Services. At that time, Drummond said that a customer service question would not be added to the survey. The CSAC members would like to continue the discussion, because they feel that a question should be included in the survey.

Gary Blackmer: Gave an overview of the intended purpose of the SEA and how the Citizen Survey (CS) is used to inform it. The SEA was designed to focus on specific measures within bureaus and give a citizen satisfaction rate (through the CS) based on responses intended to inform the measures in the SEA. In the SEA, bureaus define specific areas to improve and direct the data collected to the services provided. Therefore, the CS data can be directly connected with actions that managers will take to improve services provided. He estimates that the City provides around 200 major services to the public each day. It can be assumed that no citizen has engaged in all of those services. Therefore, no citizen can give an educated response to a question about the whole City and the services that they would use to make their judgment are not the same from year to year. In addition, the generalized results of the survey would not inform changes and so would not provide the type of meaningful measure that the SEA is intended for. Finally, serious questions have been raised about the response rate of the CS. Sixteen years ago, when the CS was started, the response rate was 50%. It is now 33%. This drop in responses to surveys of all kinds is a nationwide problem that is troubling to many survey based agencies and businesses. Among the reasons that researchers site for the drop in response rate is the length of the surveys. That is, respondents don't want to take the time to fill them out. For this reason, the Auditor's office is making every effort to shorten the length of the survey. To gather meaningful customer service information, several questions would need to be included. This would simply take up too much of the space that must be limited to encourage responses.

John Dutt: Explained that CSAC will be working with bureaus to develop customer service surveys. The bureaus will then be, technically, required to conduct surveys every two years. CSAC has provided support by developing a standard set of questions that the bureaus can build on. John said that CSAC was hoping to use the CS to gain a broader overview of the City as a whole that would be more generally useful.

Gary Blackmer: The questions in the CS are all specific to each bureau. There is only one general question that asks about the overall quality of services provided by the City. There are many kinds of questions in the CS, but they are all still intended to direct specific results or actions in the bureaus.

Sue Klobertanz: Asked how the CS could be used to get an overall City wide response about how citizens view customer service to give to elected officials. She indicated that she does not think the people care who does the work (e.g. Metro, City, County), but does think there is value in taking an overall temperature from the citizens based on the usefulness of an overall positive response from people rather than the need to address specific problem areas. This whole thing got started because the elected officials are convinced that we all do a lousy job.

Gary Blackmer: When we ask questions about service in the CS, we are addressing static things like roads and sidewalks that people can rate based on their overall experience. Customer service, when not associated with specific situations, is too anecdotal because it is not like concrete things like roads. Taken as a whole, anecdotal information can be useful, but this is not the right venue for it.

Drummond Kahn: Because of the huge variety of customer service that people receive across the whole array of City functions, people cannot rate customer service in the same way they can rate general services.

Sue Klobertanz: Said that she defines customer service very generally in that, if you turn on the tap and receive City water you are a customer who has received service.

Gary Blackmer: When you ask a question about the quality of customer service, you are asking "how did we interact with you?" not, "how did the service take place?"

Art Alexander: It is a question of the quality of the service versus the quality of the interaction.

Michael Kaplan: Clarified that the question is between the type of relationship versus the type of service. There is a value to measuring the temperature of the relationship between citizens and the City. He says that he realized that the variables involved are huge, but asked if there is a statistically reliable way to accomplish this. Everything the City can do to understand that relationship is good.

Gary Blackmer: Said that this sounds more like a political poll than a survey about how the City operates. The Auditor's Office doesn't want to engage in that because the survey is designed to serve all the bureaus.

Vincent Woods: It was his understanding that CSAC wanted to try to get access to the Citywide elements of customer service that the bureaus do not address. For instance, as a whole how are we doing as a City? Do all City employees seem to demonstrate the qualities (e.g. timely, knowledgeable) that result in good customer service? Are general customer services relevant enough to the broader issue to be able to collect information that informs the assertion that regardless of where you are in the City, these are the things you experience. The State seems to be doing something like this. Could we measure the City as a whole while the bureaus continue to measure the specific customer service that they provide? If this cannot be accomplished through the CS, what would you recommend?

Gary Blackmer: Related that when he worked for the County there was an overarching City/County survey that collected data about and for everyone. Over time, the different departments took over this role for themselves because they were not getting enough valuable information from the larger survey to provide what they needed. Questions about direct interactions between citizens and staff would require a different flavor of survey. Using the CS format would be the same as saying that somewhere in the City there is a problem, go fix it.

Michael Kaplan: Isn't there a value to simply addressing the overall climate? If the CS is not the way to do it, what is the right way?

Gary Blackmer: You could use direct mailing, emails, phone surveys, etc.

Michael Kaplan: Is there a way that the Auditor's Office could help us define that?

Michael Mills: Could the Auditor's Office review surveys that are developed?

Vincent Woods: Could you direct us to a question we might use in the CS?

Gary Blackmer: You would have to be able to tie the question back to direct application toward the fulfillment of the mission of the bureau. Because the question also has to be general, that would be hard to do.

Michael Mock: How do you use your general question in the CS as a measure?

Gary Blackmer: Although we are currently using the general question, we are strongly considering removing it when we make changes to the CS. Also, the Office of Neighborhood Involvement is going to be added to the SEA next year and they will likely need a question, which limits space on the CS even further.

John Dutt: Asked if Gary feels the best advice for CSAC would be to focus on bureaus rather than a general survey.

Vincent Woods: How do you define customer versus citizen?

Gary Blackmer: Said that he does not support the idea that all citizens are customers.

Drummond Kahn: If you are considering "customer writ large" in that all citizens are customers by the fact that they receive services from the City, we already collect the information you need in the general CS question that asks, "Overall, how good a job do you think that local government is doing at providing service?".

Vincent Woods: We were looking at it as the question, "Do we have a knowledgeable workforce on matter what level you are interacting with the City?".

Michael Kaplan: What we want is, "Is your overall interaction with the City appropriate or painful" with regards to the allocation of resources.

Gary Blackmer: You don't want to deal with resources in this. If you are looking at "interaction" for a specific bureau, we can ask that. It doesn't help other bureaus. He then said that they had thought a lot about how the CSAC question could work and tried to make it fit.

Drummond Kahn: One way that you might do this is to use a filter question. For example, "Have you had an interaction with the City? If yes, with whom or how?" and they ask customer service questions from there. This helps get the right information because I might rate my yes with the Water Bureau very differently than your no with the Police Bureau. We have always volunteered to assist CSAC with that.

Sue Klobertanz: That still doesn't speak to the temperature of the City. Why can't the general question that is already in the CS be re-written to customer service? She said that she thought that they came to the meeting with a predetermined answer and haven't listened to the arguments made by the CSAC members.

Gary Blackmer: Said he was sorry she felt that way and then talked about how general questions result in numbers that never change. When you dig down to the more specific levels, you start to see changes and get important information.

Sue Klobertanz: Explained that she does not read the question as too general and said that any experience with City government is customer service.

Michael Kaplan: Said that if he sees a garbage can in the park overflowing, it is not his job to make the call and complain before he can expect to have the problem taken care of. We want to know if the balance between regularly expected practices and customer service has been attained.

Sue Klobertanz: Maybe we are all confused about customer service. What we want to know is how the citizens view the City.

Drummond Kahn: We already collect that information with the existing question.

Art Alexander: I thought we were measuring quality of interactions.

Vincent Woods: I this is already being measured , why are we here?

Art Alexander and Michael Mills: Agreed that "customer service" that the CSAC was specifically trying to gather feedback from the community about was concerning interpersonal interactions.

Michael Kaplan: Does that translate into meaningful change?

Sue Klobertanz: Maybe my problem is that I have a bad definition of customer service.

Art Alexander: If I see someone from Water working in the street in front of my house and ask about my low water pressure, how does the person respond? Does he provide information, phone numbers? We want a baseline of what people think first. How do we get it? How do we want to use it?

Vincent Woods: I kind of thought that was where to start. Would a survey like yours [CS] do that?

John Dutt: It sounds like it would be helpful to collect that type of baseline information.

Gary Blackmer: A telephone survey might be a good option.

John Dutt: Maybe you could help us to make a case for funding for a telephone survey. In the interest of time, we need to end this discussion now.