

FY 2003 Operating Budget Testimony
Joan T. Decker, Commissioner
Department of Records
Presented to City Council
Tuesday, February 26, 2002

Good afternoon, Council President Verna and Councilmen and Councilwomen.

My name is Joan Decker, Commissioner of Records, and with me today is Jeanne Reedy, Administrative Services Director, Virginia Martinez, Payroll Assistant, and Margo Richardson, Assistant Supervisor, Public Reference Room.

For Fiscal Year 2003, the Records Department is requesting a General Fund Operating Budget of \$5,424,009, a net increase of \$48,513 from the Department's FY'02 estimated obligations. This level reflects changes in the following areas.

Class 100, Personal Services allocation changes from \$3,282,989 in FY'02 to \$3,331,502 for FY 2003, a net increase of \$48,513 which reflects sufficient additional funds to cover previously negotiated wage increases offset by productivity improvements due to automation. The number of staff positions changes from 98 positions to 90 full time staff positions due to productivity enhancements and is sufficient to maintain the current level of Departmental services.

Class 200, Purchase of Services allocation remains the same at \$746,415. This level of funding supports basic services in the Department.

Classes 300, 400, 500, and 800 also remain unchanged.

Our proposed Grants Fund budget for FY'03 totals \$20,000, a net increase of \$3,818 from FY'02, reflecting the completion of three small grant projects begun in previous years as well as an anticipated grant. For FY'03, we have applied for a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission to fund preservation services for approximately 600 reels of microfilm containing pre-1940 Philadelphia County deed records. This grant will enable the Department to support our archival activities by preserving historically significant land records. Grant money has also enabled the Department to expand access to historical records by developing indices to archival collections, to develop requirements for electronic records, and to evaluate and dispose of records that exceed useful life cycles.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Document Recording / Registration

In FY'01, the Department recorded 179,665 documents. The Department projects that it will record 196,321 documents in FY'02 and 178,382 documents in FY'03. These projections are based on economic forecasts and current recording trends.

As a result of re-engineering and automation of the document-recording process, documents are recorded within one business day and the time to return the document to the filer has been reduced to an average of 2 to 3 business days. The Records Department's parcel map data is the foundation for the Unified Land Information System and provides accurate and timely land information for use by City departments, the tax assessor, and the public. The conversion of approximately 5,500 paper tax maps maintained by the Registry Unit to an automated Geographical Information System was completed last year. In coordination with the Mayor's Office of Information Services, beginning in FY'02 and continuing into FY'03, we are focusing our efforts on updating the electronic map data. In FY'03, in order to continue to improve service to the public, we will assess the feasibility of wider deployment of the pilot Internet-based land title information system to include other City departments and begin work on an Internet application for parcel map data. We will also continue to monitor the passage of state legislation that will enable the use of electronic recording to support City initiatives that provide an environment conducive to e-commerce.

New Police Reports On-Line System

Funded by the PA Insurance Federation and coordinated by the Police Department, an Internet based system for retrieving traffic accident reports was deployed in FY'02. Copies of traffic accident reports are available on-line via a subscription service and non-subscribers can search the index database and complete a request form for the report on-line, print it, and either mail it or deliver it to City Hall. Our twelve subscribers from the automobile insurance and reporting service industries purchased 2,700 reports on-line last month after establishing escrow accounts with the Department. The system is also available for customers requesting report copies in City Hall.

City Archives

The City Archives and Records Center, located at 31st & Market Streets, continues to prove conducive for research. In FY'02, thus far, visitors to the new facility have included patrons requesting copies of land documents and genealogical records, as well as the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Architectural History.

A grant of \$14,976 provided funds for the preservation of selected records at the Archives for the duplication of 450 microfilm reels of pre-1940 deeds of Philadelphia County that were deteriorating due to the breakdown of the cellulose acetate based film. We have applied for another grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission to continue this work by preserving an additional 600 reels in FY'03.

Records Storage and Retention

During FY'02, the Records Storage Center disposed of 1,238 cubic feet of records, processed 2,480 cubic feet of transfers, responded to 3,603 reference requests and made 2,902 deliveries of records in storage that were pulled at the request of various City agencies. Record retention schedules ensure the security and preservation of valuable documents, and protect against liability for the improper handling of official records. During FY'01, fourteen schedules were developed by Records. In FY' 02, four schedules have already been completed (Commerce/City Representative, Capital Program Office, Recreation Department, and Free Library) and five more schedules are underway. The remaining eight agency schedules are targeted for FY'03.

Non-confidential record series descriptions entered in Versatile, the Department's automated system supporting records management activities, are also imported into the Philadelphia Information Locator Service (PhILS) on www.phila.gov. This allows the Department to provide public access to government records.

Other Initiatives

In FY'01, the Department spent \$29,752 for microfilm readers and reader/printers to improve customer service in City Hall and the Archives. We also purchased computer equipment for the Department's Forms Unit for \$2,690 to improve services to City departments and agencies, and we purchased specialty photography equipment to improve the quality of the work performed by the Photography Lab. In FY'02, the Department will continue to upgrade obsolete and broken equipment in the public reference rooms in City Hall and the Archives by purchasing additional state-of-the art reader printers for \$18,000 and a microfilm reader for \$3,000. We will also spend \$5,000 to upgrade the computers in our Police Reports Unit in conjunction with the implementation of our new on-line system. In FY'03, the Department will upgrade equipment in the Central Duplicating Unit, replace aging and obsolete equipment in the Photography Lab, and purchase shelving and bar coding tools for document storage, for a total of \$45,827.

Staff Training and Development

In FY '01, staff members attended a total of 22 classes and professional development seminars to further develop computer skills in desktop and Geographic Information Systems software, management and supervision, and best practices in records management. Year-to-date for FY '02, staff members attended 10 classes and our FY '03 goal is to continue this practice.

CONCLUSION

In the coming fiscal year, the Department will continue the work on the initiatives outlined in this testimony. The proposed appropriation level before this Council will ensure that our progress continues. Thank you for your support.