

## **2024 Supplemental Department Questions – Office of Hearings Administration**

*Please answer the following questions in a word document and return to Council. The answers to these questions will be provided to council as supplemental information. While not part of the physical budget presentation to Council, departments should be prepared to answer questions Council may have on these supplemental questions. If you feel that you have provided an answer in a previous question, please don't repeat your answer, simply refer to the earlier question/answer.*

### **Strategic Goals**

#### **1. Provide your 2024 strategic goals; how are they different from 2023? In what way, if at all, are your strategic changes demonstrated in your budget request?**

Some goals remain unchanged:

- Provide for the fair, impartial and timely administration of justice in all matters brought before the Hearing Examiner.
- Provide efficient administrative support for Board of Equalization and Boundary Review Board to assist the Boards to maintain compliance with their statutory duties.

New goals for 2024:

- Procure and implement a case management system to be more efficient at processing cases, better manage workflow and time, and increase productivity. This is reflected in IT's budget package #384 and is more fully described below.
- Coordinate with central Human Resources on implementation of the job classification study, including revision of job descriptions and classifications for Administrative Hearings Clerks per suggestion of consultant.

### **National, state, and local landscape:**

#### **1. What are the federal, state, and local issues facing your work? What risks or opportunities does that create for you in 2024 and beyond? What is your plan to leverage the opportunity or mitigate the risk? What support do you need?**

OHA does not foresee any federal, state, or local issues or risks that will be directed specifically at the functions of the office.

**2. What, if any, new mandates do you have impacting your work? Are they funded or unfunded? What is the plan for accomplishing the work?**

Merger of the Snohomish Health District into county government created the possibility of additional appeals to be heard by the Hearing Examiner, but no appeals have yet been received. OHA and the Health Department expect few appeals which will not materially increase the workload.

**Programs**

**1. List programs, projects and services within your department funded through federal COVID/ARPA funds. What, if any, of those programs are you recommending ongoing funding for and what is the source of ongoing funding?**

No office programs, projects, or services are funded through federal COVID or ARPA funds.

**2. For programs funded by COVID/ARPA funds, detail the plan to close out and/or transition those programs to an ongoing funding source in 2025 and beyond.**

Not applicable.

**3. What new programs are you launching for 2024? What need or efficiency is that new program addressing? How is that program funded for sustainability? What metrics are in place to determine effectiveness?**

OHA currently manages cases and workflow manually with Excel spreadsheets, Outlook calendars, and the s: and g: drives. This system is time-consuming and labor-intensive and is more prone to possible errors than an automated case management system. A dedicated case management software system will manage cases and their deadlines more efficiently and provide better insight into OHA's work. The Washington State Environmental and Land Use Hearings Office, the Washington State Office of Administrative Hearings, King County Hearing Examiner, and Seattle Hearing Examiner all use case management systems.

OHA is working with Information Technology and Operational Excellence to define needed software tools. A new system will either be created by IT using existing software tools or will be a commercial off-the-shelf system. In either case, there will be an initial up-front procurement cost and lower maintenance costs in subsequent fiscal years. The cost at this time is uncertain. OHA submitted a \$250,000 priority package (#376) to be used as a placeholder until specifications are more fully developed and pricing is more certain; the decision was made to

have IT handle the procurement via their fund balance (see package #384 in IT's budget).

Processing Board of Equalization submissions is also labor-intensive and time-consuming. OHA hopes that implementation of the new Aumentum software by the Assessor and development of a portal for electronic and automated processing of submission of documents will reduce the workload to a more manageable level with existing staff.

**4. If different than #3, what are your areas of significant investment? What are you not doing because of that investment?**

Not applicable

**Internal Operations**

**1. What is your department doing to streamline processes or deliver services in a new way? How do your budget allocation requests play into these innovations? Are there ways which a different budget approach, e.g., several departments sharing a resource, could achieve the same or better results in a more cost-effective way?**

OHA is working with OpEx and IT to develop or procure a new case management system, the cost of which is being covered by IT's fund balance. This will increase access and transparency for citizens and parties to cases and will streamline internal processes. As an example, in mapping just *one* process of accepting a Public Comment on a matter before the Hearing Examiner:

- Will reduce a single instance from 20 minutes per comment to 5 minutes per comment
- Notify commenter automatically that their comment has been received
- Distribute comments to all persons logged in the Party of Record

The Board of Equalization plans to leverage the appeals module in Aumentum, the Assessor's Office's new software system. The appeals module does not presently include a portal for electronic submission and automated processing of materials by appellants. OHA will work with the Assessor and IT to develop a portal as a stop-gap measure until Aumentum provides a native tool.

Both the Hearing Examiner and Board of Equalization continue to offer hybrid hearings so that participants have the option of attending either remotely or in person.

The Hearing Examiner held a public meeting in August 2023 to solicit suggestions regarding hearing and case management procedures. A written report will be provided to Council and the Executive that describes the

suggestions and the Hearing Examiner's responses. In addition, the Hearing Examiner will schedule a time to discuss the report with Council's Planning Committee later in the year.

- 2. What, if any, hiring challenges are you experiencing? How is that affecting your level of service or internal operations? How are you mitigating those operational challenges and/or what is your plan for recruitment?**

OHA does not anticipate any need for additional positions or recruitment in 2024. An Administrative Hearings Clerk resigned in the fall of 2022 to relocate to another state. That clerk was a 0.875 FTE. The Administrator determined that OHA needed a full-time staff person and that OHA already had sufficient, existing authority to increase the position to full time. OHA is now staffed with three full-time employees plus the administrator. Increasing all staff to full-time has improved operations and productivity. If sufficient automation tools do not become available for processing BoE and Hearing Examiner cases, the administrator will discuss impacts and possible solutions in later budget years.

- 3. To help inform Council on experiences around hiring and retention, please provide a list of all vacant position titles, position codes, FTE amount (1.0, 0.5, etc.), date vacated, and date first posted. Template spreadsheet attached for convenience and conformity; if already tracking information in another format, that is acceptable as well. Please list each vacancy separately.**

No vacancies

- 4. What effect has the increase of inflation and/or supply chain issues had on your department? What, if any, services, or projects have you had to adjust to accommodate for this? (i.e., moving to outside contracted services, delaying of project starts and/or purchasing, redistribution of workload, etc.)**

No impact

- 5. When was the last time your department implemented a fee increase? Do you have any plans to increase fees?**

OHA charges fees only for the filing of a Notice of Intention as statutorily authorized for Boundary Review Board matters; this is a very small amount annually. We do not have the authority to charge fees for any other processes.

- 6. Do you have any plans to do a rate/fee study? Are your current fees established based on a full cost recovery model?**

No.

## **Successes**

- 1. Take this opportunity to share one significant success in your department over this past year. What made it a success?**

The most significant success of 2023 was increasing the 0.875 FTE to full-time and hiring a new Administrative Specialist. The addition of our new full-time team member significantly improved office efficiency and morale. Credit for this successful reorganization is due to Ms. Sonya Kraski, our new Administrative Specialist who hit the ground running. Current team members were working very hard (and well) to manage both hearings and the back-office functions, and Ms. Kraski has made positive, material contribution to the team since joining OHA in early 2023. Existing team-members, Allegra Clarkson and Hannah Iverson, are hard-working public servants dedicated to helping county residents navigate the complex requirements of Board of Equalization appeals and Hearing Examiner proceedings.