



## Memorandum

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Wally Bobkiewicz, City Manager  
Evonda Thomas-Smith, Director, Health

Subject: Response to League of Women Voters Letter of October 1, 2013 –  
Dissolution of Evanston Township

Date: October 22, 2013

The following is response to questions raised in League's October 1 letter on subject:

**1) What are the Township programs and services and how they are currently delivered?**

The Township currently provides general assistance, emergency assistance and property assessment support services. The Township currently delivers these services using Township employees. Attached are portions of the 2013 Novak Consulting Group Report that detailed Evanston Township services. (Attachment 1)

**2) How the transition will be made and how the city intends to continue the work done by the Township. We encourage the City to prepare a concrete and detailed plan describing how the Township work will be done by the City. This plan should be prepared and publicized well ahead of the early voting period starting on March 3 and should address the following issues:**

- **Program operations. Will the current Township activities related to General Assistance, Emergency Assistance and Assessment be continued, reduced or enhanced?**

Current Township activities related to General Assistance, Emergency Assistance and Assessment will be continued. It is my plan that General Assistance and Emergency Assistance will continue at the same level as provided by Township. With the resignation of Township Supervisor, I am still assessing current versus budgeted staffing levels for General Assistance and Emergency Assistance.

As these functions are now under my responsibility, I will work now with Township staff to identify ways to partner their existing work with work done in our Health, Community Development, and Parks, Recreation and Community Services Departments to provide more comprehensive assistance to Township residents in need. The City would work to

enhance the General Assistance and Emergency Assistance services without expending additional resources.

Property assessment work would continue. One staff member would be assigned to continue the property tax assessment advocacy work currently provided by the Township Assessor. This staff member would either continue from Township or be a new hire. This work would not be absorbed by existing City staff. I anticipate that this work would continue at approximately the same level as current.

City staff has worked with Township staff over the last several months during the move to the Civic Center to identify savings in overhead and administrative support costs. This work will continue over the next several months. If the Township is dissolved, I anticipate that there would be additional savings identified through further sharing of overhead and administrative costs. These savings would include goods and services as well as further reduction in staffing associated with administrative support.

**Where will current Township activities be carried out within the City government? What City Departments will be accountable for current Township programs? Will any current Township activities be contracted out to Evanston agencies? If so, which?**

I am proposing that General Assistance and Emergency Assistance activities become part of the Health Department. I believe there is an opportunity to once again create a Human Services Division within the Health Department. I am asking Health Director Evonda Thomas-Smith to work with me as well as Community Development Director Mark Muenzer and Deputy City Manager/Interim Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director Joe McRae to hold a series of community meetings in November and December to review the re-creation of a Human Services Division and potential existing City services which may join General Assistance and Emergency Assistance in that Division and report back to the City Council in January, 2014.

The Property Assessment assistance function would become part of the Administrative Services Department Finance Division.

No Township activities would be contracted out at this time.

**• Funding. Where will funds for continuing support of current Township programs come from? Will the Township tax levy be transferred and become part of the City tax levy? Or will there be a separate levy specifically for General Assistance and Assessor programs? What savings are anticipated from dissolving the Township? Will the City resume responsibility for funding the Evanston social services and mental health services that have been funded through the Township in recent years?**

Currently the Township is funded under two separate line item levies on the Property Tax: Town Fund and General Assistance. I am proposing that this be reduced to one levy: General Assistance. This levy would include costs of operating the General Assistance and Emergency Assistance programs. In addition, I am proposing that the full cost of the Mental Health Board grants be included in this levy rather than be split

between the General Assistance Levy and General Fund Levy. The costs of the Assessor program would be shifted to the General Fund.

All other miscellaneous grants that have been made by the Township to the City (support for Summer Youth Employment Program, Community Picnic) would be funded in the City's General Fund.

Savings anticipated with these changes include the elimination of office rental costs (which began in September, 2013) and reduced administrative costs. These cost savings will total approximately \$225,000 a year based on the most recent audited financial statements. A more precise savings amount will be known when I report back to the City Council in January, 2014.

**• Personnel. What will happen to current Township employees and elected official(s)? What City staff will assume Township responsibilities? Will new staff be hired by the City to carry out current township programs?**

Every effort will be made to continue employment of Township staff after a dissolution either providing former Township services or at other duties in the City of Evanston. Once Township staffing is settled in the next few weeks with the resignation of the Township Supervisor, no new staff would be hired to carry out current Township programs after dissolution. The elected positions of Township Supervisor and (after January 1, 2014) Township Assessor will likely be filled by Acting positions until election. These positions would be eliminated as part of Township dissolution.

**• Timing. How long will the transition take, including any changes in operations, funding levels, or personnel?**

Work will continue to transition overhead and administrative support services from the Township to the City prior to a dissolution election. If dissolution is approved, a final transition to City provision of services would occur over 60-90 days. Any savings accrued in FY 2014 would be reflected in FY 2015 levy. In addition, the City Council would also have to decide disposition of fund balances in Township funds. It would be my recommendation to retain a reserve balance similar to the City's General Fund and spend down remaining balances in lieu of levy increases.

**• Evaluation. How will the transition of Township operations be assessed? Will there be a plan for reporting to Evanston residents on the specific impact and effectiveness of the change?**

Regular reporting of General Assistance and Emergency Assistance data will begin immediately and continue after any dissolution. Comparison of levy for General Assistance over years will be a measure on cost savings. We will also add performance measures for General Assistance, Emergency Assistance and Assessor to City's comprehensive performance measures.

Attachment 1 – Portions from Novak Consulting Services Report.

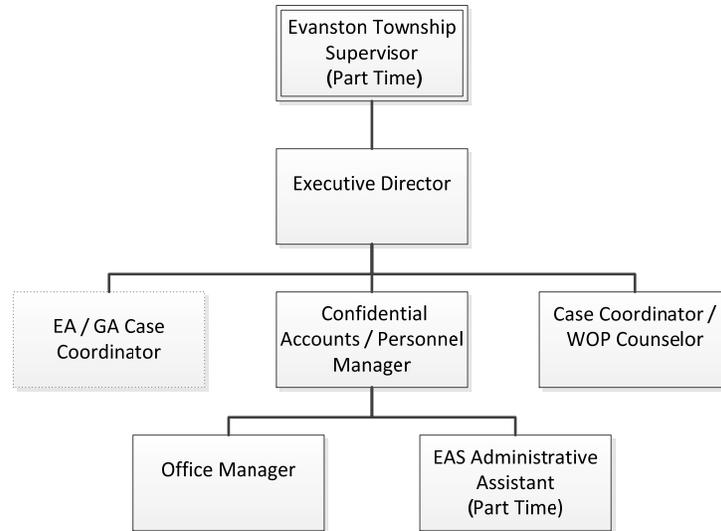
Attachment 2 – Letter from League of Women Voters

## **Township Supervisor's Office Operations**

The Supervisor's Office is the main administrative office of the Township. It is also the office through which the Township manages its GA and EA programs. General Assistance and Emergency Assistance are public grant programs designed to provide financial assistance to Evanston residents who do not qualify for any other type of government assistance, such as Social Security. The Supervisor's Office is overseen by the Evanston Township Supervisor, a directly elected position that serves on a part time basis. The Supervisor provides policy direction for the Township regarding the GA and EA programs, in addition to determining Township-wide policies relating to internal services. Day-to-day operations of the Supervisor's Office are handled by the Executive Director. This position supervises all Supervisor's Office staff, directly interfaces with Assessor's Office staff on daily issues concerning the whole Township, and provides case management and workflow routing for GA cases. Currently, the Executive Director is also performing this case management function for GA and EA cases due to the vacancy in the EA Case Coordinator position.

The Executive Director is supported by 2.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) employee positions, the Confidential Accounts/Personnel Manager, Office Manager and the Emergency Assistance Services (EAS) Administrative Assistant (a part time position). These Office Manager and the Administrative Assistant positions are the primary point of contact for applicants and clients, both in person and over the phone. The EAS Administrative Assistant administers the direct issuance of grants to clients and assists applicants with gathering the information and documentation necessary to complete their applications. The Office Manager administers the Supervisor's Office's internal case tracking software, VisualGA, providing additional technological expertise and capacity for report development. Additionally, the Office Manager plays a "jack of all trades" office management role, specifically related to server management and other related computer issues, providing technical support for small-to-moderate IT issues. Complex IT issues are outsourced to the Township's contract IT provider. The Office Manager and Administrative Assistant are directly supervised by the Confidential Accounts/Personnel Manager. Internal services for the entire Township, such as human resources, payroll, and accounting, are administered by collaboration between the Executive Director, Confidential Accounts/Personnel Manager and contracted service providers.

Ongoing case management for the GA program is provided by the Case Coordinator/Work Opportunity Program (WOP) Counselor and the Executive Director (due to the vacancy in the EA Case Coordinator position). The following figure summarizes the staffing level and reporting structure for the Supervisor's Office.



**Figure 2: Evanston Township Supervisor’s Office Organizational Structure**

The Supervisor’s Office administers a number of additional sub-programs that support the GA program and broader mission of the Office. Those programs are summarized in the table below.

**Table 2: Summary of Township Supervisor’s Office Programs**

Program	Program Description
<b>General Assistance/ Emergency Assistance</b>	The Township General Assistance Program is a financial aid program designed to meet basic maintenance requirements for a livelihood compatible with health and well-being, plus any necessary medical treatment, care and supplies required because of illness or disability for which there is no other source to receive. The assistance is provided on a monthly payment basis to, or on behalf of, eligible assistance units by the General Assistance Office.
<b>Work Opportunity</b>	As part of General Assistance, townships are required to establish a community work program. There are two options to the program: job training and workforce. Clients who are not on GA because of medical inability to work must participate in either a direct worksite placement or be involved in a "Job Club." The clients in the Job Club are required to attend a two-hour session on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Those in the Job Club are viewed as more "job ready." Some clients who have minimum skills and are in need of "on-the job training" are placed on worksites to enhance their work skills. There are others who cannot reasonably be expected to obtain a job. In the workforce program, they participate in tasks that are designed to benefit the community.

Program	Program Description
	The 50/50 matching program is also offered as an element of the General Assistance program which provides 50% of the starting wage up to a maximum of \$1500 for clients that are hired by an employer. This employment subsidy may be used for trial employment.
<b>Emergency Assistance</b>	Emergency Assistance Services are provided to non-eligible General Assistance clients who meet the established criteria for the services. The services include payment of delinquent rent, mortgages and assessments, utility payments, and emergency food vouchers.
<b>Partnership and Contractual Services</b>	The General Assistance Office establishes working arrangements with the Evanston One Stop and other not-for-profit organizations to better assist clients with counseling, employment, and training opportunities.
<b>Medical Payment System</b>	The General Assistance guidelines require the provision of "necessary" medical services as defined by the Illinois Department of Public Aid. If there are no other sources to provide the necessary services then the Township is responsible for making payment. The Township reimburses the provider at the Public Aid rate.

Source: FY 2012/2013 Evanston Township Budget

At the time of this review, the Supervisor’s Office was managing a caseload of 136 GA clients, under the “needs allowance” grant system. This system—as opposed to the one-size-fits-all “flat grant” system—requires a higher level of interaction between Case Coordinators and clients. The Evanston Township provides GA grants to meet two specific client needs: shelter and personal needs. Shelter grants are issued once a month up to a maximum amount of \$200. Personal needs grants are issued twice a month up to a maximum single payment of \$150 (up to \$300 a month). Thus, the maximum monthly benefit an Evanston Township GA client may receive is \$500.

The level of these needs is determined by the client’s Case Coordinator, which may be either the Case Coordinator/WOP Counselor or the Executive Director. The majority of cases (approximately 82 clients) are managed by the Case Coordinator/WOP Counselor, with the remainder managed by the Executive Director. Clients receiving GA grants are required to either participate in the Township’s work opportunity program (“Job Club”) or in behavioral counseling, based on their Case Coordinator’s assessment of their “employability.” This program is a requirement under Illinois statute.

Behavioral counseling is typically performed by outside agencies, to which a client will be referred by their Case Coordinator. Case Coordinators monitor client’s participation in these programs, a criterion used to determine the client’s ongoing eligibility for GA grants. Case management for the EA program is currently administered by the Executive Director. Attachment A details the case management process for the General Assistance and Emergency Assistance programs.

## Township Assessor's Office

The Assessor's Office provides taxpayer advocacy services to the residents of Evanston. These include assistance with appealing the results of the tri-annual Cook County assessment (currently underway in 2013), and assistance with applying for various homeowner or senior property tax exemptions.

The Evanston Township Assessor's office works as an adjunct to the Cook County Assessor, whose stated mission is "to serve the public professionally and responsibly by establishing fair and accurate assessments, seeking equitable tax policies and communicating this information simply and understandably."

Specifically, the mission is to serve Evanston Township taxpayers by assisting them in securing exemptions, preparing and filing assessment appeals, correcting property description errors, and researching all available information pertinent to their properties.

In addition, the Assessor's Office coordinates with the City of Evanston Planning Department to record the specifics of building permits and forward them to the Cook County Assessor and coordinates the registration of Sales Transfer Declarations with the Cook County Recorder of Deeds.

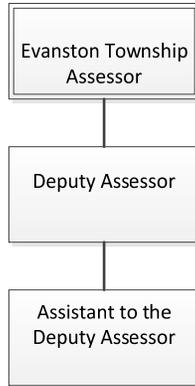
The Assessor's Office is overseen by the Evanston Township Assessor, a directly elected position that serves part time. In Illinois townships outside of Cook County, the Assessor position is responsible for assessing the property values for parcels within the township's borders. In Cook County, that task is administered by the Cook County Assessor's Office. Thus, the main responsibility of the Evanston Township Assessor is to administer a program of tax payer advocacy that attempts to ensure Evanston residents pay the lowest amount they legally owe on their property tax bill.

Day-to-day operations of the Assessor's Office are handled by the Deputy Assessor. This position supervises the other staff position in the Assessor's Office, the Assistant to the Deputy Assessor. These two positions field phone calls and meet with Evanston residents seeking information or help to address issues related to their property tax bill, a large portion of which are senior citizens.

Annually, the Assessor's Office undertakes a senior exemption mailing campaign, aimed at alerting seniors in Evanston about ways in which they can save money on their property tax bill. Approximately 700 seniors are contacted through this program. Contacted seniors will make appointments with Assessor's Office staff who will work with them and the Cook County Assessor's Office to ensure their property tax bill is accurate. In addition to making appointments, the Assessor's Office keeps regular business hours, Monday through Friday, to act as a satellite office of the Cook County Assessor's Office; this provides Evanston residents with a local office to visit regarding property tax questions, rather than forcing them to travel to Chicago. The Assessor's Office helps property owners successfully navigate property tax exemption application processes and serves as a resource to those residents wishing to appeal their property tax assessment.

The following figure shows the Assessor's Office's current organizational structure.

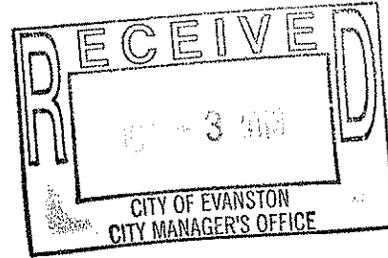
*The Novak Consulting Group  
Strengthening organizations from the inside out.*



**Figure 3: Evanston Township Assessor's Office Organization Structure**



The League of Women Voters of Evanston  
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October 1, 2013

Wally Bobkiewicz  
City Manager, Evanston  
2100 Ridge Ave.  
Evanston, IL 60202

Dear Mr. Bobkiewicz,

As you know, the League of Women Voters of Evanston regularly observes meetings of City Council and Council Committees. Our goal is to work with elected and appointed officials to strengthen the effectiveness and responsiveness of Evanston government by improving transparency and accountability of government debate and decisions. In that light, we have a request regarding the referendum to dissolve Evanston Township which will be on the ballot for the March 18, 2014 general election.

Before Evanston voters are asked to vote on this question, they need substantial information about both 1) the Township programs and services and how they are currently delivered; and 2) how the transition will be made and how the city intends to continue the work done by the Township. We encourage the City to prepare a concrete and detailed plan describing how the Township work will be done by the City. This plan should be prepared and publicized well ahead of the early voting period starting on March 3 and should address the following issues:

- **Program operations.** Will the current Township activities related to General Assistance, Emergency Assistance and Assessment be continued, reduced or enhanced? Where will current Township activities be carried out within the City government? What City Departments will be accountable for current Township programs? Will any current Township activities be contracted out to Evanston agencies? If so, which?
- **Funding.** Where will funds for continuing support of current Township programs come from? Will the Township tax levy be transferred and become part of the City tax levy? Or will there be a separate levy specifically for General Assistance and Assessor programs? What savings are anticipated from dissolving the Township? Will the City resume responsibility for funding the Evanston social services and mental health services that have been funded through the Township in recent years?
- **Personnel.** What will happen to current Township employees and elected official(s)? What City staff will assume Township responsibilities? Will new staff be hired by the City to carry out current township programs?
- **Timing.** How long will the transition take, including any changes in operations, funding levels, or personnel?

- **Evaluation.** How will the transition of Township operations be assessed? Will there be a plan for reporting to Evanston residents on the specific impact and effectiveness of the change?

The League of Women Voters of Evanston looks forward to working with you, and other leaders in Evanston, to provide clear and comprehensive information to Evanston voters so they have the resources necessary to make an informed vote in the referendum on dissolution of Evanston Township.

Sincerely yours,



Cate Whitcomb  
President, League of Women Voters of Evanston