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OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT INSPECTOR GENERAL

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July 2, 2009

Members of the Board of Commissioners
of Cook County
118 North Clark Street
Suite 567
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Re: OIIG Investigation No. IIG-09-0020 (Market Event)

Dear Commissioners:

This letter is written in accordance with section 2-289(c)(2) of the Independent Inspector General (OIIG) Ordinance, Cook County, Ill., Ordinances 07-O-52 (2007) relative to the investigation conducted in the matter of the 2009 Black History Market event ("market event"). In accordance with the Ordinance, this statement is made to apprise you of an OIIG investigation concerning management practices that has recently concluded.¹

Background

On or about February 26, 2009, a Cook County citizen provided me his concerns that the vendors who were participating in the market event being held in 69 W. Washington and 118 N. Clark were improperly permitted an opportunity to use County-owned properties for personal gain. Additionally, the citizen claimed the vendors were charged \$450.00 to participate in the market event and questioned the use of the funds collected.

¹ The OIIG Ordinance authorizes the issuance of public statements addressing management practices as opposed to OIIG investigations involving individual misconduct or illegality.



The market event was held from February 23 – 27, 2009 to highlight Cook County's diverse ethnic communities and generate funds to provide for the issuance of a grant for a community based non-profit organization. In total, 15 vendors were selected to participate in the market event. Each participant was required to pay a \$450 registration fee with several vendors being given a waiver or partial waiver from the registration fee due to hardship. The collected funds were used to offset insurance for the event, as well as a fee paid to the outside event coordinator. The remaining funds were then provided to one non-profit organization.

Based on the allegations, an inquiry was initiated by this office. During the course of the investigation, we had the occasion to review relevant documentation and interview various Cook County employees and those participating in the market event.

OIIG Findings, Recommendation and Conclusion

In accordance with section 2-288 of the Ordinance, a Summary Report detailing the findings of the investigation has been issued to the appropriate individuals within Cook County government. This statement serves as a summary of the findings related to the mismanagement allegations.

The evidence in this case reveals that the planning and implementation of the market event was initiated on or about February 17, 2009, just days before the event was going to begin. As a result, a hastily planned event took place that resulted in a number of omissions, cited below, that form the basis for OIIG recommendations should another similar event be scheduled.

- (1) An overall failure by the participating vendors to properly register with the State or County and an overall failure of vendors to possess a valid license to sell within the City of Chicago was identified. Verification procedures to confirm registration and/or licensure should be incorporated in future planning/implementation practices;
- (2) No written agreement was executed with the event coordinator;
- (3) The event failed to include a formal or transparent process to select the non-profit grantee of the collected fees;
- (4) An open vendor application or selection process or protocol should be established;

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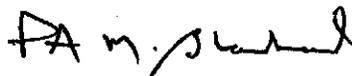
- (5) A written protocol or guideline to grant waivers to the payment of registration fees should be adopted;
- (6) Adequate accounting protocols should be put into place; and
- (7) Complete insurance coverage should be secured covering each participating vendor.

This case does not involve large sums of money or outrageous and scandalous acts. However, certain vendors were able to access county property to avail themselves of the public for profit without a clear set of protocols being applied to rule-out favoritism, ensure fairness and compliance with the law. The public has a right to have faith that its government is operating ethically and responsibly. In the wake of reoccurring prosecutions against government employees and elected officials and front-page stories about them describing corrupt or otherwise unethical behavior, Cook County representatives must do everything to ensure that they comply with County rules, local laws, and avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

Accordingly, this office has recommended that if future market event days are scheduled, a greater degree of planning and consideration be given to the issues raised in the report and outlined herein. The creation of a mission statement along with event protocols, thorough documentation and a heightened degree of oversight will assist in ensuring fairness and transparency and will reduce the potential for the appearance of impropriety.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,



Patrick M. Blanchard
Independent Inspector General

cc: Honorable Todd H. Stroger
Mr. Joseph Fratto, Chief of Staff
Ms. Pam Munizzi, Deputy Chief of Staff