



Staff Report

REPORT ON BELMONT CITIZENS ACADEMY

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

Summary

At the April 25, 2006 City Council meeting, Mayor Mathewson, as an Item #9 “Matters of Council Interest/Clarification,” asked the Council to consider the concept of establishing a Citizen’s Academy. The intention of his proposal was to establish a program to develop Belmont’s local leadership by providing participants with knowledge about City operations and engaging them in the challenges facing municipal government today and into the future. At that time, the Council directed the Interim City Manager to review the benefits and operations of local leadership programs and citizens academies and determine the amount of staff time and other City resources that would be required to implement such a program. This staff report addresses the Council’s direction.

Background

Community leadership or civic engagement programs, also known as City Service Academies, “Local Government 101,” City Knowledge Networks, and “Leadership Hayward” for example, are generally intended to inform and educate citizens about their city government and prepare future community leaders for positions of responsibility within their cities. Such programs acquaint and inform participants about municipal operations, other local public agency services, community organizations, key issues facing the community and the multiple perspectives that frame those issues. Another benefit of these programs is that they introduce participants to current and emerging leaders in the community to reinforce the benefits of community service. Finally, these programs give Council and staff great community feedback.

The content and scope of leadership academies varies as does class size, session hours, course length and frequency, application/selection process and cost. Some programs, like the City of San Mateo’s, offer the program directly through the City to educate residents over eight to twelve week periods through interactive sessions, site visits and field trips to give insights on how City services are managed and operated. Other cities provide leadership programs through their Chambers of Commerce, consortias of other public agencies or in cooperation with local educational institutions and they educate residents about City government, other public services, community issues and more.

Currently Belmont “relies” on resident participation in neighborhood associations, on City Commissions and committees and other community organizations to educate and stimulate interest in serving in elected or appointed leadership positions.

Discussion

Given the myriad of approaches to civic engagement, a possible template that could be customized for Belmont’s use is the long-standing, successful City of San Mateo City Services Academy. This Academy provides a first-hand opportunity for residents to learn how their City government is managed and operated. It is “taught” by City staff and Council in weekly sessions over an eleven-week period plus one-half day on a Saturday to a class limited to 25 participants. The primary goal of the Academy is to provide a better understanding of municipal government with a lesser intention to encourage residents to take on leadership roles in the community. Participants receive thorough briefings on the functions and responsibilities of the City Council, Commissions and each City department, meet with their elected and appointed officials and tour facilities for a first-hand look at how the City operates. Participating departments include the City Council, City Manager, City Attorney, Police, Fire, Parks and Recreation, City Clerk, Finance, Human Resources, Information Services, Public Works, Community Development, Code Enforcement, Library and Emergency Services.

City staff advertise this free program, oversee the application and selection process, prepare session materials and binders, schedule representatives from each department, arrange facilities/site tours, arrange a graduation reception and presentation of the graduates to the City Council. Annual “out of pocket” budget for their two academies per year is \$5,000 (\$2,500/each). Estimated number of staff hours per academy is 115.

If the City Council is interested in “right sizing” the San Mateo model for use by the City of Belmont on an annual basis, say each fall, free of charge to a maximum class size of 25, “out of pocket” costs are estimated to be \$500 - \$1,000 plus approximately 100 staff hours initially to develop and implement a ten-week academy with ten two-hour sessions. The ten sessions could feature Council, City Manager and City Attorney, Community Development, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, City Clerk, I.T., Police, Fire and Human Resources.

If the Council chooses to proceed, staff would recommend working with a Council Subcommittee to finalize the academy’s scope, content, timing and costs for Council consideration and approval as a Priority Calendar item.

General Plan/Vision Statement

Development and implementation of a City of Belmont Citizen’s Academy would further the City’s Vision Statement – Distinctive Community Character as outlined below:

1. “We get involved in town matters because we care about living here.”

2. “Our strong sense of community and enjoyment of the town’s assets and activities deepen as we become better informed and connected.”

Fiscal Impact

None at this time.

Public Contact

Posting of the City Council Agenda.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that Council discuss the value added by Citizen’s Academy and direct staff accordingly.

Alternatives

1. Direct staff to explore academy development and implementation with the Belmont Chamber of Commerce and /or Notre Dame de Namur University
2. Postpone action/direction to a date certain
3. Refer back to staff for additional information
4. Deny approval

Attachments

There are no attachments to this report.

Respectfully submitted,

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