



“The Drive to 2025”



Office of the City Secretary

October 1, 2018

1. Talk about your department. What do you do? Why do you do it? What would happen if your department did not exist?

The Office of the City Secretary (OCS) is the most misunderstood position in the organizational structure of the City. While the City Secretary is the oldest of public servants in local government, dating back to Biblical times, many people do not know exactly what we do or what we are responsible for. In 1934, political scientist Professor William Bennett Munro explained it best:

“No other office in municipal service has so many contacts. It serves the mayor, the city council, the city manager (when there is one), and all administrative departments without exception. All of them call upon it, almost daily, for some service or information. Its work is not spectacular, but it demands versatility, alertness, accuracy, and no end of patience. The public does not realize how many loose ends of city administration this office pulls together.”

The City’s Charter and State law mandate the responsibilities of the City Secretary’s Office. By fostering transparency and open government, the Office of the City Secretary is oftentimes the direct link between citizens and the local government.

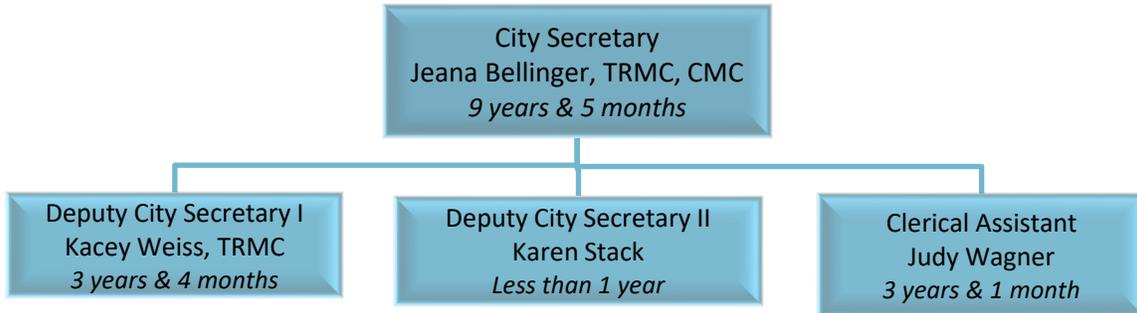
The Office of the City Secretary is charged with the duty to preserve the right of every qualified citizen to vote and to provide election services to all candidates and voters. The OCS maintains and preserves the official records of the City, including Council minutes, contracts, agreements, ordinances, resolutions, liens, easements and deeds. The OCS handles all requests for public information as outlined in the Texas Public Information Act.

In addition, we are responsible for the issuance of certain permits and licenses including, but not limited to, alcoholic beverage licenses, vendor and solicitor licenses, special event permits, and noise variances. The OCS prepares and files property liens and collects sanitation franchise and hotel occupancy taxes. The OCS is responsible for State and Federal reporting related to annexations, eminent domain, unclaimed property and boarding homes. We schedule and coordinate all annexations and requests for tax abatements. The OCS also provides training to the City Council, Advisory Boards and City staff on Records Management, Open Meetings and Public Information.

The City Secretary serves as the Secretary to the Brenham Community Development Corporation (BCDC) and the Southwest Industrial Park, Section III, Property Owners Association. The City Secretary is also the staff liaison for the Community Services Council Sub-Committee, the Boards and Committees Review Council Sub-Committee, and the Brenham-Washington County Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) Board.

The City Secretary is an Officer of the City and is required under the City’s Charter. Unless the Charter is amended by an election of qualified voters to remove the requirement of a City Secretary, the City of Brenham will always be required to have a City Secretary’s Office.

2. What about your employees. How many? How long have they been with the City, with your department? What is their training? Who is cross-trained? What type of succession plan is in place?



The City Secretary Team has, combined, over 15 years of service within the Department; 38 years of service with the City of Brenham; and over 47 years, collectively, in State or local government.

We are all active members of the Texas Municipal Clerks Association (TMCA) and the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC). We strive to adhere to TMCA’s Code of Ethics as a guiding principle in our daily efforts to assist staff and citizens:

TMCA Code of Ethics

Recognizing their responsibilities to the people, desiring to inspire public confidence and respect for government, and believing that honesty, integrity, loyalty and courtesy form the basis of ethical conduct, members of the Texas Municipal Clerks Association, Inc., do hereby subscribe to the following principles and ethics, which will govern my personal and professional conduct as a municipal clerk:

- *To uphold constitutional government and the laws of my community;*
- *To conduct my public and private life as to be an example to fellow citizens and co-workers;*
- *To never disclose confidential information gained by reason of my position nor use such information for personal gain;*
- *To be ever mindful of my neutrality and impartiality, rendering equal service to all and to extend the same treatment I wish to receive myself;*
- *To impart to my profession those standards of quality and integrity that the conduct of the affairs of my office shall be above reproach and to merit public confidence in our community;*
- *To record that which is true and preserve that which is entrusted to me as if it were my own; and*
- *To strive constantly to improve the administration of the affairs of my office through independent study, courses, meetings and seminars, and through sound management practices to produce continued progress and so fulfill my responsibilities to my community.*

The City Secretary Team realizes the importance of education and continued professional development.

The City Secretary is a Certified Municipal Clerk through IIMC which required extensive educational studies as well as tenured professional experience in municipal government or other related fields. She is also an active member of the Capital Chapter of Municipal Clerks and is currently serving her third term as Chapter President.

The City Secretary and the Deputy City Secretary I are both active in TMCA and have both obtained their Texas Registered Municipal Clerks Certification (TRMC) which involves over 200 hours of at-home study with written homework and exams, as well as, required attendance at various educational seminars. The TRMC certification also requires an additional 152 hours of personal and professional development every five years for recertification. The Deputy City Secretary II will begin the TRMC certification program in 2019.

Some of the specific training the OCS Team participates in annually include:

- ✓ Public Relations, Public Management and Administration
- ✓ State and Local Government Laws, Election Laws, and Legislative Changes
- ✓ Local Government Finance, Purchasing, Budgeting, and Public Funds Investment
- ✓ Leadership, Supervision, Ethics, and Employment Law
- ✓ Economic Development, Zoning, Annexation, and Land Use
- ✓ Records Management, Public Information, Communication, and Social Media
- ✓ Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), AED and First-Aid
- ✓ Active Shooter

Due to the various tasks our office handles, we are all cross-trained to perform each other's daily responsibilities. When a citizen or City staff member calls on us for assistance, we must be able to find information quickly and assist them with their immediate needs.

Because cross-training is such an important part of our department strategy, it is equally important to have a succession plan in place. The City Secretary is training and mentoring the Deputy City Secretary II for succession to City Secretary.

3. What are your departmental strengths? Weaknesses? Opportunities? Threats? What are you doing that you should do better or stop doing? Any Best Practices?

Strengths:

- Excellent working knowledge of regulations that govern Cities.
- Timely customer service to the citizens and our co-workers.
- Organization and maintenance of City documents and electronic records.
- A staff with over 58 years, collectively, of local and municipal government experience.
- Cross-trained staff capable of wearing many hats.
- Providing transparency and impartiality in governance to stakeholders.
- Training and support from other organizations such as the Capital Chapter of Municipal Clerks, the Texas Municipal Clerks Association, and the International Institute of Municipal Clerks.

Weaknesses:

- Department recognition among citizens and co-workers.
- Information being released to the public via City staff, the media, the City's website, and City social media pages without the coordination of one voice.
- Council packets, agendas, licensing and permitting are a manual process, which is very time consuming for staff.
- Adequate preservation of all records and information.
- Insufficient election and voter education.

Opportunities:

- Use Municipal Clerk's Week in May each year to educate citizens and co-workers about the duties of the OSC.
- Improve technology to automate our agenda, packet, licensing and permitting processes.
- Find grant opportunities to assist our department with technology needs and the preservation of historical documents.
- Establish a Handbook for the Office of the City Secretary to insure consistency and streamlining of duties.
- Find innovative ways to inform and educate citizens about the election process and what it means to serve on City Council.
- Legislative changes that may provide an opportunity to positively affect the City and/or our citizens.

Threats:

- Information and social media being presented incorrectly or inaccurately to the public.
- Information contained in historical documents being lost in translation due to cursive handwriting becoming obsolete.
- Limited pool of mayoral and councilmember candidates.
- Legislative changes that could negatively affect the City and/or our citizens.

4. What is your department responsible for? What are your tasks? How long does it take normally?

Each day brings about new challenges and opportunities for the Office of the City Secretary as we strive to meet the ever-changing needs of our citizens and our co-workers. In an effort to expand on the specific duties and responsibilities of the OCS, the following information is provided:

Election Services

Due to the implementation of the Military and Overseas Voter Act (MOVE Act) in 2011 with the passage of Senate Bill 100, the City Council approved an odd-numbered year election schedule and changed the length of terms of office for City Councilmembers from staggered three (3) year terms to staggered four (4) year terms. Due to these changes, the City's election cycle is the Mayor and two (2) council seats up for election in one odd-numbered year and the remaining four (4) council seats up for election the following odd-numbered year.

The next regular General Election will be held in May 2019 with the positions of Mayor, Councilmember-Ward 2 and Councilmember-Ward 4 being up for election. While the City contracts with Washington County for election services, the OCS is still responsible for preparing the election calendar, election notices and publications, securing and setting up all polling locations, assisting the County with election worker training, conducting early voting, accepting mail ballots, arranging for the delivery and return of the ballot boxes, counting the ballots, and preparing the canvass of election results.

In early 2018, the number of registered voters in the City was 9,450; which is a 6% increase from 2016. The last General Election in which an incumbent councilmember was opposed was in May 2006. In that election only 362 citizens voted, which was less than 5% of the total number of registered voters at that time.

Council Meeting Documents

The Office of the City Secretary creates agendas and packets for an average of thirty council meetings per year. This includes preparing the agenda, coordinating the various documents and compiling an electronic packet, notifying the media, and preparing the minutes of each meeting. Along with the coordination of the agenda packets, we also format, draft, review, revise, and/or finalize an average of 31 ordinances and 28 resolutions each year.

Public Information Requests

The OCS is responsible for handling all requests for public information as mandated by the Texas Public Information Act. Our office processes approximately 550 requests each year, with the majority of the requests relating to public safety.

During the FY2018-19 budget process a specialized software program, Social Archive, was approved by the Council to help staff address the various legal issues related to social media. This program will not only assist the OCS in complying with open records requests, it will also allow staff to properly manage social media posts made by both city staff and citizens.

Records Management

The City of Brenham's Records Management Program operates under Chapter 2, Article 5 of the Code of Ordinances and establishes the Office of the City Secretary as the Records Management Officer for the City. A Records Management Policy was adopted by the City Council in 2013. The OCS has administrative authority over the records program and each Department Director is responsible for the records within their department.

The OCS assists each department with the organization of their records and, when needed, coordinates the proper document destruction method. The OCS also provides records management training to employees that include the City's records management policy, document organization and file structure, record classification, document retention schedules, and the final disposition of records.

Currently, the OCS is responsible for over 13,000 records that have been individually indexed, electronically scanned and are being properly stored in the vault on the first floor of City Hall.

Federal and State Reporting

The Office of the City Secretary is responsible for reporting the following information to Federal and State agencies:

- Annexation Report: A report of annexations including the total number of buildings and housing units constructed and permitted is due to the U. S. Department of Commerce – Economics and Statistics Administration each year by January 26th.
- Eminent Domain Reporting: A report on the City's authority to exercise the power of eminent domain is due to the State Comptroller's Office each year by February 1st.
- Unclaimed Property: A report of unclaimed funds being held by the City is due to the State Comptroller's Office each year on June 30th.
- Boarding Home Report: A report of the total number of boarding homes permitted for operation within the City limits is due to the Texas Health and Human Service Commission each year on September 30th.

Contracts and Agreements

The Office of the City Secretary is responsible for contract administration. We work closely with Department Directors and the City Attorney to ensure that all contracts and agreements comply with contract terms and conditions adopted by the City Council as part of the City's Financial Policies.

During the FY2018-19 budget process, Council approved the purchase of contract administration software through IonWave Technologies. This software will allow us to consolidate all contracts and associated documents into one program that can be accessed by all employees. This software will help us ensure that all contract expiration dates are handled in a timely manner. Implementation of this software will begin in November 2018.

Property and Land Use Documents

The OCS is responsible for the coordination of all annexations, filing of various property-related liens, and maintaining easement and deed records for all city owned property as well as property owned by the Brenham Community Development Corporation (BCDC). We also work closely with the Brenham Economic Development Foundation on requests for Enterprise Zone and Reinvestment Zone designations for any applicable tax abatements from new and existing businesses within the City.

Variances, Permits and Licensing

The OCS is responsible for the issuance of non-consent tow permits, noise variances, special event permits, vendor and solicitor permits, and beer and wine licenses. In FY2017-18, we issued a total of 167 variances, permits and/or licenses to visitors, citizens or business owners.

Collection of Franchise Fees and Taxes

The OCS is responsible for the oversight and collection of commercial sanitation franchise tax and hotel occupancy tax payments. We currently collect monthly franchise fees from eight sanitation providers and hotel occupancy tax payments from twenty-four local hotelier and B&B owners.

Boards and Committees

The Office of the City Secretary manages and maintains records and information for ten Advisory Boards and Committees. The OCS coordinates the application process and works closely with the City Manager and a Council Sub-Committee in reviewing applications received from citizens interested in serving on an advisory board. As required in the City's "Policies and Procedures for Boards and Commissions" policy, the OCS provides annual training to all Board members on the Texas Open Meetings Act, basic parliamentary procedures, and matters related to ethics and conflicts of interest.

The City Secretary serves as the Board Secretary for the Brenham Community Development Corporation (BCDC) and the Southwest Industrial Park, Section III, Property Owners Association. She is also the staff liaison for the Community Services Council Sub-Committee and the Brenham-Washington County Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) Board.

5. What about your facilities? Are they adequate? If not, what is needed and why?

The only “facility” the OCS is responsible for maintaining is Council Chambers (“Chambers”), which is also shared with Municipal Court. The current Chambers was constructed in 2002 when the City of Brenham purchased this building and City Hall was relocated here from 110 N. Park Street.

Since its construction in 2002, the Chambers has become antiquated and is no longer sufficient for our needs. The space lacks adequate seating for those attending City Council meetings and the technology is not suitable when staff or visitors are presenting items to the City Council.

During the FY2017-18 budget, the Council approved \$80,000 in technology renovations in the Chambers. This funding was to be shared equally between Administration (Dept. 121) and Municipal Court (Dept. 155) and spread between two budget cycles (FY2017-18 and FY2018-19). As staff prepared for the technology upgrades, a local architect was brought in to discuss other needed renovations to the Chambers such as enlarging the Chambers to provide for additional seating, improved layout of the dais, new carpet, and fresh paint. After discussions with the architect, the decision was made to hold off on any technology renovations until funds are available to renovate the full Chamber to meet our needs. Preliminary costs estimates for a full Chamber renovation are [REDACTED].

6. What about your equipment and vehicles? Are they adequate? If not, what is needed and why? What is your replacement policy?

Due to the implementation of the Military and Overseas Voter Act (MOVE Act) in 2011 with the passage of Senate Bill 100, the City Council approved the purchase of four Automark machines to improve voter assistance during elections. This is the only equipment owned by this department.

These machines are stored in the City Hall vault and are used only during City elections. The Washington County Clerk’s office assists with vendor updates and maintenance to the software for these machines. During City elections, this equipment is used for Early Voting and in the polls on Election Day.

The life expectancy of these machines is 20+ years. No replacement plan is in place at this time as the machines are only seven years old.

7. Where do you see your department in 2020, 2023 and 2025? What will it take to get there? What is needed? What will it look like when we arrive?

Our departmental vision for the next seven years will include increased automation, document preservation and increased staffing.

Automation

Automation is a top priority for the OCS in 2019. During the FY2018-19 budget a specialized software program, AgendEase, was approved by the Council to help streamline the agenda and packet preparation process. This software will help save paper as well as countless hours of personnel time.

Another automation improvement scheduled in 2019 will be to work with our current permitting and licensing software vendor to correct flaws in our current program to help us better streamline the permitting and licensing process.

Historical Preservation

By 2022, we would like to tackle historical preservation of historical books, records and maps. The historical preservation project will consist of preserving 96 books of historical minutes, tax rolls, street and utility indexes, charters, ordinances and maps dating as far back as 1867. These books consist of over 15,000 pages of historical information. The preliminary cost estimate for this entire project is well over \$700,000. We will spread out the costs over six or seven budget years with the priority being those documents that are in the worst condition. The OSC will also look for grants through various organizations to help with the costs of this very worthwhile project.

Staffing

The staffing history for the Office of the City Secretary is as follows:

- 2009 to 2015: One full-time staff member was responsible for all duties.
- 2015: Two staff members (1 full-time and 1 part-time) were added to keep up with the increasing workload of the Department.
- 2017: One full-time staff member was reassigned from the Police Department to the OSC to handle the growing number of public information requests and to improve the City's records management practices. However, the job description for this position was revised to include some additional tasks and retitled as a Deputy City Secretary II position. The Deputy City Secretary II position was filled in August 2018.

By 2025, we anticipate the need for an additional staff member in order to keep up with the demands of the OSC related to the growth of our City and constant legislative changes that add to the responsibilities of the Office.

8. Overview

In broad terms, the overall responsibility of the Office of the City Secretary is governance. Governance is defined as “*the mechanisms required to balance the powers of the members*” or more simply put, the way in which a City can be controlled by its citizens.

The OCS is involved with almost every governance “mechanism” on a daily basis:

- Elections establish who are the decision makers for the City;
- City Council meetings are an open forum where citizens can be heard and participate in the decision making process;
- Public information requests are the purest form of transparency for the citizens to know how their City is being run;
- Records management assures that history is preserved for future generations; and
- Advisory boards and committees foster citizen involvement.