Weymouth News

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Innovating Weymouth: The First Step to Improving Government Performance

By Craig Hall

First in a three part series.

The first article in this series presents CitiStat, a national model of government innovation, as a new model of government performance for Weymouth.

It is often said that an efficient, effective and democratic government is adaptable and enduring.

The time is right for Weymouth to pursue an innovative reform opportunity in that so residents and businesses as well as elected officials can measure the performance of their government. Fortunately, one idea recognized nationally as an innovative model has done just that and with evidence of measured success.

The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Kennedy School of Government-Harvard University recently recognized *CitiStat* a City of Baltimore management initiative as one of its 2004 *Innovations in American Government Program* awardees. The *CitiStat* model, a citywide program, was recognized for its performance measurement model in improving government services. "In short *CitiStat* is how Baltimore's government is managed: strategies are developed and employed, managers and workers are held accountable, and results are measured – not yearly, quarterly, or monthly, but week-to-week." states Mathew Gallagher, Director of *CitiStat*. The New York Times has recognized *CitiStat* as a "real pioneering innovation."

In FY 2000, its first year of implementation, cost savings, cost avoidances and revenue enhancements were a conservative $13.2 million dollars. That number through FY 2003 now exceeds $100 million dollars. Improvements to service delivery also improved dramatically with accounts from both business and residents through the use of satisfaction surveys. Baltimore officials have even credited this innovative model with retaining businesses and middle-class residents.

Fred Siegel, a senior fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute stated that *CitiStat* had the "potential to change city government all over America." The *CitiStat* initiative emphasizes improving public services. The model works by establishing performance measurements, setting goals, then tracking numbers and patterns in a manner that the public can understand. The process then allows government to evaluate results, strategize and work across departmental lines in a manner that encourages immediate solutions to

problems and focuses resources on areas that need them. Ultimately, government services can be openly measured by residents and elected officials. Services to the public can be fairly judged because everyone knows what criteria are being used.

The key to *CitiStat* is that it is a process based on comprehensive up-to-date information that is clear to residents because everyone knows what government services are being measured on. The *CitiStat* model is based on four principles: "accurate and timely intelligence, effective tactics and strategies, rapid deployment of resources, and relentless follow-up and assessment." These four principles are adapted from *Compstat*, a 1996 *Innovations* winner from the City of New York, and widely replicated across the county. *Compstat* is credited with reducing crime and violence in New York City. There are two additional elements that are resonating from communities now pursuing the replication of this model, strong executive sponsorship and active participation from the community in identifying the performance measurements used to assess government services. Mathew Gallagher, Director of *CitiStat*, also adds that "For citizen's, *CitiStat* is perhaps the clearest example of City government's effort to be more open and transparent in its management of public resources and response to public problems."

Charles Euchner, the former Executive Director of Harvard's Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston, views *CitiStat* as a means for improving how basic services can be more efficiently delivered. Euchner has pointed out that *CitiStat* is "for any city government out to learn what it doesn't know about its community and why it doesn't know it." Phineas Baxandell, Assistant Director of the Rappaport Institute, says that the two most important things that come out of *CitiStat* are the process of organizational learning and the persistent follow-up process for finding solutions to problems. Lenneal Henderson of the University of Baltimore sums up the importance of *CitiStat* by describing it as a "critical management and civic communication tool."

Ideas like *CitiStat* demonstrate that conceptual ideas can be implemented with fiscal prudence and achieve practical policy results. The benefit of replicating a successful model in Weymouth is that the costs are limited to start-up, not toward reinventing the wheel. The *CitiStat* model is not technology driven, it is process driven therefore a scaled down implementation may be managed by existing staff, available software and technology. Weymouth like other municipalities can also take advantage of the means, resources, and training offered by Baltimore in implementing a *WeyStat* model.

The broad based support for the *CitiStat* model and successful replication have proven that it is adaptable to any size community if the will is there for a new level of accountability. *CitiStat's* own adaptability was demonstrated in 2001 by re-engineering the eventual success of a 2003 *Innovations* winner, the City of Chicago's *311 System*. Residents can call an easy to remember number "311" for all non-emergency city services, information, and service requests. This provided an even better level of performance tracking and accountability in providing customer satisfaction to residents.

In Weymouth how do we as residents, businesses, elected officials, and even the employees themselves measure our government's performance? Can we better improve

the way our government serves us, and shouldn't we expect those measurements to be in line with our priorities? Weymouth should consider pursuing the *CitiStat* model to achieve short as well as long term goals. An accountability model based on performance measures supports fact driven decision making, provides focus, promotes incentive to employees to become more results oriented, and provides residents with concrete information on how well government is serving them. If this model can begin to work across the nation, and turn around a problem-plagued city like Baltimore, then why can't Weymouth consider adopting it to improve the way our government works for us?

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Weymouth News

Wednesday December 1, 2004

Innovating Weymouth: Successful Principles for WeyStat

By Craig Hall

Second in a two part series.

The first article of this series presented CitiStat, a national model of government innovation, as a new model of government accountability for Weymouth. This second article outlines the guiding principles necessary for that improvement.

The necessity of managing our form of city government based upon a new innovative model is important to improving city services for residents and businesses. Weymouth, like many communities in Massachusetts and across the nation, is facing policy and fiscal challenges. Those challenges include the debate of what core services mean to a community. But before we can legitimately debate our community's priorities shouldn't we have a clear understanding and information of how we measure the services our government provides? The answer seems obvious enough, but without the information provided by performance measures for each city service, how can we justify their success? Weymouth should consider embracing *CitiStat's* creative features and innovative solutions to problems.

Here are guiding principles for a "*WeyStat*" model.

- **Executive Sponsorship**: *Executive ownership and commitment must be present for genuine organizational change.*
- **Performance Measurements**: *City services must be measured on what they do. Therefore, the determining of performance measurements is critical. These measurements must be well understood by the executive and community.*
- **Assessment and Accountability**: *The executive and management must be diligent in their assessment of data. People must be accountable for completing and solving problems.*
- **Efficient and Effective Utilization of Resources**: *With real-time data departments and staff can target problems and solutions proactively.*
- **Organizational Intrapreneurship**: *Staff must be encouraged to work cooperatively and given the latitude to develop tactics and strategies to solve problems.*
- **Community Partnership**: *The active participation from residents, neighborhood groups, and businesses, in the setting of measurements for government services is an investment in a process of change. A shared vision of core services and priorities educates everyone in what government can do for them, and in the end*

how they can fairly evaluate government's success based solely on performance data.

In addition to the guiding principles a blueprint for implementation must be clearly communicated and supported. The following are fundamentals for success.

- Public participation from residents.
- Executive commitment from the Mayor.
- Support from Town Councilors.
- An independent advisory team.
- A formal implementation team.

A successful implementation will depend on many factors, but with the commitment of those in positions of responsibility and decision making, Weymouth can take the steps necessary to make improvements. For Weymouth the challenge is not to re-invent itself, but to improve government services using the principles of a successful model of government accountability.

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Weymouth News

Wednesday December 8, 2004

Innovating Weymouth: Avoiding the Potholes

By Craig Hall

Third in a three part series.

The third article in this series illustrates an example for improving government performance for Weymouth.

Winter is fast approaching this year with snow having already been on the ground. This is the time of year when the Department of Public Works can shine in the eyes of the community. It's the time when snow plows clear our streets and sidewalks, our trash and recycling is picked up while atop snow banks, drains flow without backup, and the scourge of drivers – the potholes - are repaired. But, it's also the time when residents have less patience if these services are interrupted. Many have the attitude that "I'm paying taxes, it's their job, just get it done." Well, it's not as simple as it may seem.

If you have followed this series you know that this article offers an example of why Weymouth should consider adopting a new innovative approach to government management. So why not use a simple example, why not pick on the potholes. Well, I couldn't have picked a more perfect example. Believe it or not, there is a whole science behind the pothole and how to permanently avoid and correct them. The Army Corp of Engineers even has a primer for public administrators. Frankly, I know more now than I ever needed to.

For our example, the Highway division of the Department of Public Works was selected because potholes should make for easy practical research, meaning that we can count how many potholes we have and how many we fixed. But, that's as far as practical research can take us. Therefore, a thorough analysis and some observations had to be made. The results of this article will highlight three things. First, the introduction of *WeyStat* principles, outlined in the second article of this series, could improve the communication and management of government services provided to the public. Second, by using performance measurements, long term planning can actually make a difference in cost savings and resources. Third, that customer satisfaction levels could increase because of the new transparency to performance data and assessment by residents and elected officials.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate to the readers the potential gain that residents, businesses, employees and elected officials could have by initiating a *WeyStat* model of government performance.

We begin by examining three basis questions.

- How do you report a pothole?
- How does it get addressed?
- How will you know it's corrected?

These three basic questions opened up a litany of important follow-up questions.

- After reporting a pothole, who gets the information and what do they do with it?
- Who gets their pothole corrected first and why?
- Is the work satisfactory, is it permanent, are their more potholes in your neighborhood than others?
- Is the pothole data collected and reported to the director, mayor and councilors, is it measured against past years data, is it analyzed against this year's data, and is it analyzed for predictive data next year?
- What performance measures are in place to evaluate pothole corrections, resources, and cost savings and avoidances?

We can't answer all those questions here, but we can answer the one question this last article asks, whether a *WeyStat* model could improve government performance in Weymouth. The answer is yes.

We begin by asking, why is it important that we understand how a pothole is corrected? It seems like such a simple basic function of government, but is it considered a core function of government and a priority of the executive and residents? Do we even know what core functions means to us, let alone what our city's priorities are? This is all important because every day residents, elected officials and businesses contact the city regarding nuts and bolts services. If we can't efficiently and effectively correct a simple pothole, then how can we solve more challenging problems efficiently and effectively?

Our public streets are the one thing that virtually every taxpayer can measure government on. How do residents rate the roads in Weymouth? Funny thing, some say they are terrible and some say very good, but of course it all depends on where you live and what roads you drive on regularly. How does the mayor and your councilors rate the roads and do they make their budget decisions based on any measures for them?

Even though road maintenance is not the sexy public policy politicians like to champion, this and other types of basic services are important to residents - just ask them. For residents, road work and potholes cost money, lots of money every year. Whether its preventative maintenance on our streets, construction of roads, repair efforts – a great deal of money and resources are utilized. Potholes if not corrected also cause property damage to our cars and bodily harm to unsuspecting drivers. Municipalities once were virtually immune to liability are now finding themselves more open to lawsuits involving both personal and property damage claims.

Lets look at what steps Weymouth could consider implementing during this winter season to assess the city-wide potential of a *WeyStat* model? Begin by piloting *WeyStat* in the Highway division and begin implementing the *WeyStat* principles around the responsibilities for pothole correction. Here are a few basic steps for that implementation.

- Publicize and communicate the use of a single telephone number through mediums available to the city. For example, the city's main number and that of the Council. Including potholes on the department of public works web based submission service request system on the city's web site.
- Set performance measures for pothole correction. Prepare to make decisions and take immediate action after evaluating performance data.
- Collect pothole requests at one point of contact. Create a database that will provide meaningful data on customer requests, department actions, and allow for analysis.
- Provide regular reporting, including trends, projections, issues to the director of public works, the mayor, and council.
- Provide constituents with the ability to verify potholes were corrected and a means for customer satisfaction survey.

This one small example illustrates the need for improved efficiency and effectiveness in the manner in which Weymouth government manages itself. Does the Highway division do good work, yes they do. I personally can attest to that, but if we intend to do better, not just in this department but citywide we must then recognize that <u>we can do better</u>. One way we can do that is to innovate, truly innovate the way Weymouth government measures its performance.

By using the *CitiStat* model, and principles outlined in the first two articles of this series, Weymouth could improve the mayor's ability to evaluate the city departments, upper management's ability to evaluate staff, resources, and customer service. The Council could base budget decisions on hard data collected on performance measurements. The taxpayers could also fairly judge the performance of their city services on hard data and communicate their opinions to their elected officials.

The Rappaport Institute published a working paper titled; *Can CitiStat Work in Greater Boston?,* following a presentation on *CitiStat* by Baltimore officials on September 16, 2004 for Massachusetts cities and towns at the Kennedy School of Government. The report offers six simple rules that communities should consider when implementing a "*Stat*" model. These rules support the principles for a *WeyStat* model outlined in the second article of this series. The rules reinforce the commitment needed by the executive, hard analysis based on performance measures, the piloting of the process, the buy in and acknowledgement of the process by managers, employees, and residents, the necessity to adapt, and the cross-departmental goals around core functions and priorities of the city.

The next step toward innovating Weymouth government is up to the residents, businesses, and our elected officials. We have to begin challenging what we know and begin to believe we can do it better.

The Rappaport Institute is available to provide a thorough overview of the CitiStat model to Weymouth officials. The City of Baltimore and its CitiStat team are also available to offer training and resources for implementing the CitiStat model.

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