

'Seventy' calls for ending 6 row offices

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The Committee of Seventy, a non-partisan civic group, called yesterday for the abolition of six elective city row offices, suggesting their work should be handled by other city agencies.

The offices are the Clerk of Quarter-Sessions, responsible for much of the court system's record-keeping; the City Commissioners, a three-person panel in charge of the city's election machinery; the Register of Wills, whose office records wills and estates, collects inheritance taxes and issues marriage licenses, and the city Sheriff, whose portfolio includes courtroom security, transporting prisoners, serving warrants and auctioning real estate on which taxes or mortgage payments are delinquent.

"After studying these offices carefully ... we found no reason why the offices need to be elected," said Zachary Stalberg, Seventy's president and CEO.

Its report, titled "Needless Jobs: Why Six Elected City Positions Should Die," estimated that the city could save at least \$1 million a year in salaries and perks now paid to the elected officials.

"We agree with Mayor Nutter that the fiscal crisis gives us a rare opportunity to significantly restructure the government," Stalberg said in a press release. "Smartly reassigning the neces-

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sary functions of the four offices to other city departments or to the courts will produce other efficiencies and cost-savings."

Of the six officials whose offices were targeted for elimination, only Register of Wills Ron Donatucci, a Democratic ward leader first elected to the post 30 years ago, spoke to the *Daily News*. He said that having an elected official in charge of his office makes it more responsive to the public, ranging from grieving or feuding relatives, to lovers seeking marriage licenses.

Both the public and other government agencies are pleased with the Register of Wills' operations, Donatucci said.

"If it's not broken, don't fix it," he said.

Seventy said the easiest post to eliminate would be the Clerk of Quarter Sessions, held since 1992 by Vivian T. Miller, a Democratic ward leader. All it would take is a vote by City Council.

Miller did not return a call from the *Daily News*.

Seventy said that elimination of the three city commissioners and the sheriff's job would require City Council to set up a public referendum on changing the City Home Rule Charter.

The city commissioners' panel is chaired by Margaret Tartaglione, another Democratic ward leader who's been a commissioner since 1976. The others are Democratic ward leader Anthony Clark and Republican ward leader Joseph Duda.

A spokesman said yesterday the commissioners are studying the Committee of 70 report and will have no immediate comment.

Sheriff John Green did not return a call from the *Daily News*.

"The four offices are off on their own, and virtually anonymous," Stalberg said. "There is patronage and nepotism that shouldn't sit well with the public and that can't be reined in."

Nutter suggested last December that the city should consider eliminating some of its minor row offices as a cost-saving measure.

Nutter told reporters yesterday he is still "very interested" in the issue. "They provide vital services," he said of the row offices. "The question is whether or not you need elected officials to provide those services." ★

Staff writer Catherine Lucey contributed to this report.