

News Updates:

Office Depot Will Reimburse Berkeley for Overcharges

*By J. Douglas Allen-Taylor
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The City of Berkeley is expecting a small amount of budget relief this month—\$289,000 in refunds for overcharges on office supplies by Office Depot. In a memo this week from City Manager Phil Kamlarz to Mayor Tom Bates and the Berkeley City Council, Bates said Office Depot had agreed to refund the money by April 17.

“During the first term of this agreement,” Kamlarz wrote in his memo, “there was a lack of attention to the management of our account,” and that contributed to the overcharges. Kamlarz said his office will monitor the remaining three months of the Office Depot contract on a quarterly basis “to ensure compliance with the terms” of the original bid.

The three-year, \$550,000-a-year contract with Office Depot ends in June of this year, but in his memo Kamlarz said the city’s finance department intends to exercise the city’s option to extend the contract through June of 2010.

The revelation about the Office Depot overcharges were first made to the City Council last October by Diane Griffin, president of Radston’s Office Plus supply store of Hercules and a member of the board of directors of the National Office Products Alliance. Griffin, whose company had bid on the city contract won by Office Depot, submitted a 100-page analysis to the city on her own initiative, documenting her allegations that Office Depot had overcharged the city.

Councilmember Kriss Worthington, who helped Griffin get some of the city documents that helped confirm the allegations, said by telephone this week that Berkeley “owes [Griffin] a lot of gratitude. Who would have figured all of [the overcharges] out without her assistance?” Worthington already scheduled City Council consideration of a city honor for Griffin for the April 21 council meeting prior to receiving information about the Office Depot reimbursement.