

Item 30



Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date: July 23, 2013
Prepared By/Phone Number: Susan Bell, 854-9587
Elected/Appointed Official/Dept. Head: Dana DeBeauvoir
Commissioners Court Sponsor:

AGENDA LANGUAGE: Approve travel and other expenses associated with a County Clerk temporary employee who is preparing specifications and documentation for a new voting system for Travis County and who resides outside of Travis County.

CONSIDER AND TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION ON July 23, 2013.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:
Memo to Commissioners Court attached

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:
County Clerk Elections – Special Fund

REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:

AGENDA REQUEST DEADLINE: All agenda requests and supporting materials should be submitted as a pdf to the County Judge's office, agenda@co.travis.tx.us by Tuesdays at 5:00 p.m. for the next week's meeting.



Dana DeBeauvoir
Travis County Clerk

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and Records Management Divisions
1000 Guadalupe, Austin, TX 78701-2328

July 15, 2013

TO: Travis County Commissioners Court
Nicki Riley, County Auditor
Debbie Manor, Human Resources
Alan Miller, Planning and Budget

FROM: Susan Bell for Dana DeBeauvoir

RE: Temporary Employee for Development and Acquisition of New Voting System Resides Outside of Travis County

Upon request of the Auditor, we want to call your attention to a unique situation we have with a temporary employee we are using to assist us in designing, acquiring, and funding a new voting system for Travis County. Reimbursement of travel costs for this employee are being held pending your approval.

The Clerk's Office is working with some of the nation's top experts in computer science, cryptography, statistics, and human factor/usability engineering to develop a set of specifications for a voting system. This effort is in response to a request by representatives of the community serving on the County Clerk's Election Study Group who determined that Travis County's new voting system needs to provide more security, accuracy, voter convenience, transparency, accountability, and economy than those systems available on the market.

Collecting and assimilating these specifications from technical experts, activists, federal and state agencies, and election administrators is a daunting challenge. We knew we had to find a unique individual to fill that role. After discussing the pros and cons of using an employee versus a consultant, we determined the best choice, if possible, was to have a person employed by Travis County who would be directly representing our interests. However, we also knew it would be extremely difficult to find someone to fit this role.

Much to our delight and amazement, we found a person with expertise in business, computer science, cryptographic science, voting technology, and high level technical writing. Bryce Eakin's education is in economics and computer science. He has an MBA from Oxford University. He studied with one of the nation's leading experts in voting security at Rice University. Mr. Eakin was willing to accept the position as our temporary employee because of his passion for elections, his admiration for Travis County's demand for higher standards, and his belief that this project could set a new standard for voting systems in the country.

Mr. Eakin has already completed an initial draft of the RFP that will be used to give vendors a first glance at the specifications that are being developed. This draft will be presented on July 28, 2013, at a vendor meeting in Austin just prior to the Texas Secretary of State Elections Conference. Mr. Eakin also prepared the submission for the Department of Defense grant and will be working to prepare other materials as we continue to seek additional funding sources.

Mr. Eakin serves as a temporary employee (grade 31 at \$50/hour). His salary and travel expenses are paid from the County Clerk's Elections Division Special Revenue fund (also called the 10% fund). We confirmed with the Secretary of State that expenditure of these funds for this purpose is acceptable.

We want to make sure the Court understands that Mr. Eakin lives in Houston and is temporarily staying in New York City. We have been working remotely with Mr. Eakin using email and conference calls. On occasion we have requested that he travel to Austin for meetings with our team of experts, and for a presentation to the Election Study Group. We know of two meetings in the near future when we will be asking him to come to Austin. In July, we are asking him to attend the meeting with potential vendors, the Clerk's Office, and the Purchasing Office. In August we will ask him to appear with us in Commissioners Court for a presentation on the new voting system. Future trips to Austin will be requested sparingly, but will be likely as we move through this process.

We realize having an out-of-county and/or out-of-state employee is unusual, and we cannot imagine another circumstance when we would find this practical or necessary. However, for this particular situation, it serves the County well and provides us with an incredible resource who is personally invested with Travis County. We also believe this arrangement is much less expensive than if we had hired a consultant.

The Auditor's Office has said that they have no criticism of this arrangement, but they felt Commissioners Court needed to be aware that we have a temporary employee who is living out of the area.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on this matter. Thank you.