



A Tradition of Stewardship
A Commitment to Service

Agenda Date: 9/21/2010

Agenda Placement: 7E

NAPA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS Board Agenda Letter

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Hillary Gitelman - Director
Conservation, Development & Planning
REPORT BY: Hillary Gitelman, Director - 253-4805
SUBJECT: Customer Service Consultant Agreement

RECOMMENDATION

Directors of Conservation, Development & Planning, Public Works, and Environmental Management, along with the Napa County Fire Marshal request approval of and authorization for the Chair to sign an agreement with the Halle Group for a maximum of \$52,500 for the term September 21, 2010 through June 30, 2011 for work related to customer service in departments responsible for issuing building, planning, and other permits.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For several years, the permitting departments and the CEO's office have discussed development of a survey to measure customer satisfaction over time, recognizing that good customer service and efficient permitting processes save time and money for applicants, and are emblematic of our organization's core values (integrity, accountability, and service). Via the proposed agreement, the departments would engage the Halle Group to interview internal and external stakeholders, facilitate an evaluation of potential customer service enhancements, and develop a tool for ongoing feedback in the future. While it's difficult to spend money on "soft" programs such as this in tough economic times, the contract will pay dividends by improving the rapport between County staff and regular clients and by stimulating cost-saving efficiencies. Halle Group is a local firm.

FISCAL IMPACT

Is there a Fiscal Impact?	Yes
Is it currently budgeted?	Yes
Where is it budgeted?	There are funds available in Conservation, Development & Planning (29000),

Environmental Management (40500), Public Works Department (17500), and Fire Protection (25800) to pay for this contract.

Is it Mandatory or Discretionary? Discretionary

Discretionary Justification: Focusing attention on customer service is important during this economic downturn since permit applicants achieve cost savings when permit processes improve (i.e. when they become more efficient and more consistent).

Is the general fund affected? Yes

Future fiscal impact: None.

Consequences if not approved: The permitting departments would not have the benefit of consultant services in evaluating process-related improvements and developing ongoing feedback tools.

Additional Information:

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: The proposed action is not a project as defined by 14 California Code of Regulations 15378 (State CEQA Guidelines) and therefore CEQA is not applicable.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

The Departments of Conservation, Development & Planning, Public Works, and Environmental Management, together with the County Fire Marshall collectively process and issue an estimated 2,000 permits and other approvals in unincorporated Napa County each year. The departments also provide public information and assistance to prospective applicants and other members of the public. While staffing and workloads have generally declined in the last couple of years due to the ongoing economic recession, there is an expectation that workloads will begin to rebound as the economic outlook improves, and a recognition that this is an opportune time to examine permit processes, engage in a dialog about potential enhancements, and institute a feedback loop to evaluate customer satisfaction in the future.

In the past several years, the departments have instituted a variety of processing improvements, including a "quick permit" process (7-10 days) for small building permits, an "over the counter" process (same day service) for a subset of the small building permits, and performance standards (i.e. review deadlines) for the most common application types. Some processing improvements, particularly for Planning and Public Works applications, have resulted in higher costs to applicants, since billing practices have improved and applicants are being charged based on the actual time spent in processing their applications.

The departments would like to continue improving their customer services and establish a system for measuring customer satisfaction over time. The departments would also like to solicit ideas for system enhancements, particularly from customers with experience working in multiple jurisdictions.

In 2008, a working group of several County department heads, at the request of the County Executive Officer (CEO) and the Board of Supervisors, concluded a planning effort to determine the best methods for obtaining customer feedback on all County services (i.e. not just permitting services). The working group established the following goals:

- | Find out how our customers think we're doing and why they come to us;
- | Educate our customers about what we do and educate ourselves about what our customers need and want;
- | Use the results of our survey to make improvements that our customers will appreciate;
- | Monitor how we're doing over time; and
- | Make sure the program doesn't become an administrative burden and doesn't cost too much.

At that time, the County developed and circulated a request for proposals (RFP) and selected a consultant, but did not enter into a contract because of worsening economic conditions. Earlier this year, the County again solicited proposals from firms, individuals, and teams with expertise in designing and instituting customer service surveys aimed at getting constructive feedback. This time, knowledge of the local land use development issues, application processes, and stakeholders was prioritized and Halle Group was ultimately selected.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

None

CEO Recommendation: Approve

Reviewed By: Helene Franchi