



City of Homer

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Public Works

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Memorandum 20-125

TO: City Council

THROUGH: Rick Abboud, Acting, City Manager

FROM: Jan Keiser, PE, JD, Director of Public Works

DATE: August 4, 2020

SUBJECT: Proposed On-Call Services Contract with Homer Soil & Water Conservation District

Issue: Public Works needs specialized expertise to better help understand how the principles of green infrastructure and water/soil sustainability can be applied to its road maintenance and storm water management work.

Background: The City has adopted multiple plans and policies related to combatting climate change, preventing soil erosion, preserving water quality and otherwise modeling good environmental stewardship. These plans have been prepared by consultant experts, sustainability-minded volunteers, citizen scientists, and like-minded organizations. The plans contain visions, goals, objectives and recommendations and calls for action.

The Public Works Department is responsible for maintaining the City's roads, road-side ditches, storm drains and other infrastructure that directly affects soil integrity and water quality. Many of the means and methods we've been using to conduct this maintenance work are standard practices in the road maintenance world, but are not necessarily best practices in the sustainability world. For example, it is a standard practice to maintain roadside ditches by systematically excavating them with a backhoe bucket. This leaves a nice clean ditch. But, it also leaves exposed soil where invasive weeds can take hold and erosion can occur. What is the best way to maintain roadside ditches more sustainably without compromising the integrity of the road bed? I don't know.

As another example, roadside drainage is often directed into a natural drainage way. Sometimes, the surrounding properties get developed over time and the original drainage way gets altered, causing roadside drainage to flow onto private property and creating a problem. Sometimes, while the property is privately owned, it is not readily developable, and could be a good candidate for purchasing "development rights" to create a "drainage conservation area". This could be similar to the "farmland conservation programs" that have been developed to protect farmland from development. What is the best way to set up such a mechanism for Homer? I don't know. I could use some help to address these kinds of questions.

The Homer Soil and Water Conservation District, (“Homer District”), a sub-group of the USDA Natural Resource Conservation, according to its website, www.homerswcd.org, helps:

“[D]evelop, manage and direct natural resource programs at the local level. They work in both urban and rural setting, with landowners and other land managers, to carry out a program for the conservation, wise use, and sustainable developments of soil, water and related resources.”

As an example, among its multitude of work products, the Homer District authored the “Beluga Planning Document” in 2013, which provides background and planning information to help plan, manage and care for lands and waters of the Beluga Lake Wetland Complex *aka* the Beluga Planning Area. This document contains a plethora of maps, data, and descriptions of wetlands, surface water flow, soil conditions and more. Also, one of the Goals of the City’s 2018 Comprehensive Plan is “*Goal 2-A-1 Consider adopting incentives to encourage use of the Green Infrastructure Map developed by the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District*”. These documents are testimonies to the expertise of the Homer District’s staff in local soil and water conservation and sustainable planning. If anyone can help us address the challenging questions about how to conduct our road maintenance work more sustainably, it is the people at the Homer District.

At first, I hoped to engage the Homer District in a government-to-government exchange of information, at no cost. However, I learned the Homer District is funded entirely by grants from, and contracts with, public and private clients. I propose that the City issue an on-call services contract to the Homer District so we can access their expertise on specific questions. The Homer District’s billing rate is about \$40 per hour, making them among the least expensive consultants in town. For example, we are currently working with an engineering consultant whose billing rate is over \$150 per hour.

I propose to fund the on-call contract from the HART-Roads Fund, since the Homer District’s work will be entirely focused on helping us manage storm water. For example, one of the tasks I’d like to assign to them would be to help review the Update we are doing to the City’s Drainage Management Plan. Another will be to help us understand how to maintain roadside ditches more sustainably.

Recommendations:

1. We issue an on-call services contract to the Homer Soil & Water Conservation District in a not to exceed amount of \$25,000.
2. The costs for the on-call services contract should be funded from the HART-Roads Fund.