City of Fort Worth, Texas

Mayor and Council Communication

DATE: 02/22/22   **M&C FILE NUMBER:** M&C 22-0115

LOG NAME: 19NEIGHBORLY SOFTWARE

SUBJECT

(ALL) Authorize Execution of a Professional Services Agreement with Benevate, Inc. dba Neighborly Software in an Amount Not to Exceed $750,000.00 Over a Period of Five Years

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RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council authorize the execution of a Professional Services Agreement with Benevate, Inc. dba Neighborly Software, in an amount not to exceed $750,000.00 over a period of five years, including user licenses, technical support, and training.

DISCUSSION:

The Neighborhood Services Department (NSD) is seeking to purchase a comprehensive solution for the enrollment, administration and reporting of its housing and community development programs, offered by Neighborly Software. This includes a fully streamlined process for members of the public applying for rental assistance and housing programs, subrecipient agencies applying for competitive grants, and developers/contractors bidding for housing development projects. In alignment with the City's goals of providing exceptional customer service and continuous improvement, this software is able to provide both. NSD has already established a positive relationship with Neighborly, including a successful program implementation nearly two years ago. In February 2020, the Rehabilitation & Construction Management Division of NSD initially established a relationship with this vendor with the implementation of a pilot program creating an applicant portal for clients applying for the Priority Repair, LeadSafe, Weatherization, and Healthy Homes for Heroes housing rehabilitation programs. The portal is accessible directly from the NSD website and eliminated the need for paper applications or in-person appointments to apply for programs, which resulted in more efficient time management and staff utilization. It also allowed applicants the opportunity to upload documents directly to the system and submit applications 24 hours a day, provided an audit log, and status updates visible to both staff and applicants. Based on the success of this pilot program, in December 2020, the Compliance & Planning Division of NSD transitioned its Public Service Agencies Request for Proposals application process to Neighborly Software. This included access for subrecipient agencies to apply for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) grant funding. In addition, agencies awarded funding were able to submit payment requests through Neighborly, and staff monitored and prepared reports using the system. With the implementation of the Fort Worth Emergency Rental Assistance Program (FWERAP) in March, 2021, the Neighborhood Improvement & Revitalization Division of NSD initiated applications for the rental assistance program through Neighborly as well. This also allowed access for City staff, as well as six (6) subrecipient agencies partnering with the City, to administer the FWERAP program. NSD would like to continue using Neighborly Software to administer Phase Two of FWERAP, which will help streamline the process and serve future and previous applicants who apply for assistance. In an effort to maximize funding and adequately utilize resources, NSD has identified the need to merge all programs and services into one contract agreement.

Neighborly Software will allow NSD to maximize community investment and minimize administrative burden. This allows NSD to provide exceptional customer service to all of its stakeholders, internal and external, with a single point of access for all applications and document uploads, as well as grant management, case management, compliance monitoring, and reporting. This will improve compliance and simplify enrollment, administrative and reporting processes. Along with the City of Fort Worth, other municipalities currently using this software include Dallas, TX; Grand Prairie, TX; Monroe, LA; Santa Ana, CA; Anaheim, CA; Baltimore, MD; Tampa, FL; Atlanta, GA; Augusta, GA; Spokane County, WA; Springfield, OH, as well as many others.

The estimated fees and associated costs for the five-year period will be $750,000.00 based on the following fee structure:

1. Portal 1 (CDBG, ESG, HOPWA, LEAD, Priority Repair, Weatherization): $103,500.00 per year x 5 years = $517,500.00
2. New Program Fee: $1,500.00 x 5 programs/applications = $7,500.00
3. Portal 2 (Emergency Rental Assistance Program): $177,431.00

TOTAL: $702,431.00

The fee structure includes pricing up to 100 licenses. Portal 1 is the application portal currently being used to manage the CDBG, ESG, HOPWA, LEAD, Priority Repair, and Weatherization applications. Portal 2 is for the second phase of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP2) which is managed in a separate portal. The Neighborhood Services Department anticipates launching other initiatives over the next five years, which will include anticipated competitive Request for Proposals (RFPs) and/or Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) applications. This will help to reduce the implementation time and assist with being able to respond quickly to receipt of any additional funding allocations as well as provide flexibility in efficiently using the software.

This purchase is approved as exempt from competitive bidding as it is necessary to preserve or protect the public health or safety of the City of Fort Worth's residents. NSD initially selected Neighborly through a competitive bid process in 2019 to operate its Rehabilitation & Construction Management Division programs. This M&C extends the contract at the same rates to avoid disruptions. The rates are equivalent to or less than the rates of other vendors for similar services. NSD uses this software to facilitate programs that directly assist the public and are designed to

protect their health and safety. If NSD is unable to complete this purchase, or is required to use another software after performing a competitive procurement, many of the programs would be jeopardized in the process and damage the public health by exposing the City's citizens to unnecessary risks associated with homelessness and unperformed repairs through housing rehabilitation. Changing to a new or different software also poses a risk of data and application loss. The City and the public it serves cannot afford to take that risk or any further delay in processing applications for these programs. It is critical, in the interest of public health, that this software currently in use by the City for these programs is maintained.

Funding is budgeted in the Consultant & Other Professional Services account of the Neighborhood Services Urban Redev/HS Department's Grants Operating Federal Fund, as appropriated.

FISCAL INFORMATION / CERTIFICATION:

The Director of Finance certifies that upon approval of the above recommendation, funds will be available in the current operating budget, as previously appropriated, in the Grants Operating Federal Fund. Prior to an expenditure being incurred, the Neighborhood Services Department has the responsibility to validate the availability of funds.

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