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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
Special Committee Of The Whole

March 18, 2008

Council Chair Carl Weimer called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. in the Council Conference Room, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Present:

Barbara Brenner
Bob Kelly
Sam Crawford
Seth Fleetwood
Laurie Caskey-Schreiber
L. Ward Nelson

Absent:

None

1. DISCUSSION REGARDING VIDEO RECORDING EQUIPMENT OPTIONS FOR THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS (AB2008-017)

Joe Bates, Administrative Services Department, stated the Whatcom County communications plan should include the press, public meetings, video production, BTV10, the internet, and printed materials. He would like to hear what the Council thinks about how they should use video, especially in Council meetings. He is looking for direction as they build the budget for 2009-2010.

There are options. Now, they use Lynn Barton and one camera. They pay Ms. Barton about \$12,000 per year, which is below market value. They are paying for something that costs less than what it should cost. They also now pay BTV10 \$50 per week to air Council meetings.

There are issues with using only one camera and the current setup. They could stay with Ms. Barton and work with her to improve quality and add another camera, or they can go out for proposals for another contract. It's been determined that the \$40,000 approved video system will not work for BTV10 broadcast purposes. They don't need it for the public system.

Crawford asked if the \$35,000 set aside for that video system in the 2007-2008 Budget is unused. Bates stated it is.

They can do some capital improvements to the Council Chambers by adding robotic cameras like the City of Bellingham has. There has been some talk about purchasing a high-tech podium. The City's podium cost \$55,000.

There is \$35,000 in the current budget, and they can save \$12,000 per year from the current contract. He submitted a handout entitled "A Technical Guide for Building Automated Broadcast Production Systems for Tie-in to BTV 10" dated March 13, 2008 (*on file*). The handout includes some estimated costs, but it doesn't include the cost for consulting and installation. They would probably be around \$50,000. If the Council decides to do a live broadcast, they will have to develop something for the next year or so, while they put the system together.

1 The City of Bellingham wants the County to be more involved with BTV10. The City
2 is now airing the City committee and Council meetings live. It looks very good. A student
3 from Western Washington University operates the cameras for BTV10. That's what the
4 County would do. The County would enter into an agreement with BTV10 to do the same
5 for County Council meetings. Now, BTV10 will air anything the County produces or
6 sponsors outside of the Council meetings for free, unless they want to air something at a
7 specific time. That's part of the franchise agreement.
8

9 Outside production would be separate from the Council meetings, such as Health
10 Department public service announcements. The County will build a production department
11 to start creating videos to communicate with the public.
12

13 He indicated the future locations of the automated cameras in the Council Chambers.
14 The video production would include the name of the councilmembers and speakers, which is
15 more professional. He showed photos of the BTV10 production facility.
16

17 The County should improve the way it communicates. They shouldn't have to
18 reinvent the wheel. If the Council decides to go live on BTV10, the administration will begin
19 the request for proposals (RFP) process, work with Mike Russell on the details, and come
20 back to the Council with more detailed cost estimates for Council approval.
21

22 Until then, they have to either stay with Ms. Barton and hope that works out, get a
23 different vendor, or not have video at all. The Council Office doesn't get very many calls
24 about the current County Council production, but BTV10 gets many complaints.
25

26 Video on the internet is another, completely different issue with a different
27 presentation. There are lots of options for video on the internet. Without any video, they
28 also can't do any internet video. If they don't produce Council meeting videos
29 professionally, they can't be aired on the internet.
30

31 The County Council is the center of a County video plan. The Council meetings and
32 other Council-initiated productions are the hub of a wheel. Other projects are the spokes on
33 that wheel. None of it can begin without input, cooperation, and money.
34

35 County Council meetings are at the level of technology of about 1975. Skagit County
36 and the City of Bellingham are both in the 21st Century. The leap from where the County
37 Council is now, below market value, is huge and will be a bit painful. They are paying about
38 what they should have paid in the '70's. Do something that will bring them into the 21st
39 Century, or do nothing.
40

41 Crawford asked for an estimate. Bates stated his handout includes an estimate of
42 capital improvement costs and fees for BTV10. The upfront capital cost is \$41,000 just for
43 the equipment, and \$12,000 per year for fees to BTV10. There would be another franchise
44 fee, but they don't know what that would be. The City has to decide what that franchise fee
45 would be. It could be \$10 or \$1 million.
46

47 Crawford asked what the \$12,000 per year for the City includes. Bates stated it
48 includes production staff and a lease fee for their switcher.
49

50 Crawford asked if \$41,000 plus \$12,000 a year gets them to where they want to be,
51 and if the only unknown is the franchise fee. Bates stated the unknown cost is consulting
52 fee and design for an engineer to design the system for the Chambers.
53

1 Frankie Damman, Administrative Services Department, stated they would also have
2 to pay for fiber-optic directly into this area.
3

4 Crawford asked an estimate of the total cost. Bates stated that in addition to
5 \$41,000, the unknown cost estimate is about \$50,000 at the very most. In addition to the
6 \$12,000 per year they know about, a rough estimate of the unknown costs for the franchise
7 fee would be another \$10,000 per year, for a total of \$22,000 per year.
8

9 Crawford stated the estimate is \$90,000 up front plus \$20,000 per year. Bates
10 stated that would be a high estimate. Currently, for the old technology, they're paying
11 about \$12,000 per year, with no additional costs. They pay a little bit to the City of
12 Bellingham.
13

14 Bates stated the value of the service for which the County pays \$12,000 now is really
15 more than \$25,000. They got an estimate from KVOS to shoot and edit the meetings. The
16 estimate was \$2,000 per meeting.
17

18 Crawford stated KVOS has never been excited about recording the meetings. BTV10
19 only goes to Comcast Cable. However, Comcast Cable only reaches about half the
20 households in the county. People who don't subscribe to Comcast Cable won't see the
21 Council meetings. Bates stated they don't see them now. Point Roberts has no contact with
22 the County Council unless they contact the Council Office. There may be a way to digitally
23 broadcast to Mt. Baker Cable in Point Roberts. There may be other options. If they don't
24 have the equipment, they can't do that.
25

26 Crawford asked what BTV10 is doing to convert to high definition. Bates stated they
27 will never be high definition. It's too expensive. BTV10 is already digital. Cable service is
28 already digital. If people have cable service, they don't have to convert next year. It won't
29 be worth it to invest in high definition cameras.
30

31 Crawford stated everything is going high definition very quickly. He's very
32 concerned that they will regret technology that isn't high definition in three years. Bates
33 stated they could buy high definition cameras, if the Council approves.
34

35 Nelson asked the estimated costs, other than the \$41,000 and \$12,000 annual costs.
36 Bates stated he doesn't have those estimates. They're unknown.
37

38 Nelson stated he wants to see those estimates. He asked if people all over the
39 county who have computers could access Council meetings if this is internet-capable. Bates
40 stated they could. It can be produced for the internet in any way the Council wants, as long
41 as they have the equipment. They could stream it live.
42

43 Damman stated web delivery of Council meetings is a separate project that has
44 ramifications for the Information Technology (IT) Division. They would need to research
45 issues such as bandwidth, labor, and server costs. In general, it's much cheaper than
46 outfitting the Chambers for video production. It's a separate project.
47

48 Nelson asked if the proposal presented would make the video productions web-
49 capable. Damman stated it would be web-capable. It could eventually be streamed.
50

51 Crawford stated it wouldn't be web-implemented
52

53 Weimer stated there is an additional cost. Damman stated that's correct.

1
2 Nelson stated he is interested in web-delivery of Council meetings. Not many people
3 in the rural areas have Comcast Cable.
4

5 Bates stated that if the Council meeting wants to go live or record for the internet,
6 without using BTV10, the County would have to build a television studio. It would cost
7 hundreds of thousands.
8

9 Brenner stated the city residents are part of the County, also. Language in the
10 handout regarding sound equipment indicates that the microphones will pick up people from
11 the back of the room who comment. However, the Council doesn't let people in the back of
12 the room comment officially without coming forward. Bates stated they already have the
13 sound system. They don't have to do anything with the sound system for video.
14

15 If the Council wants to go forward with the BTV10 live idea, he will begin to work
16 with Mike Russell and others to come back soon with more specific cost estimates.
17

18 Caskey-Schreiber stated she likes the idea of having meetings air live.
19

20 Crawford asked if BTV10 would still have to produce a recorded meeting even if the
21 Council chooses to just broadcast via the internet. The County doesn't have a good way of
22 producing a video for the internet currently. Bates stated the County would have to do
23 everything in-house if they don't go with BTV10 for production. The costs increase
24 significantly.
25

26 Crawford stated that in this proposal, there is actually someone sitting at a controller
27 in the City's facility. Bates stated that's correct.
28

29 Kelly stated he would like to see an option that includes an upgrade of the existing
30 system, with a limit on \$35,000 they currently have. One of the biggest complaints is that
31 they're short a camera. He's talking about updating what they currently have to include two
32 cameras. The current system works well. They need two cameras. County revenue is
33 going down. He would like to spend money on other priorities. Bates stated those new
34 estimates will be for increased annual costs, not fixed costs. It will be at least three times
35 what they're paying now.
36

37 Kelly stated he expects to see that information in an option he just described. Bates
38 stated he can do that.
39

40 Weimer stated he wants to see more information on the option of broadcasting live.
41 Bring forward a menu of the different options. One option should probably be live audio and
42 skip the video altogether.
43

44 Fleetwood asked why they can't get a ballpark estimate on the franchise fee with the
45 City. Bates stated the City has never developed such a fee. This would be the first one,
46 and government moves slowly. The City supports the idea, but they just don't know what
47 the fee will be.
48

49 Nelson asked if this type of thing will help the Council and it's presentation.
50

51 Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council, stated it would be great. It's nice to watch
52 the City Council meetings.
53

1 Weimer asked if the estimates include the projector. Bates stated it doesn't.

2
3 Brenner stated she supports having both audio and video. She would like to know
4 the cost difference between broadcasting live and just recording with an updated
5 production.
6

7 **Crawford** stated Councilmember Kelly's desire to upgrade the system only isn't
8 adequate. He understands there is a shortage of funds. He **moved** to request that staff
9 move forward with the proposal received today to use BTV10 and this new automated
10 system with BTV10 controlling it, with the reservation that it becomes a budget item and
11 final vote once they know the franchise fee. Bates stated all that information will come
12 forward in a budget request.
13

14 Weimer asked how this affects the things on their earlier list. He gets an equal
15 number of complaints about how it's hard to find anything on the County's website. Bates
16 stated that is a question for the IT Division.
17

18 Weimer asked if approving this project would preclude anything for the website.
19 Bates stated it would not. It's not an either-or decision. They may actually enhance the
20 website. The County can't do certain things the Council may want for the website without
21 this video production.
22

23 They are very close now to not having any video production. The current vendor and
24 system will fail any second, and they'll have to start over on an emergency basis.
25

26 Crawford stated the current vendor will not be a vendor for a two-camera system.
27

28 **Motion carried unanimously.**
29

30
31 **OTHER BUSINESS**
32

33 There was no other business.
34
35

36 **ADJOURN**
37

38 The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.
39

40 
41 _____
42 Jill Nixon, Minutes Transcription
43

44 The Council approved these minutes on May 6, 2008.
45

46 ATTEST



WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON



Carl Weimer, Council Chair