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BGR REPORTS...

May 8, 2006

City Council Planning Contract is Out of Bounds

Planning the future of New Orleans neighborhoods presents one of the largest, most challenging planning projects in American history. Yet, at a time when resources are scarce, the City Council has awarded a \$3 million contract for that purpose without inviting competition.

The City Council awarded the contract for post-Katrina neighborhood planning to Lambert Advisory LC, a consulting firm that also holds a contract to analyze public housing investment and reinvestment for the City Council. The total remuneration under that contract is \$125,000.

In awarding the post-Katrina planning contract, the City Council relied on the 2004 Request for Qualifications under which Lambert Advisory had been awarded the public housing advisory contract. That RFQ solicited statements of qualifications from consultants capable of helping the City Council review and evaluate proposals for public participation in housing developments. The scope of work called for evaluation of a long-range redevelopment plan to be prepared by the Housing Authority of New Orleans for its properties. It provided further that the City Council "MAY wish to retain" the selected consultants to monitor HANO's implementation of certain redevelopments or the long-range plan. The RFQ was, in short, for limited consulting services related to public housing.

Lambert Advisory's post-Katrina planning contract calls for that firm, in conjunction with Hewitt & Washington, SHEDO LLC, and Bemillo-Ajamil & Partners, to develop "Neighborhood Concept Plans" (including implementation plans and economic and fiscal impact studies) for neighborhoods.

The City Council takes the position that the current contract for neighborhood planning is a just another housing matter that falls within the scope of the 2004 RFQ. Therefore, no additional competitive process is needed. Never mind the vastly different and expanded scope of work. Never mind the 2,400 percent increase in the price.

In awarding the neighborhood planning contract without inviting competition, the City Council has ignored both the City Charter and its own

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rules. The City Charter provides in Sec. 6-308(5)(c) that professional services contracts administered by the City Council be awarded through a competitive selection process established by rule of the Council. The City Council's rules require the issuance of a request for proposals or qualifications "as appropriate based on the scope of work," once the Council determines that professional services are needed. The rules allow certain exceptions to the requirement for competitive process, none of which apply to the new Lambert contract. Furthermore, the City Council is not taking the position that the Lambert contract is an exception; rather, it is claiming that the 2004 RFQ was enough.

It is absurd to suggest that one of the most significant urban planning contracts in American history can be awarded in 2006 under an RFQ issued in 2004 for totally different purposes under totally different circumstances. The contract should be rescinded or cancelled.

BGR notes that the City Charter vests the City Planning Commission with the responsibility for preparing and adopting long-term master plans and "for the replanning, improvement and reconstruction of neighborhoods and community centers and of areas and districts destroyed by fire, earthquake, flood and natural disaster." If city government has funds available for planning, those funds should be allocated to the City Planning Commission to rebuild its capacity and hire the necessary contractors, rather than awarded by City Council to its own contractor.

BGR shares the City Council's frustration with the pace of the planning effort in New Orleans. We believe, however, that the citizens of New Orleans are entitled to a serious, transparent search for the most talented, experienced urban planners in the world. Ignoring the law requiring a competitive process merely increases the uncertainty, confusion, and delay that have marked New Orleans' recovery efforts.

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