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October 4, 2023

DECISION MEMORANDUM

TO: Council members

FROM: Bill Edmonds
Executive Director

SUBJECT: Extension of contract with Coates Kokes for strategic communications

PROPOSED ACTION: Authorize the staff to contract for a six-month period with Coates Kokes for strategic communications services.

SIGNIFICANCE: The departure of our Public Affairs Division Director and the retirement of our Public Information Officer left key vacancies that have necessitated continued help with Council communications. This new contract will cover a six-month period and will be for a retainer amount of \$8,500 per month. Coates Kokes competed earlier in an RFP process and was selected for a monthly retainer contract of \$10,000 per month that was approved by the Council at the February 2023 meeting. This second contract is necessary to allow for the completion of several key tasks and to build a foundation for the efforts of two new communications employees. We have two positions open and expect the hiring process to continue through the end of this calendar year.

BUDGETARY/ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Staff recommends authorization to contract in an amount not to exceed \$51,000 this fiscal year. The six-month contract is for a monthly retainer of \$8,500.

BACKGROUND

The former Public Affairs Division Director, Ann Gravatt, departed the organization in July 2023. Public Information Officer John Harrison retired from the organization in spring 2022.

These personnel changes have necessitated the use of Coates Kokes both to help with the organization's communications work and to put in place a strategic communications framework that will help the Council organize and refresh out communications efforts.

We have posted two positions to add to our communications team (one on the Power side and one on the F&W side) and expect this process to proceed at least take through the remainder of the calendar year.

The six-month contract with Coates Kokes will allow us to complete the scope of work outlined below, with some of these tasks slated to be completed before the new hires are in place and other tasks to be performed in concert with the new hires. The scope of work includes the following general categories:

- Complete a refresh of specific tactics: Some Council tactics are in need of a refresh based on communications best management practices and these include our use of the Spotlight newsletter and an update of our website's landing page.
- Build out new tactics: Several new tactics have been put in place, with one example being the press background briefing. These high-level briefings set out Council issues in an approachable manner and serve to attract press that do not currently follow the Council. Other tactics likely include social media, language usage guide, infographics as well as others to be identified.
- Develop a communications framework: A new framework will cover the various audiences the Council needs to reach and offer up some key "touchstones" for our work that provide guideposts for our ongoing communication. The framework also will help us evolve messaging for the specific tactics we use. The work on this framework will be started now but be completed with input from Council members and with the help of our new communication professionals.
- Co-develop with the Council staff an information release protocol to guide future tactical communications efforts and create an editorial calendar that coordinate messaging priorities over an expanse of time (e.g., six months).
- Support the onboarding of the Council's two new communications hires.