



MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 9, 2025
TO: Daniel Grimmer
Interim City Manager

FROM: Brooks Chandler
SUBJECT: *Public Relations Services RFP*

I recommend 2 of the 3 responses to the Public Relations Services Request for Proposals be submitted to the City Council in executive session for their consideration. This memorandum explains my thinking and approach to improving the timeliness and quality of the City of Nome's communication with the public.

Background- Shortly after I arrived in Nome Mayor Handeland told me the City Council was interested in improving communication with the public especially with regard to activities of the Nome Police Department. I spoke with Council members Henderson and Miller to better understand needs and objectives. Council member Miller suggested hiring a part time city employee. Council member Henderson suggested contracting with a firm that regularly provides such services. The goals were identical- 1) Increase the ability of the City to provide the public with accurate and timely information on an ongoing basis; and 2) improve the ability of the City to counter misinformation and inaccurate rumors put out on social media.

Approach- When evaluating applicants for the long vacant Assistant City Manager position I concluded that Megan Onders had the potential to fulfill a role as the City's Public Information Officer. I spoke to her about this during the interview process. She was willing and had some limited experience in communicating with the public through hosting a radio show/podcast on KNOM. I determined the optimal approach for the City of Nome to fulfilling the goal of improving public communication would involve modifying the job description of the assistant city manager position to include PIO responsibility and then hiring a public relations firm. The firm could help formulate the policies and procedures for a sound approach and train/mentor Ms. Onders in her PIO role. I envisioned a 6-12 month contract. At the end of the contract



the council and administration could decide whether the assistant city manager was equipped to “fly solo” or perhaps arrange for a more limited ongoing contract for public relations support,

Process- The HR Director helped modify the job description for the assistant city manager position to include PIO responsibilities. Ms. Onders began work on December 9 under a one year employment agreement. On December 13 an RFP for public relations services was issued. The RFP was posted on the City web site and advertised for two weeks in the Nome Nugget. Responses were due by January 6. The RFP described the required services as:

The consultant will help develop core strategies for public relations capable of being implemented by the assistant city manager with the support of the selected professional. Once broad strategies have been developed the consultant will prepare or review information to be disseminated to the public with the Assistant City Manager. These services will be provided as requested subject to an annual budget approved by the Nome City Council.

Responses- 3 Responses were received. 2 from Alaska based firms and 1 from a firm based in New York City. It is impractical to use a firm 4 time zones away for these services. Both Alaska firms appear well qualified.

Evaluation Recommendation- The RFP envisioned an evaluation process weighted 60% on experience and 40% on price. In my opinion given the City Council’s interest the proposals from the 2 Alaska firms should be reviewed in executive session (this type of review implicates the reputation of each firm and therefore is a proper subject for executive session discussion). Following that review the Council would take one of the following actions after reconvening in public session:

1. Direct administration to negotiate a contract with one of the two Alaska firms; or.
2. Direct administration to schedule zoom interviews between each of the firms and Council during a future work session or regular meeting.
3. Direct administration to readvertise.

Cost- Cedar Group estimated a \$50-60,000 expense over a 12 month period. Thompson & Co. has a minimum \$5,000 per month and quoted hourly rates. If the City contracted with Thompson on a “not to exceed” basis the \$60,000 expense level would also be reached in 12 months. Adding this expense most likely would require a budget revision. You need to check with the Finance Director about funding options for the remainder of this fiscal year.