

Recommendation re: Authorization to Engage Consultant to Perform Fire Assessment Fee Feasibility Study

During the City's FY 2015 Strategic Business Planning Retreat held on June 17-18, 2014, the City Commission supported the engagement of a qualified consulting firm to perform a feasibility analysis to consider a possible Fire Assessment Fee Program for the City of Lakeland. Accordingly, staff prepared a Request for Proposal (RFP No. 4184) for qualified firms, organizations and individuals with demonstrated expertise in performing feasibility studies on the development and implementation of a Fire Assessment Fee Program with an expedited 45 – 60 day timeframe in order to discuss the option as part of the FY 2015 Budget development process.

The scope of services outlined in the RFP were broken down into the following two phases:

Phase 1 – Development of Fire Assessment Fee Program:

- Review existing City documents/materials pertaining to the delivery of fire services including, but not limited to, agreements, reports, operating budgets, long-range capital improvement plans, level of service reports, strategic plans, fire incident call data, etc.
- Determine the full cost of fire service delivery, using the City's most current financial information including, but not limited to, personnel and operating expenses, current and future capital improvement projects, scheduled apparatus and equipment replacement, etc.
- Identify alternative sources of revenue to fund the service delivery costs and determine the net service delivery revenue requirement.
- Utilize historical fire incident data and the current ad-valorem tax roll and Polk County Property Appraiser databases to develop a method of apportionment. Analyze all property use categories within the City to determine which parcels receive a special benefit from the provision of fire services. Develop a fair and reasonable method of apportionment and accurate classification of parcels.
- Identify service delivery issues that may affect the apportionment methodology.
- Establish recommended assessment rates by fairly apportioning the assessable costs among all benefited parcels within each property use category. Ensure that the recommended assessment rates and parcel classification conform to the statutory requirements of the "Uniform Method."
- Confirm that recommended assessment rates meet Florida case law requirements to be valid as a special assessment.
- Review the assessment methodology for legal sufficiency and compatibility with the tax bill method of collection. Ensure that the data approach used is the data needed to the tax bill collection method in recurring years.

- Analyze and recommend the most appropriate and efficient methods to collect the fire assessment fee until such time as the Uniform Method of Collection can be utilized and the assessment can be added to the tax bills.
- Assist in conducting community outreach and educational campaigns which will include public workshops and meetings with major community stakeholders.
- Prepare and present proposed apportionment methodology and recommended Fire Assessment Fee rates to the City Commission.

Phase 2 – Implementation of Fire Assessment Fee Program:

In the event the City Commission desires to proceed with the implementation of a Fire Assessment Fee program, the consultant will perform the following tasks:

- Assist the City in developing necessary ordinances to implement the Fire Assessment Fee program and the resolutions that establish policies related to the program and the approved assessment methodology and collection.
- Assist with meeting all legal requirements related to the certification of the assessment roll including the development and distribution of all necessary public notifications.
- Provide community outreach assistance where deemed necessary.
- Create final assessment roll and transmit, if legally feasible, to the Polk County Tax Collector's Office for inclusion on future tax bills.
- Consultant may be engaged for additional services following implementation to conduct related activities such as future updates of the rate study, expert testimony, or other related services.

Given the desire to consider a Fire Assessment Fee Program as part of the Proposed FY 2015 Budget development process, the City accelerated the timing for firms to submit proposals with a deadline of July 3, 2014. A Selection Committee comprised of the Assistant City Manager, Fire Chief, Finance Director, Assistant Finance Director and Assistant City Attorney will review the proposals to determine which firm will be recommended for engagement during the week of July 7th. However, in order to start the process as soon as possible, the City Manager is seeking authority to engage a firm at a cost no greater than the highest proposed fee for Phase 1. This will afford the yet to be recommended firm the ability to start the Feasibility Study during the two week period between the July 7th and July 21st City Commission meetings. As the costs of the proposals will not be known prior to the publishing of the July 7th City Commission Agenda, a listing of the received proposals will be provided at the July 7th City Commission meeting to set the maximum level of expenditure to be authorized for the study.

It is recommended that the City Commission authorize the appropriate City officials to execute an agreement with the recommended consulting firm to undertake Phase 1 of the Fire Assessment Fee Feasibility Study at a not to exceed price to be determined at the July 7, 2014 City Commission Meeting.