



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:16-2238

Agenda Item Number: 4.

Agenda Date: 4/27/2016

In Control: Governance Committee

DEPARTMENT: Development Services

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Roderick Sanchez, CBO, AICP

COUNCIL DISTRICT IMPACTED: All

SUMMARY:

Councilman Trevino requests that the City of San Antonio create a dedicated, paid staff person for Spanish-language interpretation services for applicants and other citizens at the meetings and public hearings of certain Boards and Commissions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The City of San Antonio has many residents whose primary language is Spanish; however, all City public hearings are conducted in English. In previous situations where an applicant could not present in English they would provide their own interpreter. Currently, Development Services and Office of Historic Preservation contract with an independent, third party translator on a per hour basis, as requested in advance by an applicant for the Building Standards Board. Recently, the departments have implemented this policy for Board of Adjustments, Planning Commission, Zoning Commission, Building-Related and Fire Codes Appeals and Advisory Board, and Historic and Design Review Commission. Applications, Public Notices, and Standard Operating Procedures have been updated to inform applicants of this option, and the posted agenda also includes this information with a contact number to request this service. Additionally, the departments have issued an Information Bulletin in English and Spanish advising customers of this service, and posted it to the city website.

ISSUE:

Board of Adjustments, Planning Commission, Zoning Commission, Building Standards Board, Building-Related and Fire Codes Appeals and Advisory Board, and Historic and Design Review Commission consider applications submitted by an applicant that request approval in order to proceed with development on a project. Staff is tasked with processing the application through applicable public hearing processes and develops recommendations. The previous practice for some Boards and Commissions has been that applicants provide their own translator. This method protected the city from misinterpreting the applicant's request to the Board or Commission, because if denied, the applicant could file litigation against the city.

Employing a dedicated staff person to provide translation services still results in a conflict of interest as the staff person is paid by the city, and the city is making a recommendation to the Board or Commission of the

applicant's request. Additionally, employing a dedicated staff person is not financially warranted as there is not enough translation work for a full-time employee. The city contracts with Worldwide Languages on an as-needed basis at a rate of \$100.00 per hour. Contracting with this third party translator minimizes any potential conflicts of interest and is more financially sound.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Departments have implemented policies for all Boards and Commissions to provide an independent, third party translator on a per hour basis, as requested in advance. Recently, this practice was used at a Board of Adjustment meeting for two applicants and has been long standing practice at the Building Standards Board. This service is free of charge to applicants.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Both options will result in added costs to the Department as the service for translation would be at no cost to the applicant requesting the service. The average cost per year for the Building Standards Board is \$3,000 to provide this service using a third party translator. Board of Adjustments, Planning Commission and Zoning Commission meet twice a month. By providing this service at the meetings, and anticipating an average of 2 hours per meeting, could result in an increase of \$14,000.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends continuing with the policy that has been implemented of providing an independent, third party translator on a per hour basis, as requested in advance by an applicant or citizen for all boards and commissions. Because Development Services and Office of Historic Preservation staff have implemented the policy for all Boards and Commissions, and due to the increased expense of hiring a full time staff person, no further action is required.