



COUNCIL AGENDA:
FILE:
ITEM:

Memorandum

TO: RULES AND OPEN GOVERNMENT
COMMITTEE

FROM: Toni J. Taber, CMC
City Clerk

SUBJECT: City Clerk Update on Public
Engagement Process

DATE: October 15, 2020

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve a verbal interpretation services plan for City Council meetings to provide Spanish and Vietnamese interpreters upon request or only for specific agenda items of interest with a “not before” time on the agenda in alignment with actions included in the 2019-2020 Annual Report that recommends \$50,000 for interpretation services.

BACKGROUND

On August 11, 2020, the City Council approved the memorandum from Councilmember Peralez regarding the Public Engagement Process. At that time, the City Clerk stated that there was an estimated annual cost of \$180,000 per year for providing interpretation into Spanish and Vietnamese at every Council meeting, and that the current total budget in Council General was \$63,000. The City Clerk indicated that we would return with a budget request when additional funds were required.

From July 28 to September 22, 2020, \$43,866 has been spent of the \$63,000. If the same level of service were to be provided through the end of the fiscal year, the total cost is estimated at \$180,000. The year-to-date costs can be absorbed within the existing Council General appropriation, but additional funding is needed to ensure translation services for the remainder of the fiscal year.

ANALYSIS

In the meetings that have been held, the interpreters have provided simultaneous interpretation from the beginning to the end of the meeting, and they are booked based on a guess of end time. If a meeting is scheduled to begin at 11:00 a.m., but does not start until 1:30 p.m., we pay the interpreters for that time period they are not active. Additionally, if we underestimate the time needed in order to save costs, we may end up having a few hours at the end of the meeting without interpreters, so we always estimate for as long as we realistically think the meeting will go. Should the meeting end a few hours earlier, we still pay for the time we estimated. With the Zoom software, we cannot tell how many people have accessed this feature; however, we have

had some visible use. For example, on September 22, we had several public speakers who utilized the interpreters. It's notable that staff had contacted me in advance of the meeting to make sure we had interpreters for item 8.1 which had the public speakers.

The City's past practice has been to book interpreters upon request and only for specific items of interest. My recommendation would be to return to this practice, but to include more clear direction on the agenda that interpretation can be requested 7 days before the meeting for specific items. Additionally, I would encourage staff to continue to notify the City Clerk's office when they know an item is of high interest well in advance, so we can book interpreters. Finally, I would suggest when an item has a language request from staff, that we include a "not before" time on the agenda, so we can schedule interpreters to come at a more specific time.

An action is included in the 2019-2020 Annual Report, scheduled for City Council review and approval on October 20th, to recommend an increase to the Office of the City Clerk's Non-Personal/Equipment appropriation of \$50,000 to provide translation services through the end of Fiscal Year 2020-2021 in alignment with the strategy discussed above that returns to interpretation on a request-only basis. Continuing the existing translation practice would require an additional \$86,000 beyond what is currently recommended.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION/INPUT

No commission recommendation is associated with this action.

CEQA

Not a Project, File No. PP17-010, City Organizational & Administrative Activities resulting in no changes to the physical environment - Appointments to boards, commissions, task forces and committees.



TONI J. TABER, CMC
City Clerk

For questions, please contact Toni Taber, City Clerk, at (408) 535-1260.