

**RULES, ENACTMENTS & INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE
Held via Audio Webinar Pursuant to Temporary Emergency Orders**

Members: Chairman Sullivan and Legislators Albano & Castellano

Thursday

6:00pm

March 18, 2021

The meeting was called to order via audio webinar at 6:02pm by Chairman Sullivan who led in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Committee Members Albano, Castellano, & Chairman Sullivan were present.

Item #3 – Approval of Minutes – February 18, 2020

The minutes were approved as submitted.

Item #4 – Approval/ Fund Transfer 21T047/ County Executive/ Increase Contract for East Branch Consulting, LLC due to COVID-19 Pandemic

Legislator Albano questioned what East Branch Consulting, LLC is working on.

County Attorney Jennifer Bumgarner stated their scope of services in the contract is to provide media relations assistance and public notices to the community with respect to any and all matters related to the government as assigned through the County Executive's Office.

Legislator Albano requested clarification that this is primarily because of COVID-19.

County Attorney Bumgarner stated work in other areas has been provided as well. She stated press releases have been issued in regard to other matters relative to County business. She stated an unexpected number of hours have been spent to provide services because of the additional information relating to COVID-19 that needs to be provided to the public.

Chairman Sullivan stated so much additional work has been required since the COVID-19 pandemic began, and it is continuing with providing information on the availability of COVID-19 vaccines. He stated East Branch Consulting, LLC has done much more work than was originally anticipated and has been a tremendous resource to the County in this regard.

Legislator Castellano questioned if any of this \$20,000 increase would be reimbursed by the Federal Government through COVID relief.

Chairman Sullivan stated he spoke with Commissioner of Finance William Carlin about this and he believes it is possible the County could be reimbursed.

Legislator Sayegh stated she appreciates the extra work in getting this information out to the public. She questioned if the original contract specifies a certain number of hours or amount of work. She questioned if the additional \$20,000 will all be utilized.

County Attorney Bumgarner stated the original contract was a set, retained amount of \$2,500 per month. She stated based upon the number of hours being spent, the \$2,500 was being exceeded, therefore she proposed moving to an hourly rate. She stated this way, a voucher and invoice will be provided each month detailing exactly what was worked on and for how long. She stated the additional \$20,000 brings the original \$30,000 contract to the maximum \$50,000 contract, which is not necessarily the anticipated cost for the services this year but is a standard maximum that complies with the County's procurement policy. She stated if the services do not require the full \$50,000 by the end of the year, what is left over gets swept back into the general fund as any other budget line would be.

Legislator Montgomery stated during the budget process she questioned what the consultant line was for and Commissioner Carlin indicated that this was a shared consultant for the Legislature and County Executive. She stated after asking more questions, she found out it is a consultant for the County Executive's Office only. She stated in 2019 \$12,500 was budgeted for this purpose, in 2020 it increased to \$30,000, and now \$20,000 is being moved from contingency to bring the line to \$50,000. She stated she understands the need for increased communication because of COVID, but each department handles their own communication and does not use an outside consultant. She stated she requested invoices, most of which were for \$2,500 which was the monthly stipend. She stated from November 2020-February 2021 the invoices were more detailed and stated which press releases were written. She stated she was surprised to see press releases written that were clearly supporting candidates running for office. She stated specifically, she believes the County Executive used her office to promote the candidates she would like to see be elected in the press release about the Drug World event, which she has a problem with. She stated she also has a problem with the \$20,000 increase to this budget line. She clarified that her comments are in no way a criticism of East Branch, LLC. She stated she, as a Legislator, is being fiscally responsible. She stated the Contingency fund should be used for emergency events and in this case it is being used to write press releases. She stated this is the reason she wanted to see additional support for the Health Department early on in the pandemic, not additional personnel in the County Executive's Office which has three (3) full-time employees and other staff. She stated the press release where political candidates were being promoted cost \$125. She stated she does not believe this is a good use of funds, especially when the public is being told the County cannot deploy mobile vaccine units because there is not enough funding.

Chairman Sullivan stated he does not believe each department handles their communications individually. He stated East Branch, LLC has assisted the Highway Department, the Bureau of Emergency Services, and has worked with the Health Department to get information to the public.

Chairman Sullivan made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Albano. All in favor.

Item #5 – Other Business

a. Approval/ Fund Transfer 21T053/ Board of Elections

Chairman Sullivan made a motion to waive the rules and accept the Other Business; Seconded by Legislator Albano. All in favor.

Chairman Sullivan made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Castellano. All in favor.

Item #6 – Adjournment

There being no further business at 6:20pm, Chairman Sullivan made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Albano. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant, Beth Robinson.