MEETING DATE/TYPE: **VOTING MEETING   5-28-19**

DEPARTMENT: Information Technology

AGENDA ITEM: Approval of City Contract No. 2019-240 with CentralSquare Technologies in an amount not to exceed $430,011 using Yuma County Contract No. MX-M753N Pricing. Funding is available through Building Permit Fees.

Approved By: Michael Lamar, City Manager

Item Summary

'If Accela works it's an unusual day'
– Anonymous City of Prescott Community Development Employee 2019

Background

In 2017 Prescott City Council authorized the purchase and implementation of Accela Civic Platform software for business licenses, building permits, inspections, and planning.

In 2017 the first year cost for the software was projected at $107,460 for the first year licenses and support and $44,695 for implementation via a third party consultant selected by Accela as a match for our business segment.

The marketing and sales tagline for Accela was (and may still be) along the lines of 'making dot com technology available to government'.

That 'dot com' technology would be online permit applications, electronic plan reviews, and inspections performed in the field and on-site.

All good stuff, all desirable, all valuable.

That was the hope and the promise.

Instead of the dot come utopia we – and many other agencies – were sold a lemon.

We can say the following about Accela:

- Brutal implementation experience

- Counterproductive business model
- No online permit submission and review
- No electronic plan submission and review
- No ad hoc ability to initiate an inspection or permit in the field
- Basic mapping abilities
- Rudimentary tasks such as reporting is a chore
- Frequent and debilitating software service outages
- Death by a thousand paper cuts sluggish and cumbersome software

Some of these items, such as electronic plan submission and review, are theoretically possible but may require a year or more of consultant time and additional cost to actually bring to fruition per item.

It is commonly said that the definition of insanity is performing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result each time.

Based on that definition Accela is insanity pure and simple.
We are coming up on the halfway point of a 5 year period with Accela.

If we do nothing our Accela costs will end up at just under $1,500,000 (emphasis mine) with nothing positive on the horizon that tells me we would get to where we need and want to be at the end of that period.

The figure I quoted you - $1,500,000 – is a staggering figure and it does not count very real costs such as lost staff productivity from the software being down or being an obstacle to overcome each day and it does not account for costs related to being stuck with reliance upon manual processes.

As a product and as a vendor Accela is broken with nothing to offer in return to our struggles beyond vague promises.

Continued use of Accela makes as much sense as handing each of you a pair of Popsicle sticks and asking you to dig a trench across Cortez Street or taking a barrel full of money and lighting it on fire.

Same net result - high costs, high levels of frustration, and a horrible return on investment every way you measure it - financially, at the business level, and at the customer service level.

Much larger agencies than ourselves have more resources and leverage at their disposal yet they are in the same Accela boat we find ourselves in.

From a business perspective software can become a prison in two aspects:

- Limitations in software constrict and shape the business
- Continuing to pay and hoping things improve to avoid changing

We risk finding ourselves permanently in precisely this type of prison.

We cannot, and should not, continue on this path and expect that somehow, in some way, a better result is going to drop from the sky and in to our hands.

The question then is what we should do about this, who we should partner with to do it, and how do we know things will be different in the process.

The first question is easy – we should stop what we are doing and get out from under Accela as soon as possible.

The second question takes thought and research and we have looked out at the software landscape to see what other agencies who are in the Accela boat are doing and we have seen the name 'CentralSquare' pop up over and over again.

The name 'CentralSquare' may not be familiar to you but the City of Prescott already does business with CentralSquare via our public safety software at Prescott Regional Communications Center (PRCC) and Lucity which is used extensively by Public Works.

CentralSquare has over 7,600 customers and in North America you will find 3 out of every 4 citizens live in a jurisdiction where CentralSquare software is used and relied upon.

CentralSquare has Community Development software which covers the following areas:

- Architect, Engineer, Contractor (AEC) license tracking
- Business Licensing
- Citizen Engagement – your electronic conduit for customers and citizens
- Code Enforcement
- Inspections
- Licensing
- Mobile
- Permits
- Planning

This software has a number of features that make it very attractive:

- Easy to use
- In-house implementation and training
- Integration with a number of software packages
- Reliable and dependable

Hour 1 and day 1 live with CentralSquare the following is ready to roll and in place:

- Data from Accela and our prior Trakit system migrated in

- Online permit submission and review
- Electronic plan submission and review
- Full featured mobile capabilities for City of Prescott field personnel
- GIS integration
- Comprehensive reporting
- Integration with other City of Prescott software such as Lucity, MUNIS, and Laserfiche

That sounds great but if I recall so did Accela at the time so that isn't good enough.

In early April 2019 we approached CentralSquare to see if they could do a demo as on paper what they had looked very promising.

CentralSquare did one better and came on-site and presented a demo to stakeholders across multiple departments.

That demo went very well and was a real eye opener.

It looked like the hype might be real, however, still not enough.

We searched out and researched agencies who had been CentralSquare customers for a long time and who had recently migrated to CentralSquare from other platforms including Accela.

What we found there was a consistent narrative that jived with what CentralSquare described and showed us.

Very encouraging at this point but still not good enough.

The final step in this process was to visit Arvada and Westminster Colorado in mid-May 2019.

The purpose here to see CentralSquare Community Development in action and talk to real people in person who rely upon this software each day to gauge the impact of this software on their business operations – warts and all.

Through this process gauntlet after gauntlet has been thrown down for CentralSquare and it is clear that CentralSquare is the business partner we need and are looking for.

CentralSquare Community Development is our ticket out of software jail and will have us live on Community Development by the end of calendar 2019.

At that time – hour 1 and day 1 – we will have all of the items and features that Accela has flashed, promised, and failed to deliver upon.

On one hand we have Company X which does not do a whole bunch of things we need, does a bunch of things we do not need, and will run us at least $1,500,000 over a five

year period while Company Y does all of the things we need, does not do the things we do not need, and will cost half the cost over the same five year period.

Financial Impact

This project is part of the FY20 budget and is funded 35% from building permits and plan check fees in the General Fund. The remaining 65% is coming from the Water, Wastewater, Streets and Engineering revenues.

Attachments

1.   CentralSquare Community Development Agreement

Recommended Action: MOVE to approve City Contract No. 2019-115 with CentralSquare Technologies in an amount not to exceed $430,011 using Yuma County Contract No. MX-M753N pricing