



City of Austin Communications & Technology Management

Council Briefing
November 21, 2013



Council Online Message Board

- The State Legislature amended the Texas Open Meetings Act authorizing use of online message boards for municipal governments.
- Council Resolution directs the City Manager to implement an online message board that meets these requirements for Austin City Council use by 12/1/13.
- CTM, City Clerk's Office and Law completed an assessment of possible solutions with the following summary and recommendation.

Guiding Principles and Process

- Our assessment included a survey of options for the most cost-effective, holistic product which meets all requirements set forth in Council Resolution.
- Our goal is to provide a recommendation for Council to increase their ability to communicate while meeting the requirements of the Texas Open Meetings Act and providing transparency to the public.

Guiding Principles and Process

- Key areas of focus:
 - Ability to administer authorized City Council members and designated staff to participate/post on the forum
 - Ability of the public to access from the City home page and to easily search and view forum posts
 - Ability to meet data retention requirements
 - Ability to administer and ensure compliance with Open Meetings Act

Guiding Principles and Process

- There are dozens of software solutions available that could meet the requirements
- We focused on these categories
 - Subscription solutions hosted by 3rd party vendors
 - In-house solutions hosted by the City
 - Solutions of either category that are designed specifically for government use

Guiding Principles and Process

- Staff recommends an externally hosted subscription service.
 - Provides most flexibility and management tools
 - Ease of use for public and staff
 - Available training and support included in subscription
 - Cost effective
 - Government specific solutions available

Summary and Recommendation

- GovLog (PeakDemocracy.com) is a forum software built for this purpose and meets all requirements
 - Over 75 Cities subscribe including Portland, OR; Salt Lake City, UT; Arlington, VA; and Tempe, AZ
 - Built-in tools for group management, forum topics and data retention—specific to government
 - Easy to administer—does not require technical staff for setup/configuration
 - Under \$2500 for annual subscription that includes support
 - Alliance for Innovation member

Summary and Recommendation

- Request a new implementation date to:
 - Coordinate with vendor
 - Allow staff to develop an administration process
- Once implemented, we will need to assess workload and staff assignments.
 - General administration of the forum related to forum topics/agenda
 - Management of forum groups/authorized member access
 - Compliance with Open Meetings Act and data retention.

Questions?