



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

- 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?

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
The City may have only one online message board to be used for the purposes described in the statute;	Yes, number of forums can be controlled administratively	Yes, number of forums can be controlled administratively	Yes, number of forums can be controlled administratively
The City must own or control the online message board;	Yes	Yes	Yes

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
The online message board must be prominently displayed on the City's primary Internet web page, and cannot be more than one click away from the City's primary Internet web page;	Yes, and forum can be embedded anywhere on austintexas.gov	Yes, in most cases forum would be a stand-alone application	Yes, in most cases forum would be a stand-alone application

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
The online message board may only be used by members of the governmental body or by staff members of the governmental body...and if an authorized staff member posts, the name and title of the staff member must be posted along with the communication;	Yes, access by individual groups can be managed administratively.	Yes, requires customization which would delay implementation and increase cost.	Yes, requires customization which would delay implementation and increase cost.

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
Any communication to the online message board must be in writing;	Yes, posts are done in writing.	Yes, posts are done in writing.	Yes, posts are done in writing.
The communication must be posted to the online message board which must be viewable and searchable by the public;	Yes, online posts are viewable and searchable by the public.	Yes, online posts are viewable and searchable by the public.	Yes, online posts are viewable and searchable by the public.

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
The communication must be displayed in real time and displayed for no less than 30 days after the communication is first posted;	Yes, online postings can be posted in real time and can be scheduled for removal automatically.	Yes, in most cases removal must be done manually.	Yes, in most cases removal must be done manually.

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
When a posting is removed from the online message board after a minimum 30-day period, the City must maintain the posting for 6 years; such posting is public information and must be disclosed in accordance with the Public Information Act.	Yes, content of the message board is maintained in the system and is also downloadable in PDF format that can be kept in the City's document management system.	Varies – most will keep content for as long as subscription is active. Download is available in some but not all applications.	Yes, content will be maintained on City servers and follow standard retention.

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
The governmental body may not vote or take any action that is required to be taken at a meeting by posting on the online message board.	Yes, system voting can be deactivated administratively. Forum posts would still need to be monitored by staff to ensure compliance.	Yes, system voting can be deactivated administratively. Forum posts would still need to be monitored by staff to ensure compliance.	Yes, system voting can be deactivated administratively. Forum posts would still need to be monitored by staff to ensure compliance.

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
Use of the online message board shall be restricted exclusively to City Council Members and to such staff members of the City who have received specific authorization from a Council Member ...the name and title of the staff member must be posted along with the communication;	<p>Yes, access by individual groups can be managed administratively.</p> <p>Need to designate an administrator to manage access and rules of the online message board.</p>	<p>Yes, access by individual groups can be managed administratively.</p> <p>Need to designate an administrator to manage access and rules of the online message board.</p>	<p>Yes, access by individual groups can be managed administratively.</p> <p>Need to designate an administrator to manage access and rules of the online message board.</p>

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
The City Manager may authorize City staff to respond to questions or requests;	Need a designated administrator.	Need a designated administrator.	Need a designated administrator.
Users are to be given the capability and authorization to create categories under which to post;	Yes, can be managed administratively.	Yes, can be managed administratively.	Yes, can be managed administratively.

Council Online Message Board

Resolution Requirement	GovLog - Subscription	Hosted Forum	In-House Forum
Users are to be given the capability and authorization to upload and share documents.	Yes, can upload files and images	Varies—some providers have this capability, some have limited file types	Varies—some providers have this capability, some have limited file types
Achieve full implementation by 12/1/13	Yes, subscription service is largely plug and play.	Probably, general forums may require some customization to meet government requirements	Maybe, definite configuration and setup time. Tight resources.
Cost/Procurement	Various packages below \$2500 per year. Includes support.	Various packages surveyed between \$2k and \$7k per year. Includes support	\$3k-6k for hardware. Some open source. Requires support.