

Public Comments for Special City Commission Meeting, October 13, 20

Bill Sparklin Resident of Great Falls up until 10/07/2020, and Husband of Sophia Sparklin, Sole Proprietor of Spark Architecture, Great Falls, Montana.

Good evening Commissioners,

As Sophia's husband, I am both personally and financially committed to her firm, and although we have recently relocated outside the city, I feel I have sufficient reason to be allowed to comment at tonight's meeting.

To be clear, these are my comments about the process given my knowledge of it, I'm not submitting them on behalf of Sophia. Further, I'm probably putting myself at risk of having to sleep on the couch by commenting at all. Sorry babe.

Since the results of the RFP process (proposals, reviewer notes, and final scores) were not made available until this meeting, for the sake of transparency I urge the commission to delay tonight's vote until these documents have been made publicly available and interested parties have had adequate time to review them and comment. Given the social and economic impact of this project, the time allowed between announcing the results of the RFP selection process and the commission vote seems inadequate.

In addition to that general comment, I was hoping few items regarding the details of the grant proposal and RFP process could be clarified.

1. What was the process used by the city to decide on approaching LPW and TD&H for a donation of services to apply for the grant? Were any other local firms contacted about donating services as well? Given the substantial size of the grant involved, would it not have been more appropriate to use some sort of open-competition to decide who participated in the grant proposal?
2. At the time that the city and LPW were developing the grant proposal, were there any concerns that if the city received the grant, an RFP would have to be used to award those funds, and that the donation of services by LPW and TD&H prior to the RFP might appear to have undue influence on the RFP results?
3. Was anyone other than a city employee involved in the development of the RFP or scoring criteria? If so, who, and in what capacity?
4. Regarding the RFP scoring criteria, if you have not done so already, could you explain how the scoring criteria under "Location" worked relative to the scores awarded to the three firms that came in for interviews?

In closing, I understand and appreciate that LPW and TD&H invested their time and effort to bring the project to Great Falls, and without that effort, we would not even be discussing the project. I'm also willing to accept that they did so with no expectation that they would receive additional consideration in return if the grant was received and a RFP was needed. I'm also willing to accept that the RFP selection was not unduly influenced by the donation of those services. But it doesn't take a conspiracy theorist (and we have a few in Great Falls) to think otherwise.

I do not think the city should accept donations of services in cases such as these when there could be subsequent financial awards via contracts that result from those donations. As in this case, there is no way to have a firm "donate" services and then compete for subsequent contracts without the appearance that one influences the other. Legitimate or not, it looks bad and gives the impression of impropriety. Instead, the city should pay for those services instead of accepting donations. Alternatively, in this case the city's other architectural firms could have been brought in at the beginning and allowed to donate their services as well if they chose, and then some sort of shared, joint contract could have been awarded if that would comply with applicable contracting law.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Bill Sparklin