

September 9, 2004

Honorable Mayor and Members of
the Hermosa Beach City Council

Regular meeting of
September 14, 2004

E-NEWSLETTER PROPOSAL

Recommendation:

That the City Council consider a proposal for an electronic newsletter to the community and provide direction to staff.

Background:

Staff received a proposal from E-GovMail.Com (John Bowler) to produce an "e-newsletter" on behalf of the City to provide regular information about City government and programs to Hermosa Beach residents and businesses. A sample of the style and format of the proposed e-newsletter is attached.

The proposal is for the City to enter into a service agreement with E-GovMail.Com to publish e-newsletters to residents and business on City activities and provide an easy link to existing information contained on the City's web site. The cost for the proposed program for three newsletters per month would be \$500.00 per month, plus a one-time set up charge of \$250.00.

Many cities print regular newsletters that are mailed to residents and businesses. These newsletters typically highlight city activities, recreation events, construction activities and other city activities and programs, and otherwise keep residents abreast of important information about their local government. These newsletters are fairly expensive to set-up, print and mail, and because of the lead-time involved, cannot provide time-sensitive information quickly.

An email newsletter has the advantage of being far less expensive to produce, and allows for very fast provision of information to constituents. The downside is that not all residents use email, and hence, would not receive the newsletter unless they requested a hard copy from city hall. Also, residents and business owners would have to take the initiative to sign up (through the City's website) in order to receive the e-newsletter, meaning that it may take some time to accumulate a meaningful mailing list. However, as more and more people use email to communicate, and have the hardware to receive newsletters through that medium, the advantages of an electronic communication system far outweigh the costs (printing, postage, etc.) and time associated with the traditional method of mailing hard copies to every address in the City.

By way of example, if a contractor is going to be working on a street we could directly provide notice to residents along that street and provide updates as necessary. Currently, a number of people are interested in the progress of the Pier Project and they often call

wishing to speak to staff about the project. Providing status reports via an electronic newsletter would save staff time.

City newsletters, regardless of the method of delivery, must adhere to certain rules concerning content. Generally, content must be informational in nature and communicate the activities and programs of the City. For example, political argument is not permitted. The City would be responsible for developing or approving all content.

We do not have the staff resources in-house now to accomplish this program. E-GovMail.Com approached the City with this proposal. In order to implement an electronic newsletter, we would need to work with a consultant to develop it, set it up and serve as the copywriter of the information. In the long run, this approach could be evaluated to determine whether or not this is the best solution or if the entire program is worthwhile. E-GovMail.com's proposal is modest in price. Staff has not, however, solicited other service providers for proposals.

Staff seeks Council direction as to whether there is interest in this idea.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen R. Burrell
City Manager