



AGENDA
Special Finance, Audit, and
Legislative Affairs Committee
Thursday, February 8, 2024
@ 5:30 PM
Peoria County Courthouse, Room 403

1. **Call to Order**

2. **Resolutions**
 - Contract award for Federal Representation Services

3. **Public Comment**

4. **Miscellaneous**

5. **Adjournment**

Vice Chairperson - Sharon K. Williams, District 1
 Camille Coates, District 2
 Betty Duncan, District 3
 Brandy Bryant, District 4
 Chairperson – James C. Dillon, District 5
 Eden S. Blair, District 6
 Phillip Salzer, District 7
 Nathan Hoerr, District 8
 Danny Phelan, District 9



Peoria County Board

Robert Reneau, District 10
 Linda Daley, District 11
 Daniel Kelch, District 12
 Terry Ruhland, District 13
 Brian Elsasser, District 14
 Steven Rieker, District 15
 Matthew Windish, District 16
 Jennifer Groves Allison, District 17
 Paul Rosenbohm, District 18

AGENDA BRIEFING COMMUNICATION

Committee:	Finance, Audit & Legislative Affairs	Prepared By:	Scott A. Sorrel
Meeting Date:	February 8, 2024	Title:	County Administrator
County Board Meeting:	February 8, 2024	Department:	County Administration
County Board District:	All	Date Prepared:	February 2, 2024
Agenda Category:	RESOLUTION		
Item Title:	Contract Award for Federal Representation Services		

ISSUE:

A resolution from your Finance, Audit, and Legislative Affairs Committee recommending approval of a contract award to Cozen O’Connor Public Strategies of Washington D.C. for federal representation services.

BACKGROUND:

In 2009, the County Board awarded a contract for similar services. This was two months into the First Session of the 111th Congress. Shortly after the Board’s action, the Congress significantly modified the earmark process, and by the time the 112th was sworn into office in January 2011, earmarks were eliminated. This proved to be bad timing for the County, as both the County and our lobbyist did not pivot well to competitive grantmaking opportunities. The contract was extended once in a partnership with the City of Peoria as a means of sharing the costs. Once the extension was complete, the contract was not renewed.

Federal spending post-COVID has significantly expanded with multiple legislative initiatives including the American Rescue Plan Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These pieces of legislation have infused billions of federal dollars into the economy. The County now finds itself at a strategic disadvantage to other units of local government, the non-profit sector, and the private sector for identifying, applying for, securing, and using federal funds to fund various County projects in place of local resources. Not only has the federal budget grown, but the current Congress also reinstated earmarks and rebranded them as Member Initiatives. Both Senators and House Members have a maximum number of projects they can put into the annual appropriations bills (Senators are allotted more than House Members). The County has positive working relationships with both Congressmen and both Senators. What the County lacks is a cohesive federal legislative agenda focused on the appropriations process and competitive funding opportunities.

At the suggestion of Chairman Dillon and the support of other Board Members, a Request for Proposals (RFP) was prepared and released for federal representation services. The scope of work in the RFP included seven (7) items, as noted below. The RFP advised potential respondents that the County sought a three (3) year engagement with the possibility of two extensions with each extension being for one (1) year, or a maximum contract of five (5) years.

- ★ **Federal Legislative Strategy.** Develop a detailed document outlining a strategic plan for acquiring appropriations and funding for local and regional projects important to the County.
- ★ **Annual Legislative Program.** Develop a detailed document outlining a strategic plan for acquiring appropriations and funding for local and regional projects important to the County.
- ★ **Authorizing Legislation and Rule Making.** Keep the County aware of authorizing legislation and rulemaking that could impact the County's operations (including but not limited to WRDA Reauthorization, Transportation Reauthorization, and the Ag Bill).
- ★ **Competitive Funding Opportunities.** Familiarize yourself with the County of Peoria's needs to be able to recommend and assist in the application process for competitive federally funded programs.
- ★ **County Access to Congress & Executive Branch Agencies.** Provide bipartisan access to Members of Congress, key congressional staff, agency heads and key agency staff for designated Peoria County officials and designated staff. At a minimum, this will include visits to Capitol Hill during the annual National Association of Counties legislative conference.
- ★ **Congressional Delegation Relationship.** Develop a collegial working relationship with the Illinois Congressional Delegation and coordinate and facilitate designated meetings with the Illinois Congressional Delegation.
- ★ **Reporting.** Provide written quarterly reports that updates on the firm's achievement as they relate to goals and objectives set forth in the Peoria County Federal Legislative Strategy

Approximately a dozen firms were invited to respond to the RFP, plus any firm that picked up the RFP from the various postings done by the purchasing division of the Finance Department. There were three (3) firms, all based in Washington D.C. that responded. An evaluation team consisting of Chairman Dillon, Vice Chairwoman Williams, Members Daley and Rieker, Assistant County Administrator Musselman, and the County Administrator reviewed the responses using the criteria below. The three firms were ranked using the criteria. All three firms were invited and accepted an interview via MS Teams. After the video interviews, the evaluation team eliminated one of the three responses, and provided the two remaining firms with a list of questions to respond to in writing. After receiving and reviewing the responses to the questions, the evaluation team came together a third time to finalize the recommendation.

- ★ **Submittal.** Completeness of the response.
- ★ **Firm Experience.** The firm's documented experience in providing the services outlined.
- ★ **Key Personnel.** The experience of the firm's personnel that would be assigned to and lead the engagement with the County.
- ★ **Scope of Work.** The firm's approach to delivering and executing the scope of work.
- ★ **Financials.** The firm has the financial stability to successfully deliver on the scope of work.
- ★ **References.** The quality of references from current and prior clients, and through the experiences of the firm's references, a demonstrated knowledge the issues facing county governments and the firm's prior success for the services being requested by the County of Peoria.
- ★ **Pricing for Services.** The annual and total cost of the engagement.

The evaluation team unanimously recommends this contract be awarded to Cozen O'Connor Public Strategies of Washington D.C. Of the three firms responding, two are very capable of delivering for the County. Therefore, the intangibles were the deciding factor. Cozen O'Connor Public Strategies was chosen based on a culmination of the criteria listed above and their intangibles.

- ★ Specifically, Cozen's four-person team will be led by former Illinois Congressman Rodney Davis. Congressman Davis has maintained his relationships on Capitol Hill since he left in January 2023. He is supported by the rest of his team, and beyond that the entire Cozen team, a prominent law firm in Washington DC. Congressman Davis had a well-documented record of being one of the

most bi-partisan members of Congress, and prior to being elected was a senior Congressional staffer for over a decade. This experience will be of great value.

- ★ A potential weakness of selecting Cozen is that the County will be their first client. The evaluation team saw this as an opportunity. The expectation is that Cozen will be aggressive and hungry on our behalf. One of the other respondents spoke strongly of the relationship they still maintain today with their first client. That relationship started 30-years ago. The evaluation team sees this as the opportunity for the County to be “that” client for Cozen.
- ★ Should earmarks be suspended again, Cozen is prepared to either terminate the contract early or pivot to a grantmaking strategy, at the County’s choice.
- ★ All other things being equal, which Cozen is slightly ahead, the pricing proposal from Cozen was the most affordable for very similar scopes of work.

Provided the full Board approves Cozen as the contract awardee, staff will be working to meet with the Cozen team while at the National Association of Counties Legislative Conference. Cozen is committed to coming to Peoria early in the engagement to build the legislative agenda. County Administration will coordinate onsite meetings with elected and appointed officials to brainstorm project ideas that will culminate in a recommended legislative agenda the Board will consider for adoption. At the suggestion of Vice Chairwoman Williams, we will also ensure there are sufficient resources available in the budget for a delegation of the Board to travel to Washington DC to meet with the Cozen team and to meet with our Congressional Delegation on Capitol Hill.

IMPACT ANALYSIS:

FISCAL IMPACT: As noted above, a federal lobbyist cannot guarantee a Member of Congress will select any of our priorities on an annual basis. However, if a member initiative is funded, it creates the opportunity for a local project to be funded with a source other than local revenues. This is true for competitive grants funded through the federal grant making process.

No budget amendment is necessary as funding was included in the FY2024 budget.

OPERATIONAL IMPACT: Creating and maintaining a federal strategy and list of priorities for projects the County actively seeks funding will cause an initial burden on the leadership and management team of the organization. This burden will be lessened as time elapses. Secondly, the Finance Department has the chance of seeing added workload in the post-award phase of any project. However, the volume of grant compliance work managed by the Finance Department currently and what might be expected out of this engagement is not expected to be a significant burden. Third, the County Administrator and Assistant County Administrator will see some increased workload from managing the relationship and the process of creating and maintaining a legislative program. However, some of the tasks that will become the responsibility of the vendor will offset Administration’s added work.

STRATEGIC PLAN: Reviewing the priorities in the County Board’s Strategic Planning, this item is not a specific workplan item. However, this is an initiative of the Board and will play a role in each of the five strategic priorities in the plan.

EQUITY IMPACT: N/A.

ALTERNATIVES: Alternatives include doing nothing, which limits the County’s ability to develop a robust federal appropriations plan and strategy; secure member initiative funding requests; and properly identify and compete for competitive federal funding opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY OTHER BODIES:

- N/A

PRIOR COUNTY BOARD ACTIONS:

- N/A

COMMITTEE ACTION:

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ATTACHMENTS:

- Resolution

TO THE HONORABLE COUNTY BOARD)
)
COUNTY OF PEORIA, ILLINOIS)

Your Finance, Audit & Legislative Affairs Committee does hereby recommend passage of the following Resolution.

Re: Award of a contract for Federal Representation Services with Cozen O’Connor Public Strategies of Washington D.C.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Committee believes it to be in the best interests of Peoria County to retain federal representation services to aid the county in federal legislative initiatives including appropriations, and;

WHEREAS, proposals were solicited from companies and firms with offices in Washington D.C. with the County receiving three such proposals, and;

WHEREAS, a thorough evaluation including interviews of the three respondents were conducted, and;

WHEREAS, your Committee would recommend Cozen O’Connor Public Strategies of Washington D.C. be selected as the most qualified respondent, and;

WHEREAS, your Committee would further recommend the County Administrator be authorized and directed to execute a three-year contract after review by the State’s Attorney’s Office.

NOW, THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED that the Peoria County Board selects Cozen O’Connor Public Strategies of Washington D.C. as the most qualified respondent to provide Peoria County with federal representation services, and;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the County Administrator is authorized and directed to execute a contract after review by the State’s Attorney’s Office.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

FINANCE, AUDIT & LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE