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Whitney Barazoto, Executive Director

TO: Public Ethics Commission
FROM: Suzanne Doran, Lead Analyst
           Whitney Barazoto, Executive Director
DATE: June 26, 2020
RE: Lobbyist Reporting App Launch for the July 6, 2020, PEC Meeting

Overview

The Public Ethics Commission (Commission or PEC) will receive a presentation and official launch of the Lobbyist Reporting application, an online reporting system that simplifies lobbyist registration and disclosure reporting and makes the data available on Oakland's open data portal. The Lobbyist Reporting application is the result of a partnership between Commission staff and the City of Oakland's Information Technology Department (ITD). This memorandum provides an overview of the background, project goals, and partners involved in creating the PEC's Lobbyist Reporting app.

Background

The Public Ethics Commission (PEC) ensures compliance with the City of Oakland's lobbyist registration law. The Lobbyist Registration Act (LRA or Act) requires registration and activity disclosure for individuals and groups that influence public decisions by lobbying Oakland public officials and employees.

Under the Act, lobbyists must register before lobbying any City of Oakland official and renew their registration by January 31 each year (OMC § 3.20.040, 3.20.120). The Act also requires Oakland lobbyists submit reports of their lobbying activity for each calendar quarter (OMC § 3.20.110). Reportable activity includes contacts with City officials to influence government decisions, employment relationships between lobbyists and City officials, and persons solicited to make contributions to elected City officials or candidates for City office. Finally, the Act authorizes the PEC to prescribe how the required lobbyist disclosure information is submitted to the Commission (OMC §3.20.090).

Until 2018, lobbyist disclosure forms were filed with the City Clerk. The copies of the forms were available for public inspection in binders at the City Clerk and PEC offices. In 2018 City Council amended the LRA to change the location for filing lobbyist forms from the City Clerk's Office to the PEC. As of January 16, 2018, all lobbyist forms and reports required by the Lobbyist Registration Act must now be filed with the Public Ethics Commission, and as a result, staff processes about 300 filings each year in a largely paper-based process requiring staff time to manually date-stamp, file, and re-enter data from the forms.

As filing officer, Commission staff initiated changes our campaign finance filing system, NetFile, so that the software could be utilized to manage the administrative and recordkeeping functions associated

with filing officer status. Utilizing NetFile also allowed the PEC to provide online public access to filings with limited search capabilities for the first time by uploading filings to the public access system.

At present, the PEC collects a significant amount of data with information on lobbying activity in the City of Oakland. The PEC is responsible for making that information available to the public and monitoring compliance. As long as lobbyist disclosure remained a paper-based process, however, the disclosure data is not readily available or in a machine-readable format that allows multi-dimensional searches, such as searches by client, official contacted, or issue-area.

Electronic Lobbyist Registration and Reporting

In August 2019, Commission staff initiated a partnership with the City of Oakland's Information Technology Department (ITD) to build an electronic Lobbyist Registration and Reporting System to increase the efficiency of our lobbyist registration program and vastly improve internal and public access to the data contained within the reports. In addition, electronic filing would make compliance with the Oakland Lobbyist Registration Act simpler and more convenient for filers. Major project goals included:

- Providing a simple, user-friendly online process for lobbyists to register and file their reports electronically;
- Streamling program administrative processes and developing automated tools to improve compliance; and
- Providing a user-friendly interface that enables the public to easily view filings, conduct multi-dimensional searches, and download data.

ITD embraced the project, and a team comprising Commission staff with IT developers assembled to build the application using the OakApps platform. PEC Lead Analyst Suzanne Doran served as the project lead and representative of the Commission, contributing expertise on legal and disclosure requirements, administrative workflow, user testing, and data needs. Information Systems Manager Ifeoma Olike and Application Developers Titus Kress and Geetha Gouindaswamy made up the development team, which built the database and designed, created and refined the frontend application for lobbyists and backend application for Commission staff to manage the system.

The resulting Lobbyist Registration and Reporting app on the City's OakApps platform enables lobbyists to submit and manage all aspects of their registration and reporting requirements online. Going forward, all registration and report documents will be filed electronically. Registration and client information is stored to reduce time spent by lobbyists on data entry. Lobbyists may view their filing history and print or download filings. Dropdown lists are provided to improve accuracy and standardize the data for greater searchability and analysis. Resources for lobbyists, such as links to the Act, our lobbyist guide, and a searchable FAQ are provided within the app. The administrative system enables Commission staff to easily track compliance with a dashboard feature and automated notifications to filers as well as full access to data entered in the system.

Commission staff will provide a demonstration of the new application at the July meeting and will implement the new system for the July 30, 2020, filing deadline.

Special appreciation goes to Oakland's Chief Information Officer, Andrew "Pete" Peterson, for supporting the Commission's project, and to the IT development team for the creativity, diligence and skill they devoted to the project.