



TEAM contract on hold as commissioners deliberate

Most Santa Rosa County commissioners aren't ready to act immediately on a new contract proposed by the county's troubled development agency or embrace a list of reforms designed to spruce up its public image and effectiveness.

On Monday, TEAM Santa Rosa Chairman Dave Hoxeng implored commissioners to adopt a new 18-month contract with TEAM at their regular business meeting on Thursday.

Hoxeng also gave commissioners a list of changes his agency plans to implement — most recommended by economic development consultant Tom Ticknor.

Among the recommendations was the creation of a chief marketing officer position to lead the agency. Hoxeng asked for \$100,000 to fund the position.

Ticknor also recommended establishing a board of business people to act as advisers, drafting an ethics and conflict of interest policy for TEAM board members, and changing the name of the organization itself.

Despite's Hoxeng's urging, most

commissioners said they wanted more time to digest the changes and didn't want to make an immediate decision on the contract extension.

"I don't think we need to rush anything," Commissioner Lane Lynchard said. "Some of the recommendations are going to require time to flush out (such as) rebranding with a new name. What does that new name need to be? I think we need to strongly consider having an identifiable regional descriptive term in the name.

"These all need to be incorporated into a new contract. This is too important, in my mind, to move forward prematurely."

TEAM is reeling from a string of controversies.

On two occasions this year, the agency was served with federal subpoenas demanding volumes of records related to land deals, travel and other TEAM business. TEAM was also named in a lawsuit brought by Terhaar & Cronley Property Co., claiming TEAM and

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the county mismanaged a deal that caused the company to lose a lucrative lease.

TEAM — charged with creating jobs — has also felt the heat of the bad economy, with several major Santa Rosa employers announcing large layoffs this year.

Hoxeng asked the commission to vote on the contract at its meeting on Thursday, promising to get contract changes to the county as soon as today. He is worried that the commission's delay could impact ongoing recruitment efforts.

"In the Internet age, and with Google, everything the News Journal writes is there forever," Hoxeng said. "We need our prospects to know we're solid to deal with. Our county has got a good organization that is backed by the board of county commissioners, and that we can deliver."

Commissioner Don Salter agreed, saying commissioners shouldn't micromanage economic development.

"We created a public/private partnership years ago. We depend on that private sector to perform economic development for us. We either trust you or we don't trust you," Salter said. "We need to take this dark cloud off of Santa Rosa County and say, 'We are unified.' We need to move forward without that black cloud."

Commissioner Bob Cole and Salter spoke in favor of voting on the contract extension on Thursday, but Commissioners Jim Melvin, Jim Williamson and Lynchard wanted to wait

until January.

Ticknor, an economic development expert from Illinois whom TEAM paid \$10,000, spent a week in Santa Rosa County during which he interviewed 75 people, including all five commissioners, to determine how to best reform TEAM.

"You have very, very good fundamentals to move forward from," Ticknor told commissioners.

"The companies I talked to who have worked with TEAM Santa Rosa ... support it very, very strongly. That's not to say you don't have challenges. There have been downsizing in some of your major industries. ... The organization has relatively low private investment."

The new executive officer would be responsible for marketing Santa Rosa to potential industries and managing the organization's image among voters and elected officials.

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Cindy Anderson, the current executive director who is a civil engineer and has worked to improve the county's inventory of industry-ready land, could stay on in a subordinate position, he said.

Ticknor also recommended that TEAM work more closely with the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce for regional economic development efforts.

TEAM needs to be more aggressive in getting grants and private investment, and the county should consider increasing public funds to TEAM, Ticknor said.

Currently, at \$413,480 annually, the county pays \$3.03 per capita whereas "aggressive countywide" economic development efforts usually see a \$3 to \$5 per capital investment, he said.

"If you want to be highly competitive, you need to look at strengthening those resources," he said.

A look at what would change

Highlights of reforms approved by the TEAM Santa Rosa Economic Development Council:

- » Recruit a chief marketing officer to be TEAM's new executive officer (if the Santa Rosa County Commission provides \$100,000).
- » Drop "TEAM" from name.
- » Collaborate more closely with Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce on marketing and branding.
- » Work to increase private sector financial support.
- » Create ethics and conflict of interest policies for TEAM board and staff.
- » Create written measurements for TEAM's annual performance.
- » Improve Web presence.
- » Produce an annual sales and marketing plan.
- » Form a media relations/public relations committee.

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