



Memorandum

To: Members of the Finance Committee

From: Kyle Krewson, Director, Building and Housing Department

cc: Mayor David E. Weiss
John Potts, Director of Finance
Jeri Chaikin, CAO
William M. Ondrey Gruber, Director of Law

Date: May 15, 2023

Re: Request to Approve Funding for CitizenServe

Intro

City staff is requesting that the Finance Committee recommend City Council approve an amount not to exceed \$45,000 in subscription fees and other software enhancements spent with Online Solutions, LLC for software as a service (SaaS) platform CitizenServe as a sole source vendor.

Background

CitizenServe is a platform that provides licensing, permitting, and code enforcement services. In 2019, the City entered into a service agreement with CitizenServe to provide this service. While it is used heavily by Building and Housing staff, it is also used by other staff for functions that cross over into other departments, including Law, Planning, Fire, Economic Development, Public Works, as well as our outside plans examiners and the City Engineer.

We used a robust competitive bidding process in 2016, when the City first partnered with six other First Suburbs Consortium cities to solicit proposals for a joint platform. There are now 12 inner ring suburbs using this platform. One of the many added benefits of this collaborative approach is that the vendor extends discounted pricing due to economies of scale (user subscription costs are discounted by 33%). The group was also successful in securing several grants to reduce implementation costs. As a result of this regional partnership, the City's share of savings and grants, \$71,400, fully funded the first year implementation costs.

Up until this year, the annual license costs have been below the threshold that required council approval. However, with expanding to include permitting and POS functions this year, additional users and capabilities will be added which now puts us over the threshold that requires Council approval.

Expanded Use of the Platform

As of today, the following functions are integrated into CitizenServe: permitting, plan reviews, business licensing, rental licensing, contractor licensing, vacant property monitoring, referrals for prosecution, rental inspections, owner-occupied exterior systematic inspections, residential and commercial complaint inspections, consultations, public nuisance declarations, enforcement of failure to obtain/renew licenses, and managing the city's land bank inventory. All internal processes handled in

the system are now completely paperless resulting in a reduction in supplies, courier, and postage costs, while increasing productivity due to workflows that are more cohesive and transparent.

Public-facing portals include all licensing and permitting activities; giving residents, property owners, contractors, and business owners real-time, 24x7 online access to submit applications, pay for licenses and permits, view inspection results, download documents, and communicate with City staff.

We are currently building out Point of Sale functions in the platform and foreclosure monitoring will be rolled out shortly thereafter. We plan to expand the system further to include functions in other departments later in 2023 and into 2024. There are now over 2,900 members in the community using the system, and that number is growing every day as the public embraces the platform.

When we first started using the platform, we started with 17 City staff users and are now up to 29 users and anticipate adding several more users this year. The cost to the City per named user is \$1,200. We therefore anticipate approximately \$35,000 in user subscription costs this year. The Building and Housing budget has already budgeted for those costs in 2023. There will be additional one-time cost this year of around \$4,000-\$10,000 for migrating over active and historical data from our old platform into the new system. We will fund this through the remaining funds available in an IT capital budget intended for use on this platform.

Future Planned Expansion: Regional CitizenServe Portal

Last month we learned that FSC was successful in securing a Community Development Supplemental Grant (CDSG, aka "casino funds") for \$25,000 to work with CitizenServe to develop a regional portal for the platform. This customer service enhancement will benefit entities that conduct business across multiple Northeast Ohio communities that use CitizenServe. This will give realtors, property managers, property owners, business owners, and contractors a single login to manage licenses, applications, and address code violations across all jurisdictions where they conduct business. The main benefit to the City is it will lead to increased compliance with City requirements. It will also provide the added benefit of better collaboration with our neighboring communities and allow us to be more proactive in identifying bad actors across the region and sharing contact information for out of state investors. The grant does not require matching funds, and because FSC is receiving the award directly, the City does not need to take any formal action at this time.

Neighborhood and Economic Development Committee Discussion

Discussion centered on how the platform functions as well as the operational benefits of the system. Details were shared about unique functionality that was not previously available to us with our 20th century systems, which now includes workflow and document management and 24x7 customer facing portals. The latter of which, provides many customer service benefits to the business owners, residents, realtors, and property managers that use the platform every day. There was also some discussion around how other departments may benefit from the platform. Essentially, any business function that involves inspections, permits, or licenses, can be integrated into the platform. It was noted that this typically involves considerable configurations to adapt to the specific workflows, but this provides an opportunity to completely rethink and streamline our processes. Planning Department boards and commissions processes, will likely follow. There is also the potential to integrate any permit or code enforcement functions of other departments, such as Police, Fire, and Public Works. Additional information was shared that clarified that the platform is cloud based and that all data storage costs are included in the annual subscription.

Summary

We believe that CitizenServe provides an essential service to the city, and we have found the platform to be reliable and effective. We are requesting that the Finance Committee recommend approval to Council to provide subscription and data integration funding not-to-exceed \$45,000, to continue using CitizenServe and expand our use of the platform to realize further operational efficiencies and customer service enhancements.