



WILDWOOD

July 16, 2019

MEMORANDUM

To: Planning and Parks Committee Members

From: Department of Planning and Parks

Re: **Discussion regarding Accela Digital Permitting Software (Wards – All)**

Cc: The Honorable James R. Bowlin, Mayor
Administration and Public Works Committee Members
Economic Development Committee Members
Steve Cross, Co-Interim City Administrator
John A. Young, City Attorney
Rick Brown, P.E. and P.T.O.E., Director of Public Works
Kathy Arnett, Assistant Director of Planning and Parks
Gary Crews, Superintendent of Parks and Recreation

Background >>>

The Department of Planning and the Department of Public Works have continued to work with Byrne Software and Accela, Inc. to create the on-line permitting system that was explained to the Committee Members and City Council, as part of the preparation of the 2018 Fiscal Year budget. The work has stretched from 2018 to 2019, with some progress being made on the specialized forms the City would need to process permits and coordination accordingly with St. Louis County. The outcome has not been what was expected and the process to get to the current point has been difficult for City staff at multiple key points in the development process of this software system.

Several revelations have been provided to the City, since the initial program was presented to the Committee that need to be provided to the members, so they are aware of some of the concerns existing among the City departments in this regard. These revelations included the following items:

1. St. Louis County does not have any plans at this time to upload the Accela software system onto its cloud or an accessible platform for partners to access it for sharing purposes.
2. St. Louis County has not fully implemented Accela's latest software, and the timeframe to complete any upgrade is unclear.
3. Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District (MSD) appears to no longer plan on working and sharing access to its Accela software system, regardless of capability or not.

4. Accela, Inc. continues to increase yearly fees for access to the software system at a rate of seven (7) percent, which far exceeds inflation levels or comparable growths in other service providers.
5. Byrne Software Technologies, the builder of the software framework for Accelia, Inc., has yet to be able to complete the four (4) forms needed by the City, since the contract began with it and Wildwood in 2018.
6. Wildwood has spent almost seventy thousand dollars (\$70,000.00) and has yet to have a completed and operational system for use.

It has become apparent from the last six (6) months of conversations, meetings, and communications, the providers of this purported software system have continued to access the City costs, while not being able to produce the final product. Certainly, the two (2) providers have noted the timelines that were not met by the City in reviewing products, but all were eventually addressed and the Department of Planning and Department of Public Work employees were able to provide the detailed descriptions and responses to them to create the needed screens for use by residents and others. At the last meeting of the parties, where personnel from Byrne Software Technologies was changed, it became apparent the system has its flaws. These flaws are exacerbated by the partners the City had counted upon for participation are now not planning full implementation or integration with outside entities.

Intent of Presentation at Tonight's Meeting >>>

The Department of Planning, an advocate for this system, which it believed would better serve the residents and associated contracting community, has stopped all work on it at this time to assess next steps and advise the Planning and Parks Committee and City Council. Given the circumstances, the Department would like to pursue a refund of monies allocated and paid to the two (2) parties at this stage, knowing that a full amount is unlikely. However, any refund, along with no further payments to the parties would be a successful conclusion to an apparent misstep on the Department's part, along with its planned partners now acknowledging the same, if not formally, by not planning full implementation and sharing of resources.

To this end, the Department is requesting the Committee authorize the City Attorney to prepare a demand letter, with cause, noting the lack of progress in completing this project and the lack of full disclosure of the pitfalls by them as well. This letter would be the first step in attempting to recoup funds and terminate any further costs to these vendors. Unfortunately, such action means the desired inter-connection of the three (3) main permitting agencies in the City of Wildwood will not likely be linked together from a permit sharing perspective for many years to come, given the investments the other two (2) users, i.e. Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District (MSD) and St. Louis County have made into the program. However, the Department does not want to proceed with these two (2) providers, given the approaches they have taken during the limited development of the software package with staff, while also assessing charges for services not used (yearly licenses for users).

Summary and Conclusion >>>

The acknowledgement in this regard is not an easy action on the part of the Department of Planning, given the costs and time that have been put forth by the City to create a better permitting process for residents and the associated contracting community. However, to proceed forward with a vendor that appears to not understand the details of a small local government, and partners that are not planning full implementation at this time, would be a greater disservice than stopping now. This acknowledgment also comes with an apology in this regard.

If any of the Committee Members should have any questions or comments regarding this information, please feel free to contact the Department of Planning and Parks at (636) 458-0440. A presentation is planned on this matter at tonight's meeting. Thank you for the opportunity to present this information to the Committee on this important matter.