

MARIN GENERAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

371 Bel Marin Keys Blvd., Suite 100, Novato, CA 94949

Phone: (415) 883-9100 FAX: (415) 883-9155

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TO: MGSA Board of Directors

FROM: Mike Garvey, Interim Executive Director

SUBJECT: Recommendations for the future operation of MGSA

I have enjoyed my time as your Interim Director for these past few months and am pleased to offer the following comments about what I see in the future for MGSA.

The first thing I see is a great and expanding future for the JPA, reducing costs to the taxpayers and assuring more effective and efficient services. This is because MGSA is in a position to operate jointly-governed, unified services on a scale that allows for a high degree of transparency, less administrative overhead, greater specialization, and shared program costs. It offers the cities and the county an unparalleled opportunity to reduce the cost of a unit of service while maintaining the quality both of service and of the work environment for employees.

The Dilemma

Local governments in California are caught between two conflicting forces: first, the increasing demands in State mandates and community desire for more services; and, second, a limited and archaic revenue system. This calls either for failure or innovation, and MGSA is well-positioned to deliver the latter.

As communities call for new services (Sustainability initiatives being an example) and as other levels of government mandate new programs (the State requirement for Ethics Training being an example) cities and counties face increased expense. This is not to say there is not support for such programs. For example, all Marin agencies support the two programs listed above. It is to say that cities and counties are obliged to include these programs in already tight budgets.

A Possible Solution

Consolidating such programs into coordinated countywide efforts allows both greater depth to the program and reduced cost to each partnering agency. The challenge is to give each agency confidence the programs will be well-designed, valuable and competently delivered. The ideal model to meet these requirements is a JPA that allows for joint governance and has the capacity to create specific advisory groups where necessary. However, each JPA does call for a small administration and multiple single-purpose JPAs will lead to citizen confusion and excessive cumulative administrative expense. And this is where MGSA can be of service.

The Role of MGSA

By virtue of its charter MGSA is empowered to host a wide variety of local programs, subject to the agreement of the member agencies. Also, as is seen in the plan to continue the MarinMap Advisory Board, MGSA has the capacity to empower specialist advisory bodies to influence program quality. The role MGSA could play, therefore, is that of a “central” JPA, hosting disparate programs, while using select specialist advisory bodies and consolidating administrative overhead.

The decision whether to add programs need not be addressed in advance, but can be deferred until each new possibility arises. One caution is that the JPA should continue its past practice of restricting itself to administrative activities, deferring policy issues to elected representatives.

Specific Programs

It is impossible to predict what future programs might present themselves for implementation by MGSA but two are imminent, Wireless Marin and MarinMap.

Wireless Marin. While the details will be worked out by the Wireless Advisory Committee, this program offers a good model for evaluating MGSA’s possible role.

Elected officials will delegate day-to-day operation of a program to appointed staff to the extent they are comfortable. Policy questions will remain in the hands of the elected officials. Only programs that are administrative in nature would be assigned MGSA. Other programs could see MGSA asked to work out administrative details on a uniform basis, with policy matters to be considered by each jurisdiction. There is no need to define MGSA’s role in advance as the specifics of each possible program will determine its role for that program. An example can be seen in MMA’s recent request that MGSA serve as the financing agent for city support for the Mediation program. This role is a valuable service, but not one that was predictable.

In the case of Wireless Marin, the Advisory Committee will structure the program as it sees fit, defining the role it wishes MGSA to play. MGSA then will make the requested contribution to the coordinated effort. The key factor is not that it can operate all consolidated programs, but that MGSA exists as an invaluable resource for local government in Marin.

MarinMap. This program comes to MGSA in a well developed stage, thanks largely to the talents of the members of the Advisory Board and the financial support of member entities through the years. It provides a host of valuable information, and has the potential to provide more. Further expansion could see this resource evolve into the core of the delivery of a wide range of public and private services. It has the potential to harness technology to deliver service at unprecedented levels of efficiency and effectiveness. There is potential to generate enough revenue to make the program self-supporting.

This is not the place for a lengthy discussion of GIS, but the Board should be aware this program has the potential to become MGSA’s major program.

Recommended Organization

The model I suggest for MGSA is very similar to that I have recommended for MERA. It calls for a small administrative core organization, starting with a single Executive Director, and a series of contracts by which program responsibilities will be met. These support contracts would include:

- administrative support, including clerical support, an office, phone and facilities for meetings
- financial services, including the annual audit
- specific conduct of the Abandoned Vehicle Abatement Program, the Streetlight Program and the Taxicab Regulation Program, as well as of other small-scale programs as might arise
- technical support for programs such as MarinMap, that require expertise

The Executive Director

This person could be an independent contractor, an employee of a firm, or become an employee of a member entity that would contract his/her services to MGSA. I would not recommend MGSA take on the administrative burden and cost of becoming the employer of record for a single employee. The hourly compensation should approximate that of a City Manager in a mid-sized city in the county. I anticipate an average workload of 16 hours per week, allowing for possibly more hours during times of peak activity, such as contract performance evaluation, contract negotiations, professional conferences, and budget preparation. (List of anticipated duties attached, Exhibit "A".)

The position of Executive Director is needed to assure dedicated, professional support for the MGSA Board on policy matters and to assure effective implementation of decisions. The position also protects the system from the appearance of conflict, as member agencies may contract for the services described above.

Executive Director services could be provided jointly or separately from MERA and MTA.

As the operation matures there will be a need for more staff. Decisions about whether to hire directly or to use contract services can be made at that time.

Conclusion

This paper predicts some uncertainty in the future, but I think that is unavoidable. The challenges to the cities and the county in Marin will increase but conditions will fluctuate. The recommended path for MGSA is to remain flexible so as to best serve those agencies as events develop, understanding different strategies will best serve different demands.

I look forward to the chance to discuss these issues with you.

Exhibit "A"

List of Anticipated Duties MGSA Executive Director

1. Prepare Board agendas and staff reports on recommended actions; assure Board decisions are implemented.
2. Prepare, recommend and administer MGSA's annual budget, including coordinating the annual audit.
3. Prepare and administer contracts issued by MGSA; evaluate contractor compliance.
4. Conduct contract negotiations, as needed, for submission for Board consideration.
5. Assemble and deliver to the County appropriate records and files for the public record archives.
6. Represent the Board in dealings with media, member agencies, other governmental agencies and the public.
7. Coordinate legal actions initiated on behalf of MGSA or filed against MGSA.
8. Manage the Streetlight Program.
9. Manage the Abandoned Vehicle Abatement Program.
10. Manage the Taxicab Regulation Program.
11. Manage the Wireless Marin program.
12. Manage MarinMap.
13. Manage Marin.org, when that program is ready to migrate to MGSA.
13. Review mandates to identify possibilities for consolidated programs.
14. Perform additional duties as may be assigned by the Board of Directors.