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LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor Matti Herrera Bower and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: April 2, 2010

SUBJECT: WebQA/GovQA Service Request System

The purpose of this LTC is to inform the Commission that the City of Miami Beach will be replacing our current service requests system (Better Place) with GovQA, an enhanced service requests system that we believe will better serve our internal and external customers. The transition to the new system will begin on Friday, April 9, 2010.

The Better Place system was produced by the Florida League of Cities several years ago to address the increasing need for web-based service request programs. At the time, there were few off-the-shelf programs designed for local governments. The program was provided to cities with a very minimal annual operating cost. Throughout the years, certain improvements were made in terms of data collection fields. However, there have been many advances in technology since the development and implementation of Better Place, as well as greater expectations in terms of the ability to easily develop reports, and to interface with other data programs run in cities, among other things. Unfortunately, for several years now, no new investments were made to Better Place, nor are new enhancements planned. As a result, many local governments began looking at other web-based customer service products to replace Better Place, especially as it is expected that support for Better Place will be discontinued in the near future.

Over a year ago, City Staff engaged in research of current products in the market to provide this support, including the availability of modules in any of the programs currently used by the City. This was not only essential for purposes of identifying a replacement for Better Place, but it was further necessitated by the elimination of the City's Answer Center. Staff was provided demonstrations and pricing information. These options either required customization, or were costly. Concurrently, several companies specializing in customer service programs began approaching users of Better Place to offer their programs as a replacement. This included companies that are currently providing their web-based programs to several local municipalities that previously used Better Place. WebQA submitted information to the City, including their program offerings, pricing and annual operating costs. Of the products reviewed by staff, WebQA's "GovQA" offered the most flexibility, usability and customization, at a price comparable to our current annual operating costs. An internal committee representing the departments that most frequently receive requests via Better Place was convened to review WebQA/GovQA and provide input on whether this might be a good replacement for Better Place. There was general consensus that this product would provide the City with a better mechanism to receive and respond to service requests (by providing confirmation of receipt of every request); for to track service requests (by both citizens and departments); and to provide information (via a FAQ module); and ask questions.

WebQA is one of the country's leading providers of Customer Relationship Management Systems. They have been providing web-based customer service products worldwide since 2000, and their customers include Global 100 corporations, leading financial institutions, large academic institutions

and local governments. GovQA leads the country in Citizen Request Management software solutions for city and county governments ranging in population size from 3,000 citizens to over one million citizens. GovQA's enhanced features will enable the City to provide citizens and business owners continued access to service requests 24/7. Other cities currently using WebQA's GovQA include Aventura, Miami Lakes, Tallahassee, Oakland Park and Winter Park.

Similar to Better Place, the program provides a tracking number for each inquiry or complaint, allowing residents to follow-up on their submission. The system also provides the ability for the City to send email notifications advising them that we have received their question or complaint.

Also important for improving response time to service requests, it has the ability to integrate with CityWorks (Public Works' work order system), as well as having the capability to interface with most systems currently used by the City. One feature of much interest to us is the ability to integrate with our Geographic Information System, (GIS), giving the City the ability to map out where issues are occurring – assisting us in identifying trends and allocating resources accordingly. The enhanced features of GovQA are expected to improve accountability, reporting and ease of use by staff. Furthermore, annual operating costs will remain unchanged from the current costs of Better Place.

As previously mentioned, the GovQA system will also feature a Frequently Asked Question portal with a knowledge base system, so our citizens and business owners can easily find answers prior to placing a request for service. Citizens will see very little, if any, difference within the resident portal. Currently, all departments are reviewing their respective Frequently Asked Questions to determine if additional questions are needed; questions will be added as needed. Additionally, Public Works/GIS will work closely with the IT department to ease the future interface with CityWorks.

In addition, we will be exploring the implementation of a smartphone application which has been developed by WebQA. This will provide residents, businesses and employees with the ability to submit requests from their smartphone.

Training has been provided to City departments, which we will make available to your staff, as well. Final training will be conducted on April 6, 2010. We will coordinate with your offices to schedule time to familiarize them with the system and its features.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me.

JMG/HMF/DM/bh

cc: Hilda M. Fernandez, Assistant City Manager
Dolores M. Mejia, Special Projects Coordinator