

**City of Palmer  
Action Memorandum No. 20-050**

**Subject:** Approving the City Manager to Enter into an Agreement with Resource Data, Inc., for Vote From Home Feasibility Study Services for the City of Palmer for \$3,000.00

**Agenda of:** June 23, 2020

**Council Action:**     **Approved**                       **Amended:** \_\_\_\_\_  
                                   **Defeated**




**Originator Information:**

**Originator:**    Council Members Julie Berberich and Jill Valerius

**Department Review:**

Route to:	Department Director:	Signature:	Date:
_____	Community Development	_____	_____
_____	Finance	_____	_____
_____	Fire	_____	_____
_____	Police	_____	_____
_____	Public Works	_____	_____

**Approved for Presentation By:**

	Signature:	Remarks:
City Manager		_____
City Attorney		_____
City Clerk		_____

**Certification of Funds:**


Total amount of funds listed in this legislation:    \$ 3,000.00

This legislation (√):

- Creates revenue in the amount of:                      \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Creates expenditure in the amount of:                      \$ 3,000.00
- Creates a saving in the amount of:                      \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Has no fiscal impact

Funds are (√):

- Budgeted                      Line item(s):    01-02-10-6029 C19 (CARES Act Funding)
- Not budgeted

Director of Finance Signature: 

**Attachment(s):**

- Resource Data Inc. Vote from Home Project Consulting Proposal

**Summary Statement/Background:**

In light of, and in consideration of the current COVID-19 Pandemic and with the upmost concern for the safety of our electorate, Council Members Julie Berberich and Jill Valerius are sponsoring legislation to address the City of Palmer's options for improving accessibility to voting for City elections. In some cases, it may be an enhancement of early voting, an enhancement of the absentee voting option or exploring the feasibility of the vote from home.

On January 28 and March 10, 2020 the City Council held committee of the whole to discuss general election matters. One of the topics discussed was researching the City of Palmer's needs and viability of conducting elections through other means. There was general consensus directing the City Clerk to contact RDI for a proposal to conduct a feasibility study.

On April 14, 2020, City Clerk Alley presented RDI's proposal under the Clerk's report. Deputy Mayor Combs and Council Member Valerius stated their support to have the feasibility study on the May 12, 2020, agenda as legislation for council's consideration. General consensus was provided by the council to support the direction for further discussion and consideration of the feasibility proposal.

March 26, 2020

Norma Alley, City Clerk  
City of Palmer  
231 W Evergreen Ave  
Palmer, AK 99645

*Re: Vote from Home System (VFHS) Project Consulting<sup>1</sup>*

Dear Ms. Alley,

Since 2016, Resource Data has successfully supported the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) in establishing a Vote by Mail program and carrying out Vote by Mail elections. We are also currently working on a Feasibility Study for the Kenai Peninsula for Voting by Mail. This recent, ongoing experience makes us well-qualified to assist the City of Palmer (Palmer) in a similar way. The goal of the project will be to provide expert consulting to study the possible Palmer-wide implementation of a Vote by Mail System (or Vote from Home System, VFHS, as it is sometimes called) to better understand the associated processes and costs versus traditional, existing voting methods.

## Vote by Mail Experience

Resource Data played an instrumental role in assisting the Municipality of Anchorage with the implementation (and subsequent enhancement) of its Vote by Mail system. In addition to the original implementation in 2016, we have provided onsite project management and support during the Municipality's April 2018 regular election, August 2018 special election, and this year's April regular election.

Specifically, our role included the following:

- Defining needs and technical specifications for several RFPs
- Vetting and acquiring the necessary IT systems
- Selecting 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendors and managing their work
- Assisting with documentation and training
- Rewriting muni code to accommodate Vote by Mail

---

<sup>1</sup> Many places call this "Vote by Mail". Since voters can return ballots by mail but also instead choose to drop them in drop boxes or at voter centers (if allowed), we find the phrase "Vote From Home" to be more appealing and accurate. They are interchangeable terms. In this document we refer to it as VFHS.



### **Anchorage**

560 E 34th Ave  
Suite 100  
Anchorage, AK 99503  
(907) 563-8100

### **Boise**

1450 S Eagle Flight Way  
Suite 150  
Boise, ID 83709  
(208) 424-2203

### **Houston**

11200 Westheimer Rd  
Suite 910  
Houston, TX 77042  
(713) 468-3385

### **Juneau**

1 Sealaska Plaza  
Suite 301  
Juneau, AK 99801  
(907) 586-6831

### **Portland**

1220 SW Morrison St  
Suite 210  
Portland, OR 97205  
(503) 208-3693

[www.resourcedata.com](http://www.resourcedata.com)

- Creating a variety of planning tools and documents, including procedures, training and testing materials, and project and staffing plans.
- Participating in a number of stakeholder groups and public outreach sessions
- Providing support in assembly meetings and work sessions
- Improving GIS for better address matching
- Developing Access database tools for supporting the MOA's call center and Accessible Vote Centers
- Assisting with data reports and reconciliation
- System testing
- Ensuring all systems and processes ran smoothly for the elections

## Understanding

Palmer has been exploring ways to increase voter participation by developing sustainable election processes that maximize accessibility and inclusivity while conserving public resources. Palmer seeks to analyze the feasibility of transitioning the election process from the current, largely poll-based structure to a hybrid Vote from Home System.

Palmer currently has approximately 5,000 registered voters, with an average turnout around 500 voters. Elections are in October and, due to legal changes, will no longer be a combined effort with the Mat-Su Borough.

The VFHS model would deliver ballots by mail to all eligible voters instead of delivering ballots through Palmer's two election day polling locations. The model could include an Accessible Vote Center (AVC), containing at least one ADA compliant voting device. The AVC would provide for ADA-related voting, replacement ballots, and serve as a drop off location for voted ballot packages, along with other voter services. In addition, one or more drop boxes may be strategically located in the City for the convenience of voters.

Palmer already provides some absentee by mail voting, so it has procedures in place for handling mailed ballots. That procedure is more time consuming than most VFHS processes, but does give Palmer a good base of experience to start from. Palmer may need new ordinances to allow voting from home, in addition to such things as new ballot handling procedures and USPS approved return ballot envelope design. For example, Palmer may choose a "flap" style return envelope so voters could provide a signature and perhaps a personal identifier (DOB, last 4 SSN, voter id), and protect that information from general view by sealing over the flap.

Palmer may be able to effectively reuse a substantial portion of the Municipality of Anchorage's return ballot sorting system, rather than incur the acquisition costs of a mail sorter, or, given the smaller number of voters, use a more manual process. Additionally, Palmer may benefit from some of the tools Resource Data created to support Vote by Mail, including tools for creating

signature image files for the State of Alaska's voter database and for managing voter interaction at the AVC.

Palmer seeks consulting assistance in comparing the pros and cons, including estimated costs, of the current system to a VFHS implementation and operation, with implementation and operation to include the impacts on the following:

- High level scope of required systems and what may need acquisition through vendors
- Use of a mail sorter system or manual process
- Election center site considerations, to include footprint, workflow, and security
- Election center operations
- AVC operations, to include voter data management and ballot package handling
- Call center operations, to include voter data management
- Drop boxes: Recommendations for acquisition and site considerations
- Education\outreach
- GIS support
- Legislative and administrative rules changes that may be needed to support VFHS

Budget allowing, Palmer may, as an option, seek support with other aspects of the project on an as-needed basis. However, it is currently anticipated that consulting regarding the following is not needed:

- Site acquisition and site prep: Palmer has a number of possible locations, expects to mobilize and de-mobilize its election systems so as to fit within the confines of available space, and has the necessary staff to manage any site needs\upgrades.
- Ballot scanning and tabulation system acquisition or related.
- Selection of a printing\packaging vendor. (However, some consultation may occur or at least be facilitated if needed, between the printing\packaging vendor and the sorter vendor to ensure full compatibility.)

## Approach

As a local company with 200 staff (including over 100 in Alaska), we are eager to support Palmer's project. In order to best define how we can help and where we can maximize the benefits of the hard work already undertaken by Palmer, we propose 20 hours of consulting to support a high-level feasibility study.

We will provide up to 20 hours of consulting to help determine the feasibility of a VFHS for Palmer.

Activities may include assistance with:

- Documenting the current structure and costs of Palmer's election system and processes
- High-level requirements of VFHS
  - Process for obtaining voter signatures for identity verification

- Impacts to or potential integration needs with other data or GIS systems
- High-level review of existing MOA vendor solicitations relative to Palmer requirements, to identify how much content may be leveraged by Palmer.
- Considerations regarding VFHS selection and implementation
- Determining where existing processes may be leveraged and where new processes and procedures must be developed
- Cost/benefit analysis of the proposed VFHS versus the currently used voting system
  - Identification of the nonfinancial benefits of VFHS
  - Identifying the critical decisions and the probable impacts of the most likely alternatives

### Deliverable:

- 20 hours consulting to support feasibility analysis; report

### Assumptions

- Resource Data will not interview individual stakeholders as part of information gathering, except the City Clerk.
- Palmer staff will be able to quickly respond to our questions for follow up information. Delays will impact the project schedule.
- Palmer will provide all needed financial information related to the cost of running an election under the current model. This will be broken out into an appropriate level of detail.
- Palmer will provide information on what is required to continue to run traditional polling location elections.

## Estimated Schedule and Cost

Work will proceed on a time and materials basis with a not-to-exceed limit set forth in the table below. We will contact you promptly should we anticipate any task overruns or changes in scope so that you may choose to have us stop work at that point, authorize additional funding to allow completion, or adjust the remaining scope in order to reach a good stopping point prior to budget depletion.

Additionally, we offer our clients continuous access to our business system (i.e., timesheets, costs, issue tracking), which helps to eliminate scope, cost, and schedule surprises.

*Table 1: Cost*

Name	Resource Data Title	Hourly Rate	Hours	Estimated Cost
Dennis Wheeler	Sr. Project Manager/Sr. Analyst	\$150	20	\$3,000.00

We are committed to the success of this project and look forward to working with you. Please contact me with any questions at (907) 770-4163 or via email at [dianet@resourcedata.com](mailto:dianet@resourcedata.com).

Sincerely,

Diane Thompson  
*Anchorage Branch Manager*  
**Resource Data**

## Case Study



To protect the integrity of the election process, Vote by Mail (also known as Vote from Home) systems must electronically verify voter eligibility and be auditable, secure, and transparent.

Resource Data is experienced at assisting election officials throughout the entire process of implementing Vote by Mail.

### At a Glance

The Municipality of Anchorage's Vote by Mail system successfully verified and counted a record-breaking 79,295 ballots its inaugural election with a 99.87% acceptance rate. Since spring of 2018, the Municipality has successfully conducted 4 Vote by Mail elections.

### Traditional Election Challenges

For decades, Anchorage Municipal Elections suffered from low voter turnout. Historically, Anchorage conducted traditional poll-based elections, with more than 120 polling locations. To increase public engagement and voter turnout and decrease the administrative burden of hiring, training, and monitoring hundreds of temporary election workers, the Municipality began exploring alternative voting options.

### Transitioning to Vote by Mail

Resource Data played an instrumental role in the Municipality's project to replace poll-based voting with a Vote by Mail system. Our roles included

- Conducting extensive research on electronic voting systems
- Defining equipment and software requirements to print, mail, sort, verify, and tabulate ballots

- Writing RFPs and providing technical support in vendor selection and management
- Conducting community outreach
- Updating Municipal Code
- Developing plans and documents for procedures, training, reporting, and more
- Assisting with the acquisition of a secure space to administer elections, including lease negotiations
- Training a Vote by Mail workforce
- Presenting to and supporting Assembly and City Council meetings and working sessions
- Onsite support during elections
- Emergency planning for disasters

### Supporting Technology

In addition to providing project management throughout the project, we also developed supporting systems and applications including

- Database tools to support the call center and Accessible Vote Centers
- Signature verification software widgets to capture, format, and rotate signatures from poll books and other sources
- Geographic information systems (GIS) enhancements to match voter residence addresses for correct ballot distribution



# Services



## Software Solutions

Technology is changing the way organizations run today, but every operation is unique. Our goal is to implement the right solution based on our clients' needs.

- Custom development
- Commercial implementation
- System modernization
- System integration
- UI/UX



## Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

GIS and geospatial thinking are increasingly integrated into business operations and planning. We implement powerful mapping and spatial data analytic solutions.

- Design and implementation
- Spatial analysis
- Data management
- Maps
- Custom applications



## Data Analysis & Management

Sound data analysis and management help organizations explore their data in meaningful ways and understand the problems, solutions, and decisions facing their organizations.

- Database design & development
- Reporting and business intelligence
- Data management services
- Data warehousing



## IT Business Consulting

The rise of automation is turning many business processes digital. We provide IT consulting in every stage of the development cycle.

- Certified project management
- Business analysis
- Quality assurance
- Strategic planning
- Organizational change management



## Systems Engineering

We help navigate the ever-growing options for infrastructure and implement the highest standards, practices, and systems for cyber security, cloud computing, and more.

**33**

Years in Business

**5000+**

Projects Completed

**600+**

Clients Supported

Government  
Logistics & Transportation  
Consumer  
Manufacturing  
Natural Resources  
Oil, Gas, Mining  
Native Organizations  
Utilities

**200+**

Employees

**5**

Locations

Anchorage, AK  
Juneau, AK  
Boise, ID  
Houston, TX  
Portland, OR

**24**

Employee Owners

**\$26.7 Million**

Revenue

