



**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA**

Online & 2 Lincoln St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Monday April 3, 2023
7:00 PM

E-mail: admin@essexjunction.org

www.essexjunction.org

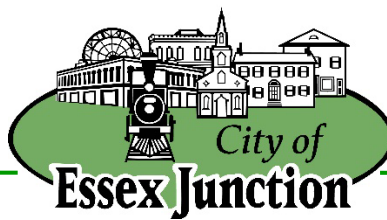
Phone: (802) 878-6944

This meeting will be in-person at 2 Lincoln Street and available remotely. Options to watch or join the meeting remotely:

- **JOIN ONLINE:** [Join Zoom Meeting](#)
- **JOIN CALLING:** (toll free audio only): (888) 788-0099 | Meeting ID: 944 6429 7825; Passcode: 635787

1. **CALL TO ORDER** [7:00 PM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
 - a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda
5. **PUBLIC HEARING**
 - a. Public Hearing on the IT RFP Bid Protest
6. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Deliberative session to discuss the IT RFP Bid Protest
7. **CONSENT ITEMS** - none
8. **READING FILE** - none
9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION** - none
10. **ADJOURN**

Members of the public are encouraged to speak during the Public to Be Heard agenda item, during a Public Hearing, or, when recognized by the President, during consideration of a specific agenda item. The public will not be permitted to participate when a motion is being discussed except when specifically requested by the President. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings of the City Council, like all programs and activities of the City of Essex Junction, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the City Manager's office at 802-878-6944 TTY: 7-1-1 or (800) 253-0191.



MEMORANDUM

To: Essex Junction City Council
From: Regina Mahony, City Manager
Meeting Date: April 3, 2023
Subject: Deliberative session for IT RFP Bid Protest

Issue

The issue is whether the City Council will enter deliberative session to discuss the IT RFP Bid Protest.

Discussion

On March 9, 2023, I received a protest of the IT services contract from simpleroute. I responded to that on March 17, 2023. On March 20, 2023, simpleroute submitted an appeal of the same to the Council. This submittal is attached to this memo. A hearing will be held on April 3, 2023.

To have a complete and thorough discussion about this topic, a deliberative session may be necessary.

Recommendation

If the City Council wishes to enter executive session, the following motions are recommended:

“I move that the City Council enter into deliberative session to discuss the IT contract award appeal, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §312(e) & (f) to include the City Council and City Attorney.”

Andrew Brown
City Council President
City of Essex Junction, Vermont
2 Lincoln Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452

Dear Council President Brown,

I am writing to appeal the City's recent decision to award in favor of Open Approach's bid with respect to its IT RFP. My firm believes the City to be in violation of its own Purchasing Policy with respect to the currently planned award and requests a formal review by the City Councilors. Specifically, we ask the City Council to review the RFP, the finalist responses, provided respondent references, and the criteria to determine whether the City Manager's selection is in line with the Purchasing Policy guidelines adopted by the Trustees and make a final determination with respect to the RFP award.

As a firm responding to the RFP, the award feels to have been a forgone conclusion. We personally had the opportunity to speak with City Manager Mahony when we were invited to tour each of the departments and offices. In the interaction, I thanked her for both her time and that of her staff and noted that I knew RFPs were a very involved process. I was surprised by a comment the City Manager made in her passing response as she noted she didn't see why the process was necessary given a vendor existed at the Water Department but noted that Wendy had started the process. Both our Director of Business Development and I were concerned by the comment.

A few weeks later when we were chosen as a finalist and asked to present, we were further surprised that the City Manager arrived approximately 10-minutes late to our presentation. Staff noted they were instructed by the City Manager to continue in her absence.

Alone, neither issue is compelling enough to question the award. The justification for the appeal can be found tucked within the reading file in the March 8th City Council meeting whereby City Manager Mahony noted the below [our emphasis added]:

*While **Open Approach's cost proposal was the highest**, it was presented as a worst-case scenario with the intent to do a more thorough review of needs once the migration work is started.*

The selection of a vendor with the highest cost proposal is highly unusual in an RFP award. Generally, the lowest bidder or two are considered and if they are close it's ranked amongst the criteria set forth in the RFP for firm comparison. There is precedence for this set within the Purchasing Policy. In the Affirmative Action and Local Preference section on page 3, a 5% margin is noted as permissible for selecting a vendor based on preference other than pricing:

The Town/Village may exercise a preference for local businesses (located in the Town of Essex) for purchases funded exclusively by the Town or Village if the local manufacturer's or vendor's bid is within 5% of the lowest bid.

In response to our protest filed with City Manager Mahony, we received a redacted copy of the Open Approach response. To add fuel to our concerns, the entire section on all pricing was removed from the proposal. While City Manager Mahony noted this section was marked confidential, it's a fact that services rendered to the City are a matter of public record. The omission of this section (even if labelled confidential) adds additional cause for concern with respect to the lack of transparency it provides.

From what we were permitted to see with respect to the chosen bid response, the admission that nearly all the City IT infrastructure was to be replaced – even if viable to run, stood out. Specifically, the redacted bid notes under section 4.10.1:

Open Approach has elected to provide these estimated/budgetary costs in a manner that would capture project services and work that would include replacement of the majority of core equipment (firewalls, network switches, wireless access points, etc.) We chose this path as a result of identifying numerous different hardware manufacturers (including different make/models) that had varying age differences (some obsolete/end-of-life, some currently identified by the current town IT department as undersized, and in some instances such as the Fire Department, non-existent).

While there were some devices in the infrastructure that were candidates for upgrade, the vast majority of them were current. This was further evident as City Manager Mahony sent a direct email within the RFP process to me asking if we would support a new firewall [see Sophos Email enclosed]:

Therefore, because of our need to upgrade the firewall now, I wanted to reach out to ensure that you'd be able to support the Sophos firewall? We already have some in the City with licenses that last a couple of more years. We'd expect that whichever vendor we choose would support these systems at least until the licenses expire.

The best use of taxpayer money is to run the current assets through their natural end of life. We noted that this is our preferred method for replacement. However, complete replacement of assets across the City is unnecessary and was not asked for in the RFP. Awarding to a bid that intends to do this goes against the Purchasing Policy's purpose as copied below and acts against the best interest of taxpayers:

*The purpose of this Purchasing Policy is to obtain the highest quality goods and services for the Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction **at the lowest possible price, to exercise financial control over the purchasing process, to promote efficiency in the procurement process, to assure realization of the principles of competitive purchasing, to clearly define authority for the purchasing function, to allow equitable opportunity among qualified suppliers, and to provide for increased public confidence in the procedures followed in public purchasing.***

The IT Request for Proposal provided a common framework for service and migration services. By their very nature, all bids are "worst case" scenario bids – the set of requested services has to be provided within the costs and answers provided under each responder's RFP response. City Manager Mahony's assertions and repetition of Open Approach's claim that their bid is a "worst case" are irrelevant with respect to comparing RFP responses and RFP responder costs. Furthermore, if a service that Open Approach was suggesting was to be considered, these should have been provided to the other two finalists to respond with equivalent pricing in the second round of response.

This process was clearly understood as during it, my firm identified one potential path to split the Town/City infrastructure that could act to save money. We put forth the question to the Town IT Manager with respect to

whether they would be open to this alternate path. While the Town IT Manager ultimately cited concerns given risk that could exist if the process was not done properly, our questions on this matter and their subsequent answers were sent to all RFP respondents. Our firm was the only one to provide an option with respect to process in this regard. If the City Manager or staff felt additional items should be included in scope, the process for adding these should have been done universally for all respondents to add. My firm also provided a price for doing a full migration should this route not be agreeable with the Town.

Ultimately, my firm is uniquely qualified as the only firm that located the vulnerabilities in NEMRC that put City taxpayer bank information at risk and City employee social security information in plaintext for all across the Town/City to see including members of the public coming in to review land records. Our approach to the project was designed to keep project costs down and serve the City's best interest balanced with the cost to taxpayers with respect to the upcoming split from the Town. We fight strongly for our clients and their needs and work tirelessly to ensure we're constantly improving their services as well as our own. Our services are comprehensive, unlike many local providers, with respect to on-site vCIO services, on-site coverage and helping guide customer direction to match their budgets and needs. For all these reasons, and for the benefit of City residents, we ask the City Council to review this matter and ensure the award is within the purchasing policy guidelines.

We appreciate the Council's attention to this matter and welcome further discussion with respect to our appeal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brett Johnson", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Brett Johnson
President, simpleroute
March 30, 2023

Regina Mahony
City Manager
City of Essex Junction, Vermont
2 Lincoln Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452

Dear City Manager Mahony,

As the Unified Manager, please accept this letter as our official notice that we are protesting the award of the IT services contract as outlined within your memorandum provided to the City Council on March 8th, 2023. Reviewing the memorandum and supplemental documents provided as part of the public report, my firm believes the City to be in violation of its own Purchasing Policy with respect to this decision and requests a formal review of the award. If our beliefs are confirmed, we subsequently request the City re-award the service contract in alignment with the City Purchasing Policy.

Specifically, you will find the following Purpose of this policy outlined on page 3 as adopted previously by the Trustees [our emphasis added]:

*The purpose of this Purchasing Policy is to obtain the highest quality goods and services for the Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction **at the lowest possible price**, to exercise financial control over the purchasing process, to promote efficiency in the procurement process, to assure realization of the principles of competitive purchasing, to clearly define authority for the purchasing function, to allow equitable opportunity among qualified suppliers, and to provide for increased public confidence in the procedures followed in public purchasing.*

In line with this desire to obtain the highest quality goods and services at the lowest possible price, the Affirmative Action and Local Preference section on page 3 states:

The Town/Village may exercise a preference for local businesses (located in the Town of Essex) for purchases funded exclusively by the Town or Village if the local manufacturer's or vendor's bid is within 5% of the lowest bid.

However, in your public memorandum provided to the City Council last night, you noted the following [emphasis added]:

*While **Open Approach's cost proposal was the highest**, it was presented as a worst-case scenario with the intent to do a more thorough review of needs once the migration work is started.*

The IT Request for Proposal provided a common framework for service and migration services on a set term. Despite commonly defined parameters, the public acknowledgement that the award will go to the highest priced proposal goes against the foundational principles of the Purchasing Policy. In addition, the financial information in the City Council provided packet shows this award goes against the notion that the City would try to keep winning bids within 5% of lower bidders when exercising local preference. The idea that Open Approach's response was a worst case is irrelevant as all respondents were provided and asked for a response on the same outlined boundaries to arrive at comparable costs. The memorandum statement undermines the Purchasing Policy and may, in turn, undermine public confidence in the RFP process itself.

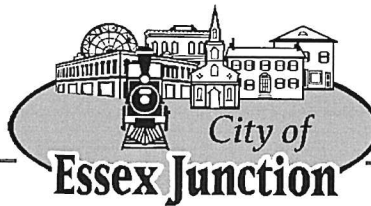
In your notice of rejection to us previously, you stated that, "[i]t was a very difficult decision with a field of highly qualified vendors." My firm is indeed amongst this field of qualified vendors as the only Managed Service Provider to uncover vulnerabilities in NEMRC four years ago that were present for nearly a decade before we entered the municipal market – something missed by all other respondents. With a significantly lower technical staff to client ratio than other local service providers, we are also confident our ability to service the City of Essex Junction is unrivaled. Most importantly though, the award to the highest priced bid and subsequent instruction to allow a more defined scope of work do not instill confidence in the RFP process nor does it service the taxpayer interest of keeping costs down at a time where tax rates are under significant scrutiny.

Therefore, we publicly object to the award and request a form review of the matter per the outlined procedures within the City Purchasing Policy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brett Johnson", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Brett Johnson
President, simplerule
March 9, 2023



March 17, 2023

Brett Johnson
President, simpleroute
1690 Williston Road
South Burlington, VT 05403

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I am writing in response to the bid protest submitted on March 9, 2023.

The Bid Protest section of the Town of Essex/Village of Essex Junction Purchasing Policy is a process associated with the Sealed Bid Process. The IT consultant RFP process falls under the exceptions to a sealed bid process. Nonetheless, I have no issue with providing you further information about this process.

Under this process "If time does not permit the use of sealed bids, or the award will be made on the basis of non-price related factors, a competitive proposal process shall be initiated by the issuance of a Request for Bids (RFB) or Request for Qualifications (RFQ) prepared by the Unified Manager or designee that includes the factors that will be used to evaluate and compare the proposals". This award is made on the basis of non-price related factors, and the Request for Proposals included the Evaluation and Criteria in Section 5 of the RFP:

A selection committee will conduct an evaluation of qualifications and will rate each submittal based on the following criteria:

1. Experience
2. Understanding of services to be provided
3. Personnel expertise
4. Compatibility with end users
5. Project approach
6. Satisfaction of clients/end users
7. Cost

Therefore, while cost is a criterion it isn't the only factor. With all criteria considered Open Approach had the highest total score; and ranked highest among the majority of the review committee members.

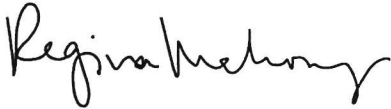
Further, under the exceptions to a sealed bid process, "If professional services, such as, but not limited to, architectural, engineering or legal services, are being solicited, this process should be used with the most qualified firm for the project or individual awarded the bid, and price or fees negotiated after the award." IT management is a professional service and therefore this process was followed.

Furthermore, under the exceptions to a sealed bid process, "If competitive proposals are used, all of the above steps in the sealed bid process should be followed except that: 1) the bid submission need not be sealed; and 2) prices will not be the primary factor in the proposal selection." Again, price was not the primary factor in the proposal selection.

Having said that, price is certainly an important factor as described in the purpose statement of the Purchasing Policy and not disregarded. The price and fees are still being negotiated as is the process established in the purchasing policy; and once finalized will be brought to the Council for contract authorization.

You've also asked for a copy of the winning proposal. I've attached the non-confidential components of the proposal.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Regina Mahony". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Regina Mahony

City Manager

Cc City Council



Final Proposal

Open Approach, Inc.
1 Mill Street, Suite 365
Burlington, VT 05401
802 242 4050

January 27, 2023

City Of Essex Junction
2 Lincoln Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452

City of Essex Junction,

Thank you for taking the time to review our preliminary proposal and selecting Open Approach as a participant for the interview process. It was a pleasure meeting the selection committee. We appreciated the open dialogue, learning the city's concerns, answering the committee's questions, and we hope the participants have a good understanding of who we are as a company and how we do business.

As a result of our interview discussions, and the supplemental information attachments received on January 24th, 2023, we are presenting a few updates/observations to our original preliminary proposal.

1. We have updated the computer and user numbers in this final proposal to reflect the updated numbers in the tech inventory received on January 24th, 2023. Our preliminary proposal reflected IT management of 90 workstations and 90 users and has now been updated to 93 workstations and 93 users. These updated counts also warranted updates to the number of Microsoft Office 365 Business Premium Licenses and our Enhanced Security Bundle of services.
2. Our initial, high-level, preliminary design found in the Estimated/Budgetary Migration Services section of our preliminary proposal, was reflective of building out a new domain controller (new server). This follows suit with the advice from the cyber security expert that provided an opinion to the City of Essex on the matter as it related to a suggestion by another vendor of splitting the domain. Open Approach had no intention of splitting the domain for the same reasons as identified by the expert (mitigation of risk).



3. Keeper Security was mentioned during our interview as a solution being used by some City of Essex staff. Open Approach is a business partner with Keeper Security and is used as our corporate password vaulting solution for clients that are looking to centralize and secure credential uses in a business environment. More information about this solution can be found in the Corporate Password Vaulting (Keeper Security – Enterprise) section of our Enhanced Security Bundle Addendum provided with our original proposal. This solution is not specifically quoted within this proposal, but Open Approach can provide a more in-depth review of how Keeper Security can be deployed for all the City of Essex staff if so desired. At a minimum, Open Approach is qualified to assist with the management of existing services being provided by Keeper Security.
4. Security awareness training was also a topic mentioned during our interview. We feel this training will be important to help city employees identify and prevent cyber threats such as phishing scams and malware. This service can help protect the city's sensitive information and systems, as well as prevent financial losses. We have included KnowBe4 security training in our Enhanced Security Bundle pricing.
5. Through our conversations with the committee there were numerous references to different platforms (i.e., Google & Office 365, etc.) and the benefits (which include economies of scale) in maintaining good standardization practices across all business units. Open Approach has always maintained that consistency and standardization follow industry best practices and is the most desirable way of positioning an organization's technology footprint. We also understand that not every business unit can maintain similar profiles or designs and we embrace the opportunity to work with our clients in building out the most sensible, purpose-built designs.

Open Approach is a full-service Managed Services Provider (MSP) located in Burlington, VT. Incorporated in 2002, we have been successfully providing Managed IT services for a diverse set of clients, including but not limited to municipal governments, healthcare, financial, insurance, industrial/manufacturing, retail, etc. With a team that includes engineers, help-desk personnel, administration, account managers, project managers, business development, etc., we believe that our team is a well-seasoned, experienced IT support company.

One of many key differentiators of our organization from other MSP's is our guiding principle of not locking clients into long-term, painful contracts. We truly want clients to maintain a long-term relationship with us because of value and not because of lengthy contract terms, which is why our agreements purposefully do not include any extended commitments. Simply put, if a client cannot sense the value we provide, then it should not be difficult for either party to disengage with ease.



We believe that we are well qualified to respond to this RFP as we have been providing IT services for a multitude of Vermont municipalities for many years and, as such, believe that our organization would be a very suitable consideration for partnering with the City of Essex for long-term IT needs. In addition, our firm has supported some of the more sophisticated network operations as it relates to IT infrastructure for the Essex Wastewater Treatment Facility and recently completed an entirely new (and currently managed) cellular-based Wide Area Network (WAN) for its SCADA systems. Lastly, Open Approach understands the needs laid out in this request for proposal and can confidently provide the solutions and services the city will need.

Open Approach has prepared this final proposal to meet the expectations of the RFP (as identified on page 1 of the RFP). This proposal includes cost estimates of a wholly "normalized" managed IT environment which is reflective of an anticipated network re-design that must occur to adequately segregate operations, systems, services, etc., away from its current IT integration with the Town of Essex.

The period from February 15, 2023, through May 31, 2023, will more accurately define the scope of services (and related solutions/costs) required to successfully achieve the independence of the city's IT operations. It should be noted that Open Approach does not sell, install, or maintain printers. We will, however, provide network support for printer installation and use.

As previously mentioned, I will be the primary point of contact for this final proposal, and my information is listed below. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. Thank you and your team in advance for reviewing our response to your RFP, and we wish you well with this process.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Burlison".

Scott Burlison
Technical Account Manager & Sr. Network Engineer
802 242 4050 x7013
sburlison@openapproach.com



4.1 Letter of Transmittal

4.1.1 Company name, address, and telephone number(s)

- Open Approach, Inc.
1 Mill Street, Suite 365
Burlington, VT 05401
802 242 4050

4.1.2 Name, title, address, e-mail address, and telephone number of the person or persons to contact who are authorized to represent the firm and to whom correspondence should be directed.

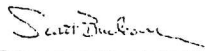
- Scott Burleson
Technical Account Manager & Sr. Network Engineer
802 242 4050 x7013
sburleson@openapproach.com

4.1.3 Briefly state your understanding of the services to be performed and make a positive commitment to provide the services as specified.

- Please see the cover letter of this proposal. In addition, and as specified in Section (3) and all sub-sections (3.1 through 3.10) of this RFP, Open Approach is fully qualified and capable of providing support and services to each core area as specifically identified.

4.1.4 The letter must be signed by a corporate officer or other individual who is legally authorized to bind the applicant to both its proposal and cost schedule.

- Scott Burleson
Authorized Representative (Print Name)



Authorized Signature

1/27/2023

Date

4.1.5 Statement which indicates proposal and cost schedule shall be valid and binding for ninety (90) days following the proposal due date and will become part of the agreement that is negotiated.

- Please refer to the end of this proposal for an estimated cost proposal of normalized IT Managed Services.



4.3 Positioning & Experience

4.3.1 Describe how your firm is positioned to provide either a set of services or all the services listed above. Provide a history of experience on providing similar services.

- Open Approach can support all service requirements noted in this RFP.

Open Approach is a qualified, full-service, Managed Services Provider (MSP) and has provided managed IT services to its clients since 2002. We have been successfully providing Managed IT services for a diverse set of clients, including but not limited to municipal governments, healthcare, financial, insurance, industrial/manufacturing, law, retail, etc. With a team of 26, which includes engineers, help-desk personnel, security operations, administration, account managers, project managers, and business development, we are a well-seasoned, experienced IT support company. Our comprehensive services include network, software (including NEMRC) and server management, backup and restore, cloud services, cybersecurity, help-desk support, life-cycle planning, strategic planning, and VoIP (voice-over-IP).

Open Approach is currently providing IT services for several Vermont municipalities. Specifically, Open Approach provides intricate and complex IT support for the City of Essex Wastewater Treatment Facility's SCADA network and has been doing so since 2017.

General case studies and client testimonials regarding Open Approach are available at <https://www.openapproach.com/working-with-us/case-studies/>.

4.3.2 Describe security steps your firm takes that would differentiate it from competitors.

- A guiding principle at Open Approach is to partner closely with clients, acting as a member of their organization and with the organization's best interests always in mind. While doing this, there is a need to update each client on the trends within the industry that are impacting all businesses on the IT front.

One important recent trend is a drastic increase in the number of cybersecurity concerns for companies of all sizes and industries. In the past few years, we have seen and assisted many companies offering their employees a chance to work remotely from home (WFH) instead of

full-time in the office. This offering is here to stay as companies implement and perfect their WFH policies and procedures. This increased WFH presence has been accompanied by an exponential increase in cybersecurity incidents and risks. Cybersecurity experts predict that this trend will continue and that it will be accompanied by insurance companies increasing their oversight and regulatory requirements for policies or claims. Another important trend is that the nature of cybersecurity attacks is changing. Attackers are not making their presence immediately known once they've compromised a network, account, or computer. Instead, they observe the account activity and decide on the most effective method of monetizing their



access. This attack approach is common regardless of company size and is increasingly being seen in small to medium-sized businesses.

To combat these trends, Open Approach's security and engineering teams continually evaluate industry-standard security solutions, features, configurations, and security practices. Often, responses to emerging security threats come with unanticipated costs. We work to manage and control costs, generally 'bundling' new and necessary expenses into annual updates that can be evaluated on a client-by-client basis. With each of these comes the unplanned cost for MSPs and clients alike. As a result, our enhanced security bundle offerings will be reviewed annually (at least) to ensure that, as an IT partner, we are reacting to the continued trends. It is our intention to clearly separate our standard MSP costs from those that are offered through these bundles as a result of the ever-changing cybersecurity landscape.

4.4 Approach & Methodology

4.4 Describe your approach to providing these services and your methodology for providing ongoing support, including how Help Desk Support is provided and tracked by the customer, time spent on-site, if on-site support includes proactive maintenance, and if remote support is available.

- At Open Approach, we start by building relationships, and we work as partners invested in your success. We get to know you and your business and understand your needs and goals – today and five years from now. We continually evaluate and assess your systems for security, ease of use, reliability, and effectiveness. We collaborate with you to build an action plan. Finally, we choose sensible, industry-proven technologies to create a holistic & responsive solution that works today and into the future.

Traditionally, our support model works best with at least (1) core point of contact that can be the source of coordination and general communication with other staff, as necessary. Individuals are always invited to reach out to us directly – the site contact simply allows for a degree of cohesiveness that spans across the organization. When you do need support, you'll talk to a person who can solve your problem. Clients contact Open Approach via telephone or our support email system. Open Approach uses a system called ConnectWise Manage to manage support tickets and maintain asset information. Our team will create a support ticket from the call, or in the case of email, the ticket is automated within our support system. The

end-user can track the ticket. The support team member will then return the call or email. Most support issues are resolved with a remote session, but Open Approach will make on-site support visits if required in major production-stopping events. When the issue is resolved, the end-user is provided a "SmileBack" CSAT (Customer Satisfaction Survey). The CSAT information is then filtered to our Account Management team, and we take this information very seriously. If



we have a support experience that is negative in any manner, we formalize a follow-up with the end user and/or Point of Contact to get additional details on how the support case was handled.

A dedicated Account Manager will be assigned to your account. Our Account Managers are fully engaged with our support staff. Account managers and support staff have regular and open dialogue on support issues. Account managers are always accessible and can be reached directly whenever a client feels it necessary. Typically, escalation is not required as our support staff is experienced in moving a support issue in the direction required.

In addition, our clients (typically our main point of contact) will have access to our internal support ticketing system to monitor the status of support tickets (to get the details such as progress, time spent, etc.).

4.4.1 Describe the process of providing services, including a schedule and budget

- Open Approach includes several methods that a client can use to establish service requests (whether it be sales, support, consulting, strategic planning & project management, etc.). Typically, most all non-support related requests would typically be directed toward a client's dedicated Account Manager (either by phone or by email). All support requests are usually directed to Open Approach either by email or by telephone. In addition to this, one of the core services provided (that does not necessarily require intervention or contact with the client) is proactive management and monitoring of systems. Open Approach has regimented internal processes for both manual and automated methods of proactive management, which includes patching/updating all systems.



4.4.2 Describe your approach to providing installation, configuration management, patching, monitoring, and ongoing maintenance for network devices.

- Open Approach has instituted multiple layers of proactive “behind-the-scenes” tools and solutions for accomplishing the typical expectations of a properly managed IT network of systems. We continually monitor, evaluate, and act on a number of levels as it relates to the respective needs of our client’s systems, and this continues to happen 24x7x365.

We work closely with our clients to ensure that our installation, configuration management, and patching/updating processes are completed in maintenance windows (timeframes) that are the least disruptive to our clients. Tasks that cannot be performed within pre-established timeframes are specifically coordinated with notice and involvement of our clients so that everyone is as prepared as possible.

Open Approach uses several automated tools and solutions (as well as manual processes) to service our clients. They include but are not limited to our RMM (Remote Monitoring & Management agent software) software for remote access in providing support to end-user systems, systems patch management, monitoring of critical systems components and services, etc. We also have toolsets to monitor and manage specific types of network equipment (firewalls, switches, etc.), backups, etc.

4.4.3 Define standard service hours during regular business hours, weekends, and holidays. Any applicable Service Level Agreement (SLA) for response time options should be included.

- Our standard support help desk is staffed and ready between the hours of 7:30 am – 5:00 pm EST. If there is a support need outside of our standard business, we offer an option to have our team paged in the event of an emergency. Our standard support help desk during standard business hours is fully staffed. Outside of standard support hours (including holidays, weekends, etc.), we assign (1) Help Desk and (1) Engineer for on-call emergency needs. For SLA purposes – please see our Service Agreement below.



4.4.4. Describe services included by the vendor and clearly state if services are inclusive if change requests are permitted and how changes in service are accounted for.

- The following services and agreements are included in our standard Managed Services offering:
 - All standard workstation, server, and network device support services
 - End-Point Detection & Response (EDR) Anti-virus agent
 - Local and offsite/cloud backup of servers
 - Update and patch management
 - Installation of support agents and continual monitoring
 - Proofpoint e-mail security & spam filter
 - Warranty management—warranty issues resolved with vendor
 - Standard switch, firewall, and wireless access point monitoring
 - Service Agreement
 - All-inclusive coverage Monday to Friday 7:30am through 5:00pm
 - All standard administrative services
 - Help desk support
 - Standard application support (Office, PDF viewers, browsers, etc.)
 - Line of business application interface – including working with other vendors to help resolve issues in their products
 - Best effort basis for non-emergency service calls, with a goal to answer calls quickly and with fully qualified technicians. If we are paged for critical issues our SLA includes a 30 minute response time and for normal/standard issues our SLA may take up to 4 hours for a response however most are addressed within minutes.
 - Next-day, on-site visits are available when a business-critical emergency is more quickly and easily resolved by being on-site
 - Business critical outages requiring on-site visits will not incur travel or hourly charges
 - Non-emergency on-site visits are available upon request
 - After-hours work will be invoiced based on the associated work type rate and may incur a premium on weekends or holidays
 - Client approval will be reviewed prior to billing for items not covered by Managed Services agreement
 - System reboots for patching, updates, and/or installations will be done primarily outside of business hours
 - Systems are monitored continuously



- Other Considerations
 - Business strategy and budget review sessions will occur regularly
 - Hardware, software deployments and other managed items will be standardized over time
 - Manufacturer warranties and maintenance subscriptions for all critical systems will be maintained

- Additional Enhanced Security Services Bundle - For more details, please see attached Open Approach Enhanced Security Bundle addendum provided with this response.

- Office 365 Enhanced Security
 - Add-On Restriction & Management
 - Alerting & Monitoring of Risk Detection
 - Guest Access and External Sharing Management
 - Single Sign-On (SSO) for Cloud Based Applications\Websites
 - Multi-Factor Authentication using Microsoft Authenticator or Duo (Duo licensing required)
 - Enhanced Backups of Office 365 Resources

- Enhanced Firewall Security:
 - SIEM/SOC Firewall Service
 - Intrusion Prevention
 - Reputation Filtering
 - Gateway Anti-Virus
 - Geolocation
 - Multi-Factor Authentication using Microsoft Authenticator or Duo (Duo licensing required)

- Web Content Filtering & Protection:
 - Corporate network web filtering
 - Remote workstation web filtering

- Identity Monitoring

- Cybersecurity Awareness Training & Email Phishing Tests with "KnowBe4"

- Privileged Access Management (Application AllowListing & Elevation Control) with "ThreatLocker"

- Corporate Password Vaulting: Keeper Security (Enterprise)

- Enhanced vCIO & vCISO Consultation\Professional Services

Please note: Project work is not included in our Managed Service offering.



4.6 Staff Resources

Identify names of principals and key personnel who will actually provide the information technology services. Summarize the technological expertise of these staff. Describe the role and responsibilities that each of these individuals will have. Resume/s of the primary individual(s) who will be responsible for the City of Essex Junction account is required.

- Please visit <https://www.openapproach.com/about/team/>
- Resumes are considered confidential, but if Open Approach is selected for the interview phase of this RFP, we are open to discussion.

4.7 Nonperformance

If your company has had a contract terminated for default during the past five years, all such incidents must be described. Termination for default is defined as notice to stop performance due to the vendor's nonperformance or poor performance, and the issue was either (a) not litigated or (b) litigated, and such litigation determined the vendor to be in default. If a default occurred, list the complete name, address, and telephone number of the party.

- Open Approach has not had any clients terminate due to our nonperformance or poor performance.

4.8 Other Services

Beyond the scope of this RFP, what services (related or otherwise) does your organization provide that may be of interest?

- Some core services that may not fall under traditional MSP offerings include full telecommunications (unified communications) solutions, assistance with video surveillance systems integration, managed security services, and Cybersecurity awareness training, enhanced Virtual CIO/CISO consulting.



Open Approach is not limited to a standard MSP offering. If a client needs IT-related support outside our current solution sets & products, we will work to develop a partnership with a company that can mutually assist. We have found that this takes the burden off our clients to act as a translator between suppliers and ultimately makes for a smoother transition in whatever area is required.

4.9 Summary

Summarize your proposal and your firm's qualifications. Additionally, you may articulate why your firm is pursuing this work and how it is uniquely qualified to perform it. Include other pertinent information that may help the City of Essex Junction determine your overall qualifications. Your proposal summary is not to exceed three pages.

- In summary, Open Approach is a well-seasoned and qualified MSP that can successfully provide holistic IT services to the City of Essex and its individual facilities/business units/departments. We have a proven track record of successfully managing other municipalities and have done so for many years – all under the core line-of-business solution “NEMRC”.

There are thousands of Managed Services Providers (MSP's), consultants, and general computer support companies all throughout the country. Generally speaking, most of these providers are offering similar types of services (although the level of competency, experience and responsiveness can vastly differ). Ultimately, even though the technology side of our offerings are critical, Open Approach has an equally intense focus on maintaining a mutually rewarding perpetual relationship with our clients and is a key differentiator from others in our industry.

In order to maintain this particular key differentiator, Open Approach continually monitors the successful foundation of our team which is the combination of individuals with successful backgrounds in both “tech” and “non-tech” industries to create a blended group that can deliver the ingenuity, innovation, and experience that our clients expect. Our staff, coupled with their instinctive nature of embracing compassion, empathy, and genuine concern when things are not going quite right for end users, is how we deliver an unparalleled experience for our clients. Frankly, it is what we expect of the partners that provide our business with their services.

Sure, the technical aspects of what a provider can offer are incredibly important, however we believe that since technology is so tightly woven not only into the operations but more importantly, the culture of most companies. . . it takes a bit more to get what a company needs from its IT experience. Successfully integrating technology within the fabric of any organization takes more than just pure technical expertise. It takes a blended team, such as ours, that is able



to collectively work in conjunction with your business and its staff to assist in the development and management of purpose-built solutions to support the success of its operations. Meeting or exceeding the goals of our clients is paramount, however, the process and resources it takes to get there should come from a collective team that has a balanced vision of what it takes.

We are not just an "IT" support company. We are a partner that starts out and then continues to evolve into an established extension of our client's operational/management teams with a goal of being as transparent and fluid as possible to seamlessly facilitate the success of our clients.

One of the unique challenges of this proposal is the nature in which other facilities may be entertained for centralized managed services as well as varying quantities of PC's/Users and varying manufacturer's equipment with no co-terminus maintenance/warranty dates. To circumvent this, Open Approach has made concerted efforts to develop a comprehensive and inclusive proposal with the hopes that it presents a wholesome understanding of where the City of Essex could be but with the ability for our firm to selectively alter/adjust which facilities are managed, how they would be managed, as well as what equipment could be re-purposed for continued use. Essentially, we are presenting a complete package of services and equipment with the ability to adjust if possible.

Lastly, as it relates to the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF), it is important to note that Open Approach recently completed a customized Wide Area Cellular Network design and implementation for the SCADA platform. Open Approach is currently managing "ONLY" this part of the WWTF network and does not currently include any other business equipment or services. Our firm did complete a campus-wide WWTF network infrastructure design and implementation a few years ago, which was to ultimately remediate issues with the stability and performance of the local network. With this institutional knowledge and assistance, Open Approach feels comfortable in fully managing the business network on the WWTF campus and has successfully worked with its SCADA systems and control providers for several years.



4.10 Cost of Services

4.10.1 The proposal must include a breakdown of costs to migrate IT services and provide managed IT services and support. A clear fee schedule that includes fixed-rate business hours support and hourly rates for additional services must be included.

- Open Approach is providing a very high level “ESTIMATED/BUDGETARY” cost structure for migration services (to successfully segregate the City of Essex IT network infrastructure from the Town of Essex IT network infrastructure). In addition, we are also providing an estimated cost structure for normalized IT management services that are based on this newly designed/implemented network infrastructure.

Open Approach has elected to provide these estimated/budgetary costs in a manner that would capture project services and work that would include the replacement of the majority of core equipment (firewalls, network switches, wireless access points, etc.). We chose this path as a result of identifying numerous different hardware manufacturers (including different make/models) that had varying age differences (some obsolete/end-of-life, some currently identified by the current town IT department as undersized, and in some instances such as the Fire Department, non-existent). In addition, given the time frame and inability to responsibly perform a deeper dive into each location’s hardware equipment (configurations, policies, subscription services, interconnectivity requirements, etc.), we have chosen to approach this proposal’s estimated/budgetary requests by providing the City of Essex with a worst-case scenario and to be inclusive of all facilities/business units “branches” which encompasses the Fire Department and Brownell Library.

Open Approach would like the City of Essex to consider that if selected as the MSP provider, we would anticipate spending a considerable number of consultative and engineering services to better and more accurately identify equipment and systems so that the city could maximize the remaining value of anything that could be retained going forward. This is a very difficult process to complete in the proposal phase and requires access/control over sensitive/secure core infrastructure systems. We want to emphasize that we will work closely with the City of Essex’s staff and representatives to best position its IT network infrastructure and would be accomplished through well-thought-out, sensible, and controlled implementation goals.

Throughout our research, discussions, and the support information provided by the City, we have identified varying quantities of actual users and computers/devices. As a result of this and for the purpose of moving forward with this proposal, Open Approach has decided to estimate the actual number of users and computers at 93. Once our management services begin for the City of Essex, we will be able to determine the actual quantities of each and adjust accordingly.



Note 3: The estimates above include users/devices for the Brownell Library and the Essex Fire Department for a comprehensive understanding of what a completely normalized Managed Services platform would look like with estimated costs. However, these (2) branches/business units, would require additional focus and customized attention in how they will be managed (including potential network re-design, end-user support expectations, etc.). The fire department is more straightforward as compared to the library simply because the library's current network infrastructure is a combination of multiple different service providers and designs, varying manufacturer's hardware and age, its current autonomous management, blended email and file storage, and its general public technology use. Open Approach will need to define better (or more accurately assess) how it can orient the library and fire department into a stable/manageable entity moving forward. However, for comparative analysis, if the City of Essex elected not to have the library under immediate IT management, then the estimates presented above could easily be decremented (firewall, workstations, etc.) by the respective number of users/computers/firewalls to derive an alternate management footprint.

4.10.2 Define any additional charges (e.g., travel expenses).

- Open Approach does assess travel charges (to/from corporate offices) in certain circumstances. Most all support services are typically provided in a remote capacity, and if there were major/critical system outages that are production stopping, Open Approach would not assess travel charges. However, if the City of Essex requests onsite support when it can be remotely provided, Open Approach may assess travel charges. In addition, most projects are quoted in a manner to address travel costs as well.

4.10.3 Outline all provisions, termination clauses, and/or penalties for closing or changing the amount of services as needed.

- Open Approach does not institute any form of termination clauses and/or penalties. Our goals and expectations are to demonstrate value to our clients and with the hopes that our clients would provide professional courtesy with advance notice of intent to cancel/terminate services (i.e., 60-days). Most of our services and licensing fees are provided on a month-to-month basis and not subject to any form of pro-ration mid-month, so any form of cancellation/termination would end on the last day of the month in which notice was given or scheduled.

Re: Slow Teams Performance Follow-up

Brett Johnson <bjohnson@simpleroute.com>

Wed 1/4/2023 06:30

To: Regina Mahony <RMahony@essexjunction.org>

Cc: Jess Morris <JMorris@essexjunction.org>; Wendy Hysko <wendyh@brownelllibrary.org>

Bcc: Tracie Spencer <tspencer@simpleroute.com>

Hi Regina,

I appreciate your taking the time to fill me in on the process - we're very excited to be considered in the three firms! I'm confident we have a lot to offer the City and look forward to getting to discuss more how we can help the City.

With respect to Sophos devices, we can certainly take over management of them if we were to assume management of the City IT. It's our standard practice to run out any licenses on such equipment and then at their natural renewal, review costs between further license renewal vs device replacement based on the costs associated with each option. The second most common device we encounter in taking over networks tend to be Sophos firewalls - we're very comfortable administering them and are prepared to assume stewardship of the devices used by the City.

Upgrading to a higher model Sophos would eliminate the current router being underpowered as a potential root cause to the noted Teams performance issues. The upgrade is merited as the current unit was sized at a time where remote work wasn't as much a factor. While I believe most disaster grant style funds were allocated a while ago, it's worth pointing out that there is at least a case to be made that this upgrade is in part related to the change in work from home.

In short, we take no issue with the upgrade and look forward to the next round. Please feel free to reach out if we can provide any assistance or you have questions as you navigate options.

Best,

Brett Johnson

President | simpleroute

Phone: 802.881.0010 x5001

Email: bjohnson@simpleroute.com

Address: 1690 Williston Road, South Burlington, VT 05403

From: Regina Mahony <RMahony@essexjunction.org>

Sent: Tuesday, January 3, 2023 17:01

To: Brett Johnson <bjohnson@simpleroute.com>

Cc: Jess Morris <JMorris@essexjunction.org>; Wendy Hysko <wendyh@brownelllibrary.org>

Subject: FW: Slow Teams Performance Follow-up

Caution: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hi Brett,

I appreciate you taking the time to share this idea with me. We are in a real need to get the speed of things improved here at the office (bigger issue than working from home on VPN). Therefore, we plan to upgrade the firewall now to a Sophos firewall.

If you haven't heard yet, you are 1 of 3 firms invited in for the next round of our IT service selection process. You should be hearing from Wendy soon, if you haven't already.

Therefore, because of our need to upgrade the firewall now, I wanted to reach out to ensure that you'd be able to support the Sophos firewall? We already have some in the City with licenses that last a couple of more years. We'd expect that whichever vendor we choose would support these systems at least until the licenses expire.

Let me know.

Thank you,

Regina Mahony

City Manager

City of Essex Junction

2 Lincoln Street

Essex Junction, VT 05452

rmahony@essexjunction.org

802-878-6944, ext. 1602

From: Brett Johnson <bjohnson@simpleroute.com>
Sent: Tuesday, November 8, 2022 11:25 AM
To: Regina Mahony <RMahony@essexjunction.org>
Subject: Slow Teams Performance Follow up

CAUTION: This email originated from **OUTSIDE** our organization. **STOP & CONSIDER** before responding, clicking on links, or opening attachments.

Hi Regina,

It was a pleasure to meet you last week; thank you for making the time to talk with us. I specifically wanted to reach out as you noted issues using Teams when working from home. I uncovered two potential root causes for this in the walkthrough that I wanted to share. Specifically, I believe one small configuration change on the router should make a marked difference in your Teams performance at home.

The router used in the basement is underpowered and in the longer term should be replaced. However, I would advise that wait until after the RFP process to ensure its replaced in alignment with other changes being made across the IT infrastructure. The more immediate change I'd advise has to do with how the VPN works with respect to users at home.

At present, when a user goes home, they connect to VPN to use work resources like the server. This VPN, per my conversation with Rob, is using what's known as an "all traffic tunnel." This means that if you want to also use Teams at home, your computer sends all its traffic for Teams to Essex, it's processed by the underpowered Essex router, and then goes back out to the Internet. This process will significantly slow down traffic for applications like Teams.

There is a way to do what's known as "split tunneling" on the router. Changing the current configuration to this will in effect allow your computer at home to still go to Essex for server data, but it will also let your computer go directly to the Internet for applications like Teams without the extra step of going through Essex. This in turn would mean much faster access to Teams and it would reduce the load on the internal router, buying some time until after the RFP process.

If it would help to discuss this either with you, Rob, or someone else, let me know as I'm happy to do so.

Thanks again for the tour - Tracie and I look forward to further discussions on the RFP!

Best,

Brett Johnson

President | [simpleroute](http://simpleroute.com)

Phone: 802.881.0010 x5001

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