

Staff Report

REQUEST TO OPEN HIRTA FACILITATION MEETINGS

December 9, 2014

BACKGROUND:

At the November 25, 2014, meeting, the City Council instructed City staff to inform the members of the ASSET Administrative Team of the Council's desire to have the HIRTA meetings open to the public, even though they are not required to be under the open meetings law.

In accordance with this directive, Assistant City Manager Melissa Mundt informed Story County's representative, Deb Schildroth, of the Council's support for open meetings. **After checking with other County officials, Deb notified Assistant City Manager Mundt that the County believes the meetings should remain closed.** It was explained that the County partnered with the City to fund the facilitation process with the understanding that in order to be effective, these discussions might involve conversations about specific cases or specific clients, which would not be appropriate for open meetings. In addition, it was made clear to the County that the facilitator, Nancy Franz, believes that "open meetings can prevent the collection of genuine, authentic, and useful data from target audiences resulting in products and solutions that fail to fully reach the intended goals." Therefore, she indicated she would decline any further involvement if the meetings were opened. Finally, it was emphasized that the County officials are supportive of the public input component that was included in the process that would allow the review of and input to the findings and recommendations derived from the meetings prior to being transmitted to the City Council and Story County Board of Supervisors.

CITY STAFF COMMENTS:

The response to the request for open meetings puts the City staff in a bit of a quandary. There was no direction given by the Council to the City staff if a negative response was forthcoming. **Should the City staff continue to attend the closed meetings?** It is staff's assumption that the Council believes it is very important for the City staff to participate in these discussions. Therefore, Assistant City Manager Mundt was directed to attend the second meeting on December 3, 2014, even though it was closed. **Council's direction regarding this issue is greatly appreciated since advocates for open meetings will be questioning staff's participation in any upcoming closed discussions.**

The third meeting is scheduled for December 18, with the public input session to follow thereafter.