



Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc.

Board of Directors

Public Meeting

~ Minutes ~

Friday, August 14, 2023

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1. **CALL TO ORDER:**

At 9:00am, Board Chairwoman Stacey Mitchell called the meeting to order.

The Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc. (“HFSC” and/or the “corporation”) board of directors (the “board”) convened this in-person meeting on Friday, August 14, 2023, in the City Hall Council Annex Chamber, 900 Bagby Street (public level), Houston, Texas 77002. In a manner permitted by the corporation’s bylaws, the meeting was called by providing all directors with notice of the date, time and purpose of the meeting at least three days before the scheduled date.

In accordance with Chapter 551 of the Texas Government Code (Texas Open Meetings Act) a notice of this meeting was posted on the bulletin board located on the exterior wall of the City Hall building at 901 Bagby Street on August 10, 2023.

2. **ROLL CALL:**

The following board members were present in-person:

Chairwoman Stacey Mitchell
Vice-Chairwoman Vanessa Goodwin
Anna Vasquez
Ellen Cohen
Vicki Huff
Tracy Calabrese

The following board member arrived late:

Lois Moore (<i>approximately 9:09am</i>)
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The following board positions are vacant:

Position 4
Position 8

Chairwoman Mitchell declared a quorum was present.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Chairwoman Mitchell invited members of the public to address the board and make public comments. No members of the public addressed the board.

4. **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PRIOR MEETING:**

Following a motion by Director Ellen Cohen and seconded by Director Vanessa Goodwin, the board unanimously approved the May 12, 2023, meeting minutes as presented.

5. **CHAIRWOMAN STACEY MITCHELL'S REPORT:**

The chairwoman began the report by reminding the board that only two regular board meetings remain in the 2023 calendar year: September 8, 2023, and November 17, 2023. In discussing the need for a quorum, she acknowledged that the regular board meeting for September was scheduled during the Labor Day Holiday weekend and asked members to review their calendars for availability. Chairwoman Mitchell commented on the possible need for a special board meeting if a quorum could not be guaranteed on September 8th. She went on to remind the board of the annual September meeting agenda item regarding approval of the corporation's annual objectives and goals. The Chairwoman also commented that Friday, September 15, 2023, would be a potential date for the meeting if a quorum could not be guaranteed for September 8, 2023. The Chairwoman highlighted the November regular meeting date, noting the second Friday of the month is a day on which HFSC will be closed due to its observance of Veterans Day. She reiterated the importance of the scheduled November 17, 2023, meeting as the designated time to hear the year-end review from Dr. Stout and conduct his performance evaluation. Chairwoman Mitchell urged board members to submit any questions or topics related to the corporation's performance this past year for Dr. Stout to address in his presentation.

Ending her comments, Chairwoman Mitchell provided an update to the board about a previous grant-funded DNA outsourcing contract the board approved during the January 2023 board meeting. The agreement was initially funded for \$1,108,934.00 by the FY2022 Bureau of Justice Assistance DNA Capacity Enhancement and Backlog Reduction federal grant, to test approximately 1,000 untested Sexual Assault Kit and non-Sexual Assault Kit cases over a five-to-six-month period. The Chairwoman informed the board that in recent months, funding of the project was increased to \$1,606,404.00 and required approval of an amended budget and agreement. Because the budget modification was a time sensitive matter, Chairwoman Mitchell approved the change, as the board has authorized for these matters. She noted the additional funding would allow for casework to be shipped to the vendor, Signature Science, starting in June 2023.

6. **CONSIDER APPROVAL OF AN AGREEMENT WITH QUISITIVE, LLC, FOR DELIVERABLES-BASED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES (DBITS):**

Chairwoman Mitchell introduced the item by noting the five-year agreement is between HFSC and the company formerly known as Catapult, LLC, a vendor who has provided services to HFSC for the last several years. Dr. Stout provided additional context, noting the vendor originally was hired by HFSC approximately five years ago, to assist with the external website and eventually the request portal as well as HFSC's e-discovery webpage. Dr. Stout highlighted the vendor's potential future role in helping the corporation work through the implications of S.B.991, the state discovery portal for criminal case records, as well as continuing to provide information technology services beyond the corporation's expertise.

Director Vicki Huff made a motion to approve the five-year agreement between the corporation and Quisitive LLC, (DIR-CPO-TMP-553), total contract value \$407,400.00. Vice Chair Vanessa Goodwin seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved the agreement. Upon the board's approval, Chairwoman Mitchell directed Dr. Stout to execute the agreement on the corporation's behalf.

7. **TREASURER AND CFO DAVID LEACH'S PRESENTATION REGARDING FISCAL YEAR 2023 YEAR-END-REVIEW, BUDGET REALLOCATIONS AND APPROVAL OF FISCAL YEAR 2024 REVISED BUDGET:**

Mr. Leach first provided a year-end summary of the corporation's financials for fiscal year 2023. He noted the budget overview from fiscal year 2022 as compared to fiscal year 2023, is almost identical by line item and the funding received remained almost the same, when grant funding is excluded. Mr. Leach highlighted the largest expenditure remains costs towards people at 72% followed by services at 22%, which includes grant-funded outsourcing, information technology services, and the building lease. In reviewing the corporation's spending by department, the largest expenditure among the forensic sections is in forensic biology at 19%, while the largest department overall is support services at 20%, which is a catchall for several administrative functions, including, human resources and legal.

Next, Mr. Leach discussed the need for approval of the final fiscal year 2023 budget reallocations. He began the review by highlighting the grants column of the budget, noting the 1.4 million dollars allotted is a number the corporation spends against throughout the year. Similarly, the corporation spent against funding provided through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), an award granted by the City of Houston. He went on to explain that the budget adjustments column showing the net numbers are the same. Mr. Leach reiterated the need to move line items around to avoid overspending in any specific area. The board did not discuss the proposed reallocations any further and Mr. Leach asked for approval to proceed as described.

Director Vanessa Goodwin made a motion to approve the fiscal year 2023 budget reallocations. Director Anna Vasquez seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved the reallocations.

Lastly, Mr. Leach presented the revised fiscal year 2024 budget, which reflects the actual budget approved by the City of Houston, City Council in June 2023. He reminded the board of Dr. Stout's presentation during the March 2023 board meeting requesting a three-million-dollar budget increase for fiscal year 2024, to meet the corporation's needs. The City did not approve the increase and instead, approved the same budget as fiscal year 2023 with a \$600,000.00 additional allocation for DNA outsourcing. Mr. Leach went on to describe the expenditures the board approved during the March 2023 meeting, that would no longer be funded in the final City's final FY24 budget. The primary line items highlighted included a lack of funding for additional employees in the crime scene unit, toxicology, firearms, quality, and forensic biology; equipment in firearms and seized drugs; as well as upgrades to information technology systems. The board discussed potential additional funding sources including the likelihood of receiving more grant funding, however Dr. Stout noted most grants are limited to forensic biology or are short term, eventually leaving a funding gap, particularly for staffing. Among the viable grant sources, Dr. Stout highlighted the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement grants, funding through the Debbie Smith Act, and recent additional funding under ARPA. He went on to reiterate the various challenges in each section and the costly nature of keeping up with staffing needs, records production and testimony, as well as evolving technologies in each discipline. Dr. Stout spent significant time explaining the need to purchase 3D scopes in firearms given the recent challenges to admissibility of firearms evidence in court.

At the conclusion of the board's discussion, Mr. Leach requested the board's approval of the revised fiscal year 2024 budget. Director Ellen Cohen made a motion to approve the revised budget, as presented. Director Anna Vasquez seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved the revised budget.

8. **ADJOURNMENT:**

Chairwoman Mitchell requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Director Vanessa Goodwin made the motion and Director Anna Vasquez seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:36am.

The undersigned secretary of the board hereby certifies the following are true and correct minutes of the August 14, 2023, public meeting of the board.

By: Ashley Henry
Ashley Henry
Interim Board Secretary