

# THE **WATCHDAWG**

## REPORT

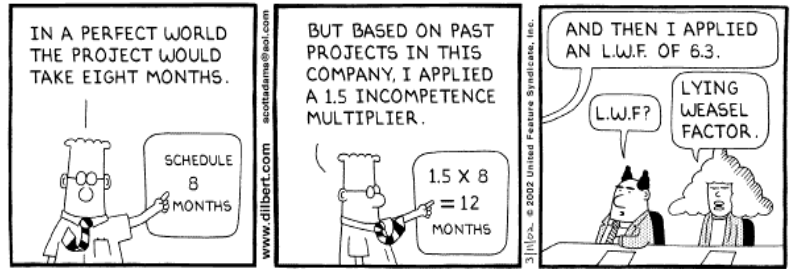
### Courthouse Renovation Update

It is great to see the New Commission coming into 2023 with high energy and already on top of the renovation project. The best thing to report is that Presiding Commissioner Ike Skelton met with Veregy and negotiated an agreement for them to finish the project as described in the contract without further change orders. Scheduled completion is mid-March... which at least sounds realistic as opposed to the completely made up dates previously provided. This includes the replacement of the cast iron sewer pipe they had been requesting an additional \$200,000 for. Pretty interesting that when pushback came, that work was accepted as being within the scope described in the contract...thank you Commissioner Gohagan for sticking to your guns at previous meetings.

The biggest issue remaining is that Veregy did not agree with formatting project status reporting and invoice formats. It's not clear on how the Commission will come to understand and be able to explain the content of Veregy's monthly invoices, but we the citizens expect them to be able to explain every dollar they sign off on. Apparently Veregy thinks that formatting invoices and project reports in a way that corresponds with the visible reality of progress on the ground involves negotiations with their sub-contractors. That seems a dodge to this Watchdawg, and we hope the Commission will readdress this with them when asked to approve an invoice based on the nine obscure categories as opposed to work site percent complete as described in previous Watchdawg issues.

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*Good Riddance 2022 Commission! Welcome to The New Commission!*



### County Commission “Contract With Citizens”

The Watchdawg is committed to citizen involvement in our government. We focus on Camden County, and the State of Missouri politics. With the positive step of having an upstanding majority in the New County Commission for 2023, we thought it would be a good idea to help our New Commissioners with some citizen input. Our recommended first draft of a “Contract with Citizens” is on Page 2 of this issue.

Please make note of the following and use these contact emails to have a direct dialogue with your commissioners.

Ask questions. Expect answers. Tell them what's important to you.

James Gohagan – 1<sup>st</sup> District Commissioner –  
[james\\_gohagan@camdenmo.org](mailto:james_gohagan@camdenmo.org)

Don Williams – 2<sup>nd</sup> District Commissioner  
[Don\\_williams@camdenmo.org](mailto:Don_williams@camdenmo.org)

Ike Skelton – Presiding Commissioner  
[Ike\\_skelton@camdenmo.org](mailto:Ike_skelton@camdenmo.org)

Please review the details on Page 2, and let me know what you would like to see added or changed in this proposed “Contract with Citizens” Email me at [Contact@watchdawgreport.com](mailto:Contact@watchdawgreport.com). Let's continue this conversation until we see a document on the county website with commitments that we and the Commission approve of.

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Citizens would like to see a document on the county web page that represents the Commissioners commitment to the following good practices. These recommendations below are a starting point, and we hope Commissioners will use this guidance to establish their document, and communicate with citizens to arrive at a final version.

1. The Commission will never approve a single bid...no exceptions.
2. All county purchased services and products will be bid to a specific list of pre-qualified vendors unless all three Commissioners sign their names to a document owning the decision to directly engage a private entity with a full explanation.
3. The Commission will, over time, see to the documentation of practical processes for all county functions, including simple to track metrics that allow citizens to witness efficiencies and areas of concern. Process documents should be visible to the public on the county's website, and public meetings should at times include process reviews that include public input.
4. Commissioners will oversee that the County Purchasing Department develops and adheres to a documented, legitimate bid process that includes the preparation and use of a qualified bidders list for every service and product the county purchases. Advertising in a local newspaper does not meet legitimate bid process requirements.
5. Commissioners will never vote to approve any proposal or contract that has not been thoroughly read, completely understood, and can be explained to the public by any Commissioner. No finger pointing.
6. Commissioners will never vote on any proposals being seen for the first time in a meeting. They will establish a process for multiple reviews of all proposals, public comment, and knowledgeable voting.
7. Commissioners time will be recorded so the public can see a record of hours spent in their offices and public meetings. It only takes a few seconds to record each day the hours dedicated to Commission work.
8. Commissioners will expose and discuss instances of perceived corruption by county employees and elected office holders in an efficient manner. Transparency is always the goal and allowing office holders and employees to explain activities in a public meeting with a published agenda will prevent rumors and misunderstandings. Many times, sharing and education is the quick fix.
9. Commissioners will immediately request an investigation by the Prosecuting Attorney's office regarding the potentially corrupt engagement of Veregy Group for the 2022 renovation project.
10. Commissioners will permanently remove Veregy Group from any county bidders list for future work.
11. Commissioners commit to immediate, visible, 100% compliance with Missouri Statutes, including regarding county assets, with zero tolerance for office holders that are not in compliance. Here's an excellent example: "55.160. Duties (second classification and certain first classification counties). — The auditor of each county of the first classification not having a charter form of government and of each county of the second classification shall keep an inventory of all county property under the control and management of the various officers and departments and shall annually take an inventory of such property at an original value of one thousand dollars or more showing the amount, location, and estimated value thereof."

No one has yet come forward with how Veregy was initially engaged. We encourage our new office holders to continue efforts to expose and punish corruption. Following is information uncovered in the review of sunshined documents. Apologies for length. There's a lot to know.

Documents requested included all communications between county employees and office holders with Veregy Group in 2022. Its fascinating to note that there were no emails provided from or to Maintenance Supervisor Melvin Miller, Greg Hasty (except the one from Veregy with the contract attached), or county attorney Charlie McElyea. This, of course, makes one doubt the full compliance of the county to provide all sunshined documents. I'm guessing the request is handled by the individual with something to hide. Hopefully the Prosecuting Attorney will have more success surfacing all communications.

February 23, 2022 – Eight emails between Veregy Project Development Engineer Zechariah Renaud and Auditor Jimmy Laughlin discussing the design and new furniture for the Auditor's new office. Writes Mr. Renaud, "Here is a revised furniture layout per our conversation earlier today. The furniture with diagonal crosshatch lines indicates invoice items from Page Office Supply". Our County Auditor was choosing furniture without bidding it out separately or insisting that Veregy gather bids from furniture vendors. We sent an email to Jimmy Laughlin asking about the non-bid choice of Page Office Supply in Lebanon...no response. These emails were exchanged months before Veregy was awarded the contract.

April 21, 2022 – Email from Ellie Blankenship, Veregy Group Local Government Account Manager to Melvin Miller and Jimmy Laughlin. (Why would a contractor be involved at this point, let alone advising the county on the content of the RFP?)

The email includes an attachment that is the "sample RFQ/P that was used last time". Per Ellie "I have highlighted the areas that you would need to edit once you determine due dates [for the bid], number of copies, etc. I added Mel as the contact, but you can change to whatever you think makes sense. Being that this is really just RFQ with no pricing component (???) you could put it out for two weeks if the Commission is agreeable to that. I have attached that list from last time also."

Attached to the email was a list of bidders that are in the energy savings business, e.g., Johnson Controls, but none were ever sent a bid package. Per Melvin Miller, verbally to the Sunshine Attorney working my request, bid packages were never created or sent to any vendor. County Maintenance and the Auditor's office worked only with Veregy.

The first paragraph of the "Request for Qualifications and Proposals Guaranteed Energy Savings Contract" that came from Veregy: "Camden County, Missouri is requesting Qualified Providers to propose Facility Modernizations and Energy Conservation Measures through a Guaranteed Energy Savings Contract. These proposals may include, but not be limited to, the following items: (a) the implementation of an energy audit, data collection and other related analysis preliminary to the undertaking of Facility modernizations and Energy Conservation Measures, etc." Note here that the "audit" which included the walk through to count the lights that needed to be replaced and assess the HVAC units was completed by Veregy prior to their bid, obviously well before contract signing. Basically, they described work they had already completed in the bid document example they recommended to the county. There are five pages in the "Bid Request" that were written by Veregy for the county, and never presented to any other bidders. The county did not create a qualified bidders list of their own, create a scope-of-work document, nor forward any type of bid package to any other bidders. The County Auditor requested the County Attorney to help purchasing put an ad in the local paper. The ad language accentuated that bidders must provide a "Guaranteed Energy Savings Contract", thereby discouraging/eliminating local general contractors.

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It appears that all sewer, plumbing, asbestos abatement, flooring, painting, sidewalks and roof are outside the scope of the “Guaranteed Energy Savings Contract” part of the contract. So the county hired a company who specializes in a small part of the scope to act as general contractor for this very large project.

April 21, 2022 – Auditor Jimmy Laughlin’s response to Ellie Blankenship’s email:  
Ellie,  
Thanks again to you and Jason for all your help. We will get this done.  
Thanks,  
Jimmy Laughlin

*“We will get this done” from the County Auditor. Interesting, don’t you think?*

April 26, 2022 – Email from Ellie Blankenship to Jimmy Laughlin  
Jimmy,  
Thank you for all your help as well! When do you think you all will send out the RFQ? Jason was reminded today that the prevailing wage order usually updates in May. That could impact costs as well so just wanted to give you a heads up. Obviously, as we all already know the sooner the better!  
Let me know if you have any questions on the document.  
Thanks,  
Ellie Blankenship, Local Government Account Manager

*Someone needs to ask the sub-contracted workers on the job site if they are receiving prevailing wage. If they are not, the county is vulnerable to a class action suite brought by the workers that could award them double prevailing wage plus attorney fees, per the Missouri Department of Labor. It was rumored that Veregy told the Commission that by using the expensive Bond instead of ARPA funds that paying prevailing wage could be avoided...which is apparently untrue. Going by the courthouse? Ask a worker if he’s making prevailing wage and let me know!*

May 2, 2022  
Janet Fry, County Purchasing Dept sent an email to Ellie Blankenship, the official “Request for Qualifications and Proposals”. It was not sent to any other vendors.  
It says “Request for Qualifications and Proposals Contract Issued by Camden County, MO 1 Court Circle NW, Camdenton MO 65020. The Commission’s document appears to be dated 4/29/2022.

Melvin Miller was the sole contact provided on the request, and it said “any attempt to contact any other County employees or companies/agencies representing the County regarding this process will be grounds for disqualification

This information, and more, is on its way to Prosecuting Attorney Richelle Grosvenor for review. We’d like to see a report on that investigation, and clarification if activities were illegal and/or unethical. As before, we’re calling for the immediate resignation of Maintenance Supervisor Melvin Miller and County Auditor Jimmy Laughlin for their involvement with Veregy Group, and clear avoidance of the legitimate bid process that’s vital to the security of taxpayer funds.

Do you enjoy your Watchdawg Report? Would you like to receive a free copy directly in your email? Contact me (Jennie) at [Contact@watchdawgreport.com](mailto:Contact@watchdawgreport.com), or call 660-238-6514 and leave a message. If you enjoy the print version and would like to see it continued, you can donate any amount to help. Drop by cash or make your check to Design & Print with note “Watchdawg”. Mail to Design & Print, c/o Jessica Thompson, PO Box 1915., Camdenton, MO 65020. Let me know via email or a call when you donate so I can coordinate the delivery list if you want copies for yourself. We thank Jessica for her generous offer to allow donations to come directly to her shop. She does great work, so bring her your print business while you pick up your Watchdawgs!