WHAT’S UP WITH THE RFP? -
The RFP Numbers and Possible Offers

April 13, 2019

HCPS administrators should not be “researching the possibility” of outsourcing with a costly and time consuming RFP, especially if it is generated on numbers that don’t seem to show actual understanding of HCPS’ own efficiency, quality or costs. It’s one thing to generate an RFP to contract out an operation that is clearly running as efficiently as possible in-house; it’s another to use an RFP to seek out a vendor who will simply take the responsibility of proper and efficient management of custodial operations off of HCPS administrator’s shoulders.

The Gibson Report described that in 2014-15 “The HCPS custodial services function is responsible for cleaning 21.6 million square feet in 215 schools, and other non-school facilities.” and “Current custodial productivity at HCPS is 15,321 square feet cleaned per custodian.” The report also states: “Formulas for elementary, middle and high schools may vary from the target district productivity (lower coverage for elementary schools and higher coverage for high schools), but the net effect of formula changes should achieve the 22,500 square feet per FTE target.” (Gibson Phase I, pgs.12 / Gibson Phase II, pgs.195)

The RFP on the other hand, explains to bidders that “HCPS is made up of 270 schools and other district facilities” (1.1 Background pg. 3 of RFP) but then later in the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH) report for HCPS attached to the RFP itself, lists 258 total schools and non-school facilities combined (Appendix A pg. 55-69 of RFP). It is unclear how the total number of 270 quoted in the Background of the RFP was determined. Does it include a portion of the 50 charter schools in Hillsborough County? HCPS Custodial Operations is not responsible for charter sites.

Although the RFP inaccurately counts facility totals and does not specifically detail the total square feet custodial services is currently responsible for in the background or scope of work sections, the FISH report for HCPS attached at the end of the document provides a number. This report lists approximately 27.5 Million total net square footage (NSF). (Appendix A pg. 69 of RFP). However, the total NSF reported is not necessarily a precisely accurate measure of space to be cleaned, as it includes areas like outdoor covered areas that would not be used in square footage cleaning measurements per employee.

The RFP also shows that “HCPS requests a minimum square footage assumption of 19,000 standard of cleaning with explanation by the vendor of any exceptions” (5.2.4 Requirements pg. 34 of RFP). This target proves an understanding that it is unreasonable to achieve 22,500 sq. ft. per FTE target provided by the Gibson Study.

More importantly, how did district administrators decide that 19,000 sq. ft. is acceptable or an even achievable number?

Furthermore, the estimated budget in the RFP is included for the purposes of calculating a protest bond amount and is valued at approximately $65,000,000 for the initial term of five (5) years. (5.2.1 Estimated Budget & 5.2.2 Contract Term/Option to Renew pg. 33 of RFP). Best practices in writing a strong RFP should include providing an estimated budget to bidders. An estimated budget is in fact meant to keep vendors and the district from wasting time with proposals that are way out of range for what the district can or will pay and is ultimately included to permit vendors to compete with each other for the best target price they will offer HCPS.

On the other hand, the amount of the protest bond can be related to (1) the cost of processing a protest; (2) the cost or loss to HCPS if the contract execution is delayed; or (3) a percentage of the contract value. HCPS included this $65 Million value for determining a protest bond amount and not necessarily for assigning a limit for the contract. Since the estimated budget in the custodial operations RFP is about one third of the current value of salaries alone, this RFP will most likely lead vendors to provide unrealistic or low-ball offers to the district.
We have looked at yearly expenditures and appropriations for salary and benefits for Operation of Plant within the HCPS budget, which is where custodial expenses are accounted for. We will conduct a full investigation of any proposals the district may consider, but even without final proposals submitted, assuming the cost of custodial operations salaries alone is $38 million for more than 1500 workers at an average salary of $24,000, it is reasonable to expect how any vendor will present cost savings to our district: Cuts in staffing numbers, which will certainly amount to loss of quality.

Furthermore, if decided on too hastily and without fully understanding what is going on in-house, outsourcing will have disastrous consequences. Once a department is privatized, there is practically no turning back. When giving up in-house control of a department like custodial services, which is dependent on a significant amount of supplies and equipment, it becomes nearly impossible and/or extremely expensive to bring the services back in-house at a later date, especially in a school district the size of HCPS. The enormous capital costs associated with restocking equipment, tools, trucks, etc. and the cost to train new staff is typically impossible to fund and will never produce the quality service we have now. This fact is what contractors know will ensure long term contracts.

For an RFP to be strong and to procure the best servicer, it is imperative district administrators have clear understanding of the facts and numbers related to custodial operations now and over time. Without this knowledge, any 5 year agreement recommended to the School Board will certainly guarantee hidden costs and unforeseen troubles. There is evidence to support serious concerns over how any vendor will be able to accurately estimate cost savings and service quality based on comparison of unclear square footage targets seen in the Gibson Report and in the RFP. Vendors will likely present tempting offers in an effort to secure a multimillion dollar contract, and based on what is presented in the current RFP these offers will be unrealistic. School Board members MUST be prepared to recognize misleading information before any decision is made that could impact the nearly 207,000 students in HCPS neighborhood public schools.

VIEW THE RFP DOCUMENT HERE: [http://hsefonline.org/RFP.pdf](http://hsefonline.org/RFP.pdf)

MYVENDORLINK FOR HCPS CUSTODIAL OPERATION RFP: [https://www.myvendorlink.com/common/SolicitationDetails.aspx](https://www.myvendorlink.com/common/SolicitationDetails.aspx)

The Myvendorlink is a starting point to investigate the current RFP, see how many vendors have applied & read a myriad of clarifying questions being asked.

1. **Click: bid solicitations**
2. In "agency" drop down to "Hillsborough County Public Schools"
3. In "department" drop down to "Custodial"
4. **Click: search solicitations**
5. Once updated, scroll down to the FIRST item for "Custodial Services" and click the blue magnifying glass.

On this new page you can scroll down to see over 70 vendors who have applied, along with a long list of clarifying questions from vendors. Extension of the original April 17 deadline to May 8 is surely based on multiple vendors’ requests for more time.

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