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PORT AUTHORITY COMMISSION DELIVERS MEASURES FOR EMERGENCY SECURITY PURCHASES

Port Commissioners also approve agenda items related to Bayport, environment, legal expenses, and community partnership

HOUSTON – The Port of Houston Authority (PHA) Commission approved several recommendations involving contract awards, bids and proposals, professional services and general administrative and operational matters during its monthly meeting on **Monday, February 24, 2003**. Chairman James T. Edmonds presided over the meeting in the board room at the PHA’s Executive Office Building, located at 111 East Loop North.

Emergency Purchases

The Port Commissioners approved two recommendations related to the heightened national security threat level determined earlier this month by the U.S. Office of Homeland Security. One recommendation called for approval of a purchase order in the amount of \$34,080 to W.T. Byler for the recent installation of concrete barriers to restrict, close, or redirect traffic to the PHA’s waterside areas. Another recommendation called for enabling the PHA to pay for emergency purchases in excess of \$25,000 when necessary to protect public health and safety, respond to a public calamity, and carry out security directives from agencies of the state or federal governments.

“The safety and security of our employees and the communities surrounding the Port are of paramount concern at all times, but especially now in the wake of the nation’s heightened terrorism alert,” states Chairman Edmonds. “The Port Authority remains prepared to respond expediently to all threats in cooperation with all of our partners at the local, state, and federal levels,” he adds.

Bayport Matters

The Port Commissioners approved recommendations related to the first phase development of the proposed Bayport Container and Cruise Terminal. One recommendation called for advertising to receive CSPs for wharf and dredging at an estimated cost ranging between \$35 million and nearly \$55 million. Another recommendation involved advertising to receive competitive sealed proposals (CSPs) for a site clearing contract estimated to cost between \$225,000 and \$375,000.

The Bayport project remains under review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is expected to issue a final environmental impact statement (FEIS) in March, 2003. “Although no work will be performed and no spending will be authorized until and unless the corps approves the project, beginning the process now of advertising for and receiving CSPs, bids, and quotes will save time and money when we are authorized to begin construction,” states Chairman Edmonds. The entire bidding and contracting process can take six to eight months from the time bids are submitted, evaluated by staff, reviewed by commissioners, and then awarded, he adds.

Pending the FEIS and construction permit approvals, the PHA is committed to meeting ISO 14001 standards upon the completion and opening of the Bayport facility. The Port of Houston Authority recently became the first U.S. port to achieve compliance with ISO 14001 standards through its environmental management system (EMS) at Barbours Cut Container Terminal and the Central Maintenance Facility.

Environmental Matters

The Port Commissioners approved a recommendation to advertise and receive competitive sealed proposals (CSPs) for the replacement of two existing diesel engines with Tier II engines for the PHA fireboat Farnsworth. The recommendation also called for underbody maintenance while the vessel is in drydock.

Widely considered the cleanest burning diesel engines available, Tier II engines help reduce emissions of nitrogen oxide (NOx), which combines with volatile organic compounds (VOCs) to form ozone. Reduced air emissions, solid waste reduction, and increased recycling are the key objectives of the PHA’s environmental management system (EMS), the voluntary initiative that has enabled Houston to garner prestigious stature as the first port in the U.S. to meet the rigorous standards of ISO 14001 compliance.

“The Port Authority maintains a steadfast commitment to a clean environment,” states Chairman Edmonds. He notes that the PHA requires all of its cranes and off-road vehicles to be equipped with Tier II engines.

The estimated total cost of the Tier II engines, parts, and labor for the PHA’s fireboat Farnsworth is expected to range between \$500,000 and \$600,000. To pay for the engines, the PHA expects to use a \$337,000 TERP (Texas Emissions Reduction Program) grant. The TERP is administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to aid clean air initiatives.

Legal Matters

The Port Commissioners approved recommendations authorizing the payment of several invoices totaling more than \$400,000 related to the continuing legal dispute with GB Biosciences Corporation, a company accused by the Port Authority of contaminating the soil and groundwater on property belonging to the PHA. The invoices relate to expenses for numerous expert witnesses and professional legal services rendered on behalf of the Port Authority by the law firm of Connelly, Baker, Wotring & Jackson.

“Although this dispute appears long and arduous, the Port Authority is closely monitoring the expenses,” states Chairman Edmonds. “Our efforts in this case, and the associated costs, are necessary to ensure that the best interests of the Port Authority and the public are being served.”

Upper Texas Coast Water-Borne Education Center

The Port Commissioners approved a recommendation to enter into a memorandum of agreement (MOU) for continued support of the Upper Texas Coast Water-Borne Education Center (WBEC), a non-profit organization that promotes public awareness of Galveston Bay and the Houston Ship Channel through classes, field trips, and a variety of other programs aimed at environmental education and stewardship. The terms of the MOU call for the PHA to provide \$50,000 to the WBEC over the next two years.

“The coastal resources along Galveston Bay and the Houston Ship Channel hold a wealth of economic, ecological, and cultural heritage that everyone should have the opportunity to experience,” states Chairman Edmonds. “The partnership between the Port Authority and the Water-Borne Center will greatly enhance the public’s knowledge and appreciation of this region’s vast coastal resources,” he adds.

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The Port of Houston Authority

The Port of Houston Authority owns and operates the public facilities located along the Port of Houston, the 25-mile long complex of diversified public and private facilities designed for handling general cargo, containers, grain, other dry bulk materials, project and heavy lift cargo and other types of cargo. The Port of Houston Authority plays a vital role in ensuring navigational safety along the Houston Ship Channel, which has been instrumental in Houston’s development as a center of international trade. The port -- sixth largest in the world -- is ranked first in the United States in foreign waterborne tonnage and second in total tonnage. Each year, more than 6,600 vessels from around the world call at the port. For more information, please visit <http://www.portofhouston.com>.