

South Lake Tahoe in the market for lobbyist

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe may have a new lobbyist working on its behalf this summer.

The Houston Group, touted by former members of the City Council as being bloodhounds that could bring money to town, is going to have to bid for the job and prove its worth.



Anyone who bids on the lobbyist request for proposal will have to include performance goals. That isn't something that is in the current contract.

The RFP, which opened May 9 for one month, says, "The city is seeking a state representative to plan, develop, coordinate, and implement a strategy to advocate for the city's interests at the highest levels in both the state of Nevada and state of California, through the office of the governors, state legislators, and state agencies [both states]."

Records show the Sacramento-based Houston Group did as-needed work for the city prior to signing a contract Feb. 6, 2007. That contract ensured the Houston Group \$3,750 a month no matter what they did. It was reduced to \$2,500 a month on May 14, 2009.

When that reduction took place then-Mayor Jerry Birdwell and Councilman Bill Crawford wanted the lobbyists to stop working for the city because no one could show how the agency had earned its pay. It was then-City Manager Dave Jinkens and Councilwoman Kathay Lovell who strongly advocated to keep

paying the bill.

The contract has no expiration date – as is the case with many contracts the city enters into.

The point of having a lobbyist working on South Tahoe's behalf is to have a voice at the capital and in the Capitol, to be notified of legislation that may affect the city, and to be alerted to money that may be available.

Besides South Tahoe, the Houston Group also represents Tahoe City and Placer County – which could present a potential conflict of interest. When this reporter spoke with Doug Houston in June 2008 he said, "We don't have competing clients." In that same conversation he said, "I'm in Tahoe about every other week. We have clients throughout the basin."

Perspective lobbyists may be interviewed at the June 21 council meeting – in public.