

Take bids to find out if other law firms cost less, Cassidy says

By Amy Sylvestri

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The San Leandro City Council had a discussion last week about keeping the Meyers Nave law firm as the city's attorneys, with the council saying they liked the firm's work but also that they are interested in renegotiating their contract to cut costs.

Meyers Nave represents 23 cities all over California and in San Leandro legal services are handled by attorney Jayne Williams. The city hired the Municipal Resource Group (MRG) to do a performance evaluation of Meyers Nave, the first evaluation in nearly a decade.

Tom Sinclair of MRG told the City Council that Meyers Nave will cost an estimated \$1.3 million this fiscal year; a \$28,000 per month retainer, plus hourly rates for litigation, and Williams will earn about \$230,000. Those figures don't include the costs of legal settlements.

The City Council considered the options of getting prices from other law firms or hiring an "in-house" lawyer as a city employee, but ultimately decided to continue with Meyers Nave because of their knowledge of the city's background.

Williams gave the example of medical marijuana as a reason to have a law firm with a history with the city working on an issue. She started discussing medical marijuana with the city years ago, giving general advice and now her law firm is helping draft a medical marijuana ordinance.

Councilman Michael Gregory said that the evaluation was "a friendly reminder" that the city should be looking at contracts more frequently.

Mayor Stephen Cassidy objected to the fact that Meyers Nave charges San Leandro more than they do for their services in other cities, such as Union City or Pittsburg. He was the sole member of the City Council who wanted the legal contract to be put out for bid, though he said doing so wouldn't necessarily mean they would change to a different law firm.

“We shouldn’t spend taxpayer’s money any differently that we spend our own money,” said Cassidy.

Cassidy said that putting the contract up for bid is the way to determine what the marketplace is like and what options the city has.

“Maybe we won’t take the lowest bid. Maybe Meyers Nave is still the best option, but put it out there,” Cassidy said.

The City Council did not vote on the matter, so for now the city will continue to work with Meyers Nave. The Council told City Manager Chris Zapata to look into modifying and renegotiating the contract for a vote at an upcoming meeting.