



Fort Bend County Historical Commission

Charles Kelly, Chairman
Tim Cumings, Vice-Chairman
Don Brady, Secretary
Claire Rogers, Treasurer

May 23, 2016 COUNTY JUDGE
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To The Fort Bend County Commissioners Court:

MAY 27 2016

I am writing on behalf of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission regarding two of our current projects and their funding requirements. They are:

- Excavation of the cistern in Lamar Homestead Park
- Development of a mobile app designed as a guide, or portal to the historical and cultural legacy of Fort Bend County

Cistern Excavation Project Background

The cistern excavation project has undergone a long gestation. We had planned to begin in the 2015/16 budget year, but ran into difficulty engaging a certified archeologist to serve as the project's principal investigator, which we are required to do since the cistern is on public land. Our Cemetery Committee Chairman, Bob Crosser, interviewed 7 candidates before he found one who could work on our team. (He is Robert Marcom, professor emeritus at the University of Houston.)

The first phase is a test dig to determine if the cistern warrants full excavation. We will begin this phase in a matter of weeks, since we have completed necessary documentation and permits with the Texas Historical Commission. The Friends of the Historical Commission have provided \$8,000 to cover this phase of the project. We are confident this amount will be sufficient for the test dig.

Therefore, the Historical Commission will not spend the \$4,000 earmarked in the 2015/16 county budget for the excavation project. (Note: these funds are supplemental to the \$5,000 the county provides the Historical Commission for annual operations.) As you will see below, the Historical Commission requests that you redirect these funds to our second major project, the mobile app.

If the test dig indicates artifacts relating to Mirabeau B. Lamar are buried in the cistern, we request that the county commissioners consider matching the Friends



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donation, so we can complete the full excavation. Bob Crosser has discussed the importance of this site with archeologists at the Texas Historical Commission, and they agree that Lamar's role in Texas history justifies excavation and preservation of relevant artifacts we may find.

Mobile App Project Background

In early 2014 a group of Historical Commissioners and other interested parties began exploring the application of advanced digital technologies to museums and other historical organizations. The scope of this investigation ranged from mobile devices (smart phones & tablets) to emerging virtual reality sets. Another impetus was growing interest in heritage tourism. The City of Houston, John Nau (current Chairman of the Texas Historical Commission), and local municipalities had begun serious initiatives aimed at attracting tourists of all categories to the upper Gulf Coast. The Historical Commission wanted to ensure that local history and culture were included in these initiatives.

Historical Commissioners, Vernon Hunt, who is I. T. Director at the City of Sugar Land, and Pat Pollicoff, who is Communications Director at the City of Sugar Land, introduced the team to Mansai Inc., a software development company in West Houston. They developed a mobile app free of charge for the Historical Commission in 2015. It was very simple and static, much like an electronic version of conventional paper brochures. Our intention was to use it as a proof of concept and a springboard to a more sophisticated application involving user interactivity and more extensive content covering all of Fort Bend County. The Historical Commission viewed the app and was enthusiastic about the concept, so Mansai began working on phase 2.

A couple of months ago, Mansai completed a plan and an estimate of costs. Using off-shore developers, the total cost amounted to \$50,000. This was more than they could afford to absorb on their own, so they asked that the Historical Commission pay half the total (i.e., \$25,000). We considered this a good deal since the labor rate was \$25/hr., and a static app developed for the Galveston Historical Foundation cost approximately \$15,000.



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Since the Historical Commission needed to raise funds for the project, we asked that Mansai give us an estimate to complete an abbreviated, but functionally complete prototype, which we could use as a showcase to raise funds. They can complete a prototype this summer for \$6,000.

Funding Request

The Historical Commission requests that the County Commissioners redirect the \$4,000 earmarked for the cistern excavation in 2016 to the mobile app project. The Friends of the Historical Commission have approved a donation of \$2,000 to complete the amount needed for the prototype.

As soon as the prototype is complete, the Historical Commission will begin a campaign to raise \$19,000 to complete the full application. We will use the prototype for live demonstrations to potential donors, which will include corporations, private citizens, non-profits, and state and local government.

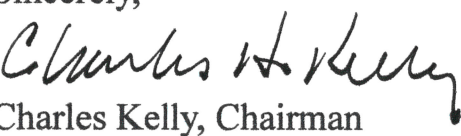
We are confident live demonstrations of a working model will be a very effective fund-raising method.

Conclusion

The Historical Commission and Mansai Inc. are happy to provide further information needed to address this request. We have planning documents, screen samples, and select working components which we can present in any suitable setting.

This request is focused on limited, but immediate funding for a prototype, but we are aware the Commissioners Court and other county departments may want to explore this project further. We are happy to do that at any time.

Sincerely,



Charles Kelly, Chairman
Fort Bend County Historical Commission