Council Online Message Board

- The State Legislature amended the Texas Open Meetings Act authorizing use of online message boards for municipal governments.
- Council Resolution directs the City Manager to implement an online message board that meets these requirements for Austin City Council use by 12/1/13.
- CTM, City Clerk’s Office and Law completed an assessment of possible solutions with the following summary and recommendation.
Guiding Principles and Process

- Our assessment included a survey of options for the most cost-effective, holistic product which meets all requirements set forth in Council Resolution.

- Our goal is to provide a recommendation for Council to increase their ability to communicate while meeting the requirements of the Texas Open Meetings Act and providing transparency to the public.
Guiding Principles and Process

• Key areas of focus:
  – Ability to administer authorized City Council members and designated staff to participate/post on the forum
  – Ability of the public to access from the City homepage and to easily search and view forum posts
  – Ability to meet data retention requirements
  – Ability to administer and ensure compliance with Open Meetings Act
Guiding Principles and Process

• There are dozens of software solutions available that could meet the requirements

• We focused on these categories
  – Subscription solutions hosted by 3rd party vendors
  – In-house solutions hosted by the City
  – Solutions of either category that are designed specifically for government use
Guiding Principles and Process

- Staff recommends an externally hosted subscription service.
  - Provides most flexibility and management tools
  - Ease of use for public and staff
  - Available training and support included in subscription
  - Cost effective
  - Government specific solutions available
Summary and Recommendation

• GovLog (PeakDemocracy.com) is a forum software built for this purpose and meets all requirements
  – Over 75 Cities subscribe including Portland, OR; Salt Lake City, UT; Arlington, VA; and Tempe, AZ
  – Built-in tools for group management, forum topics and data retention—specific to government
  – Easy to administer—does not require technical staff for setup/configuration
  – Under $2500 for annual subscription that includes support
  – Alliance for Innovation member
Summary and Recommendation

- Request a new implementation date to:
  - Coordinate with vendor
  - Allow staff to develop an administration process
- Once implemented, we will need to assess workload and staff assignments.
  - General administration of the forum related to forum topics/agenda
  - Management of forum groups/authorized member access
  - Compliance with Open Meetings Act and data retention.
Questions?