



MIAMI-DADE COMMISSION ON ETHICS AND PUBLIC TRUST

Overtown Transit Village North
701 Northwest 1st Court · 8th Floor · Miami, Florida 33136
Phone: (305) 579-2594 · Facsimile: (305) 579-0273
Website: ethics.miamidade.gov

MEMORANDUM

TO: Amado Gonzalez, Selection Committee Coordinator
Strategic Procurement Department

Sade Chaney, Research Manager
Office of the Commission Auditor

FROM: Loressa Felix, Staff Attorney
Commission on Ethics and Public Trust

SUBJECT: INQ 2022-151, Voting Conflict of Interest § 2-11.1(v); Appearances of
Impropriety; County Resolution R-449-14

DATE: November 7, 2022

CC: All COE Legal Staff

Thank you for contacting the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust and requesting our guidance regarding the following proposed transaction.

Facts:

We have reviewed your memorandum dated October 27, 2022, which was prepared in connection with the Appointment of Selection Committee for the Miami-Dade County Department of Solid Waste Management Request to Advertise for Design Criteria Professional and Owner's Representative Services for the Department of Solid Waste Management's New Waste to Energy Plant – Project No. E22-DSWM-02. The memorandum was prepared in connection with Resolution No. R-449-14, directing the Office of the Commission Auditor (OCA) to conduct background checks on members serving on evaluation/selection committees.

The memorandum noted that a member of the Selection Committee made a disclosure on his Neutrality/Disclosure Form that merited submission to the Commission on Ethics for an opinion. Specifically, the memorandum notes that “Ravi Kadambala, Department of Solid Waste Management, indicated on his resume that SCS Engineers employed him from 2014 through 2019. SCS Engineers (Stearns Conrad & Schmidt Consulting Engineers Inc) is identified as a subconsultant for Arcadis US, Inc., a respondent to this solicitation.”

We conferred with Mr. Kadambala. He is the Division Director for Miami- Dade County Department of Solid Waste Management. He confirmed that he previously worked for Stearns Conrad & Schmidt Consulting Engineers Inc. (hereinafter “SCS Engineers”) as a Project Manager. Mr. Kadambala stopped working for SCS Engineers on or about June 2019. Mr. Kadambala indicated that the termination of his employment with SCS Engineers was amicable. Mr. Kadambala has no current ownership interest or other financial interest in the company.¹ He also does not have any business, close social, or other relationship with the SCS Engineers solicitation team members.² Mr. Kadambala believes he can be fair and impartial when evaluating the respondents to this project.

Discussion:

This agency conducts reviews of these issues under the County Ethics Code, which governs conflicts by members of County advisory and quasi-judicial boards. We also consider whether there is an appearance of impropriety created and make recommendations based on R-449-14 and Ethics Commission Rule of Procedure 2.1(b).

Specifically, Section 2-11.1(v) of the County Ethics Code states that no quasi-judicial personnel or advisory personnel shall vote on any matter presented to an advisory board or quasi-judicial board on which the person sits if the board member will be directly affected by the action of the board on which the member serves and the board member has any of the following relationships with any of the persons or entities appearing before the board: (i) officer, director, partner, of counsel, consultant, employee, fiduciary or beneficiary’ or (ii) stock holder, bondholder, debtor or creditor.

It does not appear that Mr. Kadambala has a voting conflict of interest under Section (v) of the County Ethics Code because he will not be directly affected by the vote, and he does not currently have any of the enumerated relationships with any entity affected by the vote.

Additionally, Section 2-11.1(x) of the County Ethics Code, commonly referred to as the Reverse Two-Year Rule, which bars County employees from participating in contract-related duties on behalf of the County with a former employer for a period of two years following termination of the employment relations, would not apply to Mr. Kadambala since he stopped working for SCS Engineers over 3 years ago. *See* INQ 17-174, INQ 17-183, INQ 18-229, and INQ 20-136.

¹ Mr. Kadambala has held stock from SCS Engineers in the past. However, since his separation, the stocks were liquidated and placed in an account with a private investment company. The funds are a fixed amount and do not fluctuate with market or company conditions. Neither Mr. Kadambala nor SCS Engineers have access to the funds; Mr. Kadambala may access the funds once they are vested in the future.

² Mr. Kadambala advised that he does have ongoing professional relationships with some SCS Engineers employees. Upon review of the SCS Engineers team members for this solicitation, Mr. Kadambala confirmed that he had no relationships with any of these individuals.

Further, as noted above, due to the sensitivity of the procurement process and the need to sustain public confidence in it, this agency also opines concerning whether there may be an appearance of impropriety in a given situation that would justify the removal of a member of an appointed selection committee. *See* Section 2-1067, Miami-Dade County Code, and 2.1(b) of the COE Rules of Procedure.

As noted above, Mr. Kadambala disclosed that he was previously employed by SCS Engineers, as a subconsultant for Arcadis US, Inc., a respondent to this solicitation. As Mr. Kadambala's employment at SCS Engineers ended over three years ago, on an amicable basis, and he does not have any business, or close social relationship with any team members of the solicitation³, it is our opinion that Mr. Kadambala's prior employment at SCS Engineers would not create an appearance of impropriety or in any way detract from the County's conducting a fair and objective evaluation for this project. *See* INQ 20-73, INQ 18-202, INQ 17-69 and INQ 20-136.

Opinion:

Consequently, consistent with the COE's holding in prior ethics opinions, Mr. Kadambala does not have a conflict of interest under the Ethics Code that would prevent him from serving on this selection committee because he will not be directly affected by the vote, nor does he currently have any of the enumerated relationships with any entity affected by the vote. *See* INQ 14-246, INQ 16-242, INQ 19-99, INQ 20-40, and INQ 21-81.

This opinion is limited to the facts as you presented them to the Commission on Ethics and is limited to an interpretation of the County Ethics Code only and is not intended to interpret state laws. Questions regarding state ethics laws should be addressed to the Florida Commission on Ethics.

We appreciate your consulting with the Commission in order to avoid possible prohibited conflicts of interest. If the facts associated with your inquiry change, please contact us for additional guidance.

³ *See* INQ 18-78 (A prospective member of a selection committee may serve on the committee, where the prospective selection committee member maintained a close personal friendship with an employee of one of the respondents to the project because the County employee would not personally benefit from the vote, and he did not have a prohibited relationship with any of the parties involved in the solicitation. Additionally, no appearance of impropriety was found because the individual that the prospective selection committee member maintained a personal friendship with at the respondent company was not listed in the proposal submitted, he had nothing to do with the company's response to that particular solicitation, the individual had for the most part retired from the company, and the individual was not going to be making any type of presentation before the selection committee regarding that project.)

INQs are informal ethics opinions provided by the legal staff after being reviewed and approved by the Executive Director. INQs deal with opinions previously addressed in public session by the Ethics Commission or within the plain meaning of the County Ethics Code. RQOs are opinions provided by the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust when the subject matter is of great public importance or where there is insufficient precedent. While these are informal opinions, covered parties that act contrary to the opinion may be referred to the Advocate for preliminary review or investigation and may be subject to a formal Complaint filed with the Commission on Ethics and Public Trust.